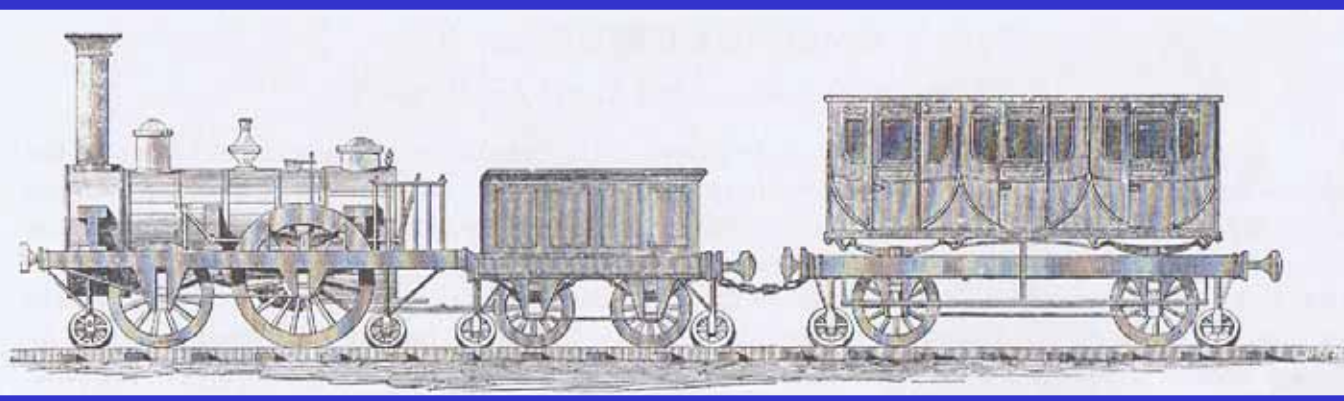
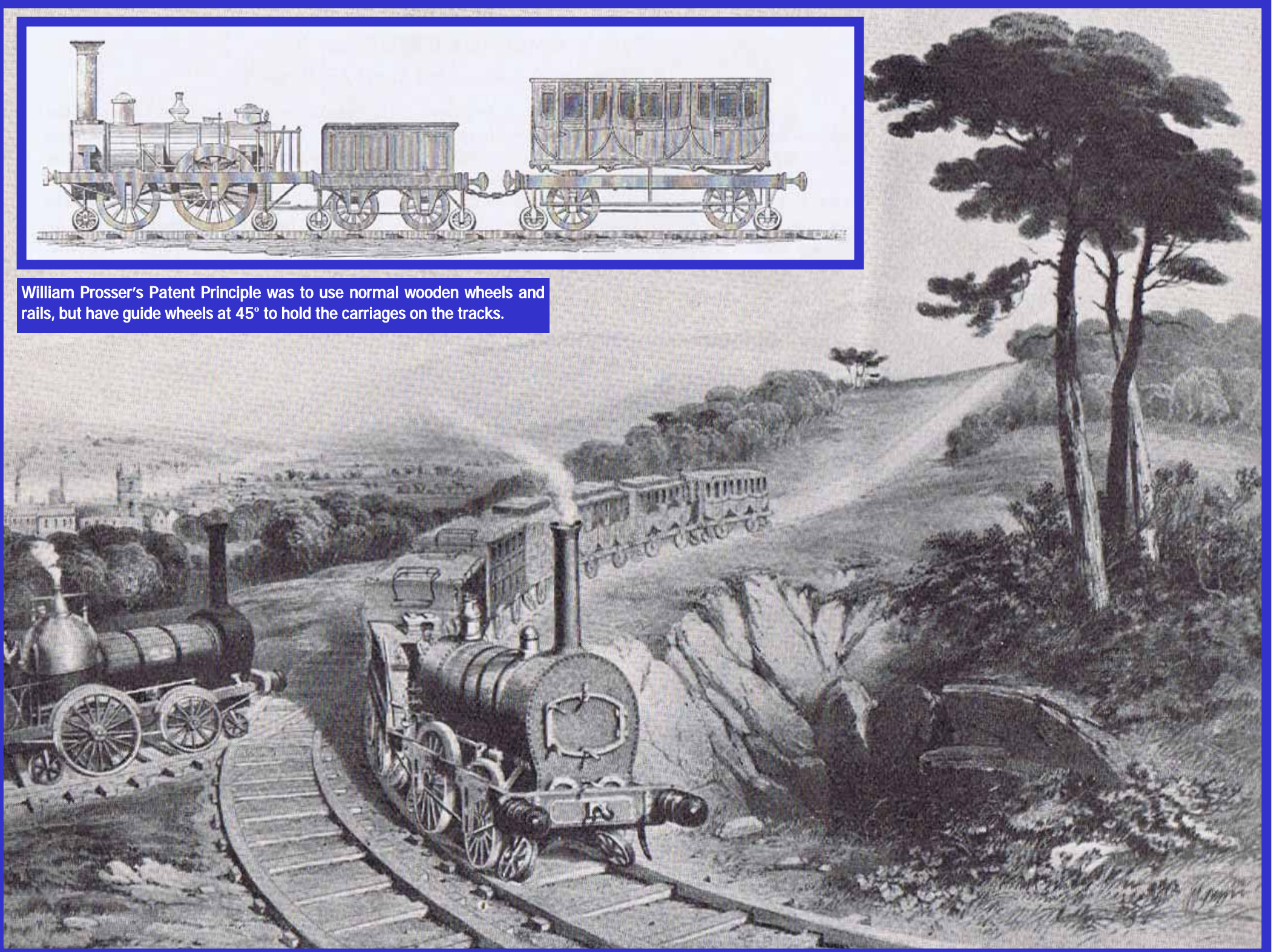


