

Platform 2



Access to an extensive canal network is possible from Stourbridge. Slightly further afield, but accessible via a number 16 bus are the Bratch Locks at Wombourne

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CANALSIDE RAMBLES

by Roger Davis

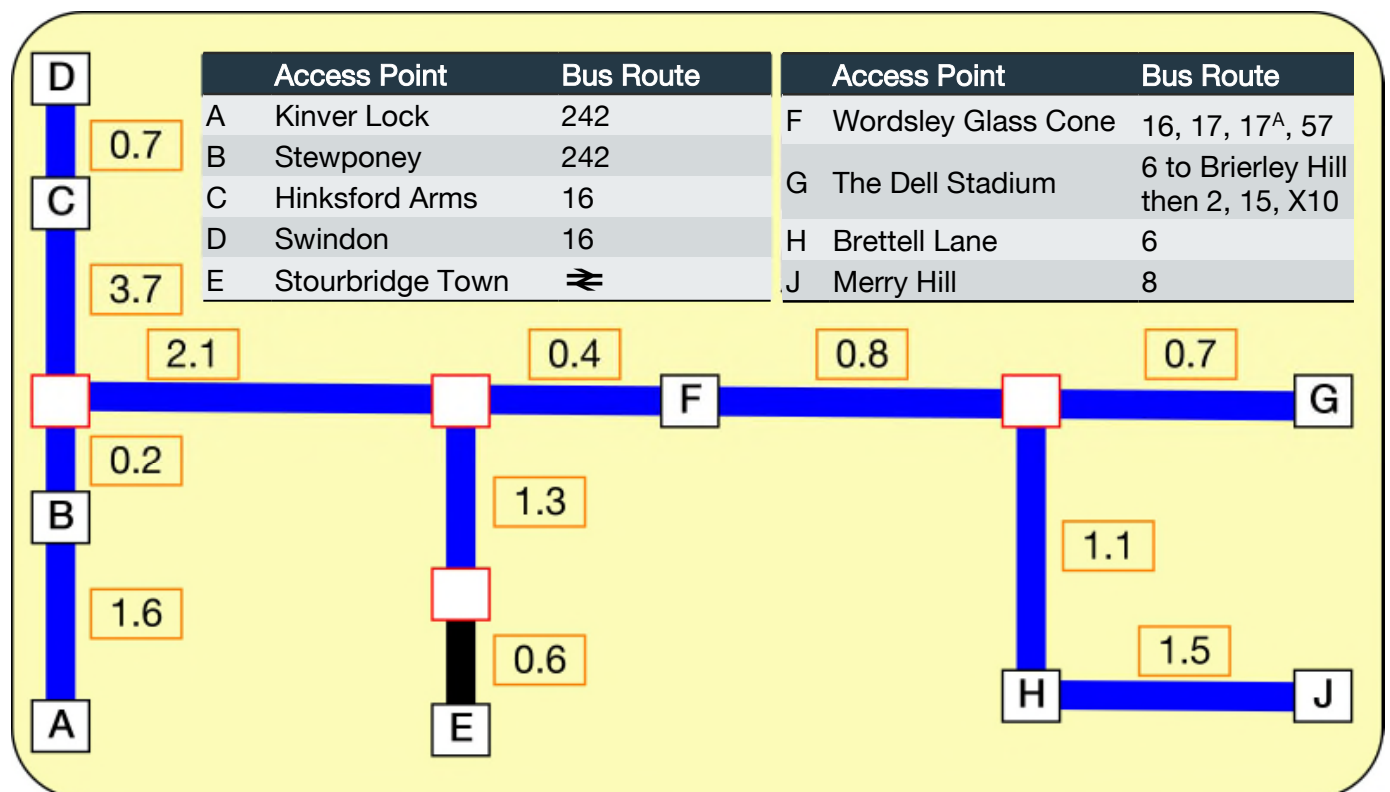


The Bonded Warehouse in Stourbridge

The Covid-19 crisis affected people in different ways. In my case, it changed the way I walk. Before Covid, I walked a lot but, unless I was on holiday, it was to a destination - the shops, the bus stop, the local pub etc. The need for daily exercise made me explore areas close to home that I ignored in the 35 years I had lived in Kingswinford. I knew that there was a Nature Reserve within 10 minutes of home and a canal within 15 minutes

but I rarely visited them. Covid gave me the incentive to visit these areas regularly.

