

Railways at Midhurst

By GEOFFRY SPENCE



Photo]

[C. Hogg

Petersfield-Pulborough train, hauled by class "M7" 0-4-4 tank engine No. 30109, leaving Midhurst on December 18, 1954

MIDHURST, described in 1826 in "Paterson's Roads" as a "popular and tolerably well-built town," returning at that time two members to Parliament, lost, on the evening of February 5, its passenger service that had been running from Petersfield since 1864, and from Pulborough since 1866.

A railway through Midhurst was first considered in 1845 by the Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth Company, a scheme supported by the London & South Western Railway. It was to have started from the terminus of the Guildford Railway at Guildford and to have followed a route through Godalming, Haslemere, Midhurst, and Chichester. The direct London & Portsmouth Railway, via Petersfield, was another line planned at the same time, as was also the Brighton & Chichester's extension to Portsmouth. The outcome of this was that the Brighton scheme was allowed and the other two virtually rejected.

In the following year, the Direct Portsmouth again entered the field. The Brighton, having trouble with the London & Croydon Railway, made an Agreement

with the L.S.W.R. to use that company's proposed London terminus at Waterloo Bridge, and convert its Chichester and Portsmouth extension into a joint line. To this end, both agreed to support the Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth Company, with the usual doubtful agreements not to make lines into each other's territory. The amalgamation of the Brighton and the London & Croydon in 1846, however, altered the position, and the Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth eventually came to nothing more than the small portion from Guildford to Godalming (Old Station).

The next scheme to affect the Midhurst district was the Mid-Sussex Railway, incorporated August 10, 1857, for a line from Horsham to Pulborough, and Petworth. This was opened on October 10, 1859, with intermediate stations at Billingshurst, and Pulborough. Fittleworth was opened in the autumn of 1889. The river bridge over the Arun at Pulborough had given rise to some anxiety during construction, as it was on marshy ground. The piers had sunk to a considerable depth, and had to be reconstructed.

The *West Sussex Gazette* gives a long report of the new line. There was a preliminary inspection on Saturday, October 8. The special train consisted of the company's officers, reporters, and "a medley of people who were quite of a migratory character." The report continues: "Men, women and children were being removed to a district which some of them had never seen before. They had been appointed to certain posts on the line, and this train conveyed them to their destinations with their small collections of children, goods and chattels."

