

# The Railways of Salisbury—2

By T. B. SANDS



[Photo]

[T. B. Sands

View from the west end of Salisbury Station in July, 1960. The light engine is approaching the up main platform

**T**HE new trunk route from London to the west country *via* Salisbury, completed on July 19, 1860, when the London & South Western Railway opened the extension from Yeovil to Exeter, had certain initial shortcomings. Practically the whole length of 122 miles from Worting Junction (Basingstoke) to Exeter was single track, and at the important midway point at Salisbury the flow of traffic was badly impeded by an awkward and almost unworkable station. Little time was lost in widening the line. Most of the structures had been built for two tracks in the first place, and by the early part of 1870, when a final section between Grateley and Porton was widened, a double line existed all the way from Waterloo to Exeter.

The problem of Salisbury Station was far more difficult to solve. The L.S.W.R. had found it impossible to build separate up and down platforms on the chosen site west of Fisherton Street without encroaching on the property of the rival Great Western Railway; and although the G.W.R. directors may not originally have set much store on their Salisbury branch as a commercial asset, throughout the long years of intermittent warfare with the L.S.W.R. this outpost at a vital spot in enemy territory had a decided nuisance

value. The L.S.W.R. could not acquire any land belonging to the G.W.R. between Wilton and Salisbury, where the two railways ran side by side, without the written consent of the G.W.R., and to make matters worse, the boundary was far from straight. There were salients of G.W.R. land projecting into L.S.W.R. territory, on one of which the G.W.R. had most inconsiderately built an engine shed.

Thus the L.S.W.R. station which came into use on May 2, 1859, was a one-sided affair, with a single platform on the south side of the line extending over Fisherton Street, where it was recessed to form a bay, corresponding in part to the present No. 6 platform. The station building, now partly occupied by the parcels office at the London end of Platform 4, was completed in 1860 in readiness for the opening to Exeter. The L.S.W.R. had meanwhile erected a footbridge from near the east end of the station building across to the G.W.R. station, and had built an engine shed a short distance to the west on the down side.

The platform, including the bay, had a total length of about 800 ft. and was claimed at the time to be one of the longest in England. It could accommodate up and down trains simultaneously, but up trains could not come



The old station buildings at the east end of platform 4



Photos]

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The offices and refreshment room erected in 1902 on platform 4 to the west of the old buildings

in direct. It was the practice for them to run first to a ticket platform well beyond the station, make a prolonged stop until there was a vacancy at the main platform, and then set back into the station, where the impatient and often infuriated passengers were at last able to alight. A ticket platform on the down line, in use until 1893, acquired an equally evil reputation.

The opening passenger service in 1859 of four trains each way on the main line, and five to and from Eastleigh, may not have placed too great a strain on these arrangements, but there was not much scope for increase. Apart from a normal growth of traffic on the existing routes, the L.S.W.R. had soon to find room for four additional trains each way when the cross-country branch from the Eastleigh line to the Southampton & Dorchester line was opened on December 20, 1866. This pleasant single-track byway of 18½ miles from Alderbury Junction to West Moors Junction, built by a local concern, the Salisbury & Dorset Junction Railway Company, incorporated on July 22, 1861, was worked from the date of opening by the L.S.W.R. at 45 per cent. of the gross receipts and absorbed with effect from January 1, 1883.

In 1876, under pressure of mounting congestion and delays, the traffic committee of the L.S.W.R. drew up plans for the enlargement of Salisbury Station to be carried out "in concert with the G.W. Co." But the moment could scarcely have been less propitious. In the previous year, the L.S.W.R. had been a party with the Midland Railway in snatching the Somerset & Dorset Railway out of the hands of the G.W.R., in circumstances giving rise to bitter accusations of bad faith, and thus the prospect of the two companies achieving anything "in concert" was for the time being exceedingly remote.

The L.S.W.R. fell back therefore on an alternative plan for an entirely separate up station on the curve east of the Fisherton Street bridge, approached by a new carriage road north of the bridge, and furnished with its own booking office, refreshment room, waiting rooms, and so on. The only link with the old station was by way of a footpath down the embankment on the south side of the line leading to a subway, to which there was another entrance by an alleyway turning out of Fisherton Street on the

town side of the bridge. The new platform, 683 ft. long, was apparently rather narrow, though room was found for a bay at the eastern end. The buildings, constructed chiefly of timber painted and sanded to look like stone, were obviously makeshift; yet the up station, opened on August 19, 1878, had to do duty for nearly 24 years. By then the G.W.R. and the L.S.W.R. had reached a sensible agreement, and a station more worthy of Salisbury was nearing completion.

