

UNUSUAL RAILWAY PUBS REFRESHMENT ROOMS AND ALE TRAINS

Bob Barton

Queen Victoria's private waiting room; the setting for the film classic *Brief Encounter*; a Lincolnshire signal cabin; a pre-war parcels van; a gas-lit ladies' waiting room; and a wooden carriage of 1876... some of the locations that serve as station pubs with a difference. You can, quite literally, drink in Britain's railway history (and dine too) in the world's first purpose-built railwayman's inn, or the Metropolitan Railway's headquarters, or the terminus of the late lamented Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway. The author, Bob Barton, has spent five years visiting remarkable hostelries where cask ale and coffee is served along with generous portions of railway heritage and now you can too, with the help of this lavishly illustrated guide.

Stations both large and small once had licensed refreshment rooms of the type immortalized in Noel Coward's *Brief Encounter*. During the nineteenth century, a new generation of railway pubs on and adjacent to stations became the successors to coaching inns, for which the railways had sounded the death-knell. Bob Barton traces the 175 year-old relationship between railways, refreshment rooms and the brewing industry through this guide covering everything from main line termini to rural branch line halts. It includes the growing phenomenon of steam hauled Ale Trains on heritage railways, and features reproductions of pump-clips of railway themed beers. The book will appeal to railway enthusiasts as well as both armchair and actual travellers (the places featured can all be visited, most of them by train as well as by car) in addition to real ale lovers and those who like their nostalgia infused with the sight or spirit of steam trains.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

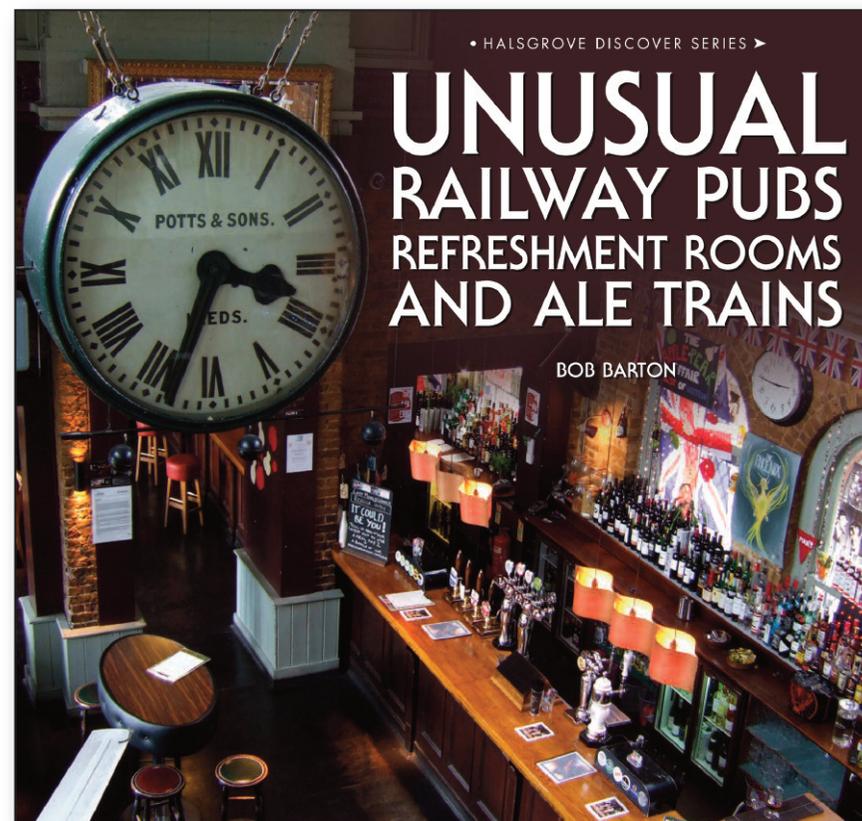
Bob Barton is former senior press officer at tourist board VisitBritain and has written travel features in magazines and newspapers worldwide; he is also a columnist for nostalgia magazine *Best of British* and co-author of *The Rainy Day Book* (Guardian Books, 2009).

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Railwayman's Arms, Bridgnorth Station, Shropshire.



Denmark Hill Station, London, was restored as a pub after a fire in 1980.

The Crown Inn, with Stockport's massive viaduct rising above.



Above: The Middy Bar, Brockford, Suffolk, is an ancient third class coach carefully converted for real ale lovers. Below: Bonapartes, Bristol Templemeads, has the look of a medieval great hall.

Example of a double-page spread.

PITSFORD & BRAMPTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Former London to North Western Railway between Northampton and Atherley Harbourside (closed). Partially reopened as Northampton & Lompot Railway (a heritage line).

THE BRAMPTON HALT

This popular pub-restaurant is set around a greatly extended former stationmaster's house in a housey spot. Adjacent is a branch line that closed in 1981, now the backbones of a developing heritage railway. Four real ales are regularly available: Sharp's Devon Bitter, Fuller's London Pride, Mermaid Old Stocked Hen and Adams Bitter when I called and the menu is extensive (and all day until 9.30pm, Sunday 9pm), including a barbeque in summer and afternoon tea.

The former branch line outside has been re-railroaded the Brampton Valley Way and is a linear country park used by National Cycle Network Route 6. I found cycling from Northampton Station a pleasant way to reach the pub, including views of the West Coast main line. After three miles of mainly level pedalling, I glimpsed a semaphore signal and signal box marking the southern extremity of the preserved line. A volunteer engineering gang was re-erecting the semaphore.

The old stationmaster's house, which is the pub's nucleus, is the only original railway building surviving at this location, dating from around the time of the track 1879 opening. It had brick walls with horizontal courses of yellow, and three upper windows are white-painted arches – their covers with delicate finials – are indications that this was home to a railway employee of some rank. He would have taken personal charge of any important or upper dignitary arriving or leaving by train, supervised a staff of four half-walkers and came out to meet the main passenger train. Today, the original entrance has been sealed and a modern glazed canopy placed in front. For visitors, drawing from the lock somewhat. Nothing original

PORTHMADOG, GWYNEDD (†)

Former Cambrian Railway (GWR) between Barmouth and Pwllheli.

STATION INN

The Cambrian Coast line is one of Britain's most scenic and this is the only licensed station refreshment room on the route from Machynis to Pwllheli. Situated in the building on the camped southbound platform, it is a fine house people with the

local community as well as passengers. Its two hand-pumps often dispense one ale from the town's Purple Mouse brewery and another from a further-flung independent, such as Cornwall's Wooden Horse, or Barmouth from Cardiff. There is a small public bar served mainly by sports memorabilia, the hand-crafted and a larger bar, which is rather functional but whose walls are decorated with railway photographs, prints and signs, many GWR-related. A list shows the prices of refreshments on the Cambrian Railway; very different to today's. A collection of coats along the wood-paneled bar table are an early relic of an Army hospital, Royal Navy ships and the police. There is a pool table and juke-box. Six to twelve coaches are served here and in the adjacent café. Outside seating is a small garden.

The Cambrian Coast Engine at Porthmadog on August 25, 2016. Headed by BR 477 2447 No. 76173. The station line occupies the right-hand carriage building on the right.

The Brampton Halt, Pitford Road, Clontarf, Northampton, NN6 8BA. Tel: 01604 842676. Weekdays 11am – midday (Friday and Saturday 1am), Sunday 10am – midday. Nearest station: Northampton, 3.7 miles, then rail or cycle. www.thebramptonhalt.co.uk

