

# A Last Journey on the Chichester-Midhurst Line

By H. M. MADGWICK

**W**ITH the closure of the Lavant-Midhurst section of the railway between Chichester and Midhurst on August 28, another country branch line goes under the axe that is falling so mercilessly upon those byways that gave such charm to the railway scene of bygone days. This branch, which formed part of the former London Brighton & South Coast Railway, was 12 miles in length,

single throughout, and was opened on July 11, 1881, and served the villages of Lavant, Singleton and Cocking. It passed through some of the most picturesque scenery to be found in this part of the county of Sussex.

In its heyday, the line carried a considerable traffic, both passenger and freight, and even saw Royal Trains, for Singleton Station served Goodwood Race



*Photo]*

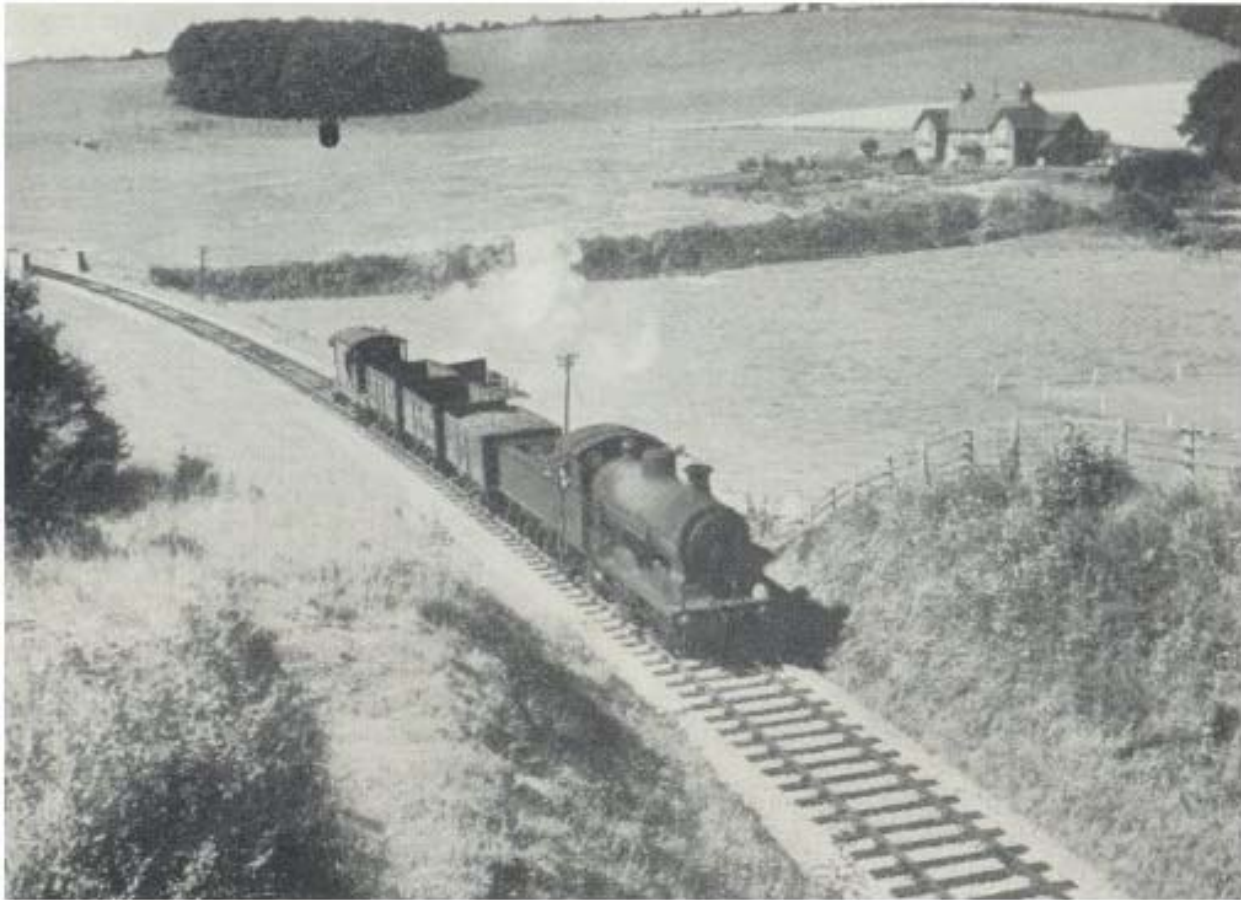
*[H. M. Madgwick*

**The daily freight train on the Chichester-Midhurst line at Lavant Station, hauled by a former L.B.S.C.R. "C2x" class 0-6-0 engine**

Course, which frequently was visited by King Edward VII. With the development of the motor bus, however, the passenger traffic began to dwindle. Eventually, it declined to such an extent that passenger services were withdrawn by the Southern Railway on July 6, 1935.

The freight services continued, but latterly the main reason for maintaining them was the seasonal traffic in sugar beet, a very large tonnage of which is produced in this part of Sussex. It is for this reason that the line will continue to be operated as far as Lavant, the first

last time on a glorious summer day. The train traversed the pleasant Sussex countryside, and wound its way up through the hills between Singleton and Cocking, which open out grand vistas of downland, and give a magnificent view of Trundle Hill and the Goodwood Grand Stand, perched high amid its splendid setting. It was with some nostalgia that visions arose of the spacious days when the L.B.S.C.R. engines added their yellow livery to the autumnal tints of the woodlands, and the shrill "Brighton" whistle echoed over these rolling downs.



*Photo]*

*[P. M. Alexander*

**Goods train approaching West Dean Tunnel, between Lavant and Singleton, with "C2x" class 0-6-0 locomotive No. 32522**

station north of Chichester, and the main centre of the traffic.

In November, 1951, a culvert near Midhurst collapsed, and derailed the daily freight train. Since then the section between Cocking and Midhurst has been closed, and the service operated as a shuttle between Cocking and Chichester. The latest closure has cut off a further six miles, leaving only the short section between Chichester and Lavant.

The present writer has travelled over the line regularly in all seasons of the year, and it was with some regret that recently he surveyed the scene for the

Although the country branch lines may pass, they leave with those who have known them so well an ineffaceable memory and for those who will follow after a memorial in the form of embankment, cutting and tunnel with here and there a station building or railway cottage that time does not destroy. For while a roadway, once disused, quickly becomes overgrown and lost, the track of a railway, although its rails and sleepers may be torn up and removed, can never be completely erased from the landscape, and remains a mute reminder of perhaps more leisurely and quieter days.