

STONEHOUSE & NAILSWORTH and DURSLEY BRANCHES

ONE of the most fascinating aspects of the contemporary interest in railways is the fast growing cult for obsolescent practice. Perhaps the reason for this is the rapid growth of standardisation, which has brought in its wake a nostalgia for the old order, and a desire to appreciate all that remains whilst it yet survives. Few of us would decry the merits of standardisation from a purely utilitarian standpoint, but aesthetically it lacks character, and certainly the variety and interest required to stimulate enthusiasm.

No doubt this explains why the study of branch lines and little known routes is now a popular pastime with more people than ever before. During the past few years almost every rail-fan excursion to run has been routed for a part of its journey, over some half-forgotten byway and, whenever possible, hauled by a vintage locomotive of the pre-grouping era. Of the thousands of people who participated in these trips, there must have been many, who like myself found a new and unexpected

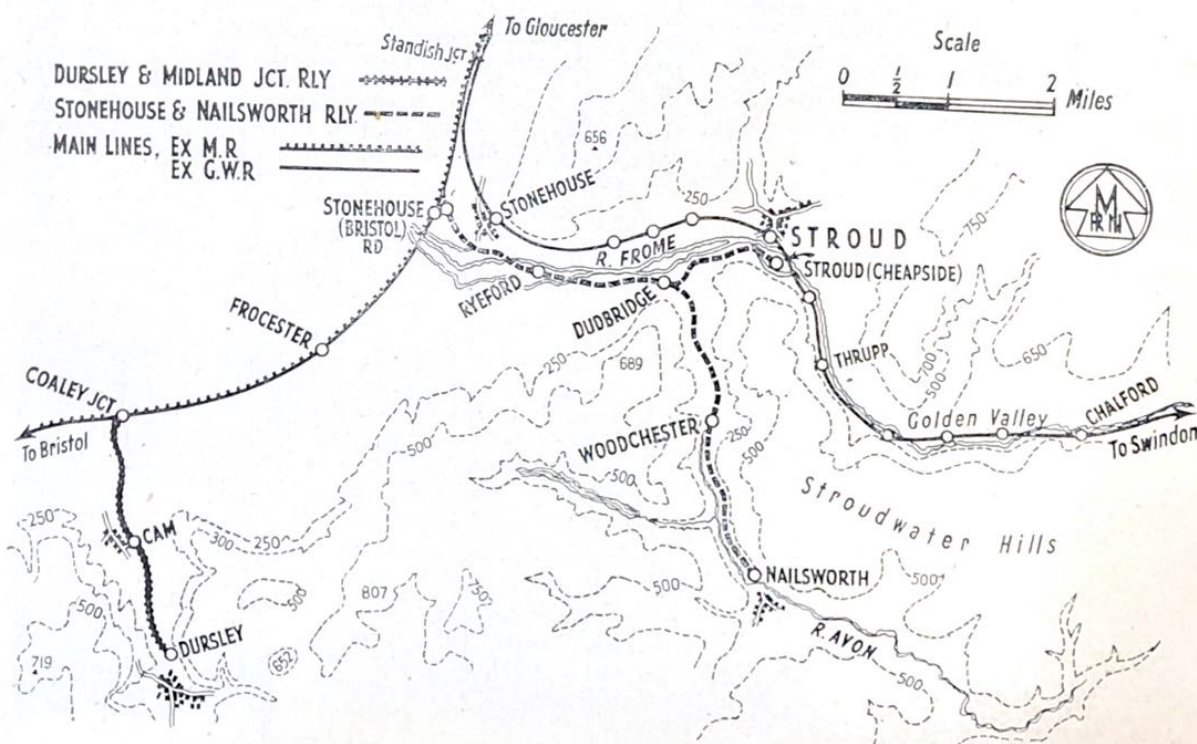
It is not often one finds a prototype layout that can be modelled without a host of alterations, but Peter Winding describes two such lines in this feature, both set among the wooded slopes of Gloucestershire. The photographs and drawings are by the author.

