

Historical Environment Report April 2023

Last year Tim Meacham delivered a talk on the arrival of railways in Barnard Castle, followed by a visual trip along the lines from Darlington (opened 1856) and Bishop Auckland (opened 1863). From a passenger point of view these were the two key links to County Durham, but there were two further lines, a main line route, the South Durham & Lancashire Union Railway, and a local branch line, the Tees Valley Railway which left the SDLUR at Tees Valley Junction, just west of Barnard Castle, and proceeded to Middleton-in-Teesdale. These two lines were the subject of this March's talk.

We looked first at the SDLUR line which emerged thanks in part to the 'people power' which had seen off the hostility of the Dukes of Cleveland to railways. Within a year of the Darlington line opening, and this time with active support from Raby, a new Act was gained (on 13th July 1857) to build a major main line to send Durham coke west and bring haematite ore east for smelting. This was the South Durham & Lancashire Union Railway (total cost of construction £531,858 4s 7d) which opened for traffic on the 8th August 1861 from Tebay to a new terminus at Barney. The original 1856 terminus, much nearer the town, had only been operating for 5 years, although it continued to be used for goods until 5th April 1965, and still exists (off Montalbo Road) unlike its replacement (now the site of the main Glaxo car park). Within less than a year the SDLUR title disappeared as the company was amalgamated into the Stockton & Darlington Railway (30th June 1862) which in turn became part of the North Eastern Railway (NER) on 13th July 1863. It was a happy time for the inhabitants of Lartington, Bowes, Barras and Kirkby Stephen as they could now catch trains westwards and eastwards, but passengers were not the main business which led to this line.

Our photographic journey started at the 'new' Barney station as we joined the last ever passenger train from Bishop Auckland heading west towards Tebay on 6th August 1962. Passing through the ground floor of Enterprise House (site of our talk) we headed over Percy Beck viaduct (£3,928 to build with 8 stone spans and now a private access road) before crossing Thomas Kennard's 'Tees Viaduct' (£25,119 to build, with its 5 iron piers and height of 132 feet). This was demolished in the early 1970s, leaving two isolated abutments, both reachable by walks either side of the Tees.

This brought us to Tees Valley Junction where we saw the guard of a Middleton-bound train receiving the token to enter the branch. A modern equivalent view spoke volumes showing a rural footpath along the course of the SDLUR and no sign of the erstwhile branch. We took the high road for a mile or so as the two lines ran side by side with the SDLUR gaining height before the two parted just before Lartington. Here the station (surprisingly ornate thanks to the link with Lartington Hall's Witham family who championed the railway) survives in private ownership, recently restored most sympathetically. Onwards the trackbed is a fine footpath passing the remains of Lartington West signalbox (go soon if you wish to see it); this was once the guardian of the adjacent Catcastle Quarry branch. The walk ends dramatically at the gap where once stood Thomas Bouch's Deepdale Viaduct. Built in 1861 this just lived to see its centenary, closing in 1962 and being dismantled in 1963; it cost £20,687 to build with its 11 60 foot span iron girders reaching a height of 161 feet above Deepdale valley. Safely over the bridge we passed (by photograph) under the main A67

Barney to Bowes road where we met the sad sight of the final demolition train removing track in 1963, only months after our final special has passed.

Soon we came upon a little known halt, for workmen at the nearby Hulands Quarry. The quarry had closed in 1897 but was reopened in 1912 by the NER to produce stone ballast. The halt is thought to have been opened by 1912 (certainly by the early 1920s) and survived into the 1950s. Two morning trains are shown in a working timetable of 1948 to have stopped to drop off workers, and presumably the other platform was used to return them later in the day. An open stretch of line took us to the next station proper, Bowes; a pretty wayside station but again once of quite grand design. The line here has been obliterated by the provision of the A66 bypass, although the collapsed station building remains as a sad witness of the change, unnoticed by the traffic thundering by on the A66. From Bowes there was a steady climb to reach Stainmore Summit but much of the line has been removed for road improvements. Since 2011 a modern replica railway sign has marked the actual summit (the original is in York railway museum). The line parts company from the A66 at this point and heads through remote and spectacular countryside to Barras our third local station where at around the turn of the 60s a photo showed us a family using the train, possible for an afternoon out in Kirkby Stephen; a 2007 picture showed dereliction but Barras has since enjoyed a better fate than Bowes as it has since been turned into a fine private house.

It simply remained for us to 'cross' the most celebrated of the line's three spindly viaducts, Belah, west of Barras which like Deepdale was totally demolished soon after the line closed – the subject of many 'vandalism' claims since: could not one of these historic structures have been preserved? More optimistically, our arrival at Kirkby Stephen East station (our terminus for this part of the talk), revealed a beautifully restored station, now owned and operated with steam power (westward only!) by the Stainmore Railway Company since its official reopening in 2011.

