

The Direct Portsmouth Railway—1

By G. A. SEKON

THE railway known as the Direct Portsmouth line of the late London & South Western Railway was a "Contractor's Line" pure and simple. It was built during the period when the construction of such railways was a regular business of groups of speculators, each group formed of a lawyer, engineer, contractor, and (if possible) a financier. The idea was to construct a railway which would compete with an existing line, with the hope that it would be purchased ultimately by the established company for the purpose of eliminating competition.

The London & South Western Railway line from Woking to Guildford was opened on May 5, 1845, and extended 4 miles to Godalming in 1849. What became eventually the Direct Portsmouth line was a continuation of the L.S.W.R. from Godalming to Havant, where it joined the west coast line of the L.B.S.C.R., and was sanctioned by Parliament on July 8, 1853, by an Act incorporating the Portsmouth Railway Company.

For nine years, however, the matter had been debated fiercely in Parliament and elsewhere, and the actual name "Direct Portsmouth" is a survival of the controversy, for it formed no part of the title of the company which secured the powers under which the line was built. The tangled skein of this period has been unravelled admirably by the late H. Grote Lewin, in his book *The Railway Mania and its Aftermath*, to which the present writer is indebted for the following *précis* of the Mania (1845-52) details. Beginning in 1844, some hundreds of railway schemes were promoted, with the object of carrying the railway into remote parts of the country, and providing shorter routes than those of existing railways between important centres.

It is natural that a severe contest should have been waged over the question of better communication between London and Portsmouth, for the inhabitants of the latter place had never been satisfied with their roundabout route of 88 miles

from London to Gosport, which was merely an appendage to the original London & Southampton Railway. The Brighton & Chichester Railway was already sanctioned as far as the cathedral town, and that company was seeking to extend its line into Portsmouth and to join the Gosport branch of the L.S.W.R. at Fareham, but, although by this means it was intended to establish a station in Portsmouth itself, the route from London *via* Brighton—a distance of 95 miles—was even more circuitous.

Two schemes entered the field, namely, that of the "Direct London & Portsmouth," supported by London & Croydon Railway interests, which sought to make a line from the termination of the Epsom Railway, *via* Dorking, Godalming, Haslemere, and Petersfield, to Portsmouth; and that of the "Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth," supported by the L.S.W.R., which began at Guildford and went *via* Godalming, Haslemere, and Midhurst, to Chichester, and thence was extended to Portsmouth and Fareham over much the same ground as that proposed by the Brighton & Chichester Railway. The House of Commons passed the Brighton & Chichester Railway Company's extension to Portsmouth and Fareham; cut down the G.C. & P. R. line to the two small sections from Fareham to Portsmouth and from Guildford to Godalming; but passed the Direct Portsmouth on the understanding that a general station should be built at Portsmouth for the use of all the lines converging there, and that the atmospheric system of working should be excluded from its vicinity. However, on reaching the House of Lords, the Chichester and Portsmouth extension of the Brighton & Chichester Railway alone survived the ordeal.

The further fight which occurred in 1846 over the question of providing more direct communication between London and Portsmouth disturbed the amicable relations which had existed hitherto between the London & Brighton Railway and the L.S.W.R., and resulted in the admission of an intruder to fill the large gap between the main lines of the two

companies. When in the previous year the schemes of the Direct London & Portsmouth, and the Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth were both rejected, it is probable that the L. & B.R. and the L.S.W.R. would have accepted the position and divided the traffic, had not the Direct Portsmouth, a creature of the London & Croydon Railway, with the redoubtable W. A. Wilkinson as Chairman, determined to renew the contest. In this the Direct Portsmouth was supported by the inhabitants of Portsmouth.

To understand the somewhat complicated position properly, it must be recorded that in 1845, as a result of strained relations between the Brighton and the Croydon Railways, the former made a general agreement with the L.S.W.R., one of the principal provisions of which was to give the Brighton Railway access to the new L.S.W.R. terminus at Waterloo. As a *quid pro quo*, the L. & B. promised to convert the Chichester and Portsmouth extension into a joint line, provided that the L.S.W.R. would pay half the cost of construction. To secure for the L.S.W.R. the full benefit of this proposal, the two companies were to combine to support the Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth, and to defeat the Direct Portsmouth. In addition, it was stipulated that the L.S.W.R. was not to propose any line east of the Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth, except north of Epsom (thereby allowing the previously-rejected L.S.W.R. Wimbledon to Epsom branch to stand for a renewed application), while on the other hand the L. & B. was to refrain from any extension west of its main line, other than the Horsham branch. It would appear that the L.S.W.R. had secured the probability of the whole of the London-Portsmouth traffic, in exchange for giving the L. & B.R. an alternative London terminus.

