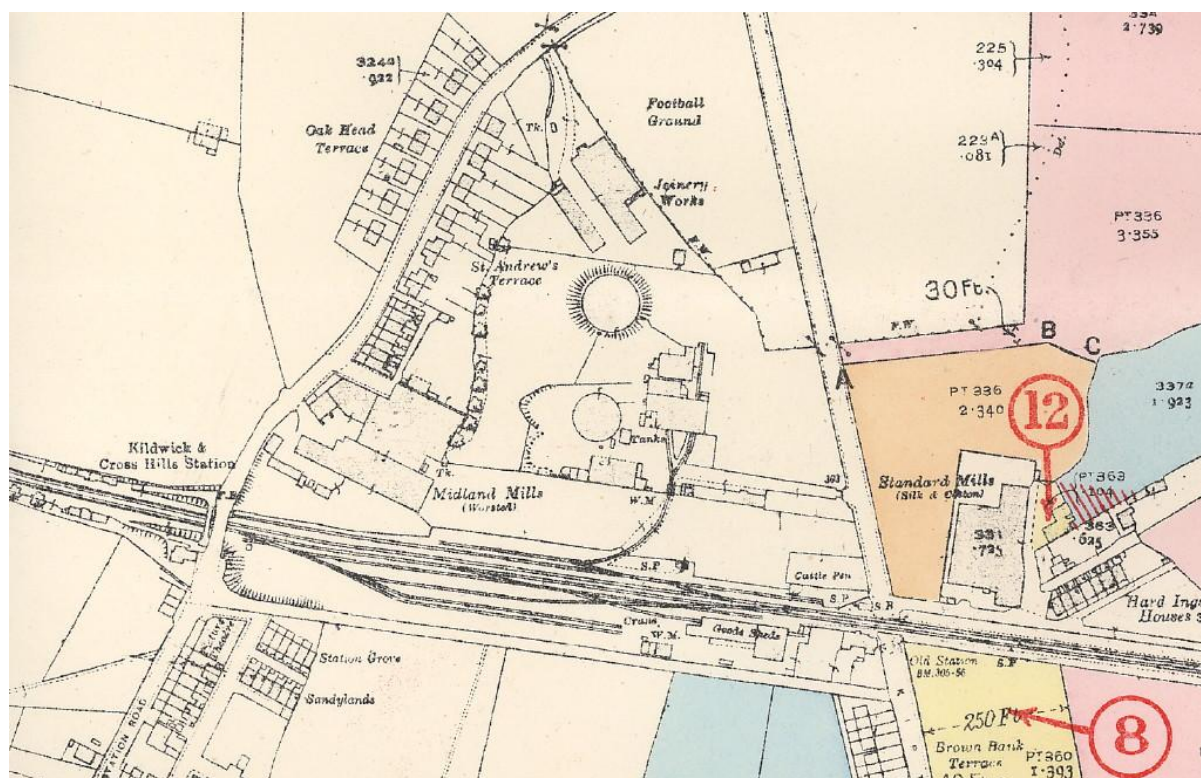


Kildwick & Cross Hills Railway Station

Boyhood Memories from the 1950s

Dr John Laycock



The early map above of 1938 shows the general layout of the station and goods yard, relative to the surroundings. Kildwick is off the top of the map, Cross Hills off bottom left, Eastburn off bottom right. The station is to the left with the goods yard centrally placed. The central buildings above the goods yard comprise the old gas works.

