

Stoke-on-Trent Jolly Boys Itinerary 12th May 2022.



Coronation Class loco 46254 City of Stoke-on-Trent.

Pictured at Shrewsbury in 1958 and almost certainly on a “running-in” turn after overhaul at Crewe Works.

In an attempt to clear up any confusion (or just possibly create some more) about what Stoke-on-Trent is, and how it came to be, we need to get some historical stuff out of the way. Before Stoke-on-Trent there was Stoke-upon-Trent and this was one of 6 towns in an area of North Staffordshire known as The Potteries, so-called because the manufacture of all kinds of pottery products was carried out in these towns on a very large scale. The other towns were, and indeed still are, Burslem, Tunstall, Hanley, Fenton and Longton. Now at this point you may be asking “Well I always thought there were only 5 towns?” and if you did you would get a Gold star and go to the top of the class. In fact this confusion was mainly caused by one Arnold Bennett, novelist, playwright and famous son of the Potteries. Many of his novels and short stories are set in a fictionalised version of the Potteries, which he called The Five Towns. Bennett of course knew perfectly well there were 6 towns but he thought that 5 towns sounded better in a literary sense and he even had a word for it, describing it as more “euphonious” (what a great word - and I bet you thought I could only write about pubs). And so he omitted Fenton, an action which must have really annoyed generations of worthy Fentonians.

Out in the real world there had been increasing efforts over a period of about 20 years to merge the administrations of the 6 towns (although there was also a great deal of local opposition). Much of this had to happen in Parliament as there was no precedent for such an amalgamation in England, which indicates the importance of the Potteries in those days, and it was a very lengthy process, but finally in April 1910 came the formation of a single county borough of Stoke-on-Trent. In 1925 application was made for city status. This was initially turned down by the worthies in the Home Office, due to the population then being less than 300,000, However King George V was due to visit the Borough in that year and His Maj knew a thing or two about making himself popular, and as it lay within the powers of the monarchy to confer city status, he duly reversed the decision and was able to announce the elevation to city status during his visit to Stoke on 4 June 1925 to much public rejoicing. Nice one Your Royal Highness!

However for our visit to the Potteries we will stay within the boundaries of Stoke-upon-Trent itself. Unfortunately Stoke and Longton, which is on the line to Derby, are now the only representatives of the 6 towns remaining on the railway network. There used to be the Potteries Loop Line which left the existing main line from Stoke to Manchester just north of Etruria station (where the original Wedgwood factory was) and made its scenic way through the huge Shelton steelworks, and then to Hanley, Burslem and Tunstall, rejoining the line further north at Kidsgrove. The Loop Line was closed in 1964. Fenton station was between Stoke and Longton and, although the line still very much exists, the station was closed in 1961.

Itinerary :

It is well worth pausing at Stoke station for a look at its North Staffs Railway train shed which is still remarkably unspoilt, even by the arrival of electrification in the 1960's. Exit the station through the main buildings on the Up side and once outside admire the station's architecture and also the matching elegance of the North Stafford Hotel on the other side of the road. Both built in "robust Jacobean manor-house" style according to Wikipedia.

Turn right and right again at the end of the street to go under the railway, then across the Trent & Mersey canal and over a busy dual carriageway, known locally as the 'D' road. If you look to the left in the distance (about 2 miles) you should see the stadium of Stoke City FC, opened in 1997 and known for years as the Britannia stadium, but now less poetically as the Bet 365.

Stoke City's previous stadium, the Victoria Ground, was only about a 10 min walk from here. Now it's more like an hour along the canal, or more if you stop at the Oatcake Barge (highly recommended if you are down that way). For those Jolly Boys who do not know what an oatcake is (i.e you southerners) it is a local delicacy about 9" wide and you can bung anything on it, bacon or cheese whatever, roll it up and warm it up - a gastronomic treat! There used to be oatcake shops but sadly I didn't see any on the recce.

Once over the 'D' road, turn left and follow the road round to the right. This is Glebe St and to the right we pass the Glebe, one of our pubs which we will visit later, and the imposing Kings Hall (venue of a few CAMRA Beer Festivals I have attended over the years) with Stoke Minster on the left. At the main road turn right along Church St. and eventually on the right is :

The Wheatsheaf : 84-92 Church St, Stoke ST4 1BU. This is our JD Wetherspoon for the day. I remember using this pub in pre-JDW days in the 1970's and as the building it is in was relatively modern, I would guess it was maybe a 1960's rebuild of the hotel that was there before. Leave at 11.00 and retrace our steps back along Church St. and left into Kingsway, up the street on the right is :

The White Star : 63 Kingsway, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1JB. This pub normally opens at 12, but I am assured that if I phone in advance they will open at 11. Fingers crossed that I remember to. A nice city pub with some Titanic beers on my visit. Leave about 11.55. Back along Church St (again) and left into London Road. Right up Hill St and on the right is :

The Staff of Life : 13 Hill St, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1NL. A small local pub. Opens 12. 3/4 real ales including Joules, Bass and Oakham Citra. Leave at 12.30. Exit left along Bradford St and on the next corner is :

Ye Olde Bull & Bush : 9 Hartshill Rd, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 7QT. Opens 12. 3 handpumps. Was not open by 12.15 on the recce so I didn't do it. But as it's close by we can check if it is open after leaving the Staff of Life. If open leave at 1pm. If not head back toward the King's Hall and next to it is :

The Glebe Hotel : 35 Glebe St, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1HG. Opens 12. An excellent Joules pub which looks like it ought to be in a nice market town rather than in Stoke. Even grander inside with large stained glass windows, lots of wood panelling and a magnificent oak fireplace above which is the carved shield of the British Monarchy. All very impressive as is the bar with its 4 handpumps. This could be a food stop. Leave at 1.45 and return to the railway station for our final pub which, very handily, is in the station buildings just before the main passenger entrance.

The Bod at Stoke Station : this is a cafe/bar which is accessible from outside the station or from Platform 1 - so go through the barriers and use the platform entrance. It is a Titanic Brewery place with 6 handpumps dispensing all or most of Titanic's range of beers. No excuse for missing your train here! PS I knew you'd ask - the "Bod" comes from Bodmin Ave, Stafford where the 1st Bod was opened - no not very exciting.

Stoke is on the main north-south line from Manchester to Birmingham and London and also the east-west line from Derby to Crewe. As Jolly Boys are highly train-literate and know their way around railway timetables, as compared to the general populace, I see no need to give you train times. You'd be mad to trust me anyway. And before departure you will be sitting in the station bar (or on the platform outside it) supping away and keeping an eye on what's coming and going. There is also a monitor screen, which is in the bar just under the ceiling on the wall next to Platform 1. As I said before NO EXCUSES FOR MISSING YOUR TRAIN. So don't blame me if you do!

Recce carried out on 24th March by Howard Lowndes.

