

The Great Eastern as we knew it.

Article by Bob Farmer

I suppose I ought to entitle this 'The Great Eastern and its successors as we knew it' but it makes for a very long-winded title. What follows is largely gleaned from the book 'The Great Eastern as I knew it', written by my father John Farmer about his [and later my] local railway although, as I too used the line to get to and from school and, from what my Dad wrote, in possibly the same rolling stock, there will be memories from me as well. Although Dad was never a professional railway man, he had a keen interest in railways from a very early age and a prodigious memory and could remember details of things many years after seeing them.

The bit of the Great Eastern that Dad got to know best was the local branch line that ran from Liverpool Street to Ongar. This line had been built to Loughton by the Eastern Counties Railway which had started life by building a line from Devonshire Street, Mile End to Romford which opened in June 1839. Crossing the Lea with the marshy ground on each side of it required much ballast and was an expensive operation but they were able to open their terminus at Shoreditch in July 1840 and by then the other end of the line had reached Brentwood. Money was always a problem and when the Northern and Eastern Railway requested to use the Shoreditch terminus this was agreed for a rental of £7,000 per year. The Northern and Eastern had succeeded in building their line only from Broxbourne to Stratford and as a result, in September 1840 this agreement made Stratford a junction. In 1843 the Eastern Counties took over the working of the Northern and Eastern and in 1844 the decision was made to change the entire system from 5 foot to standard gauge

Despite various extensions the Shoreditch terminus (later called Bishopsgate), was grossly inadequate to handle all the traffic generated. In 1848 a line from Bow Junction to Fenchurch Street was opened by the Blackwall Railway and this enabled the Eastern Counties to terminate some of its trains at Fenchurch Street and ease the overcrowding at Shoreditch. In the meantime the decision was taken to move the works from Romford to Stratford and some 300 houses were built for the workmen

The line to Loughton was opened in 1856 with most of its trains terminating at Fenchurch Street. The terminus at Loughton was where the Lopping Hall now stands about a half a mile north of the present London Transport station. Later the line was shortened and the terminus sited in what became the carriage sidings. Dad believed it to be Loughton's second station but it is unrealistic to think that the impoverished Eastern Counties would have found both the need and the money to cut the line back and provide a new station in the six year gap between 1856 when the line was opened and 1862 when the Great Eastern came into being. I suggest it was not the second station but the third and that for a time it co-existed with the new GE station. The GE would be unlikely to use the old terminus once the through station was built but it would make sense to cut the line back to the carriage sidings and provide some platforms for terminating or excursion trains, and I understand that there was indeed at some time a platform in the carriage sidings which was used for excursion traffic. However for the sake of this article I have called this station number two and later

stations numbers three and four.

In 1862 the Eastern Counties Railway had become the largest component of the new Great Eastern Railway that decided to extend the line to Ongar. This line opened in 1865 which necessitated the building of station number three which was built a few hundred yards to the west of the present L.T. station. The line to Ongar was built only as a single line but traffic was such that the line was later doubled as far as Epping. I was told that one of the reasons that the Great Eastern built the line to Ongar was with the possibility of extending the line to Chelmsford. Had such an extension occurred it would have been most useful as a diversionary route if anything had happened to cause the closure of the main line but it never happened like so many bright railway ideas of the Victorian period.

Dad recalls his first ever contact with the local line was when at a tender age he saw his first Holden locomotive from a footbridge in South Woodford. And as he recalls 'I was hooked' As it happened he later had plenty of opportunity to see the railway at first hand as he lived south of the railway line and went to a school that was north of the line so four times a day he would have had to cross the line at the Snakes Lane level crossing, [No school dinners in those days!]. He never forgot the sequence that took place as the gates were opened, the levers in the ground frame were thrown back and the sound as the gate lock indicator operated. This was followed by the crash of the up home signal coming off. Snakes Lane level crossing is no more, it has been replaced by a pedestrian subway which is undoubtedly safer and requires no staff but it isn't half as much fun!

In 1903 the branch acquired another leg when a line was built from a junction between Woodford and Buckhurst Hill to Fairlop and the line continued through Ilford Yard and joined the main line in a 'Y' allowing trains to proceed in either direction. Thus Woodford Junction box came into existence and as Dad was particularly fascinated by signalling he found his way there. He soon got to know the three signalmen but especially Bill Gooderman a Norfolk man who taught him how to work the box which he was able to do before he was fourteen. Dad recalls one day in the mid 20's when there was a fire in a store at Ilford, which closed the main line. The LNER tried to get as many trains away as they could by sending them up the branch to Woodford round the Fairlop line to regain the main line at Ilford. They would have had to merge with the local traffic and the chances are that the branch timetable would have been ignored but they would have been able to get some main line trains away. Obviously not a full service but something has to be better than nothing. I doubt if Dad was allowed near the box that day but you can bet your boots he found some suitable vantage point to observe the proceedings. Trains to Fairlop are no longer able to get to the main line as the line through the yard has been removed. Instead the line now continues in a tunnel from Fairlop to Newbury Park and Wanstead to rejoin the branch line at Leytonstone. These tunnels were bored before the war and were converted into workshops to make parts for the war effort.

