

The Hellingly Hospital Railway

By H. R. STONES, A.M.Inst.T.



Photo]

[H. R. Stones

The hospital's electric locomotive shunting in the exchange sidings by Hellingly Station, Southern Region

THE traveller with an eye for railway byways will observe between Eridge and Polegate, on the Southern Region of British Railways, a line with overhead electric conductor wires running north-east from the wayside station of Hellingly, in the heart of East Sussex. This line, now owned by the Hailsham Hospital Management Committee, serves the Hellingly Hospital, which covers an area of about 460 acres of mainly wooded country.

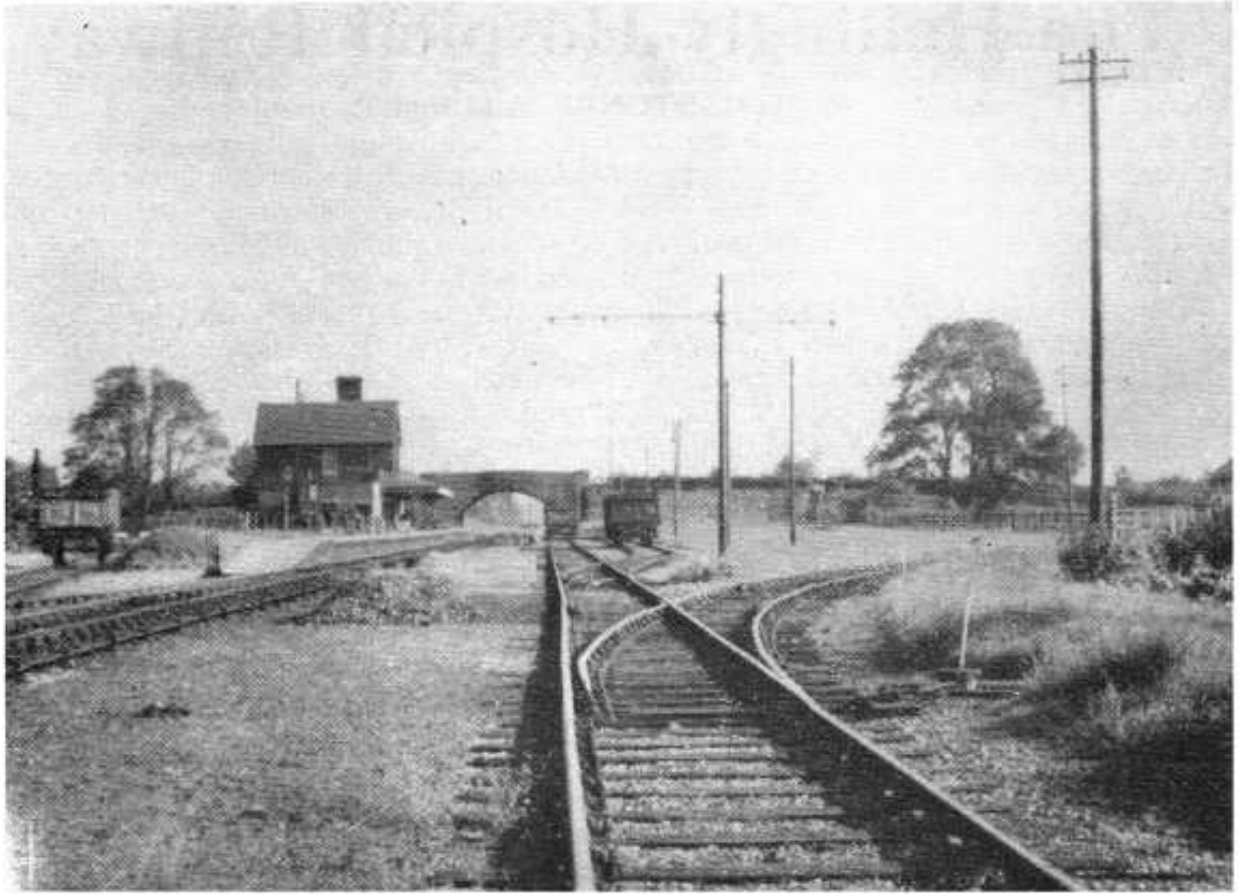
The railway was constructed by contract in 1899, to carry materials for the building of what was then known as the East Sussex Asylum; it was worked by the contractor's steam locomotive. On completion of the hospital in 1903, the line was electrified and taken over by the East Sussex County Council, to carry coal and stores to the institution, and to provide transport for patients, visitors and members of the staff. A loop siding, with shunting necks, was provided at Hellingly Station of the former London, Brighton & South Coast Railway for exchange of traffic, and a short island platform (removed in 1932) was constructed between the main line and one side of the loop for the interchange of passengers.

