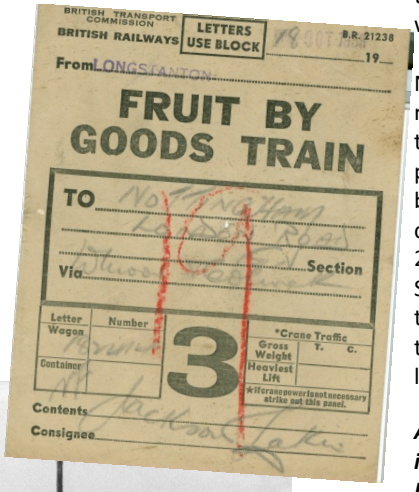
Longstanton Station Remembered

On 17 August 1847 the Wisbech, St Ives and Cambridge Junction Railway opened. Between St Ives and Cambridge, stations were established at Swavesey, Longstanton, Oakington and Histon. The coming of this branch line was to have a significant impact on East Anglia and the local area. This railway line allowed access to markets across the country for locally produced agricultural and horticultural goods prevalent at this time. These markets were critical for the big cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester and others seeing rapid expansion as employment for the country's population became increasingly centred around fast developing urban areas.



The new railway line not only allowed local businesses to expand and thrive, with Chivers of Histon being one of the outstanding success stories of this area, but the railway line also opened up recreational travel across the country and for local communities including Longstanton, this enabled a tourist industry to develop, particularly to Hunstanton which had its own railway line until its closure in May 1969.

This branch line would also play an important role in the defence of the country during the Second World War, as the line which ran between Longstanton, Oakington and Westwick villages played an important role in enabling personnel and supplies to be easily transported to the Bomber Command airfield of RAF Oakington; construction of which had begun in 1939. Following the war, transport requirements changed and the transport of goods and people by lorry and car became more commonplace. The station's role as a major hub for the transport of horticultural produce from local villages including Willingham, fell into terminal decline. By 1967, St Ives became a terminus with the closure of the line from March to St Ives and with no through trains the only service that could run was between Cambridge and St Ives. This was only a short reprieve and 5th October 1970 saw the last scheduled passenger train run; another casualty of Richard Beeching's cuts to the rail network. The line continued to be used for a while transporting sand and gravel from the gravel works near Fen Drayton and St Ives. Some excitement was generated however, when on 19th October 1991, 34027 Taw Valley and 70000 Britannia were on driver training and passed through Longstanton. In May 1992, the last gravel train ran on the line which was then closed for good.

Nature was left to take over much of the old line but fortunately the route remained intact. This allowed the St Ives to Cambridge branch line to be reopened, in the hope that it would alleviate the transport problems being experienced on the old A14 and other local routes between St Ives and Cambridge. Eventually, the decision was taken to convert the old railway line to the Guided Busway that is in use today. In 2021, when the Northstowe boundary was finalised, Longstanton Station and its sidings were placed within the new town. Irrespective of this change of boundary, Longstanton Station still stands as testament to the pivotal recreational and economic contribution the former branch line played for local communities and indeed the nation as a whole.

All images used in this article form part of the LDHS Archives and illustrate why this collection is of importance to Northstowe, Longstanton and the surrounding communities. Help to protect and display these archives (in person and on-line) is now being sought as the Heritage Society considers both its future and that of our archival collection.

Hilary Stroude

Seasons Greetings
&
A Happy New Year
from
The Longstanton &
District Heritage
Society