SHEFFIELD & ROTHERHAM RAILWAY, THE WICKER BRANCH, AND EARLY SHEFFIELD PASSENGER STATIONS

Page last updated 2 January 2025

***Branch Line News* nos. 1396 carried the following paragraphs:**

582] Sheffield Victoria Part 1: Wed 5 Jan marked an anniversary that few will remember, 52 years since the closure from 5 Jan 1970 of the first main line station at **Sheffield** linking it directly to **London.**

The city's very first station, **Wicker** (OP 31 Oct 1838 by the Sheffield & Rotherham Railway), was at the end of a 5¼ mile short line from **Rotherham Westgate** - both termini. George Stephenson had chosen the more easily graded route bypassing **Sheffield** to the east ('The Old Road') for the North Midland Railway from **Derby** to **Leeds**, and industrialists in **Sheffield** wanted their city to be linked to it.

The Sheffield, Ashton-under-Lyne & Manchester Railway (SA&MR) opened its line from **Dunford Bridge** to **Sheffield Bridgehouses** without formalities on 14 Jul 1845. On completion of the (first) **Woodhead Tunnel**, the line opened throughout between **Manchester** and **Sheffield** on 23 Dec 1845.

A connection to **Wicker** station OG 1 Jan 1847 but was only used to exchange a small amount of goods traffic; it CA Jul 1948. The SA&MR merged with two other railway companies to form the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway (MS&LR) on 27 Jul 1846. The line east of **Bridgehouses** (to **Beighton Jn** on the Midland Railway) opened on 12 Feb 1849 but **Victoria** station was still under construction then. The line passes over the 660yd long 41-arch Grade II* listed 'Wicker Arches' viaduct (the main arch has 30ft headroom and a 72ft span). The overall design was in the hands of the Sheffield-born engineer John Fowler, who later gained fame as one of the principal engineers of the Forth Bridge.

Sheffield Victoria OP 15 Sep 1851, a through station with two 300m island platforms. A prominent architectural critic of the day castigated the station as providing a 'singularly unpromising' approach to the city, penned in as it was by steelworks, marshalling yards, a cattle market and the then filthy River Don. The Victoria Hotel opened next door in 1862 and became the 'Royal Victoria' after a visit by the Prince and Princess of Wales to Sheffield in 1875.

MS&LR trains ran to **King's Cross** via **Retford**, in conjunction with the Great Northern Railway (GNR), their ally. However, the Midland Railway provided tough competition when they opened the direct line between **Tapton Jn** and **Grimesthorpe Jn**, including the new **Sheffield Pond Street** (later **Midland**) station, on 2 Feb 1870. Not only was their station closer to the city centre but they also had a more direct route to **London**. The MS&LR subsequently expanded southwards into the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Commentary by Richard Maund:

line 2: Victoria wasn't the first station at Sheffield with a through train service with London – the honour goes to the MS&L Sheffield station at Bridgehouses, from which the GN started through trains with Kings Cross from 2 Sep 1850 (GNR advert in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* 31 Aug 1850, p.4); the MS&L line between Sheffield and the link with the GN at Gainsborough had opened to the public on 17 Jul 1849 (MS&L advert in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* 21 Jul 1849, p.1). At that time, however, the MS&L had thrown in its lot with the 'Euston Square confederacy' (see Dow on the Great Central or Grinling on the Great Northern) and was offering minimal co-operation with the GN. The Midland started a competing through service (overlaid on the MS&L *connecting* services at Eckington) between the Bridgehouses station and Euston from early July 1851 (*Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* 12 Jul 1851, p.3).

line 3: the first Sheffield station (thus needing no suffix!) – together with the line from Rotherham - was **formally** opened 31 Oct 1838 with a service of special trains (including some for the *hoi polloi*); "public service" (presumably goods as well as passenger) only started the following day (two adverts in *Sheffield Independent* 27 Oct 1838, p.1). The 'Wicker' suffix did not appear in timetables until autumn 1853 while the 'Westgate' suffix did not appear until 1 May 1896.

