

OLD DALBY

A brief collection of boyhood memories and impressions

Chris Chellis

2017

Introduction

Most of what is written in this book are memories of a 75 year old of the time when I was from 8-15 years old (1950-1957) when my main activity was watching the trains at Old Dalby, and a few references from the time after that period. I make no apologies for giving lists of locomotives that I saw or anything else that might be considered by intellectual people as being trivia not worthy of mention. This is a boys view of events witnessed and experienced by myself during the period mentioned

I have not put pen to paper for any commercial reason, rather that there may be some things that ought to be put on record for any future students of local history, and as there aren't too many people still around who worked on, or had the youthful interest in the railway as I did it would be a shame if some events were not put down in print. Though my demise is not in any way regarded as imminent, when I eventually do depart my memories go with me. Some people might like to hear them.

If the summary of the railway operations at Old Dalby were to be written in one paragraph it would probably go like this: -

The line from Nottingham - Melton Mowbray was opened for Goods traffic in November 1879, and for passengers in January 1880. Iron ore was delivered from Wartonby mines by narrow gauge railway and tippler for onward despatch to various Ironworks until it ceased in 1929. Extra sidings were added in 1941 for traffic to and from the newly constructed Military Depot, Goods deliveries to the station ceased in 1964, then the Station was closed to passengers in April 1966 and to Express trains & long distance freight in November 1968. Occasional military traffic continued to arrive from the Melton Mowbray direction only until late 1969 and after this ceased the remains of the line were converted to the test track that we see today.

The times of the trains are those when they were at, or passing Old Dalby. Included in the book are some photographs that are alas not of high quality though I have used them because I have seen very few pictures taken by other people and it would be a shame if they were disposed of when I'm no longer around, and in the long away future years although they are not too good images they will give to future generations a basic depiction as to how things used to be. These photos were taken in 1951 on a novelty "Snap shot" camera aimed by the makers at the childrens market and costing all of (wait for it) three shillings and eleven pence - 3/11d, in today's money about 19p. Who knows? The test track may not be there forever and if it does close eventually then even the most rudimentary relic such as these pictures may assume the mantle of historical evidence to inquisitive locals in the far distant future when all the remaining infrastructure and artefacts are swept from the scene as has happened in countless other areas of the country during the last 50 years or so. It is no conjecture to think that if the line had not been converted into the test track it would undoubtedly have closed completely, the bridges would have been destroyed, the embankment bulldozed and the tunnel filled in. Little evidence would exist today that a railway ever passed this way.

Feb 10th 1950: At approximately 3pm our family arrived at our new Airey house of the married quarters belonging to the R.E.M.E Depot at Old Dalby. My father a W.D. police officer had been promoted to sergeant and posted to this depot. When I say new Airey house I mean new because on our arrival the builders were still there finishing the downstairs floor. Outside was a machine boiling the mixture that the floor was to be made up of and we sat outside on some old crates until around 5.30pm till they had finished pouring the compound and it had cooled and set solid. Then we were allowed to occupy the house.

We had come from Branston Depot near Burton on Trent and by bus not train. Old Dalby was to us right in the outback compared to an industrial town like Burton, where I had discovered railways by standing at the bridge over the Derby to Birmingham line. Being a towny the local farms held nothing that I was familiar with and very little else did either. But a mile from our house was the Melton Mowbray - Nottingham main line running through the extreme western end of the Vale of Belvoir. After noticing the trains from the bedroom window as they raced up and down the bank in both directions it wasn't long before I with two new pals that I'd made started to go up to the Station each morning when we were not at school, and in the evenings when we were at school. In very short time the pattern and times of the trains became familiar to us. Ian Allens ABC's became a necessity and once as with all spotters when we had underlined our first few namers we were hooked.

As train spotters we were not too welcome on the station and if we went and sat on the seats on the platform we would pretty soon be told to leave the station, so eventually we decided to stay on the road below near the bridge or spend much of the time in the fields on either side of the embankment. Despite being barred from the station, often we would creep along the foot of the embankment on the down side (Nottingham line) as far as the loop where empty coal trains returning to the Nottinghamshire pits would pull in to allow express train to pass on their way North. This way we were able to "cab" numerous Johnson or Fowler 0-6-0's, Stanier 2-8-0's, Horwich Crabs and B.R 9F locomotives, though I never got onto a Garret and no-one would let us onto one of the Crosti boilered 2-10-0's, which is not surprising as they were detested by the crews, and the fellows were never in a good mood while they were working them. Usually when we cabbled something it would be during the following times when expresses were due to pass.

3.30pm - 4.00pm, 5.05pm - 5.30pm or 7.00pm - 7.40pm.

Very occasionally we would go right along the bank to the signalbox and on a few occasions Wilf Goodman would let us into the signalbox and when a train came, after seeing it from a distance we would lay on the floor so as not to be seen by the train crew and get him reported, while he would take the engine number for us. These were however very rare events as on the whole the station staff (apart from one man, John Wright) were very hostile to us, even though we never did cause any trouble. I remember as clear as yesterday the day in 1955 of the government announcement that Steam engines were finally to be replaced altogether. I was waiting for the 4.38pm train from Nottingham that brought the Nottingham Evening Post papers for my paper round. At about 4.20pm Harold Cox who had obviously been listening to the news on the radio emerged from the porters room on his way to open the booking office to serve any passengers who wished to catch the coming train. As he passed me as I sat on the bench outside the waiting room he said in a very unpleasant manner, "Well there is one thing, we'll definitely get rid of you lot now." I asked him what he meant and his exact reply was, "All these steam engines will be gone, all scrapped in the next five years so we hope we'll see the back of you and all your mates as well"

Well of course, this sort of attitude was sure to get the young to respect their elders, wasn't it?
(I don't think)

We had a long running dispute with the two porters, as if I wasn't there to meet the train and personally collect my papers from the guard, but arrived say 5 minutes after the train had departed, they would cut open the rolled bundle so that they could check the Stop Press column for the early horse racing results. We didn't mind at first, but as they were so hostile to us youngsters we reciprocated their attitude in the end and they were told by the Nottingham Evening Post people that the bundle was addressed to us not them, and they were not to open it. It made no difference whatever so we just had to let it continue to prevent any further antagonism.

The Staff members working at the Station who were familiar to me during my boyhood days were

Station Master	A. Conduit
Admin clerk	Mr Hingley
Porters	H.Cox C.Ashley
Goods Shed porter	J.Wright
Signalman	W.Goodman
Gangers	H.Goodman L. Goodbourne R.Williams

There were several other gangers not from the locality whose names I did not know and also other signalmen unknown to me

If the the platelayers and gangers were working to the North on any given day they would set out on foot in the Nottingham direction immediately after the 08.25 train to Nottingham had left and not return until 4.30pm just prior to the arrival of the 4.38pm from Nottingham to Bourne & Kings Lynn

To the ordinary person living in the locality the railway was just an everyday common or garden thing which caused little raising of eyebrows or interest, just a mundane run of the mill thing that had been there for years was nothing out of the ordinary and would continue to be there for the all time future, and it was unthinkable that it would ever close. To us it was however a spectacle to excite the minds of young lads full of boyhood fascination. Would that it were possible again to see and hear the passing of an express train as we used to, particularly on a still, quiet summer evening. We would sit on the fence at the roadside near the bridge and hear from far away over Grimston hill the staccato roar of a Jubilee class loco as it accelerated away from the 40mph speed limit that was in force at Melton Junction. This rhythmic roar would get louder and louder as it blasted it's way up past Holwell Works and through Grimston Station as it approached the summit of the line just short of the tunnel entrance and got to the start of the downhill stretch to Nottingham. Silence would fall and we would know that it had entered the 1305 yard long tunnel. There would come a swish from the signal wires as the peg went up to give it a clear run North. Above the tunnel in the woods we could easily see one of the vents and would watch for the smoke to shoot out as the train approached the tunnel exit from which it would burst with a mighty roar sending a huge column of smoke skywards. Round the curve it would come, through the station, over the bridge and onto the bank towards Upper Broughton, absolutely thundering down it at 75 - 80mph-ish. Just an every day occurrence, but now never to be seen again.

From the opposite direction when an express was due we went through the bridge and looked across the fields to Upper Broughton. A sudden streak of smoke and steam would appear along the top of the trees as it took the curved cutting and then pounded up the bank towards us at about 70mph. Usually there would be a brief toot on the hooter as it entered the tunnel to warn any platelayers that might be working in there.

Not known to many people was that about 600 - 700 yards North of the Station in the embankment trees on the up side (Melton bound) was a brick built storage hut that was reached by two long sloping cinder paths dropping down from the line, one from each direction, the Station direction and from the Upper Broughton direction. Stored in this hut were many detonators, chocks, nuts and bolts, fishplates, etc. We were birds nesting in the trees one Sunday afternoon when there were was little railway traffic and no-one else about when we discovered it. Unless one walked the line you would not know of it's existence. We only went there once, on that occasion only, as whatever some people might have thought of us we did not trespass on the railway embankments or lines as a habit

The Station

The Station itself was of a pretty standard Midland Railway country village stop style, the buildings being almost entirely of wooden construction, built in 1879. At sometime later however, possibly just before or during World War 2 (I am not sure when) a prefabricated concrete office block had been added with 2 extra offices, one serving as the Station Masters room and the other as the administration clerk's office. On the up platform also a brick building had been added as the platelayers facilities some time after the original Station construction.

The road access was by a 100 yard hill on the up side leading to the main buildings. Half way up this hill was the weighbridge, the Station Masters house being at the entrance to the drive at the bottom of the hill on the main Old Dalby to Nether Broughton road. At the top of the hill a "U" turn brought you to the main Station buildings, and although when built no such thing as cars existed there was a large area for what I assume would have been horses and carts. Though I never saw many vehicles there, there was ample space for up to 30 cars in the 1950's

The main up building comprised a parcels room, with scales etc, and a door in the corner of this room gave staff access to the booking office. Diagonally opposite this door in the parcels room was a water closet. Next along the platform was the general waiting room, and after that was the Ladies waiting room which also had a toilet, which I suppose would now be referred to as being En Suite. The next room was the gents toilets followed by the porters room. On the end of the building was a small storage room besides which, attached to the wall was a water standpipe fed from the springs and drains flowing down from the hillsides. These water sources also supplied the toilets. On numerous occasions we lads were advised not to drink this water as it was not supplied by the Water Board or connected to the main village supply line but came out of the ground and was untreated. But, on a boiling hot summer's day when we had been kicking a ball around in the fields below alongside the embankment we drank it from the tap anyway as it was akin to an oasis in a desert

Fifteen yards south of the main building was a brick building, the gangers and platelayers changing room, behind which was a small corrugated hut used for the storage of oils etc. Some of the gangers would also put their bikes in this hut as few people working there in those days had motorbikes let alone cars, they biked to work, though later on in 1961/62 I do recall seeing porter Harold Cox who lived in the Hickling/Kinoulton area passing Station lane several times on a brand new 98cc Sun motorcycle on his way to work. He was quite a stout man and being a motorcyclist myself by then I remember thinking that such a big man on such a small machine was in fact a case of cruelty to a motorbike.

On the down platform was a wooden waiting room, compact and very sturdily built with really substantial bench seats fixed to the walls. There was a second room on the North end of this building but what was in there we never found out, as in 7 years we never saw it open once. It is amazing to think when we see some of the things thrown up today that this wooden facility stood for almost 90 years I doubt if a tornado would have done any damage to it due to its solid construction. The platforms were still illuminated by oil lamps in those days, and there was of course a Station clock on the wall outside the waiting room. To mark the approach of a stopping train there was also a bell next to this clock. It would be rung twice by the signalman to alert staff and passengers alike that the train was coming. This bell was so loud that it could be heard 300 yards away from any direction.

From the up platform a sloping pathway led to a flight of steps that went down to the main road below, and there was also a flight of steps leading down from the main building parking area to the weighbridge. Passengers crossed from one platform to the other over a sleeper styled foot crossing at the North end of the Station.

The Yard

Immediately south of the up platform end was a small bay platform which held the cattle dock and Cattle pen. Perhaps, even in the fifties cattle by rail had ceased at certain small stations because not once in 7 years at Old Dalby did I ever see this facility in use for livestock. It usually had a large pile of sand inside it for railway use, or for a local merchant a Mr Marson of Upper Broughton. I certainly never saw it occupied by a single animal.

50 Yards further South was the Goods shed which still stands today, it is 138 years old now if you can believe it. Many times during the school holidays I and my pals would assist John Wright in unloading wagons containing large sacks of Cow cake, Sugar beet, and golden flaked maize, all for collection or delivery to local farmers to feed their herds of beast. They were heavy but we were not fazed as we wheeled them on a sack truck into the large steel floored cage that protected them from the rats that were known to get into the building from time to time and inhabit the crawl space beneath the wooden floored platform. This all came to an end one day when the Station Master knowing that we were down there walked down to the shed and told us we were trespassing on railway property and if we did not leave he would call the police. He must have waited until he assumed that we had, with John, completely unloaded all that there was, as it was late in the afternoon when he chased us off. John was not too pleased not because he had lost his helpers but because he was down there all day by himself, and appreciated someone to talk to even if we were only 12 year old lads.

Alas apart from John it cannot be said that anyone at the Station had a sense of humour, was fond of youngsters or even the travelling public, though as I wrote earlier on a very few occasions we did get into the signal box with Wilf Goodman.

As can be seen from the track layout plan there were two lay-by loops (1up & 1 down) for goods trains to occupy enabling express trains to overtake them. There were also 6 sidings at the North end of the yard and 4 at the south end, with a connection to the depot coming in at the scissors junction. In the winter the South sidings would be occupied by the carriages that were used in the summer season for some of the Nottingham to wherever holiday trains. Sometimes also the North sidings also accommodated a couple of sets of coaching stock. The rest of the sidings were for coal wagons or traffic to and from the R.E.M.E depot. Over the years several coal merchants had wagons delivered here for their rounds. Each of these sidings had its own miniature signal that stood at about the same height as the locos and wagons were tall.

