

INSIDE: 1851, memories, train times, what's in the future? And answer the questions in our quiz.

# Happy Birthday, (and Melbourn!) Meldreth Station



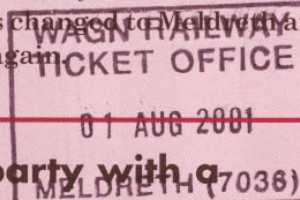
*Those were the days: the station in the 1920s, complete with busy goods yard; a familiar A4 locomotive passing through in the 1930s and the original plan for the line, presented to Parliament in the 1840s.*

## Meldreth station – 150 years old on August 1 2001

**B**uilt in the later stages of the Victorian 'railway mania', the coming of trains to South Cambridgeshire in 1851 transformed life for villagers – giving them a chance to travel far from home, to seek work or knowledge, maybe a holiday, even a fortune. Businessmen used the railway to transport their produce to London

and far beyond – and to put new, and cheaper, goods on sale in communities like ours. In 150 years steam trains have been replaced by electric ones, wagons bearing fruit have come and gone, to be replaced by commuters – and the station's name has changed to Melbourn and Melbourn, and back again.

**Join us at Meldreth Station for a birthday party with a difference – from 10am to midday on Wednesday August 1.**  
**Free draw with prizes including a month's rail travel in Europe for two. Bring this souvenir with you to enter.**  
**Cake, refreshments, model railway, exhibition.**



Commemorative Souvenir – Sponsored by TTPcom, WAGN Railway,  
TTP Group, Railtrack, Eternit Building Materials,  
Cambridge Building Society and Cambridge Antibody Technology





ANNO UNDECIMO & DUODECIMO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

Cap. cxix.

An Act to enable the *Royston and Hitchin* Railway Company to extend their Line of Railway from *Royston* to *Shepreth*, and to make a Deviation of the authorized Line at *Hitchin*.

[14th August 1848.]

## Railway mania!

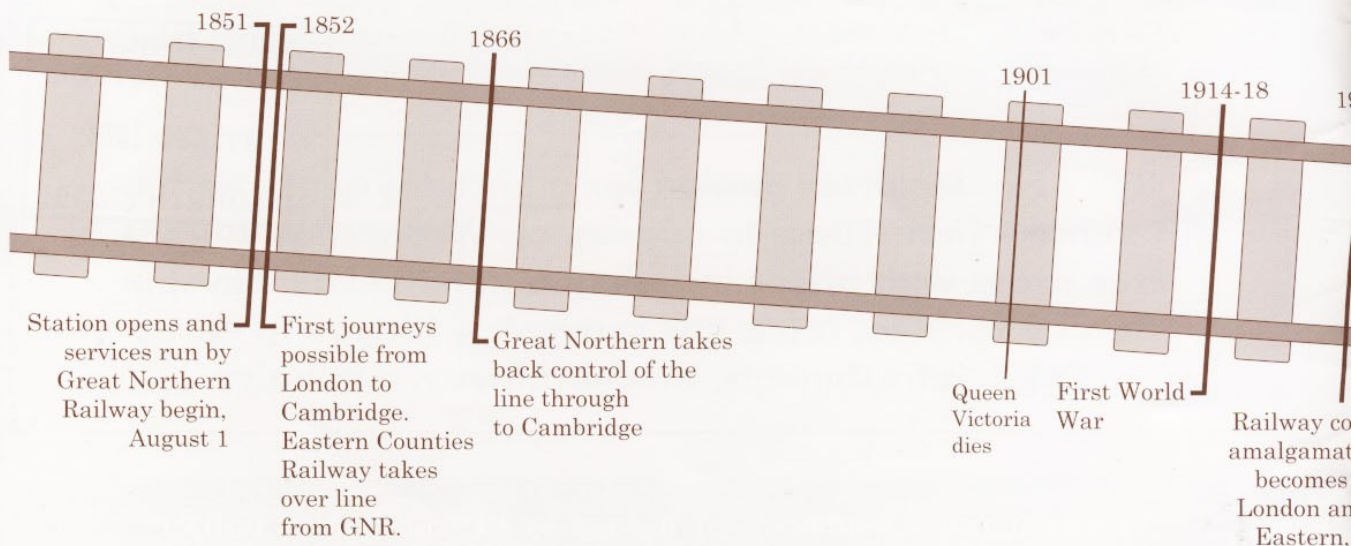
The age of the train began in 1825 with the opening of the Stockton and Darlington, the world's first steam railway carrying goods wagons and passenger carriages on metal rails. The pioneering Liverpool and Manchester service, using Stephenson's 'Rocket', began five years later and the 1830s also saw London's first route and the first long-distance railway. The frenzy called 'railway mania' took off and at the height of it 600 miles of new track were being laid in just one year. Fortunes were made by inspired schemes and lost by hare-brained ones. Legislation clogged up parliament, creating a dazzling number of railway companies, often with conflicting priorities.

