

Today, the Great Ayton railway station yard stands forlorn, in a ruinous state. The former stationmaster's business, the weighbridge, now roofless, stands at the end of the eight coal cells which were stocked up from the track spur above.

The last stationmaster of Great Ayton, Mr George Scarth, was born on 17th December 1897 at Castleton, deep in the North Yorkshire Moors. At the age of sixteen, George started work for the London & North Eastern Railway (LNER) at Boosbeck railway station as a lamp lad and porter. Still a teenager, he served in the First World War as a corporal machine gunner with the East Yorkshire regiment in Flanders.

Restarting his railway career after the war, he gained promotion to signaller at Danby railway station. During the Second World War he was in the reserved occupation of stationmaster at Moulton, Richmond, on the strategic branch line carrying troops and munitions associated with Catterick Camp. He also saw railway service at Dinsdale, near the RAF aerodrome at Goosepool, now Teesside Airport. Wanting to return to the moors after the war, George took charge of the lesser station at Kildale, complete with a coal business, in 1949.

In the early 1950s, George, now with a son and daughter, was on the move again, this time to Great Ayton station, also with a coal business. In the early 1960s, when George retired from being a stationmaster with British Railways, the Beeching axe deemed the station an unmanned halt. My own memories of George are of a happy, genial gentleman who had time for everyone in a warm waiting room with its open coal fire. In 1960 George's son, Maurice, joined his father in the coal business, eventually taking it over in 1964. Soon after, with the cessation of coal deliveries by rail, the coal came in by lorry. The coal business continued until Maurice retired in 1987 at the age of 65. He then moved out of the former stationmaster's house to live in Stokesley.

George died in 1972 aged 74. His grand daughter Elaine now lives opposite Great Ayton railway station, with its reminder of a previous age.