

THE WAY WE WERE

It's full steam



AMAZING SIGHT: The inaugural train crossing St Dunstan's Street, Canterbury – as shown in the Illustrated London News of February 14, 1846

Way We Were

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ONE hundred and seventy years ago, on Friday, February 6 1846, a special South Eastern Railway train containing the chairman and other directors of the company and their friends departed from the Bricklayers' Arms terminus in London for Ashford, 67 miles away, on the inaugural service on the company's branch line from Ashford to Canterbury and when subsequently completed, Ramsgate and Margate.

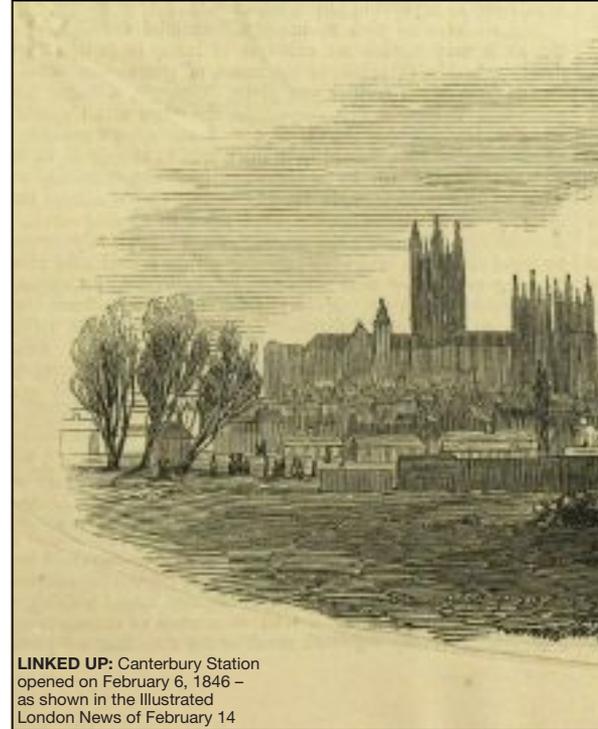
The new branch line had been approved by parliament during the 1844 session, with the legislation authorising running rights over other companies lines and powers to cross roads, where trains wait, at Wye and Canterbury.

The train departed from the Bricklayers' Arms terminus at half past ten in the morning, hauled by two locomotives: Mars and Orion. The locomotives, with their 5ft 6in diameter driving wheels, were built by Sharpe, Roberts and Company at their Atlas Works in Manchester.

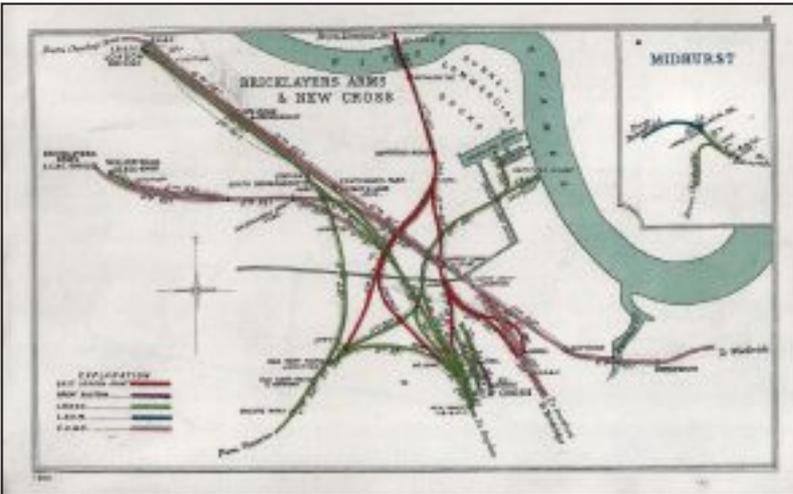
On arrival at Ashford in twenty-five minutes to two, the special train was met by the Canterbury Brass Band playing and a crowd of well dressed people on the platform.

The train had to be greatly extended in capacity, to eighteen carriages, to cater for the large number of additional passengers at Ashford boarding for Canterbury, resulting in a gross train weight of over 90 tons on departure.

The new line being opened branched left from the mainline south of Ashford on a half-mile radius curve, at the beginning of its 14.5-mile journey to Canterbury.



LINKED UP: Canterbury Station opened on February 6, 1846 – as shown in the Illustrated London News of February 14



ON TRACK: Railway Clearing House's map of the lines, 1908

Photo: Wikipedia

Two and a half miles later, Eastwell Park, the seat of the Earl of Winchelsea, was passed on the west side of the line.

A short curve then took the line past the attractive village of Wye, where the company intended to build a station, four miles from Ashford.

Just over a mile later, picturesque Godmersham Park was passed, where the line entered the heaviest cutting, 53 feet deep and a quarter of a mile long, immediately followed by the heaviest and mile long embankment and then a thirty

feet deep cutting. A half mile radius curve on a shallow embankment brought the line into Chilham, nine miles from Ashford, six miles from Canterbury and 76 miles from London, which together with Wye were envisaged becoming the only intermediate stations before Canterbury.

