

6th May 2016

Media Release

Great Northern Outpost Volume 1: The Bradford & Thornton Railway

The former Great Northern Railway routes linking Bradford, Halifax and Keighley via Queensbury were early casualties of the post war service cuts imposed by the British Transport Commission in its vain attempt to streamline the network and balance the books.

Within a year of nationalisation in 1948, the “Queensbury Lines” had been identified as high on maintenance costs and low on passenger revenue.

The writing was very much on the wall but services continued until May 1955 when all 12 intermediate stations lost their passenger trains. The more lucrative goods services continued for a few more years at some of the local depots before they too finally succumbed.

The demise of the Queensbury Lines came too early for the advent of mainstream colour photography. Colour film was expensive and the few local railway photographers who could afford to use it tended to concentrate on more glamorous main line locations.

However, diligent research over a period of more than 40 years has unearthed enough material to illustrate the last remaining vestiges of the Queensbury Lines network in glorious full colour, albeit that most of the images show a railway system in its last throes of existence before being swept away.

The Bradford & Thornton Railway was the first part of the system to be completed and it is that section which is covered by this book. The line from Halifax to Queensbury and the extension from Thornton to Keighley will be covered in Volume 2 which is in preparation for publication later in the year.

Great Northern Outpost Volume 1 provides full colour coverage of the Bradford & Thornton for the first time. Much of the information presented in the book and the vast majority of the images have never been published previously.

The authors have both had a lifelong interest in the spectacularly engineered Queensbury Lines system which was characterised by fearsome gradients, deep cuttings, tunnels and superb viaducts.

Historian and former journalist Alan Whitaker – author of several previous books and numerous magazine articles about railways in the Bradford area – is the son of the last Station Master on the Bradford & Thornton Railway and he grew up in the Station House at Thornton.

This has given him a unique perspective on what happened during the last years of railway services on the Queensbury Lines as he was actually there to witness it all.

Co-author Jan Rapacz, a Chartered Engineer, grew up close to the line at Great Horton and witnessed the final years of steam operation which was often a struggle with adhesion for the locomotives on the fearsome gradient. He has himself spent many years researching the history of the lines especially from the perspective of the promotion, planning, engineering and construction of the railways.

Both authors have been instrumental in initiating and promoting the Great Northern Railway Trail which includes a section of the former railway from Queensbury to Thornton featured in this volume.