

A Class 155 dmu approaches Droitwich Spa on a Birmingham - Cardiff service.



(www.miac.co.uk)

11 May 1987 saw the reintroduction of through services between the Stourbridge line and Cardiff - this time with services running via Cheltenham, Gloucester and Chepstow rather than via Hereford. On Mondays to Saturdays, 5 through trains operated between New Street and Cardiff Central in each direction, while there were 4 through trains in each direction on Sundays. The journey time was reduced to about 2½ hours with stops along the

Stourbridge line at Cradley Heath, Stourbridge Junction, Kidderminster, Droitwich Spa and Worcester Shrub Hill. In May 1990, the Birmingham New Street to Cardiff services were re-routed to operate via Bromsgrove, with the Stourbridge line services diverted to Hereford. The excuse used was that it would shorten journey times between Birmingham and Cardiff, while Stourbridge line passengers had a single change either at Droitwich Spa onto the rerouted Birmingham to Cardiff service or at Hereford onto Shrewsbury to Cardiff services.

Neither of these single connections still exists. Birmingham to Cardiff services were diverted away from Droitwich Spa and Worcester via the Midland main line while Birmingham to Hereford services were diverted away from the Stourbridge line and now operate via Bromsgrove. Both changes were done to “shorten journey times”. There is now only one parliamentary service from Hereford via the Stourbridge line on a Saturday evening at 1911. What it means is that, to travel from the Stourbridge line to Cardiff, you either have to travel into Birmingham and walk across to New Street or change twice - at Droitwich Spa and Hereford.

There is one development that could change the situation in the future and reintroduce a single change service. Worcestershire Parkway station is due to open in 2017 and it is proposed that Nottingham to Cardiff services stop there. Great Western Railway are concerned that the station is to be built with only a single platform on the Cotswold line. They want a passing loop and two platforms to be available from the outset. Although this will not happen when the station is built, passive provision for a second platform will be provided and it is hoped that Great Western Railway will apply enough pressure to ensure that the second platform and passing loop is provided as soon as possible. Stourbridge Line User Group feels that Stourbridge line trains should be extended to serve Worcestershire Parkway station, thus giving our passengers connections onto the trains that stop at the Birmingham to Cheltenham platforms, though line capacity and existing signalling on the single line to Evesham will preclude that until that second platform is provided. The alternative is to extend some of our services to Cheltenham Spa and Gloucester to provide connections there. Stourbridge Line User Group will be liaising with West Midlands Rail to ensure that the new London Midland franchise includes improvements in this area.

# PLATFORM 2



Issue 2

January 2016



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## WORCESTER'S INTER CITY "EXPRESS"

by Roger Davis

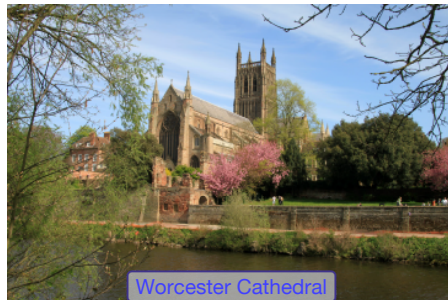


On Mondays to Saturdays, if you leave Cradley Heath at 1003, Stourbridge Junction at 1009 or Kidderminster at 1018, you arrive at Worcester Foregate Street in plenty of time to connect with the 1050 (1046 on Saturdays) Great Malvern to Brighton service, which links eight English cities. A return service to Great Malvern leaves Brighton at 0859

(0900 on Saturdays). Unfortunately, it cannot be classified as an Inter City Express service as it is operated by Sprinter DMUs and takes just under 5½ hours to cover about 216 miles at an average speed of just under 40 mph, taking in such byways as Cam & Dursley, Freshford, Avoncliff and Dilton Marsh. However, for anybody with a bit of time on their hands who wants a two or three day break at a historic English city, this train provides a service for Stourbridge line passengers that requires only a single change. Let's look at the cities along the route, with the Monday to Friday outward and return times (the Saturday times may vary slightly).

