

PLATFORM 2



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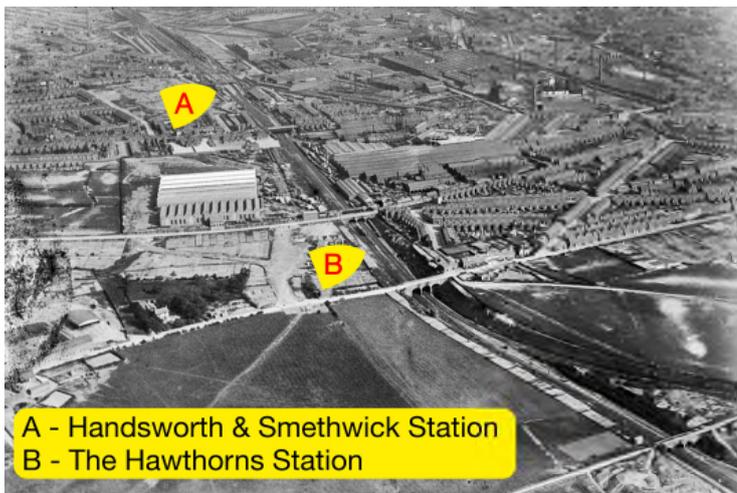
BUILT IN HANDSWORTH by John Warren

If you are travelling into Birmingham on the Stourbridge line, immediately after leaving The Hawthorns station you pass under Middlemore Road bridge. The area to the left of the line is currently occupied by the Middlemore Trading Estate while the area to the right is largely derelict. However, from 1866 to 1963, the land on both sides of the line was occupied by the Birmingham Railway Carriage and Wagon Company (BRC&W), the area to the left being the North Works and the area to the right the South Works. In the following photograph, the line into Snow Hill can be clearly seen, with the works across the centre of the photograph between A and B.



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The Birmingham Wagon Company Ltd was registered in March 1855 and operated from offices in Newhall Street in Birmingham. They moved to their new works in 1866 and started wagon construction on the site, receiving extremely profitable wagon orders from Birmingham Corporation. In November 1878 the company was dissolved and reformed as the Birmingham Railway Carriage and Wagon Company Ltd (BRC&W). It started to manufacture other types of rolling stock, including quality carriages and Pullman stock. In fact, in 1910, the company built Argentina's presidential coach, which still survives, and once carried Eva Peron.



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In addition, tube stock for the London Underground was built at the factory, with examples dating from 1923, 1938 and 1956, and some of the 1938 stock is still in use on the Isle of Wight operating between Ryde and Shanklin.



There was a private standard gauge railway on site and this was connected to the main line by a spur from the Handsworth and Smethwick station goods yard to the South Works. The extensive internal private railway network included a bridge over the Great Western Railway to the North Works.

After World War II, BRC&W built diesel and electric locomotives for British Railways. Three classes of diesel were built - 47 Class 26 locomotives in 1958/59, 69 Class 27



locomotives in 1961/62 and 98 Class 33 locomotives in 1960/62. The electrics were 25 Class 81 locomotives built between 1959 and 1964 for the electrification of the West Coast Main Line. In addition, three classes of diesel multiple unit were manufactured - Classes 104, 110 and 118. In the 1980s, the surviving Class 118 DMUs, having spent their lives on the Western Region in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, moved to Tyseley and could

be found on Stourbridge line services through Smethwick Rolfe Street, less than ¾ mile from the factory where they were built.

However, in 1962, British Railways had a need for lightweight express diesel locomotives. Two prototypes were built. BRC&W built D0260 *Lion*, while Brush built D0280 *Falcon* at Loughborough. The prize for the successful company was substantial as 512 production locomotives were built up to 1968. Unfortunately, it was Brush who won the order, and the ubiquitous Brush Class 47 diesels were born. For BRC&W, this was a



D0260 Lion photographed by the author at Swindon station in 1962

body blow. They had an order from London Transport to build new 1962 Tube stock, but financial difficulties meant that this order was transferred to Metro-Cammell.

Therefore, in 1963 the business closed down and the extensive works were split up into smaller units. On 3 December 2014, a massive fire ripped through some of the old buildings, destroying a number of businesses.



The December 2014 Fire

(Birmingham Mail)

However, this may not be the end of the story. On 16 June 2014, the company reformed as a not-for-profit organisation. According to Wikipedia (so it must be true), the aim is to rebuild prototype locomotives from the 1960s including D0260 Lion. It will be interesting to see if this story develops.

