

S&DR 2-4-0 No.9 at Evercreech station c1870. Built by George England & Company at Hatcham Iron Works, New Cross, London, in 1863 at a cost of £2,550 each, Nos.9 and 10 differed from the original series of eight locomotives in that they had wider cylinders, a longer wheelbase, a larger raised firebox and, most noticeably, they were blessed with a spacious cab which offered protection against the elements. The original Somerset Central line was broad gauge and worked by the Bristol & Exeter Railway, but when the SCR headed toward standard gauge amalgamation with the Dorset Central the BER forced the SCR to lay a broad gauge third rail to Bruton. This picture clearly shows that the third rail had since been removed — the last BER train ran in 1868 — and that point rodding had taken its place, but it is difficult to discern whether the remaining rails rest upon a baulk road or cross-sleepers. The tracks to the right look to be converging, thereby suggesting that a middle road was in existence. Station staff and crew pose by the engine positioned (on the wrong road) beside the store and up platform shelter, possibly during shunting duties given that the engine displays the head code for goods working. Positioned by the smokebox is one of the re-railing jacks whilst the second jack lies between the rails, hinting at a possible mishap.

150 YEARS OF THE SOMERSET & DORSET RAILWAY

BY MIKE BEALE SOMERSET & DORSET RAILWAY TRUST

Photographs from the SDRT with captions by Russ Garner and David Milton

Mention of the Somerset & Dorset Railway conjures up scenes of two locomotives struggling over the steep gradients of the Mendip Hills with heavy trains conveying workers from the industrial cities of the Midlands and North of England on their annual holidays to Bournemouth. But when the railway was conceived 150 years ago, foremost in the minds of the promoters was a route linking the capital cities of Wales and France.

On 10th August 1857 Royal Assent was given to an Act of Parliament authorising the

Dorset Central Railway's extension from Blandford to Cole, the objectives of which were stated as: "...not only to accommodate the traffic of the district, but by means of other lines to complete a continuous line about 70 miles in length, from the English Channel at Poole and Southampton to the Bristol Channel at Highbridge".

"Other lines" referred to the Somerset Central Railway, whose extension from Glastonbury to Cole had been authorised a year earlier, and the two lines would subsequently link to become the infamous Somerset &

0-6-0 No.35 entering Blandford, probably during August 1892. The first batch of six locomotives (Nos.33-38) was built by Neilson & Co. of Glasgow in 1878 and they were

known as 'Scotties', a nickname attributed to the whole of the class even though the following 22 locomotives were all built by the Vulcan Foundry. In 1889 No.35 received a

Dorset Railway or S&D (known affectionately as the Swift & Delightful or Slow & Dirty). This would fuel a gauge war generating ill-feeling between the S&D and Great Western Railway, which ultimately contributed to the untimely end of the former.

When the first section of the Somerset Central Railway from Highbridge to Glastonbury opened on 28th August 1854 as a broad gauge (7ft 0 in) branch operated by the Bristol & Exeter Railway, it was described as "going from nowhere to nowhere over a turf moor, with but one town on the whole line and that having less than 4,000 people". The intermediate stations at Ashcott and Shapwick were two miles from the villages they served and the intervening moors were sparsely

Johnson boiler of a similar pattern and by the end of 1890 it had been vacuum fitted, as was the whole class, so as to cater for passenger duties. With their 2,200 gallon tenders they would have an approximate water radius of 55-65 miles and, based on passenger duty classifications for 1917-1923, the 'Scotties' were capable of hauling up to 140 tons. The ten-coach Bath to Bournemouth West fast passenger train, with two Midland Railway passenger brake vans and a possible saloon at the rear, draws into Blandford. The signalman and the fireman successfully exchange their tablets, the 'pouch' duly looped over their respective arms, each suitably packed with newspapers, or the like, to dampen the impact, decreed to be at 10mph (4mph at night). With two minutes allotted for stops at the main stations along the route, it is possible that water might have been taken on before the scheduled 4.05pm departure. During 1892-3 parts of Blandford station were being remodelled. The up platform awning was in the process of being extended and awaits its roof, whilst the squat S&DJR Type 1 signal box would be superseded by a new S&DJR Type 2 box at a position almost opposite on the down platform in September 1893.



