

CHAPTER 7 THE EARLY AND MIDDLE YEARS OF THE SURREY IRON RAILWAY

Following the opening of the Surrey Iron Railway in July, 1803, Outram and Company supplied the railway company with a weighing machine in August, and another in December. Oswald & Anderson arranged for their delivery, and erection at Wandsworth. Later, in 1807, the firm provided two turnplates and three tipping frames for use at the Wandsworth basin.^[1]

By September, 1803, Samuel Jones, coal merchant, was established at Wandsworth, and advertised the delivery of coal "conveyed from the Bason at Wandsworth on the Railway to Croydon, at 5s.6d. per Chaldron." He also offered to supply wheat, oats, barley, linseed and other produce. ^[2] Presumably this was the same Samuel Jones who was appointed on 3 June, 1802, to be one of the surveyors in connection with the proposed extension to Reigate, and gave evidence to the Commons committee on the subsequent Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway Bill. According to Patrick Drummond, the clerk of the Croydon Canal Company, Jones was at this time the Surrey Iron Railway Company's wharfinger and resident engineer. ^[3] He was evidently a man of diverse interests: on 27 January, 1804, he won the contract for building the Grand Surrey Canal basin at Rotherhithe, although he was dismissed in July, 1806. ^[4]

A special general meeting of the Surrey Iron Railway proprietors was convened to be held at the London Tavern on 11 October, 1804, "to take into consideration the State of the Company's Funds, and to appoint a Treasurer. And also to consider the propriety of empowering the Committee to let the Tolls thereof." ^[5] The appointment of a new treasurer to replace Walter Powell had become necessary due to the bankruptcy, effective from 22 September, 1804, of his firm Castell, Powell and Company. ^[6] Subsequently, by order of the assignees, ten Surrey Iron Railway shares and five Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway shares held by the bankrupts were offered for sale by auction on 13 December ^[7], and six Surrey Iron Railway shares and eight Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway shares went on sale on 11 January, 1805. ^[8] Messrs. Barclay, Tritton and Bevan became the Surrey Iron Railway Company's bankers, and John Henton Tritton, the treasurer of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway company, was appointed as their treasurer also.

It appears that the company did not decide to let the tolls until two years later, when tenders were invited for "Renting the Tolls for the term of three years from Midsummer next", to be delivered on 5 June, 1806. ^[9] A tender was then accepted, and two days later the unnamed "Surrey Iron Railway Contractors" advertised for applicants for the posts of wharfinger, lock-keeper, and watchman, who would be required to "devote the whole of their time to the service of the Contractors." ^[10] There is some reason to suppose that these contractors were Charles Morris and Company.

A further outcome of the meeting on 11 October, 1804, is likely to have been a decision to make an application to Parliament for an Act to raise more money. On 16 January, 1805, the company presented a petition to the House of Commons seeking leave to bring in a Bill "for enabling the said Company to raise such further sums of money as may be requisiteand for the completion of the said Railway and Works," The committee to whom the petition was referred reported to the House on 23 January that it was not within the relevant Standing

Orders of the House, insofar as it was not intended to increase the rates, duties or tolls, or to vary the route. Nevertheless, leave was granted to bring in the Bill. William Bedcott Luttly, examined by the committee, had stated that "the Petitioners have made "great progress in forming the said Railway and other Works, and have not only expended thereon all the money they have been able to raise under the authority of the said (i.e. 1801) Act, but have also contracted divers debts", and therefore it was necessary to obtain further funds.

The second reading of the Bill was given on 4 February, and after some amendments were made at the third reading on 12 February, it was sent to the Lords. There Luttly was examined by a committee, when he produced accounts to show that receipts to date had been £49,805 in share capital plus £1917 from tolls, and expenditure £49,068 including £7356 owing and £2272 lost due to the bankruptcy of Castell and Powe¹¹. [11]

The Royal Assent was given on 12 March, 1805, the title of the Act being: "An Act to enable the Company of Proprietors of the Surrey Iron Railway to raise a further Sum of Money, for completing the said Railway, and the Works thereunto belonging." (45 Geo.III, cap.5)· The preamble recited that it was necessary to raise more money, due to "the great Advance in the .Price of Materials and .Labour, and from other Circumstances... " The company was therefore empowered to raise an additional £10,000 by the creation of new shares of £100 each or by mortgage of the tolls.