Dad's interest in signalling led him to construct a train set in his garden but not in the sense that term is generally understood. Dad had his garden properly signalled and each garden path would have been treated as a 'line'. His signals would have been made from anything he could lay his hands on as they were a fairly poor family and money for train sets was not available. The only thing that he used that had been anywhere near a railway was the lead weights that acted as a counterbalance to the

signals. They were genuine GE / LNER as over each carriage door was a cast lead number and the GE were probably puzzled as to why so many were missing! Dad recast them as required. Dad would make a mould out of cardboard and stick a staple through one end. Into this he would pour his molten lead. The cardboard would catch fire and disintegrate but it would keep its shape long enough for the surface of the lead to solidify. And what did he use for rolling stock? The answer was the local boys and girls who would be assembled in trains and would stop or go as instructed by the signals and woe betide them if anyone got it wrong! I wonder what happened when my grandmother went out to hang up her washing?

In 1922 Dad won a scholarship and he could have gone to a large grammar school called Bancroft's which was in Woodford or to a private school in Loughton called Loughton School. He opted for Loughton as it would have meant travelling on his beloved railway.

The terminus at Bishopsgate in Shoreditch was failing to cope with increased traffic and so a site for a suitable replacement was sought. Wormwood Street was one option that was rejected, Finsbury Circus was chosen and then rejected because of the hostility of the local people and finally Liverpool Street was chosen. Many tenement buildings had to be demolished and the occupants were rehoused mainly in Walthamstow or Edmonton. The government insisted that these displaced people should be allowed to travel to London for a return fare of two pence [and in old money there were 240 pence to the pound!]. How the Great Eastern managed to cope with this extra traffic is anyone's guess. In 1866 the Great Eastern took control of the Blackwall Railway on a 999-year lease which gave it control of Fenchurch Street station although that sounds better than it really was as some GE trains already terminated there and some of this station was used by the London, Tilbury and Southend trains. However in February 1874 the first part of Liverpool Street was opened. Platforms 1 and 2 were actually through platforms as the lines continued onto the Metropolitan Railway and as I think there was a similar connection at Paddington, in theory it would have been possible to run a train from Great Eastern onto Great Western tracks. And we think 'Crossrail' is a new idea! This link was later removed and the tunnels used to provide office space. Apparently the link was not there for the Great Eastern's benefit but was put in so that the Metropolitan Railway could use it as a temporary terminus.

By now trains for Cambridge were able to branch off the main line at Bethnal Green junction allowing the old platforms at Stratford to be used by the Loughton branch. It is interesting to find how old names hang on as they are passed from one generation to another. Even when I started at Loughton School in 1946 it was referred to as the Loughton rather than the Epping branch. Nowadays it is all part of the Central line...

Suburban traffic was still increasing and the management would have been relieved when the rest of the station came into use in November 1875 some two years later. Still traffic continued to increase and the station was further enlarged until it had 18 platforms. Liverpool Street station was more like two stations than one, something like Victoria in that respect as I think Platforms 9 and 10 were made extra long to cater for the Harwich boat trains and extended across the concourse effectively cutting the station in half. The early part of the station was called the West side and the later extension the East side. At some time a bridge was built linking all the platforms and I

recall using a refreshment room off the bridge so it's possible a second storey was built over some of the concourse. The building of Liverpool Street enabled the GE to use the station at Bishopsgate for parcel traffic.

And what of the other end of the line that we left at Brentwood? In 1841 the Eastern Counties started extending the line to Colchester but it was an extremely wet summer and the construction was plagued with slips and subsidence so that by the time they reached Colchester they must have been physically and certainly financially exhausted. Ipswich would have been the next town on the route to Norwich but the Eastern Counties was in no hurry to extend the line from Colchester so the inhabitants of Ipswich formed the Eastern Union Railway to build a line from Ipswich to Colchester. At one time it was suggested that the Eastern Union should have its own station at Colchester but common sense prevailed and they eventually linked with the Eastern Counties in June 1846. Like the Eastern Counties, the Eastern Union later became a founding part of the Great Eastern along with a host of smaller lines.

Meanwhile over in the west the Eastern Counties had been working the Northern and Eastern line to Broxbourne and they finally took the line over altogether on a 999 year lease. They then sought and received parliamentary approval to extend the line to Cambridge, Ely and Brandon. It was now the turn of the natives of Norwich to get upset. The Eastern Counties had promised to build a line from Norwich to Great Yarmouth but had failed to do so. Taking the 'bull by the horns' they engaged no lesser a pair of engineers than George and Robert Stephenson and the line was built in record time by Samuel Morton Peto the Baptist who apparently had a reputation for treating his men better than other contractors who were better behaved as a result.

But this didn't get them any nearer London and realising that Brandon was some 23 miles nearer to Norwich than Ipswich; they set about getting a line built to Brandon. This meant crossing the River Wensum which of course is navigable into Norwich and so the famous [or infamous] Thorpe swing bridge was constructed. Looking at the railway map the line from Norwich to Brandon goes in a fairly straight line until you get near Thetford when the line suddenly dives down and after visiting Thetford swings back to the original line. Someone told me that Thetford was left off the original route until someone tumbled to the fact there was valuable trade to be had there and so it was added. This seems a rather simple explanation and I am sure there is more to it than that.

Completing the 'loop', the line from Norwich to Ipswich was opened in June 1846 to Norwich Victoria but by then the all conquering Eastern Counties had taken over the Norwich lines and it was considered beneficial for the Ipswich lines to terminate at Thorpe so the Trowse curve was built to facilitate this.

Although our local line did get to Ongar I think it fair to consider Epping as the true end of the line and in fact some years ago London Transport made this a reality by discontinuing trains between Epping and Ongar. However although Ongar has been abandoned by LT it still has a connection. The entire underground network distances were metricated and Ongar was chosen to be point '0' with various stations being chosen as interface stations and the kilometreage being counted up or down as appropriate. I think Mile End is the interface station to the District line. Ongar was chosen as the furthest station from central London, that honour now goes to Chesham. However things are rarely static and there are all sorts of ideas on how the old line could be used and it's possible that Ongar may get the honour back. You never know!

