

At the end of the viaduct, we pass HENWICK (closed 5/4/1968), another Worcester station that has been mentioned for potential reopening, and crossovers at this location turn the line back into true double track rather than two parallel single tracks. We now head into open countryside with the Malvern Hills in front of us and pass four stations that all closed on 5 April 1968. They are BROUGHTON HALT, RUSHWICK HALT, BRANSFORD ROAD and NEWLAND HALT. There is nothing to suggest that any of the halts ever existed, although the approach to Bransford Road is visible on the right. Between Rushwick Halt and Bransford Road, a line diverged to the right. This line was opened to Bromyard in 1877 and extended to Leominster in 1897. The section between Bromyard and Leominster only survived until 15 September 1952, while passenger services to Bromyard survived until 5 September 1964. A line of trees follow the track bed of the old line but it is difficult to identify the junction which is on the right hand side.



As the Malvern Hills get close, the tower of St Matthias C of E Church can be seen on the left before we enter MALVERN LINK (opened 5/1860). The station was extensively refurbished in 2013/14 with a brand new elegant booking office to our left and a smart waiting room on the right hand platform.

The final leg of our journey is in a cutting until we reach GREAT MALVERN (opened 5/1860).

The station is Grade II listed and the present buildings by architect E. W. Elmslie were completed in 1862. The buildings are in local Malvern Rag stone and follow a French Gothic theme. Particular features of the station are the awning pillar capitals on both platforms. They are decorated with high relief mouldings depicting different arrangements of flowers and foliage. Adjacent to the station was the Imperial Hotel, claimed to be the first building in the world to be lit by incandescent gas. Guests had their own subway link, nicknamed "the worm", from the left hand platform. On the right hand platform is Lady Foley's tearoom, named after the self styled lady of the manor.



That concludes our journey from Birmingham Moor Street to Great Malvern. Anybody wishing to return to Birmingham Moor Street should use the subway to get to the opposite platform and turn this guide upside down!

PLATFORM 3



Issue 2

May 2016



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A VIEW FROM THE WINDOW



Birmingham Moor Street

Our journey starts on platform 2 at BIRMINGHAM MOOR STREET, a station beautifully restored in 2005/2006 in 1909 GWR style to replace the functional and ugly 1987 tin sheds on the through platforms and reopen the derelict closed terminus.

As soon as we clear the platform we enter the 635 yard long Snow Hill Tunnel and climb at 1 in 45. While still in the tunnel, a side tunnel joined from our left hand side. This tunnel originated in the basement of the Bank of England building at the junction of Temple Row and St Philip's Place, and was used by bullion trains that reversed from platform 1 at Snow Hill to the bank.

Immediately after leaving the gloom of the tunnel, we enter the gloom of BIRMINGHAM SNOW HILL, opened on 5 October 1987 to replace the much grander GWR station that closed on 6 March 1972. It was unfortunate that, when the new station was built, it was decided to build a three storey car park on top of it and this has served to make the station dark and uninviting. The good news is that there are plans to demolish the car park. The bad news is that the plans involve replacing it with a 15 storey office block. Platform 4 at Snow Hill is now unused since the old Snow Hill Metro terminus closed on 25 October 2015 and there are plans to reinstate heavy rail services on platform 4, this time as a through route.



Birmingham Snow Hill

As we leave Snow Hill station, the Midland Metro line joins us from the right at the new Snow Hill Metro stop and this will remain to our right to The Hawthorns. The line was diverted from Snow Hill Station on 25 October 2015 and now travels on-road along Bull Street and Corporation Street to a new terminus in Stephenson Street outside New Street station and the Grand Central shopping centre, the terminus being named after the latter. There are plans to extend this line to Centenary Square alongside the International Conference Centre by 2019, while a separate line will leave the current formation in Bull Street to serve the HS2 Curzon Street station and Eastside by 2026.



