



# News from North Woolwich

No. 1 3 March 2007

Railschool.org • Royal Docks Heritage Railway

# 1847

# 2007

## 160 years on, a new start is just ahead

**T**he North London line was closed between North Woolwich and Stratford on 9 December last year, but plans to revive the line between Custom House and North Woolwich are now well under way.

This newsletter explains where we've got to – and what is planned in the next few months.

We hope you find it useful, and we would be delighted to hear your suggestions or questions – just email us at [project@railschool.org](mailto:project@railschool.org).

[RailSchool.org](http://RailSchool.org)

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Come and see us  
at North Woolwich  
station: we have plenty  
to tell you about!

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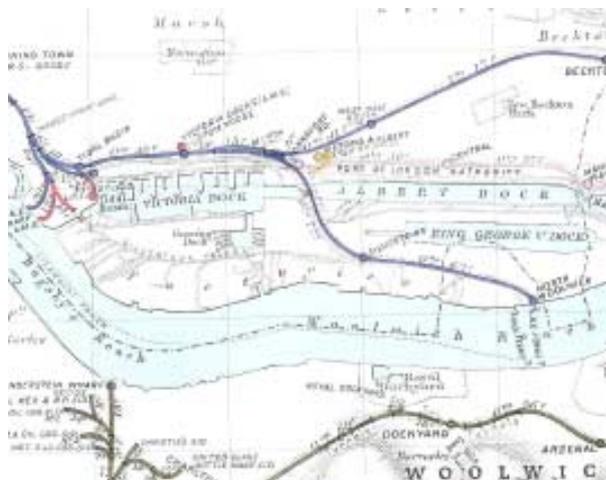


# How have we got to where we are?

HISTORY  TODAY'S CHANGES  TOMORROW'S RAILWAY

**T**he railway between Custom House and North Woolwich was once part of a larger system in this part of Docklands which also included the Silvertown Tramway, lines to Gallions and Beckton and a complex local network serving the docks operated by the Port of London Authority and its predecessors.

The story really begins in 1847, when the line to North Woolwich was opened. Although the railway had been promoted by a small company, this company was bought by the Eastern Counties Railway before the service started.



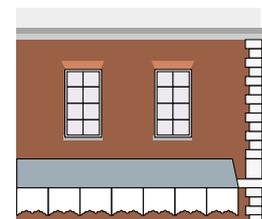
The purpose of the new line was not to serve North Woolwich itself, because there was almost nothing there. The goal was the town of Woolwich proper, a short ferry journey away on the other side of the river. Indeed, this new route between London and Woolwich soon prospered enough to justify the building of a more substantial station at North Woolwich in 1854 – the building which is still there today.

Trains services from North Woolwich have run to various parts of London over the years, including (in the early days) the original Bishopsgate station, as well as Fenchurch Street and, between 1887 and 1963, Palace Gates. The 'Palace' in its name was Alexandra Palace on the North London heights, which was a popular tourist destination for several decades.

Although the North Woolwich line was busy, the Eastern Counties Railway was not always so successful with its ventures, and it became part of the bigger Great Eastern Railway in 1862. Nearly all British railway companies were merged into 'the big four' in 1923, which placed the North Woolwich line in the hands of the London and North Eastern Railway. Nationalisation in 1948 saw the southern section of the LNER taken over by the Eastern Region of British Railways. Network SouthEast, one of the British Railways Board's new business sectors, was created to take over local services from the BR Regions in the wider London area between 1986 and 1991. Privatisation came in 1997, when the Silverlink franchise started.

The Palace Gates branch had closed in 1963, leaving North Woolwich at the end of a truncated line from Tottenham Hale, but the 1980s redevelopment of Broad Street station in the City meant that the North London line from Richmond was diverted to North Woolwich in 1987. This brought electric trains to North Woolwich for the first time, and the improved service continued until 9 December 2006. On the following day, a single special train ran for invited guests from North Woolwich to Euston via Willesden Junction (possibly the only time that such a journey has been made), and the line was then closed east of Stratford. Much of the route, from Stratford to Royal Victoria, is now being converted to become part of the Docklands Light Railway in 2010.

