

A long time a-dying: Broadstone to Hamworthy Junction, 1872-1966*

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In a previous note I argued that the lightly-used 3¼-mile section of the former Southampton & Dorchester Railway between Broadstone and Hamworthy Junction was illegally closed to passenger trains in 1966, because the route was not included in the statutory (Section 56) procedure for the services through Broadstone that were to be withdrawn.¹ This note reviews the line's usage, particularly in its last years – for which period some of the train registers from Broadstone signal box are now available.

Early story

Originally a single track on the 1847 main line, doubled in 1863, by October 1867 (when both the Somerset & Dorset, from Burnham, and the Salisbury & Dorset Junction had opened), the route was used by 16 trains on weekdays in each direction (four down and three up on Sundays). A dozen of the weekday trains were Somerset & Dorset ones to/from Poole (later Hamworthy), and so the route's slow decline arguably started in December 1872 when these were diverted to New Poole over the freshly opened line from New Poole Junction (i.e. Broadstone). This route, extended to Bournemouth West in June 1874, was also an alternative for Salisbury & Dorset trains, which had totalled four on weekdays in 1867. Nevertheless increased service frequencies on the Weymouth main line meant the absolute number of trains declined little, if at all: in the spring of 1888 there were fifteen weekday trains in each direction, four each way on Sundays.²

Above: **Hillbourne:** A mile or so south of Broadstone, the Southampton & Dorchester line (right) and Poole & Bournemouth Railway (left) diverged. Here a local stopping service is heading in the Down direction, possibly just to Hamworthy Junction or maybe Holton Heath. This postcard view prior to March 1928 is looking southwards from beside an accommodation/occupation over-bridge that led from York Road onto the heathland that was part of the vast Canford Estate owned by the Guest family of Dowlais Iron Works fame. The access track it carried passed over the Hamworthy Junction line on the level. The difference in levels of the two routes has increased dramatically from Broadstone Station.
Postcard; Peter Russell Collection



Roman Road Bridge: *This view from 23rd September 1965, with single-track on a double-track formation, perhaps hints at the appearance of the original Southampton & Dorchester Railway in 1847, albeit with no lineside trees. The direction is towards Broadstone at the Roman Road under-bridge, its low parapets seen in the centre ground. The double line was singled in 1932. John Eyers; © South Western Circle, Eyers Collection; ref: JE 4855*

Beginning of the end

Decline really set in from May 1893 when the Holes Bay curve, the last link in the direct coastal route between Brockenhurst, Hamworthy Junction and Weymouth, opened, becoming the main line. From this point, the inland route became the secondary 'Old Road' with the Broadstone to Hamworthy Junction section in practice – if not for many years nomenclature – becoming, at Broadstone, a branch off the more heavily trafficked Poole & Bournemouth route.³ Nevertheless, before the first world war several through passenger trains still ran inland; since the gradients were less severe, goods traffic also tended to go this way – as it would until the Old Road was truncated in May 1964. For example, in summer 1914 six up passenger trains were timetabled on weekdays, with three on Sundays; in the down direction, there were three (including the mail) and two respectively.⁴

Between the wars

Traffic, passenger and goods, almost certainly increased during the first world war, although details are scant.⁵ But passenger-rated trains slackened thereafter – according to Brian Jackson, just a single Weymouth-Waterloo service still ran inland by 1925. On the other hand, an early-morning Salisbury-Weymouth newspaper train (a fixture until 1964) started to run on weekdays around this time, with a return passenger service some hours later.⁶ Indeed the station master at Southampton West, J. Thornton Burge, saw the rapidly growing residential areas to the north of Bournemouth as cause for optimism. Writing in 1924 he thought this development meant it “most probable that the time when the old main line will come into its own again is not far distant”, with the line south of Broadstone as a link in “the direct express route to Swanage, Dorchester, and Weymouth”.⁷ Such high hopes were dashed even before the depression of the early 1930s; the last regular express ran over the inland route in September 1928. Despite the introduction of a Salisbury-Weymouth return excursion on three high-summer Sundays in 1932, on 11th December the line was singled south of Broadstone.⁸



Broadstone Station:

In this southward view from circa-1924, we think this was a Hamworthy Junction to Wimborne shuttle at Platform 4, formed from an M7 propelling the only L&SWR arc-roof, two-coach pull-push set, No.375. The platform shelter survived into the 1950s. Photographer unknown; L&GRP Collection.

