Thus, Kidderminster now has its fifth station building. The first was a temporary wooden structure that opened with the station in 1852. It was replaced in 1859 by a more substantial wooden structure which comprised a booking office, two waiting rooms, first- and second-class refreshment rooms, a telegraph office and closets. That structure only survived until 17 February 1863 when it was destroyed by fire. According to newspaper reports, its replacement had been planned for Stratford-upon-Avon station but was quickly diverted to Kidderminster. This, of course was the iconic mock Tudor building that survived until 1968 until British Rail decided that it was too expensive to cure dry rot and replaced it with the brick built portakabin that lasted about 50 years until last year. One wonders what would have happened if the 1864 building had been listed as it probably would have been today.

The interior of the Booking Office and Waiting Room

What does the new station building provide? The main entrance from the forecourt leads into the large glass sided booking hall and waiting room which also contains a retail unit. This leads to the concourse with a double door out onto platform 1 or a lobby that leads to the toilet area – gents, ladies and disabled, plus a baby changing room. A second door leads from the toilet area onto platform 1. To put it mildly, this is a quantum leap from the previous building that tried to fit a booking office, a retail unit and toilets onto a postage stamp.

The station building just after opening

Does this mean that SLUG will stop campaigning for improvements at Kidderminster? The answer is no. Facilities on the Worcester bound platform are poor with only one bus stop style shelter and no canopies. This platform needs to be upgraded, given the number of passengers who use it. In addition, the planned bus interchange facility was dropped from the previous plans and this proposal needs to be revisited. However, no new bus interchange can be justified without buses to serve it and a lot of pressure needs to be applied to the local bus operators to ensure that all outlying areas are served by buses from Kidderminster Railway Station as well as Kidderminster Town Centre. SLUG will keep on campaigning for even better facilities, not only at Kidderminster, but at all of the stations on the line.

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

PLATFORM

Issue 21 September 2020

It's 25 years this month since passenger trains started using this line to get from Birmingham to Stourbridge, Kidderminster and Worcester.

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SILVER SERVICE
by John Warren

Sunday 24 September 1995 at Snow Hill, The Hawthorns and Stourbridge Junction

Twenty five years ago this month, at 09:50 on Sunday 24 September 1995, the Severn Valley Railway's British Railways Standard 2-6-4T locomotive 80079 departed from platform 3 at Birmingham Snow Hill station with a trainload of dignitaries, including Shadow Transport Secretary John Prescott. By doing so, it became the first train since March 1972 to carry passengers over the complete length of line between Snow Hill and Smethwick Junction and also the first train to stop at the country's newest three stations - Jewellery Quarter, The Hawthorns and Smethwick Galton Bridge. It then continued to Stourbridge Junction. Later journeys were operated for the fare-paying public with every trip completely sold out. The following day, scheduled passenger services started over the Jewellery Line, thus changing the journey habits of Stourbridge line passengers forever.

Work starts on laying track north from Snow Hill station in the 1990s

Before the new link opened, the line had 4 trains per hour - 2 from Hereford, Great Malvern or Worcester to Birmingham New Street (stopping only at Cradley Heath after Stourbridge Junction) and 2 from Stourbridge Junction to New Street calling at all stations including Smethwick West and Smethwick Rolfe Street. The service was not always reliable given that drivers had to throw a six to gain access to the Wolverhampton to Birmingham line at Galton Junction and then another six to gain access to a platform at New Street.

The opening of the Jewellery Line saw 5 trains per hour with two of them from Hereford/Worcester - one operating via Snow Hill to Leamington Spa and the other to New Street. The latter normally ran non-stop from Stourbridge Junction although one train per week stopped at Smethwick West where the planned closure had been delayed for a year by a clerical error. The other three trains started at Stourbridge Junction and ran via Snow Hill to Stratford-upon-Avon, Shirley and Dorridge.

The next big change took place in 2004 with the number of trains between Stourbridge Junction and Birmingham increasing to 6 per hour, although this improvement was offset by the loss of a through service to Birmingham New Street which brought protests from SLUG and users of the Stourbridge line.

2009 also saw SLUG report that *"The survey of Kidderminster station site has taken place. A further site visit will evaluate the practicality of excavating the Comberton Hill bank to accommodate a bigger bus turnaround area. Regardless of minor details, the new Kidderminster station is on course for completion in 2010".*

Unfortunately, 2010 coincided with the start of austerity, and the envisaged funding for the station did not materialise. After that, the annual SLUG Public Meeting did not pass without SLUG members complaining about the inadequate facilities at the station, especially the toilet facilities.

