

More on doubling the Corfe Mullen cut-off

From Peter Russell

Part 2

(Part 1 in PE 305)



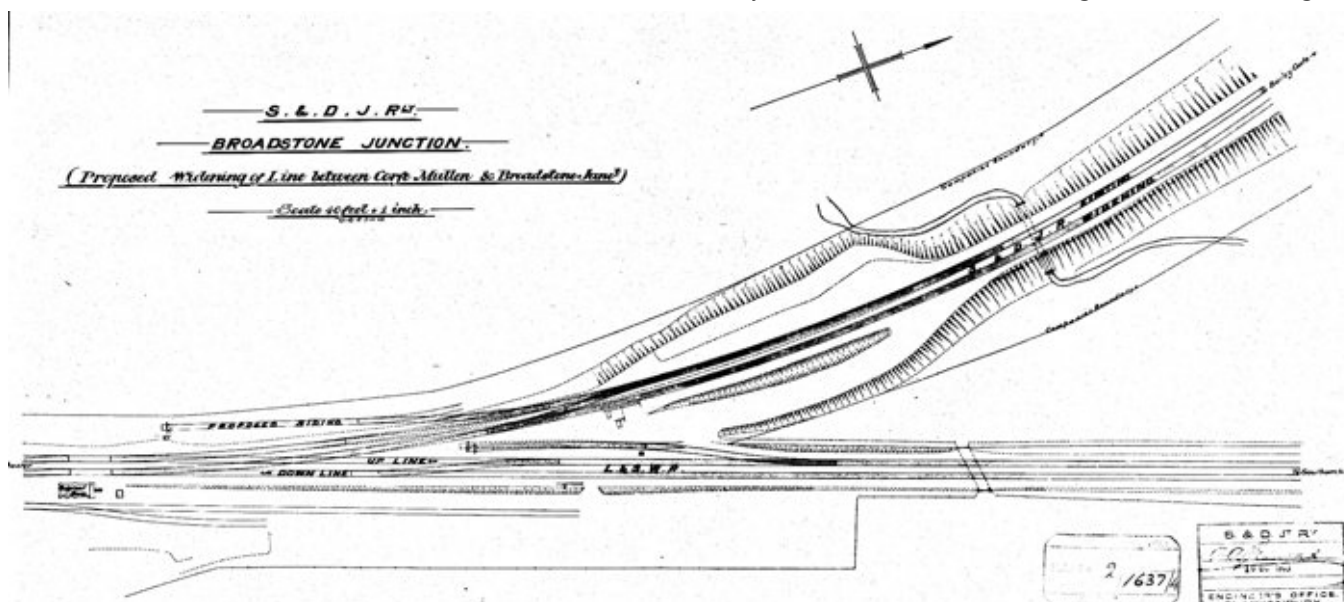
Broadstone's mystery sidings

One of the S&DJR plans from 1903 (on p.6 of PE 304) showed the Engineer's proposed revised layout of Broadstone Junction to deal with the doubling. This has led Colin Divall and I into considerable, if somewhat inconclusive, debate over the purposes and operation of two Up sidings shown near the Junction. These are not directly relevant to the proposed doubling from Corfe Mullen, but perhaps significant for the development of capacity at Broadstone as a junction for the S&DJR and L&SWR.

not gated as private sidings, so we assume they were for the use of the respective railway companies. Sadly, so far as we know, there are no photos showing either siding in use or even *in situ*, at any date up until the 1920s.

Pilots or bankers

As Jonathan suggests, and he could be correct, the sidings may have served to hold assisting engines worked up from Hamworthy Junction or Poole. That function might have offered a small reduction in delays, and less work for the signaller, if the engine



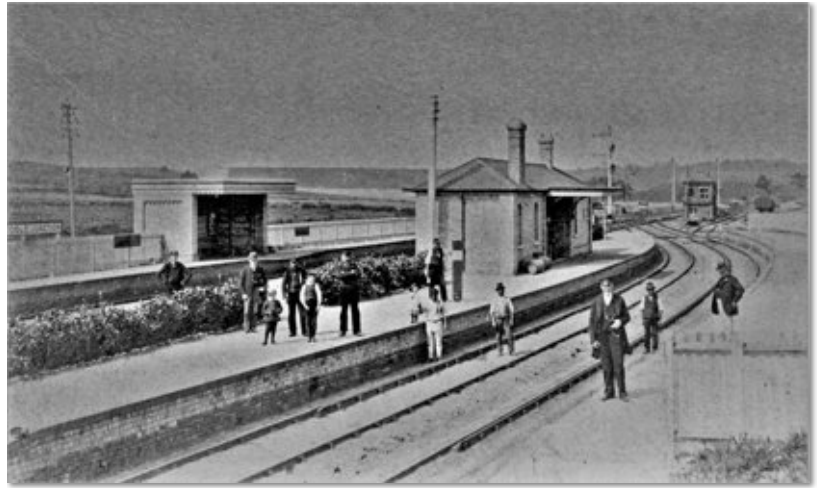
This 1903 proposals plan for doubling at the Broadstone end of the cut-off is repeated here from PE 304 as context for the two sidings referred to in the narrative. S&DRT archive.

