

## THE RAILWAY COMES TO KING'S CLIFFE

By Canon John Bryan ©1997

The years 1855 to 1870 witnessed a considerable upsurge of what one might call "Village Energy" in King's Cliffe; there was concern for the state of the streets in the village and for the roads out of the village; there was the energy and the money applied to the construction of village gas-works; growing prosperity amongst the farmers, wood-turners and tradesmen of the village urged them on to demand that a Magistrates' Court be set up within the bounds, even that a "Town Hall" should be built. But the greatest enthusiasm was for a railway to link King's Cliffe with the great world beyond its borders. Cliffe people were not slow to appreciate the significance of the opening of the Northampton to Peterborough line in June 1845, passing within sight of Nassington and Yarwell but on the other side of the River Nene. Stamford was reached by a LNWR line from Rugby in 1851, which meant that Ketton had its own station; and if little Ketton could have the blessing of a railway, then why not a much larger and prosperous King's Cliffe? There was wood-turners' ware to be exported from the village, and the ever-growing need for coal, to be brought in more cheaply than hauling it by cart on waggons from depots at either Ketton or Oundle.

That railway promoters were aware of the potential existing for an east-west Leicester line between Leicester and Peterborough is revealed in a Stamford Mercury report of 11th July 1845: -  
" We are informed that the promoters of the Leicester and Bedford railway intend to make a line from Harborough to Stamford along the valley of the Welland, with a branch from Tixover past King's Cliffe to join the Northampton and Peterborough line near Wansford; and also to unite their main trunk line with the Leicester and Swannington. This will form a shorter communication between Leicester and Stamford, as well as Peterboro', than the line from Syston, and coal will be brought from the Swannington pits into Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire at a very low price. " This was not to be, largely by reason of the fierce competition at this time of "Railway Mania", so King's Cliffe had to struggle on in hope !

But the extraordinary vigour which overtook the village in the late 1850's found expression, first in the establishment in August 1860 of Gas Works in Bridge Street, second in the organisation of public meetings to further the cause of a railway link for 'Cliffe. In this, Cliffe people were aided by the Stamford Mercury and the newly-launched Peterborough Advertiser, both of which faithfully reported every movement and meeting calculated to bring a railway to King's Cliffe. Thus a 'Cliffe report in the Mercury of 31st August 1860, after debating on the success of the Gas Works undertaking, turned attention to what may be called 'The Railroad Theme':

..... " Cliffe people are directing their spy-glasses towards some not-yet observed flag; towards one which, if once set on foot, would find more eager advocates, who would pay an unlimited amount of attention to it. This project is a railroad. One person has asked the other for the last ten years 'Why haven't we a railroad? 'Wouldn't there be sufficient traffic for a branch line from Stamford via King's Cliffe to Fotheringhay?' and such like questions. "

The reporter then suggested a route for such a branch line, apparently ignoring the steep gradients out of Stamford and down to 'Cliffe in the Willowbrook Valley. He wrote: " A branch line from Stamford to Fotheringhay, starting from the Midland station, leaving Wothorpe to the right and the race-course on the left, passing near Easton Heath farm, crossing the Wansford road, and passing through the valley in King's Sale near the Bedford Purlieus, along the valley that passes through the middle of what is called the second drift and at the bottom of the first drift, by Mr. Huskinson's house, through the Old Warren, along the valley to Apethorpe, leaving Woodnewton on the left, going down the valley to Fotheringhay, and joining the London and North Western in Fotheringhay meadows. This would be the easiest and cheapest line that could be constructed. Where does the corn that we send away go to? To Stamford and Oundle markets. How does it get there? Why, it is all drawn by horses, sometimes at great expense. If there were a railroad, it would go by rail. There is a good deal of timber goes down into the fens and sea from here that might be sent by train. Beer and malt going to Spalding and its neighbourhood that would go cheaper by train. The consumption of coal in Cliffe, Apethorpe, Blatherwycke etc is something enormous and it costs us 3s to 4s per ton to bring it from the station. The coal that comes to Oundle and different places on that line would not have to go down to Peterboro', but could take a short cut across the Stamford and Cliffe line. If we turn to the woodware we see that hampers of it have to be bumped about on the road and half spoilt before they get to Stamford and Oundle. The amount of luggage of all sorts is so great that there are no less than

four carriers who seldom leave Cliffe without as much as the waggons will hold: in fact there never is any room for passengers, although a dozen sometime manage to squeeze in among the hampers of wooden ware, and nearly get smothered before they reach Stamford. Besides all this luggage, there are several noblemen's and gentlemen's seats in the neighbourhood, viz. Deene, Bulwick, Laxton, Fineshade, Apethorpe and Blatherwycke, which would have something arrive for one of them by every train, and they would be very glad of such a line. The 1600 inhabitants of Cliffe would be enabled to take short trips, which they cannot do now on account of the railroad being at such a distance. It cannot be necessary to say any more on this subject at present, for practicability, utility, and success of such a line must be obvious to everyone who read this paragraph. "