In this circa-late-1930s view seen from across the Poole lines, M7 No.106 is leaving Broadstone with the 10.33 a.m. Wimborne to Hamworthy Junction stopping train, composed of five ex-L&SWR carriages. The M7 is working in conventional (pulling) mode. The first, 2-set is very probably one of the SR's pull-push conversions (Sets 31-36). That makes the date 1939 or later. The rear set looks like a 3-LAV, reduced from a 4-set (mid-1930s onwards). M7 106 was a Bournemouth loco from 1937. The dramatic change in levels between the two routes is evident, south of the station.

Photo: G. W. Puntis; © R. Puntis

By the mid-1930s the advertised year-round passenger service had settled on a pattern which, with minor changes of times, stops and destinations, continued until the outbreak of war. In summer 1934, for example, three weekday stopping passenger trains (the 07.05 and 19.18 ex-Dorchester, to Broadstone and Basingstoke respectively; and the 08.05 Broadstone to Swanage) were publicly advertised, with none on Sundays.⁹ In January 1935 the service was almost the same, although the 08.05 now went to Dorchester. According to Jackson, in 1936 complete closure was considered, although he probably errs in saying that there was only one passenger and a couple of freight workings each weekday.¹⁰

Passenger trains were, however, rare enough for the occasional special working to be noticed by enthusiasts.¹¹ For example, a reader's letter in *Railway Magazine* in December 1936, from a Dr. H. Chave Cox, reported two unusual special trains having passed Lytchett Crossing in August 1936. One reputedly comprised ten LNER corridor coaches of Great Eastern origin, and another of nine LMS corridor coaches of mixed type. The editor could only suggest they were probably through excursions from the LNER and LMSR to Swanage or Weymouth. It's speculative, but the first might have come via the GCR to Banbury, then GWR to Oxford and Basingstoke. while the latter might have travelled via the Somerset & Dorset line or via the LNWR line to Oxford.

The line survived, largely for diversions, goods and turning engines – in summer 1939, the two weekday up and one down passenger trains were still advertised, although Nigel Bray notes that a portion of the 09.23 ex-Salisbury was detached at Wimborne to form the 10.33 to Hamworthy Junction, and the unadvertised Salisbury-Weymouth newspaper train now carried passengers, at least on Mondays.¹² The use of the line for turning movements saved a light engine movement to the Branksome triangle or Bournemouth Central turntable, both in congested areas.

Post-WW2

It is very likely the line saw more use during the second world war, given the extensive naval facilities at Portland and the role of Dorset's ports in the evacuation of Dunkirk and Operation Overlord: but I have yet to

see any primary evidence.¹³ This may have included movement of the large gun(s) deployed on the Swanage branch, and possibly stored at West Moors depot at one stage. There is also speculation that tank traffic to and from Wool after WW2 may have used the line to and from the Salisbury area and points further north, avoiding the Bournemouth area. Again, firm evidence is lacking. There are photos of tanks stored on the Hamworthy Junction sidings in the early-1960s, awaiting onward transfer.

