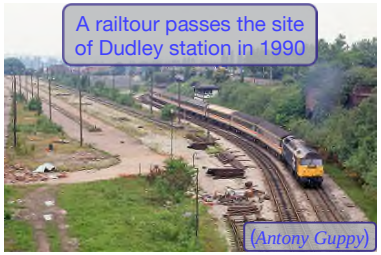
NAME THE STATION - No 2 : STREET

The following 10 stations, past and present, have the word Street somewhere in their name. Can you name them?

1. This station is now the headquarters of the Isle of Wight Steam Railway.
2. This closed Somerset and Dorset Railway station would have been a godsend to Michael Eavis had it still been open.
3. This closed station was between Sutton Park and Aldridge.
4. The original name of the existing Wolverhampton Station.
5. This station is just under 2 miles north east of answer 3, but on a different line.
6. The London terminus for trains from Norwich and Ipswich.
7. The London terminus other than the answer to 6 which cost what you earned when you passed GO.
8. This station between Dudley Port and Coseley was named this in BR days up to 1968.
9. This station has an art gallery called Movement in the old toilets on platform 2.
10. A mainline terminus with an underground station for services to Chester and West Kirby.

DO YOU KNOW ....?
When the last passenger train visited Dudley

The last regular passenger train, a Plymouth to Liverpool express service, passed through Dudley on 27 February 1967 and this was described in Issue 4 of Platform 2. However, the line from Stourbridge Junction to Bescot remained open as a through freight route until 1993 and this encouraged a number of railtours over the years. The last of these ran 25 years ago on 23 February 1991 and was organised by the Branch Line Society. The tour, which cost £33 per ticket, started at Euston and, after wandering around the Northamptonshire area, arrived at Stourbridge Junction. It reversed and went to Pensnett, stopping just to the south of the main Dudley to Kingswinford road at Lenches Bridge. It reversed back to Kingswinford Junction, reversed again and headed to Dudley, passing through the site of Dudley station.


A railtour passes the site of Dudley station in 1990 (Antony Guppy)

SEAMAN GREASES WARRANT (or ANAGRAM TEASER ANSWERS) - No 1

The answers to Anagram Teaser No 1 were as follows :-

1 - EARLSWOOD, 2 - SEVERN VALLEY RAILWAY, 3 - WIDNEY MANOR, 4 - HENLEY IN ARDEN, 5 - LEAMINGTON SPA, 6 - LONDON MARYLEBONE, 7 - BIRMINGHAM MOOR STREET, 8 - SMETHWICK GALTON BRIDGE, 9 - BICESTER NORTH, 10 - DROITWICH SPA, 11 - STOURBRIDGE TOWN, 12 - HARTLEBURY, 13 - LYE

PLATFORM 2

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

Issue 6 December 2016

Gresley A3 Class No. 60103 "Flying Scotsman" at Stourbridge Junction on 20 September 2016

CONTENTS

2	Stourbridge Line Branches : Stourbridge Junction to Oxley
5	Return To Tettenhall Station
6	Doing The Splits
7	An Obsolete Railway Manoeuvre
8	A Taste of Salop
10	The Future of Printed Timetables
12	Name That Station 2 - Street
12	Do You Know ?
12	Anagram Teaser 1 - Answers

PLATFORM 2 is published by:
The Stourbridge Line User Group, 46 Sandringham Road, Wordsley, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5HL

PASSENGER BRANCHES OF THE STOURBRIDGE LINE
4 : STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION TO OXLEY by Roger Davis

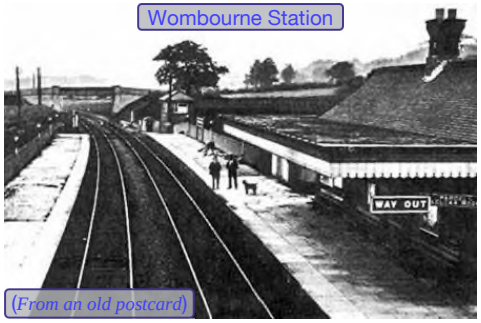
This is the fourth in a series of seven articles that looks at the branch lines that fed into the Stourbridge line between Smethwick and Droitwich Spa, working down the line from north to south.

