

Following a visit to the Whaddon road works on 8 July 1967, Mr D. S. Wright, the works engineer, made some enquiries and then wrote as follows:

"...the railway was in existence prior to this company starting in 1928. To the best of my knowledge the railway, prior to 1928, simply consisted of a horse-drawn vehicle, and there is a record of a fatal accident occurring on this railway line in 1915. The route of the railway line was as shown on your map, but also there was an off-shoot from this line to the old works at Chiswick End. This Company apparently put the line to use again in about 1929 using a petrol electric locomotive of French origin which had been used in the First World War. The original engine was eventually replaced with a Leyland engine, but of course, using the same chassis and structure. I believe the horse power was somewhere about 90 and the petrol consumption between the works and the station, a distance of possibly just under two miles, amounted to 4 gallons. The system was rendered obsolete about 1942 and the engine sold for £40 to Mr H. Dean, scrap metal merchant.... The gauge of the railway was never altered and is obviously the standard gauge....as for some time railway trucks were shipped up from Meldreth station belonging to the Railway Company."

The reference to the old works at Chiswick End is mysterious, because that place is at the Meldreth station end of the line, and there is no mention of works there in the 1911 inventory or on any map or plan of the area seen to date. Unfortunately, a letter raising this and other points was not answered.

At that time, IRS information was that the locomotive was believed to have been built by Gaston Moyse & Co, Paris, and that it went to T. W. Ward for scrap after the track was removed in about 1954, so probably Dean 'sold it on'.

The matter of the accident could throw some light on the use of the line, but sadly, search of a local newspaper for 1915 produced nothing, and the minutes of the Meldreth Parish Council for that year are also silent. Yet echoes of the tragedy lingered on in the district until a few years ago; from a booklet quoted without title or date, it seems clear that a child named Croxhall was killed whilst playing with others on the line near its home at Chiswick End - but there is yet no indication of a date, which makes further search difficult. It is, of course, by no means certain that the accident involved a locomotive, since many people were killed on horse-worked railways and on the roads too, when the only motive power used was the horse.

The problem of the identity of the original locomotive mentioned in 1911 is profound, assuming that the Meldreth P C & B Co had only one: it may have been purchased new, as the railway does not appear to have been built on the cheap, with its chaired track; the promoters were also given permission to run a telegraph wire over the roads, another indication that 'no expense was to be spared', although it is not known if this was done.

The assistance of Gordon Green (IRS), the Cambridge Record Office and Mrs G. Willers of Meldreth is gratefully acknowledged; also thanks to Ian Lloyd for converting my sketches into a fine map to accompany these notes. □