

## Who Designed the Stations on the Southampton & Dorchester Railway?

by Philip A. Brown

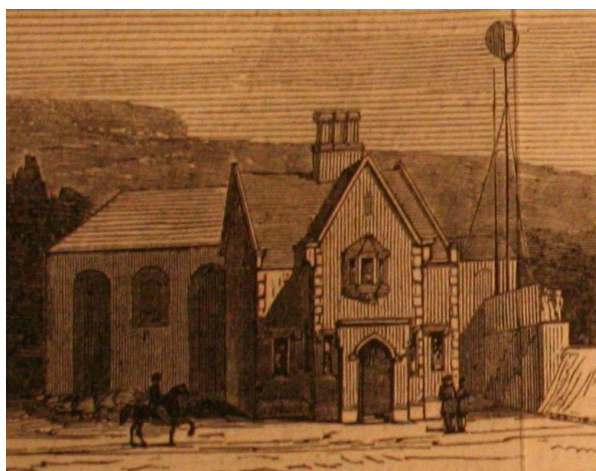
*Editorial note: This is a slightly amended version of a paper first published in the Journal of the Railway & Canal Historical Society (R&CHS) in Vol.36, Part 1, March 2008, with additional illustrations and captions. It covers some stations outside the immediate area of the Wimborne & East Dorset Railways Study, but of directly related interest because of the common heritage.*



**Wareham's first station**, as seen looking eastwards from the main road (North Causeway - former A351 alignment) in the 1960s. The running lines and level crossing are to the left. This is one of the clearest images of Moorsom's design for the Southampton and Dorchester Railway's stations, mercifully relatively uncluttered by unsympathetic alterations, unlike at Wimborne. (It also shows the original goods shed at right, which survives in recognisable form in 2022, in use by an architectural consultancy.) The passenger station was resited to the west side of the crossing in 1887, and the original building was demolished in the 1970s. *Photo: (C) John Evers, South Western Circle Evers Collection, ref: JE3800*

At least two architects have been mentioned in the literature as being responsible for designing Wimborne and the other stations along the Southampton & Dorchester Railway.

Gordon Biddle, in his pioneering 1973 study *Victorian Stations*, suggested they were the work of William Tite, on the grounds that Tite is known to have designed stations for the London & South Western Railway, some of them in a similar Tudor-Gothic style to the S&D stations<sup>1</sup>. Although the S&D was independently promoted, it was to be leased and worked by the LSWR on completion, so this was not an improbable idea but no evidence apart from use of a common architectural style was cited. A number of subsequent authors have accepted this attribution without question.



### **Wimborne Station, 1847 - the artist's impression.**

This much-published engraving is almost certainly the only illustration we have to work from at the date of the opening of the railway. Compared with the some of the other structures and features shown, the southern elevation of the station house seems the most accurately drawn. *Illustrated London News*

### **Wimborne Station, 1847 - the model.**

Colin Divall, in seeking to create a diorama of the station at the opening date, has commissioned models of various key structures at 4mm scale. This shows the south-eastern view of the station house stripped back of all the surrounding structures that obscured it, both at the time (embankment, platforms, etc.) and also the subsequent clutter of additions. *Photo: Colin Divall*

Then, in 1975, a slim volume entitled *Castleman's Corkscrew: the Southampton & Dorchester Railway 1844-1848* by J G Cox was published. It was a carefully researched work, based on primary sources as far as possible and fully referenced. It told the story of the eponymous railway's brief period of independent existence, from initial conception of the scheme by the Dorset solicitor Charles Castleman to the point when the completed line was taken over by the neighbouring LSWR.

Unusually for a work of railway history published at that time, the author included a substantial section describing the stations. In passing, he concluded that their architect was Sancton Wood, citing as evidence a payment of £21 made to Wood for the design of a 'first class' station, this being recorded in the S&D's accounts journal. Again, some subsequent writers, not unreasonably, have repeated this attribution.



**Droitwich (Droitwich Road from 1852).** Droitwich's first station, on the Birmingham & Gloucester Railway, opened in 1840 but was around two miles east of the town centre, on the road to Redditch and Stratford. It closed to passenger traffic in 1855, three years after the GWR's more conveniently located station opened, but remained as a goods station until 1952. The building survives as a private residence. This view shows the west elevation with the running lines out of sight behind. 17th February 1998. *Photo: P. A. Brown*



**Thomastown, Waterford & Kilkenny Railway.** Built of limestone with granite dressings rather than brick, it is the last known example of Moorsom's design to be built, the least altered and it still survives. The line south from Kilkenny was opened as far as Thomastown in 1848 but not completed through to Waterford until 1853. This view is of the west, station forecourt elevation. 8th August 2009. *Photo: P. A. Brown*

Putting aside the thought that this begged the question of who might have been responsible for the design of the various other buildings on the railway – the goods sheds and engine sheds, the gatekeepers' lodges etc – not to mention that the stations were not all to one standard design, the logic seemed unassailable. One had been taught the principle of Ockham's Razor: essentially that given competing explanations, assume that the most straightforward is the most likely to be right. How else could one reasonably explain a financially prudent Board of Directors authorising such a payment to an architect?

