

PLATFORM 2



Issue 3

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PASSENGER BRANCHES OF THE STOURBRIDGE LINE 1 : LANGLEY GREEN TO OLDBURY by Roger Davis

This is the first in a series of seven articles that looks at the branch lines that fed into the Stourbridge line between Smethwick and Droitwich Spa, working down the line from north to south.

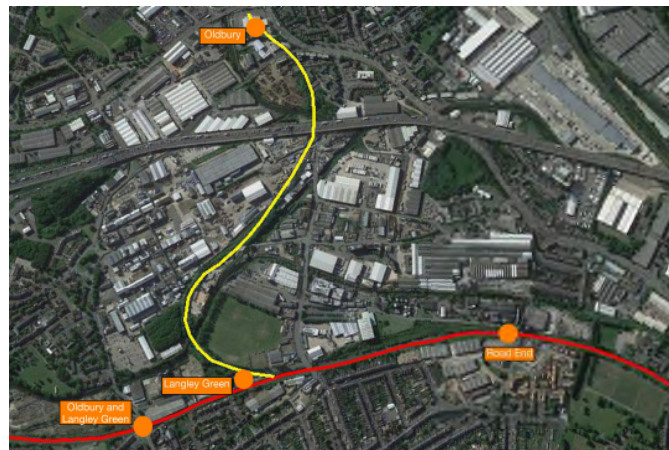
It was on 1 April 1867 that the Stourbridge Extension line opened from Old Hill to Galton Junction on the Birmingham New Street to Wolverhampton High Level line and Handsworth Junction on the Birmingham Snow Hill to Wolverhampton Low Level line. Four intermediate stations were opened on that day:-

Rowley - the current Rowley Regis station

Oldbury & Langley Green - south west of the current Langley Green station near the Station Road level crossing

Rood End - on the west side of Rood End Road about half a mile north east of the current Langley Green station

Smethwick Junction - renamed Smethwick West in 1956



The 1¼ mile Oldbury branch opened to goods traffic in November 1884. The passenger service opening was delayed until 1 May 1885 as the new junction station at Langley Green was not ready. When this opened, the stations at Rood End and Oldbury & Langley Green closed after 18 years service. There is nothing to indicate that these stations ever existed apart from the aptly named Station Road.

Station Road, Langley Green, the site of the original Oldbury & Langley Green station



The site of Rood End station



The new station had four platforms - two on the main line and two at the start of the Oldbury branch. The passenger line was just under a mile in length with no intermediate stations and terminated at Oldbury station which was situated on the present day Churchbridge on a site now occupied by the Mecca Bingo Hall. The goods line continued a further third of a mile past the station, crossing Churchbridge, running parallel with the current Oldbury Ringway and under Round's Green Road to terminate at Oldbury Goods Station at the back of the current Oldbury Green Retail Park.



The passenger service was relatively healthy from the start with an initial service of 9 trains from Langley Green and 12 from Oldbury. By October 1901, the service had increased to 16 in each direction on Mondays to Saturdays as detailed in a timetable published in the County Express.

MONDAY TO SATURDAY									
	Oldbury	0640	0720	0807	0908	1022	1203	1313	1400
	Langley Green	0645	0735	0812	0913	1027	1208	1318	1405

MONDAY TO SATURDAY									
	Oldbury	1510	1625	1723	1807	1840	2010	2130	2210
	Langley Green	1515	1630	1728	1812	1845	2015	2135	2214

MONDAY TO SATURDAY									
	Langley Green	0601	0700	0735	0833	0930	1050	1225	1343
	Oldbury	0605	0705	0740	0838	0935	1055	1230	1348

MONDAY TO SATURDAY									
	Langley Green	1455	1546	1648	1743	1825	1928	2024	2145
	Oldbury	1500	1551	1653	1748	1830	1932	2028	2150

† Operates 2 minutes later on Saturdays

No Sunday service

However, as a wartime economy measure, the Oldbury branch closed to passengers on 3 March 1915 while the Stourbridge Town branch closed to passengers on 29 March 1915. While the latter reopened in 1919, the Oldbury branch had seen its last passenger.



