

# Railway Development at Aldershot

By J. SPENCER GILKS



Photo]

[J. S. Gilks

The 8.18 a.m. Sunday train from Guildford to Bordon at Aldershot Station in August, 1955, with class "M7" 0-4-4 tank engine No. 30109

**T**O provide adequate facilities for military training, and to meet the need for maintaining large garrisons of troops, the War Office was granted £100,000 in 1854 for the erection of a permanent military camp at Aldershot, in Hampshire. Work on the construction of two camps, one north and the other south of the Basingstoke Canal, was begun immediately, and the new centre officially opened by Queen Victoria in July of the next year. At that time, Aldershot, as it was then spelt, was only a small village, with a church and two inns, and a population numbering less than one thousand. The nearest stations were at Farnborough on the main line of the London & South Western Railway, at Ash on the Reading-Redhill branch of the South Eastern, and at Tongham on the branch of the L.S.W.R. from Guildford to Farnham and Alton. With the establishment of the military base, railway promoters were not slow to explore the possibilities of providing new lines in the area.

In 1845, several schemes were prepared for the Reading-Redhill line before the present route was adopted, and all these indirectly affected the village of Aldershot. The plans of Francis Giles, which define that line as it is today, also contained an

additional north to west spur from Ash to Ash Green Stations which would have permitted through working between Reading and Farnham on the L.S.W.R. branch. Those drawn up by Samuel Hughes followed an entirely different route through the Aldershot area, much nearer the eastern end of the village, and included a triangular junction at Tongham, to give direct access from both Reading and Reigate to Farnham, before the main line passed under the Hog's Back and turned eastwards. At the same time, proposals were made and plans prepared by Messrs. Sandiforth and Griffen for an atmospheric railway which passed through Ash *en route* from Reading to Reigate.

The year 1845 also saw a most ambitious project put forward in the shape of the Southern Counties Union & Bristol, Bath & Dover Direct Railway. This was surveyed by J. U. Rastrick and H. Renton, and would have passed through Aldershot on its way from Reigate to join the L.S.W.R. main line at Fleet. It was to diverge from the L.S.W.R. at Wootton St. Lawrence, near Basingstoke, and continue in a north-westerly direction to Trowbridge, Bathampton and Bristol.

On July 16, 1846, powers were obtained for the Reading, Guildford & Reigate

Railway, which was to use, as far as Ash Junction, the first  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles of a branch from Guildford to Farnham which the L.S.W.R. was authorised to construct on the same day. Trains began to operate between Reading and Guildford on August 20, 1849, and from Farnham to Guildford seven weeks later, on October 8. The South Eastern leased and worked the Reading line from its inception until the entire undertaking was vested in the larger company under an Act dated June 19, 1852.

Department of the S.E.R. issued notices to the effect that as from the next day a messenger would leave that station for the Post Office at the camp at 7 a.m., 1 p.m., and 6 p.m., returning at 8 a.m., 2 p.m., and 7 p.m.

As yet, no public transport existed between the nearest stations and the new camp, but by 1856 some private speculators had opened a service between Farnham Station and the camp with a horse bus. The first station specifically to serve the camp, and hence Aldershot



