

THE MID DERBYSHIRE (JOINT)

Brian Dominic

THE ACT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION of the Monyash & Bakewell Railway was quickly prepared and passed through all its stages in Parliament, where the Royal Assent was granted on 28th March, 1890. The Bakewell end of the line was fairly easy to construct and was finished first, and a restricted service to Haddon was able to start as early as April 1st, 1892. Construction up Lathkill Dale to Monyash and the end of the Railway took rather longer, and the whole Railway was not ready for its Official Inspection (having already begun to carry minerals) until October 1895.

The Railway opened officially on Monday, 3rd January 1896 which dawned clear and frosty, and large crowds were soon gathering along the Railway to witness the celebrations consequent upon its opening. The first train, consisting of all the Company's coaches, and drawn appropriately enough by No1 *Gordon*, left Bakewell at 10:00 am, carrying railway and civic dignitaries, and the Bakewell Silver Prize Band, whom, we are told, "played lustily throughout the entire journey". The second train, consisting of mineral wagons carrying ordinary passengers at no charge, left at 11:00 am and did not have the benefit of this early form of Muzak, but seem, by all accounts, to have enjoyed the journey none the less.

THE JOINT COMMITTEE

The success of the M&B had not gone un-noticed in the rest of the White Peak. Moves to build a branch from the village of Yougholgreave had first been made soon after the opening of the

M&B, but nothing concrete occurred until 1899, when the nominally separate Yougholgreave and Alport Junction Railway obtained an Act to construct a line from Alport, through the confines of Bradford Dale to Yougholgreave. The junction itself was a trailing one in the Up direction, so trains from Bakewell to Yougholgreave had perforce to reverse and simple through workings were impossible. What was usually done was to marshal 'up' passenger trains with the Monyash portion leading, the branch locomotive collecting the Yougholgreave portion at Alport Junction after the main line train had left. In the reverse direction, the branch train was timed to arrive after the main line train, and the branch loco would attach its portion to the rear of the train. This created a minor headache for the operating staff, in that each half set of coaches worked alternately to the two extremities of the line, so finding lost property (and reuniting it with its owners) became something of a problem. To digress a little, in the twenties the Joint Committee (of which more anon) invested in railcars for passenger traffic, and these proved a godsend to the Alport station staff, as the Yougholgreave branch trains became almost invariably worked by them, with cross-platform connections being provided, rather than a through service.

It very quickly became apparent to the managements of both railways that running two separate undertakings under

Lathkill Dale (for Over Haddon) station features the oldest building on the line – a Brandbright shelter that has a 1899 builder's plate on it. Notice that the lamp (a Roundhouse bracket one) is lit.





Above: The Sheep Special sets off for Bakewell...

Right: *Magrat* takes the daily freight back towards Alport Junction.

two separate boards was a very cumbersome way to operate what was virtually one railway, and fairly soon a Joint Traffic Management Committee was set up to oversee the running of the railways, which at this stage retained their own separate identities, tickets and timetables. However, when in the Twenties the financial pinch was felt, both Management Committees recommended to their Shareholders that the two Railways be combined, and managed by a Joint Committee. Thus on 20th May 1922 the Mid-Derbyshire Light Railways (Joint Management Committee) Act passed into statute and it was then that the Railway acquired its present identity. New loco and stock liveries were introduced, the former Youlgreave and Alport Junction Company's workshop (which had in any case been sending its heavy repair work to the M&B's larger and better-equipped Bagshaw Dale Works for years) was closed, and the line began its aggressive marketing policy to attract the increasing numbers of tourists ('See the Beauties of the White Peak By Derbyshire's Toy Train').

DOMESTIC RUBBISH AND BEER

What was to be the final fling of what we now call the Old Company came in the early 60s. The MDLR, along with the mines, had been going steadily downhill for some years, (the Flagg Extension and ropeway had both closed in 1954) but had resisted all offers of help from enthusiasts, indeed these were actively discouraged as in, "The MDLR is a working professional railway, with no need of volunteer staff or help". The railway would in fact have closed rather earlier than it eventually did, but for the fact that in 1968, Derbyshire County Council, in conjunction with the Peak Park Planning Board, evolved a scheme whereby vehicular traffic of all types was banned from entering





Above: The MDLR has recently put together a PW Department train, seen here in charge of No 9 *Magrat* – the Pway Dept prefer diesels, as you can switch them off when they're not needed. The train consists of a Triassic 'Hudson' riding van, a rake of miscellaneous skips (Novo, Binnie and one other which I can't remember where it came from) and an IP Engineering 'Lollypop' brake van. There's a rail carrier on the stocks to complete the train.

Centre: It's a cold, dry, clear winter's evening as *Gytha* brings the last passenger service of the day into Haddon station. All the illumination is dirt cheap – the lamps are IKEA LEDs which sold as a set of ten lamps with a switched battery box at Christmas 2007 for just over £1.50. There is one in each of the platform lamps, two in the station building and three in the coach.

Lower: The village of Over Haddon is a comparatively recent development. The buildings are mostly of concrete, 'coz the local yokels will get hernias if they try to lift 'em. However the Gent's (being visited by one of Mahatma Coat's autorickshaw drivers) is a GRS brass kit. The other autorickshaw seems to be getting attention at the Forge Garage at the other end of the street...

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Left: Draper's Platform is the least developed of the MDLR's stations – it has never had a station name board, but has acquired a bench from Gaudi's Park Guell in Barcelona.

