

Stourbridge

Line

Newsletter Supplement

User

Group

Summer 2015

Shakespeare Country

By Rob Hebron

From time to time, the Editor includes a feature on the Worcestershire Rail User Groups Alliance (WRUGA), detailing the minutes and outcome of discussions at County Hall Worcester. I thought that in this issue, I would start to give you background information on the constituent groups, starting with the Shakespeare Line Promotion Group.

The SLPG represents passengers on the cross- Birmingham extension of the Stourbridge Line i.e. Birmingham Snow Hill to Stratford-upon- Avon via Henley in Arden. The group is also concerned with the stations of Claverdon and Bearley on the line from Stratford -upon-Avon to London Marylebone. The regular representative at WRUGA is Alan Bevan, a stalwart of SLPG. Alan belongs to the Worcestershire Alliance by virtue of Wythall station which is presently the only SLPG station in Worcestershire. All this could change when the re-opening of a passenger rail line from Stratford to Honeybourne comes to fruition.



Avon Rail Link - Stratford to Long Marston



Route map from SLPG website showing the six mile missing rail link between Stratford-upon-Avon and Long Marston.

On its website SPLG states that it is “delighted to report that the "GRIP 3" Business Case Study..... has declared that reopening the six-mile 'missing link' south of Stratford-upon-Avon to Long Marston and via the freight branch to Honeybourne, is feasible and has a sound business case”.

However, there is still a lot of lobbying to do. SLPG is rather optimistic, suggesting new stations are likely in the near future. The government has recently decided there is no case for upgrading the Long Marston branch and reopening to Stratford, which was called for as a strategic alternative route when the Chiltern Route was closed by the Harbury landslip. It says Stratford-upon-Avon to Honeybourne reopening is a matter for the local authorities. As they have less money than ever before, it may not happen for a very long time. Nonetheless, reaching GRIP 3 stage demonstrates the hard work put into the project by Alan and his fellow officers. It is by engaging with Warwickshire County Council and the building developer nearby, that the Group has come this far.

A trip on the north Warwickshire Line is highly recommended because not only is it convenient, being a through service of trains from Stourbridge but it is also one of the most scenic routes in the Midlands. There is an interesting mix of suburban stations such as Tyseley and unmanned halts such as The Lakes. Wootton Wawen is one of the many request stops for which passengers must alert the conductor or hail the train as it approaches. The newest addition to the line is Stratford upon Avon Parkway which like its counterpart at Warwick is provided as a hub for motorists and relieves traffic congestion in Shakespeare’s birthplace.

On Summer Sundays, why not experience a steam train ride on the Shakespeare Express? This is a steam train hauled service from Birmingham Moor Street to Stratford upon Avon. It is probably the nearest comparison with a ride on the famous “Cornishman”, as the North Warwickshire Line was the GWR express route to holiday destinations in the south of England. Those were the days (but I don’t remember them)!



Chiltern Railways provides the link from Stratford-upon-Avon to London Marylebone via Claverdon



Stratford-upon-Avon Station, pictured in the days of Central Trains