

Giant timeline unveiled to marks 175 years of rail in Lowestoft

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A mural was unveiled at Lowestoft rail station to commemorate 175 years since the arrival of the railway in the town.

To mark the occasion, the mural - which depicts a timeline of events since the Norwich - Lowestoft 'Wherry Lines' railway opened on 3 May 1847 - was unveiled by Waveney MP Peter Aldous.

The mural has been installed by the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership and the Lowestoft Central Project, who in recent years have worked with Greater Anglia to substantially rejuvenate and restore the station, with major initiatives including the creation of an exhibition space inside the former parcels office and the opening of a new Tourist Information Office at Lowestoft station.

The timeline details the many changes the line has seen over the years, culminating in the introduction of brand new trains by Greater Anglia in 2019.

Martin Halliday, Community Rail Development Officer said, "We were pleased to create this special timeline marking 175 years of railway history here in Lowestoft.

"The arrival of the railway brought enormous growth and prosperity to the town with the expansion of the port and creation of a Victorian resort. 175 years on and the railway still plays an integral role in the towns economy, enabling greater connectivity for residents and visitors with the railway station itself being situated at the very heart of the community which it serves."

Greater Anglia's Head of Corporate Affairs, Jonathan Denby, said, "After 175 years the Norwich – Lowestoft line continues to go from strength to strength, benefiting from the introduction of our high quality, brand new trains; regular and frequent services on both the lines to Norwich and Ipswich and first rate performance, with punctuality consistently over 95% all year around. Add in improvements to station facilities and recent re-signalling upgrades and the railway is well placed to continue to serve the community with an excellent service, connecting people to work, social and leisure opportunities.

"We're grateful for the ongoing support of the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership, our amazing team of station adopter volunteers and other local partners in ensuring a bright future for the railways in Lowestoft, providing great connectivity and facilities for the local community."

Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney, said, "It is important to mark the 175th Anniversary of the railway coming to Lowestoft, as it has played such an important role in the town's history.

"Special thanks are due to the Community Rail Partnership and the Lowestoft Central Project for their tireless work in renovating and refurbishing the station, which has such an illustrious past, including the welcoming of 500 Kindertransport refugees in 1938 and saying a temporary farewell to 3,000 school aged evacuees 2 years later.

"It was a privilege to help unveil the timeline recording these and other important milestones over the past 175 years and to look forward to an exciting future."

In 1844, Sir Samuel Morton Peto who resided at nearby Somerleyton Hall purchased Lowestoft Harbour and announced plans to construct a railway from Reedham. Following Parliamentary approval, construction started in 1846 with the line opening to goods traffic on May 3rd 1847 with passenger services commencing a couple of months later on July 1.

After the arrival of the railway the town grew considerably, attracting major industry in addition to trading links via the port to Europe. Morton Peto also created a fashionable resort to the south of the harbour. The initial route to Norwich was followed in 1859 by a line south to Ipswich and in 1903, a direct route to Great Yarmouth.

The railway brought huge prosperity to the town, with a network of goods lines conveying products from major factories including war rations from the Maconochie canning factory and later produce from famous brands such as Morton and the Cooperative Wholesale Society. The railway enabled fish caught in Lowestoft, to be available in Manchester or London within hours.

Lowestoft railway station is a great survivor having escaped serious damage in two World Wars, fire, floods, attempts by the local authority to relocate it away from the town centre and the infamous Beeching Report.

Key historic events around the station include, in 1915 the former Great Eastern Railway stables becoming the first UK railway premises to be bombed in a Zeppelin Air Raid, the 1938 arrival of over 500 Jewish children escaping Nazi oppression in Europe as part of the Kindertransport Initiative and the evacuation of over 3000 children away from the threat of invasion and bombing during World War 2. The station was even used as a filming location for Anglia Television's acclaimed drama series, Tales of The Unexpected.

In recent years, Greater Anglia introduced a brand-new fleet of high quality, comfortable air-conditioned trains, which have operated services from Lowestoft to Ipswich and Norwich, from summer 2019 onwards (including the first service operated by one of the new trains anywhere on the Greater Anglia network in July 2019). Network Rail has also invested over £60m upgrading signalling and level crossings, as well as creating brand new freight sidings which operated for the first time earlier this year.

The special timeline has been installed by the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership and the Lowestoft Central Project, who in recent years have helped to rejuvenate and restore the station, creating an exhibition space inside the former parcels office and most recently, opening the town's Tourist Information office.

