



Stepping Out to Combe Valley C'side Park, Sunday 14th July 2:00pm

Welcome to the Stepping Out walk to Combe Valley Countryside Park with Bexhill Museum. I'm Alex, one of the museum's local history volunteers and this is Peter Hunnisett, Director Combe Valley Countryside Park CIC, keen photographer of nature, and maintainer of the park's website. We'll be assisted by Heather and others who will act as backmarkers so you'll always be kept in the group.

During this 2½ hour walk we'll be visiting the south-eastern end of the park and talking about the history and natural wildlife of the area. The walk is just over 3 miles, looking to finish back where we started here at Blackbrooks car park.

Be aware there's one residential road to cross, and most of the walk will involve stretches of rough ground with a few steps to climb.

Introduction

Combe Valley Countryside Park covers an area of 4 square miles between Bexhill and Hastings. Development of the park is managed by a Community Interest Company with support from East Sussex County Council, Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council. Although most of the land is privately owned and farmed, there are lots of paths for walkers, cyclists and horseriders allowing the quiet enjoyment of this beautiful stretch of East Sussex countryside.

The park contains the Combe Haven Site of Special Scientific Interest established in 1985 – find it outlined on your map, and the Filsham Reedbed Local Nature Reserve which is managed by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. During the winter season the central valley floods encouraging waterfowl like ducks, geese, herons and egrets. The considerable diversity of flora and fauna includes a nationally important population of dragonflies some of which we hope to see today. Cattle graze many of the fields through the summer months and help to manage the water meadows. Cereals are grown in many of the fields on higher ground.

A Discovery Centre and Community Café opened in 2016 which acts as an information hub to visitors; we'll be coming back past the centre towards the end of the walk if you haven't yet discovered it for yourself.

Our first stop is just beside us...

Route

🕒 **Boundary stones.** In September 1859 a local builder, Robert Burchell, signed a contract with the Corporation of Hastings to supply 60 stones to mark the boundaries of the Borough of Hastings and the Liberty of the Sluice at Pevensey. At a total cost of 33 pounds 15 shillings (about £2,000 today), they were made of York stone and had the letters CH cut in them. Stones delivered to Pevensey had numbers cut in them and the stones for the home boundary had letters from A-P.

After the incorporation of Bexhill Borough, it was decided in 1909 that another set of 63 large stones should be placed along the 12 mile perimeter of Bexhill. Starting from Normans Bay, up through Lunsford's Cross, along to Watermill Lane, down through Combe Valley, finishing at Glyne Gap.

Made of Cornish granite, at a cost of 15 shilling each (about £3,700 in total today), these were all sequentially numbered and prefixed with BB.

A number of these stones have disappeared over the years, either through boundary adjustments, development, bank erosion or general neglect. In survey I did last year I found 30 of the Bexhill stones - one was hiding in Hastings Museum!

[IMAGE 1] So you may be wondering what on earth is going on in this photo? These are Bexhill Councillors continuing an ancient tradition called 'Beating the Bounds', started when there were few maps and it was necessary for representatives of a parish to walk the boundaries of their area to establish that there had been no encroachments. At suitable points, people were 'bumped' in order to instil into their memories the actual boundary. We have records these were performed in 1909 (to scout out where Bexhill stones were to be placed), 1925, 1928 and most recently 2002 (more of a photo opportunity at Glyne Gap).

We'll be passing a few of these boundary markers along the way and I'll point them out as we pass.

[Peter: butterbur]

Next stop, the ruins of St. Mary's Chapel, towards marker post #36.

Blackbrooks car park – St Mary's Chapel

🕒 **St. Mary's Chapel.** [IMAGE 2] St Mary's Chapel was built by the Earls of Eu and was originally Norman with additions in the Early English style. Local records first mentioned the chapel in 1372 where it is called St Mary the Virgin. The site was excavated in 1861 by a T Ross who was able to trace the complete ground plan (see information board for the outline). Excavations in 1929 in the nave of the chapel disclosed burials with a human skull and skeletal remains dating back to the Middle Ages.

