

Rudyard Lake and its Environs, Including its Place in Railway & Canal History

RCHS West Midlands & North West Group Joint Walking Event: Thursday 26th October 2017

The walk (a joint NW & WM Group event) will start at the site of the NSR station at Rushton Spencer and finish in Leek; a distance of 5.5 miles. A major feature of the day will be Rudyard Lake and its history as both a reservoir for the Trent & Mersey Canal and its promotion as a holiday destination by the North Staffordshire Railway. The route of the walk will be mainly the track bed of the railway but short diversions may be made to look at water supply, both to the lake and to the canal. Time permitting, the site of Leek station could be visited but this will feature on a future walk.



Rushton Spencer (c1960)



Carlos Trower crossed the lake in 1864 & 1878



Rudyard Lake Station looking north towards Hotel

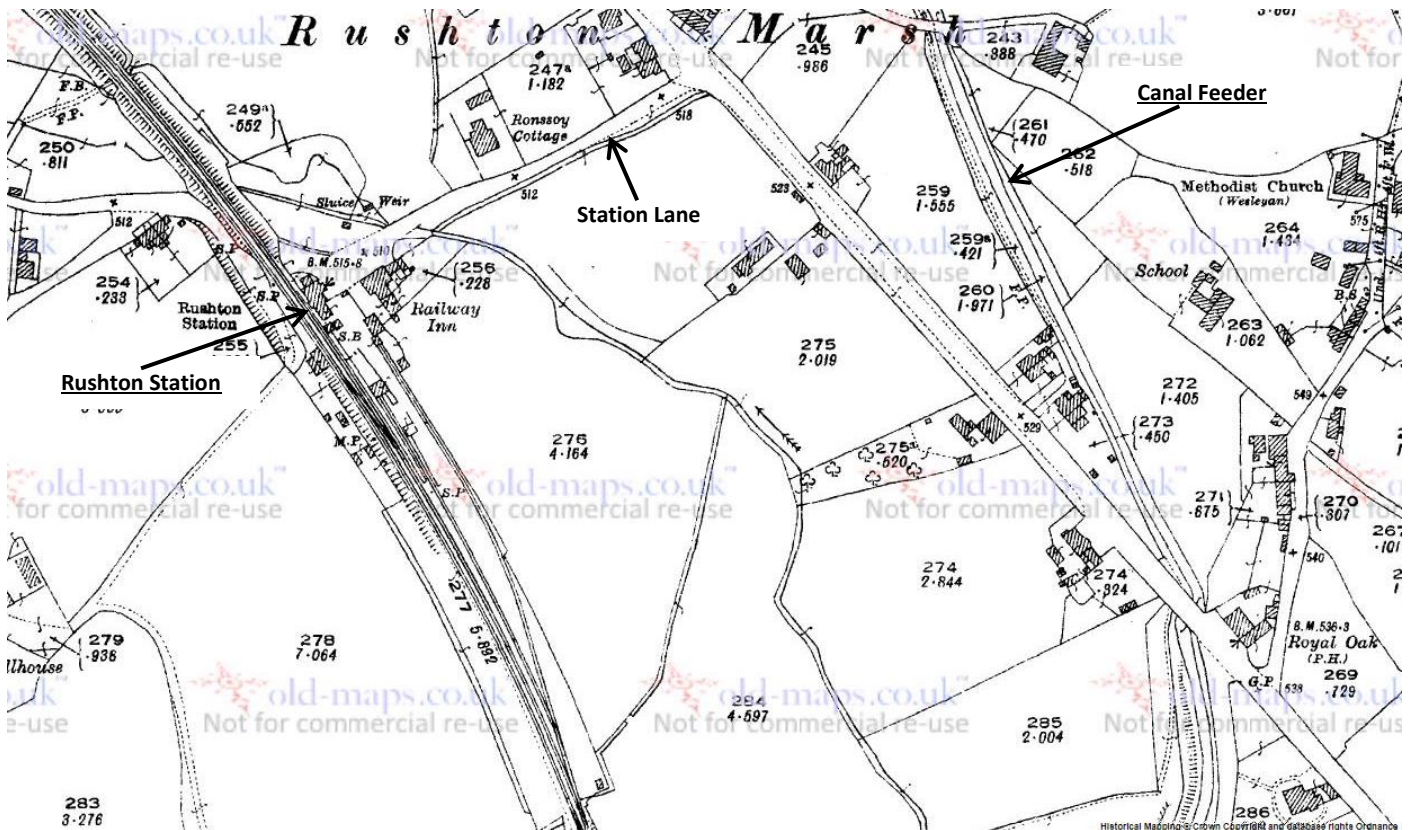
Historical Background

The origins of the North Staffordshire Railway (NSR) including the current main line from Macclesfield to Stoke (and on towards London) lay in the railway politics of the 1830's. It is clear looking at a map that the shortest route between Manchester and London would pass through Stockport, Macclesfield, Leek, Burton and Rugby (see map on p8). Such a line, if built, would not pass through the towns of The Potteries; nor would it serve the interests of the London & Birmingham, the Grand Junction & the Manchester & Birmingham Railways; nor, consequently, business interests in Liverpool. An important compromise was reached in 1839 between the M&BR and the GJR, with the latter dropping proposals for its line to pass through Stoke rather than Crewe. The consequences of this were twofold; firstly the railway system from the north west, through the Midlands, to London that we know today was settled and, secondly a network of railway lines was built by the NSR linking the pottery towns, Macclesfield, Leek and Uttoxeter. What