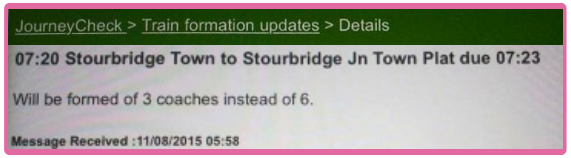
ALL CHANGE AT … BLOWERS GREEN
The changing scene at a location on the Stourbridge to Dudley line

It's hard to imagine that this is the same location. The line from Dudley to Stourbridge Junction carries on to the right of the 1964 photo while the "Bumble Hole" line to Old Hill diverges to the left with a GWR Pannier Tank propelling its auto train towards Old Hill. All traces of the junction have been totally removed by the building of the embankment carrying the Dudley southern bypass (Duncan Edwards Way).

SIGN OF THE TIMES

London Midland apparently tried to resolve the issue of overcrowding on the Town Car on 11 August 2015 but did not have enough coaches to achieve their objective.



MANAGES AT REAR (or ANAGRAM TEASER) - No 6

The clues below are all anagrams of stations either on the Stourbridge line, or branch lines of the Stourbridge line, that were closed during the 1960s.

All you have to do is unravel the anagrams. The answers will be given in issue 23.

1. BARS HILL HUT
2. BOWEL STINTS
3. DENTAL SPIT BATH
4. DID BANANAS DRY BY LAKE
5. ENDORSE NOON WASHING
6. FATHERLY POLKA
7. HANDLED BY RAT
8. HIGH ROLLED THISTLE
9. HITLER HALF HEN
10. LEAVING LAWS
11. LEGS WERE BORN
12. NEVER SPONSOR TROUT
13. OPEN ENCASED CYLINDERS
14. SHED MATCH WHO WANTS DRINK
15. TENT LABELLER
16. TIGER SOUGHT BREAD
17. TUG TALLER CHANNEL
18. VAIN WIFE SPOTTY

WHERE ARE WE ? - No 6 ANSWERS

Here are the answers to Where Are We? No 6 which featured in the previous issue.

1 - Worcester Shrub Hill, 2 - Rowley Regis, 3 - Hoobrook Viaduct, 4 - Approaching Lye, 5 - Approaching Rainbow Hill Tunnel, 6 - Station Road, Langley Green

PLATFORM 2

Issue 22 December 2020

Happier, pre-Covid days at Kidderminster Town station on 21 April 2018. King Class 6023 "King Edward II" displays the headboard for the "Inter City" from Paddington to Wolverhampton Low Level

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OLD DOG - NEW TRICKS
by Rob Hebron

SLUG Officer, Andy Cope has recently described the “new normal” with regard to Stourbridge Line rail journeys. There is no doubt that the Coronavirus has not only disrupted timetables but the travelling experience as well. There are strict government regulations in place for public transport but how does that affect the private heritage railways? I was able to make my own observations by taking a trip to Bridgnorth on the Severn Valley Railway.

Service 125 runs hourly from Stourbridge to Kidderminster Town station on Mondays to Saturdays

On Saturday 24 October, I set out from Stourbridge. The first leg of my journey was by bus rather than train. I chose to take my family on the 10:10 departure of the No. 125 bus service to Kidderminster. My reasons were twofold.

Firstly, trains to Kidderminster had been unreliable all week. Secondly, we were travelling with our 13-month-old granddaughter and a pushchair. A journey from Stourbridge Town might involve conflicts with capacity on the Town Car and we would also need the lifts to transfer to Platform 3 at Stourbridge Junction. (As it turned out, I discovered the lifts were out of order on the day).

On arrival at Comberton Hill, the newly installed bus shelter was provided with a raised curb which was perfect to unload the pushchair. Unfortunately, even in the new millennium, many railway stations are not infant-friendly and there is often a dangerous gap between an open train door and the platform.

