

Along the Line – Facts or Fiction?

The City of Bristol

Long associated with Bristol is Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The name 'Isambard' is derived from the old German word Isanbert, meaning "bright iron" or "famous iron". Quite a fitting name for this famous 19th century British Civil Engineer, noted as one of the driving forces of the Industrial Revolution.

Grade I listed Bristol Temple Meads station, which was opened in 1840, was the first station to be designed by Brunel. Moored in Bristol harbour is the SS Great Britain, now a popular museum, which Brunel designed for the Great Western Steamship's emerging transatlantic service. Launched in 1843 it also marked the beginning of international passenger travel and world communications.

Perhaps not so well known is that, although credited to Brunel, the nearby Grade I listed Clifton Suspension Bridge which spans the Avon Gorge and River Avon, was not completed in Brunel's lifetime or to his original design. Opened in 1884 to a design by William Henry Barlow and Sir John Hawkshaw, the only remaining parts of Brunel's design, whilst not identical, are the hollow Towers at each end of the bridge. However the suspension chains used were purchased by Barlow and Hawkshaw when Brunel's Hungerford Bridge over the River Thames was demolished to make way for a new railway bridge to Charing Cross railway station.

Close to the heart of Bristol, is Arnos Vale Victorian Garden Cemetery, a forty-five acre national heritage site with woodland trails, exhibitions and much more. It contains the graves of most of Bristol's Victorian citizens, industrialists, philanthropists, scientists and soldiers as well as tens of thousands of others.

Keynsham is a good stopping off point for walks along the paths of the Rivers Avon and Chew and the Kennet and Avon Canal.

On the outskirts of Keynsham is Keynsham Humpy Tumps, one of the most floristically rich acidic grassland sites within the Avon area.

Oldfield Park railway station was the third station to be built in Bath on the GWR line and it is the only

station on the local railway line whose platforms are below the surrounding road levels.

Bath, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is famous for its hot springs, Roman baths, medieval heritage, stately Georgian architecture, Jane Austen and more.

Maybe not so well known is that quarry owner, entrepreneur and philanthropist Ralph Allen, a Postmaster at the age of eighteen, reformed the British postal system. Allen is also reputed to be Weymouth's first Georgian tourist. He liked the town so much he bought a property there, spending up to three months each summer in Weymouth, hobnobbing with King George III and his entourage.

An intriguing feature of Royal Victoria Park, the largest park in Bath, is the Botanical Gardens where it's easy to forget how close one is to the city, and when it comes to the battle of the famous cakes credited to Bath, who will win – Sally Lunns or Bath Buns?

Freshford, where the Rivers Frome and Avon converge, is home to the successful community Galleries Shop and Café, built, owned and run by the people of Freshford and nearby Limpley Stoke.

Avoncliff. Although still shown as a Halt at the railway station this has been a scheduled stop for some years. Avoncliff's many charms include the 17th century Cross Guns Inn (*due to reopen later this year*) whose grounds extend to the riverside, and the Tea Gardens cafe - both great places to unwind after a walk.

The Avoncliff Aqueduct which carries the Kennet and Avon Canal over the River Avon, is said to be one of the most impressive structures on Britain's waterways.

Bradford on Avon's railway station, built in 1848 initially without any railway lines, is a rare example of a small Gothic station style designed by Brunel and the town's name derives from Saxon times when they drove their carts across the 'broad ford'. There are several buildings which date from the 17th century when the town grew due to the thriving English woollen textile industry which was followed in 1848 by the rubber industry.

There is an ancient Lock-Up on the 13th century bridge over the River Avon and the nearby 1502 Bridge Tea Rooms is unusual in that it has a Hansel and Gretel style exterior, a Victorian style interior and the staff dress in Victorian outfits.

The medieval 14th century Tithe barn is one of the finest and largest in England, and the Kennet and Avon Canal is on the outskirts of the town.

Trowbridge is one of twenty-five Magna Carta Baron Towns where the Barons, who acted as sureties for the Magna Carta, had their caputs or manor houses.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries when the town was the foremost producer of clothing and blankets in the South West, it was nicknamed "The Manchester of the West".

Sir Isaac Pitman, born in Trowbridge, devised Pitman shorthand, which became the most widely used form of shorthand.

And did you know that on a sign at the railway station it states the town is 45 meters above sea level and a nearby road is called Bythesea Road despite Trowbridge not being anywhere 'by the sea'? *Actually it's not pronounced 'By The Sea but nevertheless it causes amusement.*

Westbury. The distinctive 'Westbury' White Horse carving in the nearby hillside is, more accurately, the Bratton and Westbury White Horse, as it is located on the original Iron Age hill fort of Bratton Camp.

Westbury railway station is at a major junction, serving the lines to and from Bristol Temple Meads, Swindon, Reading, London Paddington and Waterloo, Taunton, Penzance, Cardiff, Portsmouth and Weymouth.

Frome. This Market Town has been voted one of the best places to live in Britain for its vibrancy, historic centre, architectural interest, thriving art scene including the annual Festival of art, music, history and nature.

Markets continue to be held and there is said to be a unique community spirit as witnessed by the Community Fridge (the refrigerated version of a food bank).

Frome's railway station which opened in 1850, is Grade II listed being one of the oldest through [train shed](#) railway stations still in operation in Britain, although there is now only one platform in use.

