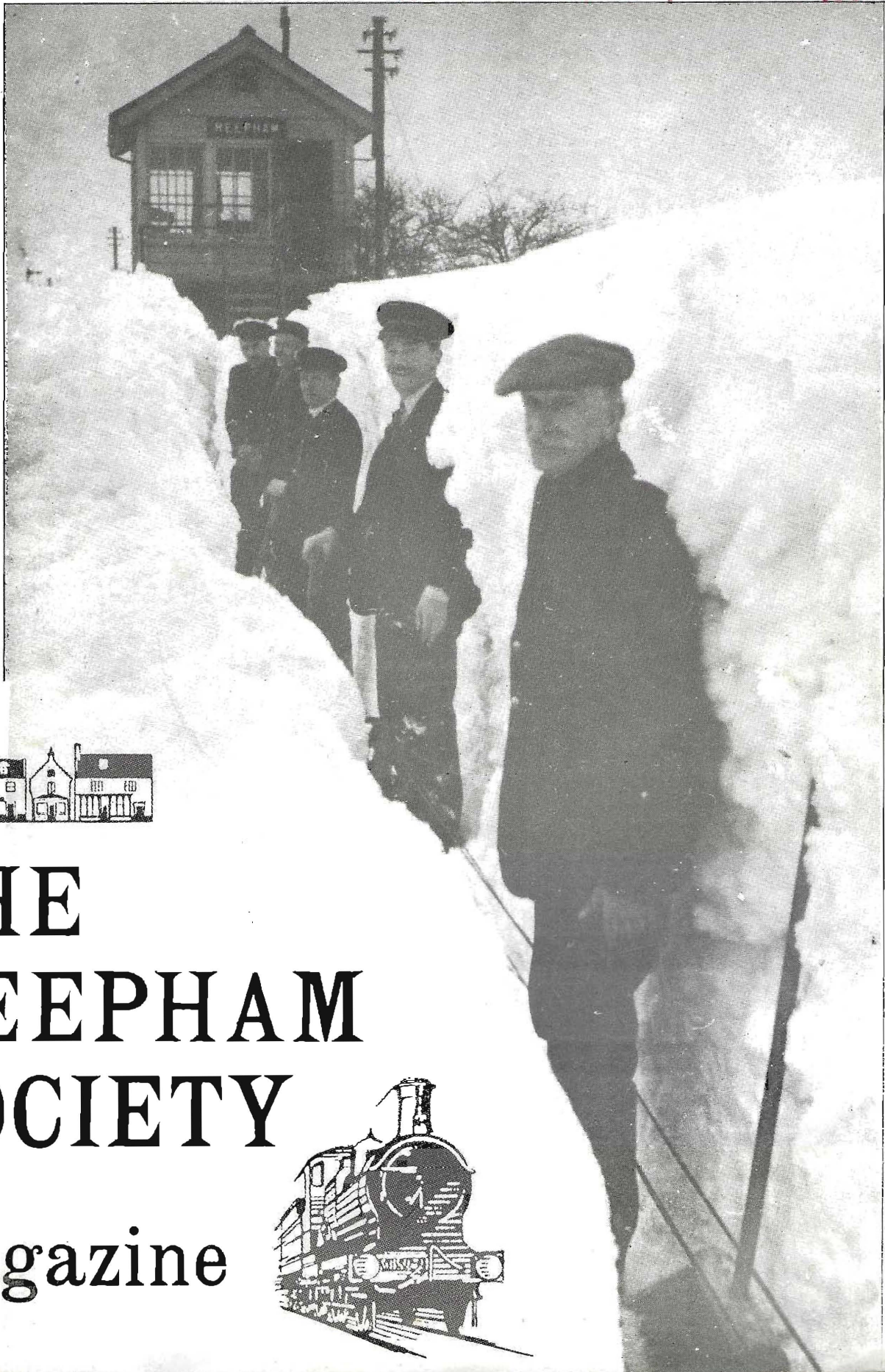
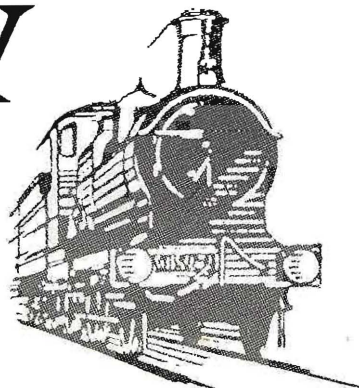


NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY 1991 425

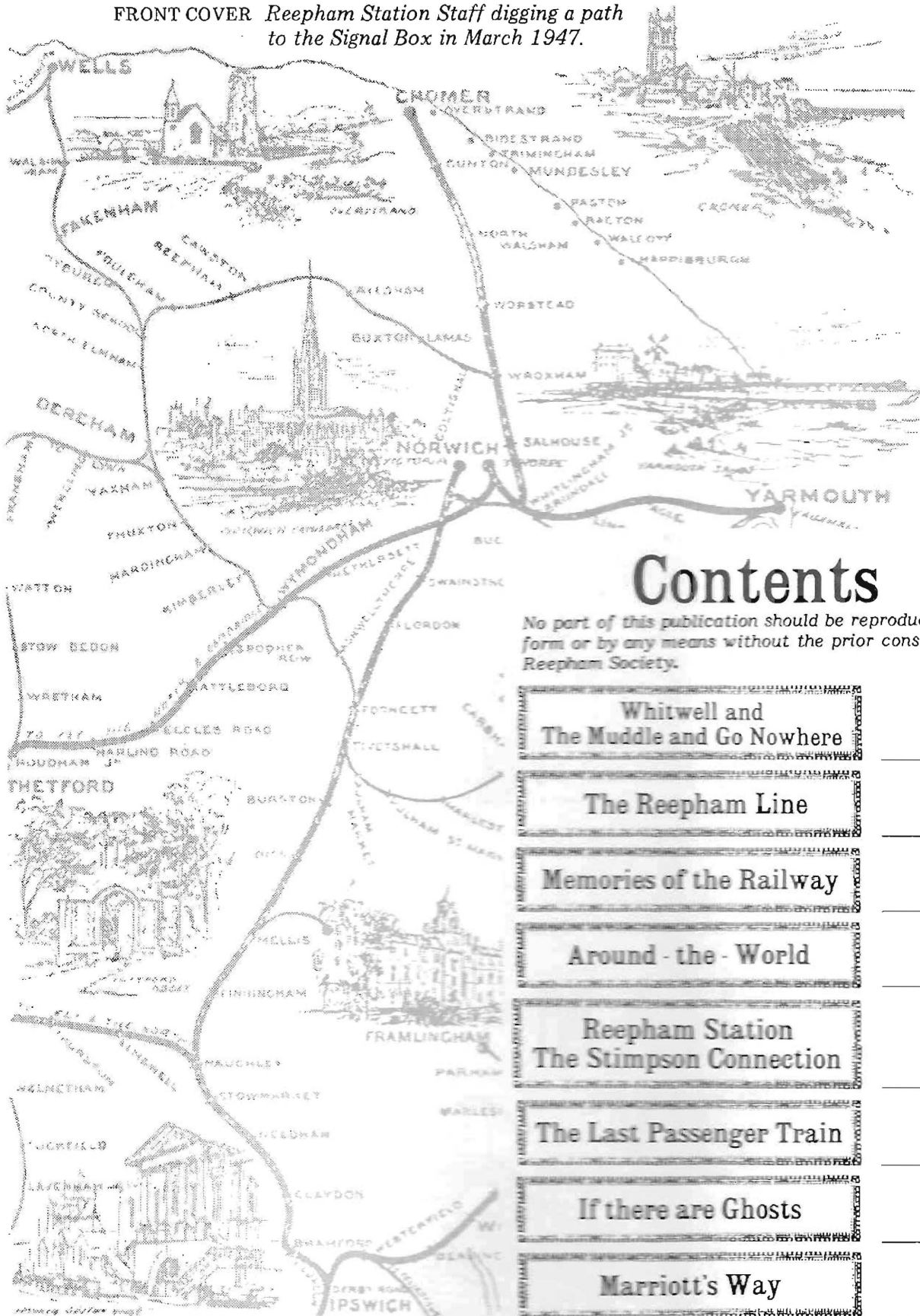


THE REEPHAM SOCIETY

Magazine



FRONT COVER *Reepham Station Staff digging a path to the Signal Box in March 1947.*



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Introduction

In November 1990 I received a letter from Mr Norman Sherry who lives at East Grinstead in West Sussex, he had received previous magazines of the Society and had written to me asking for further information about the railways in the Reepham area; he was particularly interested as to why a relatively small market town in the middle of agricultural Norfolk should have had the benefit of two railway lines and two stations.

It is indeed an interesting point and in acknowledging Mr Sherry's interest I must also confess that his enquiry subsequently determined the content of the next issue of the magazine of the Reepham Society - it is wholly about Reepham and its Railways. I have tried to cover the building and eventual closure of the lines, the impact it had on local life particularly the affect it made to business in the town and also the future use that is to be made on the route of the old lines. The story of their history is often complemented by the uniqueness of having two lines, one either side of Reepham which were operated by two independent companies for nearly 70 years until they were nationalised in 1948. Their separateness and individuality were strengthened by fierce staff loyalty. These points and many more, add to the story of Reepham and its Railways.

An official guide dated about 1930 describes Reepham as "situated in one of the most charming parts of Norfolk is Reepham - a small town on the banks of the little river Eyne. If it's not very ancient, it is at least, not very modern, and for that reason can be recommended as a haven of refuge for those who wish to flee from the stress and strain of city life".

Although in one sense it was 'out of the way' it was by no means inaccessible as it had two stations within a very short distance of each other. The first (is described in 1930) as being on the Aylsham-North Elmham line of the London and North Eastern Railway (L.N.E.R.) and serves Reepham and the second, on the Melton Constable-Norwich line of the London, Midland and Scottish (L.M.S.) which serves the neighbouring parish of Whitwell. Both lines maintained good services of local trains and connections could be made with the south main line expresses from Norwich and with those running west and north (via Melton Constable) at Nottingham, Leicester and Peterborough.

It was possible to travel from Reepham to London in 4½ hours although to achieve this you had to travel to Norwich via Whitwell as the trains on this line accomplished the distance of 12¾ miles in about 25 minutes. If the journey was taken from Reepham Station then it took nearly one hour as the trains went via Aylsham and Wroxham into Norwich and the distance was approximately twice the Whitwell journey.

The guide lists the Whitwell station as being on the L.M.S. line but this is not strictly correct, the various lines in the North Norfolk area underwent a number of changes, takeovers and amalgamations during their working life and this resulted in a number of name changes. Hopefully this will be more fully explained in later pages.

I've enjoyed finding and bringing together the information; I hope you enjoy reading it. The information that has filled these pages is not available from one source but it has been found by researching a number of archives, books, studies and by talking to people who remember the railways. To all these sources and people who have helped me I must offer a collective thank you, but there are some who must be singled out for a particular mention.

Mr Richard Joby who offered me advice, and who has allowed me to quote from his publication 'The East Norfolk Railway'.

Mr W Freeston who allowed me unhindered use of the scrapbooks of Reepham news which had been kept by his mother Mrs Freeston, a lifelong resident of Reepham.

To Mr Richard Black who has so meticulously redrawn the map of the layout of Reepham Station.

Mr Ben Stimpson who offered many hours of time to talk with me about the history of Stimpson's and also about the general daily life of Reepham Station in its heyday.

To the M and G N who have generously allowed me access to their collection of photographs a number of which are reproduced here. Eva Tuddenham and her son Edwin lived in Laburnham Grove in Reepham and from the 1940's onwards built up a wonderful collection of photographs of the local railways, most of which they took themselves. Whilst Edwin worked on the railway his mother worked in Hunt's Stores at Station Plain, Reepham, this however, did not stop her from photographing particular trains at specific times. She would rush out of the Stores and down into the Station to take her pictures and then go back to carry on with her work. How many people were able to say they were slow in being served because a train was late!

Tragically, Edwin died relatively young in 1967 but Eva carried on with this great love; after her death some years later, the collection passed to a friend who had a similar interest. He then passed the negatives on to the M and G N Circle for their archives and the collection is today extensively used by its members and others who are interested in trains.

It is a fitting tribute that this magazine about railways in Reepham should be so adequately illustrated by Eva and Edwin's handwork. I'm sure they would have been more than pleased!

And a final 'thank you' to my wife, who has had to endure many evenings of 'railway talk' and who now knows more about railways than she ever wished to.

Michael Black
Middlemarch
Broomhill Lane
Reepham

Norwich (0603) 870936

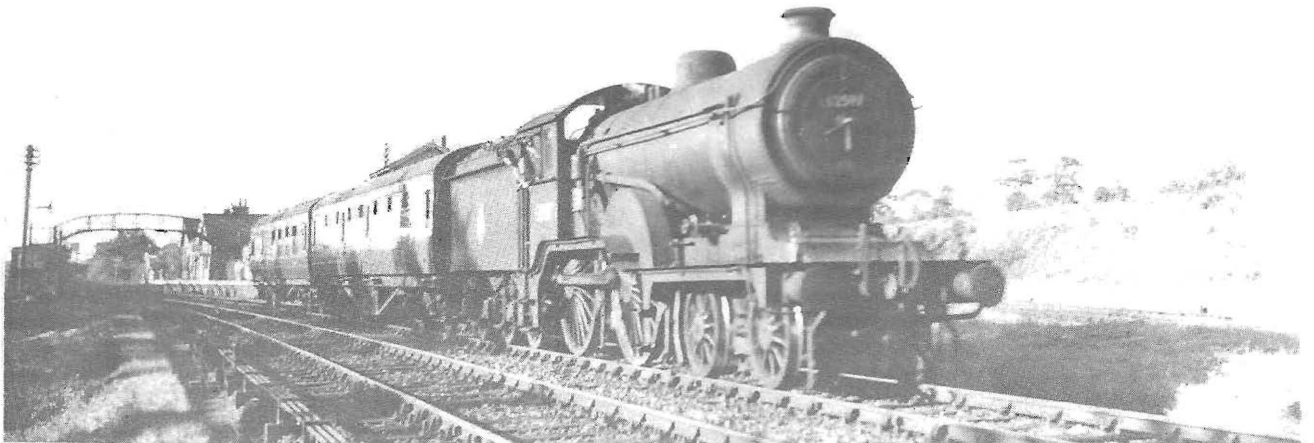
Whitwell and The Muddle and Go Nowhere

Whitwell Station was opened on the 1st July 1882 when the section of line from Guestwick to Lenwade was opened up to passenger and goods traffic. This section was 6½ miles in length and initially there were four trains a day, (with variations on Tuesday) which ran to and from Melton Constable. On the 12th August 1880 the Lynn and Fakenham Railway was authorised to build from Fakenham to Norwich and the line was subsequently opened in stages as its builders progressed through the countryside of central north Norfolk; Fakenham to Melton Constable, then to Guestwick, to Lenwade and then to Norwich where the line terminated at the City Station. The whole length was officially opened on 1st January 1883. The Lynn and Fakenham was merged with a number of other local railways and they formed the Eastern and Midland Railway Company. For the next ten years the East Midland ran the system although by 1889 it had run into such financial difficulties that the Midland Railway and the Great Northern Railway made a joint offer to take over the Eastern and Midland system. This offer was accepted and after some four years of negotiation the new committee took control of the line from 1st July 1893 and the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway was born (the M & G N). The forming of the M and G N was therefore a microcosm of the railway fever that had swept Great Britain in the 1840s; as the major cities were linked by the amalgamation of small railway companies so the towns and villages of much of Norfolk were linked by the amalgamations, forty-two Acts of Parliament and foresight that made the M and G N.

The Muddle and Go Nowhere as it was affectionately known retained its independent existence but finally ceased to exist under its own title on the 1st October 1936 when it came under the control of the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER). It then became part of British Railways with the nationalisation in 1948 but to the end of its days the route was always referred to locally as 'the old M and G N'.

The lines of the M and G N stretched from Little Bytham in Lincolnshire through the Fens and Kings Lynn with a spur to connect with the Great Northern at Peterborough; from Kings Lynn it ran across Norfolk to Melton Constable and on to Norwich with other lines running out from Melton to Sheringham and Cromer and another which went to Great Yarmouth via North Walsham.

