

**An essay entitled Down Memory Lane “Tempus Fugit” by W H Pettifer**

Introduction and comment by J R Jennings

In 1965 Mr Pettifer presented me with a copy of his essay and the sequel to it (which is catalogue ref 03.03). The documents were not good copies being “carbons” from originals produced on an old typewriter by the author. They have been in my collection ever since. Mr Pettifer told me that he had deposited copies of the documents with several museums but I do not recall which ones. When I reviewed my Stratford area documentation in 2003 for the purpose of placing important items into the public domain I revisited the essays and realised that with the passing of nearly fifty years since they were written and many more since the events described in them the contents are significant. It is the comment of a normal workman on his life and times and his efforts in producing it are to be commended. If only more of the old employees had deposited similar documents we would have a richer knowledge of past times. The original documents would not reproduce easily even with modern scanning and copying equipment so rather than attach a poor copy of my original carbon copy I have completely re printed the material verbatim. I have kept to the author’s original layout and all errors except basic spelling mistakes have been left exactly as they were. No attempt has been made to correct content even where I know it is wrong. I have added footnotes that correct what I consider to be errors and I give readers my reason for the challenge to the original.

The core subject is the section of railway formerly known as The Stratford upon Avon and Midland Junction Railway. I would refer readers who have no knowledge of this railway to my list of Stratford area railway references 02.03 and to my own Family and local history documents ref 02.01 & 02.02. The railway was usually referred to as the SMJ although I have heard Stratford railwaymen also refer to it as the LMS (who were the successor company to the SMJ), the Smudge, the S & M and Old Town.

A difficulty readers may have with the essay is that the author sometimes skips back and forth in time and puts some events out of chronological order.

I have found that when interviewing old railway employees it is not uncommon for them to get things out of order. Mr Pettifer was often keen to convey the impression that he was a lifetime served SMJ man but I know that was not so. I have discovered that some of the events in his essay that appear to be first hand incidents witnessed by himself are in fact stories handed down by older SMJ men that he worked with after being transferred to the line by the LMS. He told me that his railway career commenced with the LNWR at Rugby as a lad porter during the Great War. He was proud to relate on more than one occasion that he had worked long hours at Rugby (Midland) helping to dispense tea to returning wounded soldiers crammed into non corridor troop trains when those trains paused for water there. The LNWR and the SMJ became part of the LMS in 1923 and around that time Mr Pettifer moved from porter grade to the carriage and wagon dept as a greaser, still within the Rugby division of the LMS. He ended up as an examiner at Rugby in the late 1920’s although I believe he may have worked for some time in the Northampton area, certainly the employers had no compunction about moving men as they thought fit. In the sequel to this

essay he tells how he applied for a transfer and ended up working on the ex SMJ line originally as a signalman. Readers will see that he changed jobs several times in his career. That was unusual for ordinary railwaymen with the normal course of progress being moving up the grades in a chosen department. There were complex rules for many railway jobs involving experience and seniority and most men simply waited to fill retired or dead colleagues' shoes. I have not been able to establish when or why Mr Pettifer decided to move from being a signalman to being a guard, he was certainly still at Kineton Box during WW2. He was obviously keen to "better himself" and willing to move grade if there was advantage to him although more than one contemporary colleague hinted to me that his forthright nature got him into trouble at times and caused management to move him. His final job as a guard was the grade that he was in when he finished his service with BR. My notes on conversations with him place his transfer to the SMJ line around 1931 although it is hard to fix a date. In the 1930's the ex SMJ line would have still been regarded as a very parochial backwater of the LMS and the majority of the men employed on the line would have been the original SMJ staff. I know from speaking to some of the remaining SMJ men who were already retired in the 1960's that this gradual "infiltration" of new blood was not always welcome on a railway that ten years after the 1923 grouping still had the atmosphere of a family affair. The newcomers were taken to only slowly. I think that some of the stories related by Mr Pettifer may have been handed down to him during conversations with other men but non-the-less are a fascinating picture of working life during the period.

When I first met Mr Pettifer he was near the end of his railway career (circa 1957). He was one of the men transferred to the books of the Western Region at Stratford from Old Town in 1958. (refer to Volume 02.01). He was a stocky built man of medium height with grey hair. He wore his railway uniform trousers and waistcoat even when not at work. His final job before retirement was as a passenger guard working on the last steam hauled local trains to Worcester, Birmingham and Leamington. I do not believe he trained to work the new diesel railcars due to his age. He always had a lot to say for himself and would air his views on topical matters in a rather loud voice. I got the impression that he was not too popular with the existing staff at Stratford (GW) but that may have had more to do with the "seniority" issues than anything else. He lived in one of the small cottages in Shottery Road near to Evesham Road Crossing and his hobby was bee keeping for which he was well known locally. He had an allotment on the Shottery Fields side of the railway between the two footpath crossings (now housing) and if he had been pottering around in the afternoon having finished on an "early shift" he would appear at the Kissing Gates leading to Albany Road where I often stopped to take photographs. He would always stop and natter about his early service and it was because I had showed an interest in the SMJ during the time that I had known him that he presented me with my copy of his essay. It was 1965 just after the line had been closed throughout with the exception of the section between Burton Dassett and Fenny Compton and I got the impression that writing it had been a labour of love over a period of time. He told me that some of the ex SMJ employees had taken part in a BBC radio documentary about the line and that the recording had been marked down for keeping.

J R Jennings last revised 01.2006

### **DOWN MEMORY LANE. "TEMPUS FUGIT"**

**By W. H. Pettifer**

The other Saturday morning, I was keenly reminded of that old Latin tag, when the radio gave a mention to an old broadcast and the compere played a portion of one that I was instrumental in helping to caused to be produced SEVERAL YEARS ago, with the help of three of my colleagues, and the voice of one of them was reproduced.

Listening again to a voice that has long since passed to his reward, I thought of the other two and realised that I was the only one still alive of the quartet.

Names of fellow mates passed through my mind in quick succession only to be hung with the 'tag' gone, when I realised that I was one of the few of that fast declining number to be still alive, and I thought "What a loss it would be not to leave some memories and history behind me of that happy band who together helped to form that bit of railway known as "THE EAST & WEST JUNCTION RAILWAY", or later "THE STRATFORD-UPON-AVON & MIDLAND JOINT RAILWAY". *[note 1]*

Even as I am writing this, I have heard of the passing of another of the old drivers, and so here is the story of this railway, as I knew it, and some of the anecdotes of which I have become aware. *[note 2]*

### **STRATFORD-UPON-AVON & MIDLAND JOINT RAILWAY**

This line extended from Broom Junction to Ravensthorpe Wood Junction with an extension from Towcester to Blisworth, and a further branch from Towcester to Cockley Brake Junction, to connect with the line which ran from Bletchley to Merton Street station, Banbury.

