

Local History: The Coming of the Railways to Alton

Alton was first connected by rail to London by an extension of the Farnham Branch of the London and South Western railway, which was officially opened on Monday 26 July 1852.

In 1861 the Alton, Alresford and Winchester Railway Company received permission to continue the line to Winchester. Building work was started and the Company, which later changed its name to the Mid-Hants Railway, opened for business on Monday, 21 October 1865.



The 'new' station of 1865 is still in use today. The original station was on the site which is currently the station car park, but with the continuation of the line to Winchester, the orientation of the track needed to be changed at that point. The solution

was a new station and the present structure was constructed and the original building converted into two houses, one for the Station Master. This original building was demolished in June 1962 and the site converted into what is now a car park for commuters.

On 1 June 1901 the Basingstoke and Alton Railway was opened and exactly two years later, on 1 June 1903, the Meon Valley Railway to Fareham was brought into use.

The line to Basingstoke was closed in 1916 and the track was said to have been sent to France as part of the war effort, although there is some doubt about it being reused. Following local pressure the track was re-laid and re-opened in 1924 only to close finally in 1932. The Meon Valley Line closed to passengers on Saturday, 5 February 1955 and the central part of the line lifted. Freight traffic continued at the Alton end until 13 August 1968, after which the track was removed.

After a long public battle, the line to Winchester was closed on 4 February 1973, however a group of preservation enthusiasts was formed to acquire part of the line and the section from Alresford to Ropley re-opened in 1977. The line was extended to Four Marks in 1983 and finally reached Alton in May 1985. A regular timetable of steam and diesel services are operated by the Mid Hants Railway during the year, as well as special events, on what is now better known as 'The Watercress Line'