

Wingfield station during WW1 – a time of challenge and change

When [Thomas Robinson](#) arrives to take up his post as Stationmaster at Wingfield in November 1908, he is probably hoping that his final job before retirement in 1919 will be relatively easy at this semi-rural station. Instead, his final working years will see significant social changes in addition to the conflict and upheavals of WW1.

A time of change:

- King George V succeeds to the British throne in May 1910 following the death of his father King Edward VII. There are Coronation celebration events in June 1911 in towns and villages around the country, including here in Wingfield.
- There is unrest across Europe as nations threaten war in defence of one another and in dispute over access to natural resources, like coal and iron, that fuel their economic growth.
- Established imperial structures that control Europe start to break down and it is the beginning of the decline of powerful global trading empires.
- Existing power and wealth structures are challenged as working people join trades unions. There are periods of serious industrial unrest, especially in the mining and textile industries, as well as railway strikes. The Labour movement grows and develops under the leadership of prominent socialists such as Keir Hardie, the first elected Labour MP.
- Invention and enterprise bring new forms of motorised transport to replace the use of animals. Here at Wingfield, as elsewhere, electric and steam powered motor vehicles begin to replace horse drawn carts and drays.



Steam motor lorry 1908

Image: National Railway Museum - Derby Works Collection (under Creative Commons licence)

- Farming and agriculture are no longer the principal sources of work. The population of Wingfield Parish has grown steadily from 1091 people in 1831 to 1647 people in 1911 and people can now more easily travel to work in the factories of Derby and Chesterfield, by virtue of the Midland Railway line and the passenger station at Wingfield.
- This is the age of the great steam shipping liners that transport passengers and freight across the Atlantic between Europe and the Americas. In April 1912, the sinking of the White Star Line's Titanic on her maiden voyage after a collision with an iceberg off the coast of Newfoundland will be a moment of national disbelief and grief for the loss of over 1500 lives.
- Women are starting to make their voices heard in public life, demanding the right to vote, to study in Higher Education and to qualify to take up professions such as in medicine and law and to be elected as Members of Parliament.
- The suffragette movement that campaigns for the Women's Vote is gaining momentum. In 1913, the Suffragette campaigner Emily Davison dies after throwing herself under the King's horse at the annual Derby Race.

WW1 The Great War – its impact on the Midland Railway

In August 1914, Britain enters the War in defence of its Allies in Europe. Across the country, young men are called upon to join “Kitchener's Army” and government posters paint a picture of the nation's patriotic duty to fight.

Young men volunteer in their hundreds of thousands and over 20,000 Midland Railway staff sign up in response to the call of the recruiting regiments. By 1916, the heavy number of war casualties leads to the conscription of all young and physically fit men which further depletes the British workforce.

How does the sudden loss of so many skilled railway workers impact the Midland Railway, and Wingfield station in particular?

The war recruitment drive significantly reduces the number of trained staff working for the Midland Railway during the war years. Almost one third of the workforce at all levels of skill and management are absent during the war. Those who remain will try to keep the railway running with the same level of service and efficiency. The railways are under increasing pressure to meet the extra

demands of transporting soldiers, horses and munitions. A wartime Railway Executive Committee is set up by the government knowing that huge numbers of troops and the freight needed to support the British Expeditionary Force must be transported by rail to Channel ports.

Large guns being transported by rail 1916

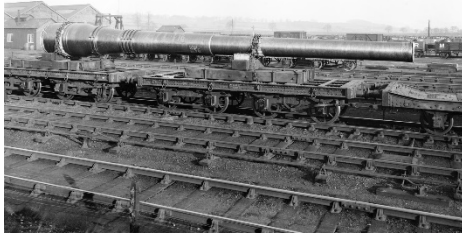


Image: National Railway Museum - Derby Works Collection (under Creative Commons licence)

Women step forward to take on working roles in many industries, including the running of the railways. Women are recruited to fill administrative roles and within maintenance workshops and manufacturing departments. However, women were deemed to be “unsuitable” to take on key train operating roles such as driving or signalling. In some places, women become porters or booking clerks or operate level crossings and occasionally they become local stationmasters. Generally, women railway workers are paid less than men in equivalent roles and they are offered fewer benefits like war bonuses or travel passes. Women’s “war work” is viewed as temporary employment. By 1917, there are 9000 women employed by the Midland Railway, compared with 1400 before the war.