### Worcester (outward 1103, return 1417)

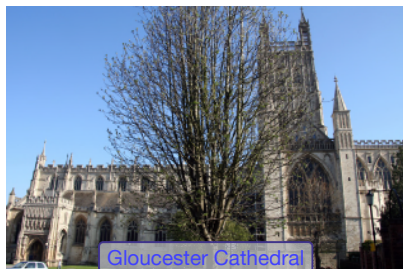
Worcester is a historic cathedral city on the banks of the River Severn. The major attraction is the magnificent 12th century cathedral and panoramic views over the city and the surrounding countryside may be had by climbing the 235 steps to the top of the tower. In addition, Worcester has many fine half-timbered buildings, especially in New Street and Friar Street where the Greyfriars House (National Trust) and the Tudor House Museum may be visited. At the end of Friar Street, turn to the left along Sidbury to visit The Commandery, the headquarters of Charles II during the Civil War and now a Civil War Museum. Finally, Worcester is famous for Royal Worcester Porcelain and the premises are now a museum.



Worcester Cathedral

### Gloucester (outward 1145, return 1337)

Gloucester is a city on the banks of the River Severn with a magnificent cathedral that is well worth a visit. A 15 minute walk will take you to the historic Gloucester Docks, now transformed as a leisure attraction offering a couple of museums and a designer shopping outlet. Boat trips along the canal are also available at the docks.



Gloucester Cathedral

The situation remained much the same after the 2nd World War with service levels not increasing until 1951 when an additional southbound service was introduced. The 0800 service from Snow Hill, which had taken 3 hours and 1 minute in 1935, now took over 3½ hours to reach Cardiff. One innovation was a Saturdays only service which ran over the holiday peak from the end of July to the start of September. The southbound service ran from Kidderminster to Barry Island while the northbound service ran through to Birmingham Snow Hill.



(Michael Mensing)

A Swindon-built Cross Country dmu approaches Old Hill in 1964 with the 1345 Cardiff General to Birmingham Snow Hill service. The single railcar in the background is waiting to operate a service to Dudley.

Hall Class 4-6-0 6907 "Davenham Hall" waits to depart from platform 1 at Snow Hill on the 1700 service to Cardiff General in early 1958.



(Michael Mensing)

9 June 1958 saw a major improvement to the services with the introduction of Swindon-built Cross-Country DMU's to the service. The new service comprised 6 trains in each direction with a running time of between 3 hours 10 minutes and 3 hours 15 minutes - still more than the fastest steam operated service in 1935!

The 1961 Summer Timetable shows one very interesting departure over the line which ran on the evening of Friday 28 July only. It left Birmingham Snow Hill at 2157 and called at Stourbridge Junction (2226), Kidderminster (2239), Worcester Foregate Street (2304), Great Malvern (2317), Hereford (2353) and Cardiff General (0145) arriving at Fishguard Harbour at 0530. It connected with the 0700 ferry to Rosslare and was for West Midlands passengers holidaying in Ireland. Surprisingly, there was no corresponding northbound service a week or two later. Perhaps they were expecting everybody to stay in Ireland!

By 1963, Birmingham to Cardiff services ran approximately every 2 hours (southbound at 0805, 1005, 1205, 1405, 1605, 1805 and northbound at 0735, 0940, 1140, 1340, 1540 and 1845 with one northbound service starting at Carmarthen).

1967 saw services transferred from Snow Hill to New Street, but the services were now on borrowed time and had all disappeared by the end of the decade.

**CAPITAL DIRECT**  
by Roger Davis

**Part 2 : Cardiff**

Although through trains from the Stourbridge line to London were introduced in the 1850's shortly after the line was opened, through services to Cardiff did not start until the 1880's. In 1887, there was one through train in each direction between Birmingham Snow Hill and Cardiff via Stourbridge, Worcester and Hereford. The southbound service left Snow Hill at 1000 arriving at Cardiff at 1500, while the northbound journey left Cardiff at 1300 arriving at Snow Hill at 1815.

A Birmingham to Cardiff service stops at Smethwick West (previously Smethwick Junction) in 1960. The station closed in 1996.



By the start of the 20th century, the services had been greatly improved and named "The South Wales Expresses". There were four services in each direction. The southbound services left Snow Hill at 1015, 1138, 1555 and 1750, the first running non-stop between Snow Hill and Stourbridge Junction while the last three also stopped at Smethwick Junction (latterly Smethwick West). Two of the northbound services also

stopped at Smethwick Junction, while a third stopped there "on request". One interesting feature of some of these trains was that they combined with services between the West Country and the North West via Bristol and Shrewsbury. As an example, one of the northbound services from Cardiff to Birmingham had additional coaches for Shrewsbury and beyond. It arrived at Pontypool Road just before a West to North service and the two trains were combined. At Hereford, the two trains were split with the Cardiff to Shrewsbury coaches now attached to the West to North train. The two trains then departed from Hereford separately. The same procedure was used on southbound services with trains combining at Hereford and splitting at Pontypool Road.

