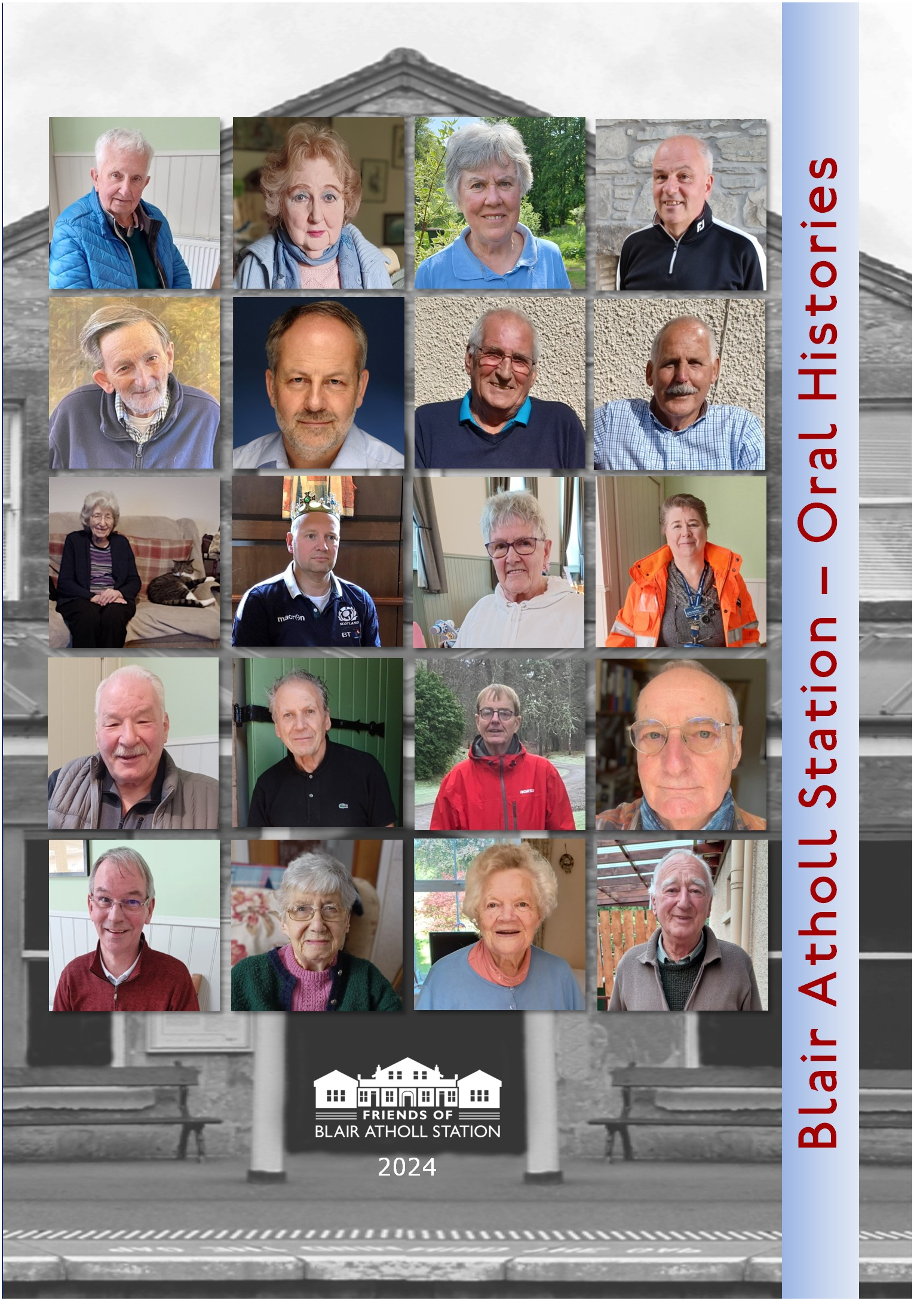

Blair Atholl Station – Oral Histories

FRIENDS OF
BLAIR ATHOLL STATION

2024

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BLAIR ATHOLL STATION

Oral Histories of Blair Atholl Station

Recollections of life in Blair Atholl
in and around the railway station
told by residents and visitors.

This book is a collection of the transcripts of the
recorded interviews conducted on behalf of
Friends of Blair Atholl Station by:

Viviene Cree
Imogen Bell (Historic Dunkeld)
Sue Gledhill

The recorded interviews can be heard on
our YouTube channel:

youtube.com/@FriendsofBlairAthollStation

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and to all those who generously shared their stories and recollections with us.

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www.blairathollstation.co.uk

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Contents

Allan Barclay

Allan has a long family connection with the Highland line and with Blair Atholl station, as he explains.

I'm Allan Barclay, I'm aged 84, my first name Allan has two 'l's' in it because I'm named after Alexander Allan who was a great-grand-uncle and he was the person who introduced the linkage or designed the linkage for the first Highland railway engines. And that was the *Raigmore* and the *Aldourie* and the *Loch Awe*. And he's described in a book called *The Iron Track Through the Highlands* and he worked with Joseph Mitchell who was well known in the development of the Highland railway. My grandfather Barclay lived in Station Cottages at Blair Atholl, where my father, John Brown Barclay, was born. He was known always as Jack Barclay and not long after he was born, the family moved to Inverness where his father did the same job in Inverness that he had been doing in Blair Atholl. He was responsible for the general running of the railway in Inverness and there was a plaque that appeared in Inverness station for long enough that was dedicated to him; that plaque, I believe, is now in the railway museum in York.

I never knew my grandfather Barclay and it often was a puzzle to me as to why I didn't really know him except that okay, he did die while I was very young and it was only after my own father had died that my uncle, who at that time was involved in the railway in Perth, explained to me why I didn't know my grandfather Barclay. The story goes that he was in charge of everything in terms of the running of the railway at Inverness, whereas my mother's father was the first ever railway union leader in Inverness. And my father was (shall we say) 'blackballed' by his parents because he went and married the daughter of the first railway trade union leader. And so that was how I never got to know my grandparents Barclay.

I've got photos at Inverness of his father (always Highland Railway) driving the first locomotive into Inverness called *the Raigmore* and that, I think, came via the Moray side of the railway line. But his brother, William Gall Barclay, who was named after his father, was the only one of the family that carried on in railway work and he was in charge of railway works in Helmsdale during the Second World War. He was responsible for seeing that the *Jellico [Express]* got through to Thurso for the troops

and for the navy to be supplied at Scapa Flow. And after he died, I acquired a huge scrapbook which has photographs galore of railway engines and which also has photographs of the snow in Forsinard between Helmsdale and Thurso – they're digging in the snow not for the trains but digging in the snow to find the telegraph wires. And there are other photographs showing where they blasted the snow out of the way for the trains. That railway record is in the Heritage Centre in Inverness and it's there in our name so that our family can access it, but it's there for all to see.

Carolyn Ferguson

Carolyn regularly used the train to travel to school in Pitlochry from Blair Atholl. She shares memories of the many local businesses in the village and the slow decline in the use of the station.

My name is Carolyn Ferguson and my father came to Atholl Estates in the November of 1949. He'd actually done the season with the stalker at Forest lodge who was retiring. We were there until the summer of 1951, and then my father moved down to the Kennels. And he was there for about 25 years until he retired in 1976, and he moved to Woodend. And that is where he spent the rest of his life in retirement.

We used the train on special occasions, if we were going for a day to Perth. When we lived in Glen Tilt, obviously we had to arrange for a taxi to take us to the station. And that was from Alec McCrae who was the garage owner at that time. And he would have to come up the glen, Glen Tilt, and pick us up and take us to the station, and then take us home again at night after we got back from Perth.

When we moved to the Kennels, it was possible to walk to the station from there but again, if the weather was poor, obviously we needed to hire a taxi to get there and back. It was not a frequent occurrence to go on the train really unless you had to go for a day out or, had to keep an appointment in Perth or elsewhere.

The most frequent travelling I did from Blair Atholl station was when I was going to school in Pitlochry, where we had to get the train every morning into Pitlochry and then walk up to the school and then walk down again and get the train at night and get back to Blair Atholl Station and then walk home to the kennels, that was, every, every school child from Blair Atholl and from further North in Struan, Calvine did the same thing, when you reached 12 and went on to Pitlochry High School.

The porter at the Blair Atholl Station at that time was Jimmy McBain, he was a very well-known character. He had a word for everybody, he was a very popular man and very obliging. He got postcards from people all over the world I think in his room at the station.

Everybody knew Jimmy. People who'd come every year to the estate for deer stalking and that, he would be helping them with their luggage, and they all knew him. I

remember one of the station masters at Blair Atholl was a Mr. Grieve and they had three children. Two sons and a daughter, and they attended Blair Atholl School. I remember the youngest was Irene and she was a lovely fair-haired girl.

I think that it was still steam trains in the late [19]40s/early 50s. But I think by the time I was travelling to Pitlochry School that would be about 53/54? By that time, I think it was diesel locomotives, at that time.

The people who are roughly my age - that's in their late 70s, 80s - would've used the train to get to school and to go to Pitlochry High School. People like Libby McCrae, and people of that vintage, we all went to Pitlochry school via the train.

In my youth, very few ordinary people had cars, but then when we began to move into the late 50s and into the 60s more and more folks were able to have their own car. And of course, the result of that was that they used the train much less frequently and eventually they decided to close the station.

When we first came to the glen, there was the post office of course, and there was Alistair Seaton's shop, he was a saddler to trade but eventually he ended up selling most things. And then there was a baby linen shop down on the road to the level crossing. It was a Mrs. Walker who ran it, and she sold baby clothes, mainly in wool and sort of haberdashery. And then Cissy Stewart ran the store, which is now called the Premier Store. There was also another shop along at Blair Cottages. That was run by a Mrs. Campbell for MacNaughton of Aberfeldy, they were the firm, and she worked for the firm, and they sold clothes and underwear and all that sort of thing.

All of that's gone now of course. There was the Atholl Arms Hotel which is still functioning, and the Tilt Hotel. And there was a grocers shop where the Tilt stores is now. Another change, at that time, the mill was not functioning as a mill but then Mr. Ridley came and he got the mill going, I think, in the 1980s. So that was a change for the better.

People I remember being employed on the railway during the 50s? Apart from Jimmy McBain, there was Mr. Sutherland and there were other people too. And quite a few others over the years in various different jobs on the railway, they did employ quite a few people.

Christine Cheape

Christine came to Blair Atholl in 1976 as the District Nurse and lived close to the station. She recalls being woken at 2am by trains and also that the signal box provided a vital line of communication for villagers in emergencies.

I'm Christine Cheape and I came to Blair Atholl in 1976 as the district nurse, midwife, health visitor. The district nurse's house was situated just in front or behind the railway, well it was behind the railway because we had to go across the level crossing to get to the house. The actual level crossing, we had to go across the level crossing to get to the house, which I must say I always thought was a funny place to build a house for the district nurse because frequently you were stopped because of a train coming when the gates would be closed! Generally, this was all right unless there was an emergency and even at night now at night time, there was a train about 2 o'clock in the morning, and for some unknown reason to me, this would sit for ages, I mean to me it would be half an hour, I couldn't believe it. And I recall sort of having to go out at night because in those days the job entailed, us being on call 24 hours a day, and maybe someone called, they might have been going to have a baby! Or somebody might have died, we'll go to the two extremes and you would have to get across this level crossing. And I do recall one night, I was stuck at this level crossing for ages and I had to go up into the signal box and to say to the wee man "How long is this train gonna be here?" because I had somebody who was dying and the family had phoned me "Oh," he said, "it'll no be that long" but did nothing about it - the train was just still stopped.

Anyways, that was that. When I first went into the house, you would be disturbed by the trains at night especially, but you soon got used to it. In those days that I can remember they told me there were about 27 trains in the 24 hours, such a change from today, but that was a lot of trains going up and down the line which included goods trains and passenger trains. There were quite a number of railway houses in those days which, of course, were occupied by railway workers and also many who were working would then go on to be retired in the station at that time.

There was a man called Jimmy McBain who other people are likely to talk about and he seemed to help folk on and off the trains, but he must have had a job of some sort and keeping the place tidy and everybody knew Jimmy there and of course he was married and had a family here as well. A lot of the ladies worked in the bookshop at the station - can you imagine? Selling newspapers, which just proves that in those days the train was used all the time, school children went to school on a special train at that time, but I can think of two or three people who worked in the station paper-shop, not the bookshop like what they have in Pitlochry just now. It was just selling papers, *John Menzies*, I suppose it would be.

I did use the train, but only on very sort of minimal occasions because, of course, we needed a car anyway to get around for our work so that was my main mode of transport. I can remember I wasn't long up here working, and I was travelling to Perth on the train one day when this lady whose husband worked on the railway interrogated me - who I was, and where I had come from? what I was doing? Blah, blah, blah and the whole carriage would have known about this, because she had such a loud resounding voice. I was glad that she got off at Pitlochry!

As time went on, trains were reduced in numbers because in the village, there were more cars and people became more independent, deciding when they would go to Pitlochry or Perth especially for shopping, because shopping changed. Whereas before, the folk would buy a lot from the village stores - people shopped every day and got most of the shopping locally - but with the introduction of supermarkets, folk then decided to go to Perth. The Co-op wasn't in Pitlochry at that time I'm thinking about. So they'd have gone to Perth and folk then shopped differently, they would go and shop for a week or a fortnight or whatever, and take their car.

And, of course, the road improved as well, the A9 improved. You weren't having to go through Pitlochry, through Dunkeld, Bankfoot, the whole way down - it was a long road from Perth up to here but once the new A9 was made and these places were bypassed, it's so quick now and folk just go there.

