

Photo.]

Trains crossing at Chelfham

[D. E. H. Box

The Lynton and Barnstaple Railway

By JOHN W. DORLING, B.Sc.

RARELY, if ever before, has the closing of a railway aroused such keen interest as has been awakened throughout the country by the running of the last trains over the narrow gauge Barnstaple-Lynton section of the Southern Railway. This is to be attributed very largely to the unusual character of the line and the magnificent scenery through which it passes.

For quite twenty years prior to its opening there were schemes to secure rail communication between Barnstaple and Lynton, and there had been several Acts authorising various lines. All had come to nothing. Then, largely through the influence of Sir George Newnes the Act of June 27, 1895, incorporating the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway Company "for the construction of a 2-ft. gauge line from Barnstaple to Lynton," came to fruition. Even then there was a rival scheme, under which a line of standard gauge was to be constructed from Lynton via Blackmoor and across the edge of

Exmoor, to a junction with the G.W.R. Taunton-Barnstaple line at Filleigh, near South Molton. It seemed strange as one travelled in the little puffing trains to think that, had this line been constructed, one might have travelled to Lynton by a coach off the G.W.R. Cornish Riviera Express. However, the narrow gauge won, and construction was formally begun on September 17, 1895, when Lady Newnes cut the first sod at Shambleway, near Lynbridge. Sir James Szlumper was the Consulting Engineer.

Festivities at Barnstaple in connection with the opening began on May 10, 1898, when a Mayoral at-home in the Music Hall was attended by 400 guests. The formal opening took place on the following morning. The district seems to have made a public holiday of the opening, triumphal arches were erected and towns and villages gaily decorated. After a procession to the North Walk, where the L. & B. and the L.S.W.R. had erected a new joint station (now the Towu



[Photo.]

[D. E. H. Box]

Coat-of-arms of the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway

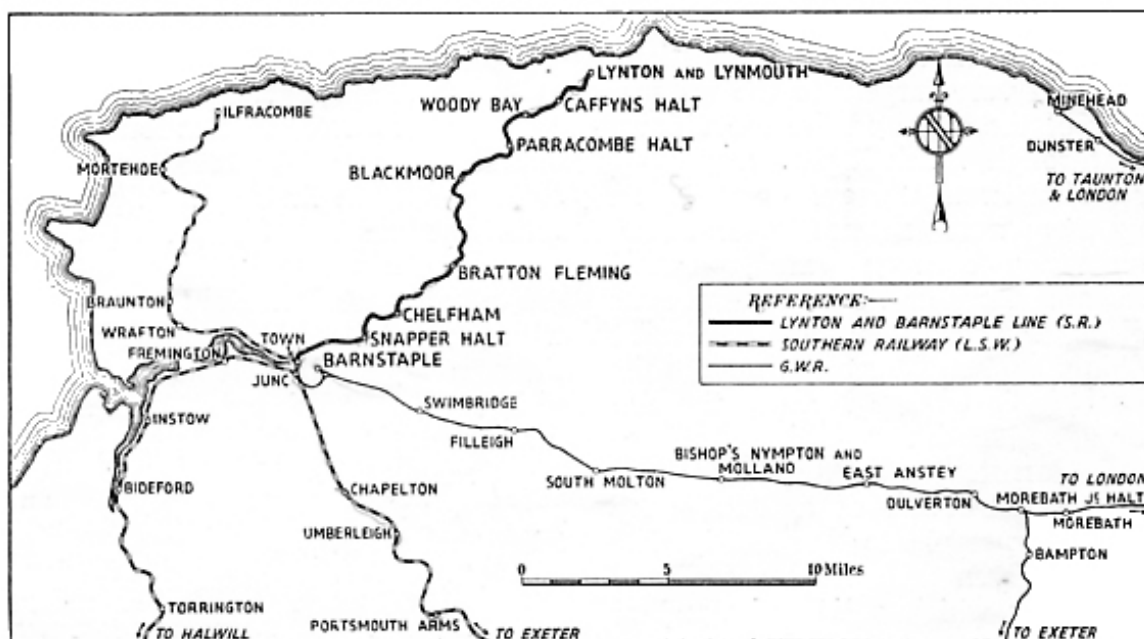
(From a panel painted from memory by A. W. Chapple)

