

The Western Way to London

Introduction

Until 1965, Staines was served by a second station, known as Staines West in British Railways days, but formerly owned by the Great Western company. However, most of the populace seemed unaware of its existence, or thought that it had been "closed down years ago". The alternative route it offered to London was perhaps more convenient for those living in the north-west of the town, but we had to be real enthusiasts to make use of it; firstly, to reach the station involved a two-mile walk, whichever way we chose to go passing by the Southern's Central station just before a fast electric train to London was due to call.

Secondly, the Western train stopped at all stations and some halts, and necessitated a change, with variable connections, into the main-line stopping service at West Drayton. The journey time was often nearly an hour, sometimes more.

Lastly, much as Paddington station was a marvelous place to be in the days of steam, to be honest it was not where most people wanted to go in London, either for business or pleasure, so there then followed another long walk or a tube journey. I don't think the fares were any less this way, either!

However, use it we did (often on a Saturday morning); when time was not too important it was a very pleasant and stimulating alternative to the everyday electrics of the Southern line. The walk from our home along the Kingston Road could be avoided by hopping on a number 90, red London Transport RT bus at the "Jolly Butcher", but these could not always be relied upon to turn up when they were needed. The buses were not advertised as running to Staines West station, though this route like several others did terminate there. We would usually be allowed to stay on board beyond the last official stop at the "Regal" cinema, for the run down Bridge Street to the terminus in the station forecourt.

Walking, the quickest route was along Gresham Road. There used to be a group of tiny cottages on the inside of the sharp bend as the Southern line came up on our right, and several elegant large Georgian residences beyond, now mostly vanished. After reaching the Central station's down-side buildings (SR red brick and timber construction from the 1920's) there was a choice of route. Continuing round Gresham Road, on our right was Beach's coach garage, home of three old Bedford OB buses used for school services as well as their more modern luxury vehicles. Gresham Road eventually led up to Thames street, beside the river, thence we turned right and passed under the Southern's girder bridge, with its misplaced pier jutting out into the roadway. Further along here was our local model shop, where the excellent new "Kitmaster" plastic locomotive kits were eagerly awaited every month. Crossing the main High Street road junction, between "Johnson & Clarks" and "Kennards" was tricky even then, to reach Church Street leading through to the West station.

From Central, an alternative route was firstly over the station footbridge, an unusually wide lattice-girder and timber construction with no less than six separate flights of steps, then left into Station Path. From here it was footpath all the way, still somewhat over a mile, to the West station. Walking parallel to the SR Windsor line, the back of the pumphouse was passed on the left, followed by extensive derelict yellow-brick buildings of Knowle Green corn mill, hidden behind a tall wooden fence to the right. Next came our school playground, a tennis court, a small group of cottages and the unofficial school "tuck-shop" at the end of George Street, and a somewhat disgusting Victorian public lavatory (nowadays converted into an office, but still instantly recognisable for what it was!) There was a little brown-painted wool shop just before reaching the High Street, and an old-fashioned open-fronted fishmongers beside the "Iron Bridge" around the corner. On the other side of this main shopping street, opposite the "Garibaldi" pub, was the site of Staines High Street station, opened in 1884 no doubt to meet the threat of competition from the new GWR line, but closed down from as early as 1916 despite its apparent convenience for the town centre. It was presumably a wooden construction on top of the embankment, reached up flights of stairs from the road on either side of the iron bridge, but no trace of it remained by the 1950's. The "iron bridge" itself was originally a wrought-iron arch, and the stone corbels which supported its ends may still be seen in situ. It was rebuilt with girders in the 1920's, to avoid the necessity for double-decker buses to keep to the centre of the road when passing underneath.

Another footpath "Factory Path" led off northwards, this time on the down side of the Windsor line, then veered away from it into the vast industrial complex of the Staines linoleum factory. Nestling between this and the railway line was a neat little terrace of workmen's housing, "Factory Cottages".



The high walls of the works buildings on either side were punctuated by two gaps where factory roadways crossed our path. Glimpses might be had here of standard-gauge sidings, usually containing several vans parked alongside a loading platform, and a disused internal narrow-gauge railway system (about 3 foot gauge), once extensive with its own engine shed, but of

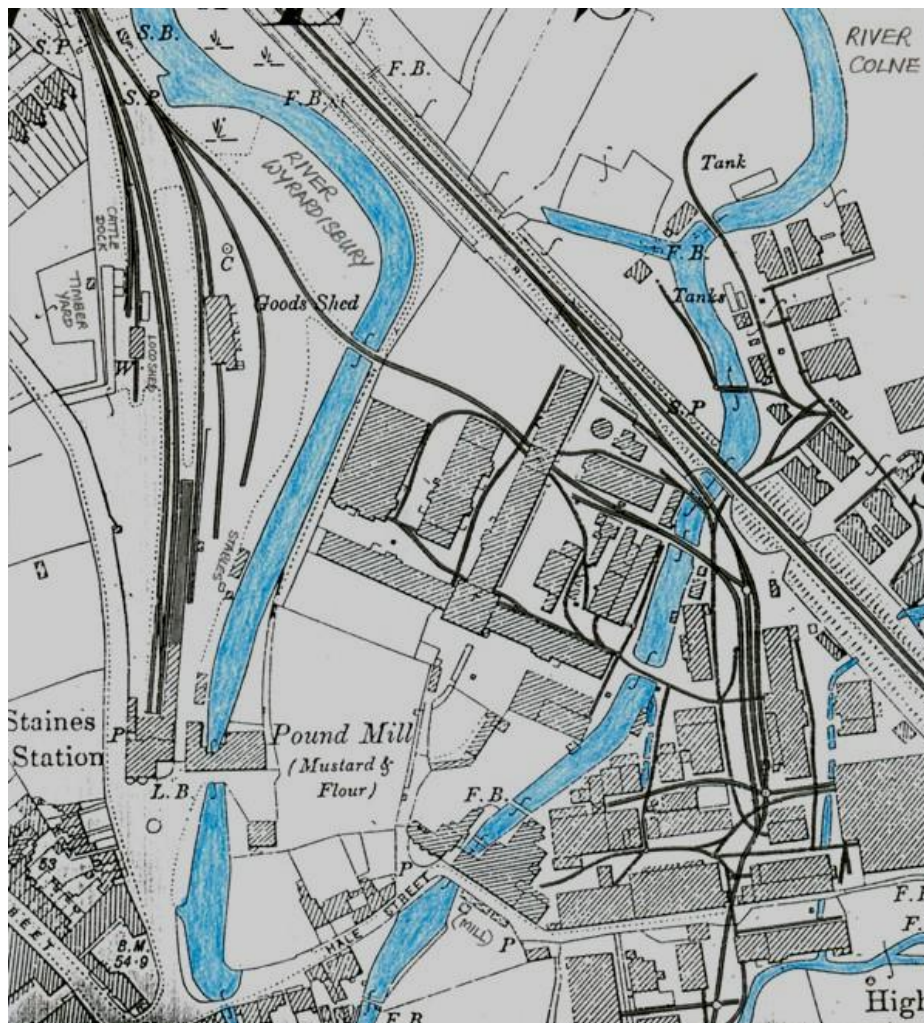


whose history we knew little. The "lino" was a noisy and frightening place, with lorries and trolleys rushing to and fro, machinery clattering, and steam issuing unexpectedly from wall outlets. At the far end of the complex, a tremendous roar emanated from the darkness behind a barred window opening, this being the rush of water over a dam and turbine built directly in the flow of the River Colne. The outfall from this, on the other side of the path, was often covered by a vast blanket of white detergent foam, indicative of the quality of the water coming out of the works area. Our footpath at last came to an end here, with a sharp left turn into Hale Street. If this description has become tedious, this is exactly

how we would be feeling by this stage. However, past the cottages and over the stone bridge of the Wyardisbury stream, Staines West station building hove into view, beyond parked red and green buses. It looked just like a large Georgian town house, and that is exactly what it was originally, having being built around 1830 for the manager of the adjacent mustard mill. Here are two old pictures of the approach to the station, also showing the mill buildings.....