So that was a big change for the village. The village also and going back 40 years ago, it would be mostly local people, or some folk would marry into local families especially those who worked in the hotel - the hotel employed a lot of girls, especially from the Islands. They would come and work in hotels and they in turn would marry local people. Whereas nowadays, there's not a lot of new houses but there are some new houses and people from elsewhere are now buying houses and coming to live in the village, and the whole dynamics of the village I think have really changed. You know there's not the same number of old, local people that there used to be.

in my early days here, the railway did still employ quite a number of folk and there was always activity at the railway station from the goods point of view and that was that. But, of course, Atholl Estates at that time employed a lot of people as well. So, there were families up and down the railway track, you know. I'm meaning from Old Struan as well, there would be people who would be employed and of course there

were railway houses up there as well. Atholl Estates has also changed. They had the big forestry department that had a lot of joiners, a lot of tradesmen and there would also be the agricultural people and up to today, there's not. Well, I don't know how many they employ but certainly the numbers are much, much lower. And in days gone by, it would always be employees or retired employees that were given Atholl Estates houses. But nowadays, if there's a house vacant for renting, other people can be allocated these houses and many houses are being sold.

So, there is a big difference in the village, in who stays in the village. What do they do in the village? Tourism is the main employer now. The other thing I'm just remembering is that the signal box had a telephone and it's not the first time that there might have been an emergency nearby the signal box and, if there was an emergency, that's where people would run to the signal box because there were a limited number of phones in houses. And you would run to the signal box, ask the man to phone for an ambulance or to phone the surgery to get help, and that happened on a few occasions.

Gordon Dilworth

Gordon grew up by the station and recalls how he and his father, the bank manager, would trespass on the railway to get to the golf course! He also explains the importance of banking engines for the railway.

My father moved to Blair in 1940 and we there until he retired in 1967. From sometime in the mid-[19]40s, I was (as a child obviously), growing increasingly conscious of the importance of a railway because - it would be a little bit of an exaggeration to say that Blair Atholl was a railway village and the railway was probably more or less as important as the Estates as a source of employment etc. During that period as I say, we used the station just as everybody else did, very few people had cars - you took the train and of course, there was the local train service as well as the mainline trains. and Blair Atholl was a railway complex - not just the passenger station, but the engine shed was hugely important in the running of the railway because it provided not only the engines for the local train service into Perth through all the various stations that are now closed but it also provided the engines to push the trains up to Dalnaspidal to allow them to get over Drumochter.

As far as I can recall, they were inaccurately generally referred to as ‘pilot engines’ though most of them were used as ‘banking’ engines. And from our house - my main view of the railway was the trains, down trains coming in from the south and the long distance trains say, either passenger or goods and then the train would pull past our windows as it went across the field which is now the public park and then a minute or so probably less, the banking engine would run down the upline more or less onto the Tilt bridge. It would ‘toot’ to tell the signalman that it was there, he would change the points, and it would go up the down line to take its place at the bottom of the train. So, I saw plenty of railway movement, because the points doubling the track at the south end, in fact it’d be the east end of the station. The signal boxes in Blair Atholl were Blair Atholl North and Blair Atholl South but in fact they, actually, in compass terms, east and west.

So, Blair Atholl South was the one by the level crossing, which still exists. Blair Atholl North was up just beyond where the tracks from the engine sheds were, but the points were slightly nearer the Tilt bridge than they are now so that the banking

engine would be just onto the bridge, it would be under the west bank arch of the Tilt bridge when it would stop, and it would 'toot' and then make its way back up the line. My father and I frequently trespassed on the railway because we used the Tilt Bridge as the illegal route to get to the golf course where my father was both secretary and treasurer. We lived in the Bank House and my father was the second and last bank manager in the bank here.

As far as cars were concerned, my father was able to afford a car as a bank accountant - he had owned a car at the beginning of the war. It needed major repairs, and as a bank manager he did not have priority to get it repaired and so he sold it to the Atholl property's clerk of works and so he was without a car until the late 40s.

I don't think there was much trouble associated with the kids going down on the 10 to 9 local train to Pitlochry. But people travelling on the main line trains [at teatime] complained that their journey between Pitlochry and Blair Atholl would be disturbed by kids rampaging up and down the corridors and opening compartment doors and shouting and generally just being rowdy. I certainly can't ever associate it being connected with any accidents or near misses or people falling out the windows (of course in those days, there were old strap windows on trains) but most people in Blair Atholl sort of deplored it in a rather helpless way - it didn't do the village's reputation any good that.

By the 1960s, [I'd left home] and was basically simply coming home on holidays. The radical changes in Blair Station would have happened whether Beeching came along or not, because the key thing there was moving from steam to diesel, which meant that the banking engines were no longer required, so that diesel units had replaced the steam trains providing the local service, you know, Killiecrankie, Pitlochry, Ballinluig, Guay, Dalguise, Dunkeld then Murthly etc. So, they had gone on to diesel, so that the whole point that made Blair Atholl (from a railway running point of view) a much more important station than Pitlochry had disappeared. This was a period in which so many people did get their own cars etc. that the structure of rural transportation was changing generally. The branch line to Aberfeldy closed in 1965 only a few weeks short of its centenary but, by that time, many people actually said it more convenient to take the bus.

I think that there's possibly three or four things that I might mention. In my time, you still went to the ticket window (when I was as child), to buy your ticket. There would be somebody behind it and they would do the usual business of buying your ticket through the window. And then as I recall that tended to be closed and you just went to the entrance to the station office, as it were. And there was a counter which served as a bar area then and certainly that was the case in Jimmy McBain's day. Jimmy McBain was a major character in Blair Atholl, he <u>was</u> Blair Atholl station, he got written about in the press etc. He was particularly important when the Scout Jamborettes were on. I know in later years, I mean as things got more and more informal, at least if you were known, you didn't sit on the benches outside (unless it was nice weather of course) or use the waiting room. You just sat in the station office

and it would be a huge roaring fire and you could sit there in armchair comfort and wait till the train came in and Jimmy would go around his business selling tickets if he had to or listening to all these various bells ringing and the various apparatus which the railway use and then as the train pulled into the station, you roused yourself and walked out and got on.

When I was growing up the station had a stationmaster and, as I say, it was a more important and senior job on the railway than it would have been if Blair Atholl had been a station like, say Dunkeld, with no running sheds etc etc etc. Just the actual hierarchy as to whether the stationmaster was entirely in charge of the running sheds or whether the local locomotive engineer or whatever was in charge. I don't know. But Mr. Watt lived in The Firs house in Tulloch Road. I'm not sure when he was stationmaster or whether it was after he retired that he moved there. If he was there when he was stationmaster, it would have meant that he wasn't living in the stationhouse. I have a feeling the station house was let out sometimes. In Jimmy McBain's time, Jimmy (as far as I know) was the only station employee at Blair so he would be responsible for everything from selling tickets etc. By that time, the North box would've been closed so the only other permanent railway employees probably would have been the signalman operating the South box beside the Ford Road level crossing. I've never been in the Stationhouse - I know there were some structural alterations, because you can see from the photographs the station house was originally built as a sort of Swiss Chalet type design. I know that the end of the station where you come in off the road, coming up past the Atholl Arms bar, there was at one time a lean to shed which the station, various station barrows were kept and I think it may actually have been a more extensive bit of demolition there. [The Duke's private waiting room was brought down in the 1960s.]

As far as I'm aware, it was always said that one of the conditions the Duke made for going through his land was that all trains should stop in Blair Atholl. You know what a Black Five is? This was the mainline engine used basically all my lifetime till steam disappeared on the mainline - these were 46-O engines. These were engines which, in order to line up with the water towers, there was a big hose coming out which you stuck into the water tank up their station, the Black Fives were so long that they actually came out into the level crossings and I can always remember that it was quite a thing looking up at the front end of this very big engine crossing the line.

The railway in those days (it's worth remembering) didn't just convey passengers, it conveyed all sorts of things in the guard's van. I know on occasions if my father was sending a report to Perth for the newspaper, rather than put it through the mail, I would be told to go up to the station and it would travel down on the train. Or I know once a year, the keeper at Dalnaspidal was told by his boss to send down to my father a haunch of venison. So the venison would be put on the train at Dalnaspidal station and would be offloaded at Blair and I would be sent up to the station to collect it. Basically. there was a lot of traffic of mainline goods trains, and they all required a pilot or a banking engine. I think they would normally get a banking engine - my only

impression is that the vast majority of the trains got banking engines rather than pilot engines. The point is that the banking engine is at the back of the train – it isn't coupled to the train - it doesn't need to be – this was the Highland railway practice – when he got down to Dalnaspidal, all the banking engineer had to do was simply slow down and the train went on. And there were local goods trains. One of the main excuses if my pals or I were late coming home from our tea was "Oh sorry mum, the 4:30 goods must have been late today." Because we didn't have watches, we estimated the time from seeing what trains were coming up and down. So, a local goods train usually came up about 4:30 and we would reckon that if we were in sight of the railway, it was time to get home for our tea.

Graham Connelly

Graham attended his first Scout Jamborette at Blair Castle in 1966 and has made return visits to jamborettes (and to the village) ever since.

I'm Dr. Graham Connelly, I'm a retired academic and I have a continuing appointment in the University of Strathclyde's Department of Social Work and Social Policy. But that's not why you've asked me to talk to you - you're asking me about my connection with Blair Atholl station. Well, I first saw Blair Atholl station in 1966 when a, as a Scout aged 13, I went to the Blair Atholl Scout Jamborette which was held and is still held, in the grounds of Blair Castle. I returned two years later because the Jamborette is held every two years, in 1968, also as a Scout. And then in 1970, I returned as a 17 year-old and I think I attended the Jamborette for, for every two years for many years. And the last time that I attended it was in 1996, when I was a visitor, but I camped for the weekend with my son who was a Cub Scout.

The Jamborette is a smallish Jamboree, and it's been held at Blair Atholl every two years since 1946. The camp was originally held in what is now the caravan park but later in the time that I attended, migrated closer to the Castle in what I believe is called The Target Park because it was used as a practice for shooting for people who went out and shot deer. In the camp, there were probably about 500 Scouts, about half of them were from different parts of Scotland and the others came from many different countries and the idea was that they camped together in small groups, cooked together and took part in activities together.

I remember that as a wonderful experience I like, I still like camping and outdoors and it started with my involvement in the Scouts. But I actually didn't go to the station in the first two years that I attended as in the first two of those Jamborettes that I attended, I had no need to because I lived elsewhere in Perth, and I think I got transported by car. But I acquired a driving license age 17 and I had worked in my holidays on a farm and learned to drive a tractor. And they needed a tractor driver to transport wood into the camp. Firewood. And do other jobs and also crucially to collect the baggage of the Scouts that came from overseas Scouts to the camp. For many of the occasions, I attended as a volunteer leader. It involved going down at the

start of the camp to meet the overnight train that brought many of the international Scots from London.

Those are my connections with the station itself. On one occasion, I remember at the end of the camp, we took the bags down in the evening before the Inverness train was due to take the overseas Scouts to London. And we were actually allowed to operate as almost baggage handlers and put the bags into an empty goods van that was sitting in a siding near the station. That seemed a kind of improbable thing that we were allowed to do that! And I remember on that particular occasion that Jimmy McBain (the station porter) who was well known to the Scouts, saying to the then camp chief, Dr. Brian Fairgrieve, "Dr. Fairgrieve, that's the train loaded, when would you like it to leave?" Somehow, it was as if Jimmy, clearly an important person in the station and in Blair Atholl – he held many roles - was able to interrupt the rail service and decide when the Inverness to London train could actually leave!

You asked me what's my connection with Blair Atholl now? Well, it's a long time since I was involved in the camp though actually this conversation has got me thinking about it and I know that this is a Jamborette year so I think I will try and make a visit. But I go occasionally to visit the mill which is a favourite stopping off point of ours and I like to go there and have a coffee and I was there recently actually for lunch. The first time I came to the Jamborette at Blair Atholl the mill was in a poor state and so I've taken an interest in the renovation, and I like going there. And I like taking people there, I've taken many overseas visitors there because so many people just bypass Blair Atholl on the A9 heading towards Inverness.

So that's my story about the station. I think I only once in my life got off the train here, for a hillwalking trip. I did get off but I visited recently since we had the initial conversation about your project and I know that you've got plans to renovate the station buildings - the waiting room and so on, so I wish you well with that.

Margaret Balmer

Margaret has lived in Blair Atholl for 50 years; her husband was a railway track worker on the Highland Main Line for most of his working life.

My name is Margaret Balmer. I'm coming on 92 years of age, and I've lived in the village for coming on 50 years. I had three children – now grown up and gone their own ways.

We lived in a place called Black Tank[1] many years ago – we lived there for five or six years, and then one of my children took ill and the doctor, Dr. Grant, advised that we move down into the town. So, we came from Black Tank to Blair Atholl, and we spent many happy years there. I'm a widow now, and still have a son with me. We lived in Station Cottages at first, for about nine weeks, and then got a new house in Bridge of Tilt. We've been there ever since.

Blair Atholl was a very handy station. It was easy for Perth and for anywhere you wanted to go, if you wanted to go North to Inverness.