I had no knowledge of the latter branch, as it was worked exclusively by Blisworth and Towcester Guards, and can only tell about it by repeating hearsay. The remainder of the line I knew intimately as I worked it for many years, and met and knew some of the venerable stalwarts to whom the line was their whole life and love.

During the course of that period; I absorbed the history of the line as was told me and anecdotes of the different characters who together were the Railway. As I get older, and I near my seventies I realise that these memories will be lost forever. Who knows or who can foretell his fate, and I should like to put down my memories so that posterity will not lose those stories of which I have knowledge. The line has already been ripped up and many of the bridges destroyed and abandoned with the aid of Dr Beeching, *[note 3]* whom I forecast the country will live to regret ever putting in the position of being able to order the closure of so many lines. One mile of roadway takes up 35 acres of valuable land, whilst the same distance of railway line only takes a little over two or three. I digress, because I loved the beautiful movement through the countryside.

To return to the story of the line. In its heyday this line carried coal from the Nottinghamshire coalfields through to Bedford and thence along the Bedford – Northampton line to Olney in Buckinghamshire. (If one cannot bring this market town to mind, the poet Cowper lived here and also the home of the "Pancake Races" every Shrove Tuesday). From Olney SMJ men picked it up and conveyed it to Broom Junction, where men from Gloucester carried it forward to the Bristol area for distribution. The return journey, and of course the outward journey for the Stratford men, empty wagons were conveyed through to the next village beyond Olney called Turvey, where we stored the wagons and returning to Olney engine and brake *[note 4]* the driver and fireman turned

the engine and oiled it to prepare it for its return journey. We would then attach the required load, usually 26 wagons of coal and, backing on to the brake, proceed towards home (if we were lucky). I would like to deviate for a second, as the engine usually used for these journeys was the Number Four type [note 5] and the size was such that it just stood in the turntable with nothing to spare, and the engine had to be balanced perfectly to enable two men to turn this weight. [note 6] If the engine was put onto the table before the tank was filled it was obviously off balance and no human power could have moved this object. So the tank had to be filled and had to be at perfect balance with the result that we used to watch carefully to see the slight movement which noted that the engine was in perfect balance and there was a matter of fractions of an inch in the difference between being able to turn the engine, and the hard work of levering the mass round with the crowbar.

The whole of the line was "single" with the exception of the crossing places. And the Northampton and Bedford line which was "double" throughout, but the piece between Olney and Turvey was worked as single on the "up" line to enable the "down" to be used for spare coach storage, with the exception of the two ends which were kept for the storage of the coal at one end and the empties at the other.

On arrival at Turvey we detached the van and shunted the empties on to the dead road, and then propelled the van back to Olney,

On completion of the work on the engine, we proceeded to pick up our return load and back onto the van. The fun then began, as we were faced with a very steep hill climb with very little run at it to get up speed. There were two levels provided on the incline for the enginemens to have a short rest and to allow the engine to regain its steam pressure to proceed up the next piece. The first piece was the very devil, and we watch the slow deterioration of the engine beats as it did its best and, if only the driver could succeed in getting the engine chimney through the bridge hole before the first level, all was well. If we stuck before we reached that objective then the poor old guard had to walk all the way back to Olney box to receive permission to set back and get a "wrong line order form" to permit that movement. One can tell of the speed we often made on that last bit up to the bridge, as I have on several occasions got out of my brake, ran ahead of the train and run up the bank to pick a bunch of wild sweet peas which grew in profusion along its side, and then returned and calmly got into my brake when it caught me up again. The sweet peas I may add were not self-sets, but the fad of another old ganger who used to throw the seeds along the bank when he was doing any work in that neighbourhood.

The type he sowed were of the bouquet or everlasting type. If the engine was able to get its chimney through the bridge hole, then we knew the driver would be able, on the snatch and start principle, to get to the first level and we were saved a long walk. (By the way the ganger's name was Pearson).

Up to Ravenstone Wood Junction and then with a left turn down a steep drop of 1-84 into the hollow, And then a long steady climb, with the exception of a little level at a disused station called Salcey Forest.

I remember when I was at Northampton how the Sunday schools used to book up a special train of two or three coaches, and leaving St John's Station go to Salcey Forest for their Sunday School outing. The owner of a large field adjoining the station had fitted country toilets and a large roof on

stilts for the helpers to put up a stall or two and also cover for the boilers with which to make the gallons of tea that the children so eagerly lapped up after the exciting races that the helpers arranged for them. The train journey was the high spot of their year as they came from a very poor quarter of Northampton and many had never been on a train before. I often wonder who was the tireddest at the end of the day, children or helpers. I transgress. Up and down the train went gradually climbing until it reached the highest point and then a gradual slope down until at its lowest point at that moment we crossed the old London and North Western Railway (what a name to conjure up memories) at Roade Junction. At one time there was an exchange siding here and the level and curve could still be seen, whilst an old railway coach that did duty as a shunters' cabin was still there in my time. Climbing now steadily we came to another station Stoke Bruerne, which at one time had sidings behind for the benefit of the local coal merchant. At my time the station premises were used as a home for one of the platelayers, and there was a telephone installed and if we got into trouble during the night we had to knock him up and then use the telephone to communicate with Towcester. I am glad to say I never had recourse to use it and I never heard of anyone who did after the station closed. *[note 7]* In the face of this station there was a round hole in the brickwork. It was never filled in as it was made during the building with the intention of inserting a clock. The clock was ordered and made by a clock maker by the name of W. H. Wade, Kineton, and that clock was still in use up until the closure of the line in Kineton signal box. To accommodate the round clock he made a wooden case and made it to look as near to marble as possible but his painting skill was spoiled after I left the box by the decorators on their next visit. If I had been there I might have been able to stop the sacrilege. A small anecdotal reminiscence of that W. H. Wade will not be out of place here. He was the official watch repairer for the old East and West and one could see him wandering down to the station at Kineton each morning just before nine o'clock and then he would set the clock (his clock) at the right time. At a minute to ten the signaller at Kineton pressed the needle on the single needle instrument with which all the boxes communicated and then promptly at ten o'clock send the appropriate signal to say it was JUST ten o'clock. Each signaller recorded it in his block book and any correction he had to make with his own time-piece. To return to Stoke Bruerne, after leaving the station we soon passed under a very narrow bridge. This was the barge- horse bridge for horses going over the top of the hill whilst their owners foot-propelled the barges under the hill as the canal was too narrow to allow for a tow path. I believe I am right in stating that this is the Grand Union Canal. Still climbing, but now much steeper, 1-200, we reached the dreaded Northampton hole. This was a short, vicious drop of 1-100, both ways over the Towcester-Northampton road and a drop into Towcester of 1-94. As I said, this was dreaded by every man jack on the line, if your train was extra long, this was the place if one was going to break lose then this was it. *[note 8]* As one can easily see the engine would be on a falling gradient, the middle on both at the same time and the brake on a rising gradient. No wonder a silent prayer passed our lips when we realised that we had safely passed that hazard. Talking of the danger of this spot it was known by we regulars that if the signaller at Towcester became aware of the mishap in time he would try to switch the second portion onto the Banbury line. This was done by the driver making a great row on his whistle and getting as much speed as possible to get away. When this was done the rear portion had an empty line in front of it and a rising gradient of four miles that would have slowed anything to a standstill. One Bedford guard who had not been told of this arrangement jumped from the moving rear portion and failed to stop himself when he landed, with the result that he ended up against the waiting room wall and spent the next few weeks in hospital.

