



# Culham Ticket Office

Platform 2, Culham Station CULHAM Oxfordshire OX14 3BT



MENU



# CULHAM

## Welcome to the Old Ticket Office at Culham

Here you will find out about the history of the building, together with photos old and new and, by following the YouTube link, view videos of some of the heritage trains that can be seen passing through. Selecting the 'ABOUT' menu will lead not only to a wealth of background information, including the station's 175th anniversary in 2019, but also to resources which are free to download and include our construction sheets for any potential modeller of Culham. The 'BITS & BOBS' menu is the place to find interesting asides, and the 'MEMORABILIA' menu keeps expanding as we add more information about our ever growing collection of models, original GWR and other associated items.

The building has been rented from Network Rail since early 2014 by Entikera Limited (*trading as [Mp Fine Art Printing](#)*). Whilst a selection of items from our memorabilia collection may be seen on display inside the original Waiting Room and Station Office it is not a museum but rather a busy working environment and so it is not possible to accommodate unexpected visitors. *Prospective visitors should therefore avoid disappointment and always arrange an appointment if they wish to view inside the building.* Contact details can be found on the 'FIND US' page. However, free copies of our Discovery Trail booklet and souvenir tickets are always available upon request during office hours.

The electrification project was slowly creeping towards us and together with planned platform extensions at the station we expected to see big changes. Current information suggests that neither are now planned to happen in the foreseeable future. The old ticket office building is Grade II\* listed and so it and the original (now unused) Platform 2 upon which it stands should remain untouched by progress.



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PENDON



# Culham Ticket Office

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## Nuneham House

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### A brief history of Nuneham House

From our collection, this coloured print of Nuneham House was taken from the book by Francis Orpen Morris *A Series of Picturesque Views of Seats of the Noblemen & Gentlemen of Great Britain and Ireland*.

The original

illustrations by Alexander Francis Lydon were printed using the coloured woodblock process known as *Baxter Printing*, by Benjamin Fawcett of Driffield, and the book was published by William Mackenzie of Ludgate Hill in 1860.

Nuneham House is a Grade II\* listed building like the Old Ticket Office. Being originally built for Simon Harcourt, 1st Earl Harcourt in 1756 it is currently owned by Oxford University. Simon Harcourt famously had an entire village demolished in 1761 and relocated to create an open aspect for the parkland around his new villa. The 2nd Lord Harcourt, George Simon Harcourt, who succeeded in 1777 commissioned Lancelot "Capability" Brown to re-design the landscaped grounds. These were started in 1779 with alterations to the house following in 1781. Several further alterations and additions to the house followed, notably in 1832 and 1904. As far as we can ascertain, but this may be open to correction, ownership of the house and estate was passed on through inheritance as follows. First to William Harcourt, the 3rd (and last) Earl Harcourt, then by marriage to Edward Vernon Harcourt, Archbishop of York, who took the name Harcourt upon inheriting the estate from his cousin in 1830. Then followed his elder son George Granville Vernon Harcourt and upon his death leaving no heir, by George's younger brother William Vernon Harcourt in 1861. From here the estate passed in turn to his son Edward William Vernon Harcourt and then his son Edward Aubrey Harcourt who died in

March of 1904. His uncle, Sir William Vernon Harcourt, inherited the estate but died himself suddenly in September of the same year. He was the first member of the family to be hit by Death Duties which he himself had introduced as Chancellor of the Exchequer a number of years previously.

Following the death of Sir William in 1904, Nuneham House passed to his newly married son the 1st Viscount Harcourt, Lewis Vernon Harcourt and finally to his son William Edward Harcourt, the 2nd Viscount Harcourt. Whilst under the ownership of William Harcourt, Nuneham House was requisitioned by the RAF in 1942 for use as a P.R.I.U. (Photographic reconnaissance interpretation unit) being known as RAF Nuneham Park. This continued until 1957 when all the buildings and roadways that had been added during that time were removed

and the estate handed back to the Harcourt family. It was then sold to the University of Oxford who leased the house to a number of different tenants. One of whom, Rothmans International, undertook a programme of complete restoration and renovation during 1978/9, with a start also being made to return the gardens to their former glory. The whole estate was eventually put up for sale in September 2016. The Harcourt Arboretum, part of the tree and plant collection of the University of Oxford Botanic Garden, occupies part of what were the grounds of Nuneham House and remains in University ownership.



Undated postcard published by Taunt's Photographs  
Author's collection

Whilst almost fifty years have elapsed between the publication of the coloured print above and this postcard, believed to have been photographed in 1907, very little seems to have changed. Even the trees to either side look remarkably similar but the one behind the main house has disappeared. Could it have been added by the artist to form a more pleasing composition or did something happen to it, we will never know.

In June of 1841 Queen Victoria joined Prince Albert for the first of several visits to Nuneham House, and wrote whilst there to her uncle the King of Belgium that ... *This is a most lovely place; pleasure grounds in the style of Claremont, only much larger, and with the Thames winding along beneath them, and Oxford in the distance; a beautiful flower garden and kitchen garden, and all kept up in perfect order...* Prince Albert was visiting Oxford for the award of an honorary degree which was conferred by the Duke of Wellington who was chancellor of the university.

## Lock Cottage and bridge

Whilst Nuneham Park was not generally open to the public, for many years this part of the grounds on the bank of the river was a favourite place for picnics and river jaunts. Parties were allowed to land on Tuesdays and Thursdays with Salter's steamers passing to and from from Oxford also scheduling stops on those days. The first undated postcard shows a very busy scene with pleasure boats large and small congregating near Lock Cottage which served teas to the visitors. The ornate bridge links Nuneham Park with a small island. The second postcard, also undated, shows the Salter's steamer named 'Nuneham' at almost the same location.



Postcard published by Savage, Carfax Oxford  
Author's collection



Postcard published by Salter Bros., Oxford  
Author's collection

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The brothers John and Stephen Salter established their firm of boat builders in Oxford during 1858, and by 1888 they had started operating a passenger steamer service between Oxford and Kingston. In conjunction with the Great Western Railway, and later with British Railways, they introduced a range of 'circular tours' combining options for travel by both rail and river. The firm, which became Salter Bros Ltd in 1915, continued to operate their steamers during the First World War still stopping at Nuneham. We do not know when they finally stopped calling at Nuneham, but it is thought most likely that this happened in 1942 when Nuneham House was requisitioned by the RAF.

**NUNEHAM.**

By kind permission, passengers are permitted to land at Nuneham on Tuesdays and Thursdays during the season (May 20 to September 16). Bicycles are not admitted to the Park. The Steamers arrive at Nuneham about 10.45 a.m. and 3.30 p.m., and the return Steamers call about 12.0 noon and 5.45 p.m.

Return Fare, 1/-; Bank Holidays, 1/6.

Passengers taking Circular Tickets No. 421 by the morning Motor on Tuesdays and Thursdays may, if they desire, break the journey at Nuneham and proceed to Abingdon by the afternoon Steamer calling about 3.30.

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**Special Afternoon River and Rail Trip To WALLINGFORD.**

*Total No. 442.*

|                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| OXFORD (Jolly Bridge) | depts. 2.30 p.m. |
| Wallingford           | arr. 6.40 "      |
| Wallingford Station   | depts. 8.18 "    |
| Oxford                | arr. 9.12 "      |

**Fare (3<sup>rd</sup> Class on rail) 3/11**

Transcribed by Colin Taylor, 2022

We have seen a number of leaflets advertising steamer stops at Nuneham and this one from 1915 included a combined river and rail trip from Oxford to Wallingford. **Click or tap on the thumbnail image** to see an enlarged version. The description of the service to Nuneham is useful as it confirms the dates between which landing at Nuneham was allowed that year.

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## Siting of the station



When Culham station was opened in 1844 it was originally called 'Abingdon Road'. This makes sense as it was at the place where the GWR branch line from Didcot to Oxford intersected the main road to Abingdon and so was the closest it could get to serve the town at the time. It is however about three miles from Abingdon and lies between the villages of Culham and Clifton Hampden with nothing other than a few cottages and farms nearby. The Railway Hotel (as it was first called) followed just a couple of years later. The station was the closest convenient point on the railway network to Nuneham House, and as such would be ideal for travelling to and from London, however, things could have been very different for the station.

Just South of the station the railway crosses over the Thames which makes a big loop West through Abingdon. It crosses once more as the river turns back East before turning North again towards Oxford. Other than where it crosses the Abingdon road and the narrow Thame Lane, which it does in a deep cutting, the railway passes through open countryside. A mile or so away to the North East of the station lies Nuneham House and Park.