Some 20 years after these publications appeared, the author, having moved away from Hampshire, found himself living near an earlier railway built by the S&D's engineer, Captain W S Moorsom. This was the Birmingham & Gloucester Railway, opened in 1840-41. Exploration of the surviving infrastructure led to the surprising discovery that Droitwich station had been built to the same design as Wimborne, Lyndhurst Road/Ashurst New Forest, Holmsley, Ringwood, Wareham (first station) and Poole/Hamworthy Goods.



**Ringwood.** A 1963 view of the western elevation from the station forecourt. The original structure is buried within extensions on all sides. The right-hand gable with its oriel window above the entrance porch should enable viewers to orientate themselves by comparing with the illustrations of other, less altered examples. The station site was cleared after closure and is now a business park.

*Photo: (C) and courtesy Michael Bailey*



**Holmsley** (initially Christchurch Road). The south elevation seen from the station forecourt in 1963. Moorsom's T-shaped building is to the left and there is an additional two-storey wing on its right, built in an identical style. We do not currently know whether this was part of the original construction or a sympathetic later addition. The building survives as The Old Station Tea Rooms. *Photo: (C) and courtesy Michael Bailey*

These buildings were to a 'T'-shaped plan, two storeys high, decorated in a mild domestic-Tudor style and featuring paired chimney stacks and an oriel window above the entrance porch. The vertical stem of the 'T' was orientated parallel to the railway track and the pitched roofs of the two parts of the building were separate constructions, so no internal communication between the roof spaces was possible. Frances Wishaw, writing about the B&G, recorded that 'the buildings of the intermediate stations are erected in the Gothic style, very much like those on some of the Scotch railways recently opened to the public. An intermediate station-house consists of about four rooms, including a booking-office and waiting room'.<sup>ii</sup>

Clearly Droitwich could not have been built to Wood's plan, which was as yet undrawn. Furthermore, there were strong design similarities between the lesser stations on the two lines, between the portals of the cut-and-cover tunnels at Moseley and Southampton and between some of the gate lodges on the two railways. A further example of a station built to the Droitwich design was found in Ireland, at Thomastown on the Waterford & Kilkenny, another Moorsom line. The physical evidence pointed to the designs originating with Moorsom and being reused on each subsequent contract he undertook.

Confirmatory evidence that the design should be attributed to Moorsom was found in the writings of Herbert Spencer, the philosopher and evolutionary theorist. As a young man he had worked for Moorsom as an assistant engineer on the B&G contract. His autobiography confirms that the design work was undertaken in-house by the engineer's staff. 'In the office at Worcester', Spencer wrote, 'there had been made not only drawings for engineering works, but also those for various buildings – stations, offices, engine-houses, and so forth. Naturally there occurred occasions for the discussion of architectural principles...' Spencer also mentioned a fellow-employee, C E Bernard, 'brought up as an architect and eventually settled in Cardiff'. Perhaps he was the person ultimately responsible for the design<sup>iii</sup>.



**Lyndhurst Road (renamed Ashurst New Forest in 1995).** Rather like Droitwich Road, Lyndhurst Road station was some 2½ miles from the village it purported to serve. This photo shows the north elevation viewed from the station approach. The cream painted area of wall records the location of a single-storey extension. This once housed the booking office but was demolished after the station became unstaffed. Moorsom's building, however, survives. 17th August 2011. *Photo: P. A. Brown*



**Hamworthy** - Poole's first station. This is the perspective of the road frontage viewed from the north-east in 1958. Like Droitwich Road, Hamworthy ceased to be a passenger station (in 1896), but continued to serve for goods traffic. It differed from its sister stations in having a less steeply pitched roof and, as seen here, the two sections of roof are conjoined. Again, we do not know whether this was an original feature or a later alteration. The photo bears witness to much unsympathetic alteration to the building's original features. *Photo: R.M. Casserley, ref:17511*

But why did the S&D pay Sancton Wood to design a station? When Mr Cox carried out his research, the S&D's minute book was not available to him. It has since come into the public domain and does contain a clue. It reveals that the idea of asking Wood to design a station came from Samuel Clegg, Moorsom's resident engineer. A minute of 8 October 1845 records that 'the resident engineer having expressed a wish that an architect should be employed to draw a plan for a First Class Station, the Board directed this to be done without delay: the expense thereof to be defrayed by the Company'. A further minute of 18 December 1845 records that '... a plan and elevation of a First Class station was submitted to the Committee; and the same was approved'. Finally, the payment of £21 to Mr S Wood was included in a report to the Board's Committee of Finance on 11 February 1846<sup>iv</sup>.

Quite what happened afterwards must be conjecture since the minute book says no more on the subject. Moorsom was certainly present for the earlier part of the Board meeting on 8 October, where Clegg's request was the final item recorded in the minutes. Was Moorsom aware of the request beforehand? Did the Board consult him about it? There is no clear answer. One possibility is that Wood's design proved too expensive to build, so Moorsom's existing design was substituted. Another is that Moorsom simply put his foot down, perhaps annoyed that his deputy had apparently gone over his head, directly to the Board. There are no more expressions of wishes by Clegg recorded in the minutes. As to Sancton Wood's design, whether it disappeared without trace or whether he reused it elsewhere, we will probably never know.

## References:

- i. See, for example, Tite's obituary in *The Builder*, 3 May 1873, which lists some examples of his railway station work.
- ii Francis Wishaw, *The Railways of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1842, reprinted David & Charles, 1969.
- iii Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, Williams & Norgate, 1904.
- iv *Minute Book of the Southampton & Dorchester Railway*, Southampton Record Office, ref.D/X/416.