

# HISTORY OF BRITISH RAILWAYS (1825 - 1993)

**BRITISH RAILWAYS**, a.k.a. **BRITISH RAIL**, was the former **National Railway System of Great Britain**, created by the **Transport Act of 1947**, which inaugurated public ownership of the railroads. The first railroad built in Great Britain to use steam locomotives was the **STOCKTON & DARLINGTON**, opened in 1825. It used a steam locomotive built by **George Stephenson** and was practical only for hauling minerals.

The **LIVERPOOL & MANCHESTER RAILWAY**, which opened in 1830, was the first modern railroad. It was a public carrier of both passengers and freight. By 1870 Britain had about 13,500 miles (21,700 km) of railroad. At the system's greatest extent, in 1914, there were about 20,000 miles (32,000 km) of track, run by 120 competing companies.



Replica of Robert Stephenson's **ROCKET**.

The British government combined all these companies into 4 main groups in 1923 as an economy measure. When World War II began in 1939, Britain's railroads were placed under Government control.

- The TRANSPORT ACT OF 1947 nationalized the railways, which were taken over by the British Transport Commission (BTC) in 1948 and given the name BRITISH RAILWAYS. The BTC divided Britain's rail network into six (later five) regions on a geographic basis.
- A 1962 law replaced the BTC with the BRITISH RAILWAYS BOARD in 1963. The Board's management emphasized mass movement over major trunk lines and the closing of money-losing branch lines and depots.
- Between 1963 and 1975 the board shortened its routes from 17,500 miles (28,000 km) to 11,000 miles (17,000 km) and cut personnel from about 475,000 to about 250,000. As part of a modernization program, steam locomotives began to be replaced by diesels in the 1950s, and this was followed in the '60s by ELECTRIFICATION.
- The board undertook TRACK RECONSTRUCTION, installed long, continuously welded rails, and introduced new signalling systems.
- A COMPUTERIZED FREIGHT SERVICE introduced in 1975 could monitor the movements of more than 200,000 freight cars. In 1966–1967 the West-Coast Line from London to Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool was electrified, and in the early 1970s electrification was extended to Glasgow.
- Track improvements and the HIGH-SPEED TRAIN (InterCity 125), a diesel train operating at speeds up to 125 miles per hour (200 km per hour), cut travel times between Britain's major cities.
- The British government restructured BRITISH RAIL in 1993 prior to privatizing the company. Passenger traffic and freight traffic were divided into 25 passenger train-operating units and 6 freight-operating companies, respectively, that were franchised to private-sector operators.
- A new state-owned Company, RAILTRACK, was created in 1994 to own and manage the railway system's track, signals, land, and stations. RAILTRACK was privatized in 1996. A cracked rail led to a train derailment at Hatfield in 2000 that killed four people; trains were slowed down throughout the country as rails were checked for cracks. As a result, Railtrack announced losses of £534 million in 2001. The British government formed a new not-for-profit company, NETWORK RAIL Ltd., that assumed Railtrack's business in 2002.

# HISTORY of the LONDON & SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY.



The London and South Western Railway (LSWR or L&SWR) operated a Railway Company in England from 1838 to 1922.

Starting as the LONDON & SOUTHAMPTON RAILWAY, its network extended from LONDON to Plymouth via Salisbury and Exeter, with branches to Ilfracombe and Padstow (Cornwall) and via SOUTHAMPTON to Bournemouth and Weymouth (Dorset).

It also had many routes connecting towns in Hampshire and Berkshire, including PORTSMOUTH and READING. In the grouping of railways in 1923 the LSWR amalgamated with other railways to create the SOUTHERN RAILWAY.

Among significant achievements of the LSWR were the electrification of suburban lines, the introduction of power signalling, the development of Southampton Docks, the rebuilding of London Waterloo station as one of the great stations of the world, and the handling of the massive traffic involved in the First World War.

Spreading car ownership led to a rapid decline of passenger traffic in DEVON and CORNWALL from about 1960 to the end of that decade so short mid-distance from London branches and the remote peninsular sections of route closed under the BEECHING REPORT, except the line to Penzance from Exeter which had, since the very outset, been the main preserve of the GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY, chiefly due to that company's initial laying of track there and doing so on broad gauge and encouraging Devon and Cornish companies to do so under the "Gauge War".

