

Platform 3



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INTRODUCTION

In this issue of *Platform 3*, SLUG committee member Andy Cope investigates two innovations by the Great Western Railway from about a century ago.

His first article looks at the GWR Steam Railmotor and its use on local branch lines, particularly on the branch from Brettell Lane to Wolverhampton via Wombourn.

A GWR Steam Railmotor at Halesowen station on a service to Old Hill



(John Alsop Coll'n)

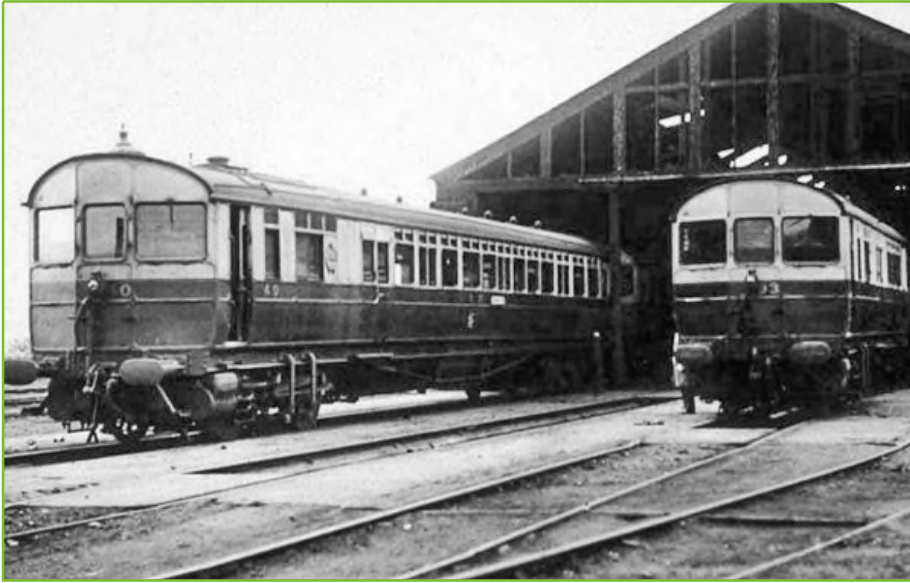
His second article looks at bus services in the area that were operated by the Great Western Railway. We hope you enjoy this issue.

Clarkson 20 hp Steam Bus DA 81 on a Bridgnorth to Wolverhampton Low Level service in 1904



(Commercial Vehicle Archive)

STEAM RAILMOTORS AND THE REGULAR WOMBOURN PASSENGER SERVICE by Andy Cope



Sunday 24 April 1932, 6 months before the Wombourn line service terminated with Railmotors 93 and 40 at Stourbridge shed. As 40 seems to have a Stourbridge Town board on its side, 93 must have been the Wombourn car. (There was no Sunday service, and Stourbridge only had two Railmotor diagrams by this time)
(H C Casserley)

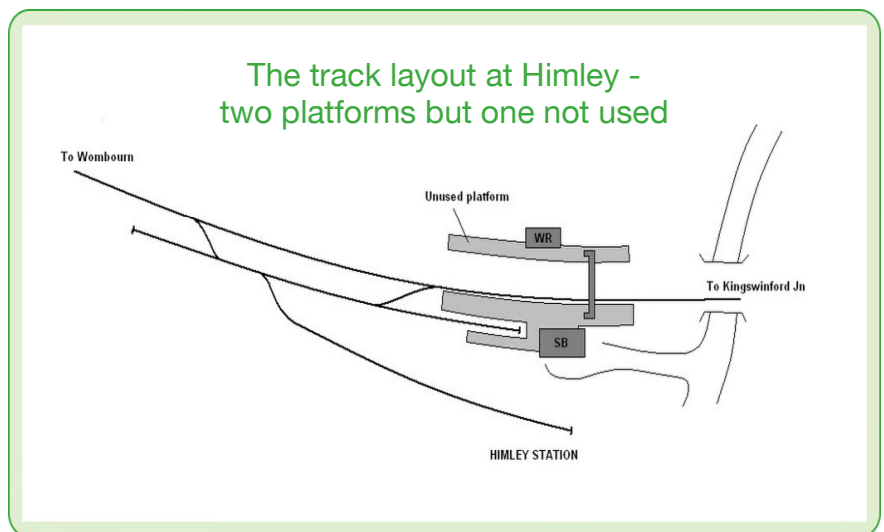
It's my family history that got me into delving into this issue; my grandfather worked for the GWR, initially as a shunter and brakesman at Leamington Spa then as a goods guard at Kingswinford Junction just off Brettell Lane. He retired as a Stourbridge passenger guard in 1947 and passed away in 1962. I was seven then and never had chance to ask him if the family story was true that he had been a guard on the short lived Stourbridge to Wolverhampton via Wombourn service in the late 1920s. But although I was never able to ask him about it, it did give me an interest in the passenger service and how it operated. This was the impetus to try and find out just a little bit more about the service, which was unusual in that it was so short lived and only operated from 1925 until 1932. The story is very closely associated with the GWR Steam Railmotors which were the only booked passenger trains to operate the line. I thought the endeavours of my research may be of interest.