line 8: the SA&MR's Sheffield station opened 14 Jul 1845 (advert in *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* 12 Jul 1845, p.1); it seems never *formally* to have acquired a 'Bridgehouses' suffix although it was locally known as such and was given in a MS&L advert (*Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* 20 Apr 1850, p.5) as "the Bridgehouses station, Sheffield".

line 10: The Tunnel line (as the Midland dubbed it) had goods service from Nov 1846 (*Derbyshire Courier* 14 Nov 1846, p.6) and passenger service from 1 Jan 1847 (*Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* 9 Jan 1847, p.8), worked by stationary engine (as also recounted in *RCHS Journal* no. 200: Carl Shillito, *'The Fiery Jack' – A Short History of the Spital Hill Tunnel, Sheffield*).

line 11: BLN 1401, line 9 (below) was – properly – more circumspect about the final closure date.

line 12: although the Act providing for the SA&M merger into the MS&L received Royal assent on 27 Jul 1846, the merger did not come into force until 1 Jan 1847.

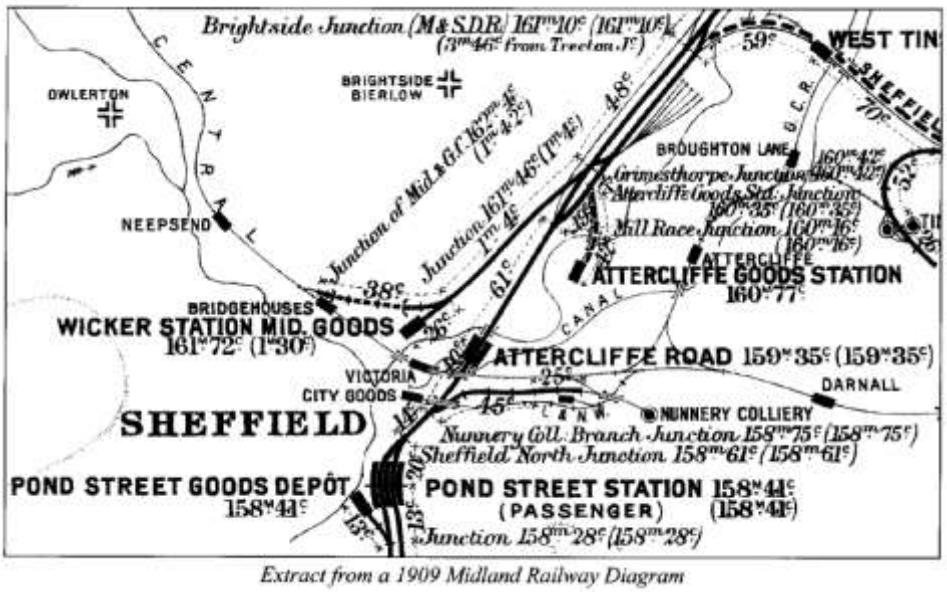
line 13: the passenger opening of the link to the Midland on 12 Feb 1849 is confirmed by *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* 10 Feb 1849, p.8. MS&L trains ran to/from Eckington (Mid.) for connections. This service ceased from Feb 1852 but resumed from 1 Mar 1854 and continued until MS&L trains were diverted instead to their own Chesterfield station from 1 Jun 1892.

line 17: Victoria station opening 15 Sep 1851 confirmed by *Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*

lines 20 and 21: although both the MS&L and GN had subscribed to its capital, the Victoria **Station** Hotel (to give it its correct original title) was an independent venture from its opening in 1862. It renamed itself the Royal Victoria Hotel from Aug 1875 (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 8 Feb 1876, p.3) and – following the expiry of its lease in 1883 - was acquired by the MS&L under their Additional Powers Act of 1885 (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph 24* Nov 1884, p.3).

line 22 *et seq.*: the alliance between the MS&L and GN did not come into force until the former company broke with the 'Euston Square confederacy' from 1 Aug 1857 (Grinling, *The History of the Great Northern Railway*, p.162). By that stage, the shorter route via the present-day ECML to Retford (opened in summer 1852) was available for the Kings Cross – Sheffield service, which was worked by the GN.

line 25: the Midland's new Sheffield station (and the new line between Tapton and Grimesthorpe) was opened from Tue **1** Feb 1870 and from that same day Wicker closed to passengers (advert in *Sheffield Independent* 24 Jan 1870, p.1). Advertised as the "New Midland Station" it was so shown in the Midland's public timetable until altered to simply "Midland station" from 1 Feb 1876. Despite what the RCH's *Hand-book of Stations* and this internal Midland plan showed, only the goods station at the new site was normally referred to publicly as Pond Street.



