

Kibworth Station
Aspects of the Midland Line Railway
by John Lovell

Contents

	Page
Background & Construction	1
Passenger Services	2
Goods Train Traffic	4
Staffing	4
Train Accidents	5
Additional Oral History	6
Footnotes	6
Layout of Kibworth Station	7
Gradient Profile of Line	8
Photographs of Station Buildings in 2002	9-10

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During the early 1830s there was discussion on various proposals for extending the Midland Counties Railway southwards from Leicester to a junction with the London and Birmingham to obtain access to London. A scheme was initiated in 1836 for a 'South Midland Counties Railway' to run to Northampton via Kibworth and Market Harborough, unfortunately, this scheme collapsed at the Parliamentary Committee stage.¹

The Leicester to Rugby Line via Countesthorpe and Ullesthorpe was then built, opening for traffic on 30 June 1840, which then became the Midland Railway's main line south of Leicester and provided a through route from London, Euston to York.

In 1845 during the 'Railway Mania' a further line from the London and Birmingham line at Courteenhall, south of Northampton to the Midland Railway near Syston was proposed - the 'South Midland' or 'Northampton and Leicester Railway.' This would have avoided the congestion which was occurring at Rugby, causing delay particularly to the Midland Railway coal trains, but would still have put the Midland Railway traffic on to the already heavily trafficked London and Birmingham main line. George Hudson, the chairman of many railways, including the Midland, now revised the plan to become the Leicester and Bedford line. Possibilities for a railway at or near Kibworth now improved and in 1847 the Midland obtained powers to build a line from Wigston via Market Harborough, Kettering and Bedford to the Great Northern Railway at Hitchin.² Hudson had hoped to gain access to the Eastern Counties Railway (of which he was also chairman) at Hertford, some 15 miles from Hitchin, but his scheme was stopped by the growing opposition to him in Parliament.

Hudson's various schemings then caught up with him, and he resigned all his posts in disgrace, to be followed as chairman of the Midland Railway firstly by John Ellis, one of the originators of the Leicester and Swannington Railway, and then by Edward Ellis. The 1847 Act was relinquished in 1850 and for the second time prospects of a railway connection for Kibworth disappeared.

A new Act was obtained on 4th August 1853³ and this time work began early in 1854. The contractor was Thomas Brassey, a man of considerable competence and integrity. Progress was slow, hindered by a shortage of capital due to the Crimean War and men leaving the sites during the summer of 1854 to work on the harvest. Continuous rains further delayed the work, as did numerous falls in the Kibworth cutting, which at its maximum point was over 30 feet deep, between May and October of that year.

The completion date of October 1856 over-ran and the line was opened in 1857, on 15th April for minerals traffic, 22nd April for goods traffic and was passed for passenger traffic by the Board of Trade Inspecting Officer on 4th May. The line was formally opened on Thursday 7th May with 15 stations opening on 8th May. The smaller stations, excluding Kettering and Wellingborough, were of a common design, although materials varied, with stone, yellow brick and red brick being used. At Market Harborough the Midland line ran through the London & North Western Railway station (this railway being the July 1846 amalgamation of the London & Birmingham, Grand Junction, and Manchester & Birmingham Railways), and continued to do so until 14th September 1884 when the new station built to the south of the original L&NWR station with separate lines and platforms was opened (albeit in incomplete

form). At Bedford the London & North Western station was also used for two years, until separate platform arrangements were made.⁴

The sites of the stations were selected in June 1855, the line having been built (as is almost always the case) to engineering requirements and not to the provision of services close to a town or village. Kibworth was thus extremely fortunate in that the line ran through the gap between Harcourt and Beauchamp, giving the station a central location. The station was well equipped to handle both goods and passenger traffic, having sidings able to hold 42 wagons, a brick built goods shed and a 30 cwt crane. Dock facilities for unloading carriages, furniture vans, horseboxes etc were also provided. On the east or 'Up' side of the line was a full cattle dock with pens, this siding having a capacity of 25 wagons. In 1904 Ellis & Everard also had a siding.⁵ The passenger station platforms were lengthened in 1862 and again in 1870, steps from the road overbridge being provided in 1885. The following year a footbridge was provided, and the booking office was extended. After nationalisation the platform canopy was removed, the platforms themselves being demolished immediately after the closure of the station to passengers on 1st January 1968.

