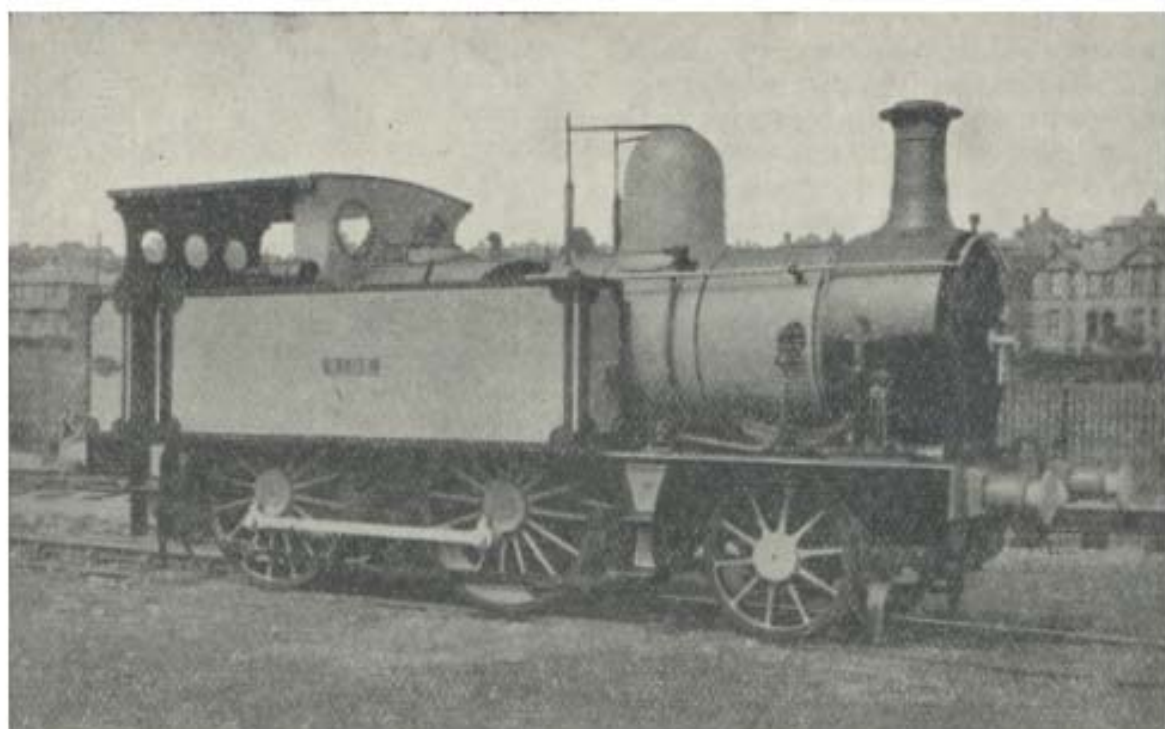


The Isle of Wight Railway

By K. WESTCOTT JONES



[Photo]

[A. B. MacLeod

Built by Beyer-Peacock & Co. Ltd. for the Isle of Wight Railway in 1864, "Ryde" ran 1,556,846 miles before it was withdrawn in July, 1932

SHORTLY after the promotion of the first railway in the Isle of Wight,* from Cowes to Newport, the Isle of Wight Eastern Railway was projected to link Ryde with Sandown, Shanklin, and Ventnor. Opposition from the local landowners, headed by the Earl of Yarborough, to a railway from Shanklin to Ventnor through the village of Bonchurch caused some delay, and resulted in the line being diverted inland on a somewhat circuitous course, through Wroxall, to a tunnel, $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile long, under St. Boniface Down (to the north of Ventnor), the highest point in the island.

The railway was authorised on July 23, 1860, and the first section of $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles from St. John's Road, Ryde, to Shanklin was opened on August 23, 1864. The completion of the final 4 miles, which included the tunnel at Ventnor, was delayed until September 15, 1866. During the construction of the tunnel, a large spring was tapped, which was diverted to supply the town with water. The railway was

single throughout, with passing loops at all intermediate stations, except Wroxall. Apart from the tunnel at Ventnor, there were no outstanding engineering works, but the gradients were by no means easy.