The section from Custom House to North Woolwich is now protected for longer term use as part of Crossrail, but this is unlikely before 2013 at the earliest. In the meantime, the route will be put to good use by the Royal Docks Heritage Railway and RailSchool.org. **A new chapter has begun.**



**It is easy to discuss the next stages in the North Woolwich story, but much harder to make them happen. In fact, a lot has already occurred behind the scenes.**

There are several parts to this new chapter. One is, of course, the line itself. Everyone agrees that the best way to look after a railway (and this one is, after all, officially reserved for eventual use by Crossrail) is to run trains on it. There is a serious risk that an abandoned urban line will quickly become a huge and possibly hazardous eyesore: it will take a lot of (public) money just to keep it passably safe and tidy.

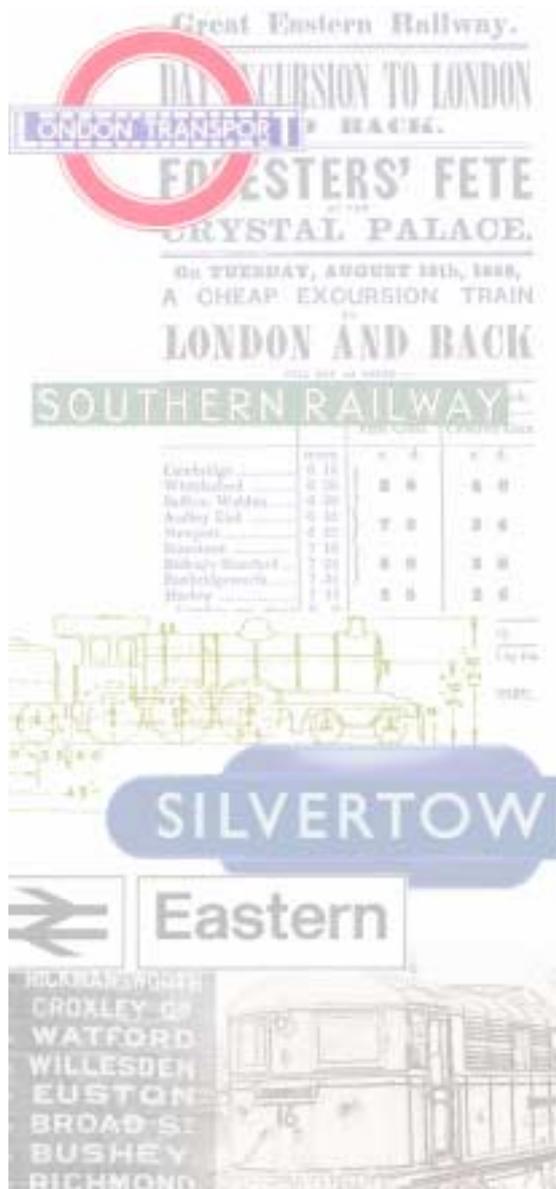


So what kind of trains can be run? In fact, there are several uses proposed, and they can all be fitted together. One is trains operated as part of RailSchool.org – a new major railway training centre which is set to bring hundreds of young Eastside people into the growing railway industry. You can read more about RailSchool.org over the page.

A second use, which has attracted great interest from the railway industry, is to use the line as a test bed for new and developing railway equipment, especially signalling. There are almost no places around Greater London where railways are available for this kind of research: London's railways are too busy serving London as it is. Stopping the trains on other lines for trials of new equipment is simply not an option.

Thirdly, there is the chance to run heritage trains, particularly during the summer and at weekends, when other 'customers' of the line are less likely to need it. This combines neatly with the already existing railway museum at North Woolwich.





