

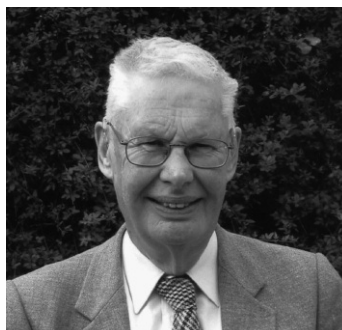
DORSET RAILWAYS

Colin G. Maggs

The first railway in Dorset was not a steam operated line, but one worked by horses and gravity, to transport Portland stone from the quarries to the sea. However, the first true main line in the county was the Southampton & Dorchester which opened on 1 June 1847 followed by the Wilts, Somerset & Weymouth Railway (WSWR) which reached Weymouth on 20 January 1857. The Southampton & Dorchester Railway had running power over the line between Dorchester and Weymouth and opened to Weymouth in 1857. The Salisbury & Yeovil Railway opened to Gillingham in 1859, and to Yeovil and onwards to Exeter in 1860. The Dorset Central Railway was inaugurated between Wimborne and Blandford in November 1860 and northwards to Cole in 1862 where it linked with the Somerset Central Railway, the two companies uniting as the Somerset & Dorset Railway. The extension to Bath opened on 20 July 1874 creating a new main line.

Thus was established the pattern of four main lines in Dorset: two running approximately east to west and two north to south. From these main lines, branches were created to serve places off a main line such as to Lyme Regis, Bridport, Abbotsbury, Portland and Swanage. For decades these branch lines flourished, but eventually the more convenient internal-combustion engined vehicles rendered these branches uneconomic and they were closed around the time of the 1963 Beeching Report.

Colin Maggs, the renowned expert on railway history, tells the fascinating tale of the railways and the impact they had on the lives of everyone in the county. The nostalgic branch lines with their small local trains and the main lines with their thundering expresses, are all part of a rich heritage which is explored in an expert text and in more than two hundred evocative images to present an absorbing view of Dorset's recent past.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colin G Maggs has published more than 70 books to date, has written countless magazine and newspaper articles and has appeared frequently on radio and television. Mr Maggs was awarded the MBE in 1993 for services to railway history and was awarded an honorary MA by the University of Bath in 1995.

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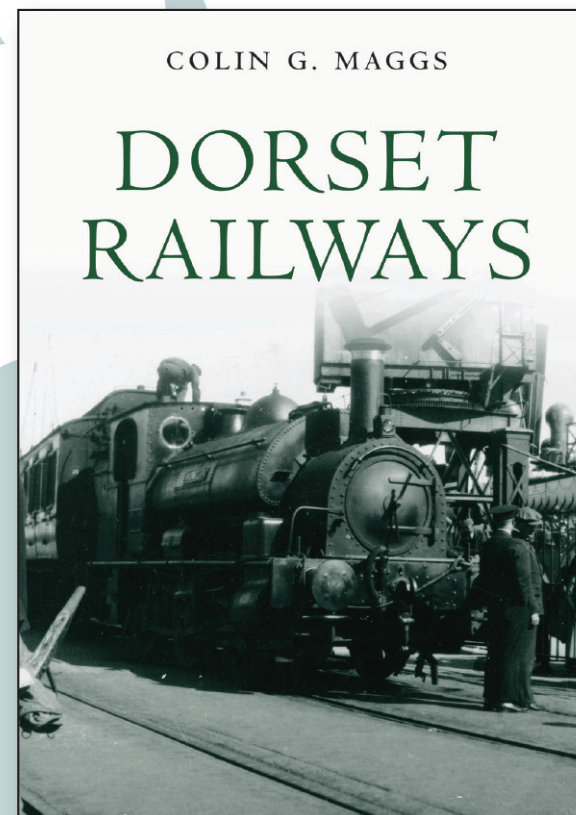
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DORSET RAILWAYS



Above: S&DJR 4-4-0 No 18 at Branksome shed.
This engine was painted in the company's dark blue livery.
Author's collection

Left: A porter pushes a laden trolley at Blandford Forum circa 1966. C.Steane/Author's collection



Ex-GWR '57XX' class 0-6-0PT No 7714 leaves Corfe Castle for Norden
10 November 2007. K. Hampton

AN OUTLINE SURVEY OF RAILWAYS IN DORSET

1 An Outline Survey of Railways in Dorset

THE FIRST railway in Dorset was not a steam operated line, but one worked by horses and gravity. In the early nineteenth century there was an increasing demand for Portland stone and an economic means was required for transporting it from quarries on top of the island down to a jetty. Unlike many such contemporary lines, an Act of Parliament was sought for the line's construction. This obtained Royal Assent on 10 June 1825. Unlike many lines which found difficulty in raising the necessary finance, even before the Bill was passed £5,000 had been subscribed, exceeding the estimated cost by £310 8s 0d.

The line, the Merchants' Railway, opened by October 1826 and between that month and 31 December 1826 4,803 tons of stone were carried. Stone was brought to the railway by horse drawn carts, craned into wagons on the 4ft 6in gauge railway, drawn by horses to the head of the incline where the trucks descended by gravity, a cable round a drum at the top of the incline enabling empty wagons to be drawn up the incline. The cable section was known colloquially as 'The Blondin' after the famous tightrope walker.

The incline plane was in two sections: 303yd and 282yd. Subsequently quarry owners laid lines from their quarries to the Merchants' Railway. The line paid its shareholders good dividends - 7½ per cent for the first six months of 1839, but with the outbreak of World War 2 almost all quarrying ceased and the line closed on 11 October 1939, though the track was not lifted until 1958. Its peak year was 1904 when 93,133 tons were carried.

In 1848 construction started on another gravity worked railway to bring stone to build a breakwater, the quarrying of stone being by convicts from the nearby prison. This incline had three sections and its gauge was 7ft. At the foot of the incline, two steam locomotives drew wagons to the breakwater.

The first main line in the county was the Southampton & Dorchester which opened on 1 June 1847. The next main line in Dorset was the Wilts, Somerset & Weymouth Railway (WSWR). This line was planned to link the Great Western Railway (GWR) near Chippenham with Weymouth. It received its Act in 1845, but due to the slump following the Railway Mania, investment was slow and it did not reach Weymouth until 20 January 1857. The Southampton & Dorchester Railway had running power over the line between Dorchester and Weymouth and opened to Weymouth on 20 January 1857.

The Salisbury & Yeovil Railway opened to Gillingham on 2 May 1859, to Yeovil on 1 June 1860, and onwards to Exeter on 19 July 1860. The Dorset Central Railway was inaugurated between Wimborne and Blandford on 1 November 1860 and northwards to Cole on 3 February 1862 where it linked

A loaded stone wagon descending the quarry railway at Portland. The cable attached to the wagon passes round a drum behind the photographer and proceeds down the left-hand track to an empty wagon towards the foot of the incline, which is drawing up. The central rail is common to both tracks but in the middle of the incline branches to two tracks to enable the wagons to pass. M.J. Torr collection

Convicts at work in the prison gang at Portland circa 1884. Author's collection



A busy scene at Weymouth, 28 June 1924. The GWR was fond of having a wide variety of coaches in its trains. Author's collection

Example of a double-page spread.