

From Faversham to Dover—2

By the Rev. A. W. V. MACE



Photo]

[Rev. A. W. V. Mace

Former S.E.C.R. 4-4-0 locomotive No. 31166 backing out of the north end of Dover Priory Station, after working a local train from Canterbury

IMMEDIATELY beyond Shepherds Well the line passes into a deep cutting, under one bridge and into Shepherds Well Tunnel, 2,376 yd. in length, and the longest on the former L.C.D.R.; it was called Lydden Tunnel in the early days. Apart from its length, its other particular interest lies in the fact that during construction a coal seam was pierced, the first discovery of coal in Kent. It must have heartened the shareholders with great visions of unexpected mineral traffic, though, as it turned out, the first Kentish collieries did not come into operation until after the working union with the rival S.E.R.

Throughout the length of the tunnel, the line is on a down gradient of 1 in 132, and, when the train emerges, the character of the countryside is again found to have changed. The railway is now running well below the top of the Downs, which lie on both sides, but are specially notable on the east side, their grassy slopes stretching down almost to the line. About three furlongs from the tunnel mouth some sidings on the down side, together with a footbridge and

derelict signalbox (on the up side), are all that remains of Stonehall & Lydden Halt (21.5 miles from Faversham). It was opened by the S.E.C.R. in 1914, and lasted until after nationalisation.

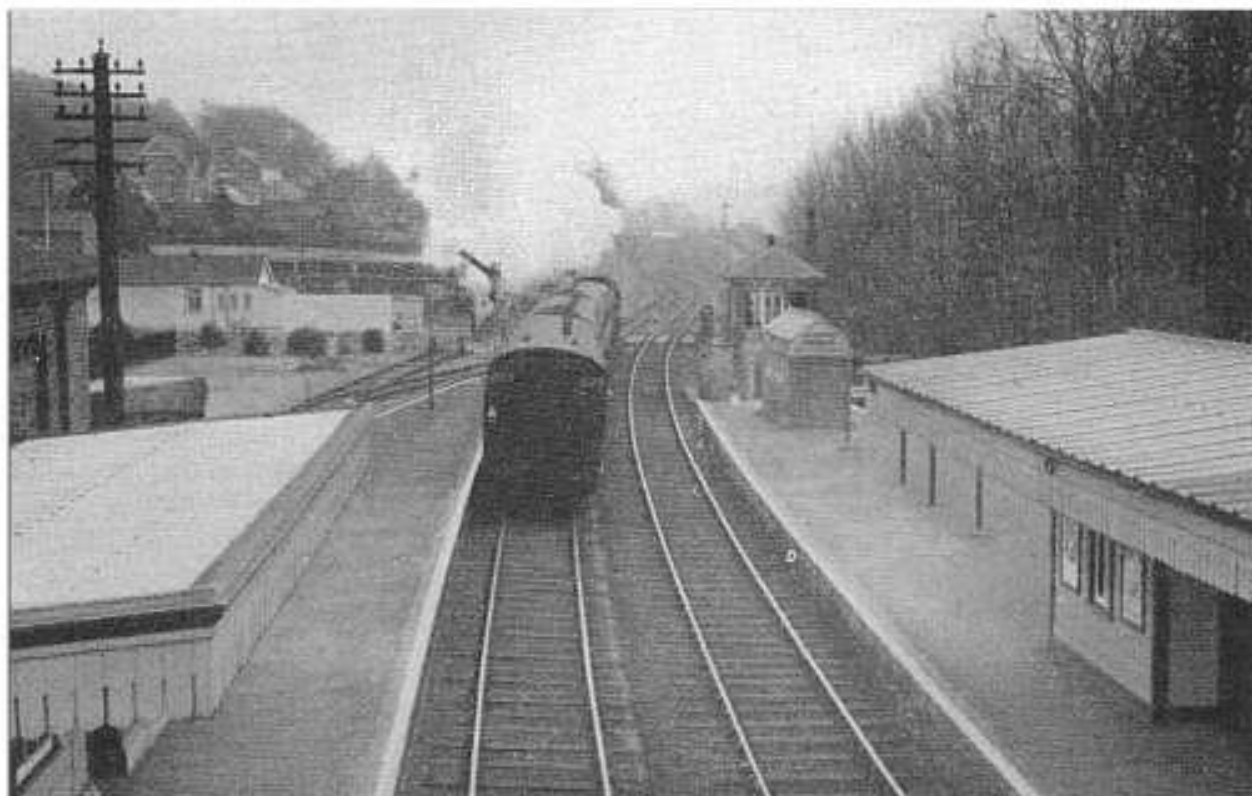
The next station, approached by a high embankment, also was constructed after the opening of the line, but by the original owners; it is Kearsney, opened in 1864, and called Ewell for the first four years of its existence. It is 23.1 miles from Faversham, and is bigger than any of the previous intermediate stations, having in effect four platforms, though two only are now in use for passenger trains. The up side forms an island platform, with one through line and a terminal bay running the whole length of the platform. On the down side there is a short bay at the Dover end; the building and goods shed are on this side, while on the up platform there is an extensive awning in addition to the usual shelter. The reason for Kearsney's extra accommodation is that shortly after the Dover & Deal Railway was begun in 1878 (as a joint line with the S.E.R.) it was discovered that no

