



# The Axminster to Lyme Regis Railway

**SCHOOLS PACK -  
TEACHERS' NOTES**

FOR THE LOVE OF A RAILWAY

Supported by



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These Teachers Notes are part of a pack that also includes printable pupil worksheets, a library of photos and other resources. All can be accessed from our website,

Production of this resource has been made possible with financial support from the East Devon National Landscape.

Developed by For the Love of a Railway with writing, design and editorial control from local volunteers supporters by digital tools, including OpenAI's ChatGPT. All material has been reviewed, edited and approved by the project team to ensure historical accuracy and educational suitability.

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**For the Love of a Railway,**  
6 St George's, Chard Street, Axminster EX13 5DL  
Registered charity no: 1213097  
[fortheLoveofarailway@gmail.com](mailto:fortheLoveofarailway@gmail.com) [www.fortheLoveofarailway.co.uk](http://www.fortheLoveofarailway.co.uk)

## FOR THE LOVE OF A RAILWAY

This schools pack has been produced by 'For the Love of a Railway', an Axminster-based charity dedicated to celebrating memories of the famous old Axminster to Lyme Regis Light Railway. We are keen to encourage schools to use the National Curriculum opportunities created by the work we are doing.

The pack is designed to help Key Stage 2 children explore the history and importance of the railway, which used to connect the seaside town of Lyme Regis with the main line at Axminster.

Through engaging in activities and suggested field trips, students can learn about the railway's role in shaping local communities and the economy, while comparing life in the past with the present day.

We will welcome opportunities to work with individual teachers and to improve and further develop the pack from suggestions received.



*A working model at For the Love of a Railway's visitor centre in Axminster tells the story of the line*

## LEARNING AREAS

This project supports National Curriculum aims across History, Geography, English, Art & Design, Design & Technology, and Science, with optional links to PSHE and Citizenship. It encourages children to explore how the railway shaped life in their local area — connecting past and present through creative, practical and enquiry-based learning.

Subject	Key National Curriculum Themes (KS2)	How This Project Supports Learning
History	Local history study; changes in Britain from the Victorian period to the present day; continuity and change; significant events beyond 1066	Pupils investigate the development and closure of the Axminster to Lyme Regis Railway, exploring its impact on people, jobs and the community. They use historical sources, role play and creative writing to imagine life in 1903.
Geography	Use maps, atlases and digital mapping; understand physical and human geography; land-use changes over time; fieldwork	Pupils trace the railway route, study local landforms and discuss why engineers built the line where they did. They explore how transport links support settlements and tourism.
English	Writing for different purposes; reading comprehension; spoken language and drama	Activities include diary writing, storytelling, persuasive poster writing and role play. Pupils use descriptive language to bring historical scenes to life.
Art & Design	Drawing, painting and design techniques; evaluating artists' work; creating art inspired by history	Children design railway posters, study the shapes and details of trains, and create observational drawings of historical and modern locomotives.
Design & Technology	Understanding how key events and individuals shaped the world; mechanical systems and structures	Pupils study how the railway was engineered, including the Cannington Viaduct, and explore model-building to understand design challenges.
Science	Forces and motion; materials and structure	Linked discussions cover how steam locomotives worked, how gradients affected movement, and why engineers chose particular construction materials.
PSHE / Citizenship (optional)	Living in the wider world; economic understanding; community and environment	Pupils consider how the railway created jobs, boosted local trade and tourism, and supported community life. They also reflect on how modern rail travel contributes to sustainability.

## **ASSESSMENT & LEARNING OUTCOMES (KS2)**

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Through engagement with the Tracks Through Time project and accompanying worksheets, pupils should be able to:

#### **History**

Pupils will:

- Understand that transport developments influence how people live and work
- Recognise continuity and change between past and present
- Explain why the Axminster to Lyme Regis Railway was built
- Describe the social and economic impact of the railway
- Use imagination supported by historical context to interpret the past

Evidence of learning may include:

- Diary writing showing historical awareness
- Verbal explanations of cause and consequence
- Contributions to class discussion and debate
- Written reflections and descriptions

#### **Geography**

Pupils will:

