A booklet describing the last horse drawn railway in England. The tramway took coal from the South Gloucestershire coalfield around Ram Hill to the Avon to fuel the fires of Bristol.
The Dramway

The old horse drawn railway path from Coalpit Heath to Wilsbridge.

by Ross Barber

Illustrations by John Walker
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Preface

The Avon Industrial Buildings Trust would like to dedicate this book to the memory ofMatt Southway, Matthias Hingley and E. Hingley in the Drumway, and recalled playing as a child at Loddonbury Wharf when the track was still in situ. He was the first industrial historian to take a serious interest in the Drumway, and it is his meticulous research work which forms the basis for much of the Trust’s current proposals to conserve and protect the alignment of the Drumway and its associated monuments.

He will always be remembered for his untiring courtesy and helpfulness.

The ‘Drumway’ is the local term for the old horse-drawn railway, or tramway, which ran through the east Bristol coal mining district from Coalpit Heath to the Avon near Keynsham. Though some of the line has been built over much of it still remains. Even when inaccessible the route is often visible in the existing boundaries and property divisions. The book describes and illustrates the Drumway from north to south together with other sites of industrial archaeological interest. Access and rights of way are indicated wherever possible but this is a sensitive issue. A number of sites are described which lie on private property and are not open to the public.

The Drumway is an unrecorded line and recognition of its ancient character and importance as a link to industrial sites in the coalfield is being preserved as an industrial heritage footprint. The project is being undertaken by the Avon Industrial Buildings Trust (AIBT) and has been supported by the Avon County Community Environment Scheme (ACCES) and the Conservation Section of Avon County Council Planning Department. Local District Councils and Parish Councils have given their support. Kingswood District Council has printed this book and encouraged its production. Most of the drawings are reconstructions of scenes as they might have been. They are intended to evoke the feeling of the district as it was at the height of its industrial activity. The background historical material is often limited. The drawings may include inaccuracies, some intended and some no doubt, unintended. We apologise for the latter and are pleased to receive correction.

Local, regional and industrial archaeologists have been aware of the significance of the Drumway for many years. A number of writers have emphasised this. Particularly important are the articles in the journal of the Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society (BIAS) by Matt Southway and Kenneth Grew as a Cole Maggie book on the two railways (see bibliography). A number of people have given advice and help with the historical and technical background to the publication: John Cypress, David Poland, Alan Bryant, Michael Thompson, Tony Whitcher, R. F. Fuller among others. I am grateful to these people and others while realising that they cannot be held responsible for the interpretation given to their material or for any errors made.

I also wish to thank John Cypress for his photographs.

Proceeds from the sale of this book will be devoted to the Drumway project.

Ross Barber
March 1986
Historical Background

The Dramway Path described runs along a line which was originally part of two tramways and a colliery extension. The ownership, nature and purpose of the line have changed over time. An attempt is made below to explain its evolution.

The early tramway scheme was designed to provide cheap and easy transport of coal from the mines of Coaft Heath to the wharves on the Avon at Keynsham which supplied both Bristol and Bath. It was constructed at a time when demand for coal as the primary source of power was increasing rapidly.

Two companies were formed and given statutory permission to build lines in 1839. The Bristol and Gloucestershire Company was to build a line from the Floating Harbour in Bristol to Orchard Colliery in Coaft Heath. The Avon and Gloucestershire Company was formed to build a separate line from the Avon at Keynsham to connect with the Bristol and Gloucestershire line at Mangotsfield.

The Avon and Gloucestershire and the northern part of the Bristol and Gloucestershire were opened in 1833. The Bristol to Mangotsfield section, which included the tunnel at Staple Hill, took longer to complete. The whole tramway route was completed in 1835. This development not only eased the transportation of coal to Bristol and Bath but also lowered its price. The original lines were designed to accommodate horse-drawn trucks, and were built to the standard 4ft 8½in gauge. There was a single line with passing places. Unlike many horse-drawn tramways which were built of angle iron, these lines were equipped with edge rails of rivulite, light weight, cast iron. The trucks used would necessarily have had flanged wheels. In order to increase the

The rails, chairs and sleeper blocks used on the Dramway (top left). The rails and sleepers used by the Great Western Railway (top right) and the dual carriage way which existed briefly over the Shortwood section (below).
The original plans for the route incorporated several tight curves and gradients to maintain the gradient. A number of these were eventually straightened by the construction of embankments and cuttings, notably at Warmley, Siston Common and Willows. This was in the west of the route and were the chief surviving feature of the tramway. Because of the heavy trains, the traffic there was not to be used for two years, together with wipers stretching across the track, the sleepers would also have been inconvenient for the horses walking down the centre of the line.

