

RAILWAY from MINNIS BAY to MANSTON AIRFIELD

A single track railway line once ran from Minnis Bay across the fields to Manston Airfield. It was constructed early in 1916, during the First World War, for the purpose of carrying supplies, goods, and aeroplane parts to the airfield by rail. The airfield was then a Royal Naval Air Service Station which had been transferred from St. Mildred's Bay, Westgate.

The line was nearly 3 miles long, laid on cinders and of a new American pattern, now known as flat-bottomed, and instead of being bolted to the sleepers was "dogged" or clipped.

This railway line joined the main North Kent line on the "up" side near the site of the old Birchington "A" signal box which was demolished in 1929, and very near where the footpath over the fields from Essex Gardens crosses the main line at Horsa Road. From here, the track went across the fields to the Canterbury Road which it crossed about 80 yards west of King Edward Road. It then continued across the fields to the Acol Road which it crossed just below the short fir-tree lined private road leading to Quex Park. It then proceeded over the field crossing the B2049 road, and then on to near Sparrow Castle Water Pumping Station. From here it ran parallel to the Manston Road, crossing the road leading to Cheeseman's Farm to the airfield. It terminated near Pouces where there was a long platform and a siding alongside a hangar and workshops. Where the line crossed the roads there were gates across the tracks which were opened and closed by the guard.

At the Minnis Bay end there was a long siding into which the carriages were shunted from the main line until ready to be taken to Manston. Usually a small tank steam engine was used on this line but occasionally main line steam engines were employed. The line had no signals and all the points were hand worked.

On occasions Service Personnel were issued railway tickets at Manston and travelled by the train from Manston to Birchington where the coaches were attached to the main line trains.

The line was demolished and taken up in about 1928. Its route can still be seen in places where it crosses the fields – the corn does not grow quite so well on the line of the track. At Manston rails could be seen in the coal yard, as well as the old unloading platform until the 1970s.

I am told that boys from Acol going to school in Park Lane at this time used to put pennies on the line where it crossed the Acol Road for the train to run over, and they were known to jump on to the train for a short ride until chased off.

The track of this railway is marked on the One Inch Ordnance Survey Map, sheet 117, dated 1920.

Authorities for some of this information – Mr. Clayfield of Cross Road, and Mr. B Oddy who both worked at Manston at this time, and lastly Mr. Gammon of St. James Terrace who worked the signal Birchington "A" box at Minnis Bay.

Manston engine - c. 1920

