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# Platform 3



# MEMORIES



An almost new DMU waits at Birmingham Snow Hill on a service to Great Malvern via Stourbridge Junction

## CONTENTS

- 2 Memories - An Introduction
- 3 Up The Junction
- 10 Up The Junction - A Pictorial Journey
- 14 A Black Country Eye Opener
- 16 Snow Hill Afternoons
- 20 Snow Hill - The 50s and 60s in Photographs

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## MEMORIES - AN INTRODUCTION

by Roger Davis

In this edition of *Platform 3*, we look back at the Stourbridge line through the memories of some of the regular contributors to *Platform* who recall their formative years on or around the line.

Like other contributors, my interest in railways started very young – at the age of 8. However, my memories will hold little interest to Stourbridge line users as they involved regular visits to Bristol Stapleton Road and Bristol Temple Meads, a circular walk that took in the three Bristol engine sheds at Barrow Road, St Philip's Marsh and Bath Road, excursions to long-closed stations at Bath Green Park and Gloucester Eastgate, and the occasional Wednesday afternoon tour of Swindon Works. Famous named trains such as the Bristolian, the Devonian and the Cornishman ran on two separate lines, each only ¼ mile from my home.

Childhood Photos with a Kodak Brownie



Bristol Stapleton Road. The 1250 Cardiff to Brighton service hauled by a GWR Castle

Bristol - Lawrence Hill

I didn't move to the West Midlands until 1970 and my first connection to the Stourbridge line was to pop into Snow Hill station via the Livery Street entrance shortly after I moved to Birmingham. By that time, it was the only entrance to a once-magnificent station that had largely been abandoned. Only a couple of bay platforms were in use to serve the skeleton services to Wolverhampton Low Level and Langley Green and the station was only a year away from closure.

My first encounter with the Stourbridge line did not occur until I moved from Dudley Port to Kingswinford in 1986 and involved a journey from Cradley Heath to New Street. The unit was a first-generation Class 116 DMU which had obviously been recently transferred from Cardiff as the map by the entrance doors showed the Cardiff Valleys network and all of the other notices inside the unit were bilingual. Cardiff had obviously been glad to lose this unit as it spluttered out of Cradley Heath and ground to an ignominious halt on Old Hill Bank before we even reached Old Hill station. We were rescued by another unit and, fortunately, that first journey on the Stourbridge line turned out to be worst ever.

However, other contributors have far more interesting memories of the line, some of which go back to the days of steam and through trains to Dudley and Wolverhampton. I'll hand you over to them and I hope that you find some of their memories very interesting.

Despite not leaving the station, our 2½ hour stay seemed to fly by. We had to get home for tea. There was a choice of two trains. The first was at 16:00 and ran all-stations to Kidderminster. I think this ran from platform 1. The other was also at 16:00 and was a fast train to Hereford, stopping only at Smethwick West before reaching Stourbridge. If I remember correctly, this train used platform 4. Of course, it was no contest when choosing which one to catch. The trains normally left the station together on parallel lines but the stopper was soon left behind as it slowed to stop at Hockley. We were back at Stourbridge Junction at about 16:20, over 10 minutes before the stopper. A walk home got me in the house in time to watch David Coleman and his teleprinter announce the final football scores or latest cricket scores on Grandstand, and to look forward to the tin of peaches in just 24 hours' time.

A County class locomotive arrives at platform 7 on a Birkenhead to Bournemouth West service



(Michael Mensing)

As a postscript, visits to Snow Hill were not exclusively confined to Saturdays. There were school holidays and we invariably tried to organise a weekday trip. The choice of trains on the outward journey was not available as the train from Cardiff was half an hour later on Mondays to Fridays. Obviously, the holiday extras did not operate on weekdays but one highlight was the Birmingham Pullman which arrived at platform 5 at 14:05 and returned to Paddington at 14:30. At that time, a First Class Single to Paddington was 35/- (£1.75) and a Second Class Single 23/6 (£1.17). However, to use the Birmingham Pullman, you had to pay a supplementary fare of 10/- (50p) First Class or 5/- (25p) Second Class. Given that the Blue Pullmans gained a reputation of being uncomfortable and rough riders, and resulted in them only lasting 13 years, you have to wonder if passengers regretted the extra outlay.

The Birmingham Pullman waits at platform 5 on a service to London Paddington



(Robert Darlston)

Sadly, Snow Hill station was effectively closed in March 1967, although a small corner of it around platforms 3 and 4 lingered on as an unstaffed halt until 1972 for a skeleton service to Wolverhampton Low Level and Langley Green. Demolition came in 1976. It was great to see the station rise from the ashes in 1987 although the new, functional, commuter station is a pale imitation of a once great station.

Cities like Bristol, Brighton, York and Newcastle still have the magnificent stations of the steam era. Birmingham saw both of the stations of my childhood succumb to the bulldozer and replaced by concrete hell-holes. Luckily, I am old enough to remember the stations as they were.

At platform level, there are only minimal facilities – small waiting rooms, toilets, and food and drink machines. The only retail outlet is at concourse level on the far side of the ticket barriers. However, the station is practically an underground station with a three storey car park above it making it dark and uninviting. There is talk of demolishing the car park – and replacing it with an office block which will not improve the ambience at platform level.

