Wimbledon, 1951-53 (and a few other railway memories)

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Neither this nor its companion piece "Derby Day, 1949" lays claim to any particular literary or other merit; they are merely pieces of first-hand reportage which may perhaps be of interest to future transport historians.

In September 1951, I started going to school in Wimbledon. This involved a train journey morning and evening, an experience which put me off commuting for life but which also led to an interest in railways that still survives. In particular, one of the ways of walking from the station to school followed a footpath alongside the railway for the first half mile or so.

Wimbledon is seven miles out of Waterloo, on what was originally the main line of the London and Southampton Railway. In due course, this became the London and South Western, then it was grouped into the Southern Railway, and by 1951 it had become part of British Railways. The lines from Waterloo divide at Clapham Junction, a line towards Windsor and Reading branching off to the north, and there are several connections between the two. One is at Putney, where a steep climb leads up to East Putney station on the Wimbledon branch of the London Underground District Line, and a Waterloo to Wimbledon suburban service via East Putney used this until 1941.

Wimbledon station had been completely rebuilt in 1929, and in 1951 it comprised ten platforms. Four were terminal platforms for the District Line, this side of the station being essentially self-contained though there was a connection from the East Putney line to the main line just outside. Platforms 5 to 8 served the main line, the fast lines being in the middle, and these were intensively used; in those days, there were fifteen trains an hour on the slow lines throughout the day, with more in the morning and evening peaks, and the fast lines also saw heavy traffic though only a few trains actually stopped. The last two platforms served the lines to Tooting and Sutton which are now part of the Thameslink route, and also a line to West Croydon along what is now the Tramlink route. However, whereas today the Thameslink trains use platform 9 in both directions and the trams run into a terminus on platform 10, in those days both were ordinary one-way through platforms as regards the Tooting and Sutton trains, and platform 9 was also used as a terminus for the West Croydon trains.

Wimbledon also had four goods depots, though one, which had been the milk platform in the days when milk was transported in churns, now saw only occasional traffic. It was separate from the main station, being a couple of hundred yards away on the country side with its own road access, and was served by a loop off the up slow line. I personally never saw a vehicle on the platform line, but I do remember twice seeing the platform occupied by consignments of Italian motor scooters which had been unloaded there.

The second depot was on the London side of the station, on the up side just beyond the end of the District Line platforms. I think this was known as North Yard. After the land had passed out of railway use, it housed a scrap metal dealer for a while, and now the site has been built on.

The third depot comprised a few sidings opposite platform 10, and here I remember a prominent nameboard for a builder's merchant above one of the sidings. This site also has been built on, and now accommodates part of the up-market shopping centre which has replaced the splendid concert venue that used to be provided by the old Town Hall; such are the priorities of the modern age.

The fourth was the main yard, known as West Yard, and was on the down side some four hundred yards out in the country direction. This was primarily a marshalling yard, though I think it also handled the coal traffic, and even as reduced by the building of the Wimbledon and Sutton line it sported two reception and departure lines and seven or eight ordinary sidings. The last time I passed, the land was still in railway use and there were some modern railway-related buildings on part of it, but much of the site was weed-grown and desolate.

As regards the traffic using these depots, it will be realised that much of the goods movement was at night, and that some of that which took place during the day took place at times when I was otherwise occupied. The account that follows will therefore be very partial.

We have already looked at the former milk platform. North Yard was shunted during the morning by an 0-6-0 of the 0395 class. This was the standard London and South Western goods engine of its day, seventy of them having been built during the period 1881-86 by the Glasgow builder Nielson. From 1902 onwards they were put on the "duplicate list" (an accountancy device whereby an elderly engine could be replaced in capital stock without being withdrawn from service), and most went to France during the First World War. The remainder were inherited by the Southern Railway, and were used on light goods work throughout the former South Western area. Eighteen passed into the ownership of British Railways, and the final survivor lasted until 1959. None has been preserved.

The 0395 was an attractive little engine. The survivors had of course been extensively rebuilt (a couple carried boilers taken from London, Chatham and Dover Railway 4-4-0s which had been withdrawn from service in the 1920s), but the basic guts of the engine had presumably carried through. British Railways gave them a power classification of "1F", which was unkind.

