

## **Derby Railway Heritage Trail – In Depth**

A deeper look at Derby's historic railway village and its pioneering role in British rail

### **Introduction**

Derby is one of the birthplaces of the railway industry in Britain. From the early 1800s, the city grew into a major hub for rail transport, engineering and manufacturing. The area surrounding Derby Station, known today as the Railway Conservation Area, was once home to workers, workshops and company buildings that helped shape the national network.

This trail takes a deeper look at the historic buildings and places connected to Derby's railway legacy, including one of the country's first planned railway housing estates, the original station site, and the first purpose-built railway hotel outside London.

### **1. Derby Station**

Opened in 1840 and later expanded in 1844, Derby Station became a key part of the Midland Railway network. It was unusual for its time, rather than having three separate stations for each of the rail companies, a single shared site was built, known as the 'Tri-Junct' Station. The station had one main platform, a north and south bay, and seven stabling roads, all connected by a series of carriage turntables.

Designed by Francis Thompson and constructed by Mr Jackson, the station was built on a 26-acre site in Litchurch, on the edge of Derby, at a cost of nearly £40,000. As part of the agreement to consolidate the lines, Derby Corporation built Siddals Road to connect the site to the town centre.

Over time the station expanded again in 1867 and 1881, and by the 20th century it had become one of the largest in the country. It was bombed during both world wars and later redeveloped in the 1980s. The glass roof was lost, but much of the original frontage remains.

To this day, Derby Station (officially renamed Derby Midland Station in 1950) is an active mainline stop. At either end of the original platforms stood two key buildings: the Midland Hotel for first-class passengers, and the Brunswick Inn for second-class passengers and railwaymen.

## **2. Derby Roundhouse**

Built in 1839 by the North Midland Railway and designed by Francis Thompson, Derby's Roundhouse is the oldest surviving locomotive roundhouse in Britain and holds Guinness World Record status. This innovative sixteen-sided structure was constructed around a central turntable and originally served as an engine shed, allowing locomotives to be turned and housed under one roof.

A contemporary description from *The Railways of Great Britain and Ireland* (2nd ed., 1840) details:

“The engine-house is a polygon of sixteen sides, and 190 feet in diameter, lighted from a dome-shaped roof, of the height of 50 feet. It contains sixteen lines of rails, radiating from a single turn-table in the centre... Each of the sixteen stalls will hold two, or perhaps more, engines.”

The Roundhouse continued to operate beyond the age of steam before falling into disuse. Threatened with demolition, it was acquired by Derby City Council in 1994 and upgraded to Grade II\* listing in recognition of its historical significance.

In 2009, it was restored by Maber Architects as part of Derby College's flagship campus. Many original features were retained, including the roof structure and track layout.

(Please note: the building is not open to the public)

## **3. Railway Workers' Cottages (North Street, Midland Place & Railway Terrace)**

Built between 1841 and 1843, these cottages were some of the first purpose-built railway housing in the country. The estate formed a triangle of streets, North Street (now Calvert Street), Midland Place and Railway Terrace - spelling out “NMR” for North Midland Railway. There were 92 houses in total, with a mix of designs to reflect status and rank within the company.

Leeds Place and Sheffield Place were later added, named after key cities along the line. In the 1970s, the area faced demolition, but thanks to campaigns from the Derby Civic Society and Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust, the cottages were saved, restored and modernised.

Features such as maroon-painted doors, new streetlamps and railings helped return the area to its original character. The project was recognised with a Civic Trust Award. Rents were once just two shillings a week, though census records show some houses had as many as 12 people living in just two rooms.

#### **4. The Railway Institute (Now the Waterfall Pub)**

The idea for the Midland Railway Institute began as early as 1850, when workers met in a room at the Brunswick Inn to set up a reading room. They later moved to Leeds Place, then to part of the station building, and eventually to a purpose-built institute in 1892.

The building replaced some of the estate's grandest cottages, including those once lived in by the first stationmaster and locomotive superintendent. The Institute opened in 1894 and featured lecture rooms, a library of 14,000 books, a games room, café, and a concert hall with seating for 500.

Designed by Charles Trubshaw, it was decorated with terracotta detailing and topped by an octagonal corner tower. Over time the Institute fell out of use, and in the 1980s it became the GPO Social Club. In 1996, it was taken on by new owners and converted into The Waterfall pub. Some areas, including the concert hall, are still being restored today.

#### **5. The Brunswick Inn**

The Brunswick opened in 1842 as a railway and commercial inn, built for railwaymen and second-class passengers. It stayed under railway ownership for 105 years. After falling into disuse, it was rescued and restored in 1987 by Derby Civic Society and Derbyshire Historic Buildings Trust.

The building now houses its own brewery - Brunswick Brewing Company, established in 1991 and known nationally for its real ales. Its interior features a glass-fronted snug, family parlour, and a lounge bar decorated with vintage bottles and memorabilia. It remains a key stop for rail enthusiasts and real ale lovers alike.

#### **6. Midland Hotel**

This was the first purpose-built provincial railway hotel in Britain, designed for first-class and wealthy passengers. Built by Thomas Jackson and opened in the 1840s, it was eventually purchased by the Midland Railway Company in 1862 for £10,500. The hotel has seen various owners and refurbishments over the years and is currently closed.

Despite its changes, it remains a striking part of Derby's railway history and still stands beside the station as a reminder of the golden age of rail travel.

## Final Notes

Many of these buildings remain in use today, offering a living connection to Derby's past. This heritage trail not only reflects the city's role in the development of the railways, but also the lives of the people who lived and worked here.

To explore more, visit: [www.visitderby.co.uk/railway-200](http://www.visitderby.co.uk/railway-200)