

Seaside Excursions from North-Western Suburbs

By B. K. COOPER



Photo]

[K. A. C. R. Nunn

Watford to Littlehampton through excursion train at Willesden Junction, headed by Southern Region "N" class 2-6-0 locomotive No. 31811

IT is hard for dwellers south of the Thames to realise how relatively remote the Kent and Sussex coasts appear from the north-western suburbs of London. The journeys to and from the Southern Region termini may not be unduly long or slow, but they tend to be tedious because the average traveller does not feel he is really on the way until seated in a through train to his destination. For those who live in the populous areas around Willesden, Wembley, Harrow, and Watford, the proportion of the total journey time occupied by travel in local or Underground trains seems unduly high when it is realised that all these places are within about sixty miles in a straight line of the nearest point on the South Coast.

The railway geography of London provides a direct connection from the London Midland suburban area at Willesden to the neighbourhood of Clapham Junction, where three routes to the coast are in close proximity. Regular travellers to Euston have a daily reminder of this fact in the sight of Southern Region

locomotives among the wagons at Harlesden, and the junction near Willesden No. 1 signalbox where the West London line bears away towards the Thames and Southern territory on the opposite bank. The West London and West London Extension lines are well known as the route of the "Sunny South Express" and its present unnamed successor, but these services are of interest mainly to the passenger from the Midlands and North. It is less generally known that local stations between Willesden and Watford enjoy a regular programme of week-end and some mid-week through excursions to coastal resorts throughout the summer months.

The regularity of these excursions is such that an eight-coach train of centre-corridor stock is stabled at Watford Junction during the summer and runs to a series of resorts in rotation. Extra coaches are added as required, and at times two trains are necessary. At the August holiday week-end in 1951, for example, trips to Margate and Clacton were scheduled on the same day.

A typical month's programme for the height of the holiday season (actually that operated in August, 1951) takes in the following resorts, with the frequency shown in brackets: Brighton (two Wednesdays), Clacton (two Sundays), Eastbourne (one Wednesday, one Sunday), Herne Bay and Margate (one Sunday), Littlehampton (one Sunday), and Southend (two Saturdays). Other excursions operated on some occasions during a season run to Bexhill and Hastings, and to Southampton and Bournemouth.

It will be seen that most of the destinations involve using the West London

East Croydon line at Streatham Junction North to run *via* Mitcham Junction and the Mid-Sussex line to Ford.

There is no direct connection from the West London Extension at Clapham Junction with the main line from Waterloo to the South-West *via* Basingstoke, but trains can run into the Windsor line side of the station. Southampton and Bournemouth excursions therefore proceed west along the Windsor line as far as Point Pleasant Junction, Putney, whence a sharp and steeply graded curve brings them into East Putney Station on the line used by London Transport trains