station) in place of the latter company's Quay station, in use since the opening of the Ilfracombe line in 1874, there were many speeches, and the Mayor of Barnstaple travelled to Lynton. Here the High Sheriff of Devon remarked on the low cost of the line (£5,000 a mile) and Sir George Newnes defended this railway as opposed to another scheme for a line from Minehead to Lynton. A grand

display of fireworks, free concerts, and dances followed.

Public traffic began on May 16. The line, 19½ miles long, was single track, consisting of flat-bottomed rails spiked direct to transverse sleepers and well ballasted. The actual gauge was 1 ft. 11½ in. The original board of directors comprised Sir George Newnes (Chairman), Col. Evan B. Jeure, Sir Thomas Hewitt, and Mr. W. H. Halliday, all closely identified with Lynton. The first General Manager was Mr. Frank W. Chanter who had been Resident Engineer during the building of the railway; a year after it was opened he was succeeded by Mr. C. E. Drewitt, who held office during the whole of the remaining independent life of the company. The original staff numbered 30.

Early association of the railway with public motor services resulted from the efforts made to provide easy communication between Lynton and Ilfracombe. At first horse-drawn coaches provided a service between the latter town and Blackmoor station, but early in 1903 Sir George Newnes with characteristic enterprise decided to work motors. He bought two 22-seat, 16-h.p. Milnes-Daimler motor wagonettes and inaugurated a service in June of that year. A contemporary London newspaper comment said: "This is the first time that a railway company has started a motor-car service to collect and distribute passenger traffic, and it

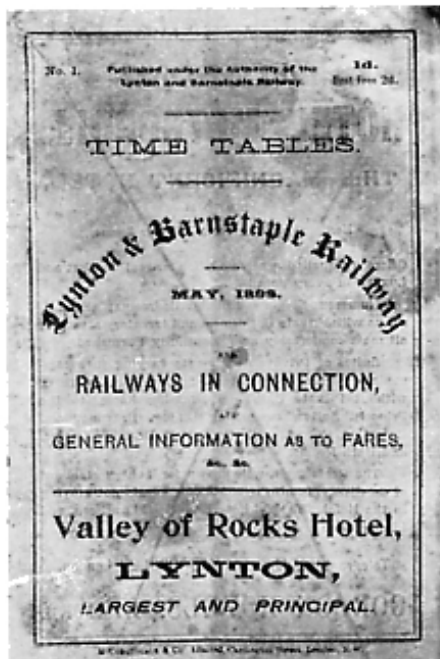


Sketch map of the Lynton and Barnstaple line

may be hoped that the example thus set may be followed by some of the great companies." By a curious coincidence the example was not only quickly followed by the G.W.R., but the first enterprise of the latter was actually begun with the same vehicles, for the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway found its enterprise unpopular in a district where horse-drawn coaches were at the height of their popularity and, following difficulties with the police as to "speeding above 8 m.p.h.," disposed of the two Milnes-Daimlers to the G.W.R. It was with these that the latter

the River Yeo through meadows, Snapper Halt was reached. The platform here as elsewhere, except Barnstaple, was very low, a mere line of bricks marking the edge. A small tin hut did duty as waiting room. Beautifully wooded country followed till Chelfham Viaduct, 4½ miles from Barnstaple, came into view. This, the largest engineering work on the line, is constructed of brick and consists of eight spans, each 42 ft. wide and 70 ft. above the road below.

Just across the viaduct the train ran into Chelfham station, the most prettily



LYNTON AND BARNSTAPLE RAILWAY.

