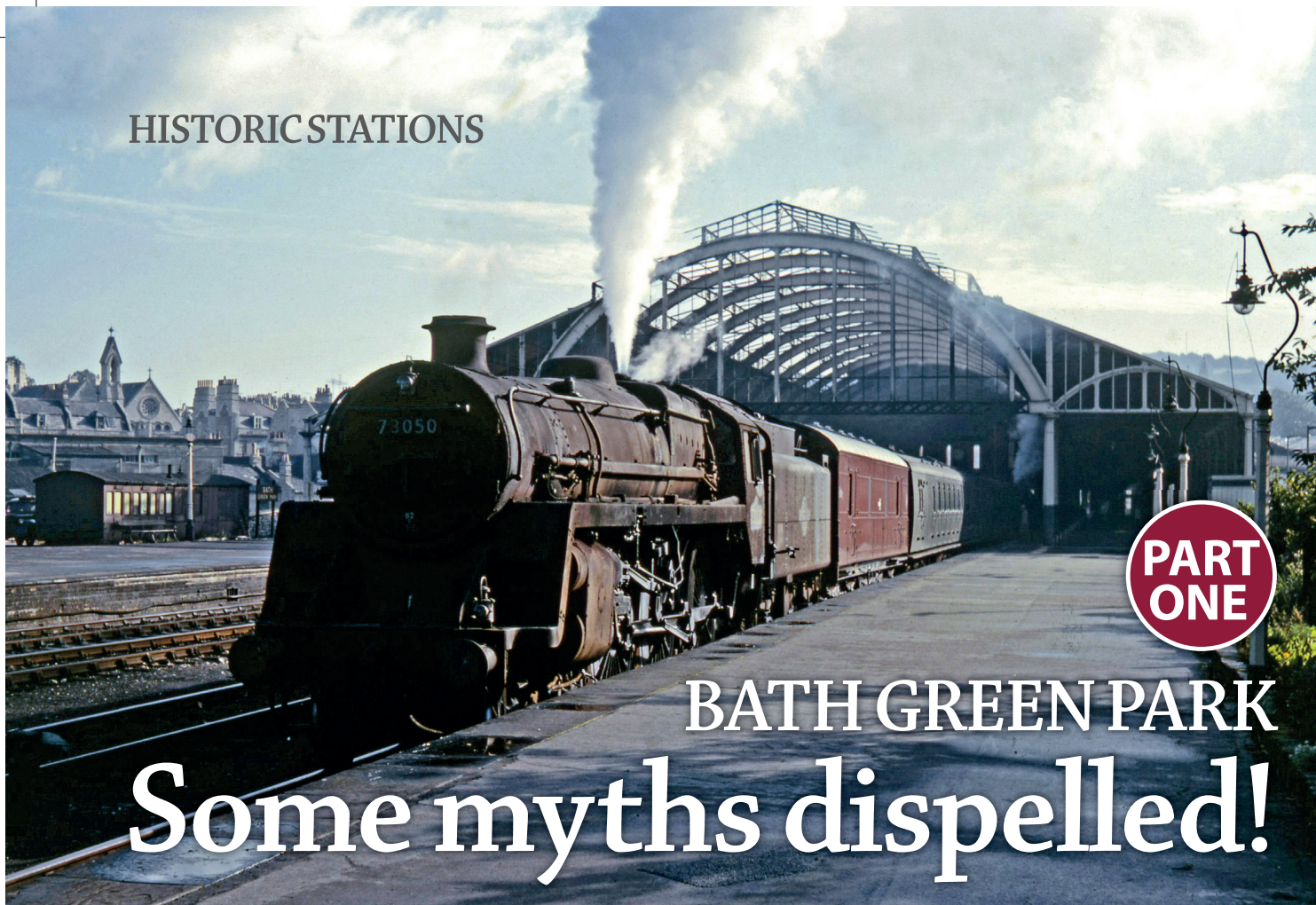


HISTORIC STATIONS



PART ONE

BATH GREEN PARK Some myths dispelled!

