

Welcome to our latest Newsletter and I hope you have had an enjoyable, if somewhat overly hot summer. The weather does seem to be breaking now as I look out at the showery rain falling.

Our confirmed programme until Xmas is:

11th September 2025	The Rise and Fall of Witley Court	<i>Ray Sturdy</i>
9th October 2025	There's Always Something on at The Civic	<i>John Caldwell</i>
13th November 2025	The Work of the CPRE— A Vision for Planning	<i>Dr Peter King</i>
11th December 2025	Fun Quiz and Social (to be confirmed)	

*Other talks and events coming up for 2026: - lunch in January,
talk about Bewdley,
talk about The Social Aspect of the Industrial
Revolution in the Black Country
an evening guided walk around Bewdley*

We also plan to have just two raffles a year, at Xmas and at the Summer Social

A reminder that subs are now payable and we are pleased to say that rates and admission charges remain unchanged from last year.

Your membership form for renewal is on the last page of this newsletter.

Bridge Street Car Park Update

by Andrew Booton

Our small but experienced team has been working hard on proposals to redevelop Bridge Street Car Park, ready for a submission to Wyre Forest District Council (WFDC) next month.

Work so far

We have worked up plans and concepts to demonstrate our ideas and backed them up with financial models. We have had fruitful conversations with the Canal & River Trust's (CRT) planners, heritage advisers, urban designers, business managers and civil engineers, who have all welcomed our proposals and supported them. They suggested useful amendments and considerations and were enthusiastic about the effects of our heritage-led approach. We have also been speaking with potential developers, proving that even in a difficult economic climate, the site and an appropriate, well-designed scheme will attract investors.

Support

We now have CRT, Stourport Forward and Stourport Heritage Inland Port Group on side. Public support for a high-quality scheme for the site remains strong. Stourport Town Council continues to be lukewarm, mainly for political reasons and loyalty to WFDC. But the greatest risk to the scheme is WFDC itself.



Obstructions

At every turn, WFDC has placed obstacles in our way – deliberately, not through oversight. As well as the short consultation period for the car park's removal from the Car Park Order and the dismissal of the hundreds of letters from the public (taxpayers) objecting to that action, we have not been provided with the required information and even after chasing, it has not been provided. WFDC has also cut down the development land by trying to retain an unnecessarily large amount of land around 8a Bridge Street (the tatty building of flats on the corner of Engine Lane) to try to make our plans unviable while providing little benefit to WFDC and thus, to taxpayers. Our meetings have been cordial, but it has been obvious that WFDC is resentful of the Civic Society's involvement, contesting their plans.

WFDC has protested that it has done all it possibly could to speak to CRT and developers, but CRT was never interested (we have found the opposite) and developers never came forward due to the repeated economic downturns (we have found the opposite).

No matter how attractive our proposals (and we expect them to be compelling, operationally sound, achieving the planning objectives and financially viable), we have no confidence that WFDC will accept them. Why? Because we do not believe that WFDC is keeping an open mind or that it has the best interests of Stourport at heart. We have had no positive feedback from them, and we do not know what their intentions are. Indeed, we already know that WFDC has done nothing for Stourport since its formation over half a century ago, and it is not minded to change that now.

What could happen?

It is expected that that option will be a private sale (without competition) to a developer that is not committed to delivering a link to the basins, or in an appropriate architectural style for the Conservation Area, or that will satisfy the duty under s72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1993 to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of that area.

Such an option would not necessarily leave the people of Stourport without options. We can still object to inappropriate planning applications (remember the fight against the homeless hostel) and support appropriate ones. The Civic Society's hard work on this project has enabled us to build strong relationships with and support from influential and important consultees.

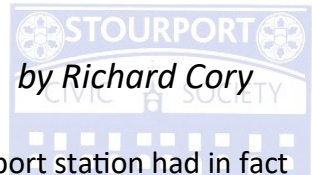
This would be a terribly short-sighted route to take.

WFDC is, of course, free to assess options and take the best course of action but we would hope that that course genuinely reflects the intention to choose the option that is in the best interests of Stourport, not WFDC, nor its officers or councillors, nor the emerging unitary authority.