As Melton Constable was the crossroads of these lines it eventually became the headquarters of the M and G N. This was due to a number of reasons; the first was geographical as it was below the ridge of high land running from Fakenham to Cromer and secondly the availability of 25 acres of land owned by Lord Hastings (with part of the eventual contract being the construction of his own platform and private waiting room). As a result of one of the earlier amalgamations the locomotive shops of the Yarmouth and Fakenham Railway were moved to Melton and this was the initial impetus that was to create the 'Crewe of Norfolk' and turn Melton Constable into historical uniqueness as the only railway village in the world. In 1888 it had a population of only 118 and this had increased to nearly 1000



by 1901, the works gave a great impetus to the local labour force as an alternative to the only other occupation - agriculture. With the influx of labour into Melton it was necessary for the Company to provide accommodation. Houses were duly built which included gas, running water and main drainage - all for a rent of 4/- a week which was stopped from the wages. A general store was built to serve the growing community and a school soon followed; this provision set the foundation for what was to be one of the most successful and happy railway companies in the history of steam locomotion. It is little wonder there was such affection for the M and G N during its working life and for many years after it demise. Obviously the 43 years of the M and G N saw its ups and downs; on one occasion the Company ran into such financial difficulties that they were unable to pay the men on a Friday night but on the Monday morning they all turned up for work as usual and the engineer in charge was physically reduced to tears at the loyalty of his workforce.

The engineer was William Marriott who was the Chief Engineer and Manager of the M and G N system for 41 years. He was based and lived in Melton Constable and often worked from a railway carriage which had been turned into an office and in which he travelled round the railway system. His name became synonymous with the M and G N and he is remembered today in the new long distance walk named 'Marriott's Way'.

Whitwell and Reepham was a typical M and G N small country station which was staffed by a station master, a clerk, two signalmen, one porter and a lad porter who cleaned the lamps and carried out other general duties. There was a daily passenger service of four or five trains each way and there

were regular goods trains that would deliver coal, artificial fertiliser and animal feed stuffs and would pick up grain and livestock and sugar beet during the winter months.

As with Reepham (North) the sugar beet was brought to the station by farmers wagons (drawn by horses initially and then in later years by tractors). This crop was grown under contract to the Cantley factory and to get there it had to be hauled from Melton Constable to Great Yarmouth and then onto the line to Cantley. Both stations at Reepham were in the Cantley contract area and as the area was purely agriculturally based they were both competing for the same type of business, the Whitwell Station generally suffered from this competition. Although there were large facilities at Whitwell for storage, the entrenched business of Stimpsons at Reepham Station meant that they enjoyed most of the trade in fertilizers and feed stuffs that was available although Stimpsons stored grain etc. at Whitwell.

With the volume of sugar beet being loaded throughout the season meant that the railway gangmen often had the onerous task of clearing up the soil that would drop through the wagon doors. They would have to clear up the yard nearly every day and so much soil would be collected that it would be put into wagons and sent to the coast to be dumped along the sea wall.

The twelve mile length of track which included the stations of Hindolveston, Guestwick, Whitwell and Lenwade was looked after by an eleven man gang who were based at Guestwick and who used a motor trolley to travel up and down their length of track.

For much of the year the work of the gangmen was routine but it was often aggravated and at times made hazardous by the vagaries of the weather.

D16/3 No. 62597

LEFT
*Leaving Whitwell
in the evening in
June 1957 and*

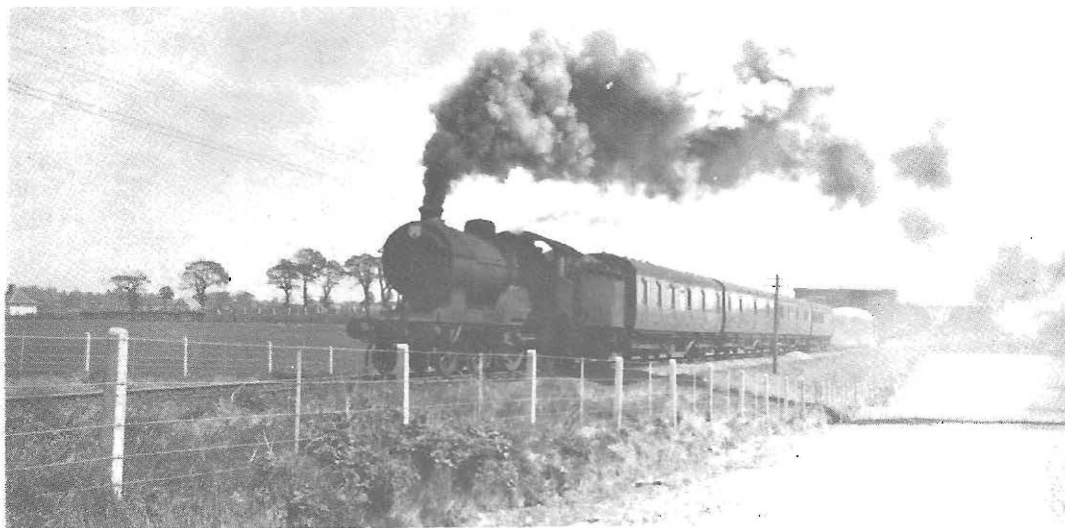
RIGHT
*The same view
in June 1991*





D15 No. 62538
 Taken in August
 1950 this shows
 the best kept
 'Claud Hamilton'
 on the Norwich
 District at that
 time leaving
 Whitwell for
 Melton Constable

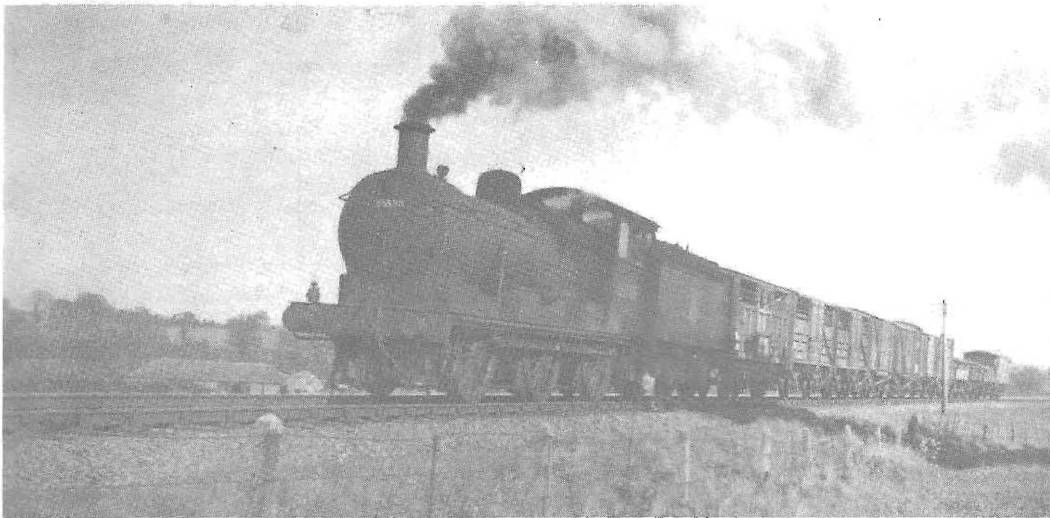
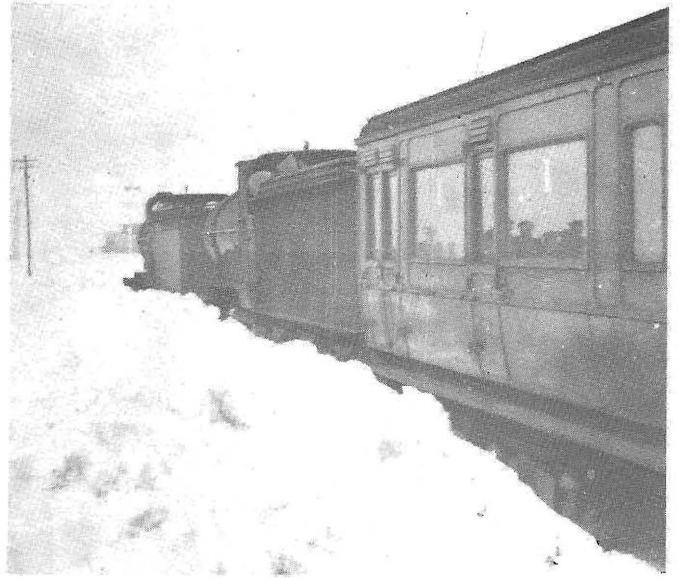
D 16/3 No. 62533
 Hackford Bridge
 was removed a
 few years ago,
 this shows a full
 head of steam as
 the train heads
 from the Bridge
 towards
 Themelthorpe
 in May 1957



D 16/3 No. 62562
 Before the
 passenger traffic
 declined in the
 1950's the
 10.41am from
 Melton to
 Norwich leaves
 Whitwell in
 February 1949



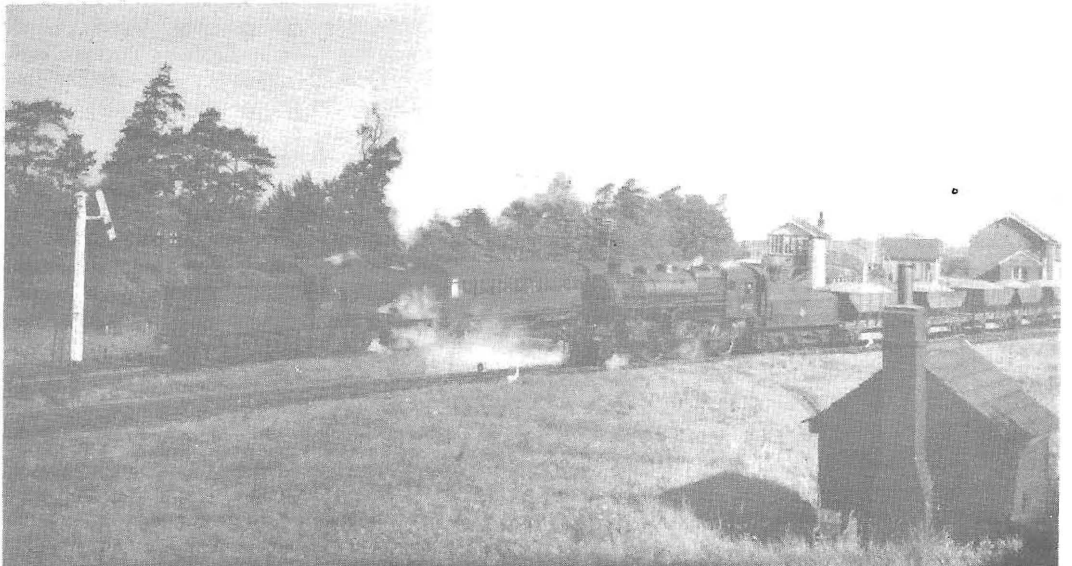
D 2s Nos. 2157
and 2195
*Just before the
train was
released from
snowdrifts
at Guestwick
9th March 1947*



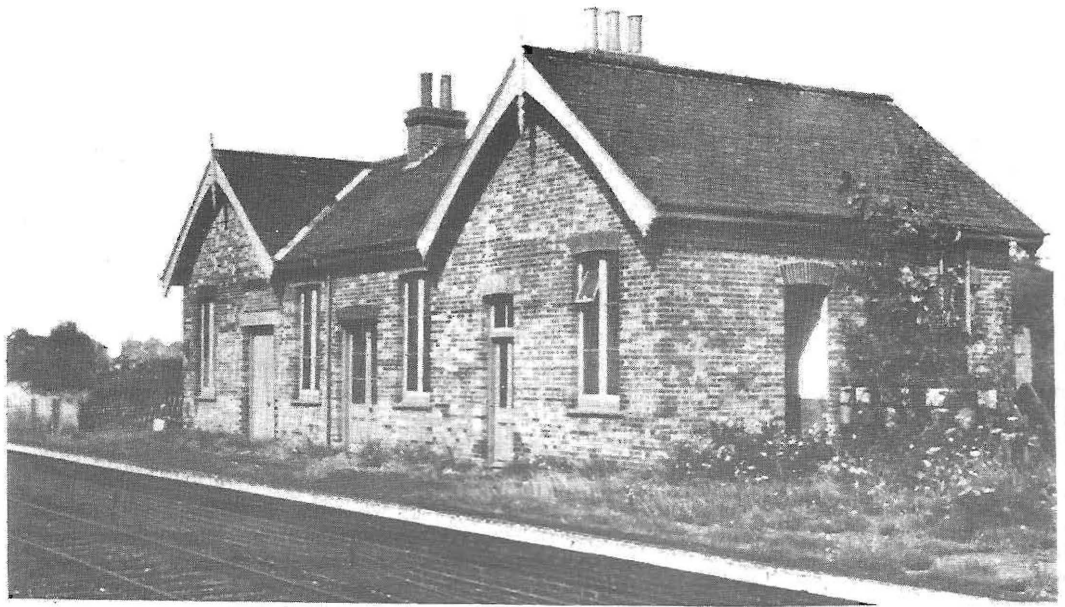
J17 No. 65588
*The 'afternoon
freight' from
Norwich to
Melton Constable
in May 1957*

4 MT No. 43111
(Goods)
D 16/3 No. 62515
(Passenger)

*A busy scene at
Whitwell in
September 1957.
The goods train
has shunted its
ballast trucks
into the yard to
let the 9.37am
Melton Constable
to Norwich City
pass by.*



The main Station building at Whitwell in August 1965



In the severe winter of 1947 many roads and rails were blocked by snow and two engines and a coach became stuck on Wednesday 5th March in high drifting snow in a cutting at Guestwick. Initially railway staff could not get to it by using snow ploughs so it had to be manually dug out. Troops based at the Weybourne army camp assisted by a number of German prisoners of war started digging from the Melton Constable side and a train load of men (who were temporarily unemployed due to the weather) were brought from Norwich. The train also brought a refreshment van and a quantity of shovels supplied by R G Carters of Drayton.

After much hard work the train was finally freed on Sunday 9th March when a snow plough coupled with three engines from the LMS was used to clear the final drifts.

Another great weather problem was the fog and in a poem about the job of a platelayer, Mr A L Jex, who worked on the length gang covering Whitwell wrote that:

'When that black beast called fog descends,
A signal post he must attend;
Put detonators on the line,
So drivers may be warned in time'.

He recalls that he was on fogging duty at Whitwell one day and he cracked a fog signal to stop a goods train. After a while he heard what he thought was wagons on the rails and then through the fog came a brake van and eight wagons. The track was downhill from there to Lenwade so he jumped on the brake van and pulled up the wagons in the Black Water Cutting. He then went back to Whitwell Station and told the staff and they arranged for an engine to go down and pick up the wagons. His only reward

for this was a few lumps of coal that he had off the tender; it was an offence to take these but the driver and guard were not in a position to say anything as the loss of their goods train was far worse than the loss of some coal.

In the days before large road transport the railway was one of two means of getting cattle to the main Norwich Market (the other was to walk the animals there). Every Saturday a special train would leave Melton Constable at 4 am and would convey the animals to Norwich, they would be unloaded at the City Station (near Heigham Street) and would then be driven to the Market then situated in front of the Castle.

A large number of passengers (particularly on Saturdays) would be conveyed to and from Norwich, many farmers and business people would go and make purchases and these would be delivered by the shopkeepers and merchants to the City Station ready for the 'passengers' to pick them up when they came back for the return journey.

The agricultural goods traffic declined rapidly at Whitwell after 1945. There was the competition from the G E R at Reepham and from the increasing number of road hauliers, full wagon loads from Whitwell became non-existent from the late 1940s onwards.

By the 1950s the passenger traffic had declined and this sleepy country station displayed a general absence of business. A member of staff from the Norwich office of the Railway remembers a day in the mid 1950s when he went to Whitwell to catch the train back to Norwich. It was a cold day and the waiting room fire made a welcome place to sit by until the train came. There was no one about



*and sadly its state
in June 1991.*

except a lady station attendant; when the Norwich train came in - she called 'Whitwell and Reepham Station' three times - no one got off and just the one passenger got on; as the train slowly pulled out of the station he remembers thinking 'change and decay' - it was therefore inevitable that closure

would come and in February 1959 the last passenger train steamed its way through Whitwell, the lamps were put out, the doors were closed and the cold winters day was warmed only by the nostalgia which so many felt for this much loved railway.

Whitwell Station — date unknown, but believed to be circa 1920.