The yard opposite platform 10 was worked as required by a London, Brighton and South Coast 0-6-0 of the C2X class, which chuffed in from the Tooting direction, collected or dropped off a few wagons, and chuffed out again. By and large, the Southern kept the engines it inherited in their pre-grouping territories, partly for the usual reasons of familiarity and conservatism, and partly because of loading gauge differences. The Brighton had the most generous loading gauge, the South Eastern and Chatham the least generous, and a typical Brighton engine could not run on South Eastern lines without alteration to the cab and boiler mountings. A few of the most powerful Brighton engines were indeed so modified to give them wider availability, but most were left as they were, and so were restricted to work within the former Brighton area. Despite being on the South Western main line, Wimbledon was border territory in pre-grouping days, and the original lines through what became platforms 9 and 10 were joint lines with the Brighton (the Sutton line was added in Southern Railway days). Additionally, the natural gateway from the yard opposite platform 10 to the outside world was the ex-Brighton marshalling yard at Norwood Junction, so it was natural that a Brighton engine based there should handle the traffic.

West Yard was normally shunted in the morning by an 0-6-0 of the rebuilt 700 class, though occasionally an elderly 4-4-0 would take over for a day or two (old passenger engines tended to be kept on hand "spare", being called into service as required for a special or to take over a duty while the regular engine was being overhauled or repaired, and they could often be found on menial goods work). The rebuilt 700 was an ugly beast, much uglier to my mind than the widely derided Bulleid Q1. The Q1 was a ruthlessly logical design in which everything was sacrificed to give the largest boiler possible within a preassigned loco weight, but it had the beauty that comes with being functional, and had it been multiplied sufficiently to become the established standard I think we would have grown to accept and even to like it. The rebuilt 700 was a bodge. The original 700, a Drummond design, was a typical late Victorian heavy-duty 0-6-0, squat, sturdy, and as powerful as any. Thirty of them came from the Glasgow builder Dübs in 1897. Even as built, they were slightly gawky, with the middle driving wheels set well forward of centre to accommodate a large firebox; as superheated by Urie from 1920 onwards, with boiler raised to clear piston valves above the cylinders, smokebox extended to accommodate the superheater header, and a surely unnecessary stovepipe chimney, they were among the least elegant engines on the railway. None has been preserved, but some idea of their appearance can be gained from the preserved and similarly rebuilt T9 4-4-0. However, the boiler of the 700 was pitched three inches higher and the tops of the driving wheel splashers were eighteen inches lower, resulting in an ugly gap below the boiler which was much less marked on the T9. But for all their unattractive appearance, they would seem to have been good engines; the first was not withdrawn from service until 1957, and all but two lasted until 1961-62.

In the afternoon, the shunting of West Yard was taken over by the 0395 which had spent the morning in North Yard. Around midday, this had brought a short string of wagons along the down slow without benefit of brake van (there must have been some special dispensation permitting this, because the trip from one yard to the other crossed eight running lines), and after shunting West Yard during the afternoon it went forward light engine to Raynes Park (there was a goods relief line alongside the down slow almost the whole way, so it could wait outside Raynes Park station for a suitable gap in the suburban traffic). It then shunted the yard at Raynes Park during the early evening, and after that I do not know what happened to it.

In addition to these shunting movements, West Yard saw various arrivals and departures. In mid-afternoon, the reception and departure lines were normally occupied by one or even two trains headed by C2X class 0-6-0s, and in the early afternoon, only to be seen if the weather had caused the cancellation of games and they hadn't thought of something else for us to do, a C class 0-6-0 of the old South Eastern and Chatham would sometimes sneak around the corner from the West Croydon line, pick up or deposit a wagon or two, and sneak away again. And of course there were early morning, late evening, and night movements as well. We were reminded of this one morning when a 700 and a King Arthur 4-6-0 were seen to have had an argument during the night over possession of a certain section of track, and the running plate of the 700 was distinctly bent.

These were the local goods movements, in so far as I was aware of them. What of the through trains?

The main line through Wimbledon was unusual in British four-track railway practice in that the goods traffic took the fast lines. One reason was that a heavy goods train, with its slow acceleration after a stop, would have played havoc with the intensive electric suburban service on the slow lines; the other was that most of the "goods" trains were fast van trains, the slow coal and mineral traffic of railways elsewhere being sparse or non-existent. There were no coal or iron ore mines in the region served, so there was no originating mineral traffic (apart from stone traffic from the quarry at Meldon beyond Exeter, but most of this was used as ballast by the railway itself and did not come our way), and although the region had the then usual requirement for incoming coal some of it went by coastal shipping (even the locomotive coal for the shed at Exmouth Junction didn't go down the main line, it went by sea to the port of Fremington on the Torrington branch). So the Southern never built the small-wheeled 0-8-0s and 2-8-0s which did the heavy haulage elsewhere; its idea of a heavy freight engine was the S15, a 4-6-0 with 5' 7" driving wheels well able also to cope with a twelve-coach holiday relief on a summer Saturday.

