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Trains to Bracknell: August 1857

Part 1 (February 1983)

The Staines, Wokingham and Woking Junction Railway (alias the Staines-Wokingham line) opened in the summer of 1856. The service timetables for August of the following year have recently become available and make interesting reading.

In 1857 the line to Wokingham was a double track branch line which had Country stations at Bracknell, Ascot, Sunningdale, Virginia Water & Egham. The Virginia Water/Chertsey line opened in 1866, and the Ascot/Aldershot branch in 1878. The West Curve at Staines did not appear until 1884 and the various private sidings, which later appeared along the line were yet to be built. The line served a rural area and apart from the limited passenger services and agricultural goods, its main function was for the Reading traffic and the lucrative, but spasmodic, Ascot Race traffic.

As opened, Bracknell Station was a smaller affair than that which existed in later years. The station building was the one which survived until 1974 but it was later extended at each end. There was no Signal Box and just a small shelter on the Down (Reading) platform. The goods yard consisted of the sidings nearer to the platforms, but there were no Down Sidings at this time.

Down Trains

The August 1857 Service timetable shows five passenger trains from Staines to Reading. These left Staines at 9am, 11:39am, 1:40pm, 5:21pm, 8:42pm. They took an hour to run to Reading with six stops (not including Earley, on the South Eastern Railway; and Winnersh & Longcross did not exist). All trains were run to and from Waterloo, and all but one were 1st and 2nd Class only, the exception being the 9am ex Staines which was the Parliamentary Service that also conveyed 3rd class passengers. Under an Act of 1844 all Railway Companies were obliged to run a train conveying 3rd Class passengers in each direction over all their lines, calling at all stations. These trains, called "Parliamentary Trains", had to run at a minimum speed including stops and had minimum standards of comfort & fare levels laid down.

The 11:39am from Staines (the 10:50am from Waterloo) did not stop at Ascot and did the trip to Reading by 12:30pm, a time of 51 minutes. Until 1858 the L&SWR, GWR and SER were in competition for the Reading traffic, with very cheap fares which benefitted the passengers but not the Companies. This competition was mainly inspired by the SER who ran trains to London Bridge via Redhill – the descendants of these trains ran until the end of steam.

Goods workings were not as lavish as in 1909. There was a "goods" at 5:45am from Staines (this was the 4:30am ex Nine Elms) which ran to Reading; a coal train at noon, and a Cattle train (Mondays only) at 3:55pm (not calling at Virginia Water). The wtt presents problems here in that arrival and departure times e stations are not shown and the booked departure times are so close together as to leave little or no time for shunting. This leaves two options:-

- a) The wtt bears no relation to what actually happened and in practice shunting made trains run much later than booked times - strange but quite possible at this time.
- b) Wagons were shunted at Bracknell, Ascot etc. by horses and pinch-bars between trains, and visiting trains just picked up/dropped off odd assembled rakes of wagons. In the 1850s traffic was light and wagons were small so this is quite feasible.

Traffic was exchanged at Reading with the GWR but this could only be done by transshipping goods from broad gauge wagons at this time. Narrow gauge tracks ran from Oxford to Basingstoke but not to Reading station; in 1857 a junction line was authorised and it opened in 1858, using the present day (disused) bridge under the GWR main line east of Reading Station. This was the first junction line at Reading and it survived until recently as part of the eastern goods yard.

In 1857 the SW&WJR was being worked by the L&SWR under a temporary arrangement which lasted from 1856-8. Services were poor and complaints were to mount steadily until the L&SW absorbed the line in 1878.

Part 2 (April 1983)

Up Trains

The Up trains consisted of five passenger workings, leaving Reading at 8:15am, 10:35am, 3:45pm, 5:45pm and 7:15pm. As before they all took an hour to run to Staines but the 8:15am cut 5 five minutes off thi time despite calling at all stations. The 3:45 pm was the "Parly". – note that it was not a return working of the Down train which was booked to reach Reading at 10:00am. Trins served all stations and did not miss Ascot as did one down train. They took about 25 minutes to reach Bracknell, not bad for a 2-2-2 with one stop compared to todays electrics.