Despite arrangements made with Hastings Corporation for the preservation of the ruins which had been standing for centuries, only this eastern part of the building has escaped estate developers. The tower and nave were completely destroyed by the construction of the roadway in the late 1940's early 1950's and as we walk out I'll show you how far it once extended. But for now feel free to have a look around for a few minutes.

[point to front window of 48 Bexleigh Avenue]

Let's retrace our steps slightly and go along the track to marker post #41.

St. Mary's Chapel, Sea Road – Lewis Avenue

② **Hastings Tramway.** [IMAGE 3] This track is known as Lewis Avenue, which was part of the route taken by the Hastings Tramways Company between Bexhill and Hastings. The company was founded in early 1904 and public services started in April 1906. Originally running from West Marina in St. Leonards to the roundabout on Marina road by the De La Warr Pavilion, it was extended later that year to Cooden Beach. It ran every ten minutes between St Leonards and Bexhill, and every thirty minutes between Bexhill and Cooden. Its full length was almost 20 miles.

The original Hastings electric trams used a ground level power supply (dangerous - stories of electrocuted horses come to mind), then later changed to petrol powered dynamos, and finally to over-head wires (to the dismay of the wealthy who didn't want the poles spoiling their view!). Bexhill had over-head wires from day one.

[IMAGE 3] This image shows flooding over the Glyne Gap marsh in 1925 where we stand today, you can clearly see the high water, track and over-head wires. Trams would have last used these in September 1928, when they were replaced with trolleybuses which were in use until 1959.

Now let's have a meander up to our next stop near Pebsham Lane, marker post #43.

Lewis Avenue – Pebsham Lane

③ **Boundary stones.** [point to BB56, CHP & BB55, CHC]

Pebsham Lane – Pebsham Marsh

④ **Pebsham Farm House.** The site of the former Manor of Pebsham. The name Pebsham comes from the name Pypfels Ham. The site was included in in the 1086 estate of Bollington (now known as Bulverhythe), the whole of which was held in the time of Edward the Confessor. The great part of the property was granted after the Conquest by Robert, Count of Eu, to the Abbey of Treport, which he had founded in 1059. The Manor remained in the hands of the Abbey until the dissolution, when the Abbey lands, including the Manor of Pebsham, were granted in 1539 to Sir William Sidney and Agnes his wife. From this date Pebsham was held in the Manor of Robertsbridge until the end of the 17th century.

[IMAGE 5] What we see today is a 16th century Grade II listed building and sadly one of the original barns built around 1150 was burnt down in 1985, it was located where Pebsham Rural Business Centre sits to the west of the site. The farm was owned by Hastings Borough Council in the 1990's, and today it is up for sale at a cool half a million pounds, with five bedrooms, three bathrooms and some quite large grounds.

WW2 V-1 bomb. If we turn towards the north and look over at Pebsham Marsh, on the day of Tuesday, 11th July 1944, 75 years ago, a V-1 (Doodlebug) came crashing down causing a huge explosion quite close to here. When David Hatherell and I first looked into this we thought that this may have been what caused this lake to appear, but having recently acquired some aerial photos from the 60's, the lake is much more recent than first thought. Which leads me to give a little plug for my mapping website Bexhill-OSM, where I've recently uploaded a complete collection of aerial photographs from 1967 for everyone to browse online.

Let us continue towards the lake and marker post #61.

