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The 14:27 Exeter St. David's to Barnstaple calls at CREDITON on Saturday 6th May 2017. Signs are looking good for regular daily trains to Okehampton although there is no date as yet. These will also improve the service frequency between Exeter and CREDITON.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

In November we had another successful branch meeting in Crediton. We once again welcomed OkeRAIL and heard about their hard work to secure a daily train service between Okehampton and Exeter. News that radio communication masts were to be installed was a promising sign.

Then on 30th January 2018 the Secretary of State for Transport sent a letter to South West MPs to update them on rail in the South West. It included a statement saying that, *'.....we have instructed GWR to prepare plans to introduce regular train services to Okehampton, with the objective of securing a credible and costed plan for delivering an all-week, all-year round train service between Exeter and Okehampton as soon as reasonably practicable'*. A similar statement is in Section 4.3 of the Department of Transport issued report, **South West Peninsula strategic rail blueprint: government response**. This also says, *'We also expect GWR to play its full part in supporting the development of local proposals for other service enhancements such as between Exeter and Axminster/Honiton (Devon Metro), and in longer term proposals such as the potential scheme to reopen the railway between Plymouth and Tavistock'*.

It is of course disappointing that progress on the full reopening of the Exeter to Plymouth via Okehampton line is still on hold. The through route was needed for 3 weekends at the start of the year when track work between Totnes and Plymouth closed the normal route. On Thursday 1st March the Night Riviera is thought to have been cancelled in anticipation of high tides and debris being washed on to the track in the Dawlish area. Indeed the line was completely closed on the Friday. For a short time there was flooding between the tracks at Dawlish and missing paving stones from the down platform which exposed the framework beneath.

On a brighter note planning permission was granted in February for the Lynton and Barnstaple railway to restore more of the old narrow gauge route. It will still unfortunately be isolated from the national rail network, but looks to demonstrate what can be done on long disused rural railways.

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Report of Branch Meeting in Crediton

The meeting was on 25th November 2017 at the Boniface Centre.

Okehampton Line

Dr. Michael Ireland from the OkeRAIL organisation, and also deputy mayor of Okehampton, spoke on the proposed regular Okehampton to Exeter train service. He explained that it would benefit the regional economy and give added value to the national rail network. Also better rail access to over 100,000 people in the 'Rail Desert' to the north and west of Okehampton in the direction of Bude. The new organisation, 'Connect Bude' had similar aims and also recognised the importance of tourism.

Okehampton would be a railhead for the sub-region with Exeter being a key driver for potential passengers. Twenty five percent of respondents surveyed mentioned London as a destination. The business community would use the service as travel cost is of concern to them. OkeRAIL were thinking that the daily service would be initially 4 trains per day aimed for the commuter market, but tweaked to pick up connections from London.

A network of fast efficient limited stop coach services was envisaged linking into the trains at Okehampton from places such as Tavistock, Bude and Hatherleigh. In the case of Tavistock these services would be an interim measure, prior to restoration of rail services beyond Okehampton to the west. The proposed Okehampton Parkway station would be an ideal hub for the coach services. Such services would transform peoples' lives in the area.

The summer Sundays only Okehampton to Exeter service continued to run in 2017 and with high passenger loadings. On one occasion 160 or more and this led to 3 car working at the end of the season.

Also popular was the Royal Oke special train from Okehampton to London Paddington, although outbound it was necessary to change trains at Exeter due to a wheel flats problem. It provided ordinary people with a day out to London at a price they could afford. For some it was there first every visit to London. OkeRAIL representatives met with the Under Secretary of State. The Royal Oke trains also carried the political message that the train service was popular.

Taw Link Barnstaple to Braunton

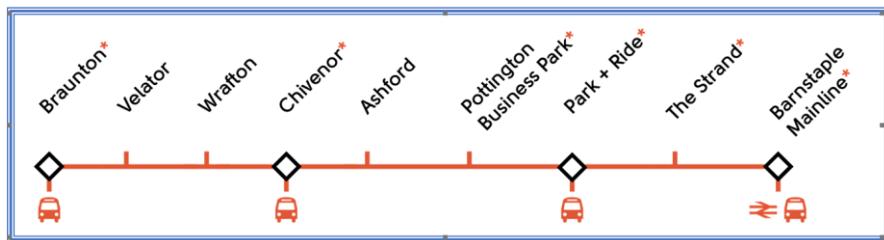
Richard Heacock (Combe Rail CIO) outlined the TawLink proposal to reopen the former Ilfracombe branch from Barnstaple to Braunton as a light railway/tramway. The A361 road at this point is already at capacity - with resulting poor air quality - and yet the corridor is due for substantial residential and light industrial development in the coming years.

