

CHADDESSEN'S FIVE FORGOTTEN RAILWAY COTTAGES

In early 1993 Highfield Cottages at the bottom of Highfield Lane, Chaddesden, were incorporated into what was then Derby City Council's latest Conservation Area, in recognition of the contribution they made to the local built environment. The cottages, arranged in two parallel terraces, and consecutively numbered from 1 to 30 date back to the 1860s and were originally constructed by the Midland Railway Company to house its workers (Fig. 1). However, did you know that five other houses in the vicinity, now long since demolished, once continued the sequence? They were number 31 (a single house) and numbers 32 to 35 (a terrace of four properties).

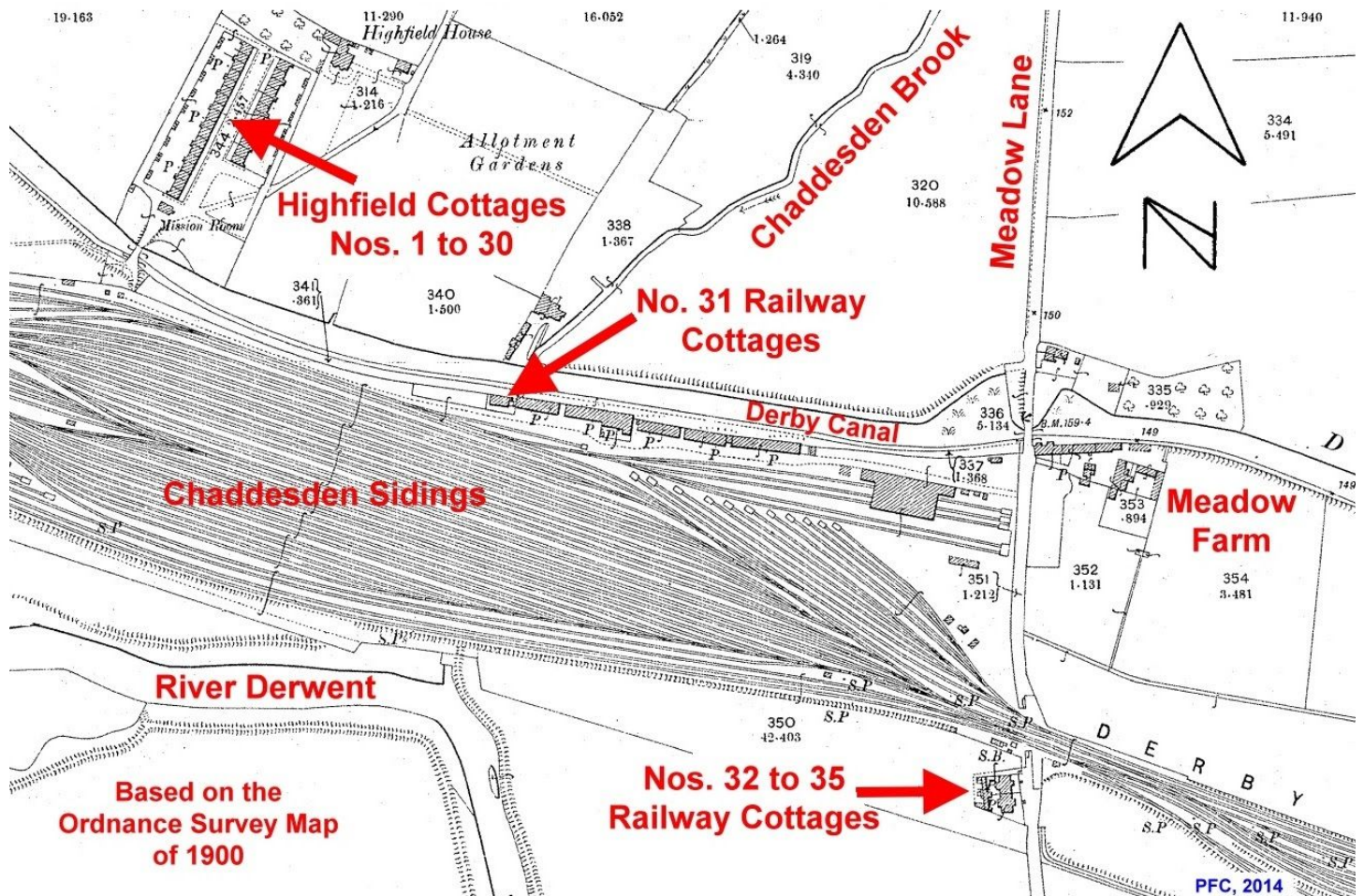


Fig. 1: Railway Cottages, Chaddesden, Derbyshire.

