

# Platform 2



Worcester Shrub Hill - the starting point  
for a walk around Worcester

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## CHANGE AT WORCESTER FOR ..... CHELTENHAM SPA by Roger Davis

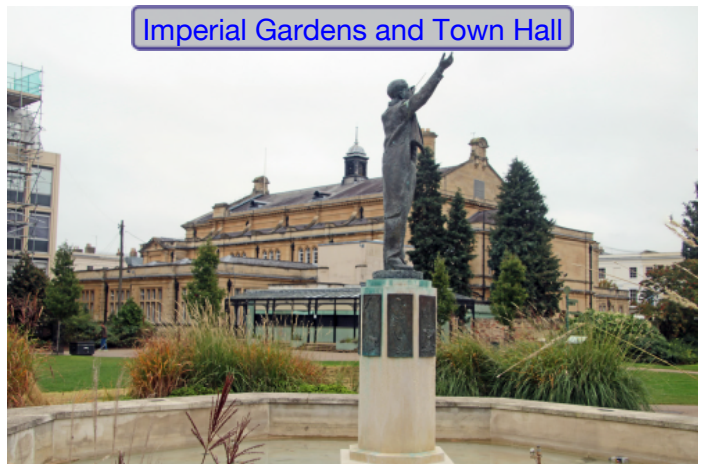
*This is the third in a series of articles that look at potential day trip destinations that may be reached by changing trains at Worcester and which are within an hour's direct train journey from Worcester.*

Cheltenham is a large spa town on the edge of the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire. The train journey from Worcester takes about 25 minutes on the hourly Great Western Railway service to Bristol Temple Meads.



Cheltenham once had three railway stations that served the central area and it is ironic that the sole survivor is the furthest from the town centre, being situated 1¼ miles to the south west. There are three ways that you can reach the town centre.

The first is to walk along the road by turning right outside the station forecourt and keeping straight ahead onto the main Lansdown Road to Montpellier. At the roundabout, turn left into Montpellier Walk with the fine Montpellier Spa and Rotunda to your left and Montpellier Gardens to your right. This road passes the Imperial Gardens and Town Hall to the right before reaching the Promenade.



The second route is via the railway path. Cross the road outside the station forecourt and go down the path at the side of the railway bridge to join the walk. This walk passes the site of the old Malvern Road station before splitting into two. Take the righthand path which will lead to the site of Cheltenham's third railway station at St. James. At the end of the walk, continue straight ahead to reach the Promenade.

For the less energetic, Stagecoach route D runs every 20 minutes to the Town Centre, Pittville and the Racecourse. Details of this bus route are available at : [https://tiscon-maps-stagecoachbus.s3.amazonaws.com/Timetables/West/2024/Cheltenham/D\\_070124.pdf](https://tiscon-maps-stagecoachbus.s3.amazonaws.com/Timetables/West/2024/Cheltenham/D_070124.pdf)





Promenade



Promenade

The Promenade has fine buildings and gardens and leads to the main shopping area around the High Street which intersects at right angles at the north of the Promenade. Off of the High Street is a covered shopping centre at Regent Arcade.

North of High Street, Pittville Street leads to the Pittville area of Cheltenham. Pittville Park is a fine open space and to its north is the Pittville Pump Room.



Pittville Park



Pittville Pump Room

Continuing uphill on Evesham Road brings you to Cheltenham Racecourse, which is also served by a 22 minute bus ride from the station on route D. An off-road walk of about  $\frac{2}{3}$  mile past the back of the main grandstand will take you to Cheltenham Racecourse station, the southern terminus of the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway. A ride on this line will take you to the lovely Cotswolds town of Broadway as described by Rob Hebron in his article published in issue 15 of *Platform 2*, which is still available on the SLUG website.

Cheltenham is an interesting destination for a day trip despite the distance between the station and the town centre.



