

Retrace the route of the historic Sprat and Winkle Line through scenic Test Valley

SPRAT AND WINKLE

The Sprat and Winkle Line opened on 6 March 1865 and ran between Redbridge, Southampton and Andover Junction to connect with the recently completed line from Basingstoke to Salisbury. Its route through Test Valley is the subject of this guide and it remains a picturesque reminder of a fascinating era. Here you can explore its route on foot or by car.



1 Andover Town Station

Like many towns which saw the fierce competition between rival railway companies, Andover used to have two stations. The original and survivor is Andover Junction which was built in 1854 and serves the West of England Main Line.

Andover Town Station opened in 1865 and originally occupied the site opposite where Sainsbury's now stands and its sidings stood where Lloyds TSB is.

The road in front is where for 100 years traders, farmers and coal merchants handled merchandise in the railway wagons and vans. For 50 years before the railway era, the same site was a more peaceful but often busy scene with canal barges moored at the wharves.

Andover was home to the famous Tasker Engineering Company. Traction engines, steam rollers and trailers produced by the Anna Valley factory in their thousands can still be seen at rallies and in a special collection at Milestones Museum, Basingstoke.

2 Andover Station Hotel

Built before the railway in 1790, the Andover Station Hotel owes its location to an earlier means of transport - the Andover to Redbridge Canal. Once called the "Eight Bells" the hotel was used by travellers as a place to meet and stay and by industries to house local produce and livestock prior to shipment. Today the hotel stands as one of the last references in the town to the canal and the Sprat and Winkle Line.



3 Goodworth Clatford

The station was situated between Upper and Goodworth Clatford and was described as being simple in design within a tranquil setting. The nearby ford through the River Anton meant that there was little traffic across the line which led to the early closure of the signal box in 1962. The rest of the station closed when the line was shut down.

Nothing but a private house remains of Clatford Station. It was rumoured that local people could still hear the old Sprat and Winkle carriages run along the disused track, long after the line was closed.



Clatford signal box at the northern end of Goodworth Clatford

4 Longparish

Longparish Station, built to a near-identical design as Wherwell, lay on the Longparish Branch (Fullerton - Whitchurch).



5 Wherwell

Wherwell Station opened in 1885 and lay on the Longparish line. During the 1920s the railway line between Wherwell and Fullerton was used as the location for a silent film "Ghost Train". Today, Wherwell Station is a private house which includes the ticketing office, waiting room and station masters house.



6 Fullerton

Fullerton Bridge Station opened in 1865 but today exists as a pair of private houses, The Old Railway Cottages. After only 20 years Fullerton Bridge made way for Fullerton Junction Station which connected the main Sprat and Winkle Line with its new Longparish line extension. During the 1940s the station was provided with an air-raid shelter and accommodation for its staff. Fullerton Bridge remains as a private house by the A3057 bridge, but of Fullerton Junction, only the platform foundations can be spotted amongst the tree roots.



Fullerton today The Old Railway Cottages

Test Way

The Test Way is a long distance footpath running 49 miles between Inkpen Beacon in the north to Eling Quay, Totton in the south. For just over 8 miles, between Stoneymarsh and The Mayfly pub at Fullerton, it follows the track bed of the Sprat and Winkle Line and offers a wonderful opportunity to explore local countryside. See www.hants.gov.uk/walking



Why not visit the old line?

There are plenty of convenient places to park in Andover, Romsey and Stockbridge: Between Kimbridge and Chilbolton, the Test Way footpath is well-served with car parks just off the A3057 (Romsey to Andover Road)

Stoneymarsh on the northbound carriageway - near Kimbridge

Horsebridge Station, just opposite The John O'Gaunt pub west of the A3057

The Mayfly pub at Fullerton or Chilbolton Common, just over the junction and in Wherwell at The White Lion pub.

7 Stockbridge

Absolutely nothing is left now of the station, bridge and sidings that made this connection between the Winchester to Salisbury A30 and railway such a prominent stop on the line. It would have been well used in Victorian and Edwardian times by those visiting Stockbridge Racecourse close to what is now Danebury Hill Fort. Establishments like Lillies (Lillie Langtree) reflect this period. The station was demolished in 1967 to make way for the new A30/A3057 roundabout.