As we enter Towcester we saw the 4 miles long branch to Blisworth, I should say on the right hand side, it goes straight up the hill and down the other side and at the top there used to be a marker saying "summit, 2.1/4 miles straight down". This was a lie as there was a level both ways. I understand that at one time there was a halt or setting down point at the top of the hill in the big cutting at a village called Tiffield. [note 9] But I wonder if the people who referred to this stop had got mixed up with the fact that the line was serviced by a system of travelling trolleys conveying the gangs to and from their jobs, controlled by the staff system with a special staff, having an extra staff which could be inserted into the special places where it was possible to turn the trolley to right angles and wheel it off the line by inserting the staff into these special boxes. One put the instruments into phase and so allowed the signalman to allow another train into the section to pass the workmen until they were ready to resume their journey onwards to another place or to return to base cabin. Of course the men would make for the pub during their meal-break and so a path would be cut up the bank to enable them to get to Tiffield village. Hence the thought that there was a halt at one time.

Blisworth was the meeting place with the L & N W Railway and also one of the termini of this line. At one time it was supposed to hope for a straight connection to Northampton but the hope was never fulfilled and so the separate station. If perchance one should have gone into the station too fast one would have finished up in the canal, which ran at the end of the station approach, with the bacon factory beyond. As one left Blisworth with a load, one was very careful not to overload as there was no run up to the start of the incline and so one had about 300 yards and then would start climbing, as I said before<sup>1-74</sup>, under the road bridge and up to a small iron stone yard and then it was almost level. Then the driver would have a rest if he was short of steam and have a blow up to give the engine time to recover before trying the long haul to the top. If a train got stuck, then the guard would count out so many wagons and send the driver on ahead with those while he waited for him to return and take the rest of the train, and then reunite at Towcester, and proceed towards Stratford. On leaving Towcester we travel over a double line for a short while, not truly double but two singles side by side. The reason for this was when the line was first built it was a true single line with a box at the junction to Cockley Brake called Easten-Neston, [note 10] but it was soon found at that the amount of traffic at that time caused unnecessary delay and the other line was added to obviate the delay and save some money on the signalman's wages. To return for a moment to Towcester, immediately on leaving the station we pass on the left one of the three turntables on the system [note11] and then cross the old Roman Road, called Watling Street Road with its everlasting road traffic which killed this line and many others too, with the aid of Lord Beeching and his axe, but they too are now suffering as they caused the railways to suffer and are now getting to saturation point and soon we shall see the government of this country at that time admit that a mistake was made and railways will come back into their own again.

It was a lovely run to Blakesley, the next station to Towcester and often in the early morning when the sun was just getting up, in the summer, I would ride on the veranda of my van watching the country unfold. I remember on one occasion very vividly as all of a sudden there was a flash of a lovely sandy creature lying in the four-foot [note 12] and I immediately thought that a large hare had been knocked over. On arriving at Blakesley, a relief-signalman by the name of Billy Williams was just about to finish his shift and as broad as long. Literally, he was a heavy man and had to wait until the passenger came at eight o'clock before he could get home which was at Blisworth. I told him what I had seen and, as he had two hours to wait, he decided to walk the mile each way and get himself a good meal for nothing.

The next morning we had again to wait at Blakesley for a train, (Blakesley was a crossing point), for trains going in the opposite direction as well as being a station. I proceeded gaily to the box, expecting to be profusely thanked (it was war time and food was on ration) when I got the biggest cussing it was possible. As I said, Billy was fat and a two mile walk had taken quite a bit of fat and sweat out of Billy, and when he got there, there was the animal alright but it was not a hare. IT WAS A VERY DEAD FOX.

Blakesley station is, or was, unique in as much as there was another station alongside our station actually leading off the platform into a lovely miniature station, having the name of Blakesley Miniature Railway. Why was it there? You see, the owner of the big house was named Bartholomew and at one time he was a director if not the Managing Director, and he was so interested in railways that he built himself a railway all over his own grounds and ran a passenger train to and from the house, meeting the trains and taking his guests up to the front door. Just inside his grounds was a branch and across the road into the station yard and when the coal or any other goods arrived, Mr Bartholomew took delivery with his own train. He also gave a magnificent silver cup, known as the Bartholomew Cup which was competed for by the ambulance men of the line. The final was an occasion of great rejoicing as the teams were entertained in the grounds and they were honoured guests for the day. A huge marquee was erected in the grounds in which the competition was held, with a wonderful high tea to follow and I believe the drinks were "on the house", especially to the winners. I understand that he ran two steam engines made by Basset-Lowke of Northampton, and one motor maid of all work to haul the goods and I understand from some of those who were present that the rails ran all over the estate. As we leave the station on the left, and in the grounds of the hall was a large tower, in my time getting a little worse for wear, and people who know tell me that it was an old snow tower; in other words, it was the forerunner of modern 'fridges. As those who know told me, they were able to cut ice or snow from it as late as August the next year. Fruit and butter, etc. were stored and kept in perfect condition for a very long time.

A little further on we arrived at Moreton Pinkney Station, known to all farmers as the home of Pettifer's cattle medicines (no relation to the writer) and also the nearest station to the home of George Washington, Sulgrave Manor.

During my time we had many visitors from across the "herring pond" and this was the first time I had seen an American dollar, and I hardly knew what to do with it when it was given to me as a tip.

This puts me in mind of a real character, known as Ernie Berksworth. To understand I must say that Moreton Pinkney was a through station and it was not necessary for the box to be continuously open, and in fact it was only opened during the daytime.

