

Branch Line Handbook No.3

WESTERHAM VALLEY RAILWAY

By G.T.Black

Second Edition

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Introduction

This series has been introduced to meet the needs of the enthusiast seeking information about the branch lines and it is hoped that this booklet will satisfy all but the most exacting enthusiast.

That there is a real interest in the Westerham Valley line is shown in the short interval between the publication of the first edition of this Handbook and the present volume. This augurs well for the Westerham Valley Preservation Society to which we wish every success.

The opportunity has been taken to correct minor errors in the first edition.

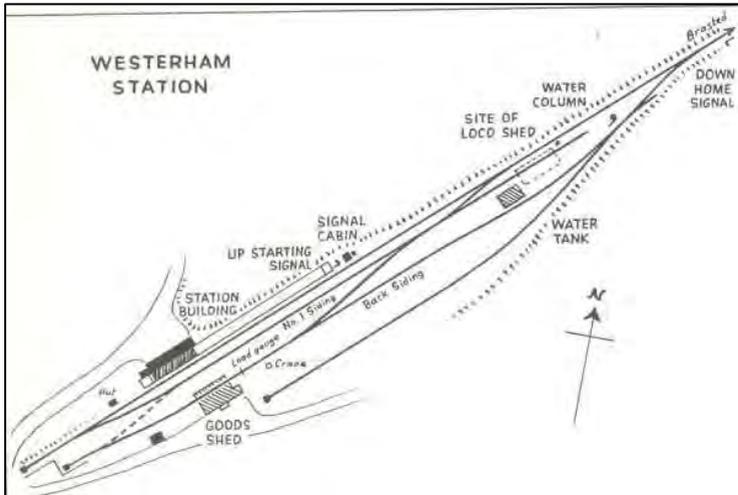
History

In 1872 the South Eastern Railway obtained powers to build a branch line from their main line at Dunton Green to the small town of Westerham in Kent. However it allowed these powers to lapse, thus when the local people realised that the S.E.R. had no immediate intention of constructing the line, they formed their own company with the idea of doing so.

The Westerham Valley Railway Company was incorporated on 24th July 1876 and in common with many other Kentish railway companies owned a seal which depicted at its centre the White Horse of Kent. A bill for the construction of the line from Dunton Green through Westerham to join the L.B.S.C. line at Oxted, was deposited in 1877 and received the Royal Assent in 1878.

Little construction was carried out by the local company, and in 1879 after prolonged negotiations, the company was taken over by the S.E.R. They undertook to build the line with one reservation: that the part of the line from Westerham to Oxted should be dropped from the plan. This was mainly because of the steep gradients and heavy engineering works involved.

The 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles of track from Dunton Green to Westerham opened on 7th July 1881 with one intermediate station at Brasted. Chevening Halt, laying between Brasted and Dunton Green, was opened in 1906.



The line was opened as a single track line although enough land was bought by the company to enable an additional track to be laid if the traffic warranted it. For the same reason all bridges, embankments and cuttings were built to take the second track, although they were not required.

For many years the branch pursued a placid existence as a small hardly known, rural line serving the small villages in the area, under the control of the South Eastern Railway, later the Southern Railway, and finally the Southern Region of British Railways. It paid its way by carrying a number of season ticket holders between their homes in rural Kent and their work in London. This was accomplished easily by the Westerham trains connecting with the London trains at Dunton Green.

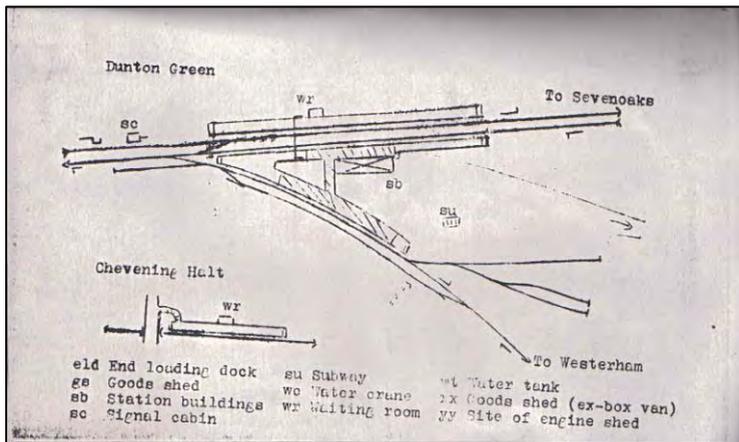
The main reason for the building of this line was to serve and to help in the development of the area as both an

