

## ELSENHAM and THAXTED LIGHT RAILWAY

An Archaeological Assessment of the Former Elsenham – Thaxted Light Railway  
The Thaxted Branch Railway Line



2010

# **THE THAXTED BRANCH LINE SURVEY**

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The Thaxted Branch Railway Line**

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## **Elsenham and Thaxted Light Railway**

### **The Thaxted Branch**

#### **1.0 Summary**

The Elsenham and Thaxted Light Railway opened in 1913, closing in entirety just 40 years later in 1953. It was, therefore, a very late development coming well after the major 19<sup>th</sup> century eras of railway construction and it also had an early end coming 10 years before the Beeching Report of 1963. Thaxted had been by-passed by both the construction of lines from London to the north during the ‘Railway Mania’ era of the 1840s, and also the branches running eastwards off the London Liverpool Street to Cambridge line built in the 1860s. Thaxted was the centre of an agricultural area with only a small amount of agriculture related industry and it suffered badly during the agricultural depression of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a situation not helped by the fact that it had no railway connection to use to get its produce to local and London markets.

Possible salvation of this situation came with the passing of the Light Railways Act in 1896. This Act was a conscious attempt to alleviate distress by allowing light railways to be constructed in rural areas which were more lightly engineered and hence cheaper to build. Where it was certified to the Treasury by the Board of Agriculture that the making of a light railway would benefit agriculture in an area, the Treasury might agree to aid the railway construction out of public money. A number of local landowners and businessmen supported the construction of a narrow gauge line from Elsenham to Thaxted and beyond, but in the end a standard gauge line, which ended short of the town itself on the west side of the Chelmer valley, was built and opened in 1913. It was initially a success, but suffered competition for freight from road transport after WWI, although passenger figures held up for longer. The line was very busy during WWII, but both freight and passenger figures declined after the war. It was identified as un-remunerative in 1951 and closed to passengers in 1952 and to freight in the following year.

This survey details all significant archaeological/structural elements associated with the branch line and comments upon extent, integrity, relative significance and condition of the surviving resource. However, as a result of the original minimal engineering of the line and the integration of it back into the landscape following closure very few original features survive – just parts of the track-bed, sites of road crossings, station and halt sites and buildings at Thaxted station.

Today the branch line lays redundant and integrated back into the rural, agricultural landscape. Much of the track-bed has been reclaimed by landowners and is now part of their ploughed fields, except where it is used as farm tracks. Intermediate stations and halts have been removed and the sites are overgrown or are part of the agricultural land – considering their primitive nature of clinker and ash platforms and wooden buildings, often old coach bodies, their demise was inevitable. The only structures of significance to survive are at the two terminus stations and these enjoy no form of statutory protection and hence are at risk of future development. Although Elsenham station is on the operating line from London Liverpool Street to Cambridge

and its future is therefore secure, it may be the subject of development proposals if the line is up-graded at a future date.

This report makes recommendations relating to significant surviving structures the overarching message being that the features which do survive are significant in themselves and as the last remaining evidence of this former branch light railway and that all efforts should be made to conserve and retain them. In fact the Thaxted Branch was one of only three Light Railways to be built in Essex, the others being the Kelvedon, Tiptree and Tollesbury Pier Light Railway and the Corringham Light Railway. Any features of the Thaxted Branch surviving may, therefore, have greater significance due to the rarity of this type of railway in the County.

