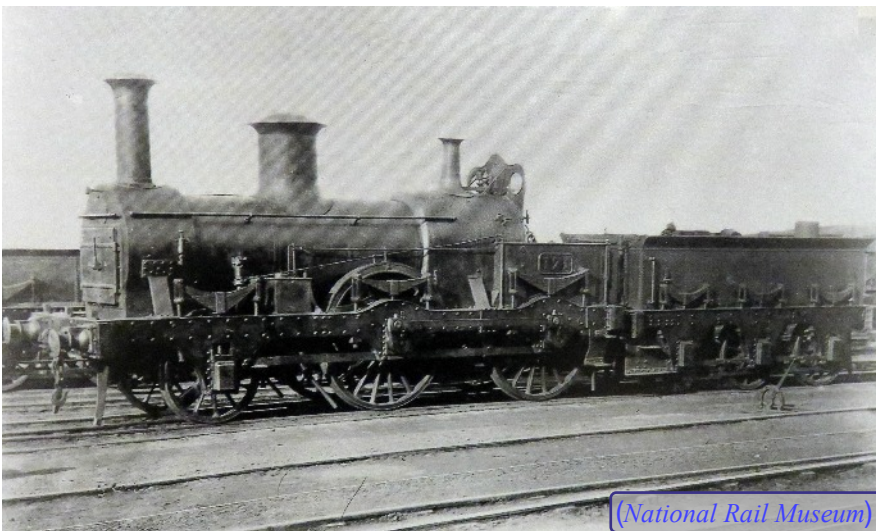


CAPITAL DIRECT by Roger Davis

Part 1 : London

With the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway (OWWR) completed in December 1853, it wasn't long before through trains to London were introduced. An arrangement had been reached with the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) for trains to leave the OWWR south of Handborough (as Hanborough was then known) and run via the newly opened Yarnton loop and Bletchley into London Euston station. A second agreement with the LNWR enabled trains to leave the OWWR just north of Tipton station and operate via a loop line over the LNWR through Coseley (Deepfields) to the LNWR's Wolverhampton Queen Street station. In fact, the OWWR sought to abandon the building of five miles of railway from Tipton to the GWR at Priestfield, but Parliament would not allow it.

By 1857, four through trains operated in each direction. Two of the northbound trains from Euston terminated at Wolverhampton Queen Street while the other two terminated at the OWWR's Wolverhampton Low Level station. There was one southbound service from Queen Street and three from Low Level. Journey times were pedestrian by today's standards. One train in each direction was designated an express train with journey times of 4½ hours between Kidderminster and Euston and 4¾ hours between Stourbridge and Euston, while the remainder of the journeys took between 5¼ and 6½ hours between Stourbridge and Euston.



OWW no 1 "Hawthorn" was the first locomotive delivered new to the OWWR. It was renumbered 171 when the GWR took over the line. It was scrapped in 1885

(National Rail Museum)

On 1 July 1861, management of the OWWR was taken over by the Great Western Railway (GWR) and on 1 August 1863 the OWWR was absorbed into the GWR. Through trains to Euston ceased on 1 October 1861 and London trains operated via the GWR main line through Reading to London Paddington. The number of through trains increased to 4 each way between Paddington and Wolverhampton Low Level and 1 each way between Paddington and Dudley. Although the majority of services continued to take between 5¼ and 6½ hours between Stourbridge and London, the two Dudley services saw a Stourbridge to Paddington journey time of 4 hours, with the return journey taking 3 hours 40 minutes.

By the beginning of the 20th century, there were 5 journeys from Paddington to Wolverhampton Low Level and 2 to Stourbridge Junction, with 5 journeys from Wolverhampton Low Level and 3 from Stourbridge Junction in the opposite direction. Journey times at that stage had not improved from 40 years previously, possibly because George Jackson Churchward had yet to drag British locomotive design into the 20th Century.

However, in 1905, a new express was introduced to the line. It left Wolverhampton at 0750 calling at Dudley (0802), Stourbridge Junction (0814), Kidderminster (0826), Droitwich Spa (0839) and Worcester Shrub Hill (0855). It then ran non-stop to Paddington arriving at 1110 - just 2 hours 56 minutes from Stourbridge Junction. The return journey left Paddington at 1645 and reached Wolverhampton Low Level at 2004 (3 hours 19 minutes journey time).