In the June 1980 issue of *The Railway Magazine*, **Mike Arlett** recalled the history of The Midland Station at Bath (renamed by BR as Bath Green Park in June 1951). All these years later it is apparent there *still* remains some confusion as to the date the station opened and the alleged existence of a ‘temporary terminus’. August 4, 2019 marks the 150th anniversary of the opening of the line from Mangotsfield to Bath, an opportune time to clarify these matters.

In May this year, I received as a birthday present, a handsome book (republished 2018) in which it is claimed “the (Midland Railway) line opened to a temporary terminus in Bath in 1869. A permanent two-platform terminus...opened in 1870”. When I last looked (also this May), one entry in *Wikipedia*

stated much the same. Both are incorrect, but are by no means the only examples where this information has been misquoted. To get to the facts, we must first turn to a local newspaper report, viz:

“A Bristol paper understands the Midland Railway Company, upon completing their line to

Bath, will erect a magnificent station at the lower end of Queen Square, and that the land required for the purpose has already been secured. Although we are not in a position to give a more positive contradiction to this statement, we nevertheless believe that it is incorrect. We have always understood that the station in question would be built at the rear of Seymour Street, and from the inquiry we have made, we believe we are correct.”

So reported the *Bath Chronicle* on Thursday, May 31, 1866. The paper’s understanding of the proposed location was indeed correct; the ‘magnificent station’ was to be built fronting the north-west side of Seymour Street, [1] around 200 yards to the south of Queen Square, immediately beyond the junction of Charles Street with James Street West.

Demolition

This would require the demolition of an entire terrace of nine late-Georgian period houses, comprising Nos. 10 to 18 Seymour Street. The location to which the misinformed Bristol paper attributed the proposed site – “at the lower end of Queen Square” – was a narrow street called Chapel Row. The Midland Railway Company (MR Co) planned to demolish all the properties on the south-east [2] side of this street to improve (widen) the access from

MIDLAND RAILWAY.
OPENING OF THE LINE TO
BATH.
The BATH and MANGOTSFIELD Extension of the Midland Railway, will be opened on
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4th, 1869,
Affording a new and direct route between BATH and GLOUCESTER, WORCESTER, BIRMINGHAM, and the whole of the Midland System, also a new and convenient route between BATH and BRISTOL.
Thro' Trains will run between BRISTOL and BATH, and be in connection at MANGOTSFIELD with Main Line Trains to and from BIRMINGHAM and the NORTH as under:

Midland Railway 1869 timetable header for opening of the Mangotsfield to Bath line.

Left: BR Standard 'SMT' 4-6-0 No. 73050 prepares to leave a deserted-looking platform No. 1 (the original 'departure' platform) with a through Bristol, Temple Meads to Bournemouth semi-fast service on September 24, 1963. The loco had arrived at Bath, brand new in June 1954, following display at the International Railway Congress Association Exhibition at Willesden. Today it is based at the Nene Valley Railway, where it is currently undergoing a major overhaul. NORMAN LOCKETT ARCHIVE, COURTESY DAVID LOCKETT

Right: Ivo Peters' first photograph of the Midland station, taken in 1925, features an S&D train preparing to depart from under a fully glazed train shed. IVO PETERS, COURTESY JULIAN PETERS

the upper parts of the city, via *Queen Square*, towards their new station.

