The Landmark Trust

ALTON STATION

History Album

Written by Charlotte Haslam, 1981

Updated & expanded by Caroline Stanford,

2008, 2022

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 *and Scotland* SC039205

Bookings 01628 825925 *Office* 01628 825920 *Facsimile* 01628 825417
Website www.landmarktrust.org.uk

BASIC DETAILS:

Built	**1849**
Listed	**Grade II**
Architect	**attr. Henry Arthur Hunt**
Booking office enlarged	**1882**
Station closed	**1965**
Acquired by The Landmark Trust	**1972, freehold**
Architect for restoration	**R. Gradidge**
Contractors	**Forresters of Alton**
Refurbished and the Waiting Room made part of the Landmark	**2008**

Contents

The station master's house with its Italianate tower.

Summary

Alton Station was built in 1849 as part of the Churnet Valley branch line for the North Staffordshire Railway (the NSR, also known as “The Knotty", from the Staffordshire Knot which it took as its emblem).

Railway mania coincided with the height of the Battle of the Styles in Victorian England and the construction of stations provided a rare opportunity outside the aristocratic and institutional for well funded, architect-designed buildings. In the countryside, there was no need for a grand scale. The railway directors sought portals that would be familiar and reassuring to nervous rural passengers who might not have travelled on this new form of transport before. As they forged across the countryside, the railway engineers and speculators were often high-handed; however, the NSR line was built when railway design was possibly at its best. The plans for the Churnet Valley Line were laid in 1845, the first year of "railway mania", but it was not begun until 1847, by which time improved methods of engineering and construction had developed, and railway architecture was at its most inventive and attractive.

A wealth of small-scale architecture came out of this boom in the construction of railway stations. Some could be msitaken for gate lodges, especially where they matched the style of the ‘great house’. The NSR stations were a particularly fine group, most being in a consistent Tudor or Jacobean style, but with the odd appearance of Domestic, Rural and Italianate Styles. The main line stations were characterised by diamond patterns in the brickwork, the Churnet Valley line by the use of the local stone. he roofs of both displayed patterns in different shaped tiles. The Company employed a London architect called Henry Arthur Hunt to design these stations for them. On this basis, Hunt seems the most likely candidate to have designed Alton Station, even though his other stations were Tudor or Jacobean. Conclusive evidence remains elusive and it is strange that Alton is unique among NSR stations in being Italianate in style.

For a long time, geographical and chronological coincidence meant Alton Station was attributed to A. W. Pugin, in an area that contains some of the finest examples of his collaboration with Lord Shrewsbury in the Gothic Revival style. However, it is implausible that Pugin designed such an Italianate group of buildings, given his passion for the principles of Gothic architecture and his lampoon in his book, *Contrasts*, against ‘Italian villas in the coldest situations’. In fact, Pugin did produce drawings for a station at Alton and the NSR Company were happy to employ him, but only on condition that he provided detailed drawings and specifications. This Pugin declined to do – he was not capable of tendering on these terms, since he relied heavily on his builder, George Myers to transform his drawings into reality. Somewhat dog-in-the manger, Pugin nevertheless urged the Earl to take a firm line on the design, lest ‘the greatest horrors be perpetrated under the very walls of the old castle and the whole place ruined….no engineer was ever a decent architect.’ Pugin had to settle for providing a new lodge across the road, a suitably grand entrance to convey those visiting Lord Shrewsbury by rail on by carriage to Alton Towers itself.

Perhaps all this toing and froing delayed progress on the line, since a temporary station had to be built at Alton when the Churnet Valley line opened for passengers and freight on 13th July 1849. H. A. Hunt could easily have built a station in style in keeping with Pugin's Gothic gatehouse a hundred yards away and built a year earlier; if the Earl was indeed disinterested, the design may even have been a propagandist gesture by Hunt on behalf of 'cosmopolite practice' in the Battle of the Styles, a successful and provocative infiltration of the opposition's very heartland.

It was not until 1850, then, that the main station buildings were ready to receive passengers. Most passengers were day visitors who came in their droves from the pottery towns to visit the famous garden at Alton Towers, to marvel at its temples, pagodas, glass-houses and monoliths. Initially, the Waiting Room was known as the Booking Hall, with a small, heated Ladies Waiting Room (now the kitchen) alongside, and a Ladies' WC leading off (gentlemen's facilities were across the line on the Down platform, behind the signal box). The Station Master's Office and Porters' Room completed the block. Across the line were goods sidings and sheds, cattle dock and a weighing machine and office, with a goods hoist at the end of the platform against the bridge. Around 1880, the goods yard and sidings were enlarged and a 30 - lever signal box built, with ornate bargeboards and window boxes. In 1882 a separate booking office was added on to the rear of the waiting room (easily distinguished today by its heavier character) and a waiting shelter on the Down. Then, in 1884, the sum of £200 was spent on lengthening the platforms and building a special pathway leading directly from the platform to the road up to the Towers, called 'The Avenues'.

In 1923 the NSR merged with the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, which extended the catchment area for excursion trains considerably; and, more importantly, Alton Towers itself was sold to a consortium which planned to run it as a full-scale public attraction. Business on the line boomed and in 1937, three rows of steps and barriers were put in up The Avenues, to allow the flow of visitors to be managed in an orderly fashion. After nationalisation in 1948, the name of Alton Station was changed to Alton Towers but use of such rural lines now declined dramatically. In 1960, passenger services on the Churnet Valley Line were cut to almost nothing. Four years later, as part of Dr Beeching's overhaul, the line was reduced to single track, with total closure following in 1965. The stationmaster lived on in his house for a year or two, but the waiting room soon began to suffer from neglect and vandalism. Staffordshire County Council bought sections of the line with the station buildings in 1969, to turn the former into a footpath and find new uses for the latter. In 1970, having failed to find anyone locally to take on Alton Station, the County Planning Officer approached Landmark, who in 1972 took on the station master's house and waiting room.

At the time, funds were only available to make the station master's house into Landmark accommodation. The house needed little work to make it habitable again. The waiting room was simply made sound, repainted in the NSR colours and left to complete the picture until funds became available. This came in 2008, when the Waiting Room was incorporated into the accommodation, the Booking Office was made into an additional bedroom and the Ladies Waiting Room into a kitchen.

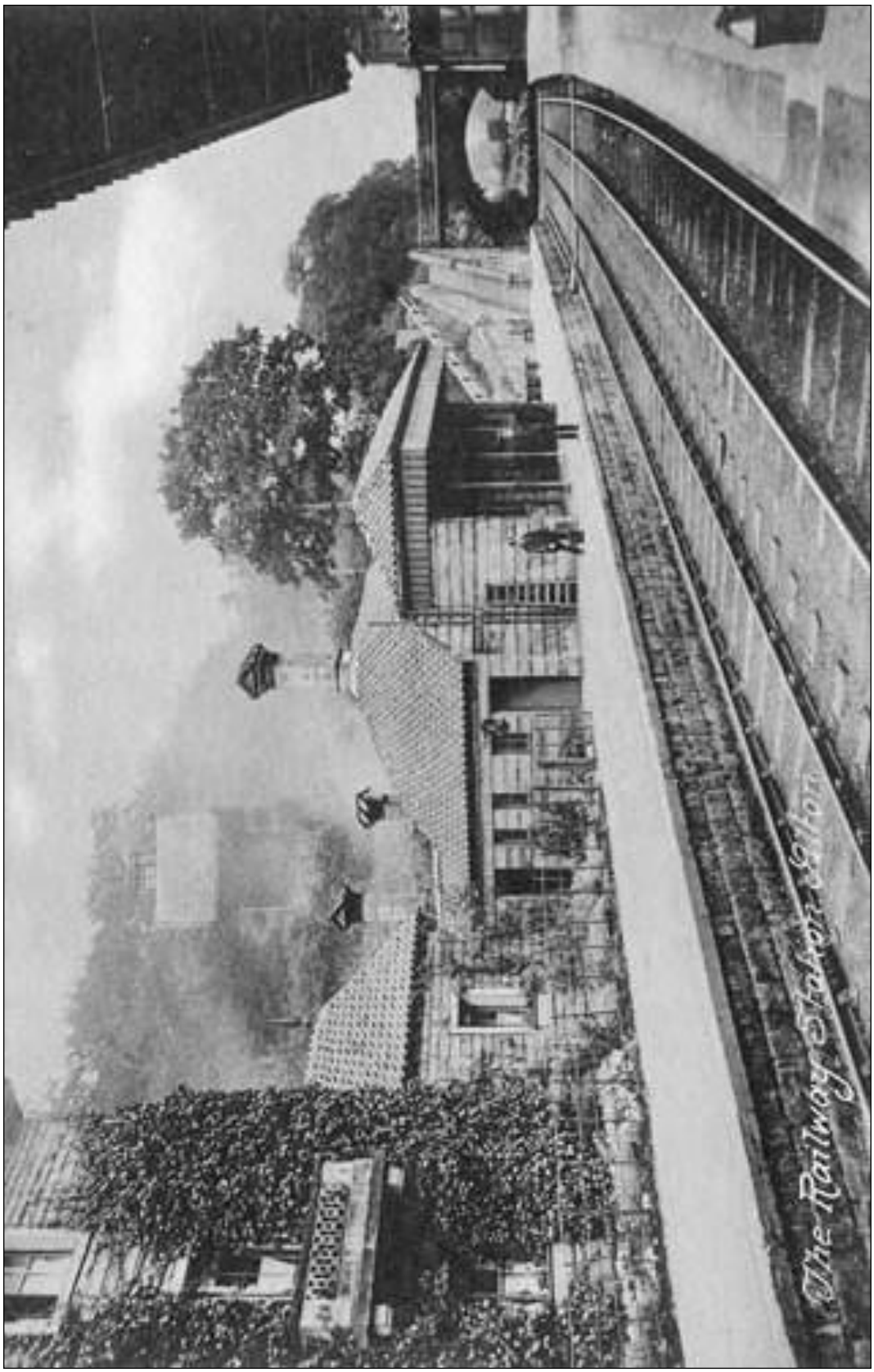
Alton Station – A Tale of Architects and Architecture

The a question of who designed Alton Station has been given some curious answers since architecture itself has been a subject for study - coming too late, sadly, to save many of the best examples from demolition. For a long time, it was wrongly assumed that the station must have been designed by A W Pugin, simply on the basis of the closeness of his relationship with the Earl of Shrewsbury and geographical coincidence with some of his finest work. The story of how the design came about is an interesting one, touching on some of the deepest divisions of the great architectural debate of the 19th century – as, of course, did the stations when originally built. It may seem strange now that a building as matter-of-fact as a railway station should be the subject of controversy, for its style as well as its existence, but at the time the railways were built amid fierce argument.

The Coming of the Railway Age

The opponents of the railways ranged from those who, like Wordsworth, (*Sonnet on the projected Kendal to Windermere railway*), regarded the invention as an evil that would bring about the destruction of all peace and beauty in a godly world, to the farmers and landowners who simply resented the intrusion on their land, sometimes so forcibly that the surveyors had to work under cover of darkness to avoid being molested. Once, in the case of a particularly fierce parson-landowner (or Squarson), they even did their work while he was distracted preaching his sermon on a Sunday. Many people believed that physical damage would result for anyone travelling at such speeds, and livestock standing near a line when a train went by would surely be killed, from fright if not from suction.

No argument could dampen the adventurous spirits of the railway builders, who had all the self-righteousness of "progress" on their side, and they carried on regardless.



Alton Station in the early twentieth century

Some saw their behaviour as high-handed in the extreme; one of these was the Reverend Jones, Vicar of Alton. At a public meeting at the Royal Oak, in Cheadle on 21st Jan 1841, Rev Jones, who had spoken in favour of the Extension Line through Alton at Uttoxeter in April 1841, now opposed a line through the Churnet Valley. The Earl of Shrewsbury had authorised him to say that his Lordship would oppose the scheme in and out of Parliament

> 'as far as his influence and purse would go. The Earl and his predecessors had expended a million and a half of money on what was formerly a wilderness; they had adorned it as far as art could go and had erected one of England's proudest palaces. Was it likely that the Earl could submit to the beauties of the place destroyed by the cuttings and embankments of a railway?'

Rev. Jones also regarded the railway bridge by the station as not only ugly, but dangerous. He had been unable to impress the contractor with the need to alter it, and failed equally with the engineer, the Chairman of the Company and the Government itself. He finally turned to the Press, writing to *The Staffordshire Advertiser*:-

> 'To protest against the overbearing conduct of the railway companies, the want of skill frequently evinced by the engineers, and the utter impossibility, except at an enormous expense, for any individual to gain redress for any public or private injury.'

The navvies who built the lines were dreaded as a scourge by the local population, because of their fighting and stealing; but when they were gone, and the lines were opened, those same protestors were transformed into enthusiasts, buying shares with the rest. *The Illustrated London News* greeted the opening of each new line with a full description, praising at length the mightiest engineering feats, and carrying illustrations of stations and viaducts.

In the local press the descriptions ran to guide book length: The *Staffordshire Advertiser* had several pages of fulsome praise for both the main Potteries line and the Churnet Valley line, on which Alton was one of the main stations.

