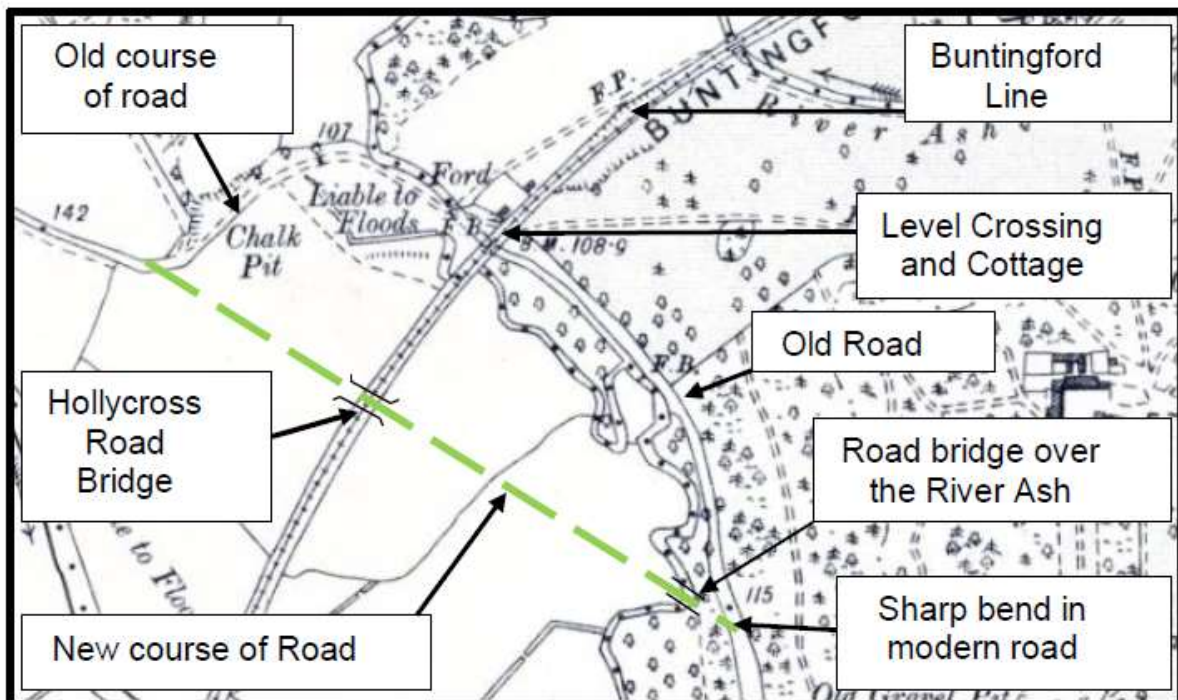


HOLLYCROSS ROAD LEVEL CROSSING AND ROAD DIVERSIONS BY STUART MOYE

Many locals frequently drive from Ware to Stanstead Abbots via Hollycross Road and Cappell Lane. Few know that 120 years ago the route the road followed was significantly different and included a ford across the River Ash and a railway level crossing. Travelling from Ware the first deviation from the current road took a more winding northerly route to cross the valley floor of the River Ash. Today's road adopts an almost straight line route crossing both the Buntingford line and the River Ash by means of overbridges.