SLUG kept the pressure up at its Committee Meetings, at Public Meetings and at the Worcestershire Rail User Group Alliance (WRUGA) meetings. Finally, in February 2015, £1.8 million of Government funding was secured towards the then total cost of £4.3 million. Initially, there were suggestions that the replacement station building should have a heritage feel to match the Severn Valley Railway's station. However, SLC Rail, the manager of the project on behalf of Worcestershire County Council, announced in 2017 that the station would be of a modern, predominantly glass, design to emphasise that this was the station for the modern railway while the SVR station served the heritage railway. SLUG was shown the plans at a committee meeting and was present at two public consultation events at the station. The first on 12 July 2017 attracted a very positive public response and led to a planning application being submitted in February 2018 and approved two months later. The second public event on 6 November 2018 informed the public on what would be happening during the reconstruction, a period that SLUG described as "short term pain for long term gain". The work had three distinct phases.

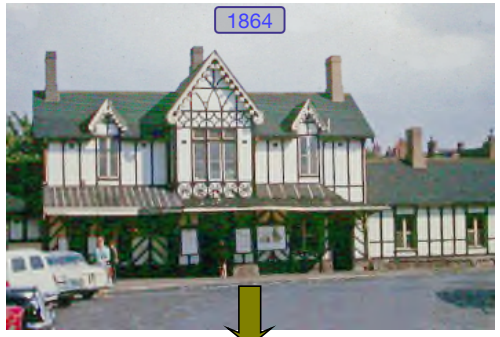
The November 2018 Public Event

1. The realignment and resurfacing of the station access road and forecourt (including the removal of the cobbles), the clearance of shrubs from the bank alongside Comberton Hill and the improvements to bus stops on Comberton Hill.
2. The demolition of the old station building which took place in late July and early August 2019.
3. The construction of the new station building which started in September 2019.

Out with the old - August 2019 …

… In with the new - September 2019

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER
by Roger Davis



Monday 8 June 2020 was a red letter day for Kidderminster's long-suffering rail passengers when the new station building opened. This ended a long campaign by SLUG and its members for an adequate building for a station with four trains per hour and over 1.6 million passengers a year (pre-Covid 19).

The SLUG Summer 2005 Newsletter reported that *"Much time was spent at our public meeting discussing the inadequacies of Kidderminster station which is the 6th busiest station in the West Midlands. The speakers all recognised the unsuitability of the building for a town of its size. The Group would like to see a completely new station building with a proper waiting room and at least two toilets."*

The Winter 2008 Newsletter reported that *"SLUG has seen detailed drawings of the new station and surrounding area but it would seem that there are still various options open for revision of the original design. The objective is to provide a more spacious station building with more passenger facilities but at the same time to protect the number of car parking spaces. The station area has been earmarked for an interchange incorporating three bus bays and shelters which will be located behind the existing taxi rank on land excavated from the shrub filled embankment. In addition, a layover bay will be constructed on the Severn Valley Railway car park"*.

The station saw one major improvement in 2009 when the new footbridge with lifts opened, greatly improving access to the Worcester bound platform from the Booking Office. It was somewhat ironic that the GWR owned the station before nationalisation as its nickname of the "Great Way Round" could have been used to describe the step-free 200 yards walk from the booking office to the Worcester platform by leaving the station, walking across the forecourt, turning right up Comberton Hill and then down the slope to the platform.

Since then, there have been some improvements offset by some cutbacks. Through services from Kidderminster to Birmingham increased, first to 3 trains per hour and latterly to 4 trains per hour. In addition, evening services have been improved and much improved Sunday services are expected next year, although without earlier Sunday morning services. Through services to Stratford-upon-Avon have increased from 1 to 2 trains per hour. On the downside, off-peak through services to Warwick and Leamington Spa have disappeared, while all through services to Hereford have been withdrawn and through services to Great Malvern radically reduced.

The 0920 service to London Marylebone at Stourbridge Junction on St George's Day 2016

The opening of the Jewellery Line also enabled Chiltern Railways to introduce through services to and from London Marylebone on Mondays to Saturdays, initially from Stourbridge Junction and then from Kidderminster. SLUG raised a lot of objections when Chiltern decided to withdraw through services from Marylebone on a Saturday evening but vigorous campaigning not only saw these services restored eventually but also saw Sunday services introduced in each direction. In addition, many of these services are now operated using the very comfortable Silver Sets.

Over the 25 years, local services have been operated by four different companies - Regional Railways (a division of British Rail) to 1997, Central Trains to 2007, London Midland to 2017 and the present incumbent West Midlands Railway. London Midland was responsible for the largest investment in the line in 2011 when it replaced the aging Class 150 units with brand-new Class 172 units. On the downside, it also slashed the opening hours of booking offices.