The reporter for the Peterborough Advertiser of 8th Sept 1860 produced an even more fascinating scheme, one which established a "push-pull" line based on a station at the foot of Bridge Street. Here is the graphic scene which he portrayed:-

KING'S CLIFFE - The Projected Railroad. We have been told that there to still hope for the 'Cliffites'; hope that they may some day see the time when they shall be no longer exiled but again unite themselves to that world which had banished them for so long a period. Hope is restored, but there is a great deal to be done before the Cliffites can turn the first sod of their railroad. The first step they ought to take is to consider carefully where they should have their railroad: how long it is to be; and where it should go to.... let us consider these important questions. The line which has been marked out would most certainly have the most traffic on it; but can the required capital be raised? If it cannot, why should this glorious enterprise be abandoned, could not a shorter and cheaper line, which would equally benefit Cliffe, be undertaken? A line might be constructed from Cliffe to Fotheringhay, which would make Peterborough and Oundle the market towns. The terminus of this line would be somewhere in Bridge Street, Cliffe. It would take the course of the brook as far as Spout Hall, where it would turn to the right, and follow the course of the brook down to Apethorpe, Woodnewton, and Fotheringhay; to the left of the latter place it would join the North-Western. This valley seems as if nature had formed it for a railroad, for there would not have to be a single cutting, and it would only require three bridges 12 yards long; for the Nene would not have to be crossed. Another great consideration is, that not even a single bridge over any road would have to be built. The road would be five miles and two furlongs in length, and as a single line would be sufficient, the company would only require to buy twenty-five acres of land. This would be the cheapest as well as the easiest line of rail that has been constructed in the United Kingdom. As to paying, the outlay would be so small that it could not help paying. The timber, corn, wooden-ware, and all kinds of produce could be conveyed by the line; and coal could be had at Cliffe at nearly the same price as at Peterborough. Nature having made the cuttings centuries ago, the sooner a company is formed to raise and smooth the road the better, and if shareholders never invest their money in worse speculation, they will never injure themselves." So spake whoever in Cliffe was the correspondent for the Advertiser.

Let us now see what the correspondent for the Mercury had gleaned and presented, for there can be no doubt but that these correspondents were each "listening in" to village-circles of influence. "Stamford Mercury, 7th September 1860:-

KING'S CLIFFE, - The route for a railway through Cliffe, as suggested in last week's Mercury, should commence at the Oundle station on the London and North-Western railway, taking Cotterstock, Tansor, Fotheringhay, Woodnewton, Apethorpe, King's Cliffe, Blatherwycke, Fineshade, Duddington, Collyweston, and Easton to Stamford. The following parishes would also be within 2 miles of a station, near Fineshade; viz, Bulwick, Laxton and Wakerley; and within 4 miles of Deene and Deenthorpe. The population of the above parishes are, according to the census of 1851, collectively 7120. They contain eight noblemen's and gentlemen's seats, with two gas-works, a distillery, besides extensive malting, all of which would materially add to the coal and other traffic. There are few localities with a better prospect of a branch line paying than the above."

And, then in the Mercury of 14th September, 1860, this splendid insight into the notions prevalent in the Cliffe of that time:-

"KING'S CLIFFE - Railway, Market, Magistrates' Bench

The all-engrossing subject here is the proposed railway. Two projects are on the anvil, but with the view of settling any difference of opinion upon the matter we would suggest that a public meeting of the inhabitants be held to calmly discuss the question, and to make out such a case for the landed proprietors along the route and the monied interest as will secure a railway for King's Cliffe. A line

being obtained, a market should be established. To show that this can be easily effected, we may state that on Tuesday last, an extensive show of fine soil produce was witnessed here; the heavy loads of onions, cucumbers, apples, pears, etc, having been brought from the neighbourhood of St. Neots. Should the project of a railway be abandoned, it must not deter the inhabitants from making an effort to establish a market, but do only one thing at a time; don't have too many irons in the fire. A Bench of Magistrates is much needed at Cliffe, which parish, we regret to say, supplies the Oundle Bench with much of its business. Persons seeking justice are occasionally put to much inconvenience by the non-attendance of Magistrates, and offenders thereby frequently escape punishment."

