

THE CHANGING RAILWAY SCENE IN SOUTHAMPTON

By B. MOODY

THE Parliamentary Bill for the construction of the London & Southampton Railway received the Royal Assent on 25th July, 1834. The original London terminus for the railway was located at Nine Elms, and the portions of lines between Nine Elms and Basingstoke, and from Winchester to Southampton were opened for traffic on 10th June, 1839. In the same year the title of the Railway Company was changed to the London & South Western Railway and the complete line from Nine Elms to Southampton was opened on 11th May, 1840. It is obvious that since that time there have been many changes in the railway scene in the Southampton area, and many features have completely disappeared.

LEVEL CROSSINGS (pl. X)

One change which has taken place very gradually is the elimination of level crossings – the bane of all present day motorists. At one time there were nine public level crossings within what is now the City boundary of which only three remain – those at Mount Pleasant Road, Adelaide Road (St. Denys) and Chapel Road. The crossing in Canute Road is not a level crossing in the normal sense of the word as the lines into the Docks are not actual running lines. At Chapel Road crossing the conventional level crossing gates remain in use, but at the other two, lifting barriers have been installed in recent years. These lifting barriers are controlled by the signalmen, and should not be confused with the automatic lifting half barriers, which have been the subject of adverse comment in certain parts of the country.

The six level crossings which have been closed were located as follows:

St. Denys – linking Dukes Road and Priory Road.

Southampton Junction – linking Bevois Street and Longcroft Street. (See pl. X.)

Marsh Lane – linking Marsh Lane with that portion of road now known as Chantry Road.

Bridge Road – linking Bridge Road (later to become part of Bernard Street) and what is now known as Lower Bridge Road.

Southampton West – Blechynden Street and Western Esplanade.

Millbrook – Millbrook Road and the Foreshore.

With the exception of Bridge Road, footbridges which were adjacent to these crossings remain today, although in the case of Marsh Lane and Millbrook new footbridges have been constructed.

Complaints regarding delays at certain of these crossings were numerous, and considerable public agitation developed for the provision of bridges over the railway at Marsh Lane and Bridge Road, near Southampton Terminus station. The resultant discussions between the Southampton Corporation and the London & South Western Railway Company were extremely long drawn out. In the early 1870's the Railway

STATIONS, SIGNAL BOXES, LEVEL CROSSINGS AND RAILWAY LINES IN SOUTHAMPTON

STATIONS

- OPEN IN 1969
- CLOSED BY 1969
- 1 SWAYTHLING ●
- 2 PORTSWOOD ○
- 3 ST DENYS ●
- 4 BITTERNE ●
- 5 MILLBROOK ●
- 6 SOUTHAMPTON ●
- 7 BLECHYNDEN ●
- 8 NORTHAM ○
- 9 WOOLSTON ●
- 10 TERMINUS ○
- 11 CHANNEL ISLANDS ○
- 12 ROYAL PIER ○
- 13 OCEAN TERMINAL ●

SIGNAL BOXES

- OPEN IN 1969
- CLOSED BY 1969
- I WOODMILL □
- II TUNNEL JUNCTION □
- III SOUTHAMPTON JUNCTION □

LEVEL CROSSINGS

- OPEN IN 1969
- A MOUNT PLEASANT
- B CHAPEL
- C CANUTE ROAD
- D ADELAIDE ROAD
- CLOSED BY 1969
- E MILLBROOK
- F DUKES ROAD/PRIORY ROAD
- G BLECHYNDEN
- H BEVOIS STREET/LONGCROFT STREET
- J MARSH LANE/CHANTRY ROAD
- K LOWER BRIDGE ROAD

