

The Freshwater, Yarmouth & Newport Railway

By K. WESTCOTT JONES

ALTHOUGH the Isle of Wight is a comparatively small island, without any major industries or populous towns, it has an early and interesting railway history. By 1880 there existed on the island quite a network of small railways, serving the well-known east coast watering places, the yachting centres, and the market town capital of Newport.

However, the entire western part of the island was without railway facilities at this time; and, with a view to serving the increasingly popular "Tennyson Country" on the Freshwater peninsula, with its beautiful sandy bays of Totland and Colwell, and the small harbour at Yarmouth (one time capital of the island), the Freshwater, Yarmouth & Newport Railway was authorised on August 26, 1880. The company was assisted by the London & South Western Railway, but most support came from wealthy residents in the districts affected by its promotion, many of whom cast an interested eye on the prospective fruitfulness of an efficiently-operated steamer service on the hitherto unexploited short sea passage from Lymington to Yarmouth, a distance of only three miles. The authorised capital was issued as follows: £100,000 ordinary stock, half of it as 6 per cent. preferred, and the other half deferred; £42,000 as 5 per cent. preference; and £47,300 as 5 per cent. debenture stock.

The line was constructed without great difficulty as single track throughout, but with passing loops at Carisbrooke, Ningwood, and Yarmouth. The only engineering works of note were a trestle viaduct, 576 ft. long and 20 ft. high, at the foot of Hunny Hill, Newport, and a concrete viaduct over the Newtown River. It was, however, necessary to introduce $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles of curves in the 12 miles of line, and a series of switchback gradients to avoid major earthworks and tunnels. The contractor was W. Jackson, who acquired for the work of construction the steam engine formerly used on the Ryde Pier Tramway.

The railway was opened for goods traffic on September 10, 1888, and officially for passengers on July 20, 1889. The opening ceremony was performed by Mr. Granville Ward, J.P., in company with his fellow directors Messrs. E. Fox, G. H. Hogan, and Lt.-Colonel J. Walker. The locomotive used for the inaugural train was an 0-6-0 tank, taken to the island by the contractor and named *Freshwater* for the occasion. This engine was returned to the mainland shortly after the completion of the railway, but not before a lawsuit as to its ownership had arisen.

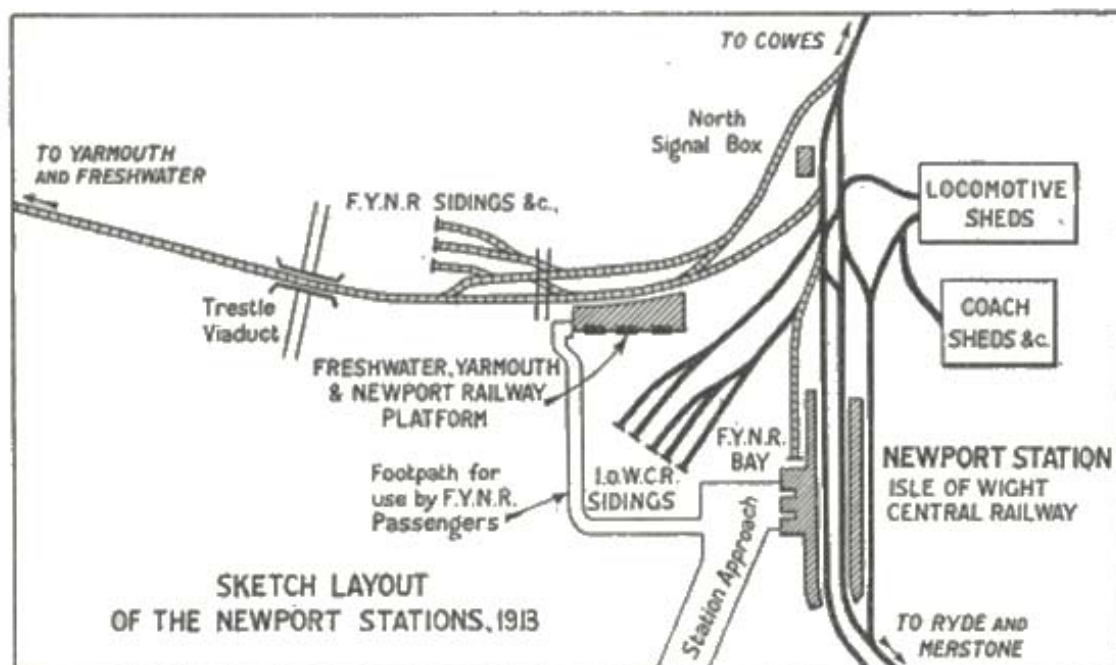
From the commencement, the line was worked with locomotives and rolling stock supplied by the Isle of Wight Central Railway, under an agreement by which 45 per cent. of the gross receipts, and $8\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. for the maintenance of the railway, were paid to the Freshwater Yarmouth & Newport Company. The trains started from a bay platform at Newport Station, and had to be backed for some distance towards Cowes to reach the Freshwater line. This peculiar layout was adopted to permit of through running to and from Cowes, a facility of which advantage was never taken. These arrangements worked satisfactorily until 1913, when the Isle of Wight Central claimed an additional share of the gross receipts for working the line, a demand that the smaller company could not sustain. As a result of the dispute, the Freshwater, Yarmouth & Newport assumed complete independence, only to become bankrupt almost immediately afterwards. On behalf of the Receivers and Managers, Sir Sam Fay, of the Great Central Railway, and Mr. G. Aman undertook to support the company, and to provide extra labour and rolling stock.