Stourbridge has a network of canals on its doorstep and these are easily accessible from Stourbridge Town by bus. To the west of Stourbridge, the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal heads north through Kinver [A] towards Swindon [D] and continues through Wombourne and the west of Wolverhampton. Just north of the Stewpony [B], the Stourbridge Canal branches to the right and heads across country to the west of Wordsley where a branch to the right leads into Stourbridge, terminating at the Bonded Warehouse [E]. From Wordsley [F], the main canal heads uphill through a series of locks to Buckpool where there is another junction. Straight on takes the canal to a dead end close to the Dell Stadium [G] while the main canal continues to the right past Brettell Lane [H] and up the flight of nine locks to reach the Merry Hill Centre [J]. It then continues under Parkhead Viaduct to reach Dudley Tunnel.



What I don't want to do is recommend a walk as different people walk different distances. Therefore, I have highlighted 9 access points along the canal network which are a bus ride from Stourbridge Town station thus enabling you to choose your own walk between two access points. The diagram at the bottom of the previous page shows briefly how to reach each access point and the distance in miles between the access points. Bus services 2, 6, 8, 15/15A, 16, 17/17A and X10 operate all day, every day while services 57 and 242 operate daytimes only on Mondays to Saturdays. Links to bus timetables can be found on the Stourbridge Town page (under the Stations tab) on the SLUG website at the following link

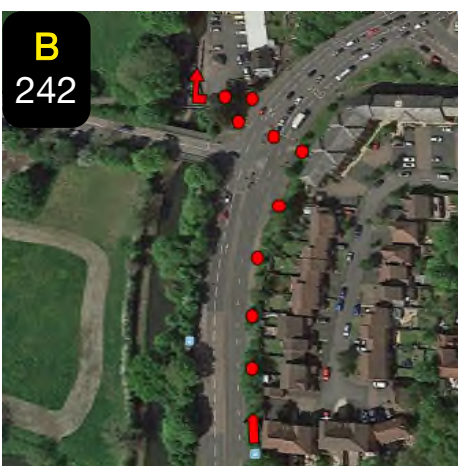
<http://www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info/files/Bus---11---SBT.pdf>.

The following maps show how to transfer from bus to canal.



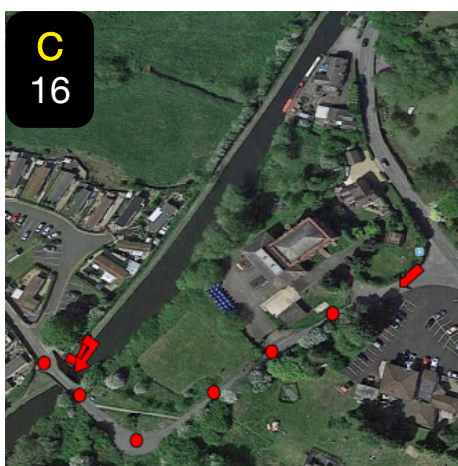
A
242

Alight at the stop just after passing "The Vine" public house and walk back to the canal.



B
242

Alight at the first stop on the A449, cross carefully at the lights and join the canal just north of Bridgnorth Road.



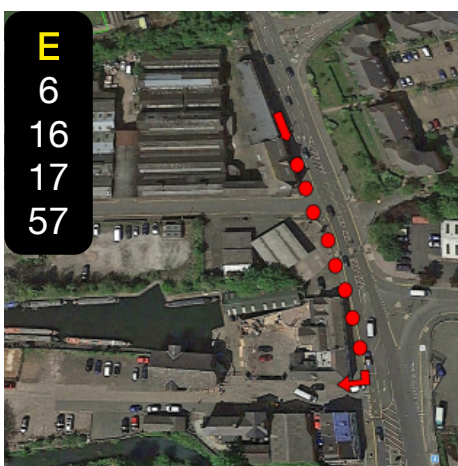
C
16

Alight at the Hinksford Arms, shortly after leaving the urban area of Wall Heath. Walk down the lane at the side of the pub to the canal.



