

Notes made from a conversation with **Russell Bloomfield**, 51 Gracechurch Street, Debenham, Suffolk IP14; 01728 861244, talking to John Brodribb on 31st July 1996 at his home; updated by letter, September 1996. Also incorporating on material from conversations on 5th May and 27th May 1996. *See also* the three photographs, two of the bridge on the Debenham branch of the MSLR, and one of an open crossing, thought to be between this bridge and Kenton.

The cutting for the Mid Suffolk Light Railway reached almost to where Mr Bloomfield's house now stands. The station was going to be on the site where later there were tennis courts, i.e. on his land at the back of his house. Mr Bloomfield bought this land for his garden in the 1960s. From his front window he could see Gull Farm at the end of the cutting; the latter was still being filled up until about 10 years ago. The line had been fenced as far as Winston and the formation possibly made up.

In his childhood there was a meadow down Low Road (i.e. on from the station and Gracechurch Street) that had been fenced-off corner-wise. This is where the railway would have crossed the road; the field was called "Hector's Meadow". The station level crossing would just have missed Derry Brook Farm, which was just to the north of 51 Gracechurch Street. Council houses just up the road were built about 1919.

RB married in 1939. Johnny List built a house near the cutting at the bottom of London Hill.

At Kenton there were often goats about, and the engine crews would throw coal at them to clear them off the line. The woman who lived there then used the coal to do her baking. There were occasions when chickens were despatched from Aspall to Bath by train; they would go on the train which was through Aspall at around 8.0am. On other occasions RB opened the gates at the station, with Gig Eade pedalling furiously from Rishangles. He also used to weigh parcels there. Kenton was a much busier station than Aspall, although much arrived for M. Bloomfield, Agricultural Engineer, at the latter. Bloomfields received and consigned all their materials via Aspall station

(see label). The first (American) combine harvester was delivered there, and was unloaded sideways onto the loading dock. Items such as boiler tubes, firebars, rivets and strakes were carried down to Debenham by Blind Harry in his hand-cart. He was led by his sister or another relative, and would zigzag up the hill. He carried general merchandise, and is reputed to have carted a ton of boiler tubes down to Debenham. Unloading of machinery at Aspall was difficult, and it often had to come off sideways, sometimes dragged by a steam engine. The firm bought a lot of steam engines, which sometimes had to be driven home. Combines arrived ready-assembled at Stowmarket; if delivered to Aspall they would be boxed, and be reassembled later. Sometimes machinery would arrive in unsuitable wagons - perhaps fixed- or high-sided, and would have to be sent back to Stowmarket. Jack Godbold took dogs to the station in the basket of his trade bike.

Bloomfields were essentially retailers and repairers of machinery rather than builders, so not much was sent away by train. They did make tractor wheels, and would take delivery of up to 4 tons of steel in long bars or 6x6 angle. Sheet steel also arrived, and boiler lagging in bags from Buck & Hickman of London. Most items had tin labels. Bloomfields also cut up steam engines, although they occasionally had fireboxes arrive.

As with all stations coal arrived by train. There were two coal merchants at Debenham, Johnny List (of E.W. List Haulage) and Mr Eagle; both of them weighed their coal in bags at Aspall. In the early 1920s List had an old Ford truck, plus another for general goods. He also ran a solid-tyred bus to Ipswich. He brought ice from Ipswich in a big box; it came in blocks about 3ft each side, covered in sacks, and was used by fishmongers and butchers, and a few well-to-do people who had their own ice-boxes. List also delivered groceries from the station. Steam coal would be delivered direct from there by cart. Sugar beet was loaded there, and cattle travelled via the pens, which were on the right-hand side opposite the platform.

Grain was sent away in sacks, being taken up to the station in road wagons. A wheelwright who worked for Bloomfields drove a horse mail-cart (belonging to

Barnards) from Stowmarket to Debenham. He was also a blacksmith and lodged at the Ten Bells, the pub run by his brother next door to the smithy at Stonham.

Donald Goose was the Aspull stationmaster in the 1920s; he lodged at Oak House in Debenham (opposite the Post Office) and cycled up to the station (see Peter Paye p155 - last stationmaster at Aspull; transferred to Trimley when the post was downgraded to porter-in-charge in May 1929; previously stationmaster at Mendlesham). He was friendly with RB's father, who had a Model T Ford. (NOTE: Mrs Gill - Aspull Hall - may know about the bridge on the Eye road. The horse and cart in the picture may have come from Aspull Hall. Lord Kitchener often visited the Hall - did he come by train?). Daisy Tawle (Vera Goudy's sister-in-law) collected fish from Aspull station, and had the fish & chip shop in Debenham. Jack Godbold was a dog-breeder, and took them to the station in a basket.

Russell Bloomfield has a friend in Stowmarket who used to cycle to Aspull station to catch the train to the school in Stowmarket. There were then two pupils from Debenham; Jimmy List also went to school from there.

After the Middy closed, Bloomfields bought the Kenton station site (for about £500?) for storage, on condition that Clarkes had the first refusal. In fact, Bloomfields never used the site. Latterly items were delivered from Haughley by road, and later from Ipswich. Finally door-to-door lorry services became the norm, and the traffic was lost completely from the railway.

Photographs: boulder is on the Aspull side of the bridge (and is still in position- October 1996) so the line goes away from the photographer towards Debenham in the photo which shows the bridge. Photographer probably Mr Harris, headmaster of Debenham school. Possibly the driver of the vehicle (landau?) is Mr Gooding. The bridge was still in existence in 1930, but had gone by 1934.