provision had been made for L.C.D.R. trains to run direct to Deal. Powers were therefore obtained in 1881 for making a loop from near Kearsney to the new line. It then also became possible to divert certain of the Dover and Deal trains into Kearsney Station, and to reverse them there, a practice which continued until after the Southern Railway had come into being.

The line hereabouts is attractively sited; it is tree-lined, with the Downs on either side, and a narrow stream-filled

Buckland Junction (24.4) miles. Dover Priory Station is approached by two short tunnels, and has modern buildings opened in 1932; the original station, which was first known as Dover Town, was somewhat similar to the present Canterbury East, with an over-all barn-like roof. There are now three platforms, and numerous sidings in a severely restricted space, for the line passes into tunnel again immediately beyond the station.

The layout on the far side of this



Photo]

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Train for Dover leaving Kearsney Station

valley on the up side. The Dover Road, crossed for the last time about a mile above Kearsney, is now on the down side. A mile beyond the station, the Kearsney loop branches off, the junction signalbox being situated between the two sets of lines. The loop sprang into a brief burst of activity in February, 1953, after the coast line flooding, and before the Canterbury loop was ready, for during this time the Ramsgate and Margate trains used the branch line from Faversham to this point, continuing their long detour *via* Deal and the Minster loop.

A short distance further on, we meet the direct line from Deal to Dover at

tunnel has varied considerably in the last 97 years. The first Dover Harbour Station of 1861 was to the north of the present Marine Station. But the Admiralty Pier (begun by the Government in 1847, but not finished till 1875) was even then used by the Channel steamers, and in 1859 the rival S.E.R. had obtained Admiralty permission to extend from its own Dover Town terminus, by running a single track onto the new pier. The L.C.D.R. obtained similar permission in 1862; its line was also single, and ran onto the pier parallel to the S.E.R. line. This meant that the new Dover Harbour Station was reduced in usefulness almost as soon as it was

opened, and it was resited just beyond the mouth of the tunnel, and short of the connecting loop, opened in 1874, to join end-on with the S.E.R. line at its Dover Town Station.

The resited L.C.D.R. station was called Dover (Town & Harbour), while the first L.C.D.R. Dover Town was renamed Priory, as at present. The Town & Harbour station remained in use until 1927. The next change came in S.E.C.R. days, with the building of the present four-platform Dover Marine, with its imposing facade and somewhat aloof interior (it is essentially an exchange station). The train ferry terminal, which was a Southern Railway venture, opened in 1936, occupies a site approximately that of the original L.C.D.R. Dover Harbour Station. Dover Marine is 26.4 miles from Faversham.