Oldbury Goods Station in the 1900s (R S Carpenter Collection)

Despite this, goods traffic to Oldbury Goods Station continued until 7 September 1964 when it closed. There was also goods traffic to private sidings owned by E Danks & Co, Chance & Hunt and Allbright & Wilson.

The building of the M5 motorway in the late 1960s severed the line at this point and, until recently, the buffer stop at the end of the truncated line could be seen from the southbound carriageway of the M5. However, goods trains still traversed the southern end of the branch to serve the huge Allbright & Wilson chemical works.

In addition, one of the branch line platforms found use from 1967 to 1972 when Stourbridge line services were diverted from Snow Hill to New Street with a skeleton rush-hour service between Snow Hill and Langley Green. The 1971 timetable showed just how sparse this service was and how good the connections were.

MONDAY TO FRIDAY						SATURDAY	
<i>Arrival from Stourbridge Jct</i>	0649	0711	0803	1639	1739	0711	0803
Langley Green	0656	0735	0812	1719	1817	0735	0812
Smethwick West	0659	0738	0815	1722	1820	0738	0815
Handsworth	0703	0742	0819	1726	1824	0742	0819
Winson Green	0705	0744	0821	▼	1826	0744	0821
Hockley	0707	0746	0823	▼	1828	0746	0823
Birmingham Snow Hill	0710	0749	0826	1731	1831	0749	0826

MONDAY TO SATURDAY		MONDAY TO FRIDAY				SATURDAY
Birmingham Snow Hill	0630	0714	1658	1736		NO SERVICE
Hockley	0633	▼	1701	1739		
Winson Green	0635	▼	1703	1741		
Handsworth	0638	0719	1706	1744		
Smethwick West	0642	0723	1710	1748		
Langley Green	0645	0726	1713	1751		
<i>Departure to Stourbridge Jct</i>	<i>0712</i>	<i>0858</i>	<i>1724</i>	<i>1800</i>		

Langley Green in 2015. The Oldbury line branched to the right just past the crossover



Goods trains along the branch to the Allbright & Wilson chemical works finally ended in 1995. It is thought that this was due to Allbright & Wilson selling off some spare land for housing. The branch had been used for the safe delivery by rail of a chemical from Seal Sands on Teesside. Unfortunately, safety regulations dictated that a trainload of the chemical could not be handled within a given distance of housing, whereas a single road tanker full could.

Thus, the line was closed and the connection to the Stourbridge line has been severed in the last ten years when Langley Green station was refurbished and a new footbridge built.

Apart from at Langley Green station, it is now very difficult to see the trackbed of the line as it has been reclaimed by nature. However, the abutments of the bridge that took the railway over Seven Stars Road can still be seen while there are unsubstantiated rumours that the bingo callers at Mecca refer to 59 as the Oldbury Line (not true unfortunately).



