

# Platform 2



The anonymous modern entrance to Snow Hill station contrasts sharply with the 1912 entrance and that proposed in 1939

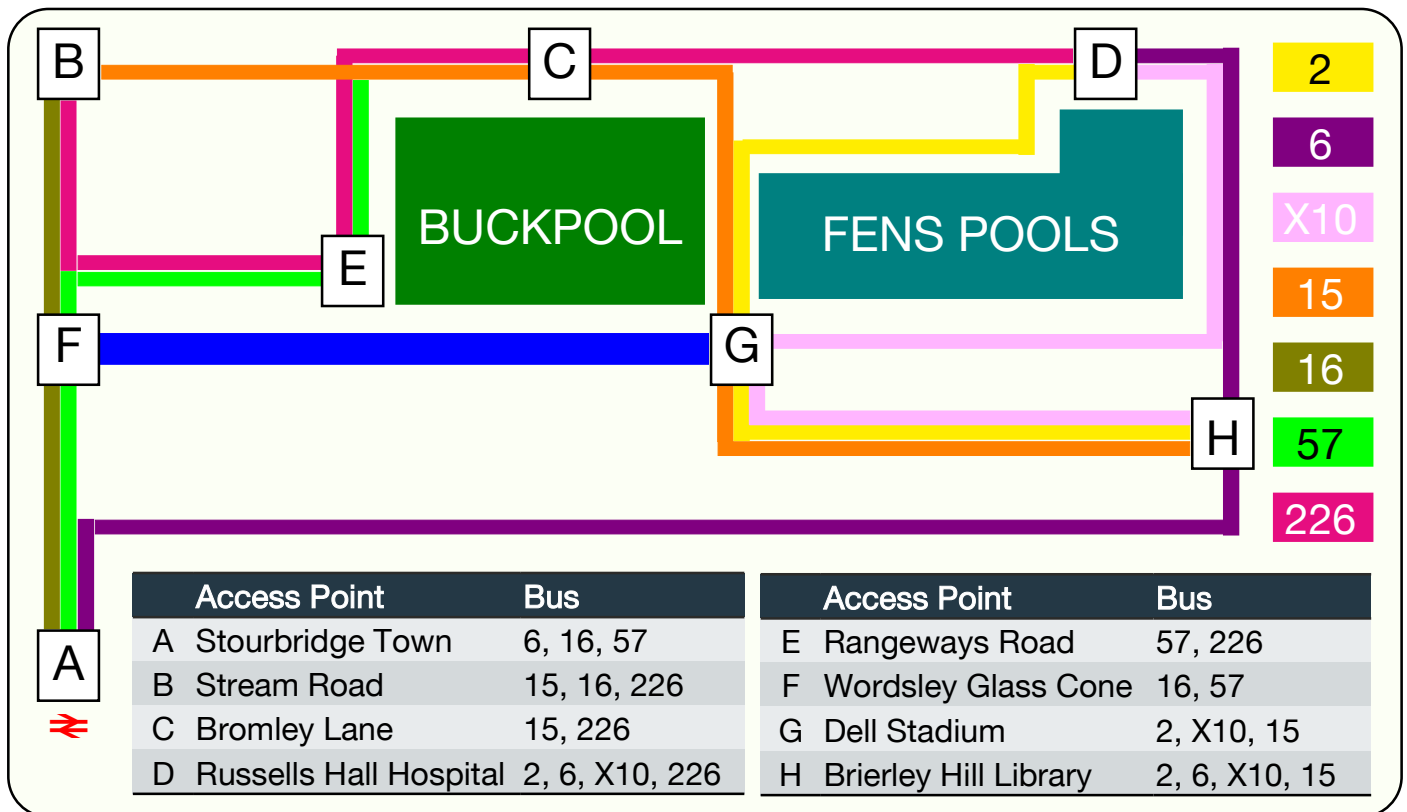
## CONTENTS

- 2 A Return To Nature
- 5 What Might Have Been : 1 - Birmingham Snow Hill
- 8 Load Of Rubbish
- 10 Meet The Neighbours : 1 - Kidderminster
- 12 All Change At ... The Hawthorns
- 12 Platform 2 Quiz Corner - Questions and Answers

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## A RETURN TO NATURE by Roger Davis

In the previous issue of *Platform 2*, I looked at the towpath walks that are accessible by public transport from Stourbridge Town station. One potential route is the 1½ mile stretch from Wordsley Glass Cone [F] to The Dell Stadium [G].