Public opinion was moving along, obviously, and a public meeting was called for the 4th October, a report of which duly appeared in the Mercury of 12th October:-

"The meeting called at the Cross Keys inn on the 4th inst., in connection with the proposed railway scheme was numerously attended, the Revd. E. Wells (curate), was called to the chair. Many excellent suggestions were made by the Revd. G. Amos (Congregational minister) and others as to the route and beneficial effects of a railway through Cliffe; and the motion being put to that effect, the meeting was unanimous in its desire to use every endeavour to carry out the same. A liberal fund was guaranteed to meet the preliminary expenses to further the object, and a committee of 10 was also appointed to transact the required duties that fall relative to the project. A vote of thanks was unanimously awarded to the revd. chairman."

Subsequent meetings of this committee issued in an opening of correspondence with London and North Western Company, but with little promise of success. However, the elders of Cliffe consoled themselves with a grand public dinner at the Cross Keys Inn on Monday, 5th November 1860 to celebrate the opening of the Bridge Street Gas Works. The Mercury reported in the edition of 9th November, 1860:

"KING'S CLIFFE, On Monday last a public dinner was held at the Cross Keys Inn, to celebrate the opening of the gas-works. The lighting of the streets with gas, which took place for the first time on Saturday last, will form a new era in the annals of Cliffe history, and will be looked upon as the commencement of improvement and progress in this small town. So successfully and economically has the matter been carried out, that it has given a fresh impetus to the desire for a railway, and one person at the dinner went so far as to point out what he considered to be the best and cheapest route a line from Cliffe must take. It seems, however, to be pretty well understood that unless the North-Western Railway Company enter zealously into the project, it will all end in talk."

Nothing daunted, the committee went ahead and decided to send a deputation to meet the LNWR Board of Directors at Euston Station, London, the deputation to consist of the Revd. G. Amos (Congregational minister), the Revd. E. Wells (curate, chairman of committee), Mr. T. Law (treasurer), and Mr. Robert Holmes, jun, (secretary). The meeting took place at Euston on the 22nd of November 1860, of which the outcome was deemed "encouraging". In the meantime the village was immediately concerned with getting the bridge widened and repaired, a task for which yet more public meetings were called. [This was the bridge by which Bridge Street crossed the river Willowbrook.] Eventually the old and very narrow bridge was demolished and the new one built in the course of July-September, 1862. A further pre-occupation for the village elders, at this very time, was the state of the Stamford road in the West Hay stretch. Who was liable for it and who would pay for its repair - the Marquis of Exeter or the Parish? This wrangle went on for several years. But when was King's Cliffe to get that badly-needed railway, so vital for its future prosperity?

The year 1861 passed with no advance on the situation left by the Nov. 1860 meeting of the Cliffe deputation with the LNWR Board of Directors. Then in August 1862 the Mercury published a report which ran thus:

"A NEW RAILWAY - A prospectus is about to be issued for a new railway from Stamford to Oundle, The scheme will be undertaken by the promoters of the Bourn and Spalding and Long Sutton and Lynn Railways. From Oundle it is intended to pass through the village of Cotterstock, cross the river Nene near to Perio Mill, skirt the village of Woodnewton, pass Apethorpe, King's Cliffe; cross West-hay Wood, to Duddington, and there enter the valley of the Welland, on the ridge of which, eastward, are also the villages of Collyweston and Easton. It is proposed that from Easton Wood side the line shall run parallel with the Midland, and be carried into the Water-street Station of the Stamford and Essendine Railway. Meetings are about to be held by the promoters at Oundle, King's Cliffe, and Stamford."

This was a development bound to stir King's Cliffe and on 25th October, 1862, the Mercury reported:

"THE PROPOSED RAILWAY TO KING'S CLIFFE AND STAMFORD - A petition, signed by all the principal inhabitants of King's Cliffe, was forwarded to London on Tuesday last in favour of a plan for a railway submitted to them, from the London and North-Western station at Oundle, via Cliffe, to Stamford. A deputation from the projectors visited Cliffe on Saturday last. Application is to be made in the next session of Parliament for powers to make the proposed line. The necessary steps are being taken for giving the required notices in November. No opposition is expected from the owners of the land through which the line will pass, both the Earl of Westmorland and the Marquis of Exeter, it is said, being favourable to the project." So far, so good, Cliffe people may have said, but by December of 1862 it was found impossible to proceed with a Bill in Parliament, chiefly because there were several companies angling for their own projects.

