

# CHADDESSEN SIDINGS – TRACKS THROUGH TIME

## INTRODUCTION

The opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825 provided the impetus for the creation of a rapidly expanding railway network right across the landscape of Victorian England. In the adjacent county of Leicestershire, the new Leicester & Swannington Railway, which commenced operations in 1832, prompted various land-owners and businessmen to explore the possibility of creating one or more railway lines connecting centrally-placed Derby. Many months of negotiations followed before proposals for three different routes crystallised. Bills were drafted and submitted to Parliament which, in 1836, sanctioned the creation of three separate railways with Derby playing a key role in each as follows:

Birmingham & Derby Junction Railway (Royal Assent on 19 May 1836)  
Midland Counties Railway (Royal Assent on 21 June 1836)  
North Midland Railway (4 July 1836)

As far as Chaddesden was concerned, the most significant of these three routes was the Midland Counties Railway which ran eastwards from Derby towards Nottingham. The very detailed plans of the Derby area (c.1835) prepared by their civil engineer, Charles Vignoles, can be seen online in the David Rumsey Map Collection at Stanford University, USA.<sup>1</sup>

The actual route the Midland Counties Railway took as it ran through Chaddesden in-between the Derby Canal and the River Derwent and then on into Derby closely matched Vignoles' proposed line, although he initially envisaged the railway terminating in the town centre. The same plan also shows a second line leaving Derby close to St. Mary's Bridge, quickly turning eastwards and running parallel to and north of Nottingham Road, before cutting through what would later become Nottingham Road Cemetery, crossing Highfield Lane and Meadow Lane (obliterating Meadow Farm in the process), and then rejoining the first line a few hundred yards over the parish boundary in Spondon. This seems to have been an alternative route for the railway as it approached Derby. The trustees of the Nottingham Road Turnpike understandably called a special meeting on 4 February 1836 for the purpose of '*assenting to or dissenting from the intended line of the Midland Counties Railway crossing the line of the said Road at Chaddesden Hill, in the Parishes of Chaddesden ... and Saint Alkmund.*'<sup>2</sup> Whatever conclusion they reached, this secondary route (which would have involved dealing with steeper gradients) was evidently abandoned at an early stage.

Construction work on each of the three railway companies' lines began in 1837,<sup>3</sup> advertisements inviting suitable contractors to tender having previously been placed in the pages of local newspapers.<sup>4</sup> By the summer of the next year, the *Derby Mercury* informed its readers that the Midland Counties Railway '*now employed on the line no fewer than 3,480 men and 328 horses; viz. between Derby and Nottingham, 691 men and 93 horses; Trent and Leicester, 1,076 men and 97 horses; and Leicester to Rugby, 1,713 men and 138 horses.*'<sup>5</sup>

William Mackenzie of Liverpool,<sup>6</sup> the contractor for the Derby to Long Eaton and Long Eaton to Leicester sections of the new railway was not slow to devise a cost-cutting measure when he had to divert a section of the Derby Canal between Spondon and Borrowash.<sup>7</sup> Faced with a penalty for every hour the canal was to be closed, he came up with a novel solution to get the work done without paying the Canal Company anything whatsoever when, by chance, the canal happened to be closed for repairs. The *Derby Mercury* newspaper explained just how he did it (see Fig. 1 below).

1 <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~331487~90100082>

2 *Derby Mercury*, 27 January 1836. Chaddesden Hill is now better known as Cemetery Hill.

3 North Midland Railway construction commenced in February 1837; Midland Counties Railway in May 1837; and Birmingham & Derby Junction Railway in August 1837.

4 For example, *Derby Mercury*, 1 March 1837.

5 *Derby Mercury*, 20 June 1838.

6 Mackenzie had formerly worked for Thomas Telford. Thanks to Peter Barnes for his helpful comments here and elsewhere.

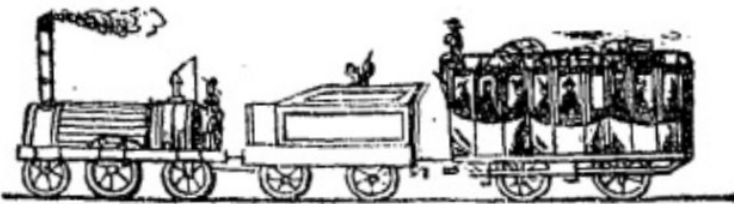
7 The Derby to Sandiacre section of the Derby Canal opened on 30 May 1795.

**MIDLAND COUNTIES RAILWAY.**—The neighbourhood of Spondon, near Derby, has presented a busy scene for the last week. A diversion of the Canal had to be made by the Railway Company, which could not be effected without stopping the navigation, for which there is a penalty £2 *per hour*. The contractor, (Mr. Mackenzie) taking advantage of a stoppage of the Canal for repairs mustered his forces from the other parts of the contract, and has succeeded in executing the diversion, while the repairs of the Canal were going on to the astonishment of the natives. Between 200 and 300 men were employed in a very small space, and when all busily at work, presented very animated spectacle. To induce the men to persevere and work an extra number of hours, Mr. Mackenzie supplied them daily with a substantial dinner of beef and ale in addition to their wages, which was served out and eaten on the works.

**Fig. 1: Extract from Derby Mercury, 15 August 1838, detailing William Mackenzie's incentive to his workers.**

In formulating their plans, the three respective railway companies proposed separate stations at Derby, but by March 1839 they had agreed to construct a 'tri-junct' station for their joint use. This was soon being put to good use when the companies began regular services as detailed below:

- 1839 (4 June) Midland Counties Railway (Derby to Nottingham) opened
- 1839 (12 August) Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway (Birmingham to Derby) opened
- 1840 (11 May) North Midland Railway (Derby to Leeds) opened to Rotherham



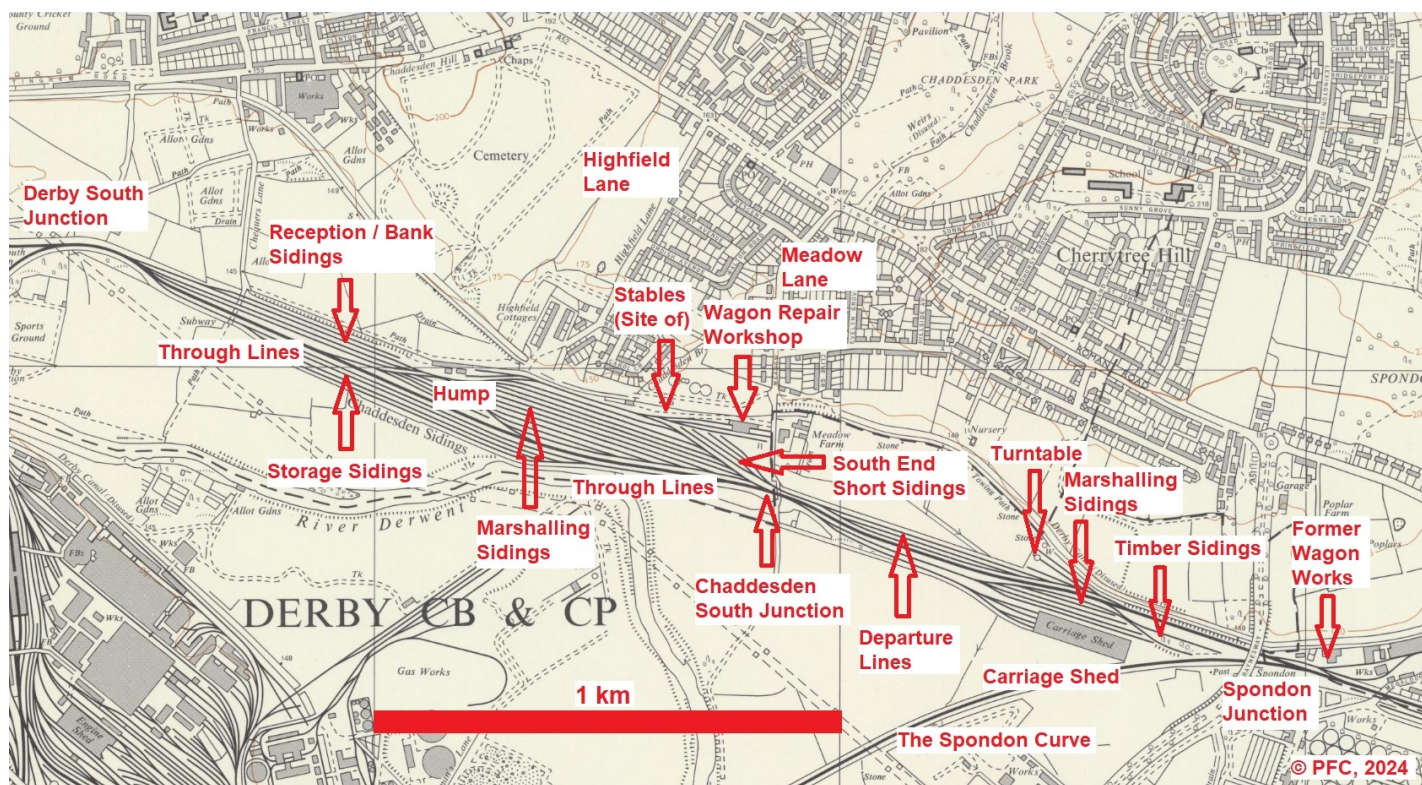
**Fig. 2: A simple illustration used in 1839 railway advertisements**

