

The coming of the railway

Brighton and other coastal towns of Sussex were transformed by the arrival of the railway in the 19th century. But how did rail industry innovations influence the development of the local tourism industry?

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DIRECT ELECTRIC SERVICES LONDON—BRIGHTON



Southern Railway, 1934 by Walter Spradbery



From a Water Colour by RICHARD WARD

With the arrival of railways in the second half of the 19th century, Brighton and the surrounding market and coastal towns of Sussex were transformed by new rail routes bringing increased tourist numbers. Brighton had thronged with refined visitors since Regency times, becoming part and parcel of the calendar season. The resort grew considerably during Victoria's reign, a fetching and bustling destination for day excursion and progressively for short and longer stay visitors. As a result of a fast and convenient London rail connection, by the mid-1880s a selection of suitable hotels was added to Cook's yearly tourist guides. With the 1899 August bank holiday, the *Brighton Gazette* celebrated the traditional glories of the 'Sussex Fortnight'. They talked of the 'general migration of the masses' to the seaside enjoying 'many facilities

for the free indulgence of pleasures that once only belonged to the well-to-do'. The piers and seafront amenities were ideal for visitors 'making the most of what they find going on'. The city to coast London, Brighton and South Coast Railway (LBSCR) – often referred to as the Brighton Company – coped exceedingly well with busy summertime travellers. And it was not just one-way traffic as rapid London train links coupled to the capital's burgeoning commercial status, saw Brighton morph into a year-round commuter town.

The journey from Victoria was short, with passengers enjoying comparatively inexpensive third-class fares. Certainly, cheap day-tickets were primed at certain times of the year. Visitors were met with an array of accommodation to suit all pockets. In addition to hotels, comfortably furnished boarding houses with sitting-rooms and bedrooms sprung up attracting

EASTBOURNE



Official Handbook from Publicity Manager (Dept. S.R.)
Information Bureau. Eastbourne.

FREQUENT ELECTRIC TRAINS · CHEAP FARES
SOUTHERN RAILWAY



'The Brighton Belle was said to be so punctual that you could set a watch by its Victoria departure'

ABOVE:
Brighton and
Hove tourism
poster, 1935
Charles Pears

LEFT:
Eastbourne,
Southern Railway,
1925 Kenneth
Denton Shoemith
Photo: Southern
Railway

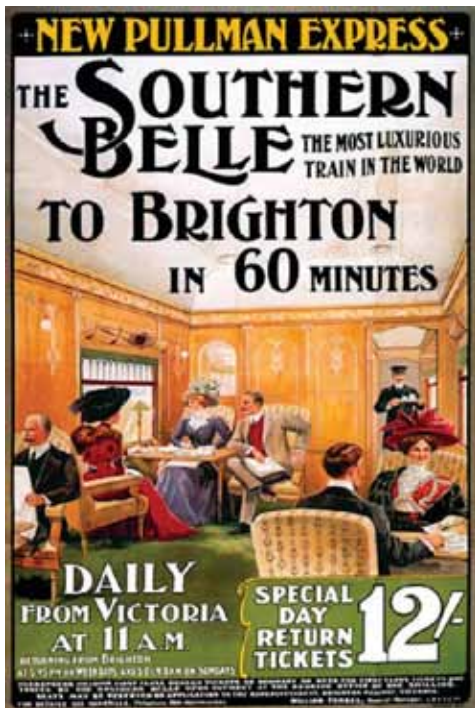
a fast-developing family visitor market. Away from the coast comfortable country apartments on the South Downs enticed many Victorian town-dwellers drawn to exploring an upland landscape and its rural lifestyles. By the early years of the 20th century Brighton possessed one of the country's most in demand sea vistas. Its well-cultivated image held a strong attraction for an affluent clientele. With hoteliers using an array of marketing slogans such as the 'Ace of Watering Places', it was hardly surprising the town had its fashionable following. With Cowes Week, royalty and

London society could be found on the nearby Solent bobbing along on a flotilla of yachts, while genteel Eastbourne was regarded as a more exclusive bolt hole. Among the upper-classes the idea of acquiring a 'marine residence' on the coast was seen as a necessary accoutrement. Brighton and the Sussex countryside also enjoyed an enviable destination persona on the other side of the pond. Boston polymath and storyteller Oliver Wendell Holmes concluded that Brighton even in the off-season was well worth a visit.

