



Stratton Station c1959

## Railway, Canal & Public Transport History

In November 1834 the Great Western Railway gave notice in National Newspapers of their intention to build a railway through various locations including Stratton. In October 1841, the Stratton St Margaret Churchwardens, having got wind of the Great Western Railway development, asked for and got a land survey of value of land along proposed new railway route.

**Swindon & Highworth Light Railway** – Mr Hussey-Freke chaired the first meeting of locals on 24-09-1873 at the Large Room, National School, Highworth to build the line from the GWR at Swindon through Stratton to Highworth and eventually on to Lechlade (East Gloucestershire Railway), (*Jackson's Oxford Journal 20-09-1873.*), and a company was subsequently set up. After a Private Bill was deposited in 1874, the Swindon & Highworth Light Railway was incorporated by Act of Parliament on 21-06-1875 to build a 5½ mile line from Highworth Junction, just east of Swindon on the GWR main line, and Highworth, with intermediate stations at Stratton, Stanton and Hannington. and was built by Hilton & Haynes. At a half yearly meeting in 1877 it was stated the line would cost £25,000 and should give a return of 6¾%. (*The Western Daily Press 01-03-1877.*) The first sod was cut on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1879, contractors, Mr. J. Hinton & Mr. W. J. Haynes. The line was completed in 1881 but the company was by now bankrupt so sold out to the GWR ON 7 June 1882 and opened for traffic on 9 May 1883. The Light Railway Act allowed speeds up to 25 mph, but on the Highworth Branch 7 to 8 mph were the order of the day. Stationmaster in 1889/1890 was John Hopkins, 1894/5 a Mr William Williams. Few accidents were reported but Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November 1896 a lad in the employ of Mr Hoddinott was backing his cart when the service from Highworth came out of the fog and smashed up the cart, luckily the lad and horse were unhurt. The station conveyed a lot of milk churns from local farms, each having its own brass nameplate, up to 100 17 gallons churns per day. Trusses of hay were sent to collieries in South Wales for the pit ponies, Beer was also sent out from here, hops, malt etc coming the other way. Station was also used to release racing pigeons. In 1903 28 thousand tickets were issued. By 1905 John Churchill was stationmaster. The line never had more than a dozen staff and the best year for passengers was in 1913 when over 40 thousand tickets were sold. There was originally a signal box at Stratton, but this was closed in 1906 the sidings then being accessed by Ground frames. 1907 Stationmaster Mr Ernest Lee. 1909 saw an additional goods siding added along with a 3-ton crane. A temporary Signal box was built in 1917 to service the new Ordnance Factory, this closed with the factory in 1919. Around this time there were 4 corrugated iron structures added, a pagoda style one was used as parcels office and waiting room, another as a small lockup, another for lamp storage, and in the yard one for use with the goods platform. Stationmaster in 1928 was W Cousins. By 1933 ticket sales had dropped to 2 and a half thousand due to competition from the new bus routes. 1938 saw the replacement

of the wooden bridge in Ermin Street with a brick one. A spur and signal box were added for the Vickers factory in 1942 during WWII. The line finally closed to passenger traffic on 28-02-1953, the last train driven by Bert Scaplehorn, who had worked on the line since 1910, some workers trains ran to Vickers-Armstrong until August 1962, and the final freight train ran October 1965. Part of the line nearest the main line had a small yard with spurs into the Kembry Park Cordite works and from 1955 to the BMW (originally Pressed Steel) plant. The BMW link was originally used to bring in Steel Coils for the press shops, Oil for the boiler houses and Calcium Carbide for the Acetylene generation plants (used for welding on cars). During the Rover period, it was used to send 3 train loads a day of car parts to the Longbridge plant in Birmingham. When Rover failed, the trains stopped and a lot of the trackwork in the plant was removed. The line was entered from the main line under a bridge at the end of Gypsy Lane and controlled by Highworth Junction Signal box. 1969 saw the removal of the Ermin Street bridge. In 1970's a Rail served Oil Terminal was built but had closed by 2000, track still exists on site but link severed. The Ermin Street road bridge was demolished in 1975/6. The Green Lane "Bunky Bridge" was demolished in 1980's and a crossing installed. H Thomas, a Labour Chancellor, was once a train driver on this line.

Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle 17 November 1879

**THE SWINDON AND HIGHWORTH LIGHT RAILWAY COMPANY.**

*NOTICE of APPLICATION to the BOARD of TRADE to RAISE ADDITIONAL CAPITAL.*

**T**HE SWINDON and HIGHWORTH LIGHT RAILWAY COMPANY (hereinafter referred to as "The Company,") intend to apply to the Right Honourable the Lords of the Committee of Her Majesty's Privy Council for Trade and Foreign Plantations for a Certificate under "The Railway Companies' Powers Act, 1864," as extended by the 38th section of "The Regulation of Railways Act, 1868," and "The Railways (Powers and Construction) Act, 1870," for powers to raise Additional Capital partly by the issue of New Shares or New Stock, either ordinary or preference, or partly ordinary and partly preference, and partly by borrowing on Mortgage, and with power to create and issue Debenture Stock.

Copies of the Draft Certificate as proposed by the Company will be supplied at the Offices of Messrs SIMSON and WAKEFORD, No. 11, Great George-street, Westminster, London, S.W., to all applicants at the price of Sixpence each.

All persons desirous of making to the Board of Trade any representation, or of bringing before them any objection respecting this application, may do so by letter addressed to the Secretary of the Board of Trade, Whitehall Gardens, London, S.W., on or before the First day of January next succeeding the date of this advertisement.

Dated the 14th day of November, 1879.

**KINNEIR and TOMBS,**  
Swindon, Wilts,  
Solicitors for the Company.

taken from - Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle 06 June 1891

<b>SWINDON AND HIGHWORTH.</b>								
<b>DOWN TRAINS.—WEEK DAYS ONLY.</b>								
	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	
			12P					12P.
SWINDON dep	7 15	9* 5	11 15	1 30	4 35	5 45	7 35	
Stratton ..	7 28	9 12	11 22	1 37	4 41	5 51	7 41	
Stanton .....	7 40	9 21	11 31	1 46	4 47	5 57	7 47	
Hannington ..	7 50	9 27	11 37	1 52	4 52	6 5	7 52	
HIGHWORTH..	8 5	9 35	11 45	2 0	5 0	6 13	8 0	
	† Mixed Train.		* Mondays only.					
<b>UP TRAINS.—WEEK DAYS ONLY.</b>								
	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	
								12P
HIGHWORTH dep	5 20	8 15	9* 40	12 15	3 15	5 5	6 35	8 30
Hannington ..	5 26	8 21	9 46	12 21	3 21	..	6 41	8 37
Stanton..	5 33	8 28	9 53	12 28	3 28	..	6 48	8 44
Stratton ..	5 42	8 37	10 2	12 37	3 37	..	6 57	8 59
SWINDON ..	5 50	8 45	10 10	12 45	3 45	5 30	7 5	9 15
	† Mixed Train		* Market Train (Mondays only).					

And notification of Day trip from Highworth in local paper-

Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle 11 July 1891

**ON WEDNESDAY, July 15th, a fast EXCURSION to WEYMOUTH and ABBOTS-BURY will leave Highworth at 6-35 a.m., Hannington 6-40, Stanton 6-45, Stratton 6-55, SWINDON 7-45, Wootton Bassett 8-0, Dauntsey 8-10, Malmesbury 7-20, Calne 7-45, CHIPPENHAM 8-20, and Melksbam at 8-35 a.m.**

A complete History of the line can be found at <http://www.highworth.freeuk.com/>

**Stratton Park Halt** on the main London to Bristol line opened circa 1840 and was re-built in 1933 consisting of a corrugated steel/iron shelter with a rounded roof. There was no door, just an opening which was about 1/3 of the front. The station closed with the Beeching cuts in 07-12-1964.

The listed Ermin Street Railway Bridge was built in 1841, parapet rebuilt higher in 2017 as part of electrification project. The Keypoint Rail Terminal was opened during 2002, to date it has hardly been used following the downturn in the Motor Industry, Honda only used it to ship new cars during 2010 and 2011. During 2015-2018 the main line was updated to Electrify Great Western Main Line, overhead masts were added, new signalling installed, bridge parapets were raised, Ermin Street Bridge repaired and because it was listed the track was lowered below it and the older part of Green bridge replaced.

**Greenbridge Rail Bridge.** Built with railway in 1840. It was widened in 1963 at cost of £25,000. It was rebuilt in 2015 ready for GWML electrification.

