

The Midland Railway's Branch Line to Stroud

The Stonehouse and Nailsworth Railway opened in 1867 and, because of the company's dire financial position, was operated by the Midland Railway from the start. There were stations at Stonehouse, Ryeford, Dudbridge, Woodchester and Nailsworth.

The Midland Railway Company stated they had no plans to build a line to Stroud, although they did have an office and agent in Stroud, John Bradford. He ran buses from the company's office in Stroud to their railway station in Stonehouse, connecting with train services to Bristol and Gloucester.

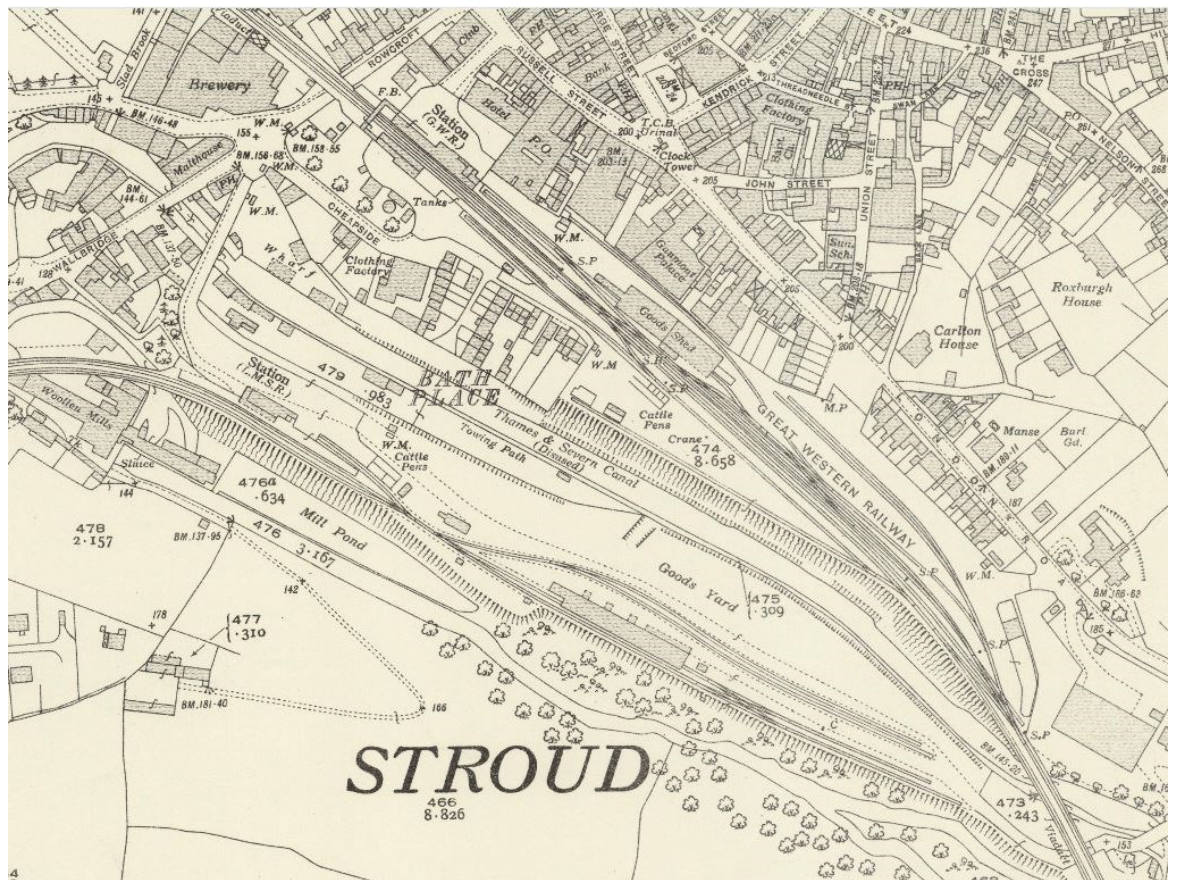


Rail services to Stroud were provided by the Great Western Railway, but the Great Western line was built to Brunel's broad gauge (7ft 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ in) which was fine for those who wanted to send goods from Stroud to another Great Western station but most of the other railways in Britain were built to George Stephenson's standard gauge of 4ft 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. **W J Linton's engraving, produced around 1846**, depicts the chaos at Gloucester caused by passengers transferring from broad gauge to standard gauge trains. While this is obviously a piece of satirical propaganda designed to show how ridiculous it was to have the main line railways of Britain using two different gauges, there is no doubt the change of gauge was a problem. If it was a problem for passengers, imagine how much more of a problem it was transferring goods from broad gauge to standard gauge wagons and vice-versa.

Another problem at Stroud was the cramped space available for the Great Western's goods yard in Stroud and many local businessmen chose to send their goods to and from Stonehouse by road for transfer to rail or used water transport— anything to avoid the change of gauge at Gloucester.

The Midland Railway was asked by those same local businessmen to build a standard gauge line to Stroud.

They finally agreed and did build the line the local people wanted, even though the Great Western line through Stroud had been converted from broad gauge to narrow gauge in 1872, 13 years before the Midland Railway's branch to Stroud opened. The Midland Railway's Stroud branch ran from Dudbridge to Stroud Midland station and was 1 mile and 23.6 chains long (about 1.3 miles). It opened to goods traffic on the 16th November 1885 and to passenger traffic on the 1st July 1886. There were no intermediate stations between Dudbridge Junction and Stroud but a siding was opened to serve the gas works in 1924.



The line was the most expensive branch line on a cost per mile basis built by the Midland Railway Company. The route is now used as a footpath and cycle track and if you walk the old trackbed, it is easy to see why it was so expensive. The entire line is built on a series of embankments and cuttings, finally crossing the 145 yard long Wallbridge viaduct before entering the station and goods yard at Stroud. The line may have been expensive to build, but the Stroud terminus occupied a much bigger and flatter area than that available to the rival Great Western Railway, resulting in more goods traffic being handled by the Midland Railway than the Great Western across the other side of the Thames & Severn Canal.

Sadly passenger services on the Stonehouse to Nailsworth line and its branch line to Stroud ceased on 20th June 1947 under a government directive intended to reduce railway passenger mileage to help counteract the post-war fuel shortage. The closure was meant to be temporary, but regular passenger services never restarted, although both Nailsworth and Stroud were visited by enthusiasts' special trains in the 1950s and 1960s.

The line finally succumbed to the Beeching axe and closed to goods traffic on 1st June 1966. For the first time since 1885, the Great Western main line was the only one serving Stroud.

Mike Smith