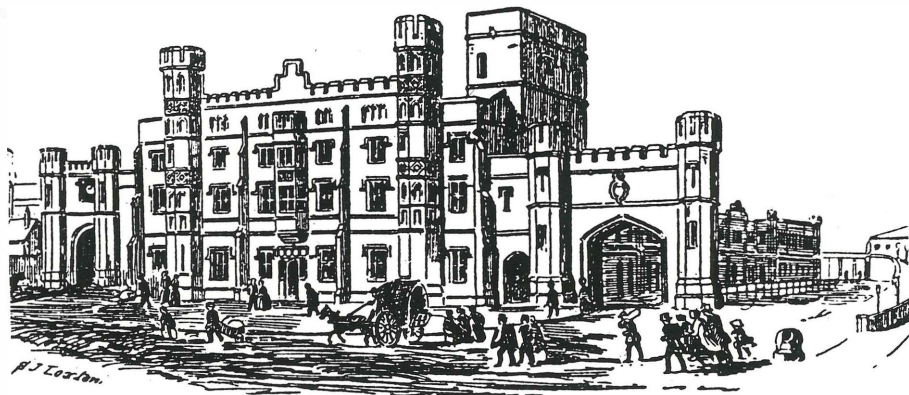


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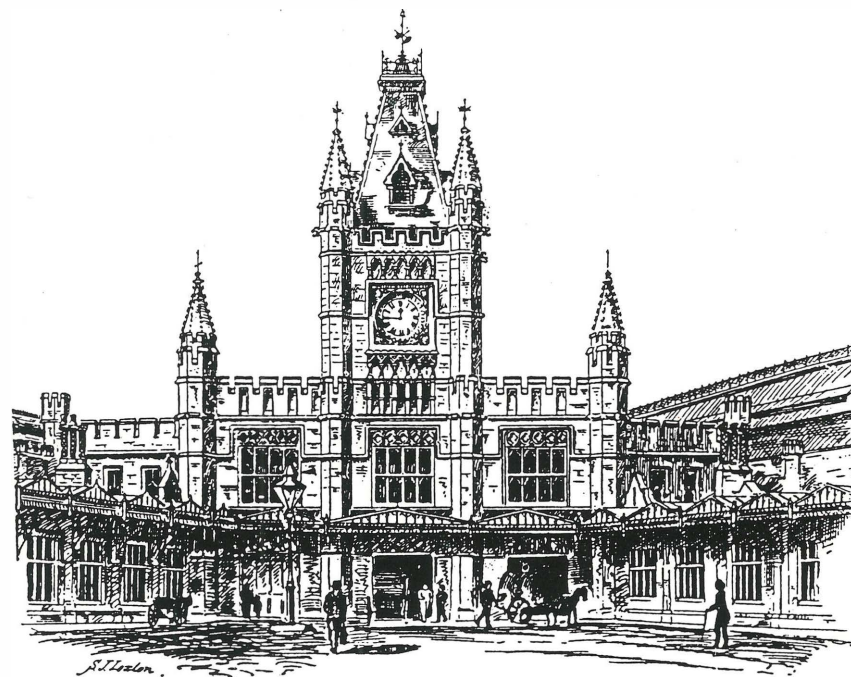
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# BRISTOL'S 'RAILWAY MANIA' 1862-1864

PETER HARRIS



BRISTOL BRANCH OF THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

LOCAL HISTORY PAMPHLETS

Hon. General Editor: PATRICK McGRATH

Assistant General Editor: PETER HARRIS

*Bristol's 'Railway Mania', 1862-1864* is the sixty-sixth pamphlet to be published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association. Its author, Peter Harris is national chairman of the Local History Committee of the Historical Association and a former Deputy President of the Association. He is Area Adviser for Gloucestershire and Avon as well as Honorary Secretary of the Bristol Branch. It was at his suggestion that this series of pamphlets was started in 1960, and his energy and enthusiasm as Honorary Assistant Editor and as Business Manager have made it possible for the series to flourish over the last twenty-seven years.

The illustration on the front cover shows the new Temple Meads Station of 1880. The back cover shows the original Great Western Railway offices on Bath Parade.

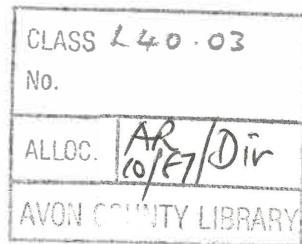
The next pamphlet in the series will be *The Bristol Gas Industry 1815-1949* by Dr Harold Nabbs.

The Pamphlet Appeal Fund, which is designed to put the series on a sound financial basis, is still open, and readers are invited to contribute. Donations should be sent to Peter Harris, 74 Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol BS9 2DG. Cheques should be made payable to the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association.

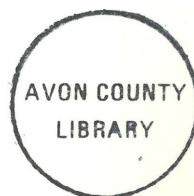
A list of pamphlets still in print is given on the inside back cover. Copies can be obtained from most Bristol booksellers, from the shop in the City Museum, from the Porter's Lodge in the Wills Memorial Building, or direct from Peter Harris.

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## BRISTOL'S 'RAILWAY MANIA'.

