THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY

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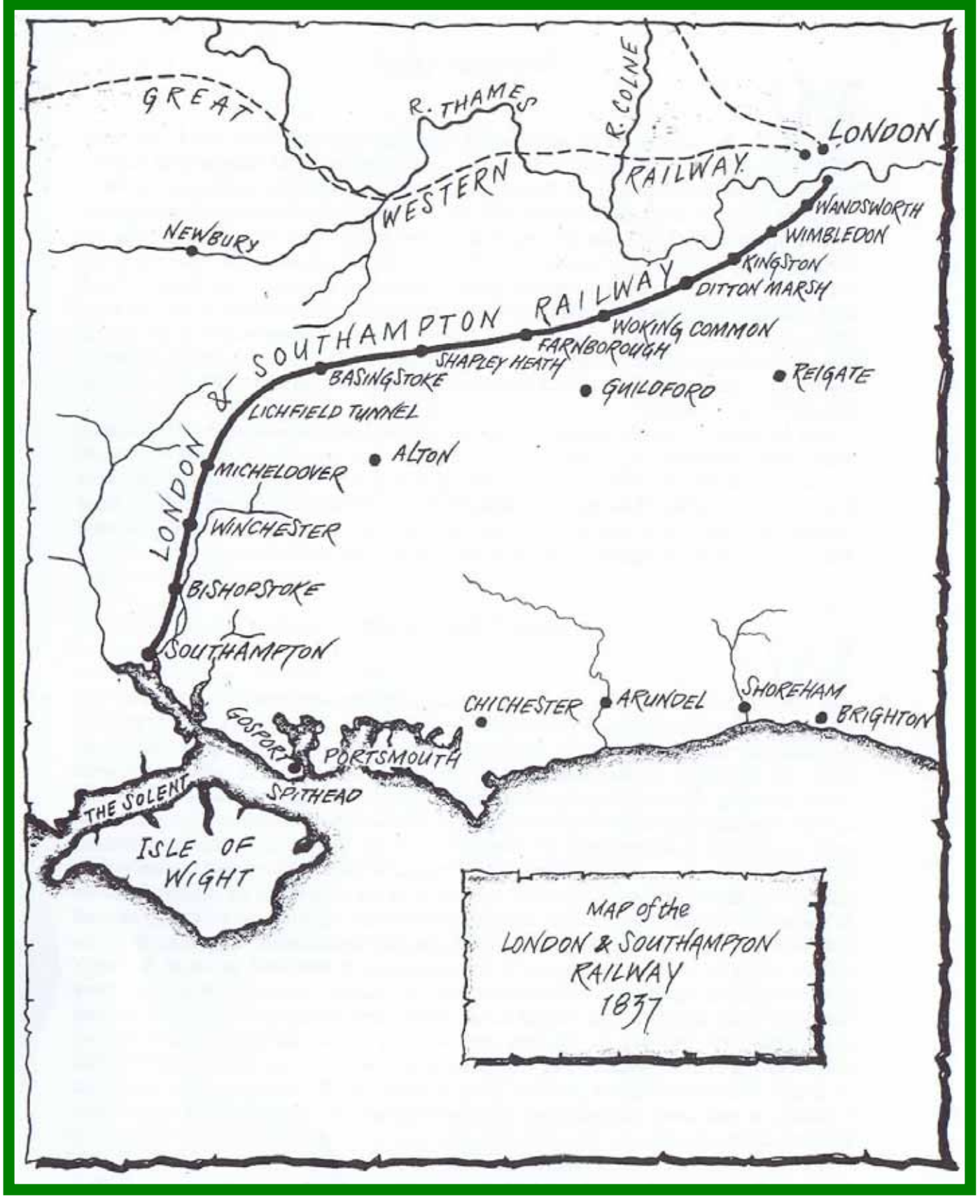
On 6th October 1830 about 15-20 people attended a meeting at the home of Southampton's M.P., Mr Abel Rous Dottin, to discuss the idea of building a railway to London.

The idea of linking the two ports was not new (several canal schemes had previously been discussed), but this ambitious scheme for a railway to the capital, and a branch line to Bath and Bristol, caught the imagination and £400 was quickly raised for expenses to look further into the idea. An article in the Hampshire Advertiser reported the meeting and two weeks later the prospectus for the Southampton, London and Branch Railway Company was published.

A survey of the line was carried out by a local man called John Doswell Doswell who proposed that the line should cross the Thames between Weybridge and Chertsey and that the London terminus should be somewhere near Paddington! In the end, however, a rival scheme for a line to Bath and Bristol used that area as it's London station and the London & Southampton Railway (as it was then named) chose Nine Elms at Vauxhall for its terminus in the capital.

