

THE 8D ASSOCIATION

ON SHED

**The Journal of the 8D Association
Volume 1 Number 3
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Fisons Locomotive Number 2 in the late 1950s

Not all of the railways within the area of interest to the 8D Association were under the ownership of the big railway companies or later British Railways. Many local firms had railway networks of their own such as Fisons at Widnes.

50p if Sold

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Editor

Welcome to the third 8D journal and thank you for the feedback I have had regarding the second which does seem to have been very well received. The association goes from strength to strength. We have increased our membership base still further and the site visits have proved to be very popular. The discussions that have taken place amongst members at the visits has been most enlightening and of great interest to all. As the summer draws to a close a programme of events for the winter period, mostly indoors, has been put together which is published on the back page. Hopefully there will be something of interest to all.

The railways in our area do not stand still they are constantly evolving. In this edition there is an article on the Folly Lane branch which is currently undergoing something of a renaissance. Within a year there will be regular waste trains from Manchester using the branch. It is good to see rail has a future into the 21st century. **Paul Wright**



The original Norton Station Signalbox as seen in 1970. At that time the stations platforms were extant.

St Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway site visits 2nd of June and 18th of August 2011.



*The site of Union Bank Farm Halt as seen in January 1982. Track lifting had begun.
Photo by John Mann.*

The summer site visit programme included two visits to sections of the former St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway. On the 2nd of June 2011 eight members and two guests walked from a point that would have been to the north of Farnworth & Bold station to just short of the Union Bank Lane bridge adjacent to the M62 Motorway. This section of the line had closed on the 1st of November 1981 and track lifting commenced just before Christmas of that year. The trackbed is easily walkable as far as Union Bank Lane where it becomes flooded. The sandstone bridge at Bold which was part of the original line was a highlight of the visit.



8D Association Members inspect the site of Peasley Cross Station on the 18th of August 2011.



An ex LMS 8F Locomotive heads south through the site of Peasley Cross Station in 1965. Photo by Bevan Price.

There was clear evidence that the bridge had been cleaned at some point in the recent past. During the walk the site of Union Bank Farm Halt which had opened on the 1st of October 1911 and which closed on the 16th of June 1951 was visited. The only evidence that there had ever been a halt at the location was a gate post at the top of the embankment.

On the 18th of August 2011 six members of 8D visited the northern end of the line. Gaining access just to the north of the site of Peasley Cross Station the course of the line between Sutton Oak Station and Ravenhead Junction was surveyed.



A train from the Hayes Chemical works at Peasley Cross Station site in 2002 the last year that the service ran. Photo by Bevan Price.



The bridge at Bold as seen looking north in 1983. Photo by Paul Wright

The section of the line walked on the 18th of August 2011 included the last sections to remain in use and track was found to still be in situ from St Helens Central (formerly Shaw Street) to the site of the Hays Chemical Works (Formerly the Leathers Chemical Works). After its closure as a through route the line remained open at the St Helens end between St Helens Junction and St Helens Shaw Street and between Sutton Oak Junction and Sutton Manor Colliery. The first section to close was the line to Sutton Manor Colliery which was taken out of use on the 10th of October 1987 up to the junction at Sutton Oak. The line had been lifted by May 1989. On the 27th of May 1989 Sutton Oak signal box was taken out of use. The structure was burned down by vandals. The line between St Helens Junction and St Helens Shaw Street probably closed as a through route on the 11th July 1990 which was the date when Ravenhead Junction signalbox was taken out of use. Between St Helens Junction and the Hays chemical works the line was lifted, and from Hays to St Helens it was remodelled being singled to the site of Ravenhead junction signal box with a run around loop at the site of Peasley Cross Station.

The altered track layout was clear to see during the visit and some of the chairs that hold the rails to the sleepers carried the date 1990. Interestingly though they were marked Eastern Region. The last trains ran to Hays works in the summer of 2002.

Other highlights of the walk included the site of Sutton Oak Shed, Sutton Oak

Station, the site of Broad Oak Junction signalbox and the site of Ravenhead Junction signalbox. An interesting find was a surviving section of the Widnes direction platform wall at Sutton Oak Station.

Fading light prevented further explorations at Ravenhead Junction but a further site visit will be planned in 2012 so that this complex and fascinating railway location can be explored in more detail. **Paul Wright**



In this view from November 1990 the remains of the Ravenhead Branch just beyond Ravenhead Junction are shown. Photo by Bevan Price.

Principal Closing Dates for St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway

1st of November 1981 – Widnes No 1 Signalbox to Clock Face Colliery Number 1 Ground Frame. Line closed as a through route.

