



*Vale and Downland Museum – Local History Series*

## ***The Faringdon Branch***

**by Reg Wilkinson**

When the Great Western Railway was put down between London and Bristol it bypassed Faringdon on its way through the Vale of White Horse. As a result, for many years the inhabitants of Faringdon were dependent on a shuttle service of passenger and freight conveyances between the town and Faringdon Road Station on the main line.

Eventually, however, Daniel Bennet the Lord of the Manor of Faringdon persuaded a number of local businessmen to form the Faringdon Railway Company and put up the money to construct a line between Faringdon and Uffington station. The latter was located on the main line a few miles west of Faringdon Road, which was renamed Challow to avoid confusion when the Faringdon Railway, 3½ miles in length, was opened on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1864.

Because the Faringdon company had no rolling stock of its own the GWR agreed to carry out the day to day running of its railway for 55% of the gross earnings. This went on until June 1886 when the larger concern purchased the Faringdon Railway outright.

Thereafter the railway served the surrounding area as a typical rural branch line, encouraging trade and industry in Faringdon and carrying heavy goods which could not be carried on the roads. Passenger traffic reached a peak in 1913 with the sale of over 19,000 tickets at Faringdon, although the best financial year was 1925 when its total revenue amounted to £27,347.

Unfortunately, after the 1939-45 war receipts decreased rapidly as the petrol engine began to have an ever-increasing influence on the transportation of both goods and passengers. As a result, by 1948, when the railways were nationalised, the total annual revenue for Faringdon station was down to £3,000.

British Rail tried to tempt customers with cheap trips to Swindon on Saturdays, but defeated the object by not having a late train back to Faringdon. Therefore people preferred to travel by bus, or by car, if they wanted to stay late in Swindon after a shopping spree or a football match.

On 11<sup>th</sup> November 1951, a meeting was convened to discuss the future of the branch line and as no objections were raised British Rail decided to withdraw the passenger service. Less than two months later, on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1951, a large crowd assembled just before 9pm to sing Auld Lang Syne and watch the last passenger train depart from Faringdon Station.

The branch carried on as a goods line after the passenger service ceased and continued to have some influence on life in Faringdon until Uffington station closed down on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1964, a little over a century after Faringdon Railway opened.

The Faringdon line was taken up soon after closure and Uffington station was demolished. The building which housed the offices of the Faringdon Railway Company is now occupied by a building society and Faringdon station has been turned over to commercial use.

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