As mentioned above, the public opening of the Midland Counties Railway took place on 4 June 1839, however, this was preceded by a special event for the company's directors, shareholders and their friends who, on Thursday 30 May, were conveyed by four trains hauled by the locomotives *Ariel*, *Mersey*, *Hawk* and *Sunbeam* from Nottingham to Derby and back again. *Sunbeam* was the first to depart and left Nottingham at 12:30 pm, pulling four first-class and two second-class carriages. The panels of the carriages were painted with the arms of the four counties of Derby, Nottingham, Leicester and Lincoln and flags were hoisted on the top of each carriage.<sup>8</sup> The weather was fine and thousands of people gathered at various places along the route to watch this innovative means of transportation. Presumably any residents of Chaddesden who had walked down either Highfield Lane or Meadow Lane and crossed over the Canal to see what all the fuss was about would have been rewarded by the sight of *Sunbeam* chugging past at about 1:15 pm, closely followed by the other three engines! The White family of Meadow Farm would certainly have had a grandstand view of the trains running along the 8ft-high embankment only 180 yards or so to the south of their farmhouse. William Morledge White, a keen, modernising farmer would no doubt have been quick to appreciate the significance of what this new form of transport might mean to his business activities.

The three railway companies continued to operate separately until 10 May 1844 when they were merged by Act of Parliament to form the Midland Railway Company, which within a couple of decades commenced construction work on the vast Chaddesden Sidings extending from west to east across the three parishes of St. Alkmund's (Derby), Chaddesden and Spondon. Simply measured on a map, the distance was about 1.3 miles but, as will be seen later, the total length of railway tracks was

<sup>8</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 5 June 1839.

many times this figure. Fig. 3 reproduced below shows many of the different components of the sidings which will be discussed in more detail in the second section of this article.



**Fig. 3: Main features of Chaddesden Sidings. 1969 OS Map reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland (<https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>). Enlarge the browser image to view the plan in more detail.**

## CHADDESSEN SIDINGS

Whilst it was certainly true that the new railways revolutionised the carrying of large quantities of freight, the heavily laden wagons presented a significant problem in how best to process them. For example, an engine might be pulling, say, twenty wagons carrying different items from one or more places. At some stage these wagons would need to be sorted out, one from the other, and then marshalled into the correct sequence of the stations at which they were ultimately destined to be detached.<sup>9</sup> If this was not done properly then considerable time and money would be wasted by the railway company, yet, as one railway historian noted: *'Many railway companies were slow to recognise the profitability of transporting freight and hence did not invest in major marshalling yards until many years after their formation.'*<sup>10</sup>

By the late 1850s the Midland Railway Company had begun work on sidings at Toton, eight miles to the east of Derby and six miles south-west of Nottingham, in order to sort trains loaded with coal from the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire coal-fields and then marshal the wagons prior to despatch to London and the south of the country. Closer still to Derby, a new sidings facility was proposed for Chaddesden, less than one mile to the east of Derby Railway Station.<sup>11</sup> The layout of the new sidings would be largely dictated by local geography, since the railway line at Chaddesden was bordered by the Derby Canal to the north and the River Derwent to the south, with a noticeable 'pinch-point' less than 200 yards wide opposite Chaddesden Mill. At around 140ft OD, this was the lowest-lying area of ground in the parish and, as such, frequently flooded when the Derwent burst its banks, e.g. early in 1881, *'at Chaddesden Sidings the water was only a few yards from the line of the Midland Railway.'*<sup>12</sup> In passing, it is worth noting that the network of drainage channels marked on

<sup>9</sup> For some idea of the complex nature of shunting, see: W. J. Gordon. 'Everyday Life on the Railroad – In the Sidings', in *Leisure Hour*, London, 1891, 191–195, pp.192–3.

<sup>10</sup> M. Rhodes, *The Illustrated History of British Marshalling Yards*, Sparkford, 1988, p.9

<sup>11</sup> A very brief summary of Chaddesden Sidings may be seen on Derbyshire Historic Environment Record at the following link: <https://her.derbyshire.gov.uk/Monument/MDR11733>

<sup>12</sup> *Derbyshire Advertiser*, 11 February 1881.

the 1865 plan reproduced as Fig. 4 below presumably represents a previous generation's attempt to deal with this perennial problem.

At their greatest extent, the sidings can be considered as beginning close to Derby South Junction a couple of hundred yards to the west of the bottom end of Chequers Lane (originally in St. Alkmund's Parish, Derby), then running south of the Derby Canal through Chaddesden before crossing another parish boundary into Spondon, where the sidings terminated just to the west of Spondon Junction, not far from an enormous carriage shed. Some 130 yards north of the carriage shed was the turntable, serviced by its own sidings, right alongside the Derby Canal.

Inevitably, construction of the new Chaddesden Sidings meant acquiring a substantial area of land alongside the existing track, resulting in negotiations with Sir Henry Sacheverel Wilmot, the Bateman family, and the Duke of Devonshire – the major landowners in this particular part of the parish. In the *London Gazette* of 29 November 1859, formal notice was given that the Midland Railway Company intended to apply for an Act of Parliament authorising, amongst other things, '*the Company to purchase lands and houses by compulsion or agreement*' ... in the parishes of St. Alkmund, Derby, and Chaddesden.

It is interesting to discover that some months prior to this, the railway company had already begun discussions with Sir Henry Wilmot, for documents in the National Archives at Kew note that in June 1859, '*Mr Crossley*<sup>13</sup> *reported that Mr Lewis*<sup>14</sup> *and himself had agreed to purchase from Sir Henry Wilmot about 14 acres of land at Chaddesden for the proposed sorting sidings at £200 per acre.*<sup>15</sup> Also in 1859 and only a few months later, '*Resolved that Mr Crossley be instructed to obtain possession of the land lately purchased of Sir Henry Wilmot near Chaddesden and proceed with the construction of the proposed sorting sidings as far as the land already purchased will allow.*<sup>16</sup> In the spring of the next year it was '*Ordered that notice to quit be given to Messrs Towle and Collumbell of the land they now hold of the company, the land being required for work connected with the proposed new sidings at Chaddesden.*<sup>17</sup> By that autumn, the Midland Railway's Way and Works Committee had approved a tender of £789 from Mr. C. Martin for culverting at the new Chaddesden Sidings.<sup>18</sup>

Details in Brian Radford's comprehensive book have provided further information about early developments at the sidings. The railway lines, trackbed, ballast, etc., began to be installed later in 1860 and were completed by June 1862 at a cost in excess of £15,000, by which time work was in hand on a second set of sorting sidings. Signals and boxes for the pointsmen were also in place by 1860 and various new buildings, such as stables for the horses and offices were constructed at a cost of £2,043 18s 11d between October 1861 and December 1863.<sup>19</sup> Since most of the shunting at Chaddesden in those early days would be done using heavy horses, it is no surprise that in 1860, when the Midland Railway authorities had first resolved to build a 6-stalled stable at Chaddesden, they did so '*in such form as to admit of extension*' – a sensible decision since horse usage would increase considerably over the forthcoming decades.<sup>20</sup>

The new sidings at Chaddesden were, to some degree, operational by early 1862,<sup>21</sup> for the *Derby Mercury* of 19 February that year records what was to be the first of all too many fatal accidents there, when Henry Barton, a ganger at the sidings, was run over and killed. Construction work at the sidings must have been ongoing for many years afterwards as new lines and facilities were created and amended as workloads dictated. The railway company also had to ensure it owned any areas of land at Chaddesden that might be needed for its future operations, and so, on 2 January 1863, the Midland Railway Company and the trustees of the will of Richard Thomas Bateman, formerly of

13 Presumably John Sydney Crossley (1812–1879), the Midland Railway's chief engineer (from 1858), who had previously worked with Vignoles.