On July 28, 1863, powers were obtained for a western extension, $15\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, from Wroxall through Godshill and Blackwater to a junction with the Cowes & Newport Railway at Newport. Since this extension would have caused the existing title of the company to appear somewhat incongruous, it was then decided to omit the word "Eastern," and the undertaking became known officially as the Isle of Wight Railway. The construction of the new line was never undertaken, but the company did not revert to its original title.

Five years later, on July 3, 1868, the Isle of Wight (Newport Junction) Railway was authorised from Sandown to Newport. The Isle of Wight Company agreed to work the line, and enlarged Sandown Station to accommodate the expected transfer traffic. However, in 1880, after the ill-fated Junction Company had become financially embarrassed, the

* Articles by the same author on the Isle of Wight Central Railway and the Freshwater, Yarmouth & Newport Railway appeared in our March-April and July-August, 1946, and our May-June, 1947, issues respectively.

working agreement was terminated, and the railway from Sandown to Newport came under the control of the Joint Committee of the Cowes & Newport and Ryde & Newport Companies.

Whether the shareholders of Isle of Wight Railway benefited by this decision not to seek an entry into Newport is by no means certain. Nevertheless, their railway became a most successful undertaking, and high dividends were maintained consistently. Offering as it did the most direct route between London and the popular watering places of Sandown, Shanklin, and Ventnor, by means of the short sea crossing from Portsmouth to Ryde, the railway secured a heavy summer traffic; and since Ventnor was a fashionable winter resort, a certain amount of off-season traffic was assured.

The terminus at St. John's Road, Ryde, was on the outskirts of the town, some distance from the pier used by the steamers plying between the island and the mainland. To bridge the gap of more than a mile between the railway and the pier head, a tramway was laid through the streets and on the pier in 1865. For the time being, the cars were drawn by horses, but subsequently steam traction was adopted. On July 23, 1877, the London & South Western and London, Brighton & South Coast Railway Companies obtained joint powers for a railway from St. John's Road to the pier head. The extension, which was double track throughout, was completed to Ryde Esplanade on April 5, 1880, and to the pier head on July 12 following. Running powers to the pier head were granted to the Isle of Wight and the Ryde & Newport Railways. The latter line had been opened on December 20, 1875, from Newport to a junction with the Isle of Wight Railway at Smallbrook, near Ryde. In 1887 it became part of the Isle of Wight Central Railway. The tramway through the streets of Ryde was removed, and the section on the pier was electrified some time later.

The only branch of the Isle of Wight Railway, from Brading to Bembridge, originated as a connection to the quays at Brading Harbour, which then extended up to Brading village, although little more than the channel of the River Yar was fully navigable. Powers for the construction of these lines were included

in the company's Act of incorporation of 1860. More than one attempt to reclaim large portions of these tidal creeks had ended in failure; and it was not until 1874 that the Liberator Company, headed by Jabez Balfour, was authorised to construct a sea wall from St. Helen's to Bembridge. This work was completed successfully some years later, with the result that the fishing port of Brading became an inland village. In 1895, the Liberator Company failed, after several of its schemes had been the subject of legal proceedings which attracted enormous public attention. Balfour, who had sought refuge in Argentina, was extradited, and was sentenced to a long term of penal servitude at Parkhurst Prison in the Isle of Wight.

Meantime, powers had been obtained on April 7, 1874, to improve the existing line to the harbour, and to extend it across the reclaimed land to Bembridge, 2½ miles from Brading. The branch was completed and opened for traffic on May 27, 1882.

The livery chosen for the Isle of Wight Railway locomotives was a near-Midland red (officially specified as lake oxide), with black lining. The company was fortunate in the selection of its locomotives, as all gave long and satisfactory service. In its earlier years, the company was sometimes requested to lend motive power to the neighbouring Isle of Wight Central Railway; but later on this facility was reversed, occasionally as increased traffic taxed the small stock of eight locomotives beyond the limits of its capacity.

