

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF THE LYMINGTON TO BROCKENHURST LINE



No. 62 JULY 2021

Dear Friends,

The latest message from the Government (21st June) postponing full freedom was predicted, and I am sure necessary. But with promised freedom in July on the horizon, your Committee has decided to set a date of **27th September 2021** for the postponed **Annual General Meeting**, at 7.30 pm in the McLellan Room at the Community Centre. We will of course remind you all nearer the time, and will re-send the paperwork referring to the AGM. John Canavan has promised a **film-show** afterwards, which I am sure will be a real treat!

We did however manage to have a 'real' Committee meeting three weeks ago in the garden here (so adhering to the Covid guidelines). John hopes to run the **September excursion**, but given the continuing uncertainties we will not be too adventurous, in case it has to be postponed till next year. The current idea is to take the train to Poole and then the scheduled boat to Brownsea Island, with a wonderful trip through Poole harbour en route. Firmer details will be sent out nearer the time (we hope!).



Brownsea Island

Train travel. You may have heard from the national News that a new style of Flexi season ticket has been launched nationwide. More details will be found below in an Appendix, and at

https://www.nationalrail.co.uk/times_fares/ticket_types/flexi-season.aspx

Cross Country trains still do not stop at either Brockenhurst or Winchester, but we hope that as more people return to the trains the company's trains from the west of us will again stop at least at one of these stations. Check the latest times. SWR has adjusted its timetable, so do again check before you travel.

Problems with e-tickets on phones. On two occasions travellers have had to buy new tickets because the wifi on the train did not work, and the inspectors would not believe

this to be the case. If you can somehow pre-print your ticket it might be a good idea, until the bugs have been got out of this clearly unreliable system!

Station news. The arrival of ‘Dessie’ I and II. Those of you who have been recently to the Pier will have noticed that the boat planters have been removed. They were no longer seaworthy, even on land, and we have just installed a new planter in the form of a two-carriage EMU (Electrical Multiple Unit) ‘Desiro’-type train based on the trains that normally run on our branch line. A similar one has just arrived at Lymington Town station, both of them thanks to the Community Rail Partnership. I will include photos in the next Newsletter. Meanwhile the volunteers have been putting in the summer planting in the red, white and green colours of the old London & South Western Railway. (These plants do not need as much water as many other types of bedding, so are more sustainable.) We had a visit from Darryl Smith of SWR, who was so pleased with the general effect that he is putting the station in for the competition for best-kept small station...Volunteers at Brockenhurst been working on a historical display in the waiting room on Platform 3 & 4, which opened last Wednesday. Do take a look at it when you next travel.

Organ donation. Friends, this is nothing to do with the Friends of the Line, but I have been reading about the tragic loss of life of people who need organ donations but the organs are not available due to the unwillingness of the potential donor’s family. All you have to do is to click on this link below and fill in your really basic details, such as name and address: it’s that simple. I have carried a donation card all my life, but this way the NHS can speed up the process and be surer that this is what you want. Up to 9 (yes, nine) people can benefit from your gift.

<https://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/registeryourdecision/donate/confirmationfab/?v=558> Thank you!

With best wishes from
Georgina and the Committee

APPENDIX 1: NEW FLEXI SEASON TICKET: MESSAGE FROM SWR

The Flexi Season ticket offers 8 days of travel in 28 days – any time between two stations.

Get ready for Flexi Season tickets by registering for a Smartcard or downloading the app or both, check with your train operator to see what they offer. If you don’t have a Smartcard then please allow plenty of time to get one before you travel - they can take up to 5 days to arrive by post. Find out more about Smartcards here and more information below.

What is a Flexi Season ticket?

A Flexi Season ticket provides customers with **8 days of travel in 28 days** - any time between two named stations.

The 8 days of travel doesn’t need to be specified in advance, giving part-time commuters more flexibility to travel when they want and need.

The Flexi Season ticket will offer a minimum of 20% discount on an equivalent Monthly Season ticket, offering savings for commuters travelling during peak times, 2-3 days a week.

Flexi Season tickets will be available as either a Smartcard or Barcode ticket, check with your train operator to see what they offer. If you don’t have a Smartcard then please allow plenty of time to get one before you travel - they can take up to 5 days to arrive by post. Find out more about Smartcards here.

You will need to activate a day pass within your ticket before you travel.

