

CHAPTER 4 THE LONDON AND PORTSMOUTH RAILWAY SCHEME AND THE ORIGIN OF THE CROYDON, MERSTHAM AND GODSTONE IRON RAILWAY.

In his second report on the Surrey Iron Railway proposal dated 10 December, 1800, William Jessop had put forward the idea of a railway between Wandsworth and the Sussex coast, of which the Surrey Iron Railway would form the first stage:

" one might venture to foretell, with little doubt of the prediction being verified, that the railway to Croydon will become a trunk for many branches - It has often been in contemplation to have a Navigable Intercourse between the Metropolis and the Coast of Sussex; but the want of water, the great expense, and many other impediments, have hitherto discouraged it: since, however, most of the impediments forbidding to a Canal are not obstacles to a Railway, that is one prominent reason for believing, that when they become generally known they will be frequently adopted. The completion of one so near to the Metropolis will probably tend more to give publicity to the system than all those which have been hitherto executed in the remoter Counties."

It would seem that the promoters were interested in the prospect and asked Jessop to make more definite proposals. During September, 1801, when building work on the Surrey Iron Railway was just beginning, a notice of intention to apply to Parliament for a Bill to authorise making an extension to it, was published. The notice, dated 14 September, 1801, described a route commencing at the termination of the railway at Croydon, running thence through Merstham, Reigate, Dorking, Ockley, Horsham, Billingshurst and Wisborough Green, to terminate at Newbridge in Sussex. At Newbridge, the northern limit of the Arun Navigation, completed in 1790, a dock was intended to be made. From Merstham, a collateral branch was to be made to Lindfield via Godstone, Horne, Burstow, Worth, East Grinstead and Ardingley. At Lindfield, a dock was to be built to connect with the River Ouse Navigation.^[1] (in fact, although work on the Ouse Navigation had been proceeding since the authorising Act was passed in 1790, the river was not made navigable as far as Lindfield until 1809).

This initial proposal was not, therefore, for a railway all the way to the Sussex coast. In fact, the plan subsequently deposited with the Clerk of the Peace for Surrey on 29 September, 1801, showed a much more modest proposal, for an extension of the Surrey Iron Railway only to Reigate. ^[2] The route shown thereon commenced at a junction with the Surrey Iron Railway at Pitlake, and ran south-eastwards through South Croydon to join the road leading to Reigate, following the course of the road, as far south as the modern Coulsdon. It then ran to the east of the road, passing east of Merstham, then turned to the southwest and crossed Wray Common to terminate at the east end of Reigate High Street. In view of later developments, it should be noted that although the route was to the east of Merstham village, it did not pass through the lime-works and stone quarries there, further to the east.

Nothing was done to advance the major scheme at this time, or even the first section from Croydon to Reigate, but the proposal was revived, in a modified form, the following year, with Portsmouth as the ultimate objective.

At the first annual meeting of the Surrey Iron Railway Company, held at the Spread Eagle Inn, Wandsworth, on 3 June, 1802, with George Tritton in the chair, the progress that had been made in building the railway encouraged the proprietors "to enquire whether the work

might not be extended through the Counties of Surrey, Sussex, and Hants, so as to open a Communication with the Sea-Ports in the Channel, and particularly with Portsmouth. Such an Enquiry was particularly desirable, at a Time when, from the general Conviction of the Importance of providing some means of easing the Expence and shortening the Delay of Carriage, it was to be apprehended that Plans might be formed to cut Navigable Canals through this District of Country,"

The proprietors went on to review all the disadvantages attending the formation of a canal in the general direction of such a railway, and in particular considered that the nature of the ground between Croydon and Merstham precluded any extension of the Croydon Canal in that direction. On the other hand, it was agreed that a railway was a feasible proposition, and its alleged advantages were described at length in the minutes of the meeting.

The Wandsworth terminus was felt to be ideal as it was conveniently situated close both to London and to the mouth of the Grand Junction Canal at Brentford; and the Surrey Iron Railway "was peculiarly favourable to the Country beyond Croydon, because it opened to the Farmer a fine Market for his Corn, at the many extensive Mills established on the River Wandle, without the Delay of going to London." If a branch to London was required, as an alternative to navigating the Thames, it was from the Surrey Iron Railway "that the Branch to the Metropolis could be made with the greatest Economy as to Price, and the greatest Convenience as to Level."

It was estimated that a single line of railway, with passing places, could be built for £3000 per mile, and would provide a return to the shareholders of nearly seven per cent per annum. Accordingly, it was resolved that "a Subscription be entered into to defray the Expence of a Survey, and of taking the levels from Croydon to Reigate, as the next Step towards the Extension of the Plan to Portsmouth and the other Ports in the Channel." William Jessop, George Wildgoose and Samuel Jones were engaged to make the survey and prepare a plan, section and book of reference.[3]

The survey and drawings were sufficiently advanced to enable a notice of intention to apply to Parliament for a Bill, to be published on 2 September, 1802. The notice outlined a route from Croydon to Reigate with a branch from Merstham to Godstone Green, and another branch from Purley to Godstone Green via Caterham.[4]

The final proposals, prepared by Wildgoose and Jones, were presented to a meeting held at the London Tavern on 29 September, when George Tritton was called to the chair. Prior notice of this meeting had been advertised, and the "Nobility and Gentry who are connected with the Counties of Surrey, Sussex, and Hants, in the line through which the said Railway is intended to pass", had been "earnestly entreated to give their Attendance." [5]

The meeting was informed that the survey confirmed the previous opinion that a canal could not be formed in the district south of Croydon without interfering with the sources of the Wandle and other rivers; and further advantages of a railway were described. It was agreed that the proposed extension to Reigate and Godstone "promises to be a work of great public utility." The cost, for a total distance of about 16 miles, was estimated at around £48,000.

