THE RAILWAY ERA IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

F. G. COCKMAN

The growth of the railways system in Great Britain during the 19th century was largely haphazard and was based on the construction either of main lines between cities, with a fairly certain return on capital, or of local lines brought into being by the landed gentry, with dividends very much in doubt but serving social interests. Counties like Norfolk or Cornwall relied on the development of local railways whereas Buckinghamshire first benefited from its geographical position—lying across the trunk routes—and later by local enthusiasm. It is not surprising to find that at an early date there was a need for lines to connect London with Birmingham and with Bristol. In each case the inhabitants of Buckinghamshire were to hear the noise of pick and shovel as the navvies invaded firstly the north-east corner of the county and very soon after, the southern extremity.

The London & Birmingham Railway crossed the county from Pitstone to Hanslope. Due to the genius of Robert Stephenson it was beautifully engineered, and although he made it as level as possible for the weak Bury locomotives of the period, the gradients he laid down were to be of lasting benefit. The first train ran from Euston to Boxmoor on 20th July, 1837, and the line was prolonged to Cheddington, Leighton Buzzard, Bletchley and Denbigh Hall on 9th April, 1838. On the same day the rails reached from Birmingham (Curzon Street) to Rugby, thus leaving a gap between the latter town and Denbigh Hall. Until the heavy work of boring Kilsby tunnel was completed, passengers were conveyed by horse-drawn coach between Denbigh Hall and Rugby.

A plaque on the bridge over the A5 road at Bletchley commemorates this fact and also the final opening throughout of the London & Birmingham Railway on 17th September, 1838. The best trains between Euston and Birmingham took three hours on the journey, but most of them required four. The directors therefore decided that a stop should be made approximately half way for the convenience of passengers (there were no corridor trains until 1891—introduced by the Great Western) and Wolverton station was selected. The station was then isolated, Old Wolverton village being a mile to the west and Newport Pagnell four miles to the east. Its refreshment rooms became famous partly because of the pork pies. The Company had bought a pig farm adjacent. It was here that the locomotive and carriage works was situated with such a profound effect on the growth of the population. The London & Birmingham Railway justified the faith of its promoters by paying 9 per cent

on its share capital. Early in the 1840s the Duke of Buckingham became a director.

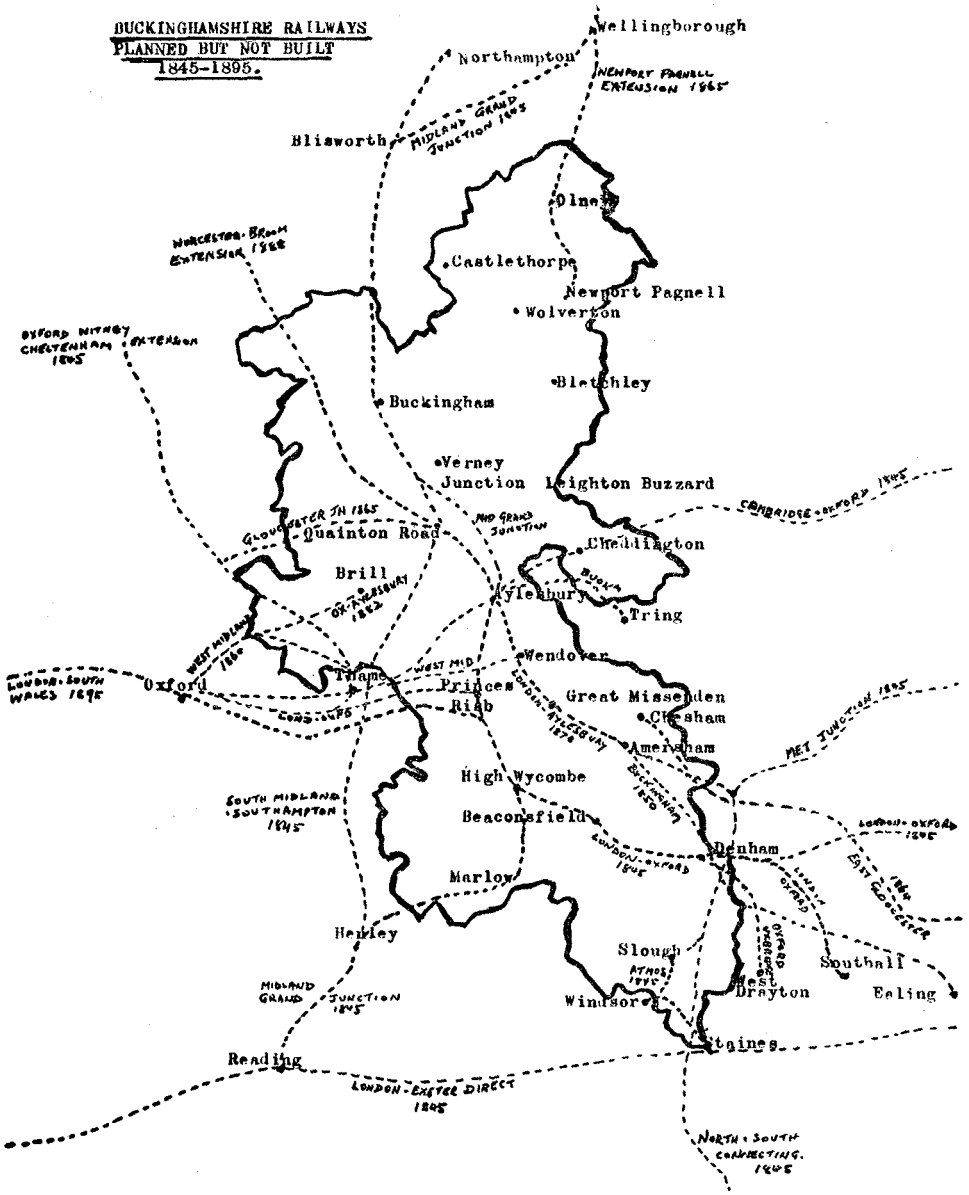
In 1839 Aylesbury was already a town of some importance, and it had the distinction of having the first branch line in England to be constructed. The branch ran straight for seven miles through Marston Gate to effect a junction with the main line at Cheddington. Thus early in the 19th century the inhabitants of Aylesbury found that they could travel freely to London, to Birmingham, and over the Grand Junction Railway to Manchester and Liverpool.