# The day li

Fifty years after Parliament had first sanctioned the building of a railway – for goods traffic only and powered by horses, not an engine – the age of the railway finally reached Meldreth and Melbourn. The rail network was spreading at a pace hardly imaginable now. In 1848 the politicians had approved an extension to the planned railway from Hitchin to Royston – taking it as far as Shepreth – but before the original project had even been completed. In 1850 the Great Northern Railway from London to Peterborough was opened and the track to Royston was ready too. Building work to take the new railway into Cambridgeshire was completed in the summer of 1851 and the first trains ran through Meldreth on August 1. But the line only went to Shepreth, so at first journeys to and from Cambridge were finished by horse-drawn coach – now the old-fashioned way of travelling.

## The world in 1851

Queen Victoria opened the Great Exhibition in May. Railways carried thousands to London to see a huge display of technology, manufacturing and fine art. The Liberal Lord John Russell was Victoria's Prime Minister. Britain might rule the waves, but pride was dented when American yachtsmen out-raced Britain's best in August. The America's Cup was born. Isaac Singer patented his new sewing machine, 11 days after our station opened. In print, the anti-slavery novel 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' shocked and 'Moby Dick' excited. J.M.W. Turner, the first to convey through art the novelty of rail travel, died. And gold was discovered near the Melbourne with an 'e'.





# Life changed for ever

## GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY. CAMBRIDGE and LONDON.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, THAT THE LINE IS NOW OPEN BETWEEN  
**SHEPRETH AND KING'S CROSS,**  
FOR THE CONVEYANCE OF PASSENGERS AND PARCELS.

The GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY has put on well-appointed **FOUR-HORSE OMNIBUSES**, which perform the journey between **CAMBRIDGE** and **SHEPRETH** with perfect regularity. They start punctually from the

**Great Northern Railway Office, 23, Trinity Street, Cambridge.**

**PASSENGERS BOOKED THROUGH FROM CAMBRIDGE TO LONDON.**

### FARES :

First Class.  
**10s.**

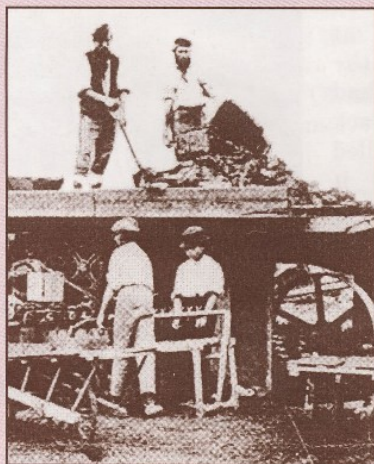
Second Class.  
**7s. 6d.**

Third Class.  
**5s.**

For Particulars of the Trains, see the General Time Bills. The Evening Train to London now starts at Six o'clock instead of Five o'clock, P.M. (By Order) **SEYMOUR CLARKE, General Manager.**  
Company's Offices, King's Cross Station, London, August 5th, 1851.

*How the Great Northern Railway promoted its new service in the Cambridge Independent Press*

