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 Alexander Korda award for direction goes to the First Great Western steward on a Worcester to Paddington HST service for the following announcement "The Buffet Car is open and is situated at the front of the train. For those of you in First Class, the buffet car is at the rear of the train".

THE ORDERLY QUIZ : 1 - Rolling Stock

Here are ten photos of trains at Stourbridge Junction. All you have to do is put the ten photos in order of the year in which each class of locomotive/unit was first introduced into service. If you are feeling really confident, can you also name the year that each class was first introduced. *(Answers in the next issue).*

NAME THE STATION ANSWERS - No 7 : SAINT

Here are the answers to Name The Station 7 which featured in the previous issue.

1 - St Austell, 2 - Exeter St David's, Exeter St Thomas, St James's Park, 3 - St Erth, St Ives, 4 - St Andrew's, 5 - St Leonards Warrior Square, West St Leonards, 6 - Glasgow St Enoch, 7 - Ryde St John's Road, 8 - St Alban's City, St Alban's Abbey, 9 - St Budeaux Ferry Road, St Budeaux Victoria Road.

PLATFORM 2

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

Issue 24 June 2021

Langley Green station with the ruined Langley Maltings building in the background

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TITLED TRAINS ALONG THE STOURBRIDGE LINE - PART 5
by Roger Davis

This is the fifth 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 Cathedrals Express operated along the sections of line between Worcester Shrub Hill and Kidderminster and between Worcester Shrub Hill and Great Malvern from 1957 to 1965.

The Cathedrals Express at Worcester Shrub Hill

It was introduced on 16 September 1957 on the Western Region of British Railways and connected the cathedral cities of Hereford and Worcester to London Paddington, with a second portion to and from Kidderminster detached/attached at Worcester Shrub Hill. It operated six days a week and, like all Western Region named expresses of the period, used coaching stock in the Great Western Railway chocolate and cream livery.

The Cathedrals Express was a fast service east of Worcester Shrub Hill and this section had a Restaurant Car service throughout. However, between Hereford and Worcester it was at most a semi-fast, while the Kidderminster portion served Fernhill Heath and Hartlebury on the northbound service but passed both stations non-stop on the southbound service. Motive power for the service was provided by a "Castle" class locomotive from Worcester shed.

The 1959 timetable was as follows :-

FRONT PORTION : Hereford 0745 : Ledbury 0807 : Colwall 0818 : Malvern Wells 0823 : Great Malvern 0827 : Malvern Link 0831 : Worcester Foregate Street 0843 : REAR PORTION : Kidderminster 0819 : Droitwich Spa 0832 : TRAIN COMBINED : Worcester Shrub Hill 0900 : Evesham 0918 : Moreton-in-Marsh 0942 : Oxford 1020 : London Paddington 1130

London Paddington 1645 : Oxford 1804 : Moreton-in-Marsh 1841 : Evesham 1900 : Worcester Shrub Hill 1920 : TRAIN SPLIT : FRONT PORTION : Worcester Foregate Street 1932 : Malvern Link 1943 : Great Malvern 1947 : Colwall 1956 : Ledbury 2007 : Hereford 2030 : REAR PORTION : Fernhill Heath (set down) 1940 : Droitwich Spa 1946 : Hartlebury 1956 : Kidderminster 2003

Ledbury High Street is a very long road but has much character. It would be very accurate to describe the town as "charming". There are a multitude of black and white buildings, a clock tower and an ancient corn exchange structure. Ledbury boasts traditional butchers' shops as well as high class clothing and tapestry outlets.

I particularly enjoyed heading off-track up and down the various alleyways and courtyards. Here are located craft shops such as Tinsmiths. I could have purchased several quality presents for family and friends but as we were travelling light, we could not have carried them back home. I would certainly go to Ledbury again if we had large suitcases.

Views of the charming town centre of Ledbury

We set off back to Great Malvern and rounded off the day at The Foley Arms, this time for just drinks. At the apartment, we consumed some snacks and caught up with our favourite television programmes. If we had visited Malvern later than we did, we would have been able to enjoy evening entertainment at The Winter Gardens. Unfortunately, there were no plays or films which appealed to us at the time.

A short break, early in the year is very rewarding even if the weather is cool. We had no great expectations regarding entertainment and so we were not disappointed. Was the trip a success? Yes, it was well worth it.