My husband worked for a long time on the railway. We lived for a time at Inch Lea, halfway between Newtonmore and Dalwhinnie. There were two or three houses there – railway cottages. The neighbours were wonderful, we all looked after one another. We had a phone in our house which was just for emergencies. The people that lived there were four railwaymen on the track – trackmen – and my husband was the leading trackman in charge of them, and we had a signalman. We all knew about Blair Atholl. There was a wee train that used to come up once a fortnight – the railway put it on – to take people to do their shopping. And it was quite a long day, because you could get the train at 10 in the morning, and then come back after the London train at night. So, you could go anywhere you wanted, it was quite handy. I very often used to go to Granton-on-Spey to see my mother and grandfather – he was alive then

[1] There were railway cottages here to cope with heavy snow on the single track. The service that operated every other Saturday for railway workers and their families was called the 'housewife's choice' and it served line-side cottages from Blair Atholl to Kingussie. See www.railscot.co.uk/

too. It was great for getting away. I had no trouble with transport in any way at that time. Most of the drivers were known. If you wanted a lift on a goods train, they would give you a lift and drop you off when you wanted off. And also at that time, we were allowed coal. The driver would say to the fireman, “I think Mrs. So-and-so is needing a bit of coal”, and he would just throw it over the garden fence! They were happy days. Quite simple days. You just got on with life and that’s the way it was.

When we came down to Blair Atholl, my husband carried on for a long time working for the railway. He used to walk the track so many days a week, walking as far as Moulinearn. It was quite a long track he had to be responsible for. The railway employed a lot of people at that time. A lot of jobs were lost.

I remember when the station closed. That was a sore point and it’s still a sore point. There were a lot of people paid off. Jimmy McBain was in the station then. He sorted out tickets for my son returning to the army. You could depend on him giving the correct timings and tickets.

We couldn’t afford a car then, but we didn’t need a car – you got passes for the railway and would use them.

Then the stations were closed and Beeching had his way.

As for the future, what I’d like to see is a doctor’s surgery and dentist’s surgery. A community building would be fine for older people like me – maybe a small museum pertaining to the railway and a wee tea room?

Martyn Cummins

Martyn first came to Blair Atholl on holidays with his grandfather. He fell in love with the station, trains and the village, and changed his career mid-life to work as a train guard.

My name is Martyn Cummins and I was born in November 1973 in a town called Basingstoke in Hampshire in the south of England; basically my connection with Blair Atholl is that my granddad built a bungalow in Blair Atholl in St Andrews Crescent. It was 1985 when we started going up. I know that the Highland Chieftain (the 125 service) started in May 1984 from King's Cross to Inverness and my grandad saw this new train service as an opportunity to take his grandchildren up to Blair Atholl so it was him, my nan and my sister Sarah and myself and in the Easter holidays and also the Autumn half-term, from 1985 onwards - we would travel up.

I am what I call a commercial guard. My depot base is Woking, for the Southwestern railway company. They've run services out of London Waterloo and I basically go through, checking tickets and looking after the passengers and everything like that any, any help or needs or anything like that and when disruption happens, that's where we really step up and we provide all the information, connections and just help people and funnily enough, it's during disruption that people actually say "thank you" to you. And I've been doing it since October 2014 and it was the Intercity 125, it was the Highland Chieftain and all those trips we used to take that sparked off my love for the railways. Before that, I was a graphic packaging product designer and I wasn't enjoying my time at Unilever either and I thought, "I am not waiting until I retire to actually do something I love" and that's what I did. I took redundancy and I went and joined the railway and that's why it doesn't feel like a job, I'd say about 90% of the time. And sometimes it's a lovely day and you just feel like "They're paying me for this. I can't believe this. I'm running around on the train. I'm not stuck in an office." I deal with some lovely people, I deal with horrible people too but the majority of them are lovely and my wife just thinks, "As long as you're happy, that's all that matters."

Back in the late 1970s, the 125s were really starting off and all the marketing and everything - they were like nothing else - even the colours, the livery, the speed, all the news and everything like that, all the promotions. The whole works and they really did kind of stick in your head. I had like a little model Hornby 125, and I've still

got that today. There are so many memories. I got married in 1997 and my wife and our two children absolutely adore Blair Atholl. And if anything, it's my wife who's the one who's like saying she wants to keep on going back to the village and we still do all the walks that my nan and grandad used to take us on - up through the River Tilt in towards the castle, up over Lude, all of those kind of things, out onto the moors and we still go back to all those places and we just reminisce. I think the beauty of the village is it doesn't change an awful lot and the station obviously is still there. It gets touched up and stuff but the basics, like the signal box is still there, the mill is still there. The Atholl Arms is all still there and it's all, it's wonderful. For me it is. I just return to being a kid, I really do. All my worries and everything just disappear when I'm in Blair Atholl, when I just return to being a child and all my childhood memories just come flooding back.

Back then, I would literally - there's the golf bridge and there's a little path that ran from the bungalow towards the golf course and the golf bridge and I would literally - because you know when the Chieftain is coming through - it's about quarter past 9 in the morning, heading towards King's Cross and it's about half 6 in the evening heading up towards Inverness. So, whatever it is, I just dropped everything, and I would go and run to the golf bridge, when I was a kid. I still go and run to it now, even when I'm like "I'm 50 now", but I still go and run to the golf bridge or to the station. And just wonderful and you'd see, you could hear - especially in the morning - you'd hear the level crossing barriers going down and then you'd see the semaphore signal raise up at the station. And you're just waiting, and I'm getting goosebumps now actually thinking about it, and then you'd see the 125 come through and go over the River Tilt bridge and then they'd just open up, you know. The engines would rev up and everything and you'd get that diesel fume, just whisk up into your nose and everything like that and then the scream of the Valenta engines and the turbos on the 125 and you just see it, just like "voooooom", shoot down, heading towards Killiecrankie and Pitlochry and I would wait and watch it disappear until it turned off to the right.

Then it would be the ScotRail service, it'd be the Class 47s and there'll be Class 37s with Mark 2 coaches and all those kinds of things and you could literally hear those trains like leaving and I would run to the golf bridge or run down into the fields to the water treatment place opposite the quarry and everything like that and there's an 'on foot', level crossing in the field. And I'd run down into those fields and just watch the trains go past and everything like that. It was, oh blimey, and I still do it today.

We were in Blair Atholl back in April last year, around Easter time, and we're in the mill at the time having a cup of tea and then suddenly the level crossing barriers are going down and I just like, "I've got to go" - swish! And that's it, I'm running out the mill and I've gone to the station onto the platform and then the Royal Scotsman, you know, that luxury train, oh, it looks absolutely pristine, it just rolled up and it just stopped there. And because (obviously) it's a single line down towards Pitlochry and you've got to wait for something to come up and it was just absolutely amazing. It was

like those surprises - you don't know what's coming along and "bang!", there it is, and it's like "Oh my, that's amazing."

But I still do illustrations, 'front on' drawings using my i-pad and an Apple pencil. And then I do 'side on' drawings. Funnily enough, my sister a few years ago, wanted a birthday present and I said, "What do you want?" and she said, "I want the 125-power car that was called Highland Chieftain." So, I drew that and put the name plate on it, and I think it's Number 92 back in the blue and flying banana yellow and blue and grey colours. And I decided to draw that in all its different liveries over its lifetime and everything like that and sometimes I post those drawings up onto twitter.

For me the village is - I'm not a local, you know? I live in the south of England, but I've been there so many times and I've been there since nearly day one of my life and I wander through the village and yeah, I'm English, I'm afraid, but I feel more than just a tourist. I feel like it's extremely special to me and there's so many memories of the castle - there's certain bits when I arrive in Blair Atholl that I've got to go and see, one of them is the golf bridge, one of them is the station and then it's the castle. Oh blimey, even just like talking to you, I've got images and pictures of Blair Atholl. And sometimes I even love the sound of saying 'Blair Atholl', it's just absolutely magical, I absolutely adore the place. Extremely special.

Maureen MacIntosh

Maureen has lived all her life in Blair Atholl and recalls the trains in the days of steam, turntables and wheel-tappers. She also has a special mention for Jimmy McBain.

I'm Maureen McIntosh. I was born in Garryside and married a local, and I've lived in Blair Atholl all my life. I'll be 80 in July if I make it, I keep reasonably well, pop the pills and hope for the best, that's all you can do. I just remember as a child, the railway like that was basically it. We probably weren't supposed to be playing there, but as youngsters we used to go sledging on the hill and when we came back from the hill, we went up to where the fire was because the tenders had to fill up with the water. So there was a huge, huge fire there which we used to all go and get dried out before we went home. You wouldn't even get to walk up that bit now because it's all barricaded off, but that's where the fire was.

Jimmy McBain was a well-known character, a very nice chap. You'd sit in the waiting-room, he had a big board and it was packed with post-cards. It could still be there. Jimmy used to always have a beautiful fire, fantastic fire. There was a fire burning all the time for when we went to school, that was when we went by train and back at five o'clock at night

And I remember the big turntable at the far end of the station, and there was a huge shed and we'd sit to watch the turntable. We watched the big engines that used to go in and turn round and then off the siding. The coaches used to come in and there used to be an old coach where there he was a railway man - I can't remember his name - used to tap the wheels and the carriages on every train that came in before they drew out again - he used to tap, go along and tap the wheels. There was always somebody there all day. And they would just chat along to you, no malice, no harm done, and we used to sit and talk and that was it. When the trains came in and he would go away and do what he had to do and that was it

You used to get your Sunday papers at the station shop, but before that, Jimmy McBain used to have an old barrel that you used to put papers on and sell them, that was before the bookstall.

Mike Shanto

The station was part of Mike's life in so many ways since his childhood and the days of steam. His story is now the subject of an illustrated children's storybook and video, entitled 'Mike's Station'.

My name is Mike Shanto, I'm not very young, I'm 79. I was born in Blair Atholl, the only time I've been away was seven years when I was in Canada from (19)45 to (19)52 and I've lived in Blair Atholl ever since. I worked at a good number of jobs, I served my time in the garage here and I still live here. The thing that got me interested in the station was Viviene Cree. I met her and we got chatting about the station for some reason and I told her that my mother met my father when she a clerk in the station in 1943 or 1944 and they got married. He was a Canadian and that's how I got interested in the station. Also, I had a relation, it was a cousin of my mother's who'd been in the station for many, many, many years and he was a good friend and a good well-known porter in Blair Atholl Station.

Our ship that we came across from Canada on arrived in Greenock and my grandmother and grandfather came to meet us and we all travelled up by train from Greenock to Blair Atholl. We got into Blair Atholl station and I think it was 10 to 10 in September, the end of September in 1952. We got off the train and it was so dark and dingy and it was gas lamps that were lit and we walked down the platform and my grandmother and grandfather stayed in 8 Railway Cottages which is beside where the signal box is now and the railway crossing is. We walked down there, and the man was looking after the station, he walked behind us and pulled the lamps to shut them off. They were gas lamps at the time, and we went into this little, little house. It was like a doll's house, compared to what we had in Canada; it was a railway house.

My grandfather was well-known in the railway, he was a ganger and a well-liked person. My mum worked as a clerk at the station when she left school. She'd have been there, I think, for about four years before she left to get married to my dad in 1944. They were going to Canada - that's the only reason she left. In fact, I tell a lie, she worked on, my dad went back in (19)44 and we went out about 10 months or a year later or something like that, but she carried on working part-time in the station after I was born, because my granny looked after me. But then when it was time to go to Canada, that was it, she left the station then. But she's always been known at the

station through (as I said) her cousin, Jim McBain. And she spent a lot of time there, believe it or not, visiting - just going to see Jim and when his relations came down from Kincraig, they would meet at the station sometimes, you know, that's where they'd meet and when they'd got another train going up - you come off one train and have a blether, get on the train and go back up. Jim would be working - it was actually quite good, because Jim made the tea and everything, he sat in that ticket place. He sat in there and he was so, he was so good a guy and so well-known and liked, you know, Jim McBain that he didn't make just tea for us, he used to make it for strangers, folk that were sitting out on the platform, waiting on the train. You know if there was a cold day, Jim was out with a cup of coffee or tea for them, it was usually tea not coffee, it was tea. Usually tea, but he was known all over the world they sent postcards from everywhere. That's why I would like to get into the ticket office now because all the walls were covered with postcards from all over the world – people that Jim had met, all the jamboree people who came. The trains were loaded with all the scouts who came from different countries. There weren't buses so much then, just one or two buses maybe, but it was usually all trains, all trains that delivered the scouts from all over the world to Blair Atholl station.

The scout jamboree happens every four years, with a jamborette which was a smaller one in between; it was half the size of the jamboree. The park that's now the caravan site, and the park across from the caravan site, that was all full. That was full, right up to the top. Full of tents and then they had open nights - more like campfires - and the local people were invited in. The scouts would do different turns from different countries, it was, it was great and it was good for the village, but it kept the railway station going anyway, the jamboree, because it was busy, busy. And then they'd all go home as well and we were scouts ourselves and you took a scout home for a week. All the different nationalities you would take a scout for a week and then there was some staying in Pitlochry too and then a week later, we were all gathered together and to Glasgow they went and then to their different destinations.

Returning to my grandfather, he was a ganger – he was in charge of the boys that were sorting the rails and everything. Now I went with him every Sunday, every Sunday morning, before the train came up. On a Sunday, it was the *Sunday Post* that was delivered, the papers were delivered on a Sunday morning about 11 o'clock, the train came in and, in the morning, we'd set off early, about 8am and walk the line from Blair Atholl, him and I. From Blair Atholl to Killiecrankie, checking the pegs in the rails and then walk back up and then as a treat, when the train came in, it was a steam train, of course - the paper train as we called it. Unload the passengers and stuff. It had to get pushed up the hill with a pilot they called it (another steam train) and in Blair Atholl there was an engine shed with a turntable and everything, so I got on the train with the fireman and the driver and my grandfather, myself. We pushed up to the top of Drumochter and then it reversed all the way back on its own. Turned it on the railway station turntable, I got to push the thing around and that was my Sunday. Sunday morning, and we did that, I did that for years. Years, all my time, more of my primary school, from Primary 3 to Primary 7 in Blair Atholl.

