

'The 10:30 to Stampant...' **Tales from ...Nassington Station 1879-2023.**

When I began researching the topic of Nassington Station I thought I had a fair idea about what I would find. I knew from my mother, after all, about the service provided in the 1940s, and why else would the road through the village be called Station Road if there had never been one? With the ironstone quarry at Old Sulehay and Dr Beeching's infamous Report of 1963 as obvious 'starting' and 'end' points, what else was there to know?

I also had my fair share of easy assumptions about how a railway service 'must' have 'improved' the lives and prospects of those fortunate enough to have used it. Upward social mobility thanks to all the reachable, exciting new job opportunities. A broadening of horizons. Emancipation from 'traditional' women's jobs. Travel to exotic locations.

Wow.

How wrong can you be. This has been quite the voyage of discovery and a trip down memory lane to boot. From conversations with people I've known since my childhood in Nassington, people lucky enough to have ridden on the trains or worked at the quarry, to rail enthusiasts at the Nene Valley Railway (NVR) at Stibbington and Railworld in Peterborough, there's been a lot to learn. Gradually, all of the assembled jigsaw pieces have fitted together to create, I hope, a picture of how Nassington station really did begin and why and how it ended. And where, for that matter, we find ourselves in 2023.

Let us begin in Queen's Street....

1879 – 'All Aboard the Skylark'.

We've probably all heard of Stephenson's Rocket, a steam locomotive that was to prove the way of the future. In 1829, during a competition organised by the Liverpool and Manchester Railway to find the most effective form of locomotion for their network, his engine was the only one of the ten entered able to pull a train to complete the task over the designated one mile stretch. His 'Rocket' reached the dizzying speed of 30mph. Wow again. Stephenson would go on to provide the steam engines for that very network, quite a lucrative prize all things told. And so a new technology was born, heralding in the 'Railway Mania' of the 1870s. Just fifty years later, on July 25th 1879, Nassington Station was opened to goods traffic at the bottom of what had once been Queen's Street.

Only fifty years later. Just think of that. So convinced were the Victorians about the future of steam that they built railway after railway throughout the country - tracks, signal boxes, platforms, station houses, viaducts and bridges, the lot. It could well have been that Stephenson himself was involved in surveying the area around

Nassington for he certainly worked on the creation of the Wansford line. By training he was a civil and mechanical engineer after all. By 1844 over a thousand men, sometimes with their families, were living in earth huts in this area as the infrastructure was built. Wages were low, fights were frequent, and Peterborough police force assigned extra men to help keep trouble to a minimum. With the village boasting seven pubs (yes, seven) at the time, doubtless their evening trade was brisk. Quite a scene I bet.

Nassington Station was to find itself as, eventually, a stop on the Peterborough and Rugby branch of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMSR), and, in time, on the Leicester and Peterborough section of the Great Northern Railway. The former service ran into what would become East Station in Peterborough and the latter into the North station. Various goods were transported, mainly coal and sugar beet, from the Midlands to Peterborough via our village and various others along the way. The first controllers of the line back in 1879 and for some forty years thereafter, were The London and North Western Railway (LNWR). Like Dr Who though, there were to be a further three 'regenerations' before the gig was up. A passenger service began a matter of months later, taking paying customers on a twenty minute journey over the bridge still crossing Ruisbieck Lane between Rugby and the London Road station in Peterborough.

London Road became the East Station. It was the first one in Peterborough, built in 1845, as too was the station in Oundle. From there you could take a down train to the north, east or west but not, surprisingly, an up train to London. For that journey you needed to endure a four hour roundabout route via Cambridge or Ely so, to make life easier for customers, Peterborough North Station was built. By 1847 passengers from Nassington could make their way to the bright lights of The Big Smoke, as it certainly was back then, should the mood take them and the finances allow.

East Station no longer exists. Just like in Nassington, few physical reminders survive, although the odd building has clung to life in the new Riverside development, one in the form of the now ubiquitous coffee shop. You can hunt them down if you wish, along East Station Road in Peterborough, together with their accompanying blue plaques.

There may not be many physical remains left in 2023 but there are images, and there are still memories if you know who to ask.

Queen's Street became, for obvious reasons, Station Road. The very first stationmaster at Nassington was William Graves, his a short lived posting from July 1879 to July 1880, before he headed off to Euston, doubtless via the North Station, to take up a role as a guard.

His shoes were filled by George Randall from July 1880 to August 1908 and it is with him that Nassington Station's real life begins.

The Stamford Mercury on 7th November 1879, recorded events. Enthusiastic crowds gathered on the two platforms to watch the 09:12 rattle and steam to a halt from Peterborough, followed by the 10:50 from Rugby. A proud Mr Randall, sporting his peaked cap and uniform, officiated. The reporter sang the praises of the facilities, commenting on the '*very neat structure... commodious booking-office, gentlemen's and ladies' waiting rooms and other offices on both sides*'. The platforms were each one hundred and fifty yards long. Interestingly, he also mentioned that '*some months ago it was decided that a gas-lamp should be placed at the end of the road leading to the station*'. Although the one currently in situ is not the original, it does give us an idea of how it all might have looked back in the day. The route from the street up to the station was a proper pathway, however, for the sake of the customers boots and shoes, but not, as yet, the road through the village. The article mentions, indeed, that this is a matter of some concern in need of urgent attention. Doubtless those charged with cleaning out the trains each day might also have appreciated such consideration.