This famous composer was born in Lower Broadheath near Worcester and his most well-known works include The Enigma Variations, The Dream of Gerontius and The Pomp and Circumstance Marches. The surroundings, sensibly priced food and drinks so impressed us that we returned the next morning for breakfast.

The Malvern Hills

Perhaps we should have taken a later breakfast that morning? The Foley Arms Hotel is immediately opposite St. Ann's Road and it seemed sensible to leave from there to ascend Malvern Hills. The incline is steep and with a full stomach, the climb is very strenuous. I gave up after reaching St Anne's Well. At this time of year, the café is only open at weekends and so the earlier meal was a wise decision. However, the vestibule was open, giving public access to the fountain within. A notice on the door advised visitors not to drink the spring water due to the high content of bacteria. There is a strange irony to this situation, as bottled Malvern Water is world famous and promoted as a healthier alternative to tap water!

It was time to descend the hills and we discovered that our usual route down the steps was sealed off due to subsidence at the edge of the access road. A local man told us that recent drainage works were inadequate and could not cope with the exceptional rainfall. He directed us to an alternative route which took us through the park at the foot of the hills. This was a good opportunity for a rest on a bench before we set back to the apartment.

Great Malvern From The Malvern Hills

We only needed a short pit-stop before setting out for Great Malvern station to travel onward to Ledbury. At the station I recognised the booking clerk – it was my old colleague Julian Palfrey from the Cotswold Line Promotion Group whom I had met several times in my SLUG liaison endeavours. We had a short conversation in which we caught up with rail campaign developments. He handed over our tickets and we proceeded to platform 2 for our Ledbury train. The train which was bound for Hereford called only at one stop, namely Colwall. This station has only one platform for both directions and very little else to make it attractive to passengers.

Ledbury station is a little better, provided with a booking office in the form of a wooden hut. This is a privately run initiative but, unfortunately, was closed to the public that afternoon. Leaving by the station driveway, we soon realised that Ledbury station was a considerable distance from the town itself.

The Cathedrals Express arrives at Paddington (Richard S Greenwood)

One unusual feature of the Cathedrals Express was the style and colour of the headboard. All other Western Region headboards originally had silver lettering on a black background, but these were superceded by more ornate headboards with black block capital lettering on a cream background with a black border. The Cathedrals Express headboard was the last one designed and had a blue borderless background and ecclesiastical font in silver, surmounted by a bishop's mitre.

The route of the Cathedrals Express has seen a few changes since the 1960s. The line from Oxford to Worcester was extensively singled and, although some sections have since been redoubled, the remaining single line sections need to be redoubled as a matter of urgency to improve services. This includes the section through Worcester City Centre where operations are restricted by the rationalised track layout. Two stations served by the Cathedrals Express - Fernhill Heath and Malvern Wells - closed on 7 April 1965, while other minor stations between Oxford and Worcester were closed on 3 January 1966 - Adlestrop, Blockley, Chipping Campden, Littleton & Badsey, Fladbury, Wyre Halt, Stoulton and Norton Halt. All of these were at the Worcestershire end of the line, while small stations at the Oxfordshire end (Combe, Finstock, Ascott-under-Wychwood and Shipton) still survive with a restricted service. A campaign to reopen Chipping Campden station is currently being waged, while Worcestershire Parkway station on a brand-new site near Norton has opened to provide connections with services on the Birmingham to Cheltenham line.

Two stations on the line have been immortalised in verse. Schoolchildren of a certain age will remember Adlestrop just as the poet Edward Thomas did in his famous 1914 poem. Less well-known is the poem "Pershore Station - A Liverish Journey First Class", although its creator John Betjeman is far more famous.

A re-creation of the Cathedrals Express passes Didcot in 2011 (Bob Foster)

Honeybourne station also closed in 1969 but was reopened in 1981 with a single platform. Since then, a second platform has been brought into use and the station could return to its former glory if the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway extend northwards from Broadway and the line southwards from Stratford-upon-Avon is reopened as part of the national network.

