

Platform 2



Bewdley station was served by trains between Hartlebury and Kidderminster in its final BR days. It has since been superbly restored by the Severn Valley Railway

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CHANGE AT WORCESTER FOR LEDBURY by Roger Davis

This is the seventh 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.

Ledbury is a small market town in Herefordshire. The train journey from Worcester takes about 25-30 minutes on either a Great Western Railway service or a West Midlands Railway service. The majority of West Midlands Railway services only serve Foregate Street.

The station is north of the town, which is reached by a $\frac{5}{8}$ mile walk by turning left at the end of the station forecourt and following the A438 main road. As you approach the town centre, the first picturesque half-timbered buildings in The Homend come into view, including the Grade II listed Horseshoe Inn



As you enter the High Street, the Barrett Browning Institute and Clock Tower is on the right and the fine Market House, which dates from 1617, is on the left.

The Homend



The Horseshoe Inn



The Barrett Browning Institute and Clock Tower



The Market House

Just before the Market House, the cobbled Church Lane, which contains many historic buildings, branches on the left and leads to the Grade 1 listed St Michael and All Angels Parish Church, dating from the 12th Century.



Church Lane



Church Lane and St Michael's Church



St Michael's Church



High Street and The Feathers Hotel

By retracing your footsteps back along Church Lane to the High Street and turning left, you will encounter more fine buildings including the Feathers Hotel and Ledbury Park House.



High Street



Ledbury Park House

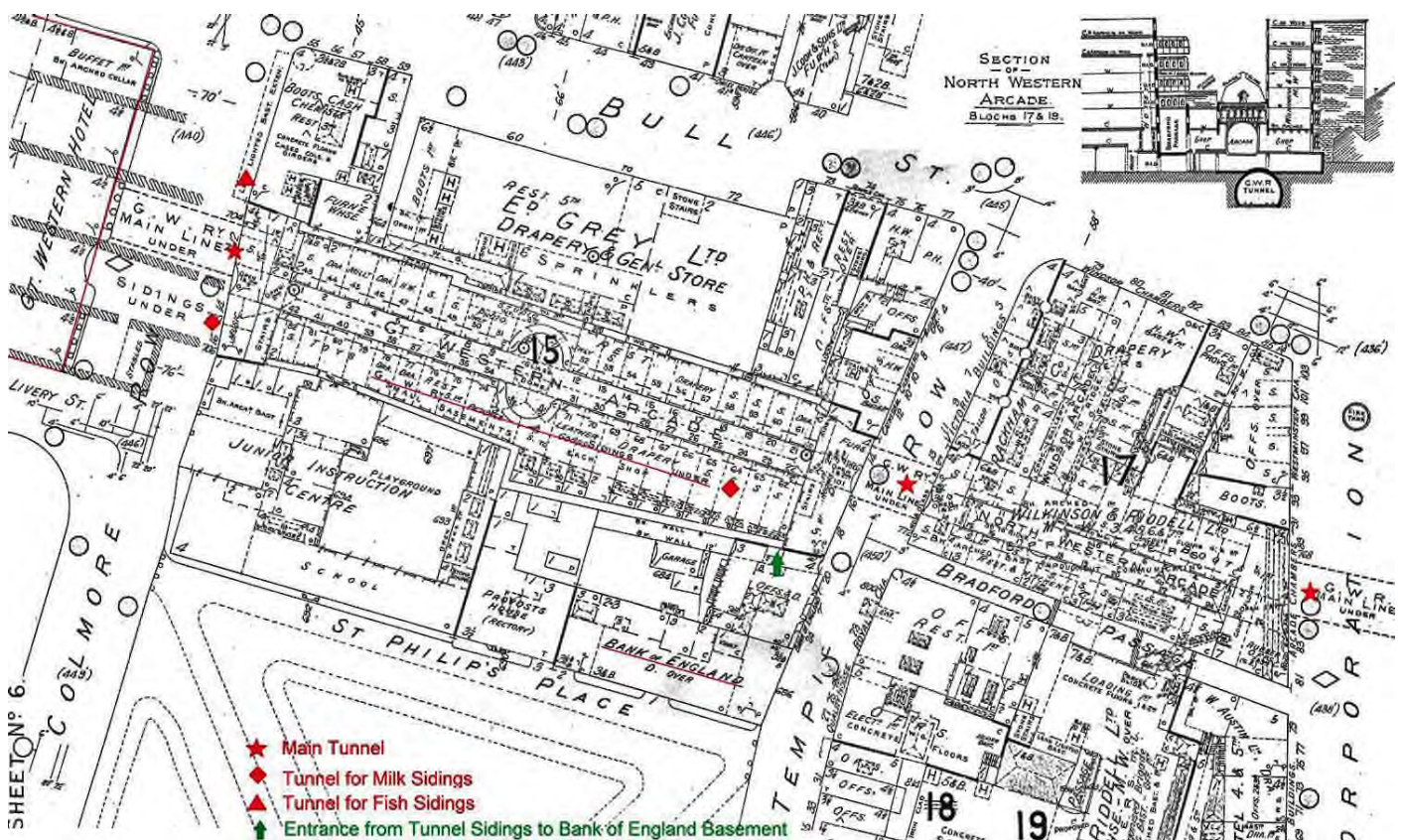
Ledbury is only a small town but contains a large number of fine historic buildings and is well worth a visit. All that is left after your visit is the 5/8 mile walk back along High Street and The Homend to the station.