Epping had an engine shed with a staff of about ten engineers but an eminent engineer who was at one time in charge of the shed told Dad 'Epping shed was always a bit of a problem and I was not sorry when it closed down'. Epping yard was not all that big but it had to handle all sorts of traffic besides having a loco shed. One siding had a facility whereby a vehicle could be driven into a suitable covered truck and there were a total of about six roads for various purposes. On the up side of the track was the gasworks which had its own spur which would be used for incoming coal and outgoing products like coke, creosote and ammonium sulphate. As it was only a small gasworks it could not deal with small fractions and these were allowed to vent to the air. The gasworks would have been far too small to be viable and once the mains network was in place to bring supplies in from the outside, it would have been closed. I found the smell from the gas works quite pleasant at times but I am sure there are many that didn't and were glad to see it go.

Woodford was always that little bit more important than other stations on the line because some trains would terminate there and it also had considerable carriage siding space. However, as I have already mentioned, in 1903 its status went up a notch when it became a junction. The line from Roding Valley Halt to Chigwell was built on a thirty-foot embankment with a bridge over the River Roding and the railway authority must have thought themselves safe from one of the hazards of railway operation – floods! However the railway had built the embankment with something they had plenty of, ashes and clinker which are not the most stable materials. As a result there were several instances of serious subsidence on the banking. However with the general settling of time and the planting of trees and shrubs on the bank sides, this problem seems to have been overcome.

If you recall we left Dad having passed his scholarship and opting to attend Loughton School. This meant a trip down the line of two stations, Buckhurst Hill and then Loughton. I have this mental picture of him standing on Woodford station with his season ticket in his hand which cost – wait for it – eighteen shillings for a full term. It would have cost my grandfather quite an effort to find that sort of money but later it was paid for by the Essex County Council, possibly after my granny became a widow after my granddad fell out of a tree and received fatal injuries. Dad still came home for lunch and the school timetable was adjusted to take the train times into account. School started with an assembly at 8.55 and finished at 12.55, afternoon school started at 2.25 and finished at 3.55. And I think these timings were still in use when I went to the school and after nearly 60 years I now know why!

And boys will be boys and like boys both before and after him [including me!] they will get up to pranks. Dad recalls that they used to walk along the running board as the train went between stations. Fortunately the railway company provide plenty of convenient handholds although Dad recalls it was a bit of a stretch when they came to a first class section. In my day we did not have this problem, as all the stock was third class. We used to play a game called carriage he and many of the carriages were built with the rows of seats ending at head height with a luggage rack above but it was easy to roll over the top of the seat to get from one compartment to another. One of our number would be 'he' and the rest of us would endeavour to stay out of his clutches. This would include going along the running board but, as Dad relates, there were plenty of things to hang on to and no one got seriously injured. Scrapes cuts and bruises in abundance but hey! That's a part of growing up. Carriage he required an

empty coach but there were few travellers on the trains just after four o'clock and what there were soon learnt to avoid the coach that a group of maroon capped boys were heading for.

While I have no doubt that Dad would be involved in his fair share of pranks he would not maliciously damage railway property but he remembers a boy called de Ritter deliberately smashed the glass in the carriage pictures with his hockey stick. Unfortunately he did it in full view of Mr Staples the stationmaster and after a visit to the headmaster the next day he had a bad attack of psoriasis. You can work out the pronunciation for yourselves!

On one occasion they found the fogman's hut at Loughton Station unlocked and stole a packet of detonators. There were twelve of them and he and his friends raced to put them on the line in time for the train which they knew carried a lot of boys. Foolishly they put the whole twelve on the line, there was a huge explosion and they heard the brakes go on. It put the wind up them and for months they would not talk of it, even to each other.

When my Dad started to work his employer was a Mr C Wood who told Dad of an incident in the 1870's when he was asked to assist with a Great Eastern locomotive that had stopped exactly on top or bottom dead centre in Theydon Bois station. It would be interesting to know what sort of locomotive it would be that had only a single cylinder. Was it some form of Great Eastern loco or was it a gleaming from one of the lines the GE took over? When Dad was young nearly all the branch traffic would have been handled by 2-4-2T's built by James Holden which became F5 in LNER days. There was one exception and this was a 2-4-2T built by S. Holden when he took over from his father and was later designated an F6. During World War I a locomotive arrived in Woodford carrying the number 1002 but all Dad says about it is that it was one of a series of 12 superheated locomotives built by A. J. Hil, numbered 1000 to 1011.

The maids of all work were the 0-6-0T locomotives a J type in the LNER classification. Beginning with what became the LNER J66 there followed the J67, 68 and 69. They were not particularly fast due to their four-foot wheels but this enabled them to out-accelerate more powerful engines. This was a valuable asset with suburban stations being close together and they were used all over the Great Eastern suburban system going out to Epping, Enfield, Edmonton, Walthamstow and even Hertford. In 1888 the LNWR works had managed to assemble a 0-6-0 in 25 and a half hours and claimed it as a world record. The GE rose to the challenge by assembling no 930 a 0-6-0 of a class affectionately known as 'Buckjumpers', in nine hours and forty seven minutes from scratch which was and remains the world record. It was sent straight out to traffic and it covered 36,000 miles before it returned to the works for adjustment. They continued as the LNER class J15 to the very end of steam. They were unglamorous but utterly reliable.

