

Wray Valley Trail Project - Some Stories

Note

These stories have been prepared as suggested content for the various media through which the fascinating history of the Wray Valley during the Victorian era might be brought to life. They have been grouped together to fit in with waypoints along the old railway line from Bovey Tracey, through Lustleigh and on to Moretonhampstead. They have been written to cater for the fact that one of the primary audiences will be families and children, many from out of the area and hence unfamiliar with both its detailed features and, certainly, with little or no prior knowledge of its Victorian history. Its intent is to present these stories in straightforward and accessible language.

Bovey Tracey

During Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), there was a big reduction in Devon's rural population, where farm labour almost halved from 81,000 in 1851 to 44,000 in 1901, as agricultural decline and the booming industrial revolution caused people to move away to towns and cities. But the arrival of the Moretonhampstead and South Devon Railway in 1866 helped Bovey Tracey to buck this trend and the little town thrived as the reduction in its farming population was more than offset by growth of jobs in craft and industry, such as the local pottery and brickworks. Bovey Tracey's local shops and services expanded, creating work for carpenters, masons, smiths and traders.

The railway made it easier and more cost efficient for local products to be transported quickly to markets all over the country. There was a wide variety of goods leaving Bovey and the Wray Valley, such as timber from the Valley's woodlands, cattle (particularly from Moretonhampstead), rabbits, all sorts of farm produce, and general merchandise, such as pottery and earthenware products from the Bovey Pottery and the Great Western Pottery Brick and Tileworks at Heathfield. In the other direction came new middle class residents and tourists, drawn by the beauty of the Dartmoor countryside and the new easy transport links. All of this activity brought demand for shops and domestic servants to cater to this new clientele, while the increasing number of tourists provided welcome business to hoteliers and innkeepers.

The enthusiasm and dedication of influential members of the local gentry were vital to the successful planning and building of the railway. Local businessmen such as John Divett, one of the founders of the Bovey Tracey Pottery Company, and George

and Thomas Wills of Lustleigh, were 'movers and shakers' who played a big role in promoting the idea of a railway and securing the money to build it. The initial prospectus for the railway talked of the benefits of increased trade with the 'outside world', tourism and of improved communications. And, as the railway opened up the Valley to all the advances of the Victorian era's industrial and technological developments and ideas, many of these benefits were delivered.

The railway brought real growth in Bovey's tourism. The Union, Dolphin, and The Railway Hotels all ran horse-drawn carriage excursions to beauty spots on Dartmoor - by the 1890s 'there were soon over one hundred horses engaged on the tours during the summer months'.¹ Bovey was a favoured start point for trips to the moor, the 1898 *Black's Guide to Devonshire* noting that 'here, daily in summer, starts two sets of five-shilling circular coach excursions, so arranged to allow passengers from Exeter, Torquay, etc., to visit the best parts of the moor and return in the evening'.² And, in 1891, an article in the *Western Times* talked of an improved Great Western Railway timetable, 'enabling Messrs. Hellier and Joll, the enterprising coach proprietors, of the Dolphin Hotel, to arrange of somewhat more extended trips than those in their ordinary programme'.³

As an example of what was on offer, in the 1880s, the Dolphin Hotel's J.L.Joll was running trips on three days a week in summer, taking passengers from the 12.16 train from Newton Abbot on Mondays through the 'Lustleigh valley to Moreton, Blackingstone Rock, Tottiford and Kennick Reservoir...via Canonteign and the valley of the Teign. On Tuesdays, to Haytor, Hound Tor, Manaton and Becky Falls'.⁴ Tea ('meat or plain') was provided at the Dolphin Hotel at the end of the trip. It must have been a tiring and long day out, but a real occasion, as visitors dressed in their Victorian finery sat aboard their horse-drawn coaches, open to all the elements.

