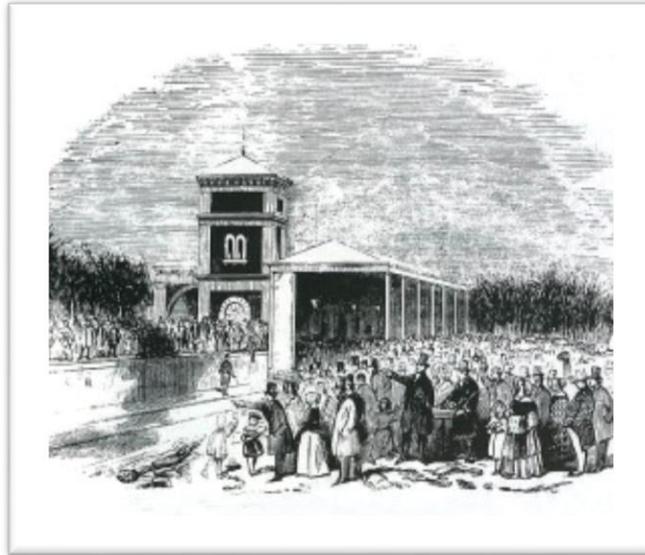


# Railways to Leamington Spa

*This is a lengthy story and is told in three parts -*

- 1. Coventry to Leamington and then to Rugby on the LNWR*
- 2. Leamington to London and Birmingham on the GWR*
- 3. "Merger" by Nationalisation and Beyond*

## Part One, Coventry to Leamington and then to Rugby on the LNWR



*The First Milverton Station, 1844, courtesy Windows on Warwickshire*

In the nineteenth century Leamington Spa became like many British towns with the construction of railway lines radiating to several points of the compass. Leamington missed out on the first main line from Birmingham into London which opened in 1838 and passed through Rugby and Coventry on its way to Birmingham. However, in the next four years the London and Birmingham Company saw the value of a feeder line to the spa town and on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1844 the line opened from Coventry to a station alongside Rugby Road in Milverton. The owning company soon became part of the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) in 1846.



*The second Milverton Station*

To some extent this station fell between the two stools which were (and are) the towns of Warwick and Leamington Spa because it was over one mile from the centres of both towns. This new station had an eventful history. It was originally called Leamington but had eight different names during its life based on various permutations of the words Milverton, Leamington and Warwick. The station was originally north of Rugby Road and its centrepiece was a handsome stone building. This was also the site of a goods yard and small engine shed. This station was replaced with a brick building further to the south in 1883 on the north side of Warwick New Road. The station building was at the road level and the platform structures were made of timber to reduce the weight on the embankment. The Rugby Road station was



redeveloped for goods and locomotive servicing. On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1851 this line was extended as a branch from Milverton to Rugby via Leamington Spa.

Although the GWR line soon ran close to, and parallel with it, a station was not built near the GWR station until February 1854. This was on a site off Avenue Road in Leamington and it was initially known as Leamington Priors but was later named Leamington (Avenue) with an area outside known as Station Approach (which still exists in 2016). In March 1860 a new and enlarged Avenue Station was opened. It was built by Mr Parnell of Rugby to London and North Western Railway design at a cost of £4,500. The booking hall contained ornamental tiles by Mann and Co of London. A footbridge from Old Warwick Road crossed both railway lines to reach Avenue Road with no access to railway platforms. This replaced a footway known as Upper Avenue. A notable structure along the line was the viaduct over the canal at Radford Semele which still exists. The final evolution of this line was a branch from a new Marton Junction to Daventry and Weedon and a junction with the main London to Birmingham Line.



*Accident at Hill Wootton 1861*

One tragic accident happened on the line to Coventry in June 1861 when a steam locomotive hauling a goods train fell through the bridge across the road junction between Leek Wootton and Hill Wootton. The driver and fireman were killed instantly when the tender fell onto the loco below. There were reports that the bridge was known to be unstable and the investigation blamed the accident on the use of brittle cast iron for the main structure. The timber bridge across the Bath Street/High Street crossroads was replaced in 1883.

This line was notable in the 1930s for the use of Armstrong Siddeley railcars which had Michelin pneumatic tyres.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1939 an IRA bomb exploded in the cloakroom in Milverton Station but there were no injuries.



*Michelin Railcar*



*Viaduct across the Leam, circa 1905, courtesy Warwickshire Railways*

The passenger service on the line to Rugby ceased in 1959 (well before the Beeching report) but freight services continued until the mid-1960s. On 15<sup>th</sup> September 1958 passenger services between Leamington Spa (Avenue) and Weedon were withdrawn and most of the line to Weedon closed in 1959. A few goods trains used the line from Rugby to Marton Junction and part of the Weedon line for access to cement works at Southam.

On 17<sup>th</sup> November 1958 the Warwick (Milverton) engine shed closed. Passenger services between Leamington Spa(Avenue) and Rugby finally ceased on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1959 and a substitute Midland Red bus service, No 561, was introduced.