Cheltenham Racecourse Station

Further details on attractions in the town can be found at :

<https://www.visitcheltenham.com/things-to-do/tours-and-trails/self-guided-tour>



## A WALK FROM THE STATION - WORCESTER SHRUB HILL by John Warren



*This is the first of a series that looks at what you can discover by taking a walk from a station served directly by Stourbridge line trains. This walk is approximately 2.6 miles.*

Turn left from the booking hall and walk to the main road. Cross at the lights and walk down Tallow Hill with the retail park on your right. Turn left onto the canal towpath (1). Follow the towpath to the Commandery (2), a museum of the Civil War, which boasts an open air canalside café.

Continuing along the canal brings you to the Diglis Marina. Turning left and keeping right around the marina brings you to the Diglis locks (3) and the River Sever. Turn right across the footbridge and follow the path along the river towards the Cathedral (4).





After passing the Diglis Hotel on the right, you will reach a passage (5) with walls that include stones indicating the height of flood water on given dates. Go through the passage and up the steps to reach College Square, with the cathedral to the left. Continue through the Edgar Tower (6). By turning left up the steps, you will reach the entrance to the magnificent cathedral (7). (Note that a short 130 yard diversion to the right from Edgar Tower leads to the Museum of Royal Worcester Porcelain).



Cross over College Street and walk to the right down the hill before turning left into Friar Street. This contains many fine buildings - the Tudor Museum (8), Lasletts Almshouses and Greyfriars (9), a National Trust property. Friar Street continues into New Street (10) which also contains fine buildings, including one or two hosteleries. Turn right at the end, cross the dual-carriageway City Walls Road and continue ahead into St Martin's Gate. Continue up the hill past the canal to Shrub Hill station.



In the next issue, an alternative walk from Foregate Street station will be described.

## DOCKING IN GLOUCESTER

by Rob Hebron

I've passed through Gloucester many times on my way to Bristol and the south-west, as it is an important stopping point on the Great Western Railway route. I must confess that I have never visited the city for the specific purpose of exploring its geography and history. My perception has been marred by the appearance of its railway station which lacks any architectural merit. Trains that serve Gloucester from Worcester to Bristol have to reverse here before resuming their southward path. I have always been glad to leave this ugly station behind, hopefully facing forward for the rest of my journey.

My wife and I decided to revisit Tewkesbury where we had a very enjoyable break the previous year. On the Monday morning, we travelled from Stourbridge Town to Worcester Foregate Street and connected with the GWR service to Weymouth via Ashchurch for Tewkesbury. This sprawling unstaffed station is the nearest point to Tewkesbury and so we continued our



journey by bus no. 41 to the town centre. Our accommodation was as good as before and our host was extremely helpful.

Our first full day was spent exploring the multitude of fascinating alleyways which criss-cross the High Street and Riverside. We were aided by a useful leaflet which we picked up at the Tewkesbury Heritage Centre. These alleyways are not at all like the ones in Worcester which are full of independent retailers. They are instead, passageways to flats and offices above the High Street shops and some of these alleyways are squalid, neglected and forlorn. Even so, the exploration thereof is a fascinating glimpse of history.

The evening started with a tasty meal at the Rosado Lounge, part of the "Lounge" group of café bars. Having visited the Soffio Lounge in Stourbridge, I was assured of the quality and service to expect. Naturally, the evening concluded with a couple of real ales in the Cross House Tavern, a micro pub, a few doors away!

The Wednesday was set aside for a trip to Gloucester. We could easily have caught a train from Ashchurch but, as that would have involved the no. 41 bus to reach the departing station, it was just as easy to catch a Stagecoach no. 71 bus to Gloucester, eliminating the train altogether. Nowadays, being the owners of a national concessionary bus pass, it is wise to save on fares when there is a bus alternative. In terms of frequency, the no. 71 operates hourly, as opposed to the two-hourly Gloucester train service. This resulted in a "win-win" situation for us and the bus company. A fair number of customers were awaiting to board the bus at its designated shelter. Our driver was very amiable and humorous, giving us a running commentary of the journey, almost like a courier on a long-distance coach trip.