By 1935, the number of trains had been reduced to 3 in each direction. One of the southbound trains truly was an express, leaving Snow Hill at 0800 and stopping only at Smethwick Junction, Stourbridge Junction, Kidderminster, Worcester Foregate Street, Great Malvern, Hereford, Pontypool Road, Newport and Cardiff, arriving at 1101. By this time, the practice of trains combining and splitting had stopped, although the 1235 Cardiff to Birmingham service had carriages for Manchester London Road and Birkenhead which were detached at Pontypool Road and re-coupled to the 0852 service from Plymouth North Road.

**Bristol (outward 1235, return 1241)**

Bristol is a historic city and port on the banks of the River Avon and was once the second city in the land. Unfortunately, a lot of its finest buildings were destroyed by the Luftwaffe in the 1940s and Bristol City Planners in the 1950s, the latter probably causing far more destruction than the former. One name associated with Bristol was Isambard Kingdom Brunel and no visit to Bristol is complete without visiting his magnificent Clifton Suspension Bridge. Other attractions are the fine parish church of St Mary Redcliffe (described by Queen Elizabeth I as the finest in the kingdom), Bristol Docks and Brunel's SS Great Britain, Bristol Zoological Gardens, Park Street and the Cabot Tower on Brandon Hill. This time, it is only 108 steps to the top to get panoramic views of Bristol and the surrounding area.



**Bath (outward 1256, return 1211)**

England's foremost Georgian spa, which became a World Heritage Site in 1987, has its origins as the Roman city Aquae Sulis and the Roman Baths are a major attraction today. The superb Georgian architecture is best exemplified by John Wood's magnificent Royal Crescent and The Circus, the Assembly Rooms, the Pump Room and Robert Adams' Pulteney Bridge spanning the River Avon. Bath Abbey was founded in the 7th century but the current building dates from between the 12th and 16th centuries. One hidden gem off the normal tourist trail is the superbly restored Bath Green Park railway station which is now used as an indoor market and car park for a nearby Sainsburys. What a pity it no longer sees train services from The North to Bournemouth.



## Salisbury (outward 1402, return 1113)

Salisbury is also on the River Avon, but a different Avon to that which passes through Bath and Bristol. The city is dominated by the magnificent spire of its 13th century cathedral which, at 404 feet high, is the tallest in the country. The cathedral also houses a copy of the Magna Carta, signed by King John in 1215. Around the cathedral is the Cathedral Close which houses many fine buildings including Arundells (the home of Edward Heath) and Mompesson House (National Trust). The city centre has many fine historic buildings including the 15th century Poultry Cross. Just outside Salisbury is the site of Old Sarum, the location of the city until 1220, while Stonehenge is only 8 miles away and easily reached by tourist buses.



## Southampton (outward 1434, return 1042)

Southampton is one of the major ports in the United Kingdom and, as a result, suffered extensive bombing during World War II which destroyed many historic buildings. The main shopping centre dates from the 1950s, although a centrepiece of the area is the Grade I listed Norman Bargate. Between the Bargate and the docks, portions of the old city

walls still exist. Inside the walls, a few medieval buildings survived the blitz including the magnificent half timbered Tudor House in Bridge Street and the Medieval Merchant's House in Castle Way. Boat trips and the Isle of Wight ferry are available at the docks and large modern cruise liners regularly visit.

## Chichester (outward 1529, return 0946)

Chichester is a small city in West Sussex with a fine 12th century cathedral. Alongside the cathedral is a 15th century bell tower, which was built at a distance because parts of the cathedral were prone to collapse due to subsidence. The centre of the city (at the intersection of North Street, East Street, South Street and West Street) is marked by the 15th century Chichester Cross, a perpendicular market cross built by the Bishop of Chichester. The Chichester Festival Theatre was founded in 1962 and its first artistic director was Sir Laurence Olivier, who based the first National Theatre Company at the theatre.



Both members of staff are qualified drivers. When one isn't driving, he/she performs Customer Service duties. Ordinarily, we do 1 hours driving at a time, then swap to the other role, although we can swap over whenever we feel like it.