A GWR 16xx Pannier Tank crosses the main line from the Vinegar Branch

(Michael Mensing)

The train has now reversed direction and once again we are heading away from London in the "down" direction. We leave Shrub Hill and take the line to the left, on an embankment with panoramic views of the city centre to our left. Up to 1964, a single line crossed this line on the level from the shed sidings to our right and then ran steeply downhill to our left crossing three Worcester roads on the level - Shrub Hill Road, Pheasant Street and Padmore Street. This line served Worcester Vinegar Works and was known either as the Vinegar Branch or the Lowesmoor Tramway. Shortly afterwards, we cross a bridge that used to carry the line across another goods branch to Worcester Gas Works in Tolladine Road.

The line from Rainbow Hill Tunnel comes in from the right and runs parallel to us. Until 1973, there was a junction at this location but now we have to travel to Henwick before there is a junction between the lines. We cross the Worcester Birmingham Canal, which will join the River Severn about 1¼ miles south of here at Diglis Lock, and enter platform 1 of WORCESTER FOREGATE STREET (opened 5/1860). Platform 2, to our right, is not accessible by trains from Shrub Hill and can only be used by trains coming directly from Worcester Tunnel to the station.

The most impressive part of the station is the bridge that carries the railway over Foregate Street. It was originally a very plain structure but, in 1909, the council voted to spend £162 towards the more elaborate one that survives today and which has undergone renovation in the past couple of years. The only problem is that it can't be seen from the train so you'll have to alight and walk down the stairs to street level to admire the bridge.



Worcester Foregate Street

The departure from Foregate Street takes the line over the city's main shopping street to our left and onto a viaduct. A branch line, named the Butts, ran steeply down from the viaduct on our right hand side and then turned left under our track along the river side towards the cathedral. It remained in use until 1957. We pass the modern Hive building on our left. This is Worcester's main library and opened in July 2012. The viaduct leads onto the River Severn girder bridge which was built in 1905 to replace the earlier elegant bridge of two arches. To our left, we can see the road bridge over the Severn adjacent to the Worcester County Cricket Ground at New Road. Behind the bridge is the magnificent cathedral which dates from 1084, although it is thought that the original cathedral building dated from 680 AD. To our right alongside the river is the race course which has seen racing since 1718. Once over the bridge, we are on another shorter viaduct. The two viaducts have a total of 68 arches.

Heading south west, we cross open countryside before reaching FERNHILL HEATH which opened on 1 May 1852 and closed on 5 April 1968. In early days, the station was named Fearnhill Heath. No trace of the station can be seen now although its reopening is an aspiration to serve north Worcester as it is just north of the A38 which we pass under on the skew.



Fernhill Heath station in 1960
(Stations UK)

After crossing the dual carriageway A449 north Worcester link road, we enter the city. On this stretch of track were two short lived halts - ASTWOOD HALT which was open from 1936 to 1939 and BLACKPOLE HALT which was an unadvertised halt open from 1917 to 1920 and 1940 to 1946. We now enter the 212 yard long Rainbow Hill Tunnel. As we leave the tunnel, the direct line to Worcester Foregate Street diverges to the right, and the majority of services from the Stourbridge line take that route. We continue straight ahead. If you look at the signal box to our right at the junction, you may notice that the brickwork at the southern end is newer than at the northern end, the result of a somewhat too heavy shunt. The line curves to the left past the diesel maintenance depot to our right. This is on the site of the Worcester steam shed (85A) which opened with the line in 1852 and which consisted of two sheds with sidings between them. To our left is the site of the GWR's Locomotive Carriage and Wagon Repair Works. The line on the third side of the triangle, from Worcester Foregate Street, joins us from the right and we enter WORCESTER SHRUB HILL (opened 5/10/1850).



