

## THE MELDRETH "TRAMWAY" CAMBRIDGESHIRE

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For about fifty years, a standard gauge industrial railway ran for about one and a quarter miles in a north-westerly direction from Meldreth & Melbourn station, on the Hitchin to Cambridge railway, to works on the Whaddon road.

On 25 March 1892 Hubert O. S. Ellis, on behalf of himself and his partners John Williams and William Hawkins Tilston, applied to Meldreth Vestry for its consent to their constructing a railway from the station. The route described by Ellis and his engineer, Spargo, was to cross four roads on the level (as the line constructed did), and these crossings were to be gated. The Vestry sanctioned the railway, 'one rate-payer dissenting', which was perhaps not all that surprising as Ellis himself had had to vacate the chair in favour of a disinterested member.

It seems likely that there was some delay in getting the scheme off the ground, for the land for the works was not conveyed to the Meldreth Portland Cement & Brick Co Ltd until April 1898, and the land for the railway was the subject of seven conveyances dated December 1898 to August 1901. This company appears in *Kelly's Directory* for 1900; the Ordnance plan was revised in 1901 and showed the "tramway" terminating on the north side of the Whaddon road at a brick and cement works, and the company's siding is listed in the *RCH Handbook* for 1904. (The Cam Portland Cement Co, Meldreth, is listed in *Kelly* 1896, but this is not thought to have anything to do with the present subject, although this cannot be ruled out entirely.)

The land, works, railway and equipment were put up for sale on 14 June 1911 by order of the mortgagees. The auctioneers, Valentine & Foster of 3 Bloomsbury Court, London, provided no details of the 'locomotive engine' which was included; indeed, we know more about its shed, which had a galvanised roof on timber framing and uprights. The 'permanent railway siding' was about 1.1/2 miles long, with 'extra sidings for shunting', laid with chairs and keys to 4'-8.1/2" gauge. There was a 100ft long corrugated iron shed for railway trucks to stand under, and 'about 500 yards of tramlines about the works'. The main item of fixed machinery was a 135 IHP horizontal compound steam engine by Marshall, Sons & Co, of Gainsboro'. It seems that the brickmaking side of the business had ceased (if indeed it had ever started), judging by the heading on the sale notice, "Meldreth Lime & Cement Works", and the fact that no mention was made of brick production.

The next phase of history here is, at present, vague at best. There is some indication that the operator of the works was the Meldreth Lime & Cement Co, their siding being listed under Meldreth & Melbourn station in the *RCH Handbook 1929*. The fact that the Atlas Stone Co Ltd had set up shop at the Whaddon road works in the previous year is not recorded, but a certain time-lag in such matters is understandable. What is more odd is that the *RCH Handbook 1938* lists separate sidings for both the Atlas Stone Co and the Meldreth L & C Co. There is clearly a possibility that the latter was either a separate siding in the station yard, or that it was situated some distance from the station. This opens up the possibility that the Whaddon road works and its railway were in fact out of use, or only in use on a very small scale, in the period 1911-1928, and there is some support for this, as will be seen later.

