

CHAPTER 6 FURTHER EXTENSION SCHEMES

Nothing more was done to pursue the London and Portsmouth canal and railway schemes of 1802-1804 described in Chapter 4, "but in 1810 John Rennie produced a proposal for a Grand Southern Canal, to provide an alternative route to Portsmouth. His report, dated 10 May, 1810 [1]. made reference to his 1803 report on the London and Portsmouth Canal, then continued: "But on the Croydon and Portsmouth Bill being lost, and a survey, at the same time, going forward for an extensive line of Inland Navigation through the Weald of Kent, to form a junction between the Rivers Medway, Stour, and Rother, it occurred to me that it was probable a Line of Canal from Tunbridge to Portsmouth might answer, in some measure, the objects of the Canal from Croydon to Portsmouth, whereby the local objections to that Line would be avoided."

He described a route 95 miles long from Tonbridge on the River Medway navigation to Portsmouth, by way of Hever, Edenbridge, Burstow, Crawley, Horsham, Pulborough, and Arundel, where the River Arun would be utilised for a little over a mile. Thence the canal would go to Chichester, Havant, and Portsea. From Crawley onwards the route pretty well corresponded with that earlier proposed for the London-Portsmouth Canal.

A number of possible branches were described, among them one "that may be made down the Vale of the River Mole to the Thames, or, to the Croydon Canal, and, another may be made from Dowland Farm by Merstham to Croydon, in the Line originally proposed; which would, by means of the Croydon Canal, form a direct communication with London." His estimate of the cost was £585,500, which did not include for any of the branches.

Two months after Rennie's report was published, Edward Banks submitted a report to the proprietors of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway. This report, dated 3 July, 1810 [2] began with a reference to an idea he had put to the proprietors at the previous annual meeting of the company, for a canal from the terminus of the railway at Merstham, to Horsham, a distance of about 26 miles. Following instructions given to him at that meeting, he had prepared a plan of his proposal, and an estimate amounting to £115,500

But he now recommended an alternative proposal. He had examined Rennie's plan, and it had occurred to him that it would be feasible to make a canal from Merstham to join the intended Grand Southern Canal near Copthorne Common, a distance of about 12 miles. This would achieve a through route from the Surrey railways to Portsmouth, and by this means the "original grand Design" would be accomplished. He had ascertained that the subscription for the Grand Southern Canal, which he gave as £650,000, had been filled, and that it was intended to apply to Parliament in the next session to bring in an authorising Bill. He was confident that the idea would be welcomed by the promoters of the Grand Southern Canal, as the branch would increase the traffic upon it.

His estimate amounted to £72,500, which included for an "engine, inclined plane, with a cutting to join the Croydon and Merstham railway"; the plan which accompanied his report indicated a tunnel at Merstham.

Banks's proposal must have been accepted in principle by the - Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway proprietors, for they sent a copy of his report to the Grand Southern Canal promoters, who passed - it on to John Rennie, and asked him for his comments. On 10 August Rennie reported in favour of the idea:

"I have no hesitation in recommending it as fit to be adopted, consolidated with and made at the expence of the Subscribers of the Grand Southern Canal. In my opinion this branch will greatly enhance the Value of that concern as by its means and the Surrey Iron Railway a more direct communication will not only be opened between the Croydon Canal, the Metropolis and Portsmouth, but a very good Trade will be brought to the Grand Southern Canal by the Carriage of Merstham Stone and Lime" [3]

Rennie's advice was followed by the Grand Southern Canal promoters, but a variation was made to the route proposed by Banks. The notice of the intention to apply to Parliament for leave to bring in a Bill for making the canal, published during September, 1810, mentioned a branch from the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway at Merstham to join the canal at or near Cheathurst Farm, Burstow, about three miles north of Copthorne Common, where Banks had fixed the junction.[4]

The petition was presented to the House of Commons on 1 February, 1811. Its first reading on 6 March was followed soon after by the reading of a petition from several landowners opposed to the Bill.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the subscribers to the canal had been held in London on 28 February, with Lord Erskine in the chair, at which it was formally agreed that "a proportionable part of the Subscription be appropriated towards the making of the Merstham Branch." The Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Egremont proposed an extension to the main line, by providing a branch from Horsham to Newbridge, and for making use of the Arun Navigation between Newbridge and Arundel. The meeting agreed to these variations.. [5] However, the Bill was defeated on its second reading in the House of Commons- on 8 April, by a vote of 100 to 17. The Earl of Egremont then resumed his promotion of the Wey and Arun Canal, which had been proposed in 1810 but proceedings in which had been suspended pending the outcome of the Grand Southern Canal scheme. The Wey and Arun Canal was eventually authorised in 1813 and opened on 29 September, 1816.

