

# William Warwick Hawkins 1816-1868

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William Warwick Hawkins from the Mason Collection at Colchester and Ipswich Museum

William Warwick Hawkins was born in 1816, the eldest son of William Hawkins, the timber merchant and his wife Mary, daughter of Mr J. Warwick of Cumberland. His father owned the wharf at the Hythe to which his timber was shipped primarily from the Baltic and from where it was sold and distributed in the Colchester area. He benefited greatly from the building of the Napoleonic Garrison buildings. This had brought the family considerable wealth and his father had become a Magistrate for Essex. He owned property and land in Magdalen Street in the St Botolph's area (as well as the Barrack Street area) and it was here that he built a substantial family home in "white brick", St Botolph's House.



St Botolph's House, courtesy of Andrew Philips.

By 1842 William Warwick Hawkins was already working with his father and was living at Alresford Hall when he married Jane Harriet, the daughter of Francis Smythies of The Turrets, Lexden Road. The late Mr Smythies was a solicitor in Colchester and a leading High Tory member of the Council, and Town Clerk. He

had also been William Hawkins' business partner particularly in the building of the Barrack Street properties.

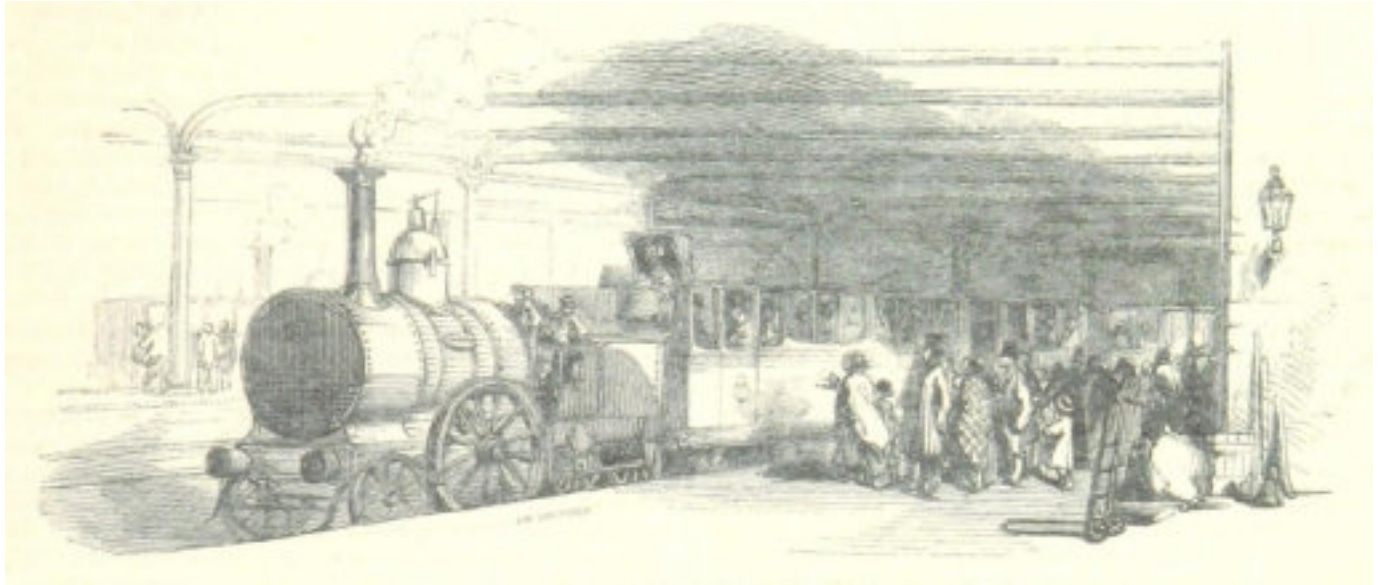
With this marriage, William Warwick had secured his place at the centre of Colchester Tory politics. On his father's death a year later in 1843, he inherited the substantial family business which he continued to run in partnership with his brother, Charles Henry, for the rest of his life.



Alresford Hall, home to William Warwick Hawkins.

He built the first village school in 1846.

As major business owners at the Hythe, the Hawkins brothers were, with the other local owners, particularly aware of the River Colne's perpetual problems of shallow tidal water and with a tendency to silt up. As a consequence, deep freight vessels had to trans-ship to lighters at Wivenhoe. The gradual growth of the new rail network was starting to reach Colchester and threatened too the dominance of the Hythe as the means of handling large freight in the area while also offering a role in distributing their timber further afield.



Eastern Counties Railway train at Bishopgate Station 1851.

The eventual arrival in Colchester of the new Eastern Counties Railway in 1843, after considerable delay, finally brought a halt to their rail building for the moment. It did though introduce William Warwick to the E.C.R. Resident Engineer, Mr Peter Schuyler Bruff, a civil engineer of considerable vision and ambition .Bruff was now employed on building the line from Colchester to Ipswich for the new Eastern Union Railway.

William W Hawkins gradually became involved with in seeking to guide and mentor Mr Bruff through through the local politics of a multitude of new local railway designs, and town development schemes as well as water supplies.