In the meantime there was the extensive restoration of Cliffe Church - removing all the old box-pews and the two galleries, renewing windows, re-plastering the walls, erecting new 'open' pews, etc - work begun September 1862 and completed June 1863 - all this to absorb the attention of Cliffe folk. Then came the shock of the death of the Rector, Archdeacon H. K. Bonney, on Christmas Eve 1862; he had served the village for 52 years and 8 months and had been a generous benefactor to Church and to people. He would be sorely missed now that he had gone. Who now would provide the poor of the village with Christmas beef, as the good Archdeacon had always done?

Throughout the year 1862 the railway project appeared to be at a standstill, at least as far as Cliffe was concerned. But it was unlikely to rest as long as the roads in and out of the village were in a bad state, the Stamford road through West Hay especially. Evidence that it did not rest is to be found in an article which appeared in the Peterborough Advertiser of 2nd Jan. 1864. This article is of special significance because it highlights, not only the railway question and not only the state of the West Hay road, but also an extensive clearance of woodland in the West Hay area by the then Marquis of Exeter. What we now know as the fields appurtenant to West Hay (new) Lodge Farm and to West Hay Farm proper, were woodlands stretching from Law's Lawn across to the Westhay Wood, as we know it today. Clearance of these woodlands began about 1856 and issued in the establishment of two new arable farms, with the two farmhouses of West Hay Lodge and West Hay farm. The Stamford road ran through their midst; it was strictly "extra-parochial" territory. The Marquis of Exeter owned these new arable fields on each side of the deplorable road from Cliffe to Stamford; shouldn't he be held responsible for a rate to repair and maintain the road? Many were the public meetings held down in King's Cliffe to determine the issue and long did battle rage in the 1860's!

Here then is the Advertiser's article of 2nd January, 1864: -

" KING'S CLIFFE AND ITS DIFFICULTIES - Last Christmas we were quite expecting that in a short time we should have railway communication at King's Cliffe. The land was surveyed, and the owners all seemed agreeable to the proposed plan of constructing a line from Oundle to Cotterstock, Woodnewton, Apethorpe, King's Cliffe, Duddington, and to Stamford. But now all seems to have been forgotten, and we are still where we were, about seven miles from any railway station. What is worse than all is that part of the high road from King's Cliffe to Stamford is impassable; Stamford being the principal market town for this neighbourhood. Many will say how is it that the road should be in such a bad state, and particularly now, after the passing of the new Highway Act. The fact is, this mile or mile-and-a-half of bad road belongs to nobody, no parish or township, and there is nobody to interfere. At the present time it is not fit for any light or spring vehicle to travel upon, and many people rather than drive over this road, which is the direct highway from King's Cliffe to Stamford, and only seven miles long, have to go by Blatherwycke, Fineshade, Duddington, to Stamford, a distance of 10½ miles, making the distance to Stamford and back 21 miles, instead of 14.

The road complained of was repaired for years by the parish of King's Cliffe, the road at that time running through a forest belonging to the Marquis of Exeter, and always considered to belong to this parish or lordship. The forest of late years has been cleared and converted into farms, 800 acres in total extent, and these being considered extra-parochial, pay no rates. The parishioners of King's Cliffe attempted to rate the land now under cultivation; the Marquis of Exeter disputed that right, and contended that the land did not belong to the parish of King's Cliffe at all. Consequently the road does not, and from that time the parish of King's Cliffe has ceased to repair it. The last three or four years it has been temporarily repaired by subscriptions of various people in the neighbourhood, but it is now left to its fate. Surely there must be some remedy for this. "

From this time onwards, and until September 1871, we hear no more about a railway for King's Cliffe. It would appear that the negotiations between the companies interested in promoting an Oundle to Stamford line, one way or another, were shelved for a period of nine years. Then, in its edition of 23rd September 1871, the Peterborough Advertiser disclosed fresh interest in the topic by publishing this report:-

"KING'S CLIFFE:- NEW RAILWAY - Considerable interest is felt at King's Cliffe in the new line of railway proposed by the London and North Western Company, the general wish of the inhabitants is that the line may run close to the town, so that the station may be conveniently situated. But according to the last survey that was taken, which appears to be the most favourable for the making of the line, the station would be nearly a mile from King's Cliffe. At the present time the nearest railway station of any kind is about seven miles distant. This new line is intended to connect the Stamford & Rugby branch with the Peterboro' & Northampton line."