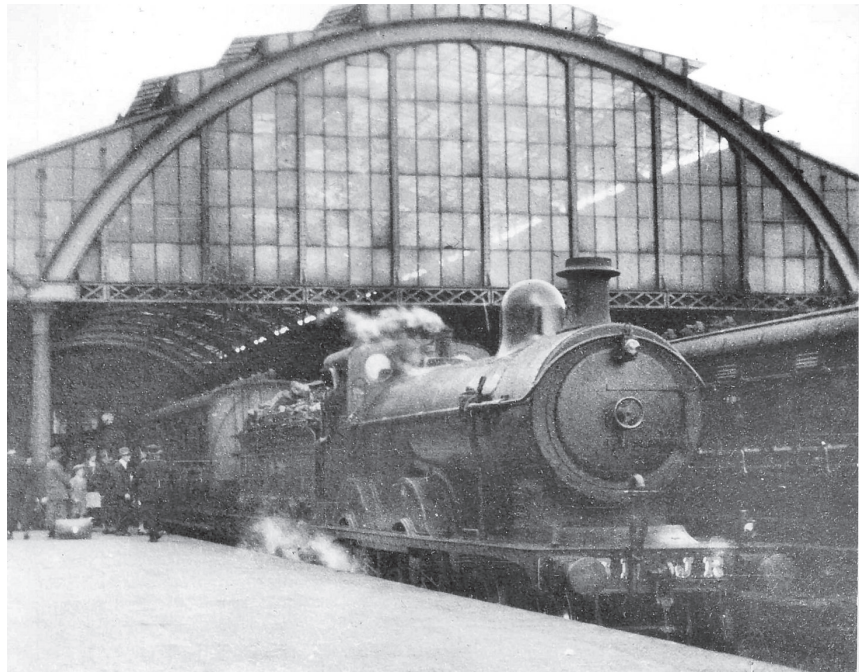
Designed by John Holloway Sanders, Midland Railway architect, the station facade represented a successful attempt to replicate the Palladian architecture for which the city of Bath is renowned, and of which nearby *Queen Square* remains a superb example.

The contract for the construction of the station (excluding the train shed) was awarded to Charles Humphreys by an agreement dated May 26, 1868. Humphreys was a contractor closely associated with works undertaken for the Midland Railway Company.

The supply and erection of the train shed, designed by John Sydney Crossley, was awarded to Messrs Andrew Handyside & Co of Derby in October 1868. Having completed the individual purchases of the nine houses in Seymour Street, the Midland Railway Company – by a number of auctions – disposed of everything saleable (see, for example, the local advert reproduced ref Nos 12 & 13). None of the construction work undertaken appears to have been photographed, this despite one of the earliest local commercial photographers (Walter Lewis) having his studios in premises on the opposite side of Seymour Street.

The Midland station opened to the public on August 4, 1869, and not (as still persists on some websites and among the pages of certain tomes) May 7, 1870, or, sometimes, merely '1870'. Misleading references can also be found regarding the use of a 'temporary terminus'. It is probable such confusion has arisen because the station was not fully completed by the opening date announced by the railway company.

For example, the train shed (the arched roof spanning the two platforms for around half of their original length, the cross-platform, and four lines of track) was still being glazed and



painted, buffer stops were about to be fitted, and chandeliers were yet to be hung and connected in some of the rooms. The latter was the cause of an explosion on the day prior to opening (the blast strong enough to shatter glass and force a door from its hinges); a classic case of a workman attempting to trace the source of the smell of gas with a lighted match!

Detailed

The evidence for the 1869 opening date comes from several sources. These include an extremely detailed report in the local newspaper. Its accuracy can be gauged from the fact the descriptions and layout of the various offices, rooms and other station facilities, all correspond with those shown on the contract drawings (of which more later).

Formal evidence is provided by the report – dated August 2, 1869 – of the official Board of Trade Inspector, Colonel Yolland. He had undertaken his inspection on July 28 and his report gave mention of the work yet to be completed. However, having subsequently received word from Mr Crossley all the works outstanding had since been attended to or were in the process of being completed, the inspector authorised the station could be used by the

public from the opening date of the railway from Mangotsfield.

Yolland stated that, if necessary, trains could be worked from under a portion of the roof where the glazing (to that part) had been finished. On the same date as Yolland's report, the *Western Daily Press* provided a detailed description of the new branch line. There was no mention of any temporary station at Bath.

