

PLATFORM 2



Issue 11

March 2018



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

DUDLEY'S RAILWAYS

1. DUDLEY STATION by Roger Davis

This is the first in a series of articles looking at the railways of Dudley and the passenger services that emanated from Dudley.

In the mid-1840s, two railway companies identified Dudley as a town to be linked to their rail network. One was the Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton Railway (OWW) who were building a line from Oxford to Wolverhampton and the other was the South Staffordshire Railway (SSR) heading south-west from Walsall. The OWW at that time were backed by the Great Western Railway (GWR) while the SSR was backed by the London & North Western Railway (LNWR). The two companies held a high-level meeting in 1846 and this ended with a line of demarcation being drawn at Dudley with the LNWR promising not to build south of Dudley and the GWR promising not to construct any lines from Dudley towards Birmingham.

The SSR was formed on 6 October 1846 with the merging of the South Staffordshire Junction Railway (SSJR) and the Trent Valley, Midlands & Grand Junction Railway (TVM&GJR). The SSJR had gained an Act of Parliament on 3 August 1846 for the construction of a line from Walsall to Dudley and the TVMGJR had gained a separate Act on the same day to construct a line from Walsall to Lichfield, so the merger of the two companies made perfect sense. A clause inserted into the original Act stated if no train had run from Walsall to Dudley by 1 November 1849 then the rival Birmingham, Wolverhampton &



Dudley Railway (BWD) would be given powers to reach Dudley from Swan Village. On 1 November 1849, even though construction of the line was running seriously behind schedule, a special train was run from Pleck to a very temporary station in Dudley that consisted of a wooden platform attached to a goods shed. Along the line, the train passed stations and other buildings still under construction. Goods services started operating on 1 March 1850, with passenger services following during May 1850, these running to a second "temporary" station near Dudley Castle. This station opened on 1 May 1850 and was sited adjacent to Tipton Road, slightly south of the temporary station used in 1849.

Construction of the OWW line was authorised by Act of Parliament on 7 August 1845 as an 89-mile mixed-gauge railway (7ft and 4ft 8½in) from Oxford to Wolverhampton via Worcester, Stourbridge and Dudley. Construction of the line was painfully slow and the costs greatly exceeded the original estimate of £1.5m made by Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

At one stage, with the GWR dragging its feet, the OWW approached the LNWR and the Midland Railway (MR) to complete the line. No sooner had the LNWR and MR signed the agreement of 21 February 1851 to complete the construction of the line, the GWR had the agreement declared void in the Court of Chancery and offered the OWW a similar agreement. The Stourbridge to Dudley section was opened on 16 November 1852 to goods, and 20 December 1852 to passengers, with the final section of the line reaching Wolverhampton in April 1854 for goods and 1 July for passengers.

The 'temporary' SSR station was to become permanent and was still in use when the OWW opened its station on the Oxford to Wolverhampton line on 20 December 1852. Both stations consisted of island platforms, and were described as "nearly side by side but without any direct connecting line, and both consisting of equally shabby wooden shedding". All suggestions for constructing a joint station were disregarded. Years passed by, and the same unsightly and disjointed buildings remained as the passenger station. Fortunately, in the late 1850s, a fire broke out in the premises, necessitating a rebuild.

Following the fire, the stations were rebuilt along the same lines with both having an island platform. The entrance to the SSR side of the station was in Tipton Road through a high level booking office which spanned the down passenger and freight lines of the SSR. A covered flight of stairs provided access to the island platform, covered by a canopy, on which waiting rooms, toilets and offices were provided. A turntable was installed at the southern end of the station alongside an LNWR signal box.

Passengers for the OWW side of the station could access the station from Tipton Road through the SSR booking office and onto a covered bridge which spanned the



up SSR line, through lines and the up OWW line. A large GWR booking office was provided at the end of the bridge which spanned the down passenger and goods yard access lines. This booking office was also accessible from the service road that ran down the west side of the station. A covered flight of steps gave the traveller access to the island platform which was lengthy enough to easily accommodate long express trains to Paddington and

Birkenhead in the future. Waiting rooms and toilets were provided on the platforms, which were also protected by a canopy. A bay platform at the southern end of the station was used by local services to Old Hill and Stourbridge Junction. The signal box was of GWR design and was situated on the platform. Although regarded as a joint station, the two companies maintained their own separate booking and goods offices and yards.