- Use maps to identify human and physical features
- Explain how landscape influences transport routes
- Recognise how infrastructure alters environments
- Describe land-use change over time
- Interpret visual sources such as maps and photographs

Evidence of learning may include:

- Written comparisons of before/after maps
- Annotated drawings
- Reasoned explanations of route choices
- Discussion-based responses

#### **English**

Pupils will:

- Write for different purposes (recount, narrative, persuasive)
- Use descriptive and sensory language

- Write in role using first-person voice
- Structure short creative texts logically
- Develop subject-specific vocabulary

Evidence of learning may include:

- Diary entries
- Short stories
- Persuasive slogans
- Descriptive passages
- Spoken language activities

## **Art & Design**

Pupils will:

- Recognise features of historic poster design
- Use visual elements to communicate ideas
- Apply colour, composition and layout choices
- Produce creative responses inspired by history

Evidence of learning may include:

- Poster designs
- Observational sketches
- Use of appropriate visual style
- Explanations of creative choices

## **Design & Technology / STEM**

Pupils will:

- Understand that railways required engineering solutions
- Recognise how design constraints influence construction
- Consider how materials and structures affect performance
- Apply simple design and problem-solving thinking
- Explain how engineering supports transport systems

Evidence of learning may include:

- Annotated drawings
- Explanatory writing
- Verbal reasoning and discussion
- Creative design tasks

## **Key Skills Developed**

Across activities, pupils are encouraged to develop:

- Enquiry and reasoning
- Interpretation of sources
- Creative thinking
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Communication (spoken and written)
- Observation and analysis

## **Approaches to Assessment**

This resource is designed primarily for formative assessment, supporting:

- Observation of pupil discussion and engagement
- Review of written responses
- Informal questioning
- Peer discussion and reflection

Possible assessment opportunities include:

- Discussion-based – explaining why the railway mattered
- Written evidence – diary entries, narratives, explanations
- Creative evidence – posters, drawings, designs
- Reflective thinking – considering the effects of closure

## **Success Indicators**

Pupils are demonstrating secure understanding when they can:

- Explain ideas rather than simply describe them
- Link railway developments to wider life changes
- Use historically plausible detail in writing
- Interpret maps with increasing confidence
- Justify explanations or creative choices

## **Differentiation Opportunities**

Activities naturally support mixed abilities through:

- Open-ended questions
- Visual prompts
- Creative responses
- Discussion tasks

Teachers may adapt by:

- Providing sentence starters

- Using paired or group discussion
- Allowing verbal rather than written responses
- Extending with deeper analytical questions

### **Extension & Greater Depth**

More confident pupils may be encouraged to:

- Debate historical decisions
- Write extended narratives
- Produce detailed creative work
- Explore wider railway history
- Compare past and modern transport systems

### **Overall intent:**

This project supports knowledge development while fostering curiosity, imagination and engagement with local heritage.

# THE STORY OF RAILWAYS

## The role of railways

For over 200 years, railways have played a vital role in shaping the United Kingdom, transforming the way people live, work and travel. From their beginnings in the early 19th century, railways revolutionised transport, connecting towns and cities, and helping industries grow.

In the 1800s, railways carried coal, iron and other goods from factories to markets, powering the Industrial Revolution. Trains also made travel faster and more affordable, allowing people to visit places they'd never seen before and even commute to work. Entire communities sprang up around railway stations, and new jobs were created to keep trains running smoothly.

## Railways today

Today, railways remain just as important. They help millions of people get to work, school and holidays. Rail freight moves essential goods like food, construction materials and medicine, keeping the economy going. Railways are also a greener way to travel, helping to reduce pollution and tackle climate change.

The UK's rail network connects small towns and villages to big cities and links the nation with the rest of the world through ports and airports. It's not just about moving people and goods — railways bring communities together and play a big part in how the country works. Today's main line through Axminster is part of the network.

## Our local railway

It was in 1860 that the railway arrived in Axminster, with express trains stopping on their way between London and Cornwall while also establishing a local service to other towns in Somerset and within Devon. In 1903, Axminster became the starting point for a new, more local line – just seven miles across the countryside to Lyme Regis.