The Station Buildings

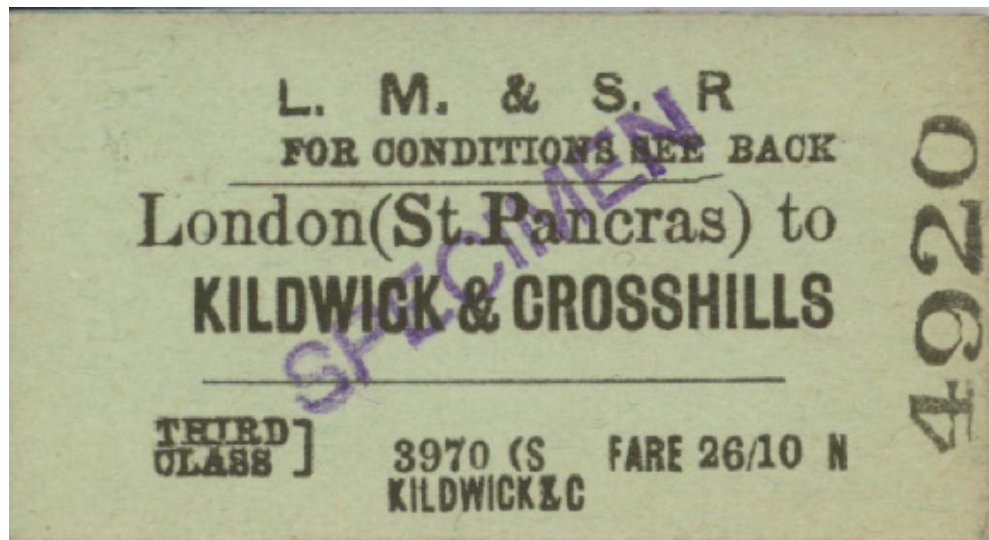
- The 'new' station was on the Cross Hills side of the road bridge on Station Road.
- Alongside the road bridge was a cast metal footbridge on the Cononley side. This was used to allow passengers to cross from the station building to the platform on the Kildwick side, for trains to Keighley and beyond. It was also used by us boys to watch the steam trains go by and to stand over them to get engulfed in the smoke from their chimneys. That unique overpowering experience for eye, nose and throat of smoke and sulphur! But great fun.



- The main building was the Booking Office for the station which was entered on the rail (Kildwick) side of the building, there being no direct door onto Station Road. In the Booking Office one bought tickets and booked in/collected parcels/cases etc. The ticket counter was to the right whilst to the left was a large floor-mounted weighing scale, with an arm for movable weights, used to determine how much the freight/packages would cost to send. Some of these items were large - packing cases etc.
- The Station Master's and Parcels Office was stepped back beyond the Booking Office, on the Cononley side of the building, with its door facing Station Road.



- The Skipton platform was approached by a fairly steep ramp from the Booking Office door down to the platform. Both sides of the ramp were bounded by a palisade fence. Boys used to run down the ramp and get told off by the porter who was responsible for moving heavy freight, parcels and cases around on very heavy, robust wooden trolleys, like giant sack carts. The ramp was lit at night by old fashioned gas lamps with hissing mantles which for a boy were fascinating to behold. Similar lamps lit the platform and Waiting Rooms.
- To access the Keighley platform one was obliged to cross the footbridge and descend the Kildwick side ramp.
- On both platforms there were separate Waiting Rooms for First Class Ladies and Gentlemen, each with a fireplace which hosted a coal fire in the winter. For the masses there was a unisex General Waiting Room. We were never allowed into the First Class rooms so one can only speak for the furnishing in the General Waiting Room which comprised of solid wood benches and not much else. Toilet facilities were very basic in true Victorian style with plenty of fresh air, very solid sanitary ware and an open stone trough in the gents urinal.
- Alongside the platform were advertising bill-boards. For a country boy used to tiny shops this was ones first experience of big-time marketing.
- Standing on the platform was an exhilarating and worrying experience. Would a passing steam train suck me off the edge of the platform - better stand well back beyond the stone edging paving slabs. Don't lose the ticket and make sure to get on the correct train - not that any of us could afford the ticket to London (below). Cheap day returns to Skipton or Keighley for us.



- In those days trains were frequent, noisy, cold and dirty but who cared. It was an exciting new experience, rarely to be repeated due to both lack of funds and no need to leave the comfort of the village. No money, no need to buy anything, no need to travel to either Skipton or Keighley!

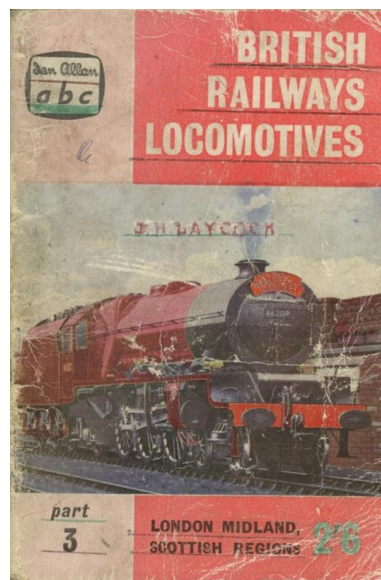
The Goods Yard Lane (Old Station Lane)

- **In the 1960s** there was a paper/sweet shop run by Mr. & Mrs. Hudson in the adjacent premise on the Cross Hills side of the station Booking Office.
- The boys of the village used to buy ice lollies and crisps from the shop and then go and play in the old infrequently used private lane down to the goods shed and railway sidings, which in those days had only low dry-stone walls either side - no fence or bushes in those days to detract from the pretty girl.





