

# From Lewes to Newhaven and Seaford

By H. R. STONES, A.M.Inst.T.



Photo]

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The south end of Newhaven Harbour Station, with the Seaford line diverging to the left. The Continental Station is in the background

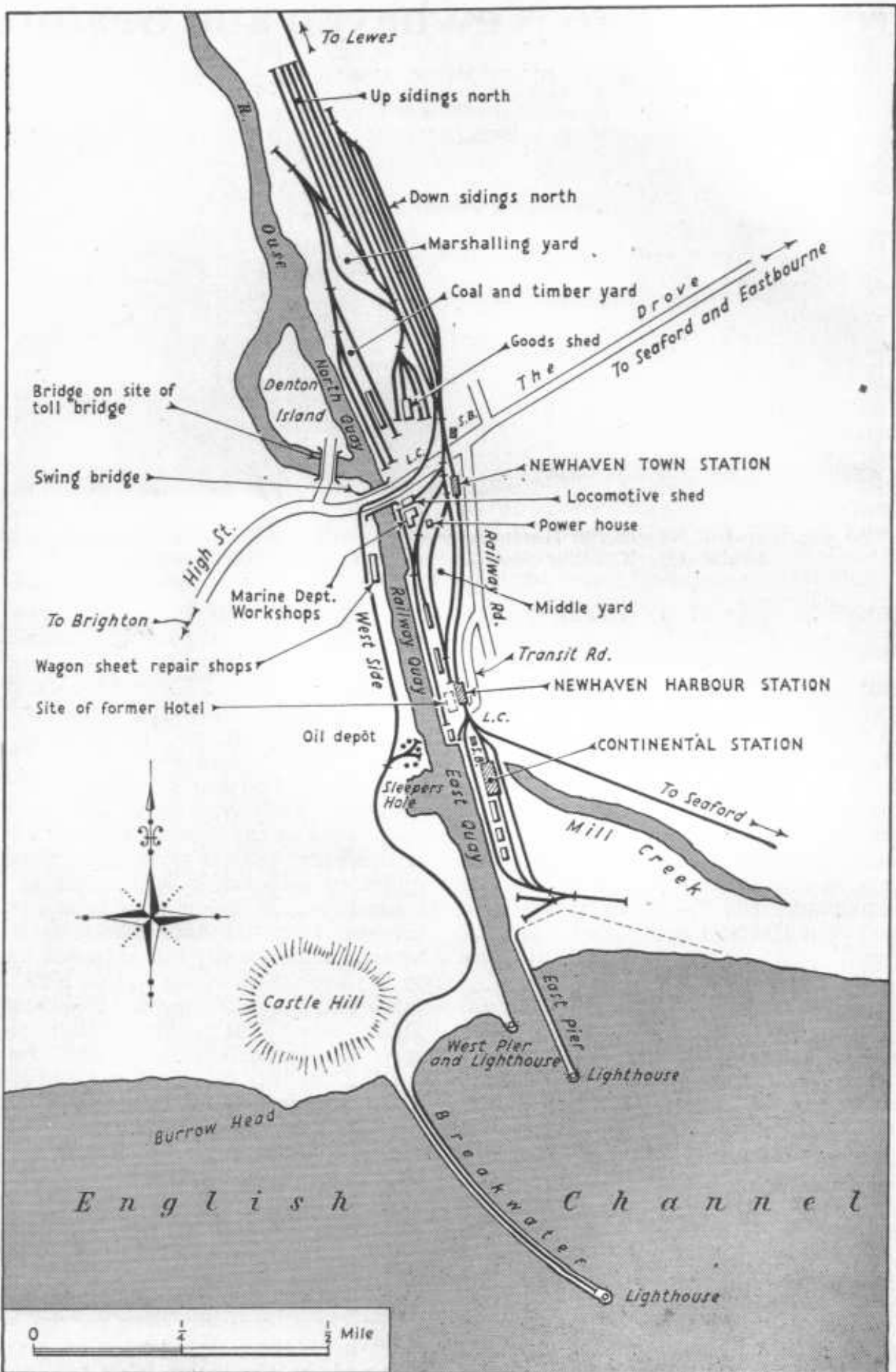
THE last part of the railway journey from London to the Channel port of Newhaven and the seaside resort of Seaford is made over a branch which leaves the main line to Eastbourne and Hastings at the Sussex County Town of Lewes. This branch originally extended for  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Southeram Junction, near Lewes, to Newhaven Harbour and was built to develop the cross-channel service to Dieppe which, at the time, was operated mainly from Kingston Harbour (Shoreham). The  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -mile extension from Newhaven Harbour to Seaford was built several years later to open up this seaside town.