Kidderminster Town station during lockdown in May

We had booked the SVR trip in advance, online. The website advised intending passengers to arrive up to 45 minutes early, to avoid overcrowding of the station by too many latecomers. This advice appeared to have been heeded and we waited for a minimal time in an orderly queue outside the building. A member of staff in SVR uniform allowed family groups into the ticket office at intervals. Once inside, we were able to use the hand sanitiser and were provided with wristbands rather than tickets to avoid contamination by ticket checks or handovers.

THE ROAMING EMPIRE
Part 3 : BLAKEDOWN by Rob Hebron

The general public tend to blame Doctor Richard Beeching and the government of the day for the decimation of the British railway network in the nineteen sixties. In fact, the motor omnibus companies were equally culpable. Just as the old railway companies expanded and built empires, so did the emerging bus operators. Suddenly there was a cheaper alternative to the train and offered long distance routes too.

The Birmingham and Midland Motor Omnibus Company (B.M.M.O.) better known as Midland Red, lured passengers away from the Stourbridge to Wolverhampton railway line and contributed to its closure. The Stourbridge Line has survived to this day but has lost wayside stations and halts. Surprisingly, Blakedown still enjoys a creditable level of train service but is not a station to use for transfer to bus.

Back in 1968, a resident of Blakedown or Churchill could travel to Birmingham by train or bus. Three separate bus services (132, 133, and 192) operated via Halesowen and Bearwood providing the backbone of the North Worcestershire network. Though only a small community, Blakedown had arguably a more varied and assorted range of destinations than Hartlebury (a village covered in my first article of the series).

Blakedown folk could reach Worcester by train or bus (315), both travelling via Kidderminster. The intrepid roamer could even reach Wolverhampton from Blakedown on the 885 bus service. This bus route which commenced from Kidderminster was an oddity, even by today’s standards. It ran via Blakedown, Hackman’s Gate, Hagley, Pedmore, Stourbridge, Kingswinford and Penn. Luckily, for Kidderminster based customers there was an alternative 883 which was quicker (via Wolverley and Kinver) but this only ran three times daily. The 885 was curtailed after the introduction of the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive.

885 from Wolverhampton to Kidderminster

Midland Red bus services started to decline when the company lost the densely populated urban areas of North Worcestershire and Staffordshire. Thankfully, the train service improved. In 2020, Blakedown has only one bus service (192) operated by Diamond Bus and that runs hourly to either Kidderminster or Halesowen. The County Council has tried shopping services from Kidderminster to Belbroughton via Blakedown and Churchill. Sadly, they were not well patronised and were withdrawn to be replaced by community bus services which are not available to the general public.

Blakedown is akin to Hartlebury because the rail station is vital for commuting or roaming. Both have an evening service which is not provided by the bus company. Because their train service is so precious, I would warn Blakedown parish councillors to be vigilant because if ever a parkway station was built at Offmore Farm then Blakedown train services would be downgraded and the station possibly closed. Use it or lose it. Keep roaming!

TRUMPED UP NEWS EXTRA
authenticated by ~~Donald Fake~~ Beau Jiden

Commuters reacted angrily when Northern Rail's 0650 service from Hazel Grove to Manchester Piccadilly departed this morning – on time! Season ticket holder Albert Ramsbottom told us "It's disgusting. I arrived at the station at 0655 as normal to find that the train had already left. If they want to operate a reliable train service, it should be late EVERY day".

After 20 years of research, managers at CrossCountry Trains have found a solution to the problem whereby passengers have to change at Exeter because the Voyager units refuse to travel over the sea wall section at Dawlish when rough high tides are throwing waves over the railway track. A spokesman told us "We've just realised that these trains can't swim, so we've designed rubber rings to put around them to ensure that they get from Exeter to Newton Abbot without drowning".

