

CHAPTER 9 THE END OF THE CROYDON, MERSTHAM AND GODSTONE IRON RAILWAY

The account of the schemes to extend the Surrey Iron Railway and Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway given in Chapter 6, closed with the emergence of a London to Brighton railway project from one of the lines proposed by the Surrey, Sussex, Hants, Wilts and Somerset Railroad Company in 1825.

For this company, John Rennie the younger had prepared three plans for that part of the route from London to Brighton. One, surveyed by Rennie himself, was a "direct" line through Croydon. A variation of this, retaining the first part of that route, was surveyed by Grantham and Jago. The third scheme was a line surveyed by Charles Vignoles, running from Wandsworth, where he had been instructed to "commence upon the tramway from Wandsworth to Merstham", and thence through Epsom and Dorking.

In 1829, Rennie was instructed by a board consisting largely of the same promoters of the original scheme, to reconsider a line of railway from London to Brighton only. He employed Hamilton Fulton to carry out further surveys, and produced a variation of his former "direct" line. The London terminus was at Kennington

This proposal was accepted, and notice of the intention to apply for a Bill to authorise the building of this line was published in November, 1830, [1] [2] and a prospectus was issued in December.(2) At a meeting of the directors of the now-named London and Brighton Railway Company, including Hylton Jolliffe and his nephew Sir William Jolliffe, held on 7 January, 1831, it was agreed that Rennie's estimate of £650, 000 was excessive and that a tender they had received in this sum- should be reconsidered. [3] Accordingly nothing was/ done in respect of an application to Parliament in the current session, and a further notice of intent of an application in the following session was published in November, 1832. [4]

But Rennie was- making further revisions to the route, and in September, 1833, the promoters of the scheme, now renamed the London, Brighton and Shoreham Railway, announced a share issue and named a provisional committee, which included Sir William Jolliffe, but not Hylton. [5] Yet another notice of intent was published in October, 1833. [6]

A number of different London and Brighton railway projects were promoted and pursued during 1832 to 1837. A detailed consideration of these is beyond the scope of this study, and they will be referred to only briefly as we follow the progress of Rennie's scheme which, after various modifications, was ultimately successful, and the implementation of which resulted in the closure of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway.

When Rennie's latest plan was produced on 14 November, 1833, the committee engaged Robert Stephenson as an adviser to examine the proposal and report thereon. Stephenson made a number of criticisms, and so the project was held in abeyance.

The following year the committee took into consideration alternative routes proposed by Nicholas Cundy and by Charles Vignoles. Stephenson was asked to report on these two plans, and also to make a re-appraisal of Rennie's scheme. At this time, rival independent plans were being prepared by Joseph Gibbs, the engineer of the London and Croydon Railway, and Henry Palmer, the engineer of the South Eastern Railway.

In February, 1835, Stephenson reported generally in favour of Gundy's line, via Dorking and Horsham, but had some doubts as to the accuracy of the plans, and proposed that the route be re-surveyed by George Bidder. He eventually submitted the plan, in a revised form, under his own name. Meanwhile, Rennie's scheme had been altered to start from a junction with the proposed London and Croydon Railway, at that time under Parliamentary consideration. On 16 August, 1835, the committee decided to adopt Stephenson's proposal.

Evidently this decision was not unanimous, for some of the members who favoured Rennie's line (including Sir William Jolliffe), promoted it under the name of the Direct London and Brighton Railway and issued a prospectus in February, 1836. [7] In March, a Parliamentary committee considered the plans prepared by Rennie and Stephenson, together with those introduced by Gundy, Vignoles, Gibbs, and Palmer. All six were rejected.

In this session Sir John Rennie, giving evidence before the select committee in April, 1836, was persistently questioned as to his proposals in respect of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway. He agreed that insofar as his line was intended to follow the general route of the existing railway south of Croydon and cross it at Coulsdon, it would be necessary to purchase the latter, or arrange for it to be diverted. His answers indicate that he had only a vague idea as to how the matter should be dealt with, and apparently no negotiations had been entered into with the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company. [8]

The following year the 1836 contestants again presented their schemes to Parliament. The matter of Rennie's line interfering with the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway was again raised by the Select Committee. The engineer J.H. Rastrick, who had assisted Rennie in making some variations to the route, when examined, admitted that it would probably be necessary to purchase the older railway: and the surveyor Edward Driver confirmed that it was intended to do so and that it had been included in the estimate of the value of the land to be taken. [9] During the same session, Joseph Gibbs was examined on his proposal (in effect an extension of the London and Croydon Railway) and confirmed that it would be desirable to purchase the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway. [10]

