

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

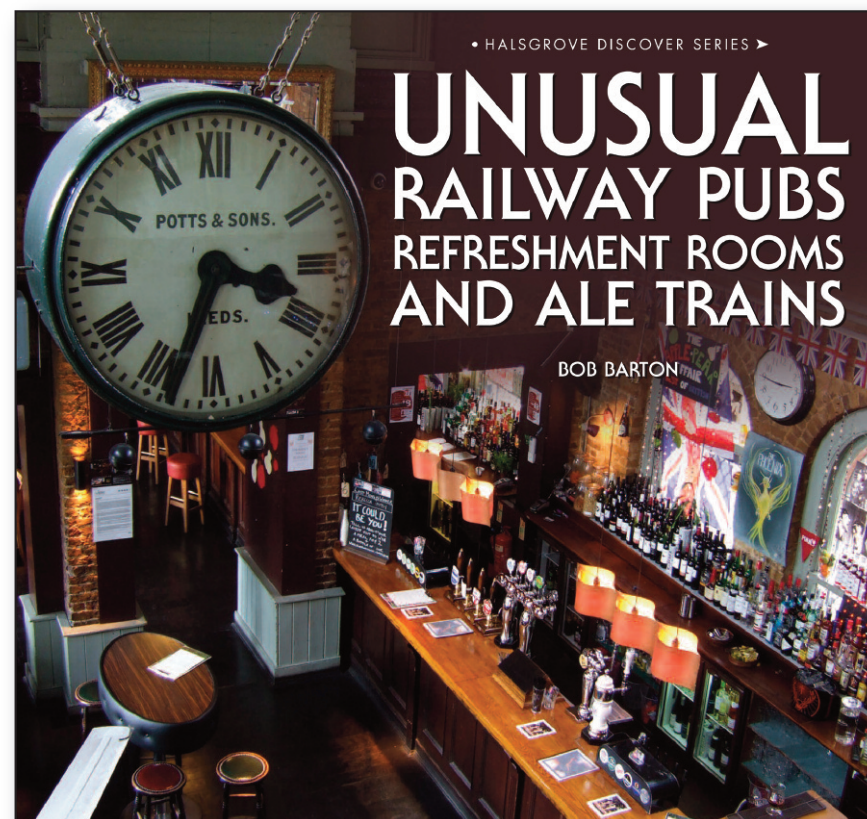
Bob Barton is former senior press officer at tourist board VisitBritain and has written travel features in magazines and newspapers worldwide; he is also a columnist for nostalgia magazine *Best of British* and co-author of *The Rainy Day Book* (Guardian Books, 2009).

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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 Market Harborough (closed). Partially reopened as Northampton & Loughborough Railway (a heritage line).

THE BRAMPTON HALT

This popular pub-restaurant is set around a greatly extended former locomotive's house in a busy spot. *Milner* is a branch line that closed in 1981, now the headquarters of a developing heritage railway. Four real ales are regularly available: Chispy Dismal Beer, Fuller's London Pale, Mermaid Old Speckled Hen and Adams Bitter when I called and the menu is extensive (even all day until 9.30pm, Sunday 9pm), including a barbeque in summer and afternoon tea.

The former branch line outside has been re-routed into the Brampton Valley Way and is a finer 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 locomotive's house, which is the pub's main room, is the only original railway building surviving at this location, dating from around the time of the line's 1875 opening. Its red brick with horizontal courses of yellow, and three upper windows on 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 regular shipments arriving or leaving by train, supervised a staff of at least half-a-dozen and come out to meet the main passenger train. Today, the original entrance has been sealed and a modern glazed canopy placed in front, for visitors' use, detracting from the look somewhat. Nothing original

A Midland Railway lamp stands the grade of The Brampton Halt, an extended former locomotive's house.

PORTRIMADOG, GWYNEDD (1)

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 Mynyddach to Pwllheli. Situated in the building on the camped outboard platform, it is a fine house popular with the local community as well as passengers. Its two hand-pumps often dispense one ale from the town's Purple Moose Brewery and another from a further-flung independent, such as Cornwall's Wooden Haul, or Barm from Cardiff. There is a small public bar devoted mainly to sports memorabilia, the hand-crafted and a larger lounge, 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 shows the wood-panelled bar takes one to railway bar on Army barracks, Royal Navy ships and the police. There is a pool table and juke-box. Six to six as a bar is served here and in the adjacent cafe. Outside seating in a small garden.

Neatly: The Northampton to Loughborough Railway is maintained by volunteers who run trains on heritage diesel-hauled trains every Sunday from March until October. An array of working steamships and several signal boxes enhance the attraction. The cycle track footpath, follows its length. Northampton has a restored Art Nouveau house, 70 Denigate, designed in 1917 by Charles Rennie Mackintosh for model railway manufacturer W.J. Bassett-Lowke and displaying some of his models.

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

GAZETTEER

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