

03.05

A critique of 'The Lost Railways of Warwickshire' by Geoffrey Kingscott

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I submit the following comments on the above book concerning the chapters on the Stratford upon Avon and Midland Junction Railway and the ex GWR line between Stratford and Cheltenham.

I would say at the outset that I appreciate how difficult and time consuming researching and writing any article is (I have been on the treadmill of a monthly magazine column for over fifteen years!) My lifelong interest in the SMJR and as a Stratfordian by birth who knew the line as a boy and teenager cannot allow me not to correct errors printed in the book. I wrote to the publisher outlining these over a year ago but have received no response.

In the interests of accuracy and as no criticism of the book I list below my observations. If anyone thinks I have done the author an injustice and any of my comments are not accurate please comment as all I am interested in doing is setting the record straight.

Page 68 the SMJR coined the slogan "The Shakespeare Route" not "line" as claimed. The wording "Shakespeare Route" survives on much printed material and luggage labels.

Page 72 a description of a journey on the line implies that the Ettington Lime Works sidings were located between Kineton and Ettington. They were between Ettington and the top of Goldicote cutting. Ettington Station was at mp 32.70 and the Limeworks at mp 33.54 measured from Blisworth. I agree that the text is a little ambiguous.

Page 74 another location error with no ambiguity. The text states that the SMJ line passed under the Stratford & Moreton Tramway before reaching Clifford Sidings. This is incorrect. Clifford Sidings were before the bridge (travelling east to west) In fact the two long military sidings laid in 1942 had their buffers almost up against the road bridge of the A34 trunk road. The Tramway Bridge was immediately to the west of the A34 bridge.

Page 75 The river Avon Bridge. The text implies that the bridge is "a modern one" giving the impression of a replacement. This is incorrect. The basic bridge with its elegant brick arches is the original East and West Junction Railway structure. It has however been strengthened on two occasions. In 1958 as part of the preparations for the new chord at Stratford and the upgrade of the line British Railways undertook strengthening works to the deck and side walls to allow the use of 9F class locos and heavy steel billet trains. When the Highways Authority constructed the by pass road on the formation of the line they undertook more extensive strengthening including shot coating a concrete skin to the underside of the main arches. I spoke to an engineer from the contractors at the time this work was being done and he said that an investigation into the condition of the bridge had found that it was basically sound and fit for purpose as a road bridge.

Page 76 the renaming of Stratford's stations by BR in 1952 was somewhat confusing and unnecessary as the SMJ line lost its passenger service in that year. I would like to see evidence of

the use of "Stratford West" for the GWR station. All of the references to it in the 1950's were either still just "Stratford on (or upon) Avon" or Stratford on Avon General. The name "General" does survive on ticket stock and some internal publications. The name "Stratford West" does not as far as I am aware appear anywhere except on the signal box to the south of Alcester road bridge. The renaming of the SMJ station to include "Old Town" was both accurate geographically and was needed to differentiate the SMJ goods yard from the GW one. Most Stratfordians called the SMJ station Old Town regardless of its official title.

Page 77 second paragraph the "Atlantic" wheel arrangement is 4-4-2 not 4-6-0

Page 77 the Ro-Railer had 26 seats for passenger use.

This concludes my observations on the SMJ chapter.

In the chapter on the GWR line mention is made of the racecourse platform which became intertwined in the story of the ex SMJ line after 1959 as it sat in the triangle of the lines. For the record page 98 says there was no booking office, this is correct BUT tickets were issued from Stratford RACECOURSE platform. On most race days a junior booking clerk was sent from the GW station on the first train to stop at the platform. He carried a wooden portable ticket box equipped with proper ticket racks that contained printed ticket stock to most local stations plus the usual blank card stock for anywhere else. His other essential items were a chair and umbrella!! Many examples survive in the hands of ticket collectors.

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