## Why the line was built

Lyme Regis, once a busy sea-port, had by the late 19th century seen its fortunes decline with the advent of larger vessels and changing transport patterns. Local people and promoters believed that a railway link would bring fresh visitors and much-needed tourist traffic to the town and the surrounding scenic countryside. Indeed, holiday travel from London, via Axminster and then onto the branch, became a key motivation for the scheme.



*Two 'Lyme Billy' locos pull a busy passenger train across Cannington Viaduct*

Before the route finally chosen was agreed, a series of no fewer than nine different proposals were put forward over nearly sixty years. These included schemes to bring rail from Bridport, via Chard or via other local towns, and each was hindered by financial, engineering or terrain concerns. Eventually, under the Light Railways Act 1896, the promoters of the Axminster–Lyme link obtained an order in 1899.

### **Cheaper construction – and its consequences**

Because cost-control was vital, the line was built to modest standards: the track was light, gradients steep (up to one-in-40, i.e. 2.5%) in each direction, and curves unusually sharp. A key engineering work was the imposing Cannington Viaduct, which rises some 28 m (around 93 ft) and spans roughly 186 m (about 200 yd) in ten arches. During construction, the viaduct's west abutment and adjacent pier slipped badly, delaying the opening. The financial and engineering compromises meant operational limitations: light locomotives only, axle-load restrictions, and a maximum of around 25 mph generally and 10mph on the viaduct.

### **Locomotives and operations**

In the early years the line struggled to find suitable motive power. Initial engines (such as older "Terrier" class 0-6-0 T) proved under-powered for the steep grades and tight curves. Later, around 1913, the branch became home to a pair of the 415 class "Radial" Tank

engines (4-4-2 T) designed by William Adams, which for nearly 50 years made the line almost their own. They became known collectively as 'Lyme Billy' and were famed for their reliability on a very demanding branch line.

### **Stations, traffic and employment**

The line included only one intermediate station: Combpyne, nestled in the wilds of the countryside, on a sharp curve where the line changed direction from south to east. From the first full timetable, there were six return journeys each weekday, rising to nine by 1908. Summer Sundays saw even more frequent trains: by 1938 there were up to eleven on a peak Sunday. The line carried not only holidaymakers but also freight: fish landed at Lyme Regis, building materials, farm produce and general goods were moved through Axminster and along the branch. One local benefit was new employment – from track-laying and maintenance, station staff and signal-workers, to goods-yard staff and the hotels, inns and services that sprang up or expanded thanks to increased tourist traffic. (The George Hotel at Axminster, for example, ran its own horse-bus to meet trains.)

### **Success, decline and eventual closure**

In its early decades the branch was a success in terms of usage – holiday trains from London, direct carriages from Waterloo to Lyme Regis, and busy summer weekends. But after the Second World War competition from bus services and the motor-car began to bite. Freight traffic dwindled, off-peak services fell away, and the railway found it hard to compete with much faster or more direct road travel. The branch featured in the The 'Reshaping of British Railways' report and closed on 29 November 1965. After closure the track was lifted, buildings dismantled (the station building at Lyme Regis was re-erected at Alresford on the Watercress Line in Hampshire) and very little remains of the branch line today. One of the three 'Lyme Billy' locos has been preserved at the Bluebell Railway in Sussex.

### **Legacy**

While the rails are all gone, the Cannington Viaduct remains as a striking landmark and is now a Grade II listed structure. It stands as a reminder of the bold ambition, local effort and engineering determination of the early 20th century, and of a time when the railway brought holidaymakers, jobs and connectivity to this corner of Devon and Dorset.

