

# MORTLAKE

by Peter Kay

Mortlake station (which has always been passenger-only) has not had an especially exciting history, however it retains all its LSWR buildings and canopies and in consequence still possesses a pleasant atmosphere, enhanced by the adjacent ex-Master Bootmakers almshouses. The most newsworthy events here were the deaths and delays at the numerous road and footpath crossings in the vicinity, the Board of Trade file on this subject having to be kept up for 34 years, even longer than the corresponding file for Barking! Unlike Barking, the principal road crossing here, Sheen Lane adjacent to the station, never has been replaced by a bridge.

As was noted in previous LSWR articles, there are no surviving company minutes for most of the 1850s-70s period, but it appears that there were no major changes at Mortlake in that period anyway.

## THE 1846 STATION

The story of the Richmond Railway's original stations, and their architect John Emmett, has already been told in the Barnes article (*LRR* 95). As noted there,

the Mortlake building was in the standard style, and was nearly complete when the line opened in July 1846. For further comment on the 1846 Mortlake structures see the caption below. The Richmond Railway minutes for 1846-51 have no reference to any changes at Mortlake, and the 1850 OS skeleton map shows the structures as in the 1860s photograph here and the 1867 OS. However the platforms were at some date extended westwards (E-F in plan p.366 top).

In the 1870s (approx) the down platform shelter was extended westwards to the length shown on the 1893 OS (p.364). Otherwise the absence of significant changes continued until the major improvements of 1886.

## THE 1886 IMPROVEMENTS

These were provoked by the Sheen Lane crossing situation (combined with the absence of a passenger footbridge). In 1875 (when the first fatality occurred at the Church Path crossing to the east) it was noted that at Sheen Lane there was 'a porter stationed night and day' to work the road gates and warn pedestrians. He worked under the signalman in the



Mortlake in the 1860s. Whilst the station house was the smallest of the three standard style houses on the Richmond Railway, the other facilities on the up platform were the most extensive. (This is assuming that everything seen here did date from 1846; there are no early sketches of Mortlake, and no maps prior to the 1867 OS, which shows everything the same as in this photograph). The block on the left probably contained the Ladies and Gents. The entrance to the station building must have been on the east (road) side. The down platform had a standard type 1846 shelter. The gates are shut here and the slotted post signal for up trains appears to have the arm in the clear position.

adjacent box, which had been opened at an early date, probably the late 1860s. Thus for *road* users delays were more important than danger. By the mid-'80s the gates were being worked directly by the signalman from the box. However passengers crossing between the platforms, including those from the Booking Office to the down platform, used a separate board crossing immediately to the west of the road, and there was no control over their movements, which were merely 'under the general control of the station staff', without any particular employee being responsible (and of course with the staff being otherwise occupied when trains were present, the most dangerous time).

The question of a footbridge here had in fact been raised at LSWR Board level in 1883, but two years then passed before the Engineer Jacomb presented plans for the 'proposed footbridge and connected works' to the Engineering Committee in June 1885, at the large estimate of £1,400. Then, in December 1885, a local resident Alfred Peachley engaged in the classic method of self-immolation on a double track crossing. After waiting on the up platform until the 5.40pm up departure had cleared, and wanting to leave the station by the down platform exit, he strode out onto the passenger crossing immediately behind the up train and was hit by the 5.10pm Waterloo - Shepperton. This resulted in the Board of Trade despatching Major Marindin here in January 1886 to report.

An LSWR 8am-8pm survey after the accident showed:

497 vehicles over the road crossing

2,046 pedestrians over the road crossing  
539 passengers crossing between the platforms  
122 trains passing (24 hour figure).

Marindin's conclusion was that for the passenger numbers in question 'a footbridge would certainly be required if this station were to be coming under inspection on account of any new work'. He also became rather heated about the road crossing, saying that it 'ought not to be allowed to exist for a day longer than necessary'; and suggested a road diversion to the west halfway along the platforms. (However the LSWR quickly pointed out the problems of that and advised that they were not going to pursue it).

The Directors gave final approval to Jacomb's plans (which they were probably about to do anyway even without Peachley's assistance) on 20th January 1886. On 18th February a deputation from Mortlake attended the LSWR Board and was told that the company had already ordered the erection of a double footbridge for both road users and passengers (meaning one divided by railings along the middle of the bridge span). In April the footbridge was noted as under construction. The improvements were not actually an inspectable work, so Marindin did not return on their (assumed) completion in the summer.