An unidentified rebuilt Fowler 0-6-0 poses beside the up platform at Blandford with station staff and a handful of passengers, whilst the shunting horse straddles the down line c1900. In 1874 six 0-6-0 goods locomotives were ordered from John Fowler & Co. of Leeds in readiness for the opening of the Bath Extension, but by the early 1890s these locomotives were working the easier gradients south of the Mendips. Apart from No.19 (rb.1888) these locomotives were rebuilt during 1892-3 using Midland Railway fittings, whilst retaining their distinctive Stirling-style cabs. Devoid of shadows, it is difficult to identify the up goods in question, but only one of three goods services would allow sufficient time for the cameraman and shunting horse to be safely manoeuvred on to the running lines, thereby depicting the Wimborne to Templecombe (Lower) through goods. Arriving at 10.43am, it allowed the down stopping goods to enter the yard at 10.52am before having to make way for the Bournemouth to Bath fast passenger to call at 10.55, after which the through goods could safely continue its journey at 11.10am. Perched above the down platform the signal box sits upon a tall narrow brick base, which



commands greater visibility than its 1893 predecessor, whilst allowing the goods line at the rear to pass without hindrance. At 10.45pm on 23rd June 1906 a lightning strike and subsequent fire burnt out the signal box — the signalman, Charlie Whiting, was rumoured to have been in the local pub at the time as there were no trains due — and in its place, using the brick base, a

contemporary S&DJR Type 3 signal box was rebuilt. During 1901 the station layout underwent further modifications when the line to the south was doubled as far as Bailey Gate. In 1919 a 1 mile spur was laid immediately south of the station complex to serve a military camp to the north east but was little used after 1921 and was subsequently lifted in 1928.

populated. It was therefore not surprising that the directors' minutes for 7th October 1854 referred to the possibility of extensions to Burnham and Wells, which were authorised by an Act of 30th July 1855.

At a special general meeting held on 30th October 1855, the directors of the SCR proposed developments to the port of Highbridge and revealed their ultimate objective: "The connection of the Bristol and English Channels has for many years been considered to be of great importance particularly with a view to the more rapid conveyance of the produce of South Wales to the ports of the South Coast of England."

The meeting considered two alternative proposals for extension eastwards:

1. Through Wells (as authorised by the Act of 30th July 1855) and Shepton Mallet to the Wiltshire, Somerset & Weymouth line at Frome;
2. To Week Champflower (*sic*) to make a junction with the Wiltshire, Somerset & Weymouth line near Bruton.

In addition to providing a rail link to London, both plans ostensibly envisaged reaching the south coast at Southampton by way of Westbury and Salisbury, but the second alternative was specifically and significantly recorded as "having for its object an ultimate connection with the proposed line from Poole". This can only refer to the scheme for the Dorset Central Railway, whose prospectus proclaimed it as "Junction of English and Bristol Channels". The case was argued against the route from Wells to Frome on the grounds of high costs and steep gradients. Despite strong opposition from the Wells faction, the Bruton proposal carried the day and the extension from Glastonbury to Cole was authorised by an Act of 21st July 1856.

Meanwhile the Dorset Central Railway was emerging from meetings in Blandford and Poole in 1854, although part of its heritage comes from the abortive South Midlands Union Railway of 1852, leaving the Midland Railway's Birmingham to Bristol line at Mangotsfield

and following a route through Keynsham, Radstock, Holcombe, Stoke St. Michael, then close to the route ultimately followed by the S&D through Blandford to Poole. The scheme was abandoned due to considerable opposition and physical difficulties, though the preliminary survey was claimed as available in the Dorset Central's prospectus.