Such initial excitement was justified of course. Anything new always garners enthusiasm. A hundred years later, in 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, thousands of East Germans visited the other side now that they could do so without fear of being shot, just to see for themselves and wonder at the high prices. They visited often in those first weeks and days but they didn't, in the main, stay. They had homes and families after all, the security of familiarity. Did the same prove to be the case with the railways back in those first heady days? Opportunity had arrived with that first steamy train for sure but was it all viewed as a mere novelty, to travel on a couple of times, and a pricey one at that? Who, if anyone, would grasp the opportunity nettle?

The initial service connected the Rugby and Stamford line, via Seaton, Wakerley Barrowden and Kings Cliffe, through Nassington and on to the Northampton and Peterborough line. As branch lines opened so the network spread until, with the odd change and the necessary fare, you could get to Essendine or Barnwell, Oakham or Thrapston. If you fancied going further still then before too long you could be in Liverpool or Doncaster, Leicester or Yarmouth. A new world had been opened, to both people and local businesses, not just economic but personal and cultural. Farmers found themselves with a greatly enlarged market. No longer were people limited to working close to home within walking, riding or cycling distance. No longer need you follow in your father's footsteps for you could find gainful employment far beyond the village. No longer need you be a stonemason working on a local estate as generations of your family had done before, or a labourer on a local farm. Just a short walk away was daily transportation to Peterborough, Stamford, Oundle or Kettering, to a factory perhaps in this age of heavy industry – Baker Perkins, Peter Brotherhoods, The British Sugar Factory - or an office or a shop. Better wages, potential promotion, a clean job where you came home tidy at the end of your working day, trade union representation, a pension. And indeed a social life as well if money and family commitments permitted. New shops appeared along Bridge Street, eateries, cafés, places to browse around and relax in and a hitherto undreamt of life style. For women horizons could broaden if they so wished. No longer need they go into service or work in the village shop. The vagaries of seasonal work on the land doing back-breaking potato picking in the drizzle could now be a thing of the past.

But was this actually the case? Even in the 1950s, when wages had improved, taking a trip by train was regarded as something of a 'treat'. In his memoir '**When I was a Boy**' Lance Lock states that a Saturday outing, clutching his mother's hand while he waited for the train to arrive, was just that, a rare treat. Jo Cooper mentioned going to Yarmouth by train but only on occasion, for this was deemed, due to the cost, a special event. June Parrish can't really remember going on the train at all. It was too dear and they wouldn't have had the money to do any shopping anyway once they got to Peterborough. For many villagers then, while the station was in existence, the price of a ticket was restrictive. To travel every day 'into town', even with the prospect of more gainful employment, might well have seemed too much of a risk. The average wage in the 1890s for a farm worker or labourer was around 20-30 shillings. That just about covered your living costs, but to spend it on a jaunt up to Rugby or London would have seemed rash and irresponsible in the extreme. Perhaps it was just that bit too insecure, given that there was plenty of opportunity for work nearby with people you knew doing something familiar and 'safe'. With a wife, children and elderly parents to support in an age before the benefit system we take so much for granted these days, a secure and steady income was paramount. Bill Shepperson mentioned two things to me recently. First, there were a number of busy farms still in operation when he was a boy, each employing about a dozen workers. During the war years, of course, many able bodied men were posted far away and had no need for railways except during periods of leave. In short, there simply were not that many men about between 1914-18 and 1939-45 at least who needed to take a train to work.

Mr Shepperson also mentioned the shops. He commented that he remembered about five people working in the 'bottom shop' when he was a boy and doubtless the same was true for other village businesses. Mr Rowles owned the 'top' shop which, even in the 1980s before it closed, employed various staff throughout the week. My mother often spoke wistfully of the joys within Casey's sweet shop, Mr Dixon ran a bakery, Mr Crowson a timber yard. There was a wheelwright-cum-carpentry business, the aforementioned seven public houses (a tale for another day), the Watson's laundry, Mr Ireson's watch and clock repair establishment. The school needed dinner ladies and playtime assistants. People employed cleaners, for their homes, for the church, for the vicarage, and gardeners too. The list goes on. Business was brisk, people found employment with relative ease, so why travel far and into the unknown?

So people stayed. A few did, of course, use the trains for work, like Mr Bagshaw who travelled daily into Peterborough for his job at Barclays Bank, watched as he walked by each day by the young Lance Lock.

It would seem, therefore, that, for the majority living in the village at the time, a train journey was something to splash out on now and then, on high days and holidays, yet Nassington Station survived until 1971. How so you may ask?

Well, read on.

1912 - Disaster Strikes.

At the start there had been a platform and station building on both sides of the track. As time went by services became more frequent, running throughout the day in both directions and some sort of shelter, after all, was needed. Mail was delivered, packages and parcels that had been ordered by those who could afford them, either directly in the shop or through the new medium of the mail order catalogue, arrived each week. People from Yarwell and further away, from Woodnewton perhaps, would come in their ponies and traps to catch their trains in the early days, or cycle over and leave them for safekeeping until they came home at the end of their journey.

