

PLATFORM 3



Issue 5

May 2019

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



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PLATFORM 3 is published by:
The Stourbridge Line User Group, 46 Sandringham Road, Wordsley, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5HL

INTRODUCTION by Roger Davis

Welcome to the second issue of *Platform 3* that looks at press coverage of the Stourbridge line and the West Midlands in general over the years.

We start this time in 1954, when British Railways (Western Region) introduced its new “intensified” local train service. Given that we now have train services every 10 minutes along the Stourbridge line, the word “intensified” seems a bit exaggerated to describe an hourly clockface service.



Birmingham Post - 10 September 1954

Important Announcement

Commencing Monday, September 20th 1954
British Railways will operate an
Improved and Intensified Train Service

ON WEEKDAYS by through services over the
undermentioned sections of line

WOLVERHAMPTON (L.L.) - BIRMINGHAM (Snow Hill) -
KNOWLE & DORRIDGE

LEAMINGTON SPA - BIRMINGHAM MOOR STREET

DUDLEY - BIRMINGHAM (Snow Hill)

STOURBRIDGE Junction - BIRMINGHAM (Snow Hill)

HENLEY-IN-ARDEN - BIRMINGHAM (Moor Street)

LEAMINGTON SPA - STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

LEAMINGTON SPA - BIRMINGHAM (Snow Hill) -
WOLVERHAMPTON (L.L.)

Additional Fast Trains between Leamington Spa, Birmingham
(Snow Hill) and Wolverhampton (L.L.) Only

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON - BIRMINGHAM (Snow Hill)
Frequent Semi-Fast Services

REGULAR INTERVALS of approximately
1 hour - Additional Services during peak periods.

Cheap Fares - Any Day - Any Train

Time Table and Cheap Fares Booklet (including Sunday
Services) FREE from any station in the areas covered.

BRITISH RAILWAYS

New Hourly Train Services

'Taking a Gamble' in Birmingham

British Railways in Birmingham are "taking a gamble" in putting on new suburban services which will provide hourly trains during off-peak periods during week-days. A reconstruction of the Birmingham district time table from next Monday week till the middle of next June will be closely watched by the railway authorities to see if the public response justifies the alterations. The new service involves an increase of more than 3,000 miles weekly.

"We are taking a gamble in putting these services on," Mr. F. E. Phasey, an assistant to the commercial superintendent for passenger and parcels traffic at Paddington, said in Birmingham.

The gradual reduction of fares on the district railway had been designed to co-ordinate with the new service of hourly trains. Now the fares schedule was complete and compared favourably with return bus fares to and from Birmingham for similar journeys.

Regular Interval Departures

The new weekday service is based on the principle of regular interval departures from stations on the following sections of line and at intervals shown below:-



Birmingham (Snow Hill) to Stourbridge Junction - Every hour from 5.45 a.m. to 10.45 p.m. Augmented during peak period.

Stourbridge Junction to Birmingham (Snow Hill) - Every hour from 5.15 to 8.15 a.m. and every hour from 9.10 a.m. to 10.10 p.m.

Snow Hill to Dudley - Hourly service from 9.55 a.m. to 10.55 p.m., except 5.55 p.m., calling at all stations except Hockley and Soho and Winson Green.

Dudley to Snow Hill - Hourly from 9.0 a.m. to 10.0 p.m., except 5.0 p.m., calling at all stations except Soho and Winson Green and Hockley.

Birmingham to Stratford-upon-Avon, via North Warwick line - every hour from 9.10 a.m. to 9.10 p.m. from Moor Street to Henley-in-Arden or Stratford-upon-Avon.

There will be additional semi-fast services between Snow Hill and Stratford-upon-Avon.

Stratford-upon-Avon to Birmingham via North Warwick line - every hour from 9.20 a.m. to 9.20 p.m. Henley-in-Arden to Moor Street, with additional semi-fast trains between Stratford-upon-Avon and Snow Hill.

Leamington Services

Birmingham to Leamington Spa - every hour from 9.50 a.m. to 9.50 p.m. Snow Hill to Knowle and Dorridge, and every hour from 10.20 a.m. to 10.20 p.m. Moor Street to Leamington Spa.

Leamington Spa to Birmingham - every hour from 10.0 a.m. to 10.0 p.m. Leamington Spa to Moor Street and every hour from 9.53 a.m. to 9.53 p.m. Knowle and Dorridge to Snow Hill.

Snow Hill to Wolverhampton (Low Level) - every hour from 5.30 a.m. to 10.30 p.m., calling at all stations, with a few exceptions during off-peak periods.

Wolverhampton (Low Level) to Snow Hill - every hour from 9.10 a.m. to 10.10 p.m., calling at all stations, with a few exceptions during off-peak periods.

Old Hill and Dudley - morning and evening workmen services only will operate, connecting at Old Hill with trains to and from Birmingham.

In addition, fast trains will call at Leamington Spa, Birmingham (Snow Hill) and Wolverhampton (Low Level)

Letters to many business and other people in Birmingham have been sent, giving notice of a sleeping-car service which will begin on Monday week. Sleeping car accommodation (first and third class) will be provided on the 12.5 a.m. from Paddington to Birkenhead (Woodside) except on Sunday mornings; on the 7.15 p.m. from Birkenhead (Woodside) to Shrewsbury, except on Sundays, and there will be through sleeping cars connecting with the 10.15 p.m. (Mondays to Fridays) and 10.10 p.m. (Saturdays only) Shrewsbury to Paddington trains.

Three things became evident when transcribing the 19th Century press reports. Firstly, the English language was slightly different in those days. Secondly, the reports were very verbose. Thirdly, as can be observed in the Stourbridge Junction station opening ceremony report, sexism was alive and well !

