

## AN OBSOLETE RAILWAY MANOEUVRE by Roger Davis

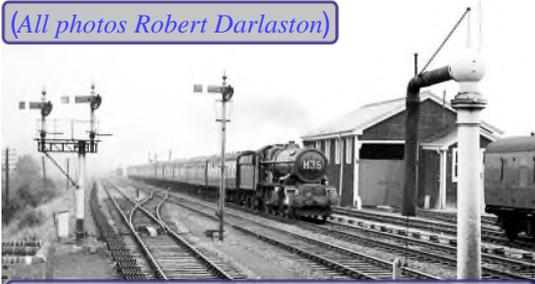
Passengers on the 1715 train from London Marylebone to Kidderminster probably do not realise as they pass through Bicester North station at 1800 that this was the time when a railway manoeuvre took place every weekday up to 10 September 1960.

In those days, the Chiltern line was the main line from London Paddington to Wolverhampton Low Level and two trains between the two stations left Paddington at 1634 and 1710 hrs, stopping at the following stations.

London Paddington (1634), Gerrards Cross (1700), Beaconsfield (1708), High Wycombe (1716), Princes Risborough (1733), Bicester North (arr 1759, dep 1825), Ardley Halt (1833), Aynho Park Platform (1840), Kings Sutton (1845), Banbury General (1855), Leamington Spa General (1926), Birmingham Snow Hill (2002), West Bromwich (2012), Wednesbury Central (2019), Bilston Central (2025), Wolverhampton Low Level (2031)

London Paddington (1710), Leamington Spa General (1850), Knowle and Dorridge (1909), Birmingham Snow Hill (1929), Wolverhampton Low Level (1951)

(All photos Robert Darlaston)



The 1710 service approaches Bicester North with the slip coach following it

This meant that the second train overtook the first one at 1815 while it was waiting in the platform at Bicester North, the station having two through roads as well as two platform roads. It also seemingly meant that anybody travelling from London to Bicester or Banbury had to catch the earlier train.



The slip coach coasts to a halt alongside the station

However, the last coach on the 1710 service was a slip coach which had its own dedicated guard. On arrival at Bicester North, the locomotive of the 1634 service, normally a GWR Castle or King class locomotive, was uncoupled from its train. When the 1710 service, hauled by a GWR King and travelling at speed, reached a point about ½ mile south of Bicester North, the slip coach guard uncoupled the slip coach and slowly brought it to a halt opposite the platform by applying a brake while the express sped towards Leamington Spa. Once the express was clear, the engine from the 1634 service pulled forward onto the main line, set back to the slip coach and coupled up, before drawing forward and setting back once more to attach it to the front of its train, allowing passengers for Bicester North to alight. This service then departed from Bicester North at 1825, having spent 26 minutes at the platform.



The GWR King from the 1634 service retrieves the slip coach

One wonders what the Health and Safety Executive would have made of the practice had it still existed today!