One siding was apparently for the S&DJR's purposes, leading off from where it goes from single to double-track, just a few yards NW of the Junction. The L&SWR siding lay in the fork of the two lines in a somewhat cramped position, with its point trailing towards Wimborne. Neither site had any obvious access for horse-drawn or later motor vehicles, and were probably

Title photo; Broadstone Junction showing the merging of the two lines into the single line of the cut-off. Photographed in July 1969.

By this time, both lines were in use for limited freight traffic only – the one on the right leading to facilities at Wimborne and West Moors.

could be berthed off the line that the train would subsequently follow. Yet Colin notes that, since the gradient up from Poole was, at 1-in-75, steeper than that from Hamworthy Junction (1-in-100), surely it was more likely that any assisting engine would have come from the former direction? He's not really convinced that this holding role was the main reason for these sidings. Two refuges just for assisting engines strikes him as overly generous provision. The S&DJR one was once, at maximum, about 500 feet long from lead to buffers, almost reaching the end of the Up Hamworthy (No.4) platform! I also wondered if the issue of locos either banking or piloting would have been relevant to how the assisting might have worked and where the waiting loco was attached after standing in one of these sidings. We've seen no evidence from Working Timetables to date to offer any explanation. Again, more questions than answers!



New Poole Junction: This early image is included partly for the truncated running-in board which shows 'Broadstone' added separately above 'New Poole Junction'. It was initially thought to date from around or shortly after the 1872 opening of the station and drop-line to New Poole (foreground), and the familiar 'gallows' junction signals are not evident. However, the apparently fresh, climbing alignment of the cut-off seems visible between the roofs of the central waiting room and the shelter, with Sand Cutting through the Corfe Hills ridge visible above the shelter roof. That would make the date circa 1884-85. [Photo by Andrew Hawkes/Poole Photo Archive.]

What other purpose might these sidings have served? Another possibility might have been for berthing 'tail-end' traffic off Up passenger trains. Once stabled, any vans could be tripped later to the yard, as was known to be the practice at other stations. Yet another is for horse-and-carriage traffic for the local landed gentry, although that raises other issues about road access to get in and out. Both sites are seriously constrained by inaccessibility from the nearest public highway.

Dates and functions

The OS map evidence is interesting but not that helpful. Colin and I have identified various key points. Firstly, note that by 1900 both sidings had probably been built. While we can't rely entirely on OS surveys for the fine detail of track layouts, the 1:2500 maps available from the National Library of Scotland's excellent on-line collection are very suggestive. The L&SWR siding appears for the 1886 survey (published 1888) and for 1900 (published 1901), so might have been implemented a few years after New Poole Junction station opened in 1872. The 1900 edition indicates the S&DJR siding in roughly the same location as that on the 1903 plan. Perhaps the Engineer's 1903 label "proposed siding" indicated nothing more than a suggested shortening of the existing facility, together with the provision of a trap point at the exit, but would the company bother calling it a "proposed siding" if it was just a shortening?

Colin comments that these dates are themselves quite suggestive – in the late-19th century, passenger-rated goods were

commonly carried in sufficient volumes to justify vans being dropped off from and picked up by through trains, but by the inter-war period road competition had killed off a lot of that traffic. The inevitable delays to passenger trains could be minimised by providing sidings easily worked by the train engine. Perhaps that's why these sidings were built: to offer this facility for Up trains on both the Southampton & Dorchester and S&DJR lines? The S&DJR gradient was 1-in-97 immediately up from the Junction, so adding vehicles from this siding, with the loco already on the gradient and having to restart, might have been operationally challenging. Yet Colin reckons that by this time the locos were sufficiently powerful to cope and such practices would have been acceptable within the operating regulations.



Broadstone Junction: a No. 76011 passes the signal box and has just taken the Corfe Mullen line on 27 June 1956.

[Unknown photographer/Kidderminster Railway Museum Trust, ref. 150724.]

Working the sidings

As both the S&DJR and L&SWR sidings were situated north of the junction, it would not matter whether trains had come off the Poole branch or the main line from Hamworthy. In the other direction, it would have been easy enough for trains heading to Poole to use the yard off the Down (to use the 1888 nomenclature) line on the 'branch' through the Poole platforms. The only direction for which there was apparently no convenient provision was for trains heading Down to Weymouth.



An engine heading for the Corfe Mullen cut-off passes the Whitaker tablet apparatus at Broadstone in August 1950.

Note the siding above the tablet apparatus with a long sand drag.

[Unknown photographer/Kidderminster Railway Museum Trust, ref. 015951.]

As regards the much shorter L&SWR siding, heavy goods trains from Weymouth and Dorchester to Southampton and beyond may well have needed assistance up through Delph Cutting to a summit near Merley Bridge. The extra loco would presumably have dropped off at Wimborne Station (or possibly Ringwood). Assistance was also required at times for starting Down trains at Wimborne, where the gradient from the River Stour Bridge was 1-in-100 up to the same summit. Were locos despatched from Wimborne's S&D shed for such duties, at least until the shed closed in 1923? More research is needed.