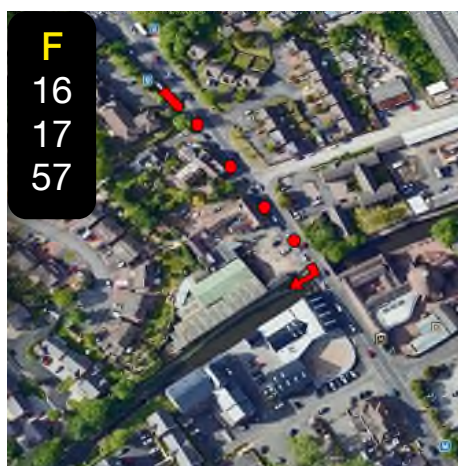
D
16

Alight at 2nd stop after Hinksford Arms (just after playing field on left). Walk on to Old Bush and turn left to the canal.



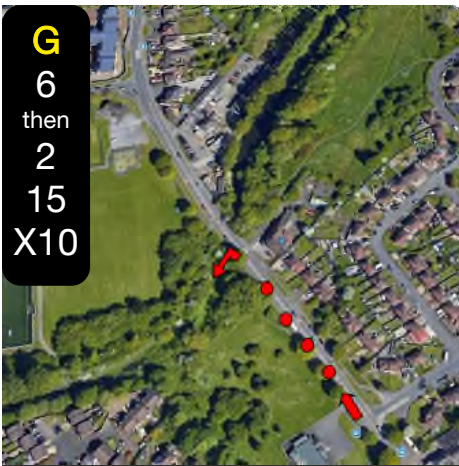
E
6
16
17
57

Alight at 1st stop after leaving Stourbridge Ring Road. Walk back down hill and turn right at second set of traffic lights.



F
16
17
57

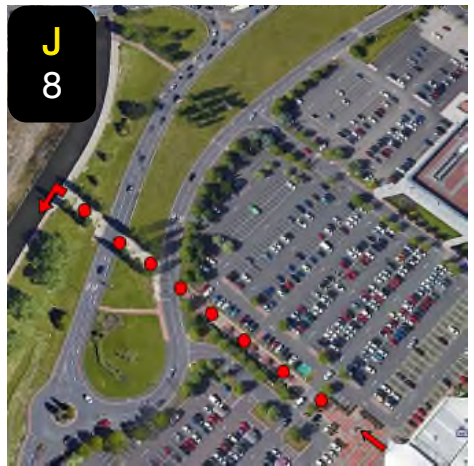
Alight at stop immediately after Glass Cone. Walk back up the hill and turn right onto canal just before Glass Cone.



Change at Brierley Hill High Street (Library) from the 6 to 2/15/X10 (same stop). Alight at Wallows Road and walk forward and turn left to canal.



Alight in Brettell Lane between the canal and the railway bridge. Cross road and walk back and turn left to access canal.