All seems to have ticked along quite nicely thank you very much, until the fire of 9th October 1912. Given that the station had undergone something of an upgrade to the platforms in 1905 this must have been particularly galling. According to the Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury the station caught alight, probably as a result of renovation work while workmen burnt off old paint ready for renewal. A problem was first noticed about 2pm and word was sent by the then stationmaster, Henry Essen, to Elton Hall for the attention of Colonel Proby. Many private estates had their own fire engines at this point to deal with problems that might spring up on their property and Elton was close by. Within ten minutes the men and horses had the Shand and Mason Fire Engine on its way, arriving twenty minutes later on the scene. The Elton Estate agent, Captain Maddock, was on hand to keep an eye on proceedings, as well as Colonel Proby himself, keen to see how his new piece of equipment would perform when finally put to the test. Well it would seem, for by 5pm the fire was out and Kings Cliffe Fire Brigade, when they finally arrived, had nothing left to do. Sadly, though, the down platform and buildings were destroyed, leaving the other to double as the ticket office in future years. The damage was estimated as having cost £1,000. No one lost their life thankfully but, if anyone lost their job, it was not been recorded for posterity.

It was also possible to catch an express boat train to Harwich from Peterborough East Station and then across to the Continent but, unsurprisingly, the most popular trains were those running on Saturdays. East Station brought you in to the bottom end of Bridge Street and the shops. Woolworths for the pick and mix perhaps, Brierley's for your Christmas decorations, or Dolcis for some new shoes. Once your shopping was done you could nip into Woodcock's Tea Shop for some light refreshments before heading off home. Elaine Quincey remembers this as a particular treat for at Woodcock's there was silver service, a distant memory these days for many of us in our self service era. David Teall told me about how his parents would regularly use the train to go to the Odeon cinema in Peterborough on Broadway. The building still exists, now an 80s themed nightclub, visitors able to dance the night away to *Duran Duran* or *Madonna*, so not all that bad. As a child he and his siblings were also taken to the Embassy Theatre on the opposite side of the road, at Christmas to see the annual pantomime, the rail journey there and back part of the treat. Thinking about it I too went there myself once, not by train sadly, to a concert in the 1970s when it still had its stage but was more often used as a cinema. Cliff Richard if I remember correctly. Enough said.

If you preferred a more exciting Saturday afternoon's entertainment you could make your way to the London Road Stadium to see the Posh being beaten at football on a fortnightly basis. If your tastes were more local the station platform offered a good vantage point to watch the village team huff and puff their way about the ground that used to be close by. Not the most level of pitches I am given to understand by both Bill and Len Chambers who variously mentioned slopes and ditches you needed to negotiate, but a pitch nonetheless. A chance for a kick-about with your mates and some victories along the way. Lance Lock remembered that, in the early 1920s, Mr Marks had taken over as stationmaster. There seem to have been five passenger trains running at this point along with one mail train. As many as forty people might be waiting on the platform to board alongside him on a Saturday, so a pretty busy service all things told. He remembered the chaps playing football too, in the field below, and how the stationmaster's son John used to enjoy watching as they negotiated all the hazards. He would get himself so worked up at the thrill of it all from his vantage point on the up platform that, from sheer excitement, he would regularly kick the metal advertising boards that used to line the station, making everyone jump out of their skin. Happy days.

Although most children frequented the local school, as is still the case for those of primary age, some used the steam train for their education too. In those pre 11+ days, only those children regarded as 'bright enough' were given the chance to win a scholarship to a local grammar school. My own mother Jean Palenski (née Black) was certainly one of those who won a place at the Peterborough County School for Girls along with various others in the village. She told me often about the little boaters they were expected to wear, about the delights of learning such rarefied subjects as Latin and Physics, of the 'indoor' and 'outdoor shoes' and the elocution lessons. She also mentioned the journey each morning to and fro by train. She would head down to the station during term time, meeting up with her pals en route and head up to the platform to wait for the train where her special friend, Betty West, would be waiting. They must have looked very smart in their yellow trimmed brown uniforms, satchels full of books and homework and pockets full of sweets. After much giggling and scuffing of shoes they would eventually clamber into their carriage, vying for a window seat no doubt with much pushing and shoving until, blowing his whistle and waving his flag, the stationmaster sent them on their way. Off for another day of edukashun.

Sunday services were more restricted back then, of course, a respite for the stationmaster and his family. A day of relative rest once a week at least between the passengers and the goods and the mail and the trains. Not until 1994 could shops choose to open for Sunday trading, offering us all the dubious 'pleasure' of trundling round the local supermarket with a trolley or stocking up at the DIY store. Lucky us. By then of course Nassington Station had gone. Not so lucky us.

Many local people were employed by the railway full time too, as porters or platelayers, signalmen, labourers, firemen or engine drivers. There had once been a signal box at Nassington but, by the late 1930s, the nearest signal box was at Wansford. Harold Black recalled going to keep his pal Jack Woodward company there on occasion when he worked the night shift in his capacity as a signalman. In

those heady days of pre Health and Safety rules and regulations they would, he said, set the alarm clock to ensure they woke in time to change the signals for the night trains passing through. As far as we know there were no accidents on the line despite this haphazard system, more thanks to luck than judgement I fear.