Members of the Harcourt family served in Government variously as MPs (both Liberal and Conservative), Home Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer and a Secretary of State, and featured prominently in other walks of life too. It is not known whether Brunel was a guest at Nuneham House on other occasions, but during a visit in the August of 1843 the subject of the siting of the station was raised by Archbishop Harcourt. The outcome was that he, and his family, expressed a preference for the station to be sited where the railway crossed Thame Lane, close to the Abingdon Lodge rather than on the more distant Abingdon to Dorchester turnpike. Brunel expressed indifference to either siting, and in a letter to the Company solicitor he wrote ... *Can you advise the Company that they are under no obligation to any body which can prevent them placing the Culham Station on the Nuneham road instead of the Dorchester Road ...* but, for whatever reason, the station was built on the turnpike road. It is possible that the level site was deemed more suitable. It is also interesting to note that, with the exception of road bridges, the buildings at this station were the only brick structures on the line when it opened. Both Oxford and Didcot, together with the very short lived station at Appleford, were all timber built. This may be conjecture, but accounts do suggest at least that the brickwork and original green paint scheme of the station buildings was subject to external influence. Certainly the Harcourts were very influential in the area at the time and were consulted by Brunel as to the siting of the station. Read more about this by selecting the '**Brunel Connections**' item under the '**Some bits of history**' option under the '**ABOUT/Culham Station**' menu tab.

## Alice in Wonderland

Nuneham Park served as the setting for several chapters of *Through The Looking Glass* by Revd. Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll. Alice Liddell (the real Alice) recalled in 1932, at the age of 80, that one of her ... *favourite whole-day excursions was to row down to Nuneham, and picnic in the woods there where Carroll would sometimes tell stories after luncheon that transported us into Fairyland.*

One such excursion to Nuneham, on June 25th 1863, which ended up at Abingdon Road station (as it was then) was recorded by Dodgson. *About 10 o'clock Alice and Edith came over to my rooms to fetch me over to arrange about an expedition to Nuneham. It ended in our going down at 3, a party of ten. We had our tea under the trees at Nuneham, after which the rest drove home in the carriage - while Ina, Alice, Edith and I (mirabile dictu!) [literally 'wonderful to relate' a phrase he apparently used often] walked down to Abingdon-road station, and so home by railway: a pleasant expedition, with a very pleasant conclusion.* Rather than row back, as they normally did, Carroll was permitted for the first and only time to travel back on the train alone with the three girls. Alice's mother, however, was far from happy, and his company was not encouraged for almost six months. That excursion turned out to be the last that he ever took with the girls. Strangely, the pages for the next day or two were removed from his diary.

There can be no doubt, however, that over the eight summers from 1856 to 1863 their river trips to Nuneham and Godstow provided the inspiration for many of Carroll’s stories.

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*Navigate between pages using the drop down list on the right of the secondary menu bar*  
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# Culham Ticket Office

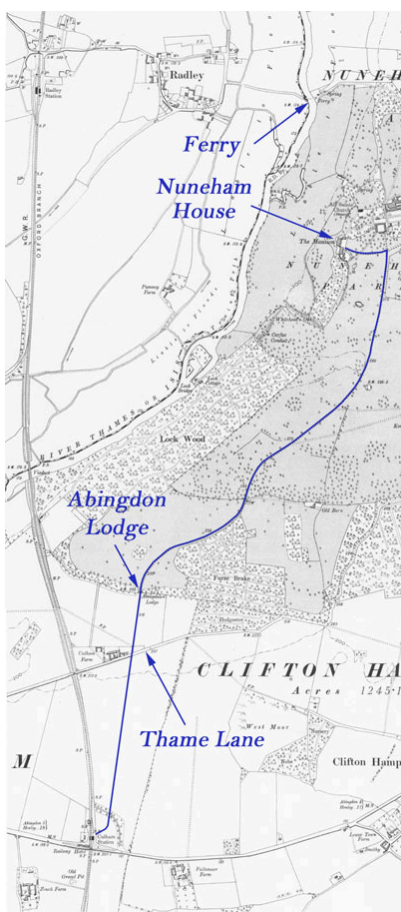
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## Nuneham House

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### Private road to Culham Station



Map published by Ordnance Survey Office,  
Southampton in 1900  
Reproduced with the permission of the  
[National Library of Scotland](#)

At one time, an estate road ran from Nuneham House to the station at Culham. It is known that this route was used for many years by both visitors to and the residents of Nuneham House. A large gate house known as 'Abingdon Lodge' existed where the estate road emerged before continuing on to meet and cross Thame Lane. From there the route to the station headed in a straight line before turning towards the station forecourt outside the Ticket Office. It isn't known when the estate road was made, but it is possible that the exit to Thame Lane had existed for many years and it was extended from there to the station when the railway arrived. Almost all traces of the road from the gatehouse to the station were obliterated by the development of a Royal Navy air station, RNAS Culham (or HMS Hornbill) which opened in 1944, with Thame Lane itself being diverted around the airfield site.

This route to the London trains via Culham station was thought by some to have fallen into disuse when Radley station was opened in 1873, even though that alternative would have involved the use of the river ferry which operated near the Radley boathouse until the mid 1940s. However as can be seen on the 'Press reports' page, articles appeared in the Local and National Press up until at least 1931 showing continued use of the land route to Culham. Possibly the ferry route could have been favoured by smaller groups of travellers and the land one by large groups or those being conveyed by carriage or motor car.

The map is a composite of extracts from two sheets published by the Ordnance Survey Office in 1900 and shows the Nuneham Estate, together with Culham and Radley stations. An estate road can be seen to wind Southwards from Nuneham House to Abingdon Lodge which is marked on the map. From there, the road goes straight down towards the station at Culham, first crossing Thame Lane before finally turning towards the station forecourt. The distance from the House to the edge of the Estate being about twice that from the gatehouse to the

station. Following a revision in 1910 this map was republished in 1913 and shows the whole length of this road to be lined with trees.

An estate road can also be seen heading northward from the House before turning sharply west and down to the bank of the River Thames. A ferry is marked, and the route can be traced continuing west to Radley station. Interestingly, an earlier map based on an 1875 survey and published in 1883 does not show the ferry nor either road linking it to Radley or the estate. It is understood that a ferry existed here linking Lower Radley with the original Newnham village which was situated on the slope leading down to the river as early as the eleventh century. However, it may have ceased operating when the old village was demolished in the early 1700s, being reinstated when Radley Station was opened. In *The Abingdon Branch* by Nigel Trippett & Nicholas de Courtais, first published by Wild Swan Publications in 1985, it is suggested that Lord Harcourt fell foul of the railway authorities at Culham station over the parking of his carriage there and so financed the ferry and footpath to Radley station.

### **Abingdon Lodge**

The Abingdon Lodge, sometimes called Culham Lodge, formed an impressive southern entrance to Nuneham Park. This view taken by Henry Taunt in 1906 shows a very well kept scene with mature trees flanking the gatehouse. Just visible within the arched gateway is a lady, possibly from the lodge, who lends an idea of scale. We originally thought that the building formed a single dwelling, but we have been told that there were in fact two houses, one on each side of the gateway. This entrance would have seen many and varied visitors over the years including Kings and Queens, Princes and Princesses, and other dignitaries and politicians of the time either going to or from Culham station. Many fêtes and gatherings were held in the Park just inside the gate and the road would then have been thronged with thousands of people.

Despite the development and later closure of RNAS Culham, the gatehouse managed to survive in splendid isolation for some years before finally being demolished. We are grateful to Martin Loach for taking his camera whilst exploring the area sometime in the early 1970s as he managed to capture this unique image of the gatehouse shortly before its demolition. Gone are the trees and all trace of the estate road with an overhead power line and mast now dominating the scene.





*H.W.Taunt, PictureOxon POX0115971*



*Photograph © Martin Loach*



Photograph by Major G.W.G.Allen circa 1930  
*Courtesy of Jaqi Mason*

This undated aerial photograph was taken in the early 1930s by Major G.W.G.Allen who had his own landing ground close to the station at Culham. Shown here is a portion of the larger original image and it includes, at the bottom right, part of the field from which he flew and kept his plane. Comparing the image with the map above one can see the main Abingdon road across the bottom with Culham Station visible at the bottom left. The

railway line can be seen snaking its way up to the bridge over the Thames through a cutting then on towards Radley and Oxford beyond. Going diagonally bottom left towards the top right is the tree-lined estate road which linked the station with Nuneham Park. Going across the centre is Thame Lane. The boundary of Nuneham Park is defined by the treeline at the end of

the estate road and Abingdon Lodge can just be made out. The parkland beyond at the top right is where the various fêtes would have been held.

