



The Railway Inn

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The Leicester & Swannington railway was built in 1832, although it didn't reach Swannington until a year later. Essentially designed to carry coal from the local pits it also, by the carriage of passengers, generated a modest supplement to that income. It was therefore necessary to control access and to collect fares. It is thought that William Sherwin, who owned land and had business interests in this area, bought up sites strategically placed along the line on which booking offices could be built. These were generally uniform in design and were essentially double fronted pubs with a central doorway, a ticket office to the left and a bar to the right.

On the Bagworth self-acting incline, where the weight of the loaded wagons bound for Leicester pulled the lighter returning empties up the slope, the passengers had to disembark, walk the length of the incline and then rejoin the train for the remainder of their journey. This proved to be a wise precaution when one descending train ran away and smashed into empty wagons at the bottom causing very considerable damage.



Although first class carriages were quickly introduced, most passengers were carried standing in uncovered high-sided goods wagons on mixed freight and passenger services. This was the normal practice throughout the early railway network and continued until 1887 when, following a circular from the Board of Trade, mixed goods and passenger working was progressively abandoned.



Passengers tickets were issued in the form of octagonal brass tokens stamped with a number and the name of the issuing station. The guard on the train was equipped with a belt carrying leather pouches, one for each station on the line: at the end of the passenger's journey his token was collected by the guard and placed in its appropriate pouch. Details of the journey would be recorded and the tokens returned to the issuing station for re-use.

The author of this article had a replica of a token which has done service as key fob for many years without any sign of wear, very different from the staying power of the pasteboard tickets with which tokens were replaced. When the line opened the cost was one and a quarter old pennies per mile. For the first class passenger, and one would guess that there were precious few from Swannington, the fare was two and a half old pennies per mile. First class passengers, who were allowed to book in advance, were issued with paper tickets, their name and the name of the station being entered by the booking clerk.

The heyday of The Railway Inn, Swannington

The last of the booking offices along the line was in Main Street Swannington at the corner of the Tan Yard, a little over half a mile from the boarding point at the top of the Incline. It may be thought that requiring such a stiff walk before boarding the train was pretty cavalier treatment of one's customers, but the alternative modes of transport were no more enticing and, to be fair, in the interests of safety, passengers were not carried on inclines.

The Railway Inn can only have operated as a ticket office for 12 or 13 years for, in 1846, the Leicester to Swannington Railway was taken over by the Midland Railway. An extension to Burton on Trent was built with a fine new station at Swannington, a mile or so south of the Railway Inn, catering for passengers. The

line to the Incline was thus left as a spur for the carriage of coal from the pits of Swannington and Coleorton.

Though deprived of its original purpose, the Railway Inn continued to ply its trade as a public house for there were thirsts to be quenched in Swannington as in all mining settlements. Ownership passed through several hands until it came into the ownership of Joseph Wheatley, an inspector and later a clerk of works on the Midland Railway, one of whose sons, Alfred, was to become their chief architect.

Closure and demolition of The Railway Inn

It seems that in 1908 the police were intent on reducing the number of licensed premises in this area and at the Ashby Brewster Sessions in that year they objected to the renewal of the licence of the Bull's Head Inn in Swannington, which was also in the possession of the executors of the late Joseph Wheatley.

Giving evidence Superintendent Lockton said that the population of Swannington was 1,737 and that there were 10 licensed houses of one sort or another in the village. He said that the Railway Inn was 62 yards away, the Fountain 343 yards and Mr Atkins' wholesale premises 108 yards distant and therefore by implication that there were too many licensed premises in such a small area.

Mr Musson appearing for the licensee said that the Bull's Head and the Railway were in the same ownership and the police were applying to take away the licence of much the better of the two. In support of that proposition he said that the Wyggeston Hospital Trustees always took lunch at the Bull. All the cases brought by the police were referred to the compensation authorities but the Bull's Head continued as a pub for many more years.

One suspects that Mr Musson might well have been right as far as the respective merits of the two pubs were concerned. Nevertheless the Railway does have the distinction, such as it is, of claiming to be the last inn in the midlands to have a "Bull Ring and Peg" game in the bar.



In 1929 Alfred Wheatley sold the Railway, together with an adjoining cottage, to Bass and Company Ltd for £885, it was delicensed and let as a private house in, or about, 1930. It was sold again in 1946 and was demolished in 1958.