



Norfolk's First Railway

By "East Anglian"

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ALTHOUGH our railways are often the butt of comedians with their jokes about gathering flowers and cardboard sandwiches, the present generation would be at a loss without such transport. Few people realise what difficulties have had to be overcome to establish the railways.

The pioneers deserve our praise and thanks for the great tasks completed and for their disregard of difficulties and disappointments. Large sums of money had to be raised, great risks taken and much thought given to the problems that arose before any headway could be made in establishing even a small railway service.

The first railway in Norfolk was

that laid between Yarmouth and Norwich. This was opened to the public on May 1, 1844, having been formally opened the previous day with the usual ceremony and banquet beloved of that period.

The Norwich-Yarmouth railway was the direct outcome of negotiations for a much longer railway and more ambitious scheme. In 1834 a London firm, Messrs. Dimes and Boyman, and a Norwich firm, Sewell, Blake, Keith and Blake, issued a prospectus for a proposed railway, London-Norwich-Yarmouth, to be known as the "Grand Eastern Counties Railway." This prospectus outlined the main benefits of such an undertaking and showed that, wherever a railway had been established

between main centres of population and industry, travel and general intercourse between such places had increased forty-fold. This indicated that the proposed railway would be profitable to the shareholders and helpful to the people in general.

The prospectus also relates that: "The rate of speed on the best horse roads of the kingdom has rarely exceeded ten miles an hour; on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway the ordinary rate is twenty miles an hour."

(This latter speed will make many Norfolk travellers long for the old days as some of the present services are much slower!)

The new railway not only speeded up transport. In the words of the prospectus, the railway "would give a new impulse to every branch of industry and furnish directly or indirectly employment for many thousands of hands — and take a large share of the burden of the poor rates on itself; thus multiplying prodigiously the resources of the district, while at the same time it diminished the demands upon them." Such then were to be the advantages of the Norfolk railway.

Although the prospectus met with a certain amount of trouble from its detractors and from those who objected to their property being bisected by a railway line, the reception accord-

ed it was satisfactory and encouraging.

The map showing the proposed route of the railway was prepared by Mr. John Braithwaite, who subsequently became the company's first engineer. The route was from London to Norwich and Yarmouth, *via* Chelmsford, Colchester and Ipswich, and is roughly the same as the present main line.

In spite of the careful planning of the whole scheme it was later found impossible to complete it owing to lack of finance. Work was started at the London end in March, 1837, and the line was constructed only to Colchester.

MANY Norfolk people were greatly annoyed at the failure of the original scheme, and a meeting was held in Norwich on January 21, 1841, to devise a plan for building a railway from Norwich to London. As a result of this meeting another scheme was outlined for making a railway from Norwich to Yarmouth.

In 1842, a notice was issued of intention to ask Parliament for permission to construct the proposed line. After many difficulties and the weighing of the pros and cons the Yarmouth and Norwich Bill received a favourable report from the Committee of the House of Commons. The favourable decision was the result of the recognition of the poor transport facilities between the two places, and the estimated yearly

income of £40,000 from the traffic carried. The Bill was given Royal Assent in June, 1842, under the title of Yarmouth and Norwich Railway.

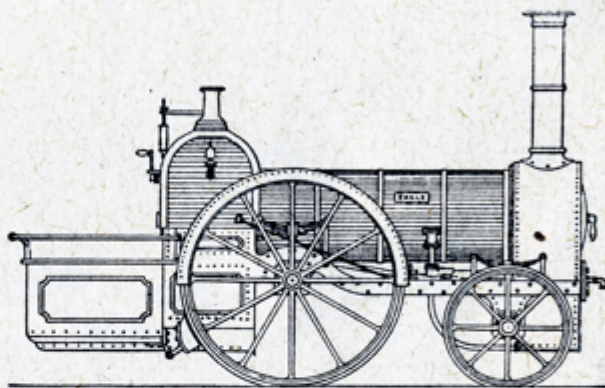
The first railway directors' meeting was held on June 28, and the famous George Stephenson was elected chairman. Fortunately the landlords, through

him and that the twenty miles (approx.) could be completed in about eighteen months. The line was of standard gauge and single track.

The ultimate cost exceeded the estimate by some £3,000 per mile.

Construction contractors were Messrs. Grissell and Peto; Mr. M. Peto being resident engineer. So

The Norfolk
Railway's
locomotive
"Eagle"



whose estates the line was laid, gave full support and most of the shares were taken up by Norfolk residents. Also at the meeting was Mr. Cooke, of Messrs. Cooke and Wheatstone, and who was patentee of that firm's electric telegraph. He explained the working of this invention to those present, and it was decided to provide the railway with this modern aid to communication.

Robert Stephenson, son of the chairman and an engineer, told the directors that his estimate of the cost of constructing the line was about £7,000 per mile maxi-

well did their 1,500 employees work that one year after starting operations the line was opened to the public. Work began at Postwick Hall Farm, near Thorpe Asylum, in April, 1843.