In May, 1837, the Select Committee reported generally in favour of Rennie's line, but appointed as assessor an independent military engineer, Captain Robert Alderson, to report on all the proposals. On 27 June, he recommended that Rennie's line should be adopted. Accordingly, the Direct London and Brighton Railway was approved, and the Act authorising its construction received the Royal Assent on 15 July, 1837- (1 Vic. cap. 119)

Although the actual properties of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company to be occupied by the London and Brighton Railway comprised only two portions of the line at Hooley, and a cottage and garden at Merstham, the London and Brighton Railway Act of incorporation required the company to purchase the whole of the older railway. Section 40 of the Act recited; "That previously to the Company hereby incorporated taking possession of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway, or any Part thereof, or the Land upon which the same is laid down, or the Cottages, Toll Houses, or other Premises belonging to the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company, or any Part thereof, the said Company hereby incorporated shall and they are hereby required and empowered to purchase of the said Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company the whole of the said Iron Railway from Croydon to Merstham, and the Land upon which the same is laid down, and all other adjoining or contiguous Land, and the Cottages,

Toll Houses, and all other Erections and Buildings belonging to or vested in such Company, and all the Estate and Interest whatsoever of the said Company of and in the said Railway or arising therefrom, for such Sum or Sums of Money as shall be determined upon by Three Arbitrators, or any Two of them"

The London and Brighton Railway Company were not to take possession of Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway property until the purchase money had been paid.

Section 51 of the Act authorised the diversion of the Croydon to Reigate turnpike road at Hooley.

On 21 June, 1836, an Act had been passed authorising the South Eastern Railway Company to construct a line to Dover from an end-on junction with the London and Croydon Railway at Croydon (6 Will. IV, cap.93). Subsequently the S.E.R. Company's engineer, William Cuhitt, resurveyed the route, and recommended that the junction with the L.&C.R. should "be at Penge, and then the line should pass to the east of Croydon. Accordingly, a second Act was obtained on 3 July, 1837 (7 Will.IV, cap.93) authorising this and other deviations. This was under consideration by the Commons Select Committee at the same time as the L.&B.R. Bill, and the committee decided that if the L.&B.R. Bill was successful, the S.E.R. Company should be given the option of joining the L.&B.R. at some point north of Earlswood and of purchasing that part of the L.&B.R. line from Norwood to that junction, instead of constructing a line roughly parallel to it. Accordingly, this proviso was inserted as Section 135 of the L.&B.R. Act of incorporation.

In January, 1838, an agreement was reached between the two companies in respect of a joint line from Norwood to Redhill, and in February it was agreed that the L.&B.R. Company should be responsible for the construction of the shared line. The conditions were amended on 25 April, 1839, when a formal agreement was signed, providing that if the S.E.R. Company gave up their right to purchase all the joint line north of Redhill, they would be entitled to a transfer to them of the southern half of that line, while the northern half would remain in the ownership of the L.&B.R. Company.

In pursuance of this agreement, the S.E.R. Company obtained an Act on 19 July, 1839 (2 & 3 Vic. cap.79) empowering them to abandon the proposed junction with the L.&C.R. at Penge and to join the L.&B.R. at Redhill. This Act also repealed Section 135 of the L.&B.R. Act of incorporation and authorised the S.E.R. Company to purchase only the southern half of the joint line (i.e. between Coulsdon and Redhill, a length of about six miles).

The S.E.R. Company assumed control of this portion of the line on 19 July, 1844, but a dispute as to the amount to be paid to the L.&B.R. Company was not settled until 7 August, 1845. Thus that part of the L.&B.R. line that actually crossed over the route of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway then passed into the ownership of the S.E.R. Company.

As was previously recorded, James Lyon of Wandsworth had taken the lease of the tolls of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway for a period of three years from 1 January, 1837. Following the passing of the L.&B.R. Act of incorporation in July, he put in a claim for compensation for loss of trade, to the arbiters appointed to determine the purchase price of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway. Prior to the arbitration, the L.&B.R. Company's surveyor valued the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway

property at £7000, and the Monday Committee of the L.&B.R. resolved on 30 July, 1838, to pay this sum to the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company, and "the remaining (if any) amount of the award to be given, within one week after such award."^[11] The Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Company had apparently claimed £40,000. ^[12] The arbiters awarded £9614-8s to the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company, and £1000 compensation to James Lyon, and on 27 September, 1838, the L.&B.R. board ordered payment to be made accordingly. ^[13] On the same day the board resolved that "the Person recommended by Mr. G.Button (their solicitor) to take charge of the Trams of the Croydon & Merstham Tramway and the Tolls therefrom at 15/- per week be appointed."