The Reepham Line

The East Norfolk Western Extension Railway

Before the railways, communications in North East Norfolk were served by the turnpike system which in this area was sparse and followed the main coach routes and by a dense network of country roads which until the 1870s was extensively served by carriers carts. Essentially all roads in this area seem to lead to and from Norwich. Passenger services on these roads were very poor, the smaller market towns such as Aylsham were well served with passenger coaches twice a day, but Reepham had to make do with a passenger service twice a week. Apart from these services the only alternative was to hire a horse and carriage or to pay for a seat on a carriers cart.

In the 1860s and 70s the people of Reepham were able to journey to Norwich or have their goods picked up from or delivered to there by the two local carriers.

William Leeds, the proprietor of the Sun Inn, ran an omnibus and carrier service from that establishment every Wednesday and Saturday, leaving at 8am and concluding the journey at the 'Moon and Stars Public House' in Norwich, returning the same day at 4.30 pm in Winter and 5pm in Summer. The journey passing through Booton, Alderford, Attlebridge, Taverham and Drayton.

William Stimpson-Lewis offered a similar service from Reepham on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday and the Post Office operated a mail cart which left Reepham at 4.30pm and which returned from Norwich at 6am the following morning.

Carriers carts rarely took more than a ton of goods and were primarily to transport consumer goods to and from market centres and to supply local shops and businesses. Heavy, low value goods were less

A timetable from the early part of this century, note there is no Sunday service. When land was purchased for the line many Farmers only sold on the condition that the 'Lord's Day' was observed.

Table 57 NORWICH (Thorpe), WROXHAM, AYLSHAM (South), COUNTY SCHOOL, and DEREHAM

Miles	Week Days only							Week Days only												
	p.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.		a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.						
3	London (L. St.)	dep	10 25	4 25	10 20	1 00	3 40	6 40	..	54	London (L'pool St.)	dep	5 50	..	5 50	9 20	11 25	..
..	Norwich (Thorpe)	dep	6 45	9 18	2 05	4 08	6 55	9 25	..	Dereham	dep	8 38	8 23	11 55	..	12 00	10 18	8 5	..	
14	Whitlingham A	..	6 10	9 23	2 0	..	7 0	9 30	..	North Elmham	..	6 45	8 23	12 3	..	12 8	2 18	8 14	..	
8	Balhouse	..	6 20	9 33	2 14	5 02	7 10	9 40	..	County School	{ arr	6 50	8 37	12 8	..	12 15	2 23	6 20	..	
6	Wroxham	{ dep	6 28	9 40	2 22	5 07	7 15	9 45	..	Foulsham	{ dep	6 50	8 48	12 8	..	12 15	2 23	6 20	..	
11	Coltishall	..	6 38	9 51	2 40	5 17	7 25	9 55	..	Reepham (Norfolk)	..	7 09	2 12	24	..	12 29	2 36	6 26	..	
14	Buxton Lamas	..	6 42	9 57	2 48	5 13	7 31	9 59	..	Cawston	..	7 18	9 7	12 28	..	12 34	2 44	6 43	..	
17	Aylsham (South)	..	6 51	10 6	2 55	5 23	7 40	10 8	..	Aylsham (South)	..	7 26	9 17	12 39	..	12 44	2 56	6 54	..	
22	Cawston	..	7 0	10 15	3 4	5 32	7 49	10 17	..	Buxton Lamas	..	7 34	9 25	12 47	..	12 52	3 4	7 4	..	
24	Reepham (Norfolk)	..	7 7	10 20	3 9	5 39	7 54	10 22	..	Coltishall	..	7 40	9 31	12 53	..	12 58	3 10	7 10	..	
25	Foulsham	..	7 16	10 29	3 18	5 48	8 10	10 31	..	Wroxham	{ arr	7 47	9 36	12 58	..	1	3 16	7 15	..	
32	County School	{ dep	7 25	10 38	3 25	5 55	8 10	10 38	..	Balhouse	..	8 09	9 37	1 01	24	1 24	18	7 24	..	
34	North Elmham	..	7 24	10 37	3 25	5 55	8 11	10 39	..	Whitlingham A	..	8 79	44	..	1 31	1 31	25	7 27	..	
38	Dereham	..	7 30	10 46	3 31	7 1	10 17	10 45	..	Norwich (Thorpe)	arr	8 16	9 55	..	1 40	1 40	24	7 27	..	
163	54 London (L. St.)	arr	7 58	10 54	3 59	7 10	10 28	10 53	..	3 London (L'pool St.)	arr	11 34	1 35	48	4 54	0 6	6 7	9	..	

A Station for Thorpe St. Andrew
 a a.m.
 i Runs 15th July to 9th September inclusive
 c 3 minutes later on Saturdays
 E Except Saturdays

F The East Anglian. Limited accommodation
 L Via Norwich (Thorpe) Dep. 10 p.m. on Wednesdays and 1 1/2 p.m. on Saturdays

H Arr. 5 6 p.m. until 24th June
 P Dep. 10 25 a.m. on Saturdays
 p p.m.
 S or 8 Saturdays only
 Z Dep. 11 25 p.m. on Sundays

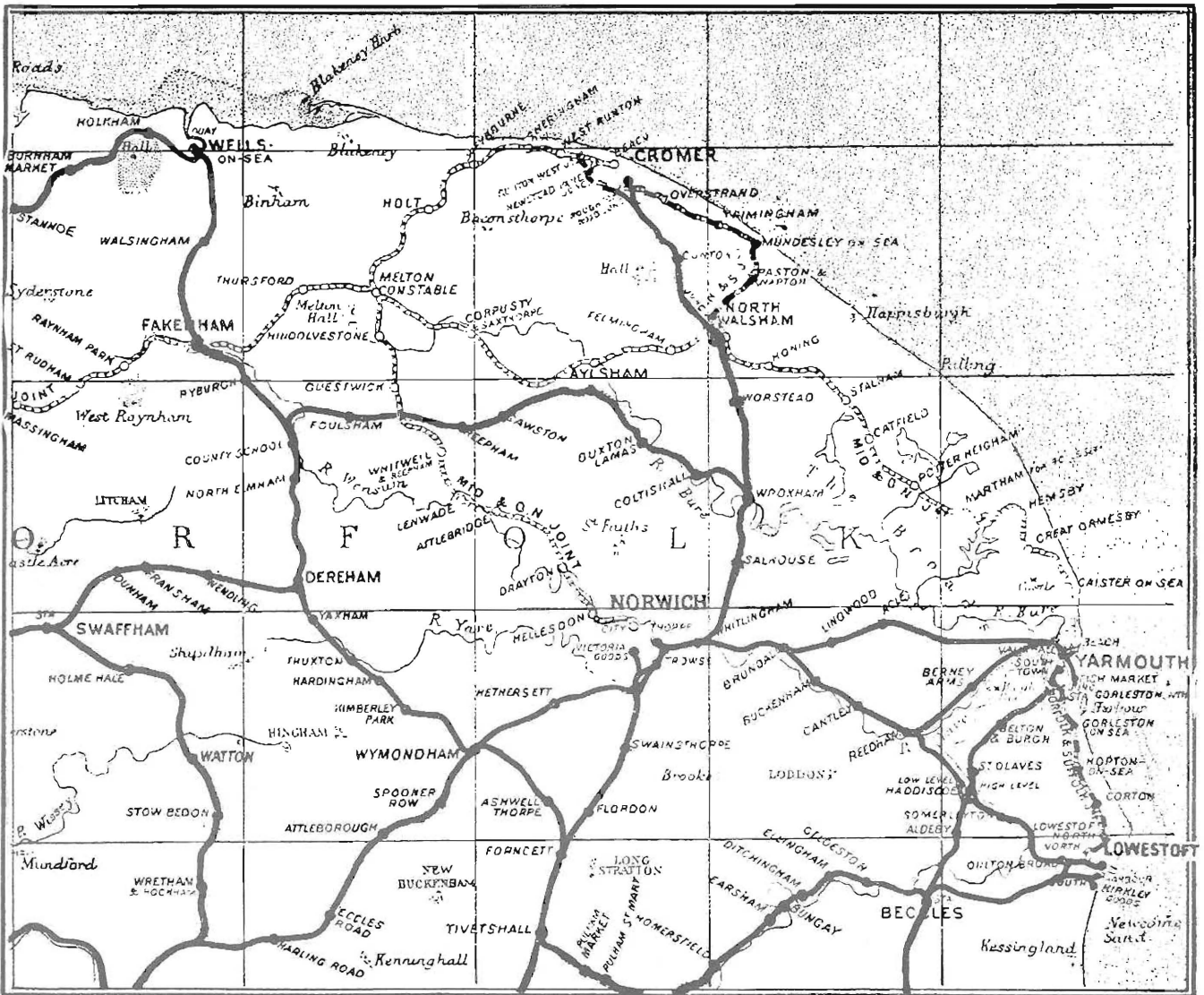
For OTHER TRAINS between Norwich and Whitlingham, Tables 55 and 56—Norwich and Wroxham, Table 55—Norwich and County School, Table 54—County School and Dereham, Table 54.

often carried in this way. Farm waggons, droves of animals and walkers formed the rest of road traffic at this time. Footpaths were also intensively used by both locals and by foot postmen. Carts were expensive, 8d to 1/- a mile, and more in bad weather and hence were a strong factor in the isolation of the communities in this area. During the mid nineteenth century in the whole of North East Norfolk less than fifty passengers a day could be carried by public transport and yet there was little call for a more intensive coach service. This dearth of traffic was noted as a fact by the Board of Trade when the rest of the country was gripped by railway mania. North East Norfolk therefore lacked any manufacturing industry and it lacked a transport infra-structure capable of supplying any new large industry or resort, the area was totally agriculture based and it was undeniably prosperous for the farmer if not for his labourers.

This area, was, in the eyes of many an entrepreneur ripe for the consideration of a profit making line of communication - the railway! The first railway

in Norfolk to be built was the Yarmouth and Norwich railway conceived in 1841 by the Stephenson as the first link in an east-west trunk railway from Yarmouth to Peterborough, the line was completed in 1844.

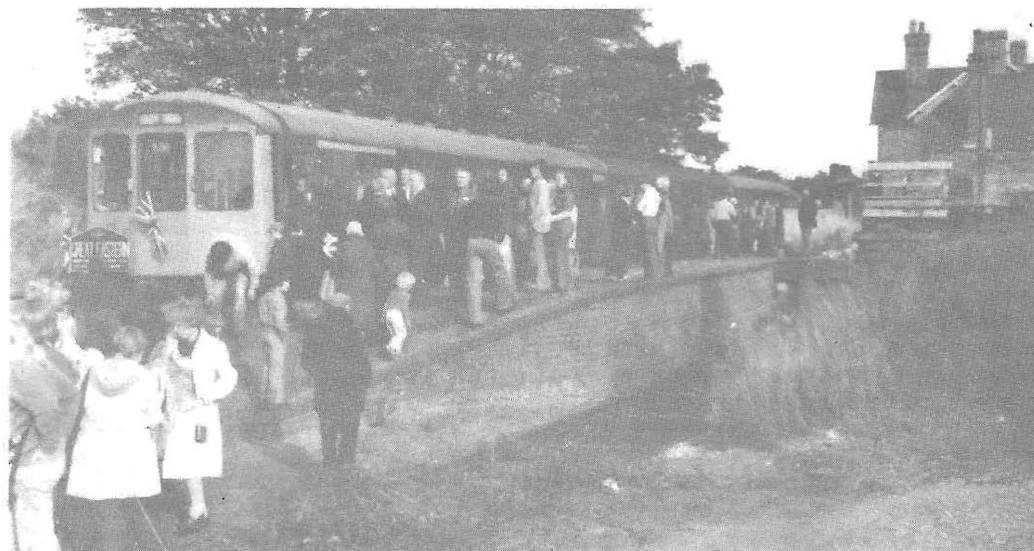
The second stage of the Stephenson project was the railway from Norwich to Brandon which was duly built and when the line was extended from Brandon it finally allowed Norwich to be linked to London, although it was one of the last major urban centres in England to be so joined. Norfolk was linked to other main centres of trade but the route was often tortuous and the lines badly run but there was no reasonable alternative. In 1850 goods sent from North East Norfolk to Ipswich, had to be carried by horse to Norwich and then consigned on the railway via Cambridge and London, a journey of some 200 miles as against 40 by road. This long journey was still quicker and more reliable as the turnpike in winter was invariably half a yard deep in mud.





The Station Staff take time between trains to pose for the camera — date unknown, but probably the early 1900s.

A busy moment at the Station during the inter war period. The use of the Railway declined during these years, but was revived for a few years during the Second World War.



The Last Passenger Train to stop at Reepham Station — organised by Aylsham and District Rail Action Committee in 1978.

There was then a flood of proposals for railways to fill the gaps in the railway map of the 1840s and 50s in North East Norfolk but for various reasons none were built. In the early 1870s construction began on the line from Whitlingham Junction to North Walsham and after the appropriate Board of Trade inspection it was permitted open to traffic as from the 20th October 1874. The line ran through Wroxham and it was from here that the east-west extension was planned.

The East Norfolk Railway Act of 1864 had originally planned an extension to Aylsham but delays in building other extensions (notably to Cromer) and other financial problems slowed down expansion plans so that the Act to extend the line to Aylsham was not granted until the 16th April 1876. Tenders for the work were submitted during 1878 and that of the lowest, William Waddell, was accepted and in August 1878 the work commenced. There were a number of initial problems particularly with the weather; bricklaying was stopped in December, due to the severe frosts.

However in the Spring of 1879 with a large increase in the number of men employed and with the assistance of two stationary steam engines and a traction engine he was able to keep to his contract of 'Coltishall by the middle of June' and he estimated that he would be at Buxton by the end of June. The Board of Trade Inspector declared the line adequate and the first section from Wroxham to Buxton was opened on the 8th July 1879. The Company however was running into financial problems and when shares in the Western Extension (to County School) were offered in September 1879 there was a lack of response and this coupled with proposals for extensions submitted by other railway companies in Norfolk meant that there was little chance of the Wroxham to County School extension becoming a profitable possibility if it ran on its own. It was inevitable that it would only survive if it was taken over by a larger company, this happened in June 1881 when the East Norfolk Railway was amalgamated with the Great Eastern Railway.

During these troubled times however, the building of the line continued with the extension from Buxton to Aylsham opening on the 1st January 1880 and from Aylsham to Cawston opening on the 1st September 1880. At the time of the Great Eastern Railways takeover in June 1881 land for the two miles beyond Reepham had already been purchased and work from Cawston was proceeding on schedule.

After the amalgamation with the G.E.R., the East Norfolk lines were developed as part of an integrated system but this development favoured the Norwich to the North East Norfolk coast area and this was further enhanced when a line from Mundesley to Cromer was opened in 1906.

The western extension of the North East Railway became the poor relation of the system; it proved to be an unpopular and profitless extension which slumbered along into the twentieth century; it epitomised the sleepy rustic branch line that our memories are so fond of.

The First World War brought a halt to the extensive holiday traffic to the Cromer/Mundesley area and there was compensation by an increase in military and general farm traffic as maximum production from the land was encouraged. The immediate post war period continued this revival particularly as farm production stayed high but the first buses started to run scheduled services to Cromer and Aylsham. When the road surfaces improved during the 1920s and bus stops were introduced into the very centre of Norwich, the passengers started to turn away from trains onto the buses. They found they could catch a bus which passed through the village rather than walking up to two miles to a station to catch a train.

The Wroxham to Reepham and County School line really suffered in this inter-war period, being an east-west line when most of the traffic was north-south (to the coast and the Broads). Reepham to Norwich was catered for also by the M & GN line from Whitwell (which was 35 minutes quicker) and by buses. Worst of all in the inter-war period was the depression in farming and allied industries. Arable North East Norfolk was depressed more than most areas and with little money available to finance development or initiatives the railways were losing a lot of a decreasing total of traffic. It was not until the approach of the Second World War that traffic began to increase markedly. RAF Stations built at Coltishall and Foulsham brought extra traffic to the line, agriculture revived as in the First World War and bus schedules were slashed. A great many people now had to travel and the only service available were the trains.

After the war there was a rapid decline in passenger traffic on the line from Aylsham to County School once the buses and private cars returned to the roads. The long meandering line from County School to Norwich via Aylsham in a slow train pulling dowdy and worn carriages which were at least 40 years old were no match for the direct and competitive buses.

The passenger services from Wroxham to County School ceased on the 15th September 1952 and the line from Foulsham to Reepham was closed to goods as well.

The line was linked to the M & GN line from Melton Constable to Norwich via Whitwell when the Themelthorpe curve was laid in September 1960 and this allowed the concrete production from Lenwade to form much of the traffic for few years until it finally closed to goods in 1982.