Worcester Shrub Hill



Ladies Waiting Room at Worcester Shrub Hill

On Platform 2a is the old ladies' waiting room which extends onto the platform. It has a cast-iron frame cast at the Vulcan Iron Works at Worcester. This was a subsidiary of the MacKenzie and Holland signal manufacturing company about 200 yards from the station. The exterior is decorated with classical pilasters and covered with "majolica" ceramic tiles made by Maw and Company of Broseley, which had the same owner as the signal manufacturer. The waiting room is Grade II listed and was put onto the "Buildings At Risk" register in 2003. Fortunately, it has now been completely restored and was reopened in 2015.



St Chad's Cathedral

We cross Great Charles Street Queensway, part of Birmingham's inner ring road. To our right, St Chad's Roman Catholic Cathedral, built in 1841 and raised to cathedral status in 1852, is prominent. To our left, the 500 feet high BT Tower built in the mid-1960s rises above the skyline that includes St Paul's Church, where Matthew Boulton and James Watt worshipped regularly at the end of the 18th century. The church gives its name to the Metro stop to our right just before we pass under Livery Street bridge which was completely rebuilt in 1995 at a cost of £2 million.

We now pass through two short tunnels - Hockley No 1 at 136 yards and Hockley No 2 at 160 yards before emerging at JEWELLERY QUARTER station, the first of three new stations opened on 24 September 1995 as part of the reopening of the line from Snow Hill to Smethwick Junction and called the Jewellery Line. A Midland Metro stop accompanies the main line station.



The approach to Jewellery Quarter station through Hockley No 2 Tunnel



Joseph Chamberlain

As we leave Jewellery Quarter, we pass Key Hill Cemetery on our right hand side. Amongst the famous people who have this location as their final resting place are Alfred Bird of custard fame, and Joseph Chamberlain (Mayor of Birmingham and father of Neville). When the Metro line was built in 1999, there was insufficient space to build the line and the two Metro platforms alongside the heavy rail platforms, so part of the cemetery was requisitioned, meaning that some bodies had to be dug up and reburied in another part of the cemetery. On the left hand side of the line for the next half mile or so, industrial units now occupy the site of Hockley Goods Depot, one of the largest in the country.

We cross Icknield Street Middleway, a dual carriageway that is part of Birmingham's middle ring road. Immediately after this, we pass the site of HOCKLEY station (closed 6/3/1972) although no trace of the station still exists. This station was unusual as, although 4 tracks passed through it, it only had 3 platforms. The reason was simple - there wasn't enough room for the fourth platform.



Hockley station in 1964

(Peter Shoemith)



Soho & Winson Green station
(25/11/1962)

(Michael Mensing)

The next Metro stop on our right is Soho Benson Road which occupies the site of SOHO & WINSON GREEN station (latterly WINSON GREEN and closed 6/3/1972). On the left hand side, a grassy mound indicates where one of the platforms stood. Just after the station, a small industrial estate on the left occupies the site of the goods depot at Soho & Winson Green and the line then passes under the railway line from Soho

to Perry Barr which carries the Birmingham New Street to Walsall semi-fast services, plus Birmingham New Street to Wolverhampton services when the line through Sandwell & Dudley is blocked.

To our right-hand side are the streets of Handsworth with the skyline dominated by the Gurdwara Sahib Sikh Temple next to St Michael's Church spire at the junction of Soho Road and Villa Road. The Metro line to our right passes Winson Green Outer Circle tram stop and then climbs steeply at 1 in 30 on a viaduct to enable it to cross Queen's Head sidings, returning to ground level via a 1 in 60 descent. The viaduct cost £2.7 million to build, making it the most expensive single structure on the Midland Metro line. At this point, a siding to the left serves Cooper's Metals.



Handsworth & Smethwick station
(21/10/1990)

The Metro stop at Handsworth Booth Street is on the site of HANDSWORTH & SMETHWICK station (latterly HANDSWORTH and closed 6/3/1972) and parts of the platform to the left still exist. In fact, that platform reopened for one day only on Sunday 21 October 1990. A charity walk, organised by the Sunday Mercury, took place along the line from Snow Hill to Handsworth where a DMU was waiting to take

walkers back to New Street via Smethwick Junction.