Townspeople, especially, thronged to travel on the railway; for them it brought into existence the holiday away from home, the outing to a beauty spot, such as that described by Arnold Bennett in *Anna of the Five Towns*:-

> 'The school treat was held in a twelve-acre field near Sneyd, the seat of a Marquis, and a Saturday afternoon resort very popular in the Five Towns. The children were formed at noon on Duck Bank into a procession, which marched to the railway station singing of "Shall we gather at the river?". Thence a special train carried them, in seething compartments, excited and strident, to Sneyd, where the procession was reformed along a country road.'

The railway companies were quick to grasp the possibilities of this new custom, and bought land at resorts, such as Rudyard Lake, on which they built hotels.

Even the country people gradually came round to the idea, finding trains useful for transporting themselves and their animals to market or, as Cecil Torr noticed in Devon, as a countryside clock:-

> 'After the railway came, the trains proclaimed the hours, as most people knew the time-tables approximately, calling the 8.19 the 8, the 11.37 the 12 etc - odd minutes did not count. As the trains upon this branch were "mixed", partly passenger and partly goods, there generally was some shunting to be done; but this caused no delay, as the time-tables allowed for it. If there was no shunting, the train just waited at the station until the specified time was up. The driver of the evening train would often give displays of hooting with the engine whistle while he was stopping here, and would stay on over time if the owls were answering back.'
>
> (from *Small Talk at Wreyland*)

The designing of railways and railway stations

The area served by the North Staffordshire Railway (the NSR or the "Knotty", from the Staffordshire Knot which it took as its emblem) was lucky, for the line was built when railway design was possibly at its best. The plans had been laid in 1845, the first of the years of "railway mania", but it was not begun until 1847, when the fuss had begun to die down, and the more fraudulent practitioners had been shown up. The years of experiment were over, improved methods of engineering and construction had been developed, and were applied with greater confidence; the crossing of high moorland or a boggy valley no longer presented problems to men such as Thomas Brassey, whose construction firm was one of the largest, and who built the NSR's main line from Macclesfield to Colwich, via Stoke. The engineer for the NSR was George Parker Bidder, a mathematical genius and inventor, in partnership with Robert Stephenson. These two, with Brassey, were to build railways throughout Europe, and as far away as India and Canada: the NSR had the sense to employ the top men available at the time.

Railway architecture, in particular, was at its most inventive and attractive in the late 1840s. A number of suitable styles had been developed, but had not yet reached the stage of stagnation or repetition. The companies required their architects to give them an imposing building for their terminus, but in small towns and the countryside, the aim was to be encouraging and unformidable, to draw passengers onto this new and strange method of transport. So the architects set about presenting a comely and familiar face to the world. Local materials were used, in the days before the railways themselves made brick the cheapest and ever-present alternative.

The architectural styles of the stations fell into four or five main groups. There was the Classical, mainly used for termini, such as Euston and Monkwearmouth (though the latter never actually functioned as such), but also watered down for

country stations. Growing out of this was a sort of hybrid Renaissance, or Italianate, villa or palazzo, with round-headed windows and very often a tower or "campanile" as well. It was a good way of not being too grandly Classical, but not going Gothic either, and became so popular that it was christened the Railway Style. Good examples were the early termini for the Eastern Counties Railway at Bricklayers Arms, and for the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway at London Bridge. Excellent small stations were Gobowen, on the Shrewsbury and Chester Railway, and Trentham on the NSR.

True medieval Gothic did not appear much before the High Victorians, except in the churchlike Richmond in Yorkshire, and one or two others. More common, and also thought of as Gothic, or Old English, were Tudor and Jacobean, which were felt to capture the spirit of British enterprise, and which blended in easily with their surroundings. Another unobtrusive style was the Domestic, or Rural, which could come out half-timbered, or as a full "cottage ornée", copied from J.C. Loudon's *Encyclopaedia*.

So the stations went up, the same architect (or sometimes the engineer for the two frequently swapped roles) designing expertly in all the available styles on the same line. The result was a sudden wealth of small-scale architecture: outside the parks of the gentry, these were among the first small buildings to be "architect-designed". Some, indeed, would have passed quite well for lodges, especially where, as at Sandon and Trentham, they matched the style of the "great house". People were quick to perceive their importance; Loudon, for example, believed that having good stations along a line could "hardly fail to improve the general taste of the country".

The stations on the NSR were a particularly fine group, the majority being in a consistent Tudor or Jacobean, but with the odd appearance of Domestic, Rural and Italianate. The main line stations were characterised by diamond patterns in the brickwork, the Churnet Valley line by the use of the local stone, while the

roofs of both displayed patterns in different shaped tiles. Gordon Biddle, in his *Victorian Stations*, says that there was no line better for the care taken "in the choice of materials and the execution of detail". The minute books of the Board of Directors, and of the Finance Committee, tell us that the Company employed a London architect called Henry Arthur Hunt to design these stations for them. Besides attending a number of Directors meetings himself, payments were made on his Certificates to the contractors of all the different lines under construction in l848-50.

A.W. Pugin & Alton Station

The first historians of the line, writing under the name of "Manifold" in 1952, concentrate more on the design of railway engines than of stations, which they barely mention. In 1971, their work was brought up to date by R. Christiansen and R.W. Miller, who wrongly attribute Stoke to R.A. Stent (though they say he may have collaborated with "an architect called Hunt, to whom the similar Stone station has been attributed") and produce the surprising statement that a number of stations on the Churnet Valley line, including Alton, were designed by A.W. Pugin, master of nineteenth-century Gothic Revival. This assumption is superficially not unreasonable, for the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury's estates contain some of Pugin's finest work, especially at Alton Towers (where Pugin's son Edward completed his work after Pugin's death in 1852), Cotton and Cheadle.

For the whole of his active life Pugin spoke out against - and in his own work demonstrated the antithesis to - the stylistic versatility which was usual to his contemporaries. He believed, passionately, that buildings should show their function clearly and, at the same time, reflect the society and landscape in which they existed. Decoration should be the outcome of structural necessity, not something to be applied as an afterthought to the finished surface.

Alton Towers in 1880. The mansion is a famous example of Gothic Revival architecture, designed by A W Pugin and further adapted by his son E W Pugin.

For Pugin all this was embodied in Gothic architecture, which had, after all, suited the needs of Britain very well for many centuries and, he considered, was well adapted to do so again. The broad result of Pugin's crusade was that the Gothic revival took on a more serious note; instead of being just another style, or a subject for antiquarian study, Gothic came to be built with a religious sense of conviction by the next generation of architects, regarded by some as the One True Architecture, as appropriate for the future as for the past. To attribute such a building as Alton Station to Pugin is to ignore completely what he stood for as an architect, and to belittle the ideals of one of the 19th-century's most searching architectural critics.

And yet the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury, owner of Alton Towers, was perhaps Pugin's most loyal and generous patron, becoming as close to a personal friend as the difference in their stations allowed. His name is painted on the frieze in the library of Pugin's own house, The Grange in Ramsgate, another Landmark.

The area around the Earl's estate at Alton saw the fullest realisations of their shared convictions, in the churches at Uttoxeter and Macclesfield, and especially at St Giles, Cheadle. As architect to Alton Towers, Pugin was only the successor to others whose approach was more purely ornamental than his own, and his contribution was mainly to the interior, but on the other side of the valley his imagination was allowed full reign in the building of Alton Castle, a college for priests, and St John's Hospital. There he could realise his dream of the collegiate religious life, echoed in the purest of architectural styles.

Despite his preoccupation with the Middle Ages, Pugin himself was already a fan of the railways, and the punishing itineraries across the country recorded in his diaries would have been impossible without them. He would use the Churnet Valley Line to arrive at Alton within months of the line opening in July 1849, and often thereafter until his death in 1852. But both Pugin and Lord Shrewsbury were anxious about the effect of the railway to the Churnet Valley. Pugin at least

acknowledged the need for railway buildings, and suggested that the ever-functional Gothic was, as ever, the most suitable style. This did not mean the 'mere caricatures of pointed design' found in the Great Western Railway's stations:

> 'Mock castellated work, huge tracery, shields without bearings, ugly mouldings, no-meaning projections and all sorts of unaccountable breaks, to make up a design at once costly, and offensive and full of pretension. In every instance the architects have evidently considered it an opportunity for showing off what they could do, instead of carrying out what was required.'

He was even more critical of building them in the Classical style, calling Euston 'a piece of Brobdingnagian absurdity' where you drove through a vast portal, to be confronted by a meagre wooden booking office. All this when:-

> By merely following out the work that was required to its natural conclusion, building exactly what was wanted in the simplest manner, something grand and durable could have been produced.

Buttresses, weathering and segmental arches were all that was needed for good design.

The Earl, however, was initially very resistant to the prospect of the railway forging through his valley. He recruited the Vicar of Alton, Reverend Jones, to speak out on his behalf. Reverend Jones had spoken in favour of the Extension Line through Alton at Uttoxeter in April 1841, but at a public meeting at the Royal Oak in Cheadle on 21st Jan 1842 he vigorously opposed a line through the Churnet Valley. The Earl of Shrewsbury had authorised him to say that his Lordship would oppose the scheme in and out of Parliament,

> 'as far as his influence and purse would go. The Earl and his predecessors had expended a million and a half of money on what was formerly a wilderness; they had adorned it as far as art could go and had erected one of England's proudest palaces. Was it likely that the Earl could submit to the beauties of the place destroyed by the cuttings and embankments of a railway?'

The Earl seems to have been paid off. The directors of the NSR, supposedly, paid him £1,000 annually to ensure his support while the Bills enabling them to build were going through Parliament.

Such aristocratic patrons also had the opportunity to influence the design of the railway buildings on lines running through their estates. The Duke of Sutherland, for example, bestirred himself to get what he wanted, offering to pay for the station buildings at Trentham, so long as they could be designed by his own architect, Charles Barry. Another such offer recorded in the railways records books, with a glad acceptance, was from Thomas Brassey; he wanted to pay for Stone station, to be built to H A Hunt's design.

The railway company minutes yield no such license to Lord Shrewsbury. There was an outline agreement in 1845, before the Company had even been incorporated, requiring only that the station should be of first-class status, and that it should not interfere with or, it is hinted, even be seen from, the approach to Alton Towers. The Earl's approval had to be sought if there was to be any change of plan, but this could only mean one of site, since no architectural drawings would have existed at that stage. The agreement, so far as it went, was confirmed on application from the Earl after work had started on the line, but no further stipulations were made.

However, from Pugin's own correspondence, it seems that the Earl did ensure that Pugin was given a shot at the designs for the station at Alton. Initially, Pugin too was vociferous in his fears for the valley. On1st October 1847, he had sent an urgent plea to his patron on the proposed railway bridges, including some notes for him to show to the railway company.

> 'if you do not make this point a sine qua the greatest horrors will be perpetrated under the very walls of the old castle and the whole place ruined… You might insist on a great deal more & nothing can be more reasonable than you should be secured against vile erections & designs on your Lordship's estate. No engineer was ever a decent architect and if they attempted Gothic it would be frightful.'

The railway company, however, was perfectly happy to employ Pugin to design the station at Alton. On 3rd June 1849, Pugin wrote to Lord Shrewsbury 'I have just returned from Ireland, I will attend to the vases immediately - & also to the station, but the plan was sent *only 5* days ago, just when I went to Ireland. I will send them all the working drawings this week.'

Over the next week, working in his library at Ramsgate, Pugin prepared a set of drawings (now lost) for the station at Alton for submission to the railway company. On 10th June he wrote to the Earl

> 'I sent a compleat set of Elevations of the station with details of the Doors windows &c – and 2 plans, one of the ground and the other of the upper floor. What I was afraid of, if they had paid me full commission, they would expect me to go through all the routine of railway building, attending contractors for competition & supplying detailed specification of the modern work inside [you can almost feel Pugin's disapproving shudder] inside – which I really don't have to do as I work on altogether different principles. I have supplied them with everything necessary as far as the exterior is concerned and I think it will make a picturesque building. I suppose it will be brick with stone dressings. If your Lordship will kindly let me know what time you would wish me to come down I will arrange accordingly.'

The rub was that the railway company's willingness to employ Pugin as architect at Alton depended on their standard terms: that their architects should provide a set of complete drawings and specifications. Pugin had never formally trained as an architect, and this was not how he worked, nor, as the letter implies, was he capable of doing so – he relied on his builder, George Myers, to transform his sketches into buildings. Thus he declined – or perhaps lost - the commission.

Pugin's only contribution, then, to the advent of the railway at Alton was the design of the lodge across the road, commissioned by Lord Shrewsbury in 1848 to create a suitably grand entrance through which guests arriving by train might be taken on by carriage to the Towers.

The Earl proposed to keep the name of the humbler building it replaced, Jackson's Lodge, presumably out of respect for an old retainer. Pugin however spluttered ' "Lodge" is a modern word savouring of Regent's Park and Jackson is a plebeian name. All the entrances should be called gate, and gate houses, after the manner of the ancients.' Today, it is most commonly known as Station Lodge.