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Imagery ©DigitalGlobe, Getmapping plc,  
Infoterra Ltd&Bluesky, The Geoinformation Group  
Map data ©Google.co.uk

Perhaps surprisingly, not quite all traces of the estate road were eradicated. This satellite view of the station in 2014 shows a curving avenue of trees just inside Culham No.1 Site which follows the curve of the estate road shown on the map above, leading towards the station. At ground level it is a bit harder to appreciate that the trees form a curving avenue, but closer exploration confirms that they very clearly do as the photographs below show.



These two photographs were taken in 2017. The first looks southwards towards the station and the route can still be seen with some surfaced road and then what had become a grassy area before stopping at a wire fence immediately adjacent to Station House.

The second photograph was taken from the fence looking back over the grass before the paved

area starts with the viewer ready to proceed up towards Nuneham House. It is fun to imagine it being thronged by the crowds of visitors making their way to and from the Park when attending one of the fêtes held there many years ago. Read more about the fêtes and other comings and goings on the press reports page.



This third photograph was taken in April 2025 by Sasha Berenzina and shows the remaining short length of roadway which was resurfaced in 2023. A combined cycle/footpath was laid to a new pedestrian gate to provide direct access between Culham Campus and the station.





*Courtesy of Sasha Berenzina*

Lighting and small bus shelter with turning circle were also installed with the eventual aim to provide an autonomous bus service for Campus staff commuting by train.

The roof of the ticket office can just be seen in the centre distance with the waiting shelter on platform 2 visible to the right. The newly laid road finishes just beyond the bus shelter, but would have originally continued straight on to a wide gate opening onto the station forecourt, whereas the

cycle/footway curves off to the right behind the far tree to the metal gate at the end of the tall hedge.



*Courtesy of Sasha Berenzina*

This final photograph was again taken in April 2025 by Sasha Berenzina whilst walking along Thame Lane, which now follows the outer boundary of Culham Campus along the old airbase perimeter track. At its most northerly point, and looking towards the north along the track beyond this gate, one can see where Abingdon Lodge probably stood at the top of the rise. The area is not open to the public but

the line of the estate road into Nuneham Park can be clearly seen on satellite maps.



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## Nuneham House

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### Press reports

There were many comings and goings to Nuneham House which did not merit press coverage, however there do exist a number of reports concerning visitors to Nuneham House travelling via Culham station. This list is not exhaustive, but here are some snippets that we have been able to find.

#### GWR Widows and Orphans fête

August 1857

Many reports on Nuneham Park being chosen to host the annual fête for the Provident Society of the GWR in aid of the Widows and Orphans Fund on Tuesday August 4th. With alterations to trains which will greatly facilitate the transmission of the thousands of visitors expected.

Apparently commodious omnibuses ran from Culham station to the centre of the park where large marquees were erected for dancing and refreshments with the added promise of unusual attractions. However it was also noted that the park was 10 minutes walk from Culham station. A ticket to the event apparently also allowed holders to proceed to and return from Culham on any train. There was even a special from Paddington leaving at precisely 8.25am. calling at intermediate stations and not leaving on the return until 8.30pm.! Combined rail and entry tickets from Oxford or Abingdon were advertised as 2s First Class and 1s Second Class. Visitors from the neighbourhood not travelling by train paid 1s entry with children being charged full price.

The volume of people attending seems to have caused some problems, with the Reading Mercury reporting that '*special trains arrived at Culham in rapid succession, bringing parties from Paddington, Slough, Taplow, Reading, Didcot, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Weymouth, and a number of other places on the line and its tributaries. From Oxford alone, we understand some 5000 excursionists were taken up*'. This mass of people descended upon Culham station at the end of the fête, and as the report continued '*So great was the crowd with return tickets to various parts that it was 2 o'clock on the following morning before the remnant was cleared off. Some had waited at the Culham station for 6 hours*'.

#### Odd Fellows Grand fête

July 1860

The Odd Fellows Grand fête and Gala Day had exclusive use of the park and gardens at Nuneham on 17th July. Its promoters enlisted the services of some professional artistes, whose performances added greatly to the amusement of the day. Half-a-dozen bands were

also engaged, including those of the Second Life Guards, the University Rifles, and the City Rifles. In addition to the usual trains calling at Culham Station, excursion trains were also run which conveyed a great many passengers from Oxford. Other excursion trains were also started from Birmingham, calling at Warwick, Leamington, Fenny Compton, Banbury, Aynho, Somerton, Heyford, Woodstock Road, and Oxford, on their way to Culham; and from London, calling at Slough, Maidenhead, Twyford, Reading, Wallingford Road, and Didcot.

## **Royal visit**

**June 1863**

Visit by Prince and Princess of Wales to Oxford. They left London on June 16th by special train from Paddington and arrived at Culham at 11.30am where a detachment of the County Police were stationed to carry out the necessary arrangements. The Yeomanry Cavalry of Oxfordshire were in attendance to form guard honour, commanded by the Duke of Marlborough, who appeared in his uniform as Lord-Lieutenant of the county. From there they were driven in an open carriage through Nuneham Park escorted by the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Yeomanry Cavalry then onwards to Oxford.

The scene at the station must have been very impressive, as the Hampshire Chronicle reported *'From Culham station towards the bridge a spacious tent had been erected, and two stages were placed beneath it, leaving a space between them which was covered by a crimson carpet. Upon these stages sat a select company, principally consisting of the ladies of the neighbourhood. From the inside of the tent roof streamed the flags of England and Denmark, and the platforms on each side of the railway were covered with a profusion of geraniums, azaleas, and other exotics'*.

## **GWR Widows and Orphans fête**

**July 1863**

The 8th annual fête for the Provident Society of the GWR in aid of the Widows and Orphans Fund was held on Tuesday 28th July. The public were 'respectfully apprised that no boats will be allowed and conveyances from Culham station were forbidden to pass through the entrance gate'. Special trains ran as usual from numerous stations on the Great Western line at low fares, and by the middle of the afternoon the little station at Culham presented a most lively appearance as throngs of visitors arrived and wended their way under a broiling sun to the park.

The Reading Mercury reported that *'Twenty-five coaches, as the Railway officials now term the carriages, came from London, well filled, and the train from Hungerford, Newbury, and Reading, &c, consisted of 18 carriages, all heavily laden with human freight, and the trains from the various other parts also conveyed large numbers to the Culham Station, and altogether there were about 7,000 or 8,000 on the grounds'*.

## **Oxford City Rifle Corps**

**September 1865**

On Thursday 7th September the Oxford City Rifle Corps accompanied by their band travelled by train to Culham where they were met by Colonel Harcourt mounted on horseback in his uniform of Colonel of Artillery. They then proceeded to be met at the House by the Harcourt family.

## **Oxford City Rifle Corps**

**July 1867**

The Oxford City Rifle Corps once again visited Nuneham House. The Corps accompanied by their band marched from Culham station and were welcomed by Mrs Harcourt and



V.Harcourt,Esq.,Q.C. Several batallion movements were gone through in the grounds, and dinner was served on the lawn.

## GWR Widows and Orphans fête

July 1869

Three special trains left Oxford for Culham on Tuesday 6th July along with other specials for the 14th annual fête for the Provident Society of the GWR in aid of the Widows and Orphans Fund. fête tickets would act as a pass to and from Culham and for admittance to the park. Various reports stated that *'For two hours the carriage road from Culham station to the Park, distance of a mile, was filled with a compact mass of humanity. As may be imagined the number of persons present during the day was exceedingly large'*. This year it was advertised that boats could land visitors to the fête from Oxford or Abingdon. The weather that day was reported as being favourable.

Various newspapers report on the fact that as a result of the fête £1,100 was credited to the fund, this being the highest sum raised so far. It was a huge sum indeed as it has been calculated to be the equivalent of about £100,000 today.

## GWR Widows and Orphans fête

July 1872

This year, Tuesday 9th July saw the 17th annual fête for the Provident Society of the Great Western and Bristol and Exeter Railways in aid of the Widows and Orphans Fund hosted by the Nuneham Estate. The weekly publication *The Graphic*, in its issue of 20th July, included on page 44 this series of engravings illustrating the event. As the Abingdon Road bridge can be seen in the background, the crowded platform must be platform 1 full of passengers heading back to Oxford.

It is interesting to include some extracts from a report on the fête which appeared in the *Reading Mercury* the following Saturday.