But already new earthworks were scarring the face of south Buckinghamshire. The leading merchants of Bristol and London had decided that rail communication was essential, but despite their influence the Bill presented to Parliament in 1834 (which contained a clause stipulating a gauge of 4 ft. 8½ in.) was thrown out. Next year the Company was successful and their Act made no reference to gauge, but it restricted the construction of railways to London and Reading, and to Bath and Bristol. This was because it proved difficult to obtain enough money immediately for the whole of the 117½ miles between the two cities; finally the sum of £5 million had to be raised, an enormous figure for those early days. The proposed branch from Slough to Eton was dropped owing to opposition from the College authorities. Another Act was obtained in 1836 and one of its provisions was to permit the establishment of the London terminus at Paddington. Thus the Great Western Railway, as the Company was now called, rejected the suggestion of the London & Birmingham Railway that they should have a common station at Euston, a source of inconvenience ever since.

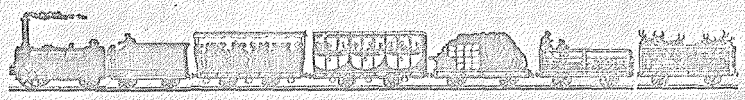
The Great Western, like the London & Birmingham, were fortunate in securing the services of a genius as their chief engineer. He was Isambard Kingdom Brunel, 27 years of age. Brunel exploited to the full the freedom of choice of gauge permitted by the 1835 Act and proceeded to lay his railway with a gauge of 7 ft. ¼ in. In this he was absolutely right as he gave the railway a vastly increased carrying potential, which would have been invaluable today. On 4th June, 1838, the first great engine with its wide carriages left Paddington for Taplow. The rails reached Reading on 30th March, 1840, and Swindon on 17th December of that year. The boring of the two-mile tunnel through the limestone at Box delayed the opening to Bristol, but this took place on 30th June, 1841.

In Buckinghamshire, Slough was the only station at first, to be followed soon by Langley and Burnham. Iver came much later. In 1839 the first class fare to Slough from Paddington was 4/6d the second class being 2/6d, i.e. about one half of the stage coach fares charged hitherto.

In 1825 George Stephenson had adopted a gauge of 4 ft. 8½ in. for the Stockton & Darlington Railway because he found the existing colliery lines laid to that gauge. Other famous engineers—Locke, Vignoles, Rastrick and Cubitt following his example and soon a network of railways laid to a gauge of 4 ft. 8½ in. lay across Britain, except for the sector due west from Paddington. Where the broad gauge met the standard one there were inevitably delays and inconvenience which grew to such a pitch, notably at Gloucester, that



Parliament set up a Gauge Commission. In view of the fact that Brunel's gauge extended for 230 miles only as compared with the standard gauge mileage of 2,200 the result of the Commission's findings could hardly be anything but in favour of 4 ft. 8½ in. which we find today. Although Brunel received this check to his plans in 1845, the broad gauge continued to expand in Great Western territory. However in 1861 a third rail was laid inside the tracks between Reading and Paddington to allow standard gauge trains to run; the last broad gauge trains could be seen in south Buckinghamshire on the Great Western main line to Bristol until May 1892. As will be seen, the G.W.R.



TIMES OF ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE OF THE

LONDON AND BIRMINGHAM RAILWAY TRAINS

AT

WOLVERTON CENTRAL STATION, NEWPORT-PAGNELL,

Office, Swan Hotel.

Every Day (Sunday excepted).

Trains.	*Leave Wolverton for London*	*Arrive in London.*	*Leave Wolverton for Birmingham.*
Mixed	½ before 7, Morning	¾-past 9 Morning	7, Morning
Mixed	10 min. past 10 Morn.	½-past 1, Afternoon	10 min. past 10, morn.
Mail.....	½-past 11, Morning	½-past 2, Afternoon	12 at Noon
Mixed	¼-past 4, Afternoon	½-past 7, Evening	½-past 1, Afternoon
First Class ..	6 in the Evening	9, Evening	40 min. past 4, Aftern.
First Class ..	7 in the Evening	10, Evening	½-past 6, Evening
Night Mail....	40 min. past 2, Morn.	¼-before 6, Morning	¼-past 11, Night

	Leave London for Wolverton.	*Arrive at Wolverton.*	*Arrive at Birmingham.*
Mixed	½-past 7, Morning	14 min. past 10, Morn.	½-past 10, Morning
Mail.....	½-past 9, Morning	10 min. past 12, Noon	2, Afternoon
Mixed	11 in the Morning	40 min. past 1, Aftern.	½-past 3, Afternoon
Mixed	2 in the Afternoon	44 min. past 4, Aftern.	5, Afternoon
First	4 in the Afternoon	40 min past 6, Evening	½-past 8, Evening
Mixed	6 in the Afternoon	8, Evening	10, Evening
Mail, Mixed ..	½-past 8, Evening	25 min. past 11, Night	¾-past 2, Morning

On Sundays.