This 25" O/S map extract of circa 1900 shows both the linoleum works complex and the GWR station. The South Western Railway branch from Staines to Windsor runs diagonally across the map from bottom right, and the River Colne passes beneath it in the centre of the picture. The Wyrardisbury River runs north-south between the two railway routes, with the footpath alongside it.



A bit of history

The Staines & West Drayton Railway was constructed by a nominally-independent company which unfortunately ran short of cash before completing the line, but they were able to buy the house cheaply for conversion into a terminal station, opened as such on 1st November 1885. Despite the local company being a mere "puppet" of the mighty Great Western Railway almost from the outset, and rumours that they were in fact being used subversively as a springboard by the latter for a major incursion into LSW territory, towards the South coast, this was as far as the line ever went.

Our first view of the station, from the road side, was in fact the back of the house, as it had effectively been "turned around" for its new role. An old door under a small porch had long been sealed off, so entry to the station was by a set of double doors to its right, in a single-storey extension built at the time of conversion. This lead directly into the large former main hall. To the right, the original elegant curving stairway remained in situ to the upper storeys, latterly used as staff living quarters; there was a gate at the bottom duly labelled "private" and a delightful alcove half way up which always contained a vase of fresh flowers. To our left was a ticket window, set into the sealed-up door of the old kitchen, which had become the booking office.



There was never a great crush of passengers here, more usually a deathly quiet slumber, a haven of tranquillity from the nearby bustle of the town or the lino factory. Beyond was a waiting room, even quieter and slightly musty, where one could rest peacefully upon heavy leather upholstered oak benches, disturbed

only by the slow, sedate ticking of a wall-clock. Other furniture in this marvellous room comprised a large solid-oak table in the centre, a welcoming stove, and a gilt-framed wall mirror. The plaster ceiling cornice was quite ornate, a surviving feature of the old house; the bicycle shed and parcels office were adorned with even more elaborate designs! Finally, on clomping up the wooden ramp through the old front door into the garden, the branch train was usually to be found ready and waiting for custom at the buffer stops; through the day it usually arrived at around half past each hour and left about 10 minutes later. Up to the mid 1950's, the train comprised one of those ubiquitous GW branch line engines, a class 14XX 0-4-2 tank facing chimney-first towards the end of the line, with a single push-pull auto-coach beyond.

Some of our regular engines over the years were 1426, 1438, 1443, 1446, 1462 and 1474, working out of Southall depot since the small wooden sub-shed at Staines was closed down (or perhaps fell down) about 1952. Occasionally, one of the large-wheeled auto-fitted panniers would appear (I recall no. 5410) but they were not common. The passenger carriages used seemed to be either very old - vast, 70 foot long former steam-railmotor saloons with wooden panelling, plush longitudinal seats and leather straps to hang onto, or the very newest - BR all-steel vehicles carrying names such as "Thrush" or "Wren", having ordinary bus-type seats and plastic decor.

In 1954, most weekday trains went over to diesel power, in the form of the later-series GWR AEC-built single-unit railcars, painted like the autocoches in standard BR red and cream livery. The story goes that when one of these diesel cars was first tried out on the line, the lack of brake power was not fully appreciated on the final descent into the terminus at Staines, and it attempted to get into the station booking hall. A repeat of this embarrassing incident was discouraged by the appearance shortly afterwards of an enormous pyramid-shaped mound of concrete, surrounded by railings, behind the bufferstop; an object of great curiosity. On Sundays, we still had the steam train for a year or two longer, I think because the working was then shared with the Uxbridge (Vine Street) service from West Drayton, running up each branch alternately. From October 1958, brand new purpose-built B.R. single-unit railcars (D55xxx series) painted green took over on all services, being supplemented on Saturdays by an extra driving trailer coach. The Sunday services were soon axed altogether.

The station described



Staines West had the air more of a typical GWR branch terminus deep in the country, than that of a town station less than 20 miles from central London. There was only a single platform leading off from the paved, conservatory-style "concourse" (dominated by that concrete slab); it was long enough to hold a six-coach train, but a short canopy roof with ornate valence provided protection from the elements for only about a quarter of this





distance. The station is remembered over many years as looking exceedingly dingy in pre-war GWR "stone" paint colours, faded and very grimy, until it was unexpectedly fully repainted in sparkling blue and cream in 1960; a sure sign of intended imminent closure! The further one ventured down the platform the more grass-grown and decrepit it became, with broken-down fencing, neglected lamps on cast-iron posts, and a large wooden nameboard near the far end.

only the inspection pit and a tall conical-topped water tower surviving, and beyond, an equally derelict cattle dock siding and pens.

Across the running line from the platform end could be seen the site of the old engine shed, with



Behind the pens was White's timber yard, but this was not rail-served, being accessible only from Moor Lane. My father sometimes took me here on a Saturday morning, buying wood for a household project, and I recall watching one of the large 94XX series pannier tanks shunting vans in the yard from here on one such visit. This would have been about 1953, as the general goods traffic to Staines West ceased in November of that year.

The goods yard proper was situated over on the far side of the running line, behind the station platform. As late as 1962, it was still all quite intact, but had turned into a veritable nature reserve with scrubby vegetation obscuring the rails and trees growing up the rear walls of the yellow-brick warehouse building.



In the spring of that year, several of us would excuse ourselves from school early on games afternoons, and break the bus journey home to explore around here. The remaining buildings were quite dangerous, with rotting floorboards and staircases, and were pervaded by a peculiar musty smell which I will always associate with them; they were thus a great attraction to us teenagers. The goods shed retained its cantilever weighing machine, stiff with rust but still operable, and an overhead track for a sack hoist. There was a wooden office in one corner full of decaying but interesting paperwork; GWR wagon labels, ledgers, waybills and suchlike. One curiosity that I rescued and have kept ever since was a "Misfitting Uniform Report Form"!.....

Great Western Railway. (2673-1)

MISFITTING UNIFORM CLOTHING.

Division
or
District.