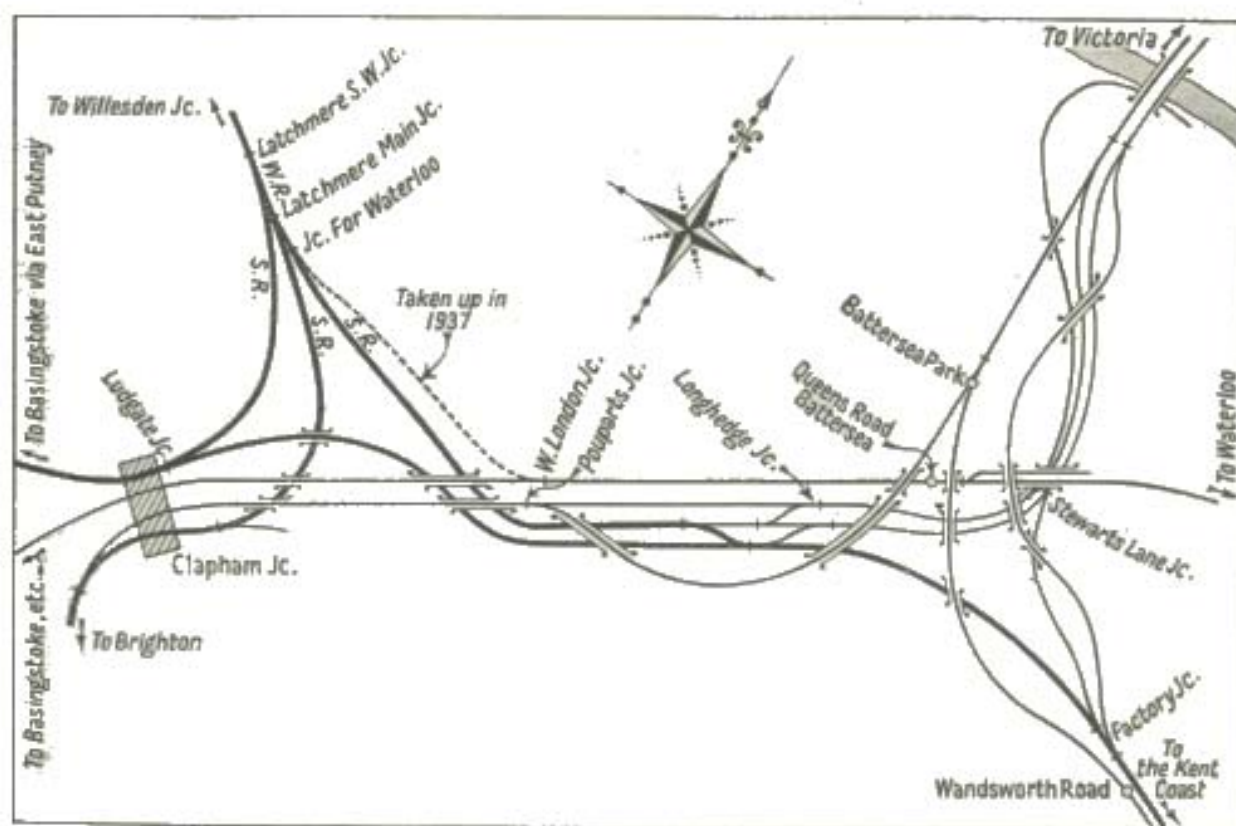
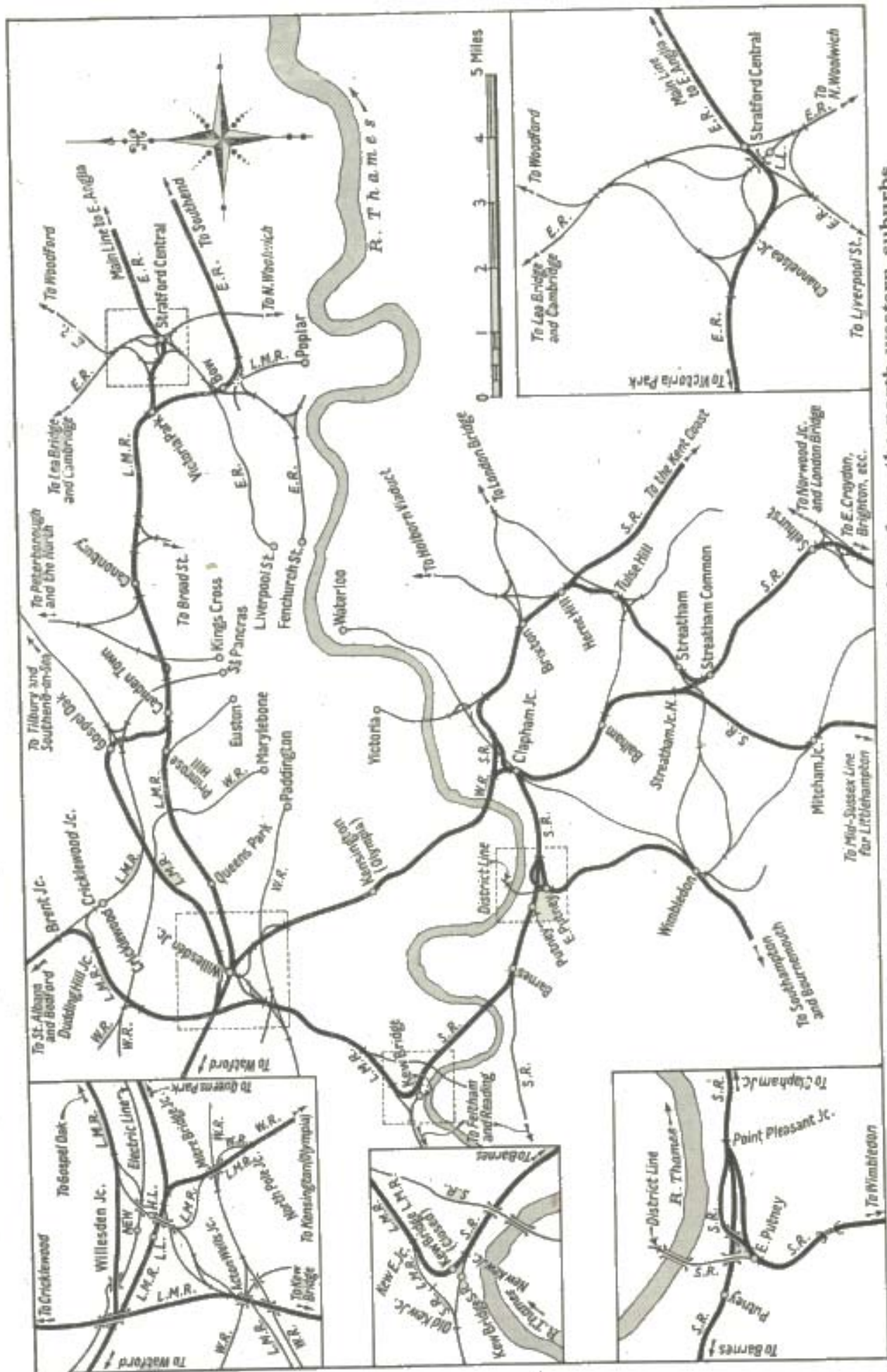