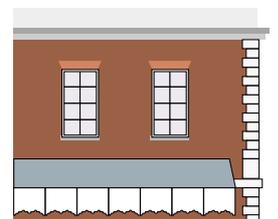
The London Borough of Newham has decided that it can no longer operate the museum as it is for much longer. The present museum is mainly concerned, appropriately, with the Great Eastern Railway, but in future it will gradually change its role to include all the surface commuter railways of London, which are not covered in depth anywhere else. (The Underground, and trams, are already well looked after by London's Transport Museum, which reopens later this year.) The eastern end of Docklands is busily setting itself up for tourists (for example, a major new centre for water life – *Biota!* – is due to open near Silvertown in 2009), and a heritage railway and revived museum will be excellent additions to the Eastside.

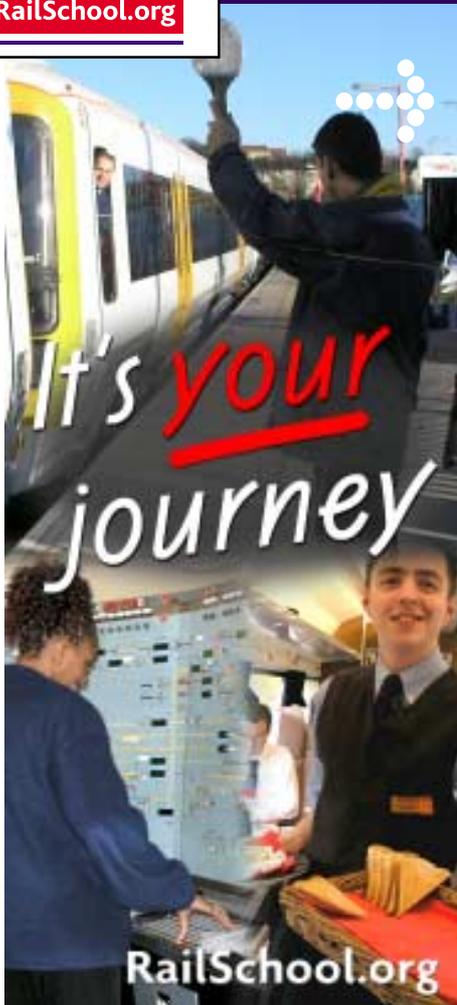
There are even more uses for the railway, and one is as a filming location. There is a great shortage of usable railway locations for photographers and film makers in Greater London because, once again, the railways are too busy doing their job. Film London, which finds locations for film directors, often has to refuse railway requests for this reason. In future, from time to time, it may well be *Lights ... Camera ... Action!* at North Woolwich.

If you are wondering whether this mixture is almost too rich, we can see why. In fact, significant investment is needed so that some of these varied functions can happily co-exist. A mixture of funding from the public and private sectors has been identified, although RailSchool.org will be run by a non-profit making company.

**There is a lot to do yet, and many questions to be answered still. But the evolution of North Woolwich and the line to Custom House is now on track.**

**2007 is the year when it all begins.**





# Introducing RailSchool.org

**A new start in a rewarding career for hundreds of teenagers and younger adults – that's the offer from RailSchool.org.**

Railways in the London area need thousands of recruits every year, and soon the North Woolwich line will be playing a major part in filling those jobs. RailSchool will give anyone aged 14 or more a chance to sample them, in a real railway environment.

For those who like what they find, RailSchool will also be a portal to a great future. Railway companies will be keen to employ RailSchool graduates, because they will have already proved they know and understand the basics.

The railway is a big and growing industry, so there's something for almost everyone: engineering, customer service, signalling, management and yes – train driving, of course!

But whatever you choose, it's **your** journey.