⑤ **Pebsham Marsh Lake** *[Peter: orchids, butterflies and cormorants]*

⑥ **North of Landfill** *[Peter: views, flood meadows, birds]*

Bexhill West Branch Line and Crowhurst Viaduct. [\[IMAGE 6\]](#) Running from June 1902 to June 1964 this double track railway was a branch of the Hastings Line. It ran from Crowhurst to the bottom of what is now known as the Beeching Road Industrial Estate as a faster a more direct route to London. Directors included the Earl De La Warr. You can take a pleasant stroll along a mile stretch of the disused line from the marker post #69 (near the Combe Valley Way roundabout) to the high ground south of the valley past marker post #13. This is where largest structure on the line was located – you all know it – [\[IMAGE 6\]](#) the Crowhurst Viaduct. It took two years and nine million bricks to build the seventeen arches over the marshland. It was destroyed in 1969 by controlled demolition leaving the Bexhill West Station the only surviving feature.

Pumping Station and Narrow-Gauge Tramway. The Hastings & St Leonards Waterworks had a pumping station in the Combe Haven Valley, the remains of which can still be seen in the bushes about 150 yards west of marker post #56. Pumping Station No. 5 (Crowhurst) was originally a temporary wooden structure built in 1892 to house a steam engine to drive pumps extracting water from a 100 foot deep borehole. A 6 inch gravity main then took 116,000 gallons per day downstream for 1½ miles to Pumping Station No. 4 (Bexhill Road) near marker post #1.

The pumps were steam driven and coal was moved from Adams Farm on a 500 yard long 18 inch narrow gauge service tramway, using a hand-operated truck. The truck is believed to be preserved at Tinkers Park in Hadlow Down. When the tramway was cut off by flooding, coal was sent up the Combe Haven by barge.

By 1908 it was realised that a permanent solution was needed and in about 1912 a brick structure was built to house both the existing and some additional equipment. It remained in use until about 1950 and a few years later it was dismantled and the well capped.

The new Link Road has obliterated the northern section of the tramway but 200 yards of line still run across a field south of the road and the 1066 footpath passes one end of it (between marker posts #14 and #56). The track is now hardly visible but is marked by a line of hedge running south-west across the field towards the pumping station site near the Watermill Stream. Remains of one of the bridges over a ditch can still be seen as can the concrete base of the pumping station hidden in bushes along with a strange cast iron dome [\[IMAGE 7\]](#), I wonder if any of you can solve the mystery of what the dome could be?

Pebsham Marsh – Combe Haven waterway

⑦ **More boundary stones.**

[Peter: damselflies]

Combe Haven waterway – Filsham Reedbed

⑧ **Filsham Reedbed.** *[Peter: reeds, dragonflies and bladderwort]*

Filsham Reedbed – Bulverhythe Recreation Ground

📍 **Bulverhythe Aerodrome.** [IMAGE 8] The first mention of an aerodrome site being laid out was published in *Flight* magazine in 1934. During WW2 RAF fighters and a couple of bombers used it for diversions and forced landings. The aerodrome was officially opened by the Mayor of Hastings in July 1948 and a fourteen year lease was granted to Hastings & East Sussex Air Service, who operated mostly pleasure flights using Auster J1 Autocrat's - a 1940s British single-engine three-seat high-wing touring monoplane built by Auster Aircraft Limited at Rearsby, Leicestershire. This continued until around 1958. Today it is still used by aircraft, but of a smaller type – the 1066 Model Flying Club who has been using the area just behind the football pitches for over 30 years.

[Peter: Discovery Centre]

Bulverhythe Recreation Ground – Blackbrooks car park

Finish

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Note: The tour was put together to raise funds for Bexhill Museum, so if you enjoyed it please consider sending them donation at <https://bexhillmuseum.org.uk>

