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"The East Anglian Railways Company; A Study in  
Railway and Financial History"

by

Donald I Gordon, B.A.

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, May 1964

VOLUME 1

# The East Anglian Railways Company: A Study in Railway and Financial History

by D.I.Gordon, B.A.

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This work covers the period from 1844 to 1862, and is set, against a national background, in the King's Lynn area, then suffering a time of severe economic transition as distant railways undermined the town's commercial monopoly, and low corn prices the agricultural economy. The companies, authorised in 1845 and amalgamating as the East Anglian Railways in 1847, were founded in a complex of personal greed, parochial ambition and commercial fears. In the following years they had to learn that they could not be the arbiters of the local economy. Misguided directors, faulty estimates, defective accounts, the inadequacies of Parliament, the duplicity of the Eastern Counties Railway and other factors led to bankruptcy. Slow recovery and appreciation of the company's proper place in the economy were complicated by the key role which the East Anglian assumed in the conflict between the Eastern Counties and Great Northern railways, the effects of which proved most serious to the local economy.

Despite local need for the railways the bulk of the capital came from London and the north, and this, when considered with the state of the general economy and other factors influencing public attitudes towards railway investment, led to grossly inflated capital commitments. The company had also to learn through experience of the close relationship between social conditions and revenue returns, and of the many problems of actual operation.

But for a variety of personal, economic, geographical and financial reasons, and by more successful participation in railway politics, the company survived, reaching stability by 1862. Its impact was seen to best advantage only in the long run, but its value to 1862 had been, in conjunction with other factors, to ensure for Lynn and local agriculture that the period was one of successful transition leading to prosperity rather than one of decay.

# Table of Contents

## Volume 1

<u>Introduction</u>	<u>1 - 4</u>
<u>Chapter 1: The Awakening (1844)</u>	<u>5 -53</u>
1.The Promoters (p.5)	
2.The Vulnerability of King's Lynn (p.12)	
3.The Rival Concepts (p.31)	
4.The Merits of the Case (p.45)	
<u>Chapter 2: "The Great Chance For All"</u>	<u>54-112</u>
1.A Golden Promise (p.54)	
2.The Lynn & Ely Railway	
A.The Launching of the Company (p.65)	
B.The Railway in the Local View (p.67)	
C.The Original Plan (p.73)	
D.Changes and Additions (p.75)	
3.The Ely & Bedford Company (p.83)	
4.The Lynn & Dereham Railway (p.93)	
5.Williams and the work of a Promoter (p.105)	
6.Where did the Capital come from? (p.109)	
<u>Chapter 3: Deceptive Foundations</u>	<u>113-177</u>
1.Railway Bills and Parliament (p.113)	
2.A Critical View of the Assets on which Williams based his case (p.121)	
A.Lynn Harbour (p.122)	
B.The Volume of Traffic on the Ouse (p.125)	
C.The Contribution to be made by the Towns (p.130)	
D.The Agricultural Situation:The Soil (p.135)	
E.The Agricultural Situation:The Human Element (p.138)	
3.The Companies Estimates:The Revenue (p.150)	
4.The Construction Estimates (p.160)	
5.The Passage of the Bills & Further Seeds of Bankruptcy (p.162)	
6.The Lynn Lines in the Larger Pattern (p.169)	
7.Conclusions (p.174)	
<u>Chapter 4: The Failure of the Estimates,1845-1848 (I)</u>	<u>178-236</u>
Introduction (p.178)	
1.Directors,Shareholders and Accounts (p.179)	
2.The Preliminaries of Construction (p.205)	
3.The Lines on the Ground	
A.General Considerations (p.219)	
B.The Individual Contracts (p.223)	

1. The Failure of the Revenue Estimates to December, 1848
  - A. Summary Table of Opening Dates (p.237)
  - B. The Figures (p.238)
  - C. Why the Traffic had failed to develop
    - I. External Factors (p.248)
    - II. Internal Factors (p.258)
2. The Working Expenses (p.270)
3. The Construction Period and the Local Economy (p.279)

Contents of Volume 2Chapter 6: Frustration and Bitterness, 1845 to 1847300-356

- Introduction (p.300)
1. The 1846 Bills
    - A. The Intentions (p.301)
    - B. Preparation (p.309)
    - C. The Bills in Parliament, 1846 (p.312)
  2. The Months of Revolution, August 1846 to January 1847
    - A. The Issues Involved (p.315)
    - B. The Background Features; the Eastern Counties, Norfolk and Great Northern railways (p.317)
    - C. The East Anglian Bills for 1847 (p.322)
    - D. The Eastern Counties Lease Negotiations to January 1847 (p.327)
  3. Deception and Disaster (February to October 1847)
    - A. The Unfortunate Characteristics of the E.A.R. Bills (p.340)
    - B. The 1847 Bills in Parliament (p.343)
    - C. The End of the Lease Negotiations, October 1847 (p.352)

Chapter 7: The Struggle to Survive (1847-1852)357-461

1. The Changes in Leadership (Nov. 1847-Nov. 1849)
  - A. The Directors (p.357)
  - B. The Tasks of the New Board (p.361)
2. Financial Policies and the Capital Debt, 1845-1852
  - A. The Background to Railway Investment, 1845-1850 (p.363)
  - B. The Original Capital (1845-1847)
    - I. The Shares (p.374)
    - II. The Debenture Loans (p.378)
  - C. The 6% Preference Issue of 1847
    1. The Origins (p.380)
    2. Summary of the Situation on Amalgamation (p.382)
    3. The Proposals and the Reaction (p.383)

(chapter 7 continued on the next page)

- D. The 7% Preference Issue of February 1848 (p.390)
- E. Summary of the Capital Account at the Close of 1848 (p.395)
- F. The 7% Preference Issue of February 1849 (p.396)
- 3. Bankruptcy (p.403)
- 4. The Revenue (July 1848 to July 1851)
  - 1. Local Circumstances (p.415)
  - 2. The Attitude of the Eastern Counties Railway (p.422)
  - 3. The Level and the Character of the Revenue, 1848 to June, 1851 (p.426)
  - 4. Working Expenses (p.434)
- 5. Entanglement with the Great Northern Railway and Lease to the Eastern Counties Railway; the events of 1851/2
  - 1. Agreement with the Great Northern Railway (p.439)
  - 2. The Agreement in Operation (p.447)
  - 3. Lease to the Eastern Counties Railway 1852 (p.452)

Chapter 8: The Final Years (1852-1862)

462-535

- 1. Introduction to the Period (p.462)
- 2. Revenue and Its Background, 1852-1857
  - A. The Figures (p.466)
  - B. The Norfolk Estuary Cut, 1853 (p.468)
  - C. The Harbour Tramways, 1855 (p.469)
  - D. Harbour Improvements, 1856-7 (p.474)
  - E. Other Efforts to develop Traffic (p.476)
- 3. The Relationship with the Eastern Counties Railway to 1857
  - A. The Points at Issue (p.478)
  - B. The Explosion (p.488)
- 4. Stability in Finance (1852-1862) (p.496)
- 5. The Approach to Amalgamation (1857-1861) (p.500)
  - A. The Manchester Revolt, 1859 (p.501)
  - B. The Waddington Conspiracy, 1860 (p.510)
  - C. The Watkin Report and Bruce's Resignation, 1861 (p.517)
  - D. Other Companies Affecting the Position and Prospects of the East Anglian on the Eve of Amalgamation
- 6. The Amalgamation, 1862 (p.526)

Chapter 9: Assessments

536-599

- 1. The East Anglian Railways and King's Lynn (p.536)
- 2. The East Anglian Railways and the Countryside
  - A. The Farmers (p.562)
  - B. Towns and Local Industries (p.566)
  - C. The Villages and the Lives of the People (p.569)
  - D. Local Transport (p.574)
  - E. General (p.576)

(chapter 9 continued on to p.iv)

3. Policies and Men of the East Anglian Railways
  - A. General (p.577)
  - B. J. C. Williams (p.529)
  - C. H. C. Lacy (p.582)
  - D. Henry Bruce (p.582)
  - E. Lightly Simpson (p.585)
4. Why the E. A. R. Survived (p.586)
5. The E. A. R. and Railway History (p.590)
6. Profits and Public Service (p.597)

<u>Table of Appendices</u>	600
<u>Appendices</u>	601-634
<u>Bibliography</u>	635-645

List of Diagrammatic Maps in Illustration of the Text

	<u>Volume 1</u>
The Lines Proposed in 1844 in Relation to Lynn and the River Ouse	13
The Proposals of the Lynn Corporation Railway Committee	33
The Wisbech Branch and the form of the Lynn & Ely line as Planned in December, 1844	78
Actual and Proposed lines mentioned in the Text in connection with the Ely & Bedford	86
The Lynn & Dereham and other lines mentioned in the Text	96
Map of Lines Specified in the Text for 1845	171
	<u>Volume 2</u>
Lines mentioned in the Text in connection with the Promotions etc. of 1846	304
The Southern End of Lynn Harbour (inset of the Estuary Cut)	470
The Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway	557

List of Graphs (all Volume 1)

The Pattern and Volume of East Anglian Traffic Receipts in 1848	245
E. A. R. Average Receipts per mile per week during 1848	245
Wheat Prices, 1843 to 1853	256
Wheat Prices in Relation to Imports of Wheat, 1843-1853	257
Barley and Oats Prices in Relation to Imports, 1843-1853	257

Special Note on Railway Companies' Titles

It has been found in the course of this study that confusion often exists over the correct titles of certain railway companies of this period; this is heightened by changes of names by the companies themselves and by the fact that in some cases two or even three versions were in current use.

There are three particular examples in this work:

- a. Lewin speaks of the Yarmouth & Norwich, C.J.Allen of the Norwich & Yarmouth. Generally the latter has been adopted in this work.
- b. The East Dereham & Norwich (Lewin) was also known as the Direct Norwich & Dereham - again the latter has been used.
- c. The Wisbech, St. Ives & Cambridge Junction (Lewin) has been described in this work as the Wisbech, March & St. Ives, the name in current use during the period.



Introduction

Geographical isolation, natural advantages for agriculture and the absence of power or mineral resources together ensured that to 1840 the Industrial Revolution should have effected little change in the fundamental economic patterns of western Norfolk and the Fens. Cottage industries in the former, especially those concerned with textile manufactures, had declined severely, but overall this had been amply compensated for by the improved agricultural techniques for which the areas were renowned and by the ever increasing demands for produce from the rapidly expanding industrial areas. In western Norfolk, where enclosure was almost complete, much of the soil had been enriched to a quite incredible extent, while in the Fens wonders were being performed with land that, although highly fertile by nature, often had been only recently reclaimed from marsh. Constant experiments and new discoveries, plus an increasing trend towards a mixed farming economy, were indications that the improving force was as yet by no means spent.

But even so there were to the discerning mind certain disturbing elements in the situation. One was the unbalanced nature of an economy in which almost total reliance was placed on agriculture alone. Another was the lack of flexibility in commercial organisation, a factor which sooner or later must inhibit the growth of even agriculture. For centuries the norm of inland transport had been the river boats plying along the Ouse and Nene and their tributaries in connection with coastal shipping. In themselves the river interests exhibited all the more unfortunate elements of a monopoly, but more significant were the opportunities for such offered by the situation to the coastal town of

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King's Lynn and, to a rather smaller extent, the river port of Wisbech. By 1840 the latter was engaged in a highly enterprising attempt to undermine Lynn, but its disadvantages were naturally such that the key to the whole area remained inevitably with its larger neighbour. But there the economy was static. Power was in the hands of a small group of rich merchants and bankers who had no incentive to progress of any kind. The harbour facilities were poor and expensive, the channel between the sea and the town frankly dangerous, but, secure in the town's monopoly, the ruling element within Lynn well knew that all the costs of inconvenience could be recouped from their customers, and that major improvements might well attract unwelcome rivals to the town.

But change was in the air, and no matter how much they disliked it the great merchants of Lynn had to accept that they could not continue to dwell in the past. Railways in other parts threatened to destroy their monopoly, and it was inevitable that soon the farmers and others would be in a position to welcome them into the very heart of Lynn's traditional markets. Conditions were thus ideal for the enterprising individual, imbued with the spirit of the laissez faire economy, who was moved to build his own private industrial 'empire'. Such a man was J.C. Williams, the junior partner in a firm of Lynn solicitors, and in many ways a typical product of the middle classes of the period, enriched by their own efforts, given new status and authority by the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832 and now seeking new fields to conquer. The advent of railways provided Williams and many like him, including the mighty Hudson, with their great opportunity for self expression.

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The attraction of railways by 1844 was plain, for by then enough of the pioneer lines had become sufficiently established to show convincingly that railways represented wealth both directly as an investment, and indirectly as major contributors to commercial expansion. The early difficulties of such as the Stockton & Darlington, the Liverpool & Manchester and the London & Birmingham had been forgotten, the total failures and the only partially successful, for example the Eastern Counties Railway, generally overlooked. It is true to say that by the end of 1844 railways had captured the public imagination and were being viewed in the general rather than the particular. To most they seemed an irresistible dynamic force, and there were many individuals prepared to apotheosize them as the panacea for all economic ills and frustrations, and as the infallible means of personal gain. To Williams and his immediate associates railways represented all these things, but in addition the opportunity for a town such as Lynn to extend its traditional markets at the expense of neighbouring towns. In that many other communities and individuals currently shared the same ideas much of the locally inspired railway enterprise of the period thus became a matter of self defence through aggression.

In the course of time the overall effect of railways was to unify Britain both socially and economically, but this ultimate was founded in a mass of parochial and individual enterprise in which many of the participants were seeking to consolidate and improve on the conditions of the pre-railway age, such retrogressive visions being given substance by the greedy optimism of a purblind investing public. Here was an essential

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element in the background to the <sup>4</sup> 'Mania'. When the fantasies of 1845/6 had cleared it remained for many promoters and investors to discover that haphazard construction was after all not such a sound guarantee of security as they had liked to imagine.

Through the medium of a group of lines that failed in their intentions but survived, these and many other aspects will be considered in what follows. The study covers only 17 years, but of necessity must be of some length if justice is to be done to the many themes suggested. The East Anglian Railways Company is worthy of close examination as an ideal example of a small promotion of the 'Mania' period designed to serve an agricultural area; the value of the study is enhanced in that it was faced by virtually every problem that could beset an infant company of that period, and yet survived so that the whole story can be told. But apart from these considerations there are the fascinating problems that arise from the contemplation of individuals, their motives and reactions, and, perhaps of even greater importance, those of assessing the relationship and interaction as between an area and its railways, especially so in this case because the latter set out to be the arbiter of the former's economy. Finally, in the events constituting the history of the East Anglian is found a more than convenient microcosm of the inevitable process by which the nation's railways moved, slowly and unevenly, through amalgamations, from initial disorder towards a more rational and systematic form.

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Chapter 1The Awakening

(1844)

Section 1: The Promoters

The East Anglian Railways Company, formed in 1847 and absorbed into the Great Eastern Railway at its creation in 1862, was comprised of three promotions incorporated in 1845, the Lynn & Ely, the Ely & Huntingdon, and the Lynn & Dereham. Each of these owed its conception to J.C. Williams, a Lynn solicitor, who was enabled to identify his personal ambitions with those of the mercantile community of his town. The occasion was the promotion of other lines within the area of Lynn's commercial monopoly which stimulated the town's instincts of self preservation and ensured that Williams would find sufficient support for his immediate purposes. There was nothing startling in the idea of such relatively small lines serving purely local ends. Commercial thought was still conditioned by the circumstances of the pre-railway age in which the inadequacies of transport facilities imposed their own severe limitations, while in any case the idea of giant joint stock associations necessary for larger projects had still to become an accepted part of national life. Hence, at the beginning of 1845, of the 2,235 route miles of railway open to traffic 1,134 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles were shared by 11 companies, but the remaining 1,100 $\frac{1}{2}$  by no less than 92<sup>1</sup>.

J.C. Williams himself remains a somewhat shadowy figure as far as personal details are concerned. All that may be said with certainty is that he joined the firm of Goodwin & Partridge in 1838<sup>2</sup>, and then stayed

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<sup>1</sup> H.G. Lewin; The Railway Mania & Its Aftermath, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 9th November, 1861.

in Lynn until 1846, when, the <sup>6</sup> firm having taken Edwards as a new partner, he went to open a London office for his firm, There he remained until the death of Goodwin in 1859 led to the partnership being dissolved. During the 13 years in London Williams was subject to no supervision from Lynn, and he used the opportunity so provided to divert large sums of the firm's money into his own private speculations in land, mines, buildings, estates and loans. Some of these at least must have proved sorry failures, for towards the close of 1860 his former partners, Partridge and Edwards, who had been totally misled by the false accounts supplied by Williams, were suddenly called to account for immense sums received by the London office in the name of the firm. Their combined private fortunes of £70,000 were inadequate to cover the deficiencies, and in 1861 they were brought before the courts as bankrupts.<sup>1</sup> Williams fled abroad and no more was heard of him.

It would obviously be unsound to argue from the above that Williams' participation in railway affairs had been equally dishonest, but the evidence will show that despite many fine words concerning his interest in the future of Lynn his predominant motive was that of amassing a personal fortune without risk. To that end he first stimulated and then exploited the fears of the town. He did not invest in his creations<sup>2</sup> His profit was to come through handling the multitudinous legal business associated with the launching of a new railway. As will be seen he, in the name of his partners, exploited and defrauded the railway companies to the utmost, so much so that in the 1850's the East Anglian took the firm to court in a quest for partial repayment of what it had spent in legal

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 1st November, 1861.

<sup>2</sup> This will be discussed in a later section where an analysis of the Subscription Contracts is undertaken.

charges. That the case was dismissed on technical grounds did not invalidate the essential justice of its claim.

As early as 1836 Herapath had warned the public of the:-

"..needy adventurer (who) takes it into his head that a line of railway from the town A to the town B is a matter of great public utility because out of it he may get a great private benefit."

and had gone on to link such with the "solicitor out of practice"<sup>1</sup>; a theme further developed by Jeaffreson and Pole in 1864 when they described the "attorney without practice" as invariably being the principal culprit in the fraudulent promotions of 1836 and 1845 which had done little more than collect and then absorb deposits on shares.<sup>2</sup> But Williams was not of this type. Quite apart from the fact that his firm was well established and highly respected, he was genuine in his determination to create railways. Indeed, as will be seen in a subsequent chapter, the initial success of 1845 was but the first stage in what he intended to be a veritable network including a grand trunk line from Manchester to Norwich. In that he was for a year or two after 1845 to maintain a high degree of personal control of the three companies through puppet directors it is indeed possible to believe that in many ways he saw himself in the role of a second Hudson, even if on a much smaller stage.

In everything that he did Williams was shrewd and calculating, clever and persuasive; he abounded in self confidence, and had cultivated the appearance of complete frankness while making totally disingenuous utterances. On one occasion he demanded to know who could object to him

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by J.Francis: A History of the English Railway, London, 1851, Vol.2. p.296.

<sup>2</sup> Jeaffreson and Pole: The Life of Robert Stephenson F.R.S., London, 1864, p.274.

putting £50,000 in his own pocket if at the same time he was putting £100,000 into those of other people.<sup>1</sup> On at least two occasions, apparently aware of the possible invidiousness of his personal position, he made direct references to his profession. On the first he apologised for being a solicitor, and avowed that his proposed lines were not a "lawyer's job" in the approbrious sense of that term;<sup>2</sup> a few weeks later he made a jest of it, declaring his sincerity even if it was the last 6/8d. he got from his practice.<sup>3</sup>

Three main factors account for Williams' success in 1844 and '45. First there was his undoubted power of conveying conviction to those who heard him. Secondly there was his great ability in organisation. Thirdly, and in many ways the most important, was the fact that his intentions conformed exactly to the immediate needs of his town, and to the inclinations of the public at large on whose financial support all would be eventually based. The nature of the growing enthusiasm for railways during 1844, and its climax in 1845, will be examined in a later section, and it is sufficient to quote here from James Morrison M.P., a shrewd although prejudiced observer of the contemporary scene:<sup>4</sup>

"..it would have been deemed illiberal at that time to suppose that directors could have anything in view in the powers they sought for but the advancement of the undertaking and the good of the shareholders; or that agents could by possibility be influenced in their movements by the heavy bills which would be incurred to them."

Williams did not of course work entirely alone. It would seem that his immediate associates numbered six. Of these the hardest to assess are

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March, 1844; report on a Town Meeting held to consider the Lynn & Ely promotion on the 28th March, 1844.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.    <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 20th April, 1844; Town Meeting of the 17th April.  
<sup>4</sup> J. Morrison: The Influence of English Railway Legislation on Trade and industry; London, 1848, p.67.



his business partners, Partridge and Goodwin. Of the former little can be said except that he placed a moderate investment in the Lynn & Dereham line and subsequently held a number of East Anglian bonds; although practising in Lynn he lived at Snareshill House near Thetford. Charles Goodwin, the son of a Bishop of Carlisle (Doctor Harvey Goodwin), conducted "a large practice" amongst the most respected and wealthiest elements of Lynn's society<sup>1</sup> and was already a very rich man<sup>2</sup>. He had been foremost in subscribing to the town's charities, and, as a building speculation in the late 1830's, had been responsible, as both designer and financier, for the first attempt to give King's Lynn a planned suburb<sup>3</sup>; a plaque in St. Nicholas' church testifies that he was also a generous and active church worker. Such a man had everything to lose by lending himself to any deliberately unsound project, and it is significant that he remained a highly respected citizen of Lynn, as well as a borough councillor, despite the initial failures of the railways and the financial losses of a number of Lynn men who had invested in them. The problem is how men such as Partridge and Goodwin could lend themselves to the exploitation of the railway companies practised by Williams. The answer must be that they were for the most part deceived. It may be safely presumed that Williams retained control of all accounts connected with the companies, and that by working partly through a second firm of solicitors, Messrs. Rooper, Ingram & Birch retained by the Lynn & Dereham Company, and, from 1846 on, his own

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser, 15th February, 1890; 'Personal Recollections of a Lynn Sexagenarian' (actually D. Thew, the editor).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 24th February, 1872; 'Memoirs of Lynn', actually a lecture delivered by W. Armes to the Lynn Conversazione Society in 1858.

<sup>3</sup> Comprising Guanock Terrace, New Checker St., Goodwin Road and Albert St. (built through his own garden). Thew said of the scheme that it was successful after initial failure; Armes commented (1858) that it was "when building was a better speculation than it since has been."

London office he was enabled to keep his partners in the dark as regards the actual details of the financial transactions between the firm and the railway companies. Obviously Williams could not have proceeded without his business partners, while involving them did have the advantage of gaining for his projects an absolutely unimpeachable appearance of respectability.

A third member of the inner group was Charles Burcham, a civil engineer and surveyor, who was included no doubt to advise on the selection of practical routes for the lines that Williams had in mind; he was another sound and respected Lynn citizen, a member of the Borough Council, and formerly, before the office was abolished in the 1834 reform of municipal government, a Town Chamberlain.<sup>1</sup>

The three so far mentioned played no part in events after the lines proposed by Williams had been accepted by the Lynn community, but the three remaining members of his group were destined to serve as company directors, acting as both the mouth-pieces and the cover for Williams' activities. Whether they were his collaborators or merely his dupes is a difficult question that will be resolved in the more appropriate context of the events of 1847. It will then be shown that while the three were certainly not blameless they were more the victims of Williams' guiles and of their own total inexperience of railway affairs than anything else. Certainly there was nothing to provoke suspicion in their records to 1844. First there was Sir J.W.H.B. Folkes (1786-1860) who lived at Hillington Hall and who owned most of the land within Lynn. Known locally as a popular and improving landlord he already had had a lengthy career in the public eye. After two unsuccessful attempts to win a Lynn seat, in which he had

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<sup>1</sup> A Report on the Proceedings of H.M. Commissioners for enquiring into the existing state of the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales; a verbatim report on the Lynn Enquiry, 16th-22nd March, 1833; Lynn, 1834, p.35.

been thwarted by the council's wholesale creation of Freemen in the Tory interest, he had represented Norfolk as a Whig M.P. between 1830 and 1832, and from then until 1837 the newly created division of West Norfolk; in 1838 he had been appointed High Sheriff of Norfolk.<sup>1</sup> In 1845 he was to become chairman of the Lynn & Ely Company although his investment was one of only £900. Subsequently he was also chairman of the Norfolk Estuary Company (see below) which was concerned with providing a safe and direct channel between Lynn Harbour and the open sea. Alongside Folkes as a promoter and director was William Everard (1797-1861), the younger brother in a wealthy merchant and banking family of the group which dominated the town. Everard held both shares and debentures in the railways, but, like Folkes, found it prudent to make a hasty withdrawal from the board in 1847. In later years he was prominent amongst those creditors who hounded the East Anglian into temporary bankruptcy. Finally, there was Francis Cresswell, a former R.N. captain, a wealthy banker in partnership with Everard, a Borough Alderman, a church warden, and a man much interested in school and charitable work within the town. In short all three were successful and eminently respectable figures in Lynn society, although it may perhaps be felt that the grounds which Folkes had for a grudge against the Tory families and Everard's junior status in his family (the seat of which was Middleton Hall) could have some significance. At this stage it may be said in their favour that they had committed themselves financially before their proposals were adopted by the town and while there was still the possibility that alternative suggestions might be given preference, for, during the winter of 1843/4 they had engaged the services

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<sup>1</sup> The details given in respect of Folkes, Cresswell and Everard are derived from a wide variety of sources; in particular they come from obituary notices in the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald and the memoirs of Thew and Armes cited in previous footnotes.

of J.U.Rastrick, already an engineer of renown and one who was enabled to command a high premium on his services, to survey the route between Lynn and Ely.

One other name, although not that of a promoter, should be mentioned at this stage, particularly so as his written opinions are to be frequently quoted in the following pages. William Armes, a retired sea captain who had returned to his native town while still a relatively young man to enter into partnership with J.Marsters in the manufacture of sacking and coconut matting, was an especially powerful advocate for both the Lynn & Ely and the Lynn & Dereham lines from what were almost entirely disinterested motives.<sup>1</sup> He was fearless in his criticisms of the obscurantist merchant coterie which dominated the town, and, as he spoke not only with eloquence but from extensive commercial knowledge and a wealth of practical experience gained in wide travels, the spontaneous support he gave to Williams at the critical Town Meetings, where irrevocable decisions had of necessity to be made, proved an invaluable support to the promoters. He may be said to have represented the progressive forces within the town which, until the issue of railways arose, had been held completely in check by the dominant families.

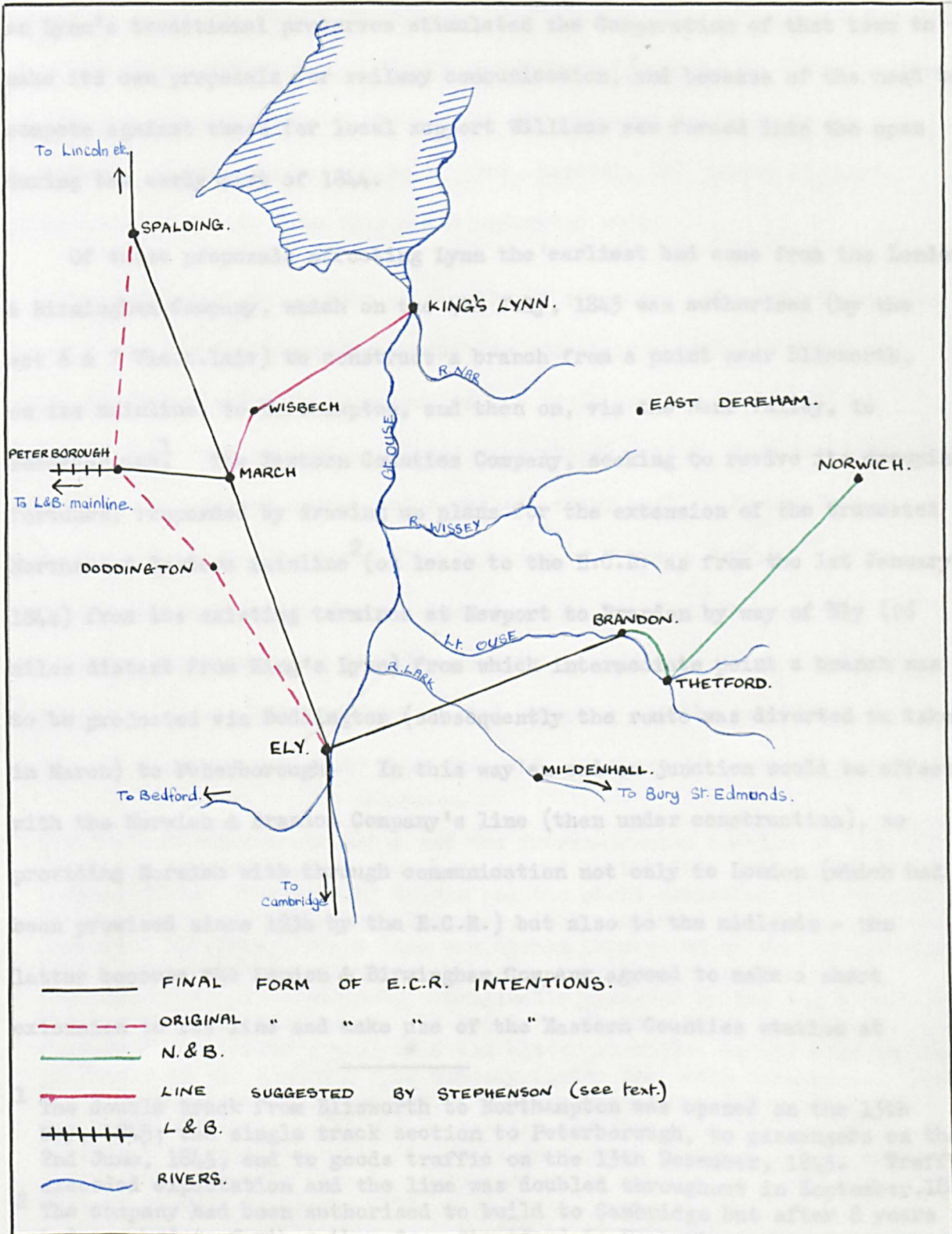
## Section 2: The Vulnerability of King's Lynn

In all probability Williams had conceived the Lynn & Ely line as early as 1843 at a time when there was a marked change in the public attitude

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<sup>1</sup> Additional Note on William Armes (1804-1872); principal source his Obituary Notice in the Lynn Advertiser, March, 1872. Born in Lynn he went to sea as a boy, eventually obtaining captain's rank which he held for eight years before returning to set up in business in the town early in the 1840's. He became the secretary of the Lynn Maritime Insurance Association, a Borough Councillor (in 1853) and then a member of the Pilot and the Paving Commissions. His expert knowledge made him a key witness and speaker at enquiries and meetings in connection with both the railways and the improvement of the harbour approaches. In 1852 he published an excellent monograph on Lynn Harbour, extensively quoted below. He was a Liberal in politics, a devout Wesleyan in religion.

The Lines Proposed in 1844 in Relation to Lynn and the River Ouse



towards railway enterprise (see chapter 2 below), and had then spent some months examining its feasibility. He was not, however, to be allowed to perfect his plans at leisure. A series of railway promotions that intruded on Lynn's traditional preserves stimulated the Corporation of that town to make its own proposals for railway communication, and because of the need to compete against these for local support Williams was forced into the open during the early part of 1844.

Of these proposals affecting Lynn the earliest had come from the London & Birmingham Company, which on the 4th July, 1843 was authorised (by the act 6 & 7 Vic.c.lxiv) to construct a branch from a point near Blisworth, on its mainline, to Northampton, and then on, via the Nene Valley, to Peterborough.<sup>1</sup> The Eastern Counties Company, seeking to revive its drooping fortunes, responded by drawing up plans for the extension of the truncated Northern & Eastern mainline<sup>2</sup> (on lease to the E.C.R. as from the 1st January, 1844) from its existing terminus at Newport to Brandon by way of Ely (26 miles distant from King's Lynn) from which intermediate point a branch was to be projected via Doddington (subsequently the route was diverted to take in March) to Peterborough. In this way an end-on junction would be effected with the Norwich & Brandon Company's line (then under construction), so providing Norwich with through communication not only to London (which had been promised since 1834 by the E.C.R.) but also to the midlands - the latter because the London & Birmingham Company agreed to make a short extension to its line and make use of the Eastern Counties station at

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<sup>1</sup> The double track from Blisworth to Northampton was opened on the 13th May, 1845; the single track section to Peterborough, to passengers on the 2nd June, 1845, and to goods traffic on the 13th December, 1845. Traffic exceeded expectation and the line was doubled throughout in September, 1846.

<sup>2</sup> The company had been authorised to build to Cambridge but after 8 years had reached no further than from Stratford to Newport.

Peterborough (now Peterborough East). At the same time the Eastern Counties was contemplating the possibility of a northern projection from Peterborough to Lincoln and York along what was substantially the route selected by the Northern & Eastern in 1836; during 1844 the surveys for this were actually carried out, although, in fact, this was to be the only one of the proposals enumerated above which did not come to fruition as intended.<sup>1</sup> In the winter months of 1844, however, all seemed distinct probabilities and to Lynn they spelt undoubted ruin.

To understand the nature of the threat it is now necessary to examine briefly the town's commercial activities and status, although detailed analysis of the content and volume of the trade handled there will be reserved for later contexts. Lynn's importance derived from its dual functions as a market centre and a sea and river port. In the former capacity it was justly termed "The Emporium of Western Norfolk"<sup>2</sup> and was in fact, the focal point for an area, including much of the rapidly developing Fenlands, some 25 miles or more in radius. As a seaport it derived its main substance from coastal shipping and the importation of coals and manufactured goods from Hull and a variety of northern ports,

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<sup>1</sup> The Newport-Brandon extension and the Trowse-Brandon section of the Norwich & Brandon Company were both opened on the 30th July, 1845; the opening of the Trowse Swing Bridge and the short extension into Norwich (Thorpe Station) on the 15th December, 1845 completed the Norwich-London link; the Ely-Peterborough line was opened throughout on the 14th January, 1847. The northern extension, however, continued as a source of frustration to its promoters. Originally proposed by the N & E in 1836 but prevented by Parliament, the E.C.R.'s adoption of it met with no better fortune being, after a prolonged and bitter struggle, turned down in 1846 in favour of the London & York Company (later the Great Northern). The E.C.R. and subsequently the G.E.R. continued to nurse the project (with March the starting point) but opposition and financial difficulties prevented realisation until 1882 when in a joint enterprise with the G.N.R. a line from March to Lincoln was opened.

<sup>2</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.505.

although there was also a not inconsiderable foreign import trade, particularly in timber, wines, beer and general building materials. The harbour also stood at the mouth of the Great Ouse and its several navigable tributaries, the former being navigable for larger vessels for 24 miles and as far as Bedford for smaller craft. As a consequence of this Lynn had become, over the centuries, the natural outlet for several inland counties<sup>1</sup> which in their turn had come to depend on Lynn for a very wide range of imported goods. The Lynn & Ely prospectus summarised the position without embellishment when it recorded:-<sup>2</sup>

"The extensive trade in timber, deals, wine, coals, oil cake, tar, flagstones, slates, pantiles and other general merchandise carried on between the port of King's Lynn and the towns of Brandon, Thetford, Mildenhall, Bury St. Edmunds, Newmarket, Cambridge, St. Neots, St. Ives, Huntingdon, Bedford, Biggleswade, Northampton, Peterborough and the districts adjoining these places."

and

"..the large mass of agricultural products comprising corn, flour, wool, fruit, vegetables etc. etc. brought from these districts to the Port of King's Lynn for shipment to the northern markets."

The prospectus was also justified in mentioning at length the substantial trading connections in livestock which existed overland between Norfolk and London at that time, although such did not constitute an element in the monopoly, covering all other particulars indicated above, practised by Lynn.

It will be observed that Lynn's trading security was based on what were essentially negative grounds - principally the depth and direction of the Ouse and its tributaries and the favoured position of the town between sea

<sup>1</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845 says eight counties: Talbot Q.C. in evidence against the L & E bill before Committee I of the Commons said "part of seven" (Herapath; 21st April, 1845, p.594) as did a Lynn Guild Hall Petition in favour of the Norfolk Estuary Bill (Guild Hall Book, Vol.14, p.792f, 26th Feb.1849).

<sup>2</sup> April, 1844. A copy is preserved in the Castle Museum, Norwich.



and river. The town, fundamentally an entrepot in character, had acquired its monopolistic status during the ages when the extensive sea board of East Anglia and the large number of navigable streams traversing the area had made water transport the norm. As a consequence of this East Anglia had tended to divide itself into fairly secure and well defined areas of economic interest, each being centred on a central market town, of which the smaller ones were themselves within the sphere of one or other of the larger ports. This factor, combined with the comfortable distance which separated Lynn from Norwich and Yarmouth and the town's situation at the lowest bridging point of the Ouse, had for long assured Lynn of a secure position as a market and distributing centre, conflict of interest being confined to the marginal areas.

Traditionally Lynn itself was accustomed to direct competition only in the area of central Norfolk, particularly so in the East Dereham district where Norwich merchants maintained a strong interest. It is true to say, however, that the construction of the Norwich & Brandon line, even without the Northern & Eastern connection, would have extended that rivalry to Brandon and the areas of southern Norfolk and northern Suffolk where Lynn's position was strong without being monopolistic. Nearer home Lynn men were becoming increasingly anxious for their interests in the northern Fens where Wisbech was making a determined bid to attract trade to its own harbour, but, up to 1844, the grossly unsatisfactory state of the Nene channel and the fact that Wisbech's hinterland was naturally restricted to the west side of the Ouse had made the threat much more imagined than real.

The threat represented by the proposed railway extensions was one of three fold implication. Firstly, the cross country link between Norwich

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and Peterborough with its direct connections with the midlands and north threatened to sever Lynn from its extensive markets to the south of that line and to introduce a strong element of rivalry from Norwich to the north of it.<sup>1</sup> In this way the town stood to lose some of its most profitable holdings - 10,000 tons of coal and general merchandise went each year to Bury St. Edmunds alone<sup>2</sup> - as the use of its harbour would be rendered superfluous. Secondly, the northern extension of the Northern & Eastern would lead directly into the coal fields of Yorkshire from which Lynn harbour was accustomed to derive its staple trade - in 1843, for example, 237,213 tons of coal were brought in coastwise as opposed to 94,390 tons of other goods from all sources.<sup>3</sup> Once again the use of Lynn harbour, except on a very restricted scale, would be made not only unnecessary but also undesirable on grounds of cost. Thirdly, and for reasons that will shortly be made apparent, the best that Lynn could hope for from the Eastern Counties and the Northern & Eastern would be the projection of a branch to the town by way of Wisbech. If this transpired not only would that town be in closer rail communication with London than was Lynn but would also be enabled to intercept all trade emanating from the midlands towards the latter. Thus, the natural advantages on which Lynn had flourished were facing complete nullification and Lynn men could gloomily contemplate an immediate future in which their harbour's trade would be drastically reduced, and their commercial sphere reduced to a small and isolated portion of western and north-western Norfolk.

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<sup>1</sup> The threat from Norwich was made more acute because since 1833 the city had been in direct communication with the sea as a result of the new cut made from Reedham to St. Olaves, the deepening of Oulton Dyke, the erection of locks on Oulton Broad and the making of a cut through the beach at Lowestoft.

<sup>2</sup> Arnes: The Port of King's Lynn; Lynn 1852, p.14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. App. p.56.

All classes of Lynn society faced a common ruin with the decline of the harbour. The strong merchant community had, as individuals, extensive and diverse multiple interests in coal, corn and general merchandise, all of which would now be diverted away from the town in most substantial quantities. The owners of the 144 vessels currently registered in Lynn<sup>1</sup> and the seamen and others who derived their livelihood from them (not to mention those connected with the fleet of some 190 fishing smacks belonging to the town)<sup>2</sup> all faced the possibility of serious hardship. If the harbour lost status and ready access were provided to Norwich and Wisbech the town would also suffer severely as a market centre; thus the owners and employees of the 119 inns, the 38 beer houses and eight eating houses, the dozen breweries, the ten malthouses, the five machine makers, the basket makers, the saddlers, the coopers, the tailors and furniture makers, the gunsmiths and in fact all those who existed to meet the diverse needs of a wide rural area would meet with severe and direct loss; Lynn's population of 16,039 (1841) was also provided with no less than 13 firms of solicitors, an equal number of surgeons, three each of physicians, opticians and veterinary surgeons, five dentists and nineteen each of insurance offices, tailors and barbers,<sup>3</sup> a concentration of services only justified by the enormous influx of country dwellers into the town each Tuesday and Saturday market day. Directly or indirectly all these various classes, and others, depended on the continued prosperity of the harbour.

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<sup>1</sup> Of a total tonnage of 16,503; Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, April 1849, App.4, p.64.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. The fishing fleet totalled 195 in 1848.

<sup>3</sup> The list is derived principally from White's Norfolk Directory 1845. It could be extended even further and made to include the four iron and brass foundries, the rope and twine makers, the sail makers and so on. Basically, none of the activities listed was of more than local significance, but, because of Lynn's monopolistic position, all were flourishing in 1844.

How could there be such certainty that trade would desert Lynn so completely once alternative means of transport were offered? The question of cost involved in a mixed sea and land journey apart, the answer was sufficiently clear from the condition of the harbour and its approaches. These were so bad that, as they stood, Lynn was in no position to fight back on its own terms. Armes wrote of the former that he "never saw a harbour in which nature having done so much, man had done so little"<sup>1</sup>. His strictures were fully justified. Up to 1838, when at last the first harbour master was appointed, neglect had been permitted to reach the chronic stage, and as a result much potential trade had been deterred from using the town. The conditions under which ships actually sank at their moorings had passed with the opening of the Eau Brink Cut in 1821,<sup>2</sup> but right up to 1841 it was still common for vessels to be delayed for days on end because the heavy mooring ropes, stretched over the harbour, to which they were attached had become entangled or even frozen together. In that latter year, however, the energy of Mr. Bowker and the expenditure of £12,900<sup>3</sup> led to the provision of more manageable chains to which vessels were moored in tiers by their sterns.<sup>4</sup> It is an interesting commentary on former times that with the clearance time of vessels being reduced to a certain ten minutes three public houses in the vicinity of the harbour had to close for lack of custom.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Port of King's Lynn, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> This work had been sanctioned in 1795 but because of inadequate financial powers and the opposition of landowners and the Lynn Council it required 27 years, seven further acts and the expenditure of some £500,000 before completion. It was situated  $\frac{3}{4}$ ml. south of the harbour, was  $2\frac{1}{2}$ mls. long and between 300' and 350' wide. It cut off a  $5\frac{1}{2}$ ml. curve in the Ouse and thereby improved the tidal scour through Lynn, aided river navigation and facilitated the drainage of 320,000 acres of good farmland.

<sup>3</sup> The cost was to be recouped from the harbour tolls; the chains were themselves replaced by screw couplings in the early 1850s.

<sup>4</sup> Burnett: A Handbook of King's Lynn, London 1846, p.77.

<sup>5</sup> Armes: 1858 lecture; Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 24th February, 1872.

Remaining in 1844, however, was the serious problem of silting. Reliance was still being placed on tidal scour, the consequence of which was that ships could be approached at low water only through inches of clinging mud<sup>1</sup>, and their ports and windows had to be securely caulked or else they ran the risk of becoming waterlogged, so firmly were they embedded in the mud when the tide began to flow.<sup>2</sup> As it was vessels often had to anchor a full 40 to 80 yards from the warehouses,<sup>3</sup> a matter of heavy expense and lengthy delay. This latter defect arose from an entirely unanticipated consequence of the Eau Brink Cut. At first this had benefited the harbour by increasing the force of the tidal scour; in May 1829 Telford and Rennie, the engineers of the project, had written, "the channel in front of the town is deeper than before and from the town to the sea has seldom been better"<sup>4</sup>, but as time progressed the long term effect of the Cut was to divert the main channel towards the west bank of the river, that is the side away from the harbour, with such steady vigour that the house of a Mr. Broadbent of West Lynn was actually swept away. Meanwhile, the harbour itself, especially between the Mill Fleet and the Customs House, became heavily silted,<sup>5</sup> the deposits eventually proving sufficient to provide the foundations for a new quay.<sup>6</sup> To atone for this and the damage sustained also by the east banks of the Magdalan Fen,<sup>7</sup> and to pay for the series of jetties and breakwaters built at Lynn to redirect the current towards the east bank, the Eau Brink Commissioners were compelled to pay a sum of £46,000 in compensation.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Port of King's Lynn, p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>3</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.518.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of Telford and Rennie to the Eau Brink Commissioners, 6th May, 1829, and now in the archives of the Lynn Conservancy Board. <sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.518. <sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The Eau Brink Commissioners derived their income from a drainage tax on the 320,000 acres affected by the cut, and from a toll of 5d. per ton levied on all up river cargoes. The Ouse Bank Commission itself was empowered in 1837 (7 Wil.IV & 1 Vic.c.1001) to raise funds for the upkeep of the banks.

This was administered by the Ouse Bank Commission (created by an act of 1831, 1 & 2 Wil.IV c.lxxiii and otherwise known as the Haling Commission) and a sum of £750 per annum was reserved for harbour works, but, in the event, the bulk of this was squandered on the upkeep of the mainly decorative Marine Parade and on the depositing of silt, which was speedily swept away, along the west side of the river.

As urgent as were the needs for sound harbour direction and the provision of both wet and dry docks, the solution of these problems, however, could not take precedence over that of an even more serious defect, namely the dreadful condition of the harbour approaches. In 1844 Lynn was still approached from the sea along a wide and most treacherous curve of the Ouse. Both this and the outer approaches were beset with submerged sandbanks, cross currents, shifting sands and acute silting. The Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill (briefly stated, the promoters intended to make a straight cut between the harbour and the sea) in 1849 laid bare the full extent of the channel's inadequacy and the harmful repercussions it had had on Lynn trade. On being asked to explain the nature of the defects Armes replied:<sup>1</sup>

"I should say there are several. One to which frequent allusion has been made is that instead of its being a direct channel, it is a very circuitous channel, and, in addition to that the danger is increased by the fact that when the sands are overflowed the tide does not set straight through the channel, but across."

Similarly, Mr. Wing, the counsel for the promoters, had commented in his opening address:<sup>2</sup>

"I believe there is hardly any instance where the sands have shifted and the channel of the river varied so much as this has."

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<sup>1</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, 1849, p.30.: evidence of W.Armes.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.2.

and also<sup>1</sup>

"..at present it is a very circuitous channel and the estuary is full of light and shifting sands."

The extent of the improvement made by the Eau Brink Cut was placed firmly in perspective. W.Chace, the senior Lynn pilot, at first said of the channel, "I have known it worse", but further questioning elicited the admission that it was "only as good now as it generally was in my time; it always fluctuated"<sup>2</sup>.

The practical consequences of the situation had been, and still were, gravely detrimental to Lynn. An average of 30 vessels a year grounded in the vicinity of the harbour,<sup>3</sup> which meant that "from eight years' record... the cost to the port has been ld. per ton upon all cargoes delivered to pay for the damages that have been sustained by vessels running aground between Lynn Roads and the town"<sup>4</sup>; a further consequence was that many northern insurance companies charged a higher premium on vessels bound for Lynn than on those for London and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Adverse weather added difficulties to the already hazardous passage and caused expensive delays; one ship of only 13' draft was once seven days between the Deeps and the harbour, and another, the 'Cato', was on one occasion actually held for twenty-six days.<sup>6</sup> A further source of delay was that captains rarely dared to attempt a night passage, so badly lit was the channel;<sup>7</sup> but, even so, when in 1847 the Pilot

<sup>1</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, 1849, p.2.: evidence of W.Armes. <sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.31. <sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.30. Evidence of

<sup>4</sup> W.Armes who was the secretary to the Lynn Maritime Insurance Association. Ibid. The most notorious example was that of the 'Henry William' which cost £350 to refloat and a further £500 to repair.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. <sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.47., evidence of Mr. Garland (ex R.N.)

<sup>7</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.520. There was a lighthouse at Hunstanton, the property of F.Lane, the Lynn Town Clerk, but in the care of Trinity House. For the rest the Head Pilot was paid £350p.a. out of which he supplied all lights and buoys except the Thief and Whiting Beacons.

Commission sought authority to provide marker lanterns it was refused on the ground that the council "do not deem it necessary"<sup>1</sup>. It is hard to justify this completely parsimonious attitude, for the deterrent effect of the factors enumerated above had been illustrated only too clearly a few years previously when a representative of Birmingham business interests had visited Lynn to investigate the possibility of despatching the midland city's products through the harbour there instead of that at Hull, but had abandoned his intention solely on account of the state of the channel.<sup>2</sup> Another incidental result had been the steady deterioration of a once prosperous shipbuilding industry in the town.<sup>3</sup> Naval contracts had ceased about 1800, and, although three small yards survived in 1844, the industry was extinct by 1858.<sup>4</sup>

As though the condition of the harbour and its approaches were not enough, there also remained an anachronistic system of harbour tolls and petty dues to hamper trade. The tolls were initially privileges conferred on Lynn Corporation, which undertook to maintain the sea defences, harbour bridges and various other public works, over several centuries by various "indulgent monarchs"<sup>5</sup>. Apart from their extreme complexity, these tolls had, by the mid-nineteenth century, become "vicious in principle and injurious in practice" having "many times diverted a trade beneficial to the town"<sup>6</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> Guildhall Book, Vol.14, p.829, minute of the 10th February, 1847.

<sup>2</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, p.34, evidence of W.Armes.

<sup>3</sup> A 600 ton warship, the 'Auspicious' was launched in 1796, and one of 22 guns, the 'Victor', in 1798. The last naval vessel built in Lynn appears to have been the 'Duke of York' in 1800.

<sup>4</sup> Armes gives this impression in his 1858 lecture; Hillen (p.737) gives a list of constructions after 1845 but includes nothing after the 600 ton 'Arethusa' in 1855. As the Marsh Cut was open by then it is obvious that other factors were involved in the decline, for which see chapter 9 below.

<sup>5</sup> Armes: The Port of King's Lynn, p.6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



but despite this the Corporation wilfully continued to exact its full dues and to meet evasion or doubtful cases with legal sanctions.<sup>1</sup> The complexities of the whole system defy simple explanation and the full tables are given in the appendices,<sup>2</sup> but their general application, in round figures, was to impose a levy on general cargo entering the harbour of  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per ton in the case of Lynn freemen, and 3d. in the case of 'strangers'; for coals the figures were  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. and 6d. per ton respectively.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these impositions and the state of the channel, already by 1844, Hull merchants were turning to Wisbech in preference to Lynn whenever the opportunity offered, and the former was deriving considerable benefit from the expanding trade of the midlands, whereas Lynn was most certainly not doing so; in addition a considerable amount of the growing Baltic timber trade was being diverted to Wisbech<sup>4</sup> concomitantly with the improvements made to the Nene navigation. Most alarming of all, however, were instances of Hull merchants having brought goods into Wisbech and then retailing them in Lynn at lower prices than identical goods brought directly into the harbour there.<sup>5</sup> But, despite this, it was 1889 before the toll system was finally abolished, and in the meantime the Corporation had even added to it by imposing a tax of 4d. per ton on incoming cargoes to assist in defraying the cost of the Norfolk Estuary Cut works. The reason for this obstinate attitude, at least in the 1830s and '40s, was simply that the Corporation could not afford to sacrifice what was far and away its largest single item of revenue. Total income averaged

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<sup>1</sup> Guild Hall Book, Vol.14, p.807, minute of the 17th September, 1846, for note of action taken against evasion of wharfage due. See also *ibid*, p.730, 8th July, 1844; p.728, 27th June, 1844 and also a case of the 9th November, 1846 where only £2-13-1d was involved. <sup>2</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry, p.29, evidence of E.Lane Swatman, the collector of the dues; also *ibid*. p.66, App.5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*. p.31, evidence of W.Armes.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*.

some £7,000 per annum<sup>1</sup>, rising in a good year, such as 1845, to as much as £9,300, the fluctuations themselves revealing the importance of the toll receipts as it was these which were, being dependent on the state of trade, the variable factor. In 1844 the town dues and groats contributed £3,042-4-5d. and £543-1-0d. respectively to the revenue, the corresponding figures for 1845 being £4,211-14-3d. and £646-5-0d.<sup>2</sup> These facts and proportions have only to be set against the insecure state of the Corporation finances of the time for the position to be clearly understood; as early as 1842 a council minute had spoken of the "depressed state of the Corporation finances"<sup>3</sup>, and, in fact, the financial year ending August 1845 left the authority with a balance of no more than £465.

The responsibility for the degree of Lynn's unpreparedness lay squarely with the dominant merchant families of the town to which some reference has been made in preceding pages. The "high caste"<sup>4</sup> coterie numbered perhaps thirty or forty merchants, bankers and lawyers and centred on the families of Everard, Bagge, Hogge and Self who lived around the inner courts of the town in combined business and domestic premises. These families "gradually and kindly (had taken) the management of the several commercial interests until all were completely in their own hands"<sup>5</sup>, they had appropriated every inch of the river frontage so that the "private properties" of "small men" were sometimes kept laden "month after month"<sup>6</sup>, and they had also acquired a

<sup>1</sup> White's Norfolk Directory, 1845 p.527.

<sup>2</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry,

p.66, App.5. <sup>3</sup> Minutes of the General Committee, Vol.3, p.173, 20th June, 1842.

<sup>4</sup> So designated by Armes in his lecture of 1858.

<sup>5</sup> The Port of King's Lynn, p.7. This was a just contention as examination of White's Norfolk Directory and other contemporary sources reveals. The Everard family had interests in brewing, malhouses, the manufacture of rope and twine, in wine, coal, timber, general merchandise and shipping, it also owned a rich banking firm: the Bagges were brewers and general merchants: the Hogges were brewers and malsters and also coal, wine and timber merchants: the Selves were merchants in corn, seed, oilcake, coal and timber.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

a complete hold over the local tradesmen so that any burgess detected in seeking alternative quotations from any source other than that with which he normally dealt was likely to be shunned by the whole trading community.<sup>1</sup> There was no possibility of redress, for not only were the families closely bound by friendship, intermarriage and business alliances, they also controlled the civic<sup>2</sup> and social life of the town as surely as they did its economic activities.

Immediately prior to the reform of municipal government in 1835, when only the 250 or so freemen of the borough, themselves the creatures of the coterie<sup>3</sup>, enjoyed the franchise, seventeen of the thirty council seats were occupied by members of the four principal families; of the remainder seven were held by friends of the group and four were vacant.<sup>4</sup> Reform had made little practical difference, and in 1844 the members of these families, their business associates and friends could still combine to form a majority. They were aided by the fact that the new electorate, barely a thousand strong even by 1844,<sup>5</sup> consisted in the main of the former freemen (who were to retain their privileges for life) and the newly enfranchised small tradesmen who did not dare to offend those on whom their businesses depended. They also inspired respect as individuals. The investigating commission of 1833, a prelude to the 1835 act, found no irregularities in their conduct of

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<sup>1</sup> R.J.Hillen: a History of the Borough of King's Lynn, Norwich 1907, p.603.

<sup>2</sup> For details of the 1844/5 council see Appendix B and below in passim.

<sup>3</sup> The freedom could be obtained by Mayoral Gift, by Patrimony (the first born son of a freeman), by purchase (usually at £150 by 1835 although the price could be raised, and on occasion was, to exclude undesirable applicants), or by serving a seven year apprenticeship in the borough.

<sup>4</sup> The Town Clerk was also an Everard by marriage, but this liason took place after his appointment.

<sup>5</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.525.

affairs,<sup>1</sup> while in subsequent years substantial subscriptions and encouragement towards a new Lynn hospital and improved market accommodation, as well as to other town improvements, and the provision of the beautiful Town Walks gave material proof of the coterie's zeal for the well being of Lynn's citizens.

While Lynn's trade stagnated because it had "been managed by too few hands"<sup>2</sup> the families in question waxed prosperous, either storing their accumulated wealth or, as in the case of the Everard and Bagge families, investing in land and taking up residence on nearby country estates. A bitter critic, mindful of Lynn's needs, might complain that they were too rich to care about their neighbours,<sup>3</sup> and in one sense this was true, but it would be more exact to say that they ignored the need for harbour and channel improvements because they had a vested interest in retaining things as they were. Existing conditions had made them rich, but further developments might well lead to the emergence of unwelcome rivals in the town and a consequent undermining of their position. Lynn itself possessed a widespread trading monopoly and within this the coterie had its own secure monopoly. If the harbour service was costly and inefficient it was little matter to them, for the costs could easily be recouped from the traders, who in their turn passed them on to the consumers obliged by geographical circumstances to deal in Lynn. If the channel was a source of delay and danger to shipping it was again a matter of small concern, for the extra costs involved were still less than those which would be incurred by an

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<sup>1</sup> See "A Report of the Proceedings (verbatim) of H.M. Commissioners for Enquiring into the existing state of the Municipal Corporations of England and Wales at King's Lynn, November 1833": Lynn 1834.

<sup>2</sup> The Port of King's Lynn, p.7. <sup>3</sup> Letter of 'Crito', Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 15th February, 1862.

outside rival's attempts to utilise overland transport and ignore the Ouse and its tributaries. Until the advent of railways the position was, in fact, impregnable and the incentive to improvement non-existent.

Two examples, the second of which is particularly relevant to this study, will suffice to illustrate the mental outlook of the Lynn civic authorities. On the grounds indicated above they had first of all resolutely opposed the Eau Brink Cut, thereby incurring the hostility of many of the up-country gentry which, even by 1858, had not been fully allayed.<sup>1</sup> This fearful suspicion of any change, perhaps partly justified by later events in this former instance, was seen in its worst manifestation in the reaction of the council to proposals to improve the harbour approaches during the 1830s. In 1837 Lord George Bentinck<sup>2</sup> and others had commissioned Sir John Rennie to report on a grandiose scheme for enclosing 150,000 acres of the Wash and so form a new 'Victoria County'. In 1839 the engineer reported favourable conclusions. At a cost of £2,000,000, a sum that would speedily be recouped by the value of the reclaimed land, he proposed to straighten and confine the rivers Witham, Welland, Nene and Ouse, and lead them to a common outfall some miles from the existing coastline. Three times this was put to Parliament and three times it was rebuffed. The high initial cost partially explains this, although the acreage created would have been worth three times as much, but the main blame must be attached to the actively hostile attitude of the

<sup>1</sup> Armes: lecture of 1858.

<sup>2</sup> Lord George Cavendish-Bentinck (1802-48), son of the fourth Duke of Portland; M.P. for Lynn from 1828 on, a substantial landowner in the district; earned his fame by leading the attack on Peel in 1845/6 over the repeal of the Corn Laws. Woodward: *The Age of Reform*, Oxford Press, 1938, p.118fn. says that Peel offered him office in 1841, but he refused the offer as he could not spare the time from racing - his connection with this scheme, however, indicates that he was not without a serious side.

Lynn Council, for "as it seems one duty of corporate bodies to resist good projects, so the Lynn Corporation strenuously opposed this"<sup>1</sup>. Its members, indeed, lent themselves to the general credulity which dogged the project from its outset. Some maintained that the water of the Ouse would run so fast that Ely would be the port instead of Lynn, some feared that the channel would dry up and that a new town would arise at the river mouth to replace Lynn, while others gloomily prophesied such a pile-up of tidal waters that the town would be completely inundated by flood. Fortunately for Lynn the promoters were not completely deterred and caused J.M.Rendal, in 1839, to draw up a very much modified plan to cost only £500,000. This simply involved a  $2\frac{1}{2}$  mile straight cut (actually in two parts, Marsh Cut and Vinegar Middle Cut) between Lynn harbour and the sea, and would lead to the reclamation of no more than 70,000 acres. Despite the obvious benefits of this proposal and its essential moderation, resistance and indifference continued and in 1844 it was still no more than a carefully devised plan and a stick which critics were using with increasing effect to beat the council. It may be noted at this point that, helped by the stimulus of external threats to Lynn's security, the patience and persistence of the promoters was rewarded in 1846 when the Company of the Promoters of the Norfolk Estuary was at last duly incorporated and its project sanctioned. Even so, a further four years elapsed before the first sod was cut, and another three before the work was complete after difficulties and legal complications to which reference must be made in a later chapter.

In view of the above it will hardly be an occasion for surprise that

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<sup>1</sup> Arnes: Lecture of 1858.

the reaction of the Lynn authorities to the Northern & Eastern extensions was one of culpable sloth - indeed, they were probably taken by surprise at the sudden turn of events. William Everard, one of Williams' group, admitted as much in his own case when he said that two years before he had thought that railways would never come to Lynn, but that now they were at Ely they could no longer be ignored<sup>1</sup> - a sentiment revealing his reason for becoming associated with the L & E promotion, and also a degree of foresight not shared by others of his family and their fellow merchants. Not until the 5th February, 1844 did the General Committee of the council meet to discuss the alarming situation, conclude that the council must "oppose any bill which should exclude this town from the proposed railway communication"<sup>2</sup>, and decide to recommend the council to appoint a deputation to approach the borough's M.P.s and charge them to wait on the E.C.R. and N & E boards "for the purpose of urging upon them the necessity of making Lynn the terminus or junction"<sup>3</sup> of the extensions.

### Section 3: The Rural Concepts

On the 7th February the deputation (henceforward designated the Railway Committee) was duly appointed to "open a negotiation (sic) with the directors of the several companies which are about to extend their present line of Railroad in this neighbourhood for the purpose of making the best arrangement in their power to secure to the town the most efficient line which can be obtained"<sup>4</sup>. The committee was exhorted to "lose no time" in its task - a commendable sentiment, except that it was already far too late. The

<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March, 1844. Speech at the Town Meeting of the 28th March.

<sup>2</sup> General Committee Minutes, Vol.3, p.219: minute of the 5th February, 1844.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Guild Hall Book, Vol.14, p.721; minute of the 7th February, 1844.

Northern & Eastern had completed its initial surveys, and the Eastern Counties proprietors had given their approval to the Brandon and Peterborough extensions on the 10th January, 1844;<sup>1</sup> by mid-February the shares had been subscribed,<sup>2</sup> and, of course, the plans and requisite deposit lodged with the Board of Trade and Court of Chancery respectively.<sup>3</sup> Finally, on the 21st February, the Eastern Counties proprietors signified their approval of the Lincoln extension.<sup>4</sup> To even contemplate that they would be prepared to alter plans so far advanced for the sake of one community's interests was positively naive.

For five days the members of the Railway Committee cogitated and drew lines on maps, emerging at the end of that time with two schemes involving 66 miles of completely new railway and a battery of ingenious arguments.<sup>5</sup> The first scheme represented what, in the committee's view, would happen if the E.C.R. and N & E were unimpeded in their progress, and forecast a branch line, 26 miles in length, running from Turf Fen (a point of no significance except that it was exactly midway between Ely and Peterborough) through Wisbech and on to a terminus at Lynn. This, it was pointed out, would place Lynn at a serious disadvantage to its rival, Wisbech, and would render the route to both Ely and Peterborough circuitous, and in either case 30 to 35 minutes longer than by direct lines to either of the two towns. It is curious that men accustomed to spending hours and even days in wearisome road journeys should now consider such a relatively small time a major handicap, but, as difficulties were being deliberately created to enhance

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<sup>1</sup> Railway Times, 13th January, 1844, p.26; E.C.R. meeting of the 10th January.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 24th February, p.210; E.C.R. meeting of the 21st February.