#### **In the News.**

**INQUEST.** - At Stratton St Margaret, near Swindon, on the body of John HOUSE, 36 years of age. The deceased was at work in company with Thomas ANSELL, on Tuesday afternoon last, between four and 5 o'clock, on the Great Western Railway, in Stratton cutting. As the up express from Exeter was coming along, they both got away according to Ansell's statement on the down line. He then went a few yards to get some small bolts, and on turning round he missed the deceased. Having looked about, he found him one hundred and thirty yards off in a gutter, on the north side of the railway towards Shrivenham. His clothes were all torn to pieces, and his body was dreadfully injured, causing instantaneous death. Witness was of opinion that deceased had gone back to the up-line for the purpose of removing a bar which was leaning against a transom, thinking it might not be cleared by the train, thus causing the accident. The bar he found about thirty yards further on, and bent. The driver of the train stopped on purpose at Shrivenham station, giving information of what had taken place, when superintendent and others immediately came to the spot. Verdict – Accidentally killed. *Salisbury & Winchester Journal Sat 14-06-1851.*

**SHOCKING ACCIDENT** – The Danger of walking on the railway received another exemplification on Thursday, when Mr. Whitmarsh, coroner for North Wilts, held an inquiry respecting the death of Fanny HATHERILL, a young woman residing at Stratton St. Margaret, near Swindon. The inhabitants of the village in question are mainly composed of operatives in Swindon factory, who, in spite of repeated warnings and prosecutions, persist in going to and returning from the factory by walking on the main line of the Great Western Railway. On Wednesday evening the deceased woman was returning from Swindon when she was overtaken by the 4.10 express. The whistle was sounded, and the deceased became confused, and before she had time to run to the other side of the line she was struck by the buffer of the engine and the base of her skull fractured. She was taken up in a dying state, and the train backed into the Swindon station, where she died shortly after her arrival. The jury returned a verdict of 'Accidental Death'. *Western Gazette 31-12-1869*

Knocked down by a train – On Tuesday night, Mr William Heron, who recently a draper in Swindon, was walking on the Railway near Stratton when he was knocked down by a train. After lying on the ballast for some hours he

crawled into the village, being too weak to call for assistance he entered a cowshed on Mr GREENAWAY's farm, where he was found the next day and taken to hospital. His left arm and shoulder were terribly smashed, several broken ribs and his head was cut about. It is not thought he can recover. *The Western Daily Press 19-04-1878.*

At the monthly meeting of the Swindon District Highway Board this week, the question of the liability of the embankment leading up to the crown of the bridge crossing the G.W.R. at Stratton, which has for some time been giving way, was again discussed at considerable length. The surveyor was ordered to at once proceed with the work and send in a claim for the cost to the Railway Company. *The Western Daily Press 01-02-1879.*

Charles TURNER, an elderly man, shopkeeper of Stratton, was charged with attemptin to comit suicide on the G.W.R. on July 21st. He was remanded. *The Bristol Mercury 24-07-1888.*

William BRIDGES, 34, was killed on Stratton Crossing December 5<sup>th</sup>. *Swindon Advertiser 18-12-1897.*

BOY TRAIN WRECKERS – The Swindon police have arrested a lad named John GOODSHIP, 15, from Stratton, on suspicion of having attempted to wreck the Great Western mail train from Paddington on Sunday evening, by placing a large stone on the metals. GOODSHIP was remanded. Other arrests expected as police think it was work of gang of boys. *Yorkshire Telegraph 07-07-1899.*

Compulsory purchase of land through Stratton to improve the three main road bridges. *Swindon Advertiser 20-11-1903.*

Man Decapitated - On Wednesday last week at about 8:30 p.m. a lad named Albert Victor MAYNES, errand boy of The Green, was collecting dandelions near GWR line at Greenbridge when he found a body. P.C. Purdie attended a found Thomas Francis SELBY, aged 67 lying decapitated on the line. *Faringdon Advertiser 24-05-1913.*

SUICIDE – Inquiry at Poor Law Institution, Stratton on death of James POWELL, an inmate of Poorhouse, on railway crossing in Stratton. Body identified by Henry SPACKMAN, deputy porter at Poorhouse. The driver, Thomas William WOODHOUSE, of Reading was on 2.05 slow service Swindon to Reading, when he saw person on tract at the crossing, he stopped as quickly as possible and Mr Thomas WILLIS the guard moved the body to the lineside bank. The signalman at South Marston was informed and a team was sent to retrieve the body. Dr Philip Henry HENSLEY declared him dead. Coroner verdict – suicide. *Faringdon Advertiser 07-01-1922.*

