

Harcourt Street Line and Foxrock

History

The Dublin to Bray railway line opened in 1854, initially from Harcourt Road in Dublin to Bray but the line was extended in 1859 to Harcourt Street where a new terminal had been built.

Development of Foxrock

The opening of the railway meant that development of land along the track became attractive and in 1859 William and John Bentley and Edward and Anthony Fox leased the lands of the Foxrock Estate from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin Richard Whately. The aim was to create an affluent garden suburb and the railway line meant that Foxrock was within easy commuting distance of Dublin.

The developers donated a site for Foxrock railway station which opened in 1861 although a temporary station had opened in 1859.

In 1862 an advertisement was placed in *The Irish Times* for “beautiful building sites for mansions and pretty villas”. “The scenery (green and mountain) from Brighton Road just finished, leading from the hotel at Foxrock station to Carrickmines, is magnificent. The land, being undulating, affords perfectly sheltered positions on Torquay Road to the railway station at Stillorgan and Foxrock”. “Stage coaches and omnibuses ply regularly between Foxrock station and Kingstown. Fare 3 pence and 4 pence. There is cheap and excellent shopping at Foxrock market”. “Apply to W.W Bentley, Foxrock, or Bentley and Son, 110 College Green”.

The office for the Foxrock estate development was in what is now Primrose Cottage on Westminster Road. It later became the post office and is now a private residence.

Foxrock Station

Brian MacAongusa wrote a history of the Harcourt Street Line *The Harcourt Street Line*, published by Currach Press in 2003. In it he called Foxrock Station “The largest and most important intermediate station on the line”.

Leopardstown Racecourse opened in 1888 and special sidings were built at Foxrock as well as a third platform and extra siding for horse traffic. The three platforms were linked by a footbridge.

As well as the up and down lines, Foxrock had a siding for special trains which ran on race days at Leopardstown Racecourse. Over 3,000 racegoers could be carried on a single day and the ticket office for the racetrack can still be seen near the entrance to Foxrock Golf Centre. That entrance still has the original pillars which had gates leading over the railway tracks. When King Edward VII visited Leopardstown Races in 1907 the level crossing was decorated with a triumphal arch by local residents.

There were other sidings on which reserve carriages were stored for occasional use on race days and also horse box wagons for horses competing in the races. Some of the carriages stored were from the nineteenth century and had birds’ nests in the roofs of some of them. The platform for one of those sidings can still be seen at The Hedgerows. The Drumm C and D railcars were stored on a siding at Foxrock until the line closed in 1958 and they were finally scrapped in 1964.

In 1922 during the Civil War the signal cabin at Foxrock Station was burnt to the ground and in 1923 two carriages were destroyed by fire and the temporary signal cabin was first burnt and later blown up.

Samuel Beckett and Foxrock Station

The Dublin and South Eastern Railway Harcourt Street Line, known to many as the 'Slow and Easy', played a large part in the early life of Nobel Laureate Samuel Beckett. Beckett was born in 1906 in Cooldrinagh on the corner of Kerry Mount Avenue and Brighton Road and used the train while going to school and Trinity. As Eoin O'Brien puts it in his book *The Beckett Country*, published in 1986, "The Dublin and South Eastern Railway was the link, the placental cord ultimately to be severed, between the home and the City of Dublin and the world beyond. Foxrock Station and its train, the 'Slow and Easy', were to leave lasting memories with Beckett, memories that are emerging again in his latest writings."

As well as setting the radio play *All that Fall* in Foxrock and its station, Foxrock Station also features in his novel *Watt* where a description of the waiting room in Foxrock Station is given

"There was a high-backed chair and the remains of an open fire." "It was a high, narrow, black, wooden chair, with arms, and castors.

One of its feet was screwed to the floor, by means of a clamp. Not one of the remaining feet, but all carried similar, if not identical irons. Not one but all! But the screws, which no doubt had once fixed these to the floor, had very kindly been removed. Through the bars, which were vertical, of the back, Watt saw portions of a grate, heaped high with ashes, and cinders, of a beautiful grey colour."

Trains

Different types of trains were used on the Harcourt Street line.

Steam trains were used up to the 1950s. In 1929 Clayton steam railcars operated from Harcourt Street to Foxrock for a short period but they were discontinued due to poor steaming and high coal usage.

The first Drumm battery train was introduced in 1932. As Brian Mac Aongusa puts it in his book, they were "an Irish invention fully and very successfully realised in Ireland by Irish scientists, engineers and craftsmen". They drew their power from batteries stored underneath the coaches. Dr James Drumm and his team at UCD developed industrial-sized rechargeable batteries powerful enough to drive a two-coach railcar at 45mph. A passenger quoted in Brian's book says that Drumm trains were "comfortable, bright, well-lit at night, warm and were silent running". During the Second World War when coal shortages impacted the running of steam trains, the Drumm trains became the mainstay of the Harcourt Street line.

More were introduced in 1939 and soon most services on the line were operated by two-coach electric Drumm trains. They were discontinued in 1949 when the batteries reached the end of their working life.

Diesel trains were introduced on some services in 1954 and by 1956 only two steam trains were running in each direction while twenty diesels were running. Steam trains stopped completely in 1957. It took 30 minutes to travel by diesel from Bray to Harcourt Street and an 8.50am express with one stop at Ranelagh completed the journey in 20 minutes.

Stations on the Line

The Dublin city terminus was at Harcourt Street where the station building can still be seen. The southern terminus was at Bray with intermediate stations at Rathmines and Ranelagh (one station), Milltown (where the nine arch bridge can still be seen), Dundrum, Stillorgan, Foxrock, Carrickmines, Shankill, Woodbrook Halt.

Closure of the Line

The Harcourt Street Line started to lose money in the 1950s partly due to the expansion of bus routes into the city centre. When the closure was announced in October 1958 it attracted very little publicity and, as Brian MacAongusa puts it “was generally accepted at the time as inevitable”. The last train ran on 31st December 1958 and by August 1960 the last tracks around Foxrock had been taken up.