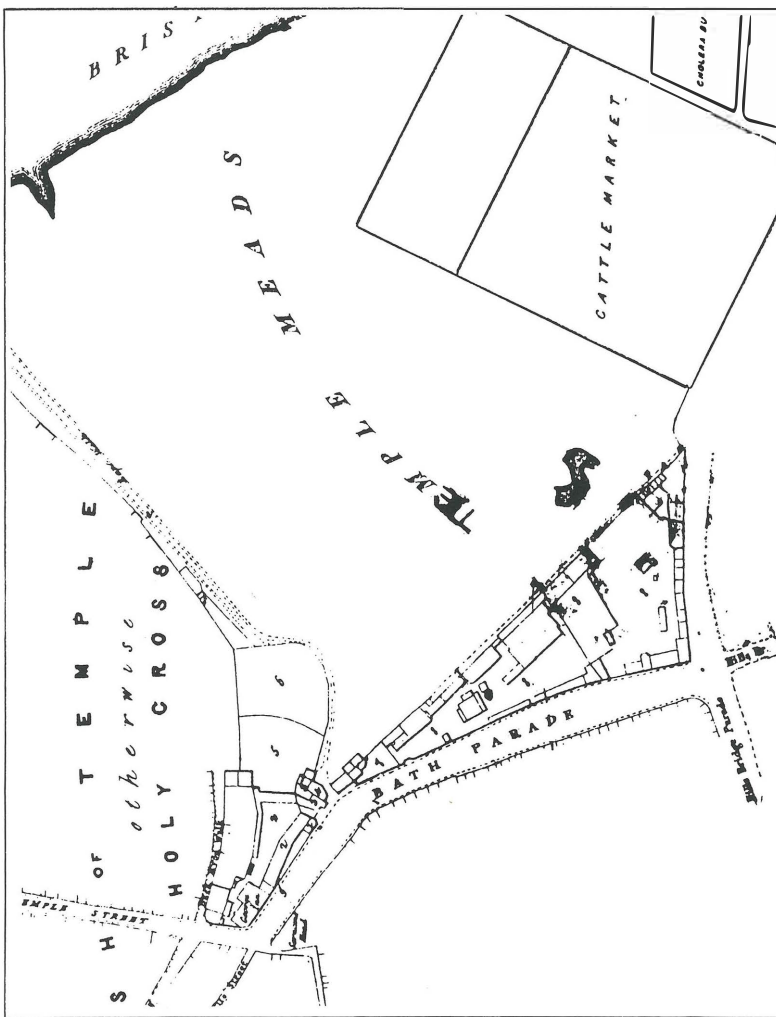
It is not always an advantage to be first in any major technological advance. Bristol was in the vanguard of railway construction when, in 1834, its citizens promoted the building of a railway from Bristol to London. When the Great Western Railway was opened it had a splendid terminus at Temple Meads, but time was to show the inconvenience of its situation and a number of attempts were made later to bring the railway into the heart of the city.

In 1840 few people realised all the implications that the building of a railway station would have for a large provincial city. In Bristol Brunel chose Temple Meads as the site of his terminus because it was the nearest piece of open land to the centre of the city if the approach route of the railway was to be along the valley of the river Avon. The station was just outside the old extended city walls with Temple Gate adjacent to the frontage of the offices. Earlier proposals had envisaged a terminus near Old Market and in 1835 Brunel stated that the Great Western Railway could have been carried across Pill Street and Queen Square, but in the event the area round Temple Meads was chosen because it was so sparsely populated and there was no need to displace many householders when the station was built. As it happened, much of the property between the station and Bristol Bridge was in fact demolished in the 1870's, but by then, of course, it was too late to bring the terminus nearer to the city.

When deciding on the position of the terminus for the Great Western Railway, Brunel does not seem to have considered any connection with the Bristol and Exeter Railway whose terminus was to be only a short distance away. As he was the engineer for

both lines, presumably planning for both was proceeding simultaneously, and this lack of foresight is surprising. It would seem that the two Boards of Directors wished to have separate stations and buildings which would emphasise the prosperity of their companies.

The plan of the site of Temple Meads [fig 1] shows that the land was still open and used for grazing. An assortment of sheds and



The site of Temple Meads Station as shown on Parliamentary Plan,  
1834

By courtesy of Bristol Record Office

houses lined Bath Parade while the northern edge of the property was still being used as a rope-walk.

The building which Brunel erected on this plot is unique in railway history. It was intended to be a 'comprehensive railway building' containing most of the services necessary for running a railway. At the track level there were separate arrival and departure platforms with five lines of track between them. The station section was covered by an overall roof with rooflights over the platforms. Beyond this section was an extension of the carriage shed with a much lower roof. Trains which had just arrived were drawn into this section and the engine was switched to another track by a movable set of rails called a 'sector table' which was built at the far end of the station. The engine was then free to leave the station by another track. The carriages were transferred to other tracks where they were prepared for their next journey. In the office block which faced on Bath Parade, there was an impressive Boardroom for the Directors with an equally impressive office adjoining it for the company secretary. There were other offices connected with the administration of the railway, and over the extension of the carriage shed was a drawing office for the engineers. There were two large strongrooms built into the offices. There were also domestic quarters for the Company Clerk who resided in the building. As the whole station was built on arches, these were used for storage and stabling.

The goods station was to the north of building and at a lower level. The only services not available on this site were the engine sheds and the coke ovens which were some short distance along the line towards Bath.

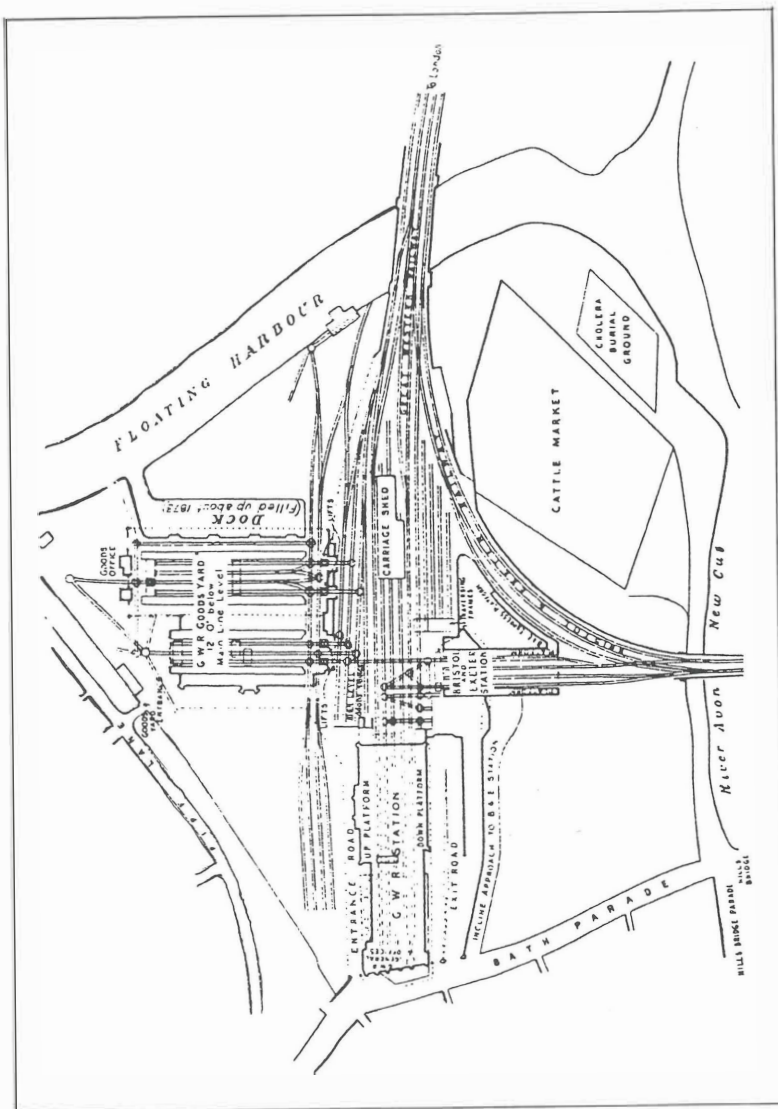
The station was intended for the use of first and second class passengers. When Parliament decreed that third class passengers must be carried, they joined the train at a point outside the station.