WHAT'S IN A NAME ? by Rob Hebron

What is in a name? In the case of train companies, it is an identity and a statement. My all-time favourite corporate name is the “Great Western Railway”, founded in 1833. The first adjective says it all. “Great” can be applied to ambition and accomplishment. Both are totally appropriate for the former owner of the Stourbridge Line. It may be that “Great” refers to the area of operation which was the greater part of western England, supplemented by the Borders and parts of Wales. It doesn't really matter – greatness is greatness.



The GWR logo on the tender of 3440 City of Truro at Highley

Of course, rival companies stole the descriptive idea, such as the *Great Central Railway* (established in 1897) but its greatness is only a legacy and not a surviving route. The same could be said for GWR. However, the three intertwined letters can still be seen in the cast iron frames of platform seats and canopy girders. Moreover, the lines of the GWR were handed over to British Railways after nationalisation in 1947. Many are still intact and even improved.



The BR logo on the tender of 5043 Earl of Mount Edgumbe at Stratford-upon-Avon

There is nothing wrong with the name “British Railways” even though its logo (applied on locomotives) was the butt of jokes referring to a “cycling lion”. The logo needed a makeover but the name was fine. As usual, the modernisers messed with both: The name was

shortened to “British Rail” and a double arrow symbol appeared on trains. There is a touch of irony that the rail is no longer (exclusively) constructed of British Steel and the Chinese nation has taken an interest in British tracks and trains.

British Railways was despised by politicians of the time and so the state-owned network was broken down into separate entities, namely Inter-City and Regional Railways. This was the preparation for privatisation at a later date. The Stourbridge Line trains were given the regional livery of dark blue and white. Inter-City trains were painted in two-tone grey. The familiar all-over BR blue quietly disappeared.

The formation of West Midland Passenger Transport Executives (WMPTE) in 1969 was the excuse to introduce another identity. The double W logo was applied to trains running within the county and across its boundary as far as Great Malvern. The name “Midline” became the brand for an enhanced service on the Stourbridge Line.



The experimental Midline livery on bubble car 55033

(Jim)



In 1990 WMPTE became Centro with its intertwined circles logo. The nation's railways were now privatised and from 1997 Central Trains had taken over the Snow Hill Lines along with former Regional Railways services passing through Birmingham New Street. Central Trains was a sister company to National Express but it would seem that the latter name was associated with coach services and inappropriate as a railway brand.

The Central Trains livery was a mixture of Green and blue. By now, all the old slam-door diesel units had been replaced by Class 150 "Sprinter" trains which were introduced in 1986. The Central Trains Company was heavily criticised for performance. To its credit, it modernised the fleet and together with Centro it upgraded stations and improved the customer experience.

In 2007 Central Trains lost the West Midlands Franchise to Govia, a multi-national company. Govia decided to trade as London Midland (LM). This was a name given to the regional operating area in the days of British Railways. The London aspect is the service which runs from Birmingham to London Euston via Northampton. Some commuters would comment that the emphasis should be on "Midland" but the reality is that the Snow Hill Lines have experienced a significant investment, in the form of the Class 172 trains. The splendid green, black and white coaches have raised the bar for comfort and image. The words, "London" and "Midland" are merged within signage and "Midland" is in bold font – rightly so.



The London Midland franchise has just expired and its successor is West Midlands Trains (WMT). The franchise will run under two brands, West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway. West Midlands Railway, operated by West Midlands Trains, will be managed by a devolved power authority known as West Midlands Rail (WMR). Effectively, WMR is an executive body of the West Midland Combined Authority (WMCA). It is an offshoot of Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) which is the umbrella organisation for bus, tram and train provision. What can be simpler!

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There are too many organisation names in the mix and it becomes confusing for passengers. I prefer simplicity. It worked when our railways were operated by Great Western Railway (later British Railways) and our buses by Midland Red.

What's in a name?

Answer: Just what it needs to say.

THE CYNIC'S GUIDE TO SECRETARIES OF STATE

by Roger Davis

The privatisation of Britain's railways in 1996 seemed to mark the end of Government interference with private companies running the services for the benefit of their shareholders. However, the demise of the ill-fated Strategic Rail Authority brought control back into DaT (Department for Transport) hands with overall decision making controlled by the Secretary of State for Transport.

