

The First West End Terminus

By CHARLES E. LEE



Pimlico terminus, from a woodcut in "The Illustrated News of the World" of April 10, 1858

IN the year 1857, more than 13½ million passengers passed through London Bridge Station, namely, 6,062,716 on the Brighton side and 7,509,765 on the South Eastern. Parliament in its wisdom had decreed in the early days of railways that there should be only one outlet to the south and south-east, and, therefore, all such traffic approached London over the viaduct of the London & Greenwich Railway. At the time London Bridge Station was opened, on December 14, 1836, there had been little development in what became known as the West End, but progress was rapid after the site of Belgravia had been drained, the level raised and attractively laid out by Thomas Cubitt.

When Bricklayers Arms Station was opened, on May 1, 1844, one of the facilities offered was the avoidance of "the inconveniences and loss of time arising from passing through the city, from or to the West End of London." As a passenger station, however, it proved a failure, as was shown in the articles by Canon Reginald B. Fellows in *The Railway Magazine* of July-August and September-October, 1944, and it was virtually closed to passenger traffic at the end of October, 1846, although South Eastern Railway boat connections and some suburban trains lasted until the beginning of 1852. By 1857 street traffic congestion had assumed alarming proportions, and on May 1 of that year

the *Journal of the Society of Arts* commented that "your occupant of the knife-board of a Clapham omnibus will stick on London Bridge for half-an-hour with scarcely a murmur." Another Press comment said "every year the London traffic increases, and unless its stations increase the crowding must."

There was thus an admitted need for a West End main-line terminus for railways from the south, and this was provided exactly one hundred years ago with the opening of the 3 mile 20 ch. section of line from Wandsworth to a terminal station called Pimlico, although it was actually in Battersea on the south side of the River Thames. The owning company was the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway, the history of which was outlined in *The Railway Magazine* as recently as October, 1956. It is, therefore, sufficient here to recall that the enterprise was a direct outcome of the removal to Sydenham of the Crystal Palace from its Great Exhibition site in Hyde Park.

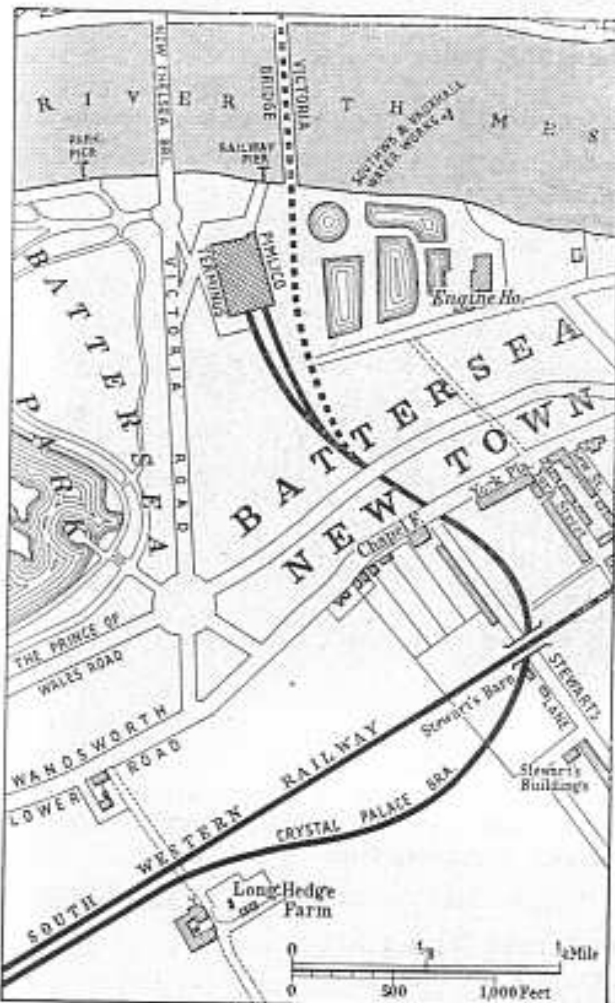
The railway company was an independent promotion, incorporated on August 4, 1853, and believed in financial circles to have as its object the occupation of strategic territory with a view to profitable sale to one of the existing railways. When the first section (Crystal Palace to Wandsworth Common) was opened, it was worked by the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway, but efforts were

