

THE RAILWAY COMES TO HALLATROW, 1873.

Since the 1820s various schemes had been proposed to construct a railway, which would provide access from Bristol to the North Somerset Coalfield. None of these schemes came to anything until the passing of the Bristol & North Somerset Railway Act in 1863, which gave the go-ahead for the construction of a line from Bristol Docks to Radstock.

With a burst of enthusiasm the work was ceremonially inaugurated at Clutton on 7th October 1863 by Mrs Milward, wife of the vicar of Paulton, who was an active supporter of the scheme. Mrs MILWARD was actually the third choice of dignitary, as the Earl of WARWICK and Lady WALDEGRAVE had failed to take up the invitation. A large crowd of children and adults assembled, including nearly 3,000 miners, who were no doubt attracted by the generous provision of a pound of beef, a pound of bread and two pints of beer per man, which the directors of the railway company made available, to ensure the event was a success. A similar ceremony took place the following day near the Floating Harbour in Bristol. Head teacher Frederick NEEDS recorded the event in the High Littleton School Log Book thus: -

Oct 7th 1863 - Turning of first sod for the commencement of the Bristol and North Somerset Railway in a field at Clutton. The Teachers and children (above 8 years) invited to attend & take part in the ceremony. We therefore took the children as directed etc. and vacated our school for the day.

Oct 8th - James CARTER asked leave to go to Clutton at 3 p.m. to take some clothes there for his sister, who had got wet the day before and was obliged to exchange. The weather rainy the greater part of the day & attendance thin.

Messrs BETHELL & WALTON were awarded the contract to build the line from Bristol to Radstock but ran into trouble a few months after starting and pulled out. The contract was thereupon given to LAWRENCE & FRY, who went bankrupt in June 1864. A few months later Mr LAWRENCE himself took over the work but he also pulled out at the end of 1866. Meanwhile the B. & N.S.R. was suffering a financial scandal, with large sums of money apparently unaccounted for. The company collapsed with considerable liabilities and, with the greater part of the construction work on the line in an advanced state, all work ceased.

Another Bristol & North Somerset Railway Act was passed in 1868, following which a detailed survey was undertaken to ascertain what work remained to be done to complete the line. In the event a further Act was required in 1870 to authorise a deviation of the original route. John PERRY & Sons of Stratford, London, were then awarded a contract to complete the work, which was split into two sections, from Radstock to Cloud Hill and from Cloud Hill to Bristol. Like his predecessors PERRY also encountered difficulties and in 1873 the Cloud Hill to Bristol section (apart from Pensford Viaduct, which PERRY had to finish) was handed over to John MACKAY of Shrewsbury. Meanwhile in 1872 tenders were invited for the building of stations at Brislington, Pensford, Clutton, Hallatrow, Welton and Radstock. Hallatrow Station was subsequently built by Saunders & Ward at a cost of £2,359.16s. 5d.

Eventually all the work was completed to the satisfaction of the Board of Trade inspectors and an agreement was reached with the G.W.R. for them to operate the line. On 3rd September 1873 the first train, which left Radstock at 7.15 a.m. destined for Bristol, called at Hallatrow Station. As one contemporary newspaper report stated "*few railway ventures of its size have been so long in completion*". An 1877 timetable showed that the 16 mile journey from Bristol to Radstock took 50 minutes and that 5 passenger and 2 coal/goods trains per day ran in each direction.

The G.W.R. had opened its line from Bristol to London in 1841 and in 1854 a branch was opened from Frome to Radstock. However this was broad gauge, whereas the Bristol to Radstock line was standard gauge. In 1874 the broad gauge line was converted to standard gauge and it was then possible to travel from Hallatrow to London via Radstock and Frome.

It was only common sense to lay sidings from stations to nearby collieries. Thus Clutton Station was linked to Frys Bottom and Greyfield collieries. In 1882 sidings were laid from Hallatrow Station to Cloud Hill Quarry, to facilitate the transport of its pennant stone throughout the West of England. In the same year the Camerton Branch Line was opened.

The Bristol to Radstock line did not prove profitable for the B. & N.S.R. and in 1884 the company was taken over by the G.W.R. Subsequent local demand resulted in halts being opened in 1925 at Farrington Gurney, which came under the control of Hallatrow staff, and Whitchurch in 1927. In its heyday Hallatrow Station was extremely busy with passengers commuting to Bristol for work, shopping or school. There were also holiday excursions and football specials.

On the goods side a large number of coal trucks passed through Hallatrow, although little coal was actually handled there. The G.P.O. provided good business, as did PURNELLS and the boot and shoe factories at Paulton. From Cloud Hill quarry came stone and, during World War II, aero components from the factory there. Milk from the local farms was carried by the railway until 1931, when Express Dairies began regular milk collections by lorry. BLANNINGS sent their butter by rail and the Glass factory in Marsh Lane also provided business. Much of the livestock from the market at Farrington Gurney was taken to Hallatrow for onward transport by rail and crates of racing pigeons were carried regularly. During the last war, and right up to the 1950s, the Ministry of Food Buffer Depots near Hallatrow Station were regularly supplied by rail. There was also irregular business ranging from the transportation of racehorses to large gas pipes.

One of the most unusual transportation contracts was carried out in April 1934, when Mr Evelyn NORRIS of Sleight Farm, Timsbury hired a complete train to move all his livestock and farming equipment to Charlton Park Farm near Malmesbury. No less than 19 truckloads were despatched from Hallatrow Station to Wiltshire via Frome. These included 94 cattle, 2 bulls, 15 calves, 5 horses 2 loads of fowls and fowl houses and 6 trucks of furniture and farm implements.