Station Lodge, designed by Pugin about 1849

Another architectural contender

It may seem strange, having just said that the NSR employed architects, that Alton Station's designer is in question at all, but the records are often silent on the individuals involved. Henry Arthur Hunt remains the most plausible designer for Alton, although definitive evidence of his authorship has yet to be found. The attribution is based on the following arguments.

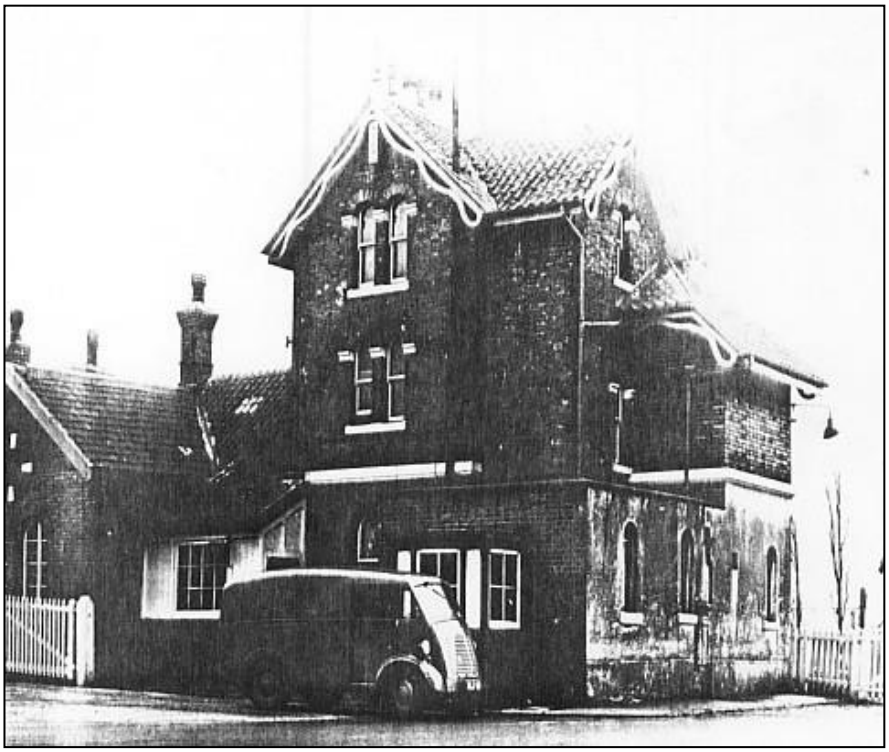
Hunt is credited with responsibility for Stoke Station, since his name is firmly linked to it, both in the records and in reported speeches of the company chairman, Mr Ricardo, in *The Staffordshire Advertiser*; other references in the records, connecting him with the minor stations, have apparently been overlooked.

Another plausible contender for the design of Alton Station is William Sugden of Leek. His case rests on the argument that all the rest of the NSR stations are Tudor or Jacobean, and can therefore be attributed to one hand, while Alton is Italianate, and so must be by another. Sugden was trained in the office of Andrews and Delauney, in Bradford. They later became Andrews and Peppar, and built some Italianate stations on the Bradford to Colne Railway, perhaps, it is suggested, drawing on Sugden's experience. For Sugden had, by then, left the firm; in 1848 he came south to work on the Churnet valley stations, whether on behalf of his firm, or on his own account, is not clear. He would have held some fairly junior job, as a draughtsman perhaps. Liking the area, he set up his own practice in Leek in 1849. For the next fifty years he, and then his son William Larner Sugden, were to design nearly every building of importance in Leek, as well as many that weren't, and a number elsewhere. The son used an elaborate, High Victorian style, but his father's work is much plainer, and frequently Renaissance or Italianate in character. So there he was, in the right place, at the right time, and soon to build in the right style. On the strength of

this it is concluded that he must have designed Alton station and also, it is said, Leek, a hybrid of Classical and Tudor.

THE NEW BREWERY.

Designed for Allsopp's by H.A. Hunt



Cresswell Station by H.A. Hunt

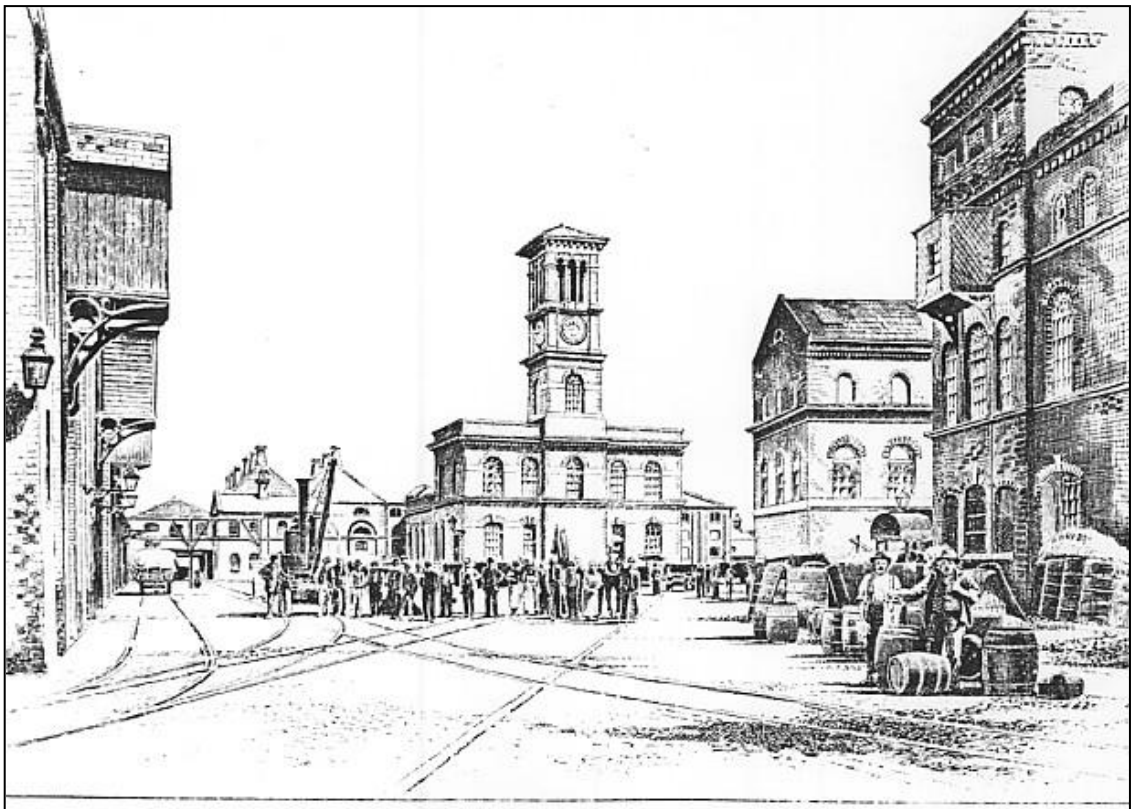
There are clearly a number of arguments against this. First and most simple is that Hunt - who, on the strength of Stoke and Stone stations and the generally high standard of the others, was clearly a competent and imaginative architect - would have been employed by the company to turn out good stations for just such places as Leek and Alton, both of first-class status. It is, therefore, very unlikely that he would have delegated the task of designing these, of all stations, to a young and inexperienced member of his team, however busy he was elsewhere.

Secondly, and the general point has already been made, architects of this period, just as they passed to and fro between their own profession and that of engineer and surveyor, passed equally freely from one architectural style to another. An argument that depends on Hunt building only in Tudor and Jacobean, even if that was his preferred idiom, is not a strong one. Besides which, there are already examples of other styles, such as Domestic, on the same Churnet Valley line.

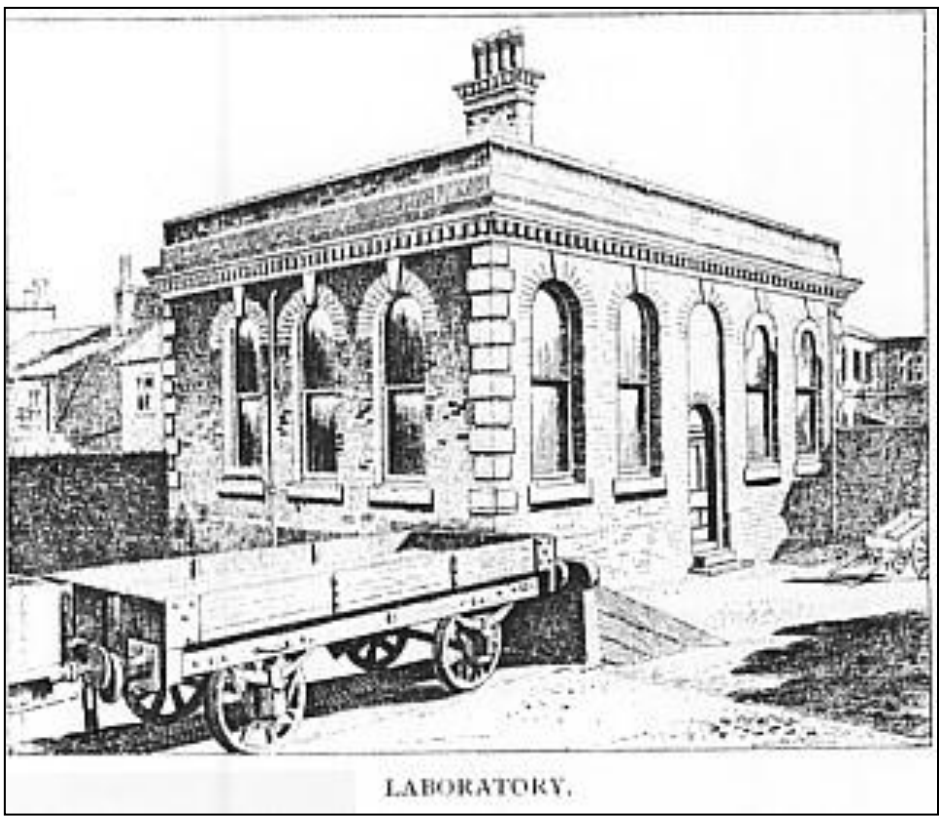
Hunt's obituaries state that he worked on the Eastern Counties and on the London, Brighton and South Coast Railways, as well as on the NSR, though in what capacity is not recorded. He would, therefore, have had the opportunity to meet David Moccata, who designed some good small Italianate stations on the Brighton line, and Sancton Wood and Francis Thompson, who did the same for the Eastern Counties. It will be remembered that the earliest termini for both these lines were in the Railway Style.

Hunt had his inter-disciplinary side; he dabbled in engineering, later becoming an Associate of the Institute of Civil Engineers, but he had trained as a surveyor. Wearing this hat, he came to hold the post of consultant to the Office of Works, for which he received a knighthood. He was surveyor for such bodies as the Commissioners of the Great Exhibition, managing their estate in South Kensington; and for the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's, Westminster and

Canterbury. Most significantly, when rather younger, he had worked with Charles Barry. Here was another, even richer source of knowledge for the execution of Italianate designs, made all the more probable in that there are echoes in Alton Station of Barry's Trentham.



CLOCK TOWER OVER HYDRAULIC ENGINE-HOUSE.



LABORATORY.

Allsopp's New Brewery

Hunt did, in fact, use elements of the Italianate style elsewhere on the NSR, at Cresswell on the Stoke to Uttoxeter line, where there is no question of Sugden having worked. Conclusive evidence for Hunt's mastery of Italianate design, however, lies in the town of Burton-on-Trent where, in 1858, he used it for the enormous New Brewery he built for Allsopp's, reputed at the time to be the largest in the world, and all carried out in the most confident manner. Besides the giant palazzo of the main building, there was also a small laboratory and a clock tower, which bear some similarity to the earlier Alton Station. On looking at these buildings, it would be hard to maintain that Hunt could only design in Jacobean.

There is still the curious fact that Hunt was so tactless as to build an Italianate station at Alton, of all places, when the views of the Earl and of Pugin must have been well known to him - one of the jobs that he worked on under Barry was the Houses of Parliament, during the course of which he and Pugin must have come into contact. At Sandon he built a station in keeping with the house; at Alton he could have echoed Pugin's gatehouse, going up at the same time a hundred yards away, using the Tudor with which he had been so successful elsewhere. Perhaps, as Gordon Biddle suggests, there is something undercover in the choice he made, and it is in fact a propagandist slogan on behalf of 'cosmopolite practice' in the Battle of the Styles, a successful and provocative infiltration of the opposition's very camping ground.