18th of April 1982 – Widnes Number 7 Signalbox to Widnes Number 1 Signalbox.

27th of May 1987 – Sutton Manor Colliery to Sutton Oak Junction Signalbox.

11th of July 1990 – St Helens Junction to Hays Chemical Works Ground Frame.

May 2002 – Last trains run to Hays Chemical works.

The Folly Lane Branch

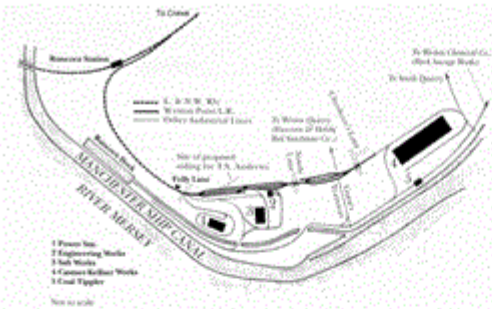


The Folly Lane Branch as seen looking west at Folly Lane in 1988. At this time BR based a class 08 diesel shunter on the branch and the line was still electrified. To the left of the picture can be seen the BR staff accommodation block.

The Folly Lane branch was opened in 1868 by the London & North Western Railway (LNWR). It connected the Runcorn Docks to the LNWR Ditton Junction and Weaver Junction line which provided a short cut for trains travelling between London and Liverpool by bridging the River Mersey at Runcorn. Prior to the line opening trains had to travel via Warrington.

Runcorn Docks can trace their origin back to 1776 when the Bridgewater Canal opened at Runcorn. Runcorn was the western terminus of the canal which had a direct connection to the River Mersey via a set of locks at the town which allowed for the onward movement of goods to Liverpool. A dock system developed at the point where the river and the canal had their juncture. Early railway developments bypassed Runcorn but when the Ditton Junction and Weaver Junction line was proposed the opportunity was taken to also obtain an act to build a branch to the Runcorn docks.

Castner-Kellner (Later to become ICI) opened a factory at the end of the branch at Weston Point which was served by its own sidings. Over the years the Castner-Kellner works expanded and in 1922 the company opened its own railway which was known as the Weston Point Light Railway. It connected directly to the Folly Lane branch. Castner-Kellner (and later ICI) had their own locomotives for the system.



Map showing the Folly Lane Branch and the Weston Point Light Railway.

The Folly Lane branch and Weston Point Light Railway became a very busy railway location. In the early 1960s the Folly Lane Branch was electrified. The decline started in the late 1980s when pipelines and road competition began to have an effect. On the 13th of March 1994 the branch was de-electrified. By the mid 1990s the only rail traffic that was using the branch was a couple of times per week trip that ran between Warrington Arpley and the Salt Union Works. The service finished in 2000. In 2001 a new automated loading facility was opened at the site of the Picow Farm Road sidings by Ineos Chlor and at present three trains per week visit it. **Paul Wright**



Looking north from Runcorn Signalbox along the Folly Lane Branch in the first half of the 1960s. The branch can be seen curving away to the left. To the right can be seen Runcorn station at which an electric hauled service is arriving. Photo by R W Mercer.

8D MEMBERS RIDE ON A GHOST TRAIN

No some of our members have not been to the fun fair nor have they been spirited away by some supernatural force. The Ghost Train was the 7:53 Summer Saturdays Only Chester to Runcorn train that is operated by Northern Rail.

There are a number of Ghost Trains around the country the more accurate description for which is Parliamentary Trains. They run on sections of line that do not normally see scheduled passenger services so that the illusion of the line still being open can be maintained. The 7:53 Summer Saturdays Only Chester to Runcorn service is run in order to demonstrate that the Halton Curve (the line from Frodsham Junction on the Warrington to Chester line to Halton Junction on the Ditton Junction to Weaver Junction line) is still open. Since early 1994 the Halton Curve has only been able to be used in one direction, from Frodsham to Runcorn. It does not have any scheduled services on it, including Freight, other than the Ghost train.

Ghost trains are usually run at the most inconvenient of times, often offer no return journey opportunity (as in the case of the Chester to Runcorn) and are not well advertised. As a result they are not used by many people and often run empty and it is the empty nature of the trains that has given them the nickname of 'Ghost Trains'.

On Saturday the 6th of August 2011 ten members and two guests rode on the Chester to Runcorn 'Ghost' which gave them the opportunity to travel over the little used Halton Curve.



8D association members at Chester Station alongside the 07:53 service to Runcorn on Saturday the 6th of August 2011.

