

The Direct Portsmouth Railway—2

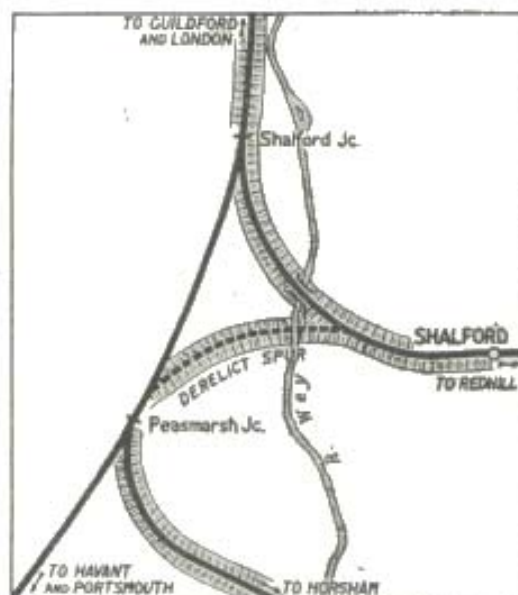
By G. A. SEKON

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 Hilssea, 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.