

## **The History of Railways into Grimsby**

Grimsby at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> C was no more than a small east coast market town with a small dock, which suffered from silting problems. The population was estimated at about 1000. It had, except for the river Humber, poor connections with the interior of the country, especially to the south. Some attempt was made, with the introduction of a rope and ships cordage factory, to raise the economical situation of the town. However the potential of this industry was never realised at the time. In 1844 however things changed, and from that date onwards Grimsby experienced its own mini industrial revolution. This revolution emanated from the change in fortune, which was brought about by the coming of the railway to Grimsby in 1844. In a matter of a few years Grimsby was changed into a thriving, major east coast port, with a busy commercial dock, and fish dock. In fact Grimsby became the premier fishing port in the world. Fish, landed in Grimsby, fed the nation. The population, which was 1000 in 1800, by 1900, had increased to 63,000, with the railway and the docks being the largest employers.

The main reason for bringing the railway to Grimsby was its potential as a port. This potential was realised by a group of Sheffield businessmen, and local landowners, who could see the benefits of an east coast port being directly linked to the coal mines and factories of South Yorkshire, and thence to the west coast of continental Europe. A meeting was duly held with Lord Yarborough the largest landowner in the Grimsby area, other local landowners and entrepreneurs, at the Red Lion Inn at Caistor in October, 1844, to discuss the raising of capital to support the project. At this meeting it was proposed and unanimously agreed to build a railway to Grimsby. The route of the new railway was planned and the engineering difficulties resolved and royal assent was given in June 1845, and construction began, the labour being provided locally. The new railway would be known as the Great Grimsby & Sheffield Junction Railway (GG&SJ). Also by the end of 1844, with the dock project in mind, they joined with the Grimsby Haven Company, who was at that time responsible for the running and upkeep of Grimsby Docks, and a new company was formed called the Grimsby Docks Company.

At first the new railway into Grimsby was a branch line. This branch line left the main line from Gainsborough to New Holland and the ferries to Hull, at Ulceby Junction. Passengers for Grimsby were required to change there. There were some through trains to and from Grimsby serving the passenger and commercial trade at the Docks, the passenger traffic being mainly immigrants travelling from Grimsby to Liverpool, for the sea journey to America. The branch line status lasted until 1888, when the Grimsby line was designated the main line, after a new triangular junction was laid at Brocklesby. From then passengers for New Holland, Hull and Barton upon Humber had to change at Brocklesby.

In 1846 the GG&SJ became known as the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway (MS&LR), a name it would retain for many years until the turn of the century when it became known as the Great Central Railway (GCR). From 1846 onwards railway work went on apace. A locomotive service shed and works were built in Grimsby, along with a coaling stage, and turntable. By February 1848 the railway was completed and officially opened. At the same time under the auspices of the Great Northern Railway (GNR), a line from Louth, to the south of Grimsby was opened. This line however, although carrying much trade from Grimsby Docks in later years, and being the main connection with London and the south, had no connection with the dock construction and its administration

On the completion of the line into Grimsby, the Grimsby Docks Company immediately went ahead with plans for the construction of a new commercial dock. It was proposed to site the new dock to the east of the existing dock, but not joined to it, extending out into the river Humber, with two large 300ft lock pits. The lock gates being of the hydraulic type controlled by water pressure contained in a tank on top of a 200ft brick tower, which still exists today although no longer in use. This tower followed the design

of an Italian bell tower in Sienna. The dock would be called the Royal Dock. Work on the new dock was completed by March 1852, and was ready for use by the following May, although the railway connection was not completed until August 1853. From its opening import/export trade increased considerably, most of the trade being with continental Europe, consisting mainly in timber, coal, dairy products, cotton, steel, machinery, particularly agricultural machines, locomotives, and grain. The docks also became an emigration centre for continental Europe. The increase in trade led to the construction of several coal drops, a grain warehouse, and a large transit shed. A graving dock was also built. By 1873 berthing spaces were proving inadequate to meet demand, so it was decided to connect the Royal Dock with the Old Dock with a new dock in order to meet demand. This dock was known as the Union Dock. Again the increase in trade caused berthing problems, and another new dock known as the Alexandra Dock, was constructed north of the Union Dock, with extensive rail sidings to serve particularly the increase in coal exports to France. These siding were connected to the main line via a new line and junction at Great Coates one mile east of Grimsby.