became known as the Churnet Valley line, running from a junction at North Rode (four miles south of Macclesfield), through Rudyard, Leek, the Churnet Valley and on to Uttoxeter, was opened in 1849; along with the line from Macclesfield to Congleton which, in turn, completed the link from Stockport, via Macclesfield, to Stoke. The southern section of the Churnet Valley route from Oakamoor, through Rocester and into Uttoxeter closed in 1965. The line from North Rode to Leek closed in 1964, Leek to Leek Brook closed in 1970. The line from Leek Brook, through Cheddleton and Froghall to the sand sidings at Oakamoor remained open until 1988.

The Caldon Canal, starting at a junction with the Trent & Mersey Canal at Etruria, opened in 1778 three years after the T&M main line. As well as serving the quarries at Caldon Low, the Caldon canal served as a supply of water to the T&M main line. Indeed, water from one of its two reservoirs (Knypersley which enters the Caldon Canal to the west of the locks that raised the canal to its summit level) did little other than to serve the needs of the T&M. Water at the summit level of the T&M remained a problem and is the reason for the reservoir being built in Rudyard Vale. The dam was designed by John Rennie and Hugh Henshall was the resident engineer. Rudyard reservoir has a capacity of 122m ft³ and was opened in 1799. Water flows into the reservoir (known as Rudyard Lake) from streams to the north and, through a feeder, from the River Dane (built in 1809). The Dane runs east to west two miles north of the reservoir and forms part of the boundary between Staffordshire and Cheshire. Today, it appears that little water flows through the northern end of the feeder. From Rudyard Lake, a feeder runs for more than three miles to the Leek Branch Canal, which joins the Caldon Canal at the eastern end of its summit level at Hazelhurst Junction (see the notes from the 28th September walk for further details of this).