The morning started bright and early when members met at Runcorn Station. Crammed into three cars the group set off for Chester. At Chester station a bemused ticket clerk tried to explain to the group that travel was only possible directly to Runcorn East. After insisting that this was not so on Saturdays during the summer month's tickets were issued.

The Ghost train was clearly advertised on the station departure indicator but this did not stop another member of the station staff trying to advise the group to travel to Runcorn East.



The departure indicator at Chester Station on the 6th of August 2011
Photo by Paul Wright

The train departed promptly at 07:53 and other than the 8D group there was only one other passenger travelling. The first part of the journey was a lively run along the very straight section of line from Chester to Frodsham during which Les Fifoot explained that back in the 1960s it was one of the first sections of line that he had seen relayed with continuous welded rail.

Colin Turton told the group that one of his jobs when he was based at 8D in the early 1960s was to fire a train that ran from Ditton Junction to Helsby. Colin explained that the train called at Runcorn and then travelled over the Halton Curve and on through Frodsham to Helsby. Upon arrival at Helsby the 8D crew then worked a service that called at all stations to Liverpool Lime Street via Runcorn. Colin explained that 8D lost the work when the service went over to DMU operation. The train that Colin recalls was listed as Table 96 in the BR London Midland Region timetable of 1960. It was listed as departing Ditton Junction at 6:05 and arriving at Helsby at 6:38. According to Colin the service was well used.

After Frodsham the 'Ghost' began to slow down. It crossed over the River Weaver viaduct at less than 20 mph and at Frodsham Junction turned northwards onto the Halton Curve. This was the highlight of the trip and the reason for the existence of the 'Ghost train'.

The Halton Curve was originally opened as a double track railway by the LNWR in 1869. It provided a link from the companies Ditton Junction to Weaver Junction line which was built to provide a short cut over the River Mersey for trains travelling between Liverpool and London. Previously they had had to travel via Warrington. The curve itself branched off from the main line at Halton Junction (Runcorn) and ran for a mile and a half to form a junction with the Chester and Warrington Railway at Frodsham Junction (Sutton Weaver). The Chester and Warrington Railway was at the time a joint line of the LNWR and GWR. The curve allowed trains to run direct between Liverpool and North Wales.

For many years the curve carried a steady stream of express passenger, local passenger and goods trains. A regular stopping service between Liverpool Lime Street and Chester General was still running in the early 1960s and even went over to DMU operation. In 1964 however British Railways reduced service levels and sought to withdraw the service altogether. Consent was refused in 1966 but from the 6th of March 1967 a revised service was introduced that deliberately destroyed connections and left only a very sparse service in the middle of day. Although supported by a grant in 1969 by May 1973 there were only six passenger trains per day in each direction over the Halton Curve on weekdays running between Runcorn and Chester except for one which ran from Liverpool. A few extra services ran on Saturdays. The service was withdrawn completely with effect from the 5th of May 1975. Summer only services running between Liverpool Lime Street and North Wales continued to run. They continued into the 1980s but the frequency became less and less.



Looking south along the Halton Curve as the Ghost travels along it on the 13th August 2011 – Photo by Mark Aldred.

The Halton curve was singled in the 1980s. In 1994 points were removed at Frodsham Junction due, it was said, to the cost of replacing them (it was estimated to be £48,000). It was after this date that the Ghost services began. Since that time there has been an active campaign to reinstate the Halton Curve to a bi-directional line. It is a key part of the transport plans of both Halton Borough Council and Merseytravel who want to re-introduce the Liverpool and Chester service. Halton Borough Council has aspirations to create a station on the curve at Beechwood (Runcorn). In 2003 a closure proposal was vigorously fought off.



Halton Junction as the Ghost prepares to come off the Halton Curve bound for Runcorn on Saturday the 20th of August 2011. Photo by Lee Woods.

As the Ghost travelled along the Halton curve at 20mph it constantly hit trees and overgrown vegetation. It was obvious that the line was not a priority for its current owners Network Rail. John Wilson, a driver with DBS explained how he had taken the Northern Belle along the curve and its highly polished coaches had been damaged by the vegetation which led to the trains owners filing a compensation claim against Network Rail. After only a few minutes the journey over the curve was over and the Ghost joined the main line at Halton Junction. A few minutes later and the train was at Runcorn. Chester to Runcorn had taken only 21 minutes, a very competitive time that could not be bettered by road. Clearly with a little investment the Halton Curve could become a very useful section of railway line once more for both passenger and freight services. **Paul Wright**

Halton Station



*Halton Station
in the early
1970s – Photo
by John Mann*

Halton Station was situated on the Birkenhead, Lancashire & Cheshire Joint Railway's (BLCJR) Warrington and Chester line which opened on the 31st October 1850. Halton Station did not open with the line but following a serious railway accident that took place in the Sutton Tunnel on the 30th April 1851 a report by Captain R. E. Laffan recommended that a station be opened at each end of the tunnel and that they be linked together by electric telegraph. Halton was the station provided at the southern end of the tunnel.