Alternative methods of transport have robbed the line of much of its traffic.

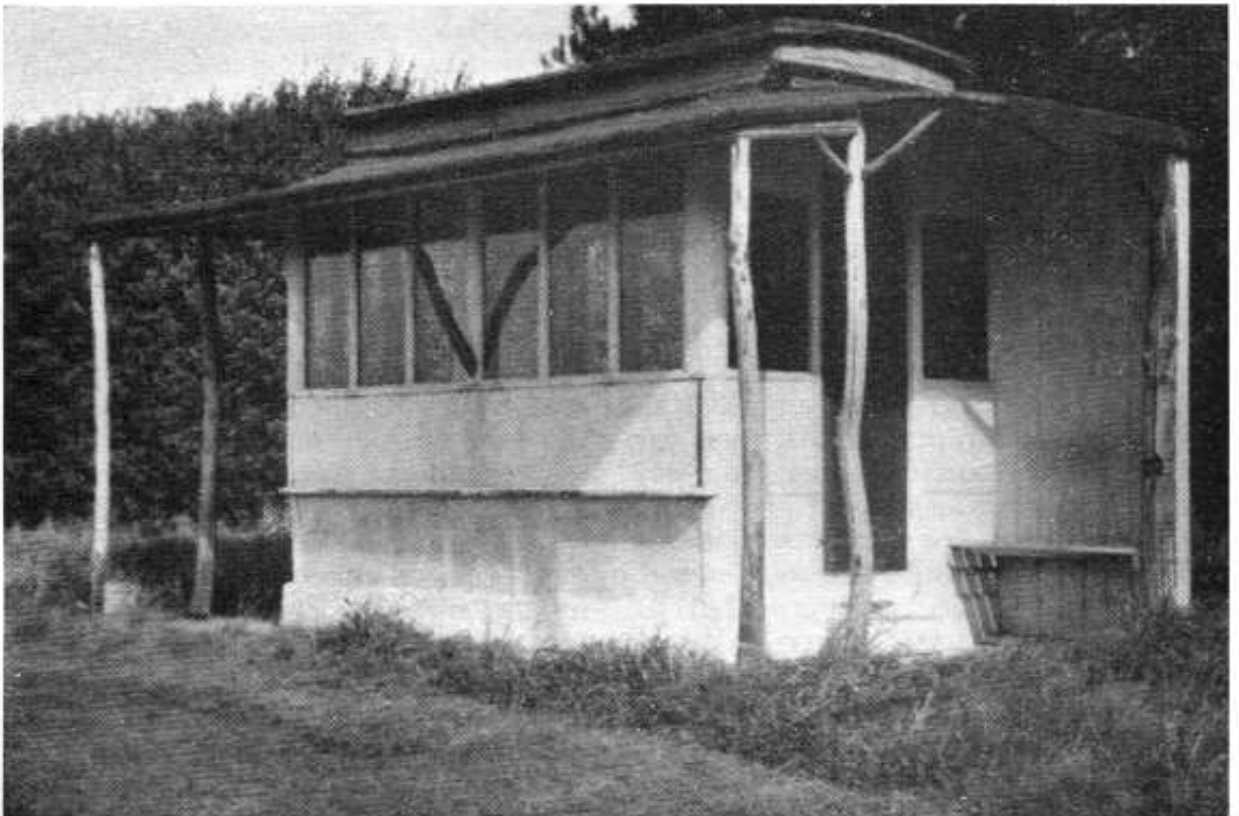
The passenger service was discontinued in 1931, and coal is now about the only commodity handled. If the present intentions of the hospital authorities to convert the power house boilers from coal to oil fuel are carried out, the necessity for the limited use of the railway will no longer exist, as the oil fuel would be delivered direct by road. In such an event, the line will be closed and the track removed.