The line was last used in the mid 1970s when a small number of passenger trains were organised by the Aylsham and District Rail Action Committee. The journeys from Thorpe Station to Lenwade (and back) via Wroxham, Aylsham, Reepham and Whitwell were packed with passengers but they provided little more than evocative reminders of the slow pace of life of a bygone age, a service which could not be profitably sustained today.

Memories of the Railway

The days of man are three score years and ten - but that was certainly not the vision that inspired the building of the 'Western Extension of the Great Eastern Railway', as it was termed, when it was opened in 1882, but 70 years was how long the passenger service lasted until its closure in September 1952.

Launched amidst much anticipation (with perhaps not a little trepidation) during the period 1876-79, grandly the project gathered sway from Aylsham to County School, as Cawston, Reepham and finally Foulsham Stations arose and the railway tracks completed their easy communication in 1882.

All the actors on that stage have now taken their last call and it is no longer possible to converse with anyone who was involved with the building of the line. There are many and varied episodes connected to the building, some are complimentary and many are contradictory. The search for detail can be long, exciting - sometimes exasperating - but always interesting and at last a more or less coherent story can emerge. When the line closed it was still possible to contact people in the Reepham area who could remember the 1880s. Whilst most could remember the line being built very few worthwhile details could be gathered.

The patriotic urge, to provide waste paper and reduce the danger of fire from aerial attack early in 1939 doubtless resulted in many old papers being given over for salvage.

One lost paper held an account of the dinner given at the Kings Arms, Reepham to celebrate the opening of the line when the Superintendent (Mr R W Kendall), under whom it was built was chief guest.

The high fields bounding Stoney Lane and the eastern boundary of the yard to the railway bridge are often a puzzle to people. The navvies who built the railway excavated the site of the Reepham Station yard, leaving the fields high up on either side. The soil that was removed went to build the embankments which lead to the bridges on the Cawston and Kerdiston roads.

One old inhabitant, Mr Matt Timbers recalled the making of the yard, entailing the work of a pick and shovel brigade ("There were no excavators or bulldozers in those day, you know"), and the earth was run down the slope on a specially-constructed light track to build the embankments approaching the bridge over the Kerdiston road.

Horse-drawn trucks were the motive power, and Mr Walter Wilkin, drove the tip horse. Originally the road from Cabbage Court to Cawston New Road (now known as New Road) ran through Crown Meadow, but with the construction of the railway bridge to the east of the station, it assumed its present curve over the bridge. Incidentally, this bridge is the highest spot in Reepham and served admirably as a look-out post for air raid wardens in the last war. The blaze at Lowestoft in its worst night could be discerned at this vantage point.

Victorian ideas as to the Sabbath - and they were not bad ones either - insisted that the sale of many properties through which the line ran was conditional upon there being no Sunday traffic over them and this reservation has been scrupulously observed.

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LADY JEUNE writes in the "WEEKLY SUN" CHRISTMAS NUMBER, 1896:
"It seems to me that the real interest of Norwich centres in the Cathedral and the Maid's Head Hotel."

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	1st Class.	3rd Class.	1st Class.	3rd Class.	1st Class.	3rd Class.
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
Hunstanton	30 6	18 0	25 0	13 0	16 0	10 0
Lowestoft	33 0	19 9	27 6	15 0	22 0	11 0
Mundesley-on-Sea	34 0	20 0	27 6	15 0	22 0	11 0
Yarmouth	34 0	20 0	27 6	15 0	22 0	11 0
Cromer, *Wroxham	34 0	20 0	27 6	15 0	22 0	11 0
Norwich	31 10	18 11
Liverpool Street to—						
Walton-on-the-Naze, Clacton- on-Sea, or Frinton }	20 0	12 0	17 6	10 0	13 6	7 6
Harwich or Dovercourt ..	20 0	12 0	17 6	10 0	13 6	7 6
Felixstowe	23 4	14 3	17 6	10 0	13 6	8 0
Aldeburgh	27 9	16 9	25 0	13 0	16 0	10 0
Southwold	31 3	18 5	27 6	15 0	22 0	11 0
Southend-on-Sea, †Burnham- on-Crouch }	†8 8	†4 4	†7 0	†4 4	6 0	3 6

(a) Tourist Tickets are issued daily throughout the year, by any train, and are available for the return journey by any train as follows. Those issued from 1st May to 31st October inclusive on any day up to and including 31st December; those issued from 1st November to 30th April inclusive on any day within two calendar months from the date of issue. (b) Fortnightly Tickets are issued daily by any train, and are available for return by any of the advertised trains on any day within 15 days, including days of issue and return. (c) Friday to Tuesday Tickets are issued every Friday and Saturday by any train, and are available for return by any of the advertised trains on the day of issue, or on any day up to and including the following Tuesday.

* These tickets are issued to Wroxham only from May to October inclusive.

† Tourist and Fortnightly tickets are only issued to Burnham-on-Crouch from May to Oct. inclusive.

These Tickets are available to or from additional Stations as follows:—Hunstanton Tickets at Heacham; Lowestoft Tickets at Beccles, Reedham, Carlton Colville, Oulton Broad, Yarmouth, Cromer, Mundesley; Yarmouth Tickets at Beccles, Reedham, St. Olaves, Acle, Lowestoft, Cromer, Mundesley; Cromer Tickets at North Walsham, Gunton, Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Mundesley; Mundesley Tickets at Paston and Knapton, Cromer, Yarmouth, Lowestoft; Walton-on-the-Naze Tickets at Frinton, Clacton, Harwich, Dovercourt; Clacton-on-Sea Tickets at Frinton, Walton, Harwich, Dovercourt; Frinton-on-Sea. Tickets at Clacton, Walton, Harwich, Dovercourt; Harwich Tickets at Dovercourt, Parkeston, Frinton, Clacton, Walton, † Felixstowe; Felixstowe Tickets at Trimley, Harwich; Aldeburgh Tickets at Leiston; Southwold Tickets at Darsham, Wenhamston, Blythburgh, Walberswick; Southend-on-Sea Tickets at Prittlewell; Burnham-on-Crouch Tickets at Farnbridge, Althorne, Southminster. Passengers must pay the ordinary local single Fares when travelling from one Station to the other.

‡ Passengers travelling to or from Felixstowe with Harwich or Dovercourt Tickets are required to pay the difference between the respective Fares, in addition to the Local Single Boat or Rail Fare, when travelling from the one place to the other.

Extra Journey Return Tickets at Reduced Fares are issued at the above Stations—except Southend-on-Sea, Burnham-on-Crouch, Prittlewell, Farnbridge, Althorne, and Southminster—to the Station from which the Tickets are issued, to visitors holding not less than two Tourist or Fortnightly Tickets. The Extra Journey Tickets will be available for return until the date of expiry of the Tickets in respect of which they are issued.

J. F. S. GOODAY, GENERAL MANAGER.

Liverpool Street Station, 1900.

The Midland and Great Northern Railway Company had for some time been considering a line which would give a more direct route to the Midlands - which covered much of the area taken in hand so energetically by the Great Eastern once the necessary sanction had been given the latter really got on with the task and the speed with which the work was done came as a great shock to those who favoured the nearer route to Norwich from Whitwell Station. Because of the close proximity of the two stations of rival Companies the fare to Norwich was the same, notwithstanding that the mileage from Reepham was about double that from Whitwell. The Whitwell line had no Sunday service either.

The story of the sheds at Reepham used as blacksmiths' and iron-workers' shops, of the turntable in use because the Government of those days forbade a train to run with the tender before the engine; the work of Mr H E Hawes, a survivor of those days when he was a carpenter employed in the interior construction of the station's dwellings at Cawston, Reepham and Foulsham and on the woodwork of the line - are not all these with many another written in the Book of Memory.

In the early 1880s a favourite Sunday walk of those days was to the station to see the weekly progress of the line - how many more sleepers had been laid; this walk was alternated with a visit to Booton Church to see how many more bricks had been laid by the Rev Whitwell Elwin and his team.

The line from Reepham to County School was opened on the 1st May 1882 and two months later the July issue of the Foulsham Parish Magazine proudly printed the first timetable of the East Norfolk Railway with its conglomeration of 'Mixed', 'Parliamentary' and 'Market' trains. By this it took 43 minutes to travel from Aylsham to Foulsham, the editor for brevity omitting reference to Cawston and Reepham. The journey from London to Foulsham by the 'Mixed' train occupied 5 hours 14 minutes while the 'Parliamentary' one took 6 hours 29 minutes. Norwich to Foulsham by the same trains were a matter of 1 hour 24 minutes and 1 hour eleven minutes respectively. There were, however 11 trains daily from Norwich to Foulsham and 10 from Foulsham to Norwich. All these, of course, passed through Reepham too.

In 1882 the fastest train of the day did the 17 mile journey from Foulsham to Norwich in 63 minutes. This seems to be the fastest time recorded for this trip in the 70 year history of the line.

The building of the line seemed to have been relatively accident free, or else no accidents were ever recorded, but two incidents were recorded. Firstly, the one outstanding incident before the line opened when a steam traction engine used by the contractors blew up near Foulsham while the users were desperately trying to replenish the boiler with water from a nearby stream.

Shortly after the line opened the only bad accident occurred when a man named Flatman left Cawston where he had been waiting longer than he thought

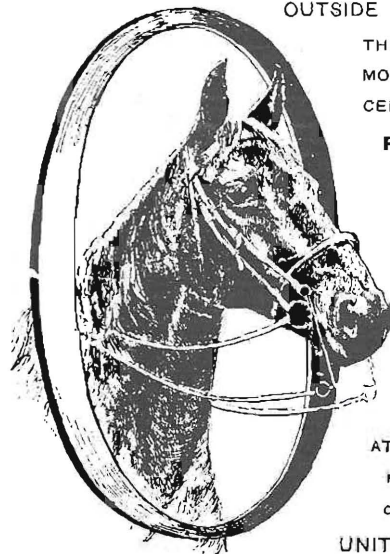
reasonable so he started walking a short cut home along the railway line. It was late and dark and a train overtook him, cutting him to pieces. The gory evidence of the accident was only revealed when the train stopped at Reepham Station and search parties went out and soon found further evidence to substantiate the tragedy.

No story of the Reepham railway would be complete without some reference to its stationmasters, the first of whom was Mr Richard Sayer, a genial and much-beloved gentleman. It seems he was succeeded for a short while by Mr Frank Rice, who subsequently became stationmaster of Sheringham, to help in its development from a lobster fishing village to a popular North Norfolk watering-place.

Probably his successor was Mr Youngman, whose son Harry contributed much to the cultural life of Reepham through the Orchestral Society and Nigger Minstrel Troupe before the 1914-18 war, in which he was killed. Later holders of the office were Mr Wilson, Mr Moore and finally Mr S B Bass whose maternal grandfather was a Mr Hoggar who was the first stationmaster at Foulsham. Mr Bass came from a real railway family who accumulated 390 years of railway service between them. Eleven members of his family were stationmasters.

SPELMANS' HORSE SALES, Norwich.

MESSRS. SPELMANS' Fortnightly Sales of High-Class Horses are noteworthy for their assemblage of Ponies, Cobs, Saddle and Harness Horses, and Hunters. Entries can be arranged on application at the Auctioneers' Offices, St. Giles Street, Norwich, and 28, Hall Plain, Great Yarmouth.



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was then where magisterial business was transacted and where a well attended busy market was held each week. The railway gave Reepham a direct communication with neighbouring villages and with towns like Dereham and Norwich, while London was now only 5 hours travelling time away. To the farm labourer of the time for whom a journey to Norwich was likely to be an annual event the prospect of leaving Reepham at breakfast and to be in the centre of London for lunch must have been difficult to comprehend. Although it is unlikely that he would have been able to afford it let alone have the free time to go.

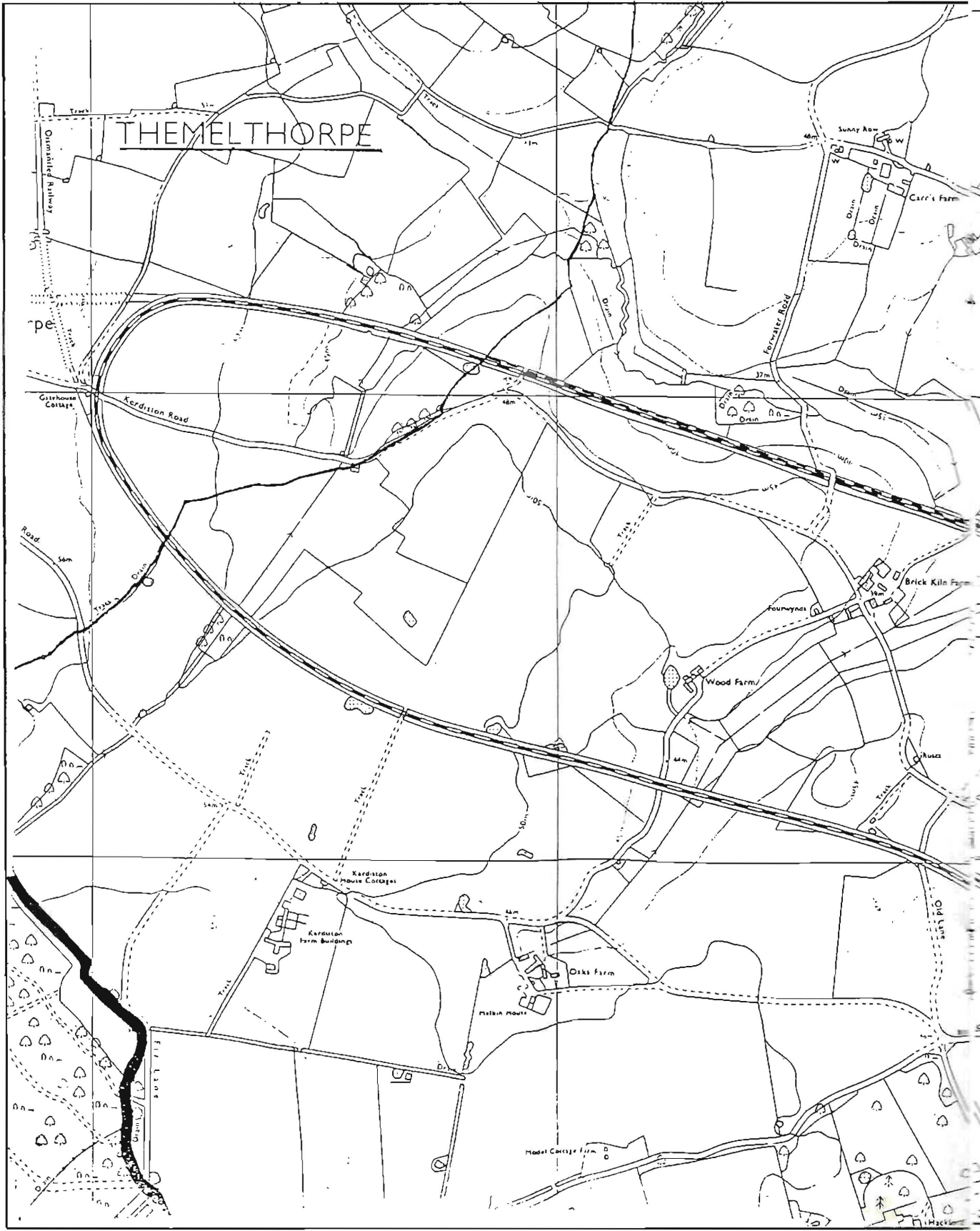
The novelty of a railway journey though, undoubtedly brought a shrinkage of trade and it is more than possible that the railway started the dispersal from the countryside.

The railway came as an engineering marvel which provided unlimited travel to the people of this Victorian era the service however, did not change much during the next 70 years and in its latter days it had many faults of infrequent and slow service but the passenger train during its 70 years at Reepham did meet a very real need. Even with its faults there was considerable sadness expressed when its farewell finally became necessary.

