



Festival atmosphere for Ramsgate train

Way We Were

Richard West
 Founder of the
 Chaucer Education
 Project
vie.tcep.org.uk



EASTER Monday, April 13, 1846 was another cause for celebration, and this time, not only in Canterbury but in Ramsgate too.

The occasion was the opening of the Canterbury and Ramsgate extension of the South Eastern Railway's branch line from Ashford, just over nine weeks after the opening of the Ashford and Canterbury section.

At 11.30am, a special train departed from the Bricklayers' Arms terminus in London on the 67-mile journey to Ashford. The train consisted of seven first-class carriages and was hauled by the locomotive 'Shakespeare', which arrived at Ashford in under two hours.

Special guests conveyed on the journey included directors of the railway company: chairman James Macgregor; deputy chairman Viscount Torrington; and the Right Honourable Stephen Lushington. Three members of Parliament also travelled: William Bodkin, one of two for Rochester; George Dodd, one of two for Maidstone; and William Feilden, one of two for Blackburn. Influential shareholders travelled on the train too.

Crowds loudly cheered the train as it passed towns and villages.

The directors of the railway company had arranged a long free tourist excursion train from the town of Ramsgate to the City of Canterbury, to enable several hundred people to visit.

The free tourist excursion train arrived in the City of Canterbury almost simultaneously with the arrival of the special train from London.

The contract to build the branch line from Ashford to Canterbury, Ramsgate and Margate was awarded to Miller and Blackie of Liverpool in September 1844.

Superintending engineers were Joseph Cubitt and WR Forde. The railway branch line was built to provide a double track from Ash-



SCENIC: Passing through St Stephen's, Canterbury in 1846

Photo: Kent Libraries, Registration and Archives - Canterbury Library

ford to Canterbury and a single track onwards to Ramsgate and Margate.

Bridges were built to accommodate a double track throughout the entire route, so a second line could be added later if there was demand, to justify the additional cost incurred.

The 15.75 mile long extension from Canterbury to Ramsgate was constructed in 15 months and within budget, at an average cost of £15,000 per mile.

Gradient

The route was mainly through flat countryside, with a gradient of one in 264 for the first 13 miles of the route from Canterbury, after which the gradient rose to one in 100 where it passed through chalk for the remaining distance. The only intermediate station was at Minister, 11 miles from Canterbury.

The Ramsgate terminus was built in the parish of Saint Lawrence, where there was a festival atmosphere to greet the special train, with flags flying, guns firing from the pier head and musicians playing.

At 4pm, a dinner was held for the railway company directors, their friends and 150 gentlemen guests at the Albion Hotel, presided over by the town deputy S Sackett.

After the meal, toasts were raised and in response to company chairman James Macgregor

proposing the health of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Reverend J Snowden returned thanks and expressed his earnest prayer that: "Heaven might speed and prosper the Canterbury pilgrims journeying by the South Eastern trains and that all the well-founded and legitimate expectations of those who were concerned in the great undertaking that were assembled that night to celebrate might be abundantly realised."

In responding to the toast, James Macgregor spoke about the great benefits likely to accrue to the townspeople of Ramsgate and the community at large, not least of all from continental travellers.

He mentioned that the South Eastern Railway had formed the South Eastern and Continental Steam Packet Company, whose steam boats would arrive in Ramsgate Harbour with greater regularity than mail coaches had achieved, improving communication with northern Europe.

During the course of the dinner, the company's steam ship Princess Mary arrived in Ramsgate Harbour and was greeted with a salvo of artillery.

After the dinner, the return special train departed around 9pm and arrived back in London at 1.30am, having been delayed at intermediate stations.

Earlier Way We Were articles from The Chaucer Education Project, including "It's full steam ahead for Canterbury" and "Bells

were rung and flags hoisted for new arrival", articles in this series covering the opening of the South Eastern Railway's Ashford to Canterbury, Ramsgate and Margate branch line, can be accessed under Latest Articles on the virtual learning environment website at chaucer.university



BUNTING: Albion Hotel in Ramsgate viewed from the harbour

Photo: Illustrated London News, Saturday, April 18, 1846 edition



JOY: Procession passes The Market Place in Ramsgate

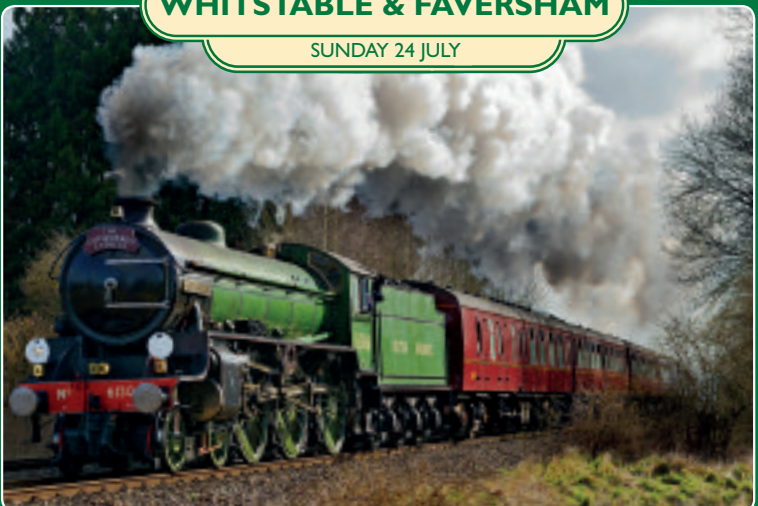
Photo: Illustrated London News, Saturday, April 18, 1846 edition

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