To build the footbridge it was necessary to demolish the 1846 station building. As the Booking Office was in this building, a new single-storey staff offices building including a replacement B.O. had to be provided on the down side. The majority of the 1846 up side canopy was retained, along with the whole of the existing down side shelter / canopy. A

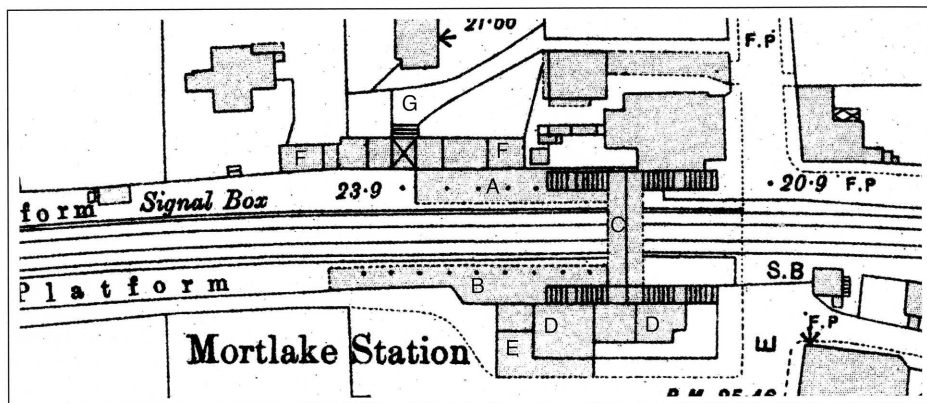


A 1900s view from Sheen Lane, but the station structures seen here are all 1886. The east end of the 1886 up platform block (left) contained a replacement Ladies Waiting Room. At right are the two pre-railway houses / shops on the north side of the crossing, which prevented the station expanding at that point (which would otherwise have been the obvious position for an improved main station entrance).

*Barnes and Mortlake History Society*



Montage of two 1980s views of the 1886 up side buildings. The flat-roofed section at right was the 1886 B.O. / entrance (closed by this date and let out). As the 1893 OS shows, the canopy originally extended in front of it (removed in the 1940s). The section at far right behind the letter box was a C20 extension. At left is part of the 1895 section. All are in stock brick with red brick arching.



Mortlake in its 1886-1895 form is seen here in the 1893 OS 1:1056 map (reproduced at 80ft to the inch).

- |                                                                                                       |                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| A Remaining section of 1846 canopy (westernmost bay 1886).                                            | D-D 1886 down side building.                 |
| B Down side shelter / canopy (1846 east of B / 1870s west of B / widened portion on south side 1886). | E 1886 roadside canopy.                      |
| C 1886 footbridge.                                                                                    | F-F 1886 up platform building.               |
|                                                                                                       | G 1886 up side exit / pathway to Sheen Lane. |

The second signal box on the up platform is a mystery. Possibly a replacement box was built c.1890 (for better signal sighting?) and the scheme then abandoned?

new timber staff offices / waiting rooms building was erected behind the up platform, together with an exit route on this side (1893 OS above).

### THE 1895/6 IMPROVEMENTS

With a growing local population, further improvements soon became necessary. In March 1895 an additional £400 waiting room / toilets block was agreed for the down side, to the west of the 1886 building. In October 1895 there was a Directors' visit to examine the situation here, resulting in a new entrance / B.O. building being authorised on the up side in December, at £450. (One imagines that in 1886-95 passengers from the north side for an up train would often have had to go over the footbridge twice). Finally in June 1896 a £262 westward extension of both platforms was approved.

### THE 1897 RESIGNALLING

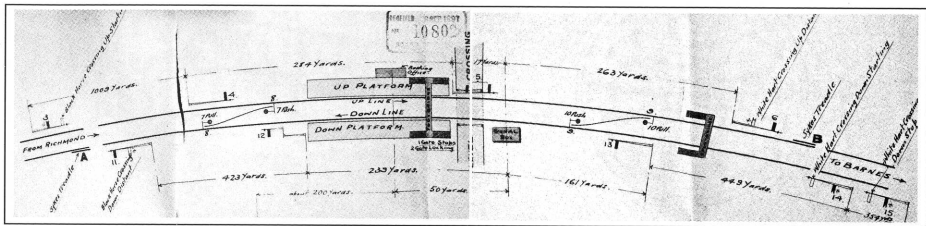
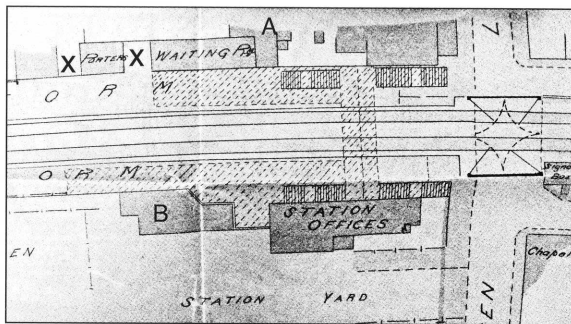
Two crossovers were installed in 1897, one just

