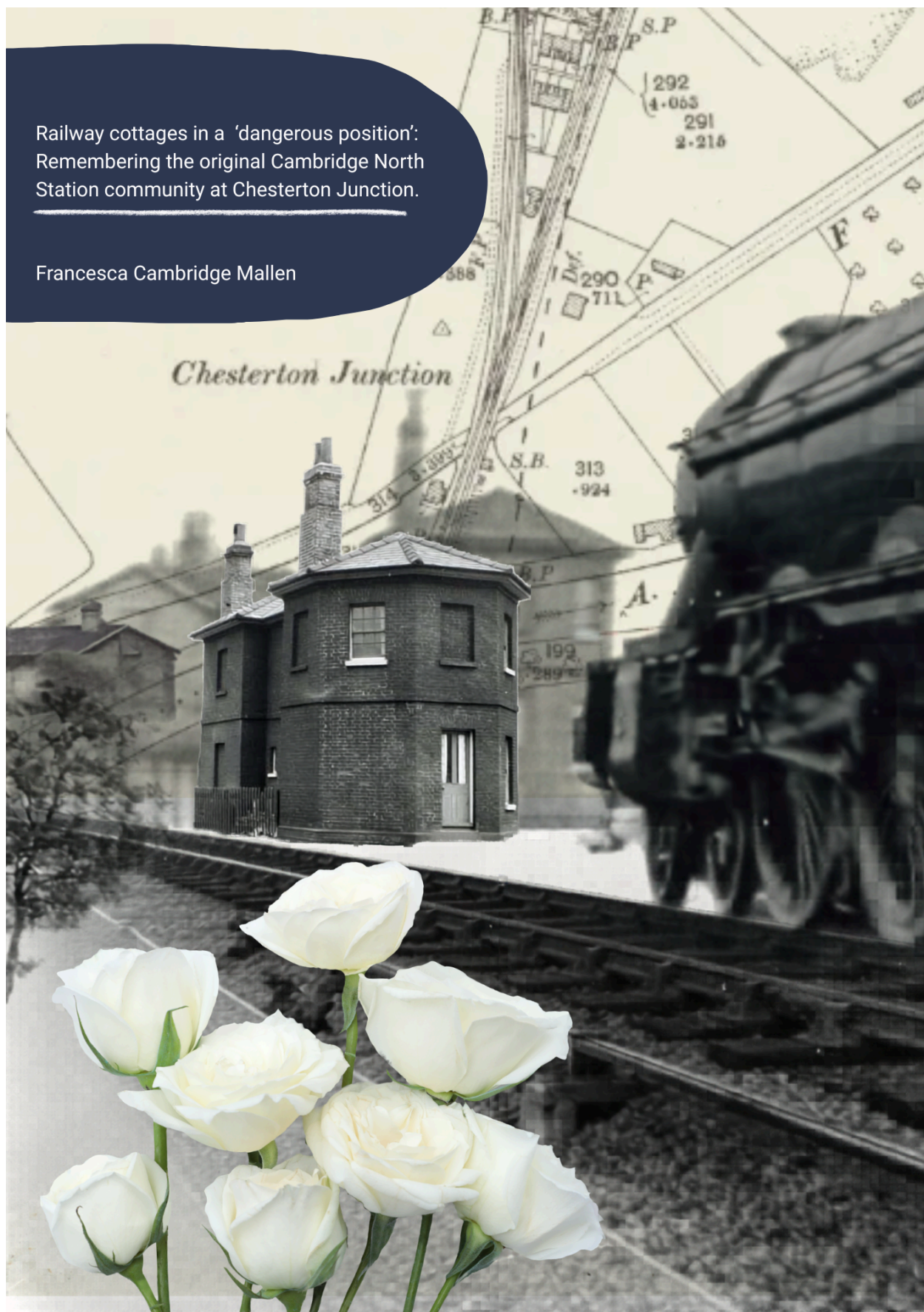


Railway cottages in a 'dangerous position':
Remembering the original Cambridge North
Station community at Chesterton Junction.

Francesca Cambridge Mallen



**Railway Cottages in a 'dangerous position':
Remembering the original Cambridge North Station
community at Chesterton Junction**

Dedicated to

Susan Middleton (1824-1873) - Rose Rickwood (1881-1885) - William Stretton (1854-1892)

James Rivett (1821-1893) - George Rickwood (1859-1907) - Ernest Rule (1880-1922)

Author Francesca Cambridge Mallen

June 2026



Chapters

1. Introduction: The Rickwood family
2. Hidden tracks: Finding the railway cottages at Chesterton Junction
3. Barnwell to Chesterton Junction: A stretch of line 'notorious for fatalities'
4. In focus: Railway accidents involving children resident in railway cottages
5. Four-year-old Rose Rickwood
6. 'The most dangerous trade' meets 'an exceedingly dangerous place to live'
7. Stability versus uncertainty: The case of Thomas Rickwood
8. Conclusion
9. Bibliography
10. Appendix
 - a. 25-inch Ordnance Survey Map of England and Wales (1901)
 - b. Local newspaper reports that mention Chesterton Junction between 1850 and 1989
 - c. 1881 and 1891 Census for Chesterton Junction
 - d. Image use
 - e. Acknowledgements

A wonderful amount of detail respecting a community of folk who lived surrounded by rails; this will be of great interest to generations of railway historians.

Mike Petty MBE



A steam locomotive and wagons piled with timber rumbles past the Great Eastern Railway Company cottages at Chesterton Junction circa 1960

Courtesy of the RCTS Photo Archive (Collection of Chris Berridge)

Introduction: The Rickwood Family

In the latter half of 1965, a front door closed for the final time as the last resident of the railway cottages at Chesterton Junction stepped out towards the tracks, along Fen Road, and into the wider world. This was the final house to be cleared in order to make way for the extensive new Permanent Way Depot on land that now forms the southern tip of Cambridge North Station before the line meets the River Cam. No visible traces of the cottages remain, and the community of railway workers and their families who lived at *The Junction*, has largely faded from memory. Yet for over a century, this small apex of land—adjacent to where the original Chesterton Station once stood—was home to a small community of Great Eastern Railway workers and their families, including George and Rhoda Rickwood.

Rhoda Anderson was the youngest sister of my great-great-grandmother, Henrietta Cambridge, and in 1880 married George Rickwood - a platelayer for the Great Eastern Railway Company (GER) - at St Luke's Church, in the Cambridge suburb of Chesterton. George grew up in one of the railway cottages at Chesterton Junction, where his father, Thomas Rickwood, was also employed as a platelayer. Following their marriage, Rhoda and George moved into a neighbouring cottage, and in 1881 welcomed their first child, Rose. Their second child, Emily Rosetta, was born two years later and would go on to marry Sidney Vail, himself a platelayer and the son of her father's close friend, before moving into the very cottage once occupied by her parents. Their daughters—Violet Elizabeth Rhoda, Gladys Rosetta, and Kathleen Vera—were all born there, becoming the fourth and final generation who made The Junction home.

Bapt May 14 1909	1909. July 4	Violet Elizabeth Rhoda	Sidney & Emily Rosetta	Vail	Chesterton Junction	Platelayer	R. W. Shelton Vicar.
No. 326							
Bapt May 17 1909	1909 July 4 th	Gladys Rosetta	Sidney & Emily Rosetta	Vail	Chesterton Junction	Platelayer	R. W. Shelton Vicar.
No. 327							

Baptism record for Violet Elizabeth Rhoda and Gladys Rosetta Vail, 1909¹

¹ Cambridgeshire Archives and Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Family History Society; Cambridgeshire, England; Church of England Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials; Reference: P40/1/8

In 1985, former GER railwayman Mr. Keith Clarke, would recall Sidney Vail living in one of the cottages at what he aptly referred to as *The Fort*.² Home to most of the railway workers and their families at Chesterton Junction, this small piece of land appeared almost fortified, enclosed by railway tracks on all sides. Well documented in photographs taken by railway enthusiasts during the 1950s and early 1960s, a distinctive Victorian building with faceted façade occupied a prominent position in front of additional terraced housing. Owing to its appearance and proximity to the railway, the structure—also referred to as the ‘round house’—has frequently been mistaken for the original Chesterton Station building. In fact, the ‘round house’ and the terrace to its rear provided accommodation for railway employees, including pointsmen, signalmen and platelayers. Three generations of the Rickwood family—George, his father Thomas, and his son-in-law Sidney Vail—were employed as platelayers, serving consecutively from the 1860s through to the late 1940s. Their work involved the upkeep of the railway infrastructure along the isolated stretches of line extending north of their homes and southwards towards Cambridge Station. Originally surrounded by farmland and a good ten-minute walk from the nearest populated areas, this small stretch of land would develop into a busy and important area of development for the railways - with families like the Rickwoods living literally in the middle.

The Cambridge family from which I descend lived in Harston for at least five centuries. In 1881, as a result of the downturn in coprolite mining, my great-great-grandparents, former ‘fossil digger’ George Cambridge and his wife Henrietta (née Anderson), moved their young family to Camberwell in south London where my father Michael Cambridge would eventually be born in 1948. I was drawn to Rhoda’s story after discovering the tragic circumstances surrounding the deaths of both her husband George and four-year-old daughter Rose in separate railway accidents. To what extent these events—and the environment in which they occurred—contributed to Rhoda’s admission to Fulbourn Asylum, where she spent the final twenty years of her life, remains unclear, but Chesterton Junction was undoubtedly a controversial place to live. Unlike the terraced railway cottages on Mill Road, the Rickwood’s house was not built along a road - or even an established footpath. Their home stood not beside the tracks, but between them.

In 1885, Cambridge’s Deputy Coroner, John Bennett, wrote to the directors of the GER company to convey the findings of an inquest into the death of George and Rhoda’s eldest daughter, four year old Rose Rickwood. Bennett conveyed the jury’s findings that the cottages at Chesterton Junction were ‘**an exceedingly dangerous place for human habitation.**’³

² Clarke, K. (1985). The Lamp Oil Run. *Saffron Walden Weekly*. 23 May.

³ News Editor (1885b). Shocking Death of a Child. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 2 May.



AI-generated image of George, Rhoda and Rose Rickwood created from photographs of their parents and siblings. ©FCMallen

Just a decade earlier, in the same area and under the same conditions, another coroner also remarked the cottages were ‘**in a dangerous position**’ following the death of Susan Middleton, the wife of a platelayer, who also lived at Chesterton Junction.⁴

Close and continual proximity to passing locomotives—*notwithstanding speed*—defined the risks faced by platelayers, an occupation widely recognised by the turn of the century as one of the most dangerous in the country. At Chesterton Junction, however, these dangers extended beyond the workplace and into the domestic sphere. Platelayers were frequently required to work in isolated sections of track; in the case of those living at the Junction, access to and from their place of work necessitated walking alongside the railway lines. Notably, in instances where accidents occurred, representatives of the GER contended that such movement constituted trespass, on the grounds that the workers were no longer officially on duty. Taking a shortcut from Cambridge across Newmarket road and over the railway bridge was common, and although casual ‘warnings’ were issued, no further action was taken suggesting management turned a blind eye - particularly as walking *to work* alongside the line was encouraged.

⁴ News Editor (1873). Railway Accident. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 3 Dec.

Family members, including young children, were also exposed to these dangers, as any attempt to leave their home necessitated crossing the St Ives branch line. To make matters worse, the railway company incentivised residents, including children, to cross the tracks in order to access gardens and allotments that they provided on the opposite side of the line. This ‘implied license’ where children in particular are not effectively warned away from the line and other dangerous areas around the tracks, but invited, presents a strong argument for negligence which persisted well into the 1950s.⁵ Such conditions effectively extended occupational hazards into the domestic sphere, embedding railway-related risks within the routines of everyday family life.

Records of accidents involving residents at Chesterton Junction in this study have been derived primarily from newspaper sources and, as such, provide only a partial account. These accounts are likely to reflect a bias toward more sensational incidents reported in the press, while near misses and less dramatic events remain undocumented.⁶ Likewise, a comparative analysis of mortality from respiratory or cardiovascular disease has also not been undertaken, yet it is reasonable to infer an elevated level of risk arising from the prolonged and routine exposure to soot and coal dust emitted by passing steam locomotives on both sides of the dwellings as well. A pumping station also stood behind the apex cottages, supplying water to the locomotives at Cambridge station, and not far north beyond that, Cambridge’s water treatment works and first public drains. The drinking water at Chesterton Junction was thus also plagued by contamination from raw sewage,⁷ and the smells from a local fat-rendering factory left many residents in the late 19th century unable to work due to nausea.⁸

Far from ideal by even contemporary standards, Chesterton Junction was nonetheless a distinct community of workers—men conditioned by mid-Victorian liberalism and the threat of the workhouse⁹- and whose livelihoods offered a level of security and opportunity their fathers and grandfathers could scarcely have imagined. However, it is essential to recognise that the dangers faced by George, Rhoda, and countless other families in places such as Chesterton Junction were not merely isolated tragedies, but catalysts for reform. The accumulation of worker and public fatalities exposed systemic failings in industrial practices and public safety, contributing to the growth of trade union movements and intensifying demands for regulation.¹⁰ In turn, these pressures helped to shape the development of workplace health and safety

⁵ Disney, Henry.W. (1923). *The Law of Carriage by Railway*. 6th ed. Law Publishers Stevens and Sons Limited, p.177.

⁶ Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (2014). *Qualitative Research Practice : a Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

⁷ News Editor (1909). Polluted Wells. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 6 Aug.

⁸ News Editor (1897b). The Factory Nuisance at Chesterton. *Hunts Post*. 23 Oct.

⁹ Michael, F. (1988). *The Rise of Respectable Society*. Fontana Press.

¹⁰ Railway Museum. *Caution! Railway safety since 1913*. [online] National Railway Museum

legislation and standards, many of which continue to underpin protections today, including an effective inspectorate.¹¹ It remains essential to hold large companies to account for safeguarding the most vulnerable in society, particularly children, especially where the risks they generate are conceived at a distance or in abstract form, yet borne most directly and materially by those least able to protect themselves.

As RMT branch secretary James McLelland stated during the unveiling of a memorial plaque at Hereford Station last year:

It is important to remember that every health and safety regulation that exists was written in blood, and that people died for those regulations to be in place.¹²

This research is dedicated to the former residents of Chesterton Junction, in particular:

Susan Middleton (1824-1873)

Rose Rickwood (1881-1885)

William Stretton (1854-1892)

James Rivett (1821-1893)

George Rickwood (1859-1907)

Ernest Rule (1880-1922)

¹¹ Office of Rail and Road Blog (2015). *175 years making Britain's railways safer* | Office of Rail and Road.

¹² Your Herefordshire, April 24 2025

Hidden tracks: Finding the railway cottages at Chesterton

Junction

The *124–134 Mill Road* study, published as part of the 2013 Mill Road History Project, provides detailed insight into an ambitious approach to early housing provision for railway workers in the city of Cambridge.¹³ Characterised by neo-Gothic detailing and prominent chimneys, the terrace of cottages on Mill Road were laid out parallel to the road, within easy walking distance of both the railway line and Cambridge Station. Built around 1848, probably by the Eastern Counties Railway, the cottages later came under the management of the Great Eastern Railway (GER) and subsequently the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER), before being nationalised into British Railways in 1948. They remained in use as tied accommodation for railway workers until Cambridge City Council acquired the site in the 1960s. The former manned level crossing on Mill Road has since been replaced by a steep bridge, significantly altering the original view of these *flagship* cottages as experienced by passengers travelling into and out of the city. As Caro Wilson from the Mill Road History Project observes:

A company that could build such high-status housing for its employees was a company to take seriously. However, it has also been suggested that thereafter the company could not afford to build more accommodation for its workers; other railway housing in the area was instead provided by private developers.¹⁴

One such development was located just under two miles north of Mill Road, on the outskirts of the Cambridge suburb of Chesterton. At this point, the main line through Cambridge spans the River Cam via the Chesterton Railway Bridge, before crossing Fen Road and diverging: one route continues northwards towards Ely, while the other forms the St Ives branch line.¹⁵ This intersection of track created a triangle of land where railway cottages once stood, bounded by the river to the south, gravel pits, sidings and allotments, with the city's sewage works to the north. Despite accommodating railway workers and their families for over a century, the area known as Chesterton Junction is perhaps best remembered for the substantial Permanent Way Depot established in the 1960s, as well as for its popularity among railway enthusiasts.¹⁶ By 1964, Cyril Gotobed, the last signalman at Chesterton, recorded that as many as 160 trains

¹³ Wilson, C. (2016). *124-134 Mill Road, Cambridge*. [online] *Mill Road History Project*. Available at: https://capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/124-134_Mill_RoadCottages-3rd_edition-2016-01-31.pdf.

¹⁴ Wilson, C. (2016). *124-134 Mill Road, Cambridge*. [online] *Mill Road History Project*. Available at: <https://capturingcambridge.org>

¹⁵ Kirby, T. *Chesterton Junction/Cambridge North*. [online]

¹⁶ Kenworthy, G. and Adderson, R.J. (2005). *Cambridge to Ely*. Middleton Press (MD).

passed the signal box within a 24-hour period.¹⁷ The site offered a rare vantage point from which to observe successive generations of passing engines—from steam locomotives to the emergence of diesel power—within the wider railway landscape of Cambridge, and now forms part of the Cambridge Museum of Technology’s *Railway Trail*, which traces the city’s rail heritage from Cambridge North to Cambridge Station.¹⁸

The area is well known for its significance as a railway hub and now forms the southernmost extent of the Cambridge North Station development. However, its social history—particularly the lives of its workers—has arguably been overlooked. Despite reference to the detailed account provided by Kenworthy and Adderson in *Cambridge to Ely*, sources such as Wikipedia make no mention of the ‘cottages and buildings dating back to the early days of the railway.’¹⁹ Similarly, preparatory archaeological studies undertaken ahead of the Cambridge North development describe the area immediately north of the junction primarily in terms of ‘railway buildings and signal posts.’²⁰ Features including the well and pumping station directly at the back of the cottages are referenced, but the houses themselves and potential site of the original Chesterton Station built circa 1850 are curiously omitted.