For more information, see SWR’s website

Now read on for **Appendix 2: David Mead's engaging piece about Heritage Railways!**

THE DEAN FOREST RAILWAY: A HERITAGE RAILWAY
By David Mead, with additional material by Georgina Craufurd

The Dean Forest Railway is a heritage line that operates between Lydney Junction and Parkend, Gloucestershire, and is currently 4 ¼ miles in length. The Forest of Dean lies west of the River Severn and east of the Wye: a very hilly and picturesque area.

Before we look at the railway, the reason behind building it needs to be explained. The Forest of Dean is not normally associated with coalfields, and in fact most students would have studied the South Wales coalfields to obtain their scholarships in geography etc. However, there have been references going back to Roman times that pockets of coal were excavated in various areas of the Forest, though iron-ore seems to have been more important, with coal a secondary resource. This was probably because of the numerous underground springs in the Forest which would have hampered mining at the deeper level. To overcome this problem a number of ditches and culverts were dug over the years to assist with drainage. The coalfield was not exploited to any great degree until the Industrial Revolution, when coke-fired ironworks were built in the Forest. Initially, it proved impossible to produce coke (ideal for smelting) from local coal, and this was a major factor in the failure of three early furnaces within a decade of opening. By the mid-19th century, there were more than 300 coal workings and it was said there were more men working below ground than there were working above. These areas of mining were mainly independent. The Coal Industry Nationalisation Act of 1946 exempted the Forest of Dean, due to its unique form of ownership and history, and it allowed free mining privileges to continue intact. Some large colliery gales (a 'gale' is the Forest of Dean equivalent to a 'claim' in gold-prospecting) were subsequently compulsorily purchased by the National Coal Board (NCB), but remained under the free mining system, and a royalty was paid to the free miners by the NCB as a share of the minerals extracted. In 1945 half the male population of the Forest were employed in coal mining. The last of the NCB gales closed in 1965.



Free miners in the Forest of Dean c. 1880

Historical development of the railway system

Minerals had to be transported to where the Industrial Revolution needed them, and various tramways and narrow-gauge mineral lines were constructed in the Forest in the early 1800s. Coal was taken to the River Severn where quays were built to transfer wagon loads into barges. In 1813 a canal was constructed between the River Severn and Lydney Town, which was a mile long and was connected with another canal that was in existence much earlier, and took both coal and iron. Ocean-going vessels were able to use the quay at Lydney, and records show that it remained in use until the 1960s. One of these tramways was extended to include Parkend and Lydney; sources from the time refer to a gauge of 3ft. 6in., and tolls were paid for the transportation of minerals. This line was operated as a tramway by the Severn and Wye Railway Co. (originally called the Lydney and Lidbrook [sic] Railway) until 1875. To facilitate transfer of traffic to the neighbouring South Wales Railway main

line, the Severn and Wye Railway network was converted from a plateway (a kind of tramway where the flanges guiding the wagons are on the rails rather than the wheels) to a locomotive-worked broad-gauge system at Lydney in 1847 which gave a service also suitable for passengers. (The broad gauge was used because at that time the company looked upon Brunel as the prime railway engineer, so this gauge was the obvious choice at the time. It was altered to a standard gauge railway in 1872.)

Extensions were made to Lydbrook, Cinderford and Coleford. The Company's finances were dependent on the mineral industry of the Forest of Dean, and in 1879 economic difficulties caused it to amalgamate with the Severn Bridge Railway. In fact this resulted in a worsening of the situation, and the combined company sold its business to the Great Western Railway and the Midland Railway jointly. In 1879 Lydney Junction station was relocated adjacent to the main line from Gloucester to Swansea. Further disappointing financial performance led to most of the passenger operation being discontinued in 1929, and after World War II an inexorable decline in mineral extraction resulted in progressive closure of the network. There was still a passenger service from Lydney Town station to Berkeley Road. However, on the night of 25th October 1960 an oil tank barge collided with a pier of the Severn Bridge, causing a partial collapse of the rail bridge, and suspension of the train service over it. At first this was to be temporary, but in fact the closure of the passenger service on the Lydney side of the river became permanent.