Rushton Station

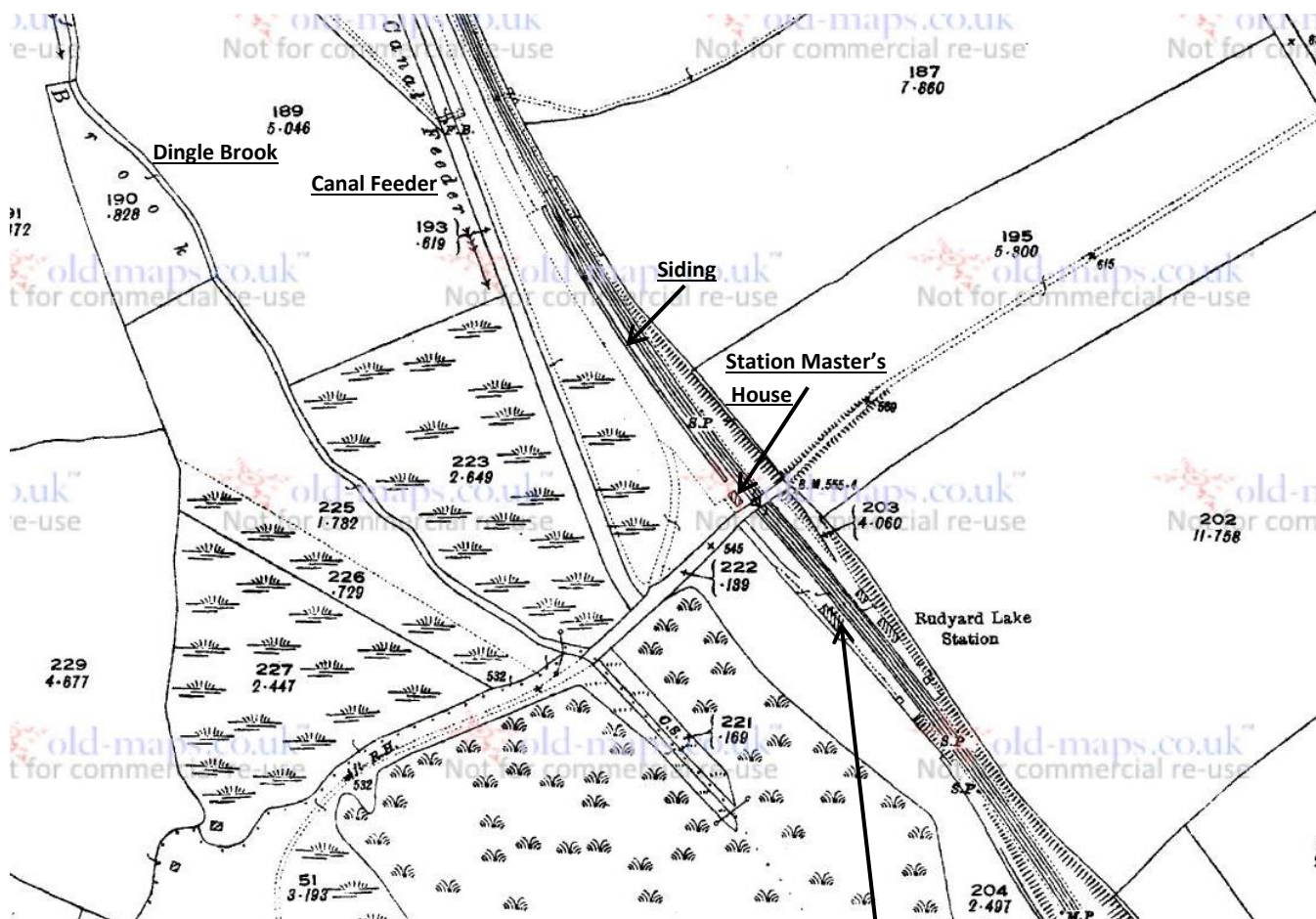
Rushton station opened with the line in 1849 (not 1844 as indicated in the date stone on the renovated building, now a house) and closed in 1962. The Jacobean-style architecture is typical of NSR stations on the line. The platforms are (just) visible from the road where the level crossing would have been. Between the station building and the public house (formerly the Railway Inn built in 1849; now the Knott Inn) was the entrance to the goods shed and yard. The goods office was between the inn and the station building. The goods yard is now a car park for the Staffordshire Way. The edge of the down passenger platform now forms a boundary of the car park. One siding ran directly behind the up platform forming a bay, part of which is visible on the northern side of the car park. The other siding ran along what is now the east side of the car park. There was a goods shed and a cattle dock. As well as being used by local farmers (milk and cattle bound for Manchester), the yard was used by wagons from collieries including Chatterley, Whitfield and Sneyd. (See page 7 for photographs of the station).



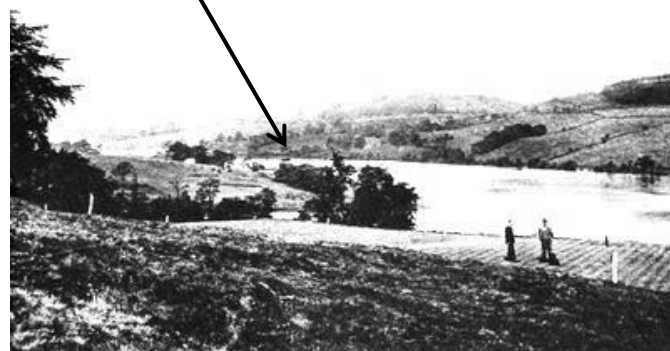
Rushton Station (left) & part of Canal Feeder from River Dane (right of map) 1925 (oldmaps.co.uk)

Cliffe Park Halt (also Rudyard Lake station)