Despite the protests of Dorset landowners against the desecration of 'the sacred valley of the Stour', an Act of Incorporation authorising

the construction of 10 miles of single line, from the London & South Western Railway at Wimborne up the Stour Valley to Blandford, was obtained on 29th July 1856, eight days after the Somerset Central had obtained the Act for its Bruton extension. The directors of the Dorset Central included Sir Ivor Guest of Canford Manor, the son of an ironmaster from Dowlais, South Wales, and George Reed of Burnham, under Chairman H. D. Seymour MP, who had already become a director of the

Wincanton station looking north toward Cole c1900. A handful of passengers and strategically placed items of luggage await the next arrival whilst station staff pose under the platform canopy. Close to the down home signal two gangers inspect the track. By the time the station was built Wincanton already had a town gas supply and the station took advantage of it for lighting. Prior to this part of the line being doubled in 1884, the original station layout had staggered platforms where passengers crossed at rail level. When the station layout changed the up platform was lengthened and access was by the wooden lattice bridge, although station staff still used the original rail level crossing — with obvious care and under the watchful eye of the signalman — the location of the milk churns enforcing the point. During the 1920s a pre-cast concrete hut appeared on the loading dock whilst metal fencing replaced wood on the platforms, the bridge being replaced during the first half of 1937 with a Southern Railway pre-cast structure. Over the years sidings were added, culminating in the double Cow & Gate siding in 1933, which increased the number of levers in the signal box to 14. As well as milk traffic, Wincanton also handled a number of horse boxes with the opening of the racecourse in 1929, races before then being point-to-point.





Somerset Central. Also sharing a Secretary, Robert A. Read, an Engineer, Charles Gregory, solicitors and London offices, and publishing half-yearly reports which were identical in format, the Somerset Central and Dorset Central were clearly hand-in-glove from the outset. The Dorset Central was planned as a standard gauge (4ft 8 ins) line, a factor of great importance to the ultimate fate of the two companies.

The 'gauge war', at its height at that time, resulted from the controversy sparked by Brunel building the Great Western Railway to the broad gauge. The Gauge Act of 1846 limited the building of new broad gauge lines to the Great Western sphere of influence which included the Somerset Central Railway by virtue of it being a branch from the broad gauge Bristol & Exeter. The writing was clearly on the wall for the broad gauge, but the Great Western and Bristol & Exeter were reluctant to accept this and expended tremendous energy in defending their gauge and attempting to block invasions of their territory by standard gauge concerns, adding additional bite to normal competition between railway companies in the same area. The association of the Somerset Central with the Dorset Central was therefore bound to evoke the gauge controversy.

The cutting of the first sod of the Dorset Central on 13th November 1856 was described by *The Illustrated London News* as follows: "On Thursday, the 13th inst the first turf of the Dorset Central Railway was cut at Blandford St. Mary, by the Lady of Sir John James Smith, Bart, of the Down House, in the presence of a vast concourse of people from the surrounding district, graced by a brilliant array of rank and fashion.

"The first section of this railway already sanctioned by Parliament is the South Western railway at Wimborne to Blandford, and it is proposed in the coming session of Parliament to apply for powers to extend the line through the vale of Blackmore, to join at Bruton the authorised extension of the Somerset Central Railway, and thus establish a direct communication between South Wales and the Bristol Channel on the one hand and the whole

Rebuilt small Johnson 4-4-0 No.68 approaches Platform 1 at Bournemouth West with a stopping passenger on Monday 28th March 1910. Built at Derby for the S&DJR in January 1896, the small (5ft 9ins coupled wheels) 4-4-0 was rebuilt in May 1908 when it received a shortened Johnson 'H' pattern boiler (so as to cater for the smaller design) albeit with the Deeley vertical tube layout, Ramsbottom safety valves, the dome placed well forward, a flowerpot chimney with capuchon and Johnson's final pattern smokebox door with wheel and polished strap hinges. The frames were also lengthened at the rear, which accommodated a cab that was a hybrid of Johnson-Deeley design. The tender also underwent modification, having its capacity increased to 2,600 gallons, whereas the provision of coal rails may have occurred just before — possibly when the change to a simplified Deeley-style livery took place from late 1906. The leading five vehicles were a typical six-wheel S&DJR main line 'set' (van, third, first, third, van) to which a Midland Railway bogie composite and six-wheel van from Derby were attached at the rear, forming the 1.25pm service from Bath which arrived at 5.47pm. The appearance of six-wheel 'sets' on the main line diminished during the lead-up to World War I by which time the S&DJR had built eleven bogie 'sets' (brake third, composite, composite, six-wheel van), all being of non-corridor design; nevertheless, the old six-wheelers could still be pressed into service when circumstances dictated.

of the South Coast and the English Channel on the other.