Hawkmoor Halt

As we move up the Wray Valley from Bovey Tracey along the path of the old railway line, the hills begin to rise and views of the moorland scenery become grander. Well before the Victorian age, the Reverend Edward Giddy, a Cornishman, travelling between 1812-1817, noted in his journal that 'The road leading to Moreton-Hampstead affords a great variety of beautiful scenery, it is carried through a fertile valley, enclosed with a succession of rocks and woods with a few breaks which open towards the downs...the ride has been pronounced by some persons to be the finest in the county'.⁵

Walking on the old railway line to the junction with Lower Knowle Road, we approach the site of the post-Victorian 'Hawkmoor Halt', a small stopping place on the railway. The Halt, which used to be on the south side of the current road at the

end of a cinder track running from the road bridge, was only ever a tiny structure with a small waiting room. Opened in 1931, the *Western Times* reported that it would 'meet a long-felt want. Situated one mile from Lustleigh...it will serve the village of Knowle and also prove a convenience for staff and patients of the Hawkmoor Sanatorium...Becky Falls, the well-known beauty spot, will be about three miles distant'.⁶

The Hawkmoor County Sanatorium had been founded in 1913 to care for patients with tuberculosis but, from 1948, its services were extended to include other chest ailments, thoracic surgery and provision of mental health services. While only three-quarters of a mile from Hawkmoor Halt as the bird flies, it was twice that distance by narrow, often steep lanes – not ideal for those suffering from respiratory complaints, or even their visitors! The hospital was closed in 1987.

Renamed 'Pullabrook Halt' in 1955 (after a nearby farm), the little station's life was, however, nearly over. Later that decade, the railway line was no longer considered to be economic and it was closed to passenger traffic in March 1959, eventually being closed completely between Bovey Tracey and Moretonhampstead in 1964, bringing to an end a history stretching back to the heyday of the Victorian railway-building era.

By the end of the nineteenth century, small mines such as Plumley Mine and Kelly Mine were active in the area, employing no more than ten men and boys on each site, but forming a significant local industry. 'Shining Ore' (micaceous haematite) occurs in thin veins, known as 'lodes', in the local granite. From the steep sides of the Wray Valley, horizontal levels, known as 'adits', were driven into the hill following the lode. The 'shining ore' was exported from the Valley and used in various applications, such as 'in cleaning fireplace grates, with the remainder sent to colour-grinders, who work it up with their paints. It has been sold at the Exeter Quay, carriage included, from three to five guineas a ton'.⁷ Adding the ore as part of corrosion-resistant paint was an important use in the industrial revolution which generated mass-production of iron and steel. The paint was used all over the world – on the Royal Albert Bridge over the Tamar, on the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and as far afield as Australia.

Plumley Mine, in existence by 1892, was located in the woods near Hawkmoor Hospital, to the east of the railway line. Controlled by the company R & J Dick of Scotland, local management was in the hands of Alexander Livingstone, whose home was at Brookfield, now in Lustleigh parish. In a letter to the *Western Morning News* in 1897, it was recorded that 'for nearly half a century, this mineral has been mined more or less continuously in several places adjoining the high road from

Bovey Tracey to Moretonhampstead, most conspicuously on the Kelly Estate'.⁸ The mine finally closed in c.1907.

A little nearer to Lustleigh, alongside the current A382 road, the Kelly Mine was the largest of these operations. Small-scale excavation of the ore at Kelly is recorded by 1797 and, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the land on which it stood was owned by the prominent Wills family of Lustleigh. By the end of Queen Victoria's reign in 1901, the mine was leased to the Scottish Silvoid Company and had thirteen workers. Production peaked at some 202 tons of refined ore in 1907, which was transported by a farmer's horse and cart to the railway station at Lustleigh. During this time, the miners doubled up as farm labourers, and were expected to help the farmer gather in his harvest, for which they were paid in cider!

In the peak year of 1901, there were 35 miners reported as working locally at the Kelly, Shaptor, Plumley and Hawkmoor Mines. Most were local men, and the Victorian housing estate at Brookfield (now in Lustleigh parish) had been built to house working men and their families. In 1901, several houses there were occupied by miners, for example, Samuel Hill, the 'captain' at Kelly Mine, and his twenty-one year old son, Jabez, who also worked there.

