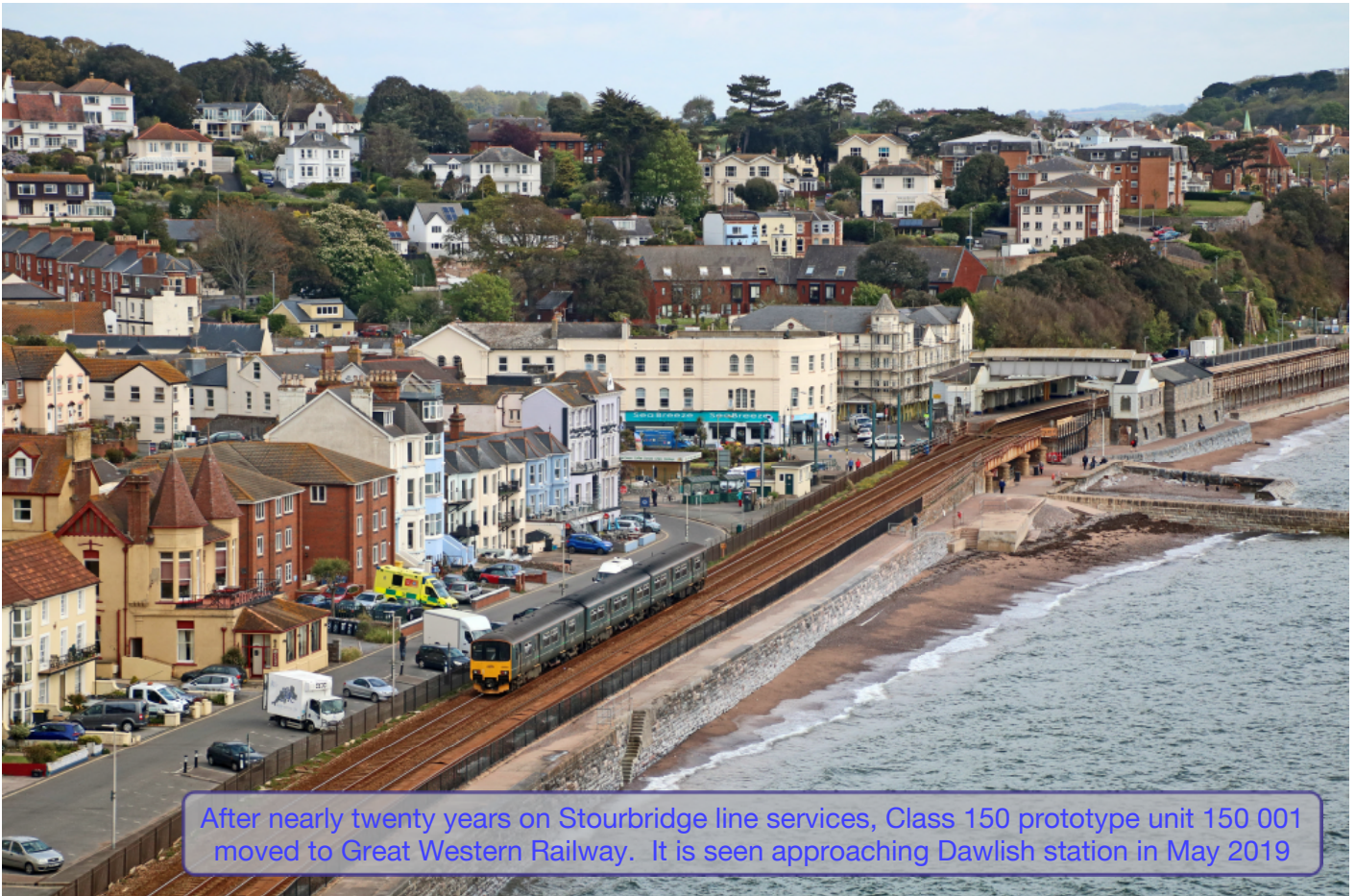


# Platform 2



## CONTENTS

- 2 Stourbridge Stalwarts : 3 - Class 150 Diesel Multiple Units
- 4 Meet The Neighbours : 5 - Dudley
- 7 A Step Back In Time From Wythall Station
- 9 What's In A Name ?
- 12 What If .... West Midlands Railway Had Existed In the 1950s
- 12 Platform 2 Quiz Corner - Questions and Answers

