

The Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction Railway

By J. SPENCER GILKS



Photo]

[M. W. Earley

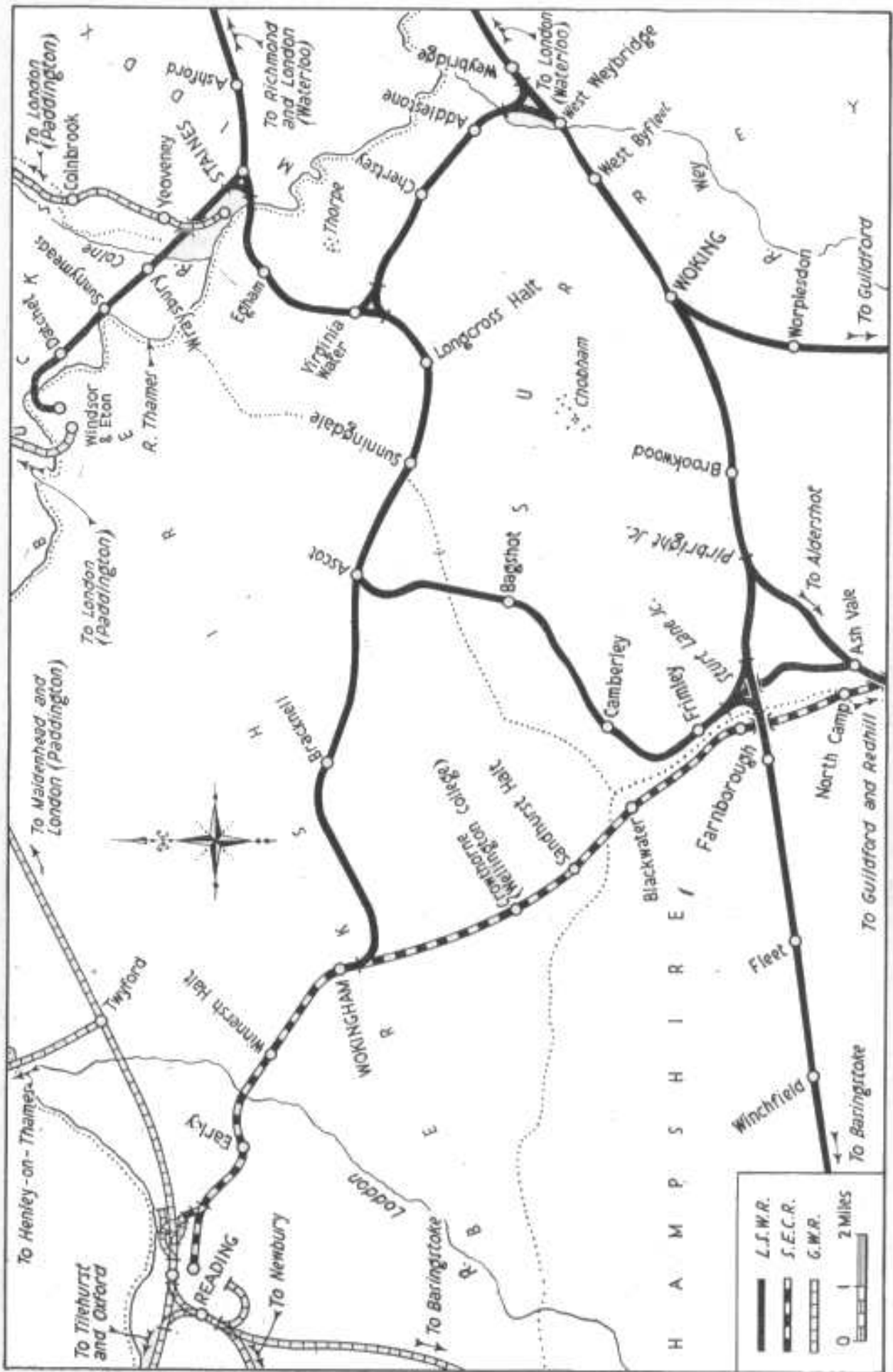
Electric train from Waterloo to Reading leaving Wokingham

THE story of the eighteen-mile railway from Staines, in Middlesex, to Wokingham, in Berkshire, which reached its centenary this year, begins in 1845. The railways then bordering the area concerned were the Great Western main line from London to Reading, on the north, and the London & South Western main line to Southampton, with its branch from Woking to Guildford, on the south. The only other relevant line from London stopped short at Richmond, and it was from there that the first significant extensions were planned.

