

## NOTES FROM THORNHAM

The remains of the Mellis to Eye Railway are familiar sights: Crossing Cottage and a bump in the lane to Yaxley, Duke's Bridge in Yaxley, a mysterious length of embankment next to the A140 and the coal office in what was once Eye station yard and is now the chicken factory.

Despite the strenuous efforts of the town, the Great Eastern Railway's Norwich line opened in 1849 by-passing Eye. Instead, Mellis station served the thriving industries and people of the town until the three-mile-long single-track Mellis to Eye branch line opened in 1867. Financed by local worthies it was built and owned by the Mellis to Eye Railway Company, but operated by the Great Eastern in exchange for a share of the takings.

This timetable of 1910 shows 10 return passenger journeys a day. Two goods trains slotted into the afternoon schedule and on Tuesdays a cattle train left Eye

MELLIS and EYE.—Great Eastern.												
Miles	Down.	Week Days.										
		mrn	mrn	mrn	mrn	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft
3	Mellis ..... dep.	7 49	9 10	10 21	11 6	1210	1241	2 53	4 46	5 57	7 45	
	Eye ..... arr.	7 57	9 20	1010	1114	1218	1249	3 14	4 54	6 57	7 53	
Miles	Up.	mrn	mrn	mrn	mrn	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	aft	
—	Eye ..... dep.	7 24	8 40	9 45	1048	1149	1224	2 33	4 30	5 35	7 25	
3	Mellis 288, 292 .. arr.	7 32	8 50	9 53	1056	1157	1232	2 41	4 38	5 43	7 33	

at 6.35am. In Mellis the trucks were attached to a cattle express to the Tufnell Park Depot in north London. From there cattle were herded through the streets to the Metropolitan Cattle Market. No trains ran on Sundays, when one of the enginemen was paid four hours overtime to clean and service the locomotive.

The bridge in Yaxley was named the Duke's Bridge to commemorate its use by the Duke of Edinburgh on his way from Diss station to Thornham Hall in late 1886. The line was not ready for him to open but *Suffolk Chronicle* of 29th December 1886 reported: "The late royal visit – In order to celebrate the event rabbits have been given away upon the Duke's Bridge this week to every cottager in Yaxley, through the liberality of Lord Henniker".

There were no intermediate stations until in 1922 Yaxley Halt was opened next to the bridge. The guard let down steps for passengers to ascend and descend, and in inclement weather those waiting could shelter under the bridge.

Passenger services on the line stopped as early as 1931. One daily goods train ran until 1964 and the line was dismantled soon after. Unfortunately the land was sold and the opportunity to convert the line to a traffic-free footpath and cycle way to Hartismere School and into Eye was lost.

**NOVEMBER EVENT IN THE THORNHAMS ● Friday 24th:** Village Hall film, 7.30, *My Cousin Rachel*