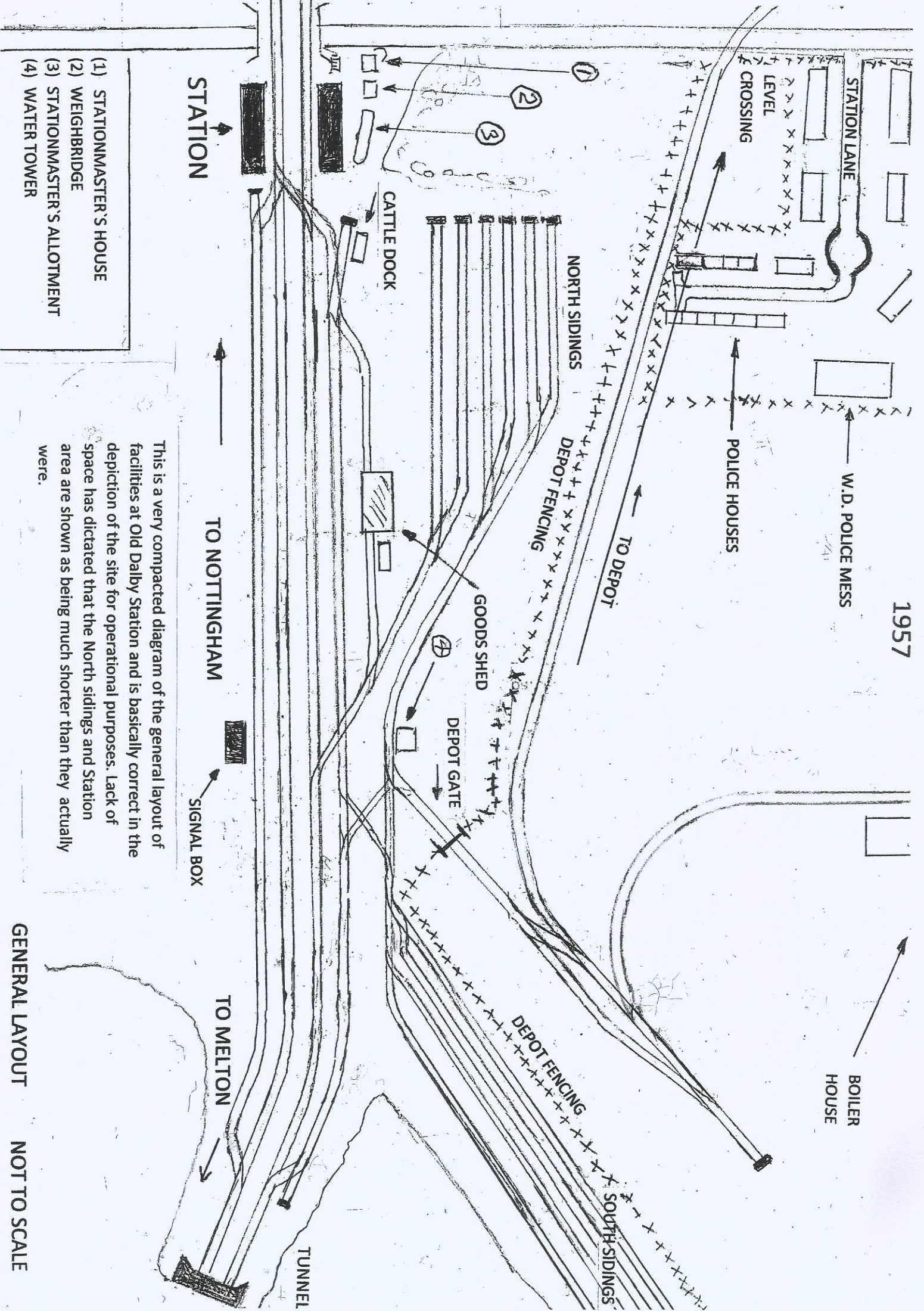
At the top of the Station drive near the buffer stops of the North sidings was a secure wooden shed where much railway paraphernalia was stored, crowbars, spanners etc and outside this for sharpening various tools, was the biggest manually operated grindstone I have ever seen, even after a lifetime of working in the heavy engineering industry. It was well over 2 feet in diameter and at least 6 inches wide, mounted on a sturdy trestle and operated by a very large crank handle similar to a car starting handle (itself very much also a thing of the past nowadays) Its style of construction must surely have made it a genuine relic of the 19th century.

Beside this where the embankment dropped away was the area where the Station staff would dump their waste. There were dozens if not hundreds of old meat tins, milk bottles and various other un-assorted items of garbage from decades of rubbish disposal. It would have given today's H.S.E. Officials and environmentalist zealots bad doses of apoplexy. It reeked to High Heaven and there were numerous rats around this vicinity.

For a short while from 1959 onwards in an area of the Depot sidings directly across the road from the main Depot entrance and between the sidings fencing and the nearest railway track on the site, a Go Kart circuit was allowed to be operated by some individuals though whether or not they were Depot employees or private individuals I cannot say. These events took place only on Sundays and any spectators would watch from outside the perimeter fence on the roadside footpath.

Go Karts were a recent invention at that time so there was much fascination from the local youngsters while it lasted.

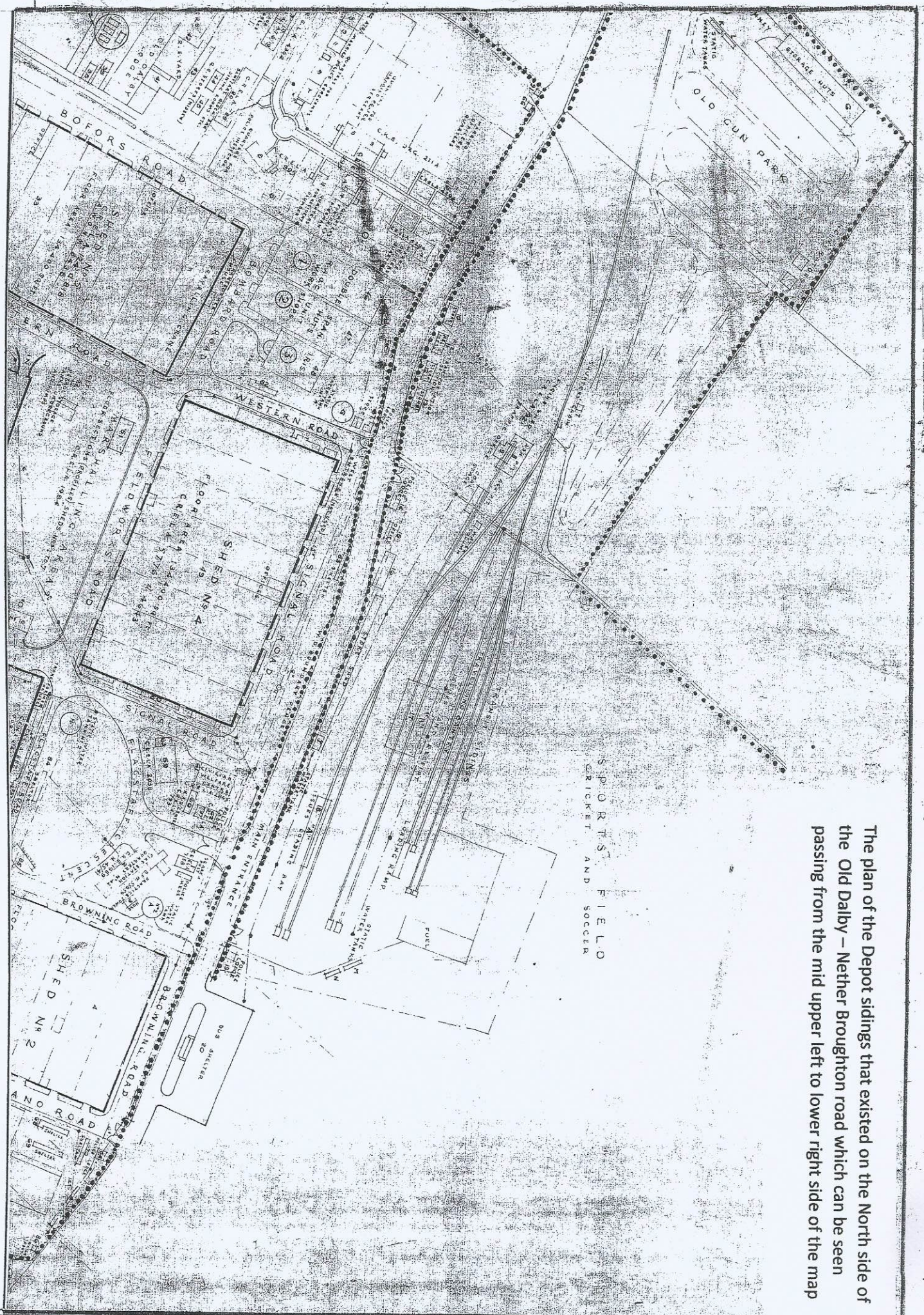
1957



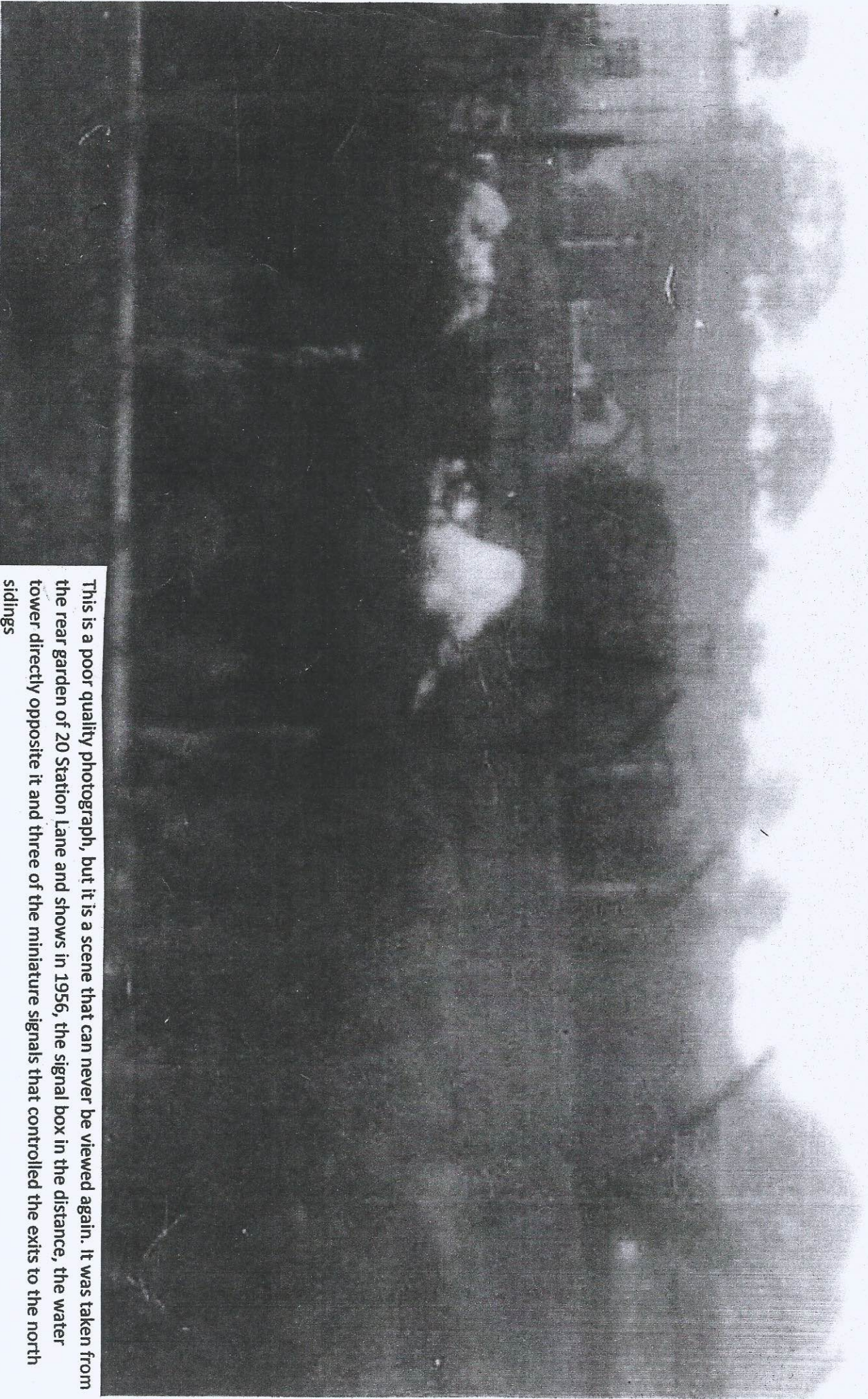
- (1) STATIONMASTER'S HOUSE
- (2) WEIGHBRIDGE
- (3) STATIONMASTER'S ALLOTMENT
- (4) WATER TOWER

This is a very compacted diagram of the general layout of facilities at Old Dalby Station and is basically correct in the depiction of the site for operational purposes. Lack of space has dictated that the North sidings and Station area are shown as being much shorter than they actually were.

GENERAL LAYOUT NOT TO SCALE



The plan of the Depot sidings that existed on the North side of the Old Dalby - Nether Broughton road which can be seen passing from the mid upper left to lower right side of the map



This is a poor quality photograph, but it is a scene that can never be viewed again. It was taken from the rear garden of 20 Station Lane and shows in 1956, the signal box in the distance, the water tower directly opposite it and three of the miniature signals that controlled the exits to the north sidings

Amazing Fact

One story that staggered me when I heard about it was an event that had occurred in 1947 either at Easter time or at Christmas, (I cannot recall which)

The war was over yet thousands of men in hundreds of barracks all over the country who had been conscripted into the Army for the war were still in uniform. At some time that year the Government and Military Authorities considered that the emergency was now at an end and that these conscripts could now all be demobbed. The final day of these men's retention and their day of release was announced and on that day very, very many men left Old Dalby camp for the last time to (in Army parlance) push off home.