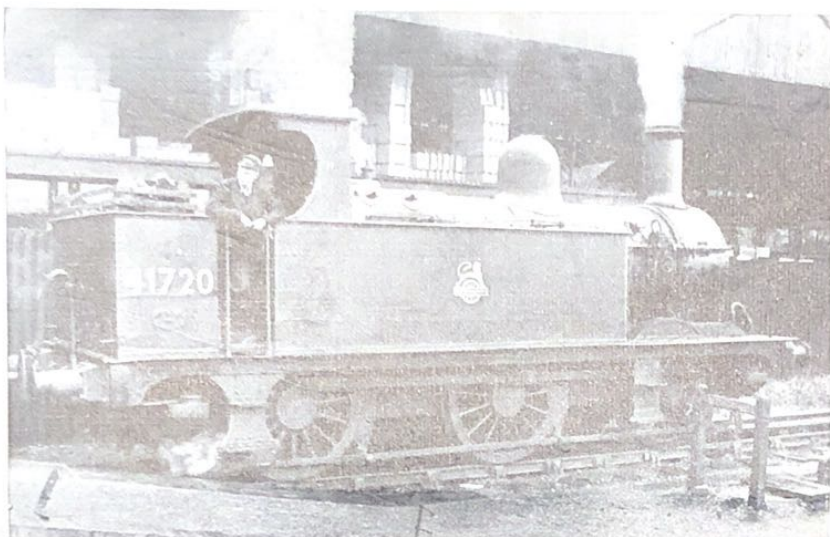
pleasure in the subtle charm that characterises the branch line "atmosphere."

For the first time, one becomes really aware that a railway line is an intimate part of the landscape through which it passes. One perceives the curiousness of each particular feature. Overbridges, cuttings, wayside halts, trees and farmsteads, all harmonise into a series of distinctive pictures that distinguish each meandering length of

track as different from the next. Eventually the whole detailed mass of observation builds up into a complete entity—a branch line, perhaps—that forever afterwards will stamp its individuality upon the mind. In a sense one reacts towards branch lines in much the same way as towards individuals. It is possible to feel at once attracted, or merely indifferent. I would not go so far as to say that one could dislike a branch line, because obviously that would be heretical. Reactions of this sort may well be a matter of personal taste, depending on the nature of the landscape, the layout, and the derivation of ownership. A lover of the Fenlands probably feels happiest when jogging across some bleak and measureless expanse of treeless country, whereas my preference is for lines which climb among the hills and finally get lost in wooded valleys that seem beyond the reach of time.

Nowadays it isn't often that one can hope to fulfil such romantic expectations—but thanks to the initiative of the





View of ex Midland Railway 0-6-0T at Dursley, showing the open cab which is now something of a rarity

Stephenson Locomotive Society, my hopes were realised on a Saturday in August when the sun shone with fitful brilliance from between great banks of lowering cloud, and the wooded hills of Gloucestershire, half-shrouded in mist and rain, looked as mysterious and remote as some half-forgotten land of legend. The occasion was the celebration of the centenary of the Dursley Branch, which was opened to traffic on August 25th, 1856, and still retains its passenger service. The Centenary Special which celebrated this achievement was chartered by the Stephenson Locomotive Society, and consisted of three saloon coaches hauled by 2-6-2T 41208. The journey also included runs over the Stonehouse to Nailsworth and Yate to Thornbury branches. All three branch lines stem off the Gloucester to Bristol main line, and the precise location of the

two that are dealt with in these notes may be ascertained from the accompanying map.

The Dursley Branch

The Dursley Branch leaves the main line at Coaley Junction, and is single line throughout, and worked on the one engine in steam principle. Although little more than 2½ miles long, with one intermediate station at Cam, this little branch is not lacking in character, and still retains something of an air of independence. It was originally incorporated as the Dursley & Midland Junction Railway, and was worked by the Midland Railway for the first few months, and subsequently by a contractor. The company bought the contractor's 0-4-0T locomotive in September, 1857, for £34 10s. and thenceforth worked the line themselves.

On October 23rd, 1860, the directors accepted the Midland Railway's offer of purchase for £10,500, and the line became incorporated as part of the Midland Railway as from January 1st, 1861. Today, much of its Midland ancestry is still apparent, and one delightful feature is that the line is worked by one of two Johnson 0-6-0T's which are kept specially for this purpose, and are the only two members of their class fitted with the vacuum brake for passenger train working. These engines, Nos. 41720 and 41748, were built at Derby in 1883 and 1885 respectively, and are among the very few engines still in service to retain the old characteristic open cab. To house the branch line engine shed there is a neat single road engine shed to the left just before the terminus at Dursley; the relief engine is kept at Gloucester, and sometimes deals with freight on the nearby Stonehouse and Nailsworth Branch.

