

Restoring the station platform



The platform in the early 1960s

Following the Beeching Report, which found many thousands of railway lines in Great Britain to be uneconomic, Wheathampstead Railway Station was closed to passenger traffic on 26th April 1965¹. It remained open for freight until 26th July 1967. The tracks, surrounding embankments and station buildings were all removed to make way for new developments and road improvements. As with many rural villages, the station had transformed the lives of local residents since it opened in 1860 but within a few years of closure the station was all but forgotten.

All that was left was most of the platform, high and dry on an isolated embankment raised four metres above the surrounding roads and buildings. Despite being within a stone's throw of the village centre, there it lay for over 40 years forgotten and completely hidden by ivy and saplings. In 2009 a group studying the heritage of the village rediscovered the platform remains and decided to restore it in time for the 150th anniversary of its opening.

This was an ambitious project. The only access was by scrambling up the steep embankment. The tracks, platform slabs, ballast and all other signs of the railway had been salvaged or scavenged at the time of closure. All that remained were the railings, basic platform structure and some of the large edging slabs. Without access for heavy machinery or even water and power, the task seemed hopeless.

Undaunted, the team raised financial support from businesses, the Parish Council (who own the land) and other groups. Most importantly, all the work had to be done by hand (just as it was when the platform was built) so they had to rely on many villagers giving up their free time to clear the site.

¹ For information about the history of the station, see '1860' on the Timeline.



Wheathampstead is part of St Albans District and a group of sailors from HMS St Albans were dispatched to help with the initial clearance.

Once the site was clear, the first step was to restore the actual platform where all the surface slabs had gone and the edging slabs had been thrown down onto the track bed.



Where possible, original materials have been reused in the restoration but 14 new concrete edging slabs, each weighing a quarter of a ton, had to be made by hand. A member of the volunteer group made a mould and the slabs, each 42 inches by 36 inches by 4 inches, were cast in situ. All the materials (weighing several tons) had to be carried up to the site and the concrete was mixed by hand. One slab was cast each week for 14 weeks.

Casting an edging slab

A village resident donated flagstones for the surface of the platform.



The next thing needed was some track. The contractor Bam Nuttall was converting a derelict length of the original line near Dunstable to make a busway. They donated and delivered a 40 foot section of track complete with sleepers, rail chairs and ballast, all of which was put in place.

With a section of track in place the next obvious move was to acquire some railway rolling stock. The team decided to install an open goods wagon, the track being long enough to take one.

Over the winter of 2012/13 the team identified a suitable Great Western Railways wagon located at Cheltenham Racecourse Station on the restored Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway. The wagon was in a dilapidated state but was transported to the site on 13 March 2013 and has been carefully restored.



Delivering the wagon



Each plank was sponsored by a local resident.

Restoring the wagon



Local businessman John Titmuss paid for the wagon.



A small Heritage Lottery Fund grant was secured to build a shelter on the platform in the style of the original waiting room and a picnic table was salvaged from a nearby closed cafe and restored.



The addition of some period luggage and two model trains has increased the appeal of the restored platform to the many visitors who we welcome to the site which is open 24/7 all year round.





The platform in May 2023