

Text for Reedham Station function - 8 July 2015 - Derrick Smith

Good afternoon: It's good to see so many people here today at Reedham Station.

I have been asked to say just a few words about the long historical connection between the station and our old school

The first thing I must say is that if you had been here 156 years ago you would not have seen any station at all.

What you would have seen was a rather grand looking building that had just been built on top of the hill just over there. It was the new home of the Asylum for Fatherless Children and it was the year that the Lord Mayor of London and other dignitaries came down to lay the foundation stone of the new building.

The party came down by special train on the London and Brighton Railway and arrived at a special platform erected in a private siding that came off the new Caterham Valley branch line, just south of Godstone Road Station (what we now know as Purley Station). (Sorry if all that sounds a bit complicated!)

From there, according to the Croydon Advertiser, the Mayor and other dignitaries then walked in procession the last quarter mile to the site. You have to imagine the band playing and 200 children waving flags, cheering and lining the route right up to the new building.

The Asylum for Fatherless Children had been founded in London in 1844 by Andrew Reed, the energetic minister of a thriving Congregational church in the East End. The number of children being cared for grew steadily and it outgrew its premises several times. But London in those days was not a healthy place to bring up children.

Andrew Reed had made many connections with influential people in the City and with Royalty and he now worked tirelessly until he could have a new institution built here in the healthy Surrey hills and close to the new railway. There were places for 400 children and when it was finished the Board of Management insisted that it should be called "Reedham", after its founder.

Now there still wasn't a station where we are standing today. Visitors and children still had to make their way from Purley, and it wasn't until 1891 that this changed.

Then the South Eastern Railway Company took over the old Reedham siding and extended it as the Chipstead Valley line, all the way to Kingswood, and later to Tattenham Corner (The fact that the chairman of the South Eastern Railway had had a mansion built at Kingswood and also happened to be the treasurer of Reedham was probably just a coincidence!)

The new line came this way and in 1911, to compensate for the loss of the Reedham siding, wooden platforms were built just a few yards up the line from here and called "Reedham Halt". Reedham had its station at last.

For many years Reedham Halt served Reedham, the orphanage and school from which it took its name, and generations of children, their mothers and other visitors began to pass through on their way to or from the school.

As the surrounding area became more populated and commuting became the norm, the number of other passengers greatly increased and in 1936 this modern station, where we are today, was built and was named just "Reedham". Children going home for the holidays via London would have continued to be shepherded over its platform and even larger numbers would have lined the platform to wave to the reigning monarch (Reedham's patron) as the Royal Train slowed down and carried them through on their way back from the Derby.

It is good now to see Reedham station, familiar to so many of us, continuing its useful role on into the future. It seems very right that its origins are now to be commemorated by smart new signs on the platforms and that travellers will be reminded of the work of Andrew Reed and that his aims are still being followed in the work of the Reedham Children's Trust.

Thank you.