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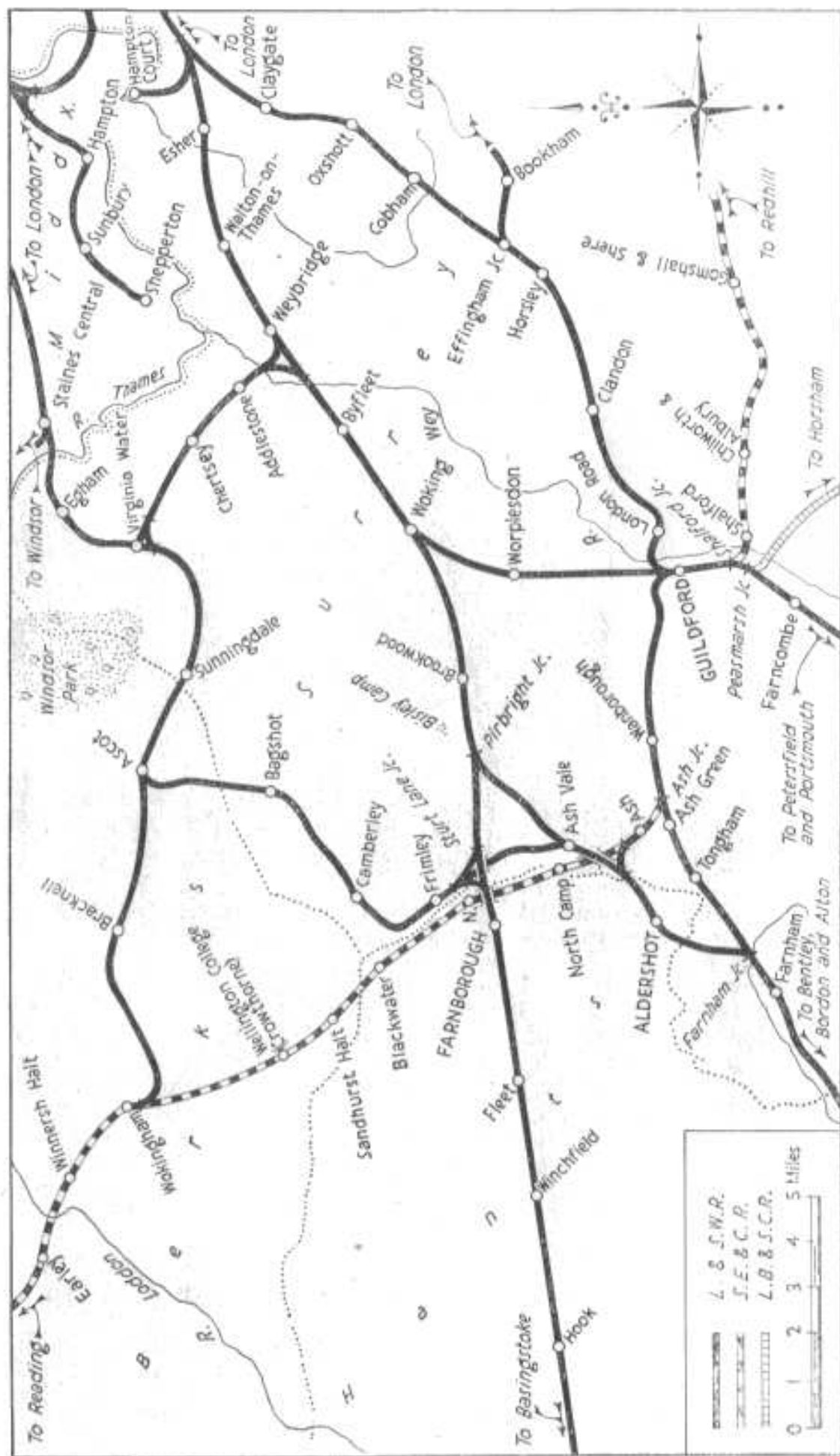
**Tongham, the oldest station in the Aldershot area, between Guildford and Farnham, closed to passengers in 1937**

Tongham Station, on the Farnham branch, was the nearest to Aldershot, and it was to that point that building materials and supplies required for the construction of the camp were sent, and carried from there by horse-drawn carts. One of the contractors engaged on the building work, George Myers, was responsible for laying a light railway from the direction of Farnham off the branch near Bin Wood, Tongham, to a point at the rear of Badajos Barracks, just short of Farnborough Road, Aldershot, and this considerably relieved the pressure on the accommodation at Tongham for the many carters that thronged the station yard there. This line had disappeared from the ordnance maps by 1869.

For communication purposes, however, Ash Station was the focal point, and on August 8, 1855, the Electric Telegraph

itself, was opened in 1858 on the S.E.R. line at a point formerly known as Lynch Ford level crossing and named North Camp. This station, which is situated in Surrey, was later known as North Camp & South Farnborough. The present station, on the opposite side of the level crossing, is reputed to have been designed by General Gordon, to meet purely military requirements. The platforms are long, and have little covering, and there is neither footbridge nor subway for passengers who have to cross the line on the level.

