

Notes from discussions with the Plews family at Scruton Station, 1 December 2015

Summary

Tony, Trevor and Margaret grew up in the Station House during the 1940s and 50s. Their parents, Ernie (Alfred Ernest) and Kathleen Plews, ran the station at Scruton from 1944 until **date??** although, the station came under the auspices of the Ainderby stationmaster, during that period.

- Alfred Ernest 'Ernie': born Redcar, 14 August 1902; died Scruton, 1978
- **Kathleen**: born Redcar, 15 February 1912; died Scruton, 1986

- **Tony** (born Marske, 1938) aged 7 when the family moved to Scruton.
- **Trevor** (born Stanhope, 1942) aged 2 when came to Scruton
- **Margaret** (born Scruton, 1945)

The Plews shared the day-to-day running of Scruton station; Kathleen managed the passenger and clerical side of things, Ernie, managed the goods and farm traffic, including the use of the loading bay to the east of the crossing, on the village side. When Ainderby station closed, Dad left and went to work at Leeming Bar as a crossing keeper. At her retirement, Kathleen was given a gold watch for her long service to the railways (**check date**). They continued to live here until they died, Ernie in 1978, Kathleen in 1986. The bought the station house from BR(?) in the 1970s.

Family background

Both families came from Redcar. Ernie's father worked at the gas works, grandfather was a farmer at Old Marske, Kathleen's father ran the fish shop and grandfather was a fisherman. Ernie began his railway career as a platelayer. When they came to Scruton (from Stanhope) in 1944, Ernie took charge of the signals and the tracks, and Kathleen managed the station and the crossing.

General Waiting Room

Newspapers

Harold Hobson used to come over from Great Fencote to Scruton with the newspapers. He would come up to the station and sort them on the long bench in the main waiting room, which at that time was painted green, and sat on the platform side of the waiting room rather than against the garden wall, as now. This bench ran almost the whole length of the wall to the door. The other bench was broken.

Ladies Waiting Room

There was a sign on the door that read 'Ladies Waiting Room' and the old earthenware toilet was adjacent. *'It was a terrible place! We didn't go in there often!'*

Ticket Office

Kathleen worked in the Ticket Office and always had the fire lit. There was never any electricity. There was a ticket punch by the cast iron grille and alongside it a big stack of

tickets in a wooden holder. There was a large wooden desk where the wardrobe now stands, in which she kept all her books and ledgers, recording passengers and traffic. Originally, there was a wheel to open and shut the crossing gates situated in the far LH corner of the Ticket Office, but this had gone by the time the Plews left (*confirm date*). The original clock in the wall was double-sided so it could be seen by staff inside the Ticket Office and by passengers on the platform. It was stolen while the Plews were on holiday one year. There was a telephone in the Ticket Office by the clock.

Gentlemen's Toilets

The Gents toilets have been recreated exactly as they were - '*spot-on!*'

Platform

The platform was much longer (its original length) when the Plews were here – reaching almost the length of the coal siding to where the platelayers hut stood. It was decorated with 4 or 5 stone troughs and raised beds with circular tubs placed in between, which were full of geraniums.

Signal Box

The signal lamps were paraffin lamps and needed refilling every week. Tony would help to do this in the Signal Box. The paraffin was stored in large churn-like containers.

There was a galvanized metal cover on the bench in case the paraffin dripped.

There were 4 paraffin lamps on the gates, which were on all the time. They were filled up each week, The paraffin was brought up in the big churns/containers by the platelayers. Trevor has an old red/green platform lamp, which he has adapted for electric bulb but will look out for us.

Trains were also lit by paraffin lamps; guard's vans had lamps at other end.

Station Garden

The Plews kept 2 pigs in the station garden every year for 10-15 years. The pig house was made of sleepers and was situated against the boundary, near the gate (may have formed part of the boundary fence). White, the butcher at Morton-on-Swale, would slaughter the pigs for them each autumn, and was given one of the two in return. Wrights would go round the village with a van, selling meat.