beyond the west end of the platforms and one some way to the east of Sheen Lane. A full resignalling was required as a result. Neither the authorising minute in January 1897 nor Major Yorke's inspection report in November tell us what the intended purpose of these crossovers was. One is forced to assume that it was for running round passenger trains on occasion, but the 1898 LSWR timetables do not include any new trains starting from / terminating here.

### NEW CANOPIES (c.1905)

The remaining sections of 1846/1870s canopy / shelter were hardly fit for a busy suburban station, and in the 1900s the provision of longer new canopies was authorised. The up platform canopy was in the standard LSWR style of the time (e.g. Brookwood and Farnborough). However the down platform was too narrow for standard construction and the new canopy was carried by large brackets on the rear wall. Both canopies still exist today at their full length.

Extract from the plan sent to the Board of Trade in June 1897, showing the station structures in their 1896-1902 state. A is the up side Booking Office building of 1896, and B the additional up platform building of 1895. (A is shown fading out on the north side as the BoT were not really interested in station buildings). The road side canopy around the 1886 up side building is omitted in error. The sections of the up platform building marked x / x were archways, shown as part of the building on the 1893 OS. Scale 80ft to the inch.



Signal box diagram, as sent to the BoT June 1897. Prior to these 1897 changes there was no pointwork at this station. The box's existing 15-lever frame was retained but two levers had to be made push-pull. A full resignalling was effected.

The eastern crossover was removed pre-1934, the western was taken out of use on 11.8.1934. Lifting barriers were installed on 2.6.1974, the signal box being reduced to a gate box on that date. On 19.12.1976 the crossing became CCTV from Barnes and the box was abolished altogether.



The 1896 up side Booking Office building seen from Mortlake Green in the 1980s. This was a flat-roofed brick building in the same style (or lack of style!) as the 1886 down side buildings. It suffered bomb damage in 1944 and the new brickwork areas are still identifiable. It may have been in 1944 that the roadside canopy shown on the 1910 OS disappeared. At right is the rear of the timber-built 1886 up platform Waiting Rooms etc block.

*John Minnis*



1910 OS 25in map, reproduced at 80ft to the inch.

A Up side station yard, 1896.

B 1896 up side B.O. and roadside canopy.

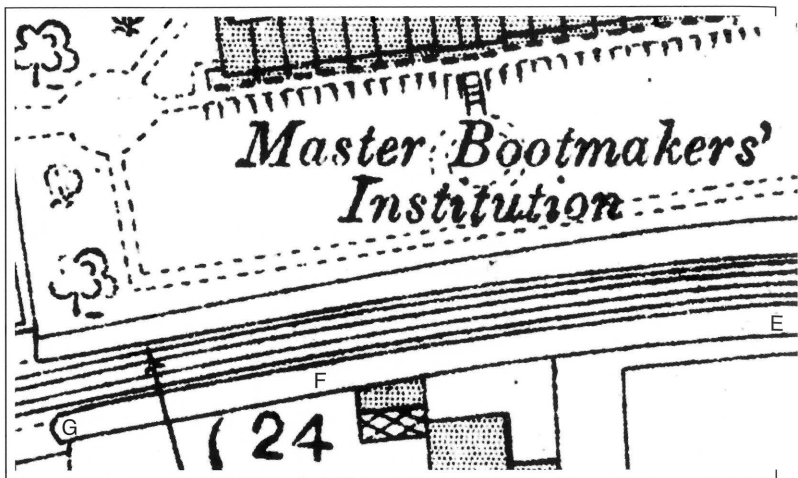
C-C c.1905 up platform canopy.

D-D c.1905 down platform canopy.

E Platform ends in 1850 OS.

F Platform ends in 1867 OS.

G Platform ends following 1896 extensions.