The station was very definitely a terminus. By building the office block across the end of the tracks Brunel made it impossible to convert it into a through station, a fact which must have annoyed future generations of railway planners.

The Bristol and Exeter Railway Company also built its station on Temple Meads, adjacent to but at right angles to the Great Western Station. Shortly after the railway opened, the bridge carrying the Great Western over the Floating Harbour was widened to carry an extra pair of tracks. These curved round the edge of the cattle market to form a direct connection with the Bristol and Exeter line. The shape of this curve was to dictate the



present shape of the station. A platform was built by the Bristol and Exeter Company known as the 'Express Platform'. Here all through trains from London to the West of England stopped to pick up and put down passengers. The Great Western station was



PLAN OF THE BRISTOL STATIONS, 1845

used for trains from London and Gloucester which terminated there. [Fig 2].

After all this it is surprising how little Bristol was affected by the spate of railway promotions of the mid-1840's. The period 1844-47 is often referred to in English History as the 'Railway Mania'. During these years hundreds of proposals for new railways were made. In 1845 there were 620 schemes proposed, which, if constructed, would have cost £563,203,000. In 1846 there were another 369 schemes for England and Wales which could have cost another £184,000,000.

One area of calm in this storm of speculation was Bristol. Only five Bills were submitted to Parliament during this period which affected the city. They were:

- 1844 A Bristol and Exeter Railway Company Bill which included the branch line from Yatton to Clevedon.
- 1845 The Bristol and South Wales Junction Railway from Temple Meads to New Passage.
- 1845 The Portbury Pier and Railway. This was to be a line to Portishead via a tunnel under Failand. From the plan it appears that Brunel thought that it might be a suitable line for the use of the Atmospheric system of locomotion.
- 1845 The Dover and Bristol Railway - proposing a line from Bristol to Queen Charlton. This was the most speculative proposal.
- 1846 The Bristol and Poole Harbour Railway - Routed via Knowle, Clutton, Radstock, Shepton Mallet, Blandford, Corfe and Poole Harbour.

This limited interest in the Railway Mania may have been because in the eighteen forties the investors of Bristol felt that the city's railway needs were adequately served by the existing lines. The G.W.R. provided a link with London and the major cities to the east. The Bristol and Gloucester was the way to the Midlands and the North. The first section of this line had opened from Mangotsfield to Bristol in August 1835, a few weeks before the G.W.R. bill was approved. The line was extended to Gloucester and, by a series of complicated arrangements with the G.W.R., it was agreed to alter the gauge from 4 feet 8½ inches to the broad gauge of 7 feet. This was mainly at the insistence of Brunel. The result of this was the notorious scene of chaos at Gloucester where passengers from Bristol who were travelling on to the Midlands

had to leave their broad gauge train and cross the platform to board a standard gauge train to Birmingham. While this worked reasonably well for passengers, luggage and goods were always going astray in the changeover. Gloucester was also important because it marked the junction with the lines to South Wales.

The link with the West of England was the Bristol and Exeter Railway which in its early years was operated by the Great Western Railway. The line from Bristol to the West left the city by a route which was reasonably level. The line to Gloucester had a steady climb to Fishponds but was probably the easiest route north from the city. What Bristol did not have was a direct route to the South coast [hence the projected Bristol and Poole Harbour line of 1845].

It is likely that many Bristolians participated in the great scramble to get rich in the eighteen-forties and some may have lost their savings when the railway bubble finally burst.

Bristol's railway mania occurred in the 1860's. There were several reasons, but the most obvious one was the position of Temple Meads Station as the principal station for the city. At this time the main traffic carried by the railway was passengers and first and second class passengers at that. Third class travellers were something which had been forced on the Railway Companies by the 1844 Act and were not to be encouraged. Goods traffic did not figure largely in the revenue of the Great Western Company until the end of this decade.

This meant that most of the potential passengers were wealthy business men and citizens of the city. By the 1860's many of them were moving from the centre of the city to the more salubrious areas of Redland and Clifton. To reach Temple Meads from these suburbs meant a journey by cab or on foot to the centre of the city where they would cross the River Frome by the Drawbridge and continue by way of Clare Street to Baldwin Street and Bristol Bridge. [Baldwin Street did not run directly from the Drawbridge to Bristol Bridge until 1881]. In 1860 Bristol Bridge was much narrower than it is today but an extra eleven feet were added in 1861 by building the footpaths out from the sides of the bridge.

After crossing the bridge, the traveller turned sharp left into Bath Street and then went along Temple Street to Bath Parade. According to contemporary accounts, these two streets consisted of 'mean and dirty dwellings' and the roads themselves were narrow and muddy. It was to avoid this part of the journey that people looked for an alternative site for a station which should be

closer to the city centre.

At this time, too, the city docks were becoming more prosperous as a result of the new policy which the Docks Committee adopted in 1858. This policy was to improve the docks in the city rather than build new ones at the mouth of Avon. However, there was no direct railway access to the docks. All goods unloaded from ships for transit by rail had to be loaded into carts at the quayside and carried to the goods station. There was a small dock adjacent to the Great Western goods shed but as it was upstream of Bristol Bridge, it was useless for sea-going ships and only river boats could use it.

