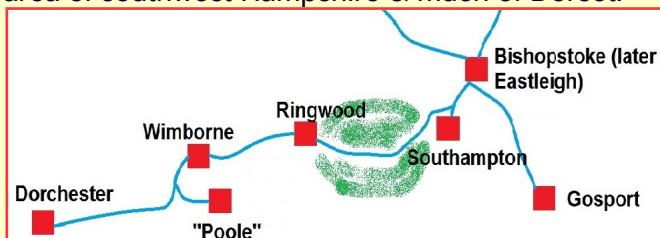


WEST MOORS AND ITS RAILWAY HISTORY

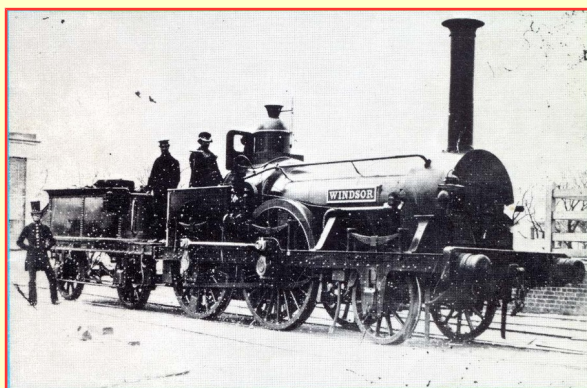
It's early in the nineteenth century: "West Moors" is a name used to define a particular area of the 'Great Dorset Heath' in this un-regarded corner of Dorset: a scattering of small farms and cottages dotted alongside minor waterways threading their way across the heath. Life had changed little for centuries past . . . and might not change for several decades yet, but in the early 1840s several local landowners, aided by Charles Castleman, a local solicitor, promoted the building of what became the first railway 'main line' in Dorset: the **Southampton & Dorchester Railway [S&DR]**. Opened in 1847, it was engineered by Captain William Moorsom, an expert in the building of cost-effective railways. It was his careful planning that ensured the maximum revenue return to the shareholders – and incidentally caused the line to pass through this small, insignificant spot on the map: to Captain Moorsom should be given credit for providing a 'focus' on which the modern West Moors would grow.

The connection with the rest of the national railway network at Southampton brought benefits to a wide area of southwest Hampshire & much of Dorset.



[The S & DR in 1847: "Poole" station is in fact on the Hamworthy peninsula; the green area is the New Forest.]

By 1858, a dramatic increase in annual railway movements triggered a clause in the original Act that required the line to be doubled-up.



There was never a 'halt' in the classic manner (i.e. single, un-staffed platform, trains stopping on request), but trains *were* halted here for offloading of carriages and horses of the wealthy-few so they could travel overland more directly to the new, prestigious resort of ' *Bourne Mouth* '.

Later, in 1866, a line was built to bring traffic from Salisbury, Fordingbridge and Verwood, south through West Moors (where it joined the S & DR) and on to Wimborne & Bournemouth. This was the **Salisbury & Dorset Junction Railway [S&DJcR]**

To service the new junction a single-storey building was opened in 1867 to act as a goods-handling facility, which by the mid-1870s had been upgraded to a fully-functioning station with resident Station Agent (later Station Master) and a second level was added to the building. The population of the district within a couple of miles or so of the Junction was only 300 – and the **London & South Western Railway [L&SWR]**, which had taken over the S&DR in 1848, were reluctant to fund the building. However, enough goods business was handled (e.g., Stewarts Nurseries) to justify the outlay.

Bournemouth's population grew dramatically during the 1870s and 1880s. In the 1881 census, the number of residents accredited to that town had increased to around 17000, a three-fold change over the previous ten years. The main line running through West Moors, together with the 'feeder' Salisbury line experienced brisk business – both passenger and goods. For example, bricks and other pottery-based products from kilns around Verwood and elsewhere were in high demand to service the building trades in the resort town. The railways turned a decent profit – the classic railway signalbox to control the junction made its appearance about now; previously a man had stood on a raised platform with signal flags or used a single tall signal to control the trains – switching the points manually.

By 1891 the local population within the 'modern' parish of West Moors was tiny – about 200 people were resident, spread across no more than 50 dwellings. And away from the cluster of habitation around the Station, these were rather sparsely distributed. The community did boast a small general store though (George & Ann Frampton) and next door there was a small 'National' school & chapel – the school mistress was Ann Frampton's mother. The image below shows the shop in the early 1890s – it had existed since the 1860s.