Chesterton Junction was the site of the short-lived Chesterton Station, which opened in 1850 and allowed passengers to request disembarkation before the railway crossed the River Cam.²¹ Timetables advertising this stop-on-request service ended that same year; however, evidence suggests the station remained open for a number of years to accommodate the movement of goods, rather than people. In October 1853, for example, the following announcement was made in relation to the Fair held across the river on Stourbridge Common:

There was a plentiful supply of onions, and during the morning a railway train stopped at the Chesterton Station for the accommodating of the sellers, and delivered as many sacks of onions as filled two large wagons.²²

According to an Eastern Counties Railway notice dated January 1850, Chesterton station was situated at ‘the Junction of the St. Ives branch with the Main Line’, though no definitive map or surviving evidence confirms its exact location and the buildings themselves have long since

¹⁷ Gotobed, C. (1984). Conversation with Colin Moule. *Saffron Walden Weekly*. 25 Oct.

¹⁸ Trail, R. (2019). *Cambridge Museum of Technology*. [online] Cambridge Museum of Technology. Available at: <https://www.museumoftechnology.com/railway-trail>.

¹⁹ Kenworthy, G. and Adderson, R.J. (2005). *Cambridge to Ely*. Middleton Press (MD).

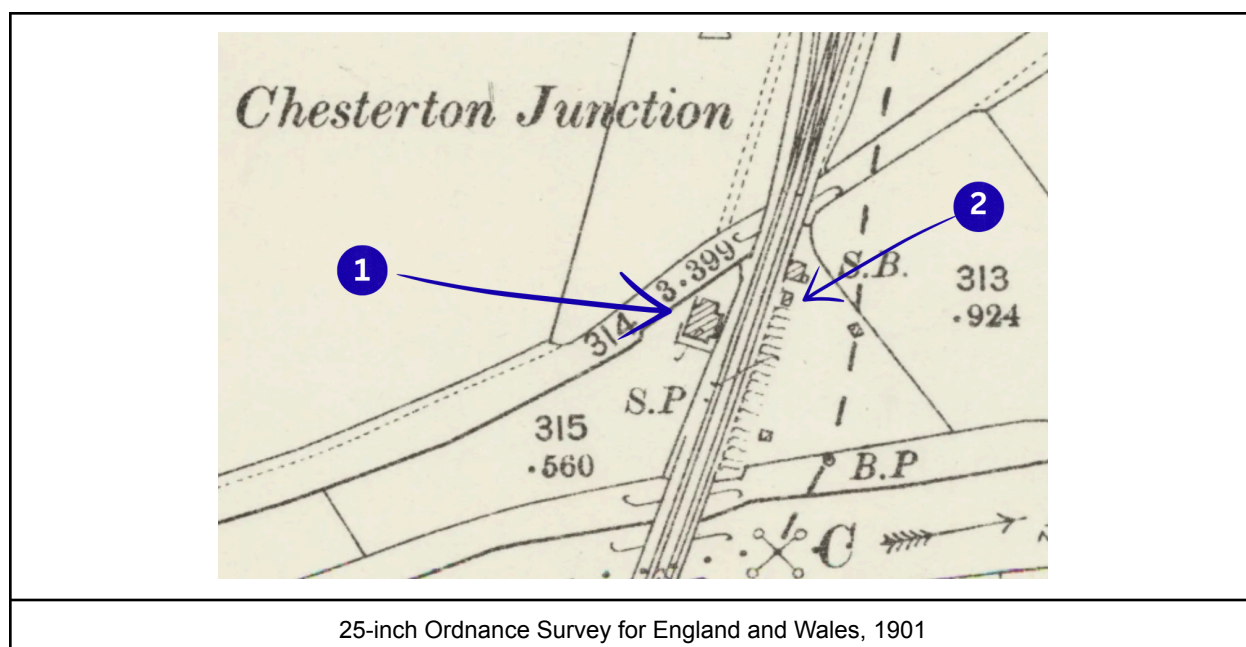
²⁰ Clover, K. (2012). *Client: Cambridgeshire County Council Chesterton Station Desk-Based Assessment*. Oxford Archaeology East.

²¹ Kenworthy, G. and Adderson, R.J. (2005). *Cambridge to Ely*. Middleton Press (MD)

²² Editorial (1853). Stourbridge Fair. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 1 Oct.

disappeared.²³ The station stood within the parliamentary boundary for Cambridge, either directly on Fen Road or alongside the railway cottages in the apex triangle between the tracks. Based on the following evidence, a single-storey building on the river-side of Fen Road appears the most likely candidate, since the footpath providing safe access from the land between the tracks to Fen Road was not built until some twenty years after the station closed.

The England and Wales Ordnance Survey maps published in 1886, 1904 and 1927, show three structures beside the tracks on Fen Road: A large building between the road and the tracks (1), the first signal box on the opposite side of the line (marked S.B, built circa 1870), with a smaller structure to the rear (2).²⁴

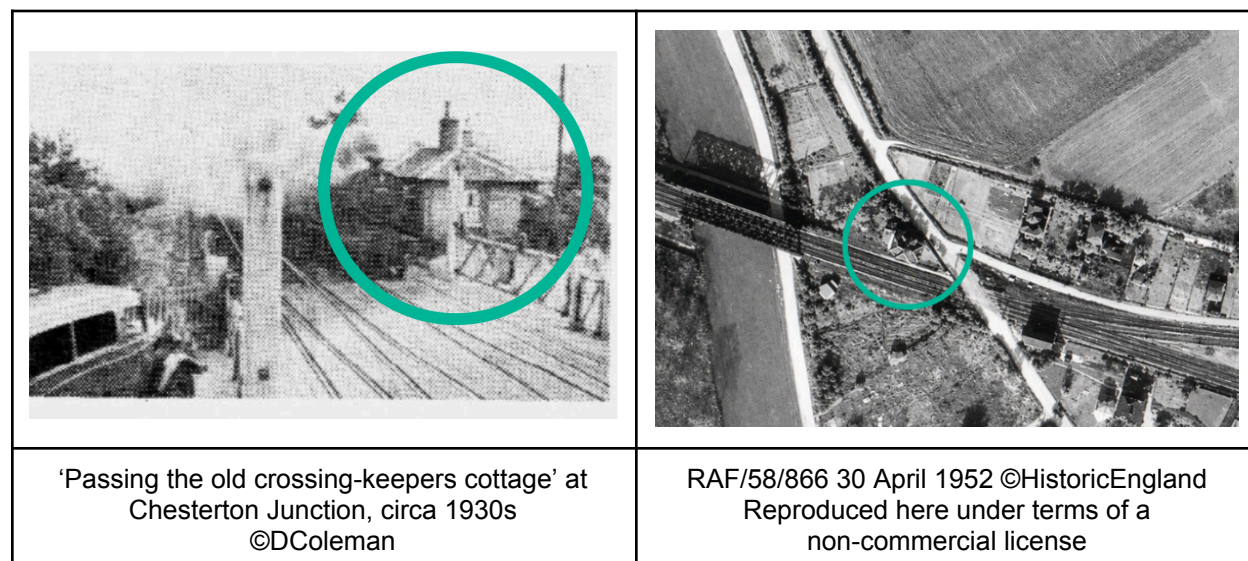


Building (1) is situated on the side of the junction where the main line diverges to form the St Ives branch line, and appears particularly well positioned to serve as a small rural railway station. Located on the Chesterton side of both the railway tracks and the level crossing, cartographic evidence further indicates the presence of an elongated, widened path running adjacent to the line, providing access to Fen Road. The smaller structure (2), positioned behind the signal box, may have been a platelayers' hut—a temporary shelter used by railway workers engaged in track maintenance. Both sides of the track would therefore have been accessible for passengers alighting at Chesterton - clearly a safer option than between the tracks further north.

²³ Eastern Counties Railway (1850). Timetable Notice. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 19 Jan.

²⁴ Gersociety.org.uk. (2020a). *MN011 Great Eastern Railway Permanent Way and Works Committee Meeting Minutes 1862-1879*. 16 February 1870

Building (1) is visible in the two photographs reproduced below, both of which post-date the relocation of the signal box to the opposite side of Fen Road in March 1931.²⁵ The structure, which appears to be single-storey and distinguished by a prominent lead-lined hipped roof, is also discernible in aerial photographs taken by the Royal Air Force in 1952.



Sawston resident Mr Keith Clarke, who worked at Barnwell Junction (preceding Chesterton Junction on the other side of the Cam) as a lad-porter in the 1940s, recalled a 'crossing-keepers cottage' by the level crossing:

The crossing-keepers cottage near the gates was occupied by Mr Sid Barker, also a signalman whose son was an engine driver at Cambridge. At **the Fort** in the middle of the junction were also cottages occupied by railwayman Mr Sid Vail, Freddie Bowman and a Mr Pauley who were all platelayers from the engineers department.²⁶

Mr Sidney Barker is recorded in the 1927 electoral roll as residing at 'The Bungalow, Chesterton Junction', confirming the presence of a single-storey dwelling. Census data indicates that this property was situated on Fen Road, and recorded separately from cottages built on the apex of land between the tracks - known locally, according to Mr Clarke, as 'The Fort.' If this was the site of the original Chesterton Station, and was subsequently adapted to house signalmen, its later identification as a 'crossing-keeper's cottage' is perhaps unsurprising. This would reflect both the site's extremely short-lived function as a station and the combined responsibilities of its occupants, who would have operated the gates to the level crossing from the signal box.²⁷ The

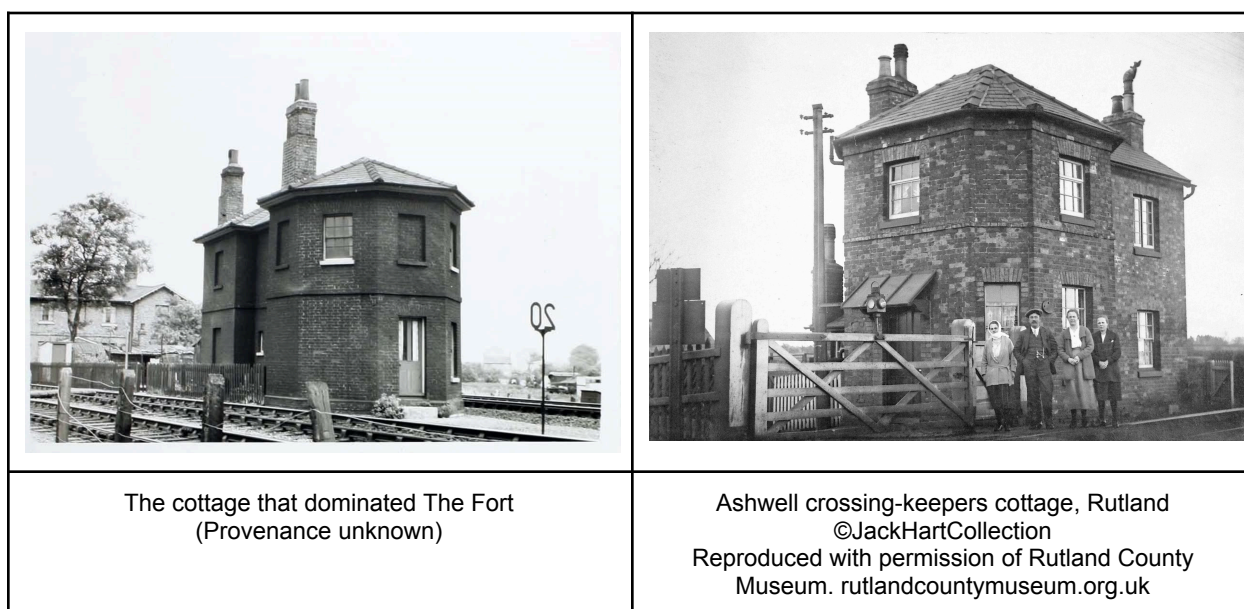
²⁵ Deaves, P. (2025). *Signal Box Prefix codes, C*. [online] Railwaycodes.org.uk.

²⁶ Clarke, K. (1985). The Lamp Oil Run. *Saffron Walden Weekly*. 23 May.

²⁷ Hall, S. and Van Der Mark, P. (2008). *Level Crossings: The history, development and safety record of railway level crossings in Britain and Overseas from 1830 to 2008*. Ian Allen Publishing.

former station building at Cherry Hinton for example, also constructed by the Eastern Counties Railway in the early 1850s and which closed around the same time as Chesterton Station, is still known locally as the 'Gate House' and which served as residence of the crossing-keeper.²⁸

The building that dominated The Fort, situated at the pinnacle of the triangle of land between the branching railway tracks, is perhaps the most photographed feature of the original railway cottages. This imposing structure with its distinctive faceted-facade was likely constructed by Eastern Counties Railway in the 1850s, and shares the same ridged hip-roof design as the crossing-keepers cottage on the Fen Road opposite. The building design is remarkably similar to other crossing-keepers cottages of the period, including the example at Ashwell Junction (on the east side of the Syston and Peterborough railway) shown below.²⁹



Behind this building stood two terraces that housed platelayers and their families. The 1886 and 1901 Ordnance Survey maps show two lines of housing separated by a footpath that ran between enclosed courtyards, and led to a gate that carried residents across the tracks and onto the footpath down to Fen Road. It was this particular set of railway cottages that became known as Chesterton Junction or simply, *The Junction*. These were not 'railway buildings,' but rather homes provided by the company as tied accommodation for up to eight railway workers and their families between 1850 and 1966.³⁰

The 1851 and 1861 census records eight cottages 'On the Fen' (Fen Road), occupied by 'railway servants,' platelayers, a pointsman and two signalmen. By 1871 the eight households

²⁸ Wikipedia Contributors (n.d.). *Cherry Hinton Railway Station*.

²⁹ Reproduced with the kind permission of Rutland County Museum <https://rutlandcountymuseum.org.uk/>

³⁰ Clover, K. (2012). *Client: Cambridgeshire County Council Chesterton Station Desk-Based Assessment*.

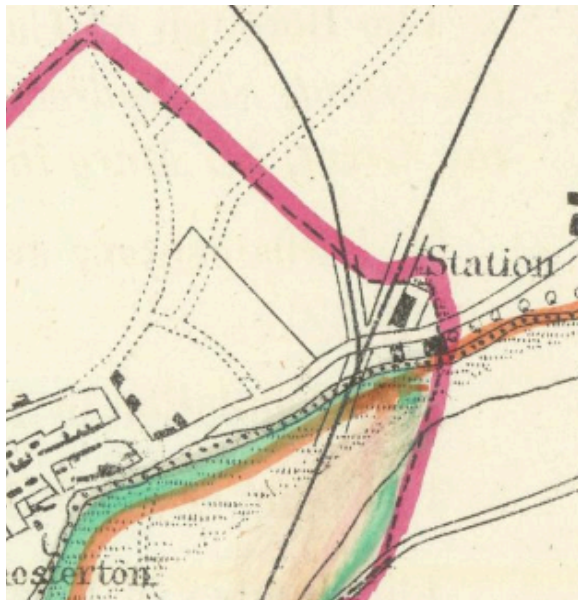
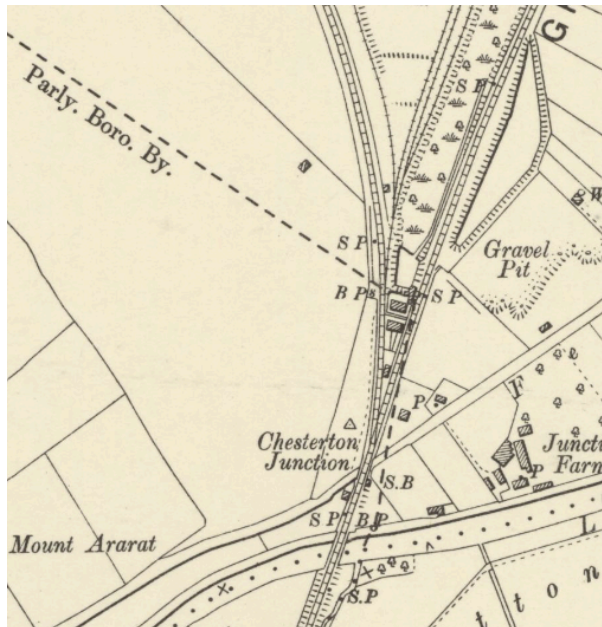
formed a distinct community of railway cottages, grouped on the enumerators schedule as 'all the houses on the Railway Junction.'³¹ Twelve year old George Rickwood appears on the 1871 census alongside his father Thomas and mother Eliza.

1871 Census

	Railway Cottages		
1	Fen Road	John Tyrell (40) Emma Tyrell (37) Harry Tyrell (11) Frederick Tyrell (8) William Tyrell (7) Phoebe Tyrell (5) Sarah Ann Tyrell (3) Annie M Tyrell (1)	Pointsman for GER
2	Fen Road	David Middleton (34) Jane Middleton (35) Martha Middleton (11)	Railway Platelayer
3	Fen Road	Thomas Rickwood (38) Eliza Rickwood (37) George Rickwood (12) Henry Rickwood (10) Thomas Rickwood (7)	Railway Platelayer
4	Fen Road	Robert Mansfield (58) Mary Mansfield (54)	Railway Platelayer
5	Fen Road	William Middleton (51) Susan Middleton (47)	Railway Platelayer
6	Fen Road	Thomas Rivett (50) Susan Rivett (46) Clara Rivett (10) Esther Boardman (Infant) William Turner (36)	Railway Labourer Engine Driver
7	Fen Road	Henry Flack (26) Violet Maria Flack (5) Maria Firk (59)	Railway Signalman
8	Fen Road	Israel Utteridge (28) Mary Ann Utteridge (33) Emily Utteridge (7) Alice Utteridge (4) William Utteridge (3)	Railway Signalman

³¹ The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1871 England Census; Class: RG10; Piece: 1582; Folio: 41; Page: 3; GSU roll: 829805

In 1868, the parliamentary boundary for the Borough of Cambridge was extended to incorporate both New Chesterton and Chesterton Village, then on the northern outskirts of the City of Cambridge. The revised boundary defined the most easterly point as the ‘northern fence of Chesterton-road Station’ (sic), south towards the Cam and east of the house ‘in the occupation of John Larkins.’³² The map showing the changes contains a number of errors, but clearly intended to show that the station building and railway cottages were to be incorporated within the new parliamentary borough. The 1886 and 1901 Ordnance Survey maps, however, offer a more precise representation, showing the boundary line running almost flush with the railway tracks. This would appear to discount the possibility of the station building lying to the east of the railway line.