It was partly to remedy these deficiencies that a string of railway Bills were promoted in the early 1860s.

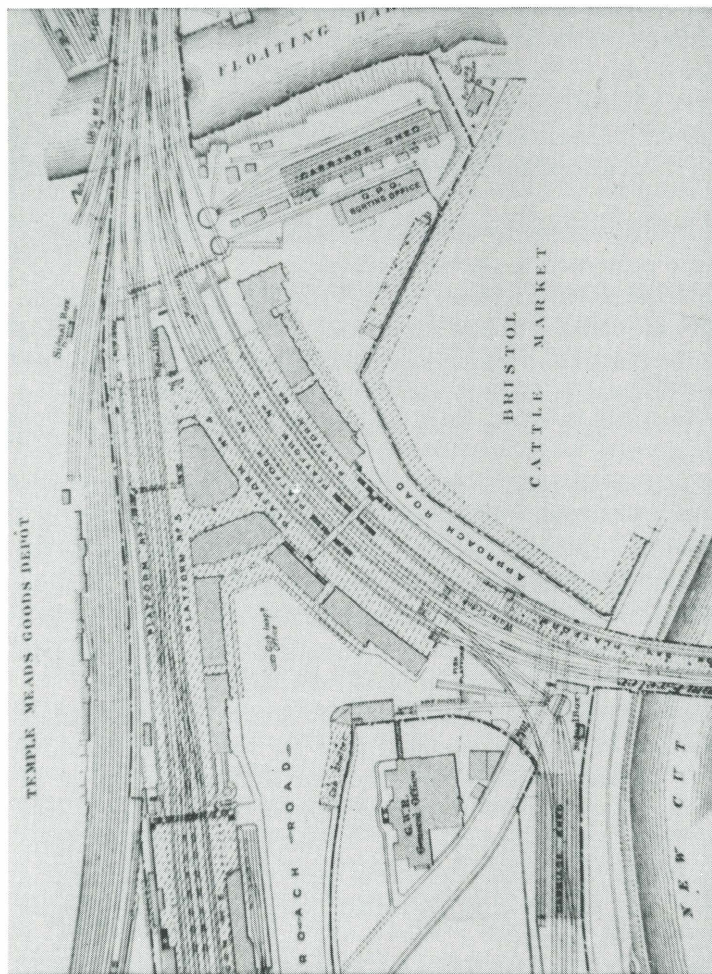
In 1860 the North Somerset Railway Bill was sent to parliament. It was for the construction of a line from St Phillips on the Midland line [as the Bristol and Gloucester railway had been acquired by the Midland Railway in 1845] to join the Somerset Central Railway at Wells. There were to be branches to Fishponds, Radstock and Camerton.

1861 saw three major bills. The first was the Bristol Port Railway and Pier Bill which was for the construction of a line alongside the river Avon from a point at Hotwells just below the Suspension Bridge to Avonmouth. From the Hotwells terminus to Sea Mills it followed roughly the present Portway and the railway line. A pier was to be built at Avonmouth to allow passengers to board ships which could not or would not sail up the Avon.

The second bill was for the Bristol and South Western Junction Railway and this was a modified plan for the North Somerset Railway. Instead of using the Midland Railway station at St Phillips, it proposed to build a new station on the site of the Cattle Market Yard, adjacent to the G.W.R. and the Bristol and Exeter stations at Temple Meads. The rest of the proposed route was as in the 1860 bill except that it would join the Dorset Central Railway at Wincanton.

The third bill appeared to be a very modest one – an extension to the Bristol and South Wales Union Railway from New Passage to Avonmouth. The original Bill for the Bristol and South Wales Union Railway had received the Royal assent in 1857 and this enabled a line to be built from just outside Temple Meads station to New Passage. Designed by Brunel, it was the first major change in the local railway scene for many years. Passengers for South Wales could travel from Bristol to New Passage where the line ran along





Plan of Temple Meads Joint Station, 1880  
*Great Western Railway Magazine*, 1907

a pier out into the River Severn. Here they transferred from the train to a steam ferry which carried them across the river to a corresponding pier at Portskewett where they boarded another train to carry them to Newport and Cardiff. The line opened on 8 September 1863 and was operated by the Great Western Railway. It did not provide an easy route to Wales, the ferry boats were unreliable, the voyage was often rough and travellers might find themselves stranded and spending the night in the New Passage Hotel. However, this bill of 1861 was to provide the first link between the main railway system and Avonmouth.

Then in 1862 came the first of a series of schemes which, it was hoped, would improve the railway facilities in the city itself. This was the Bristol and Clifton Railway Bill. The line was intended to fill two needs. Firstly, it was intended to link Temple Meads with a station in Clifton. From a junction to the east of Temple Meads the new line would pass alongside the station to cross Bath Parade on a bridge and then proceed through Redcliffe on a series of arches. It would cross the river Avon on a lifting bridge at about the site of the present road bridge. It would then cross the southern side of Queen Square [parallel to the Grove] on arches and a low embankment. The embankment would also support a passenger station to serve Queen Square. A viaduct would carry the track across Prince Street before crossing St Augustines Reach on another movable bridge. This would allow ships to sail up the Frome to Quayhead. The track would continue along the line of Anchor Road before crossing St Georges Road to a terminus just below the site of the old Police Station on Brandon Hill. The second function of the line was to provide a rail link with the City Docks. From the Prince Street side of the bridge over St Augustines Reach a network of tramways were to cover many of the quays around the Floating Harbour. Goods could then be unloaded directly from the ships into railway wagons and sent by rail to their destinations.

The directors of the Company which put forward this bill were some of the most distinguished men in the city – Philip Skinner Miles of Penpole House, William Harford the younger, James Bush, member of the Docks Committee 1858–1866, Handel Cosham of Shortwood Lodge, John Bates of Royal York Crescent, another member of the Docks Committee 1860–1861, Francis Kentucky Barnes, timber importer, William Killigrew Wait, grain merchant and owner of the Granary on the Welsh Back and Mark Whitwell of the ships chandlers in the Grove.

