YORK'S AVOIDING LINE -
the junction and connecting line between Great North of England Railway and York & North Midland Railway

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Great North of England

The Great North of England 1837 Act had authorised a main line "... to join to, connect with, and terminate in the proposed York and North Midland Railway at, in or upon certain Lands called "Hob Moor," belonging to and occupied by the Freemen of and in Micklegate Ward in the City of York and situated in the Parishes of Saint Mary Bishophill the Elder and Saint Mary Bishophill the Younger, or the one of them, in the said City of York and County of the same City, ...". The southern extremity and junction with the Y&NM would have been by the Hob Moor brickyard at Hob Moor Lane (now a footpath passing under the north end of the erstwhile Dringhouses yard) at or about g.r. SE586504. Nevertheless, that section of the original alignment which would have avoided York – from Acomb landing lane to Hob Moor – was never constructed; Tomlinson p. 349 says: "the connection on Hob Moor which formed part of the original plan was never made."

In addition there was to be "... a Branch Railway, to be called ' The City of York Branch ' from and out of the said intended Extension of the said ' Great North of England Railway ' ... to commence at or in a certain Close belonging to Alice Hislop of Ripon in the said County of York, and occupied by William Hardcastle, and situate in the said Township of Holdgate otherwise Holegate in the said Parish of Saint Mary Bishophill the Younger, and to terminate at or in the West Side of a certain Highway leading from Micklegate Bar in the said City of York or the Suburbs thereof to the River Ouse at the Point or Place where the said York and North Midland Railway is intended to cross the same Highway, and passing in, through, from, and out of the said Township of Holdgate otherwise Holegate in the said Parish of Saint Mary Bishophill the Younger, and in the said Liberty of Saint Peter, and in the said County of the City of York, or the one of them; ..."



The deposited plans – of which an extract is given above - show that the 'country' junction for the 'Branch Railway' would have been just to the east of Acomb Landing Lane (g.r. SE582522 – the lane is marked **A** on plan) and the city end was clearly what became Archway signal box – opposite the arch in the city wall at the Thief Lane/Queen Street level crossing (g.r. SE596516). The main line to Hob Moor would have taken it west of Hol(d)gate village – a much longer, smoother curve than that which eventually linked York North Junction and Holgate Bridge Junction. (For comparison, the *approximate* location of the curve that was eventually built is shown in red.)

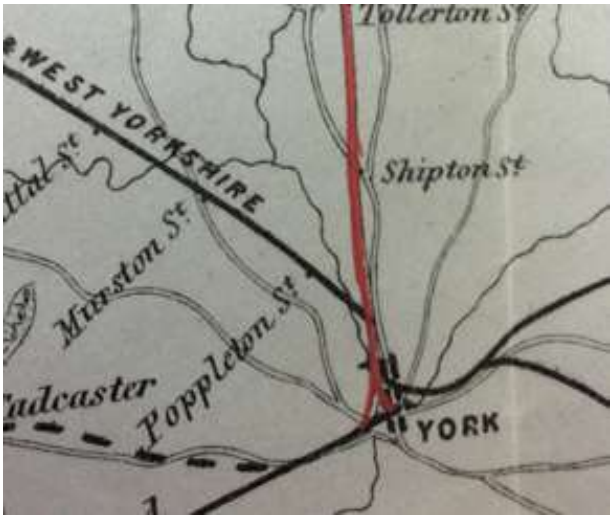
The first suggestion that the junction with the Y&NM might not be at Hob Moor appears in the GNofE Directors' minute of 14 Aug 1837 (RAIL 232/2), where it is reported that: "It appears that owing to the York & North Midland Railway Company having removed their line from the course delineated on their Parliamentary plan, it will be very difficult for this Company either to use the York Depôt or to form a junction with the main line *[of the Y&NM].*" This resulted in long and tortuous negotiations between the two companies, during the course of which the Y&NM half-yearly meeting on 13 July 1838 had heard: "Mr. Alderman Meek said he was given to understand that the Great North of England Railway Company intended bringing their line to York, whether it was their intention to abandon the line to Hob Moor or not, he was not aware; at all events after coming to York first, it was not at all likely that they would go to Hob Moor" *(Yorkshire Gazette,* 14 July 1838, p.7). (Meek was chairman of the Y&NM, so if anyone outside the GNofE knew the situation, it should have been he.) However, he was somewhat premature, for although the two companies' engineers (George Stephenson and Thomas Storey) had met, the Report of the Directors to the half-yearly GNofE shareholders meeting of 4 Sep 1838 (RAIL 232/1) - explaining why the final contract to reach York had not yet been let - said: "…it being at present uncertain which of two contemplated modes of communication with the City and with the York & North Midland Railway may most favourably combine the interests and convenience of the various parties concerned…". At the next such meeting on 5 March 1839 (RAIL 232/1) – without actually stating that the Hob Moor connection had been abandoned – the whole tenor of the report of Storey, their Engineer, was that the Y&NM connection would be solely at the archway at York itself. GNofE Committee of Management minute of 9 Apr 1839 (RAIL 232/6) reads: "York Branch: The plans for this work are in progress" (this refers to the link to Archway).