Passenger Services

The February 1863 edition of Bradshaw (a railway guide and timetable) shows Kibworth as having four trains each way on weekdays with an extra one each way on market days, and two each way on Sundays. Railway companies were required to provide one train every day which ran from one end of the line to the other, stopping at all stations, with carriages giving protection against the weather, and running at a speed of not less than 12 mph including stops. For this, the fare had to be no more than one penny (0.4p) a mile and this exempted the railway company from the 5% tax on passenger receipts. These trains are marked as 'Gov' (Government) or 'Parly' (Parliamentary) in the timetables.⁶

To London ('Up' trains)

Weekdays:

7.15 am	to Market Harborough Wednesdays & Saturdays only	1st, 2nd & Gov.
7.28 am	to London King's Cross	1st & 2nd class
10.47 am	to London Kings Cross	Gov.
1.54 pm	to London Kings Cross	1st & 2nd class
5.00 pm	to London Kings Cross	Gov.
<i>Sundays:</i>		
8.02 am	to London Kings Cross	Gov.
6.02 pm	to London Kings Cross	Gov.

To Leicester ('Down' trains)

Weekdays:

8.00 am	to Leicester Wednesdays & Saturdays only (from Market Harborough)	1st, 2nd & Gov.
10.35 am	to Leicester from King's Cross	Gov.
11.51 am	to Leicester from Kings Cross	1st & 2nd class
6.54 pm	to Leicester from Kings Cross	Gov.
9.44 pm	to Leicester from Kings Cross	1st & 2nd class

Sundays:

10.15 am	to Leicester from King's Cross	Gov.
8.45 pm	to Leicester from King's Cross	Gov.

Fares (single):

	1st	2nd	Gov.
Kibworth to London King's Cross	17s	12s 10d	7s 3d
Kibworth to Leicester	2s 3d	1s 6d	10d

On 1st October 1868 the Midland Railway opened its own Bedford to London line with the terminus at St Pancras.

By 1910 the number of trains had risen to nine each way on weekdays, plus a Saturday

afternoon train to Leicester and a Tuesday to Saturday train to Wellingborough at 12:15 a.m. On Sundays there were three trains each way. In most cases it was necessary to change at Kettering if travelling further south, and at Leicester if travelling north.

Services given in the 1910 Bradshaw are:

To London ('Up' trains)

Weekdays:

7.07 am	to Kettering
8.47 am	to Market Harborough
10.49 am	to Northampton
1.30 pm	to Kettering
3.15 pm	to Kettering
5.17 pm	to Kettering
7.18 pm	to Bedford
9.12 pm	to Kettering
10.22 pm	to Kettering
12.16 am	to Wellingborough, except Mondays

Sundays:

8.38 am	to Northampton
5.31 pm	to London St Pancras
8.25 pm	to London St Pancras

To Leicester ('Down' trains)

Weekdays:

7.50 am	to Derby
8.47 am	to Derby
9.16 am	to Leicester
10.24 am	to Leicester
12.30 pm	to Leicester
2.07 pm	to Leicester Saturdays only
2.41 pm	to Leicester
5.20 pm	to Leicester
6.57 pm	to Leicester
9.21 pm	to Leicester

Sundays:

11.31 am	to Leicester
4.51 pm	to Derby
9.10 pm	to Leicester

Early passenger numbers have not survived, but from 1872 to 1922 inclusive yearly totals are available. These begin at 27,145 passengers in 1872 rising to the highest figure of 44,652 in 1920. It is not possible to determine where the

passengers were travelling to, what class of travel or whether the total receipts include season tickets, which, from 22 in 1884 rose to a peak of 328 in 1920. Only by reference to the daily 'Trains Book,' which recorded all tickets issues, would it be possible to analyse the numbers, and these books seldom were kept more than a few years – usually six years was the laid down time, although sometimes they survived longer by oversight.

By the winter of 1952-53 the passenger train services were ten trains a day each way on weekdays, with an extra train to Northampton on Saturdays. The Sunday services was three trains each way.

