

## THE RAILWAY EXECUTIVE EASTERN REGION

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### JUBILEE OF THE LAST MAIN LINE TO LONDON

Fifty years ago, on 9th March 1899 the President of the Board of Trade the Rt. Hon. T. Ritchie M.P, formally opened at Marylebone Station the London extension of the Great Central Railway from Annesley in Nottingham - the last main line to link the Metropolis with the Provinces.

Earlier in the day three special trains conveying guests from Manchester, Sheffield, and Nottingham had arrived at Marylebone, having been enthusiastically greeted by the crowds assembled at stations and other points of vantage all along the route. Altogether some 700 people came to Marylebone to celebrate the opening of the line and in order to accommodate them at the magnificent lunch which had been arranged a portion of the platforms and lines at Marylebone were boarded over, converting the place into an enormous banqueting hall complete with orchestra.

In 1890, seven years before it changed its name to Great Central, the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway was a struggling provincial system uniting Grimsby, Lincoln and Doncaster with Sheffield and Manchester reaching also to Southport, Liverpool, Chester, and Macclesfield, by means of lines jointly owned with other railways. In the south it had got no further than Beighton, but lines carrying it on to Staveley, Chesterfield and Annesley had been authorised and were under construction.

The extension to Annesley was the first step towards London which the M.S.&L<sup>1</sup> had first attempted to reach in association with the Midland Railway, in 1878. For long dissatisfied at having to hand over London and intermediate traffic to bigger neighbours, Sir Edward Watkin ambitious chairman of the M.S & L. and one of the last of the railway kings was determined that his company should possess its own metals to the capital

Sir Edward was also chairman of the Metropolitan South Eastern and Channel Tunnel companies. With these linked with the M.S & L. his dream of through railway carriages from Manchester to Dover and eventually, to Paris over an international route largely under his control would be realised.

The Bill for the London extension the M.S.&L came before Parliament in the session of 1891. It proposed the construction of 98 miles of railway from Annesley to Quainton Road, whence access to London would be secured over the tracks of the Metropolitan Railway. The terminal was to be near Baker Street to the West of

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<sup>1</sup> Never a wealthy railway the M.S.&L. was sometimes referred to as the "Money, Sunk, and Lost" When the name was changed to Great Central it became "Gone Completely".

Regents Park reached by cutting through St Johns wood and by bordering upon or plunging beneath Lords cricket ground.

The project as opposed tooth and nail by the rival railways especially the Great Northern, but the most vociferous attacks came from the art colony of St. Johns Wood and the cricket world.

The art colony, led by Alma-Todoma, J. MacWhirter, and Briton Riveire, described the proposed line as an act of vandalism, despoiling valuable residential property

".....for the conveyance not only of passengers, but of coal, manure, fish, and other abominations," and signed a petition against the bill.

To cricketers and cricket lovers the thought of railway desecrating the sacred turf of Lords was a national calamity. Sir Edward Watkin was personally attacked. He should be brought before W. G Grace and intimidated by Spofforth the demon bowler, it was suggested; if that failed Briggs the Lancashire bowler, should cripple him. Others were even more violent; Sir Edward should be seized by his own navvies and blown up by dynamite

The chairman of the M ,S ,&,L. did everything he could to mollify and win over the antagonists aligned against him, The M.C.C. was placated by the gift of land nearby, the lease of more and the promise by that play would not be disturbed, all in return for a strip of the practise ground. But in other directions the opposition remained implacable and the Bill was thrown out.

Nothing daunted, Sir Edward decided again seek powers in the next session and, in the meantime, to endeavour to reach agreement with the opponents to the scheme. The antagonism of landowners was overcome and a satisfactory settlement arrived at with the Great Northern but the London County Council still viewed the project with some disfavour, whilst the art colony remained adamant opponents Alma Tadama alleging that the vibration of passing train would make it impossible for an artist to draw a straight lines!