Late-1940s and 1950s

In any case, immediately after the war, the publicly advertised passenger service was little changed from that in 1939. The winter timetable for 1946-47 and the Southern's last public timetable (October 1947) showed a 07.00 weekday departure from Dorchester, now for Wimborne (instead of Broadstone pre-war), returning at 08.00, and a 19.32 Dorchester departure for Eastleigh via Wimborne; the 03.50 Salisbury newspaper and passengers train continued (although only to Dorchester), with nothing on Sundays.¹⁴ The working timetable for summer 1949 differed little; the newspaper train ran again to Weymouth, which was probably why the 07.00 up Dorchester started instead (SX) from Weymouth at 06.40. There was also a conditional path for an early-morning MO Salisbury-Weymouth stopping train, perhaps a hangover from the war.¹⁵

Business picked up a little in the 1950s as the line was a useful by-pass for busy Bournemouth in the holiday season as well as carrying excursions to the Dorset coast.¹⁶ In 1952 two up and two down trains reportedly used the branch on summer Saturdays, while three years later, discussions over the possible singling of stretches of the Old Road suggested that up to four down and five up trains regularly used the route west of Broadstone on such days.¹⁷ There were also weekday excursions from Salisbury, including 2 from 1953 a high-summer SX trip to (and back from!) Weymouth; by 1956 it was joined by another, for Swanage, which lasted until at least 1961. The Weymouth excursion even ran in 1956 on summer Sundays.¹⁸ There were also one-off specials, the best-known a seven-car Pullman (accommodating travel agents) to Dorchester on 20th August 1952.¹⁹



Hillbourne: Occasional special trains used the route in the later years. Here, West Country Pacific No.34008 Padstow heads a Waterloo-Dorchester, all-Pullman special on 20th August 1952, with the Devon Belle observation car at the rear. The position is just south of Hillbourne, where the Hamworthy Junction line is diverging sharply from the Poole line to the right, by this point well below the Dorchester line. This train carried members of CTAC heading for a conference at Dorchester. We believe CTAC stood for Creative Tourist Agents Conference - a consortium of nine UK travel agents and firms that chartered special trains from 1933-1939 and 1945-68. The train had stopped at Wimborne to allow passengers to view the Minster. Photo: John Sansom; courtesy Colin Stone



Lytchett Crossing: Another Saturdays-only service, this time from from Salisbury to Weymouth is seen south of Lytchett Crossing circa 1962, headed by West Country Pacific No.34099 Lynmouth. At far right are seen three coal wagons in the siding of Dorset Clay Products, which led from the running line in a Down direction. This siding opened on 31st March 1948. Beyond the rear of the train was Lytchett Brickworks on the Up side, which also had its own siding, opened in 1890. Both sidings were taken out of use on 5th June 1966. Photographer unknown; courtesy Alan Burridge

Summer-dated trains often required berthing during the week in under-used yards, one of which, Hamworthy Junction, was the destination in 1954 for a MO ECS movement from Salisbury – this path remained in the timetable, sometimes on a conditional basis, until at least 1960; it also ran on summer Saturdays, at least in 1958. The light engine off these trains sometimes returned to Salisbury over the Broadstone line.²⁰ There were also a couple of ECS movements from Hamworthy Junction to Broadstone on Mondays in the high summer of 1956, as well as two pull-push ECS trains from Poole (08.18 and 09.50) to Broadstone via Hamworthy Junction. The latter pair then worked public services over the Old Road to Brockenhurst; there seems to have been no issue with line capacity, so it is likely that the trains were being turned to suit the rest of the diagram.²¹

Lytchett Crossing: *An example of the remaining summer services to Weymouth or Swanage, routed via Broadstone. This is the returning, Saturdays-only, 1.20 p.m. Weymouth-Waterloo service, passing over the busy then A35 at Lytchett Crossing (Upton) in 1957. The date was recorded as 21st July 1957, but as that was a Sunday, it's more likely Saturday 20th July. The direction of view is east towards Poole. The loco is West Country Pacific No.34012 Launceston. Photo: W. Newman; courtesy Brian Jackson*