THE IMPACT OF THE GUILDFORD (& PORTSMOUTH) BRANCH ON WOKING STATION

Iain Wakeford 2014



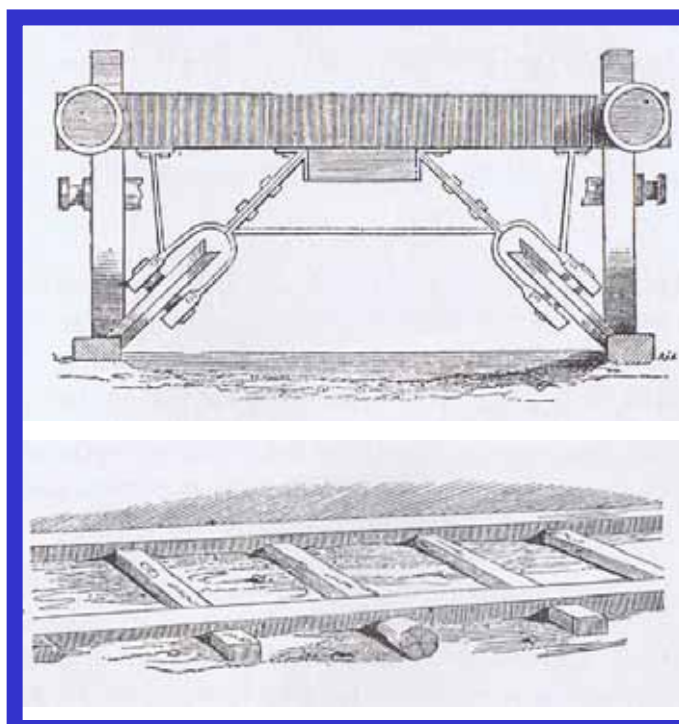
William Prosser's Patent Principle was to use normal wooden wheels and rails, but have guide wheels at 45° to hold the carriages on the tracks.



Even before the railway was opened to Woking Common there were plans to build a branch line to Guildford. In March 1838 the London & Southampton Railway put forward plans for a five and a half mile line, which was revised in 1840 to include an extension to Farnham Road, Guildford. The scheme involved a completely level track, with a huge embankment 42 feet above the Hoe Stream at Mayford. This was abandoned and in 1843 a new company, announced plans to build a line on the same route but without the massive embankments or cuttings.

The new company, called the Guildford Junction Railway, wanted to build the line on the 'Prosser Patent Principle', whereby the train was kept on the flat wooden rails by 'angular guide wheels pressing on the top and sides of the rail'. The flangeless wheels of the train were also to be wooden. The system was demonstrated on Wimbledon Common in the summer of 1845, but had it been used on the Guildford line, passengers would have had to change trains at Woking as through working by London & South Western trains would have been impossible.