1910 was a significant year as far as the OWW route was concerned. It saw the opening of the direct route between Paddington and Banbury via High Wycombe and Bicester which made that route much shorter than the route via Worcester for main line services between Wolverhampton and London. By the early 1920s, the number of southbound services had reduced to three from Wolverhampton with a best journey time from Stourbridge Junction of 3 hours 21 minutes, while northbound journeys totalled 4 (2 to Wolverhampton and 2 to Stourbridge Junction) with the best journey time being on the 1645 Paddington to Stourbridge Junction service, which arrived at 2001.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the service level remained roughly the same. For instance, in 1939 there were 4 northbound journeys (2 to Wolverhampton and 2 to Stourbridge Junction) and 4 southbound journeys from Wolverhampton.



Yes, I remember Adlestrop. In 1920, an express from London rushes through the station made famous by the poem by Edward Thomas.

However, after the war, Hereford became the preferred destination for London services via Worcester, and the number of journeys through Stourbridge Junction and Kidderminster had been reduced to two in each direction, with northbound journeys to Wolverhampton leaving Paddington at 1345 and 1645, and southbound journeys from Wolverhampton at 0650 and 1205. On Sundays, there was one journey in each direction which left Paddington at 1645 and Wolverhampton at 0800.

A Castle Class 4-6-0 hauls a London bound express on Campden Bank.

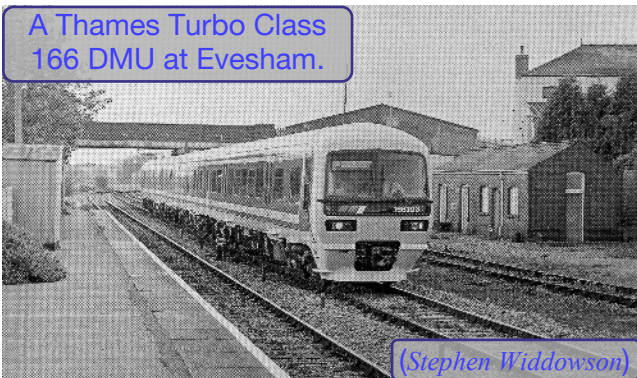


By 1955, two journeys from Paddington at 1345 and 1645 still reached Stourbridge Junction, the latter journey terminating at Stourbridge Junction. However, only 1 southbound journey remained at 1425 from Wolverhampton. The Sunday service remained as it was in 1947, with one journey in each direction between Paddington and Wolverhampton, although the southbound journey that left

Wolverhampton at 0755 had been withdrawn by 1957. However, an additional service was introduced from Kidderminster to Paddington in 1955. This departed at 0819 and combined at Worcester Shrub Hill with the 0745 service from Hereford to Paddington. In 1957, this was named "Cathedrals Express" and the 1645 service from Paddington (by now truncated to terminate at Kidderminster) was similarly named.

By 1963, only a single journey from Paddington reached Stourbridge Junction and this was on Sundays only. It left Paddington at 1700 and arrived at Stourbridge Junction at 2115. When the Cathedrals Express was withdrawn in 1965, the line lost its main line services completely after over 100 years of operation.

A Thames Turbo Class 166 DMU at Evesham.



The story now fasts forward 28 years to October 1993 when Network South East announced a new "Thames Turbo" service. The southbound service ran as follows :- Birmingham New Street (0900), Cradley Heath (0914), Stourbridge Junction (0920), Kidderminster (0929), Droitwich Spa (0940), Worcester Shrub Hill (0955), Pershore (1003), Evesham (1012), Moreton-in-Marsh (1027),

Kingham (1034), Charlbury (1043), Hanborough (1050), Oxford (1103), Reading (1137), Slough (1154), Paddington (1215). It returned from Paddington at 1248 and called at Slough (1304), Reading (1324), Oxford (1400), Hanborough (1409), Charlbury (1416), Kingham (1425), Moreton-in-Marsh 1435, Evesham (1450), Worcester Shrub Hill (1508), Droitwich Spa (1516), Kidderminster (1526) and Stourbridge Junction (1536). Given the timings, it was not surprising that the service did not last long, with the northbound service lasting only 12 months, while the southbound service survived a further 7 months. However, it was probably the first time that Cradley Heath enjoyed a through service to London.

Privatisation saw the creation of Chiltern Railways and in 2001 they introduced a through service on Mondays to Fridays between Stourbridge Junction and London Marylebone. There were 4 trains in each direction - from Stourbridge Junction at 0602, 0634, 0703 and 0825, and from Marylebone at 1700, 1800, 1900 and 2000.