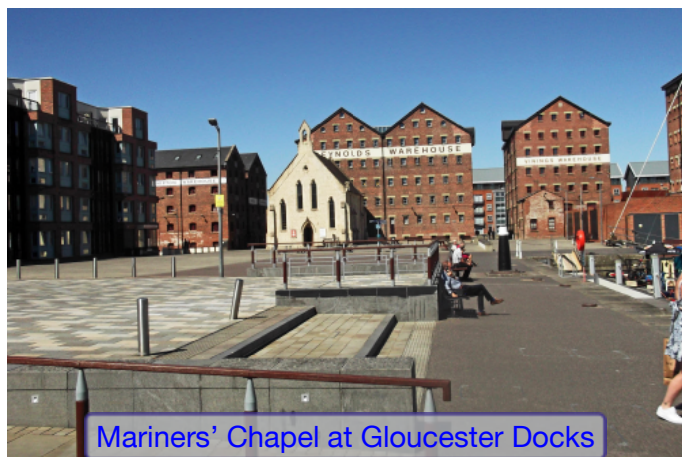


The no. 71 takes a couple of diversions into local housing estates before continuing in earnest. There is a good deal of rural mileage and sparse population after the diversions and so the additional passengers are probably essential to ensure the service is commercial. Thereafter, the no. 71 bus service is fairly direct and calls at interestingly named places such as Wheatpieces (Monterey Road) and Norton (Village Hall). The final destination in Gloucester is the very modern bus station. This is a drive in – reverse out operation. There are many other destinations served by Stagecoach from this interchange and also different operators on local services.

The City of Gloucester is an unusual mix of heritage and contemporary architecture. The oldest structure which we passed was the Greyfriars Priory, dating back to 1231 and this is a well-preserved relic of the Mediaeval Ages though partly in ruins. Elsewhere there is a hint of deterioration and neglect, especially the empty shops and offices which seem to belong to the seventies. On the whole, the city centre is bold and striking but the best was yet to come! We searched for the signs labelled “Docks” and followed our guidance and our noses.

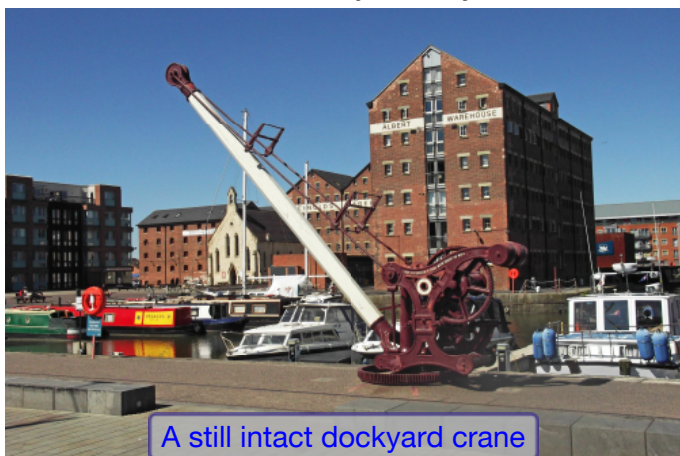


Greyfriars Priory



Mariners' Chapel at Gloucester Docks

What were formerly busy dockyards are now an attraction for tourists. Industrial buildings have been converted to offices, shops, museums and other visitor attractions. Ships have given way to pleasure craft which are moored in a marina, waiting for their owners to untether. There is still evidence of past times such as a dockyard crane and even a Mariners' Chapel. Best of all, there are plenty of benches from which to contemplate how the scene has changed. It turned out to be the hottest day of the year and it was not practical or desirable to sit in the sun. We decided to forgo the shopping centre and restaurants and head back to the bus station for our return journey.