On 1 August 1863, the OWW was absorbed into the GWR, while the SSR was absorbed into the LNWR on 15 June 1867. Goods facilities were provided by both companies. The LNWR goods facilities expanded over the years and finally consisted of two rail-connected warehouses either side of Tipton Road. The GWR yard was directly north-west of the station site with access provided from both the north and south of the former OWW line.

The “grouping” of railway companies on 1 January 1923 resulted in the LNWR station, goods facilities and associated lines being transferred to the London Midland & Scottish Railway (LMS). Nationalisation of the railways on 1 January 1948 to create British Railways (BR) saw no change as the LMS portion of the station moved into the BR London Midland Region whilst the GW side moved into BR Western Region. The goods yards were even provided with two names, Dudley Town (LMR) and Dudley Castle (WR), even though they were less than a quarter of a mile apart.



Looking from the GWR platform towards the LMS platform on 8 June 1962

(B Pask)

On 1 January 1963 a revision of BR boundaries saw the WR side of Dudley station come under the control of the LMR, thus putting the entire station under the same management for the first time ever. However, this happened after the rot had really set in, as the Wolverhampton Low Level to Stourbridge Junction services had already been withdrawn on 30 July 1962, while all other services emanating from Dudley were recommended for closure in the Beeching Report of March 1963 (*The Reshaping of British Railways*). 1964 saw the end of all passenger services through Dudley, with the station closing on 6 July 1964, although some excursions to Dudley Zoo continued to arrive at the ex-LNWR side of the station for a short period, the last documented one being on 3 August 1964.



A Class 50 locomotive on a Bescot to Gloucester freight passes the Freightliner Terminal in 1988

(J Whitehouse)

In 1967 the entire station was razed to the ground with a two-road Freightliner terminal constructed and opened by October 1967. The new terminal and many others were an instant success, and business was brisk. Sadly, though, Freightliner had opened a larger and much more accessible terminal at Landor Street, Birmingham, and the future of the Dudley site was bleak. Freightliner attempted to close the Dudley terminal as early as 1983

but it managed to survive until it was finally closed during September 1989.

After closure, the OWW line from Stourbridge and the SSR line to Walsall became part of an important freight route between South Wales/West Country and Bescot Yard, avoiding central Birmingham. However, BR announced that the line would be mothballed during March 1993, and freight services along the line north of Round Oak through Dudley ceased.



The station site on 25 March 2017

The site had returned to nature until January 2017 when work started to clear the area of 25 years of vegetation. The Dudley VLR scheme is scheduled to open in 2019 with an Innovation Centre on the site of the station and a test track installed through the tunnel to Cinder Bank. The Midland Metro extension from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill is now back on the agenda with opening currently planned in 2022/23. Finally, tram-train operation from

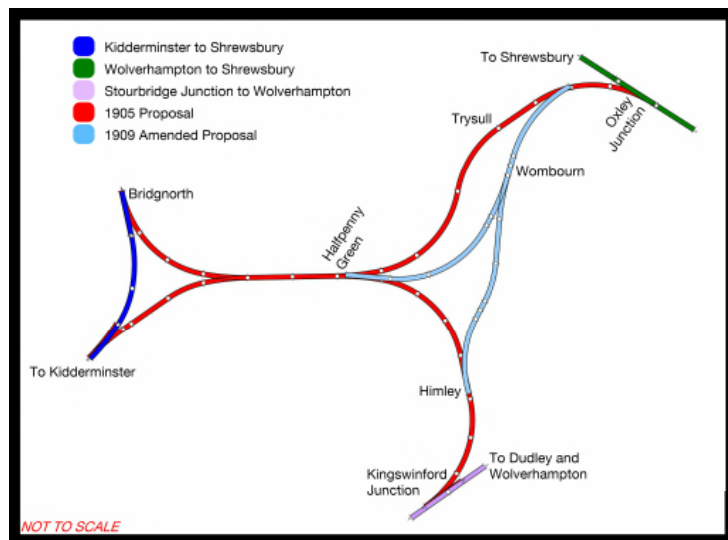
Stourbridge Junction to Walsall is an aspiration for longer term implementation.

In the next five issues of Platform 2, we will look at passenger services that emanated from Dudley, excepting the Bumble Hole line which was discussed in Issue 5. In order, we will look at the South Staffordshire line to Walsall, the Dudley Port Dodger, the line to Birmingham Snow Hill via Swan Village, the line to Stourbridge Junction and the line to Wolverhampton.

STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION TO BRIDGNORTH VIA HIMLEY ?

by John Warren

The GWR had always had ambitions to build a direct line from Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth, as passengers had to travel via Kidderminster or Shrewsbury to get



between the two towns by rail. In 1905, they received Royal Assent to build two passenger lines, one from Kingswinford Junction on the Stourbridge to Dudley line to Halfpenny Green where it would meet a second new line from Oxley Junction. The line would then join the Severn Valley railway line at a triangular junction just south of Bridgnorth. A new station at Halfpenny Green and halts at Quatford and White House. Strangely, the proposed line bypassed Wombourne, so in 1909 a second Act

of Parliament was passed to divert the line from Kingswinford Junction via new stations at Wombourne (the GWR spelling), Compton and Tettenhall to Oxley Junction, with a branch line to Bridgnorth joining the line south of Wombourne station. In 1913, work on the Bridgnorth branch was officially postponed, and the intervention of World War I meant that it was never built, although the rest of the scheme from Kingswinford Junction to Oxley Junction eventually opened to passengers in 1925.

STOURPORT RAIL PROJECTS

by Rob Hebron

A Metro tram pulling into The Hawthorns station is an everyday sight. Passengers can travel from Wolverhampton, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and tram stops in between and change onto Stourbridge Line trains. The Jewellery Line and Metro Line One were constructed in tandem and interchange between the two was intentional from the design stage. Metro tramways are commonplace throughout the urban areas of the United Kingdom and provide rapid transit to alleviate congestion on the nation's roads. Light railway systems feed into heavy railways rather than compete for passengers.

Metro Line One has been in existence since 1999, but surprisingly, it is not the first time that a tramway has served Stourbridge Line stations. As long ago as 1898, a tramway was constructed between Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn. The latter town once had its own railway station on the branch from Hartlebury to Bewdley, which pre-dated the tramway by thirty four years. The tramway was promoted as a more direct alternative to the GWR train service.

The “Kidderminster and Stourport Electric Tramway” (K&SET) was conceived in 1895 and was effectively two lines; one from Somerleyton Avenue in Kidderminster to a junction in Oxford Street, the other from Oxford Street to High Street, Stourport. The construction and engineering of the lines was undertaken by Kidderminster firm, George Law and Sons. They were laid as single track throughout with passing loops. The gauge was 3ft 6ins. which was the standard for Birmingham and Black Country tramways. Some serious gradients challenged the engineers and operators: Comberton Hill is the most notable on the section between Somerleyton and Oxford Street.



The section of the line from Oxford Street to Stourport passed the carpet factories in New Road before it continued through semi-rural terrain, crossing over the River Stour and the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. It then surmounted the GWR branch line at Foley Park, where a pick up point was provided.

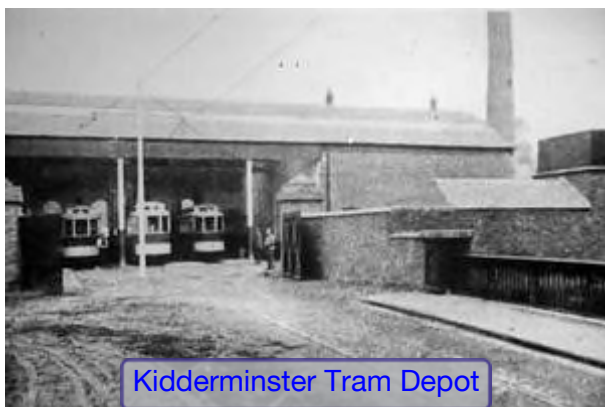
From Foley Park, trams proceeded along a course alongside what is now the A451. At the boundary of Stourport, the tramway joined the roadway and crossed the GWR line at Stourport station by means of a level crossing. The tramway now ran along Foundry Street, Lombard Street, and High Street (by the Swan Hotel) before terminating in Bridge Street.



A journey from Kidderminster to Stourport cost 3d in “old” money (equivalent to just over 1p in decimal currency) and the frequency of trams was every twenty minutes. Timings were set to coincide with trains arriving at Kidderminster railway station. Patronage was very impressive, especially at weekends when day trippers from Birmingham would transfer to the tramway. Touts would often board at Kidderminster to sell tickets for steamers on the River Severn at Stourport. By transferring to riverboat it would have been possible to travel all the way to Worcester.