The Duke of Norfolk and Lord Erskine, after the failure of the Grand Southern Bill, were still interested in a communication between Merstham and Newbridge, and they engaged Netlam and Francis Giles to survey a route through Reigate, Crawley, Horsham and Parthings. The notice of the intention of applying for a Bill to authorise this canal "from the Surrey Iron Railways at or near Merstham into the Newbridge Canal" was published in September, 1811. [6]

A meeting to promote this undertaking, now called the Merstham and Newbridge Canal, was held in London on 3 January, 1812, with the Duke of Norfolk in the chair. A modification of the route was agreed to, after discussion. Instead of Newbridge, the canal was to run from Drungewick, about five miles north and on the line of the intended Wey and Arun Canal, to Broadbridge Heath near Horsham, with an extension thence to Merstham.. [7] At a further meeting held in London on 9 January it was resolved that the two sections of the proposed canal be built as a joint undertaking. Twenty-one gentlemen were elected to be a committee, including a number of the leading shareholders of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway: Hylton and William Jolliffe, George Tritton, Richard Fleming, George Day, Benjamin Paterson, James Perry, Charles Morris, Robert Barclay, James Brogden and John Dingwall; and also William Bedcott Lutly.. [8]

A petition to bring in a Bill for making this canal was presented to the House of Commons on 24 January, 1812, and was committed, but not taken any further. The description of the proposed route as given in the petition indicated the original line from Merstham to Newbridge, but with a branch from it at Wisborough Green to near Horsham. An effort was made to revive the scheme six years later, when a meeting was convened for 20 February, 1818, to pursue the matter, . [9] "but, nothing seems to have come of it. This was apparently the final attempt to effect a canal extension from the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway.

Later proposals to develop or extend the two railways came from William James (1771-1837), an early proponent of railways.

James was born at Henley-in-Arden, and first practised as a solicitor, then became a land agent and surveyor. He became interested in railways in about 1802, when he carried out surveys for railways to connect coal mines to the Bridgewater Canal, and for other -small

local lines. In 1808 he became a shareholder in the Stratford-on-Avon Canal, and it was due mainly to his efforts that it was completed. During 1819-20 he planned a railway from this canal at Stratford to Moreton-in-Marsh, which was opened in September, 1826. This railway was the only part actually built of an ambitious scheme for a Central Junction Railway, planned to run from Stratford to Paddington via Oxford, Thame, Amersham, and Uxbridge, with numerous branches to coal mines and canals en route.

Of James's first efforts to improve the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway, Samuel Smiles wrote: "Being a shareholder in the Wandsworth and Merstham Railway, which had thus far proved an abortive project, paying not more than about one per cent per annum to its proprietors, Mr. James came up to London in 1818, to urge the formation of a line of railway from the neighbourhood of the Waterloo Bridge, to join the Merstham line, but the project was abandoned. He next endeavoured to have the Merstham tramway converted into a locomotive railway, but his suggestion met with no favour, and his speculations soon turned in another direction." [10]

In the spring of 1821, in the course of a tour of the railways in the Tyneside area, James witnessed George Stephenson's latest locomotive undergoing trials at Killingsworth, and became an immediate convert. On 22 June, 1821, he wrote, "The locomotive engine of Mr. Stephenson is superior beyond all comparison to all other engines I have ever seen." At this time Stephenson was working part-time for the firm of Losh, Wilson and Bell of Walker Ironworks in Newcastle. On 1 September, 1821, James entered into an agreement with Stephenson and William Losh whereby "they assigned to Mr. James one fourth of the profits which might be derived from the use of their patented locomotives for railroads on any lines which might be constructed south of a line drawn across England from Liverpool to Hull, the deed setting forth that this arrangement of profits was made in consideration of Mr. James giving 'his recommendation and best assistance towards the use of the patent locomotives on all such railways.'"

On 11 June, 1822, William James wrote to William Losh, "as to a locomotive he wished to get from Mr. Stephenson for the working of the Croydon and Merstham Railroad, but against which Mr. Stephenson had dissuaded him, as the cast iron plates were not calculated to bear the weight of the engine, and the result could only bring the locomotive into disrepute. Mr. James was, however, very anxious to have the engine introduced on some railway in the south of England. 'I can appreciate, he said, 'Mr. Stephenson's objections to use his engine on this defective road: but years will elapse, and the patent may expire before we can get a new road in the south for his engine, if this plan is not embraced.'", [10]

This plan was not embraced, and the following year William James made a final effort to introduce locomotives on the Surrey Iron Railway and the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway, when he published a report "to illustrate the advantages of Direct Inland Communication through Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and Hants." In this he described two proposed intersecting lines of "engine rail road." One line ran from Rochester to Portsea via Haling, Lingfield, Warnham and Petworth. The other line was

"proposed to commence at the south end of Waterloo Bridge, passing along the most vacant ground by Kennington, to fall into the present Line of the Surrey Rail-road near Tooting, which being improved and altered to an Engine Rail-road, will be continued by Croydon to Mesterham (i.e. Merstham) where the New Line will again commence."

