

8. Linwood's Lost Railways

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When the railway first came to Linwood in the mid-nineteenth century, Linwood was a fairly small village with a population of no more than two thousand. It consisted of two streets - Bridge Street, the main thoroughfare, and Napier Street. The principal industry was textile manufacture, and the village had originated in 1792 with the founding of Linwood Cotton Spinning Mill, then the largest in Scotland. Henderson's smaller cotton mill and Paterson and Neilston's Paisley Shawl factory were located in Napier Street. Nearby there were many small mineral concerns. These produced coal, limestone (for fertiliser, chemicals and building), shale (for distilling oil), ironstone (for the iron industry) and fireclay (for brick making).

From the second half of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century Linwood was served by various railways, all of which were goods lines. This is an attempt, with the help of available maps, to trace what remains of Linwood's railways.

The sketch-map of the Linwood Area (Figure 11) illustrates most of the lines covered in the text. However it is too small-scale to be comprehensive and various other branches existed, some relatively short-lived. The pits are also too numerous to show, and some mines went through several transitions over the years, eg from ironstone to shale oil to coal, with the deepest minerals being worked last. Waste material from previous enterprises also fuelled later industries such as brick making.

1. Waggonways and Tramways

Before the arrival of the steam driven railway, various horse-drawn waggonways or tramways connected pits in the Linwood area with convenient road transport. The flat topography of the area made railway construction easy, except where embankments were required for bridges and crossings. However the flat ground also contributed to the rapid disappearance of many tracks. A tramway one kilometre long connected the coal and lime workings at Darluith with the Fulton ironstone pits, following the north bank of a minor burn. Several branch lines linked other pits.

Shorter tramways linked pits such as Muirhead and Cartside with the nearest roads. It is also likely that some of the early railways, which were later linked to main lines, originated as tramways.

2. Linwood Branch Railway

The first main-line steam railways in the area were the Caledonian Railway from Paisley to Greenock via Bishopton and the Glasgow and South West Railway (GSWR) from Paisley to Johnstone and beyond. By the 1860's a branch of the GSWR also headed north from Elderslie to Bridge of Weir, and was extended to Greenock in 1869.

The first Linwood line was the Linwood Branch Railway, shown on the 1856 OS map. This left the GSWR at 'Linwood Junction' near Ferguslie. It did not reach the village, but served ironstone pits at Linclive and Candren on the south side of the Black Cart. The main line was built on an embankment and the branch would have been on a falling gradient until it reached level ground. It swept round through fields until it branched again to approach the pits.