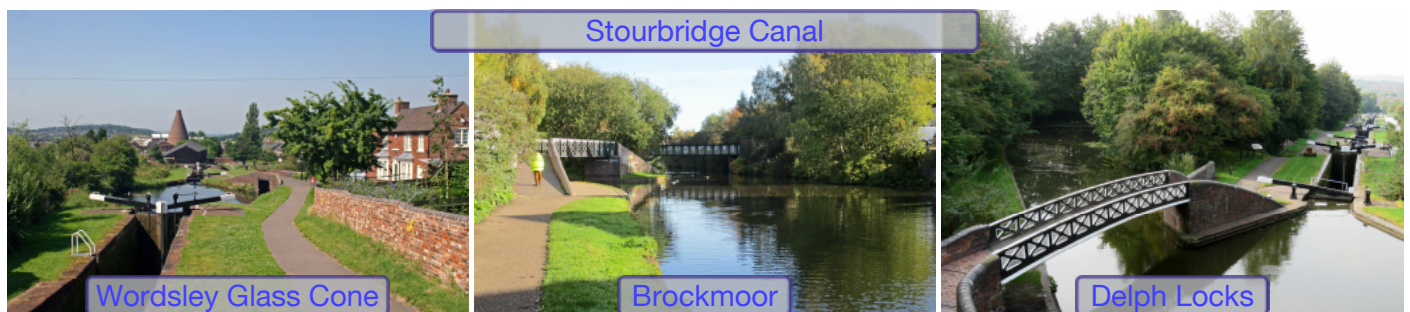


Alight at Merry Hill Bus Station. Walk through centre to M&S/Argos exit. Walk directly across forecourt to steps. Turn left at top onto canal.

So, you can choose whether you fancy a trek of over 10 miles from Swindon to Merry Hill, or just a stroll of about 1½ miles from Kinver to the Stewponey, or from Wordsley to Merry Hill. Alternatively, you could just travel to one of the access points and walk a short distance along the canal before retracing your footsteps.



What you will find is pleasant surroundings. The entire length from Swindon to Kinver is in open countryside, as is the spur from Stewponey to just west of Wordsley. The rest of the network is in the urban area but, many stretches of the walk are very tranquil despite their proximity to industry and traffic.



In fact, the walk from Wordsley to The Dell can be combined with a detour through the Buckpool Nature Reserve which borders the canal towpath, while a continuation across the road at The Dell leads you into the Fens Pools Nature Reserve. Both areas are former industrial wastelands that have been allowed to return to nature. We will look at these two areas in the next edition of *Platform 2*.

A DESIRE FOR STREETCARS by Rob Hebron

The term “streetcar” conjures up images of New Orleans in the United States of America. The system which opened in 1835 still survives to this day. Of course, a streetcar is another name for a tram and we need look no further than Blackpool to find these vehicles still operating between Starr Gate and Fleetwood. In its heyday, tram transport was available in most British towns and cities but the popularity of the tram waned with the advent of the motor omnibus and tramlines were ripped up in favour of tarmac.



So, what has become of the trams that were discarded? Many were disposed of for scrap metal but some were put to other uses such as garden sheds. Thankfully, a group of enthusiasts recognised the historical value of trams and established the Tramway Museum Society in 1955. After purchasing the site of a mineral railway within a quarry, Crich Tramway Village was developed in the nineteen sixties.

Located near Matlock in Derbyshire, Crich can be reached by train to Whatstandwell, from which it is a steep uphill walk of about 1 mile, or by bus number 140 from Matlock station. Timetable details are at <http://www.littlestravel.co.uk/timetables.html>.

Admission prices in 2022 are £20 for an adult or £17.50 for a senior (valid for 1 year). Once payment is made, a pre-decimal penny is issued to each visitor and this permits unlimited tram travel all day long.

Before boarding a tram, it is advisable to proceed on foot and visit the various buildings which comprise the village. I noticed a similarity to the Black Country Living Museum at Dudley, in that heritage structures have been brought in from other locations and reconstructed on site: Amongst these, there is a fully functioning public house named the Red Lion, boasting glazed brickwork, a stone



lion on the parapet and even an old cast iron gents urinal in the yard! Further along the street there is a traditional sweet shop and a tea room. Before the Town End Terminus of the tramway there is also a small printing works, named Eagle Press.



At Town End, a splendid tram shelter is provided, constructed of cast iron and glass. It is typically ornate without being extravagant. There are long queues here throughout the day and if you would rather be at the front of the next queue, then you can kill a little time at the Forge Gift Shop or the adjacent exhibition hall. This is called The George Stephenson Discovery and Learning Centre. It is actually a collection of rooms with various

displays and exhibits. The historical connection with the railway pioneer is his ownership of Cliff Quarry. Here limestone was extracted and distributed to limekilns that he had built alongside the new North Midland Railway at Ambergate. Cliff Quarry is effectively the site of the Tramway Village. The George Stephenson story and development of tram transport are depicted in murals, models and video clips. These exhibits are on the upper floor where there is also a viewing gallery to enable visitors to watch mechanics at work restoring tram vehicles.