And now we talk about the then biggest problem of rail operation – FOG! And we are talking about fog that really is fog. The words 'fog' and 'smog' are glibly used today when there is reduced visibility of say 200 metres and road traffic moving at 30 mph but I am talking about fog when you could not see 1 metre. You would have only to have experienced a 'London Particular' pea-souper once to find out what thick fog can be like and I assume other large cities would have had similar fogs even if they didn't have a name for them. In days gone by it was possible to get a weather condition

called a thermal inversion. [It is presumably still happens but thanks to the Clean Air Act its effects, if any, are very much reduced]. A thermal inversion means that a layer of colder air overlays warm air nearer the ground. This has the effect of inhibiting the convection currents which normally occur. Now imagine the situation at the start of the 20th century if such an inversion occurred particularly in winter. In the London area the usual and possibly only form of heating was a coal fire. This fire would generate smoke which went up the chimney but due to the lack of convection currents it would not climb very high and would remain below the cold layer. As thousands and thousands of chimneys continued to pump their smoke into the air, this layer would get thicker and thicker. It is possible that this description is not technically accurate but it will serve for the purposes of illustration. I have personally only experienced a fog where I could not see 3 metres but Dad told me he has been in a fog where, when you looked at a hand held at arm's length, it was yellow.

All signalmen had what was called a fog object. This was an object that they could normally see from their box and when they couldn't, they had to call out the fogmen. The men would collect whatever was needed in the way of stores e.g. red and green flags, detonators and a guards' lamp and each would make his way to his assigned signal. If the signal was high up in a cutting the Great Eastern would mount a tiny duplicate near the fog man's hut. It was a cold job and it would be usual to have a brazier going. It was his job to duplicate the indication of the signal and he would put two detonators on the line when the signal was at danger and remove them when it wasn't although it was common practice to leave one detonator on the line to give the driver an idea of where he was. If the fog got really bad then the line would run a reduced service and the station men would put out a notice 'Fog, reduced service in operation'. Modern colour signals have a much deeper penetration than the old oil lamps and because of smoke free zones, what fog there is, is very thin so there is now no need for fog men.

My Dad was born in 1911 and I was born in 1938 and for some time in our father's family moments he was held responsible for World War I and I for World War II. Each war would have a dramatic effect on all aspects of life which of course would include the railways. The first effect would be that many thousands of railwaymen would be called up leaving a skeleton staff who gained 'reserved occupation' status. As an aside, during WW I there were women who were prone to give men a white feather as a sign of cowardice if you looked physically fit and were not in uniform and at some time many of the people with a reserved status were given a badge to wear so that they did not receive a feather from these misguided women. However the men given reserved status would have been the bare minimum needed to run a railway and it was often these same women who stepped forward to fill the gaps. And to their credit there were few jobs they did not tackle and do well.

Great Eastern men on war service were paid a retainer of six shillings and six pence [6/6] a week by the railway [32.5p] although just stating the value does not do justice to this sum. A shilling in those days would buy what would cost you £3 today so the Great Eastern was giving each of its employees on war service something like £20. Evidence of this payment by the railway is contained in a letter to a Mrs Bear which advises the poor unfortunate widow that the allowance will stop as her husband had been killed in action.

Fortunately the dreadful carnage of the Western Front was not repeated in World

War II which brought its own problems. In each war the railways would have been expected to carry vast quantities of men and material round the country, most of which would have fallen on the shoulders of the railways south of the Thames and particularly those serving the ports in Kent. However the Great Eastern would have carried some of this traffic mainly, I guess, to and from the London Docks.

One problem that the Great Eastern men did not have to anything like the same degree as was borne by their successors was the damage to the infrastructure caused by the bombing. The total number of bombing raids by Zeppelin in WW I was less than 100, the first being on Great Yarmouth. In WW II you could have this number of raids in one week, each with considerably more aircraft than one Zeppelin. There are countless instances during WW II of repair work being done to railways after bomb damage and for every one we know about there are many that are lost in the mists of time. Men would be called upon to work long hours to repair bomb damage and would start repairs as soon as possible and there are many instances where the gangs went out while the bombing was still going on. And some of the things they accomplished are truly amazing considering their resources. A bridge could be hit and destroyed and within 24 hours a wooden bridge had been built to bridge the gap and the trains were running again, I understand that at some time the railwaymen would have been able to utilise a sort of super 'meccano' scaffolding which could be used to form the necessary supports of a replacement bridge very quickly.

We had a lot of enemy bombers over Theydon as they were often after a viaduct about a mile north of Chigwell Lane station called 'Five Arch Bridge'. Had they been successful in damaging this bridge it could have cut off vital supplies to North Weald aerodrome which was one of the 'Battle of Britain' airfields but the bridge emerged from the war unscathed and the Hurricanes continued to fly.

Among my 'treasures' I have a copy of the script of a BBC programme made during WW II called 'Junction X'. The book is extremely evocative of the many trials and tribulations borne by the railways in those dark days and how the various problems were solved. The broadcast lasted only an hour so it could not cover everything but it is a surprisingly comprehensive snap shot given the time allowed. It would have been interesting to hear the actual broadcast. I can't tell you when that was but the book was published in 1944 and I would have been six and not terribly interested in radio programmes. I just went upstairs to find the book and see when it was published but couldn't find it. Just as well it is 'backed up' on my computer.

Water. Locomotives need many thousand gallons of it to do their various journeys. On the main line, among other devices, we had water troughs where tender locomotives can pick up supplies at speed but such sophisticated arrangements are not appropriate for either a branch line nor tank engines. So devices are provided where the engines can get a necessary 'fill up' and these devices are called 'water cranes'. Both my father and I find this name curious when you realise the function of a normal crane but the name of a thing is only a word used in order that people can identify what you are talking about and if it is agreed that water crane is the name of the device by which locomotives are replenished with water, then 'water cranes' is what they are.