The penultimate contract, no. 17, had been from south bank of the Ouse to Acomb (1m 68ch). An advertisement in the *Durham Chronicle*, 4 May 1839, p.3, for tenders for "the last [contract] to complete the line from Darlington to York", contract 18, makes clear that Hob Moor had been abandoned, for this contract was 1m 23ch, "extending from a point 19 chains north of the Lane to Acomb Landing *[i.e. g.r. SE5802352729]*, to the Junction of the York and North Midland Railway, close to the Walls of the City of York" *(i.e. to Archway).*

No further mention of Hob Moor has been found in GNofE paperwork at TNA Kew – there seems to have been no formal minute to abandon it, simply that all efforts from spring 1839 were instead directed to the Archway junction. Nor did they make any further effort to provide a junction at York that would allow direct running to and from the Y&NM without reversal.

The significance of the land boundaries and colouring on a 4 chains to the inch plan of the GNofE line from Croft to York (RAIL 232/79, section 38 – part reproduced below) – is not at all clear. A curved boundary looking suspiciously like that which would have enclosed the later (ca. 1845) curve is shown, but there is no obvious reason why the GNofE should have acquired ***all*** the property shown shaded pink on that plan.





Was the York, Newcastle & Berwick involved?

Under Hudson's aegis, the GNofE was – in 1845 – leased jointly by the Newcastle & Darlington Junction, the York & North Midland and the Midland, and then a year later vested into what became the York, Newcastle & Berwick. A document compiled and published in 1849 (RAIL 1110/348) by Joseph Miller, sometime Secretary to the GNofE company, contains this plan showing the connecting line to Holgate Bridge as owned by the York Newcastle & Berwick company.

The York & North Midland involvement

Y&NM Directors' meeting minute (RAIL 770/2) of 20 November 1845: "Purchase of land from Mr. Tireman [1] : Mr Davies & Mr Richardson reported having agreed with G W Tireman Esqr. for the purchase of as much Land as may be required by this Compy. at the price of … on giving Mr. Tireman [1] a right of road from Holdgate Lane to his remaining Land. **Resolved** That such agreement be confirmed". It would seem this was to be for a 'junction line' in lieu of the GNofE's aborted section of main line because the *Yorkshire Gazette* of 6 Dec 1845 reported: "YORK AND NORTH MIDLAND RAILWAY. The directors … are making every preparation for the accommodation of the greatly increasing traffic on this line. The station at York is now in course of extension, and they have purchased land for a new line from Holgate Bridge to the Great North of England Railway, whereby great facilities will be acquired, and the safety of the public promoted." The need for such a curve may have been prompted, at least in part, by the opening of the Y&NM's Scarborough line, which joined the GNofE line by a ***west***-facing junction, west of the city, which would have involved all their goods traffic making reversals near Archway box and again at the Scarborough line junction. However, no mention or hint of such a linking curve being forthcoming appears in the Directors' report to the Y&NM half-yearly meeting on 16 Jan 1846 (RAIL 770/2).

Likewise, the "Conclusion of the Third Report of the Committee of Investigation…" (31 Oct 1848) (bound in RAIL 770/3), which lists all the "further lines for which the company have Parliamentary Powers" (i.e. over and above its original line), does not include anything remotely like a connecting line at York.

So when and by which company did the 'junction (avoiding) line' get built? … and when was it opened?

Tomlinson gives no clue but '1846' appeared in Cooke & Hoole's *North Eastern Railway Historical Maps* (RCHS, 1991) without ascribing line ownership – nor provenance for such date.

In 1926 the LNER had produced a *List of Lines … with the Acts of Parliament authorising them, and the Dates of Opening*. In this list is included, on p.38 under serial number 780: **York** North J(unction) – Holgate J(unction). The 'Authorising Acts' column carries the explanation: "General Powers, on land purchased by York and North Midland Co.", with the 'When Opened' column left tantalisingly blank. 'General Powers' would denote works effected under the provisions of the Railway Clauses Consolidation Act 1845, section **XVI Works to be executed** which essentially pulled together most of the provisions that had previously been written into each individual Act, to enable railways to make additions – such as extra running tracks, sidings or yards – to their infrastructure as their traffic increased [2]. We must presume that the LNER (and the NER before them) found no specific statutory provision for this curve, and that its origin was with the Y&NM.

The earliest traced reference to the curve being used is for a journey by Queen Victoria to Castle Howard from Euston at noon on 27 Aug 1850; the train was handed off by the Midland at Normanton: "Here the directors and officers of the York and North Midland Company received her Majesty at the hour of five o'clock, and after a brief interval the train was placed in their charge, the journey to York (25 miles) being effected in 28 minutes. The train did not enter the York station, but, taking the curve at Holgate bridge, ran up at once to the Scarborough junction with the Great North of England Railway. … The train proceeded onwards to Castle Howard…" (*Yorkshire Gazette* of 31 Aug 1850, p.7).