As we see from the Advertiser's report of 23rd September 1871, the London and North-Western had made a preliminary survey from Seaton to Sibson, along a route which commended itself to King's Cliffe except for the fact that the site of the proposed station for Cliffe would be about one mile distant from the village. The village elders were disturbed to learn this and, no doubt, made their objections heard in high places. The route proposed was otherwise a sensible one, but (one is obliged to reflect) by no means the easiest to undertake. A study of the Ordnance Survey map shows that there were two obstacles to overcome once the proposed route left the Welland Valley at Wakerley: namely, a climb to the 225-foot contour reached at Fineshade Top Lodge and the Far Miers part of Cliffe Forest; then a further climb out of the Willowbrook valley to reach the 225 contour at the Jack's Green & Ring Haw level, before dropping to Nassington and the flood-plain of the River Nene. Hence the eventual undertaking of the very deep "Fineshade Cutting" which Cliffe people came to know so well (especially those who collected "bottles" of sticks from the wood !). Further cuttings, not so deep as Fineshade, would be needed for the Cliffe to Nassington stretch. Those of us who can remember the days of the active line will recall the sounds of trains pulling with a long squeal on the bend out of Cliffe Station, eastward, as they tackled that particular run, and equally the merry noise of trains making the fast westward run down into Cliffe station. And of course at any time sounds of trains could be heard all over Cliffe, as familiar as were the sounds of village blacksmiths striking their anvils with a merry ring-a-ring-ring !

But at last there were positive indications that King's Cliffe was to get its longed-for station. A report in the Advertiser of 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1872 indicated as much:

"KING'S CLIFFE - PROPOSED NEW RAILWAYS - In September a paragraph appeared in the Advertiser, stating that considerable interest was felt at King's Cliffe in the new line of railway proposed by the London and North-Western Company, it being the general wish of the inhabitants that the line should run close to the town so that the station might be conveniently situated. According to the last survey that was taken the station would be a mile from King's Cliffe, which was not at all satisfactory. Here the matter dropped, and nothing more was heard of the proposed line until this week. They have now commenced surveying again in earnest from Seaton to King's Cliffe. The new line enters the Peterboro' and Northampton railway within a short distance of Sibson tunnel. This will be about 11 miles, and the station will not be more than a quarter of a mile from King's Cliffe. If this line should be made, Peterborough instead of Stamford will be the principal market for this neighbourhood. The Midland Company have also been surveying for a new line of rail from Kettering to Weldon, King's Cliffe and Stamford. This line would be about 22 miles, or double the length of the London and North-Western, but would certainly be the shortest line to London by several miles. As regards the trade of King's Cliffe, the London and North-Western has the preference."

The Stamford Mercury was able to report, in its edition of 23rd May 1873, that the necessary Bill had passed the appropriate Parliamentary Committee on the 19th May 1873: - "The Seaton, King's Cliffe and Wansford Railway Bill passed the Committee on Monday the 19th, Messrs. T. J. Law, T. Cunningham, G. Miles, and W. Bollans attended from King's Cliffe in support of the Bill."

But passing the Bill did not of itself provide the line; the lands to be purchased had now to be measured accurately and Land Purchase Notices served on the owners of those lands before ever a sod was turned. The Advertiser of 6th March 1875 was able to report on this:-

"WANSFORD AND SEATON RAILWAY - An intimation has been made with reference to the memorial of the landowners and inhabitants of King's Cliffe and neighbourhood, to the Directors of the

London and North-Western Railway Company, that notices have been served for the land required for the construction of the line, and that the work will be commenced as early as possible. The early completion of the railway to King's Cliffe would be regarded as a great boon, and particularly to the manufacturers of woodware, who have a considerable wholesale and export trade. "