The concentration of Channel Islands boat trains on the Waterloo to Weymouth Quay ex-LSWR route in 1959 meant a little extra traffic. All these trains were additional to the long-running newspaper train and the return eastwards around 06.40, although by autumn 1957 the latter went to Brockenhurst, picking up, mostly at Ringwood, pupils for the grammar school there.²² Crucially for the statutory closure process, these trains were still in the timetable in 1963, calling at respectively Broadstone, and Hamworthy Junction and Broadstone. In high summer, the daily (M-F) Salisbury-Weymouth excursion still ran in both directions (calling at Broadstone), as did one down and one up SO boat train. Saturdays also saw two down and one up Waterloo-Swanage services; 1963 was the last summer for such trains. There were however no regular passenger trains from the Somerset & Dorset.²³

1960s

Admittedly, even on summer Saturdays these timetabled passenger trains hardly made for intensive use of the branch. Yet the train registers for Broadstone box confirm other uses.²⁴ On Saturday 27th August 1960, for example, of 99 trains passing the box, at least ten (a third of the timetabled number in 1888, when there was no other route!) used the branch; on the following Monday, twelve of the 74 trains (16 per cent) went the same way. Not surprisingly, goods trains and light-engines made up most of the extras, although it is not possible to be certain about every movement. On weekdays, the 10.10 Dorchester and 18.50 Hamworthy Junction up goods were regular users, as was the 06.05 down Brockenhurst. At least one morning ECS train from Poole ran to Hamworthy Junction via Broadstone that summer.



*An example of a Somerset & Dorset goods service working over the Old Road to Hamworthy Junction. Class 4F 0-6-0 No.44102 passes Platform 4 and enters the single-line section with 06.35 Evercreech Junction to Poole service.
Date: 1964.
Photo: © T. C. Chapman*

One or two notable trains also came off or went onto the Somerset & Dorset. In the 1955 WTT there was an S&D freight to Hamworthy which used to be a Class 7F turn. By 1960 this had gone, but the 06.35 from Evercreech Junction was routed to Hamworthy Junction with a Class 4F, before going light to Poole. This was later diverted directly to Poole. In Summer 1959 there was a 10.18 Hamworthy Junction to Templecombe empties, again 7F-worked, once photographed at Broadstone Junction with just a brake van! In the earlier part of Summer 1960, a return goods for the S&D ran quite frequently in the late afternoon. The locomotive off the M-F Southampton Terminus train terminating at Wimborne at 18.49 used the triangle via Hamworthy Junction to turn before working back east with a goods train. A one-off was a weekday excursion from Parsons Street (Bristol) off the Old Road, probably heading for Swanage. Traffic on Sundays was very light though. The civil engineers had a conditional path (SX) to and from Redbridge, which remained in the Summer 1963 timetable. By then, just the 07.55 Salisbury goods (to Hamworthy Junction) was scheduled on weekdays (SX) over the branch in the down direction, returning at 16.25 (SX). The up Dorset goods still ran, but now starting from Hamworthy Junction (SX) and Dorchester (SO).²⁵



Hamworthy Junction: *This is the view eastwards from the Up end in 1963. A Summer Saturdays service from Waterloo to Swanage is coming off the Broadstone line to rejoin the Southampton & Dorchester line during the last summer of these services. Photographer unknown; via Castleman's Corkscrew group*

Final knockings

Traffic over the branch fell away with the closure of the Old Road as a through route in May 1964, along with the complete closure of the Salisbury & Dorset Junction and the run-down of the Somerset & Dorset. But the branch itself did not close, and staff in the two boxes opened the block section every morning. Perhaps because on many days there were no trains, the signallers were less careful about closing at the end of the late turn – or at any rate, they often failed to record their action in the train register! Yet trains did run, albeit very occasionally. For instance, on Friday 12th November 1965, Saturday 8th January and Saturday 19th February 1966, a 09.30 Weymouth freight came up the branch, heading for the Somerset & Dorset; these seem to have been specials. At least three other freight trains came up from either Weymouth or Dorchester in the same period, two of which appear to have headed towards Wimborne.²⁶