In 2002, entrain (now Today's Railways UK) published the following.

“After a period of negotiation with the SRA, lasting 18 months in total, Chiltern Railways announced the securing of a contract for a 20-year franchise on 18 February at the Great Central Hotel next to Marylebone station”.

The 20-year franchise: contracted obligations

Operation of hourly through service between Marylebone and Kidderminster for most of Monday-Saturday from September, plus the trial of Sunday services from September 2003.

In September 2002, Chiltern Railways did extend their through Monday to Friday service to Kidderminster, with 5 southbound services (at 0539, 0621, 0728 and 0828 from Kidderminster and 0615 from Stourbridge Junction) and 6 northbound journeys (at 1657, 1755, 1850 and 1950 to Kidderminster, and 1549 and 2050 to Stourbridge Junction).

A Saturday service was introduced by Chiltern Railways from May 2003. There were 5 southbound journeys at 0538, 0630, 0710, 0813 and 0910, and 4 northbound journeys at 1640, 1740, 1817 and 2040, the final journey terminating at Stourbridge Junction. The northbound journeys were cut back to terminate in Birmingham later in the decade, and SLUG are campaigning to get at least one of these reinstated.



In the intervening years, the major upgrade to the service has been the introduction of Silver Set trains onto the service. The situation in September 2015 is as follows :-

Monday to Friday southbound (5 services) - Silver Sets from Kidderminster at 0609 and 0705, class 168 from Kidderminster at 0730 and 0809, and silver set from Stourbridge Junction at 0638.

Monday to Friday northbound - Silver Sets to Kidderminster at 1715, 1815 and 1847, class 168 to Kidderminster at 2015, and class 168 to Stourbridge Junction at 2115.

Saturday southbound (4 services) - Silver Sets from Kidderminster at 0609 and 0910, and class 168 from Kidderminster at 0637 and 0813.

October 2015 will see Chiltern Railways introducing their new service to Oxford Parkway. As a result, the Kidderminster will gain a Silver Set service from Marylebone at 1615 but the 1847 service will be cut back to terminate at Birmingham Snow Hill.

It means that, although part of the contracted obligations for the 20-year franchise as reported by entrain was fulfilled, there has been no indication that an hourly through service to Kidderminster for most of Monday to Saturday or a trial of Sunday services will ever be actioned.



Chiltern Railways opened a depot in the old sidings north of Stourbridge Junction to operate the through services. While train sets operate between the depot and either Stourbridge Junction or Kidderminster at start and end of service on weekdays, there are a number of empty carriage stock workings at weekends to and from Birmingham. Train sets leaving the depot and running ecs (empty) to Birmingham do so from the north end of

the depot and operate directly towards Lye. However, train sets returning ecs from Birmingham have to stop at Stourbridge Junction and reverse to gain access to the depot. The empty carriage stock workings between Stourbridge Depot and Birmingham at weekends are as follows:-

From Stourbridge Depot

<u>Day</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>To</u>	<u>Arr</u>	<u>To form service</u>
Saturday	168	1022	Moor Street	1053	1055 Moor Street - Marylebone
Sunday	168	0945	Snow Hill	1009	1012 Snow Hill - Marylebone
Sunday	Silv	1021	Moor Street	1047	1055 Moor Street - Marylebone

To Stourbridge Depot

<u>Day</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Service</u>	<u>Dep</u>	<u>Arr</u>	<u>Stbrge Jct</u>	<u>Arr</u>	<u>Depot</u>
Saturday	Silv	1706 Marylebone - Snow Hill	1907	1936			2002
Saturday	Silv	1806 Marylebone - Snow Hill	2007	2029			2055
Saturday	168	1906 Marylebone - Snow Hill	2104	2130			2146
Sunday	Silv	1806 Marylebone - Moor Street	2000	2025			2055
Sunday	168	2030 Marylebone - Snow Hill	2240	2301			2321

Stourbridge Line User Group believes that at least one of the ecs workings to Stourbridge Depot on a Saturday evening could be operated in service. It also believes that through services on a Sunday would prove successful. The committee will continue to canvass Chiltern Railways to improve through services between the Stourbridge line and London Marylebone.

However, wouldn't it be nice to see through services to London re-established over the traditional route via Oxford ?