

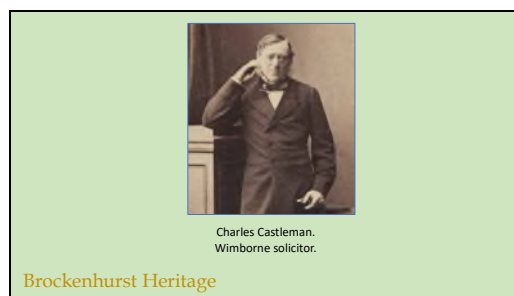
Slide 1



Brockenhurst is a prosperous village with amazing facilities. But so much is owed to the railway, without which we'd probably not have Brookley Road, three pubs (two directly built for the railway); the second of two churches, the hotels; the golf club and so much more.

But it was an accident. And it all started with:

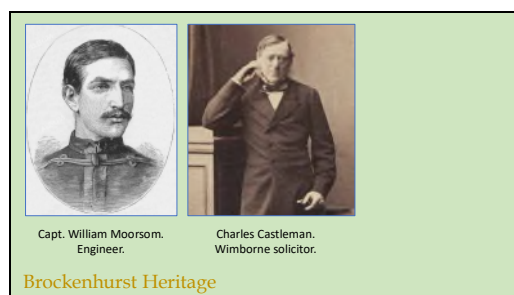
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Charles Castleman. He was a Wimborne Solicitor who also had an office in Wareham. He was fed up with the long ride or bumpy journey by coach.

He spotted that the railway had reached Southampton in 1840, and had the idea that it should stretch to the West, eventually to Exeter. He was keen it should serve as many communities along its route as possible. He appointed an engineer to survey the first half of the route to Dorchester, roughly half way to Exeter and draw up plans.

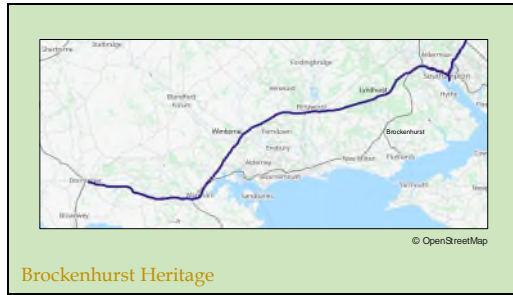
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William Moorsom had trained as an engineer in the Army. His father served at one of Nelson's Admirals at the Battle of Trafalgar, and William himself served in the Mediterranean, Canada and Ireland where he surveyed for the Ordnance Survey, then a military unit. He'd previously worked on the London to Birmingham Railway, and then Birmingham to Gloucester, where previous plans by Isambard Brunel were found to be too expensive for the shareholders.

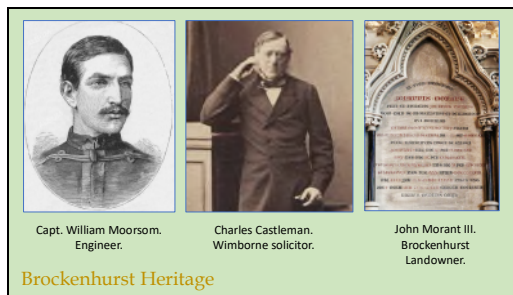
On Castleman's instructions he drew up the route to Dorchester.

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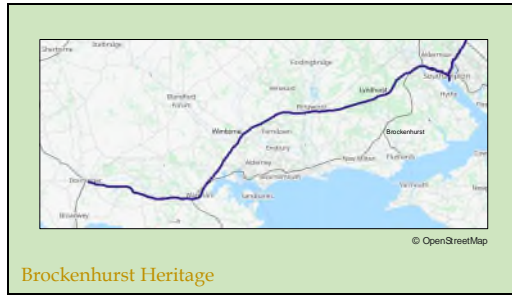
This is what William Moorsom proposed. A fairly direct route taking in as many towns and villages as it could. At that time both Ringwood and Wareham were the largest towns. Bournemouth for example was little more than a village on the coast and so it was ignored at that time. But you'll spot that this isn't the railway which was actually built – and here's the happy accident. The Commissioner for the Woodlands and Forests objected to the route through Lyndhurst as it was claimed the line would spoil the forest. Equally, Lyndhurst Parish Council, objected as they thought the railway would be a flash in the pan and they'd be left with a white elephant. So, William Moorsom rethought the route.

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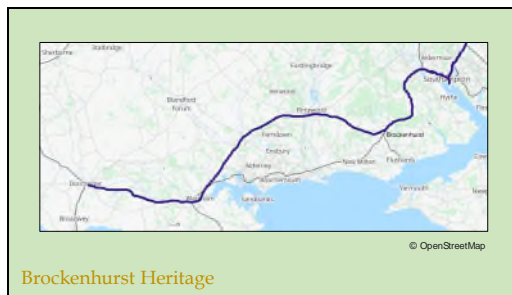
This brings us to the third person in the story; John Morant the Third. He was in his fifties, and as Lord of the Manor of Brockenhurst owned most of the land. William Moorsom had already negotiated with Mr Morant, as he also owned much of Ringwood through which the railway would pass. So, when he was approached by Moorsom he agreed to the rail crossing his land and going through Brockenhurst. On one condition – the majority of the trains should stop here, for the convenience of his family. It was a simple agreement, just one sheet of paper, and over the years successive railways have tried to turn it over, but without success. That's why so many trains from distance places such as Manchester, and the InterCity trains to Bournemouth stop here.