It was not until three months later that the company took steps to implement the Act. At the annual general meeting held on 6 June, 1805, with John Hilbert in the chair, the proprietors then present agreed that new shares should be issued in order to raise the £10,000 authorised. These shares were to be offered to the existing shareholders', each being entitled to one new share for each share he already held. The proprietors were to inform the clerk, before 30 June, of the number of shares they wished to buy. In a letter from the committee to each proprietor, citing this resolution, it was stated that the new shares "are to cost no more than £20", and it was pointed out that those subscribers who bought shares equal to the number they already held would, in effect, have bought all their shares for £60 each [12] .

It was also agreed at that meeting that interest on shares would be computed from 1 July, 1805, and that the first dividend should be paid on 1 January, 1806. It was presumably the value of the dividend to be paid that was discussed at a special meeting of the proprietors convened for 11 July, 1805, in order "to declare a Dividend, and also to consider the Amount of Tolls to be paid by Messrs. Shepley and Sons, in lieu of Bason Dues. " [13]

The latter business related to the branch railway which George Shepley had built from his warehouses on the west side of the river to the main line at a point near the south end of the basin, across company-owned land. The outcome was that it was agreed that Shepley should pay a rent to the company amounting to half the basin dues that would have been payable had his goods been taken to the basin for transfer to the railway. This agreement was ratified in September, 1806 [14] .

The dividend was not in fact paid until 10 March, 1806, following a further meeting held on 6 February, and was in the sum of £1-10s per share [15]. Even though this represents a half-yearly dividend, it fell short of apparent expectations. A very different rate was quoted in an advertisement offering for sale by auction on 13 June, 1806, the six shares of Thomas Skinner, one of the original promoters of the Surrey Iron Railway, who had died on 30

January, 1806. These were said to be "now producing an interest of 5 per cent, with a probability of considerable increase." [16]

It would appear that the company was unable to raise any of the £10,000 authorised under the powers of the 1805 Act, despite the proprietors' resolution regarding the sale of new shares. Although the actual circumstances are not clear from available documentation, it seems likely that the company had realised that the arrangement to issue new shares at £20 each was not legal, insofar as the Act had directed that the new shares should be sold for £100 each.

Accordingly, on 25 February, 1806, the company petitioned the House of Commons to be allowed to bring in a Bill to enable them, "as it had been found impracticable to raise the said further sum by the means directed" in the 1805 Act, to raise the £10,000 by other means. The committee to whom the petition was referred made the same observation as in the case of the previous Bill, to the effect that it was not within the Standing Orders, but it was again allowed, and received the first reading some three months later, on 28 May. Some amendments made by the committee were agreed to at the third reading on 11 June, and it then passed to the Lords. Luttly, examined by the Lords committee, gave the same accounts as he had in respect of the previous Act. The Bill passed through the Lords without amendment.

On 3 July, 1806, the Royal Assent was given to the Act, entitled "An Act for better enabling the Company of Proprietors of the Surrey Iron Railway to complete the same." (46 Geo. III cap. 94). It empowered the company to raise the £10,000 authorised by the earlier Act by a number of means: by the creation of new shares of £100, "or at such other Rate or Value per Share as the said Company of Proprietors shall from time to time think proper"; by borrowing on the security of the tolls; by mortgage of the tolls; by the grant of annuities: or by making further calls on the holders of existing shares, not to exceed £100 per. share. The money so raised was to be used to pay off the company's debts, for completing and maintaining the railway, and making alterations and improvements.

It is not known how much money was raised as a result of this Act, or which options were adopted, but presumably the previously-agreed arrangement for selling shares at £20 each was implemented, as this was now permissible. Evidently some new shares were issued. In September, 1806, "Eight Original Shares and Eight New ditto" in the "Wandsworth Iron Railway to Croydon" were offered for sale by auction to be held on 3 October [17]. A share certificate now in the Wandsworth Museum (Plate 3) dated 31 July, 1806, No:-814; has the word "additional" added in ink. An advertisement published in April, 1819, of the sale of various estates formerly belonging to John Hilbert, recently deceased, included "14 double shares in the Surrey Iron Railway" [18]

Share Certificate
[207.2kb]

The Croydon Canal was formally opened on 23 October, 1809, and it was probably the announcement of the imminent opening of this rival undertaking that prompted the Surrey Iron Railway Company to publish a notice, dated 3 October, to inform the public that the railway wharf at Wandsworth was available:

