

BY TRAM TO KINVER

(1901-1930)

by

D. M. BILLS &
E. and W. R. GRIFFITHS



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INTRODUCTION

THE Kinver Light Railway, built with certain railway features but popularly known as 'the Kinver trams', operated successfully from 1901 until February 1930. This book is produced to commemorate the line in the 50th year since its closure. It is not intended as a concise history, since most of the operational details are well documented in other published works, but as a means of presenting hitherto unpublished photographs of aspects of the service, and to record certain features which have only recently been destroyed.

Modern photographs are also included to demonstrate the length of time that some features of the line, if left undisturbed, can still be discerned.

Part of the 'railway' ran through private land, and in order that interested investigators can trace the course of the permanent way, various vantage points are listed in an appendix. The use of this should make it possible to gain a complete picture of the railway and to imagine the pleasant run enjoyed by the many thousands of people who used the line for a day out in the country.

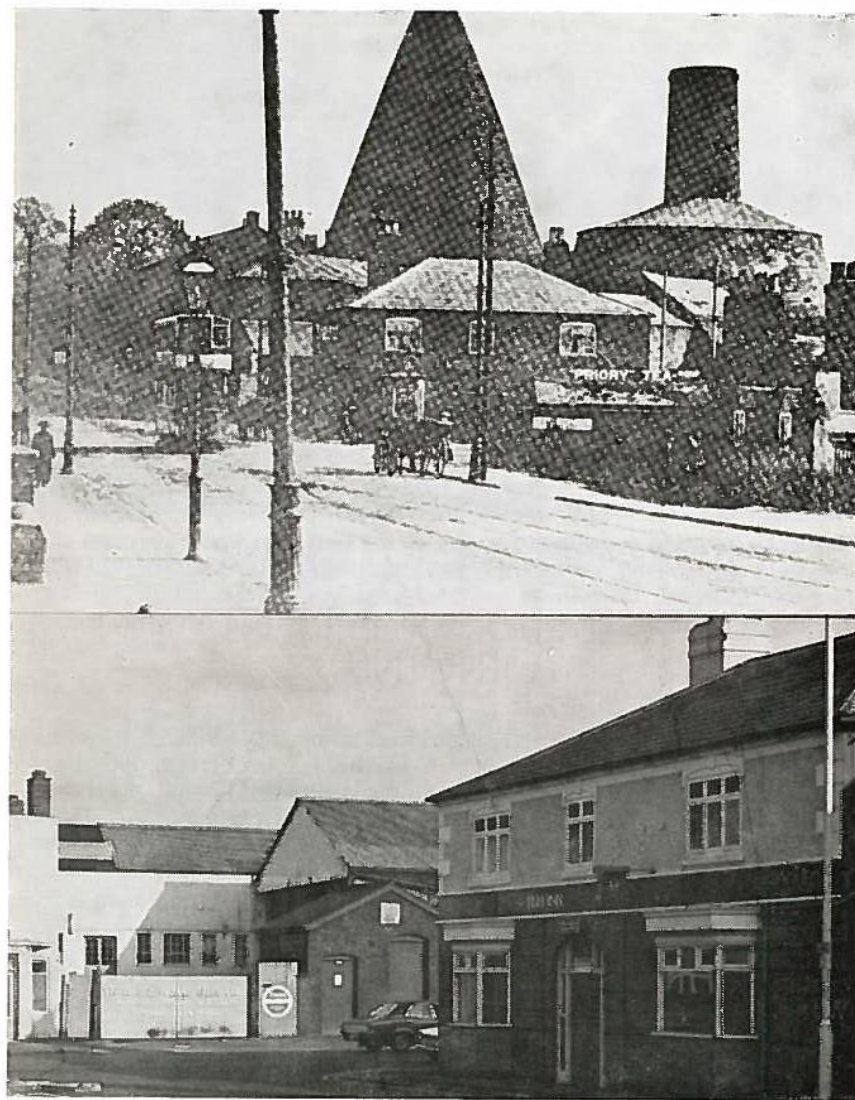
It is unfortunate that so little remains of the permanent way between Stewponey and Kinver. Could this part of the line have been preserved and in use today, it would be a tremendous and viable public attraction.

Front Cover illustration

Hyde Depot with 'toastrack' car No. 50, in 1901. Inspector E. Morris stands on the right hand side. Names of driver and conductor unknown.

Photo : courtesy Muriel Horton.

THEN AND NOW AT THE FISH INN TERMINUS



Top: Fish Inn terminus of the Kinver Light Railway, with Webb Corbett glassworks in the background. The trolley pole of the Kinver tram can just be seen above the 'Priory Tea' sign. On the main road in the foreground, a double deck tram is proceeding towards Brettell Lane.

Photo : Courtesy County Express.

Lower: Recent photograph of the Fish Inn and the Stourbridge Produce Sales Limited (formerly the Amblecote car shed).



The Ridge, Wollaston, showing the curve of the track towards Kinver. Part of a loop in the track can be seen in the foreground. Photo: Courtesy Len Dunn.