*The Graphic, July 20th 1872  
Author's collection*

*'The Great Western Railway Directors, as in former years, generously granted a number of special trains from Paddington, Windsor, Henley, Reading, Basingstoke, Wycombe, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Swindon, Oxford, Wolverhampton, Warwick, Abingdon, and other towns. Several of the engines were gaily decorated with evergreens and flags, and on front of one we noticed the words Faith, Hope, and Charity.'*

*'Towards noon on Tuesday the clouds dispersed, and the weather was most favourable. Arriving at Culham Station, the crowds of people proceeded to the Park. The distance is not great, and may be termed a constitutional walk. Several of the Oxfordshire police were stationed at intervals along the route, and the greatest order prevailed. Printed notices were posted about the Park, warning the public to beware of pickpockets. Notwithstanding this caution pockets were picked, and at the Station a gentleman lost his gold watch and a lady her*

purse.'

*'The rain kept off until the evening, when it began as the crowds of people were flocking to the railway station, and there was such an array of umbrellas as had never, we should think, been seen at Culham before. The platform and every available spot of ground adjacent was densely crowded. As the crowd increased the difficulty of despatching the trains increased in proportion, and the confusion was considerably augmented by a heavy shower of rain. If the people had been kept at some distance from the platform by strong barriers, much of the overcrowding and confusion would have been prevented. As it was, people were anxious to reach the trains, and as soon as the doors of the carriages were opened a rush was made to gain a seat. Fortunately, no accident occurred, and after some little delay, the trains proceeded on their journey.'*

## **GWR Widows and Orphans fête**

**July 1875**

On Wednesday 21st July the 20th annual fête for the Provident Society of the GWR Fund in aid of the Widows and Orphans Fund was hosted by the Nuneham Estate. The festivities were arranged near the entrance from Culham station *'with amusements on a large and liberal scale with a select Company of London artistes having been arranged'*. Sadly the event was reported to have been a washout as the weather was appalling that day.

## **Harcourt family wedding**

**October 1875**

Reports were published following the wedding of Lord Winchilsea and Nottingham to Edith Harcourt, daughter of Edward William Harcourt on the 27th at the church in Nuneham Courtenay and reception at Nuneham House. The Oxford Journal of Saturday, October 30th tells us that ... *'At about four o'clock the happy pair left the house for Culham station in a carriage drawn by four greys with two postillions, amid a perfect shower of rice and hearty expressions of good will and life-long happiness, and proceeded to London.'*

## **Royal visit**

**June 1883**

On 16th June, both the Oxford Times and the Oxford Journal reported on a Royal visit by the Prince and Princess of Wales to various functions in Oxford.

The Oxfordshire Weekly News of Wednesday 20th June also covered the visit but referred to the couple as being the Duke and Duchess of Albany. Their departure was covered thus ... *'After leaving the High School, the Duke and Duchess of Albany partook of luncheon at the Deanery, Christ Church, and subsequently went by water in the British Queen houseboat, to Nuneham accompanied by a select party. The weather was beautifully fine, and the trip was greatly enjoyed. Slapoffski's Band was engaged for the occasion. Their Royal Highnesses travelled to London in the evening by express train, which was stopped at Culham Station especially to take them on.'*

The Duke was Prince Leopold, youngest son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and some newspapers refer to the couple as being 'the Prince and Princess of Wales'. They married in 1882, but sadly he had haemophilia and died in 1884 but not before his wife, Princess Helena of Waldeck and Pyrmont, had given birth to a daughter. Their son was born posthumously.

## **Drill and refreshments**

**October 1883**

The Oxford Journal of 6th October carried the following report - '*Thursday last the City Companies, under the command of Capt. Dudley, who was the only officer present, had a march out. The new band turned out in good strength, and the total muster was 70 of all ranks. The force proceeded by train to Culham Station, and from thence drilled through Nuneham Park to the village, where they partook of refreshment at the Harcourt Arms, at the invitation of Capt. Dudley. On leaving Nuneham the men were drilled along the road to Oxford.*'

## **Military manouvres**

**April 1884**

The Reading Journal of Saturday 26th April reported on some military action - '*The Easter Monday manoeuvres of the 2nd Oxon Rifle Volunteers took place in Nuneham Park, and consisted of a sham fight between attacking force, made up the Oxford City, Chipping Norton, and Bicester Companies, and an enemy consisting of the Banbury, Headington, Thame, Henley, and Caversham Companies who were supposed to have seized Culham Railway Station. The former force was commanded by Colonel Hall, and the latter by Major and Adjutant E. A. Holmes a'Court. After the order to cease firing had been given at the close of the operations, Hall addressed a few words to the men, who, he said, had behaved very steadily on the whole, though the companies might have kept their distances better.*'

It is fun to visualise what gave cause for that remark! Whilst not mentioned in the report, it is probable that many of those involved travelled to Culham by train, although the relieving force may well have marched from Oxford.

## **Radcliffe Infirmary fête**

**August 1886**

The Oxford Journal of Saturday 7th August reported that - '*The fourth annual fête, arranged by Messrs. Porter, of St. Aldate's, in aid of the Radcliffe Infirmary, took place on Bank Holiday, the spot selected this year being Nuneham Park, near the Cottages, the use of which was very kindly granted by E. W. Harcourt, Esq., who also threw open the beautiful gardens for the inspection of the visitors. The weather was all that could be desired during the afternoon, although in the morning the sky had been overcast and there appeared the probability of rain falling. A long and varied programme of stage amusements was provided, beside which there were the Dorchester Brass Band, the Stanton St. John Band, and a stage band, so that there was no lack of attractions for the pleasure-seekers, who had the option of travelling to the Park by road, river, or rail. The house-boats, Nelson and British Queen, and three of Messrs. Porters' steamers conveyed over 800 persons from Oxford and Abingdon, and hundreds went by rail to Culham and Radley, the nearest stations to the Park, and many went by road. There was thus a large concourse of people, but owing to their being so scattered it is difficult to estimate their numbers with anything approaching to accuracy, but there could hardly have been less than 5000 persons present.*'

## **Military manouvres**

**March 1893**

The Oxford Journal carried a lengthy report entitled 'RIFLE VOLUNTEER SHAM FIGHT' and starts '*On Saturday afternoon last the 1st and 2nd Volunteer Battalions of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry were engaged in operations of an instructive character in Nuneham Park.*'

Cadets from the Oxford Military College were also involved and the whole contingent numbering well over 200 were carried by special train from Oxford to Culham where they were met by the Culham College Company. From there they all marched to Nuneham Park to carry out the exercise.

## **Grand Temperance fête**

## August 1894

On Saturday 28th July Jackson's Oxford Journal carried an advertisement for the *Oxfordshire Grand Temperance fête at Nuneham Park* which was due to take place on the August Bank Holiday. The issue of Saturday 11th August carried a long report on the fête which was held at Nuneham Park for the first time. Whilst choirs and a great many Temperance Bands from the local area and beyond attended, the fête would appear not have been quite as well supported generally as was hoped for as attendance was described as being 'up to the average'. This was put down to there not being as many attractions as in previous years and the rain which fell during the early morning. Attractions advertised did include 'Fire Balloons, Fireworks, excellent Brass Bands, Athletic Sports and Bicycle Races'. An entrance fee of one shilling per race was charged, but this did entitle competing athletes free admittance to the fête and Park, and there were quite substantial prizes to be won (40shillings for the winner of the 3 mile bicycle handicap for instance).

The July advert concluded 'Excursion Trains & Cheap Fares from all Parts. Cheap Trips down the River by Boats from Oxford.' It may be inferred that the excursion trains ran to Culham, although this was not clear.

## Grand Temperance fête

### August 1895

Jackson's Oxford Journal issue of Saturday 10th August once again carried a long report on the 'Temperance fête at Nuneham Park'. A large number of Temperance Bands were reported as attending and 'the programme was full, was well arranged, and excellently carried out'. Once again attendance did not live up to expectations, being described as average. The article did go on to suggest that considerable change to the attractions would be needed in future years if the fête were to maintain its popularity, with stormy weather over the holiday weekend also playing its part. It seems that this may well have been the last visit of the fête to Nuneham Park as no further reports have been found.

One interesting note is that a number of balloon ascents were made. These could possibly have been by an early form of hot air balloon, as the previous year mention was made of 'fire balloons' at the fête. Oxford's connection with hot air balloons went back many years even in the 1890's as in 1784 James Sadler, a pastry chef in Oxford, had become the first ever Englishman to fly. He took off from Christ Church meadow on the 4th of October in a home made balloon of silk lined with paper, heat being provided by a fire on an open grille. He rose to over 3,000 ft, flying for about 30 minutes before landing six miles away in Woodeaton. His exploits and other scientific advances make for interesting reading.

