Thomas Brassey and his link to Heritage Railways No 3

The Epping Ongar Railway

The Epping Ongar Railway is a preserved line operating between Ongar, North Weald and and Epping Forest, a distance of 6 miles.

The branch line to Ongar was originally built by Thomas Brassey under a contract for the Great Eastern Railway (GER) awarded in August 1862. The line, from Loughton via Epping, a distance of some 11 miles, was built as an extension of the route from London (Stratford) to Loughton previously opened in 1856 by the Eastern Counties Railway. The preserved railway now operates on part of this line. It was built as single-track throughout with intermediate stations at Chigwell Road (now Debden), Theydon Bois, Epping, North Weald and Blake Hall and also included the Cripsey Brook Viaduct near Ongar. The line was opened in April 1865.

A number of improvements were subsequently made. The section between Loughton and Epping was doubled in 1893. Following Nationalisation in 1948 the control of the line passed to the London Transport Executive and electrification through to Epping was completed in 1949 becoming part of the Central Line. The single line section between Epping and Ongar was electrified in 1957 although in practice the low-cost upgrade was never adequate to operate through trains and the branch was kept and operated as an isolated shuttle.

From the late 1960s passenger numbers along the Epping to Ongar section declined and services were progressively reduced leading to closure in 1994. In 1998 the line was purchased by a private company. A period of inactivity followed until in the early 2000s the owners were joined by the Epping Ongar Railway Volunteers Society (EORVS) and in 2004, almost 10 years after closure, the first train left Ongar for North Weald. Under new ownership from 2007 the line has continued to develop into the heritage railway seen today with ambitions in the future to reconnect with Epping. The photograph below from June 2018 shows a busy Summer Saturday scene at North Weald.