In case any Clothing does not fit properly, kindly state below how many inches larger or smaller are required, and return this form, with the misfitting garments, to Mr. J. W. SMITH, G.W.R., General Stores, Swindon. Please also fill in the correct measures in the column provided below for future guidance.

Station..... Dept..... Date.....

Name..... No..... Grade.....

| | NEW MEASURES | ALTERATION REQUIRED | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | | OVERCOAT | JACKET | VEST | TROUSERS |
| JACKET | HEIGHT. Most important | Inches | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller |
| | Length of Sleeve | Inches | Larger Shorter | Larger Shorter | Larger Shorter |
| | Breadth | Inches | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller |
| | Waist | Inches | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller |
| | Leg Seam from First Crease to Hem | Inches | | | |
| TROUSERS | Breadth at A | Inches | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller |
| | Breadth at B | Inches | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller |
| | Breadth at C | Inches | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller | Larger Smaller |

The same measurements will be used for OVERCOATS, allowance being made when cutting.

REMARKS:

When a misfit is returned to Swindon, this form must be filled up and attached to the Clothing. In no case will misfit garments be dealt with unless accompanied by this form.

When a misfit cannot be easily and exactly described, a note should be made in the "Remarks" portion at foot of form asking for the man to be re-measured.

All misfits entered on this form must appear on the Misfit Return (Form 2673) sent by the Chief Inspector to the General Storekeeper, Swindon.

100 yds. 30 lbs. Est. 268. (3) 6/29 K.

3005 B

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY.

EMPTY

From 2,000,000 RM 787 4/41 B Date

100,000—Est. 754—144—3 (5073 A)

G. W. R.
For Transfer to L. M. & S.
(L. & N. W. SECTION)

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY.

Divisional Superintendent's Office,
Paddington, London, W.2.

9th August, 1946.

Dear Sir,

CHEAP DAY TICKETS TO UxBRIDGE (VIA SWINDON).

It is probable that commencing on September 1st, 1946, Third Class Cheap Day Tickets will be issued from your station to Uxbridge on TUESDAYS, THURSDAYS AND FRIDAYS by any train available for return by any train the same day.

The Cheap tickets will be issued at the Single Fare for the return journey, fractions of 1d being reckoned as 1d.

Will you please wire me immediately on receipt of this letter the approximate number of third class cheap day tickets you will require to cover your issue for SIX MONTHS from September 1st.

Will you also please prepare and send to the Chief Accountant, Ticket Supply Department, Paddington, immediately a special Requisition for the number of cheap day tickets required. The Requisition should be endorsed "Priority A".

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THIS MATTER SHOULD BE GIVEN FIRST ATTENTION.

No announcement of these facilities should be made until a further advice is received from this office.

Mr. Cox please to note that bookings will also be given from Yeovuney and Poyle and advise me what tickets will be required for issue to passengers joining at these points.

Yours truly,
For G. I. (M)

J.H.

14.8
14.3.30

In reply to your Telephone No.: Paddington 2000. Extension 2775 In your reply please quote S.1/- (45.1)

G.W.R. MEMORANDUM

From The DIVISIONAL SUPERINTENDENT, J.H., Paddington Station, W.2. To Mr. Lomer, Colnbrook.

28/8/47. 194

2,000 yds. 30 lbs.—B.M. 17. 1946. ⑧

Clerical Annual Leave - 1947.

With reference to your letter of 4th instant, I am sorry it will not be possible to send relief for Mrs. Matton for the periods asked for and she has been provisionally booked for two weeks commencing 19th May. Please let me know if this will be convenient.

T. Cox.

Around the yard outside were to be found an operable standard 3-ton hand crane, a small brick-built platelayers cabin, a pair of stables which once housed the carthorses employed on town deliveries (and retaining the aroma), and a timber cart weighbridge office, also still containing the weighing machinery. All the track and pointwork lay quietly rusting, including a double-slip formation (disconnected from the main running line by then) at the far end of the yard. Lizards could be found basking in the sun on the rail tops. We would try our hand at operating the point levers, whose mechanism squealed in protest at being

disturbed, if it would move at all. One siding which had been largely removed by this time was the back-most spur which used to lead via a lightly-constructed bridge across the Wyardisbury stream into the lino works complex. I cannot recall the bridge in situ, but one afternoon in about 1955 we observed from the footpath opposite a GW "toad" brake van tipped down the bank into the river, obviously the result of some over-zealous shunting in the station yard.

The signalbox is something of a mystery to me, as photographic evidence shows this remained in use as late as the summer of 1959, yet I cannot remember ever noticing it, or the token exchange operation carried out by every train. I cannot imagine why it was still needed then, as along with the goods yard, the engine run-round loop line was by now well-rusted, and there was only ever one train present on the line south of Colnbrook. All that survived by 1962, when I measured and photographed all the remaining yard structures, was the brickwork of the signalmen's coal bunker, which I mistook for the base of the box itself.

Here are some other views of the station, taken in the period 1960-65.....



The Oil Terminal era

By the autumn of 1963, the whole of the goods yard area was cleared and razed to the ground, and in due course a rail-served oil storage terminal appeared in its place; the old rural slumber had vanished.

On 19 June 1964, while my school colleagues were undergoing a GCE "O" level examination in History, I had a free morning, and so encountered quite by chance the first oil-tanker train to come down the branch, with large prairie tank 6143 in charge; even more fortunately, I had a camera with me.....



The engine-men could not comprehend my interest in the train at all and were much more concerned to impart to me the revelation that Christine Keeler, woman of ill-repute in the recent "Profumo" government scandal, lived in one of the "Great Western Cottages" not 20 yards from where we were standing. This I did not believe, but later read to be absolutely correct.

The dilemma of how to run the oil train and the normal passenger service on the single line at the same time without the signalbox was easily resolved by B.R. management - by summarily cancelling the latter! Indeed, any raised hopes of a continued existence for the passenger service now that the line had to be maintained anyway came to an abrupt end the following March, when it fell under the notorious Beeching "axe".....

Closure – March 1965

The closure rites - on Saturday evening, 27 March 1965 - were typical of those on many such lines around this time. A three-coach London suburban Pressed-Steel diesel set ran up and down all day in place of the normal railcar, to cope with the extra loads.

We waited for the very last train of all out of the terminus in the gathering dusk; there was jostling amongst enthusiasts to be the one to buy the very last ticket issued (actually achieved by one of my schoolfriends, by accident rather than design; timekeeping was never his strong



point). Amongst the throng of passengers, a pram with very young and no doubt bemused child was loaded aboard the train, and there was also a very old man who recounted his story of travelling on the very first train some eighty years previously. Flashbulbs popped; there was inane commentary by the local pressmen.

A hand-made commemorative tailboard was placed on the train, which finally got under way some minutes late. Detonators exploded under the wheels, and the two-tone

horn blared continually. A great crush of people congregated in the rear driving cab; the last waves from a small crowd left on the platform receded rapidly into the distance. The communication cord was pulled; endless delays ensued; arrival back at the junction was very late. We waited ages in a long queue for a number 224 bus to take us back home, amidst enveloping Melancholia.