## **2.0 Introduction**

This survey was undertaken on behalf of and in partnership with the Essex County Council Historic Environment Branch, which has been undertaking surveys of industrial/modern monuments of various industries within the County for over a decade. In response to threats to two of the County's redundant railway lines, a comparable assessment of the industrial archaeology of the Bishop's Stortford to Braintree branch line (The Flitch Way) was carried out in 2002-3 (Havis & Pratt, 2003) and of the Saffron Walden branch line in 2005 (Garwood, 2005). Following these two surveys it was decided to undertake surveys of all the railway lines in Essex, both redundant and operational, and to draw all these surveys together in one over-view report on the railway industry in the County. The purpose of these surveys of the railways in Essex is to identify structures of significance, which are at risk and which need protection. This analysis then enables the establishment of priorities within the railway structures identified, the assessment of existing statutory designations and the formulation of a coherent management strategy. Assessing the significance of each site and recommending a statutory framework for future management will ensure that each site is fully considered and an appropriate response given should significant remains become threatened. Listed Building and Conservation Area (Designated Heritage Asset) status ensures a sympathetic approach to alteration and is a means to prevent unnecessary demolition or insensitive works. Such designation, and particularly Conservation Area status, is not always sufficient to preserve the internal integrity of a building, therefore, where appropriate recommendations are made that current internal configurations and features should be inspected and assessed whenever the opportunity arises. Copies of this report will be made available to the relevant internal Essex County Council sections, to the Essex Record Office and to the National Monuments Record, Swindon. Further copies may be obtained, at a nominal cost to cover reproduction, from the Historic Buildings Records Officer on 01245 437613.

## **2.1 Methodology**

The route of the Branch light railway was surveyed in January and April 2010 by the author. Where possible the route was walked from east to west starting at Thaxted. Otherwise key sites such as the sites of former stations and halts and of road crossings were visited. It was possible to accurately plot all sites using the xxth edition OS maps, modern 1:50,000 OS Landranger 167 and the line description in

Paye's book. Access to all the line was not possible as parts now fall within private land and the track-bed of the line has been ploughed into agricultural fields and in some places the line and the sites are now overgrown. The survey was unable to assess the internal integrity of the extant Thaxted station buildings as they are privately owned. A photographic record was made of all sites on the line where they could be accessed using a Fuji Finepix digital camera at 2 million pixels resolution.

### **3.0 Background**

#### **3.1 Site location and description**

The Elsenham and Thaxted Light Railway started from the Great Eastern Railway (GER) line linking London Liverpool Street to Cambridge at Elsenham Station (TL533270) where it made a triangular junction with the main line. The branch had two starting points. For passengers this was from the east side of the up, main-line platform, the branch starting from the buffers at the London (south) end of the platform. There was a run-round loop and a short siding at this point. The other start point was from a physical connection to the goods yard on the up side of the main-line to the north of the station. These two spurs curved away from the main-line eastwards and joined together just east of Elsenham Station at NGR TL534272. The course of the line from the station has been ploughed in and reverted to arable land, while the course of the spur from the goods yard can be traced for a few yards after crossing the road, but then is overgrown. The line then ran eastwards up to and beyond Mill Road Halt, then curving north-eastwards around the east side of Henham village before turning east again beyond Sibleys Station towards Thaxted.

The line ran entirely through agricultural land avoiding any major engineering features, apart from a short underbridge east of Cutlers Green Halt, and passing some distance from the settlements and so never actually passing through those it was meant to serve. All road crossings were un-gated and on the level with cattle guards on the line either side of the road to stop stock from straying onto the line. The only exception to this being where the Elsenham goods spur crossed the road to Newport.

The first stop on the branch after leaving Elsenham was Mill Road Halt (TL 545275) built in 1922 to the south of Henham village which it was built to serve. In line with keeping the cost of building the line to the minimum, this halt, like the other halts on the line, was very basic. The 25 foot platform was just a raised clinker surfaced platform with timber facing one foot in height on the north side of the line. A small wooden hut acted as a waiting shelter and the halt had a name board and two oil lamps.

The line continued eastwards for a short distance before curving north-eastwards towards Henham Halt (TL 553284), one of the original 1913 halts built to serve Woodend Green and the east part of Henham. This halt consisted of a 100 foot long raised clinker and ash platform on the north side of the line, an old 4-wheel coach body as a shelter and a brick built gentlemen's toilet, seat, name board and two oil lamps.