The following table shows the locomotives owned by the Isle of Wight Railway in the order of acquisition. The engines were named, but not numbered, although unofficially the *Ryde* was always considered as No. 1:—

Name	Type	Date acquired	Makers
<i>Ryde</i> ...	2-4-0T.	1864	Beyer, Peacock & Co.
<i>Sandown</i> ...	do.	1864	do. do. do.
<i>Shanklin</i> ...	do.	1864	do. do. do.
<i>Ventnor</i> ...	do.	1868	do. do. do.
<i>Wroxall</i> ...	do.	1872	do. do. do.
<i>Brading</i> ...	do.	1876	do. do. do.
<i>Bembridge</i> ...	0-6-0T.	1882	Manning, Wardle & Co.
<i>Bonchurch</i> ...	2-4-0T.	1883	Beyer, Peacock & Co.

The seven engines built by Beyer, Peacock & Company were of the popular design associated with that firm at the

time of their construction, and resembled one another closely. The first four had 15 in. \times 20 in. inside cylinders, coupled wheels 5 ft. in diameter, and 3 ft. 6 in. leading wheels. The boiler pressure of 120 lb. per sq. in. was adopted as standard for the Isle of Wight Railway, and was never exceeded. As originally constructed, they were fitted with tall copper-capped chimneys, and weather boards afforded the only protection for the enginemen. A few years later, the chimneys were considerably shortened, and the weather boards were replaced by cabs. Three small round windows in the back of these cabs gave the engines a distinctive appearance when running bunker foremost. The *Wroxall* was generally similar, but somewhat heavier, and had a bunker of increased capacity. It was fitted with a shorter chimney, and a cab of similar design from the first. From time to time, modifications and alterations were made to these engines.

The *Ryde* remained at work until 1932, by which time it had run more than 1½ million miles, and had become the oldest passenger locomotive in regular service in the British Isles. After it was withdrawn from service, it was repainted in its old colours, in the hope that it would be preserved. Unfortunately, efforts in this direction ended in failure, and the engine was sent to Eastleigh to be scrapped in June, 1934. The *Sandown*, *Shanklin*, and *Ventnor* all ran more than a million miles, and remained in service until the late 1920s.

The *Brading* and *Bonchurch* were larger engines, weighing 34½ tons and 35¾ tons respectively, and distinguished by their longer boilers, and two large square windows in the backs of the cabs. The former was frequently used for hauling goods trains. The *Bonchurch* met with a mishap while being unloaded on to the quay at St. Helen's, and plunged to the bottom of the harbour, fortunately without sustaining serious damage, although some days elapsed before it was salvaged.

The *Bembridge* was a small 0-6-0 saddle-tank engine, with 13 in. \times 18 in. inside cylinders, and 3-ft. wheels, built by Manning, Wardle & Company, of Leeds, for the contractor who undertook the construction of the Bembridge branch. It was purchased by the Isle of Wight Railway in 1882, and continued to work

between Brading and Bembridge until 1917, when it was taken over by the War Department, and sent overseas for war service in Mesopotamia, whence it never returned. It survived until at least 1921, when it was observed upon the quayside at Basra.

General repairs and overhauls to the locomotives and rolling stock were effected at the works near St. John's Road Station, Ryde. The livery adopted for the passenger coaches was varnished teak. For many years, the coaches ran on four wheels, but some heavy eight-wheel non-bogie coaches were purchased from the Metropolitan Railway, after the electrification of the London underground lines. The standard of comfort afforded to passengers was considerably in advance of that obtaining elsewhere on the island. The passenger coaches were equipped with the Westinghouse brake, which was adopted as the standard for the island by the Southern Railway.