The solicitors for the Company were Brice and Burgess and the office of the Company was at 52 Queen Square. The Engineer in Chief was John Fowler with Charles Richardson, who was well known in local railway circles, as his assistant. The capital required for the construction of the line was estimated to be £250,000. Of this sum the Great Western Railway offered to provide half the amount and the other half as a loan at 4%. As the G.W.R. would be the majority shareholders the line would be constructed for the broad gauge.

The reaction of the citizens to this proposal seems to have been mixed. The more influential bodies in the city like the Merchant Venturers and the Chamber of Commerce welcomed the scheme. A memorial in favour of the line was received by the City Council, signed by 5144 owners of property within the city. A counter petition, opposing the line, was signed by 1970 merchants, traders and shipmasters. According to Latimer there was strong opposition to the Bill from a number of influential members of the Council who suggested that scheme would 'divert the commerce of Bristol from the city'. Various procedural moves were made to prevent the Council supporting the Bill and, when the Parliamentary Committee of the Council recommended that the Bill should pass, Alderman Ford [the owner of extensive warehouses] called the supporters of the scheme 'traitors to their native city'.

Other objections to the Bill came from a variety of sources. The washerwomen who lived around Brandon Hill used the slopes for drying their washing and feared that the building of the station would deprive them of this right. Residents of Queen Square complained that they would lose their 'rights of enjoying Queen Square'. A similar complaint came from property owners who lived near Brandon Hill.

Eventually the Bill went forward to Parliament where the opposition was maintained before the Select Committee.

The route of the line was inspected by Col. Yolland, R.E. of the Railway Department of the Board of Trade. The tour was made on foot but the sites of the river crossings were also inspected from a tug specially chartered for the occasion.

According to the Colonel's report there were three main objections to the projected route:-

1. Low bridges over three main streets at the entrance to the city would hinder the passage of road vehicles.
2. The opening bridges over the arms of the Floating Harbour would be dangerous to shipping in bad weather and sparks

from passing locomotives could increase the risk of fires on the dockside.

3. The benefits of such a line could be obtained by the presentation of a better Bill at a future date.

A number of suggestions were made, presumably to be incorporated in a 'better Bill'. Steam locomotives should not be used on the Quayside tramways. As the quays were of varying heights they would have to be made up to a standard height. The Harbour Master would control the opening of the bridges and the Bristol and Exeter Railway and the Midland Railway were also to be allowed to use the line. The section across Queens Square should be supported by a lattice girder viaduct on cast iron columns except for the station which would be on a solid embankment.

The Bill failed to survive the Committee stage at Westminster and this particular project was lost as was the £12,000 for the parliamentary expenses.

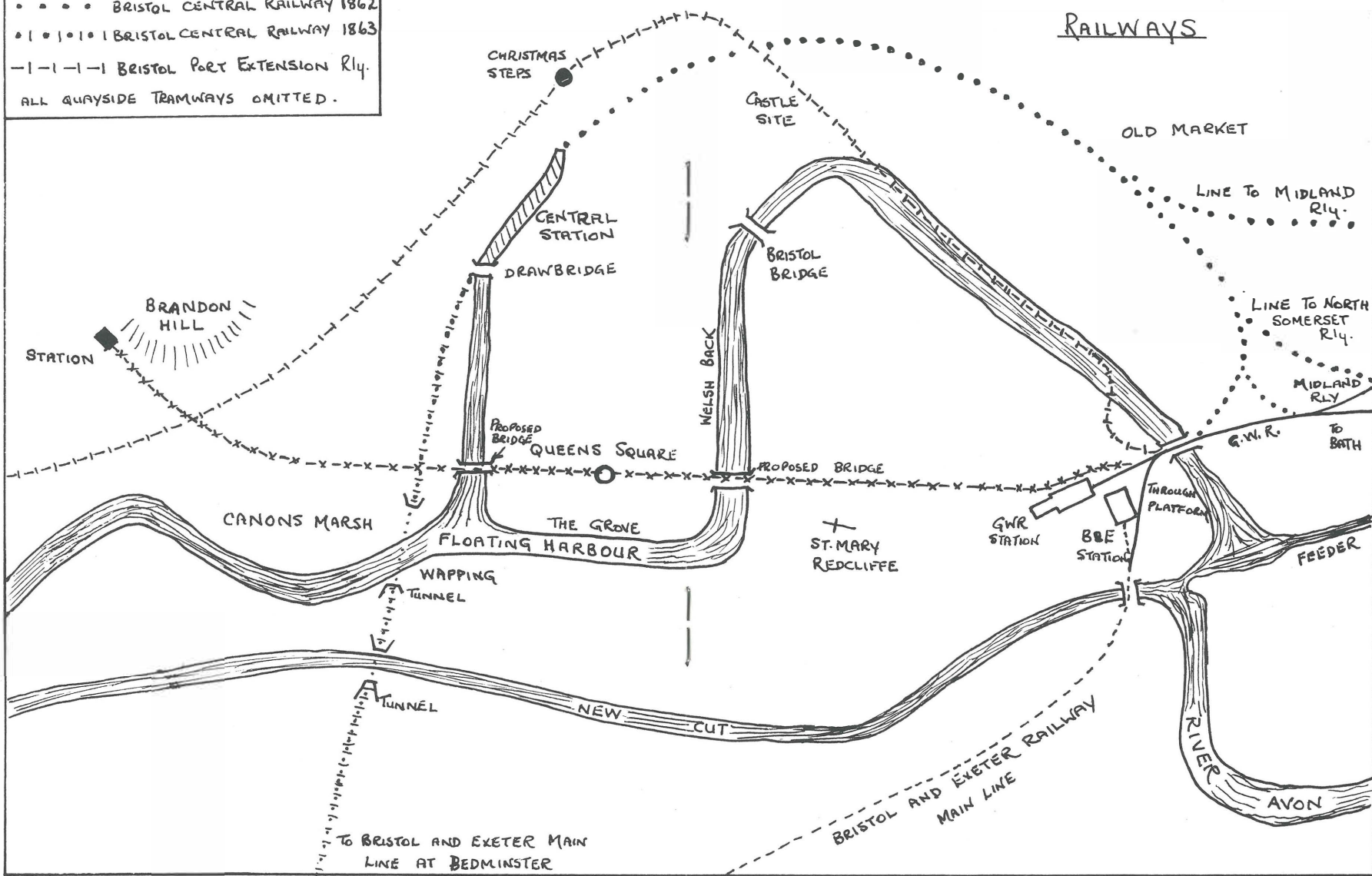
There would have been serious drawbacks to the scheme had it been completed. The new line would have created an alternative terminus to Temple Meads at Brandon Hill. Trains to and from London would have by-passed Temple Meads while trains to and from Exeter would have needed to reverse at the eastern end of the station to reach the Bristol and Clifton line. Also the Midland Railway would have insisted on the track being laid to the mixed gauge. Present day conservationists may ponder on the lack of opposition to the ruin of Queen Square, and there is no reference to the possible effects on St Mary Redcliffe.