Paragraph 1

Paragraph 2

Paragraph 3

Paragraph 4

National Rail has announced the introduction of its latest Railcard offering 34% off the price of selected train journeys. This is the 100+ Railcard designed for centenarian rail travellers. Unlike previous railcards which are available as 1-year and 3-year cards, the 100+ Railcard is only available as a 5-year card at a cost of £100.

Due to the closure of many shops, including the John Lewis flagship store, in the Grand Central shopping centre, plans have been submitted to convert the building into a railway station. A Birmingham City Council spokesman said, "We didn't realise that railway tracks run under the shopping centre and some old platforms have been discovered through the darkness. We have therefore applied for change of use"

Clearly, the railway company was not going to be deterred by a Coronavirus. The station concourse was devoted to gruesome models intended for a Halloween event. Luckily, the witches and ghouls did not frighten our granddaughter and I was impressed because the display reinforced the SVR policy of "business as usual". The *trick* which SVR has applied is replacing scheduled timetable trains with excursions. In doing so, passenger numbers are restricted to government guidelines and parties can be traced. The *treat* for customers is a carefully planned itinerary packed into six hours. There are three main options: "The Flyer", "The Explorer" and "The Adventurer". We were booked onto "The Explorer" which departed at 11:00.

Social Distancing at Kidderminster Town station

We made our way to the platform to seek our carriage number five. We boarded a vintage GWR coach and the six of us occupied a compartment which could have seated eight persons. The compartment would be exclusively ours for the outward and return journeys. The guard informed us that we were not required to wear masks unless we left the compartment. He also stressed that we must wear face coverings at the stations because of the close proximity of other day trippers on narrow platforms. A plastic refuse sack was provided and we were instructed to take it away when our excursion ended.

The Royal Mail TPO at Highley Engine House

The train departed a few minutes late and did not call at any intermediate stations. The journey was smooth except for a delay in the passing loop at Arley. The knock-on effect meant that we had less time to spend at Bridgnorth and similarly at Highley. Of course, we visited the Engine House and viewed the fine collection of locomotives and carriages. Sadly, most of the engines were roped off to prevent visitors climbing on board. However, the Royal Mail travelling P.O. van was open for internal view and provided a photograph opportunity for an ex-postman!

The café was located on the first floor and could be accessed by a lift. Staff wore protective visors and a one-way system was in place from counter to table. After enjoying a superb pork and stuffing bap, I rallied my family to leave. The exit was via the viewing gallery and this was cordoned off to prevent back-tracking over the one-way system. To gain access to the lift again, we had to do precisely that, (with the blessing of the staff).

We made our way back to the level crossing but we were too late to use it, as the incoming train from Bewdley had arrived. Instead, I had to fold the pushchair and carry my granddaughter over the footbridge. We boarded the train again and set off once more for Bridgnorth.

Warning notices on the platform at Bridgnorth

By now, my son and I had built up a thirst for real ale. The Railwayman's Arms on the station was very busy but we were able to sit under canvas at the rear of the pub. A waitress took our order at the table as per Covid regulations and I paid by contactless card. It was very appropriate that we drank a pint each of "Worcestershire Way" brewed at the Bewdley Brewery. The railway certainly helps the local economy!

It was time to leave and head back to Kidderminster Town. We arrived at 5:15 pm as scheduled and we were grateful to the SVR for providing a unique experience due to (and despite) the pandemic.

Can you teach an old dog new tricks? Well if the team of senior SVR volunteers is the metaphorical "dog", then it has learned a whole book of new tricks to accommodate the Covid 19 restrictions. A bit of praise and a pat on the back is well-deserved.