A still intact dockyard crane



National Waterways Museum

On our way back, the scorching sun had an unexpected effect on our bus – the driver had to pull up, mid-journey because a warning light on the dashboard indicated that the vehicle had overheated. Luckily, it was the same driver who had taken us on the outward trip and he kept us amused with his ditties and anecdotes. Even more fortunate for us was that we were at a location where bus routes intersected and we didn't have to wait too long for a no. 41 bus from Cheltenham to take us back to Tewkesbury.

Not surprisingly, the next day, we decided to stay in the neighbourhood of Tewkesbury. It was our last chance to purchase gifts for our grandchildren. There are plenty of independent retailers in the High Street with a vast selection of gift ideas, so we found just what we wanted.



Our journey home did not start well. While we waited at the terminus for the no. 41 bus to take us back to Ashchurch station, a young mother informed us that our intended bus service had been cancelled. For once I was grateful for a mobile phone application because she could track the later service. We were uncertain if this one would make the connection with the train, especially as she told us there were roadworks and diversions in the area. She kindly phoned a taxi for us which arrived shortly afterwards. I think the £10 taxi fare was exorbitant for the length of time it took us to Ashchurch but we had no choice in the matter. A two hourly train service from Ashchurch to Worcester at the time was simply not frequent enough. SLUG had raised the issue of inadequate Worcester to Bristol trains with Worcestershire County Council and West Midlands Rail Executive. All three parties were in agreement and Great Western Railway finally provided an hourly service just after we travelled. Hopefully, this will encourage more Stourbridge line passengers to travel via Worcester rather than Birmingham by providing a more reliable, single change service to Gloucestershire and Bristol.

### THE D.I.Y. SOCIETY by Rob Hebron

Being of a certain age, I can remember walking into a grocer's shop and being served by a person behind a counter. The stock was on shelves or in cabinets and it was picked, wrapped and handed to the customer in person. The same system applied to sweet shops, cake shops, chemists and tobacconists. Nowadays, only small independent butchers' shops have counters and provide that kind of service. Sadly, everything changed with the introduction of supermarkets, an idea imported from America. Customers were lured by cheap prices which were facilitated by bulk-buy and picking your own shopping from shelves into baskets or trollies. For every gain there is a loss. Cheap prices meant that service was sacrificed. There was no one to advise on the variations of product, its origin or its quality.



Over the years, technology has enabled the establishment to erode the service industries. Vending machines have appeared at railway stations and newsagents have disappeared. Credit and debit cards were introduced by the banks – supposedly for our convenience – and cash payment is now relatively uncommon.



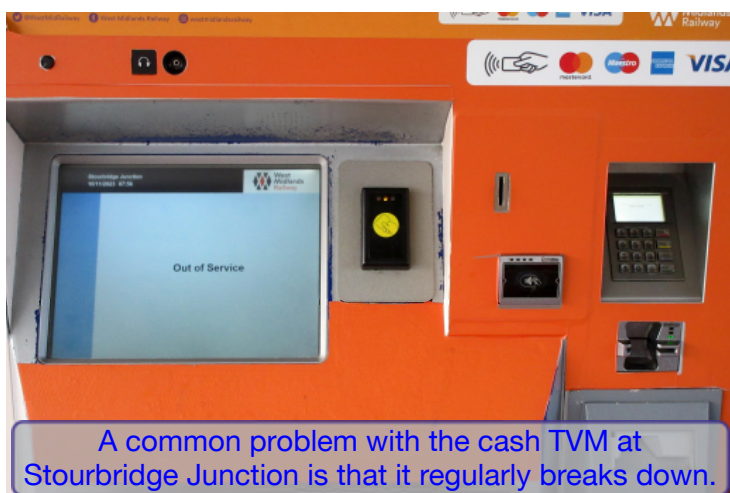
It didn't take long for supermarket chains to give preference to card payment customers. The pandemic was a perfect excuse to promote the idea that plastic was cleaner than metal. Slowly but surely, cash checkouts have given way to self-service, card transaction scanners. The ultimate innovation is a hand-held scanner which adds up goods as customers progress around the store and an "app" to pay directly through a

mobile phone, without even encountering a checkout – manual or otherwise.