Goods services were the same as for the down trains, being a cattle train (Mondays only) at 5:15am from Reading, a goods at 8:30am, and another goods at 2:00pm. The 8:30am was the return working of the 4:30am ex Nine Elms which reached Reading at 7:15am. The 2:00pm train was regarded as the return trip from the noon down coal train ex Staines which reached Reading at 1:30pm. About one & a half to one & threequarter hours were allowed for the journey to Staines but again it seems unlikely that much time was spent shunting en route; and no mention of such activity appears in the wtt.

The timetable meant that the engine and coaches of the 9:42pm arrival at Reading stabled there overnight, the loco presumably using the SER shed, one road in the three road building being reserved for visiting L&SW engines. The stock formed the 8:15am to London in the morning.

Sundays

Only two trains each way ran on Sundays, a scanty service but typical of railways at this time. This was partly due to opposition from Sabbatarians, but traffic was light and many lines had no Sunday service at all. Trains left Staines for Reading at 10:30am and 9:11pm, and Reading for London at 7:15am and 7:30pm. They called at all stations and took an hour for the 25 miles but the 7:30pm ex Reading took two minutes longer. The 10:30am down and the 7:15am up were the "Parlies"; no attempt was made to provide a service to encourage day trippers. It is interesting that the 10:30am down ran in blatant disregard of church service times, and that it had a long lay-over at Reading before the 7:30pm up train left.

Bracknell. Up Trains (Weekdays)

Mondays only, Cattle	5:40am
Passenger, 1 st & 2 nd Class	8:39am
Goods	9:24am
Passenger, 1 st & 2 nd Class	11:00am
Goods	2:35pm
Passenger, 1 st , 2 nd & 3 rd Class	4:10pm
Passenger, 1 st & 2 nd Class	6:09pm
Passenger, 1 st & 2 nd Class	7:42pm

Bracknell. Down Trains (Weekdays)

Goods	6:41am
Passenger, 1 st , 2 nd & 3 rd Class	9:35am
Passenger, 1 st & 2 nd Class	12:08pm
Coals	12:50pm
Passenger, 1 st & 2 nd Class	2:16pm
Mondays only, Cattle	4:30pm
Passenger, 1 st & 2 nd Class	5:55pm
Passenger, 1 st & 2 nd Class	9:18pm

There was no commuter service to London and anyone wanting to get to town early had no chance with this timetable. The 8:39am to London got there at 10:00am; the return from the Capital could be at 4:40pm or 7:45pm. For that matter there was no early morning train to Reading.

Locomotives

I have no record of locomotive numbers for the Reading line in the 1850s and so speculation is required. This was not a main line and was of a secondary nature, although some trains were probably regarded as "important".

In 1857 the L&SWR had only two passenger 2-4-0s and the vast bulk of the fleet of about 140 engines consisted of 2-2-2 tender locos of various shapes and sizes. It seems likely that most services would have been worked by these and no doubt some goods services as well. The "Fireball", "Alecto" and "Mazeppa" classes were the most numerous and being late 1840s engines had probably been relegated to lighter duties by this time.

Until the 1860s the South Western had only ten 0-6-0 goods engines, built in 1845-8. After 1855 these were on secondary duties at Guildford and Northam (Southampton), being replaced by a series of powerful 5ft or 5ft 6in 2-4-0 mixed traffic locos built by Joseph Beattie from 1851-63. In 1857 twentyfive were in service, of the "Hercules" and "Saxon" classes, and these useful little engines certainly worked the line, number 43 "Milo" being involved in the Egham collision of 1864.

They handled goods services and heavy passenger traffic, and were the first in a long line of L&SW mixed traffic locos.

The only other possible engines were the 2-2-2 well tanks, 17 being in service in 1857. There were also three new 2-4-0 well tanks, forerunners of the Beattie tanks of Wenford Bridge fame, but these were small engines of limited coal and water capacity and not likely to be used for the 43 mile run to Reading, although maybe used on local journeys.

Without exceptions all these engines were small with open footplates and 4 or 6 wheel tenders, and thus no great speeds could be attained.

Bracknell in 1857 would make an interesting model despite the difficulties and lack of proprietary equipment!