For ¾ mile, the canal towpath forms the southern boundary of the Buckpool Nature Reserve. This area was once part of Pensnett Chase, a medieval hunting ground of the Barons of Dudley. It was gradually turned to industrial use, with coal mines, clay quarries, brickworks and a network of mineral railways. The collieries and clay pits closed in the early 20th century but the brickworks and railway lasted until the 1960s.



Since then, the area has been allowed to return to nature with the former clay pits flooded to become ponds. This has attracted a variety of wildlife and resulted in the area being declared a nature reserve in 1993. Anybody walking along this section of the canal towpath (red dots) will find five access points into the nature reserve indicated by the pink arrows on Map 1.

In addition, pale blue arrows on Map 1 show seven access points at the northern edge of the nature reserve. The majority of these access points are relatively close to a bus stop. Service 15 (orange dots) connects with service 6 at Brierley Hill [H] or service 16 at Stream Road in Kingswinford [B]. Service 57 (green dots) operates directly to Stourbridge. Service 226 (magenta dots) connects with service 16 at Stream Road in Kingswinford [B] or service 6 at Russells Hall Hospital [D].



Having entered the nature reserve, it is easy to find your way back to the canal and to the access points at Wordsley Glass Cone [F] or The Dell Stadium [G].

However, this is not the end of the story. If you walk to the end of the canal at The Dell Stadium [G], cross Pensnett Road and walk a few yards uphill, you can access a second transformed industrial wasteland.



This is the Fens Pools Nature Reserve, named after one of the three large pools that dominate the area - Fens Pool, Middle Pool and Grove Pool. These pools act as reservoirs to feed the Stourbridge Canal.



As well as the access point from the Stourbridge Canal at The Dell Stadium (pink arrow on Map 2), there are at least six other access points close to bus stops as shown on by the pale blue arrows on Map 2. Two access points, at Dudley Road (Harts Hill) and Russells Hall Hospital, are served by service 6 (purple dots) direct from Stourbridge, while other access points are served by services 2 (yellow dots), X10 (pink dots) and 15 (orange dots). Service 2 is close to the access points in Poets' Corner in Pensnett (so called because all the streets on the estate are named after poets) and connect with service 6 at Brierley Hill [H] and at Russells Hall Hospital [D]. Service 15 has stops along Commonsides and Pensnett Road which serve the Nature Reserve. This route connects with Stourbridge services 6 and 16 as detailed earlier.

More details on the Buckpool and Fens Pools Nature Reserves can be found at the following links.

<https://www.dudley.gov.uk/things-to-do/nature-reserves/buckpool-fens-pools-and-barrow-hill-nature-reserves/>

<http://www.thedirectree.com/who-s-who/buckpool-fens-pool-nature-reserve>

Hopefully, the last two issues of *Platform 2* have shown that there are a number of pleasant walks easily accessible by train and bus to and from Stourbridge Town.

Happy walking!



## WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

### 1 : Birmingham Snow Hill by Rob Hebron

In previous years' *Platform 3* newsletter, Roger Davis has reproduced many historic articles from the press which relate to local public transport. The full compendium is fascinating reading. I have always been interested in proposals from the rail industry and the details. Whether they may or not have borne fruit does not concern me. It is the background and the reason for the result which fascinates me. Naturally, there are many factors in developing a good idea but the main two are viability and practicality. Of course, there are other reasons why innovative solutions materialise (or do not see the light of day), including vested interests. With the benefit of hindsight, certain decisions concerning our railway would have been overturned or modified. This is where we are now, but I often wonder what might have been.

The original Birmingham Snow Hill Station was constructed for the Great Western Railway in 1852 and simply bore the name "Birmingham". In 1858 the suffix "Snow Hill" was attached to distinguish it. A hotel designed by Julius Chatwin was added to the frontage in 1863. The station itself, was rebuilt in 1871 and again between 1906-12 in a grander style. The GWR intended to rival Birmingham New Street which had its own accommodation. The new designs fulfilled the need to create room for operational expansion. Extra train capacity was achieved by augmenting the eight platforms with two additional ones which were essentially halves of the two islands, reached separately by means of scissor crossings.

