

The Westerham Branch

by Geoff Marshall

This model of the Westerham branch is in OO scale and is able to be used with the Arun Valley Railway Module system. It was shown in its completed form for the first time at Model RailEx 2005, organised by Wellington model railway clubs and held at the New Zealand Kennel Club buildings in Porirua, New Zealand. Westerham is built and owned by Geoff Marshall who has also taken most of the pictures below.

Westerham is the terminus of a branch line in Kent and it is modelled as it was in the late 1930's. The line ran from the main line at Dunton Green (near Sevenoaks) for 4.7 miles along the Darent Valley, below the North Downs escarpment. The line was planned to be extended to Oxted, four miles to the west. If this had happened Westerham would have been a through station. This module can be used either as a terminus, or, with the end section removed, as a through station.

The station was mainly used for commuters travelling to London, with passengers transferring at Dunton Green to trains bound for Charing Cross. This service was usually provided by a two carriage push-pull train.



Two goods trains ran to Westerham each day, one in the morning and one late at night. These delivered general goods to the town and the farming community as well as serving the concrete factory, coal merchant and two breweries.

The Westerham line was closed in 1961 and most of its length is now buried under the M25 motorway. Westerham Station has been redeveloped as an industrial estate.

The only remnant of the station is the houses in Railway Terrace, at the left of Westerham Station.

Some unusual features of Westerham station were:

- the foundations for the engine shed (demolished in 1920's), with its unusual railings,
- the watercrane, supported by a piece of railway line,
- the makeshift bufferstop beyond the engine shed site,
- the large crane for unloading goods wagons
- unusual design of loading gauge (to left of goods shed),
- the signal at the eastern end of the station with a black hoop on signal arm, dating back to the South East and Chatham Railway.



Push-Pull train leaving Westerham between the water tower and signal box

Other points of interest

- the houses in Railway Terrace (at the left) are built in typical Kentish style, with the upper story faced with tiles.
- The double decker bus at the station is a “low bridge” bus, necessary to pass under a low railway bridge further along its route (at Oxted).
- The corridor on the upper deck is on the side of the bus in a well sunk into the ceiling of the lower deck.
- There were bench seats for four people across the width of the bus. This design allowed a lower roof.



Westerham goods shed and crane



Overall view of Westerham



Overall view of Westerham, bus waiting to depart

Force Green

This module shows farmland typical of the area. Blackets Lane, passing under the railway by Force Green farm,

was a very quiet country lane that has since been developed into a main road by passing the town of Westerham.



Railway over bridge



Train approaching Force Green



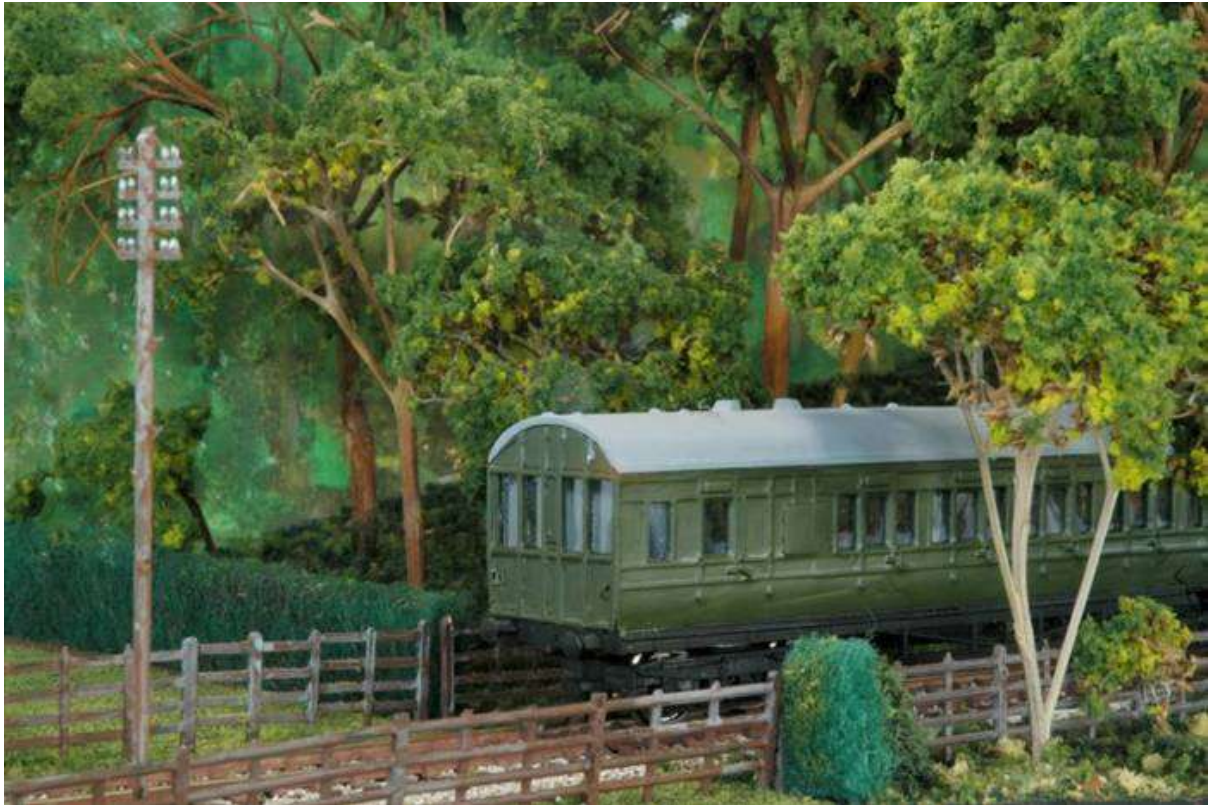
Overbridge at Force Green with Terrier crossing

