

CHAPTER 4

WATERFORD LIMERICK & WESTERN RAILWAY

A long straggling main line from Waterford in the south to Sligo in the north-west, with secondary lines and branches. Incorporated as WATERFORD & LIMERICK RAILWAY 1845. Opened 1848-54. Extended in subsequent years to Tralee, Claremorris and Sligo.

Became: WATERFORD LIMERICK & WESTERN RAILWAY in 1896.

Amalgamated with GREAT SOUTHERN & WESTERN 1901.

Route mileage in 1901: 342 miles.

Principal places served:

Waterford, Clonmel, Limerick, Tralee, Ennis, Athenry, Tuam, Claremorris, Sligo.

The Waterford Limerick & Western had a total route mileage of 342½, only 32 of which was double line, and was exceeded only by the Great Southern & Western itself, with 606 miles in 1900, the Midland Great Western, 538 miles, and the Great Northern, 617 miles. It resulted from the acquisition of a number of other lines which were originally independently promoted. The parent body, the Waterford & Limerick Railway, 77½ miles long, the first part of which, between Limerick and Tipperary, was opened on 9 May 1848, was completed throughout in 1854, the later section by means of a government loan of £120,000. There had been a much earlier proposal for a rail link between Waterford and Limerick, in 1826, only a year after the successful opening of the Stockton & Darlington, but although parliamentary powers were obtained the scheme was not proceeded with.

Limerick, which was a terminal station, then became something of a railway centre, from which lines began to radiate, worked by the WLR and later to be

absorbed by it. Westwards was the 70½ mile line to Tralee, known as the 'North Kerry' line. It came into being by the formation of three originally independent companies, the Limerick & Foynes, incorporated on 4 August 1853 and opened in 1856; the Rathkeale & Newcastle Junction, incorporated on 22 July 1861 and opened in 1867, which left the Limerick & Foynes at Ballingrane Junction (Foynes then becoming a branch); and the Limerick & North Kerry, incorporated on 5 July 1865 and opened in December 1880. All of them were worked by the Waterford & Limerick. Passenger services were withdrawn between Limerick and Tralee and over the Foynes branch on 1 January 1963.



Railway letter stamps of the WLR and WLWR

Newcastle was another terminal station, where through trains had to reverse, and at Tralee an end-on connection was made with the GSWR line from Killarney, but with independent stations until the WLWR was absorbed by the GSWR in 1907. Out of Tralee a branch to Fenit, 8 miles in length, was opened in 1887, and near to Limerick a new branch to a factory at Castlemungret was opened as recently as October 1957.

This completed the south-western leg of the WLWR. Out of Limerick there was another branch which started as the Limerick, Castle Connell (later spelt as one word) & Killaloe Railway, opened to Castle Connell on 28 August 1858, and to Killaloe on 12 April 1862, with a pier extension in August 1863. This branch lost its passenger service in 1931; it was not used at all after 1944 and closed officially in 1952. Castleconnell station was closed in 1963.

Another branch left the original WLR line from Clonmel to Thurles, where it joined the GSWR main line from Dublin to Cork. This line, 28 miles long, was known by the grandiose title of Southern of Ireland Railway. It was incorporated in 1865 and opened throughout in July 1880.

The first section of what was to become the long straggling line northwards from Limerick to Sligo, 145½ miles, was the Limerick & Ennis, 24½ miles, incorporated on 4 August 1853 and opened in 1859. It was worked by the WLR with which it was amalgamated in 1874. Next came the Athenry & Ennis Junction, another 36 miles, incorporated on 20 August 1860 and opened on 15 September 1869, and the Athenry & Tuam Railway, incorporated 23 July 1858 and opened on 27 September 1860. This line was at first leased for a period of ten years to the MGWR, whose main line to Galway made contact with both of the smaller concerns. The AER was leased to the WLR on 1 November 1872, and both lines were taken over by it from 27 July 1893.

From Tuam onwards the line was extended to Claremorris on 30 April 1894 by the Athenry & Tuam Extension Railway (which actually retained its nominal independence until the 1925 grouping) but was naturally worked by the WLR. Here contact was made with the Midland's secondary main line to Westport. From Claremorris the final section to link up with the MGWR's Sligo line at Collooney was opened on 1 October 1895, from which point running powers were obtained over MGWR metals for the last 6 miles into Sligo.

