

Bridgwater Town Council Blake Museum



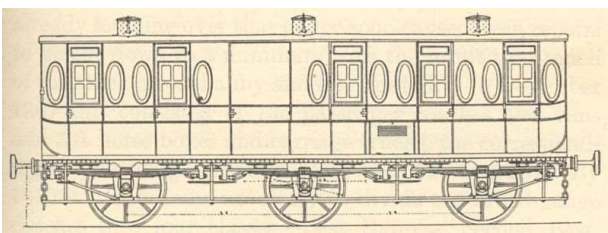
A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRIDGWATER'S RAILWAYS

Bristol & Exeter Railway and Great Western Railway



The start of the line was in August 1835 when the Parliamentary Act was passed. Construction reached Bridgwater in May 1841, and the first passenger train from Bristol to the town ran on 14 June 1841. From then on, until the line was finished, passengers were transported onwards by coach. The section to Taunton was completed in July 1842, and the Exeter section in May 1844.

The company leased the line to the Great Western Railway for five years once the line had reached Bridgwater. The lease reverted and the line was run by the Bristol and Exeter Company until August 1876 when the GWR and B&E companies amalgamated.



*Bridgwater – made Bristol & Exeter Railway
carriage*

The line was managed by the GWR until nationalisation and thereafter by British Rail. Now there are local trains hourly to Bristol and Taunton where other connections can be made, and there are two trains daily to and from London.



Bridgwater railway station

The original Act authorised a branch at Bridgwater to the river, but this was not built for a number of years. In 1844 a branch to Dunball wharf was built by the enterprise of some Bridgwater coal importers who transported Welsh coal all over the South West until the opening of the Severn Tunnel in 1886 killed the trade.

Bridgwater Carriage Works

This was built in 1849 and was sited at Bridgwater as being the mid-point of the Bristol and Exeter line. It was located just south of the Bridgwater station, and part of the site included coke ovens for making fuel for the locomotives.

By 1851 over 100 men were employed making rolling stock -- carriages and wagons. Initially the company bought or hired locomotives from outside

manufacturers, but from 1859 made them at their own locomotive works at Bristol.

The site was retained for repairs by the GWR, and continued in use until 1947 when a disastrous fire cause its closure very soon after. The site has been developed for other industrial use.

Bridgwater Ironworks

Next door to the Carriage works was the site of the Bridgwater Ironworks. This was founded by George Hennet (1799-1857) a railway contractor who did much work for Brunel. As well as owning the ironworks he managed the railway's steam saw mills, timber yard and kyanising [wood preservation] works at Somerset Bridge on the bank of the Parrett. After Hennet's death in 1857 the firm traded as Hennet and Spink (later Hennet, Else and Spink). It reformed as Bridgwater Engineering Co in 1873 and closed in 1878 with the loss of 300 jobs.

The firm was responsible for three bridges over the Thames, railway signalling work and prefabricated lighthouses for Watchet, South Wales and Australia. The site has been redeveloped for other industrial use.



Bustard Head Lighthouse, Queensland, Australia. Opened 1869

The Docks Railway

This was a horse-drawn railway constructed by the Bridgwater Corporation in 1845 to a wharf on the east bank of the River Parrett. The Bristol and Exeter Company bought the tramway in 1859 and the Bridgwater and Taunton canal in 1867,

and with it came Bridgwater dock on the west bank of the river. At the instigation of the Corporation the railway company agreed to convert the tramway to broad gauge and extend it to the docks, but the telescopic bridge over the river was not completed until March 1871. The docks basin layout of the railway can be seen on the model on display in the Maritime room.

To the north of the dock basin were a slate and marble works and a linseed oil and cotton cake works. To the south were an extensive coal yard, a warehouse, a saw mill and a pottery. To the east of the river, and served by the docks branch were cement, brick and tile works and a timber yard.

The docks branch closed on 2 January 1967. The mechanism of the telescopic bridge was partially dismantled, and later the bridge was utilised as a single track road controlled by traffic lights, before being pedestrianised upon construction of the Chandos Bridge.



The pedestrianised telescopic bridge

The Bridgwater Railway Company



The Bridgwater Railway Company opened the line from Edington on 21 July 1890. It was seven miles long and had a station at Cossington and a halt at Bawdrip. The terminus at Bridgwater was between the Bristol Road and the river and had

connections to the cement and brick and tile works there. It was operated by the Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway. On re-grouping in 1923 the line was run by the London, Midland and Scottish and the Southern railways, and on Nationalisation in 1948 it came under the Southern Region of BR.



Cossington Station



Bawdrip Halt

Passenger traffic ceased on 29 November 1952 and goods on 1 October 1954.



The demolition of the bridge over Bristol Road

The Bridgwater terminus was used by British Road Services (BRS) until demolished when Sainsbury's supermarket was built.



Bridgwater North station before demolition

This narrative has been compiled from material written for an exhibition about Bridgwater's railways and held at the Blake Museum in 2011.

Blake Museum is owned by Bridgwater
Town Council
and managed by volunteers from the
Friends of Blake Museum.
(Registered Charity 1099815)
www.bridgwatermuseum.org.uk
Version 1: 22 April 2016