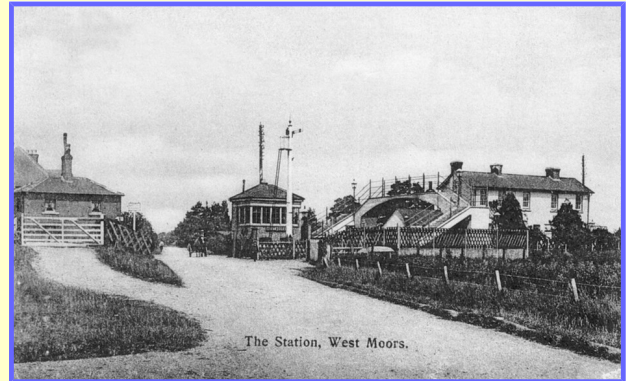


In 1893, the final leg of the modern-day main line through Poole and Bournemouth was completed; however, far from downgrading of our railway, it, along with West Moors thrived!



Here in the village, a church and school was built in the late 1890s (see image above - replacing the earlier, smaller buildings) and the first phase of residential development on former heathland around and to the north of St. Mary's parish church began. This in turn served to attract others to buy land and build – this time to the south of the railway and by 1901 the population of West Moors had grown to around 300 – across 70 or so properties.

The Edwardian period was a 'Golden Age' both for the wider railway network and for West Moors. Shops were built along Station Road (south of the railway), more houses too, especially at the western end of Pinehurst Road, along Avon Road and in Moorlands and Glenwood roads – as well as further building closer to the railway. A new 'Railway Hotel' was built opposite the Station, replacing a combined Smithy/'Railway Inn' which had stood where Ashurst Road now leaves Station Road.



Railway services were excellent; the village became the centre of commerce for a wide area. At one time no fewer than six coal merchants collected fuel from the railway yard and distributed it around the area; post & newspapers were delivered to the Station – with the post office at one time housed in one of the railway cottages close to the junction. And of course farm produce was 'exported' via the railway – much of it going to Bournemouth. There were even special services to connect with excursions to and from Swanage – a popular outing of the day.

Because pedestrians were being held up by the railway crossing, in 1902, after many complaints by West Parley parish council, a reinforced-concrete footbridge was cast on site and erected close to the crossing to allow folk to safely cross the track – one of the first of its kind erected in this country.

By the outbreak of the First World War, West Moors was blessed with a variety of shops along Station Road – sufficient to cater for most needs. For other requirements, the railway provided the means of travelling to Ringwood, Wimborne, Poole and Bournemouth. And London could be reached by two routes: north via Salisbury or east via Southampton.



The Great War (1914-18) had little impact upon the railway locally, but the aftermath did. Soldiers returning from France who had been trained to drive and maintain motor vehicles soon provided themselves with war surplus goods and passenger vehicles and started to compete with the railway; a long slow decline in rail usage dates from this time.



In 1923, the government forced a 'grouping' of the many and varied railway concerns then providing services across Britain; after over 80 years, the L & SWR was absorbed into the newly created **Southern Railway** – remembered today for its green coaching stock and 'bullseye' station name boards.



During the 1920s and 1930s, despite occasional problems in the wider economy, West Moors continued to grow steadily: by the early 'thirties', the local population was about 1200 and the first signs of development close to the Ringwood Road were seen. Ferndown was also growing – fast! It overtook West Moors about this time with respect to facilities and population – and after local lobbying, the station name was changed to **West Moors for Ferndown!** Railway traffic though continued to lose out to the greatly improved roads – which were being surfaced to a higher standard. With the growth of organisations such as the AA and RAC, the increased availability of filling stations / garages (the Dear brothers garage on Ringwood Road and the Baker brothers on Station Road both date from this era), and some excellent and relatively cheap maps and 'county guides' being printed, more and more of the 'middle class' of England moved away from the railway. Local goods business also lost out to the increasingly reliable, flexible and cheaper lorries.

The Second World War (1939-45) brought an abrupt halt to residential building. For the six years of hostilities, the United Kingdom became an armed camp – all public services were 'tuned' to one aim: to fight total war. The railway system played a pivotal (though largely unsung) part in all this. From a few days before the outbreak of war, evacuation trains were run to local stations – and an enormous amount of goods and military / essential personnel traffic passed this way – including the Royal Train!