Extract from a 1909 Midland Railway Diagram

***Branch Line News* nos. 1401 carried the following paragraphs:**

1251] Sheffield Wicker: (BLN 1396.582) This was the first station in **Sheffield**, opened 31 Oct 1838 by the Sheffield & Rotherham Railway, at the end of an isolated 5¼ mile line from **Rotherham Westgate**. A short, steeply graded connection almost entirely in tunnel, from the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway (MSLR) **Bridgehouses** station OG 1 Jan 1847 but was used only to exchange a small amount of goods traffic. The tunnel arch failed on 21 Mar 1848 and the line was closed for repairs until Jan 1849. **Wicker** CP 1 Feb 1870 with OP of the Midland Railway line through **Sheffield Midland**. The MSLR connection was clearly not regarded as a strategic link as it CA again in Dec 1940 so that the tunnel could be used as an air raid shelter, although it ROG about 1941. Final closure date is uncertain, being given as Jul 1948 or 1949. The track was lifted in 1957.

The 'Cyclops Steel & Iron Manufactory' was established northeast of **Wicker** station possibly as early as 1845 and various works gradually developed either side of the line from **Wicker** north towards **Grimesthorpe**, where the branch joined the main line. **Wicker Goods** CG 12 Jul 1965 and the line from **Grimesthorpe Jn** CA. From **Cardigan Sidings** (why so named?) to **Firth Brown Sidings** was transferred to the ownership of Firth Brown, which later became Sheffield Forgemasters. **Cardigan Sidings** were the extensive ones, south of **Grimesthorpe Jn**, at the start of the branch. The Oct 1960 Sectional Appendix lists the signal boxes on the 1m 30ch branch, from the junction southwest as **Grimesthorpe N°1**, **Grimesthorpe N°2**, **Firth's Sidings** and **Elevated Box**. It is shown as double track, with a note 'worked by Pilot Guard when necessary during time when Wicker Branch Signal Boxes are closed'.

Commentary by Richard Maund:

line 4: the opening of the tunnel line has been dealt with above (goods from Nov 1846, passengers 1 January 1847). The service was interrupted by the tunnel collapse but Shillito (*RCHS Journal* no. 200 – Carl Shillito, *'The Fiery Jack' – A Short History of the Spital Hill Tunnel, Sheffield*) states it resumed (briefly) thereafter, probably being withdrawn from12 February 1849, when MS&L to Midland passenger interchange transferred to Eckington (Mid.). Alas, *Bradshaw's Guide* (for example, March 1847 at https://is.gd/Bradshaw164) gives no indication of the service (but that doesn't prove it didn't exist!). Shillito also makes clear that the freight use of the Tunnel line was far from insignificant, over the years.

line 6: replacement of Wicker as the Midland's passenger station for Sheffield from 1 Feb 1870 by the New Midland station has been dealt with above.

line 14: transfer of the branch track – as far as general locality of Firth's Sidings - to Firth Brown, and its conversion to sidings, was recorded by the late Gerald Aston as being effective from 18 July 1965.

line 16 *et seq.*: Grimesthorpe No. 1 and No. 2 signal boxes were on the 'main line'. Between them, the two Grimesthorpe boxes controlled the junction between the Wicker branch and the 'main line': No. 2 controlled the branch connection with the Down Goods (but did not signal the Main or Local lines) and passed branch trains to No. 1 which completed the junction to the Main and Local lines. There was also Lockwood's Crossing box, 23ch before Wicker, until 1956. The "residual rail network" was closed in 1984 (or thereabouts).