The next building is the tram depot. The working tram vehicles are parked within and display destinations as diverse as Plumstead Station, Millerston and Grimethorpe. A myriad of tram lines connects each bay to the main line, enabling rolling stock to be delivered, despatched or taken out of service.



The Great Exhibition Hall lies behind the sidings and contains the finest collection of British and continental

trams, some of which are accessible to the public. Who could resist climbing on board? There is even an example of a horse-drawn tram, but the horse is a replica!



Having explored the various buildings within the Tramway Village, it is a good idea to turn around and head back to Town End Terminus. Although there are request stops in between the main attractions, some are alighting points only. Furthermore, trams are usually filled to capacity at the termini and cannot observe request stops. By boarding at Town End, passengers can wait for their preferred tram and find a seat of their choice.

What a choice there is! There are double decker trams and single deckers often festooned with coloured lights. Some have a wooden body; others have a metal chassis. Some are equipped with hardback seats and others boast upholstered seats. I can vouch for the comfort of the red leather version with a backrest which can be pulled back to face the other way on the return journey.



The route itself is linear and trams run between Town End and Glory Mine, calling at Victoria Park and Wakebridge. Victoria Park is located near the visitor entrance and this is the stop for the bandstand and Adventure Play Area. Wakebridge is the place to alight for the lead mining display and Woodland Walk. I highly recommend disembarking here and following the trail which is lined by wooden sculptures carved out of tree trunks. The path eventually leads to Bowes-Lyon Bridge. This bridge dates back to 1844 when the ironwork was first cast. It used to stand at Stagenoe Park in Hertfordshire and was donated to the Tramway Village in 1971. The whole structure was rebuilt at Crich and formally opened in 1992 by the Minister of State for Transport. This bridge is imbedded with the remains of a track used for horse-drawn trams.



The path eventually leads to Bowes-Lyon Bridge. This bridge dates back to 1844 when the ironwork was first cast. It used to stand at Stagenoe Park in Hertfordshire and was donated to the Tramway Village in 1971. The whole structure was rebuilt at Crich and formally opened in 1992 by the Minister of State for Transport. This bridge is imbedded with the remains of a track used for horse-drawn trams.

There is more than just nostalgia attached to trams. Riding on these beautiful heritage vehicles fuels the imagination. What if they could return to our streets using parts of Metro infrastructure? What if new battery technology could be employed? Trams could enjoy another golden age. I firmly believe that there is a desire for streetcars.



ALONG THE LINE 5 - HAGLEY STATION by John Warren

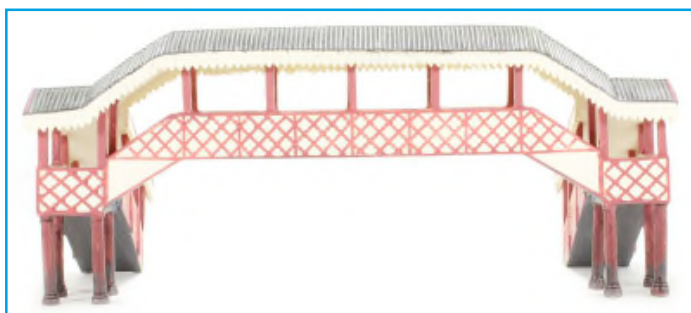
This is the fifth in a series that looks at the history of sites alongside the Stourbridge line.

Hagley station is described as a typical GWR country station. Although it was originally opened in 1857, the current station building on the southbound platform and footbridge date from 1884. Unfortunately, the buildings on the northbound platform from the same era were demolished in the 1970s and replaced by the now obligatory “bus shelter”.



Of course, Hagley station is best known for its ornate, canopied footbridge which was refurbished in late 2011 and repainted from its former navy blue and white to the original GWR cream and salmon livery.

It is common knowledge that the footbridge was used by Hornby as its OO Gauge model R9751. What is less well-known is that the station building was also used by Hornby as its model R9752.