"From an early hour in the morning the town of Blandford had all the appearance of a fete day — carriages of all descriptions, from the barouche and four — to the market cart, brought in their load of holidaymakers, and at noon the Corporation of Blandford received Lady Smith, the High Sheriff of the county, and several of the nobility and gentry; the Mayors and Corporations of Poole and Glastonbury, the directors and officers of the Dorset Central and Somerset Central Railway.

"These all formed in procession, headed by the local schools and benefit societies with banners, navvies bearing spades and picks, and two wheeling in barrows barrels of strong beer.

"The field of operations was very tastefully decorated under the direction of Mr. M. K. Welsh of Poole, with banners, triumphal arches etc.

"The barrow is of polished mahogany, with bunches of corn and poppies carved on the panels and the handles carved as Indian corn. The blade of the spade is of polished steel, the ornamentation is very beautiful and the handle of tulip wood, carved with ivy leaves.

"Lady Smith cut the turf in a most business-like manner and caused great admiration in the minds of the navvies when she tipped the barrow, turned round between the handles and drew the barrow back behind her along the planks.

"Three hundred of the company afterwards sat down to an excellent 'dejeuner à la fourchette' in the Assembly Rooms, supplied by Mr. Eyres of the Crown Inn."

The wheelbarrow and spade used were presented by the contractor, Charles Waring, and can be seen on display in the museum of the Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust at Washford, West Somerset. The expenses of the ceremony amounted to £224 13s 2d, including £71 for wine, a tidy sum in view of the company's uncertain financial prospects.

The Dorset Central had already set its sights on higher things, its new Act of 10th August 1857 authorising the building of an extension to meet the Somerset Central at Bruton to complete the Channel to Channel link. No such link could materialise so long as there was a difference in gauge, but at its own general meeting of 28th February 1857 the Somerset Central had already announced its intention of laying standard gauge in anticipation of the link-up and this was authorised by an Act of 1st August 1859. It then realised that a complete conversion to standard gauge would save £30,000 on the cost for providing mixed gauge, so it approached Parliament with a Bill to abandon the broad gauge in addition to extending the time to complete the Glastonbury–Bruton extension. But it was not to be so easy to shake off the broad gauge connection: Parliamentary opposition by the broad gauge parties resulted in modifications to the Somerset Central's Act, which received



Rebuilt small Johnson 4-4-0 No.18 passes the carriage sidings on its descent towards Bournemouth West with a through passenger on Saturday 31st May 1913. No.18 was one of the four original small 4-4-0 locomotives to be built by Derby for the S&DJR, arriving in May 1891. They immediately took on the heavier passenger workings which had been previously entrusted to the thirteen 0-4-4T locomotives, subsequent Derby deliveries relegating the latter to local and branch lines

duties. No.18 was first rebuilt in December 1904, surprisingly with a similar sized boiler, before being rebuilt again in June 1911, this time with the shortened 'H' boiler and fittings as per No.68 albeit with the Johnson horizontal tube layout. The term 'through passenger' for this particular service may be misleading as S&DJR carriages regularly worked into Bristol at both St. Philips and Clifton Down, usually having an additional Midland Railway carriage attached, as in this

instance. On this occasion the train had departed Bristol St. Philips at 11.18am and arrived at Bath at 12.07pm, subsequently departing at 12.14. A noteworthy feature about the S&DJR 'set' is not so much the mixed nature of vehicles but the appearance of bogie composite No.37; the first bogie vehicle constructed by the S&DJR in 1898 and the only one with an arc roof. In the background is the S&DJR locomotive shed located within the Branksome triangle.

Royal Assent in July 1861, stipulating that mixed gauge must be laid on the Bruton extension and the connection with the broad gauge Wiltshire, Somerset & Weymouth line near Bruton must be built as originally authorised. Throughout the negotiations, the Bristol & Exeter directors showed a most kind and neighbourly spirit, but had every reason to feel aggrieved by the Somerset Central's complete change of front over the Bruton extension and its barefaced attempt to sever the broad gauge connection.