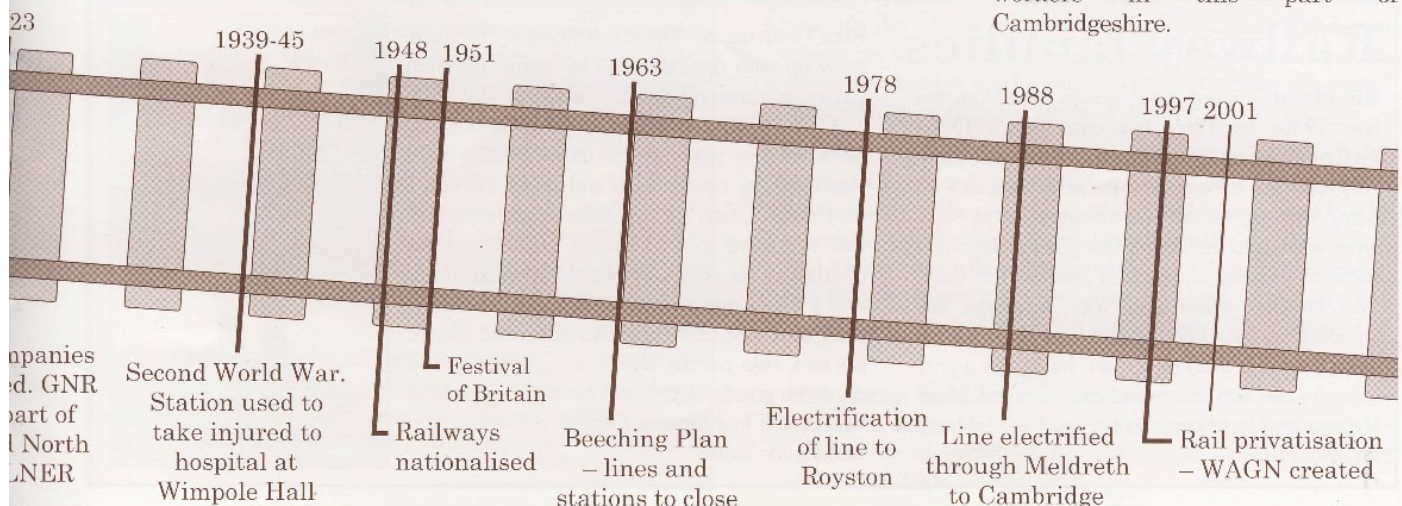
## The men who built the line



The 1851 census – carried out in the spring – lists 72 men living in the villages and engaged in building the new railway. They were part of the travelling army of 'navvies' which went wherever new lines were springing up. But there was danger. One hundred men died building Box Tunnel between Chippenham and Bath and even here there were casualties. In May 1851 labourer George Copperwaite was killed when excavated ground fell on him, knocking him on to the track where he was run over by an engine.

## Meldreth and Melbourn in 1851

For the first time, most people in England lived in towns and cities, not the countryside. So recorded the census of 1851. But the rural decline was yet to hit our two growing agricultural villages. Melbourn had 1,931 residents, Meldreth 776, both a record. They would shrink later as towns and cities grew, before finding a fresh lease of life in the 20th century. But for the time being there were still 1,500,000 Britons making a living from the fields. The railway would certainly help the farmers and their workers in this part of Cambridgeshire.





# Memories are made

## Fruits of their labours



Jack Palmer, at 96, one of the villages' oldest residents, sent fruit from the family orchards to market from the station. Apples, plums and gooseberries were sent off to be sold, as well as other crops like sugar beet.

"I spent half my life in that station. We had several carters coming from different orchards. The only central place was the

station yard, so I hung around there to ensure they put the fruit into the right trucks. They had a horse to pull it and hook it up to the back of a goods train.

Almost all the fruit went by train until after the Second World War. In London, it went to Covent Garden and Spitalfields – they were the main ones – but also to the Borough Market. Most of it went to London but we sent quite a lot to Liverpool and it had to go on a midday train."

## Kings' final journey

Two Kings were to die in less than two decades on the Sandringham estate in Norfolk – George V in 1936 and his son, George VI, in 1952. Their funeral trains passed through Meldreth en route to their final resting places at Windsor. Raymond Course, from Malton Lane in Meldreth, witnessed both journeys – the first one as a schoolboy. "We were taken to the station and stood on the platform as the royal train went through. It was caps off and stand to attention stuff. It was a fairly ancient engine which had been used to pull the royal train for many years. The windows were largely blacked out and they had black flags on the front."

Rail travel was a revolutionary new experience for 19th century villagers whose only option until then had been a much more exclusive mode of transport – the stage coach. For Betsy Coote, who lived in Melbourn High Street, the excitement was all too much. The story is told of how she was so anxious not to miss her first trip to London that she stayed awake all night, only to fall asleep as dawn arrived and miss the train. 21st century commuters may have different worries. They use Meldreth station to get to work but for much of the first 150 years it was itself a place of business, with a thriving commercial operation in a large goods yard.