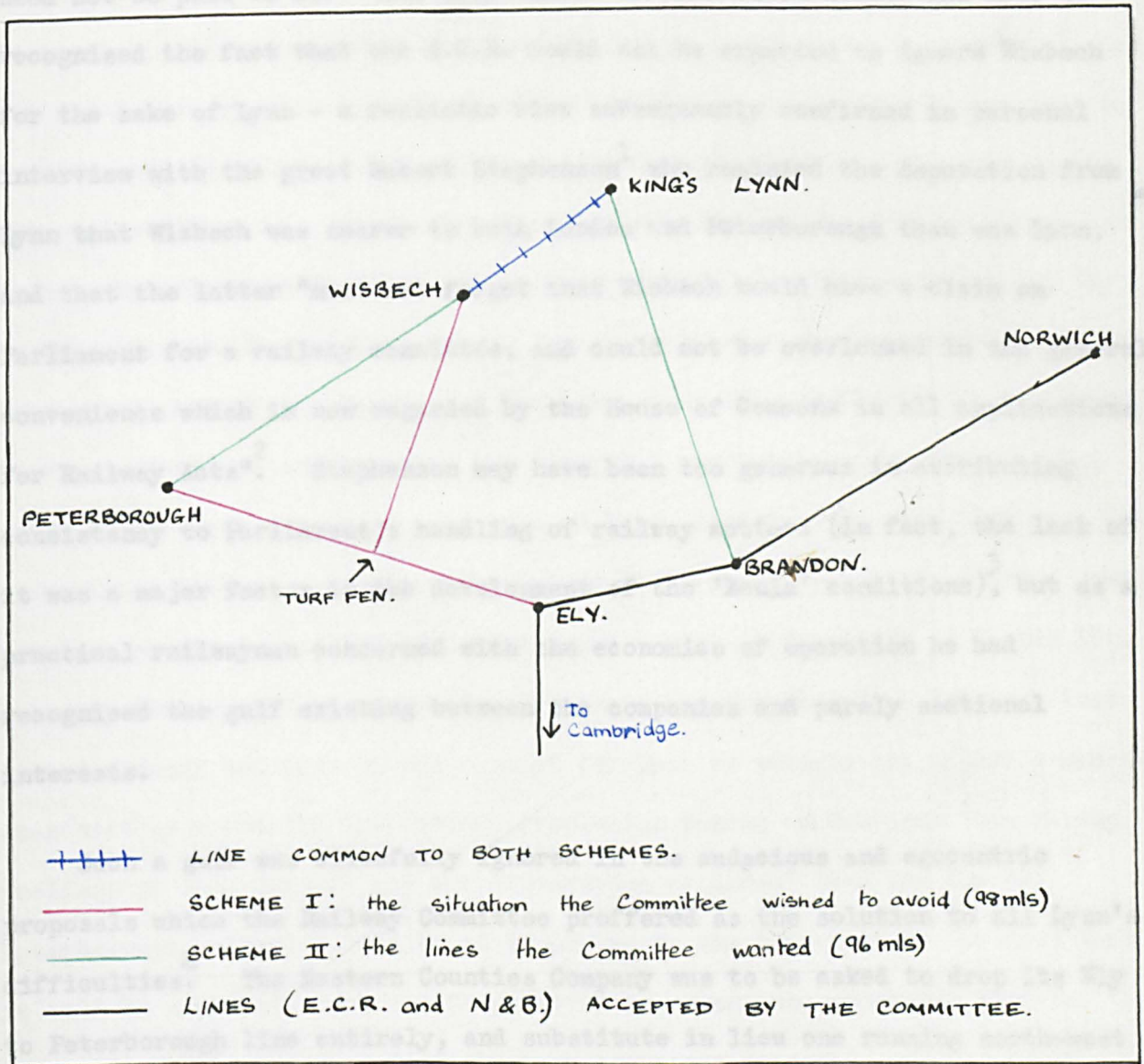
<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> General Committee Minutes, Vol.3, pp.220-1, 12th February, 1844.



The Proposals of the Lynn Corporation Railway Committee



N.B. This sketch is based on two maps included in the General Committee Minutes, Vol. 3, p220, 12th February, 1844.

the attractiveness of the alternative and positive proposal, and although the same issue was shortly to arise in another context, too much attention need not be paid to it. The only virtue of this first scheme was that it recognised the fact that the E.C.R. could not be expected to ignore Wisbech for the sake of Lynn - a realistic view subsequently confirmed in personal interview with the great Robert Stephenson<sup>1</sup> who reminded the deputation from Lynn that Wisbech was nearer to both London and Peterborough than was Lynn, and that the latter "must not forget that Wisbech would have a claim on Parliament for a railway committee, and could not be overlooked in the general convenience which is now regarded by the House of Commons in all applications for Railway Acts"<sup>2</sup>. Stephenson may have been too generous in attributing consistency to Parliament's handling of railway matters (in fact, the lack of it was a major factor in the development of the 'Mania' conditions)<sup>3</sup>, but as a practical railwayman concerned with the economics of operation he had recognised the gulf existing between the companies and purely sectional interests.

Such a gulf was blissfully ignored in the audacious and egocentric proposals which the Railway Committee proffered as the solution to all Lynn's difficulties.<sup>4</sup> The Eastern Counties Company was to be asked to drop its Ely to Peterborough line entirely, and substitute in lieu one running north-west from Brandon to Lynn and then on via Wisbech to Peterborough. In this way Lynn would be assured of a safe position on a cross country line and would be enabled, by means of the railway and the continued use of the Ouse navigation, not only to keep its traditional markets intact, but also preclude the

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<sup>1</sup> See below for the details of this visit, which took place towards the end of March, 1844. <sup>2</sup> General Committee Minutes, Vol.3, pp.230-5; 6th April, 1844; report of the committee on its activities in London, for which see below. <sup>3</sup> See chapter 3 below.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp.220-1; minutes of the 12th February, 1844.

possibility of any interference from Wisbech, and limit that from Norwich, in the town's London, Norfolk and Suffolk markets. The fact that the journey to London would now be even more circuitous was this time conveniently ignored. In seemingly disinterested justification, it was pointed out to the E.C.R. and the N & E that by the adoption of these suggestions they would be required to provide only 66 miles of new railway as opposed to 68 miles under the former alternative (that is: Ely to Brandon 14 miles, Brandon to Lynn 22 miles, and Lynn to Peterborough 30 miles, as compared with Ely to Brandon 14 miles, Ely to Peterborough 28, and Turf Fen to Lynn 26) and would thereby avoid crossing "the worst part of the Fens". Quite apart from all considerations of timing in its production, and ignoring the unfounded assumption as to the starting point of the Lynn branch, a plan such as this, conceived in only five days by a committee without a single technical qualification amongst its members<sup>1</sup> and purely specious in content, deserved short shrift. It got it. On the 15th February the council was reduced to impotency by the news from Bentinck that it was already too late in the session for Lynn to achieve its object - news countered by a totally ineffective resolution urging on Bentinck "the strong feelings of this Council and the Corporation at large" that the Ely to Peterborough railway "would be so injurious to the interests of the town that it will be incumbent upon the Corporation to oppose the projected bill in every stage unless some satisfactory arrangements be made"<sup>2</sup>. It is to be noted that the equally potent threat of the northern extension had so far received no specific mention; if Lynn obtained its railway to Peterborough such a line could presumably be made to serve Lynn's ends, but if Lynn failed

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<sup>1</sup> Wayte was a physician, Goodwin and Platten solicitors, R. Bagge a merchant and brewer, Self a merchant. Goodwin, being privy to Williams' intentions was probably no more than a passive but interested spectator.

<sup>2</sup> General Committee Minutes, Vol. 3, p. 223; minutes of the 15th February.

in its purpose it would represent a chronic danger which, as far as the evidence shows, was not yet fully appreciated.

From this time on the council was constantly on the retreat, itself a favourable omen for Williams, fighting a losing battle with dwindling confidence and certainty of intention. On the 17th February, Goodwin, then absent on private business in London (most probably in connection with Williams' schemes), was directed by letter to sound the N & E board on the possibilities of a Lynn extension from Brandon (a last flicker of hope) or, and this was a new departure, from Ely.<sup>1</sup> It was obvious that the council, fearful of forfeiting the goodwill of the two companies, was now prepared to concentrate on seeking a second best rather than surrender to the appalling possibility of the Turf Fen branch which would throw all the advantages to Wisbech; the idea of Lynn creating its own railway had still not been officially considered. Goodwin conferred with the E.C.R. board and returned to present his report on the 4th March.<sup>2</sup> As a result the Railway Committee then decided that what it wanted was a line to Ely via Downham Market, and promptly took steps to obtain a joint conference with the E.C.R. directors on the matter.<sup>3</sup> Obviously Goodwin's persuasive powers were more in evidence than was his undoubted duplicity. Very understandably the E.C.R. had rejected the original proposals for a Brandon to Lynn line, and had apparently given grounds for believing that after all it would be prepared to overlook Wisbech, but this can only have been on the understanding

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<sup>1</sup> General Committee Minutes, Vol.3, p.224; minute of the 17th February. Confusion may be caused by the apparent inconsistency of references to the E.C.R. and N & E; as the latter was leased to the former by this time the references may be taken as synonymous, although the N & E remained nominally independent until 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.226, 4th March, 1844.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

that it would not be called upon to finance the Lynn to Ely line - a point on which Goodwin, alone of the committee, was able to give assurance. Given this guarantee the E.C.R., already heavily committed elsewhere, could temporarily afford to ignore Wisbech in favour of the Lynn & Ely route for it "would consequently be saved the trouble of that part of the line"<sup>1</sup>, yet "would receive a large amount of traffic from it"<sup>2</sup>. It is also a distinct possibility that it was at this stage that, as the price of acquiescence, Williams privately intimated his willingness to throw off a Wisbech branch from the L & E to meet a future E.C.R. extension to that town<sup>3</sup>; if this was indeed the case, both parties to the understanding could feel satisfied, the former because such a branch fitted in with his ultimate intention of making Lynn the centre of a railway network, the E.C.R. because a short line (eventually it was constructed from March) would give it direct access into the heart of the Lynn and Wisbech feud, so that whatever the outcome of this it would carry a substantial share of the victor's spoils. At the same time as preparing the E.C.R. and the N & E for the emergence of a private company, Goodwin was also manoeuvring the potential opposition within Lynn into adopting the route already selected by the promoters of the company in question, so achieving a double victory.

But within a week the committee had changed its mind again. It now determined that Lynn's best interests would be served by securing "the best practical access to London and to the manufacturing districts in the west

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<sup>1</sup> Railway Times, 4th May, 1844, p.505. Chairman's report to a meeting of E.C.R. shareholders.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For full discussion of the Wisbech branch see chapter 2 below.

and north of England"<sup>1</sup>, and that if only one line could be obtained it had better be a direct line to Peterborough, although every effort should be made to obtain the Ely line as well.<sup>2</sup> Faced with the inevitability of change the council was by now at a loss to know in which direction Lynn could seek new markets and security, a choice made much more difficult by the complete dependence on the E.C.R. which the council had assumed, and which made it axiomatic that only one railway for the town could be really expected. Acting on its latest resolve, the committee now formed itself into a deputation to visit London to gain fuller information on the several current projections within the scope of "Lynn connections"<sup>3</sup>, and also negotiate "the most efficient line of railway which can be obtained"<sup>4</sup>. The subsequent intensive series of interviews, conducted during the second and third weeks of March at a cost to the Corporation of £76-10-3d.<sup>5</sup>, proved a bitter awakening to those members of the committee who might still have indulged themselves in private fantasies.

Sir John Rennie and Mr. Rendel, both involved in the so far abortive Norfolk Estuary proposals and manifesting a friendly disposition to Lynn,<sup>6</sup> secured the deputation a meeting with Robert Stephenson (then engineer to both the Northern & Eastern and the London & Birmingham companies) as it was he "whose present and projected lines promised the readiest access from Lynn to London and Peterborough"<sup>7</sup>. This introduction, however, was the high-water mark of co-operation met by the deputation. Stephenson himself was

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<sup>1</sup> General Committee Minutes, Vol.3, p.230; minute of the 6th April comprising the committee's report on its interviews in London and elsewhere during the previous weeks.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Guild Hall Book, Vol.14, p.726, 8th May, 1844.

<sup>6</sup> General Committee minutes, Vol.3, pp.230-5, 6th April, 1844. <sup>7</sup> Ibid.

brutally discouraging, and elsewhere non-committal amiability was the best that was encountered. Mr. Roy, the N & E solicitor, guaranteed the "utmost cordiality" in receiving any application from Lynn, but nothing more substantial; the N & E directors were somewhat more frank for although they expressed "their desire to meet the wishes of the Town of Lynn" this was only "as far as was consistent with the claims of other influential districts" within the area.<sup>1</sup>

The interview with Stephenson proved decisive. He, of course, would know of Williams' intentions, and it was really his task to insure against the possible failure of the private promotion by inducing the Lynn men to accept the idea of a branch to Lynn via Wisbech as would follow such an eventuality. Stephenson urged the Lynn deputation to the view that the town must accept "a comprehensive scheme embracing the neighbouring county as well as Lynn"<sup>2</sup>, reminding the members that Parliament would not overlook Wisbech even if the E.C.R. and the N & E chose to do so, but sugaring the pill by informing them that his own company had decided to adopt "the only feasible plan" and take its Ely to Peterborough line by way of March rather than by the insignificant Doddington, and to commence both its Lynn branch and northern extension from the former.<sup>3</sup> This was an obvious improvement from the E.C.R. viewpoint, for it placed London, the N & E mainline and the York extension virtually in a direct line, and thereby reduced the distances involved without the sacrifice of any major centre of population; it also considerably altered the complexion of the matter in Lynn eyes for it

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<sup>1</sup> General Committee minutes, Vol.3, pp.230-5, 6th April, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. <sup>3</sup> Ibid.

offered at one and the same time <sup>1</sup>direct and ready access to the northern markets and almost direct communication with both London and Peterborough, a most happy compromise to solve a difficult dilemma.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the committee's own proposals the journey to London would now take an extra 18 minutes, that to Peterborough an extra 8 minutes.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as Stephenson did not neglect to point out, these advantages would be assured to the town "without the contribution of one sixpence from the inhabitants of Lynn and the avoiding of the risk and expense which would inevitably attend the formation of an independent company to carry out either a direct line from Lynn to Ely or from Lynn to Peterborough"<sup>3</sup>. The engineer hammered this home by opining that neither the existing nor the potential traffic justified a direct line to either Ely or Peterborough, and as a further encouragement dismissed as "chimerical" Lynn's constant fears of Wisbech.<sup>4</sup> The cogency of Stephenson's arguments was not lost on the deputation which allowed itself to be completely convinced by what it had heard, and returned to Lynn prepared to advocate before the town the choice of the Wisbech and March line as preferable to all others. It also came back with a new awareness of the urgent need for harbour and channel developments. It had been pressed on the deputation from all sides that although "the harbour possesses greater capabilities for extensive commerce than almost any other port on the east coast"<sup>5</sup>, railways without harbour improvements would be "comparatively valueless"<sup>6</sup> - a true prophecy which boded ill for the success of Williams' enterprise but which, in fact, made it doubly desirable in the eyes of Lynn men that no possibility of advantage should be given to Wisbech.

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<sup>1</sup> General Committee Minutes, Vol. 3, pp230-5, 6th April, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.235.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



One of the deputation had been incautious enough to inform the N & E directors, in support of his new found convictions, that some 90% of Lynn men in fact favoured the Wisbech line.<sup>1</sup> Although the official report of the Railway Committee was not made public until the 6th April, this indiscretion and the decisions made by the committee were, in fact, widely known in Lynn as early as the third week of March, a leakage of information for which Goodwin was obviously responsible. The disclosure precipitated a storm of feeling in the town, a situation carefully fostered and exploited by Williams and his associates who, faced by the tacit assumption, still widely entertained, that Lynn could have only one railway, could no longer afford to remain under cover. Williams was, however, prepared. The feasibility of the Ely route had been established by private survey, and feelers as regards practical financial support had produced promises that were "not positive"<sup>2</sup> but which were sufficient to reveal "individuals ready to use every exertion to obtain so desirable an object"<sup>3</sup> as the Lynn & Ely line. Thus prepared, and after assiduously stirring up feeling amongst his fellow citizens against the Wisbech line, Williams achieved his purpose at two meetings, those of the 25th and 28th March. To the first Williams himself invited the 200 persons present, using, or so he claimed, the Rate Book to ascertain the leading occupiers as being representative of the community at large; the mayor of the borough, Alderman Wayte, was invited to preside. The cry was raised that this was "an assuming meeting"<sup>4</sup>, a "partial meeting"<sup>5</sup>, and Wayte complained bitterly of the "odium"<sup>6</sup> he had incurred by convening it at the

<sup>1</sup> Armes at the Town Meeting of the 28th March, 1844; Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March 1844; Williams on the 28th March.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Meeting of the 25th.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Meeting of the 28th.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

request of Williams and Swatman,<sup>1</sup> and, in addition, was able to cite the names of several of the town's leading citizens who were surprised at receiving no invitation on the basis claimed by Williams. Wayte was, in fact, in a most awkward situation. Conscious of the low repute in which the council stood at a time when events had served to remind the town of its unhelpful attitude towards the Norfolk Estuary proposals, he could hardly refuse a meeting on a subject such as the railway which was so vital to the interests of the community at large; moreover, Williams would probably have had his meeting with or without official civic sanction, and under the former alternative the Railway Committee, of which Wayte was a member, would at least have the opportunity of presenting the case, which it genuinely believed was in the best interests of Lynn.

Williams won over the meeting of the 25th March without difficulty and was so enabled to move on with confidence to the completely open Town Meeting which followed, after three days of "rising animosity",<sup>2</sup> on the 28th. Williams had intended such a meeting, and his opponents, the protagonists of the Wisbech line, had demanded it in order to give themselves time to organise their defences and refute the charge that they, as represented by the Railway Committee, were seeking to impose a railway policy on the town. But once again it was Williams who emerged triumphant on the 28th when the town committed itself to the promotion of an independent Lynn & Ely Railway Company. The extent of his victory was to be measured in the composition of the committee appointed by the Town Meeting to prosecute this object, and, in particular, to enlist the support of the local M.P.s and landowners.<sup>3</sup> Three

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<sup>1</sup> The Collector of the Town Charities.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March, 1844; Wayte's remarks from the chair on the 28th March.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

was to constitute a quorum in this committee which contained not only Williams himself but also his followers, Goodwin, Everard and Cresswell; there were only three other members, namely Hogge, Bagge (R) and Bowker, of whom Bagge at least, although a member of the council's Railway Committee, had been more than half convinced of the need for an independent promotion by the arguments which he had heard at the two meetings.

In accounting for Williams' success it is wise to take into account the techniques he employed before examining the strict logic of his argument. Indeed, in the highly charged atmosphere of the Guild Hall, with his audience eager to follow any positive lead which promised to lighten the burden of its members' growing anxiety (and even bring a possible expansion of business) the promoter had a comparatively easy task. He won the day because he correctly interpreted the mood of the town and was able to stir up its fear of Wisbech; because the enlightened members of the community, and in particular William Armes, rallied to him; because the council which sponsored the alternative was suspect following its attitude towards the Estuary Cut, and, above all, because of his own tactful circumspection and skill in manipulation. At both meetings Williams himself spoke last, thereby forcing his opponents to declare their case in full; he was careful, until certain of victory, to maintain a disinterested pose, claiming on the 25th that he was "unfettered"<sup>1</sup> and that he had no particular scheme to "cram down the meeting"<sup>2</sup> - a claim refuted not only by the evidence already advanced, but even more strikingly by the fact that the same issue of the local press which carried the reports of the two meetings also bore notices that the surveys were

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March, 1844.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

already underway, that a site for the Lynn terminus had already been marked out and that a prospectus would shortly be issued.<sup>1</sup> This latter, in fact, appeared on the 20th April, and was a document of such comprehensiveness as to make it highly unlikely that it could have been compiled and printed within a mere three weeks. Finally it may be remarked that the crucial motion of the 28th March, proposed by Everard, was in itself a model of ingenuity:<sup>2</sup>

"That it is highly desirable to the interests of the town that a direct line of railway communication by way of Downham and Littleport should be established between King's Lynn and Ely; and that this meeting pledges itself to give its cordial support to any company that may endeavour to carry such a line of communication into effect."

Thus, to accept the principle was to accept the practical implications of supporting a company which, despite the phrase "any company", had in essence already been formed.

It was a tribute to Williams' thoroughness in arousing feeling against the Wisbech line that at the meetings of both the 25th and 28th of March the burden of representing the case for it had fallen almost entirely on one man, namely Lionel Self, a member of the Railway Committee. He received some backing from Platten and had the comfort of Wayte's partisan support from the chair, but very little else; R. Bagge, on whom he might have looked for assistance, began by making his complaint that the meeting of the 25th was "premature and not courteous to the members of the deputation"<sup>3</sup> and finished by supporting Williams and agreeing, as noted above, to serve on the committee which was to prosecute the formation of the Lynn & Ely Company. At last something of sufficient magnitude had occurred to break down the unity and the exclusiveness of the "high caste".

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Section 4: The Merits of the Case

The case for the Wisbech line, as represented by Self, was that it would provide Lynn with the opportunity to develop new markets in the midlands and north with the distinct possibility, if the right efforts were made, that Lynn would be enabled to supplant Hull as the port for Birmingham.<sup>1</sup> If the Ely line were built in preference to one to Wisbech it would throw every advantage in the development of such new markets to the latter, and would merely duplicate the river facilities that already existed for bringing trade into Lynn. In the immediate context, Self believed that Williams was an alarmist in seeking to display the trade of Lynn as in decline; for example, for the years 1841 to 1843 there was a variation of no more than 1,200 quarters in corn exports, and if flour were taken into consideration the figures were actually up on those of previous years. In short, Wisbech was doing Lynn no harm, and by adopting a line to there the latter had nothing to lose but everything to gain. It was also argued that it would be folly to antagonize the Eastern Counties before that company's plans for Lynn were known.

The arguments for the Ely promotion came principally from Williams and Armes. They placed emphasis on the view that the citizens of Lynn were "a declining people" ('To be Let' and 'To be Sold' notices were to be seen everywhere in the town), and argued that, as railway boards were invariably selfish, the town must save itself by its own efforts and procure a line that was suited to its particular and individual needs. The choice of the Wisbech

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions quoted in this and the subsequent paragraph are all derived from the meeting of the 28th March, 1844; Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> A point echoed by R. Bagge, illustrating not only his conversion but also his disillusionment as a result of the treatment received by the Railway Committee while in London.

line would, they held, automatically involve the loss of the St. Ives, the Huntingdon, the Norwich and the Brandon markets to Wisbech, and admit competition to those of Bury St. Edmunds, Newmarket and Cambridge, hitherto supplied by water and held by Lynn in "undisputed sway". Moreover, the Wisbech line could only reach to the opposite side of the Ouse (a reasonable assumption at the time as the provision of high clearance for shipping would render the bridging of the river an enormously expensive project), and would lengthen the route to London by nine miles. It was Lynn's plain duty to overcome the handicap of being a hundred years behind the times by establishing rapid communication with its existing markets, for otherwise, as Williams put it, "the town would go to the wall". Not only would the railway to Ely be quicker than the river it would also be much cheaper, and here Armes produced figures obtained from a friend, a railway director, to show that the existing rates between Manchester and Cambridge were, by a mixture of road and water conveyance, between 4/- and 4/8 per cwt., but by Hull and Lynn and then by railway the cost would be reduced to only 3/6d. Potential gains from the Ely line included the possibility that Lynn could become a leading packet station for northern Europe (passengers from Southampton could be in Lynn within ten hours) and for Scotland, the former being the suggestion of Mr. Creed, the secretary of the London & Birmingham Railway. In addition the existing trade with Hull would be strengthened; this was a telling point as already there was the possibility of a third vessel being taken into regular service on that run. Finally, the Ely line would establish direct communication with London and nearly such with the midlands and north; north-east Norfolk would find Lynn as convenient a centre as Norwich. Best of all, these advantages would be gained without Wisbech deriving the slightest benefit.

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Before assessing the merits of these two viewpoints it is as well to establish that in fact Lynn had little if anything to fear from Wisbech as such. In this reference should first be made to the trading figures for Lynn Harbour over the period in which Wisbech had been steadily improving its own trade.

Lynn Harbour Trade, 1831-1845

<u>Year</u>	<u>Coals Imported (tons)</u>	<u>Other Imports (tons)</u>	<u>Ships registered in Lynn</u>	<u>Customs Receipts (£)</u>
1831	200,664	69,492	116	45,732
1832	230,456	82,225	122	38,902
1833	231,936	76,190	119	34,125
1834	204,322	52,146	122	38,423
1835	211,821	84,613	122	42,627
1836	232,614	97,920	121	52,407
1837	252,334	95,556	132	59,514
1838	222,811	108,021	135	62,791
1839	234,647	109,707	134	67,252
1840	236,882	105,271	140	67,139
1841	256,094	109,560	142	64,390
1842	243,252	86,797	148	48,994
1843	237,213	94,390	147	40,741
1844	198,775	122,695	144	61,306
1845	302,463	141,935	157	62,253

Source: W.Armes; The Port of King's Lynn, Appendix, p.56.

- N.B. 1. For the years 1831-1840 Armes gives the coal imports in chaldrons; these have been taken as representing 25 cwt. each (see Appendix A) and converted accordingly.
2. The rise in general imports after 1835 is largely to be attributed to the introduction of the bond system to Lynn, namely to three timber yards in 1832, to sugar and tea brought coastwise in 1835, and to all foreign imports save tobacco, tea and East India goods in 1837.
3. During the period covered exports, mostly in the form of agricultural produce, averaged some 67,000 tons per annum (Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill; evidence of Armes, p.32.).

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from these figures is that above all else Lynn's trade was essentially static, or as Armes described it in reference to the pre-railway days, "not buoyant, busy or very progressive, but sluggish, uniform and almost stagnant"<sup>1</sup>. Especially does this become

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit. p.14.

clear when it is remembered that the town's population had risen from 13,370 in 1831 to 16,039 in 1841, and that it was continuing to increase.

Particularly is the lack of progress made evident in the totals of imported coals, in which the yearly averages over the three cycles of 1832-6, 1837-41 and 1842-8 are, in tons, 222,354, 240,554 and 241,114 (coal imports in 1846 were 208,392 tons, in 1847 264,671, and in 1848 232,831) respectively. The level of the trade may thus be seen to have been steady, and the fluctuations, for the most part related to the general trade cycles, of little lasting significance. The drop of some 40,000 tons as between 1843 and '44 is surprising, but probably arose because many merchants allowed their stocks to run low in the hope that the 1845 budget would see the removal of the tax on exported coal imposed in 1842. The fact that this hope was realised, the opening of the Norwich & Brandon Railway and general prosperity would then account for the remarkable figure for 1845. General imports had received a boost with the establishment of the bond system in Lynn, thereafter remaining steady until the depression years of 1842 and 1843; recovery came in 1844 largely because of the additional timber imported in connection with the railway constructions around Ely. The importance of this timber to Lynn is suggested by the sudden jump in customs receipts, timber being one of the few raw materials which Peel's budgets of 1842 and '45 left subject to such duty. The increased volume of timber entering the harbour compensated for losses in other directions, but in so doing underlined the precarious position of the town's economy. In particular reference should be made to the importation of wines from Portugal and Spain, down by 1845 to 1,000 pipes per annum (a pipe equals 105 gallons) or barely half the amount once brought into the harbour<sup>1</sup>, and to that of wines and beers from the Netherlands, down to

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<sup>1</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.519.



126,000 gallons in 1844<sup>4</sup> as opposed to 256,600 in 1771<sup>1</sup>, although in the latter case the increased number of Lynn's own breweries was a major factor involved, and in both cases heavy falls had been in evidence long before Wisbech had begun to develop.

Not only was there lack of evidence that Wisbech had done the harbour trade of Lynn any harm, there was nothing to suggest that it ever would. Wisbech, a small market and harbour town on the Nene, was, with its 1841 population of 8,530, only half the size of Lynn. As the Fens had been reclaimed and developed so its role as the exporter of its area's corn to both south and north had developed, and the town had certainly increased in wealth and status, but it could do little to expand the extent of its influence because of the grossly unsatisfactory state of the Nene channel. Prior to the 1830's only vessels of under 60 tons burthen had been able to reach the town, and on many occasions even these had been held ('neaped') within a few miles of the harbour for periods as long as three weeks.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence Wisbech merchants of the time had frequently been obliged to adopt the extremely hazardous and costly expedient of unloading their goods at Sutton Wash, an exposed anchorage rendered doubly dangerous by the extensive sandbanks there.<sup>3</sup> It was little wonder that Wisbech was hardly known outside its immediate area, or that Bradshaw in one of his earlier editions should show the 'Forager', a vessel on the Hull to Wisbech run, under the heading of 'Foreign Sailings'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R.J.Hillen: A History of the Borough of King's Lynn, Norwich, 1907, p.539.

<sup>2</sup> N.Walker & T.Craddock: The History of Wisbech and the Fens, Wisbech, 1849, p.440.

<sup>3</sup> Walker & Craddock, op.cit., p.440.

<sup>4</sup> Gardiner: A History of Wisbech and Its Neighbourhood, 1848-1898, London and Wisbech, 1898, p-3.

The cause of Lynn's alarm, cleverly exploited to such good effect by Williams, was the strenuous efforts made under civic leadership during the 1820's and '30's to improve the situation. In 1830 the new Nene Outfall Cut was opened to prevent further shifting of the channel, and between 1827 and 1832 the straightening of the river above Kinderley's Cut so increased the tidal scour that the river bed at Wisbech was lowered a good ten feet.<sup>1</sup> Other major improvements were the completion of the North Level Main Drain, further increasing scour and depth, and the construction of the Sutton Bridge Embankment which served to confine the upper stretch of the river to its proper course. By 1849 it could thus be written:<sup>2</sup>

"(a vessel may)...sail with the utmost regularity and may calculate on the passage from Wisbech to the sea offering no obstruction to her voyage. Besides, three voyages to Wakefield or London can now be performed in the time that two formerly required, or it may be nearer the truth to say two instead of one."

Naturally a great increase of trade followed these various improvements, until by 1865 the town could be described as the "port of Cambridgeshire".<sup>3</sup> In 1829 only 55,040 tons of shipping had visited the harbour, but this rose to 63,180 tons in 1830, and continued to rise until in 1847 the total was 167,443 tons.<sup>4</sup>

The principal imports in this trade were coals and timber, the sole exports of significance corn and other agricultural produce. The river improvements and the development of the Fens had brought great increases in the latter especially, and in one period of eight days during 1843 no less than 10,000 quarters of corn had been shipped from the harbour.<sup>5</sup> The total

<sup>1</sup> H.C.Darby: The Drainage of the Fens, Cambridge, 1956, p.202.

<sup>2</sup> Walker & Craddock, op.cit., p.464.

<sup>3</sup> W.White: Eastern England from the Thames to the Humber, London, 1865, p.257.

<sup>4</sup> Walker & Craddock, op.cit., p.464.

<sup>5</sup> Gardiner, op.cit., p.102.

exports for that year suggest that the gap between Lynn and Wisbech was narrowing rapidly.

Exports of Agricultural Produce in 1843 (in quarters):

	<u>Wisbech</u>	<u>Lynn</u>		<u>Wisbech</u>	<u>Lynn</u>
Wheat	95,220	120,304	Oats	5,337	-
Barley	1,810		Peas	563	106
Malt	50		Seeds (sacks)	3,280	5,733
Rye	443		Flour	-	36,672

Source: F.N.Bacon: A Report on the Agriculture of Norfolk in 1844; London, 1845 p.127.

It is true that Wisbech had certain advantages to offer. Because of a less costly harbour service farmers were often able to obtain a better price from the dealers at Wisbech than at Lynn - a difference of 1/- per quarter being quoted on occasion.<sup>1</sup> A second advantage over Lynn was that the coal boats were utilised to carry the exports, a factor which enabled Wisbech merchants to send coals up-river at a considerable profit but still at a lower cost than Lynn coals.

Under existing conditions, however, despite the loss of some of the Baltic timber trade, there was no real threat to Lynn. But while that town's harbour trade had remained relatively static the visible results of Wisbech's gigantic efforts had excited alarm and jealousy, and it was these that Williams was enabled to exploit; that Lynn's trade had not declined, and that the rise of the former's was attributable above all else to the development of the Fens were factors that he naturally ignored. By 1844, in geographical terms, Wisbech had expanded its markets to the utmost; the Ouse was an effective barrier to the east and it depended entirely on the efforts made by Lynn to improve its harbour facilities as to whether or not Wisbech was

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 30th March, 1844; Armes at the Town Meeting of the 28th March.

enabled to intercept midland trade and nibble further at the edges of the former's preserves. Despite its own handicaps Lynn still possessed every natural advantage over its rival, for even after the improvements that had been made the channel at Wisbech still remained comparatively poor and an impediment to the full ebb and flow of the tide.<sup>1</sup> Further development of the harbour's capacity would have to be prefaced by the deepening of the lower stretches of the Nene to 17', a similar deepening at Peterborough and the reduction of the river's course from there to Stone's End to a parabolic curve.<sup>2</sup> Sir John Rennie reported on these matters in 1844, but his suggestions were not implemented, presumably because the cost was quite prohibitive.<sup>3</sup>

The conclusions from this evidence must be that as long as both towns obtained railway communication the balance between them would remain unchanged, provided that Lynn made the necessary efforts to improve its harbour facilities. But it was this latter consideration that constituted the fatal weakness in the argument for the Wisbech line, for the new markets foreseen by Self were entirely conditional on harbour and channel improvements which would of necessity take years to complete, and so involve a time lapse in which Lynn might well be irretrievably ruined as a commercial centre by the railways already under construction or planned around Ely. On the other hand the chronic failing in Williams' case for the Ely line was that he apparently visualised a future in which Lynn would continue to be an important entrepot in north to south trade, and in which everything would be the same

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<sup>1</sup> Miller & Skertchly: The Fenland, Past and Present; Wisbech and London, 1878, p.76.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.201.

<sup>3</sup> Darby, op.cit., p.202.

except that his railway would have replaced the River Ouse as the principal link with the interior; the possible effects of other lines, particularly of north to south trunk lines, were completely overlooked. However, as Williams' proposals offered immediate protection for existing markets and, provided harbour improvements were made, a basis for future expansion in the directions indicated by Self it may be said that in choosing the Ely route the citizens of Lynn had, in difficult and confusing circumstances, made the better choice.

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Chapter 2"The Great Chance For All"Section 1: A Golden Promise

Essentially, the railway promoters of 1844 were the products of a striking revival in national prosperity. They supplied the principal need of an expanding economy by turning the first fruits of it to their own and the national benefit. Long continued peace, Peel's free trade budgets and a series of good harvests were the causative and sustaining factors behind the remarkable growth of both internal and foreign trade after 1842. Abroad, the continent was sharing the boom, and British trade benefited accordingly; trade with the U.S.A. jumped from an annual value of £3.5m. in 1842 to £7.9m. in 1844<sup>1</sup> following the settlement of vexatious boundary disputes, and consequently friendlier relations and improved credit facilities; in the same period, trade with Asia, aided by the new markets gained at the Treaty of Nanking (1842), increased from £7.5m. to £11.3m.<sup>2</sup> At home, as a result of these various factors, bullion reserves in the Bank of England rose from £8.3m. in 1842 to £15.4m. in 1844<sup>3</sup>, the money rate dropped to a mere 2½% in the September of this latter year, and 3% Consols were quoted above par for the first time since the Seven Years War. None could remember a longer continuance of cheap money<sup>4</sup>, which, by 1844, had persisted for two years. As domestic industry was, by and large, already soundly financed<sup>5</sup> so that profitable fields of investment were lacking<sup>6</sup>, it was largely inevitable that

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<sup>1</sup> Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz: *The Growth & Fluctuation of the British Economy 1790-1850*, Oxford 1953, p.315 and quoting Tooke, IV, p.55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.314.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> D.Morier Evans: *The Commercial Crisis 1847 & 1848*; London 1849, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz, op.cit. p.316.

<sup>6</sup> D.Morier Evans, op.cit. p.3.

the rapidly accumulating volume of unemployed capital should be applied to the further extension of the railway network.<sup>1</sup>

Railway investment had much to recommend it. Above all it seemed to be unusually profitable. When the Stockton & Darlington paid a 15% dividend for 1843, and the London & Birmingham, the Grand Junction and the York & North Midland all paid 10%, the "desire and hope for dividends of 10 to 15% instead of the accustomed 3 to 5%"<sup>2</sup> were planted in many breasts. Misleading and incomplete traffic statistics (for such they were before the Regulating Act of 1844 enforced some degree of scientific order in them) could now be recruited indefinitely to stimulate a growing public interest. For example, there could be adduced the 4,000% traffic increase achieved by the Stockton & Darlington line in its first nine years,<sup>3</sup> the fact that the amount of travelling done in the kingdom had doubled within the last 25 years<sup>4</sup> (Parliament was already permitting promoters to include a 100% increase on existing passenger conditions in their estimates), the steady rise of receipts per railway mile to the 1843 level of £2,234 per annum,<sup>5</sup> and countless other similar examples. Disturbing figures, the small dividends of dubious origin paid by the Eastern Counties and the 50% working expenses of that line for example, were now increasingly overlooked or dismissed on grounds of bad management or mistaken estimates which need not be repeated in future enterprises.

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<sup>1</sup> See Hansard 1844, lxxii, p.233 for Gladstone's expression of this view.

<sup>2</sup> J.Morrison: The Influence of English Railway Legislation on Trade and Industry; London 1848, p.72.

<sup>3</sup> Eastern Counties Railway Prospectus, 1834.

<sup>4</sup> Francis, op.cit. Vol.2, p.136.

<sup>5</sup> H.G.Lewin: The Railway Mania & Its Aftermath 1845-52, London 1936, p.114.

Grounds, other than the mere expectation of profit, on which the strengthening impulse towards railway investment could be rationalised were many and varied. Having been "so frequently checked, thwarted and mortified" in individual ventures, the British investor welcomed the opportunity of enterprise in the safety of association.<sup>1</sup> Foreign investment had always been attended by an element of risk, but here was a chance to keep the investment under one's own eye and know it to be safe from defalcation or political upheaval, and at the same time to have the satisfaction of knowing that capital produced in this country was being absorbed here in creating roads and fuller employment, and in the stimulation of the national economy. Moreover, a railway was not subject to the risk of premature exhaustion (as were, for example, mines) and as it embraced all sections of the economy a sectional recession need not be serious to the railway investor.

Also to be considered was the generally favourable history of railway investment in this country, a history marred by few bitter memories. The boom of 1836 had never reached fever heat (no matter what its contemporaries may have thought) and the subsequent reaction, in which railway share quotations sank no lower than the 79.4 of May 1839 (this taking June 1840 as 100), had ruined few. Confidence had never really been completely lost after 1836; rather had there been a reluctance to advance further capital until the newly authorised lines had proved their worth. Thus, additional capital sought by the companies to ensure completion had, because of the growing interval between their authorisation and realisation and the general shortage

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<sup>1</sup> Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz, op.cit. p.316, fn.1, in quoting from a Circular to Bankers which commented on the marked tendency of British capitalists to combine during periods of recovery from depression; at this time joint stock companies, other than railways, were few in number.



of available capital, frequently to be raised in the form of preference shares - at guarantees of as much as 6% on occasions.<sup>1</sup> When such were honoured in payment of dividend a further cause for confidence was established. In general terms, by 1843, 15 of the 23 companies sanctioned in 1836 had been completed in their entirety, 1 partially so, and 3 in a modified form; only 4 had been totally abandoned.<sup>2</sup> The shares of 13 of these stood below par - stock which had cost £18m. being currently valued at £11½m.<sup>3</sup> - but even these were following a rising trend and were soon to be carried to a premium. One may safely agree with a contemporary who wrote that to this point railways were "an investment into which men entrusted the savings of their lives and had not been betrayed".<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, however, the probity and business acumen of the railway pioneers in general, and of the 'Liverpool Party' in particular, which had contributed so largely to this happy situation had also tended to obscure from the public vision the countless pitfalls which encumbered railway enterprise, and the many opportunities it offered to the rogue.

Rapidly the view obtaining between 1836 and 1842 that the country already possessed all the lines that its economy could support<sup>5</sup> (with the allowed exceptions of a few feeder branches and light railways in carefully selected agricultural district)<sup>6</sup> lost ground. Public judgement endowed railways with all economic virtues and now represented the existing network as a mere skeleton; the standards of the more successful companies came to be accepted as the norm, and proposals for new lines were increasingly regarded not so much according to their own particular merits but rather in general

<sup>1</sup> G.H.Evans: British Corporation Finance 1775-1850: A Study in Preference Shares, Baltimore 1936, p.91.

<sup>2</sup> Francis, op.cit.Vol.2, p.34.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. op.cit.Vol.1, p.138.

<sup>5</sup> Cf.Francis, op.cit.Vol.1, p.132 and Morrison, op.cit. p.16.

<sup>6</sup> Railway Times, November 1836.

and flattering terms. Fundamentally, this revolution in attitude was a matter of changing economic circumstances. In 1836 depression was imminent and men were alarmed at the vastness of the capital committed and yet to be called; in the years of 1843 to 1845 the lines of 1836 were seen to be complete, railways had proved themselves in every particular, there was capital to spare and men were enjoying that light headed reaction which followed escape from long and deep depression. The government singularly failed to recognise the symptoms or to apply the brake to the quickening enthusiasm which was already in 1844 hastening to excess. Addicted to a policy of *laissez faire*, fearful of interfering with the free flow of capital and influenced by the view that "if you interfere by legislation you take some of the responsibility from the railway companies and assume it yourselves"<sup>1</sup>, the government contented itself with ineffectual dabs at the loopholes in the system of company incorporation. Its chief fault lay in failing to place a restraint on company dividends. For years James Morrison had expostulated in vain that to suffer companies to pay high dividends as if subject to no restraint (theoretically, rates should have been reduced after a 10% dividend had been paid, but in practice this limit could easily be evaded) was not to give a boost to legitimate enterprise but a licence to the most extravagant speculation.<sup>2</sup> This had been Morrison's theme since 1836; at first he had been told that his proposed bill for establishing control over the railway companies was unnecessary as no further lines could pay<sup>3</sup> - now he was ignored because he was out of tune with the times. With the emasculation of Gladstone's 'Railway Plunder Bill' in 1844

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Robert Peel quoted by Francis, *op.cit.* Vol.2, p.40.

<sup>2</sup> Morrison, *op.cit.* p.4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.16.

by the railway M.P.s already in the Commons the principle of control was finally renounced<sup>1</sup>, and promoters were given a carte blanche to promise the earth.

A table best illustrates the various features and trends described in the previous paragraphs; in particular may be discerned the rapid development of confidence which coincided not only with the onset of prosperity but also the demonstration of proven worth by the established companies after 1842. The high proportion of preference shares for 1843 and '44 is explicable on the grounds that a full year usually lapsed between the issue of a company prospectus and the sanctioning of its bill - thus the lines authorised in 1843 were conceived in 1842 while the depression still obtained; those of 1844 similarly refer back to 1843 when the wave of prosperity was still only in its formative stages - moreover, nearly one sixth of the preference shares of that year relate to the special context of the Eastern Counties Railway which will be considered at a later stage.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of the principal acts affecting railways for the period of 1830 to 1845 emphasises just how little interference there was in the affairs of the railway companies:

11 Geo.IV & Will.IV.cap.68 1830: protection of carriers against loss of, or injury to merchandise.

7 Will.IV & 1 Vict. cap 83 1837: to make clerks accept documents etc. as laid down in other acts.

1 & 2 Vict.cap.80 1838: to enforce the payment of special constables by companies engaged on public works.

1 & 2 Vict.cap.98 1838: concerning the carriage of mails by rail.

3 & 4 Vict.cap.97 1840:and 5 & 6 Vict.cap.55 1842: these Railway Regulation Acts were principally concerned with matters of safety. They empowered the Board of Trade to appoint inspectors whose approval had to be obtained before a new line was opened, and who were to report on railway accidents.

5 & 6 Vict.cap.79 1842: Passenger Duties Act.

7 & 8 Vict.cap.85 1844: Gladstone's Act.

This latter act gave the government powers to purchase a line after 21 years, but it applied only to new lines and was considerably less in its scope than Gladstone had originally intended.

The share index and the number of new lines planned are much more reliable gauges of the public attitude to railway investment.

A Table to illustrate the salient features in railway enterprise between 1836 and 1845:

Year	Capital Authorised £	% of Pref. shares in whole	Rly. Share Index June '40: 100	Miles sanc- tioned	New lines	Extensions, alterations etc.
1836	22,874,998	-	111.1	955	29	-
1837	13,521,799	3	81.4	543	15	-
1838	2,096,198	7	91.4	49	2	17
1839	6,455,797	15	79.9	54	3	24
1840	2,495,032	31	86.4	-	-	24
1841	3,410,686	27	83.8	14	1	18
1842	5,311,642	28	89.4	55	4	18
1843	3,861,350	35	98.2	90	5	19
1844	20,454,000	32	121.3	805	26	22
1845	59,479,000	4	149	2,861	76	44

Sources: Principally Lewin, Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz, G.H. Evans and R.C.O. Matthews ('A Study in Trade Cycle History, Economic Fluctuations in Great Britain 1833-42' Cambridge, 1954)

- N.B. 1. To capital authorised may be added one third in respect of Companies' borrowing powers.  
2. Capital authorised represents intended expenditure; for a variety of reasons it might not all be called (cf. Matthews, op.cit. p.121).

Public opinion fully endorsed and encouraged the revived interest in railway investment. Long out of patience with expensive turnpikes (railways built their own roads), intolerant of the slow, costly and uncomfortable coaches and the monopolistic and unreliable services offered by canal and river navigation interests, it was now fired by a "quickenning desire for locomotion"<sup>1</sup>. Irrational objections long having been disposed of, the early 1840s saw the railways remove the final reservations in the public mind. They, for example, proved themselves safe. Queen Victoria entrusted herself to a train in 1842, a matter of some importance in the formation of public opinion, and the following year witnessed only three fatalities although some

<sup>1</sup> H. Scrivenor: The Railways of the United Kingdom Statistically Considered, London 1849, p.23.

330,000,000 passenger miles were <sup>61</sup>travelled.<sup>1</sup> Railways also proved themselves fast, cheap and reliable; in 1842 the average speed of all British trains over their journeys was found to be  $21\frac{1}{2}$  m.p.h.<sup>2</sup> (to be compared with the very uneconomical  $11\frac{1}{12}$  m.p.h. over short stretches by the very best road coaches), and in 1843 the average fare per mile over all classes worked out at no more than  $1\frac{3}{4}$ d.<sup>3</sup> (a figure to be compared with the 5d. to 10d. common on coaches, and quite apart from the tips and meals involved in travelling by road). So obvious were the powers and potentialities of railways becoming that no town or trading community felt itself to be able to do without them.

But, as the number of projects multiplied apace, the public at large found itself enabled to do far more than merely encourage. Motivated by greed and convinced that everyone connected with railways must have made money<sup>4</sup>, fortified by their own credulity and urged on by press, pulpit and mutual example, thousands crept through the gaping loopholes within the law to become practical participants in a national frenzy. Companies had few practical means of checking on the backgrounds of applicants for their shares (often the respectability or otherwise of the handwriting was the only criterion) so that the possession of actual assets ceased to be the qualification allowing of speculation. The root of the evil, for such it inevitably became, was of course the negotiable character of the letters of allocation (from company to applicant) which changed hands at anything between 1/- and 3/- per share and often more, and of scrip issue which, in its practical effects, had few virtues but all the vices of an uncontrolled issue of currency. The most prudent were tempted by the prospect of a quick profit

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, op.cit. Vol.1, p.136.

<sup>2</sup> W.M.Acworth: The Railways of England; London 1889, p.30 in quoting from the 1843 Report of the Statistical Society.

<sup>3</sup> Francis, op.cit. Vol.2, p.137.

<sup>4</sup> D.Morier Evans, op.cit. p.11.

with little attached risk, and the most suspicious were drawn in when a practice of canal days, that of paying interest on calls, was revived; in 1847, when Parliament belatedly prohibited this vicious practice, 94 companies had adopted it and an annual sum of £1,007,864<sup>1</sup> interest was involved. To add fuel to the excitement were the drama of the committee rooms and the uncertainty of decisions there; to minister to it were the mushroom growth of railway journals of which 20 flourished during the Mania period as opposed to 3 before and 5 after, the multitude of lawyers who could not lose whatever transpired, and the 'jackals' who were willing to carry on the business of the Stock Exchange at any time or in any place. Once again the government was completely ineffectual. It had done little to prevent the Mania, and what it had done was often ill advised or too late; as for the Parliamentary committees, even when making allowance for the mass of business before them, they were generally consistent only in their inconsistency, an example of which is that 6 bills were approved in 1845 on the same evidence that had caused their rejection in 1844; further, not the least of the causes of the Mania was that companies were obliged to promote branches in self defence as they just did not know whether competition was the rule or not. But, in the short view, events were entirely favourable to the promoter, who was enabled to procure the 75% guaranteed subscription and the 5% deposit, required by Standing Orders before a bill could come before Parliament, without difficulty. The bitter harvest was as yet unforeseen; this indeed was "the great chance for all"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Scrivenor: pp45f. in quoting from a House of Lords Paper for 1848. For fuller discussion of this matter in connection with the E & H Railway see below.

<sup>2</sup> D.Morier Evans, op.cit. p.6.

The various factors suggested above had a particular significance to such as Williams in that the new enthusiasm transcended the old objections to railways other than those associated with dense populations and high industrial development. To this time, the absence of industry of more than local significance and the scattered nature of the population,<sup>1</sup> coupled with the presence of strongly entrenched coastal and river navigation interests, had militated against railway development in East Anglia. Projects had not been lacking in 1836, but these had generally failed to secure the requisite financial backing. Of the 2,235 miles of railway open to traffic at the beginning of 1845 East Anglia's share was a mere 107½, and of this total Norfolk could boast no more than the 20½ miles of the recently opened Norwich & Yarmouth line. The fortunes of the so often unjustly maligned Eastern Counties Railway, "whose profits were ever in inverse proportion to its promises",<sup>2</sup> seemingly justified the reluctance to invest in the area. Authorised in 1836 to build from London to Norwich on a capital of £1,500,000, this company expended £1,631,000 and eight years in getting only as far as Colchester (51¾ miles); its dividends were understandably meagre, its working costs over 50% of its revenue, its shareholders and directors frequently at loggerheads, and its services the most roundly abused in the country. The balance of mileage in the area of East Anglia was provided by the Northern & Eastern Company, also sanctioned in 1836. This concern was in little better shape than its fellow, for its mainline extended only as far as Bishops Stortford on its intended way from London to Cambridge. Its prospects of ever reaching Cambridge had seemed remote until the Eastern Counties Company,

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<sup>1</sup> Norwich, with an 1841 population of 62,344, was the only really large centre in East Anglia, but was only the 13th city of the kingdom. Its textile industry was in a state of arrested decline, now concentrating on quality goods and aided by a revival in local flax growing.

<sup>2</sup> Francis, op.cit.Vol.2, p.134.

having taken it on lease as from the 1st January 1844, adopted it as the basis for its own extensions.

During 1844, as indicated, popular favour came to smile on even the Eastern Counties Railway, and therefore, by implication, on rural lines in general. If the E.C.R. was able to raise £960,000 for its Norwich and Peterborough lines and secure the approval of its long suffering shareholders to the raising of a similar amount for its intended Lincoln line, Williams could regard the prospects of his own capital issue with every confidence. For the sake of perspective, however, it is desirable to note at this point that even at the height of the Mania, May 1845, the shares of agricultural lines did not generally attain to the premiums enjoyed by those of more favoured concerns; thus E.C.R. shares, £14/16 called, reached no higher than £22, whereas £80 paid shares of the Great Western attained a value of £210, and the £50 units of the York & North Midland one of £118.

It may be said that awaiting Williams was an abundance of wealth and enthusiasm and that his principal task was to dress up his project in the most acceptable and attractive manner possible. This was so, but the very advantages of 1844/5 made inevitable many grave problems for the future. The profusion of schemes implied for the very near future a high premium on the services of every kind of railway specialist, and a certain rise in the prices of iron and other raw materials; the willingness of the country to invest was producing a serious over-stretching of the country's capital resources. An easy birth seemed likely, but it was to be followed by a perilous infancy filled with dangers in which many of necessity would perish. A wise promoter would perhaps have reckoned on such factors, but, in fact, the vast majority, including Williams, persisted in acting and calculating as if the particular railway of each was alone in the field.

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Section 2: The Lynn & Ely RailwayA. The Launching of the Company

Inertia having been overcome, and strong leadership evidenced, King's Lynn and neighbourhood rallied to Williams with an abundance of both vocal and financial support, although, for many, the latter was intended as no more than a pleasant short term speculation. There was no need for the inaccurate alarmism of a Mr. Blythe, that Lynn was the only place in the kingdom of commensurate size and commercial importance that did not have the advantages of railway communication;<sup>1</sup> on the contrary, the citizens of the town had become only too acutely aware of the dangers of being "somewhat stationary",<sup>2</sup> and of the necessity for exertion to avoid realising by experience "the sad effects arising from supineness".<sup>3</sup> A "numerous and highly respectable"<sup>4</sup> gathering of 500 at a County Meeting of the 23rd April, under the chairmanship of Folkes and representative of both town and county interests, pledged itself unanimously to "support by every means in its power" the Lynn & Ely Railway Company.<sup>5</sup> Amply reassured by the respectability of the company's agents and bankers, by Williams' assurance that liability was limited<sup>6</sup> (it was not mentioned that this did not apply until after the Act of Incorporation had been obtained), by a promise that calls would not be more than £5 per share and at least two months apart, Lynn and the gentry of the surrounding countryside lent freely of their purses to a project that, while "not a goldmine", offered a 5% return as a certainty and 10% as a "fair promise".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 27th April 1844.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Folkes' remarks from the chair.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. <sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Williams on the 23rd April.

The prospectus, inviting subscription to a capital of £200,000, appeared on the 20th April.<sup>1</sup> A notice of the 11th May was able to announce the closing date for applications as being the 31st of the same month,<sup>2</sup> although, in fact, the lists were finally closed on the 25th May<sup>3</sup> as applications received were already fourfold in excess of those required.<sup>4</sup> A further notice of the 15th June stated that one third of the capital had been subscribed in Lynn itself, and that many had inevitably been disappointed in the allocation;<sup>5</sup> it is probable that at least a further third had been taken up by the landowners of western Norfolk and the Fenlands, a possibility suggested by Williams' claim that the members of the Provisional Committee, comprising some 43 members of which 35 were luminaries of Lynn and district,<sup>6</sup> were investors "to a large extent".<sup>7</sup> Be this as it may, the money which launched the Lynn & Ely was not the money which carried it to completion and, for the most part, was never intended by the subscribers to be so. The almost daily quotations for L & E shares on the London and Liverpool exchanges prior to August, 1845 indicate an intense traffic in share transfers. It appears that a majority of the initial subscribers were engaged in the profitable practice of obtaining unregistered scrip, that "paper money....of the most trashy description",<sup>8</sup> at a cost of only the £1/5 deposit per share, making a quick sale at a premium (virtually guaranteed by the circumstances of the time), and then leaving the permanent financial backing of the line to other sources.

<sup>1</sup> A copy is retained in the Norwich Castle Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath's Railway & Commercial Journal, 25th May, 1844, p.591.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 15th June, 1844, p.676.

<sup>5</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald.

<sup>6</sup> For the full list see Appendix C.

<sup>7</sup> Williams on the 23rd April.

<sup>8</sup> Select Committee on Railway & Canal Amalgamation 1852/3; P.P. 1852-3/xxxviii; question 3338, evidence of J.Hawkshaw C.E.

The situation was ironic. From the first Williams had insisted upon the necessity of strong local support to attract that balance of capital which the area itself could not provide; in particular he had had London and Lancashire in mind.<sup>1</sup> Equally so he had sought to exclude the pure speculator, an end to which all traffic estimates and promises as to likely return on capital had been made deliberately moderate.<sup>2</sup> What he had apparently not anticipated was speculation so near home, although a quick profit, the escape from risk and the sitting back to await the saving benefits of the railway was an approach fully to be expected in view of the past record of the Lynn mercantile community. Events justified the speculation. The initial quotation on L & E shares, during the third week in August 1844, was £2/17/6 on £1/5 paid; within ten days the figure stood at £4/17/6.<sup>3</sup> Just who the purchasers of the L & E shares were is an obscure problem, and one that be dealt with in section 6 below.

#### B. The Railway in the Local View

The immediate question is why the moneyed classes of the area were so very anxious that a railway should be built for them. The salting of the mine, for this is fundamentally what the initial local investment was, may partially be explained in terms of simple speculative greed, but in fact, the reasons lay much deeper and were closely related to the everyday economic problems of the area. In Lynn itself the state of trade and the desire for "fair competition with the country at large"<sup>4</sup> were the root factors involved; the pleasure of striking an oblique blow at the Corporation and the excitement of being concerned in stirring events are further elements to be

<sup>1</sup> Williams on the 23rd April.

<sup>2</sup> Folkes at the County Meeting of the 23rd April.

<sup>3</sup> Weekly quotation lists in the Railway Times.

<sup>4</sup> Blythe in proposing the resolution in favour of the line on the 23rd April.

discerned. So much has already been explained, but the nature of the attendance at the County Meeting, the status of the 395 petitioners who sought it<sup>1</sup>, and the composition of the Provisional Committee all clearly indicate that the landowning community had also developed a vital interest in the line.

Now, the landowners of western Norfolk and the Fens were not enjoying a happy time at this period, and in all probability had little capital to spare. Briefly stated, the situation was that the landowning classes had taken advantage of the palmy conditions of the Napoleonic Wars to adopt a higher standard of living than they had ever experienced before; at the same time they increased their personal commitments in relation to their lands and houses and also in the provision of liberal annuities to their dependents.<sup>2</sup> With the return of peace, and of normality in agricultural conditions, they had been found both unwilling and unable to surrender their new style of life. Years of intermittent dispute over the question of rentals had followed between landlord and tenant, the outcome of which was that neither side was satisfied with the situation. Many estates changed hands and many tenant farmers gave up their leases. The problem was further accentuated in the early 1840s by the onset of a long continued depression in wheat prices, during which the average 66/4 per quarter of 1839 became the 50/1, 51/3 and 50/10 of 1842, '43 and '44 respectively.<sup>3</sup> The average wheat price obtained in Lynn during 1843 was even lower at only 47/10 per quarter.<sup>4</sup> The loss to landowner and tenant farmer alike was only partly offset by increased

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 20th April, 1844 for the full list.

<sup>2</sup> L.M.Springall: Labouring Life in Norfolk Villages 1834-1914, London 1936, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> Rev.H.Kitton: Statistical Tables Illustrative of the Receipts and Expenditure of the Norfolk County Rate, Norwich 1856, Table 85, p.105. The figures, supplied by a Norwich firm, refer to local conditions.

<sup>4</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.523.

Correction: line 15,page 69

land had to pay Income and Property Tax on an assessment (1842) of  
£1,954,588,

productivity and should be considered against the details of the various financial burdens supported by these classes.

Most serious of all was the rising Poor Rate which reflected the depressed wage level of agricultural labourers as a result of the fall in corn prices and the high rentals paid by tenant farmers.<sup>1</sup> Excluding the four boroughs, Norfolk Poor Law expenditure totalled £184,114 in 1842 and £188,964 in 1843, figures in line with a rising trend which had continued since 1840.<sup>2</sup> Roughly one in twelve of the 1841 population of 412,664 was in receipt of relief - in 1842 6,889, in 1843 7,817 cases of indoor relief being recorded, together with 29,987 and 24,849 instances of outdoor relief for the same years respectively.<sup>3</sup> The figures for the first quarter of 1844 were showing an ominous rise over those for the corresponding period of the previous year, namely 10,450 cases of relief as opposed to 9,098.<sup>4</sup> In addition, against a gross estimated rental of £1,778,422 as found by the tenants,<sup>5</sup> the owners of ~~land had to find £1,954,588 in Income and Property Tax (as assessed in 1842)~~<sup>6</sup> and £49,856/12/10 $\frac{1}{2}$  in church and county rates (the former standing at £8,348/16/10 $\frac{3}{4}$ ) in 1843,<sup>7</sup> the latter figure representing a rise of some £15,000 in only three years, and being largely attributable to increased expenditure on roads and police. Tithes were also heavy, being levied at rates averaging 6/6 per acre per annum in the case of cultivated land, and 2/5 $\frac{1}{2}$  in that of pasture;<sup>8</sup> examples could be quoted of good land being taken out of cultivation because of this discrepancy.<sup>9</sup> Most of the above relates

<sup>1</sup> For fuller details see Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Tenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners 1843, App.C, p.362.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. App.B, p.272.

<sup>4</sup> Eleventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners 1844, App.B, no.2, p.167

<sup>5</sup> White, op.cit. p.14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Accounts & Papers 1846 (16) xl; Abstract of Returns Relative to Rates for the year ending the 30th September, 1843.

<sup>8</sup> R.N.Bacon: Report on the Agriculture of Norfolk, London 1844, p.78.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

specifically to Norfolk farmers and landowners, but much the same situation obtained in the Fens, where there was also the heavy burden of mortgages on recently reclaimed lands to be shouldered by many farmers.<sup>1</sup>

Railways offered relief in four main ways. Their ability to check the "overwhelming evil" of the Poor Rates<sup>2</sup> by the creation of employment was still unquestioned; they would obviously reduce transport costs<sup>3</sup> and generally stimulate the economy of the whole area; above all they would assist in the movement of livestock to the London markets. The principal reaction of Norfolk farmers to the situation described above had been to turn increasingly to a mixed economy, a movement accentuated by the developing practice of sending midland livestock into the county for fattening before despatch to the London meat markets. Lynn market statistics reflected this trend; whereas in 1836 22,180 sheep and 10,435 bullocks had been sold, the corresponding figures for 1842 were 53,665 and 16,363 respectively.<sup>4</sup> Similar evidence is provided by the activities of Mr. Hudson of Castleacre, a principal tenant of the Earl of Leicester and a strong supporter of the railway. Between 1822 and 1844 he had not only doubled his crop yield but also increased the number of his cattle from 30 to 200, and that of his sheep from 500 to between 2,500 and 3,000.<sup>5</sup>

The great majority of the livestock so raised found its way to the London markets. A Mr. Shank computed that on the 12th February 1844

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<sup>1</sup> J.Caird: English Agriculture in 1850-1851; London 1852, p.184.

<sup>2</sup> So described in the Eastern Counties Railway Prospectus of 1834.