The station first appeared in the public timetable with the name Runcorn in March 1852. The station was located on the south side of a road overbridge which carried Wood Lane over the line. The BLCJR was a double track railway so Norton was provided with two platforms. The stations main facilities were located in a two storey brick built building on the southeast side of the line on the Chester direction platform. The brick building was rendered so as to give a smooth finish. The building provided booking and waiting facilities and it also incorporated a Station Masters house. The stations platforms actually continued underneath the Wood Lane bridge. An approach road connected the main station building with the public highway and this was the main approach to the station. Access to the Warrington direction platform was via a set of steps that led down from a gateway on the northeast side of the road overbridge.

At the time of opening the Station was served by trains that ran between Warrington and Chester and onward to Birkenhead. On the 1st of August 1859 the BLCJR became the Birkenhead Railway but within a matter of months it was taken over jointly by the Great Western Railway (GWR) and the London North

Western Railway (LNWR) as the Birkenhead Joint Railway on the 1st January 1860.

In April 1861 the new company renamed the station as Runcorn Road. On the 1st March 1869 they renamed it again this time as Halton. The GWR used the line through Halton as a means of access to Manchester via Warrington and lines belonging to the LNWR. Halton Station however remained very much a local facility.

In 1923 the LNWR share in the joint line passed to the London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS) who absorbed the former company as part of the 'Grouping' of the country's many railway companies into four large organisations. The GWR retained its own identity. In the summer of 1932 Halton Station was served by only seven trains in the westbound direction on weekdays. All of them went to Chester General with the first departure being at 7.41am and the last at 9.02pm. In the eastbound direction there were six trains. Four of them went to Warrington Bank Quay and two to Manchester Exchange. The first departure was for Warrington Bank Quay at 8.00am and the last was for Manchester Exchange at 7.35pm.

Halton Station was in a fairly isolated location so it was never very busy. It did not survive long after the Nationalisation of Britain's Railway in 1948 closing to passengers on the 7th of July 1952 and to goods on the 3rd February 1954. The line through the station site is still in use today for goods and passenger services. The Chester direction platform at Halton Station is still extant and the building, although heavily altered, can still be seen. It is in use as a private residence. **Paul Wright**



Halton Station as seen looking towards Warrington in 1967. Halton Borough council Collection.

Union Bank Farm Halt – circa 1920



*Union Bank Farm Halt looking south in LNWR days. The basic facilities at the halt are clearly shown. The halt was provided with short platforms as it was originally intended that it would be served by a single coach 'Railmotor'. Within a few years of the Halt being opened in 1911 the railmotor was replaced by Webb Tank Locomotives which hauled two coaches and which could operate in Push & Pull mode. The Railmotor had been given the nickname of the 'Ditton Dodger' and it continued to be used by locals when the locomotive and coach hauled service was introduced. In this view the 'Ditton Dodger' service is seen arriving at Union Bank Farm Halt on its way to St Helens.
(The Bob Martindale Collection)*



Where is this competition? (Answers to ptw64@fsmail.net)

June Edition Winner was once again Colin Wright.

Events Programme

19:00 – Thursday 20th October 2011 - The Cowley Hill Colliery and Runcorn Gap Railway – A talk and illustrated slide show by Joe Cowley - Kingsway Learning Centre (Widnes Library)

10:00 – Saturday 26th November 2011 - From Ditton Junction to St Helens Shaw Street – The Stations – A talk and illustrated slide show by Paul Wright - Kingsway Learning Centre (Widnes Library)

10:00 – Saturday 17th December 2011 – The 8D association AGM Followed by a Buffet Lunch and a Guest Speaker. Kingsway Learning Centre (Widnes Library)

10:00 – Saturday 18th February 2012 - Signalboxes – A talk by Richard Mercer - Kingsway Learning Centre (Widnes Library)

10:00 – Saturday 17th March 2012 - A morning of recollections – discussions between members provoked by slide show - Kingsway Learning Centre (Widnes Library)

Events are open to non members at a cost of £2.00 per person.



The marshalling sidings that lay to the west of Carterhouse Junction as seen in the late 1960s. The diesel shunter had originally been built by the LMS. Photo by Richard Mercer.