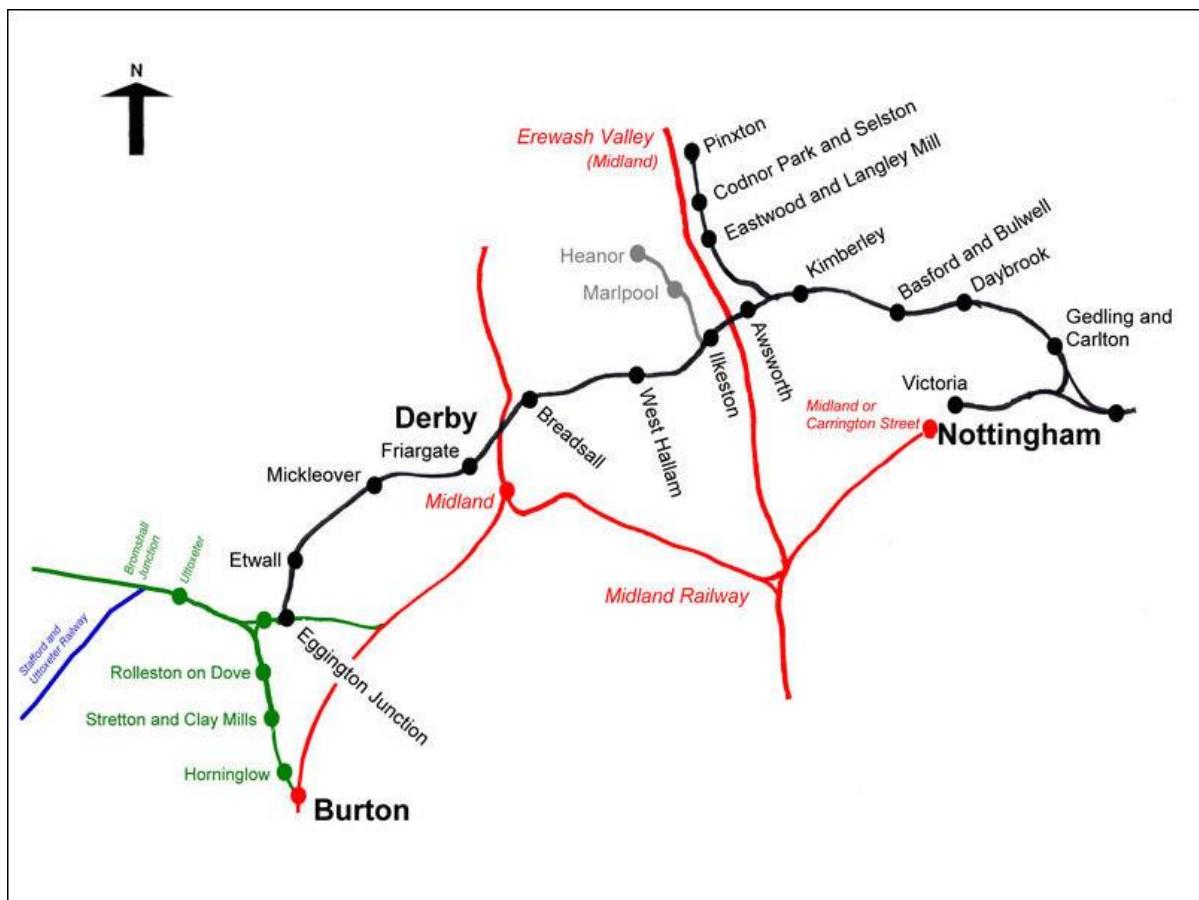


# The Gt Northern Railway Back Line and the Leen Valley Line

by Graham Woodward

The Gt Northern Railway Company's line from Colwick to Derby gave access for Gt Northern trains from Nottingham and Grantham to the south Derbyshire and Staffordshire coal fields. It also provided the company with a passenger route east from Derby to the east coast holiday resorts.

The first part of the line, built in 1875, ran from Colwick through Gedling, Daybrook, Basford, Kimberley, Eastwood and Codnor Park to Pinxton. The Derbyshire and Staffordshire Extension was built in 1878 from Kimberley through Awsworth, Ilkeston North, West Hallam and Breadsall and then into Derby Friargate. After Derby, the line continued southwest to Mickleover, Etwall and Egginton where it linked up at Egginton Junction with the North Staffordshire line from Derby to Uttoxeter. The map below shows the route in black.



The section from Colwick to Basford was known locally as the Back Line because Gt Northern trains from London Road Station to Basford and Bulwell had to go the 'back way' out of Nottingham via Gedling, a rail journey of 9½ miles (14.8km) that was only 3½ miles (5.8km) by road. The building of the Suburban Line in 1889 shortened the rail journey by 3 miles (5km) and when the Gt Central Railway opened Victoria Station in 1900, use of their main line shaved another 3 miles off the journey.

From 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1901, passenger trains to Basford from Nottingham had competition from the new electric tram service running on route 3 from Trent Bridge to Bulwell – the cost was 3d each way, about £1 today.

The Nottingham section of the line began at Colwick Station, later renamed Netherfield, in Gedling District, and then ran along the northeast side of Arnold Lane and through Mapperley Tunnel under Plains Road into Arno Vale. The line continued west alongside Arno Vale Road and over Mansfield Road at Daybrook, entering the city just west of the station. From Daybrook the line ran west, crossing Edwards Lane and running behind Bagthorpe (City) Hospital to Hucknall Road, Vernon Road and Cinderhill Road. It then headed northwest towards Hemphill Vale, where it passed into Broxtowe District.

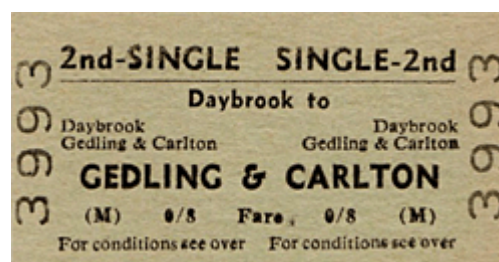
Before Victoria Station opened in 1900, trains along the Back Line left Nottingham from London Road Station which opened on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1857 as the terminus of the Grantham line. The following is a timetable from 1899 for trains using the Back Line from London Road – the Nottingham Suburban Line joined the Back Line at Daybrook. (Only trains using the Back Line are shown.)

#### Weekdays

05:30	Pinxton via Gedling
05:48	Stafford via Gedling
07:45	Daybrook via Gedling
07:57	Burton on Trent via Suburban Line
08:30	Skegby via Suburban Line
08:42	Pinxton via Gedling
08:57	Skegby via Suburban Line
09:53	Stafford via Gedling
10:35	Pinxton via Suburban Line (Sat only)
11:15	Skegby via Suburban Line
12:05	Skegby via Suburban Line
12:15	Derby via Gedling
12:38	Stafford via Gedling
12:45	Pinxton via Gedling
13:35	Heanor via Gedling (Sat only)
14:45	Skegby via Suburban Line
14:50	Eggington Junction via Gedling
15:15	Pinxton via Suburban Line (Sat only)
15:15	Derby via Suburban Line (Friday only)
15:15	Ilkeston via Suburban Line
15:43	Stafford via Gedling
16:35	Pinxton via Gedling
16:43	Sutton in Ashfield via Suburban Line
17:10	Pinxton via Gedling (Sat only)
17:40	Daybrook via Suburban Line
17:45	Eggington Junction via Gedling
18:05	Skegby via Suburban Line
18:10	Stafford via Gedling
18:45	Pinxton via Gedling
19:10	Skegby via Suburban Line
20:20	Pinxton via Gedling (Wed & Sat only)
20:20	Daybrook via Gedling (not Wed & Sat)
20:40	Skegby via Suburban Line
21:30	Burton on Trent via Gedling
21:50	Pinxton via Gedling
23:05	Pinxton via Gedling (Sat only)
23:20	Skegby via Suburban Line.

