

## A DAY AT THE SEASIDE FOR £1.50 – by Keith Flinders



A typical train used for post millennium charters: 4936 Kinlet Hall on its test run through Stourbridge Junction.

*Picture by Roger Davis*

The new junction at Kidderminster, put in last August, allows excursions to run onto the Severn Valley Railway. Ironically, excursions may soon become rare, or even extinct, with the ORR's proposal to make them meet the full cost of compensation if other trains are delayed, rather than be liable to pay only the first £5,000. How different it was 30 years ago. British Rail had hundreds of coaches available for Summer Saturday extras to the seaside. For 350 days of the year, they were available for spot use. Any use would potentially produce marginal revenue. Add to that, the integrated railway had freight drivers, guards and locos that could be called on for excursions.

The Stourbridge Line got some interesting days out in the 1980s. Trips to the seaside in Spring at £1.50 were promoted as tasters for resorts we may wish to book for a Summer holiday. For example, on Saturday 25 February 1984, a Shrewsbury to Plymouth ADEX [Day excursion] formed of nine Mark 1 coaches picked up at Cradley Heath [08.55], Stourbridge Junction [09.01<sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub>] and Kidderminster [09.10<sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub>]. Three weeks later, it was Banbury to Swansea from the same stations [Kidderminster 08.53/19.30<sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub>]. Costs, profits and losses were all not too carefully analysed, in the same way most people do not account for every journey in their own car.

Charters too were easy – and cheap. The first train I chartered cost £45! Now a train for a day can cost more than £20,000, which is why a circular tour of Wales from Stourbridge Junction and Kidderminster on Saturday 13 April this year has tickets from £74.

Our line received a dmu charter on Saturday 5 June 1983. It was a day out from Nottingham to Kidderminster or Bewdley. Bewdley was the destination of a 10 coach charter from Hull on Saturday 9 May 1981. In both directions, it was booked non stop through Kidderminster. On Saturday 14 March 1981, a charter ran from Bridgnorth to Paddington, with empty coaches coming from Duddeston Carriage Sidings. With no fuss, five minutes were allowed to hand over from/to the Severn Valley Railway at Foley Park.

One of the most interesting charters of the 1980s was on Saturday 15 June 1985 when two 3 car dmus went from Kidderminster [06.55/23.11] and Stourbridge Junction to Portmadog for the Ffestiniog Railway. It took the Abbey Foregate curve to avoid Shrewsbury and had long waits in single line passing loops at Dovey Junction, Tywyn and Harlech, reaching Porthmadog at 12.38. Return was at 17.54 and pathing it along the Cambrian was solved by attaching it to the 19.15 service train from Aberystwyth between Machynlleth and Shrewsbury. Can you imagine that being agreed today?

Finally, another source of unusual workings along our line in the 1980s was the football calendar. On Saturday 18 February 1984, Plymouth played West Bromwich Albion and it justified two trains for visiting supporters, through Stourbridge Junction at 13.10 and 13.20/17.36 and 17.50, to Smethwick Rolfe Street. One even started from Truro. Plymouth Argyle can only dream of those days. And will we only dream of excursions in years to come?