Behind the box, and alongside the line was a fairly wide and free-flowing stream. Also, as Moreton was in a dip of the landscape when it rained it always seemed to know the way to the station, with the effect that the rails were often flooded to a depth of two or three feet and if the engine fire was extinguished then the guard was supposed to proceed to either Woodford or back to Blakesley station for assistance. Ernie found himself in this predicament one night, when the water was up to the platform level. He decided to sit still until the water subsided and found himself in hot water for not going for assistance earlier, as no one knew what was happening for over two hours. Ernie

received a very stiff report to answer and it looked as if he would get several days suspension for not carrying out the rules. Ernie wrote across the report the laconic remark "cannot swim" and got away with it. We soon start to rise towards the highest point on the whole system but soon approach a sharp bend and this was the scene of the only passenger derailment in the history of the line. *[note 13]* I was on the breakdown train that went to the scene, and when I got to Woodford I was held there to allow the steam crane to proceed to the scene. While I was there Harry Bambrook, the driver of the passenger, came up to me and a great laugh went up when all he could say was that he had lost his bottle of tea. To understand the point, all drivers, and also their mates, used to get a certain square whiskey bottle for their tea and then they could ledge them on the outside hand rail to keep them cool. Poor Harry, he was a very big man and it was a very hot day. As a matter of record, the cause of the derailment was the heat bending the rails. In other words the expansion of the rail over-running the expansion gap that was allowed and so causing the rails to become out of alignment. The engine went over on its side and nearly went down the embankment. There were only two passengers travelling that morning on that particular train, as the midday and evening services were the most patronised.

To understand my point about the laugh, Harry, being extremely stout, sweated profusely and needed plenty of liquid to make up for the loss. As it happened, I always carried with me at that time a bottle of mineral water in reserve, at that time, we were doing quite a lot of overtime and one could never be sure just when one could be certain of reaching another tap.

I must press on. After leaving this spot we rose and then crossed the old Great Central Line, which was the best way to get from London and Sheffield and their "Master Cutler" was a beautiful train and, with their mahogany finish and oil polish, looked a brave sight. This train carried a through coach for Stratford-upon-Avon, which was detached at Woodford Halse Station, taken to Byfield, where it was coupled to our own train and on the other way a through coach was left at Byfield and the Central came and fetched it to couple to one of their own trains, *[note 14]*.

To return for a few moments to the actual junction, incidentally the very highest point of the whole line, there was siding accommodation leading towards the Central Line in the London direction. I understand that a connection was made but only used once or twice when it was found out that if it was persisted in, then the Great Western would be able to have a right of way to run their own trains without having to pay to the East and West for the privilege and so the agreement was squashed. *[note 15]*

Going back to Byfield brings a little anecdote to mind. I travelled up and down this line while I was courting my wife and, as my train was the one that suffered with the waiting for the coach to get from Woodford Station, we had to go towards Stratford so that the coach could enter the station for the purpose of being attached at the rear of our train. During this wait I used to illegally leave the train and getting up the bank I could pick a bunch of wild flowers or hedgerow fruits as a present for my future wife. Then we would return to the station we attached the coach and proceeded to Stratford. There are three other things that makes Byfield unique. One, the level of the platform is reputed to be on the exact level of the height of the steeple of Stratford Parish church. Two, at one time it was the headquarters of this line and the offices of the line, as finished were at this station. *[note 16]* Thirdly, the line owned a wonderful hotel at Stratford but, it was over a mile from the station and therefore the powers that be made a marvellous train (coach) which was equipped with a set of pneumatic tyres outside of the steel wheels and by a simple cam-

action able to be swung lower than the steel ones and then running up a ramp, over the length of rails and so was enabled to run on an ordinary road. *[note 17]* A passenger travelling from London with the purpose of visiting the poet's birthplace and habitations could with only one change at Blisworth, travel to his chosen hotel. So much for the grandiose scheme. It made several trial journeys and when it was on its return journey, loaded with quite big-wigs in the form of high-ups of the railway system and influential visitors, decided that it had had enough and decided that its axle was not strong enough for the job and so broke, leaving all the passengers stranded for over two hours whilst an engine was hastily prepared and rushed up to Byfield to tow the broken down coach to Blisworth and that was the last of the rail-car.

Still talking of Byfield and Woodford, I remember one hiatus that will show how important Stratford-upon-Avon was in some people's eyes. I was ordered one day to accompany two light engines to Woodford Station to pick up a "trooper" and take it to Stratford Station. *[note 18]* We arrived at Byfield and duly filled up with water so that the return need not be delayed and went on up to the Junction. The signalman asked Woodford Station for the road and he immediately asked the reason for the two light engines. When told they were for the "trooper" he replied that he had no knowledge of a "trooper" being about (this was war-time of course hence quite a bit of "walls have ears" stuff was rife) and so the signalman, thinking it may be right, made some enquiries of his control and when it was all sorted out the train was running, BUT IT WAS TO STRATFORD, LONDON, INSTEAD. Someone had blundered badly. Don't forget that it had come from the top, as all the services and train-times had been worked out to the last minute.

Leaving Byfield, we come to a small two-line siding with two lovely little steam engines working, 0-6-0 type. This was the Byfield Ironstone Company and, though its stone was of poor quality, it was very precious during the war as it saved valuable shipping space, a very important item owing to the U-boat menace. A lot of ore was sent north and two trains went to Woodford, at least each day sometimes more, and some went to South Wales, which we took out via Stratford and Gloucester. A short way further on we crossed a small bridge, which looked almost like a farm accommodation bridge, but history could tell many a story about the traffic that passed under in the old times for beneath the overgrown roadway was the fact that this was the great Welsh sheep road, along which the sheep were driven from Wales to the north. It was certainly there before the Roman era. Another little single siding, used for loading farm materials, including sugar beet for the factory. This bears a famous name as it was a Roman settlement in its time. The name is Aston-le-Walls.

Leaving Aston we go down into the dip, under a road bridge and over the canal feeder bridge, again over the combined railway and canal bridges and drop into Fenny Compton Station. There we run alongside the Western main line and we had an exchange point here, also passengers were able to cross and change trains. There were two sidings behind our station and a short siding having connections with both lines. This siding could only clear 11 wagons at a time. Later, during the second war, there were many alterations made at this station, making direct exchange for full trains without any shunting. *[note 19]* Going forward again, we come to a small siding of two short roads and on the opposite side a very short platform with a small wooden shed type of building, roofed with corrugated sheets, called Burton Dasset Halt. I understand that it was originally built for the benefit of those workmen who worked for a glorious little railway known as "The Edge-Hill Light Railway". This railway in its heyday was used exclusively for the carriage of ironstone from the Edge Hills to the railway line. The tubs of ore were lowered down the hillside by an endless rope, assisted by a donkey engine, and assisted in or as a counter-weight by the empty tubs going up the hill. The

railway boasted of two small steam engines. One, I believe at the pit face and one at the bottom of the slope, where there were a fan of sidings before the tubs were picked up on an endless rope and carried to tip into railway wagons at the first mentioned sidings at Burton Dasset Halt. The demise of the Edge Hill railway came about, according to hearsay, by the sudden parting of the hill rope, and with the result that one of the workmen had to have both his legs severed at or below the knee, and the firm could not afford the cost of both a new rope and the compensation to the man, so they had to go into liquidation. Since this period the army took over all the ground at level and have built an army depot at that point, and to digress a moment, that piece of line from Burton Dasset to Fenny Compton is the only piece of line still working as a military private railway and worked by the method known as one engine in steam. Is it not ironical that the first piece of line finished on the East and West railway should be the last and only piece of the line still working?

