

Platform 2



Bromley Halt - Opened 1925, Closed 1932,
Platforms still in situ 2022

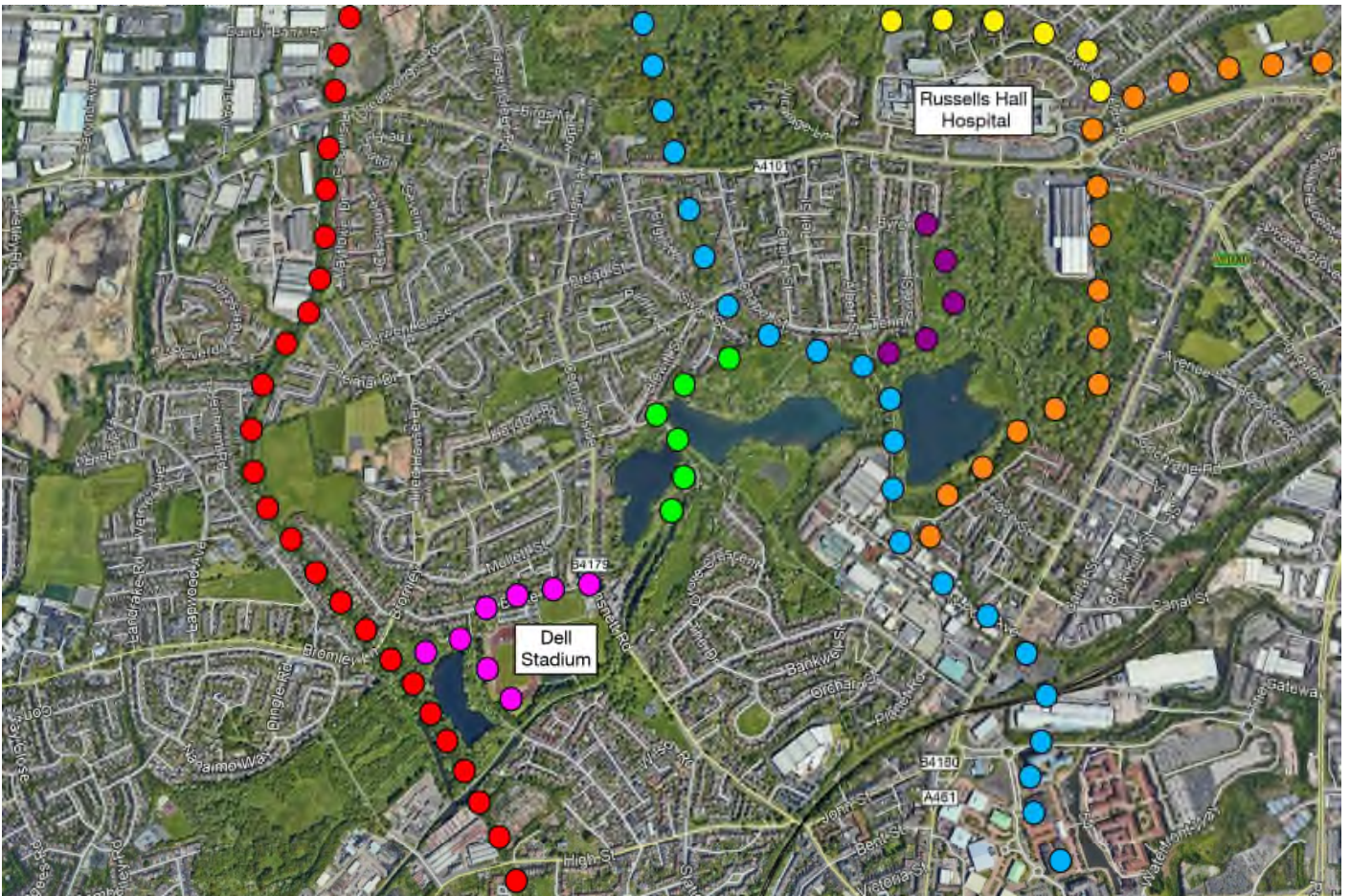
CONTENTS

- 2 When Rail Ruled The Reserve
- 5 What Might Have Been : 2 - The Coal Effect
- 8 Looking Back ... 50 Years
- 9 Meet The Neighbours : 2 - Stourbridge Junction
- 11 The DAFTA Awards Celebrate ... Railway Stations
- 12 Platform 2 Quiz Corner - Questions and Answers

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

WHEN RAIL RULED THE RESERVE by Roger Davis

The article about the Buckpool and Fens Pools Nature Reserves in the previous edition of *Platform 2* mentioned that both areas were previously industrial wastelands. Both areas were also served by a network of railway lines.



