PLATFORM 2

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Kidderminster Town station - a replica GWR style station. It's Spring Bank Holiday Monday but the normal large crowds are missing.

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ON SCREEN … THE STOURBRIDGE MAIN LINE AND BRANCHES
4. THE SEVERN VALLEY ON TV - 1995-2013 by John Warren

This is the fourth 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.

In the previous issue, we looked at television series that had been filmed on the Severn Valley Railway in the years from 1972 to 1993. We now move forward to 1995 and to the comedy series that is probably the most associated with the railway.

Oh Doctor Beeching! was written by David Croft, this time with Richard Spendlove. As was customary with a Croft comedy, the cast was made up of his inner sanctum of comedy actors and this time three stars from *Hi-De-Hi* took the leading roles - Paul McShane, Jeffrey Holland and Su Pollard. They were joined by Stephen Lewis who swapped his *On the Buses* Inspector's uniform for a BR Signalman's uniform.

The programme was set in 1963, the year of the Beeching Report, and centred on a fictional country railway station called Hatley. The actual setting was Arley station, and a set consisting of a row of railwaymen's cottages was constructed in the goods yard as the homes of the main characters. One locomotive operated by the Severn Valley Railway, number 46521, was used in all 19 episodes broadcast. As usual, the characters were typecast with Su Pollard as the slightly deranged booking clerk (rather than a deranged cleaner), Paul Shane as the slightly dodgy Porter (rather than dodgy Camp Host), Jeffrey Holland as the officious station master and Stephen Lewis as Stephen Lewis, a role he later reprised in *Last of the Summer Wine*.

Oh Doctor Beeching!

Arley station was used for a second time in 1998 with the filming, by ITV, of *Goodbye Mister Tom*, which won the BAFTA for best TV drama that year. It was a one-off film set in World War II and was based on the 1981 book by Michelle Magorian. It starred the late, great John Thaw as the eponymous reclusive widower who takes Willie Beech, an evacuee from Deptford who had been physically and emotionally abused by his mother, into his country home. Later in the film, Willie is compelled to return to his mother in war-torn London and Tom takes him to the local station in his horse and trap.

Goodnight Mister Tom

Doctors

In 2009, the BBC's daytime soap *Doctors* visited Bewdley station to film a sequence where a woman threatened to jump from the footbridge.

Finally, the BBC returned in February 2012 to film *Dancing On The Edge*, a series that was broadcast on BBC2 during 2013. This drama was directed by Stephen Poliakoff and its stars included John Goodman, Mel Smith, Anthony Head, Jacqueline Bisset and Jane Asher, plus Jenna Coleman and Tom Hughes before they became a royal married couple in *Victoria*. The series was about a black jazz band in London in the early 1930s. Near the end of the last episode, the band travel by train from "Bromley South" to "Folkestone", or Bewdley to Kidderminster Town as they are better known.

Dancing On The Edge at "Bromley South" (Bewdley)

Dancing On The Edge at "Folkestone" (Kidderminster)

Other television series that have had episodes filmed at the SVR have included *Doctor Who*, *Sorry!*, *Chucklevision* and *The District Nurse*.

In the next issue, we will look at a couple of feature films that were filmed on location at the Severn Valley Railway.

FAKE
by Rob Hebron

It would be fair to say that the general public is getting increasingly frustrated with so-called “Fake News”. Rogue elements of the media use falsehoods as a tool to deceive and manipulate the masses. Now, as we re-examine the phrase, we realise that it is not a new phenomenon but has existed for centuries in the form of “propaganda”. However, if we overlook the malicious aspects of “fake”, the word can be defined as “imitation”.

Kidderminster Town station

How does this relate to railways? Shock! Horror! The Severn Valley Railway’s station, Kidderminster Town is a fake. From its appearance, who would guess that this beautiful structure is not even a replica of one of the previous Kidderminster stations? It is in fact, a facsimile of a GWR style station building and was purpose built for the Severn Valley Railway. Traditionalists would argue that the building has no history and they would be right. There has never been a railway station on this site because it was formerly occupied by sidings. In this context, it is not a replica of anything but merely a terminus that the Great Western Railway might have built, contemporary to the operation of the line. Who would argue that the public deserve the facilities provided – a restaurant, public bar, bookstall and toilets?