The line continued north-eastwards to Sibleys, running parallel with the road as it approached Sibleys Station (TL 564299). Built in 1913, this was one of only two stations on the line, named after a local farm, and intended to serve the villages of Chickney and Broxted (hence its full name of Sibleys for Chickney and Broxted) which were respectively two and two and half miles south from the station. Sibleys, situated on the north side of the line, also had a 100 foot raised clinker and ash platform, but boasted a wooden station building, a small brick hut and a van body. As well as the name board there were four oil lamps and a seat. Here there were a goods loop and two short sidings at either end of the loop and a goods yard, shunting being performed by a rope from the locomotive on the Branch line.

The line ran almost due east to Cutlers Green halt (TL 592301) (1913), another 100 foot raised clinker and ash platform with a coach body as a waiting shelter, name board, two oil lamps and a seat. Situated on the north side of the line, the only access to this halt was via a footpath.

The line then ran eastwards crossing Little Horham Lane (TL 595300) on the only underbridge on the line and over the Stan Brook which ran through a culvert, and into Thaxted Station (TL 605301) (1913) which was almost a mile to the west of the town. By comparison with the other halts this was a most substantial station. It too had a raised 100 foot platform on the south side of the main line on which were a wooden station building, a coach body and a wooden hut, name board, oil lamps and seats. At the west end of the platform was a higher loading dock and cattle pen served by a short bay siding. There was a run-round loop with a short siding at the east end of the platform road and a siding from the loop served the brick built engine shed and its water tower. The goods yard consisted of two sidings and a head shunt.

### **3.2 Historical Background**

(This historical summary of the Elsenham and Thaxted Light Railway is largely based on Peter Paye's very detailed history and description of the line in his book published in 1984.)

The first proposal to build a railway line close to Thaxted came as early as 1835 when a route was being sought for a line from London to York via East Anglia and it was proposed to build a line via Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Cambridge. The Great Northern Railway's Bill was defeated in Parliament and subsequent proposals for a railway from London to the North were further to the west than that of the 1835 proposal. The Northern and Eastern Railway (N&ER) opened a line from London along the Lea and Stort valleys via Bishop's Stortford and Cambridge in the 1840s. Although two branches off this main line were built in the 1860s these were to Saffron Walden and Braintree both passing Thaxted by seven miles to the north and south respectively.

The area around Thaxted was heavily dependent on agriculture; what industry that existed, such as metal working, tool making and malting, was also linked to agriculture. All this activity suffered during the agricultural depression of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the population of Thaxted decreased from 2,556 in 1851 to 1,659 in

1901, only Lee's confectionary business providing substantial employment. Isolation from the railway system contributed to this situation of decline and caused concern to local businesses, landowners and the population generally.

In 1896 the Light Railways Act was passed and this was designed to alleviate the consequences of the agricultural depression by allowing less expensive railway lines to be built with Treasury aid at the instigation of local authorities, companies or even individuals. Thus a group of individual landowners and businessmen, including Sir Walter Gilbey, a local landowner who owned a wines and spirits (including gin making) business, and George Lee the confectioner of Thaxted (hence the nickname of the line being the 'Gin and Toffee') met in 1896 to gauge support for a Light Railway from the GER (created in 1862, an amalgamation of a number of East Anglian lines including the Eastern Counties Railway which had taken over running the N&ER lines in 1844) at Elsenham via Thaxted towards Great Bardfield, Finchingfield and to the Colne Valley Railway at Castle Hedingham. It was proposed to build the line to a 2' 6" gauge.

Years of negotiations with the GER and the Treasury followed, as well as detailed consideration of costs. Finally a standard gauge line from Elsenham to Thaxted was sanctioned in 1906, although due to the need to bridge the Chelmer valley west of Thaxted which was not affordable, the line would terminate to the west of the town before needing to cross the valley. Plans were finally submitted on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1907 with the Treasury and the GER funding half each. The only intermediate station was to be at Sibleys (named after a local farm) plus two halts, one at Henham and the other at Cutlers Green. The Elsenham and Thaxted Light Railway Order 1911 was granted on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1911.