agricultural and industrial region. The line soon served a market gardening area which grew up and flourished around it. Another traffic which grew up was the tourist and day-tripper industry. By the early twentieth century there were many visitors to the villages and to Westerham, with the marvellous scenery at the foot of the North Downs, and the picturesque and historical buildings only 20 miles from London. The area also soon became popular as a weekend residence for the tired businessman.

The line was little known outside the area except to the trippers and a number of enthusiasts until in 1959 British Railways put forward plan to close down the line, the trains of which were known affectionately as 'The Flyer' by the local residents. There was much outcry at this suggestion from many quarters that the line was given a reprieve until 1960, when the same thing occurred again. In 1961 it was again decided, by British Railways, that the line was still unprofitable and that it would have to be closed. The Transport Consultative Committee upheld its previous decision that it should remain open, but the Minister of Transport reversed this, despite the opposition raised by its 80 – 100 regular travellers and many others. Thus the line was closed as from Monday 30th October 1961, the last train running on the previous Saturday, the 28th.

The line may not remain in its present state as the Railway Presentation Society has much local support to re-open the line. If they succeed it will again be possible to travel between Dunton Green and Westerham on the

nearest steam worked branch to London, south of the River Thames.



Description

The Westerham Valley line is 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles long, running from the main line at Dunton Green to Westerham. There are two intermediate stations, at Chevening Halt and Brasted.

The line itself is reasonably straight, there being no sharp curves except at the entrance to Dunton Green. It runs along the valley of the River Darent at the foot of the steep scarp slope of the North Downs, and thus has to avoid numerous ponds as well as the river itself. From the line it is possible to see many fine views of the Kent countryside, adding much to the very rural atmosphere of the branch only 20 miles from the centre of London.

The whole length of the branch is single track and worked by electric key tokens. As there are no passing loops at either of the intermediate stations and only one platform face at the termini, only one passenger train can work the line at once.

The branch starts as a spur running parallel to the main line for about 75 yards from the station at Dunton Green. This is connected to the 'up' line by a trailing crossover, which in turn is connected to the 'down' line by another trailing crossover. The spur then divides into two before reaching the bay platform. The second line is the run around loop which rejoins the branch after the junction with the goods roads at the end of the platform.

The station buildings are of typical S.E.R. architectural design of the 1880's. The bay platform of the

Westerham Branch is long enough to take a three or four coach train, although the usual length was only two. No loco facilities are available at this end of the line; goods facilities are however quite good although do not appear to have been used to any great extent. There are three roads available for this traffic and quite an extensive yard which is used by both branch and main line traffic. Under this yard runs a subway which gives access to the station from the western side, access to the 'down' platform being by footbridge to the centre platform.

On leaving Dunton Green station, the line curves sharply in a southwesterly direction away from the main line, towards Chevening Halt which is 1 mile 24 chains from Dunton Green. For most of this distance the line is rising with gradients varying from 1 in 290 and 1 in 70. In some places along the line it falls slightly as it weaves along the valley, and thus it runs through short low cuttings and over long embankments.

Chevening Halt itself is an unstaffed halt of typical Southern Railway design. It consists of a modern concrete platform with a small three sided concrete building providing some shelter for the waiting passengers. The platform is reached by a flight of steps from the overbridge which crosses the line at this point. The platform is otherwise bare except for one nameboard and a post and wire fencing which prevents access to the side of the cutting behind.

The line then turns westward and runs for over a mile on a reasonably straight course on a rising gradient of 1 in 140, 1 in 146 and 1 in 78. The remainder of the line as far

as Brasted is mainly in cuttings except where it passes through thick woodland. Between Chevening and Brasted the line is crossed by three roads, after the last of which the line swings slightly southward and runs down a falling gradient of 1 in 217 through another cutting into Brasted station. 3 miles 6 chains from Dunton Green.