Stockbridge Station in the 1950s, viewed from the north, along what is now the A3057 "Valley Road"



8 Horsebridge

Opened in 1865, Horsebridge Station is the best-preserved complex of station buildings on the Sprat and Winkle Line. Designed to provide a transport service for coal and goods merchants to nearby King's Somborne, the station was closed exactly 100 years later and remained untouched for 20 years. It has now been beautifully brought back to its former glory as a picturesque venue.

An early Southern Railway coach acquired from the former BR at Bournemouth stands in the station and was until recently used as a restaurant. A signal box rescued from Yalding in Kent has replaced the original. Horsebridge also boasts a local hostelry "The John O'Gaunt" which was once called the Railway Inn.



Horsebridge Station in Summer, open for teas

9 Mottisfont

Now a private house called The Old Station House, the old platforms have been transformed into a lovely garden feature. Mottisfont Station was built in 1865 but closed 99 years later. Eventually, Mottisfont and Dunbridge Station, built in 1847, which lies on the Wessex Main Line, claimed the name.



10 Mottisfont and Dunbridge

Mottisfont and Dunbridge lies on the Wessex Main Line. Originally named Dunbridge Station, it became Mottisfont and Dunbridge in 2006 to reflect the link with Mottisfont. The original Mottisfont Station, on the Sprat and Winkle Line, closed in the 1960s. The Station lies just opposite the lovely country pub, The Mill Arms and from here you can walk to the village of Mottisfont which features the Grade I Listed 12th Century Church of St. Andrew and Mottisfont Abbey and Gardens, owned by the National Trust.



Mottisfont and Dunbridge to the left, Horsebridge to the right

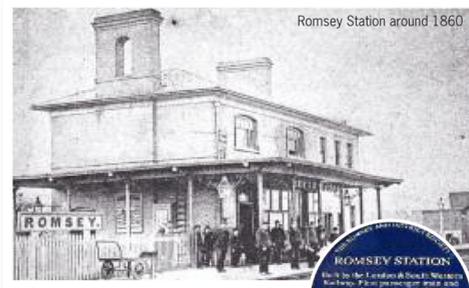
11 Kimbridge

Now just a simple crossing, Kimbridge Junction was a connecting point between the Sprat and Winkle and Wessex Main Line. In 1967, the junction was closed and the crossing unmanned with the introduction of lifting barriers.



12 Romsey

Opened in 1847, Romsey Station is a Grade 2 Listed Building which has remained largely unchanged. Romsey Station has played a varied but vital role in its local community over the years including transporting soldiers to the port of Southampton during both world wars. Today it lies on the Wessex Main Line which connects Southampton to Bristol. Look out for the Lankester name cast into the canopy columns of the platform which derive from the Victorian foundry in Southampton.



Romsey Station around 1860



13 Romsey Signal Box

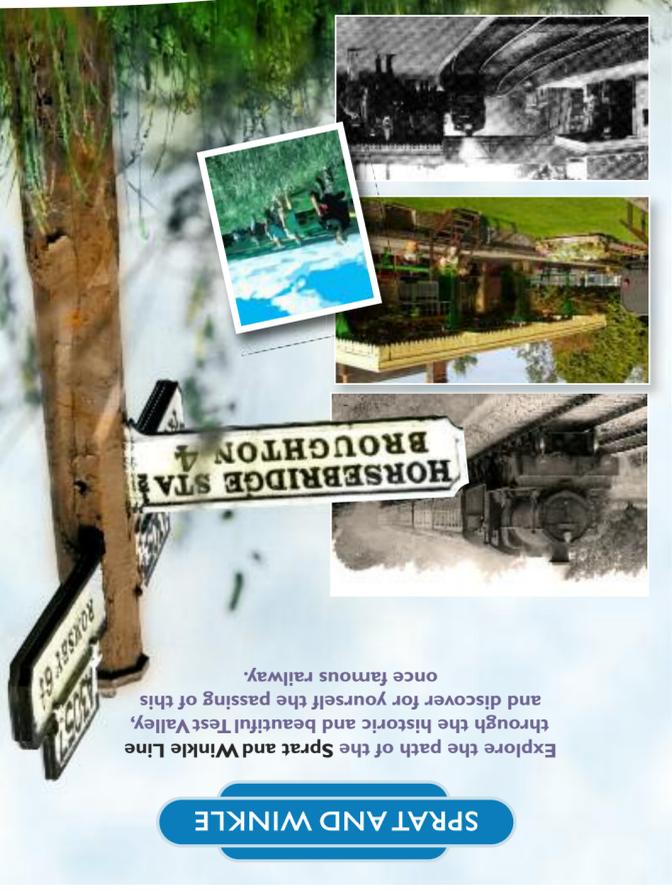
Romsey Signal Box lies behind the Plaza Theatre and is still in perfect working order - though no longer in operation. During its life it controlled Romsey Junction and its two connecting lines - the Sprat and Winkle from Redbridge and the Southampton to Salisbury. Scheduled for demolition in 1982 the Signal Box was saved by Romsey and District Buildings Preservation Trust and lovingly restored by willing volunteers. It is regularly open to the public throughout the year - see www.romseysignalbox.org.uk