In the early days in Epping, water was pumped from a well somewhere near the gasworks to a very grand looking crenelated water tower in the High Street. As it was uphill from the station to the High Street there was ample pressure of water at the

station to feed a water crane which stood on the London end of the up platform. For this reason, once the tube arrived at Epping, the tube trains used the down platform and the Ongar trains the up thereby enabling the F5 on the push-pull to get water. This arrangement persisted even when the Ongar bit was electrified but with the Ongar trains now just a memory, the tube trains use either platform, and Epping also had a back up water tank for use if the mains pressure fell.

At Woodford there was a different arrangement. For some reason the local water supplier was not keen on the railway taking large supplies of water all at one go so the Woodford water crane consisted of a cylindrical water tank on a stalk. This was near the end of the up platform but in the siding and could be used by locomotives standing on the terminating side of the up platform.

Ongar had a rectangular tank on brick piers and here it would seem that the railway was required to draw its supplies only at night to avoid domestic supply problems during the day. Loughton had two columns similar to Epping. It was actually supplied by the same company as supplied Woodford but as Loughton was lower and not so built up [and possibly the main was bigger!] it did not have the supply problems of Woodford.

The Great Eastern was not a wealthy railway but it was efficient, as it needed to be to survive. Most of the goods traffic consisted of farm produce from East Anglia and the surrounding counties. There was some fish from Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth and some bricks from Peterborough but that trade had not developed much as most localities had their own brickworks. What the railway really wanted was access to the rich coal traffic from South Yorkshire. The Great Northern, of course, did not want such a thing to happen and for thirty years had successfully blocked all of the Great Eastern's attempts to establish a route. However they eventually compromised and in 1882 a connection was established between Liverpool Street and Doncaster running via the new joint GE and GN line which ran via March, Spalding, Lincoln and Gainsborough to Doncaster and by obtaining running powers over GN and North Eastern metals the GE eventually got to York. Had digital or even colour cameras been around in the early 20's a rich harvest of pictures could have got there as every railway company in Eastern England worthy of the name would try to get some form of service to York.

It is possible that I am qualified to play cricket for Yorkshire as one set of my great grandparents came from that prestigious county. They set up home in Epworth in Lincolnshire and ran a farm where my grandmother was born. When my great grandfather died, my great grandmother continued to run the farm with the assistance of two of her sons and a daughter. After WW I my grandmother's health was in a very run down state and the whole family was invited to Epworth for an extended stay to allow her to recuperate. My grandfather was unable to come so in July 1920 my grandmother, dad's sister Ruth [and therefore my aunt] and Dad caught the train to Liverpool Street. From there they caught a train to Cambridge where they had to change and then onto Ely where they had to change again. Eventually the York train came in which would take them as far as Doncaster.

You may wonder why my Dad's family went via the 'joint' when it would probably have been quicker to go to King's Cross and go Great Northern and the answer was money. By going via the joint line the fare was cheaper and as I have already indicated Dad's family had to make every penny count. Among other things they would have

booked to Epworth via Haxey and as the GE train could not stop at Haxey as it was a GN station, it took them instead to Doncaster, and the GE would be obliged to get them back to Haxey for no extra charge!. On one of my early visits to Epworth I was taken round by my Aunt Renée [Irene] and introduced to all my family members and they seemed to go on forever. In the 1920's there would have been even more relatives and my granny and her children would have been expected to visit or be visited by a lot of them. Among other visits was one to Balby, Doncaster to visit granny's sister Annie and her husband Robert Coggan. Now great uncle Robert is the nearest I am likely to get to any form of railway fame as he was chosen by no less than Patrick Stirling to be the first driver of number 1 which is now preserved at York. Uncle Robert was not pleased to hear that his sister-in-law had travelled up on the 'joint' and ORDERED her to return via Great Northern. I don't know what the financial arrangements were but Uncle Robert was not short of a bob or two and could well afford to treat granny to the tickets.

The Great Eastern was not renowned for either speed or punctuality and there is a story told about a woman and her teen aged son presenting themselves at Liverpool Street station barrier where the woman offered a child's ticket for the boy. 'How old is your son' asked the ticket collector. 'He is sixteen' came the reply. 'But this ticket can only be used by someone of 14 years old and younger' the ticket collector pointed out. And her reply 'But he was when we started out!'

Having offered a story about punctuality and the GE's lack of it, there is a later service that was spot on punctual and I don't mean by modern standards. This was the famous GE / LNER 'Jazz' service. Now I have heard two versions of how this name came to be used either because of the colours above the compartments to mark the class or it was because of the slickness of operation. You pays your money and you takes your choice! It was also known as the 'Rainbow' service.

As I have already indicated the GE / LNER had a very extensive suburban network and the GE in 1920 was faced with the task of getting a lot of people into Liverpool Street in the morning and home again at night. Electrification was one option which was estimated to cost £3,000,000. They worked out that with some minor track remodelling and some other small modifications they could run what has turned out to be the world's most intensive service ever run by steam. It cost them £80,000 which was considerably cheaper. This is how it worked. Between each pair of platform lines was an engine bay equipped with a water crane and to start with there would be an N7, waiting there. A train would run in and before it had stopped the N7 in the bay would be on the move, crossed to the platform line and backed onto the train. In the meantime the N7 on the other end would be disconnected and once all was ready the train would be off. The old train engine would follow the train out and be switched to the engine bay and stopped under the water crane where it would get as big a drink as it could. No sooner had the N7 cleared the platform face when another train would run in and the sequence would repeat again and again and again. In those days each compartment would have had what in these days are much derided 'slam' doors but they do have the great asset that a train could be emptied and filled very quickly and they would need to be as they managed to run something like 24 trains an hour over the same set of metals. Platforms 1 to 4 were used for the service which means each train was in and out in an average of ten minutes. And I use N7 in a semi generic sense as other small loco's were involved as well. And punctuality for the last week

when punctuality was measured by a stopwatch rather than by a calendar was 100%. Eat you heart out First Great Western!