Leaving Burton, we drop down to Watery Lane Bridge (well named as it was often flooded to a depth of over a foot) and up Bedlam Curve (what flowery names were given to this line) and down again into Kineton. I'm racing ahead again with my story, as the top of Bedlam Curve was the scene of the death of a German pilot on one of the bombing raids of the last war, as the gunners defending Coventry at the time of the blitz managed to set the plane on fire. He baled out but, unfortunately for him, either his parachute set on fire or the harness gave way, one cannot say, but he landed in the field close to the line and his body was buried in Heyford Military cemetery. Continuing into Kineton we passed a small siding on the left known as Cramptons. It took me a long while before I could find out who Crampton was but I now know that he was one of the officials who was in charge of the line in its earliest years. [note 20] Kineton Station itself was unique, as behind the box there were two short lines that were always called Willoughby's sidings and, on asking why, I was told that Lord Willoughby objected to the charge of demurrage then being raised on wagons not being unloaded by a specific time and, as he had all his coal and coke, also feeding stuffs for his horses (he was master of the hounds at that time), he caused these two short sidings to be built on his own private land and connected to the line and all his loads to be placed on them to avoid the iniquitous (?) charge being made. One often wondered if his initial costs were ever repaid with the saving. A little way past Kineton Station we come to a right of way over the line, with a stile on the top of the embankment. This was a favourite resort during the summer period of courting couples but what a blessing it was that on a certain night, during an air raid alert the only string of bombs dropped around the Kineton area happened that there were no users of the stile that night. Five explosions took place and, as I was on duty, realising that they were very near the line I called the S/Master, and together we went to search the line. All was clear until we got to Brookhampton Farm, when we found that the bomb had hit a small outbuilding and killed seven calves but, owing to the fact that there were two huge Dutch barns between the point of explosion and the farmhouse which cushioned the blast, no-one was hurt and, as a matter of fact, not a pane of glass in the building was even cracked. We returned to the station and recommended the running of the freight trains, which we had held up. All went well until a train, waiting in Kineton station for the clearance of a previous one, and the time exactly 12.18am when another vast explosion took place. A sixth bomb had been dropped in the string and this was a delayed action one. Its centre was the earlier mentioned stile, and if it had gone off a little later, then there must have been a catastrophe as we reckon that the train standing at Kineton would have been buried in the debris, as it was it blew the bank to such an extent that the line was buried to a depth of over two feet of clay and soil, and it took two or three days to clear it up, even with emergency measures.

To continue our journey passing Brookhampton, we dip down to cross another famous road, the Roman Fosse Way, and then climb slowly to Ettington Station. This village is very old and on some maps is still spelt as Eatington, Through the bridge under the road there used to be a wooden bungalow, long since destroyed, but I will refer to it again in a later part of this story. And then the climb. If one was very heavily laden as it was on a reversed curve it made it all the harder and through a very deep cutting called Goldicote. The first train on a Monday morning had to travel with caution, as large slabs of Lias stone would fall down during the normal week-end when the line was out of use. As an item of record, two Sundays each year were devoted to cleaning the walls of the cutting to stay the fall of stone as much as possible. The first Sunday men were let down the cutting sides on ropes to knock down the undercut slabs (the cutting was always very wet) and the next Sunday was spent in clearing up the debris.

Leaving the cutting there was a heavy fall down to Stratford, with a level half-way down. This site was the site on the southward side of a war-time aerodrome and I always remember the first day that I had the telephone installed as I was taking a train up the line, when an airplane overshot the runway and finished up astride the line, and the first time my wife heard the phone was when I rang her to tell her of the accident and to expect me when I could get there. As a matter of record, the railway organised a 'bus service and that is how I returned, as it was a couple of days before service was restored. So to Clifford Sidings where a lot of sugar beet used to be loaded during the war and so to Stratford. The bit from Clifford being doubled and passing under the Oxford Road and then under a wonderful little railway known as the Stratford and Shipston Tramway<sup>[note 21]</sup> It is said that it was drawn at one time with horses up-hill and the horses climbed onto a special platform and rode down the other side. But to return to our line, down to Stratford and with a very steep rise 1-46, over the Great Western line to Cheltenham. We had an exchange point with them which later during the war period became a direct running junction in the other direction to enable the precious ironstone from Banbury and Byfield to be taken down to Gloucester and South Wales for the steel so vitally needed. <sup>[note 22]</sup> Our own line travelled down, after passing the GW through Luddington village and on up Sandfields bank and then down to Binton Station, passing over the Welford-on-Avon road, called the Four Alls Bridge, after the famous inn of that name which was and is still famous in fishing circles. And so through Binton Station up a little and then along almost level until we come to Cranhill almost in a straight line for Bidford-on-Avon, which I believe it was meant to serve. At Cranhill or immediately past it, I believe the builders hit a big snag in as much as the farmers would not sell the necessary ground and the line had to make a sharp right hand curve and so instead of going through the centre of Bidford and on to Salford Priors, where I believe it was supposed to cross the Evesham/Redditch main line, and proceed to join up at Worcester. Instead of which the line came to a stop at Broom Junction where it joined up with the Evesham line (Mid). And so I come to the end of the story of the line. But not quite, as one cannot leave off without some reference to the people who worked on the line and were indeed the life-blood of the old East and West and, in fact, were the railway. Let us name a few of the families, for it was essentially a family concern. There were the Campions, the Hines, the Smarts. Let us start with the Champion family. Father was the ganger at Ettington when each station had its own gang. His name was James and, as far as I know, he had three sons. When the line became patrolled by flying gangs, Jim, the son, took charge of the stretch from Blisworth to Cockley Brake and from Ravenstone Wood to Blakesley. Albert had the stretch from Fenny Compton to Clifford Sidings and Harry, the other brother, took charge from Clifford to Broom, leaving only the length from Blakesley to Fenny Compton not covered by a Champion, whilst I married into the family in as much as Jim, the son, was my wife's uncle.