ORIGINS

THE gradual expansion and electrification of the Midland tramway network during the 1890s made it inevitable that certain spur lines would be built to radiate into the countryside surrounding the Black Country. Such lines would enable large numbers of people to take a day trip to see the English countryside which, without cheap and relatively rapid transport, remained 'near and yet so far away'.

Kinver was an ideal spot for such a line. The L.M.S. offer in 1895 to open a branch to Kinver was for some reason rejected. The village was rapidly becoming a tourist resort in the latter part of the last century, yet the only means of access were by carrier wagon, the Staffs./Worcs. Canal, on foot, or by the relatively expensive horse drawn brake.

The major employer of labour in the village, the Hyde Iron Works, finally closed about 1885, following in the wake of the smaller mills in the area. This caused quite an increase in the emigration rate to the colonies, leaving much village property vacant. Contemporary accounts state that nearly one third of the houses were empty in 1880, and that four cottages in fair repair changed hands for £50. This low cost property attracted business people and investors from the Black Country and the situation gradually improved. The 1881 population of 3,551 fell to 2,160 in 1891, but by the turn of the century the tide had turned and the 1901 census figure was 2,348.

The initial promotion of the Kinver Light Railway began in 1897 when an application was made to the Light Railway Commissioners for a Light Railway Order. This application was made by agents for the British Electric Traction Company (BET) which was formed in 1896.

Kinver Parish Council objected to the scheme, as did Mr. P. H. Foley (a parish councillor) who owned the majority of the land across which the railway was to run.

The land required was to be compulsorily purchased, which presumably did not suit Mr. Foley. After much argument, Mr. Foley eventually withdrew his objections especially when he had minimised the damage to his agricultural land. The Board of Trade approved the Kinver Light Railway Order 1898 on 7th March 1899. The two main promoters were Mr. E. Clarke (director) and Mr. S. P. W. Sellon of the B.E.T. Company.

The Order basically provided for two railways with two short connections into the existing Midland network. The first part, from the Fish Inn at Amblecote via Wollaston High Street to the Stewponey and Foley Arms Hotel, measured 2 miles 4 furlongs 4.5 chains. The second part of 1 mile 4 furlongs 8.5 chains was from the Stewponey to Mill Lane, Kinver, 75 yards south of the canal lock. The gauge was to be 3' 6", the motive power electricity, and three years were allowed for completion.

Actually, the Order was a very lengthy document of 26 pages, some of it covering Mr. Foley's objections particularly concerning his land holdings in the Stewponey area, and his loading of osiers across the permanent way, provided that he did not interfere with the operation of the railway.



Recent photograph of Bridgnorth Road, Stourton, looking towards the Stewponey, taken near the entrance to the Stourbridge Rugby Club. Note: the track ran along the wide grass verge on the left.

BUILDING

WORK on the line commenced shortly after the confirmation of the Order, and the Kinver Parish Council received a complaint in June 1899 concerning the section between the Ridge and the Stewponey. It is assumed that B.E.T. engineers supervised the building using direct labour.

By July 1899, 3¼ miles out of approximately 5 miles of track had been laid, mainly the street tramway section laid in the roadway.

By August, the light railway track between Wollaston and the Hyde at Kinver was temporarily laid. During this period Mr. Foley and the Staffordshire County Council were objecting to the positioning of poles for the overhead wires. In January 1900 tenders were invited for a car shed, presumably at the Hyde, and for a terminus layout at Kinver. In October 1900 a contract for the completion of the construction of the permanent way was let to George Law of Kidderminster.

It appears that the easy sections were built first. Track laying in the street was simpler than dealing with private landowners to purchase land. The most difficult section was that between the Stewponey and Kinver, across the flood plain of the River Stour, where the land was low lying. Several crossings of the River Stour were necessary and a bridge had also to be built over the Staffs./Worcs. Canal. Much of this



The Stewponey and Foley Arms Hotel, subsequently replaced by the present building in the 1930s.

Note the tracks crossing what is now the busy dual carriageway A449.

Photo : Courtesy Len Dunn.

section had to be built on an embankment to keep the line above flood level. A steam locomotive was used to move slag and ashes from the Hyde Iron Works for use as ballast. In any case, this spoil had to be removed to allow the line to be built across disused industrial land, and it is on record that on one occasion the locomotive became derailed and fell into the river. Fortunately, the crew escaped without injury. The crossings of the meandering river and a mill-race in this area necessitated the building of several bridges, some of which were mounted on wooden piles driven into the bed of the River Stour.

This section of permanent way was originally built with bullhead rails except on the passing loops where grooved rails were used. These bullhead rails were fixed on wooden sleepers ballasted on slag and cinders from the Hyde. Similar construction was used on the roadside section between the Ridge and near the Stewponey and Foley Arms Hotel, where the track was laid in the street.

During the construction of the private right-of-way section between the Stewponey and Kinver early in January 1901, heavy rain combined with a burst canal bank caused a serious flood which washed down-

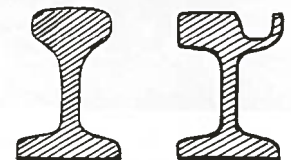


Top: Permanent way gang at work on changing the bull head rails for the grooved girder tramway rails.

Despite the poor condition of this photograph it is sufficiently rare as to warrant inclusion.