I will start with a very short history of the line as it was really a late comer in the history of railways in Britain. Although the line was not completed until after the First World War, the first mile at the southern end was completed as far back as 1858 with further extensions in the 1860s and beyond eventually reaching the coalfields around the Himley to Dudley road in a district known as Oakfarm, close to where the Crooked House used to stand until it was illegally destroyed in August 2023. Although Bridgnorth had been reached by the north to south Severn Valley Line in 1862, it had long been an aspiration of the GWR to join Bridgnorth more directly with Wolverhampton with various schemes being considered. This culminated with a railway act being passed in 1905 which authorized a branch from Oxley south west through Trysull and Halfpenny Green to Bridgnorth. A further branch from the east of Halfpenny Green would join end on to the early 1860s railway mentioned above at Oakfarm thus also providing a direct connection from Bridgnorth to Stourbridge as well as Wolverhampton. At this time, the proposals also included a branch to Kinver. The Earl of Dudley had significant land owning and mining interests around the proposed line at the southern end which meant significant and protracted discussion between the Earl and the GWR which reached agreement in 1910.

This shifted attention away from the northern part of the proposals to the southern part around Himley, resulting in the line between the southern section and Bridgnorth being postponed in favour of joining the existing Oakfarm line to Oxley via Wombourn and the 1905 act was amended to include this addition. The Bridgnorth scheme was not cancelled but “postponed”, although the proposal for a branch to Kinver was indeed eventually withdrawn. As a matter of interest, the stations which never appeared on the railway map but were in the original act were at Halfpenny Green with halts at Quatford and White House and Trysull.

The desire to connect Bridgnorth with Wolverhampton more effectively had prompted a very early steam road bus service run by the GWR between the two towns in November 1904. Looking into this bus aspect has quite a lot of information so, with the editor’s permission, this issue includes a separate article on GWR bus services in the West Midlands. The line through Wombourn started construction in 1913 with good progress being made and structures such as the “Meccano” bridge across the Staffordshire and Worcestershire canal at Compton and Oxley viaduct were completed in 1914. However, the First World War virtually stopped progress and this was followed by the contractor running into financial difficulty. The result was that the GWR finished the construction of the line, it coming into use on 11 January 1925. The line was originally double track from Kingswinford Junction, north of Brettell Lane, to Baggeridge Junction just north of Gornal Halt.

The remainder of the line was single track with a passing place at Wombourn, although Tettenhall and Himley had two platforms, one of which was never used. As an aside the GWR had to seek an “Additional Powers Bill” in 1924, because of the line taking longer than expected to complete. This Bill made it clear that the GWR still anticipated building the Bridgnorth line at some point but abandoned the idea of a branch to Kinver. (If anyone is interested in further information on the rather convoluted history of the line the definitive, excellent, book “The Railway to Wombourn” by Ned Williams is recommended.)



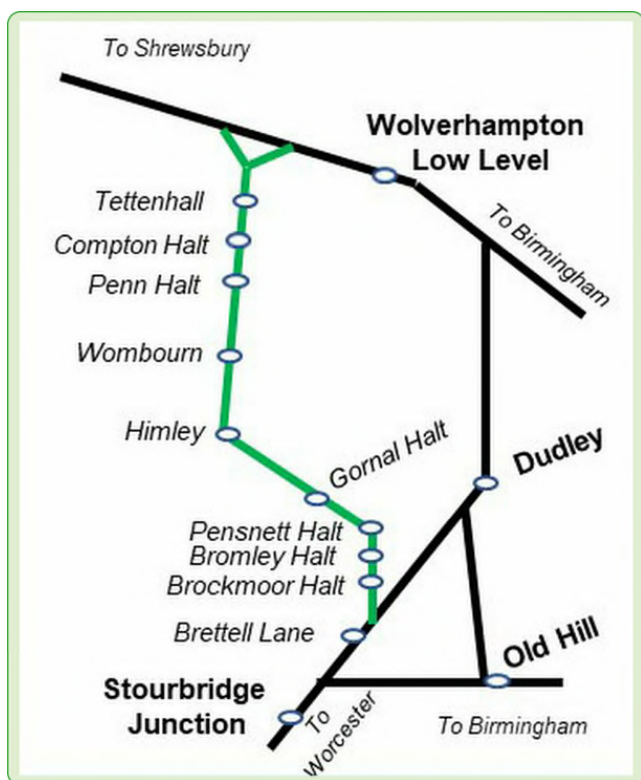
So now to the passenger service itself. The GWR had established itself as interested in pursuing the concept of the Steam Railmotor around the turn of the century. This was basically a coach with driving compartments at each end and a small vertical boiler within the coach feeding a powered bogie underneath the vehicle. It was thought that this configuration would be ideal for the many branch lines the GWR possessed and indeed, prior to World War 1, the growth in numbers of these vehicles was significant.

