

They once worked Our Line – Some 19th Century London & South Western Railway Employees on the Dartmoor Railway

By Geoff Horner

The inspiration for the first of what may, if our Editor agrees, become an occasional series of articles on the people who worked on the line of what is now the Dartmoor Railway came from the article in the Autumn 2012 issue of ‘The Dartmoor Pony’ by Dick Henrywood naming some of those who worked at various locations on the line in the late 19th/early 20th centuries. This coupled with an awareness of the research resources such as some LSWR staff records, 19th century directories and the 19th century census returns now readily available on the internet spurred me on to see what else could be discovered on this subject starting at Bow as the first station on our section of the former London & South Western main line to the west..

The earliest record traced so far is that of George Hillard (or Hilliard as the LSWR staff records have his surname) who was station master at Bow for just over three years from 1868 to 1871. George, who was born in Chard, Somerset in 1846 joined the LSWR in May 1862 as a telegraph clerk at Exeter on a wage of 10/- (ten shillings = 50p) per week. He seems to have performed his duties well as his wages rose quickly to 12/- per week in August 1862 followed by a transfer in July 1863 to Wilton at a weekly wage of 14/-. Further transfers and wage increases followed steadily George moving to Brockenhurst in June 1864 (at 18/-), Bideford in July 1865 at the same wage, then Okehampton in January 1867 before transferring to Bow in January 1868 at a wage of 25/- (£1.25) a week. In August 1870 George was placed on the salaried staff list at a yearly salary of £70 and remained as Station Master at Bow until September 1871 when he transferred along the line to a similar position at North Tawton. Although others followed later in his railway career George’s record shows just one official reprimand when in 1868 not long after he had taken up the post of Station Master at Bow he was officially cautioned for not sending the cash taken at the station by the specified train (presumably to Exeter)

According to the 1871 census there was a porter at Bow named William Cole but he does not appear in the LSWR staff records and nothing further about him or his railway career is known. Trade directories for the period 1878/79 name the Station Master at Bow as William Gardiner but again his name does not appear in the surviving LSWR staff records and where he served before or after his arrival at Bow remains unknown.

The next Station Master to serve at Bow was John Busby who served there for 10 years from 1878 to 1888. John was a comparative latecomer to railway service, joining the LSWR in November 1853 at the age of 30 having previously found employment as an agricultural labourer. His first position was as a porter at Nine Elms on 16/- a week. A number of relocations and increases in pay followed (including time at Winchester as a Porter around 1871) until in November 1866 he moved to Chard, still as a Porter, at 21/- a week. Four years later in July 1870 his wage was raised to 24/- a week. In August 1872

he was transferred on to the Staff List at a yearly salary of £70, increased to £75p.a in June 1877. A transfer to Portsmouth Arms as Agent on £85p.a followed a year later. John finally transferred to Bow in August 1878 receiving a salary increase to £90 in 1882. He finally retired aged 65 in September 1888 on a company pension. John appears to have had an unblemished railway career as his surviving LSWR records show no reprimands or warnings issued against him.

The 1881 census records show that there were two signalmen employed at Bow during John Busby's time as Station Master – Joseph Hatchley and William Jerrett. Also there at that time were Richard Tapp as Booking Clerk and Thomas Clow who joined the LSWR as Lad Porter at Bow on 16th December 1880 when he was 19 years old and earning 13/- a week. By 1884 he had qualified as Signalman at 17/- a week, presumably still at Bow where he remained until March 1898 when he moved to the position of Signalman at Barnstaple where he remained certainly until 1911 and possibly until his last entry in the Staff Records in July 1923 by which time his wage had increased to 55/- a week.

The next recorded Station Master for Bow is Alfred Hearson Webb who was certainly in post by 1891 and may have immediately succeeded John Busby when he retired in 1888. His LSWR records are very brief merely recording that he joined the company in August 1866 at Barnstaple. The 1871 census shows him at Barnstaple as a Railway Clerk and then ten years later in the same role at Bideford. In 1898 his salary increased to £100p.a but whether by this time he was still at Bow or had moved on to Holsworthy where he was definitely the Station Master in 1901 is uncertain.

Overlapping the time in charge at Bow of John Busby and Alfred Hearson Webb was Thomas Clow who joined the LSWR at Bow as a Lad Porter in December 1880 on a wage of 13/- a week. In February 1883 he was promoted to Porter at an increased wage of 15/- a week rising to 19/- a week plus 1/- a week extra for telegraph duty in 1886. In March 1898 he left to become signalman at Barnstaple where he seems to have remained up to the time the LSWR ceased to exist in the grouping of 1923. Also spanning the time at Bow of Messrs Busby and Webb was Joseph Hatchley (no LSWR records) who is recorded there as a Signalman in both the 1881 and 1891 census returns. By 1901 he had moved on and was a Signalman at Barnstaple

Also at Bow during the time A H Webb was Station Master was Thomas Gould who was a Porter there in 1891. There are no LSWR records for him but according to census records before coming to Bow he was at Chard in 1881 (quite a few of Bow's Victorian era railwaymen seem to have come from or been at Chard at some point in their railway career). According to the 1901 census he was a Porter at Minehead (not a LSWR station so he presumably jumped the LSWR ship and went to work for the GWR). In 1911 he was a Porter at Exeter (GWR or back with LSWR?).

The final 19th century LSWR railwayman known to be at Bow was William Edwin Jerrett who joined the company in May 1895 as a Lad Porter though the term must have been more that of 'rank' rather than of youth because, if the records are correct he was about 40 years old when he joined on the somewhat meagre wage of 10/- a week (3/- a week

less than Thomas Clow received in a similar role some 15 years earlier). William Edwin moved on to Devonport in 1896 still as Lad Porter. His railway career then took him on to spells at Templecombe as Parcels Porter (whilst there in 1899 he was suspended for eight days with loss of pay and 'reduced' to Porter for "misappropriating the companies money for cloakroom articles" – one might suspect that he was lucky to avoid dismissal), then to Petersfield and finally Reading.

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