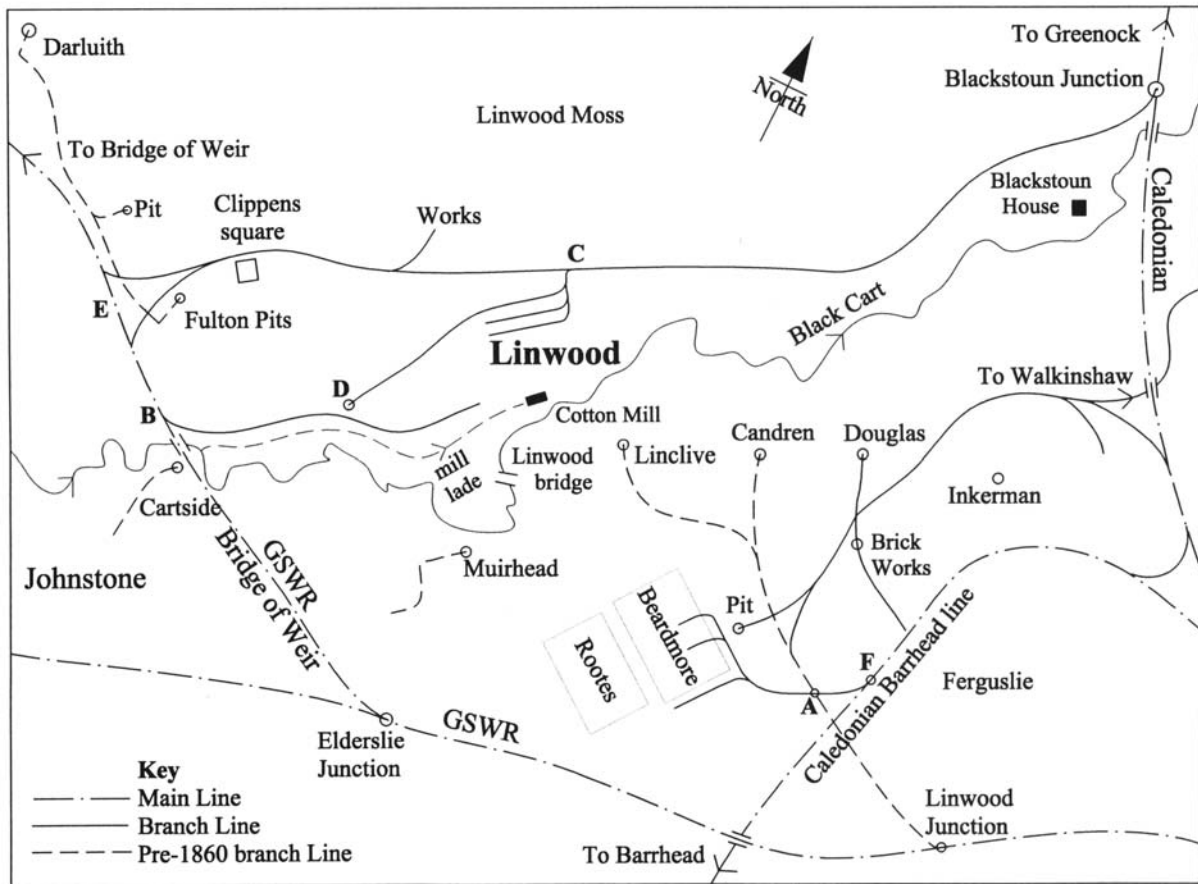


Figure 11

There is now no trace of the embankment of the branch and Ferguslie housing estate has covered up most of the path of the line. Only at the edge of the estate is there any possibility of finding evidence. A later railway branch to Beardmore's wartime production facility and the Rootes car factory cut across the path of the original line at 'A' (see below). The only trace that can be seen is an embankment that runs for a short distance through a field.

The pits and the remainder of the line lie along the corridor of the A737, between the St. James interchange and the Linclive roundabout. According to OS maps the Linclive ironstone pit had ceased production by 1882 and a new industry, brick manufacture, had begun. The 1928 OS Glasgow regional map shows that the line had grown to serve more brickworks, and the slag heaps provided some of the material for brick manufacture. The system had spread over a wider area, with one line shown passing under the Greenock main line to the Walkinshaw brick works, which were to the west of present-day Glasgow Airport.

3. Glasgow & South Western Railway: Linwood Branch.

Linwood itself was connected to the rail system by a branch which was authorised in 1873. The GSWR branch left the Bridge of Weir line to the west of the Cart Junction at 'B', just after crossing the Black Cart on a double-tracked bridge. The Linwood cotton mill lade prevented a junction sweeping from the south. A train coming from Elderslie Junction on the main line would have had to reverse into the branch, not a very satisfactory situation. As the train headed along the Linwood branch, it ran alongside the mill lade, and terminated in a

goods yard behind the old Linwood Parish Church. This was situated on the south side of Bridge Street. In 1872 the Linwood Cotton Spinning Company became bankrupt and the mill was taken over by R & W Watson, who converted it to a paper mill. This branch would have served the paper mill, as it was just on the other side of Bridge Street. The Linwood Brick Works also used the line, as did other mining concerns in the immediate area.

There is now very little evidence to show that this railway ever existed. The bridge over the Black Cart is still in place, thanks to the survival of the Bridge of Weir line into the 1980s, although some of the planking for the track-bed is missing. The guard-rails are marked Colvilles and British steel, and it is possible to cross the bridge with care. Once across the bridge there is an embankment which could be the track-bed. It is level with the line coming off the bridge and runs beside the mill lade. Unfortunately the A737 has again destroyed much of the terrain over which it might have been possible to trace the line. It would have crossed Kashmir Avenue in modern-day Linwood close to the multi-storey flats. The Regional Shopping Centre was built on the site of the goods yard.

4. Caledonian Railway: Clippens Branch.

The Caledonian Railway also had a branch which reached Linwood. It left the Greenock main line (opened 1841) at Blackstoun Junction, then ran across flat countryside until it reached the road that gave access to Blackstoun House. It followed this road and formed two branches at 'C' just before it crossed the Moss Road in Linwood.

The first branch went south over the Middleton road to a goods yard situated on Bridge Street. This branch had three sidings, one of which was used by the Dunlop Pit which was just beside the goods yard. The northernmost siding continued between the Masonic Hall and two cottages at the corner of Bridge Street and Bridge of Weir Road. It continued across Bridge Street to Barrowmans Pit and the Linwood Brick Works at 'D'. The third siding served Dunlop's small iron foundry.