Alton Station c 1850, L.J. Wood

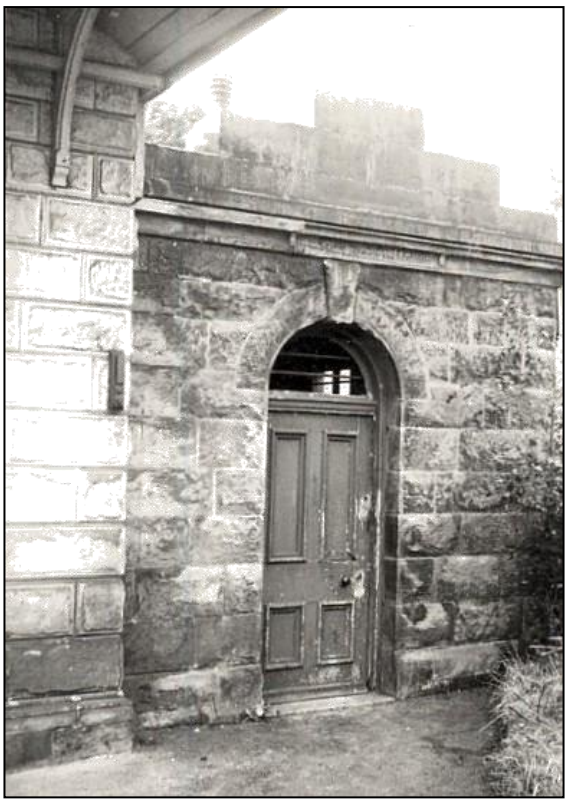
After the opening

The Churnet Valley line was declared safe for traffic on 10th July, 1849. Three days later it was formally opened, amid acclamation from the local, and national, press. The construction work was by no means complete, however: only the two first-class stations, Alton and Leek, had platforms, let alone station buildings to go on them. By 30th October, matters had progressed further, and the General Manager was able to report that crossings and sidings had been put in at Alton, both for general trade and for Lord Shrewsbury. He went on to say that 'a much larger amount of business will be done here than was expected, and further sidings will have to be put in'. It was not until the following year that Messrs. Tredwell's contract was finalised and all the station buildings were ready to receive passengers.

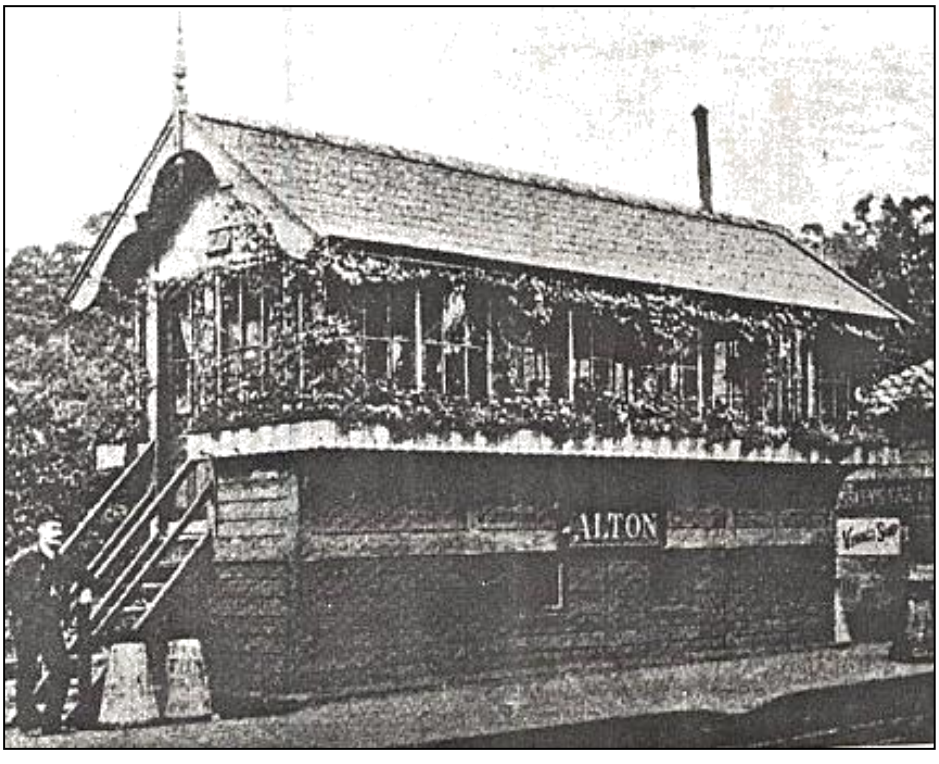
Those at Alton can be seen in the watercolour sketch, done by L.J. Wood for Sir William Salt's topographical collection, probably in the early 1850s. The platforms themselves are very much shorter, too, and have steps down to ground level. Otherwise, it looks deceptively similar to today's scene, at least on the Up. On the Down, goods sidings, weighing stations and many other structures have come and gone in the intervening years.

The station masters' houses, which add so much to the character of Hunt's stations, were by no means a universal feature in the 1840s and '50s. On many other lines in the early years even senior railway staff had to find lodgings for themselves in the neighbourhood. The NSR were repaid for their thoughtfulness; the men who came to work for them stayed in their jobs for many years. They showed good management in other fields too: many companies moved their staff around every two or three years, regardless of their individual preferences; the NSR allowed them to stay at the same station for the whole of their working life if they wished to. In the period 1866 to 1904, there

were only two Senior Clerks, or station masters, at Alton; John Williams, who served there for twenty years, and John Ratcliffe, who served for eighteen. The number of staff at stations varied according to their status, and whether they were in a town or the country. At a country station such as Alton the station master would have had an assistant clerk and two or three porters at his command, as well as a signalman and possibly an officer of the railway police.

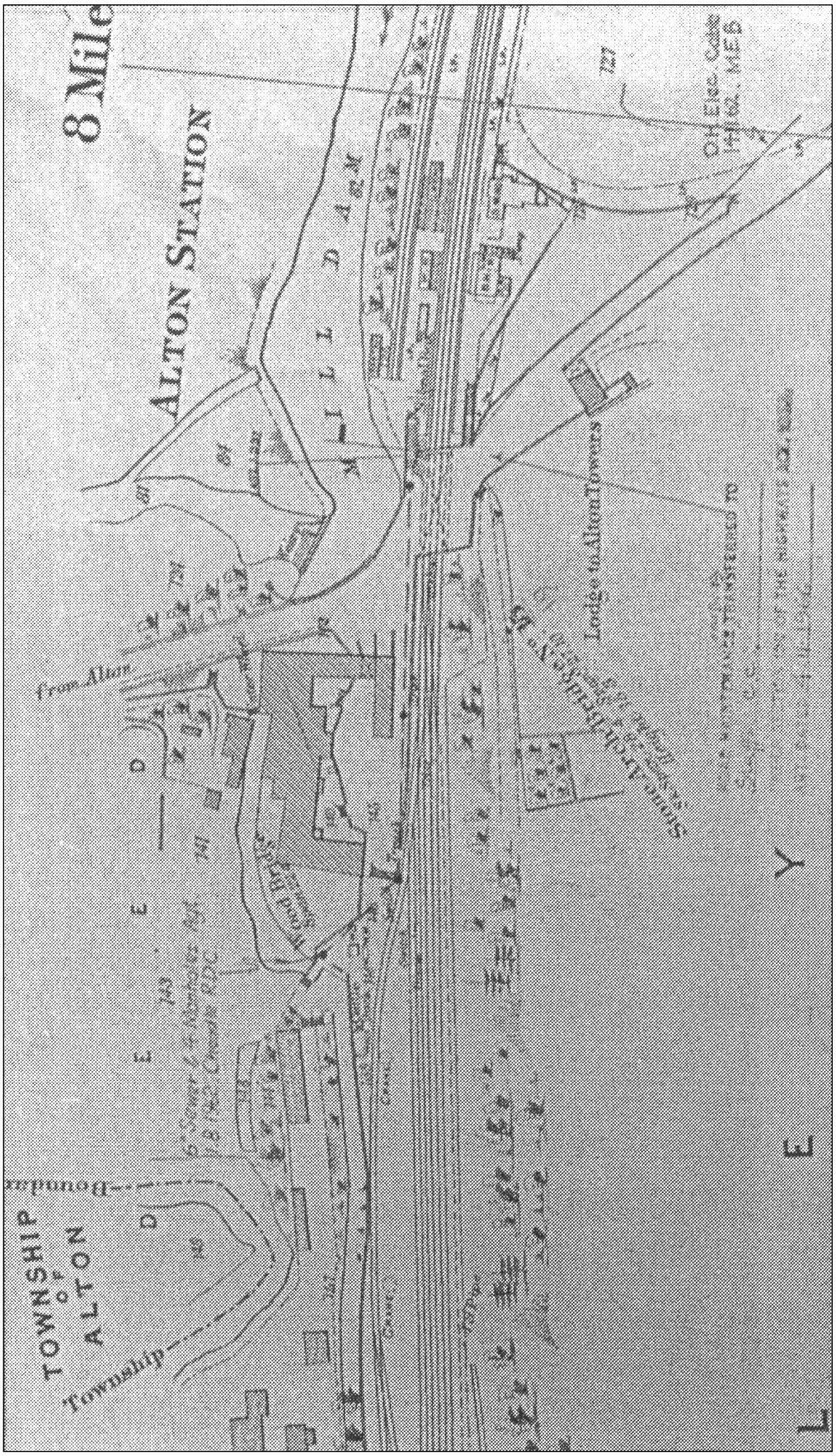


Additions in 1884: the Booking Office and, on the Down platform, the 30-lever signal box.



He was very much the ruler of his small world, particularly while the railways were still regarded with awe by the people who travelled on them. The power and influence that were his to wield if he so wished were vividly described by "Ernest Struggles", himself a station master on the Great Western, who published his memoirs in 1879:-

> There is a considerable amount of importance attached to this public place of meeting - the railway station. The Jones's who don't associate with the Robinsons, meet there. Mr Jones would not like the station master to touch his cap to the Robinsons, and pass him without notice, so he sends the station master a hare. The Rev. Mr Silvertongue is always wanting to take a party somewhere at single fare for the double journey, or some other concession, so he honours the station master by conversing with him, as a equivalent for concessions.
>
> The old lady with her dog would not, on any acount, have the little dear put into that dreadful dungeon of a dog box when she travels, so she sends the station master a basket of plums once in the year.
>
> The farmer would not like his team of horses to be sent back without his oil cake or seed corn, for which he is waiting, in case he is not at home to write out the cheque for the carriage when he sends for the goods, so he sends a couple of rabbits about once in two years.
>
> The grocer and other tradesmen want their claims for delay and damage (by which they hope to extort an additional profit) attended to, so they encourage the station master by standing treat whenever they meet him at the inn; or sending a little box of French plums.
>
> The doctor hopes to be sent for in the case of a railway accident, so he is polite.
> "My Lord" knows he has no right to bully at the railway station, so he brings a brace of pheasants and thus adds Mr Station Master to the train of his servants.
>
> The old egg woman, who goes to market and takes a huge market basket with her, which takes up the room of one passenger, ties up a few primroses and daffodils in a cabbage leaf, and hands them through the pigeonhold when she takes her ticket.
>
> The fish dealer, who is continually making claims for delay to his fish, drops a pair of soles, and when the station master says “How much?” he replies “We will settle for that when you pays me for that claim, Sir!”
> The stockbroker hands his cigar case. In fact all but the magistrates and the shareholders pay homage to the station master.



The station layout in1895. The main station buildings consist of a Booking Hall, Station Master's Office, Ladies' Waiting Room, WC and Porters' room. Behind the signal box on the down platform, beyond the bay platform, is a gents toilet.

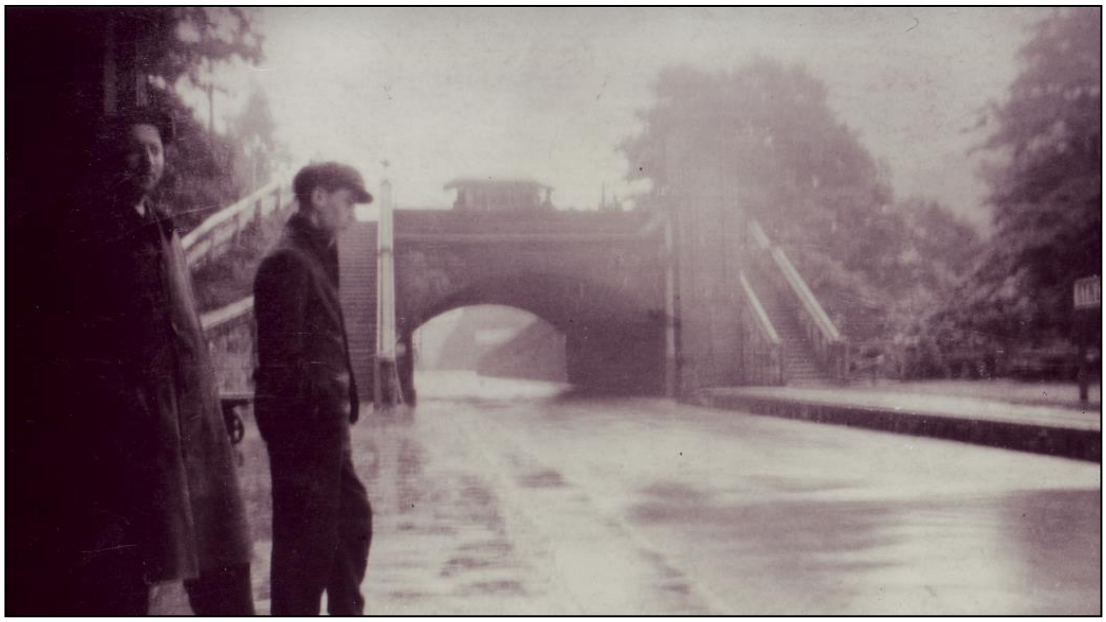
> Alton had to serve a good deal of passenger traffic, consisting largely of visitors to the famous Alton Towers garden, with its temples, pagodas, glass-houses and monoliths to marvel at. As the century progressed the Earls were there less frequently and the number of open days increased. At the same time, the railway company made sure that ever greater numbers of people were transported there to enjoy them. In one year £116 17s 6d was taken in entry tickets which, at a charge of one penny, means over 27,000 visitors.