The line then proceeded by Bletchingly, New Chapel (where it crossed the first line), Crawley Down, Tilgate, Nuthurst, West Grinstead, and Shoreham, to terminate at Brighton. Under the heading of "Private Benefits", James went on to name some undertakings whose subscribers "have experienced the most cruel disappointment in their expectations", and pointed out how they would benefit from his scheme. Among these were:

"Grand Surrey Canal and Docks - The capital employed herein amounts to £210,000 and a dividend of £3 per share has lately been made to the shareholders. By the forming of an Engine Rail-road to join the Wandsworth Rail-road near Mitcham, a great increase of trade will take place, and on the line already completed, an additional income of at least £5000 a year will be secured.

Surrey and Merstham Rail-roads - On the former a capital of £60,000, and on the latter a capital of £65,000 has been sunk, affording an irregular dividend of £1 per share only. Although from various causes the trade has been diverted, and the hopes of the subscribers frustrated, and notwithstanding the lines are not so favourable as might be determined through the country; yet by an alteration of the rail, and by improvement of the lines, they may be made practicable for engine carriages, at a small expense, and an additional income of at least £6000 a year created."^[11]

Nothing came of this scheme, but possibly inspired by James's vision, a Surrey, Sussex and Hants Railroad Company was formed at a meeting held on 12 January, 1825, following several earlier meetings to discuss the proposal. The scheme was for a "railroad to communicate between London, Brighton, Shoreham and Portsmouth, with lateral branches therefrom." Although no mention was made of the utilisation of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway, the presence of a number of shareholders of that company on the board of directors appointed at this meeting suggests an alliance of interests. These members were: George Tritton, James Brogden, Michael Shepley, Mark Wood, and Hylton and William Jolliffe. Also on the board were William Jolliffe's sons, Gilbert East and Sir William Jolliffe, together with Sir Edward Banks (he had been knighted in June, 1822). A secretary and a solicitor were appointed, and John Rennie (the younger) named as consulting engineer, who was to be directed to survey the best route. It was resolved that a Bill be prepared for submission to Parliament, and that the sum of £750,000 be raised in shares of £100..^[12] At a further meeting, held on 26 January, with Hylton Jolliffe in the chair, it was resolved to adopt a more ambitious scheme, by extending the line through Wiltshire and Somerset, to connect to Southampton, Salisbury, Bristol, Wells, and other towns. The title of the company was changed accordingly to The Surrey, Sussex, Hants, Wilts, and Somerset Railroad Company, and the capital increased to £1,400,000..^[13]

A few days later, on 4 February, a meeting was held between the directors of the company and the directors of a rival concern, the London, Portsmouth and Southampton Railroad Company, at which it was agreed to combine their respective projects and form a consolidated company..^[14] The prospectus of the Surrey, Sussex, Hants, Wilts, and Somerset Railroad Company was amended to include on its board of directors a number of the directors of the former London, Portsmouth and Southampton Railroad Company. This revised prospectus, published on 9 February, 1825, stated, "The necessity of using locomotive engines is not contemplated, every calculation being made on the use of horses only, although scientific improvement, when fully confirmed, will be availed of."^[15]

Nothing came of this grandiose scheme, but in 1830 a London to Brighton railway was promoted, which originated in one of the lines proposed by John Rennie for the 1825 scheme, and included among its supporters a few of the directors of the earlier company, including Hylton and Sir William Jolliffe, with George and John Rennie as consulting engineers. But this takes us up to the London and Brighton Railway schemes of the 1830s, which led ultimately to the dissolution of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway, and the story is continued in Chapter 9.

References

- 1.** John Rennie, Report and Estimate of the Grand Southern Canal, proposed to be made between Tunbridge and Portsmouth, 1810..
- 2.** The Report of Edward Banks on the Practicability and Expense of a Navigable Canal proposed to be made between the Grand Southern Canal near Cophorne Common and Merstham to communicate with the River Thames at Wandsworth by means of the Surrey Iron Railway, 1810.
- 3.** John Rennie's MS reports, Vol.6 (institution of Civil Engineers Library).
- 4.** The London Gazette, 11-15 September,1810.
- 5.** The Times, 19 March,1811.
- 6.** The London Gazette, 17-21 September,1811.
- 7.** The Times, 6 January,1812.
- 8.** The Times, 13 January,1812.
- 9.** The Times, 10 February,1818.
- 10.** Samuel Smiles, The Life of George Stephenson, 3rd. edition 1857.
- 11.** William James, Report, or Essay to illustrate the Advantages of Direct Inland Communication through Kent, Surrey, SUSSPV a.nd Hants ... 1823.
- 12.** The Times, 13 January,1825.
- 13.** The Times, 27 January,1825.
- 14.** The Times, 7 February, 1825.
- 15.** Prospectus of the Surrey, Sussex, Hants, Wilts and Somerset Rail-road Company, 1825.