The station was opened as **Rudyard Lake** in 1905. It was renamed **Cliffe Park** in 1926 and **Cliffe Park Halt** in 1936. Cliffe Park Hall was nearly a mile away on the opposite side of the lake (the station could have been called Wolfdale which was much nearer). The station building was utilitarian: wooden with a brick chimney. There were no goods facilities. Between 1905 and 1910 a siding was opened to the north of the road bridge and accessed from the down line for use in busy holiday times, along with two waiting shelters on the up platform, and a station master's house beside the road bridge. Between the Hall and the top of the lake was the golf course. The hall is now obscured by trees but, as the trees clear to the south of the site of Cliffe Park Halt, the outline of the golf course is clear on the opposite side of the lake. The station closed in 1963 and the buildings demolished. The feeder from the Dane may be seen to the west of the road bridge. The Dingle Brook also flows into the lake nearby. Between Rushton Spencer and Cliffe Park there are several viewing points for the canal feeder. The absence of significant water movement suggests a relatively low importance placed on the Dane as source of water. (See page 7 for photographs of the station).



Rudyard Lake (Cliffe Park) Station, 1925. The Dane feeder and the Dingle Brook at the northern extremity of the reservoir (oldmaps.co.uk)



Rudyard Lake Golf Club

Land acquired by NSR: 1903; Club opened: 1906

Membership: 114 (1906); 200 (1914)

Club closed: 1926 following other clubs opening nearer to centres of population.

Rudyard Golf Club & the NSR were active in the relaxing of attitudes towards leisure activities on Sundays.

Note: the club was promoted as being 5 minutes from the railway – perhaps by chauffeur!

Cliffe Park Hall leased to YHA in 1933.

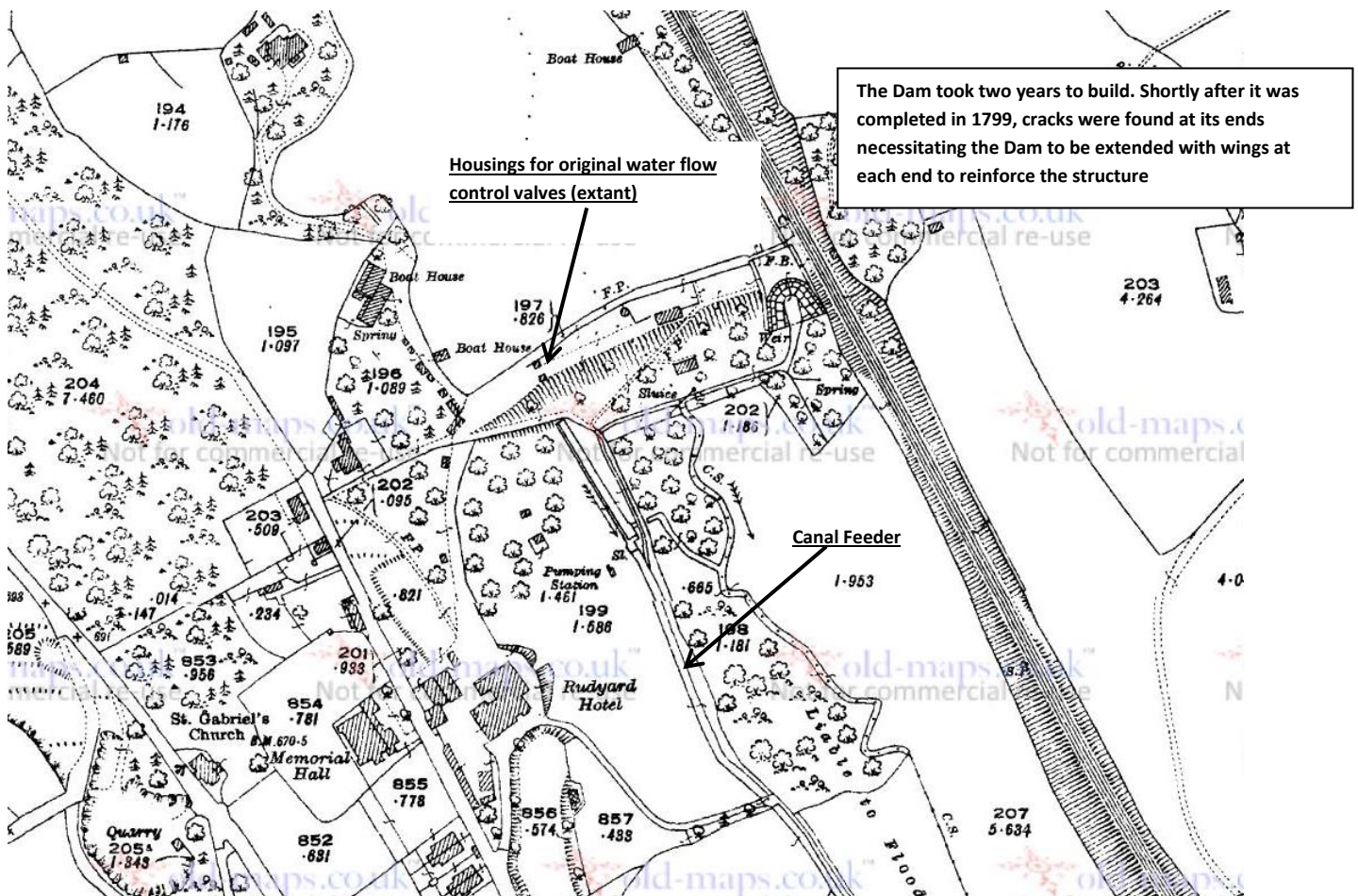
Closed by BR but reopened by YHA in 1958.