The volume of traffic at Aldershot soon began to increase rapidly, and the need for better rail communication, particularly with London, became obvious. In 1863, the Farnham, Aldershot & Woking Junction Railway was promoted for the construction of a line into



Railways in the Aldershot area, showing pre-grouping ownerships. The line from Ash Junction to Farnham Junction, the first to serve the district, was closed to passengers in 1937



the camp. The Engineer, J. W. Penfold, chose a line substantially on the modern route, but slightly shorter (6½ miles) and incorporating a west to south spur immediately south (not north, as at present) of the Basingstoke Canal, thereby permitting through running from Aldershot to Guildford and the south *via* Ash. Another spur was to run northwards to the S.E.R. at the 49½ milepost, near North Camp Station.

The L.S.W.R. objected to the scheme, and induced the promoters to withdraw their proposals on condition that a Bill was presented to Parliament for attaining their object in a more satisfactory manner. In the following year, that company's Engineer, W. R. Galbraith, drew up the plans of the Farnham, Aldershot & Pirbright Junction branch, over the present 7½-mile route from the main line to Farnham Junction on the branch through Tongham. Parliamentary sanction for this line, together with a loop from Aldershot to the S.E.R. at Ash was obtained on June 19, 1865. In return for running powers between the latter stations, the S.E.R. granted similar powers to the L.S.W.R. between Ash Junction and North Camp.

The line was opened on May 2, 1870, and stations were provided at North Camp & Ash Vale, and Aldershot Town. The loop to Ash was not brought into use for a further nine years, and the line between Aldershot and Farnham Junction remained single track for some time. The initial service of trains comprised eight up to Waterloo, and six down, the fastest being the 11.30 a.m. from London which reached Aldershot in 70 min.

Returning now to 1863, we find that two further schemes were considered in that year. The first of these, prepared by John Ashdown, was the Sunningdale & Cambridge Town [now Camberley] Railway. This commenced at Sunningdale Station on the L.S.W.R. line to Reading, and followed the main London Road to Camberley before turning south, and, after crossing the S.E.R. line near Frimley, terminated at Farnborough Station on the main line, three miles north of Aldershot. The Sunningdale & York Town Railway of the same year, planned by Sir Charles Fox, followed a similar route to Farnborough, where it was proposed to cross the L.S.W.R. by a flat junction, and then to proceed south-

wards to a terminus " at a point distant 34 yd. in a direct northerly line from the centre of the arch which carries the Farnham, Frimley and London Road over the Basingstoke Canal in the said parish of Aldershot."

In the following session (1864/65) the Sunningdale & Cambridge Town Railway was revived, and a spur near Frimley, towards Reading, added. On this occasion the main line continued west of Farnborough, crossing over the L.S.W.R. at the modern Bramshott Halt (where a spur ran west to Fleet) and entered Aldershot. From there, branches were proposed to Ash and Tongham Stations, to give access to Guildford and Farnham respectively. The whole scheme proved abortive, however, and the powers of the company lapsed, but certain sections of the route were to reappear again eight years later.

The year 1871 saw the first of three schemes for a railway from Windsor to Aldershot. This line was surveyed by Thomas Bouch, and began by a triangular junction with the Windsor line of the Great Western Railway, and involved a viaduct to carry the northern curve over a backwater of the Thames. The railway then ran westwards, and turned south near Winkfield to pass over the L.S.W.R. Reading line at Ascot Station. From there, the route of the modern Camberley branch was followed as far as Frimley, whence spurs were planned westwards to the L.S.W.R. main line, and northwards to the S.E.R. The railway was to terminate just west of Aldershot Town Station, approximately on the site of the present bus station.

In 1873, the route of the former Sunningdale & Cambridge Town Railway was revived in modified form, as the centre section of the L.S.W.R. branch from Ascot to Ash Vale, with spurs to the main line near Frimley and to the S.E.R. at Blackwater. The line was opened as far as Sturt Lane Junction on March 10, 1878, and to Ash Vale on June 2, 1879. The loop from Ash to Aldershot had been brought into use a month earlier. The section from Sturt Lane to Ash Vale has remained single track to this day although the bridges provide accommodation for two lines.