Among the motives that had prompted this agreement was the growing need for better freight facilities. For many years the two companies made little use of Salisbury as an exchange point, preferring to send as much traffic as possible *via* Basingstoke, where a mixed-gauge junction had existed since 1856. The G.W.R. branch to Salisbury remained wholly broad gauge until June, 1874, and for at least 14 years the only means of exchange was through a transshipment shed, situated astride the boundary between the two systems west of the passenger stations, and served by standard and broad gauge roads on either side of a centre platform. The G.W.R. had not put in a broad-gauge road by the end of 1859, but evidently did so early in 1860. However, the amount of traffic exchanged in this way cannot have been either large or important, for over three years elapsed after gauge conversion before an alternative method was substituted. In August, 1877, the two companies agreed to lay "a connecting siding" at Salisbury, each paying half the estimated cost of £80, and this seems to have been in use by February, 1878.

The G.W.R. branch had now begun to wake up slightly. A coal train from Bullo Pill, in the Forest of Dean, was extended from Swindon to Salisbury in June, 1876; the method of single line working progressed from the primitive single-needle telegraph to disc block telegraph in 1874, and to train staff assisted by disc block telegraph in 1877; but on the 20-mile stretch from Warminster to Salisbury crossing loops at Wylde and Wilton only were still adequate for the traffic. Two developments changed the whole aspect of the branch—the opening of the Severn Tunnel in 1886, and the expanding demand for Welsh steam coal at Southampton and Portsmouth as sailing ships gave place to steamers. A loop was

opened at Heytesbury in 1888, electric train staff working followed in 1893, and two more loops (at Codford and Wishford) were added in 1896. But even with these improvements the capacity of the branch could not keep pace with the rising flood of coal traffic, so finally the whole line was doubled, Salisbury to Wilton in 1896, and the remainder in stages to Warminster by March, 1901, though the major portion of the new work (Wilton to Warminster) was not inspected and approved for passenger traffic until July, 1902.

While the widening from Wilton to Salisbury was in progress, the G.W.R. laid in what was called a "direct siding" to the L.S.W.R. at Salisbury. This was opened for passenger traffic officially from July 1, 1896, when a through service between Cardiff and Portsmouth *via* Salisbury, with booked stops at the L.S.W.R. station, was inaugurated. However, it is clear from a note in the L.S.W.R. working time book that through coaches were already running between Bristol and Portsmouth on one train each way daily, and it would seem therefore that the "direct siding" had come into use unofficially on some previous date. It was, nevertheless, a temporary connection, controlled at the G.W.R. end from a ground frame, subject to a speed limit of 4 m.p.h., and put in at a time when the whole layout was in the melting pot.

The present spacious station at Salisbury is the outcome of prolonged discussions between the L.S.W.R. and the G.W.R. towards the end of the last century, leading to a formal agreement dated January 28, 1898, whereby it became possible to remodel and enlarge the whole of the accommodation both for passenger traffic and for freight transfers. The obstructive G.W.R. engine shed was removed, at the expense of the L.S.W.R., to a fresh site on the north side of the G.W.R. running lines, and the boundary between the two companies was straightened by an exchange of land, in which the L.S.W.R. gained enough space for three additional through platforms (two up and one down) opposite the original single platform west of Fisherton Street. It was decided to confine G.W.R. through trains to two of the new platforms (now Nos. 1 and 3), which would become in use, though not in ownership, "joint" platforms, freely accessible to G.W.R. passengers and staff at all times. Thus



Photo]

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**Diesel train to Portsmouth leaving the main line to London at the east end of Salisbury Tunnel**

the permanent double-line junction to the G.W.R., put in as part of this scheme, allowed direct running to or from these platforms only—a layout that has remained unchanged until the present day.

The L.S.W.R. moved its own engine shed to a site nearly half a mile down the line, where the present shed with ten roads and accommodation for some 50 locomotives was opened in December, 1901. This left room for a generous extension westward of the existing platform on the down side, and also for a bay (No. 5) for down stopping trains. Goods traffic to or from Salisbury (L.S.W.R.) was banished almost entirely to the old terminus at Milford, to which transfer trips are worked from the main-line marshalling yard at Salisbury East. The down sidings near No. 5 bay, previously used as a goods yard, were redesigned in 1902 to provide horse and carriage loading docks approached by a wide roadway from Fisherton Street; nowadays, these west sidings serve as a marshalling yard for down main-line freight trains.

