

The Bordon Branch, Southern Region

By G. L. HUXLEY



Photo]

[A. S. Parkinson

Bentley Station from the west in June, 1951. The bay platform for the Bordon trains is on the right

THE early years of the present century witnessed the expansion of several garrisons in the South of England, many of them in the area served by the London & South Western Railway. Among these was Bordon, which was without the railway facilities so important to any military centre in the event of mobilisation. Moreover, the construction of a military tramway between Bordon and Longmoor, a camp four miles to the south, made the establishment of a railway connection at Bordon particularly necessary. This tramway is now the Longmoor Military Railway.

On October 6, 1902, the L.S.W.R. obtained a Light Railway Order for a branch, 4½ miles long, from its Farnham-Alton line, at Bentley, to a point about ¼ mile west of Bordon. The railway, which was single throughout, was opened on December 11, 1905. An intermediate halt was established at Kingsley, some distance from the village of that name, and sufficient land purchased for the construction of a station and goods yard, but these never materialised.

Bentley Station originally consisted of a single-line crossing loop and goods yard. The signalbox was at the west end of the down platform, and had a 12-lever frame. The line between Farnham and Butts Junction, Alton, was doubled on June 2, 1901, and this necessitated the

construction of a new signalbox at the Farnham end of the down platform at Bentley. This box, now used as a lamp room, was short-lived, as a third box was constructed at the junction for the opening of the branch four years later. Bentley Station thus had three signalboxes in the course of five years.

The present signalbox has a 33-lever frame, and is equipped with Preece two-position instruments for the main line, and a Tyer's No. 6 tablet instrument for the branch. Originally the branch was worked on the one-engine-in-steam principle, but this method has now been abolished. The down distant signal was not moved when the present box was built, and the signalman has to make a pull just over 1,900 yd. to clear the arm. The crossover at the east end of the station is operated by a ground frame released from the signalbox.

The station buildings, situated on the up platform, remain as they were at the turn of the century, apart from the addition of a canopy. The down platform was extended past the site of the old signalbox to form a bay for the branch trains, which have to use the main line for some 300 yd. until the junction is reached. The signalling for up trains is so arranged that they terminate at the up platform, and then shunt back on to the down line to obtain access to the bay road. Branch passenger trains

The Bordon Branch



Bordon Station from the buffer stops in June, 1951



Photos]

[A. S. Parkinson

Train from Bentley, headed by "M7" class 0-4-4 tank engine No. 30056, entering Kingsley Halt. Level crossings on the branch have no gates, but are equipped with cattle grids, as shown in the foreground

are therefore timed to arrive when neither an up nor a down train is due. The Alton-Waterloo electric service runs at half-hourly intervals throughout the day, and as only one platform line at Alton has been electrified, down trains have to be held at Bentley, when additional trains are run.

On leaving the main line, the branch curves round to the south, and climbs on a gradient of 1 in 156 through a cutting. The level crossing at Blacknest is then reached. In common with the others on the branch, it has no gates, but is equipped with cattle grids. Beyond Blacknest, the railway falls gradually to



Kingsley Halt. This is a single platform without a shelter, and is situated on the east side of the line.

The branch runs through cultivated land, and beside outlying parts of Alice Holt Forest, in which there are some very old trees. Beyond Kingsley the line passes over several bridges, and, after a slight ascent, falls again at 1 in 145. The final climb into Bordon Station is at 1 in 105, preceded by a slightly easier gradient. At Marshe's Crossing a road crosses both the Longmoor Military Railway (originally the Woolmer Instructional Military Railway) and the branch, just before the station is entered.

Bordon Station has remained almost unaltered since L.S.W.R. days, and consists of a single platform on which are situated the station buildings, and a goods yard. It is capable of handling

the fluctuating traffic typical of military lines. Bordon signalbox is virtually an enlarged ground frame of 20 levers. A marker light is provided in place of a distant signal, and the signals are all of L.S.W.R. origin. The station for the Longmoor Military Railway adjoins the Southern Region station on the east side. It has a single platform, runround loops, a goods yard, and a signalbox with a double-wire frame. The Southern Region goods yard is extensive, and hand-worked points connect it with the military yard. These points are released by facing point locks operated from the signalbox. There is also an independent crossover worked by a ground frame, from which there is telephone communication with the signalbox.

Freight is exchanged daily with the military railway, though this has fallen off considerably since the end of the second world war. Troop trains also work through to Longmoor occasionally, and these are handled by W.D. locomotives beyond Bordon, where reversal is necessary. Except for workings of a purely military nature, traffic on the branch is light; nevertheless, a service of about ten trains is provided on weekdays, and seven on Sundays.

Passenger trains are worked by a Class "M7" 0-4-4 tank locomotive with a two-coach pull-and-push set. The engine is normally shedded at Guildford, and Bordon engine shed has now been abandoned. Freight trains are normally worked in from Farnham by a Bulleid Class "Q1" 0-6-0, or a Class "N" 2-6-0, and sometimes by a Drummond "700" class 0-6-0. It is of interest to note that Drummond steam railcars, Nos. 14 and 15, were used on the branch for a time, and showed a fair turn of speed. They were later renumbered 4214 and 4215, and were withdrawn in 1916. They hauled trailer coaches on occasions, and possessed an adequate reserve of power.

Traffic has fallen off considerably of late, and closure of the branch is being contemplated. It would, however, be necessary to continue the freight service to meet military requirements. The frequency of the passenger service on the Portsmouth Direct line probably would preclude the exchange of heavy freight traffic with the Longmoor Military Railway *via* the existing connection at Liss.