

# The Battlefield line

This is a short history of the Ashby to Nuneaton Joint Railway, a very important lifeline for business in the Leicester area in its heydays. It connected the colliery and mining areas in the North of the Midlands with the rest of the country in the South.

There were already important waterways in the area, in this case the Ashby-de-la-Zouch Canal, which runs more or less parallel with, what was originally to be, the new railway between Burton on Trent and Nuneaton.

The Midland Railway, then also owner of the Leicester to Swannington Railway and its extensions which was built between 1828 and 1832, being the third oldest railway in the country, bought the canal in 1846 and got permission to build the Burton on Trent/ Nuneaton railway.

The Leicester to Swannington was the result of an important initiative taken by Colliery owners in Northern Leicestershire, amongst others William Stenson (Long Lane Colliery, Whitwick) and John Ellis (Landowner). They consulted George Stephenson and his son Robert, who inspected the route in 1828 and saw the potential of the line. In 1830 construction of the line was started, originally from West Bridge station in Leicester, via the Glenfield tunnel to the Swanninton area and the project was finished in 1832.

The Midland, However, was reluctant to start building the planned Burton on Trent/ Nuneaton railway, because they already owned the canal and they did not feel the need to compete with themselves.

In 1864 the London & North Western Railway (LNWR) came with an alternative plan, however, for a similar railway connection, this competition urged the Midland to revive their old plan, which they modified it as follows:

- 1) **Connecting the revived Midland line -plan- at the Southern end at Hinckley with the South Leicestershire Railway.**
- 2) **At the Northern end the line was to join the Midland Railway Leicester-Burton line at Moira. (at Moira was the junction with the line to Ashby, extension of Leicester and Swannington)**
- 3) **The Midland also suggested a branchline to be constructed from Shackerstone to Hugglescote near Coalville, there joining Midland's Leicester- Burton line.**

In 1866 the act, passing the Midland's scheme was passed, in spite of the very complete fifty miles long rival railway scheme of the LNWR.

The act sanctioned the **JOINT** building of the Ashby - Nuneaton line by the Midland and LNWR, connecting already existing lines at the Northern and Southern ends of the line.

At the Northern end it connected to the extension of the Leicester and Swannington Railway to Burton (via Ashby), at the Southern end with the Nuneaton and Hinckley Railway at Stoke Golding, where the line was to have a junction connecting to each of the two towns.

Changed ownership:

**Leicester & Swannington (North)**

1845 Part of the Midland

1922 London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS)

**Nuneaton and Hinckley Railway (South)**

1860 South Leicestershire Railway

1862 London & North Western Railway (LNWR)

Concluding; The company was in 1864 in shared ownership of the Midland and LNWR

The Junctions with the other lines were North at Moira and South at Nuneaton – Abbey Road Station- both stations opened for goods and (later) passengers in 1873.

The Ashby-Nuneaton line saw extensions being opened to Loughborough, via Coalville over the Charnwood Forest Line and to Hinckley (from Stoke Golding) which was finished, but never used.

The coming to an end of the use of the Ashby – Nuneaton line started in 1931, when all passenger traffic was stopped.

In WW2 the line still had an important role. In 1943 Market Bosworth became a vast petrol depot in the build up to D-day and near Shackerstone, at Gopsall Hall, important army radio and radar training was carried out, which also meant transport of the military and goods over the line. The Petrol depot was decommissioned shortly after the war, and, regrettably Gopsall Hall was demolished after it got in disrepair in the 1950s.

With the help of the World War Two Railway Research Group (WW2RRG) we were able to find out more about the workings of the depot, which according to their information really saved D day from becoming a failure.

In 1948 the "Big Four" British railway companies (GWR, LMS, LNER and SR) were nationalised, becoming part of the state-owned British Railways.

Goods traffic on the line ended in 1970 and the extension to the Charnwood Forest Line had already been closed completely for ALL traffic in 1964.

A group of railway enthusiasts formed the basis of a railway preservation society in the East Midlands. After having failed to obtain the Jubilee class loco "Leander" for preservation. The society searched for a home for their first engine ("The King" 0-4-0) and found a temporary home at Market Bosworth in 1969, they moved to Shackerstone in 1970. The station and the yard there had already been privately bought. In the early 1970s the railway ran under the name of Market Bosworth Light Railway, on September 28<sup>th</sup> 1973 it established itself under the name of Shackerstone Railway Society. The railway section between Shackerstone and Market Bosworth was purchased and over time the Market Bosworth to Shenton section was also bought by the society.

Various restoration and rebuilding projects followed, to name but a few:

- 1) Restoration of Shackerstone Station. (1970 and onwards), railway rides between Shackerstone and Market Bosworth were started in 1973.
- 2) Resurrection of an ex Midland Railway square signal box, later Measham Canal Inspectors Office in Shackerstone (1978)
- 3) Renovation of the signal box in Market Bosworth (1970s/80s).
- 4) Relaying of the track between Market Bosworth and Shenton (after a big fund raising action by the Society) in 1990.
- 5) Rebuilding of a waiting room on platform 2 in Market Bosworth, ex Chester Road Station, Erdington on the Lichfield to Birmingham line. (1991-1993)
- 6) Move of Humberstone Road Station from Leicester to Shenton and the renaming of the line in "The battlefield line" (subsidiary of the Shackerstone Railway Society) in 1993

Current projects on hand are the restoration of the signal box in Market Bosworth, which was vandalised at Easter 2008 and the creation of a passing loop in Market Bosworth, enabling two trains to pass one another at Market Bosworth in the future.