Women shovelling coal at Derby Works 1917

Image: National Railway Museum - Derby Works Collection (under Creative Commons licence)



Worker in railway audit office 1916

Image: National Railway Museum – Doncaster Works Collection (under Creative Commons licence)

What is the impact of WW1 on Wingfield station?

Wingfield station continues to operate its passenger and goods service throughout the WW1 years. The Midland Railway relies heavily on its experienced staff who, like Thomas Robinson, are too old to fight in the war but are needed in essential roles to keep the railways in operation. There is no evidence to suggest that women take on paid roles at Wingfield to replace the missing staff.

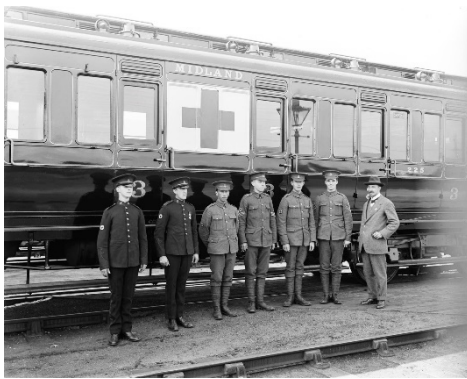
Comparing passenger timetables from before (1912) and during the war (1915, 1917) shows minor alterations to train times and a small reduction in the number of passenger trains stopping at Wingfield, notably on Saturday evenings and Sundays. Across the Midland Railway network, cuts to passenger services become more pronounced as the war continues. When conscription is introduced in January 1916, this leads to a significant shortage in staff and in rolling stock available for passenger travel. Some excursion trains continue to operate for special events during the war years in an attempt to retain a sense of normality for civilians and raise public morale.

Ambulance trains transport injured soldiers from rail-heads set up behind the front lines to Channel Ports and then move these casualties across Britain to suitable medical facilities.



Patient beds inside an ambulance train

Image: National Railway Museum - Derby Works Collection (under Creative Commons licence)



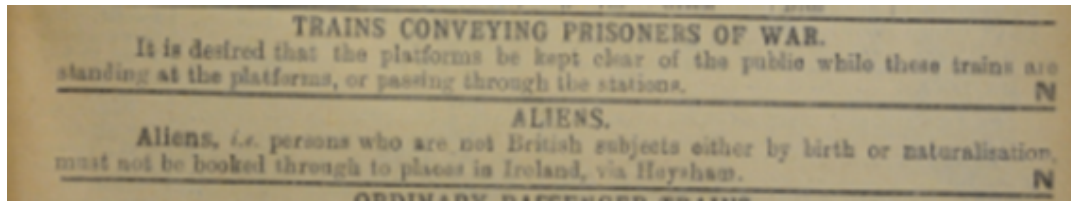
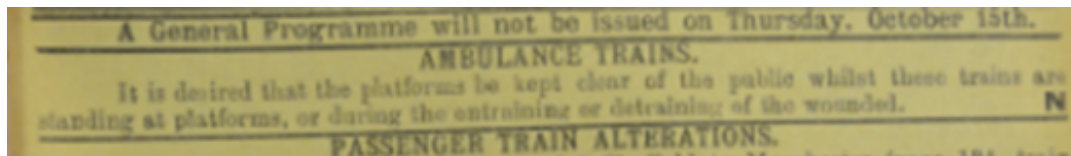
Ambulance train 1917

Image: National Railway Museum - Derby Works Collection (under Creative Commons licence)

In late 1914, a Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) Hospital is set up in the home of the Bower family at Mill House, Church Lane, South Wingfield.