But ca. 1846 certainly seems the most likely date for the commencement of the curve's use for goods traffic, to avoid the undoubted congestion which must have arisen at Archway.

Start of regular passenger use

The present authors have traced no inspection by the Board of Trade (or successors) for the initial use of this curve by passenger trains [3] although layout and signalling changes in more recent times will have been the subject of inspections. Early timetables provide no help in seeking to establish when regular passenger use started, giving merely York station arrival timings, while comparisons of times allowed for up and down trains, or between succeeding issues, has proven fruitless – until a specific column note appeared in the early 1870s.

RAIL 968/6 NER working timetable for Jan 1862 (for example) carries no notation suggesting use of junction (avoiding) line. However, the Down Night Express allowed 65 mins York to Darlington whereas its Up equivalent allowed 81 mins (depart to arrive in both cases). Down Day Express allowed 27 mins to Thirsk depart whereas Up equivalent allowed 40 mins Thirsk – York. Down stopping trains allowed 12 to 15 mins to Shipton depart while Up equivalents allowed 19 or 20 mins.
Scarborough line Down trains allowed 11 mins to Haxby whereas Up equivalents allowed 15 to 21 mins (including ticket check).
Down GN expresses allowed 28 or 29 mins from Milford Jn to York whereas Up equivalents allowed 20 mins. Down stopping trains allowed 13 to 17 mins from Copmanthorpe whereas Up equivalents allowed 8 to 10 mins.

All inbound trains must include a ticket check stop (where running round could be effected) but while the extended time for the expresses from the north *may* signify use of the junction line, there seems insufficient time for such manoeuvre from the south.

But even coal pick-ups and goods trains are simply timed at "York" – no distinguishing mark to show that some would go to the coal depot rather than to the passenger station – so it is hazardous to try to infer too much from such rudimentary scheduling.

Nevertheless, we do know that passenger use of the junction line – not only by special trains bypassing the city but also by regularly scheduled trains – was **in force by 9 April 1867** because of an accident report about the 1908 Newcastle – York (and beyond) passenger and mail train that day (Hutchinson's accident report to Board of Trade of 29 April 1867). Another such occurred on 25 November 1871 involving the 1350 Newcastle – London passenger train.

NER "working time books" to at least 1870 still give no notation to show which trains were booked "round the junction at York", although such notation had emerged by 1877. While it would be possible to ascertain when – in the early '70s – the notation did first appear, it would tell us nothing about when such use of the 'junction curve' actually started.

End of regular passenger use : 25 June 1877

RAIL 968/21 includes NER wtts 1 June 1877 and 1 July 1877.
In June, the following trains from the north were endorsed, by column a note reading: "Runs round Junct. at York" – indicating use of the North Junction - Holgate Bridge Junction curve, to enable backing in to the 1841 station and thus avoid reversing the formation of through trains:
From the north
1000 SuX Edinburgh – 1245-1250 Newcastle - York 1440 "Scotch Express"
1315 SuX Newcastle – York 1530
1345 SuX Newcastle – York 1540
1450 daily Edinburgh – 1838-1908 Newcastle – York 2128 "Night Mail"
1930 SuX Edinburgh – 2308-2323 Newcastle – York 0150 "Day Mail"
From the south
0249 daily Normanton - York
1145 SuX Normanton – York
1300 SuX Normanton – York
1325 SuX Normanton – York
1515 SuX Hull (1634 SuX Old Junction) – York

Many trains had no change in their schedule in the July 1877 issue, despite now running head first into the new station from 25 June – but the column notes had all been deleted.

*** For over 140 years the avoiding line together with the original Great North of England main line's alignment between York Yard South and Skelton Junction saw no regular passenger trains – just the occasional special or diversion. Passenger usage resumed when First Group launched their Lumo open access service between London King's Cross and Edinburgh on 25 October 2021 and *some* of the *northbound* trains commenced to use this route instead of running via York's 1877 station (for details of services involved see the ***PSUL*** section).

Notes

Note [1] : writing not clear but the spelling in clause 20 of the GNofE Act of 30 June 1837 was George William Tireman (c.f. reference in connection with purchase of land by GNofE for their York coal branch)

Note [2] : for examples: the north-east curve at Retford (between the GN and GC), and the Blyth (Summit) – Links Road – Newsham South Jn branch are amongst those which also appeared in this category

Note [3] :…but they will deem it a favour if anyone can draw attention to a record of any such inspection in the 1845-1870 period.

Tomlinson: *The North Eastern Railway – Its Rise and Development*, William Weaver Tomlinson, 1914
RAIL denotes file at The National Archives, Kew

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