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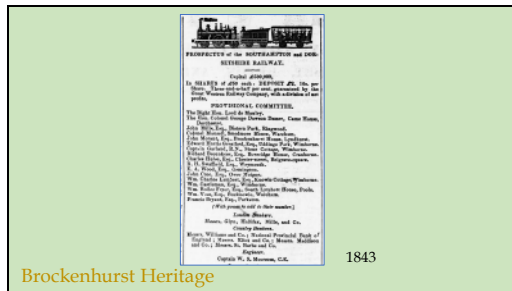
You'll recall this is the initial route favoured by engineer William Moorsom.

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And this is the route they ended up with. The line wiggled north and south on the map as on the ground, and became known after its founder as 'Castleman's Corkscrew'. But crucially, it came through Brockenhurst.

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Shareholders gathered – they needed to raise half a million pounds for construction. An initial meeting was held in Wimborne, then a key meeting at which the money was pledged, held in Dorchester. The principal backers travelled there – Charles Castleman was canny and wanted them to see what a painful journey by horse and carriage it was. You can see John Morant amongst the good and the great. The money was raised so construction could begin.

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Of course it was all very well to build a railway track, but someone had to supply the trains and operate it. Initially negotiations supported the London and Southampton Railway, by now renamed the London and South Western Railway, taking it on and splitting income with the Southampton and Dorchester Railway Company. But Castleman thought the L&SWR were demanding too high a percentage, so he approached the Great Western Railway as an alternative operator. This scared the original company – the thought that the rival GWR would then operate a rail service into their power base at Southampton. So, they backed down over the finance, and the London and South Western came in to operate the line. Indeed, only a couple of years later they bought out the Southampton and Dorchester Railway – primarily as they preferred a route to Exeter through Salisbury, and could now end the line at Dorchester and a short time later, Weymouth.


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The new railway, and Brockenhurst Station opened on June the first, 1847. Amazing to think only four years from the first idea and meetings to being open – eat your heart out HS2!

This was the original station building, where the ticket office is now, but was later demolished in 1888. You'll notice just one track, and passengers had to cross the line to get from one side to the other. So, when a train arrived, they all had to wait patiently until it had departed if they wanted to cross and go into the village. Along the route there were passing places for trains going in opposite directions, but the single track still held things up considerably. However, the engineer, Moorsom, the engineer, had cunningly left space for a second track, as he had on the bridges and crossings. So, when the Railway Inspectorate, the Government body which regulated railways, asked for a second track to be installed it all happened pretty quickly and certainly by 1852.

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1851

Brockenhurst Heritage

This is an early timetable – a few things of interest. The first is that there were just five trains in each direction each day – but they all stopped in Brockenhurst, as per John Morant’s agreement. The second thing is that this station is described as Brockenhurst and Lymington. There was no branch line then. Thirdly, the time from Brockenhurst to Southampton was just around three quarters of an hour. At that time the station was in the docks, called Southampton Terminus. From Brockenhurst, travelling to London meant a change of trains. Trains going further went into the station, and then had to be pulled out on the London Line. The direct service didn’t start until Southampton Central Station was built in 1895, and a track laid to bypass the terminus station by the modern-day football stadium.

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This is The Duke, designed by Joseph Beattie for the London and South Western Railway, the L&SWR’s mechanical engineer. It’s one of six engines built in Manchester in 1852 for the new line, and the route to London. It was noted for its efficiency at using coal as well as speed – as demanded by the railway companies – their interest was money! Perhaps that’s why they didn’t pay for a cabin for the driver and fireman. On the flat maximum speed 40mph, falling to 25mph on inclines with six passenger carriages. These were a first class carriage, three second, and two third class. In third class the passengers sat on wooden benches.

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Brockenhurst Heritage

1855

I just mentioned Lymington and in 1855 local business people and land owners got together to fund the branch line. The 'Lymington Railway' opened in 1858 as far as Lymington Town station, though the station building itself was ten years later. The line was extended to the harbour and ferry in 1884, when the London and South Western Railway bought out the private Lymington company. Originally the line was promoted to shareholders by the return on cash for transporting sea salt – but the Cheshire mines took away Lymington's trade. Instead, as well as passengers, milk was a major commodity, bound for London, and with it came wonderfully named places such as Milking Pound Bottom near Shirley Holms.

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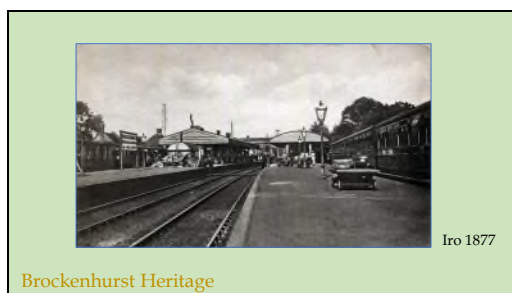


Brockenhurst Heritage

1870

Brockenhurst in 1870 was largely undeveloped. But the railway had already had some impact as this map shows the gathering of buildings around the station. One pub, the Bat and Ball had been so close to the tracks when the railway was built that smoke filled its rooms. So, it was knocked down in the middle of the decade and the Morant Arms was built further back. Along the Lyndhurst Road from there was the Railway Inn – which we know as the Snakecatcher. This is just before building began in Avenue Road – for example cottages for the station workers, and later a grand Station Master's house.