We then returned to Tees Valley Junction to consider the 4th and in some ways least of our 'railways to Barnard Castle' – the last to open (13th May 1868) and also the last to close (30th November 1964). The Middleton branch shared the tracks of the South Durham & East Lancashire line as far as Tees Valley Junction. A meeting was held to promote a line to Middleton at the Rose & Crown Hotel on 8th October 1864, plans were deposited on 29th November of the same year and the act was passed on 19th June 1865, the same date as the first sod was cut by the Duke of Cleveland. The NER subscribed £25,000 (half of the authorised capital). The line was primarily used to transport stone from first the Middleton Quarry and later the Park End and Crossthwaite Quarries but there was regular passenger traffic from the start. It was intended to be the first stage of a railway from Barney all the way to Alston ('The Cumberland and Cleveland Junction Railway' - plans were placed in 1871 and the bill passed in Parliament in Feb 1872 but for reasons unknown never gained royal assent).

So having left Tees Valley Junction by the right hand junction (impossible these days as the Tees Valley path proper does not start until we approach Cotherstone) we steamed (photographically!) along beside the SDLUR as it climbed to leave us to the left. The branch was pretty flat with sheep field on both sides until we crossed the B6277 (bridge long gone)

and entered Cotherstone Station, a basic station compared to the SDLUR 'mansions' but busy enough in its day to see the village advertised as 'Little Sunderland' when hordes of tourists descended by train once the railway arrived, picnicked by the river and went home for another six days labour. In 1891 no fewer than 15 villagers were directly employed here by the railway. Henry Park, the stationmaster brought up at least 8 children in no 1 Station Terrace. Yet on 5th April 1954 all staff were removed and the station became a halt. Peter the owner who died at the end of last year kept many features including the ticket window last used 69 years ago.

Moving on through open field we passed a former siding on the north side which served as the base for the Hury and Blackton reservoir constructors. This exercise was not without its railway interest (as with Grassholme reservoir further to the north west which was served by a line from near Mickleton) but, rather than diverge to discuss the reservoir lines, we stayed on the branch to cross the first of the line's two major bridges, The Balder Viaduct. This may be a bit tame compared with Deepdale or Belah, but at least unlike them, it's still there as an adornment to the surrounding countryside; it features nine arches, stands 91 feet over the valley and is 102 yards in length. After negotiating a series of cuttings (and passing Romalldkirk's goods station) we entered the passenger station (opened a few months after the other stations) which in 2023 is privately owned, nicely restored and sports the only railway signal on the branch (apparently originating from Gainford station). Beyond Romalldkirk a short quarry branch diverged to the south (worthy of further study) but we headed on northwest to reach Mickleton station, the last of our intermediate stations, built in the same austere style as Cotherstone, but refreshingly near the village it serves. Like Cotherstone, Mickleton lost its staff in 1954, but no trace remains here of the station. We then arrived after a quarter of a mile or so at our 2nd viaduct, over the Lune; 60 ft high, and 118 yards long, this remains today a landmark alongside the B6277 but thanks to a photo by the late Rodney Redfearn we enjoyed a view of a special train crossing the bridge in the early 1960s. Just after the viaduct we pass some interesting railway buildings on the left which mark the start of two fascinating narrow gauge railway lines to Lunedale quarries. One of these saw 2'6" gauge steam locomotives haul trains around the side of Kirkcarrion before the First World War.

We then completed our seven mile journey by entering Middleton Terminus which, during the life of the branch was always part of North Yorkshire, although the town was and remains in County Durham. A slide of a postcard showed us what a lively station this was in the 1930s, festooned with notices, adverts etc. Happily a scale model of the station in that era exists in private hands. Rumour has it that when the late Queen Mother was visiting Strathmore House, the service train would drop its cargo of passengers at Middleton station, then transfer to the mineral railway which continued north west for a couple of miles to Crossthwaite Quarry where a coach and driver was waiting to take her on to the house! Oh for a photograph.

We concluded with a short journey along the mineral branch, now a footpath on a shelf above the river and not for the faint-hearted when the winter winds are blowing. Ord & Maddison's steam trains hauled wagons of whinstone along this line until 1952, to service the UK road building programme. Local whinstone is rated as being among the very best in the country. This rather than the need of Teesdale inhabitants to travel was the prime reason for the building of the Middleton Branch. The Alston extension may have failed (depriving High

Force of its planned railway station) but hopefully this talk (and Part 1 last year) will confirm that the Railways of Barnard Castle are worthy of study – and a book one day perhaps?