#### Sundays

07:50	Burton on Trent via Gedling
09:35	Sutton in Ashfield via Gedling
11:15	Derby via Gedling
12:45	Pinxton via Gedling
14:55	Burton on Trent via Gedling
15:45	Pinxton via Gedling
18:00	Derby via Gedling
20:20	Sutton in Ashfield via Gedling
20:55	Derby via Gedling



On weekdays there were also 30 trains a day out of London Road Station to distant destinations such as London, Newark, Grantham, Boston and Northampton, and on Sundays there were four extra trains to Grantham. This shows how busy the line was and this does not include any through trains from Derby or Grantham or goods trains using the Back Line.

Later, when the Gt Northern built their High Level line from Trent Lane to Weekday Cross, passenger trains were relocated to Victoria Station, except those to Northampton, although you could still catch these trains at the new London Road High Level Station. (For more information about the high and low level lines see my [Gt Northern Railway](#) article.)



London Road Station (above) was built in 1857 by TC Hine and is now Grade II listed. Between the two world wars, the week-day passenger service on the Back Line between Nottingham and Basford comprised of nine trains in each direction, with one less on Saturdays and none on Sundays. The trains were pulled by old Gt Northern engines discarded from other routes, with very old carriages. The journey from Nottingham to Daybrook by rail was 7½ miles (12km) but only 3½ miles (5.8km) by road – the rail journey took 25 minutes on average. Two colliery trains for miners ran in each direction, serving Gedling Pit, until replaced in 1934 by a bus service. Beer trains from Bass's Brewery in Burton on Trent, then the largest brewery in the world, passed along the line every evening about 9pm, going to the docks at Hull.

In 1923 the Gt Northern became part of the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) group, along with the Gt Central and others. After World War Two, there were five trains running in each direction each day, pulled by ageing LNER locomotives. The climb east up to Mapperley Tunnel from Daybrook tested many of the old engines pulling fully loaded goods or coal trains, especially in wet weather when traction was poor. A large number of iron-ore trains heading west for Stanton Iron Works also struggled on the climb up from Gedling to the Tunnel.

In the summer, excursions were provided to the east coast holiday resorts. On Sundays as many as eight trains ran to the coast, many stopping at Basford and Daybrook. On Saturdays there was a through 'express' train from Birmingham to Skegness taking workers for their holiday at the famous resort.

Passenger trains from Victoria to Sutton in Ashfield along the Leen Valley Line ended in 1956 and all other services on that line ended in 1958. Through-train running on the Back Line ceased on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1960 when Mapperley Tunnel collapsed, with only the eastern section remaining in use to service Gedling Colliery. All eastbound traffic to Daybrook ceased on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1964 and beyond the Gt Central line at Basford, where buffers were installed, the track to Daybrook was lifted. Services out of Victoria Station closed in 1963 and in 1965 British Rail installed a link at Netherfield to the old Midland Railway's Lincoln line. Trains to and from Grantham then used the Midland line from Midland Station, as they do today. In 1966, the northern part of the Gt Central closed and all traffic along the old Back Line ceased.

Today (2021) the line from Netherfield through Gedling is still visible but after that it is very difficult to follow the route. This article shows the route through Nottingham in detail, using photographs taken mostly by me from 1979 onwards.





This extract OS Map shows the site of Netherfield Station (**Sta.**) with the Back Line curving north towards Gedling. The contours show the 170ft (51m) climb up to Mapperley Plains.



Colwick Sidings at Netherfield was originally a Motor Power Depot built in 1858 by the Ambergate, Nottingham, Boston and Eastern Junction Railway company that built the line to Grantham. The Gt Northern took over the running of the line to Grantham in 1861 and in 1878 they expanded the depot to cover a total of 150 acres (61ha).

The picture on the left is a simulation of what the sidings once looked like. As well as engine maintenance for over 200 locos, it could hold 1,150 wagons and handle one-million tons of coal a year.





Colwick Station at Netherfield (above) opened in May 1878. In 1883 it was renamed Netherfield and Colwick and then in 1901 renamed Netherfield. In 1925 it was again called Netherfield and Colwick but reverted to Netherfield in 1974. The line to Gedling left the main Grantham line 50 yds (46m) east of the station (right).

Netherfield is still in use today (below) as an island platform station, but all the old buildings were demolished in 1961 and replaced by what is effectively a bus shelter. The station serves about four trains a day and in 2019/20 it was used by 8,292 passengers. The average journey time from Nottingham is seven minutes.







(Above) Access to the station is by a flight of steps down from Chaworth Road that crosses the line on the bridge shown here.

(Below) After leaving Netherfield Station the line turned north through Colwick Yard, over Victoria Road and crossed the Midland Railway line to Newark and Lincoln on this bridge near Burton Road Jubilee Park.







The line crossed Burton Road, Gedling on this tall brick-arch bridge. This section of the line remained in use until 1995, four years after Gedling Colliery closed. The colliery opened in 1899 and in the 1950s employed over 2,000 workers. It produced over a million tons of coal per year but sadly it cost the lives of 128 miners.







Gedling Station opened in 1876 and closed in 1960 after the collapse of Mapperley Tunnel blocked the through route to Daybrook and Derby. Only coal trains to Gedling colliery then used the line. Today the station building is owned by a youth group, Gedling Youth and Community Hub, who are trying to raise enough money to restore the building.







The bridges over Wood Lane, Gedling (above) and Willow Lane (below) are still in place.







(Above) Jessop Lane bridge, Gedling, is still in place. (Below) A view of the track bed on the top of Jessop Lane bridge, and a Google Earth view looking northwest towards the site of Gedling Colliery and Mapperley Tunnel.







(Above) This Google Earth view shows the old colliery site at Gedling. Jessop Lane in the previous picture is to the right, and the entrance to Mapperley Tunnel is to the left at the end of the clump of trees. In 2020, housing development began on the land between the old railway line and Arnold Lane (A621), but the remainder of the site is now a country park.

(Below) Gedling Colliery was built by the Digby Colliery Co Ltd. Work on the first shaft began in March 1900 with the Top Hard seam of coal at a depth of 1,377ft (419m) reached in September 1902. The shaft was 18ft (5.4m) in diameter and facilities were on site to screen 3,000 tons of coal a day.