Bristol Daily Post - 17 February 1863

DESTRUCTION OF KIDDERMINSTER RAILWAY STATION BY FIRE

A fire broke out at Kidderminster railway station at midnight on Saturday, which left nothing but charred embers to represent what had been the station and refreshment-rooms. The station building comprises a booking-office, two waiting-rooms, a telegraph-office, and closets; while another structure close at hand contains first and second-class refreshment-rooms. Both these buildings are of wood, the latter having been placed there at a comparatively recent period. A night watchman's is kept at the Kidderminster, as at other stations, and the fire broke out during his absences at the goods shed. The guard of a goods train which passed through the station soon after twelve noticed an unusual light in the station, and upon seeing the watchman further up the line, he acquainted him with the fact. The station was at once visited, and a serious fire was then raging in the interior. Situated, as the station is, on a hill, there were soon some thousands of people on the spot. We regret to say that some of those were of the worst class, and the refreshment-rooms were pillaged without remorse, the effect of the spirits which were imbibed in nowise improving the behaviour of those who were already disorderly. The police did their utmost to prevent this, but unfortunately were not numerous enough to effect what was desirable. The buildings being of wood, there was not from the first much hope of saving them, and they soon succumbed to the flames. The cash (about £60) and most important books were saved, which is attributable to the excellence of Milner's safe, in which they were kept. The safe was red hot, but, notwithstanding this, kept its contents intact. Mr. Done, the lessee of the refreshment-rooms, and the company as well, are insured, so that the consequence of the fire will be inconvenience rather than loss.

*Hastings and St. Leonards Observer
- 14 January 1871*

SMASH AT KIDDERMINSTER RAILWAY STATION.

An accident occurred on the Great Western Railway on Tuesday morning at Kidderminster Station, doing a considerable amount of damage. Some passenger carriages had to be shunted from a siding, and the signalman took the usual precautions to prevent any train approaching till the line was again clear. It was found afterwards that the distance signal had not answered to the lever, and a luggage train came on towards Kidderminster on the up line at a speed of 30 miles an hour. The carriages were just then being drawn out of the siding, and the horse driver hearing the train, and seeing a collision was inevitable, whipped his horse to expedite the carriages, so that the engine might run into them buffer to buffer, instead of catching them obliquely. He had only bare time to jump out of the way when the crash came. The fireman jumped off and received some slight contusions, but the engine driver stuck to his post, and fortunately escaped without hurt. The luggage train drove the carriages through the station like toys, but the platform kept them up for a time, but when this was passed they swerved outwards and smashed the iron water tanks. One of the carriages then ran up a high embankment to nearly twice its own height, and then toppled back into the trucks, breaking in the sides of several and smashing itself more thoroughly by the violent contact. Another carriage was wrecked by the engine grinding into it and altogether the loss will be heavy. The traffic had to be carried over a single line for some time after the accident.

Birmingham Post - 27 March 1967

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

**GREAT WESTERN
RAILWAY NOTICE**

THE STOURBRIDGE EXTENSION RAILWAY will be OPENED for Public Traffic between Cradeley and Birmingham on MONDAY, 1st APRIL, giving a new route between Birmingham and Worcester. For time of Trains and further particulars, see separate bills.

Paddington,
March 21.

J. GRIERSON,
General Manager.

- *The Birmingham Daily Post,*
March, 1867.

County Express - 4 October 1879

NEW LINE

The new branch railway into Stourbridge was opened last Wednesday - the old station being now called "Stourbridge Junction;" the new one simply "Stourbridge." Nineteen trains run to and fro daily - in connection with most trains from and to Kidderminster, Birmingham, and Dudley.

Worcestershire Chronicle
- 22 December 1900

**STOURBRIDGE
NEW RAILWAY WORKS.**

It is stated that the Great Western Railway Company have decided to make Stourbridge the depot of their signal works for the West Midland district of their system, and this will lead to a settlement of about 200 men in the neighbourhood. A considerable number of men have already arrived. There is a great scarcity of house accommodation, and the company have, as far as possible, appointed single men. The erection of the new Stourbridge Junction railway station is proceeding rapidly.

Manchester Courier - 24 July 1885

**PAINFUL SCENE AT
KIDDERMINSTER RAILWAY
STATION.**

A startling incident occurred at Kidderminster railway station of Wednesday morning, shortly before the 9 17 up train arrived. A woman named Margaret Perkins was under arrest for non-payment of a school fine imposed because she neglected to send her children to school, and Police-constable Hardwick had brought her to the station with the view of taking her to Worcester Gaol. Before she could be taken across to the down platform a special train slowed into the station, and Perkins jumped from the up platform and threw herself upon the metals in front of it, causing the most painful excitement amongst those who witnessed the act. Police-constable Hardwick and a porter named Thornborough immediately followed the woman, and with some difficulty took her from the down rails and removed her to the other side of the line before there was time for mischief to occur. She made a dash to get away from them again, but was restrained after a struggle. It was only by main force that they got her off the rails in the first instance, and she said afterwards she might as well die as live. Every effort was made to calm the woman's mind, and some of the passengers at the station subscribed not only the fine, but half a sovereign besides for her. This prevented the necessity of carrying out the warrant of commitment, but the woman remained a prisoner, and was taken back to the police-station on the charge of attempted suicide. After the lapse of a couple of hours, when she had become calmer, she was brought before the mayor (Alderman W. Green), and the police thought she might safely be discharged. The Mayor cautioned Perkins, and released her on her own recognisances to appear again if called upon.



Kidderminster in the 1880s

Although the case is one which on the face of it appears to have some look of hardship, it appears that Perkins has only been proceeded against after every latitude had been shown her by the school authorities. Though her children's school fees are remitted, and she can send them to school free, Perkins has persistently kept them away. She is a married woman, and her husband is at work in a distant town.

Worcestershire Chronicle - 5 October 1901

STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION.

OPENING OF THE NEW STATION.

