



THE NORTH STAR CHRONICLES – a newsletter primarily for the model railway fraternity

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Editorial

The first model railway book I bought was by Norman Simmons “How to go Railway Modelling” published by Patrick Stevens Ltd in 1972 (by 1999 in its 8th revised edition 1.458m copies had been sold!) In the book Simmons waxed lyrically about: “*the very famous Ashburton station in Devon so beloved by branch line enthusiasts.....*”

A visit to the UK last year provided an opportunity to visit Ashburton, an ancient stannary town. (no, I did not know what a stannary town was either. Refer:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stannary_Courts_and_Parliaments)

Ashburton station features this month because it is an excellent prototype for modelling for those interested in British branch lines. Although only three quarters of a mile in length it would

still require 52.5 feet to replicate totally in 00 (27' in N – refer <http://rail.felgall.com/dist.htm> for a discussion of distances).

Such space requirements are beyond the resources of all but a few modellers so “selective compression” is required.

Brief history of the Buckfastleigh, Totnes and South Devon Railway

On the basis that knowledge of the history of the prototype assists the modeller with the design/structure of the layout, appropriate motive power and rolling stock and inward and outward types of traffic, a brief history of the line follows. The primary source for this information is Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buckfastleigh,_Totnes_and_South_Devon_Railway

Ashburton station was the terminus of the just under 10 mile branch line from Totnes at the head of the Dartmouth estuary.

Location of the line



Built to a Brunel design the line was originally broad gauge (7'0¼") and opened for traffic in 1872. In 1876 the SDR and the Bristol and Exeter Railway “amalgamated” (were rescued by?) the GWR. The GWR converted its entire remaining broad gauge system (177 miles) including the BT and SDR to standard gauge over a weekend 20th 23rd May 1892, in less than 2 days with minimum disruption to traffic, a remarkable engineering and organizational achievement!

The line’s main traffic was coal, fertilizer, timber and general merchandise in and agricultural products – dairy produce, livestock and woollen products out. In the early years

passenger traffic was a significant contributor to revenue (nearly 25000 passenger tickets issued at Ashburton in 1903). However the line was never a financial success and when bought out by the GWR in 1897 the shareholders received only £22450 for their £130000 investment.

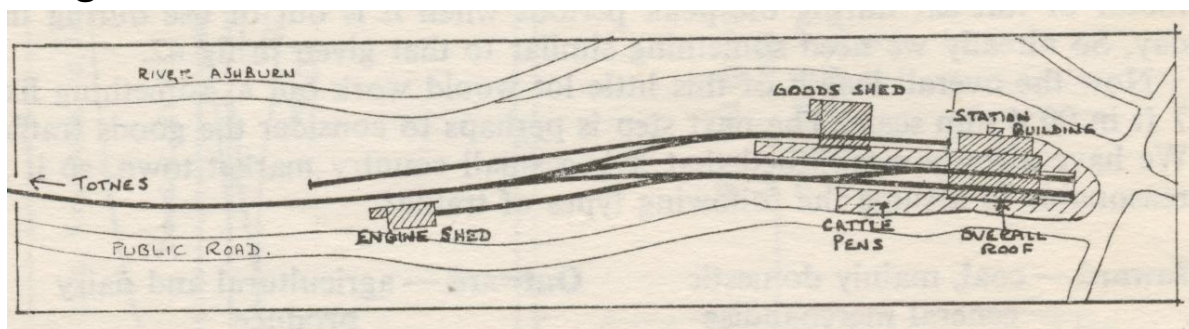
Competition from road traffic and the obsolescence of the traditional industries at Buckfastleigh and Ashburton resulted in more pressure on the line. This was mitigated to an extent by the introduction of steam railmotors and later “push pull” trains (“autotrains” - controllable from both ends of the train obviating a ‘run around’) but passenger traffic continued to decline. Ticket sales at Ashburton reduced to under 5000 in 1933.