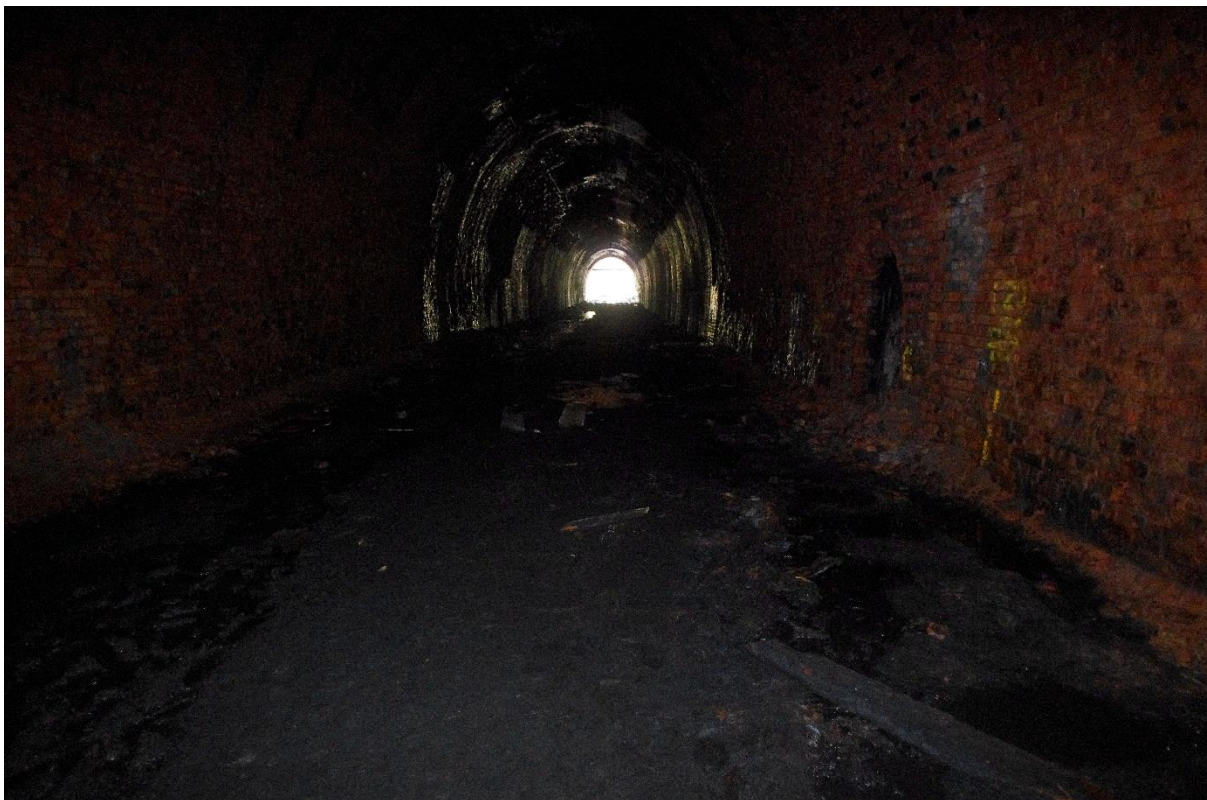
(Above) Part of the track bed was still in place when these pictures were taken by me in 2015. (Below) The approach northwest to Mapperley Tunnel was also accessible, if somewhat overgrown.



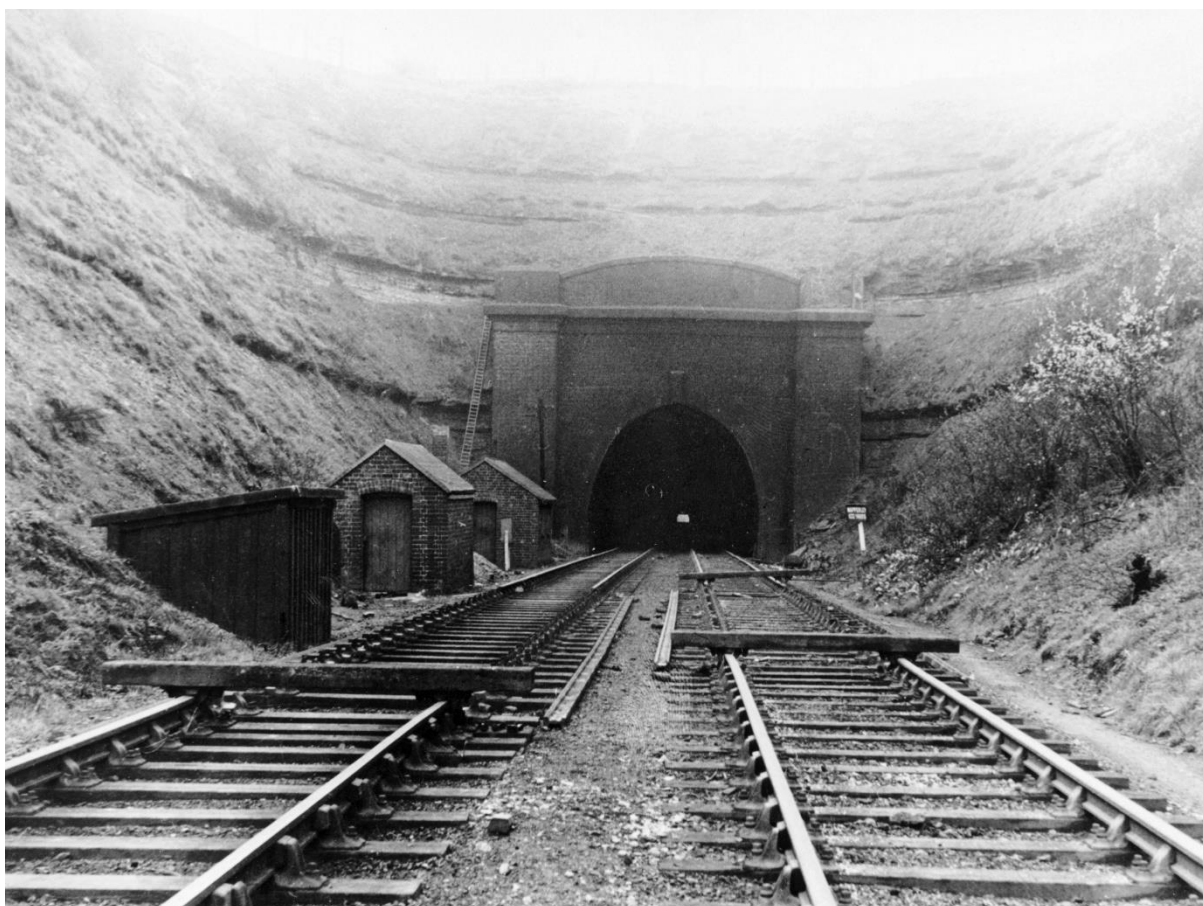




The east portal of Mapperley Tunnel (above) had a serious crack in the right-hand buttress when this picture was taken in 2015. The interior of the tunnel (below) was accessible, but further north it was blocked where the roof had collapsed.

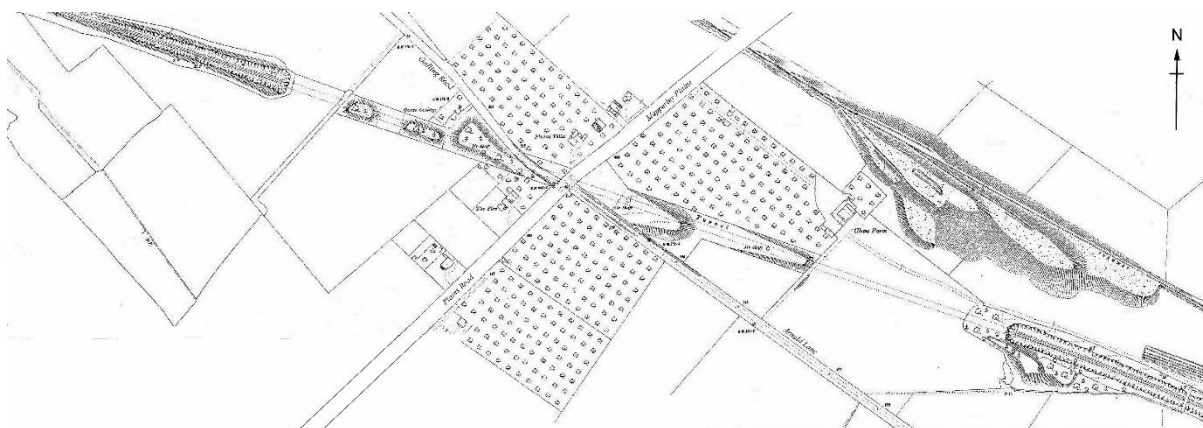






(Above) The west portal of Mapperley Tunnel, date unknown (*Copyright K. Fellows.*)

