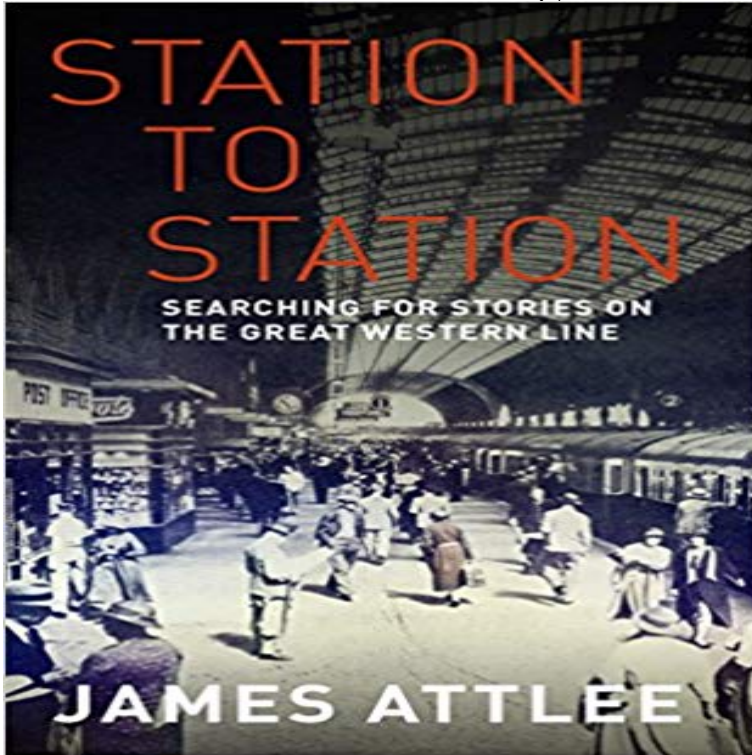


Station to Station: Searching for stories on the Great Western line



The line from London to Bristol connects two great cities, but what lies in between? Londons western suburbs, the Thames Valley, acres of farmland punctuated by provincial towns; where is the interest in such a landscape? To his surprise, James Attlee a regular traveller on the route finds it rich in unexpected encounters and the line awash with ghosts, including those of Charles I, Oscar Wilde, Lawrence of Arabia, the Beautiful Spotted Boy, Haile Selassie, Stanley Spencer, Diana Dors, Eddie Cochran and the creator of the line himself, Isambard Kingdom Brunel. But this is not another nostalgic book about heritage England. As Britain embarks on the greatest period of rail construction since the nineteenth century, trains are once more seen as the future, not the past. Part voyage of exploration, part history, part meditation on the nature of travel, Station to Station takes the reader on a journey into the psyche of a nation, along one of its most iconic lines. Recent reviews A window gazer for our times Station to Station is the chronicle of a railway journey like no other part personal odyssey, part history, part architectural guide, part reflection on the nature of travel, part investigation of the national psyche. If it can be categorised at all, here is Paul Theroux crossed with Bradshaw and Betjeman, spiced with a twist of Alain de Botton. Attlee is an extraordinary truffer of facts No railway junction imaginable could match Attlees dazzling range of imaginative connections. Michael Williams, Independent Captivating splendidly stimulating Attlee is fascinated by the mystical way in which the past concertinas into the present Station to Station is packed full of fascinating bits and pieces a wonderfully wide frame of reference All human life is here, one ghost interweaving with another. Craig Brown, Mail on Sunday Murderers, politicians, sex parties and dogs: all life is evoked in a

magical history of the Great Western Railway Gods Wonderful Railway, they used to call the link Isambard Kingdom Brunel forged between London and Bristol, and in Attlees hands the Great Western Line is indeed full of wonders, prompting passages on everything from infrared technology to resurrection as painted by Stanley Spencer in Cookham Station to Station is partly an exploration of places and buildings on or just off the line; partly a collection of stories about people who have been associated with it, whether as planners, navvies, staff or passengers; and partly a rumination on the nature of travel. Michael Kerr, Telegraph ***** James Attlees new book was a must-read for me. As he chugs along this iconic route, Attlee mines fascinating stories from the landscape, rattling off anecdotes about characters as diverse as Oscar Wilde, Diana Dors and T.E. Lawrence tales that will keep me company on this journey forever more. As well as celebrating the golden age of rail travel, Attlees book offers an optimistic view of its role in the future. Most certainly not just for trainspotters. www.worldtravelguide.net

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