<sup>3</sup> 'Shareholder' (Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 22nd March, 1845) calculated the savings in wages, horsekeeping and wear on carts as being some £25 per 100 acres per annum.

<sup>4</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.126.

<sup>5</sup> Barugh Almack: A Report on the Agriculture of Norfolk presented to the Royal Agricultural Society and printed in serial form in the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald during 1845, in this case the 19th April.

910 of 2,698 beasts and 3,065 of <sup>71</sup>20,219 sheep on sale at Smithfield were from Norfolk; on the 26th of the same month the county provided 1,021 of the 2,300 beasts on view; in each case between 16 and 20 counties shared the balance.<sup>1</sup> The totals to be handled in Lynn en route to London were calculated with confidence as a minimum of 350 beasts per week for 21 weeks of the year, and 2,500 sheep per week all the year round; these figures took no account of the unknown number likely to join the line at Downham and other stations en route to Ely.<sup>2</sup> In addition large numbers of pigs and poultry were annually despatched from Lynn to London as well as a substantial quantity of dead meat. The great advantage to be gained by the farmers was the elimination of the 14 day drove from Norfolk which usually served to reduce the animals to a wretched condition; this was not only a source of direct loss, but also a bar on efficiency, in that means of fattening sheep in 14 instead of 20 weeks could not be fully utilised as the animals were too immature to withstand the hardships of the road.<sup>3</sup> A further advantage to be gained was that hitherto inferior pasture could be put to profitable use once the physical stamina of the beasts became a matter of lesser consequence. Anticipation along these lines proved well founded. In 1850 Hudson reported that the railways were saving him £600 per annum; the substitution of a 12 hour journey for a 12 to 14 day drove had resulted in a saving of some 28lbs. in the weight of each bullock and 7lbs. (including 3lbs. inside fat) in each sheep.<sup>4</sup>

Besides these matters of fundamental importance the desire of the area for railways may be attributed also to a number of lesser factors. The 1844

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<sup>1</sup> Barugh Almack: A Report on the Agriculture of Norfolk presented to the Royal Agricultural Society and printed in serial form in the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald during 1845, in this case the 19th April.

<sup>2</sup> L & E prospectus. For the basis of this computation see chapter 3 below.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Hammond, a leading Norfolk farmer, on the 23rd April.

<sup>4</sup> Caird, op.cit. p.169.



coach took 12 hours between Lynn and London.<sup>1</sup> A railway would mean that a business trip to the city took only one and not three days, and this in padded comfort free from that "indescribable numbness about the knees and joints which it was impossible to shake off by any change of posture"<sup>2</sup> which attended slow and expensive road travel. Freight took two days to cover the same road, with an overnight stop at Cambridge,<sup>3</sup> while carriers' carts at their best could cover no more than 24 miles in a day.<sup>4</sup> The alternative to the road was to rely on one of the score or so small boats which plied between Lynn and London on their 36 hour journey, but these services were often unreliable and disrupted by the weather. A third alternative towards London and the south was to make use of the Ouse as far as Ely, but this was to suffer from monopolistic rates and a slow and uncertain journey. Northwards to Hull the area relied perforce on the six "lumbering sloops"<sup>5</sup> of the monopolistic Lynn Wharfingers and Shipping Agents - of this service it was said that it could cost more to send goods from Lynn to Hull than from Liverpool to New York.<sup>6</sup>

The L & E railway offered the prospect of getting the passenger from Lynn into London in  $4\frac{1}{4}$  hours at a rate of no more than 3d. per mile, first class, and to carry his merchandise at comparable speed and cost. One Lynn shipowner, W.Clifton, saw the writing on the wall, and as early as the January of 1844 began cutting his rates dramatically - sheep could now be carried from Lynn to London at no more than 1/6 per head, and carcasses not only carried but also delivered at the market for an inclusive charge of 2/- per cwt.<sup>7</sup> But cut

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<sup>1</sup> J.J.Coulton: Recollections of Lynn; Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 20th November, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> Rev.W.E.Dickson: Railways and Locomotion, London 1854, p.21. <sup>3</sup> Coulton.

<sup>4</sup> Railway Economy: D.Lardner, London 1850, p.35.

<sup>5</sup> Armes: Lecture of 1858.

<sup>6</sup> R.J.Hillen: A History of the Borough of King's Lynn, Norwich 1907, p.604.

<sup>7</sup> Advertised in the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald on the 2nd and 30th January, 1844.

as he might he could never compete in speed. On the other hand the river interests and the carriers continued in their old ways, although the former might plead that they needed money to ensure the safety against flood of the river banks, and the latter probably could not have cut their rates without incurring loss. The result, however, was clear. Coals which cost 20/- per ton in Lynn were at 40/- in some inland districts and so remained "a positive luxury quite unobtainable by the poorer classes" which were "sent to bed shivering for lack of fuel"<sup>1</sup>. In this latter respect there was the prospect of a much expanded trade for the numerous Lynn coal merchants.

### C. The Original Plan

And what of the actual railway which was expected to achieve so much? Selected by Rastrick, in itself a guarantee,<sup>2</sup> and so "admirably suited to meet the wants of the landed proprietors and inhabitants of West Norfolk"<sup>3</sup>, the line was to be 26 miles in length with a branch to Lynn harbour; the terminus at Lynn was initially intended to be near the South Gates on the outskirts of the town,<sup>4</sup> that at Ely was still a matter<sup>4</sup> for negotiation with the Eastern Counties Company. It had the "full sanction"<sup>5</sup> of the E.C.R., and the landowners were unanimously in favour.<sup>6</sup> No engineering difficulties were anticipated, no tunnels were required, the terrain was flat, no private parks were to be violated and only two cottages were to be taken. "Responsible contractors"<sup>7</sup> would undertake the work for £200,000 (compare Rastrick's estimate of £199,892, subject to iron prices not rising - both figures of course including land costs), so giving an estimated cost of no more than £7,700 per mile.

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<sup>1</sup> C.H.Grinning; The History of the Great Northern Railway 1845-1895; London 1898, p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Williams on the 23rd April.

<sup>3</sup> Extract from the resolution adopted by the meeting of the 23rd April.

<sup>4</sup> L & E prospectus.

<sup>6</sup> Williams on the 23rd April.

<sup>7</sup> 'An Original Subscriber to the line': Railway Times, 18th January, 1845. The contractors in question were Grissel & Peto, but in the end they did not do the work.

With all these factors in its favour it was anticipated that the work would be complete within nine months of the act being obtained, and that the first trains would be running by January 1846, almost as soon as the last call was made. Estimated revenue, excluding receipts from coals and sources west of the Ouse, was initially £33,581/7/1; allowing the liberal proportion of 40% for working expenses this promised a return of some 8½% on capital. It was typical of the cautious approach adopted by Williams that after stating the allowance for working expenses to be 40%<sup>1</sup> he should then publicly state that, in view of the flatness of the terrain and the cheapness of coal in Lynn, it was far too liberal an estimate;<sup>2</sup> in the same way the exclusion of obvious sources of revenue from the traffic estimate indicated a course of moderation, although here there was also a degree of uncertainty as to the validity of the total estimates made. In the next chapter it will be seen that these figures of anticipated revenue were by no means final or accurate. In any case, Williams, like most of his contemporaries, seemed blissfully unaware of the existence of depreciation costs and the need to accommodate them.

Williams, especially at the meeting of the 23rd April<sup>3</sup>, made much of the encouraging information outlined above. Both he, in person, and the prospectus strengthened the case by making full play of Lynn being the best coastal port within 200 miles of London for the north, Scotland, Hamburg and the Baltic, and of the fact that the railway would link Lynn with the metropolis, the cities of Norwich and Peterborough and the towns of Manchester and Birmingham etc. All this was very fine as were the cheerful comparisons

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<sup>1</sup> Prospectus.

<sup>2</sup> Williams on the 23rd April quoting the opinion of Rastrick.

<sup>3</sup> All the factual information in this paragraph unless otherwise indicated is derived from Williams' speech and answers on the 23rd April.

made between the figure of £7,700 per mile and the £53,150 per mile of the London & Birmingham and the £45,790 per mile of the Eastern Counties, but these lines were built while the L & E was still on paper. Amongst other factors Williams had so far made no public mention of Parliamentary expenses although the figures quoted for the other lines included these. In other ways Williams was to discover why lines on the ground almost invariably cost more than those on paper. Iron prices did rise; the co-operation of the landowners did not preclude extortionate demands for land compensation; the as yet undeclared opposition of the various drainage commissions affected by the line was to involve the company in ruinous expenditure on bridges. Further, the assumption that there would be a 100% transfer of traffic to the railway proved to be unfounded in fact; the objections that the harbour branch terminated a full 60 yards from the nearest quays and on the wrong side of the Nar, and would therefore be expensive and inconvenient to use, had occurred to none.

#### D. Changes and Additions.

On the basis outlined above Williams was successful in attracting first local capital and then that from a wider field to the line. But, in order to sustain confidence he was forced during the autumn of 1844 to incorporate two expensive changes in his project, although the bill was already in an advanced state of preparation. The first of these represented the height of irony, for it was no less than the addition of a branch to Wisbech. This also involved plans to double the track for the six miles between Lynn and Watlington where the new line was to commence. The second change, enforced by local agitation, was the extension of the mainline to bring it one mile nearer to the centre of Lynn. The additional cost was to be £100,000, to be raised in 4,000 £25 units, or an increase of 50% on what was supposed to be the cost of the

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original. The newly created shares were first to be offered to existing proprietors at the rate of one new for two old, the Directors explaining the position by letter to each individual shareholder. A public notice appeared on the 16th November<sup>1</sup>, the surveys were completed by the end of that month, and the final details were made public on the 14th December<sup>2</sup>; in this latter notice the 17th December was cited as the last date for objections to be lodged - silence was to be construed as assent. No substantial objection was raised, and the alterations were duly incorporated in the bill. The merits of the proposed changes apart, it is not hard to understand the reason for this acquiescence. In the first place the shareholders had no opportunity to meet as a body; secondly, L & E shares were, in the November of 1844, standing at a premium of over 100.

The question of the Wisbech line presents a difficult problem as to motive. Two local historians of the period found little in its favour:<sup>3</sup>

"It can only be nominated as a mistake. Its track is through bare Fen and its termination at Watlington leaves the traveller seven (sic) miles from Lynn and further from Ely. The country, on the contrary, which lies between Wisbech and Lynn is highly populous and requires accommodation, whereas by the authorised line there is not a single village and Lynn is about 5 miles further off than it need be."

Alongside this one is tempted to think of Morrison's stricture:<sup>4</sup>

"..had (the legislature) not authorised the issue of shares at par when at a premium, by the sale of which enormous sums were realised, the judgement of directors would not have been warped and new schemes would not have been authorised by them which did not promise to yield an adequate remuneration."

Some obviously shared the opinion on the merits of the line quoted above, for

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Walker & Craddock, op.cit. p.78.

<sup>4</sup> Morrison, op.cit. p.58.

the premium on L & E shares did decline in the last month of 1844.

However, it was also at this time that the Lynn & Dereham project had been made public and was causing much misgiving as to its worth; as this latter was so obviously connected with the L & E line it is probable that the shares of the latter were suffering from a strongly declared lack of confidence in the former. Moreover, the issue of an additional 50% of capital could not but serve to dilute the market, and this at a time when the market was already becoming overloaded with the shares of countless new companies.

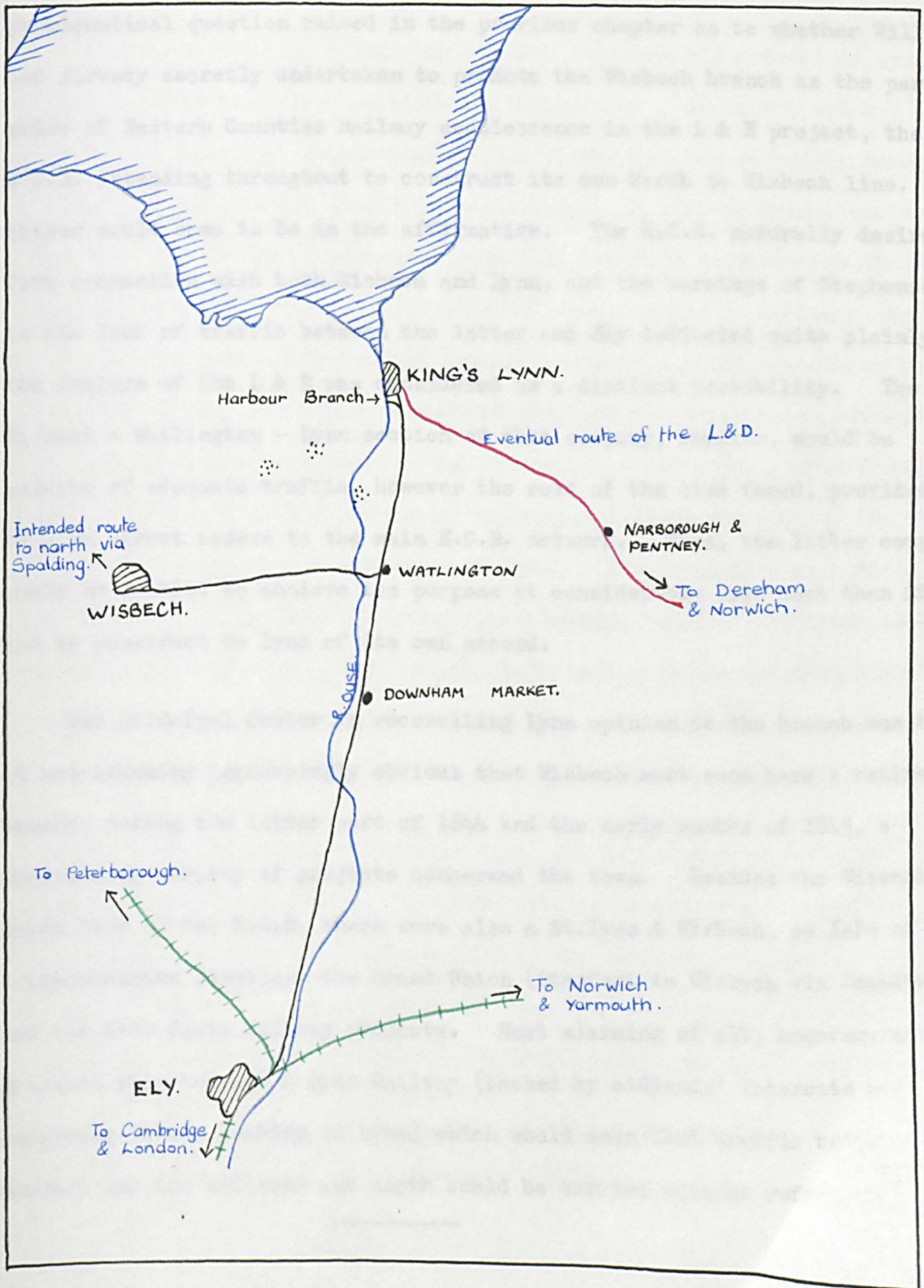
What were the facts of the line? As described on the 14th December the branch was to be 10 miles long, leaving the mainline at Watlington, six miles from Lynn. The flat terrain and the straightness of the line suggested ease of construction. The absence of any competition gave grounds for the assurance that, again excluding coals and other heavy merchandise, there would be a 7% return.<sup>1</sup> If the obvious criticisms were made they never saw the light of day. A return of 7% on £100,000, when combined with the promised 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ % on the original £200,000, would give a yield of only just over 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ % on the total £300,000; here is one likely reason for the decline in premium. Secondly, the line did ignore four large villages to its immediate north, namely Wiggshall St.Mary the Virgin, Wiggshall St.Germans, Tilney St.Lawrence and Terrington St.John. Thirdly, the estimates took no account of the expense to be encountered in bridging the already planned, but not yet constructed, Midland Level Drain.

The answer to the criticisms really lay in the undeclared motives of Williams, especially so in his intentions for an east to north trunk route,

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<sup>1</sup> Estimated by Mr.Pares, a traffic expert, who was engaged also by the L & D company; for discussion see chapter 3 below.

The Wisbech Branch and the form of the Lynn & Ely Mainline as Planned  
in December 1844



and in the development of circumstances threatening the future of the L & E mainline itself; once again Williams was enabled to cloak his ambitions in the representation of immediate necessity. Initially, however, remains the problematical question raised in the previous chapter as to whether Williams had already secretly undertaken to promote the Wisbech branch as the partial price of Eastern Counties Railway acquiescence in the L & E project, the E.C.R. intending throughout to construct its own March to Wisbech line. The answer would seem to be in the affirmative. The E.C.R. naturally desired a firm connection with both Wisbech and Lynn, and the warnings of Stephenson as to the lack of traffic between the latter and Ely indicated quite plainly that the failure of the L & E was considered as a distinct possibility. The Wisbech - Watlington - Lynn section of that company, however, would be assured of adequate traffic, however the rest of the line fared, provided that it gave direct access to the main E.C.R. network. Thus, the latter company would be enabled to achieve its purpose at considerably less cost than if it had to construct to Lynn of its own accord.

The principal factor in reconciling Lynn opinion to the branch was that it was becoming increasingly obvious that Wisbech must soon have a railway. Indeed, during the latter part of 1844 and the early months of 1845, a bewildering variety of projects concerned the town. Besides the Wisbech to March line of the E.C.R. there were also a St.Ives & Wisbech, an Isle of Ely & Lincolnshire Junction, the Grand Union (Stamford to Wisbech via Deeping) and the East Coast Railway projects. Most alarming of all, however, was the proposed Peterborough & Lynn Railway (backed by midlands' interests and receiving little backing in Lynn) which would mean that traffic between Norfolk and the midlands and north could be carried without reference to the

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L & E; it also meant that Wisbech would be between Lynn and its midland markets, and that, assuming a northern trunk route was soon to be built, traffic to London would be provided with an alternative route from Lynn.<sup>1</sup>

With these various factors in evidence Williams was assured of Lynn support in furthering his own ultimate intentions. It is not without significance that the announcement of the Wisbech branch virtually coincided in time with that of the Lynn & Dereham line. In 1846 it became publicly known that the Wisbech branch was originally intended to extend to Spalding, where an end-on junction would be effected with a group of companies building eastwards from Manchester and Nottingham<sup>2</sup> (probably a major reason for the investment of Lacy and other Manchester men); at the same time a furious storm was generated in Lynn over the revelation that it was intended to construct a spur from Narborough to Watlington (almost due west of the former) so enabling through traffic to by-pass Lynn. The intention was denied, but even today the suggestion of an earthwork leading towards Watlington is to be discerned at Narborough. The supposition would certainly explain why Williams allowed the L & E and the L & D to run into a common terminus at Lynn so that all traffic between the two requires reversal there.

With these essential factors in mind, the branch may be justified on certain independent grounds. Firstly, traffic originating west of the Ouse need no longer be lost to a future line to the north from Cambridge or Ely (the reason given for the exclusion of such traffic from the original estimates). Secondly, the branch provided direct connection with the

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<sup>1</sup> This of course subsequently happened with the Midland & Great Northern Railway - see chapter 9.

<sup>2</sup> For details of this and other intended extensions see chapter 6 below.

intended E.C.R. northern extension from March by way of that company's line to Wisbech from March (this was actually opened for traffic on the 7th May, 1847). The question as to whether the actual traffic between Lynn and Wisbech justified a railway is irrelevant to the main discussion, for, as seen, the branch was basically an integral part of a much wider pattern.

The decision to extend the mainline by one mile into the centre of Lynn, although expensive, was trivial, but it deserves recording as an example of the type of petty issue and social pressure which played not a small part in the shaping of Britain's railway network. The change of site from the South Gates, on the outskirts of the town and in the parish of South Lynn, to the centre resulted from some considerable agitation and pressure on the part of the inhabitants of St. Margaret's parish. There had been acrimonious dispute between the two sections of the town - the sort of thing that a promoter must seek to check in case it reached the ears of distant investors, who might consequently lose confidence in their investment. As early as the 13th April a letter had been published in the Lynn press urging that the railway be brought as near to the waterfront as possible.<sup>1</sup> The cry was taken up by the merchants and tradesmen of the town centre, the real autocrats of Lynn. South Lynn responded by claiming bitterly, and with some justice, that it was invariably treated as an outsider by the rest of the Lynn community. The "little knot of self elected tradesmen of St. Margaret's Parish",<sup>2</sup> however, carried sufficient social weight to win over to its views the committee appointed on the 28th March. When this met with the company directors, early in October, to discuss the matter, the latter agreed to an

<sup>1</sup> 'Observer', Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 23rd November, 1844, 'An Alien of South Lynn'.

extension to a field of Mr. Bagge's just behind the Corn Market. The company thus displayed an easy indifference to cost for the line now had to pass over several plots of valuable land, and it was also presenting the Corporation with the opportunity to charge, in later days, an extortionate £19,300 for 56 acres of very inferior land - an interesting example of conflict of interest. "An Advocate for the Public Good" (possibly Williams himself) issued a handbill to justify the change of site. This provoked one final furious outburst from "An Alien of South Lynn" who took particular exception to the manner in which the issue had been settled, and especially so to the claim of the handbill that the shareholders would be consulted; in his view this was farcical as the dispute was resolved without reference to anyone save the tradesmen who benefited from the change of site. The writer held that the directors were good but liable to error; in retrospect, however, a decision to take a line into a town centre could seldom be wrong unless exceptionally and unrealistically expensive to carry out.

Before turning to the Ely & Bedford promotion a word may be said as to the attitude of Ely throughout these protracted negotiations. This was essentially passive although welcoming. There was no question of Ely being concerned with its status as a port, for success in getting vessels of only 70 to 80 tons burthen into its harbour was a matter of special mention in the press.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the result of this had been that coal prices fell to only 25/- to 26/- per ton and further reductions were expected with the arrival of other boats from Newcastle,<sup>2</sup> but the obstacles to navigation were such that their removal would involve a completely unjustifiable expenditure when a railway from Lynn would serve the town so much more cheaply and efficiently.

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 25th January, 1845; extract from the Cambridge Chronicle.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

This viewpoint was ably expressed by 'Civil Engineer' in a letter to the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald in which he completely debunked the idea of river improvements when the railway would have every advantage<sup>1</sup>. It is tempting to think that the Civil Engineer in question was Charles Burcham; if so it is an interesting example of the methods employed by promoters to educate public opinion. For the rest, everyone was said to be in favour of railways to the town,<sup>2</sup> and the "inhabitants almost in ecstasy at the idea of having a first class station"<sup>3</sup> there - a remark following the agreement of March 1845 under which the E.C.R. and L & E tentatively settled on a site, conveniently placed for the town, between road and railway, for the construction of a joint station.

### Section 3: The Ely & Bedford Company

In every important sense, this company, which came before the public during the August of 1844, was an extension of the Lynn & Ely project. It must be admitted, however, that the evidence of Williams being the principal promoter is far less certain than it was in the case of the Lynn & Ely and the Lynn & Dereham lines. Amalgamation with the L & E was spoken of from the first, and it was agreed that each should have two directors on the other's board, but, in themselves, these indicate no more than the recognition that a common traffic stream was to be served. On the other hand both companies employed substantially the same agents and bankers, it was the firm of Goodwin, Partridge & Williams which issued the bulk of the E & B notices and advertisements, and it was the L & E shareholders who took up the bulk of the shares. In fact, the origins of the company are shrouded in

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 25th January, 1845; extract from the Cambridge Chronicle.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 19th April, 1845.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

some mystery, and there are many signs of obvious haste in its formation. The only public meeting was in Lynn, the prospectus contained no traffic estimates, and the Provisional Committee, with only 25 names, 10 of which were to be found on the L & E committee, and no titled members, was one of the shortest and least impressive of the period.<sup>1</sup> Unless the true promoters have remained completely hidden it must be thus assumed that there was no other than Williams, working on a sure basis of support from the L & E proprietors and treating the whole enterprise as a natural extension of the work already in hand. This impression is confirmed when it is found that the prospectus makes barely any mention of the area actually to be served by the proposed new line, and that four of the six members of the first full board were Lynn men. Why there should be a separate company at all will be discussed in a later section of the present chapter.

The incentive to continue the L & E mainline as far as Bedford was initially provided by the formation of the Bedford & London & Birmingham Railway (commonly known as the Bedford Railway) to construct a line from Bedford to Bletchley (on the London & Birmingham mainline). In time this project was successful, the Act of Incorporation being obtained on the 30th June 1845, and the actual line being opened during the November of 1846. The prospect of this line naturally excited the interest of Lynn, for, as described in the previous chapter, the town's commercial interests had long extended by way of the Ouse to Bedford. Here was the opportunity to link Lynn, and by way of the new line, Norwich, Yarmouth and all the other ports of East Anglia, not only with Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and the north, but also with the south midlands and the west and south of England,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the full list, see Appendix C.

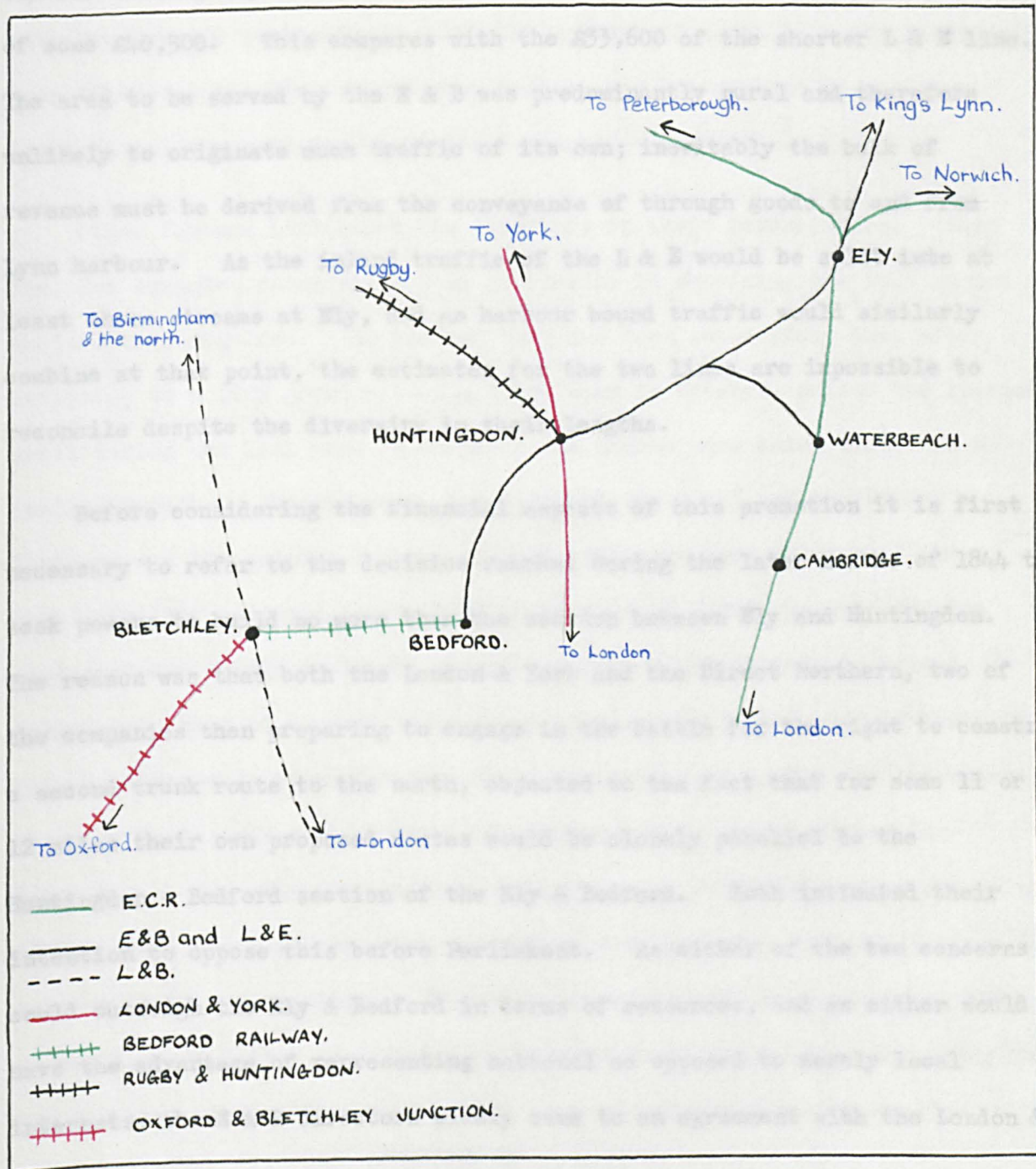
<sup>2</sup> E & B prospectus; a copy is preserved in the Norwich Castle Museum.

as well as to strengthen and extend the town's commercial connections with the south east midlands. Admittedly, access to the north was already guaranteed by the Peterborough - Blisworth line of the London & Birmingham Railway and the use of this route would be shorter by a good sixteen miles, but the advantage to be gained from the Lynn viewpoint in using the Ely & Bedford line was that through traffic would be using Lynn railways for 69 miles instead of only the 26 between Lynn and Ely. It may also be mentioned that the prospectus was anxious to emphasise, for what the fact may be worth, that when the proposed link between the London & Birmingham and the Great Western lines was carried through (as it was eventually by the Oxford & Bletchley Junction Company, incorporated on the 26th July, 1846) the Ely & Bedford would provide the shortest link between the eastern and south western parts of the kingdom.

The mainline itself, as described in the prospectus of September 1844, was to be 43 miles in length; additionally there was to be a branch to Waterbeach to give direct access to Cambridge. The whole was to take no more than 15 months to complete and was to be accomplished with a capital of £270,000, issued in 10,800 units of £25. Buck, the company engineer, was confident that this sum would be sufficient to procure the land and provide the works for double track, if such were deemed desirable. No engineering difficulties were anticipated, and as the steepest gradient would be no more than one of one in a thousand it was expected that working expenses would be low, although "a most liberal allocation" of 40% had been allowed for this. No traffic estimates were given, but even so a forecast of a 9% dividend was freely made. This was a most suspicious figure and one to which reference

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will be made in a later context. It will suffice to say at this point that it was founded largely on mere conjecture, for, in fact, such was the haste attending the production, no proper estimates had so far been made. Allowing 6% for working expenses the promised return suggests an anticipated revenue of £20,500. This compares with the £33,600 of the shorter L & B line.



Map to Illustrate the Actual and Proposed Lines mentioned in the Text in connection with the Ely & Bedford

will be made in a later context. It will suffice to say at this point that it was founded largely on mere conjecture, for, in fact, such was the haste attending the promotion, no proper estimates had so far been made. Allowing 40% for working expenses the promised return suggests an anticipated revenue of some £40,500. This compares with the £33,600 of the shorter L & E line. The area to be served by the E & B was predominantly rural and therefore unlikely to originate much traffic of its own; inevitably the bulk of revenue must be derived from the conveyance of through goods to and from Lynn harbour. As the inland traffic of the L & E would be split into at least three streams at Ely, and as harbour bound traffic would similarly combine at that point, the estimates for the two lines are impossible to reconcile despite the diversity in their lengths.

Before considering the financial aspects of this promotion it is first necessary to refer to the decision reached during the later months of 1844 to seek powers to build no more than the section between Ely and Huntingdon. The reason was that both the London & York and the Direct Northern, two of the companies then preparing to engage in the battle for the right to construct a second trunk route to the north, objected to the fact that for some 11 or 12 miles their own proposed routes would be closely parallel to the Huntingdon - Bedford section of the Ely & Bedford. Both intimated their intention to oppose this before Parliament. As either of the two concerns could outweigh the Ely & Bedford in terms of resources, and as either would have the advantage of representing national as opposed to merely local interests, the E & B directors wisely came to an agreement with the London &

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of estimates and the company's prospects see chapter 3 below.



York by which the plans for the disputed section of line were dropped.<sup>1</sup> Events confirmed the wisdom of this decision, for, when the E & B bill eventually came before Parliament, Lord Palmerston, as chairman of Committee I, reported that if the company had insisted on the whole line he would have recommended postponement until the pattern of north to south lines had been fixed; as the Ely - Huntingdon section was not germane to the main issue he was prepared to uphold the company's application.<sup>2</sup>

Other factors influenced the directors in their renunciation. They had, for example, encountered some difficulty in obtaining the full amount of capital they required. In the end they had been successful, but, after attaining to a 100% premium in the third week in October, prices had slumped until during the last week in December the shares were being quoted at a small discount. The declared opposition of the L & Y and the Direct Northern was the principal cause of this, although some measure of the responsibility belonged to the landowners west of Huntingdon who for the most part had openly declared against the line - an attitude in marked contrast to that of consent shown by the landowners to the east of Huntingdon. In the latter case economic activity normally centred on Ely and the natural route to London was through that city, but in the former instance the promotion of a northern trunk line offered escape from the expense and delays of Lynn harbour, a direct route to London, and, possibly, richer pickings in terms of land compensation. Whatever the motives of the opposition, however, it was essential that confidence be restored, especially so as the slump in E & B shares might well have been a reason for the less marked decline in

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 13th August, 1845; Directors' Report, E & B meeting of the 7th August, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Report to the Commons, 1845 xxxix (548): Railway Bills on which Reports have been made at variance with Reports from the Board of Trade, p.4.

L & E quotations. To this end only one course was possible; the decision was taken and the public duly acquainted with it on the 12th April 1845. As it happened, the directors were provided with a face saver. The newly projected Huntingdon & Rugby company was found to offer a link of almost equal value,<sup>1</sup> although in view of its quite different direction it is hard to see how this really could be so. In fact, the company in question never built its line, although when in the June of 1847 the Midland Railway obtained powers to build from Leicester to Huntingdon by way of Northampton and Bedford a fair duplication ~~was~~<sup>seemed</sup> assured. But by that time such developments were of little consequence to the Ely & Huntingdon (as it became as from April 1845) for its line was destined to be built for a mere 5½ miles on the Ely side of Huntingdon and no further.

The circumstances in which the initial capital of this company was raised are full of interest. After a prior intimation on the 14th September 1844,<sup>2</sup> subscription to the total of £270,000 was invited on the 21st September;<sup>3</sup> only two days later the subscription list was closed.<sup>4</sup> The company announced a six fold application, something described as "beyond all precedent"<sup>5</sup> and spoke of the "immense quantity"<sup>6</sup> of shares applied for by proprietors of the L & E and others locally interested. After the allocation of shares on the 18th October it was further announced that some of the most influential figures in the City of London had had to be left out.<sup>7</sup> All this sounded most impressive, justified the company's forecast that its shares would come on the market at a premium of 1¼ to 1½, and helps to explain why the initial premium was in fact 100%, £2 being paid for shares on which only

<sup>1</sup> Directors' Report, company meeting of the 7th August 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 28th September, 1844.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 26th October, 1844.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

the £1 deposit had been called. It also makes it reasonably certain that in view of the circumstances they had, by and large, accepted the opportunity presented to them. The facts as published, however, do not explain why the inducement of a  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  on calls was considered necessary, or why, eleven months later, only 8,729 of the 10,800 shares had been taken up.<sup>1</sup>

As suggested in an earlier section, the payment of interest on calls, an unsound practice revived from canal days, was invariably a sign that difficulty in raising the required capital was anticipated. Amongst the 94 companies which resorted to this expedient the highest rate of interest paid was 5%, the great majority were at 4% and the E & H was unique in offering  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$ <sup>2</sup> (the Lynn & Dereham would have been the same if Parliament had permitted it). The prime effect was to draw in those "who could not afford to set aside income for 5 or 6 years until completion"<sup>3</sup>. Assuming that Williams once again considered evidence of local support as the essential condition for outside capital to be attracted it meant in practical terms that Lynn itself had to be tempted. The haste of the promotion and the opposition from a large section of the landowners involved, the latter probably resulting from the first in that there was no time for careful preparation, as well as the absence of any burning local reason for the line, resulted in the complete absence of figures from the area between Ely and Huntingdon amongst the final list of subscribers;<sup>4</sup> even the Provisional Committee contained only ten local names. In short this was a Lynn railway and Lynn

<sup>1</sup> xxxix (548), 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Scrivenor, op.cit. pp45f.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, May 1839.

<sup>4</sup> Francis, Vol.2, p.150, speaks of one promotion in the Ely area and says that "not one person connected with the county through which it passes subscribed to the title deed". He does not name the company, but in all probability was thinking of the E & H.

men were left to carry the initial cost. They needed considerable tempting. Those who were really interested enough in the L & E as such and had maintained their financial interest had probably in many cases little further capital to spare. Those who had benefited from the sale of their L & E allocation may well have felt that to adopt the same course again was to tempt providence just a little too far, especially so as the new line in its haste and lack of closely argued figures seemed a much more doubtful proposition. Additionally, the line was not such an urgent necessity to the town as the L & E had been, and yet again, on the assumption that the Wisbech branch was in the air, some might have felt impelled to reserve further investment for a line nearer home.

Whatever the truth of the matter the fact remains that, on the evidence of the lists of the subscription contracts,<sup>1</sup> a considerable number of the proprietors of the L & E did take up the E & H shares; it may well be that the reference to the six fold application refers to the balance left after this allocation had been offered.

If indeed there was difficulty in disposing of the shares the reason for the 2,000 unsold units is clear, although a matter of deliberate policy may have been involved as well. Holding back this proportion, in conjunction with the press 'puffs' described above, would undoubtedly have the effect of strengthening the market in the company issue; intentional or not this greatly assisted those in Lynn who did risk a second speculation. Alternatively there is the possibility that the company hoped that the money represented would not be needed; it has already been mentioned that the capital of £270,000 was considered adequate for single or double track; the effect here

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<sup>1</sup> See Section 6 below.

would be a substantial increase in any dividends paid. Finally, there is the possibility that the directors were holding back until such time as a high market premium could be exploited by a judicious issue to friends of the company. Like so much else in the early stages of the E & H promotion there is no evidence one way or the other, but the most likely conclusion on what scattered strands there are must be that the line did not attract the support offered to its predecessor, that the bulk of the capital was taken by distant proprietors of the L & E, and that the unissued balance is to be explained in terms of both difficulty of sale and the hope that it would not in any case be required. No doubt all proprietors were pleased when the reduction of the capital to £194,400 on the abandonment of the Huntingdon - Bedford section led to a reduction in the par value of each share to £18. This contributed, no doubt, to the enormous jump which the company's shares enjoyed when the contraction of the project was announced. The April of 1845 saw intense activity in transference of the shares and with £1/5 called to that date they were changing hands at as much as £3/12/6d, a remarkable change from the discount suffered only four months before when opposition to the company was mounting.

A final word may be said of the part played by the E & B line in Williams' overall schemes for making Lynn the centre of a great railway network. Indications of haste have been observed; suggestions that the railway was never pushed on with the same determination as seen in the case of the L & E (and also the Lynn & Dereham) have been made - in fact, after 1847 the capital reserves of the E & H were actually used in the construction of the Wisbech branch of the L & E. The overwhelming conclusion remains that this Ely & Bedford promotion was an afterthought, hastily implemented on the opportunity presented by the proposals for the Bedford Railway.

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As Lynn & Ely proprietors would be the ones to benefit, both by immediate sale of shares if they so wished and by the additional traffic brought on to their own line, and as L & E shares were at a high premium in the summer of 1844 Williams must have felt that this was a risk well worth the taking.

#### Section 4: The Lynn & Dereham Railway

Two main strands may be discerned in this, the third of the Lynn railways to make its appearance during the course of 1844. Basically, it represented an intrinsic part in Williams' overall intention of creating a great east to north trunk route; in this context it should be taken in conjunction with the Wisbech branch, the proposal to extend this to Spalding to meet the group of companies building eastwards from Manchester and Nottingham and the abortive intention of throwing a spur from Narborough to Watlington, all matters which have been discussed in an earlier section of this chapter. Secondly, the line constituted the reaction of the Lynn mercantile community to a fresh assault on their security, this time from Norwich.

The object of concern was the projection in Norwich, during the summer of 1844, of the Direct Norwich & East Dereham line with branches from the latter place to Fakenham and (via Swaffham) to King's Lynn itself. This project, it was argued, would "be highly beneficial by increasing the commerce and prosperity of all classes of the County and City"<sup>1</sup>. Such increase, however, would inevitably be at the expense of Lynn which maintained strong interests throughout the whole area northwards and westwards of East Dereham. Moreover, the effect of the proposals would be to put Lynn at the end of a branch line controlled by the hostile interests of Norwich.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from a resolution in favour of the line at a Norwich meeting of the 7th December, 1844; Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald.

As this new promotion was receiving strong support in the city and as adequate financial support seemed available from the Norwich merchants, the outlook for Lynn appeared bleak indeed, with the distinct possibility, quite apart from all other considerations, that the L & E line would be rendered nugatory before it was even begun. All this presented a further splendid opportunity for Williams. Lynn had already become extremely railway conscious, and Williams, dressing up his proposals by reference to the local advantages to be gained and emphasising the dangers to be averted, had little difficulty in introducing his third and final successful major promotion. Probably the line had been in his mind all the time and the circumstances which had arisen were significant principally in that they forced his hand. As with the E & H promotion there were many signs of obvious haste in the following months, but at the same time the impression is given that mature thought was behind the whole, even where major alterations had of necessity to be incorporated.

To anticipate at this point it may be indicated that the Direct Norwich & East Dereham Company proved abortive. After receiving an adverse report from the Board of Trade on the grounds of sparsity of traffic between Norwich and East Dereham it also failed to pass the Standing Orders Committee of the Commons.<sup>1</sup> The advantage thus passed to the rival Norwich & Brandon Railway project which envisaged a branch to Dereham from Wymondham, a point on its existing mainline. The promoters of the former line had opposed this on the grounds that the advantages would go to Brandon rather than Norwich. The merits and demerits of this argument are beyond the scope of this work; it is sufficient to say that whether it was Norwich or Brandon which benefited it would be Lynn that would suffer. Ultimately, the N & B line was built.

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<sup>1</sup> 1845.xxxix (620).

Authorised on the 31st July 1845, it was opened to goods traffic on the 7th December 1846, and to passengers on the 15th February 1847. Later, in 1849, it was extended to Fakenham, and eventually, in 1857, to Wells-next-the-Sea.

Williams' initial plans, announced publicly on the 5th October<sup>1</sup>, were for a double track line from Lynn to Dereham by way of Litcham, together with a branch to Fakenham. A capital of £400,000 was sought. But then, almost before the ink of the first prospectus was dry, the scheme was drastically contracted and otherwise modified. Firstly, the Fakenham branch was declared superfluous on the grounds that a Wells & Dereham company was shortly to be floated. Obviously there was a strong measure of agreement here, for otherwise, despite the economies effected, the L & D would not have dropped its own proposed branch unless assured that the line from Wells would feed the Lynn line in preference to any emanating from Norwich; it is most likely that a joint station was envisaged. The second alteration was that the mainline was now to take in Swaffham. This was a common sense adjustment, as Litcham, through which the line had originally been intended to pass, was a village of small consequence, whereas Swaffham was a flourishing market centre which it might prove dangerous to leave unguarded on the flank of the line. The revisions naturally involved a reduction in capital to £330,000, a sum guaranteed by Rastrick to be sufficient for every need, but, as now only one line of rails was to be laid (although land would be purchased for two), only £260,000 was to be called.<sup>2</sup> As a result of these reductions the original promise of a return on capital of "upwards of 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ "<sup>3</sup> now became one of 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ "<sup>4</sup> on

<sup>1</sup> The announcements quoted on this page are derived from the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, issues of the 5th, 12th, 19th and 26th October, or from the company prospectuses, a copy of the second being preserved in the Norwich Castle Museum.

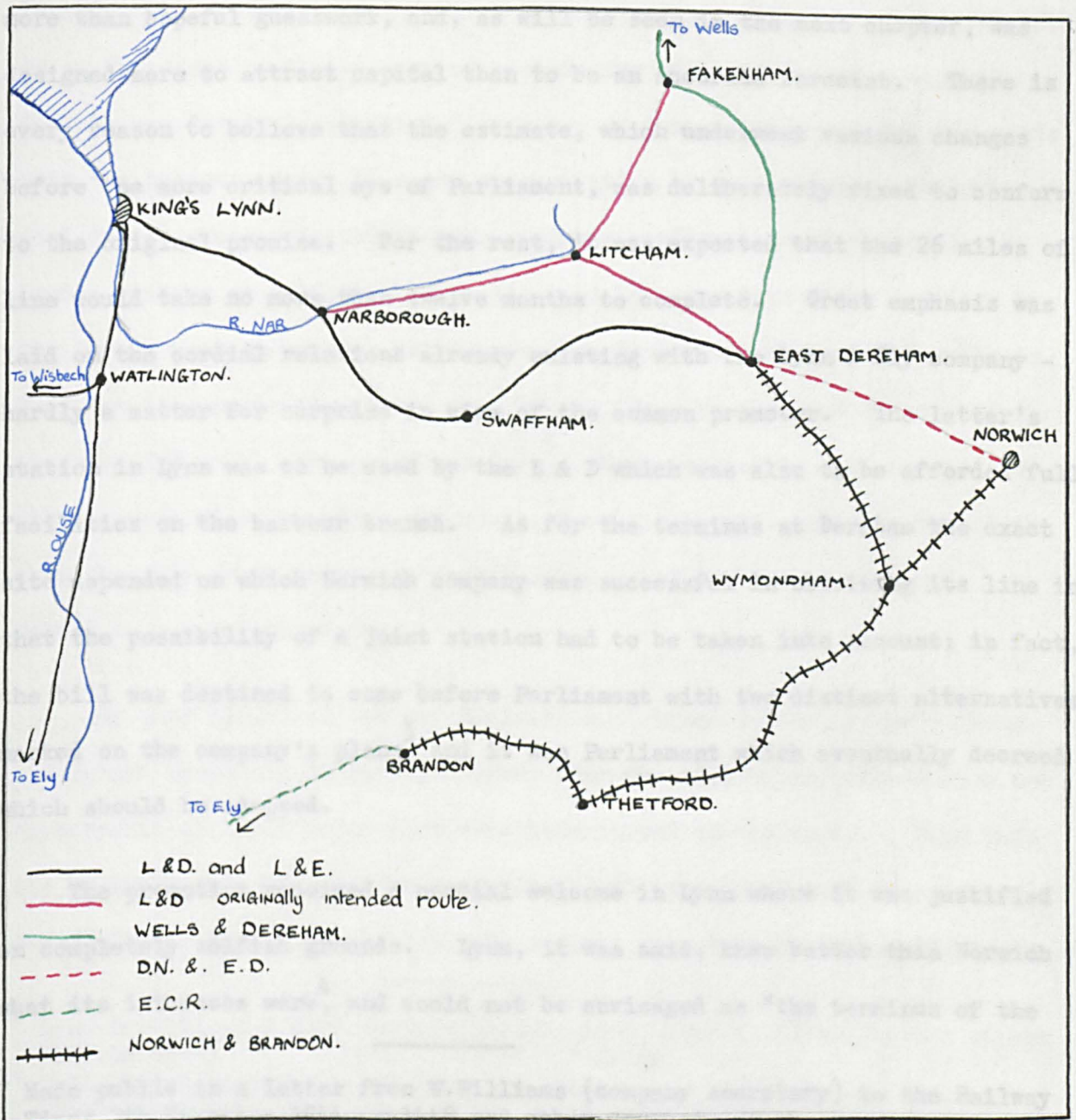
<sup>2</sup> Not specified in the prospectus, but in a letter from W. Williams, the company secretary; Railway Times, 7th December 1844, p.1448.

<sup>3</sup> L & D Prospectus.

<sup>4</sup> As fn.1.



Map of the Lynn & Dereham and other lines mentioned in the text



an estimated revenue of £41,193, 35% being allowed for working expenses. The actual estimate of receipts did not appear in the prospectus for the simple reason that it had not then been compiled.<sup>2</sup> The 9% quoted represented little more than hopeful guesswork, and, as will be seen in the next chapter, was designed more to attract capital than to be an accurate forecast. There is every reason to believe that the estimate, which underwent various changes before the more critical eye of Parliament, was deliberately fixed to conform to the original promise. For the rest, it was expected that the 26 miles of line would take no more than twelve months to complete. Great emphasis was laid on the cordial relations already existing with the Lynn & Ely company - hardly a matter for surprise in view of the common promoter. The latter's station in Lynn was to be used by the L & D which was also to be afforded full facilities on the harbour branch. As for the terminus at Dereham the exact site depended on which Norwich company was successful in obtaining its line in that the possibility of a joint station had to be taken into account; in fact, the bill was destined to come before Parliament with two distinct alternatives marked on the company's plans,<sup>3</sup> and it was Parliament which eventually decreed which should be adopted.

The promotion received a cordial welcome in Lynn where it was justified on completely selfish grounds. Lynn, it was said, knew better than Norwich what its interests were,<sup>4</sup> and could not be envisaged as "the terminus of the

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<sup>1</sup> Made public in a letter from W. Williams (company secretary) to the Railway Times 7th December 1844, p.1448 and other journals of the same week.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Pares' estimate was prefaced by the remark that it was commissioned only during the first week of October.  
<sup>3</sup> See L & D plans in the Norfolk County Record Office, Norwich.  
<sup>4</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 19th October 1844; a remark made at the Town Meeting of the 16th October.

traffic"<sup>1</sup>, and, as it was expressed at the Town Meeting of the 16th October, called to further the line, by the L & D "we get the benefit"<sup>2</sup>. Popular support was also found outside Lynn. The railway promised escape from the "intolerable monopoly" of the River Nar Navigation, which for years had acted as an "incubus" on the economy of western Norfolk.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, central Norfolk was "entirely destitute" of means of cheap conveyance for its goods,<sup>4</sup> even the dubious assets of water communication being lacking. The price of coal in the areas affected affords striking confirmation of these claims. Landed at Lynn it sold at between 16/- and 18/- per ton; after carriage by the Nar Navigation barges, and thence from Narborough by road the price in Swaffham (14½ miles from Lynn) was 27/- or 28/-; by the time it reached Dereham (26½ miles) the price was 30/-.<sup>5</sup> What applied to coal applied to other merchandise, building materials, fertilisers etc., so that the claim that the line would prove an "incalculable boon" to tens of thousands<sup>6</sup> rested on a solid foundation.

Now much hinged on the Nar Navigation. Owned by the brothers, John and Robert Marriott, it conveyed goods over the nine miles between Lynn and Narborough, at which point they were transferred to the roads. From this the brothers made what was modestly described as a "good sum" by a member of the family.<sup>7</sup> More forthrightly, the railway promoters described the business

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 19th October, 1844; Meeting of the 16th October.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 'Anti-Monopoly', 1st February 1845.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 8th March, 1845, 'One of the Privileged of Swaffham'.

<sup>6</sup> Railway Times, 7th December 1844, p.1448; Letter from the L & D representatives, Messrs. Rooper, Birch & Ingram.

<sup>7</sup> By the son of Robert Marriott who was writing as a very old man in 1922. The letter was written in connection with an article on Narborough, which has so far not been traced, to a J.M. Hotblack who passed it on subsequently to the Vicar of Narborough (now retired). The writer was just old enough to remember the first trains in 1847, had carried on the family business, and eventually sold out in 1881.

as a "very profitable monopoly"<sup>1, 99</sup>. Besides their river interests the brothers also owned and worked several maltings at Narborough and elsewhere and, from Narborough, conducted a thriving business in coal, corn, malt and general merchandise. John Marriott was a formidable figure. Standing 6' 1" in height, delighting in physical feats (he once swam from Yarmouth Pier to the jetty before breakfast) and being a former wrestling champion of all England, he was not the man to surrender his comfortable position without a hard fight. At an early stage he declared the intention of his brother and himself to hinder the L & D project with "all the opposition in our power"<sup>2</sup>.

For five months the battle raged through public meetings and the correspondence columns of the local and railway press. In essence the conflict centred on the validity or otherwise of the railway company's traffic estimates. Both parties organised traffic observations. On supposedly the same evidence the one settled on a return of 9½%, and the other on just under 2% as a likely expectation of return on capital.<sup>3</sup> Both estimates were submitted to the Board of Trade which, in the event, found itself unable to judge between them.<sup>4</sup> As will later become evident this was hardly a surprising decision, for both surveys of traffic were carried out under the most suspicious circumstances.

The Marriotts' claim that the line was "unnecessary and without any promise of return", and that it constituted an unwarranted attack on private property,<sup>5</sup> apparently struck a responsive chord in the breasts of many of the

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<sup>1</sup> Railway Times, 7th December, 1844, p. 1448; Letter of W. Williams.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 9th November, 1844, p. 1310; Letter of the Marriotts.

<sup>3</sup> For development of this theme see chapter 3 below.

<sup>4</sup> Board of Trade Report on Schemes in the Counties of Norfolk and Suffolk; printed in Herapath, 8th March, 1845, p. 330.

<sup>5</sup> Railway Times, 30th November, 1844, p. 1417.

landowners along the route. <sup>100</sup> In the November of 1844, 46 out of 94 owners, 5 out of 29 lessees, and 55 of the 129 occupiers along the line returned a notice of dissent to the company. A petition to the Commons against the line, drawn up in the January of 1845, was supported by 92 of those affected (46 owners and 46 occupiers).<sup>1</sup> Two principal sources of motivation may be discerned. The first of these was personal contact with the Marriotts. No less than 33 of the 92 petitioners came from the immediate neighbourhood of Narborough, and the leading names of the list were those of Samuel Tyssen of Narborough Hall and the Rev. Allen, the vicar of the parish. Of the remainder the great majority came from the Dereham end of the line where it is suggested that hope of playing off the L & D against the Direct Norwich & Dereham line, with an eye on future land compensation, and, perhaps, of escaping from dependence on Lynn harbour were the principal motives involved.

The opposition made a great deal of noise and was not without some effect on the fortunes of the line, but without general support it was fighting a losing battle, and ultimately secured but one short lived victory. This occurred in the February and March of 1845. The L & D promoters, fearful of being delayed for a full year but yet uncertain of the outcome of the conflict between the two Norwich companies, and no doubt disturbed by the fury of the Marriotts' campaign against them, decided to restrict their application for the coming Parliamentary session to the stretch of line between Lynn and Swaffham. This construction was to be accomplished on a capital of £120,000. The Board of Trade, however, reacted strongly against this proposal.<sup>2</sup> It approved the ultimate intention of the company to form a

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<sup>1</sup> The list was published locally and in the national railway press on various dates between the 4th and 11th January 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Board of Trade Report on Schemes in the Counties of Norfolk and Suffolk; printed in Herapath, 8th March, p.330.

link in a chain of lines between Lynn and Yarmouth, but held that the traffic between Lynn and Swaffham was "doubtful" and certainly inadequate on which to base the case for a railway; moreover, it was held that the granting of permission for a part of the line might well reduce the chances of the whole ever being completed. Thus,

"In these circumstances it becomes our duty to report our opinion that it is advisable to postpone the sanction of this scheme until consideration shall have been given by Parliament to the East Dereham and Norwich lines, and until the requirements of the whole district be ascertained together with its capabilities for supporting railway communication through it."

This was a grave setback, but one that was speedily overcome.

Recognising that the Board was favourable to the whole line as opposed to a part of it, and that lack of reliable traffic estimates largely contributed to the adverse decision, the directors reverted to their original intention of pressing for the whole line in the coming session, and undertook that Pares would appear before the Commons committee with figures to substantiate their estimates, and at the same time to demonstrate the degree of self interest concealed in those of the Marriotts.<sup>1</sup>

With this the opposition collapsed and was heard no more. The approval of the whole line indicated by the Board of Trade dealt the final blow at an edifice already crumbling both of its own accord and as a result of the determined undermining by the railway company. First, the Direct Norwich & East Dereham, encumbered with an unfavourable report from the Board of Trade and losing ground to the Norwich & Brandon, drew in its horns and dropped the proposed extensions beyond Dereham. It also came to terms with the L & D, even to the extent of a joint station being established at Dereham,<sup>2</sup> and so

<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 22nd March 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14th December, 1844.

deprived the landowners of the opportunity of playing one company off against the other. Secondly there was the death of Samuel Tyssen of Narborough Hall on the 1st March 1845.<sup>1</sup> Tyssen had been a very rich man, owning as he did many fine works of art and a collection of coins and medals which were said to have cost him some £20,000. The significance of all this is that the Marriotts had actually indemnified their supporters against all expenses of opposition, after having very "earnestly solicited"<sup>2</sup> individual landowners to join their fight. But, as 'Shareholder' (almost certainly Williams or one of his close associates) pointed out, opponents of a bill were liable to costs once they had put their name to the official opposition, and if he himself were risking £5-6,000 he would require "something more than the bare word of the interested party as an indemnity"<sup>3</sup>. The writer could not be in error for he had been told the facts by several of those concerned. It is suggested that Tyssen was, in fact, the financial backer behind this offer of indemnity, and that with his death, and with the timely letter from 'Shareholder', the Marriotts found themselves virtually deserted. Finally, it appears that the Marriotts allowed themselves to be bought off. In a later context the name of Marriott, a coal dealer of Lynn, is found as a shareholder in the Lynn & Dereham, and it is also significant that, although the bill was unopposed before Parliament, seven of the 48 clauses in the Act of Incorporation referred to the River Nar and were in effect protective clauses for the navigation interests. In view of this survey of the causes of collapse in the opposition, the claim of 'Anti-Monopoly' that "very few unsolicited and of their own accord raised their voices against" the line<sup>4</sup> would indeed appear to be a sound assessment of the situation.

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<sup>1</sup> See Wall Plaque in Narborough Parish Church.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 22nd March, 1845.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1st February, 1845.

The effects of the opposition on the financing of the line were, in fact, less than might have been expected. As with the E & B before it, the inducement of a  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  interest on calls (to commence after the act had been obtained)<sup>1</sup> proved a sufficient bait. Applications were invited on the 19th October; the allocation was made on the 11th November, when it was announced that a four fold application had been received.<sup>2</sup> A Parliamentary return of August 1845 showed that, in fact, all but 290 shares had been taken up,<sup>3</sup> a figure that probably represents forfeited allocations and nothing more.

The investment pattern was much the same as that of the two previous promotions. The Provisional Committee, in all 44 members, contained names of 30 local men; as before, it may be assumed that the majority of these sought and obtained an initial scrip issue. However, analysis of the list of subscribers incorporated (clause 3 of the Act of Incorporation) shows that only 3 of these retained a financial interest by the July of 1845, namely Everard and Wryley Birch of Lynn, and Partridge of Thetford. It also shows that 16 were subscribers in either or both of the previous promotions at the time of incorporation, 12 being subscribers to all three, and including the two Lynn men named above. Of the landed interest it may be said that it displayed a somewhat cool attitude towards the line throughout. 'Anti-Monopoly' was indeed moved to comment that "the inhabitants of agricultural districts" were "not generally much alive to the value of railway property as an investment".<sup>4</sup> Such an attitude would be understandable in this case. The farmer would gain whether the line were built by Norwich or Lynn interests,

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, as will be shown in the next chapter, Parliament refused to allow this promise to be made good.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald.

<sup>3</sup> 1845 xxxix (548)

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 1st February 1845.



and was doubtlessly rendered cautious by the substantial support which the Marriotts were initially able to claim. In fact, the latter, on the 15th March, published a list<sup>1</sup> purporting to show that only seven Norfolk residents were at that time shareholders, namely H.C. Partridge, a solicitor of Thetford, Everard, Whiting, a surgeon, and Cooper, an oil and colour merchant, all of Lynn, Birch of Wretham Hall (also of Lynn), Lock, a farmer of Barton Bendish, and E. Pindar, a shipowner whose address was not given. Four of this group remained by the July of 1845. The implication contained in this list was refuted on the grounds that the proprietors had not then all registered, a situation which was to apply until the company had safely obtained its act. In this reluctance to register with the company is to be found the principal effect of the opposition on investment. The decision to contract the line to the Lynn - Swaffham section, and the seeming solidarity of the Marriott cause made non-registration a matter of simple precaution until the future was clear. In conclusion, it must be remembered in respect of local investment that the total capital involved in Lynn lines was, with the L & D but without the L & E extensions, well over £600,000, and that those who sought a genuine investment would have already committed their resources by the time the Lynn & Dereham was offered to them; further, it is reasonable to assume that the Wisbech branch was an intention known to many in the October of 1844, and that some at least would prefer to reserve their investment for the shares of a line already at a premium rather than risk it in a company whose future was still problematical.

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 1st February 1845.

Section 5: Williams and the work of a promoter:-

In tracing the formation of the three Lynn railways to the form in which they came before Parliament, direct references to the work of Williams have been few in number. However, it must be recognised that it was to the comprehensiveness of his outlook, and to his drive and purpose that the successes so far noted are entirely to be attributed. The Provisional Committees were empty shadows, no more than devices to propagate an image of respectability. It is to be especially remarked that he was able to father three projects, occurring side by side and each subject to considerable modification, without being smothered by the mass of detailed and laborious work necessitated by the Standing Orders of 1774 and 1840 (originally concerned with roads and canals) which governed the whole procedure of railway incorporation.

The system was slow, tortuous and costly. Throughout it tempted dishonesty. Initially, detailed plans and notices had to appear in the London Gazette; the surveys involved were frequently conducted in winter conditions and at a time when the surveyors and engineers engaged were preoccupied with the business of the forthcoming session. Haste was inevitable, and repetition a usual consequence<sup>1</sup>; certainly this was so in the cases of the three lines under discussion. This was to be followed by the compilation of the prospectus, a hazardous task in that it must be convincing without being fulsome and must anticipate objections without suggesting them by denial. Previously, the Provisional Committee had to be mustered. Here the aim was to enlist as many titled dignitaries as possible, and to back these with an array of public figures and men of substance; ideally,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Clifford, op.cit. Vol.1, p.83.

the majority would come from the neighbourhood of the line, although a minority, by their addresses, would indicate a wider field of support. Naturally, there were abuses open to the unscrupulous promoter - misrepresentation of intention to the members, the use of the names of non-existent persons, the use of names without permission etc.<sup>1</sup> - but as far as the evidence goes Williams eschewed such practices. Indeed, willing members were rarely lacking. Those seeking an early allocation of scrip, M.P.s desirous of pleasing their constituents, and landowners eager to placate their tenants or hopeful of substantial land compensation were only too anxious to be recruited. The matter was felt to be of great importance in the attraction of capital. Williams, in stressing that the L & E was not "a bubble scheme for the interests of the few", cited the membership of the Provisional Committee as "the best guarantee of sincerity".<sup>2</sup> In this case the list contained 11 M.P.s and titles and was headed by the Earl of Leicester. In contrast, the E & B committee comprised only 25 names of which none was of great significance; the already guaranteed support of the L & E proprietors would sufficiently explain this rather unusual feature. Finally, in different circumstances again, the L & D committee list was felt to require considerable attention, 35 members including seven titled figures and M.P.s, and 26 Lynn and Norfolk men eventually being included.

Following these early stages there was a cumbersome mass of routine work to be accomplished. By the end of the November which preceded the application before Parliament, detailed notices had to be served (inviting a response of 'assent', 'dissent' or 'neuter') on all landowners, tenants

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Francis op.cit. Vol.2, p.127.