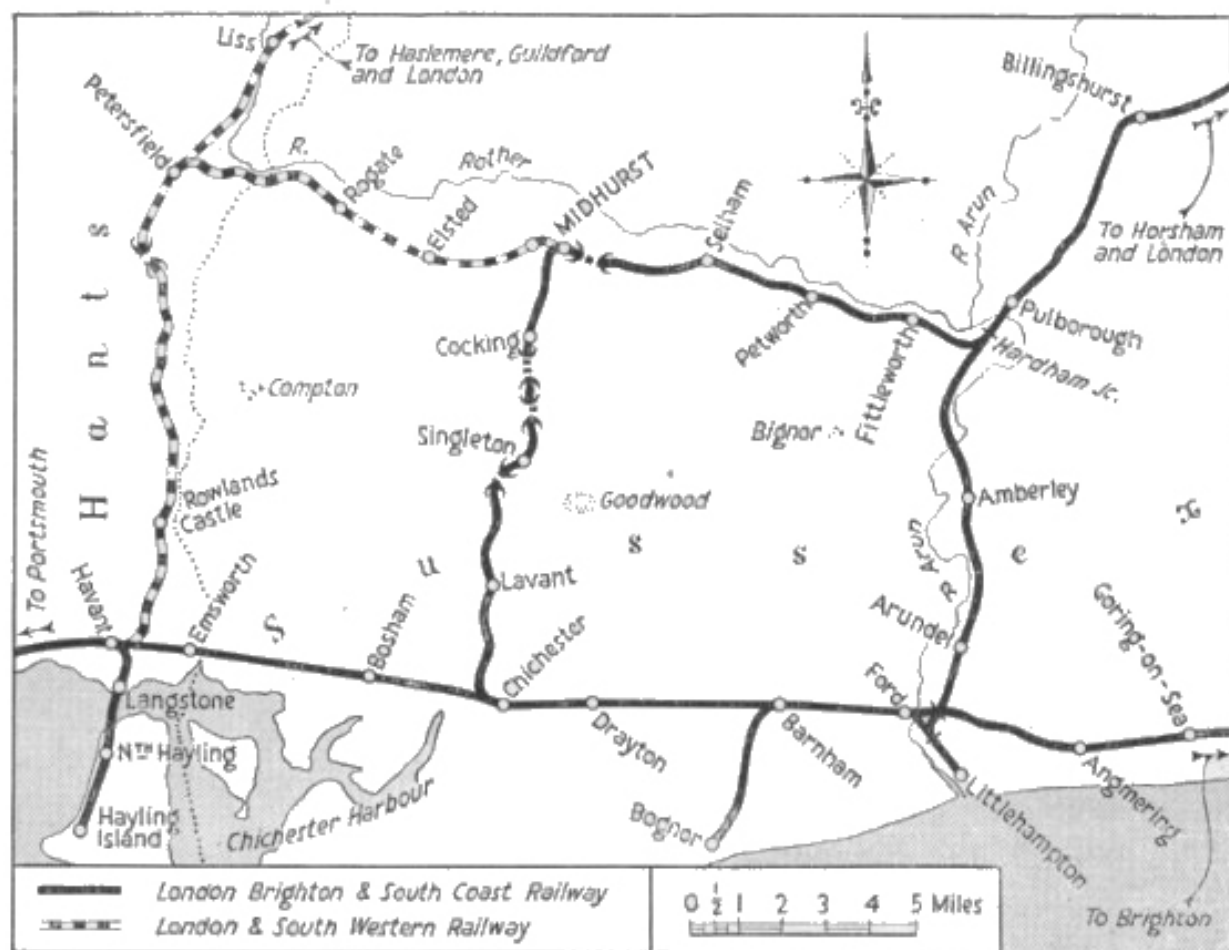
The train left Three Bridges at 8.30 a.m. and called first at the new Horsham Station, which was "built of fancy brick and faced with Portland stone." The next stop was at Barn's Green Crossing, to put out a gatekeeper "with his wife and chattels." Further stops were made at Adversane and Crays Lane Crossings (where another man was "turned out with a wholesome looking wife") and at Pulborough.

The interior of Petworth Station was finished in polished deal. Here there was "a very pretty little engine house for

pumping up the water into a tank to supply the engines." The proceedings ended with what the reporter described as "a bit of a dinner" at the Swan Hotel, Petworth, which probably meant the usual spread. The reporter might have described the line a little better. He mentions that the countryside was wild and barren from Horsham to Pulborough, and was apparently rather put out by the "few poverty-stricken cottages and only one or two gentlemen's seats," and "no road to the Billingshurst Station"—a fact which probably also irritated the inhabitants.

There seems to be no record whether the line was well patronised on opening, but on Sunday, October 18, there was an excursion from Petworth to the Crystal Palace which carried 100 passengers, a matter deplored by a local minister, but enthusiastically supported by the Editor of the *West Sussex Gazette*.

The 5½-mile extension to Midhurst of the Mid-Sussex & Midhurst Junction Railway, which was authorised on August 13, 1859, and opened October 15, 1866, was worked by the Brighton, but not



Map of the railways in the Midhurst area, showing pregrouping ownership

purchased until June, 1874. The intermediate station at Selham was not opened until the summer of 1872. The opening of the line caused little comment in the local papers; they considered that seven years was too long for its construction, merely inserting in the column of Midhurst news: "Wonders will Never Cease. The Petworth and Midhurst Railway, *alias* 'Death's Line' was opened on Monday last. This project has been so long in hand that we began to despair of seeing it fully carried out during the present generation." But reporters had often become a little *blasé* about railway openings by the mid-sixties.

Eastern's mentality, where territorial rights were concerned, there is little doubt it would have gone ahead with its plans.

Midhurst to Petersfield was, therefore, placed in the hands of the Petersfield Railway, incorporated July 23, 1860, and opened on September 1, 1864, having been amalgamated with the L.S.W.R. by Act of June 22, 1863. The intermediate stations were at Elsted and Rogate & Harting (later only *for* Harting). At Petersfield, a small separate platform was provided for the branch trains.