The station that I remember as a child was much larger than the current station and spread onto land now occupied by the skyscraper offices fronting Snow Hill.

This meant that the two island platforms were wider and longer than the existing ones and four railway tracks separated the two islands allowing trains (mostly freight) to pass through the centre tracks without stopping. The length of the four through platforms enabled each to be treated as two separate platforms. From left to right looking from Colmore Row, these platforms were numbered 1/2, 5/6, 7/8 and 11/12 with the odd numbers closest to Colmore Row. Between platforms 2 and 6 at the northern end of the station were two bay platforms numbered 3 and 4, while bay platforms 9 and 10 were between through platforms 8 and 12 on the other island. Local trains to Stourbridge usually used one of the bay platforms 3 and 4.



(Lens of Sutton)

However, this description does not do justice to the magnificence of the station. Even with many steam locomotives still serving the station, the roof was light and airy. A bridge joined the two islands together at the Colmore Row end of the platforms and apparently led out to a massive booking hall and then to a fine hotel which fronted Colmore Row. I say apparently as I don't think we ever left the station. Further along the platform, the

island platforms were linked by a subway. At the northern end, a further subway apparently led out from both islands to an entrance in Great Charles Street. Each main platform had buildings along its length – large refreshment rooms, left luggage office, waiting rooms and toilets. In front of the permanent buildings were a number of kiosks. I can't remember most of the retailers who occupied these kiosks but I remember that there was a Wyman's kiosk on each side which sold books, magazines and newspapers. If I had enough pocket money left over, I sometimes bought the latest edition of Trains Illustrated which enabled me to update my Ian Allan Combined Volume with details of withdrawn locomotives. There was also a confectionary kiosk which I regularly visited as I normally had 3d (just over 1p) left to buy a tube of Rowntree's Gums or Pastilles, a packet of Spangles or a packet of the new Opal Fruits that had recently been introduced. I think it was called Empire, but I'm not certain. On platform 7, where the London trains normally departed, a stand held boxes of packed meals for passengers to enjoy during their journey. The meals were apparently prepared fresh in the refreshment rooms.

## UP THE JUNCTION by Andy Cope

I was born in 1955 and spent my earliest years living at the top end of High Park Avenue, Stourbridge. Our house was at a high vantage point overlooking the town about a mile away. From a very early age, I was aware that those plumes of smoke that could be seen in the far distance were actually coming from steam trains and that place also in the far distance built of red brick was the engine shed which housed them. By standing on one of the upstairs windowsills at the back of the house, Stourbridge and the line from Stourbridge past the shed was set out before me. My grandfather, who lived with us, even made me a pad out of a carpet sample book to stand on so I didn't damage the paintwork. I would stand there for ages even before I started school. My focus was always the trains with their plumes of smoke as you could see all the way from nearly Brettell Lane station to Stambermill viaduct like a very small scale model railway diorama laid out in front of you. Progress of the trains could be traced as they toiled up the grade towards Dudley, often with one at the front and one at the back. Too tiny to work out any detail, you could just tell if it was a tank engine or tender engine. Occasionally the smoke from the loco was visible beyond Brettell Lane for some reason, sometimes it wasn't. I now know this view beyond Brettell Lane was when they had taken the long since closed Wombourne branch



(R Siviter)

So that was my first interest in trains. It was when I was about 6 that I met a lifelong friend who lived a little way down the road, Alan Carpenter. We met when I was aimlessly pushing a two wheeled wheelbarrow up and down the road. What I may not have properly realised at that stage was that both Alan's dad, Ken, and grandad, Reg, were train drivers at Stourbridge shed. Common interests were soon formed. From about 8 years old, it was not unusual for us to wander off from home to play in the woods or in the fields, play on a building site, watch the combine harvester at work, play on the "dobbins" (a Black Country word for soap box trolley) and, before long, we were also making our way to the Town and Junction station to indulge our mutual fascination with the activity on the railway. We both went to Hill Street school in Stourbridge and regularly caught the Midland Red S50 route, sometimes a state of the art D9 type, back to High Park Avenue. If we ran hell for leather when we were let out of school, which was not too distant from the Town station, at 1600 we could sometimes just see, or more likely just hear, what was probably the late running 1600 "trip" blasting its way up from the Town Goods Yard behind its pannier tank or, later on, behind a diesel shunter. Saturdays started to see us going a bit further afield and getting to the Town and purchasing a ticket for the Junction, which cost just a few pennies. We would then spend the Saturday morning, or afternoon, at the Junction watching the trains and consuming a shared box of Payne's "Toffetts" from the vending machine on platform 2 (the platform 2 machine was always more reliable than the one on platform 3 and a safer bet for not losing your money!).



Although we were both interested in trains, we knew absolutely nothing about them. We were just happy to be around them. Alan's dad had gone off to Southall, presumably as part of the promotional arrangements to enter the driving grade from fireman, but occasionally we would see his granddad, Reg Carpenter, driving a Cardiff to Birmingham Cross Country diesel multiple unit. We never saw him on the locals, presumably as he had been on the railway as a driver for a long time and the "Cardiffs" were a "top link" job.