Being a light railway the five and a half miles of the route avoided the construction of any major engineering works, following the lie of the land wherever possible so there were no substantial embankments or cuttings, and all roads were crossed on the level except for Little Horham Lane which was crossed by a girder underbridge. The maximum speed on the line was 25 m.p.h.

Opened by the GER on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1913, this 'farmers' line' was successful from the start for both passengers and freight, especially agricultural produce being moved to local and London markets. Road competition began to have an effect soon after the end of WWI and Mill Road Halt was opened in 1922 in order to serve more customers from the west end of Henham. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1923 the LNER was formed by the amalgamation of a number of companies including the GER, and so this branch came to be operated by this new company. While passenger figures held up as car ownership was still at a low level, freight and especially local traffic continued to decline under competition from road services. The line was much used during WWII for passengers, as petrol rationing forced travellers back to rail, and for vital food produce such as grain, fruit and vegetables out of the area, tinned food to Ministry of Food storage depots in the area and the occasional loads of ammunition for the many local airfields, but post-war both passenger and freight traffic continued to decline. Nationalisation of the railways took place on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1948 and so the line was operated by British Railways from then onwards, but not for long.

As early as 1951 the line was identified as being un-remunerative and local councils voiced no objections to suggestions that it be closed as long as a new bus service was provided. Following appeals and negotiations with bus companies, passenger services ended on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1952 (effectively Saturday 13<sup>th</sup>) and freight traffic ceased on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1953, 40 years after the opening of the line, but ten years before the Beeching Report which resulted in the closure of many other branch lines.

#### **4.0 Recommendations**

The closure of the railway resulted in very considerable losses to the Branch's infrastructure (although this was minimal in the first instance in line with construction practice of Light Railways), most notably the track, sidings and the track bed itself in many stretches, the halts and their facilities and the probably most if not all of the one underbridge. It is possible to trace the course of the line on the ground in parts where it has not been ploughed in and reverted to arable land, and to identify the sites of the halts and road crossings even though there are no original structures surviving, all from map evidence. However, sites of halts and some of the surviving track bed are densely overgrown. Elsenham Station is still in use as part of the line from London Liverpool Street Station to Cambridge. Evidence of the branch's platform here can be traced, as can the first part of the route of the Branch's spur from the former goods yard. Elsenham Station is dealt with in full in the report on the Cambridge Line (Crosby 2010). The site of Sibleys Station is used as private business premises. At Thaxted Station, a station building, the locomotive shed and water tower survive as part of private business premises.

Apart from current agricultural and business uses of the Branch's course and facilities as described above, no other use could be envisaged for any of the surviving sites. The little which does survive intact has individual and group value as evidence of one of the three Light Railways in the County and which may be exploited in future. Once any of these surviving features are removed that evidence is diminished and could be lost forever. It is, therefore, recommended that all surviving structures relating to the railway, including any not recorded during the survey are, wherever possible, retained in situ. Given below are more specific recommendations relating to each individual group identified by the survey.

##### **4.1 Buildings**

The only buildings on the branch were those providing facilities at the stations and halts. As most of these, with the main exceptions being the engine shed and water tower at Thaxted, were of wood, both specially built shelters and re-used coach bodies, they were swept away on closure of the branch as they would have had no viable re-use function. Only the wooden station building at Thaxted and the brick built engine shed and water tower survive. It is, therefore recommended that:

- **No building should be demolished.**
- **The three surviving buildings at Thaxted Station should be listed at Grade II in recognition of their individual value and group value.**
- **Any adaptive re-use should not compromise the historic integrity of the buildings; details and plan forms should be retained.**

- **As it was not possible to access surviving buildings internally as part of the survey, if the opportunity occurs all buildings should be internally assessed for original features and recorded.**

#### **4.1.1 Elsenham Station                    EHER 40892**

Elsenham Station was built in 1845 by the Northern & Eastern Railway as part of their London Liverpool Street to Cambridge Line. When the Thaxted Branch was built in 1913 the east side of the up platform was used as the Branch's platform and shaped to accommodate the curve of the Branch line eastwards away from the station. No new facilities were constructed in association with the Branch. Therefore, the buildings which constitute Elsenham Station are dealt with in the report on the Cambridge line (Crosby 2010). In association with the recommendations above and of the Cambridge line report, no alterations should be made to the up platform at Elsenham Station which would compromise the historic evidence of the existence of the Branch line.