PLATFORM 2 is published by:  
The Stourbridge Line User Group, 46 Sandringham Road, Wordsley, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5HL

## STOURBRIDGE STALWARTS

### 3 : The Class 150 Diesel Multiple Units by John Warren

By the early 1990s, the first-generation multiple units which had served the Stourbridge line since 1957 were reaching the end of their lives, and major reliability and availability issues emphasised the need for urgent replacements.

The first second-generation diesel multiple units were called Pacers with the prototype built in 1980. They were essentially bus bodies with bus seats mounted on a rail underframe and were extremely uncomfortable, especially at high speed when they proved the perfect antidote for constipation. Fortunately, none of these units found their way to the Midlands, being confined to the North, West Country and Wales. Despite their limitations, mass withdrawals of these units only started in 2020.

The second type of DMU was the Sprinter unit and was much more substantial. The first type of Sprinter unit was designated Class 150 under the TOPS system and two 3-car prototypes were built by British Rail York Works in 1984. These were designated as sub-class 150/0 and were followed by two batches of production units. Sub-class 150/1 consisted of 50 2-car units which were built in 1985/1986. They were followed by 85 2-car units designated sub-class 150/2. The two sub-classes differed in appearance with the 150/1 units having flat fronts while the 150/2 units had walk-through gangways at each end.

Prototype Class 150/0 at Newport



Class 150/1 at Bristol Temple Meads



The units originally operated longer distance services around Derby, a role for which their high-density 3+2 seating was not really suited. However, between 1987 and

Class 150/2 at Dawlish Warren



1992, three additional classes of 2-car Sprinter DMUs more suited for cross-country services were introduced – classes 155, 156 and 158.

Thus, by 1992, enough Class 150 units were available to be cascaded onto local services in the Birmingham area, including the service between New Street and Worcester via Stourbridge Junction and Kidderminster.

By the time that the line from Smethwick into Snow Hill had reopened in September 1995 to create through services to Leamington Spa and Stratford-upon-Avon, Class 150 units had taken over the service with the two prototypes, 29 Class 150/1 units and some Class 150/2 units. In addition, two “orphaned” Class 150/2 carriages, whose “other half” had been written off after accidents, joined the fleet but couldn’t be used together as neither had toilets. Thus, as they had end walk-through gangways, they were each placed into the centre of a Class 150/1 unit to increase it from 2-car to 3-car.

Over the next few years, as demand warranted more 3-car units, further Class 150/2 units were split up and used as centre cars. By 2010, 12 3-car units had been created by splitting up 6 Class 150/2 units, and only 2 2-car Class 150/2 units remained in service in the West Midlands. It meant that half of the 3-car units had two toilets while the other half only had one.

Prototype Class 150/0 at Stourbridge Junction in 2011



Old (150) meets new (172) at Stourbridge Junction in 2011



In November 2007, London Midland took over the franchise from Central Trains, who had operated the service since March 1997. London Midland announced that it was to purchase 15 3-car and 12 2-car brand new Class 172 units for use on Snow Hill line services. These trains started to enter service in September 2011.

As a result, all but three Class 150 sets were transferred to either First Great Western or Northern Rail. The three 2-car Class 150/1 sets that remained were used mostly on Marston Vale services (Bletchley – Bedford) and on New Street to Hereford services. They remained until April 2019 when they transferred to Northern.

