

## Broken Bridge

### Bunkers Hill "B"

The railway which supposedly is billed to be the first reinstatement of a closure in Devon is the stretch of the former London & South Western (Plymouth, Devonport & South Western Junction Railway) main line between Tavistock and Bere Alston.

Talked about for more than two decades, it would be a half-hearted scheme, about as lightweight as railway reconstruction can get.

If plans were realized, Tavistock would not be served once more by through trains from Waterloo; it would not even have its North Station restored. The massive viaduct straddling the town leads to a station site smothered by development, including the West Devon council offices erected almost as a statement of policy:

Okehampton .. .. .arr	..	..	5 57
Bude .. .. .arr	..	..	7 24
Padstow .. .. .arr	..	..	9 15
Bude .. .. .dep	..	..	—
Okehampton .. .. .dep	..	..	6 05
Bridestowe .. .. .dep	..	..	6 19
Lydford .. .. .dep	..	..	6 26
Brentor .. .. .dep	..	..	6 30
Tavistock North .. .. .dep	6 00	..	6b47
Bere Alston .. .. .arr	6 11	..	7 00
Callington .. .. .arr	7 13	..	—
Callington .. .. .dep	5 30	..	—
Bere Alston .. .. .dep	6 12	..	7 00
Bere Ferrers .. .. .dep	6 17	..	7 06
St. Budeaux Victoria Rd. .. .. .dep	6 25	..	7 14
Keyham .. .. .dep	6 28	..	7 18
Dockyard Halt .. .. .dep	6 30	..	7 20
Devonport .. .. .dep	6 33	..	7 23
Plymouth .. .. .arr	6 37	..	7 28
Copplestone .. .. .dep	..	..	—

"We will never have a railway return here."

Instead, a new car park station would be built on the outskirts of Tavistock, possibly as distant as Callington Road Bridge, to avoid having to replace its missing steel spans. Nothing more than a single line would connect the new "basic" station with Bere Alston, where the disused island platform would not be brought back into use for the Callington Branch. Trains from Plymouth to Gunnislake would share the single line from St. Budeaux Junction to Bere Alston with trains from Plymouth to Tavistock.

And the line would only be rebuilt if the now obligatory shared-use path were put alongside.

The first engineering feasibility study was done on behalf of

Devon County Council in 1991, 23 years after the line was closed. The report itself is now 23 years old.

The consultants found, as the E. & T.V.R. scout did in September, that all the structures between Callington Road (exclusive) and Bere Alston were in tact, bar one: Bridge No. 682, Bunkers Hill "B," 219 miles and 72 chains from London Waterloo, and just six chains short of the buffer stop at Bere Alston.

The Teign Valley scout confessed that, distracted by the sound of the engine whistle on the other side of the Tamar, he cycled past without even noticing the ruined bridge, before skidding to a halt and setting back.

The line was closed completely in 1968. It can be taken that very quickly afterwards, following standard practice, the track was lifted and the railway laid waste. Not too many years later, the land was sold off where possible, including right up to where the buffer stop at Bere Alston sits today.

In the 1970s (maybe later, since the bridge is still shown on a 1982 survey), the B.R. Property Board would have got in a steam navvy to pull down the brick segmental arch, presumably because of limited headroom. The very substantial neighbouring embankment has since been reduced as well.

If anyone had come along at the time and suggested that it would not be long before consultants would be studying the possible

reinstatement of the railway, he would have been laughed off the site.

The double line of well-engineered railway that once went over this bridge and carried express trains heading for Devonport King's Road and Plymouth Friary—and the latter-day D.M.U.s. that this writer remembers—was gone.

This was not a temporary suspension of services while the era of cheap oil—and all the stupid, short-sighted planning and provision that rode on the back of it—was allowed to play itself out. No, this was annihilation. It was intended to be, or seem, physically irreversible and this view became rooted in people's minds, to the extent that most now scoff at the idea of railway reconstruction; unlike their take on the road transport structure which is somehow untouchable and meant to last forever.

The point here is that the pleas for Greenwall Lane Bridge today were received in much the same way as those for Bunkers Hill "B" might have been when it was demolished.

The descendants of the people that would not have listened then are the residuals now making their last stand in a garret in York, where they continue to follow orders and destroy what they can of the abandoned part of the railway system.







The ruins of Bunkers Hill "B" lie a short distance from the end of the line at Bere Alston. Tavistock, 6½ miles away, waits for the return of one of its railways, which does not look like being soon. Over this former Down Main, expresses from London Waterloo once sped towards Plymouth.