

The old railway through Dunmow

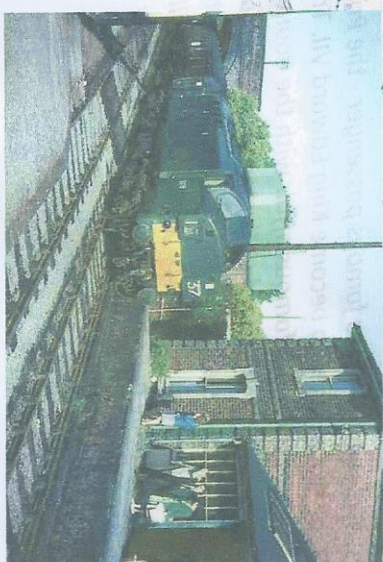
Once you've finished the walk, why not treat yourself to lunch or a snack in the Green Café!



Takeley Station as it is today as a café and village meeting room



Please follow the Countryside Code - especially closing farm gates behind you and keeping dogs on leads and under control if close to farm animals

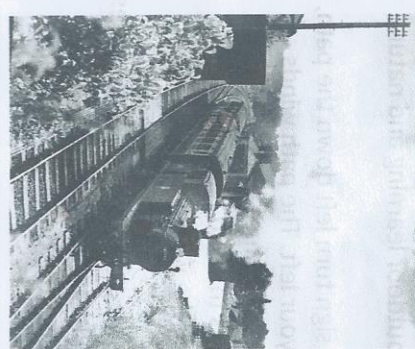


HERITAGE WALK GUIDE

The Bishop's Stortford to Braintree Railway & The Fitch Way

Distance: Approx 3 miles (5 km)
Conditions: Muddy in places after rain

2



A steam engine on the branch line which is now the Fitch Way

The Walk: Start at the Green Café car park. **1** Walk towards the containers and up the slope onto the Fitch Way. This country park and path was once the track of the Bishop's Stortford, Dunmow and Braintree Branch Line that opened in 1869. The line was built during the competitive era when rail companies tried to offer services to farmers and industry. Following a plan by the Midland Railway to link Dunmow to Chipping Ongar the Eastern Counties Railway joined forces with a group of Hertfordshire matsters, millers and coal merchants to build their own branch line. After much political deliberation the line was eventually built by the then merged Great Eastern Railway, who put up all their own money. There were further complications in buying land and their original cost estimate was soon exceeded but eventually the line was opened.

With thanks to Bishop's Stortford Tourist Centre for historical details. See www.stortfordhistory.co.uk
Map courtesy of Lt. Canfield Parish Council



More about the railway when we rejoin it later on this circular walk. Take the small path down to Church Lane. Carrying on walking with the church in front of you. Just after the row of bungalows **2** turn 90 degrees right and head down the path with the old gravel-pit in the distance. You will go between two groups of trees. On the left is a sign, *Forest School*. **3** Pupils from Takeley school visit these woods to experience outdoor learning and nature.

Immediately after the sign turn left down the path, keeping the wood on your left. The path winds southwards and eventually comes out in an open grassy meadow. **4** Cross this and take up the path again, this time keeping the woods on your right.

Eventually you will reach another path that crosses at right angles. Turn right and follow path over a small footbridge, crossing the tiny Roding River. **5**

The River Roding starts close to Stansted Airport and flows down to the Thames where it becomes the Barking Creek - once home to the largest fishing fleet in England. Redbridge is named after a bridge that spanned the river.

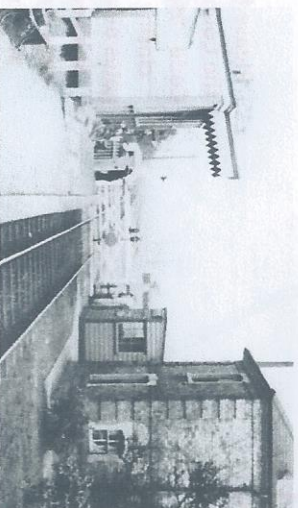
Walk through to the edge of the trees and turn left, following the path around the edge of the wood as it curves to the right. You will eventually come to a small gap **6** in the hedge, go through this and turn right following the next field edge until you see a house on your right. Go through the gap in



Takeley Station

the hedge and turn right **7** to pick up the small farm track. Follow this for about a mile as it winds northwards.

Eventually you will come to a group of farm buildings. **8** Turn right through a metal fence and take up the path that heads towards the woods in the distance - with a barn on your left. Walk down towards a fence and cross the stile. Carry on across the next field towards the corner of the wood **9** and bear left, keeping the wood on your left. This wood is full of bluebells in May. **10** Take a short right turn back to the Fitch Way. **11**



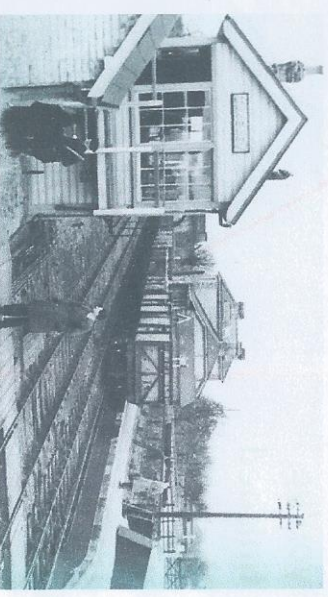
Easton Lodge Halt

Most of the traffic on the railway line was freight from industry and farmers, taking goods and produce to London and the market. There was a passenger service but this was not used as much as had been hoped due to the dwindling rural

The railway had a famous passenger - the Prince of Wales, later to become King Edward VII. The Prince had an infamous affair with the Countess of Warwick who lived at Easton Lodge. To make his visits easier she paid for an extra station to be built - called Easton Lodge Halt, that can still be seen today near the banana ripening factory on Highfield Lane.

Over the years various efforts were made to increase passenger traffic including the building of Hockerill Halt station. The line was also used to transport building materials and munitions to RAF Gt. Dummow during WWII. This was known to the Germans and they bombed the line during the war killing three students from Hockerill Training College.

By the end of the war transport was changing and more people owned cars or used the buses so the passenger service continued to struggle. It closed in 1952. Nevertheless the freight service was still profitable and in 1962 300 tons of bananas a year were transported using the line. The railway survived the Beeching Cuts in 1963 but the increase in road freight meant that the railway was no longer viable and it was forced to close in 1972.



Takeley Signal Box

By 1974 the track was taken away and eventually the Fitch Way country park was constructed.

You can now walk along the Fitch Way **12** back to the café imagining the sound of steam engines as they moved through the lovely open countryside of North Essex. It must have been a very nice way to commute to work.