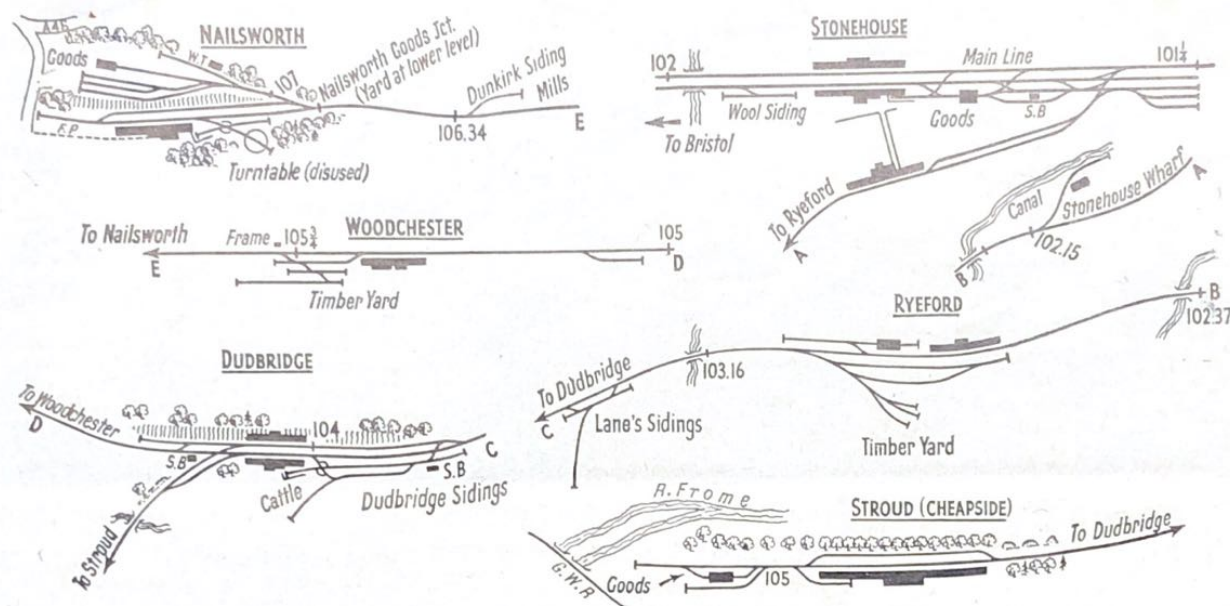
Rural and Industrial

The remarkable thing about the Dursley Branch is that in spite of its short length, it combines a complete change of character. Coaley Junction, where it leaves the main line, is situated at about 90 feet above sea level in a pleasantly undulating open countryside. After leaving the single platform on the right-hand side, the line then climbs at 1 in 135 towards the hills, and the rural village of Cam. Here there is another single platform on the right, and still climbing, the line continues towards Dursley, which is just over a mile beyond. At this point it begins to enter quite a narrow valley with the wooded hills on each side rising to between six and seven hundred feet, whilst adjacent to the line the scene becomes industrial, and closed in by extensive factories which eventually entirely enclose the terminus. This thriving industrial scene, with numerous sidings and goods wagons, comes as something of a complete surprise and probably accounts for why the line remains open to both passenger and goods traffic. The station is a quaint Victorian affair with a single platform just long enough to take an engine and three bogie coaches, and an unusual feature is that the run-round loop is before the station is reached.