An Act of July 15, 1837, authorised the London & Brighton Railway Company to build its main line to Brighton, and branch lines from Brighton, west to Shoreham, and east to Lewes and Newhaven. So far as Newhaven was concerned, the Act sanctioned a line from the second milestone from Lewes, on the Brighton and Lewes turnpike road, in the parish of St. Anne, Lewes, to a point at or near to Courthouse Farm, Newhaven, otherwise Meeching, in the County of Sussex. Authorisation was also given for the necessary preparatory work to be carried out, including the provision of station buildings at Kingstone (now Kingston), Iford, Rodmell, Southease, and Piddinghoe. It seems clear, therefore,

that the branch was originally planned to leave the Brighton-Lewes line some two miles west of Lewes, pass through Ashcombe Hollow to Kingstone, and then follow approximately the route of the road (A275) down the west bank of the River Ouse to Newhaven.

In Dendy Marshall's "History of the Southern Railway," page 258, an old map issued by the South Eastern Railway in February, 1837, is reproduced showing projected railways from London to the South Coast, including a line from a point between Brighton and Lewes to Newhaven. Undoubtedly this map was based on the provisions of the Act of 1837, but this branch was never constructed. There seems little doubt that topographical considerations, and future possibilities of the Seaford extension, must have influenced subsequent preference for the present-day route.

As the original powers lapsed, it was left to the Brighton, Lewes & Hastings Railway Company, incorporated on July 29, 1844, to prepare another scheme, which comprised the construction of a branch from Southeram, about a mile east of Lewes, down the east bank of the River Ouse, crossing over to the west bank by a three-arch bridge at a point north of the Newhaven town toll bridge. This was probably in the neighbourhood of what is now Denton Island, formed



The railway layout at Newhaven Harbour

artificially when the course of the river was straightened during the second half of the nineteenth century. The centre arch of the proposed bridge was to be movable to permit navigation, and after crossing the river, the line would turn south to a station and dock at Sleepers Hole in Newhaven, from where the railway company intended to operate a regular cross-channel service to Dieppe. However, at a meeting of the Trustees of the Ouse Lower Navigation & Drainage on December 30, 1845, it was decided not to consent to the construction of a railway bridge over the Ouse as proposed, with



Map of the railway from Lewes to Newhaven and Seaford

the result that the London & Brighton Railway, successor to the Brighton, Lewes & Hastings Railway, which it had purchased the same year, had to revise its plans.

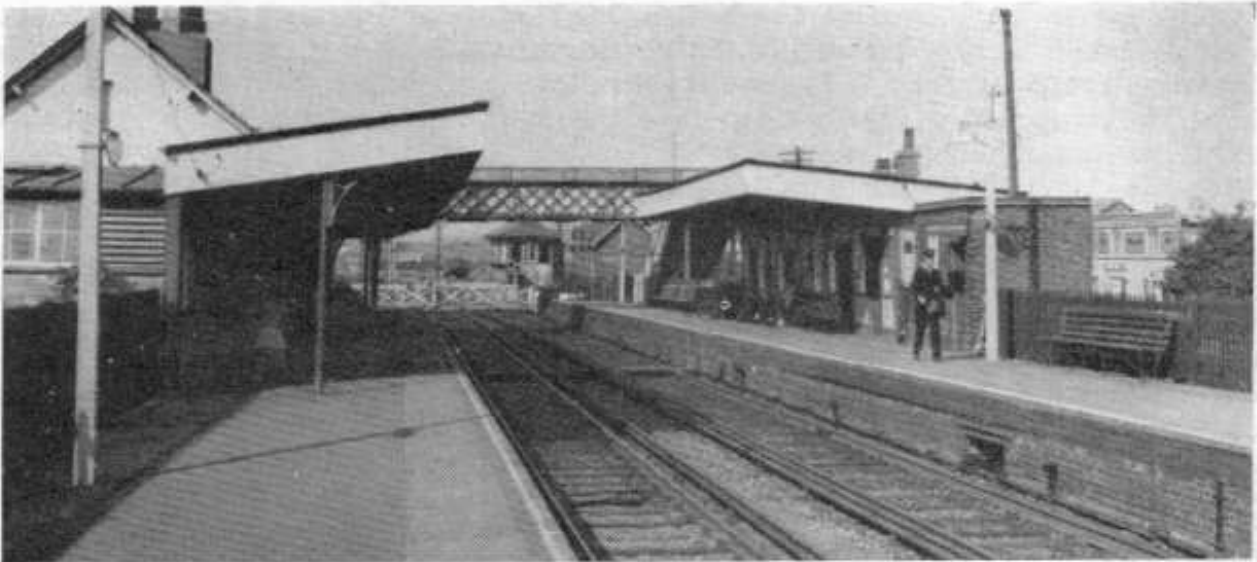
On June 18, 1846, fresh powers were obtained by the newly formed London, Brighton & South Coast Railway Company to construct the line entirely along the east bank of the Ouse to a new harbour in front of the town of Newhaven. The branch was opened to passenger traffic on December 8, 1847, two months after the connecting line from Keymer Junction to Lewes had been completed to effect a saving of  $8\frac{1}{2}$  miles on the journey from London compared with the previous detour *via* Brighton.

