



Photo: M. Dunnett

The 2.20 p.m. train from Havant crossing on to Hayling Island on July 16, 1962, headed by L.B.S.C.R. "Terrier" tank No. 32640

The Hayling Island Branch

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KNOWN affectionately to residents, and also to many thousands of holiday-makers, as the "Hayling Billy", the train service from Havant to Hayling Island is one of those recently to be threatened by British Railways' economy axe. During the summer months the railway carries many thousands of holidaymakers to the popular seaside resort of Hayling Island—tucked away off the south-eastern corner of Hampshire, and well known for its sandy beaches and equable climate—regularly taking 5,000 passengers a day at peak periods and, indeed, on one summer Sunday in 1961, carrying almost 7,000 visitors to the Island.

Alternative modes of travel are by road from Havant and by ferry from Portsmouth. The former, in spite of a newly built bridge, often entails a journey of anything up to two hours during summer week-ends when, at times, traffic is brought completely to a standstill on the narrow and congested road leading from the mainland. The ferry, recently acquired by the Corporation of Portsmouth, carries foot passengers only, having no facilities for motor vehicles or any but the lightest of goods, and thus cannot be regarded as a serious competitor to rail and road transport. When one considers the tedious road journey, it compares very unfavourably with the ten minutes—or thirteen if stops are made at the two intermediate stations—taken by the train.

Nearly all branch lines are rich in history and that from Havant to Hayling Island is certainly no exception. The Island has for nearly two centuries enjoyed a reputation as a watering place, and its natural surroundings and amenities make it the ideal place for a family holiday without placing too much emphasis on commercial attractions. There are, however, no less than

three holiday camps on Hayling which alone cater for many thousands of visitors during the season.

For many years before the advent of the railway the only means of access to the Island was by way of a road bridge on the north side, some 860 ft. in length, built during 1823 and 1824 by the Lord of the Manor—the then Duke of Norfolk—and a ferry at the western extremity, the forerunner of the present service, privately owned and providing a link with Portsmouth. Subsequently, the bridge, together with the Manorial Rights of the Island, were sold to a Mr. Padwick. Parliamentary powers had been granted to the Duke in 1823 to build a bridge to join Hayling with the mainland and these rights were later entrusted to a private company, the Hayling Bridge & Causeway Company. In the meantime, the Portsmouth branch of the old London, Brighton & South Coast Railway was opened on March 15, 1847, the line running from Chichester, via Havant, as far as Portsmouth. By an Act of July 3, 1851, the Causeway Company was incorporated under the same title and authorised to conduct a horse-worked railway from Havant to operate as far as Langston, the extremity of the mainland opposite Hayling Island. However, lack of finance precluded this line being constructed and the powers which had been granted under the Act were thus allowed to lapse.

The next move was made by the London & South Western Railway, which extended its line to Havant in 1859, rail communication with the metropolis being opened on January 24 of that year. Thus the situation arose that two separate railways were established within a short distance of the Island and determined efforts were made by local residents and tradesmen to have the line extended to Hayling itself. As a result of these endeavours a company was formed locally and incorporated by an Act of 1860 as the Hayling Railway Company, being empowered to build a line from Havant to South Hayling—a distance of some five miles.

After leaving the mainland at Langston, it was intended that the line should be built on an embankment in the harbour, roughly parallel with the western shore of the Island. One of the most active men behind this project was a Mr. Robert Hume and the Act authorised that capital of £50,000 in £10 shares would be raised, with £16,000 on mortgage, for construction of the line.

It was anticipated that the embankment would be designed in such a way that it would be possible to reclaim more than 1,000 acres of mudflats off the western shore of the Island—a very ambitious scheme in those far-off days. In 1864 further plans were approved for a short extension to South Hayling and also for the construction of docks and a harbour. It was planned that the channel from Langston to Hayling Island would be crossed by a bridge or viaduct, constructed of open pile-work, some 320 yd. in length and with a swivel-opening bridge having two openings of not less than 40 ft. space, to allow for the passage of the many large vessels using the harbour at that time.

Three years were allowed by the Act for the purchase of the land and the commencement of this far-reaching and ambitious project, and four years for the completion of all the works. Operations were shortly commenced, but by the autumn of 1863 it became very obvious that additional capital would be required and the time for completion extended. This was arranged the following year, when a further Act (the Hayling Railway & Dock Act) was passed, this allowing for the completion of the docks and pier within five years.

However, it was not until January, 1865, that the first mile of the railway from Havant to Langston was opened for public use, and there followed a very considerable goods traffic in coal, gravel and timber—many trading ships from all parts berthing at Langston Quay around this time. So far things had been comparatively easy for the designers and builders, but troubles were ahead. One of the difficulties which had not been envisaged was the constant washing away of the embankment by the sea, thus frustrating the completion of the project and eventually causing the Company to abandon its plans for the southern portion of the line. This may well have been the death knell of the scheme but for the timely intervention of a London businessman—Francis Fuller—who, visiting the Island on holiday, was immediately struck by its beauty and natural charm. Fuller realised the potentialities of Hayling as a seaside resort and at once commenced to play a very important part in the completion of the project.