Hollycross Road Diversion



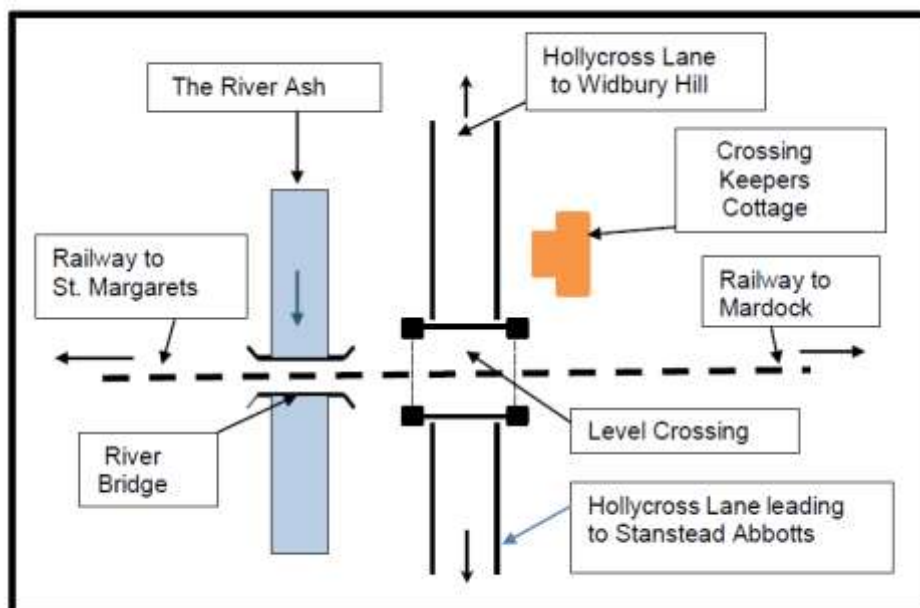
The 1893 map above shows the old route of the road. The crossing cottage and its garden can be seen just to the NW of the level crossing

Today as one approaches the Ash valley from Ware a track can be seen leading off to the left. This marks the route of the old road, known as Hollycross Lane, which having curved left into the valley of the Ash descended in a gentle right hand curve to cross the river by means of a shallow ford. Gently climbing in a south easterly direction it then passed a railway cottage before crossing the Buntingford Line railway by means of a level crossing. The road kept to a ledge above the river which it followed until it re-joined the existing road at the sharp bend in the modern road, near to today's road bridge over the river.



A November 2017 view of the old route looking towards Stanstead Abbots as it diverts away from the present road.

The author was reliably informed by his Grandmother that before the Great War the ford where Hollycross Lane crossed the river was about knee deep. She related how her and one or more of her three sisters would walk out on summer Sunday afternoons, sometimes walking along Hollycross Lane towards Easneye from Ware, a popular thing to do it seems in those days. Now it is a shallow ford, for a footpath to cross the river, the water sometimes only just covering the pebbles in the bed of the river. The site of the level crossing was located where river, road and railway came closest together. The level crossing being situated just on the Mardock side of the railway bridge over the River Ash.



The main features of the Hollycross Lane level crossing and its environs.

The level crossing itself was situated at 21 miles and 58 chains by rail from London and was known as the Buntingford Line No. 2 crossing. It had the usual two manually operated gates attended by a crossing keeper who had a railway cottage provided for him and his family close to the crossing. The road was not a busy one as the numerous gates along its length did not particularly encourage those travelling in wheeled vehicles to use it. However it was often used by the Buxton family who lived at Easneye mansion, situated on the hill overlooking the Lea and Ash valleys. The route was also particularly popular with Sunday walkers taking a constitutional out into the countryside from Ware or Stanstead Abbots.



A 1983 view of the railway crossing keeper's cottage.

It was in May 1899 that the Great Eastern Railway Company agreed to pay the Darlington Engineering Company Ltd £14 per ton for the iron work for bridge no. 2048, better known today as the Hollycross Road Bridge. The payment indicates that the iron work had been delivered and found to be acceptable. The bridge was built during 1899 and its completion allowed the road to be diverted and the old lane and level crossing closed. The section of the old road east of the railway has been private land ever since. The Crossing Keepers cottage was taken over by the Buxton Estate who used it to house one of their workers. The railway built a replacement cottage next to the new Hollycross Road overbridge in 1900, which still exists as a private residence today. It was often the case that the railway let a crossing keeper's cottage to a platelayer and his family especially where railway traffic was light. The platelayer and his wife shared the gate duties and in exchange they had a home at very low rent, albeit an often remote one. The Buntingford Line was closed in 1964 having been in operation for 101 years.