## Billy loses his job

Arthur Chapman, from Meeting Lane in Melbourn, worked at Atlas Stone, now Eternit, for 37 years from 1936 to 1973.

"In the early 1900s Atlas had a railway line built from their works at Whaddon to join the Meldreth line. Atlas had their own small black engine which they called 'Puffing Billy' and it pulled one wagon which

carried the asbestos produced at Atlas to the main goods train. Two shire horses were used to transfer it to the mainline wagons. George Hale and (pictured above) Bill Vellam were responsible for looking after the horses and transferring the loads. Sadly, after 1950 'Puffing Billy' was made redundant as the huge lorries came into being and the transportation of the asbestos was taken over by them."



## Railway families

**Bill Mead** worked in the goods yard from the late 1940s to 1965. His daughter is Drina McComb from Clear Crescent in Melbourn. "My earliest memories of the station are of being with my father and his shire horse Kitty who was used to shunt the goods wagons. I remember being allowed to ride on her back. The stables where she was kept are still standing today. Unfortunately she had to be destroyed and then my father was given a grey shire. I gave him the grand old name of Silver. He was the last horse to be used at Meldreth for shunting."

**Rita Thomas**, of Whitecroft Road in Meldreth, grew up with the railways. Her father, Bertram Cross (pictured right), was station-master from 1947 to 1962 and she worked as a booking clerk for five years in the fifties. Staffing then was lavish by comparison with 2001. "It was a very busy station and my father was always on call. We lived in the station house and my bedroom was above the booking office. There was a lot of noise from the trains but you got used to it. The staff then also consisted of two porters, two porter signalmen, a shunter, two or three goods clerks and six platelayers who walked the line between Royston and Harston looking for faults."





# de of this

## Survival – and a new future

**Richard Spendlove** was a railwayman, before finding a new career in writing and broadcasting. He created the BBC comedy series 'Oh Dr Beeching' and now broadcasts on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire. In the early sixties Richard acted as relief station-master at Meldreth in the dark days when thousands of miles of track and thousands of stations were shut to cut losses. Meldreth escaped closure, but many others on branch lines were not so lucky. Richard Spendlove admits Meldreth – with its goods trade disappearing – was not exactly busy then. "It was a quiet country station. We may have been talking in terms of daily traffic of silly amounts, perhaps £100 a week in passenger traffic. There may have been odd commuters but not many of them compared to now."

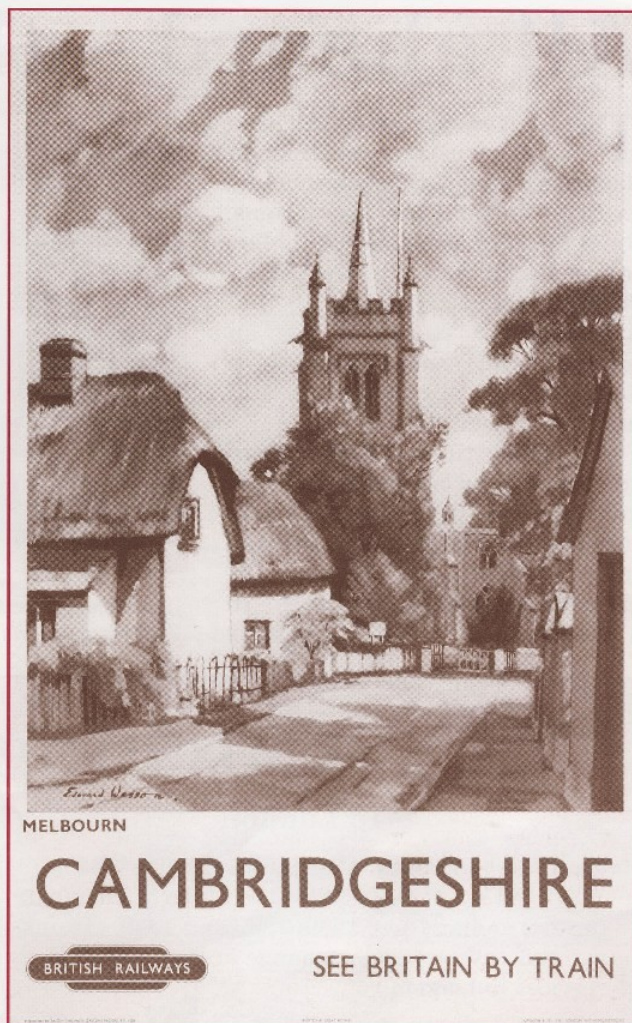
**David Burbridge**, from High Street in Melbourn, was one of those commuters. He started the daily journey to Cambridge in 1968 and continued for twenty years. "About then steam was being replaced with diesel, pulling eight carriages with side corridors. Chamberlain and Foggo manned the ticket office, sharing hours to cover all day. I think there were four oil lamps on each platform and two on the iron bridge, which they had to keep trimmed and filled. From October to April they kept a coal fire in the waiting room, but before long that was discontinued and passengers were invited into the ticket office for the comfort of the coal fire there. Often a platelayer would be there, with his 7lb hammer, amongst about ten passengers."