The Wingfield VAD Hospital receives injured soldiers (both British and Allied) for rehabilitation and provides 12 beds. The Wingfield VAD Hospital is a small auxiliary nursing unit and the number of injured soldiers passing through Wingfield station is fairly low. The local newspaper reports in November 1918 that over 300 patients have received care at Mill House during its time as a Red Cross Hospital. More severely injured soldiers are treated at the larger Devonshire VAD Hospital in Buxton. Local arrangements are sometimes made to transfer individual soldiers from Wingfield station to Mill House using private motor cars belonging to local people.

The Midland Railway District Office provides instructions as to how station staff are to manage any war-related transport that passed through the station. This requires station staff to keep any transports involving injured soldiers, prisoners of war, equipment or horses for military use (known as remounts) out of public view. This is all part of the propaganda effort to hide the scale of any losses or injuries away from the public eye.



Extracts taken from Midland Railway Excursion Timetables (Orders) 14 – 24 Oct 1914 and 30 Oct – 7 Nov 1914 (Images: courtesy of Midland Railway Studies Centre, Derby)

Wingfield Station Staff who served in WW1

As we might expect, some of the Wingfield station staff served in WW1, in addition to some sons and son-in-laws of the older staff.

John's story:

John Bernard Goodwin was born in 1891 in South Wingfield, the youngest son of local farmer George Goodwin and his much younger wife Marie. John attended South Wingfield Schools and left formal education when he reached the school age limit of 14. He started working for the Midland Railway in August 1906 as an assistant porter in charge of a weighing machine at Stretton station before transferring to Wingfield station as a railway clerk sometime after 1908. The 1911 census records John Bernard Goodwin age 20, a railway clerk, living in the household of his widowed mother in Church Lane, South Wingfield. In August 1914, when war was declared, he was working as a clerk at Wingfield earning £70 per year.

John signed up to join the Army in October 1915 when he was 24 years old. He was recruited at Aldershot into the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) with service number 71791. His Army records can be found in archives although they belong to the "Burnt WW1 Records" so they are in a poor state and may not be complete. There is no known photograph of John in his military uniform but we do know from his record that he was 5' 6" tall (above army regulation height) and with a 36" chest.

John was allocated to 135th Field Ambulance unit within the RAMC 40th Division, formed in autumn 1915 in readiness for deployment to the fighting front line. A Field Ambulance was a mobile medical unit that served an infantry division. We don't know whether John had any particular medical expertise so he was possibly deployed to make use of his clerical skills and logistics experience from his railway work.



A Field Ambulance wagon passing over muddy ground near Ovillers, Somme, in September 1916. (Imperial War Museum image Q1098 licensed for non-commercial use)

In January 1916, John came back home on leave to be married at St Luke's Church, Derby to Annie Beresford, age 22. She gave her address as the Victoria Station Hotel in Nottingham so Annie was possibly undertaking domestic duties within the hotel which provided some staff accommodation. We don't know how John and Annie met but the railway connection no doubt had some part to play.

John then rejoined his unit for further training and preparation before the 40th Division was shipped out to France between 2nd and 6th June 1916. The 40th Division were initially based near Lillers in Northern France and served on the Western Front near Loos. We can only imagine what John experienced and witnessed during these battles in the Somme region in which hundreds of thousands of soldiers were killed or severely injured.

The next information that we have is that John was admitted to Bagthorpe Military Hospital, Nottingham on 26th Sept 1916 from where he was discharged from the Army on 10th October 1916 having served for 354 days in total. The reason for his discharge was his total incapacity as a result of suffering from pleurisy, which is a severe and painful lung inflammation caused by infection. Such lung diseases were common amongst soldiers fighting in the trenches and

maybe John contracted his illness after having close contact with sick and injured soldiers while evacuating them from the front line.