The Kingswinford branch, as it was called even though it did not serve Kingswinford, opened on 14 November 1858 as far as Bromley Basin. It left the Stourbridge Junction to Dudley line just north of Brettell Lane station at Kingswinford Junction. The line was extended as far as the Himley coalfield by 1860.

However, the story of this line as a passenger line did not start until 1905 when an Act of Parliament authorised the extension of the line northwards through Wombourne (which the GWR insisted on spelling Wombourn to avoid confusion with the station at Wimborne in Dorset!) and Tettenhall to join the Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton Low Level at Oxley. The Act also authorised a new line to enable trains from Wolverhampton to branch westwards from Wombourne across country to join the Severn Valley line just to the south of Bridgnorth station - thus providing a direct service between Wolverhampton and Bridgnorth.

Construction was slow and progress was delayed even more by World War I. The result was that work never started on the Bridgnorth line, while the through route to Stourbridge did not open until 11 May 1925.

Wombourne Station



(From an old postcard)

Himley Station

(Kidderminster Railway Museum)

The line had three stations at Himley, Wombourn and Tettenhall, and six halts - Brockmoor Halt (just south of Moor Street), Bromley Halt (just north of Bromley Lane), Pensnett Halt (south of the A4101 Dudley to Kingswinford road), Gornal Halt (south of Cinder Road), Penn Halt and Compton Halt.

However, the line only lasted seven years as a passenger route, closing on 31 October 1932. One wonders whether it might have survived until Beeching had the line to Bridgnorth been built. The final timetable for 1932 showed the service level on the line.

Therefore, printed timetables are still required and they need to be of a decent standard. I recently travelled from Basingstoke to Portsmouth Harbour on South West Trains and went out to the booking hall to pick up a pocket timetable. I was pleasantly surprised when, in addition to a 97 mm x 210 mm pocket timetable for the line, a free 288 page A5 timetable booklet was available, showing all trains operated by South West Trains plus services operated by other companies alongside their own services. I understand that Great Western Railway also produce a similar booklet but at a cost of £5.

In the days of British Rail, West Midlands PTE produced timetable booklets of all lines in the area. By the time of Central Trains, pocket timetables were produced by Centro – one for each line emanating from Birmingham. This meant that if you wanted to travel from, for example, Malvern Link to Henley-in-Arden, you had to consult two pocket timetables. However, these timetables were in the form of stapled booklets which made them easy to use. When London Midland took over the franchise, they replaced these useful booklets with a series of single sheet documents that fold down to 74 mm x 104 mm. Instead of booklets, Stourbridge line services now span 4 of these leaflets – leaflet 8 Birmingham Snow Hill to Leamington Spa, leaflet 9 Birmingham Snow Hill to Stratford-upon-Avon, leaflet 10 Birmingham Moor Street to Worcester and leaflet 14 Worcester to Hereford (including services from Birmingham via Bromsgrove). Thus the journey from Malvern Link to Henley-in-Arden involves unfolding leaflets 14, 10 and 9 and matching up the services. Nominally, unfolding a leaflet is easy, but leaflet 10 consists of 24 folded sections which open up to a 208 mm x 882 mm sheet and it requires a PhD in Origami to fold it up again. In addition, a typeface of about 6 to 7 point makes the details difficult to read, especially by people of advancing years.

The West Midlands rail franchise is up for renewal in October 2017, with West Midlands Rail involved with the Department for Transport in specifying the franchise. It would be a bonus if the standard of timetables offered for the West Midlands business unit in the new franchise is improved – ideally as a single all-lines booklet, but more realistically as individual booklets for each service group. This would mean a single booklet serving all stations on the Hereford – Worcester – Stourbridge Junction or Bromsgrove – Birmingham – Leamington Spa or Stratford-upon-Avon corridor. The Liverpool, Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Rugeley corridor could also form a single booklet.

It will be interesting to see what happens in the next franchise. Maintaining the status quo as far as timetables are concerned is not an option.

THE FUTURE FOR PRINTED TIMETABLES
by John Warren

In May 2016, it was announced that the printed version of the Great Britain Timetable would no longer be produced, although the pdf version was available on the Network Rail website. Even though recent editions have contained so many mistakes that the publication could be nominated for fiction awards, this decision ends a long line of detailed printed rail timetables that started in 1839 when George Bradshaw produced his first guide, inadvertently providing regular employment to Michael Portillo. An 88 page publication costing £9.95 has been produced by Middleton Press but this only offers summary timetables for selected services – backwaters such as the Stourbridge line do not get a mention.

