

To Guildford via Cobham

By J. N. FAULKNER, A.M.Inst.T.



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[J. N. Faulkner

Train from Waterloo to Guildford entering Oxshott Station

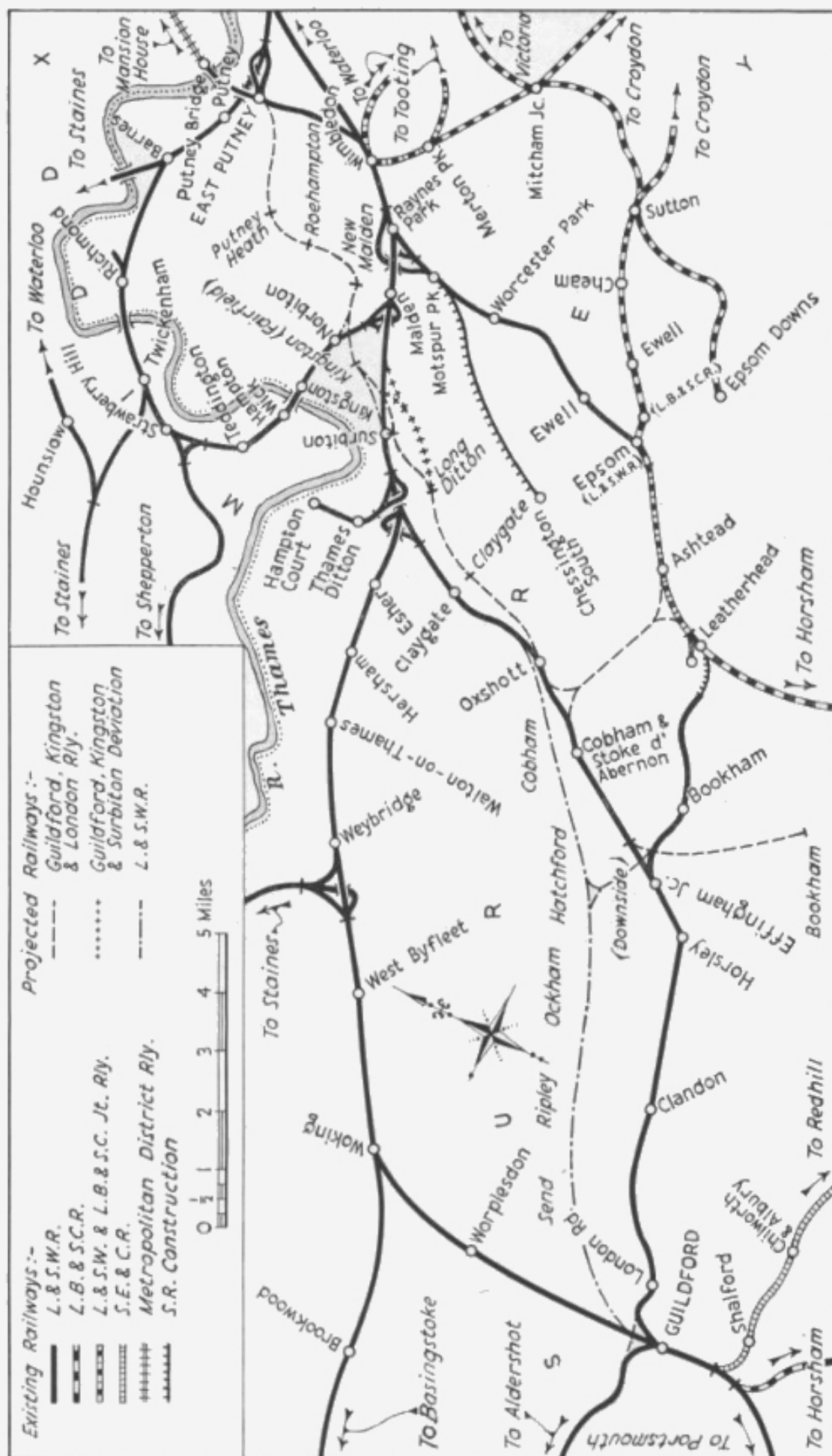
NEW may seem a strange description for a line which is nearly three-quarters of a century old, but the railway from Surbiton to Guildford *via* Cobham was always termed the "New Guildford Line" by the London & South Western Railway and the name persists today, even on the train describers in the all-electric signalboxes between Waterloo and Hampton Court Junction.