The train then passed Shalmesford Street on the left and Chartham village on the right, as it continued through a 28ft deep cutting and then under Milton Chapel Bridge viaduct, where two weeks before the

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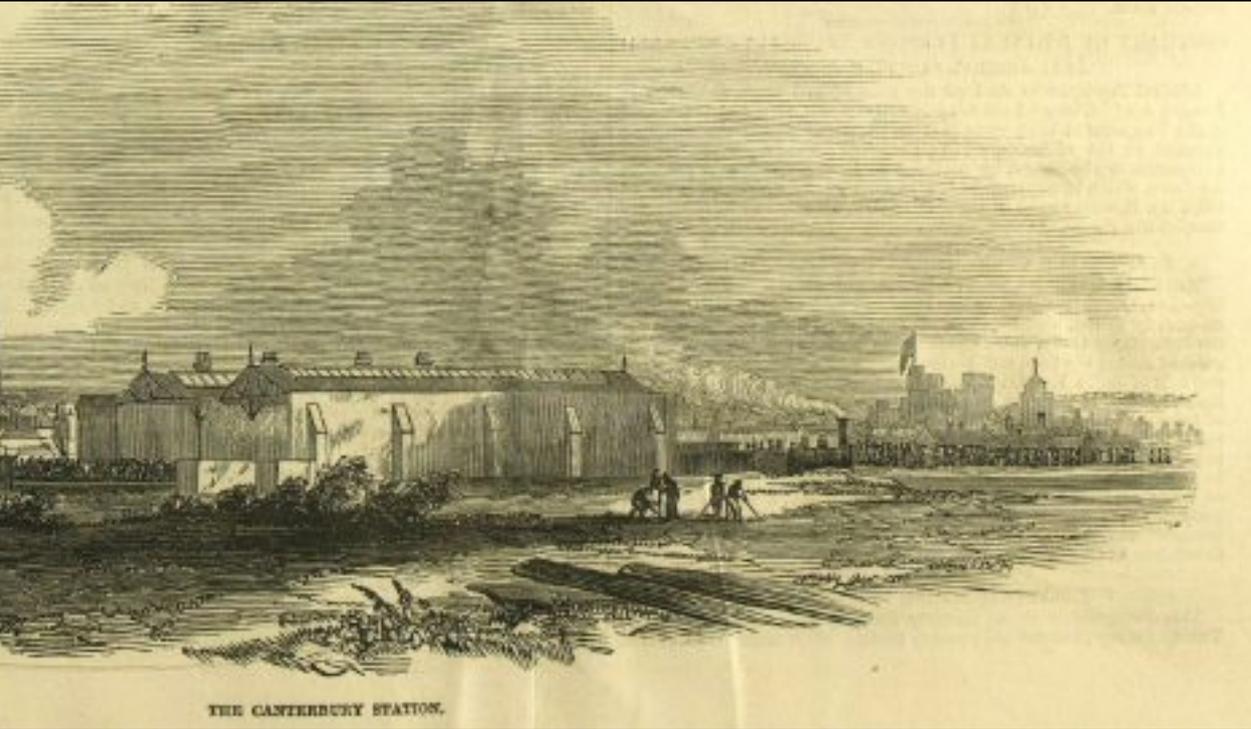
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inaugural service on the new branch line, one of the three arches carrying the Ashford to Canterbury road over the River Stour collapsed, resulting in a fatal accident and necessitating repairs to the viaduct which were completed before the opening of the line.

A slight curve in a 15 ft deep cutting brought the inaugural train to St Dunstan's Street in Canterbury, which it crossed to arrive at the four-line station between St Dunstan's Street and the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway line's crossing to its North Lane terminus, at half past two in the afternoon.

The engineer for the Ashford to Canterbury branch line was 35-year-old Joseph Cubitt, son of resident engineer for the South Eastern Railway Line into Kent William Cubitt.



ENGINEER: William Cubitt son of resident engineer for the South Eastern Railway Line into Kent William Cubitt.

Canterbury was the end of the branch line from Ashford at that time, as the extensions to Ramsgate and Margate were still under construction.

The story of the South Eastern Railway begins with the London & Greenwich Railway which, together the London & Croydon Railway, enabled South Eastern Railway trains to have running rights from London Bridge to Redhill, before branching off on to the South Eastern Railway company's own line built on an almost straight route to Ashford.

The cheapest method of constructing a new railway line was to obtain running right powers over as much of an existing railway as possible, even if that meant deviating quite considerably from the most direct route. That was to become an increasingly contentious issue with several Kent landowners.

Earlier Way We Were articles from The Chaucer Education Project, including "The floods that resurrected Harbledown's railway link", can be accessed under 'latest articles' in the right hand column of the virtual learning environment website at chaucer.university



UNDER CONSTRUCTION: The Bricklayers' Arms terminus, pictured in May 1844

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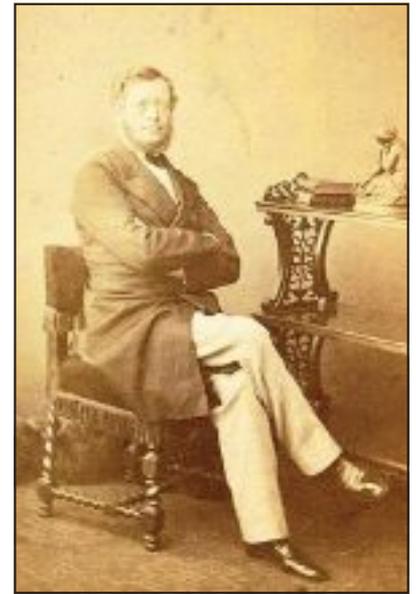
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RUNNING THE RAILS: Joseph Cubitt, like his father, was a railway engineer Photo: Wikipedia



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