After this station, on both sides of the line were the Birmingham Railway Carriage and Wagon Works. Amongst locomotives built at this site were BR Class 26, 27, 33 and 81 locomotives, plus the prototype D0260 Lion. They also built Class 104, 110 and 118 DMUs as well as stock for the London Underground. The works closed in 1963.

We immediately pass under Middlemore Road bridge and enter THE HAWTHORNS (opened 24/9/2015) and its associated Metro stop. The station serves the football ground of the same name which is renowned as the highest Premier/Football League ground above sea level.



The Hawthorns

The line now runs alongside the A449 and we pass the "Mare and Colt" pub at Summerfield to our right before reaching the Black Bridge where the A451 joins the A449 at traffic lights. Shortly afterwards, the track bed of the line from Stourport-on-Severn joins us from the right, although it is difficult to make out due to the trees that



Hartlebury

have grown since it closed on 3 January 1970. Half a mile after the old junction, we reach HARTLEBURY (opened 1/5/1852). The station building to the right is now the "Tap House" which has separate bar and restaurant areas. Alongside in the station forecourt is the Worcestershire Brewing Company's brewery where the Attwood's Special Bitter, Attwood's Pale Ale, Worcestershire Gold and Nectar Bitter sold in the Tap House is

brewed. The station is about 600 yards from the village that it serves which concerns some people in the village who would prefer it relocated further away at the entrance of Hartlebury Trading Estate about 1,500 yards further south, presumably to keep the riff-raff away from the village. There has been talk of creating a park and ride station at Hartlebury to serve the town of Stourport-on-Severn just 2½ miles away and with a population of just over 20,000 people.

The line now turns south east and heads across open countryside for 1½ miles to reach the site of CUTNALL GREEN which opened in June 1928 and closed on 5 April 1968. The suffix HALT was added in the early 1950s. Given that it was a very basic structure and over ¾ mile along a narrow country lane from the village of the same name, it is not surprising that it was on Doctor Beeching's list of stations to be closed.

The Stourbridge Line was part of the GWR and thus transferred to the Western Region of British Railways when the railways were nationalised. In 1963, boundary changes transferred the Stourbridge line north of Cutnall Green to the London Midland Region, with the line south of here remaining in the Western Region.

After another 1¼ miles of open countryside, we pass Hampton Lovett parish church alongside the line on the right. Another ½ mile further on, we pass an industrial estate to our right, before the line from Stoke Works on the Birmingham to Bristol main line joins us from the left. Between 1852 and 1890, a short north-to-east spur would have enabled our train to gain access to this line. We now enter DROITWICH SPA (opened 1/5/1852), although it was 1899 before it gained the SPA suffix. The GWR had plans to build



Droitwich Spa

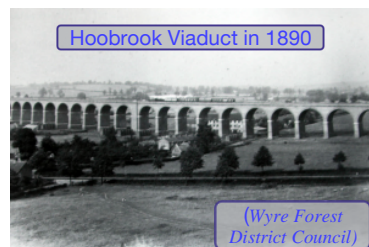
up rail traffic to the Spa by adding "culture" to the station in the form of sculptures. Most of this has long since disappeared but, if you look closely at the back of the platform to our right, you will see that an urn still survives.

The village of Blakedown is on the left hand side as we leave the station. The line bends to the right and we cross Blakedown Viaduct which was originally a Brunel-designed wooden viaduct, but the current 173 yards long brick-built viaduct was built alongside it in 1882. We cross the A456 Birmingham to Kidderminster road and this now runs parallel to us on the right-hand side. In the West Midlands ITA "Movement for Growth" document published for consultation in 2015, there is an aspiration for a new station to be built in this area named "Kidderminster Parkway".



The line bears to the left as we pass Kidderminster Cricket Ground on our left, pass under the A449 (Chester Road) and enter KIDDERMINSTER (opened 1/5/1852). Probably the most famous aspect of this station was the fine half-timbered station building constructed in the 1860s. Unfortunately, dry rot was diagnosed in the 1960s when preservation was not considered an option, so it was demolished and replaced by the current inadequate building. Fortunately, funding has been secured to redevelop the station so we can hope for something better in the not too distant future.

