

Life at Gallows Close before Safeway

(An account of the freight operations at Scarborough Goods Station, Falsgrave, during the period in which it became evident that the business was in terminal decline.)

By virtue of its size, central location, and connection with major retail and manufacturing businesses, this station was of major importance in Scarborough for a period of over 60 years, and the purpose of this article is to try to present a picture of the place itself and the various jobs of over 50 persons employed there during the 1950's. This Depot, as it was usually referred to, handled hundreds of consignments daily, mainly incoming goods for delivery to local traders all over town, a large proportion of which helped fill the shelves of Woolworths, Marks & Spencers, and W. Rowntree. Goods were also collected for rail conveyance countrywide.

The two-storey station building, combining office block and goods shed /warehouse, was rectangular in shape, approx 84m x 42m, running parallel with Commercial Street. The offices were at the front of the building and faced Falsgrave Road, where the wide station gateway was directly opposite the Bank at the corner of All Saints Road. The front of the present petrol station is approx in line with that of the former Goods office but is further to the East of the site. A central archway at the front of the building gave access to road vehicles, and at either side was a doorway; the office for forwarding goods on the left-hand side, and that for received goods directly opposite

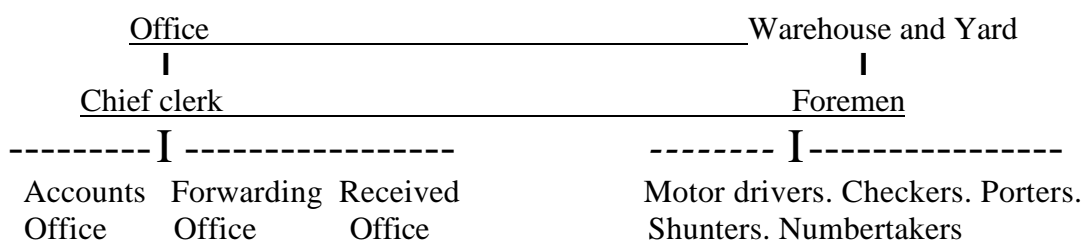
Through a doorway at the extreme left of the frontage, was a stairway leading to a balcony which ran the full width of the interior of the warehouse and gave access to the offices on the first floor. First of these was the Accounts office, then Cashier and Townsman, then the Goods Agent: all with inter-connecting doors. Then followed the Muniment room, and Ladies and Gent's toilet blocks. From the balcony could be seen the whole of the warehouse operations. At the far end of the warehouse there was a large central entrance for road vehicles, and, on either side, an entrance through which ran a single rail track; empty wagons for forwarded traffic on the left, and loaded wagons of traffic for local consignees on the right. A wide bench ran alongside the inwards track the surface of which was the height of the wagon floor.

The Goods Yard

The main feature here was, of course, the Scarborough - Whitby line which emerged from the portal of the tunnel, adjacent to West Parade Road, and ran alongside the Iron Foundry and coal depot in Roscoe Street towards Wykeham Street bridge. Branching from this line were twenty tracks serving the Goods Depot, and sidings for coal, Silcocks' store (animal feeding stuffs), cattle dock and crane road. Midway between the office block and the gateway to Falsgrave Road stood the weighbridge for road motor loads. Three of the sidings served the Coal Depot at the junction of Wykeham St. and Gladstone Rd., with another leading to the nearby Iron and Steel works. Immediately adjacent to the Goods shed, on either side, was a track under cover of a canopy usually occupied by loaded coal wagons. The coal train from Gascoigne Wood usually arrived about 8.30pm, and empty wagons returned daily at 1.30pm.

Organization

GOODS AGENT



(each with senior clerk in charge)

There was a total of about 20 clerical (Salaried) staff, and between 20 and 30 "outdoor" staff, termed Wages grade. (Note. I have a list of the names of all the employees during my spell of service there from 1950 to 1955 see scanned sheet).

