WAS IT REALLY 25 YEARS AGO ?
by Roger Davis

(Mick Mabbutt)

(Mick Mabbutt)

It seems almost like yesterday but it was early summer in 1994 when work started on relaying the track between Smethwick Junction and Birmingham Snow Hill station.

The first photo shows the first length of track being positioned in September 1994, while the second shows the reconstruction of Smethwick Junction on 5 February 1995, which resulted in an engineering overrun as there were problems getting the new trackwork from Langley Green, where it had been assembled, past Rood End Road bridge to the site.

The estimated cost was £23 million but, as work progressed, it was found that four bridges, that were previously thought to require strengthening, needed to be completely replaced, pushing up the total cost by £5.5 million.

REAGAN EATS ARM (or ANAGRAM TEASER) - No 5

The clues below are all anagrams of stations in the United Kingdom which are served every day by direct West Midlands Trains services from Birmingham New Street.

All you have to do is unravel the anagrams. The answers will be given in the next issue.

1. CHILLY DEFICIT
2. CRETAN LORD LEFT
3. DAWN ADDED SULLENLY
4. ERNEST MORGAN
5. FRANTIC JUDO TOWN
6. GILL NEWTON
7. GRAB TENNER
8. HEAT RECORDS
9. IMPROVE TOILET SELLER
10. LEFT OLD DISCOUNT
11. LET EVERY NUT ALLERGY
12. LITTLE SCANNER MONKEY
13. MARATHON PINNED
14. MARINER OMITTING HANNIBAL
15. RECALL FILTH EVIDENTLY
16. STUDIES COMBAT
17. TAWDRY MAGPIE BAKER
18. YOU WALK OVER PATROL SHIP

WHERE ARE WE ? - No 4 ANSWERS

Here are the answers to Where Are We? No 4 which featured in the previous issue.

1 - Droitwich Spa, 2 - Cradley Heath, 3 - Blakedown, 4 - East of Langley Green, 5 - Approaching Hagley, 6 - Approaching Old Hill

PLATFORM 2

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

Issue 18 December 2019

The majesty of the old Snow Hill station is evident as a "King" class locomotive arrives in 1962.
(Michael Mensing)

CONTENTS

2 No Longer Stopping At … Fernhill Heath
3 The Bad Old Days - 150 Years Ago
4 All Change At… Smethwick Galton Bridge
5 Putting On The Style
8 Steam Locomotives of Stourbridge and Kidderminster Sheds
9 On Screen … The Stourbridge Main Line and Branches
11 A Change of Names
12 Was It Really 25 Years Ago ?
12 Platform 2 Quiz Corner - Questions and Answers

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NO LONGER STOPPING AT … FERNHILL HEATH
by John Warren

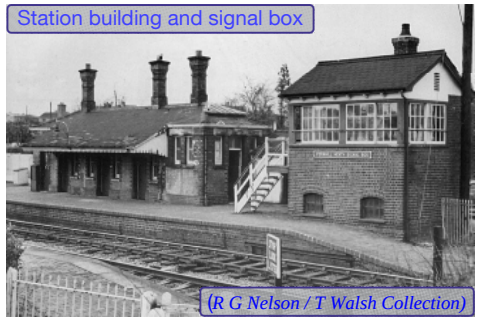
This is the last in a series of articles that looks at the stations between Birmingham Snow Hill and Worcester that have closed since 1960, working down the line from north to south.

Fernhill Heath station looking towards Droitwich

(Stations UK)

Date Opened	18 February 1852
Final Passenger Services on	3 April 1965
Number of Platforms	2
Number of Trains (1959)	14 (M-F), 13 (Sa), 0 (Su)
Number of Trains (1965)	10 (M-F), 10 (Sa), 0 (Su)

Station building and signal box



(R G Nelson / T Walsh Collection)

Station Name : Fearnhill Heath (February 1852 - July 1883), Fernhill Heath (July 1883 - April 1965).

Fernhill Heath station was situated just to the north of the A38 Worcester to Droitwich Spa trunk road as it passes through the village. A footbridge over the railway line marks the location of the station, which has been totally removed. The footbridge was installed in the early 1970s after the station had closed to provide pedestrian access over the railway line. When the station was open, access between the two platforms was provided by a walk over crossing. There have been campaigns over the years to reopen the station as it serves a large community to the north of Worcester. Worcestershire County Council had included a new station in their plans to improve rail travel in the county by 2030. The plan was for a new park and ride station close to the A38 and A449 trunk roads, further south of the original to provide better road access while still serving the village of Fernhill Heath. Unfortunately, this plan seems to have been dropped in favour of a similar station at Rushwick.