On the 29th December 1843 the London & South Western decided to support the new line, but only on the condition that Prosser's system was dropped. The Guildford Junction Railway Act was passed on the 10th May 1844 and on the 27th September they agreed to sell out to the London & South Western for £75,000. By



the agreement the Guildford Junction Railway were to complete the line by the 1st May 1845 using iron rails instead of wood, with earthworks and bridges wide enough for doubling. The line was to terminate in a field owned by the Earl of Onslow, just to the north of the Guildford to Farnham turnpike road. When the line was opened five days late, on the 5th May 1845, Woking became an important railway junction and to cope the station was partially rebuilt.

By the time the Guildford branch was opened the race was on for Portsmouth. The London & South Western Railway was serving the town via Gosport (across the harbour) by a branch from Bishopstoke opened in 1842, but the people of Portsmouth wanted a more direct route to the capital.

By 1845 there were four lines heading more or less in the direction of Portsmouth - the Guildford branch from Woking; the Gosport branch from Bishopstoke; the Brighton & Chichester Railway (linking with the London & Brighton Railway at Brighton); and the Epsom extension of the Croydon Railway Company.



The Guildford Branch in the 1920's with the sidings behind York Road on the right..

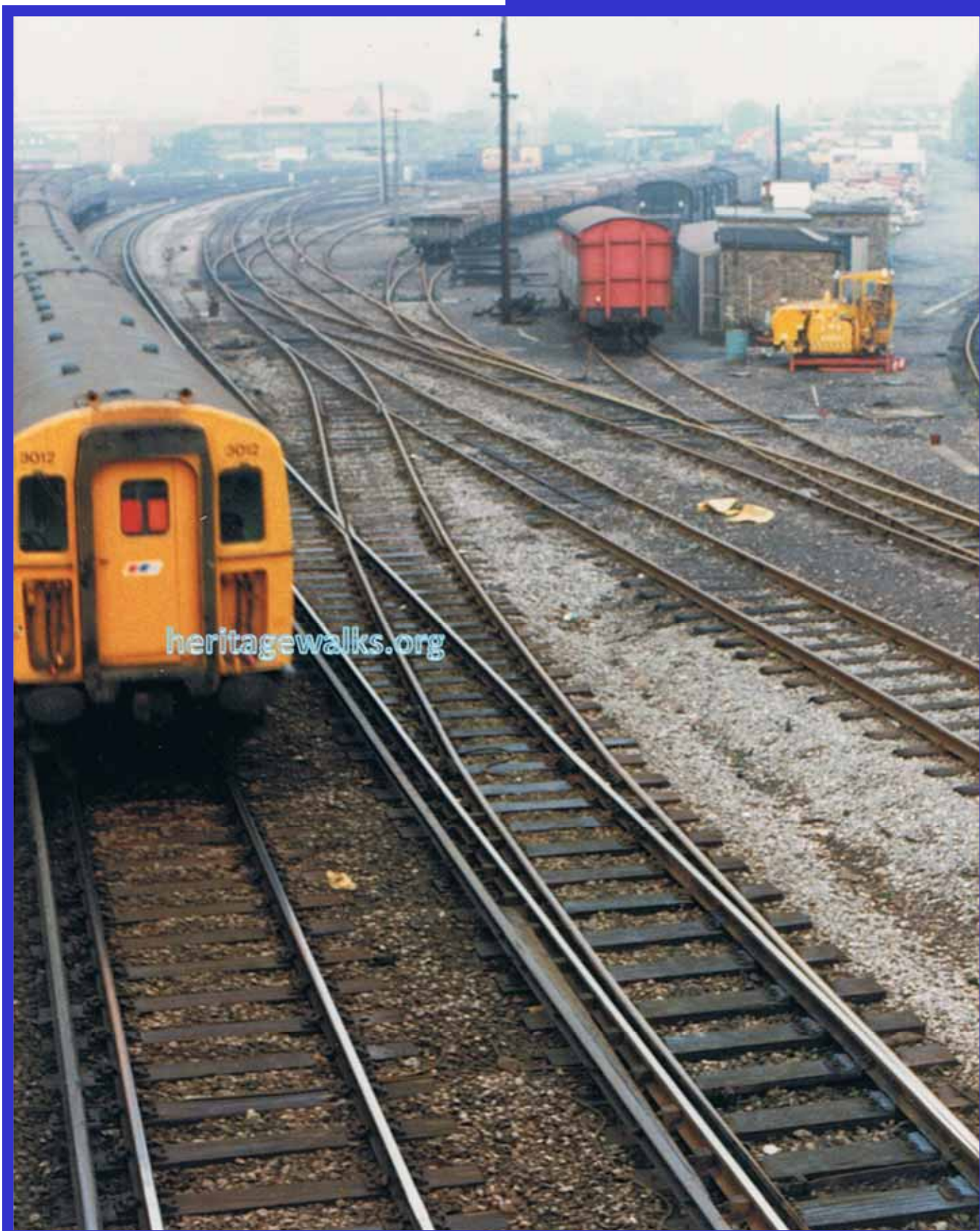
The Stage was set, and in 1845 three Bills were placed before Parliament for lines to Portsmouth. The Direct London & Portsmouth Company (backed by the Croydon Railway), proposed an atmospheric railway from Epsom to Portsmouth via Dorking and Godalming. The Chichester and Portsmouth Extension Bill (supported by the London & Brighton Railway), wanted to go from Chichester via Havant to the town, whilst the London & South Western Railway (content with its Gosport branch) were forced to promote the Guildford, Chichester and Portsmouth Railway in defence of their territory. All three Bills passed the House of Commons, but only the London & Brighton Railway's Bill passed the Lords. Now there was to be two routes to London, via Gosport (94 miles), or via Brighton (95 miles), but still no real direct route desired by the residents of the town.