And even the S15 was relatively rare at Wimbledon. One of the last acts of the London and South Western Railway before the grouping was to open a new marshalling yard at Feltham, on the Windsor and Reading line. This was conveniently placed for connections to the northern lines, so traffic from those lines was concentrated there, and that for London was then trip-worked to Nine Elms depot. As regards other destinations, I never had a chance to check personally, but I presume that traffic for Woking and beyond went west from Feltham through Staines and Virginia Water, and then took a connecting line which joined the main line at West Weybridge; trains for points further in may have started along the same route but turned east at the end to join the main line at Weybridge, reaching Wimbledon from the country direction having served various outer and inner suburban depots along the way, or perhaps some of them took a line through Kingston though this would have involved a reversal en route. Wimbledon was in fact the terminus of two or three goods workings from Feltham daily, but we never saw main line workings to Woking and beyond unless they had originated in London or were due to finish there.

One that we did see was a down train of milk empties which passed through every day at around 1620. There was a bottling plant in the arches under the northernmost platform at Vauxhall, the first station out of Waterloo, and during the day it was normally possible to see two or three milk tank wagons parked beside the platform. After being unloaded, these were gathered together and worked out initially in the Windsor direction (the direction served by the relevant platform at Vauxhall), but at Putney the train took the connecting line up to the District Line (the "District Line" tracks from Wimbledon as far as Putney Bridge had been built by the London and South Western, and so were owned by British Railways even though their only regular passenger use was by District Line trains), and then crossed over to the down fast main line just outside Wimbledon.

I have seen photographs of this train with a Bulleid Pacific at its head, but during 1951-53 it was always pulled by a Urie H15 of the original 1914 batch. This appears to have been the first example in Britain of the layout which later became so popular: a 4-6-0 with 6' 0" driving wheels, two outside cylinders, outside Walschaerts valve gear, and a high running plate leaving everything accessible for easy maintenance. From this distance, Urie seems to have been an under-rated engineer. His successor Maunsell's developments of his designs may have given them an added edge and his stovepipe chimneys were unattractive, but his work was basically sound and his heart was in the right place. This train will not have been an easy one for an H15 to work, being comprised of glass-lined tank wagons which ran on six wheels and even empty will not have been light; the climb from Putney to East Putney is at 1 in 60 with reverse curves at the top, and I have read that in the days of the Bulleid Pacifics, despite their extra power, the train was supposed to be double-headed as far as Wimbledon whenever it had more than 24 wagons. I remember it as normally loading to seventeen or so.

Another regular was a van train which came along the up fast about five minutes before the milk train. This normally had an H15 from a later batch built in 1924, but every now and then it featured something exotic. We therefore guessed that it had come from Eastleigh and was being used to get a newly repaired engine back to its home territory, and we called it the "Eastleigh freighter". With hindsight, Southampton Docks was a much more likely place of origin, and it was perhaps more likely to have been part of an out-and-back running-in turn than a one-way trip – for in the latter case, where was the engine to be found for the balancing trip? But I still think that the basic deduction, that when it had an exotic engine that engine had just been repaired or overhauled at Eastleigh, was sound.

The third regular sight in the late afternoon was an H16 4-6-2 tank which clanked its way along, light engine, about five minutes after the milk train. This did use the up slow. The H16s were built in 1922 for the transfer traffic between the new Feltham yard and the main London depot at Nine Elms, and the one we used to see had presumably deposited a load somewhere out in the country and was on its way to Nine Elms to pick up the next one. They were the first engines that the London and South Western had built purely for goods traffic since the 700 class 0-6-0s of 1897, and even the H16s were apparently used to haul the Ascot race trains before the line was electrified.

No doubt there were other fast van trains during the day, but I was interested in the engines rather than the trains and did not particularly notice them. One train that I did notice was a loose-coupled train of coal empties which rattled its way northwards behind a 700 late one evening when I was on my way home after a school concert. This was the only time I remember seeing one of the long trains of mineral wagons which were so much a feature of railway operating elsewhere, and even this was on the fast line.