Travel arrangements to the fête were reported thus '*Special arrangements were made with the Great Western Rail Company to convey passengers at cheap fares to and from Radley and Culham, the nearest stations to Nuneham, and house boats and steam boats passed between Oxford and Nuneham during the day conveying fairly good loads of passengers*'. The use of Culham station would be common practice for events at Nuneham Park, but those arriving at Radley station would have faced a fair walk down to the river and then a trip across on the small ferry before reaching the Park.

## Sir William Harcourt

### October 1904

In early October newspapers carried reports of the sudden death of Sir William Harcourt who passed away in his sleep whilst at Nuneham House and mention the return of his two sons who met at Culham station and were then driven from there to the house. The funeral took place at Nuneham on the 6th with many visitors reported as wending their way from the

station to Nuneham House and *'an extra stock of conveyances was kept in readiness at Culham station for such passengers to Nuneham as desired to use them'*.

The Derby Daily Telegraph in its edition of the 7th covers the internment and comments that the villages that lie on the outskirts of the Park are sparsely inhabited. It adds 'One of them, indeed Culham - would seem to consist of little besides its railway station and an old fashioned inn'. The reporter obviously not appreciating that many rural stations such as Culham could be located some distance from the community after which they were named.

## The King visits

June 1907

The King spent the last weekend of June at Nuneham House as the guest of the Right Hon. Lewis Harcourt M.P. and Mrs Harcourt. His Majesty arrived at Culham station at five o'clock on the Saturday evening to be met by the Culham College Company of the 2nd B.V. Oxfordshire Light Infantry who formed a guard of honour. He then motored through the park to Nuneham House. One report also includes the Queen and 'other Royal Ladies' as being in the group.

## The King visits

July 1909

On July 10th the King once more visited Nuneham for the weekend. Whilst no mention can be found of how the King travelled to Nuneham House, there is a report that he arrived back in London by train arriving at Paddington at 11.53am. on the Monday morning. Presumably he left via Culham station. Whilst at Nuneham the King and most of the house party motored to Abingdon in the afternoon. The procession was reported to consist of 6 motors which entered the town over the bridge, so it may be inferred that they left Nuneham House by means of the estate road, thence either along Thame Lane or past Culham station.

## Distinguished visitors

June 1911

Together with National newspapers, the Oxford Journal Illustrated reported on a prestigious event at the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, and the later garden party at Nuneham House which took place on Saturday 10th June. The report reads *'On Saturday last Mr. Lewis Harcourt, M.P., held a very enjoyable garden party in his beautiful grounds at Nuneham.'*

*Included in the distinguished gathering were the Colonial Premiers, who motored over after having received the honorary degrees of D.C.L. conferred upon them in the Sheldonian Theatre. Our picture shows the arrival at Culham station, by special train from London, of some of the guests, who were driven from there to Nuneham House in specially provided vehicles.'*



*Oxford Journal Illustrated*

## Old English Fair and air display

June 1931



The Banbury Advertiser of Thursday 21 May 1931 carries a report on an 'Old English Fair' to be held in June. Cheap rail tickets to Culham confirms use will again be made of the road connection to Nuneham Park. This fair offers the modern excitement of an air display.

The report reads - '*OLD ENGLISH FAIR. Arrangements are well advanced for the old English fair to held in the beautiful park and gardens of the historic mansion at Nuneham (by kind permission Viscount Harcourt) on Wednesday and Thursday, June 10th and 11th in aid of the Oxfordshire Nursing Federation. Among the attractions will be a Royal Air Force display, including a mimic bombing raid and counter attack of enemy fighters. This will be given with other spectacular stunts by No. 33 (Bomber) Squadron and Oxford University Air Squadron (by kind permission ot the Air Ministry). There will also be exhibition tennis by famous Wimbledon stars, the celebrated Martin Harvey in miming, and the bands of H.M. 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars and 4th Batt. Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. Culham Station (G.W.R.) adjoins the park, and the railways will issue cheap tickets within 60 miles, while also Salter's will run special steamers at cheap fares and there will be a frequent bus service from Oxford.*'



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## Links with Nuneham House

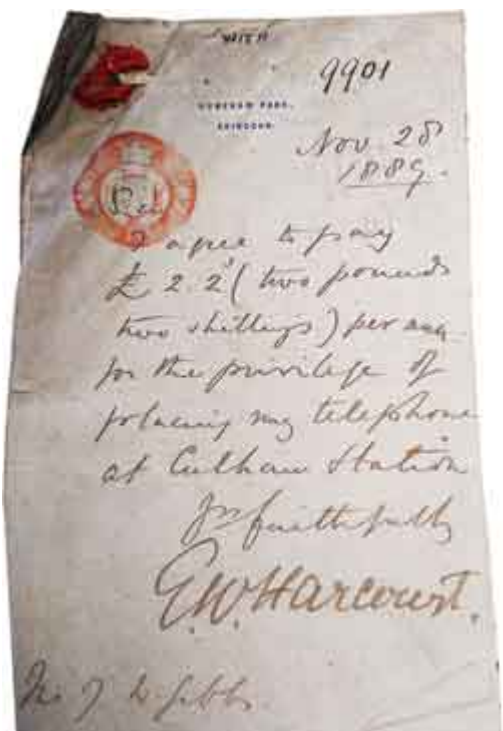
[Nuneham House >](#)

### Telephone links



#### Telephone link of 1888

A different form of physical link between Nuneham House and the station at Culham was made in 1888 when an agreement was signed between the GWR and Edward William Harcourt allowing for the placement of 'a speaking tube or telephonic



instrument' in Culham station together with its associated wiring. One may imagine that previous communication would have been made by sending someone down from the estate with a message or query. How much more convenient it would be to use the cutting edge technology of a phone! Remember that this was only ten years after the very first working telephones arrived in this country. Alexander Graham Bell demonstrated the telephone to Queen Victoria at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight in 1878 with calls to London, Cowes and Southampton. This itself being only two years after he filed his patent application in America.

The agreement stipulates an annual fee of 10 shillings for the privilege. This however seems to have gone up considerably as attached to the agreement is a note from Edward Harcourt dated November 28th 1889 agreeing to pay £2.2s per annum 'for the privilege of placing my

*telephone at Culham station*'. There is no indication when this agreement was terminated, but it is possible that it continued for a good number of years.

Such arrangements for private communication were not confined to those between Nuneham House and the station at Culham. [Waddesdon Manor Station](#) which was built for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild on the Metropolitan line in the late 1890s, apparently also had a telephone link between the house and station

namely:

1. The Company will (subject as hereinafter mentioned and so far as they have the right so to do) permit the Licensee at *his* own expense but under the inspection and to the satisfaction in all respects of the Engineer of the Company (hereinafter called "the Engineer") to carry two telephone wires over and across the Railway and land of the Company at Colham in the position and direction shown on the plan herewith annexed and for that purpose to erect a pole upon the Company's property and to attach the said wires by brackets to the outside of the parapet of the Company's over-bridge —

and during the continuance of this Agreement to use the said *method*

the railway and Company land. The wires were to cross the railway line attached to brackets fixed to the outside parapet of the over-bridge and thence on to the Railway Hotel. There is no indication as to the purpose of the telephone link between the Railway Hotel and Nuneham House but it was short lived as the agreement was terminated as of December 1912. The fee for this easement was set at £1 per annum payable in advance each January.

It is noticeable that the agreement of 1888 is written out in full by hand in beautiful script, whereas the one of 1908 utilises a pre-printed form with manually added detail. The GWR always chose to use the spelling 'shewn' as opposed to 'shown' in all publications and this form is used in the 1908 agreement when it states the position and direction of the wires is 'shewn on the plan hereunto annexed'.

Telephone link of  
1908

Possibly in addition to the telephone installed at the station another agreement was entered into in 1908 to facilitate a telephone at the Railway Hotel. This agreement allows for the installation of a telegraph pole on GWR land with an easement for two telephone wires to cross

*United States Railway*  
*General Managers Office*  
*Reading January 1910 P. M.*

*F. Webster Esq.*  
*Washington*  
*Dear Sir,*

*RE: THE ERIE AGREEMENT, 1907*  
*NOTICE OF VIOLATION, JANUARY 1, 1910*

I beg to inform you that the agreement entered  
by the above mentioned companies has been received from the Secretary  
generally, and the agreement can be considered as having been  
received on the first December last.