The proposal was approved and adopted, and it was agreed to raise £50,000 in shares of £100. A subscription list was opened and the first instalment of three per cent ordered to be paid. A committee of 26 members, composed mainly of Surrey Iron Railway shareholders, was appointed to "take the necessary Steps for carrying the Measure into Effect." [3],[6] .

A copy of the plan was deposited with the Clerk of the Peace for Surrey on the day of the meeting, 29 September. Prepared by Wildgoose and Jones, the route shown did not include the branch from Purley to Godstone mentioned in the notice of intent, but it did show the branch from Merstham to Godstone.[7] This was to pass close to the limeworks and stone quarries to the east of Merstham village, and this choice of route may have been due to the influence of Hylton Jolliffe, who had recently inherited the Merstham estate following the

death of his father, William Jolliffe, in February, 1802, and who now owned the quarries. On the other hand, it was the most obvious route towards Godstone. The route from Merstham to Reigate was changed from that shown on the earlier deposited plan, branching off from the line to Godstone just beyond the quarries. This was a less feasible route, entailing the crossing of higher ground, and it is not clear why it was altered.

A meeting of "the Committee for the Extension of the Surrey Iron Railway" was held at Wandsworth on 7 October, 1802, with George Tritton in the chair, at which William Jessop reported on the lines proposed by the surveyors. He generally approved of the route, but advised that a variation be made at Reigate, in order to obviate a deep cutting and to facilitate a future southward extension. He considered it "extremely fortunate" that the line was to pass near the limestone and firestone quarries at Merstham, and thought that "without any other object in view, these alone are likely to pay for the Expence of making the Railway to Merstham."

The committee resolved that William Jessop, together with his son Josias, should be asked to prepare a plan and estimate for a further extension from Reigate to Portsmouth. As it was felt to be "of the utmost importance that the Company, to be incorporated for this great Work, should be chiefly composed of the Noblemen, Gentlemen, and others, resident in or connected with the Counties through which the same shall pass", a subcommittee was appointed to confer with such gentlemen in the vicinity of Reigate, Godstone, and nearby places and to "engage their Concurrence" in the undertaking.[3]

" At a further meeting of the committee, held on 14 October, the subcommittee, composed of George Tritton, William Dent, and George Shepley, reported that they had two days previously had an interview with the magistrates then assembled at a Petty Sessions at Reigate. These included Robert Ladbroke, who owned land at Gatton; and Hylton Jolliffe and his brother William John Jolliffe, who were to become very much involved with the promotion of the scheme. The magistrates agreed to convene a public meeting to take the railway project into consideration.[3]

An advertisement was published accordingly [8], and the meeting was duly held at the Swan Inn, Reigate, on 9 November, with Robert Hudson, one of the magistrates, in the chair. Although those attending gave general approval to the proposed extension to Portsmouth, it was considered that the line should also be extended to London from some point on the Surrey Iron Railway. Accordingly, it was resolved that William Jessop should be engaged to make a survey and prepare a report on a suitable route to London. Fifteen persons were added to the committee, including Ladbroke and the Jolliffe brothers, and several other owners of lands south of Croydon: Sir William Clayton of Godstone, Colonel Mark Wood of Gatton, Thomas Byron of Coulsdon, and William Parker Hamond and Sir Charles Blunt of Croydon. It was arranged that a further meeting be held at Croydon on 23 November, to receive and consider Jessop's report.[9]

Apparently the requirement that the railway should be extended to London had been made informally to the subcommittee at their meeting with the magistrates on 12 October. For on 21 October the committee had assembled at Wandsworth to consider a plan, drawn up by one of the members and dated 16 October, for a northerly extension from the Surrey Iron Railway, "as it seems to be a Desideratum with the Gentlemen of Surrey, Sussex, and Hants, that the proposed Railway to Portsmouth should be extended all the way to London." The route suggested started by a junction with the Surrey Iron Railway near Mitcham, ran thence to Brixton, then either along the highway, or through Stockwell to Vauxhall Road, and then on to the Thames at a place opposite the Savoy. At this spot "it has long been in contemplation to throw up a Stone or Iron Bridge across the River." Assuming that this bridge were to be built, the railway would cross over it and continue on to Tottenham Court Road where it might connect with the proposed London Railway, which was to run from the Paddington

Basin of the Grand Junction Canal to the London Docks.[10] In fact, the route outlined was not adopted by Jessop, who later proposed a different line to a different terminal site.