Photo : Courtesy Mabel Timmings.

Right: Detail of bull head and grooved girder rails.



stream many loose sleepers and also part of the embankment. As a result the height of the embankment was raised considerably and flood water, though nearly covering the track on several subsequent occasions, never prevented the tramway from running.

The depot at the Hyde was not completed until mid-1901. This consisted of a shed of corrugated iron sheets and girders. Four tracks and a short siding were built and inspection pits were housed in the shed. This depot could store about eight cars.

The Kinver terminus originally consisted of a long loop with a stub end. This was considerably altered in 1906 to make three loading tracks and thus improve the capacity of the terminus. At this time other improvements were made to the line. Part of the track between Kinver and the Hyde (at the meadows stop) was doubled for about 300 yards.

Much of the street section of the track between the Ridge and the Fish at Amblecote was doubled by this time to improve the efficiency of the line. The Kinver terminus had its own buildings including a ticket office, parcels office, waiting room and toilets.

By 1905 the depot at Amblecote was built and a short length of track crossing the Stourbridge line connected it to the terminus at the Fish. A waiting room and parcels office were also built at Amblecote.

Power for the line was originally provided from Harts Hill Power Station by underground feeder, but expansion required extra power and a battery substation was provided. Later diesel generators were also used to provide power as the peak demands of the line increased.



One of the most photographed scenes on the Kinver Light Railway . . . still familiar to canal users.
Photo: Courtesy Len Dunn.

OPENING

THE company carried out a trial run on 20th February 1901 prior to the Board of Trade inspection which was performed by Lt. Col. Yorke on 22nd March 1901. The inspector banned the use of double decker trams and night running, and also imposed speed restrictions due to the use of bullhead rails and the absence of signals. Mr. Trotter performed the electrical inspection for the Board of Trade on 4th April 1901 to allow a public service to begin on the next day, Good Friday 1901.

THE LINE IN OPERATION

THE Kinver Light Railway offered safe and cheap communication with the huge Midland conurbation and it was inevitable that the line would be successful, at least until the novelty wore off. A fare of only 3d. (just over 1p) drastically undercut the cost of transport in a horse-brake and the impact of a mass influx of tourists into Kinver was dramatic. One of the operating company's advertisements labelled Kinver as the 'Switzerland of the Midlands', and most houses offered bed and board, or at least 'teas'. Tourism at weekends and Bank Holidays became an industry which helped the village to survive.

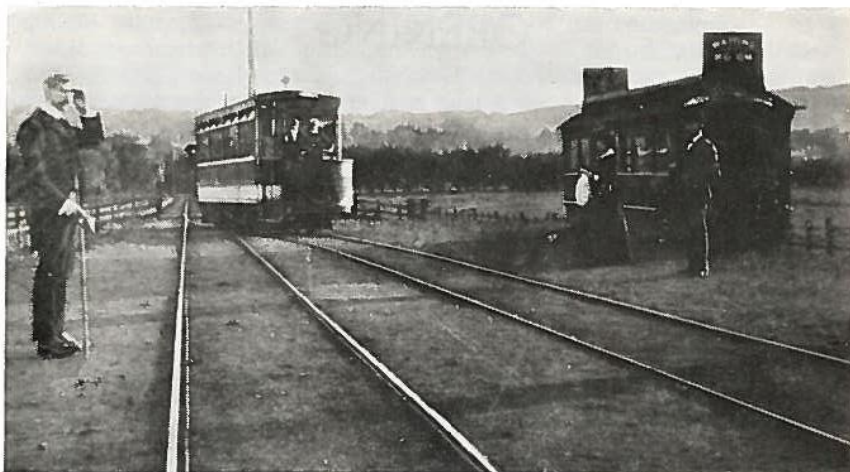
Traffic on the line at Easter 1901 was very heavy, and in June the same year the scene was repeated. The maximum capacity of the line was four cars running at 20 minute intervals and at times they could not cope with demand. The banning of double deck cars had a serious effect on the carrying capacity of the line, a fact which to some extent permitted the horse-drawn brakes to continue to ply their trade.

Many through cars were run, linking up with the main tramway system to permit special excursions from Birmingham and the Black Country, bringing groups of school children, church guild outings, and family gatherings flocking to the village and nearby Kinver Edge. The summer traffic continued to increase and at times a seven minute service was operated in an attempt to transport tourists to and from Kinver.

On Whit Monday, 1st June 1903, over 14,000 passengers were carried on the railway and at the inquest following a fatal accident that afternoon, it was said that the tram car involved was carrying between 70 to 80 passengers, when only licenced to carry 52. (see picture 'Last Tram From Kinver').

From eye witness accounts of the railway such scenes were not uncommon at holiday periods. At times, the queue of passengers waiting at the Kinver terminus extended well into the High Street.

In 1904 New Century Pictures made a film to advertise the railway. A cine-camera was mounted on the top of a tram, following a party of children. This was shown extensively throughout the Midlands and resulted in a substantial number of bookings. Unfortunately, this film



The waiting room and tracks at The Hyde Meadows Halt. The track was doubled in 1906.

Note : Bull head rails still in use.