A LABYRINTH OF TUNNELS

by John Warren

For the railway to reach Birmingham Snow Hill station in 1852, the final 600 yards from Moor Street had to pass through the town centre. To achieve this, a 434 yard tunnel, from Moor Street to Temple Row, was constructed using the cut-and-cover method of construction. This is a simple method of construction for shallow tunnels where a trench is excavated and roofed over with an overhead support system strong enough to carry the load of what is to be built above the tunnel. The line then ran through a deep cutting to Snow Hill station. In 1874, it was decided to cover the cutting between Temple Row and Colmore Row to extend the tunnel to a length of 596 yards. This enabled the magnificent Great Western Arcade to be built between 1875 and 1876, with the line of the new tunnel being offset slightly from the centre of the arcade.

However, the area around the northern portal of the lengthened tunnel is not as straightforward as thought as a team of contractors discovered in 2019 when carrying out strengthening work on the tunnel. The senior project manager reported that “it is a bit of a maze at the north end. There was a siding used to transport cash and bullion by train. I think it was last used in the 60s and the entrance is all sealed up now”. In fact, there were originally two sidings, one on each side of the tunnel.



On the eastern side, the Fish Sidings ▲ branched off, although no information about the length of this tunnel and when it closed can be found. However, it was the siding on the western side that was the more interesting. Although known as the Milk Sidings ◆, there was an entrance to the siding from the basement of the Bank of England ↑, which stood on the corner of Temple Row and St Philip's Churchyard. It was via this siding that cash and gold bullion was transported to and from the bank.

According to one report, the bullion train would arrive regularly at Birmingham Snow Hill platform 1 on a train from Paddington just after 2 pm. The bullion train was then shunted back into the tunnel siding. The train spotters could always tell it was coming by the policeman riding shotgun on the station pilot. Another report, possibly an urban myth, stated that, on one occasion, the driver had a problem starting the engine on the upward gradient in the siding and, by the time he had got it moving, he came out into the station to be surrounded by armed police as the signalman had reported that the train was missing.



Bank of England Building

(Bank of England Archive)

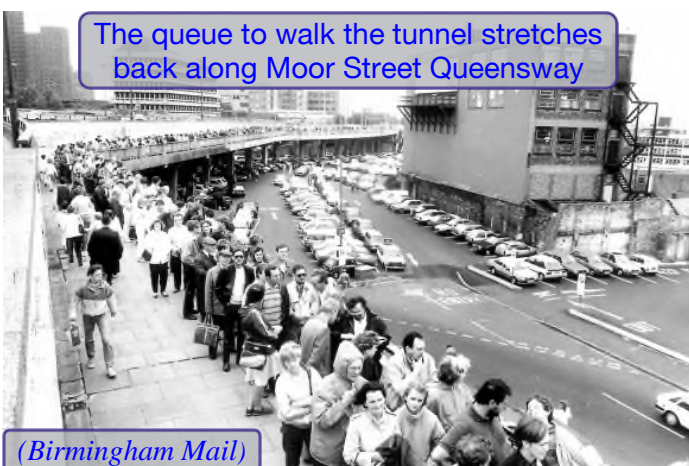


A Bullion Van immediately behind the GWR King Class loco

(Model Rail)

The siding was closed in the 1960s and the entrance bricked up. The Bank of England itself moved its offices around the corner to 55 Temple Row in 1970 and the fine building demolished and replaced by the bland concrete and glass building now occupied by Nat West opposite the back entrance of what once was Rackhams.