The line closed to passengers in 1958 and general goods in 1962 (note prior to Beeching reports of the middle sixties. It was reopened to Ashburton for a brief period in 1969 as a heritage line by the ‘Dart Valley Railway’. Ironically the reopening ceremony was performed by Dr Richard Beeching! In 1971 the line beyond Buckfastleigh was again closed and a road built on the route of the railway. The 2 mile section to Ashburton was now closed for good, but an approximately 7 mile section from Totnes to Buckfastleigh remains in operation, the South Devon Railway Trust having taken over in 1991. Those who wish more historical information should refer to the South Devon Railway website:

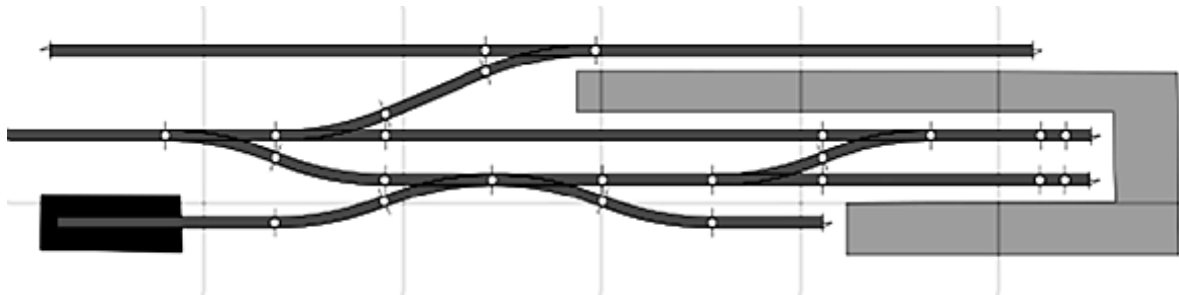
<http://www.southdevonrailway.co.uk/history/full-history>

So what generated all the modellers’ interest in Ashburton?

Diagram of Ashburton Station

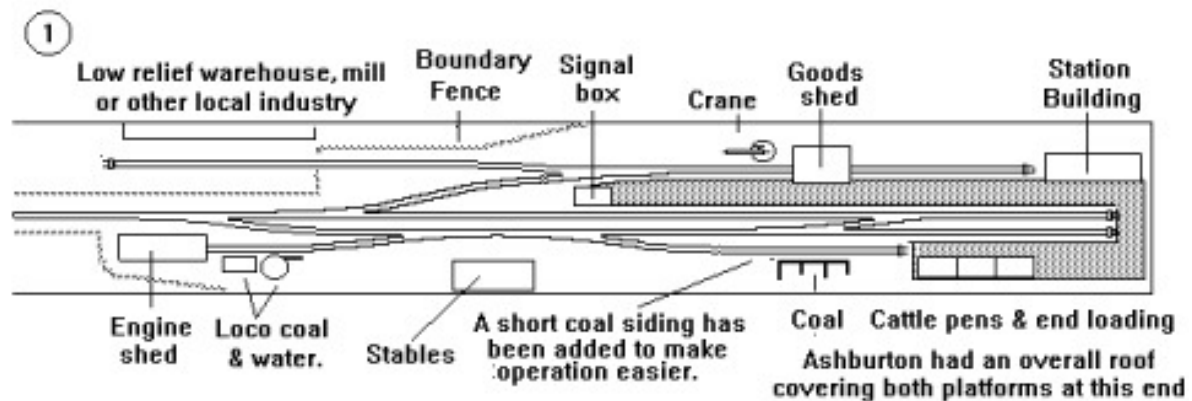


The diagram above drawn from Simmons's book and the schematic below, (source <http://www.free-track-plans.com/>) highlight not only the compactness of the station but also the operational possibilities. With the addition of a "fiddle yard" off stage to the left, hours of fun making and breaking trains can be obtained by those who want a relatively close approximation to the prototype.



It will be noted that there is one difference between the two diagrams namely the inclusion in the Free-track-plan (but not in the prototype) of a short siding leading to a coal bunker. This adds to the operational possibilities.