made to interest other companies. Nearly 22 acres of land were acquired from the Crown for the intended Pimlico terminus, at the foot of a new road bridge then being built across the Thames, and it was said that the station "would thus possess an area and approaches second to none of the metropolitan railways." However, at the half-yearly meeting of the West End company, on February 25, 1858, the Chairman, Samuel Beale, M.P., said that a temporary station had

began on the Monday (March 29) in time for the Easter traffic; Easter Day fell on April 4. The announcement said that the inhabitants of Belgravia, Westminster, Kensington, and adjacent localities would thereby be enabled, from the "Riverside Terminus," at the foot of Chelsea new suspension bridge, to reach Brighton in one hour and a quarter, and Dover and Portsmouth in two hours and a half. *Herapath's Journal*, in recording the opening, said that the terminus "was much admired for its spaciousness, convenient design, and economical construction." Chelsea Bridge had been opened only a few days earlier, on March 26, and gave the appropriate road access to Pimlico Station.

From the temporary terminus at Wandsworth Common, the new portion of line formed a curve to the London & South Western Railway, alongside which it ran on a level for a distance of about a quarter of a mile, when it gradually descended, and, by means of a curve, passed under the South Western Railway to the Pimlico terminus. A few months earlier, on October 1, 1857, a link of 1 mile 19 ch. had been opened from Crystal Palace to Norwood Junction, crossing the main Brighton line to London Bridge by a flyover, and enabling trains from the south to run direct to the West End line. By this means, L.B.S.C.R. main-line traffic used Pimlico from its opening. There were three independent through trains daily from Pimlico to Brighton, and six others with through carriages or connections, linking up with London Bridge departures for Brighton. These were separate from the local Pimlico to London Bridge service, with 18 stopping trains each way on weekdays, and 11 on Sundays, and seven fast trains each way on weekdays. Despite the mention of Dover in the opening announcement, Pimlico accommodated no S.E.R. traffic, excepting as a connection with L.B.S.C.R. trains, although in the following August Samuel Beale said that negotiations with the S.E.R. continued, and he hoped that that company would use Pimlico for its long-distance traffic.

Pimlico had the shortest life as a main-line terminus of any London station, if we except the temporary Kings Cross at Maiden Lane, which functioned only from August 7, 1850, until the permanent station was opened on October 14, 1852.



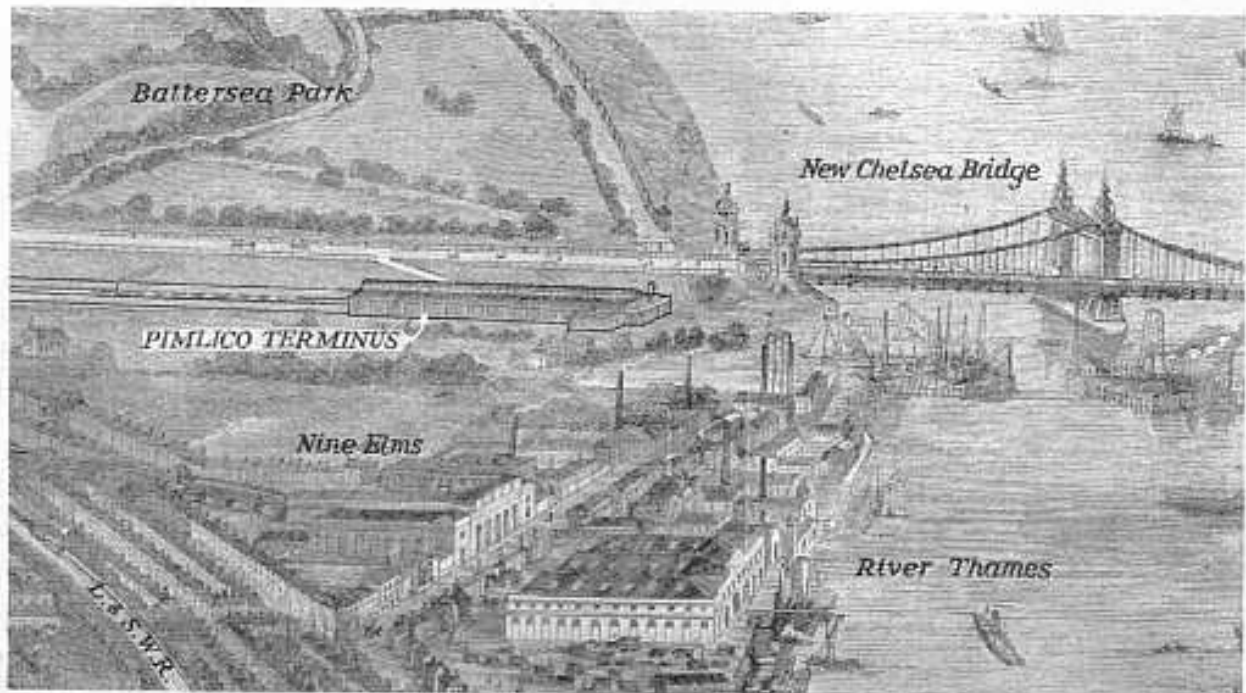
Pimlico terminus, as shown on Crutchley's "New Plan of London," 1859, indicating the extension to Victoria, then under construction