Re-birth of the line

In 1970 a society was formed with the aim of running a heritage railway between **Lydney Junction and Cinderford**. The Forest of Dean by then had become a scenic attraction, and it was hoped that a train service would open up the area and that visitors would come by train using Lydney Junction as the accessible way to visit. Goods trains were operated by British Railways until 1976 and the occasional diesel multiple unit excursions ran to Parkend, on which I had the pleasure of riding. In the early preservation days, open weekends were held at Parkend and later at **Norchard**, where there was enough space to create a headquarters, new stations, loco sheds, a museum and parking. Today the station is unique in preservation as it is the only two-level station open - a high level and a low level. To get from the shop and ticket office, passengers must cross the line using the level crossing to the platforms. The station has three platforms in total. Low Level has two platforms; platform 1 is for trains to Lydney Junction, while platform 2 has the purpose-built cafe and the 9681 shop which is in a railway coach. Norchard High Level has just one platform (Platform 3), but it serves trains from both Lydney Junction and Parkend, making it the main platform. In 1991, trains operated from Norchard to St. Mary's Halt via Lydney Town. (The level crossing over the main road at Lydney has to be hand operated by competent staff).



Loco 5541 (2-6-2, designed for GWR by Churchwood in 1928, restored 1975) at Norchard High Level (photo David Mead)

The original southerly station was named Lydney Lakeside, taking its name from the lake behind the platform. It was later renamed **St Mary's Halt** in 1995 - which takes its name from St. Mary's Church, located opposite the platform. The halt was closed to passengers after the 2013 season. Close by, the St. Mary's pedestrian bridge to the east of St. Mary's church has recently been restored; it is an original "Severn and Wye" railway bridge and is grade 2 listed. The bridge was taken away in sections and restored with some funding by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development...a source of income for other heritage railways, now lost following the political decision to leave the European Union.



Loco 9681 north of Lydney Junction station (photo Dean Forest Railway)

In 1995 the railway was extended to the current southerly terminus at **Lydney Junction**. (The original name served two different stations - one on the Great Western Railway, opened in 1851 as part of the "South Wales Railway" and the other opened in 1875, when passenger trains operated to Drybrook, near Cinderford). The station was slightly re-located for the convenience of through goods trains to Sharpness via the Severn Railway bridge and for passenger trains to **Berkeley Road**. A signal box was opened in 1995 which came from Heysham Port station near Morecambe. The station today is an "island platform" type, with a footpath connection over a boarded crossing from the road which serves Lydney mainline station. The station has a small waiting room and a disused booking office. Some of the railway's diesel fleet are stored on sidings there.



The longest level crossing gate in the UK, next to Parkend signal box (photo David Mead)

In 2001, a new **Lydney Town** station (not to be confused with St Mary's Halt) opened. The station has a single platform and serves the town centre. The station's proximity to the A48 main road

through Lydney proved to be a problem when the original line was open, and in latter days this caused long traffic queues. (There was no by-pass or motorway, as there is today. The by-pass did not open until 1995.)

The railway society gradually re-opened the line northwards, and in 2006 trains reached **Parkend**, which is the current northerly terminus. Here there are two platforms, but generally only one is used. However a footbridge connects the two and offers a good place for photographs when the locomotive runs round the train. There is also a level crossing which has to be opened each time a steam locomotive is required to perform the run round, as the point work is to the north of the crossing. The station consists of a waiting room, toilets and booking office, which on my visits have always been closed. In my research I gathered that the level crossing gate is the longest in the UK. (See photo above.) On my visits, I discovered that the old post office opens for lunch-time snacks, and two pubs nearby serve cooked lunches.

In 2012 an intermediate station at **Whitecroft** was opened. The station here was closed as long ago as 1929, and a lot of work was involved in re-building the station. Future developments include a plan to double the track at the station and build a new platform. The village is built on both sides of the station and has two nearby pubs which are handy for lunches etc. The chapel dates from 1824 and the main function of the village was to serve the collieries in the area.