Largely forgotten by most people these five houses were also owned by the railway company and trying to track down details of their history is challenging to say the very least, since they were given a bewildering array of alternative addresses. For example, at different points in time they were variously referred to as *Sidings Cottages*, *Railway Cottages*, *Highfield Cottages*, *Meadow Lane Cottages* and *Southend Cottages*. This latter title was perhaps most frequently used in the church's parish registers and whilst it describes quite correctly the geographical area of the village in which these houses were situated, the address was apparently actually derived from the name of the adjacent railway signal-box, *Chaddesden South Junction*.

The single property, usually referred to as number 31 and sometimes known as *Stables Cottage* (Grid Ref: SK 3754 3593), was sandwiched in-between the Derby Canal and Chaddesden Sidings, its name reflecting the fact that the horses which formerly did much of the shunting work at the sidings were once accommodated in linear blocks of stables immediately to the east. Indeed, at the time of the 1881 Census this particular cottage was home to John Bailey, whose occupation was that of a 'Railway Horse Keeper'. John, his wife Ruth, and their two young daughters, had only recently moved to Chaddesden from Masborough near Rotherham in Yorkshire.

Just how important the horses once were at Chaddesden Sidings is demonstrated by the following facts and figures taken from a Victorian article on railway management [Note 1]. In 1873 the sidings here covered an area of some fifty acres, with the total length of track being in the region of seventeen miles; and in that year a total of one million and eighteen thousand wagons, or three thousand two hundred wagons per working day passed through the sidings. The receiving sidings apparently held about one thousand wagons, and the marshalling sidings upwards of three thousand, and five trains could be marshalled and sorted at the same time. There were ten receiving sidings, converging into one neck, from which thirty-five sidings branched off. Through these eleven trains had been passed per hour, averaging from thirty-five to forty wagons each. The shunting time varied from three and a half minutes to four and a half minutes per train. When a train arrived at one of the ten receiving sidings, the engine immediately ran forward, and a shunting engine went to the back of the train to push it towards the neck. Horses were in readiness to take each wagon forward, the man calling out to the pointsman which siding it was destined for. At Chaddesden at this period in time there were about ninety horses and six shunting engines.

I can recall walking past *Stables Cottage* (later known as the *White House*) sometime in 1970 or 1971. It intrigued me because when this simple gable-ended cottage was approached from along what remained of the old canal tow-path, that part of the path closest to the east end of the house passed over a very short length of Chaddesden Brook, which then disappeared completely underneath the sidings, eventually re-emerging to empty into the River Derwent some 175 yards further downstream.

The approach to the terrace of four properties (numbers 32 to 35) on Meadow Lane was even more memorable and quite unlike anything else in Chaddesden. By going over the hump-back canal bridge and passing by Meadow Farm to the east and the Railway Wagon Repair Shed to the west, pedestrians and cyclists could gain access to the cottages by using the subway which ran underneath the railway tracks, whilst the farmer wanting to get his tractor to fields down by the River Derwent had to resort to the level-crossing immediately to the east of the subway, which was controlled by the staff in the Chaddesden South Junction signal-box (Fig. 2).