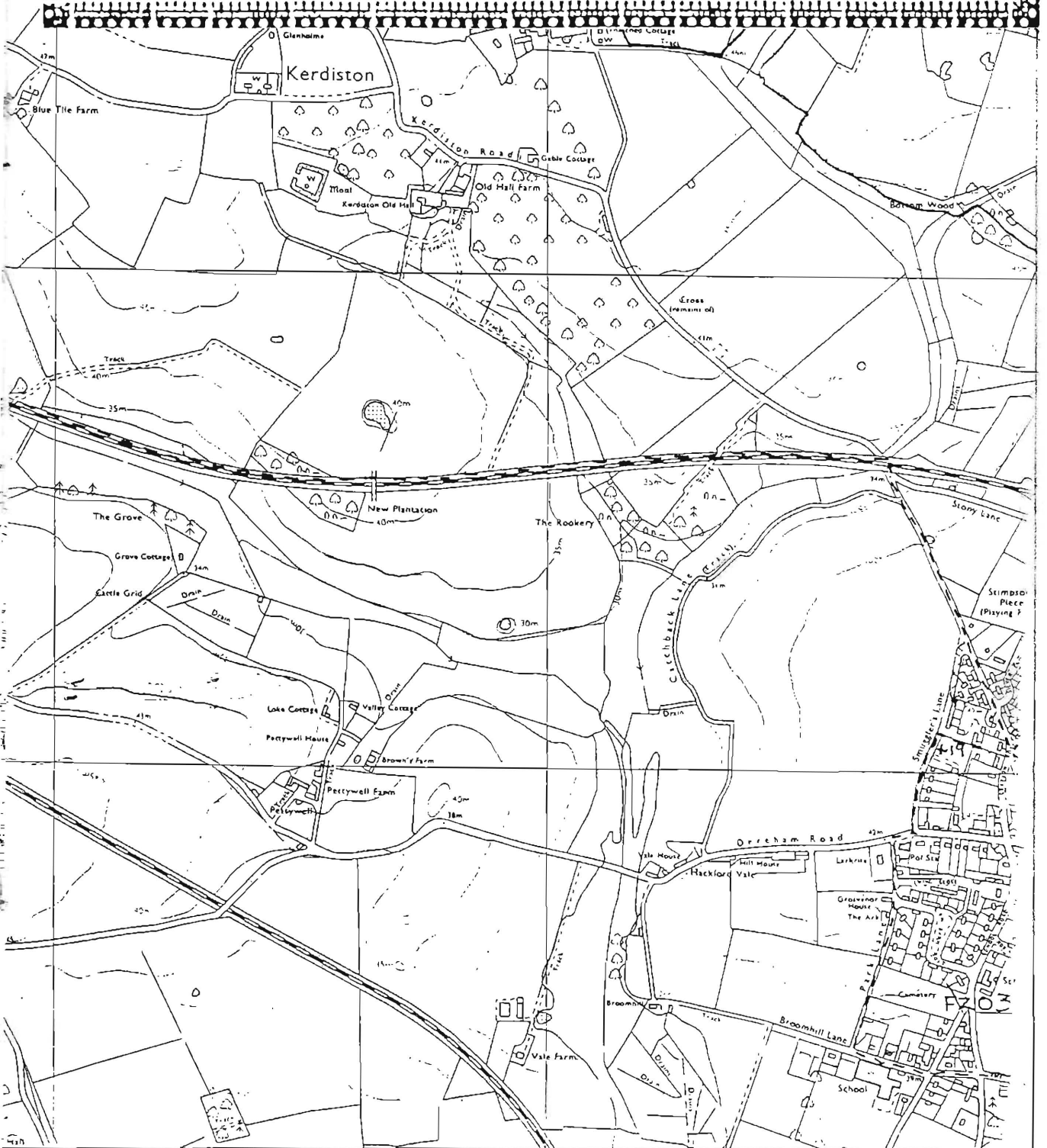
Was the coming of the railway to Reepham a blessing or not! Till the 1880s it certainly was a prosperous, self contained unit, numbering many influential people among its inhabitants. Whitwell Hall, Hackford Hall, The Brewery House, The Ollands and The Moor House were all the homes of gentry and Reepham

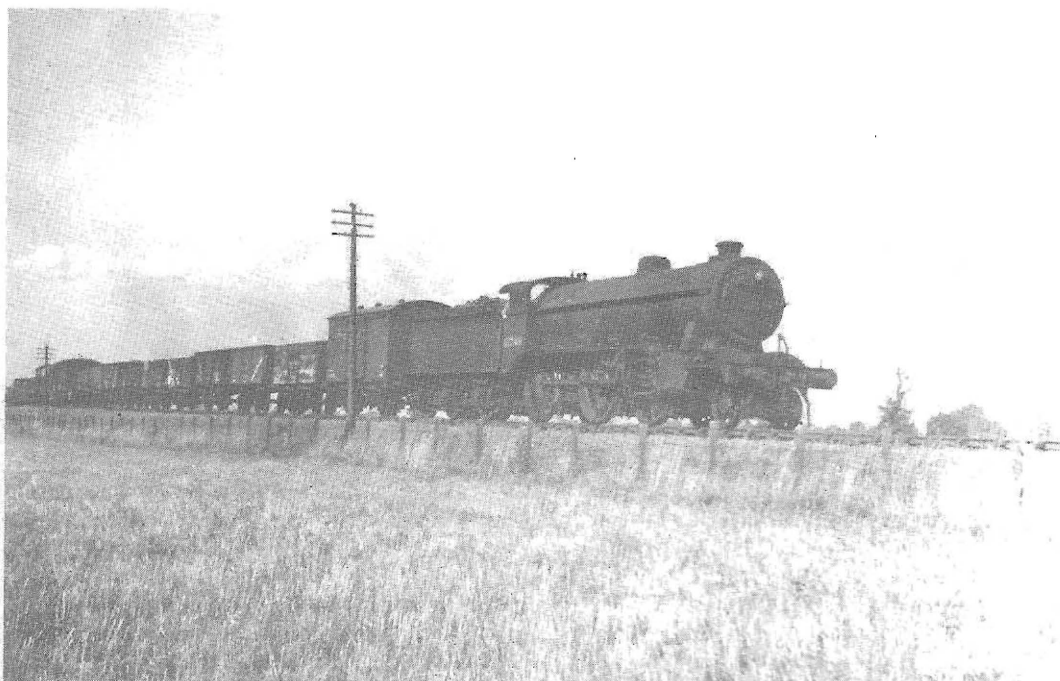
E 4 No. 2793 *The 2.10pm from Dereham to Wroxham leaves Reepham Station in May 1950*
 — Our local railway memories are encapsulated in pictures like this.





Around - the - World





K 2 No. 61748
*A Gresley K2
 passes
 Themelthorpe,
 later the site of
 the British
 Railways curve,
 on 10th May
 1949.*

Reepham is one of those few places that had the benefit of two railway lines, which ran independently for many years and which were unexpectedly linked in 1960. The line through Reepham Station which closed to passengers in 1952 and the line through Whitwell which saw its last passengers in February 1959. The railway lines were eventually taken up in the mid 1980s but in the intervening years the lines continued in use until the mid 1970s with regular trains hauling freight, the final goods train from Lenwade made its journey on 4th January 1982.

The reason for this continued use was the building of the Themelthorpe curve in 1960. This line starting from Whitwell Station and turning back almost on itself at Themelthorpe returning to Reepham Station makes a pleasant walk which traces the transport line which for 70 years was the backbone of most of the life and goods that came in and out of Reepham.

Prior to British Railways amalgamating the lines in 1948 the area was served by the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway which journeyed into Norwich City Station (the area east of Heigham Street now developed as an industrial estate) and the Great Eastern Railway which journeyed into Norwich Thorpe Station. The two Norwich stations were only a mile apart yet there was no direct link and any freight that had to be moved from one station had to be sent northwards via North Walsham, Cromer and Melton Constable and thence back to Norwich. For a distance of one mile direct the actual rail journey was immense, the route was affectionately known as 'going-round-the-world'. When the Themelthorpe curve was laid it halved the journey at a stroke.

No. D 5537

*Concrete beams
 on low loader
 wagons leaving
 Lenwade in
 August 1965
 and about to
 make their
 journey around
 the Themelthorpe
 curve.*



Reepham Station The Stimpson Connection

As the railway builders moved on their relentless course from Cawston to Reepham and on to Foulsham during 1880 and 81 the site of Reepham Station became an important point for the Company building the line. The site occupied a large area which today is bounded by Stony Lane and Wood Dalling Road and it was developed not only to house the station, associated buildings and various areas of lines to be used for marshalling goods traffic but also included areas and facilities that at the time were vital to the railway building. There was a carpenters' shop, where level crossing gates were built and materials prepared to build the signal boxes. There was a blacksmiths' shop where the metal work for gates and buildings was forged and there were areas used for storing the sleepers, rails and the mass of other items that were brought in by rail to assist in the

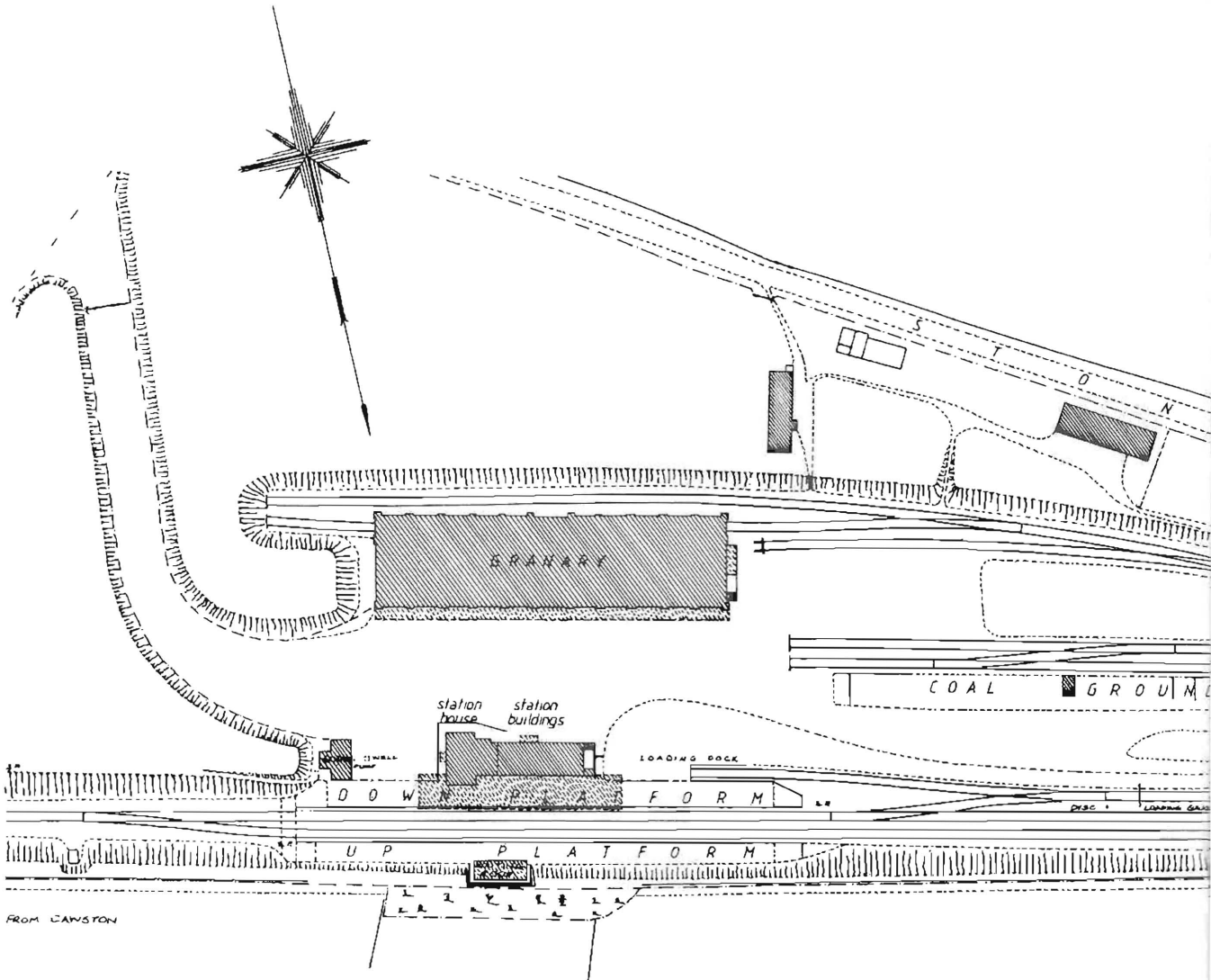


The Railway Builders

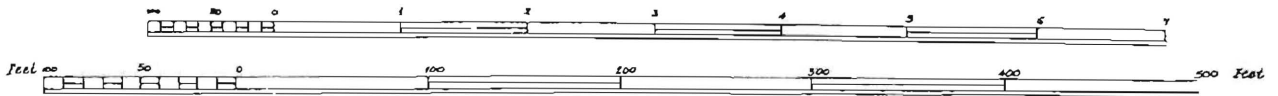
Taken about 1930 it shows Stimpson and Hurn staff with some of their delivery wagons. Mr Thomas Hurn is second right from the centre horse and Mr Ben Stimpson stands to its left.

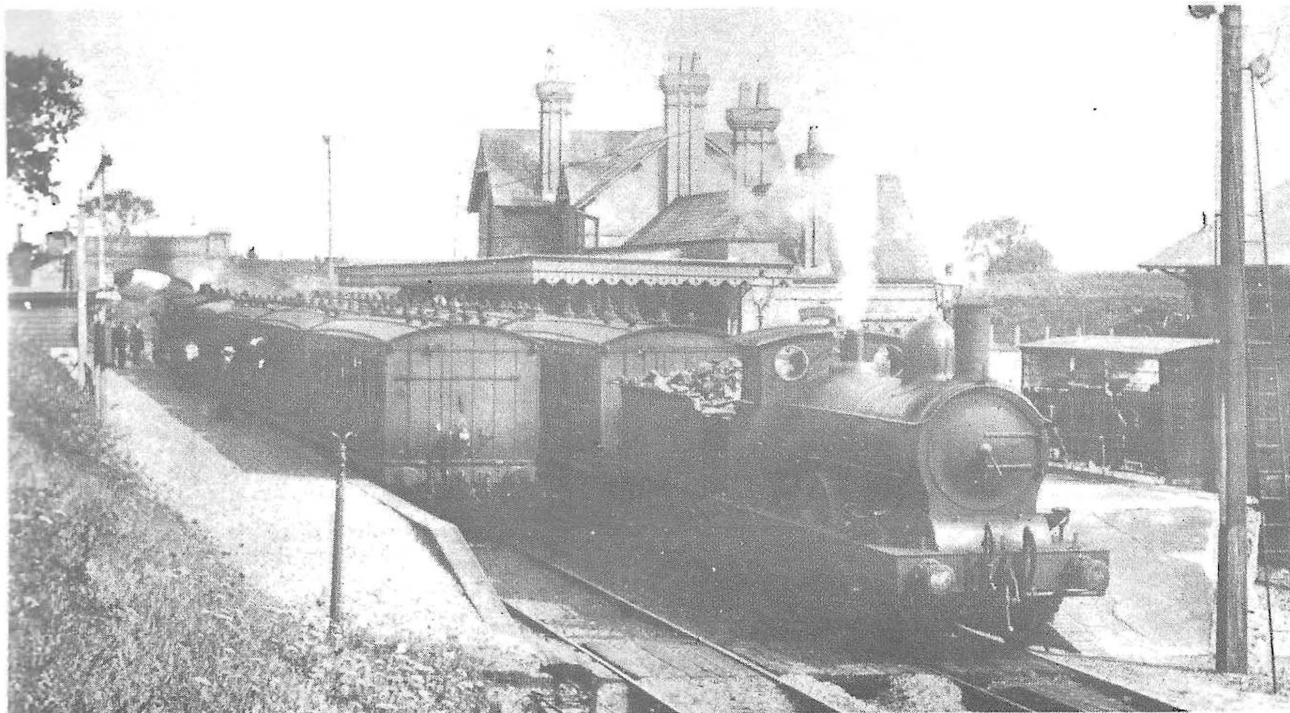


REEPHAM

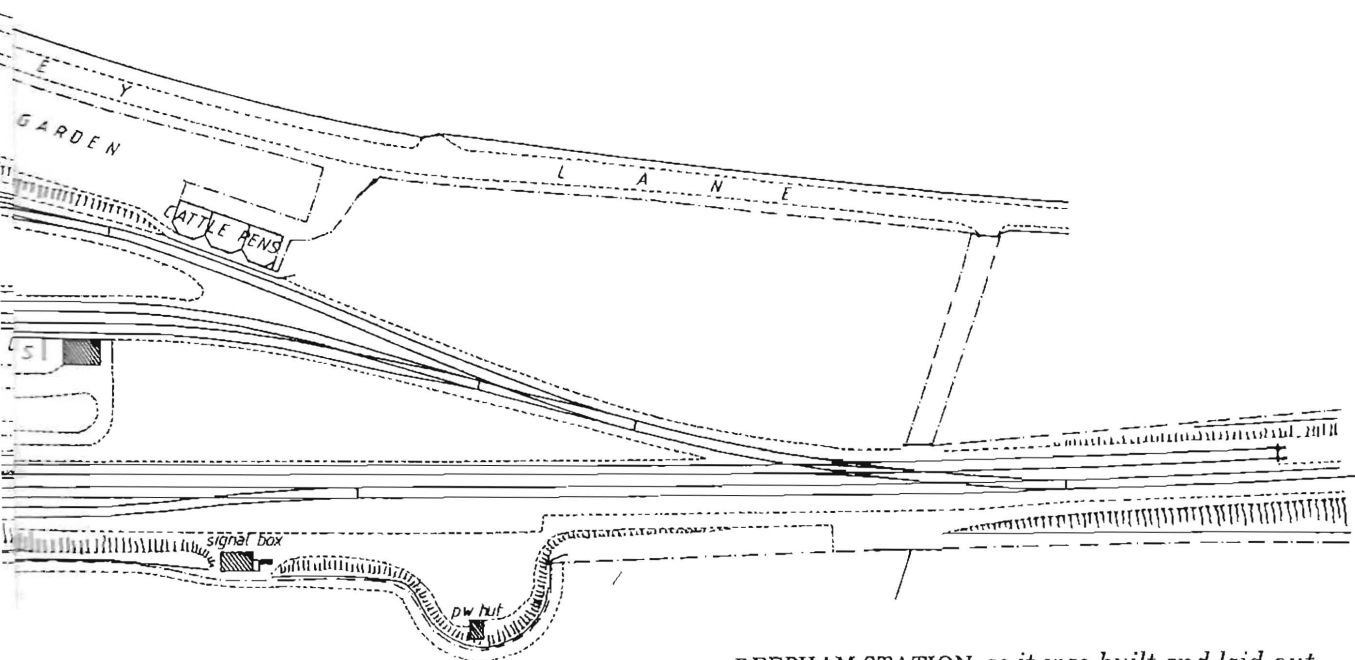


Scale 1 chain to an inch





On each weekday the 6pm from Wroxham and the 6.05pm from Dereham met briefly at Reepham at 6.38pm