It is very important to say that all these former mine sites are on private property and should not be visited without permission. Underground workings are very dangerous and must not be entered. Kelly Mine is well preserved by the Kelly Mine Preservation Society, which is open on specified days. Details can be found at www.kellymine.co.uk.

Lustleigh

When the railway reached Lustleigh in 1866, it ushered in a new era, as Victorian technology, commerce and ideas flowed into the Wray Valley. In 1869, the *Western Times* newspaper was reporting that 'this old-fashioned village, isolated from the world for centuries is, thanks to an enterprising public and the Railway Company, just emerging into life again'.⁹ It added that it 'retains its ardent and romantic appearance, but nature having lavished upon its suburbs inimitable grandeur, especially at the Cleave, numerous visitors resort thither during the summer season, to enjoy its refreshing breezes and pleasant day's outing'. In short, by the start of the twentieth century, previously remote villages such as Lustleigh could aptly be described as taking their place in the wider world. Dartmoor was now clearly established in the public's eye as a picturesque and romantic gem - and very easy to reach by train.

The construction of the railway bisected Lustleigh parish, with the station at the heart of the village. Cecil Torr, who lived between 1857 and 1928, was a scholar and

gentleman who lived in the village for much of his life. He quotes his grandfather expressing the concerns that many people initially had about the railway, with 'raw and glaring' cuttings soon ruining the landscape.¹⁰ But, within a decade, these worries began to reduce, with Cecil Torr himself reporting favourably on the improvement: the 'cuttings and embankments...overgrown and covered with verdure', before adding 'one can hardly realise how hideous it looked (before)'. In many respects, a view began to emerge that the railway had, in fact, improved the landscape. Cecil Torr, who was a well-regarded classical historian, went so far as to say that the viaducts, such as those at Caseley Court and Lustleigh Mills, strode across the countryside with 'Roman grandeur' and that, had they been transported to Italy, 'artists would have flocked to paint them!'

As with other places in the Wray Valley, Lustleigh parish saw a gradual decline in farming employment during Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), although this was more than offset by growth in other activities. The local census returns show that by 1901 there had been significant growth in incoming people 'of independent means', together with more professional people (teachers, lawyers, etc.) and people working in service occupations. The scale of this change must have been great - in 1841 Lustleigh was a rustic village dependent on agriculture, with just one resident born outside Devon and hardly any more than ten miles away. But, by 1901, seventy-nine out of a census population of 384 had come from outside Devon.

Anticipated growth in tourism had prompted Thomas Wills, local gentleman farmer, landowner, and a director of the Moretonhampstead and South Devon Railway Company, to capitalise on the opportunity in 1864, two years before the railway's arrival. In the *Western Times*, he advertised 'To be LET with immediate possession...all that large and commodious HOUSE now known as 'GATEHOUSE', to be known as the 'CLEAVE HOTEL'...adjoining the proposed Lustleigh station...The fact of there being no licensed house within three miles renders this a desirable opening for an enterprising man'.¹¹

Between 1838 and 1905, the Victorian era saw an increase in the built environment of some 42% in Lustleigh parish, equivalent to about 5,700 square metres and mainly in domestic housing. To put it another way, that is roughly the size of a mixed modern development of about fifteen four-bedroom detached and thirty or so three-bedroom semi-detached houses. Fortunately, the village retained its original Celtic character, with a compact centre around the church and farmsteads and hamlets scattered around for several miles.

Some of the new houses were built in 'Torquay villa style', beyond the village centre on higher-ground plots with large gardens and far-reaching views. Incomers attracted to country life included retired Navy and Army officers, and those retiring

from service in Britain's far-flung colonies. The needs of working people (for example, those working at the nearby mines and quarries) were also taken into account, through the building of terraced houses at Brookfield.