The GAUGE WAR was a figurative war of intense competition to control new territory, waged between expanding railway companies in Great Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup>. Century. The contest for which track gauge should become the standard carried with it the greater struggle for which companies and stakeholders would win or lose in commerce, controlling or commercially dominating rights of way.

The Gauge War was arguably the earliest format war between two similar but incompatible technologies.

The GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY adopted the broad gauge of 7 ft (2,134 mm) at the outset, while competing railway companies adopted the gauge of 1,435 mm (4 ft 8 ½ in), which later became standard gauge.

As the railway companies sought to expand commercially and geographically, they wished to dominate areas of the country, hoping to exclude their competitors. The networks polarized into groups of *broad-gauge companies* and of *narrow-gauge companies*. The term *narrow-gauge* at the time referred to the 1,435 mm (4 ft 8 ½ in) as well as any smaller size, all narrow relative to the broad gauge (whereas today it refers only to gauges strictly smaller than 1,435 mm (4 ft 8 ½ in).

Proposed railway lines required authorization by Act of Parliament, and an Act generally stipulated the track gauge for that line. When an independent line was promoted, the gauge used aligned the company to either the broad-or narrow-gauge companies. The success by one network and the failure by the other often implied the capture or loss respectively of territory far beyond the line under immediate examination.

A rail system with two gauges suffered from inefficiency where a break of gauge occurred. Various alternatives to costly transloading were proposed in the early era of railways, including roll-bocks, transporter wagons, dual gauge, and even containerization or variable gauge axles. However, these were not implemented during the Gauge War in the 1840s, which resulted in the use of wasteful trans-loading.

A ROYAL COMMISSION was set up to study the issue and report its recommendations. The Report informed the Regulating the Gauge of Railways Act 1846, which mandated standard gauge for all new railway construction except in the southwest of England and certain lines in Wales. However, building new broad-gauge lines was still legal if an Act of Parliament permitted an exception for a new line. The broad-gauge thus continued in common use in the West of England for several more decades.

# **H**ISTORY of the **SOUTHERN RAILWAY**

The **SOUTHERN RAILWAY** (SR), sometimes shortened to '**Southern**', was a British railway company established in the **1923 GROUPING**. It linked **London** with the **Channel Ports, South West England, South Coast resorts and Kent**.

The railway was formed by the amalgamation of several smaller railway companies, the largest of which were the **London & South Western Railway (LSWR)**, the **London, Brighton and South Coast Railway (LB&SCR)** and the **South Eastern and Chatham Railway (SE&CR)**.

The construction of what was to become the **SOUTHERN RAILWAY** began in 1838 with the opening of the London and Southampton Railway, which was renamed the **London & South Western Railway**.

The railway was noted for its astute use of public relations and a coherent management structure headed by **Sir Herbert Walker**. At 2,186 miles (3,518 km), the **Southern Railway** was the smallest of the **BIG FOUR** railway companies, and, unlike the others, the majority of its revenue came from **passenger traffic** rather than freight.

**It created what was at that time the world's largest electrified main line railway system and the first electrified inter-city route (London—Brighton).**

There were two Chief Mechanical Engineers; Richard Maunsell between 1923 and 1937 and Oliver Bulleid from 1937 to 1948, both of whom designed new locomotives and rolling stock to replace much of that which was inherited in 1923.

The **SOUTHERN RAILWAY** played a vital role in the **Second World War**, embarking the **British Expeditionary Force**, during the **DUNKIRK** operations, and supplying **Operation Overlord** in **1944**; because the railway was primarily a passenger network, its success was an even more remarkable achievement.

The **Southern Railway** operated a number of famous named trains, including the **BRIGHTON BELLE**, the **BOURNEMOUTH BELLE**, the **GOLDEN ARROW** and the **NIGHT FERRY (London - Paris and Brussels)**.



**THE BRIGHTON BELLE**



**THE BOURNEMOUTH BELLE**



THE GOLDEN ARROW



THE NIGHT FERRY

The West Country services were dominated by lucrative summer holiday traffic and included named trains such as the ATLANTIC COAST EXPRESS and the DEVON BELLE.

### THE ATLANTIC COAST EXPRESS



The company's best-known livery was highly distinctive: locomotives and carriages were painted in a bright malachite above plain black frames, with bold, bright yellow lettering.