14 Probably Josiah Lewis, a director of the Midland Railway.

15 TNA RAIL 491/95 (14 June 1859). Reference supplied by Jean Moss.

16 TNA RAIL 491/95 (18 October 1859). Reference supplied by Jean Moss.

17 TNA RAIL 491/95 (15 May 1860). Reference supplied by Jean Moss.

18 TNA RAIL 491/95 (4 September 1860). Reference supplied by Jean Moss.

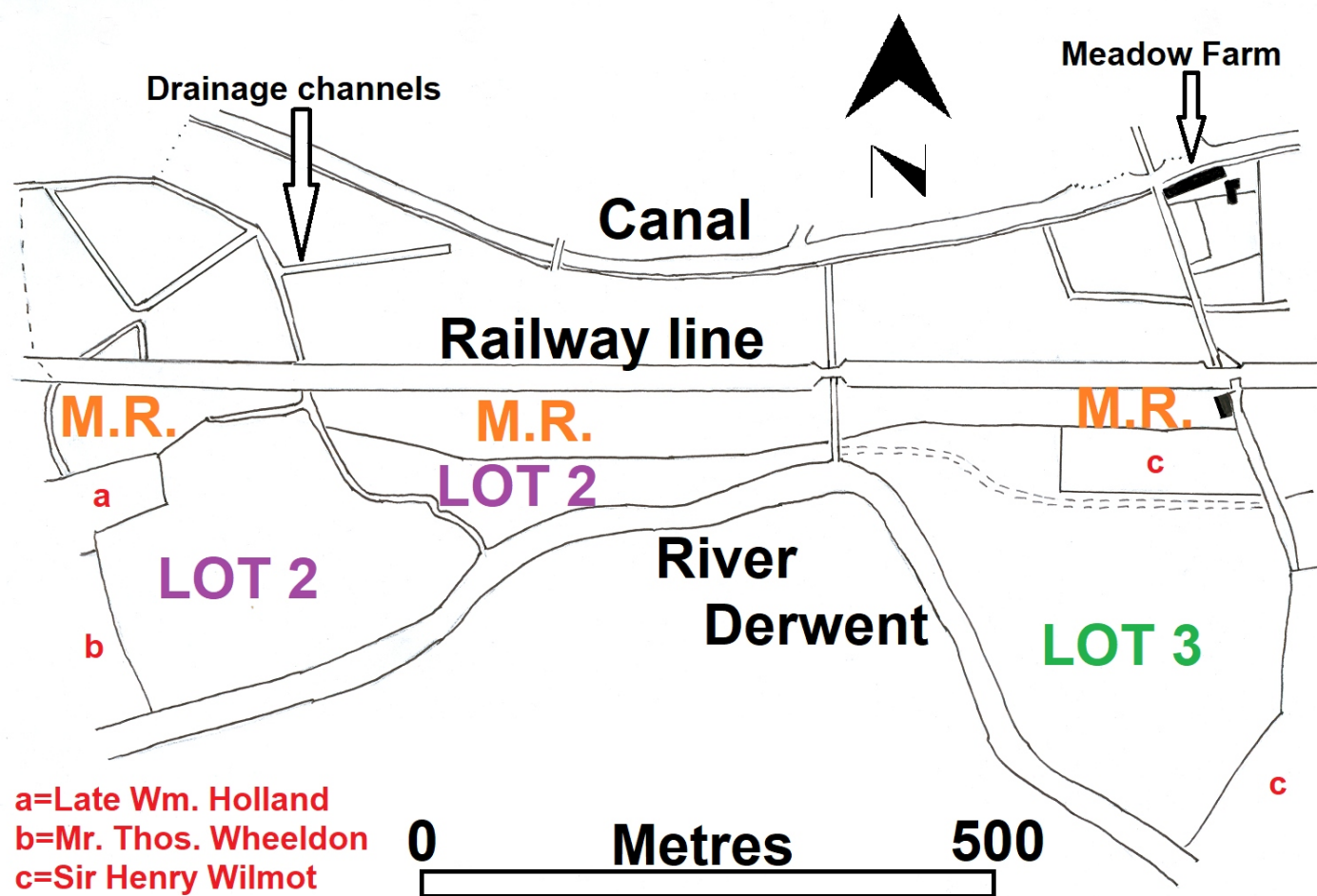
19 B. Radford, *Rail Centres: Derby*, London, 1986, p.49.

20 TNA RAIL 491/95 (6 November 1860). Reference supplied by Jean Moss.

21 Curiously there does not appear to be any account in local newspapers relating to the actual opening of the sidings.

Wells, Somerset, and Hartington Hall, Derbyshire, were named in an official notice placed in the *Derbyshire Advertiser* to the effect that both parties had agreed upon an exchange of several small pieces of land by the railway in Chaddesden. The Bateman trustees giving up nearly 4 acres of meadow in exchange for a similar acreage in Derwent Meadow and Share Flatt Nook.

Just a couple of years later, Derby estate agents, Newbold and Oliver, acting on behalf of the executors of the late Richard Thomas Bateman, advertised the forthcoming auction sale in May 1865 of some 37 acres of land at Chaddesden lying immediately to the south of the railway.<sup>22</sup> Both lots were said to be tenanted by Mr. Thomas Richardson. Lot 2 totalled 18a 0r 15p and went by various names, e.g. Near Standwich, Far Standwich, Far End Standwich, Siddon Meadow, and Derwent Meadow. Lot 3 (19a 3r 19p) was known by the names of Garrett's Meadow, Broad Meadow, and Share Flatt Nook.<sup>23</sup> The auction catalogue was accompanied by a large-scale plan drawn by John Parkin of Idridgehay the previous month, which reveals the extent to which Chaddesden Sidings had already expanded south of the original railway tracks by that date.<sup>24</sup> Fig.4 is a redrawn and simplified version of Parkin's map and shows the Midland Railway Company as owners of an irregular shaped section of land (marked M.R.) some 1,100 yards long lying south of the tracks with a total area of approx 10½ acres.<sup>25</sup> Owners of adjoining fields are denoted by the letters a,b, and c.



**Fig. 4: Simplified version of 1865 sale plan showing the railway line together with additional land owned by the Midland Railway Company (marked M.R.) on the south side of the tracks.**

Rather surprisingly, it does not appear that either Lot 2 or Lot 3 were of especial interest to the Midland Railway since the land was apparently bought by Sir Henry Wilmot, to add to his extensive Chaddesden land-holdings.<sup>26</sup> In the years immediately following this sale, subsequent developments

<sup>22</sup> Richard Thomas Bateman (1794–1853) was the nephew of Sir Hugh Bateman (1756–1824) of Hartington Hall.

<sup>23</sup> The sale particulars have the latter name as Spare Flatt Nook, but this is an error.

<sup>24</sup> Derby Local Studies Library (DLSL), 44618/9 (CF 333.33).

<sup>25</sup> Note that the plan does not mark any land north of the railway line that the Midland Railway might already have owned in 1865.

<sup>26</sup> i.e. DLSL, DD 1514, Draft Conveyance, July 1865: Trustees of Richard Thomas Bateman to Sir Henry Wilmot, Bart., Chaddesden Hall, of lands in Chaddesden. Maybe this land was simply too prone to flooding for railway use.

in this general area of the sidings, e.g. the offices, stables block, Wagon Repair Workshop, etc., seem to have taken place north of the original tracks.

In June 1867 a length of new track known as the 'Spondon Curve' (Fig. 3) was brought into use, linking the south end of Derby Railway Station with the railway line at Spondon Junction. Designed to provide better access directly through the station, this effectively allowed north–south (and vice-versa) passenger trains to avoid the line through Chaddesden Sidings altogether.

Mention has already been made of the shunting work in those early days being done using the muscle power of heavy horses. In the summer of 1872 a strike by Midland Railway horse-drivers at the sidings resulted in the six ringleaders being summoned before the County Magistrates in early September, accused of neglect of service on 22 August under the terms of the Master and Servants' Act for non-fulfilment of contract.<sup>27</sup> A newspaper account concluded by noting, '*The Railway Company employ at the Chaddesden Siding about fifty horse-drivers, most of whom took part in the strike*'. The Midland Railway did not press for a heavy penalty, since the men had '*confessed their error, and had agreed to pay such a fine as the Bench might inflict,*' and so they were each fined 5s with 18s 6d costs.<sup>28</sup>

Work to provide further sidings at Chaddesden was authorised in early 1873, once again costing over £15,000. A new Wagon Repair Shop costing £6,868 had been approved in October 1872 and new sidings for it were given the go-ahead in early December 1873 at a cost of over £3,700.<sup>29</sup>

The Wagon Repair Workshop, situated a little to the west of Meadow Farm (Fig. 6), survived as a reminder of the area's railway past until its recent demolition, which will be described in more detail at the end of this article. It was served by its own Cripple Sidings, a small section of the main sidings complex. 'Cripple' in this sense meant broken or damaged wagons and considering the heavy loads the wooden trucks had to carry, day in and day out, the workshop must have been kept extremely busy. A summary of various Carriage and Wagon premises dating from c.1905 may be seen on the Midland Railway Study Centre's website, and provides the following statistics for the Wagon Repair Workshop at Chaddesden: Area of shop – 1,292 sq yds; Yards of sidings – 1,350; Total area of shops, sidings and yards – 9,200 sq yds; Brick or wood building – Brick; Description of Roof – Slate.<sup>30</sup>

A second Wagon Repair Workshop measuring approx. 140ft x 40ft and located a short distance away from Highfield Cottages is marked on the 1883 Ordnance Survey map (see Fig. 5), but it had been removed by the time the 1900 edition was published. The two workshops are the only buildings marked on the 1875 plan reproduced as Fig. 7 and can also be seen on the 1889 plan (Fig.8).



