

AXMINSTER TO LYME REGIS RAILWAY

Timeline

1840s - 1890s	A long series of scheme is proposed to link Lyme Regis to the main line. Plans include routes from Bridport, Chard and Axminster, but none progress due to cist and difficult terrain.
1860	The main line reaches Axminster, bringing express trains between London and the West Country. Local hopes grow for a branch to the coast.
1899	The Axminster–Lyme Regis scheme finally gains approval under the Light Railways Act, allowing cheaper standards of construction.
1900-03	Building begins. Steep gradients, sharp curves and heavy clay soils make progress slow. A major landslip affects Cannington Viaduct, delaying completion.
24 Aug 1903	The line opens to the public. Three stations: Axminster (junction), Combyne (the lone rural stop) and Lyme Regis (terminus).
1903–1914	Early trains struggle with the gradients until Adams 4-4-2T “Radial” tank engines arrive and become famous for conquering the line. Tourist traffic grows rapidly, especially in summer.
1918-1939	Inter-war years. The branch enjoys its busiest period. Holiday specials and through coaches from London bring crowds to the seaside.
1940s–1950s	After the Second World War, buses and private cars begin to draw passengers away. Goods traffic declines as lorries take over local deliveries.
1950s–1960s	Services are gradually reduced. The line is reviewed as part of national railway cuts.
29 Nov 1965	The branch closes. The last train runs that evening. Track is lifted soon afterwards; most buildings are removed or repurposed.
Today	The Cannington Viaduct survives as the line’s most striking reminder. Footpaths, embankments and a few bridge abutments hint at where trains once ran.