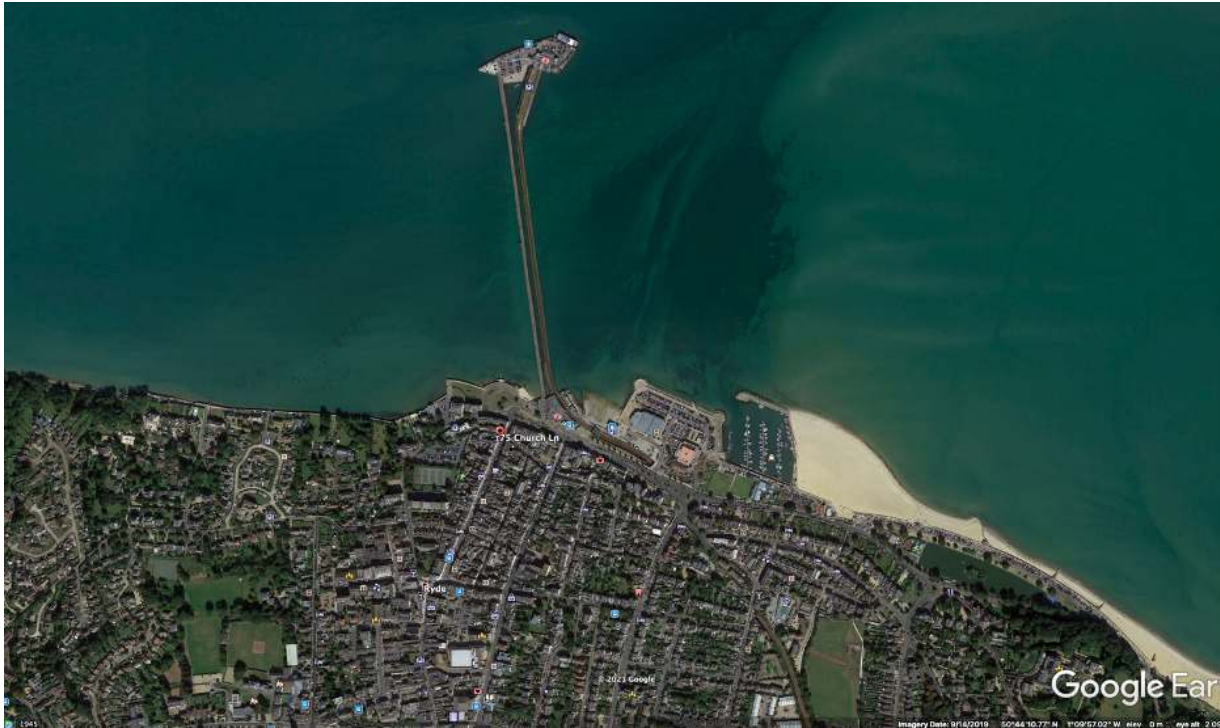
### THE DEVON BELLE



**PETERSFIELD STATION, Hampshire**

**The SOUTHERN RAILWAY was nationalized in 1948, becoming the SOUTHERN REGION of BRITISH RAILWAYS.**

# **R**YDE PIER HEAD Railway Station, Isle of Wight, Hampshire in 1930



**RYDE PIER, Isle of Wight, Hampshire**

**RYDE PIER HEAD RAILWAY STATION** is one of three stations in the town of Ryde on the Isle of Wight. Situated at the end of the town's pier, it is adjacent to the terminal for the **WIGHTLINK** fast catamaran service connecting the island with Portsmouth on the English mainland. Passengers can use this to connect with the rest of the National Rail network at Portsmouth Harbour station, which is adjacent to the Portsmouth terminal.

Trains run down the eastern coast of the Isle of Wight to Shanklin (the Island Line), the last remnant of a network of railways on the island. Because of the restricted loading gauge, particularly through the tunnel under Ryde, services are operated by former London Underground stock.



**RYDE PIER STATION – Electric Train**



**STEAM TRAIN (on left) ELECTRIC CARRIAGE (on right)**

RYDE PIER (NOTE the PADDLE STEAMER in the Background)



**RYDE PIER STATION**



**RYDE BUS & RAIL STATION**





In 1965 the remaining lines from Cowes and Ventnor to Ryde were under threat of closure and there was interest from various parties in trying to preserve some of the Island's, by now, unique hardware. Similarly, an eleventh-hour rearguard action to prevent closure was mounted and a scheme to operate the Cowes line with private investment was launched by an organization known as VECTRAIL.