The Somerset Central's Burnham branch had been passed by the Government inspector on 22nd August 1857, but difficulties were being experienced in forming a cut to admit coastal steamers to lie by the causeway and a new landing slip was opened for public traffic with the Burnham branch on 3rd May 1858. Wells, with a population of about 7,500, had shown enthusiastic support for the extension from Glastonbury at a public meeting in 1852. Disappointment followed when the 1855 Act provided only for a branch instead of the through line to Frome and the 1856 Act bypassed the city. There was reluctance to subscribe to the Somerset Central's extension and the inhabitants began to look towards the East Somerset Railway and encouraged it to add a Wells extension, which was authorised on 27th July 1857. This threat brought further pressure on the directors of the Somerset Central to complete the branch before its powers lapsed. The formal opening took place on 3rd March 1859, followed by a Board of Trade inspection and the opening to the public on 15th March.

The first section of the Dorset Central from Wimborne to Blandford opened on 1st November 1860 and was worked by the LSWR under a five-year agreement. An

extension of time was obtained for the completion of the Blandford to Bruton section, with priority given to Templecombe to Bruton. Work on the Somerset Central's Glastonbury-Bruton extension commenced in May 1859, after the Wells branch had been completed. The contractor, Rigby, had 470 men and 50 horses at work, which increased to 600 men and 70 horses by February 1860. Work was held up by bad weather, a serious slip on Pylle bank and the requirement to lay a third rail to provide mixed gauge. In addition a new station and workshops were required at Highbridge, offices provided at Glastonbury, new staff to be trained and above all a considerable quantity

of standard gauge locomotives and rolling stock had to be purchased and paid for. The Bruton to Templecombe section was ready for use by November 1861, but it was not until 18th January 1862 that the formal opening from Glastonbury to Templecombe took place and public traffic over the complete standard gauge railway from Burnham to Templecombe began on 3rd February 1862.

In February 1861 the Somerset Central directors were stressing the mutual advantages of the two companies being worked as one and by August they were strongly in favour of amalgamation to secure unity of action and economy in management. A special general

Rebuilt small Johnson 4-4-0 No.67 entering the south eastern throat of the Branksome triangle on Saturday 31st May 1913. No.67 shared the same details as No.68 apart from being rebuilt in October 1907 with the Johnson tube layout and having its Ramsbottom safety valve enclosed, the casing being painted and lined thereby making it unique amongst the other small Johnson class. The appearance of five S&DJR bogie carriages is a rarity, so had the 5.45pm stopping passenger for Bath suddenly become popular?





Rebuilt small Johnson 4-4-0 No.68 simmers at Platform 4 at Bournemouth West on Saturday 9th August 1913. For No.68 three years have passed whereupon it has acquired steps forward of the coupled wheels, whilst the upper lamp iron has moved down to the top of the smokebox door. The service in question is not known and the time of day is not discernable, but the attachment of an S&DJR milk van on such a lengthy train is unusual, unless it was doubling as a luggage van. No.68 would be working hard as its permitted hauling capacity (as at 31st December 1917) was 170 tons. The previous weekend, including Sunday, had been extremely busy countrywide with August Bank Holiday traffic. Bournemouth saw (Cook's) excursion traffic, as detachments or as whole trains, from all parts of Britain emanating from the following company lines: G&SWR (Kilmarnock), HBR, LNWR, LSWR, LYR, MR, NER, NSR and the Severn & Wye. Most, if not all, would have arrived at Bath in Midland Railway carriages and for the journey south the S&DJR would have supplemented services with its own stock. Empty carriages would have been marshalled at Bournemouth and/or returned to Bath (empty trains not to exceed eighteen carriages). The assortment of goods vehicles in the yard to the left includes a conflat that is sadly illegible. Note the litter between the tracks.

