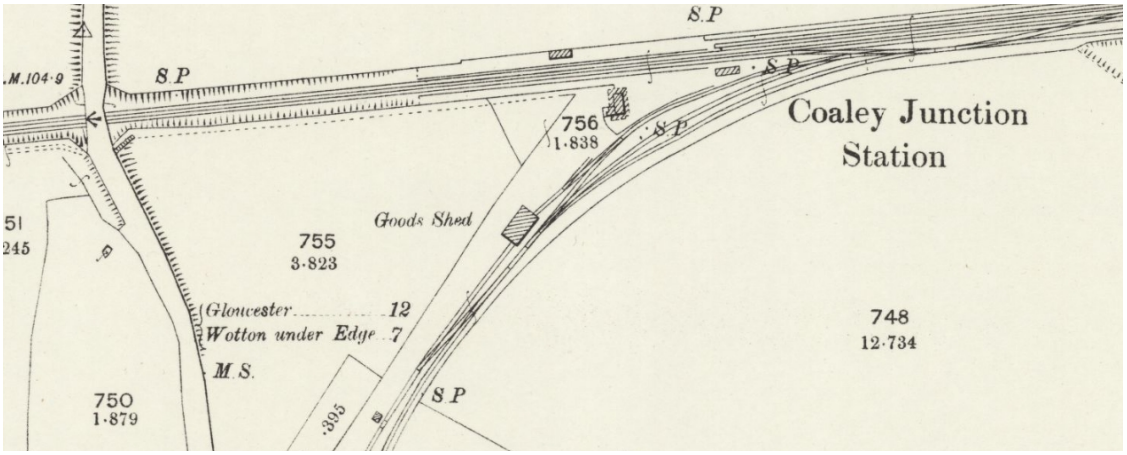
Coaley Junction goods shed

By Stephen Mills June 2024

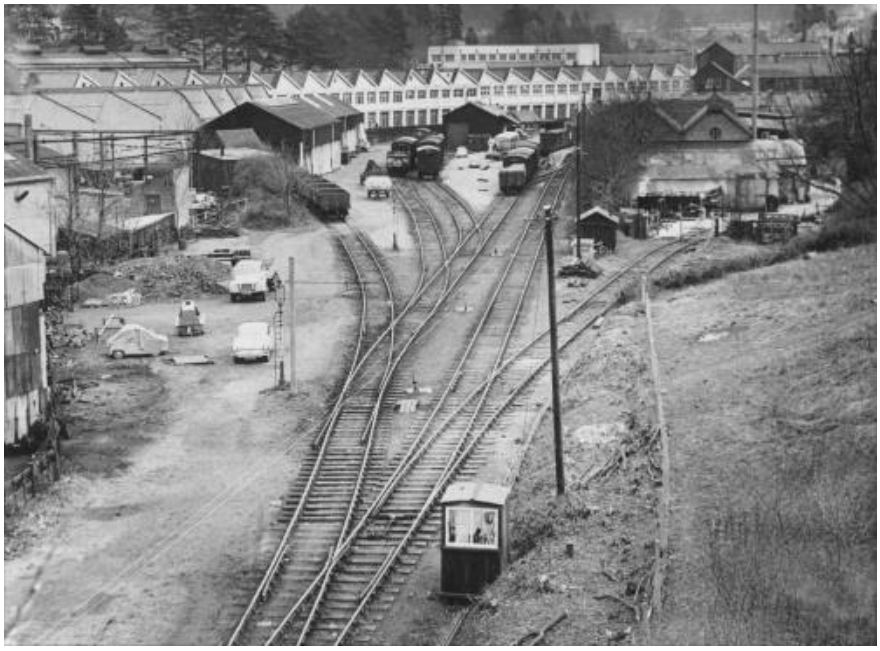
Gloucestershire has a number of little railway lines that have been largely forgotten. Some were quite successful whereas others struggled to make a profit during their lifetimes. Many were developed by the major British railway companies, although a few came into being almost entirely because of local enthusiasm. The little *Dursley and Midland Junction Railway* was one such example, built to connect the town of Dursley via a branch to the main line between Bristol and Gloucester at Coaley Junction. The line was just 2.5 miles long and ran along the valley of the River Cam, terminating at the bottom of Dursley.



Coaley Junction station and goods shed (courtesy Ordinance survey)

Eventually opened in 1856, the company was soon facing financial hurdles as it tried to operate profitably. It staggered on for a while, but before long, there was little choice but to sell the line to the Midland Railway.

Although the line was important for local transport, passenger numbers were never as high as the company hoped. However, at its peak, there were around half a dozen trains a day connecting with the Midland at Coaley Junction. There were also additional excursion trains run during the summer months. The little trains that plied the line are still affectionately remembered as the "Dursley Donkey". But for much of its working life, the line relied heavily on various industrial enterprises located *en route* to Dursley, such as a large flour mill in Cam, and latterly, Listers enormous manufacturing site that was to become a mainstay for much of the line's profitability.



Part of the extensive Listers works, once served by the line

Of course, passenger transport inevitably succumbed to competition from buses and cars, and the service was discontinued in 1962. Some freight continued to be carried, but the line finally closed completely in 1970. There are now few remains of this heroic little enterprise, apart from one surviving building that was recently given a new life.

Draycott Mills at Cam, one of the line's more freight important customers

Some of you will doubtless be familiar with architect and TV presenter George Clarke, who regularly hosts programmes devoted to renovating and restoring old buildings. His most recent series was Channel 4's *George Clarke's Amazing Renovations,* and unusually, this focused partly on finding new uses for redundant industrial buildings, one of which was the 1850s goods shed built at Coaley Junction.

The former goods shed in 2019 (courtesy Geof Sheppard)

(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2019_at_Coaley_Junction_-_goods_shed_%28rail_side%29.JPG)

After it finally went out of use, for many years, this had served as a maintenance garage for a skip hire company, so unsurprisingly, was not in the best of shape. However, even though it is now surrounded by a new huge housing development, it has been transformed into a stylish (and expensive!) family home, still in the ownership of the same family that originally ran the skip business. It was interesting to see the process of renovating and converting this redundant building, and gratifying that it has been saved as one of the few reminders of this little railway line that once played such an important role in the industrial and commercial life of Dursley and the surrounding area.

A comprehensive history of the railway and its working life is available in Peter Morris' book: ***The Dursley Railway. The life and times of a Cotswold branchline (1854-1970),*** published by Kinsett Publishing.