I was told by John Wright, the goods shed operative, who assisted in the booking office that day because it was so busy, that they took in that booking hall over £420. from those ex-soldiers who were finally going home, and even with them having concessionary passes giving them reduced train fares this was a huge amount of cash which in today's money would amount to well over the staggering amount of £12.000

If they hadn't had reduced fare passes the takings would have amounted to an incredible sum of money, and on a Nationwide basis with ex-soldiers leaving all the other camps a pretty near incalculable amount.

In 1956 we moved out of the Army houses on what had become known as The Queensway after the council houses had been built in 1953/54 and the street named in celebration of the Queen's coronation. We moved in to purpose built Police houses on Station Lane and lived in No 20 directly next to the depot railway line that crossed the main road and went up the bank to connect with British Rail. Every weekday at precisely 2.00pm the depot train climbed the bank delivering items for despatch by B.R. and returned with incoming goods wagons at approx. 3.15pm. In those days seldom did the train amount to more than 4 – 5 wagons in or out though obviously it had been very, very much more busy during World War II and the first few subsequent years after that conflict was over

There were two 0-6-0 saddle tank locomotives permanently allocated to the depot for this work and in typical military fashion they were always maintained in immaculate condition, with no steam leaks etc and not a blemish on their paint work

During the last 18 months that we resided on Station Lane (to April 1964) I was working at Holwell Ironworks, and an avid fan of the railways I may have been but when I was working nightshifts I sometimes got very dis-chuffed at being woken from my daytime slumbers by the depot train as it passed.

On my bedroom windowsill I had a very cheap pair of binoculars and though I had stopped chasing the trains for other preferable activities, sometimes when I was bored I would take the loco number on a slow moving mainline goods train just for something to do. There was however no hope at all of doing this with the expresses as they were doing 70mph + most of the time.

Very many times from 1956 onwards we used the trains to go to Nottingham or Melton. To go to the Nottingham football matches we would catch the 2.10pm train and on arrival there, for Forest matches would get a trolley bus for Trent Bridge. For Notts County games it was a half mile walk but there was plenty of time to get there for the kick off

We would return home by the 6.18pm train from Nottingham – London which stopped at Old Dalby at 6.40pm. This train was an 11 coach relief Express and was too long for the Dalby platform so when it had left Nottingham the ticket inspector would tell all passengers for Old Dalby to move to one of the first 5 coaches as they were the only ones that would be stopping alongside the platform to let you get off. My eldest brother Bob once fell asleep on this train to wake up and find himself at Corby. Also this train was very well patronised, quite different to the 3 coach locals which were very rarely crowded. The non stopping expresses however would carry down the line anywhere between 50,000 -100,000 passengers per month most of the time.

After I had left school and went to night school in Melton I would take this 6.40pm train and return by the 9.10pm from Melton to Nottingham local stopper arriving at Dalby at 9.25pm. In 1953 a sad event occurred when our local vicar The Rev Graham Perry alighted this 9.25pm train descended the steps to the main road, and commencing his walk to the village, passed beneath the bridge and collapsed and died of a heart attack. He was found by the roadside by Mr Philip Jalland who arranged for the emergency services to attend

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II comes to Old Dalby and stays overnight

On Sunday June 18th 1961 the Queen was returning south from some northern engagement and her itinerary for the next day Monday the 19th included a visit to Corby Northants. The Royal Train with her on board was stabled overnight in the north sidings at Old Dalby Station.

As I was closing my bedroom curtains at 20 Station Lane at approx. 10.30 pm before getting into bed I saw the fully lit train in the sidings. I asked my father who had just come home from his 2.00pm-10.00pm shift if something was going on up there as this was way out of the ordinary and I knew that the W.D Police patrolled the railway fencing adjacent to the depot at night as a matter of course during their duties

My Father replied sternly, in his ex R.S.M tones, "Yes the Queen is up there, and you are not to go there now or early in the morning until she has gone"

These kind of arrangements are never made public beforehand. Nobody local knew in advance, except of course the station master and signalman, and few knew afterward that this had taken place and there was little gossip amongst the natives. Officialdom with their planned secrecy had played a blinder on this occasion

There were at least 4 other times when the Queen aboard the Royal Train passed through Old Dalby en route to somewhere (without stopping of course). On one of these occasions shortly after she succeeded to the throne in 1952, but prior to her actual Coronation in 1953 she visited Nottingham. Miss Smith the school headmistress closed down the school at 3pm on that day, and took the children down to the railway bridge to see the Queens train pass at 3.20pm, all hoping to get a glimpse of her Majesty on her way back to London. Nobody did, it was going too fast. Also after all passenger services had ended or been diverted to the Nottingham – Leicester- London route via Beeston, Trent junction, and Loughborough in 1968 she did pass down the line on her way to Nottingham again thereby making her the last person to be conveyed along the line in the very last occupied coaching stock to use the line prior to its total closure as a through route. Some might think that this was a fitting Swan Song.

Another possible last event was the passage in 1968 of none other than the Flying Scotsman locomotive, light engine on its way to take up a "Steam Special" excursion from Nottingham to head North from the city. A Mr Alan Pegler had bought it from British Rail and had restored it for such purposes. This very possibly was the last steam loco ever to use the route as Mr Pegler had to get very special permission from the authorities to take it to Nottingham via the Melton line involving quite a lot of bureaucratic hullabaloo. Beloved and obsessively adored this engine was and still is by many, but not by me as I saw it so often on my many day trips to Grantham, and was and still am, bored with all the hype about it and the ridiculous amount of money spent on it (over £4 million at the last overhaul). One would think that it was the only steam loco that ever existed. There were 77 more of this class of loco, all allocated to Eastern, North Eastern, and Scottish regions and never normally seen on our line. Its appearance here was a first, and last for this class of engine. or any other of the 78 that were built.

1950 -1957

STANDARD DAILY TRAIN MOVEMENTS

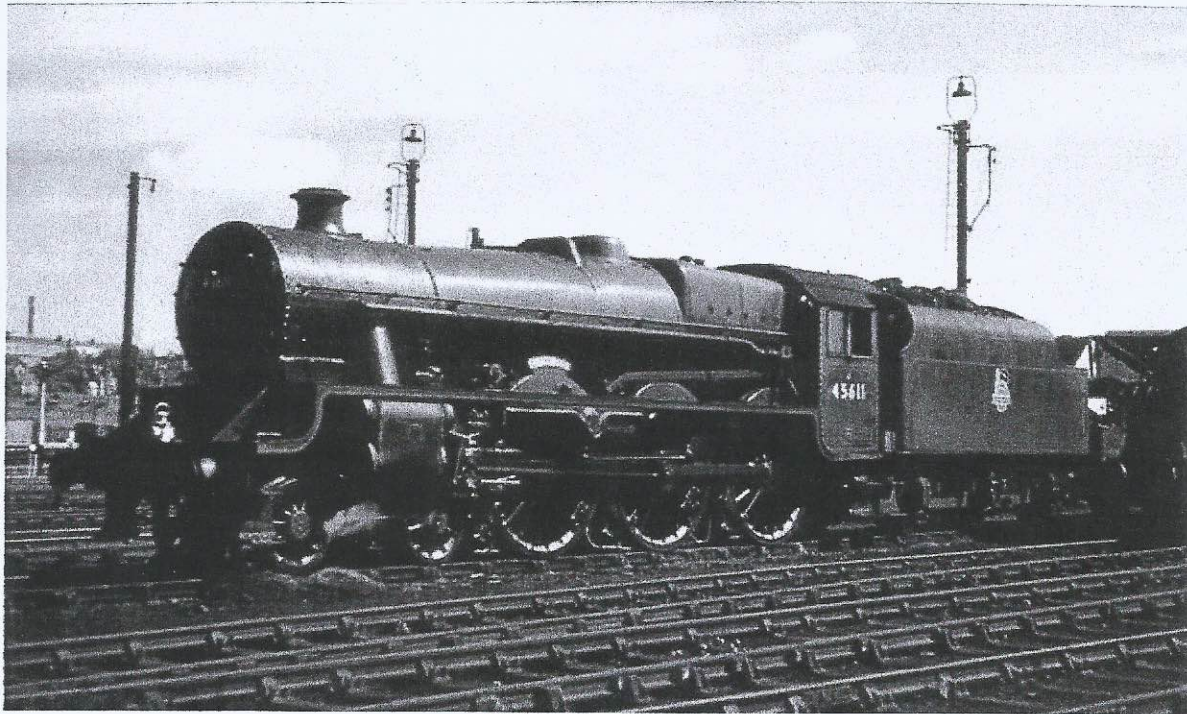
(1) Monday - Saturday

Time	Up to Melton	Down to Nottingham	Loco class	Notes
06.55	Express		Jubilee	
07.45	Stopper		2-6-4 tank	To Saxby
08.25		Stopper	2-6-4 tank	From Saxby
08.40	Express		Jubilee	
08.50	Express (Relief)		Stanier CL 5	
09.00	Stopper		2-6-4 tank	
10.10		Stopper	2-6-4 tank	
10.45	Express		Jubilee	
11.10		Express	Jubilee	
11.40	Express		Jubilee	
12.00	Pick up freight		0-6-0	Shunts till 13.45hrs
12.10		Stopper	2-6-4 Tank	
12.45	Stopper		2-6-4 tank	
13.40	Express		Jubilee	
14.10		Stopper	2-6-4 tank	
14.45	Coal		Stanier 2-8-0, W.D 2-8-0	Garret or B.R 9F
15.15	Express		Jubilee	
15.40		Express	Jubilee	
15.50		4 coach parcels	M.R. Compound	
16.15		Stopper	2-6-4 tank	Summer time table
16.38	Stopper		Johnson 4-4-0	To Kings Lynn
17.25		Express	Jubilee	
17.50		Stopper	464xx 2-6-0	
18.10		Mixed freight	Crab	Approx 8-12 times month
18.20	Express		Jubilee	
18.40	Express (relief)		Stanier CL 5	Stopper (11 coaches)
19.05		Express	Jubilee	
19.25		Express	Jubilee	
19.40		4 Coach parcels	M.R. Compound	
20.02	Stopper		43xxx 2-6-0	Summer time table
21.00	Stopper		2-6-4 tank	
21.25		Stopper	2-6-4 tank	

Sunday

11.40	Express		Jubilee	
16.30	Express		Patriot	45509
18.20	Express		Jubilee	
19.25		Express	Jubilee	

There was little or no variation in the above times, train movements, or locos for over 7 years



45611 Hong Kong
(photo by ColourRail, courtesy of Robin Gibbons)

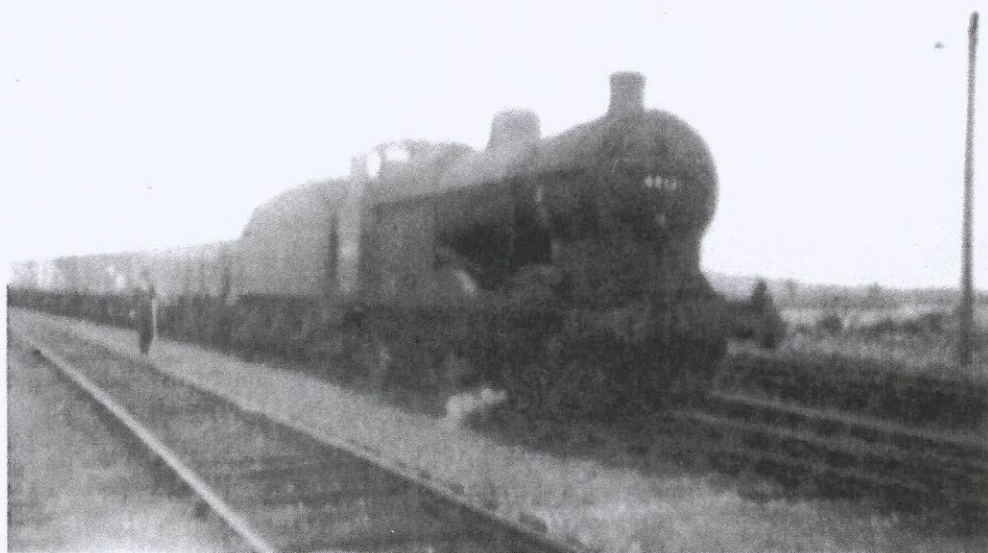
Photograph of a Jubilee class locomotive of which 191 were built. Around 70 of these were allocated to depots involved with the operation of our line and any assorted dozen of them would pass Old Dalby every day except Sundays, when only 3 or 4 would come through. This pictured example was a very familiar sight here. The trains were 11 coaches long, and would be travelling at speeds in excess of 70mph. They finally disappeared in 1962 when the diesels took over, but the sight speed and sound of a "Jube" in full cry was very inspiring and a free entertainment that today's youngsters are very much poorer for by never again being able to have the opportunity to witness such a spectacle.