The year that these two sidings were taken out of use is unknown, but possibly just before – or more likely after – World War 1, as an economy. Both were still shown on the 1926 OS revision (published 1928), but both had gone by the 1934 survey (published 1935), although the connection was still there off the S&DJR, presumably leading to the familiar gravel/ballast drag. A 1920s/1930s photo (reproduced here) shows just a short inward trap point off the S&DJR, leading to a drag of indeterminate length (because it runs out of the picture). It looks like ballast might have simply covered the former siding without shortening the track.

'Ghost' formation

Another intriguing feature of the 1903 plan that caught my eye at about my third reading is a short, wide section of 'ghost', trackless embankment on both sides of the

S&DJR close to the Junction. Was this earthwork just the result of dumping excess spoil from the cut-off's construction, as happened very noticeably at Rushcombe Bottom on the Broadstone side of Ashington? To me the ghost formation looks contrived and apparently intended for some operational purpose, the section east of the S&DJR seeming remarkably like an earlier alignment of the junction approach, with perhaps a much sharper curve than the one we know. Was the junction approach perhaps eased between 1886 and 1903? It seems unlikely and I am unaware of any record in the S&DJR/S&DRT archives of such works happening, but perhaps other readers know? The L&SWR's Up siding would certainly have fouled that sharper alignment, so presumably it post-dated any easing. The S&DJR's Up siding would also have looked significantly different if it had been contemporaneous with an earlier junction alignment.

To conclude, it's remarkable what infrastructure details can be gleaned from engineers' plans, land terriers, OS maps and similar sources, and how they trigger the search for explanations of their operational purposes, often raising speculative answers and many more questions for which there may or may not be solid evidence.

Photo clarifications

Jonathan's selection of photos raised a few questions. I've tried to identify the exact location in the lead photo on page 4 (reproduced again below). It shows an Up train "climbing Corfe Mullen Bank", which may be a fairly liberal interpretation. That bank is generally accepted as the 1-in-80 up from the Corfe Mullen end to Ashington. In fairness, I suppose that east of Ashington summit may arguably be considered as the 'downward side' of Corfe Mullen Bank! Judging by the scene to the left of the 2P, this photo was taken shortly after the train had left Broadstone Junction, as I think I detect the first tee of the golf course and some of the villas in the background. This orientation also fits with the words 'lit by the setting sun' in the caption.



The photo on p.5, showing Bridge 223 at Corfe Mullen (reproduced above), was attributed to John Evers [incorrectly so – Ed.], but was taken circa 1920 by an unknown photographer. John (Jnr.) was most active in the 1960s, and his father, also John, in the 1950s and this picture is an earlier photo included in the South

Western Circle Eyers Collection. After 1905, Bridge 223 was officially known as Corfe Mullen Junction Bridge, but its previous name is unknown – perhaps Blandford Road Bridge, reflecting its carriage of the Poole-Blandford turnpike over the railway.



The photo of Ashington Lane Bridge at the bottom of page 9 (reproduced below) was new to me and interesting particularly for the apparent works being carried out to prevent slippage of the cutting sides. These works appear to involve stone revetments on both sides of the line, the stone pile in the foreground presumably being ready for use.

It's also apparent that stone drains have been laid from the top of the Down-side bank, to channel water into the trackbed drains and reduce the risks of collapse of the cutting sides. The even deeper and similarly steep Sand Cutting, closer to Broadstone, also suffered from slippages, but never seems to have had substantial revetments built. Given that the Ashington site was also on sandy heathland, there were no immediate, local quarries to supply building stone, the nearest probably being Purbeck, Portland or around the S&D on the Dorset-Somerset border. The photo offers a rare view of the full height of this graceful, three-arch, brick bridge, which has curved end parapet walls. The piers were buried after track-lifting in 1970, when the cutting was partially land-filled, leaving the bridge looking about half its original height.

As always, I am on the look-out for more rare and/or unpublished photos of the cut-off and the Wimborne loop that may inform their history. If readers have any lurking in their collections, I would be grateful for sight of them via info@eastdorsetrailways.org.



Closure date query

Finally, a chronological conundrum: Jonathan mentioned the oft-quoted date of closure of the S&D's Wimborne line to passengers – as on and from 11 July 1920. This has been questioned in recent years. Richard Maund of the Railway & Canal Historical Society looked at L&SWR/S&DJR timetables (public and working) between that date and the winter of 1922-23, in the run-up to the Grouping. Successive issues showed a residual local passenger service until the end of the Summer 1922 timetable on 31 October of that year. That's no guarantee that such trains actually operated, but on balance it seems unlikely that they would be publicly advertised otherwise. Colin Divall reckons that a basic service of one train each way daily suggests the working was to maintain crews' route knowledge for emergencies. I wonder if the issue might have been complicated by a passenger brake being included in the milk trains that continued to travel from Bailey Gate to Wimborne for forwarding to London until as late as 1932, after which they were diverted via Templecombe. Was that lone carriage officially recognised by inclusion in the passenger timetable for a time, or was any pick-up of passengers a casual, off-timetable occurrence? Yet another mystery for now.

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