Not that the inhabitants of Cliffe were without topics of great significance for the town during these three long years (1872-1875) of waiting, from survey to initial sod turning. In 1872 for example, there was the purchase of the house and gardens in Park Street of the celebrated botanist, the Revd. Miles Joseph Berkeley, and their conversion into the Park Street Endowed (and Elementary) Schools. To these schools were transferred the 22 boys and 22 girls of the Law & Hutcheson Charity Schools on School Hill, and when the new schools opened on Monday 13th January 1873, not many other village children were sent by their parents, there being a weekly charge of 4d per child to pay. Soon there emerged an acute division, primarily of a political Conservative v Liberal character, and led by a Mr. John Cunnington, a soap-manufacturer of Brentford, London, (but King's Cliffe born and bred), as to whether there ought not to be a School Board to direct the new schools, rather than a consortium of Charity Governors led by the Rector of King's Cliffe, the Revd. Edward Du Pre. This controversy raged well into the late 70's and gave rise to much bitterness between all parties. Fuel was added to the fire by the bankruptcy of Rector Du Pre in January 1874. This delighted the Liberals and Mr. Cunnington, (by this time established at Tansor Lodge), who tried to get the Rector ousted from the parish! He, however, was rescued by his wife, Mrs. Marianne Du Pre, who was a Gist, of the Gists of Wormington, Gloucestershire, and so survived until his retirement in 1896 ! Then there were the frequent failures of the management of the Gas Works and of the supply of gas itself, to darken those homes which could afford gas-lighting, to darken also the streets. So on the whole the village had much to engage its attention and talk about until the first navvies arrived in Cliffe, built their shanties in Willow Lane and shattered the peace with their riotous drinking habits !

By 30 July 1875 the Mercury was able to report progress on the actual construction of the line. It reported that a Mr. Wm. Moss, railway contractor of Stafford, had undertaken construction of this, the Seaton to Sibson line, and that men were employed in fencing the route, ready for the navvies. The first sod was turned on Monday, 9th July 1875, by Mr Buxton, sub-contractor and engineer for the King's Cliffe stretch of the line.

Some twenty navvies then set to work; their biggest task was the Fineshade cutting, which entailed endless blasting through the stratum of limestone, on the over-burden of which grew the trees of Cliffe Forest. But rarely did the work proceed smoothly. Before the line was completed there were accidents galore, a number of which, as we shall learn, proved fatal. And then there were strikes for more pay!

On 15th October 1875, the Mercury reported: "A strike of navvies took place at King's Cliffe last week on the new branch of the L and N W railway. The men demand 24s per week, instead of 21s as heretofore. The engineer, Mr Buxton, however, not only refused this, but will not employ the same men again on any terms whatsoever. Several of the men on strike have been till lately used only to farm work, and now that they get nothing to do on the line are "out" altogether, as the farmers do not now require so many hands.

The background to this report is a twofold one. First, quite apart from the professional navvies engaged on the work, there were other labourers, in increasing numbers, recruited locally, many of them from Cliffe. Second, by 1875 the great countrywide Agricultural Depression, lasting from about 1872 until 1910, began to affect the King's Cliffe locality. Farmers were employing fewer men as they reduced arable cultivation and put their fields down to grass.

Another interesting feature of the work was the building of the railway bridge over the road leading to Huskisson's Lodge and on to Stamford. It is indeed a splendid construction and when looking at it, from either side, one cannot fail to realize how it changed the view into King's Cliffe at that point. The Mercury of 3 November 1876 carried this report:- "A strong and very massive bridge is being erected near King's Cliffe, which is to carry the railway over the road leading to Stamford. The new line is progressing some 5½ miles long being cut through or embanked."

That it was quite a long time a-building we may deduce from this report in the Advertiser of 7 April 1877, some nine months after commencement:

" A BRIDGE STRUCK BY LIGHTNING - On Wednesday, from five to six in the evening, a fearful

thunderstorm passed over King's Cliffe, lasting an hour. The rain came down in torrents, and the lightning was terrific. One flash struck the new railway bridge on the Stamford road removing the brickwork, which was finished with the exception of one day's work, from one end to the other, also some of the woodwork. The damage is very considerable."

That there were accidents galore to all working on the line is not surprising in view of the nature of the work. There were several fatalities, one at least due to the habit of taking swift rides on the light trucks from working-place to the embankment- tips and back. A particularly distressing accident occurred about 14th September 1877 as the Mercury reported in its edition of 21st Sept:- "A frightful accident occurred on the new railway near Cliffe last week. As the men were engaged working the ponderous machinery called the "steam navvy", the principal chain used in winding up the scoop gave way, and caught a man employed underneath, cutting open his body and causing his bowels to protrude. He was carried to a neighbouring shanty, and now lies in a very precarious state, no hope being entertained of his recovery." At the Coroner's inquest held in a shanty on the 20th September, it was revealed that the man was one R. Morton, a navvy from Manchester. He lingered until the 18<sup>th</sup>.