A CHANGE OF NAMES
by Roger Davis

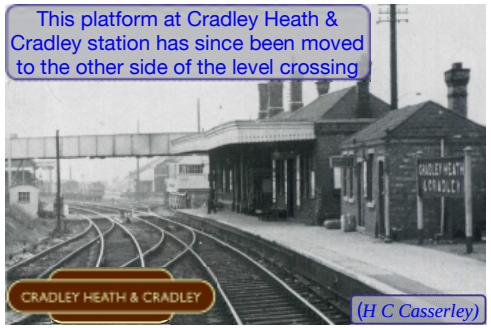
If you compare through journeys from Kidderminster to Stratford-upon-Avon or Leamington Spa in 1959 with the same journeys today, you will find that 1 station has been closed and reopened as a much smaller station (Birmingham Snow Hill), 6 did not exist in 1959 (Smethwick Galton Bridge, The Hawthorns, Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham Moor Street through platforms, Warwick Parkway and Stratford Parkway) and 5 have been closed since 1959 (Smethwick West, Hawthorns Halt, Handsworth & Smethwick, Soho & Winson Green and Hockley).

Birmingham Snow Hill in 1967 when it was still a magnificent main line station

(Warwickshire Railways website)

So, apart from the demolition of station buildings and their subsequent replacement by portakabins and bus shelters (as detailed on pages 5 to 7), and the closure of redundant platforms at some stations, nothing much has changed at the remaining 35 stations along the Snow Hill lines, despite attempts by Doctor Beeching and successive governments of the 60s, 70s and 80s to consign some of them to history.

This platform at Cradley Heath & Cradley station has since been moved to the other side of the level crossing



(H C Casserley)

However, one thing has changed at 14 of these stations and that is the name of the station, which in all cases has been shortened in the intervening years.

In 1959, trains stopped at Churchill & Blakedown, Cradley Heath & Cradley, Rowley Regis & Blackheath, Oldbury & Langley Green, Small Heath & Sparkbrook, Whitlock's End Halt, Grimes Hill & Wythall, Earlswood Lakes, The Lakes Halt, Danzey for Tanworth, Wootton Wawen Platform, Acock's Green & South Yardley, Knowle & Dorridge and Leamington Spa General.

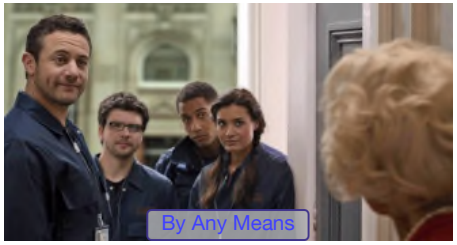
Churchill & Blakedown station has lost its station buildings since this 1960 photo was taken

(Joe Moss Coll'n)

Small Heath & Sparkbrook station had four platforms when King George V passed through in 1962

(Warwickshire Railways website)

When that series was axed in 2012, the production company needed a clone with the same slick (and somewhat unbelievable) storylines. They came up with *By Any Means*, which followed a clandestine unit, existing in the grey area between the law and justice, living on the edge and playing the criminal elite at their own game. By using cunning and deception, they trapped their targets and brought them to justice by any means possible. It starred Gina McKee (*Our Friends In The North*) as the mysterious woman who identified the targets, with Warren Brown (*Hollyoaks*, *Luther*) and Shelley Conn (*Mistresses*) as members of the team. While not set on the Stourbridge line, the unit's secret headquarters was actually underneath it – on the canal bank near Livery Street, and underneath the viaduct that takes the line north from Snow Hill towards St Paul's. The programme was axed after a single series of six episodes, possibly because it was even more unbelievable than *Hustle*.


By Any Means

By Any Means

In 2013, BBC2 commissioned a new cold war spy series, *The Game*. Ostensibly set in London in 1972, but filmed in Birmingham, it starred Tom Hughes (Prince Albert in *Victoria*) as a young MI5 operative, Brian Cox (the original screen Hannibal Lector) as his boss and Shaun Dooley (*Broadchurch*) as a Special Branch Officer. One scene shows Tom Hughes and Shaun Dooley following a female suspect to a London railway terminus, which looks remarkably like Birmingham Moor Street station.

The Game

There may be other programmes filmed at our two Birmingham stations, so please let us know at *platform@stourbridgelineusergroup.info* if you know of any.

