

The S.R. at Midhurst

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IN the year 1860, it seemed probable that the small town of Midhurst, in north-west Sussex, would become a railway centre of some importance. The London Brighton & South Coast Railway had opened its branch from Three Bridges to Horsham on February 14, 1848, and this had been extended some 17 miles, to Petworth, on October 15, 1859. Eventually, the 13 miles from Horsham to Hardham Junction, near Pulborough, became part of the L.B.S.C.R. Mid-Sussex line to Portsmouth. Shortly before the extension to Petworth was opened, the Mid-Sussex & Midhurst Junction Railway was authorised on August 13, 1859, from Petworth to Midhurst, a distance of 6 miles. This line underwent some revision near Midhurst before it was opened on October 15, 1866, and worked by the L.B.S.C.R.

It had been proposed to extend the railway for 9 miles beyond Midhurst, to join the newly-opened direct Portsmouth line of the London & South Western Railway, at Petersfield, but this was considered a violation of the territorial agreement between the L.B.S.C.R. and the L.S.W.R. The line was therefore placed in the hands of the Petersfield Railway Company, which obtained its Act on July 23, 1860. In 1861, three schemes were launched for a railway from Petersfield to Southampton, but two of the Bills, supported by the L.S.W.R., failed to reach Parliament. The third, promoted by the Petersfield Railway, was rejected in the Commons, although the company obtained powers to provide its own station in Petersfield. A renewed threat of competition at Southampton led to the amalgamation of the Petersfield Railway with the L.S.W.R., some 14 months before the railway from Midhurst to Petersfield was opened on September 1, 1864.

In 1860, both the Mid-Sussex & Midhurst Junction and the Petersfield railways sought powers to make an amended line from the east end of Midhurst tunnel to the Petersfield Railway, at Bepton Road, on the outskirts of Midhurst, and the former was successful. Separate stations were provided for the two railways, on opposite sides of the Bepton Road, but the connecting line,

opened on December 17, 1866, was used solely for the transfer of goods vehicles, drawn by a horse, as the bridge over the road was not strong enough to carry the weight of a locomotive.

Meantime, a railway had been authorised from Chichester to Midhurst on June 23, 1864, and powers to extend the line to join the L.S.W.R., at Haslemere, had been obtained on July 5, 1865. Although the first sod of the railway to Chichester was cut, with appropriate ceremony, on April 22, 1865, the financial crash of 1866 prevented the construction of these lines, and an Act for the abandonment of the Haslemere extension was obtained in 1868. The remainder of the scheme lay dormant until it was revived by the L.B.S.C.R. Act of July 13, 1876. A subsequent Act authorised a deviation at Midhurst, which made the junction with the older line face towards Horsham, instead of towards the terminus. This alteration necessitated the removal of the L.B.S.C.R. station to its present site, nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the east of the L.S.W.R. station.

The railway to Chichester, and the new station at Midhurst, were opened on July 11, 1881. The original L.B.S.C.R. station was then demolished. The distance by road between the two stations was nearly a mile, and persistent complaints were received from passengers who had missed their connections. In February, 1892, an Inquiry was held before the Railway Commissioners, but very little improvement resulted, and a proposed covered way between the two stations was never built.

The L.S.W.R. station was closed on July 12, 1925, and all passenger traffic concentrated at the L.B.S.C.R. station. The L.S.W.R. goods shed was retained in use, but the disused station buildings were converted into two dwelling houses, and the rails were removed from the platform line. On July 6, 1935, the passenger services were withdrawn between Midhurst and Chichester, and the connections at Midhurst improved. At present, there are eight through services between Pulborough and Petersfield on weekdays, and four on Sundays, although some of the trains wait a considerable time at Midhurst.

The Southern Railway at Midhurst

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A photograph taken at Singleton in 1880, showing a construction train on the Chichester and Midhurst line, L.B.S.C.R., hauled by the Contractor's engine "Fred"



Photo]

[A. C. M. Clements

Midhurst Station, L.S.W.R., from the west, showing the connecting line to the L.B.S.C.R. station on the left. The station buildings have been converted into dwelling houses