THE ROAMING EMPIRE
Part 5 : STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION by Rob Hebron

The location of Stourbridge Junction station does not make it a convenient interchange. Sited in the Oldswinford area of Stourbridge it is bound by Brook Road and Chawn Hill, neither of which are major highways. The residential nature of the area prohibits construction of multi shelter bus malls. In fact, the two immense free car parks were oversubscribed pre-Covid and locals feared on-street parking could return thereby impeding the free flow of motor traffic. There was once a dedicated bus shelter on the Chawn Hill car park but the buses which served were only diversions of existing Grange Road routes. Today the shelter still stands adjacent to the former Platform 4 but is only used for rail replacement bus services when engineering works take place.

Webmaster, Roger Davis has posted bus timetables for 1968 on the SLUG website:-http://www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info/timetables.html and the set of routes do not differ very much from today. Destinations were Lye and Cradley (241), Wynall and Pedmore (S47/S49) and the return journeys to Stourbridge Town via Red Hill. As Cradley Heath is served by six trains per hour, it is no surprise that the 241 did not survive. There is still a Cradley Heath bus calling outside the Junction station in Brook Road, namely the 28 which is a long winded route via Merry Hill Centre. As an end to end journey (Stourbridge to Halesowen) it is tedious but at least it connects the Junction to three bus interchanges albeit indirectly.

A WMPTE service S47 to Wynall turns from Redhill into Brook Road in the 1970s

(geoff7918)

Predating Roger's timetable, the Midland Red handbook for 1948 lists S37 to Wynall Estate, 240 to Cradley Heath via Overend and 241 to Cradley Heath via Cradley. Even then, Stourbridge Junction was not a point at which to leave the train for roaming purposes. Of course, at this time passenger trains still operated from the Junction to Dudley and Wolverhampton, offering much more exploration potential.

Nowadays, the local "S" number services have disappeared and a recent Sandwell and Dudley Bus Review has simplified numbering further: The main bus service passing Stourbridge Junction is the number 7 which runs to Merry Hill Centre and Dudley, calling at towns which once had stations such as Darby End. In the other direction number 7 extends to Stourbridge Interchange and thereon to Wollaston Junction via Norton! In addition, services 10A and 10C connect the station to Pedmore Fields, while service 142 operates to Halesowen and service 242 to Kinver.

It is a great shame that Stourbridge Junction station is not a hub for direct strategic bus routes. It could be argued that train passengers can find their ongoing bus at Stourbridge Interchange adjacent to Stourbridge Town. This involves an extra leg of journey and on Sunday evenings this option is not available.

HEAD FOR THE HILLS
by Rob Hebron

The period between New Year and Good Friday is a long and arduous time because there is no intervening Bank Holiday. In 2019, my wife and I took an out-of-season break which I have recounted in a previous newsletter. That turned out very successfully so, despite exceptional inclement weather, we decided to spend a few more days away from Stourbridge to recharge the metaphorical batteries. What better way to reinvigorate the cells than to spend two full days in Great Malvern?

Having booked an apartment in Priory Road, Malvern, we set off from Stourbridge on Monday 9th March and caught a train to Worcester Foregate Street. Through trains to Great Malvern on this line are a rarity and so we needed to change. Our scheduled Worcester service was running late and we didn't have to wait very long at Foregate Street for our connection. The Malvern route is operated jointly by West Midlands Railway and Great Western which means trains run through to Hereford at least hourly. In between, there are services which terminate at Great Malvern.

Great Malvern - Priory Park

Priory Road, Malvern is in easy walking distance of Great Malvern railway station and only minutes away from the nearby park and waterway at the rear of the Winter Gardens. Not only was the apartment in a good location but the accommodation and facilities were excellent. The proprietor had agreed to let us enter the room earlier than the specified check-in time and so we had most of the afternoon to explore the town.

The retail area of Great Malvern consists mainly of two streets, Church Street and Worcester Road. There is an interesting mix of book shops, gift shops, restaurants and pubs (not to mention the obligatory charity shops). Supermarkets are surprisingly lacking and the only grocery-type shop is Iceland. My overall impression of the two streets was one of tidiness. Most of the shop frontages are traditional and window displays are alluring. I was tempted to enter a couple of antique shops but I knew that the prices would be out of my league!

Late afternoon swiftly morphed into early evening and although we had purchased provisions, we located a nearby Wetherspoon's and set out for a meal and a drink. The Foley Arms Hotel in Worcester Road has an extensive and spacious ground floor with plenty of nooks and crannies. The décor is traditional, featuring photographs and paintings which reference local history, in particular, Sir Edward Elgar.