LOCAL SERVICE between BARNSTAPLE AND LYNTON, and vice versa.

ALL TRAINS PARLIAMENTARY

DOWN.—Week Days.		a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	Sundays.		a.m.
BARNSTAPLE (Town)	dep.	6 35	8 40	11 30	3 45	5 24			7 30
Chelfham	"	7 1	9 9	11 52	4 8	5 47			7 54
Bratton	"	7 20	9 25	12 9	4 17	6 3			8 15
Blackmoor	"	7 45	9 50	12 31	4 49	6 28			8 40
Wooda Bay	"	8 9	10 11	12 53	5 10	6 49			9 4
LYNTON	arr.	8 25	10 28	1 9	5 26	7 5			9 20
UP.—Week Days.		a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	Sundays.		p.m.
LYNTON	dep.	6 14	9 10	1 50	3 25	5 45			5 38
Wooda Bay	"	6 33	9 28	2 8	3 43	6 3			5 57
Blackmoor	"	6 58	9 53	2 31	4 6	6 28			6 22
Bratton	"	7 23	10 15	2 53	4 31	6 50			6 47
Chelfham	"	7 45	10 29	3 8	4 46	7 5			7 4
BARNSTAPLE (Town)	arr.	8 9	10 50	3 30	5 7	7 26			7 26

Cover and page from the original timetable of the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, issued on the opening to public traffic on May 16, 1898. The spelling of "Wooda Bay" will be noticed

inaugurated its famous Helston to the Lizard route on August 17, 1903.

The railway started from Barnstaple Town station (L.S.W.R.) from a bay platform let into the one platform for the Ilfracombe line, which is here single. On the narrow gauge there was a run-round road, also several sidings alongside the standard gauge ones for transfer of goods. There was also a separate signal box for Lynton trains. The line throughout was signalled and tablet working was used; the whole length was fully fenced. Within recent years a short length of the line was laid with steel sleepers.

Shortly after leaving the Town station on a sharp curve, two main roads were crossed on the level, and the carriage and wagon sheds at Pilton were passed. There was a well-type turntable here. Open country was soon entered, and following

situated station on the line. It was for all the world as if the train had run into a tunnel of trees; so nearly did they meet overhead. Chelfham was a crossing place, with two platforms; signals and points were worked from a lever frame on the up platform. There were waiting rooms, and also water tanks. Leaving Chelfham the train climbed upwards through densely wooded country to Bratton Fleming, where there was one platform and a short siding. The waiting room, with ivy wreathed walls and moss covered roof, was set against the rock face. A deep rock cutting followed, and the coaches, which overhung the track by at least 2 ft., seemed almost to touch the rocky sides. Once out of the cutting, the line made a serpentine curve around the head of a valley, completely reversing its direction twice, and climbed up to Blackmoor