In the next issue, we move southwards and look at television series filmed on the Severn Valley Railway.

THE BAD OLD DAYS - 150 YEARS AGO
by Roger Davis

150 years ago this month, on 8 December 1869, the main line between Birmingham and Stourbridge witnessed its most serious collision.

One of the trains involved was the 4.45 pm express service from Birmingham Snow Hill to Worcester, which carried through coaches to Cardiff. It had left Snow Hill two minutes late with the engine running tender first and pulling a guard's van immediately behind the engine, and four carriages. At Smethwick Junction, its only intermediate stop between Snow Hill and Stourbridge, another two carriages from Birmingham New Street were attached to the rear of the train, causing a further delay. As it approached Cradley station it was running six minutes late.

The second train was a coal train which was waiting to depart from Lane's End sidings which were situated on the north side of Lyde Green (the first overbridge south of Cradley station). Departures from the sidings were controlled by flags during daylight and by lamps after dark. The crew of the coal train had been given instructions that two southbound passenger trains would pass before a white light gave them authority to leave. The train would then pull onto the down (Stourbridge bound) line and then cross over onto the up (Birmingham bound) line just south of the River Stour.

Approaching Cradley Heath station.
Lane's End sidings were on the right

On a foggy evening, having already seen a goods train pass Cradley at 4.38 pm followed by a local passenger train at 4.51 pm, the Cradley signalman set the signals to give the express service a clear road through Cradley station at 5.15 pm and then left his signal box to walk down towards the sidings. He carried a white lamp to guide him on his route. Daniel Porter, the guard of the coal train, was stood alongside his train and, seeing a white light from the vicinity of the signal box and having seen two main line southbound services pass (albeit not passenger trains), gave the signal to his engine crew to depart, thinking that the express had passed on time. When he realised his mistake, he ran towards the station and flashed a red light at the oncoming express. Henry Richardson, the driver of the express immediately applied his brakes but it was too late. With the engine of the coal train and the first few coal wagons already straddling both main lines, the express train ploughed into it.

Henry Richardson jumped for his life just before impact and, although badly injured, escaped with his life. His unfortunate fireman, Charles Tasker, remained on the footplate and was killed immediately. The engine of the coal train was knocked down the embankment while the first few coal wagons were smashed to smithereens. The tender of the express engine span into an adjacent siding, the express engine finished on its side, the guard's van behind it was destroyed and the first two carriages were derailed, while the track was badly damaged. Amazingly, only one passenger was badly injured although many suffered minor injuries which were attended to by a couple of passengers with medical qualifications. The luckiest person was probably a porter who had sat in the guard's van from Snow Hill to Smethwick Junction before deciding to move back into one of the carriages. The three crew members of the coal train were uninjured although badly shocked by what had happened.

A telegram was sent to the Stourbridge Stationmaster who commandeered a train and sped to the scene, where he remained all night. Special trains also brought about 150 railway workers to the site. It seems impossible today but the gangs of workmen managed to get one line reopened within six hours, with the other line reopened about three or four hours later.

An enquiry into the crash revealed that Company regulations had been breached by all three of the coal train crew, the signalman and the yard foreman at Cradley station. After a coroner's inquest, the jury returned a verdict of manslaughter against Daniel Porter, the coal train guard and he was charged by the police. However at Stafford Assizes, the JP ruled that, as Porter had believed that the white light he had seen was a signal to proceed, the case against him must be dismissed. Therefore, the prosecution offered no evidence and he was found not guilty of the charge.

Material for this article was obtained from "The GWR at Stourbridge and the Black Country - Volume 2" by Clive Butcher. This excellent publication gives a far more detailed account of this accident and the events that followed.

ALL CHANGE AT … SMETHWICK GALTON BRIDGE
The changing scene at one of the Stourbridge line stations

ON SCREEN … THE STOURBRIDGE MAIN LINE AND BRANCHES
2. THE BBC IN BIRMINGHAM by John Warren

This is the second article in a series that looks at the occasions when the Stourbridge line or its branch lines have featured either in feature films or in television series.

Birmingham has been used as the location for many BBC TV series over the years and some of these have contained scenes in or around Moor Street or Snow Hill stations.

In 1975, an edition of the *Play for Today* series, titled *Gangsters*, was screened. It spawned two series with the same title and these were broadcast in 1976 and 1978. Among the stars were Maurice Colbourne (best known as the eponymous hero of *Howard's Way*), Saeed Jaffrey (the husband of cook Madhur Jaffrey) and Paul Barber (Denzil in *Only Fools and Horses*). As the title would indicate, the series centred on gang violence and warfare, predominately among different ethnic groups in the multi-cultural criminal community of Birmingham.