We did not have much money in our family when growing up so train travel was, by and large, not something we ever did as it could not be afforded. There was a minor exception though in that my grandfather used to visit his sister, my great-aunt, in Birmingham once a month. As a fussy dresser, there was also a tailor in Wolverhampton he patronised. As he lived at home with us when he went on these excursions, he would occasionally take me with him. Both Birmingham and Wolverhampton were memorable. Birmingham Snow Hill had a massive and lasting impression on me with all the hustle and bustle, the slightly gloomy interior of the train shed and the lights in the tunnel at the far end - a very different prospect compared to the Junction. Where did that tunnel go to? It was not until the Jewellery Line opened in the 1990s that I got to travel through it and find out! However, I knew it must be exotic as, on the radio on Saturday mornings listening to Junior Choice, there was a mention of Snow Hill on a comedy record by Reginald Gardiner (if you wish to listen to it go to YouTube and search Trains Reginald Gardiner - the relevant bit is at 4.50). We used to get the 1915 from Snow Hill to return to Stourbridge from my great aunts. It was brilliant timing as the Blue Pullman came in at 1855 and the Cornishman came in at 1901. I can always remember the Cornishman as the station announcer said the "The train now approaching.... I didn't know the meaning of the word "approaching" so the fact that this train had this unknown word attached to it, while other trains didn't, seemed to mean that it was indeed special. And it was, with a huge steam loco on the front which I now know was usually a Castle. The passenger train services through Stourbridge were now mostly diesel except for the service to Wolverhampton which was steam up to closure. I said to my parents I had never been on a steam train so my dad did try to take me one Saturday afternoon to Wolverhampton but, when we got to the Town, the timetable showed that we had just missed the Wolverhampton train. My dad told me not to worry as he would take me into Snow Hill to watch the trains there as compensation. Arriving at the Junction from the Town he was incredulous that the Wolverhampton train had not gone but was 20 minutes late. My dad tried to exchange his ticket for a Wolverhampton ticket but of course tickets are "Not Transferable" so we had to continue to Snow Hill. It was not a wasted journey though as we sat behind the driver and my dad explained to me how the distant signals in the old semaphore system worked as he was also keen on trains.

The Birmingham Pullman at Birmingham Snow Hill in 1963



(Warwickshire Railways)

The Birmingham Pullman at Birmingham Snow Hill in 1963

The stops were the same as today as far as Langley Green & Oldbury and then at Smethwick West, Handsworth & Smethwick, Soho & Winson Green, and Hockley. The route of the two trains was slightly different as the fast service moved across onto the main line near Handsworth & Smethwick while the stopping train stayed on the relief line. With arrival times at Snow Hill only a minute apart, it was not unusual for the two trains to race each other into Snow Hill with the driver of our train getting enthusiastic support from us.



(Michael Mensing)

After arrival at Snow Hill, one of the first trains to arrive was the "Cambrian Coast Express" from West Wales, which left Snow Hill at 14:00 for London Paddington. This was usually one of the GWR's magnificent "King" class locomotives, although occasionally one of the smaller, but equally magnificent, "Castle" class locomotives deputised. At the time, we didn't realise that "Western" class diesel hydraulic locomotives would soon oust these locomotives. Services to and from Paddington ran approximately hourly and these services ran as far as Birkenhead in the opposite direction. One of my greatest memories was seeing a "King" class locomotive emerge from the tunnel on a service from Paddington and realising that it was the one with the bell on the front - number 6000 "King George V", now preserved at the Steam Museum in Swindon. Why did that bell make the engine seem much more special than its classmates?

The one with the bell! King George V arrives at Snow Hill on a Birkenhead to Paddington express



(Michael Mensing)

Summer Saturdays were the best time to visit Snow Hill with holiday trains arriving from Margate and Ramsgate, Hastings, Eastbourne and Brighton, Portsmouth Harbour, Bournemouth West, and Fishguard Harbour and Swansea during the 2½ hours we were there. Unfortunately, trains from the South West arrived later.

Being only 12, we probably didn't appreciate just how magnificent Snow Hill station was. Being not much more than 4ft 6ins tall, it probably seemed even bigger than it was. Like the current station, it had two island platforms. The similarity ends there.

The new functional station was built to accommodate 4 through platforms, although it has yet to achieve this. Platforms 1 to 3 became through platforms when the Jewellery Line opened in 1995, but platform 4 remained a bay platform with access only from the Moor Street end. It was used for terminating Chiltern Railways services. Platform 4 was then closed, and West Midlands Metro tracks ran through it to the Snow Hill tram stop. Now that the Metro has moved out, there are plans to reinstate platform 4 and make it a through platform for the first time ever.

## SNOW HILL AFTERNOONS by John Warren

*These are the memories of my friend Martin Hilton, ghost written by me based on pub chats and some written notes - plus a 1961 timetable to confirm train times.*

By the age of 12, I had already developed a keen interest in railways and had a number of friends in the area who shared this interest. It was 1961 and life was different then. Today, I have lunch in the early afternoon and dinner in the early evening. In those days, at weekends, my mother had dinner on the table just after midday, and the contents of that dinner let you know which day of the week it was. Tea was on the table at about 5 pm and a special "treat" on a Sunday was a tin of peaches that a maiden aunt brought with her when she spent the day with us every Sunday. For some reason, I gained an aversion to tinned peaches in later life.