The Croydon Company had not given up, however, and in 1846 re-submitted its plans (now for a conventional railway). The London & South Western and the London & Brighton, then got together to promote the Guildford, Chichester and Portsmouth Railway in opposition to the Direct London & Portsmouth, but when the Brighton and Croydon companies merged (to form the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway) the agreement was dropped and not surprisingly the Brighton now supported the Direct London & Portsmouth line.

In July 1846 the London & Portsmouth Direct was passed at the expense of the London & South Western's line, but in compensation, two extensions to their system were allowed, from Guildford to Godalming (to link up with the Portsmouth Direct), and from Fareham (on the Gosport branch) to Portsmouth via the Chichester extension.

In 1847 the Chichester extension was opened and in 1848 the Fareham branch was built. In 1849 the London & South Western reached Godalming awaiting the London & Portsmouth Direct to be built, but with the end of railway mania and a shortage of funds the line was never begun. Godalming was the end of the line and Portsmouth was left out in the cold, with still no direct route to the Capital.

The Guildford Branch from Twin Bridges in the late 1980's



It is no surprise that the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway failed to build the Direct line. After all they already had a route to Portsmouth and had reached agreement with the London & South Western Railway to share the profits of both routes to the town. Both companies were content to leave Portsmouth as it was, but Portsmouth was far from content with the railway companies.

In 1853 a new company, the Portsmouth Railway Company, was given permission to build a line from Godalming (on the London & South Western) to Havant (on the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway), giving a much shorter route to London. The independent Portsmouth Railway approached the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway, asking if they wanted to work the line, but they refused, not wanting to upset their arrangements with the London & South Western. Next the London & South Western were approached, but they also refused, until in 1854 Thomas Brassey, the builder, offered to construct a short spur from the South Eastern Railway at Shalford to the new line at Godalming. The London & South Western, fearing that the South Eastern would invade their territory and serve Portsmouth then agreed to take over the line.

But that was not the end of the story. An argument broke out between the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway and the London & South Western resulting in the ending of their Portsmouth agreement and a 'fare war'. When the Direct Portsmouth line was complete the London & South Western announced that a passenger service would begin on the 1st January 1859. At the same time they gave warning that a goods train would negotiate the line on the 28th December 1858. Early in the morning the London & South Western train left Guildford for Havant on route to Portsmouth, but at Havant they found their way blocked. The Brighton Company had removed the rails linking the lines and had placed an engine across the route. The South Western retaliated by moving the engine, but still their way was blocked. In the end they retreated to continue the 'battle' in the courts. The result was that the London & South Western Railway were granted permission to use London, Brighton & South

Coast lines into Portsmouth.

