

CHAPTER 5 BUILDING THE CROYDON, MERSTHAM AND GODSTONE IRON RAILWAY

The one positive outcome of the London and Portsmouth Railway project was, as we have seen, the formation of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company, which was authorised to "build a railway from a junction with the Surrey Iron Railway at Croydon, to Reigate, with a collateral branch from Merstham to Godstone.

Table of Charges [78.8kb]

The preamble to the Act of incorporation stated the advantages of the railway. It would:

"be of very great advantage to several considerable Manufactories established in the neighbourhood, and to the Inhabitants of many Towns and Places, and of a very populous Country lying on or near to the Line of the said intended Railway, by opening a cheap and easy communication for the Conveyance of Coals, Corn, and all Goods, Wares, and Merchandize to and from the Metropolis, and other Places, and likewise will be of great publick Utility."

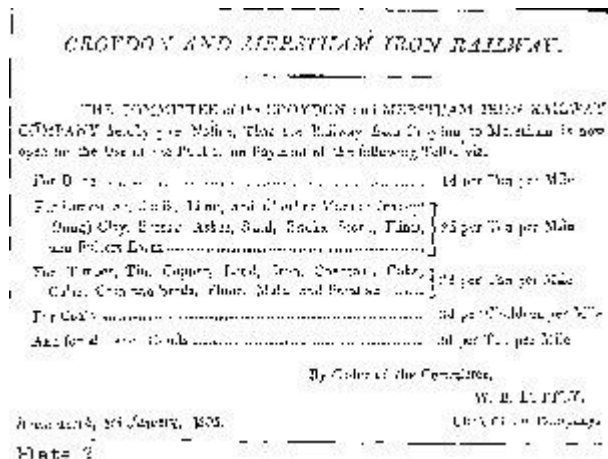
A list of 73 proprietors was given, who were constituted the "Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Company", and empowered to raise the sum of £60,000 by the issue of shares of £100 each, and a further £30,000, if required, by the sale of additional shares, or by mortgage of the property or the tolls.

The general clauses of the Act were similar to those of the Surrey Iron Railway Act of incorporation, modified where necessary to take account of the different route. One such variation was that the width of land to be taken was not to exceed 60 yards, and 80 yards where turning places or buildings were to be provided. The increased width over that permitted for the Surrey Iron Railway (i.e. 20 yards) was to allow for the construction of the higher embankments and deeper cuttings which would be required on this line.

The toll charges were the same as for the Surrey Iron Railway, but timber was added to the list of carriable goods, at 4^s.- per ton per mile. Restrictions were placed on the route of the railway at South Croydon: it was not to pass through properties owned by William Chatfield and by William Parker Hamond.

In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the first general meeting of the company was held on 7 May, 1803, at the King's Arms Inn at Croydon, with George Tritton in the chair. The Act was read, and it was resolved that it be carried into execution as soon as possible. Thirty-four subscribers were appointed to be a committee of management. - Of these, 18 were also shareholders of the Surrey Iron Railway, and the remainder were mostly local landowners and "businessmen, notably Hylton Jolliffe and William John Jolliffe. An interesting addition was that of three members of the Barclay family of bankers, and their inclusion was probably due to the influence of George Tritton. His elder brother, John Henton Tritton, after working in his grandfather's bank, had joined Barclay and Company in 1782, and became a partner in 1783. In the same year he married Mary, daughter of his partner John Barclay.

This firm, by this time titled Barclay, Tritton and Sevan, was appointed as bankers to the railway company, and John Henton Tritton nominated as treasurer. William Bedcott Lutly



was confirmed in his post as clerk and solicitor, and William Jessop as consulting engineer. An initial call of £10 per share, including a deposit of £3, already paid, was made on the shareholders, to be paid by 1 July.[1]

Two weeks later, the company advertised for tenders for "the forming of the Ground, furnishing Materials, and executing the necessary Work for the Iron Railway intended to be made from Croydon to Merstham and Godstone", to be delivered to Luttl on or before 18 July.[2]

This advertisement indicates a curtailment of the route which had been authorised, in that the section from Merstham to Reigate was omitted. This decision was probably made while the Bill was passing through, which may account for the fact that "Reigate" does not appear in the name of the company, and was presumably due to a shortage of subscriptions. Jessop's Parliamentary estimate for the railway was £52,347, but only £43,600 had been subscribed for at the time of the petition for the Bill. It seems curious that it was this section that was relinquished rather than the branch from Merstham- to Godstone, insofar as the promotion of the London to Portsmouth Railway, via Reigate, was still "being pursued.