Diagram of connections in the Battersea area, with excursion routes in thick lines

and West London Extension lines between Willesden and Clapham Junction, which run *via* Kensington (Olympia) and cross the Thames at Chelsea. At its southern end the Extension "fans out" to give connections westward and eastward. Trains for the Brighton direction run under the main lines from Waterloo and Victoria, then curve sharply west to pass through the extreme south side of Clapham Junction Station before joining the main running lines. From here the normal routes to Brighton, Bexhill, and Hastings are available. The Littlehampton excursions do not serve Worthing and may diverge from the main Balham-

to Wimbledon. The excursions diverge at the eastern approach to Wimbledon Station on to the main line from Waterloo.

Originally the eastward connection from the West London Extension near Clapham Junction to the Brighton line at Longhedge Junction served only to bring trains into Victoria. With the two curves mentioned already, and one joining the line to Waterloo (now taken up), it was brought into service on March 2, 1863. The Waterloo connection was removed in 1937, as for many years it had been but rarely used. On March 1, 1866, the London & South Western Railway opened a line from Ludgate



Cross-London routes (in thick lines) of seaside excursions from the north-western suburbs

Junction, Clapham, to the London, Chatham & Dover Railway at Factory Junction. This runs parallel for some distance with the West London Extension line to Longhedge, and a cross-over between the two enables trains from the West London to reach Factory Junction and the main line from Victoria to the Kent Coast. Tracing all these connections "on site" while travelling between Waterloo or Victoria and Clapham Junction is a troublesome business, the position being complicated by the manner in which the present high level approaches to

reach the Brighton line by way of Factory Junction, Brixton, Herne Hill, and the spur to Tulse Hill, the main line from Victoria to East Croydon, and onwards, being joined at Streatham Common.

Compared with these North-South connections, the routing of trains across London to reach the Clacton and Southend lines is relatively straightforward. Usually the route of the normal Watford-Broad Street service is followed to Canonbury, after which the trains continue along the eastern half of the old North London



Photo]

[K. A. C. R. Nunn

Watford to Clacton through excursion train leaving Channelsea Junction, Stratford, headed by Eastern Region "B1" class 4-6-0 locomotive No. 61252. The detached London Midland Region engine, class "5" 4-6-0 No. 45092, is on the left

Victoria from the Brighton and Kent Coast lines cross and re-cross the original low-level routes into the terminus.

Although this article is concerned mainly with excursions to the seaside from former L.N.W.R. suburban stations, mention of the Clapham Junction to Factory Junction line recalls its use by excursions from the L.M.R. Midland Division to the Brighton line. These trains leave the main line to St. Pancras at Brent Junction, and after crossing the Western Division main line west of Willesden Junction, run on to the one-time North & South Western Junction Railway from Willesden Junction to Kew Bridge. This brings the excursions through Clapham Junction in the west to east direction, and they

system instead of turning south through Dalston Junction to the City terminus. At Victoria Park there is a facing connection with an Eastern Region line to Stratford, while at Bow a spur turns off to join the Fenchurch Street-Southend Central line (now also in the Eastern Region).