There was already a small British army fuel & ammunition depot on Gundry's Inclosure (to the NE of the village) and in 1943, the US Army began the task of expanding this to supply fuel to units taking part in the 'D-Day' invasion. West Moors was one of six such depots across southern England – and arguably the most vital. Huge amounts of fuel & lubricants were brought in by rail (to a hurriedly constructed set of sidings off the main line), then offloaded onto lorries to supply units in training – and later for the invasion in June 1944. This was of course a highly dangerous business.



With the war won, the railways returned to peacetime operations but after many years of 'make-do-and-mend' maintenance, they found themselves unable to live an independent, commercial existence. Even if Labour had not pledged to nationalise the railways, it was inevitable that taxpayer support would be needed. 1948 saw the emergence of ' **British Railways [BR]** ' and West Moors, along with the rest of the local railway network, became part of BR Southern Region.

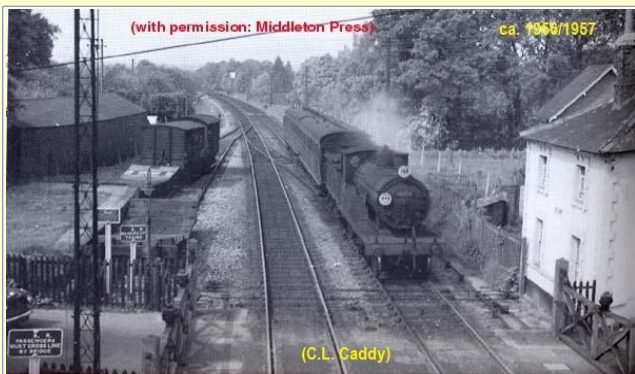
A few years of increased post-war passenger and freight movements by rail was enjoyed in the late 1940s, but the " New Elizabethan Age " saw a rapid growth of road traffic.

Long-distance lorries, local bus services, luxury coaches and reliable cars ate voraciously into the railway's revenues as living standards rose steadily. By 1955, when BR announced a 'Modernisation Plan', which would phase out steam traction, the local railway lines were losing money – heavily! The first 'rumblings' of closure were heard.



[Local scene in the 1950s: a 'push-pull' train is seen approaching the Station from Ringwood.]

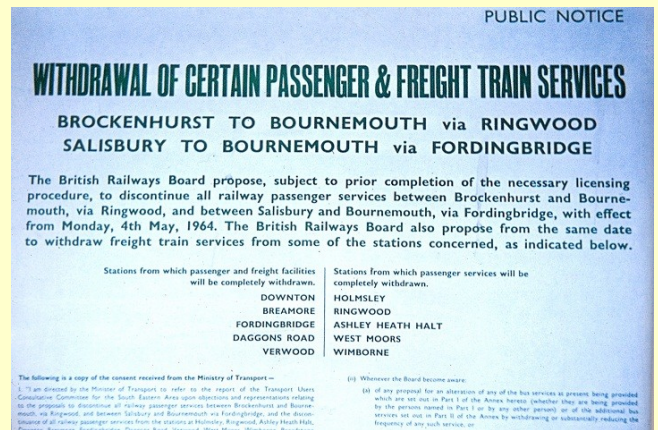
Running a railway was labour-intensive: each station had a full complement of staff; the signal boxes had a roster of signalmen, the crossing-lodges were all manned and 4-man permanent-way 'gangers' maintained relatively short lengths of track – one such was based here at the Junction.



[Another 1950s view, this time from the footbridge looking west (towards Uddens): showing the 'down-side' goods siding on the left and the crossing lodge on the right.]

All these operations were performed much as they had been for the past 100 years or more: Beeching's 'Axe' in 1963, filleting British Railways of hundreds of miles of unprofitable lines and closing scores of stations was inevitable.

Opposition to closure locally was somewhat muted given that by this time the passage of trains across Station Road and Newman's Lane was a great hindrance to motor traffic.



West Moors station closed to the general public after the last train pulled out around twilight on the first Saturday of May, 1964; the Salisbury line ceased routine operation but residual goods workings to and from Ringwood lingered until 1967. After that, only the MoD Fuel Depot (and a few 'enthusiasts' specials) provided occasional traffic along a single line from Wimborne – and even that came to an end in 1974



The station building lasted a few years more – as the track was pulled up and the ballast cleared. The crossing gates were removed. The old station was used as the local youth club for a time but eventually it too succumbed to the developers' bulldozers and Castleman Court now stands in its place. The only clue that we ever had a railway in this village is the crossing lodge – image above: It was the *first* railway building hereabouts – and it stands, rather incongruously amid later developments: a reminder of our important railway heritage.