Early on in 1905, Stourbridge had been established as a centre for Steam Railmotors with the Town branch going over to Steam Railmotors in January 1905, followed two months later by the Old Hill to Halesowen and Langley Green to Oldbury branches. There were also Steam Railmotor forays out to Stourport on Sundays.

One of the most striking Railmotor oddities I have discovered pre WW1 was the 0510 Stourbridge Town service through to Birmingham Snow Hill. This was booked to be two independently crewed steam Railmotors from Stourbridge Town - what a sight they must have been! Taking advantage of the simplicity of not requiring to run round with a locomotive at the Junction, they had just 2 minutes at the Junction before setting off again towards Birmingham at 0515. Arriving at Langley Green at 0540, the rear set was detached to work the Oldbury branch. The leading set then puffed on into Birmingham, arriving at 0602, before returning to Stourbridge from Snow Hill at 0615. After these early morning exertions, it settled down to providing the more sedate Town to the Junction shuttle for the rest of the day!

There was further expansion with the opening of the North Warwickshire line to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1908, which saw Tyseley also receive an allocation. The “high water mark” of Railmotors in the West Midlands occurred around 1911 when Stourbridge had an allocation of six, Tyseley four and Stratford-upon-Avon four.

After WW1 the Railmotors started to go a little out of favour. With a maximum speed of about 30 mph and difficulties handling tail loads, they were failing to meet modern requirements. Their availability for traffic started to become an issue with many stopped for repair for considerable periods, often requiring to go to either Wolverhampton or Swindon Works for attention. Their ride was poor, particularly when freewheeling, as the suspension at the boiler end was a complex arrangement involving 8 springs which had to be synchronised correctly, and the saloon area was becoming quite difficult to keep clean. In service, experience also showed different rules had to be applied. A particular example of this was Rule 55. Usually the fireman had to go to the signal box to remind the signaller of his train’s location but on Railmotors the fireman was expressly excluded, it being the duty of guard or driver, as the fireman had to remain with the vehicle, presumably because of issues with the fire if unattended and keeping a head of steam. As a result, a programme of conversion of Railmotors to loco hauled auto trailers commenced. Nevertheless, Stourbridge continued to have an allocation for the Halesowen and Stourbridge Town branches, the Oldbury service finishing in 1915. Wolverhampton Stafford Road also had an allocation of two, possibly used for covering shortfalls elsewhere.



The downside of providing the service with a Stafford Road based railcar was that the first train from Stourbridge to Wombourn was not until 1020 in the morning. Presumably, as a consequence, from September 1926 the service switched to being Stourbridge based which gave a much better spread of times through the day. The timetable ran like this pretty much unaltered until the service finished in October 1932.

A feature of all the timetables with a Stourbridge based Railmotor is that the late afternoon service from Wolverhampton only seems to have gone as far as Brettell Lane and not into the Junction. It is presumed that this is because the Railmotor diverted into the shed at Stourbridge for coaling and maybe fire cleaning before picking up the last round trip to Wolverhampton later in the evening. The final timetable from 1932 is shown below.

WOLVERHAMPTON, TETTENHALL AND STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION.																			
(Rail Motor Car, One Class only. Week-days only.)																			
Mis		a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.		a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
	Wolverhampton (LL) dep	8 0	9 15	11 45	12 F 43	1 30	2 30	3 30	4 30	5 30	6 50	8 10	9 25	10 40	11 55	12 55	1 55	2 55	3 55
1	Dunstall Park	8 3	9 18	11 48	12 F 40	1 33	2 33	3 33	4 33	5 33	6 56	8 16	9 31	10 46	11 56	12 56	1 56	2 56	3 56
3 1/2	Tettenhall	8 11	9 25	11 55	12 F 53	1 0	2 0	3 0	4 0	5 0	7 1	8 25	9 40	11 00	12 00	1 00	2 00	3 00	4 00
4 1/2	Compton Halt	8 13	9 28	11 58	12 F 56	1 0	2 0	3 0	4 0	5 0	7 1	8 25	9 40	11 00	12 00	1 00	2 00	3 00	4 00
6 1/2	Penn Halt	8 18	9 33	12 3	1 F 1	1 4	2 4	3 4	4 4	5 4	7 4	8 25	9 40	11 00	12 00	1 00	2 00	3 00	4 00
7 1/2	Wombourn	8 22	9 38	12 7	1 F 8	1 12	2 12	3 12	4 12	5 12	7 7	8 25	9 40	11 00	12 00	1 00	2 00	3 00	4 00
9 1/2	Himley		9 43		18 12		2 59	3 6	4 0	5 0	7 12	8 25	9 40	11 00	12 00	1 00	2 00	3 00	4 00
11 1/2	Gornal Halt		9 49		18 19		3 6	3 12	4 6	5 6	7 19	8 25	9 40	11 00	12 00	1 00	2 00	3 00	4 00
12	Pensnett Halt		9 52		18 22		3 6	3 15	4 6	5 6	7 25	8 30	9 45	11 15	12 15	1 15	2 15	3 15	4 15
12 1/2	Bromley Halt		9 55		18 27		3 6	3 18	4 6	5 6	7 30	8 35	9 50	11 20	12 20	1 20	2 20	3 20	4 20
13 1/2	Brockmoor Halt		9 58		18 28		3 6	3 21	4 6	5 6	7 33	8 38	9 53	11 23	12 23	1 23	2 23	3 23	4 23
14	Brettell Lane		10 0		18 30		3 6	3 23	4 6	5 6	7 41	8 47	10 00	11 30	12 30	1 30	2 30	3 30	4 30
16	Stourbridge Junction arr		10 6		18 39		3 6	3 30	4 6	5 6	7 46	8 50	10 00	11 30	12 30	1 30	2 30	3 30	4 30
	Stourbridge Junction dep																		
	Brettell Lane																		
	Brockmoor Halt																		
	Bromley Halt																		
	Gornal Halt																		
	Himley																		
	Wombourn																		
	Penn Halt																		
	Compton Halt																		
	Tettenhall																		
	Dunstall Park																		
	Wolverhampton (LL) arr																		

