

RAILWAYS

The origins of Scotland's railways lay in wagonways, constructed to take horse-drawn (or gravitationally moved) wagons of coal from mines to places where they could be shipped to market. The earliest recorded **wagonway**, constructed in 1722, and still traceable in parts, linked the **Tranent coal pits in East Lothian** to the port of **Cockenzie**.



© East Lothian Museums Service via SCRAN

Others followed, principally around the Firth of Forth, but also linking up to canals, such as the Monkland, east of Glasgow. The last working wagonway, from Fordell, Fife, operated until the mid 20th century.

The concept of a railway as a general purpose link between settlements developed in the early years of the 19th century: the Kilmarnock and Troon Railway opened in 1812. The Edinburgh & Dalkeith, the Garnkirk and Glasgow and the Newtyle to Dundee railway had been added by the early 1830s.

The 1840s saw a dramatic increase in railway development, with the principal line from Edinburgh to Glasgow opening. The earliest railway ferry, from Granton to Burntisland, also dated from this decade.



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By the late 19th century, Scotland had a dense network of railways, serving almost every inhabited part of the mainland. This **railway station at Oban** opened in July 1880.

The many companies which had initiated railways had, by now, amalgamated into just five: the North British, operating in the east and south east; the Caledonian, active in the centre and west of Scotland; the Great North of Scotland Railway, in the north east, as well as the Glasgow and South Western, and the Highland operating in the areas which their names suggest.

Further amalgamations, in the 1920s, left Scotland with parts of networks run by two companies, the London and North Eastern Railway and the London Midland Scottish Railway. Nationalisation, in 1948, brought these under state control – as also, under a different nationalisation, the remaining colliery railways. Finally, the 1980s saw a return to private operation, with trains and track under separate ownership.

The lines, many now closed, still incorporate many fine engineering feats – notably in bridges, viaducts and tunnels. This picture shows the **Laigh Milton viaduct, East Ayrshire**, Scotland's oldest railway viaduct.



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Other infrastructure includes railway stations, goods and coal yards, engine sheds, signal boxes and housing for its workforce.

The impact of railways went far beyond its own immediate infrastructure. It was instrumental in determining industrial and residential location; it contributed to coastal and inland resort development; it revolutionised marketing.



Former railway hotels are still to be found in locations long since deprived of their railway connections. **Newtown St Boswells, Roxburghshire**, grew up in the mid 19th century around the railway station.

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It was the railway companies who built much of the ferry infrastructure and operated their vessels. The extent of still-operating lines may now be drastically curtailed, but the long-term legacy of the railway age is still to be found over much of Scotland.

Looking at railway lines, used and disused

Between the laying out of the Scottish railway network in the 1840s, and the expansion of motor road haulage in the 1920s, the railways were essential to the working of the Scottish countryside. They remained important until about 1960.

The most important evidence for understanding how railways fitted into country life has often been removed. Many country branches closed forty years ago, and on lines that are still open modernisation has erased many clues. So old maps are particularly important. ***If you look at one you can ask:***

- **Why** are the stations where they are? **How** would people have travelled to them, and brought animals to them?
- **What** was at the station?
 - Sidings for goods and perhaps a goods shed?
 - A loading bank for sheep, cattle and horses?
 - A post office?
 - An inn?
- **Why** did the railway follow the route it did? Trains cannot climb a gradient of steeper than 1 in 60 or 90 feet (30 m) in a mile, and so they had to be carefully planned to follow hillsides.
- **How** many earthworks (cuttings and embankments) are there, and how large are they? The bigger they are, the more the line cost to build. Most railways were built before the development of steam-powered mechanical diggers. Their embankments and cuttings were made by the muscles of men and horses.

Larger scale maps show other features, particularly local sidings which might serve only one or two farms. Or there might be short former lines for taking waste from coal mines to pit heaps.