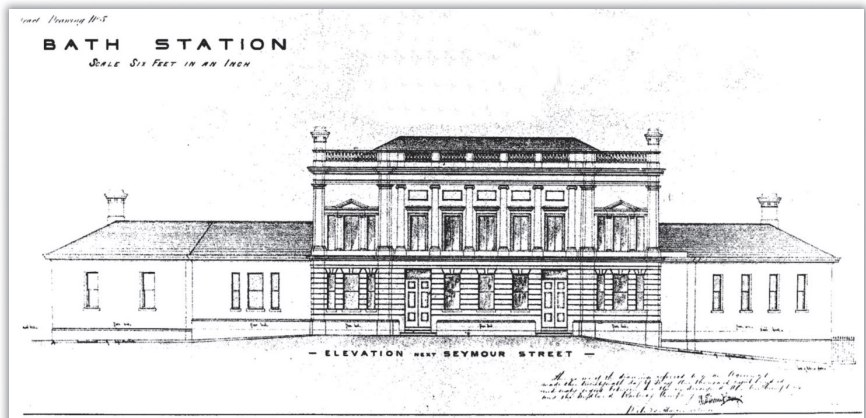
The *Bath Chronicle*, reporting on the opening day's events, mentioned work to the train shed roof "is still being carried out by means of an ingenious movable stage, constructed by Mr. J. Green, the clerk of the works; it is so managed that trains can pass in and out without interfering with it".

However, the same source reveals that: "A great deal of work has yet to be done but the amount of labour got through during Monday and Tuesday (the two days prior to opening) was surprising, as up to Monday afternoon there was no furniture in any of the rooms, and great credit is due to Mr J Green for the energy which has been displayed in forwarding the work". Then, almost as an afterthought, the reporter added: "We may mention that the side of the station which is open to Green Park (this being along the side of the south, 'Departure' platform) will be covered with

[1] The name Seymour Street no longer appears on modern-day maps. The side of the street opposite the frontage of the Midland station was severely damaged during the Bath 'Blitz' in April 1942 and demolished in 1959. The site has since twice been redeveloped, and the road partially realigned and referred to, nowadays, as being part of Green Park Buildings.

[2] These properties still exist today as Nos. 1 to 12 Chapel Row. They owe their continued existence to a change of plan by the Midland Railway Co. Along the opposite side of the road there had existed only two properties: St Mary's Chapel, and a stone yard on the site of a former public house named 'The Elephant & Castle'. It was these buildings that were destined to be demolished in order to widen the road.

Right: One of the original contract drawings, illustrating the station frontage to Seymour Street.



HISTORIC STATIONS

ornamental boarding.” The station was opened “unattended by ceremony, and, except that Mr. J Stone’s porter stores, at the bottom of Charles Street, were adorned with flags and a scroll wishing ‘Success to the Midland Railway’, there was no outward display to show that anything particular was going on....The first train was timed to leave Bath at 7.40 (am), but long before that hour people began to assemble in and about the station.”

There followed a description of the inaugural train, the *Bath Chronicle* reporter advising that most of the many passengers bought a ticket “simply for the purpose of saying that they travelled in the first train on the new line, and booked only to Weston (the first station) – a penny ride”.

The train was eight minutes late as it “quietly glided out of the station, the passengers getting up a faint cheer. At five minutes past eight o’clock a train from Bristol (due 7.55) came in, and with it a great number of those who had left Bath a little more than a quarter of an hour previously”. The driver of the incoming train was John Orford of 20 Albert Buildings, Bath. (A fact gained from his obituary – *Bath Chronicle*, Dec 22, 1910).

It appears it might have been two well-known railway historians, D S Barrie and C R Clinker, who first made reference to a temporary station at Bath. Both had been professional railwaymen: Derek Stiven Maxwellton Barrie (1907-1989) was, in 1948, the public relations officer of the Railway Executive. Charles Ralph Clinker (1906-1983), who joined the GWR in 1923, had retired from his railway career in 1946.

