ALL CHANGE AT … BLAKEDOWN
The changing scene at one of the Stourbridge line stations

This is the first of a series showing Then and Now photos of one of our stations.

1960 (*J H Moss / R S Carpenter Collection*)

2014

NAME THE STATION - No 3 : JUNCTION

The following 10 stations, past and present, have the word Junction somewhere in their name. Can you name them?

1. The busiest junction station in the UK.
2. This fabled Somerset junction was intended to allow you to change for New York by boat from Burnham-on-Sea!
3. This Devon station was the junction for a holiday resort but closed in 1967 before being reopened as Feniton in 1971.
4. Another Devon junction which closed in 1986 when a Parkway station serving the same town opened a couple of miles north.
5. Change here for Blaenau Ffestiniog.
6. A remote Welsh junction station where lines to Aberystwyth and Barmouth diverge.
7. A station in the village of Rogiet, Monmouthshire named after a major engineering feature about a mile to the east that opened in 1886.
8. The station where Virgin trains from Birmingham to London set down only on the southbound journey and pick up only on the northbound journey.
9. The east most station where the Isle of Wight Steam Railway connects with Island Line trains.
10. This station now serves a town across the River Taw but was once at the junction of lines to Bideford and Ilfracombe.

GAS WARMS EASTERN ARENA (or ANAGRAM TEASER ANSWERS) - No 2

The answers to Anagram Teaser No 2 were as follows :-

1 - ACOCKS GREEN, 2 - LANGLEY GREEN, 3 - GREAT MALVERN, 4 - WORCESTER FOREGATE STREET, 5 - CRADLEY HEATH, 6 - HOOBROOK VIADUCT, 7 - ROWLEY REGIS, 8 - OLD HILL TUNNEL, 9 - KIDDERMINSTER, 10 - BLAKEDOWN, 11 - DORRIDGE, 12 - PRINCES RISBOROUGH

PLATFORM 2

BIRMINGHAM - STOURBRIDGE
KIDDERMINSTER - WORCESTER

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

Issue 8   June 2017

A convoy of 8 brand new diesels head through Stourbridge Junction from Newport Docks. The TOPS system has designated them Class 66

CONTENTS

This is the sixth 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.

Kidderminster station opened on 1 May 1852 when the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway extended its line to Stourbridge, while Woofferton station, situated on the Welsh Marches line between Ludlow and Leominster opened on 6 December 1853. The first stage towards linking the two stations came in 1861 when a line from Woofferton to Tenbury opened with an intermediate station at Easton Court. The 14 mile extension to Bewdley was opened by the Tenbury and Bewdley Railway on 13 August 1864 with intermediate stations at Newnham Bridge, Neen Sollars, Cleobury Mortimer and Wyre Forest. The station at Cleobury Mortimer was something of a misnomer given that it was situated over 2 miles from the town of the same name. East of Cleobury Mortimer, the line passed through the Wyre Forest before crossing the River Severn via the 70 feet high Dowles Bridge and bearing right to run parallel to the Severn Valley

(*Bewdley Museum*)

Railway line for the final mile to Bewdley station. The entire line was absorbed by the Great Western Railway in 1869.

The final section of the line opened from Bewdley to Kidderminster on 1 June 1878, leaving the Severn Valley Railway at a junction to the south of Bewdley station and heading east to join the main line just south of Kidderminster railway station. The line had been approved in an Act of Parliament in 1861 but various delays and amendments meant that work did not start until 1874, with Daniel Gooch describing it at the time as a useless curve.

By 1895, the following timetable was in operation.