The Buckpool Nature Reserve was served by the railway line (red dots) from Stourbridge Junction to Wolverhampton via Wombourne. Although it was only used by passenger services between Wolverhampton and Stourbridge Junction for 7 years from 1925 to 1932, the line was extensively used by goods trains from 1858 to 1965, while the section south of Pensnett Trading Estate remained in use until 1994. In fact, this section is still officially open, although mothballed. However, much of the formation across the Nature Reserve is difficult to find under the foliage although the bridge over the Stourbridge Canal still exists, albeit without a deck.



The railway bridge over the Stourbridge Canal once carried three railway tracks

The line ran alongside the Bromley Basin, a spur off of the Stourbridge Canal. Today, about 220 yards of this canal spur still exists as part of the Nature Reserve but it used to continue for another 700 yards under Bromley Lane to a point ¼ mile north of Bromley Halt, while a canal spur to the west ran for about 700 yards along the northern perimeter of the Nature Reserve to serve five or more collieries in the area. The central area of the Nature Reserve, west of the line, was occupied by the Lays Iron Foundry, while two more collieries that occupied the site now used as the Dell Sports Stadium were served by branch lines (pink dots) to the east until about 1900.

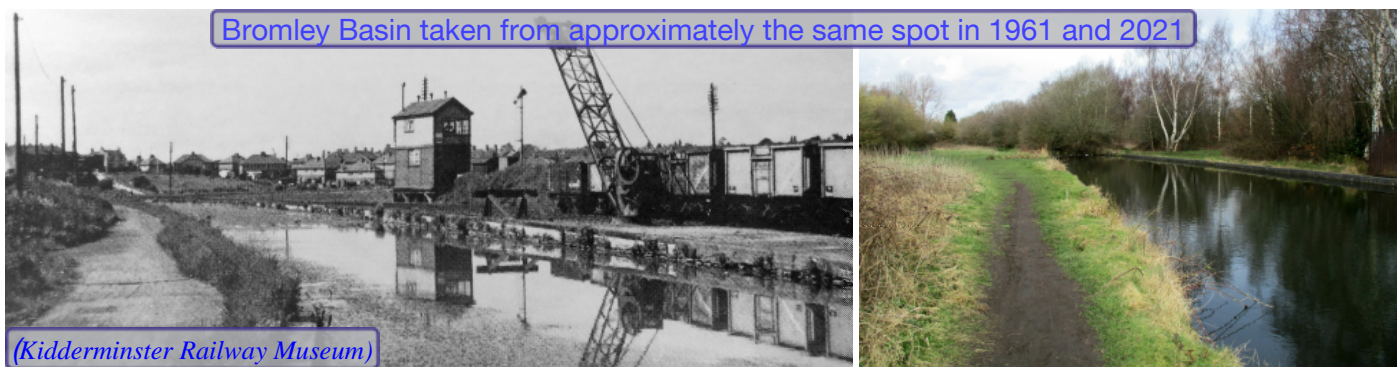


Bromley Basin from Stourbridge Canal



A short section of track still visible just south of Bromley Lane

The line across the current Nature Reserve was double track with at least five sidings on each side allowing the pits and foundry to be served by both rail and canal boat. As can be seen from the following photographs, it is difficult to believe the difference between today's landscape and that of the 1960s.