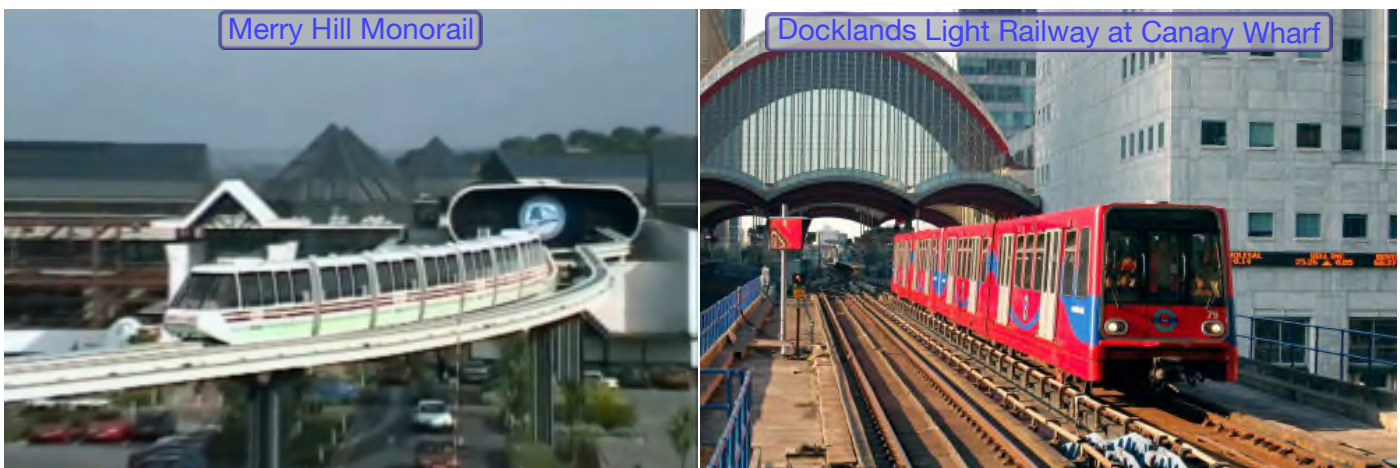
Unfortunately, both models have now been discontinued by Hornby.

DRIVER-LESS! by Rob Hebron

If we consider the advancement of communications from epistles to mobile phones, the whole process has moved in leaps and bounds. The real acceleration of development has been in the last twenty years but nonetheless, scientists ensure that messages reach their destination as fast as the technology will allow. It seems inconceivable that words can be moved more conveniently than people because the transport industry has not progressed at the same rate as telecommunications business. We have buses, trains, trams and planes and there is little co-ordination between modes, either intentionally or unintentionally. What is the next stage in the evolution of public transport?

Satellite Navigation is the means of introducing a bold new concept: Driver-less cars are being tested at this very moment and with government backing, small electric vehicles could soon be carrying commuters to their work destinations on pre-set routes at pre-set times. However, the driver-less car seems to be aimed at the private motorist market, without consideration of transforming public transport.

What if the public transport industry embraced driver-less buses and trains? Driver-less trains are already in existence in the form of the Docklands Light Railway in London. The Monorail in the Merry Hill Centre, Dudley was a driver-less system but was abandoned before it could get established. It seems that Dudley Borough is in a time bubble. To be fair, the DLR is (and Merry Hill Monorail was) a self-contained system with no inherent chance of units colliding with heavy passenger or freight trains.



A driverless train or tram is a controversial concept. There have been ongoing disputes between rail unions and a number of train operating companies (including West Midlands Trains), concerning driver-only operation. Taking away the on-board staff completely would likely cause a strike on the whole rail network. Very often, transformations are done by stealth. The guided busway may be the first candidate for de-staffing but would passengers accept the change, even though the system is partially enclosed?

On the ground, light rail transit is the trend. Ultra-Light Rail is one way forward but the Dudley ULR Research Centre has been delayed and is yet to open.

We don't need to look too far from the Stourbridge line to find a potential test bed for driver-less trains: The Stourbridge Town branch is a self-contained system



involving no physical interface with main line traffic. Given the fact that the lightweight railcar has already delivered economies for the train operator, why look for further savings? The drivers and conductors who are interchangeable on board the railcar are arguably the friendliest rail staff in the West Midlands Railway area. De-staffing the Town Car might be counterproductive in terms of revenue protection (or lack of it!) and passenger security.

passenger security.