MONDAY TO SATURDAY						
Kidderminster	0840	1015	1345	....	1739	1904
Bewdley	0851	1033	1400	....	1749	1920
Wyre Forest	0902	1048	1411	....	1800	1931
Cleobury Mortimer	0909	1056	1417	....	1808	1938
Neen Sollars	0917	1104	1424	....	1817	1945
Newnham Bridge	0923	1109	1430	....	1823	1951
Tenbury	0940	1117	1437	1600	1837	1958
Easton Court	0948	1125	....	1606	1845	2006
Woofferton	0955	1130	....	1611	1850	2011

No Sunday service

Thus, each of the 69 carriages in the Class 172 DMUs were also given unique TOPS numbers - for instance, the three carriages making up unit 172 331 have numbers 50331, 56331 and 79331, all displayed on each side of the carriage. The same system applies to single railcars. The two Class 139 railcars have unit numbers 139 001 and 139 002. However, the carriage number for unit 139 002 is 39002, the unit number being applied to the front of the unit and the carriage number to the side. Thus each of the two Parry People Movers has two numbers on the TOPS system!
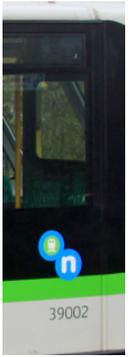
As TOPS is a 1960s mainframe based system updated using dumb terminals, it is now regarded as not being user friendly and difficult to use and maintain by personnel brought up using PCs with graphic interfaces. However, it was robustly built and other companies have discovered the error of their ways when they have upgraded to a modern system. One example was npower who retired a 40 year old billing system developed in the 1960s by MEB, only to find themselves vilified when the new all-singing all-dancing system produced domestic bills of over £100,000. A number of attempts have been made since privatisation to replace TOPS with more modern systems but none of these has yet fully supplanted the TOPS system.

Answer to above question : Steam locomotives used on the main line are registered on the TOPS system as Class 98. 98 743 is actually preserved GWR Castle 5043 Earl of Mount Edgcumbe.

BR CLASS 99 LOCOMOTIVES
Why they could never operate on the Stourbridge line

When the TOPS system was introduced in the early 1970s, all of British Rail's rolling stock was subdivided into classes and renumbered, as discussed in the previous article. One of the new classes set up was Class 99, which eventually consisted of fourteen "locomotives" - 99 001 *Suffolk Ferry*, 99 002 *Norfolk Ferry*, 99 003 *Essex Ferry*, 99 004 *Cambridge Ferry*, 99 005 *Speedlink Vanguard*, 99 006 *Twickenham Ferry*, 99 007 *Vortigern*, 99 008 *Anderida*, 99 009 *Shepperton Ferry*, 99 010 *Invicta*, 99 011 *St Germain*, 99 012 *Chartres*, 99 013 *Saint Eloi* and 99 014 *Transcontainer I*.

99 010 *Invicta* at Newhaven

However, as some of the names probably indicate, Class 99 was a fleet of ferries or train ferries, most of which were owned by Sealink, that carried rail vehicles between Britain and mainland Europe. They were added to the TOPS system to allow the computer system to count them as locomotives while carrying railway vehicles in the same way as a normal locomotive would haul a train. Thus, for obvious reasons, they were never used on the Stourbridge line, even during periods of severe flooding!

TOPS could not handle the existing numbering system, thus forcing a complete renumbering exercise. Each locomotive was given a unique 5 digit number - the first two digits indicating the Class number and the last three digits indicating the unique number within a Class. In some Classes, the first digit of the unique number was used to indicate a sub-class. Therefore, locomotive 47 401 was in Class 47/4 (class 47, sub-class 4) while 47 701 was in Class 47/7. Diesel locomotives were given class numbers 01 to 70 and electric locomotives given class numbers 71 to 96. Classes 97 to 99 were reserved for special locomotives. In fact, one of the photographs on the home page of the SLUG website shows locomotive 98 743 - can you identify it? *(answer at the end of this article).*

Diesel and electric multiple units were similarly numbered but with 6 digit numbers - the first three digits being the class number. Diesel multiple units (DMUs) with mechanical or hydraulic transmission were classified 100–199, and those with electric transmission 200–299. Electric multiple units (EMUs) were given the subsequent classes; 300–399 for overhead AC units, 400-499 for Southern Region DC third rail EMUs, and 500-599 for other DC EMUs. In recent years, class 700 has been allocated to Thameslink EMUs, while 800 to 802 are reserved for the new bi-mode Hitachi units destined for GWR and Virgin East Coast.