It was not long before a replacement Bill appeared. This was the Bristol Central Railway Station Bill. The proposed line would leave the G.W.R. at a point to the east of Temple Meads station and cross the land near Midland Road to reach a point at No.60 Old Market Street. Here it would be joined by a branch line from the Midland Railway at St Phillips before crossing Broadmead [the plan is not very precise as to where this crossing would be]. From there it would go by way of Rupert Street to a station which was to be built over the river Frome between Quayhead and the Drawbridge. Whether it was intended to cover the whole area as far as the Drawbridge is hard to discover. There is a charming vagueness about the exact size of the station. That particular stretch of the river Frome seems to have been used as a yard for the storage of stone and flagstones for paving the streets. These were brought up river by boat and stored there until required. The station would not be occupying valuable quayspace which had

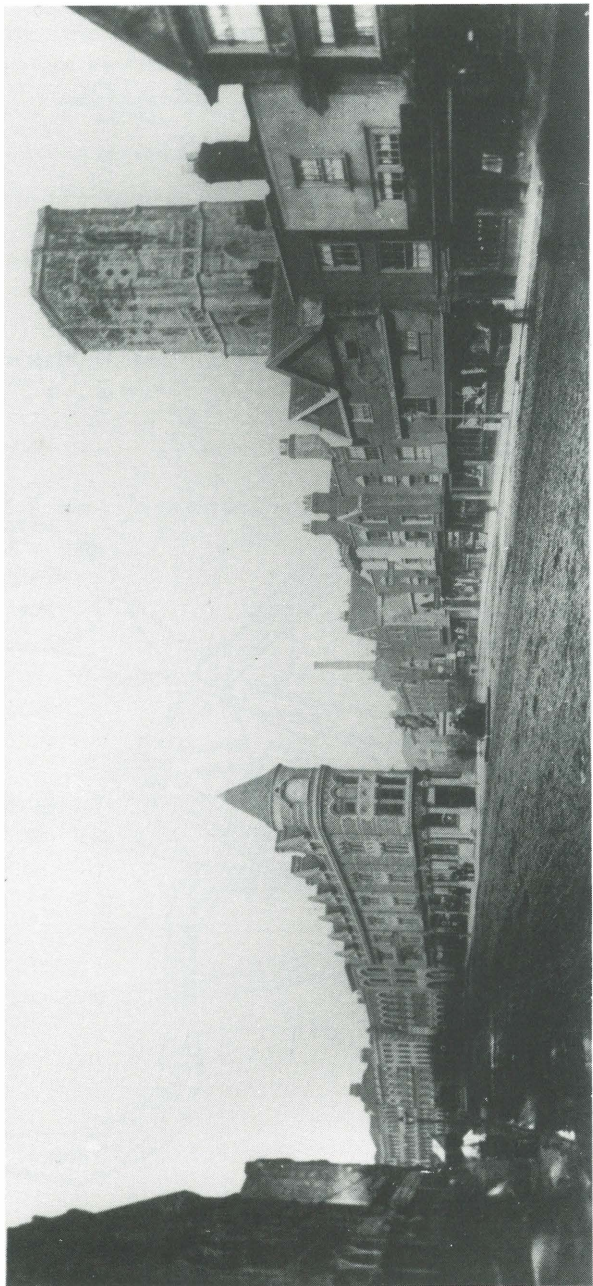


- x-x-x-x BRISTOL AND CLIFTON RAILWAY
- • • • BRISTOL CENTRAL RAILWAY 1862
- | • | • | • | BRISTOL CENTRAL RAILWAY 1863
- | - | - | - | BRISTOL PORT EXTENSION Rly.
- ALL QUAYSIDE TRAMWAYS OMITTED.

# PROPOSED BRISTOL RAILWAYS







*Victoria Street after 1871 (Temple Street to left of picture)  
Reece Winstone Collection*

been one of the main objections to the Bristol and Clifton scheme.

The proposal was supported by a provisional committee headed by the Hon. Henry Fitzhardinge Berkeley, MP for Bristol, together with W.H. Gore Langton, the other Bristol MP. There was an impressive list of other local gentlemen to support the two MPs. The capital required was estimated as £300,000 to be raised by the sale of 30,000 shares of £10 each. The initial deposit for a share was to be £1. The engineers were Messrs. Maclean and Stileman of 17 Great George Street, Westminster.

The Bristol and Clifton scheme had been strongly supported by the Great Western Railway but the company was less enthusiastic about the Central Station project. There was strong support from the Midland Railway and from a newcomer, the North Somerset Railway, which had been seeking a way of entering the city as well as a site for a station. The Central Station offered it a chance to share a station with all the other companies. The North Somerset was having difficulty in getting its bill through Parliament as the Great Western Railway was uneasy at the prospect of a standard gauge line approaching Bristol from the south. It is significant that three of the directors of the Central Station scheme were also directors of the North Somerset Company. The North Somerset was not too concerned about the gauge of its line. If the Great Western were interested, then it could be built to the broad gauge. If not, they would build it to the standard gauge and hope that the Midland and London and South Western Railways would support them.

The Central scheme, following so closely on the Bristol and Clifton one, was prompted by a decision taken by the Directors of the Great Western Railway to avoid becoming involved with any further schemes for a central station and instead to look at ways of enlarging and improving Temple Meads station.