In 1845, no less than six plans were deposited for railways crossing the country between Staines and Wokingham. The Richmond, Staines & Newbury Junction Railway, 37 miles in length, was projected from Richmond to Wokingham, much as the line runs today, but then continued due west to Newbury, avoiding Reading. The question of providing railway communication for the town of Newbury

already had caused friction between the L.S.W.R. and the G.W.R. in the Parliamentary session of 1844, and it is not surprising that the Great Western put forward an alternative scheme for a London, Staines, Ascot & Reading Junction Railway, from its main line at Old Oak Common, through Shepherds Bush, Hounslow and Staines, and thence to Reading *via* Wokingham.

To prove more important than these fruitless schemes were the three proposals of 1845 relating to a railway from Reading to Reigate, which were to result in the line from Wokingham to Reading, and thereby the foundation for the later Staines and Wokingham link. At the same time, plans were deposited for "an intended branch from the L.S.W.R. at Weybridge to the towns of Chertsey and Staines," which was to pass through Chertsey and Thorpe and terminate on the site of the present roundabout on the Surrey side of Staines Bridge. This



The railway from Staines to Wokingham and its associated lines, showing pre-grouping ownerships

was opened as far as the old station at Chertsey, on the eastern side of Guildford Road, in February, 1848.

Meantime, the year 1846 had witnessed the authorisation of the Reading, Guildford & Reigate Railway, and the submission of further schemes by the Great Western. These were for a railway from the main line just east of Hanger Lane, Ealing, through Hounslow to Staines, and terminating at Egham near the present Eclipse Inn. Branches were projected from Brentford to the docks, and from Syon Lane, Isleworth, to Twickenham. The plans were prepared by Brunel.

In 1847, the Windsor, Staines & South Western Railway was authorised from Richmond to Windsor with a branch from Staines to Wokingham. Both lines were virtually on the present route. Powers also were granted for a branch from the Wokingham line near Knowle, six miles from Staines, through Chobham, to the then 28th milepost on the L.S.W.R. near Brookwood, a distance of thirteen miles, and for another from a triangle at Virginia Water to Chertsey, to connect with the Weybridge branch (still authorised to proceed independently to Staines Bridge). Only the Windsor line was built at this time, and was opened through Staines to Datchet in 1848. In the following year, the line from Reading through Wokingham to Guildford and Reigate (Redhill) was brought into use in sections.

In 1851, the Staines and Woking Railway was proposed from the L.S.W.R. at Staines to Woking, *via* Egham and Virginia Water. The next year, the present line from Staines to Wokingham was projected as the Staines, Wokingham and Woking Junction Railway; the engineers were James Rendel and John Gardiner. The earlier branch to Chertsey was omitted, and that to Brookwood amended to run from Knowle *via* Chobham to the L.S.W.R. at Woking, near the junction of the Guildford branch, and avoiding Woking Station.

The board of the new company, whose coat of arms significantly included those of Guildford, as well as London, Wokingham and Reading, met on October 22, 1852, and received a letter from the L.S.W.R. promising support for the venture, and outlining proposals for working the line on behalf of the company. This decision was reaffirmed in the following April, when it was also agreed

that the L.S.W.R. should afford the Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction the use of its London terminus and intermediate stations.

The railway from Staines to Wokingham, and the branch to Woking were authorised on July 8, 1853. On September 18 following, the company's solicitor was instructed to prepare a contract for the construction of the line, and to register an extension from Reading to Oxford. The latter was prompted, no doubt, by the feud then raging between the G.W.R. and the London & North Western Railway, both of which were anxious to monopolise Oxford, and to connect with the newly opened Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton Railway. The Chairman subsequently had interviews with the Chairman of the South Eastern Railway (November, 1854) and of the Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton (January, 1855) regarding an alternative suggestion that a short line only should be built at Reading, to connect the narrow-gauge line from Wokingham with the mixed-gauge tracks that the G.W.R. was bound, under the Shrewsbury Amalgamation Act of 1854, to lay between Oxford and Basingstoke, which would pass only a mile west of Reading Station. This connection would have been adequate for through traffic from the new line to the north and west, but little further progress was made until the end of 1856.