To the right of the station is the fine terminus of the Severn Valley Railway, built in 1984 as a replica GWR terminus. Beyond the station, an old goods shed is used as the Kidderminster Railway Museum building and is well worth a visit. Departing from Kidderminster, the track to our right is all part of the Severn Valley Railway and this curves away to the right to head towards Bewdley. On the far side of the Bewdley line is the huge carriage shed built in 2003. The line to Bewdley was closed by British Rail on 3 January 1970.



We continue our journey and soon reach Hoobrook Viaduct which, like Blakedown Viaduct, was originally a Brunel-designed wooden viaduct. This consisted of 25 brick-built piers about 8-10 feet high which supported the wooden structure. As at Blakedown, this was replaced by the current magnificent brick built viaduct of 20 arches which was constructed alongside in 1884/85. If you look to the right at the start of the viaduct, you can see the

abutment of the original wooden viaduct alongside. One of the roads crossed is the A449 and this reminds me of a colleague in the 1970s who came into work and announced that he had had a car accident the previous evening. When pressed for further information, he told us that no one else had been involved but that he had hit Hoobrook Viaduct. When asked why, he replied that he hadn't seen it!

After leaving The Hawthorns, we pass under Halfords Lane and the line bends to the left while the Midland Metro line carries straight on towards West Bromwich, Wednesbury, Bilston and Wolverhampton. Perhaps one day it will be an alternative, but far slower, route to Stourbridge Junction via Wednesbury, Dudley and Brierley Hill. At the junction of the two lines stood HAWTHORNS HALT which was in use from 25 December 1931 to 27 April 1968 and used exclusively by visitors to West Bromwich Albion Football Club. The station had four platforms, two on each route.

We have been travelling uphill for the majority of our journey from Snow Hill, but there is now a short downhill section. We cross one leg of the Birmingham Canal, built by James Brindley (1716-1772), which passes into a tunnel to our left and enter SMETHWICK GALTON BRIDGE (opened 24/9/1995). The second leg of the Birmingham Canal, built by Thomas Telford (1757-1834), also passes under us and is spanned to our left by Telford's magnificent Galton Bridge, built in 1829 when it was the highest single span in the world at 151 feet. It was named after Samuel Tertius Galton (1785-1844), a member of a famous Smethwick family.



On departure, the line from Birmingham New Street via Galton Junction joins the line from the left at Smethwick Junction. This section of line was reinstated in April 1966 to enable passenger trains from Stourbridge Junction to operate to New Street rather than Snow Hill from 6 March 1967 and by all passenger trains from 1972 until the Jewellery Line reopened in 1995. What is remarkable is that, although the line was used very infrequently for nearly 50 years, the junction had only been removed 21 months previously on 28 June 1964.



Immediately after the junction, we pass through the remains of SMETHWICK JUNCTION station (renamed SMETHWICK WEST in 1956). In GWR days this was the major intermediate station between Snow Hill and Stourbridge Junction with many Cardiff express trains stopping there. However, given that the end of the platforms at Smethwick Galton Bridge and Smethwick West are only 180 yards apart, Smethwick West was

due to close on 24 September 1995. An administrative error meant that it received a "parliamentary" service for a year, with one train per week stopping in each direction. The two trains departed Birmingham New Street at 1130 and Stourbridge Junction at 1154 on Saturdays which enabled someone to turn up, open the station for about half an hour and then close it up again. The final service was on Saturday 28 September 1996 and was remarkable because both trains were filled by enthusiasts commemorating the closure. One part of the old station which is still in use is the car park, which now forms part of the Centro car park for Smethwick Galton Bridge.



