

# UNUSUAL RAILWAY PUBS, REFRESHMENT ROOMS AND ALE TRAINS

Reprint

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 hostelrys 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.

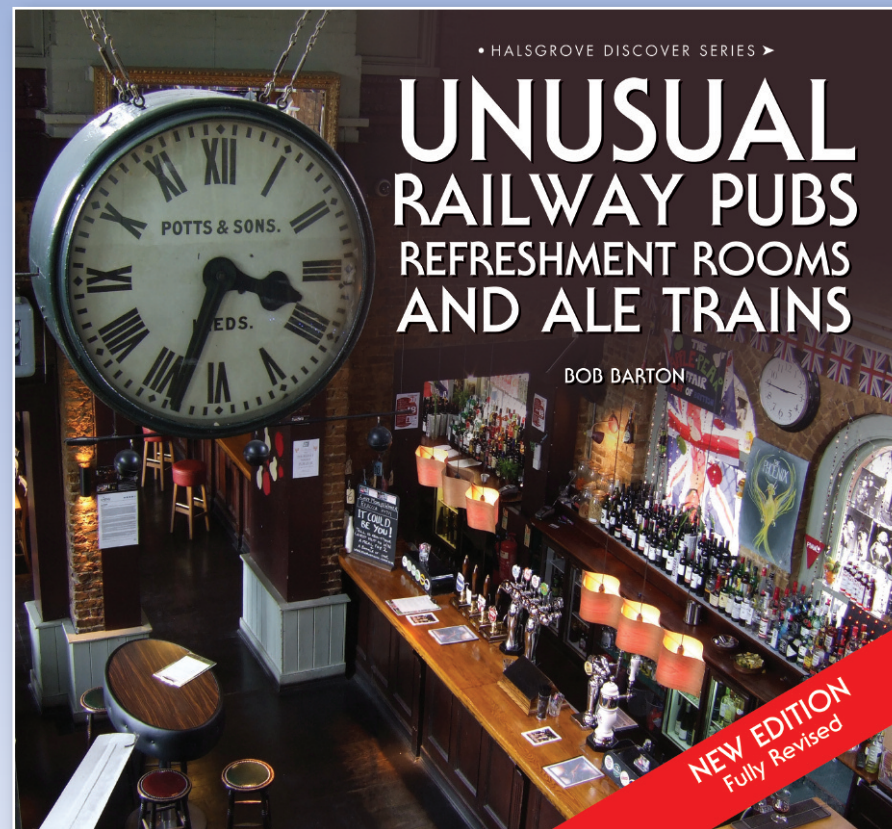
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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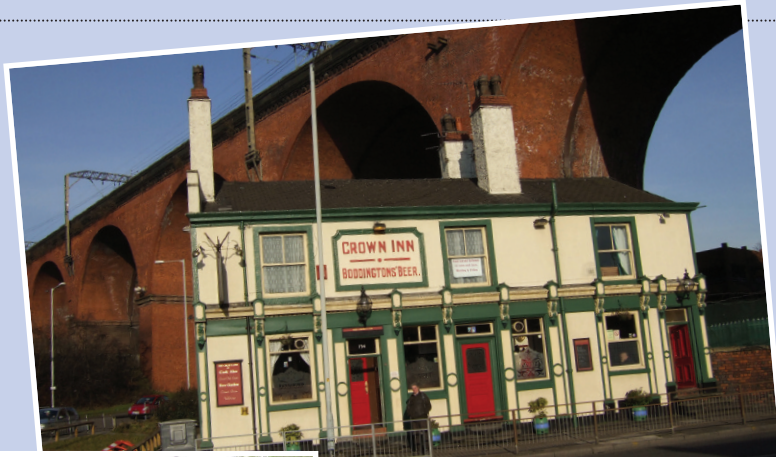
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The Crown Inn, with Stockport's massive viaduct rising above.



Above: The Middy Bar, Brockford, Suffolk, is an ancient third class coach carefully converted for real ale lovers



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



Left: Railwayman's Arms, Bridgnorth Station, Shropshire.

Below: Bonapartes, Bristol Templemeads, has the look of a medieval great hall.



Example of a double-page spread.



## UNUSUAL RAILWAY PUBS

### PORTHMADOG, 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 Machynlleth to Pwllheli. Situated in the building on the compact southward platform, it is a free 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 Conwy's Wooden Hand, or Brains from Cardiff. There is a small public bar devoted mainly to sports memorabilia (two hand-pumps) and a larger lounge, which is rather functional but whose walls are decorated with railway photographs, prints and signs, many GWR related. A far denser piece of refreshment on the Cambrian Railway, very different to today's. A collection of items above the wood-panelled bar refers not to railways but to Army barracks. Royal Navy ships and the police. There is a good table and juke-box. Stocks such as sandwiches are served here and in the adjacent cafe. Outdoor seating in a small garden.

The 'Cambrian Coast Express' at Porthmadog on August 25, 2005, headed by BR 4812 2-6-0 No. 76079. The Station Inn occupies the single remaining building on the right.

### PORTHMADOG HARBOUR, GWYNEDD (2)

terminus of the Festiniog Railway to Blaencynon, Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railway to Carnarvon (narrow gauge heritage lines).

#### SPOONER'S CAFE AND BAR

The Festiniog Railway is the cradle of narrow gauge, steam-powered railways, dating from 1825 and offering a spectacularly scenic ride behind historic locomotives through the mountains of Snowdonia. Spooner's, meanwhile, has an enviable reputation in the area for its wide range of real ale. This built these specialities are found side-by-side in one of the wonders of Wales.

The identifiably heavily rural life in the 1880s as the horse-drawn goods shed. These string-curtain get a ringside view of the steam main including, since 2011, those of the re-born Welsh Highland Railway. As having an establishment named in honour of the Spooner family (James Spooner was the Festiniog surveyor and builder, while his son and other family members helped run and manage it for half a century), the interior is filled with railway artefacts. In fact, the 'shed' was a museum on one side and the walls are covered with vintage signs and equipment, mostly belonging to this line. Pride of place once



Spencer, an 0-4-0 tank built in 1863, was at one time an exhibit in Spooner's, which occupies the old goods shed at Porthmadog Harbour.

went to a full-size locomotive, the railway's No.1, P1001, an 0-4-0 tank built in 1863 and far superior to the locomotive business in most parts (NB: The engine was returned in Jan 2012). There is also a collection of narrow-gauge locomotive artefacts – including the aptly-named Little Giant and Big Red Fire – a Festiniog shunting open semaphore signal and a six-inch (one-seventh scale) working model, built in 1859, of 7093, a George England 0-4-0 locomotive. The model was once used by Charles Spooner to entertain visitors to his house.

The long bar counter has six hand-pumps with a changing ale selection, mostly from small independent breweries such as Pwllheli, Wyn Valley and Porthmadog's own Purple Moose. That company's Snowdonia Ale was first brewed for the Welsh Highland Railway's 2006 Rail Ale Festival and is now a regular feature, having won numerous awards.

Seating includes 'brigs' along one wall and stools at the bar. Much (including breakfast) can be ordered in the adjoining cafe for serving on the bar area. Hot meals are available most of the day except for two hours in the afternoon (but be reduced in winter). The popularity of this venue, which has won several