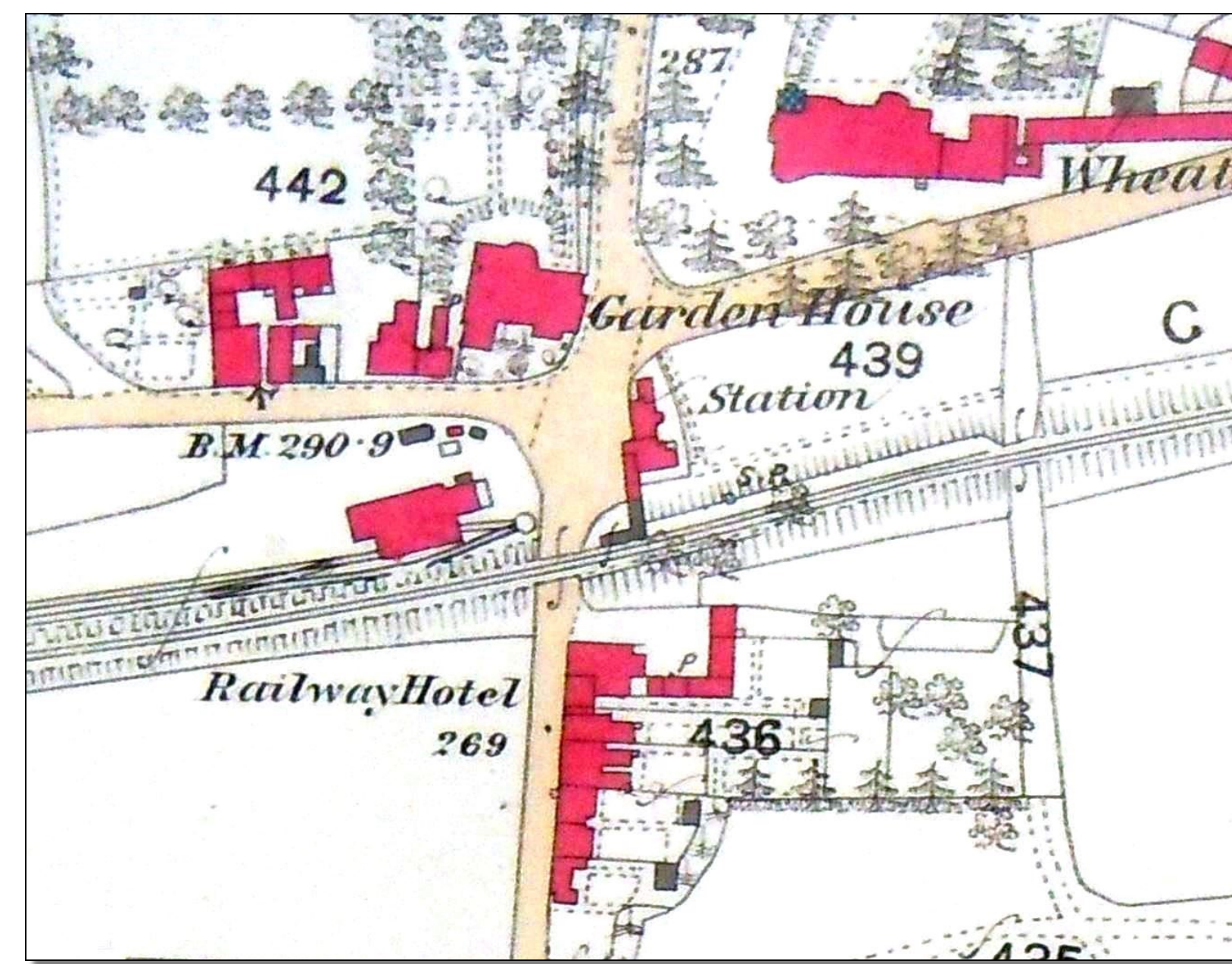


The story of Wheathampstead station

The platform on which you are standing is what is left of a complex of railway buildings that served the village of Wheathampstead for more than a hundred years. The map shows the surrounding area in 1879.



Wheathampstead station was on the line that ran from Welwyn via Luton to Dunstable and on to Leighton Buzzard. At the end of the 1840s, Luton was the largest town in England with no rail connections, being isolated between the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) at Dunstable to the west and the Great Northern Railway (GNR) at Welwyn to the east. An Act of Parliament in 1855 authorised the building of a railway to connect these two.

The section between Luton and Dunstable was opened in 1858 and the section between Luton and Welwyn (which became Welwyn Garden City at the beginning of the 20th century) was opened on 1st September 1860 by the Hertford Luton and Dunstable Railway Company. The company was taken over by the Great Northern Railway Company (GNR) from 1861. The line lost some of its significance in serving Luton when the Midland Railway opened in 1868.



