

## Chesterton Junction/Cambridge North

*Tony Kirby*

Chesterton Junction dates from 1847, with the opening of the Cambridge–St Ives section of the Wisbech, St Ives & Cambridge Junction Railway, which joined the Eastern Counties Railway (ECR) Cambridge–Ely line just north of the bridge over the river Cam. The line was extended from St Ives to March in 1848. On 19 January 1850 a ‘flag station’ (i.e. request stop) was opened here by the ECR: its exact location is uncertain, but it was probably in the V formed by the junction of the two lines. It proved unsuccessful, probably because of its remote location well away from Chesterton village, and appears to have closed within a few months. Cottages were built for railway workers on the site of the station, some of which survived until about 1959. The line from St Ives carried additional traffic from 1866, with the opening of the Midland Railway’s Kettering–Huntingdon line; the MR had running powers over the GER from Huntingdon to Cambridge, and although passenger traffic was relatively sparse it carried quite a heavy freight traffic. From 1882 onwards the line became increasingly important, following completion of the Great Eastern & Great Northern Joint Railway’s Doncaster–March line. This mainly carried coal traffic which was then forwarded from March to East Anglia destinations and North and East London: the ‘St Ives Loop’, as it became known, was invaluable for this, as it avoided the complications of pathing yet more trains over the busy March–Ely line.

Northwards, towards Ely, a ballast pit had been dug by 1885, served by sidings running off the St Ives line. This was disused by 1901, but the sidings remained as shown on the photograph and inter-war photographic evidence suggests that the area had become a dump for redundant track, sleepers and spent ballast. In 1944 it would appear that it was being used to store army lorries prior to the D-Day landings. In the 1950s the site was extensively redeveloped by British Rail as the Eastern Region’s Central Materials Depot, incorporating a rail-welding plant to produce continuously-welded track as jointed track was being phased out at the time, at least on main lines. The depot had its own shunting locomotives, and also a narrow-gauge (2’ 0”) system to move materials around. It closed around 1980 and was effectively abandoned to nature, apart from a couple of sidings near Cowley Road which served an aggregates terminal. The whole area was redeveloped to become Cambridge North station, opened in 2017, an operation that also involved moving the aggregates terminal to the site of the former ballast pits.

Immediately west of Milton Road level crossing, the photograph shows very clearly the WW2 Army Technical Stores Sub-Depot, opened shortly after the outbreak of war and from 1941 onwards operated by the US Army Transportation Corps. In 1945 it was handed back to the War Ministry, and eventually closed in 1959. The Science Park stands on the site.

The St Ives line was a victim of the Beeching era, and the declining demand for domestic and industrial coal, and was closed as a through route in March 1967, a vestigial passenger service from Cambridge to St Ives being retained until October 1970. The line continued to be used for sand traffic from Fen Drayton until 1992. The formation was bought by Cambridgeshire County Council and after much debate became the guided busway, opened 2011. The approach road to Cambridge North Station from Milton Road preserves its course; the Busway proper begins immediately west of what was once the Milton Road level crossing on the A10.

The aerial photograph also shows the unfinished north east section of the Cambridge Eastern Bypass (Cam Causeway); work on this was halted at the beginning of the War and the scheme was never completed in its entirety. In anticipation of the anticipated growth in business, Tolly Cobbold opened the *Golden Hind* where it would have joined the A10. Designed by the Ipswich architect Munroe Cautley, it is a good example of the large ‘roadhouses’ that sprang up on many main roads in the south east during the 1930s.



**Chesterton Junction Central Materials Depot, 1975; the St Ives branch is in the foreground. The whole area has been transformed beyond recognition with the building of Cambridge North station. (Tony Kirby)**



**The St Ives line awaits its fate, 1998. (Tony Kirby)**



**Chesterton Junction 1975. The short-lived (1850) station probably lay in the angle between the main line to Ely (right) and the St Ives branch (left). (Tony Kirby)**