

Radley History Club

Life in Radley in the 1930s and 1940s

Information extracted from interviews in the Radley Remembered series, mostly carried out in [2003 and 2004?]

Archive number:

A.59 Recording is restricted to Club use only

Date of interview:

18 July 2007, at 50 Spring Road, Abingdon.

Personal details pre 1953

Interviewee (complete separate form for co-interviewee if also resident in Radley pre 1953):

DENIS CARTER

Date of birth:

Born in 1925 at Drayton. During 1930s moved to Radley Road in Abingdon (opposite Barton Lane (as it was at the time) which eventually ran parallel with the railway).

Date came to Radley (if different):

Address in 1930s/1940s:

Other family information:

Youngest of five children; had two brothers and two sisters.

Education

Schools/colleges attended:

Other information about education:

Work

Occupation and place of work of father:

Occupation and place of work of mother:

Occupation and place of work of interviewee in 1930s/40s (if any):

Joined GWR at Abingdon Station in 1941 at age 15½, and worked nights (22:00–06:00) preparing the engine for the next day's work (cleaning out soot and ash, coaling, watering, oiling) — and 'loved the job'.

Job progression: started as cleaner (after passing medical examination) from age 16–17½; then fireman (after another medical), with all training on the job.

Information about farm work and farms:

Other information about what jobs people were doing:

Travel

Mode of travel to school:

Mode of travel to work (interviewee and parents):

Any comments about the station and use of the train:

Numbers employed at Abingdon Station during WW2: on goods side, 3 delivery carters, one foreman, 3 workers, 3 in office (sub-total 10); on passengers side, stationmaster, 2 porters, 2 signalman, 2 drivers, 2 firemen (sub-total 9); and interviewee at nights; total 20 in all.

During WW2 transferred to Oxford Station, then in 1948 transferred back to Abingdon as fireman. But later in 1948 train shed at Abingdon was closed, and drivers and firemen were then based in Oxford.

Worked on Radley-to-Abingdon branch line ('The Bunk') between 1948 and 1953 or 1954.

Train times from Abingdon: 07:02, 08:05, 08:35, 09:15, 10:20, 11:05, 12:25, 13:00 ('the morning shift'); (then 'the afternoon shift') 14:20, 14:50, 15:45, 16:30, 17:00, then seven departures until 21:32 (the last departure); 07:02 used by several commuters to Reading and London.

Abingdon to Radley timetabled as 5 minutes ('the book time').

During Oxford Fair, after 16:00, Abingdon to Oxford cost 4d return.

Just before Beeching cuts, 22000 passengers annually used Abingdon train [~60 per day, so only a few per train]; whereas no. 1 bus Oxford to Cowley took the same number (22000) in one day; so closure of Abingdon Station inevitable.

Once extinguished sparks-from-Southern-engine-ignited fire in field just north of Radley with a bucket of water and a mop (GWR engines were fitted with spark arresters).

In early 1950s returned to Oxford, and became engine driver. But as diesel trains came in, finally had to stop driving because he couldn't tolerate diesel fumes.

In 1958 or 1959 came to Radley Station as junior porter; initially at Radley there were 2 senior porters, 2 junior porters (incl. interviewee) and one signalman, but very shortly thereafter transfers and resignations reduced complement to only interviewee and stationmaster; however, stationmaster not justified with only one other member of staff, so finally interviewee ran Radley Station on his own for four years.

During four years running Radley Station, hours were 07:00–19:00 Monday–Saturday, 17:00–22:00 Sunday; duties were to issue tickets (most tickets on Saturdays for football matches at Reading), deal with luggage to/from Radley College, parcels for Abingdon, light waiting room fire in winter, and keep station clean; once got bottle of whisky from regulars grateful for warm waiting room.

When Radley Station shut down (early-ish 1960s), transferred to Oxford as passenger guard.

[Details of engine classes and numbers, departure and arrival times, engine firing techniques, memorable journeys (including a collision with a cow and recovery from a breached vacuum brake line using sugar beet), etc. not included in this summary but given in the audio interview.]

Any other comments about travel including, including car use and ownership:

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Buildings - location and characteristics

Location of interviewee's home:

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Any comments on size, numbers of rooms, sharing, outside loos, source of water, electricity and telephone services etc. of interviewee's home:	
Any comments on location and characteristics of other buildings in Radley including dwellings, shops, village hall, barns, laundries etc:	Saturday was always a wash day in his mother's house in 1930s.
Services and pastimes (excluding education and travel covered above)	
Comments about shopping including retail deliveries:	In 1930s/40s, groceries delivered by horse and cart.
Comments on health and health services:	
Comments on play, pastimes and recreational activities - e.g. swimming in river, pub, clubs and societies, football, darts, guides:	
Comments on religion, church and choir:	
Miscellaneous	
Any comments about Radley people not covered elsewhere:	Signalman at Kennington Junction was Cyril Smewin [? @11:50], a Radley man. Les Grimes, a Radley man, was porter at Radley Station. Signalman at Radley was a Harry Masters. During WW2 at Radley Station: Les Grimes (porter), Edwina Tubb (lady porter) (her sister was signal-lady at Abingdon), Joyce Weston (lady porter), a Mr Eldridge [Christian name not remembered], Mr Wright (stationmaster). In 1958/59 stationmaster was Ron Bolton [? spelling, @51:45].
Comments about Radley College, its way of operating and relations with the village:	
Comments on Coronation and Jubilee events:	

Any information on impact of WW2 in Radley and about wartime activities:

During WW2, at RAF Abingdon, all airmen had half a day off [a week, presumably] (Wednesday, Saturday), when they mostly went into Oxford; consequently, a few of the trains from Abingdon to Radley were run on further to Oxford whereupon they returned direct to Abingdon. On one such run, Oxford to Radley was achieved in 4½ minutes [timetabled today (2020) at 6 minutes]. Also, for some time, for the airmen, the Oxford to Kensington milk train was stopped at Radley.

At Radley Station at night, during WW2, there were no lights, only one or two hurricane lamps covered in black paint except for ~1 inch; consequently, in resultant darkness, surrendered 'tickets' were not always actual railway tickets (once only ~20% were actual railway tickets).

During WW2, direct trains went from Cowley (Morris) to Coventry with aeroplane parts; aeroplane wings were transported on stripped-down-to-floor-level old coaches.

Railway workers were not called up during WW2, except for the Railway Reserve who were called up.

Record here any other interesting items not covered above and general observations on life in those days: