

## CENTENARY REFLECTIONS ON THE BICESTER CUT-OFF

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The centenary of the railway between Aynho and Ashendon Junction, sometimes called the 'Bicester cut-off', was celebrated in July this year. In some respects this has been an unusual commemoration since most main lines are rather older, and only 20 years remain before the *bicentenary* of the opening of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway, which is acknowledged as the first main line railway.

The line opened in 1910 was the final portion of the complex route of the Great Western Railway (G.W.R.) from Paddington to Banbury (and on to Birmingham and ultimately Chester and Birkenhead) that ran through High Wycombe, Princes Risborough and Bicester North. The distance to Banbury was only 67½ miles compared with the 86¼ mile original (1850) route of the Great Western Railway through Reading, Didcot and Oxford, the 77½ mile route of the onetime London & North Western Railway by way of Verney Junction and Bletchley, or the 80¼ mile route of the Great Central Railway which involved reversing at Woodford before travelling through Aylesbury to Marylebone.

The first stretch of rails of the new route out of Paddington formed part of the Great Western main line to Bristol; it opened as far as Maidenhead in 1838. The next section was part of a series of lines authorised in 1897 and built under the direction of a joint committee of the Great Western and Great Central Railways established in 1899. From a junction at Old Oak Common (some three miles west of Paddington) the route was owned purely by the Great Western as far as Northolt Junction, where it was joined by a Great Central link from Neasden on its line into Marylebone. Beyond Northolt jointly-owned rails continued to High Wycombe. There they made a junction with a branch of the Great Western opened in August 1862. This left the main line to Bristol at Maidenhead, ran through Bourne End, High Wycombe and Princes Risborough to Thame; it was extended to Oxford in 1864. From Princes Risborough the Joint Committee built a line through Haddenham which joined the Great Central Railway's London Extension of 1899, at Grendon Underwood. It provided an alternative route into London from that through Quainton Road and Aylesbury which was shared somewhat acrimoniously with the