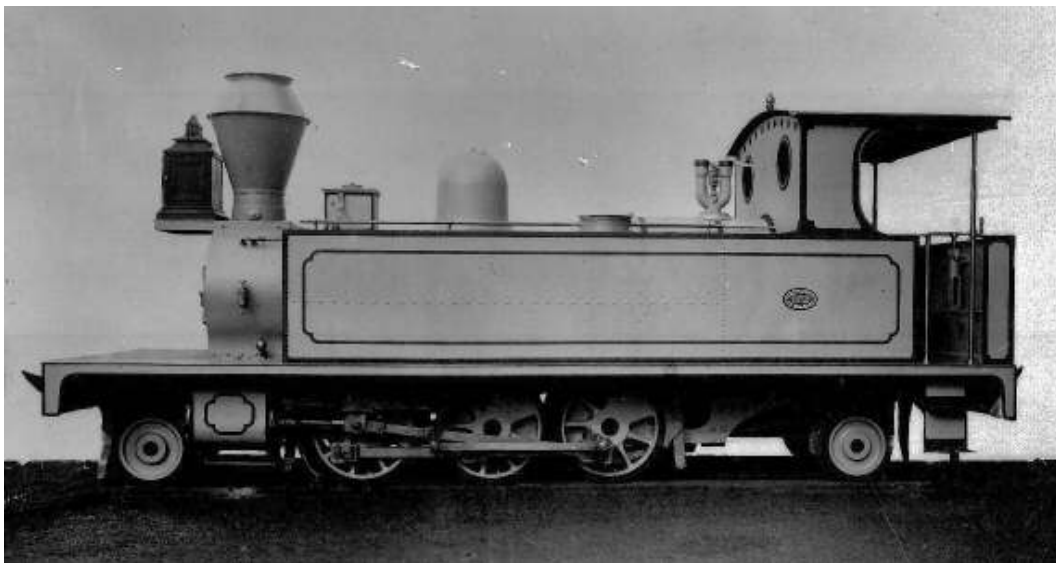


The History of the Barbados Railway

Any research into the early days of railway development, both in this country and abroad invariably reveals some interesting and historical reference to Vulcan built locomotives and the following extracts which have been culled from the journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, whilst proving this point, are also worth recording for the author's racy style and for the factual reference to the almost complete dependency of the people of that time on cultivating the soil in order to produce their own food.

We learn that on Saturday, 23rd June, 1877, the ceremony of turning the first sod for the proposed railway was the proceedings being "large and animated;" the Governor was presented with a painted barrow and spade and "in a workmanlike manner he trundled his barrow to the edge of the embankment and deposited the first barrowful of earth amid three hearty cheers from the spectators and a large body of labourers who would find employment on the works." The Railway opened from Bridgetown to Carrington on 20th October, 1881; fares were First Class 2/-, Second Class 1/4, and Third Class 6d., and in 1883 on a ceremonial run on completion of the line to Belle Plaine the local dignitaries "wondered why the railway should have ended so abruptly among barren sand hills." These musings were stilled at the subsequent meal at which, to quote the author "nothing was heard for sometime but the rattle of knives and forks and the popping of soda-water and Ginger Ale corks, which with some good sound Claret and a little Bass, cooled by abundance of ice, formed the staple beverages."



Vulcan Foundry 2-6-2 tank engine built for barbados railway

The railway began operations with a stock of five locomotives, one of which an 0-4-0 saddle-tank named "St. Michael" had been acquired from the contractors when construction had been completed. The other four locomotives included two from Vulcan Foundry and two from the Avonside Engine Company. The Vulcans were 2-6-2 tank engines with a wheelbase of 18' 8" and a weight in running order of 27 tons 6 cwt. Details of the Avonside engines have not been traced but it seems likely they were smaller than the Vulcan locomotives.