The Smarts, I told you I should return to that bungalow at Ettington. Dad Smart was the S/Master and lived in that house and reared a large family. I don't know how many females but of the sons, Frank was a signalman at Stratford, Don was a guard at Stratford, Brock (I don't know if that was his real name) became s/master at Blakesley and Cecil was signalman at Towcester. Another family was the Bambrooks. Harry, whom we have mentioned earlier in regard to the passenger derailment at Moreton Pinkney, Bert, another driver, Bill, one of the shed foremen, Tom was a cleaner and another brother became a signalman at Stoke Works Junction on the Midland line. And then the families Hine. I say deliberately "families" as there were two families at least and it is difficult to make sure which brother was the father of each. I don't mean anything wrong, but it is hard over the lapse of years to separate which family was which. Tom was a driver, Fred failed his eyesight test and was reduced to porter, another Fred was goods porter and Bill was the other shedman mating Bill Bambrook on the opposite shift. The shedman was the one who, not being a regular driver, was authorised to move engines about the shed and up to the coaching stage and turning them on the table.

There was a small refreshment room and kept up to the time of its closure by Mrs Jordan. *[note 23]* At Kineton there was a real character in the person of Joe Brown. Married for the second time late in life and fathering two more children by his second wife, but what a character he was in himself. He believed sincerely in the saying "ne'er cast a clout till May is out" and he put his overcoat on the first of September and took it off on the first of April the following year. Also at Kineton in my time was a man named Harry Greenway and though, when he came on at fogman *[note 24]* and the first train was not for over five hours, he would not wait until nearer the time in the warmth of the signal box but went immediately to his post and sat in the fog. There was the Miller family of Ettington, but I cannot remember all their connections. There was a driver named Ted Smith, who knew the rules and kept them. I remember on one occasion when he accidentally overran my signal on a greasy rail by a couple of yards but refused to set back, though I would have been unable to have seen his error, until he came and admitted his mistake and to see everything was alright. The last one I can think of at the moment is "Chinny Clifton, who worked his way up from the very bottom to become secretary and virtually at the head of the line. Charlie Harwood used to denude the line side from Stratford to Broom with his wires for the rabbits. I'm sorry to say he did not get all his bag as the drivers and guards often raided his traps.

I really must close this story of a line and only hope that my story will help to cause to live again that lovely set of men who formed, and were, the East and West railway Company. And who could close this tribute without reference to one of the greatest characters of all, beloved by all the children and grown ups as well. Always willing to go out of his way to do anyone a good turn and to see the children run after him was a sight for sore eyes. He was not a saint in as much as I only remember him being in church when he went to a wedding or funeral and then I suspect that his love of a glass might have been the ruling factor, but get a few pints into him and he could recite "The Murder in the Red Barn" with appropriate acting that would shame the best thespian who ever walked bonny Stratford theatre. I remember at one celebration, we held when the ambulance team won the shield and Flowers Brewery gave us a nine-gallon barrel in commemoration. Tacker Harris gave such a wonderful display that those who were not in stitches of laughter were in stitches of fear as we had purposely darkened the room and his fearsome expression left nothing to the imagination. When he passed on the greatness of his love was manifest by the vast variation and quantity of the congregation at his internment. *[note 25]*

The only other one that I shall refer to I did not actually know, but he left such an imprint on those who did that anecdotes about him often turned up in conversations. One I particularly liked was the fact that he was Permanent way Inspector for the whole line. At Bidford-on-Avon there was a clear running spring, and as it ran over a clean bed, naturally or otherwise, a watercress bed had formed. It was too far for Satchell to send a platelayer on a Saturday morning (half day) so as there was a lovely fresh-water spring running down the line side from Clifford, he arranged for the bed to be cleaned out and a sand bed formed, and then transplanted some roots from Bidford and in a few weeks had a private bed of his own. He was very partial to fresh water cress and woe betide anyone helping themselves, but he didn't get it all. He could not have watched it day and night and the railway did provide hand lamps for the staff, some of whom also liked fresh water-cress. Well, I really must end here, with the ghosts and memories of those who really were the STRATFORD-UPON-AVON & MIDLAND JOINT RAILWAY COMPANY, or to give it its earlier name, THE EAST & WEST.

W. H. Pettifer

1931 to its closure.

#### **NOTES ON TEXT** by J R Jennings

Note1. The correct title of the company from 1910 until the Government enforced "Railway Grouping" of 1922 was The Stratford upon Avon & Midland Junction Railway. This was the final legal title given to the amalgamation of the four main constituents that started with the formation of the original East & West Junction Railway way back in 1864. [Refer to Dunn or Jordan books]. The SMJ erected many cast iron "Trespass" & "Motor Car Acts" warning notices throughout the length of the line most of which were still in place until the early 1960's. These substantial signs all carried the SMJR company title in full and Mr Pettifer would have passed many of them on a daily basis including the ones that were on posts within yards of his signal box at Kineton! Despite this he uses the incorrect "Joint" description on more than one occasion. Of course in conversations the line was always most commonly referred to as simply the SMJ, a description that stuck with most of the men right through both LMS and BR ownership until closure.

Note 2. Mr Pettifer was fortunate to have received training as both a signaller and guard in addition to earlier experience as a wagon examiner in the Rugby division. I know he made himself available for lucrative "relief man" work. My notes and his text indicate that when he moved onto the SMJ line his duties were as a signaller and he served for a period at Kineton Box. He was too young to have served in the Great War and possibly too old for active service in WW2. Most key railway posts were "reserved occupations" anyway but the pressures of wartime on railway manpower meant he did also work at some of the other boxes on the line. After the war he reverted to guard duties.

Note 3. The withdrawal of passenger services over the SMJ in April 1952 pre-dated Beeching. It is a paradox that the life of the line at least between Woodford and Stratford was in fact extended because of a "knock on" effect brought about by the 1955 BR Modernisation Plan. [see my file ref

Vol 02.02]. Mr Pettifer uses his essay to “have a go” at Beeching because all railwaymen of that time were united in their vitriolic condemnation of the Beeching Report which they saw as destroying a cherished way of life as well as a livelihood.

Note 4. “Brake” Until modern times all freight trains ran with a special vehicle at the rear variously known as the Guards Van, Brake Van or often just as the brake or van. The SMJ working appendix of 1919 continued to use the very early spelling of “break” to describe such vehicles. Most of the vans used by both the SMJ and LMS on the line were only equipped with a manually operated handbrake. The only other brake power available on the freight trains that the author served on would be on the locomotive with the actual wagons being free running or “loose coupled” in the train. Each wagon did have a manually operated handbrake to allow it to be left safely in sidings.

