

Coxwold Railway Station

The middle of the 19th century saw a massive expansion of the railway system in the UK, with many individuals and small companies aiming to take advantage of this new form of transport. This was not coordinated in any way at national level and usually consisted of individuals attempting to serve their own self-interests by setting up companies to build small branch lines to get their goods to market more competitively than their rivals. Some of these small companies succeeded and others ran into financial difficulties, going into bankruptcy or having to merge with other companies in order to survive.

History of the Thirsk & Malton Railway

Source : <http://www.disused-stations.org.uk/c/coxwold>

In 1845, three separate schemes were placed before parliament, seeking approval to bring railways into the Vale of Pickering. The successful scheme was that proposed by the Newcastle & Darlington Junction Railway, and planned a 23-mile two track line between Thirsk and Malton, running from a junction with the Great North of England Railway three miles south of Thirsk to a junction with the York-Scarborough line at Norton, from where a half mile branch would run into a terminus at Malton. The proposed line also included a 5-mile branch from Gilling to Helmsley. The line received Parliamentary approval on 18th June 1846 but construction was delayed for some years while the company settled on its exact route. From the outset, the success of the line was linked with that of the Malton & Driffield Railway which had gained its approval on 26th June 1846. The two lines would form a continuous route between Driffield and Thirsk, thereby forming part of a new 'main line' between Hull and the north east. Work on the Malton & Driffield Railway started immediately but was halted the following year as work had not started on the Thirsk & Malton line.

The Newcastle & Darlington Junction Railway Company merged with the Great North of England Railway Company in 1847 to become the York & Newcastle Railway Company, and this in turn became part of the York, Newcastle and Berwick Railway Company in 1848. During this period there was little enthusiasm for the Thirsk & Malton section and eventually the time limit for building the line imposed by the 1846 Act was allowed to lapse. Following near bankruptcy, work on the Malton & Driffield line started again despite the lack of progress on the Thirsk & Malton line. It was even suggested that the MDR should take over construction of the TMR, but, instead, a writ was served on the York, Newcastle & Berwick Railway Company, to force them to comply with an earlier agreement to start work on the line. A new Thirsk & Malton Railway Bill was put before parliament and work finally started on 1st October 1851. There were numerous changes to the original plans and a more modest route was eventually agreed. This revised scheme would run from a north-east curve at Pilmoor (six miles south of Thirsk) to Scarborough Road Junction at Malton. From here, trains would run over the Malton & Driffield line into Malton, thereby removing the need for a separate terminus. Intermediate stations would be built at Coxwold, Ampleforth, Gilling, Hovingham, Slingsby, Barton-le-Street and Amotherby. In order to further reduce costs, the Helmsley branch was dropped from the plan and the line was downgraded to single track (even though sufficient land for a double track line had been purchased). Unfortunately, this ensured that it would never be destined to become a trunk route. From this point, progress on the two lines progressed rapidly and they were both completed in 1853. There was a joint official opening of the two railways on 19th May 1853.

and the first train carrying shareholders and invited guests ran from Pilmoor through Malton to Driffield and then back to Malton. The date of the first public train is uncertain. The goods service had started on 21st May and it probably opened to passengers during June of that year, even though some stations were unfinished.

The York, Newcastle & Berwick Railway Company merged with the Leeds Northern Railway on 31st July 1854 to form the North Eastern Railway. The Malton & Driffield Railway also applied to join the new company, which it did on 28th October 1854. The line's initial passenger services were between Thirsk and Malton. By 1856 there was one train shuttling to and fro three times a day with one daily pick-up goods train and from 1860, a daily mineral train.

Apart from the pick-up goods, the main freight traffic was coal, animal feed and timber. A large amount of limestone was also transported along the line from the quarries around Malton and Driffield, bound for the blast furnaces around the River Tees and at Redcar. Despite numerous improvements to the line in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, by the turn of the century traffic was already in decline. After WW1 both goods and passenger traffic suffered following the rapid development of road transport. Passenger numbers halved between 1904 and 1927 and by the outbreak of WW2, the line was in terminal decline.

The line was closed to scheduled passenger services on 2nd February 1953, although it continued to be used by goods services and occasional "special" excursions. The last goods train ran on 7th August 1964, with the line officially closing on 10th August 1964. Track lifting commenced in 1965 and was completed later that same year.