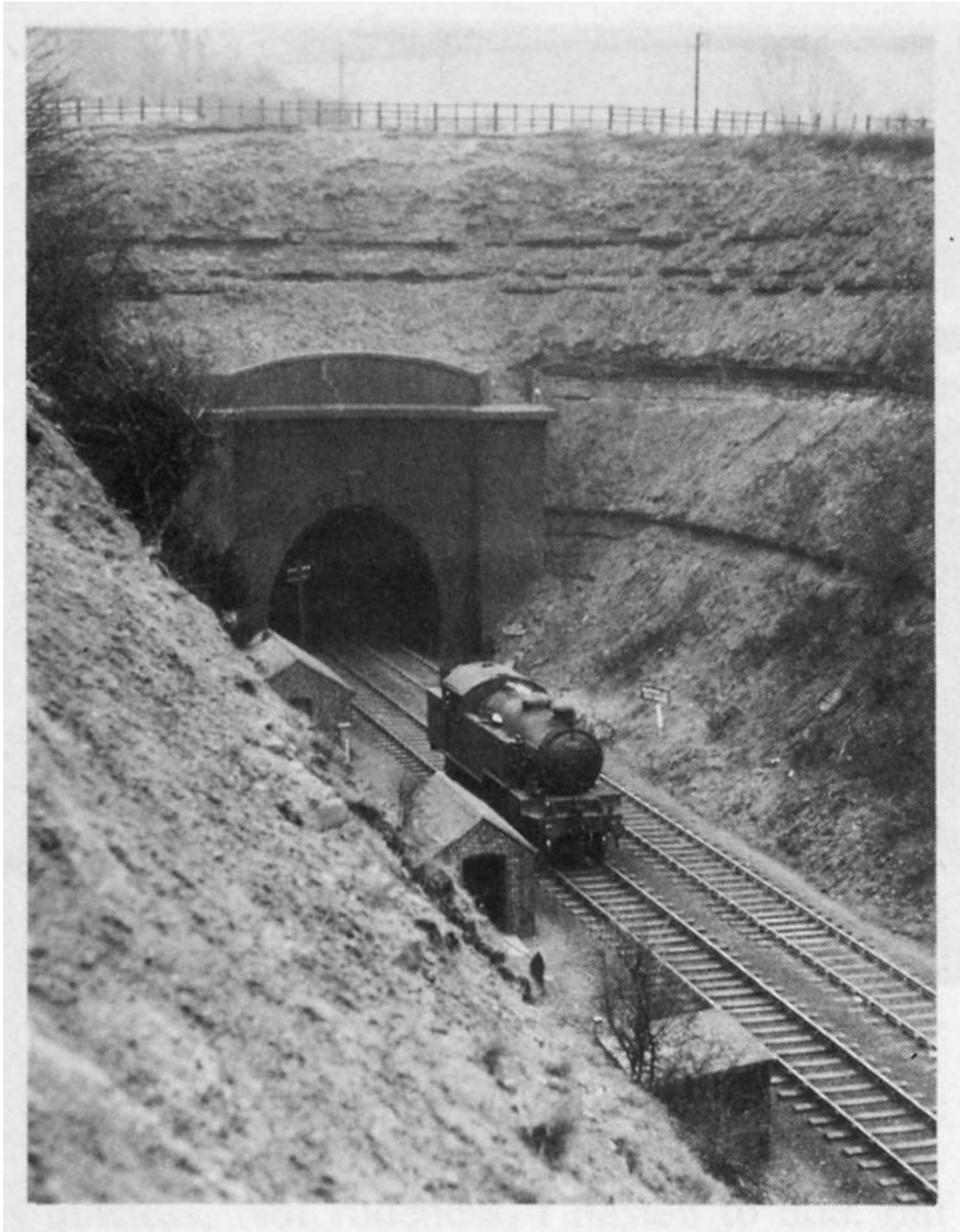
(Below) The tunnel lies about 140ft (43m) below the junction of Arnold Lane and Mapperley Plains. This 1915 OS Map extract shows the relative position of the tunnel.



Mapperley Tunnel was troublesome from the day it was built. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1925, a length of roof collapsed blocking the line. Trains used the Suburban Line as a detour until it was repaired. In the 1950s subsidence caused by Gedling Colliery caused more problems and goods traffic along the line had to be reduced to prevent further damage to the structure from vibration. The tunnel closed on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1960.

The last passenger train to pass through the tunnel was the 18.10 from Nottingham Victoria, with the last goods train passing through at midnight that same day.

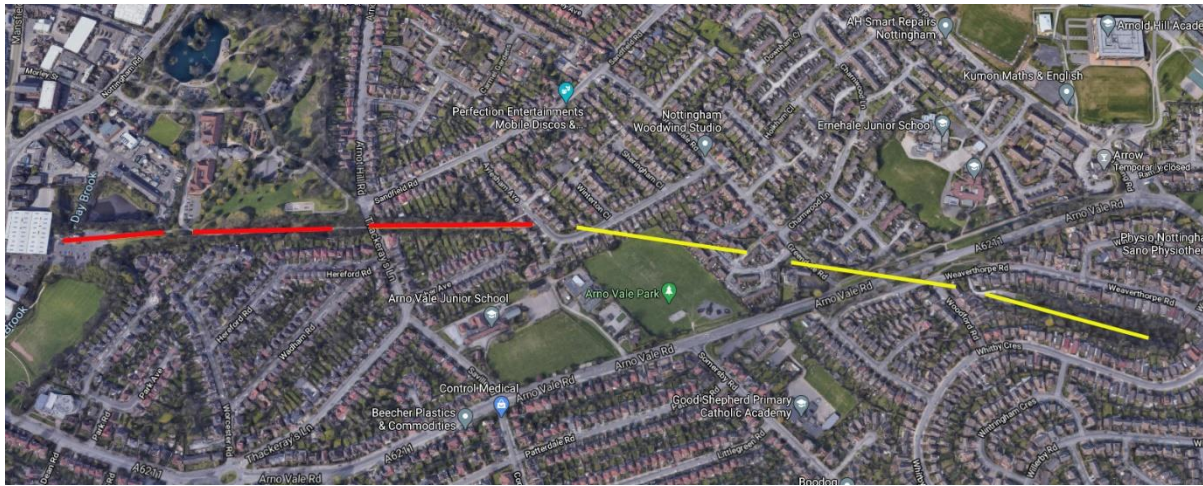




This picture from 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1960 shows a Class L1 2-6-4T locomotive on the Up line approaching (in reverse) the west portal of Mapperley Tunnel, ie. on the Arno Vale side. Two days later the tunnel was closed, permanently. (Copyright T.G. Hepburn).

The tunnel was 1,132yds (1.1km) long and this portal was behind the houses on what is now Whitby Crescent, built in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A 700ft (213m) long section of this cutting remains today, albeit overgrown with trees etc.