<sup>2</sup> Williams on the 23rd April 1844.

and occupiers along the proposed route; similarly, plans had to be deposited with each Clerk of the Peace. By the 31st December detailed Books of Reference had to be deposited in each parish. The whole system involved frantic bursts of energy followed by lengthy periods of waiting. When a company was conceived as late in the year as was the Lynn & Dereham the pace was tremendous, and it is hardly surprising to find that the plans of this line were deposited in Norwich at 6.30p.m. on the last possible day of acceptance.<sup>1</sup> Unexpected difficulties were apt to arise. In one instance Williams encountered difficulty in getting plans lithographed in London, so intense was the pressure of such work there. He set up a company press in Lynn itself. Eight days before one particular set of plans was due the press exhausted its supply of lithograph paper. Fresh supplies were ordered to arrive in Lynn on the Saturday before the crucial Tuesday, but these failed to arrive. Enquiries revealed that the paper was detained in Ely, from which place it was fetched by carriage on the Sunday. Monday saw the printing of the plans, and Tuesday a triumphant Williams driving down High Street to loud cheers and waving the plans in his hand.<sup>2</sup>

One other aspect of the promotions merits brief attention, namely the source of the money expended on stationery, the printing of the prospectus and surveyors' and engineers' fees before a single penny had been received in deposits. It was customary to raise loans by letters of appeal to prominent persons - most likely the same ones would later be approached to become members of the Provisional Committee - and eventually to repay the money so raised in either cash or in scrip issue;<sup>3</sup> however, as suggested in the

<sup>1</sup> So endorsed on the plans examined in the Norfolk County Records Office in Norwich.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald 15th February 1890; Personal Recollections of a Lynn Sexagenarian. The writer was Thew who had actually been employed in the press described above.

<sup>3</sup> G.H.Evans, op.cit. p.18.

previous chapter, it would appear that the promoters of the Lynn railways, especially so Everard, had been prepared to spend their own money in such matters as the employment of Rastrick. The expenses were undoubtedly heavy, but the blessing of cheap postage in the distribution of the prospectus represented one alleviation - before 1840 it cost, for example, 9d. to send a letter from Lynn to Wisbech, a mere 16 miles away.

Finally, why were there three separate companies projected by one and the same man to serve the same town and with the declared intention of amalgamation after completion? Fundamentally, the reason must be that each line constituted the response to a separate stimulus. If the projects had been united and then had failed because of the weakness of one of them the consequences for Lynn would have been serious indeed. Secondly, the late introduction of the E & B and then the L & D schemes precluded any guarantee that their respective bills could be prepared in time for the 1845 session. To take the risk implied might have meant that all three were delayed a full year. Thirdly, Williams had had to act with extreme caution. At first he had to reckon with the view prevailing in Lynn that the town could only have one railway; only as threats to the town multiplied and the national enthusiasm for railways mounted had he been able to expand his proposals. Further, there was the risk that the Eastern Counties Company might have taken exception to the formation of a large concern so close to its own territory, and the attitude of Parliament to monopolies was another matter requiring close study and careful handling. Yet another consideration is that the landed interests of west and central Norfolk had little concern for their Fenland counterparts, and therefore might have been expected to offer more active support to lines apparently restricted in their individual scope.

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Finally, it is not being cynical to remark that Williams' personal profits would inevitably be higher from the legal business involved in the formation of three companies, than they would be from that of one united enterprise.

Section 6: Where did the capital come from?

This is a most difficult question to answer as neither banks, the archives of the British Transport Commission nor the office of the Lynn firm of solicitors descended from Goodwin, Partridge & Williams have any records bearing on the matter. Reports of company meetings have proved to be profoundly irritating. Even when a proprietor spoke or questioned the board he is only too frequently in these reports described as 'a proprietor', and rarely is a clue to identity given; similarly, letters to the press were almost invariably written over a pseudonym. The problem is further complicated by the rate at which shares changed hands. The capital account for the period up to the 31st December, 1848 showed £64-7-6d. as having been received in transfer fees. As the fee in question was 2s.6d. per transaction this indicates that 515 blocks of shares had changed hands during the previous three and a half years. Of these changes there is no record at all.

The most positive lead comes from the Subscription Contracts deposited in connection with the 1845 bills.<sup>1</sup> These are not complete records as Standing Orders required evidence only that 75% of the capital sought had been subscribed. The full lists are given in Appendix D, and only a summarised form is included here. The most interesting feature to be observed is that of geographical distribution.

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<sup>1</sup> Accounts & Papers 1845 (13) x1, and 1845 (317) x1 for alphabetical lists of subscribers to the 1845 bills for sums of over £2,000 and under £2,000 respectively.

The Lynn & Ely

Total capital: £300,000. Amount traced: £232,215.

The number of individual subscribers for each area is given in brackets.

<u>Lynn</u>	<u>Norfolk</u>	<u>Manchester</u> <sup>1</sup>	<u>Liverpool</u>	<u>Lancashire</u>
£22,700 (28)	£20,450 (43)	£24,375 (9)	£9,950 (5)	£21,000 (14)
<u>West Riding</u>	<u>Hull</u>	<u>London</u>	<u>Rest of Britain</u>	
£17,245 (17)	£26,795 (31)	£46,425 (29)	£43,475 (31)	

The disparity in the average individual investments as between areas is to be particularly noted. Generally the shares were issued in blocks of £3,750 or £1,875 which does suggest that some of the larger investors were willing to go much further, but many exceptions were made for Lynn, Norfolk and Hull where subscriptions of as little as £50 were allowed, or conversely in the case of Sheppard of Lynn as much as £7,875. This indicates the eagerness of the promoters to obtain local support, but the facts are hardly in keeping with the claims concerning the extent of this referred to in earlier sections, unless, as suggested, many of the original applications for scrip were purely speculative in character. Folkes is seen here as holding only £900 of the shares although he was the chairman of the company; W.Everard had subscribed £3,000, Cresswell £2,000 and J.B.Whiting £1,500. Sugars, the contractor who subsequently built the stations on the line held £950 of shares. Further detailed comment is reserved for Appendix D.

The Ely & Huntingdon

Total Capital: £194,400. Amount traced: £132,015.<sup>2</sup>

<u>Lynn</u>	<u>Norfolk</u>	<u>Manchester</u>	<u>Liverpool</u>	<u>Lancashire</u>
£2,500 (1)	£2,375 (3)	£41,175 (20)	£14,500 (12)	£13,875 (15)
<u>West Riding</u>	<u>Hull</u>	<u>London</u>	<u>Rest of Britain</u>	
£19,500 (15)	-	£31,465 (20)	£6,425 (9)	

<sup>1</sup> Including north Cheshire.

<sup>2</sup> In the original £25 units.

These figures indicate some considerable exhaustion of local resources, if not a positive reluctance to come forward. Heavy reliance had to be placed on industrial sources, and many of the individuals concerned were obviously those large scale capitalists who had been partly or totally disappointed in their applications to the Lynn & Ely. This is particularly suggested by reference to the Manchester and London lists where not only do a number of names reoccur but the investments are shown to be for the most part in units of £2,000 or more. To be noted amongst the individuals are Buck, the engineer of the Ely & Huntingdon, with £1,250 (in the Manchester list) and such large scale investors as Masterman, a London banker, who was to have £116,000 involved in the projects of 1846, A.Liebert, a Manchester merchant, with £46,985 in 1846, and S.Schwabe, a Manchester textile manufacturer, who had £71,075 invested in the schemes of the following year.<sup>1</sup>

The Lynn & Dereham

Total Capital: £270,000. Amount traced: £198,250

<u>Lynn</u>	<u>Norfolk</u>	<u>Manchester</u>	<u>Liverpool</u>	<u>Lancashire</u>
£13,750 (11)	£6,750 (7)	£9,000 (6)	£49,950 (27)	£15,500 (9)
<u>West Riding</u>	<u>Hull</u>	<u>London</u>	<u>Rest of Britain</u>	
£15,750 (19)	£1,750 (2)	£57,550 (25)	£28,250 (19)	

In this case there was no definite pattern as regards the amount of investment allowed; thus Lloyd, a private gentleman of London, was able to put in £15,000, and Lacy of Lancashire £10,000. The great variations in individual subscriptions clearly suggests that by the time this third promotion was presented to the public there was little room for choice in the acceptance of applications. The very poor response from Lynn and Norfolk is to be particularly noted.

<sup>1</sup> Accounts & Papers 1846 (473) xxxviii.



Summary

Total Capital: £764,400

Amount traced: £562,480

<u>Lynn</u>	<u>Norfolk</u>	<u>Manchester</u>	<u>Liverpool</u>	<u>Lancashire</u>
£48,950	£29,375	£74,550	£74,400	£50,375
<u>West Riding</u>	<u>Hull</u>	<u>London</u>	<u>Rest of Britain</u>	
£52,495	£28,545	£135,440	£78,150	

These relative totals provide a clear rebuttal of G.H.Evan's view that local capital would predominate in areas far removed from London and the major industrial centres.<sup>1</sup> The massive obligation owed by Lynn to distant commerce and industry is only too clear, and this is to be considered against the great eagerness of the local communities to have railways provided for them. In the course of this work attempts will be made to indicate the major alterations in the balance and nature of the investment pattern. It will be seen that the principal trend was for Manchester capital to assume increasing dominance, so much so that 'Crito' of Lynn, writing in 1862, could claim without fear of contradiction that it was "the men of Manchester who made our railways for us".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit.p6. For further refutation see S.A.Broadbridge in the Economic History Review, Vol.VIII, No.2, p210, 'The Early Capital Market: The Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway'. He also quotes E.Doble (the Eastern Counties Railway and Economic Development - unpublished Ph.D.thesis, London, 1939) to show that less than one third of the E.C.R.'s 1836 capital originated from local sources.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 15th February, 1862.

Chapter 3Deceptive FoundationsSection 1: Railway Bills and Parliament:

Schemes for the construction of several hundred miles of new railway in the eastern counties were laid before Parliament at the outset of the 1845 session.<sup>1</sup> Of the situation in Norfolk and Suffolk the Railway Department of the Board of Trade felt constrained to report:<sup>2</sup>

"We cannot but remark on the extent to which Railway speculation has gone for the construction of lines in this district, and the improbability of the Legislature sanctioning at present more than a small proportion of the projects we have enumerated."

The prophecy was sound. Of the 2,816 $\frac{1}{4}$  miles of new line authorised in 1845 only some 180 concerned the eastern counties as a whole, and of this total the three Lynn companies claimed 85 miles; the total share of Norfolk and Suffolk was just over 100. Justly did the editor of the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald claim:<sup>3</sup>

"...no town in the kingdom has been so successful in its applications to Parliament in this or any previous session."

undoubtedly (in his view)<sup>4</sup>

"a circumstance to be attributed alone to the zeal, ability and perseverance of J.C. Williams Esq. under whose able direction they have been placed."

The promoter in question richly deserved such praise. Lack of adequate transport facilities within the areas of the three lines and the absence of opposition from other companies, either existing or proposed, in the neighbourhood of Lynn help to explain his success, but primarily this was the consequence of the very thorough preparation which lay behind the three bills

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<sup>1</sup> For the full list see Appendix E.

<sup>2</sup> Report on the Schemes for Extending Railway Communications in the Counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, March 1845.

<sup>3</sup> Editorial of the 26th July, 1845.

<sup>4</sup> Editorial of the 28th June, 1845.

114

and of the convincing nature of the evidence amassed on their behalf.

However, as five years after authorisation the lines concerned were not only still incomplete but also bankrupt with bailiffs riding on every train, it is pardonable to question the real value of the scrutiny undergone by the bills during their progress through Parliament. Circumstances that could not be foreseen in 1845, and in particular mistaken policies on the part of the companies' directors, played an important part in this later failure, but the essential weakness was that the companies, in their authorised form, had been founded on fundamental miscalculations which Parliament allowed to pass unrecognised. Thus, as early as 1847, Herapath could write of the East Anglian Railways Company (formed in that year by the amalgamation of the three hitherto independent concerns) that after "exceeding all expectation in magnitude of cost.....it bids fair to fall sadly short of original expectation in regard to its profitable return"<sup>1</sup>, while 'Quiet Observer' could truthfully comment that "many have erred in construction costs but few so badly in traffic estimates"<sup>2</sup>.

It was on these estimates of cost, likely revenue and return on capital that Parliament principally relied in assessing the merits of a new project, although the bona fide intentions of the promoter, his ability to carry the project through, and the national and local advantages to be derived from his line were other matters for close consideration. Parliament's task, as the watch-dog over public investment, was no easy one. Confronted with an overwhelming mass of business and deafened by the subjective clamour of promoters, investors (who had their deposits to lose), opponents (who in the

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, 20th November, 1847, p.1311.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 16th December, 1848, p.1296.

event of the failure of their application were liable for costs) and of communities anxious for the benefits of railway communication, it was in essence being asked to judge a problematical future in terms of an imperfectly known present. Unless great care were exercised Parliamentary committees were apt to be at the mercy of carefully primed witnesses, who "for an adequate consideration could express a very decided and of course competent opinion in reference to a new line or the resources of a town in the neighbourhood"<sup>1</sup>, and of skilled counsel who at fees of anything from £200 to £300 per day<sup>2</sup> had every incentive to be extremely convincing in their cases. Indeed, Williams' own success lay partly in the fact that he was able to brief some of the leading counsel of the day; Mr. Talbot Q.C., for example, who after appearing against the Lynn & Ely to the cost of that company (see below) then led with striking success for the Lynn & Dereham, was able, because of his skill in railway matters, to earn some £12,000 per annum during this period.<sup>3</sup> It was because of the dangers inherent in such subjective presentation that heavy reliance had to be placed on seemingly objective figures.

The figures concerned, however, served only to deceive. Quite apart from the facts that these estimates were compiled by the promoters themselves, and then examined by committees which had no absolute means of checking their truth and which were virtually without comparable precedents on which to draw, they were ill-conceived in their own right.

Not even construction costs, including all expenses necessary to put line and plant in running order, were susceptible to accurate forecast, although such were usually presented to the nearest penny. Although many months must

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<sup>1</sup> F.S. Williams; Our Iron Roads, London & Derby 1883, p.72.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

elapse before the first contracts could be placed, existing prices were used as the base, the possible inadequacy of initial surveys was ignored, and possible technical advances (e.g. larger locomotives requiring heavier track) were overlooked. In particular it was land costs in which prophecy invited painful rebuttal. Landowners had already learned the effective means of extortion, and the Land Clauses Consolidation Act of May 1845 (8 Vic.c.18) further strengthened their hand, for they knew that few companies dared countenance the delay involved in resorting to the arbitration procedure laid down in the act. In this and construction costs in general neither Parliament nor promoter had learned from the experience of most of the 1836 companies. The former continued to accept the figures given it, and to authorise capital barely exceeding the estimate as if prices could never change, and as if landowners would naturally be content with prices actually related to the value of their properties.

Even more forcible objections may be laid against the estimates of revenue, purporting to show what could be expected in terms of existing road and water traffic. The dubious value of such calculations has already been indicated in that on supposedly the same evidence the Lynn & Dereham estimated a return of  $9\frac{1}{2}\%$  on its line, the Marriotts one of under  $2\%$  (see chapter 2). Allowing that daily activities and the nature of social patterns can be reduced to figures only in retrospect, as forecasts of such are invalidated by the impossibility of foreseeing the intangible consequences of imposing the new and untried on the old, serious internal weaknesses in the concept of the estimates remain. The method of their compilation was the obvious case in point. The so called traffic experts - such as the Mr.Pares employed by Williams - relied principally on Parliamentary Returns (where these existed),

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on Stamp Office Returns (restricted in their application) and above all on the evidence and opinions of local tradesmen, merchants, farmers, innkeepers and coachmen. Very often a traffic census was held to supplement these sources, but such was usually short in duration, confined to the most favourable months of the year, and incomplete in its coverage. Taken in a year of growing prosperity it had little application to a year of depression, or, in rural areas, to seasons of bad weather when harvest yields might be down a full 25%.<sup>1</sup> On broader grounds the revenue estimates were founded on the facile assumption that virtually all existing traffic would transfer to the railway, and so ignored both the time necessary to develop a line's potential and the possible opposition of road and water interests entrenched within the area; the possible effects of other railways were also generally ignored unless such were held to constitute a positive benefit. Two further fundamental weaknesses were that the estimates were based on a scale of rates still to be sanctioned (the L & E bill, for example, was recommitted after the second reading for the purpose of fixing maximum tolls), and that no account was taken of the wealth of the area and the associated problem of ensuring flexibility in charges as the means of developing maximum traffic. Finally, the whole was too much influenced by what had happened in favourable circumstances elsewhere.

Working expenses were estimated as a percentage of anticipated revenue. Needless to say they were based on current wage levels and coke prices etc. and rested on a purely theoretical concept of the eventual establishment. They ignored such problematical issues as the quality of the materials and the mechanical efficiency of the rolling stock that were still to be purchased. Depreciation costs were hardly if ever specified. It followed that if these

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<sup>1</sup> Caird; English Agriculture in 1850-51; London, 1852, p.521.

or any of the estimates proved erroneous then the return on capital would be affected, and that this, in the nature of things, would be to the eventual detriment of the shareholder. The matter was serious. On the estimates were based both the fact and the financial content of the Act of Incorporation, an indication to all that the project was to be considered sound. But once work was begun, such is the specialised nature of railway equipment, completion alone could prevent the loss of thousands of pounds whatever excessive costs or difficulties were encountered. If on completion the revenue estimates likewise proved defective, then the situation was serious indeed.

The criteria of assessment were themselves sufficiently weak to justify condemnation of the whole system, but unfortunately the matter did not end there. All might have been reasonably well if there had been some degree of consistency in their application, and a series of clearly defined principles against which they might have been set, but neither existed in 1845. Both were in fact promised by the short-lived committee of the Railway Department of the Board of Trade (Lord Dalhousie's Committee of the 'Five Kings') which between August 1844 and July '45 endeavoured to achieve a rational ordering of a chaotic situation. Suggested by the Select Committee on Railway Procedure as an expedient means of dealing with the rising flood of railway applications, it was entrusted with the task of advising Parliament on the merits of each individual bill, subject only to the reservation that all its decisions were "without prejudice to the claims of private persons", the judgement of which was "altogether reserved to the Houses of the Legislature"<sup>1</sup>. It was this committee which laid down the principles of assessment enumerated above, but

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<sup>1</sup> 5th Report of the Select Committee on Railway Procedure, March 1844.

at the same time it offended deeply<sup>1</sup> by disturbing the unfounded assumption of the established companies that by their acts of incorporation they had been invested with a perpetual monopoly within their particular territories; now each project was to be judged strictly on its merits, although it was recognised that existing companies could usually build and run a line more cheaply than could a new concern. The board did some valuable work - its part in discouraging the foolhardy contraction of the L & D line has already been discussed - but not infrequently its advice was disregarded; of the 93 bills recommended by the Board for acceptance only 73 became law - 6 of the 19 put forward for rejection were actually accepted.<sup>2</sup> Behind this may be discerned the same elements that, having successfully transferred the onus of judgement to the Commons, rendered impossible in the House calm objectivity and consistency alike.

For this are principally to be blamed those M.P.s anxious to please their constituents in railway bills as in all else, the 157 members with an aggregate railway investment of £291,000 (these were, of course, the mouthpieces of the established companies), and, above all, the lawyers of the House who, in common with their parasitic brethren throughout the country, were waxing fat on conditions of unbridled enterprise, comfortable in the knowledge that they need not suffer from any of the inevitable repercussions of excess. Nothing better illustrates the attitude of this last group than its success in engineering the defeat of a proposal to reduce Parliamentary costs by allowing counsel for lines to address committees only in opening their cases, and not, as was the practice, at both the beginning and end of the evidence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In its very first report, that on the proposed lines in Kent.

<sup>2</sup> Lewin; Railway Mania & Aftermath

<sup>3</sup> Proposed by the Select Committee on Railway Procedure, 17th March, 1845.



Bearing in mind that no bill could proceed until 5% of the capital figure to be sought (collected in deposits) had been lodged with the Court of Chancery, and until Subscription Contracts allegedly proving subscription to 75% of the capital had been presented,<sup>1</sup> and assuming that the Standing Orders Committee of the Commons had been safely passed (here a number of bills failed on grounds totally irrelevant to the intrinsic merits of the line proposed), the principal instrument of examination was one of the Commons' committees appointed to scrutinise each bill after its second reading.

These all important committees had been established early in 1845 on the recommendation of the Select Committee charged to devise some practical means of dealing with the 240 odd railway bills pending in the forthcoming session.<sup>2</sup> Each committee comprised five members and was assigned a particular geographical area. In that committee members were to be completely disinterested in the area within their purview, jobbery and the open canvassing of the Speaker by interested parties were eliminated, but on the other hand the system bred its own evils. Charged with the responsibility of hearing the proof of the preamble to each bill (i.e. demonstration of advantages to be gained and substantiation of the estimates), and then considering individual clauses (in cases where there were rival schemes a decision had to be given as to which should be allowed to proceed), lack of local knowledge, by placing a premium on interested evidence, proved an immediate disadvantage. Moreover, the artificial divisions on which the system was based did not necessarily represent natural railway units, while preoccupation with limited areas tended

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<sup>1</sup> By questioning the validity of the London & York Subscription Contracts in 1845 Hudson was enabled to hold that scheme up for a year, but in general terms such were so adaptable to successful fraud as to be perfectly useless - and in fact they were recognised as being so and abolished, but not until 1859.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Select Committee on Railway Procedure, 28th February, 1845; the system applied also in the Lords, but only if the bill were opposed there.

to preclude an overall view of the developing situation. Inevitably, multiplication of committees, in the absence of clearly defined principles, produced a wide diversity of standards; that what would satisfy one committee would not necessarily satisfy another was clearly demonstrated when the E & H was permitted to pay  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  interest on calls without the practice being called into question, but the L & D was not. This lack of consistency applied equally to larger and far more important matters. Thousands of pounds were squandered on Parliamentary costs and actual construction "mainly from that uncertainty of the legislation, from having no definite principle whatever laid down as to whether competition or not was the rule"<sup>1</sup>; moreover, six bills rejected in 1844 were passed on virtually unchanged evidence in 1845. Indeed, "uncertainty" was the only certain factor on which a promoter could count when bringing his bill before Parliament.

### Section 2: A Critical View of the Assets on which Williams based his Case

With this "uncertainty" and lack of absolute standards of assessment in mind it becomes necessary to take a hard look at the various sources from which Williams expected his railways to derive their revenue, and in particular to emphasise the weaknesses which neither Williams nor Parliament detected. It will be found that without a major exception appearances flattered to deceive and that beneath each apparent source of promise lay hidden hazards. Recognising that all three estimates may be treated as a unity in that each centred on Lynn as the natural focal point of all the areas served, attention naturally turns first of all to the harbour of that place.

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<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on Railway & Canal Amalgamation, P.P.1852/3 xxxviii, 101A, question 79, evidence of S.Laing, M.P.

A. Lynn Harbour

Despite fluctuations the volume of trade handled in Lynn Harbour was of impressive dimensions:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Coals Imported</u>	<u>Other Goods</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Coals Imported</u>	<u>Other</u>
1831	160,531 chaldrons	69,492 tons	1839	187,718 chald.	109,707
1832	184,365 "	82,225 "	1840	189,506 "	105,271
1833	185,545 "	76,190 "	1841	256,094 tons	109,560
1834	163,458 "	52,146 "	1842	243,252 "	86,797
1835	169,457 "	84,613 "	1843	237,213 "	94,390
1836	186,091 "	97,920 "	1844	198,775 "	122,695
1837	201,867 "	95,556 "	1845	302,463 "	141,935
1838	178,249 "	108,021 "			

N.B. 1. A chaldron of coal was 25 cwt. See Appendix A.

2. General Imports rose steeply in 1844 and '45 largely because of the timber brought in in connection with the construction of the Norwich & Brandon Railway.

Source: W.Armes; The Port of King's Lynn, Appendix, p.56.

During the crucial period of 1843 to '45 exports, mostly of agricultural produce but also of local manufactured goods, wool and sand, averaged 67,000 tons per annum.<sup>1</sup> This figure was liable to fluctuation with the state of the harvest, but since 1840 had been encouragingly steady; it is to be remembered that in seeking to dispel the gloomy picture of Lynn trade deliberately painted by Williams, Self, the chief opponent of the L & E concept, had said that between 1841 and '43 exports of corn had not varied more than 1,200 quarters, and were actually up if flour were taken into account.<sup>2</sup>

The content of this trade and the defects of the harbour against which it was conducted need no further elaboration. It was confidently expected that the former would continue to comprise imported coals, building materials, manufactured goods, timber, wines and beers, together with exported

<sup>1</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, p.32.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 28th March, 1844.

agricultural produce, and that the latter would be remedied by the Norfolk Estuary proposals. However, although the fact was not appreciated, the whole pattern for the future was in considerable doubt in that the structure of the existing trade was such as to render the railways' dependence on the harbour peculiarly ill-founded. The warning signals were the clearly marked predominance of the coastal traffic over the foreign, and of the import trade over the export.

Arrivals at Lynn 1843-1848

	<u>Coastwise</u>		<u>Colonial</u>		<u>Foreign Ports</u>			
	<u>No.</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>British Ships</u>		<u>Foreign Ships</u>	
					<u>No.</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>
1843	2241	194,521	11	2,864	71	13,058	106	6,618
1844	2251	182,384			120	18,613	183	14,994
1845	2826	253,919			110	17,439	162	16,404
1846	2193	182,678			123	19,991	149	10,761
1847	2526	222,068			80	14,385	167	15,320
1848	2049	188,476			131	20,375	110	7,618

N.B. The sudden decline in the volume of coastal trade between 1847 and 1848 was the first positive sign that north to south railways were beginning to threaten the harbour's trade.

Sailings from Lynn Harbour (laden ships) 1843-1848

	<u>Coastwise</u>		<u>Colonial</u>		<u>Foreign Ports</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>
1843	1084	62,623	2	438	25	3,714
1844	1042	67,788				
1845	1178	67,664				
1846	956	56,862				
1847	868	48,481				
1848	858	40,212				

The colonial and foreign sailings for 1843 on were in ballast only.

Source: Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, April 1849, p.64 Appendix 4.

The declining volume of trade evidenced as early as 1846 merely illustrated the working out of possibilities that should have been obvious in 1845, but the promoters had allowed their judgement to be coloured by the optimum conditions obtaining in that year, and persisted in seeing their

lines against the background of the pre-railway era. In particular it was the coastal trade that was vulnerable under changed circumstances. This was conducted in small vessels averaging only 81 tons burthen; as the 144 boats registered at Lynn in 1845 averaged 115 tons<sup>1</sup> and were obviously the most frequent visitors to the harbour there, the great majority of the craft engaged must have been very small indeed. Moreover, the greater number of them were laden in one direction only, although, whenever possible, the coal keels were utilised for the carriage of corn in the outward direction. Together, these facts seem to indicate that the whole system was barely an economically sound proposition. When confronted with the competition of the north to south railways which could carry, at comparable rates, superior bulk more directly, and with far less intermediate handling, it was clearly foredoomed to failure. This applied particularly in coal, but almost equally so to the export of the barley that was so "highly prized"<sup>2</sup> by the brewers of Lancashire and Yorkshire and sent to them by way of Hull. The foreign trade, in itself quite inadequate to support the Lynn railways, laboured under similar circumstances. The small ships engaged - they had an average burthen of about 110 tons - would without doubt have a greater value to their owners if diverted to those ports which offered greater opportunities for obtaining an outward cargo.

Under such circumstances the Lynn railways would of course still obtain much of the freight traffic coming into the area, but they would have lost their monopoly at the point of entry and would have to compete with such lines as those from Ely to Norwich and from Wymondham to East Dereham for what was offered. Williams was sincere in believing that Lynn could be transformed

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<sup>1</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry, p.64, Appendix 4.

<sup>2</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.519.

into a major port, and during 1846 the L & E actually introduced a bill into Parliament for the construction of docks there in furtherance of that end, but the overall situation was such that only the establishment of extensive industries within the general area of Norfolk and the Fens could render the intention practical; for such development there was neither reason nor incentive save the sectional interests and needs of a small town and three minor railways. It is also to be remembered in this general context that even if the harbour trade was maintained at its 1845 level the imports were to be disseminated over a wide area, much of which (especially so north Norfolk) was outside the range of the three railways.

One other aspect of harbour activity deserves mention. Some 195 fishing smacks (average 6 tons burthen) were registered at Lynn<sup>1</sup>, and apart from local consumption of fresh oysters, cockles, smelt and cod, 72 baskets a week, or 65 tons a year, of shrimps were sent to the London markets.<sup>2</sup> Here was the nucleus of a remunerative traffic, a fact realised in later years when the E.A.R. directors made vain efforts to interest their shareholders in the development of the industry into competition with that of Yarmouth (where half a million pounds was invested); but, quite apart from the refusal encountered, nature itself took a hand. Silting in the Wash had already dealt a death blow to the sole fisheries, and by 1860 incursions of starfish had largely destroyed the once profitable oyster beds.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. The Volume of Traffic on the Ouse

In its final estimates the L & E company set a value of £16,000 on the conveyance inland of coals and slates etc., and a further £4,000 or so on that

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<sup>1</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry 1849, Appendix 4.

<sup>2</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.519.

<sup>3</sup> Hillen, op.cit. p.785.

of general merchandise of the type then monopolised by the river. Calculated at the rate of 1d. per mile this suggests an expectation of 4,800,000 ton miles, which divided by 26 to represent the length of the route implies that each year about 200,000 tons of freight were carried between Lynn and Ely. The evidence against which this assumption may be checked is of necessity scattered in nature. The only definite tonnage figure is that supplied by Armes who said that each year 10,000 tons of coal and general merchandise were despatched by way of the Ouse to Bury St. Edmunds.<sup>1</sup> This, however, represents only a marginal traffic and one which was to be lost to Ipswich as soon as the railways of that town were developed. Illuminating but imprecise are the revenue figures of the various navigation interests involved. In opposing the L & E bill the Eau Brink Commissioners claimed an income of £11,720 per annum, of which £3,610 was derived from a tax of 5d. per ton levied on all up-river traffic.<sup>2</sup> The South Level Commissioners had a toll income of about £2,800.<sup>3</sup> The conclusion to be drawn from these figures is that at least 175,000 tons of goods passed up the river each year, an average of some 465 tons per day to be distributed between the various tributary routes. This is seen to be a by no means unlikely figure when it is recalled that in 1844 a total of 321,470 tons of coals and other goods had been landed at, or passed through, Lynn Harbour, and that the L & E prospectus had claimed a likely coal traffic of 150,000 tons per annum along its mainline. The Lynn Corporation tolls levied on up-river traffic, calculated in small pence payments and excluding coals, averaged no more than £140/-/6 per annum<sup>4</sup> thus tending to confirm both the overall predominance of coals and the substantial accuracy of the above calculations. But, by comparing the L & E estimate and the

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<sup>1</sup> The Port of King's Lynn, p.14.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 26th April, 1845, p.594; evidence of C.Pemberton, treasurer to the Eau Brink Commission before the Commons Committee on the L & E bill.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 26th April, 1845, p.594.

<sup>4</sup> Guild Hall Book, Vol.14, p.765; minute of the 21st May. For details of the tolls see Appendix A.

total volume of traffic available, it will be seen that the former was assuming a virtual 100% transference of patronage from river to rail, a development that for a variety of reasons was not destined to take place. Moreover, the whole traffic case of the L & E rested on the ill-founded confidence that the volume and character of Lynn's harbour trade would remain unaltered.

There was, however, a brighter side to the picture. There were several indications that the river interests had never developed the full potential of their traffic, and that there was remaining a substantial balance of trade to be taken from the roads, a much easier proposition from the railway standpoint. In this there is above all the unequivocal testimony of Armes that, while the river could not possibly accommodate all the local trade,<sup>1</sup> Lynn Corporation had never used its powers to develop the river potential to its fullest.<sup>2</sup> Substance is lent to this contention by the facts that the central lifting leaves of the 1821 bridge over the Eau Brink had been opened only once,<sup>3</sup> and by 1845 were firmly embedded in gravel;<sup>4</sup> the special acclaim given to the arrival of an 80 ton vessel at Ely is not without significance.<sup>5</sup> The most probable reason for this situation was that when the river was high, and therefore suitable for larger craft, the Drainage Commissioners were apprehensive and only the millers pleased.<sup>6</sup> The Eau Brink Commission, an example of the former, might indeed derive some £3,600 annually from tolls (although one fifth of this went to the Commissioners of Navigation) but its primary concern remained drainage, its principal income the £7,032 yielded by its Drainage Tax of 6d. per acre.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit. p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.6.

<sup>3</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 4th October, 1845.

<sup>4</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.517.

<sup>5</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 8th January, 1845; extract from the Cambridge Chronicle. <sup>6</sup> Ibid. 22nd February 1845; Barugh Almack.

<sup>7</sup> Herapath, 26th April, 1845.



Down-river traffic was almost exclusively agricultural in content.

Provided that Lynn remained the natural outlet of the area for such, and remembering that some of it derived from tributary streams so that the extra handling involved left no advantage in using the railway, there was no reason why the L & E should not capture a worthwhile share. The volume to be contended for may be judged from the 1843 figures of down-river traffic entering Lynn<sup>1</sup>:

	<u>Quts.</u>	<u>Bushells.</u>		<u>Quts.</u>	<u>Bushells.</u>		<u>Quts.</u>	<u>Bushells.</u>
Wheat	73,006	7	Malt	20,573	2	Beans	15,476	6
Barley	8,185	1	Oats	6,280	7	Seeds	821	6
Rye	3,560	5	Peas	86	4			

How the L & E would fare in diverting traffic from river to rail was really an open issue, although few, in 1845, would have been found to subscribe to the view of 'A.B.' (referring to L & E prospects) that "the water carriage now existing will monopolise the goods traffic on which the income has been in great measure calculated"<sup>2</sup>. Rather was it the commonly held opinion that the L & E provided the "cheapest, shortest and best approach from the interior of the county"<sup>3</sup> and that it would inevitably capture the vast majority of the traffic. Indeed, the Drainage Commissioners themselves forecast heavy loss and a consequent inability to maintain essential drainage works without levying heavy Drainage Taxes. Likewise, few gave much for the chances of the Nar Navigation, that "intolerable monopoly"<sup>4</sup>, in its forthcoming conflict with the L & D line. Portents might have been found, however, in the continued payment of dividends by some northern canals despite direct railway competition. In fact, canal and river interests alike had been

<sup>1</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Railway Times, 27th July, 1845, p.830.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 20th July, 1844, p.797; 'One Who Means to Hold'.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 1st February, 1845; letter of 'Anti-Monopoly'.

overcharging for years, and now had room to reduce their rates to a level at which even the railways could not compete. When to this is added the innate conservatism of farmers and rural dwellers in general it is not surprising to find that the Ouse navigation remained a rival of the railway for many years, and that even the Nar Navigation was enabled to survive until 1885.

It might be added at this point that, whereas the defeat of the navigation interests was largely dependent on the provision of cheap and convenient services by the railways, and that victory was to be delayed, the rout of the road interests in all areas was certain to be almost immediate. The "fine rampart roads" radiating from Lynn, even if they were "better than those of most other counties"<sup>1</sup>, were of themselves not enough. Even if practical opposition had been possible the local Turnpike Trusts were too poor and scattered to provide it. The combined balance in hand of the three Lynn trusts at the end of 1844 was no more than £1,095/8/5<sup>2</sup>; the Lynn - Norwich road, in competition with the L & D, contained an eight mile section between Narborough and Swaffham which was maintained only by the parishes through which it passed; many of the smaller trust roads would not in any case be affected by rail competition. The coach services and the freight vans which plied within the district and linked it with Norwich, London, Cambridge and the midlands, were generally too few, too poorly loaded and in too many hands for an effective fight to be made; the multitude of carriers' carts with their maximum speed of 24 miles per day could be discounted as serious opposition

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<sup>1</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.507.

<sup>2</sup> Accounts & Papers, 1846; Abstract of the General Statement of the Income and Expenditure of the Several Turnpike Trusts in England and Wales (1st January 1844 to 31st December 1844), pp.68-9.

except in districts adjacent to the market centres - their inevitable role was to work in co-operation with the railway and to confine independent activities to areas beyond the reach of the lines.

C. The Contribution to be made by the Towns

Not even in the status of King's Lynn as a market centre could really solid grounds for confidence be justifiably found. Superficially, it might seem that nothing could go wrong, and, indeed, in terms of the pre-railway age there was little that could. But, once again, a close study reveals a far from certain situation. Without any doubt the trading statistics for the Lynn markets seemed entirely favourable. During 1843 no less than 107,267 quarters of wheat and 784,672 of barley were sold within the town; as the average prices were £2/7/10 and £1/8/8 respectively<sup>1</sup> these transactions alone had a value of close on £1,400,000. Still more impressive were the stock figures, which did not include livestock driven past Lynn, that sold on the grazing grounds outside the town or that sold at the free market of 1843, the first of its kind in Lynn, at which no count was taken.

Stock Sales at Lynn Markets 1836-1843

<u>Year</u>	<u>Sheep</u>	<u>Pigs</u>	<u>Bullocks</u>	<u>Horses</u>
1836	22,180	22,121	10,435	194
1837	22,245	18,995	14,052	166
1838	22,580	26,339	17,127	239
1839	40,418	17,718	24,338	589
1840	45,680	21,986	16,330	415
1841	52,343	25,415	15,369	849
1842	48,523	26,717	14,938	540
1843	53,665	25,172	16,363	240

Source:  
Bacon, op.cit.p.126

These figures serve to confirm only one advantage to be derived by the railways and no more, namely that there was every expectation of a profitable

<sup>1</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.523.

return from the carriage of livestock towards the London markets. For the rest it is to be remembered that the bulk of the corn would, under existing circumstances, leave by Lynn Harbour; if this were not the case much of it would never come to Lynn at all. A large proportion of both produce and livestock also derived from areas which the railways could not reach, and another portion would find its way more conveniently either to one of the other railways of the area (e.g. the Norwich - Ely line) or to one of the outer terminal towns of the Lynn railways; this latter development would automatically follow any decline in the status of Lynn Harbour.

The position was complex and one raising several issues affecting both freight and passenger revenues. For example, how near to a railway did one have to live before using it became an advantage. In this sociological considerations play a major part. Walking cost nothing, the use of the carriers' carts very little; the better off usually had their horses and private conveyances. The matter is complicated further by the conflicting claims of individual towns. Ideally, from Williams' point of view, the situation could have been expressed in terms of triangles with Lynn as the apex and the two lines from it bisecting the respective bases. Thus, the further away from Lynn the wider the area from which regular traffic was to be anticipated. The concept is disturbed, however, by the siting of individual stations, by the presence of other railways and above all by the projection of similar 'triangles' from the other ends of the lines. For example, Dereham's 'triangle' would be at its narrowest where Lynn's was widest; it would therefore be cheaper to ride or walk into the former than to journey by train to Lynn; indeed, as Dereham was to have its own railway to Norwich and to a London line reasons for making regular journeys to Lynn were few. Moreover, the crushing

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poverty of the labouring classes (to be dealt with in a later section) the marked reluctance of country dwellers to undertake even short journeys except for pressing necessities, or some gala occasion such as Lynn Mart, and the fact that most of those who regularly visited Lynn for more than five or six miles out were possessed of private conveyances, are all factors casting dark shadows on the revenue prospects of the three railways. There was another aspect which could not have been foreseen. The coming of railways coupled with the end of the turnpike roads resulted, in Norfolk at least, in a great increase in the number of travelling salesmen and in the volume and variety of articles stocked in country town and village shops alike; there is abundant living evidence that right until 1918 many natives of the area, even when living no further than eight or nine miles from Lynn, visited the town no more than once or twice a year. It followed, assuming these factors to be recognised, that it must be the prime concern of the Lynn railways to provide such complete facilities and such attractive fares and services as to establish the habit of travel from the outset and to settle every open issue promptly and decisively in favour of Lynn. Failure to do this could lead to damage that might never be repaired.

Reference to the actual areas involved shows how very pressing these matters were. Nowhere was the situation more fluid than at Dereham, the centre of the 'Garden of Norfolk',<sup>1</sup> a distributing centre for a large area. Long the centre of a tug-of-war between Lynn and Norwich the rivalry was now to be perpetuated when each secured the projection of a railway to it. On balance Norwich tended to have the best of it, a conclusion tenuously reached on the simple evidence that that city had more carriers' and van services

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<sup>1</sup> W.White; Eastern England from the Thames to the Humber, London 1865, p.212.

to Dereham than did Lynn<sup>1</sup> - it would also seem that this tendency, if indeed it existed at all, had been accentuated by the opening of the Lowestoft to Reedham canal in 1833 and the consequent gain by Norwich of direct access to the sea. Only the opposition of landowners had prevented the Wensum from being deepened and straightened as far as Dereham<sup>2</sup> so clinching the matter firmly in favour of Norwich. The Lynn & Dereham would overcome the handicaps imposed by the Nar Navigation, and the lack of reasonable road services to Dereham, and would thus reduce the issue to a straight fight between two railways until either the Direct Norwich & Dereham company was sanctioned or until the L & D matured its own schemes for extending through to Norwich; Arnes had opined that Dereham would turn to Lynn rather than continue to draw its trade at high rates from Norwich<sup>3</sup> - the moral for the L & D board, cheap fares and rapid services, was obvious.

The principal intermediate towns may be briefly dismissed. Swaffham, a "handsome and thriving market town"<sup>4</sup> of 3,358 inhabitants, possessing, according to White, one of the best markets in the kingdom for cattle and corn<sup>5</sup>, was the centre for the extensive Breckland and, until 1875 when it gained direct rail communication with the Norwich - Ely line, was completely within Lynn's economic orbit. Ironically enough, however, because of the factors already indicated, the town's expansion after 1845 was largely at the expense of Lynn, and therefore also to the direct cost of the L & D itself in terms of passenger revenue. Nearby Downham Market, midway along the L & E mainline, was of rather less significance. A "neat and clean market

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix F.

<sup>2</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 16th October, 1844.

<sup>4</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.384.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

134

town"<sup>1</sup>(population 2,953), its activities were restricted by the comparative lack of bridging points over the Ouse, and even by 1845 its twice weekly markets had suffered severely from the competition of Lynn, Wisbech and Swaffham.<sup>2</sup> Folkes described a station there as being "a great agricultural benefit"<sup>3</sup>, but in truth the town was little more than the focal point for the rural communities on the east side of the Ouse - an area limited even more in that, when more than seven or eight miles out, Lynn to the north and Ely to the south proved more convenient for most.

Ely was likely to be of little direct use to either the L & E or the E & H. With a population of only 6,825, with only one main street and that only partially paved, it was indeed within Lynn's sphere, but partially as a result of the fact that larger craft had to terminate their journeys up the Ouse at Littleport, four miles out, the town's interests had turned increasingly towards Cambridge and London. The town's importance was as the centre of the populous Isle of Ely, a richly soiled area noted for its fruit, vegetables and butter; these products mostly found their way to London<sup>4</sup> and the possibility that the situation would in any way change was remote - the same applied to the cattle and sheep raised in the area. The town's manufactures of tobacco pipes, earthenware, and oil from flax, hemp and cole seed were primarily intended for local consumption, and were, in any case, unlikely by their very nature to make any significant contribution to railway revenues. A rather similar situation, that of a terminal town looking away from the Lynn railways, will be recognised in the case of Wisbech, although, as previously described,

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<sup>1</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.613.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald; At the Town Meeting of the 23rd April, 1844.

<sup>4</sup> A Guide to the Ely & Peterborough Railway (anonymous) - probably from the internal evidence written in or about 1848.

the line to that place was to be judged more as a matter of strategic gain than as a source of revenue. It remains to comment, however, that the two principal centres along the E & H route, namely St. Ives and Huntingdon itself, promised to be of neither real nor strategic value to the company. Both were small market towns, the former being within the sphere of the latter, which would be more likely to patronise the direct route to London to be provided by the London & York than the railways to Lynn.

#### D. The Agricultural Situation: The Soil

Subject to the various limitations outlined above, and to those imposed by certain human factors to be described in the next section, it may be said with confidence that the agricultural potential of the districts to be served by the Lynn railways, and therefore the revenue to be derived from the carriage of the produce, was enormous; it remained only for the railways to provide every possible facility needed. In particular was this true of the Fenlands. Here, farming appeared more prosperous every year and continued to promise even further expansion.<sup>1</sup> By 1845 some 680,000 acres were under cultivation,<sup>2</sup> and a further extensive area was utilised as pasture.<sup>3</sup> The whole was "rich in the products of farm and dairy"<sup>4</sup>; the best farming methods were the common rule, and general drainage had "no insurmountable obstacle to contend with"<sup>5</sup>. Adequate drainage, reflected in an improved climate and the decline of ague, had caused a sharp rise in land values; land once worth £7 per acre was, in 1845, fetching £45, and £40 was being given for that which had once changed hands for a barrel of beer;<sup>6</sup> other examples could be

<sup>1</sup> W. White; Eastern England from the Thames to the Humber, 2 Vols., London 1865, Vol.1, p.257.

<sup>2</sup> Miller & Skertchley, op.cit. p.178.

<sup>3</sup> Caird, op.cit. p.178.

<sup>4</sup> W. White, op.cit. p.240.

<sup>5</sup> Caird, op.cit. p.179.

<sup>6</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.18.



multiplied indefinitely, as that of one property valued at £5 in 1800 now being worth between £70 and £80<sup>1</sup> - all this despite heavy rentals and high mortgages. Improved methods had gone hand in hand with improved soil and were producing an "abundant luxuriance"<sup>2</sup> of all kinds of crops. In the Norfolk Fens six quarters of wheat per acre and ten of barley were normal, as opposed to yields of three and four respectively in other parts of the county<sup>3</sup>. But, overall the Fenland wheat yield averaged between seven and eight quarters per acre, while that of Chatteris Fen was described as being quite "extraordinary" at some twelve quarters per acre<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the black soil was so rich that cropping was possible year after year<sup>5</sup>. Only on the coast was there a partial exception to an otherwise completely favourable picture, for there the soil was a silty loam, too stiff for greenstuffs and susceptible to damage by horses - in this area, where drainage was in any way inadequate, money was liable to be lost<sup>6</sup>. For the rest, the 'islands' of Southery, Hilgay, Shrub Hill, Feltwell and Ely - the latter with an 1841 population of 61,600 - were utilised principally for the raising of sheep and cattle for the London markets; although the natural railhead for much of this livestock and of the produce in general would be Ely, the L & E could still reasonably expect a substantial share on both its mainline and the Wisbech branch.

Direct competition from the Ouse and marginal rivalry from the Norwich - Ely line had to be overcome by the L & E in cornering Fenland produce, but the L & D had a rather easier task, having to ensure only that the produce of

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<sup>1</sup> Walker & Craddock, op.cit. p.18.

<sup>2</sup> Darby, op.cit. p.209, quoting from Clarke's 'Fen Sketches', 1852, pp.244-5.

<sup>3</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.34.

<sup>4</sup> Proceedings of the Royal Agricultural Society Vol.VIII 1847, p.105, J.A.Clarke 'On the Great Level of the Fens'.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Caird, op.cit. p.183.

central Norfolk was made to flow towards Lynn rather than Norwich; in this connection the support given to the formation of the company by the farmers of the area was not without significance. Norfolk was, in agricultural terms, an immensely rich county. Over the whole there were some 1,186,393 assessable acres, with an assessed rental (1843) of £1,928,422 and a gross estimated rental of £1,957,822. Excluding the four boroughs the latter figures still stood at £1,778,422 and £1,787,822 respectively<sup>1</sup>. Some 200,000 acres of open fields and commons had been enclosed since 1771, and much of the remaining uncultivated land had been improved of recent years by plantations. The whole county was "celebrated for the diversity and high culture of its soil"<sup>2</sup>; Caird, in a rather superficial view, might consider that the best and the worst in farming were to be seen there<sup>3</sup>, but the truth was that Norfolk farmers cared little for outward appearances, and that hedges and ditches tended to be neglected in as much as they wasted time and land<sup>4</sup>. "Good drilling and good ploughing (were) the 'rules' of the county", and in "the permanent improvement of the soil" the Norfolk farmer was surpassed by none<sup>5</sup>. Claying and marling were regular features of the culture, and artificial manures were applied to virtually every crop<sup>6</sup>. In the immediate area of the L & D, where the soil had been enriched "beyond belief"<sup>7</sup>, a four or five course rotation was followed and yields were constantly on the increase. Between 1822 and 1845 Hudson of Castleacre had doubled his yield, and the results of Mr. Overman of Weasenham were hardly less striking<sup>8</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.13.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit. p.163.

<sup>4</sup> Barugh Almack, Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> L.M.Springall; Labouring Life in Norfolk Villages 1834 - 1914, London, 1936, p.11.

<sup>8</sup> Barugh Almack.

	<u>Wheat</u>	<u>Oats</u>	<u>Barley</u>
7 years to 1839	25	54	31 Bushels per acre
7 " " 1846	29	54	47 " " "
2 " " 1848	36	68	45 " " "
			(3 years to 1849)

From every side the districts through which the L & D was to pass were highly acclaimed. The area near Lynn was "highly cultivated"<sup>1</sup>, the Nar Valley comprised excellent meadows and pasture, West Bilney, East Winch, Narborough and Pentney were "hard to drain, but good light soil", Castleacre and Rougham were "rich and prolific"<sup>2</sup>, the chalk lands between Swaffham and Holkham improved beyond all other districts<sup>3</sup>, and Dereham the "centre of one of the most highly cultivated districts in the kingdom"<sup>4</sup>. As Bacon described the overall situation it could be reckoned that the average yield per acre was something between 12 and 18 tons per annum on light soils, and as much as 24 on heavier land<sup>5</sup>; these were statistics of most immediate interest to the Lynn & Dereham company. In addition, livestock farming was everywhere developing, an "enormous increase" being recorded in cattle, sheep and pigs.<sup>6</sup> In fact both the quantity and quality of such had risen, and this at a time when the staple crops were proving more certain, and more productive, than ever before.

#### E. The Agricultural Situation: The Human Element

The great limitation on the revenue possibilities of the various agricultural activities outlined above was that, livestock apart, they represented traffic that would be essentially seasonal in character; the carriage of clay, fertilisers and manures was likewise restricted to certain

<sup>1</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845, p.505.      <sup>2</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.16.

<sup>3</sup> Caird, op.cit. pp.162-3.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 20th August 1845; report on the first ordinary meeting of the L & E shareholders, directors' report.

<sup>5</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.112.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.111.

periods of the year. However, the 140,000 or so people resident on the lands involved<sup>1</sup> represented a potentially vast consumer market for articles that would have to be conveyed from without; in particular these were coals, building materials, manufactured goods and groceries. Likewise, this extensive population seemingly offered the possibility of more than satisfactory passenger revenues, even if individuals could be persuaded to do no more than make fairly regular journeys into one or other of the terminal towns. All promised well, but such anticipations of revenue took into account neither the imagined poverty of the upper classes nor the very real and crushing hardship of the great bulk of the labouring population. Such factors could not but be reflected in railway receipts in that the former tended to restrict their expenditure on capital equipment, building projects and so on, and in that the latter could muster a purchasing power of only negligible proportions.

For a proper understanding of the situation it is important to identify the causes behind this attitude of mind which led the upper crust of the community to bewail its poverty, and which partially explains its already noted reluctance to make a permanent investment in the Lynn railways. As the constant background in the 1840's was, of course, the depressed state of the corn market, a subject thoroughly discussed in explaining both the conception of the railways and the growth of a mixed farming economy within the areas under consideration. Against this, each section of the farming community had its own particular problems. The key to the overall situation was the attitude of the tenant farmers of whom, in 1845, 7,452 worked some

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<sup>1</sup> The figure given by the E.A.R. chairman, Bruce, in 1860 was 95,490 in terms of the 1851 Census (Railway Times, 11th August 1860, pp. 892-6; meeting of the 9th August, 1860). If the lines had been built in full the figure would have been nearly 140,000. The basis of the computation appears to be those living within 3 miles of the line.

20% of Norfolk's arable land;<sup>1</sup> the proportion of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Fenland worked in this way was probably much the same, or perhaps a little higher. In both areas the constant complaint was of the level of the rentals. Those of Norfolk averaged, in 1844, some 21/- per acre, but on the former marshlands were 30/-, on some particularly good arable 50/-, and on the best pasture as much as 60/-.<sup>2</sup> By 1850 the position had slightly worsened. Fenland rentals remained virtually unchanged at between 27/- and 40/- per acre,<sup>3</sup> but the average Norfolk figure had risen to 25/6, a 120% increase on the 11/6 of 1770<sup>4</sup>: however, over the same span of 80 years productivity had increased only 33%, or from 24 to 32 bushells average yield per acre.<sup>5</sup> These figures may indeed represent sweeping generalisations and be divorced from the actual reality of the soil, but they do at least provide a framework for the undoubted bitterness which existed between landlord and tenant at the time.

In one important particular this bitterness was not without sound foundation. The rent levels of the period had been attained during the profitable days of the Napoleonic Wars when the corn prices obtaining had excused almost any demand. The return of peacetime conditions had found the landowning community, now joined by many townsfolk not in direct touch with the pulse of the countryside, firmly wedded and committed to a scale of household establishments, payment of annuities<sup>6</sup> and other aspects of a high standard of living quite unjustified by the post-Napoleonic slump in prices. It neither could nor would contract its requirements, and consequently

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<sup>1</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.133.

<sup>3</sup> Caird, op.cit. p.182.  
from Young.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.474.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.39.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.474. The 1770 figure was derived

<sup>6</sup> L.M.Springall, op.cit. p.21.

rentals remained high, although some reduction could not be avoided, despite the abolition of Income and Property Tax in 1816 and the nominal protection afforded by the 1815 Corn Law. Soon, the landowners developed their own grumbles, of the Poor Rates, of tithe exactions and of the closeness of their tenants. The smaller landowner farming in his own right (some 60% of Norfolk land was freehold, and in 1844 there were 5,229 occupiers employing labour, 2,710 not doing so)<sup>1</sup> shared the first two of these burdens while coping with fluctuating but generally falling corn prices, the onset of which decline causing the failure of many small freemen who had to this time survived the costs and problems of enclosure. Whatever the reality of the figures, however, the facts were that landowner and tenant alike were finding matters not so easy as before, and the latter could only see that his rental in no way reflected the current market situation.

In 1844 Bacon wrote that:<sup>2</sup>

"(the rentals)..are estimated to be fully equal to the highest and palmiest days of agriculture and nothing but a period of alarming distress, in the struggle through which numbers will be swept off, will cause any reduction."

In 1851 Caird visited Huntingdonshire and found:<sup>3</sup>

"Near Godmanchester and the neighbourhood of Huntingdon...the farmers, though not complaining quite so loudly as those of Cambridgeshire, declare their inability to go on with the present rents and prices. One third of them, it is said, must give up their land if prices do not improve; and the rest, who feel that their only remedy, supposing low prices to continue, is in increased production, declare that they will not lay out their capital unless the landlords reduce their rents 25%."

There remains, however, much evidence to demonstrate that all this was much more an attitude of mind than a reflection of actual hardship. Most suggestive of this is an incident recounted by Caird when describing his

<sup>1</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p133.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p40.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit. p572.

visit to the Fenlands:<sup>1</sup>

"No reduction of rent of any importance has yet taken place; and in one instance where a representation by a body of tenants was made to the landlord on the subject the only reply they received was a notice to quit to the man whose name stood next on the list."

Here is an indication of an actual waiting list for the lands which the tenants in possession claimed they could not farm without some relief; in the same way it is to be noted that whereas Bacon, writing in 1844, found 8 and 12 year leases to be the most common in Norfolk with a steady tendency towards the lengthier periods,<sup>2</sup> Caird, in 1850, recorded that it was the 12 and 21 year agreements which had then become the most frequent.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it cannot be overlooked that the development of livestock farming and the intense improvement of the soil were both matters requiring considerable capital expenditure. Caird wrote:<sup>4</sup>

"...the systematic management and improved cultivation which have been produced by the capital and enterprise of West Norfolk are not surpassed in any district in the kingdom."

In similar vein Bacon specified the skill and capital of the tenantry as being amongst the principal factors explaining the tremendous progress made in Norfolk farming.<sup>5</sup> It is also to be remembered that the landed interests of west Norfolk had had the capital necessary to act as a bait when the Lynn railways first came before the public.

On balance the evidence quite clearly indicates that matters were in no way as bad as they were made to seem. It suggests more a farming community which had been rendered cautious and depressed in that large scale capital expenditure had so far failed to produce quite the returns expected. Undoubtedly a few, probably the smaller men, were feeling a real pinch, but

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit. p.182.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit. p.165.

<sup>5</sup> Op.cit. p.410.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit. p.35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.pp.162-3.

the rest had little cause for fear. After all, behind all the constant talk of figures lay the solid realities of soils that were amongst the best in the kingdom, an equable climate and a more than plentiful supply of cheap labour, the average cost of which in west Norfolk, for example, was no more than 26/7 per acre per annum<sup>1</sup>, and was a factor which did much to offset the effect of high rentals.

This low level of labour costs, to be attributed only partly to the widespread employment of women and children in the fields, reflected both the "high and artificial state of the upper and middle classes and the deprivation of the lower"<sup>2</sup>. The condition of the former classes has been sketched, that of the latter may be briefly described as poverty stricken, demoralised and depraved; the ideal relationship between the two, in which the latter would be "aided by their care and kindness, guided by the example, benefited by their chance contact with persons of birth, education and station" would be indirectly civilised<sup>3</sup>, was little in evidence. In the ill-spelt words of Fred Roof, "the worken classes were little better than slaves, they were worked from there Cradles to there Graves"<sup>4</sup>, and "never thought of any thing else but what there bed and there work and there food could give them"<sup>5</sup>. Fundamentally of course it was a matter of wages. These varied from place to place, but in the Norfolk of 1850 averaged no more than 8/6 per week, a rise of only 6d.

<sup>1</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.145.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.126.

<sup>3</sup> Accounts & Papers 1843 (510) xii.I; Report of the Special Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, p.240.

<sup>4</sup> F.Roof (edited Liliias Rider Haggard); I Walked by Night, Being the Life and History of the king of the Norfolk poachers, London & Redhill 1935, p.92.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.30.

Note on Fred Roof, the poacher.

Born in Pentney about 1860 his evidence of conditions in the 1840's was based principally on the memories of his grandparents; alone this would be suspect, but what he says bears out the contentions of Bacon and others and his comments on the 1880 and '90's, compared with reports of the '40's, show that conditions had little changed over 40 years.



since 1770 (the national average was <sup>144</sup>9/7, an increase of 2/4 since the latter date<sup>1</sup>); in 1850 the farmers were talking of a possible reduction to only 7/-. To this must be added the average £5/6/1<sup>3</sup>d.<sup>2</sup> that a strong and willing man might earn at harvest, but this was likely to be soon swallowed by accumulated needs and simple pleasures. In the Fens the average wage was generally between 9/- and 10/- per week<sup>3</sup>, but on the south side of Huntingdonshire the actual rate was as low as 7/-<sup>4</sup>. The situation was grossly aggravated by the sharp rises in cottage rentals since 1770, increases not matched by proportionate gains in wages, either in actual terms or those of purchasing power. Cottage rentals varied from 60/- per annum to as much as 100/- over the area<sup>5</sup> of the three railways, and these figures in general for small, overcrowded, poorly maintained two roomed dwellings where "children were herded like pigs in a sty..the thicker they slept the warmer they were, and that was a lot of trouble with vermin, and not the evell eye"<sup>6</sup>. Even as late as 1865 White felt compelled to remark "East Anglia is not yet by any means a model district as regards rustic dwellings"<sup>7</sup>. It was not as if income was assured. 'Piece rates' were common, and thus much depended on age and ability; in many parts single men were paid less than married men, and all, especially the day labourers who could never be absolutely sure of employment, were liable to be turned off in bad weather. Virtually throughout the area wages needed some form of supplementation<sup>8</sup> from the Poor Rates.

Women and children, those who did not find employment in the big houses, or in the case of the former as dressmakers, joined the men in the fields for ten or more hours a day.<sup>9</sup> The women, mostly to be crippled with rheumatism

1 Caird, op.cit. p.474.

4 Ibid. p.175.

7 Op.cit. p.221.

9 Accounts & Papers 1843 (510) xii.I, p.240.

2 Bacon, op.cit. p.145.

5 Ibid.

8 Springall, op.cit. p.21.

3 Caird, op.cit.p.467.

6 Roof, op.cit.p.21.

by the age of 50<sup>1</sup>, fared differently in different parts of Norfolk, although everywhere wages varied with the task and the season; they could earn, for example, 10d to 1/- per day at Snarehill, 7d. to 8d. at Swaffham, one third of the man's rate at Stratton - generally they could make 8d. to 10d. per day when threshing, and 1/- to 1/2 during the harvest season.<sup>2</sup> Children joined their elders for 3d. to 6d. per day<sup>3</sup> at an age of ten or eleven if not before,<sup>4</sup> this being at the expense of their education and the result of a pressing sense of urgency on the part of their parents, an urgency which excluded the consideration that the wages to be earned would barely cover the cost of the clothing that would be ruined. It is indeed surprising that, thanks to the work of the two great education societies, so many Norfolk and Fenland children were able to read and write to some small extent, but in the eyes of many of the gentry even this was going too far as it was teaching the young to be discontented with their station in life.<sup>5</sup> But in this the last word is best left to Roof:<sup>6</sup>

"You will hear many an old man say he went to work at seven year old, and did not know a letter in the book. There was good reason for that. If they had lerned any thing at school they went to work in them days so young that they never practized reading or riting, and so forgot all that they had lerned. Wen they were done with the day they were only too ready to eat there megre tea and get them to bed, haven been on the farm from six in the morning till six at night. There were no limited hours for youngsters then, the men did not favour them, there was the word and the blow - and mostly the blow came first. All the lerning they got was starved and worked out of them."

A measure of the poverty of the labouring classes was to be found in the staple diet of most. With bread at 1½d. per loaf, meat 5d. per pound and butter a shilling a pound,<sup>7</sup> this was of the simplest nature and based on

<sup>1</sup> Accounts & Papers 1843, (510) xii.I, p.216.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.218.

<sup>6</sup> Roof, op.cit. p.25.

<sup>7</sup> Caird, op.cit. p.476.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

weak tea, potatoes, cheese and bread; by and large meat was a rarity and even in the better off households never appeared more than once or twice a week however careful the household management.<sup>1</sup> At places such as Carbrooke meat was an impossibility and the diet was almost exclusively of potatoes, bread and tea; at Tuttington it was bread and potatoes only.<sup>2</sup> For nearly all meat was a harvest luxury or the result of an individual farmer's generosity in allowing a group of labourers to buy a pig from him. Again to quote Roof,<sup>3</sup> "scors of famleys were brought up on potatos, turnips and bread, with what was called Pork Lard and Treackle, with a change of herring".