14 Nursling

Built in 1885, the same time as the Fullerton to Whitchurch branch, Nursling Station is now a private house named The Old Station. The remnants of platform run only inches from the current Wessex Main Line. (Not shown on map).





TOURISM SOUTH EAST

Welcome to Test Valley, and prepare to be amazed by the stunning landscape and picturesque villages and markets that unfold before your eyes. Covering some 250 square miles, Test Valley is renowned for its natural surroundings, ranging in the north from the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the New Forest National Park in the south. The River Test, one of England's greatest trout rivers, twists and turns its way through visitors and residents alike. The Test Valley Visitor Guide has everything you need to know.

the green and tranquil valley with only the bustling market towns of Andover, Stockbridge and Romsey to disturb the peace and quiet. So come and discover this hidden gem in northwest Hampshire for yourself. You'll be glad that you did. Sponsored by the Council, our Tourist Information Centres offer a wide range of information to help you enjoy your stay in Test Valley. Together with the attractive villages and surrounding countryside, these are one of the Borough's greatest assets for visitors and residents alike.

Test Valley has many other hidden gems to explore. As well as the beautiful Sprat and Winkle Line

Further Reading

If this leaflet has sparked an interest there are many wonderful web sites - too many to list - that give lots of interesting information. Just Google Sprat and Winkle Line!

Three rivers Community Rail Partnership
Three Rivers
www.threeriversrail.com
E-mail: markwillert@tsrcc.co.uk
Sundays and bank holidays
Summer bus service will be available on Dunbridge and Bean stations. A remaining Romsey, Motstont and operation of the Sprat and Winkle Line then this definitive book by Nigel Bray is highly recommended.

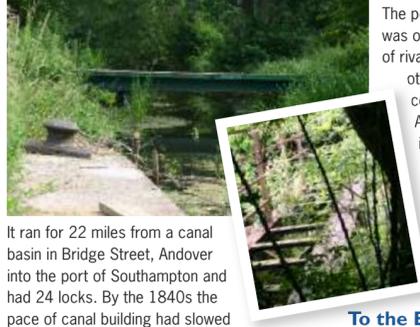
If you wish to find out more information about the history and operation of the Sprat and Winkle Line then this definitive book by Nigel Bray is highly recommended.

Test Valley would like to thank the following for contributing photos and information towards the Sprat and Winkle leaflet:
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From its humble beginnings as a canal, the Sprat and Winkle Line became the main passenger and commercial route through scenic Test Valley

Andover to Redbridge Canal

By the late 18th century Andover had established itself as a market town and its main source for international trade was Southampton. The River Anton, a tributary of the Test, was too small to sustain the transport needs of this growing town so local entrepreneurs set out the creation of the Andover to Redbridge Canal Company. The Andover to Redbridge Canal opened in 1794 and ferried farm produce and other goods up and down the valley for 63 years.



It ran for 22 miles from a canal basin in Bridge Street, Andover into the port of Southampton and had 24 locks. By the 1840s the pace of canal building had slowed in favour of railways and because the Southampton to Salisbury Canal was never completed, the Andover to Redbridge never really connected into the wider canal network.

The beginning of the Sprat and Winkle Line

On 12 July 1858 Royal Assent was granted to the Andover and Redbridge Railway Company (A&R) to build a line by converting a canal opened 66 years before in 1792 along much of the route. A year later in 1859 Lord Palmerston of Broadlands cut the first sod of the new line on his Broadlands Estate, just south of Romsey. The branch line would join the Salisbury to Eastleigh line at Kimbridge and proceed up to Andover. Following the collapse of A&R, the London & South West Railway (L&SWR) fought off Great Western Railway to gain control of the new project and seven years after its inception the Sprat and Winkle Line opened to its first passengers on 6 March 1865.