Guildford was first served by the L.S.W.R. branch from Woking opened on May 1, 1845, while, to the east, Epsom was reached by the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway in 1847, and subsequently by the L.S.W.R. line from Raynes Park in 1859. The latter year also saw the completion of the L.S.W.R. and L.B.S.C.R. joint line from Epsom to Leatherhead, which eventually formed part of the L.B.S.C.R. Mid-Sussex route to Portsmouth. Following these developments there were no less than eleven unsuccessful attempts between 1863 and 1880 to provide rail facilities for the area between the L.S.W.R. main line and the Epsom-Leatherhead-Dorking route. These proposals took the form of either a Leatherhead-Guildford link or

alternatively a branch from the L.S.W.R. main line serving the Cobham district. The instigator of most of the Cobham schemes was a Mr. Bell, a Kingston solicitor, and included one proposal in 1870 for a 3 ft.-gauge line from Esher to Cobham. All these projects failed to obtain either support from the established companies, or the capital necessary for an independent promotion.

However, in 1880 a more ambitious project was put forward under the title of the Guildford, Kingston & London Railway; its committee included the Earl of Lovelace (the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey), the Earl of Onslow and other substantial landowners, besides the Mayors of Guildford and Kingston and others. The plan was to construct a main line some 25 miles long, starting from the Fulham (Putney Bridge) terminus of the Metropolitan District Railway, thence *via* Kingston and Surbiton to Guildford, with branches from Stoke d'Abernon to Ashted and from Downside (near Cobham) to Bookham.

Though the Metropolitan District disclaimed responsibility for the scheme, it



Map of railways from Surbiton to Guildford and associated lines, showing original ownerships and projected routes

was of obvious benefit to that company, and the G.K.L.R. promoters envisaged the existing District services being extended to Surbiton and Guildford. The Guildford, Kingston & London's Bill likewise sought running powers over the District to South Kensington and High Street, Kensington, and over the West London Extension to Addison Road. A connection with the L.S.W.R. main line was to be made east of Surbiton, where the G.K.L.R. station was to be alongside the South Western one. At Guildford, the G.K.L.R. proposed to build its own

rifle ranges at Wimbledon Common. The Stoke d'Abernon-Ashted branch was to be linked by double-track triangular junctions to both the G.K.L.R. "main line" and to the L.S.W.R./L.B.S.C.R. joint line, but the Downside-Bookham branch was on a more modest scale with a two-mile single line terminating near the villages of Great and Little Bookham.

The G.K.L.R. Bill was, of course, strongly opposed by the L.S.W.R. In particular, the L.S.W.R. objected to the junction at Surbiton, and suggested a



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Cobham & Stoke d'Abernon Station, looking towards Guildford

station in the upper part of the town but to continue its line into the L.S.W.R. station, whence running powers were sought as far as Peasmarsh Junction, to reach the L.B.S.C.R. Horsham branch there. A spur was also planned to join the L.S.W.R. line to Ash outside Guildford in order to accommodate S.E.R. traffic to and from Reading.

The Guildford, Kingston & London promoters being careful to avoid their line crossing public open spaces and commons, a tunnel was planned under the north-western corner of Putney Heath, and the route deviated around the edge of Wimbledon Common and skirted Coombe Hill. The railway was to be protected by a substantial earth mound from stray bullets fired on the Volunteers'

deviation through the outskirts of the town with a spur connection joining the L.S.W.R. main line at the site of the present Berrylands Station. But the main L.S.W.R. counter-proposal took the form of a Bill for its own line from Hampton Court Junction (1½ miles west of Surbiton) to Guildford, with a branch connection to Leatherhead. Between Oxshott and Guildford the proposed L.S.W.R. line took a more northerly course than the G.K.L.R., and followed a route parallel to the Portsmouth road through Cobham, Ockham and Ripley.

During the hearing of evidence on the G.K.L.R. Bill before the House of Commons committee in May, 1881, a compromise settlement was reached between the contending parties. By its



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Effingham Junction Station, looking towards Surbiton

terms, the G.K.L.R. agreed to drop its proposed lines south of Surbiton but to continue with its Bill for the Surbiton-Fulham section, though this line was to be built and worked jointly by the L.S.W.R. and Metropolitan District. In return, the L.S.W.R. undertook to construct the Hampton Court Junction-Guildford line and the Leatherhead branch, and once these lines had been completed, the South Western was to enjoy running powers over the Kingston & London (the revised title of the G.K.L.) and the Metropolitan District Railways to both Kensington stations. The route incorporated in the revised L.S.W.R. Bill was similarly a compromise between the original L.S.W.R. and G.K.L.R. proposals, the South Western Railway's route being followed as far as Oxshott, thence the G.K.L.R. line through the Horsleys and Clandon to Guildford. The Leatherhead branch commenced from the L.S.W.R. station there and followed that company's original route as far as Effingham Common where it joined the Hampton Court Junction-Guildford line. Powers for the Leatherhead branch were deleted from the Bill in the House of Lords, but Parliamentary sanction was finally obtained in the following year. The Kingston & London and the L.S.W.R. Acts both received the Royal Assent on August 22, 1881.

