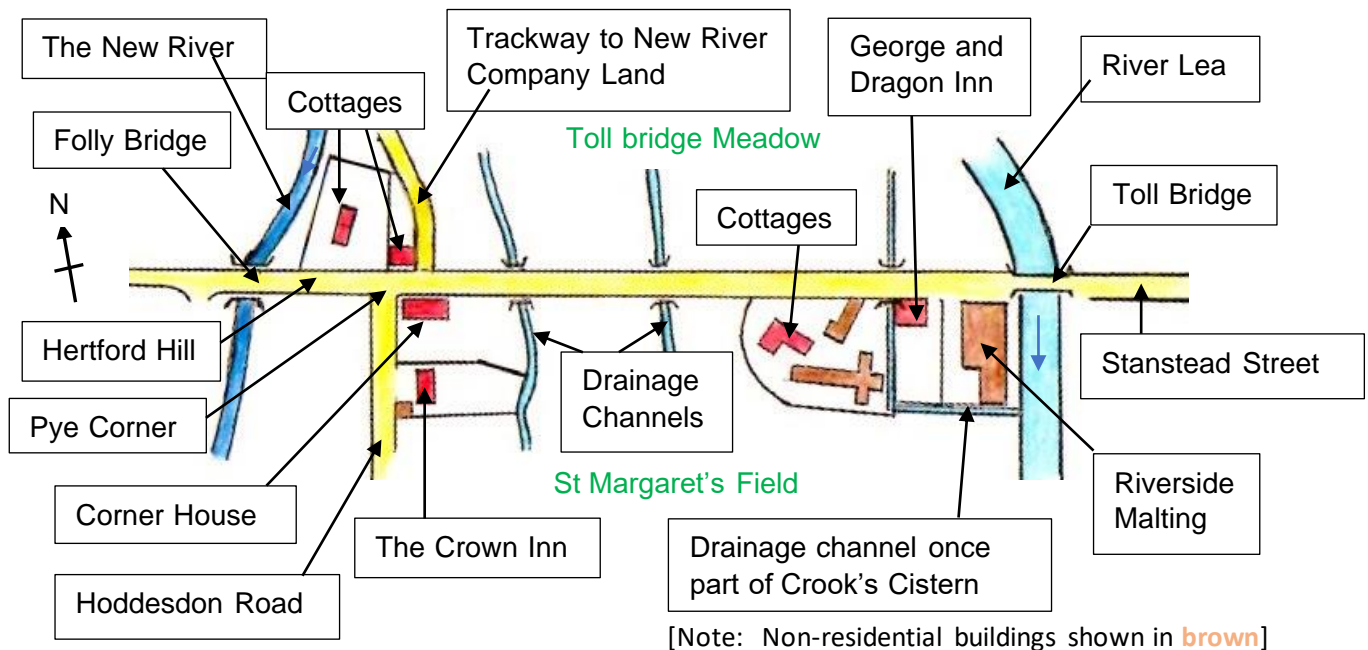


STATION ROAD IN VICTORIAN TIMES

BY
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Station Road stretches from the bottom of Folly Hill at the junction with the road to Hoddesdon all the way to the bridge over the River Lea. This is a part of an ancient route across the valley floor and was, from early times, an important east to west route joining Essex to Hertfordshire and beyond. The road forms the boundary between the parishes of Great Amwell to the north and St. Margaret's to the south. The road historically passed between farmer's fields which saw little building development until the later years of Queen Victoria's reign [1837-1901]. In 1840 the railway had yet to be built and so the road had not acquired its current name.

STATION ROAD AS IT WAS IN 1840



In 1840 Folly Hill was then known as Hertford Hill and the entire road from Amwell Crossroads (Four Want Ways) to the toll bridge over the Lea as The Hertford Road. However, in official documents the road was more often referred to as that part of the highway leading from the Four Want Ways at Amwell to Stanstead Bridge. Up until about the first world war, the area where the Hoddesdon Road joins Station Road was called Pye Corner. This name had been used for at least three hundred years, before fading out of common usage. Indeed, it was recorded that a new Vicar at Great Amwell spent his first few months in early 1600 staying in lodgings at Pye Corner. Of the buildings extant in 1840 only the much-altered structures of the Crown and the George and Dragon Inns still exist. The latter being known today as the Jolly Fisherman. In 1840 two stagecoaches could be seen morning and evening each weekday, turning the corner at the Hoddesdon Road junction, on their daily return journeys from Much Hadham and Roydon to London. Station Road had by and large a very rural appearance in 1840 with trees lining much of the relatively narrow highway for much of its length.