Leisure and the Rudyard Lake Hotel & Dam Area

Leisure activities began soon after the reservoir was built but increased considerably with the coming of the railway. Hotel Rudyard, which incorporates a house originally built for the reservoir keeper, was opened in time for the Easter Monday fête in 1851 by Peter Ullivero, a Congleton innkeeper. It was first known as Rudyard Lake Hotel; its present name was adopted c. 1886. About 1870 the hotel was taken over by Henry Platt, who enlarged it, notably with a ballroom in 1873. The grounds were improved with areas for archery and croquet, and a roller-skating rink was opened in 1876. To attract more visitors Platt started a well-dressing festival in May 1871, the railway company laying on special trains from the Potteries and Macclesfield. The festival was still held in 1873. In 1896 a later hotelier promoted the area as 'the Switzerland of England'.

The railway company acquired the Cliffe Park estate in 1903 and was empowered in 1904 to hire out motor launches and rowing boats on the lake. By 1905 a golf course had been laid out

From the late 19th century boathouses were built along the west side of the lake, some later converted into dwellings. Among the earliest is that built in 1891 for Horton Lodge and occupied from 1970 as a house called Lower Horton Lodge. To the north a boathouse built in 1893 to a design by the Leek architect Larner Sugden has a facade incorporating a ship's figurehead. It too was a house in 1991, called the Lady of the Lake.

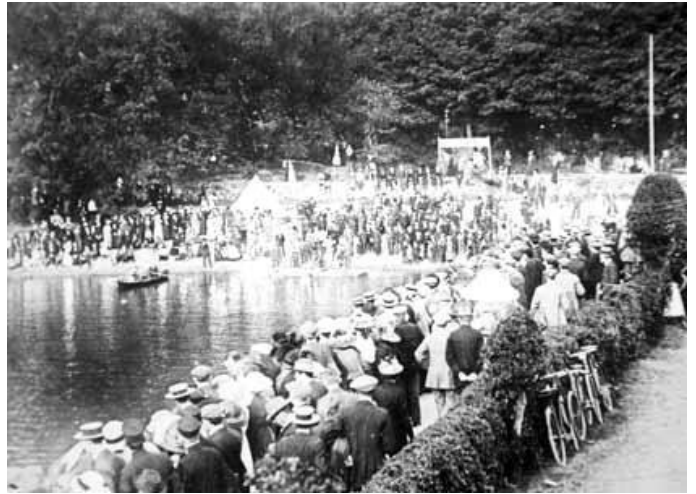


Southern end of the reservoir showing the dam and the feeder (to the Leek Branch canal) – 1925 (oldmpas.co.uk)

In the early 1900's, the Dam was raised and a landing stage added for the boating business run at the time by George Heath. A dance floor was built on the Dam in 1907, complete with a shelter and bandstand. There were stalls selling souvenirs, fancy goods and refreshments for the increasing numbers of visitors attracted to the Lake. These numbers peaked in the 1920's and 30s with trippers not only from the Potteries but as far away as Lancashire and Blackpool arriving by coach and railway and, increasingly, by car. Patterns of tourism changed during the C19th and then in the inter-war years, with numbers falling off greatly in the post WWII years.