Ours was not the only house to observe this ritual in those days – many of my friends were subject to the same restrictions. Therefore, any trainspotting in Stourbridge occurred on a Saturday morning before returning home for dinner. However, this did leave us with time to spare on Saturday afternoons and the ritual became a trip to Birmingham Snow Hill. There were 6 of us, but the numbers varied each week. I only made the trip every 2 or 3 weeks but two of my friends were regulars, while another two only made the trip when the Wolves were away – home matches meant a train trip with their dads to Wolverhampton Low Level.

I lived about a mile from the Junction and our designated rendezvous was on Brook Road outside (not inside!) the Seven Stars by 12:45. However many had turned up then walked up the approach road to the station, although there was one Saturday when I was "Billy No Mates" and nobody else turned up, meaning a walk home.

Contrasts at Old Hill - a fast Cross Country DMU ...



(Michael Mensing)

... or a slow suburban DMU



(National Rail Museum)

Having bought our tickets from the old booking office - I think the price of a child return was between a shilling and 1/6 (between 5p and 7½p) – we had a choice of trains. Normally, we would wait for the 13:06 service, which was a Swindon-built cross-country DMU that had come from Cardiff General, and only stopped at Smethwick West between the Junction and Snow Hill. The alternative was a Bewdley to Snow Hill all-stations service at 12:57 which was operated by one of the ubiquitous Derby-built suburban sets. We normally avoided this service unless the seats behind the driver were vacant, giving us a great forward view.

My first ride behind a steam locomotive followed a short while after when my grandfather took me to his tailors in Wolverhampton. I have two abiding memories of that trip - first, the compartment coaches not being connected by a corridor and second, the bark from the loco exhaust as we pulled away from each station up the incline towards Dudley.

But back to our jaunts to visit the Junction on Saturdays. Me and my pal Alan, plus Ian Boaler from High Park Avenue who often joined us, didn't really know much about train spotting other than you noted down the number. We were unaware of the Ian Allan books and that we were supposed to mark off the number as spotted in a book. So, we just jotted the numbers down in columns, one column headed "S" for steam and one headed "D" for diesel. On arriving at the Junction, the first activity was to see what was in Platform 4. It was usually a Diesel Parcels Unit and a parcels van. On one occasion, the friendly driver, Mr. Rowlands who also lived on High Park Avenue, took us on the parcels unit to Kidderminster and back rocking through Blakedown at 70mph. Well it must have been about 70 - I couldn't say for sure as we had to hide in the van part when we went through stations in case the signalman spotted us and reported it! On one occasion it was a steam loco in Platform 4 – ex-GWR Mogul 6395 – and the fireman invited us onto the footplate to have a go at firing the loco stationary in the platform. We got the guy to sign Alan's spotter book which he did with the name "Jake", although we later found out that his full name was Jeff Jackson. We managed to spill each shovelful of coal on Jake's freshly washed down floor as it was too heavy for 9 year olds.

But perhaps the most significant thing that happened around 1964 is that Alan's dad came back to Stourbridge from Southall as a Stourbridge driver. This meant that sometimes on a Saturday he would be the shunt engine driver in Stourbridge yard, and we would join him on the footplate shunting the Up Yard where the extended car park now stands. For some reason it was always the Up Yard never the Down Yard. We would spend a couple of hours on the footplate of the shunting engine occasionally transferring wagons from Up Yard to the Down Yard which involved going into Platform 3 and pulling down usually as far as the South box before



Stourbridge Shed (84F) in 1962

(R S Carpenter coll'n)

reversing. I can also remember another driver allowing us to do the same thing one Saturday afternoon. At this time, Stourbridge Shed was still a mystery to us and we longed to visit it. Alan's dad must have realised this and arranged one Sunday morning to take us there. I can remember we went there in his Morris Minor, UWP 783. We scrambled over several diesel locos but were told we couldn't go on any of the old steam locos as we would

get too dirty. It was a pity as people pay good money to do that sort of thing today!



I am not sure if Alan's dad was actually on duty that day but suddenly he had a job which was to bring a dead loco from one side of the shed yard to the other, and we scrambled up onto the diesel shunter and set off. But the amazing thing was he showed us what to do and let us have a drive! Each of us in turn! In a shunter there are duplicate controls on each side of the cab, so I guess with him sitting on the opposite side there was not much risk. I can remember going home and saying I had driven a diesel shunter, but no one believed me!