*Yours Truly,*  
*A. T. Stewart*  
*Genl. Mgr.*



The plan attached to the agreement shows the proposed route for the wires, and usefully documents what the track layout was at the time together with the relative position of the station buildings. The footbridge has yet to be built at Culham, and the passenger foot crossing between the two platforms can be seen by the signal box. No visible signs remain, but reference to the

drawing reveals what looks to be two gate posts and a gate which would have marked the entrance to the private road to Nuneham House.

~~~~~ 0000000000000000 ~~~~~

*Click or tap on any thumbnail to see a larger image.*

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Centre in Chippenham ~~*

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## Company Servants' welfare

### GWR Widows' and Orphans' Benevolent Fund

Whilst investigating the links between Culham Station and Nuneham Park, we found that the Park hosted a fête in aid of the GWR Widows' and Orphans' fund no fewer than five times. This caught our interest and so it was decided to find out a little bit more about where similar fêtes had been held.

It is not intended to be a history of the fund, which would be a huge and complex task, but we include a few contextual notes for background interest. We would be very happy to hear from anybody reading this who may have anything to add or correct.

#### A brief introduction

During our research we found the fund referred to by various similar names. We believe that several different schemes were constituted under the GWR for different grades of staff, or new ones brought into being to replace older ones. In our collection is a booklet entitled *Rules of the Great Western Railway Salaried Staff Widows' & Orphans' Pension Society* which gives the date of its establishment as 25th December 1922. The membership rules mention '...any person who is a Member of an existing Benefit Fund of the Company which makes provision for Widows and Orphans...', thus implying that several such schemes were running concurrently but falling under the general umbrella title of the *Widows' and Orphans' Benevolent Fund*, possibly benefitting from a single fund which was held in common. The fund no longer exists as a separate entity, and we think that it was amalgamated with other similar funds during the 1970s and finally became part of the overall Railway Pension arrangements in the 1990s. It has proved difficult to determine when the fund came into being, but one press report suggests it was constituted in 1842 whilst the GWR was under the chairmanship of Charles Russell, who was also M.P. for Reading at the time. There are some suggestions that Daniel Gooch may have been the first chairman of the fund which was initially for the benefit of salaried staff only. Funds were raised in a number of ways, the GWR made annual grants, the public contributed by way of concerts, special church services, organised outings, and other similar fund raising activities organised at a local level, or by bequests. Members also





By far the most important method of raising funds was the annual Grand Fête. When one reads of attendances of 10,000 to 30,000 it is easy to appreciate the income generated. It wasn't all plain sailing though, as in 1876 it was reported in several newspapers that the annual fête would not be taking place that year. In the event, at least one local fête (at Ashton Park, near Bristol) and the 21st Grand Fête (at Oakley Park, Cirencester) did take place. However, in 1877 and 1878 a fête wasn't held at all due to a dispute over the Company proposing to pass on only a proportion of the proceeds from the sale of special rail tickets. It was argued that any reduction would render the fêtes unsustainable. This issue was resolved and they restarted in 1879 at Blenheim Park but this appears to have been a final swan-song as no reference has been found for subsequent company wide Grand Fêtes. Reference has been found to large annual fêtes held at Malvern in 1883 and 1884 in support of the fund, but these were locally arranged. It was felt that the annual Grand Fête had become too large and disruptive to the normal operations of the railway and the Company undertook to make payments in lieu following the 1879 one at Blenheim.



The Railway Servants' Orphanage, Derby  
*Great Western Railway Magazine, August 1930*

and girls accepting orphans up to the age of 12 from all over the country. Children had to leave upon reaching the age of 15 however. Numbers at the orphanage fell after the Second World War and so the large old building was demolished and replaced by two smaller houses in 1977. By 1982, only one of these houses was needed and, in 1993, the home was closed.

The August 1930 edition of the *Great Western Railway Magazine* covered a visit the previous month by Viscount Churchill, chairman of the GWR, and Lady Churchill for the annual prize giving. It was noted during the speeches that Viscount Churchill had visited seven years previously and that Mr.A.E.Dean, who was secretary and manager of the Orphanage, had served a total of 48 years. The annual report stated that during the previous year 23 boys and 17 girls had been admitted, and 25 boys and 9 girls left with all finding employment, over half the boys with railway companies. It was noted that altogether 225 children whose fathers had worked for the GWR had been accommodated so far and that 30 were resident at that time. See some more photographs from the report by [clicking or tapping on the thumbnail image](#).

We were pleased to be contacted in late 2023 by Linden Collins who told us about his mother, Anthea Borlase, who was one of the 30 GWR orphans at the time of the visit mentioned above. It is noted in the edition of *The Derbyshire Advertiser* from 4th July that she recited the poem 'Sherwood' by Alfred Noyes to the distinguished guests. She had entered the home aged ten in

### The Railway Servants' Orphanage - Derby

The fund made payments to widows and orphans, either via the local station or by Postal Order. The company also supported the *Railway Servants' Orphanage* which was founded on August 5th, 1874 in Derby and grew in size until by 1887 it could accommodate a total of 300 boys



Enamel badge supporting the home  
*Author's collection*



September 1926 following the death of her father, Anthony Borlase, the previous year. He had retired as Station Master at Thatcham in early 1919, but there is a local connection as he was Station Master at Culham from December 1884 until August 1886. We include his mother's story here with Linden's kind permission.

Another charitable organisation started as a home for 'fatherless girls' in Clapham. This was the [London and South Western Railway Servants' Orphanage](#) which was founded in 1885 and went on to occupy a very large site in Woking providing support for both boys and girls, and after WW2, accommodation for retired employees also.



Collecting dog *Dandy* at Weston-super-Mare collected over £50 in six months  
*Great Western Railway Magazine, October 1925*

### Collecting dogs

One seemingly unusual method of eliciting small public donations was that of using collecting dogs. In fact, collecting dogs became quite an institution in Victorian and

Edwardian times and served as collectors for many charities, and other less genuine purposes, as trained collecting dogs could be hired by anybody wishing to make a collection for whatever cause they wished.

Donation boxes would be attached to a special harness and the dogs were left to wander and many performed tricks or barked in recognition of coins being placed in their box. Official station collecting dogs became well known and liked characters at their station, both with passengers and the station staff who looked after them, some becoming quite famous and featuring in newspapers of the day.

In its August edition from 1907, The Great Western Railway Magazine carried a two page article telling the story of many of the collecting dogs at that time. It was accompanied by a photo collage of eleven collecting dogs with the title [Friends of the Widows and Orphans](#).

The November issue of the Great Western Railway Magazine in 1921 records that [Bob the Collecting Dog](#) who worked at Gloucester station had died on August 28th. He had raised almost £370 for the GWR Widows and Orphans Fund in 11½ years. The same magazine reported in its April 1911 edition that *Prince* at Reading station had collected £104 6s.11¼d. in just over two years for the fund. Paddington had *Tim* and Swindon *Bruce*, but possibly the most famous was *Station Jim* who was at Slough from 1894 until his sudden death in his harness on the platform on the evening of November 19th 1896. Like many other station dogs *Station Jim* made the occasional excursion by train turning up at Paddington, Windsor and even Leamington stations. He made such an impression on the staff and passengers that they subscribed to have him stuffed and mounted in a display case with a collecting slot and inscription describing his life story. At the time of writing *Station Jim* could still be seen in his glass cabinet on platform 5 at Slough. Other collecting dogs were similarly preserved and displayed. Several have been found new homes in museums, most notably a couple can be seen in the private museum at Fawley Hill near Henley.



*Station Jim* at Slough



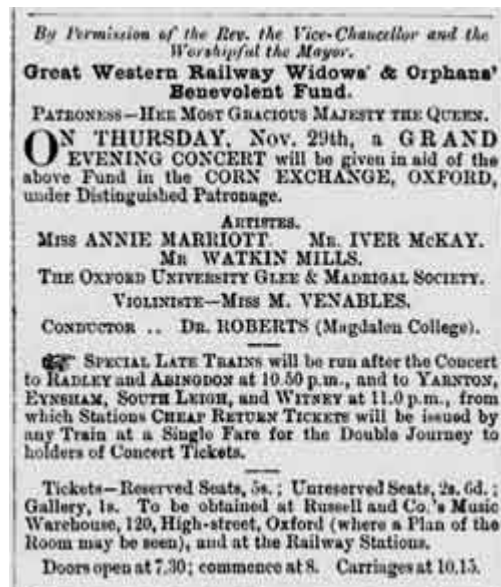


Ticket for a concert at Yatton - 1889

Many local events were arranged throughout the GWR in aid of the fund, some one-offs and others taking place more often, sometimes

annually. These ranged from special excursions and picnics, church parades and services, concerts, and large fêtes (such as those at Malvern), being too numerous to list even a representative selection.

Of particular local interest however, was the annual Ball held for many years each January in the Oxford Town Hall. Our page from the Illustrated London News from 1860, seen below, refers to it as being the eighth annual ball so implying the first took place in 1853. At the time of writing, reports can only be found for balls up to 1864 but it is possible that they continued to be held after that date. As a point of interest, these balls would not have taken place in the building as we know it today. The present building was opened by the Prince of Wales in 1897. The previous building, dating from 1752 and on the same site, would have hosted the balls, it was demolished in 1893.



Jacksons Oxford Journal - 1888



Oxford Town Hall - circa 1836  
Author's collection

The Town Hall also hosted at least one fund raising concert, with one known to have been held on Friday 22nd February in 1884. A new Corn Exchange was built behind the Town Hall and opened in 1863. It had a relatively short life however, as it too was demolished in 1893 when the whole site was cleared for rebuilding. The Corn Exchange provided an alternative venue for functions and hosted a fund raising concert on Thursday 29th November 1888.

This engraving by John Le Keux, from a drawing by F.Mackenzie and dated 1st July 1836, was first published in 1837 in the book *Memorials of Oxford - volume 3* by James Ingram D.D. who was President of Trinity College. The books were printed by S.Collingwood, 'Printer to the University' and published in Oxford by John Henry Parker, H.Slatton, and W.Graham, and in London by Charles Tilt.

## The annual Grand Fête

As previously mentioned, the biggest single fund raising event in any year was the annual Grand Fête. These would be held in large private parks with reasonable access to a GWR station by the kind permission of the owner who tended to be associated with the Company, a local politician, or a local philanthropist (possibly all three). Many extra trains would be laid on to convey visitors from far and wide, with special all inclusive tickets being produced to cover both the train fare and entry to the fête. Such trains were provided to the organising committee free of charge by the GWR, all proceeds from ticket sales going to the fund, with tickets only being valid for use on the fête specials.





These Grand Fêtes were initiated by one held just outside Cirencester in 1856, and the second one was held in 1857 at Nuneham Park with special trains being run to Culham station. There were a couple of years that a Grand Fête did not take place, and the last known one, being the 22nd, was at Blenheim Park in 1879.

These fêtes grew to be very popular indeed with local towns treating the day as a holiday, and featuring in both the local and national press, sometimes with illustrations. Vast amounts of food and drink were consumed and some of the special trains grew to enormous lengths, albeit with (probably) shorter four wheel coaches. Unfortunately, on occasion, the anticipation of a fête was ill-founded as the summer weather sometimes played havoc with the best laid plans and so dampened the enthusiasm of potential visitors on that and the following year. In 1871 an outbreak of small-pox caused many to stay away. Catering arrangements were often carried out by local business and hotel owners who presumably stood to make a good profit, but also had to carry the loss for any unsold stock. We have seen an advertisement for the auction of traders' pitches at the Abingdon Horse Races, and it is possible that similar arrangements were entered into for the various stalls and sideshows at the GWR fêtes. Entertainment in the form of bands and popular *artistes* from the Crystal Palace, London theatres, and Music Halls was paid for by the organising Committee, but was sometimes given gratis.



Poster for Beckett Park - 1874  
Courtesy of Shrivenham Heritage Society



Aldermaston fête train ticket - 1868