In 1856 the railway company, with French business men, formed a company named the Anglo-French Steamship Company. This company operated regular sailings to the continent, although initially for carrying coal, it later started carrying emigrants from the continent for America, part of the journey being by train from Grimsby to Liverpool. This was quicker by four days than the sea route. The traffic in emigrants was substantial, and special transit facilities were built on the docks. This trade lasted into the early 1900s, when emigration declined.

By 1900 Grimsby Docks was working at full capacity, and although further expansion was required it was not deemed practicable, because of the problem and expense of dredging a deep water channel. So a decision was made to construct a new dock at Immingham, which was nearer to the deep water channel. The new dock construction commenced in 1906 and was completed by 1911. A few years later the country was at war and the docks at Grimsby was taken over by the Royal Navy and was used for extensive coal bunkering facilities for their large fleet. Although both the railways and the docks worked with great efficiency during the war, they did suffer falling trade during the depression that followed, the coal trade in particular was hit very hard, but the docks still remained fairly busy. During the Second World War again the docks worked with great efficiency. After the Second World War however, both the railways and the dock were subject to the ever increasing effect of road transport, and its ability to transport goods quicker. Imports and exports through the docks started to decrease, Immingham Docks becoming the more favourable. Rail borne traffic to Grimsby Docks dropped considerably, the decline led to the rail connection to be severed in the 1980s and most of the sidings lifted. The locomotive facilities had been removed earlier in the 1960s.

There is no doubt that Grimsby's geographical position was not exploited until the railway arrived. The railway and dock complex of Grimsby had a great influence, both economic and social, on the Town, changing it from a virtual backwater to a significant port. Aside from the commercial docks, Grimsby became one of the premier fishing ports of the world, with finance supplied by the railway companies for the construction of a fish Dock in the 1860s. Many trains left Grimsby daily from large sidings at New Clee Station, for numerous destinations to feed the nation with fish. Also the nearby town of Cleethorpes was virtually transformed from a small hamlet to a thriving Victorian sea-side town with promenade and pier.

The decline since the introduction of better roads and motor transport is now in slow reversal. In more recent times the commercial docks is undergoing an increasingly more favourable future. Timber imports are increasing, car imports from the continent are using the Alexandra Dock for off loading their cargoes, Oil companies are using the docks for berthing of their maintenance vessels, and the Wind Farm industry is planning to use the Docks for maintenance facilities. A new dock/terminal has been

constructed at the mouth of the Royal Dock lock gates adjacent to the Dock Tower. It consists of a new Jetty(s) similar to the deep water Jetty's at Immingham Dock, thus allowing larger roll on/roll off boats to use Grimsby. The facility was built by APB and opened this year (2013). It will be rail connected by an existing unused line to the Marsh Junction- Great Coates freight line. The links with the fishing industry are still maintained through the extensive frozen food storage industry, with fish arriving by road, mainly from the north of England and Scotland.

Except for the severing of the rail links with the Dock complex, and the closure of the line to London via Louth and Boston, much of the rail system has survived intact, and has been upgraded to meet modern times. It is still served by three stations, Grimsby Town, Grimsby Docks, and New Clee. Grimsby Town Station has in recent times been modernised with a new roof, a footbridge and passenger lifts. Plans are going ahead with integrating the station with a new bus station, via a cycle and pedestrian way, with a Cycle Hub located at the railway station.

Grimsby is a thriving town with a deep history, a great selection of shops, in the process of being extended, a famous fishing heritage, brought to life in the Fishing Heritage Museum located on the old section of the Alexandra Dock, a fine old Cathedral Minster Church, and the best fish 'n' chips for miles, and much more.