1923 saw the first 'regeneration' as the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMSR) took over from LNWR. Alec Jackson's father worked for the company. Friday was the regular payday, and, similarly regularly, his mother would tut and grumble that the wages of £1-10s a week would hardly stretch to cover the bills. The working day was a long one, from 07:00 until 17:00 daily and until 12:00 on a Saturday, with an occasional requirement of a Sunday shift for maintenance or re-laying work. This, at least, boosted the pay a little for those trying hard to make ends meet. Railway staff would have received discounted train fares of course, which rather beggars the question, were the trains primarily frequented by railway staff?

And so life continued to the soundtrack of chugging trains arriving and departing through the day. The one hauling the weekly heavy load from the Peterborough Brickworks was noticeable by its seemingly asthmatic wheezy progress through the village. It was not an uncommon sight to see people going in search of lumps of coal that might have dropped along the trackside, quite a few at a time on occasion. Given the price of fuel these days it was an understandable undertaking and quite a good haul could be found if you timed it right.

The trains were often seen before being heard and, for little boys and girls of the time, the thrill of spotting an incoming train must have led to hours of overexcitement. Antoni Palenski, living in Northfield Lane before the houses in Eastfield Crescent were built, had a cracking view over the allotments and fields to the railway. Most mornings he could tell his mother, yet again, that he had spotted the '10:30 to Stampant' as it puffed its way merrily across the river viaduct towards its ultimate destination, after a change or two, in Stamford.

1937 - War looms.

The railway and station were to prove an enormous advantage by the 1930s in particular. In fact, had it not been for the station at Nassington, the ironstone quarries at Old Sulehay might never have been used. Naylor Benzons and Co Ltd were established importers of foreign iron ore but, with the approach of war already feared by 1937, they decided to develop a home ore site in order to safeguard supplies. Thus they purchased six hundred acres of land and had it connected to exchange sidings, five in total. Road access was from an unsurfaced track on the Apethorpe Road, the entrance now the site of R J Sutton Engineering Ltd. This venture by an independent company not controlled by an ironworks would prove significant for, when war broke out, the country possessed just a ten week supply of stockpiled imported ore.

Soon the first ironstone quarry at Old Sulehay was opened up. Between 1939 and 1943 home grown produced iron ore rose from a mere 25% across the country to 91%

and Nassington would play its part. Over the years three quarries would yield their ore to meet demand, a new one opening as another dried up. The first quarry was in use for twelve years, the second for fifteen and the third still not empty by the time the quarry blasted it for the final time in 1971. Rail lines were added to connect the quarry to the main line and on throughout the rail network across the country. These were constructed by a gang of four men, two local and two from Corby. The two main trains dealing with the iron ore, Jacks Green and Ring Haw, were named after ancient woodland nearby. Their job was to haul the three or four iron ore tipplers out of the quarry, transport them to the dispatch sidings where the offices and weighbridge stood, and then on to be picked up ready by mainline trains. The destination was the Appleby Frodingham works at Scunthorpe, or sometimes the Steelworks at Corby, there to be mixed with carbon to make steel.

Jacks Green and Ring Haw were Hunslet 0.6.0. Saddle Tank Engines, the 0.6.0. denoting the powering of the engine's six wheels and the 'saddle' reflecting the position of the water tank above the train's boilers. Jacks Green was bought in October 1939, works no. 1953. It boasted smart green livery with red and black edging, a headboard of NASSINGTON FLYER and, throughout its working career from 1937-69, it was driven by Jim Hopkin, Syd Bellamy and William Prodger as his assistants. Ring Haw, meanwhile, works no.1982, was driven by Bill Evans with the assistance of Will Gyn. Bill Evans also maintained both engines. A third engine was called into service in 1963, the Buccleuch, until it was no longer needed and broken up on site.

During the war years railway work was a reserved occupation, the importance of keeping the wheels of industry turning recognised by the government. At its height the ironstone quarry was another significant source of employment with some ninety people active there. For many in Nassington, on the surface at least, the war might have seemed at a fairly safe distance. Had it not been for the jeeps whizzing about and the men in uniform, children at the time might well have thought so. Another family anecdote has it that only one poor sheep in a field in Elton was killed during World War II, by a bomber shedding its load as the pilot fled back to the Vaterland.

So very distant it was not, however. As Alec Jackson mentioned in his memoir, many gathered, horror stricken, at the station to watch from a high vantage point the bombing of Coventry in November 1940.

1951 - The Beginning of the End.

Nationalisation of the railway network from January 3rd 1948 under the post war Labour government saw a change of name for the ironstone company to Nassington-Barrowden Mining Co Ltd. Regeneration number two saw the rail provider change to British Rail (BR).

Although a lease was obtained to ensure that the track could remain open to allow the quarry to continue its work, the introduction of a three-day week at the ironstone

hinted at the end to come. Throughout its time, until the quarry was closed on February 31st 1970, 10 million tons of ironstone was despatched to blast furnaces around the country. Cheaper European ore, especially from Sweden, rang a death knell for a quarry already struggling to survive.

This was also the end of an era. When the last train stopped at Old Sulehay history was made for it had been the very last steam engine being used commercially in the ironstone industry in the UK. The final journey for Jacks Green was to the Sugar Beet Factory in Peterborough, the then home of the Peterborough Railway Society. They had purchased the faithful old engine for the princely sum of £900 and she was to be relocated. After thirty years Jim Hopkin was not allowed to drive Jacks Green for his final time as a steam train driver. Only 'official' BR railway drivers were allowed to use British Rail owned track so his services, sadly, were no longer required.