The story of the **ISLE OF WIGHT STEAM RAILWAY** begins with one of those interested parties, **RON STRUTT** a young, mid-teens chap who, a few years earlier had tried to purchase one of the old Island engines from British Rail ... but had failed. **RON** and friend **IAIN WHITLAM** called a meeting in **South London** during late **1965** to gather interest from like-minded people in possibly preserving something of the old Island railways. Iain coined the name **WIGHT LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY** and they agreed to try and secure **at least one ex-LONDON & SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY O2 CLASS ENGINE** and possibly a Carriage or few.



Whilst the more optimistic felt it may be possible to lease back from **British Railways** part of the shortly-to-be-closed railway, others were more realistic and suggested static preservation may be possible; but if the **VECTRAIL** scheme came to fruition some limited form of operation could happen. Sights were set at a realistic level, but all around them other individuals and groups were telling the World what they were going to preserve from the impending graveyard of historic stock.

The pressure groups and politics had some effect on the railways of Wight; the line from Cowes to Ryde remained open until February 1966 and only part of the Ventnor route, that from Shanklin to Ventnor itself closed in April the same year.

A MODERNIZATION PROGRAMME was to see the end of the old steam trains and the line from Ryde Pier to Shanklin was electrified to accommodate ex-LONDON TRANSPORT TUBE TRAINS. The last steam train operated the delayed 10.12pm service from Shanklin to Ryde St John's Road on 31st December 1966.

Ex-LONDON TRANSPORT TUBE TRAIN on Ryde Pier, Isle of Wight



The **WIGHT LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY** had mustered its troops. Armed with appeal leaflets and collection tins, their presence at the last week of steam trains could not be missed. What many did not know at that time was that a few weeks earlier a budding wildlife artist **David Shepherd** had a conversation in the offices of **Publisher and lifelong railway enthusiast, Ian Allan**, at which **Mr. Shepherd** expressed an interest in helping one of the growing number of groups throughout the U.K. appealing for funds to save **steam engines**.

The reply he received was, to quote, **“David, if you have £500 to spend, why don’t you buy an 02-Class Tank Engine?”** A visit to the Island with **W.L.S. members in November 1966 sealed the deal** and the **“fighting fund”** was much nearer to raising the **£900** needed to buy a locomotive.

The **ISLE OF WIGHT STEAM RAILWAY** probably owes its existence to this **chance conversation** as, **with one exception**, all the other attempts to secure engines and rolling stock from the Island **all sank without trace**. The exception was an individual who secured one **COACH** on behalf of Canadian interests but even this lost its way and eventually came into **WIGHT LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY** ownership.

So, after the game, the final score was:

- One 02 class **Locomotive** called **“CALBOURNE”**,
- two **ex-SOUTH EASTERN & CHATHAM** Carriages and
- three **ex-LONDON BRIGHTON & SOUTH COAST** Vehicles.

(The **LOCOMOTIVE** was located at **RYDE ST. JOHN’S ROAD** as it had been used during **1967** to assist with engineering work on the newly electrified **SHANKLIN LINE** and was **effectively stranded when the connection with the old Cowes track was severed!** )



Over the next couple of years a few ancient **GOODS WAGONS** and a **CRANE** also joined the unique collection.

The coaches were at **NEWPORT STATION** together with the remaining redundant engines, wagons, and carriages, all of which were in the sights of the scrap team who relentlessly worked their way through the lines leaving little but soggy asbestos and globules of molten glass which had fallen from burning carriages.

The prospects of the **VECTRAIL GROUP** waxed and waned with the moon, its greatest hope was the Sadler Rail Car and its sponsor who may be persuaded to fund the revival of the **COWES-RYDE RAILWAY**. However, like all such schemes, whilst the local authorities and British Railways were patient, in the end it's the cash that counts! The **W.L.S.** on the other hand had seen the writing on the wall and after a little internal wrangling agreed to prepare a case to secure a short piece of line on which to store and possibly operate its collection, its exact length dependant on available funds.

In 1969 the **02-Class ENGINE** was moved by road from Ryde to join its **TRAIN** at **NEWPORT** and work started in earnest to make it operational... it had to be done as the Society hoped to make its new base at **HAVEN STREET**, some miles away by rail.