Route of the Surrey Iron Railway as shown on the deposited plan A [78.8kb]

The meeting arranged for 23 November was duly held at the King's Arms Inn at Croydon, with Hylton Jolliffe in the chair. An account of the proceedings, as published in several newspapers a few days later, must have disconcerted those railway supporters who read it, but had not been present. It was reported that two resolutions had been passed: that any extension of the Surrey Iron Railway to London was unnecessary; and that any further consideration of an extension to Reigate and Godstone should "be deferred "until the practicability of making a canal through that Country to Portsmouth, shall be ascertained by a Report daily expected from Mr.Rennie on that subject."[11]

The explanation was forthcoming in an account of a meeting of the committee for the railway extension, held at the Spread Eagle Inn, Wandsworth, on 25 November.

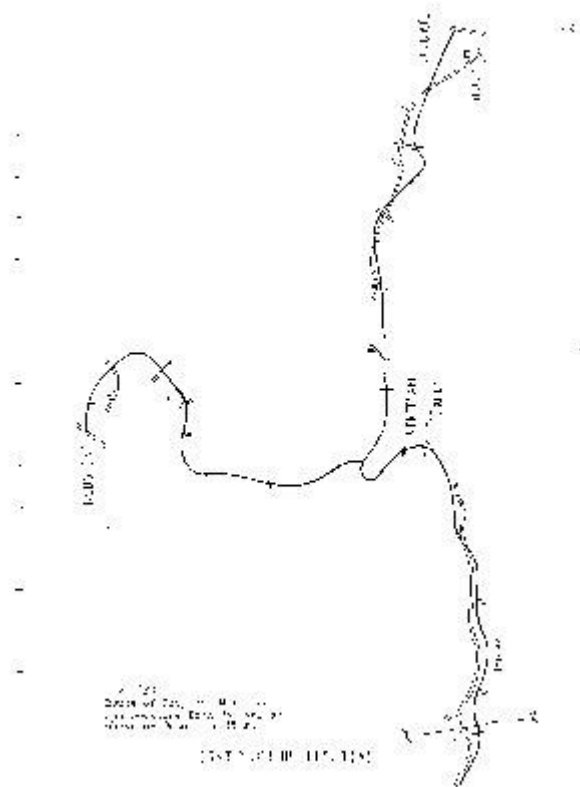
The chairman, George Tritton, reported that he and some fellowmembers had attended the previous meeting, which "had scarcely proceeded in the business of the day when a number of Persons connected with, or employed on the Croydon Canal, proposed a Set of Resolutions, which they had previously drawn up, and which were totally irrelevant to the business of the day. By superior numbers they carried their Resolutions, against the unanimous opinion of the Gentlemen who had contributed to the Survey."

A further meeting, open only to the subscribers, was convened for 7 December, 1802, to pursue the interrupted agenda of the earlier meeting.[12]

It has been mentioned that a proposal to extend the Croydon Canal had been referred to at the meeting of the Surrey Iron Railway share-holders held on 3 June, 1802. This project had apparently been in contemplation early in 1802, and a survey from Croydon to Merstham had been carried out by April, but it was first brought to the notice of the public later that year. On 10 August a meeting of some of the proprietors of the Croydon Canal was held at the Swan Inn, Reigate, at which it was decided to convene a public meeting on 18 August, "for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of forming (by means of a Canal and of the River Arun) a complete Inland Navigation between London and Portsmouth."[13]

The meeting was duly held at the King's Head Inn at Horsham, when it was agreed that £4000 should be raised by subscription, to pay the expenses of having a survey made for the extension, and an estimate prepared. Patrick Drummond, the clerk of the Croydon Canal Company, was instructed to call a further meeting as soon as £2000 should have been subscribed,* in order to consider the next step.[14]

On 27 August, Drummond announced that the requisite £2000 had been subscribed, and arranged for a meeting to be held on 6 September. At this meeting, which, also took place at Horsham, it was resolved that "the necessary Survey be forthwith completed, and an



Engineer's Estimate of the Expence, and his Report upon the subject, be forthwith procured." John Rennie was formally appointed as engineer, and 28 of subscribers were elected to form a committee. It was decided that a notice of intention to apply to Parliament for the necessary Bill be published as soon as possible, in order that the application might be made in the next Session.[15]

The notice, dated 9 September, 1802, was duly published. It indicated a route from Croydon to the River Arun at Newbridge, and from Tortington, further down the Arun, to Portsmouth.[16]. The plan, produced at great speed, was deposited at the offices of the Clerks of the Peace for the affected areas on 29 September.[17]

Following the publication of the notice, public meetings were convened by two groups of landowners opposed to the scheme. A meeting of "Proprietors and Occupiers of Land, between Tortington and Portsmouth", held at Arundel on 30 September, agreed to oppose the Bill, but only in respect of the making of the canal between Tortington and Portsmouth.[18] The other opposition group, composed of "Gentlemen, Proprietors, and Occupiers of Land and Houses in the Town and Neighbourhood of Croydon", assembled at the King's Arms Inn, Croydon, on 27 October. They agreed that the intended canal would be injurious to their interests, and they also resolved to oppose the Bill in Parliament. Subscriptions were sought to defray expenses, and a committee of 16 members was appointed, which included several members of the Surrey Iron Railway Extension committee.[19]