One of the three units retained and repainted by London Midland at Jewellery Quarter in 2014



Today, all of the Class 150 units are still in service, with all Class 150/0 and 150/1 units with Northern. The Class 150/2 units are split between Northern, Great Western and Transport for Wales, although Transport for Wales intend to replace their units with brand-new trains from 2023. As the units are now nearly 40 years old, it remains to be seen how much longer they will survive in frontline service.

## MEET THE NEIGHBOURS Part 5: Dudley by Rob Hebron

I'm going to use a little imagination and a fair amount of optimism to predict that Dudley will one day, become a Stourbridge Line station. On this basis, I can include it in my "Meet the Neighbours" series. Dudley has historical justification for inclusion, as it was a major station on the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway (OWWR) passing through Stourbridge, which opened in 1852.

Dudley Station in 1957



(R S Carpenter)

The original Dudley was once a thriving joint station shared by the OWWR (latterly the GWR) and the South Staffordshire Railway (SSR) (latterly the LNWR) but was always disadvantaged by its location which necessitated a lengthy uphill walk to the town centre.

Local trains from Stourbridge Junction to Wolverhampton Low Level finished in 1962, though the OWWR platforms in Dudley were still in use until 1964

when all services from the station to Walsall, Birmingham Snow Hill and Old Hill were withdrawn. The station buildings were demolished in 1967 to be replaced by the Freightliner Terminal which handled container traffic. This too, closed in 1989 and the remainder of the route to Walsall was mothballed in 1993.

A new, replacement Dudley station is scheduled to open in 2024. This will be a Metro station on the line from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill which will utilise part of the SSR and OWWR alignment. This station will be named Dudley Castle, to distinguish it from the town centre stop further along the route, to be known as Dudley Bus Station.

I will begin my exploration from the vicinity of Dudley Castle station. At the time of opening, this station will be reachable from the Stourbridge Line but only by a change to tram at the Hawthorns or two changes of train at Smethwick Galton Bridge and Dudley Port. Hopefully, before then, the Stourbridge Line User Group will have persuaded Transport for West Midlands that the Metro line should continue south towards Stourbridge or that a tram/train option should be explored.

The Dudley Station site now occupied by the Dudley VLR Innovation Centre in 2022



Track laying at the Dudley Castle station site in Station Drive in December 2022



Dudley Castle station will not be located on Castle Hill nor Tipton Road. It will, instead be situated on an embankment in Station Drive. This will make it convenient for tourists visiting Dudley Zoo and Castle. Passengers alighting here will be able to glance at the VLR Centre which is on the site of the old Freightliner Depot. “Very Light Railway” is a very concise term for a huge investment. Within these premises and on the test tracks, a new concept will be developed which will radically change UK railway operation. Lightweight vehicles propelled by sustainable energy sources offer the chance of re-opening old branch lines, safely and economically. It is very possible that the tram/trains desired to serve Stourbridge, Walsall and in between, could be researched and tested in Dudley. <https://bcimo.co.uk/open-for-business/>

By 2024, the immediate neighbourhood of the old station will have changed and much landscaping will be associated with laying the tracks on the new alignment. I am confident that even if trees and shrubs are planted, there will still be a good view from the elevated position of Dudley Castle. One landmark building down below will still exist, namely “The Station Hotel” which is now affixed with “...and Banqueting” to acknowledge its corporate services.



In its heyday, the Station Hotel has welcomed legendary performers who have appeared at The Opera House (later, The Hippodrome). They include Laurel and Hardy, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, George Formby and Tommy Cooper. The hotel is reputed to be one of the most haunted in the United Kingdom so maybe some of the acts are still residing there! <https://www.stationhotelandbanqueting.com/en-GB>

I fear that The Dudley Hippodrome will have been erased from the skyline by the time Dudley Castle station is in operation. There have been valiant attempts by the “Friends of Dudley Hippodrome” to save the building, but the Council is intent on demolishing this piece of Dudley heritage. The FoDH allegedly cannot provide a business case to restore the theatre and run it as a going concern. There is a serious asbestos problem within which would cost a fortune to remove. I wonder if a Blue Plaque had been screwed to the wall, commemorating Laurel, Hardy and all, Dudley Hippodrome could have gained listed status and been saved for future generations?