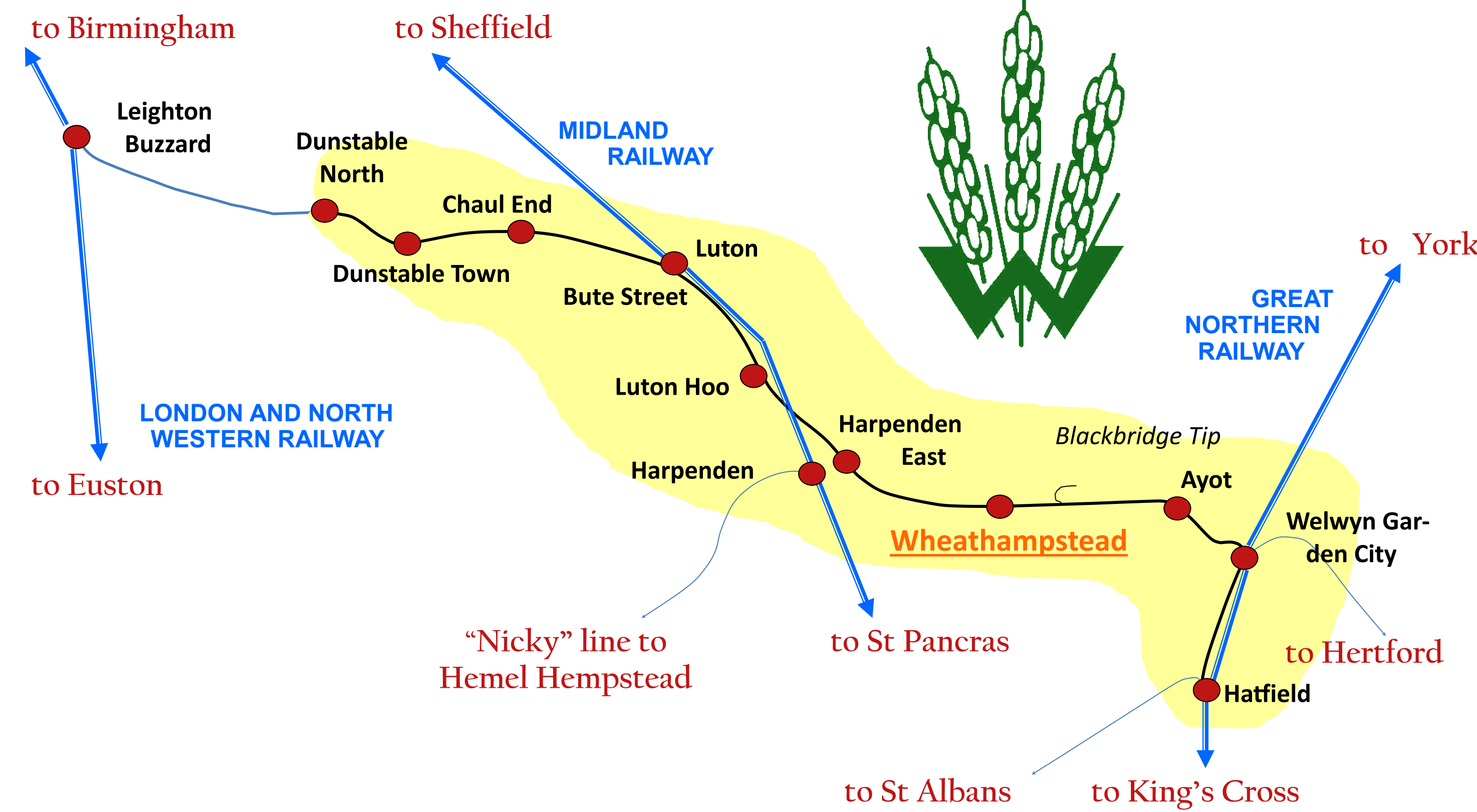
Station Road (left) is shown during the celebrations for the end of the Boer War in 1902.

The GNR merged with the LNER in 1923 and was nationalised as British Railways Eastern Region in 1948. The line continued to form an important link between the three main lines in and out of London, as shown on the map.