**Fig. 5: 1883 OS map showing the early Wagon Repair Workshop. Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland (<https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>).**

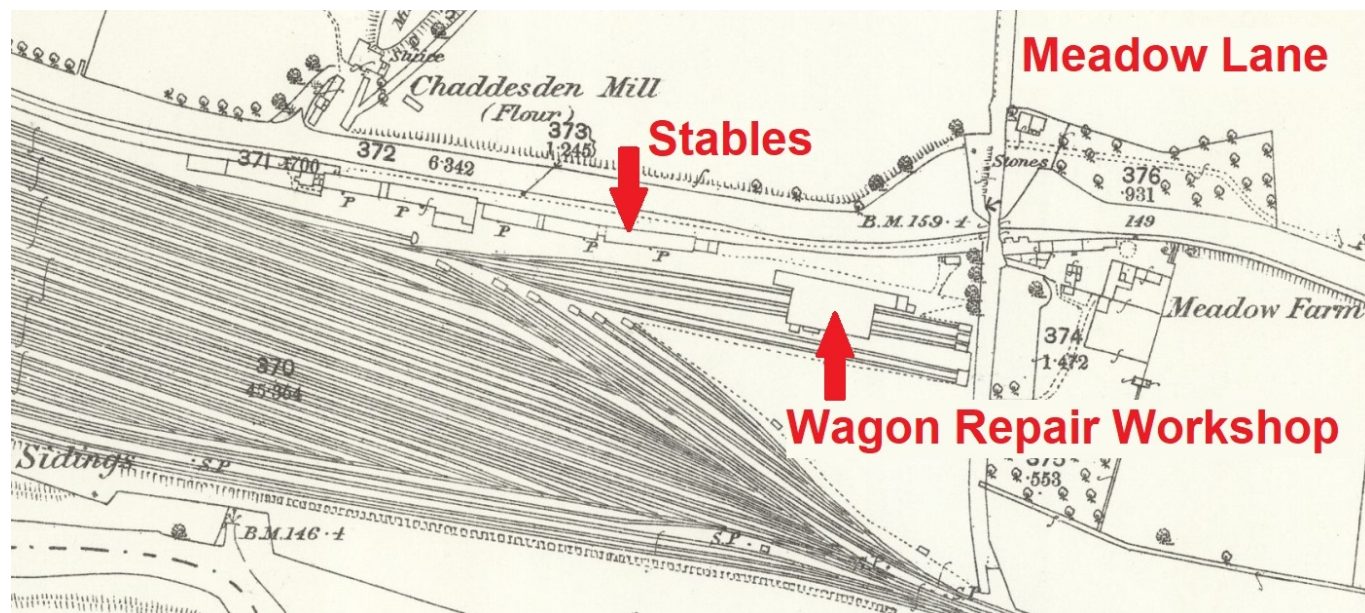
<sup>27</sup> *Derby Mercury*, 4 September 1872.

<sup>28</sup> Another, much larger, strike took place only a few years later. Starting at Toton, it spread to include other workers, including the Chaddesden horse-drivers, shunters and guards (*Derby Mercury*, 8 January 1879).

<sup>29</sup> B. Radford, *Rail Centres: Derby*, London, 1986, p.50.

<sup>30</sup> Accessed at: <https://www.midlandrailwaystudycentre.org.uk/catimages/31320.jpg> It should be remembered that these figures relate solely to the Wagon Repair Shop and its associated sidings at Chaddesden not the entire Chaddesden Sidings!

1873 was a busy year for the Midland Railway Company at Chaddesden, with new Goods Offices being authorised at a cost of £250 in June and then stabling facilities for 20 horses were commissioned for £950 that October – presumably these were an extension to the original stables of 1860 referred to above.<sup>31</sup> At this point in time, horses were crucial to shunting operations at Chaddesden and when the First Edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map was published in 1883, it shows their stable-block (Fig. 6) as a long line of five buildings just a few yards to the south of the Derby Canal. Each of the five buildings had its own pump (marked 'P' on the plan) conveniently to hand.



**Fig. 6: Extract from 1883 OS map showing the Stables and Wagon Repair Workshop. Map reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland (<https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>).**

Brian Radford also notes that on 1 July 1873 the Railway Board approved 'a 12-road wooden shed 680ft x 150ft wide, to house sleeping carriages, erected at the Spondon end of the Chaddesden complex at a cost of £1,320. It was still largely intact in the 1950s'.<sup>32</sup> However, the 25-inch OS map L14, published in 1883, does not show this huge shed, although it is featured on the 1900 edition. There is evidently some confusion around the date of the shed, for in an earlier part of his book, he mentions 'an extensive system of carriage sidings, with a carriage shed, and costing £33,770 was erected at Chaddesden sidings, approval being given on 2 June 1899'.<sup>33</sup> This date itself may well be a misprint for '1889' since various advertisements inviting tenders for the building of a 'Timber Carriage Shed at Spondon Junction' appeared in various trade publications in March 1890 (e.g. *The Building News* of 14 March 1890). Just over one month later, an advertisement in the *Derby Daily Telegraph* of 30 April 1890 noted that carpenters, labourers and navvies were wanted for the new Midland Carriage Shed near Spondon Junction. Incidentally, the massive shed can be seen to good effect in a 1938 oblique aerial photo of the new Raynesway, opened earlier that year.<sup>34</sup>

Although not forming part of Chaddesden Sidings, the early 1883 OS map marks 'Derbyshire Works (Wagon)' connected to the main railway line and squeezed-in between Megaloughton Lane and the Derby Canal, immediately to the east of Spondon Junction (see Fig. 3). These works for building and repairing railway wagons were privately operated by the Derbyshire Wagon Company Ltd until it eventually went into liquidation, the *Derby Mercury* of 10 December 1879 carrying a notice regarding the forthcoming sale of the company's land, premises and machinery. Seemingly wagons continued to be repaired there, but the property was again sold in 1882 and acquired by A. Weston, also a

31 B. Radford, *Rail Centres: Derby*, London, 1986, p.50. An earlier notice had been placed in the *Derby Mercury* of 21 December 1870 inviting builders to tender for the construction of stables at Chaddesden.

32 B. Radford, *Rail Centres: Derby*, London, 1986, p.50.

33 B. Radford, *Rail Centres: Derby*, London, 1986, p.31

34 Accessed at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/record/EPW060261>. Compare this with a photograph taken from a broadly similar viewpoint nearly three-quarters of a century later at: <https://www.networkrailmediacentre.co.uk/resources/aerial-photo-of-the-chaddesden-triangle-site-in-derby>

builder and repairer of railway wagons.<sup>35</sup> However, by the time the 1900 edition of the OS map was published, the premises are simply marked as part of the adjacent Leach, Neal & Company's Colour Works.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1913, when George Wright gave a lecture about his reminiscences of Spondon, he briefly mentioned '*What is now the Colour Works, was opened as Wagon Works in 1875*'.<sup>37</sup>

As will soon become apparent, Chaddesden Sidings handled a huge volume of shunting traffic in the last decades of the Victorian era. A casual visitor to the site would have been amazed at the scale of the work involved, with men, engines and horses all labouring to shunt and marshall the wagons as quickly as possible. In the 1883 edition of his popular book, Frederick Williams describes the appearance of Toton sidings on a wintry or foggy night and I imagine the situation at Chaddesden was broadly similar. He mentions '*clouds of fire-lit steam, the glancing lights, the white, green and red signals, the moving forms of engines, trains, and men ... the bumpings of trucks, the shouts of men, and the squeal of whistles from locomotives and from shunters*'.<sup>38</sup>

The process by which the wagons were handled at nearby Toton is also worth describing here, since it would have had parallels at Chaddesden. Williams informs his readers that the loaded wagons destined for various different locations were first delivered to one of the nine reception or 'bank' lines. As the train came in, a 'chalker' would meet it, read the destination label on each individual wagon and then chalk on the truck the number of the relevant shunting line to which it should go. Meanwhile the engine of the train was detached ready for its next job, leaving the line of full wagons on the reception line. Next a shunting engine would push the line of wagons forward so that horses could draw the trucks into their various sorting sidings.<sup>39</sup>

Some very useful facts and figures concerning Chaddesden Sidings and the working practices there were presented to the Institute of Civil Engineers in 1875 by Mr. James J. Allport, General Manager of the Midland Railway.<sup>40</sup> Allport described Chaddesden as:

*... a set of sidings, about 17 miles long, and covering about 50 acres of ground, on the Midland railway, at Chaddesden, near Derby [see Fig.7, below], through which were passed in 1873 the large number of one million and eighteen thousand wagons, or three thousand two hundred per working day, and in one month ninety-six thousand wagons had passed. They were similar to those at Shildon,<sup>41</sup> and the receiving sidings would hold about one thousand wagons, and the marshalling sidings upwards of three thousand, and five trains could be marshalled and sorted at the same time. There were ten receiving sidings, converging into one neck, from which thirty-five sidings branched off. Through these eleven trains had been passed per hour, averaging from thirty-five to forty wagons each. He had timed the shunting, and found that it varied from three and a half minutes to four and a half minutes per train. When a train arrived at one of the ten receiving sidings, the engine immediately ran forward, and a shunting engine went to the back of the train to push it towards the neck. Horses were in readiness to take each wagon forward, the man calling out to the pointsman which siding it was destined for. At Chaddesden there were about ninety horses and six shunting engines. While the engines were taking coke and water the trains could be marshalled. These sidings accommodated traffic from six different directions, from the North, from Manchester, from Nottingham, from Birmingham, from London, from the North Staffordshire district, and from one or two small branches. The traffic was both goods and minerals, the greater part being goods traffic. The short sidings were for spare wagons that might have to remain on hand for a time.*

35 *Derby Mercury*, 2 August 1882 and Spondon Historical Society.,

36 See also <https://her.derbyshire.gov.uk/Monument/MDR10385>

37 Accessed at: <https://places.wishful-thinking.org.uk/DBY/Spondon/YearsAgo.html>

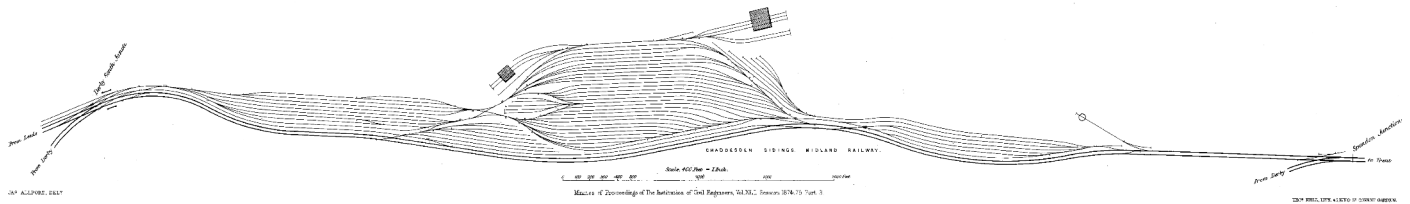
38 F. S. Williams, *Our Iron Roads*, 2nd edn., London & Derby, 1883, p.269. Williams neglected to mention the horses!

39 F. S. Williams, *Our Iron Roads*, 2nd edn., London & Derby, 1883, p.270–1.

40 J. Forrest (Ed.), *Minutes of Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, Vol. 41, Session 1874–75, Part 3, London, 1875, pp.61–2. Allport was knighted in 1884.

41 Shildon Sidings were situated a short distance to the east of New Shildon, Co. Durham.





**Fig. 7 Plan of Chaddesden Sidings presented to the Institute of Civil Engineers in 1875. Enlarge the browser image to view the plan in more detail.**

Allport also noted that the sidings at Toton only a few miles away were about 14 miles long, and entirely for minerals. In addition, he also provided the cost, shown in the table below, 'for the year ending December 1874, of working the Toton and Chaddesden sorting depôts. The amount includes shunting power, calculated at 5s per hour, and the depreciation of horse stock.'<sup>42</sup>

	CHADDESSEN	%AGE	TOTON	%AGE
Staff	9,326-08-00	33.82 %	6,790-16-08	33.83 %
Clothing	334-09-05	1.21 %	451-00-00	2.25 %
Horses	4,547-15-09	16.49 %	4,473-17-06	22.29 %
Shunting Engines	13,371-00-00	48.48 %	8,357-00-00	41.63 %
TOTALS:	£ 27,579-13-02	100.00 %	£ 20,072-14-02	100.00 %

The various decennial Chaddesden census returns provide an insight into how people living in the parish associated with the railway, both in terms of employment and the places they lived, i.e.

YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION	INHABITED HOUSES	RAILWAY-RELATED OCCUPATIONS	RAILWAY-RELATED PROPERTIES
1841	472	98	0	0
1851	433	92	3	0
1861	465	99	4	0
1871	485	100	31	5
1881	611	123	74	33

The first clearly identifiable railway-related occupations were listed in 1851 when David Bratby is shown as a station porter; Thomas Tomlinson, a railway porter; and John Davison, a railway guard. Note how the number of railway-related properties increased from just 5 in 1871 (Railway Cottages x4, Chaddesden Sidings x1) to 33 only ten years later (Highfield Cottages x30, Sidings Cottages x2 and Stable Cottage x1), due of course to the construction of Highfield Cottages for workers of the Midland Railway.<sup>43</sup>

In 1882 the gridiron sidings at Edge Hill a couple of miles to the east of Liverpool were opened. Specifically constructed on a continuously falling gradient, this was the first large marshalling yard to have a purpose-built, gravity-aided sorting facility. Later railway innovations would see the introduction of 'hump shunting', the process by which railway wagons could be separated out one from another by driving the trucks up and over an artificially-created hump or incline, after which gravity alone would cause them to move down a slight drop in gradient into the various sorting

<sup>42</sup> The percentages are not part of the original costings and have been added to facilitate easy comparison between Chaddesden and Toton.

<sup>43</sup> It should be remembered that as property names, etc., were supplied largely on the basis of an enumerator's own knowledge and diligence, total accuracy should not therefore be expected!

sidings. In an article about the Edge Hill gridiron sidings dated 15 April 1887, the *Railroad Gazette* of New York made a reference to Chaddesden Sidings.

To begin with, the *Gazette*'s reporter first of all noted two essential conditions for gravitation sidings: (1) As the wagons move from summit to foot of incline, all necessary changes in their relative positions must be made without the assistance of locomotives, i.e. in whatever order they were taken to the top, they must be ready to leave the sidings as properly marshalled trains on arrival at the bottom. (2) A means must be devised for stopping, without injury to them or their loads, any wagons which get beyond the control of the shunters.<sup>44</sup> The *Gazette* commented that whilst some limited special classes of traffic might previously been sorted with the aid of gravitation, an inclined plane had never before been specially constructed to sort and marshal a mixed goods traffic purely by gravitation alone. It noted that at places like the sidings at Darlington and Chaddesden, advantage was taken of a slight gradient to accelerate the shunting, undertaken there with the assistance of locomotives or horses. It would, however, be some years before hump shunting was introduced at Chaddesden.<sup>45</sup>

One July evening, around the year 1887, William Mitchell Acworth (1850–1925), a well-known barrister, politician and economist, visited Chaddesden Sidings in order to gather information for an account of the Midland Railway he was writing.<sup>46</sup> At around 8:00 pm Acworth, together with an engine-driver, his fireman, a senior officer of the Midland Railway Company and an inspector, were all standing on the footplate of an engine which made its way to the sidings. His narrative continued in the following words:

*The first point for which we made was Chaddesden, only about a mile outside the town, where the goods traffic converges from every point of the compass, and is rearranged, made up into fresh trains, and again sent forward. Here a train arrives and leaves every seven and a half minutes throughout the twenty-four hours, and of course at much shorter intervals in the early evening. As Nature has not been kind enough to provide a convenient slope like that at Edgehill, – and indeed as the traffic goes away in both directions instead of being mainly outwards, as is the case at Liverpool, it would be necessary to provide not one slope but two, – another method of sorting has to be adopted. A train arrives, its engine is uncoupled, and a second or shunting engine is attached at the back. This new engine then pushes the train forward to a shunting-neck, which opens out into no less than thirty-five lines. The couplings between the separate "shunts" – the single trucks, that is, or sets of trucks for the different destinations – are meanwhile unhooked; to each shunt one or more horses are attached, and the trucks are by them drawn forward into their appointed siding. A train of forty trucks is in this way broken up in from three and a half to four and a half minutes. Six engines and from fifty to a hundred horses are constantly at work here, and the cost of working was stated some years back to amount to upwards of £27,000 per annum. When we were there on a fine summer's evening the work was easy enough, but we were assured that in cold winter weather, with the grease frozen in the axle-boxes of the trucks, instead of one horse to three trucks the proportion was often three horses to one truck. When to frost there is added the yet more cruel impediment of a fog, the work becomes sometimes almost more than flesh and blood can stand. But it is got through somehow, though how they do it is more than the men themselves can tell.*

Elsewhere in his book Acworth noted that '*Chaddesden deals mainly with goods traffic; Toton is concerned almost wholly with minerals*' (p.161). When visiting Beeston, he observed that all the shunting work there was done '*entirely by engines, which puff monotonously to and fro, and so lacks the life and animation that the movement of the horses, and the cries of their drivers lend to the operations at Chaddesden and Toton*' (p.164).

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44 *Railroad Gazette*, New York, 1887, pp.243–4.

45 The location of the hump at Chaddesden is shown on Fig. 3.

46 W. M. Acworth, *The Railways of England*, London, 1889, pp.159–160. The same account also appeared a year earlier in his article 'The Midland Railway' in *Murray's Magazine*, Vol.3, Jan–June 1888, 306–323.