The Dudley Hippodrome still survived at the end of 2022



The former Odeon Cinema is now the Jehovah's Witness Assembly Hall

Castle Hill has long been an area rich in entertainment. The Dudley Hippodrome was once the next-door neighbour of the Plaza cinema. Designed by the same architect Archibald Hurley Robinson, it opened in 1936 and survived until 1997. By the time of closure, it had been re-branded The Odeon, having stolen the name from the redundant cinema on the opposite side of the Hill. When Dudley Castle station has opened, the first Odeon will still exist, as it has become an Assembly Hall for The Jehovah's Witnesses community. On the other hand, the Dudley Hippodrome may have been obliterated with the area turned into a building site.

Dudley Council has plans to develop the vacant space to include a university-style campus. As a consequence, land that once accommodated the Plaza Cinema, the legendary JB's nightclub and the martial arts centre will also be transformed. This will fulfil an ambitious regeneration project which is to be paid for with the help of £25 million from the government's Towns Fund.

I will once again leap forward to 2024. Heading up Castle Hill, the Assembly Hall is on the left, with Dudley's most precious asset, namely Dudley Zoo, on the opposite side. The iconic entrance gates, which were erected in 1937, were designed by architect Berthold Lubetkin and his modernist Tecton style features throughout the zoo grounds. Though strikingly different to the appearance of Dudley Castle, which is within the zoo, the Tecton buildings complement its antiquity, dating back to the twelfth century. <https://www.dudleyzoo.org.uk/>



Dudley Zoo Entrance Gates in Castle Hill



Dudley Castle from Castle Hill

The castle suffered damage during the English Civil War. Though bravely defended by the Royalists from 1644-1646, it fell to Parliamentary forces led by Sir William Brereton. The victors then set about destroying its fortifications, so that it could never be used against Oliver Cromwell. Some segments of the castle were restored by the later Earls of Dudley but the remaining habitable parts were destroyed by a fire in 1750, leaving the shell that we see today.

Throughout this article, I have referred to Dudley Castle as a station. This part of Dudley relies heavily on students and tourists and I predict that they will arrive in droves. This stop will need to be spacious and much more substantial than the standard tram stops as erected in Birmingham. I'm sure that designs have already been approved but wouldn't it be nice if they were revised and a railway station-type structure was substituted at a later date? For further reading, please visit - <https://metroalliance.co.uk/projects/wednesbury-to-brierley-hill-extension/>

## A STEP BACK IN TIME FROM WYTHALL STATION

by Roger Davis

It is probably not widely known that one of the country's largest transport museums is only a 1¼ mile walk from a Stourbridge line direct train service. This is the Wythall Transport Museum which houses a large collection of buses and electric vehicles from the West Midlands as well as other parts of the country. The museum opens every weekend between Easter and October, plus Wednesdays during school holidays, offering free vintage bus rides in the neighbouring countryside, miniature train rides and children's play areas in addition to its static museum exhibits.



Wythall Station



The station shuttle bus heads from the Museum towards Wythall station

On certain weekends, special main event days are organised, each having a specific theme. As a Bristolian, I was tempted to visit the museum on a day when buses built in Bristol were celebrated, with "guest" buses attending from all over the country. I therefore made the 55 minute train journey from Stourbridge Junction to Wythall. As a West Midlands Concessionary Pass holder, the journey was free because, although Wythall station is in Worcestershire, the adjacent stations at Whitlocks End and Earlswood are both in West Midlands county. It was a lovely morning so I walked to the museum despite having the opportunity to wait for a vintage bus which picked up passengers from Wythall and Whitlocks End for a free ride to the museum.