Other measures of poverty and degradation were not lacking. Such were seen in the prevalence of poaching, in the fact that between 1836 and 1843 Swaffham Gaol housed no less than 2,654 prisoners,<sup>4</sup> and above all in the growth and results of the infamous gang system originated at Castleacre (within the immediate L & D zone). Here, gangmasters wielded unlimited powers, even to the extent of determining the shops at which their employees would spend their miserable wages; indeed, often it was the gangmasters themselves who owned or had part interest in the shops in question. Under the system gangs of men, women and children were organised to work in fields often miles away from their villages. The day's labour was divided into quarters, each paid at the rate of 2d. Unfinished work or termination through adverse weather meant no pay at all for a quarter although the gangmaster received his full contract price from the farmer, and the overseers, employed by the masters, received their 12/- to 15/- per week.<sup>5</sup> This represented sweated labour at its very worst, and was only made possible by the extent of the prevailing poverty,

<sup>1</sup> Accounts & Papers 1843 (510) xii.I, p.221.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit. p.92.

<sup>5</sup> Accounts & Papers 1843 (510) xii.I, p.221ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.241.

<sup>4</sup> Bacon, op.cit. p.155.

and, in the case of Castleacre, by the fact that the village remained open amidst an extensive area of enclosures; the drifters and the dispossessed found refuge in such a place but thereby rendered themselves an easy prey to the unscrupulous. The nature of the mixed gangs, and such factors as rough sleeping conditions in barn or on haystack, all sexes and ages together, stimulated gross immorality and further confirmed the lower classes in depravity and demoralisation.

The side effects of the gang system were equally vicious. Neighbouring landowners, knowing that cheap labour would be provided by the remaining overcrowded open villages, allowed their own cottages to fall into disrepair,<sup>1</sup> and refused to build new ones; thus, cottagers were driven away, and the Poor Rates reflected, or so it was hoped, the advantage that had been gained. It might also be mentioned at this point that an equally short sighted method of obtaining the same end, reduced Poor Rates, was to divide the surplus labour of a parish between the farmers according to the size of their individual farms; this merely prevented good farmers from cutting their costs and discouraged maximum effort on the part of the workers.<sup>2</sup>

To round off this dismal story should be mentioned the ease of obtaining cheap and potent beers, an obvious means of escapism for the depressed. There was hardly a village without its beerhouses (in addition to the normal inns); an act of 1830, designed to stimulate domestic barley consumption, had allowed any householder to open such an establishment on the payment of two pounds and the presentation of three other householders as sureties; in its main purpose the act was an unmitigated success, and an 1834 act to check the less desirable

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<sup>1</sup> Accounts & Papers 1843 (510) xii.I, p.221ff.

<sup>2</sup> Caird, op.cit. p.515.

results remained a dead letter.<sup>1</sup> <sup>148</sup> These less desirable results were, of course, incitement to drunken behaviour, petty crime and immorality, and a direct discouragement of whatever thrift was possible to the poverty stricken. Nothing is perhaps more indicative of the mental attitude of the Norfolk labourers of the time than the manner in which they were accustomed to settle their arguments; contestants had their legs tied to a table and then fought until one was beaten, or simply they kicked at each other's legs until one fell to the ground.<sup>2</sup>

There were few features to alleviate the general depression. A number of landlords conscientiously undertook their obligations under enclosure of maintaining their cottages and exercising a general supervision over the welfare of their tenants, but this does not seem to have been the general rule. The usual practice of such landlords was to lease or otherwise make over small allotments, usually of wasteland, to their labourers who then could grow what they liked in their own time. This was undoubtedly "the most beneficial system that can be found for the poor"<sup>3</sup>, but one that was restricted in its potential application by both lack of suitable land and the demands already made on the time of the labourer. For the vast majority either the actuality or the demoralising fear of the fate that befell Roof's father was the pressing reality. The elder Roof "worked forty year on one farm as a Labourer, and never got any higher", this for a "mere pittance" of 9/- per week; "no doubt he was a good man, but good as he was wen he could work no more he was not wanted any more"; "there was no Old Age Pension then, so the Parish I think alowed him 2/6 a week, and poor mother had to go to work in the fields. Did the parson help them - no he told them to be contented

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<sup>1</sup> Springall, op.cit. p.23.

<sup>2</sup> Roof, op.cit. p.10.

<sup>3</sup> Accounts & Papers (510) xii.I, p.220.

with there lot, and make the most of what they had got". Finally he finished in a pauper's grave.<sup>1</sup>

Escape from the general misery was virtually impossible. Emigration was no answer because it was a costly affair; Roof's uncle, a shepherd of Westacre, was transported for sheep stealing in his efforts to raise the money to take him to America.<sup>2</sup> Between 1835 and '37 3,300 had indeed left the county (mostly for Canada),<sup>3</sup> but the 1841 Census Report, in a preface dated August, 1843,<sup>4</sup> shows that between the 31st December, 1840 and the 10th August, 1843 only 117 had left. By 1845 a single ship of 400 tons, making one journey per annum, sufficed to carry the emigrants of Norfolk and many other places to Quebec.<sup>5</sup> Fear of unemployment, the distance of the area from industrial centres, and above all the dread of losing Settlement (since 1834 principally a matter of birth and parentage) bound the Norfolk and Fenland labourers to their misery amidst unchanging poverty and a steadily increasing population which served to both aggravate and perpetuate the existing situation. It was to be regretted that the Poor Law authorities had not seen fit to continue their initial efforts to transfer suitable families to Lancashire and Yorkshire where agents were maintained to advise on vacancies in the mills. This scheme had been stimulated by the demand for child labour created by the minimum age and maximum hours clauses of the 1833 Factory Act, and had involved families with children of permitted working age being given free transport and £3 to £5 to reach the mills, where a three year contract was guaranteed to the father, but the completion of the new workhouses by 1839 and a series of good harvests had caused it to lapse.<sup>6</sup> Equally regrettable was the failure of the

<sup>1</sup> Roof, op.cit. p.4.

<sup>3</sup> White's Norfolk Directory 1845.

<sup>5</sup> See annual notice in the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, e.g. 9th March, 1844.

<sup>6</sup> Springall, op.cit. p.30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.8.

<sup>4</sup> p.138.

Norfolk and Fenland Unions to copy immediately the example of Docking, within their number, in extending Settlement to all its parishes, so promoting greater mobility of labour, fuller employment and lower Poor Rates; some years were to pass before this practice was adopted on a large scale.

Such a population as that which has been described could be expected to provide labour for the railways but little else. Its capacity for travel was inhibited by both its poverty and its deeply ingrained parochialism, as well as by the fact that hitherto travel had been completely outside their mental horizons. Roof never saw his father's parents as they lived "many miles away" at Rougham<sup>1</sup>; but Rougham was under ten miles away from Pentney where he himself lived. Even in the 1860's and '70's "some of the young men...were contented enough if they could go to a fair once a year, or Lynn Mart"<sup>2</sup>. The capacity of the labouring classes for buying such things as coal will require no further comment. It now remains to examine what the three companies made of the situation outlined in this section when they came to prepare their estimates of cost and revenue.

### Section 3: The Companies' Estimates: The Revenue<sup>3</sup>

It will be seen in this section how superficial observation and a complete lack of understanding of railway economy characterised the calculations of Williams and his fellow promoters; the major changes made in the content of the estimates will be seen to further illustrate the fundamental unreality of their nature. Yet, it was largely on the strength of these that Parliament sanctioned the three lines, seeing only an area of bustling trade,

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit. p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit. p.30.

<sup>3</sup> The related question of construction estimates is reserved for a separate section and discussed in the context of the actual bills.

great agricultural potential and dense population inadequately equipped with transport facilities.

The only detailed revenue estimate published was that of the Lynn & Ely company. This appeared in the prospectus to represent "existing traffic" and to show the return that such could be expected to yield on the £200,000 then sought. It is worthy of reproduction in full:

	£.	s.	d.
Passengers by coach and other public conveyance at 2d. per mile	6,985	6	8
Local passengers by gigs etc. etc.	<u>2,794</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>8</u>
Total of existing passenger traffic	9,779	9	4
Parcels by coach	1,164	4	5
Horse and carriages	436	11	8
Conveyance of mails	702	12	6
<u>Cattle etc.</u>			
Beasts: 350 per week for 21 weeks at 1d. per mile	796	5	0
Sheep : 2,500 per week for 52 weeks at $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per mile	3,520	16	0
Carcases, pigs and poultry	616	14	0
Manufactured goods, groceries and general shop goods	2,991	10	4
Corn, malt, wool & other general merchandise <u>except coal</u>	<u>3,793</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>6</u>
Total of existing traffic	23,801	17	9
Add 100% on passengers	<u>9,779</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>
	33,581	7	1
Deduct 40% on annual working expenses	<u>13,432</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>8</u>
Net annual profit	<u>20,148</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>5</u>

These figures were given a most impressive pedigree.<sup>1</sup> They were the work of Mr. Pares, the traffic expert, and a committee of fifteen local tradesmen, merchants and agriculturalists, all of whom were described as being most anxious for the truth. Recourse had been had to expert opinion - e.g.

<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 27th April, 1844; report on the County Meeting held in Lynn on the 23rd April.



that of Hudson of Castleacre, Burgess and Porter on all agricultural matters - and a special indebtedness to innkeepers was acknowledged. All items had been unanimously agreed, the lowest common estimate having been adopted in all cases, but, even so, despite the earlier warning of Robert Stephenson that the line could never pay (for which see chapter 1), the committee "were unanimously of the opinion that the amount is very much underrated"<sup>1</sup>. Certain deliberate exclusions were cited to give substance to this attitude of moderation, adopted, so Folkes claimed, to discourage the London speculator. The prime example was that of coal, omitted on the grounds that the traffic was variable, and was in any case to be wrested from water competition; also excluded was traffic originating from the west of the Ouse as this would eventually fall to one of the lines already under consideration in that area. Moreover, Rastrick and others declared that in view of the flat terrain, the absence of major works and the cheapness of fuel in Lynn, the estimate of 40% for working expenses was extremely liberal, and most unlikely to be approached in actual practice.

At the public meeting of the 23rd April Williams quoted Pares as saying that the likely passenger increase would be one of 400% rather than the 100% actually shown (the amount normally allowed by Parliamentary committees). However, as the rise had been calculated in terms of second class fares (2d. per mile) whereas the principal increase must inevitably derive from third class traffic (1d. per mile) the table did in fact conceal something like a 170% increase in terms of actual passengers if not in receipts. Throughout the table the tacit assumption that all traffic, private and public, would transfer to the railway is to be noted, and, in view of the

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<sup>1</sup> Prospectus.

factors enumerated in the previous section, the difficulty of reconciling the figures with the facts will be appreciated.

Further discussion of these elaborate calculations is unnecessary, as after serving their primary purpose of attracting capital to the line they were completely abandoned. With the inclusion of the Wisbech branch and the raising of the capital requirement to £300,000 an amended revenue estimate of £43,000 was compiled; this was in fact the one which came before Parliament.<sup>1</sup> This implied an expectation of £9,500 from the branch, or a return on capital of 7% after the deduction of working expenses. For the whole of the company's system the anticipated profit was now set at £25,800, that is £20,200 from the mainline and £5,600 from the branch. This meant a likely return of 8½% on £300,000. So far so good, but the startling factor was that now coals and slates had been included at a total value of £16,000, leaving £27,000 to be derived from passengers and other sources which on the original estimate, for the mainline alone, had been given a value of £33,581. Moreover, other internal changes became evident before the Commons' committee. Now it was to be 122,000 sheep per annum on the line at an average toll of 3d. per head (at first the company had said 2d.) giving a total expectation of only £1,680 compared with the £3,520 of the first reckoning. Some compensation was found in the carriage of beasts. The rate remained unchanged, but the 350 per week for 21 weeks had now become a weekly average of 170, an overall increase of 1,149 per annum. But even so, it all boiled down to the fact that to accommodate the coal traffic nearly all the individual estimates had, in this second version, to be substantially reduced.

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<sup>1</sup> Reports on the L & E bill before Committee I, 21st-24th April, 1845 from the first available issues of the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, Herapaths, the Railway Times and the Railway Record.

How can such changes be explained away? Honest miscalculation is of course a possibility in that objective and accurate assessment were beyond reach, but the evidence points to a very different conclusion, even when remembering that the amended figures were little more likely than the original to prove correct. Above all, it is too much of a coincidence that the profit remained at between 8 and 10%. Williams, intent on the Wisbech branch from the first but knowing that in the April of 1844 such would be opposed, and realising the weakness of the branch except as part of a trunk route, had in all probability included the mineral traffic in the first estimates but then raised other figures (which no one could verify) to cover the apparent exclusion of such. Parliament might well have been expected, despite the defects of its examination, to uncover this device, but meanwhile the Wisbech branch had been safely launched. Neither could any shareholder complain of the outcome. Initially promised a certain 5% return with possibilities of from 8 to 10% on the original mainline, he now had a positive promise of  $8\frac{1}{2}\%$  together with the knowledge that the Wisbech branch was necessary to the fulfilment of his original expectations. At best this was misrepresentation of the truth as Williams saw it, at worst it was pure deception. Either way it proved eminently successful, and, in the spirit of the times as reflected in the L & E share quotations of between 5 and 6 on £2/10 paid (June 1845), was condoned by those most immediately affected.

The E & H prospectus read:

"The promoters have considered it unnecessary at this late time of the year to incur the delay which must attend the obtaining of a detailed amount of traffic for, on looking to the sources from which traffic must inevitably be concentrated on the line,

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and to the facts that the line must, from its position, for ever remain free from competition, and that the estimate for its construction (including every expense) does not exceed £6,300 per mile it appears perfectly evident that the income of the proposed line must ensure to the subscribers an ample dividend. A calculation of traffic has, however, been prepared in the usual manner, and shows, after deducting £40 per cent for working expenses and maintenance (a most liberal allocation in this case), a return of £9 per cent on capital."

Ignoring the irony in the implied contrast between the "detailed amount of traffic" and the "calculation of traffic obtained in the usual way", it follows from the anticipated return of 9% on £270,000 that a revenue of something like £40,500 was expected (i.e. by taking 9% of £270,000 and making that equal 60% of the revenue). After contraction of the scheme to the Ely - Huntingdon section alone, the revised cost was fixed at £191,000 and the revenue at £23,000; thus, allowing for working expenses of 40%, the return on capital would be one of between 6 and 7%. However, during the committee hearing the question of the working expenses was closely scrutinised and the figure reduced to between 30 and 35% of revenue,<sup>1</sup> so improving the prospect for rates of dividend. All this, of course, involved no more than the manipulation of figures divorced from reality.

There were two fundamental objections to this revised estimate. Much was made of the fact that 50,000 people lived within three miles of the line, but it was not recognised that a full quarter of these lived in or near the two terminal towns and would have little use for the railway; moreover, Ely and Huntingdon were market towns in their own right and there was little apparent intercourse between them. Secondly, even if £12,000 be allowed as the revenue originating from the L & E line (comparison with the L & E

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<sup>1</sup> See the proceedings before Committee I; Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 26th April, 1845; Herapath and the Railway Record on the 10/17/24th May, 1845.

estimates shows this to be a most liberal allowance in that Ely would represent the junction of four lines with the Lynn line) it would still leave £11,000 to be derived from local sources. In view of the limitation suggested above, together with the facts that the Huntingdonshire labourer was even poorer than his Norfolk counterpart (for which see above) and that local traffic would be almost entirely agricultural and therefore seasonal in nature, this £11,000 assumes major proportions. It is also to be remembered that the halving of the project had robbed it both of its more valuable sections in terms of population etc. and of its value as a through route (at least until the Rugby & Huntingdon line should be built), but neither of these considerations were reflected in the revised figures. Finally, the Ely - Peterborough line and the Wisbech branch of the L & E itself would inevitably compete with the E & H for traffic to the midlands even assuming that an extension beyond Huntingdon became a reality, while the imminent construction of a northern trunk route through that latter town would to a large extent relieve the dependence of the entire area of the E & H line on Lynn Harbour. However, it was on the basis of the figures quoted, the fact that transport facilities in the area were "inadequate", and because the line was in itself complete and integral not depending on any future extension (sic)<sup>1</sup> that Parliament allowed the project to go through.

In the case of the Lynn & Dereham line no traffic estimates were made public until the 7th December 1844, a full six weeks after the publication of the revised prospectus during the third week in October. Prior to this the investor had had to satisfy himself with such comforting generalisations as that appertaining to double track "which on account of the extensive general

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<sup>1</sup> Report of Lord Palmerston from Committee I.

traffic expected to fall upon the line it has been thought advisable to provide"<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, it was not until the last days of October that Pares was commissioned to draw up the traffic estimates, a further indication of the haste that has already been observed as attending the promotion. Pares then took four weeks to prepare a set of singularly worthless figures, namely:<sup>2</sup>

Passengers	£21,882
Merchandise, coals, grain, line etc. now by land	<u>£14,311</u>
	<u>£36,193</u>

This total excluded the Nar traffic, "of which there is a very large quantity", as the Marriotts had flatly refused to divulge the extent of their river traffic; it will be recalled that they had even gone to the lengths of withdrawing all or some of their barges during the period of Pares' survey. The company chose to assess this unknown quantity at £5,000 per annum, a figure it claimed to be underrated.<sup>3</sup> The total anticipated revenue was thus fixed at £41,193, which sum, after the deduction of 40% in working expenses, left a profit of £27,715/16/- per annum, or a return of 7½% on capital. It was at this stage, however, that the company decided to confine its initial construction to single track, so reducing the capital sum to be called to £260,000 and thereby increasing the likely dividend to one of 9½%. If demands on the line developed to the extent anticipated so that at a later date double track was necessitated it was held that "the revenue from such traffic will provide an ample dividend on the additional cost".

<sup>1</sup> Prospectus.

<sup>2</sup> Railway Times, 14th December, 1844; letter of W. Williams which includes Pares' report and shows the commissioning date as late October and the date of submission as the 30th November.

<sup>3</sup> Railway Times, 14th December, 1844; letter of W. Williams from which all the factual matter of the paragraph is derived.

The Marriotts had little difficulty in tearing these figures to shreds. "Hope never told a more flattering tale than Mr. Pares" wrote 'Watchman',<sup>1</sup> but "who cares if the hard earned savings of thousands are sacrificed by any indiscretion so that their withers are unwrung?". According to 'Watchman' (who in all probability was one of the Marriott brothers)<sup>2</sup> the Nar traffic was overestimated a "mere 500%", and as for the passenger estimates the three daily coaches between Lynn and Dereham already loaded "miserably", and indeed, "it would take 30 of the present coaches averaging ten passengers each daily to carry his estimated number along the line, Sundays included". The Marriotts had already held their own census to substantiate these claims. Men were placed at Lynn, Swaffham and Dereham, "the places most favourable to the scheme", and credit was given for all farmers' gigs and market carts, for all existing passenger traffic and for one third of the Nar revenue.<sup>3</sup> Passengers were doubled and fares calculated at a higher rate than that of the Norwich & Yarmouth line (where fares were of necessity relatively low); working expenses were estimated at a much lower level than 40%, at a rate more in keeping with the experience of the Norwich & Yarmouth company. The results showed an annual profit of no more than £6,380, or a return of only £1/18/8 per cent. The L & D company responded by first producing Pares' figures, and secondly by casting doubt on the method of the Marriotts' survey: "we must content ourselves with expressing our surprise that they have been able to show any dividend at all, as, from what we heard of the manner in

<sup>1</sup> Railway Times, 18th January, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 25th January, 1845; 'A Friend to the Railways' claimed that the identity of 'Watchman' was obvious to all and that he had said that he would have "a slice from the loaf of every poor person in the neighbourhood" - this fits the Marriotts exactly.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 30th November, 1844, p.1417; a report of the Marriotts' census. It will be noted that this was a full week before the open publication of the L & D figures and it is to be assumed that prior notice of the latter had been given to company shareholders so provoking the Marriotts to publish their already prepared details.

which their traffic observations were taken, we had not expected so favourable a result"<sup>1</sup>. As related in the previous chapter, however, the Board of Trade found itself unable to decide between the rival estimates.

The outcome was inevitable. Pares' estimate was influenced by the undue haste of its composition and by the pressing fear of the Norwich promotions which had inspired it. The Marriotts faced great personal loss and to that extent were purely subjective in their attack, but they did succeed in underlining the chronic weakness of the company's case. That the latter was completely unrealistic there could be no reasonable doubt; the absence of any substantial traffic stream between Lynn and Norwich, the decline of Norwich textiles, the competition to be anticipated from that city through the Wymondham - Dereham line, and the rivalry to be encountered from the Ely - Norwich line were all factors that had been given insufficient weight. Thus, when the Marriotts had been effectively silenced and the bill had come before Committee K the company had been obliged to recast completely its estimates. Pares was again responsible, but this time had settled on a total revenue of only £32,889, a figure £3,304 down on the original even before the Nar traffic had been added. However, as the company had evinced its willingness to drop the Fakenham branch and confine itself to single track, so reducing capital requirements to £270,000, and as working expenses had now been fixed at an estimated 35% of revenue, a return of 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ % from an annual profit of £21,337 was deemed assured.<sup>2</sup> As there could be no question as to the public utility of the line (even though, with one exception, all the witnesses called were Lynn men) in an area devoid of cheap and reasonable

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<sup>1</sup> Railway Times, 7th December, 1844, p.1448; letter from the L & D solicitors, Messrs. Rooper, Ingram & Birch.

<sup>2</sup> Herapaths, 14th June, 1845 and the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald of the same date.



transport facilities, and as the revised estimates were seemingly based more securely in fact than the first set had been, the bill was destined to pass without serious challenge.

#### Section 4: The Construction Estimates

The question of the construction estimates may be briefly dismissed. Calculated to the smallest detail, related to current prices, and backed by convincing evidence of the lack of engineering difficulties, they were accepted virtually without question, although, as will be seen in the next section, Parliament forced on the companies additional expenditure which was not balanced by any authorised increase of capital. The L & E estimate was one of £248,826 with a further £51,174 for land to construct and put into running order 37 miles 56 chains of railway (mainline, Wisbech and harbour branches and a short extension beyond Ely); this excluded only the cost of the two cottages that would have to be taken. This low estimate of only £6,700 per mile was rendered feasible by the flat terrain, the absence of tunnels and of gradients of any severity, and by the confidence of the engineers that the line would in no way interfere with either drainage or navigation; in this last respect Rastrick had actually been over the route with Brunel, the Bedford Level engineer. The only point left really vague was whether or not these estimates included the cost of double track throughout, Durrant, a company surveyor, expressing the willingness of the company to lay such if the Board of Trade desired it.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the fact of this the most striking feature was that the £300,000 authorised left little or no room for either mistake or manoeuvre. Naturally the L & E, like all companies of the time, was permitted to borrow on mortgage or loan a sum

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<sup>1</sup> Proceedings before Committee I, derived from the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald and the various national railway journals, the 24th April on.

equal to one third of the authorised capital after 50% of such had been actually paid in, but it was never an auspicious start to effect completion already saddled with heavy interest charges, for so doing upset the calculations of return on capital from the outset. Seven years were allowed for completion, although the company anticipated that the first trains would be running within eight or nine months of the act.

The cost of the 25 miles of the E & H line was accepted as being £194,096; no major works, no gradient of more than one of 1 in 200, nor curve with a radius less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile were necessary.<sup>1</sup> To cover this a capital of £194,800 was authorised and seven years were allowed for completion.

The Lynn & Dereham estimate was one of £239,857 plus £30,142 for the 200 acres of land required,<sup>2</sup> so giving an average of just under £10,000 for each of the  $26\frac{3}{4}$  miles authorised (27 if the northern alternative at Dereham had been taken); these amended figures are to be compared with the original capital sought of £330,000 which would have provided double track (the foundations for which were still to be laid) and the branch to Fakenham. The engineering circumstances of the line were shown to be particularly favourable. The section as far as Swaffham would be almost dead level, and from thence the line would be carried over easy gradients, none being more severe than one of 1 in a 100 over a distance of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles, so that recourse to assistant engines would be unnecessary. No curve would have a radius of less than 20 chains.<sup>3</sup> On such evidence the estimate of construction cost was accepted and a capital of £270,000 sanctioned. Five years

<sup>1</sup> Palmerston's Report to the Commons, Railway Record, 31st May, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 14th June, 1845.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

were allowed for completion; this was in Committee K and is to be compared with the seven years granted to the other two companies in Committee I.

Thus, Parliament sanctioned the construction of some 85 miles of railway on an authorised capital of £764,400, an expected average of £9,000 per mile. Two final comments ought to be made. The difference between the aggregate capital authorised and the aggregate estimates was in itself insufficient to cover the costs of obtaining the acts; this was a serious matter of which more must be said in a later chapter. Secondly, the companies would have to be a great deal more fortunate than, for example, the Great Western Railway which had paid £6,300 per mile for land alone<sup>1</sup>, or than the Eastern Counties which was even then (1844 and '45) expending some £13,039 per mile in building from Bishops Stortford (on the Northern & Eastern) to Brandon.<sup>2</sup> In fact the Lynn lines were to cost something like £20,000 per mile to construct, a striking comment on the fallacy of the figures discussed above. In this Parliament cannot be entirely excused for it had, if it had cared to recognise them, several precedents on which to draw - the South Western had spent some £18,500 per mile on works and stations alone, the Great Western £40,000 per mile,<sup>3</sup> and almost without exception the lines of 1836 had substantially exceeded estimated cost.

#### Section 5: The Passage of the Bills and Further Seeds of Bankruptcy

A brief study of the actual passage of the three bills, apart from its intrinsic interest, serves three main purposes. It confirms, by displaying the absence of other factors, the prime importance of the estimates discussed above, and then illustrates how these very estimates were flouted in that the

<sup>1</sup> Annual Register 1844, pp.70-1.

<sup>2</sup> Lewin, op.cit. (quoting from Grote), p.85.

<sup>3</sup> Annual Register 1844, pp.70-1.

companies were committed both by themselves and by Parliament to expenditure far in excess of anticipation; finally it serves to bind together the various strands of which this chapter has so far been composed.

The details of passage and the various points of procedural interest which arose may be conveniently reduced to tabular form:

	<u>The L &amp; E</u>	<u>The E &amp; H</u>	<u>The L &amp; D</u>
<u>Pre-Parliamentary Stages</u>			
Prospectus	20.4.1844	14.9.1844	19.10.1844 (final form)
Petition to the Board of Trade	w.e. 1.2.1845	w.e. 2.11.1844	19.12.1844
<u>House of Commons (1845)</u>			
Standing Orders' Committees	23th Feb. (Sub-com.4)	w.e.12th April	4th April (Sub-com.2)
First Reading	4th March	7th April	7th April
Second Reading	10th March	24th April	21st April
Committee Stage	21st-24th April Group I	23rd April & w.e.10th May Group I	9th June Group K
Third Reading	30th May	30th May	23rd June
<u>House of Lords</u>			
First Reading	6th June	6th June	23rd June
Second Reading	12th June	13th June	1st July
Committee Stage	17th June	19/21st June	Unopposed
Third Reading	24th June	24th June	11th July
<u>Royal Assent</u>	30th June	30th June	21st July
	<u>8 &amp; 9 Vic.c.lv</u>	<u>8 &amp; 9 Vic.c.xlvii</u>	<u>8 &amp; 9 Vic.c.cxxvi</u>

N.B. 1. Although the preamble to the L & E bill was proved on the 24th April the bill was in fact recommitted for the purpose of fixing maximum tolls.

- N.B. 2. The E & H bill came before the Commons' committee twice as on the first occasion the second reading had still to take place. The committee agreed to proceed, however, on the submission of Austin that the E & H was not a new line but rather the continuation of a former one: the second meeting was thus pro forma to ratify the decision reached on the first occasion.
3. Austin, Smith, Baggerley and Sergeant Wrangham represented the L & E; Austin, Birch and Clarke the E & H; Talbot Q.C. the L & D.

Sources: Hansard and the national railway journals.

The chief incidents in the progress of the L & E bill arose from the claims for compensation put forward by the Eau Brink, the South Level and Midland Level Drainage Commissioners (claiming locus standi as landowners).<sup>1</sup> Their case was simply that without the river tolls they would be unable to maintain essential drainage works, except by recourse to a crippling Drainage Tax of 9/- to 10/- per acre on their lands; if their works did fail the railway itself would in places be inundated to a depth of three to four feet. Very properly, Lord Palmerston, as chairman of Committee I, although expressing willingness to hear further evidence, disallowed this claim, finding no reason to depart from the usual practice in such cases; in any case the opposition did not justly bear on the contents of the preamble to the bill. This was a just decision, especially so as the company had been able to demonstrate that the principal motivation of the commissioners was the fear that with a loss of river tolls they would be unable to meet the interest charges on an outstanding debt of some £48,500, contracted to the Exchequer Commissioners and others during the course of recent river improvements.<sup>2</sup>

Thwarted in this main attempt the river and drainage interests then turned to the means of securing adequate protection for the works and

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 26th April 1845, p.594 and the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald of the same week reporting on the proceedings before Committee I.

<sup>2</sup> Principally the Eau Brink Cut (1821), the straightening of the Ouse between Littleport and Ely (1827), and the beginning of the Midland Level Drain.

navigation which to that point they had chosen to represent as virtually doomed. In this the L & E showed itself extremely co-operative. All existing drainage works, and those planned (e.g. the Midland Level Drain) were guaranteed, as were all halting rights along the banks of the various rivers and drains; all railway works were to be at least 100' from the South Level Drain to preclude vibration and the creation of unequal pressures (clause 49 of the act).<sup>1</sup> Many other similar examples could be quoted. Only in the matter of bridge specifications did the company suffer reverse, although the ultimate seriousness of this was not appreciated at the time. The issues at stake were principally the modes to be adopted of crossing the Ouse (at the Ten Mile River) just to the south of Downham, and the Sixteen Foot River (Midland Level Drain) on the Wisbech branch. Rastrick argued in vain that in each case a wooden three span bridge would be completely safe and would impede neither navigation nor the free flow of water. Walker, the Chief Engineer of the Midland Level Commission, argued otherwise, and insisted that both bridges be built to the specifications already agreed between the company and the Bedford Level Corporation for the crossing of the latter's waterways.<sup>2</sup> The committee upheld Walker, and the company was committed to the construction of a single span of 110' over the Midland Level Drain, and to one of 121'6" over the Ouse (clause 27). Each was to be at a minimum height of 10' over the banks at the point of crossing. Rastrick's immediate reaction was that these requirements would increase the cost of each bridge from £2,000 to £4,000, but in point of fact the marshy ground at the approaches to these two bridges combined with the lengthy

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<sup>1</sup> As required by Josiah Human, engineer to the South Level Drainage Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Namely permanent, substantial iron structures.

embankments necessitated by the minimum height clauses was to involve the company in the expenditure of many thousands, and plunge it far down the road to bankruptcy. In this last respect it is to be particularly noted that these enforced changes were accompanied by no alteration in capital requirements; neither company nor committee saw fit to suggest such.

Apart from this only some minor and belated opposition from the Eastern Counties and Northern & Eastern ruffled proceedings. This arose principally from the continued uncertainty as to the exact site of the Ely terminus. The Eastern Counties, anxious that the L & E line should not run parallel with its own for a mile or more outside the city, dared not let the matter slip any longer and proposed before committee that the L & E should in fact make use of E.C.R. metals in its approach to its terminus. L & E imputations that this was simply a device to render the Lynn line liable to charges under the Six Mile Clause were denied. Eventually amicable agreement resolved the issue. The two parties undertook to submit the whole matter to the arbitration of the Board of Trade and to accept its decision as binding (clause 21), the final outcome being that the L & E was to make use of E.C.R. track over a distance of 1 mile 31 chains between Ely North Junction and a joint station within the city. Thus, the company was spared some expense, but the amount was in no way equal to that which had already been forced upon it.

The Ely & Huntingdon bill was unimpeded by any serious challenge. Crowther of the Northern & Eastern, after appearing too late to be heard in the Commons, opposed the bill in the Lords on the grounds of competition within a six mile triangle produced by the intersection of the E & H and

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the N & E lines.<sup>1</sup> This being rejected virtually out of hand Crowther claimed locus standi as a landowning interest, although the land in question was no more than a strip a few feet wide. In this too he was rebuffed, the committee invoking the principle that likelihood of injury must be established before he could be admitted to oppose the preamble. This Crowther could not do, fear of competition being his real motive, and so the E & H triumphed. However, to ease the passage of the bill and to ensure future good relations with its neighbours, the E & H did agree privately to the insertion of clauses in the act guaranteeing that no Northern & Eastern land would be taken without the consent of that company (eventually this was embodied in clause 22); it was also agreed that representatives of the two companies should meet to devise some formula for the division of receipts within the disputed area, although a record of such did not find its way into the act. The final form of the act also included some 21 sections dealing with the rights of the various river and drainage boards affected by the proposed line, in all cases the results of previous agreements. Thus, lands taken were to be subject to Drainage Tax (31), the cost of new drainage works affecting the railway was to be shared (34), compensation was to be paid by the company for any interruption of navigation, the company being obliged to erect any works deemed necessary to avert the recurrence of such injury (35) and so on. No question was raised as to the payment of  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  interest on calls.

The passage of the Lynn & Dereham bill was even less eventful. Mr. Press of Hingham appeared before the Commons' committee (K) to protest against the valuation put by the company on his land, but this matter was settled outside the committee room. There was, however, rather more than met the

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 28th June, 1845.



eye in this as the Committee's report to the Commons showed that 48/94 owners, 24/29 leasees and 74/129 occupiers were still registered as dissenters to the bill.<sup>1</sup> The withdrawal of Mr. Press, followed by a public notice that the petitions of landowners would be settled by referees,<sup>2</sup> strongly suggests that Press was in fact engaged in putting a test case on behalf of many others, and that the company had seen fit to concede his representation; it is to be recalled in this that the Marriotts had created a definite organisation to oppose the line, and it is probable that this was still functioning and combining to meet the Parliamentary expenses incurred by their single representative. By this timely concession the L & D undoubtedly secured an easy passage for its bill, but this was to be at a heavy price paid later in terms of land compensation. Once again, however, neither Parliament nor company suggested any alteration of estimate or capital authorisation. Nothing more was heard of the Marriotts themselves<sup>3</sup> although their influence was to be discerned in a group of seven protective clauses specifying such matters as compensation for any obstruction of the Nar (25), and the manner in which that river must be crossed (24). The company was obliged to adopt the southern alternative of the two routes shown on the plans for entering Dereham; to this date the issue had been left open until the fate of the Direct Norwich & East Dereham line be known; as it transpired this concern had failed on Standing Orders and was postponed until the 1846 session. It was now for that company to make any alteration in its plans necessary for effecting the proposed end-on junction with the Lynn line.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Railway Record, 21st June, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 12th July, 1845.

<sup>3</sup> Talbot announced their complete withdrawal, Herapath, 14th June, 1845.

<sup>4</sup> The agreement on this had been announced by W. Williams, Herapath, 7th December, 1844, p.1448.

The matter of the payment of  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  interest on calls was raised by Mr. Riccardo, a committee member, who objected to the whole practice on principle. Williams protested in vain that other companies had been allowed to adopt this practice, but was told that if he persisted he must be prepared to submit the whole issue to the House during the third reading of the bill. This Williams declined to do; as it was expected that the first trains would be running within twelve or fifteen months of the act being obtained he dared not risk anything that might cause the delay of the bill until the 1846 session.

As a final summary of this section it may be pointed out that in effect the three companies had been authorised to construct 85 miles of line on an initial capital of £764,400 (with powers to borrow a further £254,000) basically at the instigation of a town of no more than 18,000 inhabitants. Superficially, the combined revenue anticipation of £99,000 seemed well within reach, even a somewhat moderate estimate, and Parliament unquestioningly accepted the likely returns on the authorised capital as being  $8\frac{1}{2}\%$  for the L & E, 6 to 7% for the E & H, and  $7\frac{3}{4}\%$  for the L & D. In this there was yet one final irony. Frequent references had been made at all stages to the Norwich & Yarmouth line where conditions were held to be very similar, but at the end of the boom year of 1845 that company was able to pay a half year dividend at the rate of no more than 5% per annum.<sup>1</sup>

#### Section 6: The Lynn Lines in the Larger Pattern

To this point sufficient has been said to show that even within their own territories the Lynn lines were based on very insecure foundations. Even if these elements of insecurity had been recognised, and they were not,

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<sup>1</sup> Scrivenor, op.cit. p.72.

there still remained the second justification that the three were to form the essential pivot of a wide network of railways. Parliament was not unaware of this aspect, but, during the 1845 session, by passing some and rejecting other lines, rendered it impossible of realisation, and by the same token added further to the burdens which Williams' companies were already doomed to shoulder. Indeed, the events of the 1845 session, inconsistent and unplanned, served to radically alter the situation in which Williams had first conceived his projects.

The matter is best approached by briefly listing the individual projects involved, and by tracing the effect that each might be expected to have on the future of the Lynn lines.

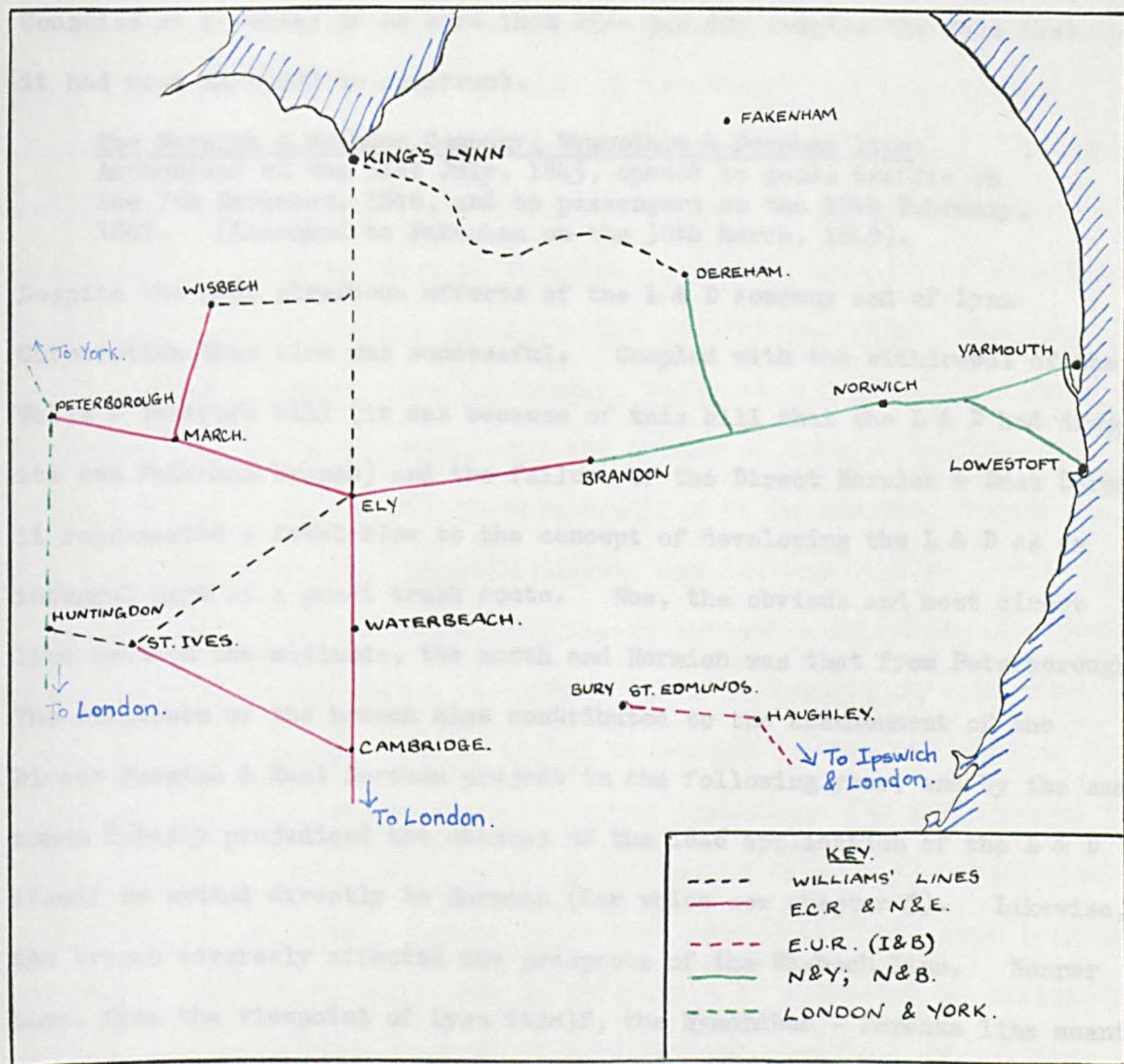
First may be specified:

The Eastern Counties Company Cambridge & Huntingdon line:  
 Authorised on the 8th August 1845, and opened on the 17th August, 1847 from Cambridge to St.Ives (13 $\frac{1}{4}$  miles) where a junction was made with the E & H and joint use made of St.Ives station.

This line not only displaced the original intention of the E & H company to construct a branch from its own mainline to Waterbeach, but also had the effect of further restricting the value of the E & H in that traffic derived from the trunk route at Huntingdon (authorised in 1846) and the intended (but abortive) Rugby & Huntingdon line would now have ready access to Cambridge and beyond without the necessity of travelling over more than six miles of E & H metals. Indeed, this must be held as a major reason, although such was never officially stated, why the E & H was never built in its entirety. As it was, the E & H company undertook with the Eastern Counties to commence its construction with the Huntingdon - St.Ives section in order to connect the latter's line with the London & York as soon as

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Diagrammatic Map of Lines (1845) Specified in the Text



this was opened: this, of course, was making the best of a very unfortunate situation. The section in question was in fact built at excessive cost, but only to find itself completely isolated from the remainder of the Lynn system; the outcome was that, in 1849, the line was leased to the Eastern Counties at a rental of no more than 25/- per day despite the fact that it had cost £125,000 to construct.

The Norwich & Brandon Company; Wymondham & Dereham line:  
 Authorised on the 31st July, 1845, opened to goods traffic on the 7th December, 1846, and to passengers on the 15th February, 1847. (Extended to Fakenham on the 30th March, 1849).

Despite the most strenuous efforts of the L & D company and of Lynn Corporation this line was successful. Coupled with the withdrawal of the Wells & Thetford bill (it was because of this bill that the L & D had dropped its own Fakenham branch) and the failure of the Direct Norwich & East Dereham it represented a fatal blow to the concept of developing the L & D as an integral part of a great trunk route. Now, the obvious and most direct line between the midlands, the north and Norwich was that from Peterborough. The existence of the branch also contributed to the abandonment of the Direct Norwich & East Dereham project in the following year, and by the same token fatally prejudiced the chances of the 1846 application of the L & D itself to extend directly to Norwich (for which see chapter 6). Likewise, the branch adversely affected the prospects of the Wisbech line. Nearer home, from the viewpoint of Lynn itself, the Wymondham - Dereham line meant that the farmers of central Norfolk now had a more direct route to London than that offered by the L & D and the L & E in conjunction; it also meant that Norwich merchants had the fullest opportunity to compete with Lynn merchants in the long disputed central areas.

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The Ipswich & Bury Company

Authorised on the 21st July, 1845 to construct between the towns named. The line was opened on the 30th November, 1846.

This company was born of the aggressive intention of Ipswich merchant interests and reached right into the heart of Lynn's southern preserves. It was to cause the L & E to embark on a project to extend to Bury from Ely. The bill for this (in the name of the Ely & Bury Company) was entered too late for consideration in 1846 and failed in 1847. A second danger to Lynn arose in 1846 when the Ipswich & Bury was authorised to construct a line from Haughley Junction (north of Ipswich) to Norwich; this branch was eventually opened on the 7th November, 1849. In that the Ipswich company merged with the Eastern Union in July, 1847<sup>1</sup> this would mean that there two lines competing for the London to Norwich traffic, the E.U.R. (handing over to the Eastern Counties at Colchester) having a nine miles advantage over the Norfolk Railway and Eastern Counties route (124 to 115). The E.C.R. at Colchester was to endeavour to hinder the Eastern Union by using dirty trains at awkward times in connection with the latter's services, but even so it had to accept the traffic offered to it. The danger to Lynn was that once physical connection was established between the two routes at Norwich (as it was in 1851 by the opening of the one mile section between Trowse Upper and Lower Junctions) much traffic deriving from central and north Norfolk would be attracted to Norwich and the Eastern Union route instead of towards Lynn and Ely. If anything the danger was to be accentuated in 1854 when the Eastern Union was taken over by the E.C.R., for then operational convenience became the dominant consideration without reference to the particular needs of the E.A.R.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There had been the closest liason from the first, the E.U.R. having six representatives on the I & B board, and being empowered to purchase the Norwich extension.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 8.

Various other lines threatened the ambitions of Lynn and the future prosperity of its railways, and were to do so with increasing success once railway operation had been placed on a regional rather than parochial basis. The Norwich & Yarmouth project, authorised in 1845, to construct from Reedham, on its mainline, to Lowestoft, together with the improvements effected by the Lowestoft Harbour and Railway Act of the same year, gave central Norfolk an alternative port to Lynn as far as convenience was concerned. It is also to be noted that during the 1845 session the London & York had virtually won its fight<sup>1</sup>, although actual incorporation was delayed until 1846. This victory paved the way for the E & H to come to terms with the northern line and to revive its concept of a Bedford extension, but at the same time it represented a major defeat for the Eastern Counties, and therefore an indirect setback for Lynn, in that Hudson's intention of making the London - Ely line a part of the second great trunk route to the north was thwarted. There can be no knowing what developments might have ensued in north-west Norfolk if it had been brought into close proximity to such a line.

### Section 7: Conclusions

The passage of the three railway bills was a hollow victory for all concerned. With their estimates unsound, with powerful rivals entrenched on three sides and with their ambitions nullified even before a start had been made in their implementation, Lynn railways faced a bleak future. Not that this was recognised at the time. Parliament's blessing confirmed the confidence that was already paramount and which clearly foresaw a bustling

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<sup>1</sup> The Direct Northern failed on Standing Orders; the Cambridge & Lincoln was rejected because of errors in its surveys; the E.C.R. withdrew its Ely - Lincoln project in favour of a Midland Railway proposal to extend from Swinton (Yorkshire) to Lincoln with a branch to March - this was defeated.

expanding Lynn served by three lucrative railways. This was not to be however. What had been conceived as the nucleus of a flourishing system of lines centred on Lynn had already become a mere appendage to the regional and national systems. Williams saw the danger quicker than most and laboured hard in the next two years to extend the L & D to Norwich, the E & H to Bedford, the Wisbech line to Spalding and the L & E mainline to Bury St. Edmunds, all to no avail. He might have thought that after all it would have been better to concentrate on one project in depth rather than several not so, but even this would have made little difference for the entire concept of his railways was to a certain extent false. That is to say that they erred in principle rather than content, for after all each of his lines could be logically defended as means of either consolidation or expansion for the trade of Lynn. Again, neither he nor Parliament, nor anyone concerned, can be blamed, for knowledge and experience can never be cheap, and both these had yet to be gained; it was inevitable that prospects for 1855 and '65 should be judged in terms of 1845. That the latter should be a year of unique prosperity merely heightened the delusion and increased the temptations.

The fundamental error was that to Williams and thousands like him a railway was something to be used as an instrument in the service of a particular community. Such was, of course, true, but only partially so. What was not recognised was that a railway must live in its own right, that not only must it be self supporting, but that it must fit in with others of its kind and with the convenience of those it sought to serve. In terms of expansion it is the railway that will dictate and not necessarily its creators. Thus, a sound railway economy does not necessarily conform to the existing economic pattern of any particular locality, and attempts to make it do so might well

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lead to the failure of the one, and then of the other.

From the very beginning of the railway era this potential conflict of interest was in evidence to a greater or lesser extent, but at the same time, however slowly and spasmodically, it was being unconsciously resolved. The decisive factor was that rarely were the majority of investors in a line the natives of its locality and the pressures brought to bear by these were inevitably in the interests of the railway as such; amalgamation of companies was an inevitable consequence, one which further divorced parochial interests from the railways which so often they themselves had conceived. This was certainly to be the case with the Lynn lines, but at the stage of events narrated in this chapter local interest still predominated, and was of course responsible for the passage of the bills through Parliament. Many of the investors at this stage were still local men fired with parochial ambition, while the rest, affected by the national enthusiasm for railways as such, were still individuals yet to meet together; if doubts crept into their minds the answer was simply to sell their shares at the high premiums still obtaining.

The Lynn railways were to fall bankrupt. From what has been said in this chapter this was perhaps inevitable, but then they recovered and the L & D and the L & E still operate today. The paradox may readily be explained. As conceived within local horizons and with the understanding of the pre-railway era they were bound to fail, and the story of their independent existence is one of dismal ruin. But then, first by lease to the Eastern Counties, and then by amalgamation into the Great Eastern, salvation was found. Meanwhile Lynn continued its long drawn out decline in relative importance, but survived as an important local centre benefited by the railways and using them as a basis for new departures in the economy of the area. It is certain

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that it was its railways which enabled the town to survive the critical period between the collapse of its harbour trade and the evolving of a new pattern of activity. In other words the railways effectively shielded Lynn while it found its level in the new age. That this should be so owes much to the fact that the railways in question were no longer small, uneconomic units struggling against irresistible economic forces, but rather elements in a comprehensive network controlled by interests that cared little for Lynn or anywhere else as such, but only for the profitable operation of their railway system.

There is one other aspect however. There was inevitably an interim period before the full effects of the railway age on the old parochial system were felt, and this was a period in which railways could be used to achieve local ends, even if only partially so. In certain respects existing patterns could be modified in preparation for the onset of external forces. To this end cheap and rapid construction, intelligent rates and services, the provision of adequate facilities, good public relations and a keen appreciation of what was going on around were all equally essential. Unfortunately such presumed a degree of that experience and foresight of which as yet there was so little.

This last section is intended both to round off what has gone before and to serve as an introduction to the detailed study of bankruptcy that now follows. In the next chapter the details and mechanics of the principles outlined above will be followed through in their application to the lines of Lynn.

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Chapter 4The Failure of the Estimates (I)(1845-1848)

Note: For the sake of convenience the title of the East Anglian Railways Company has been used throughout this chapter, although the three companies covered by it retained their individuality until the August of 1847.

Introduction:

By the close of 1848 the buoyant optimism of 1845 had given way to a gloom bordering on sheer desperation. The lines, to Ely, Dereham and Wisbech had been completed in form, although not in terms of facilities, but as yet the Ely & Huntingdon reached no further than over the 5 miles between Huntingdon and St.Ives, and in that the funds of that company had been diverted to effect the completion of the ruinously expensive construction of the Wisbech branch it was likely to remain so confined. These  $67\frac{1}{2}$  miles had cost £1,247,446<sup>1</sup> and the end of capital expenditure was still not in sight. A 5% debenture debt of nearly £300,000 hung over the company, and the original capital of £764,400 (intended to cover the construction of  $85\frac{1}{2}$  miles) had been swollen to include two creations of guaranteed preference shares, £119,899 at 6% and £70,873/10s. at 7%. Against this traffic receipts for the half year just ended had yielded no more than £18,968, of which all but £7,134 had been claimed by working expenses. Apart from interest payments, a host of contract debts had yet to be settled, further plant was urgently required and the first loan repayments were shortly to fall due, but available reserves amounted to no more than the £976/11s. cash in the bank. Further creations of capital seemed out of the question for the £25 shares had sunk to a quotation of only

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 10th March, 1849, p.254; statement of accounts to the 31st December, 1848.

£4, and doubts were being expressed as to whether they were worth even that;<sup>1</sup> E & H £18 shares were down to £2/17/6 and even the £3/10 6% preference stock had fallen to £2/2/6. The situation, further exacerbated by deep national depression, was doubly serious in that if recovery were to be effected certain vital developments and extensions had to be implemented without delay. Hopes had been raised during 1847 that the Eastern Counties would take the lines on lease and guarantee a fixed minimum return, so solving all the companies' problems, but the negotiations had been conducted in such an arrogant manner by the struggling concerns and with such duplicity by the Eastern Counties that success had been precluded from the outset. Now, a public declaration of bankruptcy was only a step away and the future seemed to be without any comfort. Already Herapath had sarcastically congratulated the company on having spent so much for the public benefit at its own unmitigated loss,<sup>2</sup> an unnecessary comment which, understandably so, had had a "positively harmful"<sup>3</sup> effect in depressing the value of company shares.

### Section 1: Directors, Shareholders and Accounts

The fundamental causes of the dismal situation outlined above are to be found primarily in the events prior to amalgamation in the August of 1847, and involve above all else the consequences that stemmed from the nature and defects of the early leadership, and in particular from the sinister role played by Williams and the companies' solicitors. An early decision that each board of six should contain two representatives from each of its partners meant in effect that the number of individuals involved as directors was only twelve.

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 16th December, 1848, p.1296; letter of 'Quiet Observer'.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 6th November, 1847, p.1264; in the first of three articles.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 16th December, 1848, p.1296; letter of 'Quiet Observer'.

The names (specified in the individual acts) of these were given to the proprietors at the initial company meetings, a practice not really objectionable in itself as prior to these meetings scrip might have changed hands several times so that the promoters would not know who would appear, and in any case the proprietors would for the most part be strangers to each other. By and large the proprietors were satisfied that the men chosen were for the most part "locally resident" and all of "great respectability"<sup>1</sup>. In making his choice Williams was first concerned to obtain men who would be amenable to his influence without the inhibiting necessity of himself having to participate in active management, and secondly to find those who would trust him implicitly without feeling the need for close observation of his activities. Men he knew on the social level were the obvious choice, because of both their personal relationships with him and the fact that they were resident in Lynn and thereby easier to manage. It was possibly because of the need for such compliance that J. Shepherd of Lynn, with an investment of £10,375, was excluded.

Thus, as chairman of the Lynn & Ely was Folkes, despite the facts that his holding was one of only £900 and that, although undoubtedly a man of the world, his practical business experience was limited to the management of his own estates.<sup>2</sup> Partridge, with £500 (the minimum qualification) in the Lynn & Dereham, appeared doubtless to hold a watching brief for the partnership he had with Goodwin and Williams, although in fairness his 1846 subscription of £4,400 to the Rugby & Huntingdon line,<sup>3</sup> potentially a great benefit to the East Anglian, should be mentioned. Cresswell and Everard, with subscriptions

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 26th July, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> For the composition of individual boards and details of personal holdings company by company see Appendix D.

<sup>3</sup> Accounts & Papers 1846 (473) xxxviii.

of £2,000 and £3,000 respectively, were naturally included as members of the 'inner group' of 1844. Seppings, a Lynn shipowner, and two Lynn merchants, Ingle and Self, were also included, although it is interesting to note, and suggestive of direct encouragement by Williams, that none of them had appeared amongst the Subscription Contracts presented in support of the 1845 bills.<sup>1</sup> The Lynn complement of eight was made up by the ardent liberal and highly respected surgeon, J.B. Whiting, who at least made up for lack of practical experience by a subscription of £5,000. The four from outside Lynn were Sir Henry Roddam Calder, a Hull baronet, T. Abdy M.P. of Essex, Francis Reynolds, a London merchant, and Henry Lacy, a gentleman of Kenyon House near Manchester; all of these had been members of one or more of the Provisional Committees of 1844. The first three of these men had started with initial investments of £1,250 each, although later Calder admitted to having bought and sold many hundreds of the three companies' shares prior to becoming a director; in that when £25 shares were being quoted at £4 he claimed he had sustained a loss of £5,000 by being a director<sup>2</sup> it may be surmised that his final stake was something like £6,000. Henry Lacy, the sole representative of the very substantial northern interest in the lines, merits special consideration.

Chairman of the Lynn & Dereham and the Ely & Huntingdon boards, a member of the Lynn & Ely directorate, and subsequently the first chairman of the combined East Anglian, Lacy stood out as the most active and deserving of all those listed above. His pre-eminence was justified not only by a stake of £13,750 in the company (1845), to which may be added £4,800 in the Ely &

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<sup>1</sup> Accounts & Papers 1845 (<sup>13</sup>625) x1, and (317) x1.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 19th June, 1849; meeting of the 16th June.

Huntingdon 1846 extension capital and £5,200 and £6,500 respectively subscribed to the abortive Ely & Bury and Rugby & Huntingdon projects of that year, but also by previous practical experience in the field of transport; in fact, "his previous great experience of coaching was relied on"<sup>1</sup>. The nature of this remains undetermined, but it is tempting to think that like Chaplain and others he had had the foresight and courage to bow to the inevitable and identify himself with the new age. Certainly he had the courage to hold fast when troubles set in and several of his colleagues sold out rather than attempt to weather the storm. Throughout he endeavoured to set a stabilising example by maintaining an unaffected faith in the ultimate future of his lines. He deserved a better fate than failure, and it can only be regretted that his previous experience proved inadequate for the conduct of railway affairs.

Two general observations may be made on the composition of the three boards. Firstly, because the majority were Lynn men, the offices were in Lynn and three constituted a quorum, the local directors, under Williams' direct influence, were going to hold a dominant position. With the exceptions of Folkes and Whiting, the Lynn group did possess successful business experience, but only such as had been gained within the security of the town's monopoly and on the foundation of long established family concerns. Secondly should be noted the low financial stakes, a factor which, amongst other things, rendered less likely that degree of constant caution which would probably have derived from really large personal holdings. In fixing directors' investment qualifications, as a general rule, so low, Parliament had erred most grievously, and contributed directly to the general loss of

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 16th December, 1848, p.1296; letter of 'Quiet Observer'.

confidence in railway securities which had become manifest by 1847.<sup>1</sup> The first possibility that could arise was that having gained a place directors could unload large holdings at a premium, and yet still retain their seats.<sup>2</sup> As seen Calder specifically denied this practice in his own case, but a large question mark must hang over Everard and Cresswell who resigned their seats in 1847. Another possibility was the development of a dilemma such as that which the East Anglian board faced on the creation of preference shares during 1847; public confidence could have best been boosted by large scale purchase on the part of the directors, but in fact only a minority contributed simply because, or so it was claimed, to do so would have involved the prior sale of original shares which would in itself have undoubtedly "pulled down the market".<sup>3</sup>

Chronic errors of judgment were committed by these directors, and in particular did they saddle the company with an almost impossible burden of capital debt. The key to this lay in their relationship with the companies' solicitors. Examination of this will show why after saying of the first boards in 1849, "all their faults had arisen from ignorance of railway matters",<sup>4</sup> Henry Bruce, chairman of the East Anglian from 1848 to 1861, could amend his judgment (1859) to speak "with shame and indignation" of those "proceedings of earlier days" when the proprietors had been truly robbed by "iniquitous law charges and worse".<sup>5</sup> It should be added, however, that genuine suspicion attaches only to Folkes, Everard, Cresswell and Seppings, although even here, as suggested in the first chapter, there is a strong

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<sup>1</sup> See a pamphlet of 1848: 'In Answer to a Letter of George Carr Glyn' by John Whitehead of the London Stock Exchange, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Williams, op.cit., p.6.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 19th June, 1849; Bruce at the meeting of the 16th June.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3rd March, 1849; meeting of the 28th February.

<sup>5</sup> Railway Times, 19th March, 1859, pp.324-7; meeting of the 11th March.



case to indicate that they were fundamentally the dupes of Williams more than anything else. Lacy and Self were certainly above suspicion, the latter continuing to serve on the board throughout Bruce's period in the chair. The question, incapable of settlement either way but with the balance of evidence perhaps favouring the charitable view, is therefore one of deciding between a verdict of culpable negligence or positive fraud.

It is clear that the central role played by Williams was in no way diminished in the first two years after the acts of incorporation had been obtained. With his partners, Goodwin and Partridge, and a second firm of solicitors, the Messrs. Rooper, originally retained by the Lynn & Dereham, he continued to hold the reins of power and provide the principal motive force when matters of major importance, for example extensions of the system, had to be decided. The two firms of solicitors, acting in close association, performed the functions of company agents, they lent money to the companies, received the calls on shares and exercised a general control "without paying any attention to the directors of the day"<sup>1</sup>. This was facilitated by the fact that of these directors four, Everard, Cresswell, Seppings and Folkes, were close personal associates of Williams and sufficient in number to form a majority amongst the members of the boards who could afford regular attention to the companies' affairs. By the very smallness of their investments these four owed more to Williams than they did to their proprietors whose constantly shifting composition and general lack of cohesion precluded any serious challenge to external control. Unhappily the integrity and genuine sincerity of Lacy were outweighed by his inexperience in railway matters, and this prevented him from comprehending the realities of a

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 10th July, 1858, p.712; an editorial comment on the legal proceedings being undertaken by the E.A.R. against its former solicitors.

situation, obtaining until the August of 1847, in which he and his co-directors were tolerated as mere figure-heads as regards the formulation of policies, but were made the principal instruments, and thereby the potential scapegoats, in their execution. Perhaps unobjectionable in itself this distribution of power was rendered reprehensible by the fact that it was used by the solicitors to cover their speculation and gross over-charging against the companies.

First suspected only in 1849, when an auditors' report questioned the massive total of the solicitors' charges and recommended that the accounts be re-opened and examined,<sup>1</sup> it was 1853 before active investigation, the prelude to legal proceedings, began. An amazing picture was then revealed. It was found that in the matter of receiving calls no regular accounts had been kept, that financial transactions were passed on to the railway offices on mere slips of paper, that what books there were were full of discrepancies and false balances, and that despite the huge sums involved there had never been a formal settlement between the solicitors and the companies.<sup>2</sup> In short the Lynn & Ely and the Lynn & Dereham had no means of knowing the proper amounts to be credited to individuals, the most glaring discrepancy coming to light being that of a payment of £13,291 to the solicitors appearing in the company's books as £1,051. While no dividends were being paid, and because the railway accounts were in such hopeless confusion, there was little danger of either imminent discovery or eventual retribution. In respect of bond issues it was found in 1853, amongst other irregularities, that shortly after the amalgamation had taken place two bonds were issued, each of £3,000, in

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 17th November, 1849, p.1157; meeting of the 23rd August, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 10th July, 1858, p.700; Bruce at a special meeting of the 6th July.

186

the names of the L & E and the L & D respectively (both legally extinct), but when the first joint accounts were compiled only one of the bonds had been credited to the capital account.<sup>1</sup>

But, even though many more similar examples could be cited, such fraudulent gains were only incidental to the massive and systematic over-charging of the companies in such matters as Parliamentary Expenses and land conveyance. Conscious of the need for some degree of concealment the solicitors ensured that £21,184 of the former appeared in the new East Anglian joint accounts as two items of £9,262/6/1 and £11,922/10/2 under the heading of Permanent Way and Works. Even more blatant was the inclusion of bills totalling £21,000 in the figures presented to the Board of Trade prior to amalgamation,<sup>2</sup> although the work represented in them was in fact not even due to be done, and in the case of investigation of land deeds in connection with the E & H extension to Bedford and the proposed Eastern Counties lease was never done.<sup>3</sup> The newly formed board, free of Williams' influence as will be shown in a later section, suspected nothing and met the demands, just as in 1849 it was to meet further bills without questioning their contents. The former payment proved to be a grave error, for in 1858 the Vice-Chancellor ruled that submission to the Board of Trade (although the purpose had been no more than to establish that 50% of the capital of the three companies had been paid in and properly expended - a condition of amalgamation) in fact constituted proof of settlement, and therefore refused the East Anglian plea that the books be re-opened.