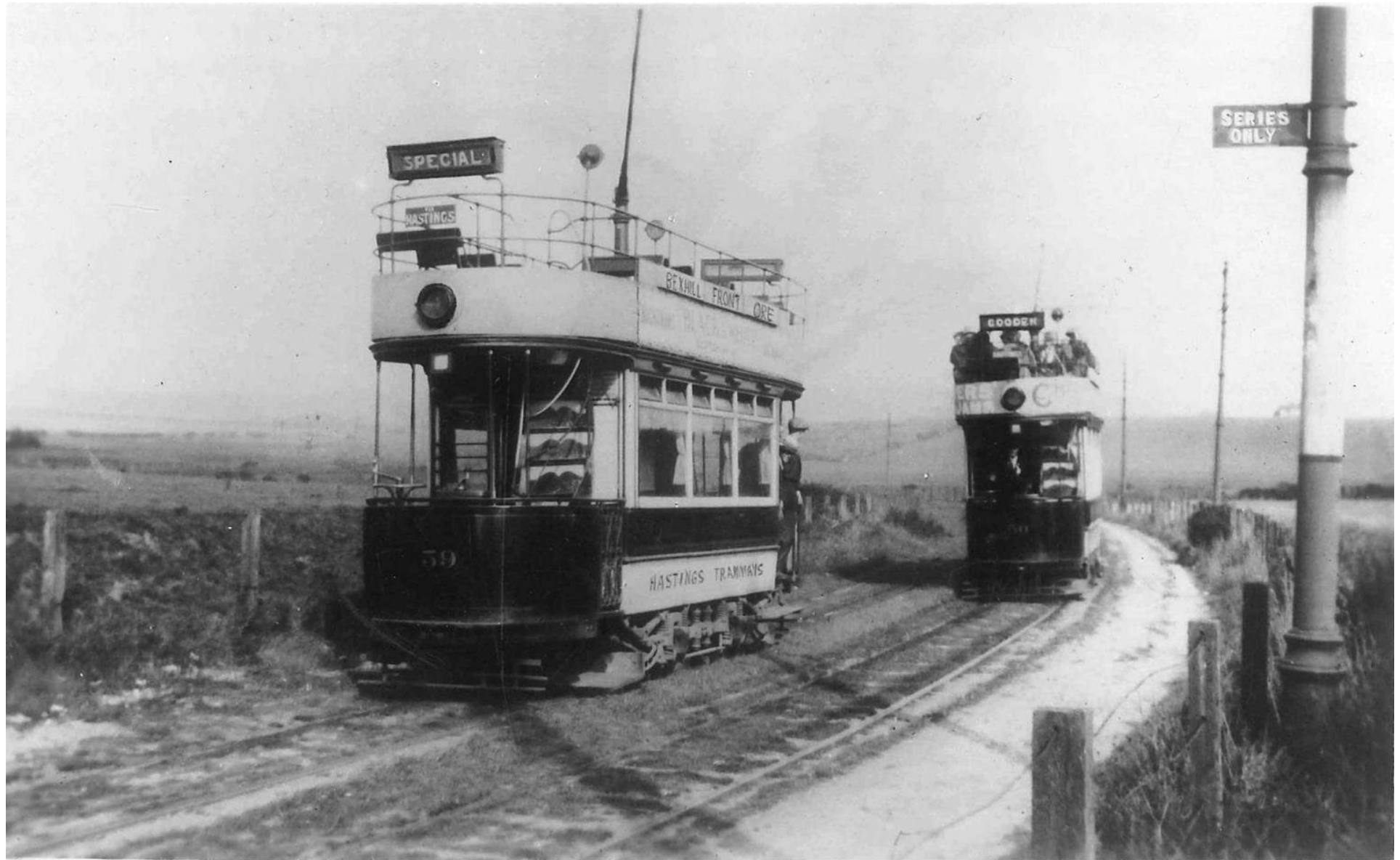
#1: Lunsford's Cross | 1925



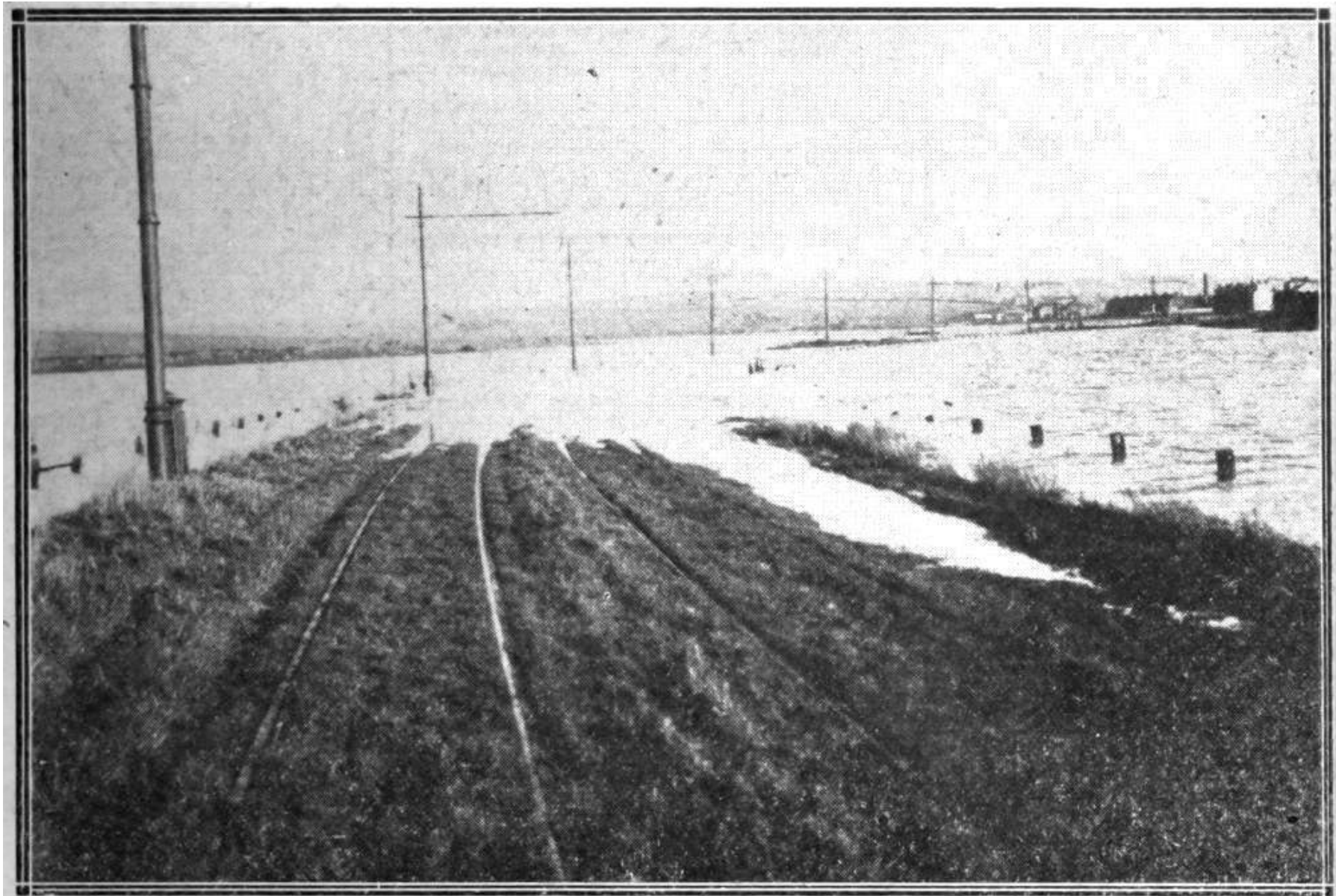
#2: St Mary's Chapel | pre 1900



#3: Lewis Avenue | 1920



#4: Lewis Avenue | 1925



THE FLOODED TRAM LINES AT GLYNE.

#5: Pebsham Farm House | 1989



#6: Crowhurst Viaduct | 1964



#7: Strange cast iron dome



#8: Bulverhythe Aerodrome | 1950s



Banded Demoiselle



Bee Orchid



Bladderwort





Butterbur



Clouded Yellow

Lapwing





Migrant Hawker

Orange-tip





Shoveler

White-legged Damselfly