The event was really well attended and very popular with families, many of whom arrived by car and used the park and ride facility offered by the museum. Vintage buses shuttled between the two sites every 10 minutes, although one of the buses in use (*below*) brought back unhappy memories as it had a nasty habit of regularly breaking down in the Kingswinford area when used on the 255 and 256 bus routes.



The Park and Ride bus leaves the museum



The miniature steam railway

The miniature steam railway which ran around the site was very popular with the children as were the play areas. Two large halls displayed exhibits mostly consisting of buses operated by Midland Red, WMPTE and the Corporation fleets of Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton and Coventry. There was also a display of restored battery-electric vehicles including milk floats and bread vans.

Outside, the area was full of visiting buses, mostly built by Bristol Commercial Vehicles and bodied by Eastern Coach Works. A few were on static display, including one (*below*) which I caught to my gran's house in the early 1970s and displaying the correct route number and destination.



A 1971 Bristol Omnibus Company vehicle



The entrance to one of the halls

However, the majority of the buses outside were rostered to provide bus rides around the area. These operated every 15 minutes throughout the day, with two buses operating in tandem. Again, these proved extremely popular with the children. I made two nostalgic trips. The first was on a 1955 double decker of the type that I regularly caught to school in Bristol in the early 60s, while the second was a 1969 double decker of the type used on my local route during my student days in Brighton.



Built in 1955 and still going strong



On arrival at the Maypole

After an enjoyable visit, I prepared to walk back to Wythall station. However, I noticed that one of the free bus rides was to Maypole which connected with a regular number 50 bus to Birmingham Moor Street station for a train back to Stourbridge Junction. This final vintage bus ride was on a bus dating from 1980 which operated for Southdown in Sussex. It turned out that the owner and driver of this bus was a senior rail industry manager who SLUG regularly liaised with. It gave me the opportunity for a quick chat before the short walk back to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For further details, visit <https://www.wythall.org.uk/>.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME ? by John Warren

The name of a railway station should serve a single purpose – to identify the exact location of that station. However, there are a number of station names that aren't as accurate as they should be.

The most notorious of these have been mentioned before in *Platform 2*. These are the “Road” stations, where the dictionary definition of “Road” is “reached via a long hike over rough terrain”. In Cornwall alone, five of these stations existed – Gwinear Road (2¼ miles distant), Grampound Road (2½ miles distant), Bodmin Road (3¾ miles distant), St Columb Road (2½ miles distant), and Port Isaac Road (3½ miles distant and a long walk for Doc Martin). Of these, the building of the station at Grampound Road did result in a new settlement being created close to the station with the same name as the station. In Hampshire, the line through the New Forest between Southampton and Brockenhurst also saw two road stations at Beaulieu Road (3¾ miles distant) and Lyndhurst Road (2¾ miles distant), although common sense has seen the latter renamed Ashurst after the village less than ½ mile to the east.



In addition, there were many stations on the network at junctions with branch lines. The majority were simply named after its location followed by an instruction to change for a branch line train – for example “Hartlebury. Change for the Severn Valley Line”. However, others were given the name of the town at the far end of the branch line followed by “Junction”. Of course, there is a famous one on our line, but the fact that

it opened as “Stourbridge” 27 years before the branch line probably explains why it became “Stourbridge Junction” rather than “Oldswinford, Change here for Stourbridge”. A famous example still in existence is Llandudno Junction, which, although built in the village of Tremarl, was named after the seaside resort 3 miles distant. However, as at Grampound Road, the station resulted in the local settlement expanding and being renamed from Tremarl to Llandudno Junction. East Devon also had two such stations. The station built one mile west of the village of Whitford was opened as Seaton Junction (4¼ miles distant), while further west the station in Feniton was opened as Sidmouth Junction (8½ miles distant). Both stations closed in the 1960s along with the branches they served, although the latter station reopened in 1971 and was correctly named Feniton. Having said this, it must be noted that the busiest Junction station in the country, Clapham Junction, is wrongly named as it is situated in Battersea rather than Clapham.