The former railway formation lies directly adjacent to all the scheduled new developments. It is of double-track width, allowing for the retention of the Tarka Trail leisure path alongside the TawLink tramway. Lightweight battery-electric or hydrogen-cell vehicles could share the formation, without the need for unsightly overhead wires. Combe Rail are urging North Devon Council to incorporate TawLink into the local plan, and to commission a pre-feasibility study.



A light rail vehicle in the Strand in Barnstaple as it might be. This is an area the Council is keen to rejuvenate as it has declined and retail has left.

Starting at Barnstaple railway station it would cross the existing road bridge or a new one to the Strand. Plans for a new cycle and pedestrian bridge from the new Anchorwood development might be an opportunity to incorporate the tramway. Then stations for a park and ride near the downstream road bridge, Pottington, Ashford, Chivenor, Wrafton and Braunton.



<http://www.taw-link.org.uk/>

Rail User Group Award at Railfuture's Leicester Conference

The Tarka Rail Association (TRA) won a national gold award for best rail user group newsletter. At Crediton, Chris Irwin presents the award to Alan Clark of the TRA committee.



Connecting the Dots

Christopher Irwin, Director, of TravelWatch SouthWest talked on matters based around their publication, 'Connecting the Dots'. It provided initial views from the south west to pass on to the Department of Transport franchising team. The need is to align the Great Western and CrossCountry service patterns. The table shows the similarity of franchise dates.

Great Western

Last franchise contest 2005/6
 Direct awards in 2013 and 2015
 Premium to HMG: 1.5p
 per passenger kilometre in 2015/6

*New franchise starts:
 April 2020*

CrossCountry

Last franchise contest 2007
 Direct award in 2016
 Premium to HMG: 2.2p per
 passenger kilometre in 2015/6

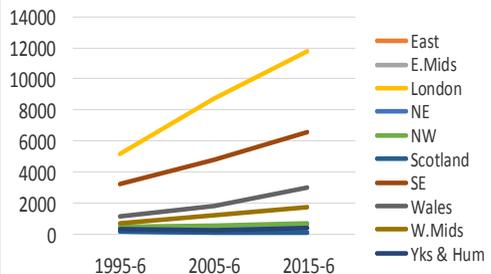
*New franchise starts:
 December 2019-October2020*



Over 20 years there has been 133% growth in passenger journeys to/from and within the greater South West. In 1995-96 21.7 million rising to 50.6 in 2015-16.

Journeys between the greater South West and London reached 11.8 million in 2016-16, followed by the South East at 6.6 million, Wales 3.0 million and the

Passenger journeys (thousands) between SW and other regions



West Midlands 1.7 million. Journeys to and from the other regions were much less: North West 0.659 million, East 0.585 million, Yorkshire & Humberside 0.420 million, East Midlands 0.363 million, North East 0.102 million and Scotland 0.080 million.

Rail has been out performed by low cost airlines between the South West and Scotland, so that for every 20 air journeys only 1 is by rail. Journeys to and from the North East have also declined. However, on other services demand could grow by as much as 7% per year.

Priority is for a 7-day railway with clock-face timetable, frequencies at least hourly and more where busier. CrossCountry to be a fast inter-city service, not a West Midlands local service, and with HS2-compatible rolling stock. More through trains, better connectivity between trains & with other modes. More use of diversionary routes.

Top South West regional priorities

Improving performance and reliability: route upgrades, more platform staff, delay-repay, tackle pinch-points.

Sufficient, fit-for-purpose, rolling stock: raising the game to stay competitive as road vehicles become more sustainable and ever more user-bespoke.

Advance MetroWest and Devon Metro: on the front line in beating congestion and unlocking the South West's economic potential.

Introduce a clock-face based, 7-day week timetable giving a basic hourly service pattern with more frequent services on the principal metro and inter-urban flows.