Rail-based public transport costs money and that must come from the passenger and taxpayer. Accordingly, it is not unreasonable for the public to have a say in how the vehicle is driven. Of course, I am relating to existing rail lines but what about disused lines? Would the public accept a driver-less train if it meant that a branch line could be re-opened on a shoestring? I must confess that I don't know the answer to that question. What I do know is that the debate on driver-less vehicles must take place now.

AUTOTRAIN TO STOURBRIDGE by John Warren

In the years up to 1935, the Stourbridge Town branch was operated by one of two methods. The first was a conventional train where the engine hauled its coaches down to Stourbridge Town, ran round its train, and then hauled it back up to Stourbridge Junction. However, the majority of services were operated using a GWR Railmotor, which was a combined steam engine and carriage. A restored example can be seen below in use on the Looe branch in November 2012.

GWR Railmotor No 93 operating between Liskeard and Looe in November 2012



In 1935, these options ceased to exist as the Railmotors were withdrawn, and the two crossovers at either end of Stourbridge Town were removed as the branch became two independent lines – the passenger line to Stourbridge Town and the goods line to Amblecote Goods Depot.

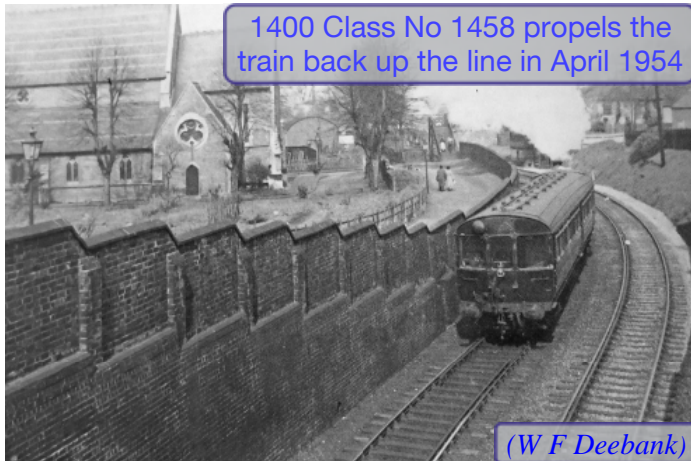
The new method of operation was the autotrain (or push-pull train). This required a specially adapted engine and a specially adapted “autocoach”. The GWR had introduced two different types of locomotive from 1931/1932 that were fitted for push-pull operation. The first was the 4800 Class of 0-4-2T tank engines, which was renumbered in 1946 to become the 1400 Class. The second was the 5400 and 6400 Classes of 0-6-0PT pannier tanks. Stourbridge shed received a small number of 1400 Class locomotives for use on the branch but, if one was unavailable, a 6400 Class locomotive was brought in from Wolverhampton Stafford Road shed.

1400 Class No 1458 waits at Stourbridge Junction in 1950



(D K Jones)

1400 Class No 1458 propels the train back up the line in April 1954

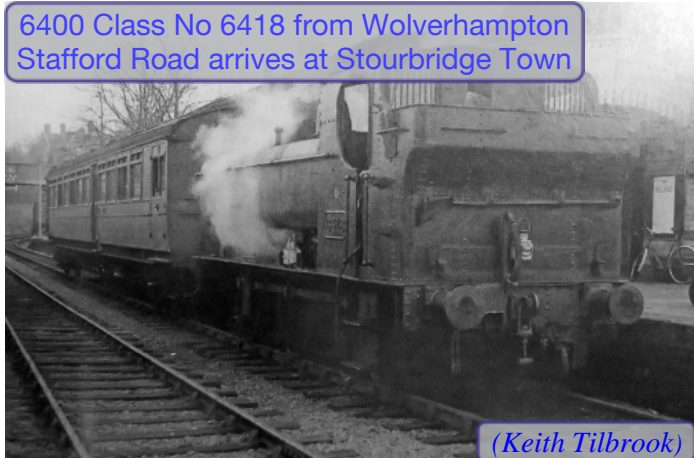


(W F Deebank)

The branch was operated as follows. All journeys from the Junction were operated with the engine at the front of the train manned by the driver and fireman. However, for journeys back to the Junction, the driver left the engine cab and went to the cab at the rear of the autocoach. Controls in this cab allowed the driver to operate the regulator, brake and whistle when driving the train “in reverse”. The fireman would remain on the engine in order to stoke the fire and to take off the brakes, as the driver could only apply them from the autocoach.