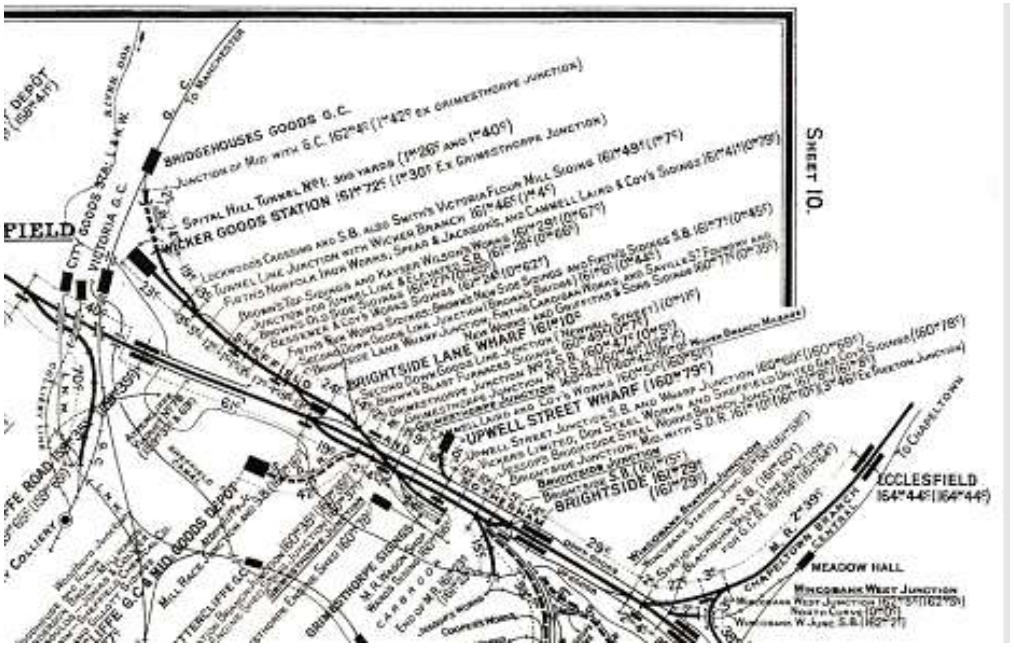
***Branch Line News* nos. 1407 carried the following paragraph:**

2013] Rotherham Westgate: (BLN 1396.582) This was Rotherham's first station, opened 31 Oct 1838 by the Sheffield & Rotherham Railway, the terminus of an isolated 5¼ mile line from **Sheffield Wicker.** It was then called simply **Rotherham** but **Westgate** was added on 1 May 1896, by which time it was one of three stations with **Rotherham** in its name. It CP 6 Oct 1952 and officially CA east of **CF Booth's Sidings** (scrapyard) on the same date. However, the final freight to **Westgate** ran on 7 Oct 1952. The track was lifted east of the bridge over the River Don, immediately west of **Westgate** station, in Sep 1953. **Booth's Scrapyard** is east of the overbridge carrying what used to be termed the 'Old Road', now named the Barrow Hill lines, between **Tapton Jn** and the now closed **Rotherham Masborough** station site.

Commentary by Richard Maund:

The S&R's Greasborough branch – northwards from Holmes Junction - opened for goods 7 Aug 1839 (*Sheffield Mercury,* 10 Aug 1839) and in conjunction with the opening of the North Midland line from Derby via the 'Old Road' to Masborough Rotherham station for passengers on 11 May 1840 (adverts *Sheffield Independent* 9 May 1840, p.1) the first section of this branch became, in effect, the passenger link between the S&R and NM lines. Thus Westgate was reduced to a branch for local trains. The S&R was taken over by the Midland from 10 Oct 1844. The late Gerald Aston writing in *Railway Magazine* Jan 1953, p. 62, confirmed that the official closure date was Mon 6 Oct 1952 - the final passenger trains ran on 4 Oct 1952.

The following plan is an extract from a Midland Railway Distance Diagram, sheet 10E of 1918. The whole sheet – and other relevant sheets – can be found at [the RCHS online Media Archive.]



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