Accuracy

Jointly, they produced the book *The Somerset & Dorset Railway* (first published in 1948 by The Oakwood Press, and subsequently republished several times). Clinker, in particular,

was to become known for the accuracy of his research, while both are still highly regarded as recorders of railway history. Both men, their publisher advised, “had lived in the Bristol area and became intimately acquainted with the old Somerset & Dorset ...” In the 1930s, Clinker served as secretary of the Bristol Railway Circle.

In describing the arrival of the Midland Railway in Bath they stated: “...and had been opened for passenger traffic to a temporary terminus at Bath on August 4, 1869 and for goods on September 1 of the same year; the present (Queen Square) terminus at Bath was brought into use on May 7, 1870.” Note also their reference to the title Queen Square – of which more in Part 2 next month.

What Barrie and Clinker did not state or clarify – and herein, perhaps, lies the crux of much of what has since been written – was whether the location of the temporary and permanent stations at Bath were, in effect, one and the same (ie – ‘temporary’ because it could not – because of the works still to be completed as at August 4, 1869 – yet be considered as ‘permanent’?).

In 1960, publisher and author David St John Thomas, in his book *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain* (Volume 1 –



Following arrival of the ‘Pines Express’ from Bournemouth, ex-Midland Class ‘2P’ 4-4-0 No. 518 has just backed down and coupled to the stock for the continuation of the run northwards. IVO PETERS, COURTESY JULIAN PETERS

“It appears that, in turn, other writers relied upon and used Barrie and Clinker as their source for this information (why May 7, 1870 had been misquoted elsewhere as the opening date); thus a classic example of how an error has been replicated time and again and, as such, unwittingly an accepted illusion of truth has been created. It is a trap into which this writer has been known to fall!”

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Sales by Auction.

MIDLAND RAILWAY.

TO BUILDERS, CONTRACTORS, & OTHERS

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,

By Messrs. BARTRUM,

On the respective premises,
On MONDAY NEXT, the 11th inst.
Commencing at 12 SEYMOUR STREET, at Eleven
o’Clock precisely,
The Valuable MATERIALS, FIXTURES, and
FITTINGS of
TWO DWELLING HOUSES

viz. :-

Nos 12 and 13 SEYMOUR STREET

The same include Slates, Pantiles, Coping, Paving,
Prime Timber in Roofs and Flooring Board, Partitions,
Cupboard Fronts, Wainscoting, Doors, Architraves,
Sashes, Marble and other Chimney Pieces, Lead in Flats,
Gutters, Cisterns, and Pipes. Force and other Pumps,
Modern Stoves, Ranges, and almost every other Material
connected with the Building Trade.

The Whole will be on View on the Morning of Sale, when
Catalogues may be obtained of the Auctioneers, or of
Messrs COTTERELL and SPACKMAN,

Terrace Walks, Bath

The Bath Chronicle, Thursday, November 7, 1867

The West Country), repeated what Barrie and Clinker had written. In 1967, Robin Atthill, author of the classic history *The Somerset & Dorset Railway* (first published by David & Charles with several reprints), also referred to the opening date as May 7, 1870. Furthermore, in describing the railway on the western side of the River Avon at Bath (that is, on the opposite side of the river to that where the terminus was built), Atthill added: “*Hereabouts was the site of the temporary terminus used by the Midland from August 4, 1869 to May 7, 1870, between the signalbox...and the two engine sheds*”.