The Down platform was extended to the bridge and steps built up the road in 1865. A goods hoist was installed at the end of the platform for the guests of Lord Shrewsbury, taken out during WW2. Immediately beyond the road bridge was the goods yard, with sidings installed in 1857 and extended in 1860 and 1874.

On a typical summer's day by the last quarter of the century, the station master would have had to meet and despatch not only the five scheduled trains which ran in each direction, but excursion specials as well, converging from as far away as Derby and Manchester. The NSR directors realised that extra provision would have to be made for all this traffic, and a round of improvements and enlargements was put under way. To begin with, in 1880, only the goods yard and sidings were made larger, but in 1882 a separate booking office was added on to the rear of the waiting room, easily distinguished today by its heavier character. Then, in 1884, the sum of £200 was spent on lengthening the platforms and building a special pathway leading directly from the platform to the road up to the Towers, to avoid a crush of trippers on the steps.

A new signal box was built at the same time, probably the same charming 'swiss cottage' shown bedecked with flowers in a photograph in *The North Staffordshire Album*. After the retirement of Mr Lathom, the signalman who created this display, the gardeners from the Towers are said to have taken on the job of tending it.

Mr Holtham was stationmaster at Alton in the 1920s, shown here with his wife and daughter Nancy in 1925. It was not unknown for the Churnet to burst its banks, water surging down the line to platform height. This happened on 12th July 1927 (below), closing the line to traffic until 13th July. Arthur Holtham, the stationmaster's son, inspects the scene.

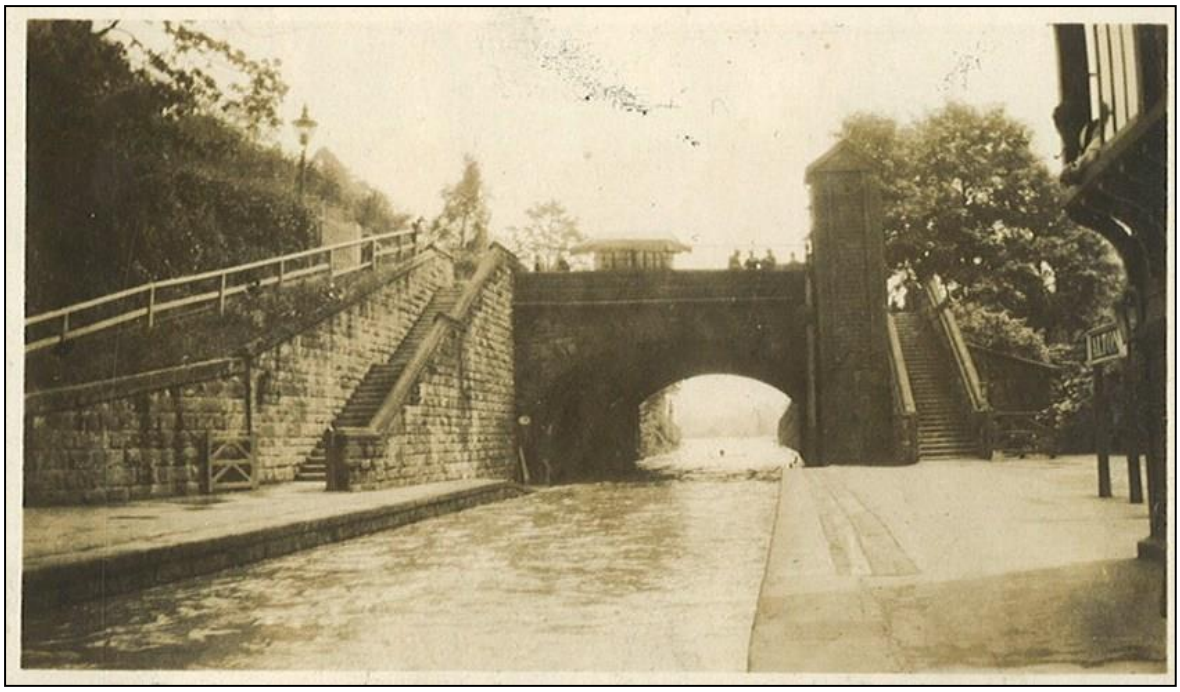


In 1923 two changes occurred, which together resulted in yet more traffic at Alton. The first of these was that the NSR merged with the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, which extended the catchment area for excursion trains considerably; and, more importantly, the Towers itself was sold to a consortium which planned to run it as a full-scale public pleasure park, and as far as they were concerned the more family outings the merrier.

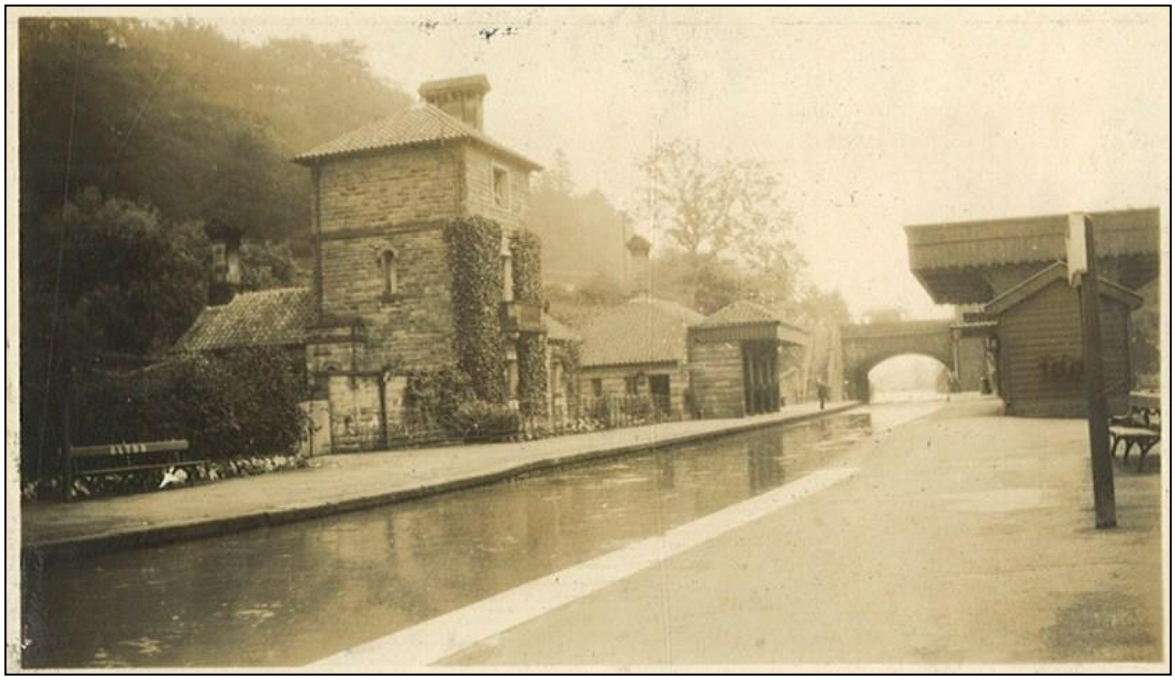
An account of an evening excursion from Stoke in 1930 illustrates the attraction of the gardens, and the success of the liaison between the railway company and consortium. So long was the queue for seats on the first train, and so great the determination of everybody not to be left behind, that in the end nine trains had to run. That visitors came in such numbers no doubt explained the creation in 1937 of The Avenues, three rows of steps and barriers that could be used as holding pens to enable passengers to leave the station for Alton Towers and return in orderly fashion.

During the Second War, the then stationmaster's daughter, Mrs G Jones, remembers 'the special trains taking the troops from the training depot at Alton Towers to battle camp and returning them in due course worn, battered and sometimes bloody.' She also remembered 'that my father's treasured station rockery was a haven for dozens of snakes.' After nationalisation in 1948, the name of Alton station was changed to Alton Towers, a herald of more drastic changes that were to follow. In 1960, passenger services were cut to almost nothing. Four years later, in the wake of Dr Beeching's recommendations for the overhaul of the railway network, even this came to an end, and the line was reduced to single track. Goods traffic continued to pass through Alton for another year, but in 1965 came total closure. All the buildings on the Down were demolished in the early months of 1966. The station master lived on in his house for a year or two, but the waiting room soon began to suffer from neglect, and from the inevitable attentions of vandals.

'The Avenues', holding pens to avoid a crush on the platform of day visitors returning from Alton Towers.



Alton Station railway track flooded in 1927 (photos from Graham Eyre).



New hope came in 1969, when Staffordshire County Council bought sections of the line, with the station buildings, aiming to turn the former into a footpath, while finding new uses, or occupiers, for the latter. It was with this idea in mind that the County Planning Officer approached the Landmark Trust in 1970, having failed to find anyone locally to take on Alton Station, and wishing to save it from the sad fate of many other NSR stations, which have simply been demolished. As a handsome building in a superb setting, with very little chance of survival under any other circumstances, Alton seemed an ideal candidate to be used as a Landmark. The opportunity was not to be missed; plans were drawn up in 1971, and work started as soon as the conveyance was completed the following year.

Flooding in 1961.

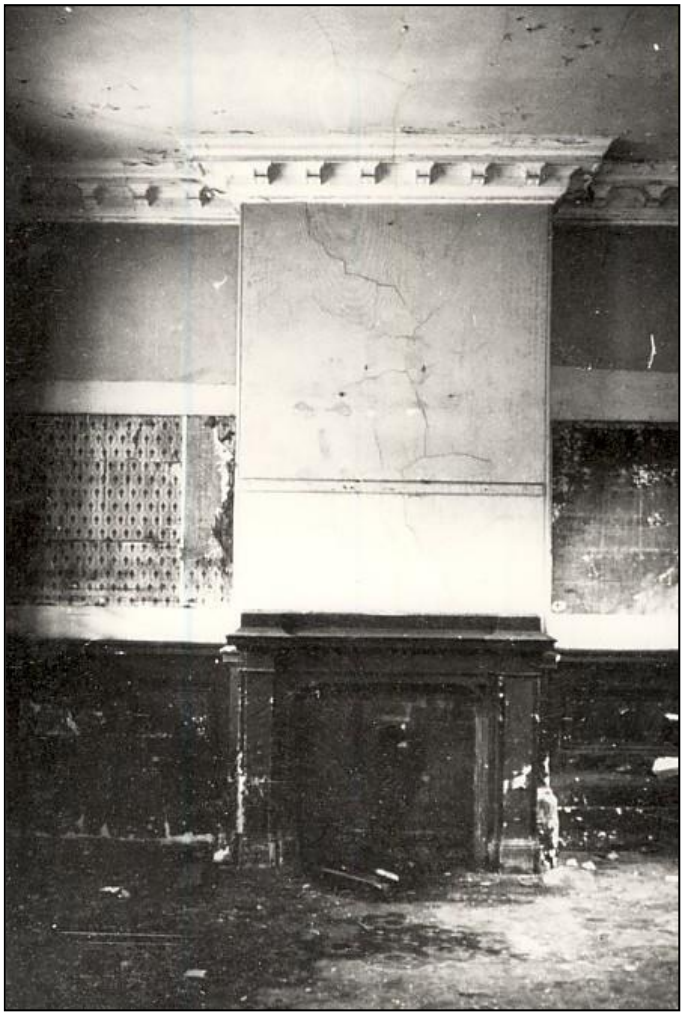
Alton Station in 1962, just after it had been bought by Staffordshire County Council. The passenger services on the line had been reduced to a minimum in 1960.

The last Station Master continued to live in the house after the station had been sold by British Rail.