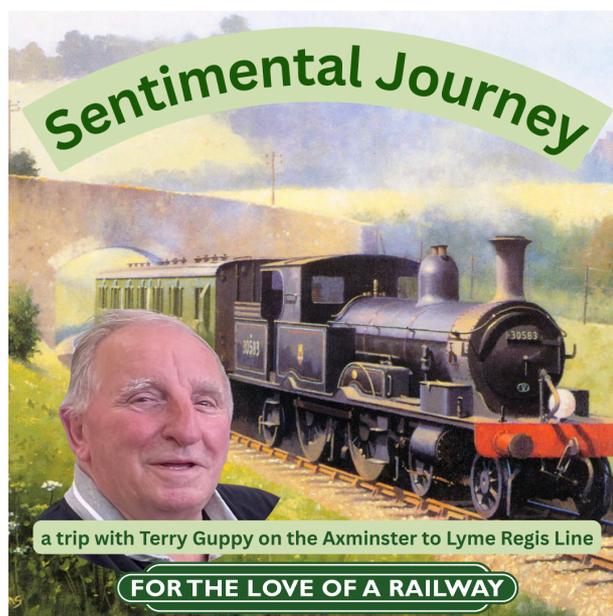
## Cross Curricular Resource: Sentimental Journey

Pupils can climb aboard our virtual train for a 25-minute ride along the old Axminster to Lyme Regis line! This digital railway simulation follows the exact route of the original branch, featuring a commentary that blends history with the personal memories of former fireman Terry Guppy who once worked on the line.

**Curriculum links:** history (local study, continuity and change); geography (human and physical landscapes); English (listening, recount writing).

**How to use:** Show in class or assign sections for study. Pupils can take notes, sketch scenes, or write their own travel diary based on the journey.

**Find it here:** [https://youtu.be/Nblv3m\\_DuH8](https://youtu.be/Nblv3m_DuH8). We can also supply it on a memory stick and will be happy to come and present it with a speaker if you would like us too.



## History & Transport

### Learning potential

Pupils will explore how railways shaped everyday life locally and nationally, learning to recognise what has changed and what has remained the same over time. They will be encouraged to connect personally with the past by imagining how their own families might have travelled in 1903, helping them build empathy and a sense of historical perspective.

### Key ideas to reinforce

Children should understand that before the railway, travel was slow and limited, often by horse and cart or on foot. The arrival of the railway made journeys quicker, opened up new opportunities and created a real sense of excitement in the community. It is also important for pupils to grasp the impact of railway closure in the 1960s, and what that meant for local people.



### Suggested questions

Invite pupils to consider why the railway mattered so much to Axminster and Lyme Regis, who benefitted from it most, and how life may have changed once trains stopped running. These questions help them think like historians and explore cause and consequence.

### Extension ideas

Challenge pupils to debate whether the Lyme Regis line should ever have closed. This encourages broader enquiry and critical thinking.

### ***History activity 1: Railway Stories Through Time***

#### ***Objective:***

*Understand the role of the Axminster to Lyme Regis Railway in shaping local life.*

#### ***Task:***

*Share historical accounts or photos of passengers travelling on the railway. Pupils imagine they are passengers in 1903, writing a diary entry or letter describing their journey.*

#### ***Prompt questions:***

*What are you travelling for (a seaside holiday, transporting goods, visiting family)?*

*Would you have made this journey before the railways came? If so, how would you have travelled and how long would it have taken?*

*Who might you meet on the train?*

*What would you see outside the window?*

**Worksheet:** *Diary of a Journey*

## **History Activity 2: A Big Boost for Jobs and Businesses**

### **Objective:**

*Understand how the arrival of the railway transformed work and business in the local area.*

### **Task:**

*Consider the new world of opportunity arising from the railway. New jobs were created, including engine drivers, firemen, station masters, signal operators and track workers. Meanwhile, older roles such as waggon drivers and horse handlers became less common.*

*Businesses like carpet making and farming benefited from being able to deliver products more quickly and further afield, while many new tourism jobs appeared.*

### **Prompt questions:**

- *Which jobs disappeared and which new ones appeared?*
- *How might a carpet weaver, farmer or shopkeeper have benefited from the railway?*
- *Why did tourism grow so rapidly after the line opened?*
- *What would the loss of the railway in 1965 have meant for these jobs and businesses?*

### **Worksheets:**

- *My Favourite Job on the Railway*
- *How the Railway Helped Local Businesses (this worksheet also supports learning in our Economy, Tourism & Community section)*

# Geography

## Learning potential

Children will develop their map-reading skills, learning to recognise features such as roads, settlements and contour lines. They will begin to understand how physical geography — including hills and valleys — influences where and how people build transport routes, and how human geography changes as communities grow.