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 10th July 1858, p.700; Bruce at the special meeting of the 6th July.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Bancroft from the floor.

Four factors explain how the solicitors were enabled to get away with so much. Of these, the relationship between Williams and the directors, inexperienced and trusting, has been explained; the second is rather more open to doubt, but offers a very attractive possibility, and one that would exonerate the 'inner group' of everything but a charge of negligence. The secretary of the Lynn & Ely and the Lynn & Dereham was a W. Williams. No family relationship has been established between him and J.C. Williams, but if there were such a great deal would be explained. It may well be significant that as far as can be ascertained the fraudulent practices of the solicitors were not extended to the Ely & Huntingdon, the one company of the three of which W. Williams was not the secretary.

The third factor requires extended treatment, because it concerns the chronic confusion that then existed throughout the accountancy systems of nearly all railway companies. The East Anglian was not alone, nor was dishonesty necessarily involved, in the production of balances which had "no more effect than a sheet of waste paper"<sup>1</sup>. Lack of authoritative guidance was the cause, for section 115 of the Company Clauses Consolidation Act of 1845 had done little more than enjoin that:

"..directors shall cause full and true accounts to be kept of all sums received or expended on account of the company by the directors and all persons employed by or under them, and of such matters and things for which such sums of money shall have been received or disbursed and paid."

At the time when the practical problem of translating a new medium of transport into meaningful figures was necessarily at its most acute such general directions as these left the way wide open for a vast range of individual practices, with the immediate results that comparison between

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Williams, op.cit. p.59 from the 'Times'.

companies and the possibility of learning from the mistakes of others were precluded.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, directors, with the best of intentions, often found it difficult to make one set of accounts comparable with those that had gone before so that the progress of a single company could not be accurately measured. Until governmental imposed audits were instituted in 1849 there was no check on content. Prior to that regular audits were conducted, but by elected representatives of the shareholders (the holding of one share qualified the individual for election) who were usually totally unqualified for the task and who might be self interested, the friends of the directors or mere speculators, while persons "eminently well qualified as auditors to consider the general truth and fidelity of Railway Accounts (were) not likely to possess the technical knowledge which would render their supervision of Parliamentary or legal costs a sufficient protection against abuse".<sup>2</sup> Often such auditors had to work on books that were unintelligible, sometimes incomplete and occasionally fraudulent, and almost invariably were given such a short time that little more than the addition of figures and the comparison of book totals against the vouchers passed to them by the directors was possible;<sup>3</sup> the Select Committee heard of one case where the auditor was given a single day to examine a 200 page ledger containing solicitors' bills to the extent of £80,000<sup>4</sup> (the company was not specified but could well be the East Anglian in almost every respect). Such audits were "moonshine as against dishonest directors"<sup>5</sup> (or in this case directors misled by dishonest solicitors), and valueless for the proprietor of the best companies, but even so great faith was placed in them, this arising largely from an exaggerated

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<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on the Audit of Railway Accounts, Sess. Papers 1849 (421) 3rd Report, p.v.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Qs.2334-6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Minutes of Evidence, Q.2334.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Q.2548.

respect for the characters of the directors as individuals, "a transient security at best"<sup>1</sup>. Great difficulties intervened if the individual proprietor wished to conduct his own personal investigation into details of the accounts. Parliament had decreed that these must be open at all reasonable times, which of course allowed the times for inspection to be most inconvenient and often restricted to a couple of days before the meeting and in the absence of directors and others qualified to answer direct questions on their contents;<sup>2</sup> the East Anglian, and many others, further decreed that once approved accounts could not be reopened. If by chance a proprietor did discover a matter needing redress he was obliged to pit his own against public funds, and place himself at the mercy of the Supreme Courts of Law and Equity which were invariably slow and costly and sometimes completely ineffectual.<sup>3</sup>

To provide a basis for further discussion and a foundation for subsequent sections the detailed accounts of the East Anglian's expenditure are now set out in the form in which they were presented to the proprietors for the period to the 31st December, 1848. It may be assumed that, as in the February of 1848, the directors presented them with "clean hands and clean hearts"<sup>4</sup>. To this point receipts totalled £1,248,422/19/11.

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<sup>1</sup> Third Report of the Select Committee on the Audit of Railway Accounts, 1849, p.xii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.xi.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. x-xii.

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; Bruce on the 16th February, 1848.

Capital Expenditure to the 31st December, 1848<sup>1</sup>

	<u>Since the 30th June</u>			<u>Total</u>		
Advertising, printing and stationery	274	11	0	4,502	8	6
Debenture stamps, commission on loans and bankers' charges	105	16	0	3,441	10	7
Office salaries, rates, rents, taxes	278	14	0	3,892	4	5
General office expenses, travelling expenses, postage etc.	263	17	10	4,759	0	11
Engineering and surveying	861	17	10	21,761	1	5
Preliminaries and Parliament	296	7	3	72,678	18	10
Direction and audit	20	0	0	3,820	0	0
Law costs	490	7	7	3,268	8	3
Land and compensation	7,914	4	10	262,797	18	9
Earthworks, bridges and stations	4,316	5	1	516,077	19	2
Sleepers, rails and chairs	10,390	19	6	221,502	2	7
Carriages, wagons and trucks	8,449	12	7	56,075	16	4
Locomotives	4,462	1	2	19,519	4	11
Stores and expenses at the yard	1,781	18	5	7,289	18	2
Sacks, tarpaulins and covers	263	18	11	790	8	2
Interest on debentures and 6% preference shares at £14,323/16/7 - deduct revenue profit to 30th June, 1848 of £9,087/7/8	8,636	9	10	13,872	18	9
Interest Account	101	5	10	25,041	8	6
Fire Insurance				81	16	1
Brick Yard				599	7	1
Bricks	1,003	19	4	2,628	17	10
Due by insolvent parties whose shares are transferred in trust	79	19	3	3,044	19	3
	<u>£89,438</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>£1,247,446</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>
Cash at Bank				<u>976</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>5</u>
				<u>£1,248,422</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>11</u>

Special Notes:

- A. Advertising, printing and stationery: It is evident from this triple item that the cost of advertising cannot always have been the serious drain that it has been represented to be. The expense lay in covering as many as possible of the mushroom growth of railway journals during the 'Mania' period (14 twice weekly, 2 daily and 4 monthly as compared with 3 before and 5 after). Some of these existed on advertising alone and were said to have incomes of £12,000 to £14,000 per week (cf. Francis, Vol. 2, pl48 and Morier Evans, op. cit. pl10). But the fact that from the 25th October, 1845 the 'Railway Gazette' charged only 5/- for 6 lines and under, £3 per column, £1/15 per half column or £7/10 per page is very hard to reconcile with these figures, and even more so with Francis' claim (Vol. 2, pl50) that some advertisements cost £700 each.

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 10th March, 1849, p254; presented at the meeting of the 28th February, 1849.

B. Legal or Law Costs: This can refer only to legal business over and above that connected with land conveyance and parliament.

Revenue Account for the six months ended 31st December, 1848

Receipts: £18,968/7/11½. (for details see later section)

Expenditure:

Repairs of permanent way	1,477	0	10
Wages - locomotive department	1,114	10	11
Coke, coals, oil, tallow, grease, turps., white lead etc.	2,784	1	4
Wages of clerks, porters, guards, police gate-keepers, pointsmen	2,972	5	9
Salaries viz. management, audit officer, and proportion of secretarial and accounts offices	748	6	5
Passenger Duty	418	6	11
Rates and taxes	232	8	5
Gas and water rent	54	11	4
Compensation	25	6	9
Printing and stationery	542	6	5
Travelling and general expenses, post and petty disbursements	94	17	1
Stores and wages at the harbour branch	483	1	1
Cartage	239	3	7
Balance	<u>7,134</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8½</u>
	<u>£18,968</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>11½</u>

Puncher justly complained of the accounts for the previous half year to these that capital and revenue expenditure was "all jumbled together"<sup>1</sup> so as to be completely baffling. It is obvious that his grumbles had borne no fruit. It will be observed, for example, that rents, rates, taxes, stationery, general office expenses and salaries had been charged to both accounts without any apparent distinction, that interest charges which properly belong to the revenue account appeared under capital expenditure as did also the expenses of the Stores' Yard, and that the amalgamation of such items as advertising, printing and stationery precluded any check on individual heads

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 29th September, 1848.



of expenditure, and especially so on such matters as solicitors' charges. That no confidence could be placed in the balance of revenue shown only became really apparent with the report of the committee of inquiry in the autumn of 1849.<sup>1</sup> Then it was found that an "unnecessary large amount of stationery" had been purchased and distributed indiscriminately to capital and revenue, that an undue quantity of office furniture had been acquired (until the December of 1846 this had been shown as a separate item, but thereafter was included under General Office Expenses, itself part of a composite group), and that the maintenance of three Lynn offices after amalgamation was both unnecessary and highly costly. In particular reference to the accounts of December, 1848 and the apparent revenue profit shown it was pointed out that in a "very badly kept" Stores' Account items to the value of £7,289 had been purchased and then that half had been distributed without distinction between the two accounts, that locomotive repairs to the extent of £230/16/4 had been charged to capital as also had been an item of £230/1/11 for clothing which properly belonged to the revenue account. Thus, the relationship between revenue receipts and working expenses was far worse than it appeared. This, however, was a common feature of the time. Moon of the London & North Western Railway admitted that "if the capital account were closed the company would never pay another dividend",<sup>2</sup> while an even more significant comment was made by L.M.Wolfe before the 1849 Select Committee, "as soon as the capital accounts are closed we shall then be able to see the real state of many of these companies. (At present) Nobody knows the real state".<sup>3</sup> The principle that the capital account should be closed with the completion of the line for

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<sup>1</sup> Printed in Herapath, 19th November, 1849, pp.1158-9.

<sup>2</sup> Kirkaldy & Evans, op.cit. p.100; also compare Morrison, op.cit. p.60.

<sup>3</sup> Minutes of Evidence, Q.2350.

which it was intended was one that few could afford to face before traffic was fully developed - it might be added, however, that in terms of facilities 'completion' is a concept almost incapable of definition.

Nowhere did these accounts contain a valuation of company property or any provision for depreciation. In fact hardly any company, not even the London & Birmingham, boasted a depreciation fund at that time<sup>1</sup>, and in 1849 the East Anglian positively asserted that such was unnecessary<sup>2</sup>, a foolhardy decision dictated by financial necessity rather than clear thinking. An expenditure of nearly £1,500 during the latter part of 1848 on the repair of permanent way barely two years old should have been sufficient warning, although at the best of times oak keys lasted only five years, and at up to £10 per thousand with some 7,000 used per mile this constituted a major item of replacement<sup>3</sup>; creosoted larch sleepers lasted only 21 years<sup>4</sup>, and wagons and trucks twelve years or less<sup>5</sup>. In addition the company courted the risk of falling behind technical advances. Progress in locomotive design, for example, generally meant greater efficiency and economy, but almost invariably heavier track - the Liverpool & Manchester had opened in 1829 with wrought iron rails of 35 lbs. to the yard, yet by 1854 the weight ratio throughout the country had risen to between 44 and 84 lbs. per yard<sup>6</sup>. Such progress also involved rapid deterioration in the capital value of locomotives; the 'Times' gave one such example in December, 1848 when reporting the sale of an eighteen year old locomotive of the Renfrew & Paisley Company, which had cost £750, for a mere £13<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on the Audit of Railway Accounts, L.M.Wolfe, Q.2350.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 19th November, 1849; Report of the Committee of Inquiry, 17th November.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, op.cit. p.234.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. <sup>5</sup> Head, op.cit. p.78.

<sup>6</sup> Dickson, op.cit. p.49

<sup>7</sup> 28th December, 1848.

Exception could also be taken to the fact that these complex accounts were open for inspection in Lynn for only two or three days before the meeting. Occasional demands that the half-yearly accounts should be printed and circulated well in advance, as was done by the Great Western for example, were rebuffed by a variety of subtle pleas; in the November of 1847 it was argued that to accede to the request would further reduce attendance at meetings and that extra clerks would have to be employed, whereas the company then had "no more cats than caught mice"<sup>1</sup>. The demands were not pressed. Similar arguments were employed to counter suggestions that the figures be broken down to show the exact state of each of the three sections of the company's system. As with a statement of powers, the presence of which could be reasonably expected with each set of accounts, the board had good reasons for fighting shy of such requirements. The incomplete state of the E & H (which in 1846 had raised capital to extend to Bedford) and the diversion of its funds to the Wisbech branch of the L & E<sup>2</sup> were matters best kept quiet. The directors also had to combat a growing suspicion, common to the original shareholders of both the L & E and the L & D, that it was the other section which was dragging the fortunes of the joint enterprise so low. This diversion of capital was of course involved with an important question of moral principle, and also served to render the company accounts even more useless as a means of estimating the real value of a company's stock<sup>3</sup>; the practice, however, was not uncommon.

Finally, the most important of all the omissions was any record of outstanding liabilities in either the accounts or the company's books. This

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; meeting of the 3rd November.

<sup>2</sup> Clearly stated in the report of the Committee of Inquiry, *ibid.*, 19th November, 1849.

<sup>3</sup> Select Committee on the Audit of Railway Accounts; minutes of evidence, Lewis Mortlake, a former share broker, Q.2327.

goes far to explain the reckless expenditure of the early boards. At the February meeting of 1849 Bruce told the proprietors that when he came to office he had been assured that there was a surplus of £115,000, and that this would suffice for the completion of the Ely & Huntingdon, all other works then in hand and the provision of the extra sidings and traffic facilities still required. But in fact over £250,000 had been needed, and even at that stage, February 1849, further liabilities were still coming to light.<sup>1</sup> Thus, despite further creations of capital, the lines as a whole were still far from complete, and relatively urgent matters such as the installation of the Electric Telegraph were having to be left in abeyance. In their report of August, 1849, the auditors recommended as a matter of urgency that a detailed list of liabilities be prepared at the end of each half year, and only then was the matter taken in hand.

To explain this situation one has to turn to the report of the committee of inquiry. This confirmed the honesty of the directors in finding that all capital had apparently been devoted to its proper purpose, and concluded that all "mistakes do not appear to be by design but arise from the imperfect system of accountancy".<sup>2</sup> Here was a fundamental cause of all the mischief, misleading figures and false confidence. The system was imperfect and difficult to follow, and there were too many books<sup>3</sup> - the end product was a hopelessly inaccurate representation of the overall situation at any given moment. Of course the audits had been little more than the usual trusting formality. As early as November, 1847, a shareholder had complained of his inability to make anything of the accounts and presumed that the auditors had

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 10th March, 1849, p.254; meeting of the 28th February.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 19th November, 1849.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13th August, 1849; the auditors' report.

done little more than total up the figures; Lacy, who could be surprisingly ingenuous at times, "believed" that the auditors had seen all the vouchers but he had not "interfered or overlooked"<sup>1</sup>.

The fourth and final factor in explanation of the chronic failure of the first directors concerns the nature of their relationship with their shareholders, and in particular the absence of any pressure from that direction. It might have been expected that even at an early stage exception would have been taken to the extent of the Parliamentary Expenses and land charges. The Lynn & Ely, Ely & Huntingdon and Lynn & Dereham acts of 1845 had cost the companies, as far as either the directors or the shareholders knew, sums of £15,565, £15,191 and £13,304 respectively,<sup>2</sup> which when added to the costs of £28,421 incurred in the various additional bills of 1846 and '47 involved a total expenditure of over £72,000 as shown in the accounts, but in reality one of nearly £100,000. Included were of course the fees of both Houses, of Parliamentary Agents, of counsel, of copy and shorthand writers and mapmakers, as well as the expenses of witnesses and company officers while in London,<sup>3</sup> but when it is considered that none of these items, with the exception of counsel's fees, could amount to more than a few hundred pounds, even allowing for the fact that witnesses to the Lynn & Dereham preamble had to be maintained in London for over a month, and that therefore the bulk must have gone to the solicitors themselves it is curious that no strong opposition was raised. It might of course have been felt that the £44,060 apparently expended in securing the acts of 1845 meant an average of no more than £514 per mile, and that this in no way compared with the £650 of the London & Birmingham, the £1,000 of the

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847; meeting of the 3rd November.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.1254; Lacy on the 3rd November, 1847.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. G.Morier Evans, op.cit. pp.16-17.

Great Western or the £4,806 of the Brighton line,<sup>1</sup> but any such argument ignored the fundamental questions of revenue anticipation and the ability of the companies to shoulder the burden on non-productive capital expenditure involved. In this light the East Anglian may be said to have paid dearly for its acts, for after all the costs of the 1845 group, even at the level published, represented one eighteenth of the entire capital sought and the equivalent in estimates of nearly five miles of construction. When one lone voice was raised in criticism of the size of the Parliamentary Expenses it was silenced with the excuse that these must be high as there were three companies involved<sup>2</sup> - it has already been suggested that one reason for there being three companies was to achieve this very situation. But such was part of the price to be paid for devotion to the principles of laissez faire and for the optimistic greed of the 1845 subscribers who, in their blind confidence, were for a time unbelievably trusting. It may be added here that much the same trust was required to swallow the charges exacted in connection with land conveyance, the whole subject of which is considered in the next section. In this the solicitors were fortunate for all land negotiations were conducted under the terms of the 1845 Land Clauses Consolidation Act (8 & 9 Vic.c.18) of which it has been truly written that "no modern statute has brought such grist to the legal mill"<sup>3</sup>. For the legal representatives of company and landowner alike this act abounded with opportunities for the creation of profitable difficulties (a charge eventually to be levelled against Williams),<sup>4</sup> although,

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<sup>1</sup> See p.19 of the 1st Report of the Select Committee on Railway Acts Enactments, Sess.Papers 1846, xiii, and also the Annual Register 1844, pp.70-1. Higher figures still could be quoted as, for example, the £14,414 per mile of the Blackwall Railway (Williams op.cit. p.83).

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; Lacy from the chair at the meeting of the 3rd November.

<sup>3</sup> F.Clifford: A History of Private Bill Legislation, London, 1885, p.524.

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; Copeland at the E.A.R. meeting of the 16th February.

in the absence of these, the simplest land conveyance could still be made to yield a handsome return.

But such charges were accepted, and difficulties mounted all without serious challenge from the shareholders who were, of course, as misled by the half yearly accounts as the directors themselves. Signs of restlessness first became apparent in the latter months of 1847, this being coincidental with a severe fall in the value of railway securities at large, but it was not until 1848 with the obvious failure of the traffic estimates that a major stand was taken against the "lamentable mismanagement" of the company's affairs.<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 1848 five groups of angry northern proprietors drew up identical memorials to the board, claiming that:<sup>2</sup>

"That the extraordinarily small traffic and consequent depreciation of stock is mainly to be attributed to the resources of the line not having been developed; that a greater amount of practical energy is required and that the only way in which the railway can be rescued from its present critical position is by the appointment of some gentlemen to the directory who will take an active share in its management."

Underlying such complaints was the growing recognition that in no way did the existing board represent the pattern of investment in which, as discussed in the previous chapter, the northern counties were assuming an increasing dominance. To February, 1848 at least matters had been left almost entirely in the hands of Lacy, a situation that had obtained since the August of 1847 when, finding discretion to be the better part of valour and weakened by the reduced status of Williams (see chapter 6), Folkes, Cresswell, Everard and Seppings had all stood down from the board.<sup>3</sup> Mounting misfortune had meant that the interests of Lynn as a community must inevitably be subordinated to

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th November, 1849; Cope on the 17th November.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 30th August, 1848, pp.924-5; reported at the meeting of the 16th August.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath expressed it in such words in answer to 'Distant Registered Shareholder' on the 22nd January, 1848.

the interests of the railway as such, and as controlled by elements who cared little for Lynn except as one source of revenue. The transition to this situation as reflected in the changing composition of the boards was, however, only slowly effected, and was not complete until the February of 1849. Until that date the discussion of events in subsequent sections of this and the next chapter must constantly take into account the gradual emergence of the 'new' men from the status of a small but highly critical pressure group within the company to eventual dominance, at which latter stage recovery began. That Bruce and Wheeler (for whom see below) were enabled to attend a meeting of northern shareholders (representing £82,000) in the summer of 1848 in connection with the complaints set out above and yet come away with a vote of thanks<sup>1</sup>, really amounting to one of confidence, was a clear sign that the 'new' men were at last gaining the upper hand, and that neither Lynn nor the solicitors could any longer regard the railway as their own respective private property.

On amalgamation the board had been fixed at ten, and so with the resignation of the four Lynn men there were two vacancies to be filled. One the company made no effort to fill, and if it had not been for a Mr. Birch who raised the matter the proprietors would have foregone their first opportunity of exercising their right of initiative in choice. Significantly they chose, on the nomination of Birch, Henry Clay, a Hull M.P. and "a gentleman of capital, a man of business and of great industry"<sup>2</sup>. The other vacancy had been filled by a company nominee, namely Henry Bruce, who, unlike Clay, had been an original subscriber.

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 30th August, 1848; meeting of the 16th August.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; meeting of the 3rd November.



The elevation of Bruce was the decisive point in the company's history, for it was he who as chairman was to prove its saviour. It was no accident that after assuming the chair in the August of 1848 he permitted the appointment of a committee of investigation, comprising himself, one director and five proprietors, to conduct an impartial inquiry into the company's affairs. A former West India merchant, his first great asset was that he was retired and able to devote the greater part of his time to railway business. His second asset was a tireless energy. A third point in his favour was his enormous wealth<sup>1</sup> of which a substantial portion was invested with the East Anglian; initially allocated £1,250 in the L & D and £1,500 in the L & E he had, by the August of 1845, increased the former holding to £7,750<sup>2</sup>, and then, in 1846, had further extended his interest by subscribing £9,380 to the extension schemes of that year. His fourth attribute was that already he had gained, at the expense of some hard knocks, practical experience of railway politics. It was he who, more from misplaced zeal than any defect of character, had been associated with the infamous 'Chaste Petition' of 1845 which, by throwing doubts on the validity of the London & York subscription contracts, had caused Parliament to delay a decision on the choice of company to build the second trunk route to the north until the following session. Acting as vice-chairman to the rival Cambridge & Lincoln Bruce had taken up, and then presented as a petition to Parliament, the doubtful research of a Mr. Croucher (described by Herapath as well known in certain electioneering cases)<sup>3</sup> and his even more disreputable<sup>3</sup> assistants purporting to demonstrate "the fictitious and irresponsible character of a large portion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Besides his E.A.R. holding he had subscribed elsewhere to £32,750 in 1845, and to £29,240 in 1846.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 23rd August, 1845; L & D meeting of the 20th August.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit., 23rd August, 1845.

subscribers"<sup>1</sup> to the London & York line - to its credit the Direct Northern had refused to accept the filth that had first been offered to it, but Hudson, Bruce's chairman, had had fewer scruples. Disinterested investigation at the instigation of Parliament revealed just a little fire behind the smoke,<sup>2</sup> but not sufficient to justify anything but the rejection of the petition. Threats of prosecution - not implemented because such would constitute a breach of privilege<sup>3</sup> - and fulsome apologies filled the air for a time, and a Parliamentary committee on the question castigated Bruce for acting "without taking the most ordinary means of inquiry"<sup>4</sup> and for abusing the right of petitioning.<sup>5</sup> There the matter had been allowed to drop except for one final blast from Herapath who took strong exception to Bruce's assumption in proposing the vote of thanks to the L & D board at a meeting of August, 1845, and advised him to retire from public life for a while.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately the advice was not taken, although it might help to explain why Bruce's promotion was delayed until 1847, and why then his advancement to the chair was so rapid.

In the February of 1848, when Bruce became vice-chairman, the proprietors showed belated signs of stirring, and unseated Partridge and Ingle, replacing them by Carden of Manchester and Wheeler (of whom nothing is known). This sacrifice failed to appease the shareholders or avert the memorials from the northern shareholders, with the result that in the August Abdy was replaced by H. Tootal of Manchester (originally allocated £1,250 in the L & D), and Lacy, pleading a damaged ankle and bereavement for recent non-performance of duty, made way for Bruce as chairman, although for the time being continuing to serve on the board. In the February of 1849, however, Lacy, Reynolds and

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<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on the London & York Subscription List, House of Lords, Sessional Papers 1845 (480),<sup>3</sup> Appendix 4, p.133, transcript of the petition.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., App.4, pp.136-8.      <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.135.      <sup>4</sup> Ibid., Report, p.iv.  
<sup>5</sup> Ibid.      <sup>6</sup> 23rd August, 1845.

Calder all stood down, apparently without being given the option of doing otherwise for the same meeting carried a resolution that the vacancies be not filled. This left Whiting and Self of the originals and the only representatives of Lynn. Finally, in August, 1849, Tinker of Hyde (in Cheshire), Chadwick of Manchester, Flint of Hull and Bates of Leeds came on to the board which, coupled with the resignation of Whiting, completed the period of reconstruction. The work of this board will be considered in following chapters.

Why the proprietors should exert themselves during 1848 is easy enough to understand; what is more difficult to appreciate is why they had remained docile and acquiescent for so long. While it may be rather harsh to judge them "timorous, credulous and ignorant"<sup>1</sup>, a description that has been applied to the railway shareholders of the 1840s in general, fear of exclusion from lucrative projects, lack of understanding and unfounded confidence in eventually enormous returns are factors not to be entirely discounted, but the real reasons lie rather deeper. It must be remembered too that individual proprietors who developed misgivings could, until the latter part of 1846 at least, sell their holdings at a comparatively small loss at a level often still above par. In the case of the East Anglian explanation must first be sought in the nature of the relationship between the boards and the proprietors, and here the first consideration is that company meetings were invariably badly attended. At an early stage London offices had been deemed an unnecessary expense<sup>2</sup>; the offices were thus to be found in Lynn, an awkward town to reach and one far removed from the great majority of the shareholders.

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<sup>1</sup> R.S.Lambert: The Railway King, London, 1934, p.117.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 2nd August, 1845; L & E meeting of the 29th July.

Even so, all general meetings were held in London at the London Tavern, Bishopsgate. This meant that proprietors who wished to inquire into detailed matters to be raised at a general meeting had to make two journeys, one of them at least awkward, and both time consuming. The crucial discussion on the terms of the Eastern Counties lease offer was attended by only 42 proprietors, Puncher's motion, in the August of 1848, that the accounts be not accepted was considered by a meeting of only 25 and rejected 16 to 9. Well might Puncher bemoan the fact that "to the great supineness of the great body of shareholders may be attributed the present unhealthy state of railway property<sup>1</sup>."

Both circumstance and design confirmed the early boards in a rather autocratic attitude. However, although subsequently charged with ignoring suggestions and not taking the proprietors into their confidence,<sup>2</sup> the large number of extraordinary general meetings does testify to a degree of willingness to hear all views on really important matters. For the rest many problems had to be settled without delay and could not wait for a meeting which few might bother to attend. In most cases, but with the exception of certain important matters connected with the Eastern Counties lease which will be considered in a later chapter, the boards were straight forward in their dealings with the proprietors. Some boards were much given to the creation of fraudulent votes and the engineering of proxies, but it seems in the case of the East Anglian and its predecessors such practices were eschewed, although they were not above placing controversial matters at the end of an agenda to be discussed when many had left and all were tired.

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Herapath, 2nd September, 1848.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; Copeland at the meeting of the 16th February.

Only once, the Eastern Counties lease terms being considered, were proxies employed by the board under the procedure laid down by section 77 of the Company Clauses Consolidation Act<sup>1</sup>; on this occasion the board itself was split. Only once were technical grounds invoked to silence unwelcome criticism, the occasion being Puncher's proposal that all future capital issues be for completion as opposed to extensions, the grounds being that as he was only a scrip holder he was not entitled to move a resolution.<sup>2</sup>

All these various factors lend support to the general theme being advanced that even the first boards of the three companies were genuine in their desire to see the lines brought to successful completion, and that all irregularities and dishonesty arose from ignorance skilfully exploited by Williams, who took care at all times not to intrude too obviously or forcibly in affairs. Certainly the directors as such gained little advantage from their position. Copeland might grumble that "it was a good thing to be a director of the line as people took off their hats to him as he passed,"<sup>3</sup> but the hard facts were that the majority of the directors lost heavily in pocket and gained only in abuse. As for direct reward, to the end of 1848, the fifteen or so individuals involved had shared no more than £3,820 in fees, and from this was to be deducted the annual £10 paid to each of the auditors; nothing at all had been received in 1848. Earlier, on the 29th July, 1845, the L & E board had turned down a vote of £500 cheerfully accorded by the proprietors.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the later directors took office to safeguard their

<sup>1</sup> By which proxies had to be collected at least 48 hours before the meeting at which they were to be used. Fraud was possible, however, in that the same act (section 10) was no more specific than to say that the Shareholders' Address Book should be open for inspection "at all convenient times" - this could mean anything.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; meeting of the 16th February.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 2nd August, 1845.

investments the earlier ones had been primarily concerned with bringing benefit to Lynn, confident in their abilities to make the line pay and prosper themselves either directly or indirectly. But they were out of their depth in the railway world and for two years or so lived in a fool's paradise shared by the ordinary rank and file proprietors.

## Section 2: The Preliminaries of Construction

A combination of directors' folly, the greed of local vested interests and sheer ill luck destroyed the possibilities of cheap and rapid construction before a single line had been laid; thus the East Anglian lost its opportunity of making itself the arbiter of the local economy, and its intended relationship with Lynn proved impossible of realisation. All this had been determined, although the fact was not recognised, by the close of 1845.

The first setback occurred with the ~~chronic~~<sup>severe</sup> shortage of draftsmen and skilled technicians which obtained until the 30th November, the date on which all plans for the bills to be considered during the 1846 session had to be submitted; even after this date the position still remained difficult,<sup>1</sup> so that prior to the Christmas of 1845 little had been done except the staking out of the intended routes and the opening of negotiations for land on the initial sections.<sup>2</sup> The delay so imposed was a cause of annoyance, but at least the costly error of employing enterprising amateurs, particularly schoolmasters, at anything from six to fifteen guineas a day,<sup>3</sup> was not committed. Empowered to delay construction until satisfied in respect of bridge specifications, and not wanting the railways at all, the Bedford Level Corporation and kindred bodies "really persecuted"<sup>4</sup> the companies, so causing

<sup>1</sup> Railway Gazette, 28th February, 1845, p.457; E & H meeting of the 26th February, the engineer's report (dated the 17th December).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, op.cit. p.51.

<sup>4</sup> Railway Gazette, 5th December, 1846; Lacy.

further delay. On the E & H plans were actually approved in good time, but in the February of 1846 further details were demanded; Buck, the engineer, submitted these at once and by a personal meeting with representatives of the Bedford Level finally succeeded in settling the matter,<sup>1</sup> but not without yet more valuable time having been consumed. The manoeuvres of the river interests put the Lynn & Ely back by three full months,<sup>2</sup> a most serious matter when a fifteen month construction estimate was involved. A further source of delay to the E & H, perhaps a consequence of the haste in which the project had been conceived, was the necessity of application to the Board of Trade for authorisation of diversion beyond limits in the Huntingdon area to facilitate operational efficiency, and to avoid the construction of earthworks involving 200,000 cubic yards of soil. The application was submitted on the 19th November, 1845, but it was the 30th January before permission was granted.<sup>3</sup>

The immediate consequences of such delays were easy to see. For the L & E and the L & D it was September before the staking out of the initial sections in the vicinity of Lynn could begin,<sup>4</sup> October before the first tenders for materials could be invited (e.g. for 80,000 larch or Baltic timber sleepers),<sup>5</sup> December before construction contracts could be advertised,<sup>6</sup> January and February before definite orders for materials could be placed, February and March before such could begin to arrive in Lynn harbour (an interesting condition of the tenders was that deliveries should be to the harbour) in any appreciable quantities,<sup>7</sup> and April before the initial

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<sup>1</sup> Railway Gazette, 28th February, 1846, p.457.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5th December, p.671; Lacy on the 2nd December.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 28th February, 1846, p.457; E & H Meeting of the 26th February.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 20th September, 1845.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 18th October, 1845.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 27th December, 1845.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 28th February, 1846.

contractors' agreements were signed. Progress on the E & H was even slower; in February, 1846 it was still not known when either delivery or contractors' agreements could be signed, and it was in fact late spring before either were. The principal long term result of these delays was that failure to get off to a flying start meant that the E & H was never to be built. Placed third in the scale of priorities by a Lynn dominated directorate its surplus funds proved too tempting to be ignored when the Wisbech branch exceeded estimate, while the primary requirement of the Eastern Counties when entering lease negotiations in the latter part of 1846 was that all but the Huntingdon and St.Ives section should be abandoned; this section would provide a through link between the Eastern Counties' own Cambridge & St.Ives line (opened on the 17th August, 1847) and the Great Northern trunk route authorised during 1846, the remainder would have constituted a rival to both the Cambridge & St.Ives and the Ely and Peterborough lines of the E.C.R. When the discussions ended abortively during 1847 the East Anglian promise of contraction was of course rescinded, but by then the money had gone.

Increased cost of rails was yet a further consequence of delay.

Following their usual pattern in the latter stages of a major cycle iron prices had risen steeply<sup>1</sup> by the time the three boards were in a position to place their orders; instead of the £7 per ton estimated, £12 per ton of rails had to be paid, an increase on the total anticipated cost of £60,000<sup>2</sup>. A bewildering variety of rail patterns required proved a further factor in increasing manufacturers' charges<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the great demand for labour resulted in a 25% increase in its costs between the spring of 1845 and that

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<sup>1</sup> Gayer, Rostow & Schwartz, op.cit. p.309 and p.539.

<sup>2</sup> Lacy on the 16th February, 1848; Herapath, 19th February 1848, p.201.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Francis, op.cit., Vol.2, p.229.



of 1846.<sup>1</sup> No company could have avoided these extra expenses - Peto told the 1846 Select Committee that if the Norwich & Brandon line had been built in 1846 rather than in 1844 and '45 it would have cost £17,000 per mile, not £13,000, for "I paid for rails about £5/15 per ton, whereas I am paying now about £10/15 to £11 a ton"<sup>2</sup> - but the Lynn boards exacerbated a bad situation by a policy of bulk buying rather than spreading their requirements over several months in the hope that prices would drop. Moreover, probably as a consequence of the haste pursuant to the belated engagement of skilled assistants, too many rails were ordered, and were in fact still being delivered in 1849 at heavy loss to the company.<sup>3</sup>

The worst obstacle of all, however, to both rapid and cheap constructional possibilities proved to be the avarice of the local landowners who exploited the eagerness of the companies to commence their works to the very fullest extent. As Francis wrote of railways in general "... (with) what unjust demands and impure claims they had to deal, and with what sad and selfish treatment it was their lot to meet"<sup>4</sup>. In effect it meant that the goodwill of the community had to be purchased in hard cash, a situation that had arisen from four main sets of circumstances.

The first of these was the impossibility of obtaining an objective assessment of value in such imponderables as the effects of severance of a property, and the consequences of a railway on drainage and visual and aural amenities. A Select Committee having reported that existing rentals had

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<sup>1</sup> S.C. on Railway Acts Enactments, 1846; evidence of Peto, Q.3553.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Q.3552.

<sup>3</sup> See Section 3 below.

<sup>4</sup> Op.cit., Vol.1, p.255; also compare Jeaffreson & Pole, op.cit. p.270, and Williams, p.496.

little relevance to severance<sup>1</sup> and that this and drainage questions were incapable of exact settlement<sup>2</sup>, a wide variety of practices existed, but always with a premium on bargaining skill. Settlement might be reached on the basis of the marketable value of a property plus a percentage for compulsory purchase<sup>3</sup>; country houses were often taken at the equivalent of 30 to 35 years' net rental, or at 20 to 26 years in the case of town dwellings<sup>4</sup>. Compensation for severance varied in almost every case, and could, incidentally, result in quite substantial additional construction expenses as in the case of the L & E which had to expend £5,000 on additional occupation crossings along its mainline. Additional compensation might be paid if an owner was left living alongside the railway, although a person whose lands had not been touched and yet who was in similar circumstances received nothing<sup>5</sup>.

The second factor was the undoubted bias of the legislature in favour of the landowner, considerations of public benefit being relegated to second place. Not only was this reflected in actual legislation, but in the individual demands themselves, for what landowner could fail to derive encouragement from a Select Committee which declared itself<sup>6</sup>:

"....of the opinion that many cases occur in which it is necessary to consider the land etc. not merely as a source of income, but as the subject of expensive embellishment, and subservient to the enjoyment and recreation of the proprietor",

and which held<sup>7</sup>

"....that a very unfair view is taken of the injury done to proprietors, and of the compensation due to them".

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<sup>1</sup> Select Committee of the Lords on Compensation for Lands taken for or injured by Railways; Sess.Papers, 1845 (153) x. p.3 of the report.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Minutes of Evidence; evidence of John Duncan, Qs.36,42,43.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Report, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Francis, op.cit., Vol.2, p.95.

<sup>6</sup> Report, p.4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.5.

The committee's conclusions were that as the primary motives during the early stages of a company were speculative gain - the public being the beneficiaries only in the long run - railway companies ought to pay rather high rates for their land<sup>1</sup>; indeed, 50% of the original value plus severance and drainage compensation should be regarded as the absolute minimum.<sup>2</sup>

These sentiments were implicit in the Land Clauses Consolidation Act of 1845, and especially so in the procedure for negotiation which it laid down. Disputed sums of under £50 were to be settled by two J.P.s (section 22), but where larger sums were involved, and no private arrangement could be reached, the landowner had the option of going either to arbitration or before a special jury (23), each party to nominate one arbitrator in the former instance unless both were agreed on one man (25); settlement by jury became obligatory after three months if not successfully determined by arbitration (42). Opinions of these arrangements naturally varied with cases. The East Anglian maintained that arbitrators (to be J.P.s - section 24) were invariably on the side of the landowner<sup>3</sup>, and therefore, ensured (either by prior intimation or simple delay until the three months of arbitration had expired) that all disputes were settled by juries (it will be recalled that Press had withdrawn his opposition to the L & D on this understanding - see chapter 3 above). Whether or not the decisions of the juries subsequently caused a change of mind is unfortunately not recorded. John Duncan, solicitor to the Eastern Counties, had earlier expressed a confirmatory view when he told the Select Committee that juries were generally very favourable to the companies, and often made awards in close approximation to the

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<sup>1</sup> Report, pp.3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; Directors' Report, 3rd November, 1847.

original estimates;<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, however, John Swift, solicitor to the Grand Junction Railway, held that the "reasonable prejudice of the jury is in favour of the landowners" and preferred arbitration.<sup>2</sup> Such conflict of opinion serves to emphasise the lack of general criteria and variety of practice according to locality. The landowner had the advantage of choice of procedure, and was strong in the knowledge that by adopting delaying tactics to ensure a jury a company was only adding to its own difficulties in another direction. All in all the landowner could not have been in a better position, enjoying "every sort of protection you can conceive".<sup>3</sup> So strong was their position that when demands for excessive compensation were coupled with threats of opposition before Parliament many companies found it desirable, and probably cheaper than employing counsel,<sup>4</sup> to reach prior agreement at almost any cost - the probability of such an arrangement between the L & D and the Marriotts may be cited as a case in point. This practice was much more common in 1836 than in 1845<sup>5</sup> and later years, but even so there could be "no doubt that (it) was done by every railway company more or less".<sup>6</sup>

Two particular sections of the 1845 act may be cited additionally as being particular sources of delay and expense to companies. Section 85 laid down that in cases of defective or disputed titles, or where settlement as regards compensation had not been achieved, the land could not be entered by the company until the purchase money, as claimed, or as independently assessed if the owner could not be found, had been deposited at a bank of the owner's or his representative's choice and the company had undertaken to pay 5% per annum interest on that sum until such time as the matter had been

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<sup>1</sup> The East Anglian certainly does not appear in Sess. Papers 1849 (69) Li.93: All Appointments made by the Board of Trade or the Commissioners of Railways in Questions of Disputed Compensation, a return of umpires. <sup>2</sup> Report of the Select Committee; minutes of evidence, Q.45. <sup>3</sup> Ibid., Qs. 478, 479.  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Evidence of John Swift. <sup>5</sup> Ibid., Evidence of John Duncan, Q.56.  
<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Q.57. To this extent it would seem the 1845 Act had improved the situation.

finally settled and the deposit on the then agreed purchase amount lodged. By the December of 1847 the East Anglian was being obliged to pay interest on some £80,000 under this section of the act<sup>1</sup> in addition to the litigation costs involved, both items being to the detriment of the public service.<sup>2</sup> Section 92, requiring that a company might be obliged to take the whole of "any house or other building or manufactory" if any part of the premises were taken, was one which proved a particularly prolific source of litigation<sup>3</sup> and therefore of profit to the solicitors representing companies and landowners alike, and typified the tenor of the entire act.

Given such circumstances and protection the field was wide open for the placing of most outrageous claims against the railway companies. Thousands of known examples could be quoted, but one actual instance described before the Select Committee of 1845 will suffice to illustrate the attitude encountered a hundred times along the East Anglian lines.<sup>4</sup>

Q.353

Answer: "There is an instance of a railway projected upon which one party had 8 acres and  $\frac{3}{4}$ s of land; the value of it was easily to be ascertained. The party objected. Mr. Brunel is concerned and he said to me last night this party says he is willing to come to an amicable arrangement. He asked, 'What do you want for it?' He replied, 'I want £15,000 for it'. That is for 8 acres of mere agricultural land."

Q.354

Answer "Is that not for injury to the residence?"  
"No. I have been upon the line and I do not think that it is worth £2,500 for the fullest compensation of all kinds. I could not see the house along the line."

Q.355

Answer "Is there to be an embankment?"  
"No; it is almost dead level. That is the sort of exorbitant claim that railway proprietors are often obliged under certain circumstances to comply with."

The phrase "under certain circumstances" needs little interpretation - it points simply to the average railway company which could afford neither lost

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; Directors' Report, 16th February.

<sup>2</sup> The Secretary's Report at the same meeting.

<sup>3</sup> Clifford, op.cit., p.524.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence of E.Driver, a land surveyor.

time nor the ill will of the neighbourhood.

The East Anglian's land cost estimates, based on two independent and disinterested surveys conducted by two gentlemen well acquainted with local land values and agreeing within a few hundred pounds,<sup>1</sup> totalled £101,250 and covered the land for 85½ miles of track, station room and harbour accommodation (35 acres).<sup>2</sup> A further £20,000 was subsequently added in respect of additional purchases at the harbour and near various individual stations<sup>3</sup> such as Swaffham. Hopes that the absence or pacification of declared opposition would show the figures to be realistic proved completely fatuous. By December, 1847 the L & E alone had spent £118,858 on land and compensation and had lodged a further £24,773/4/3 in deposits; the respective figures of the L & D were £53,039/3 and £18,631/11/4, those of the E & H, reflecting restricted construction, £10,319/7/8 and £18,505.<sup>4</sup> By the following December the overall total had reached £262,797/18/9 and constituted the second largest single item of expenditure. Not only was this total 150% up on the original estimates but was also for only 67½ miles, not 85½. The average per route mile thus was in the region of £3,960, although the inclusion in the overall total of land for stations and harbour accommodation makes exact computation impossible. However, taking the figure in its relationship to actual track provided it offers a fair comparison with the £2,200 per mile of the Newcastle & Carlisle, the £3,000 of the Grand Junction, the £4,000 of the South Western, the £6,150 of the Manchester & Leeds and the £6,300 of the Great Western.<sup>5</sup> A reasonably low figure in real terms the East Anglian average compares badly, however, when respective traffic potentials are taken

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; meeting of the 16th February.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 2nd August, 1845; L & E meeting of the 29th July.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, pp.1253-4; Directors' Report 3rd November.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 19th February, 1848, p.201.

<sup>5</sup> Figures derived from the First Report of the Select Committee on Railway Acts Enactments, p.19, and the Annual Register 1844, pp.70-1.

into account. In addition, certain items of compensation were recurring, as, for example, the provision each year of free coal to the inhabitants of Pentney in acknowledgement of the fact that the L & D crossed the common there. The same line runs adjacent to the Narborough vicarage grounds where once resided the outspoken and implacable opponent of the railway, the Rev. Allen; the incumbent there still receives a small annual sum from British Railways, although a recent vicar, resident 20 years in the parish, admitted to having no precise idea of why. The hostility of Allen and the contents of the previous paragraphs, however, suggest the reason.

A convenient microcosm of the relationship between company and landowner is afforded by the records of the negotiations between the L & E and Lynn Corporation. Here, the gains to be derived by the community did not avert a reprehensible and incredibly shortsighted display of sheer cupidity. There is a local but unconfirmed tradition that at one place the L & D diverted its line rather than accede to a particularly outrageous claim, but true or not, no such possibility was open to the L & E in coming into the centre of Lynn, and to the harbour. The corporation lands involved were quite undeveloped and of poor quality, but, in 1845, suddenly assumed great value in the eyes of their owners. On the 8th January, 1846, on receipt of a letter from Williams requesting the immediate possession of a field near the harbour,<sup>1</sup> the General Purposes Committee resolved that first £21,300 (a sum determined on the 3rd January after £22,000 had been proposed and rejected)<sup>2</sup> must be placed by the company in Guernsey's Lynn bank, and interest at the rate of 5% per annum must be paid on this until a final purchase price

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the General Purposes Committee, Vol.3, 8th January, 1846, p.264.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.262.

was agreed; this of course was the procedure authorised under section 85 of the Land Clauses Consolidation Act. Although the £21,300 was to be prejudicial to neither party it remained a preposterous demand for a vacant field of inferior quality, and, most understandably, Burcham, a member of both council and company, refused to agree. But argument was too costly in time, and on the very next day Everard appeared for the L & E to agree, interest to be paid until the date on which the conveyance was eventually signed<sup>1</sup>; that the company was to receive the rents, if any, of the field was poor compensation in this grossly unfair arrangement. The Corporation next set about a proper valuation, but in no obvious haste. On the 14th January the committee flatly declined to fill in a schedule sent by the company requiring details of the claims to be made in respect of this and other lands<sup>2</sup>, and not until the 19th was Mr. Locke of Barton appointed to make an independent assessment<sup>3</sup>. On the 6th March, at a meeting of the full council<sup>4</sup>, final terms were agreed, and then accepted by the company on the 25th<sup>5</sup>. The original demand for a single 35 acre field had not stood up to independent valuation, for now 55 acres, 2 roods and 13 perches in the parishes of South Lynn and St. Margarets plus the 1 rood and 34 perches of Echo Road (to be demolished to make way for the station) were to be sold for £19,300<sup>6</sup>. This was high enough in view of the nature of the land, and the company had reason to be thankful only in that a proposal that £20,000 be required from the company had been rejected, a strange departure from the attitude hitherto displayed<sup>7</sup>. However, in that the company was to provide all roads and fences,

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the General Purposes Committee, Vol. 3, 8th January, 1846 p.266.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.269.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.270.

<sup>4</sup> The Guild Hall Book, Vol. 14, minutes of the 6th March, 1846, pp.795-6.

<sup>5</sup> General Purposes Committee, 25th March, 1846, p.798.

<sup>6</sup> The Guild Hall Book, Vol. 14, 6th March, 1846, p.798.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.795-6.



pay the costs of conveyance and compensate individual tenants<sup>1</sup> it may be seen that the Corporation's apparent generosity was not entirely without ulterior motive. A source of considerable dispute in later years was the further agreement that under no conditions would the company infringe upon or diminish the existing Corporation or private rights on the Fleet (a small creek off the harbour now filled in and the site of the bus station) or the Nar.

On the 17th September, 1846, consequent upon the slight deviation of the mainline sanctioned in the summer of that year, another £1,333/2/6 was taken for 3 acres 30 poles in South Lynn, as well as £1,181/5 for various oddments excluded from the initial agreement.<sup>2</sup> With surprise it may be noted that on the 14th May the Corporation had actually waived its rights to a portion of the compensation due to the owners and users of South Lynn common, although it hastened to add that this was not to be considered detrimental to its rights as the Lord of the Manor,<sup>3</sup> and indirectly secured its compensation in the September transactions which followed. So far the incidents recorded might be regarded perhaps as no more than examples of shrewd business negotiation, but the Corporation's attitude in other directions was one that beggars description, and confirms the shortsighted cupidity already suggested.

Without exaggeration it might be said that Lynn's commercial future hinged on the provision of a footbridge (at least) over the lower stretch of the Nar, otherwise known as Sandringham Eau, to effect direct communication between the singularly ill-sited harbour branch and the harbour it was supposed to serve. Carts were needed anyway in moving goods from ship to train, but without a bridge such had to make slow and expensive detours

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<sup>1</sup> Guild Hall Book, Vol.14, minutes of the 6th March, 1846, pp.795-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 17th September, 1846, p.806.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 15th May, 1846, p.799.

through the centre of the town. Yet, the concession allowing the company to build a small footbridge (presumably wide enough for carts) was granted with the maximum of bad grace and only on condition that it be removed on demand if it ever proved an obstacle to navigation; a nominal rental of 1/- per annum was to be paid by the L & E.<sup>1</sup> In the November of 1847 the conditions were shown to be more than a mere formality when the Corporation demanded that stages erected over the Sandringham Eau in connection with the said bridge's construction be immediately dismantled as they constituted a serious navigational obstruction.<sup>2</sup> There were to be legal proceedings if the company refused to comply - it did. The same issue arose again in November, 1848, and once again the company gave way,<sup>3</sup> this time with the rather pathetic assurance that "it was their desire that every accommodation possible on their part should at all times be afforded to the merchants and shipowners" of Lynn.<sup>4</sup> Not until 1853 did the corporation come to its senses and permit a substantial swing bridge to be built; it should be added that all the previous protests were on behalf of nothing but the Marriotts' slow and expensive barges which served an area to be reached more cheaply and efficiently by the Lynn & Dereham line. The bills of 1847, so vital to both town and railways, produced nothing from the Corporation but promises of support and a committee to oppose the bills failing the insertion of any protective clauses deemed necessary. Many other incidents of similar nature could be cited, but perhaps none so positively hurtful to the railways as the imposition in 1849 of a levy of 4d per ton on all ships entering the harbour. This, meant to cover the Corporation contribution to the Norfolk Estuary Cut, properly

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<sup>1</sup> Guild Hall Book, 26th February, 1846, p.792.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 15th November, 1847, pp.850-1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Vol.15, 9th November, 1848, p.36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1st January, 1849, p.38.

belongs to another context, but better than anything else may be said to typify the attitude of the Lynn Corporation at this crucial stage in the town's history.

There has been a recent tendency to play down the seriousness of land costs to the railway companies of the 1840s,<sup>1</sup> and this may well be justified in the cases of many of the larger companies, but in this case, as in so many others, the facts must speak for themselves. Fundamentally it was a matter of degree. The 1845 committee reported, not surprisingly in view of its general attitude, that the total spent on land was not prohibitive and represented "but a small proportion of the sum required for the construction of a railway"<sup>2</sup>, although in the following year the Select Committee on Railway Acts Enactments was commenting that the buying off of opposition had considerably swollen total expenditure,<sup>3</sup> and a later committee of 1852/3 heard evidence to the effect that land had been a large item of waste, "incredible sums" having been paid for it to avert opposition.<sup>4</sup> After all, the land involved was for the most part a strip only a few feet wide, and, by and large, the value of adjacent properties tended to rise steeply with the coming of a railway.<sup>5</sup> Even allowing for the fact that in their inexperience the directors of the East Anglian lines purchased some 60 to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, J. Simmons: *The Railways of Britain*, London, 1961, who quotes from (p.54) H. Pollins in *Economica* xix (1952), 406: "...while individual landowners may have done well out of the sale of land to railway companies - and may even have blackmailed the companies on occasion - the latter nevertheless spent the bulk of their money on the more legitimate side of their business. British railway companies would have gained if land had been cheaper; but this would not appreciably have reduced their difficulties".

<sup>2</sup> Report, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> First Report, p.16.

<sup>4</sup> Select Committee on Railway & Canal Bills Amalgamation 1852/3; minutes of evidence to the Second Report, evidence of S. Laing M.P., Qs. 87-88.

<sup>5</sup> See the First Report of the 1846 Committee on Railway Acts Enactments, p.8.

70 acres too much (including 42 for the abortive dock scheme of 1847)<sup>1</sup> expenditure still equalled one third of the original capital, howbeit for a restricted line. There can be no mitigation in assessing the importance of land costs to these lines; they were in their effect a crippling burden and a permanent millstone around the neck of the company.

### Section 3: The Lines on the Ground

#### A. General Considerations

By the December of 1848 the lines still lacked adequate siding accommodation, and several of the bridges and stations existed only in a temporary form, but already £527,386 had been expended on bridges, stations and works, and a further £221,502 on sleepers, rails and chairs, (although some £21,000 of these totals properly belonged to Parliamentary Expenses) so giving an overall average under these headings of £11,000 per route mile (compared with an estimate of £5,000), a total cost to that date of £16,000, and a final possibility of £25,000.<sup>2</sup> Track, works and stations had cost £8,000 per mile, which might appear reasonable at first sight when compared with, for example, the £12,000 of the Newcastle & Carlisle, the £32,280 of the Brighton line or the £41,400 of the Manchester & Leeds,<sup>3</sup> but not so when the relative ease of terrain and the ability of the revenue to repay the costs are taken into account. Certain aspects of the excess were unavoidable, but three mistaken policies "under the lamentable mismanagement"<sup>4</sup> of the first directors must be recognised as making a substantial contribution.

The first of these, already indicated in another context, was the

<sup>1</sup> See chapter 6 below.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath's second article on the E.A.R., 13th November, 1847, p.1287.

<sup>3</sup> The Annual Register 1844, pp.70-71.

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 19th November, 1849, p.1158; Cope on the 17th November.

reckless policy of bulk buying at a time when iron prices were at their peak and the estimates had just been completed in haste. A typical example of the harmful consequences of this was found in the 1846 contract with Bailey Brothers of Liverpool for 6,000 tons of iron rails, to be made to specification and delivered at Lynn; iron prices in Liverpool at that time were between £6/10 and £7 per ton, but the contract price for the finished rails was to be £12/2/6 per ton. In the February of 1849 these rails were still being delivered although no longer needed. To the previous December £72,491/18/2 had been paid on the contract (including interest on deferred payments), £1,572/2/3 was owing on deliveries, and a further 110 tons (value £1,430) were still to come, although each delivery constituted a "heavy loss" to the company<sup>1</sup>.

Just as the policy outlined above had added £60,000 to the rail estimates, a further £60,000 had been added by the foolhardy decision to make an additional 25 miles of the system double track.<sup>2</sup> From the outset this had been intended for the Lynn to Watlington section, but early in 1847 it was decided to extend the second line throughout the length of the L & E mainline, and also to make the E & H section double track. The former was to be doubled in anticipation of an extensive traffic consequent upon the lease to the Eastern Counties, the latter at the direct request of that company<sup>3</sup> which envisaged a prolific flow along its own Cambridge & St. Ives line to the E & H and from thence to the midlands (via the ~~Rugby & Midland~~ ~~Huntingdon~~) and the north (via the Great Northern). Such decisions were

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th November, p.1158; Cope reporting from the Committee of Inquiry, 17th November, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> The decision to double the L & E line was announced on the 3rd November, 1847; the estimated cost on the 16th February, 1848.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; meeting of the 16th February.

\* In the end, because of financial difficulties, only 10½ miles of the L & E line were in fact doubled.

entirely unjustifiable. Quite apart from the facts that the lease was not realised and that in the event traffic proved meagre, it would have been only common sense and sound business to have first tested the situation in the light of actual operating conditions, for then, if circumstances warranted it, double track could have been provided within three or four months against the promise of an assured return. The presence of the powerfully entrenched Ouse navigation interests, from which traffic still had to be wrested, should have given rise to a cautious approach even if nothing else did. The folly stands out even more starkly when it is considered that on the L & D the same question had arisen, but had been solved by laying single track over works that could take double, until the traffic potential had been fairly assessed in the light of experience.

The third error of the directors was the failure to make economy of construction a positive and primary aim. When, in November, 1847, Lacy was so incautious as to boast that "the works throughout are of the best and most substantial kind and are not surpassed by those of any line in the kingdom"<sup>1</sup>, he left the company wide open to the charge of having adopted "an expensive policy", and to the sneer that "we may infer cheapness of construction has been abandoned for handsome structures and expensive workmanship"<sup>2</sup>. The truth, however, was not where it appeared to be even though the estimated cost of works and bridges had been exceeded by £180,000.<sup>3</sup> As will be seen a large portion of this excess had arisen from ~~chronic~~<sup>acute</sup> practical difficulties in building the major bridges to the specifications enforced by the Drainage Commissioners. As it was the final bridges were solid and made to last.

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1253; meeting of the 3rd November.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath's first article, *ibid.*, 6th November, 1847, p.1264.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 19th February, 1848; Williams at the meeting of the 16th February.

Perhaps they could have been made more cheaply, but to do so would have represented false economy. The same applies to the stations, except that here a more simple structure than that generally adopted could have been used as the base for subsequent development. In themselves the stations were solid structures of local carstone comprising a station master's house and a fairly full provision of offices, waiting rooms and storage space. The fault lay in that the traffic potential of each still had to be tested. The East Anglian itself had to close stations at Sporle and West Bilney by the 1870s, and the fine station houses there still remain visible as a monument to wasted capital. Fine, solid gatehouses were also built in large numbers, although here, despite the fact that the gatekeepers were also linesmen, economy could have been effected by detailing, in many cases at least, the staff of nearby stations to go along the line and operate the gates, so reducing the number of houses that had to be built. In contrast to such possibly unnecessary expenditure, however, were three examples of false economy, all arising from the desire to advance opening dates. The first two of these were the stations at Lynn and Wisbech, both opened as temporary wooden structures. The former lasted until the 1880s with its single island platform (200' along each face), a booking office, two cloakrooms, a clerks' room and storage space and at the time had the advantage of being built in no more than two months, but maintenance costs must inevitably have been high, and this apart, the company would have done better to have economised elsewhere for the sake of its public image if nothing else. The third example was that of the temporary wooden viaducts erected along the E & H and on the Wisbech branch. Some of the former exist unchanged to this day, but others the Drainage Commissioners were not prepared to accept and forced replacement by permanent structures from 1849 onwards. This policy of lavish expenditure

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in one direction, economy in another, was of course totally unsound and a major contribution to the company's problems. All that might be said in defence of the directors is that they at least avoided the wild excesses which led the Eastern Counties during the same period to expend £81,500 on Ely station (built on a marshy swamp), £93,234/17/5 at Peterborough and £55,659/4/3 at Cambridge.<sup>1</sup>

### B. The Individual Contracts

Actual construction was expected to cause little difficulty, especially as throughout the companies maintained a rigorous supervision over the works.<sup>2</sup> But, serious and unforeseen engineering problems connected with certain major bridges and atrocious weather conditions delayed completion, and combined to increase the cost of labour to such an extent that several of the contractors became financially embarrassed or actually bankrupt, a situation further hastened by the exaction of £100 per week after the dates scheduled for completion under the penalty clauses of the individual contracts. That too much labour was employed is a possibility to be examined in a later section, that the employment of small local contractors without substantial reserves to see them through difficult periods was a mistaken policy must remain an open question.

#### The Construction of the Lynn & Ely mainline and branches:

The first contract<sup>3</sup> to be signed was that of the 7th April, 1846 between the L & E and Messrs. W.S.Simpson of Downham and C.Briggs of Ferry for the

<sup>1</sup> Second Report of the Select Committee on the Audit of Railway Accounts, 1849, Appendices, p.376 A, Report of the Committee of Inquiry to the Shareholders of the Eastern Counties Railway, 1848.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dickson, op.cit. p.25 for general comments on this, for the particular cases see annual Parliamentary returns showing the numbers employed by each company on construction - e.g. A & P, 1847(579) Lxiii.101 shows that the L & E had 5 inspectors and 2 engineers on the site, the L & D 7 inspectors, 1 supervisor and 1 engineer, the E & H 1 engineer, 1 supervisor and 1 inspector - these for the 1st May, 1847.

<sup>3</sup> This contract is still extant in the Lynn office of Messrs. Bantoft, Broadley and Ward, for further particulars see Appendix G.



construction of the mainline between Lynn and Denver and the harbour branch, in all 13 miles 726 yards. The tender accepted amounted to £48,347-10-8d., and the indenture specified a sum of ~~£44,16-8d.~~<sup>£44,544-</sup> to be paid to the contractors; it is to be assumed that the difference represented the balance to be held by the company until the works were completed and the one year's free maintenance required performed. From this balance were to be deducted any fines or the £100 per week penalty for non-completion on and after the 31st August, 1846. The indenture required that the best materials be used, detailed specifications for fences, gates and bridges were given, and sufficient labour was to be employed or else the company would make good the deficiency and deduct the cost from the balance of payment still held. No bricks in excess of need were to be made on the site; at no time were stores and plant, all material on the site being deemed the property of the company, to be removed from the works. The contractors were rendered responsible for fencing all the works, for temporary roads, for compensation for any damage done by them, for any acts of trespass by their employees, and for the provision of special police. No trees were to be removed. If in default in any single particular the contractors were to be liable to the seizure by the company of all plant on the works, and also to any further costs that the company might seek to recover through legal action. As further sections controlled the employment of labour (see p.290 below) it would seem that nothing was being left to chance. In effect the use of the best materials was assured, the contractors were barred from making any private transactions at the possible expense of the company, and were prevented from accepting other work until this was complete.

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After the initial delays already noted work was pushed on with great despatch, a circumstance duly noted in numerous reports primarily designed to catch the eye of the stock market. By August the temporary station at Lynn (actually built by J.Sugars of Lynn as were all the stations), the station houses, and all track, gatehouses and drains were ready for the arrival of the first engines in September.<sup>1</sup> On the 27th October the line was opened as far as Downham with the running of the usual ceremonial train. A year later, November, 1847, the line's "excellent order" was reported, as was a regular and increasing traffic; the double track, so far only to Watlington, was described as a great advantage.<sup>2</sup> But, like all the other sections of the East Anglian, this was grossly inadequate in terms of facilities; twelve months after the opening Valentine was reporting the current provision of sheep and cattle pens at Lynn.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile the completion of the harbour branch had been held up by the delay in bridging the Nar<sup>4</sup> (near the South Gate) which, coupled with severe weather conditions had prevented the carriage of earth to form the embankments along the branch. In the July of 1845 Lacy had boasted of the "extraordinary progress" being made in planning the branch and obtaining the land required,<sup>5</sup> but even so it was the May of 1848 before the first coal trains ran. By that stage, however, burdened with extended labour costs and the loss under the penalty clause - also, in the case of Simpson, deeply involved in the ruinous Wisbech branch - the contractors had become "embarrassed"<sup>6</sup> and unable to provide the year's free maintenance which the

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<sup>1</sup> Railway Gazette, 29th August, 1846, p.195; L & E meeting of the 27th August.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; Valentine on the 3rd November.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Railway Gazette, 28th February, 1846.

<sup>5</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 2nd August, 1845.

