

Platform 2



The GWR Large Prairie tank was a mainstay of the Stourbridge line until the end of steam. Class member 4172 is seen at Stourbridge shed in 1964

(Colour Rail)

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STOURBRIDGE STALWARTS

1 : The GWR Large Prairie Tanks by John Warren

Since 2011, almost all services operated by London Midland or West Midlands Railway along the Stourbridge line have been operated using the Class 172 diesel multiple units. However, previous eras have also seen local services along the line dominated by a single type of train.

Our story starts in 1902 when George Jackson Churchward was appointed as Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Great Western Railway. Churchward was a revolutionary and immediately got to work producing radical designs to create modern engines using standard components. In fact, Churchward's designs provided the basis for steam locomotive design right up to the end of steam.



An original Churchward Large Prairie seen near Stourbridge Junction in 1922

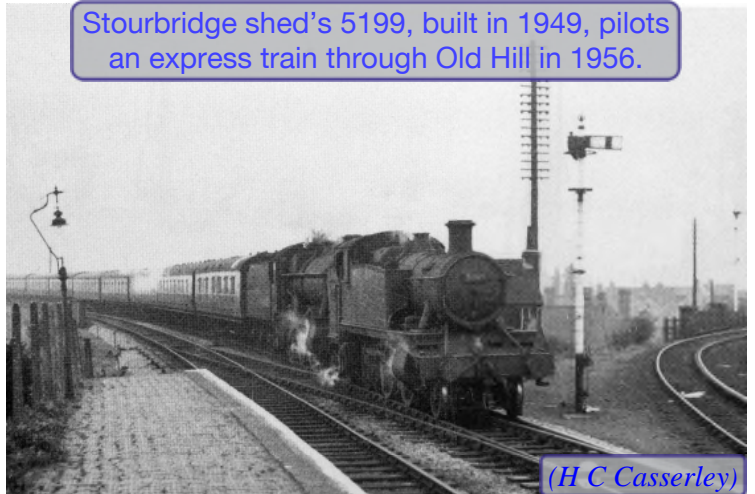
(Picasa)

One of the most versatile designs for local services is the Prairie Tank, which has two leading wheels, six coupled driving wheels and two trailing wheels and is designated as 2-6-2T. From 1904, Churchward had introduced two different designs of "Prairie" Tank into service – a total of 40 Large Prairie Tanks (3100 Class) for heavier suburban services and 10 Small Prairie Tank (4400 Class) for lighter local and country services. He

improved his own designs from 1906 to produce another 40 Large Prairie Tanks (3150 Class) and 75 Small Prairie Tanks (4500 Class).

Churchward retired in 1922 and was replaced by Charles Collett. Collett is renowned for created some of the most iconic GWR engines (Kings, Castles and Halls) although these were more powerful modifications of Churchward's original designs (Stars and Saints). Collett's policy of improving existing designs and supplementing these with new-build locomotives saw him convert the 40 Class 3100 locomotives into more powerful Class 5100 locomotives in 1928, and start the building in 1929 of an additional 140 locomotives to the same design to create a class of 180 Large Prairie Tanks numbered 5100-5199 and 4100-4179. The last of these was not built until 1949, by which time the GWR had

Stourbridge shed's 5199, built in 1949, pilots an express train through Old Hill in 1956.



(H C Casserley)

become British Railways (Western Region). These were supplemented from 1927 by another 100 brand-new Small Prairie Tanks, built by improving the design of the original 4500 Class, which meant that the ubiquitous Prairie Tanks could be seen throughout the GWR network.

From this period, the Large Prairie Tanks were the predominant motive power for local services emanating from Snow Hill. In addition, they were regularly used on Stourbridge Junction - Dudley - Wolverhampton Low Level services, and could be seen on Severn Valley services alongside their smaller siblings.

By 1955, Stourbridge and Tyseley sheds each had an allocation of thirteen Large Prairies, while Kidderminster shed had an allocation of four.

The British Railways Modernisation Plan in 1955 and the resultant introduction of diesel multiple units on services from Snow Hill saw the use of the Large Prairies diminish, although they continued to serve the Stourbridge line until the end of steam, and remained the main motive power on the Wolverhampton to Stourbridge line up to closure in July 1962.