	Leave Wolverton for London.	*Leave London for Wolverton.*	*Leave Wolverton for Birmingham.*
Mixed	½ before 7, Morning	½-past 7, Morning	14 min. past 10, Morning
Mail.....	39 min. past 11, Morn	½-past 9, Morning	10 min. past 12, Noon
Mixed	47 min. past 4, Aftern	5, Afternoon	.....
Mail, Mixed ..	49 min. past 2, Morn.	½-past 8, Evening	25 min. past 11, Night

W. Rose, Printer, &c. St. John Street, Newport.....March, 1839.

PLATE V. Timetable issued by the London & Birmingham Railway in 1839, for the Wolverton district. Note the address—Wolverton Central Station, Newport Pagnell. Railway tickets were written by hand until the early 1840's, and could be obtained from the Swan Hotel, Newport Pagnell.

AYLESBURY RAILWAY.

FIVE POUNDS REWARD.

Some evil-disposed Person or Persons have lately *feloniously Stolen and carried away*, a quantity of RAILS, STAKES, and MATERIALS, belonging to the Company, for which any Offender, on Conviction, is liable to Transportation for Seven Years.

Several STAKES driven into the Ground for the purpose of setting out the Line of Railway, *have also been Pulled up and Removed*, by which a Penalty of Five Pounds for each Offence has been incurred, half Payable to the Informer and half to the Company.

The above Reward will be paid on Conviction, in addition to the Penalty, to any Person who will give Evidence sufficient to Convict any Offender guilty of either of the above Crimes, on application to Mr. HATTEN or Mr. ACTON TINDAL, of Aylesbury.

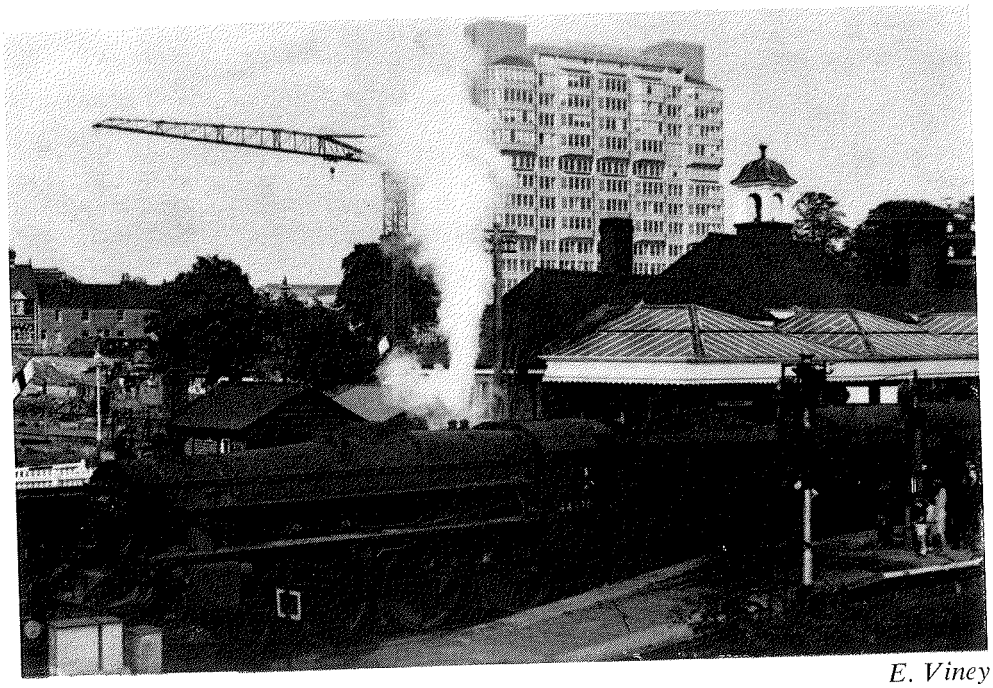
By Order of the Directors.

Aylesbury, August 18th, 1838.

May, Printer, Aylesbury.

PLATE VI. Notice posted along the Aylesbury Railway, 1838, during the period of construction.

PLATE VIIa. The 12.31 train leaving Olney for Bedford, 3 January 1962. (No. 84005 hauled the last train from Hitchin to Bedford on 30 December 1961 and still carries the wreath attached for this occasion).



E. Viney

PLATE VIIb. The 16.38 from Marylebone about to depart from Aylesbury on the last day of through working to Nottingham, 3 September 1966.

spread over a large area of the county and was justly celebrated for its speed and safety.

The first two railways in Buckinghamshire had thriven while serving the community, but now a unique situation was developing where return on capital took precedence over social and commercial needs and the investing public turned towards railways as a means of rapid enrichment. If the development of railways had been under Government control from the first as in Belgium there could have been no Railway Mania here. But the new means of transport was growing up in an atmosphere of laissez-faire and private enterprise, and the public had to endure the sad years of 1845 and 1846 before a saner view emerged. In Buckinghamshire one new scheme a year had sufficed, but in 1845 eighteen new railways were proposed, with a total mileage of nearly 1,000. When investigating the railway activities of the Victorians one admires their enterprise, while deploring an enormous waste of time and money. Clearly the capital available could never have covered all the projects. Four times as many schemes in our county failed as came to fruition, and it is possible to select only the major ones in a review of this kind.