<sup>6</sup> Herapath, 17th November, 1849, p.1158; Reply of the directors to the Committee of Inquiry (dated the 18th August, 1849).

contract demanded. This now fell to the company and proved a source of great difficulty and expense.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, however, the work must have been well done, for subsequently Simpson was awarded the relapsed contract to complete the Lynn & Dereham line after the bankruptcy of the contractor there, and, in later years still, it was he who obtained the contracts for the Lynn & Hunstanton and the West Norfolk Railway constructions.<sup>2</sup>

Contract No. 2. placed with Messrs. Gregson for the Denver to Ely section had a miserable history ending with the bankruptcy of the unfortunate contractor. After prolonged difficulties in fixing the sum this contract was actually placed at a figure below estimate<sup>3</sup> (somewhere in the early summer of 1846) and construction got off to a flying start. Trouble came, however, with the bridges over the Ouse and the Wissey. Empowered by the L & E act "to regulate the height and span" as they saw fit<sup>4</sup> the hostile Drainage Commissioners made their specifications as onerous as possible. On his initial inspections Rastrick had found six to eight bridges constructed at bank level and with openings of no more than 20' to 30'.<sup>5</sup> On these his designs had been based. Such precedents, however, did not prevent the South Level Commission and their partners from demanding in the case of the Ouse bridge a 10' clearance over the banks and a viaduct of 150 yards comprising seven arches of 30' and one of 121'6" (instead of the 40' proposed for the central span)<sup>6</sup>; similarly over the Wissey, a mere 30' wide, there was to be a 10' clearance over the banks, seven arches of 30' and one of 70' (again in lieu of the 40' intended); in this instance, however, the company had gained

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 17th November, 1849, p.1158; Reply of the directors to the Committee of Inquiry (dated the 18th August, 1849).

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 15th February, 1890; Thew.

<sup>3</sup> Railway Gazette, 29th August, 1846, p.195; Valentine, 27th August.

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; Bruce on the 16th February. <sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Herapath, 19th November, 1847, p.1254; Valentine on the 3rd November.

a little ground, for the initial demand of the commissioners had been for a span of no less than 102'.<sup>1</sup> The clearance involved in crossing these two rivers meant the provision of a heavy embankment three furlongs in length to avoid excessive gradients between them, and long approach embankments on the far side of each. In these embankments lay the real cause of the trouble, expense and delay which then ensued. The foundations first laid were immediately swallowed in the soft alluvial soil and peat;<sup>2</sup> expensive pile driving, trenches and layers of brushwood were all tried without success. Eventually, in near desperation the engineers resorted to the even more costly expedient of laying down an 18' to 19' layer of gravel and dry sandy soil.<sup>3</sup> This served at last to press the moisture out, and construction was enabled to proceed.

The bridges complete, work was pursued with "redoubled energy"<sup>4</sup>, but only to encounter a savage winter of frosts and pouring rain which imposed delay after delay and completed the ruin of the contractor. But even so the line was opened throughout to Ely on the 26th October, 1847, and rail communication between Lynn and London was at last established even if twelve months behind estimate. The unfortunate contractor left some fine work behind him. The first Fen winter passed without slip or mishap,<sup>5</sup> while the Ouse bridge, with its massive bowstring truss, showed a deflection of no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$ " during exhaustive tests.<sup>6</sup> The line was complete, but the manner of its construction had had a serious effect on public confidence in the company as an investment; the decline in value of company stock was accentuated by the destructive gibes

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; Directors' Report, 16th February.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Valentine, 26th February, 1847.

<sup>5</sup> Valentine, 19th February, 1848.

<sup>6</sup> Valentine, 3rd November, 1847.

of Herapath who, in the first of his three articles in the November of 1847, made great play with the fact of a temporary speed restriction over the bridges (imposed until the track on the embankments had had time to settle)<sup>1</sup> in suggesting that the line might collapse under heavy engines, "we do not add weighty trains, because we do not see exactly whence the traffic is to come".<sup>2</sup>

The Wisbech branch, built by Simpson and Bennett,<sup>3</sup> cost £170,000 instead of the £80,000 estimated,<sup>4</sup> and "was made out of capital not belonging to the company who formed the line".<sup>5</sup> Staking was completed by the end of August, 1846, but actual construction did not commence until the summer of the following year. Until then the cost of the mainline had prevented a start being made, but when the Eastern Counties "said that unless the branch was made the lease to them of the Anglian lines could not go through"<sup>6</sup> the company's hand was forced; fortunately the embargo placed by the E.C.R. on the E & H at the same time released the necessary capital. The Eastern Counties wanted the branch so as to effect a link between Lynn and its own Wisbech and March line and so afford facilities for the development of traffic between Lynn and the midlands - obviously the Norfolk Estuary Scheme was being included in this calculation. The fear that the mainline of the L & E might fail lingered on (see chapter 1) and the branch offered an insurance against such an eventuality; so determined was the E.C.R. to have a foot in Lynn that in 1845 it had actually threatened to construct its own Wisbech - Lynn line,<sup>7</sup> a threat that might still be implemented, and so revive the dangers of 1844 which had

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; Valentine's Report on the 3rd November.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.1264.

<sup>3</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 15th February, 1890; Thew.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce at the meeting of the 28th February, 1849.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce on the 17th November, 1849.

<sup>7</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 2nd August, 1845; L & E meeting of the 29th July.

precipitated the formation of the L & E. To this extent the L & E board had been trapped by circumstances, but there was, in apparent justification, a more positive side. This was, of course, the carefully nurtured concept of a great east to west trunk route which was now coming nearer realisation with the commencement of the L & D works and the authorisation on the 16th July, 1846 of both the Manchester, Buxton, Matlock & Midlands Junction Railway and the Ambergate, Nottingham, Boston & Eastern Junction Railway. To bridge the remaining gap the East Anglian itself during 1847 sought to obtain authorisation to extend from Wisbech to Spalding where it would make connection with the latter of these companies. But, the former was obliged to restrict construction to the  $11\frac{1}{2}$  miles between Rowsley and Ambergate, and the latter, by an act of 1850, to suspend all construction save that on the section between Colwick and Grantham<sup>1</sup>, with the result that the E.A.R. was left with a ruinously expensive branch so badly situated in relation to the villages of the area through which it passed that it could not even cover its own working expenses. The only practical advantage derived was that by the branch and the running powers obtained over the E.C.R. lines from Wisbech to March and St.Ives physical connection could be made with the E & H section. This, however, was not sufficient to prevent Bruce from later claiming that he "could not imagine why the line had ever been built"<sup>2</sup>. He, of course, had not been a member of the board at the time the decision was taken; if he had been it is probable that he would have taken a firm stand against the Eastern Counties (as indeed a minority had wished to do) and would have prevented ambitious intentions conditional upon the success of two other independent and unrelated concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of these matters see chapter 6 below.

<sup>2</sup> On the 28th February, 1849.

Finally commenced in the August of 1847 the branch was expected to be complete by the end of December, but in fact was not open for traffic until the 1st February, 1848. A short extension linking the East Anglian station with that of the Eastern Counties was ready by the middle of the summer. Failure to realise the estimates in either time or cost was once again the fault of the Drainage Commissioners and their specifications, this time for the bridges over the Ouse and the Midland Level Drain. Indeed, by the November of 1847 all the culverts and the minor bridges were complete, the embankments had been consolidated by ballast trains, track was laid and ballasted to within a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of Wisbech station and all the stations and gatehouses were ready for a December opening<sup>1</sup>; only the two bridges were "some months" off completion,<sup>2</sup> although in the case of that over the Ouse the coffer dams for the piers were finished, the foundations of the west pier were above low water mark and ready to receive stone, and the east pier had been erected to ground level.<sup>3</sup> By the February of 1848 the piers for both bridges were ready and above high water mark and the difficulties of construction were over,<sup>4</sup> but rather than risk a repetition of the delays that had occurred on the mainline temporary wooden structures were erected to allow for a February opening - the same was done in the case of Wisbech station. This was a costly and completely unnecessary procedure. The Eastern Counties negotiations had failed and there was absolutely no advantage to be gained in respect of the trunk route concept. That enormous expense was incurred to hasten the opening of a line that could not even pay its way is not the least of the mistakes made by the early directors.

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; Engineer's Report, 3rd November.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; Engineer's Report of the 16th February.

The Ely & Huntingdon

The  $4\frac{3}{4}$  mile section of this company's line which survived the complications of railway politics and depredation of capital was in any case the first that was to be commenced. This followed an agreement with the Eastern Counties in the November of 1846 that the section would be completed within two years of the act and in time for the opening of the line from Cambridge to St. Ives; it was also agreed, on the suggestion of the E & H, that the latter station should be jointly financed, a considerable saving to that company<sup>1</sup>. After this most auspicious start both land and construction contracts were obtained within estimate<sup>2</sup>, and finally construction began in the first weeks of 1847. Completion by the 1st May was intended, but it was in fact the 17th August before the line was opened, the same day as the opening of the line from Cambridge. Meanwhile, at the request of the E.C.R., the line had been taken forward a quarter of a mile to bring it to the 'Views' in Huntingdon where readier access to the Great Northern would be obtainable<sup>3</sup>. These five miles had cost £130,000, or £26,000 per mile. The luxury of double rails explained part of this, but the chief cause of the remarkable cost was the series of heavy wooden viaducts (single track) necessary to take the line to and fro over the twisting course of the Ouse outside Huntingdon.

To anticipate, this very expensive line proved a heavy drain on the resources of its owners. Separated from the parent body it was from the outset worked on lease by the Eastern Counties<sup>4</sup>. But so poor was the return that in 1849 that company gave notice of suspension of all services as from the 1st October. The rental paid by the E.C.R. has not been ascertained. Such was the state of the East Anglian books that in the February of 1848

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<sup>1</sup> Railway Gazette, 5th<sub>2</sub> December, 1846, p. 672; Announced at the E & H meeting of the 2nd December. <sup>2</sup> Ibid. <sup>3</sup> Herapath, 26th June, 1847, p. 755.  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 6th November, p. 1254; meeting of the 3rd November, 1847.



Bruce himself had to admit, "I have been unable to determine the rent paid in this case"<sup>1</sup>. Lacy was to have settled the details at a private meeting with Waddington, Vice-chairman of the E.C.R., but a damaged ankle made him unable to keep the appointment, and there is no record of any subsequent meeting being arranged. The Eastern Counties made good its threat and the East Anglian was reduced to the employment of a horse drawn tram seating 60 passengers; this provoked a remarkable complaint from the Railway Commissioners that the minimum speed of 12 m.p.h. as required by the act of 1844 was not being observed. This was not resolved when the Eastern Counties, no doubt fearful of complete closure in case of future developments in the area and perhaps alarmed by news that the Great Northern was contemplating a lease of the E.A.R., consented to resume freight workings. The dangers attendant on the mixing of horse and steam were too obvious to be ignored, however, and so from the 1st January, 1850 two daily passenger trains in each direction were resumed.<sup>2</sup> The E.C.R. had offered a rental of 25/- per day<sup>3</sup>; whether or not this was the finally agreed figure is not known, but in view of the alternative of having practically no income at all there is no reason why it should not have been. A new junction with the Great Northern line in 1851/2 improved matters, but there was no substantial improvement in the situation until 1866 when the Midland Railway (which had taken over the Kettering, Thrapston & Huntingdon line - authorised in 1862 - in 1863) negotiated running rights with the Great Eastern over the old E & H and E.C.R. lines to Cambridge. Subsequently, in 1878, the E & H section was considerably raised in status by becoming the first part of the Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint line to Black Carr Junction near Doncaster.

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 24th August, 1850, p.828.

<sup>3</sup> C.J.Allen: The Great Eastern Railway, London 1955, p.35.

The Lynn & Dereham

The first section of the L & D, the  $8\frac{3}{4}$  miles between Lynn and Narborough, entrusted to a J. Walker, was completed, despite adverse weather, between the February of 1846 and the 27th October, the same day as the opening of the L & E to Downham Market. A year later the line was reported to be "in a most perfect state" with a successful service in full operation.<sup>1</sup> Most remarkable of all the contract was completed within estimate, a circumstance which led the youthful Valentine to point to the fact as evidence of how well the estimates had been made and that the excess cost of the L & E was entirely the fault of Parliament; these claims were perhaps justified, but unfortunately they led on to the boast that "I" shall complete the line within estimate.<sup>2</sup> Valentine was to have ample cause to repent of this rashness in the days that followed.

The second contract was awarded to Messrs. Fry and Frost and covered the 8 mile section between Narborough and Swaffham. Taken at a sum below estimate the contract was implemented during the August of 1846 with the 30th June, 1847 as the intended date of completion.<sup>3</sup> Bad weather intervened,<sup>4</sup> however, to force the actual date back to the 31st July, and it was the 10th August before the first regular trains ran through to Swaffham, and the 26th October before the temporary terminus at Sporle could be brought into use. This section, however, exceeded estimate and continued to be a source of expense for several years. The trouble lay in the extensive chalk cuttings outside Swaffham and round the actual station which proved far more difficult

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; Valentine's Report on the 3rd November.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Railway Gazette, 29th August, 1846, p.195; Valentine on the 27th August; L & D meeting.

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 6th March, 1847, p.302; Valentine on the 26th February.

than expected and which for years continued to need the "greatest care"<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, as in so many places along the E.A.R. lines, the goods accommodation at Swaffham, incomplete at the opening,<sup>2</sup> soon proved to be completely inadequate and subsequently required more expensive excavation to provide extra sidings space. The only compensation was that the chalk so removed was taken up for Fen road improvements and so became a source of revenue. But to the contractors the chalk meant ruin and bankruptcy,<sup>3</sup> so once again displaying the folly of contracting for such work without adequate reserves to cover the costs of labour when unforeseen difficulties occurred.

Fry and Frost had virtually completed their work when overcome by debt, but Messrs. Berwick and Burrows, who, on the 7th January, 1847,<sup>4</sup> contracted for the Sporle to Dereham section, were far from completing their work when overwhelmed. In this case the reason is rather hard to discern unless it was that too much labour was employed (for which see section 2, chapter 6 below). Originally intended for completion by the 31st July, 1847, summer came with a forecast of an autumn opening, then in the February of 1848 it was to be the early summer, but ultimately, after a government inspection on the 29th August, it was the 11th September, 1848 before the first regular service began. The Norfolk Railway had reached the town and commenced its services on the 15th February of the previous year, and had thus gained an enormous initial advantage for Norwich in the competition that existed with Lynn for the Dereham trade. The L & D board were of course largely to blame for this in having delayed the placing of the contract so long, but contractors' bankruptcy also contributed by bringing all work to a halt for three full

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine on the 17th December, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> Valentine on the 3rd November, 1847.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 17th December, 1849; report of an East Anglian meeting of the 15th

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 6th March, 1847, p.302; Engineer's Report, 26th February.

months<sup>1</sup>; in the end the company had had to finish the work itself at heavy cost and to the complete overthrow of the estimates.<sup>2</sup> There remains only one possible clue as to the nature of the constructional difficulties, but at the same time it begs the question of why ten whole months were wasted in the final stages. On the 3rd November, 1847 Valentine reported that to that date 336,000 of 501,000 cubic yards of earth had been moved, and that 250,000 out of 429,000 had been placed for embankments; eleven of the 23 bridges were complete (six more were to follow in the next two weeks), all culverts were made, 3½ miles of track had been laid and ballasted and all stations and gatehouses had been covered and were but a month from completion.<sup>3</sup> The possibility suggested here is that sheer weight of earth may have been the cause of much of the trouble - it will be noted that there was an excess of 72,000 cubic yards which would have to be removed by the contractors, and this alone may well have involved considerable expense. If this is so the folly of employing small contractors on small sections receives further emphasis, for a few miles away at Narborough (part of the second contract and one that also ended in bankruptcy) may still be seen the evidence of deep digging to find the earth used in some of the high embankments there; the 72,000 cubic yards could have represented a considerable economy there if only one contractor had been responsible. Also, it must be added, the state of completion indicated by the report of November, 1847 leaves nothing but wonder that the directors could possibly have taken so long to completion.

Bridges, contractors' bankruptcy, weather, rising prices, ill timed contracts, greedy landowners and foolish bulk buying thus all played a part in

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 17th December, 1849; <sup>2</sup> reply of the directors to the Committee of Inquiry.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; Valentine on the 3rd November, 1847.

making the East Anglian lines so expensive that even the most sanguine estimates of revenue could not be said to be sufficient to support the weight of capital that had to be incurred. Why should so many adverse factors combine against three such lines? The answer must be that mismanagement invited misfortune; sounder direction would have meant a closer awareness of the true situation and modified plans. The failure involved the economy of the whole of west Norfolk for because of their expense and laggardly construction the lines could no longer hope to dictate the economic pattern of the future.

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## Chapter 5

The Failure of the Estimates (II)Section 1: The Failure of the Revenue Estimates to December, 1848A. Summary Table of Opening Dates1846

October 27th	King's Lynn to Downham Market	L & E	10 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles
" "	King's Lynn to Narborough	L & D	8 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

1847

August 10th	Narborough to Swaffham	L & D	5 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
" 17th	Huntingdon to St. Ives	E & H	5 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
October 26th	Swaffham to Sporle	L & D	3 "
" "	Downham Market to Ely North Jnc.	L & E	14 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

1848

February 1st	Watlington to Wisbech	L & E	9 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
May	Completion of the Harbour Branch	L & E	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
September 11th	Sporle to Dereham	L & D	9 "

Stations

- L & E mainline: Lynn, Watlington, Stow, Downham Market, Denver, Ouse Bridge, Hilgay Fen, Littleport  
Average distance between stations: 3 $\frac{3}{4}$  mls.<sup>1</sup>
- Wisbech Branch: Magdalen Gate, Middle Drove, Smeeth Road, Emneth  
Average distance between stations: 2 $\frac{1}{4}$  mls.
- L & D mainline: Middleton, East Winch, Bilney, Narborough, Swaffham, Dunham, Fransham, Wendling, Dereham  
Average distance between stations: 3 mls.  
N.B. There was also a temporary terminus at Sporle from October, 1846 to September, 1848.

There were no intermediate stations on either the Harbour Branch or the E & H line; later the latter was slightly extended at the Huntingdon end and the original terminus was renamed Godmanchester.

Notes on the present situation:

- Renaming in modern timetables: Watlington is now Magdalen Road
- Stations closed: Bilney, Ouse Bridge, Denver, Huntingdon (East), Godmanchester, Magdalen Gate; under existing closure plans Stow, Hilgay and St. Ives are either closed or to be closed.

<sup>1</sup> On the 1st May, 1848 there were 1,321 stations along 4,523 route miles, an average of 3 $\frac{1}{4}$  miles apart - see Lardner, op.cit. pl46. For further details on the stations see Appendix J.

Lines in contact with the E.A.R., opened prior to December, 1848:

Ely to Norwich ( $53\frac{3}{4}$  miles) 15th December, 1845, E.C.R. and Norfolk Railway  
 Ely to Peterborough ( $28\frac{1}{4}$  miles) 14th January, 1847, E.C.R.  
 Cambridge to St.Ives ( $13\frac{1}{4}$  miles) 17th August, 1847, E.C.R.  
 March to Wisbech ( $7\frac{3}{4}$  miles) 3rd May, 1847, E.C.R.  
 March to St.Ives (19 miles) 1st March, 1848, E.C.R.  
 Wymondham to Dereham ( $11\frac{1}{2}$  miles) 15th February, 1847<sup>1</sup>, Norfolk Railway

## B. The Figures

Although any discussion of East Anglian revenue returns and working expenses is vitiated by the erroneous nature of the accountancy and the absence of such essential statistics as train, ton and passenger miles,<sup>2</sup> it remains clear that to the close of 1848 traffic was falling far below expectation and working costs proving disturbingly high. At first the proprietors were kept completely in the dark. Only in the February of 1848 were they informed that to the end of 1847 a net profit of £5,225/16/8 had been realised since the first openings, and that since the completion of the Lynn & Ely line gross overall receipts had averaged £423<sup>3</sup> per week.

When set against the then capital expenditure of £1,062,741 these paltry sums were disastrous in their implications, but the directors were not deterred from seeking to present them in a totally favourable light. In the first place they advanced some highly dubious figures purporting to show that for the 40 route miles involved working expenses amounted to less than £200 per week:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Opened to freight traffic only on the 30th November, 1846.

<sup>2</sup> This of course applies to virtually all companies, for the Railway Regulation Act of 1840 required little more than a weekly statement of revenue by classes.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.200; Directors' Report, 16th February.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Bruce in reply to a shareholder's question.

	£	s	d
Stations' Department	49	1	6
Goods' Department	36	1	1
Locomotive Department	37	0	0
Coke, oil and grease	48	10	9
Carriage Department	13	6	11
Secretarial Department	9	5	0
	<u>£193</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>

Little comment is necessary. The confusion then obtaining between capital and revenue accounts has already been discussed at length, and it need only be indicated here that these figures are utterly incompatible with such features as the interest charges on debenture stock, the wages of a staff of nearly 180 men (some of them earning as much as 19/- per week)<sup>1</sup>, an engineer's salary of £1,000 per annum<sup>2</sup>, a secretary's of £600 and the continued existence of the three individual company offices in Lynn, all these being in addition to the actual running costs of the trains themselves. Questions of depreciation and major overhauls were ignored altogether. But on this basis Lacy declared that receipts had "more than defrayed expenses" (while the additional benefit of a fully trained staff had been secured)<sup>3</sup>, and that on completion the "exceedingly moderate" costs would make the East Anglian one of the cheapest to run in the entire kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Others were not so sure, but, of course, had no means of confirming their doubts. Copeland pointed out that whereas the gross revenue of the East Anglian at its existing level would be about £22,000 on 40 route miles, the North British Railway was expending £42,000 per annum in maintaining and operating its 81 mile system<sup>5</sup>; comparisons may not be pushed too far, but the implication here was startling enough. Herapath went further, hazarding

<sup>1</sup> See below.

<sup>2</sup> Announced on the 16th February, 1848.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1254; 3rd November.

<sup>4</sup> Lacy on the 16th February, 1848.

<sup>5</sup> At the meeting of the 16th February.



a guess that receipts in fact barely if at all covered expenses, and claiming that in his view this was "a part of the country incapable of supporting a railway, especially when constructed on expensive principles"<sup>1</sup>, although subsequently he gave the lie to this by becoming a shareholder in the company he had done so much to run down. The difference, however, was to be found in the management, not in the countryside.

The alleged profit received further bolstering. It was said to obtain despite the growing severity of the national depression, incomplete arrangements, winter openings and the fact that the lines were not strategically complete,<sup>2</sup> but in no case was any attempt made to relate these various factors to specific lines or periods of time. A proprietor's plea for greater detail, showing the returns of each individual line, was rebutted by the subtle appeal to economy to provide such would involve the employment of extra clerks. Indeed, at this stage, the directors displayed such coyness in anything appertaining to a separate revenue account that even the profit claimed was placed to an accumulative section of the capital account; Copeland did not allow this to pass without comment,<sup>3</sup> but his was a lone voice and nothing was done - not until the August of 1848 was anything approaching a reasonable revenue account produced. Finally, circumstances, past and present, were evoked in attempts to portray a bountiful future. In the November of 1847 Lacy spoke with satisfaction of the 170,000 passengers who had already used the lines,<sup>4</sup> although this of course was probably more a reflection of natural human curiosity than a solid basis for confidence. In the following February he was

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<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., article of the 13th November, 1847, p.1287.

<sup>2</sup> Directors' Report, 16th February, 1848.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.200; At the meeting of the 16th February.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 6th November, 1847, p.1254; 3rd November, 1847.

engaged in telling the shareholders that since 1841 an average of 244,000 tons of coal had been landed each year in Lynn, and that 80% of it went inland in the direction of their lines;<sup>1</sup> the implication was that here lay a prolific source of revenue that could easily be wrested from the navigation interests (comments on the 5% pilferage to which water freight was subject were added for good measure), but as events were to show this was to be something more easily said than done.

In fairness to the directors, however, it should be remarked that despite the lowness of the actual figure claimed as profit there was one very solid ground for self congratulation. Four months after the initial openings to Downham and Narborough Lacy had quite bluntly stated that the purpose was not so much to gain a profit as to test the qualities of men and machines, and to prepare the staff for the more general opening.<sup>2</sup> The mistaken nature of this policy will be examined below and it is sufficient to say here that in all probability the remark was genuine and not meant to cover up for disappointing initial results. The whole concept rested on the assumption that there would be no long delay before all the sections were in fact ready, but in that the opposite had proved to be the case it was a matter for satisfaction that it could be believed that a profit had actually been achieved, however erroneous the foundations of such belief. But then 1848 should have shown results more positive and concrete altogether for in that year all the remaining sections were opened to traffic and there was the full twelve month period over which the capabilities of the mainline of the L & E might be tested; moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.200; 16th February, 1848.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 6th March, 1847, p.301; Directors' Report, 26th February, 1847.

because of the initial over-staffing it could be assumed that little time, effort or money would be wasted through inexperience. It was further to be hoped that as the bulk of the staff and the plant had already been concentrated on the first sections to be opened working expenses would not rise in the same proportion as the additional revenue produced by further extensions. The year, however, proved to be one of disaster, leaving 'Quiet Observer' for one to see nothing ahead but a "miserable prospect", and of the opinion that while many companies had erred in their construction estimates few had ever been so completely inaccurate in their revenue estimates.<sup>1</sup>

East Anglian Traffic Returns for 1848

Table 1: 1st January to the 30th June: refers to 40 route miles, except for week 5 of June when the total was 51.

	<u>Week 1</u>			<u>Week 2</u>			<u>Week 3</u>			<u>Week 4</u>			<u>Week 5</u>		
	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d
January	460	0	0	450	0	0	432	17	0	410	3	3			
February	431	13	0	425	11	10	472	10	4	642	1	0			
March	540	14	2	487	2	4	442	9	10	453	10	5	464	0	1
April	474	3	11	447	5	4	465	4	4	483	17	0			
May	481	3	2	521	19	8	512	8	8	498	6	2			
June	Not published			604	15	1	636	5	5	565	16	9	548	8	0

The above figures<sup>2</sup> were incorporated in the grand total of receipts to the end of June, 1848 and therefore cannot be subjected to detailed examination. The conveyance of passengers, merchandise and mails were lumped together to give a grand total since October, 1846 of £20,295/10/11½, to which was added £102/17/6 from the rent of surplus lands. After deduction of working expenses a balance of £9,087/7/8 was left, which, by deducting the £5,225/16/8 claimed as profit to the end of 1847, suggests that over the six months in question a profit of £3,861/11 had been made. Bad enough in itself even

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Herapath, 16th December, 1848, p.1296.  
<sup>2</sup> Published week by week in Herapath's and other leading railway journals of the period.

this profit must be doubted if attention is turned to the curious figure of 40 route miles on which it is based. This total is constituted by the L & E mainline and the L & D line as far as Swaffham. No mention was made of the Ely & Huntingdon section, although the explanation might well be that that line was on lease to the E.C.R., and that as late as the February of 1848 the rental had still to be arranged.<sup>1</sup> For practical purposes it may be assumed therefore that for the moment the E & H had been written off as a source of immediate revenue. Much harder to explain is the absence of the Wisbech branch which in fact had been open since the 1st February, but which was not shown in the above table until the last week of June. The only suggestion that can be made is that the branch was losing money heavily (evidence for this was given in the previous chapter) and that the directors saw fit to conceal this fact from their shareholders as long as possible; it is noteworthy that the first week of inclusion involved a drop in total receipts of only £17 on the figure for the previous week, possibly an opportunity for the Wisbech branch to be slipped in without undue notice being taken. As is clearly apparent on the attached graph the weekly figures follow a slight upwards trend; there are major peaks in the last week of February and in the second and third weeks of June. The former may be confidently ascribed to the holding of Lynn Mart which then, as now, brought thousands into the town to join in the general festivities. The latter peak is to be associated with the completion of the harbour branch in May, this in the sense that only then were the works sufficiently consolidated and the bridge over the Nar complete in a form that allowed for the passage of heavy coal trains. Indeed, between May and August were concentrated five sixths of all the goods

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<sup>1</sup> This became evident at the meeting of the 16th February. Lacy had damaged his ankle and had been unable to keep an appointment made for the previous week with Waddington, the E.C.R. chairman; a new date was still to be arranged.

244

traffic that had passed along the L & E since October, 1846, and similarly three quarters of the overall total on the Swaffham line.<sup>1</sup>

Table 2: Weekly Receipts from the 1st August 1848 to the 31st December

The total milage given was 51 miles until the second week of September; from then the total was 67½ miles and included both the final section of the L & D and the E & H which by this stage had been abandoned by the E.C.R. for lack of traffic, services being provided by the owners in the form of a horse drawn carriage.

	<u>Week 1</u>			<u>Week 2</u>			<u>Week 3</u>			<u>Week 4</u>			<u>Week 5</u>		
	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d
July	605	16	11	628	11	11	652	8	11	633	11	3			
August	620	8	1	548	6	2	567	6	3	520	8	6	579	10	1
September	631	13	4	807	3	10	710	11	8	684	15	2			
October	726	6	5	865	9	11	817	5	5	706	19	6			
November	743	3	8	739	2	8	716	14	10	620	18	2	657	4	2
December	668	10	0	653	0	11	724	9	8						

Reference to Graph B (p.245) will show that after the peak reached in the October section, as a result of harvest traffic and in particular the movement of barley to the malt houses, there was a steep drop in the average receipts per mile, indicating that either the L & D was not attracting traffic or that all three lines were suffering declining receipts. The latter is the more likely explanation, for, as shown in a previous chapter, this was the period of the year when the average labourer's wage tended to drop and when activity of all kinds, both social and economic, was at its lowest ebb of the year. This was to be expected, but was serious in that the general revenue level was such that there was barely a reserve to tide the company over the slack season; it must be assumed that trains ran to much the same timetable and that staff remained at a fairly constant level. The September peak may be explained perhaps by the coincidental opening of the L & D at a time when

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 2nd September, 1848, p.925; Valentine on the 30th August.

Graphs displaying the pattern of East Anglian Traffic Receipts in 1848

Graph A: Weekly totals

Graph B: Average receipts per mile

£900

Graph A

A: Lynn Mart

B: Opening of Harbour Branch

C: L &amp; D opening

D: Harvest traffic

E: Christmas traffic to London

800

700

600

500

400

40 miles open

51 miles

67½ miles

J

F

M

A

M

J

J

A

S

O

N

D

£15

10

5

Graph B: read dates from above

1. A rough average of 40 miles open for the year was derived from the fact that the Lynn Mart was only having been opened in the year of the directors as the year progressed, but they failed to let the directors beyond their control, with a view to the year on purely commercial grounds.

2. Derived from London and the North Sea & the Atlantic, 1848.

3. In a letter to Harcourt on 12th December, 1848, p.1236.

harvest wages had swollen the <sup>246</sup>labourers' resources, so allowing for some satisfaction of their curiosity and interest in the new transport,<sup>1</sup> a feature not to be repeated in subsequent years. That still left the December peak caused by the massive trade conducted annually between Norfolk and London in Christmas poultry, but again this was hardly sufficient to compensate for the long periods when little moved along the lines.

There can be no disputing the fact that to this stage receipts were overall very bad indeed. A rough average of £630 per mile per annum compared very badly with the national figure for the year of £1,936.<sup>2</sup> 'Quiet Observer' made some very telling comparisons with the railways of the "most dreary parts of the kingdom"<sup>3</sup> by taking the 21 weeks to the 20th October, 1848 during which total revenue was £14,116 (that is £670 per week or £247 per mile), and found the average per mile attained on the East Anglian had been exceeded by such companies as the Kendal & Windermere (£402 per mile) and the Belfast & Ballymena (£291), the latter despite the "miserable state of commerce in Ireland" and only having been opened in the April of that year. That something was seriously wrong was borne home increasingly to the directors as the year progressed, but they tended to lay the blame either on matters beyond their control, such as national depression and free trade, or on purely circumstantial events. At no time did they really get to the roots of the failure and examine their own policies with a sufficiently critical spirit. In respect of the first half of 1848 they pointed out that receipts had increased 40% to an average per week of £600 as against an

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<sup>1</sup> A further factor of importance may have been the commencement of the London social season involving the movement of large quantities of baggage, private conveyances, servants and families.

<sup>2</sup> Derived from Lewin; *The Railway Mania & Its Aftermath*, p.114.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Herapath's, 16th December, 1848, p.1296.

increased train mileage of only  $\frac{247}{25\%}$ . They insisted that the "line must not be judged from the receipts of the last half year" and sought to justify themselves by reference to the Fen floods of March and April which had kept the farmers off the land until May, to the unfavourable winter conditions which had attended the opening of the Ely line and the Wisbech branch, to the national depression and to the continued shortage of rolling stock<sup>1</sup> (somehow they did not seem to consider that this was their fault). But even so it had to be admitted that the bulk of local produce was not coming to the lines,<sup>2</sup> and shareholders were warned that it always took longer for agricultural lines to develop their traffic than any other kind.<sup>3</sup> Similar excuses were brought forward to explain away the "disappointing results"<sup>4</sup> of the second half of the year. In particular it was now the "peculiarly depressed state of agriculture" and the bad harvest, the delayed date of the Dereham opening, and, again, "the want of carrying plant"<sup>5</sup>. Lucrative anticipations were, however, not to be abandoned, although it was felt that the resources of the lines were only to be ascertained by working over a period "exceeding that which is ordinarily assigned to the development of railway traffic"<sup>6</sup> (usually assessed at 3 years).

Before turning to consideration of the many and various factors which really explained the failure to this point it is useful to take the analysis of the 1848 returns one stage further. This is possible because the receipts for the latter half of that year were presented to the shareholders in a more

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 2nd September, 1848, p.925; All specified at the meeting of the 30th August.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Statement of Bruce.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.201; Directors' Report, 16th February.

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 10th March, 1849, p.254; Directors' Report, 28th February.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



detailed form than hitherto.<sup>1</sup> 248 The revenue for that period was comprised thus:

	£	s	d
Passengers	10,749	17	4½
Goods and cattle	7,210	17	0
Mails	88	8	0
Milage, demurrage of wagons and sheets	115	10	5
Rent of surplus land	165	19	6
Locomotive power and wagons while employed by contractors	<u>637</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>8</u>
	<u>£18,968</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>11½</u>

From this total was to be deducted £11,834/1/3 in working expenses (for details of which see below), so leaving a profit of £7,134/6/8½. Of the overall total actual train operation had yielded £18,049/2/4½, of which 40.3% had been contributed by freight traffic and 59.7% by passenger workings as compared with overall national proportions of 42.5% and 57.7% respectively.<sup>2</sup> The discrepancy would not be serious were it not for the fact that by its very nature and the economic circumstances of its area the East Anglian had primarily to depend on freight transit, the people of the area being few and poor. Here then was a major weakness which must now form a part of a separate study.

### C. Why the Traffic had failed to develop

#### (I) External Factors:-

It must first be recognised that the deep depression of 1847/8 inevitably had serious repercussions on the economy of Norfolk and the

<sup>1</sup> From the accounts presented to the shareholders at the same meeting.

<sup>2</sup> Figures from Lewin, the Railway Mania & Its Aftermath, who had in turn taken them from reports to the Board of Trade.

Year	Pass.Receipts	% of total	Freight rec.	% of total	Milage	Rec.pr.ml.
1846	£4,725,216	62.4	£2,840,353	37.6	3135½	£2,412
1847	£5,148,002	60.5	£3,362,884	39.5	3876½	£2,195
1848	£5,720,382	57.5	£4,213,169	42.5	5129½	£1,936
1849	£6,277,892	53.2	£5,528,606	46.8	5940½	£1,987

Fenlands, its incidence being coupled with the deficient harvest of 1848 and general agricultural depression. From the railway viewpoint this meant that the purchasing power of the community was diminished and that as a consequence fewer goods would be moved and fewer people would travel; harvest failure implied that the seasonal peak on which so much reliance was perforce placed would be lower than usual. This becomes evident by particular reference to the goods handled at Lynn Harbour.<sup>1</sup>

	Coals imported (Tons)	Other goods imported <del>and</del> <del>exported</del> (tons)	Arrivals	Town Dues £ s d	Groats <sup>2</sup> £ s d
1845	302,463	141,935	2,841	4211 14 3	646 5 0
1846	208,392	120,468	2,171	3262 10 2	435 1 4
1847	264,671	107,948	2,493	3473 15 0	458 16 4
1848	232,831	82,386	2,037	3220 9 0	375 7 4

Other important factors besides the depression were, however, involved in this decline in 1848. In particular the Peterborough-Ely-Norwich line of the Eastern Counties Railway and the Wymondham - Dereham branch of the Norfolk Railway had made it possible for traders in general to avoid the dangerous and expensive use of Lynn Harbour whenever they desired. The area still bound to the harbour had greatly shrunk and now comprised little more than the north-west section of Norfolk and the western area that was within roughly <sup>f</sup> fifteen miles of Lynn. Salvation for the harbour and as a consequence the railway lay in the Estuary Cut and the provision of docks, both wet and dry. These needs were clearly recognised but two vicious circles had been created in connection with them. In the first the Lynn Corporation was soon to impose an additional harbour toll of 4d per ton on all visiting ships to

<sup>1</sup> Statistics derived from the Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, April, 1849; columns 1 and 2 are from Appendix 4, p.64, the remainder from Appendix 5, p.65.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A.

finance its own contribution to the Estuary Cut; inevitably this had the effect of further alienating trade. In the second the L & E had already obtained an act (1847) authorising it to raise capital for the construction of a dock at Lynn, but could not implement the project for lack of capital.<sup>1</sup> Further capital could not be raised while public confidence remained so low; confidence could not be bolstered without an improved revenue, but the latter was unlikely until Lynn's facilities had been substantially improved. Bruce, for one, was in no doubt concerning the vital importance of the harbour to the East Anglian. In the early part of 1849 he was conducting negotiations with a Hull steamship company for a regular passenger and freight service in connection with the trains, and investigating the possibilities of a similar link with Newcastle and Leith; if these discussions proved fruitful "they would no longer be told their line ran into the sea" and "still less that it fell into the Wash".<sup>2</sup> But without Lynn Harbour flourishing there would be an uncomfortable element of truth in Herapath's sneer of 1847, "In all you have about 100 miles of railway (sic) running here and there, yet scarcely anywhere".<sup>3</sup>

So far the causes cited are beyond dispute, but there yet remains the highly emotional question of the effects of Peel's free trade budgets of 1842 and '45, and in particular of the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The subject was naturally enough argued at an emotional level because of the fundamental importance of the corn trade to the area (especially so in view of the lack of any significant industry), and because the champion of the protectionists, Lord George Bentinck, was well known as a person to his Lynn

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 6 above.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 2nd September, 1848, p.925; At a meeting of the 30th August.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath's first article on the East Anglian, 6th November, 1847, p.1264.

constituents who gave him a public banquet in 1846 on his having "hurled Peel from office"<sup>1</sup>. As late as the June of 1849 (and then again in the August of 1850)<sup>2</sup> Bruce was speaking of the unprecedented depth of depression in the agriculture of Norfolk and Cambridgeshire and blaming it on free trade. On the former occasion he also said of it that "so far as it had gone it had acted most prejudicially to the trade of the port of Lynn", although he did add, and later years were to prove the wisdom of this, that these conditions might not last as farmers would probably be stimulated to greater enterprise and a demand for artificial manures<sup>3</sup>; he was speaking particularly of developments since the February of 1849 when the nominal 1/- per quarter duty had become operative, but the implication of his remarks was to be extended to cover the whole period since 1846.

The essence of the protectionist case was contained in a speech delivered by Bentinck to the Lynn electorate during the course of 1847, its content subsequently being printed and widely distributed in pamphlet form.<sup>4</sup> Bentinck argued that two good harvests would be required to restore the corn trade to its natural condition (the harvest of 1846 had been bad, that of 1847 was still to come), "and then we shall see wheat during a series of years average in this country no more than 45/- a quarter, at which price...the agriculturalist, with tithe, poor rate, land tax, malt tax and hop duties, cannot live". Only protection or a revision of taxes could give the agriculturalist the same footing as the Manchester manufacturer. He went on to point out that "we

<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 15th February 1890; Personal Recollections of a Lynn Sexagenarian.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 24th August, 1850, p.828; Meeting of the 21st August.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 16th June, 1849, p.596; Special meeting of the 13th June.

<sup>4</sup> There were in fact two pamphlets concerned with virtually the same arguments: 'Address of Lord George Bentinck to the Independent Electors of the Borough of King's Lynn' - Lynn, 1847, and 'Speech of Lord George Bentinck - House of Commons 20th July 1847 - on Sir Robert Peel's Letter to the Electors of Tamworth' - London, 1847. The quotations above are taken principally from the former.

protectionists" had forecast the current depression, and that the manufacturers had been the first to suffer by the exchange of sure customers at home for the vague chance of new ones abroad; meanwhile the European countries took British gold for their corn and used it to foster their own industries. Finally reference was made to the vexed subject of price fluctuations which were proving so disruptive of a balanced farming economy. Here figures were taken at random without any reference to prevailing conditions, the whole being intended to show conclusively that the farmer, and therefore trade in general, had been better off under the sliding scales of 1828 and 1842 than at any time since repeal of the Corn Laws. Under the former scale the highest price obtained had been  $81/4$  in 1839, the lowest the  $38/6$  per quarter of 1835; in 1843, under the revised scale of 1842, there had been no wider fluctuation than that between  $65/8$  and  $45/-$ . In 1844 the greatest change in one month had been that between  $49/8$  and  $57/7$ , in one week  $52/2$  and  $57/7$ , but since 1846 conditions had deteriorated seriously. During the course of 1847 one month had seen a change from  $81/10$  to  $102/5$  (the maximum for the year so far) and prices had been down to  $45/1$ <sup>1</sup>.

In the light of cold and retrospective logic these arguments cannot be allowed to stand, however convincing they may have seemed to those who wanted to be convinced at the time. In the first place he was arguing from the particular to the general, for the circumstances of the 1847/8 depression were quite unusual in both their coincidence and severity and were directly related to causes quite beyond the scope of Bentinck's case (for discussion of these factors and their relationship to railway investment see chapter 7 below). Admittedly the export of gold to pay for foreign corn constituted a major

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are representative of a whole mass of statistics quoted by Lord Bentinck in the two speeches which the pamphlets represent.

cause of the slump, but this represented a transient situation only and one from which industry was strong enough to recover in the next years without any substantial change in the agricultural situation. To press the point as Bentinck did was to revert to the by now discredited premises of the Mercantilist system and its associated concepts of national self sufficiency, for he seemed to assume that Britain could only remain rich while others remained poor - he apparently chose to forget that Europe as a whole had shared in the great boom of 1845 with results highly beneficial to British trade.

In essence Bentinck's case was the outcry of a pampered child suddenly made to stand on its own feet as did its industrial brother. It was entirely selfish, failing to recognise both the national benefits to be deprived from cheap bread and the fact that British farmers just could not meet the needs of an ever growing population. The whole argument was redolent of self pity. Bentinck made much of tithes, but these had been related to corn prices since 1836, of Poor Rates, which were rising again but to nowhere near the pre-1834 level (in any case intensive cultivation would on the whole serve to diminish these)<sup>1</sup>, of taxes on land, malt and hops etc., but these were all related directly or indirectly to actual production and could be recouped to a large extent by increased yields arising from more efficient methods and by the further development of livestock farming. Moreover, railways were now offering cheaper transport than ever before and extending the range of potential markets; they were also making possible the profitable use of lands hitherto deemed inferior. These and other factors were indeed already laying

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<sup>1</sup> G.E.Fussell, 'High Farming' in the East Midlands and East Anglia, 1840-1880, Economic Geography, Vol.27, No.1, January, 1951, pp.86-7, provides evidence for this contention; see chapter 9, section 2 below.

the foundations for the golden era of 'High Farming', which in itself showed how little the British farmer had to fear from free trade in corn provided that he was prepared to readjust himself and move with the times; the real threat was to come some 30 years later with the opening up of the American prairies and the technical developments allowing for the importation of New Zealand and Australian meat and dairy produce.

But to argue in this wise is to take the long term view when speaking of an area such as this which, if anything, was over-dependent on corn. If the importation of foreign corn (to the extent that in 1851 one quarter of the corn consumed in this country was of foreign origin)<sup>1</sup> did depress prices further than was already the case, the consequences could indeed be serious for the whole area, until of course suitable readjustment, especially by the adoption of a mixed arable and livestock economy, had been made. In the following table of wheat prices the second column is derived from the researches of a Norfolk clergyman in 1856<sup>2</sup>; the figures were provided by a Norwich firm and were represented as being true for the area in general. The third column, derived from a Parliamentary return of 1878/9<sup>3</sup>, gives the national average for each year, but with the exception of the last three years is identical with the figures of the second.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clapham, op.cit. Vol.2, p.218.

<sup>2</sup> Statistical Tables Illustrative of the Receipts and Expenditure of the Norfolk County Rate; Rev. H.Kitton, Norwich, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> Accounts & Papers, 1878/9, Lxv, p.438.

<sup>4</sup> The table is continued in Appendix H.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Norwich average</u>	<u>National average</u>	<u>Highest weekly av.</u>	<u>Lowest weekly av.</u>	<u>Wheat imported in cwts.</u>
1843	50/1	50/1	61/2	45/5	4,073,853
1844	51/3	51/3	56/5	45/1	4,762,667
1845	50/10	50/10	60/1	45/-	3,777,411
1846	54/8	54/8	62/3	45/1	6,207,894
1847	69/9	69/9	102/5	49/6	11,511,305
1848	50/6	50/6	56/10	46/10	11,184,156
1849	44/3	44/3	49/1	38/9	16,663,305
1850	40/3	40/3	44/1	36/11	16,202,312
1851	39/5	38/6	43/6	35/6	16,518,701
1852	39/10	40/9	45/11	37/2	13,261,161
1853	45/7	53/3	73/7	43/3	21,300,197

As may be seen from the graphs on pages 256 and 257 (which show the price variations in barley and oats as well as in wheat) there was indeed some degree of correlation between rising imports and falling prices, but in that between 1849 and 1851 imports remained at a steady level while prices continued to fall, yet in 1853 both increased substantially, it would seem that the abundance or otherwise of the individual harvest was the key factor, and not free trade in corn as such. This view is rather confirmed by the rise of both prices and imports in 1847, and by the situation in 1853 when the sharp rise in the volume of imports coupled with the increase in prices indicates a deficient harvest in 1852, although the discrepancy between the Norwich and national averages indicates a more productive yield in East Anglia than elsewhere. It also seems clear on the evidence of these years that the effect of repeal when coupled with high harvest yields and the work of railways in making prices national rather than local in character was to cause some considerable reduction in the range of price fluctuations within any one year.

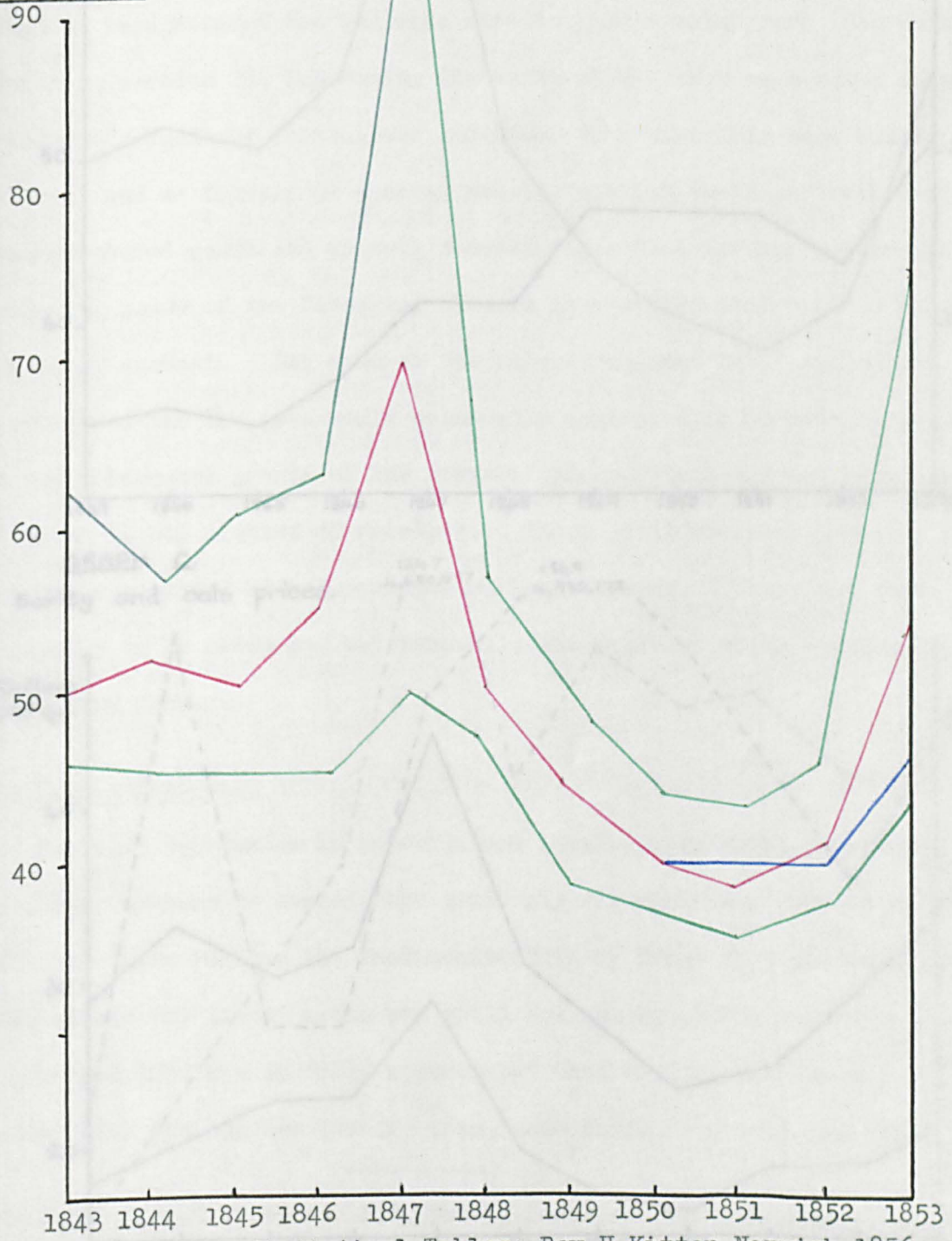
From the national viewpoint lower corn prices and a restriction of the fluctuations in them were entirely beneficial, but to the wheat farmer of East Anglia the former meant inevitably a period of anxiety and enforced



Graph A: Wheat Prices

Shillings  
per quarter

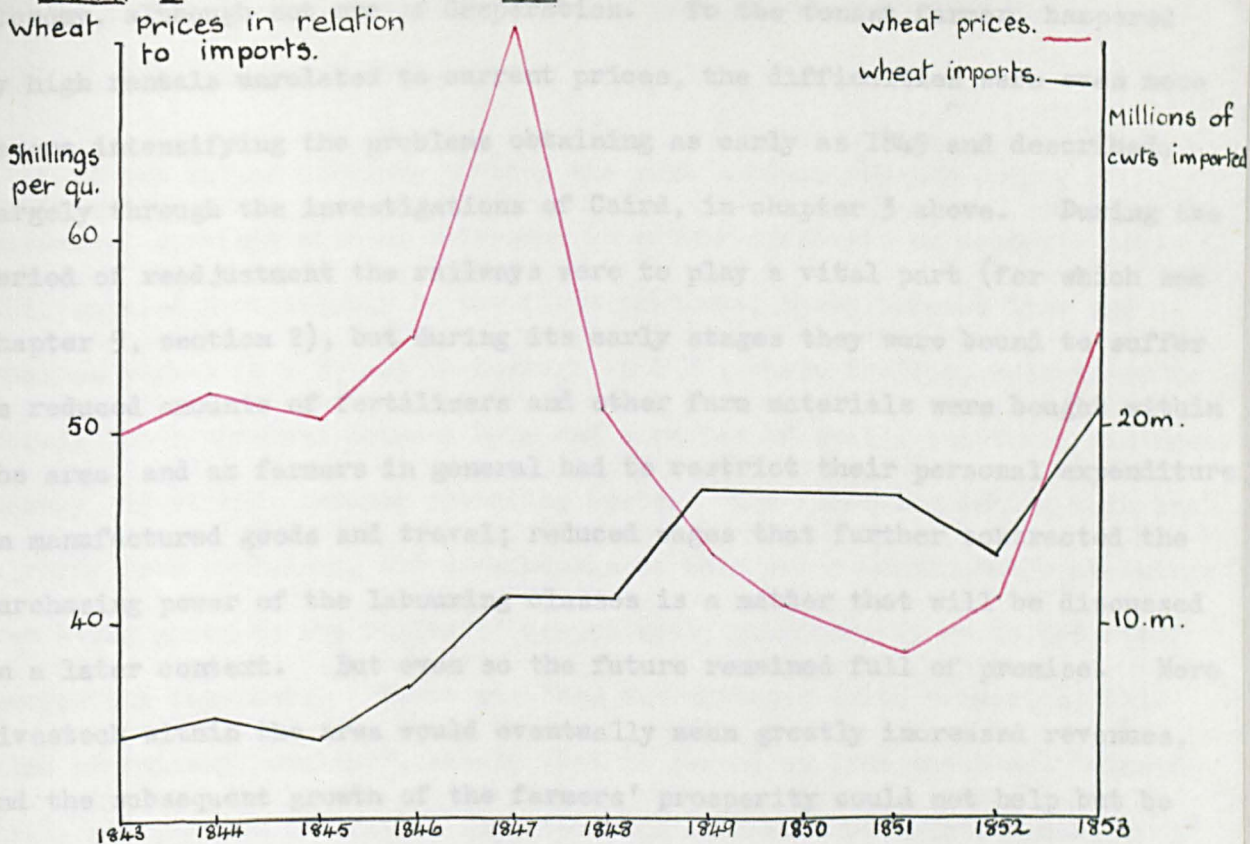
National average ———  
 Norfolk average ———  
 Highest and lowest (weekly averages) ———



Sources: Norfolk - Statistical Tables; Rev.H.Kitton, Norwich, 1856.  
 Others - Accounts & Papers, 1878/9/lxv, p438.

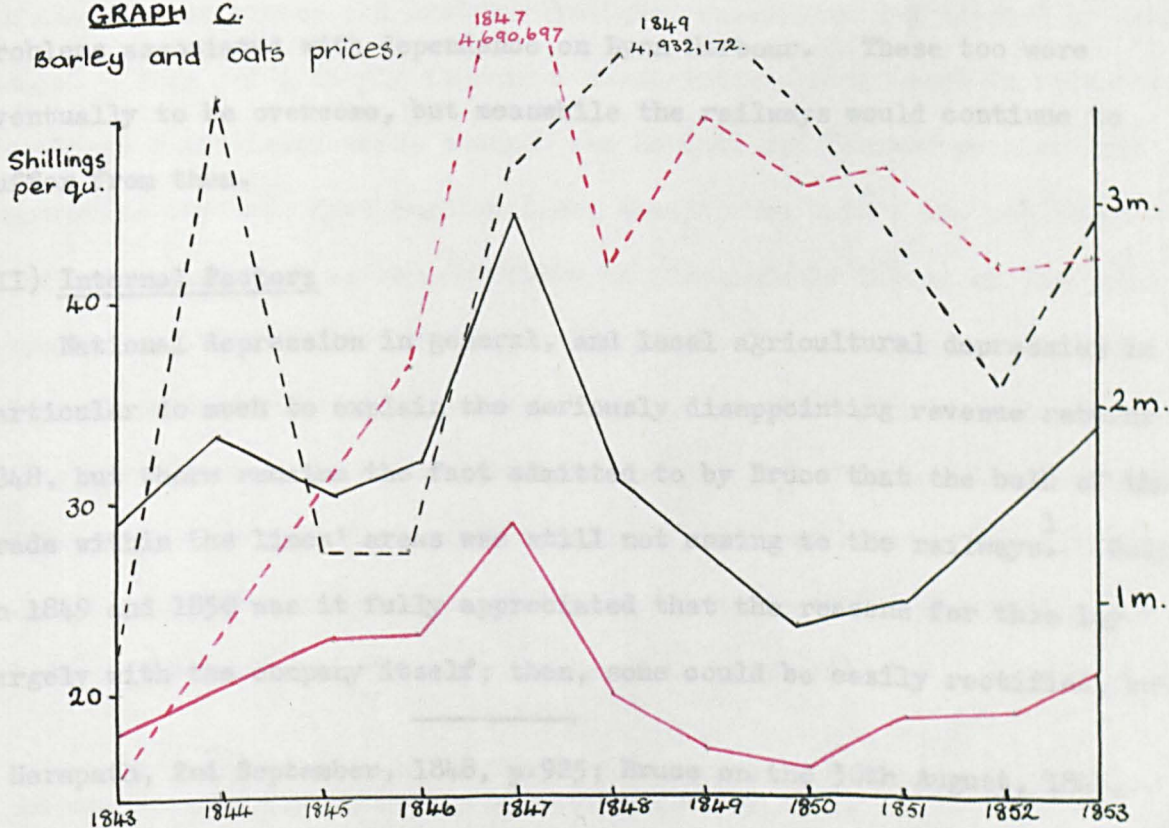
**GRAPH B.**

Wheat Prices in relation to imports.



**GRAPH C.**

Barley and oats prices.



SOURCE: Accounts & Papers 1878/9/1xv, p.438.

Barley. —  
Oats —  
Barley imports - - -  
Oats imports - - -

economy, although not one of desperation. To the tenant farmer, hampered by high rentals unrelated to current prices, the difficulties were even more severe intensifying the problems obtaining as early as 1845 and described, largely through the investigations of Caird, in chapter 3 above. During the period of readjustment the railways were to play a vital part (for which see chapter 9, section 2), but during its early stages they were bound to suffer as reduced amounts of fertilizers and other farm materials were bought within the area, and as farmers in general had to restrict their personal expenditure on manufactured goods and travel; reduced wages that further contracted the purchasing power of the labouring classes is a matter that will be discussed in a later context. But even so the future remained full of promise. More livestock within the area would eventually mean greatly increased revenues, and the subsequent growth of the farmers' prosperity could not help but be reflected in all classes of receipts. There still remained, however, the problems associated with dependence on Lynn Harbour. These too were eventually to be overcome, but meanwhile the railways would continue to suffer from them.

## (II) Internal Factors

National depression in general, and local agricultural depression in particular do much to explain the seriously disappointing revenue returns of 1848, but there remains the fact admitted to by Bruce that the bulk of the trade within the lines' areas was still not coming to the railways.<sup>1</sup> Only in 1849 and 1850 was it fully appreciated that the reasons for this lay largely with the company itself; then, some could be easily rectified, but

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 2nd September, 1848, p.925; Bruce on the 30th August, 1848.

others that had arisen from the mistaken policies of the first boards were to prove harder to redeem.

Of the latter category perhaps the most serious was the policy of piecemeal openings without reference to either strategic or economic entities. This applied particularly to the first sections, those between Lynn and Downham Market (L & E) and Narborough (L & D), where traffic, restricted to purely local movement between Lynn and a series of small, scattered villages, barely, if at all, covered operating costs. The intention behind this has already been explained, but commendable as this was a considerable advantage was being given to the railways' competitors, particularly so to the river navigation interests. There was "one circumstance which render(ed) this line of railway peculiar", namely that it served an area which was "already well, and perhaps naturally, supplied with the means of intercommunication" in the form of rivers and drains, straight, convenient and adapted by long usage.<sup>1</sup> This and a deeply ingrained conservatism, manifested in reluctance to change established ways, amongst the Norfolk and Fenland peoples made it imperative that the East Anglian lines should come before the public in a form and manner such as to constitute an irresistible impact on the local economies. This implied strategically purposeful sections, a sufficiency of plant to deal with every possible type of traffic offered, and a rational rates' structure. As it was the lines opened in sections without significance, with a grossly inadequate amount of plant and with rates still the subject of opinion and experimentation. Then for twelve months (in the case of the L & E) rail and river were allowed to exist side by side without the

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath's second article on the East Anglian, 13th November, 1847, p.1287; he was speaking specifically of the Lynn & Ely line.

former being able to offer a single major advantage to either farmer or merchant; for any journey of 12 miles or more at least two modes of transport were required, together with the additional costs and delays arising from the extra handling of goods. This situation not only allowed the Ouse river interests plenty of time in which to set their house in order and prepare for cut rates and other methods of competition, but also permitted the locality to get used to the railway without actually coming to use it. Thus it was that during 1848 the now completed L & E felt the full force of its "numerous natural competitors" with their "natural advantages" and low rates.<sup>1</sup> Bruce, in the February of 1849, admitted to the fact without recognising the cause, but could only hope that soon "coal owners and farmers would see and find it to their advantage to place their traffic on the line".<sup>2</sup> For some considerable time to come, however, they didn't, so giving rise to Bruce's subsequent complaint of the slowness with which agricultural districts changed their habits,<sup>3</sup> a point further developed in the directors' reply to the Committee of Inquiry in the second half of 1849.<sup>4</sup>

For the second major weakness, the general inadequacy of facilities and rolling stock, the directors must bear a heavy and direct share of the responsibility. To the latter stages of 1848 the company's operations presented a pathetic spectacle of poverty, unpreparedness and feebleness culminating in the necessity to abandon normal goods traffic in the autumn of 1848 in order to accommodate the harvest movement.<sup>5</sup> This was hardly surprising in view of the facts. In the February of 1848 Valentine was

<sup>1</sup> Herapath's second article, 13th November, 1847, p.1287.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 10th March, 1849, p.254; Meeting of the 28th February.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 16th June, 1849, p.596; Meeting of the 13th June.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 17th November, 1849, p.1158.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 2nd September, 1848, p.924; Bruce on the 30th August.

describing additional goods accommodation at most stations as absolutely essential,<sup>1</sup> and it was the August before he could announce (the first fruits of Bruce's regime) the provision of such essential facilities and aids to effective operation as an engine shed at Lynn (engines standing in the open would inevitably require higher maintenance costs and be reduced in their availability), goods sheds, cattle pens and sidings at Downham Market (supposedly to be a major source of cattle traffic), Narborough and Swaffham (where great expense was incurred in further excavation of the chalk), of sidings at St. Germain, Denver, Hilgay and Sporle (the temporary terminus of the L & D), together with extra accommodation at the harbour station.<sup>2</sup> The lack of such facilities as these in practical terms meant long delays in transit and probably prolonged exposure to the weather; it is particularly noteworthy that these additions were rendered necessary by the miserable level of traffic already obtaining, and this gives added point to the significance of Valentine's remark in the February of 1848 that if extra facilities were provided "a very large and remunerative traffic as yet wholly untouched will be brought upon your railways"<sup>3</sup> But rectification<sup>3</sup> of such a completely false start took time and money, neither of which the company had to spare, so that as late as the December of 1848 Herapath could still write that so far "scarcely anything appears to have been done in goods traffic"<sup>4</sup>; as indicated something was in fact being done but many months must elapse before it could yield a measurable return.