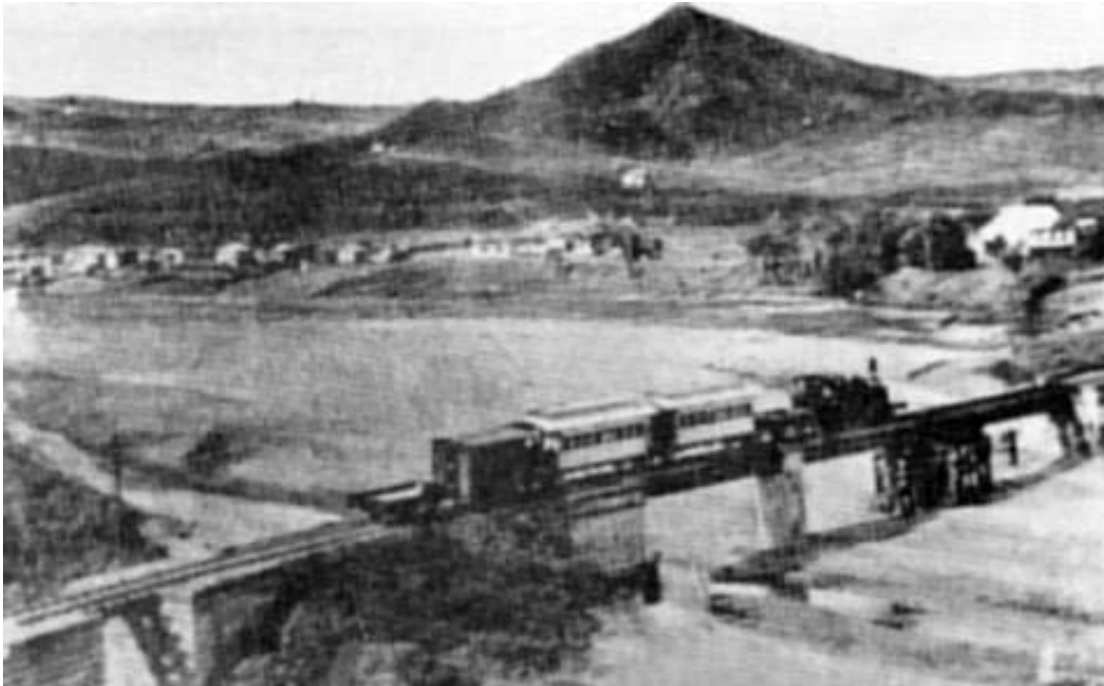
Interior of first class coach

The Company rules exhorted guards and drivers to "have their trains well under control" and to use "every exertion to stop any runaway vehicle that may become detached from a train whilst it is ascending before the impetus has become too great."



Bridgetown Station around 1930

They also naively stated that "if the engine be defective the sooner the train can be stopped the better" and "if any vehicle be off the rails, the breaks (sic) in the rear must be instantly applied." There was in addition a quaint injunction to guards that "persons affected with insanity must not be placed with other passengers, but in a separate compartment" and to "use all gentle means to stop the nuisance caused by drunk or disorderly passengers," if gentleness avails not, the recalcitrant passenger is to be removed at the first station, apparently by force but the rules are prudently silent on this point.



Train crossing Long Pond, St Andrew, before the gauge change of 1898

Unfortunately by the early 1930's inadequate standards of maintenance began to cause anxiety; the carriage and locomotive sheds were described as being beyond repair whilst the locomotives needed complete stripping and overhaul. On the deterioration of the track and lack of points maintenance a driver's report reads-" about 150 feet from the Carrington siding I noticed the points open half way for main and half for siding; at this discovery the steam was shut off, engine reversed and danger whistle blown. I can only say, Sir, that if those points had been run over undiscovered it would have been a most (sic) terrible disaster."

It was further stated that the passenger carriages were " in a parlous state, many wheels having flats, and brakes being in an erratic condition." All carriages required paint, the absence of which on the entire system was " most noticeable."

Traffic gradually diminished until eventually only a restricted goods service was being maintained and the line was finally closed in 1937.

In an extract from the Barbadian Newspaper dated June 24th, 1861, we read "the reaping of the sugar crop is advancing towards completion; in a few weeks time the last hogshead of sugar will be made. Potatoes are cheap (80 cents. per 100 lbs.) Indian corn is coming in, yams have been planted and our food prospects are better than might have been expected. The planting of provisions can by no means said to be general, a few potatoes, to satisfy present needs, are not what are needed with our alarmingly dense population (150,000 by the last census or nine hundred to the square mile), food that will keep and may be laid up in storerooms, such as pigeon peas, guinea corn, and yams must be planted if we are to live without the constant dread of famine."

In his acknowledgments to various individuals and organisations who assisted in making the publication possible, the compiler especially mentioned two photographs of early locomotives which were provided by the makers, The Vulcan Foundry Ltd., and Messrs. W. G. Bagnall.