Once the Somerset & Dorset finally closed, on Monday 7th March 1966, there was clearly no reason to keep the branch. On Friday 3rd June 1966 the single-line instrument was disconnected between Broadstone and Hamworthy Junction, although one token (no. 19) was left in the box to allow access to Doulton's clay siding (installed as late as June 1962) at Hillbourne just south of Broadstone station. The date for official closure of the through route is usually given as Sunday 5th June 1966, but clearly that was just a bureaucratic nicety.²⁷ Jackson says that the branch had been severed at each end much earlier, in April 1965, but clearly that is wrong; the signalmen were still opening the section right up to (and including) 3rd June 1966!²⁸ The Down line had been downgraded to a siding on 5th June 1966 and track subsequently lifted between Doulton's Siding and Hamworthy Junction, where three sidings were retained just short of Hamworthy Junction, but removed in April 1971. According to Mike Brown, an Upton resident at the time, what was left of the section (north of Doulton's Siding) closed completely on 2nd May 1972. In any case, the end of through traffic left just the 11 miles 74 chains of the Old Road between Broadstone and Ringwood open for a regular weekdays (on and from 16th July 1966, SX) goods train until August 1967, accessed via the 1872 link to Poole via Holes Bay Junction.²⁹

Doulton's siding, Hillbourne: The last traffic to use the remaining stub of the line was to serve Doulton's Clay Siding until Spring 1972 (exact date uncertain). The siding had only opened on 24th June 1962. Seen from a remaining Up Broadstone Distant signal post, an unidentified Crompton D65XX or Class 33 has left its brake van on the running line and collects the full wagons from the siding, having first dropped off some empties. The train will then reverse back to Broadstone Junction. Circa 1970. Photographer unknown; courtesy Colin Stone Collection



Post-closure life

There is a coda, an echo of J. Thornton Burge's optimistic musings of the 1920s. After the Old Road closed to passengers in 1964, Cyril Tapper, a former councillor, floated a scheme to rid Poole of the level crossings that had plagued the town centre since 1872. He proposed closing the station and making either Parkstone or Branksome a terminus ('Poole East') for London trains, removing the railway through the town. Weymouth services would be maintained by reopening the Old Road (no lifting had yet taken place), accessed from the Poole area by a revived Broadstone station, to be named 'Poole North'. One objector pointed out that the Broadstone-Hamworthy Junction section would have to be redoubled, but that was probably the least of the scheme's drawbacks. Despite making the front page of the local newspaper, there is no evidence that Tapper's suggestions were taken any more seriously than Thornton Burge's four decades earlier.³⁰ The 1971 opening of the Towngate Bridge across the railway near the station still left Poole with the huge inconvenience of the High Street level crossing, and with much of trackbeds north of the town destroyed (notably through conversion to roads) there is no chance of the Broadstone to Hamworthy Junction route seeing trains again.³¹ At least walkers, cyclists and other active travellers can still enjoy the views across the remaining patches of open heathland from the stretch of trackbed north of the A35 that forms part of the Castleman Trailway.



© Colour-Rail

Broadstone: Long-distance goods trains continued to use the Hamworthy Junction to Broadstone section until the end of passenger services on the Old Road. Here, an Up goods headed by BR Standard Class 4MT 2-6-0 No.76065 approaches Broadstone Station Bridge on the former Down line before crossing to the Up line just south of Platforms 3 and 4, on 12th October 1963. The train is believed to be the 2.00 p.m. Dorchester-Bevois Park Yard (Southampton) service. The stub siding of the former Up line (behind the train), south of the single-to-double-track convergence, is seen with carriage stock berthed. This siding would have normally held holiday stock up to the end of Summer 1963, but these are more likely to have been condemned coaches awaiting scrapping. They look like Maunsell stock, which was being withdrawn by 1963.

Photo: Roy Patterson; © Colour-Rail, ref: 314071

Main References

In some cases, pinning down exact dates for openings and closures (and for any developments in between, including name changes for stations and halts) can be a minefield for research. Primary sources such as railway company records are normally the most reliable, and some researchers and authors have collated material from these. Otherwise, we are reliant on the recordings in secondary sources such as those listed below, which are generally accurate.

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Note

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