The new and commodious station which the Great Western Railway Company have provided for the Stourbridge Junction traffic was opened on Tuesday, and there was a large attendance to the ceremonial proceedings. The connection of the new section of the town line with the old part was completed by five o'clock in the morning, and the first passenger train came up the branch soon after six o'clock. The Junction Station was freely decorated.



A special train, with the engine garlanded and flagged, brought a party of ladies and gentlemen from the Town Station to the Junction Station at mid-day, and there was also a considerable muster of people awaiting the arrival of the train at the Junction. Mr. Murphy (divisional superintendent of the Great Western Railway Company), Mr. Robinson (locomotive superintendent), Mr. Monckton (engineering department), Mr. Scaife (Worcester), Chief Inspector Ledbrook, Mr. Cope (Junction stationmaster), and other officials were present. Mr. J. E. Jones (vice-chairman of the Stourbridge Council) represented that

body - and there were a number of members of the Council present, and among others were: Mr. R. Biddulph Martin, M.P., Messrs. J. Silvers Williams, R. L. Mathews, Walter Jones, G. Harward, H. N. Collis, G. J. Eveson, Rev. I. G. Owen, Rev. E. G. J. Moore, Rev. A. G. Lewis, etc. and a number of ladies.

The brief ceremony of formally declaring the station open was entrusted by Mr. Murphy, on behalf of the railway company, to Mr. J. E. Jones, the Vice-Chairman of the Stourbridge Council, who said that times had changed since the line was taken over in 1863 by the Great Western. There were then only 50 passenger trains and 50 luggage trains through the station, while now there were about 150 of the former and about 200 of the latter. The provision of that new station showed the increased trade of the district, and the Great Western Railway Company had been alive to their duties in providing that beautiful and commodious station. They congratulated the railway company upon it, but Stourbridge people would, he must say, have liked the station very much nearer the town, and an increased service of trains to and from the town. The company had promised more trains,



and he hoped they would soon have them. Mr. Jones then unlocked the gates and declared the station open, and after a vote of thanks to him the visitors returned to the platforms, and spent a short time there before returning to the town. The expenditure to which the Great Western Railway Company have gone in connection with the new Junction Station at Stourbridge approaches a sum of £100,000. There is a large amount of work yet to be carried out, and the demolition of the old station will pave the way to the execution of matters which still have to be attended to.

Worcestershire Chronicle - 22 February 1902

EXPRESS IN COLLISION.

ALARMING OCCURRENCE AT STOURBRIDGE

A serious railway collision took place on Monday near the old junction station at Stourbridge, which happily was not attended by loss of life, although several passengers and officials received injuries. The up express train from Wolverhampton to London, which is due to arrive at Stourbridge Junction at 1.40, was running into the old station, which is 300 yards or more from the new junction, and the signal had, it is stated, been given to it to proceed, when straight before it on the main line a light engine was come upon.

A collision was seen to be unavoidable, and Harry Tarver, of Sydenham road, Small Heath, fireman on the light engine, jumped off the engine, but the other three men engaged on the two engines appear to have stuck to them. The driver of the express was William Watkins, of Bushbury Lane, Wolverhampton, and the fireman W. T. Gilbert, of Whitmore Reans, Wolverhampton, while the driver of the light engine was Frederick Hill, of Byron road, Small Heath. Watkins and Gilbert escaped comparatively lightly, their heavy and powerful engine having pushed the lighter engine in front of it. Both engines fortunately kept upon the metals, or the results would have been more disastrous.

Hill and Tarver suffered a good deal from the shock. The passengers in the express were greatly alarmed, for the crash not only caused them a very violent shaking and threw them from their seats, but the noise was most alarming. Medical men were immediately summoned from Stourbridge. The passengers included Mr. Edwin Stringer, of Stourbridge; Mr. Horton, builder, of Brierley Hill; Mr. McMillan, of Brierley Hill; Mr. William Griffiths, of High Bank, Kidderminster; Mr. Clements, of the Opera House, Dudley; and some ladies, one of whom jumped from the carriage, but without injury. Some of the passengers complained of shock, and some had sustained other slight injuries. They were all able to proceed home, as were the injured officials.



Bournemouth Evening Echo - 9 April 1902

THE COLLISION AT STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION.

Reporting to the Board of Trade as to the collision in February between a passenger train and a light engine at Stourbridge Junction on the Great Western Railway, Lieut. Colonel Yorke says that the cause of the accident was fully explained by Signalman Townsend, in the Stourbridge Junction north box. He forgot that the engine was at the home signal, and accepted the passenger train when offered.

THE QUEEN'S VISIT 1957



An article on the Queen's visit to Worcestershire was published in *Platform 2* issue 12. The information in that article was based on reports found on the internet.

However, The Birmingham Post covered the visit fully and the following are the original articles published at the time.

Birmingham Post - 14 March 1957

Kidderminster Carpet for The Queen

The Queen will be presented with a carpet, as a souvenir of her visit to Kidderminster on April 23.

Announcing plans for the visit yesterday, the Mayor, Ald. Louis Tolley, said the cost would be £3,750, more than a 2d. rate, but much of that would be for decorations.

The Queen and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, will be in the town for 55 minutes. The road from the Land Oak to the Town Hall will be decorated, and 1,500 schoolchildren will line a section of Birmingham Road.

At the Town Hall, which will fly the Royal Standard for the first time, 30 of the 140 guests will be presented to the Queen. The Royal train will leave Kidderminster station at 5.30 p.m.

the factory of Walter Somers Ltd. Their next stop will be at Oldbury Council House at 11.55 a.m. to visit the Mayor's Parlour and the Council Chamber.

At 12.20 p.m. they will leave for Dudley, but on the way they will stop for a few minutes outside the new comprehensive school on the Wolverhampton New Road on the Rowley Regis border. Lunch will be taken at Dudley Council House and it is expected the Queen and the Duke will appear twice on the balcony before going on to the glass factory of Stevens and Williams Ltd., Brierley Hill.

