

Fakenham's Railways

Many towns in Norfolk have two railway stations built by competing companies and with the same ultimate destination.

The Dereham and Fakenham Railway (D&FR) was opened in 1849. At the same time a company was formed to extend the line to Wells and this was to have the second of Norfolk's railway tunnels. In 1857 the work came to a temporary stop because of a disagreement over 100 yards of land already being used by Fakenham station. In the end the smaller companies between Norwich and Wells came under the ownership of the Great Eastern Railway (GER).

Meanwhile in the west of the county the Lynn and Fakenham Railway (L&FR) got its act through Parliament in 1876 but starting was delayed by lack of money and enthusiasm. The Chief Engineer did not like the proposed contractor who he saw as rogue and not to be trusted, he resigned over the matter and was later to be proved correct. The contractor was paid in shares which he was supposed to sell to get his money, which he did not do, thus he became the largest shareholder and made decisions without referring to the other directors! In the event Lord Townsend and two other directors resigned.

The Lynn Terminus was at the Great Eastern Station which was reached via a junction with the Lynn and Hunstanton railway at Gaywood. The line went eastwards as far as Massingham where a temporary terminus was made while the line was built towards Fakenham. There was a proposal to terminate at the Great Eastern Station but the track bed would have to be raised quite a lot to do this. The Great Eastern station at Fakenham was high level, built on the end of an embankment. So the original plan to continue to Melton Constable was proceeded with.

There were problems using the Great Eastern station at Lynn and so a new station was built at South Lynn together with new connecting lines. It's interesting to note that a shuttle service remained between the two stations into the 1950s! There was a plan for the L&FR to build a station in North Lynn but building one at South Lynn was a better option because it would attract traffic from the Midlands. The railway reached Fakenham in 1880, terminating in Hempton before continuing toward Melton Constable

The first stop was Langor Bridge where a station was proposed (who for it is not clear) so a sugarbeet siding was put in before the line continued its way to Melton. This junction had lines radiating out to various parts of the county, some at the instigation of the L&FR.

In 1883 the line was taken over by the Eastern & Midland Railway before they ran out of Money in 1893 when a partnership between the Midland and Great Northern Railways were able to name their price for the operation. The M&GNJ owned it until 1923 when all the railways combined into four separate companies and it was 1936 before the LNER took over. It remained with them until nationalisation in 1948.

The Great Eastern station became Fakenham (East) and closed to passenger traffic in 1964. Freight carried on for a few more years until the rest of the line closed.

The M&GN station at Hempton became Fakenham (West) and was closed in 1959.