One of the reasons offered is that everybody now has access to on-line enquiries via PCs, tablets or smartphones. This is patently not true, especially among older people to whom technology is a mystery rather than an aid.

Of course, for these people, reliable information can be obtained by contacting a "help" desk, although a recent incident questions the reason for doing so. A

Southern season ticket holder, perturbed to discover that the next few trains from her local station had been cancelled due to staff "sickness" caused by a dispute between Southern and the RMT, phoned Southern's help desk to find out how she should get from Aldrington to Brighton, a journey of two stations and 2 miles. She was told that she should get a train to Clapham Junction and change onto another train to Brighton, a round trip of 97 miles. When she later queried this advice with Southern, she was told that the operative had confused ALDRINGTON with PORTSMOUTH. This is an obvious confusion given that both have 10 letters, but less obvious given that Aldrington has 3 syllables and Portsmouth 2, while 6 of the first 7 letters of the former do not appear in the latter. Southern stated that the previous enquiry that the operative handled involved Portsmouth and that the advice he gave was correct given his confusion, making one wonder why rail pressure groups and local MPs are demanding that Southern are stripped of their franchise. Therefore, anyone enquiring about a journey from Lye to Stourbridge Junction should ignore any advice to travel via Peterborough and Leicester as this would probably indicate that the operative had keyed in the letters LYE in the wrong order.

MONDAY TO SATURDAY				so	sx	sx	so		
Wolverhampton LL	0800	0915	1145	1243	1250	1430	1437	1810	2100
Dunstall Park	0803	0918	1148	1246	1253	1433	1440	1813	2103
Tettenhall	0810	0925	1155	1253	1300	1440	1447	1820	2110
Compton Halt	0813	0928	1158	1256	1303	1443	1450	1823	2113
Penn Halt	0818	0933	1203	1301	1308	1448	1455	1828	2118
Wombourn	0822	0938	1207	1308	1312	1454	1501	1835	2125
Himley	....	0943	....	1313	....	1459	1506	1840	2130
Gornal Halt	....	0949	....	1319	....	1505	1512	1846	2136
Pensnett Halt	....	0952	....	1322	....	1508	1515	1849	2139
Bromley Halt	....	0955	....	1325	....	1511	1518	1852	2142
Brockmoor Halt	....	0958	....	1328	....	1514	1521	1855	2145
Brettell Lane	....	1000	....	1330	....	1516	1523	1857	2147
Stourbridge Junction	....	1006	....	....	....	1522	1530	....	2153

MONDAY TO SATURDAY				sx	so			
Stourbridge Junction	0650	....	1022	....	....	....	1638	1940
Brettell Lane	0656	....	1028	....	....	1342	1644	1946
Brockmoor Halt	0658	....	1030	....	....	1344	1646	1948
Bromley Halt	0701	....	1033	....	....	1347	1649	1951
Pensnett Halt	0704	....	1036	....	....	1350	1652	1954
Gornal Halt	0707	....	1039	....	....	1353	1655	1957
Himley	0712	....	1044	....	....	1358	1700	2002
Wombourn	0720	0825	1050	1210	1355	1405	1706	2009
Penn Halt	0725	0830	1055	1215	1400	1410	1711	2014
Compton Halt	0730	0835	1100	1220	1405	1415	1716	2019
Tettenhall	0733	0838	1103	1223	1408	1418	1719	2022
Dunstall Park	0741	0847	1111	1231	1416	1526	1727	2030
Wolverhampton LL	0746	0850	1116	1234	1419	1431	1731	2033

so Saturdays only, sx Saturday excepted No Sunday service

The line did survive until 27 February 1965 for goods traffic, with the section north of Pensnett Trading Estate closing completely from that day. The line between Kingswinford Junction and Pensnett Trading Estate remained used until about 1990, when it was mothballed. Since then there have been plans to reinstate train services to serve the Trading Estate and take heavy traffic off of the A4101 but these have never come to fruition.