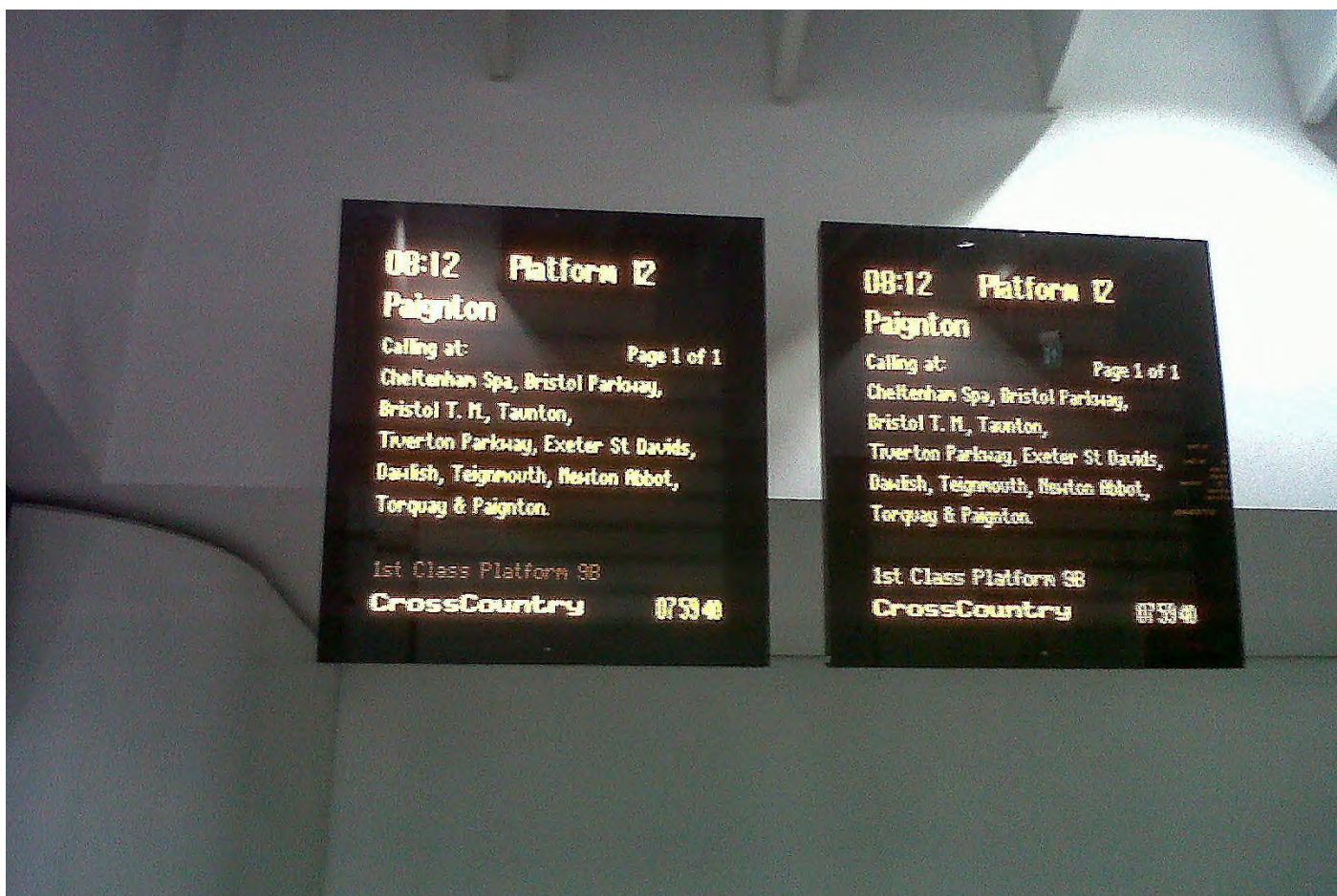
The remains of the bridge abutments in Seven Stars Road



Mecca Bingo in Oldbury on the site of Oldbury (GWR) station

In the next issue : Part 2 - Old Hill to Longbridge via Halesowen.

SIGN OF THE TIMES



CrossCountry Trains have discovered a way to get the 0812 train to Paignton into Birmingham New Street sideways! According to the information screen, the train is on platform 12, but 1st Class is on platform 9B!

PLEASE STAND CLEAR - FAST TRAIN APPROACHING

by John Warren

A warning such as this is not uncommon, especially at stations such as Lye, Old Hill and Langley Green where four trains per hour pass through in each direction without stopping. However, if such a warning occurred at a terminal station, you might be a bit worried.

Stourbridge Town is at the end of a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile branch that runs downhill all the way from Stourbridge Junction, and trains from the Junction always stop well, nearly!