Things change a bit when you get a wee bit older and you do different things with different people then, you know, when I was off to school. But I remember when my grandfather moved from Railway Cottages up into - they were the new houses there - beside the school, the school wasn't built there then. He moved up there into a bigger house, but he still was working on the railway and the drivers used to throw coal out just before the railway bridge and he would go down and gather coal for his fire. That's the fireman threw the coal out for the guys to use, you know? This wasn't just for my family no. The boys would throw some coal and you'd just go and gather it. I don't mean a truck load of it, just big lumps of it and if you broke it up, if you broke it up there'd be enough of the lumps maybe to last you the whole night, sort of thing. I used to go down with him to pick it up, down through the field which is now a caravan park. I used to go down there and pick it up. This wasn't every day, no. We would maybe do it on a Friday and a Saturday, never on the Sunday because we did the wee 'walk the line' thing on the Sunday but he would always know when they were going to dump some coal and as I said, it wasn't just for him. Frank Lloyd lived next door, he was an ex-railway man too, so he got coal, but it was just part of the perks, they weren't well paid or anything.

Everything that we did when we were young, you would never get away with now, but that's what made our life. There was no televisions or computers or nothing, in fact, a railway, a railway! A radio, you had to go up to the garage to get it, the battery for your radio charged up on the little electrical thing. There was nothing and we were never off the hill. As I said, at the railway yard, turning the engine, using the steam it was very light, you just pushed it and it the whole steam train, the huge steam train went round, you know? You pushed it and there was a hand, a break thing that locked it on opposite the rails and away it goes. And there was a shunting yard right along the back of Railway Cottages, that's where if there were two trains in and it was a goods train, they would reverse in there until the passenger train went and then the goods train would go up.

When we came here in 1952, we lived with my grandparents and then we got a house at Aldclune. This was a big, big difference for us because there was no rationing in Canada when we left or anything like that, but when we came here, it was rationing. We got a little poke of sweeties to last a week, I mean I could have ate that in about an hour in Canada, things like that, you know. But when we did stay [with my grandparents] in this little house, it had a little stairway, it was very small, and had an outside toilet. Things I'd never seen other than when we'd camped in Chippewa Park and that had an outside toilet, but I'd never ever seen a house with an outside toilet until I came to Blair Atholl. And there was a wash house as well out there, for doing the washing. I think the wash house did two cottages, that would probably be right, yeah. The toilets were individual though. There was no bath or anything. So the house was busy alright, it was busy and when I came off the train that day and walked down the platform and went into the house, my grandmother's house, it was a Tully lamp that was going and you could smell it like. Yeah, and I always remember, there was icing on the mirror above the fireplace - "Welcome home Babs and Mike and family"

was written on the mirror, by our next-door neighbour who was my godmother, Irene. I turned and said to them, "I'm not staying here, I'm going home." Because I'd never seen anything like it - no electricity, as I said. In Canada, we used to go to a log cabin on the Chippewa Park at weekends – not every weekend - and even it had electricity in the house, though there wasn't a toilet. But in Blair Atholl, it was all Tully lamps. There was nothing - there was none of the shops and then over the railway crossing there was the wee house you can rent now, that was where you bought your tea, bread and there was a bake shop, a baker's shop in there and that was all. Lamps in there as well. There was no electricity at all.

But the railway as I said - the railway was a big part, and once you'd finished Primary 7, you went to Pitlochry school instead of Blair Atholl school, then you had three years in Pitlochry and that was the 10 to 9 train. I'll always remember, 10 to 9 when it left Blair Atholl. It reversed itself up to Struan, got the Struan kids and any folk that were going on the train, it came back and picked us up at 10 to 9, Killiecrankie stopped there and picked up the kids from there and going on to Pitlochry and we all got off and then the train went on to Perth. There would be goods - the rabbit catcher, Peter Roy, that used to put in his crates of rabbits – they were hung up with their legs crossed to the bar, hung over as pairs. And he would put them in the back in the guard's van to get them delivered to Perth. The butchers and that in Perth. It was nothing seeing them there, nothing. I mean nobody bothered about it - it was just a part of life and Peter was there, I think it was two times a week or three times a week, he put his rabbits out on the train.

Once we got to Pitlochry, off we all got and walked up the hill to the school [this was the old Pitlochry school, before the fire] and then the train we got back on was at 5 o'clock. The school finished at 4, 10 past 4. We walked down the hill, got the 5 o'clock train at the station, but we could also use our pass on a Saturday to go down to Pitlochry to the pictures and we'd go maybe on the 5 o'clock and come back I think it was 9 something, the train coming back and we could do that, we could do that for we'd never have to pay for that, which was good. But [the station] it was a very important part of village, there was hardly a bus service. There was a bus service but most folk used the train if you were going to Perth or something like that.

There was an initiation when you first started your first year in Pitlochry - you'd be 11, 12 years old - you had to unscrew a bulb in the carriages! There weren't any corridors to start with, it was just, you opened the door, and you went in and there was a bench on one side and a bench on the other. It wasn't a hard bench, it had cushion things on. So, you got on there and there were six, I think it was either four or six bulbs screwed in the light in the roof, and you had to take the bulb out and when you went into the tunnel at Killiecrankie - you had to open the window and throw it down. That was your initiation. You only done it the one day, just that one day but everybody had to do it. If you didn't do it, if everybody didn't do it the one day, they had to do it the next. And then the next year, the first years that came on they were told to do the

same thing. It was a stupid initiation, but it went on for years, for years it was handed down. Girls and boys, girls and boys. And there were about 16 of us in there.

You wouldn't have got 16 adults in there but, you got 16 kids in there. Once the corridor came in, that all stopped, because the guard could walk up and down. He couldn't do that before, you see, because you opened the door and that's just whoever in there was in and that's it. There were three carriages on the train, and you'd sit wherever you wanted. If there were 12 of you that were all friends, you would all try and get into the one carriage sort of thing, you know? Or you'd meet up with guys you were pally with, girls you were pally with, from Struan. They'd be looking out the window and you would get in where they were, so you were all together and you walked up the school together. It wasn't gangs but it was just friends! Friends that you had. Adults didn't come into the carriages, and it was very rare that adults came into the school at all because there was loads of other places for the adults to go.

To me, the best time of the railway was the steam, and they used to all stop here for water. You had your hoses, the ones going south was just past where the waiting room is on this side, and the other water tank was just at the railway crossing where the signal box, with the signal thing is, that was just tall, like a lamp-post, with a canvas bag thing that they just hooked on and then filled up the tank for the stream. It was, it was great. Honest, the railway was great. I mean, I was never away from the railway. When we were kids, we did stupid things as well. We stole detonators that they had for stopping trains. The detonator was just a round thing about the size of a small lid, and it had two lead straps out of it. If anyone was working on the railway and something happened, they would put these around the line and the train would go out with a bang, and it would know to stop. But we stole them. We used to drop rocks on them and, I mean, we could have killed us. We didn't steal them all the time, we got odd ones. And then there were the wheel tappers - where the waiting room is now, over behind it there, you can still see the lines. It was the shunting yard, there they had an old railway car that was made into a hut for them. They had a fire and everything in it, they had a chimney in there and we used to go in and sit with them and get cups of tea from them and they used to give us the carbide they used to put in the lamps and the medicine bottles you had then with corks - if you put the carbide in water in with it and shook it, it exploded. Quite a shock, actually. The wheel tappers had to go round to make sure that all the breaks were off on the goods trains especially for going up the hill. They just tapped it, it's like a sledgehammer - same size, same height, a little bit lighter head than the sledgehammer - and they went right along all the train, all the train every wheel and tapped it and they'd know if something was wrong - they knew the sound, if it went 'thump' there was something wrong with the break working or something like that, you know, and they would adjust it if they could. The train would have to stay until it was sorted because going up the hill, the drag on the train and getting pushed up. That's what the wheel tappers were. There was two, there was always two. Jock Sutherland stayed up in Tulloch Road, in the end house, and it was him that taught me to play golf, he was a

great golfer. He was one of them and the other boy stayed down by, just outside of Killiecrankie. He had a motorbike, I always mind of that, I'm trying to think of his name, I can't remember. But they, they were wheel tappers.

It stopped when diesel came in. Jock had retired anyway, but everything changed when the diesels came. It meant your engine shed disappeared, everything. I mean it was a main hub because of the having to push the trains up the hill with the pilots. Every, every, every train had to be pushed up the hill with a pilot. And you had two signal boxes in Blair Atholl – there was the one where there is now and there was one further up. And the guy would take you into the signal box. I knew the people - some of them had sons that I palled about with so, you were never out the signal boxes or in the railway you know, some of them worked in the clerking office as well, you know?

So, the railway's part of your life, it was a big part of mine when I came here. I, I just loved it, just, I loved the engine shed. I mean it's, it's hard for anybody to realise I don't think because it's a bygone age now. You know, with the steam? But it was just special and the guys that worked on them, the firemen and the servicing guys and it's just different, you know? When I went on the pilot engine with my grandfather - there was an engine driver, a fireman, there were always two guys on the train - someone to shovel the coal then your engine driver. You started off, you started off as a greaser, and that was the boys that would go when the engines would come in, they would grease them all up ready for the next shunt up the thing. That was them serving their time and then their next job was a fireman which was up, you're on the plate then shovel in the coal and then you progress from there to the driver. What we used to get up to was where we got our peashooters. We weren't supposed to get them, but the greaser boys were young, they were young you see, young boys. Young lads, they boys, but young lads and there were things about a foot long and they were gauges for the steam to show you the level the water was and all that, you know. Two glass gauges and we used to ask for them for peashooters and we used to get them, and we used to hate if they gave us a thick one because you needed the smaller ones, you know, for shooting rowan berries. The red berries, so there's only a certain time that you could get them. There were seasons in Blair Atholl then. When I came here you had four separate seasons, you had your winter, your spring, your summer and your autumn and there was a lot of snow, we used to have a lot of snow here in the winter time.

The other thing that we had in the railway, and I always remember it, was the newsagents *Menzies*. It was always there and that's where we used to buy our sweeties for going, if we had money, if we wanted to buy. It was the book stall, book stalls they were called, and the woman that worked in it for as long as I can remember was a local lady, that lived in the village here.

Over time, the workers got less and less and less, and you had less people working on the railway once they didn't need folk to look after the water pumps and check for the water - it came from Glen Fender, the water. All the houses were fed by the

railway. It was the railway water that we had until about four or five years ago? Then they piped all that other thing in, but it used to be all railway water. And that's another thing I used to do with my grandfather was, sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, sometimes on a Saturday, up to Glen Fender and up the steep hill and just where you'd turn to the right to go to the back at Lude, just up to the next bend. There was a wooden shed, and it had all the beds that filtered the water. That's what it was and that's where it came and that was drinking water but that's the same water that went in the trains and he looked after that as well, my grandfather. To me, the time of the railway was the steam trains, right from the very beginning of *the Rocket* when Stevenson made it. I've had a shot at driving a steam engine – you got to pull the whistle and everything as well.

Neil Mackintosh

Neil looks after our village hall and is instrumental in the floral displays around the village. He recalls some of the characters he has encountered over his many years at Blair Atholl.

Hello, I'm Neil Mackintosh and I was born in 1942, but not in Blair Atholl because it was during the war and my father was called up, so my mother moved to the farmhouse, my grandfather's farmhouse in Morayshire, so I was born there. So, although I am a Blair Atholl-onian, I wasn't born here but I still think of myself as Blair Atholl. I spent most of my boyhood here and all my teenage years here apart from two years I went back to the farm, because my mother wasn't well and that was it. So, basically, I'm very much a Blair Atholl person.

I learned to play golf here and I became addicted to golf and when I left school at fourteen, I helped my father in the shop at the Bridge of Tilt, but I practised so hard because I just wanted to get away and become a golf professional. Which I eventually did when I was nineteen, so that was me away from the village until fifty odd years later when I came back when I retired as a golf professional to my own village Blair Atholl.

My memories are not just of the station itself but of the railway really. So it seemed to me when I was a boy in the village which would've been when I was six and onwards all the males in the village, or most of them, majority of them either worked on the estate (Atholl Estates) or the station, and the railway included. And the incredible difference of today when that was the hub of the village in a sense and now it's, it's just over there…

So now, there were obviously people worked there - the Stationmaster, who was quite a respected person in the village at that time. There were drivers, guards, ticket collectors, and people who worked at the shunting sheds, and amongst them there were quite a lot of characters really, and I can mention a few there was my special friend and mentor was a Jock Sutherland who was a wheel-tapper. Which I don't know if you know what a wheel-tapper is but it's somebody who goes round and checks the wheels for every train that comes in and checks for the heat and checks that they're, they're okay. He swung the hammer a lot at the job and his golf swing

was much the same, it was that type of movement he did but he was a very good golfer and a very keen golfer and he introduced me to golf and for the rest of my time in Blair Atholl, Jock Sutherland was my hero and that helped to give me my career for the 50 years.

Jock was also the Cadets leader and he took the Cadets at the shunting shed at the station and my brother was a Cadet. The village knew Jock and his Cadets as Jock Sutherland's Army, and they would march to church occasionally and he had them all exceptionally smart and so forth. And there's many, many tales (not always good ones) that my brother told me about his time in the Cadets.

There was a Jock MacKenzie who was a train driver who was called 'Pimple' because he had a pimple on his nose. There's one story I like that my mother used to tell. My mother had a great sense of humour and Jock or 'Pimple' became chairman of the community council and my mother met a Mrs. Robertson one day after the news was broken that Jock was the community council chairman and Mrs. Robertson said to mum, "You know Pimple will go on until he's reached number 10." And my mother found that hugely amusing and told that story for, for years later. So that was the kind of characters you were meeting at the station, and everyone you knew and most of them had nicknames, so it was typical village life at that time.