F—Saturdays only, also runs on Thursday, July 21st and Fridays, July 22nd and 29th. G—Saturdays excepted. J—Saturdays excepted; will not run Thursday, July 21st and Fridays, July 22nd and 29th. K—Passengers change at Brettell Lane. S.—Saturdays only.

As for staff working the branch, we have a couple of insights. One of the drivers initially picked out to operate the service from the Wolverhampton end was a driver who had a significant disciplinary record. The original disciplinary form is shown on the next page but the transcript reads :-

Circumstances : Passing Outer Home, Inner Home, Starting and Advanced Starting signals at danger.

Note : A very serious disaster was averted by the LNER Driver whose signals were "alright" noticing the irregularity in time to stop short of the junction.

Penalty : Cautioned, taken off main line and employed exclusively on shunting. He will be employed on the Bridgnorth Line Motor Service.

As can be seen from the disciplinary form, an accident had narrowly been averted by the vigilance of a LNER driver joining the GW&GC section at Ruislip.

Note how the driver's service document, written in early 1925, still refers to the Wombourn line as "The Bridgnorth Line." This particular driver was involved in the service from its first day of operation.

My grandfather also did not have a blemish free record, receiving reprimands for not properly securing a horse box door when he was a shunter at Leamington Spa. We don't know if the horse escaped!

RECORD OF FINES, &c.

Locality.	Penalty, &c.	Circumstances.	Reference Correspondence
Whampton Puislip	Cautioned taken off main line & employed exclusively on Shunting.	Form & colour vision normal J ⁶ Passing Outer Home, Inner Home, Starting & Advanced Starting signals at danger. Note: A very serious disaster was averted by the L.M.S. Driver, whose signals were at "allright", noticing the irregularity in time to stop short of junction. will be employed on the Bridgworth Line Motor Service.	
Whiston	—	Colour vision normal. Form vision R ¹² L ¹² B ⁹	
do	—	Colour vision normal. Form vision R ⁹ L ¹² B ⁹	
do.	—	do Form vision R ¹² L ⁹ B ⁶	
Stafford Rd.	—	do Form vision R ¹² L ¹² B ⁹ Carefully	
Lundon	—	Colour vision normal. Form vision R ¹² L ¹² B ⁹ Inside & outside	
Lundon	—	Form vision R ¹² L ¹² B ⁹ Inside. Colour vision normal.	

When the Railmotors were first introduced it had been decided that there would be an intermediate grade between Goods Guard and guard/conductor for the Railmotors which had specific provision for career progression to full Passenger Guard in the future. We are also fortunate to have an eyewitness account of firing Railmotors on the Wombourn line from Walter Cotham who joined the GWR at Stafford Road as an engine cleaner in 1916.



Tettenhall Station

Mr Cotham was scathing about the coal capacity and said coal storage was little better than trying to store it on a shelf. Coaling was carried out at Stourbridge with a wheelbarrow although some sources suggest it also came in bags. Mr Cotham was also not impressed with water capacity as you would top the Railmotor up at Wolverhampton and again at Wombourn, but you would be nearly out by Stourbridge. However, this

is contrary to the experience documented by the Highland Railway which borrowed a GWR Railmotor in 1917 for trials. It stated they would run for 25 miles between water being topped up, but I guess it depended on the duty cycle and condition of the boiler as to the actual circumstances which prevailed.

Mr Cotham added that, in a normal steam locomotive, you would fire with the regulator open to prevent smoke. However, on a Railmotor, you had to fire with the regulator shut. It was fatal to the fire to open the firehole door with the regulator anything but shut. Presumably, as a consequence, at every station stop there would have to be frantic firing with the result of a plume of smoke over the station. Another steam motor fireman, Bert Attew, had a theory that, with a Railmotor, you had to make the fire like a cone and balance a big lump of coal on top of the cone. How long that big lump stayed there with the notorious rough riding of the steam Railmotors is anyone's guess! Each crew had a long list of tools which included spanners and equipment to repair leaking glands which were common particularly as the boiler end of the car vibrated a lot. Presumably, the change to the rule book, whereby firemen had to stay on the vehicle in the event of carrying out Rule 55 as mentioned previously, was due to the firing challenges these vehicles presented.