In fact, Snow Hill Tunnel itself closed with the last train passing through it on 2 March 1968. In 1970, a hare-brained Birmingham City Council scheme proposed converting it to a road tunnel with access to a huge underground car park. Fortunately, this never happened and, having remained dormant for 19 years, the tunnel reopened on 5 October 1987 along with the new, smaller, Snow Hill station and the new through platforms 1 and 2 at Moor Street station.



The queue to walk the tunnel stretches back along Moor Street Queensway

(Birmingham Mail)



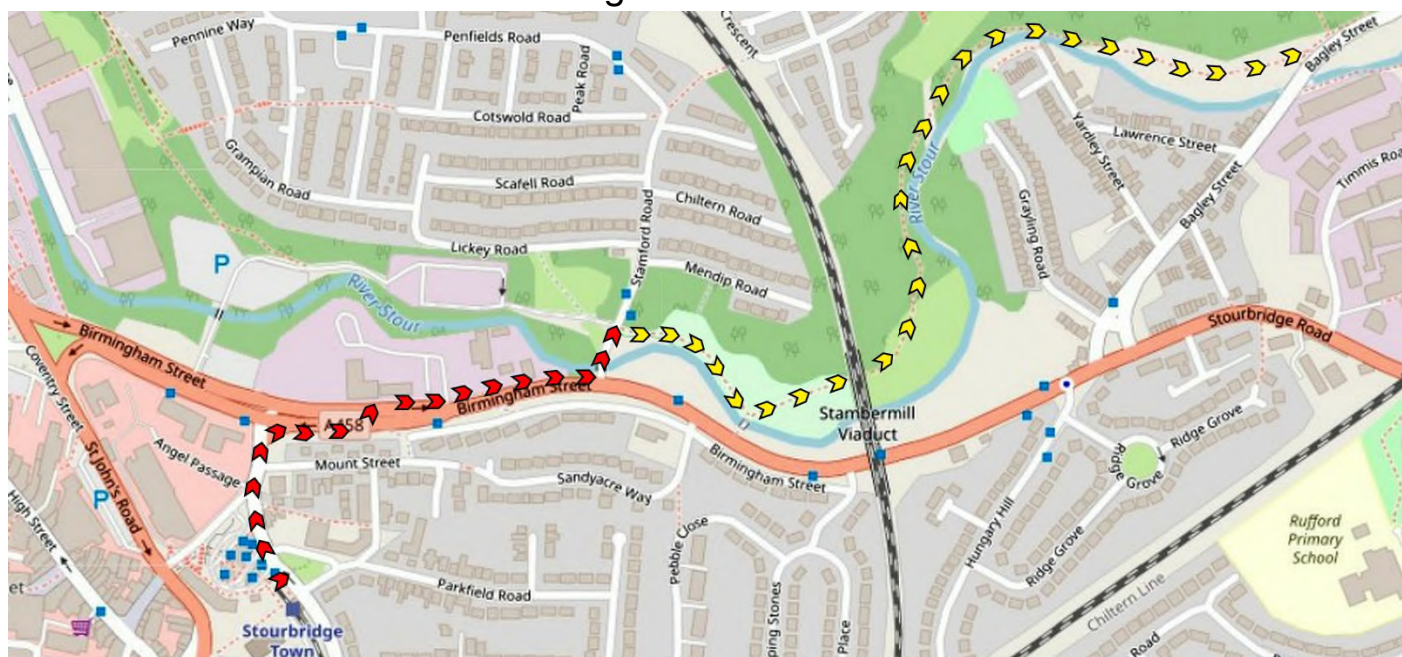
Journey's end at Snow Hill

(michaeln544)

A month before reopening, on 12 September 1987, over 13,000 people took the opportunity to walk through the tunnel from Moor Street to Snow Hill. I wonder how many of the 13,000 people realised that, behind the bricked up wall to their left as they exited the tunnel, a lot of cash and gold was transported to and from the Bank of England.

A RIVERSIDE STROLL by Rob Hebron

Following on from my article about the River Stour in the previous edition of *Platform 2*, I would like to suggest a pleasant walk alongside the river which is only a short distance from the heart of Stourbridge.