Tenders for the construction of the line had been accepted from a Mr. McCormick, and for the station and ancillary buildings from Oades & Son. As the result of constant friction with the board, John Gardiner was replaced as Engineer on July 9, 1855, by John Hawkshaw, whose first action was to improve the curves at the junctions at Staines and Wokingham. At this time, too, protests were made by local inhabitants alleging that the eastern pier of the bridge over the river at Staines had been incorrectly sited and jutted into Laleham Road. There appears to have been good reason for the protest (then overruled), for Laleham Road still narrows today on passing under the line.

On May 31, 1856, Colonel Wynn of the Board of Trade travelled from Staines to Ascot, and expressed his satisfaction at the state of the line, which was opened on June 4. At the same time, a letter was received from the S.E.R. stating

that the junction at Wokingham was now complete and asking permission to run trains from Reading during Ascot races. As the permanent way was not finished beyond Ascot this was impossible, however, and the offer had to be declined. This section was approved by the Board of Trade on June 25 and opened throughout on July 9, 1856. The *Reading Mercury* of July 12 mentions the opening very briefly as follows:—

On Wednesday morning this line was opened, but the carriages went off with very light loads; this, we apprehend, may be attributable to the scale of fares, which, as regards the transit from Reading to London exceeds that of the Great Western and nearly doubles that of the South Eastern. It is true that the distance from Reading to Waterloo Bridge is accomplished in rather under two hours, which may be great accommodation to some, as the tedious omnibus travelling is avoided from Paddington to the Strand.

In November, negotiations were resumed between the Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction and the G.W.R. regarding the proposed connecting line at Reading, when the latter indicated that it would not oppose the scheme. It did, however, oppose a similar plan of the S.E.R. for a line running south of the G.W.R. Reading Station and joining the narrow-gauge rails on the western curve of the triangle near Tilehurst, and secured its defeat in Parliament.

The same session saw the passage of the Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction scheme, on condition that that company should lay the line from the narrow-gauge rails of the G.W.R. at Tilehurst to the South Eastern only if the G.W.R. did not within a year make such a line to a point east of its Reading Station. In the latter event the Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction might only complete the connecting link. The G.W.R. preferred to do the work, and laid the required line on the north side of its metals from the junction of the Basingstoke loop, past the station and down to ground level, where it curved to pass under the main line and join the short branch laid by the Staines Company from the S.E.R. This was opened for traffic in December, 1858.

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memorial was received from the inhabitants of Chobham urging the company to exercise its powers. In March, a deputation was received from that neighbourhood and informed that there was still two years before the powers lapsed, and that the necessary work would only take six months to complete. In October, it was agreed that an application should be made to Parliament for an extension of the period in which to complete the branch. Renewed efforts were made towards its implementation when, on November 30, the board approved revised plans to enable to branch to join the L.S.W.R. further to the east at Woking (thus entering the station) and these were hastily deposited with the Clerk of the Peace for Surrey the same evening. Nothing came of this amended scheme, and the line to Woking was not built.

On July 12, 1858, an Act for leasing the Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction to the L.S.W.R. received the Royal Assent, and the lease was sealed on October 28. A month later, the L.S.W.R. formally accepted responsibility for the maintenance of the line. The lease remained in force until the company was absorbed by the L.S.W.R. in 1878. In June, 1858, an agreement had been entered with the G.W.R. and S.E.R. regarding fares to be charged between Reading and London, which by this time had reached such ridiculously low levels as to be damaging to the companies concerned. Henceforth, the receipts were to be pooled, the Great Western taking roughly two-thirds of the passenger revenue and the other two companies between them two-thirds of that from goods, after allowing for working expenses.