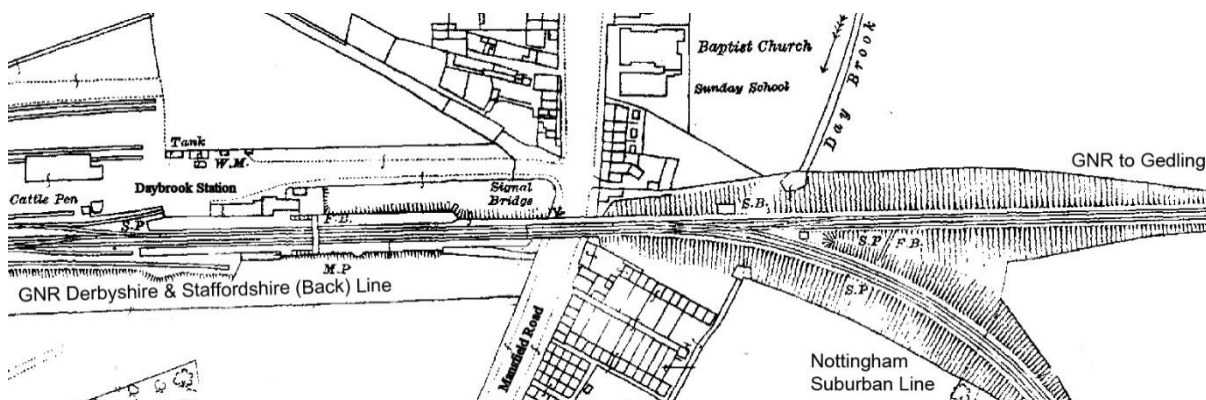




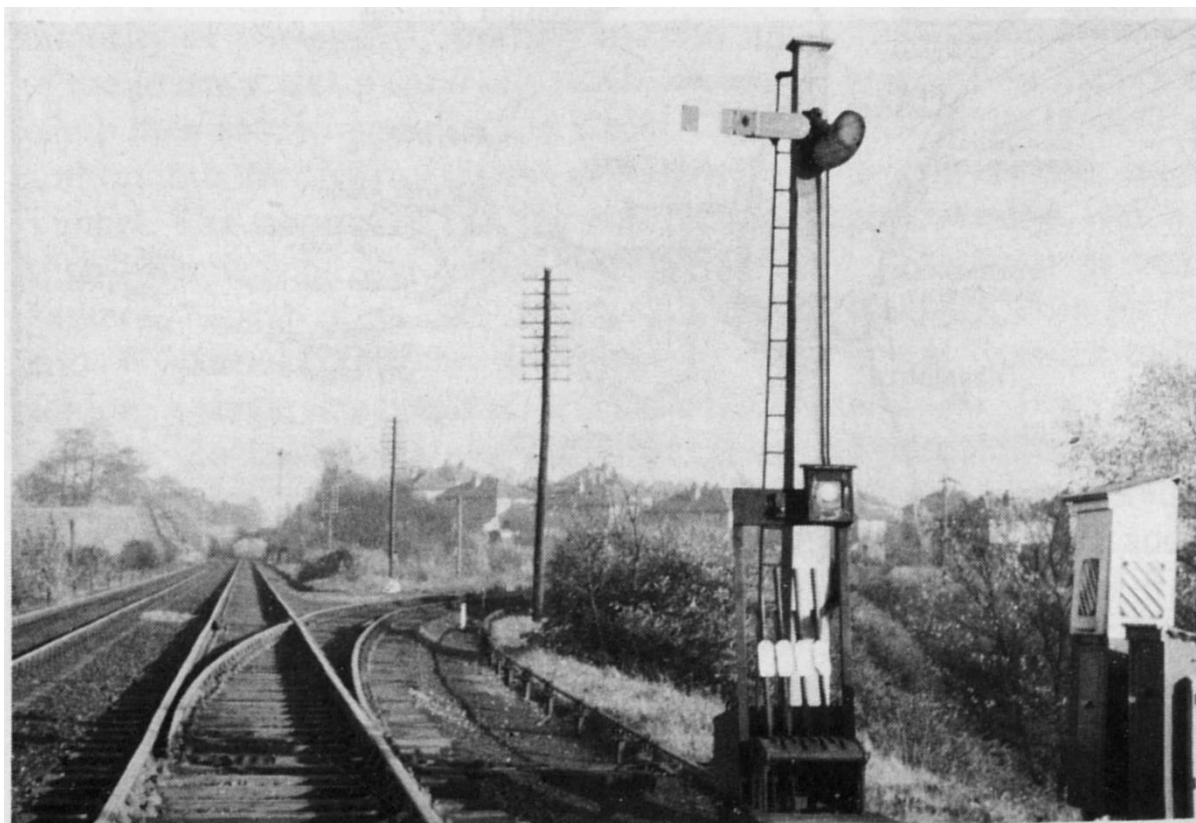
(Above) This Google Earth view shows the line of the track from the western portal of Mapperley Tunnel on the right to Mansfield Road on the left. The red section from Aylesham Avenue, under Thackeray's Lane and on to Mansfield Road, is now a nature trail (below).



(Below) This 1915 OS Map extract shows the site of Daybrook Station and the Suburban Line link.







The Suburban Line joined the Back Line at Daybrook Junction, seen above on the right. The line ran behind what are now the back gardens of houses on Worcester Road. The bridge in the distance is at Thackeray's Lane near Hereford Road. Daybrook Station is behind the photographer.



(Above) This shot from 1951 shows an eastbound train that has just left Daybrook Station and is crossing Daybrook Junction with the Suburban Line on the left. The train is actually on the 'wrong' track – it is travelling Up on the Down Line.

For those not familiar with British railway terms, railway directions are usually described as "Up" or "Down", with "Up" being towards a major location. This convention is applied not only to the trains and the track, but also to items of lineside equipment and to areas near the track, such as platforms. British trains run on the left, the same as cars on the roads, and all trains to London go "Up". On the Midland Railway, trains to Derby were always "Up" trains, but on the Gt Northern Back Line, "Up" was west to east, away from Derby.





The line crossed Mansfield Road at Daybrook on this brick and steel bridge, seen here in 1904. Dixon & Parker was a tailors and outfitters with shops at 3 Long Row East, 1-15 Lister Gate, 32 Hounds Gate and 14 Arkwright Street, Nottingham. In 1904, the partners were John and Thomas Dixon and Thomas Parker. Their head office was in Hounds Gate. (Photo – Brubaker Imaging)

(Below) This 1907 postcard shows Daybrook Station Up (north) platform and buildings. The view is looking east towards Mansfield Road. (Clumber Postcard No.124).



Nottingham to Daybrook usually took about 25 minutes. According to one source the trains were popular with courting couples, as most of the compartments were usually empty and the journey to Daybrook was cheap with a return fare costing on average 5d each. A Day return ticket from Basford to Nottingham via Daybrook cost 3d each and took about 35 minutes each way – plenty of time to be alone. (The cheaper fare from Basford was designed to compete with the tram, and later the trolleybus.)





(Above) This picture shows Home Brewery workers going on a works outing to Skegness in 1927. It looks like it was a long train. (Copyright: John Mann Collection).

(Below) This view from 1951 is looking east, with Daybrook Station's Up platform on the left. The building on the far left was the Be-Ro flour mill, later Rank-Hovis-McDougal.



Tickets for Daybrook from Nottingham were sometimes branded as 'Daybrook for Arnold'. This linked back to when the station opened in March 1876 as Bestwood & Arnold. Bestwood was mentioned because of the entrance to Bestwood Lodge about ½-mile (0.8km) away near what is now Oxclose Lane. Within a few weeks it was renamed Daybrook for Arnold and Bestwood and by August that year it became Daybrook.





(Above) This view of Daybrook Station from 1951 is looking west, with the Down platform for Basford and Derby on the left. (Picture: *HB Priestley*.) The station closed to passengers on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1960 as a result of the closure of Mapperley Tunnel after the roof collapsed. The line was officially closed on 12 March 1962 and the buildings were demolished sometime after 1971, replaced by a warehouse for Rank Hovis McDougal. In 1994 the site opened as the newly built Madford Retail Park.

