

Spondon as a Railway Centre

Spondon as nearly all 'Bygones' readers will know rests just four miles from centre of the city of Derby and boasts a long and interesting history as well as a strong independent streak; even today many villagers ruefully accept that although their village now lies within the fringes of Derby's city boundaries, it is to a great number of residents very much still a village community boasting Locko Park and open countryside on its doorstep.

I have explained in earlier pieces to 'Bygones' how Spondon Station was one of my favourite haunts at the beginning of my teens when first coming to live in the East Midlands. It was a nearby venue from which to train spot, along with Raynesway bridge; long before I joined the rail Industry. It was also a wonderful starting point to begin journeys stretching in all directions. In an earlier article, I outlined how in the 70's and 80's it was a first stepping stone for a number of European jaunts, what I didn't say was that it was also the first point for the short journey to work every morn in Derby and the thankful return home every eve.

Like many unsung locations and venues' it has its own history and intrigue. For years at the roadside gable of the main station building next to the footbridge was a curved heavy metal railing which butted right up to the former booking office; it looked reminiscent of the type of metal barrier I had witnessed in my earlier boyhood on the quayside of the Tyne but clearly with Spondon being landlocked was simply not the case. For years it baffled me, and no one could throw light upon the mystery. Even though the sadly neglected canal was situated merely yards away this appeared to have no bearing either and station staff and passengers alike were as much at loss as my friends and myself. Many years later and with the 21st century on the horizon I alighted from a train at the station one sun kissed summers eve and got chatting to a railway permanent way worker, he was emptying the contents of his van, namely tools and equipment and taking them inside the former station building which was at this juncture, used as a lock up store. By this point in time sadly the station was no longer manned as is still the case today. I happened to question the existence of the railing and its origin and received the most illuminating reply. Apparently in the late twenties or early thirties a steam lorry had crested the adjacent hump backed bridge and subsequently lost control and ploughed into the station building critically injuring the station master at his desk; in true British style the barrier was erected after the event as in 'shutting the stable door once the horse has bolted'. I've never been able to authenticate this tale but am quite sure that if it actually occurred the Telegraph would have a report somewhere in its archives? The storyteller of the day also relayed to me another fascinating snippet in relation to times past. In the 1950's the now filled in and adjacent canal may have fallen into disuse but was still clearly a waterway of sorts; in fact, even by the late sixties a sunken barge lay within yards of the railway at the canal turn a winding circle. According to the trackman, the station master of the era who he thought was called Wilson had a most unusual way in checking the receipts for Borrowash which was the next station up the line and for which he was also responsible. Instead of travelling by train, car, motorbike or even cycle to carry out this duty he merely lowered a canoe into the waters and paddled up to his desired destination. This too of course could be just folklore or is it fact? – I would love to know. They are certainly both exceedingly good yarns.

At this point I would like to add my own thoughts in relation to Spondon station; little more than a decade and a half ago when departing the East Midlands for my new home in South West Scotland I had opportunity to interview the then Managing Director of Midland Mainline – the forerunner of today's East Midlands train company. At that point he was in the process of securing funding and the go-ahead to build the new rail station serving East Midlands Airport. I have long thought that the lack of parking at Derby station and the roads to it place many local rail travellers at a disadvantage and that with the ready access to the A52, Raynesway and the burgeoning Oakwood housing scheme on Spondon's doorstep it would make sense to re-label the station as Derby East Parkway and use some the old Courtaulds site for parking whilst expanding the stations current inadequate skeleton service. The man at the centre of my posed question on the subject readily agreed but also admitted it had been hard enough to fight for one rail hub let alone two. Now more than ever with Derby again endeavouring to expand its girth and Pride Park so close to where the rails once ran through its site, surely the concept could be visited again with an adjoining light rail link also being evaluated.

Further housing too has been suggested for where Celanese once stood and this too I believe adds credence to my suggestion. It is a brownfield site ripe for development and a car park right opposite the station would not surely need costly decontamination work as in the case of dwelling construction.

It is a long time since the Celanese steam shunting locos Victory, George and Henry trundled across the level crossing although at least one of these engines is now preserved, and it is even longer since the esteemed Midland Railway of old ran through Spondon between the once extensive Chaddesden sidings and the cottage style platform buildings that once adorned the past rural idyll of Borrowash.

But just what if the powers that be, in light of the occurring worldwide rail renaissance came to realise that in Spondon they have gem of a site that could start to build the southern end of the new northern powerhouse? – answers on a postcard please!

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