'Connecting the Dots' available at <http://travelwatchsouthwest.org/documents/>

Marsh Barton Station

Plans for Exeter's new station to serve the Marsh Barton industrial estate have been on hold since the price rose dramatically from £4.3 million to £13 million (Express & Echo). Hopes have risen that the funding shortfall may be closed this year, as a Devon County Council cabinet meeting on 14th March 2018 identified a 2017/2018 underspend across various budgets of several million pounds.

Growth Deal Funding of £3.52 million was already allocated to the project by the heart of the south west Local Enterprise Partnership, but they may also now increase their contribution. When built the station will have two platforms 124 m in length and so be able to take a 6 carriage train. Train services would mainly be on the Paignton to Exeter and Exmouth route.

Launceston's Lost Station Sites

Countless passengers will have descended the steps to Launceston's North Cornwall line station, but not for 52½ years (Photo 1). Closure west to Wadebridge and from Okehampton via Halwill Junction was on 3rd October 1966. The Plymouth service ended on 31st December 1962. Today only narrow gauge trains of the Launceston Steam Railway head up the Kensey valley for 2 miles in the direction of Wadebridge.

For Plymouth there is an hourly bus via Callington and Saltash, but to Exeter there are only five Monday to Saturday buses and six back (Stagecoach 6A).

The Okehampton to Exeter rail reopening will bring rail services closer to Launceston, but a rail/bus link should connect Launceston to Okehampton. Not everyone can afford a car even if they are old enough to drive.

Raifuture Devon and Cornwall suggest reopening from Launceston to Okehampton. Whether this was via Halwill Junction or Lydford, trains could reach Exeter in under 1 hour. This would be over half an hour faster than the bus. The western half of the old station site is



Photo 1 The steps leading down from Launceston's Dockacre Road towards the former entrance of the North Cornwall line station. (All Launceston photos 22/2/18)



Photo 2. Launceston station site which is now the car park for the Launceston Steam Railway, which operates from beyond the main road bridge in the background. The steps next to the wall are those of the former footbridge. View to west.

relatively intact for a length of about 5 coaches and is the best station option (Photo 2 and map p10). It would have good access for Launceston's residents on foot and not be too isolated at night.

Beyond, most of the Newport industrial estate is on or between former railway land of the Great Western and North Cornwall Railway routes. However, only 3% of the area of the estate would be needed for a single track line from the old station site with extended platform. Only a car showroom blocks the way (Photo 3).

For the old station site there would be no choice other than to relocate the car showroom and estate road. Beyond the car showroom the estate road follows the alignment of the North Cornwall main line for about a quarter mile. There is ample room for a restored single track railway. (Photo 4). This would be best run on the south side of the road and close to the position of former sidings. Most business units on the south side of the railway would continue to have road access via Station Road.



Photo 3. The east end of the North Cornwall line station site is covered by this car showroom and is the only unit in the Newport Industrial Estate directly on the line of route. The apex of the roof marks the position of the up platform former which curved gently to the right. Former down side station building site on right.



Photo 4. The North Cornwall Line a ¼ mile short of the former station with the main single track running line marked by the pavement on the right (north) side. The radius here was 18 chains (360 m). The left hand pavement and adjacent land (on a former siding and head shunt) would be best used for a new running line as fewer entrances would be blocked. The church on the hill is St. Stephen's. View WNW.

Option 2 for a new station would be approximately where the goods yard once was (see map p10). This would keep the car showroom and main estate road as they are, but have a greater impact on business units on the south side of the industrial estate. The station would be further into the industrial estate and be a little more isolated at night. However, it might be easier for building a car park.

At the far eastern end of the industrial estate the road ends in a turning circle. Here there is a third option for a station on the North Cornwall line, although it would be less convenient for passengers. However, it would avoid the expense of rail restoration through the industrial estate.

The site is just before the line starts to curve east in a cutting and then across the former Great Western route. Space could be made for a platform and some car parking. There is an existing pedestrian link on to Ridgegrove Hill as well. From here it is steep quarter mile climb to the town, but not



Photo 5. View of the new house on the former Great Western line formation which blocks the Great Western Ridgegrove Hill station site option at Launceston. Also the site where the 1943 war time connection diverged to the North Cornwall Railway station. This was used from 30th June 1952 for Plymouth trains when the Great Western station closed to passengers.