### War-time role for station

Meldreth was used as a stopping off point for trains carrying injured American servicemen during World War 2. They were travelling to a military hospital at Wimpole Hall. A special concrete road was built to allow the troops to be put into vehicles for the road journey to Wimpole in a siding of their own.

**Ethel Adcock** worked in Cambridge during the war but had her family in Melbourn. "We were not allowed up there. They used to take all the service people who were wounded off the trains at the sidings and then to the hospital in ambulances. There was activity all the time and a lot of trains but you did not see any people." The station escaped damage when a German bomber attacked a train passing through – but bombs landed on either side of the track.

At other times the scene was more peaceful. David Chapman worked on the railways from 1913 to 1956. His daughter, **Joan Turrell** from Melbourn, remembers. "All the workers at the goods yard were given allotments. The ground was really black, from all the soot from the trains. But the soot made the soil better, so we were brought up on vegetables from there during the war, as well as hares and rabbits which were hit by trains. Carrots, potatoes and swedes were brought home every Friday night."



MELBOURN

## CAMBRIDGESHIRE

BRITISH RAILWAYS

SEE BRITAIN BY TRAIN

## Those were the days

- "John George Mortlock, who lived at The Court in the first part of the last century, ran Mortlock's china business in the city. He always caught the 8am train and went to the station by donkey and cart. If the donkey was moody and would not go, Mortlock was late but the train always had to wait for him as he had a great many shares in the Great Northern Railway." (*Sidney Butler, of Gables Close in Meldreth.*)
- "As youngsters we knew the time of every train that came through. A favourite was, when a train was due in, we would rush up the platform on to the footbridge and stand over whichever line the train was on and as it passed underneath we would stand in all the smoke. Better than any cigarette!" (*Eric Walbey, of Howard Road in Meldreth*)
- "The arrival of the first diesel train in Meldreth brought us much personal sadness. My father and I were saddened by the end of the steam era. But it was a good time to grow up beside the railway. My father, Bill Mead, was always so proud he was a railwayman. His favourite saying was 'once a railwayman, always a railwayman.' (*Drina McComb, from Clear Crescent in Melbourn.*)
- "The station has been very important to the local area. It used to be called Meldreth and Melbourn but then someone dropped the 'Melbourn' off for some reason." (*Marcus Wilson, of Orchard Road, Melbourn.*)

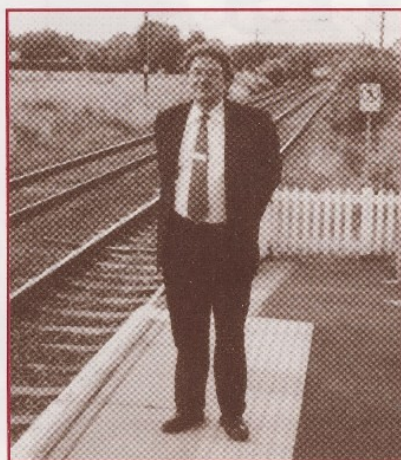


# All aboard – then and now...

**T**hen: steam engines, three classes of travel, conditions so uncomfortable they were mocked as little better than sheep-pens. Railway companies forced by law to run cheap trains for the poor.

**N**ow: electric power, second class the standard, but an industry still recovering from a disaster the Victorians would have been used to.

The railway time traveller from 1851 would be astonished. From an infrequent service only starting each day with a London train at 9.11 and taking 124 minutes to reach King's Cross – to a quickest morning rush hour



Waiting for the next train – David Piggott, WAGN's one man in Meldreth in 2001.

journey in 2001 of 59 minutes, with some evening services back to Meldreth scheduled to take just 50.

