

A Brief Outline of Railways in the Coventry Area

The first railway to serve Coventry was the Rugby-Birmingham section of the London & Birmingham with its northern terminus at Curzon Street, opened on 9th April 1838. The Curzon Street terminus, a version of the demolished Euston Arch, still exists and can be seen from the train on the left hand side of the tracks going towards Coventry. The line was authorised by Act of Parliament in 1833 following surveys in 1826 and 1829.

The first Coventry station was located on the south side of Warwick Road overbridge (since rebuilt) and the station house was still in use as a dwelling until 1961. Its life as a station was short, being replaced in 1840 with enlargement in 1849/50. Alterations were made in 1860 and from 1901 to 1904 producing the station existing until 1961. Work on a new station commenced weeks before the outbreak of war in September 1939 but was then suspended. Before 1961 the station comprised four roads, two being through, a parcels dock at the Birmingham end on the up side and a short siding into the former Midland locomotive shed on the down. All was completely swept away, except for a short section of platform edge on the up side, by the 1962 rebuilding which provided the present four platforms and the power signal box.

Full colour light signalling from the new box came into use over the weekend 14th/15th April 1962. It had progressively replaced Nos.1 to 4 manual boxes between May 1960 (No.2 box) and April 1962 (No.1 box). The station opening, by a local railwayman, took place with little ceremony on 1st May 1962 in time for HM The Queen's visit to open the new cathedral in June and this latter date is often quoted as the formal opening.

On the L&B route to Birmingham, stations were provided at Dockers Lane (renamed Berkswell in 1853, Berkswell & Balsall Common in 1928, then later reverting to Berkswell), Marston Green, and Stechford Gates (later Stechford) from 9th October 1844. On 9th December 1844 the Coventry-Warwick line opened with stations at Kenilworth and Leamington. The latter station was renamed Warwick Milverton in 1854 when the line from there to Rugby opened with the new Avenue station in Leamington.

The two LNWR Leamington Spa stations have undergone several name changes resulting from the siting of both being in Leamington but one serving Warwick. The former L&B station has had at least nine name changes and Avenue Road station six. The final line to enter Coventry was from Nuneaton, opened by the LNWR on 2nd September 1850 with stations at Counden Road (Coundon Road from 1894), Foleshill, Longford and Exhall (closed 1949), Hawkesbury Lane, Bedworth, and Chilvers Coton. Further stations were Allesley Gates (Allesley from 1863, and Tile Hill from 1864) on the Birmingham line in 1848.

A wartime opening on the Birmingham line on 30th September 1940 was Canley Halt serving the Standard Motor factory. On the Nuneaton line a

station at Daimler Halt opened on 12th March 1917 to serve the Daimler works. All the stations on the Birmingham line remain open with a half-hourly weekday service. However, for stations between International and New Street a change now needs to be made at International.

The Nuneaton-Coventry-Leamington line closed to passengers on 18th January 1965. A Coventry-Leamington service resumed on 2nd May 1977 with no intermediate stations, the new service being for cross-country express workings. Coventry-Nuneaton reopened for local services on 11th May 1987 with no intermediate stations, Bedworth not re-opening until 16th May 1988.

The service was suspended for almost a year during 2004/5 due, it was said, to lack of staff.

The Coventry-Leamington line was singled over the weekend 9th/10th December 1972 with a loop provided at Kenilworth. Reopening of Kenilworth station has been discussed over many years but no party will bear the cost. It should be noted that the section from the former Gibbet Hill box to the former Kenilworth Jct. box has always been single, reputedly to prevent the GWR obtaining running powers to Coventry. Coventry Park Jct.-Gibbet Hill was relaid as double track during September 2006. Traffic resumed over one line after a two-week closure but full use is not expected until the resignalling of the whole Coventry area is completed by Easter 2007.

In order to bypass the City station, a loop was opened by the LNWR from Berkswell to Kenilworth Jct. on 2nd March 1884 at which time the line on to Leamington was doubled. This 'Berkswell Loop' closed in 1965 at the same time as Coventry-Leamington; it only had a meagre service for many years. Reopening as a major freight diversion was considered but it closed completely in 1969 and was lifted by April 1970.

A goods loop was opened on 16th August 1914 from Three Spires Jct. on the Nuneaton line to Humber Road Jct. on the Rugby line. This served Gosford Green Yard, Coventry Wholesale Market, Coventry Ordnance Depot and Bell Green Yard, but has never had a passenger service.