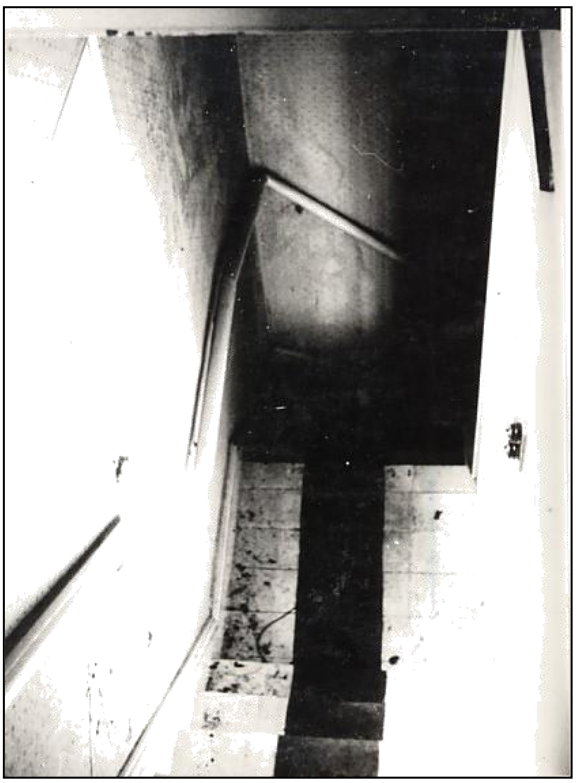
Alton Station as it was when acquired by Landmark in 1971

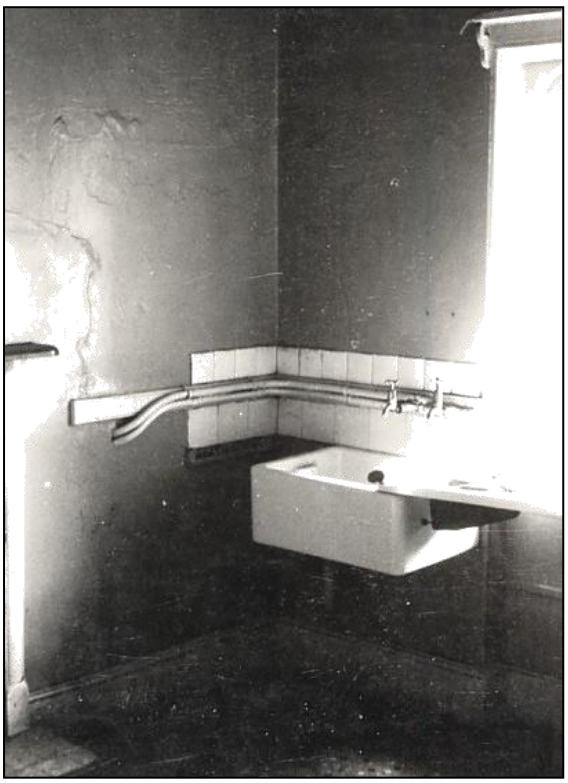
The waiting room in 1971 (left) and the booking office (right).

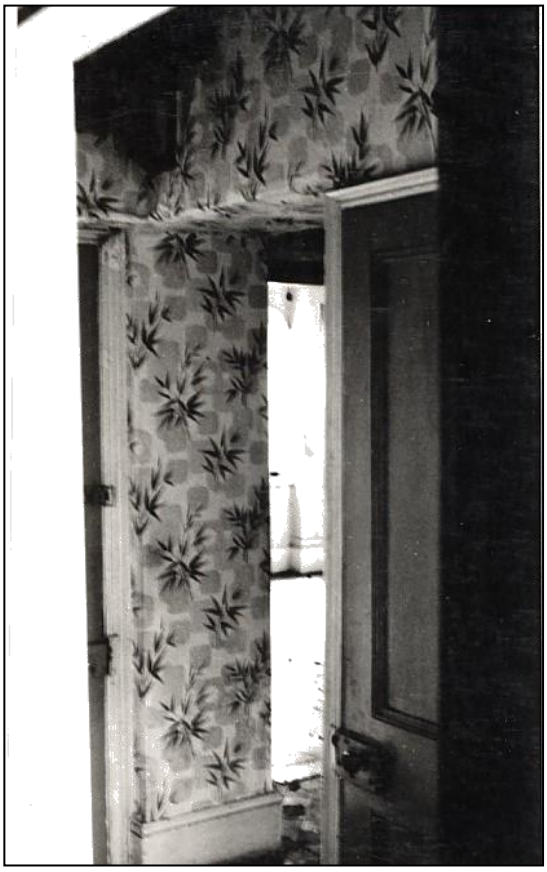
The effects of vandalism and neglect, 1971.



The Station Master's house, 1971







The interior of the Station Master's house had become dilapidated, but structurally the building was sound.

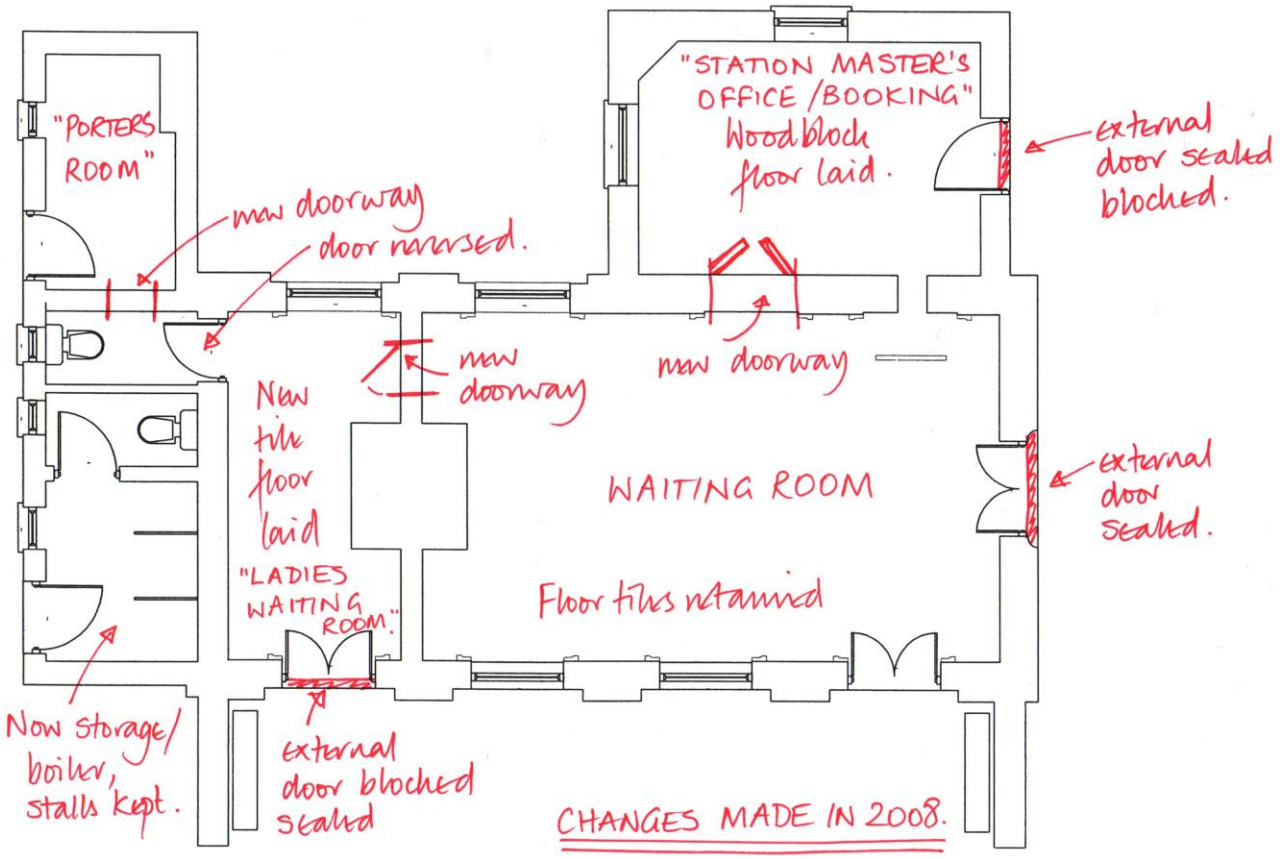
Restoration by the Landmark Trust in 1972

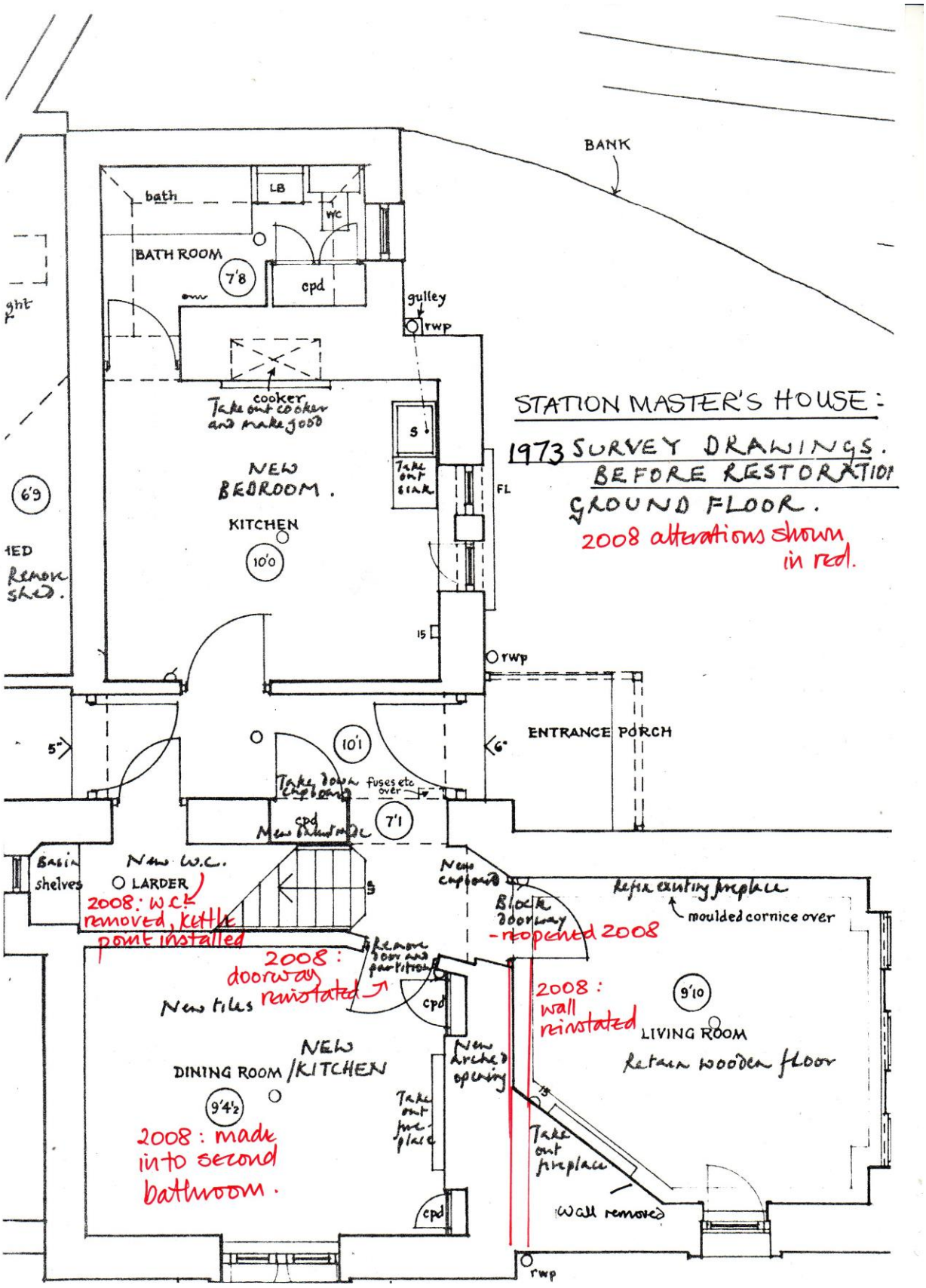
The first plan had been to convert the waiting room into a second dwelling, but then it was decided that to have two houses so close together might cause some inconvenience to both; the waiting room was therefore made sound, repainted in the NSR colours, and left to complete the picture until some other use could be found for it.

The station master's house needed no great amount of work to make it habitable again (see plans for details). The only major change made, in fact, was to turn the kitchen into a third bedroom, and to make a new kitchen and dining room combined. An arch was then pierced between this and the sitting room, to make both rooms larger and lighter. New quarry tiles, considered by the architect to be of a suitably magnificent size for the railway era, were laid in the kitchen. Apart from this, and some minor carpentry, all that remained to be done - and it was important to do no more - was to make good those signs of neglect brought about by the house standing empty for a year or two, by redecoration.

Outside, a shed has been removed and also a fence around the house, which was no longer thought necessary to protect the station master's flower beds from waiting passengers with picking fingers.

We hope that the station, though bereft of its track and its proper purpose, retains its distinct Victorian character of being both serviceable and fanciful at the same time; that the house feels snug as only a station master could make it, but not so luxurious that you would fail in your duty of turning out in the early hours of a January morning to see off the milk train.


"PORTERS ROOM"
new doorway
door narrowed.
"STATION MASTER'S OFFICE / BOOKING"
Wood block floor laid.
external door sealed blocked.
new doorway
new doorway
New tile floor laid
WAITING ROOM
external door sealed.
"LADIES WAITING ROOM."
Floor tiles retained
New storage/ boiler, stalls kept.
external door blocked sealed
CHANGES MADE IN 2008.