Brasted

More than half a mile from the village of the same name, Brasted station had a siding and a coal merchant. Features of interest are a low bridge over country lane, an unusual loading gauge, the station name in whitewashed stones opposite the platform, and an old London Brighton and South Coast Railway van used as a storage shed.



Train leaving Brasted



Push pull train at Coombe Bank Woods

Coober Bank Wood

This module depicts the railway passing through Coombe Bank Wood, between Brasted and Chevening. There were several sections of woodland like this along the branch line.

The wood was located near Coombe Bank Farm and a convent. The trees were made using dead flowers (hydrangeas and others) as the frame of the tree. These were soaked in diluted PVA glue and covered with commercial foam foliage material.

This process was repeated several times until the required effect was reached.



Class C2 hauled train leaving Coombe Bank Woods.

Chevening

A simple halt one mile south of Chevening Park (a large Country House) and half a mile north of Chipstead village. There were three bridges carrying minor roads over the railway, all to the same design and featuring a double arch to provide for future double tracking.

In 1952 the bridge at Chevening was replaced with a concrete structure, also with provision for double tracking, and the wooden station platform was replaced with concrete structure. This was only 9 years before the line closed.

Legend has it that the building at Chevening Halt was a common scene of assignations between local courting couples.

It had a sliding door, which when closed, revealed the names of couples written on the interior of the wall normally obscured by the door when in the open position.



Chevening Halt leading to Coombe Bank Wood



Chevening Halt overbridge

The Westerham Valley Railway

Location

The line ran between Dunton Green (near Sevenoaks in West Kent), for 4.7 miles along the Darent Valley, below the North Downs escarpment. The line was planned to be extended to Oxted, four miles to the west.

Description

The branch was a single track with 3 stations – Westerham, the end of the line and serving the small town, Brasted over half a mile from the village, with sidings and a coal merchant, and Chevening, a simple halt one mile from Chevening Park and half a mile north of Chipstead village.

The line was opened in 1881 and closed under Dr Beechings axe in 1961

Model shows the three stations, with sections of farmland and woodland typical of the area in the Southern Railway era of the 1930's.

Winston Churchill's residence was at Chartwell near Westerham but he rarely traveled on the line. However a regular shipment of maggots was carried on the railway destined to feed the Churchill's goldfish.

A short history

The construction of the line was originally promoted by a group of local businessmen who formed the Westerham Valley Railway Company. By the time the railway was opened 1881, the company had been absorbed into the South Eastern Railway. The new railway provided a journey time of just over one hour to Central London, compared with the previous journey of three hours by stage coach. The South Eastern Railway was amalgamated into the South East and Chatham Railway which in turn became part of the Southern Railway in 1922 and was absorbed into British Railways at nationalization in 1948. The line and was closed under Dr Beeching's axe in 1961.

Personal Comments

I grew up a few miles away from Westerham and it was the nearest railway to home. I never traveled on the branch line while it was operating, as bus services from my home were more convenient. (This no doubt added to the demise of the line). I did however walk some stretches of the line after closure and before the motorway construction removed all trace of it. The line closed when I was 11 and I have vague memories of short trains waiting in the station.

It has been very rewarding studying the detail of the locations from books and old photos. Also trying to find remnants of the original line on the ground in recent years. Most of the railway is buried under the M25, and Westerham Station is now an industrial estate.



The rest of the world, Roger's Arun Valley Railway traverser fiddle yard



The owner and builder with Westerham at it's first show



About to be dismantled after a successful show