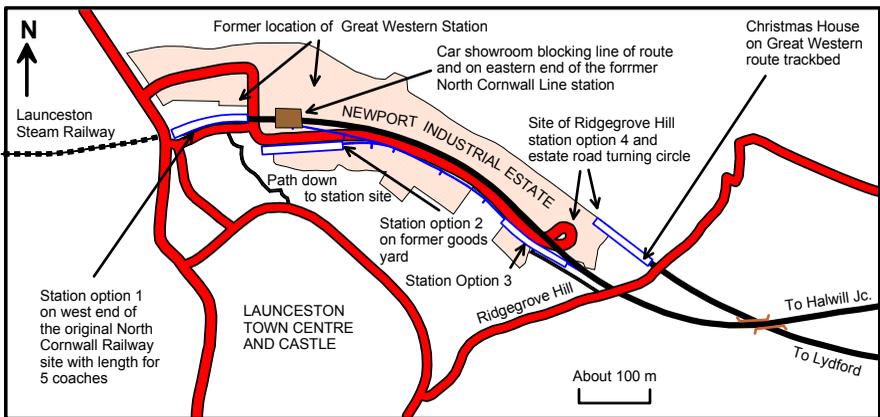


Photo 6. This view is from the Great Western Railway overbridge on Ridgegrove Hill looking towards Lydford. The Southern Railway embankment is covered with trees and crosses from right to left. It shows how close the two routes are. There are number of places east from here where the Southern route could be diverted on to the Lydford line. Christmas House is immediately behind. Photo view to east.

too isolated with lighting and a few houses.

Until recently there was a fourth option for a new station on little developed land and actually on the Great Western line formation from Lydford. Unfortunately a new house (Christmas House) has recently appeared on the trackbed (Photo 5). This house also makes other options difficult, such as a new route alongside the northern boundary of the industrial estate.

The new property was given planning approval by Cornwall Council on 8th June 2015 (original reference PA15/02906). Launceston Town Council (14th May 2015) did object saying, ***“Launceston Town Council support this application only on condition the development does not obstruct the railway bed of the old rail line or access to it. The current scheme would however appear to block access to the railway bed.”***



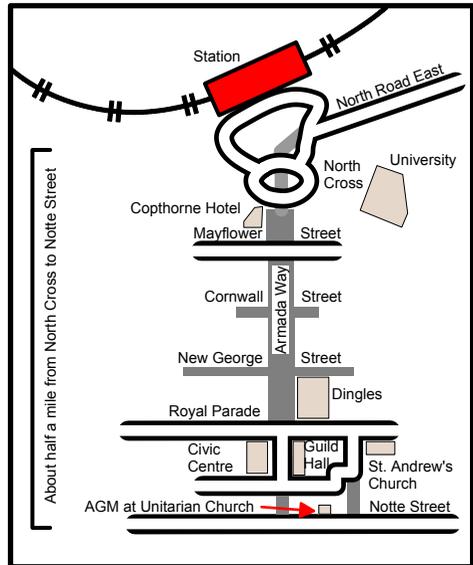
Sketch map of Launceston's Newport Industrial Estate showing new station options. The North Cornwall line is shown in its original position in black with three station options – the original site, the goods yard site or Ridgegrove Hill. Blue ticked line shows deviation to the south side of the main estate road. Lost Great Western option 4 also shown with intact former running line in black.

In view of Christmas House Railfuture Devon and Cornwall suggests a station option is chosen on the North Cornwall line and protected, even if there is no immediate prospect of restoring the railway, 1) the original site, 2) the goods yard site or 3) a Ridgegrove Hill site.

Next Meeting – AGM 28th April 2018

Our AGM will be on Saturday 28th April 2018 at the Unitarian Church, Notte Street, Plymouth, PL1 2AQ. From 13:30 to 16:15.

The venue is in the centre of Plymouth near the Guildhall and Civic Centre. To get there from the railway station, walk towards the North Cross roundabout and through the pedestrian subways to Armada Way. Then straight down past Dingles on your left, and after crossing Royal Parade you will have the Civic Centre on your right. Cross the next road which is Princess Street, and turn left into Notte Street to find the Unitarian church.