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Brockenhurst Heritage

Iro 1877

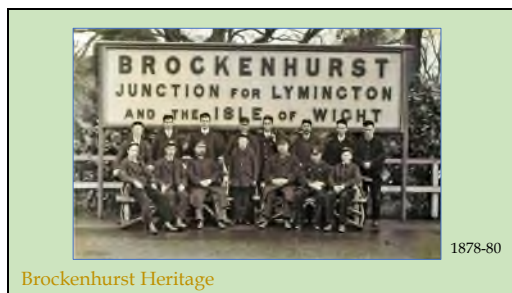
None the less, even then the Brockenhurst Station is recognisable. The train on the right is a branch line service to Lymington. If you look closely you can see the porter awaiting an up – that is Southampton bound – train. The name plate says 'Brockenhurst Junction for Lymington'. It's not clear whether this is the sign replacement which changed the village's name. Previously Brockenhurst had not had the 'c'. But it changed about then and by repute either stations signs were mis-spelt, or a clerk at Waterloo ordered tickets with the 'c' inserted. Even today places such as the golf club, and Brokenhurst Park retain the original.

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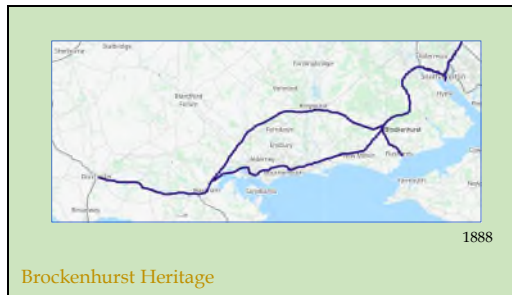
The lady on the left is Julia Margaret Cameron. She was a noted Victorian photographer who lived on the Isle of Wight – indeed next door to Alfred Lord Tennyson who's the central picture. Her house was on the south coast some three miles from Yarmouth and she used both this rail station, and the ferry frequently. She began her photography later in life when she and her husband, who was a tea planter in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka returned to Britain for a time and her daughter bought her camera. Soon the good and the great were flocking to her for portraits – the gentlemen on the right is Charles Darwin. In 1876 she came to Brockenhurst to wait for a son, arriving by train from Sri Lanka. The weather was dreadful and the station staff took her into the warm office and made her tea. In gratitude, Julia Margaret gave the station some of her pictures, which hung at that time in the waiting room. They were copied in the 1930's by the rail company, because they wanted to keep the originals safe. Sadly, we think they were destroyed in the war, not least financially as each original is now worth more than fifty thousand pounds. Currently the Friends of Brockenhurst Station and Hampshire Archives are restoring the pictures once again as part of the Rail 200 project, and they will return to display in the ticket office.

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These are the senior staff by the Brockenhurst Junction sign. By the mid 1870's the station employed some 70 staff. As well as the ticket and office staff, there were porters, and for the siding's, engine drivers and shunters. There were also personnel to open and close the level crossing, and operate the station signals.

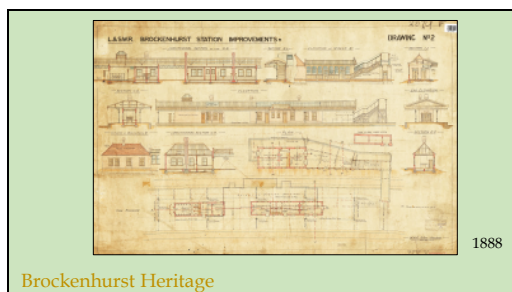
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The next big development was 1888.

Bournemouth and Christchurch had blossomed and were now significant towns, so the old route, via Ringwood was no longer suitable. So, a new line was built – today it's the main line. It passed through Sway, New Milton and Hinton Admiral where the land owner, Sir George Tapps-Gervis-Meyrick, was friend of John Morant. Mr Morant persuaded Sit George to allow the rail across his land in return for the building of a station – which is how Hinton Admiral, which was then in the middle of the countryside, came about.

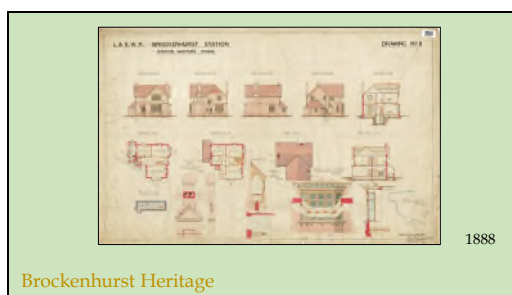
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The 1888 line also saw Brockenhurst Station redeveloped. The original ticket office and station masters' house was demolished, and a new ticket office built together with a bridge over the platforms. That new ticket office is what we still use some 140 years later.

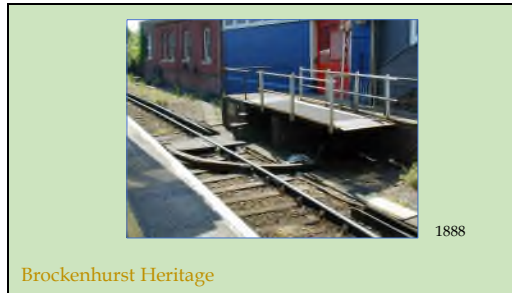
Elsewhere a turntable for engines was built, on the far side of the railway, opposite the end of Partridge Road, and the sidings were expanded including a parcel shed, now used as the Italian restaurant.