I wouldn't mind but all these modern ideas are being introduced in the name of progress and supposedly to make it easier for customers. Baloney! The purpose of it all is to reduce staff and cut costs. Are these savings passed on to the customer? The shareholders certainly don't take a proportionate cut in dividends.

We have become a "Do it yourself" society with rapidly diminishing face to face contact in the real world. For instance, the utilities use call centres to answer customer queries and it is unlikely that you will speak to the same colleague twice. It is even harder to get through to a surgery, let alone visit a doctor. If you are lucky enough to get to the end of the call queue, you might be assigned a telephone consultation. I think the doctors would prefer you to visit the pharmacist or self-diagnose.

The same is true on the railways. Tickets may now be bought online or via ticket vending machines and this has reduced the percentage of tickets bought face to face at a ticket office. This gave the Government the excuse to try to close the majority of ticket offices. Thankfully, people power won out and the Government was forced into a humiliating U-turn.



I accept that many people prefer the new cash-free, contact-free method of purchasing goods. However, there are still a lot of people who prefer personal service. While this is still the case, facilities such as shop counters, high street banking facilities and railway ticket offices must remain as an option.



## BY CHARTER TRAIN FROM STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION 1 : THE HERTFORDSHIRE RAILTOUR YEARS by John Warren

Articles in previous issues of *Platform 2* has shown that, up to the 1960s, it was possible to travel directly from the Stourbridge line to destinations such as London and Cardiff, plus some unusual destinations currently being detailed in *Platform 2*. Since then, apart from a three year period from 1987 to 1990 when a service ran to Cardiff via Gloucester, the line has become essentially a local line. Therefore, the introduction of charter trains serving Kidderminster and Stourbridge Junction gave local travellers the opportunity to explore the country.

In 1988, Hertfordshire Railtours, based in Welwyn Garden City, started a series of railtours in conjunction with the InterCity sector of British Rail using an InterCity 125 (HST) set. This set ran on the East Coast Main Line on Mondays to Fridays but, between October and May, was not used at weekends. From January 1988, Hertfordshire Railtours started using an HST set most Saturdays when available, initially running railtours from London termini. However, it extended its operation to include tours from the Midlands, initially based on Birmingham New Street.

Early in 1991, I saw an advert in the *County Express* for a railtour on 2 February and immediately booked a ticket. The train started at Kidderminster at 0730 and I joined the service 10 minutes later at Stourbridge Junction. The outward route took us through Birmingham New Street, Derby and Sheffield, before heading into the



Yorkshire Dales. On the higher ground, there was a light snow covering of the sort that the Reach Newspaper Group would now describe as a “snowbomb” caused by “blizzards from the beast from the east”. We continued through Penistone, Huddersfield and Saltaire to reach Skipton for a ride up a freight branch to Rylstone. We then retraced our steps through Skipton to Keighley where a Keighley & Worth Valley steam train was waiting to take us for a ride

along the branch either to Haworth or Oxenhope. I chose the former and was able to walk up the hill to the village and the Brontë Parsonage in the hour’s break. The return route through Leeds, Doncaster and Sheffield got us back to Stourbridge Junction at about a quarter past nine.

Having enjoyed the scenery and the comfort of the superb InterCity 125 train (surely the best British train ever built), I booked a second trip for 6 April – my first ride over the Settle & Carlisle Railway. Again, the train started at Kidderminster and the pick up at Stourbridge Junction was at 0805. We travelled via Derby, Sheffield and Wakefield to reach Blackburn, where the train was to reverse.





Ribblehead Viaduct on the Settle-Carlisle line



Unfortunately, the windscreen wipers on the rear power car were not working and this necessitated a wait at Blackburn station for the replacement power car to arrive. Despite this, the rest of the journey was superb, travelling from Settle to Carlisle, then along the line parallel to Hadrian's Wall through Hexham to Gateshead, followed by a high speed run down the

East Coast main line to York. We returned home via Pontefract, Sheffield and Derby, reaching Stourbridge Junction just before 9 o'clock.