In 1845 it was proposed to link Cambridge with Oxford by way of Luton, Dunstable, Aylesbury and Thame. The Commons cut the Bill to pieces and sanctioned only 18 miles out of the 73 planned. This was between Royston and Hitchin and it forms part of the King's Cross to Cambridge line today. The London & Exeter Direct Railway would have sent a branch from Staines to Windsor but internal strife and lack of funds put an end to the scheme. Two railways, which were competitive, would have provided a very useful outer ring by connecting all the main lines radiating from London. The Metropolitan Junction Railway, in its 114 miles of route, was to run from Hatfield to Reigate (now called Redhill) via St. Albans, Watford, Rickmansworth, Iver, Staines and Weybridge. It would have relieved London of a great deal of traffic but could not raise enough capital and was wound up. Its competitor, the North & South Connecting Railway had a similar route and a similar fate. It would have crossed Buckinghamshire from Denham to Iver on its way from the Great Northern at Hatfield to the London & South Western at Weybridge.

Quite a different route was to be taken by the Midland Grand Junction Railway. In 56 miles it was to run from Wellingborough (on the Northampton & Peterborough Railway) through Blisworth, Buckingham, Aylesbury, Princes Risborough, High Wycombe, Marlow and Henley to Reading. The Company had hoped to derive traffic from the Direct London Manchester Railway but this concern came to grief through internal quarrelling. The Great Western held aloof and the London & Birmingham was hostile. The Bill was withdrawn. A similar scheme, which would have helped the remoter parts of Buckinghamshire, was the South Midland & Southampton Railway, 69 miles in length, planned to serve Blisworth, Buckingham, Waddesdon, Thame and Reading. It suffered from a chronic lack of money and disappeared. Brunel, of all people, had been temporarily attracted to the atmospheric system of train propulsion, and this rather clumsy contrivance became briefly popular. That is why the Windsor Slough & Staines Railway inserted the word "Atmospheric" in their title. The Company held many meetings, but made no

progress and was duly swallowed up by the London & South Western Railway when they made their Staines and Windsor line in 1848. The first attempts to build a railway through Mid-Bucks date from 1845. Three such schemes were the London & Oxford, going through Chalfont St. Peter, High Wycombe, Princes Risborough and Aylesbury; the second called itself the Oxford, Thame, High Wycombe & Uxbridge Junction. 41 miles in length, it relied too much on another line, the Aylesbury & Thame Junction Railway. The latter became a victim of the manoeuvres of the London & Birmingham and the Aylesbury Railways, and in falling took the O.T.H.W. & U.J., with it. Thirdly came the Oxford, Witney, Cheltenham & Gloucester Independent Extension Railway. The surveyors trudged the familiar route through Denham, Beaconsfield, High Wycombe, Princes Risborough and Thame, all to no purpose. This venture, like the London & Oxford, was wound up.

The railways listed above are shown on the map. To have shown all would have confused the issue, and the map would have resembled that famous one drawn by Mr. Punch in 1846, showing his version of the railway map of the United Kingdom.

At the other end of the county a new railway appeared. The Bedford Railway, with the active help of the Duke of Bedford, saw its first train leave on 17th November, 1846. This left Bedford for Bletchley and returned to find the Duchess and her party with champagne to celebrate the occasion. The stations in Buckinghamshire are Fenny Stratford, Bow Brickhill and Woburn Sands (Woburn until 1851). Fortunately the line is still open, and the new city at Milton Keynes may increase its importance.

A glance at a map of Buckinghamshire in 1846 would show the Great Western main line to Bristol crossing it in the south and the London & North Western Railway (as the London & Birmingham had now become) traversing the north-east region with a small branch to Aylesbury from Cheddington and a somewhat longer branch from Bletchley to Bedford. In the centre there would be a great void. There now appear upon the scene two prominent Buckinghamshire men determined to fill in the gap. Before dealing with this great development we must glance at two new lines at the southern tip of the county. In the year that Queen Victoria ascended the throne the London & Birmingham Railway was running its first trains to Boxmoor. The queen however disliked the new mode of transport and refused to try it. The Prince Consort, whom she married in 1840 was already a convert and enjoyed the speed of rail travel. It was only a question of time therefore before he would persuade the queen to accompany him, and this she did in June 1842. The first line to realise that the queen's custom should be sought was the London & South Western which in 1848 built its line to Staines and then pushed a branch across to Windsor. This stung the Great Western into activity to such purpose that they were able to open their Windsor branch from Slough in 1849. The South Western station was used for journeys to Osborne House, and the Great Western when the royal party was going north or west.

The need for railway communication in the heart of Buckinghamshire so impressed Sir Harry Verney of Claydon that he was able to interest the Duke of Buckingham and others to subscribe towards the setting up of a Company

to remedy the need. The Company adopted the simple and obvious title of "The Buckinghamshire Railway Company". The Act of Parliament was obtained in 1845 with a supplementary Act in 1846 sanctioning the construction of a great system connecting the following places: Aylesbury to Banbury, Aylesbury to Tring, Aylesbury to Harrow, Bletchley to Oxford crossing the above at a place near Middle Claydon.