Every couple of years or so, either after a General Election or when the time has come to replace some of the older poor performers with young up and coming poor performers, a cabinet reshuffle takes place. The Prime Minister sits down with two lists - a list of round holes (or cabinet positions) and a list of square pegs to fill them. After carefully matching up the square pegs and round holes, the Prime Minister usually finds one square peg left over. A quick check then reveals that, yet again, he or she has forgotten the round hole that predecessors always forgot - Transport!



Thus the position of Secretary of State for Transport is filled and the new occupant will probably fall into one of the following five categories.

The Uppers. These are the politicians destined for one of the major offices of state. They have friends in high places but to promote them directly from the position of Under Secretary in the Department of Rural Affairs in the Chipping Sodbury area to the position of Chancellor of the Exchequer may be seen as favouritism. Thus they are given Transport as an intermediary step. They have no interest at all in Transport but all they have to do for two years is not rock the boat or make a big mistake and the job they have always craved is theirs. Thus Transport spends two years in suspended animation.

The Downers. These are the politicians who have underachieved in one of the higher offices of state and are heading for political oblivion. The Prime Minister has decided out of malice to prolong their fall from grace and they are now in the Last Chance Saloon before their descent into late night television with Andrew Neil. They have no interest at all in Transport but are so desperate that they take party political actions in an attempt to make them popular with party members and hopefully get them back up that greasy pole. Downers are much more dangerous than Uppers as they have no regard at all for transport users as we have found out in the past when the Department for Transport has washed its hands of problems on the railways.

The Personal Gainers. These are politicians and businessmen who have gained great interest in Transport - usually from the shares they own in companies with transport links. Therefore, transport policy is designed to increase the value of those shares. Thus, hypothetically of course, if those shares were in a Road Building company, transport policy would encourage road improvements to the detriment of other forms of transport such as railways.

The Enthusiastic Amateurs. These are the politicians who are very interested in transport - so much so that they continually pester the Prime Minister to give them the job until the PM is forced into submission. The good news is that these people are full of ideas on improving the transport infrastructure. The bad news is that most of those ideas are rubbish.

The Round Pegs. Very occasionally, a round peg is found to fit the round hole. These are either MPs who have mysteriously found themselves matched up to the right position, or individuals brought in from other establishments. These people are very interested in transport, have many ideas on how to improve transport infrastructure and have the ability to carry these ideas through to completion. The only downside is that even these people don't remain in the job for too long, either because their political party is thrown out of power at a General Election or because the Prime Minister feels that, if they can do such a good job in Transport, they will make a brilliant Secretary of State for Wales or Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or Culture, Media and Sport.

On the previous page are photos of Ministers for Transport since 1960. It is possible that they could all be pigeon-holed into one of the five categories above. Obviously, there are no right answers as everybody has their own ideas of a politician's ability.

It will be interesting to see how the next Minister of State will compare with the current and previous incumbents. Could we hope that an expert on all matters transport not only gets the job but is allowed to keep it for a long time.

ALL CHANGE AT ... LYE

The changing scene at one of the Stourbridge line stations



TUNNEL TROUBLES

by John Warren

The Stourbridge Extension Railway from Stourbridge Junction to Handsworth Junction opened in stages with Cradley reached in 1863 and Old Hill on 1 January 1866. The major engineering feature of the line past Old Hill was Old Hill Tunnel and this opened along with the rest of the line on 1 April 1867. The tunnel carries a double track under Blackheath at a gradient of 1 in 51. It is 896 yards long and does not have a ventilation shaft, being just short enough to get away without one. For much of its length, the tunnel was built without an invert (i.e. a bottom section that connects the bottom of the two walls and therefore provides support to the two sides).

As anybody who lives in the Black Country knows, you are probably closer to a mine shaft than you are to a rat, and mining subsidence is prevalent across the area. Therefore, by the 1920s, subsidence and the lack of an invert had caused the centre section of the tunnel to become so distorted by pressures from the sides and bottom that clearance for two railway tracks was critically tight. The GWR therefore decided that a length of 330 feet near the centre of the tunnel needed to be rebuilt completely to provide not only a larger bore but an invert as well.

This work took place in 1929. To provide clearance for the work to take place, the two tracks were interlaced through the affected section with temporary signal boxes at each end of the tunnel to control single line working. A telephone box was provided at the work site within the tunnel to ensure that the signaller did not allow any train into the tunnel until the foreman told him that the route was clear and that all workmen had been warned that a train was entering the tunnel. Electric lighting was also installed at the work site which improved the working conditions. However, with about 120 trains per day passing through the tunnel, many of them heavy freight trains with both the train engine and a banking engine working hard up the 1 in 51 gradient, working conditions were not exactly favourable.