In 1840 a person standing on the river bridge looking west along the road would see in the middle distance the slope of Hertford Hill and the road rising more gently beyond towards Amwell Crossroads. To the right of the road would be seen a large riverside meadow known as Toll Bridge Meadow which stretched as far as a drainage ditch which ran close to where Amwell Lane is today. To the right could be seen a riverside malting occupying the site of what is now the Riverside Green. This location is thought to be the place where London Merchants built their grain, malt and flour warehouse in 1248. A location which was to be associated with malting up until the 1960s. Downstream of the malting could be viewed a drainage channel feeding water into the River Lea. This being a remnant of a feature known as Crook's Cistern dating from 1701 – 1707 when Japhet Crook was the Lord of the Manor in St Margarets. When built it formed a side channel and dock for the growing London barge traffic of the time. Its location was approximately where the modern steps from the tow path lead up onto the Riverside Green.

Walking westward the 1840s pedestrian would see just beyond the malting the George and Dragon public house. The plot of land on which this stands formed part of the properties of the Baesh Charity between 1636 and 1918. The public house replaced a row of cottages in 1736 which are known to have been in existence when the Baesh Charity took over the property a century earlier. It had stabling for eight horses in 1756 and provided rooms for travellers. Like the Rose and Crown just over the bridge in Stanstead Abbots it was well positioned to provide sustenance to those who worked on the river, the wharves and in the maltings associated with them. Just beyond the Inn a drainage channel passed under the road taking water into the remains of Crook's Cistern. The channel itself is believed to be a residual of a much wider stream which was in much earlier times a second channel of the River Lea at this point.

Beyond the George and Dragon an enclosure of land taken out of St Margaret's Field contained a long building set back from the road a much smaller building close to the road and at the far end an 'L' shaped cluster of cottages. It has proved difficult to determine for certain what the first two buildings were. It is likely given the length and narrowness of the larger building that they were a malting making good use of the proximity to the river for onward transport. The cottages at the far end of the enclosure are much easier to understand. These cottages, perhaps first built for malting workers, were to survive into the 1930s and became known as the railway cottages due to being adjacent to the 1843 station.

The western end of the enclosure is formed by an intriguing curved boundary. Such property boundaries usually indicate a natural feature in the landscape that form suitable and obvious property boundaries. The most curved part of the boundary well away from the road was marked in 1840 by the remnants of a drainage channel. This suggests that this was an historic drainage channel that had been superseded by extensive new channels dug in the 1760s in connection with the construction of the River Lea Navigation Cut between Ware and Stanstead Abbots. These were necessary because the traditional draining of Amwell Marsh to the Old River Lea had been cut off by the new navigation and it was essential new drainage channels were dug to lead this water down the valley and eventually into the River Lea. One of these 1760s channels can be seen today behind the Hertford bound platform of the railway station whilst a second was culverted alongside Amwell Lane. On the other side of Station Road, a house was inadvisably built over the culverted channel and the house suffered subsidence and took on a considerable lean by the 1970s, eventually it was demolished and a new house built in its place. [No. 40 today]. The significance of the curved boundary near the cottages is that it was partially preserved as the boundary of the railway owned property alongside the station approach road, for the 1843 built railway station. For the 1840 visitor the next part of the walk, as far as Pye Corner, was along a narrow road lined with overhanging trees flanked by St Margarets Field to the south and Toll Bridge Meadow to the north.

On the corner of Hoddesdon Road was to be found Stratfield [sometimes spelt as Streatfield] House. It was owned at the time by a Mr Henry Stratfield who appears have named his house after himself, although he does not seem to have lived there. On the other side of Station Road opposite Hoddesdon Road was a pair of thatched cottages. These cottages were to be one of the last of such homes in Stanstead Abbots or St Margarets not to see the thatch replaced by slate or tile. They were to last until at least 1912. Just up the slope of Folly Hill were two cottages built end on to and set back from the road. Both these sets of cottages were rented from the New River Company which owned the land between the New River down the valley side to a drainage channel. The shortly to be constructed Amwell Lane was to run alongside this drainage channel which in 1840 divided Toll Bridge Meadow from the New River owned field.