The route from Coggeshall to the Avon was a drop of approximately 400 ft. The whole length of the line was carefully graded so that only empty trucks were pulled up the steep gradients, and full trucks had the benefit of the downhill gradient. Loaded trucks were equipped with a long handle to prevent them overturning. In the days of the tramway accidents, it was hazardous to ride, and in at least one occasion, a man died, and the wagon overturned the horse and killed it. (Maps, p.59)

Under the terms of the original 1831 Act, the colliery owners at Coggeshall had the right to transport coal in the 4½ ton trucks along the line to link up with the Avon and Gloucestershire tramway at Mangotsfield, North Junction. Hence the 4½ ton trucks had to be 4½ ton in place. Once the route was completed, the section of the tramway from the Avon bridge at Bitton on the Avon and Gloucestershire station to Mangotsfield North Junction was the first dual gauge railway in the country. At the time it seemed likely that the Avon and Gloucestershire would purchase the Bristol and Gloucestershire Company, but the Midland Company were also interested in the line and in 1833, to the annoyance of GWR, it was sold to the Midland Company. The Midland owned and ran the line until amalgamation in 1923. In the 1890s the Bristol and Gloucestershire Company became the Bristol and Gloucester Company. Under the influence of the GWR, they started to convert the 4½ ton tramway to 7 ton rail. Work started on the 19th June 1894 and was completed by the 19th July. However, the conversion of the Avon and Gloucestershire tramway to the standard gauge was opposed by the Midland Company, which had the line in its own right. The Avon and Gloucestershire Railway, the southern section of the present tramway, was acquired by the Forest and Avon Canal Company in 1835 when it was taken over by the GWR. Unlike the northern section, it was never converted to locomotive railway and contains many of the most interesting tramway remains.

As shown above, tramways, neither of these lines had a long or flourishing existence. The Bristol and Gloucestershire section was converted to locomotive power in 1894, and the Avon and Gloucestershire continued to carry coal to 1890, although after the early years was negligible. Even in the early years when coal was coming from Hilles Lane, Crowne and Lower Soundwell pits, receipts cannot have matched the £5,000, which the line cost to build. Nevertheless, in these early days, a number of extensions were planned from the central line, particularly by the Avon and Gloucestershire Company. One, projected for the Golden Valley, Bitton, would have nearly equalled the length of the existing line. In the event only one of these planned extensions were built, at Fairford. They were the line through Hole Lane Colliery to its extension at Bull Hill, the Lower Soundwell branch, and the branch line to Holford. In later years the California Colliery Company made use of the southern end of the line and built an extension to its colliery from the Willows.
Ram Hill Colliery

The colliery sits beside the British Rail line running to Parkgate and stands on British Rail land. It was abandoned around 1870. A number of remains are discernible on the ground: the hornet, the shaft and the tramway lines forming an arch. There are also overgrown foundations of what was probably an engine house. This site has not yet been made safe. The arch is loose and it is not known how the 500 ft deep shaft was capped. If at all, the depression in the ground marking the line of the tramway towards Bitteswell Lake can be clearly seen running through private land to Ram Hill Lane.

An older pit known as Ram Hill Engine Pit lay 300 yards downhill to the west. The shaft was used for pumping in the enlarged workings. The main Ram Hill pit was sunk about 1830, and in later years was linked underground to Serridge and New Engine pits. It is currently being developed as an industrial archaeology site.

Though only a short distance away from the Ram Hill and Serridge mines the Frog Lane colliery was separated from them by a deep fault and the underground workings were not connected. The main mine in the late 19th century was Frog Lane pit which remained open until 1949, served by a branch line from the Bramley line built around 1869. There were three separate units in the colliery: Frog Lane pit itself was the principal pit; for ventilation and pumping and the earlier Mayshill and Nibley pits were used only for ventilation and pumping. It was owned by the same Coalport Colliery Company that owned Ram Hill and Serridge. The only building now standing on the site is the engine house for the horizontal steam winder though the railway track can still be traced to the Bitteswell Lake junction.