Class 172/1 number 172 102

The new numbers started to be applied in the early 1970s, but a few tweaks to the original numbering system needed to be made before the system was fully implemented in 1973.

When a new class of rolling stock is introduced, a new Class Number (and possibly sub-class numbers) is allocated. Thus, when London Overground, Chiltern and London Midland ordered a new type of DMU, class number 172 was assigned together with four sub-classes (172/0 for London Overground, 172/1 for Chiltern, 172/2 for London Midland 2-car units and 172/3 for London Midland 3-car units). Thus the Stourbridge line received two-car units numbered 172 211 to 172 222 and three-car units numbered 172 331 to 172 345.


Class 172/2 number 172 217

In addition, every carriage and wagon was given a five or six digit number that was different from any locomotive or multiple unit number and added to the TOPS system. For instance, TOPS numbers 44 001 to 44 010 were allocated to the "Peak" Class diesels originally numbered D1 to D10, while 44 011 and 44 012 are coaches in High Speed Train sets - the former with GWR and the latter with CrossCountry.

Class 172/3 number 172 342

MONDAY TO SATURDAY					
Woofferton	0707	....	1020	1155	1640
Easton Court	0716	....	1025	1200	1647
Tenbury	0723	0945	1033	1212	1656
Newnham Bridge	0732	0953	1041	1220	1705
Neen Sollars	0739	0959	1047	1226	1712
Cleobury Mortimer	0750	1009	1058	1236	1724
Wyre Forest	0756	1015	1104	1242	1730
Bewdley	0812	1030	1124	1303	1748
Kidderminster	0820	1038	1132	1311	1756

No Sunday service

In 1905, two halts were opened each side of Bewdley Tunnel. On the Kidderminster side was Foley Park Halt, while on the Bewdley side was sited Rifle Range Halt, provided to enable the Territorial Army to access their training ground. The latter was short-lived, closing in 1920. At about the same time, Tenbury station was renamed as Tenbury Wells.

Cleobury Mortimer station became a junction in 1908 when the 12¾ mile Ditton Priors Light Railway was opened. The line was operated by two 0-6-0 saddle tank locomotives that had been built by Manning Wardle. When the line was absorbed by the GWR in 1922, the two locomotives were renumbered 28 and 29 and rebuilt as 0-6-0 pannier tanks, similar to the 1366 Class locomotives that the GWR used on the Weymouth Quay branch. The GWR also used Swindon built 0-6-0PT locomotives of the 2101 and 1600 Classes on the line - all the engines being based at Kidderminster shed.
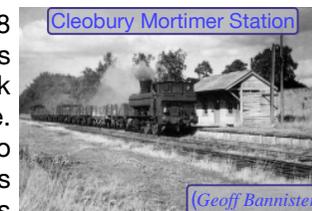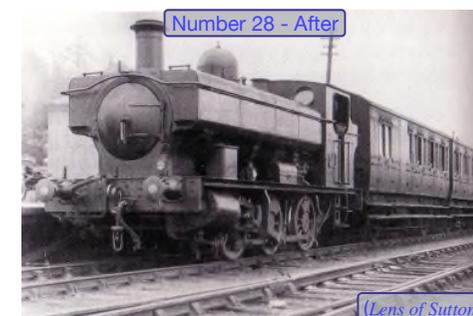

Cleobury Mortimer Station
(Geoff Bannister)

Number 28 - Before
(Bucknall Collection)
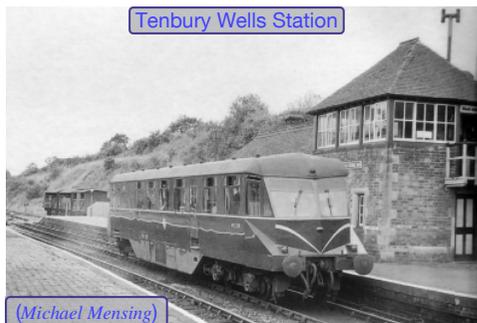