**Like to know more? Send an email to [project@railschool.org](mailto:project@railschool.org), giving your name, address, age and school. We'll soon be in touch with more details. Don't hold back: if you find that the railway isn't for you, that's cool – and you might surprise yourself!**

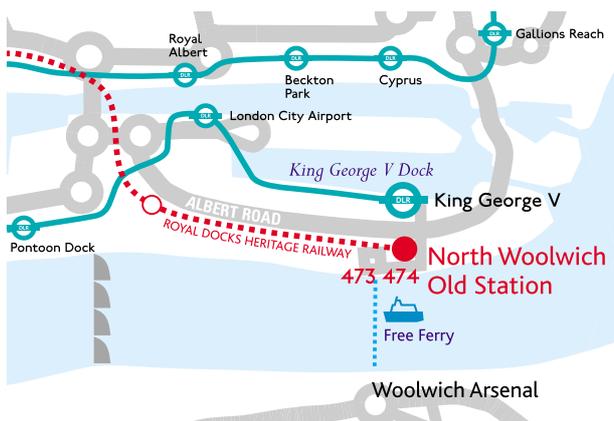


## Come and see us on 24 March



# SATURDAY IS OPEN HOUSE

RailSchool.org and the Royal Docks Heritage Railway welcome you to North Woolwich Old Station between 1300 and 1700hrs (1pm to 5pm) on Saturday 24 March. Find us in Pier Road, North Woolwich. Nearest station King George V (DLR). Buses 473, 474 – or sail to us on the Woolwich Ferry.



# ❖❖❖ (Some) of your questions answered

WHO? ❖❖❖ WHAT? ❖❖❖ HOW? ❖❖❖ WHY?

## Who is putting forward these proposals?

A group of people with considerable railway experience, led by Neil Howard, a former senior Public Affairs manager with British Rail. Neil also created and ran the *Train for Life*, a remarkable train which ran from London to the Balkans in 1999 with essential supplies for war-torn areas. He is highly experienced in running charter trains of many kinds, and the new organisation at North Woolwich will also be reviving tourist trains in Hungary and surrounding countries – a long way from East London, but all part of the bigger picture. His management team includes a former Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways, who will be in charge of the railway itself. Safety will never be compromised.

## But is there room for all these ideas on one short railway?

A typical summer day at North Woolwich might start with a film shoot from 06.00 to 08.30, followed by RailSchool operations from 09.30 to 16.00. Then, in the evening, a special corporate hospitality train could run from Custom House and back between 19.30 and 22.00 – another useful revenue stream, and likely to attract many exhibitors at ExCeL. ExCeL has already recognised the railway as an official partner for this. During the day, the museum would also be open, and in the evening play host to the corporate party.

## You say safety will never be compromised. Where's the evidence?

At the moment, in a letter from Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate, which is paying close interest and has recently issued a preliminary letter of approval – a vital first step. A detailed railway operational plan is now being prepared for submission to HMRI this spring. Until the railway inspectors are completely happy, not a wheel can turn in public service. There are no short cuts to this process.

## Will all these things happen in 2007?

Probably not, but some will. The railway is fairly delapidated at the moment, and a good deal of work is planned for this spring to bring it up to an acceptable standard – which will be, by the way, a good deal higher than it has been in recent years.

## Does it matter if people walk on or near the line at the moment?

Absolutely! Trespassing on any railway is **always** a dangerous thing to do. Trains may run at any time, in connection with engineers' inspections, contractors' work or examinations by the Railway Inspectorate, for example. The line is officially closed, but is not out of use.

## Crossrail will need this line one day. What will you do?

To some extent, retire gracefully! But the North Woolwich station area and the museum are not affected. We would hope to have established these sufficiently by then to allow them to run as going concerns. There are also outline proposals for more *RailSchools* elsewhere, although RailSchool will stay at North Woolwich while it can – and that might be quite a long time. There are great advantages for Newham and the wider Eastside from these proposals. Longer term developments need not stop them happening now, to the great advantage of the local economy and possibly thousands of young people over the next few years. This kind of opportunity is rare: we intend to realise its full potential for the benefit of East London and its people. Your support will be greatly appreciated, and we will keep you in touch with progress in newsletters and on our website.

This newsletter may also be downloaded from [www.railschool.org](http://www.railschool.org)