The Southend and Clacton trains in 1951 were booked to call at Queens Park, where there are platforms on the slow steam lines. A demonstration prefabricated station building erected on the up side during the war probably advertised their existence for the first time to many travellers accustomed to thinking of Queens Park as an all-electric station, but this structure has now been

removed. A few seats and nameboards are the only indications that passengers once trod these normally deserted platforms and now do so again on excursion days. Access is by means of a footbridge connecting with the electric side of the station.

While the routing on to the North London line *via* Camden No. 2 enables trains to call at Queens Park, it is possible to by-pass the Willesden-Camden section by leaving the main line west of Willesden Station. This connection crosses over the electric lines and passes outside the platforms at Willesden Junction New Station, eventually linking up with the route of the electric service from Willesden High Level to Broad Street *via* Gospel Oak (Hampstead Junction line). On some occasions, when excursions to Southend or East Anglia are not booked to pick up at Queens Park, they use this alternative route, which joins the line from Camden No. 2 between Primrose Hill and Camden Town Stations. There is also a curve from the electric line east of Willesden Junction (New Station) to join the High Level line in the Broad Street direction, but it is not used for steam workings.

Locomotives for the seaside excursions are provided by Willesden shed. Those on the Southend trains work right through and therefore must be equipped with the A.T.C. apparatus installed on that line. Willesden has a number of Class "5" 2-6-0s and Class "4F" 0-6-0s fitted in this way, as well as crews who work over the Southend road on regular goods turns. Class "5" 4-6-0s are most frequently used on the other trains.

Willesden engines have on some occasions worked through to Clacton (picking up an Eastern Region conductor at Channelsea Junction, Stratford), and sometimes to the South Coast. In 1951, one Willesden driver worked to Brighton without a Southern Region conductor, but other crews were accompanied. On other occasions a Southern locomotive and crew take over the train at Willesden. "Battle of Britain" Pacifics came into Willesden on the Herne Bay and Margate excursions in 1951, and on June 27 last the writer saw Brighton Atlantic No. 32425, *Trevoise Head*, waiting on the Watford side of Willesden to back on to a special excursion for Hastings.

The seaside excursions attract passengers from a wide area. They are booked to pick up at Bushey, Harrow, Wembley, and Willesden, and cheap fares are available from intermediate and adjoining stations. Monthly programmes are issued in leaflet form and displayed as posters. Separate posters advertising individual excursions are also published, and announcements are made regularly in the local press.

Overall timings from Watford vary according to circumstances, but are approximately 2½ hr. to Brighton and Southend, 2½ hr. to Eastbourne, 2¾ hr. to Littlehampton, and 3 hr. to Clacton and Margate. In comparing these times with journeys *via* London, allowance must be made for the fact that in the latter case about half-an-hour would be added to the actual journey by most travellers to allow for changing and finding a seat at the terminus. Apart from any advantage in time there is no doubt that the fact of having a through train from the local station reminds many that the coast is not so far away after all, and there is no need to wait for the annual holiday before spending a Sunday by the sea.

This article has dealt mainly with one particular group of seaside excursions. There are, of course, many other regular seasonal workings from different parts of the London suburban area, some of them using sections of the routes described and others routed over less familiar connections. Last summer, for example, an excursion from Enfield to Brighton *via* Lea Bridge reversed outside Liverpool Street in order to pass under the Thames by the East London line to New Cross Gate. Football excursions prolong interest in workings of this kind through the winter months, with the added attraction of taking locomotives far off their usual beats. For the collector of railway literature, handbills advertising dates, times, and stopping places of seasonal excursions form an interesting study.

In preparing this article the writer was indebted to the assistance of the Public Relations & Publicity Departments of the London Midland and Southern Regions, and to the collaboration of Mr. K. A. C. R. Nunn, several of whose photographs are reproduced on other pages.

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Photo]

[E. G. Dott

**Bedford to Brighton excursion train at Kew Bridge
London Midland Region class "4F" 0-6-0 locomotive No. 43967**



Photo]

[K. A. C. R. Nunn

**Watford to Hastings through excursion leaving Willesden Junction
Southern Region "N" class 2-6-0 locomotive No. 31410**



Watford to Margate through excursion train at Willesden Junction
Southern Region "West Country" class Pacific No. 34068, "Kenley"



Photos]

[K. A. C. R. Nunn

Watford to Clacton excursion passing Colchester, Eastern Region
London Midland Region class "5" 4-6-0 locomotive No. 44663