Some of the key dates of the era of railways in Lowestoft which appear on the new station mural include :

- 1847 Passenger- services commence on July 1st between Lowestoft and Norwich via Reedham, stations on the route include Haddiscoe, Somerleyton and Mutford (Oulton Broad).
- 1847 Trains can run direct between Lowestoft and Yarmouth (Vauxhall Station) via a curve east of Reedham.
- 1848 Coke ovens are constructed in Lowestoft to process fuel for railway engines, at their- height some 80 ovens were involved in coke production.
- 1855 The current Lowestoft Railway Station is built, shortly after, the original roof is destroyed by fire.
- 1859 The East Suffolk Line is extended to reach Lowestoft via Beccles. Oulton Broad is served by Carlton Colville station.
- 1862 The Great Eastern Railway is formed, taking over all services including the port. 1865 The Great Eastern Railway constructs a new fish market in Lowestoft.
- 1881 Mutford station is renamed Oulton Broad.
- 1890 The ever-enterprising Great Easton Railway transports barrels of sea water from Lowestoft for 'medicinal' purposes.
- 1895 A network of lines in the south of Lowestoft are constructed for the transportation of goods.
- 1903 The line between Lowestoft and Norwich is doubled.
- 1903 A direct line between Lowestoft and Yarmouth Beach station is opened in a joint initiative by the Great Eastern Railway and the Midland and Great Northern Railway. The new route includes stations at Lowestoft North, Corton, Hopton, Gorleston North and Yarmouth South Town.
- 1903 The front entrance of Lowestoft station is extended, with separate ticket offices provided for the GER and Midland Railway and an enlarged parcels office.
- 1903 Lowestoft railway station is renamed Lowestoft Central following the opening of Lowestoft North station.

- 1903 Replacement swing bridge constructed crossing the River Yare at Reedham.
- 1904 The Great Eastern Railway begin operating a bus service between Lowestoft Station, Kessingland and Southwold. A garage for the buses is constructed at the end of Denmark Road.
- 1905 Replacement swing bridge constructed crossing the River Waveney at Somerleyton.
- 1907 Replacement swing bridge constructed across Lake Lothing adjacent to Mutford Lock in Oulton Broad.
- 1913 An extensive new railway sleeper manufacturing facility is constructed next to Lake Lothing.
- 1914 Gorleston Links Halt is added to the Lowestoft to Yarmouth Line to serve the adjacent golf course.
- 1915 Great Eastern Railway stables on Denmark Road become the first railway owned building in the country to be damaged by high explosive bombs during a Zeppelin Air Raid.
- 1923 Following amalgamation of several railway companies including the Great Eastern, the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) is formed. Ownership of Lowestoft Harbour passes to the LNER. 1927 Carlton Colville station is renamed Oulton Broad South.
- 1927 Mutford station is renamed Oulton Broad North. 1929 Gas lighting at Lowestoft Station is replaced by electricity.
- 1933 Horses used for shunting wagons at Lowestoft goods yard are replaced by tractors.
- 1935 HRH Duke and Duchess of York arrive at Lowestoft station on a visit to the town.
- 1938 Over 500 Jewish Children escaping Not oppression in Europe arrive at Lowestoft station as part of the Kindertransport initiative.
- 1939 -1945 Several railway and harbour premises and infrastructure across Lowestoft suffer significant damage and loss of life through enemy bombing during World War Two.
- 1940 In June over 3000 schoolchildren from Lowestoft and surrounding areas are evacuated by train from Lowestoft station to Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.
- 1948 Railways across the country are nationalised forming British Railways, services to Lowestoft become part of the Eastern Region.
- 1953 Services to and from Yarmouth Beach station cease following closure of the Breydon Viaduct after damage caused by the East Coast Floods. Trains to Great Yarmouth terminate at South Town station.
- 1959 Much of the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway network is closed. The direct link between London and Yarmouth South Town via Beccles and Haddiscoe is closed. The line between Lowestoft and Yarmouth South Town is upgraded to take more direct services from London.
- 1961 Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, architectural historian describes Lowestoft station as “Italianate, of Yellow brick asymmetrical and ‘picturesque’.” 1962 Steam services in the area end.
- 1962 A rail connected Grain Silo is constructed on North Quay. 1963 Management of Lowestoft Harbour passes from the railway to the British Transport Docks Board.
- 1963 Beeching Report published, recommending closure of the Lowestoft to Ipswich East Suffolk Line.
- 1966 The East Suffolk Line between Ipswich and Lowestoft is reprieved from closure as recommended in the Beeching Report, following a successful campaign led by the East Suffolk Travel Association.
- 1967 After London services to Yarmouth South Town are re-routed via Norwich and Yarmouth Vauxhall, the Lowestoft Central —Yarmouth South Town route is singled and only diesel sets with conductor guards (Paytrains) operate.

