

Auchterhouse Smiddy, where five schoolboys on their way home from Dundee spent the night before finishing their journey home to Newtyle on foot through the snow.”

Born in 1929, Tayport resident Reg Mulheron has fond memories of a train trip from Dundee to Blairgowrie: “As a small boy I remember going there on a day trip with my father. The train went through Lochee and branched off to Blairgowrie at Newtyle. I was so excited and the carriage was full. It travelled through parts of Dundee you wouldn’t believe existed and I looked out the window at the country scenery in awe. When we got to Blairgowrie, we walked about and had a cup of tea.”

On July 17, 1948, the Crewe-built Swiftsure was hauling the Aberdeen to Glasgow express, four postal sorting vans and seven passenger coaches.

As it thundered past Meikle towards Ardler Junction, where two lines gradually converged, the crew were unaware that the smaller and slower Dundee to Newtyle train was approaching the same stretch of track, also west bound.

For it to have been allowed onto the main line was a catastrophic error. As the two trains came together, the 321-ton express smashed into the trundling tank engine. The Swiftsure was spun like a toy and its coaches piled headlong into fields. The first few carriages, unmanned, were reduced to splintered wood and twisted steel. The Dundee tank engine was launched along the tracks and landed with its wheels in the air.

Express driver David Nutt had been thrown clear and went searching for his crew-mate — but fireman James Smith was trapped beneath the tender and grievously injured. He died in Dundee Royal Infirmary that night.

Meanwhile, in the cab of the tank engine, fireman Robert Nixon lay stricken with a smashed leg and driver John Laing had been hurled against the controls. He, too, died later in DRI while Nixon lost his leg.

Following damage caused by the Second World War, in 1948 the UK’s railways were nationalised, and the line became part of British Railways. It survived for seven years, with passenger services withdrawn on January 10, 1955. Freight services continued, but the Auchterhouse–Newtyle section closed in 1958, and the remaining route to Dundee ceased operation on April 5, 1965.

FOR 30 years, the Dundee to Newtyle Railway ran through the Law Tunnel, a 330-yard tunnel cut through the 570ft extinct volcano that towers over Dundee. It closed in 1861 when the line deviated via Lochee. “It was uneconomic and time-consuming to operate, and locomotive power was now available,” says Dr Martin.

The tunnel was re-opened by the Scottish Mushroom Company for growing purposes in 1898, but the company went into liquidation in 1902. Five years later, botanist Sir Patrick Geddes, a pioneer of the Green movement and modern town planning, drew up plans for the tunnel as a fernery, along with elaborate plans for the surrounding area.

It was converted to an air-raid shelter during the Second World War before

Pictured (clockwise from right) are relics of the old railway: the former Newtyle Station; the Miley at Harefield Road in Dundee; Lochee Station. Pictures: Dougie Nicolson.



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- The Dundee and Newtyle Railway: A Talk by Dr David Martin, takes place on February 19 at 7pm at Dundee’s Discovery Point. His free talk will cover the history of the railway and how it helped the development of industry around Dundee. www.dundeecivictrust.co.uk

- Donations to upgrade Newtyle Path Network can be made at the Post Office, the Commercial Hotel, or by post to D.Treffry, 20 South Street, Newtyle PH12 8UQ.

- Ron Watt’s video about the Dundee and Newtyle Railway can be viewed at www.thecourier.co.uk/1.700582



Below: a postcard marked ‘The first railway engine in Scotland, 1833. Dundee & Newtyle Railway.’



its entrances at Kinghorne Road and Keats Place were blocked off in 1983.

Artist Deirdre Robertson is campaigning to have the tunnel re-opened as a tourist attraction and local historian Ron Watt’s film about the railway picked up steam after being launched online in November.

“I’d like to see the tunnel re-opened but it could be dangerous,” says Mr Watt, 82. “I played there as a kid — we’d climb into the tunnel, or as far into as we could before we got scared.”

Elliott Simpson, 69, has fond memories of exploring the tunnel in the 1960s. “The entrance was covered with rubble but over the years, rain had uncovered the top of the arch,” he says. “We could feel a draught coming through one end and there was a gap large enough to slither down into it. One of the lads who came in with me had a Tilley lamp so we could see. It was so exciting.”

Following this adventure, when the northern end of the tunnel was excavated in the 1980s, Elliott took photos of surveying and put them and other pictures he’d taken of features along the line online in an attempt to create an archive of Dundee’s early railway history.

In Dundee, Cross Roads Station survives as a small cottage with a space for a clock over the door. In Newtyle, the old station survives, and along the lines remain various cuttings, embankments and signal houses.

Much of the line is seeing a new lease of life as walking and cycling routes — the Newtyle Path Network, Sidlaw Path Network and Dundee’s Green Circular. The landscape along the routes is packed with historical interest; its hills, burns, cottages and farmsteads, dykes and ditches, woods, factories, monuments, castles, echo the past.

Maintaining the pathways which meander past these fascinating features

comes at a cost. “Paths need to be resurfaced, ditches cleaned and water courses kept clear,” says Newtyle Path Network member (and Courier columnist) Dudley Treffry. “And linking with other projects around Strathmore will incur further expenditure.

“We’re hoping to raise the line’s profile, making the old turntable in Newtyle a landscaped feature and providing information boards and seating.”

Evidently, much has changed since the line opened almost two centuries ago, but it hasn’t been abandoned to weeds and dereliction; people really care enough about this part of their heritage to want it to continue to play a role in their future.

“The Dundee and Newtyle railway was instrumental in the development of modern Dundee,” Dr Martin concludes. “Even though trains no longer run, it won’t be forgotten. It’s a key part of Dundee life for transport, leisure and culture.”