

Off The Rails

When the railway line was open from Norwich to Wells a pickup goods train ran in both directions each day calling at stations en-route as required.

Late one afternoon I was at Fakenham East station, for some reason, when this goods train arrived. The level crossing gates were shut across the road, these were not controlled by the signal box. The gates were opened and closed by a staff member who happened to be available at the time. This arrangement was carried out on most of the crossings on this line. However, to the north of the town, there was a crossing over a C class road, Norwich Long Lane, near Parker's private siding. There the gates were permanently shut across the road any driver who wished to cross the line had to call at the gatehouse and ask for the gates to be opened!

Back at the station, the goods train had just arrived headed by an elderly J17 steam loco and once the goods had been dealt with and the token exchanged to allow the train onto the next few miles of single track, the train moved off only to come to a halt when it reached the Wells end of the crossing. Two of the loco's wheels had come off the rails with the train parked across the road. I waited a short while to see what was going to happen and then went off for my tea.

I returned soon after to see what was happening just as the breakdown train arrived from Norwich but it was in the wrong position for the crane to be of any use. After the breakdown crew had inspected the problem they used two substantial wood battens and a lot of sweat to replace the wheels back onto the rails. Having checked that the loco was not damaged in any way they gave the train the OK to proceed. The gates remained shut while the track was inspected for any damage.

It seemed that all was well, the breakdown train returned home and things returned to normal.

Until passenger services were withdrawn in 1964, diesel railcars used this length of line without any problem as did the goods trains which used it in the years after. These goods trains were known as 'grain trains' because they were taking away grain from the rail-side granary at Fakenham Station.