

The Cuckoo Line part3.

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The Cuckoo Line, Part 3.

After a few months without any real group treks, we were all very pleased when Agent Holmbush started nagging us about getting back along to the Heathfield Tunnel, as it was by all accounts open to visitors in the summer. Finally, we got our collective act together and on the 28th August 2010, we got back out there.

Operatives present:

Ghost, Skyframe, Shades, Agent Holmbush & Agent Missus.

1. Heathfield Tunnel and Station Building.

Yes! We finally made it back to the hallowed turf for a little bit of subterranean messing around. But what is this place? Is there more to Heathfield than first meets the eye? It would appear so.

Things are certainly not as they first appear in Heathfield. Strange and improbable as it may seem, England's first ever natural gas deposits were found right at the entrance to Heathfield tunnel in 1895, which must have been a royal pain in the arse. However, this find wasn't put to any kind of use until a year later, when the railway company was drilling for water, smelt gas at about 300ft down and then all ran away and hid behind anything not flammable.

An unbelievably high pressure of 140lbs. to the square inch was found from the pocket of gas and it remained at roughly the same pressure for about six years. Unsurprisingly, the railway company used this to good effect and pressed it to work illuminating the station.

In 1901 an American company called (strangely enough) 'The Natural Gas Fields of England Ltd.,' sank further bore holes to around 400ft deep and the output of one of these was recorded at 15 million cu/ft a day - equal to roughly 1/8 of the total daily sale of gas in London at this time, which is really quite impressive for such a seemingly very quiet and unassuming place.

Due to its purity the gas was used extensively in researching safety in mines and bottled supplies were taken . By 1934 the gas supply had dried up and the station lighting was converted to use ordinary town gas mains.

As a station, Heathfield was heavily used by both passenger and goods traffic and had a large goods depot in use up until August 1968, the area of which is now, totally predictably, given over to an industrial estate, behind the station building.



ABOVE: And so our journey starts where the story once began... The last time we came here was off peak season and the doors to the tunnel were resolutely locked. We vowed at the time that we would return and walk the tunnel and Agent Holmbush made it his personal mission that we should return, so here we are. This is the Northern end of the Heathfield Tunnel, just behind the Coop superstore and adjacent to the Millenium Arch. This photo is taken from the trackbed heading towards Eridge and Tunbridge Wells, and the track bed going the opposite direction is covered in ["Cuckoo2"](#) and ["Cuckoo Waltz part2"](#)

BELOW: The Heathfield Tunnel is fully lit for the whole of its length, allowing for some very atmospheric photos. The path is concrete, sadly....



BELOW: The brickwork in the tunnel is in excellent condition and provides a fascinating collage of colour due to the varying combinations of fungi, soot and water ingress.





ABOVE: There are a few places along the tunnel's length where water drips through the ceiling and the ensuing limescale builds into the beginnings of stalactites.



BELOW: The tunnel has huge gates at both ends. Sadly, we arrived here slightly quicker than us tunnel-hogs would have liked, but it was a worthy experience - there can't be many original railway tunnels which have been made such good use of and conserved in such a way.



ABOVE & RIGHT: There is a small skate park at the Southern end of the tunnel, where we were watched hawkishly by the local Yoof, doubtlessly thinking what a sud bunch of muppets we were, photographing boring old stuff. Each to their own, say!! It's interesting to note that, according to old OS maps of this area, a water tower and gas holder stood exactly where the skate ramps are now.

BELOW: Looking due South again, there is another small bridge carrying the track under Station Approach. Heathfield Station can be seen just off the right of the photo and is in remarkable condition. It appears little changed from its heyday and the present owners seem to take great pride in the buildings' heritage. The water tower and gas holder mentioned before stood almost exactly on this spot.

[CLICK HERE to see the water tower and gas holder on the fabulous "Disused Railways of East Sussex" website on Fotopic.net, courtesy and \(c\) Mr. Paul Matthews.](#)



ABOVE: A nice 3/4 view of the station. The immediate area is relatively unchanged, but the inevitable ingress of newbuild modern tat is prevalent at the top of the road and stands out like a sore thumb.

BELOW LEFT: It was about this point that it decided to piss down with rain, so we took shelter in the porte-clochere of the stationhouse and waited for it to ease off (and had a quick rollie as well).



ABOVE: Agent Holmbush models the very latest in Urbex Headwear fashion. Being somewhat follically challenged by his own admission, Agent Missus was worried he would get a cold bonce. Agents Skyframe and Shades spent the whole day foraging for stuff to eat from passing trees, as seen in the background, although it looks more as though they're relieving themselves in this shot... Needs must when you're out in the field, I suppose.

Hellingly stretch from Upper Horsebridge Road to Mill Lane crossing.

Having seen pretty much everything we intended to in Heathfield, we had already ascertained that there was not a great deal in the way of interesting geographical features of the line between Heathfield and Horam, so we skipped a bit and drove the short distance back to Lower Horsebridge with the intention of having a look at the area around the junction with the Hellingly Tramway.

BELOW: This was the start point for this leg of the trek: Upper Horsebridge Road, oddly enough in... Lower Horsebridge. This is the point where the Cuckoo Line Crosses the road, again we are guessing that there was probably a bridge here, judging by the incline on either side.



BELOW: Hellingly Station house is remarkably well preserved, despite being a private residence in the present day. There is no real change to the layout and the adjacent platform is still in situ. We wanted a closer look at the platform but there were a pair of border collies going berserk in the front garden, so we observed from a safe distance! The junction of the Cuckoo Line and the Hellingly Tramway is not far from this point.



BELOW: The edge of the platform and the gradual ascent of the ramp end can be clearly seen in this photo. The silhouette of the house can be seen just behind the large tree in the centre. This shot is taken from just inside the bridge where Station Road crosses the line. There was a great deal of barking and growling from behind the hedge on the right, so I didn't want to get too close!



BELOW: This view is looking towards the bridge from the access path next to the station. My right foot is up to the knee in a very angry border collie at this point.



BELOW: This bridge carries Station Road across the trackbed. This is just to the right of the platform and station-house.





ABOVE: We could have endured a fair bit of confusion figuring out the names of local roads. Okay, we knew it would be called something like "Station Road", but it was still nice to have it written on the bridge as well.



ABOVE: Trackbed looking due North in both views, on the left is shortly after the Station House, on the right is closer to Mill Lane.



ABOVE LEFT & RIGHT: This is where the track would originally have crossed Mill Lane. I am guessing that there would probably have been a bridge across here, but the level of the embankment doesn't seem to be high enough overall to entertain such a bridge. It's possible that it could have been a cattle creep style arrangement originally and that the road has been widened at a later stage once the railway had been removed (Clarification needed here, anyone?)



LEFT: This is the view looking due south, back the way we had come, as viewed from the crossing point at Mill Lane.

ABOVE: Distant shot of the crossing point. The trees are quite mature and don't give any clues as to the crossing's configuration...

It occurred to us on this trek that we had been to Hellingly many times before to see the Lunatic Asylum, but had never actually seen the village itself.

It's very pretty indeed.





Naturally, as with most of our treks, we ended up in the pub, but a little closer to home this time: The Hartington in Whippingham Road, Brighton.

Excellent it was, too!



ABOVE: Agents Shades and Holmbush enjoy a few quiet pints, whilst Agent Skyframe enjoys the ceiling, for some silly reason...



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