

The Importance Of Rainbow Hill Junction by Roger Davis

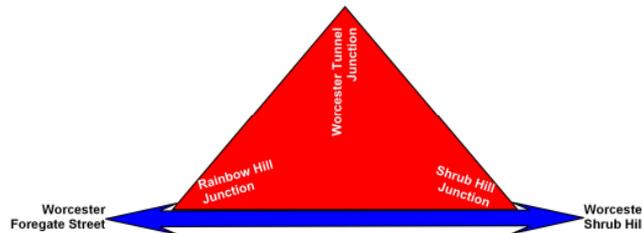
If passengers on the Stourbridge Line have no idea where Rainbow Hill Junction is, it is not surprising as it no longer exists - Rainbow Hill divergence would be a more appropriate description of that section of track these days. However, with the new Worcestershire Parkway station due to open in about two years time, it is important that Rainbow Hill Junction is reinstated to enable Stourbridge line trains to serve both Worcester City Centre and the new station.

The railway arrived in Worcester on 5 October 1850 when a line from Abbotswood Junction on the Midland Railway's Bristol to Birmingham line reached Shrub Hill station. In 1852, the line was extended to Droitwich, Kidderminster, Stourbridge Junction and Dudley, with a branch to Stoke Works and Bromsgrove. The complete line from Wolvercot Junction (north of Oxford) to Wolverhampton Low Level was opened by 1854.

In 1860, the line from Malvern Wells to Henwick was extended through Worcester Foregate Street station to Shrub Hill station and Worcester Tunnel Junction, thus forming the triangle of lines that exist today with three junctions - Shrub Hill Junction in the east, Worcester Tunnel Junction in the north and Rainbow Hill Junction in the west. Worcester Motive Power Depot (now a multiple unit stabling point) still occupies the land bounded by the triangle of lines.



(courtesy of www.miac.co.uk)



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The three sides of the triangle consisted of double track unidirectional main lines, with services towards Great Malvern and Hereford using platform 1 at Foregate Street station and services towards Shrub Hill and Droitwich using platform 2.

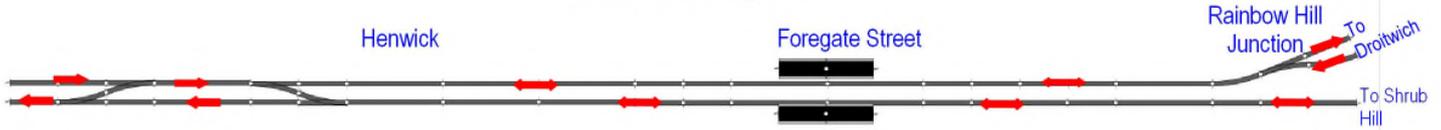
Pre-1973 Layout



However, on 7 November 1973 it was announced that Shrub Hill Junction and Rainbow Hill junction signal boxes would be taken out of use in work to be carried out between 17 and 21 November. As a result, the track layout and signalling was drastically rationalised to remove Rainbow Hill Junction and create two parallel bi-directional single lines - one from Shrub Hill to Henwick passing through platform 1 at Foregate Street and one from Worcester Tunnel Junction to Henwick passing through platform 2 at Foregate Street. However, in the latter case, double track was retained along most of the line from Worcester Tunnel Junction to just before Rainbow Hill. Full details of the changes are available on the web at <http://www.signallingnotices.org.uk/scans/HOLD%20507/1973%2043%20w%202705.pdf>.

The changes produced the following layout which is still in existence today.

Present Layout

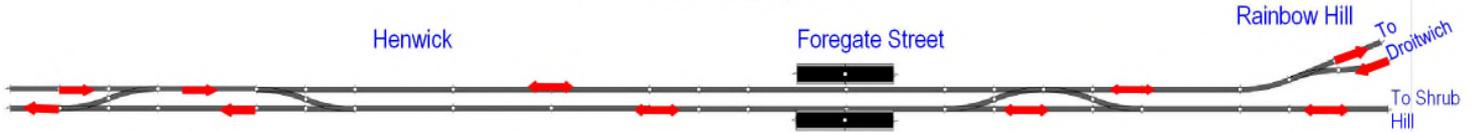


The existing layout does cause a number of operational issues. For instance, a train waiting to leave Shrub Hill towards Foregate Street is forced to wait if another train is in the section of track between Henwick and Shrub Hill.

However, for passengers on the Stourbridge line, the greatest issue is that, although you can travel between Droitwich Spa and Foregate Street by reversing at Shrub Hill, you cannot travel between Droitwich Spa and Shrub Hill by reversing at Foregate Street. While this is not a great problem at present, the opening of Worcestershire Parkway station will make that option desirable, with services on the Stourbridge line serving Foregate Street station to provide a half-hourly service to Worcester City Centre and then reversing to travel via Shrub Hill to Worcestershire Parkway. This is important as it is intended that services to Bristol and the South West, Cardiff and South Wales, Manchester, the East Midlands and Yorkshire and the North East will stop at the low level platforms at the station. Worcestershire Parkway is intended to be the main interchange station serving the county of Worcestershire. It would be amiss if large populations in the north of the county are precluded from accessing the station and forced to either travel via Birmingham or to change twice at Shrub Hill and Cheltenham Spa.

Therefore, it is essential that Rainbow Hill Junction is reinstated in one or another form as part of the resignalling of the Worcester area.

Enhanced Layout



Enhanced Layout



This is one of Worcestershire County Council's top 10 Rail Priorities. It is the scheme that they should be lobbying for as their number 1 priority. It is essential that the rail infrastructure in central Worcester is of the standard that will allow more frequent services with a greater variety of through journeys.