The hospital railway leaves Hellingly Station at the south end, and runs north-east to the institution's power house close to the main buildings. Constructed on hospital property, the line is single track with two short intermediate loop sidings. It is laid to standard gauge with chaired lightweight bullhead rails, and extends for just over a mile with a maximum gradient of 1 in 50 for about half the distance. All points are of the hand-operated tumbler pattern, and there are no signals. The total length of track including sidings is about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles. Electrification accords with tramway practice at 500 volts d.c. generated at the hospital's own plant, which is also connected with the National Grid, and the overhead conductor wire is supported by cast-iron standards with single bracket arm.

From Hellingly Station yard, the



Hellingly Station and yard, looking north, with the hospital railway diverging by the curve to the right



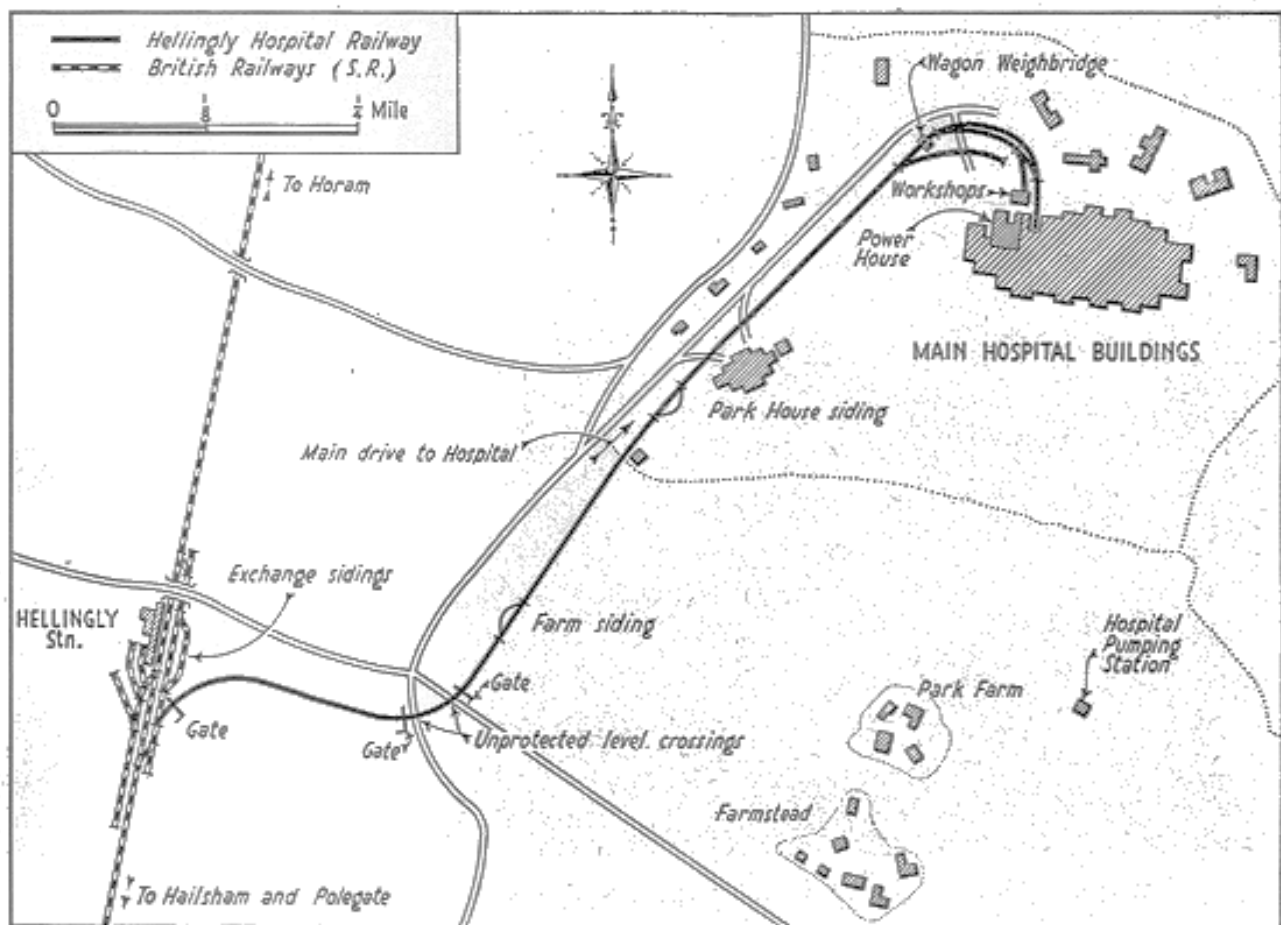
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Body of an electric tramcar used until 1931, now converted to a pavilion on the hospital's sports ground

