

= Tunnel Railway =

The Tunnel Railway ( also known as the Ramsgate Cliff Railway , the Ramsgate Tunnel Railway , the Ramsgate Underground Railway and the World Scenic Railway ) was a 2 ft ( 610 mm ) narrow gauge underground railway in Ramsgate , Kent , England . Following the restructuring of railway lines in Ramsgate in 1926 , the section of line between Broadstairs and Ramsgate Harbour including the tunnel was abandoned . This narrow gauge railway was opened in 1936 to connect tourist attractions and shops near Ramsgate harbour with the new railway main line at Dumpton Park .

Except for its two stations ? one at each end of the tunnel ? the line ran entirely underground . The line was built in less than three months , and on its completion in 1936 was one of the shortest independent railway lines in the country . It was open for only three years before being converted to a major air @-@ raid shelter during World War II . After the war 's end , it was not included in the 1948 nationalisation of British railways but remained in private hands .

Passenger numbers fell during the 1960s , and the line became economically unviable . Following a train crash in 1965 , the owners closed the line at the end of September that year . The tunnel still exists , but no trace remains of the stations .

= = Background = =

The coastal resort and port town of Ramsgate was historically served by a complex network of unconnected railway lines , the legacy of competition between two rival companies to provide links to London and to neighbouring Margate . The town 's first railway station , Ramsgate Town , was opened by the South Eastern Railway on 13 April 1846 , on what was then the outskirts of the town , about a mile from the seafront . Lines from the station ran north , before splitting west to Canterbury and on to London , and north to Margate .

The London , Chatham and Dover Railway opened a second line to Ramsgate on 5 October 1863 . This line ran from London via Herne Bay , Margate and Broadstairs before descending to sea level at Ramsgate through a 1 @, @ 124 @-@ yard ( 1 @, @ 028 m ) tunnel to Ramsgate Harbour station , on the seafront immediately adjacent to the harbour .

Although very conveniently sited for passengers , Ramsgate Harbour station presented severe operating difficulties . Its situation at the end of a steep gradient in the tunnel meant there was the constant risk that an out @-@ of @-@ control train would run through the station onto the beach , as happened on 3 August 1891 and 24 March 1915 . Cramped conditions allowed no room for station growth or improvement , and the small turntable meant larger engines could not be used , so heavier trains needed two engines to haul them up the tunnel 's gradient . Additionally , by the 1920s the population of Ramsgate had almost doubled since the station had opened , making the freight facilities inadequate , with no room for expansion .

= = = 1926 restructuring = = =

Following the railway grouping of 1923 , both the South Eastern Railway and the London , Chatham & Dover Railway became part of the newly formed Southern Railway , which decided to address the duplication of lines and stations at Ramsgate and Margate . It decided to link the two lines at Ramsgate to allow through running between them . This scheme had been proposed by the South Eastern and Chatham Railway before World War I , but work did not commence until 1925 . This meant the closure of the terminus stations at Ramsgate Town and Ramsgate Harbour , and the construction of a line skirting the northern edge of the town to link the two existing lines . New stations on the north @-@ eastern and north @-@ western fringes of the town , called Dumpton Park and Ramsgate respectively , replaced the existing stations in the town centre and at the harbour . Construction work on the new line involved over 700 men moving 200 @, @ 000 long tons ( 224 @, @ 000 short tons ; 203 @, @ 200 t ) of chalk , at a cost of approximately £ 500 @, @ 000 ( £ 26 million in 2016 ) .

The new link opened on 2 July 1926 , from which date both former Ramsgate stations were closed

along with the line through the tunnel to Ramsgate Harbour . The tunnel was sealed and abandoned , and the former Ramsgate Harbour station was sold to Thanet Amusements , who converted it into a zoo and funfair called Merrie England .

Although adequate for the town 's residents the new stations were a long way from the seafront attractions , which were at the foot of a steep hill . The day @-@ trippers on whom Ramsgate 's tourist industry depended were therefore increasingly attracted to Margate , where the station was next to the beach .