Photo : Courtesy Mabel Timmings.

has been lost and recent attempts by the Crich Tramway Museum have failed to trace it. What a find it would be!

1905 brought possibly the heaviest traffic the line ever carried. On Whit Monday, 16,699, and on Tuesday, 14,421 passengers were carried in a 15 hour operating period.

Parcels, milk and vegetables were also carried to provide valuable income. This service became sufficient to warrant specially adapted cars and was essentially a part of the regular service which was totally different to the peak summer service.

The depot at the Hyde was normally closed during the winter and used to store the trams required for the summer traffic. Shortly before Easter a gang of maintenance men prepared the summer trams in readiness for the opening on Good Friday. These were the familiar toast racks which appear on many of the photographs taken during the picture postcard era of about this time. They were open cars without windows; hence their use in summer only.

Several other types of car were also used on the K.L.R. including 'Brills', 'Baltimores', ex-cable cars, and 'Cradleys'. Some of these were enclosed and used for the regular service throughout the year. Some of the cars appeared in several forms, since many were rebuilt at least once before being scrapped.

The basic winter service which lasted for many years consisted of hourly trams in the morning and trams every half hour in the afternoon. This service enabled people to live in Kinver and commute to work in the industrial Midlands. Such mobility had a revolutionary effect on the village of Kinver and started the dormitory image that it has today.

The first world war had a dramatic effect on the K.L.R. The

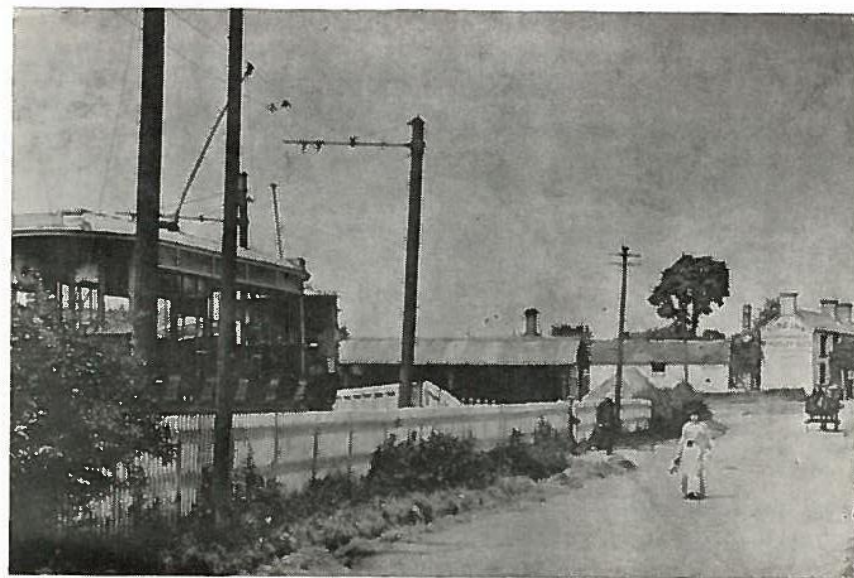
shortage of men and materials made maintenance impossible and the line suffered as a result. When the hostilities ceased the service had to face competition from a new form of transport—motorised vehicles. Omnibus services provided by The Midland 'Red' and 'Supreme' were later to defeat the tramways, just as the trams had eventually caused the demise of horse-drawn transport.

In the 1920s summer traffic was still heavy, but regular traffic gradually diminished. This regular traffic included many canal boatmen who lived in the Black Country but could leave their boat moored at the Stewponey at night and journey to their homes for provisions and a change of clothes, returning to the boat on the first tram of the morning.

By 16th November 1926 the service was reduced to two journeys each way per day. By 1929 the service consisted of only one journey morning and evening.

Mr. A. Horton served the railway for many years, first as a driver in the early 1900s, and later as an inspector. Some of the photographs used here come from his collection and are reproduced by kind permission of his family. Another driver, 'Happy' Jack, is well remembered by regular commuters between Kinver and Stourbridge.

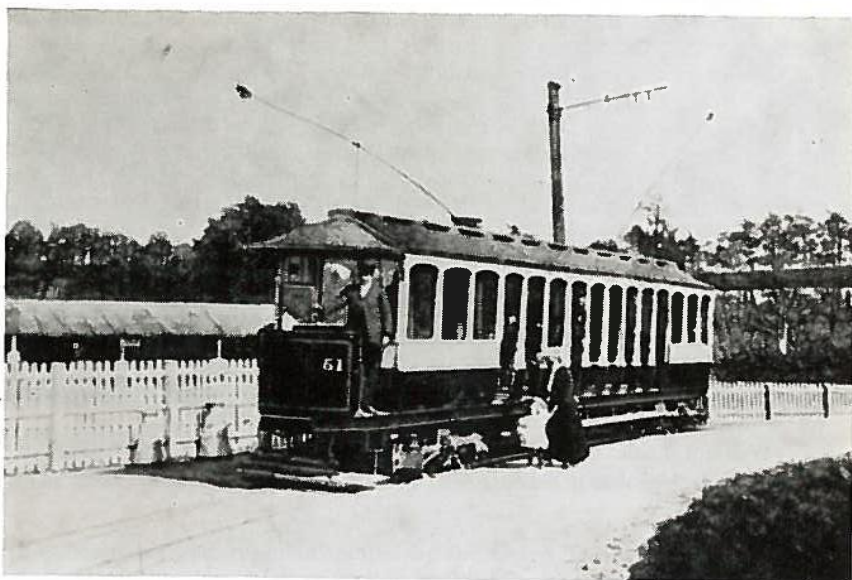
William Lane of Kinver was an inspector with the railway in its early days, and his son Edward was a driver. Mr. E. Tombs and



Kinver tram terminus, Mill Lane: a familiar sight to the many thousands of visitors between 1901 and 1930.