Himley Station

Was there ever any other type of passenger train used on the branch? Well, it's not known for sure, and no photographic evidence has ever come to light. It would be possible to speculate that, with the poor reliability of the machines by the 1920s, Stafford Road may have occasionally used a conventional loco and stock. I say Stafford Road rather than Stourbridge as Stafford Road had a smaller allocation of

Railmotors so, if one of its Railmotors failed, it would possibly be more difficult to find a Railmotor replacement compared with Stourbridge although, by the later days of the service, Stourbridge had acquired an allocation of loco hauled Auto trailers and suitably equipped locomotives.

By 1931 the GWR seems to have had enough of the losses the line was making. It stated that it cost over £5,000 per annum to run but revenue was only about £700 per annum. Part of the earlier agreement to build through the Earl of Dudley's estate meant that the GWR had to approach him before the passenger service could be withdrawn. This the GWR duly did, and the



Wombourn Station

agreement was that the service would not be completely withdrawn but "suspended" or "withdrawn for now" with the possibility of reinstatement at a future date. Of course, the service was never reinstated and now we can only dream!

The allocation of Railmotors at Stourbridge continued to decline with them being converted to loco hauled Auto trailers. The last two, numbers 55 and 88, covered the Town branch until 1934.

So, does this take me any closer to discovering if my grandfather was a guard on the short lived passenger service. Factually “no”, but circumstantially “yes”! He was a goods guard in “dead man’s shoes” in the early 1920s at Kingswinford Junction. An opportunity could have presented itself to apply for a Railmotor guard/conductor job on the new line and he could have been successful. I know he later went on to be a fully fledged passenger guard so perhaps that was his way into that grade.



Preserved Railmotor on the Looe Branch



Preserved Railmotor on the Looe Branch

It’s with immense fascination that I note a Steam Railmotor has been resurrected at Didcot. It is a surprising survivor which only survived due to it being used as a stationary mess and stores coach. It has been converted back to its original condition with a new power bogie and boiler. By a complete coincidence, this Railmotor is number 93 the actual car shown in the photograph at the start of this article, and it

certainly worked on the Wombourn branch. However, it is currently painted in an earlier all over crimson livery rather than the later chocolate and cream.

I haven’t had chance to see it yet and I believe it’s currently out of use at Didcot but hopefully one day I will be able to see it in steam and maybe take a short ride on it. And with my eyes closed I will imagine it’s my grandfather giving the right away from Himley and shouting “next stop Wombourn”

Ah, if only!

THE CASE OF THE MISSING “E” by Roger Davis

The above article consistently refers to the major intermediate station as “Wombourn”. However, everybody living in the South Staffordshire village knows that they live in Wombourne, with an “e” at the end. In fact, everybody except the Great Western Railway knows that that village is named Wombourne. So why did the Great Western Railway name its station Wombourn with a missing “e”. The reason given is that it did not want the station to be confused with Wimborne in Dorset, which seems strange given that Wimborne is nearly 150 miles away by road and not served by Great Western Railway trains, Perhaps, it should have named a nearby station “Ly” to avoid confusion with the East Sussex station at “Rye”

THE WOMBOURN BRANCH TODAY IN PHOTOGRAPHS by Roger Davis



The remains of Brockmoor Halt can just be made out (left of centre) in this view taken from Moor Street and looking towards Kingswinford Junction

Just north of Brockmoor Halt, this bridge took the line over the Stourbridge Extension Canal



The line crosses Buckpool Nature Reserve before passing under Bromley Lane Bridge

A few yards past Bromley Lane is Bromley Halt where both platforms are still intact 90 years after closure.



The line continues north towards Pensnett Halt (no longer visible). This view is just to the south of the Halt

Gornal Halt has now been buried under new housing. This artwork in Tansley Green Road, Pensnett is close to the location where the railway passed under the road just south of Gornal Halt.



North of Gornal Halt, the line becomes the South Staffordshire Railway Walk all the way to Aldersley.



The remains of the up platform at Himley Station can be made out through the shrubbery. The site of the down platform is now a picnic area.

Wombourn station still exists with the platform edges in good condition and the station building used as a café.



The platform edges at Compton Halt are also in good condition although nothing else exists of the station buildings.

Just north of Compton Halt, the line passes over Bridgnorth Road. The main road to Wolverhampton is the left hand road under the bridge



South of Tettenhall, the line crosses the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal on the “Meccano” Bridge.

Like Wombourn, Tettenhall Station has been restored and used as a café. The goods depot is now used as a transport museum.



RAILWAY BUS SERVICES IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

by Andy Cope

No, no, not the “Rail Replacement bus service” we all dread, but the early bus services operated by the railway companies or in connection with the railway companies. I started looking at these when I was researching the previous article on passenger railway services to Wombourn. While reading about the long-thwarted plans to build a direct rail connection between Wolverhampton and Bridgnorth, bus alternatives kept cropping up. So, I thought I would pen a separate article for members on railway operated bus services, a little covered area of our transport history in the West Midlands.