Four sets of movable steel ribs (one of which is shown in the photograph) were used to support the old arch and the ground above and each enabled a length of either 10 ft or 15 ft to be dealt with. Thus, work could take place simultaneously at four separate non-contiguous sites within the tunnel. The work consisted of cutting out the centre part of the old arch within the section, supporting it with rails and head boards and then working down each side, supporting the excavated sections with rails and head boards. The excavated material was stacked at the sides of the tunnel and removed during a twice weekly, two hour night time occupation of the line.



When the section of tunnel had been excavated down to rail level, a Sunday occupation of the line enabled the rails to be removed, the material for the invert excavated and the invert under the lines concreted. This work, including the reinstatement of the tracks took about 8 hours for a 10 ft length, although a 15 ft length needed the work to be spread over two Sundays. The brick side walls were then rebuilt and the new arch completed. Each section took a month to complete by two gangs each working an 8 hour shift.

There have been subsidence problems since at the tunnel. By the early 1960s, pressure from the back of the western portal of the tunnel meant that it had to be supported to prevent it collapsing, but this problem has since been remedied.



The western portal of Old Hill Tunnel has buttresses supporting it in 1962

(Michael Mensing)

From our point of view, the rebuilding work undertaken by those men in 1929 has ensured that we have retained our double track line throughout from Worcester to Birmingham. The conditions for the workmen in the tunnel must have been horrendous, and Health and Safety legislation would ensure that it could not be repeated today. Therefore, what would happen if problems were found in the tunnel today? For a start, the tunnel would be completely closed while repairs were carried



The western portal of Old Hill Tunnel in 1988

(Railscene)

out and the line would need to be completely closed between Stourbridge Junction and Rowley Regis due to the lack of turn back facilities at Lye, Cradley Heath and Old Hill. Bus replacement services would have to operate between the two stations.

The length of any closure would depend on the severity of the repairs. As an example, the 1,092 yard long Whiteball Tunnel

between Taunton and Tiverton Parkway was closed completely for 23 days in 2014 to repair the brick arch and line the worst parts with concrete.

Of course, we should remain optimistic and say that subsidence will never affect Old Hill Tunnel in the future. However, if a train ever enters the tunnel at one end and doesn't re-emerge at the other end

Much of the information for this article was taken from the book *GWR Engineering Work 1928-1938* by R Tourret (published by Tourret Publishing, 2003).

WORCESTER SHED'S BANANAS

by Roger Davis

The previous issue of Platform 2 featured the GWR AEC railcars that were based at Stourbridge shed. This second part moves the story southwards along the Stourbridge line to look at the railcars that were based at Worcester shed and used on many lines throughout Worcestershire including the Severn Valley and Wyre Forest lines from Hartlebury and Kidderminster.

Worcester shed received railcars from the very start, with numbers 6, 7, 25 and 33 being delivered brand new. From 1947 to 1958, Worcester had a constant allocation of six railcars, receiving both the early Gloucester RCW streamlined models and the later GWR-built angular designs.

In 1950, the six Worcester railcars operated four diagrams on weekdays but were not used on Sundays. Two of the diagrams served most parts of Worcestershire and extended into Oxfordshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire serving places such as Ledbury, Oxford, Bromyard, Stratford-upon-Avon and Droitwich Spa. One of these two diagrams spent the early morning in our territory operating from Worcester shed to Highley, Bewdley, Hartlebury and Kidderminster before returning to Worcester Foregate Street at 0927. However, it was the other two diagrams that served the Severn Valley and Wyre Forest lines.

Diagram B operated out of service from Worcester to Kidderminster and then spent all day on the Severn Valley line operating 7 journeys from Hartlebury and 6 journeys from Kidderminster, with one of these journeys travelling as far north as Buildwas. The final journey from Kidderminster to Worcester Shrub Hill operated in service at 2250 before the railcar retired to the shed having amassed 233 miles during the day.



Diagram D operated out of service from Worcester to Shelwick Junction, just north of Hereford, before reversing to operate out of service to Ludlow. It then ran in service to Woofferton before operating three full round trips from Woofferton to Kidderminster and one short round trip from Kidderminster to Bewdley. In the evening, it ran a workers' special from Woofferton to Leominster before

returning to Worcester Shrub Hill in service from Leominster via Bromyard. It then retired onto shed having completed 239 miles during the day.