The Vine Inn still stands adjacent to the lock on the Staffs/Worcs. Canal.

Photo : Courtesy Geoff. Clewes.



Top: Toast rack car No. 51 at Kinver terminus. The parcels office can be seen on the far side of the fence. This is now the site of a filling station.

Note Milk churns—reminder that the line also carried produce.

Photo: Courtesy Len Dunn.

Lower: Dining car on the K.L.R., date unknown. It is difficult to take this one seriously, its authenticity being derived from Inspector A. Horton.

Photo: Courtesy Muriel Horton.



Harry Webb were also drivers. Edward Morris (seen to the right of the tram shown on the front cover) started on the Midland tramway network as a driver of steam, and later electric trams. He rose through the rank of inspector on the K.L.R. to chief inspector, before moving to the Midland 'Red'.

CLOSURE

THE final withdrawal of service must have been something of a non-event, since there is no press record of the closure.

From September 1929 until the closure of the line the entire service of one car morning and evening was run by Mr. L. Bowen and his father with car No. 32.

In January 1930 the general manager wrote to local authorities stating a desire to abandon the K.L.R. as soon as possible and expressed the wish to come to an agreement, rather than obtaining an Order which would be a more lengthy procedure.

An agreement must have been made very quickly, since the Kinver Parish Council received a letter saying that the service would cease on Saturday 1st February 1930. It is recorded that cars were seen running on Monday 3rd February, so the final date of closure is uncertain. It is assumed that the date of closure would be Saturday 8th February, but it had certainly occurred by 1st March, for press coverage of the closure of the Dudley line refers to it as "the last tram service to run locally".

Certain salvage work would almost certainly have been performed soon after closure, although much of the track remained until the scrap metal drive during the second world war. Some of the poles on the roadside section were adapted to carry power cables, and road improvements gradually nibbled at the street sections of the track.

REMAINS IN 1980

THE Amblecote depot remains, having for many years been a wholesale greengrocer's establishment. The height of the roof gives some indication of its former use, and the adjacent waiting room is also extant.

The Fish Inn is much as it was, although the signs which advertised the K.L.R. have long since disappeared. From the Fish to Wollaston the road and the bridges over the canal and the River Stour have changed very little, but the roadside factories have enlarged considerably. The centre of Wollaston is virtually as it was in the heyday of the railway.

From the Fish to the Ridge the track ran completely in the road, whilst between the Ridge and the Stewponey the wide grass verge on the left hand side marks the roadside reservation along which the trams ran. Some of the wooden poles are still visible in this section, and this wide margin can still be followed to the present Stewponey Hotel and nearby road junction. This area has altered considerably. Near to the telephone kiosk is an iron pole with an ornamental top, identified on early photographs as being one of the supports for the overhead cable.

The Stewponey Hotel was rebuilt in the 1930s and set further back from the road, whilst the road junction itself has been altered considerably, as can be seen from the drawing on page 19. The new road bridge over the Staffs./Worcs. Canal which now takes the A458 has been built roughly on the site of the tramway bridge. To the right of this new bridge can be seen the original road bridge which today leads only to the boating centre.

On the left hand side of the road is a lay-by which stands on the site of the permanent way, and at the end of this lay-by is a gate which leads to a large water main crossing the River Stour. This is the site of Stourton Castle Bridge, demolished in December 1979, having for many years been in an advanced stage of decay—see illustration on page 17. A short section of the railing is all that remains.

This water main defines the remainder of the route of the K.L.R. to Kinver although the main is only visible at the crossing points of the River Stour, where the bridges to carry the permanent way existed until recently. This pipeline was installed in 1938 to carry water from boreholes in Mill Lane, Kinver to Shavers End Reservoir, Dudley. It followed the line of the railway embankment from the Kinver terminus to Stewponey and then along the A449 to Wall Heath; then through Gornal to Dudley.

The embankment closely follows the river and canal to Kinver through Dunsley meadows, where Dunsley Bridge is still intact, and the Hyde. Although the embankment is still complete, only parts are readily visible or accessible.

Various viewpoints are described in a three mile circular walk included in the appendix.

The bridges between the Hyde and Kinver were repaired by the South Staffordshire Water Works Company in 1954 to allow pipeline



Top: Stourton Castle Bridge over the River Stour in 1977. The remains of the bridge and tracks were removed in December 1979.

Photo: Courtesy F. A. Bills.

Lower left: Kinver Bridge over the River Stour in 1979, during demolition.