The original Bill for the Bristol Central Station was withdrawn in 1862 for lack of support but it was to reappear in a modified form in 1863.

In November 1863 two sets of plans were deposited with the Clerk of the Peace. The first was the modified Bristol Central Station plan. Now, instead of terminating the line at the Central Station, it was to continue along St Augustines Parade, across Canons Marsh to a tunnel which would carry it under the Floating Harbour and then under the New Cut in another tunnel before joining the Bristol and Exeter line at Bedminster. A branch would link up with a possible line to Portishead and another would





View of station from bottom of incline (tram shed on left) about 1890  
*Reece Winstone Collection*

connect with the North Somerset Railway.

This was a much more realistic proposition in that it recognised the need for a through station and not a terminus. It brought all the railways serving the city into one station [except the Port Railway and Pier which was still isolated at Hotwells]. Had this station been built Bristol would have been in a similar position to Birmingham with a main line station in the centre of the city. Would the bridge over the Bristol Central Station have become as important as the famous one at New Street Station, now incorporated in a modern block of shops and offices?

There is no doubt that the construction of this line would have changed the original street plan between the Centre and Old Market but probably no more than it was changed a hundred years later. The most difficult engineering works on the line would have been the tunnels under the Harbour and the New Cut. Covering the river Frome at the Centre might have seemed a problem but by 1940 this had been done for a longer stretch of the river than the Central Station plan had envisaged. The Cathedral would have suffered no more from the proximity of trains than it did at the beginning of the century when the Goods Depot at Canons Marsh was built. The prospect of a double line of track through Broadmead is an intriguing one.

Neither the Great Western Railway nor the Bristol and Exeter Railway were pleased with this scheme as it would have made Temple Meads Station redundant. The high cost of the line and doubts as to whether the tunnels could be built led to the scheme being dropped.

The other scheme put forward in 1863 was the Bristol Port Extension Railway. Its directors included some who had earlier supported the Bristol and Clifton bill and it represented the response of the opposition party to the central station scheme. The three main line railway companies said that they would support this scheme.

The proposed line was to leave the Great Western main line at a point to the east of Temple Meads station and swing northwards across the river from the south bank of the Avon. It was then carried over the river towards Bristol Bridge on a viaduct supported by girders resting on the banks. When the line reached the point where the Castle Ditch joins the river, it continued across the centre of the city. It crossed St. Peters Street and the top of Union Street. A station was to be built at the bottom of Christmas Steps and the line would continue to cross Park Street and then,

skirting the edges of Brandon Hill, continue to Jacobs Wells Road [then known as Woodwell Lane]. The line then ran along the lower slopes of Clifton to another station at Clifton Vale. Presumably a tunnel was to be excavated to carry the line under the end of Royal York Crescent. From here the line would continue along the bank of the river to join up with the Port Railway at its terminus below the Suspension Bridge.

The capital required for this project was estimated at £450,000, to be raised by the sale of 24,000 £20 shares. When all the capital had been subscribed and half had been paid up, the company could borrow to the amount of £160,000.

The line was to be of mixed gauge and there would be two long branches which would serve various quays in the City Docks. It would provide a direct link with Avonmouth for trains coming from London and the Midlands but those from Exeter and the West would have to pass through Temple Meads station and then reverse on to the new line.

The cost of purchasing all the property along the route was estimated as £242,562. There was considerable opposition to the bill. It seems likely that the corporation opposed it for political rather than amenity reasons. There is also some doubt as to whether it was a serious attempt to build a railway or whether it was a ploy to block the Bristol Central Station scheme. It was almost certainly part of the backstairs wrangling which occupied the various groups connected with the docks. The only body which might have welcomed the scheme would have been the Port Railway and Pier Company which, only a few years later, was to fall into the hands of the Receiver.

By 1864 other plans were being discussed to improve the railway facilities and most of these were on the edge of the city rather than in the middle. There was the plan to enlarge and improve Temple Meads Station. This led to the Bristol Joint Station Bill of 1865 which became law in the June of that year. It authorised the building of a new station on the Temple Meads site, the cost to be shared by the three companies using the station. Although the Port Extension Railway bill had been rejected and there were no further proposals for central stations, the Great Western Railway and the Midland Railway could not agree on the proportion of the costs that each should bear. As a result work on the station did not begin until 1871 and the new station was not completed until 1878. By this date the Bristol and Exeter Railway company had become part of the Great Western Railway and so the greater part of the

total cost was borne by the Great Western Company.

The new station was built in the Gothic style and its splendid overall roof, Gothic tower and imposing entrance hall were considered to be a credit to the city. From now on the station was known as the 'Bristol Joint Station' [and so it remained until nationalisation in 1948]. Even when completed the new station was barely large enough to cope with the increasing volume of passengers. All trains to Devon and Cornwall still passed through the station as did the increasing number of trains from the North. Delays were frequent and several minor accidents at the station were blamed on overcrowding. The original Brunel terminus platforms were extended and a new trainshed was built over the extension alongside the new station. These platforms in the future would be used more by Midland Railway trains than by Great Western ones. The Boardroom and offices in the original building were no longer used for their original purpose and the whole block was taken over by the Goods Department. The imposing Bristol and Exeter building was closer to the passenger station and so this became the offices of the Divisional Superintendent of the Great Western Railway.

In 1865 another development had helped to maintain Temple Meads as the main station for the city. A proposal to build a new street from Bristol Bridge to Bath Parade was revived. It had been put forward in 1845 as part of a package of road improvements but had never been carried out because of the cost and local hostility to the scheme. The work seems to have been carried out quickly and the cost, £46,000 was less than the estimate. Eventually this was recovered by the sale of properties along the new street which was called Victoria Street. This removed one of the main objections to the position of Temple Meads station.