Old (Class 150) meets new (Class 172) at Stourbridge Junction on 2 August 2011

So what should the future hold? In the short term, the restoration of an hourly service to Leamington Spa must be considered to provide a single connection with services to the South East and the South Coast, while through services from the Stourbridge line to Oxford and London Paddington, and to Cheltenham Spa and beyond are on SLUG's campaign list. In the longer term, through trains to Hereford must be considered, while electrification of the Snow Hill lines is a no brainer. Finally, when HS2 is completed and Curzon Street station opened, passengers will celebrate our trains serving the adjacent Moor Street station rather than the remote New Street.

Let's hope that whoever writes the article "Golden Days" in issue 121 of *Platform* in September 2045 can report on 50 years of improvements along the Stourbridge line.

A "NEW NORMAL" TRAIN JOURNEY
by Andy Cope

Having heeded the Government health warnings that train travel was bad for my health and for essential travel only, I finally made my first journey since February on 1 September.

My initial observation on arrival at Stourbridge Junction just after 0900 was how empty the car park was. It felt as if about 80% of the usual rush-hour travellers were still not travelling.

On the station, hand sanitisers were available and safe distancing was well marked out. Platform benches were also marked out for social distancing. A member of staff was cleaning down the station hand rails on the subway steps.

The Stourbridge Town car carries clear information

At the time I arrived, there was no service to Stourbridge Town as this was one of the three gaps in service while both trains are being cleaned. Large signs on the Town car advertised the times of these gaps in service and also informed passengers that only 15 people could be conveyed. It will be interesting to see what happens when the schools return.

I caught the 0927 service which starts at Stourbridge Junction along with approximately a dozen other people, who were all wearing masks. However, as the journey progressed, a small minority of passengers who boarded at intermediate station were not wearing masks. There was plenty of space throughout the journey as the service was operated by a 5-car unit.

My journey was to and from Snow Hill, and everything seemed to be working well at that station. My return journey, at 1223 from Snow Hill, was much busier but the 4-car unit afforded plenty of room. Again, all passengers were wearing masks apart from a few who boarded at Smethwick Galton Bridge.

On both journeys, the senior conductor wore a mask, but there were no announcements or ticket checks. If I had one issue with the journeys, it would be that regular announcements should be made requesting that passengers should wear masks while at stations and during journeys.

Overall I felt that West Midlands Railway was doing a good job managing the current situation and I felt completely safe throughout both journeys. I will certainly be using train services in the near future.

NEWS IN BRIEF
compiled by Rob Hebron

A Bit Premature. In my article "Crisis after Crisis" (again in issue 20), I bemoaned the withdrawal of Diamond Bus service 303. I am happy to report that the route has been reprieved by Worcestershire County Council which is subsidising the service. Although the full hourly timetable has been restored, I would advise previous passengers to use it or lose it. The same applies to the hourly train service for Hartlebury which has taken so long to achieve.

Bus service 303 at Kidderminster Bus Station

(Source: Diamond Bus Company)

Still in the Running. I would like to make a slight clarification to the News In Brief section in the recent issue 20 of SLUG Platform: The PMOL bid for funding from the Government's "Reversing Beeching" scheme for a Stourbridge to Brierley Hill service has not been "unsuccessful". The DfT has asked for further information regarding the Brierley Hill line project. There has been a further list published, and (confusingly) PMOL does not appear on that. However, the company will be supplying DfT with the information they request and should know during the autumn whether it has ultimately been successful or not. *(Source: Pre Metro Operations Limited)*

CGI of the proposed Darlaston station

Start Digging. More than £60 million in new funding has been granted to the West Midlands to help it kick start so called 'shovel-ready' regeneration projects. The investment, announced in June, has come from the Government's Getting Building Fund, with up to £66 million being made available to the region. This injection of capital will enable projected new stations such as Darlaston and Moseley to be constructed. To its credit, this government is using infrastructure improvements to create jobs and replace those destroyed by lockdown. *(Source: Business Live)*

Shakespeare Line Adoptions. West Midlands Railway announced on 10 August that every station on the Tyseley – Shirley - Stratford-upon-Avon line had been adopted by volunteer groups tasked with making improvements to their station. This is the result of a lot of hard work by the Shakespeare Line Promotion Group who went out and recruited the volunteers for the remaining 11 unadopted stations on their line in only 4 months. SLUG is keen to see this replicated at every station along the Stourbridge line. At present, only Stourbridge Town and Stourbridge Junction have been adopted – by FoSS (Friends of Stourbridge Stations). Let's see if we can emulate the achievements of SLPG. *(Source: West Midlands Railway)*