Lower right: A section of the grooved girder tram rail from the Kinver Bridge.



maintenance. Lengths of grooved tramway rail were still fixed to the timbers to provide a vivid reminder of the purpose of the bridges and the embankment. Hyde No. 1 Bridge was removed completely in 1976 and the Hyde No. 2 and Kinver Bridges in November and December 1979. This prevented the walking of a section of the tram track which, though not a public footpath, was extensively used as such.

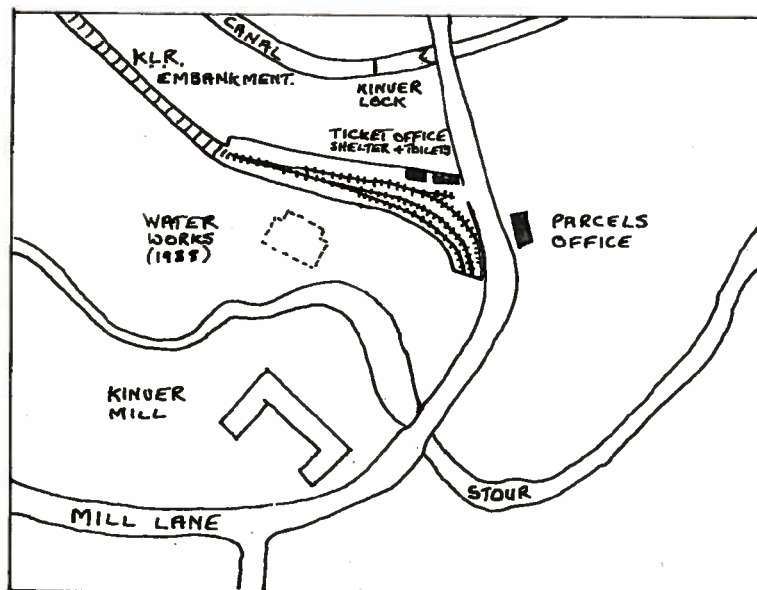
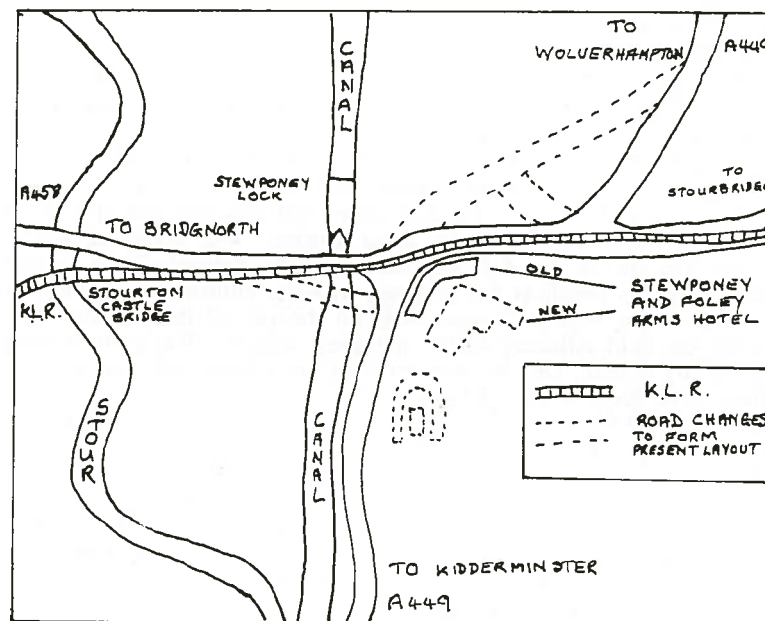
The embankment ends at Mill Lane Pumping Station, Kinver, on the site of the Kinver terminus of the K.L.R. Even though it is no longer possible to walk along the track, the embankment still serves as a reminder of a once flourishing transport system.

APPENDIX

A THREE MILE CIRCULAR WALK AROUND THE K.L.R. EMBANKMENT BETWEEN STEWPONEY AND KINVER VILLAGE.

Start at the lay-by on the Bridgnorth Road (A458) opposite the Stewponey Hotel. This is actually located on land on which the railway used to run. Walk up the hill towards Stourton Castle and pause on the bridge over the river. On your left, the water pipe crossing the river marks the site of Stourton Castle Bridge which was set on a very tight curve. This is the start of the embankment, which runs between fences to mark the boundary, but is somewhat overgrown. Keep walking uphill towards the entrance to Stourton Castle, opposite which is a public footpath and a stile. Follow the well-trodden path diagonally over the field. The Dunsley Bridge and water main are just visible from near the top of the field. The footpath meets the field boundary at a stile, with steps and a handrail beyond. Follow the path through a field containing assorted jumps for horse trials, to a gate. As the path narrows and runs by a chestnut fence it tends to become muddy, but as this area was once an osier bed and hence always boggy, it is hardly surprising. This is The Hyde, and the K.L.R. depot was located nearby. Continue along until the path suddenly crosses a wide track. (For those who want a short walk turn left and follow the track to the canal towing path, turn left again and walk along canal towing path to Stewponey Lock).