Both the Mid-Sussex & Midhurst Junction and the Petersfield sought powers to make a connecting line between



[Photo]

[A. W. Burgess

Fittleworth Station, looking towards Pulborough

Comparison of fares may not be without interest. In 1868, the single fare to Midhurst (by Brighton or South Western) was: first class ordinary 10s. 10d., second class 8s. 2d., and third class 4s. 11d. The 1955 figures were first class 13s. 5d., third class 8s. 11d. *via* Pulborough, and rather more *via* Petersfield; single fares had been considerably reduced in 1952.

The intention of the Mid-Sussex & Midhurst Junction was to extend the line to Petersfield, but this would have been a violation of the Agreement between the Brighton and the South Western, anything west of the original Guildford, Chichester & Portsmouth route being, presumably, still L.S.W.R. territory. If the Brighton had had the South

the two stations at Midhurst, which were a considerable distance apart, near the Bepton Road Bridge. Although the Petersfield's Act did not allow for any connection, this short spur was opened on December 17, 1866, and appears to have been South Western property. The connecting line was used for goods traffic only, drawn by a horse, as the Bepton Road Bridge was unsuitable for locomotives.

In the meantime, the Chichester & Midhurst Railway had been incorporated on June 23, 1864, but had not got on very well. The first sod was cut on April 22, 1865, by Lord Henry Gordon Lennox, M.P., attended by the usual junketings and hat-waving, and with incidental music by the Petworth Volunteers. But



Photo]

[C. Hogg

Class "C2X" 0-6-0 locomotive No. 32551 shunting on the Petersfield line at Midhurst. The line to Chichester is on the left

disasters overtook the Brighton at this time, and the company became (not for the first time) financially embarrassed. Some work on the line was carried out, for on December 13, 1866, at the Midhurst Petty Sessions, the Surveyors of the Highways, Bepton, brought an action against the Chichester & Midhurst for damage done to the parish road, and the contractors, who said that "work had been carried out at intervals since February," were ordered to make good the damage by the following January 14, and pay the costs.

On July 5, 1865, powers were obtained

to extend the line from Midhurst to Haslemere. This section was abandoned in 1868, and the works on the Chichester portion came to a standstill. It was not started again until the Brighton revived the scheme under an Act of July 13, 1876. There was a further deviation at Midhurst to allow for the junction with the Mid-Sussex line to face towards Petworth. This involved the building of a new station at Midhurst, about half a mile east of the South Western one.

By 1881, the new line was ready, and was opened on July 11. It had previously been announced that intermediate



Photo]

[A. W. Burges

Elsted Station, on the Petersfield line, from the east

stations would be opened at Lavant, West Dean, and Cocking, but West Dean was named Singleton before the railway was opened. For Goodwood race meetings, there was provided at Singleton "three-quarters of a mile of sidings with accommodation for 14 trains of 20 carriages each, besides docking for carriages and horses."

The first train was drawn by a Craven 2-2-2 tank engine, No. 222, *Egmont*, and decorated with a wreath of flowers. It is recorded that 57 passengers were landed in Chichester by the first train down, and 20 booked out, "this number being greatly exceeded later in the day."

ferred to the Brighton station, although the South Western goods shed was retained.

The train services of the Midhurst lines have never presented unusual features. The sparse population served did not warrant anything more than any other branch. When the Mid-Sussex was first opened to Petworth, there were five trains up and down on weekdays, and two on Sundays. On the opening of the line from Pulborough (Hardham Junction) to Arundel Junction, on the Brighton-Chichester section, on August 17, 1863, Petworth was served by branch trains from Pulborough only, except for one



[Photo]

[R. C. Riley

View, looking towards Pulborough, of the former L.S.W.R. station at Midhurst, closed in 1925. The platform covering has been demolished

There were seven trains each way on weekdays, some running through to and from Pulborough. On Sundays, the line was closed, a state of affairs that never was improved.

In 1892, there was an enquiry before the Railway Commissioners, to consider complaints from the public about the distance between the two Midhurst stations—nearly a mile by road. A suggestion that a covered way should be built was not proceeded with, and the agitation (as in many other cases) came to nothing. More than 30 years later, on July 12, 1925, the South Western station was closed, and passenger traffic trans-

ferred to the Brighton station, although the South Western goods shed was retained.

