

Railway Might Have Beens

BRS Newsletter 2 October 1993

During the 19th Century, many speculative railways were promoted by financiers, who saw the possibility of promoting a railway which threatened the traffic of existing lines, the idea being that the railway could then be sold to the highest bidder, earning the speculators a healthy profit. These lines were usually promoted with little regard to being practical or economic routes, and there was often no intention of actually building the line. Two such lines were promoted in the Bracknell area in the 1870/80 period.

BRS Newsletter 2 February 1994

During the 19th Century, the railway network was not developed on a planned basis; railways were projected wherever the various companies and businessmen thought they should go, and these plans frequently failed due to Parliamentary opposition or lack of money. As a result, many lines were planned which were never built, and it is interesting to think that the modern network could have been very different. Most projected railways had to submit detailed plans of their route to Parliament as part of their application for an Act to build the line. Copies of these plans had to be given to the County Surveyor for the area, and as a result, they have often survived in County Council Public Record offices to this day. Berkshire County Council hold many plans for lines which were projected and built, and these can be inspected at the Record Office at Shire Hall, Reading.

Staines to Reading – The Record Office hold the plans and Act for the Staines Wokingham and Woking Junction Railway, dated 1853; this is the line which exists today. There is also an 1852 version which does not include amendments introduced by the Act. This is a very interesting document which shows how roads were diverted in Bracknell to accommodate the line (Ref. Q/RUm/95). There is also a plan for the Windsor, Staines and South Western (Staines to Ascot and Wokingham) Railway of 1846 (Ref. Q/RUm/75). This was an earlier version of the SWWJR following the same route but with different gradients and levels. The WS&SWR was an LSWR sponsored company which built the line from Richmond to Windsor, opened in 1848; the extension never got past Parliament. It included a branch from just north of Virginia Water station to Weybridge, along the route later followed by the Chertsey branch, and a line from near Longcross to Pirbright on the LSW main line, via Bisley.

(Note: Since the article was written, the Record Office has moved to the Western side of Reading – see their website at <http://www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk/>)