On 14 October the committee of the London and Portsmouth Canal promoters, meeting in London, had been informed by the chairman, Lord Gwydir, that John Rennie was unable to report on the scheme, until further surveys had been completed. It was resolved that he be urged to expedite the work. It was also decided that he be sent a copy of a letter received by the committee, containing the resolutions of a meeting of mill-owners and manufacturers on the River Wandle, held two days earlier, and be asked to incorporate his comments thereon in his report.[20]

The mill-owners' meeting, held at the King's Head Inn at Merton, had been chaired by John Hilbert. Taking notice of the intention to bring in a Bill for making the canal, the meeting agreed that a canal could not be formed between Croydon and Merstham without adversely affecting the sources of the Wandle. They therefore resolved that they would oppose the Bill in Parliament.[21]

In fact, the Bill was not proceeded with at this time, as Rennie's report was not completed until July of the following year. In the interim, the canal proponents engaged in spirited opposition to the rival railway project, of which the first manifestation was their disruption of the meeting of the Surrey Iron Railway Extension supporters held on 25 November, 1802, as previously reported.

The meeting of the railway subscribers, following the interrupted meeting, was held at the King's Arms Inn, Croydon, on 7 December, when Hylton Jolliffe again took the chair. William Jessop's report on the proposed extension of the Surrey Iron Railway to London was read and approved, and it was agreed to raise £35,000 in shares of £100 for carrying the scheme into effect. It was also resolved that the subscriptions for this line, referred to as the "London Extension Railway", and those for the extension from Croydon to Reigate and Godstone, be incorporated into a general fund for the complete line from London to Portsmouth, as soon as the survey to Portsmouth was completed; and that an application be made to Parliament in the next session for a Bill to incorporate the various portions into one consolidated Act. It was arranged that a further meeting be held on 29 January, 1803, by which date it was anticipated that Jessop's report on the complete line to Portsmouth would be available.[22]

Meanwhile, the railway committee went ahead with the Parliamentary application in respect of the Croydon to Reigate and Godstone section. On 13 December, 1802, they presented a

petition to the House of Commons for leave to bring in a Bill to authorise the making of this extension. The committee to which the petition was referred reported to the House on the following day that the Standing Orders had not been complied with, insofar as the notice of intent published in September, 1802, had referred to an extension of the powers of the 1801 Act of Incorporation of the Surrey Iron Railway, whereas the petition was in respect of a new and independent Act. The following day it was ordered that the petitioners should issue a revised notice of intent, and this, dated 31 December, 1802, was duly published. [23]

A little earlier the Croydon Canal and Grand Surrey Canal companies had announced their intention to oppose the Bill. On 10 December, the committee of the Grand Surrey Canal had resolved that as the proposed railway extensions "would be highly detrimental to the rights and interests" of the company, they would "take the most efficacious means of opposing their being carried into effect." [24] And on 13 December, the committee of the Croydon Canal also determined to oppose the railway.

Route of the Surrey Iron Railway as shown on the deposited plan B [78.8kb]

scheme in Parliament, and to "concur with the Grand Surrey Canal Company in taking the most efficacious means to that effect.

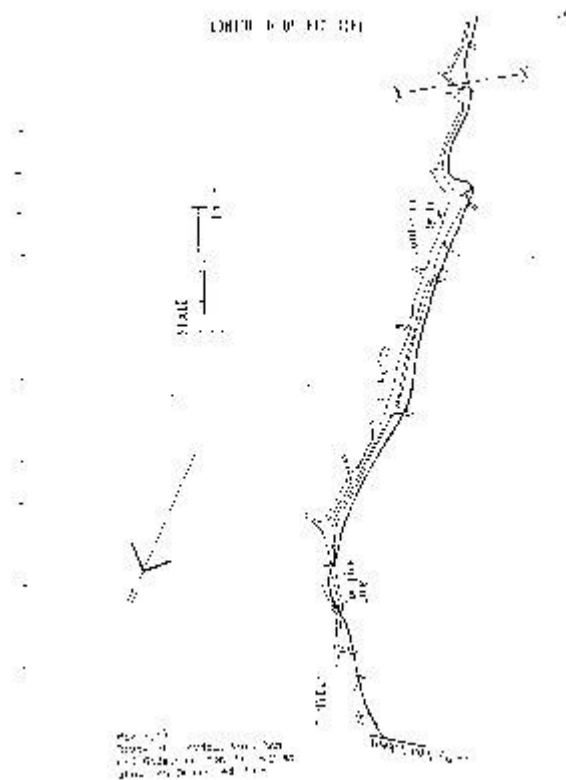
"[25] The railway petition was presented again to the Commons on 4 February, 1803, and the first reading of the Bill was given on 23 February. Two days later the Croydon Canal Company delivered their petition opposing the Bill, alleging that the "proposed Railway would transfer from the Croydon Canal to the Surrey Iron Railway, a principal part of that traffic, in prospect of which the Proprietors of the Canal have subscribed a capital of £50,000, and have already expended a fifth part of that sum in its execution." On 8 March the Grand Surrey Canal committee presented their petition, praying that they be heard "against such parts of the said Bill as may affect them."

