

Railway Heritage in our Area

Our poster 'London Road Station and the Birth of a Community' outlines the growth in the latter part of the 19th century of the streets immediately around London Road Station. But what of the wider area?

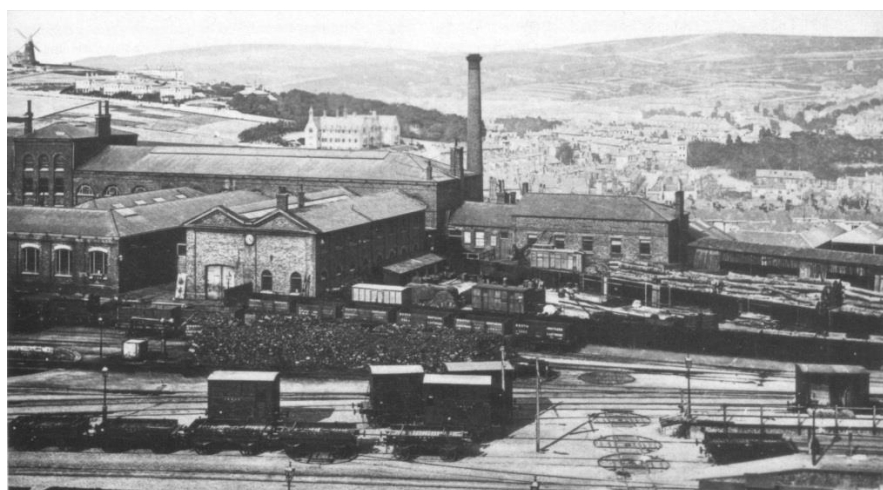


Photo taken in 1871 from above Brighton station looking over to Round Hill. (brightonlocoworks.co.uk – image owned by The Madgewick Collection.

In the foreground are the Brighton Engineering Works. In the background is Ditchling Road with Tower Mill, built in 1838, where Belton Road is today. A number of villas have been built on Ditchling Road. The building to the left of the chimney is today the Brighton Business Centre at the bottom of Ditchling Road. It was a training school for women school teachers, constructed in 1854. Note there is no sign yet of Ditchling Rise and adjacent streets

With the coming of the railway, Brighton transformed itself from a small fishing village into a major seaside resort with hotels, restaurants, parks and places of entertainment being built mainly along the seafront and in the streets of the centre. What is not so well known is that the railway also brought heavy industry to Brighton, with a significant industrial area developing around the station to the east and north (now the New England Quarter). As the number of trains on the line increased, so goods yards, repair shops and engineering works were required to support them. From 1842, maintenance of railway stock was located in Brighton. By 1848, carriages were also being built. In 1852, thanks to the initiative of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway (LBSCR) superintendent engineer, John Chester Craven, substantial engineering works were established.

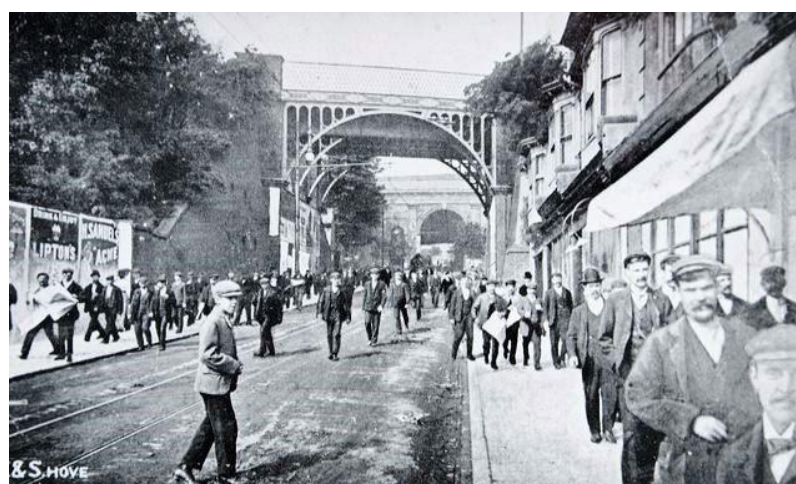
The Works continued to grow throughout the second part of the nineteenth century under Craven's successors, William Stroudley and R.J. Billington, but their capacity was constrained by their restricted site. In 1889, Billington extended the Works by building out over columns (seen in the photo below). By 1891, the Brighton Works was producing around twelve locomotives annually, between 40 and 50 passed through for maintenance and repair, and just over two and a half thousand people were employed there.