When the Midhurst extension was opened, there were six trains up and down between Pulborough and Midhurst, with two extra to and from Petworth, and three up and down on Sundays. At this period, a fast Portsmouth train left London Bridge at 4.5 p.m., and calling only at East Croydon and Three Bridges, slipped a carriage at Pulborough at 5.28 p.m., which arrived at Midhurst at 5.55 p.m. This probably was the best service Midhurst ever had until main-line electrification helped to speed up connection to and from London. There was no

corresponding up fast train, and even the down slip had disappeared by July, 1868.

With the opening of the Chichester and Midhurst line, most trains worked through to and from Pulborough. In such an area, largely unaffected by sprawling suburbia and much development, the train service as a whole tended to remain static, serving only local needs. In the early 1930s, economies became necessary, and Cocking became a halt, but in name only; the station buildings remained as solid and imposing as any of the others on this section. On July 6, 1935, passenger traffic was withdrawn between Chichester and Midhurst, and even the daily goods was cut down to the Chichester-Lavant section in 1953. After July, 1935, some improvement was made in connection with the Petersfield line at Midhurst, but difficulty in connecting both at Pulborough and Petersfield naturally created some awkward waits at Midhurst for any passengers travelling through.

The Petersfield line began with five trains up and down on weekdays, and three on Sundays. This service was later increased, although the Sunday trains between Pulborough and Petersfield were withdrawn in 1951. From 1919 to 1924, two of the three Sunday trains on the branch ran through to and from Portsmouth & Southsea.

Motive power on the Midhurst branches has shown little variety. J. C. Craven, Locomotive Superintendent of the L.B.S.C.R. from 1852 to 1869, had the odd practice of designing different locomotives for each individual branch line. Unfortunately, his first engine for the Midhurst branch, a double-framed 0-4-2 tank, No. 213, built in 1865, proved too heavy for the line and was transferred elsewhere. Older Craven engines had to work the line until October, 1866, when No. 230, a smaller 0-4-2 tank, was completed. This engine lasted until 1881, by which time Stroudley's famous "Terrier" 0-6-0 tanks had appeared; No. 42, *Tulsehill*, and No. 77, *Wonersh*, were familiar engines at Midhurst shed for many years. They were in turn replaced by Stroudley "D1" class 0-4-2 tanks, of which the last survivor in passenger service, No. 2252, continued to appear on the branch until shortly before its withdrawal in 1950. The L.B.S.C.R. shed at Midhurst was closed soon after grouping,

when Horsham shed assumed responsibility for the branch. As withdrawal depleted the ranks of the "D1s," Billinton class "D3" 0-4-4 tanks took over, but since 1948 they in turn have been succeeded by *ex*-L.S.W.R. class "M7" 0-4-4 tanks. In recent years, freight traffic has been handled by L.B.S.C.R. class "C2X" and "C3" 0-6-0s, with the Southern Railway "Q" class making an occasional appearance. The "C3" class, known as the "Horsham Goods," became extinct in 1952.

The L.S.W.R. section of the line probably was worked by Beattie tanks in the early days, but for many years Adams class "T1" 0-4-4 tanks predominated; one was stabled in the L.S.W.R. shed at Midhurst, a sub-shed to Fratton. This shed was closed about twenty years ago, and since the Portsmouth line electrification in 1937, the branch has been worked by class "M7" 0-4-4 tanks from Guildford shed. Since then, also, the Horsham and Guildford engines have worked indiscriminately over both ends of the branch.

That it has been found necessary to close the whole line from Pulborough to Petersfield for passengers, and from Midhurst to Petersfield for goods, is not without good reason. It is a misfortune of railways that, having once been laid down, they cannot be moved about to cope with changing conditions. The Pulborough-Petersfield section was in the more difficult position of having practically all its intermediate stations between one and two miles distant from the places they were intended to serve. Even Midhurst never had a central station. The only station reasonably near its village was Selham, and as the population of that place rose, according to the *Railway and Commercial Gazetteer*, from 48 in 1894, to 65 in 1938, this could not be considered a large figure for which to keep open a station. With the withdrawal of passenger trains, this pleasant and peaceful countryside will now echo only occasionally to the sound of the whistle of the goods train.

In conclusion I would like to express my thanks to Mr. L. C. Johnson, Archivist of the British Transport Commission, for assistance in the preparation of this article, and to Mr. R. C. Riley for information about locomotive workings on the Midhurst lines.