Inevitably the motor car and lorry ousted rail as the most convenient mode of transport and, as part of Doctor BEECHING's drastic cuts, the passenger service from Hallatrow ended on 2nd November 1959. The goods service continued for several more years but this too ceased on 15th June 1964.

THE CAMERTON BRANCH LINE, 1882.

During the 19th century a number of collieries operated in the Cam Valley and they were dependent on horse drawn carts and the Somerset Coal Canal for the transportation of coal from the pits. The desirability of creating a rail link between the Cam Valley pits and Bristol had long been considered necessary but was not a practical proposition until 1873, when the line to Hallatrow opened, as this was the most suitable place to make a junction.

The construction of a branch line from Hallatrow to Camerton was authorised by the Bristol & North Somerset Railway Act of 1873. By 1875 plans for the route had been agreed, land acquired from local owners, permission obtained to cross the Coal Canal and a deal struck with the G.W.R. to operate the line. T. Mousely won the contract to lay the 3½ miles of single track line to Camerton for the sum of £19,000. Four bridges were built over the line, including one on the A39 below Highbury Road, and 11 under the line, including one in Hart's Lane by Cloud Mill. A new station was built at Camerton with a siding into New Pit, a brick signal box was built at Hallatrow and the station enlarged. By the end of 1880 the work was substantially complete. However, in 1881 the railway company ran out of money and there was some delay while additional finance was raised to complete the project.

The Camerton branch line eventually opened for goods traffic on 1st March 1882 and for passenger traffic a month later. The first published timetable of 1882 showed that the journey from Hallatrow to Camerton took 10 minutes and that there were 7 trains a day in each direction - 1 goods, 5 passenger and 1 mixed from Hallatrow and 3 goods, 3 passenger and 1 mixed from Camerton. The anticipated demand for passenger trains proved to have been overestimated and this service was soon drastically reduced.

The Coal Canal, which ran from Paulton Basin, just east of Goosard Bridge, to Limpley Stoke, had enjoyed the lion's share of the Cam Valley coal business until the opening of the branch line. The railway immediately captured all the Camerton coal business, which amounted to 75,000 tons a year, and this

marked the beginning of the end for the canal. The canal company went into receivership in 1893 and the canal finally closed in 1898 after a life of almost 100 years. In 1900 railway sidings were laid at Radford wharf, to which Lower Conygre Pit at Timsbury was linked by a self-acting, cable operated, narrow gauge inclined tramway.

THE CAM VALLEY LINE, 1910.

It was considered desirable to extend the Camerton branch line to Limpley Stoke, where it would meet the G.W.R.'s line from Bath to Weymouth via Westbury. The necessary Act of Parliament was obtained in 1904 to build a track more or less on the line of the disused canal, which the G.W.R. acquired from the liquidator. Pauling & Co. of Westminster were awarded the contract, which included draining the canal, and work began in July 1906. By April 1907 the first phase of the extension, from Camerton to Dunkerton Colliery, had been finished and the final connection through to Limpley Stoke was completed 3 years later. As part of the extension, stations were built at Dunkerton and Monkton Combe, together with halts at Radford (Radford & Timsbury) and Combe Hay. The first passenger train to Limpley Stoke from Hallatrow left Hallatrow at 7.55 a.m. on 9th May 1910. The scheduled time for the journey was 32 minutes.

The extension of the line made it necessary to carry out major alterations at Hallatrow Station, which hitherto had only a single track and platform. In order that Hallatrow could become a crossing point for passenger trains a new platform and track was laid on the west side of the station and the platform on the east side extended. A new signal box was built, which came into operation in September 1909, more sidings were laid, a water tower was erected and finally an ornate footbridge was erected to link the platforms. In June 1912 a wooden parcels hut was built. The overall cost of these alterations was nearly £9,000. To take advantage of the increased activity Thatcher's Welton Brewery built the Station Hotel in 1910.

From this time until the outbreak of war the Cam Valley line enjoyed its most successful period, with large quantities of coal carried, although not many passengers. Further halts were opened at Midford on 27th February 1911, Dunkerton Colliery on 9th October 1911 and Paulton, which was actually in High Littleton parish, on 5th January 1914. However, the outbreak of war marked the downturn in the fortunes of the Cam Valley line. The passenger service was suspended on 22nd March 1915 as a wartime economy measure and was not resumed until 9th July 1923 but the halts at Paulton and Midford were never reopened. By then buses had become a convenient means of transport and the railway passenger service between Hallatrow and Limpley Stoke ceased altogether on 21st September 1925.

The Conygre pits at Timsbury closed in 1916 but the loss of this business was partly offset by the opening in 1915 of the Priston (Tunley) pit, from where coal was brought by road to Radford Wharf. Dunkerton Colliery closed in 1925 and the amount of coal mined at Priston after the 1926 strike became insignificant, so that pit closed in 1930. The carriage of milk was the only other sizeable goods traffic and, when this business dwindled following the introduction of farm gate collections by lorry, it was the last straw. What was originally the Camerton branch line closed on 8th February 1932 and by 1933 the rails from Hallatrow to 500 yards west of Camerton Station had been taken up and nature began to reclaim the track.

Goods traffic between Camerton and Limpley Stoke continued as long as there was coal to carry. In 1950 Camerton Pit, the last in the Cam Valley, ceased production and the remainder of the Cam Valley line closed on 15th February 1951.

The attractive setting of the line appealed to film makers. In 1931 Camerton Station was renamed Fal Vale for the film "The Ghost Train" and in 1937 Dunkerton Colliery sidings were used in "Kate Plus Ten". The same sidings were used in the 1952 film "The Titfield Thunderbolt" for the location of the level crossing "duel" between a steam roller and the Thunderbolt, whilst Monkton Combe Station was renamed Titfield.