HEBDEN BRIDGE STATION "HAWKSEYE" NAMEBOARDS

These signs were introduced in 1938 by the London, Midland & Scottish Railway after several years of research and experimentation. The prototypes were enamelled sheet metal, with varying styles and fonts.

The final design was reminiscent of the London Transport 'bar & circle' of 1908 and the Southern Railway's 'target' signs. They were cast aluminium mounted on a backing board within a substantial timber frame. The majority were 4ft (122cm) in length. However, as the lettering was kept to a standard size, longer station names required longer signs. Those at Hebden Bridge were 5ft (152cm) in length. Others, like Luddendenfoot were longer and in extreme cases, like Brighouse (for Rastrick), the sign was cast in two halves.

Theses signs became known as "Hawkseyes", presumably inspired by the manufacturer's name, OG Hawkes of Birmingham, and the shape of the sign. They were originally painted a distinctive yellow with black lettering. In order to enhance visibility in poor light, the yellow paint was impregnated with tiny glass beads to create a reflective surface. The signs were usually located at the approach end of each platform, known as 'running-in boards', often angled to face oncoming trains to improve identification.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 almost certainly halted production. It is unlikely it was resumed after the war and, in any event, nationalisation in January 1948 would have ended the project. Consequently, the distribution of Hawkseyes was sporadic. Stations between Hebden Bridge and Cooper Bridge inclusive were furnished with them, though there is no evidence of any at Sowerby Bridge, nor any west of Hebden Bridge towards Manchester.

Under British Railways the Calder Valley line initially came within the London Midland Region, whose 'house' livery was maroon with white lettering. From April 1950 lines and stations east of Eastwood were transferred to the North Eastern Region. Many pre-nationalisation signs, including Hawkseyes, were painted in the region's distinctive tangerine with white lettering, augmented by new enamel signs in similar colours.

Hebden Bridge's hawkseyes appear to have been removed around 1973/4, when the station was re-signed under BR's 'Corporate Identity'. However, thankfully, much of the original Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway signage was spared and is in situ to this day and the two LMS hawkseyes now displayed were saved from the scrapmen.

Martin Firth

Hebden Bridge