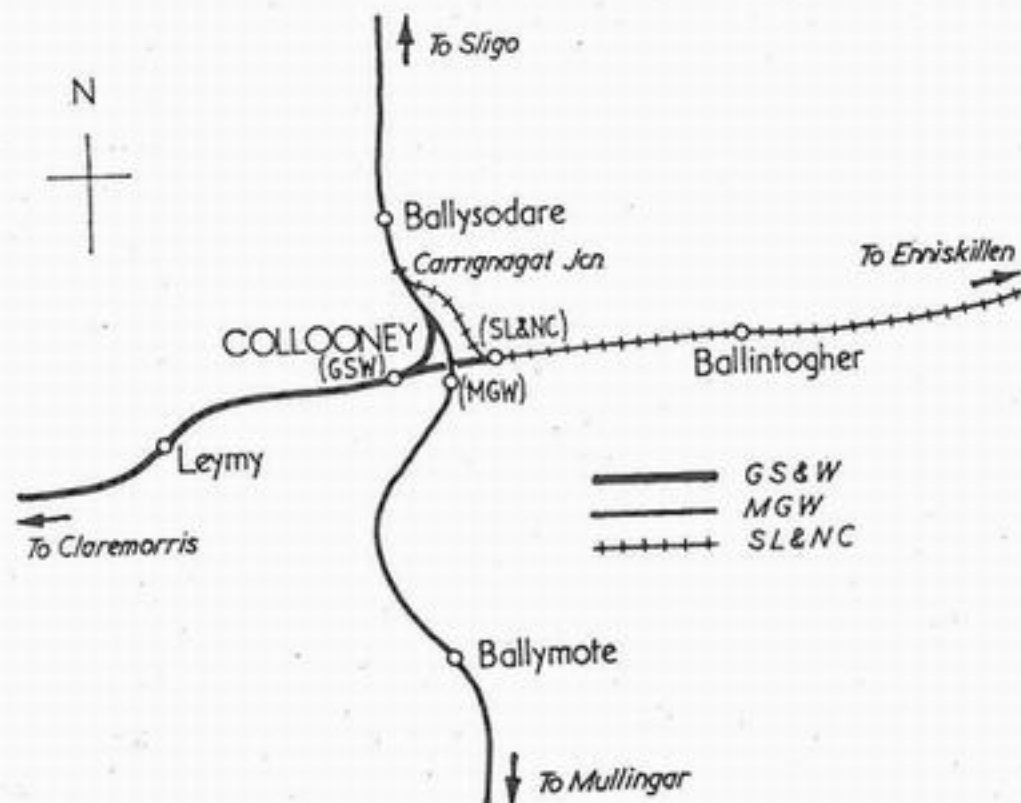
By this time the original title of Waterford & Limerick Railway seemed no longer wholly appropriate in view of its long northwards extensions, and from 1 January 1896 it became known as the Waterford Limerick & Western.

This last section of line was almost unique in Ireland in that it was used by three different railways, the MGWR as owners, the WLWR, which became after 1901 the Great Southern & Western, and also the Sligo Leitrim & Northern Counties. To gain direct access to the latter the WLWR put in a loop at Collooney, which though little more than a village of about 600 inhabitants, was an important centre for livestock traffic. It was remarkable in possessing three separate stations, owned by each of the three railways, and there was no way in which they could be embodied into one, as all were situated before the junctions at which the WLWR and SLNCR separately converged on to the MGWR. But how such an uneconomic arrangement would have horrified Dr Beeching!

The long trek from Claremorris to Sligo came in later years to be nicknamed after the notorious railway constructed by the Japanese, the 'Burma Road'. The leisurely progress of the trains was undoubtedly extremely tedious to the ordinary traveller, as distinct from the railway enthusiast. Nowadays the journey has, even worse, to be made by bus, the passenger service having been discontinued on 15 June 1963. In 1910 the two daily trains each way, stopping at all stations, took the almost incredible time of about 6½ hours for the through 145½ mile journey. But perhaps it was not quite so difficult to understand in view of the leisurely way of life in the west of Ireland and the fact that station

time allowances had to be sufficiently elastic to allow for dealing with general merchandise, not to mention the likelihood of having to attach or detach a van or two, or a cattle wagon or horsebox. By 1955 there was only one daily train throughout, in each direction, and the time had been reduced to 6 hours in the down direction (from Sligo) and $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours in the up.