Lord Gwydir and several others, being "subscribers to a fund for ascertaining the practicability of forming a Canal

Navigation from London to Portsmouth", presented an opposing petition on 11 March, stating that the survey for the proposed canal was well under way, that it had begun before that for the railway, and that between Croydon and Reigate the lines of the proposed canal and railway "would interfere with and cross each other, so that, if the Railway Bill should pass, it would occupy the ground and effectually prevent the execution of the Canal."

A similar petition to the latter was presented by another body of subscribers to the canal on 14 March. On the same day, two other opposing petitions were submitted, by different groups of proprietors and occupiers of houses and lands in Croydon, claiming that their properties would be injured by the making of the railway.

The second reading of the Bill took place on 14 March. Three days later a petition was presented by the Trustees of the Surrey and Sussex Turnpike Roads, who believed that certain powers contained in the Bill would be "prejudicial to the Roads under their care." On 4 April, the committee examining the Bill reported that they had heard all the opposition



petitioners, and had accordingly made some amendments to the Bill. These were approved by the House, and the third reading was given on 6 April.

The Bill passed to the House of Lords, where it received its first reading on 19 April and its second on 21 April, when three petitions

against the Bill were heard. These were submitted by Mark Wood (the owner of Gatton Park), "by sundry landowners and inhabitants of Croydon and by Dr. Ireland, the vicar of Croydon.

The Lords committee made some further amendments, which were approved at the third reading on 12 May. The Royal Assent was given on 17 May, 1803. The title of the Act was, "An Act for making and maintaining a Railway from or from near a Place called Pitlake Meadow, in the Town of Croydon, to or near to the Town of Reigate, in the County of Surrey, with a Collateral Branch from the said Railway, at or near a Place called Merstham, in the Parish of Merstham, to or near to a Place called Godstone Green, in the Parish of Godstone, all in the said County of Surrey." (43 Geo.III, cap. 35). The Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company was thereby incorporated.

Two months later, on 16 July, 1803, John Rennie completed his long-awaited report and estimate on the proposed canal between Croydon and Portsmouth. This was presented to a meeting of the committee held on 4 August. The committee approved the report and resolved that the necessary steps should be taken "for preparing and depositing the Plans, and giving the Notices, pursuant to the Standing Orders of Parliament, in order that if the Subscribers should determine upon proceeding to Parliament in the ensuing Session, the Business may be in a proper state to attain that object."^[26]

A general meeting of the subscribers took place on 15 August, with Lord Gwydir in the chair. Rennie's report was approved, and it was agreed that application for a Bill should be made in the next session. A subscription list was opened with the aim of raising £800,000 in shares of £100 each.^[27]

Rennie commenced his report with the statement that "the Line of Canal originally presented ... by the Surveyors, had been taken with too much precipitation, and contained obstacles which in fact, rendered it impracticable." The revised route he now approved commenced at a junction with the Croydon Canal just north of its termination, ran south to Merstham where a long tunnel was to go through Merstham Hill, and on to Smallfield, where an aqueduct would be necessary. Thence the route was to Pulborough via Crawley, Ifield and Faygate, and on to Arundel, where it connected with the River Arun. The navigation was then along the river for over a mile, and the canal then continued via Yapton, Barnham, Mundham, Chichester, Emsworth and Havant, to terminate at Portsmouth Harbour. The distance from Croydon would be about 100 miles, and there would be 41 locks.

Two estimates were given, one for a broad barge canal, amounting to £660,649, and the other for a narrow boat canal, of £511,621. In both cases there was an additional £60,000 to be allowed for the cost of the reservoirs.^[28] Rennie favoured the narrow canal, but it would seem that the proprietors had opted for the broad canal.

The notice of intention to apply for a Bill for making the canal, dated 8 September, 1803, was published early in September,^[29] and the plan was deposited with the local Clerks of the Peace on 29 September.^[30] A little later the "Lewes Journal" optimistically reported that "the London and Portsmouth Canal it is now thought will be speedily carried into execution, a great number of shares having been subscribed for, since Mr. Rennie's survey and report, and no opposition that we have heard of being intended to be made to it in Parliament."^[31]

However, some formidable opposition was to be declared in due course.

Meanwhile, the proceedings in connection with the London and Portsmouth Railway scheme continued. The meeting of the promoters which had been arranged for 29 January, 1803, had been cancelled, as Jessop's report on the extension from Reigate to Portsmouth had not been

completed by that date. The report was not, in fact, ready until August, and on the 19th. of that month a meeting of the "Committee and Subscribers of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway" was held at the George Inn, Portsmouth, with Hylton Jolliffe in the chair, "for the purpose of taking into consideration the practicability of extending the said Railway to Portsmouth and London."