#### **4.1.2 Thaxted Station                    EHER 40873**

Thaxted Station was built as part of the original Branch in 1913 and in line with practice for construction of the other stations and halts on this Light Railway. It had a raised 100 foot clinker and ash platform on the south-east side of the main line on which were a wooden station building, a coach body and a wooden hut, name board, oil lamps and seats. At the west end of the platform was a higher loading dock and cattle pen. Only the station building survives and is a single storey wooden building having two doors and two windows on the platform side and a window in each of the gable ends. Internal inspection was not possible and should be undertaken when the opportunity arises. Currently it is in use as part of private business premises, but should this use end an alternative suitable use which maintains the integrity of the building should be secured. **Therefore it is recommended that the station building should be Listed Grade II as the only surviving intact station building on the Branch (possibly the only surviving wooden station building in the County and the only station associated with one of the County's three Light Railways) and for its group value with the other surviving buildings at Thaxted.**

#### **4.1.3 Thaxted Engine Shed            EHER 40874**

The engine shed at Thaxted is brick built with a roof covered with corrugated iron sheets. It has four bays, each with wide arched windows on each side and is a single road shed just large enough to accommodate one of the Branch's 0-6-0T tank engines. Internal inspection was not possible and should be undertaken when the opportunity arises. Currently it is in use as part of private business premises, but should this use end an alternative suitable use which maintains the integrity of the building should be secured. **Therefore it is recommended that the engine shed should be Listed Grade II as**

**the only surviving intact engine shed not only on this Branch but within the whole County and for its group value with the other surviving buildings at Thaxted.**

#### **4.1.4 Thaxted Water Tower EHER 40875**

The water tower at Thaxted is brick built and surmounted by the cast-iron water tank, the lower portion having been used as a mess room for the train crew. Water was pumped from a well to the tank and then fed to a water crane, which used to stand in front of the engine shed, for filling the engines' tanks. Internal inspection was not possible and should be undertaken when the opportunity arises. Currently it is in use as part of private business premises, but should this use end an alternative suitable use which maintains the integrity of the building should be secured. **Therefore it is recommended that the water tower should be Listed Grade II as one of only three surviving intact railway associated water towers in the County and for its group value with the other surviving buildings at Thaxted.**

## **4.2 Station and Halts**

The three intermediate halts and one intermediate station as originally constructed are described in detail in section 3.1 above. As nothing now remains of the sites of these halts and station **there are no recommendations for preservation of these sites, although further survey work, especially at Sibleys Station is recommended when the opportunity arises.**

### **4.2.1 Mill Road Halt EHER 40891**

Although the site of the Mill Road Halt can be identified, nothing remains of the platform or station facilities. The site is overgrown and can be accessed from Mill Road and the footpath to Elsenham.

### **4.2.2 Henham Halt EHER 40884**

Although the site of Henham Halt can be identified nothing remains of the platform or station facilities. The site has now reverted to arable land and can be viewed from the road from Woodend Green to Greenend.

### **4.2.3 Sibleys Station EHER 40881**

Although the site of Sibleys Station can be identified nothing of the platform or station facilities appears to survive, although a full inspection of the site was not possible as it is now the site of private business premises. The site can be viewed from the lane running down passed the farm called 'Sibleys' to Sucksted Green. **Further inspection of the site is recommended when the opportunity arises.**

#### **4.2.4 Cutlers Green Halt EHER 40878**

Although the site of Cutlers Green Halt can be identified nothing remains of the platform or station facilities. The site is now overgrown and can be accessed via the footpath from Cutlers Green passed Loves Farm. All that remains is a small footbridge across a ditch from the footpath to the platform.