LOCAL LINES

- OPEN IN 1969
- a ITCHEN WHARVES
- b CORRALLS YARD (BULL RUN)
- CLOSED BY 1969
- c CHAPEL TRAMWAY

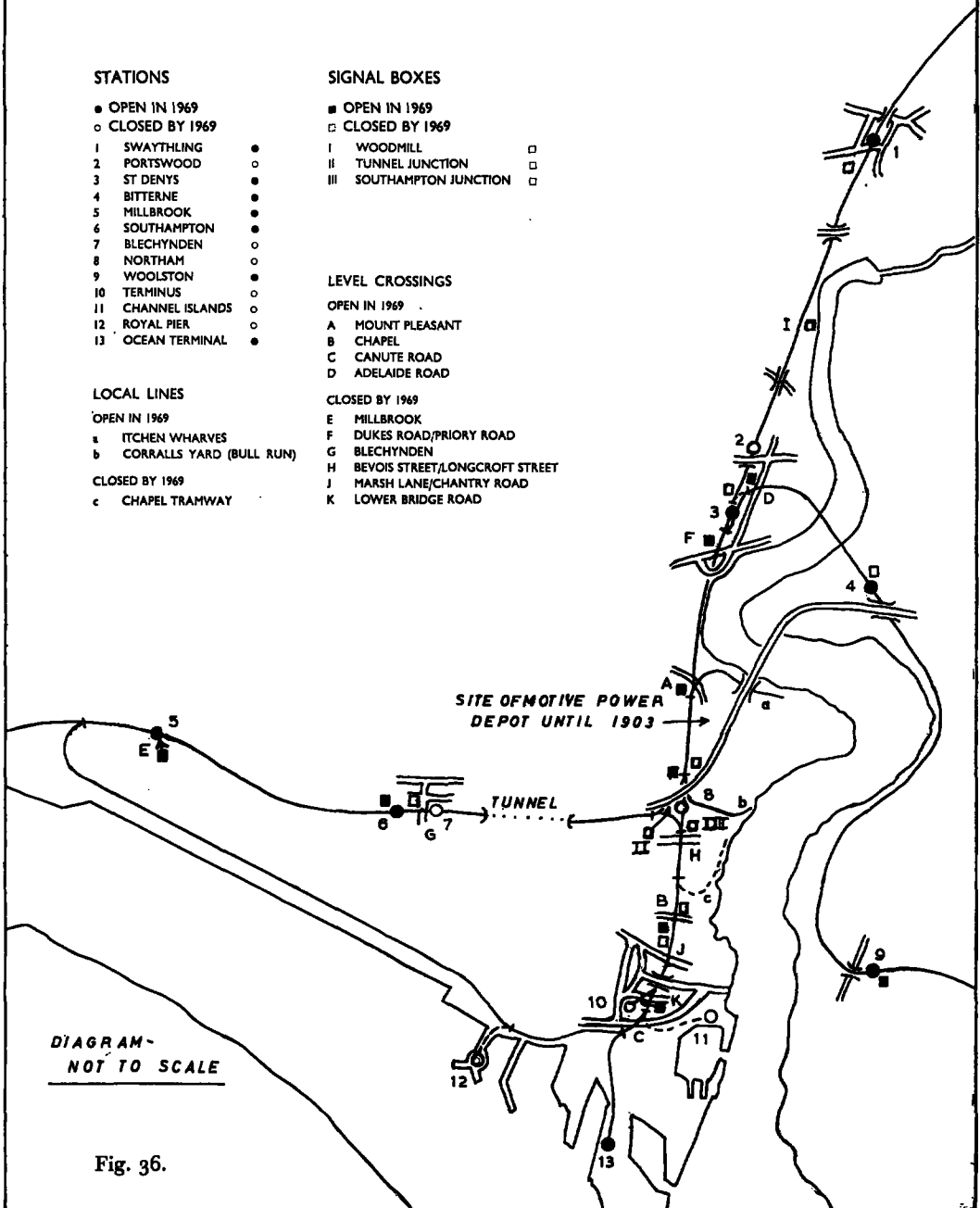


Fig. 36.

Company submitted a proposal for the closure of both the level crossings and the provision of one overbridge. The Corporation at first insisted that two road bridges should be provided, and the compromise eventually reached was the construction of one bridge, which still exists today, having two road approaches on the west side of the railway, one serving Marsh Lane and the other Bridge Road (later to become part of Bernard Street). The bridge, which was built by Bull & Sons and cost £50,000, was opened to the public in July 1882, and metal plates commemorating the opening still remain today. (See pl. X.)

The next crossing to disappear was that at St. Denys with the completion in 1903 of the bridge just south of the site of the crossing. The foundation stone for this bridge can still be seen at railway level in the brick support on the west side of the bridge. The stone was laid on 28th October, 1902 by the then Mayor of Southampton – Frederick A. Dunsford. In connection with the ceremony it was reported in the *Southampton Times* that the London & South Western Railway Company's directors met their guests at the Docks (Terminus) station and a special train of luxurious coaches ran to the site of the bridge, where a temporary platform had been erected, gay with flags. After the ceremony the train returned to the Docks station, and lunch was taken in the South Western Hotel. Associated with the cost of the construction of this bridge was an agreement with the Corporation to remove the horse tram lines in part of Canute Road, thereby allowing the Railway Company to lay additional lines across the road into the Docks.

Just over thirty years passed before the next level crossing closure took place. This time it was the one located at the London end of Southampton Central station, which was then known as Southampton West. The road bridge at the west end of the station was opened, and the level crossing at the east end was closed on 25th June, 1934. The crossing at Millbrook station was closed the following May. No further crossings were closed in the area until as a result of the major rebuilding programme in the St. Marys district, it was possible to close the crossing at Southampton Junction in 1964.

SIGNAL BOXES (pls. X and XI)

The introduction of colour light signalling and improved techniques has made it possible to introduce larger signal boxes, in some cases controlling many miles of track and this has resulted in the elimination of a number of the smaller signal boxes.