Field ambulance stretcher evacuation (Somme area) July 1916

(Imperial War Museum image Q65411 licensed for non- commercial use)

Being unfit to continue in the army, John returned to live under the care of his mother Maria in Church Lane, South Wingfield. We might presume that his new wife Annie joined him there to assist the family to care for her husband. John submitted the required paperwork to confirm the reason for his army discharge to the Police Station in South Wingfield on 12th October 1916. Later, John was awarded a Silver War Badge number 147780 on the grounds of “sickness” and a King’s Certificate in recognition of his military service. He was also awarded a War Pension for having a “disability due to active service overseas”. At the time of these awards, his address is noted as being at Ambergate but we have no further details as to exactly where he was living or whether John or Annie were capable of earning any living in addition to his war pension.

Name	Corps	Reg. No.	Rank	Date of Discharge	Cause of Discharge
Goodwin John Bernard	R.A.M.C.	1791	2nd Lt	10.10.16 Enlistment 23.10.15	Sickness Para 392 (V) K.R.
Date of application		(a) Badge		(b) Medal	
No. of File					
Address of applicant					
Action taken					
Lut R.A.M.C. 148					

W20-57247-50,000-1/20 HWY(2015) G14/1202
S18-412218 200,000-11/16

John Bernard Goodwin’s medal card

(Image: National Archives WO 372/8/64961)

After the war had ended, John made an application to join the Colonial Government Service in October 1920, possibly wanting to move abroad and make a fresh start in a clerical role. However, this appears to have been unsuccessful because at the 1921 census, John and Annie were living near St Albans, Hertfordshire. John was now sufficiently recovered to be working once again for the Midland Railway as a Booking Clerk and Annie worked as a Ladies Outfitter Shopkeeper who employed other staff in her small business.

The couple are recorded as still living in Hertfordshire in the electoral rolls of 1923 and 1924. However, by 1926, they had moved back north and were living in Normanton, Derby in the home of Elizabeth Beresford who was probably Annie's mother.

By the time the 1939 Register was taken at the start of WW2, John and Annie were living at 47 Rosamond's Drive, Derby and John is once again recorded as working as a Railway Clerk with Annie doing "unpaid domestic duties". There is no evidence that the couple had any children

Can you help to complete John Bernard Goodwin's story? He probably died in 1966 in Derby but we have no further details about his later life? What happened to Annie? Are you related and do you have any photographs?

Frank's story:

Frank Bowley was born in Wingfield in 1893. He was the youngest son of Robert Bowley, a local coal miner, and his wife Emily, living in Birches Lane, South Wingfield. The family were active members of the Birches Lane Baptist Church and well known in the parish. Frank worked first as a colliery banksman and then became a platelayer for the Midland Railway although it is more likely that he worked at nearby Stretton. Two other brothers, Walter and Harry, also worked as local labourers at the colliery and then on the railway.

Frank enlisted in March 1917 with service number WR 201445 and became a "sapper" in the Royal Engineers Railway Transport Department which meant that he continued to use his skills in railway construction and repair.

Frank was seriously wounded in action in September 1917. There were a number of local newspaper reports charting his progress from field hospitals in France through to receiving surgery at Derby Hospital. He suffered gunshot

wounds to both of his arms and legs and developed lung complications. Unfortunately, his army records have not survived.

Name BOWLEY		Corps TRE	Rank Spr	Regt. No. 267034
First Name Frank		Warrant No. 201445		
Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks	
VICTORY	TRE	102862	11587	
BRITISH	16			
STAR				
Service RE 2223				
Theatre of War Area served in				
Date of entry therein				

Frank Bowley's medal card

(Image: National Archives WO 372/3/12192)

He was awarded a Silver War Badge number 435649 for his injuries on active service and discharged from the Army in August 1918. He was assessed as “totally unfit for railway employment” so he was unable to return to work for the Midland Railway immediately after the war. He went back to live with his parents in Birches Lane.

SOUTH WINGFIELD AND DISTRICT CASUALTIES.