Railway sidings such as those at Chaddesden were hazardous places in which to work. Heavily-laden wagons moving along the tracks whether by gravity or propelled by horses or shunting engines could not easily be brought to an immediate halt in the event of an emergency. A moment's inattention by a workman might result in him tripping over a rail or slipping on an icy surface and then being crushed under the wheels of a wagon with life-changing or fatal results. At the start of this article mention was made of the first known death at the sidings, that of Henry Barton in February 1862. A search for similar events at the sidings recorded in local newspapers quickly produced details like these:

Oct 1864	William Rimmington – left arm caught between buffers of two trains. Arm amputated.
Nov 1882	J. Stevens – knocked down by truck and right leg fractured. Died.
Sep 1889	Thomas Marsden – horse-driver knocked down by shunting engine. Injured back.
Jan 1900	Owen Freestone – crushed between buffers. Died
Sep 1900	Thomas Seed – horse-driver kicked in stomach by horse. Taken to Infirmary.

Coincidentally, one of the witnesses giving evidence at Mr. Stevens' inquest in 1882 was my own great-grandfather, William Cholerton, who was then a goods train examiner.<sup>47</sup> The deceased was an engine-driver at the south end of Chaddesden Sidings and had briefly left his engine when he was hit by a wagon and suffered a compound fracture of the right thigh, his leg was amputated, but he died soon after.<sup>48</sup>

The small paragraph in the *Derby Daily Telegraph* of Monday 16 September 1889 which noted the opening on the previous Saturday of an important railway symposium might easily have been missed by its readers. However, the third session of the International Railway Congress held in Paris, at which the Midland Railway was represented by Mr. Henry S. Wiggin, the Staffordshire MP and a director of the company, would provide significant information about Chaddesden Sidings. The various reports presented to the Congress were duly written up in a substantial publication and fortunately an online copy is available on the Bibliothèque Nationale's website.<sup>49</sup> Comprehensive details were given to the Congress about the shunting and sorting arrangements undertaken at Chaddesden, Shildon (Co. Durham) and Toton. As the original volume is only available in French, I have had to rely on online translation facilities<sup>50</sup> coupled with my own dimly-remembered O-Level studies to produce the following imperfect transcription of the relevant Chaddesden entries, which must be regarded as approximate only. It should be noted that the pagination of this 1200+ page book is somewhat unusual, with no continuous numbering. Instead the volume is divided into separate sections, each of which are individually numbered, e.g. page 35 of the fifteenth section is represented as XV / 35.

*XV / 16, (Items 19–21): Congress heard that the gradient at Shildon was 1/128 on average, but slightly steeper on newer installations (i.e. from 1/110 to 1/100 at certain points), enabling wagons to be moved by gravity. With these arrangements in place at Shildon and Edge Hill, unnecessary work is avoided since all wagons moved in the same direction, on routes which did not intersect. At both Chaddesden and the loaded-wagon facility at Toton the process was similar to the above with the same specialisation of the tracks, but with horse traction used instead of gravity.*

*XV / 16, (Item 22): Toton, like Shildon, is almost exclusively a marshalling yard for coal; hence, as at Shildon, the complete separation of the service of loaded wagons and that of empty wagons. These two completely distinct functions are carried out one on one side of the main tracks, the other on the opposite side. This arrangement would present disadvantages if exchanges of wagons were frequent between the two parts of the yard;*

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47 In his spare time my great-grandfather ran the family smallholding on Morley Road. When he retired from the railway, he had completed 42 years' service.

48 There is an ongoing project to list railway accidents on Portsmouth University's website at this link: <https://www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk/the-accidents/>

49 *Congrès International des chemins de fer: Troisième session. Paris: 14 au 23 Septembre 1889, Compte rendu général*, Deuxième volume, Brussels, 1890. Accessed at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1092898r/f1043.item>

50 Mostly Google Translate and Bing.

the transfer manoeuvres would, in fact, be long and costly, with all wagons passing from one section to another having to undergo two sortations, one of which would be without profit. A different solution was therefore adopted at Chaddesden sidings, which leads to six major directions, each of which receives wagons from the five others and the different yards at Derby station. Chaddesden sidings is entirely on the same side of the main tracks; it has only one set of sorting sidings, only one set of upper receiving sidings; and trains from both directions access this last siding through a single point, some directly and those in the opposite direction by setting back. Chaddesden does not have sorting gridirons similar to those at Edge Hill; essential sortations in geographical order are made by shunting locomotives on small groups of dead-end tracks established for this purpose.

XV / 17, (Item 24): Chaddesden Sidings use 68 horses for shunting, Toton, 44.

XV / 35–6, (Item 51): Some data relating to the English yards as presented to Congress:<sup>51</sup>

DESIGNATION	CHADDESSEN	TOTON
Number of wagons that can be accommodated on the reception tracks	750	800
Number of wagons that can be accommodated on the sorting tracks	2,700	1,550
TOTALS:	3,450	2,350
Average number of wagons received per week	20,012	20,280
Average number of wagons received per workday	3,335	3,380

XV / 37, (Item 52): At Chaddesden, where horses are used for the sorting of wagons, the expenditure comes to 520,975 francs<sup>52</sup> for 1,040,600 wagons entered, or 50 centimes per wagon. In this figure, horses only account for 10 centimes. When compared with Shildon, Chaddesden in effect receives wagons loaded with goods of all classes, susceptible to being damaged by impact shocks, while Shildon is a special yard for mineral wagons, which have nothing to fear from harsher manoeuvring impacts. Thus the use of horses seems less well justified at Toton, than at Chaddesden; but it was pointed out that it was not possible to create gravity-operated sidings everywhere.

XV / 68: At Toton and Chaddesden, each horse works six hours during the day and six hours at night; the twenty-four hour service being divided into four shifts.

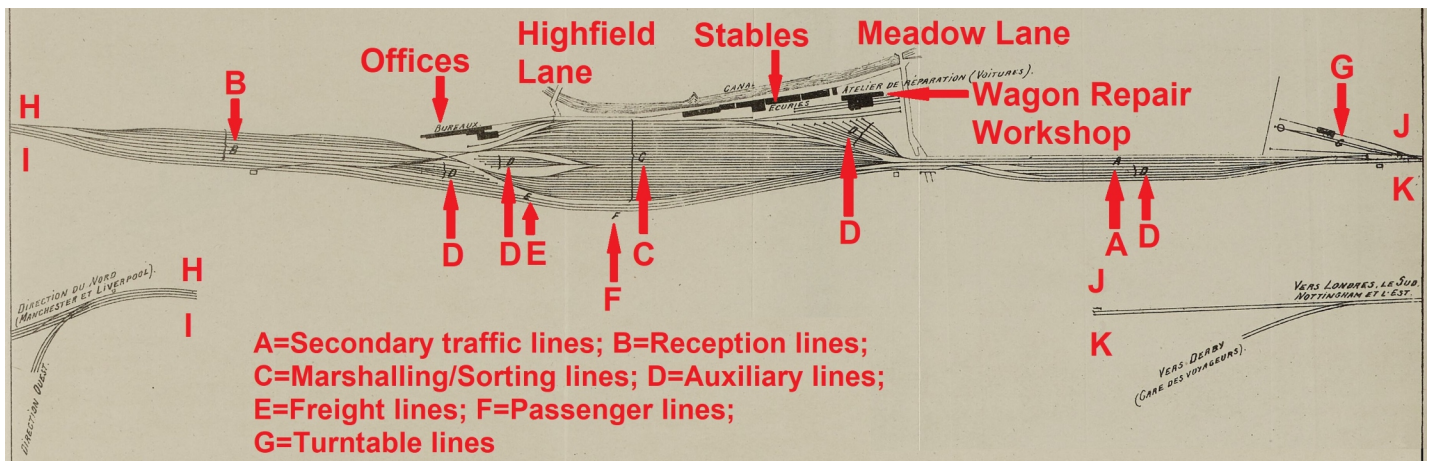
XV / 69–70: CHADDESSEN SIDINGS – Chaddesden marshalling yard is situated to the north-east and approximately 1,600 metres from Derby passenger station, and takes its name from the neighbouring village. It provides a central facility for sorting freight, coal and ore wagons arriving at Derby from all points on the Midland network. Here is how operations are conducted:

The yard includes two running lines connected by two short parallel tracks and joined by crossovers which constitute a head common to the two sets: the west set is used for receiving trains; the track serving to classify the wagons. The reception lines, designated on the plan (Fig. 8)<sup>53</sup> by the letter B, are ten in number. The marshalling lines, designated by the letter C, are thirty in number. Clusters of auxiliary lines were established in the spaces remaining free between the main sets.

51 This is a simplified version; the original includes data for Edge Hill and Shildon too.

52 A footnote in the original text (as translated from the French) comments, 'Counting at 6 fr 25 c per shunting locomotive hour, a figure perhaps too high.'