Nine Elms was proposed by Francis Giles, a consultant engineer and pupil of John Rennie who had previously worked in the area on the plans for the Wey & Arun Junction Canal, the Portsmouth & Arundel Canal (in 1815), and in 1825 the London to Portsmouth Ship Canal, but

Top: Abel Rous Dottin, M.P.
Above: Francis Giles.

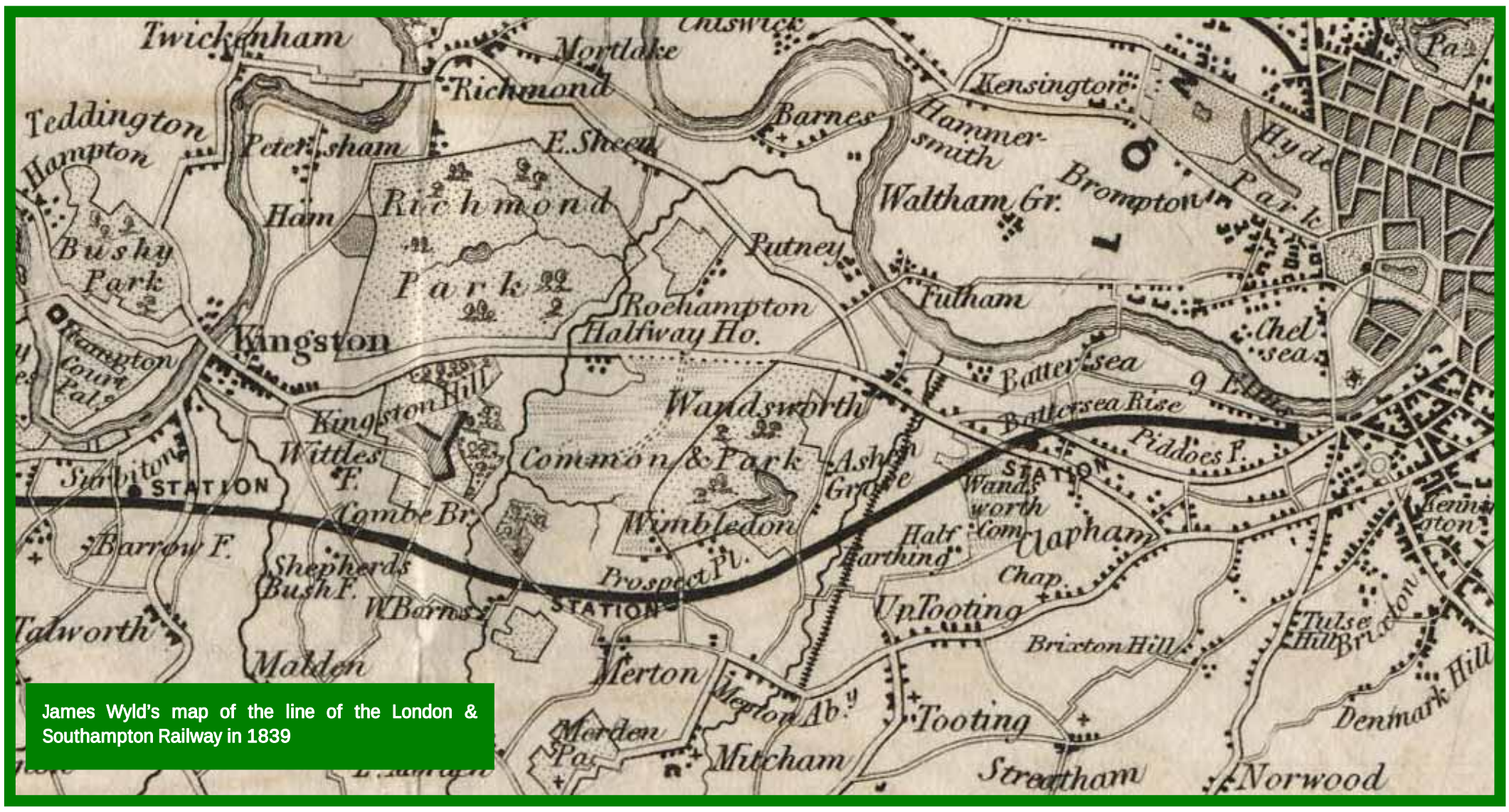


had recently been involved in the construction of railways - notably the Newcastle to Carlisle Railway.

