

MEMORIES OF LEAMINGTON AVENUE STATION BOOKING OFFICE
1950s

Due to health reasons I was strongly advised by my doctor to change my occupation from the footplate to something lighter, and working more regular hours. After being on the footplate for nearly twelve years, and giving up a job I liked was rather upsetting.

A vacancy appeared in the local press advertising for a booking clerk at Leamington Avenue station, so I went to see Station Master W. Bland, and he said he would be pleased to have me if I could pass the clerical entrance examination. I took this examination at Worcester Shrub Hill station and passed. As there was no line of promotion from the Locomotive Department to the Clerical Department I had some difficulty in making the change, but eventually I was told to report to Mr. Bland in February 1954.

I met Mr. Bland at his office, and we walked from the General station to the Avenue station where he introduced me to Alan Vaughan the chief clerk. His parting words to me were, "The money in your pocket is yours, and the money in the booking office is the railways".

Alan was about my age of 28, and he worked a middle turn of duty, the other two clerks worked 06.00 to 13.00 and 14.00 to 21.00 Monday to Saturday alternate weeks. I commenced with six weeks training before taking up my duties. I found it a vastly different life working indoors and in one location.

The booking office was quite large, approximately 20` square with a high ceiling. Lighting was by gas, and it had an open coal fire for heating. There was a table in the middle and the main desk was high with a sloping surface where you would stand to work or sit on a high stool. There were no mechanical aides such as adding machines. There were three ticket cases; two held Edmondson type card tickets and a smaller one for the season tickets. Probably about 500 different tickets in all.

These tickets comprised of single tickets and ordinary returns at full fare. Workmen's tickets issued where you must reach your destination before 08.00. Day return tickets were issued, Coventry being the busiest destination. Commercial travellers tickets which allowed the traveller to carry extra luggage/equipment.

Forces on leave tickets, which were at a reduced rate, Government tickets permitting forces to travel free. Reduced rate tickets for rail staff. Tickets for dogs, bikes and prams. One higher fare dog ticket used to be in the form of an envelope where a pull out slip advertised Spratts dog biscuits.

Season tickets, which could be issued for a period of a week, one month, three months or months and odd days up to one year.

Most tickets issued were third class but where demand justified a few first class were held.

The bookings were varied, a lot of tickets were issued via Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire and interior Irish stations, also Liverpool and Belfast, and Heysham / Belfast.

Sleeping berths were arranged and booked to Scottish destinations for passengers joining at Rugby, Birmingham or Crewe.

A certain amount of accountancy work was done here, and then totals transferred to the Leamington General station.

The parcels traffic received was considerable and livestock of one form or other dealt with daily. Day old chicks arrived in biggish numbers, mainly from Mytholmroyd.

Guide dogs arrived for the Blind Association Training School, which was at Leamington and young sheep dogs, often collies, arrived for local farmers. Many farmers were not on the telephone and a telegram was sent to advise them to collect. Racing pigeons in baskets arrived to be released as part of their training.

Once a year, a train load (probably a dozen vehicles) of pigeons in baskets consigned from stations in the Erewash Valley arrived in the early hours of the morning accompanied by a lot of helpers. During the morning these helpers would unload the pigeons and stack the baskets about five high along the unloading dock. The pigeons were fed and watered and at 13.00 if the weather was fair, all would be released in the space of a very few minutes. The pigeons did one circle above the station then headed in a northerly direction, and for a few moments the sky was full of birds.

The forwarded traffic at passenger rates was quite varied, from small packages to machine parts weighing several hundred weights. Live stock (from pigeons to prize cattle) were regularly dealt with, also the occasional corpse, which was charged at three shillings a mile on the journey made.

One incident I remember where a very small package was in transit to an address at Daventry. This package was only the size of a matchbox and clearly marked with a live stock label. A live stock label measured about four inches by two and this wrapped completely around it. Bert Jarrett the parcels porter brought it into the office during the morning and placed it on the office desk in a conspicuous place ready to be put on the only train of the day to Daventry at 14.43. Everybody who came into the office tried to guess what was in it as a buzzing noise could be heard from inside. The favourite suggestion was a queen bee. Station Master Bland always visited the station about 11.30 and he also examined this package. The 14.43 train regularly stood in the platform for about ten minutes and some member of the staff was calling out, "Anymore for the sunshine line," and the next moment the train departed without this package. The next service was in twenty-four hours time.

Mr. Bland came at his usual time the next day and instantly saw this little box. He addressed Jarrett and said, "What's this still doing here"? and Jarrett instantly said, "its another one sir".

(This has been written from memory in May 2006) Peter Chater.