

The Bickley and Chislehurst Loops, Southern Railway

By H. A. VALLANCE

WHEN the working agreement between the South Eastern and the London Chatham & Dover Railways came into force on January 1, 1899, the two systems were physically connected at Blackfriars, Beckenham, Sevenoaks, Strood, Ashford, Dover, and Deal. It was considered, however, that additional connections were required, to enable full advantage to be taken of the multiple terminal facilities in London. A convenient site existed near Chislehurst, where the main line of the L.C.D.R. passed under that of the S.E.R. The difference in level between the two railways was not excessive, and connecting lines could be constructed on comparatively easy gradients.

To provide for through running between Charing Cross and Cannon Street and the L.C.D.R. below Bickley, and between Orpington and Holborn Viaduct and Victoria, powers were obtained, in 1899, for four connecting loops, all under a mile in length, with flying and burrowing junctions, to avoid, as far as possible, crossing other lines on the level. Construction was well in hand by the end of the year. At that time, the quadrupling of the S.E.R. main line, between St. Johns and Orpington, was in progress, although far from complete. On the L.C.D.R., four tracks were available between Bickley and Shortlands, whence the Catford Loop, opened on July 1 1892, provided an alternative route to London.

On July 17, 1902, the northern end of the tunnel between Grove Park and Elmstead Woods, on the S.E.R., showed signs of imminent collapse, owing to the ground being disturbed by the construction of the new (present main-line) tunnel alongside. The uncompleted new works were also damaged, but not so seriously. The main line was closed to through traffic, and trains were diverted to other routes. To minimise the dislocation of traffic, the construction of the loops between Orpington and Bickley was pressed forward as rapidly as possible. The down line was opened on September 8, and the up line 6 days later. Elmstead

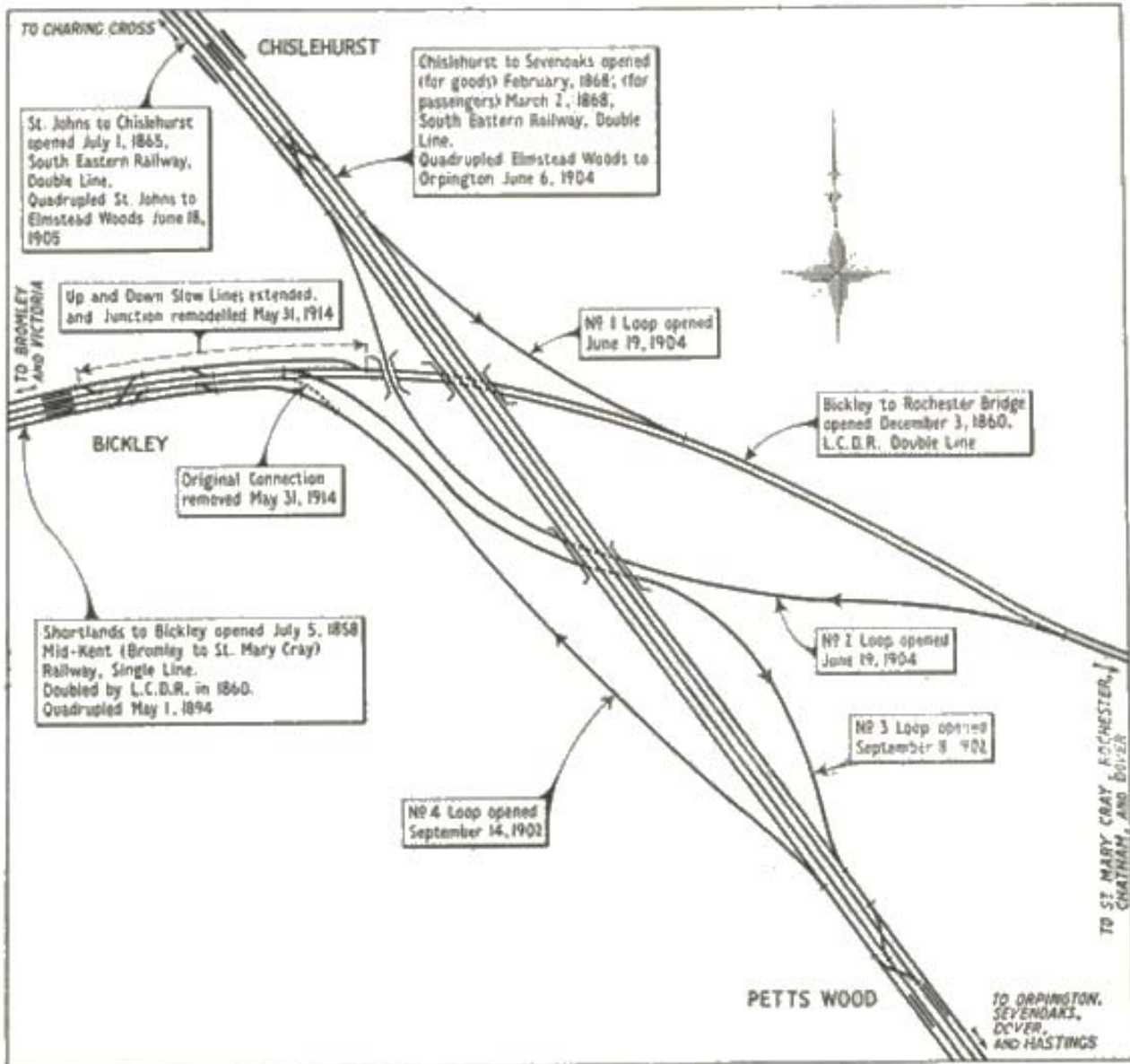
Woods tunnel was re-opened for traffic on November 3, 1902.