The difference in size between Large and Small Prairie Tanks is evident in these photos of 5164 and 4566 taking water on the Severn Valley Railway



The usefulness of the GWR Prairie Tanks has been demonstrated by their popularity with heritage railway lines. Fourteen of the Small Prairies have survived into preservation, while ten of the Large Prairies have also survived. However, the GWR policy of adapting existing locomotives to create new ones was adopted in 2004 by the West Somerset Railway, who converted 2-6-2T 5193 into a 2-6-0 tender engine numbered 9351. In this area, both types of GWR Prairie have served Kidderminster

in preservation with engines 4566 and 5164 both part of the Severn Valley Railway fleet. In addition, British Railways Swindon Works built a class of 45 standard Prairie tanks from 1952 to 1955 and, although none of the 45 made it into preservation, a brand new 46th locomotive (82045) is currently being built at Bridgnorth and should be seen on the Severn Valley Railway in forthcoming years.

New build 82045 will create an engine like 82041, seen at Bath Green Park in 1960



LOOKING BACK ... 100 YEARS

By Roger Davis

Today, the Stourbridge line is mostly a self-contained line with services from Worcester, Kidderminster and Stourbridge Junction linked to Dorridge, Whitlocks End and Stratford-upon-Avon via Birmingham Snow Hill. Timetables are largely clockface with 4 trains per hour (tph) to/from Kidderminster and Stourbridge Junction, and 2 tph to/from Worcester. Sunday services are less frequent – 2 tph to/from Stourbridge Junction and 1 tph to/from Kidderminster and Worcester. This means that, on Mondays to Saturdays, Stourbridge Junction and Kidderminster see about 60 services in each direction while Worcester sees about 30 in each direction. On Sundays, this reduces to about 25 in each direction at Stourbridge Junction and about 15 at Kidderminster and Worcester. The service is supplemented by a limited Chiltern Railways service to London Marylebone. In addition, the Stourbridge Town branch has 107 round trips on Mondays to Saturdays and 43 on Sundays.

How does this compare with the service levels 100 years ago in 1922? Of course, the route mileage around the current line was a lot higher. The Severn Valley routes from Hartlebury and Kidderminster to Shrewsbury and Woofferton were open as was the line from Stourbridge Junction to Wolverhampton Low Level via Dudley. Old Hill had two branch lines to Halesowen and to Dudley via the Bumble Hole line. In those days, there was no such thing as a clockface timetable, so two trains within 5 minutes of each other followed by a long gap was not unusual.



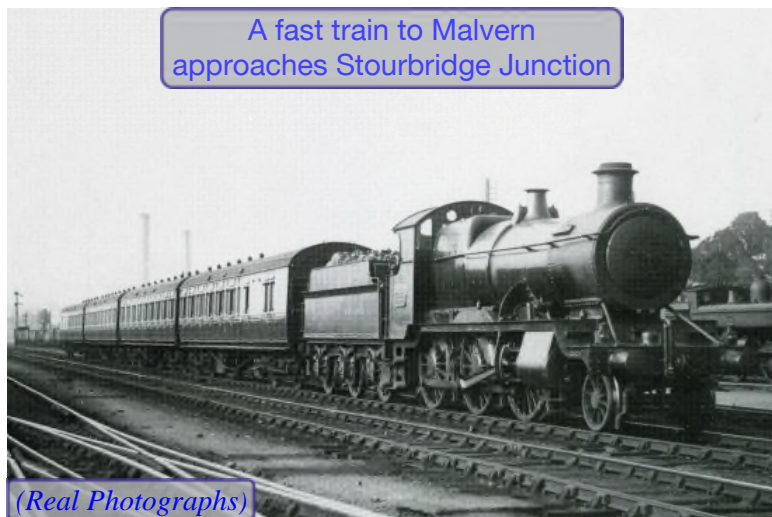
Let's look at the 1922 timetable in a bit more detail starting with Monday to Saturday. Worcester saw 20 northbound journeys over our line, with 2 originating at Cardiff Central, 2 at Hereford and 4 at London Paddington. However, only 9 ran through to Snow Hill, with 7 operating to Wolverhampton Low Level via Dudley and 1 branching off at Hartlebury to run to Shrewsbury. The other 3 were local services to either Kidderminster or Stourbridge Junction. There were also 20 southbound services with 11 starting at Snow Hill and 4 at Wolverhampton. Again, the majority of services operated past Worcester with 2 to Cardiff General, 1 to Newport High Street, 4 to Hereford, 1 to Ledbury, 1 to Malvern Wells and 4 to Paddington. One local evening service from Kidderminster operated via Bewdley and Stourport-on-Severn.