In fact, the branch to Godstone seems to be a curious conception altogether. There was little commercial justification for it. It did not go conveniently near the fullers' earth pits at Nutfield, and was to stop about a mile short of the stone mines at Godstone. It had apparently survived as the first part of the branch from Merstham to Lindfield, described in the earliest proposals of 1801. In the event, this branch was also abandoned.

Presumably the tenders received for the line as advertised were in excess of the building fund, so it was decided to "build only as far as the junction point, at the Merstham lime works and stone mines. The successful tenderer was Outram and Company (the name was later changed to the Butterley Company), with an offer of £36,350, which included for supplying all the materials and carrying out all the work.[3]

The first consignment of 406 rails was dispatched on 22 August, 1803, and further deliveries were made at approximately fortnightly intervals throughout the duration of the contract. On 13 September, twelve wheels 21 inches in diameter together with twelve axles were sent. The "building materials of six houses and a barn in Church Street, Croydon, on the route of the railway, which were about to be demolished, were offered for sale, "by order of the Croydon Iron Rail-way Company", at an auction to be held on the premises on 22 February, 1804.[4] This late date confirms the validity of Outram and Company's claim, in their final account, for an extra for expenses "occasioned by being prevented from executing the work through Croydon for 7 months." To the southeast of Church Street, the route ran through the grounds of the former Archbishops' Palace, then used for calico-printing, and entailed the demolition of a mill leased to John Freeborn.

The first consignment of stone sleeper blocks, obtained from a ' quarry at Cromford near Outram's foundry, was sent on 21 March, 1804" Later, blocks were also supplied from a quarry at Little Eaton. On 14 August, four bearers and ten centre ribs for a bridge over Woodmansterne Road at Coulsdon, were dispatched.

Benjamin Outram made his first visit of inspection in September, 1803, and made a number of subsequent visits. George Leather junior, who had worked as assistant to his father on the Surrey Iron Railway works, checked the levels as the sleepers were laid, and probably acted as resident engineer. Josias, William Jessop's son, set out the line and probably supervised the work until he went as resident engineer on the Bristol Dock Company works in February, 1804- William Jessop may have made occasional inspections, but he was much occupied with other projects at this time.

The management of the contract was by the firm of Oswald and Anderson, who usually acted as Outram's agents for works and deliveries in the London area. Their address in 1802-1804 was Little Alie Street, Goodman's Fields, London. In about April, 1804, Alexander Oswald

left ' the partnership, and was replaced by George Harrison Eades.[5] The firm's name was changed accordingly to Anderson, Eades and Company, with an address at 104 Leadenhall Street, London.

They received a commission of one per cent of the cost of the works, paid in instalments as the work proceeded, and for this arranged for the hiring of workmen, delivery of materials, and general administration. It would seem that a few subcontractors were employed, and on one occasion, specialist labour from Outram and Company: "To cash paid blocklayers expences going to Croydon, 6th. April (1805) £4-10-0." appears as an item in Outram's account book.

We do in fact know the names of three workmen employed on the works. The parish registers of Merstham record the burial in 1804 of the daughter of Valentine Cannon, who was "working on the railway", and in 1805 of Samuel Richardson, "labourer on the railway", and of the son of another labourer named Bath.

Following the initial call for a payment on shares made in June, further calls of £10 each were made in September and November, 1803, and in January, February, March, April, May, July and August, 1804, thus completing the subscription.

A special general meeting of the proprietors was convened for 26 September, 1804, to be held at the London Tavern, "to take into consideration the present state of the Works, and of the means of completing the Contract for the same by Christmas next; and also to consider the propriety of empowering the Company to lett the Tolls thereof." [6] It is not known what resolutions were passed at this meeting, but whatever action was taken, it did not result in the completion of the railway by December, 1804. It was perhaps in anticipation that it would be ready soon afterwards that the following toll ticket was printed: CROYDON AND MERSTHAM IRON RAILWAY. THE COMMITTEE of the CROYDON and MERSTHAM IRON RAILWAY COMPANY hereby give Notice, That the Railway from Croydon to Merstham is now open for the Use of the Public, on Payment of the following Tolls, viz. For Dung.....1d Per Ton Per Mile For Limestone, Chalk, Lime, and all other Manure (except 1 Dung) Clay, Breeze, Ashes, Sand, Bricks, Stone, Flints, and Fullers Earth2d per Ton per Mile For Timber, Tin, Copper, Lead, Iron, Charcoal, Coke Culm, Corn and Seeds, Flour, Malt, and Potatoes.....3d per Ton per Mile For Coals..... 3d per Chaldron per Mile And for all other Goods3d per Ton per Mile By Order of the Committee, W. B. LUTTLY, Clerk of the Company. Wandsworth, 8th January, 1805. Charles Lee, referring to this notice, pointed out that the name "Groydon and Merstham Iron Railway" was never used on any other of the company's notices or documents, and suggested that it might "be a proof copy prepared for an intended opening. [7] JTo other evidence has "been found for an opening date in January, 1805, and in fact several consign- ments of rails and sleeper "blocks were dispatched after January, the last being sent in July. An advertisement for the sale of Surrey Iron Railway and Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway shares, published early in January, stated of the latter railway that it was "in a state of forwardness. "[8] And a meeting of. the proprietors was called for 31 May, 1805, "to take into consideration the present state of the Works, and the best means of completing the Capital of the Company." [9] The actual opening date is generally considered to have been 24 July, 1805, when a wager was made as to the load one horse could pull along the railway, and a trial was held. An account of the event was published in a number of contemporary newspapers and magazines, the fullest being given in The Morning Chronicle under the heading, "Extraordinary Peat of a Draught Horse.":