It had been decided earlier that the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway should be built only as far as Merstham. The reports considered at this meeting were therefore on a proposed line from Merstham to Portsmouth, and on the London Extension Railway from Wandsworth to Southwark,

It was agreed that the whole line to be completed by these two extensions would "not only be of great National Service, but attended with numerous advantages to the Line of Country through which the same shall pass", and it was accordingly resolved to raise £400,000 in shares of £100 for carrying it into effect. This sum was to be added to the fund for making the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway, and the requisite notice of intention was to be published as soon as possible with a view to applying to Parliament in the next session for a Bill for making the two extensions and for incorporating them with the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway under the general title of "The London and Portsmouth Iron Railway." A number of businessmen and land-owners, chiefly from the Portsmouth area, were elected as additional members of the committee.[32]

A further meeting of the subscribers was held at the Bear Inn at Havant on 26 August, 1803, chaired by William John Jolliffe. The proceedings were devoted mainly to a consideration of "the comparative advantages of the two plans for facilitating the transport of goods, viz. by a canal, or a railway", obviously in response to the claims then being made by the London and Portsmouth Canal promoters. It was agreed that "however advantageous a canal may be in districts to which an inland navigation is applicable, yet in this line of country it would be obviously attended with such incalculable difficulties and expense in the making and with such hazards in the maintaining, that it would not be a safe speculation to attempt its execution. Whereas an Iron Railway may to a certainty be completed, upon an expense previously ascertained to a shilling, and the maintenance of which would be subject to no impediment from the variation of seasons."

In more specific comparisons, it was asserted that the expense of the canal was estimated at £800,000, while the railway would cost only half that amount; that the length of the canal would be 112 miles, and the time taken to convey goods on it would be not less than 65 hours for the whole journey, whereas the railway would be 95 miles long and conveyance by it would take only 24 hours; and that a railway could be constructed in half the time necessary for the building of a canal.

A subcommittee comprised of 13 members was appointed to take the necessary measures for carrying the railway scheme forward. None of these members was a proprietor of the Surrey Iron Railway or Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway, and the active promotion of the project seems to have passed by this time to the interested businessmen and land-owners in Sussex and Hampshire. Cornthwaite John Hector was appointed as clerk to this subcommittee, but William Bedcott Lutly continued as clerk to the full committee. Finally, it was resolved that "a model of the railway" be displayed at the Swan Inn, Chichester, until 1 October.[33]

The subcommittee arranged for a public meeting to be held at the Crown Inn, Gosport, on 8 September, 1803, "at the request of a number of the respectable Merchants and other Inhabitants of the Town of Gosport and its vicinity." This meeting was chaired by Edmund Cobb Hurry, a Gosport banker, and the main proceedings were reported as follows:

"At this meeting a paper which had "been transmitted to them by Patrick Drummond, Esq., solicitor for the Canal, stating all the advantages of a Canal in opposition to a Railway, was

read and care-fully examined. In this paper it was asserted that the Wandsworth and Croydon Railway had cost £6400 per mile, whereas it had not cost more than £4500, and that goods cost very little less conveyed by the railway than by the common turnpike road; whereas the expence is little more than one half, and will, when completed, be no more than a third. Every fact in the paper was refuted in a manner so clear and so satisfactory to the Meeting, that they came to a unanimous resolution, that the authors of it had been very much misinformed, and that the statements were not warranted by facts. They resolved therefore, in conjunction with the Gentlemen of Portsmouth, Chichester, and Havant, that a railway would be more beneficial in that line of country than a canal, and that the Subscriptions be continued for carrying the same into effect." [34]

On 13 September, 1803, another meeting of the subscribers was held, at the Society Hall, Portsea, with Thomas Sharp presiding. The members gave consideration to a draft of a "Statement of Facts in support of an Iron Railway", which had been drawn up by the committee to refute certain observations circulated by the canal promoters, and it was resolved that this statement be printed and distributed. (No copies of either of these documents have been found, but their substance is probably contained in an anonymous pamphlet giving a "Comparative View" of the two schemes, to be described later.) The subscribers were asked to pay one per cent of the value of their shares; and a further eight members were added to the committee, [35]

A public meeting, "called by the Committee of the intended London and Portsmouth Canal, and attended by the Committee of the proposed London and Portsmouth Railway", was held at the Fountain Inn at Portsmouth on 20 September, with Thomas Minchin, a Portsmouth banker, in the chair. The amicable but indecisive conclusion was reached, that "after a very full and impartial Investigation of the Merits of the proposed Canal and Railway, this Meeting is impressed with a conviction that both Plans possess intrinsic Merit, and promise incalculable Advantages to the Public, and to this part of the Country in particular." [36] This agreement did not, however, put a stop to the rivalry between the two parties.