Our story starts at 3.23 pm on Saturday 2 April 1977. By that time, the goods line to Amblecote had closed and the bridge over Foster Street had been removed. A brick wall had been built at the end of the line and trains ran into the original GWR station which was situated on the west side of the line where the main part of the bus station is now. The train, operated by a single railcar M55012, was approaching the station at about 20 mph with 13

passengers on board when the brakes failed to operate correctly. The train crashed through the buffers, demolished the brick wall and came to rest hanging over the parapet with the leading bogie crashing onto Foster Street below. Seven adults and two children aboard the train were taken to Corbett Hospital with minor injuries. The driver said that he “tiptoed gingerly up the teetering carriage and jumped to safety”. Had the train travelled another two yards, it would have overbalanced and crashed into the street 14 feet below. Unusually for a Saturday afternoon, Foster Street was relatively deserted as a lot of people were at home watching Red Rum win his third Grand National which had started at 3.20 pm. One local paper that will remain nameless declared that “This train service has been suspended”.



In 1979, the station was demolished and the line cut back by 52 yards to accommodate the first incarnation of the bus station, and a very basic station built in its place. In some ways, this was fortunate as, on 18 January 1989, a second single railcar failed to stop. The driver's reason was that he had been distracted by trespassers on the line and misjudged the braking. The guard suffered a neck injury and was taken to

Russells Hall Hospital for treatment. The other casualties were the demolished buffer stop and the new brick wall at the end of the platform which was also demolished. Fortunately, there was no 14 foot drop to contend with this time.



Just over a year later, on 1 March 1990, a second brake failure, this time in single railcar W55034, resulted in the newly rebuilt wall being demolished again. The buffer stop was not affected as it hadn't yet been replaced since the previous accident. Seven people on board the train suffered minor injuries. A BR spokesman was quoted as saying "the accident was a one-off and other similar trains are safe". He obviously didn't win

the "Mr Memory" award for 1990.

Therefore, if you're in the Bus Station and see a Parry People Mover heading towards you, you'll know what's happened.

QUICK QUIZ

1. What connects the following ten stations - Brownhills, Cutnall Green Halt, Dudley, Evercreech Junction, Fernhill Heath, Newport (IOW), Portishead, Ripon, Rugby Central, Wootton Bassett
2. What connects the following ten stations - Blackpool North, Chester-le-Street, Clifton Down, Dorchester West, Highbridge for Burnham-on-Sea, Shanklin, Skegness, Starcross for Exmouth, Uckfield, Yeovil Pen Mill



3. What connects the following ten stations - Ashchurch for Tewkesbury, Birmingham Snow Hill, Blackpool Central, Bournemouth West, Cheltenham Spa St James, Kingswear, Leeds Central, Manchester Central, Swanage, Wolverhampton Low Level



4. What connects the following ten stations - Bedworth, Briton Ferry, Chandlers Ford, Fitzwilliam, Hednesford, Lichfield Trent Valley High Level, Mansfield Woodhouse, Melksham, Templecombe, Yate

CLUE : The answers, although different, do have a common theme.

Answers on page 11.

RATIONALISING THE RAILWAYS

by Roger Davis

Anybody of a certain age can remember the days when through services ran between unexpected places - Brighton to Plymouth, Worcester Shrub Hill to Crewe via Wellington, Leamington Spa to Stourbridge Junction via Worcester, Birmingham Snow Hill to Shrewsbury via Bewdley and the wonderful Cleethorpes to Exmouth via Bath (with through carriages to Sidmouth).

These days, trains from A go to B rather than a choice of destinations. In the last 15 years, many destinations have disappeared from timetables as services have been rationalised. Cross Country services have been removed from Blackpool, Liverpool Lime Street, Portsmouth, Weymouth, Poole, Margate, Ramsgate, Eastbourne and Brighton, the final ones because the DfT appear to think that people living north of London enjoy the thrill of travelling across central London on a claustrophobic overcrowded tube train. Gloucester, which was promised that it would not lose its long distance express trains when Eastgate Station closed, now has a parliamentary service of one train per week, while Worcester has lost through services to the South West and the North.