"An unparalled instance of the power of a horse when assisted by art was shewn near Croydon on Wednesday last. The Surrey Iron Railway being compleated, and opened for the carriage of goods, all the way from Wandsworth to Merstham, a bet was made between two Gentlemen, that a common horse could draw thirty-six tons for six miles along the road, and

that he should draw this weight from a dead pull, as well as turn it round the occasional windings of the road. Wednesday last was fixed for the trial; and a number of Gentlemen assembled near Merstham to see this extraordinary triumph of art. Twelve waggons loaded with stones, each waggon weighing above three tons, were chained together, and a horse taken promiscuously from the timber cart of Mr. Harwood, was yoked into the team. He started from near the Fox Public-house, and drew the immense chain of waggons with apparent ease to near the Turnpike at Croydon, a distance of six miles, in one hour and 41 minutes, which is nearly at the rate of four miles an hour. In the course of this time he stopped four times, to shew that it was not by the impetus of the descent that the power was acquired - and after each stoppage he drew off the chain of waggons from a dead rest. Having gained his wager, Mr. T Bankes, the Gentleman who laid the bet, directed four more loaded waggons to be added to the cavalcade, with which the same horse again set off with undiminished power; and still further to shew the effect of the Railway in facilitating motion, he directed the attending workmen, to the number of fifty, to mount on the waggons, and the horse proceeded without the least distress, and in truth, there appeared to be scarcely any limitation to the power of his draught. After the trial the waggons were taken to the weighing machine, and it appeared that the whole weight was as follows:

Tons Cwt Qrs 12 waggons, first linked together, weighed 38 4 2 4 Ditto, afterwards attached 13 2 0
Supposed weight of 50 labourers 4 0 0 Total 55 6 2

The report went on to laud the advantages of the railway, and the qualities of the lime and stone produced at Merstham.^[10] The reference to the railway "being compleated and opened" perhaps points to an earlier opening date. The article on canals in Rees's Cyclopaedia stated, "Ibout the month of June last (i.e. 1805) this railway between Croydon and Merstham was opened."^[11]

The presence of 50 workmen at the trial suggests that some tidying-up work remained to be carried out. This was probably completed by 1 August, the date of Outram and Company's final account. This amounted to £41,991-5s(-)d, an increase of some £564 over the contract sum. The major extra work was for "cutting and earthwork done more than the specification" at £3645. Other additional work included a bridge to carry the railway over Hooley Lane north of Hooley, an extra length of 250 yards (which may have been due to variations made to the route, rather than an extension of it), a branch to a gravel pit, a variation near the turnpike gate at South Croydon, and the seven months delay previously mentioned. Benjamin Outram did not live to see the completion of the railway. He died in London, after a short illness, on 22 May, 1805, at the age of 41.

The Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway commenced by an end-on junction with the Surrey Iron Railway at Pitlake in Croydon, and a description of the route thence was given by James Malcolm in 1805:

".....-it enters Messrs. Lane and Lay's calico and printing grounds, at the college (i.e. the Palace) in Croydon, and proceeds through the same and some other fields in a curvilinear direction until it meets Mr. Hammond's park, when it takes off a corner of it, and passes in the front of the turnpike house at Croydon. the road proceeds close along the turnpike road on the west side until it passes Mr. Barratti's grounds and fields, it then recedes from the road, and winds up the hill in the open fields, still keeping the road in view, and within about 150 yards of it, until the road quits Croydon parish for the lower road to Godstone; the railway however proceeds in its regular elevation or rise, every here and there cutting away the side of the hill on the north side of the railway, and filling up valleys until it arrives at the Red Lion at Smitham-Bottom, where on passing it, is a valley of some considerable width, which they have raised above twenty feet perpendicular, and in the direction of the railway an arch is built of sufficient height to admit a waggon loaded with hay, straw, faggots, or the like, to pass underneath from the downs to Smitham-Bottom. The railway continues to wind the hill, and to approach the Merstham road from Croydon until it passes "by Colonel Byron's, and for

