

I REMEMBER ...

Almost twenty-one years ago Faringdon's passenger train made its last journey to Uffington, a service which had been in existence for almost ninety years. Our Contributor to this Issue's "I Remember" series wishes to remain anonymous, but he remembers this event vividly, and is also able to recall many details and events in the life of Faringdon's Railway Station, as it used to be in the old days.

He was able to produce an old newspaper cutting which tells us that at first the Great Western Railway was not prepared to construct a line from Faringdon to Uffington, as they considered it would be uneconomical. At that time, 1840, Challow Station, or as it was known then, Faringdon Road, was the nearest station. Consequently, acting on their own initiative, a group of prominent local men and their supporters decided to build their own railway, and so the Faringdon Railway Company was formed, and the line to Uffington was officially opened on 1st June 1864.

In spite of G.W.R.'s pessimistic attitude at the beginning, the service flourished, and they had to admit that their first conclusions had been wrong, and promptly made a "take-over" bid for the Faringdon Company. This was refused, and consequently began the hard struggle to maintain their independence. Unfortunately the G.W.R. did not play very fair in their bid to gain control, and went to the length of boycotting the Faringdon-Uffington service by staggering the arrival of the main-line trains, so that the passengers missed their connections. Alas therefore, the Faringdon Railway Company was forced to sell to the G.W.R. in 1881, at a price of £9,250.

During the more prosperous years of Faringdon's Station, the train ran twelve times a day, and consideration was even given to extending the line to Lechlade.

Market Day was the first Thursday in the month. The cattle were brought up from the Market Place and put in pens to await collection by the cattle trucks, and were then transported to such a firm as Harris of Calne. These cattle pens were sited where Mr. Russell Spinage now has his garages. To the left of this, almost up to the road, churns of milk could be seen, also awaiting collection - this was before the Express Dairy came to Faringdon.

Shell Mex, Anglo American and British Petroleum all had Oil Depots in the Railway Yard, and Toomers, Frosts and Cadels had coal depots - coal was also supplied from here to the Gas Works in Canada Lane. Berkshire County Council had their road materials, i.e. tarmac and stone brought into the Station, and these were distributed around the district.



Liddiards, wholesale grocers in the Market Place, were a familiar sight collecting merchandise from the Goods Shed in a horse-drawn cart, and taking them to their warehouse in Swan Lane. The hotel porter from the Bell Hotel used to come and meet the trains and take the luggage of the hotel patrons to the Bell on a trolley, and of course, the postmen used to collect and deliver the mail.

During the early 1930's a large Army manoeuvre took place in Faringdon - quite an occasion for the Town! Several special trains (never been known before) brought troops from such army establishments as Aldershot and Tidworth, and the army camp was sited in Gough's Ground, just off the Stanford Road.

Many people will no doubt remember the two engine drivers, Fred Carter and Harry Rawlings, and Firemen Fred Cope and Wally West, not to forget nightworker Bryn Thomas who cleaned the engine. Then there were the Station Masters, Mr. Durbin and Ivor Norton, and Booking Clerk Mr. W.E. Major, and Chief Porter & Parcels Clerk Jack Bowerman.

Then there are the little things that come to mind; the signal box at the end of the platform; the sound of the train's whistle as it approached Hobbie Cottages in order to warn anyone who might be crossing over the line on the public footpath to the Town; the custom of putting fog signals on the line when a honeymoon couple were leaving the Station; the cheap excursions to London for about 4/6d. return; the gas lit carriages, and last but no means least, the wellknown sight of Joe Mercer and his horse and cart taking milk churns backwards and forwards from the Express Dairy to the Station - so accustomed was the horse to this trip we are told, that whilst Joe collected his paperwork from the Goods Office, the horse would automatically reverse his cart up against the truck, ready for unloading!

As it became cheaper to travel to Swindon by road, so less and less people used the train, and so our passenger service was reluctantly closed. The Goods service did survive for a number of years, but then with the closing of the old Sawmills, this too had to die, and became part of Faringdon's history.

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