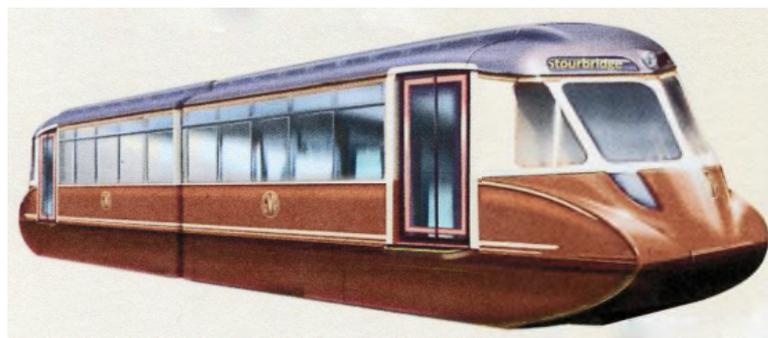
Railcar 22 arrives at Bewdley with a service from Bridgnorth on 15 August 1959



One withdrawal in 1956 was railcar 10 which was destroyed in a fire in Bridgnorth. 1958 saw an influx of the angular type from other depots to replace older streamlined models which were withdrawn and this increased the strength at the depot to seven railcars. Worcester was actually the last depot to operate railcars and the last six were withdrawn from Worcester in October 1962. These were numbers 20, 22, 23, 24, 26 and 32, the last of these having been at Worcester since 1947.

This was not the end of the story as far as Worcestershire was concerned. Number 22, which had finished its days at Worcester and regularly saw service on the Severn Valley line, was purchased by the Great Western Society at Didcot in 1967. After restoration into GWR chocolate and cream livery at both Bewdley and Bridgnorth in 1968, it remained on loan to the Severn Valley Railway until 1978 and operated a Saturday morning shoppers' service between Bridgnorth and Hampton Loade (later extended to Bewdley).

Preserved railcar 22 at the Great Western Society in Didcot



However, this may not be the end of the story if the Black Country Bugle is to be believed. In an article published in March 2015, they reported that "Parry's have designed a longer, bogie version of the Flywheel Hybrid Stourbridge Railcar and they have designed a body for it that recreates

the iconic GWR railcars that were once a common sight in our region". The new West Midlands rail franchise has specified that the new operator should address overcrowding problems on the Stourbridge Town branch. With the Class 139 having proved a very reliable vehicle on the branch, could a larger version be procured from Parry's and, if so, could we once again see a flying banana heading up the hill from Stourbridge Town station?

Most of the information in the two GWR Railcar articles came from an excellent reference book - *The History of the Great Western A.E.C. Diesel Railcars* by Colin Judge. This book was originally published in 1986 but was reprinted in 2008.

NAME THE STATION - No 4 : COMPASS POINTS

The following 12 stations, past and present, have the at least one of the words North, South, East or West somewhere in their name. Can you name them?

1. The terminus for trains from London Waterloo and Bath Green Park was actually more central than Central Station.
2. Plymouth's main station had this name until the 1960s.
3. The name of the LMS station in Gloucester that closed in 1975.
4. Would this restored Somerset station be a destination for Messrs Nettles and Dudgeon if it hadn't closed in 1966?
5. A major West Coast Main Line station between Warrington Bank Quay and Preston.
6. A south coast city is served by a Harbour station and this one in Commercial Road.
7. A station between Dudley and Wolverhampton Low Level that closed in 1962.
8. A station on the southern section of the Birmingham Cross City line.
9. A terminus on the south coast in Sussex.
10. This northern seaside station was earmarked for closure but survived when the larger Central station was closed instead.
11. This question has two answers as they are the two stations that serve the county town of Dorset.
12. This question also has two answers as they are the two stations close to the workplace that Messrs Fisher, Ramsey, Coggan, Runcie, Carey, Williams and Welby may have used.

Question 1



(Norman Lockett)

Question 4



(Norman Lockett)

RAT RAN NEAR MASS SEWAGE (or ANAGRAM TEASER ANSWERS) - No 3

The answers to Anagram Teaser No 3 were as follows :-

- 1 - RAINBOW HILL TUNNEL, 2 - SPRING ROAD, 3 - STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, 4 - BANBURY, 5 - THE HAWTHORNS, 6 - SMETHWICK JUNCTION, 7 - STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION, 8 - STRATFORD-UPON-AVON PARKWAY, 9 - WOOTTEN WAWEN, 10 - JEWELLERY QUARTER, 11 - BIRMINGHAM SNOW HILL, 12 - WORCESTER SHRUB HILL