

## THE RAILWAY AT PERRANWELL.

On the 21<sup>th</sup> of August 1863 Falmouth town was decked all over with bunting, flags and arches of evergreens. The streets and the verges of the newly laid railway line were thronged with excited crowds. At 1pm the very first train arrived at Falmouth station welcomed by local dignitaries and to the accompaniment of five bands and a discharge of guns. The thirteen carriages drawn by two locomotives were crowded with 700 cheering passengers. There followed a banquet in the Docks warehouse for 326 of the great and the good of the county and a dinner for the 400 navvies, who had worked on the line. The festivities continued into the night with a torchlight procession and a firework display.

It had taken over 30 years of protracted negotiations to resolve disputes between rival interests and to assemble the finances required to construct the line. As early as 1830 Richard Thomas, a well respected local surveyor, who lived at Mellingey house, Perranwell, had advocated building a connection with the railway from London to Exeter. He proposed a line along the spine of Cornwall through Launceston and Okehampton more or less following the existing coach route. He had his supporters, but a bill for the line presented to parliament was obstructed by rival interests and failed. The proposal was revived in 1840 and a Captain Moorson surveyed the route hampered by weeks of deep snow! The engineering difficulties of this, the Central line, contributed to the collapse of the financial negotiations and the route was rejected.

Finally in 1846 a southern route from Plymouth to Falmouth advocated and surveyed under the direction of Brunel received royal assent. The so-called Cornwall railway was to be of the broad gauge of 7ft linking Falmouth to London. The completion of the line as far as Truro was delayed for 13 years owing to the reluctance London commercial banks and local merchants and business people to subscribe the necessary finance and a severe downturn in the national economy. Eventually the line reached Truro in 1859 and Falmouth four years later. The long delay contributed in 1950 to the removal of the packet ships with their mail and passenger trade from Falmouth to Southampton. Owing to the short sighted attitudes of his financiers Brunel was forced to make economies and build high maintenance viaducts of timber over the many valleys and tidal inlets on the route rather than more expensive masonry structures. Of the original 8 timber fan viaducts between Truro and Falmouth, the last to be replaced by masonry was in 1934.

The Cornwall railway was taken over by the GWR in 1889 and a well organised, lightning operation changed the original broad gauge to a standard gauge of 4ft 8 and a half inches in 1992. A sharp observer will note that the bridges and tunnels were built to accommodate a double broad gauge track if required. The line remained under GWR control until nationalisation of the railways in 1948. The familiar Victorian chalet style serrated edges to the canopies of the platform shelters have been retained.

Perranwell station rapidly attracted business and passenger traffic with a thriving trade in flowers and vegetables for the London market, cattle and pigs transported to abattoirs and carriage of local crops such as sugar beet. The line was double tracked through the station with platforms for the up and down lines. An attractive station with waiting rooms and a booking office was built. A cattle dock and goods shed was added in 1907 with extra sidings beside it, one of which was straddled with a most distinctive signal box. There was a great local pride in the station, which won prizes for well kept buildings and a beautiful display of flowers and shrubs. In 1965 the sidings were taken out of use and the goods shed closed with the signal box dismantled a year later. The goods shed is now used as a storage for Deborah Services Ltd, the section of double track was removed after a short period of use for camping carriages, but the pedestal of the Victorian drinking fountain remains and the old up platform area still retains a thick growth of attractive shrubs.

The branch line was facing possible closure in 1975, but through active promotion by the not for profit Devon and Cornwall rail partnership, it has been named the Maritime line with leaflets advertising its scenic attractions and the Real Ale Trail encouraging passengers [ now customers! ] to visit pubs and walks near the

line. The building of the university campus at Penryn and the re-installation of the passing loop there in 2008, along with new signalling has allowed the doubling of train frequency. Thanks to public support and success in attracting match funding for improvements, the line has experienced greater growth in passenger numbers than any other branch line in the country.

It's cheering to relate a success story within our gloomy economic climate. Can any reader tell me who coined the term "Maritime line" ?.

Chris Burton July 2012

PS. Your correspondent in the July issue stated that in his experience tickets are not being issued between Perranwell and Truro. This will result in false statistical representation of passenger numbers using the station. Please **write to First Great Western if you have a similar experience and request a reply**. Should they consider the closure of the station it will be difficult to ignore false statistical data.