Postcard showing the dam; looking from railway.



Tourists at end of the lake. Railway is behind crowd in centre of picture



Six scenes around Rudyard Lake (Paul Blurton)

Rudyard Lake Station: also Rudyard, Horton and Rudyard (Horton)

The station site is now occupied by the terminus of the Rudyard Lake Miniature Railway. The station opened in 1850 as **Rudyard Lake**. Between 1905 and 1926 the station was named Rudyard & Rudyard (Horton) before the name **Rudyard Lake** was adopted in 1926. It retained this name up to closure in 1960. Part of the upside platform retaining wall is used by the miniature railway but all of the original station buildings, including four waiting rooms, the station master's house and garden (to the left of the slope up to the site) sidings, crane & stables have been demolished and the site turned into a car park. The canal feeder is left centre on the map overleaf. It is nearer to the railway, and visible, when walking towards Leek, although quite soon it disappears to the south as the railway continues to the south east.



Rushton Station in early BR days (Paul Blurton)



Entrance to goods yard, 1957. Note use of rail as a kerb (Basil Jeuda)



Rushton Station from level crossing (Paul Blurton).



Train to Leek at Rushton Station (Paul Blurton).



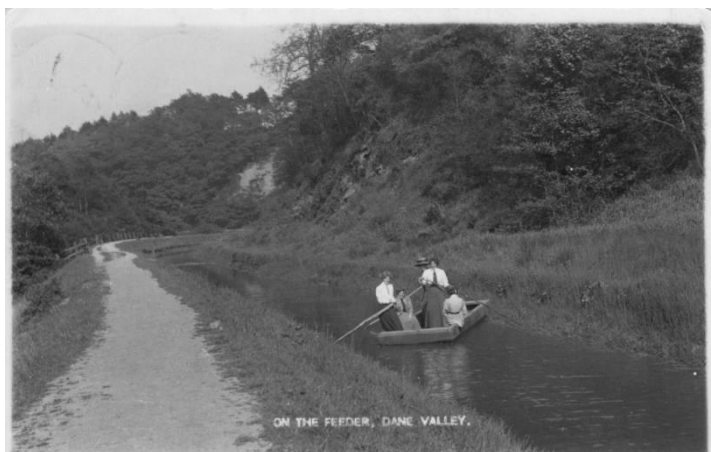
One of two bridges on NSR with rails used in construction (P Blurton)