The mileages were considerable—Aylesbury to Harrow 33 miles, Bletchley to Oxford 31 miles, Aylesbury to Banbury 34 miles.

The capital outlay was rather more than the Company could justify, and accordingly on 29th August, 1846, Sir Harry announced that the Aylesbury to Harrow section would have to be dropped. The Buckinghamshire Railway was to be worked by the London & North Western, and therefore their great rivals, the Great Western opposed the Bill and for a time succeeded in having the Brackley to Banbury section deleted. The Great Western were building their own line from Oxford to Banbury which they reached in 1850. They were naturally sensitive to L.N.W. competition. Sir Harry Verney was not the type to accept defeat and his perseverance was rewarded by the opening of the Bletchley to Banbury line on 1st May, 1850, and Verney Junction as the new station was called, to Yarnton on 12th December of the same year. Oxford (Rawley Road) was reached and opened on 20th May, 1851.

Although the fourth arm of the cross, Aylesbury to Verney Junction, had been agreed by Parliament, the London & North Western became obstinate and refused to work it on the grounds that they already served Aylesbury. Sir Harry reluctantly had to abandon this length of 13 miles, but only for the time being. Several of his supporters felt that the L.N.W. had behaved shabbily and expressed their disappointment by writing letters to the Board of the North Western in plain English. They were Acton Tindal (Clerk of the Peace, Aylesbury), Frederick Calvert of Claydon, and of course Sir Harry. The reply was a blunt refusal by Euston. Although older by 15 years Sir Harry Verney had lost none of his enthusiasm when in 1860 his great efforts were crowned with success. The Act for the missing link was obtained and he had the joy of seeing his plans fulfilled on 23rd September, 1868, when the first train ran. The locomotives and coaches were supplied by the Great Western, and the L.N.W.R. could have derived little joy from seeing a G.W. train standing in Verney Junction station. The towns which benefited were Winslow, Bicester, Brackley, Banbury, Buckingham and Aylesbury. It only remains to say that the railway served the county well 117 years, when the Bletchley to Oxford and Buckingham sections lost the passenger services. The Buckingham to Banbury line was closed in 1961. The Aylesbury & Buckingham Railway (Aylesbury to Verney Junction) had a stranger history. Closed in 1936 as unprofitable it came to life near the end of the war and was reopened from 1945 to 1948. Alas it has now disappeared.

To many people a railway is functional and nothing more, but beauty is there for the discovering. A well-kept country station can be an asset to the surrounding countryside and in a beautiful county like Buckinghamshire the railway should add to rather than detract from the rural scene. Perhaps such thoughts prompted the staff at Verney Junction to make their station a source

of delight. A traveller, say from Buckingham to Bicester, would have to change at Verney Junction, and the experience would remain in his memory. In winter he would accept the shelter of the waiting room with its cosy fire and note the shining windows and the polished floor. In summer he could pace the platform and admire the mermaids guarding the pool of goldfish, the seal, the windmill, the stork and the elves. If he were a gardener he would be attracted to the well-trimmed bushes, and particularly the flowers including those lovely standard roses. Waiting at Verney Junction was a pleasure. The main lines too, have something to offer. The great viaducts are the most significant engineering achievements since the days of the Romans. Stephenson's beautiful viaduct at Wolverton, Brunel's ingenious flat-arch bridge between Taplow and Maidenhead, and the later but impressive Great Central viaduct at Turweston can be viewed with awe or with admiration, and better still with both.

The example set by Sir Harry Verney did not go unheeded. Railways were needed in the south of the shire and the little Wycombe Railway did for the south what the Buckinghamshire had done for the north. The Act was obtained in 1846, one year after Sir Harry's first Act, but progress was slow and it was not until 1854 that the line was opened from Maidenhead, then via Cookham, Bourne End, Wooburn Green, and after Loudwater, climbing steeply to High Wycombe. Princes Risborough was reached soon after. The Company was the protege of the Great Western, which meant support in Parliament, financial assistance and working by G.W.R. engines and coaches. Needless to say the gauge was 7 ft. $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Thus for the first time the inhabitants of High Wycombe and Princes Risborough were in rail communication with the rest of Britain and could now easily reach Oxford and Birmingham.

The Wycombe Railway throve and became ambitious. In 1857 an Act was obtained to extend to Thame and Oxford and also to Aylesbury, the line forking at Princes Risborough. This apparently innocent expansion gave rise to a furious war made possible by the mutual distrust of the two giants, the Great Western and the London & North Western. After the opening of the Buckinghamshire Railway in 1850 the London & North Western had supplied the motive power and rolling stock. By 1852, Lord Carrington who was one of the foremost landowners in the county had become thoroughly dissatisfied with the L.N.W.R. service, and being sufficiently indignant and powerful promptly got up his own scheme to compete with the North Western under the title of "The London & Mid-Western Railway". In this action he was encouraged by the Oxford Worcester & Wolverhampton Railway whose own financial difficulties should have warned him to be careful. The line was to run from Wolvercot where it would join the Oxford & Worcester Company through High Wycombe and Fulmer to effect a junction with the London & South Western Railway at Brentford, a distance of 51$\frac{1}{2}$ miles. To forestall any action by the Great Western, the London & North Western promised Lord Carrington to improve their train service, and he gave in after finding that the Oxford & Worcester people could not build their line to Wolvercot for several years. Actually after discovering that they could earn no money until they reached Wolvercot, they put on a spurt and reached there on 4th June,

1853.

