

## RAILWAYS

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The East Riding provides a classic example of the factors which influenced the evolution of Britain's railway system. At its fullest extent, the county's network reflected the traffic generated by Hull, the coastal resorts and the agricultural hinterland, the inhibiting effect of the relatively moderate relief of the Wolds, and in a modest but striking way, the impact of inter-company competition. The first line to be opened, the Hull & Selby of 1840, was one of the earliest main lines in the country, linking with the even earlier Leeds & Selby of 1834 to give Hull railborne access to the West Riding. The route was near-level and near-straight for much of the way, with the first Hull terminus at Manor House Street adjacent to the original docks. For passengers, this was superseded by Paragon Station in 1848, closer to the town centre. In 1845 the Hull & Selby was leased by George Hudson's York & North Midland Railway, and in the mid-1840s the network expanded dramatically under the aegis of that company. The first routes sought to open up the coast. The York to Scarborough line of 1845 followed easy gradients (maximum 1 in 272), hugging the banks of the river Derwent through the Kirkham Gap. Hull to Bridlington (1846) posed few problems, but between Scarborough and Bridlington (1847) gradients as steep as 1 in 92 were necessary in order to cross the barrier presented by the Wolds.

These four lines mark the essential 'box' of railways in the East Riding, surrounding the Wolds and linking the major settlements. It is no accident that this is essentially the network which still survives today. In the mid-1840s, however, in the feverish years of railway speculation dubbed the Railway Mania, other companies eyed Hull's traffic and not least the route from York to Hull through the gap in the Wolds between Market Weighton and Beverley. George Hudson, the 'Railway King', sought urgently to protect the territorial monopoly of his York & North Midland. He bought the Londesborough estate of 12,000 acres near Market Weighton and rapidly built two lines across the Vale of York to Market Weighton, from York (1847) and Selby (1848), in a classic blocking tactic. Having thus secured the approaches to the Market Weighton gap, the company was in no hurry to exploit it; the line through to Beverley and Hull was not completed until 1865. By then the York & North Midland had become part of the North Eastern Railway, created by amalgamation in 1854.

As the railway became the universal form of transport for all but the most local of traffic in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the gaps in the network to serve rural and commuting needs were filled. An early line through the sparsely settled Wolds was the Malton & Driffield (1853), crossing the watershed north of Burdale in a tunnel almost a mile in length. The nascent resort of Withernsea and the longer established resort of Hornsea were linked to Hull by initially independent railways, but these were soon absorbed into the North Eastern Railway. The last line to be built in the county, the Ministry of Defence Spurn Head Railway excepted, was the purely agricultural

Derwent Valley Light Railway of 1913. Other network additions sought to improve existing routes. In 1869 a new outlet from Hull to the south was opened through Goole, shortening the Hull-London distance by nearly 20 miles. The Selby-York link (1871) was a final component of the East Coast main line, until it too was superseded in 1983 by a new line to the west avoiding the subsidence problems of the Selby coalfield. In 1890 a line from Market Weighton to Driffield gave Bridlington a more direct route to the holiday markets of south and west Yorkshire, but at the expense of gradients as steep as 1 in 95 across the Wolds.

Towards the end of the century the North Eastern Railway had a total monopoly of railway provision in the county, and nowhere was that monopoly more keenly felt than in Hull, where the Corporation had strong suspicions that the North Eastern was favouring northeast ports at its expense. With the enthusiastic backing of the Corporation, the Hull, Barnsley & West Riding Junction Railway & Dock Company was promoted, and opened to its new Alexandra Dock in 1885. The new company's route to Hull was a difficult one. West Riding coal had to be brought across the Wolds through the 2,116 yard Drewton tunnel, on gradients of up to 1 in 150, while westbound traffic from the dock faced an even steeper climb at 1 in 100. Rivalry, however, was surprisingly shortlived; by the early twentieth century the Hull & Barnsley and the North Eastern Railways achieved a close understanding, jointly opening the King George V Dock in 1914.

In Hull itself the docks east of the city were reached by two lines circling the built-up area at the time of their construction. The first, to the Victoria Dock in 1853, was built at ground level, necessitating numerous level crossings. The later Hull & Barnsley line of 1885 was built on a high embankment. In the 1960s the network was altered so that this line carried the remaining freight clear of road traffic, and Hull's notorious level crossings declined in number from 22 to four.

Since 1950 the railway network has radically contracted. Early casualties were the rural Malton-Driffield line (1958) and most of the competitive Hull & Barnsley (1959). The Beeching era saw the closure of the routes to the Holderness coast (1964) and of the inland lines crossing at Market Weighton (1965). The independent Derwent Valley Light Railway finally succumbed in 1981. What the maps do not illustrate is the drastic decline of services even on the remaining routes. Many intermediate stations have closed, and the country goods yard is no more. Hull at its zenith had 300 miles of railway sidings; today it has but two regular freight workings a day.

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