The signal box at Southampton Junction was placed out of use shortly after the withdrawal of the passenger train service to Northam and Southampton Terminus which took place in September 1966. The box has since been demolished. At the same time Tunnel Junction signal box was also placed out of use, although at the time of writing the shell of the building still remains. As a result of the introduction of colour light signalling in the Eastleigh area the signal box at Swaythling was abolished in November 1966. An intermediate signal box at Woodmill between Swaythling and St. Denys was put out of use in 1930 and was subsequently demolished.

In conjunction with the provision of four lines of railway between Southampton Central and Millbrook in 1935, the then existing signal boxes at those two stations were replaced with ones of modern design.

STATIONS (pl. XI)

In view of the large number of station closures which have taken place throughout the country in recent years, it is rather surprising that so many of the passenger stations in the Southampton area still remain open today.

When the line from Southampton to Dorchester was opened in June 1847, the original station to serve the west side of Southampton was known as Blechynden. This was located nearer the mouth of the tunnel than the present one. A painting of the original station can be seen in Tudor House in Bugle Street. In 1858, the station was rebuilt and renamed Southampton West. Completely new buildings, including the well-known clock tower, were constructed on the other side of the level crossing, and these buildings were opened to the public on the 1st November, 1895. Only two through platform lines and a bay siding were then provided and by the early 1930's these were inadequate for dealing with the number of trains then using the station. A major improvement scheme was carried out which involved the rebuilding of the down platform as an island platform and the construction of a new down platform. The buildings on the downside of the station were demolished and new premises of modern design constructed on the new platform. In addition to the rebuilding of the station and the closure of the level crossing, two additional running lines were provided between Southampton West and Millbrook. The station at Millbrook was demolished and replaced by a new island platform. The altered layout was brought into use on 2nd June, 1935. On 7th July of the same year the West Station was renamed Southampton Central. Unfortunately part of the modern buildings on the downside were damaged by bombing during the last war. The scars from bomb fragments were eventually filled and painted over in 1968.

The upside station buildings of 1895, together with the clock tower, which was approximately 100 feet high, were demolished in 1966 to make way for the new station block, which was part of the modernisation programme involving the replacement of steam engines by electric traction. So instead of an upside of 1895 and a downside of 1935, we now have an upside of 1967 and a downside of 1935.

One station in the Southampton area which did not have a very long life was the original one provided to serve the inhabitants of St. Denys. This station, known as Portswood, was brought into use in 1860, and was then located on the north side of the road bridge in St. Denys Road. When the line to Netley was opened in March 1866 a new Portswood station was built on the present site of St. Denys station, although the junction to the Netley line was then located at the north end of the station. The name of the station was changed from Portswood to St. Denys in March 1876. The original station building of 1866 still remains on the upside of the line, but the down platform was converted to an island platform and a new platform erected when the layout at St. Denys was altered in 1899, and the junction with the Netley line moved to the south of the station.

The station buildings at Northam were rebuilt over the up and down lines to Southampton Terminus when the road bridge was rebuilt in 1908. (See pl. XI.)

It is sometimes forgotten that at one time the Royal Pier at Southampton was served by passenger trains. The first through passenger train working from Southampton Terminus was made on 25th September, 1871, when the train consisting of two

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coaches was hauled by three horses, and it was not until 1876 that the use of steam locomotives was permitted. In 1913 the portion of the Royal Pier which carried the railway was in need of repairs, and with the outbreak of war in 1914 the service was withdrawn and never restored.

Without doubt the most important piece of railway architecture in Southampton is the former Terminus Station. Although various later additions were made, the original building completed in 1840 and designed by Sir William Tite, still remains. Unused now since September 1966, when the train service was withdrawn, it can only be hoped that some useful purpose will be found for this interesting building.

GOODS YARDS

With the concentration of freight traffic at centralised depots the Goods Yards at the smaller stations in the Southampton Area, which were very busy at one time, have been closed.

MISCELLANEOUS

The Chapel Tramway which served the Gas Works and various adjacent wharves was closed in 1967 and the track has since been removed. The private siding which served the Electricity Power station near Southampton Central was placed out of use at the end of 1949, but several years passed before the siding was removed and the gate replaced by concrete fencing.

Until 1903 a Motive Power Depot existed at Northam on the down side of the line, just south of Mount Pleasant Crossing, but in that year the Depot was transferred to Eastleigh. (See pl. X.)

Situated adjacent to the Terminus station is South Western House, which is still owned by British Railways. This building was originally known as the Imperial Hotel, but became extremely well known as the South Western Hotel. For many years it was used extensively by passengers travelling on the large liners of the Cunard Line and the White Star Line. During the 1920's and early 1930's both these shipping companies provided a weekly service from Southampton to New York. In 1940 the Hotel was closed and later utilised as offices, for which purpose it remains today, being now occupied by the Cunard Line, the B.B.C. and various other organisations.

References to works consulted:

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