

Chipperfield Track Opening Day: 3rd July 1949

“Mechanics” magazine of 23rd July 1949 reported the following:

Watford Track Opened

It was certainly a gala day for loco fans in the South of England, July 3, when the Watford and District M.E.S. track was opened at Chipperfield Common. In brilliant weather the crowd heard Mr Bartlett, sen. – on whose ground the track is laid – say that he hoped the track would be used regularly by loco enthusiasts from surrounding clubs.

Honour of first loco fell to Peter Bartlett’s 5 ins. “Eva May”, which broke the tape and took its cheering load around the 820 ft. continuous circuit. Next run for it was to carry a load of 16 members of the Watford Society, who had co-operated in the building of the track – a happy thought. One by one the locos from visiting clubs did their circuits and the general impression was of enthusiasm for the well laid track and appreciation of Watford’s invitation to clubs to have the facilities made available to them.



St Albans & District MES

I noticed the following locos were in operation: Messers. Wilton's "Pioneer", Smith's "Pioneer", Jenner's "Pirate", Marshall's "Mustang"; these were Malden members. From St Albans club came Mr Saunders with his "Juliet", from Luton member Bond with his 5 XP, while from Harrow and Wembley S.M.E. came Messers. Jeffries with his "Ivatt", Fox with his "Lord Nelson" and Pole with his A5. From Slough came Messers. H Varney and Farrance with their "Maisie", as did Mr Hancocks with his 8F.

My pictures show some of the scenes at the Watford track opening. The station board designates it as "Chipperfield". Top left is Mr Bartlett speaking. Top right is the first club flag – "Rocket" on a yellow background. Bottom, "Eva May" opens track; in steaming bay; visitors from Malden.

Many things have changed at the track since 1949, the most obvious of which is that the trees and laurels have all matured to the extent that much of the track is hidden from view until you get close to it. The steaming bays have been relocated and the tent has been replaced by a wooden shed. The view across the infield from the station is now partially obscured by saplings. The station sign has been replaced and the flag pole is long gone but the most important part of all, the track itself, is still in remarkably good condition. The rails have been changed at some time: if you look carefully at the opening day pictures you may discern that there are four rails catering for 2½", 3½" and 5" gauge locomotives but today the 2½" gauge rail is no longer there.



This picture from David Saunders shows the steaming bays, possibly on opening day. Nine locomotives are visible. The hedge on the right is still there today but more like 12 feet high!