BANK
bath
LB
wc
BATH ROOM
7'8
cpd
gulley
rwp
cooker
Take out cooker and make good
STATION MASTER'S HOUSE:
1973 SURVEY DRAWINGS.
BEFORE RESTORATION
GROUND FLOOR.
2008 alterations shown in red.
S
Take out sink
FL
NEW BEDROOM.
KITCHEN
10'0
6'9
15
rwp
ENTRANCE PORCH
5"
6"
10'1
Take down fuses etc over
cpd
7'1
New W.C.
LARDER
Basin shelves
2008: W.C. removed, kettle point installed
New cupboard
Block doorway - reopened 2008
Refix existing fireplace
moulded cornice over
2008: doorway reinstated
New tiles
Remove door and partition
cpd
2008: wall reinstated
9'10
LIVING ROOM
Retain wooden floor
NEW DINING ROOM/KITCHEN
New arched opening
9'4½
Take out fireplace
2008: made into second bathroom.
Take out fireplace
Wall removed
cpd
rwp

2022 Major upgrade and repairs to the Waiting Room floor.

In 2022 we undertook a major upgrade at Alton Station, in part to address customer comments about the inconvenience of having the small main sitting room in the stationmaster's house when kitchen and dining room areas were now in the waiting room. By reassessing the waiting room space and making changes to the furniture, we were able to create a more 'open plan' living space with a comfy seating area around the existing fireplace in the waiting room, while also retaining the kitchen and dining area there. The previous small sitting room in the stationmaster's house was refurnished as a quiet parlour or study.

We also made various adjustments inside and out to improve accessibility to the station for less able people. A new fence and gate were made at our Honeybourne workshop to allow wheelchair uses onto the main platform, and the shower room in the waiting room was converted into a level access shower room.

Repairs to the waiting room floor was a separate task in itself. The floor dates back to the waiting room's construction in 1849. The floor is made of early tiles by Minton & Co of Stoke on Trent. The firm began making these dust-pressed geometric tiles in 1849 and examples were exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851 and soon in widespread use.

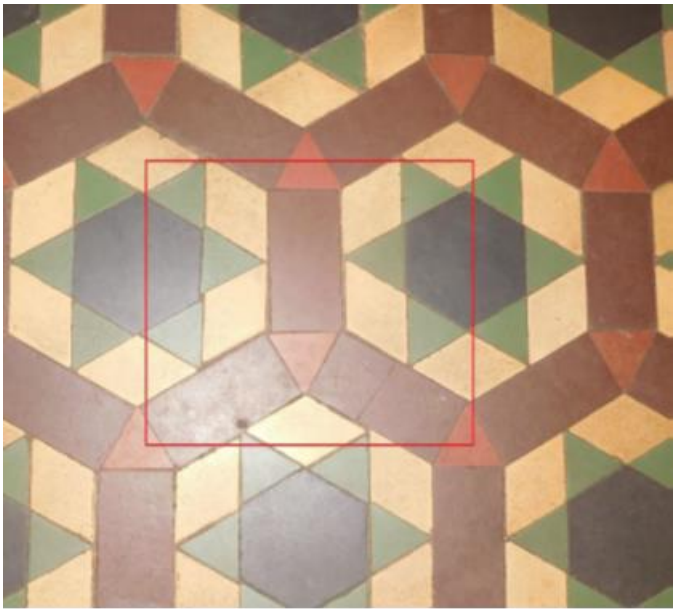
The floor in the Waiting Room is laid in a particularly complex design, of connecting roundels of six pointed stars around central hexagons. Rather than the work of a local layer simply copying one from the manufacturer's catalogue, It was probably designed by the architect. The care taken for this particular setting is apparent in the symmetry of the configuration at the opposing wall edges.

By 2020, the heavier use of this old floor from its incorporation into the Landmark accommodation had begun to result in unacceptable degradation. The damage was mostly caused less by inherent weaknesses in the tiles than problems with the original the underlying substrate. Lesly Durbin of the Jackfield Conservation Studio provided a detailed assessment and methodology statement that identified various issues.

Some of these were signs of age and history and, we felt, were acceptable, even evidence to be valued. For example, slight mistakes in the laying out, especially at the edges of the room, were inevitable and to be accepted as characteristic of such an early floor. Similarly, there was little that could, or needed, to, be done about the loss of surface pattern in areas of heavy passage. In other areas of heavy tread, distinct ‘dishing’ were appearing, where the surface has worn down over the decades, fascinating echoes of how the building was used in the past, of passengers queuing for their tickets or warming themselves round the fire.

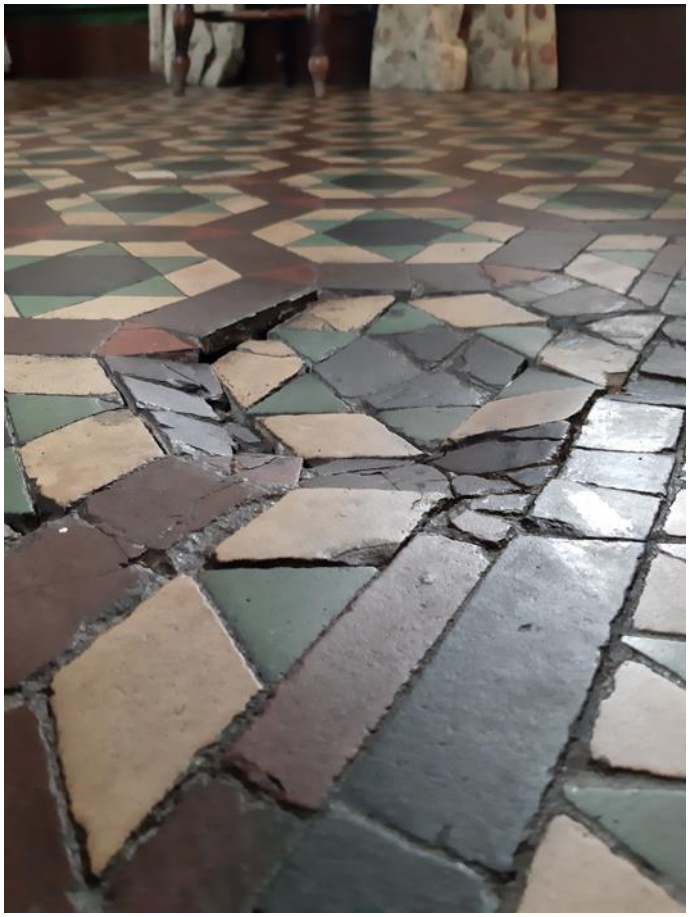
The floor’s history can also be read in other minor flaws. Varying thicknesses of grout was a typical way to disguises slight differences in size of some early geometric tiles. Elsewhere, the edges of some tiles had begun to shatter age and heavy tread with wet shoes over many years. Such weakness is caused by originally inadequate compaction of the coloured clay dust into the moulds, but can be visually distracting.

However, in places such aspects were starting to affect performance and were enough to make us anxious, both threatening the long-term survival of the floor and becoming safety hazards. In many places the tiles had become severely fractured, especially in heavy tread areas from the door to the booking office and on to the fireplace. Tiles do not fracture like this unless there is a problem with the substrate. This seemed to have happened in the waiting room; the floor sounded ‘hollow’ when tapped in such areas and the tiles could also be heard to ‘rattle.’



Varying thickness of grout

Shattered edges.



Damage had become severe in areas of heavy traffic.

When individual tiles were carefully lifted, the substrate was found to be Portland cement, rather than the lime mortar that was the commonest building material of the day. However, lime mortar is generally too soft and friable to act as an adhesive layer and manufacturers at the time recommended Portland cement as a fixative rather than lime in their catalogues.

It is common to find the underlying foundations and screed of such tiled floors to be made up of lime mortar of varying size aggregate, with an adhesive layer of harder Portland cement under the tiles. Over time, this mismatch can become unstable. Pressure from foot fall above and degrading lime sub-structure below can then cause tiles to fracture, in one place so badly that a void beneath was exposed.

Failure of the cement substrate below the tiles.

The most drastic solution would have been to replace the entire floor but this would have meant unacceptable loss of historic fabric. A more conservative approach was agreed, to patch repair or replace only the worst worn areas. This meant replacing around 112 roundels, accounting for about five square metres of the whole. While tiles were lifted with great care to clean and retain as many as possible, even this conservative approach resulted in an order for 2,240 hexagons, triangles, diamonds and slips, plus 10% contingency allowance for unforeseen damage, based on one complete roundel set carefully lifted as a reference. The tiles were made by The Firing Line based at Winkhill Mill in Stoke on Trent who still work with traditional dust-pressed tile techniques and on the same site as the original Minton Hollins works.

Rieveley Ceramics, a specialist floor conservator, carried out the works. With the surrounding tiles around damaged secured tightly in place with tape, the tiles were lifted and then the adhesive cement layer was carefully separated from the repair area to a firm edge, taking care to avoid too much vibration when knocking up the cement layer. With the lime substrate revealed, all loose or damaged material was removed and replaced with lime mortar, well-tamped down. We also took the opportunity to bury some rather unsightly, wall-mounted heating pipes serving the booking office/double bedroom, by lifting the border along the inside wall.

Finally, the whole tiled floor was steam cleaned, using domestic scale pressure only, to avoid too much surface water on the tiles resulting in longer drying times can sometimes result in salt crystallization or even cause the tiles to lift from the substrate. The end result allows the historic floor to be retained in a safe condition, looking almost as good as new while allowing the marks of its past still to be read, and with renewed durability.

The parquet floor in the booking office was also reconditioned.

Landmark Surveyor Stuart Leavy assessing the re-laying technique with Alex of Rieveley Ceramics

Left: Extent of the repairs, mirroring the areas of heaviest traffic in the past. Right: A group visit was organised for Landmark's Patrons to Winkhill Mill of Stoke on Trent to see the traditional production of dust-pressed tiles.

Burying unsightly pipework in the Waiting Room.

Article from The Staffordshire Advertiser, Saturday July 14th 1849

North Staffordshire Railway - Opening of the Churnet Valley Line

The North Staffordshire Railway is now rendered complete in all its main features, by the opening of the Churnet Valley line, with the Willinton Branch, which took place yesterday (Friday) and thus offers the shortest route between Manchester, Derby and Leicester as well as between Liverpool and Derby.

The Churnet Valley line commences at Uttoxeter by a junction with that from Stoke to Burton, nearly opposite Doveridge Hall, and, leaving the town to the left, it passes through a shallow cutting about half a mile long, proceeds up the vale of the Dove to Spath, a distance of two miles, where it enters what was, until recently, the chanel of the Uttoxeter Canal, along which it is continued, with various deviations, as far as Froghall. It passes near Crakemarsh, the seat of Lady Cotton Sheppard and quitting its proximity to the Dove, enters the valley of the Churnet near Woodseat, at which point part of the old canal forms a lake about 400 yards long between the railway and the hall. The line again takes the course of the canal, and passes Rocester, leaving Barrow Hill, the beautiful residence of Mrs White, on an eminence to the right.

Scarcely is the Churnet Valley entered than the country assumes something of the Moorland aspect, rough walls of boulder stones taking the place of the luxuriant hawthorn hedges that have hitherto been seen. The Weaver Hills, of which a distant view was presented at the Uttoxeter Junction, now come more nearly in sight, the effect of their fine undulations being heightened by the broad light and shade which play over their deep green surface.

The line now approaches the estate of the Earl of Shrewsbury, which it enters by an extensive cutting at Crumpwood in the sand stone rock, which on the left hand rises to 20 to 40 feet above the level of the rails. After rounding the rock it runs into that exquisitely beautiful part of the valley which lies between Alton Towers and the village of Alton. The scene immediately becomes perfectly enchanting. A precipitous height, clothed with wood, is crowned by a projecting mass of rock, at an altitude of 80 or 90 feet - the river in some places rushes wildly over a rocky bed, and in others exhibits lengths of placid water - while the valley occasionally contracts and is rendered still narrower in appearance by the thick hanging woods which cover its sides. A considerable curvature of the line, to enable it to occupy as far as possible the course of the old canal, brings a constant succession of fresh objects before the eye; and to excite the imagination to the highest pitch, a conventual looking old mill suggests the ideas of the ancient faith which the noble owner of the estate prefesses, and a castellated building on the top of an almost perpendicular rock, in the style of the Rhenish strongholds, carries the mind back to the feudal period, when on that very spot the old castle of Alton frowned defiance over the whole country. The modern building is, however, to be devoted to the holy purposes of charity,

being intended, we are informed, for an hospital for decayed priests. A chapel and schools, in the same architectural style, adjoin the hospital. Immediately below this point the road from Alton to Farley crosses the line by a handsome bridge of stone, and, that all may be in keeping with surrounding objects, the station is to be built upon one of the angles of the bridge, with a flight of steps down to the platform.

With undiminished beauty the valley continues up to Oakamoor, the railway and river sometimes monopolising the narrow pass, both overhung by the spreading branches of fine old trees. Here and there the valley widens into green meadows, and glimpses are obtained amongst the hills. The old flag tower on one of the most lofty heights may be seen to great advantage in the rear. Skirting the high ground to the right is the Earl's new road from "the Towers" to Oakamoor. The church is most picturesquely situated in front.