By the South-Western & District (Kingston & London Railway) Act of 1882, the agreed take-over of the Kingston & London company was carried out, and its management was vested in a joint committee composed of L.S.W.R. and District representatives. The original K.L.R. board had included an *ex-officio* director appointed by Kingston Corporation, and that town was not pleased to see its independent route to London fall into the hands of the L.S.W.R. The L.S.W.R. Act of 1882 included powers for junctions between the Kingston & London and existing L.S.W.R. lines at Surbiton, Norbiton and Putney, and also for a branch off the District to a West End terminal station for the L.S.W.R. at Pelham Street, South Kensington. The L.S.W.R. promised the Mayor of Kingston in 1881 that it would run fast trains over the new route, quoting a journey time of an hour between Guildford and Earls Court as an example.

To complete the story of the Kingston & London Railway, it soon became apparent that the District could not raise its half of the £650,000 authorised capital. Negotiations between the partners dragged on, and twice counsel's opinion on the financial arrangements was sought, but no solution to the District's problem could be found. Extension of time to complete the works was obtained with

some difficulty in the 1884 Parliamentary session, but the necessary finance was still not forthcoming, and after the L.S.W.R. had refused to advance capital to the District, the joint committee in October, 1885, recommended abandonment of the project. The Putney Bridge-East Putney section was incorporated in the authorised Wimbledon & West Metropolitan Junction line, for which the L.S.W.R. acquired powers in its 1886 Act, and by the same Act the remainder of the Kingston & London and its connections was abandoned.

station was closed to passenger traffic, though it is still used for berthing electric stock.

Both the main line and the Cobham route to Guildford were included in the L.S.W.R. electrification plans of 1913, and electric traction reached Claygate on November 20, 1916. However, wartime difficulties prevented further progress towards Guildford and, in fact, the post-war shortage of rolling stock caused the electric services to Claygate to be withdrawn in June, 1919. After grouping the Southern Railway resumed the L.S.W.R.



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Train from London Bridge via Bookham joining the Cobham line at Effingham Junction in April, 1955

Meanwhile construction work went ahead on the Surbiton, Leatherhead and Guildford lines, and in the absence of any major engineering works, both sections were ready for opening on February 2, 1885. The new mileage comprised 16½ from Hampton Court Junction to Guildford, and 4½ between Leatherhead and Effingham Junction, all of double track. Subsequently, a burrowing junction was built in 1908 to carry the up Guildford line under the main line at Hampton Court Junction. Following the formation of the Southern Railway, a spur was constructed at Leatherhead to bring the Effingham line into the former L.B.S.C.R. station, and from July 9, 1927, the adjacent L.S.W.R.

electrification project, and it was now possible to include the former joint and L.B.S.C.R. lines through Epsom and Leatherhead to Dorking. As part of the first stage in the Southern's suburban electrification scheme, regular electric services commenced on July 12, 1925, on the routes Hampton Court Junction-Guildford, Raynes Park-Dorking North, and Leatherhead-Effingham Junction.

The "New" Guildford line leaves the Western Section main line at Hampton Court Junction a few yards west of the imposing flyover carrying the down Hampton Court branch. Half a mile from the main line, at the point where the up and down lines diverge for the burrowing junction, Hinchley Wood

Station is situated. Opened on October 20, 1930, its island platform serves a residential area which developed following the construction of the Kingston by-pass road, which crosses the line by an over-bridge just beyond the station.

The line now rises steadily for about a mile to reach Claygate & Claremont, the limit of the 1916-19 electrification. All the original stations on the line are built to the same pattern, with a red brick building on one platform accommodating the customary passenger and office facilities, together with a station house. Crossing the iron footbridge to the opposite platform, one finds only an awning and in some cases a small general waiting room. Several stations have their signalboxes situated on the platform, which facilitates operation by porter-signalmen when required to open for brief periods, and, in fact, Effingham Junction is the only box open throughout the day. Except for Hinchley Wood and Effingham Junction, all stations possess small goods yards capable of handling local freight and mineral traffic.