When Grouping became effective on January 1, 1923, the Isle of Wight Railway was merged into the Southern Railway without difficulty. The new company speedily inaugurated a series of alterations and improvements on the island railways, including rebuilding the station at Ryde Pier Head with four platforms. On the Isle of Wight Railway, an additional passing loop was provided at Wroxall, and the line was doubled between Brading and Sandown. The widening was brought into use on June 23, 1927. Thanks to the foresight of the promoters of the railway, the necessary land had been purchased to enable the line to be doubled throughout from Ryde to the north end of Ventnor Tunnel. So far, however, the widening has not been extended in either direction. For many years before Grouping, the section between Smallbrook Junction and St. John's Road, Ryde, had been worked as a double line during the summer months, to accommodate the heavy tourist traffic. For the remainder of the year, the signal box at the junction was closed, and single-line working began at St. John's Road. The Southern Railway continued this arrangement.

Between Ryde and Ventnor the locomotives carry a headcode of one white disc at the base of the chimney. The railway on the pier is practically level, but beyond Ryde Esplanade Station

there is a fall at 1 in 50 round a sharp curve (on which speed is restricted to 20 m.p.h.), to a tunnel, 391 yd. long, under part of the town. On emerging from the tunnel, the locomotive is faced with a short climb at 1 in 99 to St. John's Road Station, the original terminus of the Isle of Wight Railway, $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles from the pier head. The ascent is continued on easier gradients for $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile to Smallbrook Junction, where the line to Newport diverges to the right.

A fall at 1 in 79 and easier gradients carries the railway through well-wooded country, past Brading, to an almost level stretch of line, which ends with a steep climb at 1 in 77 to Sandown, formerly the headquarters of the Isle of Wight Railway. In 1917 the offices were severely damaged by fire. Beyond Sandown, there is a climb at 1 in 80, past the village of Lake, which at present lacks railway facilities, although a halt was provided for a brief period several years ago. Shanklin is approached by a fall at 1 in 90, and a rise at 1 in 88, easing to 1 in 190. Sandown and Shanklin, two of the most popular holiday resorts in the island, bring a vast amount of traffic to the railway during the summer months.

Beyond Shanklin there is a gruelling ascent, known as the Apse Bank, beginning with $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles at 1 in 70, and easing to 1 in 88 and 1 in 190. Splendid views over wide stretches of rolling downland are revealed from the train as Wroxall is approached. As already mentioned, the passing loop here is a comparatively recent addition, but otherwise the station is practically in its original condition. The small refreshment room, the only one on the Isle of Wight Railway, is a unique and pleasing feature. A further climb at 1 in 88 and 1 in 95 brings the train to the summit of the line at the entrance to the tunnel under St. Boniface Down. The scenery is wild and open, and the district appears to be quite uninhabited.