Deltic D9000 arrives at Margate on a Virgin Trains service from Birmingham New Street

The DfT specification of the Arriva CrossCountry franchise brought further rationalisation. Through journeys such as Bournemouth to Edinburgh and Bristol to Glasgow via Carlisle disappeared as the DfT decreed that the new CrossCountry network would have four basic services - Bournemouth to Manchester, Bristol to Manchester, Plymouth to Edinburgh and Reading to Newcastle, although some services still served Aberdeen, Dundee, Guildford, Torbay, Newquay and Penzance.

The Stourbridge line has also suffered from rationalisation. After over 80 years from the 1880s to the 1960s, through services to Cardiff were withdrawn before being temporarily resurrected for three years from 1988 to 1990. Rationalisation of trains from Paddington via the North Cotswold line has resulted in all services that operate past Worcester continuing to Great Malvern or Hereford, rather than some of them heading north towards Stourbridge. Thus, the historic through services that operated in the days of the GWR and British Railways have disappeared.

A GWR Grange Class loco on a Wolverhampton Low Level to Oxford service



(David Flitcroft)

With the opening of the Jewellery Line in 1995, the Stourbridge line had 10 weekday services to Hereford, a further 12 to Great Malvern and 8 to Warwick and Leamington Spa. Further rationalisation decreed that Hereford would be best served by trains via



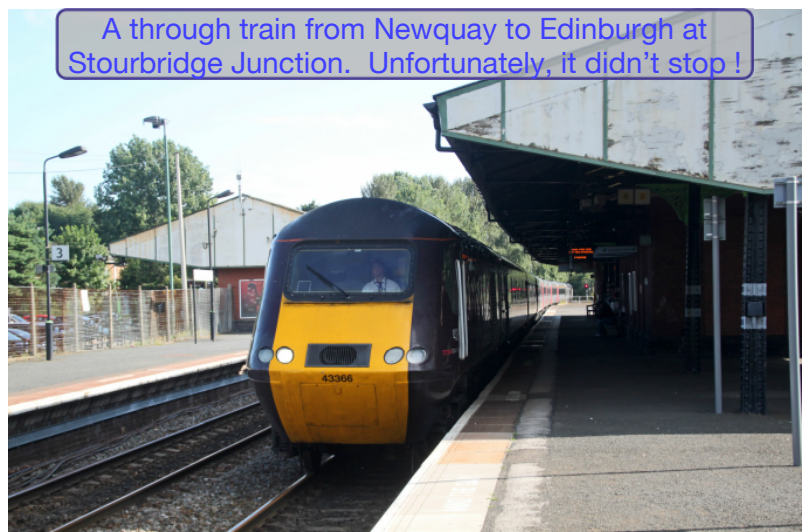
Hereford has only one train per week to the Stourbridge line - at 1912 on Saturdays.

Bromsgrove rather than Stourbridge, at the same time removing direct services to Cardiff from Droitwich Spa and Worcester Shrub Hill as they now operated directly via the Midland main line. The only “good” news on the horizon for Worcestershire (but not Worcester) passengers is that these trains are scheduled to stop at Worcestershire Parkway once it opens. In addition, many Stourbridge line services to Great Malvern were truncated to terminate

at Worcester with Great Malvern served by extra Great Western trains from Paddington and Bristol. The result is that the Stourbridge line now has 1 through train per week from Hereford and 4 through daily services to Great Malvern. All of the off-peak services to Leamington Spa were truncated to terminate at Dorridge with Leamington Spa being served by Chiltern Railways services from Birmingham.

As far as the Central Trains/London Midland services are concerned, the Stourbridge line is now a purely local line. Journeys that used to be direct now require one or more changes of train. Fortunately, the Stourbridge line still has peak time Chiltern Railways to London Marylebone and efforts need to be made to negotiate improvements to these very successful services, such as Saturday evening and Sunday through journeys to and from London. The current franchise expires in 2022 so it is necessary to ensure that the DfT does not attempt to rationalise the replacement franchise to operate from Marylebone to Birmingham only.