There were numerous shallow mines on Coalport Heath, as the name suggests, although most have disappeared without trace. Two which are known about were Osprey and Half Moon. As with most of this area, mines of one sort or another have been found which predate the records.
Above. The shading shows the approximate area of the underground workings in Coalport Heath. The main fault line divides the workings of the older pits (New Engine, Ram Hill, etc.) from the later and generally deeper workings centred on Frog Lane.

Below. Cross section showing theprints in the upper coal series.
Ram Hill to Bitterwell Lake

From Ram Hill Lane to Bitterwell Lake the line of the Drainway can be followed by the public footpath. This is an old mining area and many pits have been sunk here. A number of remnants can still be seen.

Chuch Hassan pit is beside the Drainway where it crosses Serridge Lane. Apart from a disused pit, the ground no traces remain.

The mine near Serridge House was sunk in 1790. This mine was linked by an early tramway to the old Ram Hill pit.

Chuch Hassan was active at the time the Drainway was first built and was supplied by the New Engine pit soon afterwards. New Engine pit, in the mid 19th century, was the main pit for the Coalpit Heath group of mines. The 1st edition (1886) Ordnance Survey map shows the railway line flanking at the pit. Most coal for this area was drawn from this pit, the other shafts being kept open for pumping and ventilation.

There is some dispute about the functions of Bitterwell Lane in relation to the mines at New Engine. It may have supplied reservoirs for the mine engines. Stakes run from the lake through the grounds of cottages built on the mining site and within living memory there were structures on the lakeside which were thought to link it to the mine. However, the lake may not have had any connection with the mines at all.

The deeper the pits became, the more serious were the drainage problems. By about 1850 the workings were down to 500 feet and considerable quantities of water had to be pumped out of the mines. Part of the drainage was effected by means of a sump (tunnel) which was driven down to the banks of the river near Darnons Bridge. The water can still be seen running out of the exit of this level.

Reconstruction of the view looking south from the Drainway by Coalpit Heath cricket pitch. Church Lane pit is in the foreground with Serridge and Chuch Hassan behind.
Bitterwell Lake to the M4

Just east of Bitterwell Lake the line from Bristol divided into three. The centre branch ran to Portskewet, the southern branch went to New England and the northern branch went a mile further to Frog Lane Pit. The last line was built in about 1862 and it had to accommodate locomotives. It was laid on timber sleepers. Though now quiet and rural the site must have been a busy industrial scene in the 1860s as is suggested by the name of an adjacent copse, 'Branch Lodge Wood'.

The disused barn at the end of the line from New England pit was originally an engine shed. The large engine doors and an old wrought iron handlock pump used as a water tank are still in place.

The abandoned cottage in the scrap yard was a weathervane house. It was situated at the end of the line owned by the Midland Railway. A mile post opposite marks the end of the Midland territory. Arches and brick gateways were used at the level crossing on the line where the branch was equipped with a platform and had both levels of track. Both the cottage and the barn are on private property.

The section from Bowsedge Farm Lane to the Westerleigh Road runs through private land and is severely overgrown. South of the Westerleigh Road the Drumway joined the line of the main Bristol to Gloucester railway. From the point to the Mangotsfield Station the Drumway was overlain by the later railway.

The narrow gauge railway was very short lived. In 1884 the narrow gauge line was closed between the 7 mile and 9 mile markers. It was envisaged that the Great Western locomotives would run on the broad gauge and the 4.5" trucks running from Coaley Heath down to Keynsham would use the narrow-gauge rails. There were two obvious problems. The first concerns the platforms encountered at junctions and passing places. It was extremely difficult for the 4.5" trucks to cross the 7 mile line from the outside. Further platform work was necessary. More serious, perhaps, was the problem of safety. Supervision and signalling for a section of railway three miles long which had to carry horse-drawn trucks at three miles an hour and steam locomotives at 60-80 m.p.h. was obviously difficult. The Government inspector thought that this was impossible. He calculated that as there were only 6 passenger trains running down the line per day there should be at least 2 hours and 20 minutes between each train. As long as the horse drawn trucks waited until a locomotive passed and then set out within 20 minutes they should have plenty of time to get clear of the other end before the next passenger train arrived. This system was obviously impracticable so, later in the same year, a separate parallel line was built for the coal trucks.