They are due at Stourbridge Council House at 3.55. They will inspect the glass exhibition, and the Queen will also drive round Mary Stevens Park to see children and old age pensioners.

Drive to Guildhall

After having tea at Kidderminster Town Hall the Queen and Duke will rejoin the Royal train. They will arrive at Shrub Hill station, Worcester, at 8.45 p.m. and will drive to the Guildhall for a reception at 9 p.m. They are expected to leave at 10.30 p.m.

Tomorrow the Queen and the Duke will visit Worcester County Cricket Ground, the Malverns, Ledbury, Leominster, Dinmore Hill, Hereford and Ross-on-Wye.

Birmingham Post - 23 March 1957

THE QUEEN AND DUKE BEGIN MIDLAND TOUR

In Worcestershire To-day

The Queen and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, will arrive at Hagley station at 10 o'clock this morning to start a two-day visit to Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

Most of today's tour will be in the Black Country. Places the Royal party will visit or pass through include Halesowen, Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Dudley, Brierley Hill and Stourbridge.

In these towns people have spent the Easter holiday putting the finishing touches to decorations on houses, shops, and offices. Everything is ready to give the Royal visitors a rousing welcome.

From Hagley station the Queen and the Duke will drive through Halesowen to Mucklow Hill, where they will spend almost an hour touring

TOWNS STRIKE GAY NOTE OF WELCOME

Route a Blaze of Colour

Thousands of people flocked into Dudley yesterday, not only to visit the Zoo, but also to look at the hundreds of flags, pennants and streamers which have been erected to welcome the Queen and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, when they visit the town today.

Never has Dudley looked so smart since the end of the war. The main shopping area, through the Market Place and along the Royal route is a mass of red, white and blue.



There are many shop-window decorations in which photographs of the Queen and the Duke are dominant features.

Quiet Dignity

The area around the Council Rouse, however, where the Mayor of Dudley, Coun. S. Danks, will welcome the Royal guests to luncheon, presents a scene of quiet dignity.

The civic buildings are not decorated, but this enhances the handsome facade of the buildings, which only a few weeks ago received a thorough "spring clean."

The Coronation Gardens, which overlook the Council House, and on which more than 4,000 children will be assembled, also lack traditional bunting, apart from pennants strung along the fringes.

Again, the decision is tasteful. The lawns are fresh and green, and masses of spring flowers are in full bloom.

Station Transformed

Workmen were putting the finishing touches last night to Hagley station where the Queen begins her tour.

She will leave the Royal train on the far platform and will have to cross the bridge before entering the Royal car, so the bridge has been made the centre-piece of the decorations. It is lined with flowers and draped in velvet.

As the Queen steps out of the train she will see a "Welcome to Hagley" sign on a blue background facing her. The station has been transformed from a quiet little country stop to a luxurious stepping-off point for the tour.



At Stourbridge, the Mayor, Ald. R. S. Walker, has made a last-minute alteration to the list of people he is presenting to the Queen. He received a telephone call from Adml. Sir William Tennant, Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire, asking whether he could find the Rev. H. H. Daws, who helped to found the O.J.I. leper colony in Nigeria, which the Queen and the Duke saw on their colonial tour.



Mr. Daws, who is now vicar of St. John's, Stourbridge, was in Nigeria as a member of the Church Missionary Society from 1920 until 1940 and again from 1946 to 1947. His wife, who will also be presented, helped to organise the first maternity home in the colony.

(cont'd on next page)

Original Touch

Corporation workmen were due to report for duty 5 a.m. today to put the final touches to Oldbury's decorations. The Mayor, Coun. A. Gunn, yesterday toured the procession route and said: "Everyone has made a grand effort to decorate - from humble householders to the large industrial concerns."

An original touch has been provided by the manager of the Talbot Hotel, Mr. D. Hawthorne, who has draped the building with four 20ft. banners in mauve, scarlet and gold - the Queen's racing colours.

Oldbury products to be presented to the Royal visitors are a posy bowl and a shooting stick. Both are made with the semi-precious metal titanium.

Banner Dispute

When the Queen and the Duke pass the junction of Church Street and New Road, Halesowen, they

will pass under a banner reading: "Halesowen Carnival welcomes Her Majesty." They will not know that in the space between "Carnival" and "welcomes" was the word "Queen."

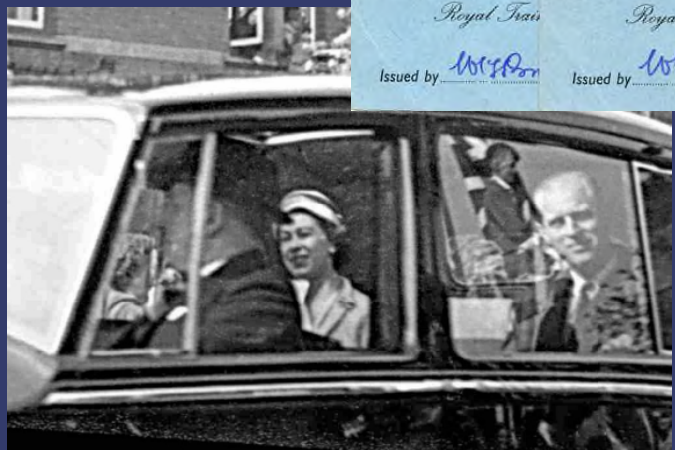
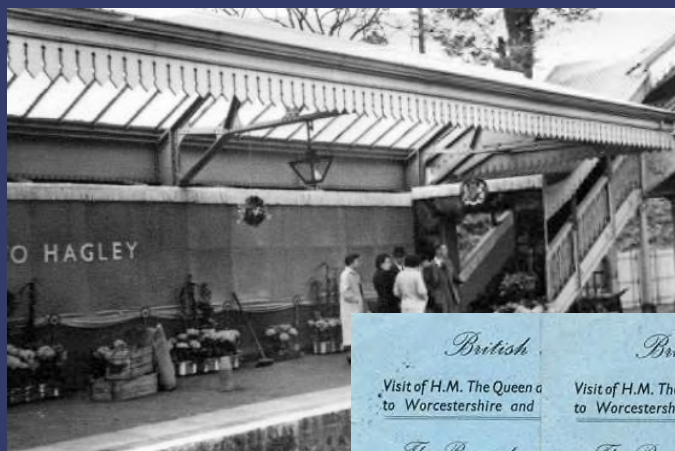
Carnival Committee officials who hoisted the banner on Friday were asked to take it down yesterday because of complaints that the wording was in bad taste. At first they refused, saying that if the banner were to be pulled down, the police would have to do it. Later, however, they compromised and obliterated the word "Queen."

