

SPIRIT OF THE ISLE OF WIGHT STEAM RAILWAY

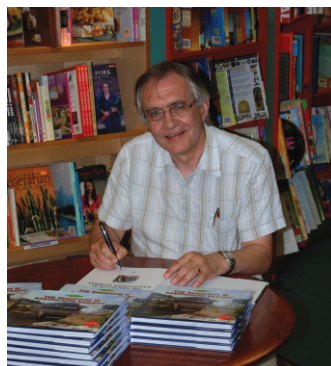
Mike Heath

In the golden age of steam the Isle of Wight could boast an impressive 54 miles of railway. Opened in 1862, the line between Cowes and Newport was the first connection on the island and more branch lines followed. For many years the railways were an important contributor to the island's economy and the variety of engines, carriages and wagons that worked on them, many bought second-hand from the mainland, gave it a charm much appreciated by visitors.

In 1923 all the lines became a part of the Southern Railway and the whole system was improved and modernised. The 1930s saw holiday traffic reach record levels and, excepting the war years, this trend continued into the early 1950s. As on the mainland, competition from road transport proved too much and as the 1960s dawned closure was proposed. By 1966 all that remained was the Ryde to Shanklin section and that same year saw the last steam train on that line.

However the trains that had remained on the island had attracted a devoted following and a group of enthusiasts collectively sought to save a locomotive and a few carriages for static exhibition. Initially their stock had been kept at the closed Newport Station but in 1971 all was relocated to Havenstreet and passenger services between there and Wootton commenced. Daily running during the summer season started in 1980s and the line was extended to Smallbrook, alongside the Ryde to Shanklin route, in 1991.

Having holidayed on the island regularly Mike Heath has had the opportunity to visit and photograph the line many times. From his collection of stunning images he presents this photographic excursion along the line which, with many of the society's locomotives and all of its carriages having spent much of their working lives on the island, is truly a journey back in time.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For well over 25 years Mike Heath has enjoyed combining his hobbies of photography and visiting preserved railways all over Britain. In that time he has amassed a vast collection of stunning photographs covering all aspects of the railways across all four seasons, day and night. He is the author of more than ten railway titles, all for Halsgrove.

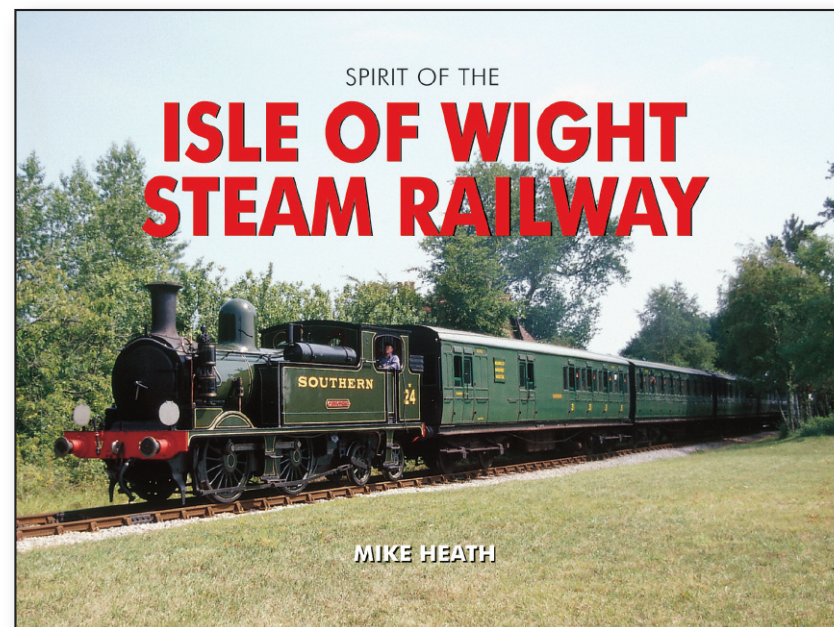
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A water tower, transferred from Newport Station in 1971 is located alongside the Up platform.



One of the preserved locomotives that spent part of its working life on the island is A1/x Class 'Terrier' W8 Freshwater.



Right: The society's re-creation of a small 'Victorian' island terminus is perfectly illustrated in this scene.



Example of a double-page spread.

Left:
The heart of the Isle of Wight
Steam Railway is at Havent Street.
The station buildings and platform
were constructed by the Southern
Railway in 1926...

Right:
...and incorporate a signalbox.



A Victorian scene in all but fashion!



The train passes through woodland on the climb away from Ashley Road Bridge, also known as Long Arch.