In 1860 the Oxford Worcester & Wolverhampton Railway gained strength by amalgamating with the Worcester & Hereford and the Newport Abergavenny & Hereford Railways, changing their name to the West Midland Railway.

At this point they became alarmed by the extension of the Wycombe Railway towards Thame and Oxford and accused the Great Western of violating an agreement between the two whereby no extension of railways in that area should take place without prior consultation and agreement. The West Midland calmly ignored the fact that they had broken several clauses in their own Act, the most flagrant being the omission to lay a third (7 ft. ¼ in.) line over the whole of their system. What they were angling for was amalgamation with one of the two giants. The O.W.&W. Board decided that the best way to bring things to a head was the promotion of an associated Company called The London Buckinghamshire & West Midland Junction Railway. In this they were quietly encouraged by the London & North Western because if the line were built it would do great harm to the Great Western. The route lay through Yarnton, Thame, Ellesborough, Wendover, Amersham where there was to be a long tunnel, and then by way of Uxbridge "to a terminus in Sloane Street 700 yards from the Albert Gate entrance to Hyde Park". Seeing that the new West Midland venture would extend from Newport (Mon.) to London, the Great Western took the threat very seriously, particularly as the Bill began to make progress at Westminster. Not everyone was in favour. John Hale of Chesham wrote to Acton Tindal at Aylesbury on 29th April, 1861, "The Cheshamites are not very sweet on this project". Benjamin Way, a prominent landowner at Denham said on 30th March, 1861, "The railway will utterly destroy Denham Place".

At this time there had been a change of management on the London & North Western Railway, and they turned a cold shoulder to the project. The Great Western, not knowing this, decided to amalgamate with the West Midland and so kill the Bill. This fusion took place on 1st August, 1863, much to the advantage of the West Midland Railway.

A few notes on the Wycombe Railway will not be out of place. They duly reached Oxford and Aylesbury, and Great Western engines appeared at the latter place in 1863. Five years later the line was narrowed to the standard 4 ft. 8½ in., being the first G.W. line to abandon the broad gauge altogether. It was a further blow to Brunel's splendid idea.

In 1863 an Act of Parliament was obtained to build the Newport Pagnell Railway, a useful little branch running from Wolverton to Newport. It used to be patronised by railway employees travelling to and from their work in the Wolverton carriage and wagon depot, and was opened in 1867. It is a tribute to the enthusiasm of the 19th century railway promoters to record that, before the Newport branch was functioning a second Act was obtained (1866) to extend the line to Wellingborough. The construction actually commenced but was abandoned through lack of money. Remains of bridges and embankments can be seen near Filgrave today. After a life of 97 years the Newport Pagnell branch closed in 1964.

Railway prospecting and building continued with unabated energy at this period. The year 1870 saw the opening of a branch from Bourne End to Marlow. The present year (1972) sees the centenary of two railways, both alas, now defunct. The Bedford and Northampton line put Olney on the railway map for the first time and proved to be a very useful east-west link by virtue of its junction with the Stratford-on-Avon line at Ravenstone Wood. It was closed in 1962. The Watlington branch of the Great Western had one little platform "Bledlow Halt" in the county. It was a pretty line, but Watlington station was not very near the town—a disadvantage which grew with the years. It ceased operating in 1957. The Duke of Buckingham opened a delightfully rural branch in 1871/2 from Quainton Road to Brill. Its two trains a day in each direction served a useful purpose, but in 1894 it was taken over by the Oxford Aylesbury & Metropolitan Junction Railway. This concern proceeded to do nothing in particular and to do it very well, and the line was rescued by the Metropolitan Railway in 1899. Most regrettably the last train ran in 1935.

Having regard to the spread of the railway system in north and south Bucks it is surprising to find that the centre was still isolated. People living at Beaconsfield would have had to take a horse-drawn conveyance to reach the nearest station—High Wycombe, and similarly those in Amersham wishing to go to Manchester, would have had to make the trek to Boxmoor. This does not mean that the district had been overlooked—far from it—in fact, so many schemes had been put forward that there is only space enough to give a list:

1858. Watford & Wendover Railway; via Rickmansworth, Amersham and Missenden. Supplanted by the Watford Rickmansworth & Uxbridge Railway.

1861. Rickmansworth Amersham & Chesham Railway; via Amersham and Missenden. Funds exhausted.

1864. London Buckingham & East Gloucester Railway; via Yarnton, Thame, Wendover, Missenden, Amersham and Harrow. Thrown out by the Commons.

1865. London Buckinghamshire & Gloucester Junction Railway; via Islip, Quainton Road, then running over the Aylesbury & Buckingham Railway, Missenden, Amersham and Harrow. Bill withdrawn.

1870. London & Aylesbury Railway; Rickmansworth via Amersham and Wendover to Aylesbury. Rejected by the Lords.

1880. Great Western Railway, extension from Uxbridge branch via Denham, Amersham, Missenden and Wendover to Aylesbury. In February, 1881, the G.W.R. had had to spend £51,000 to clear away the deep snow drifts which were blocking the main lines. Although the G.W.R. included this line in their 1880 Bill they withdrew this section owing to the unexpected expense caused by the weather, and the depressed state of the money market.