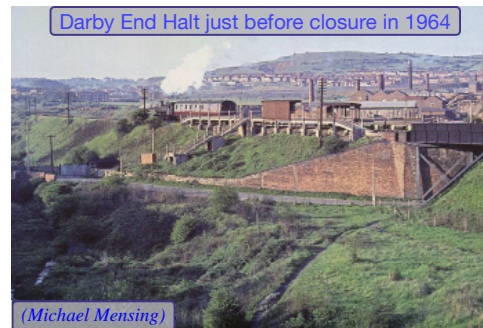
Our trips to the Junction continued. We were also not quite done with steam yet. The Wolverhampton service had finished so, apart from freight, steam on passenger services during the hours we were at the Junction, and therefore as far as we were concerned, had gone - except that is for the 1655 all-stations Stourbridge Junction to Worcester Shrub Hill, including a rare call at Cutnall Green Halt. I seem to recall, but have never been able to verify from the working timetable, that this train came into Stourbridge Platform 4 mid afternoon complete with its Palethorpes sausage van next to the engine and simmered in the platform for quite a while until departure time. The Palethorpes van was apparently destined for Cardiff and was transferred to a Cardiff train at Shrub Hill. We would sometimes dare one another to go inside the coaches which were of the compartment type to see what they were like - they seemed very plush to us. I get the impression that the train came in quite early because I remember going home one Saturday afternoon and mentioning to my mother that there was steam passenger train at Stourbridge that was going all stations to Worcester at about five o'clock. To my surprise she said words to the effect of "shall we go and get it to Churchill and Blakedown and walk back home from there" and that's what we did. How I savoured every minute of that all too short 9 minute journey on this otherwise empty train. We were riding in, what seemed to me, the absolute luxury of a compartment coach with side corridor! There were no other passengers - it was all for us! How I wished I could have stayed on to Shrub Hill! Of course, having arrived at Blakedown, we then had to face the several mile walk back, but I was elated having travelled the 9 minutes on this, to me, special train so the walk was nothing. It was quite common on Saturday afternoons for my mother to take us on a walk out from High Park Avenue down the lanes to Hagley or Blakedown, usually Hagley, and travel back on bus and train. On one memorable occasion the guy in the booking office at Hagley bought us back home in his car as it was easier than issuing a ticket! The Blakedown trip was the last time I travelled behind a steam locomotive on BR.

But the demise of steam didn't stop us visiting the Junction. A lot of the drivers seemed to know us or, probably more correctly, they knew Alan's dad and grandad so it was not unusual to get to "cab" a loco. One of the last illicit rides I recall was on an English Electric Type 4 (Class 40) from the Junction to the shed just before the shed closed.



Churchill & Blakedown station in 1961

(J H Moss/R S Carpenter coll'n)



Darby End Halt just before closure in 1964

(Michael Mensing)



Just south of Baptist End Halt in 1964

(Michael Mensing)

After Dudley Tunnel, the highlight of the day for me was to take the Bumble Hole branch through the beautifully named Windmill End Halt to Old Hill (my one and only trip along that line). The second best highlight followed the locos running round the train at Rowley Regis, a trip down to Halesowen. Normal service had finished as long ago as 1927. I think we must have been the last passenger train there before the track was taken up - if they could find it, as I remember the vegetation coming up to my waist. Yes, those were the days before Health and Safety stopped you jumping down from the train onto the track and climbing on everything for the best photo. Did you know that the earthworks were dug out for a direct connection from the north end of Haden Hill Tunnel to the Bumble Hole line just south of the canal bridge, but the track was never laid? Later that day, the locos abandoned the coaches in the platform at Lapworth, whilst they dashed to the water column at Knowle and Dorridge [as it was then known], with pannier tanks almost empty.



The GWR liveried DMU leaves Hereford on a service to New Street via Stourbridge in the early 1990s

(Redhill Bull coll'n)

Later memories include a special organised by BR staff in Birmingham which used a first generation DMU painted in Great Western chocolate and cream. We came south across Cannock Chase, through Walsall and Dudley, reversing in Platform 3 at Stourbridge Junction for a ride down to Town.

From my years of commuting from Rowley Regis to Birmingham, I remember the standing - every morning bar one. The usual 3 car set was replaced by two 2 cars and there were quite a few spare seats. Yet almost everyone who normally stood continued to do so. Creatures of habit! Whenever I could get out of the office a bit early, I would return on the 16.42. This was the once an hour from New Street, coming in empty from Tyseley Depot - and usually late. It was little known that if you were 20 minutes or more late, you were entitled to compensation. It was the princely sum of £1! Even those who knew couldn't be bothered, but I always claimed and ended up with enough vouchers to take my son on a walking holiday along part of the West Highland Way in Scotland, funded by a fistful of vouchers.



**A BLACK COUNTRY EYE OPENER**  
by Keith Flinders

My earliest memory of the Stourbridge Line was a brief visit by road. My brother and I had joined a trainspotters' coach trip and I recall a steep climb from where the coach had parked up to the engine shed at Amblecote. It was really a bit disappointing, not many engines, all filthy and no namers.

Some years later, though still at school, we had a few days riding the branch lines of Devon and Cornwall, camping at Torrington, Coombe Junction and Newquay in a garden play tent - no luxuries such as a ground sheet! Our last night, a Saturday, was in Plymouth Youth Hostel, so the journey home began with the 09.25 to Manchester. Normally this turned left at Filton to go through the Severn Tunnel and up the North and West through Hereford and Shrewsbury. But this was one of the maintenance Sundays when the tunnel was closed. Instead, it called at Gloucester Eastgate and Worcester Shrub Hill. Then it was non stop to Wolverhampton Low Level.

It was an eye opener to see why this was called The Black Country. At Stourbridge Junction, pleasant countryside suddenly was replaced by grime, dereliction, filthy heavy industry and more grime. Absolutely fascinating to be trundled by a nearly new Class 47 in nearly new Mark 1 coaches through the middle of Round Oak Steelworks and across the flat crossing with the Pensnett Railway.