Great Malvern

THE Sun

Diverted Dodger Disaster Delays Dumbfounded Daytrippers

On 16 October 1891, the Stourbridge Town service left the old Stourbridge Junction station and headed south along the main line in order to branch right onto the Town branch. Unfortunately, the points had not been switched which meant that the train continued along the main line and it failed to brake in time to avoid a collision with a stationary empty stock train waiting just south of the junction. What seems incredulous today is that the damaged Town engine was simply replaced and the service operated as normal, albeit 30 minutes late.

DAILY EXPRESS

Killer Arctic Blast From The EU Blamed For Old Hill Mayhem

On Monday 20 December 1926, the 7.18 pm Birmingham Snow Hill to Kidderminster service had arrived at Old Hill station at 7.47 pm. An auto-train had arrived on the opposite platform from Dudley via the Bumble Hole line, and this crossed over onto the down line once the Kidderminster service had cleared the crossover east of the station. The auto-train then moved forward into the platform to return to Dudley - unfortunately before the Kidderminster service had departed. The front of the auto-train was badly damaged and the rear carriage of the Kidderminster train was lifted about two feet into the air, shattering the windows and throwing passengers around the compartments. Ten passengers required first aid on the platform for cuts and bruises but none were badly injured. The damaged coaches were then shunted into a siding and the rest of the Kidderminster train departed about 30 minutes later.

DAILY STAR

Petrified Passengers Incarcerated Underground After Crash From Hell

On 13 June 1950, a northbound freight train was held at signals just to the south of Dudley station with the rear of the train just inside Dudley Tunnel. Shortly afterwards, a GWR railcar left the Bumble Hole line and stopped at Blowers Green station to pick up passengers. The guard rang the bell to enable the driver to depart and with the signal clear, the railcar entered Dudley Tunnel. The last section of the tunnel before Dudley station curved to the left and, as the railcar rounded the bend, the red tail lamps of the goods train came into view. The freight train had just started to move but the railcar was unable to stop in time and ran into the rear of the train, derailing the brake van and the wagon in front of it. Staff on the brake van jumped for their lives. The derailed wagon hit the end of the platform as the train entered the station, broke free from the rest of the train and finished up blocking both lines. The brake van finished up on the platform. Billy Robbins, the railcar driver, brought his train to a halt outside the tunnel mouth and led his passengers to safety. A later enquiry found that workmen rebuilding Blowers Green station had dropped a large baulk onto the signal wire, which moved the signal arm to indicate that the road was clear.

Let's hope we never see any tabloid headlines on our line in the future. Of course, the fear is that a quality publication may unearth some hidden secret.

SUNDAY Sport

EXCLUSIVE EXCLUSIVE EXCLUSIVE

Bing, Groucho, Chaplin, Marc Bolan and Maria Callas seen together on doomed train driven by Elvis just before they all died in 1977.

Strangely, Midland Red and its competitors have never seriously tried to draw traffic from Hagley to Merry Hill Centre. For a brief period, an X95 service ran from Bridgnorth to the shopping centre via Hagley and Lye. It did not survive long enough to develop and was a once a week variation of the 297 Bridgnorth to Kidderminster service which itself was not a strong route. The last time the X95 service number was used, prior to this experiment was in 1960 when X95 operated between Stafford and Stratford-upon-Avon via Hagley. This was a Sunday seasonal service from the end of May until end of September. Taking over three hours for the full length of the journey, it was a challenging trip for families with children.

Another attempt at connecting Kidderminster with the Black Country (via Hagley) took place in 2001 when Midland Red introduced the 285 service. This was specified as Kidderminster to Dudley via Merry Hill Centre and it also served Woodside. The timetable, consisting of only four outward trips was not attractive to residents of Kidderminster or Hagley and 285 did not survive.

Hagley rail station now has only two bus services in close proximity; the aforementioned 318 (Stourbridge to Bromsgrove) and the 192 Kidderminster to Halesowen service. This is a shadow of itself and it is unlikely to ever be extended back to Birmingham. It has no weekday evening journeys or Sunday daytime provision.