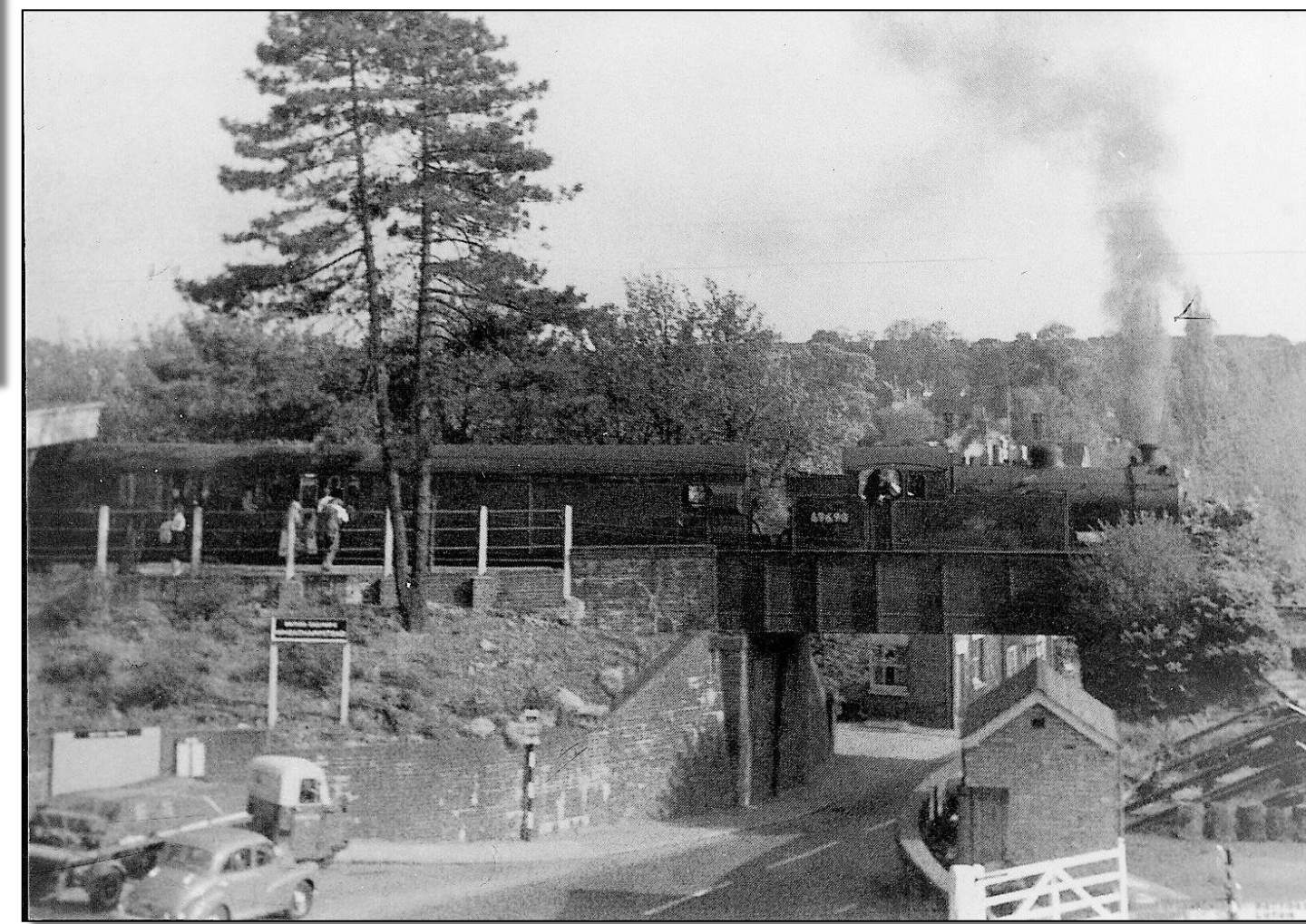
c1911

WHEATHAMPSTEAD



There was a large station house at the junction of Station Road and Codicote Road with a single-storey booking office alongside. From the booking office a covered stairway led up to the platform. A wooden building with waiting rooms and a canopy overhung the back of the platform. The ticket office was moved up to this building in 1881 and the old ticket office was taken over by a coal merchant.

Wheathampstead station was opened at the same time as the line. The platform was originally much longer than it is now, extending as far as the bridges over Station Road (to your left) and Waddling Lane, now Abbot John Mews (to your right). The permanent station buildings were erected a few years later.



The Railway Hotel (left), later the Abbot John public house, was situated in Station Road, next to the bridge.