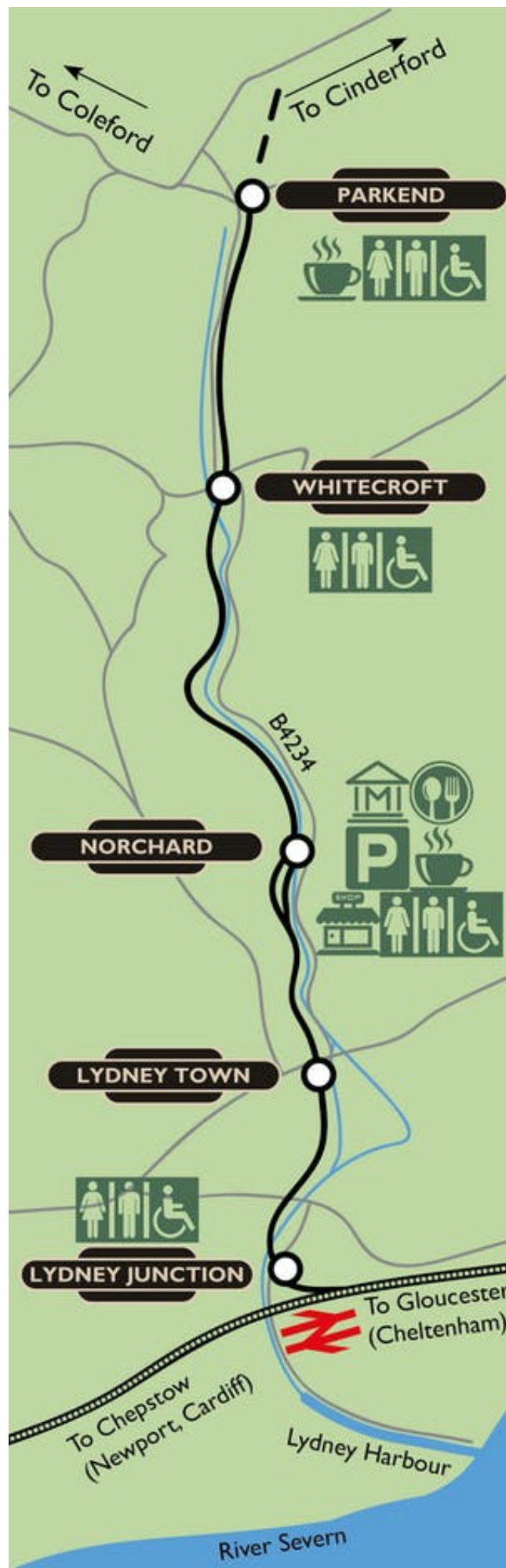
Practical details

Trains on the line are generally a mixture of steam and diesel. Steam locomotives are generally former GWR tank locos. 5541 was built in 1928, and this loco operated on my recent visits. At **Norchard** there are various locomotives to be seen undergoing restoration. Access to the loco workshops is generally not allowed due to health and safety concerns, but often the door is kept open so one can get a look. The large bookshop and the very informative museum are worth a visit at Norchard. On Saturdays, a diesel multiple unit service often runs. The first and last trains operated from the Low Level Station at Norchard and the through trains from Lydney Junction to Parkend use the high level station at Norchard. **Visitors without a car** are advised use **Lydney mainline station** and join the heritage line at Lydney Junction. Lydney station is unstaffed and has waiting shelters on both sides. Mainline trains are roughly hourly, but fewer run on Sundays. Passengers arriving on the down line from Gloucester will need to cross over the level crossing to reach the junction station. **If arriving by car, use Norchard** just north of Lydney town where there is a large car park. It is feasible to do a day trip from Southampton, and for most rail journeys it will be necessary to travel via Severn Tunnel Junction station and sometimes Newport and then catch the train back to Lydney. A through ticket will allow travel via Newport at no extra cost. The future aim of the Dean Forest Railway is to re-open the line north to Cinderford, which was closed to passengers in 1958. For those of you who want to visit **Cinderford**, Stagecoach Bus 22 operates every two hours from Gloucester to Cinderford via Westbury-on-Severn and most services go through to Coleford, which is a scenic ride and the English bus concession passes are accepted. Stagecoach Route 27 operates (infrequently) from Lydney to Parkend and Cinderford.

Other local attractions

See www.deanforestrailway.co.uk and Wikipedia for further details of this line. There are underground tours and the Forest of Dean Mining Museum at **Hopewell Colliery**, LacindaCoalway, Coleford GL16 7EL (www.hopewellcolliery.com) and also at **Clearwell Caves** (www.clearwellcaves.com/about-us) which advertises 4500 years of mining history and a natural cave system. A section of the old Severn and Wye Railway is now a **cycle and footpath**, as is the Churchway branch dating from 1812. **Tintern Abbey** with its amazing Mediaeval ruins is not far away. The gardens and Roman Temple site of **Lydney Park Estate** are occasionally open (<https://www.lydneyparkestate.co.uk/opening-times>) and **Westbury Court Garden** (NT) is also not far away.

For a map of the Dean Forest Railway, see next page.



Map of the Dean Forest Railway (courtesy Dean Forest Railway)