As passenger traffic on the railways was increasing, so too was the freight traffic. By 1867 the Goods Department of the Great Western Railway was producing the larger part of the Company's revenue. True, much of this was due to the South Wales coal traffic but business over the whole system was looking up and this increased interest in providing access to the Bristol City docks. In 1866 the Bristol Harbour Railway Act led to the construction of the line which was carried over Victoria Street on a bridge and under St Mary Redcliffe church in a tunnel to Wapping Wharf. By 1906 the Bristol Harbour Extension Railway extended the line from Wapping to join the Portishead Branch at Ashton Junction. This line was carried across the New Cut on that remarkable



double-deck swing bridge which carried the road from Cumberland Basin on the top deck and the railway underneath. Today the road deck has gone and the bridge cannot be swung.

Also in 1906 an extension to the Harbour Railways provided a link with the new Goods Shed and depot at Canons Marsh. This was the first rail link for the quays on the north side of the river. It meant that a swing bridge had to be built across the Junction Lock at Hotwells and this had to remain open to docks traffic most of the time, only closing when a train had to cross. The Depot at Canons Marsh was the nearest point to the city centre reached by the railway. Narrow Quay, the Grove and the Welsh Back were never served by the railway.

Efforts to improve the local passenger service continued after 1865. The Clifton Extension Railway Act received the Royal Assent in 1867. This was a joint effort of the Great Western Railway, the Midland Railway and the Bristol Port Railway and Pier company. Needless to say, the first two companies provided most of the money. The line from Ashley Hill junction to Clifton Down opened in October 1874 with an intermediate station at Montpelier [Redland Station did not open until 1897]. The completion of the Clifton Down tunnel and the connection with the Port Railway at Sneyd Park Junction gave the first direct connection from Temple Meads to Avonmouth. At last Clifton had its own station. There was a junction with the Midland Railway to Fishponds and until 3 September 1939 it was possible to travel from Clifton Down Station to Bath via Mangotsfield. The Portishead branch had been opened in 1867 and was originally worked by the Bristol and Exeter Railway as a broad gauge line. All of these lines served Temple Meads. The additional stations which were opened on the South Wales line were intended to feed passengers on to long distance trains rather than to act as part of a suburban network.

The opening of the Severn Tunnel made some of the suburban stations more important. Stapleton Road station became a junction and dealt with nearly as many trains each day as Temple Meads. All trains to and from South Wales stopped there as well as trains from Cardiff to Portsmouth which did not pass through Temple Meads. Before the opening of the Severn Bridge commercial travellers from Bristol who were going to work in South Wales would catch the early morning trains from Stapleton Road and Ashley Hill stations to Newport or Cardiff. There they would travel up the valleys by local trains.

For most Bristolians the suburban stations were places where one caught a train to Temple Meads, there to travel on to a distant destination, or to catch an excursion train to Weston, Weymouth or one of the other holiday places which were popular with residents of the city. Most of the suburban stations did not support much traffic between stations. Some people who lived close to the Clifton Extension line would travel from Shirehampton and Sea Mills to Clifton Down or Montpelier. When the Fry's chocolate factory was moved to Keynsham a special train ran from Stapleton Road station to Keynsham to carry workers who would otherwise have had to move house in order to be nearer to their work. Residents of St Anne's Park might travel to Bedminster but, by and large, these local stations fed Temple Meads up to the time of the Beeching closures.

Just as local stations attracted little commuter traffic, so the railways carried only a small amount of local goods traffic. There was still an extensive network of local carriers whose horse drawn carts visited surrounding villages once or twice a week carrying parcels of goods from Bristol up until 1914.

The problem of easy access to Temple Meads station still remained after the construction of Victoria Street. There were plenty of cabs to convey passengers to the station where they would be set down at the top of the incline outside of the main entrance. Passengers arriving by train found a cabstand with cabs waiting to carry them to the city centre and Clifton.

For those who worked in the city and wished to travel daily to Temple Meads from one of the suburban stations, it was a long walk to Bristol Bridge and from there to an office in the central area. The construction of a horse tram route from Bristol Bridge to Totterdown [Three Lamps] in 1879 provided a quick and cheap way of reaching the station. In 1881 the line was extended from Bristol Bridge to St. Augustines Parade by way of the newly-widened Baldwin Street. At some stage the Tramway Company had rented the space between the old station building and the incline and a covered shed was built here as a terminus for horse trams from the Centre. In 1899 this route was electrified and, when the routes were given numbers in 1913, it became the No.17 route, Temple Meads—Tramways Centre—Hotwells. This service continued until the mid-1930s when the Tramway Company began to run bus services to the top of the incline from various parts of the city suburbs. The tram service ceased and the shed was eventually demolished, the site being used for the staff canteen

which was built during the Second World War. For most commuters the quickest route to the Centre or Old Market was to walk to the bottom of the incline and catch the trams or later, the buses which went along Victoria Street.

For many who worked in the city and travelled to and fro by train, the long trudge up the incline after a long day's work must have seemed endless and even worse if one was late. For travellers with luggage it was a daunting obstacle to overcome. The closure of some local stations and the reduction in the number of stopping trains in the 1960s emphasised the role of Temple Meads as a station for long distance travel. In 1970 British Rail opened an experimental station on the site of the old marshalling yard at Stoke Gifford. Christened Bristol Parkway, it provided free parking and an opportunity for travellers to use the express trains on the London-South Wales route. The introduction of High Speed trains with a journey time of 1 hour 10 minutes from Paddington produced the first serious challenge to the position of Temple Meads. The new station has attracted the custom of many travellers who live on the north side of the city.

For several years there have been proposals to build a 'Metro' railway similar to that in Newcastle on Tyne, using parts of the existing British Rail system, some of the disused routes and new sections in tunnels under the city centre. It is unlikely that such a system could now be financed from public funds and an independent company has been set up to promote the scheme and to find the necessary money. If such a system is built it will bring new life to the Clifton Extension line and could lead to the re-opening of other local stations.

In 1985, as part of the G.W.R. 150 celebrations, steam and diesel trains were run on the Portishead branch. This led many people to ask if the branch could be re-opened properly for commuter traffic. However the final judgement of an official in the County of Avon Planning Department was, "How many passengers will want to travel to Temple Meads? It is too far from the city."

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

This paper is based on a study of the deposited Parliamentary Railway plans in the Bristol Record Office and on *Gazette* notices and summaries of evidence before Select Committees which are also available in the Record Office. There is a good deal of useful material in the following works:

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