This view was taken from the top of Hertford Hill close to the New River Bridge. Although taken about 1900 little had changed in this location for many decades.

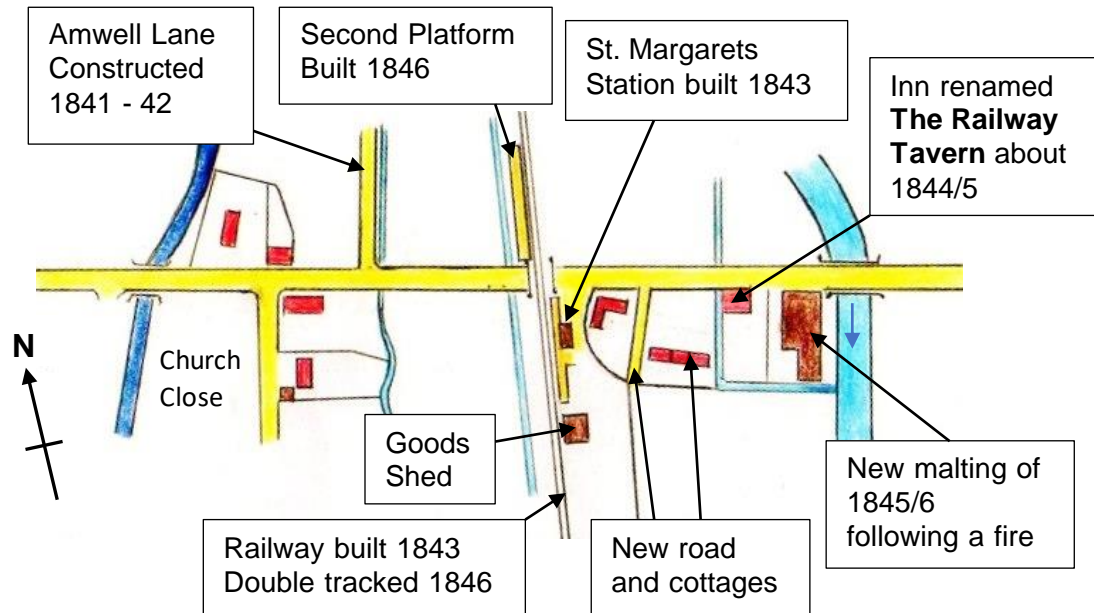
The junction with the Hoddesdon Road can be seen on the right, both roads being much narrower than today.

The rural nature of this location was to last until the 1890s and beyond.



Another early 1900s view that had not changed much in the previous 60 years. Taken from the Hoddesdon Road it shows the cottages that stood here for more than a century. The only obvious modern addition in this turn of the century scene is the finger post road sign on the left. The narrow wheel tracks in the gravel road are a characteristic of the time when much wheeled traffic took the form of small two wheeled passenger and goods carts hauled by one horse.

STATION ROAD AS IT WAS IN 1855



The settlement of the tithe award in Great Amwell took place in 1839 and led as elsewhere to new investment in both agriculture, commerce and infrastructure. One of the outcomes was the construction of Amwell Lane in 1841 to 1842. This provided a more direct route for wheeled road traffic between St. Margarets and Great Amwell. At the same time the original access track used by the New River Company was closed as Amwell Lane rendered it redundant.

A much bigger change to Station Road was already being planned before Amwell Lane was completed. This was the construction of a new railway line from Broxbourne Junction to Hertford by the Northern and Eastern Railway. The first obvious sign on the ground that locals would have seen was the railway companies' surveyors pegging out the alignment of the railway, in the mid-summer of 1843. The railway purchased a strip of land through both St. Margarets Field and Toll Bridge Meadow, wide enough for double track. On the St. Margarets side of the level crossing a wider strip of land was purchased on the Stanstead Abbots side of the line, sufficient for a station and goods yard to be built. The station approach road ran alongside the pre-existing curved boundary mentioned earlier. This meant that some of the old cottages now faced onto the station approach road as well as others onto the main road.

This railway line was built in about three months [August to October], opening to traffic on October 31st 1843. The main change to Station Road was the level crossing equipped with two manually controlled gates. The Railway Company being obliged to provide a person to be in attendance to ensure the safety of the public every time that trains passed over the road. In the early years the gates were only closed for a few minutes about sixteen times a day, creating only minimum inconvenience at a time when road traffic was relative light.