On 26th February 1831 a meeting to promote the company was held at Southampton Town Hall, and when this was resumed on the 6th April the chairman, Colonel George Henderson, gave a short account of the line. Using simple sums based on the number of inhabitants within 10 miles of the line, Henderson showed that on coal alone the railway would make about £40,500. At the same time the poor families along the line would make a saving of about 20s. per annum on their fuel bills. The same could apply, he said, to other commodities such as sugar, tea, and groceries etc. On top of this it was estimated that 30,262 tons of freight were carried each year along the route of the line by road carriers at a charge of about £63,000. If only one-third of this was transferred to the railway a total of about £21,000 would be made. Passengers from the ships docking at Southampton equalled about 100,000 annually, and if charged just 10s each to travel by train would bring in £50,000. To carry all this freight and passenger traffic Henderson estimated that only five engines would be required, three for freight and two for passengers, making just two journeys to London a day. Cost of construction, he thought, would be about £1,200,000 with £65,000 for land.

As new docks at Southampton were considered a vital part of the scheme the company was formed as the Southampton, London and Branch Railway and Dock Company, with a share capital of £1,500,000. A meeting on the 7th September approved the rules of the company and the following day a meeting was held at Winchester to gain support. On the 9th November a meeting was held at Basingstoke for support, with another meeting a few days later being held at Kingston.

In 1831 Francis Giles re-surveyed the line and the company was ready to go to Parliament, but the chairman of the London Committee, Sir Thomas Baring, persuaded them to wait until the London & Birmingham Railway Bill was presented, to see how it fared, with the result that Birmingham was the first major city to be



James Wyld's map of the line of the London & Southampton Railway in 1839

linked with the capital and the Great Western Railway was able to take trade away from the Southampton Railway's proposed branch line to the West Country.

Nevertheless, in January 1832 the prospectus of the Southampton, London and Branch Railway was issued. By now the idea of the docks had been dropped, although a separate dock company, run by many of the Railway Company's committee, was set up. Giles again surveyed the route in 1833 and in 1834 their Bill, for the main line only, was placed before Parliament. The Bill went before a Lords Committee on the 26th May, who heard evidence for and against the line. In favour were the Navy, Army and the people of Southampton, whilst against were several eminent engineers including Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Joseph Locke and George Stephenson.

Brunel's opposition was obvious (if you don't know he was engineer for the rival Great Western Railway), whilst Stephenson and Locke had their own personal reasons for doubting Giles' route. In the 1820's when Stephenson, with Locke as his assistant engineer, was working on the Liverpool to Manchester Railway, Giles apparently stated that nobody in his right mind would take the route across Chat Moss (which Stephenson had proposed and Giles supported)!

