

# Horton Country Park - Days of Steam

## The line

The story of the railway began in

1889, when the Local Government Act was passed giving Local Government the responsibility for care of the mentally handicapped. In the 1890s London County Council purchased the Horton Estate to the west of Epsom and began to construct a series of large hospitals for the mentally and physically ill. By 1903 the construction of Horton, St Ebbas and the Manor Hospitals was complete. Horton Place, the former manor house for Horton Estate had been converted to become part of the Manor Hospital. The construction of the hospitals caused a great deal of damage to the surrounding roads and disturbance to the local residents.

The next hospital to be built was Long Grove. To avoid further disturbance and possible claims for compensation, the contractors building Long Grove Hospital, Foster and Dicksee, obtained a Light Railway Order for the construction of the Ewell and Long Grove Light Railway. The Order purchased 40 acres for the line and exchange sidings with the London and South West Railway at a cost of £10,000. The line was of standard gauge using light rails and was first used on 20 April 1905. (The original order and accompanying map are kept at the Surrey Records Office).

The exchange sidings were adjacent to Ewell West Station. Today this area is residential housing (Revere Way). The railway ran parallel and south west of Chessington Road (see map) as far as Hook Road. Entering the Country Park, near to the present day junction between Horton Lane and Hook Road, the route went around Great Wood and into sidings in Long Grove Hospital. The hospital was completed in 1907 making the Ewell and Long Grove Light Railway redundant. Soon after the hospital opened the railway was dismantled all the way back to the sidings at West Ewell Station.

In 1909 London County Council decided to construct a new light railway to supply the hospitals cluster, now the largest in Europe, with coal and other supplies. The County Council under the General Powers Act of 16 August 1909 purchased the land used by the old Ewell and Long Grove Light Railway from Foster and Dicksee for £9,300. Work started on the Horton Light Railway in 1911. The new railway followed the route of the Ewell and Long Grove Light Railway along Chessington Road as far as Hook Road.

apparently when they first fired in the Chessington Road area, they shattered windows in many of the nearby houses.

Several times during the history of the line the local youth managed to derail the engines, fortunately without serious consequences. In another incident of vandalism Sherwood ran full team into an ash truck which someone has pushed under Hook Road underpass, again fortunately no harm was done.

Acknowledgements to ALAN A JACKSON for his article in Railway Magazine 1981. For more information on the history of Horton Country Park visit [www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk](http://www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk) tel: 01372 732000



From Hook Road the new line took a different route going through an underpass under Hook Road into the present day Country Park. The new route went through Butcher's Grove Wood, where the line branched with lines to Long Grove Hospital and the new central power and pumping station at Sherwood. (See map).

The Horton Light Railway began its operations in May 1913. The railway was not extended to St Ebbas, Horton and Manor Hospitals due to the cost of constructing another underpass, under Horton Lane. Underpasses were thought necessary following the death of 65 year old Mary Tobin in March 1906, at the Hook Road crossing. This rather dramatic reaction had been put down to the importance that London County Council attached to its public duty to ensure safety.

In 1915 the line was extended, branching by Four Acre Wood, to help construct and later supply West Park Hospital which was not completed until 1924, due to the First World War.

The inter-war years were the railway's heyday, during which the line carried out its daily duty of bringing in coal and other supplies.

By the end of the Second World War the track was worn out and needed replacing. The cost of new track and the rise of road transport made the railway uneconomic and in January 1950 the railway was closed. The track and rolling stock were sold for £8,371. The track is thought to have ended up in Nigeria.

Little remains of the railway furniture. However, the route is clearly visible, with embankments and junctions. Indeed the old route of the railway provides the country park with excellent footpaths. The red brick parapets of Hook Road underpass can still be seen today, several sleepers remain by the side of the track and a pair of old buffer stops have been placed on the path leading out of the car park. There is also a display about the railway in the Country Park Information Centre showing photographs of both the route and the rolling stock in the 1940s.

## The engines

The first engine was a Manning Wardle 0-6-0 saddle tank. Built in 1901 and officially named Hollymoor, unofficially the engine was known as 'Puffing Billy' by the



local residents, a name which stuck with all the following engines. Hollymoor was sold in 1907 following the completion of Long Grove Hospital and the dismantling of the Ewell and Long Grove Light Railway.

