

Tunbridge Wells West as a Railway Centre

By F. S. BOND



Photo]

[Denis Gallon

Tunbridge Wells West Station from the east end

IN the Tunbridge Wells area of the Southern Region of British Railways, there are two combined passenger and goods stations, Tunbridge Wells West and High Brooms, and one purely-passenger and one exclusively-goods station, Tunbridge Wells Central and Tunbridge Wells Goods respectively; all four are under one stationmaster. The two main passenger stations are Central, on the former South Eastern London-Hastings line, and West, originally a terminus of the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway and later connected to the S.E.R. route by a single-line spur.

The Central station is situated near the centre of the town, and is confined in a very small space between two tunnels and by important roads. Although—as opposed to the West station—it is used almost exclusively by passengers traveling from and to London, including a large number of season ticket holders, it has room for only two platforms, one each for the up and down roads, with an emergency

crossover. Apart from trains that also call at the West station, it serves only the London-Hastings-Bexhill traffic.

Under the British Railways modernisation scheme, this route is to be one of the first main lines to be worked by diesel-electric multiple-unit trains. The present intention appears to be that these trains mostly will be six-coach sets run separately or in pairs, though there may be some smaller sets also. It seems likely that in the up direction, as an hourly service, except during the rush-hour periods, six-coach sets will leave Hastings successively as stopping and fast trains, so timed that they will be coupled at Tunbridge Wells Central and proceed to London as a twelve-coach train. Similarly in the down direction, twelve-coach trains will be split at Central, the leading portion proceeding fast to Hastings, followed by the rear six coaches as a slow train.

As the platforms now accommodate only eleven-coach trains, they will have to be extended to the portal of Grove

Tunnel, south of the station. Other modernisation developments expected are the installation of colour-light signalling in this area and the removal of the cross-over to Grove Junction at the south end of that tunnel. At this junction the single-line link to the West station diverges on a 1 in 80 falling gradient.

West Station, though it is quite near the celebrated Pantiles, is less conveniently situated than Central and on the outskirts of the old part of the town. A large new estate is, however, springing up beyond it. It is a much larger station than Central, and is self-contained with its own goods yard, motive power depot and carriage sidings. The passenger station has five platform roads, three serving long platforms, two of which are in the form of an island, and the two others bays, used by short trains.

The reason for this extensive layout is that the station serves no fewer than six different routes, three of them bifurcating at or near Groombridge, three miles distant, and two at Eridge, five miles away. As from the introduction of the 1955 summer timetables, the services between London and Tunbridge Wells

West were entirely revised and the number of passenger trains using this station increased.

On a normal mid-week day there are 66 departures and 70 arrivals, or 136 trains in all. There are also nine goods trains, five in and four out, daily. During the 18 hr. between 6 a.m. and midnight there is, on an average, a passenger train either arriving or departing every eight minutes. The traffic distribution over the six routes is as follows:—

Route	Departures	Arrivals
1. Oxted and London via Edenbridge Town	18	18
2. Oxted and London via East Grinstead	13	15
3. Three Bridges via East Grinstead (through trains)*	2	2
4. Uckfield, Lewes and Brighton ...	12	13
5. Heathfield, Hailsham and Eastbourne	7	8
6. Tonbridge and Sevenoaks via Central	14	14
	<u>66</u>	<u>70</u>

* By changing to or from the East Grinstead-Three Bridges shuttle service, a much more frequent service is available

There are a few through trains to London *via* Route 1, but most terminate or originate at Oxted, running as a shuttle service from and to West Station, but connecting at Oxted with Route 2



Photo]

[Denis Cullum

Tunbridge Wells Central, looking towards Tonbridge

through trains *via* East Grinstead or with London trains starting from or terminating at East Grinstead. Before July, 1955, more trains ran through to and from Three Bridges, but now there are only two each way; the service beyond East Grinstead is, however, maintained by the shuttle service to Three Bridges connecting with the West Station-London trains and *vice versa* at East Grinstead. On Route 4, one or two trains run to and from Uckfield or Lewes only, and there is a complicated series of interchange services at Eridge between trains both ways on Routes 4 and 5 and through trains from and to London and Brighton (*via* Uckfield), and Eastbourne (*via* Heathfield), which use the spur connection between Ashurst and Eridge. Trains on Route 6 mostly come from or go to Tonbridge, though a few originate or terminate at Sevenoaks. Most of these trains go through to or come from Brighton.

The motive power depot (code number 75F) has a four-road terminal-type shed, but only a small turntable. The shed is at present being rebuilt with higher walls and rail-fabricated Warren-truss roofing girders spanning all four tracks. All goods trains are worked by "foreign" engines, stationed at Tonbridge, Three Bridges, Brighton or elsewhere. Consequently the 25 engines at 75F are all of passenger types. The preponderance of class "4" 2-6-4 tanks is remarkable,

there being 14 of these, eight standard and six of the London Midland type. There are also two class "2" 2-6-2, three Brighton-built 0-6-2, and six South Western class "M7" 0-4-4 tank engines. The latter have been imported mainly to work the shuttle trains to and from Oxted. Visitors are mostly Brighton 0-6-0s, various South Eastern 4-4-0s, and standard class "4" 2-6-0s, all tender engines, as well as *ex*-S.E.C. "H" class tanks.

The through London trains and some others, notably a few to and from Brighton, are composed of modern Southern corridor stock, but most other trains are of the South Eastern non-corridor (except in part of one lavatory vehicle) stock, or pull-and-push sets.

The station yard is controlled by two signalboxes, one at the west end with 45 levers which also controls roads to the locomotive yard and carriage sidings, and the other at the east end with 28 levers. The single-line section between the latter box and Grove Junction is worked by the train staff and ticket system. The double-line approach for down trains to the west end of the yard is on a 1 in 88 gradient right up to a point well within the home signals, which are 368 yd. out from the outermost facing points; similarly steep gradients continue onwards towards Grove Junction. No very heavy trains are, therefore, to be seen at the West Station, eight corridor coaches being the maximum passenger train load. However, it is quite a busy centre for light short-distance traffic.