When the railway came to Newhaven, the harbour inside the piers was a mere channel, but the railway company, having acquired land for a considerable distance from the Mill Creek to the east, con-

structed a continuous quay with landing stages, sheds and other equipment. The railway was brought down to the quay, the harbour deepened, and a station called Newhaven Harbour, with an adjacent hotel appropriately named "London & Paris," were built close to the quay; trains were accommodated at a platform on the land side of the hotel. At the same time, another station, Newhaven Town, situated a quarter of a mile nearer Lewes, was provided for general traffic and to serve the small town of Newhaven lying directly across the river on the steep eastern slope of the downs.

The steamship service entering and leaving Newhaven was tidal from its commencement, and proved very inconvenient in many ways, especially so far as connecting train schedules were concerned. Various unsuccessful attempts to improve the harbour were made by the Newhaven Harbour Board, but in 1878, a comprehensive scheme was approved, and the Newhaven Harbour Company was formed under the auspices of the L.B.S.C.R. to carry out the work. However, the original capital proved inadequate, and additional funds had to be raised by subsequent Acts of Parliament. Finally, the tidal services were replaced by sailings at fixed hours as from April 1, 1889, a new continental station was built about 200 yd. nearer the sea from the old Harbour Station, and the main part of the improvement scheme was completed in 1893, at a cost of about £650,000. The Newhaven Harbour Company was dissolved in 1926, and the property vested in the Southern Railway Company.

The extension of the branch from Newhaven Harbour eastwards along the coast to Seaford, a distance of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles, was authorised in 1862. An intermediate station called Bishopstone (now closed) was built about three-quarters of a mile from Newhaven Harbour, and the single track was opened throughout on June 1, 1864. Contemporary reports state that there was great rejoicing at Seaford, and when the first train steamed in, flags were flying, church bells ringing, and ships sounded their sirens. The advent of the railway was regarded, rather optimistically, as a prelude to the town regaining some of its former importance as a port, for, up to the latter part of the



Photo]

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### Newhaven Town Station looking towards Lewes

sixteenth century, the River Ouse entered the sea just west of Seaford Head.

The popular and generally-accepted belief that the Ouse was diverted by a freak storm about 1587 to its present outlet at Newhaven, or Meeching as it was then known, has never been substantiated conclusively. According to geographical research, the mouth of the Ouse until the past two centuries, when artificial means have been used to keep it in check, had always been subject to movement along the two miles of coast between Newhaven and Seaford. The latter was apparently an outlet for the Ouse for some years, and did not decline as a port until the sixteenth century.

Although Seaford has remained the terminus of the branch, the possibilities of connecting the town with Eastbourne by a direct line were discussed in 1885, and on June 25, 1886, the Eastbourne, Seaford & Newhaven Railway Company was incorporated to build lines, with a total length of about  $9\frac{1}{4}$  miles, connecting these two seaside towns. However, by an Act of July 26th, 1889, a substituted line was authorised from Seaford to a junction with the Brighton-Hastings line of the L.B.S.C.R. at Wilmington, but as this scheme was opposed by the general manager and directors of the latter company, the undertaking was abandoned by acts of 1889 and 1892.



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### Bishopstone Station from the east

The line between Newhaven Harbour and Seaford was doubled in 1904, and the layout at Seaford was modified to handle increasing traffic. In 1938, a new station (still in use) was built three-quarters of a mile nearer Seaford to serve Bishopstone. The old Bishopstone station was closed temporarily and reopened the following year as Bishopstone Beach Halt, but closed finally as a wartime measure in 1942.

After leaving Lewes, trains for Newhaven and Seaford run for about a mile over the main line to Eastbourne and Hastings, and after crossing the River Ouse by a deck girder bridge originally

sive sidings on each side of the main line. These were mostly constructed during the two world wars, when all maritime and railway installations at Newhaven were taken over by the naval and military authorities.