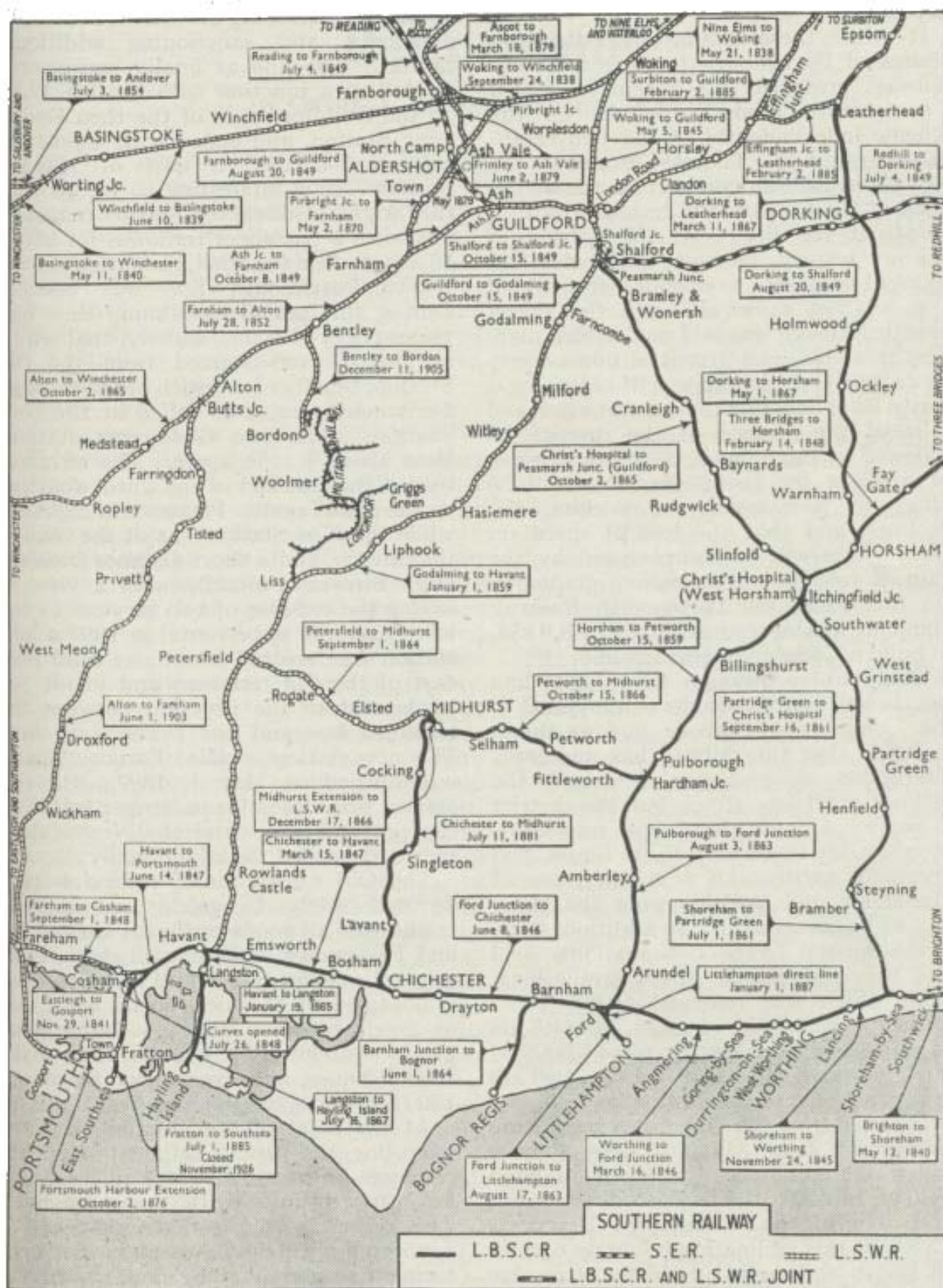
The subsequent amalgamation of the Croydon and the Brighton Railways as the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway completely altered the position, so that the company's access to Waterloo lost a great deal of its importance. The amalgamated company, at the instigation of Wilkinson, agreed somewhat reluctantly to a complete *volte-face* as regards the L.S.W.R., including a resolution to back the Direct Portsmouth and to

oppose the L.S.W.R. access to Portsmouth. Thus the Direct Portsmouth scheme was successful with the help of the L.B.S.C.R., in obtaining its Act of incorporation on June 26, 1846, as the Direct London & Portsmouth Railway Company.