An Act of August 12, 1867, granted new powers to relinquish the former plans for the embankment line and to allow the building of a new course overland direct to



Photo: S. Creer

Hayling Island terminus after arrival of No. 32661 with the train from Havant

The branch train in its bay at Havant Station



Photo: R. L. Picton

the south beach, where Fuller, the shrewd man of business, had already purchased building land and had laid out a race-course as an additional attraction for potential visitors. However, things were far from easy. With the works suspended and exposed to the worst of the weather, an almost completely empty exchequer, and the local councils divided among themselves on the project, the situation was difficult in the extreme. Thus it was only after long and patient negotiation that Fuller was

eventually able to infuse new life into the scheme. He had quickly realised that an overland route, skirting, instead of crossing, the harbour would be constructed more easily and economically than that which had originally been intended, and in the event his theory was fully justified. Having become a director of the company, Fuller caused yet another Bill to be introduced into Parliament in 1867 to authorise the diversion of the line from that at first planned, and, in anticipation of subsequent events,



Photo: C. T. Gifford

No. 32661 at Hayling North with a down train

he purchased all the land required, even before the Bill was finally approved, at the same time arranging for plans to be prepared and contracts sought for immediate construction.

Thus the scheme, which had been dogged with ill-fortune since its inception, at last reached maturity and, having seen the works completed, electric telegraph supplied for the line and the whole railway approved by a Board of Trade Inspector, Fuller had the immense satisfaction of travelling in the first experimental train from Havant to South Hayling on June 28, 1867. The Hayling Railway was at long last a reality and was opened to the public on July 8 that year. Apart from a few months during the ensuing winter when services were temporarily suspended because of extremely bad weather, trains have been operated continuously until the present day, when, once again, the future of the line is threatened.

On January 1, 1872, a lease to the London Brighton & South Coast Railway came into

effect, wherein that company took control of the Hayling Line at a guaranteed net rental of £2,000 per annum. The line, however, remained independent until absorbed by the Southern Railway in 1923, and subsequently by British Railways on nationalisation.

As originally constructed the line measured 4 miles 52 ch., with a 31-ch. branch to Langston Quay, the intermediate stations being at Langston and North Hayling. Renamed in June, 1892, the terminus at South Hayling has remained as Hayling Island Station until the present day. For nearly 70 years the line has been worked by 0-6-0 tank engines of the "Terrier" class "AIX", the first of which appeared in October 1872, being originally designed for use on the East London Railway, which had bad gradients and very light rails, and also for the South London Line plying between Victoria and London Bridge. Considering their diminutive size, these beautiful little engines have done remarkable work over the years. About ten of the original 50 engines still



Photo: Ian G. Holt

The 10.52 a.m. train to Havant crossing the timber bridge between Hayling Island and the mainland on April 8, 1963, headed by "Terrier" No. 32670

exist, five of which—probably the oldest in operational service in this country—are used to operate the Hayling line.

Having no passing places or lay-by, the single-track Hayling branch is still worked on the old-fashioned "staff-and-ticket system"; that is, any number of trains may travel in one direction, the first carrying the stationmaster's ticket and the last the staff, there being thus no danger of collision on the line. The rolling stock used today is usually "S" or "BCK", depending on traffic requirements, and together with the "Terrier" engine, the "Hayling Billy" is limited to four coaches for the non-stop run to Hayling Island or to three when stops are made at Langston and North Hayling.

Some traffic statistics (kindly supplied by British Railways), showing specimen examples of tickets issued and of luggage carried during winter and summer seasons of 1961, make interesting comparisons: tickets collected during March—2,077; tickets collected during August—32,176; tickets issued during March—1,705; tickets issued during August—7,019; items of paid luggage in advance during August—854 collected and 1,496 delivered.

Many are the stories told by old residents about the line. One of the most popular personalities among the railway staff was Sam Waldron, a guard, who knew all the passengers by name and would delay the last train until all his regulars were aboard, even going so far as to meet and urge on the latecomers outside the station. He was responsible, apart from normal duties, for the issue and collection of tickets and the lighting and extinguishing of the old oil-lamps at the intermediate stations, and it may well be that history will repeat itself if the proposals at present under discussion

for some country stations are implemented!

During the first world war, when the blackout was in force, the drivers worked out a system to stop at North Hayling Station when the lights were not visible—"after crossing the bridge, watch for a clump of trees, then a white gate, count six telegraph poles and apply the brakes". Remarkably enough, it worked very efficiently. Some of the busiest periods occurred when the farmers of North Hayling, a part which was very good agricultural land in those days, sent their milk to a Portsmouth dairy. Every day, at 8.15 a.m. and 4.25 p.m., the farmers would send a two-wheeled low cart, drawn by a trotting pony, to the station and a miniature chariot race would invariably ensue as each driver did his best to be nearest the wicket gate, all being required to roll several 12- and 17-gal. churns up the slope of the platform to the approximate spot where the guard's van would stop. At this time the return fare from North Hayling to Havant was fivepence, while a single from there to South Hayling (Hayling Island) was a penny!

It will be a very sad day, not only for the residents of Hayling Island, but for the thousands of holidaymakers who visit the resort every year, if the line should be closed and there is no doubt that hardship would result. With the matter still to be finally resolved, it is sincerely hoped that British Railways will think very carefully before reaching a decision which could adversely affect one of the most picturesque and historic branch railway lines in the country and, at the same time, one which performs a real service to the community. Who knows, perhaps a modern Francis Fuller will again come to the aid of the Hayling line.