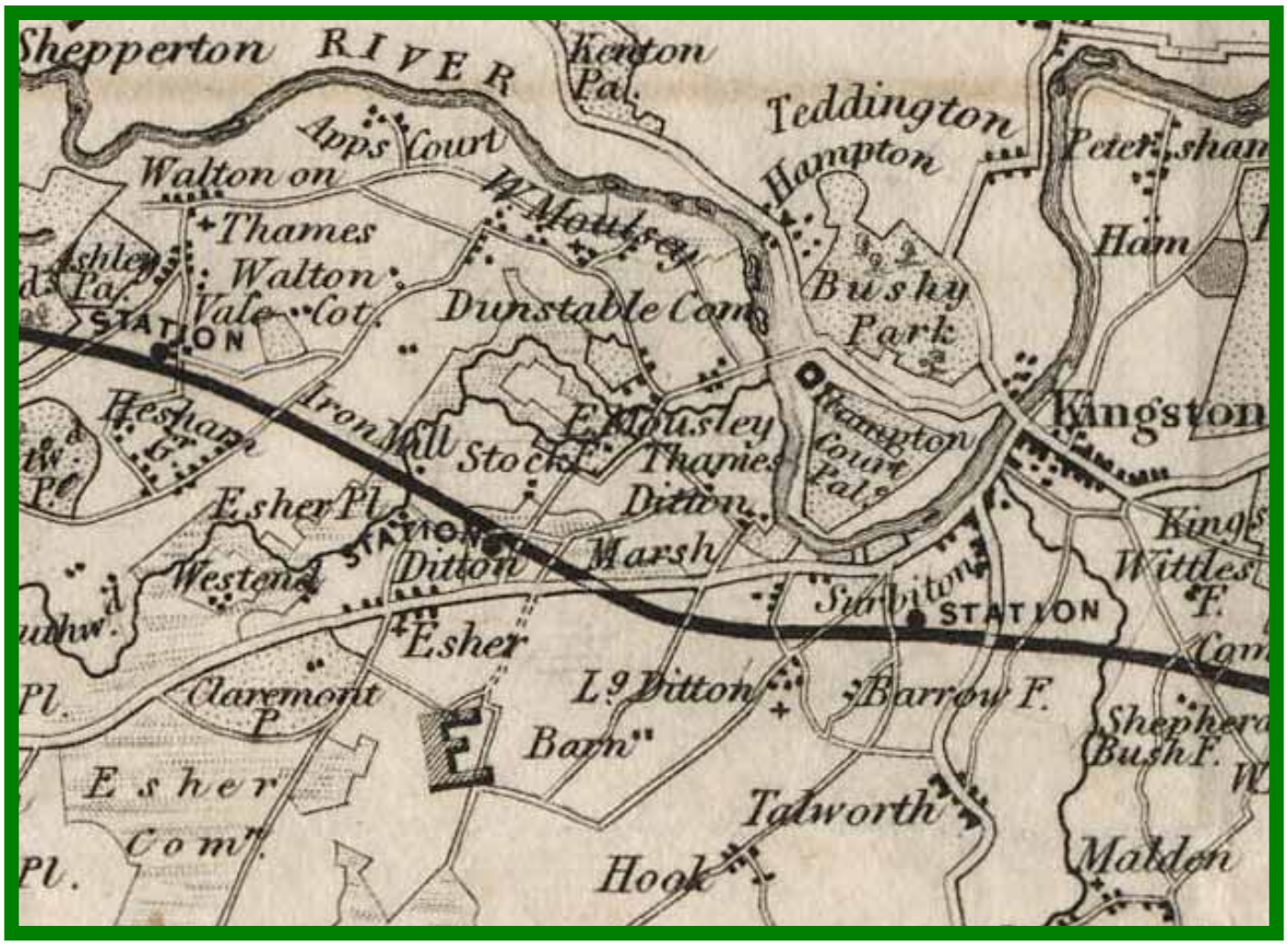
Also in favour of the Southampton line was the Harbour Master of Brixham in Devon, who felt that the railway at Southampton would be of benefit to the Torbay fisheries which presumably looked up the coast to Southampton as a more logical route to the capital, than around Land's End and up to Bristol.

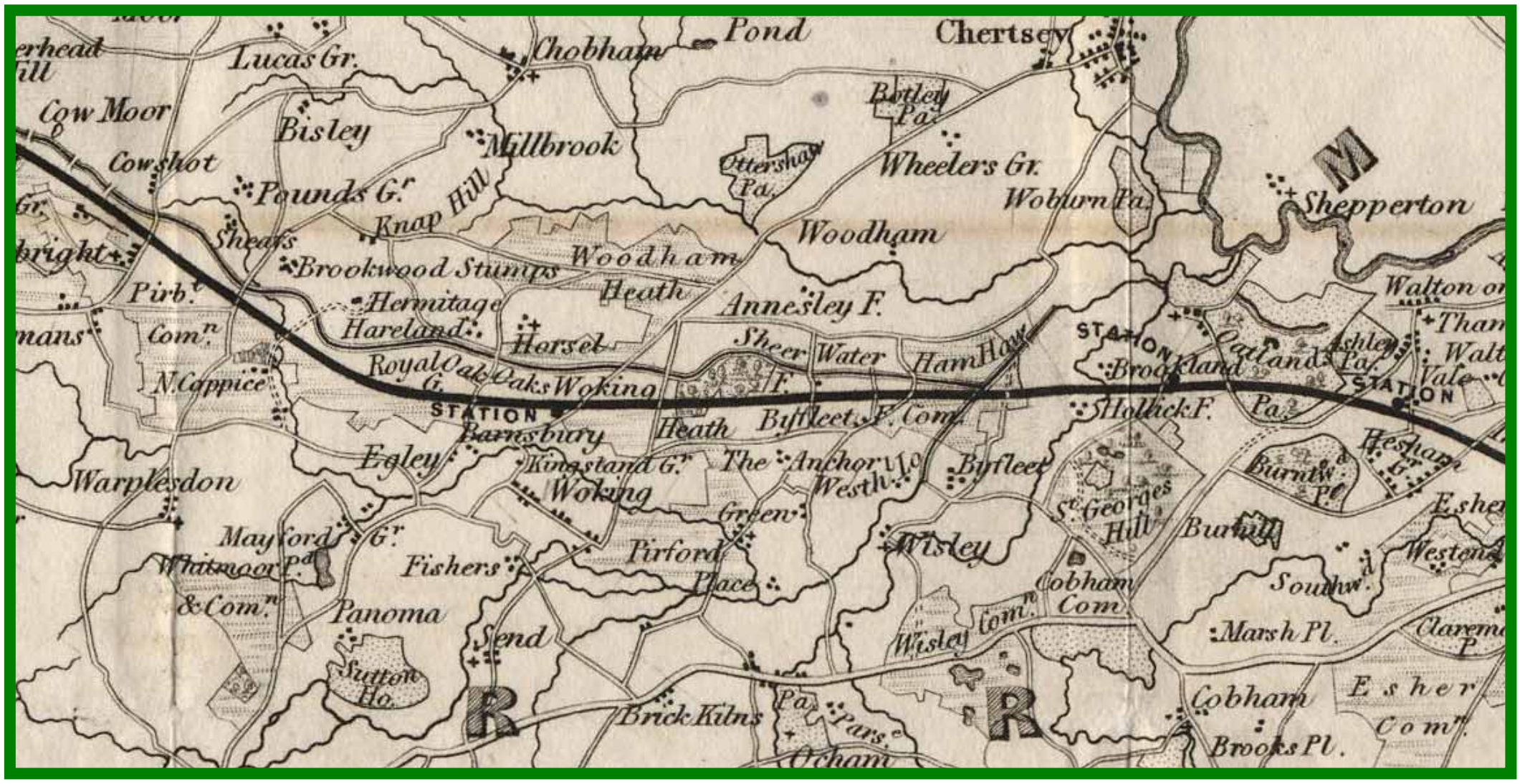
The Act was passed on the 25 July 1834 as the London and Southampton Railway, giving the company powers to purchase land and pay compensation. The maximum width for the railway was to be 22 yards except where approaches, cuttings, embankments and warehouses were needed, where 200 yards on either side was allowed. The Act also set the rate of charges on the railway at 2d. per mile for passengers and a ha'penny for horses etc.