The Great Eastern had all surface junctions and had to arrange things to reduce the need to cross other lines as far as possible. At Liverpool Street trains for Enfield Town, Palace Gates, Walthamstow and Chingford normally used platforms 1 to 4 as these would all leave the main line at Bethnal Green junction, Loughton branch trains together with Broxbourne, Hertford and Woolwich trains sometimes used platform 4 but more usually platforms 5 and 6 and the Cambridge and Colchester trains went from platforms 7, 8 and 9. Platforms 10, 11 and 12 were regarded as main line 'arrival' platforms, platforms 13 to 17 were used by Ilford and Romford suburban trains and platform 18 had a sort of miscellaneous function. There are three sets of running lines out of the station, Platforms 1 to 4 used the left or 'suburban' pair, Platforms 5 to 9 used the middle or 'local' pair and main line trains used the right hand pair. Because the Great Eastern had no flying junctions it must have been quite a work of art to keep things going smoothly where trains crossed other lines.

I find it ironic that the railways which had acquitted themselves so well while under government control in both world wars should have been rewarded for their efforts by grouping after the First World War and by nationalisation after the second. In the case of the Second World War the government limited the railways income but put greater and greater loads on them and it is small wonder that the railways were in such a run down state when the war ended.

After the grouping in 1923 things took some time to settle down and the various components of the groups were getting to know each other and by the end of 1925 things were looking up and 1926 was looked forward to with some optimism when in May a heavy blow fell. The General strike began as with so many others in the coal industry. Mining coal is a dirty job and often the miner will be working in cramped and dark conditions. It is not a job that I have any experience of, nor do I want any as I tend to get claustrophobic whenever I can't see a bit of natural light somewhere. During the war I would have been useless in tunnelling my way out of a prisoner of war camp although my practical skills would have been useful, My impression is that many miners were in that occupation because it was quite simply a case of going down the pit or starving and hunger can make a lot of people do things they are not keen on.

However in May 1926 for whatever reason the miners came out on strike and the TUC [Trade Union Congress] supported them by calling everyone out on strike. The government's first priority was to arrange for the distribution of food and all sorts of means of transport were pressed into service. Although the first car had run only in the late 19th century, by 1925 road transport had become reasonably reliable and the strike provided a huge shot in the arm for the motor industry. The railways had plans to cope with contingencies such as this and they were immediately put into operation. There was no shortage of men with experience of a steam engine although it may not have been on rails. From a mixture of steam wagon drivers, traction engine drivers, students, stationary engine operators and retired men, the railways selected their volunteers and by the end of the strike they were running quite a reasonable service.

Although the General Strike ended after ten days, the miners stayed on strike until the autumn and by then the railways had used up all their reserves and were getting coal from where they could, not all of it was good stuff.

There was no doubt that this strike was a disaster for the railways. Whenever

anyone goes on strike, the people that use whatever service the strikers provide must make alternative arrangements and on many occasions the alternative arrangements prove to be as good or better than the old ones and are kept on after the strike to the detriment of the strikers. When I worked for BT the Post Office Engineers' Union called a strike as they expected that escalating faults on the telephone system would soon force the BT board to return to the negotiating table and concede their demands. What it actually proved was how robust the system had become with the new electronic exchanges and the strikers returned to work after a month for what was on the table before the strike. And BT was able to reduce the number of maintenance men as a result.

A similar thing happened to the railways during the General Strike of which Dad gives one example. Before the strike the railway had carried a considerable volume of milk. The 'milk' train left Ongar at 8.30 and bearing in mind that some of the farmers had to transport the churns as much as eight miles to the station, many had to start milking their cows at 3.30. At one time Stratford was handling 5,000 churns a day which were not all from Ongar of course. However the General Strike left farmers with a lot of milk on their hands and most of them turned to road transport to fill the void. And the farmers found that road transport was both cheaper and more convenient as the lorry could collect the churns direct from the farm. Loading platforms appeared outside farms and although the milk trains were kept on after the strike, the trade dwindled and finally disappeared forever. I imagine the cows could set their alarms later as well.

Many people are surprised to learn that railways were built to move freight rather than people round the country. There are today, of course, instances of various railways built only to move people but these are a later development. Freight is fairly easy stuff to move if you can manage to fill a train with one commodity and transport it as a single load from A to B but usually freight comes in smaller packages. But when a train and many others like it is made up of trucks with different destinations, what is needed is some form of 'sorting office' And while the Post Office can manage with a building, the railway companies require considerably more space.

Misdirection is a problem and as an example of how easy it is, a friend read over an early draft of this article and pointed out that the Great Eastern did not run a service to Hereford!. Just looking at the names on our branch, as well as our Loughton we have another in Bucks and a third in Shropshire and to go with our Woodford we have examples in Cheshire, Cornwall, Northants and Wiltshire, and both a Woodford Halse and Woodford-cum-Membris in Northants, And few people will need telling of another Stratford in the shape of Stratford on Avon but there is also Stratford St. Andrew and Stratford St. Mary in Suffolk and Stratford Sub Castle and Stratford Tony in Wilts. And there are probably others. I have a friend that used to live in Hereford and he told me there was at one time a large basket on the platform labelled HerTford. I imagine there would have been something similar at Hertford. Nor need this misdirection be accidental. At one time in the early days at North Walsham there was bitter rivalry between the staff of the Midland and Great Northern and that of the Great Eastern and it was not unknown for porters of one company to put a parcel in the care of the other into the wrong train. And of course the trucks themselves could get lost. Often the only directions for the destination of a truck would be a scribbled chalk name or a paper label each of which could be misread or in the case of the paper label, lost.