The Nile Valley Railway

The Nile Valley Railway nickname for the Longparish Branch was given by the Victorians because it reminded the Queen of her more exotic tours abroad. Others say it was because of the anglers who visited the area to fish the River Test, which still has a reputation for being one of the finest trout rivers in the country.



Railway Mania

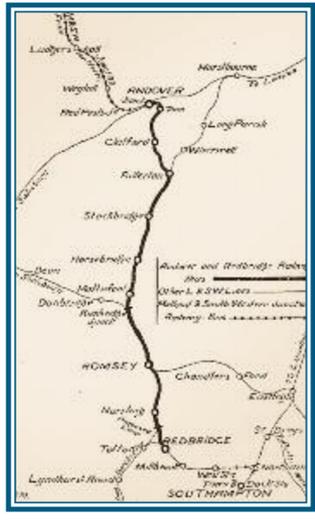
The period between the 1840s and 1870s was one of intense competition. Hundreds of rival companies strove to beat each other to the lucrative market of connecting new towns. As today, Andover lies at the junction of the important east west route out of London and north south route connecting Southampton to the Midlands. The Sprat and Winkle Line was all part of that struggle for commercial supremacy.

To the East and West

The railway had only come to Andover via Basingstoke in 1854 and for 3 years Andover remained a terminus. Then in 1857 the London line ran on to Salisbury and Andover became a mainline station. The fight to create a north south route through Andover was too fierce and complicated to review here but the so called 'Nile Valley Railway' between Fullerton and Hurstbourne played its part.

To the North and South

Developments moved apace after 1865, culminating in the Midland and South Western Junction company linking Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham with Southampton, via Cheltenham and Swindon, crossing the Cotswolds and the Wiltshire Downs. The only remnant of this bold venture is the line from Andover goods yard to the army depot at Ludgershall.



Fullerton to Hurstbourne Line

Twenty years after the Sprat and Winkle Line was built a short branch line was added between Fullerton Station (re-christened Fullerton Junction) and Hurstbourne Priors. It ran via Wherwell and Longparish to the main Basingstoke to Salisbury line. It became known as 'The Nile Valley Railway'. The L&SWR intended to link north via Whitchurch to Newbury and outflank its great rival, GWR. However this ambition was never



realised so the company found itself with a 7 1/2 mile line serving no real need. Not surprisingly passenger services ceased in 1931 though there was a brief boom in freight traffic during the Second World War when Harewood Forest became an ammunition dump. This section was finally closed in 1956.

Demise

By the early 1960s it became apparent that the Sprat and Winkle Line was unable to compete with other modes of transport. The rural line could not generate sufficient revenue. The last diesel passenger train ran in September 1964 followed not long after the last freight train. Beeching struck and by the autumn of 1964 much of the railway line north of Romsey had been dismantled and had vanished.



Horsebridge Station in full bloom

Queen Victoria

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There are at least three explanations for why the railway line was called 'The Sprat and Winkle Line'. If you have a better one please tell us.

- 1 The southern part of the line ran close to the mud flats of the River Test where the winkle may have been found - though not the sprat! It was also rumoured that the line was used to transport illicit goods, and to deter well-dressed inspection guards, the contraband was covered with sprats and winkles.
- 2 A Sprat and Winkle refers to a type of railway coupling that connects the wagons.
- 3 The name refers to the diminutive stature of the line linking the main Southampton and London Line and the London to West Country Line.

“ Mr A Nicholson (82 years old) started work on the Sprat and Winkle as a fireman at the tender age of 16. He went on to drive trains until the lines closed in the 1960s. One of his fondest memories of working on the line was the lazy Sunday afternoons with his boss, stopping in at the Station Hotel for a couple of drinks after a hard days graft on the line ”

Passengers of the Sprat and Winkle Line

The Sprat and Winkle Line was used by a wide variety of passengers. During the wars it was used to move troops and supplies from nearby Salisbury Plain to Southampton Docks en route to France but the majority of passenger traffic was taking people to the beach in summer. With the many horse racing stables around Stockbridge the line was also used to transport race horses around the country.



SPRAT AND WINKLE

You can still trace the path of the Sprat and Winkle Line through the historic and beautiful Test Valley, and discover for yourself the passing of this famous railway