The morning after the night before: here is the station slumbering on Sunday morning, a few hours after the last train had left. The station house was occupied by railway staff tenants for some years further, before being left empty to suffer from dereliction and extensive dry rot.

Three months after the closure to passengers, on 25 July 1965 an enthusiasts special train brought the last steam working - pannier tank 9773 hauling green-painted Southern region main-line carriages - down our branch.....



In this last picture the train has left Staines West station and is about to cross over the Southern Electric branch to Windsor, which brings us conveniently to the next part of our story.....

then all was silent save for the elusive diesel-hauled oil-tanker train only once a fortnight or so, running at unpredictable times, often quite early in the morning.

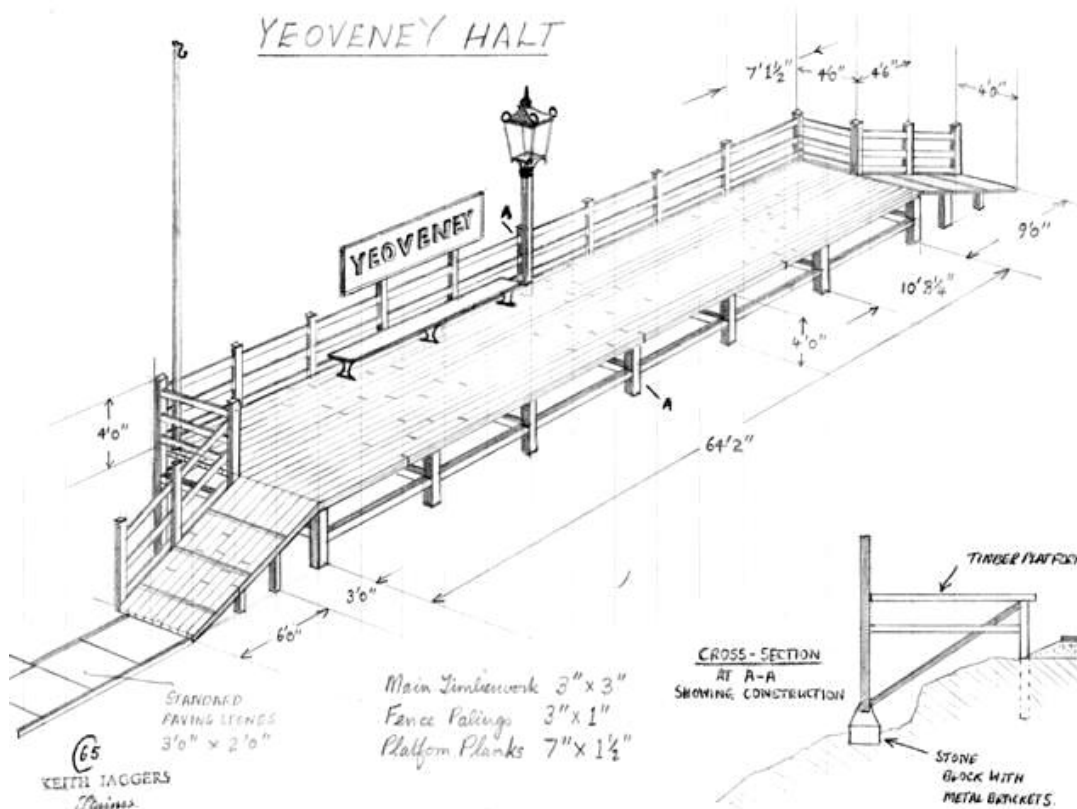
Out onto the Moor – Yeoveney Halt, and the 1940 wartime spur line

On summer weekend afternoons about 1954/55 when my father played cricket at Chertsey, my mother and I would sometimes walk along Moor Lane as far as the first halt out from Staines West, a bleak and uninhabited spot on the moor known as Yeoveney.



Along the way we passed by this rather elegant brick bridge which carried the GWR branch line over the River Wyardisbury once more. This is the bridge which was originally so badly built that it fell down before the line was opened! When it was rebuilt, it was to carry just a single of rails, unlike other structures which had provision for a doubling of the line at a later date (and which was never to occur)

The simple shelterless wooden platform of Yeoveney Halt lay 300 yards from the road (which was later realigned, bringing it much closer), over a stream footbridge where I was frightened of the cattle usually found drinking there, across a field and through the characteristic wicket gate in the railway fence. We would then sit on the platform seat waiting to hail the train for the short run back to the terminus. Just along the line, a point diverged to the left, with rusty rails leading off into dense undergrowth and bushes. I would dream of where this old line might once have gone to - perhaps to the south coast, as was supposedly originally intended? The truth was much more prosaic, and the line not really that old, being merely a quarter-mile wartime emergency connection down to the S.R. Windsor line, laid out in 1940, but unused after about 1947.



There was another walk to Yeoveney, discovered later and much more interesting than the road, which revealed all. A path off to the right of the Staines West station forecourt led through an iron gate beside a small turbine-house on the river, the last vestige of the old mustard mill premises. Through tall nettles along the river bank, this took us past the former lino works siding and bridge, then over the S.R Windsor electric lines by a board crossing. Just before the latter, buried in long grass, was a GWR cast-iron boundary marker (implying that they owned the river, as well as the railway land!) which I once tried unsuccessfully to dig up, not realising how deep it went into the ground. From the crossing could be seen the Southern's spur into the lino factory, then still in very occasional use, together with the remains of coal delivery sidings embedded in concrete on the up side opposite.

To the left was a space once occupied by yet more sidings, this time leading to the clearly defined track-bed of a long spur running directly across the moor, over an extant iron bridge (pictured right) to the Metropolitan Water Board pumping station near the "Crooked Billet" on London Road, again for coal supply, but long since ceased.



There then followed a somewhat desolate stretch of moorland, as yet undisturbed by the Staines bypass road (1960), much less by the M25 motorway (1981) which finally saw off the remains of the GWR branch route in its quest to provide 8 lanes of tarmac up this formerly-quiet valley.



The only access road then was the drover's track from Moor Lane which crosses firstly the GW line (nearest in this picture), then the river and Southern line in succession by the "three bridges", all of markedly differing ages and designs.



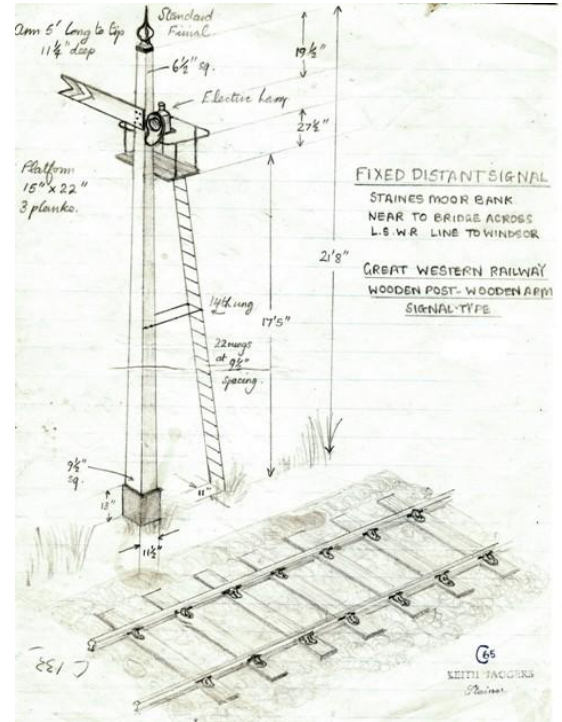
This second view of the bridges is looking south from the new Staines By-pass bridge, constructed in 1960. Here the Southern line is on the left and the GW one to the right. The bulk of the various lino works buildings are in the centre background, with the West station oil storage tanks on the right, above the GW bridge.