OkeRAIL special train on the 21st April from Okehampton (07:10/20:45) to Oxford (10:26/17:20) & Stratford upon Avon (11:13/16:32). Also Crediton (07:47/20:05) & Exeter St. David's (08:12/19:47). Std Class: www.ticketsource.co.uk/event/239689
1st Class: www.ticketsource.co.uk/event/239687 (available at time of printing)

Great Western Franchise Consultation - Railfuture Response

Railfuture submitted a single response to the Department of Transport's franchise consultation on 18th February 2018. The title of the consultation document was '*Great Western Rail Franchise Public Consultation Moving Britain Ahead*'. ISBN:978-1-84864-197-6.

The Railfuture response was written and co-ordinated by the Severnside Branch Secretary and took into account the views of 6 other Railfuture branches. It answered a series of questions posed by the Department of Transport. The following are some edited excerpts from the 17 pages where it is mainly relevant to Devon and Cornwall matters.

1 (a) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the Franchise Objectives and why? We agree in principle with the stated objectives, although we have some concerns as to how these might be achieved. In particular, we believe the environmental, financial and operational performance of the railway would be enhanced by further electrification.

1 (b) Are there any priorities you would change or add and, if so, why ? Services should be sufficiently frequent and at times that passengers want to travel.

2 (a) Do you agree or disagree with the proposals for splitting the Great Western franchise into smaller franchises ? We disagree.

2 (b) Why ? The proposed split runs counter to the concept of better integration between “Track and Train” in para. 3.8 of the Document. It is likely to result in different fares structures and standards of rolling stock on the same route. A smaller franchise would have fewer resources with which to respond to major disruption or unexpected heavy peaks of traffic.

3 (a) Giving reasons, do you agree or disagree with the options for transferring Greenford branch services to the Chiltern franchise; and transferring the Brighton- Southampton portion of the Bristol- Brighton service to the Thameslink, Southern & Great Northern franchise ?

We agree with transferring the Greenford branch to Chiltern railways.

We disagree with transferring the Brighton - Southampton portion of the Bristol - Brighton service to TSGN. This would result in poorer connectivity, slower journeys and potentially higher fares for passengers between South Wales, the West of England and Sussex. ... These trains are also popular with passengers travelling between Cornwall or Devon and the South Coast connecting at Westbury, particularly since the South West franchise ceased to operate west of Exeter.

5 (a) Which routes do you believe could benefit from improvements to train frequencies ? Bristol - Gloucester- Worcester, Exeter - Paddington semi-fast services, Reading - Redhill- Gatwick Airport, Swindon - Westbury and beyond (TransWilts route), Hereford /Worcester- Oxford- Paddington, Cardiff – Paddington and Bristol - Brighton.

5 (b) What times of the day or week are these improvements needed ? Bristol-Gloucester- Worcester needs an hourly service throughout the day and week. Exeter- Paddington semi-fasts need additional services to cover long gaps during the middle of the day.

In the 21st Century, Britain is a seven day society and needs a consistent seven day service pattern. On main lines later trains are needed on Saturdays, corresponding to last trains Monday to Friday. We need to offer passengers more opportunities to travel.

Newbury has a poor service to/from the South West despite being the largest town (2017 estimated 41,000 population) on the route between Reading and Taunton. A more frequent semi-fast service could give much improved westward connectivity for Frome and serve new or reopened stations at Devizes Parkway and Langport. Expanding the semi-fast service would allow longer-distance trains to run non-stop between Taunton and Reading.

6 (a) Are you proposing a scheme for a new station or line which has a realistic chance of being funded ? If so, please provide brief details here. We support new stations / services / lines for Devon Metro, MetroWest, Okehampton, Saltford, Tavistock, Wantage Science Vale Parkway, Wilton Parkway and Witney. Some of these may be dependent on housing development in their respective areas. Devon Metro includes Edginswell, Marsh Barton and extension of local services to Taunton, with reopened stations at Cullompton and Wellington.

7 (a) Do you agree or disagree with reducing journey times to destinations in the South West by reducing stops at intermediate stations ? We agree, subject to no reduction in journey opportunities or frequency at intermediate stations. There needs to be a hierarchy of services, timed as far as possible to maximise connectivity at interchange stations.

7 (b) Which services or stations would benefit or be disadvantaged by this approach ? Some smaller stations on the London - West of England Route might lose their fastest trains if stops were removed from Paddington - Plymouth / Penzance services. These stations would, however, gain more frequent stops in semi-fast trains if our suggested service patterns were introduced, i.e.