Lower: A passenger train approaches Lathkill Dale (for Over Haddon). Unlike the southern counties, leaves on the line are generally no bar to progress...

Photos: Brian Dominic

the area served by the MDLR, and residents were only allowed out of the area in their vehicles once a week, except for emergencies. Police, Fire, and Ambulance vehicles were allowed access, but all bus services were reorganised to connect with an intensified train service to serve the villages. Freight traffic also underwent a terrific upsurge, with much extra traffic (including domestic rubbish and beer) being carried. One of the two ex WD bogie wagons was adapted to carry the half 'standard size' containers which were used for transshipment traffic, and more would have been done in this direction had the scheme lasted more than two years. As it was, the MDLR was barely able to cope, the arrears of maintenance finally caught up with the Company's operations, and eventually there was nothing fit to run service. In a final nose-thumbing gesture to those who would have saved it, the railway was closed without notice on a Monday, and on the Wednesday, the whole of the motive power, rolling stock and rail was sold to the scrap man. The Old Company was then wound up, and the land and buildings were sold.

The howls of the enthusiasts were heard far and wide when the events recounted above became known. Two locos, *Gordon* and *Simplex No 4* were rescued from the scrap man, and a Mid-Derbyshire Light Railway preservation scheme was floated. The first priority was to secure all the trackbed and buildings, and this was achieved with the aid of a grant from the County Council. The section of line from Lathkill Dale station to Alport Junction was selected as the area with the best tourist potential, and the Preservation Society has succeeded in reopening this section of the original main line. Traffic is building up quite satisfactorily, and the long term plans of the Society include the reopening of the section from Lathkill Dale to Monyash, which has been re-laid in light-weight track to provide access to the Works at Bagshaw Dale. The Youghreave Branch will follow, so that eventually trains will once more trundle through the Dales on their way to serve the people of the White Peak. Here endeth the Official History.

RADIO LUXEMBOURG

The Mid-Derbyshire Light Railway as a concept goes back a very long way. The initial idea took root in the days when Scouts went on minimally-supervised night hikes in a snowy Derbyshire, and we listened to early Beatles records being



Above: The pride of the line, No14 *Havelock Vetinari*, a radio controlled Roundhouse 'Jack', passes a deserted Lathkill Dale on an empty stock working.



Centre: A busy scene at Alport Junction – the MDLR (like many garden railways) is underprovided with sidings.



Lower: The loco shed for Alport Junction was the first concrete building I bought – it's now 'bedding in' nicely with the lineside growth snuggling up to it quite nicely. Notice the line's resident trainspotter, who's having a bit of a dull day.

Below: A visitor to the MDLR many years ago made this handy rack for couplings and a coupling hook – I added the lamp brackets and the whole comes in very handy when the MDLR goes to 'play away.'





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Above: A short passenger train approaches Lathkill Dale.

Inset: The Management of the MDLR are ever mindful of the spiritual needs of the people they serve, so erected a church at Over Haddon. (In fact, the space needed filling) Note that the 'tree' alongside the church is a self-set 'something or other' which is in scale, so it's been allowed to flourish.

Centre: It must be Market Day in Bakewell, as one of the local farmers is loading his sheep to go to market. The wagons were scratch-built, with P&J Models supplying the 'ironwork' and Imp Models the wheels, axle boxes and couplings.

Lower: The first and last services on the MDLR each day are the Explosives Specials – 'up' in the morning with a full van, 'down' in the evening with the empties. The line's IP Engineering 'Lollypop' Railcar, hauling a TR Gunpowder Van, habitually performs these duties.



Above: This is the longest train that can be accommodated at Haddon!
Right: A passenger train awaits departure from Alport Junction.

played on Radio Luxembourg whilst we were supposed to be sleeping on the floor of a Church Hall. On one such hike, up Lathkill Dale, I spied some stone columns that had once supported a leat or sough carrying water from a mine and which I imagined could have been a railway. A study of an Ordnance Survey map revealed that it would have been possible to build a line from the other side of Bakewell to the Midland Railway, down the valley of the Wye nearly to Rowsley, then up the side dale to Alport and so up Lathkill Dale to the outskirts of Monyash.

This all got filed away for future reference, until I got into 009 modelling and built two layouts based on this concept. However, the dreaded Ten Thumbs Syndrome stuck and one night, when I'd spent far too long assembling a four-wheeled wagon kit and come into the house in a *foul* temper, my wife said, "Why don't you try something bigger?" She was right (as always) so I took myself off to my local model shop and bought a couple of Coopercraft plastic wagon kits and a set of underframe components. This was just about all that was easily available at that time. The kits more-or-less fell together, and the underframe bits went under a scratch-built flat wagon – which I still have.

I so enjoyed the experience that the 009 all got sold and I decided to build a 16mm scale 'layout' down the garden. A concrete path, a block wall, some more wall built of rockery stone and seven tons of roadstone later, I'd got the basis for the new MDLR. Of course, I got things wrong. The initial track (Brandbright wooden sleepers) laid in ballast 'set' with concrete was far too hard, the clearances were much too generous and we had horrendous gradients, the worst of which had a sharp bend at the bottom – a recipe for disaster if ever there was one. There was also a tree (with very low branches) on the inside of the bend...

Things have come on a little since then, as the line celebrated its twentieth birthday in 2008...