THE DAFTA AWARDS

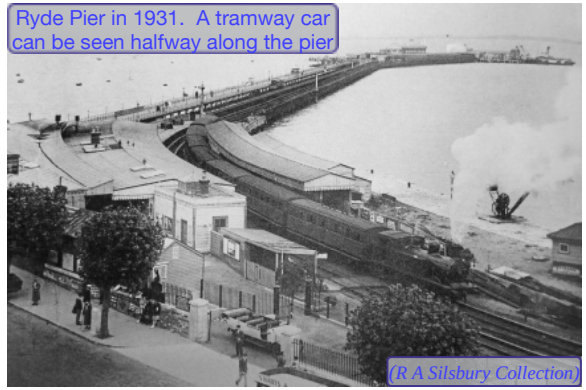
Occasionally, somebody using the rail network does something that is worthy of an award. On behalf of DAFTA, SLUG will publish the winners as they are announced.

The Doctor Who award for encouraging time travel is a triumph for CrossCountry whose Train Manager on an Edinburgh to Plymouth service announced the train as follows "This train stops at Newcastle Central, Durham, Darlington, York, Leeds City, Wakefield Westgate, Sheffield Midland, Chesterfield Midland, Derby Midland, Birmingham New Street, Cheltenham Spa Lansdown, Bristol Parkway, Bristol Temple Meads, Taunton, Tiverton Junction, Exeter St David's, Newton Abbot, Totnes and Plymouth North Road".

The Piers Morgan award for offending an entire city goes to the CrossCountry Train Manager for the following announcement - "Welcome to passengers joining this CrossCountry service at Wolverhampton. I'm sorry for the delayed departure of this service. Of course, I'm even more sorry that you came to be in Wolverhampton to begin with."

Ryde Pier on the Isle of Wight is the world's oldest seaside pleasure pier. It was designed by John Kent of Southampton and opened on 26 July 1814. Built entirely of wood at the time, it needed further strength. In 1895 a concert pavilion was constructed at the pier-head, and by 1911 the original wooden piles had been replaced with cast iron. A parallel pier equipped for a horse-drawn tramway opened in 1864. This was complemented by a third structure alongside the existing ones in 1880. The line laid on this structure was part of the Portsmouth and Ryde Joint Railway and enabled steam trains to run from Ryde, St. John's Road to the pier head and make connections with ships to Portsmouth. In the 1930's concrete modifications were made to the pier head and it played an important strategic role during wartime. Today, the railway from Ryde Pier Head to Shanklin is known as The Island Line, The line was electrified (630 V DC third rail) in 1967 and uses ex London Underground stock to carry passengers. A station at Smallbrook Junction opened in 1991 enabling transfer to the Isle of Wight Steam Railway. There is no public access to this station by footpath or road and trains only call on days when both railway companies are operating.

Ryde Pier in 1931. A tramway car can be seen halfway along the pier


(R A Silsbury Collection)

Ryde Pier in 2016. The tramway has gone and the trains are ex-London Underground stock dating back to the 1930s

Southport Pier, the 2nd longest in the UK, had a tramway which closed shortly after this 2015 photo was taken

There are still a considerable number of British piers which have survived storms and the passage of time. Some have provided "trains" for adults and children but many have been merely tractor type road vehicles with open carriages. Some piers have even been rebuilt in modern style, such as Weston-super-Mare's Grand Pier. It is unlikely that any more pier railways will ever be built due to weight limits and the decline of passengers wishing to arrive by ferry. The golden age of the British seaside has passed - gone forever.

The Southend Pier train waits at the end of the pier in 2019, 1⅓ miles from the sea front

Southend Pier is in close proximity to the nation's capital and is the world's longest pier. Originally built of wood in 1830 it was replaced by an iron version designed by James Brunlees, which was completed in 1889. As well as being a pleasure pier, it is the home of the town's lifeboat station and the structure has seen many alterations over the years due to natural catastrophes and suspicious circumstances. The first pier had a horse tramway to convey goods and visitors but the iron version was provided with an electric tramway in 1890. The system was steadily upgraded to the point where it was double track; bearing four trains, each with seven carriages. Sadly, the electric railway infrastructure deteriorated and was replaced in 1986 by a single line with passing loops, operated by diesel trains. The tramway/railway continues to evolve and in late 2005, Pier Head station was temporarily re-sited due to a fire and a new, modern structure was opened on the original site in September 2009.

