

Maurice Scarth was interviewed at 12 Leven Road, Stokesley, by Ian Pearce on Tuesday 9 December 2003 at 9:30am
Interviewer's comments in brackets and in red.

It's all in the newspaper article 'The Last Stationmaster of Kildale and Great Ayton Railway Stations' - you can read it. It's all about my father from being a lad porter before the First World War. He joined the railway as a lad porter or an oilman (filling oil lamps) when he was 14 or 15 years old. That was at Boosbeck, then he married my mother there eventually. He went in the army in 1914 (a lance corporal) and he got a porter's job and moved up the rank, then he got a signalman's job at Danby. He had to take a signalman's test. He got the signalman's job at Danby, I don't think it was Castleton, I can't remember, but Danby was the main place. He studied for the passenger station work and accounts for the passenger stations and goods stations, two lots of things. And he passed them both. Eventually he got a job at Moulton, near Northallerton. He moved to Middleton St George when it was an RAF station (Goosepool) he had moved up in rank. He wanted to reduce his rank and get a coal sale. They let him drop his rank to get the coal sale and that was at Kildale.

He when I was a kid we had goats and other things. I had TB glands in my neck and they said it was through drinking cows' milk. So we got goats and then a pony. We used to deliver coal around Danby. That was what he wanted to do. The Railway (Company) ran the coal, the financial side of it. You got your cut when you did the books. Eventually they didn't want it at all; it was too much work for them. By that time my Dad was at Ayton and he got tot much work for him. He got a couple of blokes employed but they was robbing him right and left. And so I decided I was working for Simpsons the, and I decided to leave and go into the coal trade. My brother (Desmond) hummed and hawed but eventually he left Clifford Petch's and came to work on the coal sales. But he was doing so much work for Clifford Petch and so much for us that eventually he left; he didn't like it. And I just carried on myself. He was an engine fitter in Darlington, railway engines, served his time, and then he was in the army. He didn't want to work on the railway, and when they were running down the Darlington Works and he got a job driving buses. He retired from the buses.

(Your said that your father studied at home?)

He studied at home. Dead silence all the time! He got the stationmaster's job just after I left home in 1937-8, I'm not so sure now. I got a job at Danby Beacon building the radar mast. I was just a labourer then. They wanted some younger blokes to travel with them for the work. The boss asked me and my mate from Lealholme, Johnny, if we would go with them. I had my eighteenth birthday just after I left (home). We said yes and we were never at home really. I only visited sometimes after the war had started. But he did all this studying at night-time after he had finished work. This was run by the Railway. I don't know how we got books, I think he learned by doing the work and not getting paid for it! He would go and get examined, I think it would be at Darlington really, that's the main station. He had to pass the passenger station work accounts and the goods station work accounts, two separate ones. As I said, it was dead silence when he was studying. Des was four years younger than me. I was carrying coal at 13. He got his stationmaster's job at Moulton and then Middleton St George and then Kildale and finally Great Ayton.

I retired from the electrical work that I did at £17 a week and got a job at the railway at £5 a week. I was a platelayer. That was on the line between Castleton and Battersby. Then I got a job as a porter and then I studied for a signalman. At Battersby there were two lines; there was the one from Ayton running round and going to Whitby and there was a through line from Stokesley. The through line was double line working so you had to pass two exams. I

failed the first one! I had a cold or something – I wasn't very well. He just said to me 'Well how have you done?' I said 'Not very well'" He said 'There's not much to do, I will give you another exam shortly.' I passed both the second time. And then I stopped there (Battersby) until the full-time signalman came back and they reduced me to porter. And so I left but by then Beeching was coming along and I got a job at W Simpsons at Battersby until I went onto coal in 1962 or 1964, hang on, '62 I think.

We went into the stationmaster's house at Great Ayton in 1964 when he (Maurice's father) retired. But it was too big for us. The station buildings were still there.

(Maurice's wife then told a story about her children going unaccompanied on the train in their pram.)

You could take your baby in a big pram on the train. You put them in the guard's van and leave them if the baby was asleep. The guard would come and tell you if they woke up. You sat in the coach. When they grew up a bit we would leave them in the pram and send them to Kildale. They would let the pram off at Kildale for my mother. There were still steam trains then.