The number of passenger specials over it can be counted on one hand. The junction at Humber Road was severed on 7th October 1963 and it was worked as a long siding to Gosford Green for traffic to Chrysler (now Peugeot) until 1981. The line was subsequently lifted, much of it now being the route of a bypass. Many proposals have been made to quadruple the tracks between Coventry and Birmingham to relieve congestion. First proposed by the LNWR in 1912, then the LMS in 1938, it was revived again in 2000 but has been shelved yet again. Some land for this work has been owned since LNWR days to allow additional tracks.

Two locomotive depots have existed at Coventry. The main one opened by the LNWR in 1865 to house four locomotives was extended to four 100ft. roads in 1896. Located in the 'V' of the Leamington and Rugby lines, the site is now partially occupied by the Coventry power signal box.

Closing on 16th November 1958, it was used to store locomotives into the 1960s and demolished in February 1970. Its allocation was always small. In

1940 the allocation was 16 locomotives and in 1954 six including two passenger locomotives, 46420/46. An engine in steam was recorded as late as 3rd December 1965 when BR 9F 92217 stayed about a week after suffering a hot box.

The other shed was a small one-road affair for one locomotive at the north end of the down (pre-1962) platform. This belonged to the Midland Railway who exercised running powers from Nuneaton from September 1865 until around 1920. The building remained in use for other purposes until 1962. Coventry goods yard closed in October 1962, most of the site being redeveloped for the Central Six shopping complex and car park. Some sidings were retained for engineers' use and were taken over by Central Trains to stable CI.350 EMU sets overnight and at weekends.

The 1962 parcel depot on the up side at the south end of the station closed on 8th June 1972. This had an unusual roof structure and was the subject of a preservation order, as is the station itself, but was found to be unsafe and has since been demolished. A new multi-storey car park has recently been built on the site. The former carriage sidings alongside the Leamington line were relaid in 2002 for engineers' use in connection with the upgrade of the West Coast main line.

November 2006 services are as follows. CI.390 Pendolinos operate Virgin West Coast Wolverhampton-Coventry-Euston. Virgin XC uses CI.220 Voyagers and 221 Super Voyagers on their services from Manchester and the north to Bournemouth. Central Trains services from Coventry to Birmingham are worked by CI.350 Desiro or CI.323 EMU sets. Their Northampton-Coventry-Birmingham trains are CI.350 units with two morning services bringing Silverlink CI.321 into the area. The Coventry-Nuneaton shuttle is normally a single CI.153. On the freight side EWS use CI.66/0 and CI.92 while Freightliner use CIs.57, 66/5, 66/6 and 90. In the event of Virgin failures CI.57/3 appear as Thunderbirds, although only Rugby has one manned.

There have been few lines in the area not operated by the main line companies and those that existed, with one exception, have all now disappeared. The factories of the Daimler Company, Morris Engines, Dunlop and Courtaulds all had their own sidings off the Nuneaton line and their own locomotives. Colliery branches off the Nuneaton line served Coventry Colliery, Griff No.4, Clara Colliery and Newdigate Colliery, each with a stud of locomotives. A colliery branch off the Rugby line served Binley Colliery that was shunted by gravity until mining subsidence created the need for one locomotive. Sidings off the Nuneaton line also served Coventry Gas & Electricity works, each having their own locomotives for shunting. The former Coventry Colliery branch from Three Spires Jct. is the only survival, albeit not in operation. Having lain dormant for some years it was re-laid to serve the ProLogis Distribution Park built on the colliery site but has seen no traffic beyond two light engines. The LNWR signal box at Three Spires Jct. was burnt down by vandals and replaced by a remotely controlled box to work the junction.

One system that deserves further mention is the nominally independent Foleshill Railway. Opened in 1901 from a junction off the Nuneaton line to serve Webster's brickwork's it was extended in 1905 to serve the new Courtaulds factory and Coventry Ordnance works, crossing the 3'6" gauge Coventry Corporation tramway system on the level at Stoney Stanton Road. Much heavy ordnance came out over the line during the Great War of 1914-18 and a new connection was made with the Coventry loop in 1914 making it a through route. Courtaulds traffic was always steam-worked the line closing on 29th February 1972 after Courtaulds converted their boilers from coal to gas. A final steaming was staged on 8th April 1972 before some 100 enthusiasts and Courtaulds wove a silk bookmark to commemorate the event. Rocket (0-4-0ST Peckett 1722 of 1926), there from new, was handed over to a local RCTS member for transmission to Tyseley Museum. A 3' 6" gauge Coventry Corporation Tramways system also served the area from 1884 until destroyed by the blitz in 1940. Steam tram engines worked the first line to Bedworth but electric trams soon took over. The system had a dual gauge siding at Bell Green goods yard for exchanging traffic from the main line.