53 The original plan is to be found at the back of the volume at: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1092898r/f1214.item>



**Fig. 8: Plan of Chaddesden Sidings presented to the International Railway Congress in 1889. Enlarge the browser image to view the plan in more detail.**

The engines of trains arriving from the north and west directions haul the freight wagons directly onto the receiving tracks. However, the engines of trains arriving from the south and east take them there by setting back. In both cases,<sup>54</sup> the wagons approach the reception tracks via the post established at point A on the plan. On their arrival on these tracks, the wagons or batches of wagons receive a number corresponding to the marshalling track which must receive them. Then they are uncoupled and hauled by horses onto the designated track. Each horse has its own driver. Once formed, the trains exit yard C through the east end. The distribution of wagons on the sorting tracks is ensured by an operative who is sited near the common section of the two clusters B and C. In these conditions, it takes three and a half or four and a half minutes to break down a train of forty wagons.

The horses are assisted by a shunting engine that gently pushes the trains forward. The sorting operations are continuous and are carried out night and day. The men and horses who are employed there are divided into teams, each working twelve hours a day, in two sessions of six hours, separated by six hours of rest as at Toton. Offices and canteen facilities for the staff and stables for the horses were built close to the sorting tracks.

Certain lots of wagons destined for the east must undergo a second sortation. This operation is done by an engine, without the help of horses. The shunting engine used for this purpose also serves to place the trains formed on the tracks where the engines intended to take them to their destination pick them up. The auxiliary tracks are used to arrange in geographical order the wagons intended for the intermediate stations, which are, for this purpose, previously separated from the long-distance wagons, and for the classification of vehicles intended for the Company's machine, carriage and wagon workshops in Derby.

Here are some figures relating to the work done at Chaddesden:	
Average number of wagons handled per week	20,012 wagons
Average daily number of arriving and departing trains	195 trains
Number of horses employed (This is the total number of horses; each works two shifts per 24 hours)	68 horses
Number of shunting engines (each of them is on duty 12 hours per day)	8 engines

<sup>54</sup> I take 'both cases' here to mean trains arriving from the south and east.

<i>Number of wagons that can be received:</i>	
<i>By the reception tracks</i>	<i>750 wagons</i>
<i>By the sorting tracks</i>	<i>2,700 wagons</i>
<i>By the auxiliary tracks</i>	<i>720 wagons</i>

<i>The annual expenses of the marshalling yard are as follows:</i>				
<i>DESIGNATION</i>	<i>EXPENSES (Francs)<sup>55</sup></i>	<i>%AGE<sup>56</sup></i>	<i>EXPENSES (£)<sup>57</sup></i>	<i>OBSERVATIONS</i>
<i>Staff salaries</i>	<i>216,050 Fr</i>	<i>41.47 %</i>	<i>8,472</i>	
<i>Clothing &amp; stores</i>	<i>15, 275 Fr</i>	<i>2.93 %</i>	<i>599</i>	
<i>Horses</i>	<i>99,450 Fr</i>	<i>19.09 %</i>	<i>3,900</i>	<i>Includes depreciation</i>
<i>Shunting engines</i>	<i>190,200 Fr</i>	<i>36.51 %</i>	<i>7,459</i>	<i>1 shunting engine hour = 6.25 Fr</i>
<i>TOTALS:</i>	<i>520,975 Fr</i>	<i>100.00 %</i>	<i>£ 20,430</i>	

*The staff includes: 1 department head, 9 clerks, 10 foremen, 25 shunting staff (leaders and workers), 62 horse drivers, 16 grooms, 3 blacksmiths and, in addition, the signalmen.*

*The experience of a great number of years has demonstrated that given the circumstances which decided the Midland Company to establish a marshalling yard at Chaddesden (the need to have this yard near Derby; land which the Company had; nature of the traffic), the sorting method adopted gives excellent results, and that from the point of view of saving time and money, the chosen installations could not be better.*

The Fifth Session of the International Railway Congress was held in London in 1895, with Mr. George H. Turner, General Manager of the Midland Railway, reporting on shunting issues. This time, Chaddesden only warranted a brief mention (in English, fortunately) to the effect that Chaddesden Sidings were used for the following three categories of traffic: (1) Goods and minerals moved from one district to another; (2) Goods and minerals moved from one district to another on the same line which needs to be sorted and worked on through trains to the relevant destination; (3) Wagons which are handed by one railway to another at junctions. Turner added that Chaddesden Sidings were also used for traffic to and from the various stores, shops, and works of the Midland Railway Company, and others belonging to private firms who have independent siding connections with the main line in the neighbourhood.<sup>58</sup>

With Chaddesden Sidings working round the clock there was an obvious need for effective lighting facilities at night-time. Presumably this would originally been provided by oil lights, gas lights and then later by electrical lights. The necessity for staff to be able to see clearly what they were doing in such a potentially dangerous workplace came into conflict with people's perceptions of national security at the time of the First World War. Fearful of Zeppelin attacks, one newspaper reader in 1916 demanded to know '*Why Chaddesden Sidings are illuminated whilst tradesmen and private householders are doing their utmost to restrict their lights?*'<sup>59</sup> A year later another Derby resident

<sup>55</sup> These are the actual figures given in the (French) Congress report.

<sup>56</sup> This column is not in the original publication, but has been added to permit easy comparison with the 1874 annual figures presented to the Institute of Civil Engineers shown earlier.

<sup>57</sup> This column is not in the original publication. An internet search suggests that in 1889, 25.5 French francs were equivalent to £1 and this conversion figure has been used here.

<sup>58</sup> *International Railway Congress, Fifth Session, London June–July, 1895, Proceedings (English Edition)*, Volume 2, Brussels, 1897, p. X/42.

<sup>59</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 4 Feb. 1916.

queried why Chaddesden Sidings was lit every night, '*sending up its glare into the sky*' when St. Peter's Street in Derby was '*wrapped in Egyptian blackness?*'<sup>60</sup> No doubt they would have had a different perspective on the situation if they had been engaged on shunting work in the sidings!

After the First World War, the various main line railway companies, of which there were more than one hundred, were amalgamated or 'grouped' under the provisions of the Railways Act 1921 into one of four new businesses. Thus, from 1923, the Midland Railway Company became part of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS). After the Second World War the railways were nationalised under the terms of the 1947 Transport Act, with the LMS becoming part of the newly created London Midland Region (LMR) of British Railways on 1 January 1948.

Precisely when a hump-shunting facility was introduced at Chaddesden is not known. As previously mentioned, the sidings certainly did not have one in 1887, however, a 1929 article confirms the presence of one thus: '*At the Chaddesden sidings single hump of the London Midland & Scottish Railway over 4,000 wagons are regularly dealt with and the number of brakemen employed per shift is normally 12.*'<sup>61</sup> Local people can still recall the wagons being shunted up to the top of the hump and then watching them roll down the slope. What proportion of the total traffic passing through the sidings was gravity-sorted using the hump is not recorded.

The strategic significance of the site was acknowledged in the Second World War when a bombing decoy was created between Aston on Trent and Thulston to lure enemy bombers away from the sidings. Such installations were set up by the National Decoy Authority, which operated under the control of Col. John Fisher Turner, and used a variety of lighting and pyrotechnics to mimic civil sites of national importance to deceive the German bomber pilots flying night-time bombing raids. The Aston site, located where the modern A50 / A6 interchange is today, and thus some 4 miles south-east of Chaddesden Sidings was active from 1941 to either 1943 or 1944<sup>62</sup>

The Second World War gave the sidings an important role as an Air-Raid Precaution (ARP) Railway Control Centre. A recent report notes that an A2-type Emergency Control Centre was constructed there in 1939, its reinforced concrete walls capable of withstanding bombs up to 500 lb in weight.<sup>63</sup> The Control Centre would have been equipped with telephones and diesel generators, and, at the given grid reference of SK 37155 35990, seems to have been located close to the office buildings on the site.

The wartime years also resulted in a noticeable 'first'. Apparently the very first woman wagon examiner to be employed by the LMS spent time at Chaddesden Sidings. Christina Axworthy and her husband (also an LMS employee) moved to Derby after their London home was bombed.<sup>64</sup>

After the Second World War, Chaddesden Sidings at first seemed to continue work much as before. Local papers in the 1950s frequently carried advertisements for shunters, goods guards and number-takers; there were also vacancies for a female chargehand cook at the sidings' canteen and a shorthand typist at the Yard Master's Office. A local resident put pen to paper in 1959 to complain about excessive noise emanating from the sidings, such as conversations '*blaring out over the inter-com loudspeaker system,*' which could be '*heard during the night as far away as on Nottingham-road,*' much to the detriment of those in their homes trying to get some sleep. He was also annoyed by the '*din of wagons being shunted, many of which are allowed to career down the incline unsteadied by the brakemen until they are brought to a sudden stop when they hit the preceding stationary wagons*'.<sup>65</sup> He felt the noise levels were much worse than pre-war years!

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60 *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 5 Oct. 1917.

61 International Railway Congress Association, *Monthly Bulletin 11 (Jan–Aug)*, 1929, p.732. The hump is marked on Fig. 3.