(Below) This is the site on Mansfield Road where the bridge carrying the line over the road once stood. Madford Retail Park has been built on the site of the Station and the old flour mill.





After Daybrook station the line ran west towards Basford Station, 2 miles (3.1km) away at what is now the Northern Court Industrial Estate near Vernon Road. The line of the track bed can be seen at Peggy's Park (below) between Longdale Road and Weaving Gardens near Edwards Lane.



Peggy's Park in Daybrook is a recreation ground covering an area of about 4½ acres (1.8ha). It occupies a site that was once the line of the railway between Daybrook Station in the east and Edwards Lane in the west. Longdale Road housing estate was built on the eastern end of the site, behind where these pictures were taken in 2015.







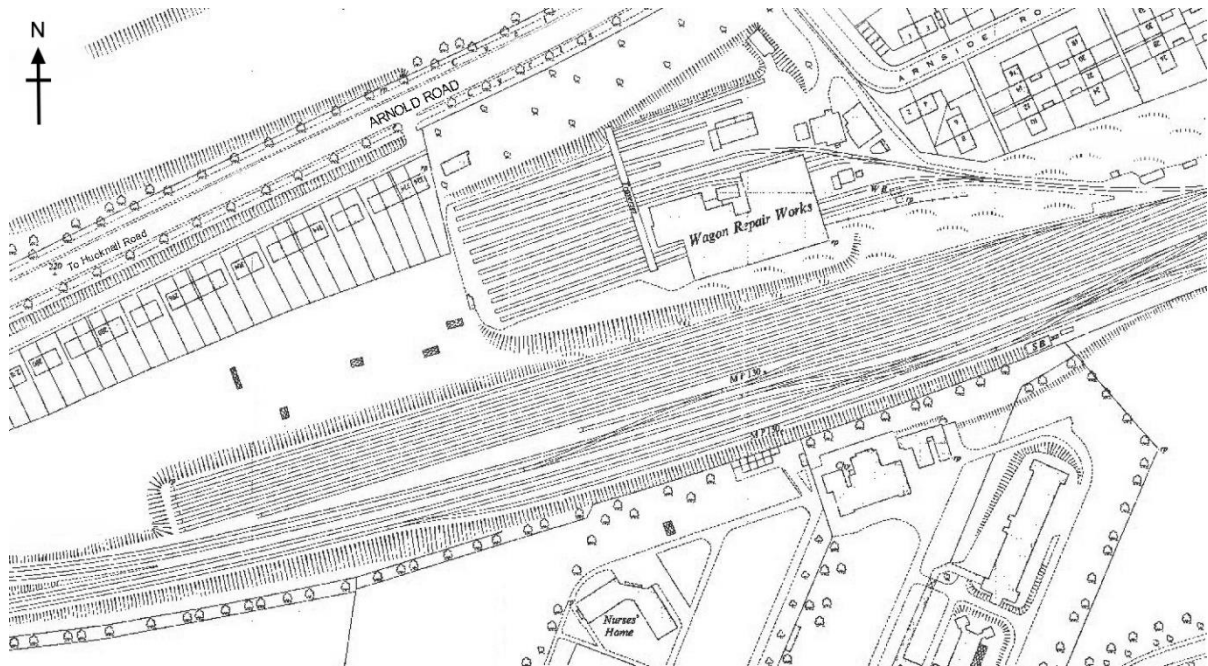
(Above) The line passed under Edwards Lane where this brick wall now stands on the east side of the road.

(Below) On the west side of the road the area was once part of a children's playground but has now been filled in and built on with modern housing – numbers 207-217 (odd numbers) Edwards Lane.





After Edwards Lane, the line ran on the north side of Bagthorpe Workhouse and Bagthorpe Hospital, now part of the City Hospital. The area is now housing on Ravens Court, Orlock Walk, Oakington Close and Wyton Close. Next came a large set of sidings with a wagon repair works on the south side of Arnold Lane. The map below shows this substantial site built sometime after 1901.



(Below) The site of the wagon works was on the east side of what is now Belconnen Road and is now vacant land. It has been earmarked for redevelopment, but no specific plans have yet been submitted for approval. The section leading west (left) towards Hucknall Road (Leen Valley Junction) is now occupied by housing on Belconnen Road and Cairns Close.





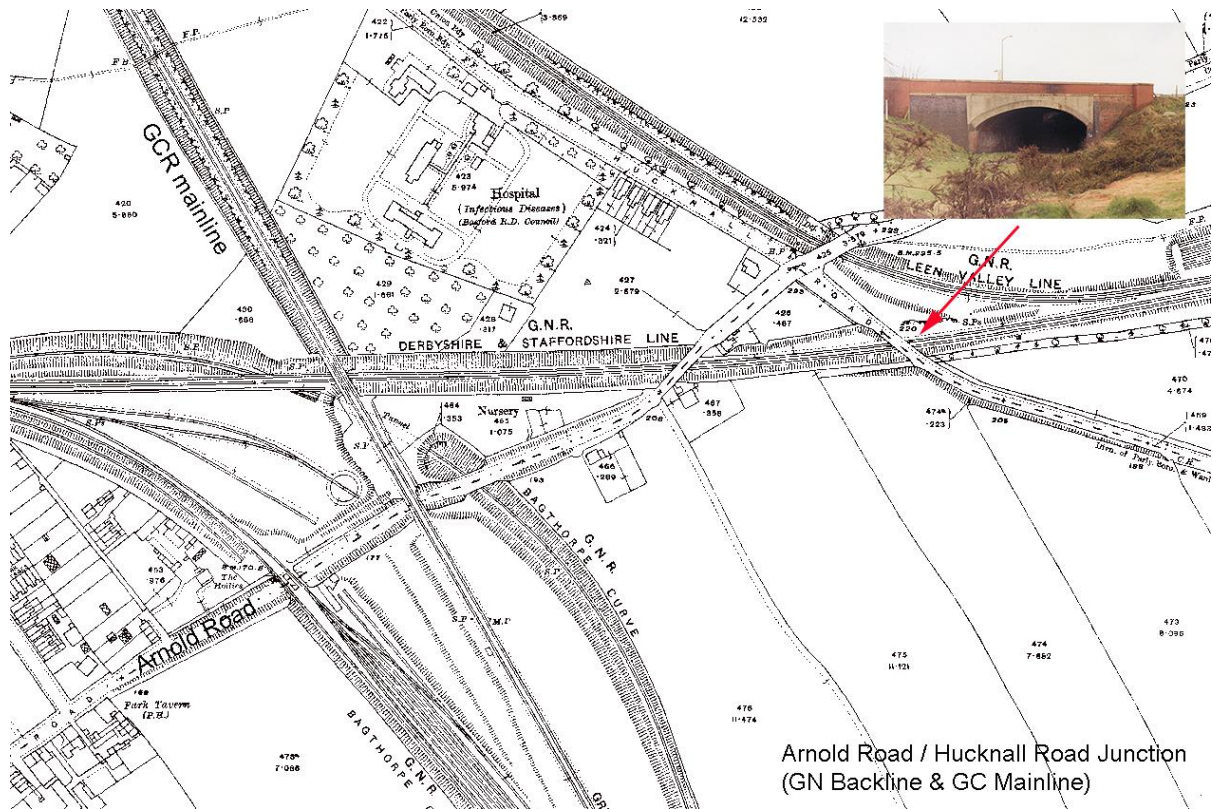


Just near the wagon works was Leen Valley Junction, seen here with the signal Box next to the Down line to Derby. The locomotive is on the UP Back Line, heading east towards Daybrook.