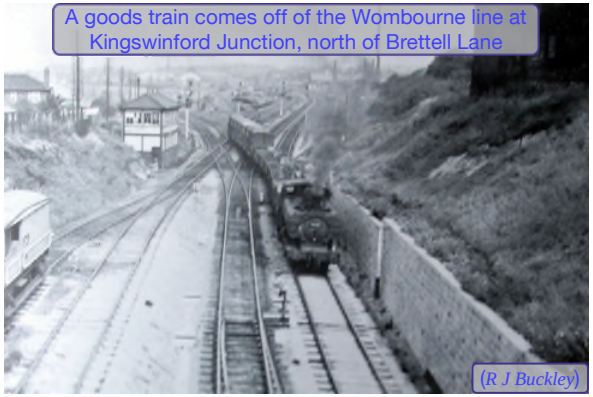
The bridge over the Stourbridge Extension canal

View from under Bromley Lane Bridge

Himley Station 2016

Wombourn Station 2016

Tettenhall Station 2016


A goods train comes off of the Wombourne line at Kingswinford Junction, north of Brettell Lane (R J Buckley)

Unlike the three branch lines described in the last three issues, the line is easy to find. The formation to Pensnett Trading Estate still has rails, although it is difficult to find them at certain locations due to 25 years of vegetation. In addition, the platforms of all three halts still exist amongst the vegetation.

North of Pensnett Trading Estate, there is a gap in the formation where a new housing development named Himley View has obliterated the line and Gornal Halt. The developers have honoured the former railway line by naming the main road on the estate Great Western Way, while Halt Mews remembers the site of the station.

However, within ½ mile, the Kingswinford Railway Walk starts and continues all the way to Aldersley Stadium, just south of Oxley in Wolverhampton. From Castlecroft onwards, the line is promoted as the Smestow Valley Park.

Of the stations, the platforms at Himley and Compton Halt still exist along the walk, although Penn Halt has been consigned to history. The biggest surprises along the line are at Wombourn and Tettenhall, where the platforms still exist and the station buildings have been converted into tea rooms for walkers and cyclists. In addition, Tettenhall Goods Shed still exists and is a small transport museum.

In the next issue : Part 5 - Stourbridge Junction to Stourbridge Town.

The exterior of Shrewsbury station resembles a cathedral or academic building and compensates for the neglected and sorry looking platform features within. The station is well situated for the town facilities as well as being only ten minutes away from the bus station. The main bus operator here is also Arriva.

Shrewsbury town centre is a pleasant mix of traditionally built shops and modern malls. Much of it is pedestrianised.

Shrewsbury Town Centre and the River Severn

No visit is complete without a walk along the River Severn or even a cruise on the river boat “Sabrina”. From the Welsh Bridge, The Quarry, also referred to as The Dingle is just a few minutes away. This beautiful park was partly designed by Percy Thrower, the famous television gardener who introduced viewers to green pastimes well before Alan Titchmarsh and Charlie Dimmock. Pictures do not convey the full experience of a visit on a summer day.

The Dingle

The statue of Sabrina in the Dingle

A TASTE OF SALOP
by Rob Hebron

As a resident of Stourbridge, I've found that reaching Shrewsbury and most Shropshire towns directly by public transport almost impossible. The chances of the Severn Valley Railway extending its tracks north of Bridgnorth are remote and so a rail journey is inevitably indirect. Nevertheless, a simple one-change option is available at Smethwick Galton Bridge where the Arriva Trains Wales service calls on its way to Holyhead. This service omits the local stations between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, making it a semi-fast trip. Sadly, the London Midland service from Birmingham to Shrewsbury calls at Albrighton, Shifnal etc. but not Smethwick Galton Bridge and so a connection is not available to provide a joint half hourly service.

An Arriva Trains Wales service to Aberystwyth calls at Smethwick Galton Bridge

The scenery, after leaving Wolverhampton is pleasant and interesting. The Arriva train passes straight through Cosford but the passenger can catch a view of the airfield which is adjadcent. Before arriving at Telford Central, a line diverges to the left. This is a freight line to Ironbridge Power Station which is in the process of being decommissioned due to environmental laws. There are aspirations for this line to be incorporated into the Telford Steam Railway, a heritage operation, based at Horsehay near Telford. Details of this railway can be found at https://telfordsteamrailway.co.uk/

Telford rail station is uninspiring but very well used and merits an occasional service from Virgin Trains to London Euston. Further up the line, Wellington station looks a much grander affair but redundant rooms are boarded up and there is hardly any sign of railway staff. This must have been an important junction in the pre Beeching years.

