



ROUTE NOTES – FROM HENLEY

The following route notes have been compiled by Vintage Trains to add interest and enjoyment to passengers travelling on the heritage steam train services. The journey therefore describes the steam train trip along the line, which does not stop at all the stations that the regular Shakespeare Line trains call at. Nevertheless, these notes should be of interest to ALL Shakespeare Line users. The notes can be used in conjunction with the separate route map. They are written as if facing the direction of travel throughout the journey.

Please note that some of the undergrowth on this line may scrape along the coaches in places and this can be very dangerous to the unwary. We would ask therefore that you take great care and do not lean out of the windows - on the left-hand side of the train in both directions where the undergrowth is closest – on the right hand side there is the danger of trains travelling in the opposite direction.

From 2007, the Shakespeare Express calls at Henley on its way to Stratford. Passengers joining here make a round trip which is described in three sections: 1 - Henley to Stratford on the southern part of the Shakespeare Line; 2 – Stratford to Birmingham Snow Hill following the alternative route; 3 – Birmingham Snow Hill to Henley along the northern part of the Shakespeare Line.

Section 1 : HENLEY to STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

The journey begins with a short run through pleasant countryside to **Wootton Wawen** station, shortly after which we pass a camping site at Sillesbourne on the right hand side, the occupants of which usually give the train a friendly wave. Immediately after passing the campsite we run under Edstone Aqueduct, a superb example of an early iron aqueduct, which carries the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal for 200 yards over the railway, a river, a road and the remains of the trackbed of the former branch line from Bearley to Alcester.

Now running on a gentle right-handed curve, we reach the signalbox at Bearley West Junction (left) with the line from Hatton and Leamington Spa also trailing in on that side. A short run now brings us to **Wilmcote** station, shortly before which, on the right hand side, is Mary Arden's House, former home of Shakespeare's mother. Now a countryside museum devoted to showing life in Tudor times, it is owned by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Leaving Wilmcote behind, we descend the steepest gradient on the line, a little over a mile of 1-in-75 of Bishopton Bank, which carries the line beneath the A46 to the outskirts of Stratford-upon-Avon.

We approach the station at Stratford-upon-Avon on a right-handed curve, crossing the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal for the last time with the ground of Stratford Town FC over on the right. Our outward journey ends in platform 1 where we ask that you be prepared to leave the train as quickly as possible for operational reasons, in case we have to shunt to platform 2 ready for the start of the train's return journey.

BEFORE ALIGHTING FROM THE TRAIN, PLEASE ALLOW THE STEWARDS TO UNLOCK THE DOORS AFTER THE TRAIN COMES TO A HALT AT THE PLATFORM.

Section 2 : STRATFORD-UPON-AVON to BIRMINGHAM SNOW HILL

Leaving **Stratford-upon-Avon** on a left handed curve, we pass the ground of Stratford Town FC on our left before crossing the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. Our steam locomotive will be working hard to accelerate the train as we make our way towards the beginning of the steep climb of Bishopton Bank. We pass beneath the A46 and the beat of our locomotive slows as we take on the 1-mile 1-in-75 climb. It ends shortly before we pass through **Wilmcote** station, where, on the left-hand side, can be seen Mary Arden's House, former home of Shakespeare's mother. This is now a countryside museum showing life in Tudor times. Accelerating briefly, we run downhill and reach Bearley West Junction.

Here our usual route is to take the Shakespeare Line to the left, but due to a weight restriction on a bridge, we have to leave that line to take the alternative route to the right through Claverdon to Hatton to join the GWR mainline for the run to Tyseley.

With the usual route along the Shakespeare Line continuing to the left we take the line to Hatton and Leamington Spa curving off to the right at Bearley West Junction with the signalbox on our left in the fork made by the two lines. We are climbing now and pass the station at **Bearley** and climb Langley Bank to **Claverdon**. Both of these stations now only have platforms on the left-hand side as the line has been reduced to a single track. Passing beneath the M40 Motorway, we branch to the left as the line to Hatton continues to the right.

Rounding a sharp left-handed curve we reach the former Great Western Railway main line at Hatton North Junction and with the M40 for company on the left, begin to regain speed. Along this level section were the famed water troughs at Rowington in the 'good old days'. We cross a 200-year-old link between the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal on the left and the Warwick & Birmingham Canal on the right.

By the time we pass through **Lapworth** station we are on a gentle climb, which continues as far as **Dorridge** station. As we leave Dorridge behind, we cross the level crossing at Bentley Heath and then pass over the M42 Motorway and the River Blythe to reach **Widney Manor**. We note the golfers at Widney Manor Golf Course on the left.

Next we can see the town centre of Solihull and the Touchwood Court shopping complex on the right before we pass through the island platform at **Solihull**. We run through a cutting, which then opens out to reveal Olton Reservoir. Built to supply the Warwick & Birmingham Canal with water, it is on the left just before we cross the main A41 Warwick Road by way of a 1930's built girder bridge. Immediately following is **Olton** station. It is then less than a mile from Olton to the station at **Acocks Green** after which we shall soon be slowing for our booked stop at **Tyseley** where the usual route, the Shakespeare Line from Stratford-upon-Avon trails in on the left-hand side as we near the station.

BEFORE ALIGHTING FROM THE TRAIN AT ANY OF OUR STOPS (TYSELEY, MOOR STREET, SNOW HILL), PLEASE ALLOW THE STEWARDS TO UNLOCK THE DOORS AFTER THE TRAIN COMES TO A HALT AT THE PLATFORM.