Further up the line, a station is named “Country Park Halt”. Again, this station never existed in the previous incarnation of the SVR. Its purpose is to facilitate access to the Severn Valley Country Park and provides the railway with revenue which it can use for restoring original infrastructure. This is the reasoning behind a proposed “Safari Park” station which would draw in tourist passengers who could park their cars there and enjoy two attractions.

The new Broadway station has a genuine bridge - but it came from Henley-in-Arden !.

The closure of main lines and branches in the fifties and sixties was followed (with indecent haste) by the demolition of many fine station buildings, platforms and bridges. The private heritage railways companies which purchased and preserved the lines had little choice than to build again from scratch – fake but sympathetic replacements. Preserved lines do not necessarily mean everything has been preserved and so the managers frequently have to beg, borrow or steal in order to recreate the scenery which the customer would expect. Bridges, shelters and signal boxes are acquired from other locations to do the job. The artefacts are genuine but the location is fake!

The Nene Valley Railway is a good example of improvisation. The line from Peterborough (Nene Valley) extends to Yarwell where a station never existed but does now. The penultimate station is Wansford and opened in 1995. The building here is of a design completely different to the original built in Jacobean style. At the time, the real station dating back to 1845 was in private hands, serving an industrial purpose. In 2015 the NVR purchased this building and the railway can now boast two stations at the same location. The NVR need rolling stock at a time when all nearly the redundant British Railways steam locomotives and coaches had been salvaged by other heritage railways. Its solution was to employ trains from the continent which makes the NVR unique. The company does not advertise a historical reproduction of years gone by. Even if things are not quite the same, there is nothing fake about the experience of riding the line or the smiles on children's faces.

Wansford station on the Nene Valley Railway

Original station

New station

Is it sacrilege to introduce fake decoration or identity? It depends if the result is tasteful or tacky. Some years ago some unknown railway employee decided to apply patterned vinyl to the windows of waiting rooms at Stourbridge Junction. The desired effect was to imitate etched glass. Sadly, vandals realised how easy it was to peel off sticky vinyl and left a worse impression than if the glass was left clear.

The boldest venture to date is the attempt to recreate the Great Western Railway. The franchisee for the Cotswold Lines and beyond operated under the name "First Great Western" but has recently re-branded as simply "Great Western Railway". Of course, it is purely a train operating company and does not own the system, unlike its predecessor of the same name. Nevertheless, its trains have a tasteful dark green livery and a logo reminiscent of the first GWR. If the new Great Western Railway aspires to evolve and embrace the spirit and ethos of the old GWR, where is the harm? It is what the original might have evolved into and not a deliberate fake.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. I have cited examples of copying and counterfeiting and in most cases it is justified. One thing that is certain is that SLUG's newsletters will always contain real information and never, ever fake news.

TITLED TRAINS ALONG THE STOURBRIDGE LINE - PART 1
by Roger Davis

This is the first in a series of articles that looks at the seven titled express services that operated along sections of the line between Birmingham Moor Street and Worcester Shrub Hill, in chronological order of their first run over the line.

The Cambrian Coast Express operated along the section of line between Leamington Spa and The Hawthorns from 1927 to 1967.

It was in July 1921 that the Great Western Railway introduced a through Saturday service from London Paddington to Aberystwyth. On 15 July 1927, this train received its permanent title of the "Cambrian Coast Express" and started running on Fridays as well. By 1939, the Friday service had been withdrawn and the outset of World War II saw the Saturday service withdrawn on 9 September 1939.

The Cambrian Coast Express passes through Soho & Winson Green station on its way to London

(Robert Ferris)

It was reinstated on 7 July 1951 as a summer only weekend service, but by 1954 it has been enhanced to run Mondays to Saturdays all year round. The train contained two portions – one to Aberystwyth with a Restaurant Car throughout and the other to Barmouth. The second portion was extended to Pwllheli in the second half of the 1950s. Over the years, the location where the train split into two portions changed and it is thought that there was a period where the service ran as two separate portions west of Wolverhampton, while another period saw the train split/combined on Abbey Foregate curve in Shrewsbury.

