

CONNECTIONS TO THE RAILWAY

In 1844 The Great North of England Railway (GNE) published plans for a railway from Pilmoor to Harrogate via Boroughbridge and Knaresborough, with a branch from Boroughbridge to Ripon. They then, in competition with the Leeds and Thirsk Railway, proposed to extend this line to Leeds, via Spofforth and Rigton. However, by 1845 George Hudson had taken control of the York and North Midland Railway as well as the Newcastle and Darlington Junction Railway and his next step was to take a lease of the GNE, which . He immediately ordered the abandonment of the proposed line from Pilmoor. The GNE had opened a line from York to Darlington in 1841 and it was soon realised that there should be connections to the towns either side of this line, to generate more business, and so in 1846 Acts were obtained to build three branches, one of which was from Pilmoor to Boroughbridge - completed and opened on June 17th 1847.

The GNE had chosen Boroughbridge as its destination as it was an important market town on several stage coach routes and it was situated at one end of the River Ure Navigation - a waterway connecting the town with Ripon which had been completed in 1773. The Leeds and Thirsk Railway had already bought the Navigation, hoping to attract traffic to its line passing through Ripon. This did not deter the GNE as they bought a strip of land from the edge of the new Boroughbridge Station down to Milby Cut enabling them to attract traffic from Ripon and the Dales!

There was no station at Pilmoor because there was no habitation nearby so the first station, 2½ miles along the line, was at Brafferton – complete with a cattle dock, loading dock, coal cells and a siding. Next came a small siding with coal cells adjacent to the road crossing at Humberton before the line reached Boroughbridge. A bridge took the line over the River Swale near Brafferton and there were other road crossings, complete with cottages to house the gatekeepers, near Pilmoor, Wath Lane and Myton Road (Ellenthorpe). At Boroughbridge a station, with Station Master's house, Goods Shed, Engine Shed, Lime Shed and Coal depot were constructed.

In 1875 an iron bridge was constructed over the River Ure and the line extended through to Knaresborough with a new passenger station being constructed between Leeming Lane and Milby Road. A cattle dock, loading dock with 15 ton capacity crane, and siding to allow the loading of sand and gravel from the adjacent works were also now provided and the railway facilities in Boroughbridge were now complete.

In 1921 Francis (always called Frank) Louis Hick applied for a position of Junior Clerk with the North Eastern Railway and, after some months of hard study, exams and tests, started work at Brafferton Station on May 1st 1922. Frank was born at Harwood Dale, near Scarborough, but, after his father died when he was only 2 years old, he and his mother had eventually settled in Myton. He had left school at eleven years of age, with a very basic education, and worked long hours on a farm until he decided that he must obtain better employment and set to work to obtain the necessary educational standards. After four months at Brafferton he was moved to York Goods Station, cycling to Tollerton to catch the train each morning and returning in the evening. After three months he requested a transfer and was moved to Bainton, on the Yorkshire Wolds, where he had to live in "digs" for the first time. In February 1924 the Station Master asked if Frank could be transferred back to him so back home he came before quickly being transferred yet again to the goods office in Boroughbridge.

The railway in Boroughbridge, by now, was a busy operation with a wide variety of passenger and parcels business. It provided the main method of transport for people wishing to get to Knaresborough, Harrogate, Leeds, York, and virtually anywhere else in the country. On the goods side two full trains of 60 to 80 wagons of cattle, sheep and pigs left the adjacent Auction Mart for the West Riding every Monday. Large quantities of potatoes would leave between October and Spring, with seed potatoes then coming inwards. Round timber, 35 to 40 feet in length, were despatched on large bolster wagons, bricks and tiles from Roecliffe, and sand and gravel from Blundy Clark's. All kinds of produce would leave after being delivered by horse and cart from surrounding farms and a whole range of items required by the farmers would continually arrive.