Functions of the various offices

Accounts. Processing of accounts, cash and credit.

Cashier and Townsman. Paybills. Collection of cash from non-credit firms , and investigation of complaints of loss or damage of goods in transit'

Outwards office. Process consignment notes for goods forwarded Calculating carriage charges and preparing invoices for destination stations

Inwards office. Process invoices in respect of goods received; prepare delivery sheets and follow up discrepancies.

Operations

The traffic dealt with in the Goods shed was described as sundries or, more commonly, smalls traffic (generally, consignments under one ton). Full wagon loads for individual consignees ; e.g. coal, scrap metal, and Containers (household removals etc.) were dealt with in the Yard where there were loading / unloading docks and the crane.

The daily operation began with the arrival of the express freight train from York about 7 a.m. Sundries wagons were shunted into the Inwards road of the Shed empty trailers having been positioned endwise to the other side of the bench. The position of each trailer was labelled with the name of the delivery area it served, i.e., South Cliff, Westborough, Long North, North West, etc. There were separate trailers for Woolworths, Marks & Spencers, and W. Rowntree.

Rural areas were served by rigid lorries (Bedford or Leyland) Running almost the full length of the bench, between the wagons and trailers, was an electric conveyor belt, which had been installed in 1946 to facilitate the work of the handling staff.

As the consignments were transferred from wagon to trailer, the porters called off details (description and name and address of sender and consignee) to the checker who recorded details onto the delivery sheet of that particular round. On completion of the load, the trailer was drawn out by the 3-wheel Scammel motors known as mechanical horses. Maintenance of the motor vehicle fleet was the responsibility of the Road Motor Dept., based in Sherwood Street where the cartage horses were once stabled. At the end of the bench closest to the offices, was an area designated to goods which had been consigned "To be called for", and for any goods brought back to the station owing to the motor driver being unable to deliver for whatever reason; re-delivery was usually arranged, or senders contacted for disposal instruction. On return to the station, the completed delivery sheets were handed in to the Inwards office to be checked.

On the track at the opposite side of the Goods shed, empty wagons were shunted into designated position, to await incoming loads Each wagon was labelled to a particular major freight depot; York, Leeds Wellington St., Leeds Hunslet Lane, Manchester Ardwick, Glasgow High St., Kings Cross, and Liverpool Huskisson, plus others when required. Traffic consigned to places other than the above had to be loaded into whichever was the appropriate wagon for transshipment; depending on the length of

journey, traffic for some small towns and villages often required a second transshipment. Failure to load goods in the correct wagon, would result in transit delay and consequential complaint and possible claim. All goods were checked against sender's consignment notes, which were then endorsed with the appropriate wagon details and handed into the Forwarding office to be processed, (details of this procedure later)

On completion of the day's loading, the wagons were drawn out of the shed to form part of the Express goods train to York, departing Scarborough Central station at 6.40pm. A significant proportion of the goods forwarded on a daily basis consisted of five motor loads of galvanised metalware (farm equipment etc.) from a firm called Swifts, and a variety of returned empty packaging.

By early 21st Century standards, the Goods station offices during the mid-1950's can best be described as archaic. In both ground floor offices there was a sloping desk running the entire length of the front wall facing Falsgrave Road, at which sat every clerk except the clerk-in-charge (usually two grades above the rest) There was no central heating - simply a coal fire in the Forwarding office and a coke stove in the Received office. The allocation of fuel was one large bucketful per day to each room. During particularly cold spells this was quite inadequate, and the staff were forced to "improvise" in order to avoid frostbite! It was quite common to see two members of staff sawing through a discarded wooden sleeper spread between two chairs, to produce logs. On one occasion, the porter who delivered our ration of coal arrived just as we were about to sweep up the resultant pile of sawdust, and called out "hold it". Mystified as to what was about to happen we obeyed. He then brought in a shovelful of slack from his barrow and proceeded to mix it with the sawdust, declaring the mixture to be the equivalent of coal bricks — a widely-used substitute for coal in many households at that time. Without permission he then shovelled a pile of the mixture onto the brightly burning coal in the fire-place and, fortunately for him, left the office only minutes before we were left with lots of smoke but no heat. When in desperate need; there; was an occasional visit to the coal wagons standing under the shed canopy where it was possible to find a few lumps which had "accidentally" fallen off. The coke stove in the Inwards office was about a metre high and 30 cms.diam This stood a short way from the back wall and could often be seen with the top third or so glowing red. So much for Health and Safety requirements in those days!