	
<p>Parliamentary Boundary Revision Map (1868) The red line represents the new parliamentary boundary for the Borough of Cambridge</p>	<p>Ordnance Survey Map (1901)³³ The parliamentary boundary line is visible as a dashed line to the north and east of the tracks.</p>

The community of ‘Chesterton Junction’ appears for the first time in the 1881 census, a name that continued in official use, including the electoral rolls, until as late as 1966. The Junction was now home to a community of twenty-six inhabitants (eight houses), with neighbours, the Utteridges — Israel, his wife Mary Ann, and their son William, a short distance away on the other side of the Fen Road. Of these twenty-six residents, only six were employed by the Great Eastern Railway Company. The Junction was in fact predominantly family members (77%), with

³² The Boundary Commissioners. (1868). *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, 28 Mar., p.1.

³³ Ordnance Survey Map for England and Wales (Rev 1901, pub 1904) National Library of Scotland, available online at <https://maps.nls.uk/view/101571859>

four women recorded simply as 'wives,' and one household headed by Mary Mansfield (widow of platelayer Robert Mansfield), who supported herself as a greengrocer. The remainder were the children of the platelayers and their wives, some already setting out in working life and eight under the age of sixteen.

The railway line and steam locomotives were quite clearly a constant presence in the lives of the children of The Fort. According to Driver Charles Maddocks, they were often seen 'outside the palings' or fence-line surrounding the cottages, watching the passing trains perhaps with a mixture of curiosity and caution.³⁴ In a letter to the *Cambridge Weekly News* in 1989, Mrs H. E. Smith of Windsor Road, Cambridge, vividly recalled her childhood memories of staying in The Junction railway cottages:

I recognise the house which stood in the fork of two railway lines at Chesterton Junction, pictured on January 26th. There were more houses behind it where my grandparents lived, as my grandfather was a platelayer. I stayed there as a child but was terrified when the trains came hurtling by and got under the bed clothes when I heard a train coming.³⁵

A resident of the Fen Estate on Fen Road, Chesterton, Mr Gavin Moulton, shared similar information provided by a former neighbour who has since passed:

She remembered as a very young girl going to visit the people in the end house. She felt very scared being in the living room with the bay window looking out to the railway tracks as it felt like the train coming from the Cambridge direction was going to go right into the house.³⁶

Mrs H. E. Smith goes onto to explain what life was like for residents of this small community, including how they kept their washing free from soot:

On the other side of the line, now part of Fen Estate, railwaymen had allotments. My grandmother hung her washing out in a field there called 'The Meadow.'

Mr Tom Franklin also mentioned the allotments in his account of visiting the junction as a small boy, delivering tea and sandwiches to a Mr Albert Hickman, who worked in the 'old steam pumphouse:'

³⁴ News Editor (1885b). Shocking Death of a Child. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 2 May.

³⁵ Editorial (1989). Track Terror. *Cambridge Weekly News*. 9 Feb.

³⁶ Moulton, G. (2025). *Chesterton Junction*. *Cambridge History Then and Now - Facebook Group*. 9 Oct.

All those railwaymen who lived on the junction had a piece of allotment where the back of the gardens are in Long Reach Road. It was all railway owned land in those days.³⁷

The steam-powered pumphouse, located behind the railway cottages, drew water from boreholes close to the gravel pits (also used to supply ballast to the track bed) and fed it directly to Cambridge station for tenders and locomotive tanks.³⁸ At a meeting of the GER Way and Works Committee in 1902 for example, a payment of £250 was authorised for the lowering of the bore tube to increase the output of the water supply feeding Cambridge Station.³⁹ The pumping station was also recalled by Mr Bill Last, who visited the junction as a young man and was 'fascinated by the steam pumps' situated behind the houses.⁴⁰ The high-water table meant that locals were able to ice skate on the gravel during frozen winters but had persistent issues with sewage polluting the drinking water.⁴¹ Notices from the Public Health Committee in the local press confirmed that these wells were contaminated with sewage, and by 1909 the council recommended that residents be provided with a 'pure supply' via Cambridge Waterworks.⁴²

On the opposite side of the junction houses, where allotments and meadows once served local residents, a footpath is shown on the 25-inch 1886, 1904, and 1927 OS maps, allowing safe passage to Fen Road after crossing the St Ives line. Dan Jackson, writing for the Cambridge Weekly News feature 'Down your street' in 1989, also noted a footpath that went past a one-story house towards the cottages across the lines:

There is still a crossing-keeper's bungalow. A footpath runs past it across the lines. This once led to a terrace of platelayers cottages, long gone.⁴³

The footpath Mr Jackson refers to, which is visible on the 1904 OS map, was added after Susan Middleton (née Gray), wife of platelayer William Middleton and resident at Chesterton Junction, was struck by a train and killed on November 29th 1873:

William Middleton, husband of the deceased, said he saw his wife when she left to go to Chesterton. At about six o' clock he went down the line and about forty yards from the junction gates noticed something lying on the line. He first noticed his wife's basket and

³⁷ Franklin, T. (1985). *Boyhood Days at the Junction*. Saffron Walden Weekly.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Gersociety.org.uk. (2020b). *MN012 Great Eastern Railway Permanent Way and Works Committee Meeting Minutes 1880-1922*. 18 Mar 1902

⁴⁰ Last, B. (1984). Locked inside a Boiler. *Saffron Walden Weekly*. 1 Nov.

⁴¹ Editorial (1858). Chesterton - Skating. *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*. 27 Nov.

⁴² Editorial (1909). Polluted Wells. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 6 Aug.

⁴³ Dan, J. (1989). Thousands watch the new rail bridge arrive. *Cambridge Weekly News*. 26 Jan.

next saw the deceased lying in the grip... He called for help, and the pointsman came and she was carried home. She died on Tuesday morning.⁴⁴

At the inquest, William Middleton stated 'there is no path to the house except down by the railway. There are eight tenements, and about 26 inhabitants.' The coroner gave a verdict of 'accidental death' but in summing up stated the following recommendation on behalf of the jury:

Considering the cottages are in a dangerous position, (the jury) recommended that this being the fourth accident which had occurred at that point, the company should make a path directly across the rail to the road, so that persons passing from the houses should have no necessity for walking up the line.⁴⁵

The GER company took action, and on 14 January 1874 the Way and Works Committee authorised expenditure of £50 for the construction of a footpath leading from the cottages to Fenn Road. The lack of footpath prior to his date also confirms the station building was not on the apex of land between the tracks, since passengers would otherwise have had no safe route to and from the building.

Susan Middleton was not a paying passenger or employed by the GER, but sustained a fatal injury because she was obliged to walk along the track, having no safe alternative. Alongside the other wives and children at Chesterton Junction, Susan Middleton was effectively required to shoulder the same risks as platelayers and other labourers working on the line, in order to perform simple daily tasks outside the home.

The UK parliament would eventually acknowledge that regular, close proximity to moving locomotives made the work of crossing-keepers, shunters, and platelayers 'by far the most dangerous trade in the country.'⁴⁶ The residents — around three-quarters of whom were not employed by the railway company — not only shared that close proximity to moving locomotives, but were also required to cross the railway tracks in order to access their homes and carry out everyday activities. In these circumstances, their presence on or beside the line could not reasonably be regarded as trespass. A footpath was added as a direct result of Susan Middleton's death, but this would not be the last time a coroner drew attention to the 'dangerous position' of the Chesterton Junction railway cottages.

⁴⁴ Editorial (1873). Railway Accident. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 3 Dec.

⁴⁵ Editorial (1873) Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hansard (1900). *Railways (Prevention Of Accidents) Bill, Volume 84*. Parliament.uk.



The Junction Houses, circa 1950 ©TransportTreasury

Barnwell to Chesterton Junction: A stretch of line 'notorious for fatalities'

Residents ate and slept behind walls bound on either side by railway tracks, and where multiple risk factors combined within a confined area. The mainline from Cambridge for example, diverged directly in front of the railway cottages, and where points enabled trains to enter a curve in the line as they moved onto different tracks. This created a critical zone of track geometry, and compared to straight miles of railway track, increased the risk of derailment. The momentum caused by changing tracks at Chesterton Junction for example, caused on one occasion, a guard to fall out of the brake van to his death as he waved at the signalman on duty.⁴⁷

In 1850 two trains—one from St Ives and the other from Ely—collided directly in front of the railway cottages, resulting in what was described as a 'tremendous crash' that caused six wagons to pass beyond the level crossing and descend the embankment towards the river. In 1855 another derailment occurred, causing damage to the wagons and likely concern from residents that a train may one day breach their walls.⁴⁸ In 1875 such an incident did in fact occur when a derailment sent wagons directly through one of the houses at The Junction, causing a 'complete breach' of the outer wall whilst the family slept upstairs:

A Midland goods train from Cambridge to Huntingdon in passing over the points on to the branch line ran off the rails. The coupling broke, and the engine crossed the main line and ran down an embankment in the direction of some cottages close by. The tender was thrown over on the opposite side of the line in a battered condition, whilst the goods wagon dashing straight forward, ran into the front of the house erected within the **angle of the junction**, occupied by an engine driver named Gates, who was, with his wife and family in bed.⁴⁹

In 1880, an excursion train from Great Yarmouth was stationary at the junction when it was struck by a train operated by the Midland Railway coming from Huntingdon. The collision was forceful enough to knock the excursion train off the line, severely damaging the engine and causing the passengers to be 'considerably shaken.'⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Editorial (1860). Fatal Accident. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 29 Dec.

⁴⁸ Editorial (1855). Accident on Railway. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 19 May.

⁴⁹ Editorial (1875). Railway Accident. *Cambridge Independent Press*. Apr.

⁵⁰ News Editor (1880). Collision at Chesterton Junction. *Cornish and Devon Post*. 9 Oct.

This was an area where trains converged, from the branch lines or the up and down on the mainline, and those moving about the tracks had to be especially cautious that having spotted one train, they didn't move into the path of another. This was a recurrent error revealed by the Railway Inspectorate records dated 1900 to 1939, where even a 'glancing blow' was enough to lead to serious injury or death.⁵¹ As a result, many railway workers were struck from behind having misjudged the direction or source of the danger. Residents at Chesterton Junction, for example, may have been unsure of the source of the whistles and engine noise as trains approached the signalbox. What is certain however, is that an approaching locomotive is entirely unforgiving to the human body, irrespective of speed. Unlike motor cars for example, trains cannot deviate from their path to avoid obstacles and yield via crumple zones, but require substantial braking distances to reduce speed and come to a complete stop. Today, Overhead Line Equipment (OLE) supplies electricity to many trains, carrying up to 25,000 volts. Organisations such as Network Rail acknowledge that effective safety strategies depend on engaging with communities 'living and working alongside the railway' in order to communicate the potential risks.⁵² However, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, passenger safety was paramount, not least because of the need to maintain public confidence in railway companies. Railway workers were issued with booklets outlining company rules and regulations, whereas members of the public crossing the track effectively did so at their own risk and were expected to be responsible for their own safety.⁵³ In fact it wasn't until 1900 that the Board of Trade were permitted to investigate accidents involving railway staff, which by 1913 numbered nearly 30,000 cases.⁵⁴

Accidents were by no means uncommon at Chesterton Junction, which by 1900 had already acquired a reputation for danger and death. In testimony given after her husband's death, a local widow recalled that he had indicated an intention to take his own life, stating that he might be found at 'Chesterton Junction, then the brook, then other places.'⁵⁵ At the turn of the century, journalistic accounts also became increasingly graphic, describing the 'shocking spectacle' encountered by platelayers who were forced to recover dismembered human remains along the line between Barnwell and Chesterton Junction:

⁵¹ Details of railway worker accidents from the 'Railway Work, Life & Death' project, run by the University of Portsmouth, National Railway Museum and Modern Records Centre: railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk

⁵² Network Rail. (2024). *Always On - Network Rail*. [online] Available at: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/who-we-are/safety-in-the-community/railway-safety-campaigns/always-on/>.

⁵³ Railway Museum (n.d.). *Caution! Railway safety since 1913*. [online] National Railway Museum. Available at: <https://www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/caution-railway-safety-1913>.

⁵⁴ Esbester, M. (2022). *Guest Blog: 'The Dark Side of Railway Work' by Dr Mike Esbester*. [online] The British Newspaper Archive Blog | Amazing finds and news from over 300 years of historical newspapers. Available: <https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2022/08/11/railway-accidents-mike-esbester/>.

⁵⁵ News Editor (1882). *Supposed Suicide*. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 2 Apr.

Few spots in and around Cambridge have become more notorious for the number of fatalities which they yield than the vicinity of Barnwell Junction and the short stretch of line between that point and the level crossing on the Chesterton side of the railway bridge which spans the Cam.⁵⁶

It was the platelayers who made these gruesome discoveries, often within yards of their homes and families. The dangers were readily apparent to residents; at the inquest into his daughter's death, George Rickman freely admitted that he considered the junction a 'dangerous place for children,' adding that his wife, Rhoda, had 'complained of the place' for this reason.⁵⁷ It is therefore hardly surprising that, even as late as the 1950s, shortly before families were relocated to make way for the new Permanent Way Depot, accounts of life at the junction continued to reflect similar concerns - particularly about gates and fencing.

In the 1950s, David Hill lived at Chesterton Junction with his brothers, Steven and Raymond; their father, a GER fireman, was among the last railway workers to reside there. In conversation with brother Steven, David recalled the following about living in the middle house between two other buildings with 'tracks on both sides.'

My earliest memory was when a train derailed and came through the front door... I was nearly killed when the painters were painting the new fence and left the gate open, and I walked across the rail crossing. I can remember quite a lot about the house, I think I was about 4 years old when we moved to Coldhams Lane.⁵⁸

From the earliest days of the railways, acts of parliament required companies to provide line-side fencing (in order to prevent trespassers and cattle wandering onto the tracks), and gated crossings for roads that were to be manned by 'good and proper persons.'⁵⁹ From the photographs of the Junction taken in the 1950s, later residents at Chesterton Junction benefited from quite low, but tightly knitted wooden picket fencing as opposed to the taller and further spaced timber pale posts strung with wire common along the trackside.

⁵⁶ News Editor (1901). Last Night - A Shocking Spectacle . *Cambridge Daily News*. 29 Jan.

⁵⁷ News Editor (1885b). Shocking Death of a Child. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 2 May.

⁵⁸ Hill, D. (2025). *Chesterton Junction*. Oct. Statement provided by Mr Steven Hill on behalf of the Hill Family.

⁵⁹ UK Parliament (n.d.). *Highway (Railway Crossings) Act 1839*. [online] Legislation.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/2-3/45/section/1>.



In his testimony at the inquest into the death of Rose Rickwood, signalman Israel Utteridge described the fencing around the Junction houses, noting in particular a ‘swinging’ wicket gate through which Rose left the compound and crossed the tracks unattended. In March 1885, a month before Rose was fatally struck, resident Mary Mansfield was the victim of a burglary and described securing two house doors and a garden gate in her testimony to police.⁶⁰ This suggests a layout in which each cottage had its own gated yard as well as the gate leading onto the tracks. The perpetrator was able to open both doors and leave the courtyard gate open, indicating that these barriers were simple and easily operated rather than secure. In fact, the apparent ease with which the gates onto the track could be opened and closed, including by children, suggests they were lightweight, manually operated, and not designed with safety control as a priority, but rather to ensure fair and convenient access. There is no evidence of self-closing mechanisms or any form of locking system that would reliably prevent access, nor is it likely that the gates would have been controlled from the signal box, given the distance involved and the irregular timing of crossings. As a result, the boundary between the cottages and the railway line was effectively unrestricted. Residents, in particular non-GER employees—including children—would have had relatively easy and routine access to the tracks, with safety depending more on habit and awareness than on any physical or mechanical safeguards.

The ‘meadow’ used by residents for drying clothes, alongside the allotment beyond the railway tracks, formed part of their daily routines, making it a familiar and inviting space—particularly for children, for whom it would have held a natural and tempting appeal. Early maps also show that the area around the railway cottages was already an active industrial site, with a large gravel pit, pumping station, and railway sidings, long before its development as a maintenance hub in the 1960s. In 1897, for example, 21-year-old GER labourer Ernest Matthews was killed just yards

⁶⁰ News Editor (1885). Burglary at Chesterton Junction. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 21 Mar.

from the Junction railway cottages when a collapse in one of the gravel pits pinned him against a ballast wagon.

Childhood curiosity, combined with an over-familiarity with a dangerous work environment carried the potential for accidents involving children who lived adjacent to the railway tracks. For example, in 1857, toddler Frederick Harris, the son of a 'gate-keeper' living in railway cottages bordering Woodcroft Crossing in Etton, was 'accidentally killed by a railway engine' after finding his way through a garden fence and onto the tracks.⁶¹ Similarly, in 1907 at Cherry Hinton, GER signalman Charles Henry Challis watched in horror as his two sons, aged three and five, gained access to the track from their adjacent home, and, despite the driver braking hard, the younger child was killed.⁶² For the nine children living at the Junction in 1885, the sights and sounds of the railway would have been part of their childhood story; the sound of engines roaring past, a backing track to their earliest memories. Crossing the line was part of their daily lives, including visiting gardens and allotments on the opposite side of the tracks. The air would have smelt and tasted of soot, the whistle of approaching engines reason to pause in wonder as the windows rattled with each passing train. For children five years and under growing up in this environment, 'straying' onto the line from adjacent railway cottages was sadly all too common - and Rose Rickwood's story is far from unique.

⁶¹ Michell, S. (2022). *Death on the Railway in Victorian Peterborough*. [online] Railway Work, Life & Death Project. Available at: <https://www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk/death-on-the-railway-in-victorian-peterborough/>.

⁶² News Editor (1907). Signalman's Sad Story. *Cambridge Daily News*. 5 Jan.

In focus: Railway accidents involving children from railway cottages

The following twenty cases focus specifically on accidents involving children (aged 16 and under) residing in railway cottages between 1857 and 1968, and reveal consistent patterns of environmental risk, infrastructural inadequacy, and limited child-specific safety measures. Although geographically dispersed, the incidents demonstrate striking regularities in both circumstance and causation.

