

Chaddesden Sidings

Neil Johnson came to live in Chaddesden from Northumberland in the winter of 1964-65 just as he entered his teens. His uncle, a Scot had married a Derby lass in wartime. He loves Derbyshire and twice lived in Cherry Tree Hill – with a time living in Smalley in between – and he's written frequently for the Derby Evening Telegraph. He was a Public Affairs Manager for British Rail at the Tech Centre on London Road, Derby and has daughters living in both Crewton and Spondon. He is a frequent visitor to Derby and we are indebted to him for the articles he has sent our group.

Chadd Sidings

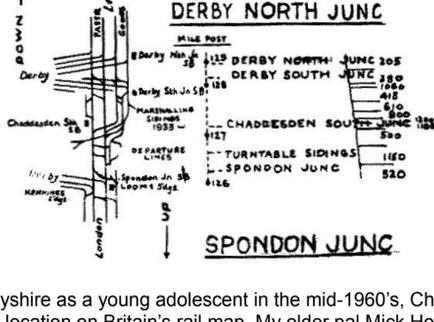
Chaddesden historically has been famous and celebrated for many things over the years: St Mary's church, the Wilmot family, the long lost Chaddesden Hall and the old village with its almshouses, the former canal and vanished farms, its old flooding brook and parkland, plus open countryside on its doorstep – indeed many things of note. Additionally, it has boasted a host of characters and notable individuals ranging from the pillars of society with the great and good on one hand to the odd murderer and total vagabond on the other.

Perhaps though, for many, many people throughout the UK the name of Chaddesden became known for an entirely different reason. When the Railways first made an impression on England's green and pleasant land replacing both horse power and canals – (which Chaddesden already boasted); nearby Derby was establishing itself as a railway town with virtually no equal. Others throughout our island race will no doubt cite Crewe and Swindon or even Barassie but to a Mercian and an East Midlander, Derby is THE town of the Rail



Chaddesden South Junction signal box

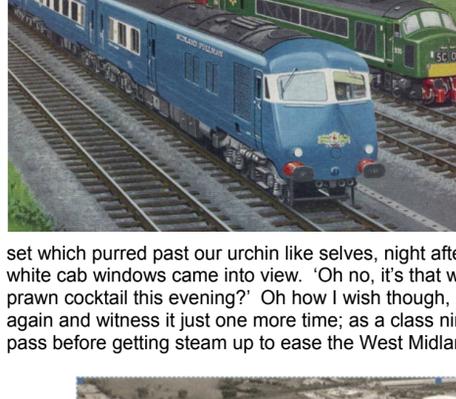
Lower Chaddesden, flanking the river Derwent lies on the bed of a shallow valley with a relatively flat and even contour, which is why in recent decades the extraction of gravel from its reaches has seen some considerable activity. It was a prime site and natural choice for those wishing to lay down wooden sleepers and metal rails, and so became known to railwaymen far and wide simply as Chadd sidings. From Cornwall to Carmarthen to Caithness, its importance as rail junction for the transfer and exchange of goods became celebrated and in doing so the Midland Railway Company rose as the leading railway conglomerate in the area. The Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway, Midland Counties and North Midland Railways were the three original organisations which merged to become 'The Midland' and in doing so became the dominant force for transport in the area. Although the Great Northern did penetrate the region and established a station at Friargate, it was the Midland at Derby with its workshops and nearby Chaddesden sidings that were about to dominate rail transport in the region for the oncoming century and beyond.



When I first came to Derbyshire as a young adolescent in the mid-1960's, Chaddesden Sidings was still an important strategic location on Britain's rail map. My older pal Mick Horobin, (now of many notations) lived on the eastern edge of Chaddesden in what was then the last house by the fields on Nottingham Road as Cherry Tree Hill and Chaddesden met Spondon at Raynesway. Mick was an employee of Derby Parks department, working as a gardener and horticulturist of some note at the now lost greenhouses at Nottingham Road Cemetery. In his working hours he had splendid views from the elevated ground down to the sidings on their western approach. As an avid rail-fan he often took his binoculars to work and scanned the scene when the chief foreman was not looking.