In the late 1950s, the up service to London combined at Dovey Junction while the down train split at Machynlleth. On Saturdays, the service bypassed Shrewsbury in both directions while the up service to Paddington started at Barmouth Junction, a four-platformed station situated south of the famous Barmouth Bridge at the junction with the line to Dolgellau, Bala, Llangollen and Ruabon.

By 1957, it was usually operated from London Paddington to Wolverhampton by a "King" Class locomotive, the Western Region's most powerful locomotive.

As a “King” was not allowed beyond Wolverhampton, a lighter “Castle” class locomotive replaced it for the short onwards journey to Shrewsbury where a much lighter “Manor” class locomotive was used for the journey over the Cambrian lines. This very inefficient use of loco power was resolved in 1958 when “King” class locomotives were allowed to operate to Shrewsbury.

The timetable in 1959 shows that the Monday to Friday times differed considerably from the Saturday times, which are shown in brackets.

London Paddington 1010 (1050) : Banbury General 1124 (1215) : Leamington Spa General …. (1243) : Birmingham Snow Hill 1217 (1320) : Wolverhampton Low Level 1243 (1346) : Shrewsbury 1323 (....) : Welshpool 1401 (1456) : Newtown 1430 (1528) : Machynlleth arr 1520 (1618) : TRAIN SPLIT : FRONT PORTION : Machynlleth 1525 (1623) : Dovey Junction 1531 (….) : Borth 1545 (1646) : Aberystwyth 1605 (1710) : REAR PORTION : Machynlleth 1540 (1630) : Penhelig Halt 1602 (….) : Aberdovey 1606 (1651) : Towyn 1614 (1702) : Tonfanau 1621 (....) : Llwyngwril 1632 (1715) : Fairbourne 1640 (1724) : Barmouth Junction 1644 (1727) : Barmouth 1650 (1733) : Dyffryn-Ardudwy 1703 (….) : Harlech 1717 (1800) : Penrhyndeudraeth 1729 (1814) : Portmadoc 1738 (1821) : Criccieth 1750 (1835) : Afon Wen 1756 (1843) : Penychain 1802 (1850) : Pwllheli 1810 (1900).

FRONT PORTION : Pwllheli 0955 (....) : Criccieth 1014 (....) : Portmadoc 1025 (....) : Penrhyndeudraeth 1035 (....) : Harlech 1050 (....) : Llanbedr and Pensarn 1058 (....) : Dyffryn-Ardudwy 1105 (....) : Barmouth 1120 (....) : Barmouth Junction 1126 (0845) : Fairbourne 1129 (0850) : Llwyngwril 1140 (0905) : Tonfanau …. (0915) : Towyn 1159 (0902) : Aberdovey 1206 (0930) : Penhelig Halt 1210 (0936) : Dovey Junction arr 1223 (0950) : REAR PORTION : Aberystwyth 1145 (0925) : Borth 1205 (0945) : Dovey Junction arr 1225 (1000) : TRAIN COMBINED : Dovey Junction 1233 (1008) : Machylleth 1243 (1020) : Moat Lane Junction 1326 (....) : Newtown 1335 (1117) : Welshpool 1407 (1155) : Shrewsbury 1452 (....) : Wolverhampton Low Level 1535 (1318) : Birmingham Snow Hill 1600 (1342) : Leamington Spa General 1625 (1413) : London Paddington 1800 (1610).

The Cambrian Coast Express passes through Hockley station on its way to Wales

(Robert Ferris)

The Cambrian Coast Express last ran on 4 March 1967, the day that long distance express services through Wolverhampton Low Level and Birmingham Snow Hill were withdrawn, leaving both stations with a limited local service that would linger on until complete closure on 6 March 1972.

So, what has happened to the route since?

The old GWR main line from London Paddington to South Ruislip no longer exists as a through route. This may change in the future if Chiltern Railways go ahead with plans to increase services. There is no available space to expand Marylebone station so the alternative would be to reinstate the section south of Greenford and run services to the proposed GWR/HS2/Crossrail station at Old Oak Common.