After leaving Claygate, suburbia is well behind and the line descends at 1 in 100 through open country. Farmland soon gives way to more wooded scenery, and as the train climbs again towards Oxshott one of the Metropolitan coal dues obelisks provides an unexpected landmark on the down side. Running through a deep cutting the line enters Oxshott Station (formerly called Oxshott & Fairmile), situated among typical Surrey pinewoods. The goods yard on the up side is prolonged by a little-used siding which enters a brickworks alongside Cook's level crossing. The crossing, which is not a block post, is followed by a winding stretch of line before Cobham & Stoke d'Abernon Station is reached, $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Hampton Court Junction.

Shortly after leaving Cobham the route crosses the River Mole by a three-span girder bridge, and commences once again to climb at 1 in 100 towards Effingham Junction. The scenery at this point is aptly described by the name "Withy Bed" given to one of the new electrical section huts here; but this area of farmland was to have been the site of the G.K.L.R.'s intended Downside junction station. Just before reaching Effingham Junction the Cobham line is joined by the Leatherhead branch coming

in from an easterly direction.

The branch to Effingham now diverges at the south end of the former L.B.S.C.R. station at Leatherhead, and the remains of the abandoned L.S.W.R. station and the original route to Effingham can be seen across the station approach road. After crossing the River Mole by a viaduct, the Effingham line climbs steadily and passes through a short tunnel before reaching Bookham. The station is situated among heathland some distance from the twin villages of Great and Little Bookham, but has always attracted enough traffic to justify some up residential trains starting from this point. After some undulating gradients a short rise at 1 in 95 brings the line round a sharp curve into Effingham Junction. The station here was opened in 1888, and though Effingham is now the most important intermediate point for traffic purposes, the meagre wooden buildings on each platform are a reminder of its original status as a wayside station serving a scattered rural community. A seven-road carriage shed beyond the station accommodates most of the line's rolling stock.

After the short level stretch through Effingham Junction, the 1 in 95 gradient resumes until the summit of the line is reached just before Horsley Station, once known by the extended title of Horsley & Ockham & Ripley. A creeper-covered water tank on the up platform remains as evidence of the pre-electrification practice of terminating at Horsley most of the trains off the Leatherhead route. This procedure is still followed by the 5.15 p.m. (Saturdays excepted) from Waterloo, although its advertised destination is Effingham Junction. The stations beyond Effingham have the peculiarity that their up platforms have never been lengthened to accommodate eight-coach trains, so that passengers from Guildford during peak hours have to be careful to avoid the last two vehicles if they wish to alight before Effingham.

Over three miles of mainly falling gradients through some attractive countryside separate Horsley from the next station, Clandon (for Newlands Corner), originally entitled Clandon & Ripley. Clandon to London Road (Guildford) is another three-mile section, at one time broken by an intermediate signalbox at Merrow, where there is still

a siding serving a county council depot. Post-war building development at Merrow has led to local demands for a station, and it is interesting to note that the G.K.L.R. promoters did intend to provide one there. The outskirts of Guildford are soon reached, and the line runs through a deep cutting to enter the sharply-curved platforms of London Road Station, which serves a residential part of the town and the upper end of the High Street.

After leaving London Road the line falls sharply at the ruling gradient of 1 in 100 and running along a series of

the line fortunately has been free from major accidents.

The New Line was opened in 1885 with an all-stations service of six weekday and two Sunday trains on each route to Guildford. By the summer of 1914, local services to Guildford numbered twelve *via* Cobham and six *via* Leatherhead with additional short workings terminating at Bookham, Cobham or Horsley. From about 1890 the line began to be used by Waterloo-Portsmouth expresses, mainly in the down direction, and the afternoon trains provided a fast residential service, with the 3.45 p.m. calling only at Cobham



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Victoria to Cranleigh ramblers' excursion at Effingham Junction on February 23, 1958, headed by "E1" class 4-4-0 locomotives Nos. 31506 and 31067

embankments and viaducts describes a semi-circle round the town. From the carriage windows a continuous view is obtained of the new cathedral rising from the hill across the valley of the Wey. A final viaduct over the river brings the train alongside the main line from Woking, and the straight run would lead into Guildford Station's main down platform (No. 2). However, Cobham line trains terminate at their own bay (No. 1), which was built to accommodate the electric service. This bay was the scene of several minor buffer-stop collisions during the early weeks of the electric trains, and a more serious fatal accident of this kind occurred on September 18, 1953, not long after the introduction of the "EPB" type stock. Otherwise

and the 4.30 p.m. running non-stop to London Road. On Sunday evenings the 6 p.m. from Portsmouth Harbour to Waterloo ran *via* Bookham, calling at Guildford, Leatherhead and Epsom.