(At this point the nurse came in and we stopped the discussions for about 15 minutes. We picked up by asking about the station buildings.)

I remember quite a lot of the buildings. That's the first wagon we had going up to Aireyholme. That was the first new thing we bought. This was never used virtually the coal sidings are at the back. This box can you see a black box, when we had the goods trains running, if the goods trains couldn't clear the line for a passenger train we used to have to take the tablet off him and lock it into that box. That's all there was at Great Ayton.

The goods trains carried coal wagons and covered delivery vans with anything that was wanted sending by rail. There was a decline in goods traffic and eventually we got everything delivered by road. Even the coal came by road. It was diesel engines by then. I was at Battersby in the early 1960s when steam was going out. The signal cabin at Battersby, when you were running the sidings, there was 57 movements in Battersby cabin to work the signals, a hell of a lot of movements for a little place like that. The trains used to come up from Ayton, come to there, the fireman would uncouple the engine and drive it forward. The signalman would alter the points and lock them, so the engine could go back on another route, past the train, and the same thing thing would happen again when he had gone past it. The other trains (from Stokesley) were straightforward. There was a water tower at Battersby. One of the girls that got a signalman's job eventually and she put some little goldfish in from Stokesley Show. That was Margaret Hill wasn't it. There was a water tank at Stokesley, a water tank at Battersby, a water tank at Danby and then Whitby.

(Were there still holiday specials?)

Oh yes. I've often wondered if I'd kept some of the posters that had been put up how valuable they would be now, but we gave them all away. The trains would be full going to Whitby and of course there was the coast line as well going to Whitby, and the viaduct going on to Scarborough. And the line to Pickering.

At Battersby there was the office staff, the booking office, the waiting room, the ladies waiting room and the toilets.

The Friends' School used the station at Ayton. When they were going on holiday my dad had a terrible time with them and with all their luggage. They went all over he country. I never heard of any going astray. The people who worked on the railways in those days did their job properly.

(Do you remember any unusual loads on the trains?)

One unusual load we had at Battersby was when a train knocked a badger down and killed it. The driver wanted to see it and then he said 'We'll get shot of it now' so they put it in the firebox. The next day when they came up they said we had it (burning) right to Whitby.

(Do you remember the shooting specials, or were they before your time?)

I remember when I was leaving school Lord Downe at Danby Lodge he used to let the lodge out for grouse shooting. We used to get all sorts of cars in. I remember before I left school I got odd jobs with (the name was indistinguishable on the recording tape) what put the electric in at Danby. And we got all sorts of cars. We had a 1918 Rolls. They were driving up in their own cars. (Harold) Macmillan lived in the big house was at past Danby Church, at Botton Hall. That was his place. They came by car; there were Italian ones and all sorts.

(Do you remember any emergencies on the railway?)

We had a train crash at Battersby. The Ayton train came in and it was going too fast and hit the buffers hard. And the bosses came out. I was asked about the crash and said that a woman had bumped her head 'Oh' they said 'It was reported as no injury.' 'Well she didn't report it, but she bumped her head.' There was a farmer killed between Battersby and Ayton crossing the road. In the 60s. We had the Royal Train (this was in the 1980s). We went out that night, we went out for a drink and it wasn't the same ones on duty when we pulled up at the house, and before we knew it there were all these fellows around us. We knew in advance it was stopping near Ayton, a few hundred yards beyond Ayton. We were late home obviously and there were policemen all round us. What they didn't know, and nobody had told them, that the bridge over the railway was a public road, the one to Fletcher's Farm. They weren't informed of that. One of the ladies-in-waiting went out jogging early morning and it tanked down and somebody had to go out with an umbrella to bring her back. We didn't see Charlie boy.

(Going back to the station at Ayton.)

There were separate waiting rooms, a ticket office and toilets. At Battersby it's a house now.

The water supply before Frys took it over was a pump from a well 32 foot deep. There was a 2 inch lead pipe came out of the well and into the other end of the house. It was beautiful water. (At this point Maurice's wife said that when Maurice was in hospital she took water in for him) I took the lead piping out.