But the staple fare of Wimbledon was of course the passenger traffic. In those days, the other railways still derived most of their revenue from goods traffic; the Southern, as a whole, derived three-quarters from passenger traffic, and in the inner suburban area the proportion will have been higher. In the pre-war timetable, reinstated by 1951 and not yet reduced by the cuts which started in 1958, there were three trains an hour for Epsom and beyond, branching off the main line at Raynes Park; three more which took the Epsom line as far as Motspur Park and then went to Chessington; four which branched off at New Malden for Kingston and Teddington, and then continued to Twickenham and Richmond on the Windsor line and so looped back to Waterloo; two more which took the same route as far as Teddington and then went to Shepperton; and three

which took the main line to Surbiton and then went to Hampton Court. All these used the slow line. There were also three trains an hour which diverted at Surbiton for Effingham Junction and Guildford, but these stopped only at Wimbledon and Surbiton in the inner suburban area and used the fast line until just outside Surbiton.

All these were electrics. The London and South Western had electrified the Kingston loop and the lines to Shepperton and Hampton Court in 1916; the Southern added the rest in 1925 apart from the branch to Chessington, which was electrified from its opening in 1938-39. Even if I were competent to make one, this wouldn't be the place for a technical comparison of the third-rail system used on these lines and the overhead wire now almost universally used for railway electrification elsewhere, but I do remember "Ice on conductor rails" being given as an explanation for slow running and gaps in service in snowy or frosty weather. On the other hand, we didn't suffer the complete breakdown in service that sometimes happens when high winds bring the overhead wires down, and the railway could be electrified with none of the bridge raising and even re-tunnelling that is necessary with overhead wires. The Southern, having examined the alternatives (because the Brighton had done some electrification using overhead wires, and the South Eastern had also been thinking about electrifying though nothing had yet been done), decided in 1923 or 1924 to adopt the third rail, and by 1930 it had completed what was by far the world's largest suburban electrification. One or two of the other lines into London still haven't caught up.

To run these services, the Southern used "multiple units": two motor coaches with one or two trailer coaches sandwiched between, kept together as a unit and capable of being driven from either end. Originally all the units were of three coaches, and an additional two-car trailer unit was sandwiched between two three-car units to make up an eight-coach train at peak periods. In 1941, however, a prototype four-car unit was produced, and the three-car units were gradually expanded to four by the insertion of an extra trailer, these being either taken from the two-car trailer units or newly built. This simplified operation at the cost of extra trailer car mileage. This programme was completed in 1948, so we saw only four-car units on the suburban trains.

They were a mixed bunch. The original South Western electrification had used ordinary coaches originally built in 1904 and converted into electric stock by the addition of motors and driving compartments. These were still in service in 1951, a few accident or war casualties apart, but the Southern had rebuilt them a second time to put them on longer underframes. The Brighton also had electrified some of its lines, using an overhead system which the Southern converted to third rail in the interests of standardization, and much of this stock was also converted. Additionally, some steam-hauled stock from the constituent railways was converted, and in 1925/26 the Southern built some three-car units from scratch. All the pre-grouping stock had wooden bodies, the originating company being most easily distinguished by the shape and form of the ventilators above the carriage door windows; the bodies of the 1925/26 stock had teak frames, but steel panelling.

All this pre-war stock was eight feet wide or thereabouts, being compartment stock with no gangways, and seated five a side. The coaches built from 1941 onwards were all-steel vehicles, nine feet wide with curved sides, and seated six a side (or three-plus-two with a central gangway). The four-car units which had been obtained by inserting a newly built trailer unit of this design into a pre-war three-car unit therefore had an irregular appearance.

If the trains varied in appearance, they also varied in comfort. The stock obtained by converting South Eastern coaches had almost entirely vanished by 1951, but in so far as I can dimly remember it from earlier years it was not greatly different from the South Western stock (or indeed from the post-war six-a-side stock). Much more comfortable were some of the middle compartments in the 1925/26 steel-panelled stock, and I was not surprised to read later that they were deconsecrated firsts (first class having been discontinued on the London suburban lines in 1941). There were also some former first-class saloons in some of the South Western stock, but these I never sampled. In contrast, the ex-Brighton stock was to be avoided if possible, being a bare eight feet wide with narrow compartments and hard seats. I remember one day when fog had greatly reduced the service and 22 people had squeezed into such a compartment, five sitting on each side and no fewer than twelve standing down the middle; but I understand that even worse things happened on the lines into Liverpool Street.