When I think of the station, my memory immediately goes to 10 to 9 which was the time the train came in to take us to school at Pitlochry. So 10 to 9 was always huge in my mind, it was always called the 10 to 9 train. I can remember waiting for the train in the winter, when it was freezing, but occasionally the station master used to put the fire on in the waiting room and that was a real blessing to get down from Bridge of Tilt and into the waiting room and see a fire. It wasn't much of a fire but it was enough to keep warm until the train came. Often the highlight of the train coming in was when it didn't actually come in because it was snowed up at somewhere, up at Dalwhinnie or Dalnaspidal or somewhere and it didn't come, so you had a day off of school which was, was great.

Another memory I have of the station is the book stall which I don't think you get now at the stations, but the book stall was always quite a busy place, and especially on Sundays because the shops, all the shops were closed on Sundays, but you go your Sunday papers at the book stall. It seems to me that the Crichton dynasty in the village was always in control of the bookstall because the three sisters all had years doing the bookstall. Once one left, the other sister took over, so there was always a Miss Crichton at the bookstall. That would be between 1946 and 1950, or later on in the 1950s even. It illustrates how busy the station was when they needed a bookstall there and how important it was to people getting off the train and getting something and getting back onto the train again.

The signal box was very special to me, there was a Hugh Ross who was the signalman and occasionally he would invite my brother David and me up to the signal box which was really exciting occasion, and we would sit there with him as the, as the trains

came in and he worked. The bells would ring - it had to be at a certain point - and he would work the floor levers. I'm not quite sure what that was for but, I think it was maybe to change the line so that the trains came into the right position. And every train that came I, the driver would put out his hand with a leather satchel and connect it to a hook and the signalman would open the window and take that in. It was probably to record something, I'm not sure but that was and it was very special to be invited up to do that and I remember him in particular because he had a big hole in his hand and he had been shot during the war and the bullet had gone right through his hand and it was very obvious it was always a part of when you saw him working you always saw this and you know, it's funny the memories that come back to you when you think of things. It's the little things that you think about mostly.

Another thing I enjoyed doing was when the jamboree, Scout Jamboree was on. I don't know what age I'd be, maybe six or seven but I would go up to stand on the bridge as the trains came and watch all the Scouts from all over the world come off the train for the Jamborette. I had never been out of Blair Atholl, I don't think, but there on the platform were so many people, young boys from all over the world all colours and all that and it was a very moving occasion to see them arriving. It just felt such an international thing to see this happening to a wee village like Blair Atholl and it was even more emotional when they were leaving. I would go up and stand on the bridge and see them all leaving and there would be a piper there and he would be playing "Will you no come back again?" and I think I even cried when that was happening you know because it was such an emotional thing, and in my mind was, "I wonder if they ever will come, come back again?" So that was for me, that was brilliant memories of the station.

You know the war hadn't long finished then and my dad went to Egypt for the last spell. He didn't come back till 1946, that's when we came back from up North to the village. There was an instance there that happened, my brother and I were standing at the railway gates one night and it was dark and the train came and stopped and someone opened the window at the top, slid the window down - I can see it happening - and there were soldiers. I thought they were American soldiers but, on hindsight, they were maybe Canadian soldiers - they weren't British soldiers. And they threw us out two bars of chocolate, wrapped up in silver paper, and we didn't know what they were, you know? But we got one each and off the train went and we ran home with those, we didn't know, chocolate bars and to my mum at Tulloch Road and when we opened them, it was dark, dark chocolate. And I remember the bitterness of them, you know? Because we had never had chocolate it was something different and I think that's when I really fell in love with chocolate - I still love my chocolate today. But not milk chocolate, I don't like milk chocolate but, the dark chocolate, so that was my first. Because you didn't get sweets then, you know, everything would be rationed and so forth, so to get something like that was, it was a miracle, you know, that happened? And I can see the two soldiers yet, looking out of this window and throwing the chocolate at us.

So that was a nice memory of the railway crossing. There's another lovely story that I've written a story about, it was about a Mrs. Masson, who lived at the Railway Cottages just across the way. And the story goes, and it is true because I followed it up and it was true! It was a winter's night, and it was snowing and there was a whist drive on at the village hall here and Mrs. Masson and Mrs. Fergus who lived next door decided to go to the whist drive when it was dark, snowing, windy apparently and they came to the crossing just outside. It was closed but Mrs. Masson knew about trains so she said, "We'll go across, we'll still go across" - there was a gate at the side. Mrs. Masson started off and went halfway across then suddenly this engine was right at her, so she dived down between the lines and the train went right over you know, poor Mrs. Ferguson, I spoke to Mrs. Ferguson's daughter not long ago about it and Mrs. Ferguson was just hysterical because she thought she had lost a friend, but no, Mrs. Masson got up and dusted herself down, put her hat back on and came onto the hall for the whist drive!

So that was two instances of the level crossing that still stick very much in my mind. When I left the village in 1962, I don't think there was a stationmaster anymore, it was just Jimmy McBain. You've probably heard of Jimmy McBain - he became everything, you know? Jimmy was a real character. He was a good badminton player. I used to play badminton with him. I've been told that years later, people still wrote to Jimmy because he looked after them so well when they came off the train.

And so, I love train travel. I would never go on a bus if I could help it but, trains, yeah, definitely.

Niel and Eck Haggart

Niel and Eck grew up in Blair Atholl. They share childhood memories about the station and the railway. Eck also describes his work as a trackman on the line.

I'm Niel Haggart, I've lived in the village 74 years. I've never moved far, I moved from 11 Invertilt Road to 17 Invertilt Road when I got married. School was in the Old School, then Pitlochry. That would be ([19]61/62? That would be my first memories of steam trains.

We had a neighbour, James McBain, he was the porter at the station, and my memory of him is through the golf course. James never had a carry bag, he had an old leather golf bag that he carried under his arm, and he was a left hander, and a really good golfer. I mean obviously we've got memories of mum taking us down to see the steam trains, you know?

After that, I was friends with Ali Sutherland whose father was the signalman, Geordie Sutherland. And Alistair Watt, now I'm not sure whether he was secretary or the treasurer of the golf club, he was the stationmaster when we went to school. Betty Murdoch ran the bookshop at the station - a *Menzies*' thing.

Eck says: It was just a wee bookshop. You used to get your sweeties for school from there.

Niel adds: As far as the steam train goes, as I said it was just something to get us to school. One morning the train was late, or we were late getting in to school. Speedy was the schoolteacher and she said, "Why are you late? Why are you late?" And Hughie, quick as a flash, "The train had a puncture Miss, the train had a puncture!" They were quite small carriages. You'd get six in the one carriage and you and your pals would sit together. When we got off the train there was always a carry-on going up the road. There was always the idiot who pulled the cord and stopped the train as well.

Our younger brother, John, disappeared this day, and oh, panic, panic. How old was he at the time? He was quite young, maybe 9?10 years old? And then we got a call from the police, saying that that there was a young boy on the train, and he was now in Keith! And did we know anything about this? And of course, mother and father didn't know. He'd just gone down to the station, jumped on the train, he'd no ticket, he'd no money, he had nothing. I can remember that dad had to go down at night because he was coming back down on the train at night. That was our younger brother's experience of the train!

There were a lot of the railway workers, a lot of them were involved with the bowling club. There was always the turntable down there which we used to go and watch the trains going onto the turntable and turn round.

Eck says: Jimmy (McBain) used to have all the postcards in the station from all over the world from the scouts and everything. We used to go on a Sunday past the golf course to the railway sidings to see if we could pick up any lumps of coal and if there were any sticks, we would go up and get the saw and come back and cut them up and carry them home.

Niel picks up the story: Occasionally, there was fires down the sides – just with the steam trains with the sparks, sometimes in the summertime fires down the railway embankment and that. That was just a bit of excitement for us then, wasn't it? It didn't do anything, it just burnt itself out. And then you used to come down here and stand on the railway bridge and watch the steam trains going past – you got covered in smoke, you would get home, and mum would be, "You're stinking of smoke. Go and get changed."

We used to sit on the girders on the railway bridge there and fish into the river, we used to catch the eels there. Our older brother, he worked on the railway too.

I can remember about the ticket hut at the station – there was the wee glass sliding door when you went in to get your ticket. It was normally Alistair Watt, he was the stationmaster, he did the ticket machine and said, "Yes, can I help you?" and there were hard seats in the waiting room, solid boards in the waiting room.

Eck: We cleared the snow up at the Pass [Drumochter Pass]. Now-a-days there's no snow so they don't have to do that. They called it flanging. You cleaned out the inside of the rail because it used to pack with snow, they were always afraid that the train would lift off. Because the wheel has only got about that much grip on the rail. That turns it round the corners because there's no steering wheel in the trains. You only went when the signalman said so.

Neil asks: Yeah, and did you not have to clean out the points? Did they not get frozen or jam up?

Eck: Aye, well sometimes they did but, they used to have heaters in them. Gas heaters on them and they heated the rail up. It melted them all. Well, it's all electric now but, it used to be gas, and you'd sometimes have to be there to relight them

again if it was a windy night because they would blow out. And Dalwhinnie was the worst for it because the wind up there and then you'd have the snow as well and you'd try to walk out in it to relight them again. So that's a downside for the points then if you had to keep on going out to relight them. The signalman wasn't allowed to leave his box, that's why we were always there for snow clearing. And going under his directions because of the snow.

In the old days, they used to have the cesses[2] so tidy that they used to cycle along the cess. To get to their work. And it used to all be built up with stones. Tidy and everything. They used to have a rake at the back of their bike, so when they were down to their work, the rake covered their tracks.

We used to scythe from fence to fence, the workers scythed all their section. Well, it was all jointed track then, and it is all long, welded rail now. Fred Skinner, Jock Keith, Pa' Dunask. Jock Keith was a trackman. Niel asks: did they walk the line every day then? Eck: It was every second day. You put the keys back in and everything like that, that held the jointed track in. Now the panels don't come out really, because the joints are welded in. Niel asks if they did any tapping. Eck says, 'No. The tapping was only for the train driver, that tapped his wheels, just to make sure that they weren't chipped or anything.

Niel again: they must have been quite a lot of you here at one time?

Eck: Oh aye! Kenny and Peem. But it wasn't as many as there was! I don't know how many there would have been, but we had a wee section up here and then there was another one at Killiecrankie and another wee squad at Pitlochry. And then another wee squad at Ballinluig, and then at Dalguise. This was needed because they'd nothing to get there, get home again and everything. Whereas when I started, we went from Moulinearn right up to Dalnacardoch. I could get dropped off at Moulinearn and I would walk to Blair Atholl. Somebody would get dropped off at Dalnacardoch and walk to Blair Atholl. That was on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Neil: You'd have been quite fit in these days then?

Eck: Aye but, we had a railway van so we got taken on the way there. Then you had to humph tools and that when you were on a bogey, if you were going to Dalnacardoch. You'd know where between Dalnacardoch and Struan to get anything on the track. So halfway you were walking' to get to the job. We'd a big jack, and there's somebody with it on their shoulder and then your grips and hammers and picks and everything what you were needing. But when I was with the welding that was about a ton and a half in the bogey that we had to push. And that could be two and a half miles. But now, now it's all modern, you just go to a railway crossing and on you go, away.

[2] The 'cess' is the area either side of the railway immediately off the ballast shoulder. This usually provides a safe area for authorised workers to stand when trains approach.

Three years before I left, they finally got the vehicles on. They just wouldn't pay the money. It was all there! But they wouldn't pay the money for it, the railway was always, "That's the way we used to do it, and that's the way you're doing it." The old boys, that was the way they were. There would be a machine sitting at the side there, for doing' it. So, this day, a Sunday, we were working, and they put in a section, about half a mile, a new rail, and Denny said, "Right, get your bars and we'll go and bar this rail." And I said, "Look Denny, that machine is sitting there, I'm passed out for it [had been qualified], I'll put it on and show you how easy and different this is." Denny says, "No, no. The old way's the best." And he says, "Right then, you do it." and I put it on. I jack it up, and the boys who'd passed go up another half dozen sticks and do the same, all the way though the half mile, he (Denny) says, "What are we going to do now? That's the work finished." And I says, "Well, is that no easier?" And Denny says, "No, no. You're still better with the old bar. It takes longer and passes the day." Eck says they just hated the machines because that's the way they did them.

Eck ends by reflecting on the doubling of the track, from Perth to Dalwhinnie and then they ripped it all out [after the Beeching cuts]. As he said: And then they came back and re-did it again.

Peter Barr

Peter lives in Killiecrankie and laments the demise of the station there. He loves the days of steam and has his own model railway.

My name is Peter Barr. I've been associated with Killiecrankie through family all my life, which goes back to 1942. All through my life I've been interested in railways, I've had a model railway of my own. I still have model railways at home but not a lot of room to put them up but I'm very pleased to be here and to associate myself with Friends of Blair Atholl Station. The model railway I had up to the age of about 18 was a Hornby 'double O'. It was featured in the *Meccano* magazine but it was never really based on any particular place. The railway that I have now is just a circle with a train going round and round because I don't have that much room in my house to put it up on a large scale.