Is rationalisation a good thing? On the plus side, it has helped to create clockface timetables which people can remember. On the minus side, journeys that could previously have been done directly can now involve multiple changes. It might be nice to go back to the days of through journeys from the Stourbridge line to Cheltenham, Gloucester, Hereford, Cardiff, Oxford and London Paddington.



A through train from Newquay to Edinburgh at Stourbridge Junction. Unfortunately, it didn't stop!

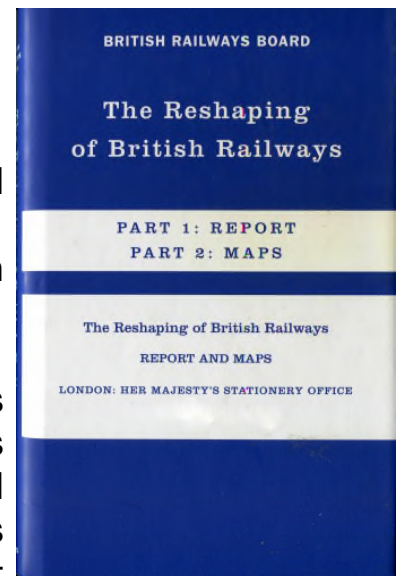
However, we must remember that, in those days, the Stourbridge line did not have two trains per hour from Worcester, four trains per hour from Kidderminster and six trains per hour from Stourbridge Junction.

OH DOCTOR BEECHING ! by John Warren

It is a matter of conjecture whether the most infamous publication of the 1960s appeared on 16 August 1960 or 27 March 1963. The first, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D H Lawrence, resulted in a famous trial at the Old Bailey under the Obscene Publications Act. The second, *The Reshaping of British Railways*, had no attributed author although it is known to be the work of Dr Richard Beeching and resulted in a large number of public enquiries and protests. Apart from that, the two publications had little in common although some cynics maintain that Dr Beeching did to British Railways what Oliver Mellors had done to *Lady Constance Chatterley*.

The Reshaping of British Railways would not have been an easy read for those who attempted it in full and consisted of a report of 148 pages and 12 (mostly unreadable) maps. Most people ignored the first 101 pages and went straight to the nitty gritty - appendix 2 between pages 102 to 136, which was where you found out if your local service or station was on Beeching's hit list or not. This had a number of sections:-

- Passenger Services to be Withdrawn
- Passenger Services to be Modified
- Passenger Stations and Halts to be Closed
- Passenger Services under Consideration for Withdrawal before the Formulation of the Report
- Passenger Stations and Halts already under Consideration for Closure before the Formulation of the Report



The question that has been discussed over the past 53 years is this - was Beeching right or wrong? The answer is probably a bit of both. There were certainly lines and stations that saw more carriages in a day than passengers and these lines needed to close. There were also lines that did not truly serve the community they purported to. For instance, seaside resorts like Brixham, Ilfracombe, Lyme Regis and Ventnor saw their stations closed by Beeching because they were inconveniently sited on hills above the town centre, and therefore people found it more convenient to get directly to the town centres by road. Conversely, towns like Portishead and Yate lost their stations even though they were growing as overspill towns for Bristol, this resulting in increased traffic congestion. Fortunately, Yate regained its station in the 1980s and it seems that Portishead will regain a rail service within the next 4 years.

So, how did the West Midlands fare? Lines proposed for closure included Wolverhampton High Level to Burton-on-Trent via Walsall, Walsall to Rugeley Trent Valley, Walsall to Dudley, Swan Village to Great Bridge and Old Hill to Dudley. Services to be modified included Stourbridge to Hereford via Worcester. This modification resulted in off-peak services between Kidderminster and Worcester almost disappearing and Sunday services being withdrawn.





In the “Passenger Services under Consideration for Withdrawal before the Formulation of the Report” section, Shrewsbury to Hartlebury, Kidderminster to Tenbury Wells and Stourbridge Junction to Wolverhampton Low Level were listed, although the last two were annotated with an asterisk to indicate that the withdrawal had already been instigated.