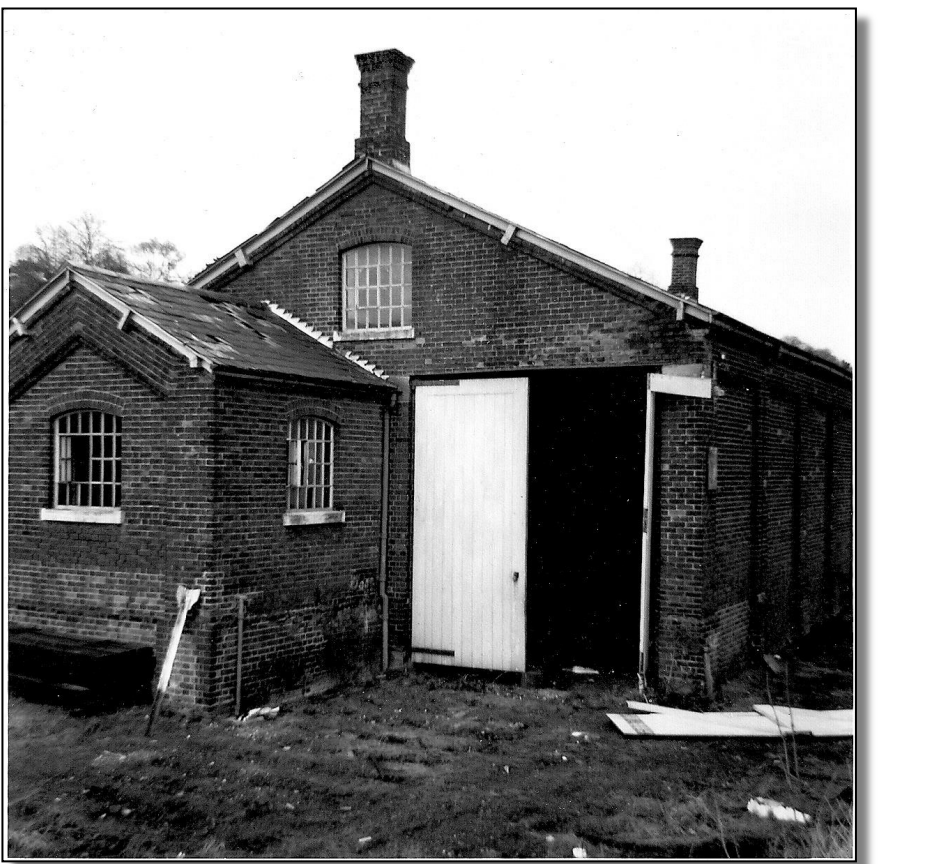
1965

A working station

The station was busy with both passenger and goods traffic. The 1864 timetable shows that there were seven passenger down trains (towards Dunstable) and six up trains on weekdays, with two trains each way on Sundays. By 1913, there were ten trains each way each weekday. The fastest through train took 53 minutes from Wheathampstead to London King's Cross.



On the far side of Station Road, where there is now an open grass area, was the busy goods yard (left), complete with weighbridge, signal box (closed in 1921) a loop and four sidings, and an office and goods shed (right). One of the sidings served the coal yard while another was for loading and unloading cattle from the neighbouring pens. There were also stables for



horses that were used for shunting. Here too was the unloading point for wagons of dung from London Zoo that were used to fertilise the nursery gardens at the Dyke and at Gustard Wood, which sent lettuce and tomatoes back to London. Watercress from Castle (then Cresswell) Farm went to London and straw plait was sent to Luton for the hatters.

In 1916, the bridge over Station Road had to be raised to allow large anti-aircraft guns to pass underneath on their way to a site near Gustard Wood. Raising the bridge meant raising the track, which in turn meant raising the platform. You can still see the original height at the eastern end of the platform, where there is also part of an original platform edging slab. The date it was cast, 14 February 1916, is clearly visible.

The end of the line

The Beeching Report (1963) recommended that the line be closed. Wheathampstead station closed to passengers on 24th April 1965 and to goods traffic on 26th July in the same year. The sidings were dismantled in 1966. The whole line was closed to all traffic in 1967, except for trains taking rubbish to Blackbridge tip (right), a mile east of the village, which closed in May 1971.



The track was removed in March 1967 and the bridges over Station Road and Waddling Lane were demolished in August of the same year (left), together with a length of platform at each end, leaving the island site that you see now. The stationmaster's house, the booking office and the platform buildings were demolished in the 1970s during the construction of the village bypass, which was opened in 1978.

The platform lay neglected and increasingly overgrown for 40 years until, in 2009, a group of local people rediscovered it and decided that it should be restored. You can read about the restoration on the next panel.



2009



1855 Work starts on line



1910 Ivatt N1 0-6-2T (left) in use till 1951. Line remains in steam till 1960

1965 Station closed to passengers

1934 Gerald Lee is station master (until 1956)

1967 Closed to freight

2010 Partially restored platform re-opened

1860 Station opens

1875 Two trains collide between Wheathampstead and Ayot

1914 World War 1 begins. Platform raised to allow field guns to pass under the bridge

1939 World War 2 begins

1963 A derailment Beeching Report proposes line closures

2013-4 Wagon installed and restored