Photo Copyright: Simon Robinson

<http://www.jubilees.co.uk/photos/45611a.html>



Stanier class 5 4-6-0 on fast fitted freight passes Ivatt 43000 class 2-6-0 in the loop (1956)



0-6-0 No 44131 shunts at Old Dalby (1956)

The locomotives

The locomotives that operated on this line were generally from only a few number of classes and the passenger engines were from only a few motive power depots. The main expresses were hauled by Jubilee class loco's in the main with only a very few variations between 1950 – 1957. These engines were named after (1) Countries or provinces of countries belonging to the British Empire, (2) British Admirals over the years, or (3) British Warships over the ages. These loco's came from the following sheds only

London Kentish Town	Code 14b
Nottingham	" 16a
Derby	" 17a
Sheffield Millhouses	" 19b
Leeds Holbeck	" 20a
Bristol	" 22a

The Bristol loco's came less frequently than the others as they were only usually commandeered by one of the other sheds to fill in on a London working if they were short of an engine. Unlike most other Midland lines Stanier 4-6-0 Black fives were far less common than Jubilees though they did put in frequent appearances and they always were the power for the 2 relief expresses to London at 08.50am & 18.35pm. On rare occasions expresses would be double headed with a MR Compound on the front. New Diesels 10000/1 put in several appearances in 1951/52

The freight loco's came from any shed in the central midlands area. They usually consisted of Midland 0-6-0's, Stanier 2-8-0's, Garretts a few Horwich Crabs, and later of course BR 9fs. There were no ex-LNW 0-8-0's and there was a strange recurring event regarding the WD Austerity 2-8-0's Peterborough New England depot had 40-50 of these loco's and there was a regular coal train to that depot that passed Old Dalby at about 2.45pm some times three times a week. In all the years and the dozens of times I saw that train it was only ever hauled by one of this class of loco, the same one every time No 90501. Also and equally as strange was the fact that this train was once hauled by Fowler a 0-8-0 from Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire, No 49554. Up to 1941 some of these engines were shedded at Wellingborough, but they all went North during World War 2. This was the only example of this class that I ever saw, they just did not come this far south during my loco days. The stopping trains were either 42XXX class Stanier, Fowler, or Fairburn 2-6-4 tank engines, Ivatt 43000, or 46400 2-6-0's plus 1 daily MR 4-4-0 on the 4.38pm to Kings Lynn, and 1 daily Black 5 on the 6.35pm relief express to London St Pancras that called at our Station. There was only ever one 80000 series 2-6-4 tank, No 80044 which was around for a couple of months only in the very early 50's. When it departed for another shed elsewhere there were no others thereafter, none.

There was little variation in the usage of loco's but on very rare occasions Leeds Holbeck would use one of their Royal Scots on their diagrams, I saw 4 of them but only one time each. Patriots were rare also except No 45509 The Derbyshire Yeomanry, that for 6 years or more hauled the 3.45pm Derby to London Sundays only passing Old Dalby at 4.30pm. This was Derby's only Patriot and the only one shedded away from the West Coast Main Line at that time,

During the Suez crisis of 1956 two other Patriots appeared on troop trains one Sunday so we were ecstatic to see three on one day plus a 3rd troop train behind a Manchester Newton Heath Jubilee These were

- 45503 Royal Leicestershire Regiment
- 45507 Royal Tank Corps
- 45671 Prince Rupert

The B.R 4-6-0 73000's also appeared but with about the same frequency as the Stanier Black 5's i.e much less than the Jubilees, though they were still quite common.

Rare before 1957 were the Leeds Scots and I saw only 4 of them, each only on one occasion. These were :-

46103 Royal Scots Fuselier

46108 Seaforth Highlander

46133 The Green Howards

46145 The Duke of Wellingtons Regiment (West Riding)

After I had stopped chasing the locos other Scots appeared from various locations after they were ousted from the West coast main line in the late 50's by the diesels and the occasional Britannia also showed up. In general though the Jubes reigned until the Peak class diesels came.

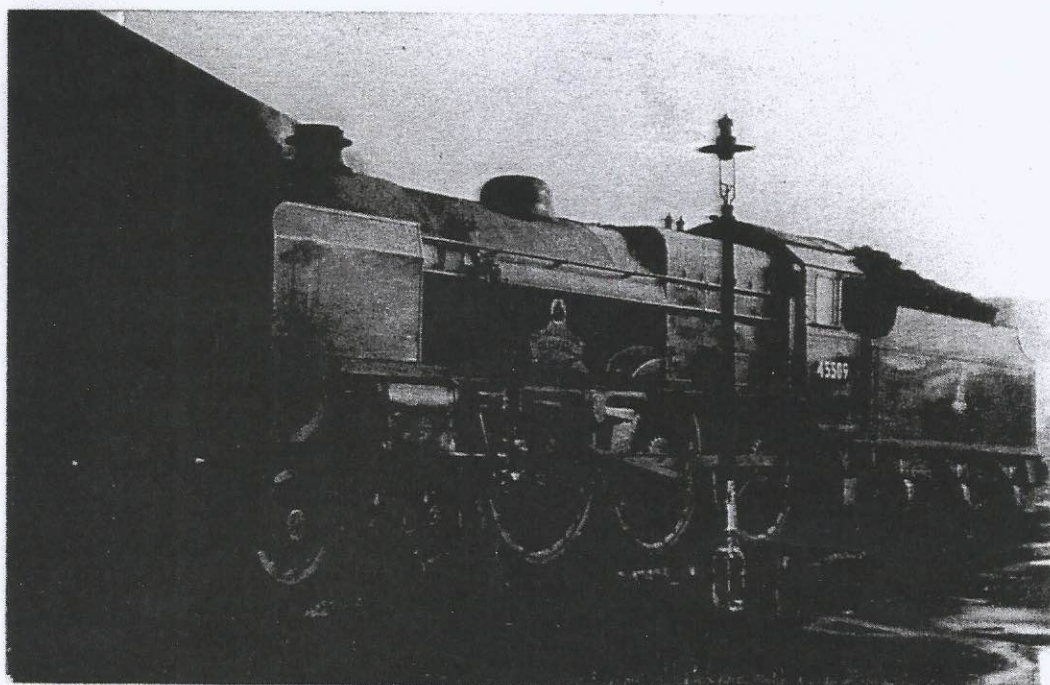
One amazing visitor was Scottish Clan No 72005 Clan McGregor on the 6.35pm London bound stopper around 1960-61. I saw it through binoculars from my bedroom window but doubted the integrity of my own eyesight for years until one day whilst browsing through the cut price books in a basket on Nottingham Midland Station I saw a photograph of what must have been this very train leaving Wellingborough for London. I still spoke to rail enthusiasts at the time of seeing it but kept quiet for fear of being ridiculed. That book removed all my doubts. A few weeks later that same train brought Black 5 No 45156 Ayrshire Yeomanry which had been a Glasgow St Rollox engine for many many years. I was very surprised, now being quite out of touch with things, and I had not known that it had been moved to Newton Heath.

Names of Jubilee locomotives regularly seen at Old Dalby in 1950's

No	Name	
45554	Ontario	45641 Sandwich
45557	New Brunswick	45648 Wemyss
45560	Prince Edward Island	45649 Hawkins
45561	Saskatchewan	45650 Blake
45562	Alberta	45651 Shovell
45564	New South Wales	45653 Barham
45565	Victoria	45654 Hood
45566	Queensland	45656 Cochrane
45568	Western Australia	45657 Tyrwhitt
45569	Tasmania	45658 Keyes
45572	Eire	45659 Drake
45573	Newfoundland	45662 Kempenfelt
45575	Madras	45663 Jervis
45576	Bombay	45664 Nelson
45579	Punjab	45665 Lord Rutherford of Nelson
45585	Hyderabad	45667 Jellicoe
45589	Gwalior	45671 Prince Rupert (Once only)
45590	Travancore	45675 Hardy
45594	Bhopal	45679 Armada
45597	Barbados	45682 Trafalgar
45598	Basutoland	45684 Hogue
45602	British Honduras	45685 Barfleur
45604	Ceylon	45690 Leander
45605	Cyprus	45694 Bellerophon
45607	Fiji	45696 Arethusia
45608	Gibraltar	45699 Galatea
45609	Gilbert and Ellice Islands	45725 Repulse
45610	Gold coast	45739 Ulster
45611	Hong Kong	
45612	Jamaica	
45614	Leeward Islands	
45615	Malay States	
45616	Malta G.C	
45617	Maritius (Once only)	45617, & 45671 were From Newton Heath who's locos
45618	New Hebrides	were very rare at Old Dalby
45619	Nigeria	Any one of all the rest could be seen at anytime
45620	North Borneo	
45621	Northern Rhodesia	
45622	Nyasaland	45665 Lord Rutherford of Nelson
45626	Seychelles	was transferred away to Glasgow
45627	Sierra Leone	
45628	Somaliland	early or mid 1950's
45629	Straits Settlements	
45636	Uganda	
45639	Raleigh	
45640	Frobisher	



Old Dalby station looking North 1955



45509 The Derbyshire Yeomanry

As mentioned in the text this was Derby's only Patriot class loco. It would pass Old Dalby at 4.30pm on a Sundays only working to London St Pancras. Except for the times it was in works for overhauls or maintenance it appeared on that train, and it seldom failed to appear for a period of over 7 years, until it was transferred away to Manchester Newton Heath depot in August 1958. Amazingly this powerful Express loco would the following day, on the Monday, return on a 3 coach all stations local from Kettering (10.45) to Derby via Oakham & Melton Mowbray. It must have been Derby's pride and joy, as it always very cleanly turned out. It would stop at Old Dalby at 12.10pm

First ride on a steam locomotive footplate

One day early in 1955 I completed my paper round and returned to the Station to watch the 5.25pm London – Leeds express pass. On my arrival, there was one of the recently introduced British Railways 9f 2-10-0 freight loco's (92008) in the loop at the head of a train of 50 or so empty coal wagons being returned to the Nottinghamshire coal mines. It had pulled in to allow the following Express train to get ahead of it. In flagrant disobedience of the station staff's orders to stay away, at all times, I rode up to where it was standing and sat down opposite it.

The fireman descended from the cab and I called across to him asking if I could "cab" the loco. He checked the signals were clear and beckoned me over and I climbed up onto the engine. A minute or so later the fireman climbed back onto the engine. He had uncoupled the loco from the train, and the driver said to me "Your'e going for a ride lad". I got a bit worried as I didn't want to go to Nottingham which I thought was what he meant, until he told me that they had to pick up some wagons from the South sidings. The driver then wound in the reverser and showed me how to open the regulator, and when the small exit signal for the loop went up he told me to pull the lever up 2-3 inches to set the loco in motion. As we started to move OH!!! it was the biggest thrill of my life to that point, and never before had I ever been so excited. We rumbled out onto the main line, stopped, and reversed through the crossovers and points up the yard until we reached the waggons they wanted. As we approached the signal box they told me to stoop down out of sight in the cab so as not to be seen by the signalman and possibly getting them reported to someone.

The express passed, and we went back with the extra wagons and re-joined the train in the loop. Then off I got, and they departed for Nottingham. Many times prior to this incident some of us had managed to get on the engines with the loco crew, but never had any of us been on one whilst it was in motion. For several weeks after, any train that pulled into the loop to let an express train pass was attended by one or another of the lads that I had told about this event, they being in hope of having a similar experience. None of them ever did, and I was called the biggest liar alive for months afterwards.

Some sobering thoughts

When one looks at the test track of today with its modern overhead catenary etc it must be hard or even impossible for those who came to Old Dalby after 1970 to be able to visualise the scene as it used to be. No longer is it an active railway connected as a through route to the main infrastructure with passing trains as older folk will be able to recall. For long periods it remained silent and unused with only periodic testing of new locomotives and rolling stock. Long gone are the days of steam and the regular timetable of programmed trains, gone alas for ever. Opened in 1879 and closed in 1968 its effective life was just over 89 years but as things now move so swiftly in today's world this can actually be viewed in retrospect as something quite notable in its duration.

Thinking back to the mid-fifties it is also a mind boggling thought that some of the engines still in use in those days, (and I am referring to the Johnson 0-6-0 freight locos that were so common) were actually designed and commenced production in 1885, just 6 years after the railway was opened. We never thought of this when we were young but now as a senior citizen I find it incredible to think that some of these engines were 70 years old in the fifties and had been travelling to and through Old Dalby for 14 years even before my father was born. It must have seemed to some people that it would go on forever.

Looking back also at the economics of the line tends to bring into a different light the actions of the infamous Dr Beeching tending to lessen the scepticism and revulsion that was prevalent during his tenure as boss of British Railways although I for one will never view him or his policies with anything other than contempt. If one takes the cost of say the 09.00am train (at Old Dalby) from Nottingham to Saxby Junction and returning as the 10.10am to Nottingham in 1958 for instance then what have we got?

We have a 3-4 coach train with driver, fireman, and guard, with an engine having a bunker holding 2-3 tons of coal. There were signal boxes along the line at Edwalton, Plumtree, Widmerpool, Old Dalby, Grimston and Holwell works. At Old Dalby there was a stationmaster, porter, admin clerk, and goods shed operator, plus a line maintenance gang of at least 6 men. There were also goods operators at Edwalton, Plumtree, and Widmerpool and stationmasters at the last mentioned two. Between Nottingham and Melton the only stop where passengers could board or alight the train was Old Dalby, and seldom were there more than 4-6 people doing either, as also seldom were there more than a dozen passengers all told on this train. I know, I used it regularly. This train could not have generated more than £5.00-£6.00 in income to the railway and the costs of running it must very much have exceeded the takings. There would have been more than 24 people requiring wages just during the movement of this train and between 09.00am (when the local headed for Melton) and 10.45am when there was a London bound express due the 10.10am to Nottingham was the only train movement on the line. The same lack of patronage took place with the 12.10pm, 2.10pm, and 5.50pm trains to Nottingham. Most of all the other local services also ran at a very heavy financial deficit.

Despite the down sides to the railway one might also consider other things that could have been thought of as slightly more positive. Take for instance the journey times by rail or bus. If you wanted to go to Nottingham by train the distance was covered in 20 minutes or less. If one went by bus then you had to somehow travel 1 and three quarter miles to Nether Broughton to catch the Melton to Nottingham Bartons bus. The journey from Nether Broughton - Nottingham took 45 minutes which added to the time for the trip between the villages made the whole journey 50 minutes or more, 30 minutes longer than by train.

By train to Melton was approx' 13 minutes, by bus from Nether Broughton exactly 15 minutes, or 25 minutes if you took the round the villages bus route.