The Royal party will arrive at Shrub Hill station at 8.45 p.m. and arrive at the Guildhall, Worcester, at 9 p.m. About 500 people from Worcester and the county will be present, and a number will be presented to the Queen and the Duke.

During the evening a brooch will be presented to the Queen by Maj. J. K. Brodie on behalf of the Queen's Own Worcestershire Hussars, in which he has served continuously for 47 years.

Birmingham Post - 24 March 1957

Royal Visit to Midlands - In Pictures



Day of Royal Splendour in Worcestershire

By a Staff Reporter

Never again will the Black Country complain about the weather.

However much it misbehaves itself in the rest of 1957 it was magnificent for a magnificent occasion yesterday, the first day of the Royal tour of the Midlands.

With almost the precision of a curtain rising on a theatrical first night the sun broke through the morning cloud as the Queen and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, stepped from the train at Hagley station. Thereafter the Royal procession through the Black Country - Hagley, Halesowen, Oldbury, Rowley Regis and Dudley - was bathed in a brilliant sun which reflected the warmth of the welcome from thousands who lined the route, and which turned the chimneys and factories into a proud background.

Houses, streets, towns throughout were decorated, often by people who had worked through the Easter holiday. Crowds waited for hours and the few moments given by the slowly moving car were to be treasured.

Slowly, proudly, the sisters stood; to the Queen and the Duke they expressed what was in the hearts of the thousands who had lined the routes - the affection of the people, the pride with which Britain looks to the Royal Family, and the pleasure which is derived from the standard set by the Royal Family on occasions both private and public. "Thank you," they said.



City's Loyalty

This was reflected again at Worcester where the Queen and the Duke arrived in the late evening to be greeted in the Faithful City by citizens, who like their ancestors of 1575, greeted the Royal visitors with "loyalty and humility."

In contrast to the brilliant sunlight, it was a softer artificial light which gave to the ancient buildings of Worcester a glow, effectively outlining the charm of age. Darkness gave Worcester another advantage for the interior of the car was lit, and there was the Queen in a full-skirted gown of primrose yellow.



Sisters' Greeting

None could have summed up the feelings of the Midlands more appropriately than Miss Jane Badland, aged 104, and her sister, Miss Caroline Badland, aged 101, the only two centenarian sisters in the country. As the Queen and the Duke walked through the Kidderminster Town Hall after the official presentations, they stopped to speak to the two sisters. "Don't get up, you must sit down," the Duke said.



EMPTY TRAIN 1960

During the early 1960s, many experienced railwaymen were of the opinion that British Railways deliberately made rail travel as awkward as possible to justify the closure of lines that were “uneconomical” to operate. The following story was published after the Birmingham Post was approached by the Railway Development Society.

Birmingham Post - 8 February 1960

ENIGMA OF AN EMPTY TRAIN

If a Passenger Were a Parcel He Could Stay ...

By a Staff Reporter

As daintily as the toot of a model railway engine’s whistle, the makings of a jolly little row began this week-end over a one-carriage train which takes passengers along a branch line from Old Hill to Dudley and leaves them there for an hour to await a later train to Wolverhampton ... while it rushes on itself to Wolverhampton, empty.

The story began with the Railway Development Association which has had some success in preventing branch lines from being closed. Two members, Mr. William Finch, who has special responsibility for the Black Country, and Mr. Owen Prosser, the founder, spent several hours on Saturday investigating at first hand The Case of the Empty Train.

Feeling much as Dr. Watson must have felt when Holmes urged him into some new mystery, I met them at Wolverhampton Low Level, and saw the 12.3 p.m. to Old Hill advertised on a poster. The first hitch started at the booking office, where the clerk was able to give us cheap day tickets to Dudley only. This supposes that passengers should buy a second ticket at Dudley for Old Hill, except that the stop at Dudley is not long enough to allow them to do so.

[Later a Wolverhampton railway official explained that cheap day tickets are printed only for the journeys on which they were likely to be needed. The demand for cheap day tickets to Old Hill is so small that such tickets are not made for the whole journey. The procedure is, therefore, to pay excess at the end of one journey, or buy a return ticket “the wrong way round” as we did.]

The Wrong Engine

At 12.3 p.m. the one-coach train was still standing several platforms away. It remained there for three-quarters of an hour. It is one of the old Great Western railcars, propelled normally by a “push-pull” engine, but someone had put on the wrong sort of engine. We stood with ever colder feet until the matter could be put right.

The stationmaster was considerate, conciliatory and apologetic, but unable to explain how or why the proper engine was missing.

It was 1 p.m. when the 12.3 p.m. left, but it did its best, in a terrier-like way, galloping joyfully from one tiny station to the next to pick up or set down a few passengers at each. There were fewer passengers than usual, probably because they had become tired of waiting and travelled by other means.

(cont'd on next page)



Diminishing Returns

At Old Hill the real purpose of the journey began, for it is on the return to Wolverhampton that the cause of contention arises. While the engine turned round, we squared our financial obligations with British Railways by buying return tickets from Old Hill to Dudley.

Old Hill station has been brought more up to date from the time when it was simply a Halt, but the old platform made of sleepers is still there, with the remains of ornamental Victorian gas lamps.