Proposed model of Ashburton station



In the words of the site compiler – Mike Smith:

(<http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/gansg/8-yards/y-goodb.htm>)

“Fig ___ (1) is based on Ashburton, a popular subject for 'OO' scale modellers although limited in operational interest (not sure I agree. Prefer this to a “tail chasing” layout – ed!). The layout as shown, with the additional siding for the coal merchant, could be built on a baseboard four feet long by ten inches wide. The model could be built using kits for the major structures; Langley Masterbuild low relief warehouse, Ratio goods shed, cattle dock and station building, SD Mouldings small signal

box etc.). As shown in the drawing a road over bridge at the left hand end could be used to hide raised hinges and a second four foot board could then be added containing a simple fiddle-yard. When not in use the two boards fold up to form a box four feet long, ten inches wide and about five inches deep”.

Photographs of the station



Exterior of station building

The first of a number of photographs copyright Mike Roach. Taken in September 1961



Brunellian style roof Ashburton station – Rosser photo taken 1954



Goods shed

View towards station building taken in 1970. Copyright J Brodribb.



Engine shed

Taken in September 1961 when the engine shed had already “suffered modification” in the words of the photographer! Photo copyright Mike Roach

Motive power



Swindon built Locos 4555 (front) 2-6-2 of 1924 and 1420 0-4-2 of 1933 fitted with “push pull” apparatus for auto train control (bi directional operation) without running around. 1966 (the weedkiller train)



4555 with a special in 1966
The loco will need to push the stock back in order to use the run round loop. Above and adjacent copyright Mike Roach



6435 (front) 1420 rear right. 4555 left May 1971.

Copyright Gordon Edgar

Photo taken when Ashburton was being used as Dart Valley Railway servicing facility.

6435 being coaled, 1420 oiled.



Steam railmotor no 93 and trailer no 92.

The GWR built 99 railmotors, 93 the only operational one. Their limited capacity led to the introduction of driving trailers, used later with dual controlled 'push pull' trains.

And now the sad part.....



The goods shed October 2014

From a preservation perspective I can live with this.



**Engine Shed
October 2014**
And maybe at a
push this.



**Engine Shed
October 2014**
But this???????



**Brunellian style
roof and the
station building
October 2014**
And this????
I don't think so.
Not sure this
building should
win any awards
for heritage
preservation!

Model Opportunities

Kernow Model Rail Centre has commissioned DJ Models to build an (electric) OO gauge model of a GWR Steam Railmotor (http://www.kernowmodelrailcentre.com/page/79/GWR_steam_railmotor)

DJ Models offer an OO version of class 14 available from Hattons <http://www.ehattons.com/14xx>

Hornby also manufacture a class 14 in OO gauge and at one stage manufactured an autotrailer coach (R4547)

Dapol manufactured an N gauge version of class 14 in 2004. It would appear this model is back in production. Refer

www.britanniamodels.com/n-scale/dapol/steam-locomotives

Kingscale offer a gauge 3 (2½") live steam class 14 model. (www.kingscalelivesteam.co.uk/gauge3GWR14xxTANKLOCO.php)

And for those who like challenges of a different kind there is a lego version (with “push pull” autotrailer!). Refer ScotNick1 at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/94645638@N07/15019769770/>

For an even bigger challenge, how about modelling Ashburton in its original format i.e. broad gauge? In 4mm (OO) scale the track width should be 29mm but 32mm (O gauge) track is arguably near enough. So that covers the track what about locos and rolling stock? All to be scratchbuilt. Not in this life!

Conclusion

Ashburton has been described as “the one that got away”. Arguably in this day and age it is unlikely that the authorities would permit a road to be built over a preservation/heritage line especially when the tourism/employment benefits of such lines are now so readily appreciated. But the deed is done and those who wish to appreciate this classic branch terminus can now only do so by visiting the remains so to speak, (under threat from redevelopers? <http://friendsofashburtonstation.co.uk/>) view photographs or build a model thereof.