On the extended down platform (No. 4) a new set of buildings was erected adjoining the original (1860) block, comprising an entrance hall, booking offices, waiting rooms and buffet. This is a handsome building in red brick with

white stone courses, though in style it is somewhat at variance with its mid-Victorian neighbour. The effect of the platform extension is noticeable on incoming trains as they sweep round the curve, past the old station building that was for so long their stopping place, eventually coming to rest well down the platform with the tail near or even beyond the exit—a performance which strangers to Salisbury are apt to find puzzling and rather disconcerting. The six platforms of the present station have the following lengths, measured between the tops of

engines and crews normally worked through to the east yard on coal or freight trains destined for the L.S.W.R. Likewise in the opposite direction, L.S.W.R. engines and crews worked on to the G.W.R., handing over in Fisherton yard west of the G.W.R. terminus. The goods yards at Salisbury are still very active, especially at night; in fact the busiest turn of the 24 hours for signalmen, except during the peak periods of the summer holiday season, is often from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

The complete resigalling of Salisbury



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[T. B. Sands

#### Down main and local platforms at Salisbury in July, 1960

the ramps:—No. 1 (up local) 662 ft., No. 2 (up main) 665 ft., No. 3 (down local) 665 ft., No. 4 (down main) 695 ft., No. 5 (down bay) 585 ft. and No. 6 (loop bay east of No. 4) 540 ft. The junction with the Market House Railway is at the east end of Platform 6.

The first of the new platforms, the present No. 1, came into use on the morning of Sunday, April 6, 1902. The separate up station, closed the previous night, was quickly demolished and replaced by a transfer and marshalling yard of 16 roads where the bulk of the through freight traffic is now handled. This was the most easterly point at Salisbury to which G.W.R. engines regularly penetrated in bygone days. Under the agreement of 1898, G.W.R.

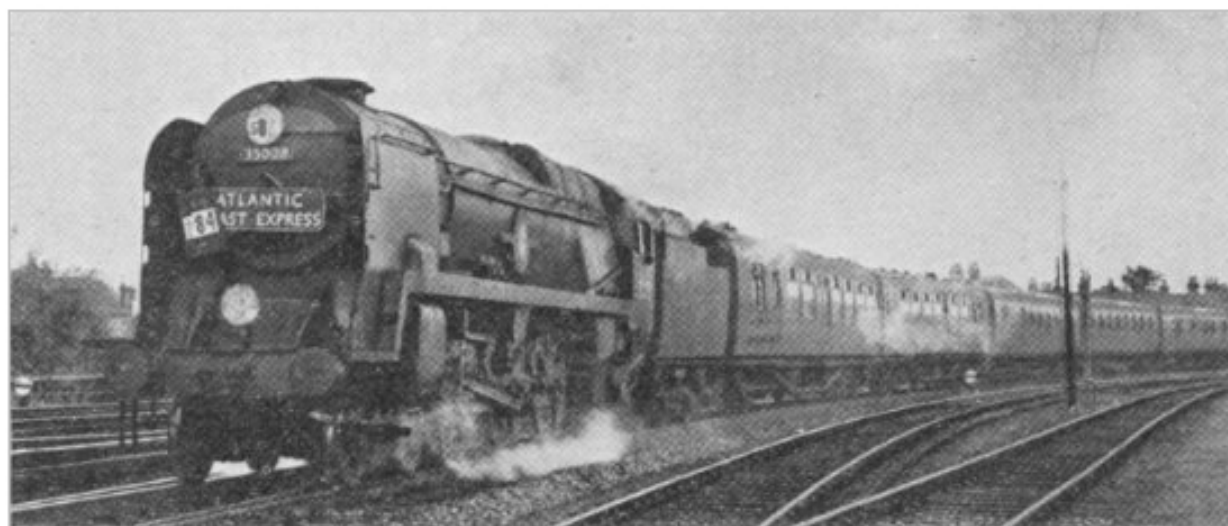
Station and the approach lines formed an essential part of the 1902 improvements. The G.W.R. built what is now Salisbury "C" box, installing there a large manual frame of 93 working levers, with spaces for several more. Its opening brought to an end a most unsatisfactory state of affairs whereby there was no proper interlocking of points and signals in Salisbury yard, and all trains running in and out of the terminus had to travel at walking pace over a distance of about half a mile.