By 1933 Merrie England , now under the ownership of Ramsgate Olympia , had become extremely popular , and Ramsgate Olympia began to lobby the Southern Railway to reopen the line through the tunnel , with a new junction station between Dumpton Park and Broadstairs . However , the Southern Railway rejected the proposal as too costly and impractical . Ramsgate Olympia and the Southern Railway were keen to make the attractions near the harbour accessible from the railway main line and to provide a service from the seafront to the greyhound stadium at Dumpton Park . The two companies eventually agreed on a scheme by which a new line would use the 780 yards ( 710 m ) of the tunnel nearest the beach , before branching off into a new 364 @-@ yard ( 333 m ) tunnel to emerge at a new station at Hereson Road , a 250 @-@ yard ( 230 m ) walk from Dumpton Park station . Ramsgate Olympia planned the construction of a large @-@ scale housing estate , charabanc parking facilities , and a 10 @,@ 000 @-@ seat stadium at Dumpton Park to increase passenger numbers and encourage people to use the new rail line .

= = = Route = = =

The stations each had three platforms ; a broad island platform in the centre for passengers waiting to board trains , and narrower outer platforms from which passengers exited the trains . Although the upper station was known as Hereson Road from the outset , the lower station was never officially named . It was known at various times as " Olympia " , " Beach " , " Sands " and " Lower Terminus " . The platforms and ticket offices were immediately outside the mouth of the tunnel at both stations .

The line ran between Hereson Road , across the road from Dumpton Park station , down a steep gradient of 1 in 15 in the new tunnel , before running at a 1 in 75 gradient down the original tunnel to the lower terminus . The line consisted of a single line , branching into two platform tracks at the two stations , with a crossing loop halfway along the tunnel . Over the 1 @,@ 444 @-@ yard ( 1 @,@ 320 m ) journey between Hereson Road and the lower terminus , the line descended 83 feet ( 25 m ) .

= = = Construction and infrastructure = = =

The new line 's infrastructure was designed by Henry Greenly , a leading figure in the design of narrow gauge railways . He had begun his career at the Metropolitan Railway ( now part of the London Underground ) , and had designed the route , buildings , locomotives and rolling stock for the Rhyl Miniature Railway and the nearby Romney , Hythe and Dymchurch Railway . As the new railway would not be carrying heavy loads and would be travelling only a short distance , it was built as a narrow gauge railway , with a track gauge of 2 ft . This allowed the new branch tunnel to be built to far smaller dimensions than the existing tunnel , at just 8 feet ( 2 @.@ 4 m ) high and 6 feet ( 1 @.@ 8 m ) wide .

Although a cable haulage system had initially been considered , Ramsgate Olympia decided early in the line 's planning to electrify the line . A third rail system was rejected due to concerns for the safety of the large numbers of children expected to use the line , and the locomotives had trolley poles drawing power from a single 400 @-@ volt DC overhead line running the length of the tunnel . The wire ran along the wall of the old tunnel , on brackets in the roof of the new tunnel , and was supported by poles at the open @-@ air stations . The electricity was supplied by an electrical substation built by English Electric , inside the tunnel near the lower end .

Construction work began on 2 May 1936 . The company hoped to have the line open in time to serve the large crowds expected on the August Bank Holiday , leading to a very tight construction

deadline of three months . To try to meet the deadline , construction work was carried out both day and night . As the journey would take place entirely underground it was decided to line the wider , original tunnel with illuminated displays showing scenes from around the world . This led to the line becoming semi @-@ officially known as the " World Scenic Railway " .

English Electric built two trains for the line , designed to resemble the electric trains already in use on the Southern Railway , but on a smaller scale . A 94 ft 6 in ( 28 @. @ 80 m ) four @-@ car train , painted red , was capable of carrying 108 passengers , and had a driver 's cab at each end to avoid the need to turn the train around . A 99 ft 6 in ( 30 @. @ 33 m ) train , painted yellow , was also able to carry 108 passengers , but had two extra driver 's cabs in the centre , allowing it to be split into two separate 49 ft 9 in ( 15 @. @ 16 m ) trains , each capable of carrying 54 passengers . It was envisaged that when the line was busy both trains would be used , but during quiet periods the line could be operated by the two halves of the yellow train . The red train was modified so that it could also be split , reducing its capacity to 102 as the two rows of seats at the centre were replaced by driver 's cabs .