Bromley Basin taken from approximately the same spot in 1961 and 2021

(Kidderminster Railway Museum)

(left) Looking south from Bromley Lane (1961), (centre) Bromley Halt (1961), (right) Bromley Halt (2021)



(Brian Moone)



(Brian Moone)



While the Buckpool Nature Reserve was traversed by a single railway line, the Fens Pools area was covered by a network of railway lines that served pits and brickworks both within the Nature Reserve and further afield. The lines were part of the Earl of Dudley's Mineral Railway which emanated from the huge Round Oak Steelworks. The main line crossed the GWR line from Stourbridge to Dudley on the flat just north of Round Oak station before passing under the A461 road just north of Brierley Hill.



Looking along the old trackbed of the main line to Baggeridge with Fens Pool on the right

The lines then entered the Fens Pools area through the area now occupied by a retail park that includes the Wickes DIY store. The main line (blue dots) passed between Fens Pool and Middle Pool on an embankment and continued to the east of Pensnett (High Oak) through Gornal to Baggeridge Colliery. A number of branches served other collieries and brickworks in the Gornal area including a number close to the “Glynne Arms” - now

better known as the “Crooked House” as a result of mining subsidence. A further branch from Gornal passed to the north of Kingswinford and through Wall Heath to a wharf at Ashwood Basin on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal.

At Fens Pools, a line (orange dots) diverted to the east and passed to the south of Fens Pool towards Russells Hall where the main line continued to the north of the Kingswinford to Dudley road to a terminus at Wellington Road in Dudley, while a short branch (yellow dots) served collieries on land north of Russells Hall Hospital which now constitutes the Barrow Hill Nature Reserve. Two further short branches served the east side of Grove Pool (green dots) and local collieries (purple dots).

Today, like Buckpool and Fens Pools, the areas around Baggeridge, the “Crooked House”, Ashwood Marina and Barrow Hill have returned to nature and are all excellent areas to explore, as the following photographs demonstrate.



Baggeridge Country Park



The “Crooked House” in Gornal



Ashwood Marina



Barrow Hill Memorial

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN 2: The Coal Effect by Rob Hebron

History can be accurately described as “cause” and “effect”. When I wonder what might have been, I always find a reason why events didn’t turn out that way. Even so, it is fascinating to revisit railway history and diverge from the true path onto an imaginary course.

The Black Country derives its name from the colour of coal which was found in abundance beneath the fields of Staffordshire and north Worcestershire. Coal fuelled the Industrial Revolution, providing the fire for domestic fires, iron forging, glassmaking and driving steam locomotives.

The coal seams beneath the British Isles were formed millions of years ago when forests decayed and the composted matter was compacted by the increasing weight of the ground above. Coal is essentially carbon, a stable element which is a building block of life. It is combustible and when ignited, combines with oxygen in the air to produce carbon dioxide (CO₂). The heat from combusting coal was soon harnessed to heat water to produce steam. This steam could power engines and these in turn, replaced the need for manpower and horsepower.



Coal was mined in two ways; from extraction deep underground, and opencast (near the surface). There were examples of both in the area, namely Alveley which opened in 1938 and Netherton which opened in 1904 as a deep shaft but turned to opencast operation in 1971. Naturally, railways were the perfect way to transport coal and consequently, mineral lines

opened, serving Highley, Round Oak and Himley. The Earl of Dudley was responsible for a network of private lines radiating from Round Oak in Brierley Hill and linking the steel works with his coalfield. These lines were only built for freight purposes but did occasionally carry passengers who were employed by the Earl. On Bank Holidays, miners and their families could enjoy(!) a ride from Himley to The Wallows in a converted wagon.

The line serving Alveley was the Severn Valley Railway which still exists today, though permanently disconnected from Hartlebury, its junction with the Oxford, Worcester Wolverhampton and Railway (O.W.W.R.). The original line from Hartlebury to Shrewsbury passed through Stourport where a coal-fired power station was sited.

In its raw state, coal contains other elements such as hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and sulphur. When coal is heated at high temperatures without the presence of air, it releases another useful compound known as coal gas. This is sometimes known as “town gas” and was produced at many urban sites then stored in huge containers referred to as “gasometers”. The baking of coal at high temperatures also purified the fuel and the resultant substance was known as coke. It was discovered that the smelting of iron was aided by coke and so began the Industrial Revolution.

