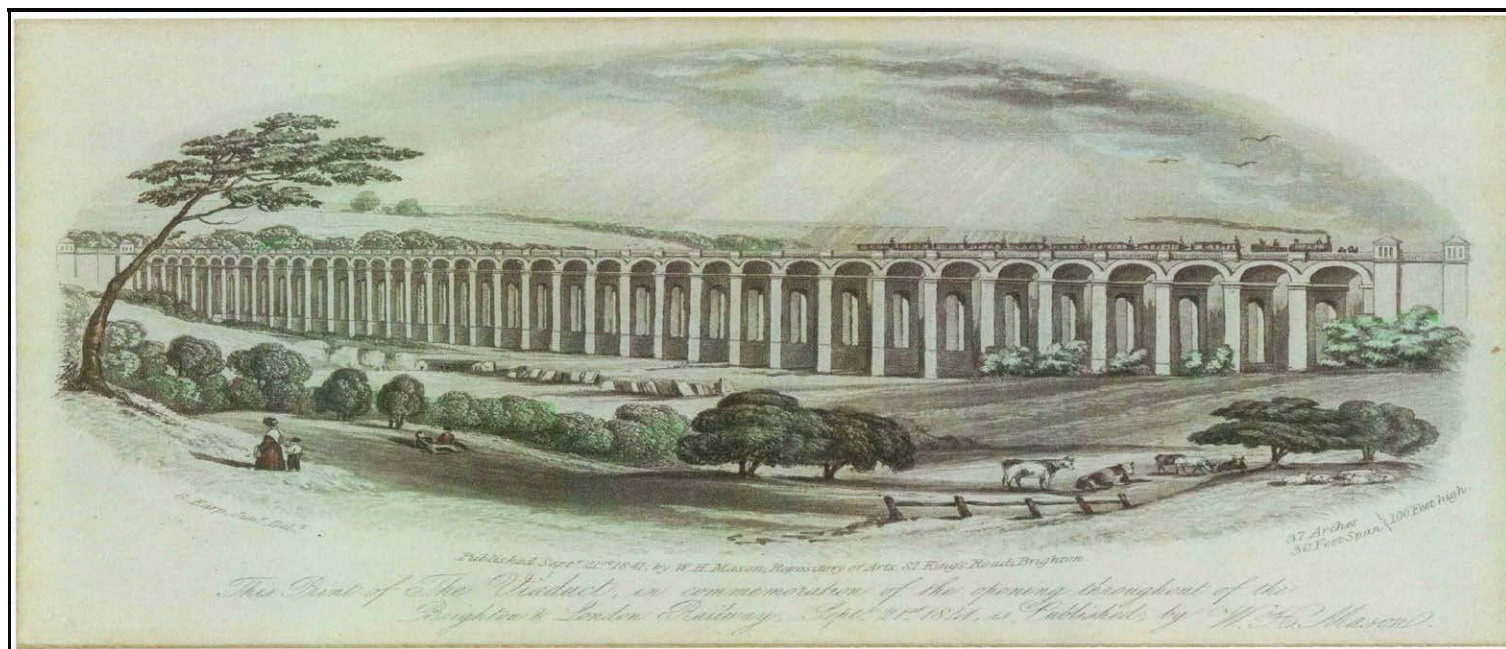


Full Steam Ahead

Contributed by Sue Burgess

Throughout the autumn, to complement the celebrations in Haywards Heath, Cuckfield Museum devoted much of its display space to commemorating the railway station's 175th anniversary. We looked at why the line did not come through (or rather under) Cuckfield as originally planned and we remembered Joseph Flesher, the engineer responsible for our local stretch of the line, who is buried in Cuckfield churchyard and whose descendants still live locally.