Early shift crews operate Shuttle journeys 5am-3pm. Late crew 3pm-midnight. (Late crews refuel the Railcar after service

at midnight and occasionally perform Railcar swaps if required.) Our rota is on a 4 days on/4 days off rota that rolls continuously including weekends and Bank Holidays. (The only days we don't operate are Christmas Day and Boxing Day). Crews have one 30-minute "personal needs break" and a 1 hour lunch break during shifts, during which another member of staff provides cover. Outside of this cover, that member of staff provides standby cover to ensure continuity of the service.

## What of the future?



The Shuttle is operated under contract to LM and thus our service will be under review when LM's franchise comes up for renewal. We will be part of the discussions and negotiations. Longer-term, we're looking at vehicle capacity and how we can improve the service further. We're talking with Network Rail to address improvements to ride quality on the line. Pre Metro Operations Ltd is also involved in discussions regarding potential operations at several locations

around the UK that are considering a similar light rail operation. Recent local media reports have highlighted plans to operate a new Very Light Rail service between Dudley and Dudley Port, and we are involved in this proposal.

The Shuttle is active in the World of social media too! Our Twitter feed (@SbridgeShuttle) and Facebook page (facebook.com/StourbridgeShuttle) carries details of live service information for both the Shuttle and Snow Hill line services, which may affect our passengers. We also provide information about local Stourbridge area bus services if there are issues. Occasionally, we also give a nod to our local history if we come across any old photos or articles about railways in Stourbridge.

We're also building a new website at [premetro.co.uk](http://premetro.co.uk), where we'll include downloads for rail enthusiasts and our younger fans!

## How do we swap the Railcars around?



If one has a problem, or routinely (early on Sunday mornings before a later public service starts), we use the ground frame to change the points, much like our forefathers would have done over the previous 100-plus years! By changing the path, one Railcar can move onto the area near the old signal box, and via communication between the Person In Charge and Driver, we can alter the points in order to move one Railcar behind the other on the single line and back

into the depot.

Line speed is a 20mph maximum, which means the 10 minute service can be maintained with a turnaround time of around 60 to 90 seconds at either end. It is literally a continuous operation!



It's also worth addressing from a passenger perspective why we operate strictly to the LM timetable and appear to depart when some Snow Hill line trains arrive. The "turn up and go" 10-minute frequency is very attractive to our passengers. During the day, Snow Hill lines services to Birmingham are also on similar frequencies. But we also connect with bus services at Stourbridge Town, in the adjacent Interchange. Some of these services run at lower frequencies, and

we know that many of our users make connections with bus services. Although many Snow Hill line trains are designed to connect comfortably with The Shuttle, not all do. Add into the mix that some will inevitably run slightly late, even by a minute or so. If the Snow Hill line service is coming in on platform 3 (towards Kidderminster), it will take time for passengers to get across to platform 1 to reach The Shuttle. It is always a judgement for our staff in this situation. If we delay the Shuttle by any more than a few seconds, we start to lose our timetable. More importantly, existing passengers may be making connections onto buses at the Town. And the next journey from Town to Junction will consequently depart late, potentially inconveniencing passengers making onward journeys back at the Junction. It may seem like "only a few seconds" to wait at the Junction, but that can quickly add up to a minute, maybe two minutes. Some passengers may not be as quick as others in making their way to platform 1, some may need to use the lift. So delaying the Shuttle on our high frequency has implications, which is why we operate to the LM timetable. We may hold for a few seconds, but the window of opportunity to do this literally is those "few seconds".

## Brighton and Hove (outward 1614, return 0859)

Brighton and Hove is one of Britain's premier seaside resorts and was, in fact, two separate towns until 1997. The combined town gained city status in 2001, on the same day as Wolverhampton. The most famous building in Brighton is the idiosyncratic Royal Pavilion, built by John Nash for the Prince Regent (later George IV) as a seaside retreat and love nest to share with his mistress Maria Fitzherbert. Brighton and Hove has many fine Regency squares, crescents and terraces, with the Brunswick area of Hove and the Kemp Town area of Brighton having the finest examples. The Lanes and North Laine area of Brighton is famous for its independent antique and bohemian shops. The world's first electric railway, designed by Magnus Volk, runs along the promenade between the Brighton Marina and the Palace Pier. The latter is the only pier in use in Brighton today although the skeletal remains of the West (and best) Pier can still be seen. However, summer 2016 will see the opening of the British Airways i360 observation tower which, at 162 metres tall with a viewing platform 138 metres high, will be the tallest observation tower outside of London. Full details about the tower are at <http://britishairwaysi360.com/>.



