

The story of Quorn and Woodhouse station

Can you envisage hundreds of tourists arriving at Quorn station eager to go to Woodhouse Eaves? During its first fifteen years the Great Central Railway would bring train loads of people every Sunday from Leicester and Nottingham to Quorn, from where they would bus to Woodhouse Eaves and spend the day in the fresh air of Charnwood Forest.

As station-master Jack Shaw told the Local History Group in December this all became possible because of one man's dream. Edward Watkin was the chairman of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire railway. His big ambition was to compete with the big boys of the railway world by building not only a new line from the Midlands to London, but also a tunnel under the Channel which would take his passengers on to Paris.

In 1890 the Leicester Mercury reported that Watkin's "London extension" would have a station close to Quorn, which would be welcomed by those wishing to join the Quorn Hunt or take the fresh air in Charnwood Forest. Two years later a public meeting in Woodhouse declared themselves in favour, provided the station was called "Quorn and Woodhouse".

Construction of the new line started in 1894. In Quorn there was a frenzy of building – the bridge, the station, the Manor House hotel and much of Chaveney Road were built in the five years that followed. The old MSL Railway was transformed, and in 1897 the complete MSL line was re-named The Great Central.

It took just four years to build 92 miles of line – which is incredible when you consider how long HS2 is taking today. After a year of bedding down the track with coal trains it was opened to passenger traffic in 1899. The tourists started coming almost immediately, and they didn't stop until the country went to war in 1914. The Edwardian period brought prosperity to the GCR, to Quorn and Woodhouse station, and to Woodhouse Eaves.

During the First World War the government took control of the line, and shortly afterwards forced through the great rail re-organisation of 1923. The GCR was given to the London & North Eastern Railway, but there was little money to invest in the 1930's until the government intervened again when war was declared in 1939.

The station was busy during the war, first with children being evacuated to the countryside, then when the Royal Engineers turned the yard into a railhead for ordinance which was stored in dumps around Charnwood. Finally the American 82nd Airborne Division came to train for D-day at Quorn, and used the station yard to store all their equipment.



When the railways were nationalised in 1948 the GCR was placed first in the Eastern Region, then later in the Midland region. The managers there didn't want the GCR: investment was non-existent, services were being cut, and by 1959 rumours were swirling that the station would be closed. The last train stopped there in 1963.

But that's not the end of the story!

In 1969 an intrepid group of volunteers met in Loughborough to explore the possibility of creating a heritage railway – uniquely one using a main line double track. It led to protracted and difficult negotiations with British Rail, but with last-minute help from Charnwood Borough Council a deal was struck, and in 1973 the line from Loughborough to Leicester was re-opened as a heritage railway.

Quorn and Woodhouse station has been restored to how it looked in the 1940s, and the yard is used for a whole variety of special events. Our December speaker Jack Shaw is the station master, who has to balance the demands of the heritage railway with his day job - in Network Rail's Innovation and Development Centre at Melton.

In Jack's words: "I work with the railway of tomorrow in the week, and with the railway of yesterday at the weekend".

Roger Berkeley, Local History Group