The passenger's experience within the booking hall and concourse would be a mixture of anticipation and awe. Waiting rooms could be described as lavish and refreshment rooms at platform level were equally as grand, adorned on the exterior with salt glazed bricks. Unfortunately, the Great Western Hotel was never popular with guests who found it very noisy due to continuous train movements below. The hotel was later converted to offices.



In 1939, architects produced a brand-new design for the frontage of Snow Hill Station, reviving the idea of incorporating a hotel. It is at this point that I shall diverge from the timeline. I shall explore what might have been if the new blueprint had been adopted and the building actually constructed. The new design was loosely in the Art Deco style. One striking feature was an integral clock face within the brickwork of the frontage. The features within the drawings were not as elaborate as the 1906 version but were still pleasing to behold.



The 1912 Great Western Hotel



The proposed 1939 Station Hotel

It is fair to assume that a sturdy functional new building would have been erected if not for the outbreak of World War 2. During the conflict, the familiar frontage of Chatwin's Snow Hill was virtually unscathed by bombs and internal damage was treatable. What if Hitler's bombs had obliterated Snow Hill? Despite the financial state of the GWR, would it have been cheaper to rebuild in the new style?

The GWR had ceased to exist by 1948, having been replaced by British Railways. A network paid for by the public purse would have to be leaner and more efficient. Duplicate lines between Wolverhampton and London via Birmingham were vulnerable and expendable.

British Railways rationalisation plans would have not spared Birmingham Snow Hill, even if it was a brand-new facility. However, the station might have been mothballed, leaving the offices occupied and earning

revenue for the buildings' owners. In this scenario it might not have been necessary to infill the platforms and turn the train shed into a car park.

The fate (or possible fate) of Birmingham Snow Hill station must be considered in conjunction with that of Birmingham Moor Street. The latter was a terminus for Warwickshire-bound trains and provided the extra capacity which Snow Hill lacked. Without Moor Street, Birmingham New Street could not handle the traffic diverted from Snow Hill. Amongst the re-routed trains into New Street were those of the Stourbridge Line, made possible by a junction at Smethwick.

The West Midland Passenger Transport Executive (WMPTE) came into being in 1969 and its role was to develop public transport in co-operation with the operators. Hence, WMPTE was keen to work with British Railways and provide financial subsidy for crucial corridors. From the outset, WMPTE favoured cross-city patterns to keep trains moving as opposed to occupying precious platforms. The first project was dubbed (and has always been called) "The Cross-City line". It linked Lichfield and Redditch via Birmingham New Street. When opened in 1978, no one expected the passenger numbers that it generated. A victim of its own success, the service needed more slots through Birmingham New Street which was becoming congested.



The impressive station in 1959. This platform is the equivalent of today's platform 3

Various ingenious solutions were mooted including an underground station below New Street and a completely new station in Birmingham's Heartlands. WMPTE had always envisaged another cross-city line from Leamington Spa to Worcester via Stourbridge. To route it through Birmingham New Street at that time would have added to capacity problems. The obvious solution was to

re-open Birmingham Snow Hill station. In my imaginary timeline, that could have been accomplished much sooner, assuming platforms and tracks had been mothballed.

I believe that the Snow Hill Cross-City line would have gone ahead regardless as it was necessary to undertake groundworks in preparation for the Midland Metro Line One. Anyone who had aspirations to restore the old GWR route to Birkenhead were deluded and local passengers to Wolverhampton already had an adequate service on the Stour Valley Line.

There was an even better reason for a Snow Hill Cross-City line which was to restore another corridor to London and the south east. The franchising system was created by the Railways Act 1993 as part of the privatisation of British Rail by the Government of John Major and the first franchises came into effect in 1996. Re-opening Birmingham Snow Hill station and the tunnel beneath the city, meant that a



The sorry sight from the same platform in 1973

franchise could be formed around the old GWR route to London, amalgamated with suburban lines in the Amersham district. This has come to be known as Chiltern Railways which competed with Virgin Trains' service to London Euston. Unlike the old GWR route, trains from Birmingham Snow Hill terminate in London Marylebone rather than Paddington. Another dissimilarity is that the Chiltern services are extended from Birmingham Snow Hill, along the Stourbridge Line.