A fortnight later, the trip was to Plymouth leaving Stourbridge Junction at 0710 and Kidderminster at 0725. We travelled directly to Plymouth via Worcester, Bristol and Exeter and enjoyed a 7 hour break in that fine Devon city. The return journey by the same route got us back to Stourbridge Junction just after half past nine.

The final trip that year occurred on 14 December with a trip to the beautiful North Yorkshire town of Whitby. This train originated at Worcester Shrub Hill, picking up at Kidderminster (0701) and Stourbridge Junction (0711). Again, the direct route via Derby, Doncaster, York and Middlesbrough was used in each direction, although the Sheffield avoiding line was used. A break of 3½ hours ensued in Whitby and we got back to Stourbridge Junction at about 2120.

Over the next few years, Hertfordshire Railtours bypassed the Stourbridge line, although I joined trips from either Wolverhampton or Birmingham New Street to Tenby and Blaenau Ffestiniog (for a steam train to Porthmadog and back).

The final trip from Stourbridge Junction occurred on 4 March 1995. The train picked up at Stourbridge Junction (0844) and Kidderminster (0855) before travelling via Worcester, Yate and Bristol to Bishop's Lydeard. Passengers transferred from the HST onto a West Somerset Railway steam train for the 20 mile ride to Minehead. Two hours were available to explore Minehead before we headed back to Bishop's Lydeard to rejoin our HST. The return journey was slightly different as we travelled from Bristol to Gloucester via Newport and Chepstow before getting back to Stourbridge Junction just before half past seven.



A change of train at Bishop's Lydeard

With the privatisation of British Rail in 1996, Hertfordshire Railtours retrenched to its local area and trips from the Midlands ceased. Charter services from the Stourbridge line operated by other companies continued and I will look at some of them in the next two issues.



## THE DAFTA AWARDS SALUTES OUR AMERICAN FRIENDS

**The George W Bush award for being a typical American** goes to the American couple on a CrossCountry service who, after checking their tickets from Birmingham Stns to Bristol TM, asked the Train Manager the following question. “We’re travelling to Bristol Tee-Em. Can you tell us if that station is before Bristol Temple Meads or after it?”

**The Donald Trump award for being a much less intelligent American** goes to the American couple on a London Northwestern Birmingham to Liverpool service who read the display “Next stop – Smethwick GB”. “Gee, honey, what does that mean – Smethwick GB?” “It means that there’s a Smethwick in another country”. (Note that Smethwick was pronounced Smeth which rhymes with death, and wick with a non-silent w).

## FILM AND TELLY ADDICTS

The answers to the following questions are all real railway stations (rather than fictional names), either closed or still open.

1. At which Lancashire station did Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard meet in the 1945 film *Brief Encounter*?
2. ... and at which Hampshire station did Sophia Loren and Richard Burton meet in the 1974 remake of *Brief Encounter*?
3. Which station became Hatley in the BBC comedy series *Oh! Doctor Beeching*?
4. Which closed village station in Somerset became Titfield in the film *The Titfield Thunderbolt*?
5. ... and which station was used in the same film for the main line station at Mallingford?
6. At which Yorkshire station did Perks (Bernard Cribbins) work in the 1970 film *The Railway Children*?
7. Which tube station featured in the opening credits of the television series *Citizen Smith*?
8. At which station is the fictional platform 9¾ in the Harry Potter films?
9. In the 1971 film *10 Rillington Place*, at which station did Timothy Evans (John Hurt) alight when returning to Wales to visit his relatives?
10. In the 2013 television series *Father Brown*, starring Mark Williams, which station acts as the local station for the village of Kembleford?

## NAME THE DESTINATION 4 - ANSWERS

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

A - Manorbier, B - Market Drayton, C - Moreton-in-Marsh, D - Newport, E - Oxford, F - Pembroke, G - Pershore, H - Saundersfoot, I - Shrewsbury, J - Solihull