Coxwold Station

This was located at the end of a short access road, running south from a point just east of the cross-roads in the middle of Coxwold village. The station was to the west of an overbridge (now demolished) taking the line under the Easingwold to Oulston road, very close to the centre of Coxwold village. There was a substantial brick building on the down platform (the only platform when the station opened) which incorporated the Station Master's house, station offices and a first class waiting room with a separate timber general waiting room alongside. When the line opened there was no passing loop between Pilmoor and Gilling, but a loop with a second platform was added in 1900. There was a similar waiting room on the new platform together with a signalbox which controlled access to a sizeable goods yard on the 'down' side of the line behind the station buildings. A footbridge was planned but never built. The station also acted as village Post Office until June 1914. The waiting room on the 'up' platform was demolished shortly after closure to passengers in 1953. The goods yard comprised five sidings, one serving coal drops immediately behind the down platform and another passing through a goods warehouse. There were two loading docks (for horses and cattle), one being served by two sidings, a weighbridge and weigh office. There were two railway cottages at the west end of the goods yard and a single storey gatekeeper's cottage and a signalbox at the Coxwold gates to the west of the station.

After line closure, the main Station House became a private residence. Externally it is largely unaltered. Isolated sections of the 'up' platform survive as a garden feature. The 'down' platform has been demolished but its position is clear from a line on the wall of the station building. The Coxwold gatekeeper's cottage and signalbox to the west of the station have been restored as a private residence. The signalbox still carries a 'Coxwold' sign which is assumed to be a reproduction. New housing now occupies the site of the goods yard.

Smith Family & Coxwold Railway Station

My gg-grandfather, William Smith was Station Master at Coxwold Station. The Smith family had been residents of Coxwold since the 1780s, although William was born at Kildale in 1813. In 1850 at York, he married Mary Barwick, daughter of William Barwick (victualler at The Fauconberg Arms, Coxwold), after which the family moved to Liverpool. However, by the mid-1850s, William had returned to Coxwold with his family.

In 1861, William is recorded in the Coxwold census, living with his family at Station House, where his occupation is listed as 'Station Master'. So far, I have discovered no information prior to 1861, but given that the Thirsk – Malton railway had only been open a few years, it is possible (likely?) that he may have been the first Station Master at Coxwold. The family continued to live at Station House throughout subsequent decades with William (as Station Master) and his family listed at Station House in the 1871 and 1881 census records. William died in 1887 (aged 74) and he probably continued in the role of Station Master until his death.

By the time of the 1891 census, the Smith family continued their association with Coxwold Station as George Smith, son of William Smith, had taken over the role of Station Master from his father. It seems that George had a railway background as the 1881 census shows him with an occupation of 'Railway Clerk', living at Harome. George was unmarried and in the 1891, 1901 and 1911 census records he is living at Station House with his unmarried sisters, so the Smith family were occupants of Station House for (at least) 50 years between 1861 & 1911 (perhaps longer).



Coxwold Station (circa 1905)



Coxwold Station (circa 1910)



Coxwold Station (circa 1951)



Coxwold Station - View from Coal Yard (1964)



Coxwold Station - Derailed near Goods Yard (1964)



Coxwold Station - Day of Last Rail Movement (7th August 1964)

The locomotive shown in this photo was originally built by the North Eastern Railway (NER) at Darlington as part of a group between 1906 & 1923 as Class P3 No.2392. On consolidation of railway companies in 1923, the NER became part of the London & North-Eastern Railway (LNER) and they were reclassified as Class J27. After nationalisation in 1948, it was renumbered as No.65894, a number it retained through to withdrawal from service by British Railways in 1967.

When steam locomotives were withdrawn from service, most were cut-up as scrap. A few were saved from the scrap-heap by preservation groups who purchased them with a view to restoration and running them on private (heritage) railway lines, also purchased from British Railways.

The only Class J27 preserved was No.65894, purchased by NELPG (North-Eastern Locomotive Preservation Group). It was then hosted by the North Yorkshire Moors Railway (NYMR), based at Grosmont. It is still in operation today, 100 years after it was built, and is shown below.



LNER Class J27 No.65894

*North Yorkshire Moors Railway
at Levisham in June 2019
hauling a
Grosmont to Pickering service.*