The meat would be hung on the landing and in the living room in the cottage, and Kathleen had a bacon table in the living room (*check?*)

Presentation of the station

A stone trough at the back, full of water, was used for watering the geraniums. There was no running water on site, although a bore hole was drilled at the back when Kathleen was here (*approx. date?, location? Was this the main source of water?*). Geraniums were one of the main flowering plants used in the beds and planters at the station and it was these for which Kathleen won prizes for 'Best Kept Station' and 'Best Station Garden' in the late 1940s and early 1950s (see list). The certificates were all presented to K. Lynn, the Ainderby stationmaster who was officially responsible for Scruton. Kathleen also had a vegetable garden between the house and the trackside fence, growing all her own vegetables. There were two benches on the platform.

Station Cottage

The Plews lived in one of the two (semi-detached) cottages opposite the station. The cottage to the right was traditionally provided to the stationmaster and his family. There were two sets of signal bells (signaling a train at approaching at a distance/nearer) and these would ring in the passage of the house as well as in the station. The family budgie would often copy the ring calling 'ding-a-ling!' There was also a railway telephone in the house. A train went straight through the crossing gates once! – *'Mum would probably have been out the back watering the geraniums!'*

The extension to the main building had been done before the Plews arrived in 1944, but they added the bathroom at the back. The front porch is a more recent addition. 'Joan 1944' was inscribed on the window of the kitchen, the ground floor room on the R (facing the house from the station platform). The kitchen had a Yorkist range on which Kathleen would cook bread and cakes, which she would often send round the village. The room to the left of the front door was the small sitting room. There was no porch in those days; the front door led into the passage between the kitchen and sitting room. There were two bedrooms upstairs and steps down to a third bedroom at the back. Many of the ceilings were cracked due to the vibrations from the locomotives on the nearby line. Outside, Kathleen had her vegetable garden between the house and the trackside fence (not hedge as now). Blackcurrant bushes grew in the hedge at the front. Behind the house, where the brick-built garage is now, was a wooden hut used as a coalhouse and later as a chicken run. The wash house also overlooked the yard. Ernie and Kathleen bought the house from the railway (British Railways) in the early 1970s (Ernie died in 1978).

The French family, with Jimmy, their only child, lived next door to the Plews in the LH railway cottage throughout the time they were here. Jimmy was the same age as Tony (b1938). Jimmy's father worked for the Swale Catchment Board, whose van picked up 4 or 5 local men each morning to work on the river. After leaving school, Jimmy went to work at the Co-op. He lived in the cottage all his life. He died last year (2014).

George Ward farmed next door to the station (on the south side) at South Grange Farm. The brass wagon plaque stamped 'G. Ward, Scruton' given to us by Margaret & Jack Ward who bought it at auction, would have belonged to him.

Goods traffic

14 stone sacks were used for corn on its way to be milled (possibly Selby)

16 stone sacks were used for barley & oats

18 stone sacks were used for wheat

Sugar beet was sent to the York factory

Potatoes were also sent by railway

Livestock (horses & cattle) was also loaded onto wagons in the loading bay.

Dairy produce/milk was loaded on at Leyburn bound for Northallerton, where it was unloaded at the large depot above the topline siding. This is now a nursing home.

Coal Siding

Snowdrops were brought in from Lady Beresford-Peirse, who lived in the large house on the corner of Ham Hall Lane (*? Check house name*) to be sent by train down to London?

[Other reference to snowdrops to footnote?]

Cattle (bullocks) were brought in from Ireland for one of the farmers (with a double-barrelled name) at Kirkby Fleetham. They were walked (ran!) from Scruton to Fleetham. On occasions, ferrets were brought in to force out the rats who nested in the sleepers which formed the wall of the siding. 'There'd be rats everywhere!'