Some way beyond this muddy track we encountered the wartime spur, its rusty rails entangled in undergrowth, and with quite mature trees growing up between the sleepers. Exploring this jungle, one would suddenly burst forth right upon the double junction to the Windsor line, un-nerved by the close presence of an electric train rattling by. At the other end however, it seemed perfectly natural and safe to go

clambering about all over the track, and up onto Yeoveney's platform, where we would invariably be the only passengers waiting.



The picture (left) shows the view north from the top of the fixed distant signal warning of the approach to Yeoveney platform, the site of which was on the left side of the line just beyond the set of points. The derelict wartime spur climbs up from bottom right to meet the main running line here.



Looking in the opposite direction, we see the plate-girder bridge by which the GW line crossed the Southern electric lines, visible at bottom right. This bridge was clearly intended to carry double track.



The little halt at which the drivers were often reluctant to stop was finally abolished on the Saturday evening, 12th May 1962; myself and a friend deliberately went there to catch the very last train from there back to Staines West, and again we were on our own, surely some kind of record for a station closure! Within a few days, the platform was razed to the ground.

The journey, Staines West to Paddington, via West Drayton

I can vividly remember earlier trips up the line from Staines West, on the steam auto-train or the GW railcars, on account of the friendliness of the train staff. Shortly after leaving the terminus, we would be

invited to ride in the leading driving cab all the way to the junction at West Drayton. After Yeoveney, there was another small halt at Poyle, with a weak bridge and generous provision of signage.....



In my late father's collection was this photograph which I am sure shows him and myself so ensconced as the train ran into Colnbrook, over the Old Bath Road level crossing; however, they probably offered such rides to all their young passengers!

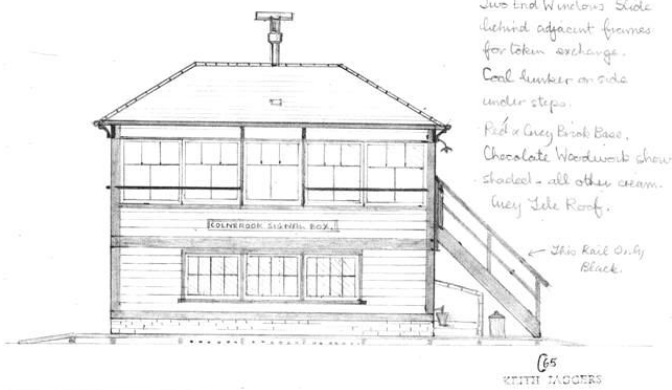
Colnbrook was the only intermediate station along the branch. It was a much more typical example of a GWR country station and crossing-point on a single-track route, and many standard features were to be seen.



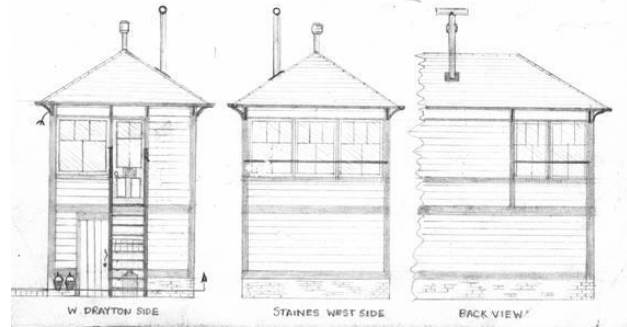
The wooden signalbox was situated adjacent to the road level crossing, and contained a large, heavy cast-iron wheel by which the wide gates could be swung, as well as the usual electric token apparatus. The driver would slow his train almost to a stop to carry out the exchange of tokens (and the odd pleasantries) directly through the open window of the box, from his cab. There was then a very brief burst of power applied over the loop points, and we would free-wheel to a stand alongside the up platform



COLNBROOK SIGNAL BOX - FRONT VIEW 4mm - 1ft



COLNBROOK SIGNAL BOX - END & REAR VIEWS 4mm - 1ft



shelter. There was often a goods train on the other line, with 57XX pannier waiting to shunt the yard after we had passed. Freight traffic here survived much longer than at Staines West, due to the presence of a steel merchant and a heavy engineering works adjacent to the station, both served by private sidings.



The general goods yard contained the usual facilities, with a crane similar to that at Staines, and a loading gauge whose profile could be altered from elliptical-roof to the old clerestory shape by pulling on a chain. When I tried this for a photograph (above) in 1964, the rusted mechanism protested loudly, and once altered would not revert to its previous setting!

Passenger facilities were incorporated in a neat red-brick main building on the down platform, with Dutch gables more reminiscent of East Anglia than the Great Western, presumably built by the original local railway company. The signalman's cottage behind the box on the main road was in the same style.

The journey time from Staines West up to the junction was usually about 20 minutes, depending on patronage at the request-stop halts, and sometimes waiting to get access into the platform; this bay was shared by the Uxbridge and Staines trains (both usually auto-sets or railcars). In steam days one could never be sure whether the front or back train was for Staines, as they tended to run in according to whether one or other of the engines needed to take on water (presumably there was some form of code between the drivers and signalmen to determine this). That one would be to the rear, having run down to the water tank at the London end of the platform, and come back ready to commence its return journey.

Stepping out from the train onto the platform, our branch-line reverie would be shattered more or less immediately by a thunderous roar from across the far side of the station as an express powered by at upwards of 60-70 mph, a majestic "King" or "Castle" at its head. For a few seconds, the platforms trembled, sounds of the carriage bogies on rail-joints echoed around the canopies, then the dust settled and peace returned. The down main line platform buildings were intact, but looked somewhat decrepit, being little used. Our wait for the London stopping train to arrive on the up relief line was usually about 10 minutes or so, filled by wasting a penny in the machine that stamped out our choice of name on a thin metal strip, or on a small bar of chocolate softened by the sun from another.

In due course our train, which originated from either Slough or Reading, would coast smartly into platform 4, always a 61XX class 2-6-2 tank at its head running like a sewing machine, the loudest sound being the rhythmic ticking of its crosshead-driven vacuum pump. The train was formed of modern, all-steel compartment carriages, either late GW or early BR types, painted plain matt unlined red (not at all like the later maroon) and reasonably clean both inside and out. I do remember problems with sticking doors, however; I once got trapped in a compartment at Paddington, and had to climb out through the open window, much to the guard's consternation.