This dataset has been compiled from regional and national newspaper reports and evaluation based on qualitative research techniques.⁶³ It is therefore important to reflect on the relevant methodological limitations of using this specific dataset.⁶⁴ Newspapers are more likely to report incidents that were particularly dramatic or tragic, such as fatalities or severe injuries involving mutilation. Consequently, the sample is inherently skewed toward the most serious outcomes, while less severe accidents, near misses, or routine trespass incidents are likely underrepresented or entirely absent. The findings presented here should therefore be understood not as a comprehensive record of all child–railway interactions, but as a partial reflection shaped by contemporary news values and editorial priorities.

A further limitation arises from the use of digital archival tools and AI-assisted searching in compiling the dataset. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) errors within digitised newspaper collections can obscure relevant articles, particularly where print quality is poor or typography irregular.⁶⁵ In addition, reliance on specific search terms (e.g., ‘railway cottages’ ‘child’ ‘ railway accident’) inevitably constrains results, as relevant incidents may be described using alternative or less predictable language that evades retrieval. The dataset is therefore shaped not only by historical reporting practices but also by the limitations of modern search technologies. Finally, practical constraints on research time mean that archival coverage cannot be exhaustive; the sample reflects a selective trawl rather than a complete survey of all the potentially relevant material. Together, these factors introduce an additional layer of incompleteness and potential bias into the evidence base.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (2014). *Qualitative Research Practice : a Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

⁶⁴ Kiyimba, N., Lester, J.N. and O’Reilly, M. (2018). Utilising Media and Text-Based Sources. *Using Naturally Occurring Data in Qualitative Health Research*, [online] pp.159–178. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7122163/>.

⁶⁵ The BNA (n.d.). *What is OCR text?* [online] British Newspaper Archive. Available at: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/help-faq/what-is-ocr-text>.

⁶⁶ Bell, J. (2005). *Doing Your Research Project : a Guide for first-time Researchers in education, Health and Social Science*. Maidenhead, England ; New York: Open University Press.

A dominant feature across the cases is the young age of victims. The majority of children were under five years old, with several under two. This highlights the vulnerability of toddlers who lacked both risk awareness and the physical or cognitive ability to heed warnings.

Contemporary commentary occasionally acknowledged this limitation, as evidenced by a 1934 coroner's remark that 'little children... cannot be expected to read notices,' underscoring the inadequacy of passive safety measures such as signage.

Spatial proximity between domestic space and railway infrastructure emerges as the principal risk factor. Railway cottages were frequently situated immediately adjacent to active lines, often separated only by low-quality fencing, gates, or, in some cases, no effective barrier at all. Multiple accounts describe children 'creeping through' fences, exploiting gaps, or accessing the line via wicket gates. Similar to the set up at Chesterton Junction, the design of the property at Barton-under-Needwood (1936), also necessitated crossing the tracks to access gardens, creating what was legally interpreted as 'implied permission' to be on the line. This blurring of domestic and industrial space - and the creation of proxy railway servants - fundamentally increased exposure to danger.

The circumstances leading to accidents were typically mundane and unintentional. Younger children often wandered from gardens or homes, sometimes while under partial supervision, as in cases where caregivers were occupied with domestic tasks. Others were motivated by ordinary childhood behaviour—chasing animals, playing near fences, or attempting to reach a parent at work (e.g., the 1907 Cherry Hinton case). Older children, though fewer in number, were more likely to be engaged in purposeful movement, such as walking along the line as a route home, or using railway spaces as informal play areas - again, in circumstances where adequate fencing and irregular warnings from railway staff was lacklustre at best.

Infrastructure deficiencies recur throughout the dataset. Poorly maintained footpaths (1879), inadequate fencing (1901, 1906, 1934, 1936), and unsafe access points contributed directly to several incidents. In some cases, responsibility was implicitly or explicitly attributed to railway authorities or property arrangements, suggesting an awareness—if not always an enforcement—of systemic safety failures. The persistence of similar accident types across more than a century indicates that such hazards were not effectively mitigated over time. This is further illustrated in the following chapter; no senior railway official or GER spokesperson attended the inquest into Rose Rickwood's death.

The 1936 incident involving five-year-old Betty Ratcliffe, who lived at No. 5 Railway Cottages in Barton-upon-Trent, East Staffordshire, offers valuable insight into the legal arguments advanced

by counsel on behalf of the family against the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMSR). Following an accident on nearby railway sidings in which Betty's arm was severed, counsel argued that gardens provided for residents by the railway company effectively 'invited' occupants, including children, to pass beyond the boundary and onto the tracks. On this basis, Betty could not reasonably be considered a trespasser. Mr Justice Hawke accepted this line of reasoning, directing the jury to consider whether the provision of gardens and similar features constituted an 'allurement'—a deliberate or negligent enticement that exposed children to danger. The jury ultimately found in favour of the Ratcliffe family, awarding £2,000 in damages (approximately £124,000 today).⁶⁷

Betty's father, Harry Ratcliffe, was employed as a roadman for the local county council and therefore may have felt less constrained in bringing a claim against a landlord, rather than an employer. By contrast, the family of John Vincent Morris—the child of an LMSR porter who lost a hand in the same incident—did not pursue legal action. While the reasons for this remain unclear, it is reasonable to infer that social and economic dependence on the railway company shaped the extent to which families felt able to challenge, and seek compensation for, injuries sustained within their domestic environment.

In conclusion, these cases collectively illustrate how the integration of worker housing within hazardous industrial environments created enduring risks for children. The combination of inadequate physical barriers, the normalisation of railway proximity in daily life, and reliance on behavioural rather than structural safeguards contributed to a pattern of preventable accidents. At the same time, the source base itself reminds us that historical understandings of risk are mediated through what was deemed reportable, emphasising tragedy while obscuring the more routine, and potentially more numerous, instances of everyday danger.

⁶⁷ Bank of England (2025). *Inflation Calculator*. [online] Bank of England. Available at: <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.

Newspaper reports of railway-related injuries and fatalities among children aged 16 and under residing in 'railway cottages' adjoining the tracks, 1850–1960:

Stamford Mercury, Friday 7 August 1857	Frederick Harris (16mths), Woodcroft Railway Cottages	Toddler struck by a train after 'straying' from his back garden onto the line.
Diss Express, Friday 14 February 1879	Eliza Daynes (13), visiting Spinks Lane, Railway Cottages	Due to a footpath not being in a 'proper state of repair', Eliza was forced to walk along the railway line away from the cottages, where she was subsequently struck by a train.
Cambridge Independent Press, Saturday 2 May 1885	Rose Rickwood (5), Railway Cottages, Chesterton Junction	Rose was killed just yards from her home, having crossed the line to visit the allotment gardens on the opposite side. Observed by the signalman, she had been playing on the swinging wicket gate and, as a train approached, wandered onto the line. She died from her injuries thirty minutes later.
South Wales Daily News, Thursday 4 May 1899	Ada Gleeson (2), Railway Cottages at Goole, Yorkshire	Ada lived with her parents at the Railway Cottages in Goole. She 'wandered on the railway and fell with her arms across the metals' (rails) and her arms were amputated by a passing train.
Willesdon Chronicle, Friday 15 November 1901	George William Thomas Monkley (7), 109 Railway Cottages, Willesden Junction	George was playing on newly laid sidings when he was knocked down and killed by an engine shunting on the line. Although his parents had warned him not to play on the railway, he had gained access through a hole in a nearby fence.
Salisbury Times, Friday 20 July 1906	Youngest child of Mr and Mrs C Warren (14mths), Railway Cottages, East of Grateley Station	The child was able to pass through a fence surrounding the railway cottages near the station, and was knocked down by an express train and killed instantly.
Cambridge Daily News, Thursday 3 January 1907	Edmund Challis (3), Railway Cottages next to the Cherryhinton Signalbox	Three-year-old Edmund 'crept through a fence' onto the line and was struck by a train as he made his way towards his father in the signal box. In the aftermath, his devastated father reproached himself for having previously welcomed his son into his place of work.
Gloucester Citizen, Friday 11 August 1911	Stanley Cyril Surman (18mths) Railway Cottage, Morris Hill Crossing, Swindon	Stanley had been playing with his mother in the garden and, although both gates were fastened, she briefly lost sight of him. It was only when a train came to a stop yards from their home that she realised something was wrong. The driver later reported seeing the child 'toddle out of the gate' and onto the line. Upon examining the crossing and the house, Inspector Lane discovered an eight-inch gap beneath the gate

		through which the child may have crawled.
Daily Citizen Manchester, Tuesday 8 April 1913	Daughter of Platelayner named White (2), Grekine Railway Cottages, Moffat	The child was struck and dragged 60 yards by a pilot engine, miraculously escaping with minor injuries.
Blyth News, Thursday 14 October 1920	Daughter of Railway Sub-Inspector, William McGlade (2), Railway Cottage close to the railway station	The child 'got on the line' in front of a train which amputated her foot: 'The child's home is one of the railway cottages which stand close to the line.'
Portsmouth Evening News, Thursday 21 January 1932	Frederick Charles Knight (5), Railway Cottage, Segensworth	Five-year-old Frederick wandered onto the line from his home while chasing a kitten and was struck by a goods train. He died at Royal Portsmouth Hospital.
Western Times, Friday 6 July 1934	Arthur Charles Preston (14mths), Railway Cottage, Colston Raleigh	Arthur was with his mother, who was washing in the garden, when he crawled through a fence and onto the railway line. In summing up, the coroner observed, 'I think there should be some better form of protection. Little children, after all, cannot be expected to read notices.'
Derby Daily Telegraph, Tuesday 7 July 1936	Betty Ratcliffe (5), 5 Railway Cottages, Barton-under-needw ood	Betty lived with her family beside the railway line, their home enclosed by a low, gapped fence and provided with a garden accessible only by crossing the tracks. Her arm was amputated by a wagon being shunted near the cottage, after which her parents brought a claim against the railway company for damages. The judge ruled in favour of the plaintiffs, holding that Betty had effectively been granted 'implied permission' to be on the line.
Shields Daily Gazette, Friday 16 October 1936	Paul Goodheart (2), Railway Cottages, Washington Station	Having 'strayed from home and wandered onto the railway into the path of a train', the child was only saved by the quick actions of the engine driver, who jumped from the cab and ran ahead, knocking the child down so that the train could pass over him. The child emerged shaken but unharmd.
Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencier, Thursday 13 April 1939	Daughter of J. R. Robinson, a railwayman (17mths old), of New Cut Cottages, near Malton.	The 17 month old 'strayed onto the line' just as a train was approaching and was seriously injured.

Northern Chronicle for North Scotland, Wednesday 22 July 1942	Raymond Dick (18mths), Railway Cottages	Obituary: 'The sympathy of the community is extended to Mr and Mrs James Dick, Railway Cottages, in the loss of their young son, Raymond Dick, aged 18 months, who died as a result of injuries received when he was crushed by a railway engine on the line behind the railway cottages.'
Falkirk Herald, Saturday 3 April 1943	John Malone (12), Railway Cottages, Carmuir East Junction	Twelve year old John Malone was walking on the line towards his home when he was struck from behind by a postal express train and killed.
Staffordshire Sentinel, Monday 21 September 1953	Christine Knapper (20mths old), of 3 Railway Cottages, Hardings Wood	The child lost her right arm and the fingers on her left hand after she 'strayed from her home—at the side of the railway—and was run over by a goods train'. Christine had been playing in the garden which bordered the line when she wandered through a wicket gate and onto the track.
The Scotsman, Monday 30 June 1958	Edwin Rodgers (3) of Railway Cottages, Dalment, West Lothian	Edwin's father was bathing two other children when three-year-old Edwin left the house and was killed instantly by a train on the tracks nearby. The family had moved into the house the Thursday before.
Wolverhampton Express & Star, Wednesday 22 May 1968	Spencer Davis (21mths), Railway Cottages, Stone, Kent	Spencer was able to crawl through a broken gate and onto the tracks beside his home. A police constable who inspected the gate found that it was damaged and could be pushed in either direction. In summing up, the coroner concluded, 'There is a great deal of responsibility on the part of the railway to see that reasonable precautions are taken.'

Four-year-old Rose Rickwood

Rose was born in 1881, just shy of the census. Her parents, George and Rhoda Rickwood, had married the previous year at St Lukes Church and, through George's employment as a platelayer for the GER, secured housing at Chesterton Junction alongside his parents, Thomas and Eliza—another example of the intergenerational nature of railway communities.⁶⁸

By the time of the next census in 1891, much had changed for the Rickwoods. George and Rhoda had welcomed a second child, Emily Rosetta, in 1883, but the family household had been altered more dramatically when George's father, Thomas Rickwood, was convicted of stealing sixteen-pounds of coal—valued at two pence—from his employer, forcing his parents to leave the junction, their home of at least fifteen years.⁶⁹

The year 1885 was also marked by the onset of a decade of harsh winters and cold springs, attributed to the global cooling that followed the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883. Yet the 27th of April 1885 may have offered a brief suggestion of warmth—a day when doors and windows were opened wide to let the house breathe. Four year old Rose Rickwood wandered outside, and was playing a couple of yards from her home when she was fatally struck by a passenger train. The Driver, Charles Maddocks told the inquest:

I saw a little girl standing by the fence by the houses. Outside the palings, I have often seen children standing. I never saw anything more of the child until after I was stopped by the signalman.⁷⁰

The Rickwoods neighbour who lived on the Fen Road, signalman Israel Utteridge, provided the following witness statement:

I lowered the signal for the train to pass. The train was running punctually to time. I saw the deceased about seven minutes to five: she was going up the road in the paddock, in the direction of home. I saw her cross the line by the handgate from the field to the back of the cottages, and she seemed to pass through. The train was then about three-quarters of a mile from the cottages. Deceased re-appeared at the gate, and was apparently swinging or playing with it. I called out to her, as she appeared outside the fence line: but not on the line. When the train was within fifty yards of the deceased, I

⁶⁸ Cambridgeshire Archives and Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Family History Society; Cambridgeshire, England; Church of England Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials; Reference: P40A/1/9

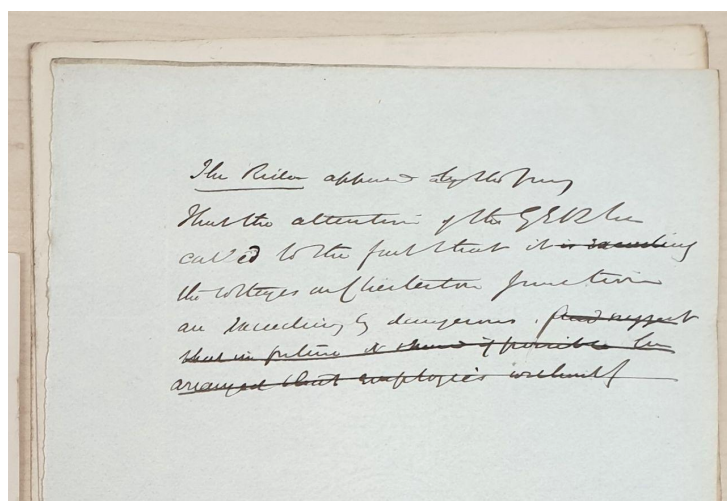
⁶⁹ News Editor (1885c). Stealing Coal. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 17 Jan.

⁷⁰ News Editor (1885b). Shocking Death of a Child. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 2 May.

saw her leave go of the gate she was playing with and go on the four-foot way. I cannot say whether she went forwards or backwards.⁷¹

Deputy Coroner John Bennett recorded a verdict of ‘accidental death’ appending a ‘rider’ or additional finding that in the opinion of the jury, Chesterton Junction was **‘an exceedingly dangerous place for cottages for human habitation to be.’**

The reply from the GER company officials in London, acknowledging receipt of the Deputy Coroner’s letter, is preserved at Cambridgeshire Archives, along with a list of jurors present to hear witness statements and deliver a verdict. Unlike other railway-related deaths—such as that of junction resident Susan Middleton in 1873, and the three-year-old son of signalman Charles Challis at Cherry Hinton in 1907—no representatives of the GER company attended the inquest. This is also alluded to in a scrap of paper included with the inquest documents, where a note was made of further actions, including that the ‘attention of the GER be called to the full’ and (crossed out) ‘in future if this is possible be arranged that employees be included’ - referring to the companies inspectors, since GER employees who witnessed the accident were in attendance.⁷²



The Rider appears by the jury
that the attention of the GER be
called to the full that it is exceedingly
the cottages in Chesterton Junction
are exceedingly & dangerous place for
human habitation to be in future if
this is possible be arranged that
employees be included

‘The Rider:’ Handwritten note made at the inquest into Rose Rickwood’s death in 1885
©FCMallen Document available at Cambridgeshire Archives, Ref: KCB/Co/1/P33/10

The train was reportedly travelling at approximately 15 miles per hour; however, even if the driver had seen Rose step into the path of the engine, he could not have slowed, swerved, or

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Cambridgeshire Archives, Inquests and Depositions: Rose Rickwood. Reference number: KCB/Co/1/P33/10

stopped in time. A typical GER engine of the period, even without wagons, weighed around 45 long tonnes; in practical terms, any collision with a person was likely to prove fatal, even that of a glancing blow. Four-year-old Rose Rickwood died of her injuries thirty minutes later, after being handed over 'struggling' to another railwayman, as signalman Israel Utteridge was duty bound to return to his post.

