

# The Manston Branch Line

The Manston branch line was opened in 1917 during the First World War, for the carrying of supplies to the Royal Naval Air Service base at Manston. The line branched off from the main line at what is now the stile and crossing at Minnis Bay. From there it went across the fields and crossed what we know as the Canterbury Road, at what is now the Sea View Garage. It then proceeded to the top of Acol Hill where it crossed Park Lane. From here on it ran parallel and beside the road, crossing left over Shottendane Road, and passing what is now the water works, until it came to Cheesman's, it then crossed the Margate-Minster Road and terminated inside the camp.

The line was a single track all the way, which was of a new American pattern, (now known as flat bottomed) and instead of being bolted to the sleepers it was 'dogged' or clipped. Cinders were used as ballast.

There was usually about one train a day, and the line had its own engine for working these trains. This engine was a small tank engine, and it was used because of its lightness, the main line engines would have been too heavy for the line. Anything that had to be worked up the branch line was put into the sidings on arrival at Birchington. These sidings extended from where the line branched to what is now Gore End Farm, they also extended for about 200 yards towards London. Having been left in these sidings the train was then worked through to Manston by the tank engine. The line also had its own guard's van. This was one of the old ten-ton types.

The line had no signals and all the points were hand worked, probably by the guard of the train. The branch at the Birchington end was controlled by what was then Birchington "A" signal box. There was also a "B" box, which is the present signal box at Birchington. "A" box however, was twice as big and was built such that when the signaller pulled a lever he had his back to the line, instead of facing it. This system is still in use.

The line was probably built by a private company, and closed during 1926.