Although the quadrupling of the main line from St. Johns to Orpington was not completed until June 18, 1905, the section from Elmstead Woods to Orpington was brought into use on June 6, 1904, and the up and down loops between Chislehurst and St. Mary Cray were opened on June 19. Nearly ten years later, on May 31, 1914, the junction at Bickley was improved by an extension of the up and down slow lines for a short distance beyond the station, and a re-arrangement of crossovers. These alterations permitted trains to enter and leave the loops without interfering with main-line traffic passing in the same direction, although down trains from Bickley to Orpington still had to cross the up main line from Chatham on the level.

In 1903, the suburban trains, which previously had terminated at Bickley, were extended to Orpington. The loops between Bickley and Orpington were also used by several regular and seasonal main-line trains, including the through services between Dover and the North of England, and the S.E.C.R. service between Victoria and Hastings, both of which failed to survive the 1914 war. When the cross-Channel services were resumed in 1919, Victoria became the London terminus for the boat trains, most of which ran *via* Bromley, Orpington, and Tonbridge, although certain relief and conditional services were routed *via* Maidstone or Chatham.

The Chislehurst loops were not used to the same extent, as the suburban trains from Charing Cross and Cannon Street terminated at Orpington. The regular services consisted of a few trains in each direction between Charing Cross and Dover, *via* Maidstone, and some of the morning and evening business expresses between Cannon Street and the North Kent Coast resorts.

The Maidstone and Dover service disappeared during the recent war, and has not yet been resumed, but the development of the residential traffic to the Kent Coast called for additional



trains, all of which ran *via* the loops. These services were reduced during the war years, but have now been restored.

The suburban services from Victoria and Holborn Viaduct to Orpington were electrified on June 12, 1925, and those from Charing Cross and Cannon Street to Orpington on February 28, 1926. A new station at Petts Wood, between Chislehurst and Orpington, was opened on July 9, 1928. The Chislehurst loops were included in the extension of the electri-

fication from Orpington and Bickley to Sevenoaks, which was completed on January 6, 1935, but are not used by electric trains, except in an emergency. Thus there remains the curious anomaly that a local journey from Chislehurst to St. Mary Cray can be made only by a roundabout route of 6 miles, with changes at Petts Wood and Bickley, although the distance between the two stations by the direct line is less than 2½ miles.