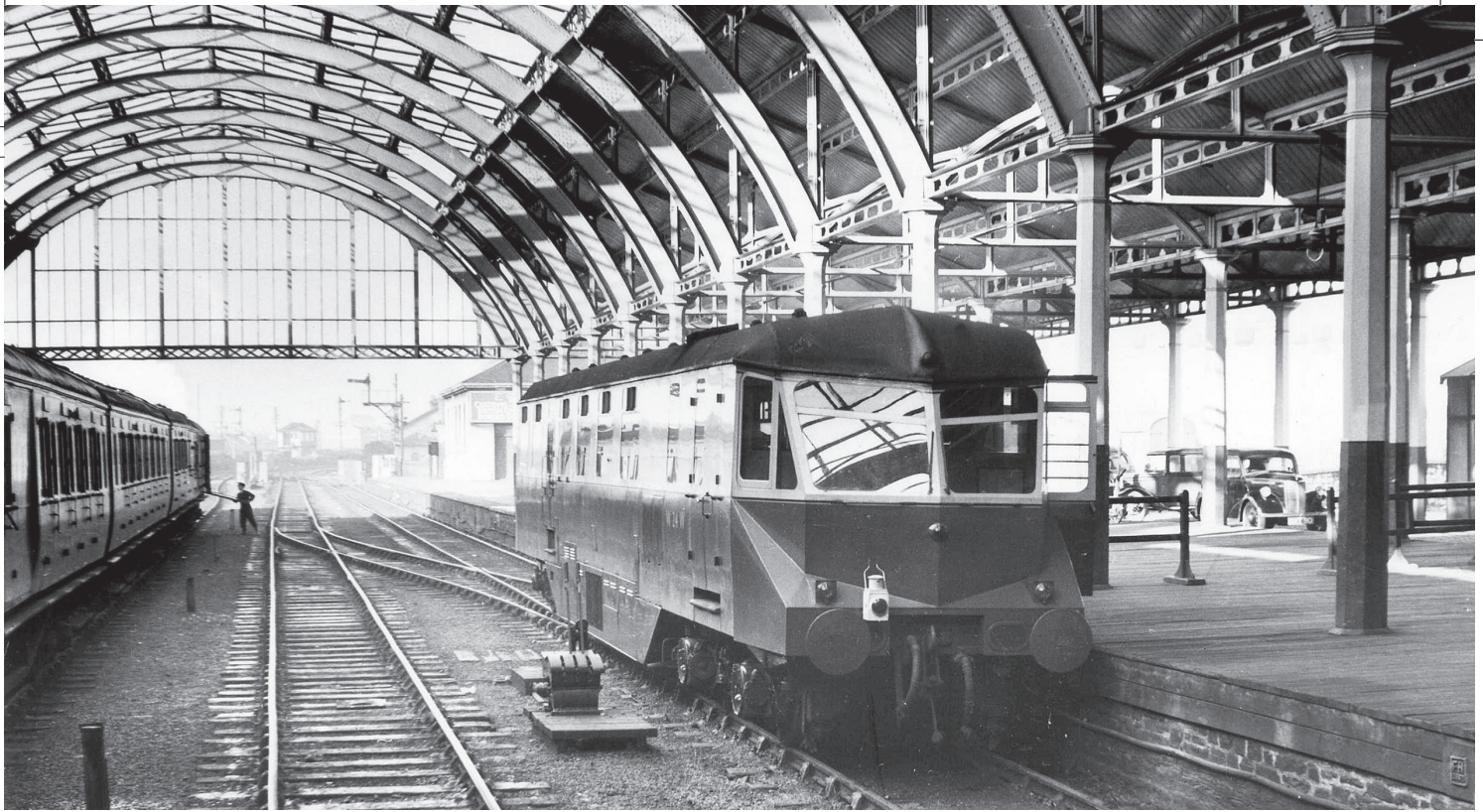
The reality was that building the new railway ‘hereabouts’ (to quote Atthill) had required the ground levels to be raised by between 9 and 12ft.

During at least the first half of 1870, the area ‘hereabouts’ remained one of intense activity, with the contractor’s large workforce engaged in constructing the Midland Railway engine shed on one side of the running lines and adding to the facilities forming the goods yard on the other, together with all the associated groundworks, tracklaying, and buildings.

The amount of material necessary to raise the ground level (mostly using stone excavated from a deep cutting about a mile to the west), was such that, for example, the concrete foundations for the walls to the engine shed could be cast on the level of the ground, but would finish up being covered by many feet of infill! So, by any stretch of the imagination, ‘hereabouts’ was not a location which might have proved suitable for a ‘temporary terminus’.