Crossness was the name of the second engine a Barclay 0-4-0 saddle tank built in 1904. Crossness remained with Horton Light Railway until 1925 when she was scrapped.

The engine Hendon replaced Crossness in 1926. Hendon was a Manning Wardle 0-6-0 saddle tank built in 1926. In 1946 Hendon needed a new firebox. However, it was decided to order a new engine and dispose of Hendon.

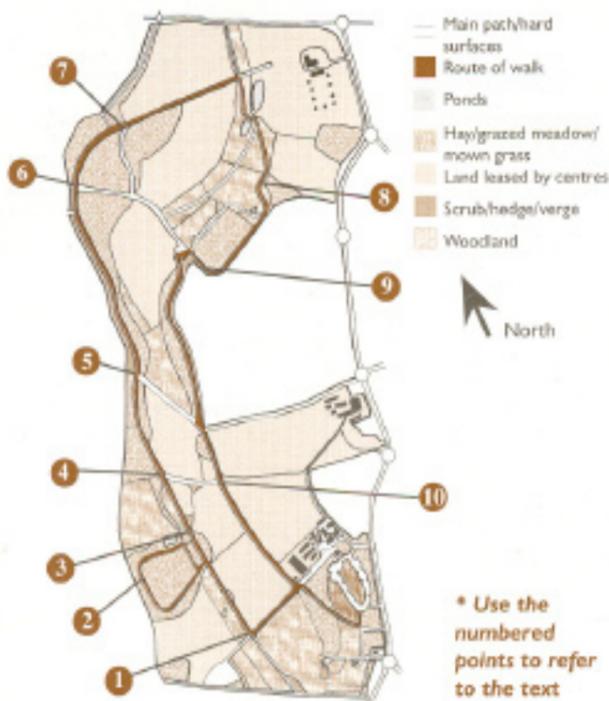
The new and last engine, named Sherwood, arrived in March 1947. Sherwood was a Robert Stephenson & Hawthorns Limited 0-4-0 saddle tank built in 1946/47. She was a poor steamer and after only a few months her slide bars were badly worn. Sherwood remained on the railway until its closure in January 1950 and was then sold for £2,760. The picture on the front cover of this leaflet is of the engine Sherwood around 1947/8.

## Famous Incidents

In March 1906, 65 year old Mary Tobin was run down and killed by the engine Hollymoor.

During the Second World War the enemy tried on more than one occasion to bomb the railway and succeeded in damaging it twice. The engine shed which was at the hospitals boiler house complex and known as Sherwood, was badly damaged and a section of track was destroyed by an unexploded bomb which blew up shortly after Hendon had passed by. On a Monday in June 1941 a stick of bombs fell parallel to the track going through Four Acre Wood, Pond Wood and the field in between. Today a large crater can still be seen beside the path in Pond Wood and it is thought that the clay dam of the pond in Pond Wood was breached allowing it to drain. It is also known that anti-aircraft guns were carried along the track during the blitz and

## A walk along the route

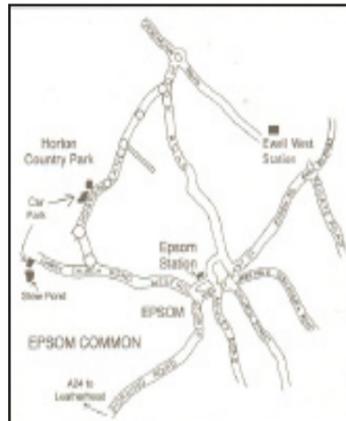


It is still possible to follow and see much of the route taken by the Railway within Horton Country Park. A circular walk is marked on the map along with information on items of interest regarding the Railway. The route makes a pleasant walk of approximately 2.5 hours around Horton Country Park on good quality surfaces, although stout footwear is recommended. There is also a display on the railway in the Country Park Information Centre, showing photographs of both the route and rolling stock in the 1940s.