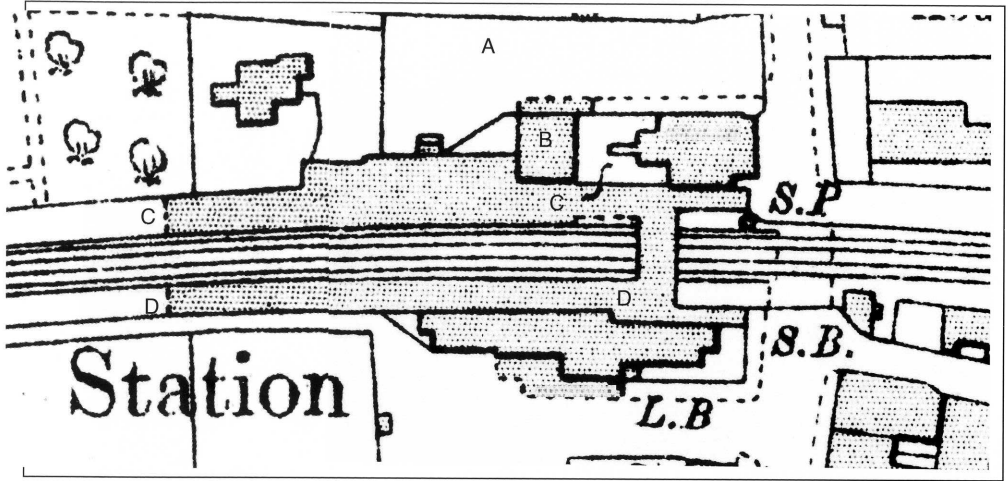


The c.1905 canopies are the main feature in this 1960s view westwards from near the east end of the up platform. The up platform canopy has the standard LSWR valancing of the period. The building seen behind the down canopy is a postwar block of flats, not a railway building.

Originally plain Mortlake, the station was renamed Mortlake & East Sheen on 1.4.1886 (this having been a request of the Mortlake deputation to the Board in February 1886). However on 30.1.1916, at the time of electrification, there was an official reversion back to Mortlake. But this was soon replaced by Mortlake for East Sheen, as seen here on the green BR (SR) nameboard.

To the right of the nameboard are the posts that support the brackets and roof above the down side exit area.

*J.E. Connor collection*



Details of the c.1905 up platform canopy are captured in this 1985 photograph. Like many later canopies, it has steel truss girder longitudinals.



A close view of the unusual brackets of the c.1905 down platform canopy.





View east from the 1886 footbridge over the Sheen Lane level crossing, c.1913. On the left is the new road made by the Richmond Railway along the north side of the line in 1845/6. Originally 'New Road', it soon became 'Worple Way North'. The signal box here (which may have been all-timber originally) was one of a number of late survivors on the Windsor lines of simple early LSWR designs, erected prior to the introduction of the standard LSWR Type 1 design in the 1870s. The staff cottage by the box (originally for a crossing keeper?) was of pre-1860s date; the later cottage at Church Path, seen in the distance next to the footbridge, was similar. The area between them was given over to large gardens for both occupants.

*HMRS, John Tatchell collection*



The same view c.1970: no major changes, but the gardens have been replaced by rented-out sheds, and the signal box has (some time since the 1920s view opposite) been rewindowed at the west end, probably for a better view of pedestrian movements?

*Barnes and Mortlake History Society*

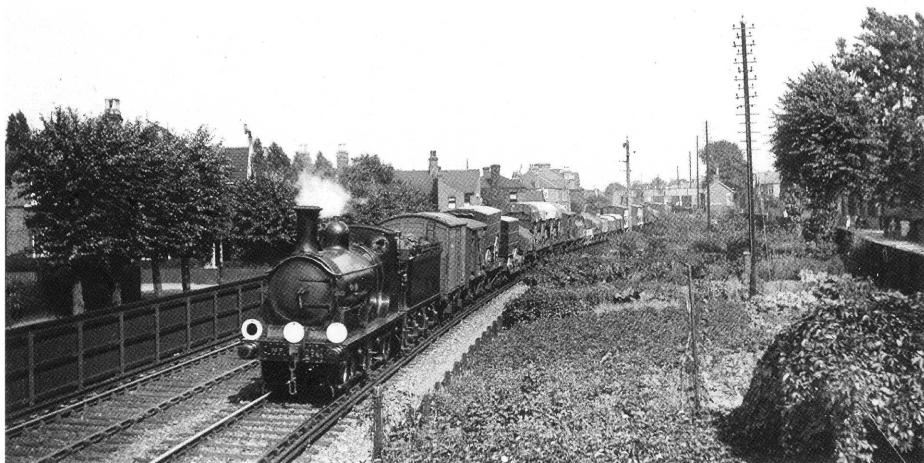


Looking south over the crossing in the 1900s. There were no wickets after the footbridge was provided. At right is the entrance to the new up side station yard of 1896.