Elsewhere rail routes put Sussex's coastal towns

on the map. Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Worthing, Brighton and Hove, Eastbourne, Bexhill, Hastings and St Leonards (Hastings was also reached from the east by the SECR), as well as inland Arundel, Chichester, Lewes and the expanse of the South Downs all received substantial travel poster investment across the various railway eras. Hastings, with its historic Cinque Ports Confederation and attractive year-round amenities attracted more than its fair share of tourists. Quite unsurprisingly railway companies responded with a torrent of visitor

“Brighton possessed one of the country’s most in demand sea vistas”



GOOD TO KNOW

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advertising over the years. Newhaven on the route to Seaford was the place to take Channel trips or head to the Continent, as indeed many tourists did. At the turn of the 20th century with a three-hour Dieppe crossing, LBSCR adopted steam turbine technology at an early stage making its steamers some of the quickest and most plush short-sea vessels operating out of British ports. With Pullman stock developed for the Brighton route, it offered prosperous travellers a deluxe rail/sea/ rail service as accompanying trains raced to Paris and south to Biarritz and the French Riviera. The Brighton Company was also one of the cannier pre-grouping railway operators latching on to the potential of a growing middle-class audience by running with its French partners a stream of special second-class boat train services. Not only for cross-channel traffic, but also for American travellers heading to Cherbourg and Le Havre on trans-Atlantic liners.

The idea of everyday folk looking for something a little special was something LBSCR later tapped into with its famous Southern Belle Pullman. An upscale Pullman service had

run on the Brighton line since the early 1880s, but with the inauguration of the seven-car Southern Belle in November 1908, it became the way to travel. Local press said ‘almost the last word has been said on luxury of railway travelling.’ It was not cheap either costing in the region of £40,000 but providing seating accommodation for up to 219 persons. Each of the tasteful Pullman cars had a distinctive name and different colour scheme, described by the local press as being ‘especially appreciated by ladies who have a pardonable horror of an unsuitable setting.’ The Lord Dalziel-owned organisation created a sensation in 1915 by introducing third-class seating in some of the cars, adding a degree of luxury at a premium for the day-excursionist. The difference between 2+2 seating and the more spacious 2+1 nature of first-class travel was a line of separation establishing a business model to last until May 1972 with the last running of the Brighton Belle all-electric Pullman train.

The transition from steam haulage to modern electric traction came in the early 1930s when the lines to Brighton and the Sussex coast were electrified.

FAME. BRIGHTON FASHION.



ILLUSTRATED GUIDE, PROGRAMME OF EVENTS & ACCOMMODATION LIST FROM CORPORATION PUBLICITY DEPT, BRIGHTON.



SIXTY-MINUTE PULLMAN EXPRESSES FROM LONDON. THROUGH TRAINS FROM WEST, NORTH AND MIDLANDS.

ABOVE:
Brighton Fame and Fashion Southern Railway, 1930s by Henry George Gawthorn

LEFT:
Southern Belle to Brighton. The Most Luxurious Train in the World. Circa 1910

Coastal route electrification was an expensive investment for the Southern, but when the five-car all-electric Brighton Belle service was launched in June 1934 it set a new standard for speed, directness and frequency. It was said to be so punctual that you could set a watch by its Victoria departure, and the 60-minute service was legendary. The idea of travelling to Sussex in style was promulgated throughout the Southern Railway and British Railway eras. Fast and efficient direct services – designed with prosperous commuter traffic in mind – to the county's towns were provided by dedicated

new stock incorporating a single specialist Pullman carriage into an all-electric train formation. Undoubtedly this set the agenda as these themes were translated into much resort promotion of the first half of the 20th century.

And it was not just railway promotion involved. Increasingly, individual resorts sought to endorse themselves in a more concerted manner as local travel guides became the essential mechanism to tempt a more well-to-do visitor. Many owners of specialist tourist services, especially hoteliers and attraction providers, were in a position to influence homegrown business

agendas – many tourist-related proprietors emerged as local counsellors. Up until the late 1960s, British Railways invited would-be visitors to write to resort town halls for free copies of local tourist guides in their promotional advertising. Thereafter, the institution tended to lose interest in resort marketing. Yet in many ways rail promotional investment was the key to creating a totally modern integrated tourism industry, helping to shape the way that Brighton, Sussex and its key coastal resorts were positioned and marketed. A long-lasting and effective legacy. ♦