Railmotors were used on branch line services and are seen at Stourbridge shed



As well as the Worcester services, Hartlebury saw 3 services via Stourport to Shrewsbury, but only 1 in the opposite direction. Stourport itself had 12 services in each direction with local northbound services terminating at either Bewdley or Kidderminster and 9 of the southbound services continuing to Hartlebury.

Kidderminster saw 29 services in each direction, with 19 northbound services operating to Snow Hill and 7 to Wolverhampton. Southbound, 18 services originated at Snow Hill and 8 at Wolverhampton. It also had 9 departures along the Severn Valley line with 5 to Woofferton via Tenbury Wells, 1 to Shrewsbury, 2 to Bridgnorth and 1 to Highley (on Mondays only). It also had 12 arrivals from the Severn Valley – 5 from Woofferton, 4 from Shrewsbury, 2 from Bridgnorth and 1 from Highley. One of the Bridgnorth services operated on Mondays only and ran through to Snow Hill, this train starting from Bewdley on Tuesday to Friday. Bewdley also had a direct mid-afternoon service from Snow Hill.



Stourbridge Junction had a far more intensive service with many local all-stations services running to and from Snow Hill and Wolverhampton. Of its 62 northbound departures, 38 ran to Snow Hill and 19 to Wolverhampton. One morning service ran to Snow Hill via Dudley and West Bromwich although the return evening journey over this route terminated at Brettell Lane. The southbound service comprised 59 services with 33 from

Snow Hill and 21 from Wolverhampton. In addition, the Stourbridge Town branch saw 46 services in each direction.

In 1922, Old Hill was an important junction. The “Bumble Hole” line had 22 services in each direction, with one morning journey from Dudley to Snow Hill and one evening journey from Snow Hill to Dudley. Old Hill’s other branch to Halesowen saw 25 trains per day in each direction.

Sunday services were much reduced. No passenger services at all ran over the Severn Valley line north of Bewdley, the Stourbridge Town branch nor the two branches from Old Hill. Northbound on the main line, Worcester had no direct services to Snow Hill, Kidderminster had 2 and Stourbridge Junction 6. One of the services that served Kidderminster started at Hartlebury and ran via Stourport and Bewdley. There were also 6 southbound services to Stourbridge Junction with four of these services continuing to Kidderminster, Stourport, Hartlebury and Worcester respectively. Just 4 services operated to Wolverhampton – 3 from Worcester and 1 from Stourbridge Junction. There were 4 return services with 3 terminating at Stourbridge Junction and 1 at Worcester. The only intermediate stations open on a Sunday were Priestfield, Bilston, Dudley, Blowers Green and Brierley Hill.

The 1922 service was very different and much more varied than today’s clockface timetable. One aspect of the 1922 timetable that SLUG would like to see is the extension of some services south of Worcester.

If anybody is interested in looking at the 1922 timetable in detail, it is available at :- <http://www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info/files/Timetable---1922.pdf>

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

3 : Planning with Hindsight by Rob Hebron

Town planning must be a thankless job. It is difficult to please industry, commerce and the general public at the same time. Nevertheless, it is thanks to town planners that we have the infrastructure for local public transport networks. Whether that is adequate or not is another matter.



Firstly, may I compliment Worcestershire County Council planners for the excellent new Kidderminster station. It has taken a long time to come to fruition because of objections to the planning application in its original form. It is only right that the public can scrutinise applications and this is how fine tuning and compromises can be made. What a pity that strong objections were not lodged against the greatest act of vandalism

committed in the town – the Ring Road constructed in the 1970's. The irony is that the final section of the Ring Road was never constructed and so the road has never been a ring.

The purpose of the Ring Road was to break the gridlock of motor traffic in the town. What if the Ring Road plans had been scuppered by objectors and general road widening had taken place? Some of Kidderminster's arterial roads were already wide enough to accommodate three lanes or more. The routes to Stourport and Bromsgrove had previously been installed with tramway tracks. These had long been removed by the 1970s and the track beds gifted to motorists. Other highways such as Stourbridge Road (A451) were already being prepared for widening. This is evident by the former Old Bear public house (now Tesco) being demolished and rebuilt further back from the road. The roads to Bewdley and Bridgnorth did require attention as they carried traffic to Wales. Even so, the Ring Road has simply moved the pinch points to Kidderminster Hospital and Bewdley Hill. Arguably, the Bewdley By-Pass has been of more benefit than the Ring Road.