The K&SET Company looked at other opportunities in the area. It looked at a possible route to Franche and another one to Bewdley. As it transpired, income from the existing route was diminishing by 1905 and the idea of new lines was abandoned. The decline in revenue was stemmed at the time of the First World War when the government commandeered motor omnibus vehicles. This left trams as the sole means of travelling between the towns. The upturn enabled profits to be invested in new vehicles, including a second double deck tram.

The reversal of fortunes was short lived. After the war, buses re-emerged and dominated the roads of Kidderminster and Stourport. In 1923, the K&SET Company decided to discontinue services from Somerleyton to Oxford Street and consequently, Comberton Hill was resurfaced to facilitate a replacement bus service. The state of the track on the Foley Park and Stourport section was deteriorating to such an extent that in 1928, there was insufficient funding to replace or even repair it. The decision was taken to close the tramway altogether.



It is conceivable that a ten year old schoolboy who rode the last K&SET tram in 1929 could have taken the first trip on the newly opened Midland Metro line. It is highly unlikely that the person is alive today but what a comparison he could make! The K&SET trams were unglazed and dubbed “toast racks”. The predominant material used in their construction was wood. Even the later double deck models,

incorporating steel, could not carry the number of passengers which Metro trams can convey.

Comfortable seating was not a prerequisite and even the hard upholstery offered on the latest Metro trams could be considered far superior. For the lifespan of the K & SET, a conductor was essential on every tram and his duties included hooking and unhooking the electric power pick up gear by means of a bamboo pole. Tram stops were rudimentary and not integrated with train station infrastructure. The whole experience was inferior to Metro travel.

In 2006 there was a cry for a new tram service to Stourport. The town had lost its railway station by 1970 and tracks had been torn up. A campaign group called “Stourport Rail Project” was formed to promote a light railway along the course of the Stourport to Hartlebury branch line.

The group invited Mr John Parry of Parry People Movers to investigate the possibility of running one of his PPM railcars along this corridor. Mr Parry was very keen but financial support from Worcestershire County Council was not forthcoming. The cost would have been enormous because bridges had been demolished and platforms removed. The enthusiasm of individuals concerned did not create the impetus for the project to progress any further.

John Parry talks to Stourport Rail Project members on the trackbed between Hartlebury and Stourport



However, the Very Light Rail technology which John Parry has developed has moved forward into the realms of Ultra-Light Rail and it is possible that some day, a cost effective vehicle will be developed in Dudley to justify reinstating a railway/tramway. In the meantime, SLUG is campaigning to develop Hartlebury as a rail head for Stourport. This is the starting point!

(Source: - The Illustrated History of the Kidderminster and Stourport Electric Tramway Company by M. Thompson and D. Voice)

ALL CHANGE AT ... HARTLEBURY
The changing scene at one of the Stourbridge line stations



FIRST GENERATION MULTIPLE UNITS

by Roger Davis

On 1 December 1954, the British Transport Commission published a document entitled “Modernisation and Re-equipment of British Railways”, now better known as the 1955 Modernisation Plan. There were five main recommendations, the following two directly affecting passenger services.

1. Steam must be replaced as a form of motive power, electric or diesel traction being rapidly introduced as may be most suitable in the light of the development of the Plan over the years; this will involve the electrification of large mileages of route, and the introduction of several thousand electric or diesel locomotives. *Total cost £345 million.*

2. Much of the existing steam-drawn passenger rolling stock must be replaced, largely by multiple-unit electric or diesel trains; the remaining passenger rolling stock, which will be drawn by locomotives (whether electric, diesel or steam), must be modernised; the principal passenger stations and parcels depots will also require considerable expenditure. *Total cost £285 million.*

Two first generation DMUs sandwich a second generation unit at Stourbridge Junction.



(John Carter)

The report also stated that “the total number of multiple-unit diesel vehicles that can be employed on British Railways for the services listed above is estimated at about 4,600, including the 300 now in use or on order. The cost of the 4,300 vehicles to be built under the Plan is approximately £35 million”.

On a more optimistic note, it proposed the immediate electrification of the East Coast Main Line, something that didn't happen in its entirety until 1991, and electrification of the Ashford to Hastings line which still hasn't happened over 60 years later.



The view from the front seat of a first generation DMU.