The quarries brought prosperity and employment to the village for over thirty years. Elaine Quincey recalled working there as a Pay Clerk alongside Nora Masters, Lesley Briggs, Joan Harris and Cath Shepperson. She remembers it as a truly enjoyable time, with Christmas parties at the branch office in Rushton, the rural background and the rabbits and wildlife going about their business undisturbed by the trains. Some of the route is still accessible if you feel up to fighting the brambles along the bridge at Ruisbieck Lane. In the *Nassington Appraisal* booklet completed in 1989, mention is made of the former railway track as an excellent vantage point from which to see butterflies, deer, rabbits and unusual bird species. My uncle Harold, he of the alarm clock, would often come home to Nassington in the 1980s and 90s to walk along the track, not to watch the rabbits I fear so much as to take pot shots at them. It was at least possible then. It's nigh on impossible now. I know. We tried. I still have the scars to prove it.

It was a happier fate for Jacks Green mind, as it's on display locally. After the Sugar Beet years, it was overhauled in the 1970s by apprentices at Peter Brotherhoods before taking up residence at its final home at the NVR. It stands there proudly, on Platform One, where young and old can climb inside the cab to get a taste of how it was to drive a steam train. Ring Haw, although still in fine fettle, is a little further away. Its first stop was at the North Norfolk Railway but, since 2020, it has been vacationing at the North Norfolk Weybourne Station. If not in person then you can see footage of Ring Haw on YouTube.

Nassington railway ceased to exist for passengers long before goods trains came to a shuddering halt. After working at the station for many years, Charlie 'Taggy' Moisey took over from William Shepperson as stationmaster, the last in the line. He would have cycled down Station Road on July 1st 1957 to blow his whistle and wave his flag for the final time. Wansford and Castor stations shut up shop on the very same day and the line closed from Peterborough East to Rugby soon after on June 6th 1966.

The 'Railway Mania' that had begun in the 1870s had gradually died away.

It all ended with a whimper rather than a bang, this station and the way of life that had offered so much potential to the village. Perhaps we wear rose coloured spectacles about the age of steam, brought up as we are on romantic and nostalgic images of travelling through the English countryside in a snug little carriage: Ealing's '*The Titfield Thunderbolt*', Watch with Mother's '*Ivor the Engine*', J K Rowling and her *Hogwarts Express* – it all seems so magical and cosy but perhaps it was not really so? If you had to live with the steam and the coal dust and the noise and the disruption, day in day out then the reality was perhaps not so positive. Shrill whistles blowing and little boys kicking metal boards might well have taken a toll on your nerves. Journeys were now being made, far more frequently, by car, and goods were being carried by lorry.

Mr Burgess offered the village a bus service from his depot in Woodnewton Road for some fourteen years beginning in 1920. The business was eventually taken over by Mr Crowson. Where once the buses lived is now a private residence known as The Bus Shed and it was from here that a regular service began its trip. His dark red coach would pick you up in Nassington from various stops throughout the village and whisk you off to Peterborough for a day bustling through the shops if you so desired. Why, then, would you struggle up and down to the station with your heavy bags and packages when you could be dropped off practically on your doorstep? The bus journey might not have been so comfortable, with its slatted wooden seats, but it was more convenient and doubtless cheaper after all. Your clothes didn't get covered in smuts from all the smoke and that blasted noisy boy and those giggling schoolgirls weren't there to spoil your trip.

Times change after all, sometimes for the worse, sometimes for the better. In 2023, just as the train was superseded by the bus, so too have nearly all the bus services in the village disappeared. Back in 1989 in the *Nassington Appraisal* villagers were grumbling about the lack of public transport. Limited daytime services made work outside the village almost impossible and with no evening service, access to entertainment after work relied on having a car. Today, in 2023, there are no regular bus services left, either to Peterborough, Stamford or Oundle. All we have, good as it may be, is the Call Connect service. People have grown, or been forced, to rely on their own cars, especially in a rural area such as ours. But now, we are urged, we must free ourselves of such reliance, for the sake of the environment. A worthy cause, few would disagree, but not so easy in these public transport free days. What an irony. Would that we still had our station.

The railway service in its various guises had given transport, opportunity and income to the community for nearly eighty years. In the saddest twist to our tale the Parish Council had a notice posted on 29th May 1956 stating that, unless there were objections to the contrary, the station would close in twenty-one days. It was no longer cost effective after all, so, unless there was an outcry, it would have to go.

Not a single objection was received.

1981 – A Brave New World?

The viaduct that once connected Nassington Railway over the river Nene was demolished on Monday 16th February 1981. Pictures from the time do indeed show that it was in a very bad state of repair. In recent years a group of budding railway trainees were given the paper task of estimating how much the repairs would have cost if undertaken today. Around a million they discovered so not something to take on lightly. Although the line from Yarwell Junction and over the river was offered to the NVR for what seems the paltry sum of £500 by Peterborough City Council, the offer was understandably declined. Not only was the viaduct in a poor way but the station at Nassington did not have the space for the steam engines to 'top and tail'. By law a steam engine can pull passengers but it may not push them. To terminate at Nassington, space would have been needed to uncouple the steam engine on arrival and move it to the front of the train for the return journey and there simply wasn't enough room to allow this to happen. As a result the bridge was demolished and very little trace of it is now visible. Mr Butters, then Headmaster at Nassington Primary School, took some of the classes out to watch this happen. To many of the children it might have meant little but it was, nonetheless, a piece of local history which some can still recall.