If you are arriving by train, then Stourbridge Town railway station is a good place to start. Firstly, leave the station driveway, and turn right and then left into Vauxhall Road, skirting the bus interchange to your left. Continue down the hill into Foster Street and then turn right into Birmingham Street. A few yards down the road, sited near the Premier Inn, there is a widened pavement and a refuge island which makes a convenient place to cross the road. Walk past the former Brewer's Fayre restaurant, gymnasium and car wash and you will approach Stamford Road. Cross the road at this junction and turn left. Shortly you will notice a gateway in Stamford Road which leads onto a meadow. The River Stour can be seen on the western edge of the meadow, having emerged from the industrial side of Stourbridge.



Stambermill Viaduct and the footbridge over the River Stour



The footbridge over the River Stour

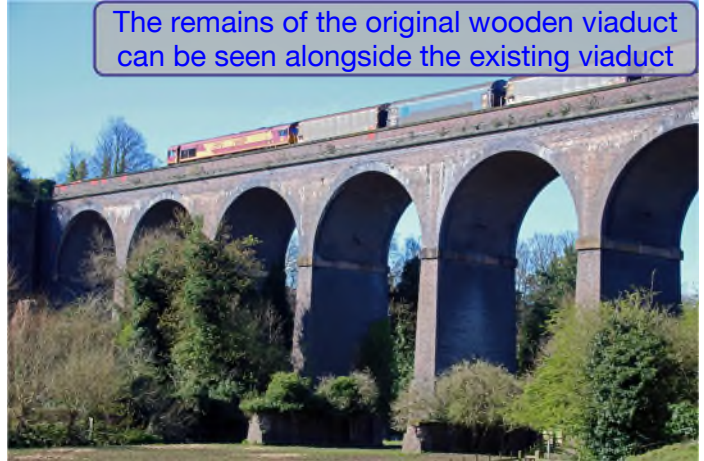
We are now in the area known as Stambermill and the impressive ten arch viaduct looms before us. The Stour continues to run parallel to Birmingham Street and within a few minutes we will encounter a footbridge enabling walkers to cross the river to reach that busy highway.

We must now head for the eastern arches of the viaduct. As we pass below the arches, we will see the remains of the original Stambermill viaduct immediately behind the existing structure. Beyond that we see a property which has several stables. There is usually a horse grazing behind the perimeter fence.

The viaduct and the River Stour in the 1880s



The remains of the original wooden viaduct can be seen alongside the existing viaduct



A close-up of the original viaduct remains



Evidence of clearance work along the route



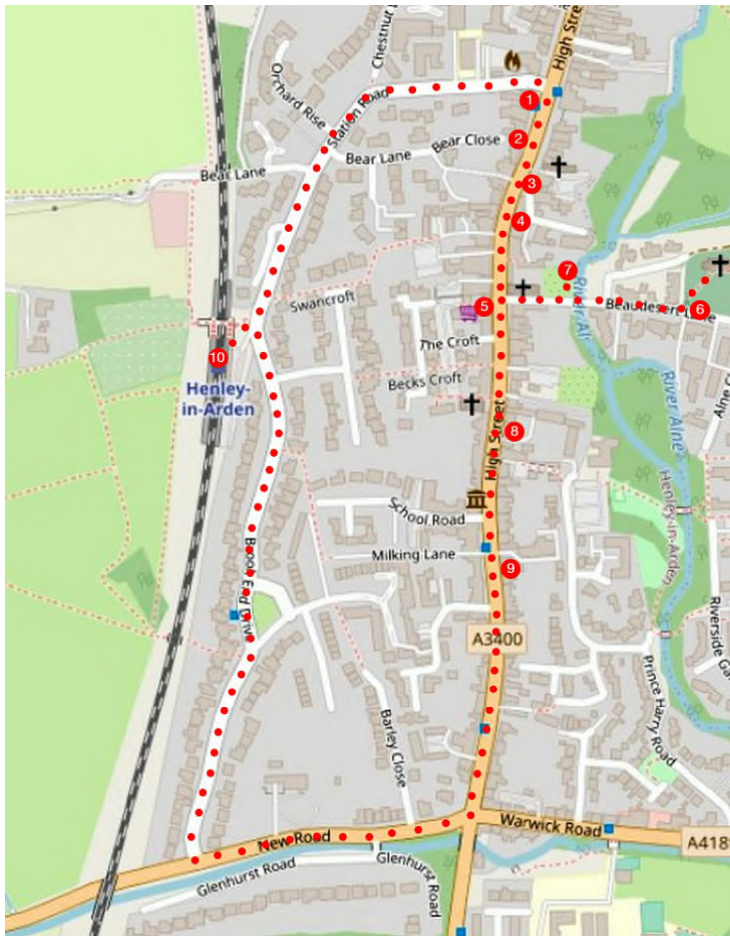
Having passed under the arch we must now climb over a stile and follow a track into woodland. This pathway is very undulating in nature and quite slippery after heavy rainfall. We are dangerously close to open water and children should be supervised at all times. There is evidence that youthful activity takes place here because a rope is suspended from one of the tall trees to form a swing.

