

EMBSAY & BOLTON ABBEY

STEAM RAILWAY

Background Information

The Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway (or 'Yorkshire Dales Railway' as it was formerly known) is a heritage railway that runs over part of the line that used to run from Skipton and Ilkley. The railway between the two towns was built by the Midland Railway Company and opened in 1888.

The line connected with other routes at both Skipton and Ilkley and, as well as local traffic, it was also used as key alternative and diversionary route to relieve congestion on the busy Aire Valley line. The line was originally built with double track, with intermediate stations at Embsay, Bolton Abbey and Addingham. There was one branch, a single-track line from Embsay Junction, half a mile to the west of Embsay station, to Grassington, with an intermediate station at Rylstone.

In 1923 the Midland Railway became part of the London, Midland & Scottish Railway ('LMS'), and twenty-five years later, in 1948, the line was run by British Railways upon nationalisation of the country's railway network. Like several other railways in Wharfedale, the line became a victim of the 'Beeching axe' and – despite vigorous local opposition – the section between Embsay and Ilkley was closed in 1965. The lines from Skipton to Embsay and just short of Grassington were retained for stone traffic from local quarries – the former was subsequently closed, but the latter – running as far as Swinden Quarry – remains open and is used regularly.

In October 1968, a group of people met in Skipton Town Hall to explore the possibility of reopening part of the line, which resulted in the formation of the 'Embsay and Grassington Railway Preservation Society', with the aim of using Embsay as an operating base for running steam trains to Grassington. This was thwarted as the Grassington line was retained for stone traffic, so attention was focused on the line between Embsay and Bolton Abbey, with the title 'Yorkshire Dales Railway Society' adopted. British Railways allowed the Society to occupy the Embsay on a lease arrangement, with the first steam locomotive arriving in 1970.

The line was opened in stages – initially in 1979, then to Skibeden (1982), Holywell

(1987) – where a new Halt was built – Stoneacre Loop (1991), and finally to Bolton Abbey (1997), given the line we know today, almost five miles long. By the mid-1990s, the railway had purchased most of the trackbed from just short of Embsay Junction to Bolton Abbey, together with the station sites at both Embsay and Bolton Abbey. At Stoneacre, a Signal Box has been built at the Loop, allowing two trains to run on the line at busy times.

Since then, a wide and interesting collection of locomotives and rolling stock have been amassed.

Responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the line is the responsibility of the Yorkshire Dales Railway Museum Trust (Holdings) Limited, a registered charity, museum and company. It has a Trading Company arm that is responsible for the shops and cafes. The Trust is governed by a Board of Directors, who set the policy and strategic direction, and has a small number of employees (full time and part time) in key positions, supplemented by occasional seasonal staff when required, although the railway is largely run by volunteers, who make an immensely valuable contribution towards our success.

General Enquiries: (01756) 710614

E-mail: office@ebar.org.uk

Website: www.embsayboltonabbeyrailway.org.uk