

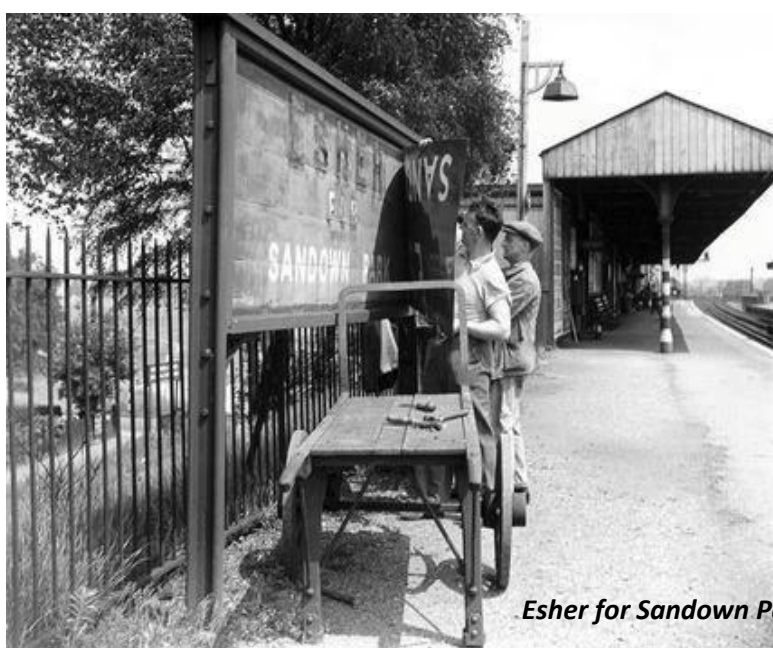
## THE HISTORY OF ESHER STATION

By Christopher Reynolds

Esher Station opened on 21st May 1838 as part of the London and Southampton Railway which provided services between Nine Elms and Woking Common. 1 - Trains stopped at Wandsworth, Wimbledon, Kingston (later Surbiton), Walton and Weybridge and could reach Nine Elms from Woking in fifty seven minutes and from Esher in thirty. 2 - By 11th May 1840 this railway had been extended to Southampton and the company was known as the London and South Western Railway (LSWR).

The railway was first conceived as a way to make Southampton Docks more suitable for trade by providing a direct, safer route to London which avoided the French raiding ships that caused concern during the Napoleonic Wars. Stations were constructed as areas for unloading goods which would be distributed to the local area, with regard to Esher's this was for Hampton, Hampton Court, East and West Molesey, Thames Ditton and Long Ditton. As passenger numbers increased, the LSWR became more accustomed to their needs and built an extension to Vauxhall and Waterloo Bridge in 1848, thus easing travel into the centre of London.

Originally named Ditton Marsh, Esher station went through name changes becoming Esher & Hampton Court in 1840, Esher & Claremont in 1844, Esher in 1913, Esher for Sandown Park in 1934 and again Esher on 13th June 1955. 3 - The station was expanded by 1st April 1888 to include four tracks and royal waiting rooms on the local line platforms for Queen Victoria's daughter-in-law who lived at Claremont. From 4th July 1937 electric services ran towards Portsmouth, Alton, Aldershot, Farnham and Waterloo increasing speeds between stations.



*Esher for Sandown Park 1940*

Esher was also equipped with its own special platforms for the race days at Sandown Park. The Park, which was the first enclosed racecourse in Britain, opened in 1875 and caused a considerable increase in passenger numbers on race days. Two platforms were built west of the up platform (the side towards Waterloo) allowing space for the three trains.

Simultaneously sidings were also built to the West to help store these trains which awaited the return of their passengers. Engines often blocked the local line between Walton and Esher during the race days until 1936 and a second signal box known as 'Esher East' had to be installed to deal with the extra traffic. The subway under the embankment towards the Western end of platforms one and two was financed by the Racing Club as a quicker way to get to the racecourse from the station. These platforms were no longer used from 1965 and were demolished in 1972<sup>4</sup>.

The station's ticket office was situated underneath the down platform with a set of stairs that led up to the platform and another passageway that led to a forecourt used as a taxi rank and car park. On the opposite side of the embankment another set of stairs led up towards the London bound platform. 5 - The freight yard, which was originally situated in the present day car park, was closed in December 1962 whilst the buildings on the disused middle platforms were taken down in 1966. The station was rebuilt in between 1987 and 1988 with the erection of a new timber footbridge and the present day station building. The old station buildings, including the royal waiting rooms, were demolished to make way for the new structure as well as easy access to the car park and waiting area.

1 Rupert Matthews, *How the Steam Railways came to Surrey* (Epsom, Bretwalda Books 2010) pp. 24-27

2 Vic Mitchell and Keith Smith, *Waterloo to Woking: Southern Main Lines* (Middleton Press, Midhurst 1968) p.4

3 Alan Jackson, *The Railway in Surrey* (Atlantic Transport Publishers, Penryn 1999) p. 224

4 Jackson, *The Railway in Surrey* p.178

5 Matthews, *How the Steam Railways came to Surrey* p.48

*Railway Times 1838* (from Elmbridge Library)