At present this section of the line is owned by British Rail. The motorway underpass is recent and access to this section of the route is difficult. The construction of the motorway and the current building plans for the railway bridge at the north of the motorway make it impossible to follow the Drumway route to its entirety. The public right of way which has been constructed from Westerleigh Road to the junction of the Drumway and railway. Past the remains of Dudley Pumps (the latter a wrought iron shaft) stop at the PA. The most convenient route at the present time runs from the bottom of Bowsedge Lane, through the fields to Oakleigh Green Farm, past the spot which marks the remains of Bowsedge pit. This passes through low lying ground and is frequently extremely wet, particularly near the motorway underpass.
The M4 to Shortwood

The section of the Okehampton Line is of interest because it is the road's only route, not least of all because it is the only part of the line that is not by New Road. The line itself is straight, somewhat unusual and not of great interest.

The local councils are hoping to purchase the length of the disused railway to create a public footpath and cycleway. Meanwhile there is a public footpath which starts in the corner of the road by Grange Farm and crosses the disused railway to Brandy Bottom Colliery (Parkfield South).

From the remains of the old coal mine the path crosses a field and passes through Shortwood Brickworks to Cattybrook Road. Parkfield Colliery was situated just east of the railway close to the motorway. One chimney still stands though most of the buildings have been demolished. On the west side of the railway are extensive colliery spoil tips. A number of earlier pit workings are recorded here but the main workings were started by Horace Cheadle in 1865. The mine was linked underground to Brandy Bottom Colliery to the south. The 1890 Ordnance Survey map shows extensive surface workings with four chimneys and several spoil tips. The mine was closed after serious flooding in 1956. Brandy Bottom is the picturesque name for an old pit on this site. This was also taken over in 1865 by Horace Cheadle who sank a second shaft to facilitate the link to Parkfield. It became known as Parkfield South. This site contains more extensive colliery remains than any other in the area. The chimney is of an unusual and attractive design. The base is square and built of stone. Above this has been built a further square section in red brick. The top of the chimney is octagonal in section with five brick capping. No other chimney of this design remains in the district.

Parkfield Colliery—a drawing constructed from photographs taken about 1905 looking across the mine from the hill behind Parkfield House. The chimney can be seen in the background.
A raised embankment runs uphill across the
field to the east. This may have been the link
between Brandy Bottom and the site of
earby quarries: Old Wood Quarries and
Hacklegher.

Shortwood foundries started over 100
years ago using local coal and clay from the
deep quarry on the site. In 1903 the
Cutts Brook Company acquired the works. In
1934 it became part of the Fostock Group
and the Shortwood Works ceased
production. Most of the buildings have been
killed, though dammed the brick clay
meets, they may be demolished in order to
preserve the valuable clay which lies
beneath them. Terraces and their associated
drying areas are to be seen on either side of
the path which runs down to the desire
railway. The coal-fired Huffman kiln is easily
recognizable and the second deep quarry and
removable tramway can still be seen. There
was a rail link to the Midland Railway line and

Brandy Bottom Colliery – remains of the
horizontal engine house in the foreground
and the older vertical engine house and the
chimney behind.

Opposite: The Bath Road Crossing around
1900. Railway wagons from Fostock
Colliery on the sidings of the Bath Road
wharf.

Overleaf, left: Lowdarching Wharf, looking
south – a carefully posed picture. The end of
the tramway rail can be seen in the
foreground. About 1900.
to the Shortwood Colliery on the hillside above.

When the Drumway was being built, the main Shortwood pits were on the site of the present brickworks close to the Bristol and Gloucestershire Company's line. In order to push trade for their line, the Avon and Gloucestershire Company planned to build an extension from near Mangotsfield North Junction to Shortwood Colliery. This course would have run nearly parallel with the Bristol and Gloucestershire line. The Bristol company objected strongly to this development and the project was dropped. Later in the century the colliery was sited on the hill to the east of the brickworks. This colliery site has disappeared, although part of the embankment which linked it by tramway to the brickworks can still be seen.

