

Leaving Castlereagh, the line crosses the River Suck and begins climbing at 1 in 94 past the site of ballast pits long out of use, to a summit more than three miles away. Ballinlough (118.60) was opened as a single platform station in 1880, that on the up side being added in 1902 when a loop was installed. A long siding served a cattle bank and goods store on the down side. Another long siding extended towards Westport to another ballast pit. The line climbs for nearly two miles at 1 in 102 and 270 before reaching Ballyhaunis (124.12) which had a loading bank, goods store and sidings at the Dublin end on the up side. Next was Bekan (128.58), a small station with only an up platform. From here the line climbs at 1 in 100 for a short distance before falling at 1 in 100 for more than a mile into Claremorris.

Claremorris (135.00) was the most important station on the Mayo branch and was a terminus for seven months in 1862. It was and is the station for the pilgrimage traffic to Knock. Prior to the opening of the Ballinrobe branch in 1892 it was similar to many of the other GN&W stations on the line. A branch platform, engine shed and sidings were located on the down side, but it achieved greater significance with the opening of the Athenry & Tuam Extension to Claremorris Light Railway in 1895 and its extension northwards to Collooney. The line from Tuam approached from the down side and entered the down main platform, running parallel to the Westport line and then diverging across the latter at North Junction. There were originally three signal cabins at Claremorris, at North and South Junctions as well as one for the Ballinrobe branch. The present 66-lever cabin was brought into use in May 1941. Major alterations were completed during 1952 in connection with the Knock pilgrimage traffic.

On leaving Claremorris, the line swings left and runs through boggy country. There is a long fall of almost six miles, some of it at 1 in 94 through Balla station (142.35) which has one platform and goods and cattle facilities. The Balla cattle fair was an important one in the Midland calendar. Next is Manulla Junction (145.71) where the Ballina branch diverges on the up side. The station here was fairly substantial with the main buildings on an island platform on the up side; there was a separate platform on the down side serving Westport trains. The signal cabin at the Dublin end was destroyed during the Civil War and was replaced by a new one at the Westport end. The station was closed in 1963, ceasing to be a block post in June 1964, the branch points being remotely operated from Balla. Then in November 1988 a new portacabin type signal cabin was brought into use on the island platform, at which time the cabins at Balla and Castlebar were closed. Castlebar

(149.74) located on a reverse curve necessitating a speed restriction, is probably the busiest station on the line. It has two platforms with the main buildings on the up side as is the goods yard which includes a container gantry.

The small single platform station at Islandeady (155.39) was the last to be opened by the MGW, in 1914, and is followed by a falling grade of 1 in 100 and then a short rise at the same figure before levelling out on the approach to Westport (160.74). Here there are two passenger platforms, the station buildings being on the up side. Two lines branched off at Westport, namely those to Westport Quay and Achill. The goods store is on the up side just beyond the Quay end of the platform and immediately beyond is the junction for the Achill branch which is now a short spur used in later years as a siding. Opposite the junction, on the down side are the two-road engine shed and turntable.

The Westport Quay line leaves the station on the level, climbs briefly at 1 in 200 and then falls nominally at 1 in 65 for almost a mile to reach sea level at the Quay station (162.67). Here there was a passenger platform as well as one for goods, the former served by a siding on the down side. There was also a siding to serve Messrs Rank's store. Formerly, the line continued across the public road out on to the quay itself.

Retracing our steps to Manulla Junction we must take a brief look at the Ballina branch. The branch curves sharply away to the right from the main line to the first station at Ballyvary (150.30) with its single platform on the up side and goods store reached by a trailing siding. There was a signal cabin at Ballyvary until 1940. The River Moy is crossed some six miles further on, before Foxford (157.14) with its two platforms and signal cabin on the down side beside the level crossing, is reached. There was a goods store on the up side served by a trailing siding and a cattle bank on a siding behind the up platform. Ballina is now the terminus of the line following the closure of the Killala extension and has the main passenger platform on the up side. Access to a locomotive shed and turntable were from a loop on the down side. Extensive alterations were carried out at Ballina in the 1970s and it now handles a lot of traffic in connection with the Asahi chemical factory at Killala. Apart from this, Ballina served a large area of north Mayo and always dealt with a good deal of freight traffic. Beyond the station, the Killala line passed through a level crossing and here a short stub of the branch was retained as a goods sidings.

#### **The Meath road.**

The branch diverged on the up side of the main line to the west of Clonsilla station and

crossed the Royal Canal which runs beside the main line at this point. The first eleven miles from the junction as far as Drumree were at one time double track. The first station was Dunboyne (10.32) which had two platforms with a short spur from the down line to a cattle bank and goods yard. Fairyhouse (12.54) was opened by the Midland shortly after it took over the working of the Meath line in connection with traffic to the nearby race-course. Originally there was only one platform, a second one being added in 1882. On race days Fairyhouse handled as many as thirteen special trains. It was used by regular passenger services for a four year period from July 1926. Batterstown (15.72) was a fine station with two platforms and a cabin on the up side. There were goods and cattle facilities at the Drumree end on the up side. Following the singling of the line some alterations were carried out, including the provision of a new cabin.

Drumree (18.73) was the end of the double line section, singled in 1919 as far as Dunboyne and from there to Clonsilla in 1925. There was a 20-lever cabin on the down platform, two spurs on the down side giving access to cattle banks. There was no goods store in MGW days, this being provided in 1927. Kilmessan Junction (24.20), was where the Athboy branch diverged, its trains using the island platform on the down side. The platform on the up side was the site of the main buildings. There was a goods yard and cattle bank as well as an engine shed and turntable of 45ft diameter. Kilmessan was the locomotive headquarters of the old Dublin & Meath.

Bective (27.25) had a down side platform as well as a goods siding and cattle bank, with a 5-lever ground frame worked with a key on the Navan Junction - Kilmessan staff. Navan Junction (30.42) was a fine station with four platforms, two MGW and two GNR. All the usual facilities were provided at Navan. Proudstown Park (33.00) was another platform provided specifically for race traffic but only lasted for a short period. Gibbstown (34.32) had one platform on the down side with a cabin at the Kingscourt end and a loop on the up side used in connection with stock specials. Wilkinstown (37.00) also had only one platform which had a double armed signal. On the up side was a run around loop and cattle bank, this being lengthened in GSR days to enable trains to cross.

Between Wilkinstown and Nobber, a halt was opened in 1928 at Castletown-Kilpatrick (39.70) but it only remained in use until 1935. Nobber (43.23) had a single, up side, platform with a goods store behind and there was a long siding on the down side capable of holding thirty wagons. Kilmainhamwood (46.12) had a passenger platform on the up side and a loop on the down side