One of the developments since the 1970s has been the opening of “Parkway” stations. Some are in the middle of the settlements they serve, for instance Didcot Parkway and Tame Bridge Parkway. Others, like Stratford-upon-Avon Parkway, Warwick Parkway and Coleshill Parkway, are on the outskirts of the town. However, some are situated some way from the towns and cities after which they are named and act as the railhead for a larger geographical area. The first is Bodmin Parkway, which we have mentioned earlier in this article as Bodmin Road in the days before it gained a car park. Further north, a new station on the site of the long-closed Sampford Peverell station, and close to a junction on the M5, was opened and named Tiverton Parkway after the market town 6½ miles away. Finally, the doyen of all Parkway stations, Bristol Parkway, could be considered a misnomer as it is situated in South Gloucestershire 6 miles north of Bristol Temple Meads. However, its proximity to the M4, M5, M32 and the Avon Ring Road makes it a magnet for motorists not only from Bristol but from a far wider area.



The use of the Parkway suffix is designed to indicate that the station is designed for use by motorists in the surrounding areas. The problem comes when a station is built and is named without the Parkway suffix. One example is Cam & Dursley. It suggests that the station is either in the one of the villages of Lower and Upper Cam, or in the town of Dursley. The fact is that these are 1¼, 2 and 3 miles distant from the station respectively. The station has a decent car park and serves towns such as Thornbury and Berkeley. Therefore, it should have been named Cam & Dursley Parkway to make that clear.

Railway station name suffixes ranged from the really useful to the totally unhelpful. The GWR excelled with stations such as Bristol Temple Meads, Plymouth North Road, Exeter St David’s and Swansea High Street. Less useful was its preoccupation in suffixing town/city centre station names with “General” as in Reading General, Banbury General, Leamington Spa General, Port Talbot General, Wrexham General and Cardiff General. Of these, only Wrexham General retains its name, although British Rail did the travelling public no favours when it renamed Cardiff General to Cardiff Central, given that Cardiff Queen Street is arguably closer to the centre of Cardiff.

However, at least the GWR did not follow the example of other companies by advertising that the station belonged to them. The Midland Railway had Derby Midland, Nottingham Midland, Chesterfield Midland and Sheffield Midland, while the Great Central Railway had at least 8 stations suffixed “Central”. The London & North Western Railway took a different tack by suffixing its stations at Rugeley, Lichfield and Nuneaton with “Trent Valley”, although it added its name to Wigan North Western despite the fact that the station is south of the Town Centre!

However, there are stations which need a suffix to warn passengers that the station is not quite where they expect it to be. For instance, Bromsgrove station is nearly 1½ miles from the Town Centre and is located in the Aston Fields district of the town. A change of name to Bromsgrove Aston Fields would have seemed appropriate.



Throughout the country, there are station name anomalies. Up to 1964, Bournemouth had two stations at Bournemouth Central and Bournemouth West. Most trains from London served both stations. Passengers who didn't know Bournemouth would obviously alight at Bournemouth Central, oblivious to the fact that Bournemouth West was closer to the Town Centre and the main beach near the pier. The city of Canterbury