Asked what he remembers about travelling by train, Peter answered: Normally, we used to come up to Blair Atholl by car. There was a time when we had our own family, and we used the car train - we could put our car on the train in Olympia [London] and get off in Perth. Unfortunately, the car train no longer operates, which is disappointing, but I suppose the road network is now improved considerably, which is a compensation. Since then, I use the train quite a lot. I much prefer to travel by train than travel by driving. I sometimes take leisure trips up to inverness and I certainly go to Perth by train but, backtracking to the time that I was a young child, a young boy, my grandfather was also quite keen on trains and we used to get in the train at Killiecrankie and take a trip to Blair Atholl, particularly to experience what it was like to be on a steam train and we used to go and sit in the guard's van and they had a fire there, a coal fire which you could sit around and keep warm while you travelled from Killiecrankie to Blair Atholl where we'd get off and then go back to Killiecrankie by car. Sometimes, we would go to Pitlochry and take the train to Blair Atholl so that we could experience going over the viaduct at Killiecrankie which was always quite an experience to look down into the Pass of Killiecrankie and then we were regaled with stories of the Battle of Killiecrankie.

So that was when I was maybe 8, 9, 10 years old. So that was a novelty for us to go on the steam train and it's always a sad reflection that steam trains no longer run

regularly. Of course, sometimes steam trains do travel up and down the line, which causes a lot of interest, and long may it continue. And, of course, the whole thrill of 'clickety clack clickety clack' along the railway line - that familiar sound of wheels on rails - is something that you never really forget. I couldn't put a date on when diesel trains started, took over from steam trains but I suppose it's just part of modern industry that the old ways give way to the new ways and sometimes the new ways aren't as good as the old ways. People do lament the passing of steam. I suppose diesel is quieter, less polluting and it's just the way that things develop, and diesel then gives way to other forms. I have no real feelings about that, other than to lament the passing of steam and I just have to accept the fact that most trains now are diesel.

Beeching made a major impression on the rail system, as you all know. I think it was 1963 he wrote his report, closing down various stations including Killiecrankie and others going down south past Ballinluig. There was a station at Ballinluig and a station further south from there and they were all closed down in the interests of economy and of course the irony is that some of these lines that were closed down are being reopened. He did take a very strict rule to close down so many stations. If you look at the rail system before he came and the rail system after he came, the difference between the two is quite considerable and one of the things that we lament is the passing of Killiecrankie station which was really quite a little hub and quite a busy little place. My grandfather was an MP and every day the train arrived in the morning with *The Times* newspaper dropped off from London for him to read while he was in Killiecrankie so it's disappointing to go to a station like Blair Atholl and find that there's no activity going on there on a day-to-day basis.

Robert Heasman

Robert worked as a British Rail Highland Main Line Manager. He reflects on the changes he has witnessed, including the period of privatisation.

My name is Robert Heasman. I like to think I have been lifelong with the British Railways but it wasn't actually quite the case because of the privatization of things. I came to Scotland, back to Scotland in nineteen-eight-four, as the area manager of what was then Tayside which was Perth and Dundee, for the operating side of the railway. And I was still there when we had one of our regular reorganizations which resulted in the creation of the area manager ScotRail North which included Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen, and Inverness. A very nice large piece of railway to operate with, and I was there until ninety-one I think when things started to go pear shaped with the start of privatization and various other re-organizations. After that, I ended up joining what was then the British rail's consultancy business called Transmark, on the basis that it allowed me to still keep living in this delightful part of the world but go and work all over the world for the next few years of my career.

I was very much a railway operator, but area management was one of those functions where you're dealing with all the key parts of operating a railway so, dealing with part of the team of the civil engineers and the mechanical engineers and the signaling engineers and (relevant to you guys is of course), the Highland Mainline. Initially I had the bottom half of it up to Drumochter and Dalwhinnie. Latterly, I had the whole of the Highland Mainline under my operating responsibilities.

I always had an interest in transport. I was never a great train spotter, but I was always interested in transport. At school I enjoyed Geography, and again, transport links and things like that and then when I was leaving school, I didn't know what to do. I wasn't quite ready to go to uni, and at the time, the railways had a sort of junior entry into their business, British Railways, to become what would be called a supervisor clerk or something. So basically, I started as a booking clerk, being taught all the ropes in an around what was then the Edinburgh Division of British Rail Scottish region, and after towards the end of that, I began to realise that I probably ought to get more further up, and if I was going to make progression, I should join the management training scheme. And at the same time, this was the start of sandwich courses at Dundee Bell

Street Tech (as it then was). It had just started a business management degree course which was a sandwich course. And British Rail very kindly put me through the sandwich degree course, for me to come out as a slightly more senior person than a junior clerk. And thereafter, I suppose, the rest is history! I've managed to work my way up the organizational tree gradually, a few steps at a time – going down South and then back up again - to be the area manager at Dundee, which is really quite interesting. Full circle of life coming back to land, so that was really how I ended up with British Rail. And I enjoyed it, I like to keep going, and although I wasn't directly involved with BR (British Rail) after I left Tayside, I was still always very much involved with railways. Once I was on the consultancy side, I spent bits of time in Africa, quite a lot of time in Ireland and quite a lot of chunks in the Philippines, and so that's how I ended up with the railways and really am quite happy to have done so and feel it was part of a life – I had no railway family connections, I have to say that. You find quite a lot of people that you come across they have family connections going back generations, actually.

When I arrived on the scene, Blair Atholl was just an unstaffed station on the Highland Mainline with a not particularly regular service and it think that was one of the things that people were looking at, particularly towards the end of the eighties, to try and get a better service for the intermediate stations on the Highland Mainline. Now I think it's a bit better, but I'm not absolutely up to date with the timetable on the route at the moment but I think a few more trains stop there now than you probably had in my day.

I think the problem with my generation was that we were in a post-Beeching era when I joined - I joined the railways in - 1968? And they were still closing branch lines around this part of the world. It's interesting I think, it's an aside, but I remember being on one of the last trains down to Leven, given that they're just about to re-open - the line is now back and they're now running test trains down to Leven to put it back again. So that's come full circle. And it was also the era when they were trying to get into marketing, rather than just selling tickets - sort of 'market pricing' of train tickets and the start of a more commercial approach to getting business. That was going on in the background over most of my early career. And this is why the focus of my time was defending all the time, explaining to the smaller stations why you didn't get trains get trains stopping at you. It was a constant battle between trying to placate the local people but also recognizing that the industry was really always struggling for money, and they're always going to end up going for the biggest deals. I can remember the arguments - when the diesel units came on – about why there was never enough room for bikes? Now at the time, people were more interested in putting people on seats, rather than having empty spaces for bikes. Now I know that's also gone full circle, you're probably aware that there is a train that runs round on the West Highland or a rather unit on the West Highland line that's designed to take the bikes! And I notice on the latest sort of iteration of tidying up the current 170's, they've all got bike spaces on them, that's the sort of era we're in now, while in the 1980s, we were just trying to keep the railway running. I think (in a political sense) that was

where our priorities lay. And one of the good things now is that we're hopefully through that. We recognize you have a place, but it doesn't necessarily immediately give too much sucker to folk like yourselves sitting at Dunkeld and Birnam or Blair Atholl, and I'm not sure what happens at places like Dalwhinnie these days? Or even Kingussie or certainly Newtonmore? I think most trains stop at Pitlochry, don't they? This is the sort of frustration that I now feel looking back on it, although I can be only too well aware of the kind of arguments that the people who are actually trying to run the railway are living with.

I think an awful lot of those at the top will privately know, but also be aware where the constraints lie at the moment. Whoever the future governments are, either in Scotland or the UK - they may be saying nice things but the railways never quite get high enough up the agenda. In our era, Chris Green was one of the first ones to be able to do it, and some of the others, senior guys in the early days of privatization. Well, the 1980s and then into privatization, they were pretty good at demonstrating that we were trying to keep the cost down but we were also trying to grow the business in a way that was sustainable. But underlying all this, I think there is a love of the industry still.

Roy Hutton

Roy was born in Blair Atholl and is a former train driver. He wanted to go to art college and took a temporary job with the railway, which lasted for 47 years.

I'm Roy Hutton. I was born in Blair Atholl in 1956, and I did 47 years in the railway. I'm retired now. I left school, I did fifth and sixth year in school and I wanted to go to art college, but I failed History of Art (I'm sure it was), that I needed in those days. I thought, "Right, I'll take a year out, go to night school whatever, and get my History of Art, get into art college".

My father worked in the railway as well. He was in the signal box he said, "They're looking for trainees - trainee drivers in the railway." I thought, "That'll do for a year, until I get back into college." 47 years later! I just stuck it out, I stayed. I loved it. You start off as traction trainee and after (I think it was) 6 months, you then became a second man. You were with a driver all the time, and you were coupling the engine off and on and making the driver's tea - things like that. Then after 5 years as a second man, you got passed out to be a driver, but you were only a relief driver at that time, until a vacancy came up.

I got my driver's post in 1987 - 12 years as a second man and then finished as a driver in 2022. There were six of us started at the same time in Perth and five of them moved away down south to get driving sooner, but I loved Perth. Driving up to inverness, Aberdeen, all over Scotland and I didn't fancy moving down south. So, I could have been a driver a lot quicker, but I was happy in Perth. Whereas nowadays, if a vacancy comes up, somebody off the street applies for it and they're a driver right away! I don't agree with that; there's a lot of mistakes made, well not a lot, but mistakes are made because they don't have the experience.

When I started in 1975, most of the drivers were from the Second World War, they had come out of an army railway job. A lot of them were virtual alcoholics at that time and we young guys, the second men, did a lot of the driving because they were lying in the corner drunk! But nowadays, there's zero tolerance of alcohol, which that's as it should be.

You're on your own now as a driver, whereas in those days, you always had a second man. Two of you so you could talk, have a good laugh in the cab. It can get a bit lonely now at times in the cab; nobody is allowed in the cab when the train is moving unless they have a cab 'pass' - Network Rail guys can come up. Your manager can come in but, nobody else. Years ago, coming out of Edinburgh and approaching the Forth Rail Bridge, the guard would come up and say, "I've got some American tourists want to take photos?", and I would say, "yeah, bring them up." So, they came up the front taking photos. It was great, there were no issues, but now they don't want that now, which I can see their point.

Reflecting on the computerisation of engine driving, Roy said: I'm not a computer buff, I can barely switch them on! If there are any faults in the trains, you just get lights coming up and you have to go back and have a look and see what's wrong and it's above my head, all that stuff. I've seen a few of the new drivers driving white knuckled, they're frightened to make a mistake and that to me is not the way to drive a train. You should be relaxed, concentrating obviously, but go through school, the training school. One of the things they told is me is, "It's difficult to get in this job, very easy to get out. Watch what you're doing." Which is not something you want in your mind.

Most people who join the railway, that's them for life. It's very rarely that you see somebody leave. I used to have a freight train. You left Perth, it was about 12 noon and you had coal wagons for Murthly - you dropped some off, the full ones. Dunkeld, Pitlochry, Blair Atholl, and we worked that up to Dalwhinnie, changed over with an Inverness crew coming down with the empty wagons and as we went back to Perth, we picked the empty ones up from other freight trains. You come up, there'd be a passenger [train] behind you, so you get put into Blair Atholl and the driver would say, "Come on, let's go over to the pub for half an hour."

One of my favourite jobs up here was the snow plough, the two engines and a big v-shaped plough at the front and back. This went back and forward to Dalwhinnie to keep Drumochter open. Some of those drifts you were hitting, they were up level with the cab; it was great fun. I absolutely loved it.

[As for the working day,] they reached an agreement that you did your eight hours and you had to be back for the end of the shift. Latterly, the maximum shift was 10 hours but there were other shifts you were only doing five hours, so it balanced out through the week. In contrast, my father was a signalman. Before he finished up, he was on 'the relief', which meant he worked every box from Blair Atholl to Stanley and his home station was Pitlochry. When he was working, say, Dalnacardoch signals, he got 'walking time' from Struan, to walk from there up to the signal box. 20 minutes to the mile, I think they got? But they all had cars, so they all drove but they still got this walking time in those days, which made their money up. They used to do 12 hours a day at Dalnacardoch, 7 days a week, a long week and those days you could work every single day of the year but there was no health and safety like there is now, you can only do a certain amount of hours, then you need time off. But then, a couple of times

when he was in the signal box at Dalnacardoch or Dalnaspidal, one of the two of them, it got snowed in. So he had to phone Pitlochry to get the snow plough to go up and get him and then run him home.

It's a shame to see Blair Atholl station to go the way it has gone.

Sadie Fraser

Sadie was born in Blair Atholl where her father was a gamekeeper on Lude Estate. She recalls the station and the steam engines, including sound effects!

I was born and brought up in Blair Atholl. I was born in Ivy Cottage, I think it's now called Atholl Bank Cottage. My grandfather was a gamekeeper up at Lude and so my father then took my (grand)father's place and we went up to Pitnacree - that's up in Lude. So, I was brought up there, went to school in Blair Atholl and then I went to Pitlochry High School after that. And then there was a stop at Struan and Killiecrankie in these days too. There were no buses or anything so they would have to take the train then. We were all gamekeepers, right through the time of my great grandfather and my mother, she came from the Black Isle. So we went away up to Pitnacree.

I can't remember very much about the station, other than maybe going on holiday or something you know? Growing up on the estate, we had a lot - we had our own garden and we got milk and everything from the estate. We had all that and then we had vans coming round at that time, even from Pitlochry.

I think Blair Castle had a lot to do with the railway. From Pitnacree, you could see the train going up the hill - the puffers, like, the steamy - and then my mother used to say [said as a singing rhyme], "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, I think I can!" And then. "I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could, I thought I could!" That was it coming down the hill - I remember that too. I can remember seeing it, well it was going up to Struan you see, and from PItnacree, you could look all the way if you were away up the valley, up to the top and I know that was it, I can see it, yeah it's puffing away, puffing Billy, TOOT TOOT! It's not as far as Drumochter, it's more or less Struan, but that gets quite an uphill, it was going up the hill, so that's what you were getting, that and then coming down again, into the station too later on.

