Time to Change!

"Railway Time"

With the introduction of the railway, travel became faster. With every station keeping its own local mean time, the need for a synchronized time arose.

The first railway company to implement a common time for all stations, appropriately named "Railway Time," was the Great Western Railway in November 1840. By 1847, most railways were using "London Time," the time set at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich.

In 1847, the Railway Clearing House, an industry standards body, recommended that Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) be adopted at all stations as soon as the General Post Office permitted it. On December 1, 1847, the London and North Western Railway, as well as the Caledonian Railway, adopted "London Time," and by 1848 most railways had followed.

Unofficial GMT

By 1844, almost all towns and cities in Britain had adopted GMT, though the time standard received some resistance, with railway stations keeping local mean time and showing "London Time" with an additional minute hand on the clock.

In 1862, the Great Clock of Westminster, popularly known as Big Ben, was installed. Though not controlled by the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, it received hourly time signals from Greenwich and returned signals twice daily.

Standard Time Adopted

However, it was not until 1880 that the British legal system caught up with the rest of the country.

With the *Statutes (Definition of Time) Act (43 & 44 Vict.)*, Greenwich Mean Time was legally adopted throughout the island of Great Britain on August 2, 1880.

Images of original British Railways South Region Clocks at Bat & Ball Station

Above – Clock circa 1950 ex Ashford Station

Below – Clock circa 1949 ex Dartford Station