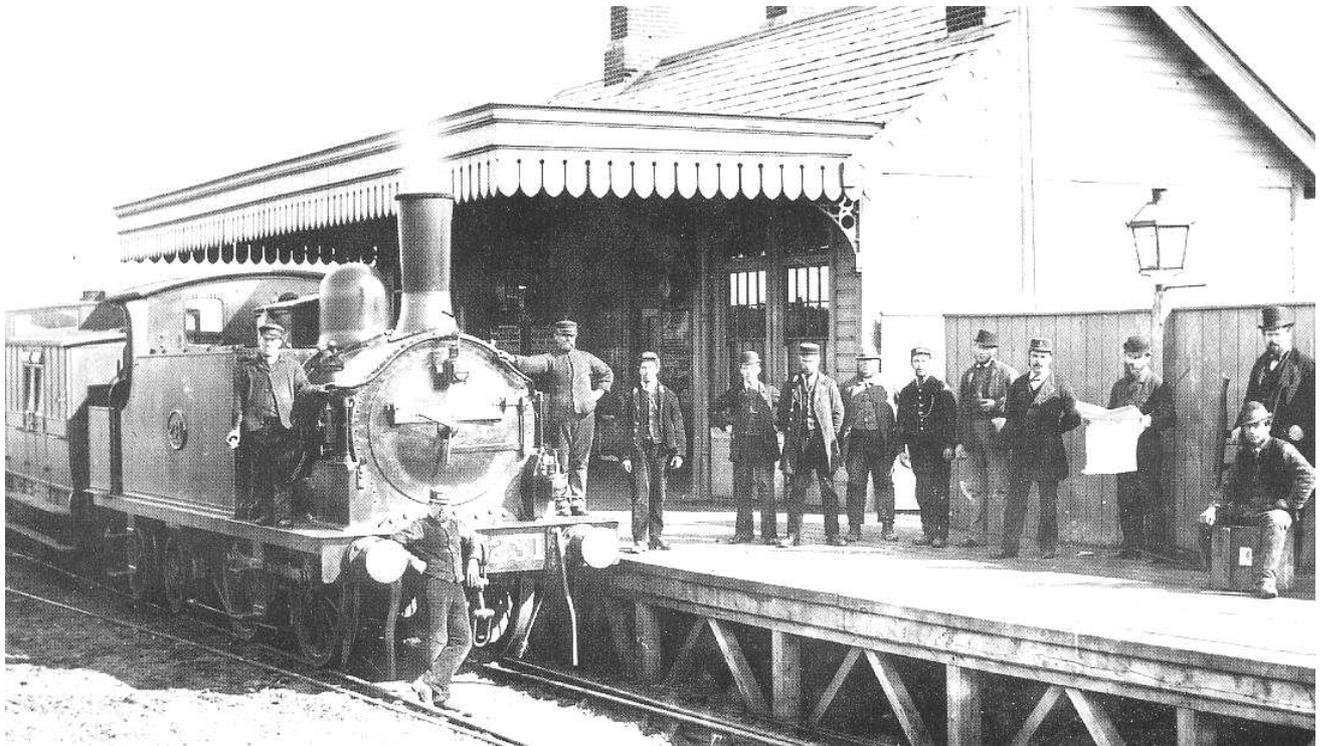


Great Eastern Railway Society

# THE VICTORIANS



*[Felixstowe Beach Station in 1883. Photograph reproduced by courtesy of Bob Clow and the GERS Journal]*

## **Some Revealing Glimpses Taken from the Minute Books of the Eastern Counties Railway and the Great Eastern Railway**

*PRESERVED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES (FORMERLY THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE) AT KEW*

## START HERE, PLEASE!

Our topic is the people who lived in England during the reign of Queen Victoria (from 1837 to 1901).

The past is like a foreign country. It was inhabited by people like us, just as clever and as friendly as we are. Their way of life was totally different to ours, however, and this made them look at things very differently.