Langley Green

The line now runs in a cutting before passing the site of ROOD END station (closed 1/5/1885) although no trace of the station now exists and then passes the Allbright & Wilson chemical works (now owned by Rhodia) on the right. The branch line to Oldbury branches off to the right as we enter LANGLEY GREEN (opened 1/5/1885). This station has had a number of names, being called Langley Green & Rood End from 1904

to 1936 and Oldbury & Langley Green from 1936 to 1968. The original booking office was high above the right hand platform in Western Road but this has been demolished and replaced by the modern attractive booking office with clock tower.

To our right as we leave the station is the Langley Green Maltings building which closed in 2006 and was severely damaged by arsonists in September 2009. An attempt to demolish at least part of this Grade II listed building was turned down in 2011 but its future is still to be decided. We now cross the level crossing on Station Road. This is known as one of the most abused level crossings in the UK. Before the recent resignalling, the barriers were controlled from Stourbridge Junction signal box via a CCTV monitor which showed if the crossing was clear. However, it automatically went blank just before the train reached the crossing so that the signaller did not have to watch if somebody decided to make a dash for it. Just past the crossing was the original Oldbury & Langley Green station (closed 1/5/1885) although no trace of this station exists.



Langley Green Maltings

The line is still climbing as we cross the Birmingham New Road (A4123) and the M5 to reach the summit of the line before running downhill all the way to Lye. Goods loops are provided on both sides at this point and the Up Goods Loop is still occasionally used to detach a banking engine which had been attached at Stourbridge Junction to assist a heavy freight train.



Rowley Regis

The Minister for Planning and Land (Mr. Kenneth Robinson): At 1.48 a.m. today an explosion occurred at West Hagley, near Stourbridge, fracturing two of four water pipes carrying the main supplies to Birmingham and adjacent areas. The explosion took place at a point where the pipelines cross the Kidderminster to Stourbridge railway line. No one was injured. First estimates of the effect of the damage suggest that the capacity of the pipeline is likely to have been reduced by about one-third. Though this is serious and calls for economy in the use of water, there is no immediate threat to supplies to the areas served by the city's water undertaking; water in storage reservoirs is equivalent to a week's total demand. One of the Department's engineering inspectors is on the spot and will report as soon as possible. It is too soon to say with certainty how long repair work will take, but I would expect a full flow to be restored in under a week.

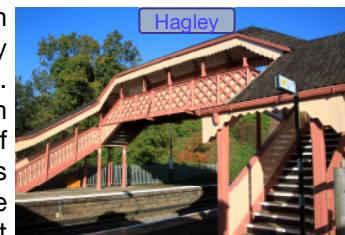


Bomb damage at West Hagley (1968)

(Unknown)

An eye witness report at the time stated that "a friend's son was a witness in the trial of the students who had blown up the aqueduct. The son was coming home from school when two men asked him where the pipeline was. My friend told me "sometime later, the family were in bed and we were awoken by an enormous explosion at one thirty in the morning. I sat up in bed and I knew exactly what it was. We arrived at the pipeline a little after two am to see a gaping hole in one of the pipes crossing the railway line and there was water coming out of it under great pressure. The railway line was in a deep cutting and it was full to the top with water in both directions". Two young Anglesey County Council employees were convicted of the bombing in 1969.

We now enter HAGLEY station (opened 1862) which has station buildings that were immortalised by Hornby when used as the basis for OO scale models. We pass under the Grade II listed footbridge which was built in 1884 and became the most famous of these models. The model has been reissued and is now available to buy as model number R9751. The station name is in some ways a bit misleading as it resides in West Hagley, with the main village of Hagley about a mile to the east. On our right hand side is Hagley Roman Catholic High School.

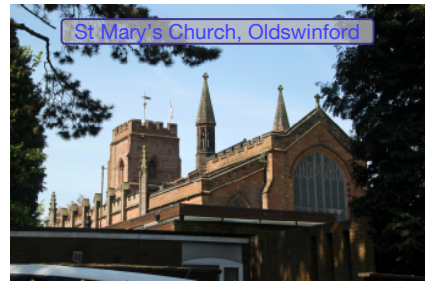


Hagley

Continuing in a south westerly direction, we pass the village of Churchill to our right before reaching BLAKEDOWN (opened 1853). The station's original name was Churchill, but it was named Churchill & Blakedown until 1968 when it was given its present name. The station originally had very short platforms but these were extended in 1991 to allow Sprinter DMUs of more than two carriages to call at the station.