It at once became necessary to provide a new terminus for the Freshwater trains, since the Isle of Wight Central Company was no longer willing to continue the facilities previously afforded. The site chosen was about 200 yd. west of the existing station; and a long wooden platform was provided on the south side

of the line, together with some sidings and a crossover. The administrative offices of the company were accommodated in a red-painted corrugated iron building at the foot of Hunny Hill, near the trestle viaduct. The inconvenience of these arrangements occasioned bitter com-

renumbered W. 2 (and subsequently W. 8), and named *Freshwater*. It was fitted with balanced safety valves, and the copper cap of the chimney was painted over.

The rolling stock required in 1913 was obtained with the assistance of Sir Sam



plaints from passengers, and in 1914 certain trains, with connections to and from other parts of the island, were admitted once more to the Isle of Wight Central station.

Two locomotives were purchased, both of which were painted green, lined with black and white, and numbered, but not named. No. 1 was an 0-6-0 saddle tank, built by Manning, Wardle & Co. in 1902. No. 2 was a Stroudley "Terrier" tank, No. 46, *Newington*, built at Brighton in 1876. In 1903 it had been sold to the London & South Western Railway, fitted with a Drummond boiler and pop safety valves, and renumbered 734. It had worked successively on the Lyme Regis and Bishops Waltham branches.

Both locomotives passed into the hands of the Southern Railway in 1923, and, to conform with the standard adopted for the Isle of Wight, were fitted with Westinghouse brakes in place of the vacuum brakes previously used on the Freshwater line. No. 1 was named *Medina*, and employed on shunting duties until it was taken to Eastleigh to be scrapped in 1933. In its latter years, it was affectionately known as "Papyrus" among the railwaymen. No. 2 was

Fay from the Manchester, South Junction & Altrincham and the Great Central Railways. Although they were four-wheeled, the coaches were quite comfortable. The livery adopted was varnished teak.

The steamer service between Lymington and Yarmouth, and the parcels contracts by this route, greatly assisted the company's revenue. For many years, at least one train ran non-stop between Newport and Yarmouth in connection with the boats. On July 1, 1913, an open-sided Drewry petrol car, seating twelve passengers, was provided for this service.