In summer holidays I would often sneak in to his place of employment on the pretext of delivering a forgotten lunchbox or the like and ask for an update on the day's activity, particularly if a number of steam locos had been in evidence. These were the changeover years from steam power to diesel and electric, also when Dr Beeching's name was coming to prominence both nationally and locally – he cynically robbed Derby Friargate of its passenger service and threatened the same for Borrowash and Draycott. Little did we all know then that within a few short years Chadd's extensive sidings too would be obliterated from the map. Our favourite location for spotting however was at the other end of the sidings where the freight lines merged at the Spondon side of the Raynesway Bridge. Night after night a small group of us who were trained mad sheltered under the canopy of the overhead road bridge to watch the trains file past. Three elderly tank locomotives stood forlorn in the last few sidings belonging to Chaddesden, they were there for about three winters awaiting their ultimate fate of being turned into razor blades. We wrongly assumed they were destined for Looms scrapyard like so many other rail vehicles and locos – however we were totally wrong and one day they set off to meet the cutters torch – goodness knows where, but it wasn't locally. We obviously enjoyed the summer evenings and light nights but the winter also drew us towards the sidings. In the winter of '66 it was very cold for a prolonged spell and the canal which flanked the length of the sidings froze brick hard; we often took an amble along its slippery path in those icy weeks and two of our merry band, Mick & Willy walked the entire length of its cold glazed surface from our second home at Raynesway, right into Derby itself. Even on dull Sunday afternoons the Sidings had the capacity to draw like a magnet after the Sunday roast and listening to the Navy Lark or Al Read. Sundays were quiet but just occasionally a 'foreign' loco would appear – i.e. one not shedded at Derby, Nottingham, Burton or elsewhere locally.

On every weekday evening around 8pm the Midland Pullman passed our spotting location on its return from St Pancras on the way back to Manchester Central station (now the G-Mex arena). It was the glamour train of the era and had been introduced at the beginning of the decade to whisk northern business men into 'the Smoke' and back within a working day. It was unusual in that, as a crack passenger express, it did not take the main curve from Raynesway towards Derby past Wilmorton and over the river Derwent but traversed the sidings route, thereby missing out a stop at Derby completely – its only station call being Leicester. Obviously, the powers of the day thought there was no 'brass' in Derby even though the town boasted quite a few little engineering concerns like International Combustion and Rolls-Royce!! Most evenings we would gaze on the vision of contemporary opulence as it glided past our rendezvous point watching Manc mandarins tucking into sizzling platters on the Formica tables illuminated by tiny vanity lamps.



The 60's Pullman was a blue and white diesel set which purred past our urchin like selves, night after night – we would groan as its blue nose and white cab windows came into view. 'Oh no, it's that wreck again' we would chorus, 'who's having the prawn cocktail this evening?' Oh how I wish though, I could turn the clock back nearly half a century again and witness it just one more time; as a class nine 2-10-0 standard on an adjacent line lets it pass before getting steam up to ease the West Midlands fish train on its way to Brum.



The Wyvern Retail Park under construction in the early 1990s on the site of Chaddesden Sidings.

Little remains of the sidings former existence these days; the fireplace showroom which still stands next to the A52 was originally a workshop and when I joined the rail industry at the end of the 60's, I worked with a lad from Leicester who had originally been transferred to work there. He had employed the people at the sidings he had worked with, but thought the facilities primitive despite the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act.

In those days, steam loco crews and goods guards in particular had little in the way of working comforts. Most goods guards that occupied the obligatory rough riding box at the rear of each and every freight train were singularly blessed with spartan conditions. Nearly all Guards vans featured a pot-bellied stove which was essential from November to April but the seating was often like a rustic wooden church pew. Try sitting on that for a twelve-hour shift when your train's been delayed and you're in charge. The other big quandary was where to go to the loo – no polished Armitage – Shanks porcelain bowls and clean towels were provided for mere Company servants – not even a tin zunder!

It was the norm to pee in a bottle and dispose of the contents when in motion! Lengthy discussions complicated matters, particularly when the train and its staff were in motion! Possible dismissal was the penalty if anyone was caught peeing off the platform of a Guards Van – so crossed legs and innovation were the order of the day.