Vick Griffen had worked as a youngster at the goods yard attached to the station so knew the area well. Vast amounts of coal were needed the fuel the engines and so there was a huge warehouse there. With the closure of the station came the abandonment of the goods yard and when the viaduct went so too did any remaining track.

There it all stood, abandoned, for thirty years, waiting for a new purpose.

In later years, when Queensgate was being built in the early 1980s, Griffin Fuel needed new premises. Thinking that coal would better serve a rural community than a town one, British Rail was approached about taking over the now forlorn goods yard site at Nassington and the business duly moved. Nothing it seems had been done to the area since it was vacated in 1971, the driveway all but impassable due to overgrown vegetation and the never ending brambles and the goods yard was full of debris. Initially the site was rented but eventually came up for public auction and was purchased by Mr Griffin. A condition of the sale, however, was the removal of the road bridge over Station Road due to safety concerns. Not wishing to do this unless absolutely necessary the council was given the chance to buy it for a mere £1 but they too declined to make a purchase.

Reluctantly, therefore, over a Bank Holiday in July 1992, the rail bridge was taken down. The road was closed at 4pm on the Friday and the crew worked until late each night, finally finishing and clearing up ready for the road to reopen at 4pm on the Monday evening. As the road into Nassington was closed the then owners of the Queens Head, Ray and Pat Pollard, organised for boats to come along the River Nene from Wansford and dock in their garden, refreshments laid on for the mariners.

It cost £7,000 to remove the bridge. Five huge girders were the mainstay of the structure, enough to bear a loaded steam train after all. The site is now smartened up, the driveway clear and various businesses thrive there. Sadly, though, there are hardly any traces of the former railway and bridge visible bar a few coping stones piled up where once the bridge began.

As for the railway line itself at the quarry, Len Chambers and Dickie Sardeson, along with a couple of others, were given the final job of lifting the sleepers and track and piling it up ready for collection as scrap. Taking a look at the site very recently there is very little of the old quarry from the Ring Haw end to see but the area has been given a fitting new lease of life. The Bridge to Ring Haw (DfT SWD 32) is still there, deemed of historical worth, and the Nassington end of the Old Sulehay quarry is now a Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve. Admittedly, when the Wildlife Trust first took over there was some local concern about potential detrimental effects due to landscaping and increased visitor numbers. Hopefully, with the passage of time, this has proven not to be the case. Indeed, if you time it right, you should be able to see a myriad of bird and insect species, at least according to the display boards around the area, but certainly there are Highland cattle, complete with slightly scary looking horns. When we visited a few weeks ago we encountered various people taking their dogs out for a run and a snuffle about, or just taking the opportunity for a walk in the fresh air. A gentle rebirth for an ancient woodland right on our very own doorstep.

The Wansford end of the quarry is also still accessible. Although the first and second quarries have disappeared the third, initially at least, was full of water. This was deemed unsafe and was eventually drained. Now it is a draw for those scrambling on bikes of one kind or another. The nearby wood, not too long ago, was the site of an occasional illegal rave but, along with the dreadful music, they haven't been heard of in recent years I'm delighted to report. The wood itself is usually busy with walkers and boasts bluebells and wood anemones in the spring. There are even bee orchids if you know how to spot them. As you drive through on your way home to Nassington you can also, sometimes, smell the wild garlic that grows there and, in the autumn, hunt down some sloes for your gin before the birds find them all. The old woodland of Jack's Green is also a place to enjoy the bluebells and the countryside, a quiet place where once industry had been so vital and so dominant.

What had once been the Station House is looking at its very best. Extra floors were added and the whole site upgraded and modernised. Initially, after the closure of the railway, it was lived in by Victor Lee and his family and, later, by Mr and Mrs Pickering with theirs. Nothing was left in the Station House to suggest that it had ever been more than just an ordinary dwelling. No ticket stubs on the floor. No abandoned valises nor empty, echoing waiting rooms now vacated of chairs. All gone. One of their sons, Alastair, took advantage of the Right To Buy Housing Act of 1980 and purchased the property as a private dwelling for around £17,000. Later, at auction, it fetched £200,000. With its architectural features, Nassington bricks and Collyweston Slate roof it has been a Grade 2 listed building since 1988 and significantly refurbished and upgraded by the current owners, Ben and Emma Homan. The orchard on the right as you leave the village was once a garden, created in the 1930s

and tended by railway staff while the station was still in existence. On the other side of the line was the stationmaster's garden, well known for its beautiful flowers I understand. It would have been in around the place where the small electricity substation now stands. Not a particularly worthy replacement I think you'll agree.

But what if? What if there had been a fourth regeneration after National Rail took over from BR? What if the NVR had been able to run over that demolished viaduct and the bridge over the road had still been in place? What if those steam trains could still run now, not just to the station at Yarwell Junction but right into their old home in Station Road? The railway might still have been boosting the economy of the village. Visitors could have enjoyed the many Grade II listed buildings that Nassington can boast. They could have enjoyed a drink by the river Nene in the summer, courtesy of the Queen's Head, and taken in St Mary and All Saints Church, or Prebendal Manor and all of their rich histories. If they'd timed it right they could have enjoyed the bellringing on a Sunday morning or the Open Gardens Weekend in the summer too, finishing their tour with an afternoon tea at Elsie's Vintage Tea Room (booking advisable). We might still have been able to see, hear and enjoy the age of steam on our very own doorsteps. Call me an old romantic, but I think that would really have been something.