For those still intent on following the original circuit, cross the wide track and take the path to the left of some new houses. This path runs between high brick walls through a kissing gate and then over a stile into a field. Continue straight on across the field and the embankment is again visible on the left but, as before, it is rather overgrown. A small gate beside a field gate allows passage into the Marsh Playing Fields. About half way across this field is the site of the tramway stop



Top: Sketch showing Stewponey alterations, noting significant road and building changes since the closure of the Kinver Light Railway.

Lower: Kinver tram terminus layout in its final years.

known as the Hyde Meadows (illustration on page 12). A gap in the fence near the miniature railway allows examination of the embankment built on private land.

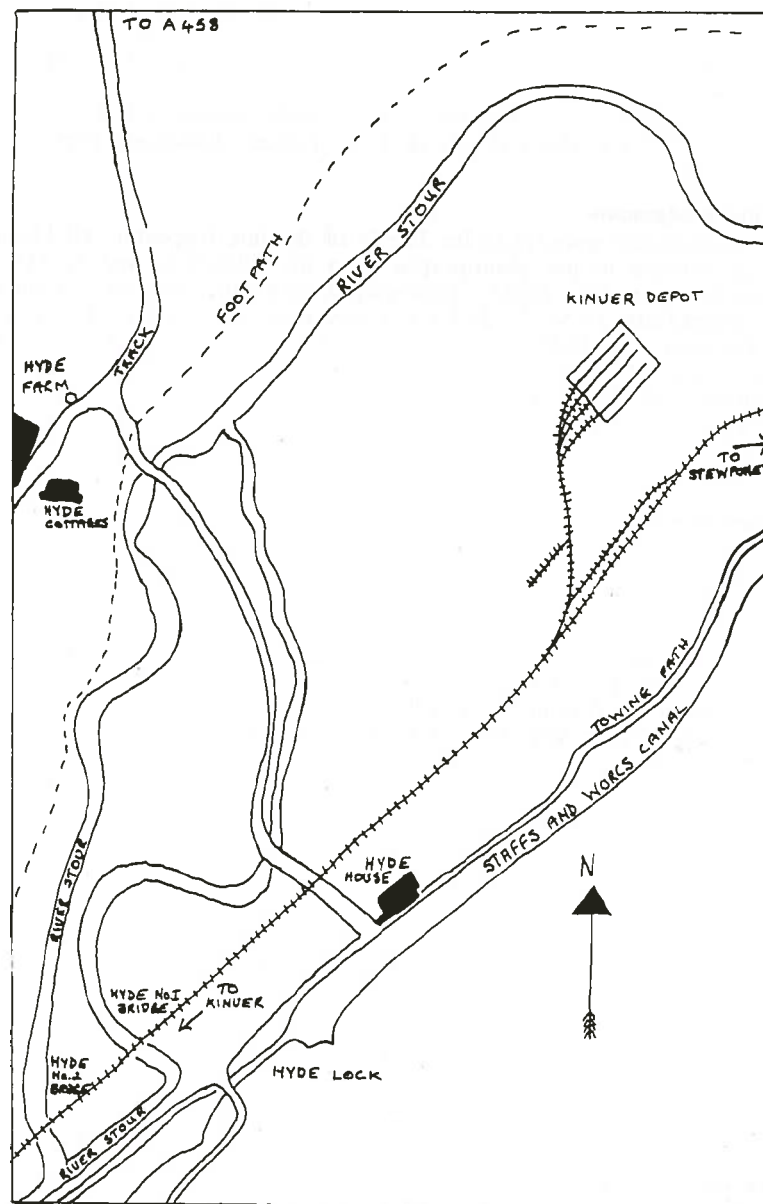
Soon the Kinver Community Association and Royal British Legion buildings are reached. Continue into the drive past these buildings and into the High Street, by Mill House, then turn left. Follow the street right through the centre of the village and turn left at the top of the High Street into Mill Lane. Proceed down hill past the old Mill at the bottom and pause on the River Stour Bridge. The pumping station stands on the site of the K.L.R. terminus. The palisade fence around the station is very much as the original, with the entrance opposite what is now the Three Stones Garage, built on the site of the parcels office. Pause by the field adjacent to the pumping station. The embankment, closed off by a gate, can be seen running into what was the terminus complex. The form of the embanking has been altered at this point by the Severn Trent Water Authority as a flood control measure. Walk to the canal bridge and turn left onto the towing path.

Follow the towing path to the Hyde Lock, continually looking left to see the green painted water main crossing the river to mark the bridge sites. Just past the Hyde Lock, a track leads off to the left. A few yards along on the right hand side is a gate which marks the crossing point of the railway. Return to the towing path.

From Hyde House, originally part of the Hyde Iron Works complex behind which the railway ran, to the next bend in the canal, marks the extent of the industrial complex. Some slag heaps still remain. The K.L.R. depot (cover illustration) was sited in this now wooded area.

The bend in the canal, much photographed in the tramway era, is marked by enormous beech trees and, as can be seen in the photographs and maps on pages 10 and 23, the line ran very close to the canal. This spot is still picturesque even though the railway has gone and the canal now carries pleasure traffic instead of working boats. At this point the line veered away from the canal across Dunsley meadows towards Stourton Castle.

