

# 100 YEARS TO WATFORD (BY THE MET.)

On 2 November 1925, the branch of the Metropolitan Railway from Watford South Junction to Watford was eventually opened, following an official inspection on 23 October. Way back in the 1880s, there had been pressure to provide a railway to Watford and this was eventually authorised in the Metropolitan Railway Act of 7 August 1912. However, some 778 yards beyond the present terminus had to be aborted, which would have taken the railway into Cassiobury Park. Moreover, it was a further ten years at the end of 1922 before work actually began on construction because of disagreements with Watford Borough Council and therefore the railway terminated at Cassiobury Park Avenue, one mile from Watford town centre. The cost of the project was shared between the Metropolitan Railway and (with reluctance) the LNER.

Apart from the terminus at Watford, there was one intermediate station at Croxley (then named Croxley Green<sup>1</sup>).

A triangular junction was provided at what was known as Watford Road Junction, the signal box there controlling access to and from the new branch – Watford South Junction for trains to and from London, Watford North Junction for trains to and from Rickmansworth, and Watford East Junction, where the South and North junctions merged. It also controlled access to and from Croxley Hall gravel sidings<sup>2</sup>.

In 1927 an opportunity arose for another route to extend the line into the centre of Watford, the Metropolitan purchasing, through a third party, an existing building at 44 Watford High Street, together with two-and-a-half acres of land behind the building, with the intention of creating a town centre terminus. For it, the possibility of a single-track extension in tunnel – either from the existing station or following a diversionary route around the station – was investigated, but excessive costs meant that no Parliamentary powers were sought. The building was eventually leased out and was disposed of by London Transport in 1936. Although the ticket hall of the intended town centre terminus was demolished many years ago, the front of the building survives today as “The Moon Under the Water” public house.

Both stations were designed by the Metropolitan's architect, C.W. Clark and the Watford terminus had a 615ft-long island platform which was long enough to accommodate a full-length main line train. Both stations had their own signal boxes and goods yards with goods facilities being available from opening.

The train services in the first few months of operation to and from the London direction (via the south curve) are summarised below, in trains per day.

From 2 November 1925				From 1 March 1926			
Departures		Arrivals		Departures		Arrivals	
Up (southbound)	Down (northbound)	Up (southbound)	Down (northbound)	Met	LNER	Met	LNER
43	30	40	29	33	18	32	12

There was also a regular shuttle service of 30 trains per day between Watford and Rickmansworth via the north curve.

*It should be pointed out that electrification from Harrow to Rickmansworth took place from 5 January 1925 – the Watford branch followed later (q.v.). The electric-steam loco changeover point thus became Rickmansworth instead of Harrow-on-the-Hill.*

With low traffic levels, within four months, the services had been considerably reduced, and from the General Strike from 4 May 1926, this gave the LNER a reason to withdraw all their passenger services to and from Watford on a permanent basis, leaving Watford and Croxley in the hands of the Metropolitan. The only main line passenger trains to serve Watford again were the very occasional specials – excursions or for sporting events. To part-compensate, an improved Metropolitan service was

<sup>1</sup> Croxley Green (Metropolitan) station was renamed Croxley on 23 May 1949 to avoid confusion with the LMR Croxley Green station.