### **4.3 Bridge and Culvert**

In line with Light Railway practice the construction of bridges was kept to a minimum on the Branch, just the one underbridge being built east of Cutlers Green Halt to carry the line over Little Horham Lane. The bridge consisted of brick abutments supporting a girder bridge to carry the line across the gap. This was also the site of the line crossing the Stan Brook which ran in a culvert under the line. This culvert appears to still exist as the Brook can be traced running under the site of the line. The bridge has been demolished and the site buried under earth, although there may be buried remains. **It is, therefore, recommended that archaeological investigations be undertaken to assess what if anything of the bridge survives underground.**

**Culverts should be maintained and kept clear of vegetation.**

**Original brick culverts should be retained where possible.**

#### **4.3.1 Little Horham Lane EHER 40877- 40878**

The bridge has been demolished, although the culvert appears to survive, but the whole site is overgrown and covered with earth. **It is recommended that an archaeological investigation be undertaken to assess what survives of these structures.**

### **4.4 Crossing Points and Posts**

All points where the Branch crossed public roads and private lanes were un-protected, apart from the spur which ran from the Elsenham goods yard across Old Mead Road which was protected by a gated level crossing. The sites of all crossings have been identified but nothing remains as evidence of what once existed at each site, apart from at Elsenham where there is a level hump in the road and a surviving concrete gate post.

**The concrete post should be retained.**

#### **4.4.1 Elsenham EHER 40892**

On leaving the Elsenham goods yard the spur of the Thaxted Branch running eastwards crossed the road from Elsenham towards Newport, Old Mead Road, at a gated level crossing. As the goods yard and Branch line no longer exist this level crossing has been removed and the road made good. However, it is possible to identify the site on the

ground by the level hump in the road and the surviving level crossing concrete gate post in the verge on the east side of the road. **The concrete post should be retained.**

#### **4.4.2 Mill Road Halt Crossing EHER 40887**

The Branch crossed Mill Road immediately on leaving and hence to the east of Mill Road Halt. It is possible to identify the site of the crossing although as there was little there originally apart from the single track across the road and the cattle grids either side of the road, no evidence survives.

#### **4.4.3 Pledgdon Hall Crossing EHER 40888**

The Branch next crossed the farm track from Henham to Pledgdon Hall and although it is possible to identify the site, nothing survives.

#### **4.4.4 Henham Halt Crossing EHER 40885**

The Branch crossed the lane from Woodend Green to Greenend immediately on leaving and hence to the northeast of Henham Halt. It is possible to identify the site of the crossing although as there was little there originally apart from the single track across the road and the cattle grids either side of the road, no evidence survives.

#### **4.4.5 Henham Crossing EHER 40886**

Further northeast the line crossed the road from Henham towards Sibleys, Chickney Road. It is possible to identify the site of the crossing although as there was little there originally apart from the single track across the road and the cattle grids either side of the road, no evidence survives.

#### **4.4.6 Sibleys Crossing EHER 40883**

The line crossed the road from Henham to Sibleys once more as the road made a ninety degree right-hand turn passed the crossing point. It is possible to identify the site of the crossing although as there was little there originally apart from the single track across the road and the cattle grids either side of the road, no evidence survives.

#### **4.4.7 Sibleys Station Crossing EHER 40880**

As the line entered Sibleys Station it crossed the road from the station southeast-wards towards Sucksted Green. It is possible to identify the site of the crossing although as there was little there originally apart from the single track across the road and the cattle grids either side of the road, no evidence survives.

### **4.5 Other sites**

As a result of the light engineering of the line, there are no other substantial features apart from one very low embankment east of Sibleys Station and one shallow cutting on the approach to Culters Green Halt. Maybe somewhat

surprisingly neither of these features has been re-integrated into the arable landscape and hence can be identified.

**The embankment and cutting should be retained as part of the historic landscape.**

**4.5.1 Cutting EHER 40879**

As the line approaches Cutlers Green Halt from the west it passed through a shallow cutting descending towards the halt. The cutting is clearly identifiable, although it is over grown with vegetation. This should be retained as part of the historic landscape and evidence of the existence and line of the former branch light railway.