Kidderminster was famous for carpet manufacturing. Wilton and Axminster carpets were the highest quality floor coverings available. These two products were also the most expensive, as a substantial amount of coloured yarn was woven into the backing as well as the pile (the visible pattern). The invention of the tufting process and imports of cheaper foreign carpets delivered a death blow to the town's major industry. Convoys of articulated lorries leaving the town were no longer a common sight. Did the town need a Ring Road after the 1980s?





The legacy of the Ring Road was architectural carnage. The Black Horse Hotel which once hosted the Rolling Stones was obliterated, (but not by Mick and Keith!). The statue of Richard Baxter, church reformist, was removed from the Bull Ring and so was the unique “pulpit” from where a police constable would direct traffic. Numerous public houses and shops were demolished but the worst atrocity occurred on Comberton

Hill: The Playhouse Theatre which was convenient to the railway station was raised to the ground and replaced with a new facility at Broadwaters. This theatre has survived but there is no evening bus service to this location.

In the wake of the Ring Road came widespread pedestrianisation of Kidderminster town centre. Vicar Street, High Street and Worcester Street lost motor car traffic but at the same time, buses had to be diverted via the Ring Road which was devoid of bus stops and passengers. Bus usage declined in the 1980s as shoppers turned to taxis which would take them to destinations no longer served by Midland Red. Thankfully, in the 1990s, train footfall increased and frequencies improved.



Kidderminster railway station was little more than a brick box and totally unsuitable for the rising number of patrons. The Stourbridge Line User Group began campaigning for a better station and lobbied the County Council to provide integration with bus services. The Midland Red Bus Company did attempt a limited form of integration when it introduced the cross-town K1 service which linked Offmore Farm / Comberton Estates with Sutton Farm / Rifle Range via the railway station and Swan Centre. It was short lived. A few bus services pulled onto the railway forecourt in the 2000s. Here, passengers could travel onwards to Stourport and Bewdley and even Worcester if they chose not to use the improved train service to Worcester Foregate Street.

The location of the bus station in Kidderminster is not ideal. When Brinton’s car factory was demolished, a new Tesco store was erected. Because the store needed a large car park, the bus shelters in Corporation Street were removed and a new bus station was installed nearer to Exchange Street. There is only one inward and one outward route for buses arriving in (or departing from) the bus station. To compound the problem, the bus station is the wrong side of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. To leave town by the nearest bridge, buses would need to combat on-street parking in the narrow thoroughfares leading off Castle Road.

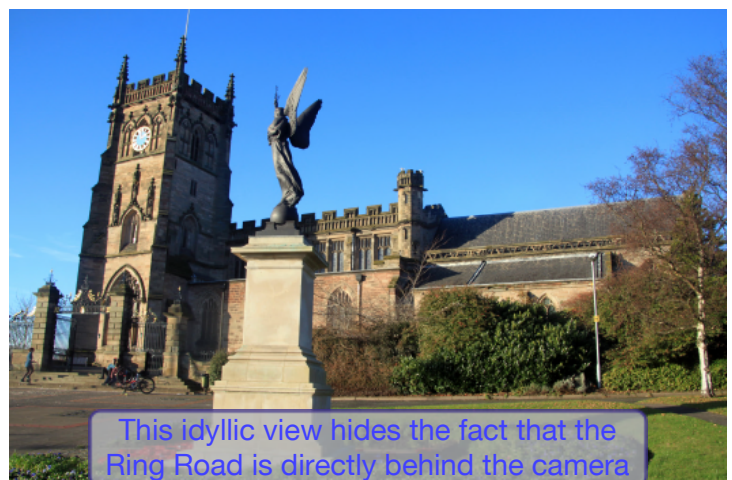


I always build in the inevitability when looking at “what might have been”. The carpet industry could not survive, though Brinton’s has fared better than other companies. Similarly, the British Sugar Corporation factory would have closed. This sugar beet processing plant ceased production around 2002 causing more unemployment in the town. At the time, there were letters printed in the Kidderminster

Shuttle which advocated creating a parkway station near the former Foley Park Halt. What if the parkway plan had gone ahead? It would have undoubtedly placed more motor traffic on the Kidderminster to Stourport road. It would also have destroyed the case for a parkway station at Hartlebury which was SLUG’s preferred option. The argument for a Kidderminster parkway is academic because Worcestershire County planners had earmarked the sugar refinery for industrial use. The Silverwoods Business Park eventually occupied the site and a link road from Hoobrook was laid as part of the scheme. It was proposed that Foley Park Halt should be re-opened to passenger trains as part of the planning package but this has never materialised, possibly because the redundant halt is owned by the Severn Valley Railway and not Network Rail.

