

The Last Run. (Requiem for the Mundesley line).

Two buzzes from Russell Burgess, the guard, and the driver releases the brakes with a hiss. Slowly the green 'Original Derby Lightweight' accelerates beside the up platform of North Walsham (Main). Past the top of the trolley slope, past the sub-way entrance, past the 'No Passengers to Cross the Line' notice and over the Norwich Road bridge with a rumble. Gently curving to the left the double track heads north. To the right are the sidings which a few years previous would hold the afternoon school train for Cromer (and beyond!), usually with a simmering BI at its head. Further in the distance the 'Town' station, canopyless and the home of the Jehovah's Witnesses. For a short while the earthworks of the abandoned M&GN railway run parallel with us, the field in between being home, on occasions in the summer, to the North Walsham sale where one could buy anything from a rabbit, horsedrawn hayrake or a Field Marshall tractor. Many unsold gems being left to rust from one year to the next. To the left, the Paston School playing fields where a frozen hockey player would watch, and photograph when the games master's back was turned, the long sugarbeet trains pass on gray damp November afternoons.

The Aylsham bound trackbed of the M&GN passes beneath us as we cross its metal bridge, the Mundesley line signal showing clear on its gantry we slow to negotiate the turnout onto the N&SJC. Curving eastwards we pass the site of the Antingham Road signal box next to the Cromer Road bridge where the M&GN joins. No trace of the box is left in reality, only in the mind's eye can one lean out of the droplight on the outside curve to try to glimpse the tablet exchange between swaying N7 and signalman. Following round the curve the North Walsham Steam Laundry is passed. From then on the line runs straight for miles.

The first section to Lyngate bridge is on a low embankment flanked on the North Walsham side by tall trees, with open fields on both sides. Gathering speed all the time we pass into a cutting which is crossed by the blue brick skew Mundesley Road bridge. With lurching speed we pass out of the cutting, over the Little London lane bridge, onto 'One Mile Bank'. This embankment at its southern end traverses the flat valley of the River Ant which, as the North Walsham & Dilham Canal is crossed on a plate girder bridge. The flat reeded area to the left gives way to woodland as the railcar hurtles (well it always seemed like that!), to the point where the gradient starts to rise again. Both sides of the line are now small fields, some meadows and some cropped but all surrounded by hedges studded with large old trees, the rattle and sway of the DMU contrasting

with the calm of the countryside through which it is passing. At the northern end of the bank the line enters a small cutting just before another blue bridge. Here the surveyors of the line decided to have a 'corner' for the line turns sharply eastwards from the straight line of the bank to a straight line in a cutting. This has caught many an unwary holiday-maker whose luggage descended from the racks.

On a rising grade we pass under the Knapton to North Walsham road bridge and as the cutting lowers several farms can be seen. Passing under an occupational bridge, which has the destination of being the only two arched bridge on this part of the line, we curve northwards through open fields, Knapton church appearing on the horizon, before descending into a cutting which ends at Paston & Knapton station where we squeak to a shuddery halt.

The station master's house is still occupied and although a little run down the station is still tidy. Having picked up two passengers we start off for Mundesley. The weed covered sand and gravel platform with its overgrown flower beds and impressive, though faded, wooded station sign pass the window. A small hut protects the ground frame giving access to the headshunt and sidings which still contains an number of wagons awaiting their sugar beet loads. To the east a fine view of the Norfolk coast can be gained with Happisburgh church in the distance. Having passed over two minor roads the line curves northwards with a rising grade on its embankment. The surrounding large open fields gradually rise up to meet us until we are running in a shallow cutting which in spring is always a mass of primroses. At this point on many a summer Saturday excited cries from the city children could be heard as the sea would be seen and the Grand Hotel, church and water tower of our destination would appear on the ridge in the distance.

On a descending grade we approach the outskirts of Mundesley passing over the North Walsham and then the Trunch road bridges. To the right Mundesley school can be seen and to the left a large orchard. The line, curving gently eastwards, on a high embankment crosses the valley of the hazardous River Mun before the land rises and we pass the gas works to enter the man made plain on which Mundesley's best piece of architecture stands. As we roll down between the long platforms the passengers prepare themselves to leave. Doors swing open as we stop under the canopy of the best railway station in Norfolk. But that's another story.....

mrw.1966