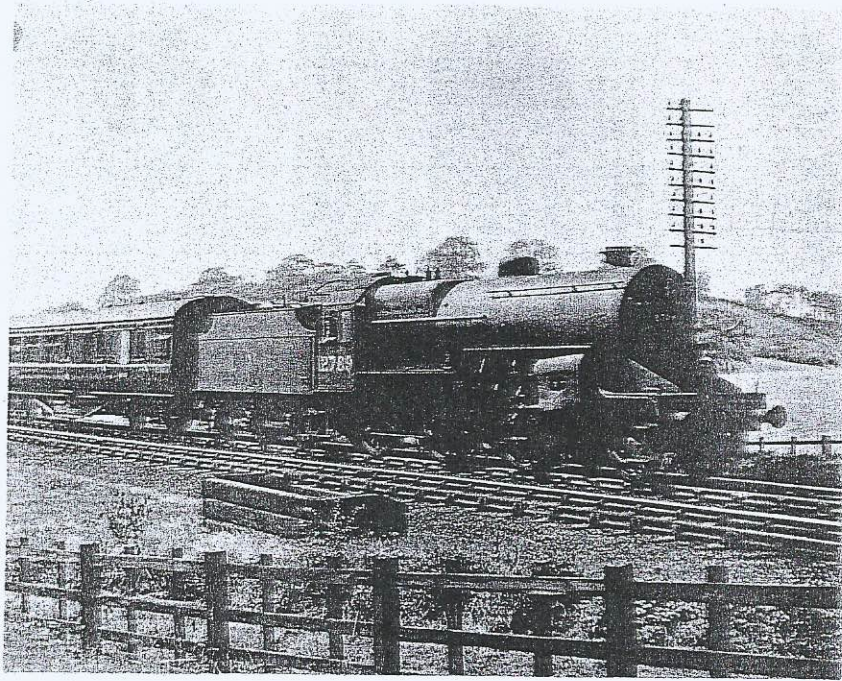
The fare difference: By bus from Broughton - Melton in 1951 the half fare for a minor such as myself was 4 pence. By train it was 6 and a half pence, over half as much again.

The viability of the goods trains must also have been questionable during the final 15 years or so of operations. There was no constant stream of iron ore trains to Holwell Works just up the line, just the odd one now and then. This traffic must have finished though about 1962 as the Blast Furnaces were demolished that year when the mines in the East of the county were exhausted. I worked at Holwell Works from 1962-1968 though and there were still rail deliveries of wagon loads of scrap metal for the Continuous Casting plant but not in any vast quantities, perhaps 4 – 5 wagons a time. The works did however despatch by rail daily, anything between 10 – 20 wagon loads of cast iron products to all parts of the Country. But as far as the line was concerned there were no long trains of steel products, timber, cattle, bricks, milk. Fish, etc or like to other areas imported bananas in their millions. Loaded coal trains and returning empties passed but not too many of these either, in fact 6 heavy freight trains a day would have been an exception, though what happened during the night I cannot say as I never found out

An anomaly in the fares systems in those days was that it was not possible to purchase a return ticket on the buses. You bought a ticket on the bus to go anywhere, and you bought a ticket on the bus when coming back, obviously each of them being for the full fare. The single fares on the buses were quite a bit cheaper than the single fare on the trains but on the Railway however, you could buy a return ticket and the return portion cost was greatly reduced (more than 50 per cent). Therefore on a two way trip it was in fact cheaper by rail. Alas though this seemed not to attract more people to the trains in rural areas such as Old Dalby lies in, but it was a huge success in the commuter belts of the large cities such as London, Birmingham Liverpool, Manchester, and Glasgow etc

By todays standards the fares in those days would appear to be miniscule and a real good deal. For example in 1962 the one way bus fare for an adult from Station Lane via Grimston and Asfordby to Melton was no more than 2 shillings (10p). By train the return fare was 2 shillings and seven pence (13 p approx.). However it must be equated to todays prices by the fact that a farm hands wages then were only just over £7.00 per week, a skilled tradesman with a 5 year apprenticeship behind him would be on £20.00 per week, and unskilled workers would struggle to achieve £10-14 per week in any employment. Other prices of that era were £12.50 per year road tax on your car, a postage stamp for a letter two pence halfpenny (1p) and a weeks holiday for a family or group of four in a seaside caravan site £7.50.

Beeching had a government mandate to cut the railway losses and there was, is, and always will be no sentiment in business, and particularly where treasury money is at stake. Tradition and age old practices count for nothing despite how beloved and accepted they might be to the natives of any particular area. Those involved with the exchequer are obliged to be mercenary, not romantic, and the losses are what led to closure of the line and consignment to history of the services we once had and which future generations of Old Dalby residents will never be able to envisage had even existed.

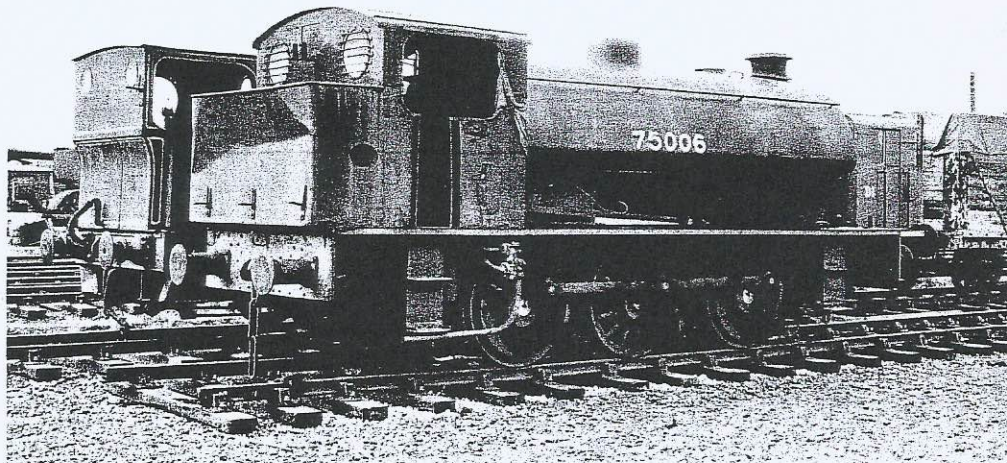


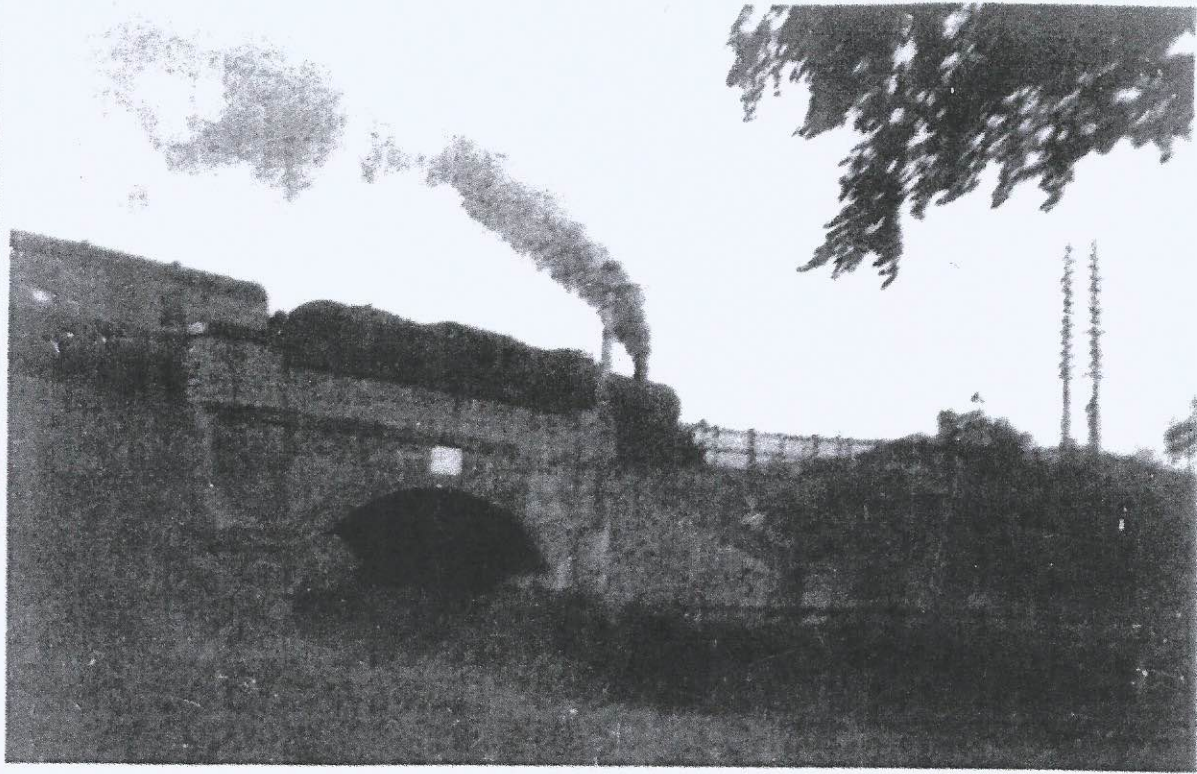
Above

Horwich "Crab" loco photographed prior to the 1948 Nationalisation of the railways. One of these engines would appear on a mixed freight usually between 6.00-6.30pm heading north about 8-10 times a month. Their appearances though were by no means prolific and the ones that passed this way were mainly from the group of 20 or so that were allocated to Burton, Derby, or Rowsley sheds. There were 245 of them built but only a few came through here and they were repeatedly from the same few allocated at these sheds.

Below

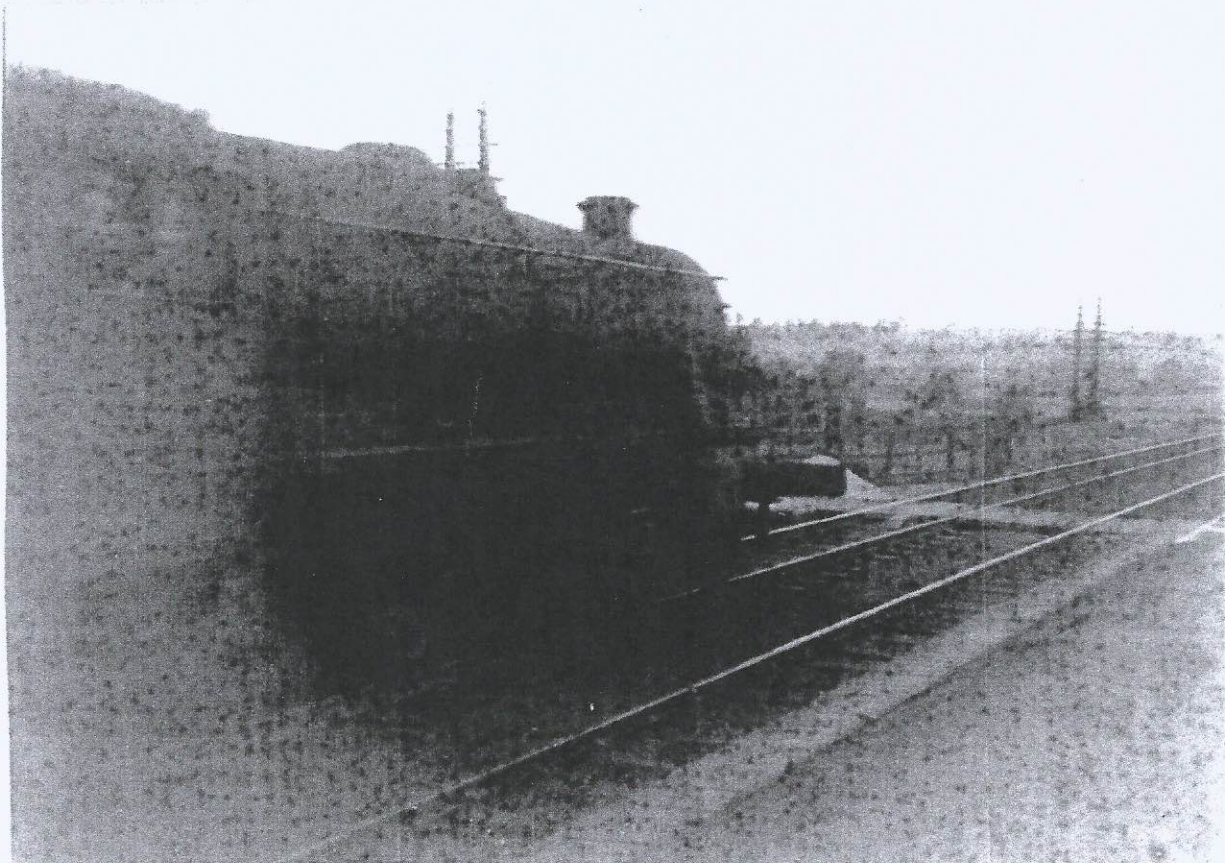
The class of Loco that worked the Depot sidings. There were 2 of them marked as No's W.D 154 and W.D 172. When either of them was sent to works for attention it was always substituted by another of the class, W.D No 163 until it returned. A large number of them were built for the War Dept from 1942, and 75 of them were purchased by the Eastern Region at the end of World War 2 and classified as J94. The two at Old Dalby worked the Depot line from 1954 till the end of railway activities there in 1969.