The closure of the sugar refinery enabled the SVR to purchase the line to Kidderminster but another integration opportunity was missed: The old outdoor retail market on Comberton Hill was convenient for passengers arriving at Kidderminster station. The adjoining cattle market had closed by 1998 and by the time the auction house building was put up for sale in 2002, the stalls of the retail market had been dismantled for good. This left a vacant site which would have been ideal for a bus station, enabling all buses to serve the railway station and town centre. This was not to be, as housing was to occupy the space instead.

Planning with hindsight only works if all key factors come into play at the same time. Town and County planners can be visionary but if the councils do not own the land required for infrastructure then the results are only compromises. The recently demolished Crown Building in the Bull Ring could have made way for an extension of the existing bus station, whereby buses could leave via Mill Street and travel directly to Bewdley and beyond. Wasted mileage results in higher fuel bills, lost revenue, higher fares, fewer passengers and reduced frequencies.



I am pleased that the County Council has re-opened Worcester Street to motor traffic. Although it is only in one direction it does partly address the wasted mileage of the Ring Road in this situation. Now, more than ever, towns need to attract customers into their centres and not divert them away on by-passes. Planners are starting to recognise this fact and it is a small step in the right direction. Perhaps George Street could be re-opened at the northern end to provide another artery?

I believe Kidderminster deserves a better public transport network. The vastly improved rail station is not reachable by bus after six o'clock pm unless you are lucky enough to encounter one of the sporadic inbound or outbound Bromsgrove services. If Foley Park Halt was recommissioned under an access agreement with SVR, it would at least connect a sizeable part of Kidderminster with the national rail network. The SVR has contributed to keeping Kidderminster on the map. Tourism benefits the local economy. What if planners tapped into tourism potential? What if they built on the strengths of the town and its rail service? What if.....

MEET THE NEIGHBOURS Part 3 : Stourbridge Town by Rob Hebron

In my last article, I explored the area in the vicinity of Stourbridge Junction. I will now imagine a passenger leaving his/her train and boarding the shuttle to Stourbridge Town. The views from the windows of the Class 139 vehicle are varied; sidings for Chiltern locomotives, roof tops, flats, school playing fields and high retaining walls constructed of blue engineering bricks. The single track which has recently been re-laid, is on a steep gradient and the railcar twists and turns before it pulls gently into the Town terminus.



The small station building is neat and resembles a chalet type structure. It has one short platform and a block-paved driveway leading into the bus station. The name "Stourbridge Town" suggests that one alights in the shopping centre but in actual fact, the station has gradually moved away from the town itself. I won't dwell on previous incarnations of the station because its history has been covered by Roger Davis in a previous edition of *Platform 2* (see issue 7, March 2017). Instead, I will continue to focus on its geography.

Stourbridge Town station is located in Vauxhall Road and its nearest commercial neighbour is the "Dog House" pub which was formerly known as "The Vauxhall".

The original hostelry occupied all the building, but the premises has been converted into a new micro pub with a fast-food outlet on the ground floor. Above the two businesses are numerous flats. At the rear of the Dog House is the office and car park of ABM Taxis. There is plenty of business for ABM in the area, especially at night when the level of bus service destinations is abysmal - of the nineteen bus services which run from Stourbridge bus station during the day, only six operate during the evening. The only other alternative to a taxi is a community bicycle available from a recently installed cycle rack on the green outside the railway station.



