

## Rare piece of railway history returns home.

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A giant original piece of railway heritage has returned to Lowestoft station after being discovered recently at auction.

The double-sided enamel British Railways platform sign reading Lowestoft Central and dating from the late 1940s/early 1950s was one of a pair and would have welcomed many thousands of people to the town before it was removed as part of a modernisation scheme in the early 1990s.

Thirty years on, it was discovered as part of a sale at Lowestoft Auction Rooms and purchased by local railway manager and industry sign collector James Steward. James has now loaned the sign to the Lowestoft Central Project and Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership with it being proudly placed on public display in a window of the stations' restored Parcels Office Exhibition Space.

Known in the industry as a 'Running in Board', original blue and white signs are highly sought after and following the public sale held in November, Auctioneer Stephen Ardley asked what would happen to the sign, and the reply that it would "go on display at Lowestoft station" received a huge round of applause.

James said: "I am pleased to have secured this authentic station sign for the town. Often rare signage such as this goes abroad or into private collections therefore through the work of the Lowestoft Central Project

and Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership, I am pleased to enable it to be viewed once again in its original home at Lowestoft station.”

Community Rail Development Officer for the Wherry Lines, Martin Halliday added: “We are delighted to have worked with James to enable this historic item from Lowestoft railway station to return home. The sign is enormous and being double sided, we have installed it in one of the Parcels Office windows enabling the public to see it from both inside and out.

On behalf of the Lowestoft Central Project, director Jacqui Dale added: “Lowestoft station already boasts the largest original enamel sign in the country, still proudly displayed in its original location on the front of the building, whilst we are working to retain this iconic landmark, it is a terrific boost to see another key part of the town’s considerable railway history back where it belongs.”

Lowestoft station is the most easterly in the UK and was built in 1855, seven years after the railway first reached the town from Norwich in 1847. In 1859, a second route opened via Beccles to Ipswich and in 1903 the station name changed from Lowestoft to Lowestoft Central when a direct line to Great Yarmouth opened with a second station built at Lowestoft North.

When the Yarmouth line closed in 1970, the station reverted to its original name of Lowestoft however it still proudly displays its original Lowestoft Central enamel name sign on its eastern elevation, installed at the birth of British Railways, and in place for some 80 years.

Over the past few years, the station has enjoyed a considerable renaissance through the efforts of the Lowestoft Central Project and Community Rail movement in partnership with Network Rail and train operator Greater Anglia, with much of the station restored and repurposed. In 2023 the station was voted the region’s Best Loved and came second in the Small Station category at the National Railway Awards. In December the Wherry Lines Lowestoft Central Project was announced as a finalist in the Platinum category at the National Community Rail Awards to be held in March.

*Photo credit: Community Rail Norfolk*