But assuming our parcel has got in the right truck and the truck is accurately labelled, it needs to go to the 'sorting office' and railway sorting offices are called marshalling yards. Many large yards were built in the sixties when the demand for freight was falling and have never worked to anything like their capacity but that's government control for you. A marshalling yard would have both reception and departure roads which would join to a single point in the case of the reception yards and fan out again after it. This single point would often be on a hump to allow trucks to roll under gravity to their particular train.

To sort the train a shunting locomotive would push it slowly over the hump. Staff would send information to the control room as to the destination of one or a string of trucks which would eventually move under gravity. In the meantime the control room would have set the points so that it rolled into the correct road. The speed of the truck could be regulated using hydraulic brakes to make sure the truck did not smash at speed into other waiting trucks.

I started going to Loughton School in 1946 and no one thought it curious that an eight year old boy was travelling on his own. Steam still held sway on the branch but the tube was steadily heading north-east. It reached Leytonstone in May 1947 and by December of that year had got as far as Woodford and Newbury Park from a branch at Leytonstone, by May 1948 the line had reached Loughton and the Newbury Park branch had got to Hainault. Due to some government scheme, in the 1930's many stations on the existing or projected to be part of the tube network had been built or rebuilt and this resulted in Loughton having its fourth station. It was built with three roads with the centre road being able to discharge passengers to either platform. That made it a convenient place as a 'change over' station as it could have a steam train waiting to go to Epping and a tube train waiting to go to the city waiting in the station and a spare road for any arriving train. The Epping train would normally stand in the down platform leaving the centre and up roads for the tube train. When the tube was eventually extended to Epping, the centre road would be used for trains terminating at Loughton. The train would come in and the down sided doors would be opened to allow the train to empty and once this happened the 'down' doors would close and the 'up' doors would open if the train was going back to London or the train would be run into the carriage sidings.

The tube train eventually arrived at Epping in September 1949. This meant I had three years of steam and like my father before me; I used to come home for lunch. However the school timetable had been set up to cater for boys in the 1920's and had not been adjusted to take the 1947/8 timetable into account. Getting home was not difficult as the train time was fairly convenient but the return trains meant I either had to bolt my lunch and get to the station at about 1.30 for a train that would get me to school horribly early or have a leisurely lunch, get the next train at 2 o'clock and then have to run all the way to get to school in time. I tried to catch the early train one day but missed it. However salvation was at hand. At about 1.45 a tube train on test came in and the guard invited me to use his train. And I gladly did so no more rushed dinners or running to school. It was ideally timed. And after that I chose to get my dinner at a restaurant in Loughton.

Despite the tube arriving at Epping in 1949, the line to Ongar was not electrified until 1957 and you get the impression that the LT's [London Transport's] heart was never really in it. There were no substations built on the line and all the power for the

tube trains had to come through the rails from Epping. This meant that the traffic on the line was very limited and no more than two four car sets were allowed on the line at any time. With a little more application they could have done so much better. One or two trains an hour were hardly likely to cater for commuter traffic and the number of passengers went down. The passing loop at North Weald was taken out, Blake Hall station was closed and the train got shorter until at the end the single shuttle consisted of only two cars. The line finally closed completely in 1994. The line has since been taken over by the Epping Ongar railway preservation society.

Due in a large measure to the war time bombing, the London County Council had many homeless people and to cater for them it developed a policy of building large estates in the Home Counties. One of these was at North Loughton which they called the Debden estate. In view of this the railway company decided to change the name of the station from Chigwell Lane to Debden which solved one problem for the RAF and possibly created another. At one time there was an RAF unit at Chigwell dealing I think with barrage balloons. Erks posted there would get to London and take the tube to Chigwell but many of them would turn up at Chigwell Lane and be dismayed to find they had a two or three mile walk on their hands [or should that be feet?] Changing the name to Debden solved that problem but as someone pointed out there was an RAF Debden and that was at the other end of Essex.

Before the Debden estate was built there was very little in the way of housing in the immediate area of Chigwell Lane station and the station was run on 'economical' lines. For many years and certainly within my memory the station lighting was by paraffin lamps and it was often referred to as 'Paraffin Junction'. The coming of the Debden estate allowed it to be upgraded to electric lighting.

The LT authorities tried various ways to cut costs and one of these was put into operation at Loughton. A generous gap had been left between the ends of the live rails in the middle of the down platform and in this gap a wooden platform was built. I assume there would also be one on the up platform as well, to allow the trains to be split. LT would run a four car set during the slacker periods but as it got nearer to the rush hour would extend them to eight. When the time came a four car set would be taken from the siding and positioned with its back end in the gap. The next down train would stop short of the gap and allow the Loughton passengers out and then butt up to the other train. Connections would be made and the four-car train was now an eight-car train. It didn't last for very long so I assume the costs would have outweighed the saving.

Another idea that LT came up with was to terminate every two trains out of three at Debden. Two roads had been built between the running lines on the down side of the station just by the Bank of England printing works where all the British folding stuff is printed. And I am happy to say, that idea is no more. However a look at Google shows that there is still a siding with access to either line on the up side and to the down line at the other end.