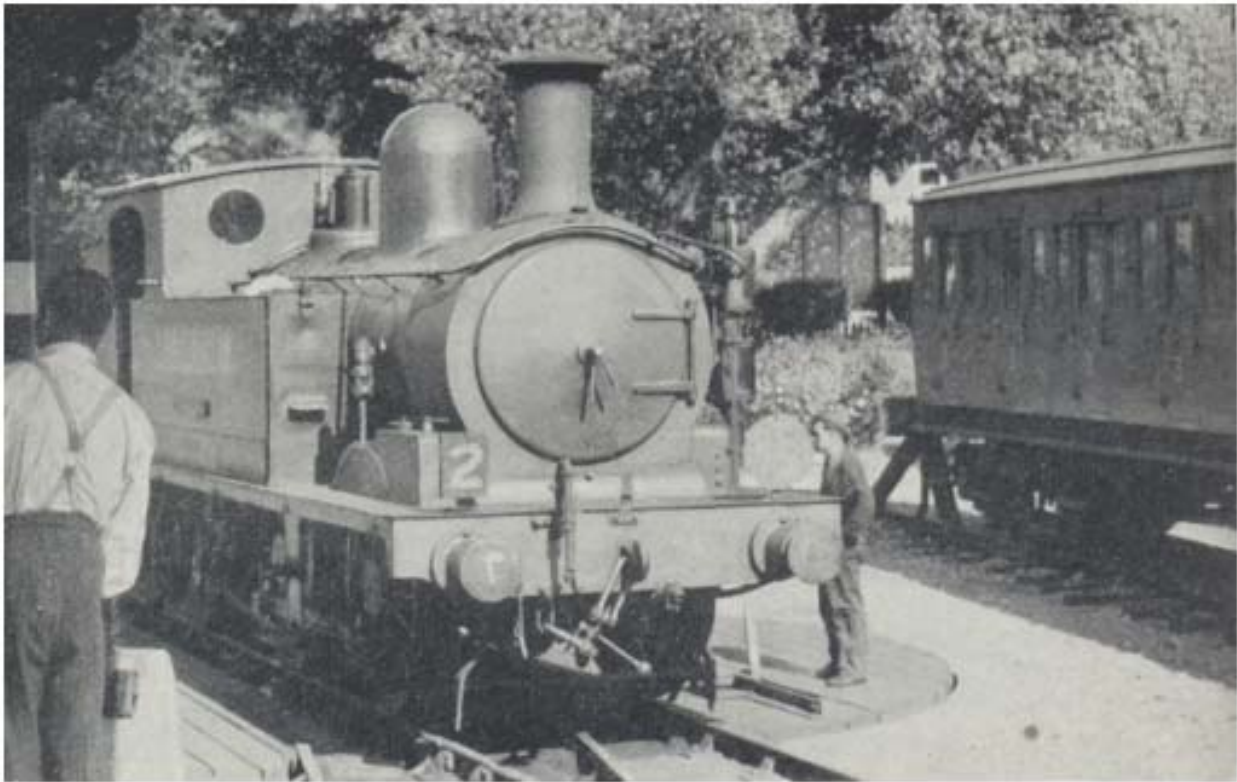
The tunnel is 1,312 yd. long, with a gradient of 1 in 173 falling toward Ventnor, and ends in a deep chalk cutting, on one side of which is Ventnor Station, and on the other several caves in which coal merchants have their offices. These coal yards are served by sidings, which also lead to a small locomotive shed. The terminus stands at a considerable height above the town, and is by no means

conveniently situated. In 1898 powers were sought for a light railway to the esplanade, but the scheme failed to materialise.

On the Bembridge branch, which is worked by one engine in steam, white discs are carried on the centre and left-hand side of the buffer beam. The junction at Brading faces towards Ventnor so that no through running to and from Ryde is possible. The train passes several sidings and disused lines running to the derelict quays of Brading Harbour; some old cement mills, long-since abandoned, are seen on the left; and, indeed, an atmosphere of inactivity and decay pervades the surroundings of the railway. Nearby are the once-famous oyster beds, now completely dry; and even the gas works at St. Helen's have been superseded by the larger plant at Ryde. For the most part, the branch is laid on reclaimed land, and the gradients are negligible. Beyond St. Helen's, the railway follows the winding course of the River Yar. The neat little terminus at Bembridge, with its single platform, is unique in affording the only turntable facilities in the island. This turntable was designed specially for the Manning Wardle tank engine *Bembridge*, and can only just accommodate the Adams 0-4-4 tank engines now used on the island railways.

The train services call for little comment, as the steep gradients, sharp curves, and frequent stops preclude fast running. For many years the trains called at all stations, and were allowed 40 to 45 min. for the journey of $12\frac{1}{2}$ miles between Ryde and Ventnor. In November, 1891, however, a fast train was introduced, leaving Ryde Pier Head at 3.10 p.m., and running non-stop to Ventnor in 19 min. This service remained in operation for about 17 years. Latterly the schedule was eased to 25 min. by the inclusion of a stop at Shanklin. In the summer of 1914 there were 17 trains in each direction on weekdays, and the journey times had been slightly reduced. The improvements introduced by the Southern Railway increased the capacity of the line to an extent that allowed of a service interval of 15 min. in each direction at peak periods, and considerably reduced the serious dislocation of traffic which had formerly resulted from the late arrival of a boat at Ryde.