Another crossing view, from the 1920s. Whilst some of the crowd may have been posing for the photographer, others were no doubt amongst the many who chose to wait for the gates to open rather than climb the footbridge.

*Barnes and Mortlake History Society*



An unknown photographer took a fair number of views of passing trains in the 1913-15 period, four of which are reproduced here. The first, dateable to 1914/15 as the third rail has been installed, was taken from the staff cottage, and shows Drummond 700 class 0-6-0 No. 694 on a Down Alton Special Goods. Note the carriage trucks with road vans.

*HMRS, John Tatchell collection*



Again 1914/15, this is taken from ground level by the cottage, and shows 415 class 4-4-2T No. 519 waiting for the off with a Windsor - Waterloo train of bogie stock.

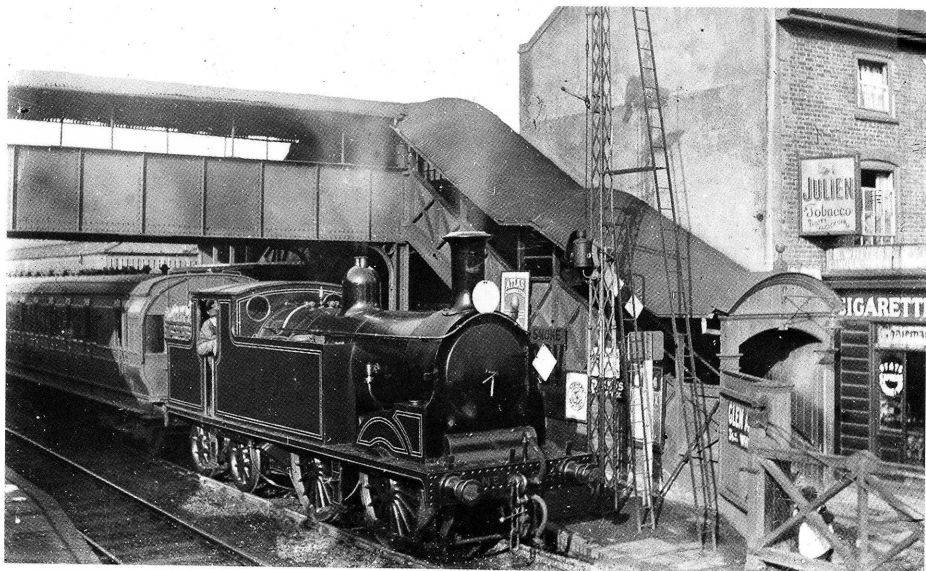
*HMRS, John Tatchell collection*





1914/15 again, this time from the signal box. Passengers wait for another Windsor - Waterloo service, headed by an A12 class 0-4-2T. To the right of the main c.1905 up platform canopy can be seen a short further section of canopy on brackets, with 1846 valancing. The most likely explanation of this is that the 1846 canopy (reduced in width) was left here in the 1886 - c.1905 period, and the valancing was reused when this new small canopy was put up in lieu. The small canopy lasted until c.2017 but the valancing had long gone!

*HMRS, John Tatchell collection*

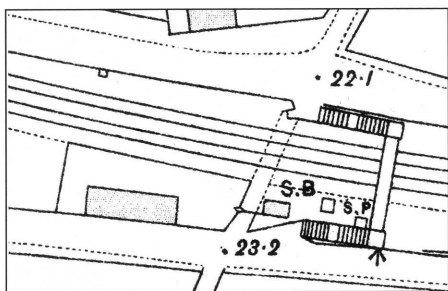


A pre-third rail photograph, 1913/14. M7 No.674 with an unidentified up train of bogie stock.