The railway was initially built as a single-track line with a one platform station built entirely within the parish of St. Margarets. The line was always intended to be double track and this was achieved in 1846 with a second platform provided on the Great Amwell side of the level crossing. Today's Hertford bound platform is in the same location but considerably longer than its 1846 counterpart. Shortly after the railway opened the road was renamed Station Road.

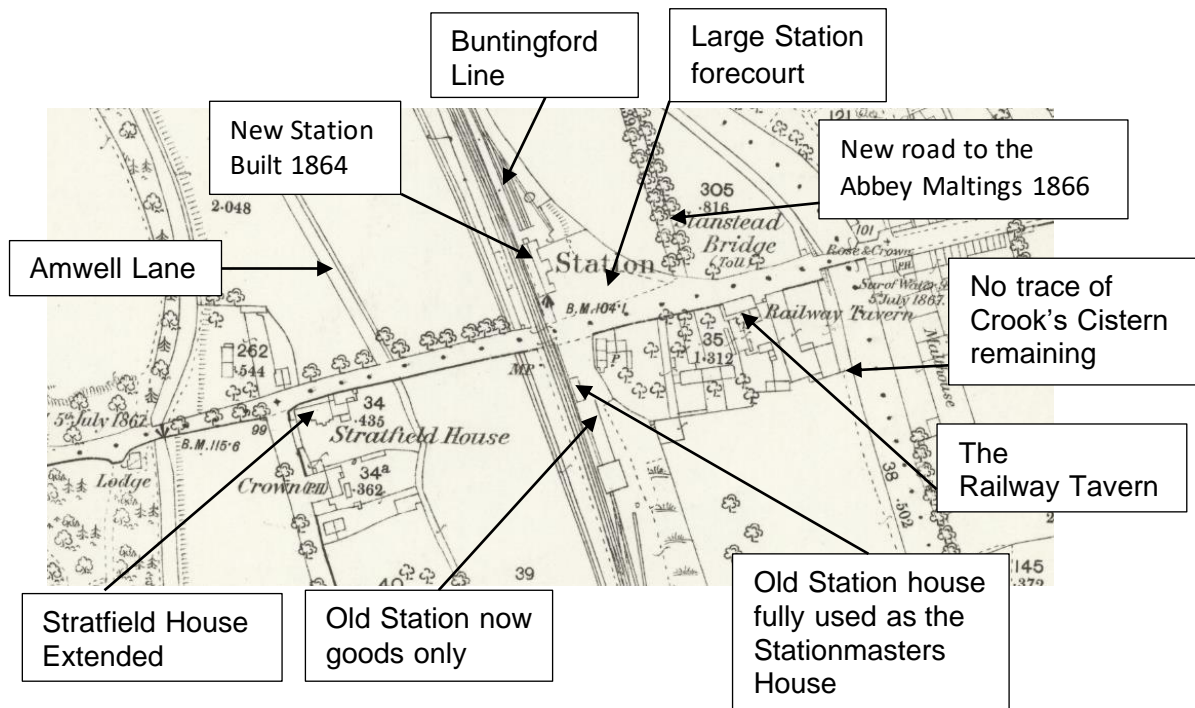
Railway companies at that time were always keen to build themselves, or encourage others to provide a Station Hotel. At St Margarets the George and Dragon was ideally positioned to take on this role. This led to the building receiving a new more impressive façade and a change of name to the Railway Tavern. At this time inns close to railway stations tended to do very well providing lodgings meals and drinks for travellers. The Railway tavern in St Margarets proved to be no exception. At about the same time that the George and Dragon was undergoing its transformation the riverside malting next door caught fire and was severely damaged. It was rebuilt in 1845-6 as a malt roasting factory capable of producing crystal, black and chocolate malts. Successive malt roasting factories were to occupy this site until the early 1960s all making good use of the railway to transport their products away.

Between the Railway Tavern and the railway were the buildings of what is thought to have been a malting as well as the cottages at the railway end of the land enclosed out of St Margarets Field. One of the first changes that took place here was the building of an access track from Station Road through the enclosed land to St Margarets Field beyond. The railway had of course effectively cut the field in half and this new track allowed access to the section that now lay between the Lea and the railway. This track is in fact the origins of Lawrence Avenue that today leads to a residential area partly built on part of the old St Margarets Field. It is not exactly certain when the two malting buildings were removed. It would seem that the footprint of the long thin malting building was used to form the foundations of a line of cottages. Due to this these cottages, which still exist today, rather unusually sit well back from the road with impressively long front gardens.