Jubilee class 4-6-0 loco heads for London on
Bradford – London express 13.40 pm

Stanier 2-8-0 Nottingham bound about to cross the bridge at 5.30pm
Having just left the passing loop after allowing the 5.25 London to
Leeds express to pass it



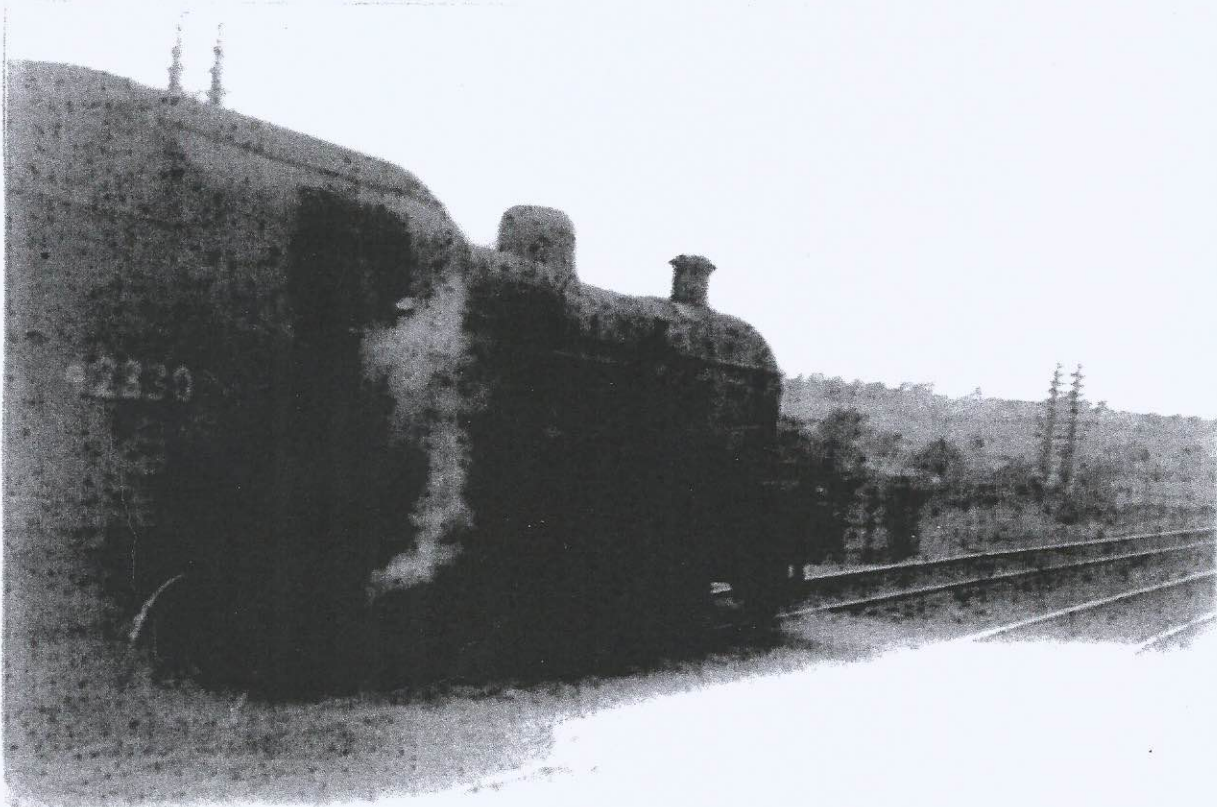


1951

Stanier class 5 4-6-0 passes through the station heading South on a special working.
Note train working No on front of smokebox

10.10am Stopper to Nottingham at Old Dalby Station

Fowler 2-6-4 tank engine in charge



1950's Steamdays train spotting

Train spotters in the 1950's had to suffer much malignment and flippancy by supposed adults and others who imagined that all they did was just jot down engine numbers and underline them in their Ian Allan ABC books. There was very much more to it than this infantile attitude, because there was nothing puerile about standing at say Nuneaton Station as I did many times watching 16 coach trains weighing over 500 tons thunder through at 90mph with a big green engine at the head and a gleaming brass nameplate somewhere on its bodywork. Many trains would have a titled headboard fitted on the loco front and the sight, noise and general spectacle of these trains was a pleasure far greater than watching 22 men kick a leather ball around for 90 minutes amidst a crowd of bellowing observers. No, this was a day long gala parade of noise smoke, speed and none stop activity. The thrill and romance of the named trains such as the Royal Scot, Midday Scot, The Emerald Isle, The Shamrock, Red Rose, Merseyside Express, The Lakes Express, The Comet, Mancunian etc was matched only by the loco names, Queen Mary, Princess Alice, Duchess of Rutland, Duchess of Norfolk etc and the Princess Royal class of loco's such as Princess Elizabeth, Princess Victoria, Princess Marie Louise etc. Much knowledge was gained of the British army by seeing the Royal Scot class engines which carried the Regimental names and crests such as The Black Watch, The Kings Dragoon Guardsman, The Honourable Artillery Company and so on, whilst the Patriot class of engines had many names of the North Wales resorts such as Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, and Bangor. The average adult would not have been able (and would not be able either today) to tell you where Gwalior, Udaipur or Baroda were. We could, they were cities or provinces of India after which several of the Jubilee class engines were named. Seldom did 5 minutes elapse at Nuneaton without the passage of an express train whilst at the same time goods trains were being shunted in the yard ready for movement overnight. These kind of scenes were being enacted all over the country at hundreds of other locations

All of this was possible in those days on a railway system twice as big as it is today by men's desire to create power by heating water and to those present day railway observers who refer to the old steam engines as "kettles" or other crass derogatory terms I have one thing to say, "You have no idea", and they haven't!!!

Being pragmatic one had to face up to the facts of life and it is doubtless that for economic, financial, and commercial reasons the steam engines had to go. There was no point dwelling on in maudlin nostalgia, the era was at an end, but I have to say that I am so happy to remember with great pleasure those easy days when I would set off from home at 8.15am with a satchel containing 3 sandwiches, an apple, orange and banana plus a bottle of lemonade made from a few ounces of kali powder bought from the Army NAAFI shop for 6d (today less than 3p). There was never any trouble, train spotters had a common interest and also never was there a day of disappointment or an unhappy ending to the trip. Our parents would not worry about us, there was no need unlike today where I would think it is doubtful that most parents would allow their 10-14 year olds to travel over 30 miles unaccompanied. The return fares total cost to Nuneaton for the day was in 1954 by bus from Nether Broughton – Melton, and train Melton – Leicester– Nuneaton 5/9d all told, believe it or not in todays money 28p

One day in 1956 whilst in the fields by the railway embankment with a John Anderson, half way to Upper Broughton on the village side of the line an old chap on his tractor drove up and started to talk to us. When I told him that I knew how to drive his Fergie tractor as Philip Jalland had taught me 5 years before he said if I would teach John how to drive he would give us something better to do as he could do with a couple of young lads like us for the weekends. He offered us £1.00 each for the weekend if we accepted. My paper round made me 2/6d per week so that was the end of the round for me. A whole pound, wow !!! If I won the lottery and had a million pound cheque in my hand today it wouldn't come anywhere near the feeling of pride I felt when I had that first green note in my hand after my first weekends work

The old chaps name was Ernest Brown and his farm was on the corner of Longcliffe Hill and Debdale Hill opposite the two (then) council houses on the left as you go towards the Crown Inn. The farmhouse still stands but there are houses now where the cowsheds, granary etc once stood. We learnt how to plough sow reap and mow , chain and seed harrow, disc and Cambridge roll, drag etc as well as activities associated with breeding sheep and fatstock. All this suited me fine as from many of the fields the railway could be viewed and I could keep my eyes on the trains and note anything unusual. I did this for 4 years and even after I left school in 1958 to supplement the meagre apprentice wages that I earned at the depot.

Mr Brown was uncle to Joe Brown the pop star who after 1959 came periodically for a couple of days break. Though I only saw him twice, several were the stories of Adam Faith, Billy Fury, Susan Maughan etc being seen in the Black Horse at Grimston with Joe

Mr Brown was also an on/off bookie who sometimes stood at point to point race meetings in the vicinity

One Sunday morning in 1959 I arrived at the farm at 8.00am to be met by the chap who had replaced John Anderson, who had gone off to live in Nottingham in 1958 when his parents had split up. My new cohort was Vic Truman and he was very agitated and said on my arrival, "Don't hang about here , get down the fields fast, the old man lost £2000 yesterday at the races and is off his rocker" (Garthorpe point to point if I remember correctly) So we sped off down the fields as we knew what we had to do, but I didn't dare to go to the house to collect my money when we finished at 5.00pm that Sunday night for fear of bucking the old boy's temper. He did pay me the following week though, seemingly having cooled off.

A fully skilled tradesman with a 5 year apprenticeship behind him in those days would be on £1000 p/a so Mr Brown lost 2 years wages for a skilled man that day, the price of a brand new 2 bedroomed bungalow, at a time when petrol was 5 shillings a gallon (25p)

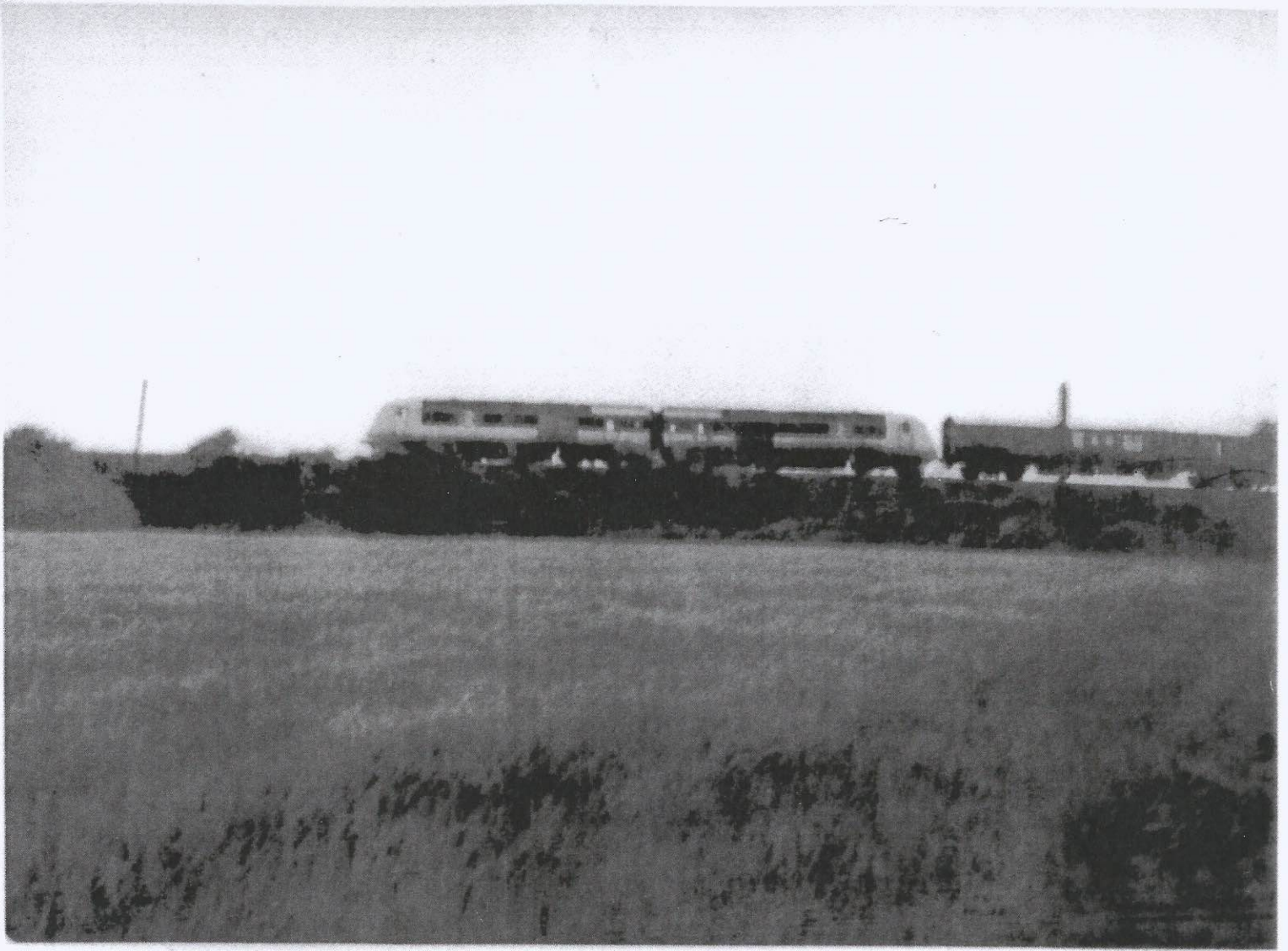
Today a skilled man would expect upwards of £20,000 p/a, so the loss would be well in excess of £40,000

Cliché, The mind BOGGLES

The only negative event that took place happened in 1954 (Oct or Nov, can't recall which) Derek Hawke and I were awaiting at the North end of the platform of Leicester Station for our homeward bound connection to Melton. As a member of the railway staff passed us on his way to the loco shed he said "Why are you wasting time here, don't you know who is in the Station Buffet?" We replied "No" and he said "Tommy Lawton, and the whole Arsenal football team" Wow!!! We beat a hasty retreat down the platform and entered the buffet and there he was at the counter with the manager and directors and all the rest of the players were seated at the tables. I've no idea about the licencing laws or hours but they were all drinking. We walked up to Mr Lawton and I asked him for his autograph. He turned to one of the directors and said "xxxxxxx hell, a bloke can't even have a drink in peace now" and refused my request. All the other players called us over and signed our books including Joe Mercer, and Jack Kelsey who was at that time goalkeeper for the Welsh National team. A big name and famous international player Mr Lawton may have once been, a pleasant sociable individual he definitely was not.

For a few months before I started working for Mr Brown at the weekends, on Saturday mornings I would take the 9.00am train to Melton to get household items that were not available in the Naafi or the village shop. One day I was waiting my return train at Melton when a very long goods train appeared from the Leicester direction. The loco and front part of the train passed through the station slowed down and came to a stop with the guards van opposite W.H.Smith's stall. The guard went to the kiosk, spoke to the woman behind the counter and she shook her head. He then turned to me and said "How far is the nearest sweet shop?" I told him about the "Chocolate Box" 300 yards away on Burton Street. He handed me a half crown piece and said "Please run as fast as you can there and get me 10 Woodbine cigarettes and get yourself a Mars bar". I left the station and did exactly what he asked. On my return he got back on the guards van held out his green flag to the engine crew and the train moved off. As the train was chuffing away he was puffing away merrily leaning over the rear rail on the guards van. Today there are no similar trains with guards vans at all, but if there were this incident would be regarded as a serious offence by a railway employee and he would be very severely censured for delaying a trains progress, even if it were just for a couple of minutes.

Footnote: A Mars bar in those days cost 3d, slightly above 1p today. Think of it. You would have been able to get 80 for £1.00p. You don't believe it do you ?



