

A short history of Strawberry Hill Railway Station

In 1873 the railway came to Strawberry Hill. Our archivist unearths the story

The most important item of news in the issue of the Richmond and Twickenham Times on the 6th of December 1873 was that reporting on the opening of a new station at Strawberry Hill. The writer added that 'it promises to be as attractive a little railway station as we could well wish to see'.

The nearest main line was that from London to Windsor via Richmond and Twickenham and this was owned by the London and South Western Railway Company. In 1859, the Company sought powers to build an extension or loop from the main line at Twickenham into Kingston and the necessary private Act of Parliament was passed on 1st of August 1859. This loop was to be known as the Kingston Bridge Line. However, there was enormous opposition by the burghers of Kingston to the building of a railway into the town and so, at first, permission was only given for a line from Twickenham terminating at Hampton Wick. The financial interests of the small clique of opponents were soon overcome and a further act in 1860 allowed the railway over the river and into Kingston.

At about the same time, another company was formed and took the name of the Thames Valley Railway Company, its object being to link Shepperton with Twickenham. With major works already in hand between Twickenham and Hampton, it seemed only logical for the London and South Western Railway to take an interest in the Thames Valley Railway and, in 1862, an amalgamation was agreed whereby the shareholders of the smaller company were suitably compensated. The London and South Western Railway constructed and operated the Thames Valley Railway.

The Thames Valley Line was opened to traffic on the 1st of November 1864 when the first trains travelled the nine and a half miles from Shepperton to Twickenham Station. Ordnance Survey maps at this time shows the absence of any station at Strawberry Hill and, of course, passengers from Shepperton journeyed through the junction with the Kingston Bridge Line and alighted at Twickenham Station.

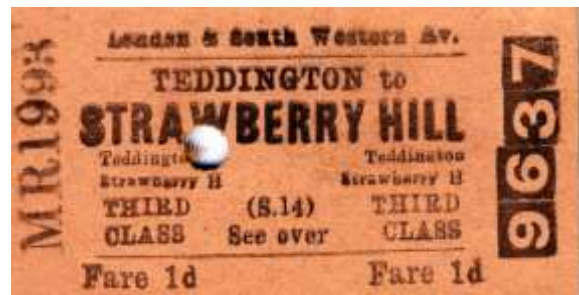


The level crossing in the early 20th century. The structure of the footbridge can be seen.

Why was the station built?

Strawberry Hill Station was opened on the 1st of December 1873. Why wasn't it thought necessary to build a station at first? Unfortunately, it will probably never be possible for an authoritative answer to be given, for the one certain source of information - the directors' minutes of the London and South Western Railway for the relevant decade - was destroyed during the Blitz on London by a fire at Waterloo Station.

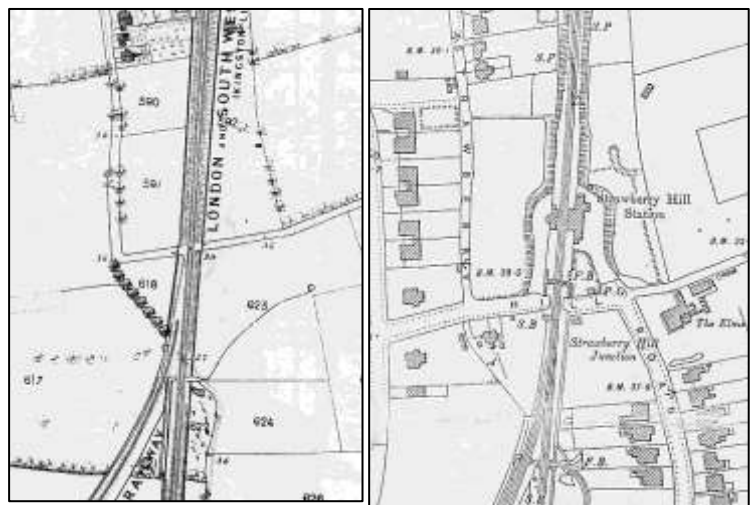
An entry in the Richmond and Twickenham Times for Saturday, 4th of October 1873, stated rather baldly: “The Waldegrave Station on the Kingston Extension Line is to be opened on November 1st. It will be under the management of Mr. George Topley Court, the station master at Twickenham.” Perhaps as a result of this report, it has been suggested that the station was built at the behest of Lady Waldegrave to ease the travelling for the many house guests she entertained at Strawberry Hill. Without the station, her many eminent guests would either have travelled from London by road or they would have left the train at Twickenham Station, quite a long and awkward distance from Strawberry Hill.



A ticket from Teddington to Strawberry Hill dated the 19th of March, 1893

A more likely explanation of the chief reason for the opening of the station is that pressure was exerted on the railway directors by property speculators, amongst whom was Chichester Fortescue, fourth husband of Frances Waldegrave. There is no direct evidence, but in the absence of the railway records, an intelligent guess can be made from other sources. Any walk around Strawberry Hill and the station will be along roads in which there are still many houses built in the last quarter of the 19th century. A W.J. Scott, writing about the Thames Valley Railway in the Railway Magazine for June 1919, referred to a “local baronet who wished to develop his building estate” and the solid, Victorian villas shown on the second map would suggest that the baronet - Chichester Fortescue - fulfilled his wishes.

The new station was officially opened on Monday, the 1st of December 1873. The Richmond and Twickenham Times had, in October, announced the opening for the 1st of November. They were a month early in their timing and on the 29th of November 1873 made a graceful apology for their “somewhat premature announcement of the opening of the station”. However, the paper added “it will be used for the first time on Monday next and will prove a great boon to the inhabitants of the district around ... ” A week later they were reporting that “it has already been much utilised”.



The centre of the village in 1864 and in 1894, after the building of the station. Note that Walpole Gardens and Strawberry Hill Road have been developed

The new station at Strawberry Hill was equipped with the very latest in signalling and safety devices. The Richmond and Twickenham Times again, this time on the 6th of December 1873, furnished technical detail. “The station”, it reported, “has been fitted with entirely new signal and locking apparatus and the completeness and efficiency of the means provided to prevent all danger of collision merit especial attention. The signal and locking system is that of Messrs. Saxby and Farmer, being the same as that fitted at the Twickenham and Windsor Line Junction Box.” In 1873 it merited special mention for its up-to-the-minute design and efficiency. In 1973, 100 years later, the same equipment

was still in use. The original footbridge still stands, though it was extensively refurbished in 2009. However, cracks appeared in the new wooden cladding, which was replaced in late 2010.

We have no idea how busy the station was when it opened. However, in the financial year 2011/12, the Office of the Rail Regulator estimated that just over 1 million journeys either started or ended at the station, up 4% on 2010/11 and more than twice the usage in 1997/98, the earliest year for which statistics are available.

This article is based on "Strawberry Hill Station - A Centenary" by Ken Breen, published in 1973.

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