By 1891, there were five children living at Chesterton Junction, down from nine a decade earlier, following the departure of the two largest families: John and Emma Tyrell, and the widower James Belch with his three children, all under twelve years of age. The 1890s saw further tragedy for this small community of just eight households, including the deaths of William Stretton and James Rivett, who were both fatally struck by trains within a year of each other. In 1897, George Rickwood and Israel Utteridge witnessed the death of another colleague, this time nineteen-year-old assistant signalman John Cornwell, who had been working with Israel at Chesterton Junction for less than a month. Cornwell had been walking along the St Ives line to collect and light the signal lamps when he failed to hear the approach of a Midland train on the Cambridge mainline, and was fatally struck.⁷³

Perhaps the dangers of the railway, or the reminders of what happened to Rose were too much, but two years later, on May 18th 1899, thirty eight year old Rhoda Rickwood could no longer live at Chesterton Junction and was removed to Fulbourn Asylum. Within two days Rhoda was seen by the local Commissioner for Lunacy, Mr E Frere, and diagnosed with a '*mania*' that would see her committed for the next twenty years.⁷⁴

There may, of course, have been a number of reasons for this decline in mental health. Rhoda's case file offers few answers, and its brief, single-sentence summaries reveal little of her condition. She is described as an orderly, hard-working, and otherwise healthy patient who has a tendency to ramble and not answer questions fully when posed by staff. The entry for 1908 states Rhoda was much improved, noting 'really better and brighter than she was' hinting at what trauma she may have faced in light of her husband's death the year before - another railway related fatality. Rhoda was in fact not the first resident of Chesterton Junction to be admitted to Fulbourn following the death of a loved one on the railway line. Annie Stretton, widow of platelayer William Stretton, who was fatally struck by a train in 1892, spent her final years at Fulbourn, where she died in 1896 at the age of 52.

⁷³ News Editor (1897). Fatal Railway Accident near Cambridge. *Cambridge Daily News*. 1 May.

⁷⁴ Records of Fulbourn Hospital, *Patient Registers and Records: Case Files 1907-1955*. Cambridgeshire Archives reference KHf/3/1/7. Available by application to the NHS Record Controller.

The 'most dangerous trade' meets an 'exceedingly dangerous' place to live.

In 1893, James Rivett, a 73-year-old platelayer who had lived at the junction for nearly thirty years, was struck by a train while working on the line near Barnwell Junction. The accident was witnessed by Isaac Edwards, a neighbour and work colleague of more than fifteen years, who had warned Rivett of the approaching train, which whistled at least three times. The jury returned a verdict at the inquest of 'accidental death' but thought it a 'great age' for a man to be engaged as a platelayer. In answer to this, District Inspector for the GER company, Mr Henry Watson, stated that Rivett was an active man 'more so than some men were at forty years of age.'⁷⁵

For residents of Chesterton Junction, such a comment may have seemed in poor taste. Only six months earlier, thirty-eight-year-old platelayer William Stretton had been knocked down by a train. He and his wife Annie lived in what the press called the 'round house', perhaps referring to the cottage with the faceted façade at the front of The Fort. His body was discovered by George Rickwood, who had last seen Stretton heading into the centre of Cambridge after work. At the inquest, Mr Henry Watson, argued that Stretton was off duty and therefore trespassing on the line as he walked home from Cambridge via Newmarket Road and onto the tracks towards Chesterton Junction. Watson admitted residents did this on occasion, and that he had 'cautioned some of them.'⁷⁶

The coroner, recording a verdict of 'accidental death,' observed that it was up to the Great Eastern Railway whether they wished to 'absolutely prohibit' residents from walking home along the line to Chesterton Junction—implying that, at the time, no such direct nor absolute prohibition took place. There are two key factors that may explain this. Firstly, the railway cottages at Chesterton Junction were deliberately sited to allow residents direct access to the working route. This meant platelayers could check and maintain the line both north and south of their homes, and therefore set where they started and ended each working day. For Stretton, having not gone straight home after work, he chose the most direct and accessible route, given that his home was outside of a normal populated area for the benefit of the company. Second, the 1889 edition of the Rules and Regulations issued to all GER company employees did not distinguish between employees and trespassers, instead it suggested trespassers in the truest

⁷⁵ News Editor (1893). Shocking Fatal Accident near Barnwell Junction. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 13 Jan.

⁷⁶ News Editor (1892). killed on the Railway at Cambridge. *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*. 26 Aug.

sense can only be those who do not work for the company. It is also worth noting that this point was in fact changed and made clearer in the 1915 reprint.

Both the 1889 and 1904 editions of the Rules and Regulations recognise that employees were not permitted to walk on the tracks except as part of their official duties:

The Company's servants must not walk *upon the Line*, except when it is necessary to do so in execution of their duty.⁷⁷

However, the 1889 edition makes no distinction between members of the public—whom it describes in Pt. 22 as the ‘chief care’ of railway servants—and its own employees working on the line. Employees were still required to recognise trespassers, instruct them to leave, and report them to the police if they refused.

Trespassing - In the event of any person trespassing, and refusing to quit when requested to do so, the name and address of such person must be obtained, and the circumstances reported to the nearest Station Master.⁷⁸

Railway servants were therefore not considered trespassers, regardless of role, which may explain why the later edition (reprinted 1915) makes this distinction much more explicit.”

Trespassing - No person, other than a servant of the company in the execution of his duty, must be allowed to be, or walk, upon the Railway, unless provided with written or printed permission to do so, signed by a properly authorised officer of the Company.

This is further illustrated in 1904 during the inquest into the death of Mrs Mary Hubbard, aged 65, who had worked in the GER refreshment department at Cambridge Station for 27 years and was buried at Mill Road Cemetery. Mrs Hubbard was knocked down by a shunted wagon immediately after passing through an employee door in the fence while crossing the line on her way home to Hemingford Road. The gate-keeper, Joseph Hill, told the inquest that all GER servants were permitted to use the gate. When the coroner asked if this included ‘other people as well,’ Hill replied, ‘No, I am there to stop them.’ Asked whether he had ever been asked to stop Mrs Hubbard from using the gate, he responded, ‘No, she was as much the company’s servant as I am.’⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Great Eastern Railway. (1889). *Rules and Regulations*. September 1st, 1889. Stratford: Printed by Benjamin Perry

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ News Editor (1904). The Station Fatality. *Cambridge Daily News*. 13 Oct.

There was clearly a culture of GER platelayers walking alongside the tracks at the beginning and end of their workday. They were responsible for the lines leading north to St Ives and Ely, and south toward Barnwell Junction and Cambridge Station. Resident workers at Chesterton Junction would therefore start and end their shifts walking along the tracks, which foremen were expected to inspect every morning and evening on weekdays, and once on Sundays.⁸⁰ The location of the railway cottages was clearly chosen for this practical purpose. Yet, at the inquests into the deaths of William Stretton and George Rickwood, company officials argued that walking *along the tracks* outside working hours was prohibited, shifting responsibility onto the workers. A detour from Cambridge Station, via a ferry or bridge over the Cam and along Fen Road, may have added as much as an extra mile to the platelayers' already physically intensive day. Walking home directly along the line was therefore a strong temptation, and it is reasonable to assume it was implicitly encouraged by the company's lack of consideration for how workers navigated their daily routines—after all, walking along the line *to work* did not appear to present an issue for GER inspectors, who made no comment when this was alluded to at George Rickwood's inquest in 1907.

George Rickwood, aged forty-seven, was found dead on the Mill Road side of the Coldham Lane Bridge where his body was identified by his new son-in-law, Sidney Vail.⁸¹ George Rickwood was a Foreman Platelayer at the time of his death; he had grown up at Chesterton Junction and spent his entire working life with the GER company.

The body was discovered by George Suttle, a neighbour of George Rickwood, who told the inquest that he was walking *along the line* from Chesterton Junction to Cambridge Station *to work* when, about 100 yards on the Cambridge side of Coldham Lane Bridge, he found the body of a man 'very much cut about.' Suttle had last seen Rickwood the previous evening, walking home to Chesterton Junction alongside the railway line - as usual. At the inquest, GER representatives Inspector F. Harradine and J. Tyler argued that walking along the tracks *after work* was prohibited. Crucially, however, they made no comment on employees walking *to work* from their homes, which Suttle confirmed was common practice. The cottages had been deliberately sited directly beside the tracks to allow workers to move along the line to and from work, yet the company inspectors were able to argue that, because George was technically off duty, the accident was his own responsibility.

According to the Cambridge Independent Press's report on the inquest, Inspector Harradine also misquoted the rulebook before the coroner, stating that 'servants were strictly forbidden to

⁸⁰ Ibid. Pp. 176.

⁸¹ News Editor (1907a). Platelayer Killed on the line near Cambridge. *Cambridge Independent Press*. Jan.

walk down the line, except in execution of their duty.’ The Deputy Coroner read from the rulebook to corroborate this, but failed to notice the crucial distinction between walking along the line and walking upon it, which is the true meaning of the text.

Inspector Tyler produced the book of rules belonging to the deceased, and the witness admitted having received and signed for a similar book in which it was written that no servant of the company was to walk upon the line except in the company's service.⁸²

Both witnesses to George Rickwood's movements were clear that, as was routine, he and others walked home along the line. They were therefore not negligent in using the tracks themselves; rather, given that their homes were located outside of town and only reasonably accessible via the line, walking to and from work along the tracks was a practical necessity. On the evening of the accident, foreman platelayer George Thomas Stearn accompanied Rickwood along the main line as far as Mill Road Bridge before they separated, further demonstrating the habitual nature of this practice.

The deputy Coroner: you know it is contrary to your rules to walk down the line? Witness (Stearn), after some hesitation, admitted that he did.

This, however, was not consistent with the rulebook, nor was the text cited by Inspector Tyler relevant in this case: the platelayers did not walk *upon* the line, but *along* it. Tragically, on this occasion, Rickwood was evidently too close to the track and was caught by the passing train.

When called to testify at the inquest, Stearn was in no position to contradict either his employer or landlord. Had he been able to do so, he may have corroborated George Suttle's observation that platelayers routinely walked along the line to reach work, but were expected to find alternative routes to their homes outside of town once off duty. Notably, the inquest did not determine that Rickwood was trespassing—a point which the 1904 rulebook sought to clarify in cases where employees were off duty but still on GER premises. The coroner returned a verdict of ‘accidental death,’ explicitly attaching no blame to any party.

George Rickwood was interred at Old Chesterton Churchyard on Thursday, 17 January 1907. His coffin was borne by four GER employees, among them Inspector Tyler and Sub-Inspector Duce of the Permanent Way Department. Rhoda attended the service with her recently married daughter, Emily Vail, who lived at The Junction with her husband, platelayer Sidney Vail, and their three daughters.⁸³ In 1949, after sixty six years spent living between the lines, Emily finally

⁸² News Editor (1907c). The Railway Fatality - Inquest this Afternoon. *Cambridge Daily News*. 15 Jan.

⁸³ News Editor (1907c). The Railway Fatality - Funeral of the Victim. *Royston Weekly News*. 25 Jan.

bade farewell to railway life.⁸⁴ Together with Sidney and their married daughter, Kathleen Noble, she left Chesterton Junction for the last time, bringing to a close the family's connection with the railway after more than eighty years - starting with Emily's grandfather, Thomas Rickwood.



Platelayers in Cambridge
Capturing Cambridge, Cambridgeshire Archive Collection RA.RAI.J93 2123

⁸⁴ Cambridgeshire Archives; Cambridge, England; *Cambridgeshire Electoral Registers*; Reference: *Camb/1949*

Stability versus uncertainty: The case of Thomas Rickwood

Regardless of how appealing railway cottages were in terms of size or location, ‘tied accommodation’ was a common feature of Victorian Britain, particularly for companies that required workmen to maintain stretches of track in remote rural areas where housing was scarce. Platelayers were an essential part of ensuring the safe and efficient running of the GER’s ever-increasing passenger services. Their duties included packing gravel beneath sleepers to maintain track alignment, inspecting points at junctions where trains switched tracks, clearing obstacles, and checking for faults that could lead to derailment. The Chesterton Junction platelayers were responsible for maintaining the track south towards Cambridge station and north along the diverging branch lines.⁸⁵ Despite the potential dangers associated with the location, railway cottages such as those at the junction provided modest brick housing, along with courtyards and allotments for working-class families—a marked contrast to the urban slums endured by many factory workers.⁸⁶

Added to this, the GER was one of the first major pre-war British railway companies to develop a ‘clearly structured internal labour market,’ in which workers were recruited in unskilled roles and could subsequently advance through organised pathways of training and promotion.⁸⁷ Few companies rivalled the GER’s rapid growth and profitability, ensuring stable, long-term employment and genuine opportunities for advancement—benefits rarely available to labourers elsewhere and unheard of in earlier generations. It is therefore unsurprising that sons frequently followed their fathers into employment with the GER company.

George Cambridge, my great-great-grandfather and brother-in-law of the Rickwoods, relocated his family to London in search of more stable work and better prospects for his children, and became a platelayer with the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. Before leaving Cambridgeshire, he worked as a *Fossil Digger*, benefiting from the inflated wages of the coprolite ‘mining boom,’ which dominated employment for unskilled labourers in his home town of Harston as demand grew for cheap fertiliser.⁸⁸

By the 1880s, however, the industry was in marked decline, with falling wages, pit closures, and more diggers than available work could sustain. The labour itself was physically demanding and

⁸⁵ Simmons, J. (1995). *The Victorian Railway*. Thames & Hudson Ltd.

⁸⁶ Daunton, M.J. (1983). *House and Home in the Victorian City*. Edward Arnold Verlag.

⁸⁷ Howlett, P. (2001). *Careers for the unskilled in the Great Eastern Railway Company, 1870-1913*.

Department of Economic History, LSE. [online] Available at:
<https://www.lse.ac.uk/asset-library/information/wp6301.pdf>

⁸⁸O’ Conner, B. (2011). *Harston Fossil Diggings*. Lulu.com

dangerous, often involving deep excavations prone to collapse, while the local press frequently portrayed miners as drunk and unruly, reinforcing a negative social reputation.⁸⁹ The Deacon of Bassingbourn Church was vocal in his condemnation:

Copolite diggers are the refuse of society and with few exceptions are extravagant, intemperate, licentious, depraved and atheistic. Wherever they lodged they caused a spiritual blight.⁹⁰

The comparatively higher wages of coprolite digging, relative to other forms of local labour, may have influenced Thomas Rayner to follow his elder brother James into the coprolite pits at Coldham Common, not far from where he would later reside at Chesterton Junction as a GER platelayer. However, any such prospect was buried when a collapse of earth - and the weight of shovels used in a botched rescue attempt - fatally injured James in 1865. The coroner concluded that the absence of a dedicated watchman to monitor ground stability, together with the superintendent's failure to maintain control over the workmen, amounted to manslaughter.⁹¹

Thomas Rayner and his wife Esther resided in the railway cottages at Chesterton Junction for over thirty years, where five of their six children were born. Despite the evident dangers of living and working between the lines at the Junction, such conditions often represented a comparatively better option than those available to many working-class families at the time. The GER company also appears to have shown a greater willingness to prioritise housing for workers with established generational ties to the area, as evidenced in the census. Widows were also permitted to remain as paying tenants, including Maria Susan Rule, who lived at the Junction for 27 years after her husband's death.

Maria and her husband Ernest, a GER platelayer, moved into a cottage at the Junction next door to his parents, George and Emma Rule, shortly after their marriage in 1916. Ernest enlisted in the Transportation Branch of the Royal Engineers during the First World War, a path typical of railway workers whose technical skills were in demand for military logistics.⁹² George Rule, also a platelayer, had grown up in Wimpole, where his father, David, worked on estate farmland belonging to the Earl of Hardwicke, under the supervision of Owen Cambridge, a cousin of my great-great-grandfather George Cambridge.

⁸⁹ Porter, E. (1971). *The Coprolite Diggers*. [online] Capturing Cambridge. Available at: <https://capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Coprolite-Diggers.pdf>.

⁹⁰ O'Connor, B. (1999). *Coton Fossil Diggings*. Pp. 65

⁹¹ News Editor (1865). Fatal accident at the Coprolite Pit. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 9 Dec.

⁹² The National Archives; London, England, UK; War Office: Soldiers' Documents, First World War Wo363

By 1921, the Rule families were living side by side, joined by Ernest's elder brother, George William Rule, aged 36, who also worked for the GER as a guard.⁹³ The following year, on 8 November 1922, Ernest was 'accidentally struck by an engine running on the Great Eastern Railway' and died of his injuries later that day.⁹⁴ Shortly afterwards, George, Emma, and their surviving children left the Junction. Maria, however, remained, raising her sons there until her death in 1958 at the age of 77—making her the second longest-standing resident of Chesterton Junction after Emily Vail.⁹⁵

Permitting a widow and her children to remain in accommodation tied to employment, intended specifically for railway workers—even where they were protected by additional rights as paying tenants—was not necessarily standard practice, including under British Rail following nationalisation. Speaking before Parliament in July 1950, Victor Yates, MP for Birmingham Ladywood, highlighted how 'tied accommodation' could cause hardship for railway workers, who were often threatened with eviction upon retirement, as well as for widows already facing financial instability following the loss of the household's principal wage earner. He vehemently stated:

That retired workers with long service and the widows of the men who have given long and faithful service should be subject at this moment to the mental and physical distress (of eviction) is frankly, monstrous.⁹⁶

The ability to pay rent was clearly no guarantee of continued tenancy; however, the GER company appears to have shown a reluctance to evict families who, through widowhood, retirement, or disability, no longer had any connection with the company as employees. Charles Frost, for example, a GER 'railway engineer,' suffered the loss of an arm in a work-related accident and remained resident at The Junction until his death in 1962.⁹⁷

For George Rickwood, however, his father Thomas's dismissal by the GER for theft, and the consequent loss of tied accommodation, provides a clear example of the profound material, social, and institutional decline—and subsequent criminalisation—that could result from the simultaneous loss of employment and housing in a system where the employer exercised control over both.

⁹³ The National Archives of the UK (TNA) (n.d.). *1921 Census Returns*. Reference: RG 15/8078, ED 24, Sch 145; Book: 08078.

⁹⁴ Cambridgeshire Register Office (1922). Certificate of Death - Ernest Rule. 8 Nov.

⁹⁵ Cambridgeshire Archives; Cambridge, England; Cambridgeshire Electoral Registers; Reference: Camb/1957

⁹⁶ Hansard (1950). *RAILWAYS (TIED HOUSES)*. Parliament.uk. HC Deb 27 July 1950 vol 478 cc828-38.

⁹⁷ Franklin, T. (1985). *Boyhood Days at the Junction*. Saffron Walden Weekly.