Brighton Works from the East, 1959 (c. Lawrence Russell, brightonlocoworks.co.uk)

Housing for the workers employed by the railway company was rapidly constructed on the east-facing slopes between the London Road and the railway line. Between 1841 and 1853, almost 3,000 new houses were built in Brighton, compared with just over 400 the previous decade. Slightly later between the mid-1860s and 1880, housing for middle-class families, including those of railway managers, came to be built on the west-facing slopes of Round Hill to the south of the Lewes line, where London Road Station was built in 1877. Then in the 1890s, elegant detached and semi-detached houses were built along wider, tree-lined avenues to the north of the line for the well-to-do.

Working life in the railway in the second part of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was characterised by long working hours. In 1867, LBSCR firemen and engine drivers went on strike over pay and conditions; a particular sticking point was their demand to work 10 hour –a-day shifts over 6 days, rather than a total of 60 hours over a week, which might involve working up to 20 hours in a block. In the photo opposite from 1912, working men are flocking down New England Road from the Works for a breakfast break, having already been at work for a number of hours!



Workers from the Works heading down Old Shoreham Road for breakfast break, 1912. James Gray collection

The LBSCR, like many of the big Victorian companies, did provide its employees with opportunities for training and education. A Mechanics Institute was established in 1848 and a large Library was set up at the Brighton Works. Members of the railway community tended to be Methodists, and the LBSCR also provided rooms for chapel meetings and then leased land for a chapel to be built in Ann Street until the land was needed for railway expansion in 1903.

A local 'Railway Mission' was also established, thanks to the initiative of three railway workers - Mr. Weller, Mr. Maple and Mr. Thyng, a ticket collector and two porters, respectively – and Mrs. Elizabeth Gates, a well-known speaker at Christian meetings for women. The railwaymen used to meet together on Sunday afternoons in the Porter's Room for "a little Bible study and a sing" and wanted to organise a Gospel service for railwaymen on Sunday duty. Mrs Gates was invited to lead the meeting.

The first meeting, with its congregation of three, took place on March 19th, 1876 in the Waiting Room at Brighton Station. Attendance soon began to increase and in 1882, the meeting had to move to the Library of the Brighton Works which could accommodate up to four hundred people. Three meetings a week were held there. This arrangement was to last for 11 years, until the Library was required for other purposes. When the Primitive Methodist Church (now the Calvary Evangelical Church) in Viaduct Road came up for sale, Mrs Gates privately advanced £2,500, whilst, in parallel, heading a public fund-raising effort to buy it. It became the Railway Mission in 1894 and Mrs. Gates is commemorated in a plaque in the Calvary Evangelical Church.



Mrs Elizabeth Gates. (Thanks to Chris Fry, mybrightonandhove.org.uk)

The Brighton Works reached their peak productivity just before the First World War. During the war itself, they were turned over mainly to the production of munitions. After the war, the LBSCR merged with two other companies to become the Southern Railway and it was decided that the work previously undertaken in Brighton should mostly be redistributed to other sites. The last locomotive produced solely in Brighton was 'The Remembrance', completed in April 1922 and named in memory of those killed in the 1914-18 War.



The Greenway, New England Quarter, 2013

The decline of the Works during the inter-war years was stayed briefly when Brighton was commissioned to build light Pacific locomotives during the Second World War. From 1945, however, they were relegated to repair work. Demolition of the site began in 1969. By 1971, part of the proud Brighton Engineering Works had become a car park! In the last decade, however, the area has been reborn as The New England Quarter. Traces of our railway heritage have been incorporated into the new developments, not least on The Greenway, a pedestrian and cycle way from the Old Shoreham Road to Brighton Station.

The Greenway runs over the cast iron bridge which used to carry the line to the Lower Goods Yard. The new housing built above it retains the arched wall of the old Works, as seen in the photos above. The brick columns which once supported the extension have also been kept, and on the bridge is Jon Mills' 'Ghost Train', an iron sculpture of the Jenny Lind locomotive that was first built in Brighton.



Ghost Train, New England Rd bridge. Photo by Clive Baldwin (<http://metaljons.wordpress.com>)