Plans for an Egham & Woking Railway over the route from Knowle were prepared by John Hawkshaw and deposited in November, 1859, and the proposal received the assent of the directors in December. Three years later, however, they decided to remain neutral, when Bills were promoted for a West Drayton, Staines & Chertsey Railway (running direct from Staines to Chertsey *via* Thorpe), and for a West Drayton, Staines & Woking Junction Railway. The latter affected the Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction in so far as working agreements were required to enable its trains to run over that line from a point 43 ch. east of Staines Station to the

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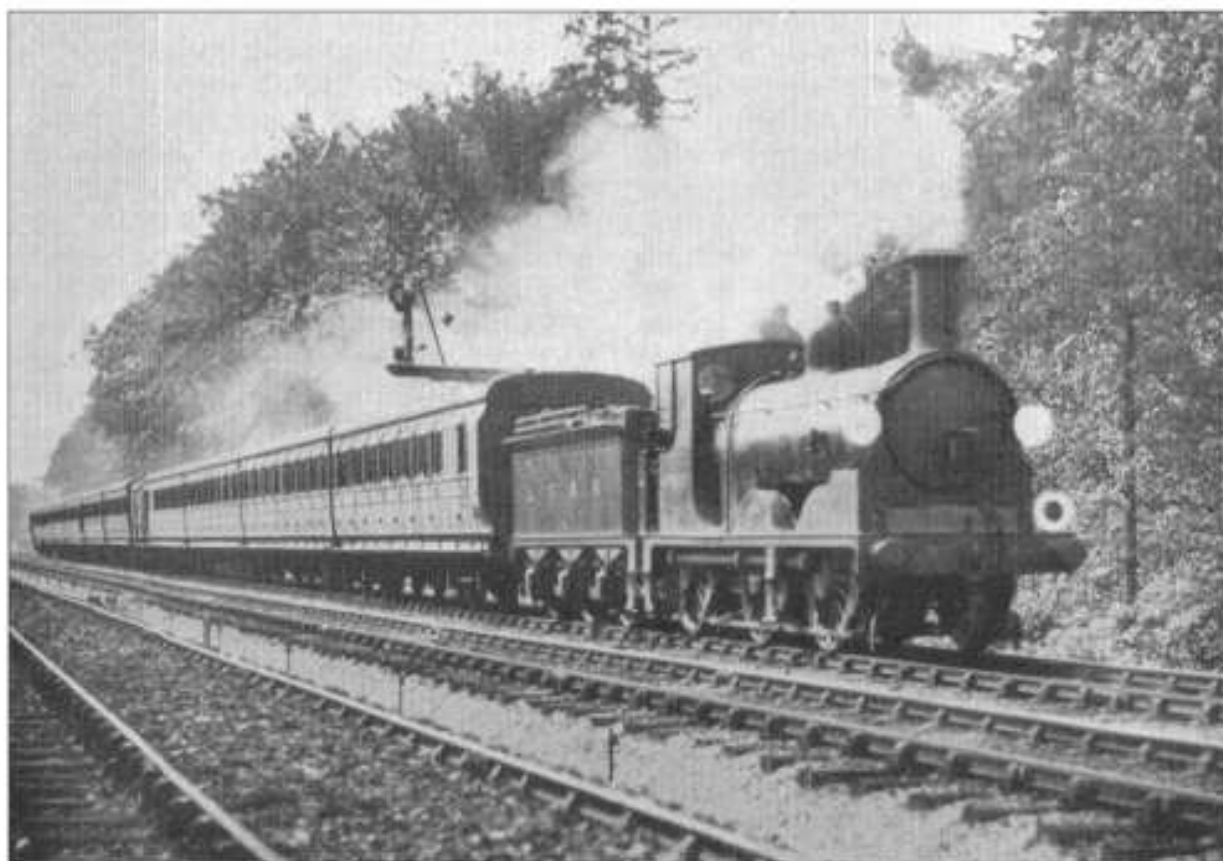
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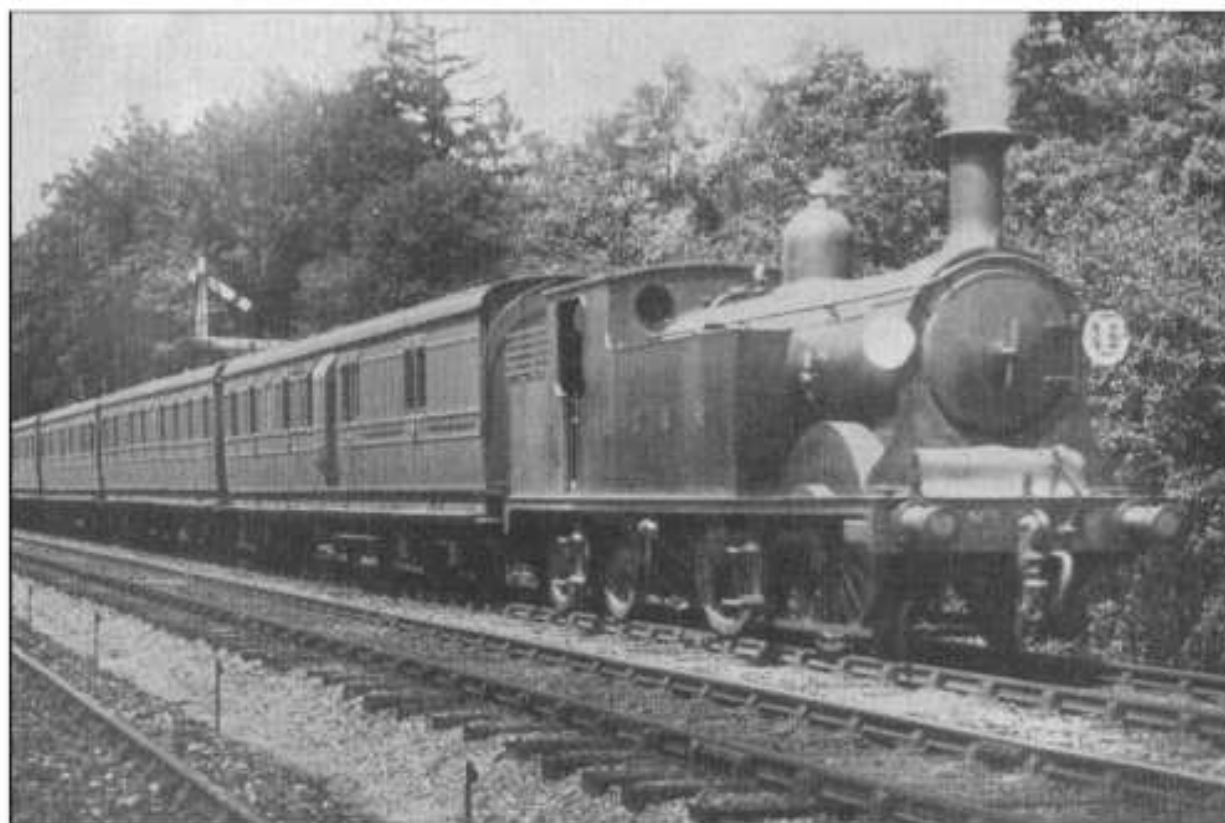
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Empty stock for a return race special, hauled by Drummond 0-6-0 No. 692, passing Earley, on its way from Reading to Ascot in June, 1924