'Up' Trains (to Kettering and south)	'Down' Trains (to Leicester and north)
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Weekdays:

6.28 am*	7.25 am*
8.20 am	7.52 am
10.58 am*	8.30 am
12.52 pm Sat only*	10.02 am*
1.20 pm	1.08 pm
5.45 pm	1.50 pm
6.24 pm	2.49 pm*
7.03 pm	5.51 pm
9.02 pm	7.14 pm*
10.04 pm Sat excepted	8.52 pm
10.30 pm Saturdays only	

The * sign indicates that the train ran to or from Northampton directly from Market Harborough via Kelmarsh.

Sundays:

8.45 am	11.22 am
9.18 am	3.07 pm
5.25 pm	9.00 pm

Parcels traffic by passenger train included day old chicks from Evans Hatchery. Passengers were in reasonable numbers for the two morning trains and the matching return services in the evening. Unfortunately the Train Books (mentioned above) which would have given numbers and destinations have not survived. Delivery of small parcels was by Scammell Mechanical Horse (a three wheeled tractor unit which pulled a semi-trailer) from Leicester.

Goods Train Traffic

Livestock traffic amounted to 1078 trucks in 1872, 1209 in 1877 and then a gradual reduction in numbers, the lowest figure being 207 in 1897. From then on the numbers varied between 300 and 400, but it is not possible to determine how many loads were received and how many despatched. Coal traffic remained around 6,000 tons a year throughout the whole period. Ellis and Everard are no more, so it is not possible to discover how much of this traffic was theirs, and how much for other merchants.

Minerals traffic probably included road stone, since Ellis and Everard had their own siding. It is known that they supplied the various local councils with road making materials.⁷ As with many country stations, cattle, pig and poultry food was received in bulk from the mills, in this case British Oil and Cake Mills (BOCM) with delivery instructions being received from the BOCM field man. Some farmers would collect from the station. Outwards traffic included sugar beet (introduced into this country in the later 1920s) despatched in wagon loads to the factories, such as Peterborough, against permits issued by the British Sugar Corporation representative. The Ellis & Everard siding had by the 1950s become known as the 'Ballast hole.' By 1963 their coal merchanting activity had ceased.

The station was closed for goods traffic on 4th July 1966.

Staffing⁸

Four signal boxes came under the control of the station: Wistow, Kibworth North, Kibworth Station and Gumley. Each would be manned for 24 hours with three signalmen working 8 hour shifts⁹ with extended shifts on Saturday and Sunday to achieve a rotation of duties. Gumley signal box was closed 29th September 1946 and was replaced by Intermediate Block Signals (these were colour light signals controlled by the signal box on the approach side and allowing the same segregation of trains to continue as when

the replaced signal box was working). The cleaning and refilling of the signal lamps was carried out by the junior porter. Correctly filled and trimmed these lamps would last for at least 8 days.

The track itself was maintained by the Permanent Way Department (not under the control of the stationmaster) with two gangs, each with a ganger and sub-ganger, under the overall supervision of an inspector. One gang took responsibility for the line north of Kibworth, the other to the south. Passenger lines were inspected daily.

The 1891 Census for Kibworth and nearby villages gives the railway staff as:

Post	Name	Age	Born
Station master	John M Jones	53	Broughton Astley
Clerk	John Pack	15	Blisworth
Foreman	Frederick Norman	50	Kibworth
Signalmen	Bryan Ward	58	Cottingham
	Ruben Horsley	49	Sutton Bassett
	George Grant	31	Kibworth
Porters	Robert Beesley	22	North Luffenham
	W G Gurney	22	Swadlincote
	John Smith	24	Tur Langton
Platelayers	George Smith	33	Smeeton
	Henry Dunkley	40	Kibworth
	John Grant	68	Kibworth
	George Poole	61	Kibworth
	William Bird	59	Smeeton
Railway Servant	Charles Norman	18	Saddington

This shows a number of interesting points. John Jones had a daughter aged 19 born in Kibworth, so had been stationmaster for a long period. John Pack comes from a village predominantly London and North Western Railway, with a small joint line connection. John Grant is evidence of the normal retiring age then being 70 years.

In the early 1950s the station staff consisted of:

Stationmaster
One booking clerk
Two porters
Two junior porters¹⁰

One porter and one junior porter together worked alternate late and early shifts, with an overlap in the middle of the day. The porters carried out any necessary work in relation to goods traffic.

