

Thomas Robinson (Stationmaster) – a life made by the Midland Railway

Thomas Robinson was a Midland Railway employee for the majority of his working life. Wingfield was his last station appointment before retirement in 1919 after 45 years of service with the Midland Railway Company.

The working life of Thomas Robinson

Thomas was born in 1854 into a family of factory workers living in Hinckley, Leicestershire. He was the third of at least 10 children born to Thomas Robinson, a stocking loom weaver, and his wife Hannah. We don't know where Thomas received any education although we know that he learnt to read and write.

Thomas also worked in a factory as a loom weaver after leaving school. He grew up living in overcrowded buildings that were the homes of families of these factory workers. We don't know exactly when Thomas decided that he should leave his home town and go to work for the Midland Railway. A new railway line was constructed to Hinckley around 1860 so this opened up the prospect of new types of employment. Thomas saw an opportunity for a better future for himself within the rapidly growing railway industry and he never looked back.

Thomas joined the Midland Railway in 1874 as a Junior Porter, age 20. He had a quick mind to learn the Railway "Rules & Regs", a good head for keeping accurate records and a clear ambition to do well for himself in life. Over a four year period, Thomas worked his way quickly up the ladder from Porter (Sandiacre) (earning 17s per week) to Senior Porter (Kettering) to Reliefman (Little Eaton) (earning 20s per week). He found himself appointed to his first Stationmaster role in 1878 at Harrow Road, Willesden with an annual salary of £63 14s. His career as a Midland Railway Stationmaster then took Thomas and his family to stations at Edwalton, Chorlton cum Hardy and Unstone. By the time he arrived at Wingfield station in Nov 1908, his annual salary had reached £130 and he was no doubt starting to plan towards his retirement. The advent of World War One alongside the social and technological upheavals of this

period meant that his final working years were a challenging time to work for the railways.



As Stationmaster, Thomas wore the Midland Railway uniform provided for each employee in their various different roles. Each Midland Railway Stationmaster wore his distinctive dark blue $\frac{3}{4}$ length buttoned frock coat, a buttoned waistcoat with a watch chain and fob and the Midland Railway cap.

Above Some Midland Railway staff in uniform c. 1902 Image: National Railway Museum – Derby Works Collection (under Collective Commons licence)

During his 7 years working at Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Thomas had responsibility for a very busy commuter station that dealt with over 50 passenger trains each day and had more than 2000 season ticket holders.

Thomas worked at Unstone Station for over 20 years. Alongside his railway duties, Thomas was very active in the local community as a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, Parish Councillor and Vice Chair of the Unstone School Board. As the local Stationmaster, Thomas was a person of some considerable standing within the Unstone community and his family (wife Mary Ann, 4 daughters and one son) was well known locally.



Left Thomas Robinson (2nd left) and some of his staff at Unstone Station (original photo source and date unknown)

During his 11 years as Stationmaster at South Wingfield, Thomas was an official of the local United Methodist Chapel and Sunday School Superintendent but he failed to gain enough local votes in 1913 to be elected to the Parish Council.



When he retired from the Midland Railway in 1919 at the age of 65 years, Thomas and his wife Mary Ann (nee Geary) moved to New Whittington in Chesterfield where they had considerably more time to spend with their extended family and for Thomas to enjoy his hobbies of rearing prize chickens and watching local football and cricket matches. Their only son, Sydney Thomas Robinson, and two of their son-in-laws, Ernest Vaughan and George Henry Farr, were all employed by the railways.

After Mary Ann died in 1932, Thomas married a second time to Jane Barlow, a widow. Thomas died in 1943 and is buried alongside Mary Ann in the churchyard at Old Whittington. He was so well regarded that The Mayor and Mayoress of Chesterfield attended his funeral.

Did you know?

Today, there is even a residential street named after Thomas Robinson. Robinson Close is located on the site of the old Edwalton Railway Station (near Nottingham). Thomas was the first Stationmaster at Edwalton when the Nottingham to Kettering line was opened and each of the Stationmasters from its operational period have given their name to a street within the housing development.

Kathy Farr