Looking down at the Stour from the steep bank, we will notice an inlet (possibly a drain) or a feeder stream from a culvert. From this point onwards, the landscape opens up to reveal neatly planted rear gardens of houses in the Grayling Road district. It would be easy to be deluded and think you were in a rural setting and not at the boundary of Lye! The track continues and once again enters a meadow. Soon you will hear the noise of traffic as our journey comes to an end in Bagley Street.

This almost forgotten riverside walk is being brought back into use by the “Love Your River Stour Project” under the auspices of the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust. The project is funded by the government’s Green Recovery Challenge Fund. Since early 2022, a team of dedicated volunteers have begun to slowly clear the pathways, collecting litter, felling trees and planting new plant species suitable to the environment. When the project is completed, Stourbridge will have a riverside walk to be proud of. It’s such a shame that the same cannot be said about the bridge which gives the town its name!

A WALK FROM THE STATION - HENLEY-IN-ARDEN

by John Warren



This is the sixth 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 1½ miles.

Walk down the station forecourt and turn left in Station Road. Continue until you reach the High Street (1) with the Bluebell Inn opposite. Turn right along the High Street (2) to the Market Cross (3). Continuing along the High Street, you will pass the White Swan Inn (4) before reaching the half-timbered Guildhall on the left next to the Church of St John The Baptist (5). The church is normally open to visitors. Turn left along Beaudesert Lane and cross the River Alne to reach St Nicholas Church (6), parts of which date from the 12th century with later parts rebuilt in the 15th century.





Optionally, you could continue past the church and climb The Mount for panoramic views of the town. As you retrace your footsteps along Beaudesert Lane, the Jubilee Gardens (7) are on the right after crossing the river. Turn left into the High Street, where there are fine buildings on either side of the road (8). Shortly after passing the spire of the Baptist Church on the right, an optional detour to the left through a passageway signposted Medical Centre) leads to the Riverlands Play Area on the banks of the River Alne.



Continuing along the High Street, you will pass the Henley Ice Cream Company (9). More fine buildings line the High Street before you reach the traffic lights at the crossroads. Turn right into New Road. Just before the railway bridge, turn right into Brook End Drive and continue through the housing estate.



The railway station (10) is on the left hand side. Henley-in-Arden is a small, but very attractive, town and is well worth a visit.

'TWIXT HARTLEBURY AND KIDDERMINSTER
A Pictorial Guide to Severn Valley Line Stations by Roger Davis



(Tom Burnham)

STOURPORT-ON-SEVERN

Opened 1/2/1862 Closed 5/1/1970

Originally named Stourport and served by trains from Hartlebury to Shrewsbury via Bewdley. It was renamed Stourport-on-Severn in October 1934. Services were cut back when the lines north of Bewdley closed on 9 September 1963. The site, north of the town centre, is now occupied by a housing estate.

BURLISH HALT

Opened 31/3/1930 Closed 5/1/1970

This simple halt was opened by the Great Western Railway about ½ mile north west of Stourport-on-Severn station on the outskirts of the town.



(Geoff Bishop)



(John Senior)

BEWDLEY

Opened 1/2/1862 Closed 5/1/1970

Originally served by Hartlebury to Shrewsbury services, with services to Tenbury Wells starting in 1864 and to Kidderminster in 1878. Services to Tenbury and Shrewsbury ceased in 1962 and 1963 respectively. After closure, the station was bought by the Severn Valley Railway and reopened in 1974.

FOLEY PARK HALT

Opened 2/1/1905 Closed 5/1/1970

Situated to the east of the A451 (Stourport Road) alongside the British Sugar Factory. Originally the single platform was located to the south of the line, but was relocated to the north of the line in 1925. It was not reopened when the Severn Valley Railway extended its operations from Bewdley to Kidderminster in 1984.