On 24 October, 1803, Robert Marshall, a former lessee of the Wey Navigation, published a pamphlet [37] giving his observations on the respective advantages of the proposed railway and canal from London to Portsmouth. Whilst he considered that "canals are preferable to other modes of conveyance in level countries, where the surface of the land is of little value, and the bowels of the earth contain valuable mines or quarries; with the advantage of plenty of water and a retentive soil", he intimated that neither the route of the Croydon Canal nor of its proposed extension passed through land of this nature. He alluded to the "very serious difficulties" the canal to Portsmouth would encounter, in particular relating to the tunnel at Merstham and to the nature of the soil which was "absorbent and porous", and would cause a serious shortage of water. Of the estimated cost of £800,000 for the canal, he commented, "the subscribers to the Croydon Canal are best able to judge how much the expense of that undertaking will exceed its first estimate, which ought to be a fair criterion for the whole line to Portsmouth." To obtain what he considered a more accurate estimate of the cost of the canal, Marshall added to the figure of £800,000 the sum of £400,000 to take account of "interest on the Instalments, probable extra expences by unforeseen circumstances, such as quick-sands, swallows, and other impediments to which tunnelling is subject." He also reckoned that the annual expense of lock-keepers, wharfingers, and other employees, and of repairs and maintenance, would amount to £5500. In order to pay the subscribers 5% interest on their investment, it would thus be necessary to earn £65,500 a year, "to obtain which there will be required 48,000 tons per annum to pass the whole line at 3d. per ton per mile." "Is there," Marshall wondered, "any road in this Kingdom, that can furnish such a tonnage?" He pointed out that a railway possessed certain advantages over a canal: "A railway does not require one fourth of the land consumed by a canal, nor does it damage any land beyond its

boundary; it is obstructed neither by drought, flood, frost or snow." He went on to claim that the Surrey Iron Railway had been completed "at the price of the original estimate", and concluded therefore that the estimated cost of its extension "is reduced to a certainty." To the quoted cost of £400,000 for the railway he added only £20,000 for interest on the instalments, assuming that it would be completed in two years. Allowing £2850 annually for repairs and running expenses, the sum to be raised each year to pay 5% interest thus amounted to £23,850, "to obtain which there will be required 20,100 tons annually to pass the whole line at 3d. per ton per mile."

Marshall's examination led him to conclude:

"on a view of the enormous disproportion of expense in the first instance, time to complete it in, and tonnage required for its support, I am inclined to think, that every person will be satisfied that a Railway is, in every respect, preferable to a Canal; and I do trust that the strenuous advocates of the latter will, from this plain statement of facts, be equally convinced."

It should come as no great surprise to the reader to learn that Robert Marshall was a proprietor of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway.

The strenuous advocates of the canal were not moved by Marshall's plain statement.

Following the approval of Rennie's report at the meeting held on 15 August, 1803, a general meeting took place at the London Tavern on 21 December. The subscribers then elected a committee "for preparing the application to Parliament, for framing the Bill, and for conducting it through Parliament", and a call of £1 per share was made to defray expenses.

The committee was handed a copy of a resolution made by "the owners of Mills and Manufactories on the River Wandle", at a meeting held on 7 November at the King's Head Inn, Mitcham, chaired by Richard Shepley, wherein alarm was expressed at the prospect of "cutting a Canal through the Fountain Head Sources and Feeders of the said River."^[38]

In about August, 1803, an anonymous pamphlet was published at Portsea, as mentioned previously. This was an impartial compilation of comparisons of various statements made by the canal and railway proponents in support of their respective projects. Among other contentious matters recorded were these: The canal supporters' rejection of the claim that the railway would cost £375,000, they putting the figure at £550,000, and of the statement that goods would take only 24 hours to go to Portsmouth by rail, they claiming that the journey would take 40 hours; the railway promoters' declaration that branches from the railway to the Rivers Medway, Ouse, etc., could be formed as easily as canal branches, and that heavy timber and bulky goods, which the canal party said were unsuitable for transport by rail, could easily be carried on wagons linked together; and that railway operation was not stopped by floods or drought. Other disputes concerned the comparative ease of loading and unloading goods, the cost of carriage, and the time necessary to build the undertakings.^[39]

A meeting of the canal committee was held at the London Tavern on 4 January, 1804, at which a description of the proposed canal, prepared by John Rennie, was read and approved and ordered to be printed. In his statement Rennie alluded to the pamphlet referred to above, and made some further comments. In the main these did not add much to the debate, mostly repeating or elaborating upon points already made. He did, however, point out that heavy goods on a railway would result in broken rails, that a railway costs just as much as a canal to keep in repair, and the claim that the railway could be built in three years should be compared with the period, more than two years, taken to complete the Surrey Iron Railway. One point that he particularly emphasised was that no plan, report, or detailed estimate of the railway had been published.^[40]

On 22 February, 1804, a petition for leave to bring in a Bill to 'authorise the making of a canal from Croydon to Portsmouth, was submitted to the House of Commons. It was referred to a committee, which reported on 29 February that the Standing Orders had been complied

with, and that John Rennie had been examined as to the surveys. The Bill was given its first reading on 6 March.