Another fatal accident occurred only a few months before the line was opened for traffic in July 1879. The Stamford Mercury reported thus on 9th May 1879:-

"KING'S CLIFFE - Fatal Accident

An inquest was held at the Wheat Sheaf Inn, on the 5th inst., before Mr Cook, deputy coroner, on the body of Wm. Stapleton, of King's Cliffe, aged 51. John Van, ganger in the employ of Mr Wm. Moss, railway contractor, said the deceased was at work with his gang, and on the 30th ult. they were engaged to empty the ballast waggons; they had a train of twelve trucks. When near Nassington the men attempted to get into the waggons to ride, as was the custom, and whilst the deceased was doing so he got his right thigh crushed between the buffers of two waggons. Witness had him put into a break van and conveyed to his home. Frederick Monk, a navvy, corroborated the evidence of Van, and added as some of the waggons were larger than others, the men were generally anxious to get into the small waggons, and would jump on them before the train stopped. Mr F. R. Dain, surgeon, who attended the deceased, said he was lacerated from the right knee to the groin, the vessels and nerves being bared. Deceased died on Friday from the shock: to the system. A verdict of "accidental death" was returned. The jury presented their fees to the deceased's widow, who has two very young children. "

Then came the great day when the line was completed, tested and declared open, at first for goods traffic only. Here is the Mercury' report of 25th July, 1879 informing us that the great day was Monday, 21st September 1879:-

"KING'S CLIFFE - The London and North-Western Railway Company's new line from Seaton to Wansford was opened for goods traffic on Monday. This line is about 12 miles long, and connects the company's two branch lines - the Northampton and Peterboro' and the Rugby and Stamford. There are three stations on the line; after leaving Seaton the first is Wakerley, then King's Cliffe, and lastly Nassington. The first train that ran through King's Cliffe (about 6 am) was from Birmingham, and consisted of 26 waggons and a guard's brake van. It was piloted by Mr. Brickenden, the company's engineer, accompanied by Messrs. Moss, the contractors. The first train from Peterboro' passed through Cliffe about mid-day, and the first fish train, through for Birmingham, passed about 2 am on Tuesday."

It was not long before a certain dissatisfaction with rail arrangements came to the surface, as we learn from a report in the Advertiser of 30th August 1879:-

" THE RAILWAY- 'A Tradesman' writes to us: The station at King's Cliffe has been opened for goods between five and six weeks, but to the disappointment of the trades people there is nobody to collect or deliver goods which therefore come to Stamford and thence by carrier. The expense is but little, and the trouble less, as grocers and others have to hire a horse and cart for four and five cwt. and pay as much as if there were three times the quantity, besides losing time to get the conveyance. According to account, there is no likelihood of the company ever delivering goods. The road to the station is all up hill, and of course newly made, and it is amusing to see the turners and others wheeling cases, hampers, sacks, and bags on trucks and barrows to and from the station, pushing and grunting and wiping the perspiration off their faces. The line is to be opened for passengers in September, and the road to the station so far as the company is concerned will be a very good one, but from the town to the station gates is a very bad one, and at the time of writing stands 8 inches

deep in mud and water. This is greatly complained of by the inhabitants, and a meeting of the parishioners is to be held next week to see what can be done in the matter."

On the 1st of November 1879 the line was formally opened for passenger traffic, as the Mercury reported on 7th November. Naturally there were a good many Cliffe people assembled at the station to see the first passenger train arrive, thus opening wide a gate from King's Cliffe into the great world outside:-

"KING'S CLIFFE - The London and North-Western Railway Company opened their new line from Seaton to Wansford on Saturday last for passenger traffic. The company have issued time-tables for this month and December; and have made this a through route from Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Rugby, Peterboro', and the Eastern Counties Railway to Norwich, Yarmouth, and Lowestoft. The first train arrived here from Peterborough at 9.12 am, and many people assembled here and at other places to see it pass. The first train from Rugby arrived at this station at 10.9am, and many people availed themselves of the opportunity to take a railway journey for business or pleasure, 139 passengers being booked from Cliffe station. There are five trains each way a day, all of which, except the 12.25 express, stop at this station. The passenger station here, which is a very neat little structure, comprises a commodious booking office, gentlemen's and ladies' waiting-rooms, and other offices on both sides; and the platforms, which are made of wood on piles, are each about 150 yards long. The company have made a good granite road to the station, and it is hoped that the surveyor of the parish will see that the road leading thereto is put in a proper state, as after a shower of rain the water stands 8 or 12 inches deep in some parts, rendering it impassable for pedestrians for a time. Some months ago it was decided that a gas-lamp should be placed at the end of the road leading to the station, but there are no signs of it at present."