A big express would seem an intruder, but our funny little engine and its rail car incorporating 1930-ish photographs (dated by the large floppy hats of the women who adorn them) are quite appropriate.

It was impossible not to think of Mr. Emett and Oyster Creek as we rattled back through Darby End, Windmill End, Baptist End and Blowers Green.

Yes and No

Then came the climax. "Dudley." the guard called loudly, though by this time there were only the three of us to hear him. "All change."

"Aren't you going to Wolverhampton?" Mr. Finch asked.

"No," the guard replied. "All change."

We stepped on to the platform, and Mr. Finch walked towards the driver, who was leaning out of his cab.

"Are you going to Wolverhampton?" he asked.

"Yes," the driver said.

So that was it. *The train goes to Wolverhampton empty, while the passengers have to wait for the next one.* I sensed Dr. Watson behind me, goggling at this startling discovery, as the engine moved off with a snort at the pleasure of going home.

Because of the hour's delay at the beginning of the expedition, we had only a short time to wait at Dudley before the second train arrived to carry us on to Wolverhampton.

Why not let the passengers remain aboard for the last six or so miles? In Mr. Finch's baleful eye, it is merely a tactic by British Railways to bring about the ending of a small branch line they do not want to be bothered with. He maintains that if the service were run properly it would pay for itself and render a valuable service, especially now that new housing estates are growing on the mixture of wild heath and forlorn slag heaps along the line. He will carry on his efforts to have the service improved.

'The Railways Regret'

Afterwards, enquiries I made of British Railways about the whole situation brought the following statement:

"British Railways (Western Region) much regret the delay of 55 minutes to the 12.3 p.m. from Wolverhampton to Dudley and Old Hill on Saturday, due to locomotive difficulties."

"The 12.45 p.m. Saturdays only train from Old Hill terminates at Dudley at 12.59 p.m. Numerous parcels are then loaded into the van and it goes forward later from Dudley to Wolverhampton as a parcels train."

"The possibility of the train being used as an additional service from Dudley to Wolverhampton will be investigated"

The spokesman declined to be more specific about the meaning of "locomotive difficulties," and said that the "numerous parcels" would no doubt vary in number. Although the train carried no passengers, it was not completely empty.

Meanwhile I can only feel that the journey would have been quicker by bus.



SERVICE REDUCTIONS 1964 - 1972

The 1960s was infamous not only for line closures but also for major reductions to service levels on the lines that actually survived. The following articles show just how drastic these services reductions would prove to be.

Birmingham Post - 10 August 1964

121 stations in the Midlands may close on Sundays

Birmingham Post Reporters

SUBURBAN train services on Sundays will be abolished in the West Midlands - with one exception - if present British Railways' plans are confirmed.

From September 7, when the winter timetable starts, 121 stations will be closed in the Birmingham area and only 19 will remain open.

The proposals are to be discussed later this week with staff representatives.

The stations remaining open would be Birmingham Snow Hill and New Street, Wolverhampton High Level and Low Level, Coventry, Kidderminster, Stourbridge Junction, Wellington, Vauxhall, Aston, Perry Barr, Walsall, Hednesford, Cannock, Rugeley, Banbury, Leamington General, Solihull, and Knowle and Dorridge. All other stations in the West Midlands Division would be closed.

NO STOPPING

Main line expresses would continue to run between principal stations but would discontinue their stops at suburban stations, which would be closed.

The exception to the Sunday closure of local stations will be on the route from New Street to Rugeley. Here trains will continue to run because total closure of the service is planned and awaits a decision of the Minister of Transport.

Services that would cease to operate are between New Street and Lichfield, where there would be no stations open between and including Gravelly Hill and Lichfield City; between Snow Hill and Stratford, Leamington, Bewdley, and Wellington, and between Leamington and Stratford. Most stations on these lines would be closed.

FIRST HALT

Trains from Birmingham to Stafford would make their first stop at Wolverhampton; Birmingham

to Worcester trains would not stop at Barnt Green and Northfield; trains between Birmingham and Derby, Nottingham, and Leicester, would no longer stop at Water Orton and Saltley, and expresses between Birmingham and Cardiff would discontinue their stops at Smethwick West.

The closing of the 121 stations on Sundays means that there would be no local suburban services except between Rugeley and New Street, and main-line expresses would call only at large towns and cities.

The closures are proposed as part of British Railways' drive for economy. Sunday services have already been reduced on some routes and have been withdrawn completely on the Nuneaton to Coventry line.

Many people in small towns and villages not served by Sunday buses would be unable to travel anywhere on public transport. Those having to make essential journeys or wishing to visit patients in hospitals would be particularly hard hit.

Railway staffs are worried because could mean a reduction in Sunday working at overtime rates and the loss of several pounds a week in wages.

Protests are contemplated by some local authorities, including Warwick, where the Town Council has already approached its neighbours for discussions.

"The proposals for the West Midlands are to be the subject of staff consultations, so until these have taken place we cannot regard the proposals as final."

"None of the local services pay their way, and we have to rationalise and streamline the economy. The withdrawal of services is always the last resort"

(cont'd on next page)

At Sutton Coldfield, on the Birmingham to Lichfield line, there are 10 Sunday trains in each direction, the first arriving from Birmingham in the early afternoon.

ABSORBED

An official at Sutton Park said the majority of Birmingham visitors to the park who did not go by car went by bus.

“There are a number who do come on Sundays by train, but if the train service was discontinued I think they would be absorbed by the more regular bus service.” he said.

Mr. S. Stainthorp, secretary of Stratford-upon-Avon Chamber of Trade, said last night: “It will mean putting the clock back 40 years.”

“Then there were no trains from Stratford on Sundays, but the Chamber campaigned successfully for them.”

“We welcome people living to Birmingham who depend on cheap day train tickets for weekend visits. It will be a great pity if they are deprived of them and it will mean a considerable loss to the town.”