Note 5. Since the earliest days of the line the normal locomotive types used for freight trains were small wheeled 0-6-0 tender engines. The SMJ possessed a mixed fleet of locos that had mainly been bought second hand by the East & West. They did purchase a few new ones from Beyer Peacock but when the LMS took over they inherited a fleet of engines in poor condition. These were quickly replaced with standard LMS 0-6-0 types of Midland Railway origin with the class 3F type being used for the passenger trains and light traffic lines such as Towcester – Banbury and the class 4F type handling the heavier through trains. Railwaymen simply called them “number 4’s” etc: It was only during and after WW2 that larger engines used the line on a regular basis.

Note 6. Although tender engines could be used, if necessary, running “backwards” or “tender first” it was not desirable for a number of reasons. The SMJ installed turntables at key locations where engines would normally turn back on return traffic. Many of them were purchased second hand and some did service at more than one location. They were all relatively short and the slightly longer engines introduced by the LMS only just fitted some of the older SMJ turntables. The SMJ line tables were operated by the crew pushing them round once the loco had been placed in the optimum position. The author’s description of the problems of balancing them correctly is a good illustration of this task that was a daily one for men all over the railway network at the time. A list of SMJ line turntables as listed in the 1919 Working Appendix is given below.

Blisworth	40 feet diameter
Towcester	41 feet 9 inches diameter
Stratford on Avon	51 feet 8 inches diameter
Broom Junction	40 feet 10 inches diameter (SMJ & Mid Jointly owned)
Olney	50 feet (Midland Railway)
Woodford & Hinton	53 feet 9 inches (GCR)

Note 7. When the line from Ravenstone Wood to Towcester was built the promoters authorised the building of two substantial brick stations at Salcey Forest and Stoke Bruerne. All researchers of the line agree that this was a folly because it transpired that the area was so depopulated that the passenger service lasted only *four months!* It is no wonder the clock was never fitted. The only use for the redundant buildings was to offer them as accommodation to local railway staff. I presume the author’s reference to closure is for common carrier goods traffic the date for which was around 1908. Both locations continued to be available for wagon loads of coal until after WW2. Photographs taken in early BR days of through freight trains on the section clearly show coal wagons in the sidings at Salcey Forest & Stoke Bruerne although the latter was the most used.

Salcey Forest is a very lonely spot even in 2005, it really must have been in the middle of nowhere when it was opened on Dec 1st 1892.

Note 8. As mentioned in note 4 the normal freight trains over the SMJ line were of the “loose coupled” variety. This means that there was no continuous automatic air or vacuum brake on the wagons. In SMJ days the only freight vehicles that did have automatic brakes were the horse boxes and hound van because these vehicles were often conveyed by passenger trains where automatic brakes were mandatory. In Mr Pettifer’s time the LMS did introduce some through freight traffic including Bristol – Kentish Town banana trains and these would almost certainly have had automatic brakes but the traditional traffic of the line remained loose coupled right through to BR days. The engine crew and guard had to work as a team to prevent violent “snatches” of the chain link couplings. The guard had to keep the couplings taught by applying his handbrake on downhill sections and releasing it on the uphill ones. The SMJ route had many stretches where the gradient profile resembled a switchback and short sections of rapidly changing grade made it impossible to keep all the couplings in tension. At certain notorious locations great care was needed not to cause a coupling to snap. The author describes the sort of situation that did occur fairly often. (there is another description of this type of incident in my own account of Stratford’s railways ref: Vol 02.02).

On sharp downhill grades the engine and brake van did not have enough brake force to prevent a runaway so at Goldicote between Ettington and Clifford Sidings west bound goods trains would stop at the top of the incline and the guard would have to walk forward along the train to manually set the handbrake on several of the wagons in order to prevent the whole train gathering too much momentum. Once past the grade the train would have to stop for him to release the handbrakes. This process was known as “pinning down”. It is worth noting that the SMJ employed the Westinghouse Air Brake system. All of the railway companies that the SMJ directly connected to used the more common vacuum brake system. This was yet another problem that did not encourage through traffic although some locos were later fitted with both air and vacuum equipment.

Note 9. The alleged halt platform at Tiffield has confounded most historians who have researched the line. There is some evidence to suggest that an official timetabled stop was there for a short time in the early East & West days. Cobbs Railway Atlas gives 1869 to 1871 as the period open for passenger traffic. Some authors claim it was never an official stop nor was any platform or structure provided. Mr Pettifer offers a very interesting and first hand solution to the mystery. He describes it as a “setting down” point and is as good an explanation as I have heard. Its frequent use by the track gangs with an unofficial path leading up the embankment would give the appearance of a rudimentary halt. With passenger numbers very small and given the rural backwater nature of the line it is possible that passenger trains did stop “unofficially” to allow local people to use the service at Tiffield. I once heard a story from a former Towcester guard who claimed that for many years a lady would get on the morning train at Blisworth once a week and ask the guard to let her off at Tiffield otherwise she would have to walk back along the Watling Street from Towcester! Apparently her request was only turned down if a high ranking official was known to be around. What arrangements there were for stepping down from the carriage I was never able to find out but it is possible that either the remains of the original platform (if ever provided) or an unloading ramp for the gangers was present.

Note 10. Confusion by the author on this location. The correct spelling is Easton Neston and that particular location is at the eastern end of Towcester along the line to Ravenstone Wood. There was an ironstone siding at Easton Neston for many years and the name briefly figured in one of the short lived names for the company that promoted the Towcester – Olney section. [fully detailed by Jordan & Dunn]. The location Mr Pettifer is describing is in fact Greens Norton. He is absolutely correct in saying that the original Greens Norton box controlled a physical divergence of the Banbury and Stratford lines but was abolished because of the short distance back to Towcester and thereafter the junction was at Towcester station with the two single tracks running parallel as far as the former junction at Greens Norton.

Note 11. See note 6. The number of turntables directly owned was 3 plus the jointly owned one at Broom. In addition the LMS had inherited the Midland railway turntable at Olney. Before 1922 the SMJ did have use of the GCR turntable at Woodford but it is unlikely that the LMS would have continued to use that facility as the LNER would no doubt levy a charge.

Note 12. The “four foot (way)” this is the term used by railwaymen to refer to the area between the running rails. On double track lines the area between the two adjacent tracks was known as the “six foot”.

Note 13. This event occurred on 3.8.49 and was reported together with photographs by the Northampton Chronicle & Echo.

