

its terraced streets remain, once the homes of engine drivers, station staff and workshop employees but now as starter-homes for those who work elsewhere. Among its community activities there is however a thriving historical society founded two years before its counterpart at Banbury.

Equally short-sighted was the 'singling' for reasons of economy of the Aynho – Prince's Risborough section of the 'new' route in the late 1960s. With the onset of privatisation and the popularity of the services between Birmingham, Banbury and Marylebone of Chiltern Railways (one of the best performing private train operating companies) this caused foreseeable but apparently unforeseen congestion, delays and operational difficulties. The double track was accordingly re-instated at a cost of some 80 million pounds some 30 years later. As a result the fastest trains from Banbury now reach the capital in just over the hour.

Fortunately Marylebone defied closure proposals and survives, busier than ever it was in G.C.R. days, as a terminus for mainly commuter traffic to Aylesbury over the original joint G.C./Metropolitan line of 1899, and to Banbury, Birmingham and places beyond over the 'new' route of 1910. No-one will hear birdsong there now.

Quanton Road also survives, as a steam preservation centre. A distinctive feature there is the recent reconstruction of the old L.N.W.R. station (itself contemporary with, and constructed on the same principles as, the 1851 Crystal Palace), which once stood as that company's terminus at Rewley Road, Oxford. That too had suffered the indignity of use as a tyre depot in its later days.

Further north the section of the 1899 London extension of the old G.C.R. between Loughborough and a new station in Leicester's northern outskirts is also preserved for steam operation, with the same company title. It is indeed the only preserved double track main line railway in Britain. August 2008 will see the fortieth anniversary of the end of main line steam working on British railways and, with its re-creation of steam-hauled express trains and even 'Windcutters', the present G.C.R. evokes better than anywhere else sights and sounds which, once familiar to all, will now be recollected only by the middle-aged and elderly.

Another few miles of preserved line can be seen at Ruddington, south of Nottingham, as part of the Nottingham Transport Heritage Centre but this, known as the G.C.R. (Nottingham) is separated from the revived Loughborough-Leicester section by the main line of the old Midland Railway. The G.C.R. crossed this by a now demolished bridge which will be astronomically expensive to reinstate.