At that time, coal was king and who would have foreseen its fate? Who would ever have thought it would be blacklisted? The fact is that mining is a very dangerous occupation and miners died prematurely from lung diseases or incurred mortal injuries when mines collapsed. Unsurprisingly, miners felt that they deserved better wages and when the industry was nationalised in 1947, the National Miners Union (N.U.M.) challenged its employers (the government) to improve remunerations, terms and conditions.

The trade unions were a powerful force in the 1970s and had a strong bargaining card which was played effectively to improve pay packets. However, in the early 1980s, unions needed to take industrial action to combat a serious threat to miners’ livelihoods: Some mines became uneconomical as coal reserves depleted. Some were subject to flooding and others, were simply not needed to provide the national quota. In 1984, the government of Margaret Thatcher announced plans to close 20 pits, thus provoking a head-on clash with the N.U.M. and a bitter dispute followed which lasted a year.



By this time, coal fired locomotives had disappeared from the railway network. Main line steam operation ended on 11 August 1968. Not only had the cost of coal increased but so had the cost of using it! Locomotives needed tenders to transport their coal. Stations needed coal yards for storage and sidings for coal wagons. Diesel trains did not require lineside water tanks, and the role of fireman was no longer needed.

Was it all too hasty? The latter steam locomotives were much more efficient than their predecessors. The world famous “Mallard” was streamlined to be aerodynamic and, theoretically, further modifications might have saved Gresley’s pride and joy. Could coal have been utilised in another form? There is speculation that research into the use of pulverised coal was the next development in locomotive engineering. Smaller particles burn more easily but can potentially be more explosive.



The problem for society was air pollution caused by combusting coal. Petrol and diesel too contaminate the atmosphere from the exhausts of cars and lorries. This has partly been rectified by fitting vehicles with a catalytic converter, a device that reduces toxic gases and pollutants in exhaust gas into less-toxic pollutants by catalysing a redox reaction (an oxidation and a reduction reaction). If the smoke from steam locomotives could have been recycled as component parts then “Kings” would have lived on.



Coal fired power stations such as Stourport were doomed due to two factors. The discovery of North Sea Gas introduced a new form of fuel, much cleaner at source than coal gas. It is essentially, methane and is odourless. The other new power was atomic energy. It is arguable whether this driving force is clean because the depleted rods from reactors are still radioactive for over a hundred years and cannot

be disposed of casually.

If Stourport and Ironbridge could have been converted to gas fired power stations, would they still be served by trains? I think they would. There are now alternative “biofuels” which could have been utilised to generate electricity and even move trains. Certainly, diesel is as much out of favour as coal. Train operators are phasing out diesel sets and opting for battery electric hybrids. Hydrogen has emerged as a motive agent. It was originally used in air balloons. Though highly volatile in its raw state, Hydrogen can be stored in fuel cells and produces nothing more dangerous than H₂O.

New technologies are constantly emerging and the railway is not immune from change. What if diesel and electric trains were introduced alongside coal powered locomotives? As long as steam trains survived, they could have been modified and improved. Branch lines and mineral lines would not have been ripped up if coal was still being transported. Passenger services could have been restored. Never mind, let’s jump in the car for a day out in Stourport or Ironbridge!



LOOKING BACK ... 50 YEARS

By Roger Davis

While the current service on the Stourbridge line still suffers from cancellations, it should be remembered that 50 years ago in 1972 the line was at its lowest ebb. Snow Hill station was closed on 4 March, although it had only been served by a rush-hour skeleton shuttle service from Langley Green for the previous 5 years. However, the threat of the axe still hung over three sections of line served by today's trains – Kidderminster to Droitwich Spa, Stourbridge Junction to Stourbridge Town and Henley-in-Arden to Bearley Junction. Had these closures gone ahead, our service today would have been a lot different. You never know but they could have been the subject of bids to the Restore Our railway fund last year!

What did the timetable look like in 1972? At the start of the year, the Monday to Saturday timetable basically consisted of an hourly service between New Street and Kidderminster, supplemented by extra services on weekday rush hours, with a few services extended south of Kidderminster. Services ran as follows :-

From Kidderminster at 0613 0635 **0703 0727** 0753 0809 0837SX 0856 0933 **1003 1103 1203 1303 1403 1503** 1603 1638 1703 1803 **1903** and **2009**.