With regard to the communication system; there was a small telephone exchange in the Inwards office, and a telephone on the desk of the clerk in charge of the Forwarding office The latter also had a "speaking tube", which I regarded as old-fashioned even at that time. This connected with the Accounts office immediately above, the caller having to unplug the whistle from the mouthpiece and blow into the tube so as to activate the whistle at the other end, thus calling attention to converse. In contrast to the rather monotonous routine of the daily workload of most of the clerical staff, the Townsman's duties ensured a much greater variety with no two days alike. This post was the only outdoor job in the clerical grades, and carried two important responsibilities ; 1) visiting traders, large and small, to collect payment of carriage accounts — a different area of town each day. 2) visiting traders to investigate complaints of damage or pilferage relating to goods delivered the previous day. Visits to Marks & Spencer, and certain retailers of china and glassware, was an almost daily requirement. In the case of damage, the Townsman had to try to establish, by careful examination of the damaged article and the packaging, whether or not the damage was of rail transit origin ; I.e. is it a manufacturing fault ? was it adequately packed ? any evidence of rough handling en route ? check price against senders' invoice in case of claim. On his return to the office each day, the Townsman had to prepare a detailed report of each investigation for submission to the Divisional claims office at York
The author's spell of duty in this post led to a career dealing with all aspects of claims

work relating to goods conveyed by both Freight and Parcels train services, which entailed visits to firms, factories and stations all over Yorkshire, and beyond. In order to appreciate how outdated and uneconomic the freight sundries business had become in the face of increasing competition from road transport, let's consider the following example of a fairly typical consignment of multiple packages ;

Goods brought into the station by our road vehicle :

1) Checking. (the duty of the shed checker prior to loading) Is the sender's consignment note of the appropriate type, I.e , "Company's (Railway) risk", "Owner's risk", "Dangerous goods", or "Damageable goods not properly protected by packing" All important contract documents in the event of loss or damage.

Is sender's declared weight correct ? Is the packing adequate ?

Is the labelling clear and secure ? (each package to bear a label showing " Part lot of—packages ")

2) Charging for conveyance. The countless number of different commodities that could be offered for conveyance had made it necessary to produce the book " General classification of merchandise", in which any item could be found in classes 1 to 20. Once the class had been determined, and destination mileage ascertained, these factors together with the weight, were applied to a charging scale, and the consignment note suitably endorsed for accounting purposes

3) Loading. With packages of various shape, size and weight, it was most important that great care was taken in the loading to wagons, to minimise the possibility of damage in transit in the event of rough shunting or transhipment

The procedure at destination would be similar to that at Scarborough mentioned earlier.

During the period of almost 60 years that the Goods depot was a busy concern, I believe there were only two significant steps towards modernisation; 1) the withdrawal of horses in the late 1930's, to be replaced by the Scammel 3-wheel motor vehicle, always referred to as the mechanical horse, and 2) the introduction of the electric conveyer belt in 1946. Although many of the staff had either taken early retirement, left the service for jobs elsewhere, or been transferred to other departments, a diminishing business dragged along into the late 1960's when eventually the sundries traffic was transferred to National Carriers, a road transport concern. Simultaneously, what was left of wagon load traffic was also lost to road transport, and by 1986 all the tracks in Gallows Close had gone. Welcome Safeway ?