Brierley Hill. The station is bottom right

(Express & Star)

The line through Dudley had closed in 1962 but there were still some station name boards to be seen. And what wonderfully evocative names, like Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill, Round Oak and especially Daisy Bank!

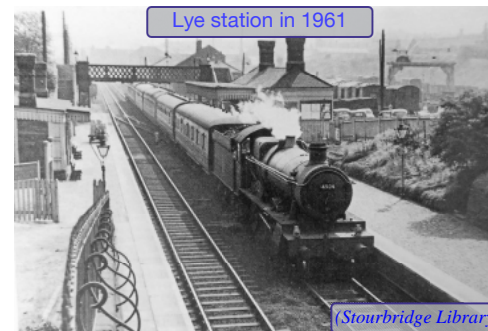
Swan Village station. The Wolverhampton line to the right, the Dudley line to the left



(John Mann)

I wanted to come back for more. The opportunity was a steam special, 'Farewell to the Pannier Tanks' in July 1965. Double headed by 9630 and 9610, we set off from Birmingham Snow Hill but didn't take the Stourbridge line at Handsworth Junction as expected. At that time, Rowley Regis had oil sidings and it seems a derailment there had blocked the line. Probably an accident rather than a deliberate act

by a railway enthusiast, but it meant we were diverted from Swan Village to go underneath at Dudley Port.



Lye station in 1961

(Stourbridge Library)



Old Hill in the late 1960s. The Dudley branch leaves the main line to the right

(John Mann coll'n)

Another cheap pocket money excursion was to Lye where the staff on the station would find you work helping to sort the galvanised metal wear that always cluttered the Stourbridge bound platform. This was after we had looked in Bache Brothers toyshop window to see the model railway items in there. Occasionally we would venture further afield often without our parents knowing. One day we went to Old Hill (!). The Dudley "Bumble Hole" branch was open, but we didn't see any trains on it. Another day we went to Handsworth but got a bit scared and caught the first train back. On another occasion we dug Mrs Green's garden next to Ian Boaler's house on High Park Avenue and with the money she gave us bought return tickets to Worcester Shrub Hill. We caught the 1328 Cardiff train. Ian Boaler was to join us,

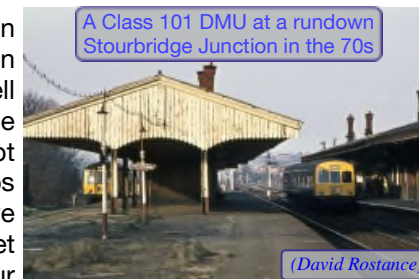


A Cross Country Class 120 DMU near Cradley Heath & Cradley on a Hereford service

(Michael Mensing)

but his mother wouldn't let him come with us as he hadn't finished his dinner (lunch). Alan and I went on rather selfishly without him and were on the Town motor about to leave the Town when Ian turned up in the nick of time and red faced having run all the way from High Park Avenue. Worcester Shrub Hill was a bit disappointing but the cacophonous racket from the fishplated rails on the dash from Kidderminster to Droitwich was lively, sitting behind the driver of the Cross Country multiple unit and watching the speedo creep up to 70.

Any variation to the routine was noted so, when one day the usual single car unit on the Town branch was replaced by a 3 car Metro Cammell class 101 set where we marvelled so much at the carpets in First Class, something we had not seen before, that we did a couple of return trips that day to the Junction. When we got home, we covered one of our "Dobbins" with old carpet and offered other kids in the street rides on our new "First Class" dobbin! There was also the time when we bumped into our teacher, Mrs Murray, on the Town motor. We were never badly behaved but meeting a teacher out of school meant extra special good behaviour on the 3 minute ride.



A Class 101 DMU at a rundown Stourbridge Junction in the 70s

(David Rostance)

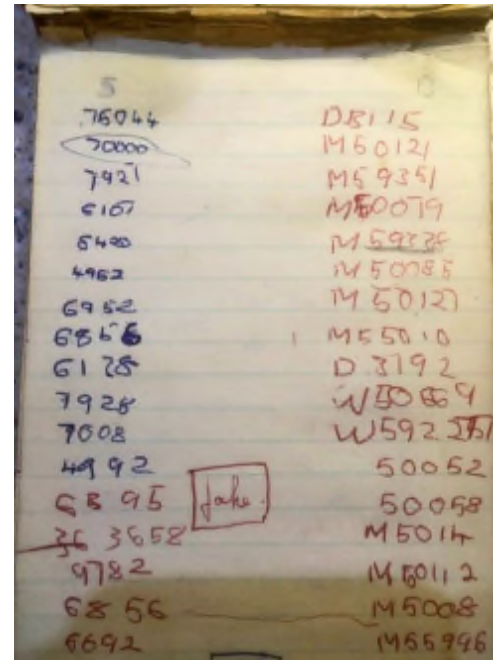
We were always interested in the Town goods yard. When I was very young my grandfather used to take me to have my hair cut in Lower High Street and as a treat he would then take me around the old yard and across the black bridge that everyone of a certain age from Stourbridge will recall crossed the throat of the yard. Often a pannier tank would be shunting, pushing up steam through the floorboards of the bridge, or later a diesel shunter which, unfortunately, didn't give such vivid displays.