After a short wait, there was a shrill whistle from the engine, and departure was brisk and purposeful, with the driver opening up flat out until a steady speed of about 50 mph was attained, thence shutting off to coast along to the next stop; the pattern always seemed to be the same. Over the wall to our left was the Grand Union Canal, with narrow-boats and lighters jostling to unload timber into extensive open-sided storage sheds. Further along came several factories, each with their own sidings, shunted with a variety of privately-owned motive power, both steam (including strange-looking fireless engines) and small diesel types.

Hayes & Harlington station was unremarkable, the same four-line, four-platform layout as at most stops along this level stretch of route, with the main-line side facilities complete but deserted. There was a parcels depot with its own separate platforms to our left, then the huge Nestles creamery on the right, before the canal bridge. After this were extensive and busy freight marshalling yards, with several 77XX series pannier-tanks fussing around.

Just beyond the following station, Southall, the goods-only Brentford Dock branch left the main line curving southwards. Here is a view of the extensive dock goods station, on the banks of the River Thames and also served by the Grand Union Canal, when it was being demolished in 1965.....



In the fork of the main and Brentford lines lay Southall shed, the principal Western Region goods and branch-engine depot in the London area. There was usually a row of GW diesel railcars stabled between the shed building and the main lines, this might include one or two examples of the parcels-service variants

painted plain red rather than red-and-cream; in later years some of these and the passenger cars also appeared in the lined green DMU livery. By this time, only the non-streamlined railcars survived, and those seen regularly around 1959 were nos. W21W, 27, 30, 31 and 34. Some of these lingered on until about 1961, long after the Staines line had changed over to BR type units, and never seemed to do a lot of work latterly.

The steam shed proper was not among the cleanest of its type. At the London end, to the rear of the yard, was seen a row of large goods engines, too filthy for us to distinguish their numbers from the passing train; their boilers streaked with rust and white deposits from leaking joints, and the lower halves of smokebox doors well-burnt from accumulated ash within. These were mainly GWR 28XX class and W.D - type 2-8-0's, and were not, as might be supposed, stored awaiting disposal for scrap, but part of the normal working allocation of the depot, operating mainly down the route from Banbury on coal trains. They might also have one or two of Tyseley shed's LMS 8F version of the breed for company.

Immediately after the depot, and in complete contrast, was the vast and well laid-out A.E.C factory, where the majority of London's buses were built; early in 1960, rows of brand-new gleaming red "Routemasters" were lined up ready for release to service as part of the trolleybus replacement programme.

Over the busy Uxbridge Road (still then complete with its route 607 trolleys) on a long skew iron bridge, our train came to a brief halt at Hanwell & Elthorne station, then passed the triangle of lines leading to the Greenford branch on the left. West Ealing station was adjoined by a large milk depot, served by trains of 6-wheeled tankers, and had an unusual arrangement, with the relief line platforms staggered either side of the road bridge.

Entered through smokey tunnels under the main road, the next station, Ealing Broadway, was the most important of the stops to Paddington; not only was the Greenford branch train (an autococh with pannier tank 5410 or 5418) often seen waiting in its reversing siding between the main and relief lines, but both District and Central "underground" lines converged on their terminal platforms at the east end. The L.T. tube and surface stock seen side by side provided an interesting contrast in size: the District trains comprised an assortment of old "Metropolitan" clerestory-roofed stock built to the "American Saloon" pattern together with relatively modern but unusual flare-sided vehicles known as the OP type; the tube coaches also had clerestory roofs, and dated from the 1920's. Leaving this busy station, the tube lines fell away to the left, and there were now additional goods running lines on this side of our route.

After passing grimy Acton Main Line station and the complex junctions hereabouts, we looked out for Old Oak Common locomotive sheds on the left - the main Western Region London passenger-engine depot - but they were often obscured by lengthy rakes of stabled carriages, much to our chagrin. I did take the opportunity to visit this home of the Great Western's best machines on an organised school trip in the spring of 1960, also "doing" the neighbouring rival LMS establishment at Willesden Junction on the same day. I was amazed at how physically close together these two sheds were (a short stroll up Old Oak Lane, pausing to consume our sandwiches and drinks from the universal duffle bags, between the morning Midland visit and the Western after lunch), yet how different their contents and cleanliness. Willesden was a sea of uniform sooty grey engines, blending in well with their surroundings, whereas Old Oak seemed to be all spit and polish (on the larger locos at least), with the inmates organized into neat lines; passenger engines to one side, 57XX panniers all together opposite, likewise the large 94XX variety, and even the condensing panniers with extended side tanks in their own little group. There were several almost-brand-new shiny black 9F 2-10-0's, mere freight locos, but very much better kept than anything seen at Southall. There were by now many main-line diesels to be seen also, with their own purpose-built facilities, and a little clutch of old GWR-designed diesel shunters, numbered in the 15101 series.

The lines of carriages, in both the Western's distinctive and elegant "chocolate and cream" livery and the later all-pervasive but dull maroon, often indiscriminately mixed up, were shuttled as ECS workings from the sidings here up to Paddington, about 3 miles distant. All the different types of pannier tank could be seen working such duties, including the ungainly short-wheelbase 15XX machines which were suited for very little else. The 94XX's were particularly prevalent, but on summer Saturdays anything that happened

to be handy would be used, including main-line types running tender-first. From Old Oak to the terminus was all junctions, flyovers, movement and bustle on either side.

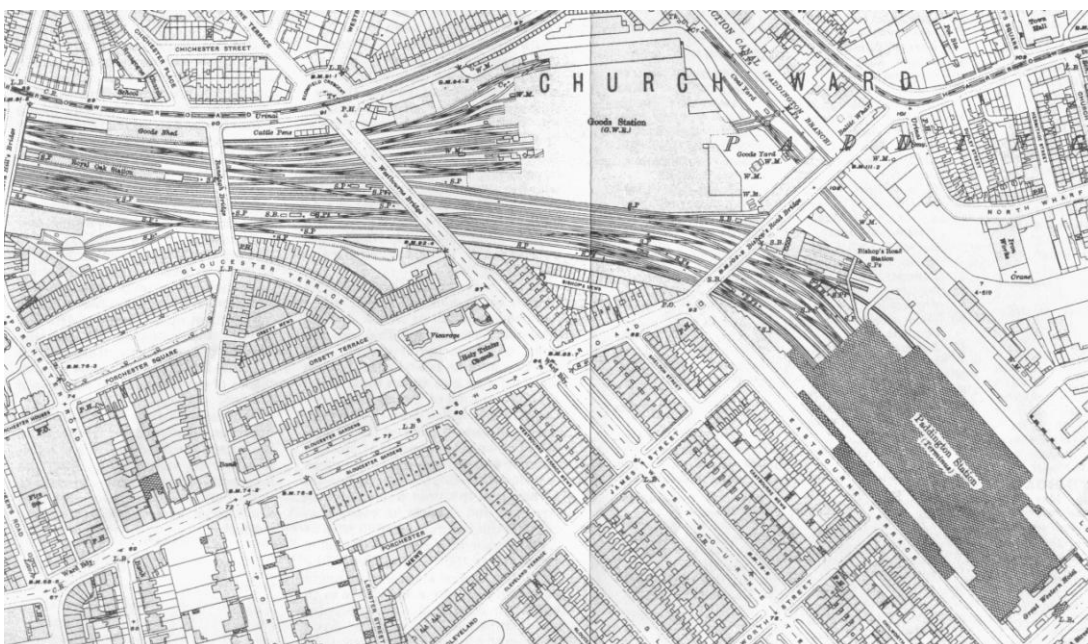
Hammersmith and City line LT trains came alongside at Westbourne Park, our last stop, then burrowed beneath us and emerged on the north side, rattling past as we slowed for the final approach. So into the terminus, over on this far side adjacent to the Met. lines, our train comes to rest in either of platforms 13 or 14, Paddington Suburban Station, dark and gloomy and quite detached from the more interesting bit. We could not even get out directly onto the main concourse (or "lawn" as it had long been known), but instead passed through a dingy ticket barrier, across the plate-girder footbridge and down the length of broad Platform 1 to the station exit. Assuming that is where we were heading, for there were of course many distractions claiming our attention, especially on summer holiday weekends!