Wilkinson, who was now Deputy-Chairman of the L.B.S.C.R., stated at the next meeting of the shareholders of the Direct Portsmouth that he had not influenced the Brighton directors in breaking with the L.S.W.R. and also that the Direct Portsmouth was equally suitable as a line for locomotive traction. One of the main points put forward in its favour had been its cheapness of construction if worked on the atmospheric system, as an extension of the Croydon & Epsom line, specially sanctioned in 1844 on the plea of its suitability for atmospheric traction.

In these adverse circumstances the L.S.W.R. was fortunate in getting two pieces of its Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth line sanctioned: the first a continuation of the Guildford extension line to Godalming, where it would join the Direct Portsmouth and so give a shorter route to London than *via* Dorking and Croydon; the second an independent line from Fareham to Portsmouth, parallel with that authorised in the previous year for the Brighton & Chichester Railway. Thus for the moment there were three separate lines authorised to be made into the precincts of Portsmouth. The Guildford-Godalming section was opened by the L.S.W.R. on October 15, 1849.

Ultimately, the Direct Portsmouth line was abandoned for financial reasons, and the same cause led the L.B.S.C.R. and the L.S.W.R. to come to an arrangement whereby the latter agreed to purchase a half share of the Cosham-Portsmouth line of the former, rather than that the L.S.W.R. should waste money by constructing a parallel line off its authorised extension from Fareham. On the opening of this line on September 1, 1848, it was agreed to pool the Portsmouth-London traffic in the proportion of five-eighths to the L.S.W.R. and three-eighths to the L.B.S.C.R., rather than risk loss by competition. In 1852 this was enlarged at the instance of the L.B.S.C.R. to include the purely L.S.W.R. traffic to and from Gosport, and the proportions



Chronological map showing the development of the Direct Portsmouth Railway, and associated lines

were altered to two-thirds and one-third respectively.

It was in these circumstances that the desires of Portsmouth to have a Direct railway provided the incentive for a "contractor's group" to take up the scheme independently of the two established railways. Thomas Brassey, the celebrated railway contractor, was at the back of the project, and he undertook to construct the line. At this period of railway history, financial exigencies had induced engineers to expound the idea of "undulating railways" and the Portsmouth Railway was laid out on this plan. The principle was that it is unnecessary to go to the great expense of obtaining a fairly level line, but that, if the rises and falls of the surface of the district be followed by the railway, the extra expense of working the rising gradients will be offset by the saving in working the declines, and that the loss of speed on the inclines will be compensated by the gain of velocity on the falling gradients. On this basis, the Portsmouth Railway Company was incorporated on July 8, 1853, to build a Godalming-Havant line.

The country through which this line runs is well adapted to the employment of the "undulating" theory, and we therefore find that the railway has numerous alterations of gradients and that the inclines are fairly steep, but the district in parts is so hilly that it was impossible to carry out the theory to its limits, and enormous earthworks, of which those at Haslemere and Whitley were the chief, had to be constructed. In addition, there is the Buriton Tunnel between Petersfield and Rowlands Castle, about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile long, from which was removed 40,000 cubic yards of material. Indeed, despite its so-called surface character, some 1,600,000 cubic yards of soil had to be removed ere it was possible to lay down the single line of railway over the 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles separating Godalming from Havant. As already noted the gradients are severe, a good deal at 1 in 80; the bank from the south end of Buriton Tunnel to Rowlands Castle at this inclination is nearly 6 miles in length and made up chiefly of reverse curves, probably to increase the length of route so as to keep the incline within the 1 in 80 limit.