Names remembered from the 1950s:

Stationmasters	Hankin (left before 1950) Freeman Harrison 1952 Brian Edge 1962
Porters	R G Knight Tom Lucas (found dead at station about 1951) Ted Cotton (to Wigston as a shunter) Cyril Brooksby
Permanent Way Gangers	Charlie Woodham Joe Hassall (later killed on the railway)
Lengthmen	Charlie Everett David Arnold Len Sewell Percy Sewell Maynard Warder & brother

Train Accidents

On 9th October 1880 Kibworth was the scene of an accident involving the Scotch express, 9.15 pm from St. Pancras. The train of eight carriages, including two Pullman cars, was hauled by 2-4-0- express engine no. 809. At 11.28 pm the driver stopped 211 yards south of the Kibworth North signal box to examine one of the big end bearings on his engine (at this time lubrication was by rape oil¹¹). Having tightened the bearing six minutes later he whistled and the signalman, John Joseph Adnett, saw the train moving backwards. It is not unusual for locomotives of that design to need to reverse

slightly, since sometimes the engine will not 'take steam' in the forward gear. Shortly after the signalman saw the train was still reversing and sent the 'train running away' bell signal to signalman Bryan Ward at Kibworth Station box. The driver in fact ran backwards for 879 yards, until he collided with a mineral train waiting to follow. Fortunately the express driver realised his error when passing under a bridge, and applied the brake. The collision took place at 3 or 4 mph and five passengers were injured, none seriously. The enquiry carried out by Major Marindin, the Board of Trade Inspecting Officer¹² resulted in some caustic remarks being passed about the train crew. The driver's excuse that the reversing gear on this engine was mounted vertically and not in the usual horizontal position, together with the fact that he restarted his train whilst the two guards were still standing by it on the track, made him 'totally unfitted for the duties'. The front guard, James Urie, a North British employee, who had held a lamp for the driver to carry out his adjustment was also found to have given 'a hardly satisfactory explanation of his actions.'

The writer's comments are that, firstly, it is surprising that the train driver did not stop at the North signal box, where he could have explained his problem. Secondly, why, having a heavy train, possibly of 180 tons, near the limit for an 800 class of engine unassisted by a pilot engine, he did not realise that the locomotive was making light work of starting on a steep gradient. Even with his concern for the bearing he had just adjusted, and the fact that the injector, which puts water into the boiler, was giving trouble the engine's performance obviously should have been clear to him.

Additional Oral History from Kibworth

[from interviews on 26 February 2002]

In the early 1950s:

David Collings joined the staff as a junior porter in 1950. He left on call up for national service in 1953.

Colin Grewcock transferred from van boy at Leicester to Kibworth as junior porter in 1952 and left on call up to the Royal Signals in October 1953.

David Smith began as a parcels van boy in May 1949 and transferred to the locomotive department in June 1950. He retired as a driver in February 1993.

The 'tin bridge' to the north of Kibworth station was originally a level crossing.