The opening notice read as follows:

YARMOUTH AND NORWICH RAILWAY
The Yarmouth and Norwich Railway will be opened to the public on WEDNESDAY, 1st of MAY next. Trains will leave Norwich at 9 and 11 o'clock in the morning and 4 and 7 o'clock in the afternoon. And from Yarmouth at 8 and 10 o'clock in the morning and at 3 and 8 o'clock in the afternoon.



Interior of an E.C.R. smoking saloon

FARES:— First class, 3s. 6d.; second class, 2s. 6d.; third class, 1s. 3d.

Tickets to and from Norwich and Yarmouth on the same day: First class, 5s.; second class, 4s.; third class, 2s.

(By Order) G. N. Tootal,
Secretary
Norwich, April 18, 1844.

Some 200 people (guests) travelled on the first train. It was made up of fourteen six-wheeled vehicles (ten first and second, and four third class). A brass band rode in the first carriage and, as the train moved off, played "See the Conquering

Hero Comes."

The journey was made in about fifty minutes, and this accomplishment was celebrated in the refreshment rooms with ices, fruit, confectionery, and wine.

The return journey was made in forty-five minutes, and was duly celebrated in the Assembly Rooms. Food included chickens, green geese, pickled salmon, plovers' eggs, tongues, jellies, peaches, ices, strawberries and various other nice things.

The Yarmouth and Norwich Railway was the first to use the electric telegraph. Members of the public were allowed to use the railway telegraph, the charge being 4/6 to begin with, and later 2/6.

WHEN this line was running to their satisfaction the people of Norfolk turned their attention to providing a link between Norwich and London. A scheme to construct a railway from Norwich to Brandon was formulated. Brandon had a link with London, *via* the Eastern Counties' Railway from Newport, which in turn connected with Bishop's Stortford, which had been linked with London since May 16, 1842. When the necessary Bill was ready it received Royal Assent without much difficulty on May 10, 1844. This entitled the Norwich and Brandon Railway to construct the line as planned, *via* Wymondham.

Thetford was originally to

have been linked up by a branch line about five miles in length, but later plans allowed a deviation to place this town on the main line.

The contractors were again Messrs. Grissell and Peto. The greatest difficulty they had to deal with was the construction of a swing bridge across the Wensum at Trowse. The river was used by ships going up to Norwich and these had to be given right of way. The bridge was not completed until the Trowse-Brandon section of the line had been in operation several months. This section was made a double-track railway about 37 miles long, and was opened on July 30, 1845.

Norwich station had to be enlarged to deal with the extra traffic of the new line, and it was soon after this improvement that the station had the addition of "Thorpe" to distinguish it from Victoria Station of the Eastern Union Railway which ran from Norwich to Ipswich and London, *via* Fornsett and Diss.

The two following years saw much fighting for power between the various Railway Companies. The war was carried through Parliament and back to the country. The Norfolk Railway sought powers to safeguard its territory against competing companies, but with only limited success. It wanted to construct lines from Thetford to Reedham, *via* Diss and Bungay; and from

near Wymondham to Stowmarket. It sought to take over by lease two other companies; the Thetford-Bury and Newmarket; and the Ipswich-Norwich and Yarmouth.

However, it was not long before the Norfolk Railway was itself merged into the Eastern Counties Railway. At the time of the merger three extensions of the Railway were in progress. The first was the taking over of the Lowestoft Railway and Harbour Company which, incorporated in 1845, was leased to Norfolk Railway in 1846. The second was the making of a line to connect Yarmouth station (Vauxhall) with the fish market.

The third extension was completing the line from Wymondham to Dereham. This was opened on December 7, 1846, for goods traffic; and on February 15, 1847, for passengers. This line was extended as far as Fakenham and was opened to the public on March 20, 1849.

A company known as the Wells and Fakenham Railway completed the line from Fakenham to Wells about 1857.

THE Norfolk Railway was finally absorbed by, and its identity submerged in, the Eastern Counties Railway on May 2, 1848. Negotiations for the merger were rather stormy and prolonged. The Eastern Union Railway had the Norfolk Railway almost within its grasp in 1846/7,

but the directorates failed to arrive at an agreement. This opened the way for negotiations between the directors of Norfolk and Eastern Railways.

Soon after taking over control the new company dismissed the staff of the Norfolk Railway, replacing it with one of its own choosing. Rates and fares of all sections were brought into line and various new regulations, etc., were enforced.

By July 4, 1850, the purchase of the rolling stock of the Norfolk Railway had been completed. The amalgamation had not been sanctioned by Parliament when the first negotiations were completed, but such sanction was eventually obtained.

On August 7, 1862, the Great Eastern Railway was founded by uniting Eastern Counties, Eastern Union and Norfolk, East Anglian, Newmarket and East Suffolk Railways.

Other major events were the opening of the first part of the Great Yarmouth and Stalham Light Railway on August 7, 1877, and the formation of the Eastern and Midlands Railway on August 18, 1882, which absorbed the Light Railway just referred to. (Eleven years after its formation the E. & M.R. was changed to the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway, which itself was later owned by L.M.S. and L.N.E.R. The latter provided the locomotives and staff.) The

alternative line *via* Acle from Yarmouth to Norwich was completed in 1883, and three years after this the Norwich Thorpe station was opened on its present site.