A Volk's Railway service heads along Brighton sea front with the Palace Pier in the background

Brighton's Palace Pier has also seen tramway tracks - but only briefly. The pier opened in 1899 but the tramway which was employed to aid construction was dismantled two years later. Even so, Brighton is worth a visit to travel on the Volk's Electric Railway which runs from The Aquarium to Black Rock. It is the world's oldest electric railway, built by Magnus Volk and opened in 1883. The line has a track gauge of 2 ft. 8½ in (825 mm) and its power supply is 110 volts DC picked up from a third rail. The railway does not rise above the sea but is certainly washed by it!

I digress and will return to the subject in hand: Hythe Pier Railway is the oldest continuously operating public pier train in the world. Operating in conjunction with the Hythe Ferry, it connects Hythe, in Hampshire with Southampton. The construction of Hythe Pier started in 1879 and it opened on 1 January 1881 having cost £7,000 to cast and assemble. The first railway along the boards was a narrow-gauge line laid flush to the decking. It was opened in 1909. Later, in 1922 the line was replaced by another narrow gauge railway (2 ft. /610 mm) but this time it was a 250v DC electric third rail system. There are no passing loops on the single track and so the locomotive at the landward end of the pier propels carriages to the seaward station and then reverses in the same formation. The pier, railway and ferry service are currently operated by Blue Funnel Ferries of Southampton.

TITLED TRAINS ALONG THE STOURBRIDGE LINE - PART 3
by Roger Davis

This is the third 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 Inter-City operated along the section of line between Leamington Spa and The Hawthorns from 1950 to 1965.

5032 *Usk Castle* waits to depart from Wolverhampton Low Level on the up Inter-City

(Ben Brooksbank)

Because the 0910 service from London Paddington to Birkenhead Central service was proving a very popular, well-loaded, service, the Western Region of British Railways decided to introduce an express service to run just in front of it and cover the southern half of the route from Paddington to Wolverhampton. Therefore, the Inter-City was introduced on 25 September 1950 with a departure time from Paddington of 0900. The headboard carried on the locomotive had the coats of arms of the cities of London and Birmingham and the town of Wolverhampton, which suggests that British Railways Western Region were 51 years ahead of the time when deciding on the train title.

In both directions, the train was timed to take exactly 2 hours between London Paddington and Birmingham Snow Hill with a single stop at High Wycombe, a time that compares favourably with the fastest train today along the line from London Marylebone which takes 1 hours 42 minutes, albeit with four more intermediate station calls.

The timetable for 1955 was as follows :-

London Paddington 0900 : High Wycombe (pick up) 0933 : Birmingham Snow Hill 1100 : Wolverhampton Low Level 1122

Wolverhampton Low Level 1635 : Birmingham Snow Hill 1700 : Leamington Spa General 1726 : High Wycombe (set down) 1833 : London Paddington 1905

In the winter 1959-60 timetable, the train became just one of an hourly all-day restaurant-car service between Paddington and Wolverhampton, as the Western Region service was ramped up to compensate for the absence of trains on the West Coast Main Line during electrification work on the latter. It was extended to Chester in 1962 with extra intermediate stops introduced on the down service, as this 1963 timetable shows.

The down Inter-City enters Leamington Spa General station

London Paddington 0820 : High Wycombe 0850 : Bicester North 0918 : Banbury General 0935 : Birmingham Snow Hill 1020 : Wolverhampton Low Level 1043 : Wellington 1106 : Shrewsbury 1125 : Gobowen 1158 : Chirk 1207 : Ruabon 1216 : Wrexham General 1226 : Chester General 1252

Chester General 1430 : Wrexham General 1452 : Ruabon 1502 : Chirk 1509 : Gobowen 1518 : Shrewsbury 1550 : Wellington 1608 : Wolverhampton Low Level 1635 : Birmingham Snow Hill 1700 : Leamington Spa General 1725 : High Wycombe 1825 : London Paddington 1859

The name was discontinued on 11 June 1965 as British Rail proposed to use the name as the brand name for all long distance express services, and the Inter-City can claim to be the origin of all later usages of the railway term "InterCity" (with or without a hyphen) worldwide.