REEPHAM STATION as it was built and laid out in the 1880's. The only items that remain today are the Granary, the Station buildings and the Old Carpenters' shop (later used by Stimpson's for stabling horses); this is the shaded building in the upper centre of this layout.

building of the line onto Foulsham and beyond. The site even included a bakery which was built to produce bread for the gangs who worked on the railway, many of whom came back at night and slept in and around the station area.


To encourage its usage the owners of the railway had to introduce and sustain goods traffic; they couldn't rely entirely on passengers to produce their profit and so the area round the station became a site of Victorian business development. Businesses were to be encouraged into the station area and hopefully would profit and expand from the regular delivery to the station by the daily goods trains.

The obvious business role was one that would satisfy the supply and demand of the agricultural needs of the areas and also to provide bulk goods for the business and domestic needs of the residents in and around Reepham.

The area to the south of the station buildings and the main up and down lines was developed as the business area; the Railway built a large granary (approximately 200 feet x 50 feet), there was an area known as the coal grounds and a group of cattle pens all served by a series of sidings.

In the first year or so after the opening of the line Garrett Taylor, Sharpins and Collers all set up business

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in the station area, although Taylors was taken over in 1886 by the Sall Coal Company. Coal, animal feed stuffs and grain were the main business of Sharpins and Sall Coal whilst Collers mainly concentrated on the supply of coal.

The three companies continued in competition until 1927 when Sharpins closed down and their business area in the station yard and Granary was taken over by the other two, although by this time the Sall Coal Company had changed its name to Stimpson and Hurn. Collers moved their Reepham area base to Aylsham in the early 1960s and the whole station site was then taken over by Stimpsons.

Mr Benjamin Stimpson was a farmer at Morton and Great Witchingham who purchased farm land at Sall in the early 1880s when Garrett Taylor had to sell up; Mr Stimpson also took over their Reepham Station business setting up the Sall Coal Company in 1886; the business continued during the next 100 years and the site is still used today by Pertwees for the distribution of seed corn, agricultural chemicals and fertilisers.

During the past 100 years the following name changes have occurred. From 1886 to approximately 1914 there was the Sall Coal Company, Ben Stimpson and E. Stimpson; from 1914 - 1932 it was Stimpson and Hurn; from 1933 to 1965, E Stimpson and Son, and then E Stimpson and Son Limited; from 1965 to 1980, Stimpson and Partners and Stimpson and Pertwee Limited, and from 1980 (and probably not finally) Pertwees.

Benjamin Stimpson (who was the grandfather of the present Mr Ben Stimpson) set up the Sall Coal Company, an agricultural merchants business which dealt in animal feed stuffs, grain and artificial fertilizers, these were bought and sold throughout the local farming community and they also bought in coal which was then sold to business premises and householders in Reepham and the neighbouring villages.

The station coal grounds were served by two lines along which the trucks were brought to be unloaded; the coal was often stored in piles at the station and unless the coal could be directly shovelled out from the trucks then men were employed who would shovel the coal into skeps which were then carried away from the tracks and hand tipped into prepared wooden bays.

The coal would be distributed in various sized lots mainly to the more affluent households of the district who could purchase and store the coal in such bulk. The big Houses in the area would order coal by the truck load and many a long working day had to be endured by the employees who were responsible for delivering the regular truckload ordered by the owners of such places as Haveringland Hall and Great Witchingham Hall.

When steam engines were used to thresh the corn the farmer would arrange for a suitable amount of steam coal to be delivered to the farms and this would be supplied in bulk by Stimpsons and Collers, the deliveries being made to arrive in advance at the respective farms as the threshing contractor with his machinery made his way from one site to another. Some farmers would buy a truckload of steam coal for use in the house as well as for threshing. The coal was also bagged and weighed up in small lots which was then sold by a delivery roundsman who toured the local area. Stimpsons had their main rounds in Wood Dalling, Kerdiston, Whitwell and Sparham with most of the Reepham area being covered by Collers. The coal (as with all other deliveries) was made by horse and cart from the 1880s until after the 1940s although the first motor truck entered service with Stimpsons in 1925.

The coal was usually bought through a Factor such as Mellonie and Golder of Ipswich, Bessey and Palmers of Great Yarmouth or Vintners of Cambridge and it was mostly obtained from the Nottinghamshire pits. A Stimpson inventory of 1887 shows that they were stocking best coals, kitchen coals, brick burning coals, smithy nuts, cobbles, screenings, coke, natural seconds, steam coal and household nuts.

In the early 1960s Collers moved to Aylsham and continued with their coal rounds but by this time there was a general decline in the demand for coal, the requests for bulk deliveries had all but gone and the introduction of oil fired central heating had reduced the household demand. The closure of the goods traffic in the 1960s and the subsequent difficulties that would ensue in the delivery by road signalled the end, in 1965, of Stimpsons as coal merchants.

Most of the work at the Station concerned with coal was carried on outside in the yard area, the granary was rented and used for the other sides of the business; the feed stuffs and grain and the artificial fertilizers. The company bought in general feed stuffs which were sold to the local farming community and it bought from the farmers their cereal crops which were then sold or stored depending upon the market demands at the time. The grain was sold at the Norwich Corn Hall in Exchange Street (now the home of Jarrolds Department Store).

A balance sheet from the end of the last century shows that the following feed stuffs were being sold to local farmers; bran, barley meal, cotton cake (square and long), decorticated cake, supers, linseed cake, maize (flat and round), malt culms, lamb food, black oats, rice meal, tares, porridge meal, fowls wheat, bullock food, beans and white peas. They also sold bar, land and rock salt.

At that time there was a small demand for artificial fertilizers and Stimpsons were buying in and selling on nitrate soda, phosphates, superphosphate, lime, bone manure and sulphate of ammonia. Much of it seemed to be recorded as manure: this would appear to have been a generic term to describe the product irrespective of whether it came from animals, chemical firms or as a by product from the mining areas (basic slag was high phosphate).

Stimpsons were responsible locally for their pioneering approach to the manufacture of feed stuffs: whilst there may not have been a specific demand from farmers for animal farm compounds, Stimpsons recognised that balanced feed stuffs were much more beneficial (and cost effective) than single feeds and they developed products which were then sold direct to local farmers. In the early 1930s they started preparing mixed pig and poultry feeds and this soon developed into a wide range of similar products. In those early days all the feeds were mixed by hand shovel but as the demand increased a mechanical mixer, hammer mill and oat crusher were all purchased and installed in the Granary.

The early development with artificial fertilizers led to the setting up of an agency with ICI in 1930, sales increased during the 1930s and during the Second World War the business was almost wholly concentrated on it. There was a great need for the Country to become as near to self sufficient as was possible and at the same time Stimpsons had to sustain a decrease in their workforce as more and more staff left to take their place in the Forces.



Mr Ben Stimpson supervising another delivery of Artificial Fertiliser from ICI in the 1950's.

Towards the end — Stimpsons unload another delivery in the 1960's also Artificial Fertiliser.



With less staff available and with a growing demand for crop production Stimpsons concentrated on artificial fertilizers and decreased their activities with feed stuffs and grains.

Coal was freely available during the early years of the war but a decline in the number of men in the pits coupled with a particularly long and bitter cold spell in January 1942 caused the rationing of coal to be brought in later that year. Stimpsons had continued with their coal rounds, although the supply to them had been erratic particularly during the winter months when the transport of coal by rail would sometimes break down completely. When rationing was introduced the deliveries continued during the rest of the war but it was of specific amounts and to regular customers.

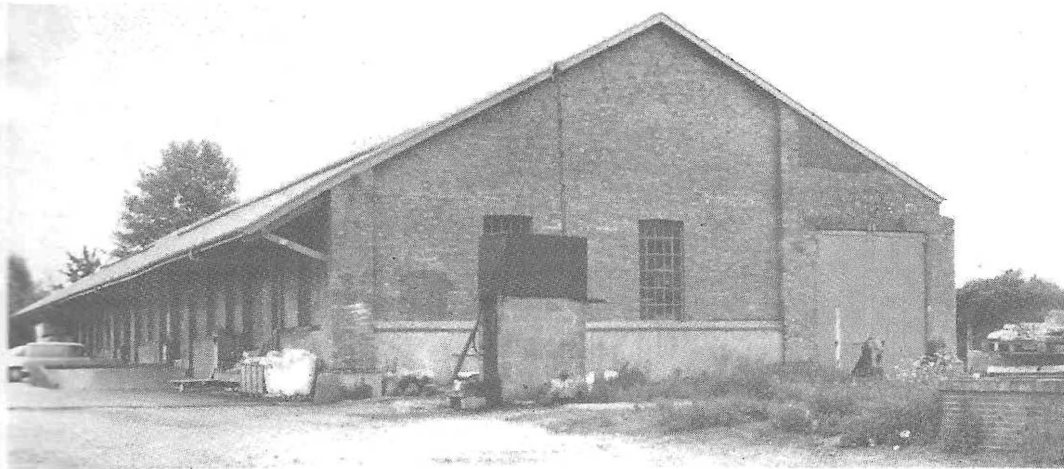
After the war some areas of business slowly declined and in 1965 (the year the coal sales finished) they merged with Pertwees: eventually the feed stuffs demised and today the whole business concentrates on artificial fertilizers, agrochemicals and seed corn.

For many years the business relied heavily on horses for their delivery work and also for use in the yard

to shunt the trucks into the granary ready for unloading. The station yard diagram shows two lines of track, one which goes behind the granary, this was known as the 'back road' and another which goes in one end of the granary and out the other end. This was known as the 'shed road'. Two horses would be used and they moved the trucks around in the sidings until the ones to be unloaded were in position, they would then be pulled by the horse to the south door of the granary.

There were two mixed goods trains a day, which passed through the station and every afternoon if trucks arrived for unloading then the trains would leave them in the area to the west of the station site. There was a gradient up through the coal grounds, until it reached the granary door; there it levelled out. If the trucks required unloading in the coal area or other outside sidings or in the granary then they were pulled into position by two horses. One was fitted with a special harness and pulled nearest the truck and the other outer horse was fitted with an ordinary trace.

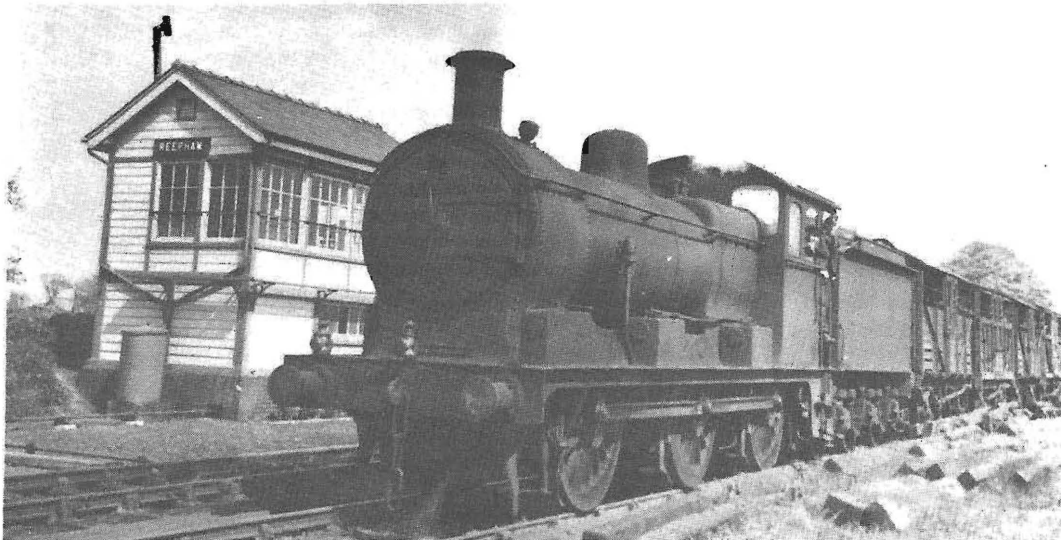
Both horses would walk on the right hand side (not between the rails) and they would pull the trucks



The Granary today, little changed in its structure since the 1880's. The Goods Trucks were pulled into the building through the large doorway on the right hand side.



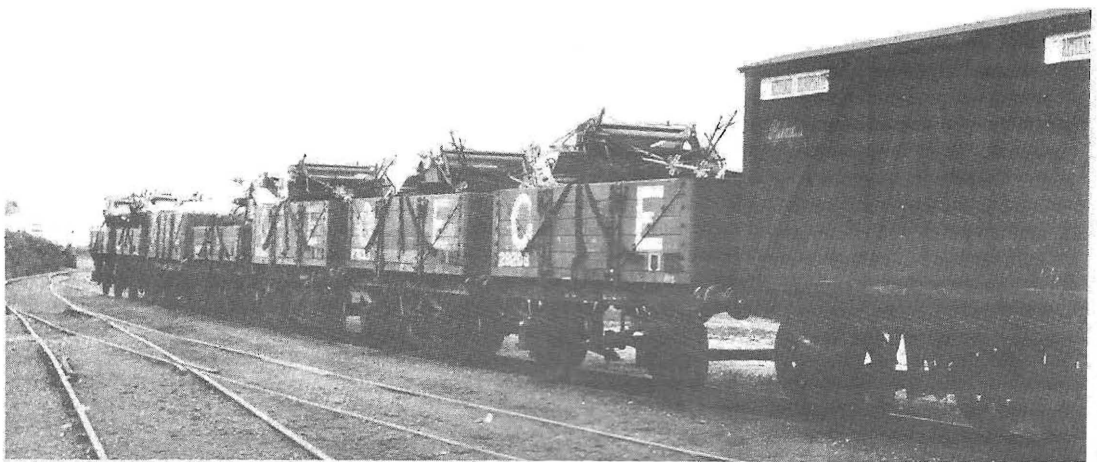
The original Carpenters shop, still standing but only just!