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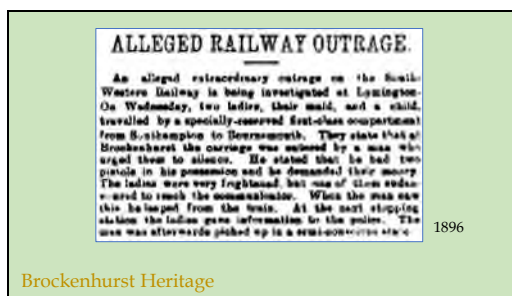
The station master was by now a senior figure in the village. The station was now the largest employer in the village with over 100 staff, and to match his status the railway built a new house for their manager in Avenue Road.

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Another 1888 innovation was this – a traverser bridge. Other than the stairs there was no way onto the platforms which for parcels or porters with trolleys was a nuisance. So, this bridge was installed, which could be swung out over the tracks by the ticket office to at least provide access to platforms one and two.

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But not everything bought by the railway was beneficial to the village. Crime was made easier by the prospect of a quick escape. Indeed, this incident in 1896, was one of several by the same criminal who became known as the Brockenhurst First Railwayman – a nod to previous 'highwaymen'. He's jump into a carriage at the last minute – in those days they weren't connected – and rob passengers before jumping out around Woodlands as the train gathered speed. This was his last escapade though as he misjudged the jump, and was knocked unconscious by the fall, by when the police arrived. There was other station related crime. Twice a year the horse races at Balmer Lawn attracted up to twelve thousand visitors, arriving by train, for the day. Pick pockets had a field day, and the Police would be kept very busy around the station.

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At the other end of the social scale, as well as the railway company building sidings the new money'd family at Rhinefield, the Walker-Munros, invested. They built Rhinefield House, and later St Saviour's church from Purbeck stone, and paid for their own siding to deliver it from Swanage. They were hugely wealthy, the money coming from Nottinghamshire coalfields which Mabel Walker-Munro's family owned. This is their collection of cars at the turn of the century. But they also had their own railway carriage, kept in their siding. When they wanted to travel to London the train halted for an extra few minutes, and their private carriage was linked on the back to take them to town.

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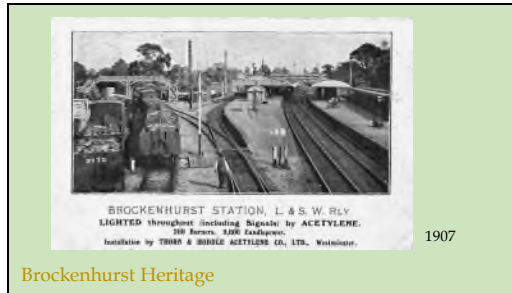
By now Brockenhurst was very busy and employed around 140 staff. One reason is reported as the need to split trains here – by now ten carriages weren't uncommon especially on freight and postal trains. The engines were still modestly powered and between London and Brockenhurst there weren't many hills. But beyond Brockenhurst, particularly towards Dorchester, the hills meant the engines struggled. So, the trains were split here and pulled onward separately, to allow them to get up the hills. You can see the sidings on the left – nowadays that's the station car park. In the background also you can see the building of Robert Bradford's stables.

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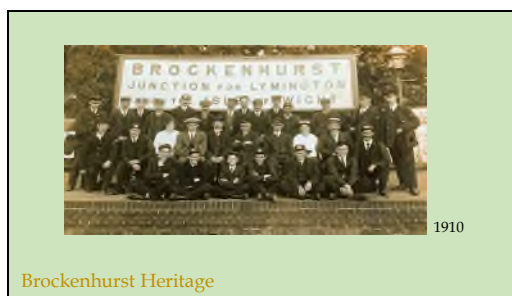
The rail had brought prosperity not just in terms of jobs, but opening up the New Forest to visitors. In the 1900's hotels including the Balmer Lawn, Forest Park, and the former Brockenhurst Hotel in Rhinefield Road (now flats near the Catholic Church) opened. People came to stay and enjoy the forest. They liked to ride, and Mr Bradford, who also farmed at Bridge Farm, rented liveried horses for day excursions. He liked to keep check on those who hired the horses not least as many came from London just for the day, and hadn't a clue about horses. So, he built a flat roof on his house by the station in Auckland Place, where he had a greenhouse. He'd sit here and watch the riders through a telescope – although the greenhouse has gone, as have the stables of course, you can still see the flat roof today. Beyond the stables was another source of village income – the cattle market – where Auckland Avenue is today. You may not realise it but if you approach the station down the short slope from Auckland Place, through the gate, this is where the cattle would be walked to clamber into wagons to be taken away.

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Brockenhurst was always modernising at a time of innovation. Gas lighting was introduced – it would be another twenty five years until electricity reached the village. Although the Brockenhurst Gas Company was now producing gas for the village from its works at the far end of Sway Road, the station produced its own acetylene gas for lighting.