The only remaining trace of this line within Linwood is an embankment behind the premises currently operated by Hydrakit Limited and Scotia Trading, which are located on the site of the old goods yard. Around the perimeter of the yard there are the remains of a fence built with old railway sleepers. In the yard of Scotia Trading there is a bing of coal waste that probably came from the Dunlop Pit, but interestingly none of the maps actually name this pit. It should not be confused with the pit now under Melrose Avenue, which was the Linwood Coal and Shale, or Barrowmans Pit. The bing of coal could be from the railway deliveries for the paper mill. The building of a small industrial estate and St Brendan's High School behind these premises has covered any trace of track or embankments. However, by going along Middleton Road towards the farm occupied by Scots Lawn, it is possible to see where the railway has been. Although covered by trees and undergrowth, the line of the railway can be identified.

The line which crossed Bridge Street has been destroyed but there is a path down to Greenhill Avenue and Greenhills Terrace which initially follows the line of the track for approximately 15 metres. According to the 1915-16 OS map, this line did not quite join up with the GSWR line at 'D', but ran on the other side of the Linwood Brick Works which were on the site of the Linwood Coal and Shale mine.

5. Glasgow and South Western Railway: Clippens Branch

The second branch from 'C' at Moss Road joined up with the GSWR at 'E' with branches swinging north and south. This was an important link, since it made it possible for

Caledonian trains to link to lines leading to Kilmarnock or Ayr by running over GSWR track. It also allowed their trains to get to Carlisle to link with London & North Western or Midland Railways. There is no evidence of this line being used for passengers.

The layout of some of the major roads in Linwood has changed very little in a hundred and fifty years. The present day Clippens Road, Bridge of Weir Road and Green Farm Road can be identified on old maps. Using this information it is possible to trace the course of the line, although it was completely built over by housing during the major 1960's expansion of the village to cater for the influx of workers for the new Rootes car plant.

The connecting line ran close by Clippens, one of the main features of which was Clippens Square. The present-day Our Lady of Peace Primary School is built on the site of the square and from this it can be deduced that the railway ran along what is now Erskinefauld Road. The chemical works and an iron foundry would have been located at the top of Green Farm Road (roughly where the small park is) and they extended back across the present day Brediland Road into the area of the Linwood Sports Centre.

There must have been enough freight business available to sustain the two railway companies' interest in serving a fairly small village. The grouping of all railway companies into the "Big Four" in 1923 saw the Caledonian and the GSWR becoming part of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS). To the new management it must have been obvious that there was a duplication of service into Linwood, and in 1934 the connection to the GSWR was closed. The other end of the line continued until 1967 when it became a casualty of the "Beeching" cuts.

6. Bearmore's and the Car Plant Branch

The last line in the Linwood area connected with a later main line, the Caledonian's Paisley to Barrhead line. It branched off at 'F' with numerous sidings into William Beardmore & Company's works on the north side of the Linwood Road. This factory was used to produce armaments during the Second World War and the line carried in raw materials and took away finished goods. After the war Beardmores continued to use the facility, manufacturing railway wagons and other items. Eventually taken over by the Pressed Steel Company, manufacture was concentrated on railway wagons, car bodies and aeroplane components. The original Glasgow "Blue Trains" were built in the plant and the line was used to take them to the electric traction depot at Hyndland, Glasgow.

In 1963 the Rootes Motor Company invested in a new car-manufacturing complex on the south side of the Linwood Road. At the same time it took over the Pressed Steel Company factory to continue the pressing of body panels. The line was used to bring components from other companies in the Rootes Group in Linwood and to transfer major mechanical components south to the main plant at Ryton in Coventry. The sidings were extensive and were worked by two diesel shunters and a machine that could lift containers. All traffic was containerised, with at least one train each way per day. With the closure of the factory in 1982 Linwood's railway lines were brought to an end.

To get to the factory, the Barrhead line left the main line to Greenock just after crossing the bridge over Greenhill Road, Paisley. It then ran on a raised embankment, skirting the Ferguslie housing estate where it branched into the factory from 'F'. The line can be followed for a considerable distance from St James station. There is a bridge over Blackstoun Road and access can be gained to the track-bed. However, the tangle of undergrowth can make it very difficult to walk along the track. The building of the Phoenix Centre and the houses in Fisher Drive has covered the remainder of the railway.

Conclusion

Of all the railways that were in the Linwood area there is very little evidence remaining. The line to the former car plant is the most prominent. Other than the embankment behind the factory units in Bridge Street, there is nothing obvious to indicate that railways were once so prominent a part of the life of the village.

Sources

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