With Brassey's financial resources available, no time was lost before construction was begun, but during the period that the

line was being built various Acts were obtained authorising deviations and abandonments, and sanctioning additional capital. The line as finally constructed started at a junction with the L.S.W.R. on the Guildford side of the then Godalming Station, and ended with a junction with the L.B.S.C.R. east of Havant Station. It is interesting to record that this original Godalming Station remained in use as a passenger terminus for about 40 years after the through station on the Direct Portsmouth line was opened. During this period Godalming thus had two services of trains, namely, that which terminated and started from the *Old* Station, together with such of the through Portsmouth trains as called at the New Station. The two Godalming stations were about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile apart. The terminus was at the east end of the town, abutting on the main London-Portsmouth highway, while the *New* Station was at the back of the Church, and a short distance from the High Street. Probably with a view to saving the expense of two services to one town over the same route, in 1897 a new station was erected about one-third mile east of the *Old* terminus and about 300 yards east of the junction between the terminus line and the Portsmouth line. This new station is called Farncombe and was opened on May 1, 1897; the *Old* station was closed for passenger traffic on the previous day, and the *New* station thereafter called Godalming only.

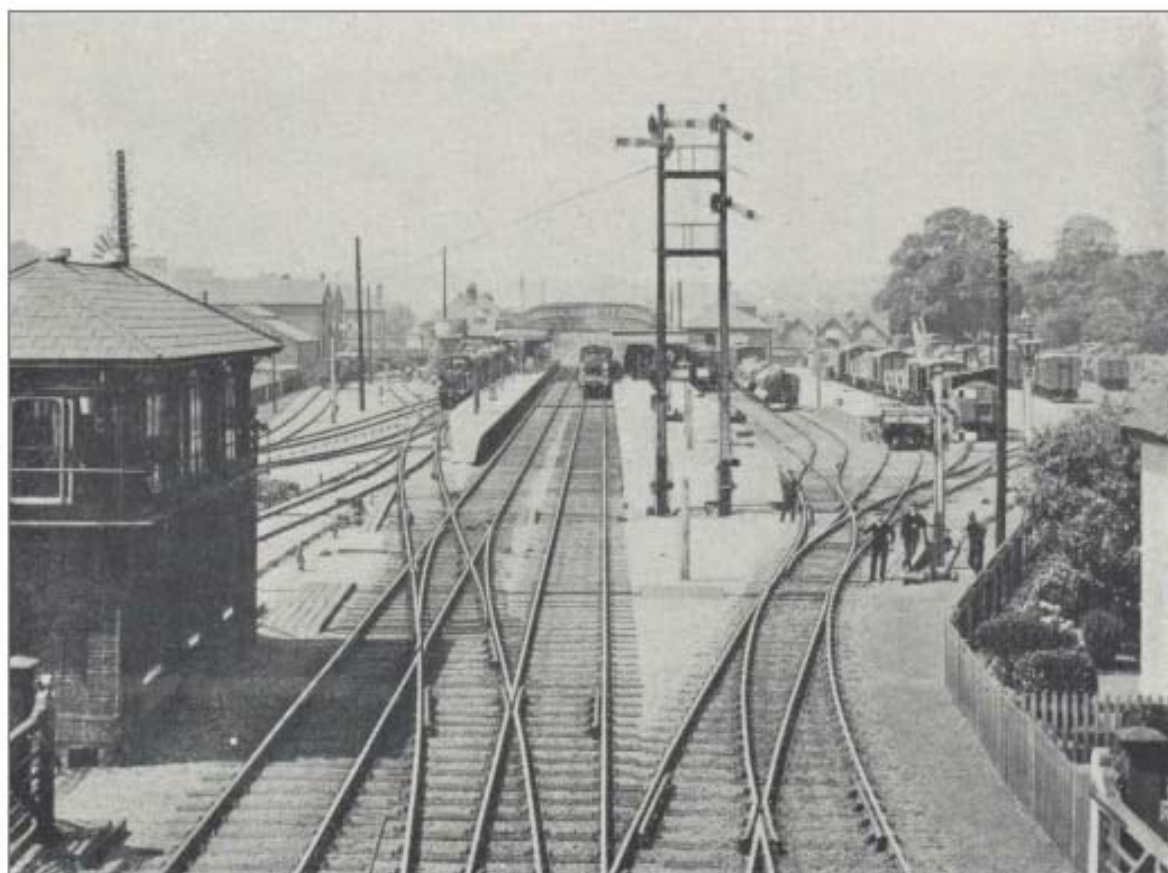
The *Old* (or terminal) station is now devoted solely to goods and mineral traffic, and all goods traffic for Godalming and Farncombe is dealt with there. The original station house still remains, and is occupied by the local goods agent and as goods offices. Part of the original platform about 18 in. high in front of the station house, and even lower for about 120 ft. towards the junction is still *in situ*.