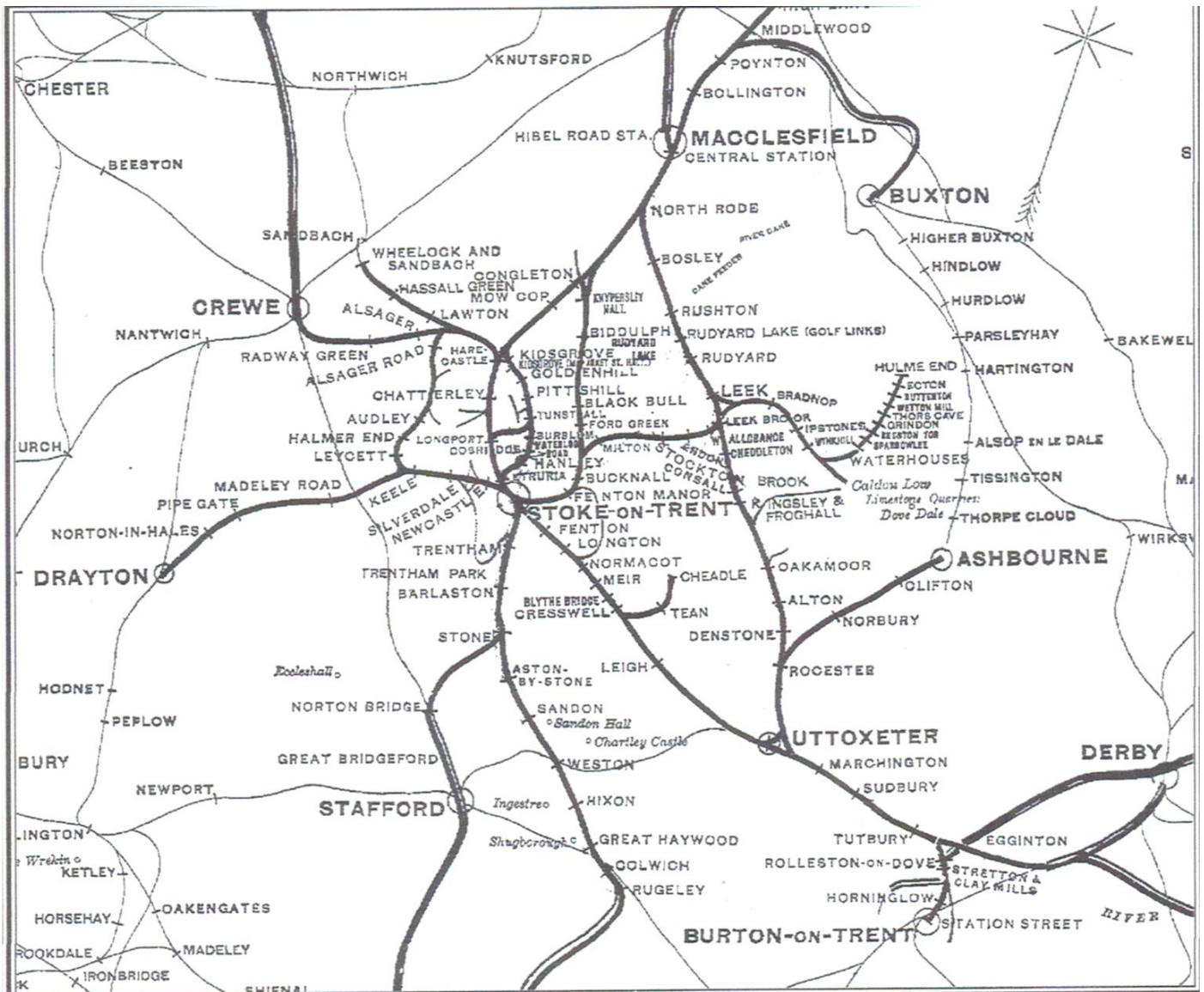
Cliffe Park Halt looking south from road bridge (P Blurton)



Cliffe Park(Rudyard Lake) Station pre-1926 (P Blurton)



Postcard: On the feeder from the Dane (date unknown; Edwardian?)



The North Staffordshire Railway around Stoke (from: The Churnet Valley Railway, Bail Jeuda; Lightmoor Press, 1999)

CHURNET VALLEY RAILWAY (27th July 1844)

At a numerous MEETING of the Inhabitants of the Town and neighborhood of UTTOXETER, held at the Red Lion Inn, in UTTOXETER on Thursday, 25th July, 1844,

ROBERT BLURTON, Esq, of Smallwood Maner. Chairman:

The following Resolution were passed:--

1st,--That this Meeting has heard with much satisfaction that line of Railway has been projected from the Town of Macclesfield along the Churnet Valley (by way of Leek, Cheadle, Rocester and Uttoxeter) so as to communicate with the Birmingham and Derby Railway; and that is the opinion of this meeting that the line now proposed by the Provisional Committee is that which will prove most advantageous to the proprietors, and most beneficial and commodious to the Public.

Moved by Mr. Blagg,

Seconded by Mr. KEATES, and carried unanimously.

2nd,-- That the line proposed by the Provisional Committee is more practicable and less circuitous than if taken by Ashbourne, and that it will commend the traffic, not only of the town of Uttoxeter, but also of the populous Districts of Tean, Rocester and Tutbury and even the competing Town of Ashbourne and its neighborhood. That the town and neighborhood of Uttoxeter, from the circumstance of lying between two Coal Fields, viz, Cheadle and the Potteries on the North and Newhall &c. on the South, from its famed Stone Quarries at Hollington and Alveton, its Gypsum Mines at Fauld, its supply of Corn from the extensive tract of Arable Land on the Forest of Needwood, its well accustomed fortnightly Cattle Fairs, its numerous Cheese Fairs and its extensive factories at Tean, Rocester and Tutbury &c. will afford a far grater proportion of traffic than Ashbourne and its neighborhood. And this meeting pledges Itself to use every means to facilitate the undertaking.

Moved by Mr. Bladon.

Seconded by Mr. Earp and carried unanimously.