In 1851 they purchased Colchester's own Waterworks at the foot of Balkerne Hill as a joint investment. The following year Bruff sank a new artesian well to increase the supply of fresh water to the town which turned out to be a far from straightforward task before a successful conclusion.



Peter Schuyler Bruff (1812-1900), engineer, railway builder and resort builder.

The primary scheme that they discussed was to launch a new railway company, the Colchester, Stour Valley Railway, Sudbury and Halstead Railway to join Colchester with Sudbury. Naturally this line would link the two Hawkins's sites at the Hythe and in Sudbury. The first and most urgent phase was to link the Hythe quayside to the new Eastern Union line to the north of the town.

Secondly the branch line to Sudbury was to be commenced at Marks Tey, to the west of Colchester on the Eastern Counties line. The Hythe and the valuable Stour valley trade could now be linked by rail. They even considered a further extension onto Cambridge that would open their trade to the industrial Midlands.

The second part of the Bruff/Hawkins scheme was a bold and expensive plan to resolve the river Colne's permanent shortage of water at the Hythe by building a

ship canal to Wivenhoe and installing a dam at Rowhedge, thus turning the Hythe into a still-water basin in a similar fashion to the Ipswich Wet Dock.

Sadly this bold plan for the river ran into considerable opposition not just locally but also from the Admiralty investigators and the proposed costs quite defeated the scheme.



The earliest known photo of the Hythe quay in 1858 looking across to the Hawkins timber wharf and tar works with Greenstead in the background.

The new Hythe rail link was soon completed and opened for freight only on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1847, but the new Sudbury line made negligible progress until in 1847 the Company put a 1000 men to work building the new permanent way while seeking new Parliamentary approval to extend the line beyond Sudbury to Bury St Edmunds. This ambitious plan was to provide for a double track sufficient to carry the line onward from Sudbury and this effectively doubled costs especially as the line involved the building of the considerable viaduct at Chappel across the Colne valley.

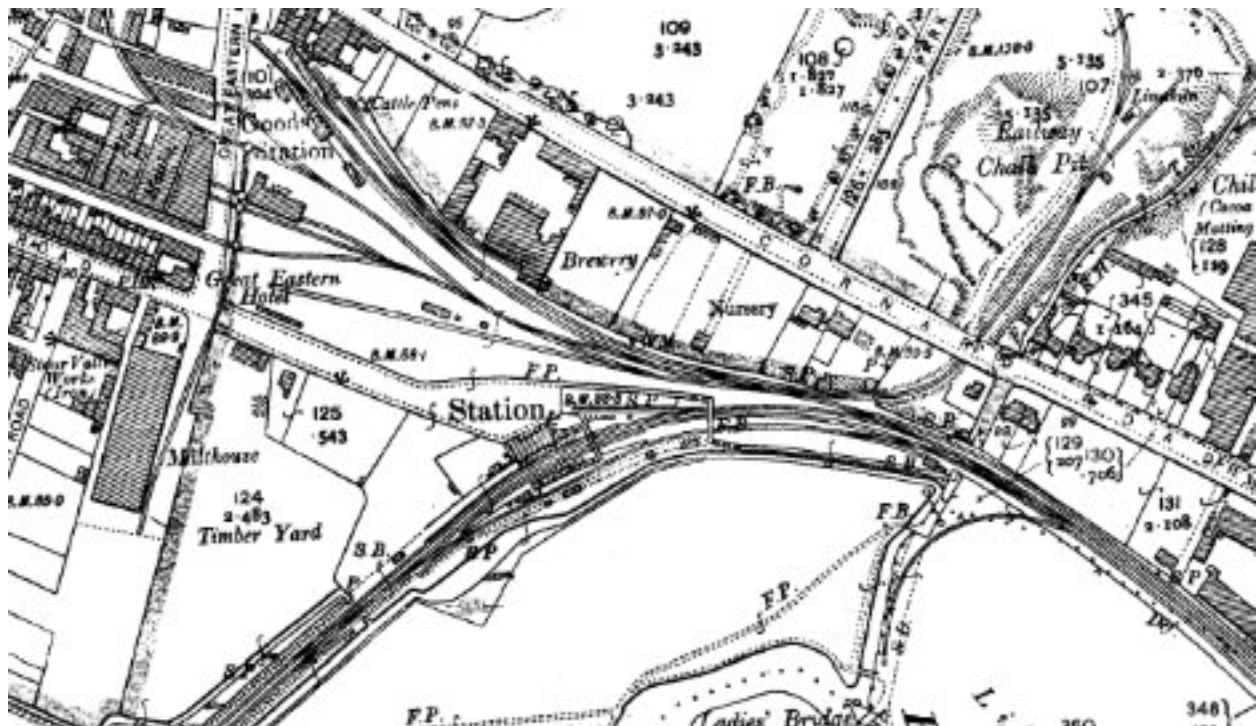


Chappel Viaduct opened in 1849. The longest bridge in East Anglia and one of the largest brick constructions in the country.

The costs grew so great that the directors, led by deputy chairman William Hawkins, became greatly overextended and they were ultimately forced to agree to be bailed out financially by the Eastern Union Railway ,who eventually took over the whole line in 1862. It was they who, then finally extended the line beyond Sudbury to Cambridge and a passenger service to the new Hythe Station.

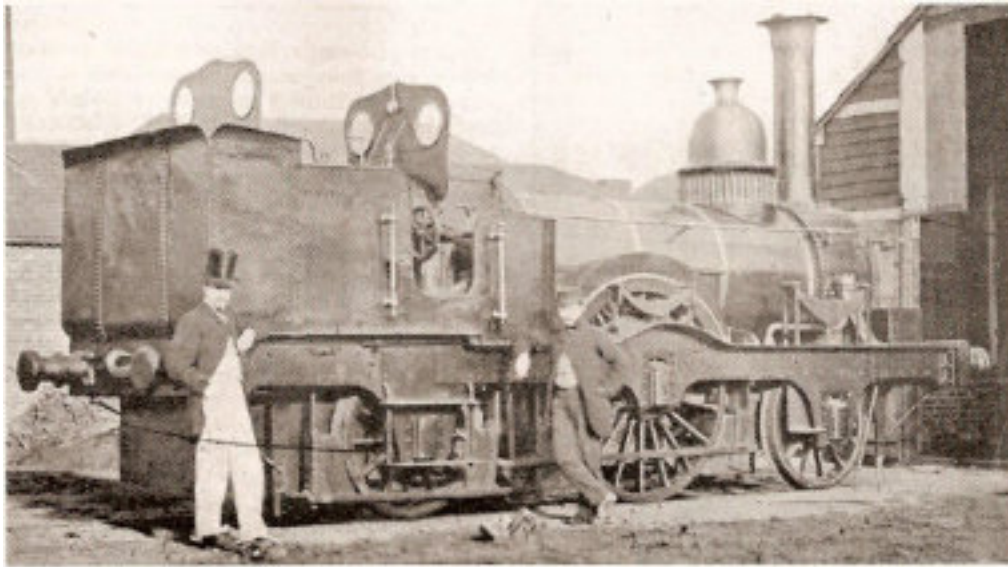


The original Sudbury station from 1849. It was later to become the Goods Station as seen on the plan below when the line was extended on to Cambridge. Note the proximity of the Hawkins Timber Yard.



The new line was opened at Sudbury in 1849 with the guest of honour, the young Mayor of Colchester, Charles Henry Hawkins whose timber yard in Sudbury was one of the main beneficiaries of the new line.





A mid Victorian photo of an engine on the Colne Valley and Halstead Railway.



Charles H Hawkins J.P. Mayor of Colchester 1848-49 by Jesse E Haddock

Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service.

William Hawkins went on to be elected as the Conservative M.P. for Colchester in 1852 .This, the apogee of his career, should have facilitated Parliamentary approval for the many schemes with which he was involved as well as facilitating greater access to the necessary financial backers .

However he suffered a “severe mental affliction” which beset him for five years and prevented him from scarcely taking his seat until he was eventually obliged to not seek re- election in 1857.

### **The St Botolph's to Walton on the Naze railway scheme.**

The other significant Hawkins/ Bruff railway collaboration was the Tendring Hundred Railways which would run from Colchester via Wivenhoe to the new sea resort of Walton. Hawkins became the leading promoter and Chairman of the new company. Not least of the factors commending the new railway to Colchester



The waterfront at Wivenhoe showing the spur from near the station down to the side of the dry dock



Wivenhoe station staff approx 1903 with Hercules the horse was used for moving steel plate to the shipyard.

The new line was originally planned to start from the Hythe Station but in the end a new terminus was built at St Botolph's Corner, where the Hawkins brothers had large timber yards and where St Botolph's House, the family home, became the boardroom for the new company.



1950's photo of Plough Corner, Colchester showing St Botolph's Station and at the bottom the family home ,St Botolph's House. The open ground is the remnant of the Hawkins timber yard.

Progress in building the railway was painfully slow, due not to engineering difficulties but continuing shortages of finance, the Parliamentary expenses and crucially , the bankruptcy of the main contractor.

It took four years to reach Wivenhoe and ultimately eight years to reach Walton . It finally opened in 1867.

For William Hawkins it was indeed the end of the line. He had lost heavily on the project and he finally only lived another nine months.

He died at the early age of 52 from the dropsy brought on by his weak heart on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1868. “Thus died the strong man of Colchester for the past 25 years.”

As a leading Conservative declared “a more open-handed and kind hearted man never lived”.



The William Warwick Hawkins vault at St Botolph's Priory.

As he died without children, his brother Charles Henry was the heir to the family business and their many investments, and he too went on to serve Colchester as Mayor four times in total. (1848, 1865, 1870, 1871)



Charles Henry Hawkins J.P. 1819-1898 by Charles Head .Colchester and Ipswich Museum Collection

I would like to acknowledge my debt to Andrew Phillips not just for two of the photos but particularly for his book "Ten Men and Colchester" (Essex Record Office) which has been a considerable source of this history.