## Key ideas to reinforce

The landscape between Axminster and Lyme Regis was steep and challenging, which is why structures like the Cannington Viaduct were needed. Pupils should see how the terrain shaped the railway's path and how transport networks help places thrive.



## Suggested questions

Support pupils in thinking about why the line could not simply run straight, what difficulties engineers faced, and how land use along the route has changed over time.

- Why the line could not simply run straight
- What difficulties engineers faced
- How land use along the route has changed over time

## **Geography Activity: The Impact of Transport on the Countryside**

### **Task:**

*Ask pupils to think about the challenge of building a railway across open countryside using before-and-after maps of the Axminster to Lyme Regis Line.*

- *Look at the 'before' map and think about the railway route you would choose. Where would you put bridges? How would you cross the River Lym near Lyme Regis?*
- *Would it be worth digging a tunnel through the steep hillsides? How difficult would that be?*
- *Now look at the 'after' map. Why do you think the route chosen winds around?*

- *Look at the photos. What impact do you think the railway had on people living nearby?*

***Resources provided:***

- *Before and after maps*
- *Supporting photographs*

***Worksheet:***

*How the Railway Changed the Countryside*

## Art & Creativity

### Learning potential

Pupils will develop their observational drawing skills and learn how artists communicate ideas visually. They will explore railway poster styles, paying attention to lettering, colour and composition, and use their own imagination to recreate this historical style.

### Key ideas to reinforce

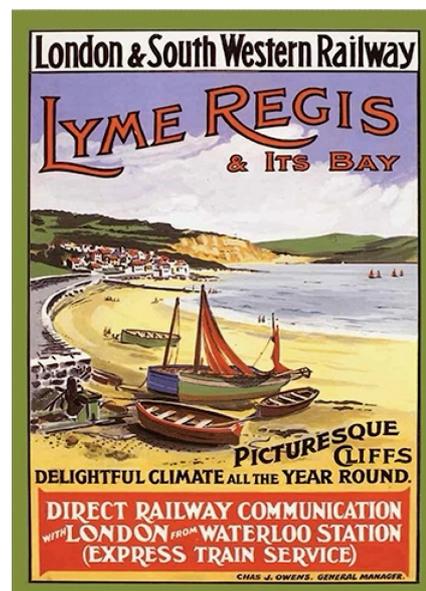
Historic railway posters used bold imagery and welcoming slogans to entice visitors, particularly to seaside towns. Trains themselves have distinctive shapes and details, providing exciting inspiration for observational drawing.

### Suggested questions

Encourage pupils to think about what message they want to send with their poster, how their choice of colours will affect the mood and how steam locomotives differ in shape from trains today.

### Extension ideas

Children who want to explore further could create collages using historic travel imagery or even build simple 3D train models from card or modelling material



### ***Art & Design Activity: Design a Railway Poster***

***Objective:*** Create a vintage-style railway poster promoting the Axminster to Lyme Regis Railway.

***Task:*** Show examples of old railway posters advertising seaside holidays (see our Resources Library). Students design their own posters, using slogans like 'Discover the Charm of Lyme Regis by Rail'. Encourage vibrant colours, landmarks like Cannington Viaduct and historical details.

***Worksheet:*** Design Your Own Railway Poster

### Learning potential

Students will build creative writing skills by imagining life in the past and writing in character. They will practise structuring diary entries or stories and develop vocabulary linked to railways and seaside journeys. Role play will support speaking, listening and confidence.

### Key ideas to reinforce

Writing in the first person helps children step into someone else's shoes, using sensory detail to describe sights, sounds and feelings. Exploring the experiences of passengers and railway workers encourages empathy and understanding.



### Suggested questions

Prompt pupils to think about how people felt when travelling by train for the first time, what they might pack for a beach holiday in 1903 and how a station worker might describe a busy day.

### Extension ideas

More confident writers can experiment with hot-seating, answering questions in character, or performing station announcements from the opening day of the line.