- 1970 Despite local opposition, the direct line between Lowestoft and Yarmouth South Town is closed.
- 1970 Lowestoft Station Buffet closes. 1970 Lowestoft Central station reverts to its original name of Lowestoft following closure of Lowestoft North.
- 1970 Coke Ovens Junction signal box is closed.
- 1972 The final sections of goods lines located in South Lowestoft are closed. During their operation, the routes served numerous factories and shipyards, delivering raw materials and exporting finished products for major brands including Beecham/Morton, CWS, Maconochie Bros, Brooke Marine, Boulton & Paul, Richards, PYE and Jewson.
- 1973 Transportation of fish by rail from Lowestoft ends.
- 1980 Drama The Umbrella Man starring Sir John Mills, part of Anglia Television's internationally acclaimed Tales of the Unexpected series and the first episode to feature scenes filmed at Lowestoft station is broadcast. The company would later film other episodes at the station including Stranger in Town starring Sir Derek Jacobi, (broadcast 1982) and The Memory Man starring Bernard Cribbins (broadcast 1983). 1982 British Transport Docks Board becomes Associated British Ports.
- 1984 Locomotive hauled direct services between Lowestoft and London end.
- 1985 Services to Ipswich via the East Suffolk Line are reduced and parts of the line rationalised with around a third of the line reduced to single track.
- 1992 Despite local opposition, the concourse roof at Lowestoft is removed. Local authority plans to relocate the station further west are believed to be a factor in the roof being removed rather than repaired. 1994 Anglia Railways takes over responsibility for passenger services in the area, as British Rail is reorganised ahead of wider rail industry changes to come.
- 1997 Operation of Anglia Railways switches from British Rail to GB Railways Group plc as the rail privatisation process progresses. Responsibility for the rail infrastructure passes to Railtrack.
- 2000 Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership is formed.
- 2002 Network Rail is formed replacing Railtrack.
- 2004 East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership is formed.
- 2004 A larger franchise for rail services in East Anglia is created, operated by National Express.
- 2012 Greater Anglia takes over passenger services in the region. 2012 A passing loop at Beccles is constructed enabling the re-introduction of hourly passenger services along the route between Lowestoft and Ipswich.
- 2013 A new bus interchange is constructed on part of Lowestoft station's former platform one, together with improved parking and taxi rank.
- 2013 Railway infrastructure at Lowestoft is flooded during a North Sea tidal surge causing extensive damage.
- 2016 Lowestoft Central Project is formed with plans to rejuvenate Lowestoft Station. 2018 Lowestoft Central Project with principal funding support from the Railway Heritage Trust and Community Rail Development Fund begins restoration work to the former station Parcels Office.
- 2018 Heritage colour scheme introduced at Lowestoft Station, new low energy lighting installed on the concourse and entrance featuring casement lamps modelled on Victorian style gas lamps previously used at the station.

- 2019 Hourly Sunday services are introduced on routes from Lowestoft to Ipswich and Norwich 2019 Parcels Office reopens as a Public Exhibition Space, doorways from the concourse closed for some 50 years are restored and reopened, better connecting the station with the town centre.
- 2019 Network Rail replaces former Lowestoft freight and carriage sidings with a new strategic rail freight head, new tamper and stone blower sidings.
- 2019 Greater Anglia introduces brand new fleet of Swiss built bi-mode 755 trains on its regional routes, with the first unit to enter passenger service operating from Lowestoft to Norwich.
- 2020 Network Rail completes major- £60m modernisation of the Wherry Lines signalling system, remodelling of the approach to Lowestoft, replacement of the Victorian semaphore signals and points and the introduction of automatic level crossings along the route.
- 2020 Lowestoft and Oulton Broad North signal boxes are switched out with signalling and points operated electronically from Colchester.
- 2021 The name Coke Ovens Junction returns to the rail network for the first time since 1970 as a new timing point and entrance to the new freight sidings.
- 2021 Lowestoft Central Project and Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership jointly open a new station shop, Tourist Information Office and Community Rail Hub at Lowestoft station.
- 2022 North Sea tidal surge causes extensive damage to railway tracks at Haddiscoe, Network Rail undertakes extensive repairs, and the line reopens within one week.
- 2022 First freight service from the new sidings at Lowestoft commences with aggregates conveyed to Staffordshire.
- 2022 Network Rail announce major investment to upgrade mechanical components in Oulton Broad, Somerleyton and Reedham swing bridges.