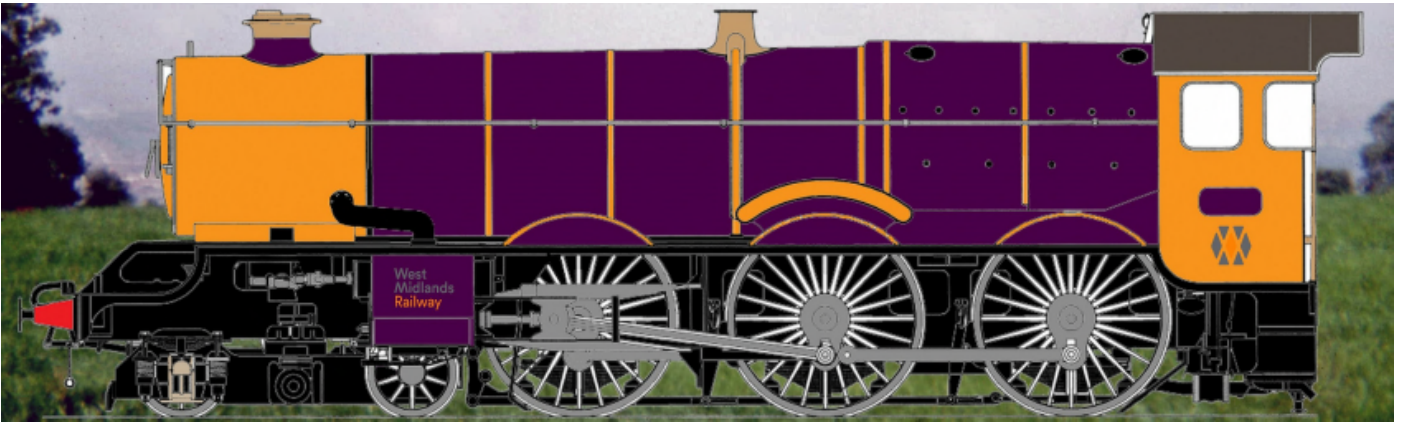
also has two stations – Canterbury East and Canterbury West. Canterbury East is north of the City Centre ; Canterbury West is south of the City Centre. If you draw lines of longitude through the booking offices at the two stations, VAR would prove that Canterbury East is more westerly than Canterbury West! Finally, the first stations on leaving Brighton are Preston Park (on the London line) and London Road (on the Lewes line). However, Preston Park station is a lot closer to the A23 London Road than London Road station. Conversely, London Road station is closer to Brighton's main park than Preston Park station is.

Thankfully, station renamings in the 1960s and 1970s have improved matters. Knowle & Dorridge station which is situated in the middle of Dorridge about 1½ miles from the centre of Knowle saw its name correctly shortened, while Great Barr station, in the middle of Hamstead and a mile from Great Barr, was correctly renamed to Hamstead in 1974. However, King's Norton station was not renamed despite being in the centre of Cotteridge and about ½ mile from King's Norton.

There are a number of proposals and advanced plans for new stations. Some of the names proposed are dubious – a "Tettenhall" station is proposed which will be over 1¼ miles away in the Aldersley area. Conversely, a proposed new station in Bristol on the site of the old Ashley Hill station will be named Ashley Down, after the district in which it will be situated. The old station was a long hilly walk from Ashley Hill, which in turn was much closer to Montpelier station. In addition, it is proposed to reopen the old Wantage Road station between Didcot and Swindon with the name Grove. Given that the village of Grove is just a mile from the station site while the town of Wantage is 2½ miles distant, this choice of name seems a good one.

The question that has been asked is how easy (and cost effective) it would be to change the name of a station. There have been attempts to rename Birmingham International and Birmingham New Street to Birmingham Airport (for NEC) and Birmingham Grand Central respectively as unwitting passengers are alighting at the wrong station. There is an obvious cost in replacing all of the signage, but how would it affect computer systems. We will look at this in the next issue.

## WHAT IF ... WEST MIDLANDS RAILWAY HAD EXISTED IN THE 1950s



## NAME THE DESTINATION 3

Here are ten photos of destinations that were served by direct services from Stourbridge Junction from the 1920s to the 2000s.

The destinations are in alphabetical order with the first starting Ha and the last starting Lo. All you have to do is name each destination station. *(Answers in the next issue).*



## NAME THE CITY - SOUTH OF BIRMINGHAM - ANSWERS

The answers to the questions set in the last edition of Platform 2 were :-

1 - Bath, 2 - Southampton, 3 - Plymouth, 4 - Cardiff, 5 - Gloucester, 6- Swansea, 7 - Wells, 8 - Winchester, 9 - St Alban's, 10 - Bristol