### INTER CITY EXPRESS QUIZ

1. The Great Malvern to Brighton service also stops at a number of other stations. How many can you identify from the clues.
  - a. An Oscar Wilde character was named after this station.
  - b. Horace Batchelor and Five Boys hailed from this town.
  - c. This is the county town of Wiltshire.
  - d. Earl Mountbatten of Burma lived on the outskirts of this town.
  - e. This town once had stations named Lansdown, Malvern Road and St James.
2. The Great Malvern to Brighton service links eight English cities. This is nowhere near the record as there is a train service which links 15 British cities. The question is - which service is it and what are the 15 cities it serves?

Answers in the next issue of Platform 2.

## SHUTTLE SERVICE ! By Phil Tonks (Class 139 Driver)

The Stourbridge branch line has been the source of much curiosity since 1879. The ¾ -mile line linking Junction and Town was built because the Old Worse and Worse (otherwise known as the Oxford Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway) didn't bring the line close enough to Stourbridge town centre. (The Junction station is actually in Oldswinford).

Plenty has been written about the history of the (supposedly) shortest branch line in Europe, but today it is flourishing under the operation of the "Stourbridge Shuttle", continuing the town's proud railway history with innovative "Parry People Mover" Railcars.

I earn my keep driving the service, so if you want to know a bit more about the operation, read on!

The Railcars are Class 139 in railway parlance, and we have the only 2 operational examples. They wear London Midland livery and the staff wear London Midland uniforms. It's a London Midland (LM) service, but behind the scenes, it is operated by the UK's smallest Train Operating Company – Pre Metro Operations Ltd, under contract to LM.

Staff are dedicated to the operation. Although trained to the applicable Railway Group standards and the Railway Rule Book, we only operate on this line. It's a good thing, as we get to know our regulars, and they get to know us – a real community feel!



The service has been operated fully by the Railcars since 2009 (although there were significant trials in the preceding years) and for passengers, many improvements on the previous operation by Class 153 units. A higher frequency (mostly every 10 minutes from either end), a flat-level entry for wheelchair and buggy users, a much cleaner/greener operation when it comes to emissions (using a flywheel/LPG system that

captures energy when braking to power it back up hill towards the Junction) and overall a cheaper general operation. A Sunday service was also introduced for the first time in many years.

For the statistics lovers, our rolling PPM (Public Performance Measure) is hovering around 99.7% - our service is very resilient and highly reliable! On weekdays, we operate 214 individual journeys every day (normally 6 return trips per hour) with slightly fewer late evenings, early Saturdays and Sundays. In a typical 4-week period, this equates to 5424 scheduled services. Passenger numbers are growing. From an average of around 34,000 per month when we took the service over in 2009/10, we are on course to top an average of 44,000 per month this year. We have seen significant rises in student use, both for Hagley schools and Stourbridge College / King Edward's students, as well as a rise in the numbers of commuters. Although the Railcars seat 21 passengers for the 3-minute journey, we can carry up to 60 passengers in total including standing passengers. For most journeys throughout the day, however, the capacity is adequate. Longer-term, we're looking at possibilities for larger Railcars. One frequently asked question is why we can't couple the two Railcars together for greater capacity during peak-periods. Operationally, we can't do this, although the two can be hooked up in case of breakdown for recovery purposes.

On the engineering front a small bespoke depot provides for all of the maintenance requirements for the 2 Railcars. Such work varies from routine A and B exams right through to major work such as engine changes and fitting reprofiled wheels to Railcar axles. A truly self-contained operation.



### So what's a typical day like?

Early staff book on at 5am. There is always 2 staff, as required for the operation – good for safety, security, revenue protection and general passenger well being. Once any operational notices have been read, the operational Railcar is checked over prior to commencement of service. This involves a series of checks to ensure the vehicle is fit for service. As the line is a single line operation, we also require a token or "staff", which we have to obtain from a locked box via communication with Network Rail. We also check in with London Midland's Control Centre. First journey on weekdays is at 0545 from Junction.