

THE STAINES TO WOKINGHAM BRANCH LINE

A second branch line was opened in 1856, running from Staines via Ascot to Wokingham. It was built and owned by the Staines and Wokingham Railway, a local company, although London and South Western Railway operated the services and subsequently purchased the line in 1878. This branch line provided Bracknell with its passenger railway station, re-developed in 1975. This followed the closure of Bracknell's goods sidings in 1969 and the Binfield Brick and Tile Company siding east of Amen Crossing in 1965. The line linked to the South Eastern line south of Wokingham to reach Reading.

This line was used for the trials on safer braking systems. The early steam trains only had a handbrake on the locomotive and another on the Guard's Van. It was not until 1881 that the system of continuous brakes, operating on the locomotive and all coaches, was adopted.

The branch line was electrified in 1939 and electric trains replaced the old steam locomotives bringing to an end 'the romance of steam' but providing a more efficient and cleaner mode of travel.

For many years the whole railway network was in public ownership but, following the recent privatisation of the railways, services on these lines are provided by South West Trains and Thames Trains, and the track and signalling systems are maintained by Railtrack.

Front cover illustration: Bracknell Station c.1960



A steam train standing at Sandhurst Halt in 1948

Although these lines are now operated by electric or diesel trains, it is still possible to see and ride behind steam engines in Bracknell on the Jocks Lane Park Miniature Railway off Binfield Road. Bracknell Railway Society runs this track on Bank Holiday Mondays and selected Sundays from Easter through the summer months.

Other leaflets available on local history include the histories of Crowthorne, Sandhurst, Easthampstead Conservation Area, Ancient Highways, The Great Forest, and The Making of Bracknell New Town. Leaflets are also available on local churches and countryside parks and country walks.

For a full list ring 01344 354124 or visit our Website at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk

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This leaflet is available in large print, braille, or on audio tape on request, please contact 01344 354124 for further details



BRACKNELL FOREST THE COMING OF RAILWAYS



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THE WESTERN MAIN LINE

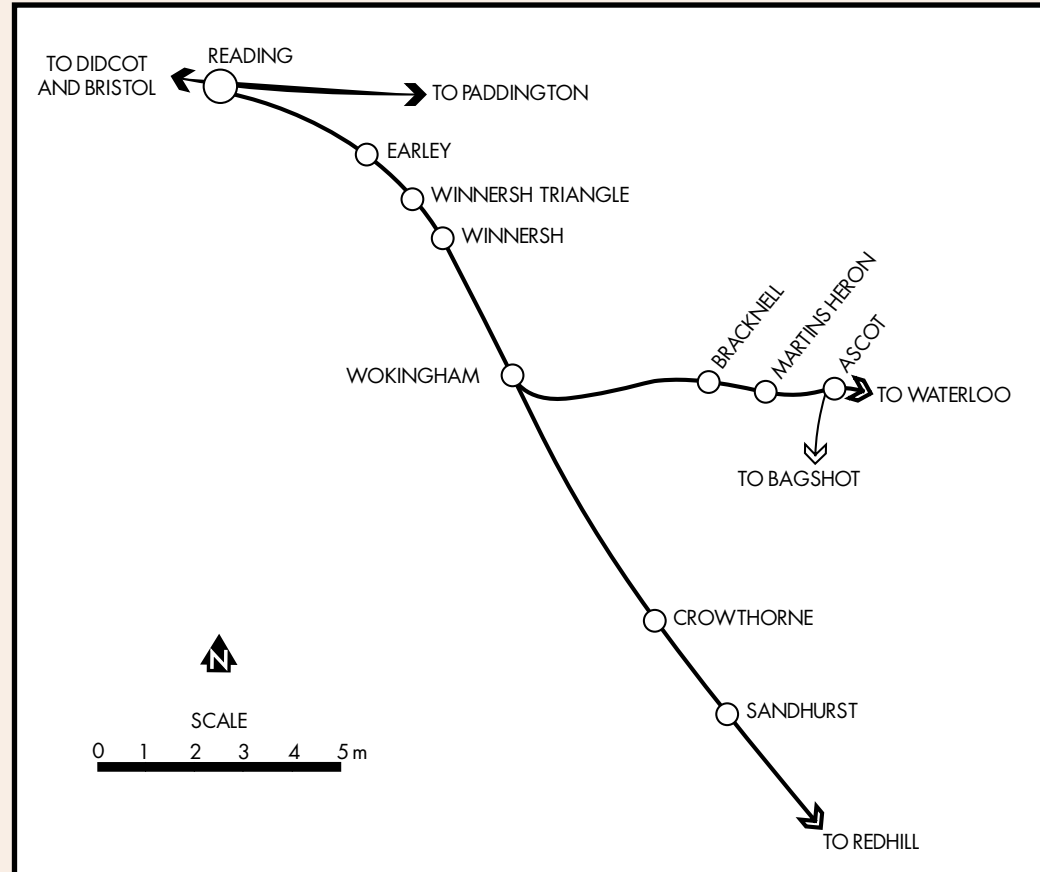
Bracknell Forest was the quiet rural area lying south of the Great Bath Road, linking London to Bristol. London was a great market for goods. The frustrations of inadequate road transport in the early Nineteenth Century led to the plan for an ambitious railway line to link the great seaport of Bristol with the capital, London.

In 1835 the Great Western Railway Bill passed through Parliament, the engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, (builder of the Suspension Bridge, Bristol) was appointed and the work got under way. His insistence on installing the track on level ground earned the railway the nickname of 'Brunel's Billiard Table'. The first section from Paddington to Maidenhead was opened in 1838, then Maidenhead bridge with its two arches of 128 feet wide, the shallowest brick arches in the world, in an area famous for its bricks. Before the end of 1840 the railway onward to Reading and through West Berkshire was completed.

The railways brought commuters and middle class entrepreneurs with their wealth and demand for schools, churches and other public amenities leading to the opening of the whole area for development. Before long, two branch lines crossed Bracknell Forest Borough.

THE READING TO REDHILL BRANCH LINE

The area south of the railway soon drew the attention of speculators with the grand plan of linking Dover with the Midlands. To this end the Reading to Redhill branch line was laid, taking in the villages of Crowthorne and Sandhurst. The line through Wokingham



Station was opened in 1849 and taken over by the South Eastern Railway in 1852. Crowthorne Station was named Wellington College Station (renamed in 1928) and opened in 1859 to coincide with the first entry of students. Roads in the area were very poor and a spur from the branch line carried the vast amount of building materials required for such a prestigious building.

Sandhurst Halt was opened in 1852, closed at the end of 1853 and not reopened again until 1909. A siding from it was used to carry materials to build The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.



Wellington College Station, Crowthorne in C.1895

The journey from Charing Cross or Cannon Street to Reading was a 'stopping' service, accounting for local needs and in 1918 took over three hours to complete the run. Nevertheless, the line was very useful as a route from Dover to Reading, avoiding London.