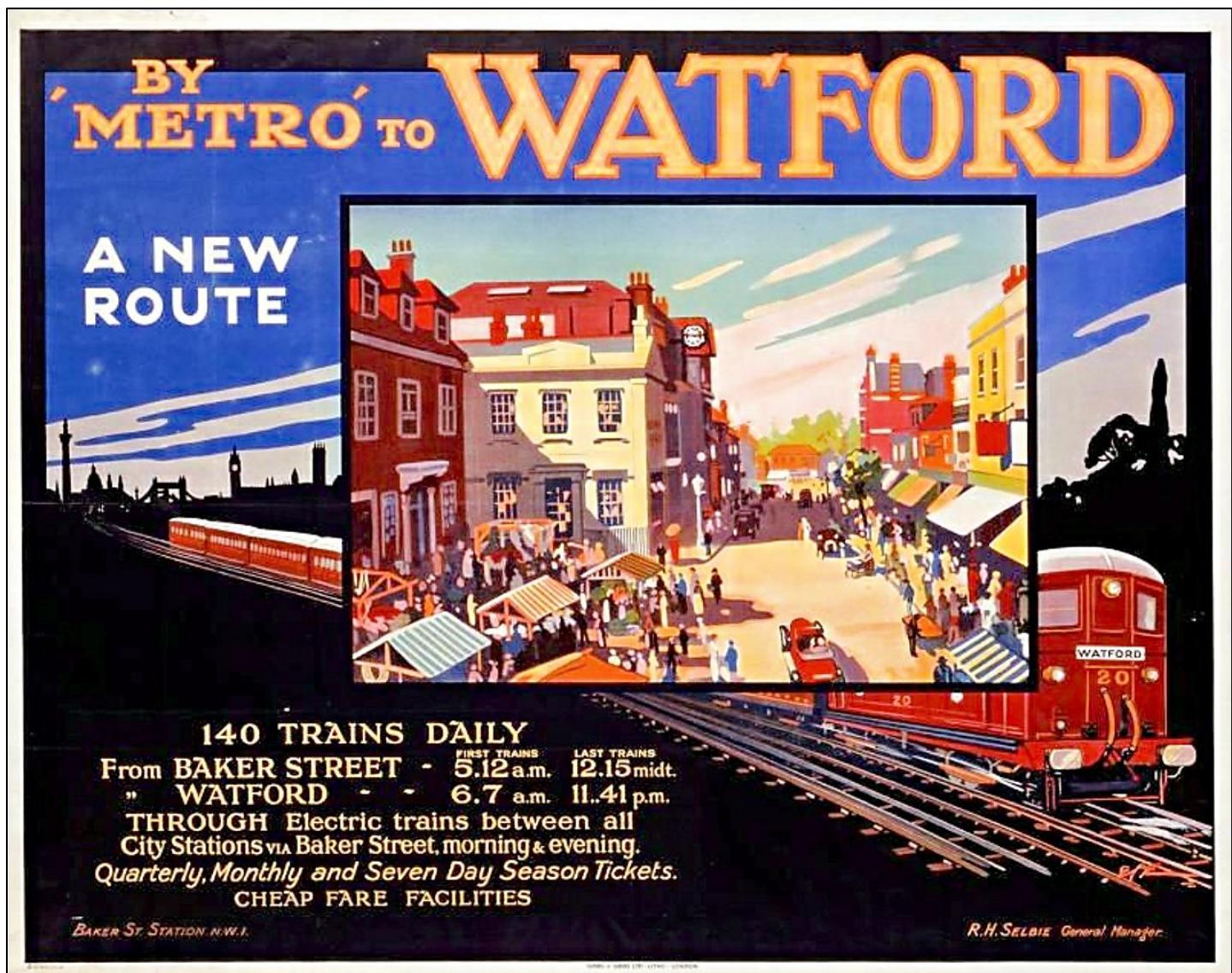
<sup>2</sup> Watford Road Junction signal box was subsequently named Watford Junction (not to be confused with Watford Junction of the LMS). This new signal box, in the angle between the branches at Watford South Junction, was commissioned some 11 months before the opening of the Watford branch and replaced that of 1902 vintage, and a previous one of 1896, both in different locations.

introduced from 31 January 1927, with 43 departures and 41 arrivals. Goods traffic, of course, continued into the 1960s with both Croxley and Watford yards closing in November 1966.

Recognising their difficulties, the Metropolitan had negotiated for the provision of bus services from their station to Watford High Street within a week of opening. Finding the bus service unsatisfactory, they terminated the agreement in 1927, purchased four Albion buses and started to operate the route themselves, maintaining the buses in the garage already used by freight lorries opposite Watford station. However, bus operations were short-lived, as Parliament intervened in 1928 with a requirement that all railway-operated bus services should have legal powers. The Metropolitan's request for such powers was rejected by the Parliamentary Select Committee and the railway handed over control to a new subsidiary company. The vehicles were subsequently transferred to Lewis Omnibus Co Ltd in 1929 and were then absorbed by London Transport in 1933.

Below: Poster By 'Metro' to Watford, unknown, published by the Metropolitan Railway in 1925. The High Street at Watford seems to feature, along with a train of Dreadnought coaches hauled by Metropolitan electric loco No.20 'Sir Christopher wren'.