In Autumn 1970, VECTRIL was laid to rest and CALBOURNE was in steam; local negotiations allowed limited operation around the **Newport station site** to test and hone our operating skills. These negotiations had taken some time to fructify, and certain clandestine and nocturnal movements of stock may have taken place ... perhaps the root of some 'ghost train' stories which later came to our ears!

Negotiations also took place with both the local Council and **BRITISH RAILWAYS** regarding the purchase of a chunk of **rail line** and various other equipment such as **water tanks, track-work and buffer stops**, all of which were going to be needed if a railway was to be run. The **WIGHT LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY** raised funds like never before, the continued existence of the historic stock depended on it and sufficient was raised to pay the deposit on 1 and 5/8 mile of line from **WOOTTON** (with road access) to **HAVEN STREET** also with road access and both on a bus route! There was little of engineering interest on the section and with a little "T L C" it was hoped a **TRAIN** would run in a short while.

All this was at the planning stage when on Monday 18th January 1971, Notice to Quit **NEWPORT STATION** arrived – it all had to be gone by the 25th! **That was only 7-days away...**

Although not unexpected, and some preliminary work on the track to **HAVEN STREET** had been carried out, it came as a shock. A meeting was called at a pub near the **FISHBOURNE CAR FERRY TERMINAL** that night, "mainlanders" and "locals" formulated a plan of action ... **After "Closing Time", and with the help of a little alcohol, things didn't look so bad.**

**TUESDAY** saw frantic action; teams started to load 'stuff' onto wagons and vans (**preservationists gather lots of 'stuff'**), and others headed off for **COWES** on the remains of an old **RYDE PIER TRAM** to gather **steel rail keys** – these were needed to replace the **wooden keys** which had kept home fires burning between **Newport** and **Haven Street** for the past few years.

**Posters** were printed and nailed to trees and posts all along the line warning trespassers to be wary of train movements over the next few days. It came as quite a shock to many a dog and owner when the tram, laden with track materials and water tanks bore down on them through the grass covered tracks at 30 miles an hour, the liberal use of the **hand operated klaxon** was a perverse joy of the driver on these trips.

**There were two main obstacles on the line to Haven Street.** The first just yards from base camp, was the **DRAW BRIDGE** which carried the lines over the **River Medina**. **It had not been opened for years and we had avoided crossing it during operations around the station. It was inspected by our engineers and found to be intact. Theft of bearings was feared but unfounded.**

**A rather fatalistic attitude prevailed amongst our youthful members. If it all “falls in”, we walk away and deny everything, remembering to wear running shoes on the day!**

**The second obstruction was more manageable.** There had been an ongoing Clay problem at Wootton for years and it was sited just a few feet short of the line we were about to purchase. This slippage and heave had to be crossed to give rail access to our line. **A small team of Boy Scouts, their Leader and one other chap went to look at the job on Thursday. By Friday some of the clay slip was cleared and the track, which had a distinct kink in it, packed and ballasted to provide a solid base. The team went away very pleased they had done their best, but it rained – Oh! how it rained! – and by Saturday, just 24 hours before it needed to carry trains, the lines lay suspended in fresh air surrounded by a sea of mud.**

**The tram arrived a little before midday Saturday** laden with timber packing, in fact the skeletal remains of numerous old wagons that had previously been broken up at Newport, plus a few hundred weights of ballast scooped from the **“four-foot”** on the way. **(A colloquial railway expression for the area between the inner running faces of a pair of rails.)**

Frantic was the action and a sort of raft was created under the track but there was no means of load testing so the Team Leader undertook to standby when the first trains crossed, although exactly what action he could have taken if the train toppled, I don't know but from his location he was certainly going to go down with the sinking ship!

Sunday 24th January 1971, a date that will go down in history, well, in the history of the **ISLE OF WIGHT STEAM RAILWAY** at least ... it would our first day or it would be our last!

At Newport it dawned bright, **pumps** were lifting water from the **track drains** into locomotive and other water barrels, and last-minute preparations to run four steam hauled trains to Haven Street were well under way. A water **“situation”** had been caused by the impending sale of the railway land to the local authorities. **As part of this process the water supply, which the Wight Locomotive Society had been using for four years without charge, was cut off** and the only alternative was to use the **track drains** as a reservoir by blocking the outlets. You will recall it rained on Friday night and by Saturday most of Newport Station was under water up to two feet in places.