The level crossing at the bottom of Lower High Street held a special fascination although it was clear it had not been used in some time. This line was officially known as Bradley's siding and it still is a mystery how it was shunted as it must be a third of a mile from the crossing gates to the factory. Locomotives were not allowed across the road but used a raft of wagons to position traffic the other side of the crossing. How traffic was then moved from the crossing to Bradley's factory is not known but I would be interested to find out! Later, I can remember visiting the site with my mate Alan. The site was clear of trains and had clearly been closed although only recently. Workmen had oxyacetylene torches and were cutting up the rails near the old level crossing. In our child's mind we thought "Oh good, they are repairing the track to use it again". How wrong we were! However, even after the rails had gone, we continued to visit the site. The old goods warehouse, which continued to stand for a while, had a chute in it presumably for ease of getting sacks from the top floor to the ground. This made a great slide to play on! I reckon a good proportion of the kids in Stourbridge must have slid down it around that time! We never saw a boat on the canal there either, although I understand due to the low bridge under Lower High street only "day boats" without a cabin could get in there. The last regular canal traffic, from there to Swindon (Staffs) ironworks had finished in the 50s.



It wasn't just Alan's dad that allowed us to accompany him. Ian Boaler had a relative, Mr. Leight who was a local signalman. Occasionally in the late 60s we joined him in Stourbridge Engine Shed box for the afternoon. The shed had closed but still had the diesel fuelling plant operational and some of the Diesel Multiple Units seemed to have been diagrammed on there for fuel. If I recall correctly, you could pull off signal "19" which was one of the exits from the shed to headshunt without it interfering with the main line, so we would practice pulling this signal off under Mr. Leight's watchful eye. I also remember the black and white levers for placing detonators on the main line in the event of an emergency.



A page out of Alan's spotting book.

As I said in the main article, Alan and I noted down the train numbers in Alan's spotting book, with steam trains noted on the left and diesels on the right. At that time, we did not know about recording the numbers in the Ian Allan book.

As also mentioned in the article, we got "Jake" (the fireman of Mogul number 6395) to sign it.

70000 seems an unlikely number as it was a "Britannia" class locomotive based on the London Midland Region. It was almost certainly an error, and could have been "Castle" class locomotive number 7000 which was a Worcester engine. It is possible that 7000 was on its way to be cut up at Cashmores, Great Bridge, which was why we circled it.



The 1655 Stourbridge Junction to Worcester Shrub Hill in Platform 4 at Stourbridge Junction behind Hall Class locomotive number 6925 *Hackness Hall* on 23 July 1964. The Palethorpes sausage van was a regular, marshalled next to the loco. I once travelled from Stourbridge Junction (Platform 4) to Churchill and Blakedown on this service, which is etched on my memory. The train was otherwise empty that particularly warm Saturday afternoon!





Stourbridge Junction south end. The van is possibly going to be attached to the Diesel Parcels Unit in the previous picture. The track on the extreme right in the background was used as a carriage siding and, in the late 60s, vans for attaching to 3M02 were often stabled there. The bracket signal in the distance is cleared for a train to enter platform 2 from the Kidderminster direction. The two other signals control entry into Platform 1 from the south, and a third signal controls the Down Goods Running Loop which allowed trains to run into the down marshalling yard without running through a platform. This line to the west of Platform 1 was never used for this purpose in the 60s in my experience, but for stabling coaches - presumably because of potential conflicts with the Town service. At the south end of platform 1 is an unusual signal with two "home" arms on the same post signifying a junction. While common on other regions this is the only time I have seen this type of installation on the Western Region. Platform 1 and 2 were always overgrown with weeds at the south end in our days of spotting there, as shown here. Our usual spotting position was platform 3. South box closed in 1973.



The 1805 Evesham to Crewe Parcels (3M02) at Stourbridge. Unfortunately these two photographs were taken by us as children using very poor equipment. They show the Evesham to Crewe parcels having arrived at the Junction in the early evening. The Hymek would come off and a Sulzer type 2 (later known as a Class 25) would replace them. The Hymek would

drop into Platform 1 before returning light engine towards Worcester. Until the closure of the Wombourne branch, 3M02 was booked to travel via Wombourne. I can recall that often there were two Hymeks in Stourbridge in the evenings but how that came about I can no longer recall.

Things were never quite the same at Stourbridge after the shed shut. However, there were still some interesting occurrences. We started visiting the Junction on weekday evenings. There was still a lot of parcels traffic on the railway at that time and a particular interesting working was an 1805 Evesham to Crewe (3M02) service that was Hymek hauled into Stourbridge. The Hymek came off at Stourbridge and usually a Sulzer type 2 (Class 25), then quite new, would be attached. I can recall that circumstances often presented two Hymeks in Stourbridge around this time but how that came about I can't now recall. There were also some exchanges of vans with another service which often involved a type 1 diesel (Class 20) to do the shunt - the diesel shunters having gone by this time. These shunts involved the use of Platform 1 and one of the few photos I have is of a Hymek off one of these services in that platform. It would go into platform 1, probably while the crew had a break, then manoeuvre past Middle signal box and head off towards Worcester light engine. When this was about to happen, we would go to the south end of platform 3 to see it roar past, light engine, picking up a good turn of speed by the time it passed us. I can remember Alan and I standing by the shunt class 20 one evening for ages hoping the driver would invite us up in the cab - on this occasion he never did!

