

HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

President: Bill Poortvliet

Chairman: Pat Cubitt

Vice Chairman: Andrew Ross

www.holtfarmers.club

CLUB MATTERS

All Aboard The Ghost Train - June 2020

A return journey to Bluestone is prompted in part by your anecdotes and interest – thank you. I'm also indebted to Joseph Mason who has an internet blog of his memories of East Anglia which focuses on our railway history as well as many features of Norfolk life. To remind you Bluestone Station is the building that still stands at the southern end of the bomber airfield that dominated Oulton Street south-east of Heydon Park. Only just mind; a USA Liberator bomber once overshot the runway and ended up on the adjacent railtrack. Joe Mason relates how he and his family visited this spot in 1961 on exeat from Gresham's and I wonder if any members can be spotted in his attached school photo. The Second World War airfield started as a grass strip and was nicknamed 'Bluestone 'drome'. Initially the public was able to pass through the site and view the bombers close up. The Yanks were "over here, over...." etc. and acted true to form. The loke next to the cottage in the middle of Corpusty that I told you I manage was apparently known as Paradise Lane because of some 'good time girls' who lived up there. There is much more on Bluestone at Blickling Hall.

Another helpful local source is backwoodsman **Mark Cook** who has been known to haunt and/or hunt these parts. He points out that the Bluestone name derives from some rocks found in the plantation on the west side of the Holt Road which may be distinctively coloured flints or glacial erratics some of which are displayed in Cawston Church. There are lodges and fishing ponds here, even a grandiosely named Bluestone Hall on the roadside. The railway line then swept eastwards as if to avoid the east - west line which is named Marriott's Way after the MGNR's chief engineer. Crossing Abel Heath the line then came into Aylsham Town (or North) Station *en route* for North Walsham, somewhere called Stalham and Great Yarmouth. Alternatively one could switch onto the line that still runs from Norwich up to Cromer. However Cromer High Station has gone; it stood at just over 200 hundred feet above sea level but, critically, it was the best part of a mile from the beach and thus left 'high and dry' one might say. Across High Norfolk to the west a station had been planned for Letheringsett while at Cley-next-the-Sea they got as far as building a station master's house near the current village hall. Helped by the fact that the trains never came this building is probably now worth about £750,000.

While these lines were never very profitable the MGNR could at least claim that no passengers were killed. However in 1879 there was an unfortunate accident on the line between Fakenham and Wells when the train from Fakenham, after passing through Walsingham, had gotten up too much steam by the time it came to the top of the decline into Wells. Unwisely the toilets were located beyond the buffers where a gentleman was 'engaged' when the train arrived and could not stop. What a way to go. The North Norfolk Railway between Holt and Sheringham, the Mid Norfolk Railway between Dereham and Wymondham, the miniature lines through the Bure Valley and the aforementioned one from Walsingham up to Wells have bravely bucked this trend to some extent. It seems a huge, nigh impossible, task though to restore most of the routes that Dr Beeching finally did for. Nevertheless the Norfolk Orbital Railway Group still clings to their dream of re-connecting High Kelling with Fakenham

via Melton Constable having passed through Holt and Pensthorpe. The 'orbit' would be completed by the re-opening of the route between Fakenham and Dereham via County School near North Elmham. Another proposal, this one backed by Duncan Baker MP, is a lightweight railway that would once more connect Peterborough with Great Yarmouth, this time via Holt rather than Bluestone. Maybe such things will be possible under the post pandemic new normal and we might, through the muddle, finally get somewhere.

It is sad to report the death of Mollie **Fowell, our erstwhile Chairman's** mother, after a long illness. She was a stalwart at local functions where she was once elected 'Queen of Cream Teas' and regularly helped at Student Days and the like. She is pictured here with '**James**' and his sister Sarah although there is no sign of two mules. Our commiserations are offered to the family and a memorial service is planned once this is permitted. It is precisely one year since **Jimmy** reached three score years while leading our triumphant tour of Liverpool so he is now into his prime. Happy Birthday to him.

Tim

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