The units built from 1941 onwards used a two-digit code to identify destination and perhaps route, but the pre-war units used letters. H for Hampton Court and S for Shepperton were obvious enough and O for the Hounslow loop (which didn't pass through Wimbledon) was understandable, but why I for Dorking (beyond Epsom) and V for the Kingston loop? I have read that no particular meaning was intended, and that the letters were merely chosen to be easy as possible for signalmen to distinguish. Whatever the reason, the result was a god-send to a well-known bread manufacturer, and advertisements showing five suitably chosen trains with the legend "HOVIS / The Route To Health" regularly appeared below carriage luggage racks.

These were the main line suburban trains. The District Line trains used Underground stock; as regards the trains using platforms 9 and 10, the Tooting and Sutton trains used ordinary four-car suburban units, but the West Croydon line had its own stock. These were two-car units which had been obtained by converting the trailer cars from the Brighton's original South London Line electrification of 1909, and they displayed a single digit "2" as a headcode (I always found it amusing to see a two-car train with a large "2" on its front waiting in platform 9 for its departure time). They remained in service until 1953 or 1954.

The passenger services on the fast lines were a mixture of electric and steam. We have already seen the trains which branched off at Surbiton for Effingham Junction and Guildford, and these were the only ones which regularly stopped at the fast line platforms. Also electrified were the line which branched off after Woking for Guildford and Portsmouth, and the line which branched off a little further on for Aldershot, Farnham, and Alton (the continuations beyond Alton were not electrified, and have since been closed). The Portsmouth line had an hourly express service of twelve-car trains with a restaurant car and a corridor right through (I remember a journey on one of them as late as 1969, having an excellent breakfast in what was then the griddle car while travelling through the lovely country beyond Haslemere), and there was also a half-hourly "slow" which stopped at all stations from Surbiton and divided at Woking for Portsmouth and Alton. One of these slows left London some 20-25 minutes before the express and waited at Guildford for the express to stop and pass it, giving a connection from each into the other.

The expresses were made up from four-car units, motor-trailer-trailer-motor, the restaurant car being one of the trailers in the middle unit. A corridor connection projected beyond the front of the leading coach, the driver's window being to its left and the route number to its right, and the resulting one-eyed look, or the naval associations of Portsmouth, or both, caused the units to be nicknamed "Nelsons". The slows were made up from two-car units, one motor coach and one driving trailer, and most of the coaches had corridors giving access to a lavatory though there was no connection to the rest of the train.

Everything else was steam apart from some trial running by the three pioneer Southern Region diesels. The most important trains were hauled by Bulleid Pacifics of the Merchant Navy class, all then still unrebuilt. We saw the first twenty-five of the thirty, the final five being used to haul the Golden Arrow and similar trains out of Victoria. We also saw a fair number of the light Pacifics of the West Country / Battle of Britain class. This isn't the place for a discussion of the merits and demerits of the Bulleid Pacifics in their original form, but I do remember hearing one leave Waterloo with the six beats of its exhaust markedly uneven, implying an unequal division of work between the cylinders which cannot have been good (apparently this used to happen when the chains driving the valve gear had become worn with use). It might be added that they were dreary things to look at in any quantity, and appeared very much more impressive when rebuilt.

Of the pre-war express passenger engines, we had the twenty Urie N15 4-6-0s of 1918-23 which were later absorbed into the King Arthur class, the ten Maunsell Arthurs built at Eastleigh in 1925 to replace some of the not-too-successful Drummond 4-6-0s, a few of the thirty Arthurs built by the North British Locomotive Company in the same year, and the sixteen Lord Nelson 4-6-0s of 1926-29. We also had the seven N15X 4-6-0s which had been rebuilt from Brighton 4-6-4 tanks of 1914-21 made redundant by the electrification of the Brighton main line. By 1951, these were being concentrated on Basingstoke trains which would have been within their capacity as tank engines, but they had done more demanding work when first converted.