There was now a direct route from Portsmouth to London, but the service was little better than before. The shorter distance (74 miles via Godalming), did not mean a lower fare and only a minimal amount of trains worked the line at first. The 'fare war' started by the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway soon ended and eventually agreement was reached again to share the profits of all lines to Portsmouth. Gradually over the years the service was improved to make the Portsmouth Direct one of the London & South Western's main lines. Not a bad result considering it was made up of four branches, the Guildford Junction Railway, the Godalming line, the Portsmouth Railway and the Chichester to Portsmouth extension.

BRANCH LINE TO ALTON

On the 9th August 1845 the London & South Western Railway agreed to build a branch from Guildford to Alton and in 1846 placed a bill before Parliament for two lines one from Guildford, the other from the main line at Pirbright. Only the first branch was passed, the first section of which, from Guildford to Ash Junction, was opened on the 20th August 1849. It was extended to Farnham on the 8th October. The slump in railway building nearly prevented the completion of the Farnham section. At one stage the Company were considering abandoning the scheme but Thomas Brassey, the builder, agreed to lower his prices to £3,500 per mile and build it single. The total cost being about £30,000, less than it would cost to abandon the line. It was not until the 28th July 1852 that the line to Alton was complete.

In 1861 a bill was placed before Parliament for a line from Alton to Winchester and on the 28th July the Alton, Airesford and Winchester Railway Act was passed. In 1864 there were plans to build a branch from this line at Ropley to Fareham, providing another route to the south coast and Portsmouth. In July 1864 it was amended to join the Petersfield to Bishops Waltham branch at Meonstoke and on the 1st January 1865 the name of the railway was then changed to the Mid Hants Railway. When the Woking to Farnham line was opened in 1870

there was an alternative route to the main line between Woking & Winchester, but because of the construction of the Mid Hants line this alternative was rarely used for passenger services.

READING, GUILDFORD & REIGATE RAILWAY

Meanwhile the Reading, Guildford & Reigate Railway Company (acquired by the South Eastern Railway in 1852), had gained permission to use the South Western rails between Ash Junction, Guildford, and Shalford Junction (on the Godalming branch). By the 4th July 1849 they had opened the Redhill to Dorking and Reading to Farnborough sections, and on the 20th August were able to run trains between Reading and Guildford. The eastern section had also been extended by this date to Shalford awaiting the opening of the Godalming Branch. When this was opened Guildford was served by trains from two railway companies, and passengers could choose to go to London via Reading, Woking or Reigate.

BRANCH LINE FROM HORSHAM

In 1846 there were suggestions that a line should be built between Guildford and Horsham, but as the London & South Western Railway refused to promote the scheme the idea was dropped. In 1860, however, the London Brighton and South Coast Railway Company decided to back a similar idea and on the 6th August an Act was passed giving powers for the line to be built. In 1861 a Bill was placed before Parliament for running powers over the London & South Western Railway to Woking, but on the 7th May 1861 the two companies reached agreement that running powers should only be granted on the line between Peasmarsh Junction and Guildford. Had the Brighton company succeeded Woking would have had trains of two railway companies.

The opening of the Portsmouth Direct line in August 1859 and the extensions to the West Country (Exeter being reached in July 1860) gave Woking an unrivalled service. By July 1862 there were 16 up trains and 12 down trains and the fares to London were 7s. 6d. first class, and 5s. 6d. second class.

The view from Twin Bridges looking towards Guildford.



THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE 'BANANA SHEDS'



In 1845 the station was partially rebuilt when the Guildford line was added but most of the original buildings (pictured last week) survived.

In 1879 a third line was added and new sidings and signalling arrangements introduced. During October 1885 the railway were negotiating with local landowners (notably the Necropolis Company) for land to improve the sidings at Woking. Extra land was purchased to the north of the main line at Goldsworth (where Morrisons is today), and to the south of the branch to Guildford. The extra land to the north also enabled the third line to be extended to Basingstoke in 1888 and Woking Station was again rebuilt.

The rebuilding of 1888 involved some major alterations including the demolition of several original buildings. A new goods shed to the west of the station's south entrance was built. It was demolished in 1988 but many of the small brick buildings and the 'banana sheds' (seen here) survived for a few more years until they too finally succumbed to the development of the new apartments on Victoria Road.