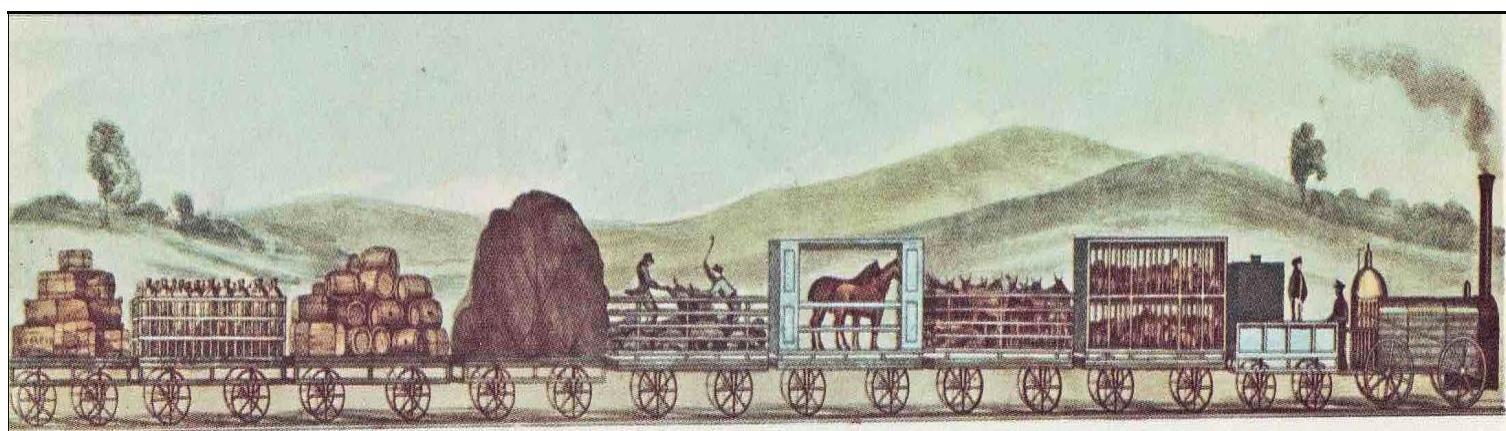


In commemoration of the opening throughout of the Brighton & London Railway September 21st 1841

As Haywards Heath was initially a terminus, the first passengers had to rely on coach travel to complete their journeys beyond Haywards Heath (the replacement buses of their day!) but as confidence in this new mode of transport grew so did the popularity of the railway and Cuckfield rapidly lost the London to Brighton stage coach trade. Employment at the inns and in associated trades was inevitably much reduced but the railway itself offered new opportunities – as did the need for staff in the substantial houses being built for, or acquired by, wealthy professional men who could now work in London but live in the country – the first commuters. If you have ever wondered why there are so many large houses in Cuckfield, have a look at our special map display.

The Museum's picture collection includes an original George Childs water colour of construction work on the Haywards Heath tunnel, the creation of which proved a problem from the outset as it was very wet ground and caused Joseph Flesher's contract to over-run by nearly three months in 1841. We also show a copy of its counterpart* by the same artist looking south towards the Downs. Both these detailed pictures are graphic reminders of the notoriously dangerous conditions in which the navvies worked and our collection of associated accident reports makes grim reading.

Visitors will also see an enlarged copy of a previously unknown print, recently donated to the Museum, commemorating a freight train crossing the Balcombe Viaduct on 21st September 1841, the first day the line was fully opened through to Brighton.



Goods train of the type seen in the viaduct print

Anyone who uses Haywards Heath station regularly will probably be interested in previously unpublished pictures from the early 1930s, prior to electrification of the line, of its total demolition and re-building with, incredibly, no interruption of the steam-hauled service.



Looking south through Haywards Heath (Folly Hill) tunnel

Generous loans from the Bluebell Railway Museum, the Burgess Hill Model Railway Club and from individual enthusiasts mean that we can

show a range of interesting models and railway artefacts. This display should appeal to anyone with an interest in railways in general and their impact on our area in particular.

** original in Brighton Museum & Art Gallery*



Re-building Haywards Heath station in 1932 prior to electrification of the line