Steam operated passenger services at Stourbridge Junction (left) and Lye (right) would be slashed



(H C Casserley)



(E J Dew)

Birmingham Post - 10 August 1964

Less steam—and fewer trains

STEAM trains will become a rare sight on local services in Birmingham and the West Midlands this winter. British Railways are replacing all but three services a day with diesel-powered units. It is hoped to cut the loss of £750,000 a year on these services partly by this means and partly by reducing the number of off-peak weekday trains and by some slight reorganisation of peak-hour trains.

These arrangements are an attempt to avoid a drastic reduction of services or closure of stations. A British Railways spokesman commented: “There have been cases where, when proposals to withdraw services have been made, British Railways have been accused of not making any attempt to improve the financial position.”

He thought that services would still be adequate in meet the demand. The reorganisation would make possible changes in the timetable which would mean better use of crews and trains.

Services affected are those between Birmingham and Stratford-upon-Avon, Birmingham and Leamington, Leamington and Stratford-upon-Avon, and Birmingham and Kidderminster via Stourbridge Junction. Changes on the Birmingham-Lichfield line have already been announced.

The revision will mean a cut from last year’s winter schedule from 33 to 26 in the number of weekday services from Birmingham to Stourbridge and from 38 to 32 in the other direction. There will be seven fewer trains from Leamington to Stratford and six fewer in the opposite direction. A reduction of only one local train will be made on the Birmingham-Leamington service.

Birmingham Post - 1 October 1966

NEWS IN BRIEF

KIDDERMINSTER: The town's railway station is to be closed on Sundays from November 6.

Birmingham Post - 26 October 1966

Rail cuts are the 'beginning of end'

DRASTIC cuts are to be made in the rail service from Birmingham Snow Hill to Cardiff. Starting on November 7 the weekday two-hourly service will be abandoned in favour of three through trains a day.

The new plan will leave Kidderminster and Stourbridge without Sunday trains, and there will be no through service on Sundays from Snow Hill to Cardiff. But the service to Cardiff via Gloucester will continue from New Street Station.

Some trains which now go through to Cardiff will terminate at Hereford or Kidderminster, and start from there in the other direction.

The number of trains on the Stourbridge Junction to Stourbridge Town route is also to be cut down. Sunday services from Birmingham New Street to Derby are also being reduced from November 13.



Not upset

A British Rail spokesman said all the trains being withdrawn are little used, and the aim was to reduce losses.

Coun. J. W. Wardle, chairman of Kidderminster Rural Council, who is also a British Rail supervisor in Birmingham, and a member of the Ministry of Transport's Steering Committee has forecast that the Sunday closing of Kidderminster station would be "the beginning of the end."

"At some time in the future Kidderminster would lose its rail service," he said.

Stourbridge does not seem unduly upset about the prospect of being without trains on Sundays. A typical comment came from Coun. A. H. Mason, who said that he did not think the closing of Stourbridge Junction on Sundays would affect the travelling public a great deal. No one had complained to him. The Mayor, Coun. H. R. Stephens, said that he would like time to consider the matter.

Birmingham Post - 5 March 1971

Revised rail service

British Rail expects to save £75,000 a year by a revision of services between Birmingham, Kidderminster and Worcester with effect from May 3.

Trains between Worcester and Kidderminster will be reduced and concentrated on the Worcester-Birmingham route via Barnt Green. Peak hour services between Kidderminster, Stourbridge Junction and Birmingham, will be reduced. An improved service is promised at Blakedown.

'Fight on' pledge over rail cuts

Birmingham Post Reporter

Reaction was prompt last night to the announcement that five West Midland railway services have been recommended for closure.

The recommendations, which put the future of five more services in jeopardy, are made in a report by the Railway Sub-committee of the West Midland Passenger Transport Authority.

Mr. Douglas King, treasurer of the North Warwickshire Line Defence Committee, said his organisation would "fight on regardless." and commuters who use two stations near Wolverhampton are planning to defend their services.

Mr Eric Barker, who commutes to Wolverhampton by the threatened Chester service, said it would be "bureaucratic idiocy" if the PTA closed down Codsall and Birches and Billbrook stations. The trains will still run, but without the passengers. About 80 people commute regularly from these stations," he said.

The services that will not get a subsidy from the P T A are: Birmingham Snow Hill to Langley Green; Birmingham New Street or Moor Street to Stratford via Henley-in-Arden; Birmingham Snow Hill to Wolverhampton Low Level; Birmingham New Street to Worcester via Barnt Green; and Wolverhampton to Chester.



The review has been carried out because the P T A will become responsible from January for paying for the lines that are retained.

25-mile radius

The report covers services within a 25-mile radius of the P T A area and Mr. Frederick Lloyd, director-general of the authority, says that last year, grant-aided services ran up deficits requiring subsidies of £3.4 million.

Grant aid, he says, would be down to 60 per cent by 1975, when a further review would be made.

He points out that the services have been judged both on their financial performance and their value in the wider context of an integrated passenger transport system.

Rail services that were kept would be developed and supported. Ten are recommended for support.

A new system of travel tickets, including rail and bus fares and parking fees, would be introduced and the shake-up would improve the efficiency and viability of rail services.

The five services to receive temporary financial support pending a decision on alternative or revised services are: Stourbridge Town to Stourbridge Junction; Birmingham New Street to Walsall via Aston; Birmingham to Walsall via Soho; Birmingham New Street to Stafford; and Birmingham New Street to Wolverhampton High Level.



Aided services

Services that will receive financial aid are: Birmingham New Street to Derby and Leicester; Birmingham New Street to Kidderminster; Birmingham New Street to Leamington; Birmingham New Street to Worcester via Kidderminster; Birmingham New Street to Stratford via Lapworth; Birmingham to Lichfield; and Birmingham New Street to Redditch.