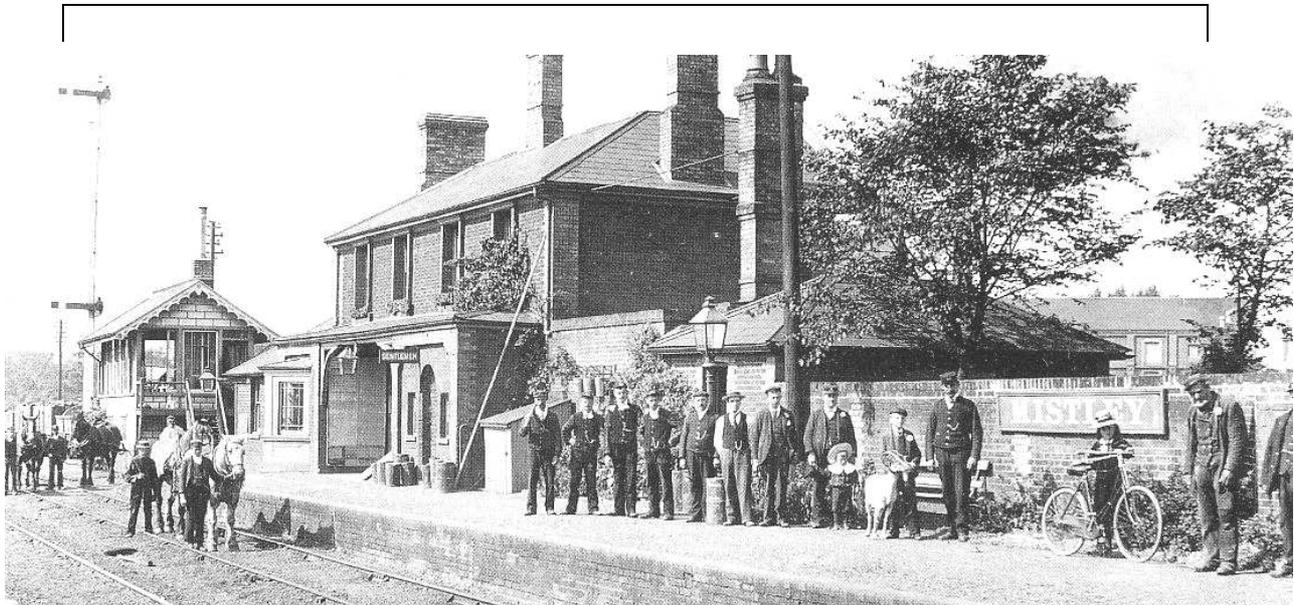


For this boy and his sister, the Victorian period was their 'here and now'. For them it was the modern age.

In each case take a careful look beyond the strange clothes to the *person* - they could have been someone in your class or even you, if you had found yourself born 150 years sooner.



There were no aeroplanes, cars, lorries or motor buses. Mains electricity was a thing of the future. They had no television, radio, telephone, computers or cinema. There *were* newspapers, but they were much too expensive for ordinary people who probably couldn't read anyway. Photography started during this period, and in the unlikely event that a man came along with his big heavy camera there would be great excitement and everyone would want to pose on the picture (... just like some of us nowadays in the presence of a TV camera?).



One day in about 1890 a photographer came to Mistley station in Essex. All the station staff have lined up for the occasion and the railway horses have got into the picture as well – standing on the main running line! The old man on the right could well be a postman waiting for the mail to arrive. The inevitable children are in on the scene: spot the girl with an oversize bike and the boy with a white goat.

Today Mistley station remains as an unstaffed halt on the line to Harwich. Even many of the large stations which are still staffed would be unable to produce as great a number of workers as Mistley did then. What do you reckon would be the response nowadays if you asked them all to line up so you could take their picture?

*[Photo reproduced by courtesy of Bob Clow and the GERS Journal]*

They did speak English of course, but despite that they would find it impossible to understand much of what we say.

**Q.** Give an example of something we might say which would baffle a Victorian. Here are a couple of examples where they would know all the words but the meaning would be beyond them: “Was there anything good to watch on the box last night?” “I’ll ring you up tonight.”