*LURS Collection*



## WATFORD BRANCH SIGNAL BOXES

Signal Box	Notes
Watford	Opened 2 November 1925 and situated on Down (northbound) side. Mechanical Westinghouse A2 frame with 43 levers. Area code 'A' but recoded 'M' after a few years. Recoded yet again to 'JL' in November 1948. Closed after traffic 27 September 1958 with control then from Rickmansworth and recoded 'JP'. At the end of 1973, experimental computer control of Watford signalling from Rickmansworth signal cabin

	until 1977, when the computer was transferred to Heathrow.
Croxley Green	Opened 2 November 1925 and situated at north end of Down (northbound) platform. Mechanical Westinghouse A2 frame with 20 levers. Area code 'B' until closed 13 June 1970. However, connections to goods yard previously decommissioned 7 December 1967 and area converted to automatic working. Croxley Green (station) renamed Croxley 23 May 1949.
Watford Road Junction	Opened 30 November 1924 as part of Harrow – Rickmansworth electrification. Subsequently became known as Watford Junction (signal box). Mechanical Westinghouse A2 frame with 28 levers. When opened, it controlled only the goods and gravel sidings but with the opening of the Watford branch, the south junction was controlled mechanically while the north and east junctions were controlled electrically. Located in the 'V' at Watford South Junction. Area code 'C' until closed after traffic on 24 September 1955 with control then from Rickmansworth and then coded 'JP'. From 17 June 1962, a replacement interlocking machine room was required because of the four-tracking. Push-button control from Rickmansworth box and the area recoded 'JJ'.

## OFF PEAK AND NORTH CURVE TRAIN SERVICES FROM WW2

After the withdrawal of the Rickmansworth -Watford shuttle from 1 January 1934, the use of the north curve has been spasmodic to say the least, mostly being for empty stock moves and special workings. When uncoupling was reintroduced on the Metropolitan Line in 1962, for each uncoupled eight-car into two four-car meant that the following train wasn't required and this ran empty to Rickmansworth via the North Curve, which included the odd four-car unit as 7x4 were required for off-peak service.

From WW2, the situation regarding passenger services may be summarised thus:

<b>TIMETABLE</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>DETAIL</b>
87/88	06.10.41	Passenger service provided over Watford north curve – to Watford via Rickmansworth. Ex-Baker Street 19.30 to 21.50 Monday to Friday, 18.20 to 21.50 Saturdays and all-day Sundays.
100	03.05.43	Monday to Friday evening via north curve every 20/40 minutes, three on Saturdays ex-Baker Street at 21.20, 22.40 and 23.40.
104	22.05.44	Saturday evening via north curve ex-Baker Street retimed at 22.07, 23.14 and 23.40.
110	01.10.45	Weekday evening trains via north curve discontinued apart from 23.07 Baker Street – Rickmansworth – Watford Mondays to Saturdays.
112	07.04.46	No north curve passenger workings Mondays to Saturdays.
182	04.01.60	No north curve passenger workings Sundays (on any day!).
288	11.05.87	First southbound ex-Amersham 06.00 Mondays to Saturdays (previously 06.38) to Watford via north curve.

Thus began some early morning and late night trips in passenger service to and from Watford via the north curve. It is assumed that these were previously empty stock moves but one wonders just how many passengers these workings carry, which were adjusted from time to time with timetable changes. At the time of writing this, the scheduled passenger workings via the north curve were as follows:

	MON-FRI	SAT	MON-FRI	SUN
Chesham	05.12	–	05.12	
Rickmansworth	05.32	06.08	05.32	00.49
Watford	05.40	06.16	05.40	00.58
			Rickmansworth	00.21

The basic off-peak service to Watford was three or four trains per hour at 15-30 minute intervals, the 30-minute gap being a train that worked direct to Rickmansworth. It wasn't until the four-tracking and

timetable recast that gave Watford a 15-minute daily off-peak service. However, that was to change later, as follows:

From 2 February 1970, the Amersham 'fast' service on Sundays was reduced from 30 to 60-minute intervals but with a 30-minute Amersham service being maintained by diverting one all-stations Watford train per hour at Moor Park to Amersham. Watford service thus three trains per hour at intervals of 15/15/30 minutes.

The guards shortage that followed saw off-peak services reduced to three trains per hour, and with the service cuts from 6 December 1982, evening services to Watford were reduced to every 20 minutes. Moreover, the Sunday practice of diverting one Watford train to Amersham per hour continued, but with a main 20-minute service, this meant that Watford was served by two trains per hour at alternate 20/40-minute intervals. A 20-minute Watford service on Sundays was reinstated from May 1987 and Amersham regained two fast trains per hour.