**4.5.2 Embankment EHER 40882**

As the line leaves Sibleys Station and curves round to the east it was on a very low embankment. The embankment is identifiable from the road but not accessible. This should be retained as part of the historic landscape and evidence of the existence and line of the former branch light railway.

## **5.0 Bibliography**

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## 6.0 Gazetteer

The gazetteer details the sites identified during the survey of the former Elsenham to Thaxted Light Railway. The sites are ordered from Elsenham in the west to Thaxted and are located onto a series of maps each with an identifying letter. Each site entry comprises the Essex Historic Environment Record number (EHER), the name/location, National Grid Reference (NGR), a photograph (if available), a short description and any statutory designations. For the general descriptions and recommendations see section 4.0.

### EHER 40873

#### Elsenham to Thaxted Light Railway / The Thaxted Branch

The Thaxted Branch was opened by the Great Eastern Railway (GER) in 1913 to improve communications between a mainly agricultural area with markets in Essex, Hertfordshire and London, as well as providing for passenger journeys to the same destinations. Although initially a success it suffered competition for freight from road transport after WWI, although passenger figures held up longer. The line was very busy during WWII, but both freight and passenger figures declined after the war. It was identified as un-remunerative in 1951 and closed to passengers in 1952 and to freight in the following year.

#### Map A



### EHER 40892 Elsenham Station NGR TL 533 270

Elsenham Station is described in detail in the survey of the London to Cambridge Railway Line in Essex (Crosby, 2010) as it was already in existence on the opening of the Thaxted Branch and remains in use as part of that main line. It was opened in 1845 by the Northern and Eastern Railway and the Eastern Counties Railway. When the

Thaxted Branch was built in 1913 the east side of the up platform was used as the Branch's platform and was shaped to accommodate the curve of the Branch line eastwards away from the station. No new facilities were constructed in association with the Branch. The site of the branch line and the curve of the platform can still be seen today.

**EHER 40889**  
**Former Crossing**

The spur of the Branch line which connected with the main line via the goods yard to the north of Elsenham Station crossed Old Mead Road at the only gated crossing on the line. As the goods yard and Branch line no longer exist this level crossing has been removed and the road made good. However, it is possible to identify the site on the ground by the level hump in the road and the surviving level crossing concrete gate post in the verge on the east side of the road.

**NGR TL 532 273**



**EHER 40890**  
**Course of goods spur**



**NGR TL 532 273**

Having crossed the road at the gated crossing (above) the Branch line ran eastwards and the course of the first part of the line can be identified curving alongside the north boundary of a bungalow.

**Map B**

**EHER 40891**  
**Site of Mill Road Halt**

The first stop on the branch after leaving Elsenham was Mill Road Halt built in 1922 to the south of Henham village, which it was built to serve. This halt was very basic in construction and facilities and although the site can be identified it is

**NGR TL 545 275**



overgrown and all physical evidence of the halt has been lost.

**EHER 40887**

**Site of Mill Road Halt Crossing**

**NGR TL 545 275**

Immediately on leaving the halt eastwards the line crossed Mill Road at an un-gated crossing. Although the site of the crossing can be identified, there is no physical evidence of the crossing surviving.



On an out-building to the house adjacent to the site of the halt and crossing is attached an LNER sign (see photo left).

**EHER 40888**

**Site of Pledgdon Hall track crossing**

**NGR TL 550 276**

As the line continued eastwards from Mill Road towards Woodend Green it crossed the farm track from Pledgdon Hall north towards Henham village. Although the site of the crossing can be identified, there is no physical evidence of the crossing surviving.



## Map C

**EHER 40884**

**Site of Henham Halt**

**NGR TL 553 284**



The line then turned north-eastwards to the second halt on the Branch for Henham built in 1913 for the opening of the line. The halt was, again, very basic in construction and facilities, and although the site can be identified all physical evidence of the halt has been lost.