Another old mine known as Fry's was situated just west of the railway half a mile north of Shortwood Road bridge. No traces remain. The whole of this section from the mktconway to Shortwood Road Bridge is frequented by pedestrians although there is no official right of way. Should a right of way be established access would be made easier. If so, a number of alternative paths which give access to most of the sites named have been marked on the plan.

Opposite. California Colliery around 1900. The remains of the spoil tip can be seen today in the middle of the modern housing estate.

Overleaf, right. Londonderry Wharf from the south. About 1900. The remains of a coal storage shed, a crane and a coal chute can be seen on the wharf. These have disappeared but the small weighbridge house on the left still stands.
Shortwood to Carsons Road

Just south of Shortwood Road the Drainway diverges from the old railway. From the road just east of a railway bridge a lane leads down towards the disused railway line. It then turns to the left around a coal yard where astile gives access to a field. The edge of the field can be followed until the Drainway with its distinctive stone sleeper blocks can be followed to Carsons Road.

Mangotsfield North Junction stands 400 yards south of the Shortwood Road bridge and marks the original junction of the Avon and Gloucestershire and the Bristol and Gloucestershire tramways. The first building here was the one-storey conical shaped toll house built around 1830. The two-storey station house was built at a later date in 1844 by the Midland Railway Company. Later in 1870, another larger railway station was built 500 yards to the south west at the junction of the lines from Bath and Gloucester. This became known as Mangotsfield Station and the smaller station near Shortwood Road became the Mangotsfield North Junction and was later closed.

Mangotsfield North Junction. Above a reconstruction showing GWR rolling stock in the foreground with a horse-drawn truck behind. Below, a recent photograph.
Carsons Road to Warmley

A public right of way extends over the whole of the section. The Drumway passes underneath the road embankment through a long narrow brick faced tunnel. About 130 yds south of Carsons Road the Drumway is crossed by a well constructed timber black footbridge. The bridge was made redundant by the construction of the Midland Railway. It leads from nowhere to nowhere but makes an attractive arch over the pathway. About 50 yds from the footbridge the Drumway crosses the disused railway (now the cyclepath) and curves around the hill at Sitton Common, crossing back over the cyclepath near the Warreys. When the M5 passed to Bath section of the railway was built in 1869 the Midland Company was anxious to avoid a double crossing of their line by slow home drawn coal wagons. In order to avoid this they built a second tramway line running through the cutting built for the railway. The small building, seen hole shaped in plan, which stands on the common beside the Drumway, originally housed the horse gin for a small pit. It was later converted into a toilet. In recent years the floor has been concreted over and it is now used as a garage.

This section of land on Sitton Common is most interesting from a historical point of view. The common itself is a very old piece of the pre enclosure ground surviving on the edge of the British subsoil. Near to the gin house can be seen the traces of rabbit warrens which probably date from late Norman times. Two bell pits (shallow coal workings) can also be seen from the Drumway embankment and just west of the track the branch line to Lower Soundwell pit was situated at the junction of Ciphouse Road and Sitton Road. The branch line passed the main Drumway by means of a small incline, probably the only section along the Drumway where loaded wagons had to be drawn uphill.

Across the bridge can be found some spoil tips which may have been the site of the "Drum for Fun" pit. At this point the Drumway crosses a small embankment with a well preserved embankment. The original plans were to contour around the hillside at this point. Such a route would, however, have entailed forty sharp curves and the straighter route was finally chosen.

Sitton Hill Colliery was situated just between the Drumway and the Midland Railway ( cycle path). A short branch line was built from the Drumway into the colliery which was active between 1804 and the 1870's. A few overgrown spoil tips and some
large foundation stones are all that remain to identify the site.

The Drumway crossed the road over Siston Common by means of a small bridge. This has now been filled in so that the road and track are now at the same level. During recent repairs some of the original abutments were identified.

The branch line from the Drumway to the stone quarry on Siston Hill is still visible for most of its length.

The road bridge carrying Norman Road over the Drumway was built in 1830. It is in a good state of repair with the typical curved parapets of canal bridges built in that period. A public footpath runs from Norman Road to the level crossing at Warmley. At the road crossing, the line is buried under layers of construction material put down at a later date. A local resident claims to have spotted a section of the original line about 18" down when excavations were being made to lay the foundation of the modern brick wall.

