THE HISTORY OF

OTFORD STATION



1882 - 1922

All Change at Otford Junction!

A railway along the Darent Valley had first been mooted in 1858 to link Sevenoaks with Swanley where the line from London to the Kent coast was being constructed. Soon, the Sevenoaks Railway Company was formed to build the line – initially a single track – from Swanley to Bat and Ball.

At 8am on the 2nd June 1862 the first of six daily trains in each direction passed through farmland east of Otford village, followed a few hours later by a special train carrying dignitaries to Bat and Ball station. From there they went to the opening celebrations at the Royal Crown Hotel in Sevenoaks.

Within little more than a year, the track had been doubled to meet expected traffic demand, although requests for a station to be built at Otford fell upon deaf ears. A siding was built in the 1870s from the down line into the lime works where the Otford scout hut now stands. The Otford Lime Company ran the site, using chalk excavated from the nearby Chalk Pit to produce lime.

The Sevenoaks Railway Company changed its name to the Sevenoaks, Maidstone and Tonbridge Railway Company and opened a line from Otford to Maidstone in 1874. Once again Otford was not allocated a station for local use, although one was constructed at Kemsing. At Otford Junction, near Long Lodge, wooden platforms were built without any protection from the elements to allow

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interchange between London, Sevenoaks and Maidstone trains. The platforms, however, had no access to or from the village. This state of affairs was to continue for another eight years until finally a station was built for the villagers in Otford.

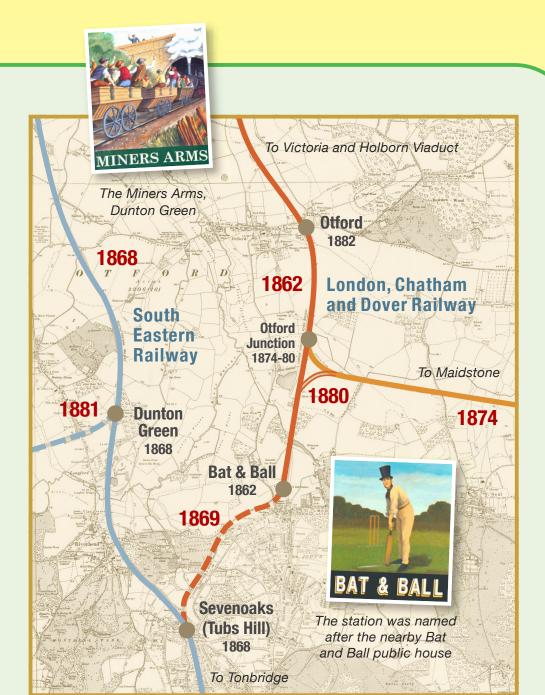


Above: In this photograph from the 1890s a 'B1' Class locomotive stands at the up platform of Bat and Ball station awaiting departure for London.

"Otford Junction consists of an uncovered platform intended only for the exchange of passengers to Sevenoaks. It is hoped that some provision will be made for the convenience of those who may have to alight there on a wet day. From this platform is perhaps one of the most beautiful views to be found in the country..." South Eastern Gazette 1874

Right: The map shows the local railway lines and stations with their opening dates The two railway companies were rivals until 1899. The inn sign from the Miners Arms is a reminder of the army of navvies who dug the Polhill tunnel. The Bat and Ball sign is

from the public house after which the first railway station in Sevenoaks took its name.



TIMELINE 1862-1922

1862 The Sevenoaks Railway Company opens a railway line down the Darent Valley from Swanley to Sevenoaks (the line terminates at Bat and Ball).

1866-67 The Prince of Wales travels to Bat and Ball on his way to Knole. The following year Queen Victoria journeys along the same route. 1868 The South Eastern Railway Company open

its line from London to Sevenoaks Tubs Hill. 1869 The two Sevenoaks stations are linked by rail.

1874 The line from Otford Junction to Maidstone East is opened. Intermediate stations are provided at Kemsing, Wrotham, Malling and Barming.

1882 The present-day Otford station opens.

1885 Following a dispute between the two companies, no passenger trains run between Bat and Ball and Sevenoaks for the next 15 years.

1899 The two rival companies, the London, Chatham and Dover, and the South Eastern establish a joint working agreement under the name the South Eastern and Chatham Railway.

1901 Improvements at Otford station are completed.

1917 Due to emergency wartime measures the Otford to Sevenoaks shuttle train is suspended. Bat and Ball station is closed to passenger traffic.