**EHER 40885**

**Site of Henham Halt crossing**

**NGR TL 553 284**

Immediately on leaving the halt north-eastwards the line crossed the lane from Woodend Green to Greenend at an un-gated crossing. Although the site of the crossing can be identified, there is no physical evidence of the crossing surviving.

## Map D

**EHER 40886**

**Site of Henham crossing**

**NGR TL 556 288**

The line continued northeast passed Woodend Green to cross Chickney Road to the east of the village. Although the site of the crossing can be identified, there is no physical evidence of the crossing surviving.



**Course of line northeast of Woodend Green**

**NGR TL 556288 – 562295**

From Henham crossing to Sibleys crossing the course of the Branch line survives as a farm track and footpath across arable land.



Course of line looking northeast from Henham



Course of line looking southwest from Sibleys

**EHER 40883**

**Site of Sibleys crossing**

**NGR TL 562 295**

After crossing the arable land the Branch crossed the Chickney Road again as it approached Sibleys Station. Although the site of the crossing can be identified, there is no physical evidence of the crossing surviving.

## Map E

### EHER 40880

#### Site of Sibleys Station crossing

NGR TL 564 298

As the line entered Sibleys Station it crossed the road from the station southeastwards towards Sucksted Green. Although the site of the crossing can be identified, there is no physical evidence of the crossing surviving.

### EHER 40881

#### Site of Sibleys Station

NGR TL 564 299



After crossing the road the Branch continued to run parallel to Chickney Road and entered one of the two stations on the Branch, built in 1913. Although having the status of a station rather than a halt due to it having more substantial buildings, a loop line and two small sidings, it was still fairly basic in construction and facilities. Although the site could be identified, inspection from the boundary did not reveal any surviving physical evidence.

### EHER 40882

#### Embankment

NGR TL 567 302

On leaving Sibleys Station the line crosses arable land as it curves to run due east towards Cutlers Green. There is a low tree-lined embankment carrying the line as it curves.



## **Map G**

### **EHER 40879 Cutting**

**NGR TL 587302 – 591301**



The line then runs due east across arable land and as it approached Cutlers Green Halt ran through a shallow cutting. Although still easily identifiable, the cutting is generally overgrown.

### **EHER 40878 Site of Cutlers Green Halt**

**NGR TL 592 301**

The line then entered the third halt on the Branch at Cutlers Green, built in 1913 for the opening of the line. The halt was, again, very basic in construction and facilities, and although the site can be identified, it is heavily overgrown and all physical evidence of the halt has been lost.



## Map H

### **EHER 40877** **Underbridge**

**NGR TL 595 300**



Soon after leaving Cutlers Green Halt the line needed to pass over Little Horham Lane which it did on the only bridge built on the Branch. While it is possible to identify the approximate location of the bridge, precise location and identification of any physical remains was difficult due to what appears to be movements of earth in the area, so the site may be buried under this earth.

### **EHER 40876** **Culvert**

**NGR TL 595 300**

At the same point as the underbridge the line crossed the Stan Brook in a culvert. The Brook is still flowing under a farm track, although it is very over grown even in winter so difficult to inspect in detail.

### **EHER 40873** **Thaxted Station building**

**NGR TL 605 300**

The line finally curved northeast-wards again to enter Thaxted Station, the terminus of the Branch almost a mile from the town itself. The original station building of 1913 is all that remains of the original station buildings and facilities, but externally it appears to be intact and little altered from the original. The rest of the site is used as a builder's yard.



**EHER 40874**  
**Thaxted Station Engine Shed**



**NGR TL 605 301**

Also at Thaxted Station the original engine shed of 1913 survives as the only existing example of an engine shed in Essex. It is brick built under a corrugated iron roof, being one bay wide and four bays long, in each of which is a wide round-arched, small-paned window.

**EHER 40875**  
**Thaxted Station Water Tower**



**NGR TL 695 301**

Finally, completing the group of three original buildings at Thaxted Station is the water tower of 1913. It survives as the only one of three intact, railway associated water towers in Essex. It is brick built and surmounted by a cast-iron water tank.