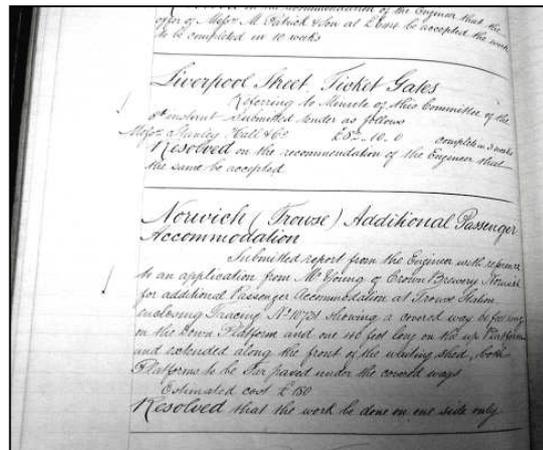
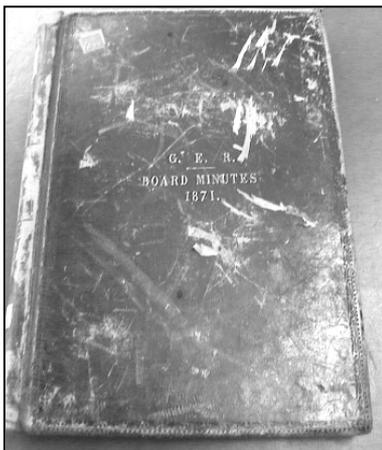
*[You’ll find that most of the questions coming your way don’t have one right answer. Instead, you will be expected to try to offer suggestions. Not all will be easy, but do your best ... and THINK. No one can ask more of you than that.]*

The past is like a foreign country, but it is one you can’t get to know simply by paying it a visit. Suppose you had chanced to be born then instead of now – it could so easily have happened, you know. If you take the trouble to think through some of the exercises which follow, you will get glimpses of the place you would inhabit and the person you would be.

Those glimpses come from the everyday records of one of our early railways. The first railways were being built at the start of Queen Victoria’s reign, using tiny steam locomotives with long chimneys to pull lines of four-wheeled carriages or goods wagons that rattled along at a gentle pace.

In 1862 some small lines (such as the Eastern Counties Railway) which served places in East Anglia and connected them with London all merged to form the Great Eastern Railway. The affairs of this railway were controlled by a Board of Directors who met regularly to discuss matters and take decisions. Many aspects of day-to-day running were entrusted to committees, who also met regularly. What went on in these meetings was recorded by hand with pen and ink in big bound books. They called them the *Minutes* of the meetings.

These Minute books still survive. In the recent past researchers have spent many hours, weeks and years studying these first-hand documents, struggling to make head or tail of the writing, and have compiled summaries of their contents for us to use today.



On the left is the book which contains the records of the meetings of the Great Eastern Railway Board of Directors during the year 1871, photographed at the National Archives at Kew in Surrey. The book is a bit larger than this sheet of paper; it is covered in red leather, now scuffed, with the title in gold.

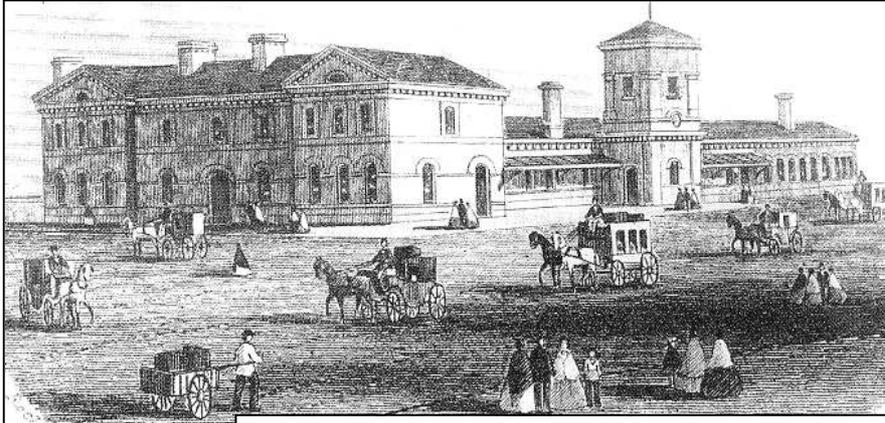
On the right is part of one of its pages, made from quality paper. It has been written by hand, using a pen which had to be dipped repeatedly into a pot of black ink. Notice the superbly neat writing, but despite that it is still far from easy to read.

*[Photographs reproduced by courtesy of Barry Jackson]*

## GLIMPSE 1 – HORSES.

In 1890 the number of horses in London was reckoned to be about 300,000. The bus company (London General Omnibus Co.) owned 22,000 of them and the Great Eastern Railway possessed nearly 6,000.