- We played football in the tarmac lane or at the bottom of the adjacent field owned by John Fort the farmer. (There were no houses there at that time). Riding bikes at high speed and leaving long skid marks was another sport as was swinging on the ladder arm of the old disused gas lamp. Endless days of care-free cheap fun.
- Of course we had our Ian Allan train spotting book with us and a pencil/biro to cross off or underline the locomotives spotted. (One of my few possessions and survivors from childhood).



- The highlight of the day was around mid-day when the express services of the Waverley between London/ Edinburgh and the Thames Clyde Express between London/Glasgow locos passed through in both directions. The 'up' (to London St Pancras) Thames Clyde Express passed at around 2pm. the 'up' Waverley, Edinburgh - St Pancras, passed at approximately 3pm. The 'down' trains passed about the same times - the Waverley at 2pm and the Thames Clyde at 3pm.

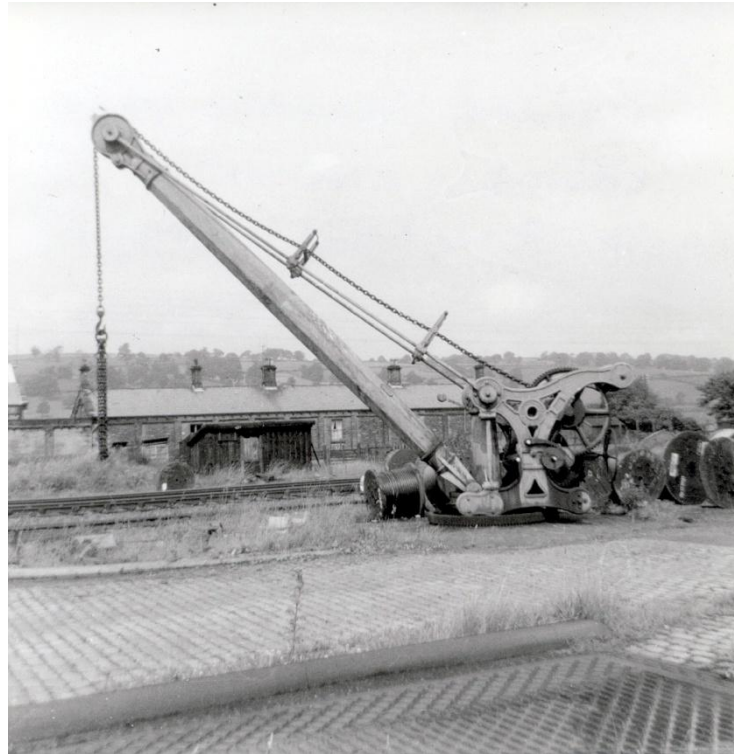


The Goods Yard

- The private lane had a chain across the bottom to block access from the level-crossing end. Access was from the Cross Hills end.
- At the far end of the lane was the 'old' railway station which to us kids was the station master's house. We had no knowledge of its previous role.



- Adjacent to the latter were the goods sheds. A substantial stone built premise which we were never allowed to get near. Access beyond the large well-painted wooden yard gates was not permitted for us young tykes.
- There was a hand-operated crane to the left as one entered the goods yard to move large objects on and off road and rail wagons. It was adjacent to the weighbridge.



- A red and white three wheeler Scammell wagon (similar to the one shown below) was used to convey loads around the yard and to/from local customers.



- Covered rail wagons were shunted in the siding down to the covered store. To my knowledge this store was used for perishable goods such as animal feed etc. and more valuable cargoes.
- The shunter used a long pole to unhook wagons. The shunting engine (which came daily from Manningham at this time) moved the convoy of trucks forward and then stopped suddenly leaving one or more unhooked trucks to free-wheel down the line. The shunter would walk alongside and use his pole to lever on the brakes at the correct moment. If he miss-judged the braking the wagons would run into the row of stationary wagons with a bang and a wave of bangs would be heard as the shock wave rippled down the line compressing the buffers of each wagon and then bouncing back to snatch the linking chain. Great fun to watch and listen to.