Nevertheless it was a journey to think about carefully beforehand, particularly as there were no refreshment facilities except for the possibility of popping into the buffet at Claremorris whilst the train was waiting for its connections.



When I did it in 1938, behind a McDonnell 4-4-0, the train was composed of non-corridor six-wheelers, with a lavatory compartment in the first-class accommodation but not in the third. Ticket inspection was very rigorous on the Great Southern (probably it had to be to stop fare evasion and prevent third-class ticket holders from invading the first) and was successfully and sensibly achieved by having the guard also act as travelling ticket inspector. He would make several checks en route and even if tickets had already been seen, make a fresh clip each time, so that at the end of the journey only about half of the ticket might be left.

Essentially a cross-country route, the $145\frac{1}{2}$ miles between Limerick and Sligo represented about the longest journey of this nature which one could make without change of train. Main line expresses had longer runs of course, such as the $165\frac{1}{2}$ miles of the GSWR between Dublin and Cork, and through trains to

Killarney and Tralee, 206½ miles. Until 1934, when passenger services ceased, there was a through coach from Achill to Dublin, 187 miles, attached to the main Galway train at Athlone. Again, between 1950 and 1953 the GNR Enterprise express between Belfast and Dublin ran through to Cork over the CIE, a total of 278 miles, and there were through services between Dublin and Londonderry by two different routes of 175½ and 162½ miles. There were also holiday expresses between Dublin and Bundoran, 159½ miles, and Dublin and Portrush, 178½ miles.

The through length of the main line of the WLWR totalled 222½ miles, and in 1910, for instance, one could leave Sligo at 8.45 am, and with a 20 minute break at Limerick and a halt of anything up to half an hour at Limerick Junction, whilst the two main line connections arrived and departed, reach Waterford at 7.40 pm—an enterprise not to be undertaken without due forethought and preparation. By 1955 it was no longer possible to make this journey in the day, as there was no through connection southwards from Limerick, although it could still be done in the other direction. Surely however this must have been the only instance in British railway history when it was not possible to traverse the whole length of the main line of what had once been one company in a day.

LOCOMOTIVES AND ROLLING STOCK

The head offices were at Waterford and the locomotive and carriage workshops were conveniently situated at Limerick. These workshops were maintained after absorption into the GSWR in 1901, and indeed remained as a supplementary complement to Inchicore right through to CIE days and the end of steam.

For working the whole of the 342½ mile system there were, at amalgamation with the GSWR, only 58 locomotives, of which about half would be found on the original section between Waterford and Limerick, and the rest thinly scattered on the branches and on the long route to Sligo. This was not exactly a lavish provision of motive power, but the service over much of the system comprised only three or four trains a day, sometimes only one. The only comparable railway in the rest of the British Isles was the Highland, which required 150 locomotives to operate its total mileage of about 500, but with the difficulty of making provision for high variations of traffic between the busy summer season and the winter.

In the early 1880s there were still three old Bury 2-2-2s in service together with another engine of the Jenny Lind type. Main line goods traffic was mainly in the hands of 0-4-2s and the passenger services were worked by 2-4-0s, ten



No. 718

Waterford and Limerick Railway.

(LOCOMOTIVE DEPARTMENT.)

Second Class.

Free Ticket.

Not Transferable.

(AVAILABLE FOR ONE JOURNEY ONLY.)

Pass.....

From..... to.....

on the..... 189.....

..... Loco. Superintendent.

N.B.—For Conditions upon which this Pass is granted see back hereof.

If not used within the time for which it is available, or not collected by the Company's Servants, this Ticket is to be returned.

Free pass, paper ticket, Waterford & Limerick Railway

(714)—Harvey & Co., Printers, Waterford.

of an express type with 5ft 6in wheels and half a dozen older ones with 5ft wheels, which were really mixed traffic engines. Some of these were later reconstructed as tank engines and others as 0-6-0 tender engines, and lasted well into GSWR days, but most of the others had gone by 1901.