A station used at first sporadically, then making its money from trade, now frequented by commuters and students. Dozens of season ticket holders, scores of one-off tickets sold each day. The blessing of a large free car park. But inflation taking its toll: second-class travel from Cambridge to London in 1851 at 7/6 (37p) a time, in 2001 annual season tickets from Meldreth to London at over £3,000.

## Catching the train

### To London

**Monday to Friday:** Departing at 0605, \*0643, \*0713, \*0743, \*0809, \*0839, then hourly from 0909 to 2209 and at 1639, 1739, 1839 and 1939. (Trains marked with asterisk – change at Royston for fast services to London.)

**Saturday:** Departing hourly from 0609 to 2209.

**Sunday:** From July 22 departing at 0732 and then hourly from 0909 to 2209. (Replacement bus from Meldreth station to Hitchin for 0732 service only, to connect with train to London.)

Late summer bank holiday Monday – check at station.

Full timetable available from Meldreth and other WAGN stations.

New winter timetable starts September 30 2001.

### To Cambridge

**Monday to Friday:** Departing at 0015, 0114, 0636, 0707, 0741, 0807, 0841, then hourly from 0907 to 1707, then at 1737, 1813, 1841, 1911, 1938, 2007, 2041, 2107, 2141, 2207, 2307.

**Saturday:** Departing at 0015, 0114, 0636, 0707, 0741, then hourly from 0807 to 2307.

**Sunday:** From July 22 departing at 0015, 0204, 0835, 0917, then hourly from 1007 to 2307. (Replacement bus from Meldreth station to Cambridge for 0204 and 0835 services only.)



### Meldreth station – ticket office opening hours

Monday to Friday – 0615 to 1330;  
Saturday – 0715 to 1430; Sunday – closed.

### Contacting WAGN

Customer service helpline – 08457 818919  
(open from 0830 to 1700 weekdays)

Recorded travel information – 08457 445522  
(open 24 hours)

Minicom helpline – 08457 125988  
(open from 0830 to 1700 weekdays)

Disabled persons helpline – 08457 226688  
(open from 0830 to 1700 weekdays, answer phone at other times)

Lost property – 01223 453729  
(open from 0900 to 1615 weekdays)  
or e-mail to [lost.property@wagnrail.co.uk](mailto:lost.property@wagnrail.co.uk)

Write to WAGN at:  
Station Road, Cambridge CB1 2JW.  
Fax to 01223 453606. E-mail to [email@wagnrail.co.uk](mailto:email@wagnrail.co.uk)

National rail enquiries: 08457 484950  
National ticket sales hotline: 0800 566566

### Online

WAGN website: [www.wagn.co.uk](http://www.wagn.co.uk)  
Railtrack website: [www.railtrack.co.uk](http://www.railtrack.co.uk)  
National Rail website: [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)  
National Railway Museum website: [www.nrm.org.uk](http://www.nrm.org.uk)



# Meldreth set to join Thameslink network

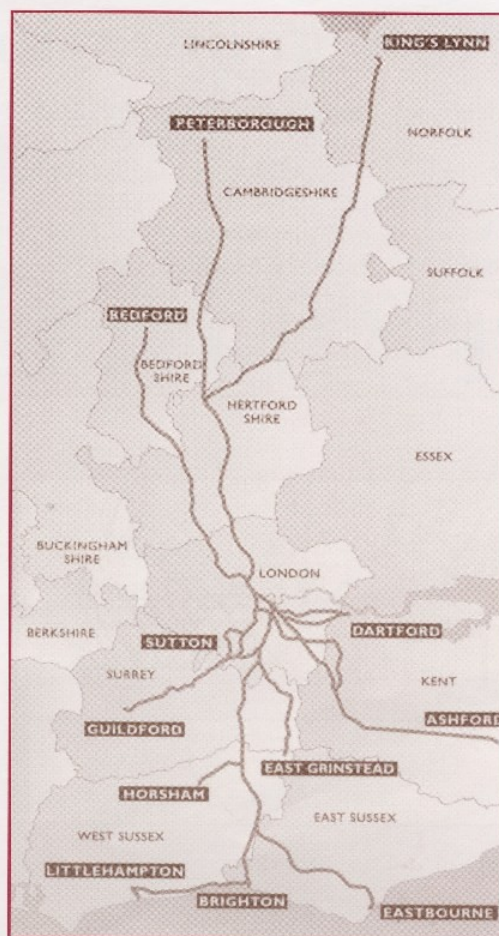
If the railway industry gets its way, there should be big changes to services from Meldreth before the end of the decade. But hopes that this will mean more trains stopping at the station look likely to be dashed.