(Dave Enefer)

Thus, in indecent haste, a plethora of diesel multiple units were sourced from many manufacturers - Birmingham RC&W, BR Derby, BR Swindon, Cravens, Gloucester RC&W, Metropolitan-Cammell, Park Royal, Pressed Steel and D Wickham & Co. However, as a child growing up in the 1950s, the new multiple units were treated with awe as, if you were able to get a front seat, you could see through the glass partition into the

driver's cab and past that to the line in front of the train.

For the Stourbridge line, 17 June 1957 was the changeover day when 29 3-car suburban units built at BR Derby took over the suburban services radiating from Birmingham Snow Hill. After a fanfare of publicity, posters and pamphlets showing diesel trains, and having a set on exhibition at Snow Hill on 14 June, it was a bit of an anti-climax to find that less than half the trains on the first day were actually diesels. The public was disappointed and sceptical, and at least two DMU services failed that day. In addition, the steam hauled trains working to the DMU schedule had difficulty keeping time because of running around and water stops. In fact, up to 1965, diesel multiple unit services were augmented by steam operated services, particularly in the rush hours and it wasn't unusual to find a GWR "Castle" class locomotive on a local train to Stourbridge Junction.



A year later, on 9 June 1958, the long distance services from Birmingham Snow Hill to Cardiff General via Kidderminster were converted to multiple unit operation, using 3-car cross-country sets built by BR Swindon, supplemented by 3-car cross-country units built by Gloucester RC&W. Unfortunately, as the 1960s wore on, through trains via the Stourbridge line ceased, leaving the line with very few services operating south of Kidderminster.



From 1970, British Rail started allocating Class numbers to its diesel multiple units and the Derby-built suburban units became Class 116. Incidentally, the cross-country units previously employed on the line became Class 119 (Gloucester RC&W) and 120 (BR Swindon).

The Class 116 units had proved popular with the Western Region and the batch built for Birmingham area services were followed by batches built for the Cardiff Valley lines and Bristol suburban services. Thus, due to the decimation of the Bristol suburban network and some reduction of the Valley Lines services in the 1960s, some of these units transferred to Tyseley for use in the Birmingham area.

By the 1980s, the first generation DMUs were badly in need of replacement, and sets were being reformed using serviceable vehicles. Second generation units started to appear in 1984 when the first Class 150 Sprinter units were introduced. Sprinter units were introduced between 1984 and 1992 for use across the country. The appalling Pacer units were introduced between 1985 and 1987 and continue to cause misery to passengers in the West Country, Cardiff Valleys and Northern

Pressed Steel Suburban Unit (Class 117) at Stourbridge Junction



(Andrew Smith / miac.co.uk)

England. Hopefully, the end of these “bus bodies” is nigh. Finally, Turbo units were introduced between 1991 and 1993 on local services out of Marylebone and Paddington stations. However, although many parts of the country benefited from these new units, the Birmingham suburban network continued to be operated using the aging First Generation units. To keep these services running, vehicles from DMUs of many classes never seen before

in the West Midlands were cascaded to Tyseley - Metro-Cammell Class 101, BR Derby Classes 114, 115 and 127, Pressed Steel Class 117 and Birmingham RC&W Class 118.

My first ever ride on the Stourbridge line occurred shortly after I had moved home from Tipton to Kingswinford in 1986. I boarded a Class 116 unit at Cradley Heath en route to New Street. The unit had obviously just arrived from Cardiff given that it had maps of the Valley Lines network along the roof line as well as a number of notices in English and Welsh. It became obvious that the set was not well and we finally ground to a halt just before Old Hill Tunnel, having to wait until we were rescued by the following service which coupled up to our rear and pushed us up the rest of the bank.

BR Derby Suburban Unit (Class 116) at Langley Green in 1983



(Andrew Smith / miac.co.uk)

The latter years saw services operated either using surviving vehicles of a single class or by making up sets using vehicles from different classes. Fortunately, the introduction of the last class of Sprinters (Class 158) from 1989 to 1992 enabled second generation DMUs to be cascaded and released enough Class 150 units to start the conversion of Birmingham suburban services to Class 150 usage. This, and the electrification of the Cross City line in 1993, saw the end of the first generation DMUs in the West Midlands.

In issue 13, we will look at the First Generation “Bubble Cars” used on the Stourbridge Town branch.