These pre-war engines had eight-wheel bogie tenders (the Bulleid Pacifics had high-capacity six-wheelers). The Southern neither inherited nor built any water troughs, so the tenders had to carry enough water to get the train between stops (79 miles from Waterloo to Southampton, 83 miles to Salisbury). A further batch of Arthurs was built in 1926-27 with six-wheel tenders for use on the Brighton line before it was electrified, but these could not be used for some of the work on the South Western lines because the tenders were too small, whereas the Arthurs with bogie tenders could not be used at all on the Brighton line because the turntables were too short; who'd run a railway?

Sadly, one class of engine which we did not see was the much praised Maunsell Schools 4-4-0 of 1930-34. These had run the Portsmouth trains before electrification, and had done spectacular work on the Bournemouth line; there was a report of one taking a fifteen-coach train weighing over 500 tons from Waterloo to Southampton at 55 miles per hour start to stop, a performance which would normally be expected only of a much larger engine (my authority is W. A. Tuplin in *British Steam Since 1900*, citing *Railway Magazine* for October 1939). But in 1951, they were to be found only on the lines out of Charing Cross and Cannon Street.

As regards the actual trains, the prestige trains were the Atlantic Coast Express, the Bournemouth Belle, the Devon Belle, the Royal Wessex, and the various Southampton boat trains running under the banner Ocean Liner Express. The Atlantic Coast Express was the legendary 1100 from Waterloo, which in its winter formation carried coaches for seven different destinations (plus a section which came off at Salisbury and followed on down the main line as a slow) and gave most places from Sidmouth westwards a daily through-carriage service from London. In summer, it split into at least five separate trains. The Bournemouth Belle was an all-Pullman train, as was the sadly short-lived Devon Belle which ran only from 1947 to 1954. The latter was made up mainly of twelve-wheelers with an observation car at the back, and was nominally non-stop to Exeter though the absence of water troughs forced an unadvertised stop just beyond Salisbury to change engines. All these were normally under the charge of a Merchant Navy. The Royal Wessex was a late afternoon train to Bournemouth and beyond, and although loading to thirteen coaches (platform lengths at Waterloo restricted most trains to twelve at the most) it always had a West Country and not the Merchant Navy that might have been expected. An Ocean Liner Express ran as and when required, and presumably took the best engine that was not already earmarked for something else; I remember them as normally having Nelsons, but this may be imagination.

This was the normal weekday panorama. Summer Saturdays were a different matter. Not only were there the regular trains and the numerous holiday reliefs, but the stock had to be got up to Waterloo to work them. So from early morning there was a procession of empty stock trains on the up fast line, headed by M7 0-4-4 tanks which had come up from their home sheds at places like Guildford to pick up rakes of coaches from their weekday resting places in outer suburban sidings and work them to Waterloo. There was presumably a corresponding procession in the reverse direction in the late evening, but that I never saw.

These M7s were the engines that had worked the London suburban services before elecrification, over a hundred having been built by Drummond between 1897.and 1911. Like the 0395 0-6-0s mentioned previously, they were attractive little engines. If you looked from the platform at Wimbledon down towards Raynes Park, you could see a footbridge over the track in the distance. If a plume of white smoke appeared as a train came under this footbridge, that train would have a steam engine; if the engine appeared abnormally tall, it would be an M7. It wasn't that the M7s were particularly tall, because they weren't, but they were elegantly slender, and this created the illusion. Urie tried superheating one of them in a similar manner to that in which he had started to rebuild the 700 class, but this made the engine awkwardly front-heavy, so no further examples were altered and the rebuilt engine was eventually cut up for spares. Apart from this and from one accident casualty, the entire class lasted until 1957, and several survived until 1964.

One day in April 1953, a Merchant Navy was running at high speed down the hill through Crewkerne when the crank axle broke. Normally, such an incident would spread the track, and the whole train would come off. This time, the line was fortunately dead straight, the track held firm although damaged, and nobody was hurt although a flying brake block slammed into one of the cast iron columns supporting the station awning and brought part of it down (there is a photograph in the *Yeovil to Exeter* volume of the Middleton Press railway series). However, all engines of the Merchant Navy class were immediately withdrawn from traffic until the crank axles could be checked for incipient fatigue and if necessary replaced, and engines had to be borrowed from other regions to fill the gap.