More and more rationalisation followed and the interest in going "up the Junction" waned. What happened to those wooden finger boards on Platform 3 like the one which said London Paddington via Worcester, or the enamelled brown and cream signs in the subway like the one pointing to Platform 3 and 4 pointing to far off places like "Cardiff and South Wales" which seemed so distant that we would never visit?



What happened to the baskets of pigeons on their way to be released at Worcester or Malvern, or all that parcels traffic, or the galvanised metalware at the Lye, or the Paynes "Toffetts" machine? Where had they all gone? Were they all destroyed without ceremony?

However, I guess that, despite the railway's obvious decline in Stourbridge, a long term love of railways was cemented in. Both Alan and I are still railway modellers concentrating on modelling those years when it all seemed so new, fresh and interesting to us. The railways were in free fall in the late 60s and I am sure this is why Alan never went on the railway. I had no real idea of joining the railway either and, after school and a brief period at Foley College, had secured a job as an apprentice with Radio Rentals. Unknown to me, my mother had some time previously written a speculative letter to the railway about potential jobs. Nothing had been heard until, out of the blue, a letter was received saying that in this particular year's apprentice intake for the Birmingham Division one of the successful applicants had failed his medical and they needed to fill the post quickly as college places etc had been booked. How was I fixed? I dropped the apprenticeship with Radio Rentals and started an apprenticeship with the railway and a career which has lasted nearly 50 years and which has taken me into every region of BR except the Southern, mainly in Depot Management but later in Train Operating Company senior management. The roots of all that certainly lie in those early days "Up the Junction"

*This story continues in Andy's book "Changing Platforms", available from Amazon.*

## UP THE JUNCTION ... A PICTORIAL JOURNEY by Andy Cope

To accompany the previous article, I have selected and captioned some of my favourite photographs of the time and these are published on the following pages.



The final days of Town goods yard. This photo was taken from the "Black bridge" that spanned the throat of the yard. A diesel shunter is now the loco on Town duties instead of the traditional 57xx pannier tank pushing steam up through the floor boards of the Black Bridge. The goods shed building stood for a while after closure. It

included a sack slide from the top floor, which was enjoyed by local children.

In the peak hours, the Town motor "Bubble car" was strengthened with an unpowered driving trailer. Tyseley had three, 56295, 56296 and 56299 and the last time I saw the trio, they were out of use at Tyseley in around 1974. Between the peaks, the driving trailer was kept in the carriage siding which ran parallel to the Town goods



line and connected onto the goods line just before it converged from the Town passenger line. It was a simple matter therefore for the "Bubble car" to reverse into this siding from Platform 1 at the Junction and pick up the additional vehicle. The working timetable does not show this move so I guess it was a local arrangement. In the afternoon, I recall that this move took place about 1530. I don't know when this practice ceased but I think it was mid 60s.

Just beyond where the goods line crosses the road, at the back of the bus garage, there was a siding known as Foster Street siding. This was there so that if there were more than 13 wagons (the maximum allowed) on a train up the 1 in 27 gradient from the goods yard, 13 could be placed in the siding and the loco returned to the goods yard for the remainder. Although still in place I don't remember this being used in the 60's. As the points were padlocked with a slightly elaborate arrangement, I guess the use of this siding would have been avoided if at all possible.



I believe Alan and I may have been present when this photograph was taken. I recall one bright Saturday morning, we were interested in a photographer that seemed to have all the gear (tripod, telephoto lens etc) but seemed to be taking more general photos rather than trains.

Anyway, whether that is the case or not, this is exactly how I remember our Saturday mornings at the Junction. What it shows is a Diesel Parcel Car bought to a stand at the signal for platform 3 or 4. Probably, by the angle of the shadows, this is the 0955 Wolverhampton to Stourbridge parcels.

The signal is off, to the right of the diesel shunter, and the points at the end of platform 3 are set for the diesel shunter to bring a rake of wagons into Platform 3 from the Up yard. Once clear of the points and the ground position signal (dummy) clears, it will propel the wagons across into Down yard before returning to its duty in the Up yard. This used to be a frequent occurrence.

The diesel shunter will have a GWR shunter's wagon coupled to the loco as both Up Yard and Down Yard shunting engines always did. When the road is cleared, the Diesel Parcels car will proceed to Platform 4. This will probably form the 1200 back to Wolverhampton possibly with a tail load of a van, which is shown in the next photo.

During the 1940s and early 50s, one of the signalmen in the Middle Box seen in this photo was William Henry Twynham. Back in July 1910, Mr. Twynham had signalled the first passenger train from Aynho Junction towards London on the new GWR "Cut Off" shortened route which had been opened by the GWR so that it could compete better for the Birmingham to London traffic.

He had also received a "Highly Commended" from the GWR when his quick thinking averted an incident at Netherton (later known as Blowers Green). He and his wife were close family friends and indeed his wife was my Godmother and wrote one of my references when I joined the railway.