(Below) Although the line closed in 1964 the signal box was still in position in 1973 when this pictures was taken. The box controlled the two main lines and at least 12 sidings.







The next section going west was at Hucknall Road and Arnold Road, one of the most intensive and complex set of railway lines in Nottingham. Leen Valley Junction was to the east of Hucknall Road and provided a link north onto the Leen Valley Line to Bestwood Colliery and beyond. The map shows the numerous lines, explained in detail later in the article. The image also shows the location of the bridge (below), which still stands today, that carried the line under Hucknall Road. At this point it is worth a short diversion to look at the Leen Valley Line in detail.



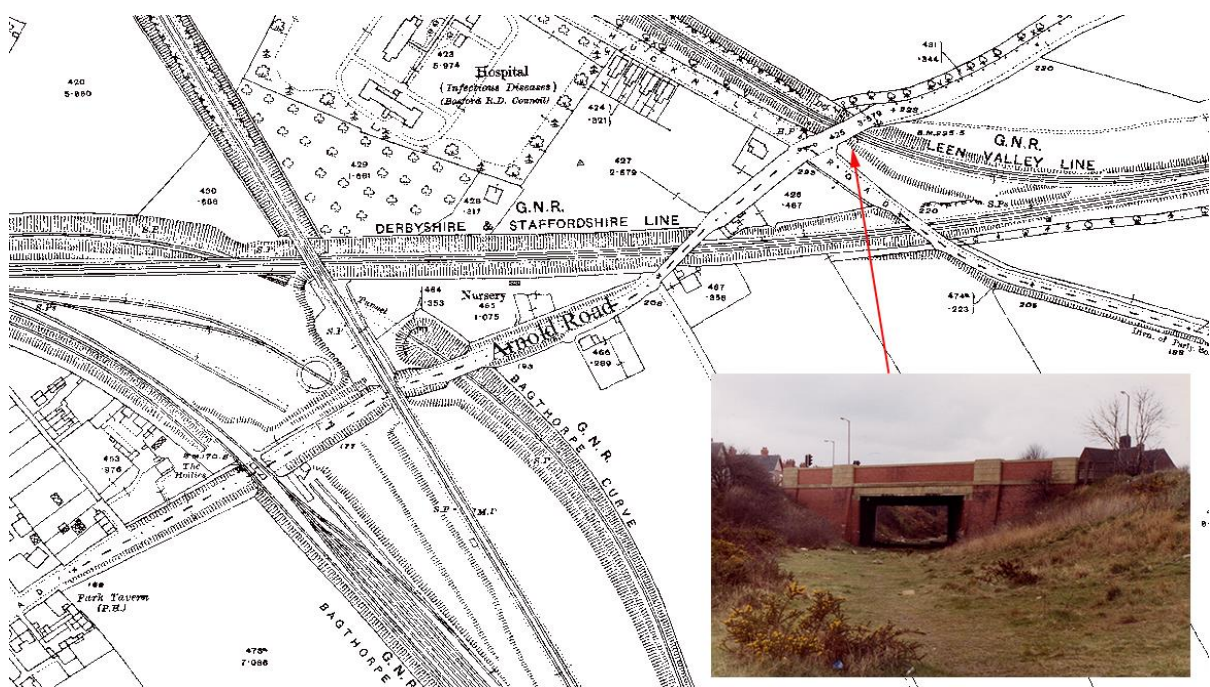


The Leen Valley Line was originally a six-mile long Gt Northern line from the Back Line at Arnold Road to Newstead, with links to Bestwood, Hucknall, Linby and Annesley Collieries, opening on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1882 at a cost of £89,077. The line was in direct competition with the Midland Railway's Mansfield branch and as the two lines ran up the Leen Valley, sometimes only yards apart, they criss-crossed several times. It was a typical duplication of lines that later Richard Beeching targeted for closure on the grounds of duplication and excessive cost. Of course, when the lines were built the two companies were arch-rivals, but in the end the Midland lines were retained, and the Gt Northern lines closed.

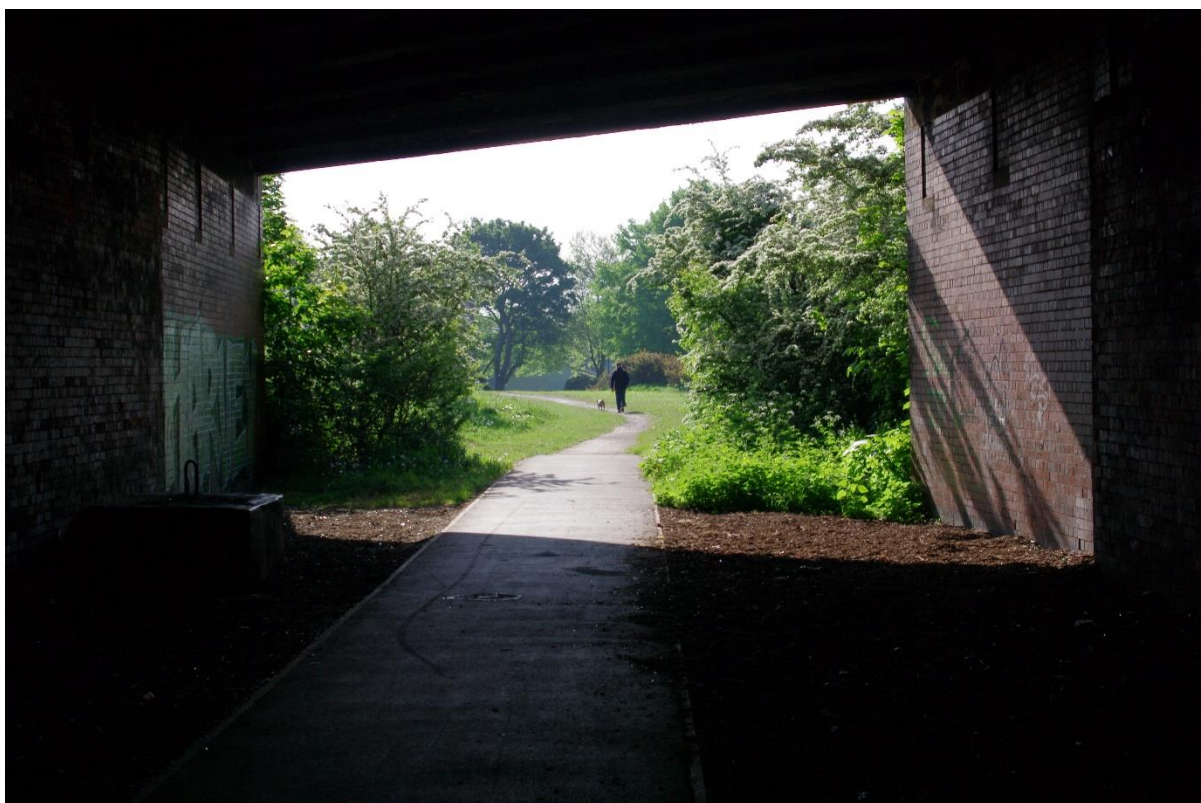
Passenger trains from Nottingham to Newstead began on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1882 with twelve each way on weekdays and two on Sundays. The line was extended in 1895 from Kirkby South Junction near Annesley Sidings to Sutton in Ashfield and Pleasley, using part of the Gt Central Railway's Derbyshire line.



This first bridge on the Leen Valley Line (above) carried the B6004, Arnold Road, over the Line at Bagthorpe. The cutting is about 20ft (6m) deep. The map below shows the position of the bridge as seen from the southeast.