In Wales, the Cambrian lines boasted a number of remote junction stations. Of the four served by the Cambrian Coast Express, Dovey Junction still exists under its original name. Barmouth Junction was renamed as Morfa Mawddach on 13 June 1960, despite it remaining as a junction station until the line to Ruabon closed on 18 January 1965. The station still exists today as a single platform halt.

The other two stations were not as lucky. Moat Lane Junction, east of Caersws, was at the junction with a line to Llanidloes and closed on 31 December 1962, the same day as the branch line. Afon Wen, west of Criccieth, was at the junction with a line to Caernarvon and Bangor. In fact, Afon Wen had a through train from London Euston as well as London Paddington, with the train running via Crewe, Llandudno Junction, Bangor and Caernarvon to Afon Wen where it split with the front portion continuing to Portmadoc and the rear portion reversing to terminate at Pwllheli. The station closed on 7 December 1964, the same day as the line to Bangor.

Dovey Junction

Barmouth Junction

Remote Cambrian Junction Stations

Moat Lane Junction

Afon Wen

However, trains over the line still exist. A through service from London to Aberystwyth did run over the years until 1991 but the London terminus was Euston and it operated as an extension to the regular-interval service over the West Coast Main Line between London and Wolverhampton. These days, the service is operated by Transport for Wales and starts at Birmingham International. An extension to London was under consideration but has not materialised, probably fortunately given the chaos caused by extending Chase Line services to London Euston.

The major change since the 1950s is the journey time. The Cambrian Coast Express took just under 4 hours to reach Aberystwyth from Birmingham Snow Hill and just under 6 hours to reach Pwllheli. Today the journey times from Birmingham New Street have been reduced by about an hour to both of these destinations.

RAILWAY ANNOUNCEMENTS : WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN
by John Warren

We thank you for travelling with Southern Railway and apologise for the late arrival into London Victoria station.
Serves you right for travelling on Southern Railway even though you had no choice.

Hi, I'm Gary, your Retail Service manager. There will be an at-seat trolley service on this CrossCountry service.
If you're really lucky, I'll be at your seat just before we reach Penzance.

The 1609 service to Worcester Foregate Street is delayed.
We haven't got the faintest idea where it is or what is wrong with it.

Hi, I'm Gary, your Retail Service manager. Refreshments are available in coach B.
I'm a lazy so-and-so, so you can do the walking instead of me.

First Class is at the rear of the train.
However, it could be at the front, because we're guessing.

Due to weather conditions, this CrossCountry train will terminate at Exeter St David's rather than Penzance today.
Network Rail management don't give a toss about people from Devon or Cornwall so why should our management. Anyway, why should we teach our Voyagers how to swim through Dawlish?

We've just arrived at Honeybourne. Because of a short platform, passengers wishing to alight must do so from the front four carriages - A, B, C and D.
If you're still in coach H, run as fast as you can.

The estimated arrival time at destination station is 2029.
That's the year, not just before half past eight.

Hi, I'm Gary, your Retail Service manager. A selection of food and cold drinks is available from the trolley.
We've forgotten the hot water.

Passengers changing trains at Birmingham New Street are advised to use the escalators at the B end of the platforms.
You never know, one of them might actually be working.

THE ROAMING EMPIRE
Part 1 : HARTLEBURY by Rob Hebron

The SLUG website www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info features a tab marked "timetables". A quick click reveals not only current timetables but historic bus services too. A comparison of journey opportunities now and then is very interesting. Whilst train patronage has increased dramatically over the last twenty years, bus usage has declined to the point where journey opportunity is severely limited. I have studied the rise and fall of the roaming empire and found that short local journeys are much harder to make than inter-city ones. This is a bizarre but factual reality.

The Stourbridge Line User Group can take credit for lobbying train companies to maximise stations: Hartlebury now has a respectable hourly service, six days a week. Residents of the village can now spend a day or evening out in Worcester. However, the nearest town, Stourport-on-Severn is not an attractive destination from Hartlebury using public transport. Even back in 1968 only three journeys per day were available using the K19 bus service.