Note 14. Here is a case of the timescale of events getting confused and also becoming mixed up with the author’s first hand experiences and recollection of what in the 1930’s was even then recent history. The alliance between the East & West and later the SMJ with the Great Central was certainly the most beneficial of the relationships enjoyed between the small local line and its larger neighbours. Before the 1922 grouping the SMJ had physical connections with the GCR, the LNWR, the GWR and the Midland Railway Co in the case of the last three at more than one location. At best the LNWR was apathetic to any business relationship, the Midland were a little more co-operative and the GWR was for the most part hostile. In an unfortunate twist of fate the 1922 grouping placed the SMJ into the LMS camp but the GCR became part of the rival LNER. Between 1922 and the start of WW2 the exchange of traffic at Woodford reduced considerably only improving to former levels under the wartime Railway Executive and later BR. The LMS (who had also taken over the Midland Railway) dictated that the traffic flows over the SMJ line would be from either Blisworth or Ravenstone Wood to Broom. The bulk of Mr Pettifer’s essay takes place within the LMS period. His description of the “Master Cutler” and the through coaches via Woodford belong to the pre-grouping era and are either boyhood observations or second hand tales.

Note 15. The author’s comment about the physical abandonment of the through direct chord from Woodford West to the south is correct. Jordan and Dunn both give the reason as saving the cost of an additional signal box and associated wages for very scarce traffic. Also it was safer and more convenient to handle the detaching of passenger coaches within a station rather than a mile away in open country. Close examination of the East & West Junction Railway Acts do confirm that the GWR had been up to its normal political tricks of trying to influence any proposed railway development it considered a threat to its interests by insisting on insertion of running powers as a condition of non opposition but it did NOT have running powers over the section of line in question. There is no evidence that the GWR did attempt to exercise any of the running powers they had

obtained over the East & West between Fenny Compton and Stratford apart from the well documented exchanges of traffic over through connections at Fenny Compton and Stratford. I can only assume that the author had picked up some mis-information on this matter and the GWR would have been as big a bogey man to him as Dr Beeching was!!

Note 16. I can find nothing to support the statement regarding Byfield ever being the HQ of the company. It is on the earliest section of the East & West to be opened for traffic and it is possible that there was some short lived administrative office there prior to the completion of the facilities at Stratford. If the author got this information from one of the old employees he worked with it would have been hearsay even then as we are talking of a time difference of sixty years between the opening at Byfield and the period of his essay.

Note 17. He is referring to the LMS "Ro-Railer" vehicle. Due to its unique nature and the relative wealth of information on it I have written a separate volume exclusively on this vehicle. Refer to my Stratford upon Avon Transport Volume ref: 02.04.

Note 18. "Trooper" A Military Troop Train. These were often arranged at very short notice and routed over less obvious routes to confuse the enemy.

Note 19. The awkward nature of exchanging traffic at Fenny Compton is well documented and due in part to the intransigence of the GWR. I can find no evidence that there were any significant alterations to the track layout there during WW2. If there were any they were abolished and the layout restored to pre war status very soon after hostilities ended because photos exist showing the siding layout in the early fifties to be the same as in pre war days. I think Mr Pettifer is mistaken on this one. He may be getting confused with the massive changes that occurred there in 1959 when the whole interchange facilities were modernised.

Note 20. Crampton & Sons Contractors were engaged in the construction of the Fenny Compton - Kington section of line for the East & West Junction Railway. T R Crampton was the contractor's engineer. No doubt the siding was the site of the work camp and it was retained for use by the company's own gangers after he had finished with it. The original siding name was perpetuated as a convenient reference to the location. Mr Pettifer is correct in stating that an early official of the line was named Crampton. T H Crampton was a director of the East & West Junction Railway in its early days. I have not been able to find out if there is a connection between the contractors and T H Crampton or whether it was just a co-incidence in the names.

Note 21. Correctly "The Stratford upon Avon and Moreton in the Marsh Tramway" It had a branch line to Shipston that was converted by the GWR into a normal railway after the original tramway main line to Stratford fell into disuse around 1895.

Note 22. A bad mistake in both location and time. The direct junction at Stratford that connected the SMJ line with the GWR Honeybourne – Stratford route to permit direct running to the south was not built until 1959/60 and the line from Stratford to Broom closed when it opened. (see my Vol. 02.02 for full details). What Mr Pettifer is almost certainly thinking of is the work carried out at Broom during 1941/42. The wartime Railway Executive authorised various improvements to the whole of the SMJ route to enable heavier trains to use it. They also installed a new chord line at Broom that enabled direct running from the SMJ line onto the former Midland Railway Barnt Green

– Evesham route in a southerly direction. This was an improvement that should have been made earlier because the natural flow of traffic from the SMJ line at Broom was predominately to the south towards Gloucester and South Wales. For the previous fifty years it had been necessary to reverse such traffic at Broom Station as the original junction faced north. The layout at Broom became triangular with the old station box being renamed Broom North. The new box nearest Stratford adjacent to the river Arrow was Broom East and the one nearest Harvington on the Midland line was Broom West. This latter box although in a rural location was built to the stringent wartime ARP specification and as I write this in 2005 its sturdy structure still stands alongside the improved Alcester – Evesham A46 road.

Note 23. Mrs May Jordan was the manageress of the SMJ refreshment room and bar at Stratford from 1915 to 1934. She was the mother of Arthur Jordan the historian who wrote the definitive history of the SMJ. The Jordan family home was for some time at No 7 Windsor Street, Stratford (now demolished). My paternal grandmother Sarah Fanny Jennings lived at No 8 Windsor Street from some time in the late 1920's until 1967. Unfortunately none of my family had any great recollection of the Jordan's.

Note 24. During fog or falling snow signalmen were authorised to request the attendance of a "fogman" who would be stationed at important signals, most often the "distant" signal. Whilst the signal remained at either a "caution" or "danger" setting the fogman would leave an explosive detonator on the railhead so that an engine driver who missed the signal because of poor visibility would receive a warning as the detonator exploded under his wheels. Fogman duties normally fell to one of the nearest available platelayers. If they were lucky the "fogged" signal might be provided with an adjacent shelter similar to a night watchman's hut and a coal brazier. More often they would be sat huddled in their overcoats with no protection from the weather.

Note 25. "Tacker" Harris was one of those larger than life characters that often feature in local history folklore. Certainly I remember my father and uncles who knew all of Stratford's working class personalities very well talking about him on many occasions. He served the East & West starting as a shunter's assistant taking wagon numbers, hence his nickname. He worked on the line throughout his life until around 1950. In the 1930's and during WW2 he was the mainstay of all operations at Stratford Old Town as passenger traffic dwindled he more or less ran the passenger and parcels department single handed. I understand that he would always go out of his way to help out anyone in need of assistance and was a much loved figure in the community.

End> last revised 06.01.2006 JRJ

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