We didn't get exact equivalents, of course. We got what they could spare, or said they could spare, so the light Pacifics had to move up to take the crack trains and the incomers were fitted in to do the best they could. I remember a V2 class 2-6-2 and a B1 class 4-6-0 from the Eastern Region, good engines both but hardly the equivalent of a Merchant Navy, and I have seen a photograph of a Class 5 4-6-0 from the London Midland Region on an express which I imagine would normally have had a light Pacific at least. I also remember seeing a Merchant Navy being towed towards London with its middle axle missing, and my recollection is that it was 35020 *Bibby Line* though this must be a mistake (it was 35020 which suffered the accident, and it will surely have been taken from Crewkerne to Eastleigh for repair without passing anywhere near Wimbledon). Perhaps I had been reading about the accident, and had confused the two.

It was an interesting time.

My route to school took me along the railway in the country direction, but there were interesting things in the London direction as well. The platforms at Waterloo, south to north, were main line suburban, main line fast, and Windsor lines, and when the main line was first quadrupled the slow lines were placed to the south of the main lines. This was soon changed to the present layout with the slow lines on the outside, and originally this continued all the way into Waterloo and incoming suburban trains had to be crossed over the main lines just outside the station (working Waterloo "A" signal box was regarded as one of the most demanding jobs on the railway). In 1936, the Southern Railway bit on the bullet and built a flyover just north of Wimbledon to take the up slow over the fast lines, after which they could follow the original plan with the slow lines to the south (even so, it was in my experience almost routine for an incoming train to be held outside the station waiting for a platform). This flyover climbed at 1 in 60 and fell at 1 in 45, and provided another reason why even loose-coupled wagon trains used the fast line.

Also to the north of the station, in the fork between the main lines and the District Line, was Durnsford Road power station. This was built to power the original London and South Western electrification, and remained in service until the 1960s (the railway now takes its power from the national grid, and the site of the old power station is part of the Wimbledon carriage depot). The boilers were fed from a high-level bunker reached by a concrete ramp on stilts, up which coal wagons were pushed by a little Bo-Bo electric service locomotive. This became a very familiar sight, sometimes standing at the top of the ramp, sometimes near the bottom (I don't remember seeing it actually pushing anything). There is a photograph of it in *Lines around Wimbledon*, also in the Middleton Press series.

A few railway memories from other areas.

- Our station at Stoneleigh, on the Epsom branch, very late one evening. Stoneleigh station had been built in 1932 in response to local housing development, and was a typical new station of the time with an island platform and no goods facilities (the goods traffic, and in particular the domestic coal, continued to be handled at the stations on either side). It had originally been reached by an open footbridge leading to a booking office on the platform; by 1948, when we moved there, this had been replaced by a much wider covered footbridge with the booking office at the top, but the original footbridge was still in position although fenced off (it has since been demolished, and no trace of it remains). But despite its status as a passenger-only station, on the evening in question a short goods train headed by a 700 was standing on the down line, and a package on the platform was either being loaded on to one of the vans or had just been off-loaded from it. I hope it wasn't too heavy, because there was no goods lift.
- The old main-line platforms at Willesden Junction on a Saturday afternoon in the summer of 1953, when three of the five still surviving Brighton Atlantics came round the corner from Clapham Junction one after another on through trains from the South Coast to the Midlands and North-West. They were apparently regularly used on these trains, working them as far as Willesden where a London Midland engine took over.
- Yelverton, 1952. We had come in from Dousland on the Princetown branch, and were waiting for the train from Tavistock to take us on to Plymouth. We had actually missed the train at Dousland, having watched it clatter across the level crossing in front of us, but they realised that we would like to have caught it and even held it for us while we got tickets – this didn't happen in suburban Surrey! Princetown was the highest passenger station in England, and the branch was worked by small-wheeled Churchward 2-6-2 tanks of the 4400 class. It climbed steeply right from the junction at Yelverton, where it had its own platform, and though there was no run-round loop gravity provided an alternative; after the passengers had got off, the engine pushed the single coach back up the branch for a short distance, the guard put his brake on, the engine detached and ran into a short siding, the guard took his brake off and coasted back into the platform (there was presumably a trap point to prevent a runaway from fouling the main line), and the engine emerged from its siding and hooked on to what was now the front of the train.

And back to Wimbledon for a final memory. The school had an open-air swimming pool which was a penance in early spring but a delight when the weather was hotter, and this was available to us during the holiday. I had been there one morning in the summer of 1953, and on my way home along the path by the railway I saw a T9 coming bravely along the up fast pulling a rake of eight elderly coaches. It had of course been rebuilt in the meantime, but it was easily possible to imagine it fifty years before, bringing a crack express down the same track when it and its sisters had been the pride of the line.