"for the Conveyance of Goods of every description, particularly for Coals, Timber, Building Stone from the Merstham Quarries, Lime, Bricks, Corn, Seed, Malt, Flints, Gravel and Manures; every possible accommodation and convenience being completed, this very expeditious mode of conveying heavy Goods to and from the interior of Surrey, is well worth the notice of Traders, Manufacturers, and Farmers." [19]

Enquiries were directed to be made to the superintendent and wharfinger at Wandsworth, Basil Cane, who had probably held that position since it was advertised three years earlier. In November, 1811, he was named as an agent for the supply of "Soap Ashes for manure." [20]

On 24 April, 1814, the railway company advertised for tenders for renting the tolls of the railway, for five years from 1 June, to be submitted on 5 May [21] [22]. Apparently no acceptable tenders were received, for a similar advertisement was published later in May, asking for tenders to be delivered at the annual general meeting on 2 June [23].

A tender was then accepted from Basil Cane, who soon afterwards, on 6 August, applied to the West Brixton Justices of the Peace for a reduction on the rateable value of the tolls and his premises imposed by the Wandsworth Vestry. This was set at £750 a year, "which was the full rent he paid for the same." He claimed that the tolls had originally been let for £2,500 per annum, at which time they were rated at £1,000, and argued that the same ratio should now apply. The magistrates agreed, and resolved to direct the overseers of the poor of Wandsworth to vary the assessment accordingly.

The Justices had first become involved in the matter of the rates on 30 August, 1806, when they gave consideration to the assessment submitted by the Wandsworth Vestry, and commented that "the assessment of the Railway Company was considerably increased, and the present rate was stated at £1,500." They decided that the overseers be asked "to reconsider the legality of such rental." The outcome is not recorded, but evidently the assessment was reduced to the figure of £1,000 mentioned by Cane.

Following the magistrates' ruling on 6 August, 1814, Cane applied to the Vestry in December for a reduction of the rateable value, and on 7 March, 1815, the Vestry agreed to set the value at £500. On 14 December following, the Vestry discussed Cane's current assessment of £300, and the churchwardens were ordered to enquire as to how this further reduction had come about.

The churchwardens reported to the Vestry on 28 December that they had investigated Cane's claim, and examined his accounts, and had ascertained that his profits for his year as a lessee had been £302, allowing for "the deductions which Mr. Cane deemed himself authorised to make for rent, wages, repair of the Iron Railway, &c." Cane had been asked why he initially accepted an assessment of £500, and he asserted that when he agreed to it, he had only recently begun renting the tolls, and had estimated that his yearly profit would be about £500, but that "the result of the year falling so far short of £500, he felt himself aggrieved, and therefore sought to obtain a further reduction." It was finally decided, on 2 January, 1817, that Cane should be assessed on the amount of his profits. [23]

Cane had claimed that "the profits of the Railway have been considerably reduced, in consequence of the articles usually sent to the Wandsworth Basin, from the estate of Mr. Jolliffe, being conveyed on the Croydon Railway, and the Croydon Canal, whereby the receipts of the Surrey Railway had been diminished upwards of £600 per annum." This obviously referred to a railway connection made by the Croydon Canal Company from the terminus of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway at Pitlake to the canal basin at west Croydon, which was

[pp71/72] opened in 1811. By this means goods conveyed on the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway could be readily transferred to barges on the Croydon Canal, and vice

versa. Apart from Cane's statement, there is other evidence that goods were thus carried on the canal as an alternative to the Surrey Iron Railway. The canal railway is described in greater detail in the next chapter.

In 1819 Anthony Lyon became the lessee of the tolls. He was a barge-builder, wharfinger and coal merchant at Wandsworth, and the first mention of him there occurs in January, 1811, when he attended a meeting of the Vestry. He had previously been in business as a lighterman and timber-carrier at Narrow-wall, Lambeth. In 1824 he was in occupation of three warehouses at the Surrey Iron Railway terminus at Croydon, and in 1831 the Croydon rate assessment on "2 cottages, 3 warehouses, tolls and railway" was to "Messrs Lyon." [24] In an 1832-34 directory, Anthony and James Lyon were listed as coal merchants on the railway wharf at Wandsworth. By 1836 Anthony Lyon had died or retired, and a directory entry for that year reads, under Wandsworth, "Railway Conveyance. To Croydon, goods are conveyed from the Railway Wharf, daily - James Lyon, wharfinger." [25] This is repeated in the 1838 edition.