A 2013 view of the cottages built well back from the road next to the Jolly Fisherman

STATION ROAD AS IT WAS IN 1878

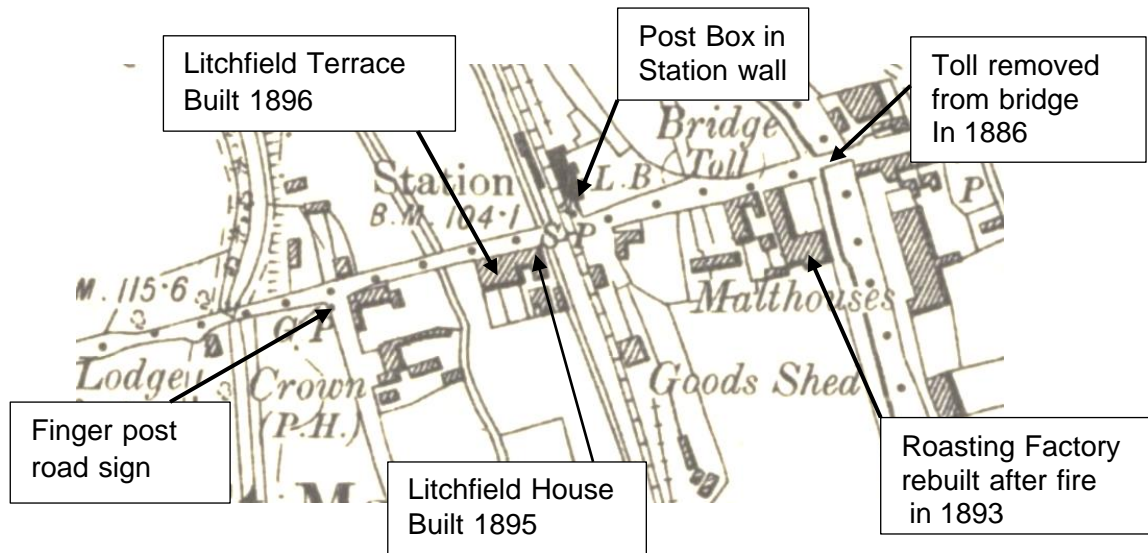


The next significant change that took place arose because the Ware Hadham and Buntingford Railway was forced to divert its junction with the Hertford Line from Ware to St Margarets station. From its opening in 1863 Buntingford trains used the existing station facilities. This gave rise to significant numbers of people crossing Station Road as they changed from Buntingford Line arrivals to Hertford bound trains. It also led to the level crossing gates being closed four times for each branch line train arrival and departure. This was caused by the Buntingford trains and London bound trains using the same platform. The railway company realised the operating problems this was causing and set about constructing a new station.

To achieve this the railway company had to purchase additional land on the Great Amwell side of Station Road. The railway company found themselves having to buy a much larger part of Toll Bridge Meadow than they were ever going to need. The problems of land purchase often bedevilled railway companies as land owners often had the upper hand in negotiations. A new station building and platforms on the Great Amwell side of the level crossing came into use during 1864. The Buntingford Line trains being provided with a bay platform in this new build meant the branch line trains no longer needed to cross Station Road at all. In connection with this new station a large forecourt with a long frontage onto Station Road was created. This provided ample turning and waiting space for road vehicles coming to and from the station.

On the Ware side of the new Station Richard Hunt a Stanstead Abbots business man built a malting between the railway and the river. This was completed in 1866 and was named the Abbey Malting as it was partly built on land that had historically been owned by Waltham Abbey. A new road was built from the malting to connect it to Station Road, the junction being at the river bridge end of the station forecourt. This road junction is replicated today by the entrance to the Rivers Meads residential development that now occupies the land purchased by the railway in the 1860s. In 1886 the toll was removed from Stanstead Bridge which for the first time for many centuries people could pass from Stanstead Abbots into St Margarets free of charge

