

North Berwick Railway Station

A brief history

1846 - Plans for North Berwick branch line

The original plans for a North Berwick branch line were drawn up in 1846, and show the line almost exactly as it was eventually built. The main change was to the planned terminus at North Berwick harbour, which was shown being reached via an embankment and a new sea wall six metres high, running along in front of Forth Street.

1849 - Line opened from Drem to Williamstone

The first service was four trains per day from Drem to Williamstone, from where "horse conveyances" connected with North Berwick.

1850 - Line opened from Williamstone to North Berwick

Although some cuttings and bridges had already been built allowing for a double track, a single line was laid for economy.

1850 - North Berwick and Dirleton stations opened

The original passenger station at North Berwick was constructed near Abbey Farm close to the old Priory. It was opened on 17th June 1850, when the temporary station at Williamstone was closed. Originally there was a single passenger platform, and goods facilities that catered for an inward traffic of general merchandise, manure, coal and livestock, whilst fish, grain, potatoes and guano from the Bass Rock were all transported outwards.



67670 leaving North Berwick. Gresley "V1" class 2-6-2T
Photographs S. Auld.

1856 - Cost saving led to a short-lived horsedrawn service
but the steam service was returned on 1st May 1857.

1859 - Visit by Albert Edward, Prince of Wales

North Berwick rapidly grew in popularity as a fashionable resort during the 1860s, helped by the visit of the future King Edward VII in 1859. The newly built Royal Hotel (on the site where the Royal Apartments now stand) was the first hotel to be built, followed by others including the Dalrymple Arms and the Marine. By 1880 there were three golf clubs in the town, and North Berwick's population had increased by more than one thousand.

1923 - North British Railway absorbed by LNER

This was the age of the familiar LNER posters advertising North Berwick as a golfing and seaside holiday destination. Throughout the period between the wars the number of passengers using the station averaged 55,000 annually, although the goods traffic declined rapidly.

1930 - Regular steam railcar service starts on North Berwick line

1948 - British Railways era began

Goods traffic on the North Berwick line was in decline; nearby Dirleton station closed in 1954. Diesel trains were introduced in the fifties, although North Berwick passenger steam trains continued until 1962.

1958 - Diesel trains introduced

This was an hourly service through to Corstorphine.

1968 - North Berwick goods yard and signal box closed

1969 - Passenger service reprieved by Minister of Transport

Following the infamous Beeching Report, the British Railways Board had announced its intention to withdraw all passenger trains between Edinburgh and North Berwick. A long campaign was fought by East Lothian County Council, the Town Councils of North Berwick and Prestonpans and the North Berwick Negotiating Committee to save the service.

1970 - A much reduced passenger service introduced

A very basic service continued throughout the seventies, and by the early 1980s there were signs that passenger numbers were increasing. In 1984 British Rail announced that the future of the North Berwick to Edinburgh service was secure.

1985 - North Berwick station buildings demolished

The remaining platform was shortened and the new station car park was built on the site of the old buildings, whilst the goods yard was sold for housing. The station was now unstaffed, and paytrains were introduced. The resulting reduction in costs along with the new park and ride facility probably led to the revitalisation of the branch line.

1989 - "Sprinters" come into regular use

The ageing diesel multiple units which had served on the North Berwick branch line for nearly thirty years were replaced with Class 150 Sprinter units.



1991 - Drem to North Berwick line electrified

Although rebuilding of bridges on the main line was required to give clearance for the overhead cables, this was not required on the branch line as they had originally been built for a double track.

2002 - Modern Class 322s replaced the original slam door electric trains

2004 - Loco-hauled trains temporarily drafted in while Class 322s were required down south

2007 - New kiosk built

2011 - New Class 380 trains introduced

1988 - Sprinter standing at the platform. The Victorian station buildings have been demolished and replaced with a portacabin. The station became unstaffed in 1985. New housing at Station Court has been built on the site of the old station buildings and goods yard.
Photograph S. Auld



B1 61351 sitting at North Berwick. The old station buildings can be seen in the background. Photograph S. Auld.

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The original station buildings prior to their demolition in 1985. The second platform had been trackless for many years, and the goods yard had been closed in 1968.
Photograph S. Auld

EWS Class 90 leaving North Berwick (2004 - 2005).

Photograph S. Auld



Further reading - these dates and the event timeline have been extracted from Andrew M. Hajducki's book "The North Berwick and Gullane Branch Lines".



Left - Before electrification, a DMU waits at the somewhat neglected North Berwick station. The second platform has not yet been demolished, and the housing at Station Court not yet built. Right - one of the large brick planters on the platform under construction.

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North Berwick In Bloom has worked with ScotRail since 2005, under the Adopt a Station scheme.

In 2007 North Berwick was awarded Best Unstaffed Station in the East of Scotland.

In 2010 the station won First Prize in the Local Station Environment category, and was also awarded a Highly Commended in the Station Garden or Floral Display category, in the ACoRP Community Rail Awards.

Currently North Berwick in Bloom volunteers at the station plant, water and maintain twenty four barrels, four large planters, two trains, a boat and a bicycle!