Seeing that the Great Western Railway were compelled to abandon an entirely new scheme, it is easy to understand why the smaller Companies failed. About this time efforts were made to drive railways through southern Bucks to reach Beaconsfield and district. In 1875 the London Beaconsfield & High

Wycombe Railway planned to join Rickmansworth to Beaconsfield through Chalfont St. Peter. They encountered considerable opposition from landowners in the district much as today there is resentment against a 6-lane motorway running through a beauty spot. There was even stronger opposition in Parliament. The Bill was withdrawn as was the 1881 Bill of the Wycombe Beaconsfield Uxbridge & London Railway. This would have run from High Wycombe to Ealing.

The Great Western constructed a short branch from West Drayton to Colnbrook and later to Staines. This was opened in 1885 and provided a useful service until 1965. The next year, 1886, witnessed the building and opening of the Wolverton, Stony Stratford & District Light Railway, at the opposite end of the county. This was really a revival of the defunct 1868 scheme, and it had a most unusual history. A Light Railway operated under a special Order issued by the Board of Trade. It enjoyed certain advantages, such as permission to run on the highway, and it was saved the expense of fencing. On the other hand the usual speed limit was 15 m.p.h., and it was held responsible for damage to the roads and bridges which it used. In 1888 the line was extended to Deanshanger, a distance of about 2 miles, and it promptly became bankrupt. Fresh capital was injected in 1891 and the railway was more or less prosperous until 1914. During the war the traffic quickly increased and all went well until 1919 when a depression set in. The London & North Western Railway, however, could not stand by and see it go derelict as it conveyed so many workmen daily to and from the Wolverton Carriage & Wagon Works. They therefore bought it up and gave it another seven years of life. The General Strike of 1926, which put so many small railways out of action, dealt the Wolverton and Deanshanger line a fatal blow.

The difficulties of the early railway promoters are well illustrated by the fate of the Worcester & Broom Extension Railway proposed in 1888. This was a line from Moreton Pinkney to Quainton Road by way of Sulgrave and Turweston. Moreton Pinkney may not be known to everyone but it had a station on the East & West Junction Railway opened in 1873. The Worcester & Broom Company had obtained their Act in 1885 but even before they had laid a rail they were seeking this extension. The Extension Bill was thrown out by the Commons and neither line got beyond the paper stage. The village of Moreton Pinkney now appears on the railway stage and plays a quite important part until 1891, when the Metropolitan Railway abandoned their proposed branch. The Worcester & Broom Extension Railway went through the familiar stages. After the great effort to attract the investing public shares were taken up and deposits paid. The next step was a costly survey by a competent engineer followed by the even greater expense of securing eminent counsel to pilot the scheme through the Parliamentary Committees. Finally came rejection at Westminster and a panic among the shareholders, some not paying the call on the shares and all demanding a return of their money.

By the end of the century, four companies had spread their services across Buckinghamshire: the London & North-Western (successors to the London & Birmingham), the Metropolitan, the Great Central and the Great Western. The main line of the L.N.W.R. ran across the north east of the county, with

branches to Newport Pagnell, Woburn Sands, Banbury, Buckingham, Oxford and Aylesbury. The Metropolitan opened its first line, from Bishop's Road to Farringdon Street, in 1863, and this later became part of the Inner Circle. Another development north-westwards reached Harrow-on-the-Hill in 1880, Rickmansworth in 1887 and Amersham and Chesham in 1889. A proposal to drive through the hills to Tring was abandoned, owing to financial stringency and to the pressure put on the board by its chairman to extend to Moreton Pinkney instead. In 1892 the first Metropolitan trains ran into Aylesbury, which now had a direct line to London, 53 years after the first little Bury engines had rumbled in from Cheddington. The railway from Rickmansworth, a distance of 21 miles, had been engineered by Charles Liddell, an associate of Robert Stephenson. The Metropolitan Railway did very well. It sent the first electric trains to Harrow in 1905, and twenty-five years later to Rickmansworth. Steam yielded place to electricity at Amersham in 1960. Comfort was provided by a Pullman coach on trains between Baker Street and Amersham, and occasionally to Quainton Road. The Board urged the public to 'Live in Metroland', advice which was taken by more people than they had bargained for. In 1933 the London Passenger Transport Board took over the "Met" and other London lines, and in 1948 they were succeeded by the London Transport Board as part of British Railways under the Transport Act of 1947.

The day of new main lines was not yet over. In 1895 the London & South Wales Railway was promoted and it is important not only for its own sake, but because it involved two other great Buckinghamshire railways—the Great Western and the Great Central. The new route was to be by way of Cardiff, Wickwar, Oxford, and Bledlow where it forked. The northernmost arm went across to Great Missenden and the southern through Beaconsfield to Hendon where it was to form a junction with the Midland Railway (opened 1868). It thus became a dangerous threat to the Great Western which had important passenger and coal traffic in Wales. Naturally the G.W.R. Company opposed the scheme and equally naturally the London & North Western supported it. The Midland, in view of the junction at Hendon hoped to enrich themselves, as they and the L.N.W.R. had for long been envious of the Great Western's lucrative trade in South Wales. Now there appeared a third enemy to the Great Western. The Manchester Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway wished to reach London, and as new traffic would be scarce they looked upon the junction at Great Missenden with the London & South Wales Railway as providing a useful source of income. The Great Western acted quickly and offered to provide most of the money required by the Manchester Sheffield & Lincolnshire for an important link from Woodford to Banbury if the Manchester people would cease to support the proposed South Wales line. The M.S.&L. promptly did so, and after the North Western and the Midland Companies had cooled off, the South Wales scheme was withdrawn.