Railway Tragedy - Mr L J Page, a stripper and cleaner in the Great Western Railway Works, Swindon, was found dead in the permanent way between the G.W.R. main lines on Tuesday night. The discovery was made by a fog man about 20 feet from the crossing near the Stratton Green bridge. Page was a married man, about 45 years of age, residing with his aunt, Mrs Reynolds, at 25 Dore's Road, Upper Stratton. When the body was found, between 11pm and midnight, it was quite cold, and it is thought that Page met his death between 8.30pm and 9.30pm. The body was terribly mutilated, the right leg being severed from above the knee. The left foot was cut off, the toes being severed from it, and the head was battered in. The body was unrecognisable, but Page's identity was established from a letter found in his pocket addressed to his aunt. The remains were taken to the G.W.R. Goods Transfer, and from thence to the mortuary at the Isolation Hospital, Gorse Hill. It is expected that an inquest will be conducted by the coroner for North Wilts (Mr A L Forrester), at St Barnabas' Schools, Cricklade Road today. It appears that Page left home soon after 6pm, saying that he was going to see a friend at Stratton St Margaret, and he does not appear to have spoken to anyone else. It is thought that he was crossing the line to reach the road leading to Upper Stratton when he met his death. Traces of blood were to be seen in the permanent way for a distance of several yards, which would indicate that Page was taken some distance by a train. Portions of his clothing and mutilated body were found, extending over a considerable distance, and there were also marks indicating that he struck the fence at the side of the line. Page was well known in the fur and feather trade. *Swindon Advertiser 07-12-1928.*

Crash at Greenbridge - At 2.50 a.m. on 12-11-1958 the 12.10 a.m. freight train from Bristol East Depot to Reading, loco no 4707, which had been working in Swindon yard, passed at danger the semaphore starting signal leading from the up goods loop to the up main line, at Highworth Junction, Swindon, and became derailed at the catch

points. Some of the eight derailed wagons obstructed the up main line on which an express freight train headed by a 9F 2-10-0 loco from Fishguard to Paddington was closely approaching, and the engine of this train was derailed. It pushed some of the wagons of the first train foul of the down main line on which the 12.45 a.m. Paddington to Carmarthen newspaper train hauled by 5009 'Shrewsbury Castle' was also approaching under clear signals at the time, and the engine of this train was partially derailed. Both the running lines and the loops were blocked, and the permanent way was damaged. No one was injured, and the line was re-opened the following day. Ian Vincent was one of the drivers, it is believed a lot of cigarettes disappeared from the damaged train.

15-08-2009 - Man dies after being hit by train - A man died after he was hit by an early morning train in Stratton St Margaret. Police said the victim, in his early 30s, was killed under a bridge at Ermin Street at about 6.30am on Saturday. Duty Inspector Andrew Carr of Swindon Police said the investigation was being treated as suicide. Police also said it was not clear where the man was from. A bouquet of flowers has been left tied to the railway bridge. The incident caused major disruption to rail services between Swindon and Didcot Parkway. It also delayed routes from Gloucester, Bristol Parkway, Reading and London Paddington throughout the morning. The line was reopened after two hours for normal service to resume. A fatality is quite rare in the area, said Insp Carr. I'm not aware of this sort of thing happening. I know nationwide it does happen, but this is not common place here. It's an unfortunate incident. A First Great Western statement appeared on its website soon after the incident. It read: ^Services between Swindon and Didcot Parkway are being disrupted due to a fatality in the South Marston area. Services are subject to delay, alteration and cancellation. Replacement road transport is being organised between Chippenham, Swindon and Didcot Parkway. British Transport Police are currently investigating how the incident happened. A spokesman would only confirm there was a fatality and no other official information was given when approached by the Swindon Advertiser yesterday. The death comes 48 hours after the Adver revealed how passengers narrowly escaped death when vandals dumped concrete blocks on a railway line in Swindon. A 125mph First Great Western passenger train, carrying up to 750 people, struck the steel reinforced blocks near Stratton Green Bridge, but managed to stay on the rails. The train was heading to London Paddington from South Wales but was so badly damaged it could not continue its journey. None of the culprits has been caught following the incident at 5pm on Monday, July 13. *Swindon Advertiser 17-08-2009.*

(The train was 1A02 05:30 BTM-Pad)

Inquest - Geoff Chaloner of Sywell Road, Coleview, laid out on the track just under Ermin Street Bridge in Stratton as a First Great Western train hit him at 70mph, Assistant Deputy Coroner for Swindon & Wiltshire Ian Singleton said. The stuntman, known as ^The Wheelie King^ who rode for many bike teams including the Over The Top Motorcycle Stunt team, made the 20-minute walk to the bridge from his home. The dad-of-two was hit by a 450-tonne train at about 6.10am on August 15. He was pronounced dead at the scene by paramedics at 6.35am, said Mr Singleton. *Swindon Advertiser*

*11-12-2009.*