1919 Bat and Ball station reopens to the public.

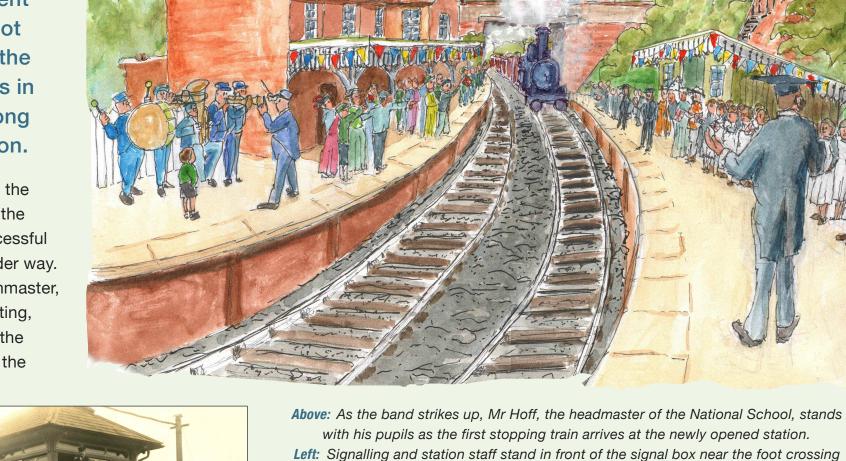
1922 The last year of the South Eastern and Chatham Railway before it is absorbed into The Southern

Richard Hoff to the rescue!

Mr Richard Hoff became headmaster of Otford's National School in 1878 at the young age of 23, and held that post until his retirement 41 years later. He left his mark on many aspects of village life, not only in education, but also as organist, parish clerk, founder of the horticultural society, census enumerator... there seem few fields in which this dominating figure was not involved, and it was not long before he turned his attention to Otford's lack of a railway station.

Tired of walking to Shoreham to catch the train, he personally visited every house in the village seeking signatures to a petition which he took to Lord Amherst, a director of the railway company. Mr Hoff's energy, perseverance and forceful lobbying proved successful and by early 1881 construction of the station building and goods shed was well under way.

The first stopping train drew into Otford Station on 1st August 1882. The stationmaster, Mr Oliver, fresh from 15 years' service at Dover, doubtless raised his tall hat in greeting, whilst Mr Hoff would no doubt have brought his excited pupils with him to witness the development in which he had played so prominent a part. The local paper said, on the



to the south of the station in 1913. Notice the hop poles in the field behind the box.

Ros Sheller

prospect of the opening of the station, that "there is little doubt that this historical village will then attract large numbers of visitors". The signal box and sidings were constructed later, in 1882. Otfordians could now travel to London in less than an hour at a reasonable cost; the village acquired its first daily travellers to the capital, and there soon followed an increase in house building. This was the start of the busy commuter village we know today.



Left: Mr Willis stands proudly with his staff on the muchimproved station. Behind him is the bay platform from whence the 'shuttle service'

"Henry Willis, an imposing figure in tail coat and waistcoat, both with braid edging, lent further gravitas by his flat peaked hat, gold braided on the brim



Welcome, Stationmaster Henry Willis

By 1901 major improvements had been made to the station. The local newspaper reported: "Now there is a moderately comfortable waiting room, lengthy covered platforms and a substantial rather handsome footbridge. A siding for the local train is a great improvement, and in many respects the station will compare favourably with those which do service in places of greater importance than Otford."

Villagers now had a service of 12 trains daily to London, and no fewer than 16 daily trains on the local service to Bat and Ball and Sevenoaks. The upgrading of Otford station coincided with the arrival, as stationmaster, of Henry Thomas Willis, who was to occupy the post for the next 15 years. Under his stewardship the station's oil lamps were replaced in 1912 by gas. The elegant, fluted columns with their decorated lamp tops with the words 'Otford Junct' inscribed on the glass – were to grace the station's platforms until the 1930s.

Before his retirement in 1915, Mr. Willis witnessed the transfer of the railway from its peacetime role to that of strict government control during the Great War. Passenger services, other than for troop movements, were drastically curtailed. A lifelong Wesleyan Methodist, he continued his active support of the church in Otford until his death at the age of 87. A year previously, he was accorded the honour of laying the foundation stone for the new Methodist church.

Below left: 'J' Class locomotive 1599 heads a Maidstone-bound train pulling away from the station during the inter-war years. Below middle: This photograph taken in 1922 shows the station's infrastructure. The 'Local' to Sevenoaks waits in the bay platform.

Right: The much loved 'P' Class engine 323 stands in the bay platform (with the goods yard beyond). This loco can now be seen on the Bluebell Railway.



Above: The 'Puffer', as it was affectionately known, reverses towards Otford Junction with the hop poles of Hundred Acre Field beyond. Inset above: A railway poster depicting Kent in spring as the 'Garden of England'... villagers would recognise much of their own landscape!

Below: The station in c.1912 after the canopy and footbridge were built and the platforms lengthened in 1901. The station lamps had just been converted to gas.