some considerable distance "beyond it, then crosses the road over an arch of about the same capacity as the preceding, but in order to make it quite so they are obliged to sink the old highway road of a sufficient depth for that purpose: they are compelled to adopt this method (though it may ultimately prove disadvantageous to the highway road) because if they had carried the arch high enough to admit of the largest load of hay, straw, faggots, furze, hops, &c. that may at any time have occasion to pass under it, it would have thrown the crown of the arch too high, and consequently the plane of the railway too much above the regular elevation or rise which they are obliged very carefully to attend to, as will hereafter be made manifest and evident. After crossing the road the railway takes its course parallel with the road on the south or left- hand side of it, and finding the ground to be far too high for their plan, they now begin to sink it, and so continue to do so with such an increase of depth as will make a cavity or hollow roadway of thirty or more feet perpendicular for a considerable distance in its approach towards Merstham."^[12]

Malcolm ended his account at this cutting, on which work was "only beginning" at the time of his visit. This ran for about a mile and a quarter on the east side of the present A23, and where this road bends to the south just before its junction with Shepherds Hill at Merstham, the railway continued in a southeasterly direction through the former stone mines and limeworks site, where it terminated.

Until the Butterley Company records, which revealed that Outram and Company had been the contractors, were examined by Philip Riden in the early 1970s ^[13], it had been generally assumed by modern writers- that the railway had been built by Edward Banks. This attribution was due mainly to a reference in Samuel Wells's biography of Banks, published in 1830, wherein he wrote, "in the year 1803 he came into the county of Surrey and set out the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone railways.." ^[14] Another declaration was made by James Edwards, who wrote in about 1820, "This railway was executed under the superintendence of of Mr.Banks."^[15] It will be noted that neither of these references state that Banks was the contractor, but indicate a supervisory role.

Edward Banks was born in 1770 at Hulton Hang near Richmond in Yorkshire. He went to sea at the age of 17 for two years, and on his return he was engaged on some works in connection with the sea-banking and drainage at Holderness. Wells gave an impressive list of canals on which he worked prior to 1803, including the Leeds to Liverpool, the Lancaster, the Ulverston, the Huddersfield, the Peak Forest, and the Ashby-under-Lyne, but it seems likely that he was only a small contractor on these works. One account of the Ulverston Canal mentions him merely as a labourer.

He became involved with Outram and Company in about 1802 when he did some subcontract work for the firm on the building of a railway at Pinxton. He carried out several other works for them, and was the largest subcontractor on their contract for constructing the Alfreton and Derby turnpike road during 1804-5.

Outram and Company's accounts make no mention of Banks in relation to the Croydon, Merstham, and Godstone Iron Railway, but he was almost certainly the "Mr. Bankes, the gentleman who laid the bet" at the trial on 24 July, 1805 (spelled "Banks" in some accounts), which seems to indicate some connection with the railway. One can speculate that he may have been called in, in some advisory or supervisory capacity, after Josias Jessop left the job in February, 1804, or after Outram's death in May, 1805. About this period he became involved with George Anderson and George Harrison Eades, together with Hylton Jolliffe, in the management of the limestone works at Merstham (as will be recounted later). This partnership was, most probably, suggested by Anderson and Eades, and it was perhaps this undertaking, rather than the railway, that brought Banks to Merstham.

References

- 1.** The Times, 11 June,1803.
- 2.** The Morning Chronicle, 24 June,1803.
- 3.** This and other information relating to Outram and Company's contract is extracted, from the "Butterley Company archives, Furnace Ledger B (Derbyshire Record Office, D 503 B).
- 4.** The Times, 18 February,1804.
- 5.** The London Gazette, 15-18 December,1804.
- 6.** The Times,-, 16 September, 1804..
- 7.** Charles E. Lee, Early Railways in Surrey, 1944..
- 8.** The Times, 1 January,1805..
- 9.** The Times, 22 May,1805..
- 10.** The Morning Chronicle, 27 July,1805.
- 11.** John Farey, article "Canal" in Abraham Rees, Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature, Vol.6, 1819.
- 12.** James Malcolm, A Compendium of Modern Husbandry, Vol.1, 1805.
- 13.** Philip Riden, The Butterley Company, 1790- 1830, 1973 (2nd. edition 1990).
- 14.** Samuel Wells, The History of the Drainage of the Great Level of the Fens called Bedford Level, Vol.1, 1830.
- 15.** James Edwards, Companion from London to Brighthelmstone, c.1820 (Guildhall Library).