Thomas Rickwood, the son of a miller, was born and raised in Ely amongst eleven siblings where he was the youngest of seven sons. In 1857, he married Eliza Shadbolt, the daughter of Ely cattle dealer William Shadbolt, and by the 1870s they were residing at Chesterton Junction with their young sons—George, Henry, and Thomas.⁹⁸ Thomas senior worked as a platelayer for the GER company for almost two decades, but in January 1885 he was caught by a police constable stealing lumps of coal from a heap beside the line, valued at two pence, and was subsequently dismissed.⁹⁹

Over the course of the next three decades, until his death in Chesterton Workhouse at the age of 70, Thomas was charged with numerous minor thefts- in particular taking eels from the Cam he intended to sell in order to buy food for himself and wife Eliza.¹⁰⁰ In court, Thomas attempted to argue that eels were reptiles and therefore exempt from fishing laws, much to the amusement of the press who gave him the moniker 'The Pirate of the Cam.' By 1896 Thomas was listed on the Habitual Criminals Register, mainly for petty crimes such as stealing cabbages, for which he received a sentence of seven days imprisonment in Cambridge Castle Gaol.¹⁰¹ During these years, Thomas worked as a labourer, but, as he advanced in age, he clearly struggled to secure regular employment and earn a living wage. In 1894, for example, Thomas, then aged 60, was injured and admitted to hospital with a fractured shoulder after falling into the sewer on which he had been working.¹⁰² In 1901, Thomas was charged with stealing a garden shovel from outside a shop and pleaded guilty to the charge stating 'My wife has been ill in bed for six weeks, and we had neither food nor firing' and that he hoped they gave him five years in prison as punishment:

I went to the Relieving Officer and he refused me, and my wife won't go into the workhouse, so what was I to do? I won't earn what you do. You can hang me if you like, I'd rather be in gaol than out.¹⁰³

Thomas and Eliza spent their final years apart, having little alternative but to enter Chesterton Workhouse in old age.¹⁰⁴ Their experiences reflect the limitations of a society that espoused the

⁹⁸ Cambridgeshire Archives and Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Family History Society; Cambridgeshire, England; Church of England Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials; Reference: P24/1/17

⁹⁹ News Editor (1885c). Stealing Coal. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 17 Jan.

¹⁰⁰ News Editor (1896). Cambridge Division Petty Sessions - Thomas Rickwood. *Herts and Cambs Reporter and Royston Crow*. 24 Jul.

¹⁰¹ The National Archives; Kew, London, England; *MEPO 6: Metropolitan Police: Criminal Record Office: Habitual Criminals Registers and Miscellaneous Papers*; Reference: *MEPO 6/8*

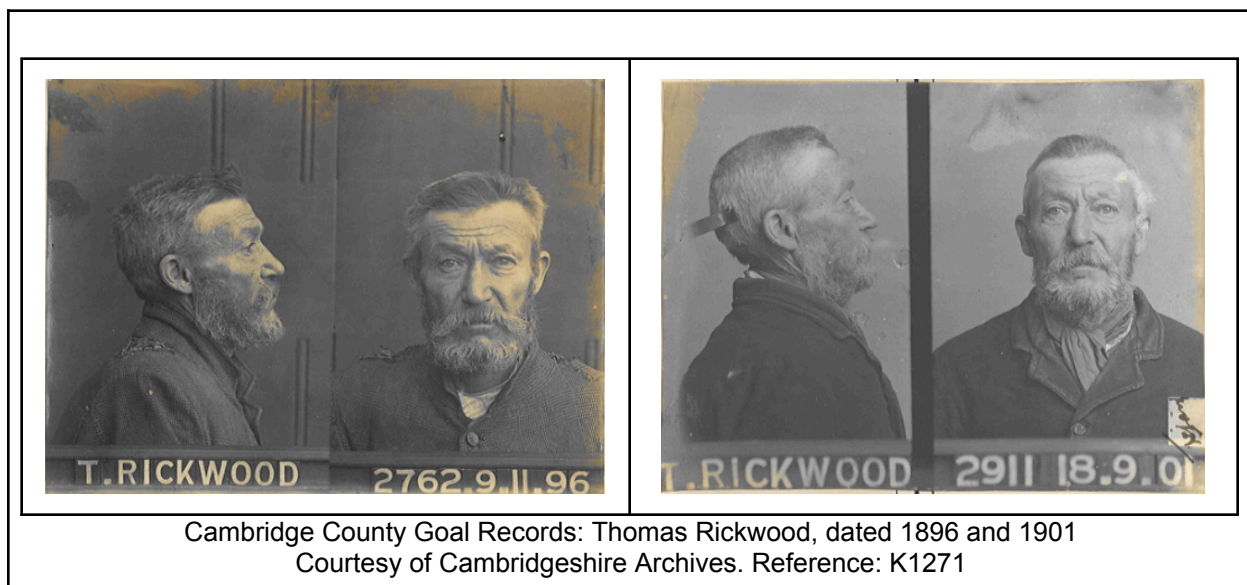
¹⁰² News Editor (1894). Accident at Chesterton. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 14 Sep.

¹⁰³ News Editor (1901b). The Pirate of the Cam. *Cambridge Independent Press*.

¹⁰⁴ The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911

virtues of hard work as sufficient for subsistence, yet offered scant support to those no longer able to labour due to age, illness, disability or misfortune. The introduction of the State Pension was only a few years away; however, it would not be until the 1950s that a more adequate and widely workable system of provision for old-age emerged.¹⁰⁵

Thomas Rickwood was mocked in the press as a cautionary figure, embodying the ‘undeserving poor’ within a moral framework that relied on such representations to reinforce prevailing social norms and expectations, rewarding those who complied with the values of the dominant group while sanctioning those who did not.¹⁰⁶ Thomas and Eliza were thus condemned to enter the workhouse and, in doing so, joined the ranks of the ‘undeserving poor’, since, as M. A. Crowther observes, ‘anyone who accepted relief in the repellent workhouse must be lacking the moral determination to survive outside it.’¹⁰⁷



For George Rickwood, a second-generation platelayer and resident of Chesterton Junction since childhood, there can be little doubt that his father’s destitution stood as a powerful lesson in the perceived virtues of remaining firmly within the GER fold. For Rhoda Rickwood, however, who had ‘complained’ to her husband George of the dangers at Chesterton Junction, there were far fewer options; her reliance on the economic stability of his employment, combined with domestic life on GER property—including proximity to the daily workings of the railway—rendered her complicit in its risks. Rhoda’s home life may therefore have been limited

¹⁰⁵ Smith, R. (2016). *Did anyone ‘retire’ in the past?* [online] University of Cambridge. Available at: <https://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk> The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, Cambridge.

¹⁰⁶ Romano, S. (2019). *MORALISING POVERTY: the Undeserving Poor in the Public gaze*. S.L.: Routledge.

¹⁰⁷ Crowther, M.A. (2016). *The Workhouse System 1834-1929*. Routledge.

to a stark choice between remaining at Chesterton Junction, with its attendant dangers, or entering Fulbourn Asylum.

While widows were often treated as having no formal connection to their husbands' employment—and thus no inherent right to remain in railway accommodation—this distinction becomes less clear in the case of women whose labour directly supported railway operations. Railway Inspectorate and GER company records reveal multiple accidents involving family members acting as proxy employees, a pattern closely linked to their residence near railway lines, despite their labour being frequently unrecognised and unpaid.¹⁰⁸ In the early twentieth century, the concept of the 'railway family' gained traction as a rhetorical tool used by companies to promote employee loyalty and project an image of paternalistic care. As Hannah Reeves observes, this concept 'included all family members in the idea, whether they worked for the company or not.'¹⁰⁹ The case of Kezia West, a thirty-one-year-old Sunday schoolteacher fatally struck by a train while assisting her seventy-one-year-old father at a level crossing in Cherry Hinton, illustrates this dynamic.¹¹⁰ Recorded by the Railway Inspectorate simply as the 'daughter of a gateman', her presence was merely noted but not explored, reflecting both a lack of formal recognition and acceptance of female labour within the 'railway family.'¹¹¹

Rhoda had little choice but to accept the dangers and responsibilities that came with living as part of a 'railway family,' where home life was inseparable from the risks and routines of the line and its moving engines. Her daughter's death was a direct consequence of being exposed to this hazardous environment, where the safeguards in place were wholly inadequate for a child of her age to understand or navigate safely. The allotment gardens beyond the line, and the meadow used for drying washing away from soot, formed part of the family's everyday domestic landscape—extensions of home rather than clearly bounded or forbidden spaces. For a young child like Rose, these areas would have felt familiar and inviting, not places requiring explicit permission to enter. In such circumstances, the issue was not a lack of supervision, but the simple and immediate accessibility of danger: the railway could be reached and crossed within yards of the front door, a reality that no parent could reasonably be expected to guard against at every moment.

¹⁰⁸ Wojtczak, H. (2019). *Female gatekeepers killed by trains 1846-1906*. [online] Railway Work, Life & Death Project. Available at: <https://www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk/female-gatekeepers-killed-by-trains-1846-1906/>.

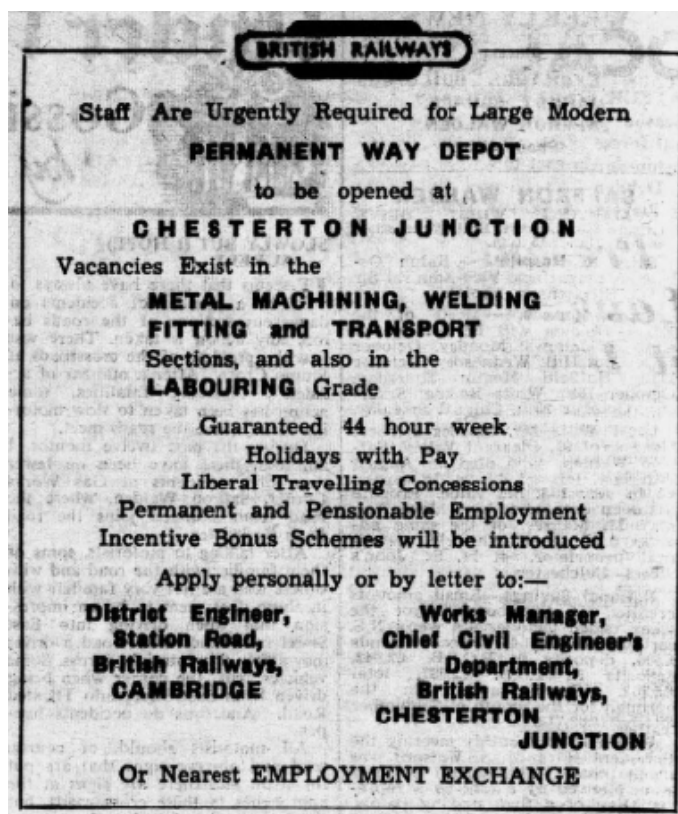
¹⁰⁹ Reeves, Hannah. (2016) *Who are the 'railway family' and why are they so important?* York Transport Historians Group Blog. Visit: <https://yorktransporthistory.wordpress.com>

¹¹⁰ News Editor (1908). Young Woman Killed on the Line. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 17 Jul.

¹¹¹ Details of railway worker accidents have come from the 'Railway Work, Life & Death' project, run by the University of Portsmouth, National Railway Museum and Modern Records Centre: www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk.

Conclusion

In 1954, British Railways announced a complete redevelopment of the Chesterton Junction site. The new central Permanent Way Department was intended to serve six of the eight engineering districts within the Eastern Region over a 52-acre site. This would include overhead gantry cranes, pre-assembly benches, a new loading dock with associated stores building, workshops, and a welding plant, in addition to new access roads, offices, a canteen, and further track connections to the main line.¹¹² The signal box was relocated to the other side of Fen Road, and the cottages themselves were gradually emptied and demolished. Over the following decade, families moved on, one by one, until by 1966 the last resident closed their door for the final time. What had existed for more than a century as a lived-in, working landscape—defined by noise, danger, routine, and resilience—was erased with remarkable finality. In its place emerged a rationalised railway environment, stripped of its domestic life and the intimate human presence that had once animated it.



British Railways recruitment advert for the new Permanent Way Depot at Chesterton Junction, circa 1956.

¹¹² News Editor (1954). New Railway Depot at Chesterton. *Cambridge Daily News*. 8 Feb.

The disappearance of Chesterton Junction as a place of habitation reflects a broader transformation in the relationship between industry and everyday life. Where once the boundaries between home and workplace were blurred, post-war redevelopment increasingly sought to separate the two, removing families from spaces of industrial risk. Yet this spatial solution, while effective in practical terms, also had the effect of obscuring the lived experiences that had made such changes necessary in the first place. The absence of any visible trace of the cottages today is therefore not merely a physical loss, but a historiographical one: a reminder of how easily working-class lives, particularly those lived on the margins of infrastructure, can slip from collective memory. It is therefore important to remember that the health and safety reforms we benefit from today were won as a direct result of the pain, suffering and loss experienced by those who came before us.

Recovering the story of families such as the Rickwoods is thus an act not only of genealogical interest, but of historical restitution. Their experiences illuminate the extent to which industrial modernity relied upon forms of labour that were not only dangerous, but domestically embedded—where risk was not confined to the trackside, but woven into the fabric of home life. The deaths of Rose Rickwood, Susan Middleton, and others were not isolated tragedies, but part of a wider pattern of exposure that shaped both personal lives and public policy. In this sense, Chesterton Junction can be understood as a microcosm of a national story: one in which the costs of progress were unevenly distributed, and often borne by those with the least capacity to resist them - where the most vulnerable paid the highest price.

At the same time, these histories underscore the origins of protections that now seem self-evident. The gradual emergence of trade unionism, regulatory oversight, and employer accountability did not occur in abstraction, but in response to environments such as this—where the consequences of neglect were immediate and devastating. To revisit Chesterton Junction is therefore not simply to document a lost community, but to trace the lineage of modern health and safety practices back to the conditions that made them indispensable.

Today, as trains pass through the site of what is now Cambridge North Station, there is little to suggest that families once lived—and died—between the lines. Yet the silence of the landscape should not be mistaken for absence. The histories embedded there, though no longer visible, remain essential to understanding both the human cost of industrial expansion and the hard-won protections that followed. To remember Chesterton Junction is, ultimately, to acknowledge that progress is never without consequence—and that those consequences, however deeply buried, continue to shape the present.



Chesterton Junction, circa 1980

©TonyKirby reproduced with permission of Cambridge Museum of Technology

Bibliography

Accident at Chesterton. (1894). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 14 Sep.

Accident on Railway. (1855). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 19 May.

Bank of England (2025). *Inflation Calculator*. [online] Bank of England. Available at: <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.

Bell, J. (2005). *Doing Your Research Project : a Guide for first-time Researchers in education, Health and Social Science*. Maidenhead, England ; New York: Open University Press.

Burglary at Chesterton Junction. (1885). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 21 Mar.

Cambridge Division Petty Sessions - Thomas Rickwood. (1896). *Herts and Cambs Reporter and Royston Crow*. 24 Jul.

Cambridgeshire Archives and Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Family History Society; Cambridgeshire, England; Church of England Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials; Reference: P24/1/17

Cambridgeshire Archives and Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Family History Society; Cambridgeshire, England; Church of England Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials; Reference: P40/1/8

Cambridgeshire Archives and Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Family History Society; Cambridgeshire, England; Church of England Registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials; Reference: P40A/1/9

Cambridgeshire Archives; Cambridge, England; Cambridgeshire Electoral Registers; Reference: Camb/1957

Cambridgeshire Archives; Cambridge, England; *Cambridgeshire Electoral Registers*; Reference: Camb/1949

Cambridgeshire Register Office (1922). Certificate of Death - Ernest Rule. 8 Nov.

Chesterton - Skating. (1858). *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*. 27 Nov.

Clarke, K. (1985). The Lamp Oil Run. *Saffron Walden Weekly*. 23 May.

- Clover, K. (2012). *Client: Cambridgeshire County Council Chesterton Station Desk-Based Assessment*. [online] Oxford Archaeology East. Available at:
https://eprints.oxfordarchaeology.com/1105/1/CAMCSS12%20Report%201353_LR.pdf.
- Collision at Chesterton Junction. (1880). *Cornish and Devon Post*. 9 Oct.
- Crowther, M.A. (2016). *The Workhouse System 1834-1929*. Routledge.
- Dan, J. (1989). Thousands watch the new rail bridge arrive. *Cambridge Weekly News*. 26 Jan.
- Daunton, M.J. (1983). *House and Home in the Victorian City*. Edward Arnold Verlag.
- Deaves, P. (2025). *Signal Box Prefix codes, C*. [online] Railwaycodes.org.uk. Available at:
http://www.railwaycodes.org.uk/signal/signal_boxesc.shtm.
- Disney, Henry.W. (1923). *The Law of Carriage by Railway*. 6th ed. Law Publishers Stevens and Sons Limited, p.177.
- Eastern Counties Railway (1850). Timetable Notice. *Cambridge Independent Press*. 19 Jan.
- Esbester, M. (2022). *Guest Blog Post: 'The Dark Side of Railway Work' by Dr Mike Esbester*. [online] The British Newspaper Archive Blog | Amazing finds and news from over 300 years of historical newspapers. Available at:
<https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2022/08/11/railway-accidents-mike-esbester/>.
- Fatal accident at the Coprolite Pit. (1865). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 9 Dec.
- Fatal Accident. (1860). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 29 Dec.
- Fatal Railway Accident near Cambridge. (1897). *Cambridge Daily News*. 1 May.
- Findagrave.com. (2023). *Charles Ellis Richard Frost (1904-1962)*. [online] Available at:
https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/256265498/charles-ellis_richard-frost.
- Franklin, T. (1985). *Boyhood Days at the Junction*. Saffron Walden Weekly.
- Gersociety.org.uk. (2020a). *MN011 Great Eastern Railway Permanent Way and Works Committee Meeting Minutes 1862-1879*. Summary of committee meetings available online at:
<https://www.gersociety.org.uk/files-emporium-home/mn011-ger-minutes-summaries>.