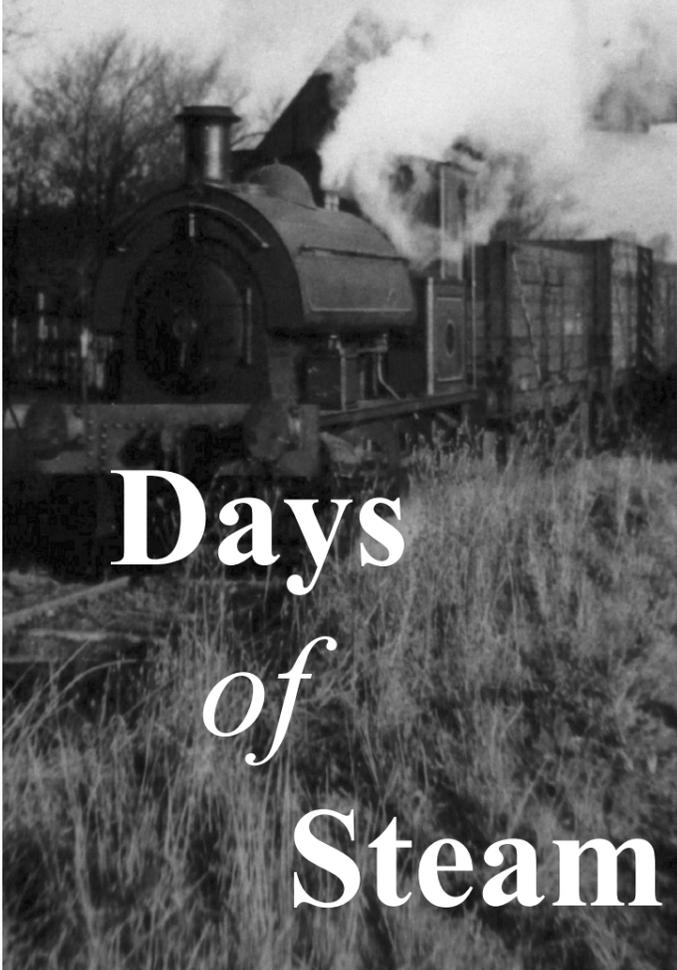
- 1 You are now on the route of the line going to and from West Park Hospital.
- 2 The crater beside the path was caused by a bomb dropped in an air raid on the railway in June 1941.
- 3 Note the steep gradient as you walk past Pond Wood towards the junction at Four Acre Wood.  
The junction here at Four Acre Wood was the only significant stretch of double track on the railway. The track on your right is the route taken by the branchline to the power station and engine shed both known as Sherwood. Today, this is a David Lloyd Leisure Centre.
- 4 The track on your right is a public footpath, leading between Epsom and Chessington. There used to be a footbridge over the railway at this point (see photo overleaf).
- 5 As you enter Butchers Grove it is striking how apart from the lack of track the scene is exactly as it was over sixty years ago.
- 6 As you can see you are standing at another junction. If you turn round and face the other way the track leading off to your left is the line to Long Grove Hospital.
- 7 The only remaining visible evidence of the Ewell and Long Grove Light Railway is the small cutting here beside Great Wood.
- 8 You are now walking on the route of the line going into Long Grove Hospital.
- 9 You are now crossing the route of the branch line to the power station and engine sheds. There used to be a footbridge at this point (see photo overleaf).

## How to get to Horton Country Park

**By car:** Parking is available at Horton Country Park off Horton Lane. **By bike:** Please use the main entrance or the Ruxley Lane entrance. **By train:** From Epsom or Ewell West Stations. **By bus:** There are regular bus services from Epsom to Horton Country Park. **By foot:** Pedestrian entrances are on Chessington Road and Horton Lane.

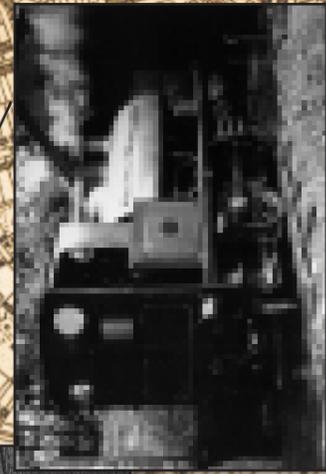
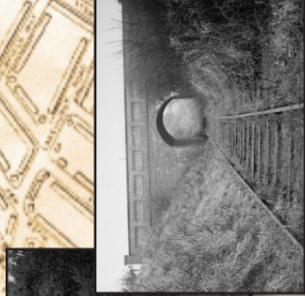


## Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve



# Days of Steam

# The Horton Light Railway



The pictures were all taken during the 1940s and have kindly been provided by Mr R Roberts and Mr N Davenport. With the exception of the engine Hendon passing Four Acre Wood in January 1938 (courtesy of Greater London Records Office). Map taken from 1933 edition Ordnance Survey