As it is we need to go further afield. The NVR is not so very far away in Stibbington but the cost of running steam trains, both in terms of cost and manpower, is such that this is a fairly rare event nowadays so be sure to check if you decide to visit. As for *Railworld*, based on the former site of the power station in Peterborough, the same applies, although the staff are helpful and informative and the Nature Trail a real haven. About a forty minute drive away (sorry, no train or bus service available), Fen Drayton boasts Carriages. Its website claims that you can '*travel back to the golden age of luxury rail travel... from the moment you step into the 1920s station*'. These converted Pullman coaches have been transformed into dining cars and they are lovely, as too is the food. It sounds like an old station and it looks like an old station, complete with the odd hiss of steam, waiting room and luggage piled outside.

All lovely, but it isn't our dear old station.

Jo Cooper mentioned a comment her mother Ruby made many years ago at the time when the station was being taken apart. Call it prophetic if you will but, in my humble opinion at least, she hit the proverbial nail right on the head:

'It's the worst thing they did getting rid of the station. One day they'll want it back'.

Contributors.

With grateful thanks to the following for sharing their knowledge and recollections with me or for their contributions in written form:

Martin Longfoot

Ian McKay

Anne Barwell	Molly Clark
Len Chambers	Tony King - Railworld
Vick Griffin	Jane Baile
Jo Cooper,	Paul Tate
Elaine Quincey (née Woodward)	Kevin Jenkins
Jean Wilson (née Sharman)	Graham Batho - NVR
Harold Black	Stan Collett - NVR
Jean Palenski (née Black)	Mike Warrington - NVR
Tracey Gilder (née Chambers)	Antoni Palenski
Alec Jackson	Lance Lock
Sonia Henson (née Pickering)	Bill Shepperson
Brian Pearce MBE – Railworld	Janice Fuller (née Boyall)
June Parrish	David Teall
Authors of the 1989 'Nassington Appraisal'.	

NOTES.

Please note that there are numerous websites available that give further information about some of the matters below but I have given details of the ones I found of most use in my research into this topic. The libraries in Peterborough, Stamford and Oundle also have local history sections that have been of great use.

I have also given references for further information and documentation available in the Nassington History Archive Files (**NHAF ref:**) that are kept in Nassington Village Hall in Church Street.

1. Nassington Station opened to goods traffic on July 25th 1879. It later closed to goods traffic on 3rd August, 1957. Passenger traffic began on the line on 1st November 1879. It closed to passengers on 1st July, 1957. The stations at Wansford and Castor also closed at the same time. The entire route between Peterborough and Rugby closed on 6th June, 1966. **NHAF ref – BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About*. Nassington Station 3.4.3.**
2. A report of the opening of Nassington Station was given in the Stamford Mercury on 7th November 1879. **NHAF ref – BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About*. Nassington Station 3.4.3.**
3. Stationmasters 1879-1971:
 - ❖ William Graves
 - ❖ George Randall
 - ❖ Henry Essen
 - ❖ Mr Marks
 - ❖ William Shepperson
 - ❖ Charles Moisey

For details of other staff members, please refer to **NHAF ref – BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About. Nassington Station 3.4.***

4. Nassington was initially a stop on the Peterborough to Rugby line. The first owners were the **London and North Western Railway (LNWR)** 1883-1916. The **London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMSR)** company took over until the nationalisation of the railways on the 3rd of January 1951. At this point **British Rail** took charge until a further reorganisation into **National Rail** in 1997 and eventual privatisation.
The LNWR has its own website (www.lnwrs.org.uk) as too does the LMS (www.lmssociety.org.uk) and BR (www.rail.co.uk).
5. Queen's Street in Nassington became Station Road in 1851.
6. At this time Nassington had seven public houses as follows:
 - ❖ The Boat
 - ❖ The Carpenter's Arms
 - ❖ The Queen's Head
 - ❖ The Black Horse
 - ❖ The Three Mill Bills
 - ❖ The Three Horse Shoes
 - ❖ The Plough

NHAF ref – RED FOLDER A: *Businesses and Facilities. Public Houses 1.2.*

7. The first station in Peterborough was the East Station that opened on June 2nd 1845. It served stations to the east, west and north. To facilitate travel to London, the North Station was built in 1847. In time there were direct services from Nassington to both of these stations. The East Station, which ran parallel to the River Nene, had originally been named the London Road station. Some of the former buildings can still be seen if you go, along East Station Road, to the new Riverside development. There are also blue plaques giving information. There are various websites that give further information about both stations, including www.peterboroughtoday.co.uk and www.disused-stations.org.uk.
7. The Nassington station fire of Friday 9th October, 1912 was documented in the Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury. A Shand and Mason engine from Elton estate, courtesy of Colonel Proby, arrived on the scene within half an hour and complete disaster was averted, although one platform and its buildings were destroyed.
8. For more information about the Shand and Mason Fire Engine visit beamishtransportonline.co.uk. Also **NHAF ref – BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About. Nassington Station 3.4.2.***