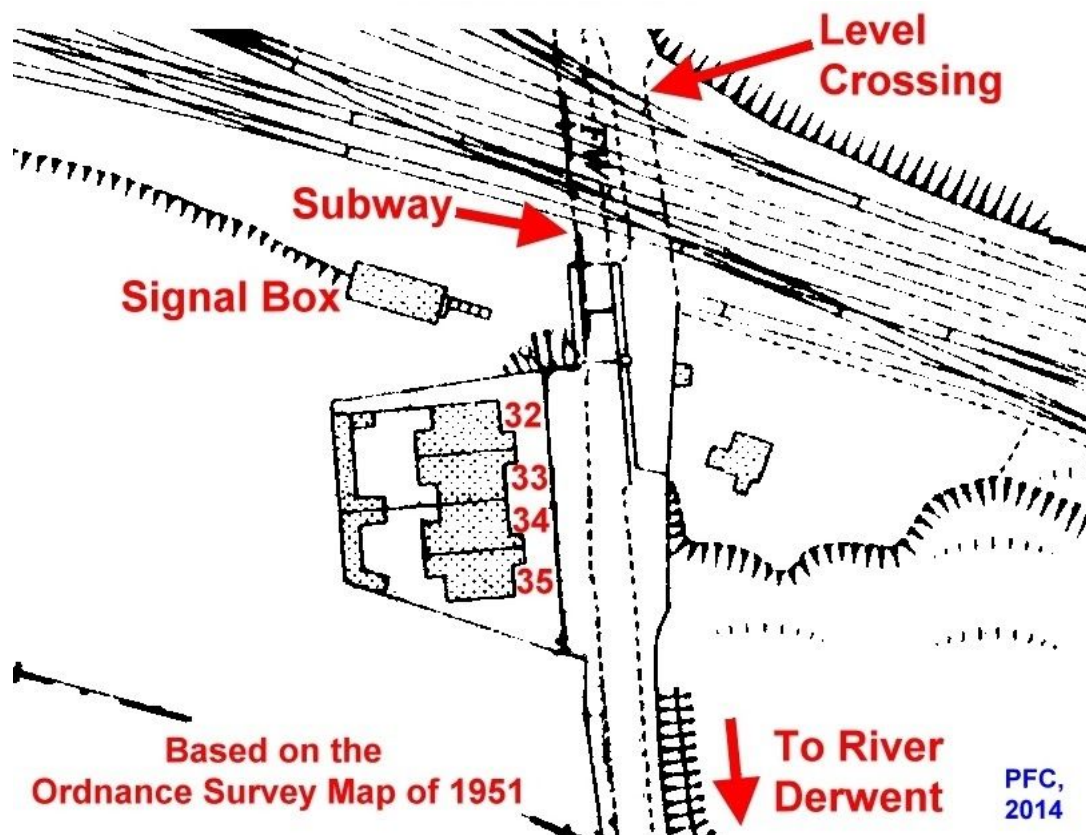


Fig. 2: Railway Cottages, Meadow Lane, Chaddesden.

The four houses themselves were of red brick with slate roofs and stood slightly elevated above the level of Meadow Lane (which was actually just a rough track hereabouts), a fact which meant that their occupants had to climb up a few steps to reach them. From an aerial photograph of the 1950s it is obvious that the little terrace had a hipped roof, rather like the adjacent signal-box, a photograph of which can be seen elsewhere on the Historical Group's website [Note 2].

Seemingly numbers 32 to 35 (Grid Ref: SK 3785 3570) were most likely built in the early 1860s, a few years before the main group of thirty Highfield Cottages. Old Ordnance Survey maps show each pair of houses sharing a water-pump in their backyards, however, later improvements meant that mains water and gas were eventually laid on, but apparently not electricity, for even as late as the 1950s the houses were still lit by gas-light. Just inside the back door of each property was the kitchen, equipped with a range and a low sink with a solitary cold-water tap. The four houses were also provided with out-buildings at the rear of the properties and from what I have been told these may once have included pig-styes, although later residents apparently have no recollection of them [Note 3]. In years gone by, many Chaddesden families kept their own pig which would be well fed on scraps of food and left-overs and, once it had grown to the required size, could be swiftly and un sentimentally converted into a plentiful supply of pork. The occupants of the cottages also had access to garden ground adjoining their properties.

When I was a small child, my mother occasionally took me down Meadow Lane as far as the subway where I could climb on the level-crossing gate to watch the diesel shunting trains passing by. Beyond the subway and the four railway cottages Meadow Lane meandered for a further 450 yards or so in a southerly direction right down to the River Derwent. In the days before Derby expanded further to the east and engulfed Chaddesden this must have been an idyllic spot, and was no doubt especially appreciated by the children who lived in the cottages since they could play in the fields, go fishing, or watch the trains as they crossed over the river on their way from Derby to Nottingham and beyond. More adventurous youngsters who wanted to leave Chaddesden in order to explore the delights of, say, Elvaston Castle, might attempt to access the far bank of the River Derwent by means of the pipe-bridge. For those who were fortunate enough to have an older relative working at Chaddesden Sidings, the ultimate achievement would be to cadge a short and strictly unofficial ride on the footplate of one of the shunting locomotives.