Moving forward a century, on buying the (then) derelict station from British Rail in 1972, Bath City Council obtained a full set of all the plans and drawings of the station plus its environs as then held by BR in the old ‘Bristol & Exeter’ headquarters adjoining Temple Meads station.

As an employee of the city council at that time, the writer was responsible for collecting and indexing the documents. Many of these were original contract drawings dated and signed on behalf of the Midland Railway Co and by the contractor. Some even included a few hand-written notes, most likely added during



'Western Region influence' GWR Railcar No. W24W, built in 1940, waits to leave with the 10.00am local to Bristol on April 20, 1954. IVO PETERS, COURTESY JULIAN PETERS

the construction work. Also included were the original plans of the MR and (slightly later) the S&D engine sheds, the goods sheds, and most of the ancillary buildings. Not one of these original documents (1), including the site layout plans, contained *any* reference to the provision or existence of a 'temporary station or platform'.

The date nearest to the oft-misquoted opening date of the 'permanent' MR station when any railway related 'opening' took place at Bath, was Monday, May 2, 1870; but that was the Midland Goods station, as it was then known.

It is difficult to imagine Barrie or Clinker could have become confused by that event. Advertised as the 'Station at Bath for goods and mineral traffic', this was located just across the River Avon, west of the passenger station platforms. It seems even more unlikely confusion arose with the opening, primarily for local traffic to and from Bath, of the Midland St Phillip's station at Bristol; this also on Monday, May 2.

Misquoted

Having searched online through the various local and regional weekly newspapers of that era, nothing has been found to suggest why May 7, 1870 had been widely misquoted elsewhere as the opening date. It appears that, in turn, other writers relied upon and used Barrie and Clinker as their source for this information; thus a classic example of how an error has been replicated time and again and, as such, unwittingly an accepted illusion of truth has been created. It is a trap into which this writer has been known to fall!

It is entirely reasonable to assume the glazing and painting of the train shed was completed very shortly after the opening date of August 4, 1869. However, further building work *did* continue at and around the station. Only eight months following the opening, both platforms were already being extended. At the western end of the northern (arrival) platform, a 'Customs House' (bonded warehouse) was built (in 1871/2).

The latter provided a covered and secure building within which bonded goods could

be removed from sealed railway wagons and transferred to the safety of the cellar space under the platforms, until such time as the goods were released with duty paid.

Within the bonded warehouse, a crane was provided which enabled goods to be lowered to the level of the cellars. A narrow-gauge set of rails was built into the floor of the vaults, to enable goods to be moved around on a number of small hand-propelled wagons. During all these and other development activities, nothing prevented the fairly infrequent service of passenger trains from using one or other of the completed platforms of the Midland station.

So one thing can be regarded as certain: there was no separate 'temporary terminus' provided by the Midland Railway at Bath; it was more the case of making use, from the opening date of the Mangotsfield to Bath branch line, of the (then) 'almost complete' station.

The first book to have these matters

correctly stated is John Owen's *Life on the Railway* (published by Millstream Books of Bath); the most comprehensive work published about Green Park Station and the Midland/S&D systems within the boundary of Bath. In more recent times, some other authors have referred to the correct opening date and omitted any reference to a temporary station.

However, as evidenced in the opening paragraph to this feature, the error is still perpetuated in much more recently published or republished titles. It is also possible that those seeking such information might refer unwittingly to one of the earlier publications (as, for example, editions often to be found in public libraries or second-hand book shops) or, perhaps, turn to the 'internet', which takes us back to the start of this article! ■

Note: (1) *The original drawings, plans, etc, referred to in this article are now held in the Record Office of Bath & North East Somerset Council, at The Guildhall, High Street, Bath.*



A late-1920s scene shows the glazed end of the train shed to good effect. As at St Pancras (opened the year prior to Bath), the supporting pillars to the main central span were grounded onto basement piers, the spacing of which enabled barrels of Bass beer (and other bonded goods) to be stored in bays under the north platform. IVO PETERS, COURTESY JULIAN PETERS