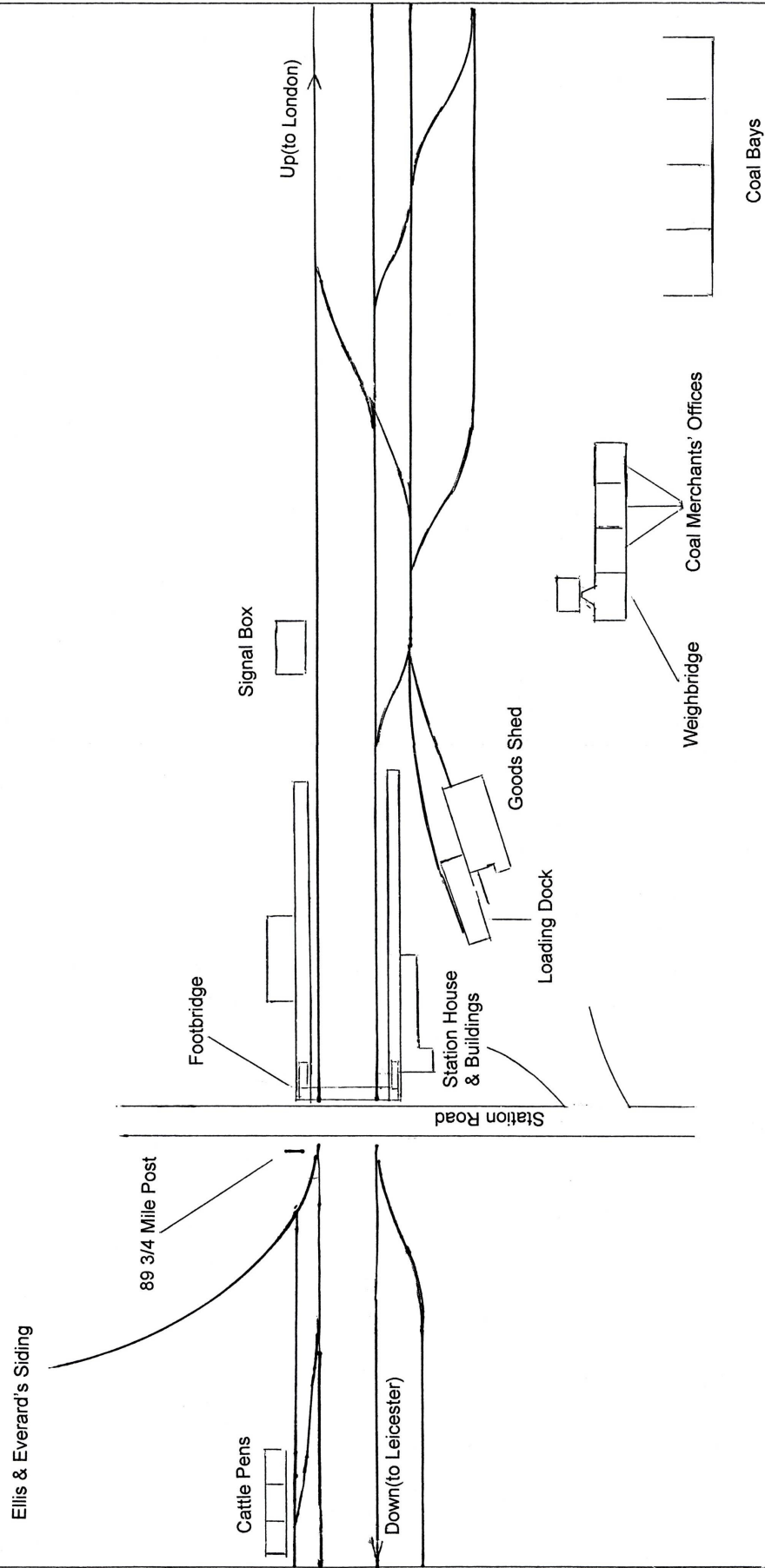
The signal boxes at Kilby and Wistow were supplied with water from Wigston, delivered by the Wellingborough local goods train. The other boxes were supplied from Kibworth.

Footnotes

- ¹ Gough, J (1984) *'The Northampton & Harborough Line,'* Railway & Canal Historical Society, Oakham, pp 8-14
- ² Parliamentary Act 1847-48 & 1848-49, 11 & 12 Vic. Cap CXXXV
- ³ Parliamentary Act 1854, 16 & 17 Vic. Cap CVIII
- ⁴ Gough, J (1989) *'Midland Chronology,'* Railway & Canal Society, Oakham, p 46
- ⁵ *'Railway Clearing House Handbook of Stations,'* 1904
- ⁶ Railway Regulation Act 1844, 7 & 8, Vic. Cap 85 S6
- ⁷ Information given to the writer by the late F J S Ellis
- ⁸ Midland Railway staff records are held at the Public Record Office under the group reference *RAIL 491*. These records may be incomplete and contain errors. The 75 years preceding the current year are not available except under special circumstances