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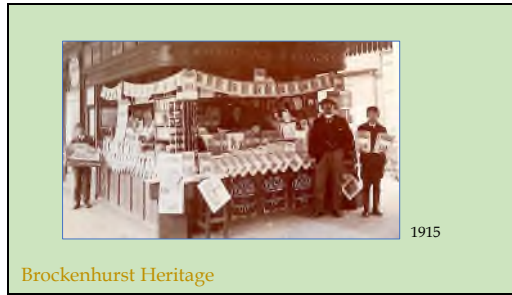
This picture is interesting as it's not just the senior staff but some of the young people who found employment – the youngest would have been just fourteen years old, and many spent their entire working life with the railway. Most lived locally, and their income helped Brockenhurst grow, established banks, shops and other businesses, and led to the building of homes such as Railway Cottages in Avenue Road.

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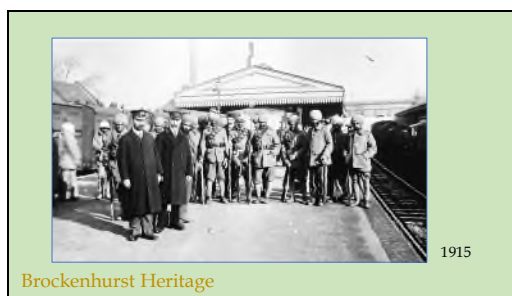
As we approached the First World War, Brockenhurst Station was a key place for lots of related activity. Large numbers of soldiers passed through on their way to training camps at Wilverley, Hincheslea and Setley. There was also a new airfield at Boldre, training the first pilots. Some of the aircraft arrived by rail as here – if you look the building behind is what was the Morant Arms by the level crossing, and now flats.

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The station even boasted its own newsagents run by WH Smith. You can see the ticket office behind – now this is the coffee shop. The papers headlines relate to the outbreak of war, and news from France.

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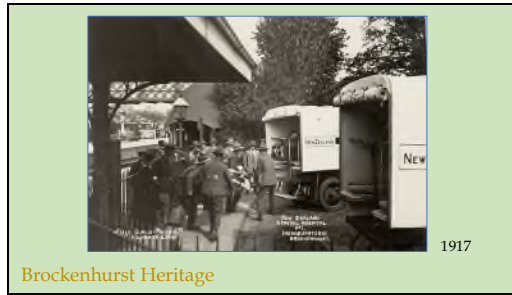
As many will know, Brockenhurst became the base for military hospitals. This was because of its transport links, availability of hotels for the hospital wards, and the favourable climate and clear air. The first to arrive were wounded Indian soldiers – bound for the Forest Park Hotel, the Balmer Lawn, and a new, tented hospital at Tile Barn near St Nicholas Church.

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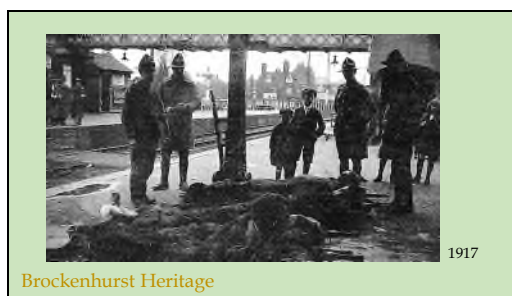
This in turn bought Royalty, and in November 1914, King George V and Queen Mary visited, arriving by train. They toured the hospitals and had lunch at Brokenhurst Park with the Morant family. Queen Mary requested a roast dinner – the Morant's replied that as there was a war on, she'd have Shepherd's Pie like everyone else. And she did. Today's Meerut Road – a place in India where many soldiers came from – commemorates the visit.

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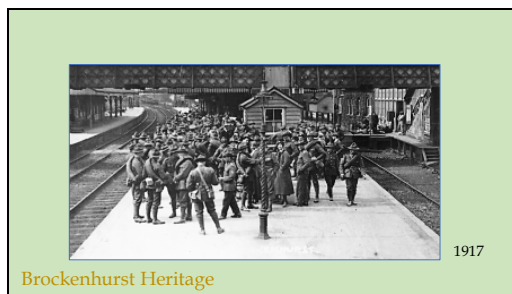
The Indian units were not happy with the northern European climate and being so far from home, and were posted in 1916 to Mesopotamia – now Iraq. In their place came New Zealand soldiers. They developed the Tile Barn site with pre-fabricated buildings replacing tents, and this became, indeed the village became, the New Zealand No 1 General Hospital. Soldiers would arrive by ferry in Southampton, and travel onward by train to Brockenhurst.

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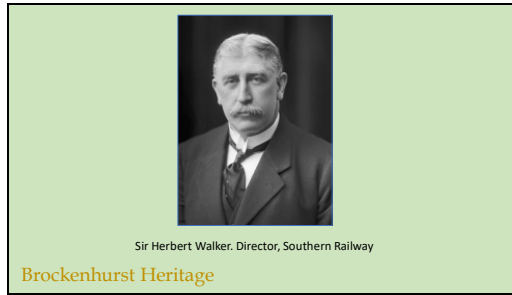
Trains were specially adapted to take stretchers, and the treatment included both physical injuries, and mental harm, what we now call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, at the Balmer Lawn Hotel. Many soldiers returned to the front. Others though returned to New Zealand, and then and later a few took brides from the village.