**Q.** Why were so many horses being kept in a built-up area like London? Why might the bus company and the railway need them? What sorts of things might all the others be used for? *[Hint: Think of all the things motor vehicles are needed for today.]*



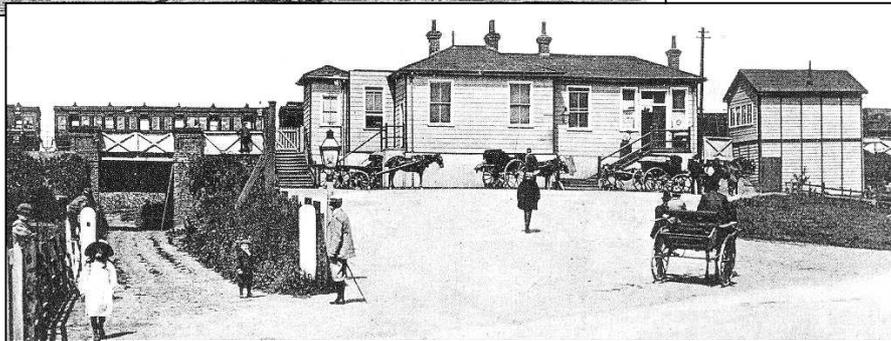
*[Left]* A drawing made in 1868 showing the scene outside the brand new station at Walton-on-the-Naze in Essex.

*[Drawing reproduced by courtesy of Peter Boyden and the GERS Journal]*

*[Below]* Outside the station at Wroxham in Norfolk in the late Victorian period.

*[Photo reproduced by courtesy of Dave Taylor and the GERS Journal]*

Look at the horse-drawn vehicles in each picture, and ask yourself what the motorised equivalent would be today.



The presence of so many horses in big cities led to quite a big traffic for the railways, carrying food for them from the country districts.

*“Feed for horses purchased: 200qtr. beans at £2 a qtr., 200 loads of hay at £6 a load.” (‘qtr’ means a quarter; we are not sure what a quarter of beans was, but 200 qtr was probably at least 20 tons. A single load of hay was just under a ton.)*

*Great Eastern Railway Locomotive, Way and Works Committee 27 October 1864*

*“Street sweepings - horse manure. Mr. Betts of Beccles complaining that charge for the rail journey from London to Beccles (over 100 miles) of 5/- (25p) a ton was too high.”*

*Great Eastern Railway Locomotive, Way and Works Committee 1 September 1869*

**Q.** What clue does the above extract give us as to what the streets of London must have been like then?

**Q.** Mr. Betts lived in Beccles, which was a small country town. Why on earth do you think he might be interested in buying London’s street sweepings by the ton?

“Life of a horse, two years average. £25 cost purchase.” (*‘Life’ meant useful working life*).  
*Eastern Counties Railway Board of Directors 19 October 1855*

“Woodbridge horses in a poor state due to overworking. Men to receive 17/- (85p) per week, three horses to be withdrawn and four new horses to be placed as work is very heavy.”  
*Eastern Counties Railway Engineering & Traffic Committee 30 September 1857*

“Purchase of 8 horses at £38.10.0 (£38.50) each; 6 horses worn out and sold at £4.15.4 (£4.77) each.”  
*Great Eastern Railway Locomotive, Way and Works Committee 16 February 1865*

**Q.** In Victorian times individuals as well as companies sometimes had to buy a horse. Why was such a purchase a bit like us today buying a second hand car?

**Q.** What do you think happened to all the worn-out horses after they had been sold for whatever price could be got for them?



Shunting was an activity which was carried out a lot in railway goods yards. It involved moving wagons around, the purpose being to get them into the right position for loading or unloading, or to assemble a group of wagons ready for picking up by a passing freight train.

In busy yards shunting was done by small locomotives, but at quiet country stations (as at this unknown Great Eastern Railway location) horses did the job.

Horse shunting continued until as late as 1967 when Charlie, the last railway horse, was retired from Newmarket station.

*[Photo reproduced by courtesy of Chris Moss and the GERS Journal]*

“Porter Corley kicked by shunting horse fracturing his jaw.”  
*Eastern Counties Railway Engineering & Traffic Committee 29 January 1862*

**(The full Pupils' Book continues to page 22)**