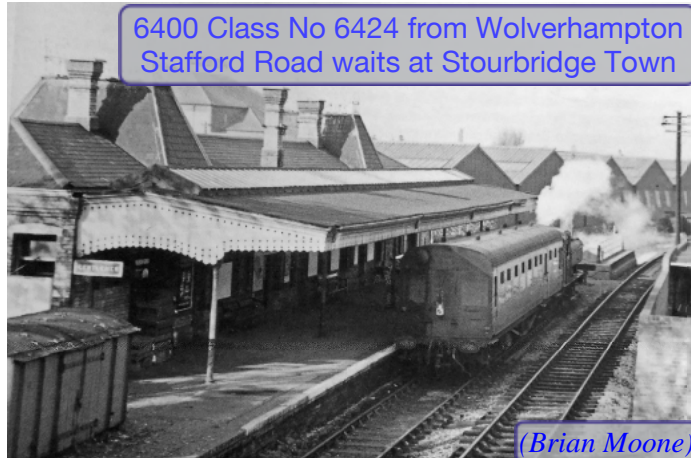
Autotrains could operate with one or two coaches, and on some lines it was possible for the locomotive to be sandwiched between the two driving coaches. Obviously, this method of operation was not possible on the Stourbridge Town branch due to the severity of the gradient.

6400 Class No 6418 from Wolverhampton Stafford Road arrives at Stourbridge Town



(Keith Tilbrook)

6400 Class No 6424 from Wolverhampton Stafford Road waits at Stourbridge Town



(Brian Moone)

This method of operating the branch continued until 1956 when diesel operation took over in the form of the ex-GWR “flying banana” railcars, built in the 1930s. Push-pull operation still exists at Didcot Railway Centre using a 1400 Class locomotive.

ALL CHANGE AT ... WORCESTER SHRUB HILL The changing scene at one of the Stourbridge line stations



1934

(Brunel Univ / Clinker coll'n)



2019

STOURBRIDGE LINE MATHEMATICAL QUIZ

There are multi-choice answers to the following questions. If you have got all seven answers correct, the total of the answers should be 5,704.

1. In which year was the Jewellery Line opened?
(a) 1993 (b) 1995 (c) 1997
2. How long is Old Hill Tunnel (or Blackheath Tunnel) in yards?
(a) 809 (b) 857 (c) 896
3. How many arches does Hoobrook Viaduct have?
(a) 16 (b) 20 (c) 24
4. What is the Class number of the DMUs that operate most Stourbridge line services?
(a) 150 (b) 172 (c) 196
5. How long are the platforms at Stourbridge Junction in feet?
(a) 400 (b) 500 (c) 600
6. In which year did regular direct services from the Stourbridge line to New Street last run?
(a) 2004 (b) 2005 (c) 2006
7. How many miles is it from Snow Hill to Kidderminster?
(a) 17 (b) 19 (c) 21

THE ORDERLY QUIZ ANSWERS : 2 - Railway Stations

I (Worcester Shrub Hill) - 1850 ; H (Kidderminster) - May 1852 ; B (Birmingham Snow Hill) - Oct 1852 ; J (Worcester Foregate Street) - 1860 ; E (Lye) - 1863 ; D (Langley Green) - 1885 ; F (Stourbridge Junction) - 1901 ; A (Birmingham Moor Street) - 1909 ; G (Stourbridge Town) - 1994 ; C (Smethwick Galton Bridge) - 1995. *Note that later stations were opened on the same site at Snow Hill in 1871, 1912 and 1987, the original Langley Green station of 1867 was at Station Road, and that the earlier 1879 and 1979 stations at Stourbridge Town were closer to the Town Centre.*