### **English & Drama Activity 1: Story Writing - “A Day on the Railway”**

**Objective:** Develop creative writing skills by imagining life on the Axminster to Lyme Regis Railway.

**Task:** Students write a short story set in 1903. They can choose to be a passenger, a railway worker or even the train itself. Include prompts to help: What happens when the train stops at Compyne? What sights and sounds do you notice on the journey?

**Worksheet:**

### **English & Drama Activity 2: Drama - The Opening day of the Railway**

*Objective: Re-enact a key historical event to bring it to life.*

*Task: Divide students into roles (VIPs, children on the train, the train driver). Act out the opening ceremony in 1903, imagining speeches, and the excitement of the first train ride.*

**Worksheet - The Opening Day of the Railway**

## Economy, Tourism & Community

### Learning potential

Pupils will learn how transport links support economic growth and help communities thrive. They will explore how the arrival of the railway supported farms, shops, tradespeople and hotels and how seaside tourism began to flourish as ordinary families could finally travel for holidays.

### Key ideas to reinforce

The railway made it easier to move goods such as milk and fish, and to bring visitors to the coast. It also brought jobs, both on the line and in related industries. When the line closed, the community lost an important connection.

### Suggested questions

Support children in considering which businesses benefitted most from the railway, why people were suddenly able to visit Lyme Regis in greater numbers and what happens to a community when such a service disappears.

### Extension ideas

Invite pupils to design a 1910 tourism leaflet for Lyme Regis or interview older residents about how travel and tourism have changed locally.

**Worksheets:** How the Railway Boosted Tourism How the Railway Helped Local Businesses

## SUGGESTED FIELD TRIPS

### **For the Love of a Railway, Axminster**

Our visitor centre has a large working model of the former Axminster to Lyme Regis Line as its centrepiece. It effectively tells the story of the line in a way that is particularly engaging for children - the three the three stations, the grateful viaduct and tortuous route that linked them. They can also see scale models of the locomotives that ran on the line, including the three veteran Lyme Billys that mastered it after others failed.

**Objectives:** Explore a detailed model of the Axminster to Lyme Regis Line and understand its historical significance. Engage with role-playing volunteers to learn about life on the railway in its heyday. Develop observation, questioning, and creative thinking skills.

**Activities:**

1. Guided Tour of the Model Railway. Volunteers guide students through the layout, pointing out key features like the Cannington Viaduct and Lyme Regis station. Students make notes or sketches of details they find most interesting.
2. Role Play with Volunteers. Volunteers act as historical characters (eg a station master, driver or fireman. Students interact by asking questions about their jobs and life on the railway in the early 20th century.

**Limitations:**

Our premises used to be a small shop and are now home to a very large model such that space for party visits is limited. We will, therefore, need to limit class visits to parties of no more than ten at a time.

### **West Somerset Railway (Heritage Railway)**

A visit to the West Somerset Railway is a great way to build on what you see at our own visitor centre and has the great added attraction of rides on a real steam train.

The West Somerset is Britain's longest heritage line, running for more than 20 miles between the seaside town of Minehead and the village of Bishops Lydeard on the edge of the Quantock Hills. The route wanders through peaceful countryside, traditional West Country villages and the dramatic coastline of the Bristol Channel.

Along the way you can spot:

- The medieval skyline of Dunster and its hill-top castle
- The harbour town of Watchet with its maritime history

- Views across to Exmoor and the Quantocks
- Classic country stations lovingly kept in Great Western Railway style

It is a popular choice for school visits, offering:

- Hands-on learning about steam engines and railway heritage
- Workshops on engineering, local history and geography
- Safe spaces for picnics, walks and outdoor activities
- The chance to explore nearby attractions

You can download a copy of the West Somerset Railway's Teachers Information Pack and supporting documents from our Resources Library.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

### Visual Materials

- Historical photographs of the Axminster to Lyme Regis Railway and its locomotives.
- Maps showing the railway's route in 1903 and today.
- Vintage posters and tickets.
- A timeline of the railway's history with illustrations.

All these can be downloaded from our Resources Library

### Credits