The down Inter-City at Birmingham Snow Hill hauled by 6004 *King George III*

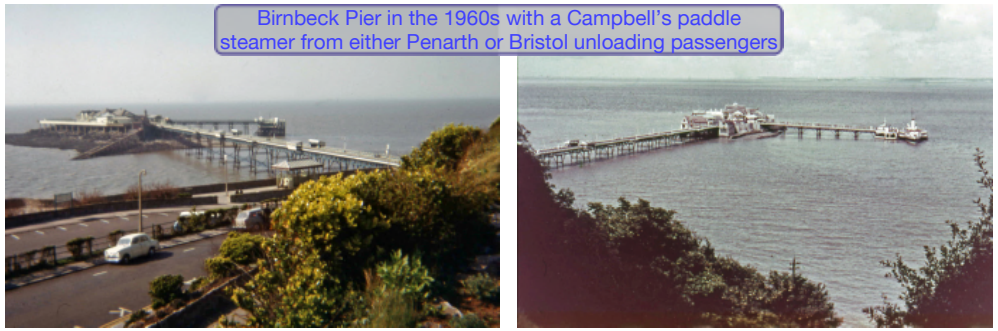
THE TRACKS OF MY PIERS
by Rob Hebron

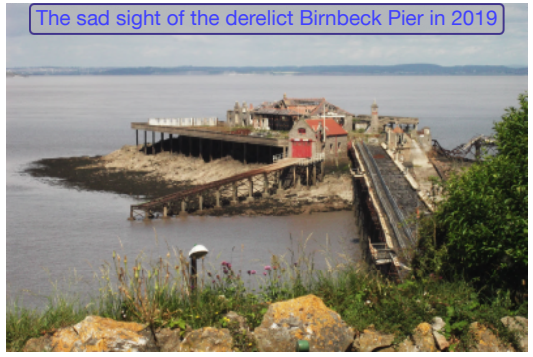
In previous editions of *Platform 2*, I have examined the relationship between railways and waterways. I have also researched ways of travelling to the outer limits of the UK rail network, often to the very water's edge. It seems only logical to follow on by looking at tracks which are suspended over the sea!

From childhood, I have had a fascination with the great British seaside pier. My early recollections are of solid Victorian structures built to provide pleasure to visitors. A typical pier experience would embrace long stretches of wooden decking, amusement arcades and a theatre. In adulthood, I have come to realise that the trappings of the classic seaside pier are an addition to (or distraction from) its primary function which is to enable embarkation and disembarkation from vessels.

Birnbeck Pier in Somerset was constructed to connect Birnbeck Island with Weston-super-Mare. It is unique, being the only pier in the country which links the mainland to an island.

Birnbeck Pier in the 1960s with a Campbell's paddle steamer from either Penarth or Bristol unloading passengers



Opened in 1867, the main structure was designed by Eugenius Birch. The pier head buildings and toll house were drafted by local architect, Hans Price. In its heyday, visitors from Cardiff Bay would arrive at the island and take their baggage to the pier front by means of a tramway. This was a considerable convenience as the original length of the pier was 1,150 feet (351 m). During its lifetime it has seen thousands of people tread the boards – 120,000 visitors in its first three months alone. However, with the intervention of war and competition from Weston's Grand Pier, numbers declined. The final steamer excursion left Birnbeck in 1979 and the last foot visitors were admitted in 1994. Birnbeck Pier is now in a state of disrepair and dereliction. It has passed through several ownerships and its fate is still undecided.

The sad sight of the derelict Birnbeck Pier in 2019