railway passes through a gate, and, after a short distance, crosses two main roads in quick succession. These level crossings are unprotected, although there is an iron gate controlling access to the railway on either side. Just beyond the crossings, there is a short loop known as Farm Siding, which formerly was used for loading agricultural produce for the hospital. A steady rising gradient, with a maximum of 1 in 50 for the next half mile, now commences and continues practically all the way to the terminus.

electric locomotive, which has been in service since 1903, and is believed to be the oldest electric goods locomotive still operating in the British Isles. Painted green, it is powered by a 14 h.p. motor with a gear ratio of $6\frac{1}{2}$ to 1. Current collection is by trolley pole with fixed head, and the locomotive is equipped with hand brake, electric headlights and a warning bell. The maximum for the locomotive is two loaded 12-ton wagons, which are propelled up the gradient from Hellingly Station to the hospital; in the



Map of the railway serving Hellingly Hospital

Halfway from Hellingly Station, the railway enters the well-kept hospital grounds, and runs parallel with a tree-lined drive about half a mile long. A further loop siding is passed at Park House, and, just before reaching the power house, the line runs over a 20-ton Avery wagon weighbridge. The track layout at the terminus comprises a loop siding leading to a short single-track extension into a small bay platform, a dead-end siding, and a spur leading to the hospital's workshops. Formerly the bay platform was used for the passenger service, but is now a coal stage.

Traffic is worked by one small 0-4-0

reverse direction, up to six empties can be hauled.

Although it carries two makers' plates—Robert Blackwell & Co. Ltd., and William Whiteley & Son, Huddersfield—neither firm can trace its construction! However, as the hospital equipment was installed by German firms, it is thought probable that the locomotive came from the same source, and this theory is substantiated by the fact that the control mechanism is of German manufacture.

Apart from the locomotive, the hospital owns two small two-axle wagons—a ten-ton high-sided clinker wagon of

L.B.S.C.R. origin built in 1888, and a five-ton low-sided wagon for internal transport of coal and coke. The under-frame and axles of the latter originally belonged to a small single-deck tramway car, which up to 1931 ran to and from Hellingly Station to convey passengers. This car, 9 ft. 6 in. long and 6 ft. 8 in. wide, was constructed by the Brush Engineering Company and had seating accommodation for 12 persons (six a side, facing each other). The car body, fitted with an awning, now serves as a pavilion on the hospital sports ground.

The railway does not work to a timetable, because movements depend on traffic requirements and are usually combined to work empties from the

hospital sidings and return with loaded wagons, the arrival of which is notified by public telephone from the station. At the present time, the average number of round trips is one per day. The electric locomotive is accompanied by a shunter who, in addition to his normal duties, flags the trains over the unprotected level crossings and opens the gates through which the line passes.

In conclusion, I must express my thanks to Mr. A. A. G. Mitchell, Secretary of the Hospital Management Committee, for permission to visit the railway, and to Mr. J. W. Greenwood, Superintendent Engineer, and Mr. S. T. Morrish, Senior Engineer, for their valuable assistance in the preparation of this article.