62 [https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results\\_Single.aspx?uid=0b62a22a-2bfe-4fb3-8fde-af9c636506e2&resourceID=19191](https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=0b62a22a-2bfe-4fb3-8fde-af9c636506e2&resourceID=19191)

63 P. Francis, P. Bellamy & G. Crisp, *20th Century Air-Raid Precaution Railway Control Centres*, Airfield Research Group, 2014. Accessed online at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/101-2014>

64 S. Major, *Female Railway Workers in World War II*, Barnsley, 2018.

65 *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 15 May 1959.



**Fig. 9: John Robert Cholerton (on right) pictured at Chaddesden Sidings, c.1950s.**

My grandfather, John Robert Cholerton, was one of those who worked at Chaddesden Sidings and, like his own father before him, was a wagon examiner or 'wheel tapper'. In this photograph of c.1950 taken on the sidings close to the bottom of Highfield Lane (Fig. 9), he is pictured on the right with his colleague, Mr. Boole, sitting outside their cabin. Behind the two men to the north is the higher ground of Nottingham Road Cemetery. Note the men's long-handled hammers, which they would use to strike the wheels of the wagons. By listening to the resultant sound, a defective wheel could be identified and the relevant wagon removed from service.

As far as I am aware, my grandfather spent all his railway years working at Chaddesden Sidings and in due course received this gold-plated pocket watch from his employers as a long-service award. The inscription on the watch reads as follows:

BR  
LONDON MIDLAND REGION  
J. R. CHOLERTON  
IN APPRECIATION OF  
45 YEARS' SERVICE'.

My grandfather often recalled the presentation ceremony with some amusement, for the senior railway official who had travelled from Chester to Derby to make the award was actually his nephew, Charles Walker-Smith, originally from Spondon.



**Fig. 10: The long-service pocket watch.**

By the 1960s, however, things were beginning to change quite quickly as the railways struggled to compete with road haulage. Smaller marshalling yards were closed with their work being switched to larger facilities like those at Chaddesden Sidings, which by 1960 was evidently still an important part of the freight handling system, as *'its eight reception roads, seven departure and thirty-one sidings handled up to 2,500 wagons daily.'*<sup>66</sup> An article from 1961 provides a few more details: *'Chaddesden is a large marshalling yard for mineral and empties traffic',* dealing *'mainly with local traffic for depots and stations in the area'*. It, too, notes the presence of *'eight reception lines, seven departure and 31 marshalling sidings',* and then mentions that they *'are fed by gravity shunting over a non-mechanised hump with manually operated points',* with a throughput of between 2,000 to 2,500 wagons per day.<sup>67</sup>

Only a few years later, though, various new initiatives proposed by the British Railways Board such as the National Freight Train Plan of 1965 would seriously impact the way freight, particularly wagon-load as opposed to train-load freight, was handled across the country. The statistics speak for themselves ... *'Between the end of 1965 and the end of 1973, 4,000 route-miles of line were closed to freight traffic'* and *'Concentration on routes also meant concentration on a limited number of marshalling yards.'*<sup>68</sup> Those working at Chaddesden Sidings rightly became concerned what their future work prospects might be, and would not have been reassured by a *Derby Evening Telegraph* article on 22 January 1968 under the heading of *'Derby area rail jobs to be cut this year.'* Readers of the newspaper were told that the long-term future of the railway sidings at Chaddesden, *'which*

<sup>66</sup> R. Leleux, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Vol.9 – The East Midlands*, 2nd edn., 1984, BCA, p.172

<sup>67</sup> B. Perren, 'Derby Midland' in *Trains Illustrated*, June 1961. Accessed online at: <https://neilfergylee.wordpress.com/derby-midland-by-b-perrin/>

<sup>68</sup> T. R. Gourvish & N. Blake, *British Railways 1948-73: A Business History*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.431.



*incorporates a large marshalling yard and carriage and wagon repair depot*' is in doubt and that redundancies would follow during the course of the year. Apparently British Railways had advised its 160 workers at the sidings that a scheme to streamline shunting and reduce the length of time wagons and carriages spent in the sidings inevitably meant there would be a very significant decrease in shunting activity both to and from the sidings, which would be downgraded to a secondary site as full train-load working was established across the network. Out of the total of 160 employees, the *Telegraph's* reporter stated that the 50 who worked in the carriage and repair depot would be immediately affected by the reduction in shunting.

However, only a few days later, on 27 January 1968, the *Derby Evening Telegraph* ran another article, this time entitled '*Chaddesden Yard Not to Close – B.R.*' A British Railways statement said that a freight train bonus scheme designed to speed up freight services would be introduced the next month, '*but Chaddesden staff will only be marginally affected.*' Also planned was an incentive bonus scheme to improve efficiency in the marshalling yard, which would result in a small number of staff being displaced, but it was expected they would be offered alternative positions. The BR statement did note that, '*As a result of altered traffic flows it is probable that the number of wagons now handled in the marshalling yard will decrease ... However, there are no plans in hand at this time to close the yard.*' The newspaper article noted British Railways had also similarly commented that, as regards the wagon repair facility, '*There are no plans at this time to close the depot.*' If the workers at Chaddesden found this encouraging, they would have done well to pay close attention to the final paragraph of the British Railways statement: '*The long term future of the [wagon repair] depot will be considered, together with the future of the yard, as developments take place, and a clearer picture of requirements emerges.*'

Evidently it did not take British Railways long to develop a '*clearer picture of requirements*', for on 28 November 1968, a local man had a letter published in the *Derby Evening Telegraph*, stating that it would be '*a very sad day for the guards and shunters when Chaddesden Sidings close – February or March, officials say.*' He continued, '*Some 20 years ago we had 180 guards and shunted up to 1,900 wagons in an eight-hour shift. Now we are down to 46 guards and we shunt about 400 a shift.*'

The changes British Railways implemented around this time as regards their handling of goods and freight traffic were to have a dramatic effect across the country, for by the end of 1972 only 124 marshalling yards were still in use, compared with 602 just ten years previously.<sup>69</sup> Chaddesden was not one of the survivors!

Various factors contributed to the gradual running down of Chaddesden Sidings. In June 1968,<sup>70</sup> the British Railways Board notified the public that with effect from 7 October 1968, as part of its scheme to re-signal and simplify the track layout in the Derby area, it intended to discontinue running any passenger services along the Derby Junction – Chaddesden Sidings – Spondon Junction line, i.e. the original line first laid down by the Midland Counties Railway back in 1839. The small number of trains affected by this would now use the 'Spondon Curve' instead. After the Multiple Aspect Signalling Scheme was introduced in 1969 the old Midland Counties line was severed completely at Spondon Junction, leaving Chaddesden Sidings as a dead-end. Toton Sidings took over marshalling work from Chaddesden, which for a while still retained some block traffic at Chaddesden South Junction. For a few more years the sidings continued to be used for the storage of crippled wagons as well as surplus railway vehicles awaiting disposal.<sup>71</sup>

Sporadic outbreaks of petty vandalism plagued the by-now largely deserted site, with fires being set in disused office buildings, children playing on and around the wagons, oblivious to the potential danger they were in, etc. After 1983 parts of the sprawling sidings site were brought into use as a stockpile for spent ballast retrieved from track maintenance, and also as a virtual quarry for the storage of aggregate. In 1982 the closure of the large Wagon Repair Shop with its three lines of tracks leading into the shed (see Figs. 11 & 12) effectively marked the end of Chaddesden Sidings.

69 T. R. Gourvish & N. Blake, *British Railways 1948-73: A Business History*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.431.

70 *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 14 June 1968.

71 B. Radford, *Rail Centres: Derby*, London, 1986, p.115.

Although now bereft of any sort of railway function, the building itself acquired a new use as a fireplace factory, while all around new phases of re-development were being planned and implemented. Unfortunately a major fire on 14 April 1994 destroyed much of the Wagon Repair Shop's shed, leaving only the northern part of the building still standing. This continued to function as a showroom until c.2016 (see Fig.12), after which it was left empty for a few more years and finally demolished in July 2021.<sup>72</sup>



***Fig. 11: Main shed of the Wagon Repair Workshop c.1970 (Tony Bowler Collection).***



***Fig. 12: The remaining northern part of the Wagon Repair Workshop, demolished in 2021.***

A look at modern satellite imagery will soon reveal how much the area has changed. The name of Chadesden Sidings lives on, but is now reduced to a few short lengths of track behind Network Rail's Mercia House on Chequers Road, while numerous retail outlets nowadays occupy the land where the extensive reception and sorting sidings once stood.

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<sup>72</sup> More details about the Wagon Repair Workshop can be seen in Newsletter 59 of Chaddesden Historical Group at this link: <https://www.chaddesdenhistorygroup.co.uk/newsletter/newsletter59.pdf> and also as a report on the Derbyshire Historic Environment Record at <https://her.derbyshire.gov.uk/Source/SDR24766>