- Gersociety.org.uk. (2020b). *MN012 Great Eastern Railway Permanent Way and Works Committee Meeting Minutes 1880-1922*. Summary of committee meetings available online: <https://www.gersociety.org.uk/files-emporium-home/mn012-ger-minutes-summaries>.
- Gibbons, S., Heblich, S. and Pinchbeck, E.W. (2024). The Spatial Impacts of a Massive Rail Disinvestment Program: the Beeching Axe. *Journal of Urban Economics*, [online] 143, p.103691. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2024.103691>.
- Girls Lost Arm - Damages Claim against the LMS Railway. (1936). *Derby Daily Telegraph*. 7 Jul.
- Gotobed, C. (1984). Conversation with Colin Moule. *Saffron Walden Weekly*. 25 Oct.
- Great Eastern Railway. (1889). *Rules and Regulations*. September 1st, 1889. Stratford: Printed by Benjamin Perry
- Hall, S. and Van Der Mark, P. (2008). *Level Crossings: The history, development and safety record of railway level crossings in Britain and Overseas from 1830 to 2008*. Ian Allen Publishing.
- Hansard (1900). *Railways (Prevention Of Accidents) Bill, Volume 84*. Parliament.uk.
- Hansard (1950). *RAILWAYS (TIED HOUSES)*. Parliament.uk. HC Deb 27 July 1950 vol 478 cc828-38.
- Hill, D. (2025). *Chesterton Junction*. Oct. Statement provided by Mr Steven Hill on behalf of the Hill Family.
- Howlett, P. (2001). Careers for the unskilled in the Great Eastern Railway Company, 1870-1913. *Department of Economic History, LSE*. [online] Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/asset-library/information/wp6301.pdf>.
- Howlett, P. (2001). Careers for the unskilled in the Great Eastern Railway Company, 1870-1913. *Department of Economic History, LSE*. [online] Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/asset-library/information/wp6301.pdf>
- Kenworthy, G. and Adderson, R.J. (2005). *Cambridge to Ely*. Middleton Press (MD).
- Killed on the Railway at Cambridge. (1892). *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*. 26 Aug.

- Kirby, T. (n.d.). *Chesterton Junction/Cambridge North*. [online] Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55e06b36e4b02100a41a0c92/t/65e0923ba1fd42189c751466/1709216317301/Chesterton+Junction+TK.pdf>.
- Kiyimba, N., Lester, J.N. and O'Reilly, M. (2018). Utilising Media and Text-Based Sources. *Using Naturally Occurring Data in Qualitative Health Research*, [online] pp.159–178. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7122163/>.
- Last Night - A Shocking Spectacle . (1901). *Cambridge Daily News*. 29 Jan.
- Last, B. (1984). Locked inside a Boiler. *Saffron Walden Weekly*. 1 Nov.
- Michael, F. (1988). *The Rise of Respectable Society*. Fontana Press.
- Michell, S. (2022). *Death on the Railway in Victorian Peterborough*. [online] Railway Work, Life & Death Project. Available at: <https://www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk/death-on-the-railway-in-victorian-peterborough/>.
- Moulton, G. (2025). *Chesterton Junction. Cambridge History Then and Now - Facebook Group*. 9 Oct.
- Network Rail. (2024). *Always On - Network Rail*. [online] Available at: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/who-we-are/safety-in-the-community/railway-safety-campaigns/always-on/>.
- New Railway Bridge Opens over the River Cam. (1930). *Cambridge Daily News*. 28 Apr.
- News Editor (1954). New Railway Depot at Chesterton. *Cambridge Daily News*. 8 Feb.
- O' Conner, B. (2011). *Harston Fossil Diggings*. Lulu.com.
- O'Connor, B. (1999). *Coton Fossil Diggings*.
- Office of Rail and Road Blog (2015). *175 years making Britain's railways safer | Office of Rail and Road*. [online] www.orr.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.orr.gov.uk/search-news/175-years-making-britains-railways-safer>.
- Platelayer Killed on the line near Cambridge. (1907). *Cambridge Independent Press*. Aug.
- Polluted Wells. (1909). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 6 Aug.

Porter, E. (1971). *The Coprolite Diggers*. [online] Capturing Cambridge. Available at: <https://capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Coprolite-Diggers.pdf>.

Railway Accident. (1873). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 3 Dec.

Railway Accident. (1875). *Cambridge Independent Press*. Apr.

Railway Museum (n.d.). *Caution! Railway safety since 1913*. [online] National Railway Museum. Available at: <https://www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/caution-railway-safety-1913>.

Records of Fulbourn Hospital, Patient Registers and Records: Case Files 1907-1955. Cambridgeshire Archives reference KHF/3/1/7. Available by application to NHS Record Controller.

Records of Fulbourn Hospital, Patient Registers and Records: Case Files 1907-1955. Cambridgeshire Archives reference KHF/3/1/7. Available by application to the NHS Record Controller.

Reeves, Hannah. (2016) Who are the 'railway family' and why are they so important? York Transport Historians Group Blog. Visit: <https://yorktransporthistory.wordpress.com>

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (2014). *Qualitative Research Practice : a Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

Romano, S. (2019). *MORALISING POVERTY: the Undeserving Poor in the Public gaze*. S.L.: Routledge.

Shocking Death of a Child. (1885). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 2 May.

Shocking Fatal Accident near Barnwell Junction. (1893). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 13 Jan.

Signalman's Sad Story. (1907). *Cambridge Daily News*. 5 Jan.

Simmons, J. (1995). *The Victorian Railway*. Thames & Hudson Ltd.

Smith, R. (2016). *Did anyone 'retire' in the past?* [online] University of Cambridge. Available at: <https://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk> The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, Cambridge.

Stealing Coal. (1885). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 17 Jan.

Stourbridge Fair. (1853). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 1 Oct.

Supposed Suicide. (1882). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 2 Apr.

The Boundary Commissioners. (1868). *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, 28 Mar., p.1.

The BNA (n.d.). *What is OCR text?* [online] British Newspaper Archive. Available at: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/help-faq/what-is-ocr-text>.

The Factory Nuisance at Chesterton. (1897). *Hunts Post*. 23 Oct.

The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1861 England Census; Class: *Rg 9*; Piece: *1021*; Folio: *51*; Page: *2*; GSU roll: *542738*

The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1871 England Census; Class: *RG10*; Piece: *1582*; Folio: *41*; Page: *3*; GSU roll: *829805*

The National Archives; Kew, London, England; 1881 England Census; Class: *RG11*; Piece: *1660*; Folio: *31*; Page: *18*; GSU roll: *1341396*

The National Archives; Kew, London, England; *MEPO 6: Metropolitan Police: Criminal Record Office: Habitual Criminals Registers and Miscellaneous Papers*; Reference: *MEPO 6/8*

The National Archives; London, England, UK; War Office: Soldiers' Documents, First World War Wo363

The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911

The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; *1921 Census Returns*; Reference: *RG 15/8078, ED 24, Sch 142*; Book: *08078*

The Pirate of the Cam. (1901). *Cambridge Independent Press*.

The Railway Fatality - Funeral of the Victim. (1907). *Royston Weekly News*. 25 Jan.

The Railway Fatality - Inquest This Afternoon. (1907). *Cambridge Daily News*. 15 Jan.

The Station Fatality. (1904). *Cambridge Daily News*. 13 Oct.

Track Terror. (1989). *Cambridge Weekly News*. 9 Feb.

Trail, R. (2019). *Cambridge Museum of Technology*. [online] Cambridge Museum of Technology. Available at: <https://www.museumoftechnology.com/railway-trail>.

UK Parliament (n.d.). *Highway (Railway Crossings) Act 1839*. [online] Legislation.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/2-3/45/section/1>.

University of Portsmouth (n.d.). *Home - Railway Work, Life & Death*. [online] Railway Work, Life & Death. Available at: <http://www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk> Details of railway worker accidents have come from the 'Railway Work, Life & Death' project, run by the University of Portsmouth, National Railway Museum and Modern Records Centre.

Wikipedia Contributors (n.d.). *Cherry Hinton Railway Station*. [online] Wikipedia. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherryhinton_railway_station.

Wilson, C. (2016). *124-134 Mill Road, Cambridge*. [online] *Mill Road History Project*. Available at: https://capturingcambridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/124-134_Mill_RoadCottages-3rd_edition-2016-01-31.pdf.

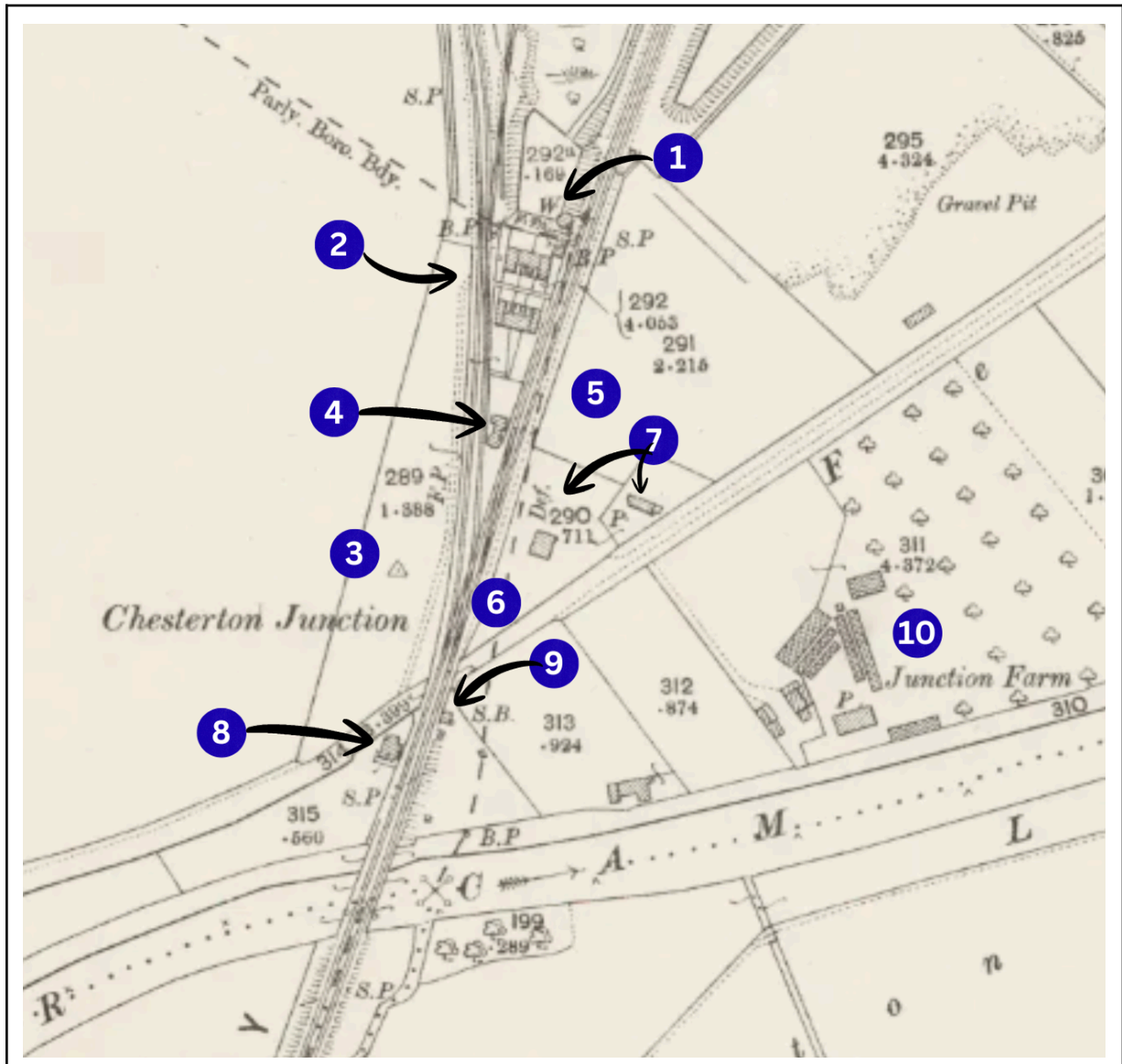
Wojtczak, H. (2019). *Female gatekeepers killed by trains 1846-1906*. [online] Railway Work, Life & Death Project. Available at: <https://www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk/female-gatekeepers-killed-by-trains-1846-1906/>.

Young Woman Killed on the Line. (1908). *Cambridge Independent Press*. 17 Jul.

Your Herefordshire. (2025). *NEWS | A plaque has been unveiled at Hereford Railway Station today in memory of railway workers who were killed while on duty in Hereford*. [online] Available at: <https://yourherefordshire.co.uk>.

Appendix

A. Chesterton Junction: 25-inch 1901 Ordnance Survey Map for England and Wales (published 1903)



25-Inch Ordnance Survey (OS) for England and Wales Revised - 1901 Edition

Key

1. A well (W) is indicated at the back of the terraced housing. The revised 1925 OS map (published 1927) labels this area as 'pumping station.'
2. Indicates where the footpath ends, running parallel to the walkway between the Junction railway cottages. Since the footpath was not established until 1874, the apex of land is

unlikely to have been the site of the original Chesterton Station.

3. 'The Meadow' (described by Mrs H. E. Smith) and residents' allotments were located behind what is now Long Reach Road.
4. The original crossing-keeper's house (later 'The Fort') stood between the tracks at the apex of the land.
5. Site of an extensive natural gravel pit, shown on the 1925 OS map.
6. The signal box was moved here in March 1931,¹¹³ shortly after the bridge was replaced; it was demolished in 1984.¹¹⁴
7. Unknown buildings shown on OS maps from 1886 to the 1950s. One may be 'The Sanitorium,' let by Chesterton Local Board in 1889, adjoining a house and garden near Chesterton Junction leased to 'Mr Tyrell.'¹¹⁵ This may refer to John Tyrell, a railway porter recorded in the Junction cottages in the 1871 and 1881 censuses.
8. Proposed site of the original Chesterton Station. This building was perhaps refitted to house railway servants and their families. In 1985, Mr K Clarke recalled a single-storey 'crossing-keepers cottage' on this site, beside the level crossing gates on Fen Road and opposite the footpath to the Junction cottages.¹¹⁶
9. Site of the first Chesterton signalbox (S.B), erected circa 1870. According to the minutes of the GER Permanent Way and Works Committee, expenditure of £300 was agreed on 16 February 1870 for the erection of two cottages and a signal box at Chesterton Junction.¹¹⁷ This signalbox was replaced during redevelopment of the area in the 1960s. The small structure indicated behind the signalbox may be a platelayer's hut which Mr Tom Franklin described as a 'wooden house' where platelayer Mr Pauley lived.¹¹⁸
10. Junction Farm (later Long Reach Nurseries), famous in the 1940s for their greenhouses and orchard of over 1000 fruit trees.

¹¹³ Deaves, P. (2025). *Signal Box Prefix codes*, C. [online] Railwaycodes.org.uk. Available at: http://www.railwaycodes.org.uk/signal/signal_boxesc.shtm.

¹¹⁴ Kenworthy, G. and Adderson, R.J. (2005). *Cambridge to Ely*. Middleton Press (MD).

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Kenworthy, G. & Adderson, R. J.

¹¹⁶ Clarke, K. (1985). The Lamp Oil Run. *Saffron Walden Weekly*. 23 May.

¹¹⁷ Gersociety.org.uk. (2020a). *MN011 Great Eastern Railway Permanent Way and Works Committee Meeting Minutes 1862-1879*

¹¹⁸ Franklin, T. (1985). *Boyhood Days at the Junction*. Saffron Walden Weekly.

B. Local newspaper reports that mention 'Chesterton Junction' between 1850 and 1985:

<p>Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 9 January 1850</p>	<p><i>The railway - Flag stations at Chesterton</i> - 'By advertisement it will be seen that flag stations are to be established at Chesterton, for the accommodation of that place, Milton, Landbeach etc. That these stations will afford a great convenience to a large number of persons there can be no doubt; they have long been a desideratum, and a great credit is due to the Railway Company for thus considerably studying the wants of their passengers. It is also, we believe, in contemplation to establish similar stations between Waterbeath and Ely for the accommodation of Stretham and the neighborhood, so that parties will be no longer subject to the vexation of being carried past the place to which they are bound and then having to walk 3 or 4 miles to get back to it.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 11 May 1850</p>	<p><i>Railway Accident</i> - An accident occurred on Tuesday night on the railway at Chesterton, about twenty yards on the Chesterton side of the bridge which crosses the Cam. Two trains were coming to Cambridge, one on the Ely line and the other on the St Ives. The trains collided sending trucks down the embankment (towards the river), but fortunately no one was injured.</p> <p>'There is a junction against the Chesterton Bridge, and the trains from either way are generally within a few minutes of each other. The night was very dark, and there was a dense fog, so that the engine-driver on the main line could not see the signal put up at Chesterton station.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 1 October 1853</p>	<p><i>Stourbridge Fair</i> - 'There was plentiful supply of onions, and during the morning a railway train stopped at the Chesterton Station for the accommodating of the sellers, and delivered as many sacks of onions as filled two large wagons.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 19 May 1855</p>	<p><i>Accident on the railway</i> - 'On Saturday last, a luggage train ran off the rails at Chesterton Junction. A good deal of damage occurred to the trucks, but to which the injury was fortunately confined.'</p>

<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 29 December 1860</p>	<p><i>Fatal accident</i> - 'On Wednesday last as the parliamentary train from Norwich was passing Chesterton Junction, guard William Williams fell out of the breakvan and received such severe injuries that he died the same day at Addenbrookes hospital. From the evidence of the signal man at Chesterton, it appeared as they were passing, the deceased held up his hand to him as he always did, and as he was doing so the break door flew open.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 6 August 1870</p>	<p><i>Shocking suicide near Chesterton Junction</i> - Statement by the Platelayer Foreman: 'He lay himself across the line very coolly and deliberately. He lay looking at the train, his eyes being wide open.. The train was going from fifteen to twenty miles an hour. There is a gap in the hedge from off the Common, through which he was enabled to get on the bank.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 17 April 1875</p>	<p><i>Railway Accident</i> - 'Between eleven and twelve o' clock on Wednesday night a rather alarming accident occurred at the Chesterton Junction of the Great Eastern Railway, which was however, fortunately unattended by fatal consequences or even personal injury. A Midlands goods train from Cambridge to Huntingdon in passing over the points on to the branch line ran off the rails. The coupling broke, and the engine crossed the main line and ran down an embankment in the direction of some cottages nearby... The tender was thrown over the opposite side of the line in a battered condition, whilst the goods waggons, dashing straight forward, ran into the front of the house erected within the angle of the junction, occupied by an engine-driver named Gates, who was, with his wife and family, in bed. Although a complete breach was made in the walls of the house, the interior and contents of which were much damaged, most fortunately none of the inmates sustained any injury.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 17 April 1875</p>	<p><i>Special Report on the Great Eastern Railway Bill</i> - Cambridge Improvement Committee hearing on the Great Eastern Railway proposal for additional lines at Cambridge Station, doubling the line from just above Chesterton Junction to St Ives. 'Cambridge had become a focus of railways, and further accommodation was required in the interest of public safety' with the committee stating members of the public wanted bridges, not level crossings.</p>