Joseph Locke

Work began on the 6th October 1834 when Mr Bainbridge of Shapley Heath cut the first sod on land he had given to the railway. On the 23rd October Giles reported that the contracts were let, the line set out, and that excavations were under way at Winchfield and Elvetham on land from co-operative landowners. It was the 31st January 1835 before the company could compulsorily purchase any land. In Woking there were 17 landowners affected by the railway, 13 were in the Goldsworth area, 3 in Heathside and 1 in Kingfield tithing. Of these 10 had assented to the Bill, 3 remained neutral and 4 had dissented, including the Lord of the Manor of Woking, Lord Onslow.

Giles promised that the first 20 miles out of London would be open within two years and the line completed within three years, but things soon started going wrong. Giles had employed a number of small contractors on the line, supplying them with their materials and paying them weekly. Several of these contractors

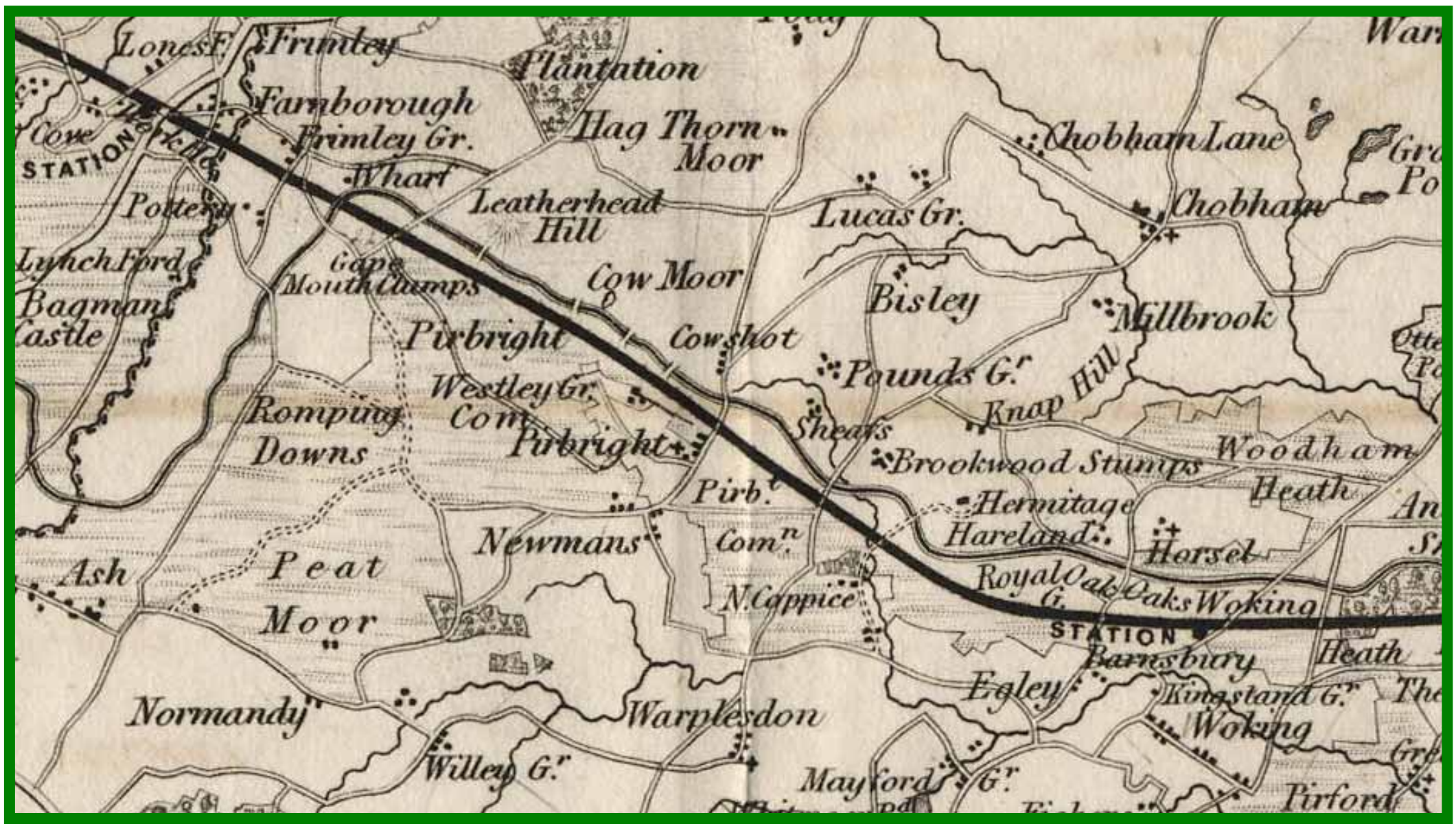




completed the easiest part of their section and then stopped work, insisting on more pay before going on to start work on the harder parts. Notices started appearing in various newspapers criticising the London & Southampton Railway and Giles in particular. The opposition came from several sources. The coaching interests had woken to the fact that their trade would be lost, and the recently formed Great Western Railway were busy proposing their alternative route to the Bath and Bristol Branch. By the 31st August 1835 (the day on which the Great Western Railway's Bill was passed at the expense of the London & Southampton) only four miles of line had been formed, although earthworks had been started in 12 places and several bridges were already complete. By the 19th February 1836 things were not much better with only 10 miles of line laid and by the end of August only a further 12 miles had been constructed. Giles now expected the line to be open to Kingston by the spring of 1838, with the section from Southampton to Winchester opening in the same year. Kingston to Basingstoke, he said would be complete the following spring and the remainder in 1839. The shareholders were not happy, especially those from Lancashire, and in December 1836 they decided to send a party to inspect the line. They found it in better shape than they had thought but were still dissatisfied with the lack of engineering skill and management. The original estimate was for £894,874 plus £105,126 for contingencies. By November 1836 this had risen to £1,507,753 without contingencies. Land, it had been estimated by Giles, would cost £65,000. In the end it cost £200,000. In his defence it should be noted that with the increase in railway construction, labour was harder to find and keep, and that prices had risen considerably since the start of construction. For instance in 1835 rails cost £7.18s. 6d a ton. By 1837 they were selling a' almost double that price! This did not affect the Lancashire committee's opinions. Finally they scorned Giles' method of employing small contractors and in short said that if they were to contribute any more money to the completion of the line then Giles must go.