Continue towards Stewponey and, as soon as the river becomes visible on the left, look for the Dunsley Bridge and the associated green painted water pipe. When passing under the present road bridge notice the odd lengths of bullhead rails re-used as rubbing strakes to protect the masonry. Odd remains of the abutments of the tramway bridge can be seen between the two bridges. Leave the towing path at Stewponey lock and return to the main road and the starting point.



Sketch showing location and layout of Kinver Depot at the Hyde.

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Acknowledgments

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We apologise to anyone who has helped and whose name has inadvertently been omitted.

Conclusion

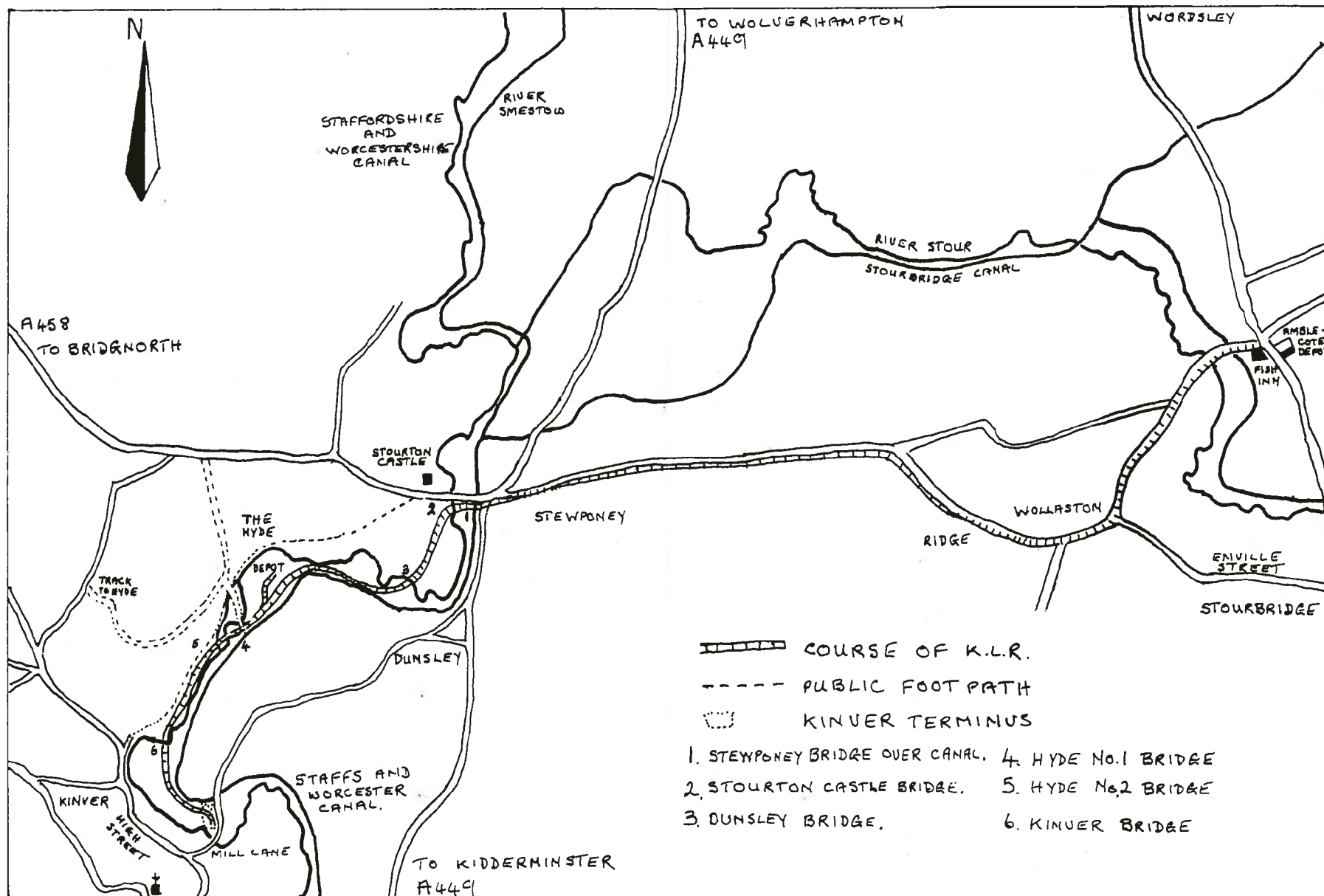
The idea of publishing this little book was sparked off by the demolition of some of the bridges along the route of the K.L.R. in 1979, nearly 50 years after the closure of the line.

Many features of the railway appear to be unrecorded despite the growth in popular photography during the line's period of operation. It is felt that there must be many 'snapshots' in existence which may reveal unrecorded items of detail, and the authors would be pleased to hear from anyone who has such material from which copies may be taken.

Back Cover illustration

The Last Car From Kinver. This 'comic' card serves to emphasise the popularity of the Kinver Light Railway at Bank Holidays. The trams and staff worked until the last visitor had boarded. Contemporary accounts suggest that this scene is only a mild exaggeration!

Photo : Courtesy Len Dunn.



Sketch map showing the route taken by the Kinver Light Railway from the Fish Inn, Amblecote, to Mill Lane, Kinver.

**The Last Car
from Kinver**