Of these, the 0809, 1403, 1703 and 2009 services started at Worcester, the 0837 at Great Malvern and the 0856, 1638 and 1803 services at Hereford.

From New Street at 0700 0745 0846 **1000 1100 1200 1300 1400 1500 1605** 1645 **1712 1730SX** 1748SX 1815 **1900** 2015 and 2115.

Of these the 0700, 0745, 1300 and 1815 services ran to Worcester, the 1645 to Great Malvern and the 1605 and 2015 to Hereford.



This meant that, late morning, there was a 5 hour gap in services between Kidderminster and Worcester in each direction. The Stourbridge Town branch had 35 round trips a day (33 on Saturdays) to connect with the main line services. Sunday services were a lot easier to describe – there weren't any!

A timetable change on 1 May saw only minor timetable adjustments although an extra train ran at 2245 on Saturdays only from New Street to Kidderminster. An extra round trip on the Stourbridge Town branch ran to connect with this service.

However, there was a major difference in the timetable as many services (shown in red above) operated to or from Lichfield City, probably for operational convenience. This arrangement continued until 1978 when the Cross City line opened.

If anybody is interested in looking at the May 1971 to May 1972 timetable in detail, it is available at :-

<http://www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info/files/Timetable---1971.pdf>

MEET THE NEIGHBOURS

Part 2 : Stourbridge Junction by Rob Hebron

A passenger remaining on the train at Stourbridge Junction will gain no impression of the town itself. There is often an interval between arrival and departure time when one can admire the heritage building at platform level but not the neighbourhood below. Because the station is flanked by a hill on one side and mature trees on the other, the view of the surrounding landscape is obscured.

There are two ways to leave the station if you are visiting for the first time; via the ticket office on the lower level or via the car park adjacent to the redundant Platform Four. I will deal with the usual way of exit first: the inbound train from Birmingham can pull in either on Platform Two or Platform Three. Both alighting points will enable you to leave the station by means of steps to a subway. Turning left and following the subway, the way out will soon be apparent and the driveway ahead will lead you to Brook Road.



The first building which will strike you is the Seven Stars Inn. You may imagine this was once a railway hotel but in fact, it never was built for that purpose, though it now actually offers bed and breakfast. Constructed on behalf of Birmingham brewers, Mitchells and Butlers it has passed through many hands (including the GWR who intended to rename it "Station Hotel") and is now part of the Black Country Ales chain. I

thoroughly recommend a visit, not only for selection of real ales but the superb menu of home cooked food.

Further along, bearing left is the former Labour in Vain Inn which has been converted to flats. This public house was notorious for featuring a racist image etched into one of the windows. A young, black lad was depicted being scrubbed in a washing tub in an effort to make him white! Nowadays such an illustration would be totally inappropriate and so the pane has been discretely removed. In



its time, it would have been regarded as typical Black Country self-deprecating humour with the emphasis on the stupidity of the white person washing the lad. In much the same way, local folklore describes Gornal people placing a pig on the wall to watch the band go by. This was seen as an act of kindness to ensure that the poor animal did not miss the fun of the parade.



Castle Grove



Gothic Cottages in Church Road

Still bearing left from the station and climbing Glasshouse Hill, you will approach the heart of Oldswinford. The name is derived from the Old English “Old Swine Ford” and was an ancient settlement which had a manor house during the Middle Ages. This has long since been demolished but later buildings pre 1900 still survive. There is a nice mix of traditional houses, shops, pubs and restaurants which give the area its character.

The nearby Old Swinford Hospital School is a centre of educational excellence and its success has brought about expansion into the old Stourbridge College building in Hagley Road.

Let us return to Stourbridge Junction. This time you might leave by traversing the car park and emerging in Chawn Hill. You will pass Chawn Hill Church and eventually reach an island at the end of the road.

If you cross Grange Lane at this point you will be able to proceed along Wollescote Road and discover Stevens Park, also known as Wollescote Park. Although the park is not strictly in the neighbourhood of the station, it is well worth a visit and it includes children’s play areas, tennis courts and a bowling green.