Brasted station is linked to the village by a road which runs up from the lane which passes beneath the line immediately beyond the platform. The goods facilities at Brasted consist of three roads, one of which runs alongside the goods shed, a disused van body; the other line serves an assortment of huts and coal staithes. Brasted station buildings are of standard S.E.R. wooden construction and housed within were all the usual offices. The platform itself is long enough to take a three or four coach train, and for half its length is covered by a canopy affording shelter to waiting passengers. On the bank opposite the platform there is the remains of a station garden, rarely seen nowadays, although quite common in Southern Railway days, but now sadly unkempt, mainly because the station became an unstaffed halt in 1955.

On leaving Brasted station the line crosses the road to the village, which is about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile on the other side of the valley. The line then continues in a southwesterly direction on a falling gradient varying from 1 in 515 to 1 in 532 passing through cuttings and over embankments. It then turns slightly south again before crossing a road and running for another $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to enter Westerham station, 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles from Dunton Green.

Westerham is one of the best stations in the area from the point of the modelling enthusiast. The plan on page four shows the station and its facilities. It can be seen that these, especially the passenger facilities, are all that are needed for a small branch terminus station. The platform again is long enough for a three or four coach train, the buildings themselves being almost identical to those at Brasted. The lines consist of the platform, run around loop, and two goods roads. Westerham is the only station on the line with any form of loco facilities. An extension of the run around loop serves as this depot, where an ashpit, a coaling stage and a water crane and tower are situated. The depot appeared to be little used at the time of closure except for the water crane and tower.

The run around loop was rarely used by passenger trains as push-pull sets were mainly used. For this reason when the loco required water, the whole train was reversed out of the station along the branch until reaching the depot, where the loco was attended to and the train then returned to the station to await its departure time.

The goods facilities consist of two roads, one of which serves coal staithes, whilst the other runs past a crane into a goods shed, which incidentally houses another crane, and finishes up at an end loading dock. This latter line is also connected to the run around loop by mean of a crossover, which allows access to the goods shed without using the beginning of the goods siding.

Westerham is also graced with a signal box and signals unlike either Brasted or Chevening Halt. Amongst these signals at Westerham is an interesting survival – it is the signal guarding the out from the goods roads to the branch line. The signal itself is of interest because it consists of a wooden post and arm, the spectacle plate of which is metal and bears the letters S.E.& C.D.R. as does the lamp. This must have been one of the last wooden arm signals in regular use on British Railways. These letters are not only confined to the signal, they also appear on a number of rail chairs in the goods siding and the loco depot.

Rolling Stock and Services

The motive power which has been employed on the branch has not varied much for many years. The trains were usually hauled by either a class 'R', 'R1' or 'H', 0-4-4- tank locos supplied from the Tonbridge Motive Power Depot (M.P.D.). Previous to this, the loco was sub-shedded at Westerham, but this practice has been abandoned for some years.

The stock hauled by these locomotives usually consisted of a push-pull set of either South Eastern and

Chatham Railway (S.E.C.R.) and later L.B. & S.C.R. (?) origins, both types being two car sets.

In 1932 a Southern Railway Sentinal Cammel railcar was tried out on the line but was soon withdrawn from service as it was found inadequate for the service. It consisted of a two cylinder steam locomotive which was automatically fed with coal and water, and could thus be driven by one man from either end.

The service itself differed little over the years, there being less trains towards the end of its life. In 1952 there were 21 'up' trains and 22 'down' on Mondays to Fridays, two less each way on Saturdays, with 14 'up' and 15 'down' on Sundays. The journey time over the branch was 11 minutes, whilst the time to London by the connecting trains at Dunton Green was just over the hour.

The goods services on the line have never been very great, usually one train in each direction each day.

The same classes of locos were used as on passenger trains.

It is however interesting to note that special instructions allowed the propelling of a goods brake van from Brasted back to Westerham after shunting in the yard at the former place.