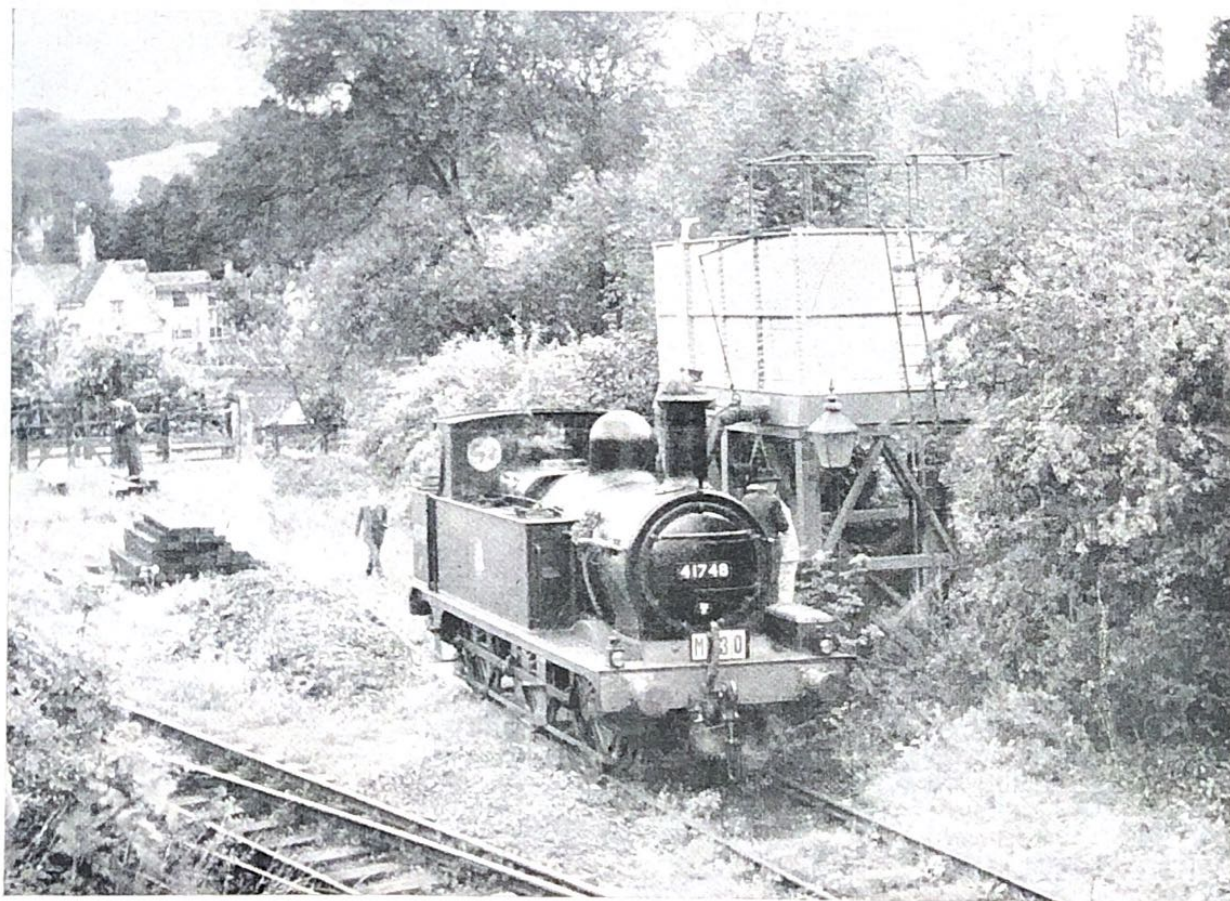
The altitude of the line at this point is a little below 200 feet, which means that the ruling grade throughout its entire length is roughly 1 in 125. The normal weekday service consists of sixty-eight trains daily, composed of one or two non-corridor coaches hauled by one of the two engines already mentioned. On the occasion of the S.L.S. visit the train engine was 2-6-2T 41208 with 0-6-0T 41720 in the rear. Both engines whistled continuously on the way up, and attracted a good deal of attention from the cottagers, many of whom stood at their doors and waved a friendly greeting. At Dursley the train was received by an official deputation



Vacuum-fitted Johnson 0-6-0T about to leave Dursley with the S.L.S. special in 1956



Track diagrams of the Stonehouse & Nailsworth Railway, based upon drawings made by the late R. E. Charlewood in 1931



No. 41748 taking water at Nailsworth. Some of the charm of the line can be gathered from this photograph

from the Rural District Council, and after a short stay proceeded back to Coaley, this time with the 73-year-old veteran proudly leading, and the 2-6-2T ignominiously trailing in the rear!