Most serious of all, however, were the ~~chronic~~ deficiencies of the harbour branch. So grossly inadequate were facilities and so small the

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.200; Valentine's Report delivered on the 16th February.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 2nd September, 1848, p.924; Valentine's Report delivered on the 30th August.

<sup>3</sup> Report delivered on the 16th February, 1848.

<sup>4</sup> Op.cit., 30th December, 1848, p.1348.

wharfage space that until the latter part of 1848 no more than 50 tons could be handled in a day<sup>1</sup>; a year later the figure had risen to 400 tons.<sup>2</sup> In addition carts had to be used to convey goods between the waterfront and railhead at such expense that many potential customers were left with no advantage in using the railway. The only real solution to this problem was a railbridge over the intervening River Nar near its point of entry into the Ouse, but so far only a footbridge was being constructed (for the attitude of Lynn Corporation to this see chapter 4 above), and the present day swing bridge was not to be installed until 1854, the same period as the valuable Boal Quay in close proximity to the harbour station. Meanwhile Bruce temporised, and in the summer of 1848 succeeded in his bid to take over the carting establishment concerned, with a resultant saving of 1/- per ton to those who used the harbour branch.<sup>3</sup> Finally, as has already been shown, the actual branch itself was not fit to take heavy coal trains until the May of 1848. This eased the situation but still left the bulk of the coal traffic on the river.

The general situation was little better as regards the rolling stock which was deficient in both quantity and quality. Services were commenced with no more than four tiny, four wheeled, locomotives, "whose quality cannot be exceeded"<sup>4</sup>, provided by Messrs. Sharp Brothers of Manchester. The last independent accounts of the L & E showed £4,029/15/7 as having been expended on locomotives, so indicating a cost of a round £1,000 each. Subsequently six more of the same type were added, all by the middle of 1849, together with an experimental light engine which was specially designed to reduce

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 17th November, 1849, p.1158; Directors' Reply to the Committee of Inquiry.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 2nd September, 1849, p.925; Bruce on the 30th August.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 6th March, 1847, p.301; Directors' Report, 26th February.

running costs.<sup>1</sup> The latter was not purchased until 1849, but meanwhile the accounts for the first part of 1848 showed a further £4,607 on locomotives, those for the second half £4,462. There was almost certainly some overlapping here, but the figures demonstrate quite clearly the extent to which locomotive costs were rising; by 1861 15" cylinder engines such as these were costing some £1,900 each together with an additional £500 for the tender.<sup>2</sup> The result of this was that the large companies<sup>had</sup> began to make their own engines, but small and poor concerns such as the East Anglian were obliged to go short of motive power to the direct detriment of traffic development. Mechanical power was extensively supplemented both here and elsewhere by horse shunting at stations, but this could do little to alleviate the difficulties of a system that could put only eleven locomotives on its 62 route miles<sup>3</sup> even when all were in working order. This happy circumstance was likely to be realised only on the rarest of occasions as reference to the high expenditure on locomotive repairs and maintenance (see section 2 below) will confirm. It is little wonder that services were few and poor and that normal freight had to be suspended to accommodate the harvest traffic in 1848. Admittedly no company could afford to keep expensive capital equipment in excess of its known needs, but this was a case of equipping at a level far below the accepted potential. It was an unsound position not only because it prevented the proper development of traffic but because it also placed undue strain on the existing stud which in any case possessed all the defects inevitable in the yet infant science of locomotive construction.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Langley Aldrich, *Locomotives of the Great Eastern Railway*, Wickford, July, 1955, p.37, states that the E.A.R. handed 10 locomotives over to the G.E.R. on the amalgamation of 1862, but in February, 1849 Valentine mentioned quite specifically that the company possessed 11. The discrepancy concerns the experimental engine which the company could not afford to adopt.

<sup>2</sup> Head, *op.cit.*, p.67.

<sup>3</sup> The Ely & Huntingdon section was worked by Eastern Counties power.



Passenger rolling stock was initially confined to eight first class carriages, seven second and ten third<sup>1</sup> - a distribution in keeping perhaps with the proportion of national travel by classes, but one hardly in keeping with the known circumstances of the area. By 1849 there were 59 in all.<sup>2</sup> These were still too few for full and completely effective services to be maintained. Probably it was again high costs that were at the root of the shortage. First class carriages were costing some £500 each by this stage, and those of the lower classes certainly not less than £200 each;<sup>3</sup> force of necessity was obliging all companies to provide "handsome and commodious vehicles"<sup>4</sup>, some with cushions and all with lamps, for the second class passenger, and since the 1844 act money could no longer be saved to the same extent on third class conveyances.

No exact figures on the number of goods vehicles in service are available for 1847, but in view of the general circumstances discussed and of the fact that "considerable additions" during 1848 and '49 brought the total to 517,<sup>5</sup> it appears that it can hardly have exceeded 300 even at the most liberal estimate; to the 31st August, 1847 total expenditure on all kinds of rolling stock had been £33,572. Allowing for 30 carriages at an average £350 each and an average £120 for vans, wagons, horse boxes etc.<sup>6</sup> the actual figure suggested is only 191 for the first part of the year at least. Once again the quality as well as the quantity may be held as a matter of doubt. As early as 1851 76 goods vehicles had to be substantially repaired, 40 bullock

<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 6th March, 1847, p.301; L & E meeting of the 26th February.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 17th November, 1849, p.1157; Bruce on the 23rd August.

<sup>3</sup> Dickson, op.cit., p.86.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp.81-82.

<sup>5</sup> Valentine on the 28th February, 1849.

<sup>6</sup> Following Dickson, p.86 who, speaking of 1854, gives the cost as between £100 and £150.

wagons repaired and substantially strengthened, and 78 other units of rolling stock modified and improved.<sup>1</sup> There may of course be some overlapping in these figures, but they do suggest that one fifth of the whole fleet had to be renovated in one year although only two to five years' old. On a total capital expenditure, to December, 1848, of £56,075/16/4 on rolling stock this was a deeply disturbing factor. Finally, in condemning the quantity of stock as inadequate (a situation that would be exacerbated by mechanical failure and lack of availability on the evidence given above) it is to be remembered that at any given time a substantial proportion of East Anglian stock would be on 'foreign' territory - a conclusion supported by the high level of demurrage payments made to the company; it is unlikely that this absence would be balanced by the wagons of other companies working into the E.A.R., for inward traffic to Lynn was largely local in origin. Secondly, to avoid excessive handling and to minimise the risk of theft, it was at that time the common practice to run small single consignment wagon loads;<sup>2</sup> this may or may not have served its purpose, but it certainly wasted wagon space and contributed to excessive wagon mileage for a poor return.

Nothing, however, bore more directly on successful railway operation than the speedy implementation of a sound structure of rates and fares. Broadly speaking the achievement of such derived from the empirical art of discovering what rate each class of traffic would bear, and, by offering reduced rates, bringing in the lowest possible strata of traffic that could be carried at an operational profit. With these had to be reconciled decisions on the basis of freight charges, for example whether to place prime emphasis on wagon space

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 19th March, 1851, p.340; Meeting of the 7% Preference Shareholders March, 1851.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lewin, Early British Railways and Kirkaldy & Evans, op.cit. p.34.

Addenda to page 266

The top paragraph should end:

.....when acting as carriers in their own right.<sup>3</sup>

Footnote 3 should continue:

..subject only, from 1845, to the "Maximum Rates Clause" which laid down that companies acting as carriers in their own right must charge "something less" than the aggregate tolls (i.e. use of the road, use of carriages and for the provision of locomotive power) they could demand from a third party carrier for each service separately (cf. W.T. Jackman; The Development of Transportation in Modern England, 1962 ed., pp 576f.); not until after 1854 were fixed maximum rates for the companies as the carriers regularly enforced.

occupied, the need of handling or actual weight, and the effects of lines, and rivers etc., in competition (e.g. a rival might have a shorter route so that a reduced milage rate might have to be considered from certain localities or for specific items of traffic). But in the end local economic circumstances had to be the arbiter, for only trunk routes, free from any kind of competition, could charge with impunity.<sup>1</sup> Companies were left with a fairly free hand in that Parliament did little more in the individual acts of incorporation than lay down the maximum charges which the companies were entitled to "demand and receive for the use of the Railway"<sup>2</sup>; the cost of conveyance and terminal charges were in effect left to the discretion of the companies.<sup>3</sup>

By and large, by 1846 the general principles leading to success had been recognised. Sir Samuel Morton Peto told the Select Committee of that year on Railway Acts Enactments:<sup>4</sup>

"I am at present constructing a line in an agricultural district and in conversation with the directors have told them several times that unless they make their rates of fares upon the line very low they will get scarcely any traffic; if they put it as low as we did between Norwich and Yarmouth<sup>5</sup> they will have a very large traffic, but not otherwise."

More succinctly Robert Stephenson told the same committee:<sup>6</sup>

"You increase your income by diminishing your fares to a certain point, and beyond that point if you go on diminishing your fares you diminish your income."

<sup>1</sup> Acworth, op.cit. p.28.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from the E.A.R. Amalgamation Act, 10 & 11 Vic.c.cclxxv, 22nd July 1847.

<sup>3</sup> Parliament in fact considered the carriage of passengers and goods as analogous to carriage by road, i.e. by a third party. In that companies became carriers of their own accord they were in effect left with a completely free hand.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of Evidence, p.242; quoted by Morrison, op.cit. p.28 fn.

<sup>5</sup> The return fares for the round journey of 40 miles between Norwich and Yarmouth were in fact 3/6 first class, 2/6 second and 1/3 third - this in 1845.

<sup>6</sup> Also quoted by Morrison, op.cit. p.28 fn.

The principles were clear enough, but their implementation demanded courage and a high degree of sensitivity to the local economic pulse. In any structure flexibility was the prime prerequisite. Another aspect, appertaining particularly to freight traffic, was a wide diversity of classes to ensure that each class of traffic could be carried at economic rates - a well known example of this is the difference between the space and handling involved in the movement of baled hay and the same weight of loose hay.<sup>1</sup> In this, it may be said, the East Anglian was awake to the situation for its Rates Book was a fully comprehensive document;<sup>2</sup> others were not so aware of the situation, for in 1852, for example, the London & North Western Railway could contain its divisions within a two page booklet.<sup>3</sup>

Evidence as regards the implementation of these principles during the early years of the East Anglian's operations is scanty, but points to a somewhat inhibited recognition. To its credit the company adopted a policy of moderate fares as likely to bring in the most money,<sup>4</sup> and made early use of the cheap excursion train, the first such, running to London, on the 12th June, 1848 with between 400 and 500 passengers packed into 17 carriages. Allowed for normal service trains to charge maxima of 3d., 2d. and 1½d. per mile to each of the classes for the use of the line, the all inclusive levels for 1848 stood at 2½d., 1¾d. and 1¼d., so being in line with the rates of the Eastern Counties system.<sup>5</sup> The question arises, however, were these rates really sufficiently low. A rise in first class travel was reported in 1849 with the additional comment that the directors had favoured this class from

<sup>1</sup> See Pratt, op.cit. p.122.

<sup>2</sup> See the 1847 edition in private collection in King's Lynn, and Appendix I.

<sup>3</sup> Pratt, op.cit. p.182.

<sup>4</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1287; Lacy on the 3rd November.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

the first.<sup>1</sup> The disproportionate provision of first class accommodation in the initial carriage fleet mentioned above lends further weight to the suggestion. Moreover, there is no mention at this stage of the reduced rate market tickets which were to prove so successful in later years. This relative lack of courage implied above arose probably from a variety of causes. The first was the not uncommon and lingering conception that the railways were a dignified replacement of the stage coaches and therefore primarily for the benefit of the upper classes. A second possibility is that the high cost of first class carriages involved a certain degree of subsidisation from the two lower levels. In the third place a cut in fare levels at a time when the overall financial situation was so grave probably called for more courage and prescience than even Bruce possessed. Last of all, linked with the previous suggestion, was possibly a very understandable reluctance to abandon the picture created by the 1844 estimates of huge passenger returns. The estimates seemed to have envisaged packed trains with the occupants paying an average 2d. per mile. But, as early as the July of 1845, Pares, the same traffic expert enlisted by the L & D and the L & E, had told Committee X on the Cambridge & Lincoln line that an estimated average of 9 passengers per carriage in an agricultural area was too high and that 7 would be nearer the reality.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, fares in 1844 had been generally higher than they were by 1848.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the estimates had been made without taking into account the 'Parliamentary Trains' required by Gladstone's Act of 1844. These involved at least one train a day over each section of line on which the third class fare was no more than 1d. per mile. Such trains were exempt from the traffic

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 27th August, 1849; Traffic Report by Mr. Pares on the 23rd August.

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 28th June, 1845.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 6th November, 1847, p.1287; Lacy in answer to a shareholder's question on the 3rd November.

tax, but where, as in this case, working expenses were so very high they could represent a source of loss, both in themselves and as a rival to the other services where the third class fare, subject to tax as part of the general 5% levy on receipts, was 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per mile.

The three major reasons for the East Anglian's failure to make a decisive impact have now been discussed; two more remain. Of these the first, the effects of neighbouring lines in drawing off traffic, is incapable of exact definition for simple lack of any precedents to form a basis of comparison. It must be assumed that the Wymondham line took a substantial share of central Norfolk trade before the L & D reached Dereham, but nothing more definite can be said. The question of formal relationships with neighbouring companies was still one that had to be broached. Discussions on the dovetailing of services, the division of through bookings and the acceptance of the other's trains were bound eventually to bring very considerable benefits to the East Anglian and its area, but the consequences of their absence are impossible to define. In fact, to the end of 1848 the matter had received no serious attention at all and fairly easy and unquestioning relationships would seem to have developed with the neighbouring companies at Dereham, Ely and Wisbech. Not until the E.A.R. fell foul of the E.C.R. by seeking to lease itself to the Great Northern Railway did any serious issues arise; then, after the E.C.R. refused through bookings and placed other frustrating obstacles in the way of the Lynn lines, formal agreements did become necessary.

Finally a word should be said of the station sites, of which full details are provided in Appendix J. In that the East Anglian lines had followed the typical Victorian pattern of going by the straightest line possible between termini many of these were ill situated from the viewpoint of the villages

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they nominally served. This was particularly true of the Wisbech branch where there was the additional difficulty that several of the approach roads were so bad as to be impassable for cart traffic during the winter months.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, with the exceptions of Downham Market and Swaffham, none of the intermediate stations had any significance as meeting points between streams of traffic. These points would have mattered little if the concept of the cross country trunk route had been developed, but in the absence of this they became a major handicap.

The foregoing section seeks to explain the initial traffic failure to the December of 1848. It will have been observed, however, that there was nothing permanent in the situation. Lynn Harbour was to be improved, the depression would end, and energetic management could put matters to rights within the company.

### Section 2: The Working Expenses

That working expenses during this period should in all probability constitute some 85% or more of receipts was not in itself an intrinsic weakness; the real cause of anxiety was the low traffic return. About half the expenses of railway operation result from the traffic as a whole, and are fixed and unavoidable. Beyond that point expenses do not rise in proportion to increased traffic. In fact it has been estimated that if it costs £x to move y traffic units, £3x will be expended in moving 5y.<sup>2</sup> This general consideration, however, does not preclude the possibility that money was wasted in operation, and it is with this aspect that the present section must be concerned.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce on the 23rd August, 1849. During 1849 the company took a major part in the improvement of the Fen roads.

<sup>2</sup> Sir W.M. Acworth; Elements of Railway Economics, rev.ed., Oxford, 1932, p.54f.



Only one detailed statement of operational expenditure was issued during the period under review. It concerned the second half of 1848 and read as follows:

Expenditure to be set against revenue, 1st July, 1848 to 31st December, 1848:<sup>1</sup>

	£	s	d	
Repairs to permanent way	1,477	0	10	(A)
Wages of the locomotive department	1,114	10	11	(B)
Coke, coals, oil, tallow, grease, turps., waste white lead	2,784	1	4	
Repair and alteration of rolling stock	647	14	5	(C)
Clerks, porters, guards, police, gatekeepers, pointsmen etc.	2,972	5	9	(D)
Salaries; viz. management, audit officers, and proportion of secretary's and accountant's offices	748	6	5	(E)
Passenger Duty	418	6	11	(F)
Rates and taxes	232	8	5	
Gas and water rent	54	11	4	
Compensation	25	6	9	(G)
Printing and stationery	542	6	5	
Travelling and general expenses, postage, petty disbursements	94	17	1	
Stores and wages at Harbour Branch	483	1	1	
Cartage	239	3	7	(H)
Balance	<u>7,134</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></u>	
	<u>£18,968</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></u>	
Total working expenses	<u>£11,834</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	

Special Notes:

A: It has been estimated<sup>2</sup> that at this time the cost of replacing one mile of track, after allowing for the scrap value of the old rails, was £300. The accounts show no realisation of such scrap value, and the figure quoted for repairs therefore may be taken as representing the equivalent of some three miles of renewal, or roughly 4% of the actual track (allowing for double lines) in use at the beginning of the half year. The uniform construction of the locomotives and the low level of traffic tend to preclude the possibility that this was because of the need, experienced on many lines elsewhere, for heavier track, and confirm the earlier argument that some at least of the original construction was defective in quality.

<sup>1</sup> As presented to the shareholders at the meeting of the 28th February, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> As by Lardner, op.cit. pp.43f.

- B: Proportionally the wages of the locomotive department are substantially higher than those of any other, so providing an indication of the premium on skilled labour in an area such as this - for further consideration see below.
- C: See the previous section for comment on the high level of expenditure on the repair and alteration of rolling stock at this early stage of the company's history. It is also to be remembered that heavy expenditure on locomotive repairs had been improperly charged to the capital account; the extremely limited availability of the locomotives is indicated by the fact that for the operation of eleven locomotives there were only 5 drivers and 5 firemen (see below).
- D: It is to be assumed that the police in this list were actually the signalmen.
- E: The reference to the proportions is further evidence of the unreliability of these accounts as a true representation of working costs.
- F: Passenger Duty was levied at the rate of 5% on gross passenger receipts, but after excluding the revenue from the 1d. per mile 'Parliamentary Trains'. Passenger receipts as a whole had yielded £10,749/17/4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ; the duty paid when multiplied by 20 gives a figure of £8,366/18/4. It therefore follows that the yield from the 'Parliamentary Trains' was £2,483/19/0 $\frac{1}{2}$ , so indicating (although having to ignore the possibility of half fares) the equivalent of 590,160 passenger miles. Overall this is a low proportion, and may be taken as further confirmation of the acute poverty of the agricultural labourers of the area, as well as partial justification of the directors' declared preference for the upper class travellers.
- G: This reference to compensation remains an obscure matter; it probably refers to the provision of free coal to those who had rights on Pentney Common, although it may be a belated reference to the death by running down of the Watlington gatekeeper during 1846. The former is to be preferred, as the Thomas Mickleson involved in the latter contributed to his own death by impudently hurrying across the line to be at his post before the train came up.
- H: As the carting establishment to provide conveyance between ship and railhead had only recently been acquired this item could be expected to rise in subsequent accounts.

Items in the general contexts of wages and administration provide the most direct suggestions of unnecessarily large expenditure. "Erroneous ideas of the future traffic"<sup>2</sup> having been entertained by Lacy, the lines were initially heavily over-staffed, although the intention of training employees is

<sup>1</sup> See Parliamentary Papers, 1847 (240), lxiii.183, 'A Return of the Number and Nature of Accidents, 1st July to the 31st December, 1846'.

<sup>2</sup> Herapath, 17th November, 1849, p.1159; Directors' Reply to the Committee of Inquiry.

to be recalled. The following table affords a striking comparison between the periods of liberal hopes and expenditure and of the subsequent realistic<sup>1</sup> economy.

Staff Returns of the East Anglian Company at various dates between May, 1847 and June, 1851

N.B. The first column gives a composite total for the L & E and the L & D.

	<u>1st May, 1847</u>	<u>1st May, 1848</u>	<u>30th June, 1851</u>
Secretaries	1	1	2
Managers	-	2	-
Engineers	1	1	-
Superintendants	3	8	-
Storekeepers	1	1	1
Accountants	3	3	1
Draftsmen	10	2	-
Clerks	20	28	36
Foremen	1	1	2
Drivers	4	5	5
Firemen	4	5	5
Guards	2	6	5
Artificers	42	26	19
Switchmen	3	7	2
Police	9	36	2
Porters	11	27	50
Messengers	1	2	-
Platelayers	2	37	16
Labourers	59	133	81
Inspectors or Timekeepers	-	-	<u>4</u>
TOTALS	177	331	231
Stations open	8	22	24
Route miles open	21½	56	67
<u>Average staff per mile</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>4</u>

National Figures (1847 for Great Britain and Ireland, 1848 and 1851 for England and Wales)

Route milage	3,305½	4,252	5,200
Stations open	1,040	1,321	1,669
Staff employed	47,218	52,688	51,979
<u>Average per mile</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>9</u>

<sup>1</sup> Returns of the Number and Description of Persons employed on each of the Railways in England and Wales, Accounts & Papers, 1847 (579)lxiii.101; 1849 (249),li.101; 1852 (153),xlviii.395.

There need be no surprise that both local and national averages should decline over the period illustrated. This is simply a reflection of economies that became obvious with experience of operation, and of the fact that office and general administrative staffs need not increase in direct proportion to actual extensions of milage. The 50% or more discrepancy between the East Anglian and the national figures in turn reflects the nature of the line on which traffic was light and where there was no call for large terminal stations and extensive goods' depots. The opposite obtained in the case of such a company as the London & North Western Railway, which, in 1861, employed 10,266 men to operate 360 route miles, an average of 28 per mile.<sup>1</sup> The 1847 and 1848 figures are also partly inflated by the overlap in some cases between actual operating staff and those engaged partially in construction.<sup>2</sup> This is seen in the East Anglian in the sharp decline between 1848 and 1851 in the employment of artificers, superintendants, platelayers and labourers, a trend foreshadowed in individual classes (especially draftsmen) during the previous twelve months; in fact the engineer's department was reduced by 50% during the January and February of 1848.<sup>3</sup>

There are, however, certain features which suggest a most definite lack of positive economy. Most obvious is a top-heavy hierarchy of administration, as exemplified by the continued existence of the original three company offices in Lynn, a situation persisting until at least the end of 1850. To the close of that year effective control was in the hands of a clumsy

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<sup>1</sup> Head, op.cit. p.112.

<sup>2</sup> Accounts & Papers, 1847 (579), lxxiii.101, show, for example, that on the 1st May, 1847 the E & H was employing 1 engineer, 1 superintendant and 1 inspector alongside the contractors' men, the L & D 1 engineer, 1 superintendant and 7 inspectors, the L & E 2 engineers, 1 clerk, 30 artificers, 20 labourers and 5 inspectors. Some of these are not included in the above returns, e.g. the engineers, but others especially the artificers, certainly were.

<sup>3</sup> Herapath, 19th February, 1848, p.200; Announced on the 16th February.

hierarchy comprising 5 directors, 3 heads of department, an engineer, a manager and a secretary,<sup>1</sup> all for 67 route miles of line, of which 5 were in any case operated by another company. With this divided responsibility effective and economical operation must have been a virtual impossibility. It is not surprising to find that with the appointment of the experienced Wentworth Clay as General Manager in 1849, following the dismissal of his predecessor in the December of 1848, that considerable economies were effected.<sup>2</sup> The 1851 list of staff gives some idea of where there had been waste in previous years. The axe fell heavily on the higher officers of the company as control was centralised and simplified. At the lower levels reductions were made in every possible way, and it would seem that as platelayers and labourers and their families already acted as gatekeepers, now porters' duties were extended to signalling and other responsibilities hitherto performed by the now much diminished police.

The wages paid by the company cannot be directly ascertained, but there is a very interesting letter of 1850, the subject of extensive editorial comment in Herapath's Journal,<sup>3</sup> which proposed a reduction from 19/- to 17/- per week. The classes in receipt of the 19/- rate were not specified, but it may be reasonably assumed that it referred particularly to the skilled artificers, enginemen and to perhaps a minority of the clerks. The overall picture emerging from the accounts is that over the six month period £4,835/3/1 was paid in wages to approximately 300 men, an individual average of £13 or just 10/- per week. The figure can only be a rough estimate as this was a period of progressive staff reductions, and as an undisclosed amount of the wage and

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 3rd August, 1850, p.752; letter of 'Veritas'.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 19th November, 1849, p.1159; Directors' Reply to the Committee of Inquiry.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 15th December, 1849; Letter of 'Inquirer'.

salary payments derived from the capital account. However, the average suggests a weekly wage for the unskilled classes of between 8/- and 9/- per week, a sum entirely commensurate with the local agricultural labourers' rate. The higher rate belonged to the skilled minority, and reflected the difficulties experienced in obtaining such men in an area so far removed from the great mining and industrial centres, this being especially true at a time when the mushroom growth of railways placed a high premium on skilled engineering labour of all kinds. That this higher rate had obtained from the outset is largely confirmed by Herapath's own comments: "As to a man's living better now on 17/- a week than formerly on 19/- a week, we doubt it much", for "if 17/- will do they should never have paid 19/-"<sup>1</sup>. Herapath resisted the proposal to cut wages, arguing that it was better to reduce staff, and to the remainder "pay so that the men can live, and have something to live for"<sup>2</sup>. In this he was at one with the very experienced Head of the London & North Western who later was to describe cheap materials and discontented workers as the worst of all menaces to the safe and profitable operation of a railway.<sup>3</sup> It is to the credit of Bruce and the reformed board that they appear to have recognised the truth of this principle and acted accordingly.

One other aspect of operational costs worthy of brief discussion is that of fuel consumption by the locomotives. This was a matter that throughout the latter part of 1848 and 1849 considerably exercised the directors. Anticipating large and heavy trains Lacy had boasted of the 15" cylinder locomotives obtained, claiming that the company had been enabled to "profit from the experience of others"<sup>4</sup>. But, when the actual level of traffic had

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath's editorial commenting on <sup>2</sup> 'Inquirer's' letter in the same issue, 15th December, 1849. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Head, op.cit. p.148.

<sup>4</sup> Meeting of the 3rd November, 1847.

revealed itself, Bruce was left wishing for 9" and 10" cylinders as a means of fuel economy, although he also held that the resultant saving would not be as great as some imagined.<sup>1</sup> Consumption of coke (coal was only permitted by law in the raising of steam) was probably at the rate of some 16 lbs. per mile (compare 35.8 lbs. during 1848 on the Great Western, 34.6 lbs. on the London & North Western in the June of 1849,<sup>2</sup> in both cases the trains being much heavier and the terrain less favourable than on the East Anglian) as a 50% saving was claimed in respect of Messrs. George England & Coys. new light engine, introduced experimentally on the Wisbech branch in 1849 and consuming 8 lbs. of fuel to the mile (including steam raising), an amount that could be further reduced by structural alterations.<sup>3</sup> It would seem, however, that the cost of buying this engine outweighed its merits, for after the initial publicity no more was heard of it. Speed was a relevant factor, but as the trains probably averaged no more than 25 m.p.h. or so, (the national averages for 1848 showed the normal speed of passenger trains to be an average 30 m.p.h. and the average weight 75 tons)<sup>4</sup> and as, in view of the traffic receipts the trains were very light in weight, the potential saving to be realised by reduction could only have been marginal in extent. An indignant shareholder did in fact write that excessive speeds were much to blame for the working costs being so high, but as he proposed substituting horses for the locomotives his concept of speed may justly be questioned.<sup>5</sup> On the whole, having inherited the large cylinder engines, the later boards did all they possibly could in the circumstances when, in September, 1849 they installed, and contracted for the working of, 24 coking ovens near the coal depot;

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<sup>1</sup> Herapath, 24th August, 1850; meeting of the 21st August.

<sup>2</sup> Lardner, op.cit. p.72.

<sup>3</sup> Described by Valentine at the meeting of the 28th February, 1849.

<sup>4</sup> Lardner, op.cit. p.43f.

<sup>5</sup> Herapath, 3rd August, 1850, p.752; letter of 'Veritas'.

throughout, in keeping with the general practice of the time, considerable economy was realised by the extensive adoption of horse shunting.

Finally, a word should be said as to the effect of various external impositions levied on all railway companies of the time. Local rating assessments were such that railway companies paid an average of £12/10 per employee as opposed to the average £1/10 per worker over the whole country.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in some parishes the railways were assessed for as much as 85% of the rate levy despite the contributions they made to employment and prosperity.<sup>2</sup> All that companies could do was appeal against their assessments, but few could hope to be as fortunate as the Eastern Counties which made a formal appeal against an £800 per mile assessment imposed in the parish of Sawbridgeworth and had the figure reduced to £300, £100 less than it had been before.<sup>3</sup> As the accounts show the East Anglian felt the pressure as all others, and in 1849 went as far as presenting a futile petition to Parliament asking for "the revision of the law relating to the rating of railways". As for the iniquitous 5% duty on gross receipts, like rates levied without regard to the ability to pay, it is sufficient to paraphrase the words of the contemporary Francis who complained that this 5% was the sum paid for the privilege of increasing the country's commercial prosperity.<sup>4</sup> Any argument that it served to control dividends is superfluous, for if this was the case the tax could have been levied selectively. The real extent of the dual burden, however, can be properly illustrated only in figures.

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<sup>1</sup> Scrivenor, op.cit. p.19.

<sup>2</sup> Pratt, op.cit. p.50.

<sup>3</sup> The case was reported at length in the Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald during the course of 1848.

<sup>4</sup> Op.cit., Vol.2, p.48.



	£	<u>Duty</u>		<u>Rates and Taxes</u>		
		s	d	£	s	d
East Anglian Railway	722	19	6	321	9	6 $\frac{1}{2}$
Eastern Counties Railway	16,817	5	1	24,754	3	8
Midland Railway	23,043	10	5	33,125	13	2
York & North Midland	7,092	14	1	13,960	18	2
Great Western Railway	29,603	18	8	38,555	5	2
London & North Western	50,505	8	0	58,649	15	10

Proportionally the E.A.R. may be seen to have fared better than some, but the £1,050 represented here could have been well employed by the struggling company.

### Section 3: The Construction Period and the Local Economy

In that the areas under consideration lacked iron and engineering industries the effects of construction on the local economy were inevitably small and mainly confined to the question of labour supplies. It is of course essential to keep the whole matter in proper perspective, for all the factors involved affected in the main only narrow areas of land within the immediate vicinity of the actual lines; this remains true even when considering the movement of the labour forces engaged.

Little that is conclusive can be said of Lynn Harbour. It has already been stated that a condition of contract for the delivery of the railway materials was that such must come through the harbour there, and at the same time materials for other lines (e.g. the Norwich & Brandon) were coming through there as a matter of convenience, but at the same time the volume of business in the harbour was declining as a consequence of the national depression and of the cheaper and more direct conveyance offered by the new inland railways through Peterborough. An examination of the appropriate

<sup>1</sup> Figures from Scrivenor, op.cit. p.19.

figures for the period allows for no other comment than that the influx of railway materials served as a temporary compensation in what otherwise would have been a period of dramatic decline.

Year	Coals imported (Tons)	Other imports and <del>exports</del> (Tons)	Vessels registered in Lynn & Seamen		Arrivals (Loaded)
1845	302,463	141,935	157	881	2,841
1846	208,392	120,468	154	844	2,171
1847	264,671	107,948	172	958	2,493
1848	232,831	82,386	177	987	2,037

Source: Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, April, 1849 Appendix 4, p.64; for 'Arrivals', Appendix 5, p.65.

The effect of the railways is best seen in the first two columns. The quite extraordinary figure of imports for 1845 has been discussed in a previous context but it is to be noted that after a sharp drop in 1846, the 1847 figure (that is for the year in which the L & E was fully opened and the L & D extended) is above the average of 241,422 tons per annum for the whole period from 1841 to 1848.<sup>1</sup> The demands of locomotives both on the Lynn lines and elsewhere is the only factor that can explain this in view of the reduced demand consequent upon both local agricultural depression and general national depression. Thereafter, however, the total declined in terms of the general trend until in 1854 no more than 172,589 tons were imported.<sup>2</sup> The decisive factor had of course been the opening of the Great Northern Railway in 1850 (that is to London; the Peterborough - Lincoln loop had been open since October, 1848, and the direct Retford line since 1852) which the rate reductions of the water interests had done little to offset. More clearly still is the pattern to be seen in the second column. Unlike coal the railway iron and timber required in such large quantities during 1846 and '47 did not

<sup>1</sup> Hillen, op.cit. p.606; also Lacy to the shareholders in February, 1848.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

represent a continuous demand. The 1848 figure, a decrease of 45% on that of only three years previously, speaks for itself. Paradoxically, however, the number of ships registered at Lynn actually increased. It can only be assumed that in a very difficult period for the owners of coastal shipping such were seeking the comfort and security that could follow the Norfolk Estuary works and the declared policy of Bruce that the East Anglian was intending to do everything in its power to attract trade through the harbour.<sup>1</sup>

In other directions some positive benefit is more easy to discern. Fine new lodges at such places as Norborough, Middleton and Beechamwell (clearly dated 1846) along the L & D route clearly suggest one use found for the land compensation paid to local landowners. That such was also a factor in the era of 'High Farming' so soon to follow has already been suggested. That it also led to increased domestic establishments is a probability that cannot be demonstrated. To Lynn Corporation the compensation extorted came as a positive lifesaver, more than offsetting the decline in Harbour Dues (£4,211/14/3 in 1845 to £3,220/9/0 in 1848)<sup>2</sup> that accompanied falling trade. With the £21,000 gained from the company a £10,000 bond debt was discharged, £4,000 invested in Norfolk Estuary Bonds, £1,993/13/8 invested in the purchase of new lands, and £3,039 in the construction of a new Corn Exchange. Further sums were expended in grants to local schools and churches, the extension of St. James' Cemetery, the rebuilding of Framlingham almshouses and the decoration of the Assembly Rooms.<sup>3</sup> Grants were also made towards the Great Exhibition and to the establishment of a Telegraph Office in Lynn. In short the Corporation was enabled by its release from the payment of debt interest

<sup>1</sup> See the Directors' Report delivered at the meeting of 24th August, 1846.

<sup>2</sup> Admiralty Preliminary Inquiry into the Norfolk Estuary Bill, 1849, Appendix 5, p.65.

<sup>3</sup> See as the principal source, the Guild Hall Book, 17th September, 1846, p.806.

to expand its purchasing power, increase its income further by investment, and in general escape from its difficulties, all without the imposition of any additional local levies. In this narrow sense the character of Lynn life was changed. In a wider sense the construction of the railways began a process which was within a few years to alter the structure of the town's society beyond all recognition, and cause, by the mid-1850s, the older inhabitants to give up "all idea of a future close corporation"<sup>1</sup>. In a double sense the East Anglian "breached the town walls"<sup>2</sup> and destroyed the former exclusive and self contained atmosphere. In the first place the company made Lynn readily accessible and was soon to lead to an influx of strangers of all kinds. In the second instance the construction of the railways was something that Lynn could not achieve of its own resources. Thus, from the very outset of the constructional process entered with their families a growing stream of engineers and skilled mechanics, draftsmen and others versed in occupations hitherto virtually unrepresented in Lynn. With them too came an influx of the labouring class to find employment on the railways. With the completion of these there was the Norfolk Estuary Cut to provide further work and further incentive to come into the town. The extent of the incursion is to be gauged from the fact that between 1841 and 1851 the population of Lynn rose from the 16,039 of the former year to the 19,148 of the latter;<sup>3</sup> in all probability the figure for 1848 would have been even

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 24th February, 1872; Memories of Lynn - a reprint of a lecture delivered in 1858 by W.Armes.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> An interesting footnote in the 1851 Census Report (note 'h', p.57 of the Divisional Index) reported that the establishment of the railway terminus had caused a great increase in the population of sub-division King's Lynn Middle since 1841, namely from 5,652 to 7,044.

283<sup>1</sup>

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higher as then the two major works<sup>1</sup> involved in the increase overlapped.  
The increase, however, was not permanent, for by 1861 the population was down to 15,981 and slightly lower than it had been in 1841. If the increase were not to be permanent, however, the same could not be said for its effects. It had in fact broken down for ever the exclusive system of social castes on which Lynn society had for so many centuries been based. The railways and their construction thus let a breath of fresh air into the town and rendered it more able to adjust itself to the changes which the railways and the decline of the harbour had brought. In the meanwhile, of course, local builders and tradesmen flourished as never before.<sup>3</sup>

A detailed study of the labour question on the Lynn lines is worthy of attention not only because of its importance to one of the main themes of this work, but also because of the light it sheds on an important aspect of national history. The numbers actually engaged on the construction of the East Anglian lines as on the 1st May, 1847 were as follows.<sup>4</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> J.J.Coulton, Memories of Lynn, Lynn Advertiser & West Norfolk Herald, 20th November, 1880, states that all observers were agreed that the coincidence of the two works during this decade explains the rise in population entirely.
  - <sup>2</sup> Possible confirmation of a higher figure still in the intermediate years comes from the comparative figures of houses for 1841 and 1851. In the former there were 3,422 of which 193 stood empty, but in the latter 4,028 of which 148 were unoccupied at the time of the census. It is unlikely that so many new houses would have been built without the certainty that they would be occupied without a long delay.
  - <sup>3</sup> For full discussion of these matters see chapter 9 below.
  - <sup>4</sup> Accounts & Papers, 1847 (579) lxiii-101; A Return of the Numbers and Descriptions of Persons employed in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland respectively on the 1st Day of May 1847.

Company	Length Involved	<u>284</u> Employed by Company	Employed by Contractors	Total
E & H	4½ miles	3	329	332

Average: 74 men per mile.

Of the contractor's men 97 were skilled artificers, the rest labourers.

L & E	22¼ miles	58	2,946	3,004
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Average: 136 men per mile.

Of the contractor's men 287 were skilled, the rest labourers.

L & D	17¼ miles	9	2,177	2,186
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Average: 128 men per mile.

Of the contractor's men 165 were skilled, the rest labourers.

N.B. The situation on the L & D line may be compared with that of the 1st May, 1848<sup>1</sup> when the total employed on 17 miles 60 chains had dropped to 922, including 128 artificers; overall this represented an average of no more than 54 men per mile, a restriction enforced by financial stringency and explaining in part why the last stages of the line took so long to complete.

Interesting comparisons may be made with certain statistics on a national basis.<sup>2</sup>

Date	Miles under construction	Total men employed	Average per mile
1st May, 1847	6,455	256,509	39
1st May, 1848	2,958	188,177	64
1849	1,540	103,816	69
1850	864	58,884	68

In all 190,000 were turned off railway works between May, 1847 and the end of 1850.<sup>3</sup> The first and most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the comparison of averages is that the East Anglian constituents employed too many men especially in view of the easy terrain on which they had to work. The

<sup>1</sup> Accounts & Papers, 1849 (249) li-101.

<sup>2</sup> The figures for 1847 and 1848 are derived from the same returns as above, those for 1849 and 1850 from the Report of the Commissioners for Railways 1850, p.ix. The figures given are in striking contrast to that of 107 cited by Francis (op.cit.Vol.2, p.152) and repeated by Jeaffreson & Pole (op.cit. p.209).

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Commissioners <sup>of</sup> ~~for~~ Railways 1850, p.ix.

difficulties over bridges might explain the situation on the L & E, but virtually the same average appears for the L & D on which there were no major constructional difficulties. It would therefore seem that in their eagerness to have the lines opened the directors and contractors defeated their own ends by the employment of labour forces so large as to contribute directly and substantially to the latter's financial difficulties.<sup>1</sup> Of course the fact that a large proportion of the work on the L & E and the L & D lines had to be done in the winter should be considered, but the effect of this was perhaps not so great as might be supposed. Chawella, a railway contractor, told a Parliamentary Committee that none were turned off in the winter because it was the winter,<sup>2</sup> for, indeed, except for brickwork "the frost is rather favourable".<sup>3</sup> Shortness of light was at all times a handicap, but the loss of work from bad weather was only fractional: ".in the summer months we consider that on average our men make perhaps 21 days or perhaps 22 days in a month; in the winter months it will be from 17 to 18 days a month."<sup>4</sup> After making every allowance for the extremely bad weather encountered, however, it still remains impossible to reconcile the discrepancy between the local and national averages.

Excluding the E & H section it would therefore seem reasonable to assert that between September, 1846 and the opening of the L & E some thirteen months later there would be about 5,000 workers of all kinds employed on the railways and within easy reach of King's Lynn; between October, 1847 and the opening of the Wisbech branch in the February of 1848 the number would decline, perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> The contractors perhaps felt the implied pressure of the contract clause noted in a previous section to the effect that if in the judgement of the company insufficient labour was being employed, then the company would employ the required amount and deduct the cost from the balance of the contract sum still held.

<sup>2</sup> Select Committee on Railway Acts Enactments, 1st Report, Minutes of Evidence Q.961.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Q.962.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Q.963.

to 3,000, and thereafter, to the September of 1848 and the completion of the L & D, would stand at about 1,000. In all probability these totals involved a considerably larger number of individuals than is at first sight suggested, for turn-over in manpower tended to be high, in the case of one Scottish line, for example, it was as high as 50% per month.<sup>1</sup> Isolation and dissatisfaction with working conditions were the most usual causes of men leaving the works, but in the case of rural lines there was the positive draw of harvest wages to be earned in the nearby fields.<sup>2</sup> There is no direct evidence on wage levels on the East Anglian works, but there is sufficient general evidence to allow a fairly firm conclusion. The cream of the workers, the navvies, were earning about 5/- per day throughout the country,<sup>3</sup> but it would seem that in view of the absence of major works there were none such on the Lynn lines, and that construction was carried through by ordinary labourers at a rate of between 2/6 and 3/- per day, this being under normal conditions, but with the possibility of earning as much as 20/- to 25/- in a week during the height of the summer when daylight was long. All the evidence points to this conclusion. This was a period of rising wages because of the premium that railway growth put on labourers' services. On the Gloucester & Bristol works in 1843 the labourers received 2/4 to 2/9 per day, on the Hawick branch of the North British Railway in 1846 2/6 per day,<sup>4</sup> and on the Great Northern Railway in 1849 2/9 to 3/-.<sup>5</sup> These figures are in keeping with T. Brassey's evidence of 1846 that labourers' wages had risen some 10% within the last two years,<sup>6</sup> and still allow for the Hon. Bouverie's statement to the Select

<sup>1</sup> Report from the Select Committee on Railway Labourers, 1846, P.P., 1846 xiii (489-II), Minutes of Evidence, Q.2478, evidence of the Rev. J. Gillies.

<sup>2</sup> Railway Acts Enactments, Minutes of Evidence to the 1st Report, Q.952 Brassey.

<sup>4</sup> Select Committee on Railway Labourers, Q.444, evidence of A.J. List.

<sup>5</sup> Helps, op.cit., Appendix C, p.370.

<sup>6</sup> Railways Acts Enactments, First Report, Minutes of Evidence, Q.951.



Committee on railway labourers (also 1846) that average wages were already 20/- to 22/- per week and likely to rise to as much as 30/-<sup>1</sup>; the latter certainly could be the case in the summer months, and it is significant that his statement was made in the early summer.

If the various estimates relating to the East Anglian made above be accepted it suggests that the workers on the three lines received between the Septembers of 1846 and 1848 a minimum aggregate total of £310,000. This calculation is based on an assumed labourer's wage of about 18/- per week, but a higher total still is indicated when allowance is made for the increased rates of the summer months and the fact that the skilled artificers (of whom there were 450 or so in the May of 1847) would in any case be paid more than the unskilled labourers. From the accounts presented in the February of 1849 it would appear that the bulk of the labour costs were concealed under the heading of earthworks, bridges and stations. It is hard to believe that more than £100,000 of the £516,077 shown there can have been consumed by the cost of materials and their transportation and, where applicable, by contractors' profits. Accepting this and deducting a further £20,000 in respect of Parliamentary Expenses wrongly included in this account, it seems probable that labour costs in construction were in fact close on £400,000, or £6,000 per mile. The undue prolongation of the construction period, the difficulties encountered in making the bridges, over-employment and poor deployment of labour must be held responsible for this grossly excessive figure.

Obviously such vast sums as those involved must have had some effect

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<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on Railway Labourers, Q.2213.

on the areas' economies, but such was largely localised and spread along the whole of the 68 miles involved. Publicans and the keepers of beer houses may be expected to have been amongst the principal direct beneficiaries - it has been asserted that £1,000 per mile of construction of British railways was spent on drink<sup>1</sup> - and in turn these would benefit local tradesmen. Tradesmen themselves could only expect to derive in the direct sense a marginal benefit, for truck shops (for more on which see below) and money taken by the men out of the area have to be taken into consideration. Various cottagers supplemented meagre incomes by offering accommodation to labourers from the lines, but gain from this was inevitably limited by considerations of both space and time. All in all it must seem unlikely that the railway workers brought much increase of wealth to the areas through which they passed. In that these men were not infrequently riotous in behaviour and not over particular as to the damage they did to private property their coming was something rather to be feared.

Much more important is the question of from where the builders of the East Anglian lines did come. Sir John Clapham says that the best of all railway workers were the 'bankers' of Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire who, in their organised gangs, were second in number only to the Irish.<sup>2</sup> He further states that the Irish did not penetrate into the south, and that most lines in the southern half of the country were built by local labour.<sup>3</sup> Thus it might be expected that the East Anglian found its labour supplies amongst those best fitted by experience for their new tasks. Moreover, simple comparison of the

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, op.cit. p.138.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit. p.405, quoting from Smiles (who himself gave no authority); also cf. Williams, op.cit. p.138 and Francis, op.cit., Vol.2, p.68.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit. p.406.

20/- or so that could be earned in a week on the railway with the 8/- to 10/- attainable in local agriculture would seem to provide conclusive justification for this assumption. It may also be argued that railway work was well within the capacity of the farm worker; Rawlinson told the Select Committee on Railway Labourers that agricultural labourers could manage any railway work;<sup>1</sup> only barrow work proved harder at first, but after a short time they were as good in that as anyone.<sup>2</sup> As long as there were sufficient skilled men (and there certainly were on the East Anglian) it was on such earth work that the vast majority of railway labourers were employed.<sup>3</sup>

There were, however, other aspects to be considered, which together suggest that the mature and well disposed man would find railway labour singularly unattractive despite the higher financial reward. In general terms he would be required to leave his family and home, as well as any reasonably secure employment that he might have. He would then have to support both his family and himself, lose the security afforded by the Law of Settlement, and run the risk that on the completion of the line he would not be able to return to the work that he had left. This applied particularly to those who lived in tied cottages, and to the growing number in Norfolk who had their precious allotments to consider. Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that large numbers of married men would be precluded from seeking employment on the works; indeed, in partial confirmation of this, is the direct evidence of the Rev. Wilson that on the Norwich & Brandon and Lynn & Dereham lines at least very few of the labourers had families with them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on Railway Labourers, Minutes of Evidence, Q.896.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Q.899.

<sup>3</sup> Select Committee on Railway Acts Enactments, Minutes of Evidence to the 1st Report, Q.958, evidence of Brassey.

<sup>4</sup> Select Committee on Railway Labourers, Q.678.

But perhaps most important of all were the conditions of railway labour; despite everything that Parliament and individual companies could do these remained generally atrocious. The report of 1846 had this to say in defining the more repellent features:

"These evils seem mainly to consist in the mode and time of payment of the men and their consequent discontent, disorder and irregularity; in the want of proper lodgings for them; in their careless exposure to risk; in the defective provision for maintaining peace and good order among them; and in the imperfections or absence of provision for their religious instruction and education of their children."<sup>1</sup>

Now to a certain extent the one extant contract of the East Anglian lines did contain certain safeguards against some of the evils specified above (although drawn up in the April of 1846, several months before the publication of the report) but it will be observed that a number of important matters are not touched upon at all. The clauses protecting the labourers may be summarised as follows:<sup>2</sup>

1. The men must be paid at least every two weeks, and then in a place chosen by the company and in the presence of company witnesses.
2. The contractors were explicitly forbidden to maintain any truck shops or to retail any article of consumption on pain of a £20 fine for each offence.
3. Sunday work was forbidden without special licence issued by the company; any men found working without such would be instantly dismissed.
4. There were to be no sub-contracts except in labour.

Even assuming that these clauses were included in all subsequent contracts it cannot be suggested that they created model conditions. In considering this much reliance must be placed on the 1846 evidence of the Rev. Wilson before the Select Committee on Railway Labourers. He identified himself to the committee as an experienced J.P. much concerned of late with the problems arising from the construction of two lines within his area, namely the

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Select Committee on Railway Labourers, 1846, p.iv.

<sup>2</sup> Drawn up for the section between Lynn and Denver, and found in the Lynn offices of Messrs. Bantoft, Broadley and Ward. See also Appendix G.

Norwich & Brandon and the line from Swaffham to Dereham. Of course, in 1846, the work on the latter had extended only as far as Swaffham to Sporle, and the evidence he gave, although no distinction is made, must refer primarily to the former; but, even so, as direct evidence of conditions on a Norfolk line of the same period as the Lynn lines there remains great value for the present purpose in what he said. It is particularly interesting in that the Brandon line was built by Peto, reputedly one of the very best of contractors from the viewpoint of those employed.

The first two intended safeguards may be considered together, the principal point being that they were incapable of being enforced in the spirit of the intention even if in the letter. In the first place the hated truck shops were not illegal, the act of 1 & 2 Wil.4.c.37 not extending to cover railway workers.<sup>1</sup> Thus, if the contractor did defy the contract terms he found himself in a strong legal position on the general principle that what is legal in common law cannot be rendered illegal by private agreement. However, the contractor need not go so far, for the clause could be circumvented by simple agreement with some private trader to issue truck shop tickets against the latter's stock. Circumstances rendered some such system virtually inevitable; of the situation in Norfolk the Rev. Wilson<sup>2</sup> said:

"Labourers come frequently in search of work after having been out of employment in their own parish, and after hanging about a few days they get work; they have only enough money to supply them for a few days and if they have to continue work for a month they cannot go on...and they are compelled to go to the truck shop for their goods by which they lose."

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Select Committee on Railway Labourers, 1846, p.vi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Minutes of Evidence, Q.636.

In whatever form they might take truck shops were general, dependence on them frequently being increased by the very remoteness of the railway sites. In them high prices were invariably charged, often for inferior goods, so that the high rates of pay tended to be discounted in realisation. In fact, when conducted on a large scale, contractors could find in them their principal source of profit; Chadwick, for example, took contracts at a working loss, but counted on making £7,000 or more profit from his shops.<sup>1</sup>

Truck shops depended fundamentally on the uncertainty of the pay system. Intervals between payment tended to be most irregular. The contract under consideration did specify each fortnight and sought to regulate the place of payment, but it is hard to believe that when bankruptcy threatened that regularity could always be maintained, nor that the place of payment was not the obvious meeting place provided by a nearby public house. Even if it were not the wages of many would be directed to one within a matter of hours. Wilson described how payment was in fact often made in public houses, and spoke feelingly of the drunken orgies which accompanied every pay night.<sup>2</sup> But another factor in the question of payment was the problem presented by the sub-contractor in labour, the only type allowed by the L & E. The big contractors such as Brassey employed no sub-contractors,<sup>3</sup> but in the case of the small scale local builders who took on the East Anglian lines there was no alternative but to do so, existing labour resources being totally inadequate; moreover, the advantage of specialised knowledge was thereby gained.<sup>4</sup> The sub-contracts in question were let to 'gangers' who not infrequently created

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, op.cit. p.144.

<sup>2</sup> Select Committee on Railway Labourers, Minutes of Evidence, Q.652.

<sup>3</sup> Helps, op.cit. p.46.

<sup>4</sup> Head, op.cit. p.39.

further sub-contracts of their own accord<sup>1</sup>, these being taken up by men who were in essence no more than labourers themselves. These men often found themselves unable to meet the wage bills of their gangs, and as they had no goods to distrain there was left no legal remedy for those who remained unpaid.<sup>2</sup> It was from this source that arose most of the complaints about the uncertainty of pay with which Wilson had to deal as a J.P.<sup>3</sup> All in all Wilson's experience had led him to believe that men would work for less on the railways if they could be assured of regular payment in cash.<sup>4</sup>

Certain other factors suggest that the better type of Norfolk labourer would not willingly turn to railway work. There was, for example, the question of accommodation. On this Wilson reported: "Many of them make a lodging for themselves by heaps of turf, and they get lodgings in different cottages; it is a very uncertain system"<sup>5</sup> Another consideration is that available evidence points to the facts that neither regular railway labourers nor contractors really wanted local men on the works. The former feared that such would keep wages down,<sup>6</sup> and subjected new recruits to a barrage of brutal language and systematic "harrying" to break their spirits and cause withdrawal.<sup>7</sup> The latter, above all anxious to keep their labour forces intact - one reason for irregular payment and enforced dependence on truck shops<sup>8</sup> - feared regular loss of men to their own homes if conveniently close, and the counter attraction of the piece rates in the harvest fields; as Brassey told the 1845 Select Committee "when the harvest comes on in July or

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1 Report of the Select Committee on Railway Labourers, p.iv.  
 2 Ibid., Minutes of Evidence, Wilson, Q.542.  
 3 Ibid., Q.750. 4 Ibid., Q.672. 5 Ibid., Q.536.  
 6 Ibid., Qs.1044-5, and similar evidence from Wilson, Q.602. 7 Ibid., Rawlinson, Q.1041.  
 8 Ibid., Wilson, Q.536.

August we shall find labour scarce and dear"<sup>1</sup>; for, as Rawlinson explained in 1846, agricultural labourers naturally turned to such especially good wages in the work for which they were best fitted;<sup>2</sup> this was a regular feature of local labour during the construction of the London & Birmingham line.<sup>3</sup>

It would also appear that the better type of farm worker looked with some degree of contempt on the railway labourer, a consequence of the drunken, violent and uncouth behaviour commonly associated with the latter. During the building of the London & Birmingham line in the 1830s the "Natives stuck to the farmer's 10/- to 12/-.....nothing would induce them to submit to what they conceived a degradation, of working upon the works"<sup>4</sup>. One contractor, Jackson, claimed an improvement after 1842 as "we are eliminating the tramp type"<sup>5</sup>, but others in 1846 still dubbed them as the refuse of the community despised by agricultural labourers,<sup>6</sup> or as the worst characters unable to find steady employment elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> This latter comment would seem to apply with particular force to the men of the locality who found work on the East Anglian construction. Wilson's reference to the unemployed labourers (Q.636), the drunken orgies (Q.652) and the absence of families on the works (Q.672) all confirm the impression derived from the general evidence that the local men employed were generally the shiftless, the restless and the unattached. As such they must have constituted a minority, perhaps 35% to 40% of the total labour forces involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on Railway Acts Enactments, Minutes of Evidence to the 1st Report, Q.952.

<sup>2</sup> Report on Railway Labourers, Minutes of Evidence, Q.908.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Q.908.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Q.895, Rawlinson.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Q.2006.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Qs.2276-87.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Q.898, Rawlinson.



Before turning to the question of the origin of the majority some confirmation of the view expressed is to be found in sources only indirectly connected with the actual construction of the railway. Individually none of the items is conclusive, but taken together they do suggest a general situation in keeping with the main argument. First there is the evidence of the 1851 Census Report that between 1841 and 1851 some 4,521 youths were leaving Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex each year, and that in these ten years Norfolk sent out 39,327.<sup>1</sup> Ambition and courage are the most likely explanations of this exodus - in all probability these were the better type of men. Some undoubtedly finished up by working on the railways elsewhere, but the main point must be that local railway construction held no attraction for them. Secondly similar deductions may be made from the evidence of Poor Law returns. It is seen that Poor Law expenditure rose steadily between 1845 and 1847, and then steeply to 1848.

Norfolk Poor Law Expenditure 1845 to 1848 (excluding medical relief)<sup>2</sup>

<u>1845</u>	<u>1846</u>	<u>1847</u>	<u>1848</u>
£197,567	£205,692	£207,369	£258,762
Years ending on the 25th March.			

Norfolk was amongst the areas showing the smallest rises between 1847 and '48<sup>3</sup> (the largest reported increases were mainly in industrial areas such as Lancashire, Cheshire, Nottinghamshire, the West Riding etc.)<sup>4</sup> which perhaps could suggest that railway work had in fact contributed to keeping the Poor Rates down, but really this is a relative matter, for it will be noted that expenditure was already high in face of the undoubted agricultural depression

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit. pp.cvii-civ.

<sup>2</sup> Figures derived from the annual reports of the Poor Law Commissioners to 1847, and particularly the First Annual Report of the Poor Law Board, 1848-9, Appendix B, No.1. pp.50-51.

<sup>3</sup> First Annual Report of the Poor Law Board, 1848-9, Appendix B, No.6. p.92.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

in the area as early as 1845 at a time when the country at large was enjoying an unprecedented boom. It therefore becomes possible to argue that the railway construction had done no more than partly offset the consequences of more general depression in the area after 1846. Support is lent to this by the comparative vagrancy figures for corresponding half years of 1848 and '49.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>Ely</u>	<u>Downham</u>	<u>Lynn</u>	<u>Swaffham</u>	<u>Wayland</u>	<u>Norfolk</u>
Indoor Relief 1848	940	572	1,105	456	151	3,995
Outdoor Relief "	170	31	-	4	2	368
Indoor Relief 1849	221	92	382	81	12	1,240
Outdoor Relief "	<u>105</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>204</u>
<u>Decrease</u>	784	468	723	385	140	2,919

The dramatic increase to 1848 had been correctly forecast by the Poor Law Commissioners in 1848 when discussing the effects to be anticipated from the discharge of railway labourers and the continued influx of Irish poor.<sup>2</sup> In local terms these figures clearly suggest the army of discharged labourers making their way across the area and towards the south and west. The nadir of depression reached in 1848 no doubt played its part, but the coincidence of dates between the number of vagrants and the completion of the lines is far too striking to be ignored. Accepting the fact and the origin of this suddenly increased Poor Rate burden of 1848/49 the whole situation may be summed up as having given a striking illustration of the accuracy of the statement in the 1842 report of the Poor Law Commissioners that railway works provide "an almost imperceptible addition of employment to the resident labourers".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> First Annual Report of the Poor Law Board, 1848-9; Report on Vagrancy in Essex, Norfolk & Suffolk and Part of Cambridgeshire, Sir John Walsham, Appendix 18, p.135. Second Report, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> 14th Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1848, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for 1842, Appendix B, p.241.

Finally, as an indication of the large influx of outsiders, in this case of the skilled and better paid men, renewed reference may be made to the interesting statistics of houses and populations in some of the main centres involved as between 1841 and 1851. It will be observed that, between these two years, in each case except King's Lynn, where the Norfolk Estuary works continued, the number of empty houses had increased as well as the total of inhabited houses. Of course, some of the former group may have been completed just before the 1851 Census, but much more likely in the context of the complete table is that they constitute an indication of a population peak between the two census years.

	<u>King's Lynn</u>		<u>Freebridge Lynn</u>		<u>Swaffham</u>		<u>Downham</u>	
	<u>1841</u>	<u>1851</u>	<u>1841</u>	<u>1851</u>	<u>1841</u>	<u>1851</u>	<u>1841</u>	<u>1851</u>
Inhabited houses	3,422	4,028	2,406	2,689	2,577	2,843	3,766	4,317
Empty houses	193	148	46	54	81	94	111	236
Population	16,554	20,530	12,580	13,557	13,086	14,320	19,202	20,985

N.B. The divisions are those of Hundreds.

Sources: Census Tables of 1841 and 1851

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The question remains as to where the majority of the labourers on the East Anglian did originate. Of perhaps great significance in this problem is the large number of persons appearing in the 1851 Census as living in Norfolk who were in fact not born there. It is suggested that as the great construction boom died away many settled in the area of their most recent employment, many possibly obtaining work on the railways which they had helped to build; it is a fact, for example, that the writer's wife's great-grandfather came up from Devon, worked on the construction of the Lynn & Dereham line, and subsequently found employment on it as a platelayer. In fact, in 1851, the South West had contributed 439 to Norfolk, and London

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and Suffolk had made further substantial contributions, the latter sending 227 to the Wayland Hundred alone and 265 to the Hundred of Mitford.<sup>1</sup> As Suffolk economy was over this period suffering the same difficulties as that of Norfolk's it is hard to conceive what could have prompted the migration if it were not railway construction. This is not to suggest, however, that men set out to cross the country with the sole purpose of finding employment in the Lynn area; rather was it a matter of workmen, both as gangs and as individuals, working their way along from line to line until finally they settled. Clapham shows how the South Devon Railway was built by the men of Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire, as well as by Devon labourers, who had worked their way along the Great Western,<sup>2</sup> and before the 1845 Select Committee on Railway Acts Enactments a major contractor in that same area, employing about 9,000 men of whom about 5,000 were of local origin,<sup>3</sup> refuted the suggestion that he must change his men as he moved along:<sup>4</sup>

"They follow us; we make them. When they become railway labourers they never go back to ordinary labour again. In Dorsetshire I have men who before were only earning 7/- a week who are earning now 12/- and 15/-, as they become stronger men from better food, and used to their work".

It is interesting to find in view of this pattern that between 1843 and 1847 were completed a whole series of lines pointing directly into East Anglian territory, namely the Norwich-Brandon, the Brandon - Ely, the March - Wisbech and the Ely - Peterborough constructions. On the last of these alone Peto had 3,700 men with him.<sup>5</sup> As for the composition and sources of this army of workers, some 200,000 strong at its peak, there is no conclusive evidence, but it is not hard to conceive a highly probable solution. The original nucleus

<sup>1</sup> 1851 Census Report and Tables.

<sup>2</sup> Op.cit. p.407; his source appears to be the Select Committee on Railway Labourers. <sup>3</sup> Op.cit. Q.3555. <sup>4</sup> Ibid., Q.3556.

<sup>5</sup> Select Committee on Railway Labourers, Minutes of Evidence, Qs.1976 and 1230.

must have been the canal workers; as time went on, and especially after 1845, these were joined by such as the miners of the declining workings of the south-west, coachmen and others displaced on the roads, the unemployed, the shiftless and unattached weary of factory or mine, the adventurous from all types of labour, but above all by the Irish, who driven from their own land by crushing poverty and famine poured into the northern ports, 133,069 of them between 13th January and the 20th April, 1846 into Liverpool alone.<sup>1</sup>

As for the eventual staffing of the lines little more need now be said. It is interesting that so far no advertisement for staff on the East Anglian has come to light, so perhaps suggesting further confirmation of the view that many were recruited from amongst the builders themselves. Some local men would naturally have been employed, but there would also have been a nucleus of skilled men, especially on the engineering staff, who came from further afield. Such men had often gained their experience in mines,<sup>2</sup> but it is likely that they were joined by junior members of established railway companies who, in the mushroom growth of new concerns, now found unprecedented opportunities for rapid advancement. The older companies must have lost many men in this way, but there were limitations on what even they could provide. Thus, Platt, the first E.A.F. locomotive inspector, was an "experienced man",<sup>3</sup> as was Carrington, the first station master at Lynn, but apparently the first General Traffic Manager was not, and had to be dismissed during the course of 1848 for Wentworth Clay who was.

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<sup>1</sup> 13th Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1847, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Head, op.cit. p.30.

<sup>3</sup> Lacy on the 3rd November, 1847.