On 1 October, 1838, the Monday Committee ordered that "the Person in charge of the Merstham Tramway as appointed do warehouse the supernumary Trams (i.e. the rails)", A few days later the directors resolved., , that Thomas Green (the contractor for that part of the Brighton railway between Purley and Merstham tunnel) be asked to make an offer for the rails, but on 25 October, Green not having responded, it was decided to offer the rails for public sale. An advertisement, dated 29 October, 1838, was duly published, asking for tenders for the purchase of the "Iron Trams now. lying either on the tramway, or contiguous to the high turnpike road", to be submitted by 6 November. ^[14] The successful tenderers were Messrs. Winter and Rick, who offered £4-11s per ton for whole rails and £3-11s per ton for broken rails. It is not known what quantity they bought but Charles Penfold, the surveyor of the Croydon and Reigate "Turnpike Road, was permitted to purchase 50 tons at the same rate. The directors ordered, on 31 January, 1839, that no more rails were to be sold. On 26 March, 1840, John U.Rastrick, the company's engineer, was authorised to take some of the remaining rails "for the use of the tunnels."

Meanwhile, the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company were making preparations for winding up the company. They issued a public notice, dated 22 October, 1838, requesting any persons having any claims or demands on the company to send in the particulars before 24 November, "that the same may be examined and discharged." ^[15] On 10 November they published a notice of their intention to apply to Parliament for leave to bring in a Bill to repeal their Act of Incorporation and the 1806 Act, and to dissolve the company. ^[16]

They presented their petition to the House of Commons on 21 February, 1839, and the Bill had an uneventful progress through the Commons and Lords Committees. The Royal Assent to the Act, entitled, "An Act for dissolving the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway", was given on 1 July, 1839.(2 & 3 Vic. cap.52)

In the preamble to the Act it was stated that the London and Brighton Railway Company had purchased and taken possession of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway property, and paid the sum awarded as the value thereof, the greater part of which had been distributed among the shareholders. The Act went on to describe the manner in which the purchase money and other assets were to be allotted to the proprietors, and claims upon the company settled.

The last annual general meeting of the shareholders was held on 7 May, 1839. The final reference to the company appears in two notices dated 12 January, 1841, published "pursuant to an Order of the High Court of Chancery." One notice directed that creditors of the company should prove their claims before 20 February, the other notice similarly requiring shareholders to make known their claims by the same date. ^[17]

Work on the construction of the London and Brighton Railway commenced on 12 July, 1838, and is said to have been on the cutting at the north end of the Merstham tunnel site. [18] The building of the tunnel had begun by 29 October, 1838, when the railway directors agreed that Mr. Hoof, the contractor for the tunnel, could convert a shed at the toll house of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway at Merstham into a blacksmith's shop, provided that he build a wall on the side of the turnpike road, "so the fire will not "be seen from it." On 17 January, 1839, John Rastrick's report on the state of the works was read to a general meeting of the company, wherein he stated that "The extra contract at Merstham for diversions of the turnpike road is proceeding in a satisfactory manner, although the contractor was at first delayed "by not having possession of the Merstham tram road." [19]

Apparently at this period the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway down to Hooley, and also the Surrey Iron Railway, were used to transport materials for the building of the L.&B.R. An advertisement published by the directors in November, 1839, invited tenders for the supply of 2600 tons of malleable iron rails and other items, for delivery "upon the tramway wharf, at Wandsworth." [20] Shortly before this, on 29 August, the directors had decided that "the business of wharfage, &c. at Wandsworth be equally divided between Mr. Lyon and Mr. Davies": and on 12 September that £300 be paid to James Lyon "on account of his claims against the Company for Wharfage and Cranage." On 16 January, 1840, Lyon's offer to rent the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway from Croydon to Hooley was referred by the directors to the Monday Committee. The outcome is not recorded.

On 7 April, 1842, the board resolved that "the Tram Plates, Stone Blocks, &c. on and about the line, be immediately, as far as practicable, collected at Croydon and sold by Auction." It was while the materials were in course of being collected that, in August, three men were charged with stealing "a large quantity of iron tram-way rails, the property of the London and Brighton Railway Company", which had been stacked up near to the Merstham tunnel. One of the men was also charged with stealing some of the sleeper blocks. [21]

On 17 November, 1842, the directors ordered that the sleeper blocks taken up should be sold. Soon afterwards, the sale by auction of "about Thirty Thousand Bramley Fall, Derby, and York Stone Blocks, about one foot square each", was advertised to be held at (East) Croydon station on 6 December, 1842. [22] On 17 April, 1843, the Brighton Company required some sleeper blocks in connection with the draining of a cutting between Balcombe and Three Bridges. Apparently it had been deemed, belatedly, that the "tramway" materials from that part of the line near that section of the L.&B.R. which was to be sold to the S.E.R. belonged to that company. Accordingly, the L.&B.R. Company wrote to the S.E.R. Company offering to buy a quantity of sleeper blocks at 4d. each, which offer was accepted. On 30 November, 1843, the S.E.R. Company gave permission for "the L.&B.R. Company to sell about 100 tons of rails at a minimum price of f.3-10s per ton.