Photos

[M. W. Earley

The 12.18 p.m. train from Reading to Waterloo leaving Earley in June, 1924, with class "M7" 0-4-4 tank engine No. 324

special visit to the site in March, 1856, before it was finally selected. Thirteen years later, the board were to receive a letter from a Mr. J. A. Arbuthnot stating that improvements were needed at the station estimated to cost over £70, and that local passengers were willing to meet half this amount if the railway would agree to make a similar contribution. This offer was declined by the L.S.W.R. There appears to have been some delay in completing the station to serve Trotsworth (Virginia Water), for the erection of a temporary station was authorised there in June, 1856.

In November, 1870, plans were deposited for a Windsor, Ascot & Aldershot Railway which would have crossed the Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction at Ascot Station. The L.S.W.R. was opposed to the project, and assisted the Staines Company in petitioning against it. At the same time the board's attention was drawn to the inconvenience caused to city gentlemen by the absence of trains from London between 4.45 and 6.35 in the evening and it was resolved "that in order to prevent the promotion of any more competitive schemes of railway in opposition to the Staines, Wokingham & Woking Junction, the general manager of the L.S.W.R. be requested to give such further passenger trains as shall meet the wishes of the Windsor, Ascot & Aldershot Railway Company." Indirectly the L.S.W.R. obliged by reviving in 1873 part of the route of the Windsor proposal and of the earlier Sunningdale & Cambridge Town Railways as a section of its branch from Ascot to Ash Vale, and thereby operated additional trains to Ascot. The section from Ascot to Sturt Lane Junction was opened on March 18, 1878.

