

## **The Lost Signal box.**

When the History group wandered around the village assessing all the properties to form the basis for the proposed new conservation area, one of the longest discussions we had concerned the station area. The question that was asked was was the signal box a unique survival in the area? This prompted some research as to where the next signal box was. Shepreth had had one, its foundations now under the buildings opposite the waiting rooms, but there was also one called Shepreth Branch Junction. Some study of old maps confirmed that it was never in Shepreth. It turned out to have been where the Kings Cross and Liverpool Street railways separate in Shelford. So why was it called Shepreth Branch Junction? Therein lies a tale of competing railway companies.

The Royston & Hitchin Railway Company opened a line to Royston in 1850 with permission for an extension to Shepreth worked by the Great Northern Railway. Meanwhile the Eastern Counties Railway company opened a branch from its Liverpool Street to Cambridge line,

intended to go to Bedford, as far as Shepreth in April 1851. The extension from Royston to Shepreth was opened in August 1851. So in August 1851 rail lines were laid all the way from Cambridge to Royston. But having the track in place didn't mean that trains ran. Eastern Counties would not allow Great Northern trains to use Cambridge station until they had signed a contract trading access to Hitchin in July 1852. In the interim the gap from Shepreth to Cambridge was by a four horse omnibus, regularly repeated with buses these days under the banner 'engineering works'. Shepreth Branch signal box no longer exists, and the next nearest surviving signal box is a long way away! No doubt someone will have the answer.



Photo:- East Anglian Railway Archive