

Hadlow Road Station

Norma Marsden remembers seeing the Royal train going through Hadlow Road Station carrying the Queen and Prince Philip in the early 1950's.

Tony Whitehead remembers that he used to get the train to Neston once a week from Hadlow Road Station with school. The boys went to woodwork lessons with Mr Hacking and the girls went to cookery classes. Tony's uncle, Joe Edwards was the signal man at Hadlow Road Station.



Passenger services stopped coming to Hadlow Road Station on 15th September 1956. The last passenger train was from West Kirby and was a very special occasion. The Last Post was sounded by a member of the 5th Cheshire (Ind) A.F.C. Battery T.A. Commanded by Captain H. Garland and the train headed by an ex-G.W.R. 2-6-2 'Prairie' tank engine number 4122 left at 9.55pm in the charge of driver Henry Tomlinson and fireman H. Bibby. Around 150 spectators witnessed the event, which was made more memorable by the fact that the train included a van conveying two circus elephants. As the train left, the elephants trumpeted their own farewell, alarmed no doubt by the detonators placed on the track which exploded as the train wheels passed over them!



Tickets that were used on the last day of service



On the engine just before the departure of the last passenger train from West Kirby to Hooton at 9.05 p.m. on Saturday, 15 September 1956 were, from left to right: Guard S. Wharton, Fireman H. Bibby and Driver Mr. Tomlinson. On the platform to see the train off were, on the left F.H. Wheatcroft, the stationmaster, and on the right, Foreman J. Pownall. (H.M. Eccles).

After the closure, passenger trains would still be seen occasionally. These were special trains, either carrying personnel en route to West Kirby RAF camp or taking visitors to Cadbury's then new factory at Moreton.

The line continued to be used for freight until 7th May 1962. Driver Ernest Nicklin and fireman Albert Cooper took the last freight train from West Kirby which stopped on route to collect any remaining station furniture and fittings.

(Information from: The Hooton to West Kirby Branch Line and the Wirral Way published by the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral Department of Leisure Services 1982)

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It's Goodbye to the 9.14

... Tomorrow, ninety years after the first excited passengers boarded the Hooton train on its maiden trip, the line closes to passengers. The final timetable passenger train leaves Hooton at 9.14pm to arrive in West Kirby (Joint) station at 9.48pm.

A special passenger-carrying train, which will not stop at intermediate station is to leave West Kirby at 9.55pm to return to Hooton. Thus will be enacted the closing scenes of a tragi-comedy which played to indifferent houses for the first eighty-nine years of its run. Tragic because Wirral loses a valuable asset.

We'll fight – Comic because more than a score of trained railway men have for years tended trains which often carried only a solitary passenger. For eighty-nine years the Hooton Lines was taken for granted. Then, a year ago, the Transport Commission broke the news that it was to be closed. If the Mighty Commission had imagined that the apathy in Wirral would remain unstirred they were wrong. Angry passengers prepared for action. Businessmen bound for the city on the 8.25am out of West Kirby discussed plans to fight the closure. As they boarded the train at Neston, Parkgate and Hadlow Road, the passengers realised that they were few in number and their case would have to be good. So, with the little urban councils who sat at Neston, Hoylake and Heswall, strong cases were drawn up to take into battle. Mainly the arguments were: The line is an essential service. It is not a good service, but with re-timing of trains it could attract more custom. Abolish six coach steam trains and substitute diesels. Threat the line as a business, increase its efficiency and make it pay...

At Willaston a fighting city merchant Mr T.S. Bigland, had roused his friends on whose behalf counsel was briefed to speak.

Meanwhile, at railway HQ in London, the Transport commission prepared a meeting place for the objectors to state their case. On December 8, 1955, the scene was set. A body with the helpful title of 'North West Area Transport Users Consultative Committee' met in a sedate hotel in Manchester (owned, like the Hooton line, by British Railways⁰ and over tea and plain biscuits, the fate of the Hooton line was discussed. Unlike a prisoner in British law, the Hooton line was unhappily, guilty before trial, and it was left to the objectors to show the 'Court of Appeal' reasons why it should not be closed. The objectors did, it seems, tell the committee things which were new to them.

The committee met again in January and decided 'the line should not be closed.' A Ministry of Transport inquiry is urged 'as soon as possible'. The men on the 8.25 the next day were gleeful smiles. But they should have waited. Bad news came four months later when a Very Important Body sat in secret in London.

The Central Transport Users Consultative committee – with powers superior to the North-West Committee – sent the following message to Manchester: 'We have decided to ask the North-West committee to reconsider their recommendation in the light of new circumstances. We think the line should be closed.' ... So the Hooton line was doomed..

Ghost Line – Goods trains will still ply between Hooton and West Kirby. RAF men will continue to start their leaves and their training through the ancient portals of West Kirby joint station but beyond that, it will be a ghost line.

Parkgate and Hadlow Road (Willaston) stations will close, so will Neston South, Heswall and Thurstaston; Kirby Park and Caldy saw their last passengers a long time ago.

There will be no redundancy of personnel or stock. This will be absorbed elsewhere in the area. But there are still many, many regrets. Mr Bigland has this to say: 'We have tried to save what could have been a national asset. Properly run this line could have made money for the nation. We have tried and failed.'

Station Master and Staff 1950