9. Details and photographs of various businesses and their employees throughout the years can be found in the **NHAF ref- RED FOLDER A: *Businesses and Facilities: Businesses 1.2.***
10. Team photographs and details of some of the matches played by Nassington FC can be found in the **NHAF ref – BLUE FOLDER: *Activities, Celebrations, Parties and Outings. Football 2.2.16.***
11. The ironstone quarry at Old Sulehay was opened by the Naylor Benzon Company Ltd. in 1939 though the purchase of the land had been two years prior to this. Three quarries were opened in total until the closure of the quarry in 1970. It was later renamed the Nassington Barrowden Mining Co Ltd. The quarry eventually closed altogether on the 31st February, 1970. Lines were removed and two of the three quarries were filled in. Further details, both about iron ore quarries in general and the quarry at Old Sulehay in particular, can be found in the **NHAF ref – BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About. Ironstone Quarry 3.2.3 and 4.***
12. Two engines transported goods from the quarries to the main line trains in the sidings where there was a weighbridge and offices as well as suitable track. All but one of the former buildings have gone and, since 1984, the site has been designated the Old Sulehay Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve. Further information on Old Sulehay Forest on their own website or www.wildlifebcn.org.
13. The Bridge to Ring Haw (DfT SWD 32) is still standing although all track has been removed. In the 1980s it became a Heritage Site. An article related to local objections to this move can be found in **NHAF ref – BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About. Ironstone Quarry 3.2.4.*** Information concerning its time as part of the railway system can be found at www.mandgn.org and as an historical site on zaubee.com.
14. There were two principal engines that worked at the ironstone quarry. Jacks Green (no. 1953) was a .6.0. Saddle Tank Engine. Built in 1939 and driven by Jim Hopkin, it had a green livery with black and red trim and the nameplate NASSINGTON FLYER on its front. It was bought by the Peterborough Railway Society for £900 in the 1970s and was housed at the Sugar Beet Factory in Peterborough where they were then based. Later it was taken to the Nene Valley Valley site in Stibbington where it sits on Platform One. Further information can be found at <https://preservedbritishsteamlocomotives.com>. Also **NHAF ref – BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About. Ironstone Quarry 3.2.4.***
15. Ring Haw (no. 1982) was also a 0.6.0. Saddle Tank Engine, driven by Bill Evans. It too is still in existence but at the North Norfolk Weybourne Station

in Norfolk. It can be seen in use on YouTube. Further information about a recent overhaul can be found on [ne-np.facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/ne-np).

16. On the 29th May, 1956 a notice was posted in the village by the Parish Council informing residents that the station would close within twenty one days unless there were objections which might delay the process. None were made. **NHAF ref – BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About. Nassington Station 3.4.3.***
17. The Peterborough County Grammar School for Girls was an all-female grammar school. It was founded in 1904 and closed in 1982. The motto was non sibi sed deo et alteri (Not for ourselves, but for God and others).
18. The viaduct over the Nene that connected Nassington to Yarwell was demolished on February 2nd 1981. Although it was offered to the NVR for £500 it was deemed too costly as the viaduct needed repair. The offer was therefore declined.
19. The former goods yard was purchased by Vick Griffen in the 1980s. Part of the purchase agreement included a requirement to demolish the road bridge over Station Road. Although he offered the council the option of buying the bridge for £1, his offer too was also declined. Over a Bank Holiday weekend the railway bridge was removed at a cost of £7,000.
20. The Station House was taken over as a private dwelling, first by Victor Lee, and later Mr and Mrs Pickering and their family. One of their sons, Alistair, bought the property under the Right to Buy Scheme of the 1980s. Since then it has become the property of Ben and Emma Holman and has undergone extensive renovation and refurbishment. It has been a Grade II listed building since 1988 and boasts Collyweston slate among many other features. The gas lamp at the bottom of the drive is not the original one, however. For more information go to <https://historicengland.org.uk>.
21. The Nene Valley Railway head office is in Stibbington near Wansford. For details of opening hours and other information please visit their website on www.nvr.org.uk. Jacks Green is on platform one. You can also ride on a steam train through Wansford Tunnel and down the track to Yarwell Junction but no further and in the other directions to Overton in Ferry Meadows, Orton Mere and on to Railworld in Peterborough. Due to the prohibitive cost, not all journeys are on a steam train so check before booking. Staff in both locations are enthusiastic and well informed volunteers who are happy to answer questions or point you in the right direction. Also **NHAF ref: – BLUE FOLDER: *Other Villages: Wansford 2.3.8.***
22. Similarly Railworld in Peterborough stands on the site of the former East Station Goods yard. It comprises a platform for the arrival and departure of the NVR services, a model railway, a beautiful nature haven and other

exhibits. Purchase has recently been made of the abandoned Wansford Road station currently just at the turning towards Stamford off the A47. With plans for the improvement of the A47 it would have been destroyed but the NVR will be moving it brick by brick to its new home. For further information go to www.cambridge-news.co.uk.

23. Alec Jackson's Memoir 'Aspects of the History of Nassington' and Lance Lock's memoir 'When I was a Boy', **NHAF ref BLUE BOX FILE: Copies of pamphlets.**
24. Some timetables and route information are available as follows in the **NHAF - BLACK FOLDER: *Around and About*. Nassington Station 3.4.5.**

Karen Palenski 2023