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Some 23,000 soldiers were treated in Brockenhurst, arriving and departing through our station. They were familiar in the community and had their own club, the Kia-Ora club (it means 'be well') near the cross roads in the village centre. 93 soldiers died despite the efforts of skilled, and mainly New Zealand medical staff, and are buried at St Nicholas. Sadly, their journey through our station was the last they made.

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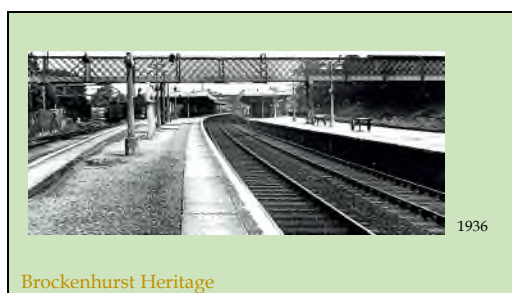
In 1923 the Southern Railway took over the London and South Western Railway. The company was led by this gentleman, Sir Herbert Walker, who'd started his work in the 1880's as a ticket clerk at Euston Station in London. He had a profound effect on Brockenhurst Station, as with the whole of the Southern Railway. He was a moderniser, and inheriting what was often Victorian buildings and trains he sought improvements. One was electrification - starting with London – and indeed it didn't reach Brockenhurst until the 1960's. But he valued the countryside also, which is why the Southern Railway installed a third electrified line system, rather than overhead wires and gantries.

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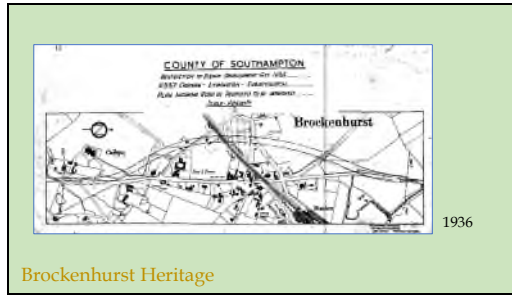
Under Sir Herbert Walker the station underwent renovation. The office and waiting room on platforms 3 and 4 were built in the art deco style, and electric lighting was installed – with standard platform lamps used up and down the railway.

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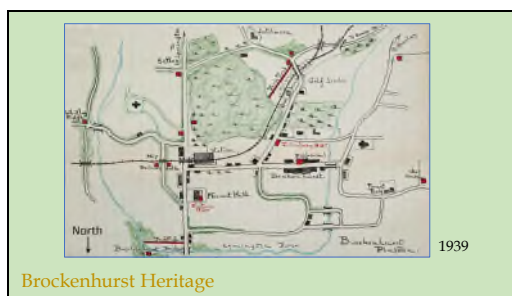
The platforms were also lengthened by half as much again towards Black Bridge to accommodate ever longer trains. At the same time, Hampshire County Council gave consideration to removing level crossings which could hold up both road and rail traffic.

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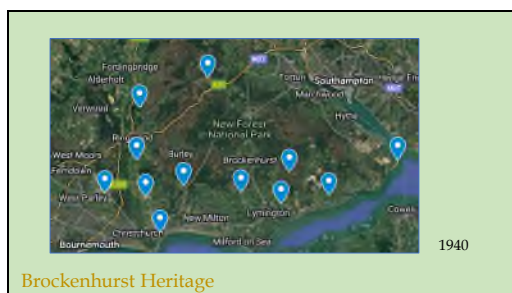
This was the plan for Brockenhurst. In fact, most of the level crossings at Totton and Ashurst were largely replaced – the bridge by the Happy Cheese as you go into Ashurst is one example. And in Brockenhurst this was the proposal. The land was bought – but the Second World War stopped the project, which was never revived.

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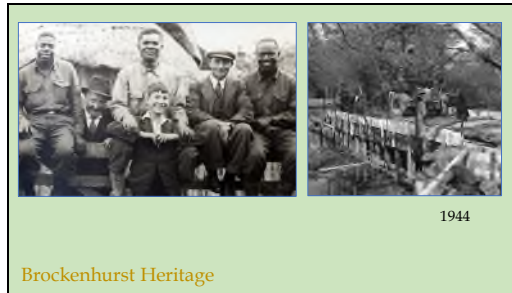
As war came again to Britain, Brockenhurst played its part with the formation of the Home Guard. This was the plan, as you'll see it's upside down with North at the bottom. The red dots are look-out and machine gun posts and similar. You can see their concentration around the station, and the railway at the end of Sway Road, a sign of the rail's key importance. There was even a quarter mile long tank trap built in the woods near Latchmoor. The railway itself had a separate home guard unit just to protect trains and stations. And Brockenhurst played a different role for the special forces being trained at Beaulieu. In Brockenhurst these secret agents learned both how to drive a train, and also what the weak points were to blow them up.

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Brockenhurst Station expanded considerably. More sidings were built between the station and the Sway Road bridge, and day and night the site was busy. At first it was builders and construction material for the New Forest airfields, followed by supplies and ammunition. All Southern Railway's storage was at Eastleigh, and by splitting it with Brockenhurst, it avoided the risk of an enemy attack destroying the infrastructure in just one place. Brockenhurst was largely spared, but one raid dropped bombs in the fields behind the station, narrowly missing an ammunition train which had just pulled in. That could have re-modelled Brockenhurst considerably – and you can still see the craters today if you walk across Black Bridge.