From time to time, proposals for extending the railway were considered, but without result. The most important, and one that would have increased materially the value of the line, was for a tunnel under the Solent, to connect the Freshwater, Yarmouth & Newport Railway with the Lymington branch of the London & South Western Railway. This scheme was considered in 1901, and again in 1913. Other proposals were for an extension of the railway to Totland Bay, where the company had already acquired an hotel; and for a line from Freshwater to Brightstone and Ventnor, to serve the

sparsely-populated south-western coast of the island, known as the Back of the Wight.

On January 1, 1923, the Isle of Wight and the Isle of Wight Central Railway voluntarily amalgamated with the Southern Railway. On the other hand, the Freshwater, Yarmouth & Newport Company declined, for the time being, to participate in the fusion, and remained independent until August 1 following. During these seven months, all traffic used the separate station in Newport, opened ten years earlier.

The new owner carried out a number of improvements throughout the island, and within a few years almost doubled the strength of the pre-grouping train services. On the Freshwater line, the most outstanding improvement was the readmission of all trains to the main station at Newport, and the introduction of a through service in each direction between Ventnor and Freshwater, *via* Sandown and Newport, calling only at the principal stations. These trains attained considerable popularity, and became known as the Tourist Expresses. The crossing loop at Ningwood was lengthened to accommodate them. On the other hand, the loops at Carisbrooke and Yarmouth were removed.

The locomotives on the Freshwater line carry a single white disc at the foot of the chimney. This headcode is identical with that in use between Ryde and Ventnor, but, since the two routes never converge, no confusion is possible.

From Newport Station, the trains are backed out to the junction with the Freshwater line at the north signal box, where a brief halt is made to reverse, and to pick up the train staff or ticket. Turning sharply westwards, past the now-disused terminus of the Freshwater, Yarmouth & Newport Railway, the train crosses the Hunny Hill trestle viaduct, and begins to climb, first at 1 in 202, and then at 1 in 66, to a brief strip of level at Carisbrooke Halt, from which there is a magnificent view of the hill, crowned by the ruins of Carisbrooke Castle, about a mile to the south. The ascent is continued beyond Carisbrooke for $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Gunville summit, for the most part at 1 in 66.

A sharply-curved stretch of line, affording glimpses of Parkhurst Forest, away to the north, is followed by a

descent at 1 in 66 to the prettily-situated station of Watchingwell, a private station, serving Sir John Simeon's estate of Swainston, which does not appear in the timetables. A further descent at 1 in 63, 1 in 60 (the ruling gradient), 1 in 66, and 1 in 91 brings the line to Calbourne Station, $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Newport. The stationmaster's office here was originally used for the same purpose at the temporary terminus at Newport.

Beyond Calbourne, a series of rapidly-changing switchback gradients extends past the viaduct over Newtown Creek to Ningwood Station, with its passing loop. A further run of three miles, over sharply rising and falling gradients, brings the line to the coast at Yarmouth. A good view of the historic old town, with its grey stone walls, red roofs, and square-towered church, dating from 1614, is obtained from the railway. The steamer for Lymington starts from the slipway, about $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile from the station.

Swinging sharply to the south, and rising at 1 in 180 and 1 in 86, the line runs beside the River Yar for some distance, through fields frequently flooded by the autumn rains. The drawbridge and embankment carrying the main road across the estuary can be seen on the right. To the south is the line of the Downs, dominated by the 500-ft. summit of High Down, on which stands the great cross erected to the memory of Lord Tennyson. The railway then crosses the suddenly-narrowed river, and curves westwards, on a falling gradient of 1 in 147, into Freshwater terminus, 12 miles from Newport. Like the stationmaster's office at Calbourne, the signal box at Freshwater was formerly in use at the now-dismantled station at Newport.

In the summer of 1939, the Freshwater line had 13 trains in each direction on weekdays, with extra trains on Saturdays, and 8 trains on Sundays; but at present the number of services is considerably reduced. The journey time is approximately 37 min. For some time past, traffic has been worked by the "Terrier" tank No. W.8, *Freshwater*, and Adams "0-2" class 0-4-4 tanks.