Modelling Possibilities

For the modeller who is seeking a simple and authentic example on which to base his layout, the Dursley branch has attractive possibilities. For those with a penchant for realism its short length of 2½ miles means that something like true to scale distances are possible. As to lineside detail, a great deal could be accomplished by using a mural showing an outline of the hills rising from the level plain around Coaley. One does not necessarily have to be a Michelangelo to do this sort successfully. Seen at morning and evening, or whenever there is a suggestion of mist about, a whole panorama becomes almost monochromatic. Provided that the outline is accurate, even a flat tone of purplish blue will give an effective background against which the modelled lineside detail stands forth in colourful contrast. Apart from an intermediate single platform halt, a siding, and a level crossing at Cam, the junction at Coaley and an odd cottage or two, most of the important detail concerns the station and yard layout at Dursley, where the various factories and the local gasworks encircle the railway and afford plenty of scope for an active industrial scene.

Both Dursley and Cam have been associated with the cloth making trade since Elizabethan times, and much of the freight traffic is worked to and from the mills. The largest works on the line are those of R. A. Lister & Co., at Dursley, and employ sidings on each side of the line. For those who would like to know as much as possible about the historical background, a detailed account of this line appeared in *The Railway Magazine* for September, 1956.

The Stonehouse & Nailsworth Branch

My earlier reference to an ideal branch line was in fact an allusion to the Stonehouse & Nailsworth branch. For not only does this line serve a locality which abounds with beauty and interest, but it has the added charm of a system in miniature, to all appearances cut off and remote from the workaday world, and yet in reality but a stone's throw from two important main lines. If one follows the configuration of the 500 ft. contour on the map, it becomes apparent that the illusion is largely due to land barriers, but it is necessary to bear in mind that the whole of this region is very heavily wooded, so that even on the Dudbridge to Stroud section one rarely glimpses the valley of the Frome, even though the river is at a much lower altitude. The effect of all this undergrowth, combined with hills which tower up to the region of 800 ft., creates an air of seclusion and rusticity which cannot fail to delight the



General view of Nailsworth Station in 1956. The goods yard lies on a lower level to the right. The spur to the left leads off to the disused turntable site and the demolished engine shed

eye of a romantic, and even cause some wonderment as to how a railway ever found its way here, let alone to have survived into this mundane era! The story of how this came about, like so many others belongs to the age when well-established railways like the Midland would go to almost any lengths to extend their "territory." Moreover it must be remembered that in those days there was a good deal of local industry which owed its origin to waterways like the nearby Stroudwater Canal; and potential passenger traffic existed in villages that are now hard put to make even a local bus service pay its way.

Nevertheless, although the Midland had a paternal interest in the line from the beginning, The Stonehouse & Nailsworth Railway was authorised as a private company by the Act of July 13th, 1863, and although vested in

the Midland from 1878 was not dissolved until the expiry of the lease in 1886. It was opened to goods and passenger traffic between Stonehouse and Nailsworth in April, 1867. The branch from Dudbridge to Stroud was opened for goods traffic in November, 1875, and to passenger traffic in July, 1886, when the line became part of the Midland Railway. In Midland days the passenger services were worked separately, the main service running through from Stonehouse to Nailsworth with a separate branch train from Dudbridge to Stroud connecting. In latter Midland days the last train from Stonehouse did a trip from Dudbridge to Stroud and back before proceeding to Nailsworth. This system was extended by the L.M.S., and at the withdrawal of the service there was no separate service on the Stroud branch, which was only served by certain



Ex Midland Railway 0-6-0T at Nailsworth, with disused loop line to the right



2-6-2T 41208 a Nailsworth on the occasion of the Centenary of the Dursley Branch

of the trains from Stonehouse to Nailsworth. The line was finally closed to all regular passenger traffic on June 16th, 1947, and has since remained open to goods traffic only, apart from an occasional special such as that which conveyed members of the Stephenson Locomotive Society.