A service 318 to Redditch departs from the old bus garage at Stourbridge

The current service 318 at the new bus station at Stourbridge only goes as far as Bromsgrove

It could be argued that Hagley enjoys the best train service it ever has. The destinations available from the village are more numerous than any bus company would be willing to provide. Despite extensive new housing development in Hagley, no new commercial bus routes have been introduced and there is a simple choice for commuters – car or train.

ALL CHANGE AT … JEWELLERY QUARTER
The changing scene at one of the Stourbridge line stations

ALONG THE LINE
2 - LANGLEY MALTINGS by John Warren

This is the second in a series that looks at the history of sites alongside the Stourbridge line.

Langley Maltings

As you pass through Langley Green station on a train towards Kidderminster you will probably notice a burnt-out ruin on your right-hand side. This does not refer to a fellow passenger but to the building on the far side of the car park.

This was Langley Maltings, which was built in 1898 as Showell's Maltings between the railway line and the Titford Canal. It was the second maltings building on the site – the original having been built in about 1880 by Walter Showell to supply malt to his new Crosswells Brewery, a hundred yards away across the railway line. This was one of the largest breweries in the area, and Showell's Ales were distributed throughout the Midlands. Although barley was locally sourced, grain had to be delivered, originally by barge and later by rail via a siding from the Stourbridge line.

On 25 September 1925 the maltings caught fire and half of the building destroyed, although it was quickly rebuilt. The building was bought from Showell's by Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries in 1944 and continued in operation until 2006, with Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries selling the building the following year for £1 million to a local real estate company. At the time of closure, it was one of few such buildings in the country using the traditional floor malting process.

On 8 September 2009, the building saw its third major fire – this time being damaged in an arson attack which destroyed much of the roof and three of its outlet towers.

In 2012, a housing application was made which involved demolishing two of three structures, with structural engineers claiming that the buildings were beyond repair. Sandwell Council refused this application and supported an English Heritage report that stated that repairing the building would be relatively straightforward, despite some unstable masonry.

Since then, nothing has happened although Sandwell Council approached the owners in 2015 to try to progress the restoration of the buildings. In 2018 the Victorian Society included Langley Maltings on its list of the top ten endangered buildings. At the current time, the future of the buildings is uncertain, but it is to be hoped that they can be retained and a new use found for them.

Langley Maltings

BUMPS, SHUNTS AND TABLOID HEADLINES
by Roger Davis

Compared with road accidents which were responsible for 131,220 casualties and 1,580 deaths in the 12 months up to June 2020, railway accidents are thankfully rare these days. Unfortunately, when they happen, the national press are quick to jump on the bandwagon with negative headlines. One such incident occurred on Sunday 3 April 2016 when a local train from Penzance, travelling at about 15 mph, ran into the back of a stationary High Speed Train waiting in Plymouth station to depart on an express service to London Paddington. As a result, 18 passengers on the Penzance train were slightly injured, having stood up to alight the local service. This allowed the Daily Mirror to lambast the rail industry in true tabloid fashion.

DAILY Mirror

Plymouth train crash: 19 injured after two trains smash into each other at station

Shocking photos show the damaged Great Western Railway carriages which collided at Plymouth station

"Smash" into each other ? "Shocking" photos ? I may be a bit strange but I find the right-hand photo below far more shocking than the left-hand one. The Mirror published the left-hand one - the right-hand one is so common it is rarely published.

After a 15 mph rail crash

After a road crash

However, in the century and a half since the railways around Stourbridge were built, the railways have not always enjoyed the levels of safety we see today. Incidents of moving trains making contact with their stationary counterparts were not rare on local lines and I dread to think of the headlines that the gutter (sorry, tabloid) press would have used to sensationalise the following shunts.

Daily Mail — London Express in Stourbridge Fog Carnage Horror Pile-Up.

On a foggy November evening just after the Stourbridge Town branch opened in 1879, the service from Stourbridge Town arrived at the old two-platform Stourbridge Junction station, which was situated close to Junction Road. As usual, the 2.15 pm Paddington to Wolverhampton Low Level service was already in the platform waiting to depart at 7.09 pm. Normally, the Town service would pull up well down the platform from the express but, due to the dense fog, the driver lost his bearings and the train hit the express at low speed. There were no reports of any injuries.