And I tell you another thing - the carriages - there was no lorries and that, so all the things that came into the village - I mean coal and everything - all the goods were taken by train and then by the horses and cart, you know. We had no telephone or anything and one time when I was going down, I had to go to Dundee, and I couldn't go because the weather was so bad. I had to go down to the station to phone. A mile

and a half down the station and there was a kiosk at the station, so I remember going down to that and phoning from the station. Aye, because in these days, we'd no way of phoning. When I think about it now - well, you never thought about it when you're young.

There was always a guard in the train. And there was always a passage way. And funnily enough, I remember once when I was in Perth, working at that home in Perth and the matron said, "Now Sadie, I tell you what I'll give you. I'll get the gardener to give you raspberries." And so, I had this tin that was like Crawford's tins, a square tin. I'm sitting on the train and there were two lads standing in the passage-way. We were about to stop, and one says, "What've you been doing?!" because the juice was running out of the tin! The juice was running out of the tin into the passage. Oh, I never felt as stupid, I tell you what.

But there was always a guard in the train, you know? There's always somebody you could get hold of but that was it. Aye, I remember one time when I got up to Struan, I was to get off for Trinafour and oh no, the train went on to Dalnacardoch, which was the next stop, and I thought "Oh for goodness sake, there's me going too!" And the guard came up and I said, "They must have put on engines at the back or something." In these days, you hadn't a lot of money with you, you know? The guard came along and I remember he said, "Don't worry, we've got in touch now." Now, that was great you see, they got in touch with an engine coming down so that I could get on to that and stop. "By gum", I said to myself, "When I get back to Struan, no matter whereabout in Struan I stop, I'm getting out here!" That happened when my father and mother were up there - he was working up there when he was nearly retired. I was on night duty, so I'd been going all day without sleep, but I thought "Oh God". I can remember that. I say, "Thank God for the guards on the train" – I had to get notice to somebody to get the train to stop.

I'm sorry I can't give you much. I think beside the station there's some new houses and in one of them is someone who was a nurse in Aberfeldy. Oh well, these were the days, it's nice that you're getting it back, I'm sorry that it's all rundown. There's no station there really, there's still a shed there isn't there? Well, you want it to encourage folk to come, so you would know yourself what's happening in Blair Atholl now.

Sandra Rutherford

Sandra works for ScotRail as manager of the Adopt-a-Station scheme. Prior to this, she was a conductor on the Highland Main Line, which she loves.

My name is Sandra Rutherford and I work for ScotRail in the Adopt-a-Station communities' programme, and I'm here at Blair Atholl to have a look around and hopefully help encourage The Friends of Blair Atholl (station) to make it a pretty place.

I've had quite a long history in ScotRail doing various jobs, booking office and I was also a conductor working out of Perth. So, working on the Highland line was one of my main duties and I loved it. I loved it, I love the Highland line going up to Inverness, it's wonderful.

One of my earliest memories is we had a train that would leave Perth very early in the morning, just after 5 o'clock in the morning, it would come up to Blair Atholl and it would terminate, would come up emptied and it was for the first commuter train coming out of Blair Atholl. You'd stand there, half past 5 in the morning, pitch black in the winter, standing on the platform, seeing your breath in the air because it was so cold. And you'd be there for such a long time. We had to wait on the first freight train going north to pass us; they needed to pass us because if they got stuck then we couldn't go down the hill again, they had to pass us. So I remember standing there looking around - it would be dark, it'd be nice and then you'd see the sunrise come up over the hills. And that's one of my nicest memories.

One of the times I remember standing there thinking, "I'm going to remember this always." Because it was beautiful, you know? The hills, the sun breaking through and just the nice quietness. I think of Blair Atholl, just standing there thinking, "This is lovely, I'm going to remember this."

But Blair Atholl, you know, is unique. You can smell the highland air, there's no taint of pollution or anything, it's lovely. One of the good things about being a conductor… I was on the train one day, when you're waiting on passengers, you're off and on, and someone said my name and I turned round, and it was my husband's old neighbour. They grew up together, he was a few years younger than my husband and they palled about for years and then off he went to London, Edinburgh, wherever. We lost touch.

For decades we lost touch, and then one day, I get on the train, and [he] says, “Oh my goodness, Sandra!” And we got back in touch, and it was wonderful, because then he visited us with his family and we went to visit him and I don’t think they would have made contact again without him jumping on my train.

So that was nice, that was really nice. Another story. I passed out as a conductor, so it was my first week on my own. I was coming up to Inverness and it was just between Pitlochry and Blair Atholl, and there was a little old lady in one of the seats, and I’d been keeping an eye on her since Perth, because o thought she looked too white. I asked her, “Are you okay?” She said, “Oh, I’m fine.” And at one point I thought, “I don’t like the look of you, you’re too, too pale!” So I spoke to the hospitality girl and I got her some water and then, between Pitlochry and Blair Atholl, she collapsed. And it was one of those “Oh my goodness” moments. With other passengers, we got her upright, asked somebody to sit with her and I put out an announcement on the train, “Are there any medical professionals on board that could help me? Could you please come to the rear of the train?” And about five people turned up. Doctors, there was a paramedic, there was a nurse, there was someone who taught first aid, and they all came to help. She had passed out through heat exhaustion, and she was okay, but I put her into first class so that I could keep an eye on her. But yes, everybody in that coach was like, “Oh my goodness.” They got up to help and everybody kept an eye on her. It was very nice - I think people do come together at times like that.

And if you have to stop at any point, if you have any delays, it’s best to be truthful with people. If something has gone pear shaped, people will understand, they really do. And on this line, it can go pear shaped because you’re single track for most of it, and as long as you tell people, “Well, there’s a queue on the line! We’re going no place!” - they’re very good, they are.

Another time the train had come down from Inverness. We were leaving Perth, and the air conditioning cut out completely and it was really nasty because it was a hot, hot, hot day. And it was a five car - you’ve probably seen them come through - you’ve got a three car in front and that’s where hospitality was. As the conductor, you’re meant to be in the rear of your train. The whole idea is that the driver is at the front, so you’ve got a crew member in the front, and you’ve got a crew member in the rear, and you can’t walk between the two different types of carriage, so, I was in the rear. The air conditioning went off - in fact it started to blast hot air and that, that might have been okay-ish but, then there was delays! There was track circuit failure all the way into Edinburgh, and I was honest with people. I walked through and at one point when the train was stopped, I phoned a signaller, I got permission to come down off my train, go into the other one, grab some water from hospitality. In a bag, back on my train and handing it out to people just sips at a time if they needed it, and because you’re visible, because you’re talking to people and saying, “Look, this is what’s wrong”, when we got in, when we eventually got into Edinburgh, the amount of people who came up to thank me. Tourists who’d been away up to Inverness, so this was a long, long journey came up and said, “Thank you very much for that, that was

good.” They were about two hours late, but they were thanking me because they knew what was going on. And people do pool together because when I was saying, “I don’t have a lot of water”, other people would say “Well, I do, and I’ll share it.” It was really nice, you know? And people are nice.

Violet Lawrence

Violet is another longstanding resident in the village; she first came to Blair Atholl in 1954. She has some great stories to tell of the station and the railway.

My name is Violet Lawrence. I'll be 93 in August. I was born in 1931, and I first came to Blair Atholl in 1954. I was living up the hill in the countryside.

When I came here, I remember travelling to Perth and back again on the train. Sometimes the train was so long that it was longer than the platform, and so if you were at the back of the train, you just had jump when you got off! But I was younger then and could do this. Sometimes I wasn't very sure about this – was afraid I'd end up in Inverness or something!

You had to watch because the children would put their heads out of the carriage and if they weren't careful, a spark could go in their eyes. It was very difficult.

And when the train came into Blair Atholl, it filled up with water before it went up the hill again, up Dalwhinnie on its way to Inverness. And that was that.

And this man, Jimmy McBain, he was in the station at Blair Atholl. He was very good. If there was anyone at the big house going on the night train to London, he would phone and say, "The train is going to be quarter or an hour late" or something. He was very good, because you didn't need to rush or anything, and if you did come down, you could sit in the waiting room because he had a fire on there. And if you had a lot of luggage, he would help you across the bridge with it.

And you went down to the station to pay for your coal at the same time, because that's where the coal office was.

The building has been closed for a long time now. I don't know what's going to happen. Will they put it into housing? I don't know. It could be a home for somebody, it would be good for that. I don't even go on the bus any more. I've got a friend that takes me places. I think that's about it.

Willy Hutton

Like his father before him, Willy is a signaller (still working today) – and a keen golfer in Blair Atholl. He describes how much his job has changed over the years.

I'm Willy Hutton, I am currently a signaller in Blair Atholl signal box. I've been in Blair Atholl since 1999, before that previous to that I was on the permanent way which was the 'P way' gang, based in Blair Atholl, I was there for 12 years. Before that I was a signaller for one year in Ballinluig signal box, made redundant from there and at the time when I passed out as a signaller in Ballinluig I was the youngest signalman in Scotland at 18 years old, as I was led to believe you had to be 21 before you could take on the job as a signaller but, maybe rules were changing at the time. I don't know if I managed to get in because my father was also a signaller at the time. So that's a brief history of me. Still as I say, currently working in Blair Atholl, 58 years old and hopefully I'll see out my retirement in the signal box but who knows?

I've stayed in Blair Atholl since I got married but I was originally from Killiecrankie. I was born in Killiecrankie in the house that my mother and father stayed in, which is quite unique being born in a small village rather than being born in the hospital in Perth.

So my dad was the relief signaller, he moved from Aberdeen down to Killiecrankie and he worked the signal box in Killiecrankie and then the relief post came up, so he worked from Stanley signal box all the way up to Dalnaspidal so that would be Stanley, Dunkeld, Ballinluig, Pitlochry, Blair Atholl, Dalnacardoch, and then Dalnaspidal. We worked all those signal boxes at one time. It's different now but it was 8 hour shifts at that point now it's 12 hour shifts so there's four to each box. Four men, so it'll be two on working 12 hour shifts and then two will be off obviously but at that time it was different. Yes, you had resident signallers, but you also had relief signallers as well to cover days off and holidays such like, so they just went to whatever box that were required to work in. And I used to go, I used to do a Saturday shift at Dalnacardoch signal box, which is obviously closed now, and I'd go on a Saturday morning because it was a short shift and go up to Dalnacardoch signal box and sit in the box for a start at 8 o'clock till 12 or something, that was just when I was a small boy - that was maybe the start of it.

What we do in the signal box? It's the safe signalling of trains, working with maintenance staff, protecting them when they have to do their work. And you get level crossing requests, you have to make sure it's safe for them to cross but generally it's just signalling trains safely. Looking after the public, not having two trains heading towards each other, is the main goal. But it's all mechanically locked - it's incredible the engineering in these, compared with when they were first started. I don't know when the first signal box opened in Blair Atholl. There were two signal boxes in Blair Atholl. There was a south and a north box, lots more signal boxes overall, Killiecrankie even had one with my father working there. Struan had a signal box too, but they've been paired back, they were closed a long time ago but that's the future direction. Network Rail will be going down to close all manual signal boxes at some point but hopefully not before I get to retirement age.

There are five manual signal boxes still on the Highland Line: Stanley, Dunkeld, Blair Atholl, Dalwhinnie, and Kingussie. Perth (it's a power box) works to Stanley and Kingussie works to Inverness. Aviemore and Pitlochry both closed at the same time, about six years ago maybe? They changed the whole signalling system in Pitlochry station. It's called a dynamic loop so trains can be approaching the station at the same time when crossing; it's just future proofing I think, that's the way they'll all go at some point. And look how big Aviemore station is, yet they've done away with it as well. So maybe the decision was taken to change the busier ones first? I honestly don't know.

There are really busy spells in the signal box. You've got the lunchtime trains and then you get a quiet spell and then it gets busier again about tea- time, but generally there's always something happening - within an hour, there's always something going on in between that spell of no trains. You'll maybe have maintenance staff looking to go on and do their maintenance and whatever else and then at night-time, the last train that comes down will be the sleeper train from Inverness. And then the next one in the morning is the sleeper train coming back from London. So in between that, we've got about 8 hours. Then that's when they'll [engineers] do their work during the night so there's what's called 'possessions' on. You give them the track so it's their track, they can do what they want in that time, and then they give it back to you in the morning when they're finished. Once they've completed their work, and then all the services start again.

There is no wi-fi - nothing at all - the railway obviously has its own systems - it's BT for computers and such like. No wi-fi, nothing like that. You're not allowed telephones, and in the past, you weren't even allowed a radio because it's a distraction. If you can imagine sitting engrossed in a television programme and you've got a train coming and somebody phones for a level crossing request and you forget the train is there! You've got to be switched on all the time. I just read - read a book, read a newspaper, things like that. Get your rule book out and read a rule book, you know? There are so many different rules – it's quite a lot to take to take in. I would hate to go back to training school now, and to learn it all again or start again!

The bag with the token is long gone - gone a long, long, time ago. That was way before my time. My father probably worked it, he probably worked it at Killiecrankie. It was a token to say you're okay to go into the next section but then it changed to what was called the 'Scottish region token-less block'. So, they're all interlocked - everyone's interlocked, so you can't pull one lever unless you've pulled another lever. That's great if everything is working correctly, but if you get problems, if things going wrong, that's when you have to use the rules. There are special rules for passing signals at danger, which is taboo - that's very, very serious if it happens. If you're having to implement that, there's so much criteria that has to be in place before you can tell a driver, "Right, pass that signal at danger." If you imagine, it's a single line, the signal is down - if the other signal box tells a train at that end to pass a signal at danger and you do the same in the single line, what's going to happen? So, there are so many different rules and steps that have to be brought into play before you can do that - that's only if there's a breakdown of the system obviously.