- The sidings away from the main through line towards the lane were used by the coal merchants. The door on the side of the coal truck was dropped down by 90 degrees to rest on props, making a flat floor about 4 ft above the ground. Old former L. M.S. redundant flat horse carts were pulled up alongside by hand to make a working platform adjacent to the coal truck. There were piles of cloth sacks and heavy duty weighing scales on the platform. One or two men would shovel the coal out of the goods truck into a sack laying on the scales. When the correct weight was in the sack it was lifted off the scales and lined up with others on the outer edged of the platform. From time to time the private road delivery lorry would come into the yard, line up by the temporary platform and the sacks would be transferred. The lorry would then drive off to make its delivery to domestic and business customers.
- The main company was Thompson's who in the early 20th century had their own rail wagons. Mr. Thompson would arrive from time to time in his old large Daimler which I believe was also used as a wedding/funeral hire car. (The image below is pre World War 1 - no horses were to be seen in the late 1950s but probably the same cart).



- The gas works were at the other side of the main line with their own siding. The coal trucks were pulled into the works not by train but by cable from a winch pulling the cable around a number of rollers alongside the track. (Full details in Denis Laycock's excellent document on the history of the Kildwick Parish Gas Co.).

The Level Crossing

- Another train spotting location was on the Kildwick side of the level crossing. On the corner was a small, old, wooden shed with corrugated iron roof which operated as a shop, primarily for the workers at the adjacent mill. An old gentleman ran the shop and spent a good part of his day sitting in an old carver chair in the shed chatting to elderly friends. He sold cigarettes, sweets etc.
- Outside the shop was a stone wall with a solid long cube of concrete on the top which acted as a bench. The boys (and occasional girl) used to sit there waiting for the trains to pass.



- Just across the road was the signal box with the steps leading up to the box positioned out of sight on the Skipton end of the box, at the opposite end to the road.



- One could hear the bell go in the box to signal a train was due. This was the time to pay attention to make sure the number on the engine wasn't missed. The next part of the process was for the signal man to come over to his window by the road and judge when to close the crossing gates across the road to stop the traffic.
- The gates were operated by a lever system which was activated by the signal man from within the box by winding a vertically mounted fly wheel around many times using a short handle sticking out at 90 degrees from the edge of the fly wheel. (Visible at the rear of the image below). This was done whilst he looked out of the window and monitored the traffic on the road. On many occasions he would have to stop the closure as drivers attempted to squeeze through at the last moment before the gates came together.



- The gates came to a halt with a crash and violent rattle when metal stops automatically came up out of a plate in the road. There were two gates either side which met each other half way across the road. The adjacent pedestrian side gates on the Steeton end of the main gates were locked at the same time. (In the image below the gates - by the wall - are removed as the crossing was modified in the 1960s to barriers).



- Next the signal would be set. There was a distant signal barely visible down the line towards Steeton. A much closer home signal was visible next to the mill amidst the numerous overhead telephone wires.



- Then the moment we had all been waiting for as the train came up the long straight from Steeton and excitement grew as it was seen to be more than a goods train or a local passenger train. Would it be a Jub, Scot, or Pat class loco with a name plate? A gem to add to the collection? If it came from Skipton it would suddenly appear from behind the signal box and rush by.



- The level crossings were very uneven as baulks of wood formed the roadway between the rails. They would come loose and rattle around as heavy vehicles went over them. From time to time a gang would appear to replace or secure the timbers. It was a long time before a more substantial solution replaced the timber.



- Needless to say, even in those days there were long traffic queues when the gates were closed (no Aire Valley road in those days). Some of the freight trains were incredibly long with many tens of coal trucks taking several minutes to pass through. Imagine how long it took for two long coal trains travelling in opposite directions to pass by. In the holiday season the queues were very long as the cars, caravans and coaches headed to and from the Dales and the Lakes. In our early teens we used to wave at the girls sitting in the coaches - and have fanciful dreams of what might be! A wonderful childhood.