Favourite vantage points were at the outermost end of the aforementioned platform 1, well beyond the Bishop's Bridge Road girder bridge, adjacent to the parcels depot and commanding a clear view right across the station throat, excellent for photography or just to watch the comings and goings of those magnificent "Kings" and "Castles" with their immaculate trains.



This spot was usually fairly un-crowded as one could not see what was going on "just around the corner", but from here could be fully appreciated that most characteristic trait of GWR designed locomotives of all sizes, the ability to march boldly and purposefully with their trains away from rest up to full normal running speed. No slipping, feeble rasping or copious volleys of black smoke here, as was commonly seen at Waterloo, Euston, Kings Cross; nor one ounce of wasted effort or any hint of struggle!



The end of the shorter platforms 8/9 alongside the old "Arrivals" signalbox was much more popular with spotters, though somewhat dark and smokey under the bridge, as it enabled a clear view straight down the main running lines, upon which there always seemed to be something on the move. Over the years we saw most of the "Kings" and "Castles" and many of the everyday "Halls" with their distinctive and usually gleaming brass plates proclaiming the names of aristocratic seats both long and short (and some unpronounceable Welsh ones with no vowels). There were occasional "Counties" and



"Granges" but rarely any of the smaller "Manors" here. Certain engines turned up nearly every time we visited; they seemed to be kept on the same day-in, day-out duties over many years. "Bristol Castle" was often, appropriately, heading the prestige "Bristolian" express. Other quite regular "Castles" recalled were Raglan, Tresco and Bridgewater, Pembroke, Winchester, Corfe, Coity, Chirk and Farleigh; Lamphey, Wardour, Restormel and Launceston. Baggrave, Capel Dewi, Elmdon, Eaton Mascot, Fountains and Olton were the common "Halls". The odd engine would be greeted with derision by the assembled throng, being a "rogue": indescribably filthy, leaking steam everywhere and generally quite down-at-heel: "Manton Grange" and "Llanrumney Hall" were such, but London-based engines were never allowed to get into such a state. These two were from Oxford, and one hopes their crews were suitably chastened by our reception. The only standard locomotive types we saw were Britannia pacifics with robust names Ariel, Mercury, Vulcan, Lightning, on the South Wales trains, notably the "Red Dragon". They did not seem to be well-liked by the GWR men; indeed this route's prestige train, the "South Wales Pullman" invariably had a Castle up front. The old-fashioned wooden Pullman cars did not especially stand out and impress at Paddington as they did at Waterloo or Kings Cross, being in virtually the same livery as the ordinary main-line stock here, and of inferior internal sumptuousness compared to the best of the GWR saloons, which were accessible without payment of a supplementary fare!



For all their magnificence, it has to be said there was not too much locomotive variety at Paddington; apart from the half-dozen or so premier types already listed, there were only the three pannier-tank classes and the 61XX suburban tanks normally to be seen, though one of the huge-boilered 47XX 2-8-0's was occasionally drafted away from their nocturnal express-freight duties onto relief passenger train work.

Steam traction was diluted early on by



modernization on the Western Region. Diesel multiple units were to be seen lurking in their own exhaust-laden gloom at either platform 10 or 11 from as early as the mid-1950's; the engines seemingly left running for hours on end. These were the plain, dull-green painted original Swindon "cross-country" units working out to Oxford, but they had disappeared up to Scotland well before the main onslaught of "Pressed Steel" sets - which displaced the 61XX's almost overnight - and the ill-fated main-line diesel-hydraulics in their assorted colours.



By 1964, loco spotting on the Western had thus somewhat lost its appeal, but spurred on by news of an influx of unusual classes, and suffering from the prospect of school G.C.E examinations, I took myself off up the main line one spring Saturday morning. The suburban diesel sets had then been in use for some three years, and did at least offer the advantage of an excellent view forward from the seats behind the driver, from which the operation of the signals, complemented by the bells and buzzers of the GWR AWS (audible warning system), could be followed on the route ahead. Southall shed did indeed boast a large new allocation of 28 and 38XX 2-8-0's, now its very own as opposed to those seen in previous years which were mainly only visiting; there were about 12 of them present, some stored but others in steam, all unidentifiably grimy as usual and some even with their cast numberplates and safety valve covers missing too.

I got off the train at Ealing Broadway, and spent the whole morning there without seeing a single steam locomotive at work! Thoroughly depressed, I was just about to give up and go back home, when no. 7327 came trundling along as a light-engine on the down relief line; this was one of Didcot shed's new allocation of seven of this mogul type for working parcels traffic and suchlike, and was commendably clean in black livery. It was the first time I had seen one of this class so close to London. Arrived back at West Drayton, I headed into town to find some lunch, and happened to glance backwards just as small prairie tank 5564 crossed the road bridge - again as a light engine - apparently en route for the Staines line. This was one of six which came "up-country" for the first time in several decades, to Southall in 1964, to finish their service on local freight trips. To complete the hat-trick, Reading's Collett 0-6-0 2257 passed by on an engineers' train when I returned to catch the diesel car back to Staines. 3 rare London classes in an hour, close to the end of regular Western steam working in our area! Despite looking out for it at Colnbrook, I never saw 5564 again that day.

Slough and Windsor

As an opportunity to see the Western express types in their element, at speed on the splendid Brunel main line, a visit to Slough was a must. I spent most of August Bank Holiday Saturday 1960, also Saturday 2 June 1962 on this station, in glorious summer weather. Travelling from Staines, one could either go by Southern electric to Windsor, thence the short walk up Castle Hill to catch the single-unit diesel car from the WR Central station for the three-minute run into Slough's west bay platform, or from Staines West changing at West Drayton thence via Iver and Langley. However, I must confess that the LT country bus route 460 was much more direct, cheaper, and usually quickest!