This effort apparently did not have the desired effect for in 1881 and 1883 respectively two more schemes were forthcoming in the area, namely, the Windsor, Aldershot & Portsmouth Railway, which crossed the Staines line at Bracknell Station, whence a branch was planned to a terminus opposite the Royal Ascot Hotel, and the Windsor & Aldershot Railway which would have passed through Ascot. Only one more scheme remains to be mentioned, and this also was in 1883, when the Staines, Chertsey & Woking Railway was promoted from an independent terminus in

Staines (with connection to the new G.W.R. branch to West Drayton) to a point 200 yd. east of the 24th milepost on the L.S.W.R. at Woking, with running powers from there to Guildford. The line was to have had its own bridge over the Thames at Staines, and to run direct to Chertsey *via* Thorpe before crossing the branch there and heading south through Woodham.

Some mention must now be made of the motive power in use on the Staines and Wokingham line over the years. Before 1914, the Reading to Waterloo trains were mostly hauled by the Drummond "M7" class 0-4-4 tanks, but Adams type 4-4-2 tanks were also frequently in evidence on various turns. In addition "Jubilee" 0-4-2s were to be seen occasionally. After the first world war, and before the grouping took place, the Adams 4-4-2 tanks became rare and were to be found more often on push-and-pull services on surrounding branch lines. The Urie 4-6-2 tanks worked into Reading with goods trains from Feltham yard almost as soon as they appeared on the line, and were sometimes replaced by the companion 4-8-0 tanks which did humping duty at Feltham. After the grouping, many Drummond mixed-traffic 4-4-0 tender engines were tried on this route and also a few of the rebuilt Stirling 4-4-0s of class "F" from the South Eastern & Chatham Section. In the main, however, the class "M7" 0-4-4 tanks remained the most predominant locomotive type on the Waterloo-Reading services. The Ascot race meetings provided some interesting motive power, including Drummond 0-6-0s, and, at one time the regular appearance of the only superheated 0-4-4 tank, No. 126. Steam power was to be superseded in due course by electric traction over the entire line, although the section between Wokingham and Reading still retains a regular service of steam trains to and from Redhill.

Electric trains first operated to Staines and Windsor on July 6, 1930. At that time, the Reading line had approximately an hourly service of trains. An unusual working in the summer timetables for 1936 was a connection at Ascot with a train at 11.58 a.m. to Winchfield, *via* Frimley, and to Basingstoke on Saturdays (arr. 12.59 p.m.). Then on January 3,

1937, the line between Staines and Virginia Water was electrified and trains began to run through to the Chertsey branch. Finally, on July 2, 1939, the remaining sections to Ascot and to Reading and Ash Vale were completed, and electric traction reigned supreme.

Today there is a half-hourly service of trains which nearly all run non-stop from Waterloo to Staines, and then call at all stations, half the train running from Ascot to Reading and the other half branching south to Aldershot and Guildford. This regular service is augmented during race meetings at Ascot. Then not only are additional trains operated from London, some *via* the west curve at Virginia Water and others *via* the east curve at Sturt Lane, Farnborough, but

also from the West Country, *via* the Sturt Lane west curve, and from the Western Region main line, *via* the spur at Reading. The latter terminate at Ascot West Station which is used only on such occasions. On race days, the up line between Ascot B Box up main inner home signals and No. 11 crossover road at Ascot West Station is used for the berthing of empty trains and single-line working is put into force on the down line. In addition, a race platform to the west of Ascot Station, and on the up line only, is used for passenger purposes.

In conclusion the author wishes to record his thanks for the assistance he has received in the preparation of this article from the Archivist of the British Transport Commission, the Public Relations Officer of the Southern Region, the Editor of the *Reading Mercury*, Mr. M. W. Earley and Mr. W. Potter.