

**The Direct London to Portsmouth Railway
and
The Battle of Havant**



*The original Havant Station, pictured in 1879 (built 1847,
demolished 1889) (Railway Magazine)*

**Special commemorative booklet produced to
mark the 150th anniversary of rail travel between
Portsmouth and London via Guildford**

Havant Station, 13th April 2009

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The Direct London to Portsmouth Railway and The Battle of Havant

The first railway route from London to Portsmouth was via Eastleigh, Fareham and Gosport. The station at Gosport was opened on 29th November 1841 and passengers had to use the ferry to get to Portsmouth. This was followed by the route via Brighton that reached Havant on 15th March 1847 and Portsmouth three months later on 14th June. The route from Fareham to Portsmouth was opened to passengers on 1st October 1848 thus providing two, albeit roundabout, routes to Portsmouth.

The Direct London & Portsmouth Railway Company obtained its Act of Incorporation on 26th June 1846. However the major companies were not keen to support the line's construction as they preferred to send their passengers over the longer, more profitable, distances.

On 15th October 1849 the line from London to Guildford was extended to Godalming which increased the demand for the 33 mile link to Havant to be built thus shortening the journey from London by some 25 miles.

Thomas Brassey, the renowned railway contractor, agreed to build the line as a speculative venture in the hope that one of the existing companies would take it over. A new company, The Portsmouth

Railway Company, was incorporated on 8th July 1853 and the first sod was dug at Buriton on 6th August 1853.

The single track line (it was not doubled until 1st March 1878) was completed during the winter of 1857/8 but neither the London & South Western Railway (L&SWR) nor the London Brighton & South Coast Railway (LB&SCR) were willing to take it over.

However on 24th December 1858 the L&SWR took over the line and announced that passenger services to Portsmouth would start on 1st January 1859.

The Portsmouth Railway Company under its Act of 12th July 1858 obtained the right to run over the LB&SCR's track between Havant and Portcreek Junction subject to agreement by arbitration between the two companies. Also included in this Act was the right to build its own line from Havant to Cosham. The L&SWR already had the right to run from Portcreek Junction to Portsmouth having previously obtained a half share in the line with the LB&SCR.

As the judgement on the arbitration had not yet been delivered the LB&SCR gave notice that they would block any attempt to run any trains through Havant. However the L&SWR chose to ignore this threat and announced that a goods train would arrive at Havant at 9.58 a.m. on 28th December 1858 and run on to Portsmouth.

In the event the train arrived at Havant at 7.00 a.m. together with a strong muster of labourers, platelayers and railway police to find that the LB&SCR had blocked their way by placing Bury type engine number 99 across the junction and removing of some of the rails. The L&SWR staff shunted the engine in to a siding and replaced the missing rails but on moving forward on the up line found that more rails had been removed at the crossover at the station thus preventing them going on to the down line to Portsmouth. Here they remained for some hours blocking both lines, much to the inconvenience of passengers between Havant and Emsworth, before eventually retreating back to Godalming.

The presence of an equally large number of LB&SCR staff gave rise to the story that a pitched battle had taken place but it seems that in reality although there must have been much arguing there was little physical violence. It is recorded however that Alexander Olgilvie of the L&SWR was fined 1 shilling (5p) for pulling the collar of LB&SCR ganger John Gates.

On 31st December 1858 the LB&SCR obtained an injunction against the L&SWR preventing them from running over the section of track from Havant to Portcreek Junction. However in order to provide a service the L&SWR built a temporary station at Denvilles and passengers had to travel to and from Portsmouth by horse drawn omnibus and pay a fare of sixpence (2½p).

Shortly after the arbiter gave judgement in favour of the L&SWR and a through service commenced on 24th January 1859.

However this was not the end of the saga for on 8th June 1859 the Court of Chancery gave a judgement against the L&SWR that resulted in them having to go back to using the station at Denvilles and the omnibus service.

While this dispute was going on both companies became engaged in a fierce fares war that was becoming ruinous to both of them but delighting their passengers. Eventually sense prevailed and on the 29th July 1859 they reached an agreement for the joint use of the line and the sharing of revenues. At last the 'Direct London to Portsmouth' service started on 8th August 1859.

The two companies remained separate until 1923 when all major railways were amalgamated under the Railway Act and they became part of the Southern Railway. This then became the Southern Region of British Railways upon nationalisation on 1st March 1948. When the railways were privatised in 1996 separate companies again operated the two routes with joint running into Portsmouth over track now owned by Network Rail.

A branch line to Langston (the railway spelling) was opened on 19th January 1865 and this was extended to South Hayling on 17th July 1867. The last public

service ran on 2nd November 1963 with the very last train, a special, running the next day. The line provided an important link to and from the island for goods traffic until the wooden road bridge was replaced in 1956. Between 1884 and 1888 a paddle steamer called the 'Carrier' operated a train ferry service from Langston to Brading on the Isle of Wight. However it did not prove to be a success.

The first Havant station was built to the east of North Street with a level crossing to Leigh Road, and was remodelled in 1889.



The second Havant station, 1889 – 1938 (Railway Magazine)

In 1938 the present station was built across the level crossing and the road bridge in Park Road South was provided to bypass the town centre. The line was electrified in 1937 and trial trains began to run

from Waterloo to Portsmouth on the 8th March with the public service starting on 4th July.

At about 1.00 p.m. on the 17th June 1939 the Chichester Motor overshot its signal and was hit by a train from London. No one was injured but the damaged footbridge was removed and not replaced until 1946.

During the war bombs fell alongside the line in Denvilles and in the field near to the junction where a cow was killed.

Although only passengers can be seen today for many years the station and the adjoining goods yard was an important centre for the receiving and despatching of a wide range of merchandise. Newspapers, mail, fish, milk and parcels were handled at the station while the goods yard handled a wide range of commodities such as coal, building materials, cattle and agricultural produce. One of the station staff duties was to release racing pigeons, their time of departure having to be carefully noted on their baskets.

Probably even more important was the role played by Havant station during the build up to D-Day in 1944. Many thousands of service personnel of several nations passed through the station and tanks and other military equipment were unloaded in the goods yard - not to mention very important people on their way to the D-Day headquarters at Southwick House.

After the war hundreds of people who had been displaced from eastern European countries arrived in the goods yard en route to their temporary camp at Bedhampton.

In 2007/8 the track and signalling systems were upgraded to provide a more speedy arrival and departure and flexible working for trains and a new train control centre was built in the old goods yard.

The eastern three sections of the former signal box were built about 1890 with the other two sections being added in 1938. It has the status of being a Grade II listed building and as it is now redundant. Network Rail is willing to dispose of it, if can be put to some other use.

Ralph Cousins
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