At the end of programme 1 of series 1 and the start of the following programme, a gangland battle took part in the disused Snow Hill station. Despite the scenes of dereliction and decay caused by 9 years of misuse (only a small part of the station and an entrance from Livery Street was used for the final five years of the station's existence), the former magnificence of the old station could still be seen. In fact, given the cramped conditions of its modern replacement, it is difficult to remember how they managed to cram such a magnificent station into the space available.

However, it seems that the BBC sees Birmingham as an adequate substitute for London when it comes to filming series. Of course, some buildings are almost indistinguishable from the originals – who can ever look at St Philip's Cathedral without thinking of St Paul's!

One series that moved its location physically from London to Birmingham, while pretending that it was set in the former, was *Hustle*, which saw its final three series filmed in and around Birmingham with stock footage inserted to give the impression that it was London.

STEAM LOCOMOTIVES OF STOURBRIDGE AND KIDDERMINSTER SHEDS
by John Warren

The following classes of locomotive were allocated to the steam sheds at Stourbridge (84F) and Kidderminster (85D) during August 1959.

1600 Class

84F : 1619, 1621

2251 Class

84F : 2270

4500 Class

85D : 5518

6400 Class

84F : 6401, 6403

8100 Class

85D : 8101

BR 3MT Class

85D : 82030

GWR Railcar

84F : W13W, W14W

Modified Hall

84F : 6987 Shervington Hall

Hall Class

84F : 4986 Aston Hall, 6930 Aldersey Hall

Grange Class

84F : 6855 Saighton Grange 6879 Overton Grange

85D : 6832 Brockton Grange

7400 Class

84F : 7429, 7430, 7432, 7435, 7441, 7448, 7449

2800 Class

84F : 2804, 2853, 2856, 2885, 2888, 2897, 3821, 3825, 3831, 3839, 3846

4300 Class

84F : 6317, 6332, 6340, 6349, 6367

85D : 5333, 5396, 6314, 6388

5100 Class

84F : 4104, 4140, 4146, 4161, 4168, 4173, 5176, 5189, 5199

85D : 4114, 4153, 4175, 5110

5600 Class

84F : 6604, 6609, 6646, 6667, 6674, 6677, 6678, 6683, 6692

85D : 6679

5700 Class

84F : 3649, 3658, 3710, 3729, 3743, 3745, 3767, 4646, 4687, 4696, 5754, 5795, 8704, 8742, 8792, 8797, 9613, 9624, 9636, 9719, 9767, 9782

85D : 3601, 4629, 4641, 7700, 8718

The information above was obtained from the book Shed by Shed by Tony Walmsley (published 2009)

PUTTING ON THE STYLE
by Rob Hebron

Our day to day routine travelling to work and elsewhere does not permit much time to study our departure points. The frequency of trains at Stourbridge Junction, for instance, means that we spend minimal time in the station environment. The same applies for users of other stations along the Stourbridge Line. As a former student of architecture, I have retained interest in buildings even though I have no formal qualifications. Railway architecture is a fascinating subject and the Stourbridge Line stations are both uniform and diverse in style.

I have only a dim memory of Birmingham Snow Hill Station and that was when my junior school organised a trip to Aston Hall. The Great Western Railway provided a magnificent terminus for the Second City with 12 platforms. Each of these platforms was surmounted by rooms for passengers and staff. Some were waiting rooms, some were newspaper vendors and others were offices for organising the despatch of parcels and goods. The scene today is very different and the four platforms of the present station are devoid of porters' trolleys, luggage and free standing notice boards. The chocolate and cream paintwork of the old station has been replaced by an abundance of clinical white. The station has passed from the GWR to British Railways and been rebuilt by Centro (TfWM). Birmingham Snow Hill is functional but aesthetically challenged.

Jewellery Quarter, The Hawthorns and Smethwick Galton Bridge have a modern house style. Metal is prevalent within and without. The cladding materials are bright and clean but the designs of these three stations lack warmth and character.

Langley Green is a modern station but, in contrast to the Jewellery Line Three, its brick built ticket office with pitched roof is pleasing to the eye. The best features are the elevated clock and side facing portals contained within three narrow arches.

Rowley Regis has little to offer at platform level but the overall roof on either side forms much needed weather protection, reinforced by standard Network Rail waiting shelters and wind screens. The booking office is accessed by stairs and is contained within the bridge between platforms. The exterior of the building located in Station Road, Blackheath is totally uninspiring and has lost original features as demonstrated by unsympathetic bricked-up doorways and windows.