The Lyons' had renewed the lease in July, 1835, having successfully tendered in response to an advertisement published by the railway company on 13 May, for the renting of the tolls for the term of seven years. This notice set out the scope of the commitment: "for renting the docks, basins, weighing, toll and other houses, wharfs and lands, and also the railway through the whole line thereof, from Wandsworth to Croydon, and the branch communicating therefrom to Carshalton, toll-gates, warehouses, cranes, tipping machines, weighing machines, and other premises thereto belonging and usually let therewith: and also the lockage dues, basin dues, railway and other tolls and rents to be collected in respect of the said docks, basin, railway, houses and premises." [26]

James Lyon held the lease for the remainder of the railway's existence. He was one of the petitioners against the Bill for the dissolution of the railway company in 1846. He also rented the tolls of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway during its final years, as is recounted in the next chapter.

Among the lands taken by the Surrey Iron Railway Company at Wandsworth on which to build the railway were two pieces owned by the parish. One was on the west side of the basin; the other, part of a plot known as the Clock Acre, was to the south of the High Street. At a meeting of the Wandsworth Vestry held on 10 August, 1821, it was revealed that the parish had never received the agreed amount of compensation in respect of these lands, which amounted to £84-14-03/4p "incurred annually for the last 19 years and now amounting to that sum." The churchwardens were directed to apply to the railway company for this payment.

The Charity Commissioners' Report of 1825 on the parish lands in Wandsworth stated the current position: "A claim having "been made "by the parish upon the company for compensation, the value of the lands so taken was estimated by a surveyor on the part of the company at £89-3s-9d and for this amount the company agreed to pay interest at five per cent until the principal should "be paid. Some doubts appear to have subsequently arisen as to the right of the parish officers to receive such interest, and in consequence no payment has been made down to the period of our enquiry in November, 1825. It is now, however, proposed on the part of the company, to invest "both principal and interest in government security in the names of trustees for the use of the parish." [27]

This situation was apparently unchanged in 1828, when at a Vestry meeting on 4 January it was agreed that the churchwardens should again apply to the railway company for payment of the compensation. At the same meeting it was reported that Mr. Gardiner had alleged that the railway company had taken another piece of the Clock Acre land he leased from the parish, and he had never received the 26 shillings per annum compensation that had been originally agreed to by William Jessop and George Wildgoose, on behalf of the company. His father, 'Henry Gardiner, together with Richard Bush junior (the former lessee of the Lower Mill) had complained to the Vestry in April, 1802, that the company had taken parts of the lands they rented, "and consequently they were injured thereby", and presumably it was following this complaint that the company had agreed to pay compensation to them also.

The matter of the parish claim was raised again at a Vestry meeting on 6 July, 1832, when a committee was appointed to examine the whole subject. The committee's report, presented on 17 August, confirmed the validity of the claim, and it was therefore resolved to apply to the railway company for compensation of £120. On 9 April, 1833, the chairman was able to inform the Vestry members that "after considerable exertion and perseverance, he had the satisfaction of stating that the subject of the claim of the parish upon the Railway Company for land taken by the Company from the parish had been at length adjusted, that the proper instalments had been executed and the amount of the compensation being £120 would forthwith be received." It is not recorded if Mr. Gardiner was also satisfied.

According to Hobert Marshall, the contractors of the Surrey Iron Railway had bound themselves to keep it in repair for the period of three years after its completion [28]. After this period maintenance work became the responsibility of the lessee of the tolls. The company did arrange for a few ancillary works to be carried out. An "Index of all the works executed by Jolliffe and Banks", (the firm of contractors we shall meet in the next chapter) includes a few items relating to the Surrey Iron Railway, unfortunately not dated or detailed. These comprise a "Surrey Railway machine house", a tilting frame at Wandsworth, and works at the Wandsworth dock, possibly an extension of the original basin [29].

The nature of the goods carried on the Surrey Iron Railway was given by Joseph Priestley in 1831: "Its principal object is to facilitate the conveyance of lime, chalk, flints, fullers' earth, and agricultural produce from its neighbourhood to London; and in return to take from thence coals and manure for the supply of the country through which it passes." [30]

Some twenty years earlier a similar list had been given in Rees's Cyclopaedia. Much of the traffic to London would obviously have been carried on the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway.