A little earlier, on 27 February, the Wandle mill-owners had held another meeting, under the chairmanship of John Hilbert, to consider further the effects of the proposed canal on the sources of the Wandle and other rivers. They believed that the cutting of the tunnel at Merstham and the forming of the reservoirs would lead to interference with these sources, and that "the whole supply for a length of thirty- six miles as well as for five hundred acres of reservoir, is to be intercepted, and taken from the rivers." As a result, "more than One Hundred Mills and Manufactories, which employ a Capital of several millions, and pay £500,000 a year in direct duties to Government, will be materially affected, if not totally ruined." As it was felt to be "difficult, if not impossible, to frame any clauses that can protect the mills from the consequences of this undertaking", it was resolved that a petition opposing the canal Bill should be presented to Parliament.[41]

On 7 March, the committee of the London and Portsmouth Canal met at the London Tavern and decided to publish a statement in answer to the objections raised by the mill-owners. This statement was prepared by John Rennie, who denied that the forming of the Merstham tunnel would interfere with any rivers, but stated however that "if it should be thought likely to intercept any water belonging to these Rivers, a provision might be made for returning it to them, in its full extent. The water of these rivers is not wanted or intended to be taken." The supply for the canal would be obtained from the flood waters only of the Rivers Mole, Medway and Arun.[40]

The mill-owners held a further meeting on 13 March. They examined Rennie's statement, and generally refuted his arguments, maintaining that their objections were based on "long and certain experience of the nature and soil of those hills, not on a transient survey made by strangers to the country." [42]

Another opposition group had discussed the canal scheme on 3 March, when a meeting of "Owners and Occupiers of Lands and Houses, in the vicinity of the proposed Canal", was held at the King's Arms Inn at Croydon, with Hylton Jolliffe in the chair. The assembly gave their unanimous opinion, "from their perfect knowledge of that part of the county of Surrey, that however desirable it might be to have an easier mode of conveyance than that which at present existed between London and Portsmouth, it was not to be obtained by a canal." They feared that the making of the canal would be "attended with the most serious mischiefs to the property of individuals, and the most alarming consequences", and accordingly resolved to petition Parliament against the Bill. Seventeen of the landowners, some of whom were Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway shareholders, were appointed to be a committee to conduct the opposition.[43]

On 14 March, the petitions prepared by the mill-owners, and by the landowners, were both submitted to the House of Commons. It was ordered that they should "lie upon the Table, until the said Bill be read a second time."

The second reading was ordered to be held on the following day, and it was then moved that the reading be deferred until 14 April. This motion was opposed by Lord Wm. Russell and Mr. Somers Cocks, on the ground that not one quarter of the sum necessary to complete it (£800,000) had yet been raised; and that the line of country through which the canal was proposed to pass would prove infinitely injurious to the landed proprietors. Mr. Jolliffe opposed the Bill, and Sir John Anderson declared, as president of Christ's Hospital, that the property of that charitable institution would be materially injured were this bill to pass." [44] Hylton Jolliffe went on to propose that the second reading be deferred for six months. "The question was then put, and amendment agreed to, consequently the Bill was lost." It had "received its death-blow." [45] The scheme was never- pursued farther.

The London and Portsmouth Railway project had apparently died quietly a little earlier. The last reference to its promotion I have found is in a notice, dated 22 December 1803, published a few days later, and again during January 1804, announcing that "the Model, together with Plans and Sections of the Country through which the Railway will pass", would be on display at the Beneficial Society's Hall at Portsea until further notice.[46]

There had earlier been a development in respect of the London Extension Railway, when a notice of the intention of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company to apply to Parliament for a Bill to authorise the making of a railway from Wandsworth to Southwark, dated 16 September 1803, was published [47]. A plan showing the route was deposited with the Clerk of the Peace for Surrey on 29 September[48].

The line shown commenced by a junction with the Surrey Iron Railway at the entrance to the Wandsworth dock, and ran approximately in a east-northeast direction. Relative to present-day topography, the route was to the northwest of and roughly parallel to St.John's Hill and Lavender Hill to join Wandsworth Road, then turned to the north through South Lambeth. It continued along Kennington Road, ran to the east of Waterloo Station, then turned eastwards along Stamford Street to terminate some distance short of Blackfriars Road.

On 30 January 1804, a number of "Gentlemen who are Proprietors and Occupiers of Land and Houses in Clapham and Lambeth" gave notice that they would oppose the application "by every legal means in their power." [49] On 3 February they convened a meeting which persons with property interests along the route of the proposed railway were invited to attend, in order to consider the best means of opposing the scheme [50].

The meeting was duly held on 10 February at the Royal Oak Inn at Vauxhall, with Samuel Goodbehere in the chair. It was unanimously agreed that the proposed railway was an "unnecessary measure", and that it would be "highly injurious to private property." Twelve persons were elected to be a committee for conducting the Parliamentary opposition, and a subscription fund was opened to defray expenses[51]

In the event, the landowners had no need to take any action; the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company never proceeded with the delivery of a petition to Parliament, nor pursued the matter further.

Referring to the London and Portsmouth Railway scheme in a report published in 1810, Edward Banks wrote: "provided a sufficient sum could have at once been raised, there can be no doubt, but that the Plan would have been immediately carried into effect: but the inadequacy of the Subscription rendered it then impracticable." [52]

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