Bruton, home of King's Bruton School founded in 1519, has thrived since the opening of the renowned world-class art centre, the Hauser and Wirth Gallery, a short walk up from the railway station. Also worth a visit is St Mary the Virgin Church, described by Pevsner as 'One of the proudest churches in the Country.'

Castle Cary railway station also links the south coast with the main London to Penzance line but, no doubt, is now better known as the main station used for festival goers on their way the Glastonbury Festival.

The town is reached by following a well marked route up from the station. There are many old buildings including the Market House, where the town museum is located, the Round House Lock-up and the Horse Pond, one of the main historical features.

The Monarch's Way long distance footpath passes through the town and Douglas Macmillan, founder of the Macmillan Cancer Charity, was born here.

Yeovil Pen Mill station, opened in 1854, is one of two railway stations serving Yeovil, the other being Yeovil Junction, and one of the few stations still using a mechanical signal box. The signal box also had a resident cat called Tom who was known to take train rides on his own. Yeovil's Heritage Railway Centre is at the Yeovil Junction station.

From Pen Mill station one can walk to the town through Yeovil Country Park. Ninesprings is the most visited area of the Park with its network of footpaths and waterways, and one can stroll through woodland following the path of the River Yeo.

Thornford station is the first of the three request stops going south between Yeovil Pen Mill and Maiden Newton. The village, a designated conservation area, is about a mile from the station and is reached on the much fought-for footpath which avoids walking on the road.

The village has several Grade II listed buildings, a Victorian Clock Tower, a Grade II listed telephone box and the Kings Arms pub.

Yetminster, the second request stop, was home of the former folk music group The Yetties and is situated on the River Wriggle. Some buildings date back to the 17th century and the White Hart is a beautiful 16th century thatched hostelry. Yetminster's Annual Fair dates back to the 13th century and is said to be one of the oldest fairs in Dorset. Unusually the church clock is faceless.

Yetminster born farmer Benjamin Jesty is the first known person to have used cowpox serum as an immunity against [smallpox](#) but didn't publicise his findings. Some twenty years later, better known Edward Jenner developed the smallpox vaccination based on similar findings of Jesty and several others.

Chetnole station, the third request stop, a timber structure when it opened in 1933, was replaced by the current concrete one in the 1960s.

The Parish Church of St Peter has a 13th Century barrel-vaulted nave, a 15th Century tower, a 17th Century porch and a 19th Century chancel. The nearby Queen Ann style country house, Nappers, was used as a military hospital during the First World War. It too has a pub – The Chetnole Inn on the outskirts of the village.

From Chetnole, keen walkers can get to Cerne Abbas, famed for its Giant, and villages such as Sydling St Nicholas, a typical Dorset village with chocolate box cottages.

Maiden Newton on which Thomas Hardy based the village of Chalk-Newton in many of his works, is set in a valley in an area of outstanding natural beauty. The nearby land is rich in biodiversity and a new species of moth was discovered there in 1997. In Kingcombe Meadows Nature Reserve, four miles from Maiden Newton, the working farm still uses traditional methods and is a step back in time to when farms teemed with wildlife and well worth a visit.

Maiden Newton is also home to one of England's oldest fire engines, restored and in full working order.

Dorchester, the County town of Dorset, which has a rich literary and historic heritage, also has a grizzly past including the trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, deported to Australia for seven years after forming the first known Trade Union, and the harsh judgments handed down by Judge Jeffreys during the Bloody Assizes.

To reach the delightful water meadows on the outskirts of the town, follow Dorchester's Mill Stream, a tributary of the River Frome, and just southwest of the town is Maiden Castle, one of the largest and most complex Iron Age hill forts in Europe.

Upwey. The current railway station is actually in Broadwey, but to avoid confusion with Broadwey in Worcestershire it was eventually named just Upwey.

Thomas Hardy wrote a poem 'At the Railway Station, Upwey' about waiting for a train at a country station, and in the days of steam trains, a favourite excursion was from Weymouth to Upwey station, then on by charabanc to take tea at nearby Upwey Wishing Well.

Weymouth with Melcombe Regis has a vast and varied history but it was King George III's patronage which changed the fortunes of the town. It became quite the place to be seen and the King's 'taking of the waters' on the advice of his Physician to aid his physical and mental health, led to sea bathing becoming popular.

The Black Death was brought ashore here, William Wordsworth's brother drowned in Weymouth Bay when his ship the Abergavenny sank. Hundreds of troops sailed from Weymouth and Portland to take part in the D Day landings in France.

The ruin of one of Henry the VIII's castles is to be found on the edge of the pretty Sandsfoot gardens, on the route of the long-gone Weymouth/ Portland railway line.

Before 1839, when the first bridge was built across Smallmouth Passage, the only connection between the mainland and the Royal Manor of Portland was Chesil Beach and a small ferry.

The Isle of Portland. There is another of Henry VIII's castle on Portland, and Portland Bill, on the tip of the island, is where the working lighthouse is located. Also the well-known Lobsters Pot Restaurant.

The two original lighthouses, known as the Old Higher Lighthouse, converted into accommodation, and the Old Lower Lighthouse, now a Bird Sanctuary, operated as a pair of leading lights to guide ships between the infamous Portland Race and the Shambles sandbank.

Portland, famed for its stone used in many notable buildings, is a good place for bird watching and most of the numerous scenic walks have great seascapes.

Unsurprisingly Portland has been one of the most popular walking areas in the history of Wessex Wanderers Railway Walks.