J17 No. 65534

*A train of
Cattle Trucks
wait to pull
away in
April 1950*

*Harvest
Machinery
waiting to be
unloaded --
probably
destined
for sale by
Randells to
Farmers in the
district.*



on the long haul up from the dip to the granary doors. Once they reached the doors the gradient levelled off and by now there was sufficient motion for the trucks to run on inside the granary (the horses having by now been released) or if the trucks had stopped they would be pushed or 'pinched' along by hand by means of a long pinch bar.

There was a gradient up to the granary, once unloaded (and with the downward gradient out) the trucks could be pushed manually down into the sidings. Stimpsons had horses available for the coal delivery and each day, for six days a week, one of these would be out on a round in the morning and then back to shunt the trucks in the afternoon. As the shunting was really a task for the GER they paid Stimpsons for the facility of the horses doing the work of a train. In 1890 there was an income of nearly £90 a year from the GER for this work. (The GER also gave a first class return ticket to London which was invariably made use of by Mr Stimpson). The amount of work must have been extensive when you consider that the average wage of a labourer of the time would be little more than £25 per year.

The daily shunting was physically hard even for the horses and they did not last too long on this work, it was a necessary task which had to be carried out. If the trucks were not unloaded within three days then the buyer would be charged 'demurrage' by the GER. Another problem, particularly during the colder months, was that the grease on the truck wheels would begin to harden and this made their movement a lot harder, particularly for the poor horses pulling them uphill.

In the late 1920s a horse named 'Smut' was regularly used on this work and it cost Stimpsons £1 2s 0d a week to supply this service; it cost 10/- a week for oats, bran and cut hay to feed 'Smut' and a labourer cost 1/- an hour for two hours a day, six days a week. If none of the horses were available to shunt the wagons, then a horse from one of Stimpsons nearby farms would be brought in. The shunting with horses started in the early 1880s and carried on until the mid 1930s when the operation was then taken over by trains.

Throughout the Country the railway companies used many horses as an alternative to trains to shunt goods trucks and in the larger stations they were



Reepham Station – Mid 1930's.

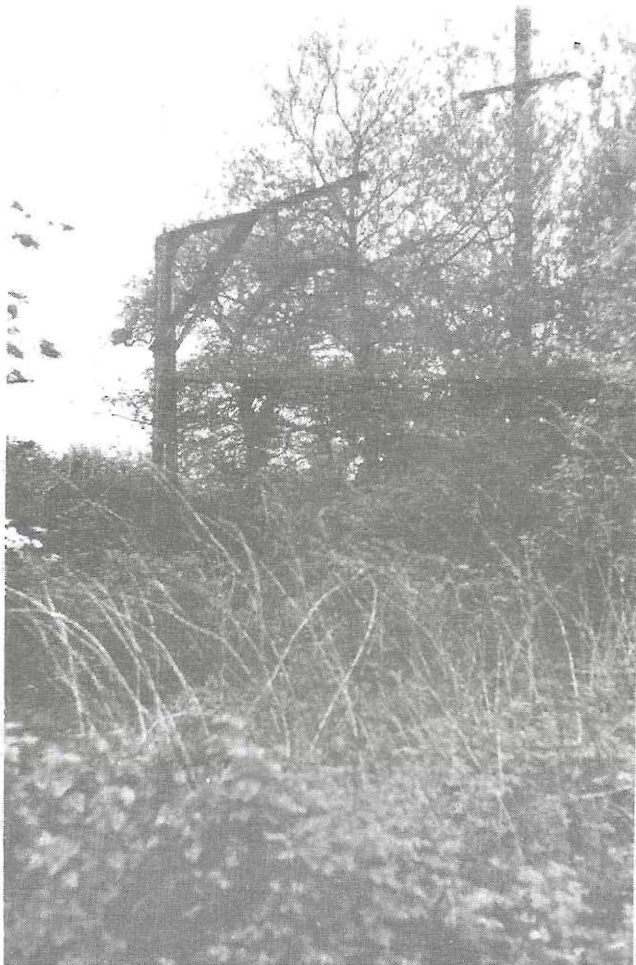
also used for the delivery of goods. Grass alongside the rural lines was cut and dried and sent as fodder to the horses based in the urban areas, notably London. The companies employed inspectors who would travel around their areas and inspect the horses on a six monthly basis. If horses had not been available at Reepham from Stimpsons then it is reasonable to assume that the GER would have had to supply and look after them.

When the line was being laid a carpenters' shop was built at Reepham which carried out most of the specialised woodwork requirements of the line as it progressed towards Foulsham. After its short but vital working period the building was left vacant and was eventually hired by Stimpsons for them to stable their horses in; it held up to six. Collers also had horses and they were stabled in the area now occupied by the new industrial units in Collers Way. The stables used by Stimpsons horses are still there today; it is the delapidated wooden building on the north side of Stony Lane. Any visit to it should be taken with care as the building is leaning badly and will probably collapse in the not too distant future. However, a visual inspection shows its history, the floor is laid in a number of places with small square stable bricks, part of the floor has been laid with old redundant sleepers, possibly the only ones that can now be found in the station area and under the present roof you can still find remains of the felt covering that was put on by the railways builders in the early 1880s.

A great deal of other work was carried out at Reepham; there was the seasonal need for the loading and movement of sugar beet to Cantley and large consignments of grain, fruit and vegetables were sent out from the station, all of these were manually loaded and unloaded for many years by the local farm labourers. The station had the use of a group of cattle pens and these were used for cattle going to and from the local Reepham Wednesday Market. Cattle sent from the Reepham area to the main livestock market in Norwich were invariably sent from Whitwell, the journey from Whitwell to Norwich was much quicker than the journey from Reepham Station which would deliver the cattle to Trowse Station whereas the Whitwell line ended at the City Station which was then a much shorter drive (up Westwick Street and St Andrews) to the Market held each Saturday morning in the area around Norwich Castle.

The imbalance in the business for transporting cattle was partly offset in the warmer months of the year when large numbers of local cattle were sent to

The Loading Gauge, unused now for 30 years and nearly smothered by nature's unchecked growth.



Reepham Station for the journey to Acle marshes where they were grazed during the summer.

On the edge of the main platform there was a loading dock with small manually operated crane which was used to lift farm machinery on and off trucks, machinery that was bought and sold by Eglington and Randells, the main agricultural machinery merchants in the area.

The loading dock was also used by the loading and unloading of horses, these animals whether for hunting or for working on the farms or to work with local business people were highly valued and could not be driven and packed into trucks like cattle. The M & GN supplied special covered wagons (which contained seats for grooms and other workers who rode with the horses) and these wagons had large sides which would drop down onto the loading dock and down which the horses could be led. It was common practice for horses travelling to and from local hunts and race meetings to be loaded and unloaded in this manner, although such events never happened in Reepham.

The GER had a parcels office (the small building next to the station) which was used for small parcels and they also had an area in the granary which was used for storing or holding the larger items.

Reepham was the epitome of a country station which served a small but busy rural town acting as a centre to the surrounding rural area. The area was wholly agriculturally based and the station and its five acre site adequately served Reepham's needs during the seventy years life of the railways. The GER Reepham station was always in competition with the M and GN at Whitwell but there was little doubt as to which one was the more successful. Reepham was always full of people, horses, traffic and generally displayed an air of business; Whitwell was the one which won prizes for its flower beds and settled into a rural quietness between trains and which dealt with goods on an intermittent rather than a regular basis with the exception of the animal trade on Saturdays.

We miss them both and although Whitwell has deteriorated to a state of dereliction, the buildings at Reepham in their soft cream brown brick remain and as a permanent reminder of their former glory. The station master's house with the attached booking office and waiting rooms, the small parcels office and the large granary are all in current use. No doubt whilst they remain as working buildings they will be preserved in good order and will act as a living reminder of their contribution to the history of Reepham and its area.

A present day view of the Station Buildings. The Parcel Building is the small separate unit to the right. The two storey part of the building was the Station Masters' house.



LIVELY FAREWELL TO RURAL LINE



With a "funeral oration" from the footplate and wreaths to bedeck the engine, there was a suitable farewell at Reepham Station on Saturday night for the last passenger train on the Wroxham -- County School line.

The Last Passenger Train

The Branch railway line between Wroxham and County School (North Elmham) was open to passenger traffic for the last time on Saturday 13th September 1952, after that date the line remained open for freight trains until it finally closed on the 31st October 1967. The closure of the line to passenger traffic was an economy measure by British Railways.

On the night of 13th September the last passenger train steamed westwards from Wroxham to County School and various ceremonies had been arranged at intermediate stations along the route to make the ending of a service which had been in existence for over 70 years and which had served so well the rural communities of this area of Norfolk.

The following detail is taken from the newspaper report of the time and it portrays the affection and regret expressed by the local people at the closure of this much loved railway line.



Mr J. R. Postle, president of Aylsham Chamber of Commerce, placing a wreath on the train when it arrived at Aylsham on its return journey.

'Among the many hundreds of people who gathered at the stations to watch the train arrive and then depart into the night, there were several who regarded the occasion with lightness of heart. But there were many more who looked upon the passing of the service - which had been a great boon not only to them, but also their parents, their grandparents, and in some cases, their great-grandparents - with real and sincere regret.

'In big and little groups all along the platforms people could be heard recalling that the line had been kept

open in far more difficult times than the present and pointing out that for many residents in the area the action of British Railways would cause real hardship and inconvenience.

'One man, for instance, declared that if he decides to use the bus service that will operate in place of the railway service he will be forced to hang about for 80 minutes after leaving off work before he can begin his homeward journey every night. Further along people were speaking of mothers with young children living in the villages who used the train to visit the shopping centres along the line. With the train, they said, these women could take their toddlers and their prams or push-chairs in comfort; now that they would have to travel by bus they would be obliged to carry their children in their arms all the way and all the time.

'At AYLSHAM (North) Station, the black and white crepe paper round and between the pillars supporting the roof of the main platform probably reflected the views of most of the 300 or so citizens who gathered there, and Chopin's Funeral March, played over public address equipment as the train steamed in from Buxton, seemed to harmonise with the general feelings. The "bang-bang-bang" of exploding detonators as the train drew to a standstill appeared to strike an incongruous note.

'It must be assumed that when Mr J B Postle, president of the Chamber of Commerce, handed the driver and firemen cigars and bottles of beer, complete with clean tumblers, he was not trying to be light-hearted, but anxious to offer the men tokens of appreciation of their services on the branch line, for, with the help of an assistant, Mr C Skoyles, who, like Mr Postle, wore a top hat and a dark overcoat, he also clambered up a ladder to the top of the engine and hung a large wreath of dahlias, held by a wire round the funnel, over the front of it.

'Attached to the wreath was a card bearing the words "To the memory of another limb of private enterprise which was amputated during the scourge of nationalisation - 1881-1952".

'Then Mr Postle and others having jumped on board to take part in the ceremony at Reepham Station, the train moved slowly off, exploding more detonators as it did so. As the red lamp at the rear of the last carriage faded into darkness, the big crowd slowly melted away. The public address equipment came to life again with a modern dance tune in a brave attempt to cheer the gloom, but the emptiness of the waiting rooms had a more telling effect. Then the doors were closed and locked and the porter wondered - would he never see the platform filled with people again?

'Four of CAWSTON'S oldest inhabitants, whose total ages were 344 years had been taken by cars to Wroxham so they might travel back to Cawston on the last up train.

'On arrival at Cawston they were presented with their rail tickets as souvenirs of the ride by the

station master, Mr J Burgess. They were taken by car to the King's Head Inn where light refreshments were served.

'At 9pm, when the last down train reached Cawston, about 100 villagers and friends were collected on the platform to say 'hail and farewell'.

'Detonators normally used as fog signals were placed on the track and as the train drew into the station their flashes and explosions added to the tenseness of the scene.

'A wreath was hung on the engine and 'Auld Lang Syne' was sung by those present, then for the last time the train left the station and a large Union Jack at half-mast waved it on its way.

'The train steamed on its way covering the short journey to Reepham.

'As soon as the 'Pink Uns' had been collected the track of pedestrians to REEPHAM Station started and the platform was thronging with spectators a good 20 minutes before the scheduled time of arrival of the last train into the station, whilst the station yard assumed the activity and proportions of a car park. Never before have there been so many motor cars assembled there. An event, which during the previous week had been dubbed 'a lot of squit' gradually gathered interest and in its final denouement was clearly proved to have captured the public imagination.

'Yet there was never evidence of any sense of 'rag' although the modest ceremony devised by Reepham Chamber of Trade and Commerce quickly bore the stamp of an 'occasion' of some importance with the general public not lacking in initiative.

'Quite 300 people were gathered on the platform, as above their hum of animated conversation the strains of the Reepham Band were heard. With unexpected near-punctuality the long train from Cawston signed its approach at the Railway Bridge and slid with the noiseless efficiency and grace of an express of a more aristocratic line into the station where the Chamber's guests, Mr Edward Gibbs and Mr H E Hawes were engulfed with the spectators, and the other 35 or so passengers from Cawston disembarked.

'The former should have been welcomed by the Chamber, but in view of the length of the train, which almost measured that of the platform, and the surge of the crowd, it is not possible accurately to state what happened to this part of the programme. It is understood that a few of the Cawston passengers made the return journey home on foot.

'Then public initiative took command, as Mrs Matthews offered bouquets as a spontaneous gesture of appreciation to the engine driver and fireman. To make the occasion the more impressive, Press photographers hoisted her on to the footplate and in the flash of their camera bulbs the public had a better view of what was happening.

'In the meantime, the District Passenger Superintendent (Mr D S Lewis), his Chief Staff Clerk, Mr Birkett, and the Reepham Stationmaster, Mr S B Bass were being welcomed and entertained in the station waiting room by Mr Ben Stimpson, chairman and members of the Management Committee of the Reepham Chamber of Commerce.

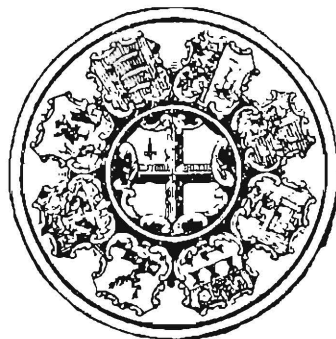
'So amidst the strains of Auld Lang Syne from the band, in which the crown joined, the waving of handkerchiefs in sad farewell, the train mounted steam to roll outward into the darkness for the last time. As it gathered speed rockets (another unofficial addition to the programme) mingled with the scurrying smoke in tribute.

'The final scenes took place in the waiting room. where Mr Stimpson thanked the general public for their grand support, the band for their great help and Mr Postle and the Aylsham Chamber of Trade and Commerce for their friendly co-operation and association. Mr Postle thanked the Reepham Chamber for their hospitality and Mr R C Seals replied for the Band in which he thanked Mr Skoyles of the Aylsham Band for taking the trouble to come over and conduct the Reepham Band on that occasion. They were proud of the honour he had accorded them'.

So a service that had existed for 70 years came to an end, it was poignant that a number of the older spectators at Reepham included some who had been marched by Mr W Pitcher from the school to the Station Bridge to watch the first train into Reepham Station.

GREAT EASTERN RAILWAY.

S SEASIDE, AND BROADS AND RIVERS



If there are Ghosts

They should be here on the old M. & G.N.



D 15 No. 62528 *The Winter sun in February 1949 brightens the 10.31 am to Norwich City as it approaches Whitwell Station.*

The railway lines around Reepham were built well after the railway mania which swept through early mid Victorian England. Their working life was from the late 1880s until the passenger closures in the 1950s although goods traffic carried on for a few more years. Today the line remains and has found a new life in offering a route to walkers and horseriders, its past use remains in the empty cuttings and archless bridges all built by hand more than 100 years ago.

The line was built by navvies who used tipping trolleys and hand tools as they dug, blasted and drank their way through the Norfolk countryside, many of them lived too far away to return home at night, so they slept in barns or among stacked up sleepers covered with tarpaulins. Many of the workmen employed on the line were ex-farm labourers from the surrounding areas who were attracted by the 50% increase over the normal wage which navvying offered and during the summer months particularly, the possibility of over-time gave them the chance to earn even more.