Around Warmley there are a number of structures associated with the Drumway. Crown Pit Colliery had three shafts situated just to the west of the line and the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows a branch line from the Drumway to the pit. The earliest workings were close to the Drumway. By the late 19th century when the mine was run by Davie and Waters, the

The Gin House on Siston Common—thought to have been part of a colliery before the Drumway was built.

Siston Hill Colliery—from a modern drawing. The Norman Road Bridge over the Drumway can be seen on the left.
two main shafts were situated on either side of the London Road. An old drawing shows an engine house on the south side linked by a rope powering a winding shaft on the opposite side of the road. An engine house still stands on this site and the buildings on the north side of the road were used as colliery workshops.

Although colliery and railway have disappeared, two old public houses recall the previous industrial activity of the district. The Crown has become the Midland Spinnaker and the Old Maples is now called The Station Master. At the point, the Midland railway and the Drainway line cross beside each other. A cyclepath has been created along the closed Midland lines and the signal box by the level crossing has been renovated.

A mile or so to the east of Crown pit can be seen the entrance to a drift mine at Weelsby Heath. This was sunk in later years, in an attempt to reach the further seams. The brick and tile works north east of the road crossing made use of the Drainway in the latter half of the 19th century and may have helped to extend the life of the line.

Grimsby Colliery was situated at Grimsby Farm and in the original Drainway plans an extension from Warmley was to be built to the pit across Warmley Brook. This branch line was never built.

Crown Pit, Warmley—a old drawing thought to date from 1866. It shows the two main shafts each side of the road, both powered from the same engine house. The older pit standing close to the Drainway can be seen on the right of the picture. The engine house still stands but the chimney was demolished recently.

Webbs Heath Colliery—a drift mine near Bridgeport.
Immediately south of the London Road the Drainway has been built over. However, a path starting from beside the Midland Spencer Inn, leads to the next section of the Drainway which can be followed through an interesting cutting and under the bridge by Sandhills. Just south of this bridge the Drainway passes through an old quarry and runs out of the cutting across an embankment to Poplar Road. This section is all right of way. At the base of the embankment there is a stream which runs down to Saxon Brook. The original plans for the Drainway envisaged a bridge over the stream which could be constructed to suit the needs of the valley and the expense of building the embankment.

South of the Poplar Road the path continues to the developing industrial estate on North Common. Over part of this section the Drainway has been preserved, through a length just north of Victoria Road has been built over. South of Victoria Road the Drainway runs along the edge of the school playing fields, converging gradually with the High Street. It crosses the road just opposite Whitecross Court Farm. From this point it passes south through Redfield Farm, along the edge of the allotments and down the side of the recreation ground to the small lane called Castle Road. It continues across the land to the Barry Road entrance to the church hall. Most of this section of the route runs through private ground and is not publicly accessible. There is a right of way from Redfield Farm along the allotments and through the recreation ground to Castle Road. The general alignment of the Drainway is faithfully recorded in the field and garden boundaries, though the track has long been abandoned. Apart from its industrial archaeological interest the Oldfield Common section does not have a lot to recommend it. An alternative route would be from Victoria Road to Cherry Garden Lane by the cyclepath. There is a view from the cyclepath just south of the bridge which crosses School Lane. A path leads down to School Lane which can be followed to Cherry Garden Lane where the Drainway may be re-joined. Traces of the mines associated with the Drainway can still be seen. Hole Lane Colliery was situated just off the Drainway on the opposite side of the High Street. A sideling was built into the colliery and one of the lines continued through to Box Hill Colliery which lay a quarter of a mile to the west across the line of the Midland Railway.

Most of the Hole Lane Colliery has disappeared though one of the workshops still stands in a garden. The original pit was sunk on the opposite side of the road. The Drainway originally crossed the road by means of a tunnel just north of the pit. This has now been filled in. The site of Box Hill Colliery has been built over, but some traces of the tramway running to it and the bridge over the Midland Railway are still visible.

South of Barry Road the line of the old Drainway runs through the garden of a private estate of recent construction and under the line of the proposed cyclepath to Cherry Garden Lane. Over this section of the route the Drainway is inaccessible and has been obliterated throughout most of its length.