Now let's have a look at my home village of Theydon Bois where I was born in 1938 and which is pronounced Theydon Boys. I was taken to task by a booking clerk at Leicester Square station for pronouncing it 'Theydon Boys' and was told the second part should be pronounced as the French word for 'wood'. I told him he was talking out of the top of his hat! But there is possibly a connection. So far as can be traced, Theydon Bois has always been pronounced that way but there was never any formal

spelling. When the Great Eastern built its line it is thought that they approached the clerk of the Epping and Ongar Council to see how it should be spelt. He told them that there was no formal spelling but in view of the village's proximity to the forest the spelling 'Bois' might be appropriate. And so the station took the spelling of Bois and later the village followed. I wonder how many people who live in Theydon realise the spelling of the village name was formalised by the Great Eastern!

Despite there being two other Theydons round about namely Theydon Garnon [or Gernon] and Theydon Mount, I am quite happy to go along with the normal practice and call our village just 'Theydon'. Dad would not approve!

When I was a lad Theydon possessed three roads in a goods yard to the north of the station and a long carriage siding alongside the down line to Epping. Theydon used to have two retreats which today would be called funfairs and excursions would be run from the East End of London to Theydon to allow the Cockneys to use them and the train would be parked in our siding. Both retreats were destroyed in the war one by a doodlebug [V1] and the other by a landmine. The engine would have needed to come off in the station, and run round the train which it would then push into the siding. This is my assumption with the siding as I remember it but there is always the possibility that at one time there was a connection at the far end back onto the down line. Two of the roads in the goods yard were quite long with the one nearer the station having sheds on a bank so that stuff could be off loaded direct off trucks into a warehouse. Even nearer the station was a third but short road that ended in a dock similar to the one at Epping for loading vehicles direct into a wagon. The yard has now gone and the space filled with housing and a car park extension. This extension called for the removal of several damson trees and during my school years on occasions I have come off my train to find the barrier unmanned and ticket collector on a ladder up one of the trees picking the fruit. Fortunately as he knew I had a season ticket, he did not need to come down.

Our local ironmonger rented a small corner of the yard which adjoined his shop and which he used to display his wares in a garden setting. One day I noticed a fountain had been installed driven by a recirculating pump and it proved to be just within range of a squirt of washing up liquid. Within quite a short period of time the fountain was a sea of bubbles and it had to be removed. I was later told about it by the shop assistant who fortunately had no idea he was talking to the culprit.

Dad was very keen on rail trips and my sisters and I found ourselves going to all sorts of places. My earliest memory however is of a trip long before my sisters were thought of and we went on an excursion from Theydon Bois to somewhere in the region of Margate. We went up to Liverpool Street and reversed and made our way under the Thames through Marc Brunel's famous tunnel. I remember little else as I would have still been in short trousers and not particularly interested in trains in those days. However it has struck me since, that it was a waste to have just that stump of the Metropolitan line using that tunnel and I am pleased that it is going to see more use as part of London Overground.

On one of my trips we went to York and I took a picture of the station pilot in its North Eastern livery until I showed it to Mike Blakemore [the editor of the 'Backtrack' magazine] who assured me that I was actually at Newcastle. Close! On another occasion I went on a trip from Waterloo to Paddington via Birmingham and Worcester and to start with we were hauled by two locomotives one of which was the preserved

LSWR 'Greyhound' , the other was also a preserved locomotive which I seem to recall was a single wheeler. These two engines took the train to Clapham Junction and took the Reading line. Soon we were to take quite a stiff climb up a bank to the left and join the District line. I understand the signalman on the District line was told not to stop our train under any circumstances as it could not be started on the slope and disobeying his instructions to the letter, we were stopped. And there we stayed for about an hour until they found a diesel shunter to push us over the top. And of course we had lost our path and at least one engine that was waiting for us had to be substituted as it had spent too long waiting for us. We arrived at Paddington over three hours late.

One of my last railtours was organised by the Locomotive Club of Great Britain [LCGB] and involved visiting as many of the old GE / LNER suburban routes as possible. I forget all the places we went to but they certainly included Chingford and Epping and I am fairly certain we went to Woolwich. The trip took place twice some three weeks apart and Dad had arranged for us to go on the first one. Going to Epping meant passing through our home village, and for the second trip I joined a small crowd gathered on what was referred to locally as the 'cow bridge' and took two photographs of possibly the last steam locomotive to run on that line. The old link which joined the down line just south of Leyton station has long since been removed but by checking on Google not only has nothing been built on the line of the old connection but what appears to be the path of that line is still clearly visible. Although I can think of no good reason why it should be done, it would not take a lot of effort to put it back although there could be a lot of LT plant in the way.

No reference to the Great Eastern would be complete without some reference to Stratford Works. It was opened by the Eastern Counties, which moved their workshops from Romford in 1848. This was then used by the Great Eastern Railway after its formation in 1862 as its main works and continued as an important works even after the formation of the LNER in 1923 which had inherited the works of all its constituent companies including the Doncaster works of the Great Northern among others. It must have been very useful for the LNER to have such a facility available so near London but locomotive building was soon stopped with the final locomotive built being an N7 no 999. Since Nigel Gresley of the Great Northern had become chief mechanical engineer it seems likely that locomotive building would be centralised to some extent at Doncaster. Steam work finished in the early 60's when the works switched to diesel maintenance and the works finally closed in 1991. And I have not checked this but I would assume that much of the acreage it once covered is now covered in works related to the new Olympic Stadium or the Stratford International station...