The report will be considered at the next meeting of the P T A - on Wednesday.

Opposition to plan for call on rates to aid rail services

Birmingham Post Reporter

Resistance to the general rate precept being proposed by the West Midlands Passenger Transport authority to subsidise loss-making commuter rail services is growing in areas which have lost all their rail links.

There is resentment that ratepayers in these areas should have to pay the additional rates to maintain services for the benefit of someone else. The P T A on Wednesday agreed to a general precept of about a quarter of a new penny which would raise £300,000 next year.

On January 1, it became responsible for subsidising services losing £3 million a year, but during the first year the Department of the Environment will pay 90 per cent of this.

Members have tried to have the precept levied only on authorities through whose areas the lines run, but have been told that the 1968 Transport Act makes it compulsory for the precept to apply equally to all ratepayers covered by the P T A.

The two authorities within the P T A but without a passenger rail service are Dudley and Aldridge/Brownhills.

Dudley's links were severed by Beeching in 1964, and the Birmingham-Castle Bromwich-Aldridge service through Sutton Park went a year later.



(John Mann Collection)



(John Mann Collection)

Mr. Frank Everton, a former Staffordshire County Councillor, who is Staffordshire district representative on the P T A said last night: "This is going to be an extremely sore point."

"I can quite well imagine some terrific opposition to this, and it looks as if I shall have to vote against this precept at the next meeting."

Beyond reach

He has already had letters from Cannock Urban and Cannock Rural Councils asking for meetings on the move, and Seisdon Council has instructed him to oppose any general precept.

"Within the last few months attempts were made to have a service reintroduced on the Rugeley-Walsall line but the figure the local authorities in the area would have had to pay was quite beyond their reach. Now they have got to pay for someone else's service."

"But we are in a peculiar position on the P T A. We are supposed to be making policy but half the time we have to rubber stamp the executive's action."

The PTA has agreed to support, for the time being at least, passenger services between Stourbridge and Stourbridge Junction, between Birmingham and Grimes Hill on the North Warwickshire Line, and the services from New Street to Walsall, via Aston and Soho, to Stafford and to Wolverhampton.

£37m boost for the commuter services

The budget on which the Transportation Study is based allows for £37 million to be spent boosting bus and rail services up to 1981, to carry 45 per cent of the 1,241,300 commuters expected to live in the conurbation.

The plan continues the earlier proposal of the study group that in certain areas bus services should no longer attempt to give overall coverage and should act as “feeders” and not competitors to trains.

It is envisaged that overall bus coverage would continue in the northern part of the area and the inner southern part of Birmingham, which will not be served by rail.

The basic rail network would be:

Diesel electric service from Knowle and Grimes Hill via Tyseley to Birmingham city centre, the former route also covering Leamington Spa and Stratford - upon - Avon via Hatton North Junction.

Electric service linking Coventry with Wolverhampton (High Level) via Birmingham (New Street) giving a high frequency between a proposed new station at Bickenhill and New Street and between Wolverhampton and New Street.

Diesel electric service between Wellington and Wolverhampton.

Diesel electric service between Kidderminster/Stourbridge Junction and New Street, via Galton Junction. The Stourbridge Town-Stourbridge Junction service would go.



Electric service linking Lichfield / Four Oaks with Redditch/Barnt Green via New Street with an extension to Worcester worked by diesel electric.

Diesel electric service between Tamworth / Nuneaton and New Street via Water Orton.

The Knowle and Grimes Hill services would continue to arrive at Moor Street and New Street until the new city centre station was provided, although the location of this would have to await full consideration of the construction of the new rail tunnel beneath the city centre.

WOMBOURNE BRANCH REOPENING PROPOSALS 1957 - 1970

The Wombourn branch was only open for seven years from 1925 to 1932, so it must have been a big surprise when Wombourn Parish Council applied for the line to be reopened 25 years after closure. As it turned out, common sense prevailed and a second proposal was made to convert the line into its current existence as a footpath.



Birmingham Post - 1 February 1957

Passenger Service Restoration Sought

Because of transport difficulties, aggravated by petrol rationing, an application is to be made to the Railway Executive for the restoration of passenger services on the line between Wolverhampton and Stourbridge Junction now used only for goods traffic.

The line runs through Wombourn and Himley and the move is being made by the Wombourn Parish Council, which suggests train services during peak hours. The Tettenhall Urban Council last night decided to support the parish council's application.

Birmingham Post - 8 October 1954

Rail Idea Dropped

The committee decided to take no further action on Wombourn Parish Council's suggestion that passenger trains should be reintroduced on the branch line between Wolverhampton (Low Level) and Stourbridge Junction, which last carried passengers in 1932.

Ald. J. W. Broadbent reported that railway officials had said they would need a guarantee of 1,000 passengers a day. The single fare from Wombourn to Wolverhampton would be 1s. 5d. compared with the present bus fare of 7d.

Birmingham Post - 12 December 1970

Railway line may become footpath

Birmingham Post Wolverhampton Staff

Negotiations are expected to be completed soon for the acquisition of part of the former Stourbridge-Dudley railway line for conversion into a footpath to rural areas from the Black Country.

The central six miles of a ten-mile section of the line being disposed of by British Rail lie in Seisdon rural district and the rural council has suggested that it should be bought jointly with Staffordshire County Council.

Wolverhampton and Dudley councils are considering buying the line in their areas and co-operating in the footpath scheme.

A report being made to the rural council on Thursday says that negotiations are being completed for buying a section from the Wolverhampton boundary to Wombourne Station.

The Town and Country Planning Committee also recommends discussions on acquiring another section from south of the Himley plantation to the A449 trunk road.

The county planning and development department has said that the Department of the Environment intends to improve the A449 south of Himley. This would involve the demolition of the railway bridge crossing the road together with its abutments.

A small length of the line between Langley Road and Penstone Lane, west of Lower Penn, will also be required for road improvement.