Shrewsbury Station

Shrewsbury station is even larger in scale and it is a major hub for North West and Welsh bound trains. Not all platforms are in use (1 and 2 are redundant), some are subdivided (4a and 4b) and there are bays (5 and 6) which are used for Birmingham locals and mid Wales trains. The Birmingham to Holyhead service splits at Platform 4 with two carriages going forward via Gobowen and the remainder reversing to return to Birmingham.

RETURN TO TETTENHALL STATION
by Roger Davis

As part of my research into the railway line from Stourbridge Junction to Oxley via Wombourne, I visited locations along the line to see what parts of the line still existed. One of my trips was to Tettenhall Station which is now part of the Smestow Valley Local Nature Reserve and I was thrilled to discover that both the station and the goods depot have been restored and are still in use.

The site is easy to find from Wolverhampton by following the A41 Tettenhall Road from the City Centre to the traffic lights at its junction with the B4161 Aldersley to Compton road. At the lights (a Majestic wine store is on the left at the junction), turn left into Henwood Road and first left into Meadow View. The large station car park is on the right and cannot be missed. The station is the starting point for walks along the old trackbed or along the adjacent canal towpath. If you don't want to walk too far, or need refreshment after a walk, the station building is now a cafe called "Cupcake Lane" with tables on the station platform.

I actually used public transport to reach the site. Bus service 256 operates from Stourbridge Interchange to Wolverhampton Police Station where I transferred onto a number 1 bus towards Tettenhall Wood, leaving the bus at the Tettenhall Road, New Road stop. It was easy to find on the hybrid bus as the dulcet tones of Kerry, the National Express Manager at Pensnett Garage, announced the name of each stop. Alternatively, from The Hawthorns, a Midland Metro tram to Wolverhampton St Georges will drop you opposite the number 1 bus stop at Wolverhampton Police Station.

Wolverhampton St George's tram stop with the number 1 bus stop opposite.

Here is a selection of photographs taken on a crisp and sunny February 2016 morning.

DOING THE SPLITS
by John Warren

What do the following railway stations have in common - Faversham, Haywards Heath, Horsham and Machynlleth?

The answer is that trains are either split or combined at the platform. In the first three cases, 8-car services from London Victoria are split into two 4-car units which proceed to two different destinations a few minutes apart. On trains towards London Victoria, the two trains are combined into one 8-car train to London Victoria. The Stourbridge line is indirectly involved in the last case as 4-car Arriva Trains Wales trains from Birmingham International stop at Smethwick Galton Bridge en route to Wales. Every two hours, the train proceeds to Machynlleth where it splits - the front 2 carriages continuing to Borth and Aberystwyth while the back 2 carriages head to Barmouth, Harlech, Porthmadog and Pwllheli.

The service from Pwllheli is waiting as the service from Aberystwyth arrives to be attached to the rear at Machynlleth.

This practice is certainly not new and was far more prevalent up to the 1960s. One of the most famous examples was the Atlantic Coast Express which ran from London Waterloo to Exeter and then via the Southern Railways network of lines to North Devon and North Cornwall, affectionately known as the “Withered Arm”. Carriages were detached from the train from Salisbury onwards to create separate portions to Sidmouth, Exmouth, Exeter, Ilfracombe, Bideford, Bude, Padstow and Plymouth.

How could this affect the Stourbridge line? SLUG has recently been told that changes have been made at Birmingham Snow Hill that will enable trains to be split and combined there. What effect this will have on existing services is unknown but it seems that its primary use will be to strengthen busy services and reduce the size of less popular ones by swapping units.

However, could splitting of trains be advantageous to Stourbridge line passengers if performed at Worcester Shrub Hill? If one hourly service was routed directly to Foregate Street and the other to Shrub Hill operated using two Class 172 sets of between 4 and 6 cars, then the arrival at Shrub Hill could be split. The front unit could continue to either Worcestershire Parkway (and Evesham until a second platform is provided at Parkway), or Cheltenham or Gloucester to provide connections with CrossCountry services to the South West and South Wales. The rear unit could reverse at Shrub Hill to operate to Foregate Street, Malvern Link and Great Malvern, thus providing a ½ hourly service between the Stourbridge line and Worcester City Centre, something that unfortunately does not exist today.

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

The slip coach coasts to a halt alongside the station

The GWR King from the 1634 service retrieves the slip coach

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.

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.

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