We are only booked to stop for a very short time at Tyseley so, if you are not intending leaving the train at this point, please remain on board. Leaving Tyseley, we pass the diesel unit maintenance depot on the left with Tyseley Locomotive Works, headquarters of Vintage Trains beyond. Occasionally another steam locomotive is running up and down the yard, if so the two locomotives exchange whistles.

Passing through **Small Heath** station, the A45 then parallels the line on the right as far as Bordesley Junction where the line, which links with the 'Camp Hill' route, diverges right. We then pass beneath this route, which allows freight trains to bypass the very busy Birmingham New Street station.

The island platform at **Bordesley** station passes on the right-hand side, while to the left we catch our first glimpse of the refurbished and very modern looking Bullring as we cross the 797 yards long Bordesley Viaduct. Slowing for the stop at **Birmingham Moor Street** station allows us a closer view of the striking architecture of the new Bullring shopping complex on the left-hand side and also the refurbishment of the older part of Moor Street station and a glimpse of GWR 2885 loco on display in the bay platforms. All Shakespeare Express trains are booked to stop for a very short time at Moor Street so, if you are not intending leaving the train at this point, please remain on board.

There is a steep climb through the 580 yards long Snow Hill Tunnel and our locomotive will have to work hard before reaching the end of our journey in **Birmingham Snow Hill** station. This usually involves a slow run along the length of the platform and we would ask that you do not attempt to open any external doors until the train has come to a complete stand. The present Snow Hill station was opened in 1987, the much grander original GWR station having been closed in 1972.

Our locomotive will be detached from the north end of the train and run forward a little way before reversing through one of the other platforms and down through the tunnel to Birmingham Moor Street. It will then return through the tunnel to be attached to the south end of the train ready for the next stage of the journey. This should provide plenty of opportunity for photographs, but we would ask that you stand well clear of the locomotive and platform edges.

Section 3 : BIRMINGHAM SNOW HILL to HENLEY

This section begins at **Birmingham Snow Hill** station. This once magnificent Great Western station was closed in March 1972 and lay derelict for many years. Rebuilt on a much less grand scale, it was reopened in 1987 it is now once more a busy station. Leaving Snow Hill, we enter the 580 yards long Snow Hill Tunnel, descending on a gradient as steep as 1-in-45 to emerge into the daylight once more as we pass through **Birmingham Moor Street** station. Some Shakespeare Express trains are booked to stop for a very short time at Moor Street. If you look to the right you will see the refurbishment of the older part of Moor Street station and GWR 2885 loco on display in the bay platforms. Beyond that is the striking architecture of the new Bullring shopping complex.

After Moor Street we accelerate gently along the 797 yards long Bordesley Viaduct with extensive views over the City of Birmingham on both sides. Shortly after we reach the end of the viaduct we reach the island platform at **Bordesley** station and then pass beneath the 'Camp Hill' line from Bordesley junction to Kings Norton. This route allows freight trains to bypass the busy Birmingham New Street station. Soon afterwards and trailing in round a sharp curve on the left, is the line which links to the 'Camp Hill' line at Bordesley junction and from there to the main North East/South West route at Landor Street Junction.

The A45 parallels the railway on the left as we continue towards **Small Heath** station and we are soon rattling over the point-work at Small Heath South Junction where connections to the Maintenance Depot and to the Tyseley Locomotive Works, headquarters of Vintage Trains, diverge on the right. Occasionally another steam locomotive is running up and down the yard, if so the two locomotives exchange whistles as we slow for our stop in **Tyseley** station. Having picked up more passengers, we resume our journey, curving sharply right at Tyseley South Junction to take the 'North Warwick' route while the former GWR main line continues to the left. This curve allows a view of our locomotive from the right hand side of the train.

Returning to our journey, we begin to accelerate round a gentle right hand curve, which carries us on a rising gradient of 1-in-200 to **Spring Road** station. The climbing continues, though on easier

gradients, to **Hall Green** station but the line levels out as we approach **Yardley Wood** where the River Cole can be glimpsed on the right hand side. Occasionally, for operational reasons, we may make a brief stop in **Shirley** station. If we do, only the very front of the train will be alongside the platform and we would ask that you do not open any external doors or make any attempt to alight from the train.

Soon after Shirley, we have to slow to negotiate the bridge over the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal, but can then accelerate as we continue our journey through pleasant countryside. **Whitlocks End** station has been rebuilt and is in stark contrast to the many stations on the line, which still retain their GWR character.

Another mile takes us to **Wythall** station where the line begins to turn to run south-westerly. Soon, on the right hand side, can be seen the links of Fulford Heath Golf Course where often, a crucial putt is delayed in order to watch and wave as our steam train passes. Shortly after passing through **Earlswood** station we run through the nature reserve at Clowes Wood to reach the small station at **The Lakes**. The lakes, which give the station its name, are to the left of the railway just before we pass through the station.

We now cross the Spring Brook, which accompanies us on the right hand side as we pass beneath the M42 Motorway and accelerate on falling gradients. **Wood End** station is quickly followed by the 173 yards long Wood End Tunnel and we are soon running on an embankment with the village of Tanworth-in-Arden away to our right. The gradient continues to fall at 1-in-150 as we pass through **Danzey** station, skirting Mockley Wood on our right hand side. A little way further on, look out on the right hand side for the Umberslade Stables where there are usually a number of young riders undergoing instruction in the paddock.

Shortly afterwards, also on the right hand side, we begin to see the golf course attached to the Henley Golf and Country Club and soon we are curving right handed through **Henley-in-Arden** station with its signalbox on the left.

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We do hope that you have enjoyed your journey with us today and look forward to seeing you again very soon.