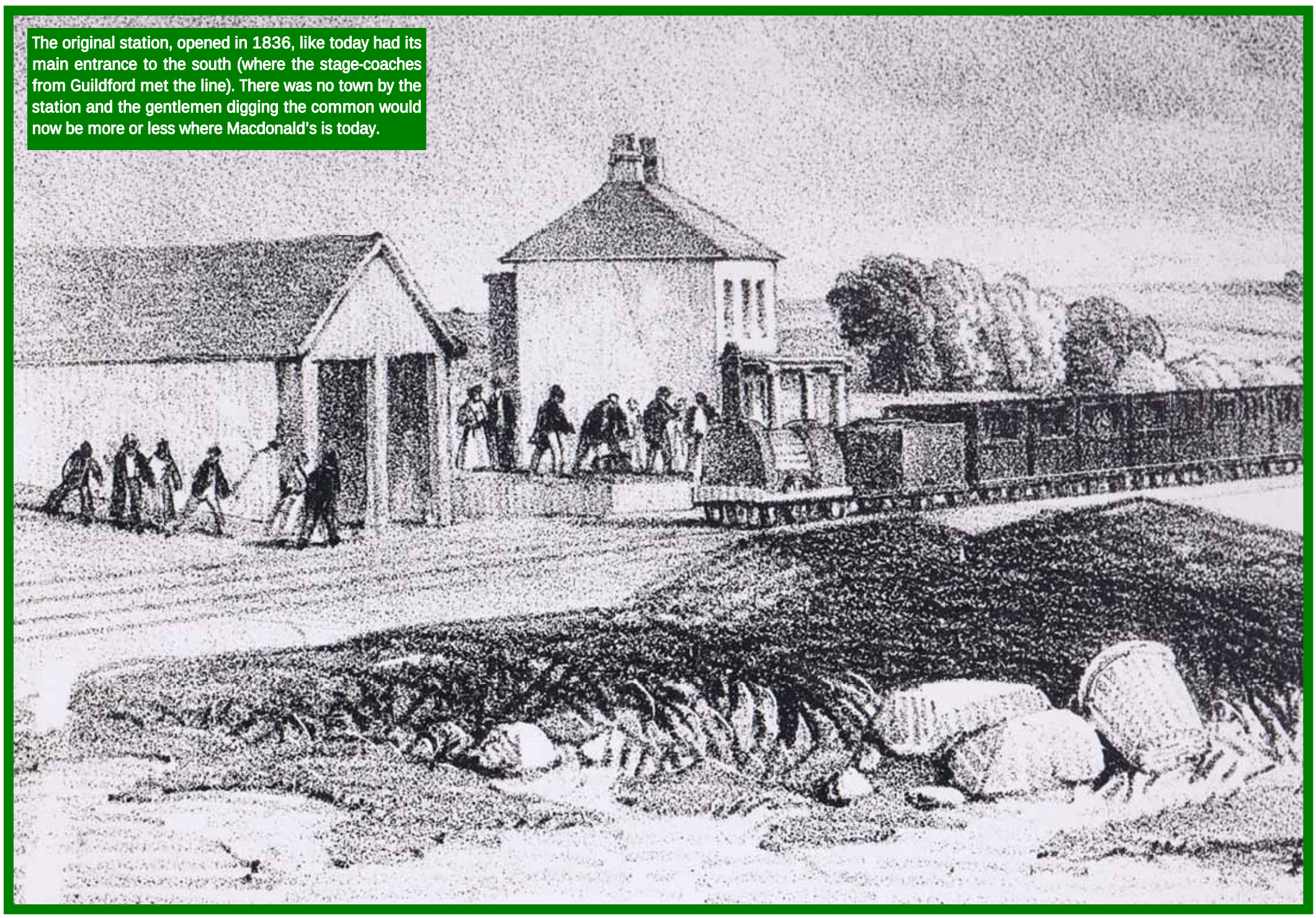
Giles resigned, but to add insult to injury the committee then appointed Joseph Locke (who

The Weybridge Cutting showing the 'horse runs' (above) and the embankment and cutting taking the railway over the Wey Valley at Brooklands (below).



had opposed the line in 1834) as engineer, with an Act of Parliament to raise more capital being passed in June 1837, along with permission for five deviations to the original plan – including St George's Hill where the line was originally to go through a cutting 116ft deep, and at Woking where the line was re-routed to avoid crossing the Basingstoke Canal several times. This did however involve another cutting through Goldsworth Hill.

The London & Southampton Railway wanted new estimates on the traffic it would attract and called in three people, Messrs Pare, Lacy and Chaplin. Pare was an experienced estimator of traffic on many northern railways, Lacy a mailcoach contractor from Manchester, and Chaplin (a shareholder of the London & Southampton Railway) was the senior partner in the coaching firm of Chaplin Hoare. The committee accepted the estimate of William Chaplin, who had obviously, in the process of compiling his report seen the future of his coaching business look very bleak. He decided to sell his interest in the coaches (the firm had



The original station, opened in 1836, like today had its main entrance to the south (where the stage-coaches from Guildford met the line). There was no town by the station and the gentlemen digging the common would now be more or less where Macdonald's is today.

about 64 coaches, 1,500 horses and several hotels) and bought his way onto the board of the Railway Company. He became a director in May 1837 and joined the management committee on the 11th August 1837.