Until mid-Victorian times, building was in a very traditional, so-called vernacular, style – long, low buildings with rendered granite or cob walls, and thatched roofs. But, after that, there came a much more planned design. Granite remained the main structural material but was worked to reveal its natural beauty, rather than covered in rendering. As you look around the village, you will see houses where red and yellow bricks 'dress' the windows, and the widespread use of slate which, of course, unlike thatch, required minimal maintenance and did not burn.

The Victorian period also saw the construction of new community buildings, with the Baptist Church (on the road to Pethybridge) being erected in 1853. A new school followed in 1876, reflecting the Victorian aspiration of free education for all, which replaced the much smaller school building, which is now the Old Vestry in the churchyard and home to the Lustleigh Community Archive. As you look at the Old Vestry, try and imagine how about forty children and their teachers managed to squeeze in there!

The railway also provided some rather unexpected business opportunities. In 1889, the *Western Morning News* reported that 84,000 pairs of clog soles, cut from local alder trees, were being produced for 'Lancashire operatives', the men behind this venture being 'two brothers, named Goodfellow; both very intelligent men'.¹² The newspaper went on to describe how the soles, in their rough state, were sent by rail to Manchester, after having been stacked to dry for three or four weeks. It noted that 'picnic parties who wander by the side of the River Wray will notice the pretty white tents, the wood fires, and the piles of small pieces of wood along its banks'. Here, at least, tourism and fair-scale industry appeared to co-exist in harmony.

Apart from tourists from further afield, the railway also helped local people get together for community events. In 1871, on Whitsun bank holiday, Newton Abbot's Methodist Free Church Mutual Improvement Society visited Lustleigh by train for their annual outing, the *Western Times* noting that 'many had never previously visited the mighty Cleave'.¹³ And, in the other direction, Lustleigh schoolchildren had a day at the Teignmouth seaside by train in 1894, having raised the money by putting on a village concert.¹⁴ By 1897, the annual show of the Lustleigh Horticultural Society was 'quite the event of the year in the pretty little village'¹⁵, drawing exhibitors and nurserymen by train from Torquay and Newton Abbot. The Bovey Handbell Ringers gave a performance, and there was dancing, sports, and an egg and spoon race for the children.

East Wray

The arrival of the railway brought an increase in the number of wealthy upper and middle class people keen to live in a beautiful rural area, while being able to enjoy excellent transport links to towns and cities in Devon and beyond. This gave rise to growth in the construction of often quite luxurious houses and villas in and around Lustleigh and Moretonhampstead. Fortunately, the local granite rock provided a suitable raw material which, after blasting, could easily be shaped for structural use.

Although the railway's promoters initially hoped that its arrival would generate granite traffic and income, it turned out that this never materialised to any great extent. Being very heavy and bulky, the economics of its transport by rail never really worked out, and Lustleigh station never had any facilities for handling stone. And so quarries around the Wray Valley were mostly used to supply local demand.

The East Wray Quarry was located on the hillside above the Wray Brook, to the east of the old railway line and the current A382 road. It is thought that its opening may have coincided with the construction of the railway line and its infrastructure (1864-1866), with the granite stone being used to supply material for bridges, culverts, viaducts and station buildings. In 1887, the quarry was being worked by John Greep but, by 1897, this had been taken over by a local man, William Painter, who also employed his sons in the business. The Painter family and several other masons are recorded as living in Lustleigh and its nearby housing at Brookfield.¹⁶

Moretonhampstead

When the Moretonhampstead and South Devon Railway finally arrived in the town in June 1866, it generated enormous excitement. The *Western Times* reported that 'At Moretonhampstead, on the platform, roadway and fields were congregated excited natives - moormen, their wives and children, who could scarcely believe the vision before them - a real railway train, with puffing engine and panting passengers, within half a mile of their homesteads'.¹⁷ The paper went on that the twelve mile railway line goes through 'romantic moorland scenery - beautiful as the wildest fantasy can imagine - for which Moreton is famous in these parts. The stations are of granite, which will ensure enduring structures, in keeping with the scenery'.

