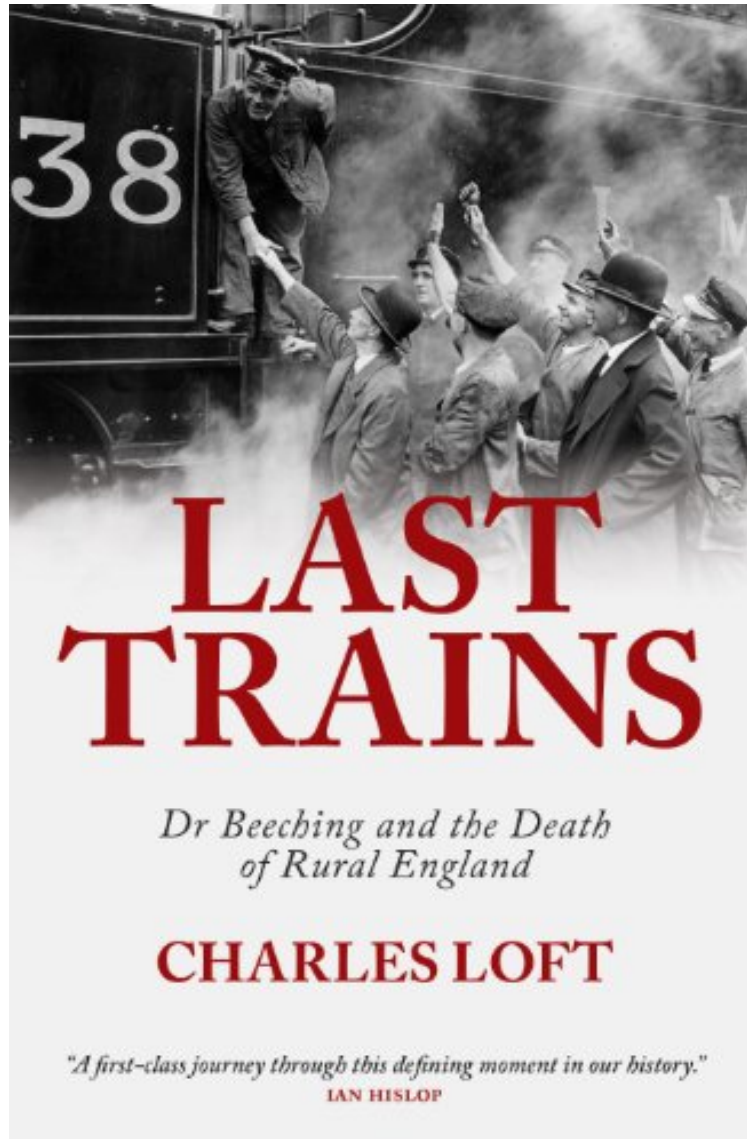


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Last Trains: Dr Beeching and the death of rural England

Charles Loft

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Charles Loft : Last Trains: Dr Beeching and the death of rural England before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Last Trains: Dr Beeching and the death of rural England:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Long and ShortThank you0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Beechings legacyBy CustomerFor someone who lived through and was effected by Dr Beeching, it was great to finally read the total story of the state of the railways in Britain both before and after nationalisation. Foe anyone interested in the history of Britain's railways this is a must read book3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Contraction of Britain's rail networkBy Peter Durward HarrisThe author goes back to the

early 20th century, looking at how road transport started taking traffic away from the railways (slowly at first) long before the mass-closures of the 1960s that provide the reason for this book. Actually, the pre-Beeching history occupies over half of the book, discussing Colonel Stephens's light railways, the Isle of Wight railways, the 1955 modernization plan, the Bluebell and Primrose line (now known just as the Bluebell railway), the Midland and Great Northern Joint railway and the Westerham line, all in depth, with references to other railways along the way. The author looks at the politics of line closures and it becomes clear (though does not say) that while it would have been more sensible in theory to close a lot of lines before beginning to modernize, politics dictated otherwise. Some railways were therefore modernized anyway to see what impact that would have on costs and benefits. But most of those that made losses before continued doing so and ended up being closed anyway. The author wanted to spread the blame around, which is at least partly why he devoted so much of the book to the pre-Beeching history. The Tory governments of Churchill, Eden and Macmillan set the framework, and the first Wilson government continued closing lines despite implying that they might save some of them from that fate. However, Beeching drew up the list of lines that he deemed to be losing money and the politicians endorsed the vast majority of his choices. Clearly, some lines had to close, but recent rail traffic increases, caused (at least in part) by road congestion, show that some lines should never have closed. I found the last two chapters (Aftermath, Conclusion) to be less interesting than what went before, but those last two chapters aren't the reason I bought the book. I am familiar with the aftermath and there is plenty I could criticize. However, I am most impressed by the preceding chapters and very pleased with my purchase. There are plenty of other books about Beeching, some of which focus on the legacy rather than the actual closures. Despite the author's desire to spread the blame around, I still regard Beeching as the primary villain.

During the course of the 1950s England lost confidence in its rulers and convinced itself it must modernise. The bankrupt, steam-powered railway, run by a Colonel Blimp, symbolised everything that was wrong with the country; the future lay in motorways and high-speed electric - or even atomic - express trains. But plans for a gleaming new railway system ended in failure and on the roads traffic ground to a halt. Along came Dr Beeching, forensically analysing the railways' problems and expertly delivering his diagnosis: a third of the nation's railways must go. Local services were destroyed, rural England sacrificed for tarmac and wheel - at least that is how Dr Beeching is remembered today. *Last Trains* examines why and how the railway system contracted, exposing the political failures that bankrupted the railways and scrutinising the attempts of officials to understand a transport revolution beyond their control. It is a story of the increasing alienation of bureaucrats from the public they thought they were serving, but also of a nation struggling to come to terms with modernity.

'Loft cleverly underlines his point that a policy which might have made sense nationally had hideous and damaging effects locally...Thoughtful and well-researched analysis.' *Edinburgh Evening News* 'This book tells the full story behind the Beeching cuts.' *Family Tree* About the Author Charles Loft was born in London at the height of the Beeching era and spent much of his youth exploring abandoned railway lines. He received his PhD from the University of London in 1999. He currently works as a policy adviser and still occasionally gets lost while looking for forgotten railways.