The Churnet is now crossed by a viaduct of timber gearing, 120 feet long, and after passing by the extensive works of the Cheadle Brass Company, which tell of busy industry in this romantic wild, the line enters a tunnel of 490 yards through the steep hill up which the Cheadle road runs. This tunnel is an exception to the general rule of persuing a straight course in such works for it is slightly curved. Its formation was attended with some difficulty from the heavy nature and peculiar quality of the ground (the coal strata), and the quantity of water which incessantly poured in. The architectural appearance of the entrances is bold and majestic, and the tunnel is lined throughout with brickwork of considerable thickness.

Leaving Oakamoor the line re-crosses the Churnet by another viaduct of wood gearing, and passes through a fine valley to Froghall, where there is a siding for the lime-stone trade, which is expected to form an important portion of the railway traffic, as it has long done for the canal. To serve the purpose of this traffic there is an inclined plane of some miles in length, from the quarries at Caldon Low to Froghall Wharf, whence the canal is continued without interruption till it falls into the Trent and Mersey at Etruria.

At Froghall a delicate engineering operation has been performed in the county bridge over the Churnet, by adding a second arch to it, causing it to span the railway as well as the river. As we proceed the valley narrows so as barely to permit the passage through it of the river, the canal and the railway, sometimes the course of the river, sometimes the canal, and sometimes both of them, having to be diverted to admit the railway between. Deviations have likewise been made requisite by the land-slips which were encountered in the construction of the works. In one spot there was a slip of nearly fifty yards, carrying with it a portion of a fine wood, and the trees remain growing in their new situation. To overcome difficulties of this description walls of unusual strength had to be constructed, some of which are thirty to fifty feet deep, and fifteen to twenty in thickness, but the passer by seeing only a frontage of a few feet above the ground, would be quite unaware of the mass of stone employed.

Fortunately the stone could be quarried near the spot. Thus the treacherous and slippery nature of the ground which is observable through nearly the whole valley from Alton up to Crowgutter, has been securely guarded against. In some places also the channel of the canal is several feet above the level of the rails, and has to be upheld by huge walls.

Leaving Kingsley on the left, the line reaches Consall flint mills, erected on the Churnet at great cost by the late John Leigh Esq. A portion of this property has been purchased by the company for the better construction of the line, which, owing to the obstacles already mentioned, and the nature of the country generally, is necessarily very much curved, but not in such a way as to impede rapid travelling. The line now enters the estate of William Sneyd Esq. almost one of the most charmingly situated properties that can be imagined. The river, which is here of considerable width, is rendered navigable for a short distance, that it may serve as the canal also. Belmont woods and Basford are seen on the right, and a fine view is obtained of Ashcombe Hall and the villa at Woodlands, on the hills to the left.

Cheddleton is next approached, and a charming picture it presents, the village and the fine old church being seated on a hill in great part surrounded with trees, most of the neighbouring country being still more elevated. The eye has not much time, however, to gaze on this view, for a tunnel is immediately entered, piercing the red sand-stone for 500 yards, at the depth of 48 yards from the summit of the hill. The line emerges on what we believe is called Cheddleton Heath. There is no masonry at either entrance of the tunnel, which, therefore, resemble a natural cavern in the rock, and it is proposed to heighten the illusion by covering the rock with plants indigenous to the neighbourhood.

A very short distance brings us to the conical hills which have so singular an appearance in the neighbourhood of Leek. One of these, not far from the Pottery Waterworks at Wall-Grange, is penetrated by a short tunnel of 70 yards, which is called "The Cone Tunnel". The entrances are faces with brick, with stone cornices etc. This tunnel is on the estate of the late John Davenport Esq. On leaving it there is a good view of the Westwood estate, and also of the town of Leek, at the distance of little more than half a mile.

Leek station is next arrived at; a very neat structure of stone, near the Gas Works, with extensive goods' warehouses, communicating also with the adjacent canal wharf. The Leek and Newcastle road is carried over the railway by what is called a "Sandwich girder bridge" of three openings. Bridges of this kind are constructed of balks of timber, sawed through the middle lengthways, and then an iron plate, inch thick, having been inserted between them, they are fastened together with strong iron bolts. By this means extraordinary strength is secured.

Here the valley of the Churnet is left by the railway, which enters a tunnel of 470 yards long, beneath the hill on the west side of the town. Like the one at

Cheddleton, the tunnel has been cut through the sand-stone rock. It is arched with brick, and has in some places brick side walls. The face of the entrances is the natural rock, which is to be covered with shrubs and creeping plants.

An embankment of considerable length, and 20 to 25 feet high, carries the railway across the valley to the north-west of the town, and over the Churnet, which is no more seen, its source lying eastwood. The scenery, though less lovely than that we have already passed through, is scarcely less interesting, the more mountainous part of the Moorlands being now approached, and the hills wearing an appearance of grandeur, as they present their rocky summits, height above height, and distance beyond distance. The picturesque village of Horton is seen through a defile to the left. On the right "the Roackes" tower in stern majesty, and the long and lofty range of Morridge (originally we think Moor-edge) whose Black-mere is the subject of an interesting legend, as well as many a superstition amongst the Moorlanders, seems to interpose an impassable barrier between Staffordshire and the "High Peak" of the adjacent county, for the road which threads its way for miles up the declivity would appear almost to approach a perpendicular. Some openings among the lesser elevations on the right afford pretty views, amongst which we may mention those in the direction of Rudyard Hall and the site of the old abbey of Dieu Le Creyse, whose remains were disinterred a few years ago.

A sweet bit of something like lake scenery next gratifies the traveller. After passing through a short but deep cutting, the line enters the extensive hollow in which Rudyard Reservoir, a sheet of water about two miles long and nearly a quarter of a mile broad, lies stretched out, covering 400 acres to the depth of 20 or 30 feet. The natural advantages of the situation are so great, that to secure this large store of water for the use of the Trent and Mersey Canal, only a comparatively short dam has been required at the lower end of the hollow. The water is brought by a feeder of three or four miles from near the source of the Dane, amongst the neighbouring hills, being a portion of the torrent which that impetuous river suddenly rolls down after heavy rains. The castellated mansion of Cliffe Park is embosomed in wood on the left of the reservoir. Along the foot of the hill, on the right, the old mail road passes, and between that and the reservoir - sometimes indeed through the water, and sometimes through cuttings in the rocks on its banks, the railway is carried. At the upper end of the reservoir another cutting is passed through, and we come upon the village of Rushton, with its curious old chapel on the hill, supposed to have been founded before Leek Church, and anciently called "The Chapel in the Wilderness".

Below this point the road from Congleton to Leek crosses the line by a bridge, and the summit level having been gained, the line descends an incline of 1 in 130 along an embankment, crossing the Dane by a handsome bridge of one arch of nearly semicircular form and 50 feet span. We are now in the county of Chester and next traverse the cutting at Bosley, which is half a mile long and 20 to 40 feet deep. Another long embankment, 40 heet high, is passed over, (to make room for which several diversions of the Dane have been required) and

the line then crosses that magnificent monument of Telford's ability, the Macclesfield canal, by a girder bridge of 40 feet span. Four great works here intersect the Dane valley, within the short distance of two miles. First we have the old mail road - no mean affair in its day, which still skirts the hillside and crosses the river by a bridge of rather striking appearance; - then the Churnet Valley line, from whose lofty embankment we command the view right and left; - beyond this, to the left, the Macclesfield canal is seen, winding and twisting among the hills, chiefly upon great embankments, and crossing the river by a single arch viaduct of 70 or 80 feet high; and further still is the masterpiece, the Dane Viaduct, with its twenty one elegant and lofty arches, in comparison with which most of the surrounding objects shrink into insignificance. There is, however, one glorious exception. Cloud Hill, whose gigantic form we have long seen on the left, now presents his bold front, and as he looks down on all these proud efforts of genius, tells how small, and frail, and feeble, are the mightiest works of man, when contrasted with those of the great Architect who called the world out of nothing, and holds it in the hollow of his hand.

Another deep cutting is passed through, and our trip terminates at the junction with the Pottery or main line, at North Rode, four miles from Macclesfield, the distance from Uttoxeter being about 27¾ miles.

The principal stations on the Churnet Valley line are Bosley, Rushton, Leek, Basford, Froghall, Oakamoor, Alton, Rocester and Uttoxeter. There are also several level crossings, at which lodges are provided, and nearly all of them at points where the speed of the trains will be slackened for purposes of traffic and where no delay or danger to the road traffic is likely to occur. The stations and lodges, and also the bridges, are handsome structures - the two former being chiefly in the Elizabethan style, and nearly all of stone. Mr Tredwell was the contractor for the line, and appears to have executed his work in a most satisfactory manner.

It will have been noticed that in respect of magnitude, the works upon the line we have been describing, are not very great, as compared with those upon many others, especially those upon the first eleven miles of the Pottery, or main line of the North Staffordshire, after leaving North Rode; the particular interest attaches not to the visible features of the works, but to the general characteristics of the country through which it runs, and to the thousand and one difficulties which have been encountered, to render the wild and tortuous valley of the Churnet a course for railway communication. It is therefore the land-slips and the means for overcoming them, the extensive canal and river diversions, and the giant retaining walls (one of them twenty feet thick) that are the chief objects calculated to arrest the attention, not only of the scientific visitor but also of the casual traveller; and these, together with the loveliness and grandeur of the scenery through which the line passes, must inevitably excite the imagination of everyone who, may select this route from Manchester towards the south. We recommend it both to the busy and those who have leisure; the former will be pleased by what they see on each side, as they hurry

on their journey, and the latter will not only enjoy the beauties of the way, but will find the roads from any station they may stop at, present fresh objects of attraction.

Both the Churnet valley line and the Willington branch were visited last Monday by Captain Wynn, the Government Inspector, who examined all the bridges, etc. and pronounced them safe, preparatory to the opening. J.L.Ricardo Esq., MP, the Chairman, T.Brodrick Esq., one of the directors, G.Bidder Esq., Mr Forsyth, Mr Berkley and Mr Lloyd, engineers, and Mr Greensill, architect, and other officers of the Company, passed over the railway with the Inspector.

From the Minute Book of the Board of Directors of the NSR 1846-51

1848

268 Resolved that the offer of Mr Brassey to erect the Station at Stone according to the design of Mr Hunt for the sum of £5,200 be accepted.

342 Mr Hunt laid before the Board a plan for the building of twenty labourers cottages (at Stoke) as recommended by the engineer. Mr Hunt was in attendance at several meetings at the end of 1848.

From the Minute Book of the Finance Committee 1846-51

1848

7th Nov John Jay, per certificate of Architect (Hunt) and Engineer (G.P. Bidder) for various works, including the Hotel at Stoke.

16th Nov Brassey & Co: November Certificate for Works
Hunt's ditto for Stone Station
Hunt's ditto for stations Stoke to Congleton

John Jay: Hunt's November Certificate for Workshops
Hunt's ditto for Stoke Station

21st Nov Roe & Hanson Gas fittings for Stoke as per Hunt's 8th certificate

1849

23 Jan The following certificates by H.A. Hunt and G.P. Bidder were submitted and pass't for Station works etc.:

Dec 31st Thos. Brassey: Stone to Congleton
Stone to Colwich
Stoke Station

Jan 17th John Jay: Works at Whieldon's Grove
Works at Tutbury
Stoke Station
Workshops at Stoke
Granary at Stoke

10 Apr Price & Leishman (Uttoxeter branch) for Station buildings as per Hunt's 7th certificate

21st Nov George Merrit for Stations on Willington Branch per Mr Hunt's 1st certificate

J & S Tredwell for Stations on Churnet line per Mr Hunt's 3rd certificate.

A number of certificates follow on from this, not actually given as Hunt's, but which can be assumed to be his from the fact that they are all consecutive from the one already quoted.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Many of these books are in the bookshelf)

The Buildings of England: Staffordshire, Nikolaus Pevsner 1974

Victorian Stations, Gordon Biddle 1973

An Introduction to Railway Architecture, Christian Barman 1950

Early British Railways, Christian Barman 1950

Some Architectural Writers of the 19th century, N. Pevsner 1972

Pugin, Phoebe Stanton 1971

The North Staffordshire Railway, Manifold 1952

The North Staffordshire Railway, R. Christiansen & R.W. Miller 1971

The North Staffordshire Album, George Dow 1970

*The Churnet Valley Rail*way, R. Keys & the NSR Society 1974

The Industrial Archaeology of Staffordshire, R. Sherlock 1976

Visiting Leek, H. Bode 1974

The Sugdens of Leek, G.A. Lovenbury 1975

Ernest Struggles, E. Simmons 1879 (Reissued by J. Simmons 1974 as *Memoirs of a Station Master*)

Noted Breweries of Great Britain & Ireland, Alfred Barnard 1889-91

The Staffordshire Advertiser, The Builder & The Illustrated London News

Country Life

Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers Vol 99 Hunt's Obituary

North Staffordshire Railway Records at the Public Record Office, Kew, and in the County Record Office, Stafford.

Information on Sugden was kindly given, prior to publication of his own work, by Christopher Wakeling of Keele University. Information on the restoration of Alton Station was kindly given by the architect, Mr Roderick Gradidge.