April 1968 and early preservation days at Bridgnorth. The original steam bus garage, painted black, on the right didn't get any attention that day. Inset is the garage today since moved to Kidderminster
Photo courtesy of David Rostance



I guess the biggest surprise is how far back railway connecting bus services go on the Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth route. Unbelievably, it is thought that the first bus service started around 1869, although the exact date is unknown, when a horse drawn bus left Wolverhampton High Level for Bridgnorth at 1620 each weekday afternoon, returning at 2000 from Bridgnorth. It's not known how long this service operated, what year it finished, who operated it or even how long the journey took.

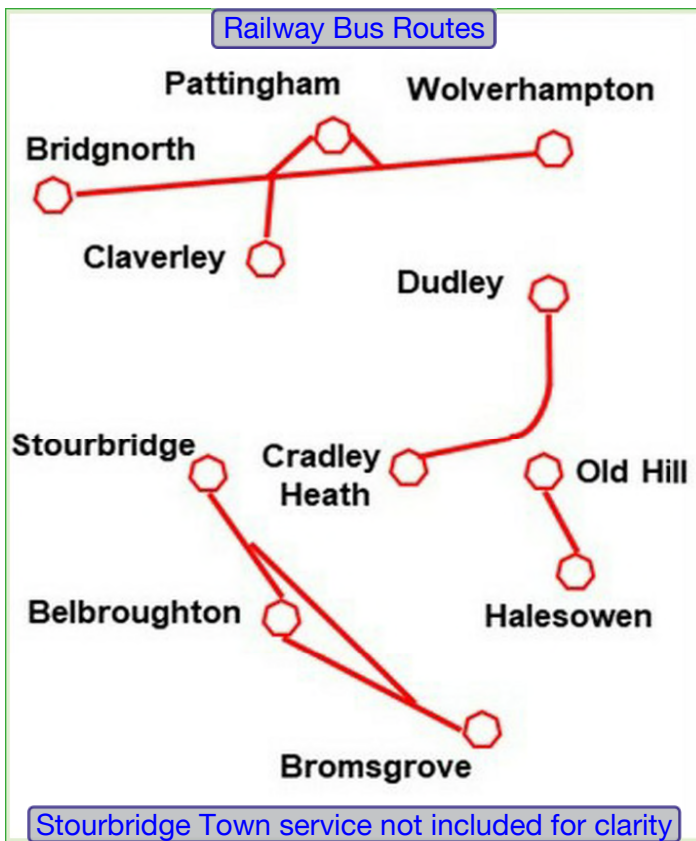
The Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth Service

Without doubt the GWR was the principal railway company to provide bus services in the West Midlands and, indeed, the country as whole. In 1928 the GWR had 300 vehicles on the road while all the other rail companies put together only provided a total tally of 30. The vast majority of GWR bus services were provided in the West of England with the Midlands only getting a few local services.

However, one of the earliest GWR bus services was the Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth service for which three Clarkson 20hp steam buses (registration numbers DA 80, 81 and 82) were ordered and put into service on 7 November 1904. These buses were fired by paraffin which was compressed in a similar fashion to an old-fashioned blowlamp, so no smoke was emitted. Unfortunately, these vehicles were not up to the job and regularly failed to climb Hermitage Hill out of Bridgnorth, a situation which required any able-bodied men on board to get out and push! So poor were these vehicles that, after operating for just a few weeks, the service was withdrawn in December 1904 to await more suitable vehicles. These came in the shape of Milnes-Daimler petrol buses which were only slightly better than their predecessors. Incidentally, after the failure of the Clarksons on the Bridgnorth to Wolverhampton service, these three vehicles were transferred to the GWR's Cheddar to Highbridge service where they lasted slightly longer, working from April 1905 to December 1905 before being found unsuitable on that route as well.



Wolverhampton Council, particularly the Watch Committee, were always keen to protect the Corporation interests within the borough of Wolverhampton and wrote to the GWR asking “on what authority” it was operating its Bridgnorth service. The GWR brushed this aside but, in future, Wolverhampton was to protect its own transport system much more fiercely. In fact, at a later meeting at Paddington, Wolverhampton Council extracted an undertaking from the GWR that it would charge a minimum fare of 2d within Wolverhampton boundary, the first recorded case of bus route price fixing. A further indication of Wolverhampton Corporation’s strong commercial management of its own services occurred in 1927 when the Birmingham New Road opened and the Corporation forced the BMMO (Midland Red), which was operating along the New Road, to charge 50% more than the maximum Corporation fare within the “Wolverhampton Transport Area”



Similarly, returning to the GWR Bridgnorth service, Wolverhampton Corporation put forward an Act of Parliament in 1920, which was passed, allowing the Corporation to start its own Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth service. It's likely that the GWR saw the competition as commercially untenable for its own service and, in the end, handed its service, which by now included services to Claverley and Pattingham, over to Wolverhampton Corporation in full.