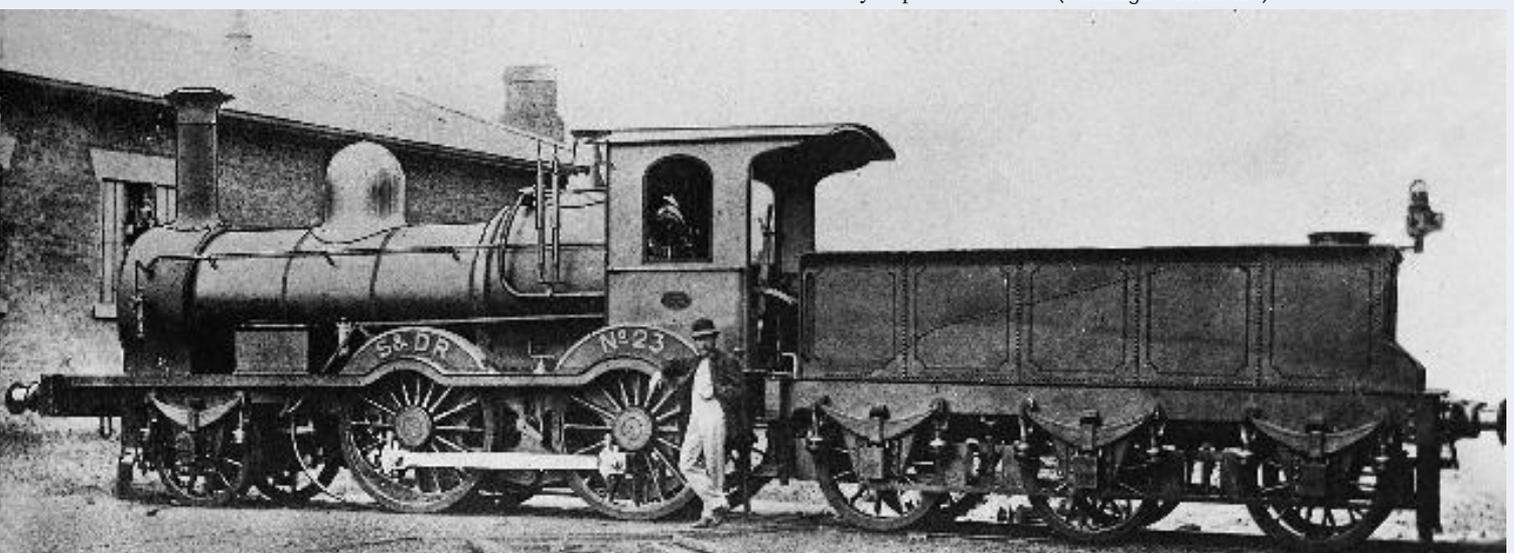
meeting on 9th May 1862 approved the Bill for Amalgamation. The Dorset Central directors also approved the proposal for amalgamation in August 1861 and met the Somerset Central directors in July 1862 at the Westminster Palace Hotel before their final board meeting on 31st July 1862. The Bill for Amalgamation received Royal Assent on 7th August to take effect from 1st September 1862 when the Somerset & Dorset Railway was born. The final link in the chain was completed on 31st August 1863 with the opening between Templecombe and Blandford and the company, by virtue of running powers to Hamworthy, controlled a railway stretching between the Bristol and English Channels and, with the inclusion of its shipping services, from Cardiff to Cherbourg, with connections to Paris.

Traffic was not heavy because much of the route only served scattered rural communities, while Burnham was found incapable of being transformed into a major port without considerable expenditure. Even so, receipts exceeded the working expenses and the financial position would have been tolerable had it not been for the excessive debts from equipping the line. A further traffic outlet was essential and the S&D initially hoped to reach

Bristol by virtue of the Bristol & Exeter laying a standard gauge rail. However, this did not materialise and the S&D was forced to construct its own route north. In 1874 an extension was opened from Evercreech Junction to Bath, linking the standard gauge Midland and London & South Western Railways with a line which passed through the territory of their broad gauge rival, the Great Western. However, the extension to Bath drained the S&D finances so that it was not able to cope with the rapid increase in traffic generated and in 1875 the line was leased jointly to the MR and LSWR, becoming the Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway and causing further irritation to the GWR.

The line from Bath to Bournemouth rapidly developed as a main through route from the north and led to the growth of Bournemouth as a holiday resort, the original Somerset Central route reverting to "going from nowhere to

Vulcan Foundry 2-4-0 liveried as S&D No.23. The locomotive was one of a batch of six ordered in 1866. In practice only two were taken into S&D stock because of financial problems; the other four were finally sold by Vulcan to the Alsace-Lorraine Railway. (Pendragon Collection)



nowhere over a turf moor'. In 1883 a cut-off was opened between Corfe Mullen and Broadstone so that S&D trains could reach Poole and Bournemouth without reversal at Wimborne. Most of the original single track from Templecombe to Bath was doubled in the late nineteenth century, followed by Corfe Mullen to Blandford, although Blandford to Templecombe, Corfe Mullen to Broadstone and the Somerset Central west of Evercreech Junction remained as single line to the end. The steep gradients, sharp curves, tunnels and viaducts required to cross the Mendip Hills on the Bath extension contrasted with the original line which ran through the flat Somerset Levels and gently undulating Blackmore Vale.