Meanwhile in 1877/78, the Ash & Aldershot Railway had been unsuccessfully projected. This was to be a little

over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles in length, and to commence by a junction with the S.E.R. just north of Ash Station. It was to skirt the south bank of the Easingstoke Canal, pass over a viaduct adjoining the White Swan Hotel, and enter a 400-yd. tunnel to emerge at a terminus immediately south of the National School in Redan Road, and adjoining High Street, Aldershot.

at East Tisted. It was then to proceed through Droxford to Soberton, where it swung east to Hambledon, and south to Cosham. One branch would run over a swing bridge and along a new quay wall to Portsmouth, while another was proposed to Southsea, with a connection there to Portsmouth Harbour Station. The route included sections of the sub-



Photo]

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**Ash Station, looking towards Guildford, in 1935, before the railway was electrified to Aldershot**

The most ambitious, but unsuccessful, scheme for the development of railways at Aldershot did not appear until November, 1881, the date of plans for the Windsor, Aldershot & Portsmouth Railway. Commencing at an independent terminus just north of the present Windsor & Eton Central Station, this line was to give connections to the G.W.R., and then run west of Winkfield before crossing the L.S.W.R. Reading line just east of Bracknell Station, whence a branch was planned to a terminus opposite the Royal Ascot Hotel at Ascot. The main line continued south until it joined the S.E.R. at Crowthorne Station. It branched from that line shortly beyond North Camp, and connected by a short spur with the L.S.W.R. through Aldershot to Farnham Junction. Here it was intended to construct a triangular junction on the south side of the Farnham line.

The new railway would then have passed through Tilford, Frensham, Kingsley and Selborne into the Meon Valley

sequent lines from Bentley to Bordon and Alton to Fareham, and also the proposed Portsmouth, Basingstoke & Godalming Railway of 1896. Some of the gradients were steeper than 1 in 80, and tunnels were needed at Selborne, Privett, West Meon, and Widley.

Mention must be made of a line planned in 1883 by John T. Gardner, which would have been from Windsor to Ascot, and then beside the L.S.W.R. as far as Frimley, where it joined the S.E.R. Between Ascot and Frimley, it would have crossed the L.S.W.R. twice. Just south of North Camp Station, it was to branch again, and would have terminated independently on the west side of Aldershot Town Station.

In November, 1883, Henry Robinson surveyed the Aldershot, Farnham & Petersfield Railway. This was to use the L.S.W.R. line as far as Bentley, and then turn south, on the route of the Bordon branch, to pass through Oakhanger, Greatham and Liss, and to join the L.S.W.R. once more near Petersfield,

Although the line was never constructed throughout, it is possible to travel this way now by using the Longmoor Military Railway between Bordon and Liss.

Seven years later, in 1890, the short length of track known as the Government Siding, which runs into War Department property from the main line half-a-mile east of Redan Hill, Aldershot, was constructed with rails brought home from the Sudan. It was considerably extended in 1899 and 1900, to meet increased military requirements created by the South African war, and it is recorded that the first regiment to leave for that campaign entrained here on September 23, 1899.

Junction to Alton ushered in the beginning of the end for steam-operated passenger services to Aldershot. On the same day, Tongham Station, once the life stream of the town, lost its passenger service when the line from Ash Junction to Farnham Junction was closed, and although it still retains a skeleton freight service, the tracks west of the station have been removed. Two years later, on July 2, 1939, the lines to Ascot and to Ash and Guildford were electrified.

Today the electric train reigns supreme in the Aldershot area, except on the Reading-Redhill service. A thirty-minute interval service is operated between Alton and Aldershot and Waterloo



Photo]

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### View of North Camp Station, looking towards Reading

Although proposals for new railways in the Aldershot area ceased with the advent of the present century, no stalemate has resulted, and the last fifty years have witnessed considerable change. The introduction of through trains between the North of England and the South Coast *via* North Camp merit special notice; and later the formation of the Southern Railway removed the individualities of the South Eastern and South Western from the Aldershot scene. The famous Aldershot Tattoo created much extra traffic for the railway; North Camp Station, in particular, was used in connection with this event.

On July 4, 1937, the introduction of electric traction on the line from Pirbright

by four-coach trains, combined with portions for the Portsmouth line between London and Woking. Additional trains are run during the morning and evening peak hours. A similar service is provided to Waterloo *via* Ascot and Staines, and trains from London by this route continue to Guildford after reversing at Aldershot.

A remnant of the former S.E.R. shuttle service between Ash and Aldershot is retained by a number of local electric trains which terminate at Ash in connection with the services on the Reading line. There is one steam passenger working to Aldershot, by the 8.18 a.m. Sunday train from Guildford to Bordon, when the branch stock returns after its weekly overhaul.