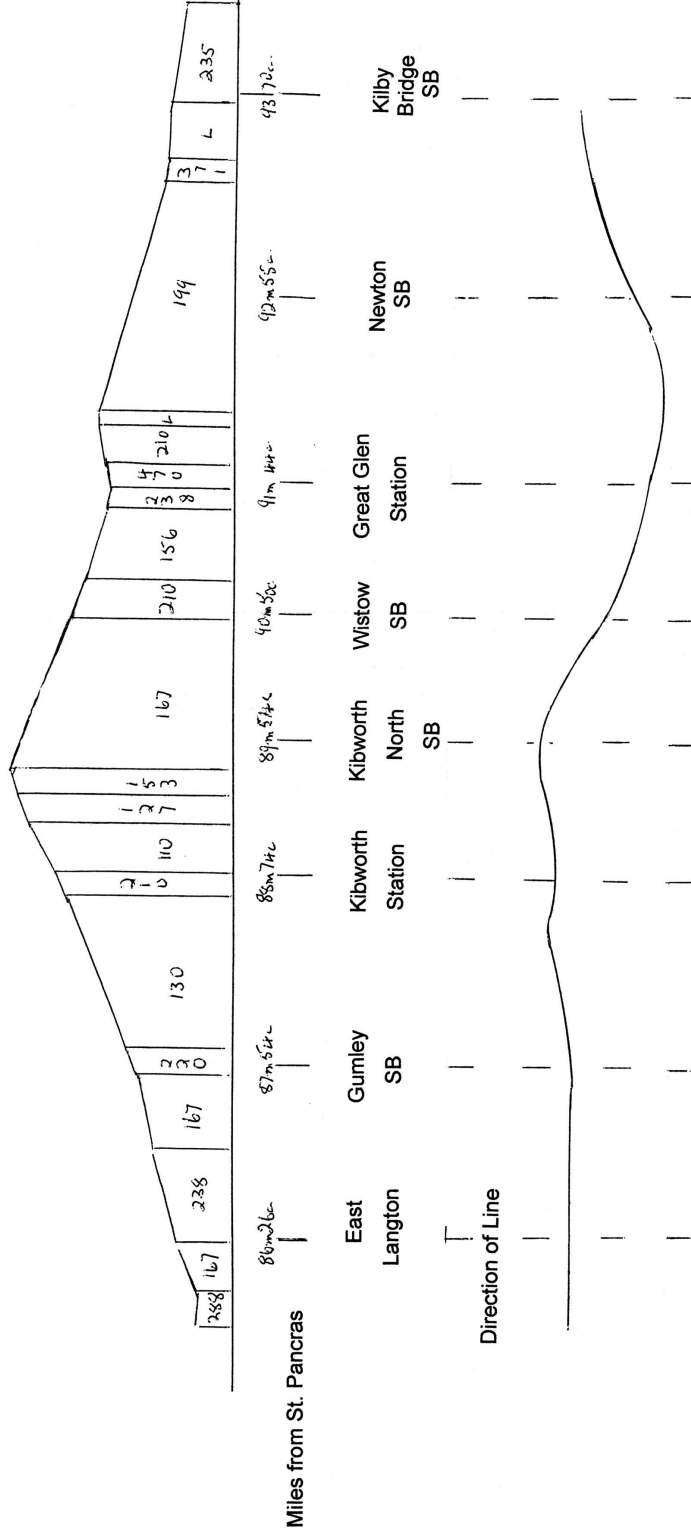
- ⁹ In the 19th century a shift varied by up to 12 hours depending on the level of traffic
- ¹⁰ Information from David Collins, Colin Grewcock and David Smith
- ¹¹ Bowen Cooke, Charles (1898) *'The British Locomotive,'* p 321
- ¹² Public enquiries into train accidents began as early as 1842, copies being presented to the House of Lords. From 1873 the Board had a statutory right to investigate accidents involving passenger trains, or other train accidents where circumstances, such as death of staff required. The enquiries were carried out promptly by an Inspecting Officer, usually from the Royal Engineers, and were printed and published. Bound copies are held at the library of the National Railway Museum, York.

KIBWORTH STATION



DIAGRAMMATIC ONLY - NOT TO SCALE

Derived from Midland Railway track plans, *Midland Railway Chronology* (J.V.Gough) and other sources





Kibworth Station Entrance &
Offices 8 August 2002



Station Master's House
8 August 2002



Station Buildings from road
overbridge 8 August 2002



Goods Shed 8 August 2002

Weighbridge (on right) and coal
merchants' offices (extreme left
that of G Bromley)
8 August 2002



Coal bunkers
8 August 2002