From May 1995 the Watford service resumed to every 15 minutes for most of the day on Sundays

From May 2001, Watford had a 10-minute service daily, which lasted until the recast of services from 11 December 2011, which did away with the Chesham shuttle in favour of through trains and making all off-peak trains all stations. To enable a 7½-minute service on the trunk section of the former Joint Line, Watford reverted to a train every 15 minutes, which remains the situation as these notes were concluded. In reality, a 15-minute daily off-peak service is more than adequate for Watford and Croxley, even 100 years on.



**Above:** Metropolitan Railway Saloon Stock also worked to Watford, although the main service was provided by compartment stock of what became T Stock from the early-1940s. Moreover, some Circle Line trains of P Stock worked some early morning trips to Watford before taking up Circle Line service. Over to the right is part of Watford goods yard.

**Below:** (Left) Although main line passenger trains bowed out of serving Watford within six months of opening, there were still occasional specials, this being what is believed to be for a sporting event in 1948, with an LNER loco having hauled Met. Dreadnought coaches from Aylesbury. Note the Metropolitan Railway diamond station name sign on the left and a train of T Stock in the other platform.

**Below:** (Right) British Railways Standard Class 4 2-6-0 No 76043 shunts in the goods yard at Watford, just before the end of steam and before the end of goods workings on the Met. Note the more modern 'table top' station name bullseye, which has replaced the Metropolitan diamond signs.



**Above:** (Left) Exterior view of Watford Road Junction signal box, which became Watford Junction (not to be confused with the main line of the same name). It was opened on 30 November 1924 and located in the 'v' at Watford South Junction. An Up (or southbound) train of T Stock may be seen coming from the Rickmansworth direction. On the right can be seen the edge of Croxleyhall substation.

**Above:** (Right) The interior of Watford Road Junction signal box which by now bore the name of Watford Junction. The line to Watford is at the bottom and Rickmansworth top right.

**All photos: LURS Collection**



**Above:** (Left) Inside the entrance to Watford station in 1934 with the W.H. Smith newspaper and bookstall on the left.

**Opposite:** (Lower Right) The Watford – Rickmansworth shuttle stabled on what became No.21 siding adjacent to platform 1 at Watford. This service was normally worked by a double ended motor car (46 – seen here – or 69), which were converted from Saloon Stock following accident/fire damage. In anticipation of increased traffic on Saturdays, a Saloon Stock driving trailer was added, seen on the right of the photo.

**Photographs: LT Museum (Left) and LURS Collection (Right)**

**Below: (Left)** From 7 October 1946, there was one loco-hauled train that ran to Watford, all others being multiple unit stock. This continued right up to the end of loco working in September 1961. No.16 'Oliver Goldsmith' is seen after arrival and will run round its coaches for the return trip to Baker Street.

**Below: (Right)** It was not uncommon for P Stock to deputise for T Stock and vice versa when stock availability was not as hoped for. However, one unusual substitution is seen at Croxley with a metadyne P Stock deputising for the morning loco working to Watford, and bearing the steam stock set number of 118 – which the locos never carried.

**Both photos: LURS Collection**



**Above:** Back in 1961, the old and the then new. On the right a train of T Stock stabled on No.24 siding, while on the left, the new order – a train of new A60 Stock, comprising one of the first three eight-car trains with black roofs, which were lost on first overhaul.

**Photo: David Hibbert**

**Below:** Signals at Watford. Inner home JP134 (Left) which is a standard LT signal which replaced semaphore signals in 1948, then coded 'JL'. The colour light running signals on the Watford branch were three-aspect but when LT standardised the signalling, they became two-aspect with the bottom aspect patched over as seen on the platform 1 starting signal (Centre and Right).

**All photos: Brian Hardy**



**Above:** In June 1950, the track at Watford South Junction was slewed on a new alignment 30ft west of the present from 1,000ft north of Watford South Junction to 1,500ft south of Watford South Junction, to allow bridges MR78, MR80 and MR81 to be taken out of use. Watford Road Junction signal box may be seen in both photos, along with Croxleyhall substation in the left hand photo.

**Both photos: LT Museum**