There are a few contemporary references to specific goods or materials carried. In January, 1811, the Wandsworth Vestry paid £15 to the railway company for the supply of flints for road repairs. There was a coal wharf on the line of the railway at Baron Place, Mitcham, owned by Henry Hoare. Following his death in March, 1828, it was offered for sale by auction on 18 August, 1829, at which date it was on lease to James Tayler, a corn and coal merchant [1]. It was still in existence at the time of the railway's closure, on lease to William Wood. A directory entry for 1836 names Thomas Phillips as a coal merchant' on the "Railway Wharf" at Wandsworth [25].

"A large Quantity of Breeze, from the Gas Light Company, lying on the railway wharf at Wandsworth and at Croydon", was offered for sale on 31 May, 1820. [2] The same, or another

quantity, at Wandsworth only, was up for auction on 27 March, 1821, [3] and five hundred chaldrons of gas coke or breeze, on the wharf at Wandsworth, was offered for sale to "Brickmakers, Limeburners, and others" on 12 March, 1822. [4]

There are a few further references to specific customers or users. James Newton and William Simpson were partners in a calico-printing business at Merton Abbey. It was the firm's practice to order bulk consignments of coal, which were stored in a warehouse they rented at Wandsworth, and coal was taken from this store as required and delivered to them by Basil Cane. The wagons were no doubt drawn along the railway to Merton High Street, then off-loaded into road wagons and taken to the firm's works nearby. During 1818 the firm was in dispute with Cane about his accounts, and one letter from them also mentioned an account made out to Mr. Wood. This was probably a reference to Peter Wood, a silk-printer who then occupied premises at Phipps Bridge, Mitcham.

In 1820 the firm, now renamed Simpson and Company following the retirement of Newton, moved the business to Wallington. In about 1827 Simpson cancelled the arrangement for the delivery of coal by the railway, rented a warehouse at the Croydon Canal basin at Croydon, and arranged for coal to be obtained from Anthony Lyon and delivered to his warehouse by William Basingwhite, a carrier on the canal. Although this procedure obviously involved the onward transit from Croydon by road, Simpson presumably found it cheaper than carriage on the railway, even though his factory at Wallington was only a short distance from the terminus of the branch from Mitcham to Hack Bridge [5].

Near this terminus, about 450 yards upstream on the Croydon branch of the Wandle, were an oil mill and a leather mill, established by George Shepley, which had a single-line railway connection with the terminus. The Rev. H. G. Dadd, writing in the late 1890s, having referred to George Shepley as "the inventor and first maker of oilcake, for fattening cattle", continued, "So remunerative was this venture, and so great the output, that the Surrey Iron Railway was extended from Mitcham to Hackbridge to meet the requirements of this enterprising firm. Old inhabitants still remember the cars passing Beddington Corner all day long loaded up with oilcake from Shipley's (sic)" [36]

There are a number of inaccuracies in this passage. For one thing, oilcake, a byproduct of linseed oil extraction, was in use as a cattle feed long before Shepley became involved in oil milling, and it is unlikely that it was a major article of trade. But it does indicate a regular use of the railway by Shepley and his successors, even if not on the scale recalled by the old inhabitants.

Richard Glover, a Surrey Iron Railway proprietor, who operated a snuff mill, a paper mill, and a corn mill on the Wandle just above Mitcham bridge, held a lease of a warehouse at the Croydon terminus from 1810 until about 1815, probably for the storage of corn. It was in the vicinity of these mills that in "the 1960's, two railway wagon wheels were found, as is described in Chapter 11.

In the Surrey Iron Railway Act of incorporation there was mention of a possible branch being carried to Richard Howard's calico printing works at Phipps Bridge at Mitcham. This was never built, but the firm evidently made use of the railway; in June, 1811, Howard and his partners were declared bankrupt, and in September their effects, which included three railway wagons, were put up for sale [37].

Other manufactories which are likely to have been served by the railway are noted in the description of the route given in Chapter 12.

A few more scattered references to the railway occur in local records. In February, 1809, the West Brixton magistrates heard a case brought by Basil Cane (at that date the company's Wharfinger) against four men "for driving waggons on the Surrey Iron Railway on the 30th of January last, and suffering them to remain thereon, above an hour." Three of the men pleaded guilty and were fined 1d. each plus 3d. costs.