~~~~~ 0000000000000000 ~~~~~  
*Click or tap on any thumbnail of a print from our collection to see an enlarged version*  
~~~~~ 0000000000000000 ~~~~~





Hampstead Park - 1858



Oxford Town Hall - 1860



Beckett Park - 1870



Nuneham Park - 1872



Blenheim Park - 1873

## Local stations used for events

~~ Click or tap on any fête year below to read  
a transcribed press report ~~

1. [1856](#) - Ten Rides, Wednesday 6th August  
*special stop near Hayley Woods four  
miles outside Cirencester on the  
Gloucester line*
2. [1857](#) - Nuneham Park, Tuesday 4th  
August *Culham station*
3. [1858](#) - Hampstead Park, Tuesday 3rd  
August *special stop at Hampstead*

< Company Servants' welfare

[1858](#) - alternative report

4. [1859](#) - Bason Park, Tuesday 26th July  
*Pangbourne station*

[1859](#) - alternative report





## GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY FÊTE IN NUNEHAM PARK

The annual fête in aid of the Widows' and Orphans' Fund of the Great Western and Bristol and Exeter Railways' Provident Society was held in the grounds of Nuneham Park, near Abingdon, on Tuesday the 9th inst. As in past years, the Board of Directors granted special trains, which ran to the Culham Station, within three-quarters of a mile of the

~~ Redisplay the map by clicking [here](#) ~~

5. [1860](#) - Hungerford Park, Tuesday 24th July *special stop by park gate, Hungerford*
6. [1861](#) - Beckett Park, Tuesday 30th July  
[1861](#) - alternative report
7. [1862](#) - Englefield Park, Tuesday 22nd July  
*Theale station*
8. [1863](#) - Nuneham Park, Tuesday 28th July  
*Culham station*
9. [1864](#) - Aldermaston Park, Tuesday 5th July  
*Aldermaston station*
10. [1865](#) - Wokefield Park, Tuesday 1st August  
*Mortimer station*
11. [1866](#) - Beckett Park, Tuesday 17th July  
*Shrivenham station*
12. [1867](#) - Englefield Park, Tuesday 23rd July  
*Theale station*
13. [1868](#) - Aldermaston Park, Tuesday 7th July  
*Aldermaston station*
14. [1869](#) - Nuneham Park, Tuesday 6th July  
*Culham station*
15. [1870](#) - Beckett Park, Tuesday 5th July  
*Shrivenham station*
16. [1871](#) - Englefield Park, Wednesday 5th July  
*Theale station*
17. [1872](#) - Nuneham Park, Tuesday 9th July  
*Culham station*  
[1872](#) - alternative report
18. [1873](#) - Blenheim Park, Tuesday 22nd July  
*Handborough and Woodstock Road (Kidlington) stations*
19. [1874](#) - Beckett Park, Wednesday 29th July  
*Shrivenham station*
20. [1875](#) - Nuneham Park, Wednesday 21st July  
*Culham station*
21. [1876](#) - Oakley Park, Tuesday 15th August  
*Cirencester Town station*
22. [1879](#) - Blenheim Park, Tuesday 19th August  
*Handborough and Woodstock Road (Kidlington) stations*  
[1879](#) - alternative report







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## HMS Hornbill

[HMS Hornbill >](#)

### The Royal Navy air station



Photograph by Major G.W.G.Allen circa 1930  
*Courtesy of Jaqi Mason*

This black and white image is from an aerial photograph of the area taken by Major G.W.G.Allen in the early 1930s. Comparing it with both the modern satellite image and the aerial shot of the air base in 1946, one can see the railway line snaking off from the station up towards Radley and Oxford, and the Abingdon road curving across the foot of the

image. The tree lined estate road can be followed from the station in a straight line until it crosses Thame Lane and a short distance further on it passes under the arch of Abingdon Lodge and into Nuneham Park whose boundary is marked by row of tall trees. Almost all the area seen between the railway and the Abingdon Road, including the wooded area on the right and well into Nuneham Park itself was to be taken up by the air base.

In order to accommodate the air base Thame Lane was diverted around the site and the estate road to the station now terminated where it met the new line of the lane. This meant that Abingdon Lodge found itself orphaned within the diverted Thame Lane, but outside the perimeter track. It survived for many years and was not demolished until the 1970s. The boundary to Nuneham Park was lost as the area reverted to agricultural use but the estate roads can still be traced, almost from where the lodge once stood. Major Allen's hangar was demolished, but the old hangar site remained outside the airfield perimeter and was later redeveloped for residential use.

*Click or tap on any link below to place an overlay onto the satellite view*

[Original course of Thame Lane and the estate road](#)

[Thame Lane diversion round the air base](#)

[Location of Culham Farm, Abingdon Lodge and 1930s airfield](#)

[Clear map overlays](#)

The base itself was completed in 1944, being commissioned on 1st November 1944 and closing as a Naval Air Station on 30th September 1953. Its official name was RNAS Culham (or HMS Hornbill). It is believed that there were a total of four incidents involving either a crash landing or runway overshoot during the operational life of the airbase. One incident took place during the afternoon of Tuesday 9th October 1945 when the railway line was blocked by an unidentified Fleet Air Arm plane which had crash-landed near the end of the runway. Another incident took place about ten years later when a Sea Vampire T Mk.22 approached to land a bit low and knocked its wheels off on the perimeter fence within view of the signal box.