The last reference to the sale of Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway materials comes early in 1844. On 12 March, the Land Committee of the L.&B.R. Company ordered the sale by auction of the remaining rails. The auction was duly held on 18 April at Croydon station; the notice advertising the sale referred to 600 tons of cast- iron tram-road plates, and other materials. [23]

Although the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway/ property had passed to the L.&B.R. Company at the end of September, 1838, none of the land was sold until some years later. Initially the directors seemed to be uncertain as to their powers, for on 11 April, 1839,

they resolved "That the Clause in the Brighton Act relating to the Croydon and Merstham Tram Road, and the Bill for dissolving the Company of the latter, be submitted to Counsel for his opinion upon the best course to be adopted for vesting such property in and continuing the powers to the Brighton."

Whatever the advice obtained, nothing was done in respect of disposing of the surplus land, although the company did receive, on 9 June, 1840, some of the original conveyances to the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company, then, on 8 October, 1841, the Land Committee resolved "That Mr.Driver (their surveyor) be requested to attend this Committee on Friday 22nd. instant, prepared with his opinion and written recommendation as to the disposal of the various properties of the Company (including) The Merstham & Croydon Tramway. " It was also decided that "Mr.Button (their solicitor) do report his opinion as to the power of the Company to dispose of the Merstham Tramway."

The outcome of the appeal to their solicitor would seem to be revealed in a resolution of the Committee on Rents made on 14 November. "That Messrs.Driver be written to (to) prepare immediately the necessary plans of the Tramway Property to serve upon the adjoining , landowners." Although there was no mention in the London & Brighton Railway Company's Act of incorporation of any conditions relating to the disposal of the redundant "tramway" property, there had been a precedent set in similar circumstances, for example, in respect of the closure of the Croydon Canal. In that case, the London and Croydon Railway Company had been required to offer the parts of the canal they wished to sell, in the first instance, to the owners of the adjoining lands, and it seems that the L.&B.R. Company's solicitor considered this to be the proper procedure.

The first portion of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway trackbed to "be sold was in fact bought by the adjoining owner. This was in South Croydon and ran from opposite the Swan and Sugar Loaf public house southwards to beyond the Red Deer public house, through Haling Park. An agreement was entered between the railway company and William Parker Hammond, the owner of the park, on 11 April, 1843.

On 28 September, 1843, the directors agreed that a portion of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway running through the property of Thomas Keen at Croydon, between Southbridge Road and. Lower Coombe Street, be offered to him at the rate of £200 per acre. Keen accepted, and it was conveyed to him on 11 January, 1844 for £91-5s.

On 20 May, 1846, the directors ordered that their solicitor be "instructed to report upon the period which the Company can hold lands not required for the purposes of the railway; and whether any exception applies as to the land forming part of the old tramway." The solicitor reported on 19 June that the company had until 15 July, 1847, to sell the surplus lands. On 4 June, the company had endorsed the conveyance of three parts of the old railway on the present course of Church Road in Croydon, namely to Mr.Dupin for £10, to Mr.Stacey for £15, and to Mr.Chatfield for £325.

On 27 July, 1846, the L.&B.R. Company was amalgamated with the London and Croydon Railway Company to form the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Company. The new company continued with the sale of parts of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway. On 14 June, 1847, a conveyance was made to Thomas Allen Shuter of a piece of land at Horley, and a conveyance to the Trustees of Elis Davy Almshouses in Croydon was

completed in August, 1848. A further piece of land was sold to the same Trustees "for a nominal sum" on 9 April, 1849- About the same time some land was sold to Mr.Blake.

Other portions of the former Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway property were taken over by the adjoining owners without permission or payment. One example is the site of the old railway through the grounds of Cane Hill Hospital at Coulsdon. Other parts were abandoned and some became used as public footpaths.

Both Ellis and Lee quoted from a resolution made "by the Coulsdon Vestry on 25 March, 1854, concerning the bridge over the Chipstead Valley Road at Coulsdon. The surveyor of Woodmansterne parish was to be asked to take measures to ensure the safety of the bridge.[24] The outcome is not known, but it seems likely that the bridge was demolished soon afterwards.

References

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- 4.** The Times, 12 November,1832. .
- 5.** The Times, 13 September,1833. .
- 6.** The Times, 29 October,1833. .
- 7.** The Times, 4 February,1836. .
- 8.** Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee on the London and Brighton. Railway Bill. Engineering Evidence (Sir John Renrie's Line), 1836. .
- 9.** Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee on the Direct London and Brighton Railway Bill, (Rennie's Line), 1837.
- 10.** Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee on the London and Brighton Railway Bill, (Gibbs1 Line), 1837..
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