Another newspaper agreed that it was 'A grand day - the commencement of a new era...the special train, drawn by the engine 'Lion', was gaily decorated with flowers and evergreens'.¹⁸ It reported that, at Moretonhampstead station there were 'about a thousand inhabitants assembled to give the directors (of the railway company) a hearty welcome'. Not only was the railway seen as 'essential for the progress and

advancement of local business, but in giving opportunities to the tourist with his knapsack, the artist with his pencil, or the geologist with his hammer'. The Earl of Devon added that the railway would benefit 'another class of visitors – those who came to erect villas, thus promoting the prosperity of all' – here, he was talking about incomers, making Moretonhampstead and its surroundings their home.

The excitement of seeing at first hand the latest in Victorian transport technology in the middle of a deeply rural area clearly deserved a big party – and so there was! A procession, led by the Newton Rifle Corps Band, marched from the railway station to the town 'amid volumes of dust'. Flags and banners were displayed at every dwelling. At the White Hart Hotel and the White Horse, 'triumphal arches were thrown across the streets'. Tables along the streets 'provided tea and cake for over 1,250 women and children, while a similar number of men and boys were provided with cider'. It must have been quite some party!

Like the rest of the Wray Valley, between 1841 and 1901, the agricultural workforce in and around Moretonhampstead roughly halved in number, where agricultural recession in the 1840s and the draw of industrial jobs in the towns and cities were factors. This was partly offset by the rise of new types of employment, to which the railway contributed. Commercial activity increased, with more drapers, ironmongers, coal merchants, a newsagent, and a chemist, along with carpenters, masons and other tradesmen, catering to the new incoming residents, many of whom were of 'independent means'.

As in Bovey Tracey, there was also growth in the tourism and hotel businesses. For example, in 1869, three years after the railway came to town, Thomas Pollard, proprietor of the White Hart Hotel, was advertising in the *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette* that he had 'Large and Small Wagonettes and other Carriages and Horses ready at the shortest notice to convey visitors to Cranbrook Castle, Fingle Bridge, Chagford, Whiddon Park, Gidleigh Castle...Haytor Rocks, Becky Falls, and Lustleigh Cleave...at moderate charges'.¹⁹

Although the railway terminated at Moretonhampstead, its station also served as an important onward link to the nearby town of Chagford. In 1868, Henry Aggett, proprietor of the Three Crowns in Chagford, had established an omnibus service to take passengers between Moretonhampstead station and Chagford. The Great Western Railway absorbed the South Devon Railway Company in 1878, and there is evidence that a horse bus, subsidised by the railway company, was operating from the Chagford Globe Hotel in 1889.²⁰ Clearly, despite not having a railway station, the entrepreneurs of Chagford were determined to get their share of the local transport market and to ensure that Chagford would share in the growth of Dartmoor tourism.

Summarised List of References (These are specifically not full academic references)

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 - ⁴ *Western Times*, 20th July 1888
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 - ⁶ *Western Times*, 22nd May 1931
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 - ⁸ *Western Morning News*, January 1897
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 - ¹⁰ Rowe, J. (2001) in Crowdy, J. (ed.) *The Book of Lustleigh: Portrait of a Dartmoor Parish*
 - ¹¹ *Western Times*, 7th October 1864
 - ¹² *Western Morning News*, 10th May 1889
 - ¹³ *Western Times*, 1st June 1871
 - ¹⁴ *Lustleigh Parish Magazine*, September 1894
 - ¹⁵ *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette*, 3rd August 1897
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 - ¹⁷ *Western Times*, 29th June 1866
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 - ¹⁹ *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette*, 6th August 1869
 - ²⁰ Kingdom, A.R. & Lang, M. (2004), *The Newton Abbot to Moretonhampstead Railway*

Important Note: These stories draw substantially on the publication *In the Footsteps of the Victorians: Aspects of change in the Wray Valley and surrounding area 1837-1901* (2018), published by The Lustleigh Society and the individual authors who contributed essays to this book; Exeter, Short Run Press Ltd