Nevertheless, when the new Bill came before the Parilament on.21st March 1892 the opposition was less severe and, after some further contest was passed by both Houses. Before the Royal Assent could be secured, however, a dissolution took place and it was not until the end of March in the following year that the necessary authority was granted.

Contracts were let in September 1894 and on 13th November the Countess of Wharncliffe, whose husband had succeed Sir Edward as chairman in the same year cut the first sod In Alpha Road, St. Johns Wood

The new line was destined to cost about ten million pounds. From Annesley it proceeded via Hucknall Town New Basford and Carrington to an imposing station in the heart of Nottingham built jointly with the Great Northern.

This station covered 12½ acres and was provided with two large island platforms each 68 feet wide and about 1,270 feet long, with bays for two lines at each end, giving twelve platforms in all, Above was a main roof in three spans and north and south of it awning roofs extended for a distance of 222 feet so that the total length of platform under cover was 889 feet.

Southwards the line proceeded through Arkwright Street station and thence via Loughborough to Leicester Central, which was situated between two sections of the viaduct carrying the railway through the city. Here one island platform 1,240 feet in length, with double bays at each end, was constructed; a Roman pavement found there was carefully preserved on the site.

From Leicester the line continued to Rugby Central, Woodford & Hinton (recently renamed Woodford Halse), Brackley Central, Finmore and Calvert to Quanton Road where a junction was made with the Metropolitan Railways line which ran through Aylesbury, Amersham, Rickmansworth, and Harrow to Baker Street. From Harrow separate tracks to be laid by the Metropolitan extended to Canfield Place West Hampstead , whence the Great Central built its own line into the terminal at Marylebone which covered some nine acres. Sufficient land was acquired at Marylebone for at least eight platforms, but four have always sufficed

The new route to London required a number of engineering works of a heavy character. Three miles north of Nottingham was built the Bulweell viaduct of 26 acres and some 60 arches and bridges and three tunnels- Sherwood Rise, Mansfield Road, and Weekday Cross (Victoria Street)- were needed to take the railway through the centre of the city, and a bridge with a single span of 170 feet carried the line over the Midland Railway

A mile of arches and steel girder bridge had to be built through Leicester and to cross the London & North Western main line at Rugby a bridge 600 feet length was constructed. Ten miles south of this place followed the Catesby tunnel, 2,997 yards long, and at Brackley a 310 yard viaduct of 22 arches.

At the London end after much cut and cover work, there were completed three tunnels Hampstead (691 yards), St. Johns Wood (1,276 yards), and Lords (236 yards), The goods warehouse erected at Marylebone 384 foot long by 355 feet wide was at the time of construction one of the largest of its kind in the country

The new line was first brought into use on 26th July 1898 when coal trains began to run. On 7th November 1898 a special inspection train from Manchester, conveying the General Manager, Mr. W. Pollitt and other officers, ran for the first time into Marylebone station previous similar trains having used the coal depot nearby

Then followed on 9th March 1899, the formal opening already referred to and on 15th March the passenger services commenced with four trains a day each way, the first train to leave Marylebone being the 5.15 a.m. with four passengers aboard! The station itself was unfinished with only two platforms in use and the refreshment rooms and some other offices being in an incomplete state. Nearly four weeks later. on goods traffic commenced.

Elsewhere on the line work proceeded on the joint station at Nottingham, meantime passengers joined and left the trains at Arkwright Street Station. Generally referred to as the Central station by the Great Central and as the joint station by the Great Northern the two owners decided to compromise naming it Victoria ,And the new Station was appropriately opened on 24th May 1900, which was destined to be the last birthday of the Queen-Empress.

The rolling stock put into service on the new main line to London compared most favourably with that of neighbouring railways. Every train was vestibuled and provided with a buffet car, the first to be introduced in Britain. An unusual feature of both 1st and 3rd class dining cars was the provision of separate toilets and w.c.s for the sexes. Externally the coaches wore a livery of French grey upper panels and chocolate, lower panels, the latter being embellished with the Great Central's new coat of arms duly authorised by the College of Heralds, which bore the appropriate motto "Forward".