

Why was it worth saving?

Chris Webb

The Hockley or Shawford Viaduct, as the railway knew it, strides across the water meadows of the Itchen Valley as it has since its construction in 1890/91 when it became the missing link in the independent DN&SR line to Didcot and the North, thus breaking the LSWR monopoly of docks traffic. The GWR did not acquire the DN&SR until 1924 but were contracted to work the passengers and goods trains with their rolling stock.

The DN&SR having obtained the necessary Parliamentary Act to build the line from Bar End goods to LSWR Shawford Junction, William Galbraith, LSWR's Consulting Engineer, was appointed by the DN&SR to build the 1½ mile line. Galbraith had built a number of small viaducts in the Plymouth area using mass concrete but this was his *magnus opus* of 33 arches, 40 foot high and 2014 foot long with columns of mass concrete clad with red bricks from Somerset and blue engineering bricks from Blanchards of Bishops Waltham. Dentils and refuges complete the exterior details. However no pictures are known to exist of the Viaduct's construction, unless anyone knows differently!

The Viaduct acts as a sound barrier to St Cross from the noise created by its 20th century cousin, the M3. For the best part of 40 years the Friends of Hockley Viaduct have been keeping a watch on the Viaduct and had working parties to keep the foliage in check. In the mid 1980s Dr Edwin Course (now 90) obtained permission to drill behind the brick cladding to obtain 2 core samples of the mass concrete (now sadly lost). This proved it to be the oldest surviving mass concrete structure of modern times.

In WW1 the Viaduct and its line were vital for the Military camps like Avington and for access to Southampton Docks. During WW11 the line was closed to passenger traffic for 8 months and rebuilt for D Day: re-signalled with long passing loops to Winchester. In the year running up to D Day – 6th June 1944 – 16,000 trains crossed the Viaduct and, since it was a single track line, I reckon that meant a train every 30 minutes both day and night. Apart from the hardware coming down from the Midlands and North, Newbury Racecourse was a huge US supply depot. The Viaduct was vulnerable to attack with the Luftwaffe being only 30 minutes or less away, so a one mile link was built from the main Waterloo line into the DN&SR at Worthy Down. You can see the remains just after the A34 goes under the main Waterloo line.

The passenger service from Newbury to Winchester ceased in March 1960 – before the Beeching axe of 1962. The line was designated as a major freight route under Beeching – the first of the company trains from Esso Fawley to Birmingham used this line and Eastleigh was allocated 5 of the 140 steam locos that BR built – like “Evening Star” – to work these trains. Perhaps I should mention that the famous “City of Truro” came out of retirement in the late 1950s and worked passenger trains. She was the first locomotive to exceed 100mph and her sister engine was “City of Winchester”.

The Friends of Hockley Viaduct kept agitating for the Viaduct to be put to good use, such as a guided bus way, but eventually we found a champion in George Beckett. Applications to English Heritage to obtain listing status came to nothing – they even said the Viaduct was in the Cheriton near Folkestone!

For our part, after a lot of searching we were able to buy from Network Rail a genuine LSWR stop signal from Kew East Junction. We hope to dedicate this signal next year as a tribute to the railwaymen who helped to make D Day possible. We have received terrific enthusiasm from Nick Farthing of Sustrans, Andy Hickman, Eloise Appleby and Jayne Green of Winchester City Council, as well as our friends in the west – Chris Grove of the Tamar Valley Railway who prepared the signal and arranged transport. I must not forget Martin Day, the Kew signalman who alerted me to its scrapping. Why the signal? What did it do in the middle of the Viaduct? It was to ensure that trains approaching Shawford Junction were able to stop!

My thanks must go to the Friends of Hockley Viaduct, Julia for her “90 minutes to each hour” enthusiasm, and the original Friends of the Viaduct: the late Jeffrey Smith, Alderman and Mayor of this city; the late Alan Weeks; and Edwin Course. Also Kevin Robertson of Noodle Books for keeping the DN&SR alive with his books – his book is now on its 3rd reprint and a new one is being prepared to cover from 1948 to the closure of the line, so this Grand Opening today will be his last chapter!

Thank you again to everyone who made this resurrection of our heritage possible.