One damp Sunday afternoon sticks in my memory for two very good reasons, I was fast approaching sixteen and for the nearly three year span that I had resided in the East Midlands I had spent at least four out of every seven weekly evenings watching trains enter and depart the sidings. Homework got allocated a night if it was lucky, Friday eve was Scouts and I had also acquired a girlfriend which was a bigger draw than algebra; Saturdays were purely for rail excursions and neither Derbyshire Cricket Club or Newcastle United were at the top of their game at that time (one was too far away to go back to watch anyway and the other never performed when I visited!). So, I stuck to my train viewing but in my heart, I knew my romance with the rails was nearly over; using my new centrally based home in England's middle county as a base, I had visited just about everywhere on Britain's diminishing rail map where steam locos had had their final flight. Barely a weekend had passed without a final, final trip, and still virtually every eve, the call of Chadd sidings too had been hard to resist. 1968 was the last year of British mainline steam and as the countdown approached barely a wisp of smoke could be located anywhere near Turntable Sidings. On the Sunday recalled, Mick had popped round just as the Clitheroe Kid finished; he had suggested an amble down by the tracks and it seemed a better proposition than helping clean the Yorkshire pudding tray. We had spent those last three years jointly at virtually every rail venue imaginable, often by invitation or with a permit to visit but also under the guise of trespass on many occasions. I had been on running lines, in motive power depots, in steam loco cabs, you name it! – And it was the norm to be welcomed if you were polite and had mixed guile with awareness and due respect. It didn't mean however like other spotters we had never been told to 'bugger off'. As we stumbled along the path towards five Arches Bridge deep in conversation, our path was blocked by a tall gabardine with a sour face and a notebook. "Don't you know this is railway property and you are trespassing?" said the Mackintosh – "names and addresses please". We were dumbfounded – years of trespass without a hint of trouble and we had been undone in our own back yard simply by walking along a path that we didn't even know had restricted access.

We returned along the old canal towpath by the railway, keeping an eye out, just in case James Brindley leapt out of the bushes to question our waterway lineage. As we did so I picked up a small parcel of newspaper neatly tied with string – "what is it?" I questioned Mick. "Sling it away" came the reply, "it's a Guard's parcel – sssh – you know what – rinse your hands in the canal quick". He was too right, it smelled decidedly nasty. Now I knew what the guards had to resort to!

Some weeks later the raincoat turned up at our door on a Friday evening when it was literally slinging it down cats and dogs – the face was still sour, but a hot cup of tea provided by my mother cracked the porcelain. I stood silently in my Scout uniform, complete with patrol leader's stripes – and awaited my fate. "Well, considering the uniform your wearing and contrite manner – I've every reason to believe you're not a bad lad and will let you off with a caution – your older mate may not be so lucky." (He was)

I thought "Well, it's over anyway mate – I've seen the lot and there's nowt left – the one thing I won't do is ever join the railway, it's dirty, crumbling and finished and I'm going to be a Mod in the Space age."

From that moment on, Chaddesden sidings lost its golden glow for me – when I'm back on the Wyvern though, revisiting Derby and eating a burger or buying brake fluid from Stanfords as Aspirin from Boots, my mind tends to slip and I can hear the soft rhythmic beat of a Staffer Class Five as the driver opens the regulator and eases a loaded coal train from the Notts & Derby coalfield on towards the southern counties.

Oh dear, he's just straight through Toys'R'Us obliterating the silly, politically never right, 21st century and returning to a more stable sensible era. (Oh, I wish).

Neil Johnson

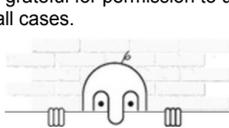
NB -as the sixties gave way to the seventies, I joined the railway working for the British Railways Board (temporarily, whilst I searched for another job) – I received a long service award from British Rail Research in Derby, before I retired!

PS. Why did the Space Age never arrive – both Dan Dare & Harold Wilson promised it.



Ian Hunt in November 73

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Readers' Comments

I know what you mean. I was born in Chadd in 1939 and knew Chadd Sidings very well. We used to go down Chequers Lane to the Meadows then walk up the Sidings. My grandad and my dad lived in Highfield Cottages, and they both worked as shunter drivers on the sidings in the '30/40s.

Very happy days; sad to see it all gone.

Chris Hayes

I too spent many hours down at the siding during the 50s, wintertime was my favourite, sparks everywhere.

J P

OThank you for the trip down memory lane. I was born in Albert Rd. in1941. I can remember my job of picking the catapillars from our neighbour's cabbages and looking down on the railway sidings with the noise of steam and shunting. We were taken up the hill from Albert road along a road parallel to the Nottingham/Derby Rd, to a bridge where we waved to the troop train taking our Dad back to the War!

Tony Lynch

Having lived off Highfield Lane until I got married I spent hours and hours sitting on the fence to the side of the Highfield Lane entrance.

My uncle worked there in the 60 / 70s and lived in the nearby railway cottages until his death in 1987.

It seemed so strange when the shunting ceased as it all became so eerily quiet.

