

SOCIETY WALK

MILL HILL EAST – ALDENHAM

Saturday 16 April 2011

by Jon Taylor

The Society walk took place as planned over the remains of the old railway from Mill Hill East to Edgware, and then followed the route of the planned extension to Bushey Heath, looking at the remaining works left after the plan was abandoned. This walk was in addition to one similar undertaken previously by The Railway Ramblers who were kind enough to lead this event for the Society and to whom we extend our grateful thanks.

We set off at 10.00 to first look at the bridge over Bittacy Hill, which takes the railway into Mill Hill East station. There is evidence the road has been diverted and lowered through the bridge. Just to the north is the site of the old Middlesex Regiment's depot, once home to the British Forces Post Office.

We then turned down Bittacy Road to pick up the formation of the old railway where it continued beyond the buffer stop at Mill Hill East, starting as a green space but soon turning into a footpath. The first bridge, which is a continuation of Sanders Lane, is in very poor condition, with the spandrel of the second arch beginning to collapse.

The main points of interest for the enthusiasts along this stretch were the old cable posts, installed in anticipation of electrification.

At Page Street we had to leave the old formation. There is a small modern tunnel under the street, but it's now bricked up. Crossing Page Street, we took a footpath into newish small estate, bounded by Bunns Lane, Page Street and the A1 (Watford Way). I'm not sure I could retrace our route through the estate, but I think we left it via Rowlands Avenue to reach Bunns Lane. The old formation ran for some way parallel to Bunns Lane, and can be seen from the road.

Where Bunns Lane passes under the A1 we paused to climb some steps (which lead up to the A1) to look at an abandoned slip road off the M1, where it once terminated before it was finally extended to its present limit.

The railway once ran through what is now Mill Hill Industrial Estate. We had to continue along Bunns Lane to pass under the M1 and the Midland Main Line. Bunns Lane eventually crosses the formation of the railway at the site of Mill Hill (The Hale) Station. We dropped down into Lydhurst Park, which gave us access to the old formation – overgrown, but walkable.

We followed the formation to the "Lydhurst Park and Mill Hill Old Railway Local Nature Reserve", run by the London Wildlife Trust. The nature reserve is formed of the old railway land and extends to Deans Lane. Normally it's only open on Sundays, but the Railway Ramblers had arranged access. We had no difficulty in getting through the gate at the eastern end, but when we reached the western end we found the gate locked, and no one answering the contact phone number the Ramblers had been given. We therefore walked back through the nature reserve (which is very pleasant) to reach Deans Lane by walking along a stream, in an area of open ground (The Meads) between the houses (as for all urban streams, rather full of litter) and then along Dryfield Road.

We went a little way along Deans Lane to look at the depot (Tube Lines Edgware Track Depot) now occupying the old railway formation to the east of Edgware. It is no longer possible to walk through the depot and it is now only possible to walk along the access road up to the closed gates.

From the depot we followed roads in a southwards loop (crossing the Northern Line to Edgware) to regain the old formation on Church Way, behind the Broadwalk Shopping Centre. On the way we went down Banstock Road, which contains some interesting prefabricated steel framed and steel clad houses from the early 1920s. These were one of several novel designs developed to overcome shortages of materials and skills after the First World War in the drive to build 'homes fit for heroes'. One was being redecorated, and a section of the sheeting had been taken back to bare metal.

On Church Way there were a number of large iron posts in the ground which no one seemed to be able to identify. I thought they were boundary posts, and showed this to be the case by

photographing the back of one of them, otherwise hidden by the adjacent fence (there was just room to squeeze in the camera). They were marked GNR.

At Edgware, we split up for an hour to find lunch. We were told there were no pubs fit to drink in – the Railway Hotel, a fine example of Tudorbethan architecture, had been closed and boarded up for some time.

After lunch we met at Edgware station again, for a quick tour along the platforms, pre-arranged with the station supervisor. We could see the slab put in to carry the proposed extension under Station Road, now occupied by an odd arrangement of sliding buffer stops with sand drags behind.

From the station (only the central section remains of the original design) we crossed the road and walked down Rectory Lane to look at the land originally reserved for the railway. Most is now built on. We followed the route down a path that opened out in an area of garages, all broken into and vandalised. We then returned to Station Road by Heronsgate, then followed Edgwarebury Lane, Purcells Avenue and Hillside Gardens. The railway would have followed the line of Shelley Close (now a dead end), parallel to Hillside Gardens.

Reaching Green Lane, we almost immediately turned south into Stirling Avenue, which is a continuation of Shelley Close. From Stirling Avenue we took a path to cross the A41 (Edgware Way) and enter the green belt. The change from city to countryside is very abrupt here. The 1:25 000 OS map clearly shows the formation built for the railway but never used. This was to be the site of Brockley Hill station (at first to be called Edgebury). The piers of a viaduct are still visible, the arches being demolished some time ago.

We continued northwards across fields, heading towards Junction 4 of the M1, with great views over the countryside and back towards London. Eventually we could go no further. The portals of twin tunnels are said to be buried somewhere under the motorway junction.

We then turned back, walking as far as a footpath giving access onto the A41, which we had to cross. This was difficult, as the traffic was very heavy, possibly a consequence of the M1 being closed due to a fire. Eventually some kind hearted motorists stopped to let us cross. We then followed the A41 northwards to Junction 4, where we crossed the motorway slip road and had a good view of a silent M1, empty save for a lorry delivering cones.

North of the motorway we paused at the junction of the A41 and Brockley Hill, to look at the site of the proposed Elstree Station – but there is nothing to see. We then walked the short distance to the entrance to Centennial Park, an industrial estate, once the site of a new depot for the extended Northern Line. The depot was built, but never used as a railway depot. During the war it was turned over to aircraft manufacture. Nothing now remains of the original structures.

At the far end of Centennial Park would have been the site of Bushey Heath Station (once to be called Aldenham). As we were running late, we didn't walk to it but walked the short way back to a bus stop on the edge of Elstree. Here we got a bus back to Edgware, for the Underground home.