At the point of the junction with the main line, the various sidings in the yard converge on one line, which runs parallel for some distance with the main lines. This siding is on the down side, and is connected with the down main line by a facing junction, just beyond which is a trailing cross-over road. This arrangement enables down goods trains to run direct into the yard and up trains from the yard without shunting at the junction.

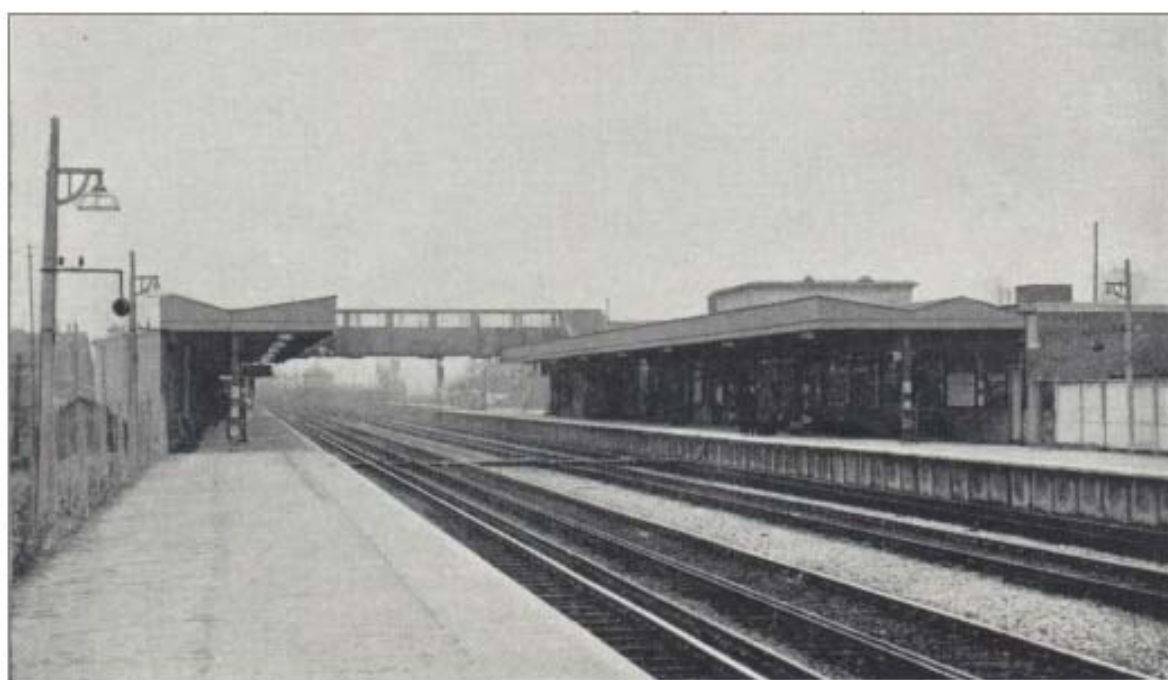
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Havant Station looking west, about 1905, showing L.S.W.R. train at the up platform, and L.B.S.C.R. Hayling Island train in the down bay



The present station at Havant from the west



Guildford Station about 1865, looking towards Woking



Guildford Station about 1865, from the London end of the down platform



Exterior of the original Havant Station, in 1879



The second station at Havant, in March, 1938, showing the old refreshment room on the left



Exterior of the present Havant Station

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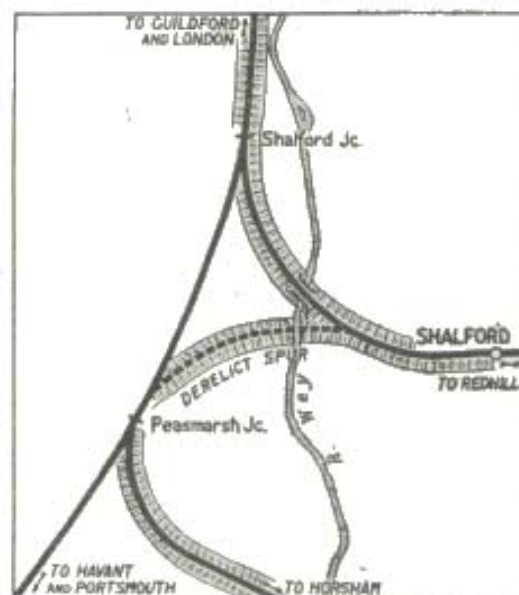
By G. A. SEKON