What more could King's Cliffe expect, now that the world lay open for its inhabitants to explore? It was to be anticipated that the village would be moved to a fresh outburst of energy and development. On this, the fictitious "Weathercock" of Cliffe (given to writing letters at sundry times to the Advertiser concerning deficiencies in the village, as detected from his steeple-top perch) made observation in his letter published in the Advertiser of 15th November 1879:-

" Cliffe has recently had a choral festival, and speaking from my proud position as a high church official I must say it was very satisfactory. Besides this, a new line of railway has just been opened connecting Cliffe with the rest of the world, and I have no doubt that the parish in general, equally with myself, have been much gratified at the passing and re-passing of the trains. We are now, however, getting into stormy November - a trying month for weathercocks and I shall probably ere long be so very busy that I shall hardly know which way to turn. Before that time arrives I am anxious to obtain information upon some points of interest, and if you will kindly give publicity to my queries I feel sure that much valuable information will be elicited. I would ask them: Where is our promised Town Hall ? Where is the brass band with its uniform ? Where is the drum and fife band ? Why have we not a good supply of gas ? And why have we neither a public reading-room, a flower show, nor a debating society in Cliffe ? "

The whole matter of construction of the line, in business terms, was the sale by auction on the 29th and 30th of June and the 1st of July 1880, at the three stations on the line, of " ALL the valuable Contractors PLANT and MATERIALS used in the construction of the above, consisting of....." and then this advertisement, appearing in the Mercury of 4th June 1880, went on to list an extraordinary amount of heavy plant: 10 loco engines, two steam navvies, 200 navy barrows, 4 purchase cranes, 20 "third class railway carriages used for huts on the line ", and an enormous amount of tools and material, together with a "locomotive road carriage to carry twenty tons", etc.

One major defect at Cliffe station was the absence of a foot-bridge over the line to the Peterborough platform, so that passengers had to cross the line on the level. There were three fatal accidents in the course of some years after the opening of the line, and the only alternative approach to the east-bound line was the eventual making of a footpath from the north side of the Stamford Road bridge up to that track. Rarely ever used, right up to the closure of the line in 1966, one can still (1997) discover it, in a state overgrown with a dense mass of vegetation. [This is now part of Willow Walk, a linear park, sign-posted from beside the railway bridge on the Stamford road.]

It is useful to consider what, in general, were the truly significant consequences of this provision of a railway for King's Cliffe. One could tell of the facility of rail travel for the people of Cliffe; now they turned to Peterborough as their market town. To get to Stamford by rail one had to take the less

convenient line to Seaton station and change trains there for Stamford. Perhaps one should not make light of the fact that increasingly people enjoyed the facility of outings by rail to such places as Skegness and Yarmouth; for example, on Monday 1st September 1884, 89½ tickets were issued at Cliffe station for a rail-excursion train to Yarmouth.

More to the point, however, is the fact that the railway introduced alternatives for employment, both for men and women. The 1881 Census Returns show that no less than 15 Cliffe men, all resident, were employed on the railway, one of them being Mr John Humphries, the first station-master at Cliffe. Younger women in search of domestic service could now take "places" in Stamford, Peterborough, Leicester, or further afield, without losing ready contact with their homes. Young men of initiative moved away to work in cities such as Leeds and Leicester, or even emigrated. But it was the bulk carriage of heavy goods and material which proved the great blessing of railways generally, and in this respect Cliffe also gained greatly. Once the line was opened, coal no longer had to be carted from either Ketton or Oundle; instead it was off-loaded on the "dock" at Cliffe station, whence it was hawked around the village by two coal-merchants. Better-off inhabitants were then able to turn from wood burning to coal delivered at their doors. George Miles, the enterprising timber-merchant with his timber-yard at the corner of Park Street and Station Road would have used loads of coal to feed the engine which drove his two heavy band-saws. William Bollans, a leading wood-turner with his workshop in Park Street, acquired a steam-engine with which to drive his lathes. All in all the advent of the railway transformed the carriage of goods to and from the village. Bricks and Welsh slates came to be used for house-building in preference to the traditional materials of stone and thatch, as can be detected in a study of the 19th century cottages and homes of Cliffe. Change had indeed come to Cliffe, with a capital "C".



King's Cliffe station, with the Stationmaster and his staff, an early photo from around to the opening of the station in 1879.