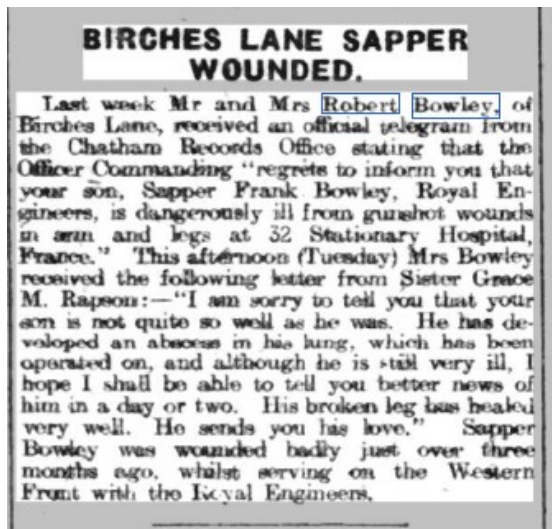
The other day Mr and Mrs Robert Bowley, Birches Lane, received a communication that their youngest son, Sapper Frank Bowley, Royal Engineers, was wounded. The letter states:—"I am writing to you at the request of your son, Sapper Frank Bowley, of the Royal Engineers, who is now in a stationary hospital in France suffering from wounds in both arms, the left thigh, and the right leg. He is so far going on as well as can be expected, and is now a good deal easier and somewhat better than he was, but I regret to say that he is still rather seriously ill. He sends his very best love and he hopes that you will not worry yourself on his account." Sapper Bowley, prior to joining the Army, was an employee on the Midland Railway Co., and he has been "somewhere in France" several months.

Extract from Belper News Sept 7th 1917

BIRCHES LANE SAPPER'S SERIOUS CONDITION.

On Tuesday Mr and Mrs Robert Bowley, Birches Lane, received a message from the sister in No. 32 Stationary Hospital (France), stating that their son, Sapper Frank Bowley, Royal Engineers, was seriously ill and in a more serious condition than he realised. Later Mr and Mrs Bowley received an official telegram to the same effect, and that permission had been granted for two members of the family to visit him. We announced last week that Sapper Bowley had undergone an operation.

Extract from Belper News Dec 7th 1917



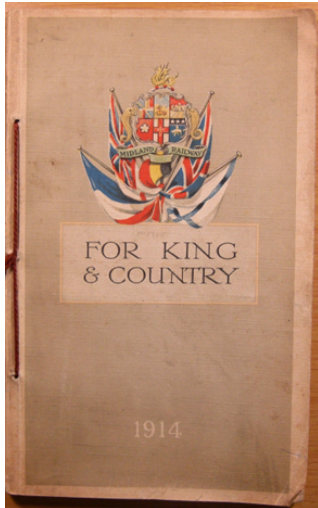
Extract from Belper News 30th Nov 1917

After the war, Frank married his cousin Bertha in 1922. They went to live in Long Eaton and the couple had one child. He did work again as a railway labourer undertaking light duties for LMS at Toton Sidings before his relatively early death in 1940 at age 46.

Sydney's story:

Sydney Scott Smith, born in Alvaston, Derby in 1896, was the son of Henry Thomas Smith, a railway clerk, and his wife Ann. Sydney was already working as a railway clerk at Derby Works at the age of 14. He had an eventful year in 1913 when was called upon to give evidence in the trial of a fellow Midland Railway worker who was accused of the attempted murder by stabbing of a young woman. Maybe this was the reason why Sydney was transferred to work at Wingfield under the watchful guidance of Thomas Robinson in order to have a fresh start after this traumatic incident.

He is the only member of staff from Wingfield station who was listed in the Midland Railway's 1914 roll of honour "For King and Country" where he is noted as being a Station Porter at Wingfield. By November 1914, a total of 7,531 men employed by the Midland Railway had enlisted to fight.



Cover of “For King and Country 1914: Midland Railway Employees and The Great War”

Image: Courtesy of Midland Railway Study Centre, Derby

The full document can be viewed online at the MRSC website at:

<http://www.midlandrailwaystudycentre.org.uk/>

Unfortunately, Sydney’s WW1 records have not survived but he did return home from the war. He worked again as a Midland Railway Clerk in the Derby Carriage Works Dept, alongside his father who worked there as an Inspector. Sydney married Grace Allcock in 1922, they had at least 3 children and continued to live in Derby until his death in 1969.