Just before entering Newhaven Town Station ( $5\frac{1}{4}$  miles), the railway passes over the main road between Brighton and Eastbourne by a level crossing operated by Newhaven Town Signalbox. This box also controls access to the adjacent locomotive shed, goods shed, North Quay, up and down sidings, and the single-track goods line which, together with the main road, crosses the swing



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Seaford Station, looking towards the buffer stops

constructed in 1860 as a bascule bridge, reach Southeram Junction. Here the Seaford branch diverges to the right, but runs parallel with the main line for about half a mile before turning south on a slightly falling gradient over low-lying marshland, which forms both banks of the Ouse at this point. After crossing the Glynde Reach stream, and passing a private siding to cement works on the down side controlled by electric release from Southeram Junction Box, the line reaches the eastern slope of the downs below Itford Hill, and then follows the east bank of the river down a wide valley to Southease & Rodmell Halt ( $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles), which is also a block post. Continuing, the line now runs closer to the river, and approaching Newhaven there are exten-

bridge (opened in 1866) over the river to serve sidings and other installations on the west side of the harbour. These include wagon sheet repair shops, an oil storage depot and the breakwater.

A quarter of a mile further on is the old Harbour Station ( $5\frac{1}{4}$  miles), which, since the construction of the more extensive continental platforms in 1889, has lost most of its importance. In 1959, the old station buildings on the up side were replaced by a small ticket office, and a new platform awning was provided. The adjacent London & Paris Hotel, which had served as naval headquarters in the second world war, was demolished in 1958.

The Continental Station is situated about 200 yd. seaward of the old Harbour

Station, beyond the junction for Seaford controlled by Newhaven Harbour Signal-box. The station is built on the East Quay, and comprises two long platforms connected by a footbridge. The main platform, on which are refreshment and waiting rooms, booking office, customs examination hall, and so on, is completely under cover and adjacent to the landing stage for the cross-channel boats. Beyond the passenger platforms are bonded warehouses with access to the East Quay and connected to sidings on the east side.

Just south of the old Harbour Station, the Seaford branch turns sharply to the east, and runs a short distance from the coast parallel with the Mill Creek for about three-quarters of a mile, passing the now-derelict platforms of the former Bishopstone Beach Halt and Tide Mills Crossing. From this point, the line commences to rise gradually on an embankment to the present Bishopstone Station (7 miles) situated in a chalk cutting, and then continues on a falling gradient, mostly in a cutting, for about a mile, to emerge at Seaford (8 miles).

The terminal station at Seaford consists of one long platform with a shorter bay at the east end. There is an extensive goods yard with a large shed and office on the north side of the main line. However, as the collection and delivery of both parcels and goods traffic, except for full wagon loads, is concentrated on Newhaven, from which point road motor zone services are operated by the railway, the use of Seaford goods yard is now mainly limited to coal traffic and building materials. The goods shed has been leased and several of the sidings are used for stabling spare and condemned passenger rolling stock.

The Newhaven and Seaford branch was electrified in July, 1935, concurrently with the extension of electrification to Eastbourne and Hastings, and there are now direct hourly local electric services operating between Seaford and Brighton, and also Haywards Heath and Horsted Keynes. The local trains are made up in two-coach sets, which can be strengthened up to four, six or eight coaches as required. Main-line services comprise two morning and evening fast electric trains daily between Seaford and Victoria and London Bridge, and the morning down and after-

noon up continental boat trains hauled by Bo-Bo and Co-Co electric locomotives. At the present time, the boat trains only run during the summer months. There are four local goods trains a day each way between Lewes and Newhaven; one of these runs through to Seaford and back to Newhaven.

The only motive power depot on the branch is at Newhaven, but, since electrification, this has lost its former importance and, at the present time, only three shunting locomotives are shedded regularly. These are certainly of an ancient and modern variety ranging from a veteran class "AIX" Stroudley 0-6-0 "Terrier" tank, No. 32636 (formerly *Fenchurch*, and believed to be the oldest locomotive at present in service on the Southern Region of British Railways), a class "E" 0-6-2 tank of L.B.S.C.R. origin, and a B.R. standard 0-6-0 diesel shunter. These three locomotives share the shunting duties at Newhaven with the exception of the sidings on the west side of the harbour; because of weight restrictions, the "Terrier" tanks are the only locomotives permitted to cross the swing bridge over the River Ouse. The 0-6-0 diesel shunter is also used to haul local goods trains between Lewes and Seaford, with the exception of the 7.21 p.m. from Lewes to Newhaven, and the return trip to Brighton, which is worked by a class "K" 2-6-0 Billinton Mogul. The only steam passenger workings on the branch are when extra continental boat trains are run and sufficient electric motive power is not available, or when occasional continental excursion boat trains are worked through from other regions of British Railways.

In conclusion, the writer is indebted to Mr. L. C. Johnson, Archivist of the British Transport Commission, for permission to consult records; to Mr. F. D. Y. Faulkener, Public Relations & Publicity Officer, Southern Region; the District Shipping Manager at Newhaven; Mr. T. H. Charman, Traffic Assistant, Newhaven; and others for their invaluable help in the preparation of this article. For much of the local historical information, thanks are also due to Mr. N. C. Simson, Clerk to the Newhaven Urban District Council, and to Mr. Michael Pollard, of Sevenoaks, Kent.