The first train service on the Faversham-Dover branch was begun when the line had got as far as Canterbury (July 9, 1860), and as the London extension was not yet open, the trains, five a day each way, were run in connection with the S.E.R. trains between Strood and London. When the line to Victoria (not entirely by the present route through South London) was opened in the following December, the five trains were extended there and retimed, but one of the Strood trains was retained. The service between Canterbury and Dover was maintained by coach until the line there was opened in the following summer. The journey was far from quick, and the fast trains, so called, took over two hours between Canterbury and London; but they all carried third class passengers as well as first and second. Moreover, the fares were cheap, because of competition with the S.E.R. Thus from the very beginning Dover enjoyed a half-crown excursion rate to London, which works out at just over five miles for a penny, while the legend "cheap fast train to . . ." became a characteristic entry in both the S.E.R. and L.C.D.R. pages of *Bradshaw*.

The Continental boat trains began to run on July 1, 1862, and the circumstance merits some reference to the background of this service. In the early days, the Government had refused to let the railways own any ships, and mails to the Continent by the Dover-Calais route were dispatched in Admiralty

vessels until 1854. The contract was then let out privately, and, when the L.C.D.R. was opened, it was being worked by the firm of Jenkins & Churchward, with its own steamers between Dover and Calais; the S.E.R. trains took the mails between London and Dover. When the contract expired in 1862, it was not offered again to the shipping firm, but to the S.E.R., the Government by now permitting the railways to run their own ships. For some reason the S.E.R. refused the offer, and the contract was taken up by the L.C.D.R. So, almost from the beginning, the Faversham to Dover line became part of the Royal Mail route to the Continent. It must be admitted that from 1863 the contract was shared with the S.E.R., but the L.C.D.R. continued to run the steamers, which had to make two or three obligatory crossings every day.

Both companies competed for the traffic between London and Dover. Their trains were scheduled to arrive at the Admiralty Pier at the same time, and this became something of a sporting event locally. Dendy Marshall, in his "History of the Southern Railway," quotes an amusing extract from the contemporary Press:—

"It is generally a moot point whether the express from Charing Cross or Victoria shall be the first alongside the steamer at Dover. The fact has been noted by the idlers on the pier, who have devised a new form of gambling, and bets are freely laid as to which train shall be the first past the post. The difference in actual mileage from London is comparatively nothing, and the betting is accordingly even. When the signals have fallen on both tracks the excitement becomes intense. The S.E.R. has a clear run in by the shore and when the train shoots out of the tunnel the backers of Charing Cross are jubilant: but, as often as not, Victoria suddenly shoots round the corner and wins, like a well-riden thoroughbred, by a short head."

The number of passengers on the Dover-Calais route at this time did not amount to more than about 80,000 a year, with just under 6,000 for the Dover-Ostend boats run by the Belgian Government, and with the train services duplicated in this way there was not enough patronage on either line to run the boat trains independently of purely local traffic. They were worked in conjunction with the ordinary trains, and on the L.C.D.R. line provided half the fast trains to Faversham, Canterbury and Dover, and, by connections, to the intermediate stations also. In the next 25 years, the annual traffic through Dover grew to more than a quarter of a million passengers, but still the Continental trains were

linked with the local services for the most part.

In 1889, there was an international exhibition in Paris, and the Dover-Calais route alone carried over 347,000 passengers that year. Of the extra services required one was retained and developed into a *de luxe* service known as the "Club Train." It was first class only as

at Canterbury and Dover. Three of them were boat expresses, and probably account for the mention of express fares in *Bradshaw*. In addition, there were six stopping trains from London or Chatham, two of them provided with fast connections from London by means of boat trains stopping either at Faversham or Canterbury. Finally there were five



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The approach to Dover Marine Station, built by the S.E.C.R. and opened in 1914 for military traffic and to the public in 1919

far as Paris bookings were concerned, and saloons, supplied by the Wagon-Lits Company, were provided. Outwardly they resembled Pullman cars, and, like the Pullmans, a supplementary charge was made; between London and Dover it came to five shillings over and above the express fares charged by the L.C.D.R. There were no intermediate stops outside the London area, but, even so, the patronage was not very great—an afternoon departure from Victoria, with a late evening arrival in Paris, was not very convenient—and contemporary pictures show that three Wagons-Lits vehicles (two dining saloons, and one smaller vehicle called a "fourgon") together with an L.C.D.R. luggage van, were all that were usually required.