(i) Paddington - Plymouth- Penzance, non-stop Reading to Taunton.

(ii) Paddington - Exeter semi-fast, hourly, calling at Reading, Theale, Thatcham, Newbury, Hungerford, Pewsey, Westbury, Frome, Castle Cary, Taunton, Tiverton Parkway, but with some element of skip stopping if necessary to maintain even intervals at start and end points.

(iii) Local all stations services such as Reading - Newbury and Exeter - Paignton.

8 (b) Are there any other stations between which you feel direct services should be provided ? Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot and Bridgend to /from Bristol Temple Meads and Bath. Abergavenny, Cwmbran, Lydney, Chepstow and Caldicot to/from Bristol. Cardiff to Exeter Central, integrated with Devon Metro. Plymouth to Paignton. Swindon to Romsey via Salisbury, Southampton and Eastleigh.

Why ? Faster and easier journeys are needed between west of Cardiff, Bristol Temple Meads and Bath. There is a proven demand for work, leisure and educational travel. Direct services will increase journey opportunities and increase rail modal share.

Cardiff - Exeter services would attract more passengers between these major regional centres and reduce road congestion. They would also improve journey times and opportunities from Bridgwater and Weston-super-Mare to stations west of Taunton.

A Plymouth - Paignton service would link Devon's two largest conurbations, i.e. Plymouth (2016 est. population 264,000) and Torbay (2011 population 131,000). Both are major centres of tourism, while Plymouth is a university city.

13 (a) Which stations do you think should be a priority for improving accessibility ? Bridgwater, Cheltenham Spa, Dorchester West, Kemble, Kingham, Stroud, Torquay, Trowbridge, Weston-Super-Mare, Worcester Shrub Hill.

13 (b) Why ? ... The criteria should be high footfall, high holiday traffic, a concentration of mobility impaired people locally and a high proportion of elderly passengers. Torquay, a major resort with a large retired population, arguably meets all these criteria but its station has no lifts and only convoluted level access via a road bridge.

13 (c) What other improvements could help to make rail services easier to access and to use for all passengers ? ... Tiverton Parkway needs safer access by foot or cycle particularly from the Uffculme direction as there is no safe crossing point of the busy M5 slip roads.

Lynton to Barnstaple narrow gauge plans

Restoration of the 1' 11½" narrow gauge Lynton and Barnstaple railway is gathering pace. The short section from Woody Bay to Killington Lane opened to passengers in 2006 and there is now a realistic prospect of an extension to Blackmoor Gate.

Following the application No 62/50/16/001 dated 18th February 2016 they now have planning permission from Exmoor National Park to reinstate the railway line between Killington Lane and Blackmoor Gate. This will give a running distance of almost 4¼ miles.

If the reopening succeeds, it will demonstrate that it may not be so difficult to reopen many more disused railway lines, at least in regard to the engineering.

Top photo, shows the well cleared cutting on the northern approach to Parracombe station. There is still a house on the station site behind and an outbuilding (Middle Photo). A platform shelter still survives adjacent to the road. Bottom photo, the south end of the Parracombe station site view towards Blackmoor Gate.



Picture Gallery



1) On Monday 16th October 2017 a class 159 heads away out of Honiton with the 15:25 Exeter to Waterloo. It is an 11 minute journey to Axminster and down trains from Waterloo are passed within 10 minutes at the west end of the 3 mile Axminster loop. Therefore this part of the route has a 3 trains per hour capacity each way.



2) On Saturday 6th May the 14:43 from Barnstaple heads across Salmon Pool level crossing as it nears Crediton. There are two separate tracks here and Okehampton line trains use the former down line which is the nearest to the camera.

The two parallel lines could be restored to a normal 3½ mile double track section between Crediton and Yeoford. Trains are also restricted to 25 mph over the ungated Salmon Pool level crossing. An improved crossing with lifting barriers and line upgrade would save 1 minute on both Okehampton and Barnstaple journeys.



3) On Friday 5th January 2018 the 10:51 from Truro arrives at Falmouth Docks on time at 11:14. The station closed on 7th December 1970 when the replacement Falmouth Town station opened. However, trains continued down to the Docks to terminate on level track and many passengers just stayed on! The station was formally reopened on 25th May 1975.