Conclusion

We hope readers will forgive our cynicism but knowing what we know, it is hard to read the picture any other way. We will work hard for Stourport and for the Bridge Street redevelopment until we have exhausted every option. **We hope that we can rely on your support throughout.**

The Arrival and Departure of Stourport's Railways – Part Two



by Richard Cory

In first part of this article, we left the railway at Stourport on a high. Stourport station had in fact been renamed Stourport-on-Severn in October 1934, possibly to avoid confusion, which continues today, with Stourbridge.

As for much of the country, World War Two brought considerable change to Stourport and its railway. The whole of the Severn Valley railway was available as a diversionary route away from the West Midlands, together with troop trains to Bridgnorth and towards the end of the war ambulance and other trains serving nearby Burlish camp. Few Stourport residents would have been aware of heavy ammunition trains carefully passing through the station on their way to and from the Royal Navy Armament Department at Ditton Priors. Eventually reached via Bewdley and Cleobury the site had been selected for its isolation in deepest rural Shropshire but with an existing agricultural and mineral branch line. The depot was not in fact vacated by the military and rail connection closed until 1965 but then taken over by US forces for the next three years after they were forced to leave France.

Increased demand for electricity resurrected the earlier scheme for a line direct into the power station and this was eventually completed in 1940 with a fan of storage sidings on a large embankment between the Hartlebury and Worcester roads. This enabled the coal to be brought in by rail direct, virtually bringing to an end delivery by barge, with only 5% of the coal used arriving by water in 1949, and also the closure of the narrow-gauge railway operation within the power station itself for internal coal movement. The replacement standard-gauge steam locomotive, later a diesel, for moving the wagons in and out of the fan of sidings was stored and maintained in a brick-built engine shed elevated high on a web of concrete beams, possibly unique. Further electricity demand from post-war housing development and West Midlands industry, once again expanding, resulted in the output of the power station being more than doubled with the commissioning in 1950 of Station B. From then on coal trains bound for the power station were worked by locomotives allocated to Kidderminster shed until its closure in 1963. Small pannier tank locomotives from the old Great Western Railway were originally regulars on the working, although from 1957 until the end of steam a larger locomotive, numbered 6679 was a regular. Towards the end British Railways class 25 diesels were typical motive power for the duty.



Early post-war aerial photograph of the power station with the railway storage sidings curving round to the left in the middle background.

www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/EAW013592

© Historic England

In the 1950's coal by train either came direct down the Severn Valley line from the Highley/Alveley pits or from Midland coalfields into Kidderminster goods yard. The latter were then tripped down to Hartlebury, reversed up the branch into Stourport and then reversed again along the power station line into the storage sidings and empties removed. From 1981, when the railway connection was closed, until the power station generation ceased some three years later, coal was delivered by road from Brierley Hill and Cannock, with Murphy's lorries causing Wilden Lane residents much annoyance. The embankment for the fan of storage sidings is still in place, now tree clad, but all else has been obliterated, just commemorated in the name Power Station Road. At the Stourport end of the Leapgate Country Park footpath the site of the start of the power station branch line can be found.

To protect aviation fuel supplies in particular, World War Two saw the laying across the country of the Government Pipeline & Storage System between 1941 and 1944, the first one completed between the ports of Liverpool and Avonmouth, passing under the railway just to the east of the Wilden Top Road bridge. This was itself the summit of a 1:100 incline out of Stourport, not an easy climb for a small steam locomotive with a substantial load. Here was constructed in the middle of a field, intentionally inconspicuous, a small complex of two sidings and a brick hut, being one of a very limited number of access points on the whole pipeline route for the loading or unloading of railway tankers. In a bid to keep the location as secret as possible, there was no road access. Subsequently known as Leapgate Private Sidings these fell out of use at the end of hostilities but were reconditioned and reused, by then with a vehicular access track, for a few years around 1960. The pipeline was privatised and is now owned by a Spanish company. Heavily overgrown the route of the access track from Widen Top Road is still discernible but there is no sign at all of the sidings, hut or fencing, in fact very difficult to believe they were ever there, The original installation was allied to the wartime Stourport Government Civil Reserve with hidden oil storage tanks at Lincombe served by river barges, taken over after the war by the Regent Oil Company, subsequently part of Texaco. Some may remember the fire at "The Regent".