During the period of the 1916-19 electrification to Claygate, a half-hourly electric service was provided on weekdays, and alternate trains connected with a steam pull-and-push train thence to Guildford. A few steam trains ran through to and from Waterloo at peak hours; on Sundays no Claygate electrics ran, and the pull-and-push service operated between Surbiton and Guildford. The abandonment of the Claygate electric service was followed by the introduction of regular-interval steam services between Waterloo and Guildford *via* Cobham, and

between Waterloo and Horsley *via* Leatherhead, at an hourly frequency during the day, half-hourly at rush hours and two-hourly on Sundays.

The electric services introduced in 1925 were based on the standard 20-min. suburban frequency, reduced since September, 1958, to a 30-min. interval outside peak hours. Services on the Cobham route have always been either non-stop or semi-fast between Waterloo and Surbiton, though the non-stop runs are now limited to the Monday-Friday residential trains. The trains to Effingham Junction *via* Leatherhead originally called at all stations, and became semi-fast between Waterloo and Motspur Park in July, 1936; besides the hourly train from Waterloo the Leatherhead-Effingham line is served by a similar service from London Bridge *via* Tulse Hill and Sutton. In addition there are a number of non-standard peak hour trains on both the Cobham and Leatherhead routes. Sunday services have always been on a half-hourly basis, and until September, 1958, the hourly train from Waterloo *via* Leatherhead was extended from Effingham Junction to Guildford in lieu of one of the Cobham route trains which terminated at Effingham. In pre-war summers there was a regular Sunday service from Victoria to Guildford, and during the summer of 1958, there was again an hourly train from Victoria to Effingham Junction.

The second world war brought drastic curtailment and deceleration of all Southern suburban services, and on the New Line late evening trains temporarily ceased to run through to Waterloo, terminating instead at Surbiton or Leatherhead. However, the reduced frequency of the suburban services enabled the line to be used once again by Waterloo-Portsmouth expresses, and several forces' leave trains traversed the route each weekend. This practice was continued on summer Saturdays after the war, and between June, 1956, and February, 1959, the 7.33 a.m. Portsmouth Harbour-Waterloo express ran *via* Cobham daily—non-stop from Guildford to Surbiton in 24 min. for the 18 miles. The only other through working over the line is the 6.12 a.m. from Waterloo which is extended to Haslemere on Mondays to Fridays, and incidentally provides first class accommodation on

this otherwise second class only service. Normally, the service *via* Cobham is almost entirely self-contained, the round trip occupying two hours, and for this reason the line was the first route to receive the new standard "EPB"-type suburban electric stock.

Freight traffic is entirely of a local nature; a pick-up goods leaves Surbiton at 5.20 a.m. on three days a week for stations to Guildford for which motive power is provided by Nine Elms shed, usually a "U" class 2-6-0, or a "Q1" or "700" class 0-6-0. There is also a return trip from Leatherhead to Guildford and back by a freight train from Norwood Junction, normally worked by a 0-6-0 of the "Q" or "C2X" classes.

Steam-hauled passenger trains are rare, but fall neatly into two categories—Royal Trains and ramblers' excursions. Royal Trains use the line on ceremonial journeys between Victoria and Portsmouth, as the route *via* Sutton, Leatherhead and Guildford is only 77 miles in length compared with 86 miles *via* the Mid-Sussex line. The most recent journey was that made from Portsmouth by the Queen Mother on May 12, 1958, but specials also were provided for the Soviet leaders, Messrs. Krushchev and Bulganin, on their visit to Britain in April, 1956. Such specials are nowadays invariably hauled by Bulleid light Pacifics. Ramblers' excursions are run at approximately two-yearly intervals, and traverse the line between Leatherhead and Guildford *en route* from Victoria to Cranleigh. On its 1956 and 1958 appearances, this train was double-headed throughout by two rebuilt S.E.C.R. 4-4-0s of the "D1" or "E1" classes, which are within the severe weight restrictions imposed on the Guildford-Horsham branch.

Though the residential traffic off the Cobham line packs the four full-length trains reaching Waterloo between 8 and 9 a.m., outside the rush hours the route still has much of the character of a rural branch, and despite the fact that it has been part of the Southern Electric network for over thirty years, it still passes through a great deal of unspoilt countryside.

In conclusion, the author wishes to record his thanks to the Archivist of the British Transport Commission and to the Editor of the *Surrey Comet* for assistance in the preparation of this article.