Probably, after the Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth service, the next most significant service operated by the GWR was the service between Stourbridge Town station and Bromsgrove. Initially, this had started in February 1905 via Belbroughton and later, in April 1906, a more direct service via Hollies Hill rather than via Belbroughton was also introduced. The GWR had ordered a further 30 Milnes-Daimler buses for its motor services a short while before and two of these were introduced brand new onto the Stourbridge to Bromsgrove route.



World War 1 brought some retrenchment of services, and the Bromsgrove service was terminated by the GWR in 1916. It was immediately taken over by BMMO (Midland Red), eventually becoming its long lived service 318.



Mishap at Oldswinford, Stourbridge, with a Durkopp manufactured bus on the Bromsgrove route. (Note advert for local chemist "Hawkeswood" on bus side)

Perhaps one of the most significant GWR bus developments during WW1 was the replacement of the train service between Stourbridge Town and Junction station by a bus service from April 1915 through to February 1919. That was not the only rail service replaced by bus. December 1927 saw the Old Hill to Halesowen railmotor service go over to GWR buses, possibly partly due to the poor availability of Railmotors. This lasted for the next 3 years when it was then taken over by BMMO (Midland Red) which, by this time, the GWR held a 30% shareholding in.

OLD HILL AND HALESOWEN.														
WEEK DAYS ONLY.														
	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.
OLD HILL (Station) dep.	6 15	6 28	6 50	6 58	7 20	7 25	7 48	8 12	8 23	8 42	8 50	9 30	10 5	10 35
COOMBES HOLLOWAY "	6 20	6 33	6 55	7 3	7 25	7 30	7 53	8 17	8 28	8 47	8 55	9 35	10 10	10 40
HALESOWEN (Shenstone) "	6 23	6 36	6 58	7 6	7 28	7 33	7 56	8 20	8 31	8 50	8 58	9 38	10 13	10 43
HALESOWEN (Bull's Head) arr.	6 25	6 38	7 0	7 8	7 30	7 35	7 58	8 22	8 33	8 52	9 0	9 40	10 15	10 45
OLD HILL (Station) dep.	11 15	12 15	12S50	1 10	1:35	2 10	2 33	3 0	3 50	4 41	5G 7	5 13	..	..
COOMBES HOLLOWAY "	11 20	12 20	12S55	1 15	1:41	2 15	2 38	3 5	3 55	4 46	5G12	5 18	..	..
HALESOWEN (Shenstone) "	11 23	12 23	12S58	1 18	1:44	2 18	2 41	3 8	3 58	4 49	5G15	5 21	..	..
HALESOWEN (Bull's Head) arr.	11 25	12 25	1S 0	1 20	1:40	2 20	2 43	3 10	4 0	4 51	5G17	5 23	..	..
OLD HILL (Station) dep.	5G35	5 50	6 15	6G35	6 50	7G 0	7 13	7 55	8 53	9 51	10 29	11S 6	..	..
COOMBES HOLLOWAY "	5G40	5 55	6 20	6G40	6 55	7G 5	7 19	8 0	8 58	9 56	10 34	11S10	..	..
HALESOWEN (Shenstone) "	5G43	5 58	6 23	6G43	6 58	7G 8	7 21	8 3	9 1	9 59	10 37	11S13	..	..
HALESOWEN (Bull's Head) arr.	5G45	6 0	6 25	6G45	7 0	7G10	7 23	8 5	9 3	10 1	10 39	11S15	..	..
HALESOWEN (Bull's Head) dep.	5 55	6 10	6 30	6 40	7 5	7 12	7 33	7 45	8 0	8 23	8 35	9 10	9 45	10 19
HALESOWEN (Shenstone) "	5 57	6 12	6 32	6 42	7 7	7 14	7 35	7 47	8 2	8 25	8 37	9 12	9 47	10 21
COOMBES HOLLOWAY "	6 0	6 15	6 35	6 45	7 10	7 17	7 38	7 50	8 5	8 28	8 40	9 15	9 50	10 24
OLD HILL (Station) arr.	6 5	6 20	6 40	6 50	7 15	7 22	7 43	7 55	8 10	8 33	8 45	9 20	9 55	10 29
HALESOWEN (Bull's Head) dep.	10 50	11 55	12 30	1S 5	1 23	1 50	2 20	2 30	3 30	4 15	4G15	5 2	..	..
HALESOWEN (Shenstone) "	10 52	11 57	12 32	1S 7	1 25	1 52	2 22	2 32	3 32	4 17	4G17	5 4	..	..
COOMBES HOLLOWAY arr.	10 55	12 0	12 35	1S10	1 28	1 55	2 25	2 35	3 35	4 20	4G50	5 7	..	..
OLD HILL (Station) "	11 0	12 5	12 40	1S15	1 33	2 0	2 30	2 40	3 40	4 25	4G55	5	..	..
HALESOWEN (Bull's Head) dep.	5G20	5 30	6 3	6G20	6 33	6G46	7 2	7 30	8 35	9 30	10 15	10S43	..	..
HALESOWEN (Shenstone) "	5G22	5 32	6 5	6G22	6 35	6G48	7 4	7 32	8 37	9 32	10 17	10S45	..	..
COOMBES HOLLOWAY "	5G25	5 35	6 8	6G25	6 38	6G51	7 7	7 35	8 40	9 35	10 20	10S48	..	..
OLD HILL (Station) arr.	5G30	5 40	6 13	6G30	6 43	6G56	7 12	7 40	8 45	9 40	10 25	10S53	..	..