The Isle of Wight Railway



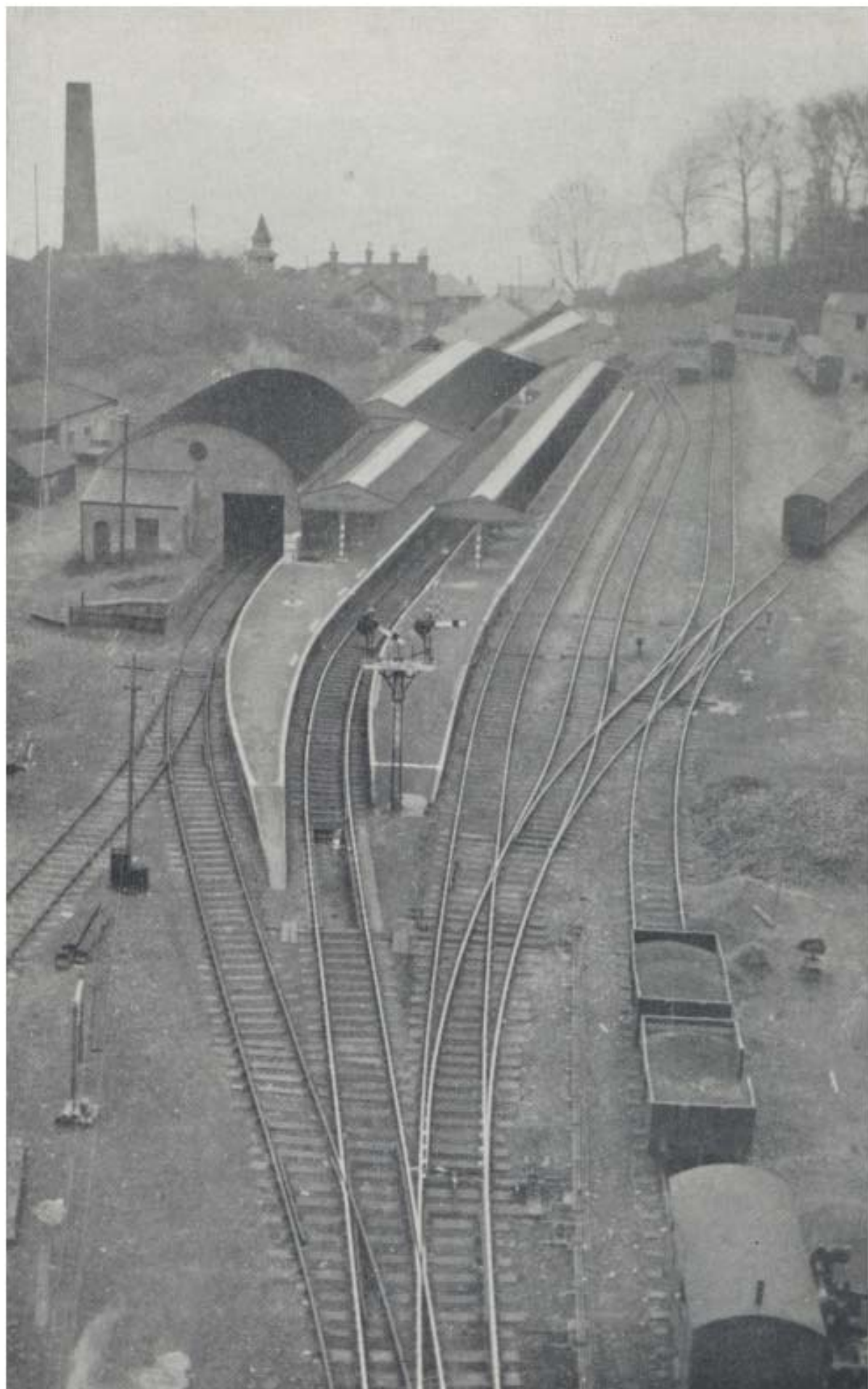
Adams 0-4-4 tank locomotive No. 14, "Fishbourne," on the turntable at Bembridge, before running round the train



Photos]

[E. C. Griffith

No. 24, "Calbourne," on a Ventnor-Ryde train at Ventnor in September, 1947



Photo]

[P. Norris

Ventnor Town Station in 1946. The view is taken from the hillside, above the mouth of the tunnel