A service 300 bus waits at Kidderminster station forecourt

For a brief period, between 2003 and 2005, a two hourly bus service (no. 300) linked the village and town *on Sundays!* This enabled tourists to visit the County Museum at Hartlebury as well as giving them travel possibilities further afield to Worcester and Bewdley in the other direction. Thanks to government cuts to local authority budgets, a regular bus to train link is now unlikely, despite Hartlebury being a natural rail head for Stourport-on-Severn.

Villages have taken the brunt of public transport cuts, despite losing local amenities such as post offices, shops and pubs. Now even bigger populations in towns are suffering isolation. Bewdley is a good example. Once joined to the Stourbridge line by the Severn Valley line, it no longer has a daily public train service. Plans to introduce through trains to the West Midlands Safari Park and beyond are optimistic. On the face of it, the bus service network for Bewdley is impressive (Nos. 2, 125, 291 and 292) collectively providing a service above a half hourly frequency. There is even a new Bewdley to Worcester bus service (296) but not via Hartlebury. All very well in the daytime but during the evenings and on Sunday there are no bus links at all.

In stark contrast, a resident of Kidderminster can reach London Marylebone or London Paddington by train, seven days a week and remain in the capital until early evening. This might involve a connection at Birmingham or Worcester but at least the trip is possible and at most times, convenient.

A service 133 bus linking Birmingham with Stourport is seen in Hagley Road in the 1970s

Public transport is now strictly supply and demand. London and Birmingham are the magnets for employment, education and leisure. Times change and so do logistics. Yes, there are ghost towns in the United Kingdom and people need to travel more. The benefit for Hartlebury of a good train service is that the village can promote itself as being in the "commuter belt". It raises the value of housing in the location.

Where railway lines and stations are re-opened, they are used and usage increases. Bearing in mind the cost of restoring railways, why is the restoration of bus services not an option? Put the two modes of transport together with light rail schemes and integrate them into a network and it would all make sense. That would require joined up thinking. We have a West Midlands Combined Authority but when it comes to boosting public transport across the area, there is nothing to suggest any combinations or collaborations are going on. Roaming wherever and whenever is a long way away, literally!

ALL CHANGE AT … ROWLEY REGIS
The changing scene at one of the Stourbridge line stations

BACK TO THE FUTURE II … RAILWAY STYLE
by Roger Davis

After our Back To The Future photo feature in the previous edition of *Platform 2*, one of our members contacted us with a photo he had taken at Birmingham New Street station. He was pleased to see on the departure board that the 19:51 service to Sandwell & Dudley and Wolverhampton was on time. What confused him was that the platform clock showed that the current time was actually 19:57 and he confirmed on his watch that this was correct.

Unfortunately, this happens regularly as the photo below, taken at Wolverhampton, proves.

NAME THE STATION - No 6 : NEW

The following 10 stations, past, present and future, have the word New somewhere in their name. Can you name them?

1. Would it cost 1000 or 2000 Guineas to use this station?
2. This station has the highest footfall of all “New” stations.
3. The terminus of a branch line from Par.
4. An important railhead in steam days, this station is served by trains between Newport and Hereford.
5. The northernmost station on the Wirral.
6. This station was just north of the Junction on the Somerset & Dorset Railway.
7. This is the third station (after Town and Harbour) in a south coast port. It is partially demolished and hasn’t seen a passenger since 2010, but is still officially open although a formal closure procedures have now been instigated.
8. Until 1975, this was the junction station for the Bridport branch.
9. You would use this station if you wanted to watch the Lockinge Stakes.
10. An important junction in South Devon for holidaymakers.

WHERE ARE WE ? - No 5 ANSWERS

Here are the answers to Where Are We? No 5 which featured in the previous issue.

1 - Passing Hampton Lovatt Church, 2 - Approaching Stourbridge Junction, 3 - Leaving Old Hill Tunnel, 4 - Between Stourbridge Junction and Lye, 5 - Hartlebury, 6 - Smethwick West