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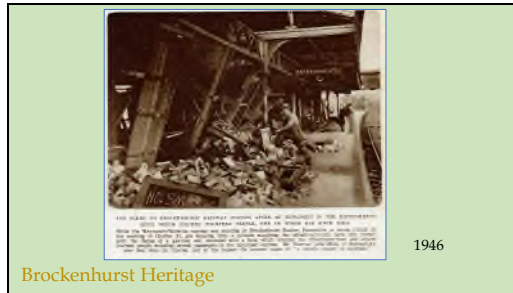
Then came D-Day. In preparation many of the local roads were reinforced – the bridge pictures is Balmer Lawn, and if you've ever wondered why the road dips through the bridge, it's to allow for the military lorries. The Lymington Branch line wasn't judged to be up to standard, so American engineers rebuilt the embankments and sections of track. Then came the soldiers – as well as military headquarters in the village there was a large camp for soldiers at Royden Woods, and another for Americans in Brokenhurst Park, entered via Mill Lane. The soldiers were under strict instructions not to fraternise – but local families invited them in for conversation, tea and the chance of a hot bath. The children especially liked the Americans – they had candy! And then, overnight on June 4th 1944, they vanished.

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But, despite escaping in the war, tragedy was to come just a year later. The tea room on platform one and two was destroyed when one of the gas canisters to supply the tea urn exploded. They were stored in the cellar under the room. About thirty people were injured, fourteen seriously, including the tea room manager, Norman Mills, who died from his wounds shortly after. The London bound train from Weymouth had just arrived when the disaster happened, and bricks and glass went through the carriage walls, and some out of the far side. The station master took charge – he ordered the damaged carriages to be uncoupled – and the rest of the train, with some of the lightly wounded passengers who opted to go on, arrived in London some 23 minutes late. The Southern Railway apologised to passengers for the delay.

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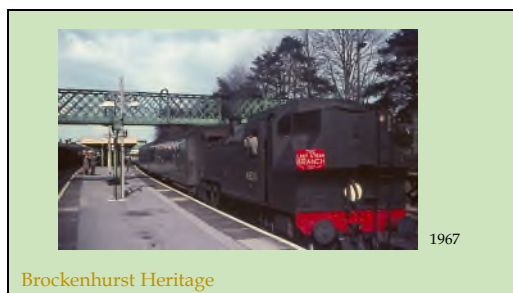
The story made the national papers – this is from the Illustrated London news. If you look today, you'll see that the brick work and the windows on the second building along the platform are different from the first, as the result of the explosion and subsequent repairs. The door to the cellar still exists, in floor in the corner of the waiting room. Two years later the railways were nationalised and the Southern Railway became British Rail's Southern region.

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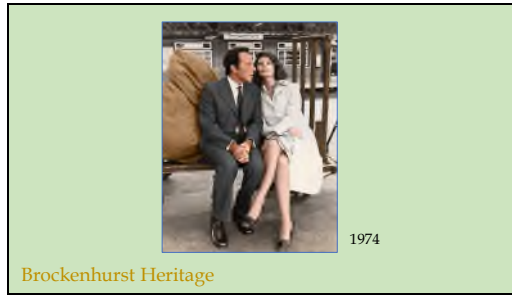
Brockenhurst continued to prosper. The Bournemouth Belle was the train of note, carrying many VIP's, emergent show business stars and others to Bournemouth for holidays. Some Bournemouth Belle trains stopped – in the 1950's for example it was chartered by Lord Montagu for his sister's wedding, and later the Prime Minister Clement Attlee passed through with many dignitaries when he opened the Fawley Oil Refinery. Thanks to the Morant contract, most trains did still stop here though, and right up to the 2000's there were routes to places such as Aberdeen, Newcastle and Manchester direct from Brockenhurst. Today only the Manchester route remains, and despite efforts, that only stops a couple of times a day.

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Another result of Beeching was the replacement of steam. In July 1967, third rail electrification finally reached Brockenhurst and beyond, and the last steam train ran on the main line on the tenth of July. The year also saw the last steam engine pulled train on any branch line to run from Brockenhurst to Lymington. Normally, as the last train of the day it would have stayed in Lymington, but she then returned, empty to Brockenhurst. If you want to see this steam engine, she was totally restored, and now runs on the Watercress Line at Alton.

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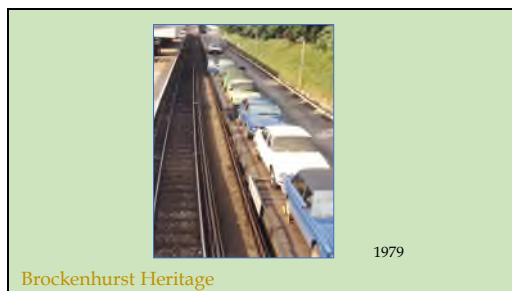
Hollywood came to the station in 1974, with a retelling of the classic film Brief Encounter. Richard Burton and Sophia Loren played the leads. However, the action was set in Winchester and the station boards had to be changed for filming. Not unnaturally this confused passengers arriving here, so filming was interrupted frequently as a train approached and the signs had to be changed back to Brockenhurst.

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The film wasn't a success in Britain – perhaps the original is too well known and liked. But abroad – in places as far apart as Japan and Iran, the new Brief Encounter went down a storm. It's odd to think there are people in those countries who are familiar with Brockenhurst, even though they call it 'Winchester'.