Once installed on a convenient wooden platform barrow at the west end of the up main island platform, with notebook, sandwiches and flask of drink, I enjoyed the spectacle of a continuous succession of passing expresses, with gleaming Kings and Castles heading smart sets of carriages in the brown and cream livery that suited them, and complemented the engines' green, so well. Of course, there were also some very assorted rakes to be seen, with dirty or quite ancient vehicles, recent maroon repaints indiscriminately mixed in, even tatty red-and-cream painted ones as well, but mainly the best tends to be remembered. It

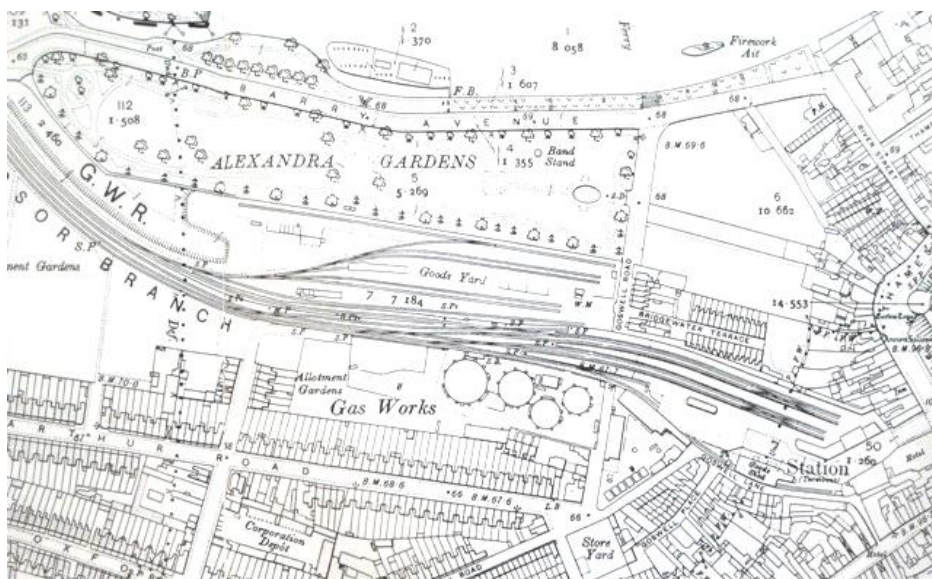
seemed that the old wooden lower-quadrant home and distant signal arms had hardly clunked back to danger, before the home at least would be pulled off again, especially on the down main line.

Those trains lucky enough to get a clear route ahead tore through the station at upwards of 80 mph, with clear exhaust and not a wisp of leaking steam anywhere. The large train reporting numbers then carried on smokebox doors obscured the engine number and made spotting difficult; concentration was needed to catch a glimpse of the nameplate instead in the few seconds available. Within a very few moments the back end of the train was receding rapidly into the distance, leaving the dust to settle in its wake. The rest shuffled by at maybe 30 or 40 mph, in the face of distant signals permanently at caution, with "Halls" and even the occasional grimy 28XX 2-8-0 in charge, their carriages full of happy holidaymakers. On my 1960 visit, diesels were remarkably absent from the scene, but one down express presented a strange apparition, accompanied by a high-pitched whine, as it approached at speed in the heat-haze.

This was none other than the pioneer GWR gas-turbine locomotive 18000, then regularly working the 3.5 pm to Weston-super-Mare, albeit a shortish train, between its lengthy sojourns out of use at Swindon works. I was sufficiently impressed to consider that this was definitely the motive power for the future - how wrong can one be?

Once or twice, the whole layout was jammed up for a few minutes by a 61XX tank and suburban rake crossing from the Windsor branch to the up relief line with a through stopping train to Paddington. The Windsor railcar shuttled quietly in and out of its bay all day long with remarkable frequency. If I had arrived by bus, I would try to fit in a trip up the branch and back in a quiet period; it only took a few minutes. This enabled a closer look at the contents of Slough loco. shed, adjacent to the triangle formed by the branch junctions with the main line. There was always a 14XX 0-4-2 tank present, either 1421, 1453 or 1474, alas no longer for working to Windsor, but being the spare one of the pair used on the Maidenhead - Marlow line well into the 1960's. In 1962, there were also two of the modern small panniers, 1622 and 1624 on shed, but they seemed to be little used. Large engines visiting Windsor were serviced here, often LMS "black fives" and west-country based "Halls" or "Granges". They worked back out of Windsor in the early evening, sometimes hauling sets of maroon LMS coaches, via the Slough west curve, thence onto the Oxford line at Didcot.

Windsor GW station had a most peculiar layout, the goods yard being situated to the north side of the passenger station and at a much lower level, reached by a very steeply-graded reversing spur out of platform 1. I once stood and watched a 57XX pannier come charging up the slope with a short rake of wagons, them jam on the brakes as it roared towards the terminal stop blocks. The goods shed was perversely on the upper level, on the opposite side of the station.....



By 1965, the station had been reduced to just one line serving platform 1 (below left). Outside in the forecourt, the magnificent overall roof with GWR coat of arms fortunately survived the destruction, and was still usually thronged with red Thames Valley buses, at this time predominantly Bristol "Lodekkas".....



Returning home from Slough via West Drayton meant attempting to buy a ticket at the office on the down main platform, then scooting through the subway under 4 lines to the up relief one in time to catch the Paddington stopper. On the day of my "gas turbine" encounter, elation was short-lived as there was a very long queue at the ticket window, and I saw my intended train come and go whilst waiting impatiently. So I perforce went instead for the boring old 460 bus yet again. This entailed a weary walk back to Slough town centre, in the course of which I passed a girl dressed in a tight sweater and very obviously wearing no bra, quite unusual in those days. I was pleasantly surprised to experience the first stirrings of sexual awareness, nicely rounding off what had been quite a heady and stimulating day for a 12-year old!

Reading

Earlier in 1960, during the school Easter holidays, I made a one-off trip to Reading General station, the first major main-line junction out of Paddington. This was by means of our trusty "28" Southern Electric svice from Staines, a tedious ride quite unlike their familiar fast runs to Waterloo. The single 2-coach unit finally coasted past the SR locoshed at Reading South, full of U1 and N class moguls off the Redhill line, and into the Southern's little terminus situated off to one side of the forecourt of the vast GW establishment. Compared to Slough, the layout at General seemed cramped and somewhat disorganised, but many locomotive classes rarely seen nearer to Paddington ran to here, a major hub for freight workings.

Small 4-6-0 7808 "Cookham Manor" was on station pilot work, shunting parcels vans around, a demeaning job for a named engine I thought, but this was in reality just filling in time, its real purpose being to provide emergency cover in case of locomotive breakdowns (usually diesel ones, at this time) on the main line. There were several 57XX pannier tanks fussing around in the sidings together with Collett 0-6-0's 2210 and 2262, a couple of the GW diesel railcars which I had not previously seen, and no. 6313, one of Reading's own moguls. However, the real "cops" of that day were two 0-6-2 tanks, 6627 and 6673. This type is normally regarded as a "South Wales" class, but apparently worked quite regularly up to Reading around this time on freight duties; I wish I had gone there more often!

A happy postscript – Staines West station building today

fully restored and in use as offices.....