After a couple of enjoyable years travelling from Myton to Boroughbridge, and back, Frank was promoted to a "bowler hat job" in NER headquarters at York and continued his employment there until retiring in 1969 as Operations Director of the North Eastern Region of British Rail, after 47 years service.

Frank's father, Francis Joseph Hick was the brother of my grandfather, Alfred Edward Hick – both born in Hutton Buscel, near Scarborough.

In 1937 George Wedgewood, together with his wife Evelyn Mary and son Tom, moved into the gatehouse at Wath Lane when he was appointed Porter/Signalman at Brafferton Station. Mrs Wedgewood had the job of crossing keeper, responsible for opening the gates to allow trains to pass over Wath Lane. There were bells inside the house warning of approaching trains and these could be quite startling at times. Passenger trains were timetabled so she knew when they were coming but goods trains could arrive almost at any time with only the bells to warn her. She had to go out to a cabin next to the crossing, pull a lever to unlock the gates, then go out and push the gates across the road before returning to the cabin to use the lever to lock the gates and pull a second lever operating a signal board down the line to let the train through. Once the train had passed the procedure was reversed before she could return to her cottage. She did this for just over two years when her husband was moved to another position on the railway, eventually retiring in 1971, still as a signalman, after 48 years service.

Mrs Evelyn Mary Wedgewood (Aunty Mary to me) was my father's sister.

With the advent of alternative methods of transport (buses, cars, and lorries) and road improvements (the A1 bypassed Boroughbridge in 1962) Boroughbridge Station and Goods Yard saw less and less traffic. The passenger station closed on September 23rd 1950 and its Waiting Room provided a short term "home" for the town's Nautical Training Corps. Finally, on October 2nd 1964, the last train ran on the line and, almost immediately, the metals and sleepers were removed.

In 1961, on leaving the Royal Air Force, my wife's family and I formed a Company to retail dress fabrics and realise a long held ambition of my father-in-law "Jimmy" Lawn, who had sold them from market stalls in the North East since returning from war service in 1946. As the business quickly grew we rented the old maltings (lemonade works) in the Laundry Yard, Langthorpe, receiving deliveries from the Goods Yard every week, via Bob Pinkney's lorry. Orders placed with London or Manchester suppliers one afternoon would be delivered by Bob the following morning around 8am - an unsurpassed service. By 1968 the warehouse was proving to be too small and we started to look for larger premises. A possible site was considered alongside the Old Goods Yard (eventually developed by Holmsterne) but, after Arthur Hawkridge had dug a six foot deep hole, he pronounced it too unstable to build on. It had previously been a settling pit for Dick Potter's gravel washing plant. We had approached Basil Johnson, the local auctioneer, to see if he knew of anything suitable and he came back with a brilliant idea. The Old Goods Yard was being disposed of by British Rail and the three occupiers of it at that time wished to purchase it to retain their facilities. However, there was an acre and a half at the far end of the site which none of them required and this could provide us with the ideal site. So, at 3pm on Thursday 2nd November 1967 George Wright (coal merchant using the coal cells), Tommy Hartley (Haulage Contractor using the Goods Warehouse), Basil Johnson (using the first part of the site for parking and washing cattle wagons), Mr Lawn and I watched with anticipation as the sale commenced. Basil, as the impressive, and very experienced, auctioneer made his presence felt and we quickly assumed ownership of The Goods Station, Boroughbridge.

So, a third member of the Hick family became involved with the Pilmoor to Boroughbridge Railway, each of us arriving from completely different directions at different eras of the twentieth century to spend part of our lives in exactly the same place. Well, well, well!

If you would like to know more of the history of this little railway try "The Pilmoor Boroughbridge and Knaresborough Railway" by Patrick Howat, published by Martin Bairstow in 1991.

There is also "That was my railway" by Frank L Hick published by Silver Link Publishing also in 1991.

Today the Station Master's house, the Goods Shed, Engine Shed, and coal cells are still extant after 164 years but are surrounded by a large security fence and not accessible, although you can view them through the road on The Old Goods Yard site.

Ian Hick