STATION ROAD AS IT WAS IN 1900



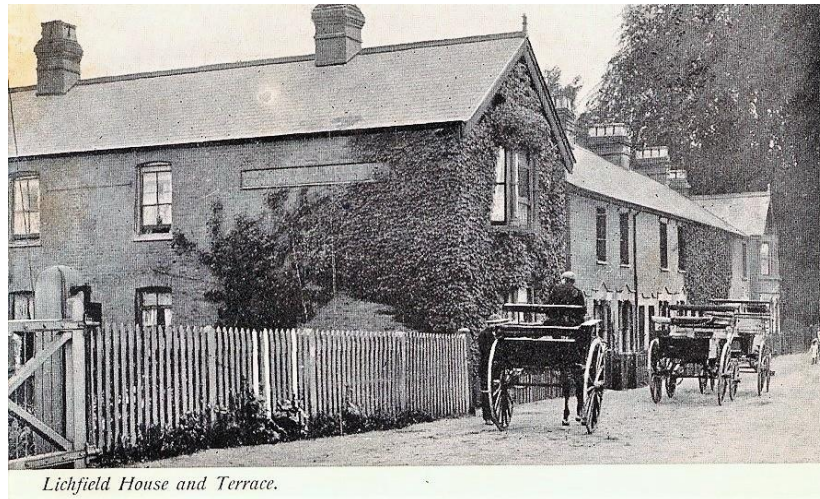
NB The map above was only partially updated in 1898 and thus still shows the bridge with a toll. GP indicates Guide Post as in road signs and LB indicates Letter Box

The Malt Roasting Factory burnt down yet again in 1893. Fire was an all too frequent occurrence in the malting industry where high temperatures, flammable product and timbers in the structures made them particularly vulnerable to catching fire. It was rebuilt over the following two years with a Warehouse and a Foreman's House facing onto Station Road. Next door the Railway Tavern was still enjoying brisk trade both from its river and railway-based customers.

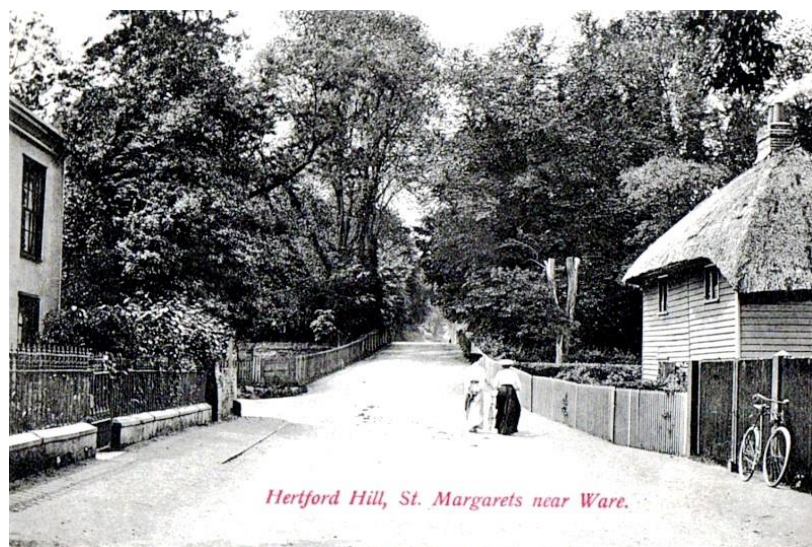


Although this picture postcard dates from well into the C20th it shows the Railway Tavern as it appeared for many years. Beyond it is the Foreman's House and the Warehouse [with large doors facing the road] belonging to the mid-1890s Riverside Malt Roasting Factory.

Although little change had taken place on the Hertford Hill side of the railway for some decades, the mid-1890s was to see a flurry of house building. In 1895 Litchfield House was built right next to the level crossing and was to become the base for a taxi firm run by Mr J Wells. The following year a row of houses named Litchfield Terrace was built taking the housing nearly opposite the junction with Amwell Lane. Interestingly the word Litchfield derives from a term meaning land cleared for farming out of woodland. Perhaps the idea for this came from the fact that Station Road was lined with trees before the houses were built.



This postcard view dates from the early 1900s and shows Mr Wells' horse drawn conveyances lined up in the road. The horses and the carriages were kept in buildings to the rear of the premises accessed by a drive between the house and the railway. The detached house in the far distance was the one that suffered from subsidence having been built partly over a culverted drainage channel. Litchfield House being so close to the railway station made it an ideal location for Mr Wells to run his business from. If the building of the Litchfield properties were a dramatic change the road along by Pye Corner still remained relatively unchanged.



This view dates from about 1900 and shows Stratfield house and Hoddesdon Corner on the left and the two thatched cottages to the right. This quiet and apparently rural scene had changed little since the railway had arrived in 1843.