The "Dog House" pub and the ABM Taxis office

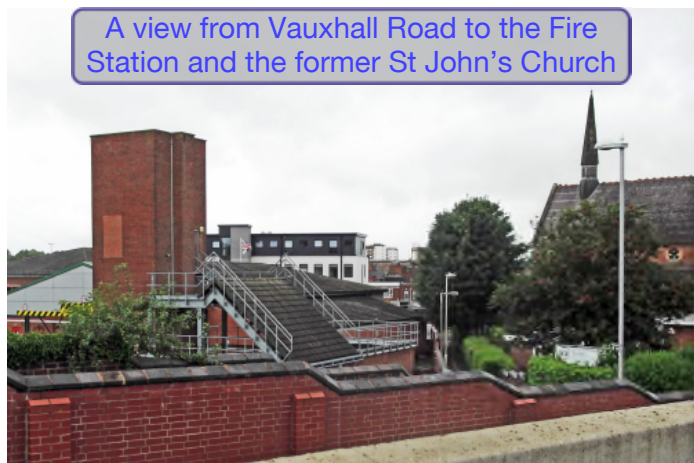


The Station Grill forms part of the "Dog House" building

The remainder of Vauxhall Road is primarily residential and a row of nineteen thirties, semi-detached houses look down on the branch railway. This part of the road was once lined by tall trees which added to the charm of the area. Sadly, the trees have been cut back and are much reduced.



Brierley Printers, the home of Platform



A view from Vauxhall Road to the Fire Station and the former St John's Church

The crescent adjoining Vauxhall Road at both ends is named Parkfield Road. At the northern end is situated Brierley Printers. This is the company which for many years has printed the SLUG newsletter *Platform*. It is a long-established firm which was originally located in Dudley Road, Brierley Hill – hence its name. Brierley Printers is owned by Nigel Creswell who deals in printing booklets, leaflets, posters and all manner of advertising material. The Editor can vouch for the quality of his products.

On the other side of the railway tracks, running parallel with Vauxhall Road, is Monarch's Way. This is little more than a drive and is wide enough for a motor car but not for two to pass each other. It leads to the Elton Centre which is a community facility for the elderly. It has no connection to a famous pop celebrity!



Monarch's Way which parallels the railway line



The former St John's Church, now used by a theatre company

The Centre may well have been associated with St John's Church which adjoins it. The Church is no longer used for worship and has been sold to a specialist theatre company. To quote from their website (<https://www.sbstcs.org/>), "we give adults with learning disabilities the confidence to express their individuality".



Stourbridge Community Fire Station

From Monarch's Way, two pathways run down towards St John's Road (Stourbridge Ringway). One path separates St John's Church from the telephone exchange and its car park. The other takes pedestrians past the fire station and the new flats which used to house the offices of the Stourbridge News. The first pathway is nearest the Town railway station. If Dudley Council had chosen to do so, a pedestrian controlled crossing could

have been installed here which would have taken bus and train passengers directly to the top of High Street. In its wisdom, Dudley MBC chose to put a crossing further away in Hagley Road where there was already a subway!

I have not yet mentioned the closest neighbour of Stourbridge Town station – Stourbridge Interchange. This is the new name for Stourbridge bus station which was completely rebuilt in 2012. It is far superior to the old bus station, offering complete shelter from the elements within the two main structures. Lighting, security and digital information technology provide a quality experience for the passenger. Sadly, as I mentioned before, a good choice of interchange is not readily available from train to bus at night nor on Sundays.



Trains, buses and cycles meet at Stourbridge Interchange

All in all, Stourbridge Town station is a precious asset which could easily have been lost in previous decades. The station has transformed in order to adapt to new circumstances and so has its neighbours. I expect that developments will continue for years to come.

THE DAFTA AWARDS

The **Rachel Riley award for not being able to count** goes to the fare dodger who boarded a train at Moor Street station one Saturday evening and immediately stowed away in the toilet before rushing out as the train stopped and asking, “Is this Cradley Heath?” before jumping off the train at Old Hill.

The **Lewis Hamilton award for quickest response time** goes to the gentleman who replied “yes” to the previous question.

NAME THE DESTINATION 2

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 Ch and the last starting Gr. All you have to do is name each destination station. (*Answers in the next issue*).



DO YOU KNOW THE SNOW HILL LINES - ANSWERS

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

1 - Earlswood, 2 - Coventry City joined Birmingham City in playing home games at St. Andrews, 3 - Tyseley, 4 - Smethwick West, 5 - Stratford-upon-Avon Parkway, 6 - Warwick Parkway, 7 - Olton, 8 - Spring Road and The Lakes, 9 - Wilmcote, 10 - Claverdon and Bearley.