Later developments.early 1970's

The Prototype HST power cars on a test train head North. Also in the train formation is the power car (with pantographs) for the ill-fated Advanced Passenger train



Amusing or not ? - You decide

There were two main porters at Old Dalby and two or three people who could stand in as substitute if one of them was ill or otherwise unable to work the station. So as not to identify anyone I will give the names of the two porters and 1 substitute for the following incident as George, Fred, and Stanley

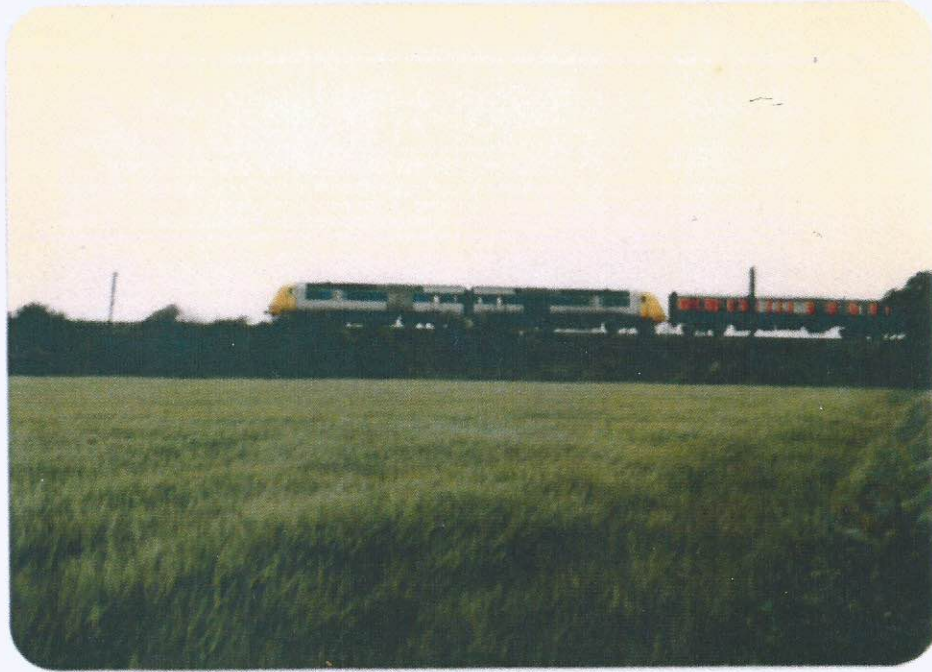
Stanley stood in for George one morning shift 06.00am – 2.00pm because George was sick. Fred would take over for the 2pm-10pm shift. Stanley and Fred did not see eye to eye and Stanley knew that Fred had a vehement dislike of dogs

One old lady from the village had a weekly habit of taking the 2.10pm train to Nottingham and returning on the 4.38pm She always took her little dog with her (Poodle or Peke, I cannot recall) Just before Stanley was due to go home at 2.00pm this day he entered the waiting room and placed in the corner a rubber dog poo that he had got from a joke shop somewhere and poured over it a cup of water so that it appeared that a dog had messed in there. The old lady duly caught the train to Nottingham and Fred checked the waiting room after it's departure and found the "poo" but did not realise that it was dummy. So he got a dustpan and mop and threw the "poo" off the platform edge and mopped up the water

On the Old ladies return at 4.38pm Fred was so incensed that he swore vociferously at her and kicked the dog several times He was unaware that he was the victim of a hoax,

The upshot of this was that Fred had to attend a disciplinary hearing at divisional H.Q. at Leicester Midland Station, was severely censured and warned about his future conduct.

The whole matter was the subject of much mirth and some enmity amongst the railway staff for many months afterwards



Later developments, (early 1970's)

The Prototype HST power cars on a test train head North. Also in the train formation is the power car (with pantographs) for the ill-fated Advanced Passenger train



Boyhood memories other than the railway

When in 1950 we arrived at Old Dalby there were only 16 Airey houses and 12 brick built ones on what is now the Queensway, some of which were then only partially built. These were designated as the Junior Ranks married quarters. The present council estate and the Crescent were in fact a derelict p.o.w. camp which we nicknamed the Gerry lines and we would lose ourselves in play amongst the many Nissen huts there. The first 4 detached houses on the Crescent were erected in 1951 and became the Officers homes. Very soon after this came the start of the council house building programme which was completed in 1954 and included Greaves Avenue, and any vestige of the p.o.w. camp had disappeared completely. Over the years on a piecemeal basis other houses were added on the old camp site as they were considered needed.

The very first television I and most of the other children ever saw was a 9 inch screened model which the Army supplied and was in what was part of the Sergeants mess complex of huts. At 4.30pm the children would gather outside and when let in by an army corporal would watch programmes presented by a BBC woman called Jean Morton. Most of the boys only went to see an episode of the Cisco Kid cowboy series the only Western on t.v at that time. At the end of the programme the T.V. would be switched off immediately and the children sent home. Very few families had a T.V. in their homes in those days.

The camp had an orchard of ample size which became the subject of much apple, pear, and plum scrumping, and there was also a plot of land at the rear of the Officers mess which grew vegetables for their Lordships, and also delicious raspberries, gooseberries and blackberries that equally suffered our attentions. The orchard was also where the Army kept their one and only carthorse during the day in an attempt to deter the scrumpers (soldiers as well as kids). It seldom did as it was a big softie and would eat anything you held out to it. The horse was stabled at night at the Grange, a large farm house and complex 150 yards east and across the road from the present day brewery. This magnificent house and stables etc was commandeered from the farmer during world war 2 for use as the C.O's residence, but the house was derelict by 1960 and the entire premises were scandalously demolished by the Army some time later.

Across the road from where the Grange stood was a Victorian house, later replaced by the bungalow there now. It was, and still is called "The Oaks" My pals lived there and there is a farm access lane to the side of the property. At the top of this lane a further 200 yard walk would bring you to one of our regular childhood haunts, the rookery. At least a couple of dozen rooks nested there and their loud caw-cawing could be heard even from the roadside so far away most of the day. It was fascinating to stand under those very tall trees and look up at the nests so high up in the air. At some time during the late 1950's or early 60's some people organised a shoot there and in one single day killed all the rooks and blew away all the nests. They had not returned when I moved from Old Dalby to Loughborough in 1978, but would like to think that they have done so since my move, as it seemed such a natural place for them to be, and in such an isolated spot where they could cause no disturbance to anyone

During the long snowy winters the hill directly to the east of the rookery was where we would go with our sledges and have hours of fun. Alas we do not seem to get these winters anymore with deep snow for three weeks either side of the Christmas period. Pity, as the children today are sadly missing out on the great times that we once had every year and took for granted.

Some things that changed, fell into dis-use or have totally disappeared since 1950

- (1) The Grange + Stables
- (2) The Oaks
- (3) The Cinema
- (4) Doctors Surgery
- (5) The Camp
- (6) Depot as a Military Base
- (7) Bus park
- (8) Bungalows + Police Mess, Station Lane
- (9) Level crossing + railway sidings
- (10) Gun park
- (11) Station + steam trains
- (12) Carpentry + joinery business at foot of station access hill (Mr Mackley)
- (13) Telephone cables on railway embankment
- (14) Sheep, cows + bullocks (hardly any nowadays)
- (15) Chapel as a place of worship
- (16) Village Hall (on the road leading to Longcliffe hill)
- (17) Coronation Club
- (18) Army sports field + pavilion
- (19) Tennis courts (on the left at the bottom of Marquis Road)
- (20) The Rookery
- (21) Mr Browns farm buildings Debdale hill
- (22) Mr Walls (Shoey) Blacksmiths forge + petrol station
- (23) 2 red telephone kiosks (1 village +1 Queensway)
- (24) Mr Jalland`s farm, (the green)
- (25) Allotments opposite graveyard extension
- (26) Post Office + village shops
- (27) Mr Jalland`s cow shed east of railway 2nd field down
- (28) Village water pump
- (29) Large paints advertisement in field east side of railway, (2 men carrying a ladder + paint pots strategically placed so as to be seen by the railway passengers) ,
- (30) Ponds in most fields

Also changed is the fact that in those days one could sit by the railway bridge and not 30 vehicles would pass you during the whole of the day, very, very different nowadays.

True facts and anecdotes

The paper round that I did in those days was only to the area east of the railway, I never delivered anything at all to the village. The Nottingham Evening Posts came by the 4.38pm train and the Leicester Mail (as it was then, but for long years now the Mercury) came by Barton's bus at about the same time of day. I would have approximately 20 of each, half of which were to be sold at the depot gate when the workers streamed out at 5.15pm. The rest were delivered to houses on the Queensway apart from one of each copy to the Police Lodge and the same to the Officers Mess in the Army camp. In the winter the 6.40pm Saturday train to Melton brought about a dozen copies of the Nottingham Football Post so I actually did 2 separate rounds on these Saturdays, one at 5pm and one at 7pm. The papers were 2d each (less than 1p today) so those who had a regular delivery paid one shilling per week plus a delivery charge of 2p that I was allowed to make, total 1 shilling and 2 pence (just over 6 p today). Those who also had the Football Post paid 1 Shilling and 4 pence (just over 7p)

Being young and impressionable there were to me 2 incidents at the Officers Mess that stuck in my mind.

I used to deliver their papers to the Foyer, placing them on the green baize covered table that was in there. Some uppity bumptious young Captain considered one day that this was not good enough for him and told me that I should take them round to the kitchens at the rear of the buildings (2 large connected Nissen Huts) so that the catering staff could put the papers on a tray to be placed by them, not me on the foyer table for their Lordships.

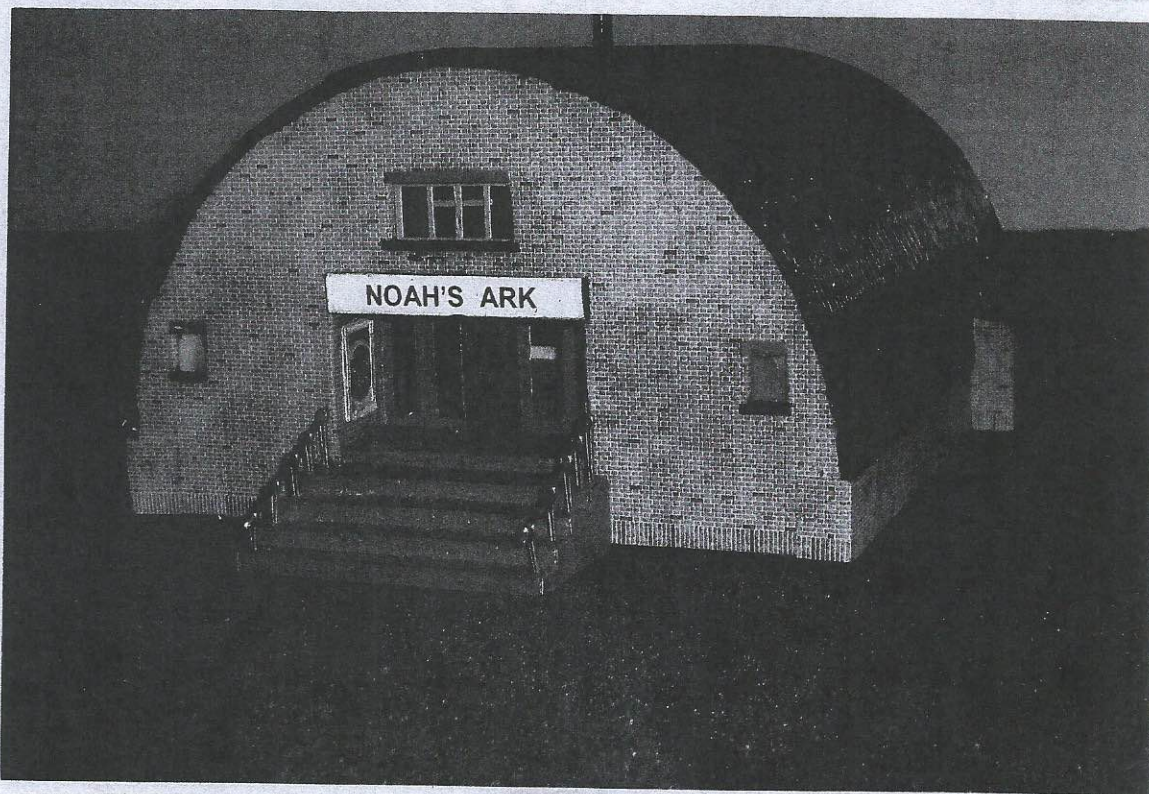
When I told my ex- R.S.M father (who had 28 years in the Army including both World Wars) about this he was absolutely livid about their unbridled arrogance and conceit and told me to be as polite as I could to them, but to totally ignore them, which I did. Later on however, I did take the papers to the kitchens as many times the chefs would give me a steaming hot cup of tea and a cake or a plate of whatever they had prepared for the Officers sweet course for their dinners. They were great blokes and in the cold, frosty and snow covered winters that we had, but seem no longer to get, this went down a bundle with me.

The 2nd incident. The guardhouse was at the camp main gate at the top of what is now known as Marquis Road and where the semi-circular entrance area still exists. This building contained the cells for those offenders on serious charges and they used to be fed in the rear kitchens of the Officers Mess (about 100 yards further west and which had it's own gate in the fencing) I arrived with the papers one night to find 2 burly military policemen in charge of a wayward Private by the name of Brooks while he was getting his dinner. He was a cockney with a strong London accent, very rebellious and insubordinate and his language was something like I had never heard. As he was slurping down his food with manners also worse than I'd ever seen one of the chefs asked him if he wanted a cup of tea. "Cawse I wanna cappa tea you xxxxxxxxxxxx" he replied, whereupon the chef opened the oven and took out an earthenware teapot. Holding this in his right hand he asked Brooks "sugar +milk?". "Cawse I want them you xxxxxxxxxxxx", so the chef started pouring the milk into the cup with his left hand and suddenly as he did this the teapot separated from it's handle and crashed to the floor shattering into many pieces and he stood there holding just the handle. The sight of this was just so funny that even I couldn't contain my laughter. Brooks burst into hysterical laughter and abuse "Ha,Ha,Ha, you big darft xxxxxxxx you can't even pour a cap o` tea you big soft xxxxxx typical Army xxxxx" he cried. That was the end of his dinner, he was instantly set upon by the 2 M.P's who dragged him off back to the guardhouse. Apart from the beating he took it was one of the funniest scenes I had ever witnessed, and for weeks after tears of laughter came to me when I recalled this incident, and I can still see it clearly in my minds eye today 60 years on.