In September, 1820, the magistrates considered a complaint brought by Anthony Lyon against a Mr. Hammond, "for passing upon a certain part of the Iron Railway to Mitcham with a carriage drawn by one horse not constructed agreeably to the orders and resolutions of the Railway Company." The case was dismissed because it was found that notices specifying the requirements for wagons "had been pulled down and none such remained."

The Mitcham parish registers record three accidental deaths on the railway. On 23 August, 1807, Thomas Strattin was buried, "having been run over by a Cart on the Iron Railway." Although there were many fatal accidents on the earlier colliery and canal railways, this seems to be the first recorded fatality on a public railway. The burial of a seven-year old boy, John Hornblow, who was "killed by a waggon on the Iron Railway" took place on 20 June, 1803, and that of five-year old George Hayward, "killed by a Carriage on the Iron Railway", on 22 July, 1810. [38] Another resident of Mitcham, John Morgan, was "killed on the Rail Road" in about August, 1837. [39]

The annual general meetings of the Surrey Iron Railway Company were held on the first Thursday in July, from 1802 until 1848, and took place at the Spread Eagle Inn, Wandsworth, every year except 1830, when the George and Vulture Tavern, Cornhill, London, was the venue. William Bedcott Lutly was the company's clerk and solicitor from 1799 until his death in 1834. Thereafter his son, Beaumont Charles Lutly, held the position.

Initially, the Surrey Iron Railway was generally regarded as a useful innovation with scope for development. A letter from "Bulstrode", to James Anderson, apparently written when the railway was under construction, welcomed the project: "I rejoice to find that a plan is in such forwardness for executing an iron rail-way on this improved plan so near to the metropolis as that which is to go from Wandsworth to Croydon, which will put it in the power of many persons to be witnesses of its practical utility, who might not otherwise have had it in their power to observe it for many years to come. I sincerely wish the undertaking complete success." [40]

Richard Phillips, writing a few years after the opening of the Surrey Iron Railway, "felt renewed delight on Witnessing at this place (i.e. Wandsworth) the economy of horse-labour on the iron rail-way. Yet a heavy sigh escaped me, as I thought of the inconceivable millions which have been spent about Malta, four or five of which might have been the means of extending double lines of iron rail-ways from London to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Holyhead, Milford, Falmouth, Yarmouth, Dover and Portsmouth! A reward of a single thousand would have supplied coaches, and other vehicles of various degrees of speed, with the best tackle for readily turning out; and we might, ere this, have witnessed our mail coaches running at the rate of ten miles an hour, drawn by a single horse, or impelled fifteen miles by Blenkinsop's steam engine! Such would have been a legitimate motive for overstepping the income of a

nation, and the completion of so great and useful a work would have afforded national grounds for public triumph in general jubilees!" [41]

William Stevenson, writing in 1809, was less optimistic about the railway's prospects:

"Notwithstanding the advantages of iron rail-ways with respect to facility and motion, this road does not appear to be much used, nor is it probable that railways will ever come into general use. The expense attending the formation of them, except where the ground is naturally level, is enormous; and it is evident that the advantages and consequently the gain, are confined to carriage in one direction." [42]

In 1844, John Weale summed up the ebbing of the early hopes: "Notwithstanding the very sanguine expectations which were at first entertained as to the success of these tramroads, it was soon found that they were never likely to realize much profit." [43]

Von Oeynhausen and Von Dechen, examining the railway in about 1826, put forward some reasons for its lack of success:

"The line is intended for general traffic; it has, however, not completely achieved its objective and has anything but encouraged similar undertakings. This arises partly because the performance of wagons on tramroads is not nearly so favourable as it is upon English railroads; the wagons are heavy and inconvenient for the transport of goods in large pieces. As the wagons are confined to the tramroad, the goods must be distributed to their final destination by other means. Therefore, short tramways for general use seldom achieve their objective." [44]

Thomas Tredgold in 1825 gave much the same explanation to account for the railway's failure:

"The Surrey rail-road being one of the few attempts to form public rail-roads in general use, the causes of its not having been so successful as to encourage others, becomes an interesting subject of enquiry. It may in some measure be accounted for by the nature of the road itself; for the effect falls far short of that produced on the edge rails, while it is equally expensive, and the carriages are heavy, and carry too small a quantity, hence, with the circumstance of the carriages being confined to the rail-road, which prevents goods being conveyed to their proper destination without reloading, the advantages are not equivalent to the increase of expense." [45]

In fact, the reasons given by these writers were not the only causes of the lack of traffic on the railway and its consequent financial failure. It seems likely that the falling off in trade was due to a large extent to the falling output and requirements of the traders. Following the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, there were a series of trade slumps, and a high level of taxation was levied in order to payoff the war debt. The Wandle valley manufacturers would have suffered accordingly. Also, the important calico-printing industry there began to decline in the 1820s, due to competition from firms in Lancashire and elsewhere.

Another factor was the alternative traffic route offered by the Croydon Canal. Trade on the Surrey Iron Railway would seem to have decreased following the opening of the canal in 1809, particularly as regards coal, which was the principal commodity conveyed to Croydon. The opening in 1811 of the canal company's railway from the basin at Croydon to the terminus of the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway further diminished the

Surrey Iron Railway's traffic. Basil Cane's reference to the transfer of carriage from the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway to the canal instead of to the Surrey Iron Railway has previously been mentioned, and further examples are given in Chapter 8.

After the distribution of the first dividend to the shareholders in 1806, further references to a payment are rare. An advertisement for the sale of shares in 1819 noted that "in the year 1813, a dividend of £1 per share was paid." [46] Evidently a dividend was declared on a few other occasions, and the last payment of 10 shillings per share was made in 1825. The total amount paid during the railway's existence was said to have been £10-6s. per share.

The last two statements were made to a House of Commons Select Committee on 20 June 1846, when it was also remarked that "the works had become very ruinous and decayed, and almost useless for railway purposes." [47] The neglect of the maintenance of the railway had begun much earlier, judging from letters written by William Simpson. We have already met Simpson, as a calico-printer at Wallington and Merton Abbey. He subsequently became Lord of the Manor of Mitcham, having married Emily Cranmer, who inherited the Cranmer Estate. In this capacity he complained to James Lyon in December 1833, of the "very bad state of the fences" to the railway adjoining his fields, on the Hack Bridge branch. In April 1834, he wrote directly to Lutly, again complaining of the state of the fences, and offering to repair them at his own expense if the railway company would contribute a fair sum(35).

Further sad glimpses of the Surrey Iron Railway in its later years are given by some contemporary observers. Felix Summerly (i.e. Sir Henry Cole), writing in 1846, recalled the railway as "a small single line, on which a miserable team of lean mules or donkeys, some thirty years ago, might be seen crawling at the rate of four miles in the hour, with small trucks of stone and lime behind them." [48] A similar description, attributed to Charles Knight, has a final sentence, "Lean mules no longer crawl leisurely along the little rails with trucks of stone through Croydon, once perchance during the day." [49]

Robert Ritchie published this account in 1846: "The whole work is of a coarse description. The plates, being imperfectly laid down, are easily shaken, and the rails present many inequalities from the sinking of the blocks, which has led to the breaking of the plates; the friction must, therefore, be considerable Notwithstanding the general levels of this tramway being good, and that it affords facilities for conveying agricultural produce to London, and the return of manure to the country, there is not much traffic on it." [50]

Arthur Freeling, in 1839, observing the Surrey Iron Railway at Earlsfield, where it was crossed by the London and South Western Railway, pointed to a greater use of the older railway than the previous writers:

"The Surrey Railway gave the country about here a very mean idea of the then but projected railroad to Southampton ... Now the Southampton and Surrey Railways present themselves together specimens of the past and present state of the works - the latter is, however, useful in its way and carries a great quantity of coals, of lime, and some merchandize." [51]

The preamble to the Surrey Iron Railway Act of dissolution, passed in August, 1846, includes a brief and pathetic history of the railway:

"The Traffic along the said Line has ever since the Completion thereof been very small, and has of late years been gradually diminishing and ... the Receipts of the Company, owing to the falling off of the Traffic on the Line having been barely sufficient to meet the Expenses of maintaining the Railway and Works."

The events leading to the dissolution of the company and the closure of the railway began in 1844 when the London & South Western Railway Company entered into negotiations for the purchase of the Surrey Iron Railway. The story is told in Chapter 10.

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