The locomotive crew was at first under the supervision of former driver **TONY TILTMAN**. His ex-boss **IVOR DAVIES** from **Ryde Works** also gave advice along with WLS member **JOHN WENYON** from **Eastleigh Works**. Later model maker **DON YOUNG** joined for a trip, but as the day wore on **BOB HUXTABLE** and **TOM JACKMAN** were left to their own devices with a guest appearance of this author (Terry Hastings) on the footplate of the very last trip. This resulted in a stop at **Whippingham** to 'blow up' which all goes to prove that I'm no better with a shovel than a pen!

**The WIGHT LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY had a commitment to its members to tell them when the move was to take place.** We were in the middle of a "postal strike" and it was years before texts and e-mail. Press Officer **RICHARD NEWMAN** and friends did their very best to contact as many as possible and he was able to issue them with tickets for the very last train from **NEWPORT**. **GEORGE WHEELER** was the person who had undertaken training of guards and shunters over the previous months, and he set out the timetable and method of working for the 'move'.

It was planned to run two passenger trains at 10.40 and 12.15 of three carriages each, then two goods trains (we had by now acquired several additional goods vehicles from the defunct **VECTRAIL**), and all this was interlaced around 'RAIL MOTOR CAR' (the tram) and light engine workings. Somewhere in the middle of all this was a stop at the one-time Royal Station of Whippingham where a letter was set down for onward conveyance to **HER MAJESTY QUEEN VICTORIA**. She must have remembered it, as she came to visit us at **HAVEN STREET**, 33 years later!

The schedule was all very optimistic but how often does moving home go exactly to plan?

At about 8.30pm, the last Rail Motor left Newport. The station, deserted and silent, had seen its last train.

**The TRAM CREW were fighting a battle of which few knew in the euphoria of the day; they had run out of "gaffer tape" to stick a leaking fuel pipe and one of their number was holding the connection together, the transmission had "given up the ghost" hours ago and was held together with a succession of bent 6" nails whose lifespan depended on the use of the right foot of the driver! They had been booked into Haven Street at 5:00pm but it was gone 10:00pm when the crew arrived in the local pub to a great cheer from the crowd and a rendition of "The Runaway Train" on the piano by the landlord."**

**We had arrived; day one at the ISLE OF WIGHT STEAM RAILWAY was over and we all slept well for the first time in a week.**

The scrap merchants really did start work on the following week and progress was rapid. We managed a couple of trips with the tram from **Haven Street** to **Smallbrook** to 'recover' sundry items and another team was at **Newport** marking up the various point-work which we had purchased. Local deals also included an amount of signalling wire and equipment which we were lacking. To be honest, at **Haven Street** we were lacking most things.

**All the stock was crammed into the up and down loops as there were no sidings, the building was boarded up, no water, no electric, but we did have an old concrete plateway hut complete with stove; what a way to run a railway!**

**The intention was to open for the public at Easter. That was less than ten weeks away if I recall. Boards came off the building and the water turned on; there was no electric to turn on, so oil lamps were the order of the day. A pump was mounted on a flat truck and was shunted to an over-bridge where river water was pumped directly into the locomotive.**

A form of pull/push working was devised with the brake van leading towards Wootton. **CALBOURNE** located on the downhill end was in communication with the guard through a Heath-Robinson bell system, although I am not certain if this was in place on that very first day.

**Sadly, the spring was not kind, the rain returned, and parts of the line became rivers.** This delayed even the most rudimentary track work planned so that by Easter it was decided only to operate as far as **WOODHOUSE CROSSING**, a little short of half the distance.

But it happened! On Easter Monday **CALBOURNE** and its train of three ex-**LONDON BRIGHTON & SOUTH COAST RAILWAY** Carriages puffed their merry way to **Woodhouse** and back and carried around 1,000 passengers in the process.

**In recent months there has been much head scratching about the timetable for those first days; search as we may there is no trace. Nor were Guard's Journals used for some months, but a recent conversation with George Wheeler, our one-time Operations guy brought it all back... "Well, it was very much a case of when Jacko (Tom Jackman, our driver) said he's got steam, WE GO!" and so we did!**



IOW Steam Railway Paint Job

CALBOURNE 02 Class ENGINE



**ISLE OF WIGHT STEAM RAILWAY – A Day Out!**

