

MEMORIES

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Party time for city when first train pulled in



Lewis Cubitt, architect of the Bricklayers' Arms terminus. Portrait by Sir William Boxall, 1845

Friday, February 6, 1846 was a general holiday in Canterbury. The special occasion being celebrated was the arrival of the South Eastern Railway's inaugural train from the Bricklayers' Arms terminus on the Old Kent Road in London, on to the Ashford and Canterbury section of the branch line that would subsequently extend to Ramsgate and Margate.

The train containing the railway company's directors and their friends travelled via Croydon and then on to the company's own line from Redhill to Ashford, before branching on to the new double track line being opened between Ashford and Canterbury.

As the train approached Canterbury, every vantage point was filled with cheering crowds eager to catch a glimpse of the inaugural steam-hauled train. Shops were closed and business had been temporarily suspended. Bells were rung and flags were hoisted to announce the train's arrival. Public amusement venues were opened free for the day.

Immediately after arrival of the train, the railway company's directors, together with their

The great and good filled the Corn and Hop Exchange to celebrate the arrival of the city's first train from London, as Richard West from the Chaucer Education Project explains...



Exterior of the Corn and Hop Exchange

friends and invited guests, proceeded to the Corn and Hop Exchange in St George's Street, where a public dinner was to be held, commencing at 4pm, for 270 people. The venue was open to the public until 1pm, to view the dining facilities laid out and the decoration of the room.

Over the dais at the upper end of the Corn and Hop Exchange venue, the royal coat of arms were displayed. At the other end of the dining room, there was an emblazoned scroll showing the wording "Success to the South Eastern Railway". The White Horse of Kent was also prominently displayed.

Catering was provided by Mrs Clements of the Rose Hotel, situated directly opposite the venue, on the corner of Rose Lane and The Parade, from where the food was carried across by a chain of waiters.

While a band played, the dinner was chaired by the Mayor of Canterbury, Henry Cooper. Vice Chairman was Alderman Brent.

Guests included the Dean of Canterbury, the MPs for Maidstone and for Oldham -

and the Mayors of Faversham, Fordwich, Hythe, Maidstone and Queenborough. After the dinner, toasts were raised to the new line.

James Macgregor, the 37-year-old chairman and managing director of the South Eastern Railway company, proposed the toast of the day. His speech described the progress the company was making in building lines in Kent. Competing petitions had been presented to parliament by both the South Eastern Railway and a rival company to build a North Kent Railway.

He said: "Gentlemen, it is true that to arrive here, we have travelled round three sides of a parallelogram, which has increased the length of the journey to at least 20 miles more than the direct line would make it, the present distance being somewhat more than 80 miles, whilst the extension of our Greenwich line to Chilham would lessen the distance to about 60 miles." He was confident that the South Eastern Railway company would receive its Act of

Parliament for this line. James Macgregor mentioned that the law governed the calculation of fares, by direct route, not allowing for the circuitous route the company took. At the beginning of the previous September, the company had reduced fares 40% by introducing uniform day tickets. Considerably increased numbers of people travelling by train subsequently occurred, maintaining total income.

The chairman said the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway was being converted into a locomotive one, with greater comfort for passengers and journey time reduced by a third. The dinner ended at 9pm and the special train departed from Canterbury station at 9.30pm, on the return journey to London, arriving at 1.30am.

The city museum had been open from early until late that day and the wax work exhibition had also been full of visitors. In the evening, the theatre was crowded. The influence of the railway had arrived in Canterbury.

FREE ENTRY

Turner Contemporary

seaside: photographed

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Down to the Beach. Photographer: Raymond C Lawson.
Courtesy of Nicholas D Cordès, with kind permission of the Lawson family



Dinner time in the Corn and Hop Exchange