

Walk One: Yarmouth to Freshwater on the Isle of Wight

A distance of 2 miles, so a short one

When I'm walking disused railways, I carry a copy of Bradshaw's *Handbook* of 1863. It's still available today, but we would call it a guidebook. The book gives a description of the town of Yarmouth; he describes it as a "decayed Borough."

The line was opened in 1889 and closed in 1953. The station buildings are still there and are used as a pub and café. The old platform is still in place. The walk is about 2 miles long.

After a coffee, I take some photos of the café. My wife gives me that look that says, 'He's off in his own world.' I start to imagine what it must have been like standing on the platform in 1889 all dressed up in a frock coat and top hat, the ladies in their elaborate and luxurious dresses. I imagine I can smell the steam and oil coming from the tank engine with a rake of 3 coaches behind the driver waiting for the guard to blow his whistle and wave his green flag, a ragamuffin being chased off by the station master. In my mind, I hear the toot from the engine. And off they go!

Our walk starts. We walk through fields of corn and cattle and sheep. A man and his dog pass us with a happy good morning. We pass a church and over a stream, passing a row of thatched cottages with the same cottage gardens that have been around for centuries. I start to imagine the Victorian farm worker toiling under the hot sun, the huge shire horse pulling a cart, children sat on the back among sheaves freshly of cut corn.

Our destination comes into sight. Time for a drink in the refurbished station building called *The End of the Line* pub. A pint of real ale for me and a G&T for my wife. As we sit there with drinks in hand, my mind wonders what it must have been like for the people back then to see this machine coming, belching out smoke and rattling along. One minute you see it, the next you don't.