In 1888 the then locomotive superintendent, H. Appleby, was succeeded by J. G. Robinson, later of Great Central fame, who proceeded to turn out a number of more modern engines, until the line was taken over by the Great Southern & Western in 1901. For express work there were eight 2-4-0s built by Dübs between 1889 and 1893:

10	<i>Sir James</i>	43	<i>Knockma</i>
20	<i>Galtee More</i>	44	<i>Nephin</i>
22	<i>Era</i>	47	<i>Carrick Castle</i>
23	<i>Slieve-Na-Mon</i>	48	<i>Granston</i>

They were handsome engines with a distinctly Great Western appearance, complete with brass domes, though their smart red livery, very similar to the crimson lake of the Midland could hardly have been less like the GWR. On being taken over by the GSWR they lost their names and became nos 263, 273, 275, 276 and 290-3. Four were scrapped in 1909-10 but the others lasted into CIE days. No 291 was still at work in Limerick in 1959.

Three rather similar 4-4-0s were built by Kitson in 1896-7, no 53 *Jubilee*, 54 *Killeennee* and 55 *Bernard*, which became GSWR 296-8, also losing their names. No 297 was scrapped in 1928 but the other two lasted until 1949.

Tank engines consisted of two 2-4-2Ts, 13 *Derry Castle* and 14 *Lough Derg*, built by the Vulcan Foundry in 1891 for the Limerick to Tralee line, later becoming GSWR 266 and 267. The first of these was sold to the Cork & Macroom Direct Railway in 1914, to appear in the Great Southern list at the 1925 amalgamation as no 491; it was withdrawn in 1935. No 267 had gone in 1931. A couple of 0-4-4Ts for the Tuam service came from Kitson in 1895, no 51 *Castle Hacket* and 52 *Brian Boru*. As GSWR 294, the first disappeared in 1910, but the second, no 295, finished its days in 1954 on the Ballybrophy to Birr branch.

For the opening of the line to Sligo, Robinson built four 4-4-2Ts, nos 16 *Rocklands*, 17 *Faugh a Ballagh*, 18 *Geraldine* and 21 *Castle Blarney*, turned out by Kitson in 1896-7. These became GSWR 269, 270, 271 and 274. The last three were withdrawn in 1949, but no 269 lasted until 1957.

Of the 0-6-0s for main-line goods work, four were built by Dübs in 1895-7:

45	<i>Colleen Bawn</i>	49	<i>Dreadnought</i>
46	<i>Erin Go Bragh</i>	50	<i>Hercules</i>

and four by Kitson in 1897-9:

56 *Thunderer*
57 *Cyclops*

58 *Goliath*
2 *Shannon*

Two more which were under construction by Kitson in 1901, when the GSWR took over, were to have been 4 *Shamrock* and 11 *Samson*; they were purchased by the MGWR, on which they became 141 *Limerick* and 142 *Athenry*, and came into the GSR fold in 1925 as 233 and 234. The eight WLWR engines were renumbered 233-9 and 222 respectively and were scrapped between 1911 and 1951.

The original livery of the Waterford Limerick & Western engines was green. This was changed to red-brown, lined out in blue, and in its later years, before absorption by the Great Southern & Western, to crimson lake, very similar to the Midland Railway of England, lined out with yellow bands. The engines also had copper-capped chimneys, a fair amount of brasswork, such as the beading around the splashers and, in the case of the 2-4-0s and some of the tank engines, brass dome casings as well, although this did not apply to the 4-4-0s.

The carriages, mostly six-wheelers, though some bogie coaches appeared during the last years for the Waterford boat trains, were painted crimson lake lined out in gold.

OUTLINE OF
IRISH RAILWAY
HISTORY

H. C. CASSERLEY



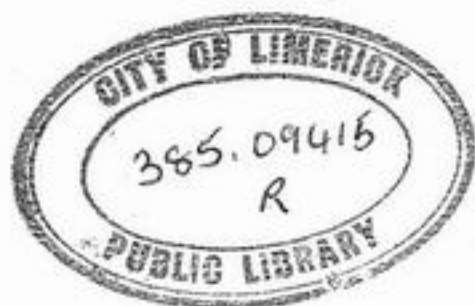
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A13239

Set in 11pt on 13pt Monotype Aldine Bembo
and printed in Great Britain
by Latimer Trend & Company Ltd Plymouth
for David & Charles (Holdings) Limited
South Devon House Newton Abbot Devon

Published in the United States of America
by David & Charles Inc North Pomfret
Vermont 05053 USA

Published in Canada by Douglas David & Charles Limited
3645 McKechnie Drive
West Vancouver BC