In conclusion, my deviated time-line would lead to a similar Stourbridge Line train service to what we have today but a much better Snow Hill station. The present station is uninspiring and is surmounted by a car park, something which would be now be discouraged in a city centre with high pollution levels. The renovation of Birmingham Moor Street shows how attractive and sympathetic architecture can enhance the landscape. There is the likelihood of a new 21<sup>st</sup> century Birmingham Snow Hill station incorporating adjacent development. It would be nice if elements of the 1939 design featured on the frontage.

## LOAD OF RUBBISH by Keith Flinders

Having decided to have a new bathroom, my wife said, “They’ll need to go into the loft. You’ll have to clear out all the rubbish.” Amongst the old computer boxes and wallpaper rolls, I came across black bin bags hiding in the far corner. Inside was *Railwayana*. I thought it had been accidentally left behind last time we moved house more than 40 years ago.

“Fortunately, there’s plenty of room in the wheelie bin this week”, said she with no appreciation that people pay good money for memories of the railways of their childhood. I set about researching auction houses that specialise in *Railwayana*. Totems, those sausage shaped name signs that used to be on every platform lamppost, sell well. I saw one from Worcester Shrub Hill which sold in March 2021 for £2,500 [1].

From Baptist End Halt on the Bumble Hole branch [Old Hill to Dudley], the top of the gas lamp also sold in March 2021 for £850 [2].



Engine name plates get the highest bids, such as Aston Hall (4986), once a Stourbridge Junction engine, which sold for £10,100 in November 2020 [3]. Great Western also named many of its smaller engines so there are lots to choose from and brass shines up so well, so they are attractive to own. Every named engine has two name plates, but signal boxes only have one diagram. It hangs over the levers, showing which to pull to change those points or put down that signal. As such, a signal box diagram really is unique - hand drawn and hand coloured.

Worcester Shrub Hill Junction sold recently for £400 [4] and Hartlebury’s Signal Box Diagram comes to auction soon. Usually, every signal box lever has a plate attached to show what it works. Brass again, engraved and filled with black or red wax, the one above was sold for £70 [5].



Collectors will go for almost anything with a railway link. Remember when your compartment had a print of a seaside or cathedral city. Carriage prints sell for £30 - £60 typically. Posters too are sought after. A 1950 poster advertising Holiday Runabout tickets for Western Region lines in the West Midlands which included the Stourbridge Line in the usual Double Royal size, sold for £400 [6]. So it is even with buttons from railway uniforms, a set of seven from GWR for just £10 [7].

It's not always the older, the more valuable. In April last year, a London Midland lamp post name sign for Great Malvern went for £220 [8].

On the smoke box door of steam engines was the shed plate, an oval of cast iron showing the engine's home depot. 84F was Stourbridge Junction, from where a shed plate raised £180 in March 2021 [9].

During lockdown, prices have risen considerably. The first of my loft hoard went to auction. I was hoping for £20. The auction house's Guide Price was £50 - £80! On auction day, the hammer price was £270!! Perhaps it's time you have a loft clear out.

**6**

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No. 12	Gloucester, Cheltenham Spa, Bourton-on-Water, Kingham, Stratford-on-Avon, Leamington Spa, Broadway, Evesham, Ashchurch.
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Publington Station  
April, 1950

K. W. C. GRAND  
Chief General Officer.



## MEET THE NEIGHBOURS

### Part 1 : Kidderminster by Rob Hebron

Travelling on the Stourbridge Line, on our journey from A to B, we probably pass through stations at which we have never alighted. Putting aside familiar local towns and villages, there may be other locations which we have never had cause to explore. It could be that these stations are isolated from their communities and the surroundings are uninspiring. From the window of the train, we may see only the sloping wall of a cutting and a steep pathway that leads to a strange foreign world. On the other hand, the station platforms may be elevated on an embankment and we view mainly rooftops which give no clue as to the activities below. Like many other passengers, I imagine what lies beyond the station drive.