And so we pass on to the Manchester Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway. Beginning as the Sheffield Ashton under Lyne & Manchester Railway in 1841 it had gradually expanded, and under the drive of its Chairman, Sir Edward Watkin, it submitted a Bill to Parliament in 1892 for a new main line from

Annesley to Quainton Road. The cost was to be £6 million. In view of the fact that it would provide a new route between Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham and Leicester and finally London it aroused bitter opposition from the London & North Western and the Midland Railways. It was also breaking an agreement with the Great Northern Railway over Manchester traffic which did not expire until 1907. The G.N.R. joined the fight against the Bill which was rejected at Westminster. The next year Sir Edward Watkin was more successful and obtained his Act. He promised the shareholders 6 per cent.

This last main line to London was a very expensive one not only because of the geography of the countryside to be passed through but also on account of extensive slum clearance at Marylebone and the potential disturbance of Lord's cricket ground. However on 15th March, 1899, the first passenger train left Marylebone for the north and the new Great Central Railway began its life of 23 years having changed its name from the cumbrous Manchester Sheffield & Lincolnshire in 1897. It was unfortunate in its quarrels with the Metropolitan Railway over whose metals it ran from Quainton Road to Harrow, but fortunate in having as Chief Mechanical Engineer, John G. Robinson whose beautiful locomotives were a mobile and a moving advertisement for the Company. Its general manager, Sir Sam Fay, was perhaps the greatest of all general managers; yet the enterprise never paid. The Deferred Ordinary Stock did not receive a penny—there was just not enough traffic for everyone.

The Great Central became part of the London & North Eastern Railway on 1st January, 1923. Such a line could not, unfortunately, stand the test imposed upon it by the various Transport Acts (1947, 1952, 1963 and 1968) and it disappeared, as regards the section Calvert to Nottingham, on 5th September, 1966.

We are in debt to the Great Western Railway for the last great development in Buckinghamshire. In 1838 the London & Birmingham Railway opened its route of 112½ miles between the cities, and when the Great Western reached Birmingham in 1852 they found they had to cope with 129 miles of track. Their ambition had always been to shorten this but it was difficult to justify the expense of building 60 miles of new main line. Fortunately for them, the Great Central offered to share the cost. The G.C.R. wanted to gain fresh suburban traffic and they had not forgotten the help they received over the Woodford-Banbury line from the Great Western. The Great Western Railway Extension Bills of 1897/8 became law, and work was started on the new lines. The Great Western route was from Old Oak Common to Northolt Junction where it met the Great Central's new line from Neasden. For the next 34 miles, i.e. to Ashenden Junction, the railway was a joint affair, and here the Great Central turned north through Wotton and Akeman Street to Grendon Underwood Junction, here linking up with their old line from Aylesbury. The Great Western went north west through Brill and Bicester to Aynho Junction where it met the old line from Oxford. The first Great Central train covered the new route on 2nd April, 1906; the Great Western proceeded more slowly. They had some heavy engineering to perform, and of course they had had to endure the great expense of broad gauge conversion in 1892. When the first

Great Western express left Paddington on 1st July, 1910, it had only 110½ miles to travel to arrive in Snow Hill, Birmingham. They could therefore compete with the 2-hour Birmingham expresses of the North Western; the G.W.R. line was the harder but their engines were the best in Britain.

An important feature of the new line from Buckinghamshire's point of view was the new suburban service through Denham, Beaconsfield, High Wycombe and Princes Risborough. Many expresses stopped at High Wycombe, and Gerrards Cross was selected by Sir Sam Fay for his new house. One peculiar casualty was the quiet, timber built station at Saunderton; this disappeared in flames one night in 1913 after a visit by militant suffragettes. It was rebuilt.

Thus finally Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Princes Risborough enjoyed excellent services. Despite the stress of war and subsequent nationalisation, the first two are still well served, but many small country stations have been closed.

In this brief review of railway development in Buckinghamshire two facts emerge. The public received excellent service from the numerous private companies. (Incidentally the vast network still in being in 1939 made it difficult for the Germans to cut communications.) On the other hand, much money was wasted by wars between the companies. If they had been built at a later date, railways, like trunk roads, would have been planned and controlled by the state. Both are important national assets. Railways require less land than roads to carry the same volume of traffic, and, when once the earthworks are grass-covered, they are unobtrusive—important in this attractive countryside. Whereas motor traffic tends to spread the population, railways have had the effect of concentration. For example, the inhabitants of Wolverton numbered 400 in 1831, but over 2,000 in 1851. In the twenty years from 1851 to 1871, Aylesbury increased from 6,000 to 7,000. The most striking increase occurred in High Wycombe, where the population was 5,000 in 1871 and 20,000 in 1911, that is to say in the years before motor traffic had had any effect.

After twenty years of state ownership it is now possible to envisage the railways of the future. Buckinghamshire will be served by main lines, not by branches. The Euston services are now the fastest, densest and most punctual in the world, and it is only a matter of time before other routes are brought up to the same standard. Railways have a trump card which is often ignored—their phenomenal safety.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must express my most grateful thanks to Mr. E. J. Davis, County Archivist, Aylesbury, and to Mr. E. H. Fowkes, British Rail Archivist, for their generous help in the compilation of this article.