

## The Development of Semley Railway Station



Semley station may well be unique for the site chosen for its development could truly be described as 'greenfield'. It was more than a mile from the village, had no road leading to it, and was almost entirely surrounded by common land. It is doubtful whether more than 100 people were living within a mile when it opened, yet in time it was to become a very successful enterprise.

The station stands roughly midway between Salisbury and Yeovil and is the highest point above sea level along the 40 mile track. When the station opened for business on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1859, the rolling stock was the responsibility of South-Western in exchange for a percentage of the takings. The line was built by a relatively small company - The Salisbury and Yeovil Railway - at a cost of about £16,500 a mile. This charge included all the bridges, tunnels, fencing, roads and 440 acres of land.

The main purpose of Semley station was to service the needs of Shaftesbury about 2½ miles away, for the position of this town, on top of a hill, presented too many difficulties to have a railway of its own. The name plate on the Semley station platform proclaimed 'Semley for Shaftesbury'.

Although the station was too isolated to benefit from much passenger traffic, there was always a steady flow to and from Shaftesbury. Coaches, initially horse drawn, were sent from the Grosvenor Hotel in Shaftesbury to meet most of the trains and in later years, taxis did good business.

Shaftesbury had long had a large, if somewhat seasonal, cattle market and the railway played its part in the onward transportation of the livestock. A by-product of the local dairy farms was that the young cattle reared for beef was very popular with butchers and the railway brought buyers from far away where demand was greater and prices higher. Driven along the roads from the Shaftesbury market to Semley station, and years later hauled in lorries, the livestock were enclosed in wooden railed pens at a special siding to await railway cattle trucks.

A major part of Semley station's success as a commercial enterprise was due to the development of a milk factory quite literally on its doorstep. Until the commercial possibilities of the railway came to be appreciated, the lives of most people in the area were dominated by dairy cows. Even the pub landlord and the vicar kept cows. Practically the entire local population survived either directly or indirectly on cattle - much of the farmland here was unsuitable for arable crops. The surplus milk they produced was generally made into cheese, but the railway brought big changes - it gave farmers the opportunity to sell their milk more profitably in liquid form.

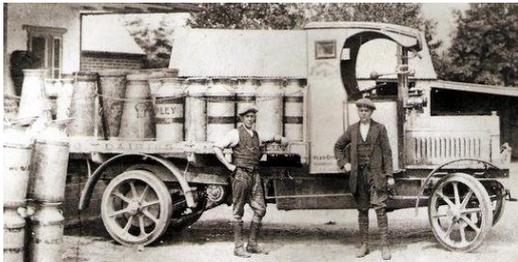
Large conical shaped churns were used - made so to give them stability - containing 17 gallons of milk each - were collected from local farms and delivered direct to London where there was a ready market. These churns were replaced in the early 1900s with steel 10 gallon churns which could be packed tighter in transit and again, in the 1950's, with a lighter aluminium one.



With the exception of the farms close to the factory who transported their own milk, full churns were collected from farms each day by the factory's own lorries. Every dairy farm had its own milk stand at the roadside where the full churns were collected and empty ones left for the next day's use.

In time, milk left Semley station in specially made, huge, glass lined tanks each containing thousands of gallons. Between the wars more milk left Semley station for London every day than from any other station in the country.

Milk stand at Senior's Farm Semley 1960's



At the height of its popularity it is estimated that Semley station provided work for about 20 railway employees, 30 working from the station for other businesses, and 80 connected with the milk factory.

Left: Churns collected by the factory's own lorries c1920