= = = Opening = = =

The line opened to passengers on 31 July 1936 , less than 12 weeks after construction began . It was formally opened by Lieutenant @-@ Colonel Edwin Charles Cox , Traffic Manager of the Southern Railway , who commented that as the traffic manager of what was then the largest electric rail service in the world , he was now opening what was probably the smallest . Initially , the tunnel was decorated with illuminated scenes depicting Switzerland , Canada , the Netherlands , Japan and Egypt .

The railway proved very popular , and over the Bank Holiday weekend carried 20 @, @ 000 passengers . As it relied on the tourist trade for business , it closed at the end of September . Throughout the 1937 , 1938 , and 1939 seasons the railway operated between Whitsun and the end of September each year , closing for the autumn and winter .

The railway never had a timetable , and operated according to demand . Whenever one station had a sufficient number of passengers the driver signalled to the other station that he was about to depart , and the trains from both stations would set off simultaneously , passing at the halfway crossing loop . The journey took approximately five minutes . Outside of times of peak demand the full @-@ length trains were generally not used , and the trains used split into their two @-@ car sections . There was no depot : trains were stabled in the lower section of the tunnel .

= = Wartime = =

In the late 1930s , war between Britain and Germany began to seem likely . Ramsgate 's location on both the English Channel and North Sea and its proximity to the Thames Estuary , its large port facilities , and its close proximity to RAF Manston made it a likely target for heavy aerial bombing and as a landing site for any German invasion of Britain . With this in mind the town 's borough engineer and surveyor , R. D. Brimmell , devised a scheme in 1938 for a network of tunnels beneath the town , to serve as a vast deep @-@ level air @-@ raid shelter for the town 's inhabitants .

A 3 @. @ 25 @-@ mile ( 5 @. @ 23 km ) semi @-@ circular network of tunnels was dug beneath northern Ramsgate , connecting to the existing railway tunnel . It was opened by the Duke of Kent on 1 June 1939 , three months before the outbreak of war , and visited during the war by Winston Churchill . The network was capable of sheltering 60 @, @ 000 people , although Ramsgate 's civilian population at the time was approximately 33 @, @ 000 .

= = Post @-@ war operations = =

The Tunnel Railway reopened for the 1946 season as usual . The illuminated tableaux had been removed during the war but were replaced , but this time they were illuminated by floodlights fitted to the sides of the trains rather than being self illuminated . The line was not included in the 1948

nationalisation of the railways and so remained in the hands of Ramsgate Olympia ( later Pleasurama ) . The tableaux were removed around 1955 due to increasing vandalism , and the station signage changed from World Scenic Railway to Tunnel Railway .

Part of the chalk cliff near the lower terminus collapsed in 1957 , forcing the railway 's closure while a strengthening concrete wall was built . The new wall reduced the lower terminus to a single length of track . The second track at Hereson Road was closed at the same time , and removed to build a short siding near the bottom of the tunnel for stabling the trains . The wooden station platforms were replaced by modern concrete structures .

At 2 : 15 pm on 1 July 1965 , one of the two @-@ car yellow trains lost control while approaching the lower terminus and ran off the end of the rails before smashing into a building . The driver , 74 @-@ year @-@ old Ernest Brown , was trapped in the cab and suffered pelvic injuries , while a number of passengers suffered minor injuries . Although the station was repaired and services were resumed , Pleasurama decided to close the line at the end of the 1965 holiday season . Services stopped on 26 September 1965 .

= = After the closure = =

After closure the tunnel was sealed , although it remains structurally intact inside . The site of the lower terminus was cleared and is now an empty site surrounded with construction hoarding . There is a small roundabout directly outside the south tunnel portal . Hereson Road station is now a used car dealership . Four of the cars were sold to the Hollycombe Steam Collection and remain in use , while the remaining three were given to the Hampshire Narrow Gauge Railway Society . Most of the rails and sleepers were sold to the Romney , Hythe and Dymchurch Railway .

Following three years of renovation , the lower section of the tunnel was reopened to the public in 2014 as part of the Ramsgate Tunnels tourist attraction . The tunnels were formally reopened by Prince Edward , Duke of Kent in a ceremony on 27 May 2014 .