DO YOU KNOW ...?

The date that five Southern Region Pacifics visited Stourbridge

The date was Saturday 27 April 1963 when the FA Cup Semi-Final between Manchester United and Southampton was played at Villa Park. This was later than originally scheduled because of the big freeze that had caused chaos that winter. Twelve specials were operated to transport Southampton fans to the match and all were hauled by "West Country" and "Battle of Britain" Pacific locomotives designed for the Southern Railway by Oliver Bulleid.

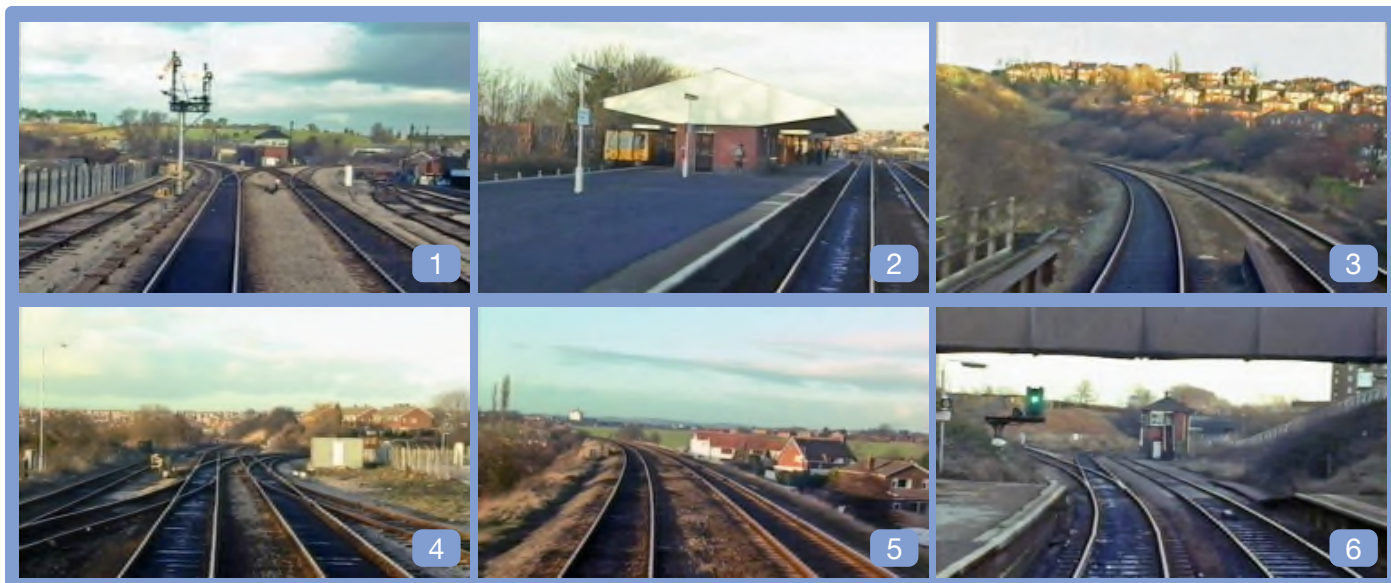
Three of the services operated from Oxford via Stourbridge Junction and were hauled by 34009 *Lyme Regis*, 34039 *Boscastle* and 34046 *Braunton*. The other nine services operated from Oxford to Snow Hill via Leamington Spa, but two of these, operated by 34045 *Ottery St Mary* and 34088 *213 Squadron* were brought down to Stourbridge as empty stock to be serviced at the depot. The match was won 1-0 by Manchester United with a goal from Denis Law.

34039 *Boscastle* approaches Stourbridge Junction on the return service to Southampton



WHERE ARE WE ? - No 1

The following are views taken from the driver's cab between Worcester Shrub Hill and Smethwick Galton Bridge taken in 1988. Can you name the locations?



NAME THE STATION ANSWERS - No 4 : COMPASS POINTS

Here are the answers to Name The Station 4 which featured in the previous issue.

1 - Bournemouth West, 2 - Plymouth North Road, 3 - Gloucester Eastgate, 4 - Midsomer Norton South, 5 - Wigan North Western, 6 - Portsmouth and Southsea, 7 - Bilston West, 8 - Northfield, 9 - Eastbourne, 10 - Blackpool North, 11 - Dorchester West and Dorchester South, 12 - Canterbury East and Canterbury West