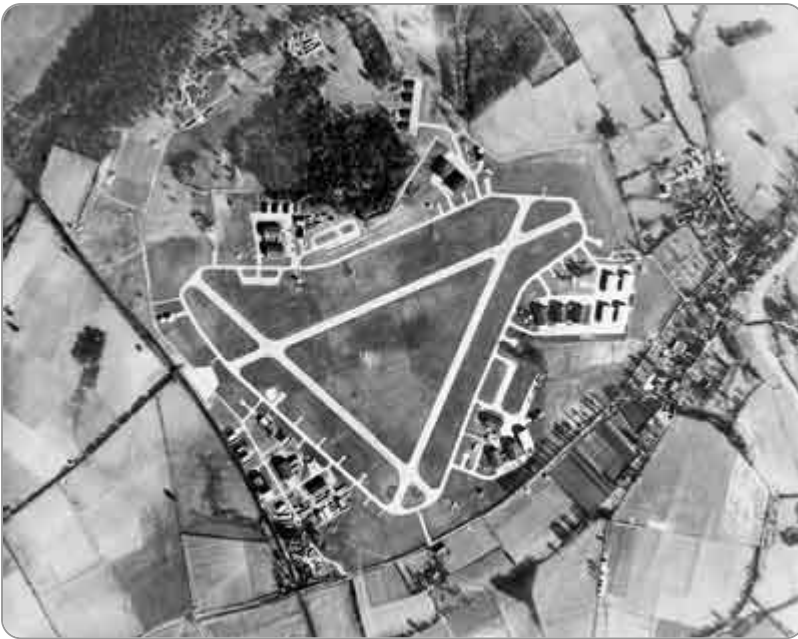
Satellite view in 2020 *courtesy of Google.co.uk*  
 Imagery ©DigitalGlobe, Getmapping plc,  
 Infoterra Ltd&Bluesky, The Geoinformation Group

This area was particularly busy during the Second World War, as the nearby Nuneham Park and House had been requisitioned by the RAF in 1942 for use as a P.R.I.U. (Photographic reconnaissance interpretation unit) being known as RAF Nuneham Park. This continued until 1957 when all the buildings and roadways that had been added during that time were removed and the estate handed back to the original owners. There were two other service camps adjacent to that at Culham, one being 'Argus Camp' on the western side close to Lock Wood and the other, 'Pegasus Camp' to the east by Clifton Heath. Little if any evidence remains of these other camps as the abandoned buildings were gradually demolished.

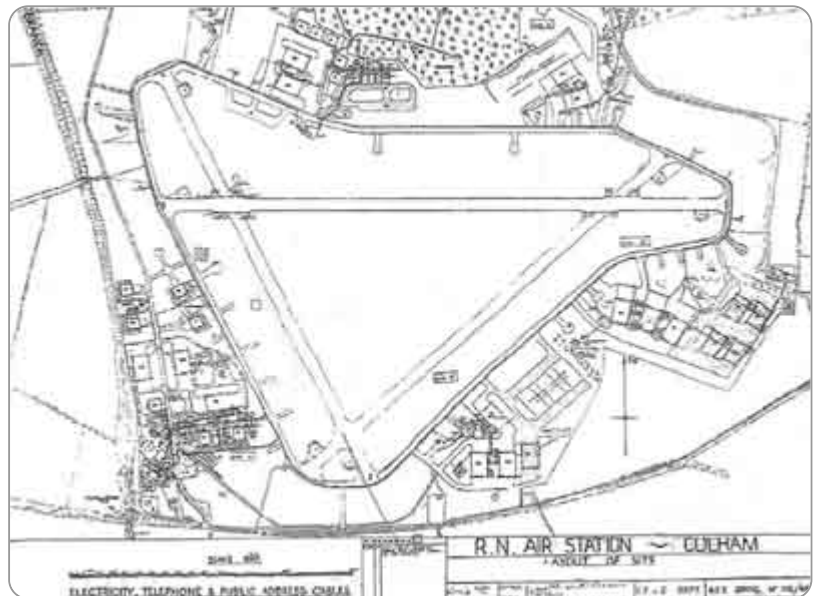
We are grateful to Peter White for this aerial photograph which was taken sometime during 1946. The railway runs across the image from top left to bottom centre, with Culham Station just discernable near the lower edge. The main road to Abingdon, the A415, runs the other way from centre right to centre bottom where it crosses over the railway line by the station. Lock Wood is the wooded area at the top left of the photograph, and the buildings of Argus Camp can be seen adjacent lying outside the area enclosed by the diverted Thame Lane.

The plan on the right dates from 1945 and shows slightly more detail, but disappointingly it doesn't reveal more information regarding the station and rail link. See a larger version by ***clicking or tapping on the thumbnail image.***

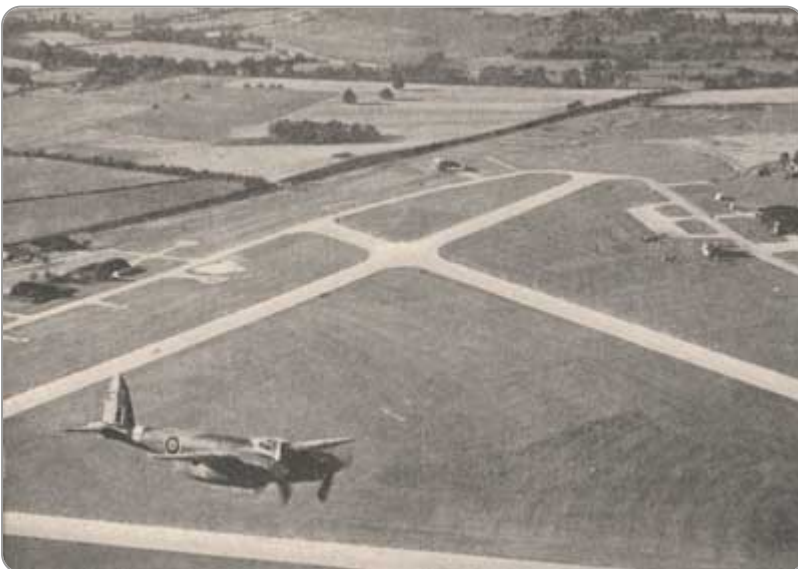




HMS Hornbill/RNAS Culham in 1946  
*Courtesy of Peter White*



HMS Hornbill/RNAS Culham in 1945  
*Courtesy of Ove Arup & Partners Ltd*



Aerial view taken from an undated Christmas card  
*Author's collection*

This aerial view of the airfield is taken from a [small undated Christmas card](#) which shows, what we believe to be, a DeHavilland Mosquito flying over the airfield in a North Easterly direction. There are few buildings to be seen in this view and it is worth comparing it with the overall view and plan shown above to see why.

Culham station is out of shot beyond the bottom left corner of the photo, but the line of the



railway can be traced from centre left up towards the top right corner. Part way along, Thame Lane crosses the line via its original bridge, which can just be made out, before it follows its diverted route around the top of the airfield perimeter.

The issue of *The Aeroplane* from 12th November 1948 contained a page entitled ['A visit to Culham'](#) which showed some Seafires in flight and an aerial view of the dispersal area.

The air base at Culham hosted a number of air displays between 1945 and 1953 when it closed as an operational air station. The photographs below were taken by an unknown visitor to one such *Naval Air Day* held at RNAS Culham on Saturday 9th July 1949.



Blackburn Firebrand  
*taken on 9th July 1949, author's collection*



DeHavilland Sea Hornet  
*taken on 9th July 1949, author's collection*



Fairey Firefly over the railway line  
taken on 9th July 1949, author's collection

We are fortunate to also have in our collection a copy of [the official programme](#) from that day in 1949. This not only lists the impressive flying programme but also includes fascinating details about the static displays, many photographs, and a general plan of the air base itself.



Hawker Sea Fury  
Courtesy of RNPA Historic Archive

This Hawker Sea Fury of 739 Squadron based at Culham is having its vertical view camera reloaded in December 1948. The Sea Fury could be fitted with both vertical and oblique cameras for photo reconnaissance missions.

It was the last type of propeller driven fighter to serve with the Royal Navy, and one of the fastest such aircraft ever built. Development of the Hawker Fury was formally initiated in 1943 in response to a wartime requirement of the Royal Air

Force. As the Second World War drew to a close, the RAF cancelled their order, however the Royal Navy saw the type as a suitable carrier aircraft. Now designated the Sea Fury, development proceeded and the type began entering operational service in 1947 remaining in service with the RNVR until August 1955.

A local railwayman, Harold Gasson, wrote a series of four books about his life on the railway and this photograph of a Seafire coming in to land is taken from his third book *Signalling Days* which was originally published by Oxford Publishing Co. in 1981. Crécy Publishing republished all four books in a combined volume entitled *Steam Days* in June 2020 (ISBN: 9781910809679) and the image has been reproduced here with their kind permission.



Seafire photographed by Harold H.Gasson circa 1950  
*Courtesy of Crécy Publishing*