

The oldest Adderbury residents recall that the whistling of the train would remind their teachers that the school day was over, whereas their Bloxham contemporaries would have had time to get to the station some 200 yards west of their school (where the A361 still rises over the railway cutting) so that efforts could be made to drop coppers down the engine chimneys as the Ports-to-Ports passed beneath them. The north-bound train would have left Banbury some two hours earlier. With the return of peace the train was reinstated to travel via Oxford and the branch line reverted to its rural calm.

The Woodford – Banbury link had a stopping service between those two towns. As part of the through route it became particularly useful in both World Wars, especially the Second, and to serve intensive freight workings extensive marshalling yards were constructed at both places.

Marylebone was in its early days a quiet station – the only London terminus where, according to the late Ronald Knox, one could hear birdsong. A contemporary surgeon, having been asked by a grateful patient to recommend somewhere peaceful for a long convalescence, is reported to have replied, “Have you thought of Marylebone Station?” Either he was being facetious or he intended to refer to the adjacent railway hotel. This still stands, no longer a place of hospitality, fronting Marylebone Road immediately south of the station. In British Railways days it was the headquarters of the whole nationalised system. Marylebone Station is, of course, a short walk along Melcombe Street to Baker Street, and thus the nearest London terminus to 221B. Sadly it opened at the end of the decade which saw the tragic incident at the Reichenbach Falls and, although Holmes was resurrected, as someone said, he was ‘never quite the same again.’ Perhaps for this reason the station does not appear as the departure point in any of his and Watson’s subsequent railway journeys, but it is unthinkable that the Great Detective did not on occasion travel on the Great Central.

Relations between the G.C.R and the Metropolitan were never easy, the joint line became congested, and the G.C. in collaboration with the Great Western constructed during the first decade of the twentieth century a new line from Aynho Junction (on the latter’s Banbury – Oxford route) through Bicester and High Wycombe to Northolt, whence the G.C. was solely responsible for a new link line (past the future site of the Wembley Exhibitions and Stadium) to a junction with the original main line at Neasden. The ‘new’ line was opened in stages and in 1910 throughout. It served such towns as Gerrard’s Cross and Beaconsfield.