

Double Rail Disaster at Abbots Ripton

Yesterday I visited the lovely 40acre gardens of Abbots Ripton Hall and was duly intrigued on the history of the site and Hall.



It is the home of Lord de Ramsey who is related to Julian Fellowes who wrote the Downton Abbey TV series.

The original land was part of Ramsey Abbey when it began in 974AD. By the 1600s it is recorded as one of 4 deer parks in Huntingdon's county. Holland's Wood and Wennington Wood abut the estate today and have a predominance of a species of Elm tree (currently around 1000 trees) that has survived the devastating Dutch Elm disease, called **the Huntingdon elm**. The gardens are one of the few sites in the country growing these on from seed.

The Edinburgh to London mainline runs within half a mile from the village. There used to be a station but this closed in 1958.

On January 21st 1876 in freezing conditions and blizzards the Scotch Express(later known as the Flying Scotsman) leaves Peterborough for London at 6.15pm. It consisted of engine, tender and 10 carriages. With steam full on ,it catches up the a slow coal train that had left Peterborough at 5.53pm and collides with the shunting coal train at Abbots Ripton. Three to four inches of ice clung to the telegraph and signalling wires causing the signals to freeze in the CLEAR position. Fortunately no one was killed.

However due to the awful weather conditions, lack of communication and human error this was followed by a second crash which occurred at 6.59 pm when the London to Leeds express crashed into the wreckage of the first collision. This time 13 people die and 53 more injured passengers.

As a result of this tragedy, a landmark recommendation was made by the Board of Inquiry that all signals were to be redesigned so they could not fail due to ice and snow and if they did it should still register in the signal box.