



Rebuilding and running a community railway through the Purbecks

SWANAGE RAILWAY MILESTONES TIMELINE – 1847 to the present.

By Andrew P.M. Wright
Swanage Railway official photographer & press officer

For press and media use.

1847: Main line railway is opened from Southampton to Dorchester via Wareham.

1847 to 1880: Several attempts made to build a Swanage to Wareham branch line but fail because of opposition from Wareham townspeople and Purbeck landowners.

1880: Swanage businessmen George Burt and John Mowlem get permission, in the form of a Bill from Parliament, to build a railway from Swanage to Wareham.

1883: Works starts at Swanage on building the £80,000 branch line to Corfe Castle and Wareham – a project costing more than £5 million in today's money.

1885: The first train runs from Swanage to Corfe Castle and Wareham.

1885: Quarried stone is now transported out of Swanage by train rather than ship.

1885: Quarried ball clay from Norden, near Corfe Castle, is now transported by train rather than by tramway and ship.

1902: Quarried ball clay from Furzebrook, between Corfe Castle and Wareham, is now transported by train rather than by tramway and ship.

1885 to 1914: The branch line railway from Wareham causes Swanage to change from a fishing and quarrying town to a seaside resort for tourists to visit by train.

1914 to 1918: Soldiers come by train to Corfe Castle and Swanage to practise for battle in the First World War.



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1918 to 1939: The heyday of the Swanage branch line as it brings visitors to Swanage because more workers are given paid time off for a holiday.

1943 to 1944: British and American soldiers come to Corfe Castle and Swanage by train to rehearse for the D-Day invasion of France in June, 1944.

1945 to 1962: More people come to Swanage by car for their holidays with less passengers using the trains.

1962: First cut-backs to the branch train service between Wareham and Swanage.

1965: Freight trains to Corfe Castle & Swanage withdrawn & goods yards closed.

1966: Steam trains are replaced by cheaper diesel trains with less branch trains being run.

1967: British Rail proposes to close the Swanage branch line, claiming there are less passengers travelling and more financial losses.

1969: Through train services to London from Swanage and Corfe Castle withdrawn.

1969: Isle of Purbeck Preservation Group formed to prevent the line's closure.

1972: After four years of objections from residents and councils, British Rail closes the Wareham to Swanage branch line and runs the last passenger train.

1972: Volunteers form the Swanage Railway Society to save or rebuild the line.

1972: Six miles of track are lifted for scrap between Swanage and Furzebrook.

1974: British Rail sells the railway land between Swanage and Furzebrook to local councils for a proposed Corfe Castle bypass and retail development in Swanage.



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1975: 83 per cent of Swanage residents vote for a rebuilt railway in a referendum.

1976: Volunteers gain access to a disused and boarded up Swanage station.

1977: First substantial track laying allowed.

1979: First diesel passenger trains run at Swanage over a short length of track.

1980: First steam passenger trains run at Swanage over a short length of track.

1981: Relaid track reaches the edge of Swanage.

1983: Track reaches the one-mile point at Herston.

1984: First passenger trains to Herston after a new halt is built.

1987: Track reaches the three-mile point at Harman's Cross.

1989: First passenger trains run to Harman's Cross, the first new station to be built in Dorset in more than half a century.

1991: Relaid track reaches the five mile point at Corfe Castle.

1992: Track reaches Norden, north of Corfe, where a 'park and ride' station is built.

1995: First passenger trains run to Corfe Castle and Norden since 1972.

1997: Signal box and passing loop is opened at Harman's Cross station.

2003: Volunteers build and open a signal box for Swanage station.

2005: Signals for passing trains are brought back into use at Corfe Castle station for the first time since 1972 with the re-opening of the 1950s British Railways signal box.

2007: Swanage Railway connects to the national railway network near Furzebrook for bringing in locomotives, stock and track ballast trains.



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2009: First diesel and steam-hauled passenger train runs from London to Corfe Castle and Swanage since January, 1972.

2011: Volunteers build a national award-winning signal box at Corfe Castle station – on the site of the original built in 1885 – which is officially opened by a Government minister.

2012: South West Trains diesel unit runs to Swanage on a test clearance run.

2013: Swanage Railway wins a £1.47 million grant from the Government to establish a two-year trial train service from Swanage and Corfe Castle through to Wareham.

2013: Second platform at Swanage is fully re-opened to accommodate visiting excursion trains from the national railway network.

2013: Two sold-out excursion trains run from London to Swanage using South West Trains diesel units.

2013: Classic 1970s Inter-City 125 High Speed Train visits Corfe Castle on an excursion train from Worcester and Oxford.

2014: Swanage Railway installs signalling equipment on Wareham station as part of Network Rail's £40 million Poole to Wool re-signalling scheme which includes trains to and from the Swanage Railway.

2014: Three miles of unused Network Rail line from Worgret Junction, south of Wareham, to the Swanage Railway at Motala - east of Furzebrook - is passed to Dorset County Council and leased to the Swanage Railway.

2014: Swanage Railway begins restoration and upgrade work of the three-mile line between Worgret Junction and Motala, east of Furzebrook. More than a thousand wooden sleepers were replaced and lineside vegetation cleared.

2015: An innovative signalling system linking the Swanage Railway to Network Rail is completed. The first train to be signalled by the new system – a special train operated by South West Trains – carries Rail Minister Claire Perry and guests from Wareham to Corfe Castle.



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2016: Norden Gates level crossing – protecting the Wytch Farm oil field, north of Corfe Castle, and the road to the Dorset County Council car park next to Norden station - is completed and tested to allow trains to and from the main line at Wareham.

2016: The four miles of restored and upgraded line from Norden station to the River Frome – half a mile short of Worgret Junction, south of Wareham – is officially opened by the Dorset High Sheriff, Sir Philip Williams.

2016: Swanage Railway operates its first steam and diesel train service along four miles of line from Norden to the River Frome, half a mile short of Worgret Junction. Timetabled passenger trains last ran on that length of line on the last day of British Rail trains on Saturday, 1 January, 1972.

2017: The National Railway Museum donates a unique Victorian T3 class steam locomotive to the Swanage Railway Trust which starts a fund-raising push to restore the engine to full working order so it can haul trains on the Swanage Railway.

2017: A 60 selected day Swanage Railway train service takes place from Swanage and Corfe Castle to the main line at Wareham.

2018: South Western Railway runs a summer Saturdays diesel train service from Basingstoke, Salisbury, Yeovil and Weymouth to Corfe Castle on the Swanage Railway. The service also ran on summer Saturdays during 2019.

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