In conclusion thanks must be expressed to Messrs. G. Nicholson, G. R. Barrett, W. Richardson, G. Barton, and the *Isle of Wight County Press* for their kind assistance in obtaining some of the information contained in this article.



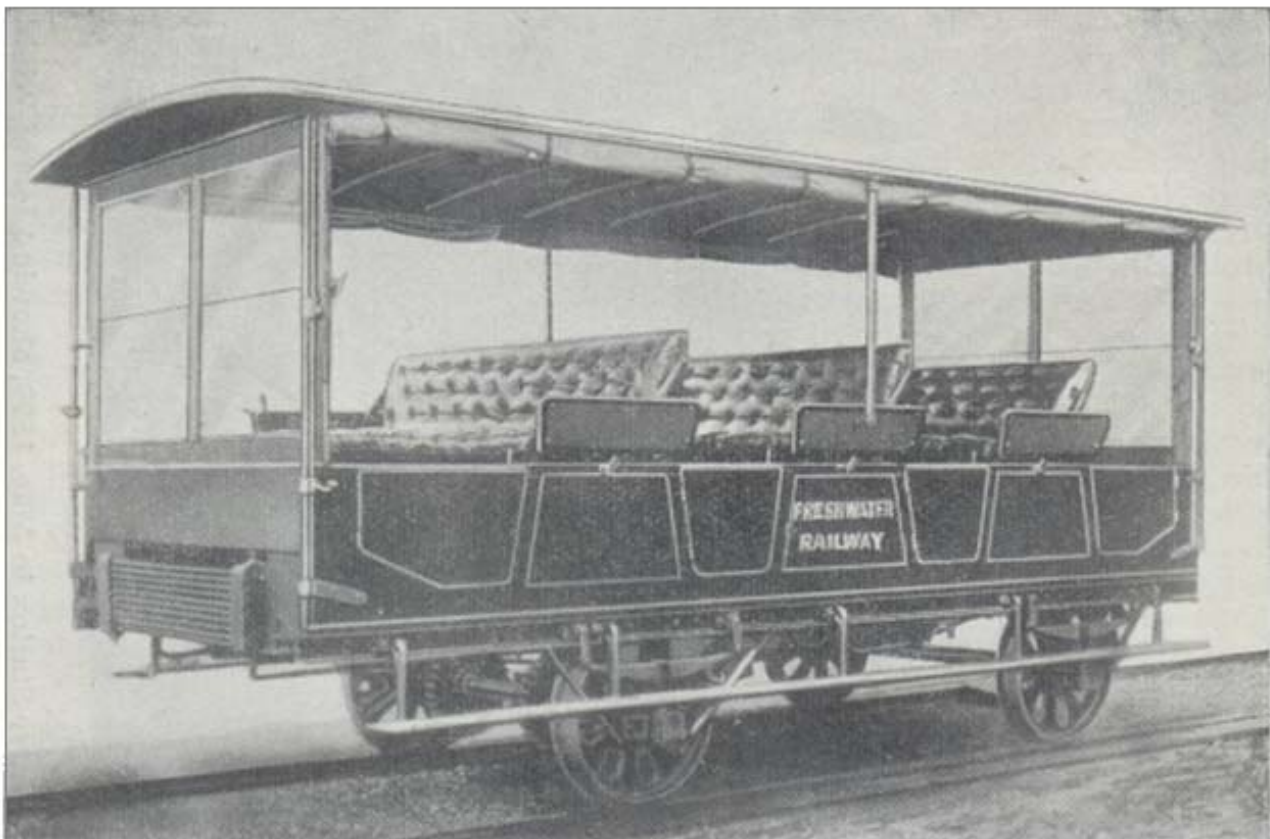
Photo courtesy]

[G. K. Barrett

Freshwater Station in May, 1890, showing Isle of Wight Central Railway locomotive No. 5, "Osborne," and composite coach



Drewry railcar, partly dismantled, being transported by road in course of delivery to the F.Y.N.R.



