



Great Western Railway: A History

Andy Roden

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“God’s Wonderful Railway”, it was called if you were a fan; the “great Way Round” if you took a rather more jaundiced view of some of its circuitous branch lines. But 175 years after its foundation, the Great Western Railway company is remembered with the most nostalgia, even love, of all Britain’s pre-nationalisation railway companies. It built, and ran, the great main line from London to the West Country and Cornwall (today’s First Great Western franchise). It was engineered by the greatest of them all, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, who built such wonders as the Box Tunnel and the Saltash bridge. Its steam locomotives were designed by great men like Churchward and Hawkesworth. But also it had wonderful stations like the soaring Paddington and Bristol Temple Meads, as well as innumerable idyllic country halts with little more than a pagoda shelter and a couple of milk churns awaiting collection. Its engines were painted a deep green, its carriages chocolate and cream. Its Cornish Riviera Express train, and the line alongside the beach at Dawlish sprayed by the waves, became the stuff of legend. Now Andy Roden has written the first comprehensive history of the GWR for 20 years, to tie in with its 175th anniversary. It will appeal to everyone who bought his Flying Scotsman or Christian Wolmar’s railway histories.

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