AS the line approached completion, the promoters had doubts as to the success of their venture, although it obviously was a considerably better proposition than most contractor's lines, seeing that it provided a section of railway which, if used with existing connections, gave a short and direct route between the Metropolis and the Hampshire Dockyard town, the Isle of Wight, etc. Against this advantage was the circumstance that the opening of the new route would reduce considerably the mileage between London and Portsmouth. The distance by the new line was 20 miles less than the L.S.W.R. route *via* Bishopstoke (now Eastleigh), and consequently the fares would have to be reduced to an appreciable extent. Furthermore, as we have seen, the L.S.W.R. and L.B.S.C.R. had entered into an agreement satisfactory to both companies concerning the division of the receipts from the Portsmouth traffic.

The promoters of the Portsmouth Railway therefore had to look around for some other means of using their property, which of itself offered no scope for securing traffic, as it passed through but one town—Petersfield—and that of no considerable size. A brilliant idea occurred to the promoters. They would connect their line with the South Eastern Railway, and get that company to work it. Accordingly, powers were obtained on July 24, 1854, for a connecting line from Godalming, parallel with the L.S.W.R., to join the S.E.R. on the Guildford side of Shalford Station. The greater part of this line was abandoned four years later, when the company sought running powers over the L.S.W.R. from Godalming to Peasmarsh (about 2 miles from Guildford), where the spur to the S.E.R. diverged. At the same time, powers were sought to run over the L.B.S.C.R. from Havant to Portcreek junction and thence over the L.S.W. & L.B.S.C. joint railway to Portsmouth. Parliament granted all these powers, but the Portsmouth Railway Company was required to erect a terminus for itself at Portsmouth.

No time was lost in constructing the connecting spur with the S.E.R. at Shalford, but when this was completed it was found that the adage "You may

lead a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink" was applicable in railway matters. The S.E.R. declined to work the Direct Portsmouth line, alleging that to do so would be a breach of its



Shalford junction, showing position of derelict spur

agreement with the L.B.S.C.R. Although the route from London to Portsmouth *via* Redhill and Shalford would have been a serpentine one, it could have competed successfully with those then in operation. The distance from London Bridge to Portsmouth would have been about 84 miles, while by the L.S.W.R. route *via* Bishopstoke the distance was 86 miles, and the L.B.S.C.R. route was then *via* Brighton—no less than 96 miles.

The spur from Shalford to Peasmarsh can still be traced easily. It leaves the S.E.R. at the down advance starting signal, curves to the left and soon reaches the bank of the River Wey. The river was crossed by a wooden trestle bridge, but through the ravages of time this has long since disappeared, although the five wooden piles that supported the northern end of the bridge are still represented by their stumps, which show above the surface of the river. From the south bank of the Wey the spur, on an embankment, continued to curve till it joined the L.S.W.R. a few yards east of the present Peasmarsh Junction, which did not then exist. Probably the Direct Portsmouth

Railway proposed to build a station (for its Guildford traffic) at the Peasemarsch end of the spur. A considerable station house exists, separate from the Peasemarsch Junction box and cottages. When the L.S.W.R. acquired the Direct Portsmouth Railway, it took over the whole of the spur. The rails were removed, and a fence erected across the embankment at a cattle creep near Peasemarsch. The grass was mowed regularly from the L.S.W.R. boundary up to this fence, but the remainder of the embankment became overgrown by dense underwood and big trees.

The L.S.W.R., although under agreement with the L.B.S.C.R. with regard to the Portsmouth traffic, began to get uneasy as to whether the S.E.R. might not after all enter into a working arrangement with the Direct Portsmouth Railway, especially as the Shalford-Redhill section had already been open for 10 years and produced little traffic. Ultimately the L.S.W.R. decided to lease the Portsmouth Railway at a rent of £18,000 a year, and to open it on January 1, 1859. The line was practically ready for opening 12 months earlier, but the owning company had neither rolling stock nor locomotives, which would have enabled it to work its property.