Old Hill was once a junction station with three platforms but has been dramatically rationalised. The Birmingham bound platform is host to a minimalist ticket office constructed in concrete blocks. Waiting shelters are provided but fall short of local passengers' expectations of capacity and protection from the elements.

Cradley & Cradley Heath (1962)
(Lens of Sutton)

Cradley Heath station is another rationalised station which hitherto was an arrangement of two staggered platforms at a level crossing. The present brick built ticket office with pitched roof is very modular in design but it is substantial and a vast improvement on the previous near-derelict building.

Lye station is probably the least attractive of all the Stourbridge line stations. The redundant booking office is merely a wooden hut and of no benefit to the passenger or the environment. The most attractive features of the station are the metal lattice footbridge and the iron railings lining the ramp from Pedmore Road to the Birmingham bound platform.

Stourbridge Junction retains many of its GWR design features. The booking office has been remodelled to incorporate electronic sliding doors but at platform level, the station is still very "period". Waiting rooms on Platforms Two and Three are still in use. Interior walls have been tiled and metal benches installed. The traditional sash windows have been adorned with patterned vinyl sheets to replicate etched glass but these fake additions have been peeled off by vandals and should be removed altogether. The canopies on all platforms have been shortened in length and the boards which form the new gables are being replaced. The tasteful London Midland paint scheme of black and lime green has been replaced by West Midlands Railway orange. A newsagent and coffee outlet are a useful addition to Platform Two.

Hagley

Hagley is the first rural station in the southerly direction and locals are fortunate that it is staffed part-time. Railway employees keep this station in pristine condition and it is a little gem. The Worcester bound platform still has its original booking office and waiting room and the building has retained its awning to protect passengers waiting outside. Sadly, the Birmingham bound platform has no heritage buildings whatsoever and its sole facility is a standard metal and glass waiting shelter. However, this is of little concern to the large numbers of pupils from Haybridge School who arrive here from the dedicated footpath. The footbridge at Hagley is an outstanding feature with its wooden adornments known individually as "dog tooth". Viewing the station from within the train, the cream and light brown paintwork of the station gives it an appearance very similar to Severn Valley Railway stations. The passenger could easily imagine he or she was behind a steam locomotive.

Blakedown station comprises two standard metal waiting shelters and the platforms are lined with a lengthy white painted picket fence. There is a level crossing here but the attractive signal box that stood here for years has been removed. There are plans to relocate it and convert it to a coffee shop type venture.

Kidderminster (1949)
(H C Casserley)

Kidderminster station building resembled a cardboard box and had no outstanding architectural features at all. It was so removed from the exquisite black and white timbered building which it replaced that it defied justification. Fortunately, SLUG has long campaigned for a new station within an interchange and this is under construction. The new station is a modern, predominantly glass, structure to provide a contrast to the heritage style of the adjacent Severn Valley Railway Kidderminster Town station.

Hartlebury station has been stripped back of many architectural features. Its main station building survives but in private hands, serving as a public house with its own brewery. The structure has lost its canopy but passengers are expected to wait within the metal shelters installed by Network Rail.

Droitwich Spa is a staffed station and the Worcester bound platform has a ticket office and shop housed within the attractive modern brick built structure. The positioning of windows and poster boards create a pleasant appearance of symmetry. The approach road to the platform still has an original railway building intact but it is not in use. Another relic on the same platform is an engineer's store which seems to be permanently locked.

Worcester Foregate Street

Worcester Foregate Street station is a city centre terminus but boasts only two platforms due to its position on a bridge over a main road. This bridge viewed at street level is very attractive with heraldic devices painted in tasteful colours. At platform level, there are signs of decay in the brickwork but to be fair, there is plenty of seating, a cosy restaurant and toilet facilities are immaculate. Downstairs, the foyer has been given a makeover thanks to Worcestershire County Council and the whole area has been transformed to a much cleaner and brighter environment.

I started my assessment of Stourbridge Line stations with an open mind, hoping to praise the standard of architectural design. The fact is that many fine structures and artefacts have been destroyed in the relentless pursuit of economies. Network Rail has an ongoing programme of station improvements but the process is slow and the taxpayer has to pay for any extravagance. We will never again see the equivalent of Birmingham Snow Hill and its magnificent Great Western Hotel frontage. However, I believe that rebuilds can be tasteful as well as functional.