Freight was always important, particularly between Bath and Templecombe, with both through trains and local coal and stone traffic from the Mendips. A special type of 2-8-0 goods locomotive was designed for the line, the first being built in 1914. Passenger traffic was seasonal and, apart from the 'Pines Express', through trains from the Midlands and North of England to Bournemouth ran only in summer. On busy Saturdays every available locomotive was often pressed into service to double head the heavy trains on gradients between Bath and Evercreech Junction.

The run-down of the system began in the 1950s with the closure of the branches to Wells, Bridgwater and Burnham-on-Sea and intensified after the Western Region of British Railways, the GWR's successor, gained control of the majority of the line in 1958, which many thought was payback for past ill-feeling.

Rebuilt 2-4-0 No.16A at Blandford in August 1892 on a down Templecombe to Wimborne goods. This locomotive was built by the Vulcan Foundry in 1866 as No.20, rebuilt in 1881, and renumbered 16A in 1891.

Through traffic, including the 'Pines Express', was diverted to other routes in 1962 and the Somerset & Dorset closed completely amid much controversy on 5th March 1966.

A variety of remains of the railway can be seen in many locations, from virtually complete stations to a small ridge running across a field, and many towns and villages still have a Station Road or Railway Hotel, over 40 years since its closure. In addition to Shillingstone, the only remaining Dorset Central station building, Somerset Central station buildings remain in private ownership at Evercreech Junction, Pylle, West Pennard and Polsham. Sections of the Dorset Central trackbed form public footpaths from Spetisbury to Charlton Marshall, north of Blandford and south of Sturminster Newton, and part of the Somerset Central trackbed is used for access to areas of peat extraction. At Blandford the railway is marked by a buffer stop, at Sturminster Newton by the railway garden in a filled-in cutting, and the Somerset & Dorset Hotel still exists just across the road from the site of Burnham-on-Sea station.

The individuality of the S&D gave it a reputation far greater than its size or importance in the British railway network and as evidence of the extent of interest, its memory lives on today through several societies. The Gartell Light Railway is owned and operated by three generations of the Gartell family. The railway runs on 2ft gauge track, part of which runs along the route of the S&D just south of Templecombe, and was first opened to the public in 1990. Two S&D stations owned by the local authorities have societies dedicated to their restoration and maintenance. The Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust was formed in 1992 to restore Midsomer Norton station and a section of

working railway along the route of the S&D. The North Dorset Railway Trust, formed in 2000, aims to restore Shillingstone station to how it was in the early 1960s.

One society which encompasses all aspects of the S&D, the Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust, has been in existence for over 40 years. Originally formed in 1966 as the S&D Railway Circle with the prime aim of collating and circulating information on the S&D, it now has a membership of around 800 worldwide. The Trust maintains a museum at Washford, which includes a working replica of Midford signal cabin, wagons and coaches, and other memorabilia of this much loved line. The pride of the Trust's collection of rolling stock is No.53808 (S&DJR No.88), built in 1925 by Robert Stephenson & Co. One of the famous S&D 7F 2-8-0 goods locomotives, No.53808 was withdrawn from service in 1964 and sold to Woodham's scrapyard, Barry, from which it was purchased by the Trust in 1970 and returned to working order in 1987.

To commemorate the 150th anniversary of the formation of the S&D, the Trust is planning a series of activities between 2007 and 2013. Exhibitions, conventions, displays of memorabilia and photographs, trackbed walks and visits are proposed at relevant locations to mark particular events, such as the opening of each section of the route. A talk titled '150 Years of the Somerset & Dorset Railway', illustrated with slides and recordings, is available for presentation to any interested group and can be varied to suit the location, technical understanding and interests of the particular audience. Anyone interested in volunteering to keep the memory alive, or wanting further information on the talk or other events, should contact the Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust, Washford Station, Somerset, TA23 0PP (or email info@sdrt.org).

