

HERITAGE CIRCLE

John Reeve, Mid Suffolk Light Railway

John Reeve, Marketing Manager of The Mid Suffolk Light Railway, or The Middy, as it is known, spoke to the February meeting of the Heritage Circle. He gave a brief history of the railway. Construction began in 1902 with 19 miles of line from Haughley to Laxfield, connected with a short stretch to Kenton.

The line was opened to goods traffic in 1904, but technical and financial difficulties prevented the line to Halesworth being completed. The Chairman and the railway went bankrupt, and the railway went into receivership. Despite this the railway operated successfully and opened for passengers in 1908, the first passenger being Lord Kitchener. At the onset of WW1 the Middy came under Government control, and with the men gone to war, women became porters. Women again helped run the railway during WW2. Traffic increased with the USAF bases in the area, and the trucks were upgraded to take larger loads. After the war lorries were beginning to take trade away from the railway, but two passenger trains a day ran each way. In 1948 the railways were nationalised. School children were carried by train between Stowmarket and Laxfield until July 1952.

The railway museum opened in 1990, on the site of the old Brockford Station goods yard, and is run by volunteers. It's aim is to educate people on how the railway served the community for many years. The track has been re-laid and items which were used on the railway are displayed, together with 4 wheel Victorian coaches, and the oldest horse box wagon. Permission has been granted for an extension to the track and grants received for the repair shed. The museum has won many awards, and re-opens at Easter, and vintage steam and other events throughout the summer. There is also a Santa Special in December.

Angela Bigley.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be at 7.30pm on 22 March when Geoffrey Kay will give a talk about the The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition of 1851. Further information about the Heritage Circle is available on its website, www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net.