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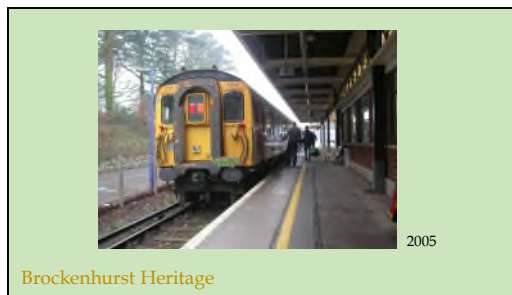
Another feature of the 1970's was the Motorail terminal, one of only a handful in the country. Cars could be driven onto a train, with the drivers and passengers boarding a separate carriage at the back of the train. At the end of the journey the cars would be driven off – it's said the local windscreen repairers did a roaring trade due to all the windows broken by stones thrown up from the track.

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Brockenhurst's prime link was from Stirling in Scotland which was an overnight route. Passengers could use normal seats or travel in a sleeper coach. When they arrived here, they'd be given breakfast in the station buffet, while waiting for their cars to be unloaded. Sadly, the train network, and particularly motorways were developing rapidly, and the service ended in 1981.

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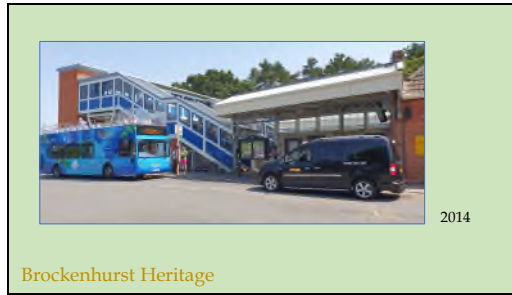
As I mentioned, the Lymington branch line was the last to have steam engines in 1967. She was also the very last line to have 'slam-door' carriages – the doors were pulled shut (literally slammed) by passengers. This was after they'd been withdrawn from the main line use, and the Lymington branch needing new rolling stock, it was designated a 'heritage line' to allow these coaches to be used. The service was finally withdrawn, and the doors went automatic in 2010.

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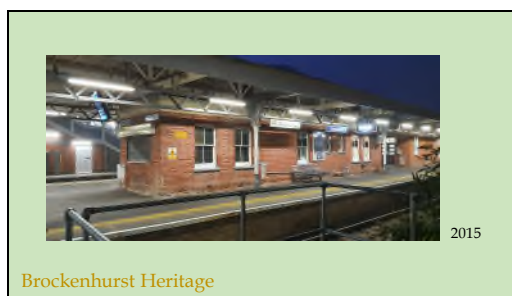
In 2009, Brockenhurst was judged to be the best medium size station in the whole of the UK, quite an accolade both for the staff and the village.

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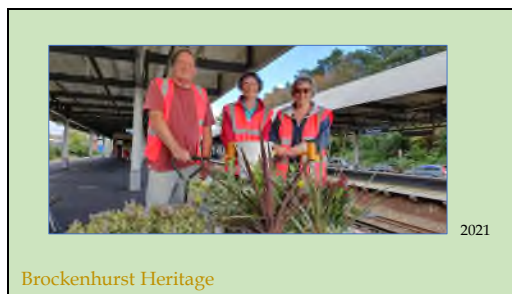
In 2014, improvements including passenger lifts were made costing £4.6 million. This was the biggest project since 1936. The improvements meant people with access requirements could go step free from car park to platform. Previously they'd had to travel to Southampton or Bournemouth to use a lift to cross the tracks to platforms three and four. A consequences of the change though was the removal of the famous traverser bridge, but again it's been preserved and is on a heritage line in Kent.

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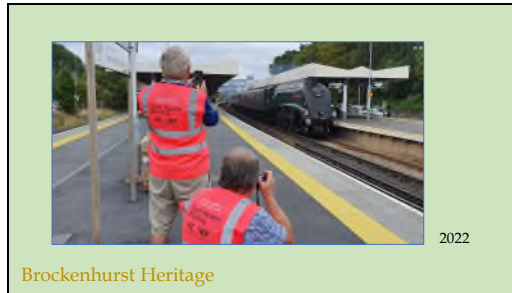
Lighting and other changes were made to modernise the station at the same time. At this time the railway was operated by South West Trains, but in 2017 the South Western Railway took over. It's operated the line until now.

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There's now a Friends of Brockenhurst Station organisation. They maintain things like the flowers on the platforms, promote the station, and arrange events. Not to be confused with the much older Friends of Brockenhurst. But FOBS, as it likes to be known, is working hard next month to promote Rail 200 – the 200th anniversary of the railways in Britain and indeed the world.

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One of the products is a book celebrating the history of the station and its links with the village which is being launched tonight, and you can talk to the Secretary of FOBS, and buy the new book, it costs £5.00, after this event at the back of the room there. FOBS is also hosting an event at the station on Sunday June the First, including the launch of a blue plaque to commemorate the site's history. And that brings us full circle – 178 years after our little village station. It's played such a part in the development of our community, and the convenience of the transport link is one of the reasons Brockenhurst is so resonant today, and indeed has won awards as the best village to live in in the UK. And, if you hang around long enough at the station, there's still the chance to see steam engines thundering through, again reminding us of the start of the rail here.

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