been erected for the opening, instead of the extensive terminus which the company was bound to construct. Doubtless this was a result of the prevailing uncertainty as to whether Pimlico would remain the intended great West End terminus.

The formal opening of the line to the Pimlico terminus, by the directors and their friends, took place on Saturday, March 27, 1858, following Government inspection on March 23. Public traffic

Nevertheless, it changed ownership during its brief span of 2½ years, as the Battersea-Norwood portion of the West End company's undertaking was acquired by the L.B.S.C.R. as from July 1, 1859. By this time it had become clear that Pimlico would not develop into the permanent West End terminus. There had been earlier "company promoter" schemes to build a station on the north side of the river, and the Westminster Terminus Railway had actually received Parliamentary powers on July 31, 1854, for a terminus near the Gray-coat Hospital, Westminster, and a connecting railway

had sought powers for its own separate and distinct access to the West End of London Railway. Its first section, from Chatham to Faversham, was opened on January 25, 1858, and the link from Chatham to Strood on March 29. For clear evidence that the latter is the precise date, and not others which have been given from time to time, I am indebted to the researches of Mr. H. V. Borley. The company's Western Extension Act received the Royal Assent on July 23, 1858, the same day on which the Victoria Station & Pimlico was incorporated.



The site of Pimlico terminus, based on a section of a large panoramic view published in "The Illustrated London News" of April 9, 1859. Note bridge for Victoria extension under construction

to the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway. Legal proceedings in 1859 revealed that Sir S. Morton Peto, Brassey and others were behind the scheme. Nothing came of these proposals, but the need for such facilities was recognised by the L.B.S.C.R., which sponsored a new company called the Victoria Station & Pimlico Railway. This was incorporated on July 23, 1858, and actually issued a prospectus on June 19 envisaging a West End terminus which could be used by the L.B.S.C.R., the East Kent (later London, Chatham & Dover) Railway, the S.E.R., and the L.S.W.R.

By this time the East Kent Railway had abandoned its position as an extension of the S.E.R. North Kent Line, and

The outcome of these developments was that Victoria Station was built and opened on October 1, 1860, and Pimlico last handled passenger traffic on the previous day. The L.C.D.R. (as the East Kent had become in 1859) did not open its Western Extension until December 3, 1860, and thus used Victoria from the first, and never Pimlico as had been intended. Because of L.C.D.R. and S.E.R. rivalry, the latter did not come to the "West End," but later crossed the River Thames independently and built its own Charing Cross terminus. No railway other than the L.B.S.C.R. ever used the Pimlico terminus, although its approach lines afterwards enabled G.W.R. and L.N.W.R. trains to reach Victoria.