Number 28 - After
(Lens of Sutton)

Over the years, there were plans to extend the Ditton Priors line to join the Severn Valley Railway at both Bridgnorth and Coalport, plus alternative extension plans to Billingsley and Presthope, but none of these plans ever came to fruition. The line had halts at Cleobury Town (a lot nearer the town centre as it was only 1 mile distant!), Stottesdon, Burwarton and Ditton Priors, plus a number of request stops. The 1922 timetable showed three trains in each direction with an extra train on Wednesdays as follows (only the halts shown) :-

MONDAY TO SATURDAY			wo	
Cleobury Mortimer		0920	1345	1730
Cleobury Town Halt	0700	0938	1400	1739
Stottesdon Halt	0715	1007	1439	1755
Burwarton Halt	0723	1028	1504	1807
Ditton Priors Halt	0740	1048	1523	1821

MONDAY TO SATURDAY			wo	
Ditton Priors Halt	0750	1110	1545	1828
Burwarton Halt	0800	1123	1558	1837
Stottesdon Halt	0813	1138	1614	1848
Cleobury Town Halt	0840	1215	1649	1909
Cleobury Mortimer	0850	1228	1713	1919

wo - Wednesdays only
No Sunday service

The passenger service only survived until 1938 but the line gained a new importance in 1941 when the Admiralty opened a munitions depot at Ditton Priors and the light railway was extended to serve it. The 0-6-0 PTs used on the line were all fitted with spark arresters to avoid a large hole appearing in rural Shropshire, and were replaced by diesel locomotives in the 1950s. In 1957, the branch was taken over from British Railways (Western Region) by the Admiralty.

Tenbury Wells Station

(Michael Mensing)

Joining the Severn Valley Railway near Dowles Viaduct

(Michael Mensing)

By 1961, there were four local services from Woofferton to Tenbury Wells at 0735, 0833, 1630 and 1725 returning from Tenbury Wells at 0755, 0850, 1646 and 1740, plus the following services that ran through to Bewdley, Kidderminster or Hartlebury.

MONDAY TO SATURDAY		SO		SX	SO	
Kidderminster	0855	....	1100	....	1610	1823
Foley Park Halt	0859	....	1104	....	1614	1827
Bewdley	0905	1110	1110	1422	1620	1833
Wyre Forest	0915	1120	1120	1432	1630	1844
Cleobury Mortimer	0921	1126	1126	1438	1636	1850
Neen Sollars	0928	1133	1133	1444	1642	1858
Newnham Bridge	0934	1139	1139	1449	1647	1904
Tenbury Wells	0940	1148	1148	1455	1653	1912
Easton Court	....	1153	1153	....	....	1916
Woofferton	....	1158	1158	....	....	1921

TOTAL OPERATIONS PROCESSING SYSTEM
by Roger Davis

SLUG members reading Platform and Platform 2 will have seen the rolling stock used on the Stourbridge line referred to by class number. For instance, you will have read that Class 172 diesel multiple units replaced Class 150 units in 2011 on the main line, that Chiltern replaced their Class 67 diesels with new Class 68 examples, and that the Stourbridge Town branch saw Class 121/122 railcars replaced by Class 153 railcars, which in turn were replaced by the Class 139 Parry People Movers.

However, I was recently asked by a SLUG member why everything is referred today by a class number rather than a generic name (e.g. Castle, West Country, Jubilee or A4), and what the class number actually signifies.