To our left is the start of the 1,000 space car park which was built on the extensive railway sidings that existed in steam days. To our right, more sidings have been taken over by Chiltern Railways and are used to stable and service their trains which

operate on the London Marylebone to Kidderminster route. This depot is Chiltern Railways' Centre of Excellence for their Silver Set trains. In the distance behind the Chiltern depot, the tower of St Mary's Church in Oldswinford can be seen above the trees. The tower dates from the 14th Century and, from the 16th Century until 1982, was graced by a spire. The line from Stourbridge Town joins us from the right, crossing the ornate cast iron bridge over



Brook Road that was built in 1901, just before both lines enter STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION (opened 1/10/1901). The station replaced an earlier smaller station which was situated close to Stourbridge North Junction at Junction Road. It originally consisted of 4 platform faces on 2 island platforms but platform 4 was taken out of use when the car park was built.



As we pull out of Stourbridge Junction, we pass, on our right hand side, the small maintenance shed for the two Parry People Mover vehicles (Class 139) that operate the Stourbridge Town branch service.



After passing under the A491 road from Stourbridge to the M5, we enter a steep cutting. The remains of the abutments that supported water pipes that crossed the line can be seen above us. This was part of the water supply pipeline from the Elan Valley to Bartley Green reservoir in Birmingham and was the site of a bomb attack by Welsh extremists on 2 December 1968. As a consequence, the pipeline has since been moved underground.

The following is an extract from Hansard.



Just after the summit, we reach ROWLEY REGIS (opened 1/4/1867), which was named Rowley Regis & Blackheath from 1889 to 1968. The free car park to our right has recently been doubled in size and now accommodates nearly 800 cars. Centro have plans to add an extra bay platform behind the one to our right. This would enable local services from Rowley Regis to Birmingham and beyond to supplement the existing services. SLUG is keeping a watching brief on these proposals to ensure that the frequency of services from Stourbridge Junction and Cradley Heath is not compromised. If the turnback platform is built, the Up Goods loop may be lost.

Leaving Rowley Regis, we are now in a deep cutting before plunging into Old Hill Tunnel which is 896 yards long and unventilated. We are now running downhill on the steepest part of the line at a gradient of 1 in 51, so it meant that the train crew on banking locomotives travelling in the opposite direction faced difficult conditions in the tunnel in steam days. On leaving the tunnel, we cross the Dudley Canal which plunges into a tunnel under Gorsty Hill to our left. As we enter OLD HILL (opened 1/1/1866) the timber yard to the left covers the track bed of the branch line to Halesowen, which opened in 1878 and extended to Longbridge in 1883. The line closed to regular passengers on 5 December 1927, although workers' specials to Longbridge continued to September 1958 and freight traffic until 1 October 1969.



As soon as we leave Old Hill, the abutments of a bridge can be seen to our right. This carried the Bumble Hole line from Old Hill to Dudley, opened on 1 March 1878 and closed on 15 July 1964, which branched to the right here. On the far side of the abutments, the track bed formation has been consigned to history but, in the middle distance, a line of trees indicates the route. We cross Halesowen Road. To our left, at the top of the hill, is Haden Hill Park which surrounds Haden Hill House. To our right are the two remaining tower blocks on Riddins Mound Estate, the third having succumbed to a controlled explosion in August 1996. The next section of the journey is on an embankment with extensive views on both sides. To the right, the spire of St Thomas and St Luke's Church in Dudley, known to locals as Top Church, can be seen as well as the remaining tower block in Eve Hill.