The branch leaves the Gloucester to Bristol main line at Stonehouse (Bristol Road) which is located at 8 miles 30 chains from Gloucester (Eastgate) station. A little further on there is a single platform on the right-hand side which is connected to the main-line platform by a footpath. At 8 miles 75 chains the line crosses over the disused Stoudwater Canal and Stonehouse wharf, with the River Frome on the left. It reaches Ryeford with a single platform on the right at 9 miles 51 chains, and continues single until Dudbridge sidings at 10 miles 51 chains. Here the line is doubled, and continues thus through the platforms of Dudbridge Station to Dudbridge Junction where the line divides at 10 miles 79 chains with a small signal box within the fork. The single line Stroud Branch then climbs steeply away to the left to reach an altitude slightly above 200 feet. Here the line doubles for a short distance and then swings right in a deep cutting along the southern escarpment of the Frome Valley and into the terminus at Stroud (Cheapside). The station is located on a shelf in the hillside, at an altitude of 160 ft. and affords a fine view across the town to the high hills on the northern side of the valley. There is one platform on the left-hand side that will delight the eye of any botanist, and a run-round loop that is fast disappearing under grass. For the rest, there are some fine antique lamp standards, and an unusual station building whose mouldering paintwork, like the overgrown platform, bears silent witness to the changing pattern of public transport. The line terminates in a small goods yard with three short sidings just beyond the station.

Although little more than a mile in length the journey from Dudbridge to Stroud is a delightful experience. The severe curves and heavy gradients impose a snail's pace, and at times one can almost lean out and touch the old cottage walls and the abundant foliage, which, together with masses of wild flowers and tall hedgerows, hide away the railway line in one of the pleasantest rural settings in Gloucestershire.

On leaving Dudbridge the single track branch to Nailsworth heads southwards and follows the Avon into the well-wooded defile of the Nailsworth Valley. One and a half miles from Dudbridge there is a single platform on the left which served the village of Woodchester. Here the railway is at an altitude of 152 feet, but on either side the land rises to about 700 feet, and the valley is about half a mile wide between the 500 feet contours. Except where the Inchbrook enters the Avon it continues thus for another one and a half miles to the terminus at Nailsworth, which is located at an altitude of about 200 feet, in a fine natural amphitheatre surrounded by tree-clad hills.

There is very little evidence of habitation because the village lies beyond the terminus, and dwellings in immediate vicinity are obscured by trees. It was here that the S. & N.J.R. had its headquarters in the remarkably fine Cotswold stone station building which is still in use as a dwelling house. The front portico is particularly unusual, and looks almost as though it might once have formed part of a Norman cloister. As at Stroud, there is a single platform with a run-round loop, similarly overgrown and evidently in a disused condition. To avoid using these loops the Stephenson Locomotive Society's special train employed two engines, one at each end of the train. Leading out of the station to the right is a spur which formerly led to a turntable and an engine shed, and coming into the station before the loop is a spur to the right which leads down a

dip, where it divides into sidings for watering the engine, and to the left a cattle dock. The engine shed seems to have been abandoned before 1930 and it is possible that the engine servicing facilities were transferred to their present position on the down side at or about that time. The distance throughout from Stonehouse is a little under six miles, and just over fourteen from Gloucester.

A glance at the accompanying map and track diagram reveals that this layout offers a variety of interesting possibilities. Treated as a separate entity, the Stonehouse & Nailsworth Railway is an ideally compact system. Stonehouse to Nailsworth would be regarded as the main line, with Dudbridge as the centre of operational activities. In its simplest form, it could be operated as a freight line only; in its most complex, as freight and passenger, with a separate passenger service over the Stroud branch, as in Midland days. For the sake of realism, the passenger services being built up from the timings of main line trains calling at Stonehouse, and just to relieve the monotony, there could be an odd rail-fan excursion with plenty of strange circumlocutions to throw the operating department into a state of complete chaos!

At the time when the Stroud branch was worked as a separate passenger service, this train usually consisted of one coach hauled by a Johnson 0-4-4T. The Stonehouse to Nailsworth section had a three coach train, and was latterly hauled by a Johnson 0-4-4T with condensing gear which had been transferred from the London area. Other motive power commonly used in L.M.S. days, included Kirtley outside framed 0-6-0s of the 2400 series, and Aspinall 0-6-0s of the former L. & Y.R.

In conclusion I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to notes supplied by the Stephenson Locomotive Society, to Mr. W. A. Camwell, and Mr. G. J. Aston, who kindly loaned the diagrams on which my drawing of the track layout is based.

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