This can and does happen, but not as bad as it used to be, thankfully. Whether it's the new system they bought in - they brought in a new system from Blair Atholl, so we now work down to the Stanley signal box. Stanley is pretty much the hub of the area just now, you've got Perth and then Stanley, but Stanley has a big responsibility, they're doing a lot more work than what we're doing. So, we're working to them at the moment. The new system that's been brought in is a lot better than the old system, which was getting pretty antiquated. This new system is all computerised. You could sit in here on a laptop and work it, believe it or not. It's that fancy, very good.

The only accident I can remember was when somebody driving a car got hit on a level crossing down at Aldclune. If I remember correctly, he hadn't phoned the signal box and tried to cross himself. He saw a train coming, reversed, didn't reverse far enough and the front of the car was struck, but he was okay. He survived it. We had a derailment once outside Blair Atholl when a tree was blown over. The train hit that and derailed. Apart from that, in this area there's not been many accidents. They had a big derailment down at Pitlochry years ago with the train coming off it just outside Pitlochry. It got derailed because of broken fish plates. (The two rails are joined together by fish plates.) Both fish plates broke at the same time and with the trains going over it, it kept knocking the rails apart and a train finally came off the track and landed down the embankment. I don't think there were any fatalities with that one again thankfully.

Looking back over my time on the railway, I think that when I began, it was a more localised railway. If the signal manager said to somebody "D'you know anyone that's needing a job?", you could put them forward and the signal manager would interview them and take them on if, if they were favourable for the job. But it's not like that now. It all has to go down to Glasgow or Edinburgh and it's human resources and so it's not that way anymore, unfortunately, because it loses the localised employing of people. When I started in the box, it was after my father said to the signal manager, "My son's looking for work". That's how I got a start there, same as when the box at

Ballinluig was closed, they were looking for staff in the permanent way gang up here, so my father spoke to the ganger at the time, and I got an interview and got to start there. So, it was all localised, it was within the area, the majority of the staff were all local, everybody knew each other. But that's all gone obviously. And you had the yard up there, how many men were employed? I don't know but now, what have you got in the railway here now? You've just got the four of us that work in the signal box and that's it.

Robert Sutherland

Robert came to Blair Atholl in 1960, aged 13, when his father started work in the South signal box. Steam and Beeching feature in Robert's account and there is a rare personal recollection of the Black Island Camp.

My name is Robert Sutherland. I came to Blair Atholl in 1960 or thereabouts. My dad was a railwayman and he worked in the South signal box in Blair Atholl. The reason we came to Blair Atholl was a former station which was Kildary,[3] up in Ross-shire just above Invergordon - it closed due to the Beeching cuts and that's the reason that we came to Blair Atholl. My dad was offered two jobs, which was Blair Atholl and (I think) Slochd, so that's the reason we came here. I'd have been thirteen .

[Viv asked: Do you remember when the Duke of Atholl's private waiting room was demolished at the station?] I don't remember it being demolished but I remember it being there, and then obviously demolished but I couldn't tell you what year that was. I remember the bookstall, and I remember it closing – I'd imagine it would have been about 1962, something like that. It was possibly just one of those things that happened, and you didn't pay any attention to it, because at that time, a lot of things were – not actually collapsing – jobs were disappearing, the engine shed was closed down, a lot of railway staff had to leave the area for other jobs – there was no work at that time. There was still the North signal box, and then the station after it, and finally the North signal box closed, and even after it, the only place left was the South box, really, and the crossing. But everything disappeared quite quickly, I would say within a year or two of us coming to Blair Atholl, all this had changed – the railway was non-existent to what it was when we came here. But trying to think of years, and putting a date on it is very difficult now.

[3] The station was originally known as Parkhill station. It was opened on 1 June 1864 by the Inverness and Aberdeen Junction Railway – later the Highland Mainline. Its name was changed to Kildary on 1 May 1868. It closed to passengers and goods traffic on 13 June 1960. The stationhouse building was designated a grade B listed building on 31 August 1983 then removed from listing on 23 November 2021 because the building had been demolished.

[Viv added: But the Beeching Report didn't come out until 1965, so either your family came here later then you remember, or it wasn't the Beeching cuts that forced the move?] Well, whether the report came out then or not, I just I couldn't tell you, but a lot of the cuts happened long before [19]65[4]. Our station closed. That's the reason we had to move, you know. And we weren't the only place that closed -there were lots of others too on the Highland Line. It was all due to the cuts, or the cutbacks, the redevelopment of the railways. I can remember, for instance, the Dornoch branch line, from the Mound to Dornoch, that was still going when I was a kiddie – it was closed before we came down here.[5] The Aberfeldy branch, from Ballinluig to Aberfeldy, was running when I came to Blair in 1960; within a very short time it closed, unless I am very much mistaken.[6]

I just can't say when the engine shed actually closed, but I remember some of the drivers that were there at the time, and they were out of a job. Within a couple of years of us coming to Blair Atholl, that was all gone. But I cannot put a date on it. I was still at the school then. I did a year and a half in Pitlochry School. I actually left school when I was 14, because my birthday was in the school holidays – you left school at 15 in those days. So I had a year and a half at Pitlochry School. I was definitely working in [19]63, because that was a very bad winter – I can remember it well – and the engine shed and everything was closed by then. I never thought of it too much at the time, because my dad was ok in a job. But my father-in-law, for instance, he was an engine driver, and he eventually ran on the 'railcars' as we called them –'the 'local' – after coming off the steam engine. I don't know how long that was on the go – before they were finally withdrawn – a year or two, maybe [19]65/66? I'm not sure.

[What were the railcars?] Just more-or-less what you see nowadays, the two parts of a train as we call them. There was one that used to come in, stayed the night in the sidings, and went to Perth again in the morning – the 'local' – it would be Perth to Blair Atholl. He drove it for a spell.

[4] Robert's account is accurate. Although busy during WW2, after the war, the railways were in a poor state and in 1948 were nationalised. The following year, the Branch Lines Committee of the British Transport commission was formed 'with a brief to close the least-used branch lines. This resulted in the loss (or conversion to freight-only operation) of some 3,318 miles of railway between 1948 and 1962.' The Beeching Reports were then published in 1963 and 1965, promising that the railways in future would be run profitably. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beeching_cuts

[5] The Dornoch Light Railway was opened in 1902 by a group of Dornoch businessmen including the Duke of Sutherland and operated by the Highland Railway; the railway connected to the Far North Line seven miles away at the Mound. Two years later a Station Hotel was built at Dornoch as a 'magnet for wealthy tourists'. By the 1950s, with increased car use, the railway's use had declined. It was finally closed in 13 June 1960. (Aberfeldy branch: See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dornoch_Light_Railway)

[6] The Aberfeldy branch line closed on 3 May 1965, two months before it would have celebrated its centenary. The goods service had already been withdrawn on 25 January that year. (See https://breadalbane-heritage.org.uk/aberfeldy-weem-heritage-walk/20-aberfeldy-branch-line/)

I wouldn't say it was the Beeching cuts that closed the engine shed. It was the redevelopment of the railway – it was the diesels replacing steam. But that didn't finally finish until about [19]68 or so, when steam was off the go altogether. Steam was away from the line up here by that time. In fact I remember seeing my first diesel engine, and that was in Kildary, before we came down here. So diesels were in, before the railway was actually closed, although it was well known that that was the end of it.

The turntable was still in operation when we came here, because there were still steam engines in the engine shed for propelling trains up The Hill, as we call it, but when that finally ceased, just don't know, but it must have been about [19]62/63. That's just a guess. Very early anyway.

I can remember the engine shed. It was open, the tower, the water, all that kind of thing. I remember when we were kids there was a water column just at the crossing, and in the winter time, when it was cold or frosty, there was a brazier there to keep the frost off the column. We could stand there and keep the fire going with the signalman watching us. You know, one of the signalmen was my father. We would stand there, just keep back from the line – there was no health and safety in those days. The engine would draw up, it would take the water. We'd be standing and the engine was just from me to you – and not a word was said about it. We behaved ourselves of course. But you couldn't do that kind of thing nowadays.

I remember that. Steam engines were still on the go then, and that train (at that particular time of night), would have been the London train. Because the wheel tapper was here, he went around the whole train, tapping the wheels. It stayed for an allocated stop, took in water, tested the wheels and then went on. Because it was quite an important train. The next place was probably Glasgow, I don't know. 'The London', as it was called – a through train. People would have got on here too. Then it would have changed engines at Motherwell or Glasgow, one of these areas. But as I said, you couldn't do that kind of thing now. You're not even allowed off the end of the platform now. We were trusted, and that was it. It was OK. We were shouted at by the signalman if we put on too much coal! If it was a cold night, that's where we hung about – not many of us – three, four maybe at the most. Yeh. Great fun!

I'm not aware of any accidents, nothing comes to mind, trains or crossings. We crossed the line often ourselves, and never thought anything of it, because we knew what trains were, having been brought up on the railway, we knew. Nowadays you couldn't do that – there are signs that say 'If you do it and you're caught….' There were always signs that said, 'Do not trespass on the railway', but it's very severe now.

I'm just trying to remember – thinking about crossing the railway, we used to cross at a place up at the camp, to go to the river to fish and that. It was a crossing at one

time, although it was blanked off. We never thought anything of it, we just looked both ways and if there was nothing coming, we crossed - a very dangerous thing to do now, because those trains don't make a noise. With the steam engine, you could hear it. A steam engine is a very noisy thing if you're in the cab. I've been in the cab a few times – very noisy, very dangerous, and a very demanding job. The driver and fireman don't get a minute's peace. It's not even like driving a car, there are so many things to look at – it's a very demanding job. Very dangerous, very noisy, not a pleasure to work in. I've travelled in one or two cabs, unofficially, just short distances. Even when standing still, they're quite noisy, dangerous too. You had to watch where your hands went – the boiler, that kind of thing. But a fireman or driver was a very demanding job. They couldn't take their eyes off anything.

They'd have started off being a cleaner first, before they became a fireman and then progressed onto driving. And there were more trains [in the past], needing more drivers, so they would have been fairly young people, I know. Most of the drivers we knew were an older generation, because at that time, I don't suppose there would be young people coming into it – very few anyway.

[Viv asked about the 'boiler washer out' job that was done by one of the 1881 drivers, at Greenock station – was this demotion?] No, I wouldn't think so. It would be a good job. Its not everybody that would be able to do it. If he was a boiler inspector/wash-out man – a boiler's a very difficult thing to get into, and really, to get to know about it, you'd need to be a bit of an expert. The engines got washed out, possibly by a fireman and a driver every now and again. If they went to the Works to get washed out, it was an inspection job to wash them out. I know this because although I was never <u>on</u> the railway myself, I was always reading railway books – I was always keen on the railway. I'm very keen on steam engines, though you don't see many about here. I've read quite a bit about them. No, to be a boiler inspector, well that's a high up job nowadays, to inspect a boiler for insurance purposes – there's not many can do it. There's not many boiler-smiths now. It's a highly paid job – a good job to get into if you can get it!

I was a joiner to trade. When I left school, I went into forestry on the local estate, and a joiner's apprenticeship came up, which I got and took it, and I've been a joiner all my days, which was handy. It meant I stayed in the area, I always had work, not like o lot of young lads or people that have to leave. I was very lucky. I had employment here, I was quite happy. It's the way things go! And my brother's the same – he's a joiner, he served his time here – we're in the same boat, as it were.

I knew Mike Shanto's dad and mum very well. There was a man in the forestry as well – Freeman Skinner, his name was – he worked here, he was a railwayman. He was 'Newfie' – Newfoundland. A lot of these people came here with the Forestry Corps – they had an area – the Black Island Camp – the Canadians were in there. There are

still one or two brick buildings. The cells are still there, it's a complete block, and there's one or two other bits that were pump houses or something. I don't remember it, but there is a concrete area where they had a big shed, but that was all gone, of course, before we came here. There was a crossing and a platform – you can still see where the platform was – I cannot remember if that platform was still there when we came to Blair Atholl – it possibly was, I just can't remember. But the crossing gates were at the end of the platform. You can still see the straining posts where the gates were and where the track goes across the railway.

[Viv asked about the cells – what were they for?] It would have been for holding soldiers who had got out of hand. You can see by the bars on the windows, there's four cells. And you see how the door is back in from the entrance? That's where the sentry would have stood if it was raining! That is what I was told – what I'm led to believe, from a man that knew the Canadians, which was my father-in-law. So there's a few stories about that, unofficially. They used to poach a lot, both salmon and trout – but anyone who lived at those times was poachers! If you get anybody my age that lived in the country and said that they weren't a poacher, I would say you're looking at a liar! 'Cos everybody fished for trout or caught rabbits, you know. But one particular story was one of the soldiers gave him the loan of a rifle for shooting deer, and he never got it back on time, so he couldn't go on parade, the soldier, so he had to go off ill until he got his rifle back. And that is true! But they were ordinary men, like everyone else. Anything for a quick buck, poaching those days. I thought that was great – he couldn't go on parade 'cos he had no rifle – the poacher still had it! But he couldn't tell them that – he had to go off ill! That's another one.

So that's it. I maybe haven't been a lot of help to you. But there you are. I've seen lots of old photos - of other sheds, and Goat Street and the coal yard - that's in books already.

Blair Atholl Station – Oral Histories

Friends of Blair Atholl Station 2024

We asked twenty of Blair Atholl's mostly older residents and frequent visitors to share with us their personal recollections of Blair Atholl and its station over the years.

Their stories were recorded and can be heard on our YouTube channel:

youtube.com/@FriendsofBlairAthollStation

This book contains the transcripts of those interviews

With thanks to those who gave of their time and memories and shared them with us

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