As I mentioned earlier, the many different addresses applied to these five properties has made it extremely difficult trying to identify the families who lived in them, but here are some of their names, mostly taken from old census returns and electoral rolls: Number 31: Bailey, Curry, Deane and Jones. Numbers 32 to 35: Carrington, Clarke, Daykin, Downing, Fee, Fewster, Harris, Hibbs, Hitchcock, Irvine, Kinnerley, Molson, Overton, Peasgood, Sanders, Smith, Stone, Storer, Toplass, Vale, Watson, White and Winter. Anyone who visits St. Mary's Church in Church Lane today can still see the name of Kinnerley mentioned on a small plaque immediately inside the main west doors. This reads as follows: 'In memory of Arthur Kinnerley of Chaddesden from whose bequest the west window of this church was restored in the year 1958.' Arthur was the son of Richard and Sarah Kinnerley, who lived in one of the Meadow Lane cottages at the end of the 19th century. Another former resident was William Henry Downing. Some time after his birth in 1895, his parents Richard and Rose moved to the Sidings at Chaddesden, where the family is recorded in the 1901 Census. William went off to fight in the First World War and was killed in action on 25 August 1918. He is commemorated on the Chaddesden Lane War Memorial and his name is also inscribed on the tablet on the front wall of the Memorial Hall.

An innovative question on the 1911 census form provides a little more information about the houses, for householders were asked to specify the number of rooms (including the kitchen but excluding any bathroom, scullery, lobby or closet) in their home. We can therefore read that number 31 (*Stables Cottage*), which was then home to Joseph Jones and his family, possessed six rooms in total. In contrast, numbers 32 to 35 were evidently slightly smaller since each property only had five rooms.

The eventual demise of the five houses was seemingly due to two different causes. To begin with, the transfer of much of the railway's marshalling work away from Chaddesden reduced the number of railway employees who might otherwise have needed accommodation close to Chaddesden Sidings. Probably for this reason references to numbers 32 to 35 seem to cease after 1965 and it appears they were demolished fairly soon thereafter. Secondly, the construction of the A52 Diversion Road (which opened in May 1980) along the line of the derelict Derby Canal involved the destruction of cottage number 31, which was abandoned some time around 1971 or thereabouts, and today its site lies a little to the north of Costco's car-park, between Chequers Road and the A52. Some distance to the south-east, any remnants of numbers 32 to 35 now lie buried beneath Boots the Chemists at the junction of Pullman Road and Wyvern Way.

This article represents a synthesis of information culled from many diverse sources, but in particular I should like to thank Sandra Rainsford, Ken Overton, Gordon Bowley, and Fred and Jean Moss for their assistance. Few pictures of these cottages seem to have survived, but a photograph on the excellent *Picture the Past* website [Note 4] does provide a starting point for anyone interested in seeing what the Chaddesden South Junction signal-box and Meadow Lane cottages looked like when viewed from the west along the adjacent railway tracks.

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NOTES:

1. 'Railway Management', in *Minutes of Proceedings of The Institution of Civil Engineers; with other Selected & Abstracted Papers, Vol. XLI, Sessions 1874-75, Part III*, Ed. by James Forrest, London, 1875, pp.34–81, 60–1.
2. A good picture of Chaddesden South Junction Signal Box accompanies Neil Johnson's article of 29 April 2012 entitled *Chaddesden Sidings* on this website.
3. By comparing different editions of large-scale Ordnance Survey maps it is clear that the outbuildings at the back of numbers 32 to 35 were substantially redesigned sometime between 1901 and 1914. Maybe the pig-styes were discontinued then.
4. The Meadow Lane cottages and Chaddesden South Junction Signal Box as photographed from the west in 1961 can be seen on the *Picture The Past* website (<https://picturethepast.org.uk/>) by entering the reference number DCHQ000875 in the search box.