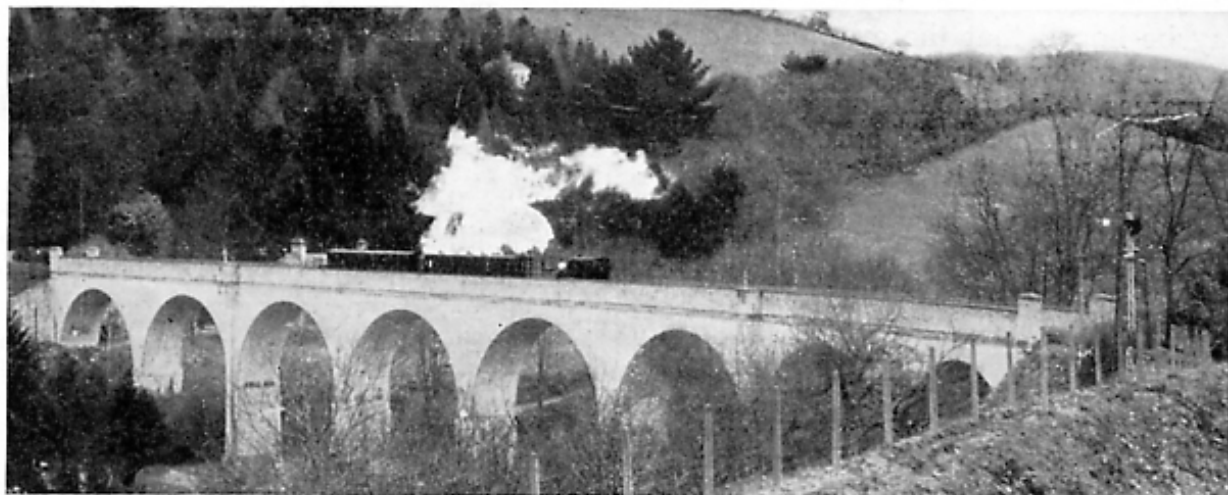
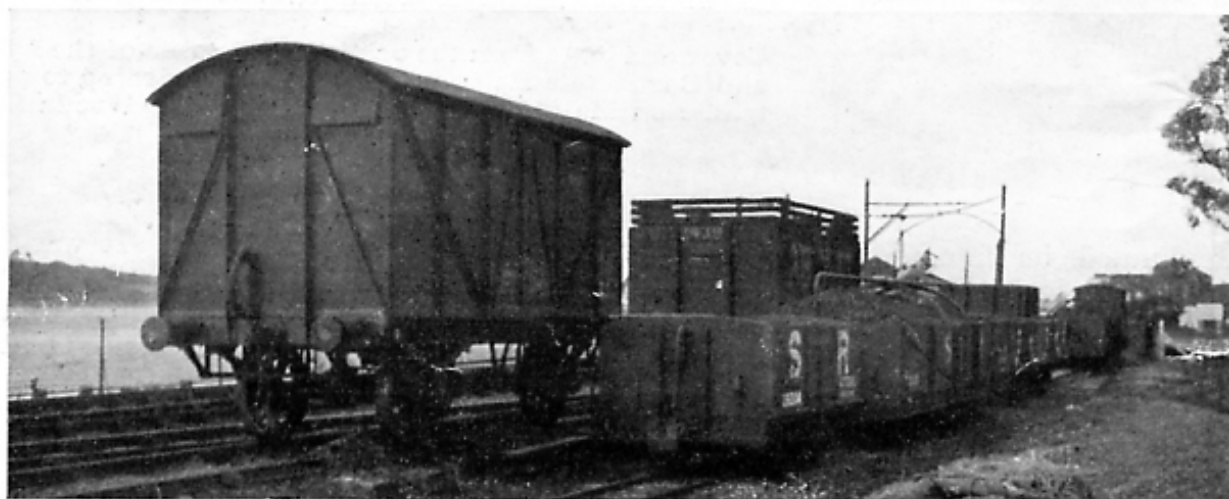


Photo.] [D. E. H. Box

Above : Chelfham Viaduct



Right : One of the five L. & B. locomotives



Photos.]

Transshipment at Barnstaple

[C. Grasmann

(12 miles from Barnstaple). This station, which was another crossing place, had two sidings, goods sheds, and more pretentious buildings. Onwards to Parracombe the route lay across open moorland country, and at the halt, as at Chelfham, there was a water tank.

More moorland scenery, interspersed with views of the sea between the heather covered hills, followed as the train wound

up to Woody Bay. Some of the best station buildings were situated here and an upper quadrant signal was noticed. Woody Bay (or more correctly Wooda Bay, as indeed it was shown in the original timetable, which is reproduced) was the summit of the line, being just 1,000 ft. above sea level. Here, as at Blackmoor, some concrete sleepers were noted. After the train had dipped under



Photo.]

Lynton station platform

[C. E. Box



Photo.]

Lynton station exterior

[J. Hughill



Photo.]

Bridge near Lynton

[W. W. Dunning