*Milverton Loco Shed, courtesy Patrick Kingston*



*Last Train at Avenue Station, courtesy Patrick Kingston*

Leamington Spa (Avenue) station closed on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1965 following the Beeching Report and passenger services to Kenilworth, Coventry, Bedworth and Nuneaton were withdrawn. The track was used only for goods until 1969 when it became disused. The line reopened in 1977 and continues in use for passengers and goods.

## **Part Two, From Leamington to London and Birmingham on the GWR**



*Original GWR Station 1853*

This GWR line through Leamington began as the Birmingham and Oxford Junction Railway and was authorised in November 1846. This company soon became part of the Great Western Railway in August 1847. When it was built the line was mixed gauge from Banbury and opened throughout in 1852. It was engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and completed the route from London (Paddington) to Birmingham. Leamington Station was built of rendered brick and opened on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1852. The station was built on the site of Eastnor Terrace which had to be totally demolished despite having been completed only in 1844. This terrace of prestigious houses was four storeys high and stretched for 140 yards and included a college. Many of the bricks were reused to build a new Eastnor Terrace at the northern end of Tachbrook Road which was not so grand.



Design, construction and completion of this line were not easy. The LNWR, GWR and local people could not agree about construction and there were many clashes at meetings before completion. Furthermore, the grand opening ceremony was delayed because,

incredibly, the train bringing guests from London collided with a goods train. For many years there were frequent trains from Leamington to both Paddington and Snow Hill in Birmingham. A branch from Hatton, on the line to Birmingham, to Stratford-upon-Avon was opened in 1860.



*GWR Engine Shed in 1965*

There was a GWR locoshed at the end of Clapham Terrace opposite the Eagle recreation ground with a coaling stage and water crane. It was on a site between the London and North Western Railway line to Rugby and the Great Western main railway line to Banbury. The original locoshed was built of timber and burnt down in 1902 but a brick replacement was completed in September 1906. It finally closed in 1965. The site is now part of the Sydenham Estate. The line itself survived unscathed following decisions after the Beeching Report.

In 1907 the original Great Western railway bridge across Clemens Street and High Street was replaced because trains had become heavier.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1923 all the existing 123 railway companies in Great Britain were amalgamated into four Groups, the Great Western Railway, the Southern Railway, the London North Eastern Railway and the London Midland and Scottish Railway (which included the London North Western Railway).



*Rebuilding the GWR bridge in 1907  
photo by EW Bryan*



*New GWR Station photo 1959*

Leamington Spa station was replaced in Art Deco style and opened in 1939. Much of this building survives and is now Listed Grade 2; the station and the gardens are cared for by the group called Friends of the Station which was formed in 2005.

### **Part Three, "Merger" by Nationalisation and Beyond**



On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1948 all Britain's railways were nationalised by Clement Attlee's Labour

Government and passed into state hands. At this time, as a consequence of the Second World War Britain's railways were worn out with a massive backlog of maintenance of track and rolling stock which their owners could not afford to rectify; hence British Railways was born.



*GWR Railcar in 1950*

Most of the locos were still steam engines. In March 1956 Diesel Multiple Units and Railcars were introduced on some local services on the Leamington (Avenue)-Coventry-Nuneaton line. These were part of a large modernisation plan to introduce alternative rolling stock in an effort to improve reliability and to reduce running costs.

In June 1957 Diesel Multiple Unit trains were also introduced on local trains between Leamington (Great Western)-Birmingham (Moor Street)-Birmingham (Snow Hill).

Steam traction on Paddington-Birmingham-Wolverhampton express services was finally replaced by diesel locomotives in September 1962. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1963 all railway lines in the Birmingham area were taken over by London Midland region and the names Western region and Great Western were lost.

From March 1967 all express trains to/from Paddington were routed to Birmingham New Street instead of Snow Hill. Leamington station closed for general goods on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1969 although a private siding continued in use for some time. In a major change Inter City trains commenced running again between Leamington and Coventry in May 1977.



*A Chiltern Train in 2014, photo Mick Jeffs*

In 1996 Chiltern Railways were awarded a franchise running trains between London (Marylebone) and Birmingham (Moor Street) with diesel multiple units.

In 2009 the station's garden, which the Friends of Leamington Station help to maintain, was awarded the title of Best British Garden in a Country Life magazine award.



*Station Garden in 2013, photo Barry Franklin*

In 2012 Chiltern Railways, which runs the station, along with the Friends of Leamington Station, the Leamington Spa Town Council, Network Rail and the Railway Heritage Trust worked together to improve the booking hall, station frontage, platform canopies, toilets and staff facilities - and it won them a National Railway Heritage Award for the conservation work. Looking to the future the Government Infrastructure Plan in 2013 includes improvements to the Nuneaton-Coventry-Kenilworth and Leamington line including

electrification. Plans have also been approved in 2015 for a new station at Kenilworth.

*Mick Jeffs and Barry Franklin, revised June 2016*

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***Acknowledgements***

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