The platelayers and their hut

At the end of the coal siding, west of the station, was the platelayers hut, a small cabin where the platelayers working on the line would gather to warm up and have a brew. There was a small stove in the hut. The platelayers would work in gangs of six or so, working up and down the line to Leyburn. They'd use a bogey truck and what was described as a 'velocipede'; a small, wheeled trolley with two wheels on one side, and one wheel on the other, the width of the rails, moved by a wooden shaft, like a spade handle. These would live on the siding and they'd use these to travel up and down the line and sometimes Tony and Trevor would ride with them! They would also use a kind of scooter, which sat on one rail, with a big arm on the other, and from this they would knock the wooden keys in (on the track).

James (Jimmy) French's cousin from Newton-le-Willows used to do the 'knocking' – checking the rails for cracks and fractures.

An engine once derailed near the platelayers hut. If an engine ever came off the track, derailed, it would be re-railed by crane and a shunting engine known as the 'coffee pot'.

Perks of the job

Coal allowance

The Plews got an allowance of coal each year.

Rail travel

They were also entitled to free rail travel; they had two weeks holiday a year, which they often spent at the coast, travelling by train to visit family in Redcar. When they went on holiday, they'd close the gates behind the train, which would wait for them a little further on, and they'd catch the train to Northallerton and on to Redcar. Grandad's farm was at Old Marske.

The year that Margaret took her CSE exams, they were on holiday in Torquay and travelled home to Scruton for the exam/results(?).

Railway childhood

As children, Tony, Trevor and Margaret would play on the tracks, go brambling, and ride on the bogey/velocipede used by the platelayers. In the summer months, Tony would stay on the train after school, travelling up to Garsdale. The driver, Mr Raine, would stop and agree this with Kathleen as he came through.

Tony Wood grew up at Ham Hall Gates. He'd walk along the track to Scruton to play with Margaret. There were no restrictions as to where they could go.

There were fishing contests on the river, where the family would also go for picnics.

School days

After leaving the village school at the age of 11, all three Plews children went to the Grammar School in Northallerton, catching the train from the station each morning and returning on the 4:05 from Northallerton in the afternoon.

Other village families

Ex-naval commander and family lived at The Anchorage named Walton. There was a son 'Merry' Tony's age. They used to fly a kite there and Ernie helped to make a pond in the garden.

The Knaggs had a dairy at Great Fencote and did a daily milk round in the village.

Harry Knowles b1916 lived in a bungalow further down Scruton Lane before you get to the school (now village hall).

Wartime memories

Two planes came down in the park; a Lancaster came down near the Akes farm (name?) by the main road. Tony was on the platform at the time.

The Army built a bailey bridge over the river.

Photographs

From Tony & Margaret

1. B&W photocopy of Scruton Station, marked 'Scruton, Bedale' taken from the Loading Bay (east of station), showing the crossing gates and station with three staff on the platform c1900-10.
2. B&W print of 1954 train to Garsdale, the last passenger train to run on the line.
3. B&W print of station taken from the coal siding (west of station)
4. Margaret aged 10 on the platform at Scruton with younger cousin, Stuart in a doll's pram.
5. Kathleen Plews British Rail Identity Card (with photograph)
6. The Plews children, Tony, Trevor & Margaret, aged c9, 5 and 2.
7. Kathleen and Ernie holding baby Tony standing in front of gates/fencing at Stanhope

British Railways Best Kept Station/Station Gardens certificates – donated by Tony, Trevor and Margaret

- 1948 Third Class Prize, British Railways Competition for Best Kept Station
- 1949 Third Class Prize, British Railways Competition for Station Gardens
- 1950 Third Class Prize, British Railways Competition for Station Gardens
- 1951 Third Class Prize, British Railways Competition for Best Kept Station
- 1951 Certificate of Commendation, British Railways Competition for Station Gardens
- 1952 Third Class Prize, British Railways Competition for Station Gardens
- 1952 Third Class Prize, British Railways Competition for Best Kept Station
- 1953 Third Class Prize, British Railways Competition for Best Kept Station
- 1953 Third Class Prize, British Railways Competition for Station Gardens