<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 15 June 1878</p>	<p><i>Suicide on the railway at Cambridge</i> - 'An inquest was held concerning the death of an unknown man, who is apparently between 60 and 70 years of age. A witness named Edwards (Isaac Edwards) said he was a platelayer and lives at Chesterton Junction. On Tuesday last between one and two o'clock in the afternoon, he was at work between Mr Gray's brickyard and the Railway Bridge (a mile and a half from Cambridge station), and then saw the deceased walk towards the engine of a train, which was coming from Ely towards Cambridge... He was above 30 yards off when he deliberately laid down in the grip. Part of his head was found against the wall of the bridge.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 9 October 1880</p>	<p><i>Railway collusion</i> - 'A collision which occurred on Monday night last, at the Chesterton Junction of the Great Eastern Railway, came very near to being a fearful catastrophe... The scene of the accident was that part of the main line of the Cambridge and Ely railway where it is joined by the St Ives and Hungton branch, and is situated between forty and fifty yards from the railway bridge over the Cam. There is a level crossing almost at the precise point where the junction is affected.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 17 January 1885</p>	<p><i>Stealing coal</i> - 'Thomas Rickwood, platelayer or Chesterton, was charged with stealing sixteen pounds of coal, value two-pence, the property of the Great Eastern Railway Company. PC Jacklin said that from information he had received he was on duty at the Chesterton Junction at half-past eleven on Saturday night and saw the prisoner go and take some lumps of coal from a heap against the engine house.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 21 March 1885</p>	<p><i>Burglary at Chesterton</i> - 'Robert Frost, a youth, was charged on remand with burglariously breaking into the house of Mary Mansfield, at Chesterton, and stealing therefrom a tin box containing about two shillings and eight-pence... Both of the house doors were open, as was also the garden gate. A woman named Betsy Houghton was called and stated that she saw the prisoner on the evening of the 4th of March, walking along the line towards the Chesterton Junction.'</p>

<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 2 May 1885</p>	<p><i>Shocking death of a child</i> - 'On Tuesday evening an inquest was held at the Pike and Eel Inn, Chesterton by Mr John Bennett, deputy coroner, on the body of Rose Rickwood, aged 4, who met with her death under the circumstances detailed in the evidence appended.' The jury returned a verdict of <i>accidental death</i>, 'appending a rider to the effect that, in their opinion, the junction was an exceedingly dangerous place for cottages for human habitation to be.' The deputy coroner was instructed to communicate the decision to the directors of the company.</p>
<p>Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 26 August 1892</p>	<p><i>Killed on the railway at Cambridge</i> - 'George Rickwood, platelayer, of Chesterton Junction, said he knew the deceased, who was also a platelayer in the employ of the GER company. He lived at the Junction, in the Round House. The witness last saw him (William Stretton) alive on Saturday night at home.'</p>
<p>Saffron Walden Weekly News 26 August 1892</p>	<p><i>Shocking death on the railway at Barnwell - Death of William Stretton:</i> District Traffic Inspector Henry Watson stated 'Inhabitants did, as a matter of fact, when coming from Newmarket-road, go over the railway, though he (witness) had warned them several times.'</p> <p>Foreman (William Brooks, who lived at Chesterton Junction with Stretton) stated "There was a public highway at the back of the Pike and Eel, though it would be a mile or two out of the way. They never prosecuted any of their servants for using the railway when off duty, because witness did not think it had been brought to the notice of the company.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Independent Press, 13 January 1893</p>	<p><i>Shocking fatal accident</i> - 'Inquest held at the Gardeners Arms, Newmarket-road, on Monday afternoon into the circumstances attending the death of James Rivett, aged 72 years, who was employed on the Great Eastern Railway as platelayer, and who was knocked down on Saturday morning on the main line near Barnwell Junction by a passenger train from Cambridge. Isaac Edwards, a platelayer on the Great Eastern Railway, living at Chesterton Junction, said he had known the deceased for fifteen years, and had often worked with him. On Saturday morning, about half-past eleven, he left him working on the six-foot on the main line near</p>

	<p>Barnwell Junction. Just before leaving him he warned him of an approaching train, and immediately afterwards the signalman asked the witness why the train had stopped. He turned round and saw the deceased lying in the four-foot.' The body was found 27 yards from where he left the deceased working. Verdict 'accidental death' but the coroner queried how a man of such age could be engaged as a platelayer.</p>
<p>Cambridge Daily News, 11 December 1894</p>	<p><i>The fatality at Barnwell</i> - An inquest held on the body of James Dalton of Chesterton, who was killed on the GER near Barnwell Junction on Sunday Evening. 'Israel Utteridge, Chesterton Junction, signalman, said he was on duty at Chesterton Junction on Sunday afternoon. The witness Jolley called his attention to the accident and witness went to the place. He found a coat about 15 yards from the body, which was very much mutilated. A verdict of accidental death was given as no one had witnessed the accident.'</p>
<p>Saffron Walden Weekly, 14 February 1896</p>	<p><i>Railway Fatality at Cambridge - A well-known resident killed:</i> Concerning the death of Thomas Beale, whose body was found on the railway, near Ditton Crossing, early Saturday morning.</p> <p>'William Pauley, foreman platelayer on the GER, living at Chesterton Junction, said he was going to work on Saturday when he saw the deceased standing against the outside rail at the crossing on the Cambridge side. The deceased was looking towards Cambridge, and when he saw witness he went over the stile. He did not see the deceased again until he had been round Abbey-road and come back and found Clark with deceased on the side of the railway.'</p>
<p>Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 5 March 1897</p>	<p><i>Medical Officer Report - Bad Water.</i> 'A certificate of the Public Analyst was presented to the Medical Officer of Heath Dr B Annington, which stated the water supply at Chesterton Junction ought not to be used for drinking purposes in its present state.' Rev. J G Forbes resolved to write to the Secretary of the Great Eastern Railway Company on the subject.</p>
<p>Cambridge Daily News, 19 October 1897</p>	<p><i>Labourer killed while loading Ballast</i> - 'Inquest held on the death of Ernest William Matthews, a GER Labourer who was injured while loading ballast near Chesterton Junction. Witnesses stated the deceased was filling one wagon when suddenly a piece of earth some five or six yards away from</p>

	the witness fell and half buried the deceased.’ He died from internal injuries.
Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 22 October 1897	<p><i>A public nuisance</i> - ‘Charles Crawley of Sefton House, Chesterton, was summoned for being the owner of a factory he did unlawfully carry on a business in the same way as to cause an effluvium, which was a nuisance.’ Situated at Chesterton Junction, the business created an intolerable nuisance, and the population in the neighborhood of Chesterton Junction, consisting of some 50 inhabitants, complained to the Sanitary Authority.</p> <p>‘George Rickwood, a Great Eastern Railway employee living at Chesterton Junction, said the stench from the factory was “something dreadful.” His house was about 70 yards from the factory and the nuisance sometimes made him positively ill. George Tyrell, a platelayer also gave evidence and stated the nuisance had considerably affected his wife and family.’</p>
Cambridge Daily News, 19 January 1901	<p><i>Cambridge Man Mutilated - Near Barnwell Junction - A Shocking Spectacle.</i></p> <p>‘Few spots in and around Cambridge have become more notorious for the number of fatalities which they yield than the vicinity of Barnwell Junction and the short stretch of the line between that point and the level crossing on the Chesterton side of the railway bridge which spans the Cam at the upper end of the Long Reach; and probably nothing has ever surpassed in ghastliness the gruesome discovery made there during the early hours of Tuesday morning.’</p> <p>‘Charles Edwards, a telegraph linesman in the employ of the Great Eastern Railway Company, and living in Edward Street, Cambridge, on Monday absented himself from work, and left home some time during the evening. The police made a search along the line in the direction of Chesterton Junction and found the deceased knocked down near Paper Mill Bridge. Several miles of the line on the Ely branch had to be searched before the entire remains could be gathered together.’</p>
Cambridge Daily News, 31 January 1901	<p><i>The fatality at Barnwell - Inquest and Verdict:</i> ‘An inquest was held to investigate the circumstances attending the death of Charles Biggs, whose mangled remains were found upon the line in the early hours of Tuesday.’</p>

Cambridge Independent Press, 26 May 1905	<i>Suidice of a Cambridge Tradesman - Illness and financial worries lead to a shocking death:</i> 'On Saturday night, an employee of the Great Eastern Railway Company found a mangled body of a man on the line near Chesterton Junction. It proved to be the body of Mr Thomas Henry Hinton (33), who lived at 189 Chesterton Road.'
Cambridge Daily News, 3 April 1906	<i>The Railway Fatality - Near Chesterton Junction:</i> Thomas Arch (74) was knocked down and killed instantly at a GER level crossing near Chesterton Junction on Saturday.
Cambridge Daily News, 15 January 1907	<i>The Railway Fatality -</i> 'Inquest upon the body of George Rickwood, a ganger platelayer, in the employ of GER whose mutilated remains were found on the line near coldham-lane bridge on Monday morning. Inspector F Harradine and Inspector J. Tyler (of the Engineers Dept) present on behalf of the GER company.'
Cambridge Independent Press, 6 August 1909	<i>Polluted Wells -</i> 'The public health committee reported that samples of water had been taken from the wells east of Chesterton Junction and reported by the public analyst as being polluted with sewage.'
London Daily News, 1923	Mr Ernest Charles Rule of Railway Cottages, Chesterton Junction, Cambridge. 'Killed by a light engine.'
Cambridge Daily News, 28 April 1930	<i>New Bridge -</i> 4000 people turned out to watch the opening of the new railway bridge over the river Cam at Chesterton Junction. The Chair of the London North East Railway, Sir William Whitelaw, was also in attendance.
Saffron Walden Weekly News, 13 January 1933	<i>Cambridge Workman in Hospital:</i> 'A nasty accident happened to Signey Vail, aged 51, of 4 Chesterton Junction, while he was at work on Monday. About 3.15pm he was assisting in the erection of a new traffic height bar at the Milton-road crossing, the old apparatus having been knocked down in a collision. The heavy iron bar was being put in position when it slipped and struck Vail heavily on the front of the head. He was speedily removed by the Borough Ambulance to Addenbrookes Hospital.'

Saffron Walden Weekly, 8 September 1933	'Considerable damage was done by a fire involving about 50 sleepers on the railway at Chesterton Junction. Our pictures show a fireman fighting the flames on a blazing truck. The clouds of dense smoke which were seen miles away.'
Manchester Evening News, 5 October 1936	<i>Four Hurt in Rail Crash - Light Engine Goes off Rails:</i> 'Four people were injured when a passenger train and a light engine collided near Milton Road Crossing, Cambridge, today. The light engine left the railways but the passenger train was not derailed. The collision occurred at Chesterton Junction at 7.34am.'
Saffron Walden Weekly, 18 October 1984	<i>Signalman sees an era pass by:</i> 'When Albert Bursford retires next month, his second 'home' for the last 16 years goes with him. Albert is a railway signalman. His other home is the signal box at Chesterton Junction. The gates will be closed and opened from Cambridge using the TV monitor and there is a built-in safety check - a crossing clear button that has to be pressed before the signals to train drivers can be cleared.'
Saffron Walden Weekly, 25 October 1984	<i>Cyril Gotobed, signalman for Chesterton Junction in discussion with Colin Moule about his retirement in 1982:</i> 'It was an important junction, especially when it used to take traffic from St Ives - and there were some lovely views from the box' Mr Gotobed recalled vividly the sobering thought that often used to strike him when he mounted the steps to a signal box that whatever happened in the next eight hours was on his shoulders.
Saffron Walden Weekly, 1 November 1984	<i>The day Bill (Last) got locked inside a boiler, Rail Link by Colin Moule:</i> 'Bill used to go down to the junction as a lad when his family lived in Carlyle Road. He was fascinated by the steam pumps behind the houses there which used to pump water up to Cambridge to fill the tanks of the locomotives. His study of the area (he is a member of the Chesterton History Group) has revealed that soon after the railway arrived in 1845, Chesterton had a station of its own. It only lasted about five years and no one is certain where it stood.'

<p>Saffron Walden Weekly, 23 May 1985</p>	<p><i>'Boyhood Days at the Junction'</i> by Mr Tom Franklin, 39 High Street, Chesterton: 'Here are some memories of Chesterton Junction from 1929 to 1939. The man who worked the old steam pumphouse was Mr Albert Hickman who died about 1941. As a small boy I used to take his tea and sandwiches down to the pumphouse for him, and help a bit. The people who lived in the houses at the junction were, Mr and Mrs Brown, Mr and Mrs Burgess, Mr and Mrs Jordan, and Mr and Mrs Frost. Mr Frost lost one arm in a railway accident and he used to be a callboy as they were known, coming round to railway men's houses at all hours of the night knocking them up to go to work. There were also some old local characters who used to go down to the three pits which were known as the ballast holes from which the water was used to pump up to Cambridge station, as in those days they were not allowed to draw water from the mains. Two more people I recall were Mr Pauley known as 'spot.' He lived in a wooden house at the rear of the signal box, and Mr and Mrs W Ansell. All worked on the railway. Mr Ansell used to go to the ballast pits to gather water cress which he sold from his house at the crossing gates for one penny a bunch. There was also an old brick shed where a Mr Jacobs made glue from bones collected from Mr Prior's slaughter house in High Street, Chesterton. All those railwaymen who lived on the junction had a piece of allotment where the back of the gardens are in Long Reach Road. It was LNER land in those days. My father Howard, who died last year, started work at Cambridge station in 1915 as a cleaner for the then Great Eastern Railway. After 4 years he was made up to acting fireman, then full fireman. As he said to me once, 'I did 20 years on the shovel before I was made up to be a driver.'</p>
<p>Saffron Walden Weekly, 23 May 1985</p>	<p><i>'The Lamp Oil Run'</i> by Keith Clarke, New Road, Sawston: 'I read your articles on Chesterton Junction, and of course Bill Last, who I remember. I remember the names of the three signalmen at the junction from 1940 to 1942. They were Freddie Overhill, Phil Lander and Chris Richardson. The crossing keepers cottage near the gates was occupied by a Mr Sid Barker, also a signalman whose son was an engine driver at Cambridge. At the Fort in the middle of the junction were also cottages occupied by railwayman Mr Sid Vail, Freddie Bowman and a Mr Pauley who were all platelayers from the engineers department. I can also remember the old</p>

pump house which Bill last mentioned. I was based at Barnwell Junction from January 1940 to February 1942 as a lad-porter. I was 16 at the time and during that time was responsible for cleaning and filling of all the signal lamps once a week at the junction down the main line as far as Milton Fen round the loop well beyond Milton Road Crossing.

I also went to the signal box at the junction which burned two large brass lamps which I had to clean and fill every day. The company supplied a cycle so my supply of lamp oil was carried by me from Barnwell.

One day I can well remember a signal failure on the down road at Milton Fen and the Chesterton Junction signalman gave me instructions to rush down on my bike and show the driver of an express a green flag and tell it was all right to proceed. Chesterton was a very busy junction especially during the war years. The gates were operated from the box by cranking a large wheel.'

c. 1881 & 1891 Census for Chesterton Junction and Fen Road

	1881	1891
1	John Tyrell (50) Railway Porter Emma Tyrell (45) Henry (21), George (19) William (17), Rhoda (15), Annie (11) Charles (7), Richard (4)	Israel Utterage (47) Signalman Mary Ann Utterage (52) William Ambrose (20)
2	James Rivett (59) Platelayer Emma Rivett (45) Clara (20), Nelly (11)	James Rivett (69) Platelayer Susan Rivett (60) Nelly (21)
3	William Middleton (60) Platelayer	William Middleton (70) Platelayer Mary Middleton (77)
4	George Rickwood (22) Platelayer Rhoda Rickwood (20)	George Rickwood (32) Platelayer Rhoda Rickwood (30) Emily (7)
5	Mary Mansfield (58) (Widower) William Durham (10)	William Richard Pauley (29) Foreman Platelayer Elizabeth Pauley (29)
6	Eliza Rickwood (45) (Wife of Thomas Rickwood, Platelayer) Thomas (18)	Thomas Rayner (31) Platelayer Esther Rayner (27) Florence (4) Grace (2)
7	Issac Edward (34) Platelayer Mary Edward (31)	Issac Edward (44) Platelayer Mary Edward (41) Niece Elizabeth Wilson (5)
8	James Belch (43) Railway Porter Ada Mary (12) Alice Maud (8) Alfred James (7)	William Stretton (37) Platelayer Annie Stretton (45)
Fen Road	Israel Utterage (38) Signalman Mary Ann Utterage (43) William (10)	Reuben J Dyson (28) Signalman Mary Ann Dyson (26)
	Out of parliamentary boundary	

Image use

All reasonable efforts have been made to identify and acknowledge the copyright holders of the images used in this research. Where this has not been possible, images are included in good faith for academic purposes. Any rights holders not properly credited are encouraged to contact the author at francescacircus@gmail.com

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Facebook community of **Cambridge History Then and Now**, in particular the Hill family, Gavin Moulton and Nigel Simon. To Mike Petty and Tony Kirby for blazing the trail of Cambridge local history, and to Capturing Cambridge and the Mill Road History Project for inspiring me to take up the reins for the Junction! Although I have failed to find a way to contact you - to Stewart Ingram - for sharing such wonderful photographs of the cottages online. Finally to Jane Gilmour, a cousin through another of Henrietta's sisters, Emily Ison (nee Anderson) for all your encouragement.

Thank you!

Author

Francesca Cambridge Mallen is a former museum curator and equality campaigner, and holds a Master's degree in Education Research from the University of Lancaster. Based in the Shropshire Hills, she is a writer focused on social history, particularly the lived experiences of individuals and families, the connections between people and place, and the recovery of overlooked or underrepresented histories.

Contact

francescacircus@gmail.com