Wollescote Park



Chawn Hill is not the only route from the car park and eastern side of the station. The adjacent Grange Road will also take you to Grange Lane and you can call into some of the local shops such as Costcutter, Grange Road Off Licence and Handy D.I.Y. There is also a takeaway establishment named Great China.

Avoiding Chawn Hill and Grange Road, leaves another option, namely Rufford Road. This can be accessed by heading towards the station's overflow car park. A purpose-built pedestrian bridge joins the two car parks, and it uses the abutments of a former track bearing bridge which would probably have been for freight trains running into sidings or passenger trains which pulled into Platform Four. Rufford Road is predominantly an industrial estate. However, it is also home to a micro-brewery named The Green Duck with a bar which opens twice weekly.



I have forgotten to mention one lesser-known route to Oldswinford: If we return to the station ticket office and turn towards the cycle parking shelter on the right, there is an alleyway which leads to Oldswinford via Castle Grove, Church Road and Rectory Road. Here you will view St Mary's Church which is part of the Diocese of Worcester. This is a magnificent piece of architecture and its history is described here - <http://www.stmaryschurcholdswinford.org.uk/about-us/>

Like many junction stations, Stourbridge Junction is situated where it is operationally convenient. Although the parish was already established, the station's construction has resulted in a lot of housing development, with houses within walking distance selling at a premium. I am unsure where the boundary of Oldswinford lies but the neighbourhood of the station is almost entirely in that vicinity. To get a glimpse of Stourbridge town from a train window then one must change at Stourbridge Junction for Stourbridge Town. I will cover the Town station in a forthcoming article.

THE DAFTA AWARDS CELEBRATE ... RAILWAY STATIONS

The Alexa award for the most confusing automated announcement goes to the public address system at Birmingham New Street station which came up with the following gem. "This is a platform alteration. The 15:08 West Midlands Railway service to Wolverhampton will now depart from platform 3b. Calling at Smethwick Rolfe Street, Smethwick Galton Bridge, Sandwell & Dudley, Dudley Port, Tipton, Coseley and Wolverhampton. Platform 7b for the 15:08 West Midlands Railway service to Wolverhampton".

The Alan Titchmarsh award for horticultural knowledge goes to the station announcer at Wolverhampton station. "The 14:25 train to Shrewsbury has been cancelled because of leaves on the line. Unfortunately, on this occasion the leaves are still attached to the tree!"

The Michael Fish award for weather forecasting goes to the station announcer at Bristol Parkway. “The train on platform 3 is the 1410 to Manchester Piccadilly, so I hope you’ve remembered your umbrellas”.

The Danny Dyer award for being a geezer goes to the steward hired in to deal with German Market crowds on the concourse at New Street Station for the following conversation with a passenger. “Where are you going?”. “Sandwell and Dudley”. “Don’t mess me about, which one? You can’t go to both of them”.



DO YOU KNOW THE SNOW HILL LINES ?

The following questions refer to stations regularly served by West Midlands Railway services from the Stourbridge line. The answers will be printed in the next edition of *Platform 2*.

1. Which station has the same name as a station on the London to Brighton main line?
2. Why did the number of trains stopping at Bordesley station double from August 2019 to May 2021?
3. Which station saw two redundant platforms reopened during 2007/2008?
4. Which station was served only by trains to Birmingham New Street after the Jewellery line to Snow Hill was reopened in 1995?
5. Which station opened in May 2013?
6. Which station, served by early morning and evening services, opened in October 2000?
7. Which station name do you get if you remove the initial letter from a station in Greater Manchester?
8. The names of two stations on the Stratford line used to have the suffix “Platform”. Which two stations are they?
9. At which station would you alight to visit Mary Arden’s House?
10. Which two stations have only been served by trains from the Stourbridge line since 2020?

NAME THE DESTINATION 1 - ANSWERS

The answers to the questions set in the last edition of *Platform 2* were :-

A - Arley, B - Banbury, C - Barry Island, D - Bewdley, E - Bicester North, F - Bridgnorth, G - Buildwas, H - Cardiff General/Central, I - Charlbury, J - Cheltenham Spa