S—Saturdays only. G—Saturdays excepted. ; Runs two minutes later on Saturdays.

The only other local GWR bus service was the Cradley to Dudley service which the GWR inherited for a short while in April 1929 when it took over the local bus company of Weston's Blue Bus. This service was also handed it over to the BMMO on the same day as the Halesowen service.

CRADLEY, NETHERTON & DUDLEY

		WEEK DAYS.				SUNDAYS.			
CRADLEY (Station)	.. .. . dep.	a.m.		p.m.	p.m.	p.m.		p.m.
NETHERTON	.. .. .	7 0	AND EVERY	10 30	11 5 0	12 30	AND EVERY	10 30
DUDLEY (Station)	.. .. . arr.	7 15	HALF-HOUR	10 45	11 15	12 45	HALF-HOUR	10 45
		7 27	UNTIL	10 57	11 27	12 57	UNTIL	10 57	
DUDLEY (Station)	.. .. . dep.	a.m.		p.m.	p.m.	p.m.		p.m.
NETHERTON	.. .. .	7 30	AND EVERY	11 0	11 30	1 0	AND EVERY	11 0
CRADLEY (Station)	.. .. . arr.	7 45	HALF-HOUR	11 15	11 45	1 15	HALF-HOUR	11 15
		7 57	UNTIL	11 27	11 57	1 27	UNTIL	11 27	

Day to day Operation and Management

With no already established precedent, staff for the early bus services were recruited wherever they could be found, and recruitment was initially very hit and miss. Within time though, the GWR set up its own training school with the most junior grade being a “lad Conductor” but with potential to proceed up the grades to more senior positions. The driver’s uniform was provided by Dunhills of Euston Road London, mostly made of leather and very heavy to wear, particularly if it got wet which it frequently did. Each road motor depot reported to the GWR Road Motor Department and was in the care of a Leading Driver who normally doubled as the mechanic. The Conductors, however, reported to the local Station Master and paid their day’s takings into the local booking office. Drivers were paid a “Petrol Bonus” if they used less than a set amount. Unfortunately, this encouraged risks, particularly running



Early GWR Driver Uniform



Early GWR Conductor Uniform

out of gear on downhill stretches, which was extremely dangerous with the poor brakes on the vehicles at the time.

Drivers were expected to be able to attend to minor repairs out on the road due to the number of breakdowns experienced in the early days. Due to this situation, drivers were empowered to procure local horses to tow vehicles or purloin the services of local blacksmiths should that provide a potential solution to a problem. In the days before roadside garages, the local telegraph would be used to contact the garage to send out a replacement bus or, more likely than not in rural areas, the conductor had to walk back to the garage. If a local horse and cart was used to get stranded passengers home, the conductor was required to travel on the hired vehicle.

A couple of typical challenges with the early Milnes-Daimler buses have been recorded. One involved the way petrol was delivered from the fuel tank to the engine. This was done by exhaust being fed from the engine into the tank to push the fuel along to the engine. Unfortunately, when ascending hills, the fuel requirement often outstripped the engine exhaust's ability, so a separate hand pump was fitted to the side of the driver's compartment which required the conductor to hang on the side of the vehicle, pumping away like mad as they ascended hills! One driver on the Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth route stated that he always ascended Hermitage Hill in reverse which must have been quite alarming for passengers! Another alarming situation to passengers was that sometimes the rear tyres set on fire as the brakes applied directly onto the tyre surface on the rear wheels. Descending hills was no easier with the conductor having to walk alongside the bus with a sprag in case the bus stopped and started to roll forwards.

By the 1930s, the railways in the West Midlands had moved on from providing their own bus services. This did not mean that it did not have an interest in bus services as the GWR had a 30% shareholding in BMMO (Midland Red) and the LMS had a 20% holding in the same company. Most of the railway bus routes mentioned above still support a regular bus service with the exception of the Wolverhampton to Claverley service. Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth is now operated as Arriva service number 9. National Express and Diamond operate various services over other Black Country routes.



GWR Bus Service Successors
9 - Wolverhampton to Bridgnorth (above)
318 - Stourbridge to Bromsgrove (below)



However, in my experience, a service which still evokes a tradition of particularly good service, perhaps paradoxically in view of its company's untraditional name, is Kev's Cars service 318 from Stourbridge to Bromsgrove, a route numbered 318 since 1928 and therefore soon to celebrate the centenary of carrying this number. It still plies a similar route to the 1905 GWR service about 5 times a day, albeit with a few detours now in the suburbs of Bromsgrove. I am pleased to say you are unlikely to have to get out and push these days though!