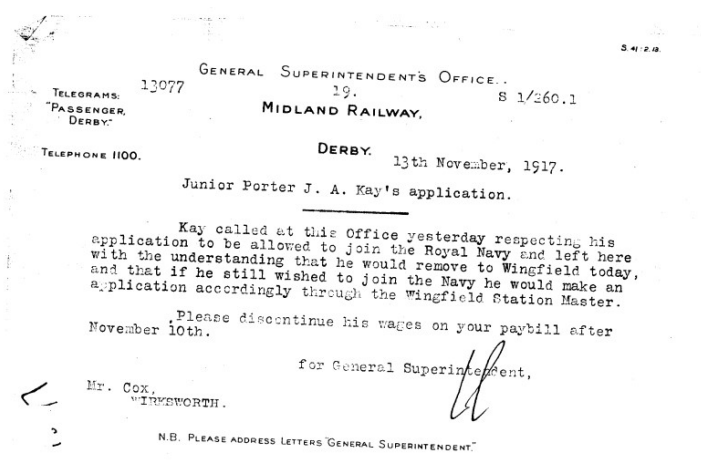


Derby Carriage Works

Image: National Railway Museum - Derby Works Collection (under Creative Commons licence)

John’s story:

John Arnold Kay, born in Wirksworth in 1901, was the son of John Kay, a cotton tape weaver, and his wife Fanny. He gained a scholarship to go to grammar school in 1913. We know that John worked for a short time as a Junior Porter at Wingfield because several letters were sent in November 1917 from the Midland Railway’s District Superintendent’s Office in Derby refusing him leave of absence for an interview to join the Royal Navy and removing him to work at Wingfield station instead.



Letter from District
Superintendent's Office dated
13th Nov 1917

Image: courtesy of Midland
Railway Study Centre, Derby

Soon after, Stationmaster Thomas Robinson did grant such a leave of absence because, in January 1918, John joined the British Royal Navy under service number J82641 and his occupation was recorded as a clerk based at Devonport. Between January 1918 and August 1919, he served as a Boy 2nd Class (a training rank for recruits under 18) on HMS Impregnable, Ganges and Egmont (which were all harbour depot ships) and then on HMS Hannibal (a depot ship sited at Alexandria, Egypt). John signed up for a 12-year term in the Navy in June 1919 once he was 18 years old. There is no photograph in his naval records but they do tell us that he was 5' 6" tall with a 33" chest, brown hair, brown eyes with a fresh complexion and a scar under his chin.

John married Betsy Oxspring at Wirksworth Baptist Chapel in 1926 and the couple had 3 children, Olive, John and Edward. He bought himself out of the remainder of his term in the Navy in 1930, a few months before their first child was born. He then worked for the postal service in Derby between 1930 and 1938.

At the beginning of WW2, Betsy and her 3 children were living in Alvaston, Derby while John had rejoined the Navy in 1938 and served on HMS Drake IV, Eaglet and Skirmisher (shore based depots) during WW2. John returned to live in Derby with his family after WW2 and he died there in 1970.

Kathy Farr



Further information and resources:

Railwaywomen: Exploitation, betrayal and triumph in the workplace (2005) Helena Wojtczak (Hastings Press) Chapters 1 and 2 provide a comprehensive account and photos of women working for the railways during WW1

Testament of Youth (1933) Vera Brittain (Gollancz) includes her account of experiences as a Red Cross nurse at the Devonshire VAD Hospital, Buxton

For further information about staff and patients with photos of the VAD hospital at Mill House, South Wingfield:

www.crichparish-ww1.co.uk

For more information about the work of RAMC units during WW1:

www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-corps-of-royal-engineers-in-the-first-world-war/railway-construction-companies-of-the-royal-engineers/

For more information about the work of Field Ambulance units during WW1:

www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/a-soldiers-life-1914-1918/the-evacuation-chain-for-wounded-and-sick-soldiers

www.ramc-ww1.com/chain_of_evacuation.php