This view shows the relationship of the river bridge and crossing keeper's cottage.



A snowy seasonal view of the Hollycross Road overbridge from the old railway track bed looking towards Mardock. Picture taken during the snowy month of February in 2012.

The Stanstead Abbott end of the diversion created a very sharp left hand bend in the new road just before the river bridge when travelling towards Ware. Locals know only too well the need to slow down for the bend, for what was perfectly fine for horse drawn traffic now frequently catches car drivers out. The old road used to carry straight on at this location, but the way is barred by iron fencing and the corner marked by white on black chevron boards as a warning of the dangerous nature of the bend.



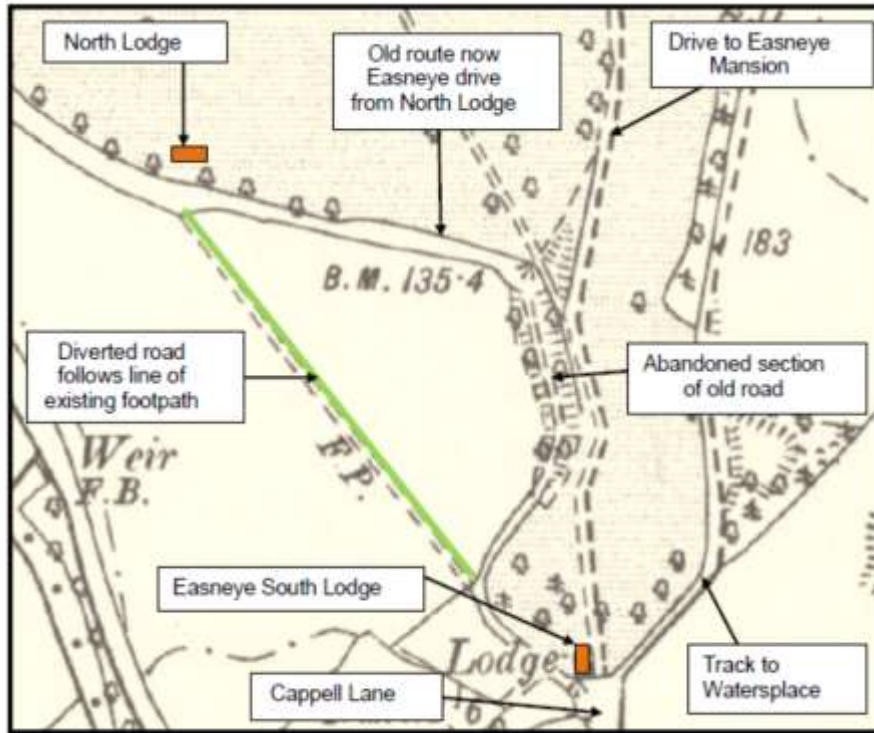
*The sharp bend in the modern road looking toward Ware.
The original road carried straight on through the woods to the level crossing*



*A glimpse over the railings shows the line of the road leading off into the woods.
Over the years there have been occasions when some car drivers
have mistakenly ventured down the old route, flattening the fence on the way.*

The second alteration of this route from Ware, which dates from very much the same time, occurs a little further on towards Stanstead Abbots at what is now the North Lodge entrance to Easneye. The modern road swings to the right here and takes an almost straight line to Easneye South Lodge, but this was not always the case.

DIVERSION BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH LODGES



Easneye North Lodge showing the route of the old road to the left.

The old route continued towards Easneye Mansion but after two hundreds yard or so it curved to the right back down the slope to re-join the current road at the end of the back garden of the South Lodge. The old road had been previously altered to swing round the lodge, when it was built, not that many years before the new road was constructed.



*Trees planted along the road form today an attractive stretch of the road to Ware.
The old route used to go through the fence line close to the telegraph pole on the right*



*A pre 1900 picture showing the two girls walking the narrow lane leading to Ware.
Note how it winds its way round the lodge and its garden
The main drive to Easneye mansion is to the right.*