At the August meeting Joseph Locke reported on the progress of the line. He had dismissed all the small contractors on the remaining 15 miles from Wandsworth to the River Wey and replaced them with Thomas Brassey. Brassey was also employed on the Basingstoke to Winchester section, whilst McIntosh was employed on the Southampton section. The original contractors remained between the Wey and Basingstoke. Locke hoped to be able to open to Woking Common by the 1st May 1838, Basingstoke by the spring of 1839 and Southampton by the following spring. By February, however, bad weather had affected the laying of rails and the opening to Woking was put back a month to the 1st June at the latest.

On Saturday 12th May 1838 an experimental run took place between Nine Elms and Woking Common The Times reported the event.

"LONDON AND SOUTHAMPTON RAILWAY, SATURDAY

The first trip on this railway, which has now been completed as far as Woking Common twenty-three and a half miles from London was made. The Directors, accompanied by a few friends, the engineers, and many persons of distinction set out from the terminus at Nine Elms shortly before two o'clock and accomplished the twenty-three and a half miles in perfect ease in forty- five minutes. Having partaken of luncheon, the party again entered the carriages and returned to town with greater rapidity than they left it, for the distance was accomplished in forty-three minutes. The Railway will he open to the public on Monday next."

With the branch line opening to Guildford in 1845 the name of the station was changed to Woking Junction, being renamed simply 'Woking' in 1913.

According to the Railway Times the day was "one of the finest; the atmosphere serene and clear, and so smooth and easy was the transit, so utterly undisturbed by even the slightest shock or jar, that if the eyes were closed it was difficult to imagine oneself in motion at all."

On the following Saturday a second party of about four hundred directors and friends travelled to Woking Common, leaving Nine Elms at 1 o'clock. They travelled rapidly to Ditton Marsh, where a boiler leak slowed down their progress to Woking, where tents had been erected on the common for the party to have lunch before returning to town in just over an hour.

Woking Common was now well and truly on the map.

Some of the station buildings were replaced in the late 1870's when an extra line was added towards Basingstoke. Later sidings and a fourth line were added to the north of the line at Goldsworth.

11th JUNE - AN ACCIDENTAL DATE IN THE HISTORY OF WOKING STATION

There were at one time three signal boxes at Woking, known as Woking Junction, Woking Yard, and Woking East.

In the 1870's Woking East was the largest of the three with a fifty-lever frame, of which only one was spare. It was situated on the up-side of the station, along the Broadway. When it was built, is uncertain, possibly in the late 1870s or 80s. It was certainly opened before 1890 when the first alterations to the box were made.

Like the east signal box, the Yard signal box also replaced an old pointsmen's hut nearby.

We know the Yard box, shown here, was in operation by 1877 as it is recorded in a report into an accident at the station on the 11th June when one passenger was killed in a collision and later that year Mr Hilditch, the Station Master, was rewarded for his prompt action in averting a serious accident when the signals failed in a snowstorm.

Strangely the 11th June was also the date of an earlier accident in 1846 when an up-goods train from Guildford hit a down-goods train at the junction. The regular driver of the Guildford train was away sick and his replacement was quite rightly looking for a lamp on the high signal post. This was not displayed and he failed to see the signalman's comparatively insignificant hand signal. Several empty wagons were overturned and the engine was slightly damaged, but on this occasion nobody was seriously hurt.

WOKING'S OTHER SIGNAL BOXES

The Junction box replaced a ground frame at the junction of the main London to Southampton line and the Guildford branch. It too was inspected on the 14th July 1877 and had a 26-lever frame with ten spare. Alterations to the track arrangements at the junction in 1878-79 left only three levers spare, and by the turn of the century the work at the junction was so complicated that a larger signal box, shown here, had to he built. The new brick built box had a hundred-lever frame with thirty-four spare for future alterations.

Two other boxes were used near Woking Station, but little evidence survives of their existence. One, at Maybury, was on the up side towards Byfleet. All that is known is that it was in use by November 1883, and that the signalman, Mr Stoner, was rewarded with ten shillings for helping at an accident in Byfleet. The box closed on the 11th October 1931. The other signal box, at Goldsworth Cutting, had a fourteen-lever frame and was built sometime before 1890 and closed in 1903 when the fourth line was built from Basingstoke to Woking.