Remember well the Dean family who lived in the small cottage near to the Engine shed.

Adventures in "miles" of air raid tunnels underneath, which to a child was always "haunted with ghosts around every corner"

Steve

I lived in the cottages from 1968-1973, then moved back in 1974. My parents lived there from 1968-1996, my dad worked as a goods guard, my son lived there from 1974-2014, my brothere-in-law still lives there.

Sonia Cresswell

I remember Mick Horobin too, I probably knew you too Neil. I used to be part of a bunch from the Trenton Green area that used to go down Raynesway but usually were towards Spondon station sitting on the gate of the crossing by Albert Looms' scrapyard. If I recall rightly Nyasaland was cut up in there, Bechuanaland and Fearless too? Good times, good times, miss it. Mucky old steam seemed better than stuffed steam somehow, tho I am always glad to turn out for a steam special en route to Penzance.

My brother and I lying in bed with the windows open on a summer's evening listening to the workings of Chadd Sidings and to paraphrase H G wells "the sound trains, ringing, rumbling, softened almost into melody by the distance" (from War of the Worlds) always takes me back to those endless summer holidays.

David Twigg

Used to have relatives lived on Evelyn Grove. Remember seeing the Midland Pullman passing through in the morning avoiding Derby via Chadd sidings. Also the continual sound of the shunters up and down the yard. It seemed to be the 12xxx locos mainly at this time. The odd steam hauled freight would still appear from the north. Also the poignant squealing sound of condemned stock being taken to the carriage and wagon works after standing in chadd yard for ages. You could still hear the squeal as it rolled onto the Five Arches bridge. happy days.

Skiddaw

We lived in Walpole Street and Billy Deachar, our next door neighbour, was signalman at Chadd Sidings. Although we used to prefer the 5 Arches as a viewing and spotting area we had to approach via the Chequers Lane Tunnel and passed the BR Cricket Ground on the way. Swimming in the river and all the other things to do during the Summer holidays. We also used to walk the canal side to Chadd Sidings behind the Nottingham Road Cemetery. I will never forget the sight of the large numbers of steam engines of all kinds in lines at the sidings awaiting delivery to the scrap yards. When we could get hold of the fog warning detenators we used to hit them with a hammer as a dangerous prank with a very loud bang. I was fortunate enough to complete my apprenticeship at the Carriage and Wagon and being so close watched the demise of steam in the railway town of Derby.

Tim Sharratt

My family on my dad's side, the Baileys, lived at 35 Walpole Street from 1928 and the Margerrisons, my maternal grandmother's family, lived at the bottom of the hill on the other side of the road from before that. Harry Bailey was my grandfather and his sons Bill, Sid and Alan (my dad) had many tales about battles across the canal and other such adventures.

Andrew Bailey

My late father-in-law, Charles Abrahart, who lived in Chapel Lane, Chaddesden was Foreman at the Sidings, before being moved to St. Mary's Wharf as Inspector. I believe he began his career as a porter at Derby Station aged 15. He passed away in February 1972 aged 65, after 3 or 4 years of illness. My late husband Keith Abrahart worked for a private wagon repairing company at the sidings until 1958, when 6 montha after our marriage he was made redundant. Fortunately he obtained work straight away at the Loco Works, No 1 shop. It's true about the noise of shunting at the sidings. I think wherever you lived in Chadd, if the wind was in the right direction you could hear it. On New Years Eve we used to stand outside and listen to the steam engine whistles at midnight. Happy days!

Janet Abrahart

I lived on Highfield Lane near the end, Highfield House was across the lane. I was only about 2 years old when we moved from Lancashire.

We lived there until 1951 when we moved back to Lancashire. My best pal was Kenneth Lines, he lived at 30 Highfield Cottages. We used to go down to the sidings watching the workers run after the trucks with a wooden pole. They used it to apply the brakes. Remember once getting a lift on one of the shunting engines. The driver let us pull on the regulator. They took us right to Derby and back. At the end of Highfield Lane there was concrete pad and a brick shed for the men who operated the Barrage Balloon. My pal had wonderful childhood. After the war we had an ex RAF rubber dinghy. We played in that often.

In the Summer we would walk along the canal path to Meadow Lane and make our way through the fields to the River Derwent to swim. We also went camping out there in our ex army tent. Wonderful years.

I went back a few years ago. I was so disappointed. The shunting siding had gone, the canal had gone, all around the back of our house where the market garden use to be was all built over with new houses

I decided I would never return.

Desmond Noon