If I were a stranger to Kidderminster, I would have probably watched the progress of the new station being built as I made my way to Worcester. The new building is a splendid complement to the overbridge which has been in place for many years. It is enough to make an impression but there is hardly time to glance at old “Carpet Town” before the train pulls away. However, the branch line and the sheds of the Severn Valley Railway offer a glimpse into local history. Maybe this would inspire me to set aside a day when I could actually make Kidderminster my destination.

Of course, I’m not a stranger to Kidderminster because I was born and raised there but imagine if I were a Brummie or Black Countryman. Without a bias, what would I make of it all?

I think I would leave Platform Two by the ramp which leads to Comberton Hill. I could wait for a bus to the town centre but I think that I’d prefer to walk down the road and evaluate the amenities in the neighbourhood of the station.



The first building that would strike me would be the Railway Bell Hotel which is a fine traditional public house serving Marston’s beers. This hostelry dates back to the opening of the railway but I believe it no longer offers accommodation for visitors. Its rival on the opposite side of the road is the King and Castle Bar located within the Severn Valley Railway station which serves an even greater range of real ales.

There is no finer British meal than fish and chips. Captain Cod’s Fish Bar which is next door to the Railway Bell benefits from the hordes of visitors who are drawn by events at the SVR. There is no shortage of fast-food establishments on the hill, including a southern fried chicken restaurant trading as Dixy and an Indian takeaway named Sher-e-Punjab which is at the junction with George Street.



Further down the hill from the Railway Bell is an army surplus/camping store belonging to the Langer family. This is an “Aladdin’s Cave” of clothing and hardware and it is run by Steve, son of Herbert Langer who established the unique Army and Navy store in Enville Street, Stourbridge. Mr Langer senior was a former prisoner of war who set up his first business in 1953. I can remember the Stourbridge premises (now demolished) which stretched over nearly five properties and there was still barely room to move inside! The Black Country Living Museum in Dudley has plans to recreate the original Stourbridge store at its Tipton Road site, in a 1960s setting.

I could carry on into town but instead, I will turn back at George Street and climb the hill again. On the opposite side of the road is a micro pub known as Weavers and is relatively new to the scene. I have never frequented this ale house but hope to sample the beers on offer in the future. Many years ago, I would have been able to purchase a pint of Ansell’s Bitter at the Farmer’s Boy which predates the Weavers but now I would probably be accompanied by a four-legged friend when I entered, as it has been converted to a veterinary surgery known as Shepherd Veterinary Centre. At this point Comberton Hill meets Comberton Place which was once the home of the Kidderminster open air market. Flats and apartments have replaced both the retail market and cattle market.



I would now be nearing Kidderminster station again. The SVR structure in heritage style never fails to impress. The elegance of this recreated railway architecture detracts from another true vintage building at Station Approach. This is the Kidderminster Railway Museum which houses a vast assortment of railway relics from bygone years. It is housed in an old warehouse that once stored grain and goods such as carpets. The

attraction is accessed through the booking hall of the SVR station and is open on days when SVR trains are operating.

Comberton Hill is not a beauty spot but it is a thriving community with varied retail assets. The back streets leading off the hill are pleasant and quaint, containing a mix of terraced housing, villas and pre-war semi-detached properties. To find peace and tranquillity, it is necessary to walk along George Street and Radford Avenue to locate St George’s Park. This is not an unreasonable distance and could be reached in 20-25 minutes.



The neighbourhood of many railway stations has been affected or influenced by people who have chosen to live nearby and commute or to set up businesses that benefit from commuters. I wonder what lies outside of other Stourbridge Line stations and how that particular set of neighbours plays its part.

**ALL CHANGE AT ... THE HAWTHORNS**  
The changing scene at one of the Stourbridge line stations



1960

(Michael Mensing)



2019

**NAME THE DESTINATION 1**

Here are ten photos of destinations that were served by direct services from Stourbridge Junction from the 1920s to the 2000s.

The destinations are in alphabetical order with the first starting Ar and the last starting Ch. All you have to do is name each destination station. *(Answers in the next issue).*



**STOURBRIDGE LINE MATHEMATICAL QUIZ ANSWERS**

The answers to the questions posted in the last issue of Platform 2 were :-  
1 (b) 1995 : 2 (c) 896 : 3 (b) 20 : 4 (b) 175 : 5 (c) 600 : 6 (a) 2004 : 7 (a) 17