The tunnel entrance at Cherry Garden Lane can be seen although at present it has been blocked under accumulated rubbish. The tunnel was originally 30 yards long and lined with masonry.
The steep sides of Wilbridge Valley posed considerable problems for the Dernaway engineers. On the original plan the line was to follow a curve which took it close to Wilbridge Hill. This course was abandoned, possibly because of opposition from the local landowner. An extension was planned to follow the line of the brook up towards Cowhorn Hill Colliery, this too was abandoned. The eventual course ran along a large stone-sided embankment into a steep sided cutting and through the 150 yard tunnel.

This is the most spectacular and iconic section of the Dernaway path. The tunnel, which has two ventilation shafts, one circular and one square, is owned by the Bristol Waterworks Company and is not open to the public. A water pipe has been laid along the track bed and the steep cutting has become dangerously unstable. The northern entrance is at base of a 50ft stone wall faced by the sides of the cutting. The southern entrance is lower (about 20ft high), built of stone blocks and can be seen from the Bath Road. During the 2nd World War the tunnel was used by local people as an air raid shelter. It later became a mushroom farm. At the moment it houses several colonies of bats.

In 1959 Abraham Fawell reopened the Wilbridge Tunnel in the hope of extracting the deep seams of good quality coal which were known to lie beneath the worked-out upper seams. The mine, which was situated on the south side of California Road opposite the entrance to Orchard Boulevard, was deepened and a tramway built to the edge of Wilbridge Valley and down an inclined way to link with the old Dernaway. The incline was operated by gravity, the weight of the full trucks coming down sufficient to pull the empties back up the slope. The Dernaway had been out of use for several years but this section down to the Bath Road and the A40 was revived by the colliery. The enterprise was relatively short lived - by 1964 serious underground flooding had closed the mine which was later purchased by the Bristol Waterworks Company.

A view down Siston Brook showing the California incline.

Wilbridge Tunnel from the north.
Willsbridge to the Avon

The Dremway crosses the Bath Road near the Keynsham Road junction, just opposite Clock Mill Farm the line divides. The original line passed under the Keynsham Road by a tunnel and across the fields to Avon Wharf. The other section, built a few years later in 1833, ran down to Londonderry Wharf. This was to allow Bristol bound traffic to avoid paying tolls at Keynsham lock.

The Bath Road was crossed on the level with no gates. Just south of the crossing, sidings were laid and warehouses were built at the request of the Bristol Temple Trust in 1834. These were considerably enlarged after 1850 when traffic for California Colliery started using the Dremway. There was a weighbridge there and it has been suggested that the small garden building at the house on the corner was originally a weighbridge house.

One end of the tunnel which runs under the Keynsham Road has now been blocked. The western entrance and most of the tunnel remains, though vulnerable due to heavy traffic.

The Dremway path from Clock Mill Farm Lane to Londonderry Wharf is a right of way through a field of the Dremway have been abandoned. At Londonderry Wharf the small weighbridge house and the stables for the horses will stand but in a considerable state of decay. The Wharf is intact and most of the limestone sleeper blocks can be found in the ground.

A large number of iron rails have been reused at Londonderry Wharf to make fences. However, they are not of the design originally used in the construction of the Dremway, and may have been used in later years to repair the line. However, there is also an indistinct line to a quarry on the opposite side of Overton Brook and it is more likely that the rails come from this latter site. Although the Dremway from Keynsham Road to Avon Wharf has been filled in, quite a lot remains at or near the wharf itself.

Avonside House, a listed building, was used by the Kennet and Avon Canal Company who owned the Dremway until it was taken over by the GWR in 1851. It was the normal meeting place for the Kennet and Avon Sub-committee of the Avon and Gloucestershire Railway.

The conical shaped weighbridge house, also listed, stands beside the clearly marked embankments of the old Dremway structure. Two hundred yards further to the west is a disused quarry which is now private property. This was where the limestone sleeper blocks for both the Avon and Gloucestershire and Bristol and Gloucestershire tramways were quarried. Part of the line of the tramway taking this quarry to Avon Wharf can be traced across the field.

Many sections of the originally rail can be seen half buried in the river bank between Avon Wharf and the Keynsham Road bridge. Access is by the public right of way along the riverbank.
Bibliography


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