

ONE LEG IN THE WATER

In this article, Derek Barnard gives us a glimpse of tourism in the nineteenth century and of a seemingly dangerous journey by train from Gravesend to Rochester.

William Orr and Co. of Paternoster Row, London, published a book in 1847 entitled *Summer Excursions in the County of Kent along the River Thames and Medway* which was well illustrated with woodcuts of original sketches. It was written to encourage the more well-off Londoners to use the steamers and make day excursions to various locations within a thirty mile radius of the Metropolitan Cathedral of St. Pauls. Being of pocket size it was expected that it would be carried by the traveller, for it not only gives directions to the destinations but also relates their history and tells of places to visit, by walking or carriage, in the surrounding countryside.

Excursion Six is to Gravesend and its rural vicinity and on the page referring to the Thames and Medway Canal is the following footnote. 'A railway has been recently formed along the towing-path which affords a rapid communication between Gravesend and Stroud [sic], and thence to Rochester and Chatham" For this was written in 1845 when the Company of Proprietors of the Canal, which had never ever made enough profit to pay a premium to its many investors, changed its name to The Gravesend and Rochester Railway and Canal Company and built a railway along the canal route. When they came to the restriction of the tunnel they laid one rail on the towpath and the other on piles driven into the canal bed. For one year the company ran this precarious route bringing the first trains into the Medway Towns. I have wondered what it must have been like to travel this route and had hoped the author would describe the journey.

Excursion Eight to Rochester was a disappointment for the decision

is taken to walk the dusty five miles to Rochester so as to describe the Shakespeare connection with Gad's Hill in great and extravagant detail to his readers. Mr. Dickens had not yet purchased Gad's Hill Place of course.

However, the book's final trip which is to Chatham is taken by rail from Gravesend. 'Journeying thence by railway on the banks of the canal to Stroud, where we shall find a floating bridge to carry us across the river to Chatham within a few yards of the High Street. The ride through the dreary tunnel with the dark waters of the canal beneath us, and an insecure chalk roof above our heads, enlivened as it is by occasional shrieks from the engines vaporous lungs, and the unceasing rattle of the train, is apt to make one feel somewhat nervous; and the first glimpse of bright daylight that breaks upon us, relieves us from a natural anxiety as to the chances we run of being crushed by the fall of some twenty tons of chalk from above, or being precipitated into twenty feet of water beneath, with the doors of the carriages locked and no 'Nautilus belt' around our waists and not even a child's caul in our pocket. This relief is however temporary, for the light only breaks in through a gap in the tunnel, and some more experienced traveller informs us we are only half out of it. However, our journey is brought to a close without any accident: and we embark on the steamer that is to deposit us at Chatham.'

Readers following his instructions would not have had to endure this hazardous journey because before the book appeared in print the canal and railway were sold to the South Eastern Railway who filled in the canal through the tunnel and laid a double track. The rest of the waterway to Higham's Dung Wharf remained in use, bringing the droppings from the London horses for the better cultivation of the crops in the area and the transportation of the grown produce to the expanding city.