(Severn Valley Railway)

UNUSUAL SERVICES ON THE STOURBRIDGE LINE

6. TO AND FROM SWANSEA IN THE 1960s by John Warren

In the previous issue of *Platform 2*, we saw that 1961 was the last year that a through train operated to Fishguard Harbour to connect with the Rosslare ferry. 1961 was also the first year that a direct service operated from Swansea High Street to the Stourbridge line. The service operated on Saturdays only with the following timings.

Swansea High Street 1145, Neath General 1200, Port Talbot General 1211, Pyle 1225, Bridgend 1237, Cardiff General 1320, Newport High Street 1342, Pontypool Road 1410, Abergavenny Monmouth Road 1428, Hereford 1513, Ledbury 1538, Colwall 1548, Great Malvern 1557, Malvern Link 1600, Worcester Foregate Street 1612, Droitwich Spa 1623, Kidderminster 1636, Stourbridge Junction 1649, Smethwick West 1708, Birmingham Snow Hill 1717



However, by 1963, this service had been cut back to start from Cardiff General, but another service had been extended to start back at Swansea on Mondays to Saturdays at the following times.

Swansea High Street 0620, Neath General 0639, Port Talbot 0649, Bridgend 0707, Cardiff General 0745, Newport High Street 0803, Pontypool Road 0821, Abergavenny Monmouth Road 0835, Hereford 0908, Ledbury 0933, Colwall 0943, Great Malvern 0949, Malvern Link 0953, Worcester Foregate Street 1003, Droitwich Spa 1013, Kidderminster 1025, Stourbridge Junction 1037, Smethwick West 1054, Birmingham Snow Hill 1103

This service ran until May 1966 with some minor timing alterations. However, between June 1964 and June 1965, a through service ran in the opposite direction at the following times.

Birmingham Snow Hill 1203, Smethwick West 1214, Stourbridge Junction 1228, Kidderminster 1238, Droitwich Spa 1250, Worcester Foregate Street 1304, Great Malvern 1318, Hereford 1355, Abergavenny Monmouth Road 1426, Pontypool Road 1441, Newport High Street 1458, Cardiff General 1517, Bridgend 1545, Port Talbot, 1600, Neath 1610, Swansea High Street 1628

This was the last of the unusual destinations reachable by scheduled services from the Stourbridge line. The following years would see services slashed. Is it too much to hope that longer distance services will once again grace our line in the future?

A WAR ON TRAINSPOTTERS

by Roger Davis

The railway industry has finally unearthed a way to eradicate all trainspotters from railway station platforms.

The introduction of Class 196 units by West Midlands Railway has seen individual carriage numbers increased from the traditional five or six digits to a whopping eighteen digits. A spokesman told us that earlier attempts to confuse trainspotters - for instance, by adding letters to the start of numbers in the 1960s to create for example D6723 or W55032 - did not work because the combinations created were too easy to remember.



However, the creation of 18-digit numbers has meant that trainspotters are only halfway through writing the first number down when the entire four-car unit disappears from view. The length of the number has also caused pens to run out of ink and pencils to break before the first number is recorded. An appeal by the NTU (National Trainspotters Union) for each carriage to carry a QR Code has been rejected.

Finally, an introduction of 18-digit numbers across every train in the country will increase the size of the Platform 5 Combined Volume from 500 pages to over 1,800 pages, making it too heavy to carry around as well as making it too expensive for most enthusiasts at £89.99.

TRAIN TRACKS QUIZ 2

The following are clues to hit records whose titles contain the word train or trains. We have provided the artist and year. Can you name the hit record?

- 1 Johnny Duncan and the Blue Grass Boys (1957)
- 2 Sheena Easton (1980)
- 3 Ozzy Osbourne (1980)
- 4 Charles McDevitt Skiffle Group (1957)
- 5 KLF (1991)
- 6 Soul Asylum (1993)
- 7 Holly Johnson (1989)
- 8 Gladys Knight and The Pips (1969)

ALL IN THE NAME – CRADLEY HEATH - ANSWERS

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

- 1 - HEALTHCARE, 2 - CATHEDRAL, 3 - HEARTACHE, 4 - LACERATED,
5 - CHARLADY, 6 - CHEETAH, 7 - TREACLE, 8 - TRACHEA