Owing to the enormous increase of traffic in and out of Norwich Thorpe, the single line swing bridge at Trowse caused difficulty and delay. Well over a 100 trains per day had to be dealt with at this bottleneck.

Between the night of the 12th and the morning of the 14th August, 1905, the old bridge was removed and replaced by a double line, power-operated bridge, a splendid achievement of engineering and hard work.

After a few minor changes and developments in the railway system of Norfolk, the whole organisation was merged in the London and North Eastern Rail-

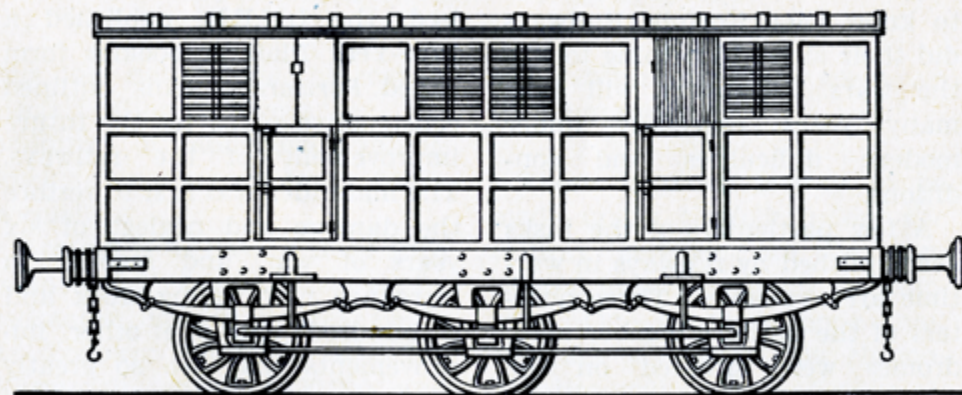
way Company on January 1, 1923. Thus it remained until nationalised this year and absorbed into British Railways.

TRAVELLERS on modern trains are mostly unaware of the early history of the railways they take for granted and about which they grumble so continually.

Railway travel leaves much to be desired, but there is no doubt that our ancestors fared much worse. The first carriages used on the Yarmouth and Norwich Railway were open trucks. Third class had no seats and no roof. The discomforts of such vehicles can well be imagined!

Later on, when roofs were provided, there was no lighting system for night journeys!

Smoking was at first prohibited in all carriages and on the stations.



A Yarmouth and Norwich Railway 3rd class coach

Restrictions were later relaxed and Parliament decreed in 1868 that smoking compartments should be provided on all trains.

The Eastern Counties Railway was probably the first to provide separate carriages or 'saloons' for the use of smokers only. This convenience was provided about 1846, and consisted of a saloon having an open-air balcony at either end. This comfort must have been very acceptable to those who enjoyed smoking, especially when undertaking long journeys.

Two Great Wars have undoubtedly had adverse effects on railway travel and luxury.

Much wealth and labour has had to be expended on war transport and this, coupled with the bomb damage and general impoverishment of the nation, has prevented the Railways from effecting improvements of all kinds.

However, it is some satisfaction to know that Norfolk Railways did their share in helping to win the wars. Recovery will take many years, especially under modern difficulties and conditions.

A few particulars of the tasks accomplished by railways in war-time are available. Three quarters of the nation's bomber aerodromes were situated on the L.N.E.R. system, and the greatest number were in East Anglia. Quiet little stations in Norfolk

suddenly became centres of great activity. Mixed with the normal traffic, mostly of an agricultural nature, were hundreds of trucks containing bombs, petrol, cement, bricks, and stores of all kinds. All the material and equipment for building huge aerodromes, together with the service people, workers, etc., connected therewith, had to be handled through and at small stations and quiet sidings.

Dereham handled 75 waggons of cement a day for several months: in one year 19,143 waggon loads of bombs passed through another station. Extra sidings had to be built at many stations.

A fleet of bombers, 1,000 strong, needed for one journey over enemy territory 28 trains of petrol and 8 trains of bombs! At some periods Norwich had to deal with 40 priority trains every twenty-four hours.

Shortly before being Nationalised, the L.N.E.R. published a Five-Year Plan in booklet form called *Forward*. This outlined constructive plans for the future improvement of the railways. The main idea was first to restore the damage and neglect of six years of war, and second, to introduce new rolling stock and a hundred and one other improvements that are so greatly needed.

Immediate expenditure will account for about £90,000,000 and



A present-day Norwich express at speed

this does not include the cost of electrification schemes, or the building of additional rolling stock, and sundry other necessities.

Norfolk is to have a large slice of the total expense as shown by estimated cost of improvements as follows: Norwich £349,000, Yarmouth about £100,000 and King's Lynn £220,000. Other smaller stations will have varying

but substantial sums spent on their improvement.

There is much leeway to be made up in Norfolk before the railway services can be considered even reasonably satisfactory. One can only hope that, contrary to expectations, Nationalisation will be able to solve all the problems within a fairly short period!