To the left, we can see the remaining tower block on the Tanhouse Estate. What cannot be seen today is the extensive network of railway lines that existed up to 1965. Alongside Corngreaves Road, which we cross halfway down the embankment, a line passed under the main line and ran to a goods depot at Spinners End in Upper High Street, Cradley Heath. Below us to our left, a series of trading and industrial estates have replaced an extensive network of railway sidings known as the Corngreaves Branch, which joined our line from the left just before Cradley Road. It is fitting that there is still a railway presence among the buildings to our left in the form of the headquarters of Parry People Movers Ltd, who designed and built the Class 139 railcars that operate the Stourbridge Town branch so successfully. After crossing Cradley Road with the offices of Neal & Co to our right, the remains of a railway platform can just be made out.



(H C Casserley)

Cradley Heath and Cradley, Views from Birmingham bound platform in the 1960's



(R G Nelson / T Walsh collection)



Cradley Heath Interchange
Opened on 26/7/2015

This was the Birmingham bound platform of CRADLEY HEATH (opened 1/4/1863) which was situated east of the level crossing until January 1984. The new platform, bus interchange and car park west of the level crossing are on the site of Cradley Heath goods yard which had closed on 28 July 1969. Cradley Heath station has had a variety of names being opened as Cradley, then Cradley Heath & Cradley, then Cradley and finally Cradley Heath.

The station is the site of an act of bravery on 7 October 1954, when Anthony James Arthur ("Tony") Rivers, who had just been promoted to the post of Lampman with British Railways at the age of 17, saved the life of an elderly lady (Mrs Rowlands). His heroism meant that he spent the best part of four months in hospital with not only the injuries in the citation below but also a fractured right forearm and a right thigh pierced by a piece of steel from the rails. It also earned him the George Medal, which the London Gazette reported on 17 May 1955 with the following citation.

'Rivers was carrying out his duties at Cradley Heath and Cradley Passenger Station when he heard unusual sounds to the rear of a passenger train. Upon investigation he found a woman on the line close to the level crossing struggling to release her right foot which had become wedged between the stock rail and check rail on the main line. Rivers endeavoured to release her foot, but without success, and seeing a train nearing the Station on the mainline, he lifted the woman as far as he could away from the track and took a penknife from his pocket with the intention of cutting her shoe loose but before he was able to do this the train was upon them. He had the presence of mind to realise that to save the woman's life it would be necessary to sacrifice her foot, and he held her by the shoulders as far away from the line as possible as the train rushed by. The woman's right leg was severed below the knee and Rivers sustained a fractured pelvis and injury to his right knee and multiple bruises and abrasions. Rivers without hesitation took what action he could to save the woman's life and knowingly accepted serious risk of personal injury. There is little doubt that if the woman had remained in her original position she would have been killed'.

Shortly after leaving Cradley Heath station, in a "blink or you'll miss it" moment, the line crosses the River Stour on a bridge 35 feet above the river. It is estimated that



Lye

due to the foundations being over 20 feet deep and the bridge being about 13 feet thick at the base, it took over 3 million bricks to build it. After a right hand bend, another branch line from Hayes Lane joined us from the left although, once again, there is nothing today to suggest that it ever existed. We now reach LYE (opened 1/4/1863) which has now become no more than a glorified halt since London Midland's decision to make it unstaffed. Lye's only claim to fame is that it

shares the honour of having the shortest station name with nine other stations - Ash, Ayr, Ely, Lee, Ore, Par, Rye, Wem and Wye.

Having crossed the A458 Halesowen to Stourbridge road, we now slow to 15 mph for Stourbridge North Junction where the freight-only line from Round Oak joins us from the right. This was the original line from Wolverhampton Low Level via Dudley and Brierley Hill. It may be of interest that we have been travelling in the "down" direction since we left Birmingham, "down" meaning away from London via Oxford and Leamington Spa. As soon as we join the line from Wolverhampton, we are now travelling in the "up" direction towards London via Worcester and Oxford.



Stourbridge North Junction