The Club trains (the S.E.R. ran a rival, of course) lasted only until 1892, but during this period the service over the Canterbury and Dover line may be regarded as the best that the L.C.D.R. was ever able to offer. On weekdays, there were six fast trains, stopping only

trains from Kearsney to Deal. The 11 a.m. boat express from Victoria, like the Club train, carried no local traffic. The Sunday services were less frequent, though all but one of the Continentals ran. The best time from London to Canterbury was 1 hr. 26 min. for the 61.8 miles, and to Dover Pier (78½ miles) 1 hr. 45 min., in both cases by boat train.

From January 1, 1899, the L.C.D.R. was brought into a working agreement with its rival, which virtually amounted to amalgamation. Train services were rearranged to avoid unnecessary competition, and the process reduced the importance of the Faversham and Dover line in two ways. In the first place, the Continental services were gradually concentrated on the S.E.R. route, and secondly the Margate and Ramsgate branch began to usurp the Dover route as the L.C.D.R. "main line." By 1910, there were only two Continental services left on the Canterbury route, and both these now ran non-stop to Dover Pier. This left four ordinary fast trains to

Canterbury and Dover; but there was an improved local service of eleven stopping trains, with eight from Kearsney to Deal (this was the average weekday service). The increased importance of the Kent Coast service was attested by the fact that the Margate and Ramsgate section of the London trains usually now left Faversham ahead of the Dover section, instead of behind it.

After the first world war, all the boat train services were concentrated on the S.E.R. route, though now using Victoria instead of Charing Cross as their London

branch had definitely become the main line, and more of the Canterbury and Dover trains had become locals, starting at Faversham, and there making connection with the Ramsgate trains. Otherwise the overall picture was much the same, except that the Kearsney loop had gone into disuse, and the Deal connections were being made at Dover Priory. Practically all the trains now terminated at Dover Marine, while the down afternoon fast train (2.10 p.m. from Victoria) included a Pullman car. As far as the boat trains were concerned, the line had



Photo]

[A. A. Sellman

Victoria-Ramsgate train, headed by "Schools" class 4-4-0 No. 30911, "Dover," passing through the junction at Faversham. The Dover line is on the left, beyond the locomotive shed sidings

terminus, leaving the L.C.D.R. line as a relief only. Also, by the time the Southern Railway was formed in 1923, the fast ordinary trains between Faversham, Canterbury and Dover had been reduced to two in number, though there was a corresponding increase in the stopping trains. The Kearsney and Deal trains had declined to five; but the increasing importance of the southern part of the branch was revealed by three new trains running from Canterbury or Adisham to Dover (the Kentish coalfield was now being developed). A further change was that about half the trains were now extended into Dover Marine.

By the middle 1930s, the Thanet

now declined to being not only a relief route, but third choice at that.

At present, under British Railways, the fast trains have disappeared completely, and the trains, some 16 each way on weekdays, stop at all stations, even though some of those with through coaches to London carry headboards and are of corridor stock. Mention must be made of the short-lived diversion of a section of the summer "Thanet Belle" Pullman car express to serve the route (the train was renamed the "Kentish Belle" to match). But it failed to attract sufficient traffic, and the whole train again serves Thanet only.

Coal trains from the local collieries,

though not many in number, are an established feature and use of the line as a Continental route is increasing. Indeed, the up "Night Ferry" is regularly routed this way, so that once more vehicles of Wagons-Lits ownership are to be seen on the branch, while another foreign touch is provided by fast goods traffic worked this way to the Ferry Terminal, with vehicles from

countries as far away as Italy. Thus in some ways the wheel has gone a full circle. Modernisation plans are now being implemented, and when they are complete it may be that yet another pattern of traffic will evolve on a branch which has seen more changes than most of our lines, even though it has yet to celebrate its centenary.