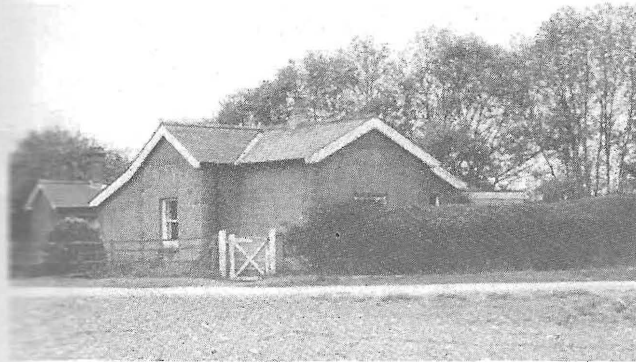
The gangs were made up of colourful characters such as Sam Shirt who apparently was not impeded

in the quality of his work by having only one arm; Lumpy Ling, Spitting Joe the Diddekoi, and Loo Dye, the latter of whom was famous or notorious, for his breakneck style of engine driving. The men often had to get or make their own meals. They cut wood for fires and would cook their food in communal coppers, which often included anything they could get by poaching. But mostly they would exist on the staple diet of bread and cheese and vegetables often taken from the local farmers' fields. These vegetables were cooked in the coppers along with the famous Norfolk dumplings made from bread dough. Water for the coppers often had to be carried long distances and to ensure that none of it was wasted any left over after the vegetables and dumplings had been cooked in it was used for making tea.

The gangs dug cuttings and used the soil to construct the embankments and they built culverts, bridges, level crossings and stations with most of the materials being sent by rail from Melton Constable as the line moved relentlessly on towards Norwich. On some occasions it was necessary to use locally made bricks from sand and clay dug from nearby pits and then fired in local brick kilns.

After the line was built life for those in the permanent employment of the Company was geared to the arrival and departure of the trains. For a short while this part of the working day was one of hurried business and in between it could be confined boredom particularly during the wet and colder weather but languid enjoyment during the spring and summer months. This intermittent workstyle affected all the station staff but particularly the signalmen and the crossing keepers. Many a signalman has wandered off to fish in nearby pits or streams whilst waiting for the next train.

At the turn of the century Railway regulations stated that gate-houses such as the one at Themelthorpe, could only be occupied by married couples, and the husband had to be a railway employee. This meant that during the day (when most of the trains passed through) the operation of the gates was left to the wife. With the house so close to the line when the trains went past they would shake the doors and window panes and rattle the pictures on the walls and move the ornaments on the mantleshelf.



The M. & G.N. Crossing Keepers' Cottage at Themelthorpe.

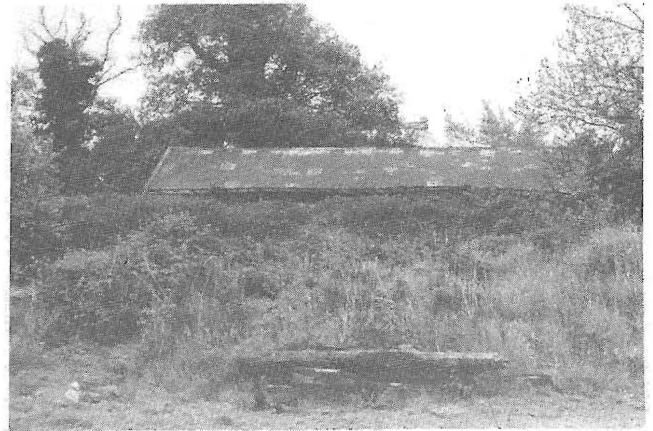
Level crossings were a prominent feature of the M & GN. They usually had a small crossing-keepers cottage, perhaps built of concrete blocks made at the Melton works, alongside. Originally it was intended to build a cottage at all but the smallest crossings, provide it with a plot of land, and then offer it rent free with a modest wage to anyone who would undertake to handle the gates as required. The wages offered varied according to the traffic and in a very minor lane just after the last war it would be a couple of pounds a week and this sort of sinecure job was much sought after.

When Reepham Station was built the navvies were fortunate in that the site was used as a main base by the contractors and a bakery was completed and available to make bread and dough for the workers who made their way back to Reepham each night.

The line is now overgrown and has become a wilderness for wildlife such as seen in very few other places today. It offers a rural enchantment in its slumbering beauty and you can feel a wistfulness and nostalgia for a railway that has now gone forever.

Under the bridges you can still see the blackened remains of old train smoke high above on the brickwork. The cuttings are steeply pitched and up to 18ft high. In the summer many areas are ablaze with hawthorn and particularly the dog rose. Later in the year they are heavy with hips and haws a berry-red harvest of crimson and scarlet.

When the railway was in use the sides of the line were kept free of undergrowth and were used for hay. This was scythed and the tonnage was sent to London where it was used by the horses of the Great Eastern Railway. This scything of the high grass was a practice which also helped to prevent fire along the banks from the sparks of passing engines. The policy of keeping the undergrowth down meant that wind borne sparks sometimes did not stop until they had landed in and subsequently set alight to nearby cornfields.



'The Last Sleepers' on the old track bed at Reepham Station.

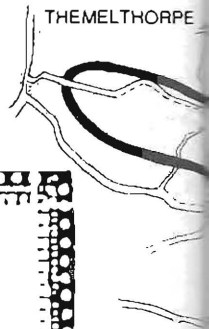
Along the walk if you look carefully you can find the few remaining examples of the railway and its staff; the odd sleeper covered in undergrowth which will in time rot away; the few rails which were never taken away when the line was ripped up and which will no doubt permanently remain, offering a metal grave stone honouring the life of the railway; whilst their surface bears no inscription they will remain for many years their very presence speaking volumes of the seventy years that the line formed the backbone of the industrial and social life of this area.

The line will now become a reserve for nature and a place of peace and solitude for the walker but it will also become a time capsule of ghosts and memories: before the last war there were a number of passenger trains every day travelling along the two lines either side of Reepham. They were slow but punctual and many a farm worker would stop and check their pocket watches or would time the routine of their day with the sound of the whistles or the sight of the trains. In this hurried age we can now only look back and consider these thoughts with nostalgia but wouldn't we like to travel back in time and ride on these trains again . . . if only we could!



In 1979 the route of the former M & GN Railway from Norwich to Lenwade (a length of seven miles) was opened to walkers, cyclists and horse riders for them to use as a footpath and bridleway. The route was named after William Marriott who was the Chief Engineer and Manager of the M & GN system for 41 years.

A further 14 miles has now been purchased and the route has been extended from Lenwade to Aylsham via Whitwell, Themelthorpe, Reepham and Cawston. The walk finishes in Aylsham opposite the station of the Bure Valley Light Railway.



Marriott's Way

The walk was officially opened on the 1st May 1991 by the Chairman of the County Council's Countryside Committee, Ingrid Floering Blackman. The route is not a public right of way, but members of the public are invited to use it as a footpath and bridleway at their own risk.

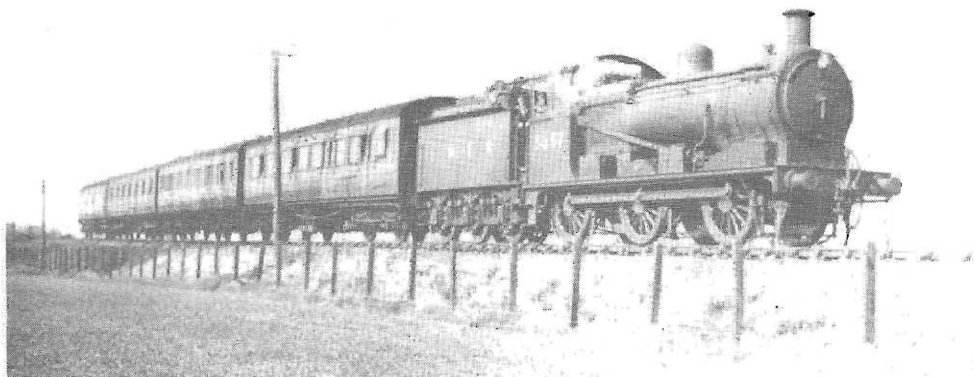
The purchase and development has been carried out by Norfolk County Council, Broadland District Council and Norwich City Council with further assistance from South Norfolk District Council, Costessey Parish Council and The Countryside Commission. Discussions were started with British Rail in 1987 to purchase the 14 mile section and these were concluded in December 1990 when contracts were exchanged and the implementation work commenced.

Part of the agreement was for the County Council to also take over the bridges and put them (and keep them) in good order - all 35 of them! Urgent work costing £44,000 has had to be carried out on

the bridges at Lenwade and Whitwell. Although a lot of money has had to be spent it is intended that no further structural repair will be required for a least another 20 years, it is ironic that the sleepers used to repair the bridges were imported from Holland as good sleepers at a reasonable price are no longer available in this area.

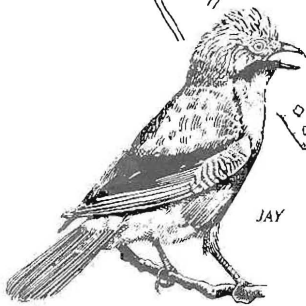
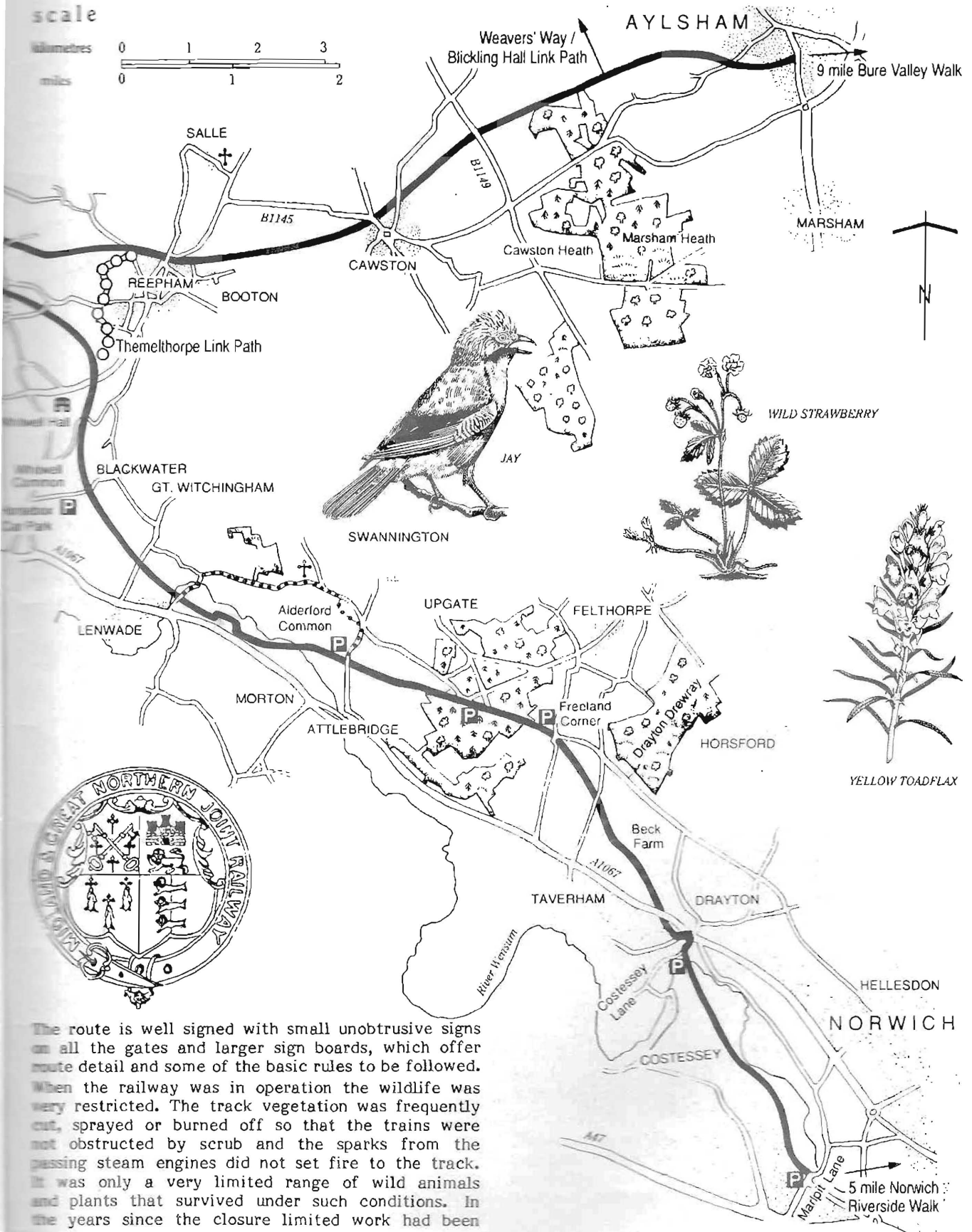
Whilst walkers and cyclists are to be encouraged there have been efforts made to discourage the motorcyclists who use and churn up the track. A large number of gates, stiles and fences have been erected and these should make it difficult for the motorcyclist, the large gates will be padlocked but are there to allow maintenance vehicles to get in and out.

Horse riders have been presented with gates that can be opened without dismounting and three horse ramps have been built to allow horses and riders to get down easily from embankments, the best local example is alongside the bridge over Orchard Lane.



J17 No. 5567
*'Trains you could
set your watch by'
-- changed into
LNER livery the
3.52pm to
Norwich
approaches
Whitwell in
May 1949.*

scale



The route is well signed with small unobtrusive signs on all the gates and larger sign boards, which offer route detail and some of the basic rules to be followed. When the railway was in operation the wildlife was very restricted. The track vegetation was frequently cut, sprayed or burned off so that the trains were not obstructed by scrub and the sparks from the passing steam engines did not set fire to the track. It was only a very limited range of wild animals and plants that survived under such conditions. In the years since the closure limited work had been

carried out and the vegetation has been allowed to encroach back in some places nearly across the track. A priority was to create a strip four metres wide along the whole length and this has meant that a great deal of vegetation has had to be cleared or cut back, this seems visually drastic but a season's growth will heal the wounds.



With exceptions of where the track starts and finishes in Norwich and Aylsham the only other place in its 21 mile length where houses come up to the track is in Reepham where the Richmond Rise estate and the houses along the Cawston Road come up to the track; it is intended to plant trees to soften this view. Generally there are some excellent views from Marriott's Way compared to other similar walks, particularly the local views from the embankments beyond Whitwell Station looking towards Reepham, at Kerdiston looking towards Pettywell and on the line beyond Orchard Lane looking towards Cawston.

Since the closure, a range of wildlife has colonised the line. Trees and shrubs are the main colonists, including oak, field maple, thorns, apple and the rarer spindle, with its distinctive coral-pink berries. The track bed and some sections of the banks have remained open, developing an interesting dry chalk grassland flora of a type that has become increasingly rare. Sections can include attractive flowering species such as wild strawberry, haresfoot clover, great mullein and primrose.

Nature conservation work will be encouraged in a number of areas particularly the cuttings which are good habitat for all manner of wildlife, a good example is Blackwater just south east of Whitwell Station. Cuttings often support both a wide variety of plants and good ranges of insects, particularly nectar-feeding butterflies and moths.

In some places, the track verges are wetter and species such as marsh-marigold, meadowsweet, common or Norfolk reed and horsetail. Horsetails are non-flowering, fern relatives, which are of particular interest as they come from a very ancient family that has survived almost unchanged for over 40 million years.

The most frequent animals that will be encountered are insects and birds, bird species include jay, magpie, goldfinch, wren and green woodpecker (which is noticeable when flying because of its loud, laughing song).

One aspect relating to wildlife that will not meet with everyone's approval is the control of rabbits, this work is not only essential but is also a statutory obligation under the 1953 Rabbit Act. Whilst many walkers will have enjoyed watching the rabbits that live in the embankments near the meadows off the Back Lane beyond Broomhill, they will I'm sure, appreciate that the large numbers that can be seen must be controlled. With the purchase of the line the necessity of this control has now passed to the County Council.



The walk is now officially open, it passes through some lovely Norfolk countryside and is there not just to be used by mainly to be enjoyed; the closure of the railways may have been regretted but now the old routes have been opened up they can be appreciated at a pace that is probably comparable with the speed of the steam engines that for 70 years plied their way backwards and forwards through this countryside.

One point will, however, never be fully accepted; the name Marriott's Way. The Themelthorpe Norwich length is the route of the M & GN Railway whilst the Themelthorpe-Aylsham length was originally run by the G.E.R. The two companies ran in competition for many years, competition which was at times fierce and which fuelled solid loyalties among its employees. Whilst the two companies were amalgamated with the nationalisation in 1948 and the two lines were physically joined in 1960 many people will never agree that an area of G.E.R. line should be known as Marriott's Way.





E4 No. 2780 The 2.33pm from Wroxham to Dereham about to enter Reepham Station in April 1949.

J15 No. 5478 The 12noon from Dereham at Reepham in August 1948.