Old Dalby Cinema

Directly opposite the site of today's brewery stood the Army Cinema the "Noahs Ark" run by the A.K.C. – the Army Kinema Corps. It was outside the camp perimeter fencing and the public were allowed to attend the film shows. Many of the top films of those days were screened there including Shane – (Alan Ladd), Niagara (Marilyn Monroe), and The African Queen (Humphrey Bogart). When we came to Old Dalby in 1950 there were film shows on Tuesdays, and Fridays commencing punctually at 7-00pm and finishing at 9.00-9.30pm but for the final ten years or so they were only held on Fridays.. The programmes included a Pathe newsreel bulletin and also a weekly episode of the original Flash Gordon series, followed by the main film. The admission price was 10d, (4p)

The cinema was very cold inside with a bare concrete floor and just one single cast iron coal fired stove just inside the Auditorium, and most of the seats were just plain Army fold up chairs. Also held there periodically were boxing bouts and Theatrical productions.



This is a model that I made that roughly depicts the Cinema as it was in the 1950's

Around 1962 the shows were moved inside the camp to one of the redundant cookhouses and soldiers dining hall which was no longer used to cater for the squaddies due to the reduction of army personnel following the end of National Conscription. The film shows finally ended altogether around 1965-1966.

The Noah's Ark was demolished around 1963 and in its place were built what you see standing there today. This was the new camp administration block which also included the M.O.'s office and the Doctors surgery, the Doctor also treating the public who were allowed to attend his surgery. This building soon got the name 'The Threepenny Bit'

Not known to anyone but my pal Derek Hawke and myself was a way to get into the "Noah's Ark" when it was locked up during the daytime..We would go to the coal bunker at the rear of the building and get inside closing the lid behind us. Then we removed the flap from the hole where they drew coal to top up the stove and crawled inside. Even in the daytime it was cold in there and we never stayed long .Nobody ever found out that we had been in there and we did it several times. Boys of the ages we were then are naturally inquisitive and sometimes mischievous, We were no different

Gates on the Queensway

Some present occupants of the Queensway might question as to why there is a security gate between them and the Crescent. It was erected in 1954 following an incident that occurred that year which caused serious concern for the safety of military personnel and W.D. police officers and also their families. There had been an IRA attack on a military barracks at Arborfield near Reading (thankfully with no serious injuries however). This caused all the military establishments throughout the country to tighten their security procedures, and with our father being a WD police officer we were made acutely aware of the situation. All of us in the married quarters were advised to stay in our houses as much as possible and to report any strange comings and goings or unfamiliar people in the locality. This situation continued for about 3 weeks then was relaxed. At the same time as the Queensway/ Crescent gate was installed a substantial pair of double gates were also placed at the main road entrance to the Queensway. It was intended to close these gates every night at 10.00pm but this only happened for about a week.

It was soon realised that the gates were quite pointless as intrusion to the camp by simply scaling the fencing at any number of places would be child's play for anyone wishing to do so. Also civilians accessing their Queensway homes would be greatly inconvenienced. Therefore the top gates remained after a week or so, open all the time. They were in situ totally unused for a few years, then suddenly and quietly removed. The road gates to the Crescent however stayed and were permanently locked just as they are today. This was to prevent the possibility of car bombs being driven in, or thieves, or any other undesirables, getting on the site with a vehicle..

With entry to the old campsite via Marquis Road, Dukes Roar and Earls Road completely free today the still closed Queensway gate to the Crescent is now just a 63 year old relic.

One thing that came out of this general security alarm and shake-up was that though they hadn't done so to this point, the WD police at the depot on foot patrol at night from here on carried fully loaded pistols and did so to the end.

The Bus Park

As there were so many depot employees who came from what in those days were considered to be long distances, Nottingham, Hucknall, Leicester etc and with car ownership not being widespread several Bus companies had contracts with the depot authorities to provide transport to and from Old Dalby. Therefore around 50 yards to the east of the main depot entrance on the North side of the road a bus park with room to accommodate approx. 20 buses was built. Part of this still exists today behind the green fencing. There a plain brick building was built as a bus shelter, with no seats or any other facilities, just an empty building, no frills whatever, with side windows and doors at each end to provide people cover during cold or wet weather

The main Bus providers were Barton's (of course), Skills of Nottingham, and Farrows of Melton. A few of the full time depot employees also held PSV licences and drove buses on a part time basis, as a hobby or to earn some extra cash, so Skills and Farrows employed them on this basis to bring the workers, do their days depot work here and then take them away at night. One of the Skills bus drivers I knew and worked with was a Mr Mawby from Nottingham. These buses were left all day on the park, usually 5 of them.. Barton's never did leave a bus there all day but in the evening around 5pm a procession of their vehicles would arrive to pick up the people

During the day the buses left here were never locked up as neither was the shelter, something that would be unthinkable today. The area was totally unprotected. Sometimes the children would play in them (I did 2 or 3 times around 1951) but there was never any kind of the vandalism that would be rife today.

FIRE !!!

One scorching hot Summer day in 1951 shortly before the Officers houses construction commenced a pal Vincent McCarthy and I went to No 25 Married Quarters to call for a Michael Royal to come out to play. Michael had a liking for fire lighting and had several times done so and had received a few good hidings from his father for these. As he came out his father's last words were "Now Michael. No fires" to which he replied "Yes Dad". The three of us went deep into the Gerry Lines whereupon Vincent pulled out a box of matches and said "I'm going to have a fire" Michael replied "xxxxxx me I'm off" And he disappeared quicker than a rabbit. Vincent and I pulled up some dry grass, made a mini hay rick and he ignited it. After 5 minutes or so we saw it was spreading so we tried to put it out but failed. We went into one of the Nissen huts and came out with a big panel of something which we threw on the fire to hopefully smother it. It exploded

We then got scared and ran across the fields to Claude Lovett's farm on the Nether Broughton road .We climbed onto his haystack and had a grandstand view of a large pall of white smoke drifting across the fields towards Upper Broughton We could hear the camp fire alarms going (empty shell casings fitted with clappers) and a few minutes later we heard something else, the Melton Fire Brigade coming up the road with all bells jangling.

Then we really panicked and quickly ran across the fields to the wood on Broughton Hill and hid there. This was where in winter we would go to gather firewood as there were numerous rotten trees in there. Around 4pm we realised that we had to go home so we started back with , believe it or not, 2 huge branches that we dragged across the fields and which we purported to be firewood for our homes. On reaching the street they were waiting for us, our Dads, the depot Fire Brigade and the civilian Police as well as the WD Police. We said "We've brought some firewood" whereupon my Dad said "Don't you dare talk about firewood, get in the house, who lit that fire"? I said "What fire"? As it was plain that I was in for a hiding if I didn't tell him the truth I did so. We had been the only children from the street not watching the Fire Brigades and were missing so they knew it was us.

The upshot of this was that both our parents were hauled before the Colonel in Command and reproved and a blanket ban was put down forbidding children to play in the Gerry Lines. A few weeks later however they were back in there, and we were able to see the area that we had accidentally but mischievously torched. It was about 30 yards square. As the camp was due for demolition anyway a lot of people thought that we had done them a favour, but the army bods didn't see it that way at all

Artful Dodgers

In 1958 a military family moved in at the Queensway and one of them was a 17 year old youth who soon became friendly with the local lads. His father owned an old 1938 350cc Ariel motorcycle that he kept in the outside wash-house. His father used to go promptly at 7.00pm each night to the Sergeants Mess and not return until 11.00pm. One night in 1959 this lad and I were bored stiff and decided that we wanted to go to the pictures somewhere, but of course there were no buses and we had no other form of transport. So after dark this particular night when his father had gone to the Sergeants Mess we crept into the wash-house and removed the motorbike marking the concrete floor with chalk at precisely the positions where the wheels had been. We then pushed the bike off the Queensway and up the main road almost as far as the camp main gate where we started it up. We headed for the Essoldo Cinema in Loughborough and went to the pictures. We knew that we had to be back by 10.15pm so at 9.30pm we left the Cinema and headed home. We killed the engine just past the camp entrance, wheeled the bike back and returned it to the wash-house erased the chalk marks on the floor and put it back in the precise position from which we had taken it at 7.10pm. Around about a week later my pal's father was totally mystified when he went out on the bike and ran out of petrol. Mum was the word for us of course and it was a good job that his father hadn't made a habit of checking the mileage on the speedo. He never did find out anything about this and we joked about it for years after.

The Police Mess

This was on Station Lane along with the Police houses. As well as the bar there was a full sized snooker table, a set up for table skittles, darts and other social games etc. I spent very many dark winter evenings in there happily playing Billiards or Snooker. Normal licensing hours were kept except for weekday lunch times, they didn't want Bobbies going on duty under the influence. There were weekly whist drives held and there was a well appointed kitchen. At the east end of the building was a television room with, in 1953 a very small b/w set on which I watched the Queen's Coronation. Several WD Police were watching as well but being a young energetic lad of 12 years age the solemnity of the long drawn out ceremony did not ring any bells with me and I recall being thoroughly bored, not fully realising the significance of the occasion. They later had a much bigger TV and it was placed in the bar-room. Very very few members of the public ever drank there or visited the Mess at all, The date of final closure I cannot say, but the last time I went in there was in 1970 to buy some cigarettes one Sunday lunch time. With less than 20- Police officers on the street, plus a couple of the depot fire station staff, trade was not prolific and many times the bar was open and not a single customer was served, with the acting Bar Steward being a lonely man a lot of the time. Long before the place closed they sold the snooker table for just £15.00. This sale was a good while before TV re-popularised what was basically a dying game at that time.

My opinion is that it was a shame that this building was destroyed as with the right sort of conversions it could have become a very des-res detached bungalow for someone, as would all of the other single storey but semi-detached buildings that existed there but which are now just part of local history.

Last thoughts

Despite some of the negative comments herein of the viability of the railway line during its final years of operation it nevertheless remained almost to the very end as a through route a very valuable and important asset to British Railways for amongst other things diversions and special train movements.

Justification for closure can however be understood by the fact that following the cessation of the local stopping trains in 1966, the diversion of all of the Nottingham – London trains via Trent junction, Loughborough and Leicester, instead of using the Melton line, involved less than 3 miles of extra distance. The superior speed and performance of the new diesels over the steam engines proved that this extra mileage was no drawback whatever and the journey times were in fact reduced. The Melton line joined the Leicester line just north of Kettering and as very many more people joined the trains at Loughborough and Leicester than did at Melton and Oakham there was a vast surge upwards in the money taken in fares. This diversion though was a sad day for we local folk, with the final realisation that the possibility of any re-opening at all was now out of the question once and for all. The accountants in this case had got their sums right and were commercially and financially correct in advising British Rail to take this action.

In 2018 it will be 50 years since the end and it is amazing to think that this is actually well over half of the total time that the line had operated in its original form and in the not too distant future there will be no-one with living memory of its erstwhile services and activities. The fact that these services ever existed will then truly only be found in the documented or computerised records and annals of local history.

Fin

Postscript

Thoughts on today's railways

I have mentioned a couple of times the Railways needs to be mercenary in their wishes to make them profitable. This is generally understandable but alas in many cases they have gone over the top and introduced fare systems that have served only to drive people away in certain areas or for certain journeys.

Who in their right mind would buy a standard day return ticket for a journey between Loughborough and Melton a distance of 17 miles for their asking price of £14.70p? Also who would do the same for a ticket between Peterborough and Birmingham (86 MILES) for £86.80p, or London to Manchester for £332.00p, (figures published by The Railway Magazine earlier this year)? The latter figure would get you a flight to America at some bargain travel agent's shop

Since Nationalisation in 1948, privatisation in the 1990's, through to today those running the railways seem always to have the same answer, that an increase in prices is the answer to any major or minor problem. I well remember the furore in the press in 1963 when they upped the price of a cup of tea to one shilling and four pence (7p) in their restaurant cars. This was more than the cost of ¼ lb packet of Typhoo tea at that time and from which you could make 40-50 cups.

Today we are told that there are now record numbers of passengers on the trains. This statement in my opinion is doubtful, even though they are doing well, because in the 1950's few working people had cars and there were no motorways at all until 1959. No household on the Queensway owned a car in 1954, not one. People had drifted away from the local trains in the rural areas because of the cheaper fares of the buses, and because they dropped them nearer their homes, but for any journey above 15 miles or so they would seek out the railways and it was standing room only on the main line expresses the length and breadth of the country. Also in the summer season there were hundreds of trains each week taking upwards of 600 people per time to the various holiday resorts all over the country.

The Trains today are of course faster and cleaner than before but generally the travelling public is being taken for two rides not one, the first one on the train and the second one on the ticket, and in the commuter belts the railways have jumped on the car parking bandwagon with excessive parking charges. (£12.00 per day at Leeds)

Apart from the extortionate prices I do not criticise too much today's railways but to those who do I would say this: Try standing at the South end of London Bridge station between 4.00pm and 7.00pm on any midweek day and watch 800 3 car units in formations of 6,9, or 12 coach trains moving over 300,000 people in or out of central London in those 3 hours. See the enormity of this operation with 3 trains leaving and 3 approaching simultaneously most of the time. Then go and complain that your train was a minute late. The scale of these movements will bring you down to earth and any reasonable man will be humbled by what he sees and realise that his gripe is totally and utterly insignificant, particularly if he remembers that this is happening at the same time at all the other big London terminus stations and with the number of passengers added to the hordes moving simultaneously on the underground the city sees in this short space of time well in excess of a million people in transit by rail.

Phenomenal.