Before nationalisation, each company had their own numbering system and duplicates did exist - for instance, number 5000 was a GWR Castle and an LMS Black Five. On nationalisation, the majority of locomotives were renumbered so that each number was unique. GWR locomotives retained their original numbers from 1 to 9999, probably because the number was attached to the side of the locomotive on a brass plate rather than painted on, the method used by the other three companies. Therefore Southern locomotives were renumbered 30000-39999, LMS locomotives 40000-59999 and LNER locomotives 60000-69999. New "standard" locomotives built by British Railways received numbers 70000-99999. When diesel and electric locomotives were introduced, they were identified by having a D (diesel) or E (electric) prefix. However, many classes of these were still identified by a generic name - Peaks, Warships, Deltics, Westerns and Hymeks being examples. Once all steam engines had been eradicated, the D prefix was removed from the number on diesel locomotives. Thus, for instance, Bristol Bath Road shed had a GWR Castle numbered 7018 (*Drysllwyn Castle*), followed by a Hymek numbered D7018 which later became 7018.

The original 7018

(John Southall)

The diesel 7018

In the late 1960s, British Rail wanted to introduce a computer system to manage their locomotives and rolling stock. In 1968, they attended a presentation by IBM of a system named "Total Operations Processing System", or TOPS, which had been developed by the Southern Pacific Railroad to take all the paperwork associated with a locomotive or rolling stock - its maintenance history, its allocation to division and depot and duty, its status, its location, and much more - and keep it in computer form, constantly updated by terminals at every maintenance facility. British Rail purchased the system in 1970 (along with the Assembler language source code which they could modify) and an IBM System/360 mainframe computer.

British Railways station totems at Kidderminster Railway Museum

An early example of illuminated station signs provided by Centro

Nowadays, station names are set in lower case lettering, as opposed to the bold upper case employed in previous decades.   London Midland has provided elegant black, white and green name boards at its Worcestershire stations but sadly, visually inferior Network West Midlands branded boards grace Stourbridge and beyond.

Small signs at stations are generally made of metal or plastic. They are there to guide directions to platforms, lifts and subways. They show the way to ticket offices and the way out.   The old train companies used wooden finger-pointing signs for such purposes. A little graphic element is retained at the modern station; black arrows, male and female silhouettes and rectangles, depicting tickets.

Traditional signs at Birmingham Moor Street. Note the lettering in bold capitals

Closure notices for Bournemouth West station and the Somerset and Dorset line from 1965 and 1966. Hopefully such closures are a thing of the past

Where would we be without notices, posters and signs?   The older generation are well aware that, during World War II, station names were removed, in order to confuse and delay the enemy. Despite this, many stations suffered grave damage from aerial bombardment.   Some that withstood Hitler were demolished by Beeching, instead.   The saddest notices of all were those posters serving notice of closure.   Let's hope there won't be many more of those to collect.

MONDAY TO SATURDAY	sx	so	sx	so	so		
Woofferton	....	....	....	1210	1210	....	....	1938
Easton Court	....	....	....	1215	1215	....	....	1943
Tenbury Wells	0755	0950	0950	1220	1220	1505	1658	1949
Newnham Bridge	0803	0958	0958	1228	1228	1512	1706	1956
Neen Sollars	0808	1003	1003	1233	1233	1518	1712	2002
Cleobury Mortimer	0820	1010	1010	1240	1240	1524	1719	2008
Wyre Forest	0825	1015	1015	1245	1245	1529	1724	2013
Bewdley	0835	1024	1022	1253	1302	1544	1736	2021
Burlish Halt	....	....	....	....	....	1550	1742	....
Stourport-on-Severn	....	....	....	....	....	1553	1744	....
Hartlebury	....	....	....	....	....	1559	1751	....
Foley Park Halt	0840	1029	....	1258	1307	....	....	....
Kidderminster	0844	1036	....	1302	1311	....	....	....

sx - Not Saturdays, so - Saturdays only   No Sunday service

Woofferton Station
(*Robert Darlaston*)

Woofferton Station site today
(*Peter Whatley*)

This was the last year of passenger services over the line. The Woofferton to Tenbury Wells section closed to passengers on 31 July 1961, followed by Tenbury Wells to Bewdley on 1 August 1962. The line between Woofferton and Cleobury Mortimer closed completely on 1 August 1962, leaving only the section from Ditton Priors to Bewdley operating for services to and from the Admiralty Munitions Depot. This section closed on 16 April 1965, although the munitions depot remained open until 1968. The last section to close to passenger services was Bewdley to Kidderminster on 3 January 1970 when Bewdley and Foley Park Halt stations both closed.