The L.S.W.R. adopted power signalling. A rather untidy arrangement of points and signals, worked manually from four separate cabins, was replaced by a low-pressure pneumatic system controlled from two relatively small boxes at either

end of the station, each equipped with frames of 64 slide levers. This installation was brought into use in November, 1902. As first installed, all operations were carried out by compressed air—control, signal and point movement, and indication back to the box. An advantage claimed for this system, which the L.S.W.R. adopted at a number of other places besides Salisbury, was that the

with the consent of the army authorities, and as this was persistently withheld, the G.W.R. had to abandon the whole project.

The L.S.W.R. was more successful with its Amesbury & Military Camp Light Railway, 1898, although this too was cut down in 1901 from a line of ten miles, running from near Grateley to Shrewton, to one of five miles terminating at Amesbury. A public passenger service



Photo]

[S. Creer

The up "Atlantic Coast Express" leaving Salisbury on August 9, 1958, with "Merchant Navy" Pacific No. 35008, "Orient Line"

equipment could be maintained by mechanical fitters possessing no electrical knowledge. The Salisbury installation was one of the last to use compressed air throughout; it is only recently that it was converted to electro-pneumatic by substituting electric circuits for control and indication, while retaining compressed air for point and signal operation. Notable also at Salisbury is the small number of semaphore signals required to govern main-line traffic movements through this busy centre—a feature typical of L.S.W.R. practice in the early years of this century.

The reconstruction of Salisbury Station coincided with the growth of an extensive military traffic that is still very often in evidence there. In 1897, the War Department began to make purchases of land on Salisbury Plain to form a military training area, and by 1902 had acquired over 40,000 acres. This development inspired several light railway schemes, among them the G.W.R. Pewsey & Salisbury Light Railway of 1898. Although duly authorised, the construction of the middle portion from Upavon to Durrington could be carried out only

between Grateley and Amesbury started on June 2, 1902, and an extension to Bulford, authorised in 1903, was opened for public traffic on June 1, 1906. Meanwhile, on August 8, 1904, some of the trains had been diverted to run direct to Salisbury *via* the Newton Tony curve, a double-line loop connecting the main line at Amesbury Junction, 2½ miles east of Porton, with the 1902 branch from Grateley at Newton Tony Junction; from there the branch, previously single, was doubled as far as Amesbury. A diminishing number of passenger trains continued to run to and from Grateley until 1918, when a last solitary survivor was withdrawn. The service *via* Porton ran to and from Salisbury until June 30, 1952, when it succumbed to competition from the more direct and frequent road services. The Newton Tony curve was subsequently lifted, but the branch remains open as a single line for goods and military traffic *via* the connection at Grateley.

This so far is the only complete casualty among passenger services radiating from Salisbury, though there have been signs of change and decay on the former

G.W.R. line. For thirty years after the G.W.R. secured a foothold in the L.S.W.R. station, local passenger trains continued to use the old terminus, which was not finally closed until September 12, 1932; bereft of its all-over roof, it now presents a forlorn and lifeless appearance. Other changes followed the nationalisation of railways in 1948. When the regional boundaries were drawn, the G.W.R. line from Westbury (exclusive) to Salisbury went to the Southern Region of British Railways with effect from April 2, 1950. Five years later, the local service was withdrawn, and all stations between Warminster and Salisbury were

ance in recent years of the 1860 footbridge from the east end. Yet here, as elsewhere, the scene is altering as new operating practices and modern forms of motive power replace the old. For example, the practice of changing engines at Salisbury has declined. Signalmen at the west box may still have to deal with an average of 100 light engine movements in 24 hours, but the "Salisbury crocodiles"—strings of locomotives, formerly sometimes as many as eight, running coupled together from the shed to the far end of the station—are much reduced in length. Engines now work through on a number of trains; multiple-unit diesel sets to and



*Photo]*

*[C. Hogg*

**Former L.S.W.R. Beattie 2-4-6 tank No. 30587 passing Newton Tony in May, 1955, with an enthusiasts' special over the Bulford branch. The line was closed to passengers in 1952, and reduced to single track**

closed to passenger traffic after the last train on September 17, 1955; through services, however, continue. The G.W.R. engine shed at Salisbury became redundant and was demolished to make way for the Salisbury Paper & Printing Depot of the British Transport Commission, officially opened on November 1, 1958.

The through station, on the other hand, has withstood change and remains today much as it was when it was rebuilt nearly sixty years ago, except for the disappear-

ance from Portsmouth replaced steam trains on the Eastleigh line in 1957; and if former plans were to be fulfilled, the city of Salisbury might receive its first electric trains in 1965.

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*(Concluded)*