Railtrack is seeking the go ahead for a £1bn scheme which would make travel to London – beyond King's Cross – and south of the capital much easier. A public inquiry into the Thameslink 2000 project finished in May but a final decision whether to go ahead may not be reached until late 2002.

The original Thameslink scheme was launched in 1988 and allows journeys from Bedfordshire to the South Coast via London – but without having to change trains or use the underground network. Thameslink 2000 would see a massive expansion, taking in dozens of extra stations – including Meldreth, Cambridge and seven others in the county.

Travelling time for these through journeys should be slashed – taking twenty minutes less, for instance, to Gatwick airport. The platform at Meldreth would be lengthened to allow more carriages and the land which was occupied by the coal yard has been re-acquired for use as a store for railway materials. Trains stopping here will go beyond London – but the plan is not at the moment for any extra services to pick up passengers at Meldreth.

Railtrack insists it is still fully behind the scheme, despite its problems after the Hatfield crash. If it does proceed, building work would start in 2003 with the expanded network to be completed by 2007 or 2008.



## All our yesterdays



*Steam in Meldreth in the fifties.*



*Looking to London - and the old bridge*



*The personal touch – maybe from the 1920s.*



*Diesel in the seventies – Inter-City trains diverted off the east coast line.*



*The old goods shed (now BHM Mould Tools) and stables, still standing in 2001*



# New generation on the right track

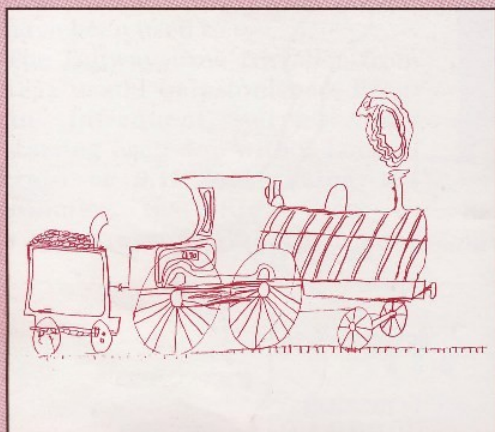
Meldreth's primary school was only built in 1911 but children from there have been digging back into history, trying to find out what it was like to live at the time the station opened.

The school is just a stone's throw from the track and head teacher Julie Fitch used the anniversary to focus on the station's history, as part of local history work under the National Curriculum. All the children from Class 6 contributed, with a group of twelve (pictured

below) carrying out a special project.

"As part of the local history topic they have produced a video of stories based around some of the imaginary characters who might have been here at the time of the opening of the railways to see what their life would have been like," she said.

The project, which used data from the census in 1851, was also designed to develop writing, planning and presentation skills among the ten and eleven-year-olds.



*What would the first train from Meldreth have looked like? Drawing by Alex Thomas.*



*Children from class 6 – aged 10 and 11 – at work on their summer term project.*

## Just the ticket – win,win,win!

Answer these eight questions right for the chance to win £20 in travel vouchers, courtesy of WAGN Railway. Many of the answers can be found in this publication.

- 1 What is the name of the London station where you catch trains to go to Meldreth?
- 2 What was the name of George Stephenson's famous engine used on the Liverpool and Manchester railway in 1830?
- 3 Where is the National Railway Museum based?
- 4 What is the name of the famous steam railway in Sussex named after a flower?
- 5 Eurostar trains go to two capital cities on the continent: Paris and which other?

- 6 Name one of the fruits taken to Meldreth station's goods yard to be sent to market in London?

- 7 What is the name of the main railway station in Birmingham?

- 8 In 1938 a world-famous locomotive set a record for the fastest ever journey by steam – 126 miles an hour on the line near Peterborough. Name it.

**Write the answers on a postcard or sealed envelope, with your name and address, and put it in the box in the station waiting room. The first correct entry picked out will receive the vouchers. Closing date: July 31.**

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# SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL STATION!