However, the line from Kidderminster remained in use for goods traffic to the sugar beet refinery at Foley Park until 1982, when the sidings were taken out of use enabling the Severn Valley Railway to reopen the line from Bewdley to a new station at Kidderminster Town on 30 July 1984 - the new station being built on the site of the old Kidderminster Goods Depot.

Today, the line from Kidderminster to just before Dowles Viaduct is intact as part of the successful Severn Valley Railway. The first section of the Tenbury branch from Bewdley station towards Dowles Viaduct is still in use by the Severn Valley Railway, primarily for stock storage, but has featured passenger trips on gala days.

Kidderminster Town station

Dowles Viaduct

Anybody on the river side of a Severn Valley Railway service will see the piers of the Dowles Viaduct in the river, although the three lattice girder deck spans have long since been removed. On the west bank of the River Severn, a car park in Dry Mill Lane (1 mile north of Bewdley) gives access to a 2 mile section of the line that has been reopened as a footpath and bridleway through the Wyre Forest. A number of station buildings, Easton Court, Newnham Bridge, Neen Sollars and Wyre Forest, have been converted into private homes, although Tenbury Wells station has been replaced by industrial buildings.

In the next issue : Part 7 - Hartlebury to Shrewsbury.

DO YOU KNOW ....?
How long it took to build Stambermill Viaduct.

When the line opened in 1852, Stambermill Viaduct was a Brunel-designed wooden viaduct, which caused a great deal of concern due to the number of accidents that occurred there. On one occasion, on 15 October 1876, an accident caused a number of vans to be propelled into the valley below. In 1881, work started to replace the viaduct with the current one which was built alongside.

(Dudley Libraries)

The first excavation was commenced on 20 September 1881, the first of over 4 million blue bricks was laid on 13 October 1881 and the last coping stone was bedded on 11 January 1882. Thus, it took 23 days to dig the foundations and a further 90 days to build the 10-arch viaduct - a total of 113 days from start to finish. That's an average of over 35,000 bricks laid per day, or nearly 25 bricks per minute. The total cost was £13,835.

It makes you wonder what would have been achieved in 113 days today. The portaloos would probably have been set up on site while a 5 mile exclusion zone would have been fenced off in the name of Health and Safety before work starts tomorrow!

TAKING NOTICE
by Rob Hebron

Notices, posters and signs at railway stations are so commonplace that we don't realise how effective they are. "Part of the furniture" is a very apt description. The fact is that each category is an essential contribution to directional information or Health and Safety. Modern electronic information screens cannot convey the entire spectrum of journey opportunity. They are visual but not inspiring to the imagination. The dot matrix lettering is flexible but totally standard.

Posters and enamel advertisements adorn the station building at Wootton (IOW)

From the very early days of railways, the management needed to post notices of forthcoming excursions, diversions and cancellations. Such temporary affairs would take the form of a poster. Very often, the station master would produce a suitable declaration on paper. It might be a printed poster with a random mix of typefaces or even a swift handwritten, attention-grabbing communication.

A collection of railway posters pictured at Hampton Loade on the Severn Valley Railway

The Great Western Railway and other large companies recruited professional artists to produce iconic posters. Their intention was to lure the population to seaside resorts and other places of interest. In some cases, a little artistic licence and marketing were employed, whereby Cornwall was titled "The Cornish Riviera", giving it a little more exotic flavour. Original railway posters are very collectable and valuable, perhaps because they seem to refer back to halcyon days. Pasted onto wooden poster boards, many posters were not recoverable and few genuine examples survive. Nevertheless, there is a considerable demand for reprints, suitably framed.

An abundance of signs at Bridgnorth station

Equally collectable are cast iron notices, favoured by the GWR for more permanent messages. Very often these plaques were used to draw attention to by-laws, railway practices and etiquette. Many have found their way to heritage railways and the information thereon is still relevant.

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