Actual physical conflict took place between the "armies" of the L.S.W.R. and the L.B.S.C.R. at Havant when the former sought to work trains through to Portsmouth, using the powers which the Portsmouth Railway had secured under its Act of July 12, 1858, to run over the L.B.S.C.R. from Havant to Hilsea, and over the joint line thence to Portsmouth, where, however, it will be remembered that the Direct Portsmouth was required to erect an independent terminus. The L.B.S.C.R. objected to the L.S.W.R. leasing the Direct line, and when on December 28, 1858, the latter tried to run a goods train over the junction at Havant to Portsmouth it was found that the L.B.S.C.R. had taken up the rails at the junction and also placed an engine on the crossing. After a good deal of fighting between the servants and imported paid supporters of the two companies, the goods train had to return without reaching Portsmouth. The Godalming-Havant line was opened on January 1, 1859, and legal aid was sought by the L.S.W.R. with regard to the working into Portsmouth.

Under an Order of the Court, through L.S.W.R. trains were run over the Direct line into Portsmouth on and from January 24, 1859. A war of fares then ensued, and the return fare between London and Portsmouth fell to 3s. 6d. After each company had lost £80,000, the arrangement for the division of the receipts was reverted to, but, as the through fares had been reduced by 21 per cent., each company's proportion was less than before the Direct line was opened. The undertaking of the Portsmouth Railway Company was vested in the L.S.W.R. under the terms of an Act of July 21, 1859.

A meagre service of trains—4 each way—was provided over the new line, and of these only the early morning one in each direction conveyed third class passengers. The local traffic on the line grew slowly, and, as Haslemere came into repute as a residential centre, the number of travellers to and from that place increased considerably. The through London-Portsmouth traffic also grew very largely, and, as this route remained the "Direct" line, a good proportion was carried by it. This growth of traffic necessitated doubling the line, which was completed on March 1, 1878. The original Havant Station buildings survived until 1889, when all were demolished excepting the refreshment room, and the station was remodelled. The refreshment room lasted until 1938; in March of that year the station was again demolished, and entirely reconstructed without serious interference with traffic, shortly after electric traction had been introduced on the Direct Portsmouth line.

The latest development has been the electrification of the line in accordance with an arrangement between the Government and the Southern Railway. The essence of the agreement was that the Exchequer would guarantee the principal and interest of a loan, and that as far as practicable all the plant, machinery, and materials for the conversion should be manufactured in the United Kingdom. Instructions to proceed with the work were issued on June 27, 1935, but it was not until November of that year that the decision was announced officially. The full scheme included the electrification of 95 route and 242 track miles, comprising the lines from Hampton Court junction to

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Portsmouth Harbour (which included the Direct line), from Woking to Alton, and from Weybridge to Staines. The work was accomplished rapidly, and electric trial trains began to run to Portsmouth on March 8, 1937. The opening to public traffic of electric traction took place on July 4, 1937, when, as is usual with Southern Railway main-line electrification, a standardised timetable was introduced. Associated with the conversion was the complete rehabilitation of the line, and the railway which was promoted for atmospheric traction, and eventually built cheaply as a "contractor's" single-line scheme, is now a thoroughly modern double-line railway with an intensive passenger service operated.

The centenary of opening of the first railway to Havant, the section of the L.B.S.C.R. line from Chichester, was celebrated locally by co-operation between the Urban District Council of Havant & Waterloo and the Southern

Railway. The Havant Centenary Exhibition was arranged in the Town Hall from March 15 to 22; it was opened by Colonel Eric Gore Brown, Chairman of the Southern Railway. The exhibition comprised about 125 prints, photographs, and other exhibits, and was aided by a free catalogue with short historical sketch upon which the Southern Railway is to be congratulated. The exhibits included a copy of an old print showing the cutting of the first turf of the Portsmouth Railway at Buriton on August 6, 1853; a series of handbills illustrating warfare over rival schemes for railways to Portsmouth in 1845 to 1847; and the original contract between the Brighton & Chichester Railway Company and George Wythes for the construction of the line from Chichester to Portsmouth, dated January 5, 1846. We understand that many of the rare early documents shown were unearthed as the result of the careful research of Mr. C. E. C. Townsend of the Southern Railway, who has local family connections.