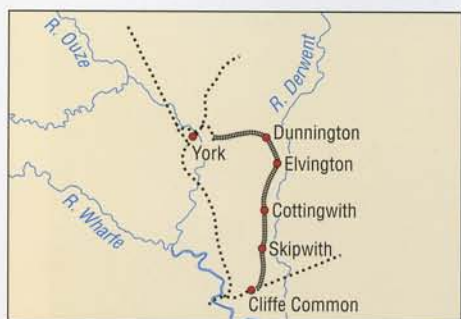


# DERWENT VALLEY LIGHT RAILWAY



The Light Railways Act of 1896 inspired many minor railways, the majority of which were rural or local branch lines aimed primarily at passenger traffic. Something rather different was the Derwent Valley Light Railway, whose 16-mile route from Layerthorpe, in York, to Cliffe Common, near Selby, was built between 1911 and 1913. Conceived largely as a freight line, it nevertheless had eleven stations, most of which were built in an appealing cricket-pavilion style. Its passenger services were operated by rudimentary railbuses. With connections at both ends and a meandering route that paralleled at a distance the direct line

from York to Selby via Naburn, it had a certain diversionary value, and was used in this way by the NER during World War I. Despite this, it had little appeal to the larger companies that surrounded it and so remained independent.

The DVLR managed to escape the Grouping of 1923 and, even more unusually, nationalization, and it never came under the control of British Railways. By then passenger services had long gone, having ceased on 1 September 1926, but there was enough freight (mostly agricultural – hence the DVLR was affectionately known as the Farmers' Line) to keep the railway open, and firmly in private hands, until the 1960s. In World War II it again proved its value as a diversionary route, but more important was its role in transporting bombs to the big RAF Bomber



▲ On the outskirts of York, near Tang Hall, an old bridge over the former trackbed has been decorated with sculpture by Sustrans and with graffiti by local residents.

▼ The DVLR shed at York Layerthorpe, a ramshackle affair, was indicative of the somewhat primitive nature of much of the railway.



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▲ Murton Park station (formerly Wheldrake but rebuilt on its present site) is the headquarters of the Derwent Valley Light Railway preservation society. This shows the characteristic cricket pavilion-cum-bungalow style favoured by the DVLR in 1913 for its stations.

▼ This is the menu and toast list used at a DVLR celebration dinner to mark the coronation of King George V in 1911. The diversity of toasts indicates the general spirit of optimism of that era.



▼ Freight trains continued to operate throughout the railway's life. Locomotives were ancient and the wagons were varied, adding to the character of this private railway. Here, a typical train passes Dunnington Halt.



Command airfield at Elvington (now the Yorkshire Air Museum). It was said that the line's overgrown nature made it naturally camouflaged.

In 1964 British Railways closed the line from Selby to Hull, and the Derwent Valley's southern mainline link turned into a branch line. A year later the southern section, from Cliffe to Wheldrake, was closed, and then progressive closures took place up to 1973, by which time only the 4 miles from Dunnington to Layerthorpe remained open. Between 1977 and 1979 the railway's private owners operated regular steam services during the summer to attract tourists, and limited freight trains continued to run until 1981, at which point closure brought the story to an end. The remaining track was lifted soon after.

Today, despite its relatively recent demise, much of the route has gone. The northern section, from Layerthorpe to Osbaldwick, is part of a Sustrans cycle route. The next station, Murton Park, is the headquarters of the Derwent Valley Light Railway, a preservation society with a collection of locomotives and rolling stock, a fully restored DVLR station and a short length of track. South from here there is little to see, with the trackbed returned to the fields from which it came. Near Wheldrake are old warehouses and loading bays formerly linked to the railway. Skipwith station has been fully restored as a private house, complete with two carriages, while at the site of Cliffe Common there is an old platform and beyond it the grand junction station, also now a private dwelling.

▼ Skipwith station has been delightfully restored. The two carriages adjoining it are used for holiday letting.



▲ At a warehouse complex near Wheldrake, a short stretch of track survives in the tarmac, a reminder of the line's dependence upon goods traffic.





▲ Cliffe Common was the southern end of the DVL, where it met the Selby-to-Hull line. All has gone save the big old station, which is now a private house, and a surviving section of overgrown platform.

▼ This distant view of Thorganby station, near the southern end of the line, was taken soon after it was opened. Passenger services were still operating (they finished in 1926) and the station buildings give a good sense of the economical nature of the line's structures.

