



West Moors: a History in Images

The old railway . . .

The fact that the name of the principal highway through the village is 'Station Road' (otherwise the B3072), tells of a railway that is long gone. It arrived in 1847, but even though there are vague references to a 'halt' hereabouts, it was not until 1867, when a small station was built astride the recently opened junction, that the railway had much impact on the community.

Little is left today: the old crossing lodge, which is on the opposite side of the road to where the station was built, is still there – modified from its 1847 incarnation. Other signs are more elusive.

The images below portray the station area within the last 15 or so years of the life of the local railway.



This image looks west, toward the level crossing on Station Road (you can just see the old Crossing Lodge to its right) and in the direction that trains would take to Wimborne, Broadstone, Poole and Bournemouth. There is a good view of the concrete footbridge, erected very early in the 20th century as the village was growing rapidly and a safer way was needed for passengers to cross from one side of the line to the other. The bridge was cast on site and was unique in its design.

The station house looks more like a 'normal' house – and this was typical of such buildings along the Salisbury line. It housed the Station Master and his family as well as the Booking Office, various storerooms & the main waiting room. On the down-side platform is a small waiting hut – built again early in the 1900s as passenger numbers grew. You can also just make out on the platform name sign that underneath "West Moors", in smaller letters is added . . . " for Ferndown ". The railway resisted this addition on both signage and in timetables until well into the 1930s.



This view looks towards the other direction – trains going straight-ahead (as this one is about to do) are heading for Ringwood & Brockenhurst. Just beyond the end of the goods train berthed in the siding is the junction for the ‘Salisbury line’ and several services a day would take that route, heading for Verwood, Fordingbridge & the county town of Wiltshire.



This view (above) shows the junction more clearly together with the iconic junction signals. The middle semaphore arm, with the circle attached, controlled traffic entering the MOD fuel depot sidings network. On the right of the tracks in the middle-distance can be seen the long line of single-storey ‘railway cottages’, dating from the middle part of the 19th century.

The last fare-paying passenger working from the station took place on Saturday 2nd May, 1964, and on the same date, the entire service along the ‘Salisbury’ line was withdrawn. Remaining services from West Moors using the old main line (e.g., mixed goods traffic) were withdrawn over the next 18 months. However traffic to / from the MOD fuel depot continued for another ten years.



Here a locomotive has just left the depot in April 1974, a few months before final closure; a member of the train-crew is walking down to the Station Road crossing gates to manually swing them across the road to allow the engine to return to Poole. Of some interest is the identity of the photographer: Colin Divall grew up locally and at the time of writing these notes (2013) he is Professor of Railway Studies at the University of York, specialising in the history of transport.

THE LAST WORKING OF A 'PROPER' TRAIN

The last enthusiasts "special" working along the 'Old Road' took place in June 1974. It was part of a major 'tour' of lines across Dorset and Hampshire organised by the Swanage Railway Society. This organisation was itself fighting to save and promote the line to Swanage, and of course they have succeeded in great measure: not so with our local railway line. By this date, the line both northward towards Salisbury & east towards Ringwood & Brockenhurst have long gone – even traffic into the Fuel Depot was minimal – mainly to do with berthing of old MOD railway stock before sale.

The 'Special' train laid on had an extensive itinerary that day – departing Poole just before 8 a.m. and running across lines that would take it to Bournemouth, Southampton, Eastleigh and Salisbury, thence westwards to places like Yeovil. As the train (a diesel-electric passenger set) came back east again, it made its final journey of the day which involved West Moors – arriving here in the early evening via Broadstone & Wimborne. The train drew up at the long defunct station around 6.20 p.m., stopped for less than 10 minutes .. enough time for the band to play a farewell .. then departed back down the line and into the sunset.



Here the reception party await the arrival of the special working – the old crossing lodge and crossing bedecked with bunting. In this photograph, the 'Tap and Railway' (formerly the *Railway Hotel*) is clearly seen – something that wouldn't have been possible in former times – as this end of the platform would have hosted the likes of the signal box, store and concrete footbridge. The photographer is standing where the old down-side platform would have been.



Still waiting .. this time looking from a point near the crossing gates (in a sorry state by this time), looking back to the old station building. Roughly at this point would have been one of the footings of the concrete over-bridge. This was erected in 1902, having been cast on site and was of radical design.



Finally, the diesel-electric multiple-unit 3-car set arrives from the Uddens & Wimborne direction. These trains were part of the British Railways Class 205 fleet – the primary motive power being a diesel engine generating electric power which was then used to drive the wheels. They were long in service, first units appearing in 1957, finally bowing-out in 2004. Several of these trains are now in private hands – being put to use on ‘heritage’ railways.



The train comes to a stand just before the crossing gates, which by this time had long been reduced to hand-operated barriers – appropriately much as they would have been in 1847 when the line was opened. For nearly 10 years, there had been no signalling along the line – essentially being worked as a ‘long siding’, with the train crew operating gates, points etc.



One half of the gate has been opened and the train slowly crosses Station Road to come to a stand in the old station. The 1st June, 1974 was a Saturday, so the road would have been quite busy and no doubt some frustration was caused to road users – but the crowds seem to be milling about fairly safely: there would be lots of ‘hi-vis’ jackets and ‘officialdom’ if it were to happen today!



A rare colour shot, taken by one of the passengers on the train, as it slowly edges into the old station. Also rare (for a photograph) is that we see a bit of the back of the station-house. The colour rendition also reveals that the crossing lodge was painted – at this date anyway – in some sort of ‘pink’ hue: an acquired taste!



And now the train has drawn clear of the crossing – allowing the gates to be closed, and also letting us see the name-board which confirms that this is the “Wessex Wanderer” rail-tour. Note the standard (at the time) BR ‘flying arrow’ motif. As with all multiple unit stock, the driver will make his way from the ‘front’ end in a little while, to take up position in the cab seen here to drive the train back to Wimborne & beyond but not before



. . . the band plays! Some of the passengers on the train leave to mark this last public act in the life of the local railway. The train stayed in the station for no more than 10 minutes, just long enough for the driver to walk to the other end of the three cars and prepare the train for its return journey.



Another rare colour photograph of the old railway showing the old station house and the Tap & Railway (it might have been named 'The Mariners Rest' at this date). Some of the die-hard enthusiasts have spilled out across the old station yard and are walking up the track, no doubt to take some more photographs. Not long after this was taken, the demu would depart back down the line to Bournemouth, thence to its depot at Eastleigh. The last train to carry passengers from West Moors.



And peace descends on the old station. Just a few more desultory workings to / from the fuel depot – and the line was abandoned formally on the 14th October, 1974.



The railway line was lifted not too long afterwards, but demolition of the station and remaining platform infrastructure would not take place until a few years later – I've got a reference to the old station building being used as a youth centre in early 1977.



One building with strong railway connections – indeed it dates from first-opening in 1847, is the Crossing Lodge. It is still with us – modified from its original construction and here it looks quite bare being bereft of any chimneys, but the dwelling has been sympathetically brought up to date. In the foreground is the area of the old 'down-side' goods siding, which may have been the location of the mysterious 'halt' of the 1840s & 1850s.