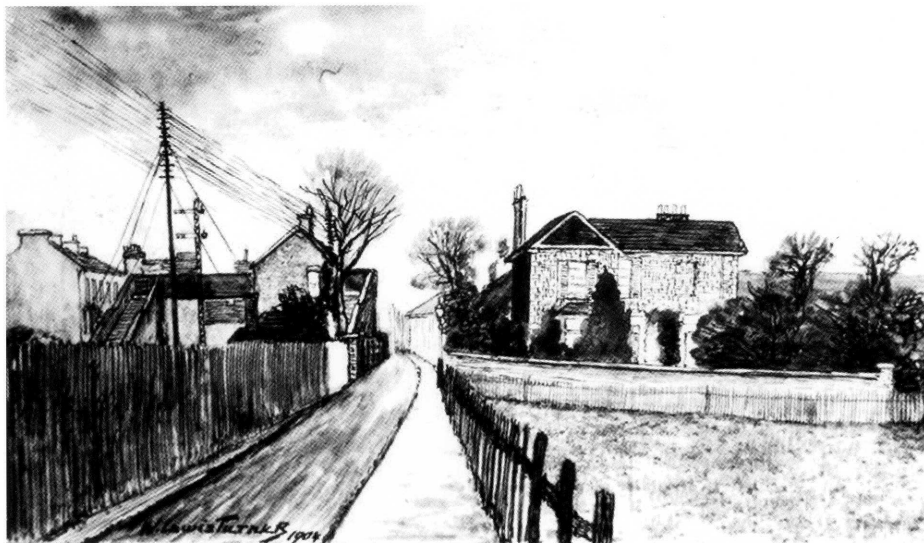
*HMRS, John Tatchell collection*

## CHURCH PATH CROSSING

Church Path was the most important and controversial foot crossing in Mortlake, as it led from the whole south side of the parish to the church and the school. In 1846 a timber footbridge was provided here, as required by the Richmond Railway's Act, but it was removed reluctantly in 1847 under pressure from the Mortlake Vestry who wanted a flat crossing, with a policeman present on Sundays and for funerals. The 1867 OS shows a flat crossing with no gate hut or cottage. In 1875, when the first fatality occurred here, it was stated that a porter was present 'night and day', with a hut on the south side. However in 1879 there was a second fatality; a special empty carriage train had appeared unannounced at Sunday lunchtime when the policeman was off duty for a period when there were no booked trains. Major Marindin conducted a full inquiry into this and recommended a footbridge with the flat crossing removed. (There were of course now a lot more trains than in 1847). No footbridge appeared, but after Marindin returned to Mortlake again in January 1886, he was told that a footbridge was now being ordered! This, the bridge that still exists (unaltered) today, must have opened in late 1886; but the crossing and porter remained also. However around 1903 the LSWR blocked off the crossing, for which they were taken to court by Barnes UDC in 1904! - but clearly without success.



Church Lane as shown on the 1893 OS map. This shows the 1886-1903 situation with both footbridge and staffed flat crossing. The tracks had previously run closer to the Worple Way North fence, and had to be slewed in 1886 to fit in the north side brick stairway without reducing the width of the already narrow road even further. William Hall, the gateman at the time of the 1879 accident, was based at the station, so the cottage (left) may not have been provided until 1886. The crossing hut did not control any signals but was clearly significant enough for the OS to deem it a 'SB'.



Although not a great artwork, this drawing of the crossing, looking east along Worple Way South, is of value, as the 'railway' photographs here are all taken *from* the footbridge. It was made by W. Lewis Turner in 1904. The house at right was Portobello Cottage. The Mortlake Up Advanced Starting / White Hart Lane Up Distant signals are seen to the left of the cottage.

*Barnes and Mortlake History Society*



A view east from Church Path footbridge, dated June 1914, just before the third rails were laid. Adams 4-4-2T No.430 heads a Waterloo - Twickenham - Hounslow - Waterloo train. Worple Way South (right) was a pre-railway road and the Richmond Railway was deliberately laid immediately on its north side to reduce severance.

*HMRS, John Tatchell collection*



Looking west from Church Path to the station in the 1930s; the east end of the up platform is visible in the distance. SECR F1 No.1204 passes with a four-carriage up train. The extra curvature caused by the 1886 slewing is evident. The cottage gardens were still in full production at this date!

*Lens of Sutton Association, Cullum collection*

### SUBSEQUENT CHANGES

Very little has happened here since the 1900s. In recent decades there has been some switching of Booking Offices. The down side B.O. had been closed by 1985, the space being let off. However the 1896 up side B.O. was subsequently closed, becoming a taxi office, with a replacement B.O. in the down side entrance area. Recently, however, the interior of the 1896 building was fitted out with a disability-compliant ramp and new steps, and restored to passenger use as an up side entrance /exit (with ticket machines on the platform).

The 1886 footbridge, seen here in 1985, remains in largely original condition in 2019, a good example of a 'double footbridge', with public road users and ticket-holding passengers separated by a central railing.

### *Principal Sources*

National Archives: MT6 805/8 (1885), 1848/7 (1897). RAIL 411/44, 49 (LSWR Engineering Committee).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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