Photos courtesy]

[Drewry Car Co.

Drewry railcar ready for service on the F.Y.N.R.

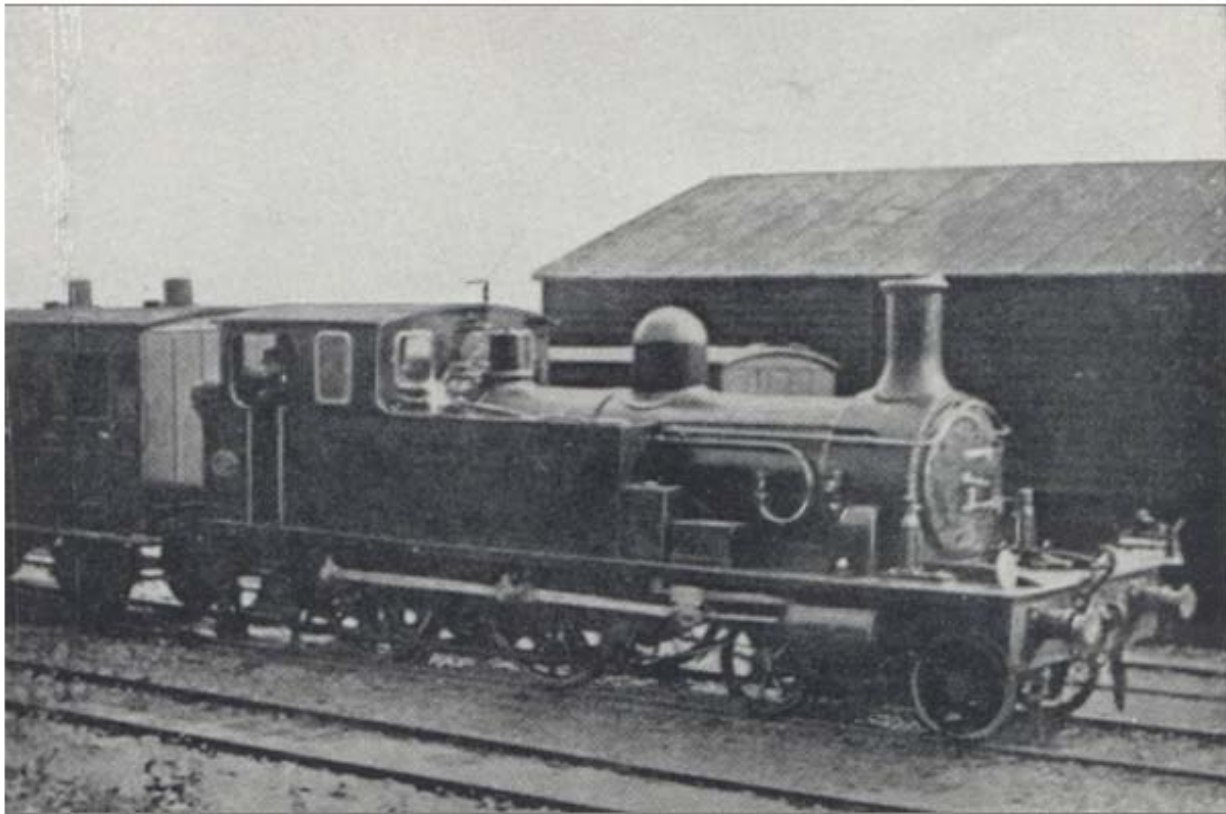


Photo courtesy]

[G. R. Barrett

Isle of Wight Central Railway 4-4-0 tank engine No. 6, leaving Newport for Freshwater in 1892



Photo courtesy]

[Drewry Car Co.

Train hauled by 0-6-0 saddle-tank engine No. 1 at Newport Station, F.Y.N.R.