Closure of stations resulted in Black Country towns such as Dudley, Great Bridge, Darlaston, Willenhall, Wednesbury, Bilston, West Bromwich and Brierley Hill losing rail services, although the last four could not be blamed on Beeching as the Stourbridge Junction to Wolverhampton Low Level service had already been closed, while Beeching never proposed the closure of the Birmingham Snow Hill to Wolverhampton Low Level service.

It was the withdrawal of urban services that has caused the most problem. It may have been true that passenger numbers were lower in the early 1960s, but the closure of railway lines and the increased use of private cars have caused major congestion problems on our roads in recent years. The reopening of the Stourbridge to Walsall line would help to reduce congestion by taking traffic off of the congested A461 corridor. The same could be said of the A4123 corridor between Dudley and Wolverhampton if the Dudley to Wolverhampton railway line could be reopened, but unfortunately the line of this route has been consigned to memory by building over the formation. It is in this area that Dr Beeching has a lot to answer for.

As you may have guessed by now, the theme of the quiz on page 7 was the Beeching Report. The answers to the four questions are as follows :-

1. These ten stations were recommended for closure in the Beeching Report and actually closed.
2. These ten stations were recommended for closure in the Beeching Report but survived the axe and are still open today.
3. These ten stations were not recommended for closure in the Beeching Report but actually did close within 10 years of the report.
4. These ten stations were recommended for closure in the Beeching Report but, after being closed, have since reopened.

			
1	2	3	4
Evercreech Junction	Starcross	Kingswear	Yate
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closure Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Actually Closed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reopened	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closure Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Actually Closed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closure Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Actually Closed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closure Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Actually Closed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reopened

DO YOU KNOW? Where Stourbridge shed was.

Many people think that Stourbridge shed stood in the yards that surrounded Stourbridge Junction station. However, this was not true as the 1962 edition of the Ian Allan Locomotive Shed Directory explained.

84F STOURBRIDGE

The shed is on the west side of the Wolverhampton line north of Stourbridge Junction Station. The yard is visible from the line.

From Stourbridge Junction Station. Turn right outside Stourbridge Junction Station along the approach road. Turn left into Brook Road and right into Red Hill. Continue along Church Road and High Street through the town, into Stourbridge Road. Turn right into a broad cinder path between a level-crossing and the gas works. Bear left up a bank and the shed entrance is on the right-hand side. Walking time 30 minutes.

From Stourbridge Town Station. Turn left out of the yard in front of Stourbridge Town Station into Foster Street and turn right into High Street. Then follow the directions as given above. Walking time 20 minutes.

Note - The shed consists of two separate buildings.

Stourbridge Shed in 1962



I would dare anybody to find the location from those instructions but the location of the shed can be found in the middle of the Pennfields Estate. The site is now covered with houses but there are clues to its location in the names of the roads. They are named after the great GWR Chief Mechanical Engineers - Gooch Close, Dean Close, Churchward Close and Collett Close. Unsurprisingly, there is no Hawksworth Close!

INTER CITY EXPRESS QUIZ ANSWERS

Here are the answers to the Inter City Quiz set in the previous issue of Platform 2.

Question 1

- The Oscar Wilde character was named after WORTHING
- Horace Batchelor and Five Boys (a Fry's chocolate bar) hailed from KEYNSHAM.
- The county town of Wiltshire is TROWBRIDGE.
- Earl Mountbatten of Burma lived on the outskirts of ROMSEY.
- This town that had stations named Lansdown, Malvern Road and St James is CHELTENHAM SPA.

Question 2

The train is the 0820 CrossCountry service from Aberdeen to Penzance which stops at the following 15 cities - ABERDEEN, DUNDEE, EDINBURGH, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, DURHAM, YORK, LEEDS, WAKEFIELD, SHEFFIELD, DERBY, BIRMINGHAM, BRISTOL, EXETER, PLYMOUTH AND TRURO.