Also constructed by the Ministry for Home Security National Cold Stores during the war in 1941, was the large concrete grain storage silo and war time emergency food store with two attendant railway sidings for over forty wagons in total. Now the site of Great Western Way on the Bewdley side of the station level crossing, dry and frozen meat, bacon, corned beef and margarine was stored, brought in by both rail and road. This facility was ultimately demolished in 1980's, having been leased for some years by food distributors such as Swifts.



Aerial photograph of the cold storage unit in 1982 showing the site of the lifted railway sidings on the Bewdley Road side.

The Arrival and Departure of Stourport's Railways – Part Two

continued

Part one of this article ended with 16,269 passenger tickets issued at Stourport in 1938 but by 1952 this was 13,007, the decline had set in. The pattern of seven trains each way from Shrewsbury and Worcester serving Stourport, which had been set a far back as 1912, continued until the outbreak of World War Two. Such a full service was not reintroduced when peace broke out and slowly dwindled during the 1950's. By the time the line closed from Bewdley northwards, only two through trains traversed the whole of the Severn valley to Shrewsbury and these being Saturdays only. However, Stourport never generated much passenger traffic for the stations north of Bewdley to Shrewsbury, the main flows being to Kidderminster via Bewdley/Hartlebury or to Worcester via the latter.

The loop between Kidderminster and Bewdley, past the Devil's Spittleful and what is now the West Midland Safari Park, was not opened until 1st June 1878, sixteen years after the Severn Valley railway proper. From then on there was a regular service around this Kidderminster/Bewdley/Stourport "triangle" with, in 1906, brand new steam railcars being introduced. These were replaced in the 1930's by single diesel railcars, used in various forms right up to closure.

This triangle developed a gruesome reputation in the 1890's: a Miss Jones was murdered by her lover during a journey from Hartlebury to Kidderminster; a deranged guard named Jenkins attempted to wreck a train standing at Stourport station; whilst further towards Bewdley a local constable rescued a woman who had thrown herself in front of an oncoming train. This constable, PC W Hardwicke, received a Royal Humane Society medal for his bravery.

Bucking the trend on certain summer weekends and Bank Holidays were excursions from Birmingham, Walsall and the Black Country, bringing hundreds of people to the delights of Stourport's riverside. The much longer than normal trains blocked the level crossing whilst loading and unloading and with little space at the station some of these had to be parked on the line to Bewdley until their return journey. Outside these special weekends there was still a Sundays only two hourly service between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stourport. Unfortunately, all these eventually succumbed to the private motor car.

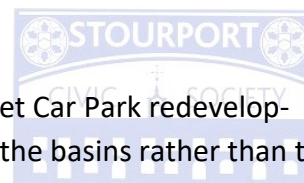
Freight traffic was still important, increasing in the early 1950's but nearly all such increase was due to coal for the expanded power station with over half a million tons of freight received and dispatched. Lost to road, there was a steep post war decline in rail freight across the country. Stourport was no different despite being one the principal stations on the Severn Valley line and having major manufacturers such as Bond Worth, Parsons Chain and Steatite. As late as 1960 the instructions for operating Stourport's railway system included an appendix for working the old canal basin interchange but it is doubtful if this was ever referred to.

On 9th September 1963, probably the inevitable happened when the Severn Valley line north from Bewdley to Shrewsbury closed to passenger traffic. The remaining Kidderminster, Bewdley and Stourport passenger triangle continued with a service using diesel railcars between the three towns. However, to reach Kidderminster Stourport's residents had to go via Bewdley or Hartlebury, not that convenient when there as a regular direct bus route. The service struggled on but finally succumbed on 5th January 1970 when Stourport station closed, with the

goods yard itself having met its demise five years before in early 1965. The rump of the line from Hartlebury to Stourport remained open for coal traffic to Stourport power station but this ceased in March 1979. The line from Hartlebury Junction to the old level crossing at Stourport was finally officially closed on 12th January 1981. This last remnants of the tracks were lifted during 1983 and few could now easily point out the site of Stourport's railway level crossing and footbridge, let alone the station itself.



**A 1956 Bank Holiday Monday view of Stourport station.
Photograph by Adrian Turley**



Introduction

Pre-planning advice from the Canal & River Trust (CRT) about the Bridge Street Car Park redevelopment suggested we apply contemporary architecture to the buildings facing the basins rather than traditional warehouse style buildings. I was struck by how old fashioned this approach was, which got me thinking.

Since the 1960s, conservation rules have often required new work on historic buildings to look clearly different from the old. The idea, from the Venice Charter, was to protect authenticity. But experience shows that rigidly applying this rule can backfire, making historic places harder to appreciate. What's needed is a more balanced approach, one that values harmony, context and community benefit.

Understanding Heritage

Old buildings tell stories. When repairs or extensions blend in with the original style, they help us read those stories more easily. By contrast, starkly modern additions can distract or confuse. Georgian and Victorian buildings often contain centuries of repairs that fit in so well we barely notice them. That makes them clearer, not less authentic.

Authenticity and Integrity

Authenticity isn't always about standing out. In the past, repairs were usually made to match, not contrast. Subtle markers like date stones or records are enough to show later work without disrupting the whole.

Public Preferences

Surveys show people generally prefer sympathetic, traditional-looking additions. Bold modern contrasts often grab attention away from the historic building itself. Designing in harmony with heritage strengthens local pride and connection. A local example is Crowngate Shopping Centre in Worcester. Developed in a traditional half and a modern half in the early 1990s, the traditional part enjoys higher footfall, fewer empty units, higher end shops and more cafes and restaurants.

There's a good reason why every Christmas advert features traditional architecture with softly-lit, small-paned windows, mellow brick walls and low eaves, fireplaces with real chimneys and narrow streets of traditional vernacular materials. Retailers know what people are attracted to. You won't find their ads featuring cold, characterless, austere concrete buildings with big plain windows and flat roofs!

Practical Conservation

Later conservation charters now focus on cultural significance, not just visual difference. Often the best approach is minimal, well-documented intervention—done with care, craft and respect for the original.



Longevity and Quality

Strikingly modern additions can look dated within a generation, while well-detailed, sympathetic designs age gracefully. The best local examples use fine materials, human scale and complementary colours. Poor ones, by contrast, often feel harsh, cheap and out of place. Look at Stourport town centre and the modern buildings stand out as dated and out of place – the Old Factory Shop (Kwik Save), the Old Post Office (Happy Staffie Rescue) and the former York Street Medical Centre. Interestingly, they are also identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal as buildings that have a negative effect.

Conclusion

Protecting heritage should not mean blindly following fashion or rigid rules. Distinction can be valuable, but it shouldn't trump authenticity or public enjoyment. We urge planners, conservation officers and architects to adopt a more flexible, context-sensitive approach that applies higher quality design and materials.

While good design can exist in any style, the evidence shows that traditional architectural environments continue to resonate deeply with how people live, move and connect. In a rapidly changing world, these timeless forms still offer a powerful sense of place - and a reason to stay a little longer and spend a little more.





Stourport Civic Society

Application for Membership

2025/26

Individual £12.00 Joint £20.00 (valid until August 2026)

Cheques: -payable to Stourport Civic Society

Bank transfer: - Pay: Stourport on Severn Civic Society
Sort Code: 204606
Acct No: 30835447
Ref: *Your name*

Please PRINT

Mr/Ms/Mrs
Name

Mr/Ms/Mrs
Name

Address

Address

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Postcode

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Telephone

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*Signature

*Signature

Date

*GDPR By signing this form you consent to Stourport Civic Society retaining these details and sending out Society information to you (by email if supplied).

Please return completed to:

David More, Membership Secretary
91 Manor Road, Stourport on Severn, Worcs, DY13 9DW

Or Email to Stourport.Civic.Soc@gmail.com

Charity No: 1092842