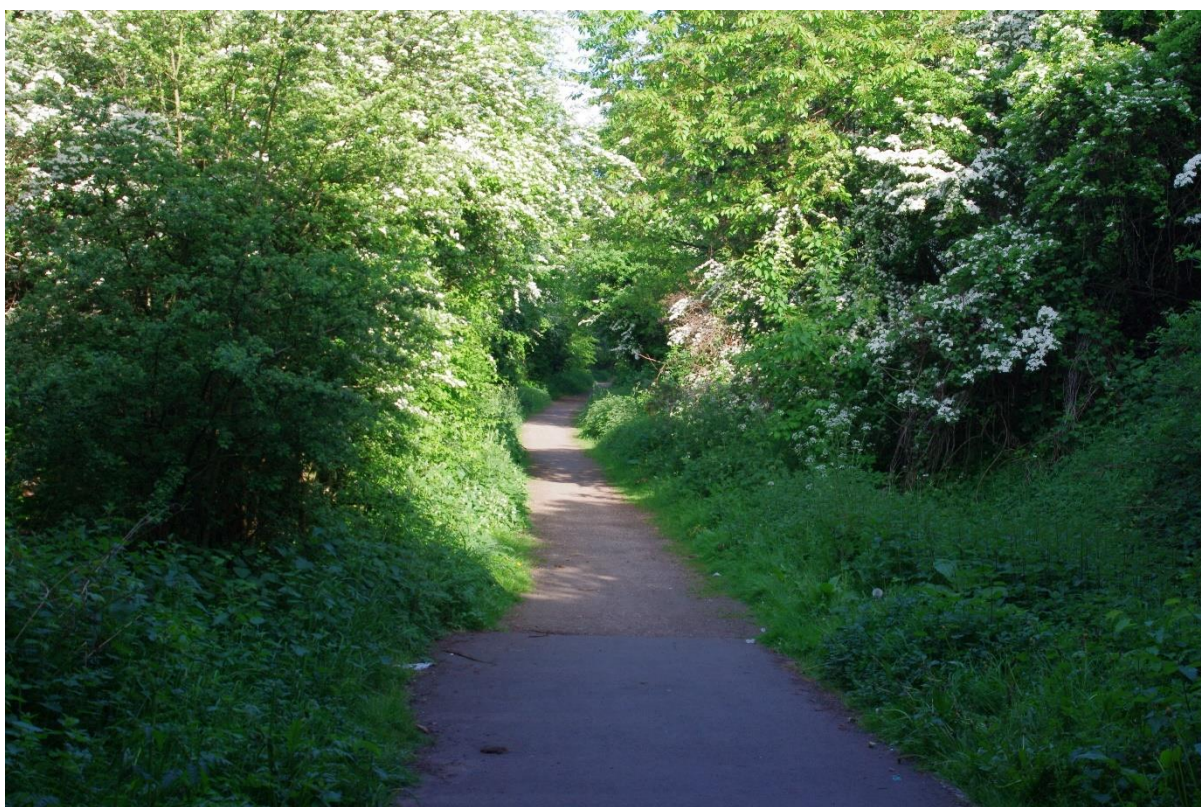






(Above) From Leen Valley Junction at Arnold Road, Nottingham, the Leen Valley Line ran northwest beside Hucknall Road and then turned north near Kersall Drive towards Moor Bridge, Bulwell. The route of the line is now a nature walk.

(Below) The former track bed alongside Hucknall Road.







(Above) This Occupation Bridge provided access from Hucknall Road to fields belonging to Southglade Farm on the east side of the road. Andover Road can be seen beyond the bridge, which has now been demolished. There were two other occupation bridges providing access to Forest Farm and Topvalley Farm (one word), but both these bridges have been demolished.





(Above) Bulwell Forest Station opened on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1887, the site of which is now a Tesco Superstore. The station was not used very often and closed on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1929. The line carried mostly Dido trains (Day-In-Day-Out staff trains), about 14 a day each way that ferried workers to the loco sheds and marshalling yards at Annesley. They ran on weekdays only but were never in any fit state to take fare-paying passengers. The Didos were replaced by buses in 1962.

In October 1892 the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway (MS&LR), later the Gt Central, acquired running rights over the Leen Valley Line and ran goods trains from Annesley to Nottingham. In January 1893 they began passenger services from Annesley to Nottingham London Road. However, this did not last long as on the 26<sup>th</sup> July 1898 the first Gt Central coal trains ran along their new mainline, the London Extension, through Nottingham and then south to Leicester, Rugby and London. After the new line opened to passengers, the Gt Central had no need for the Leen Valley Line.

Behind Bulwell Forest Station was Rigley's Wagon Works. William Rigley and Sons Ltd, founded in 1890, opened their wagon works at Bulwell Forest in 1896. By 1914 they were a large wagon-building company and contractor, employing 250 people. They also had premises next to the Gt Central line at Bulwell Common Station.

Rigleys built thousands of wooden bodied wagons and vans, with particular attention paid to coal wagons that were always in demand. When British Rail began to phase out steam engines at the beginning of the 1960s the works was used to scrap old steam engines. The business closed in 1964 and the steel frame of the building was moved to the Midland Railway Centre at Butterley.





(Above) Bulwell Forest Station looking south in about 1965. Rigley's Wagon Works is on the left.

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(Left) An advert for Rigley's services from about 1960. Apart from wagon building, hire and repairs, the advert states that, *"We are also designers and manufacturers of all types of mechanical handling plant, including conveying and elevating machinery, colliery surface and underground installation and structural steelwork."*

(Below) Bulwell Forest Station looking north towards Top Valley about 1963 with Rigley's on the right.  
(Copyright: Ben Brooksbank.)







Tesco's Supermarket car park (above) now occupies the site of Bulwell Forest station and Rigley's Wagon Works. The main Leen Valley Line track ran along what is now the grassed embankment next to the site. In the early 1900s, what is now Hucknall Road was only a narrow unpaved track from Kersall Drive to Bestwood Road.

(Below) The railway line ran along this embankment, next to Hucknall Road on the right. This view from 2015 is looking south with the Tesco site on the left (east).







(Above) This occupation bridge allowed access from what is now Hucknall Road to Rise Farm. The bridge has been demolished - the site was to the south of the modern junction with Bestwood Park Drive West.

(Below) The embankment can be seen here where part has been removed to make way for Bestwood Park Drive West.







After the line skirted what is now Top Valley Estate and Rise Park Estate it turned northeast at Bestwood Road alongside Bestwood Country Park, at which point it crossed the city boundary into Gedling Borough at the back of the houses in Little Oak Wood Drive.







(Left) This boundary stone is from 1877 when the town of Nottingham expanded massively to take in Basford, Bulwell, Lenton, Sneinton, North Wilford, The Castle, Brewhouse Yard, Standard Hill and The Park Estate. It stood next to the occupation bridge (below) on Bestwood Road, marking the boundary with Gedling Borough.

The post is typical of many in the city, most of which are now Grade II listed structures. This one however is no longer on site – it was there in 2015 (when I took this picture) but has now gone.

(Below) The occupation bridge where the boundary post stood is on the east side of Bestwood Road just before the entrance to Bestwood Village.

When coal production in the older collieries began to decline, rail traffic declined too. There was also less need for passenger traffic on the Leen Valley Line with the opening of the Gt Central line and improvements in road services. On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1956, passenger services from Nottingham Victoria to Sutton in Ashfield along the line closed and all other services ended in 1958.





Back at Leen Valley Junction at Arnold Road, the Back Line continued west under Hucknall Road and on towards Basford & Bulwell Station. The line passed under Arnold Road near the end of Mayfair Gardens which was built on the old line of the track. Today there is no visible evidence of the line on the ground.



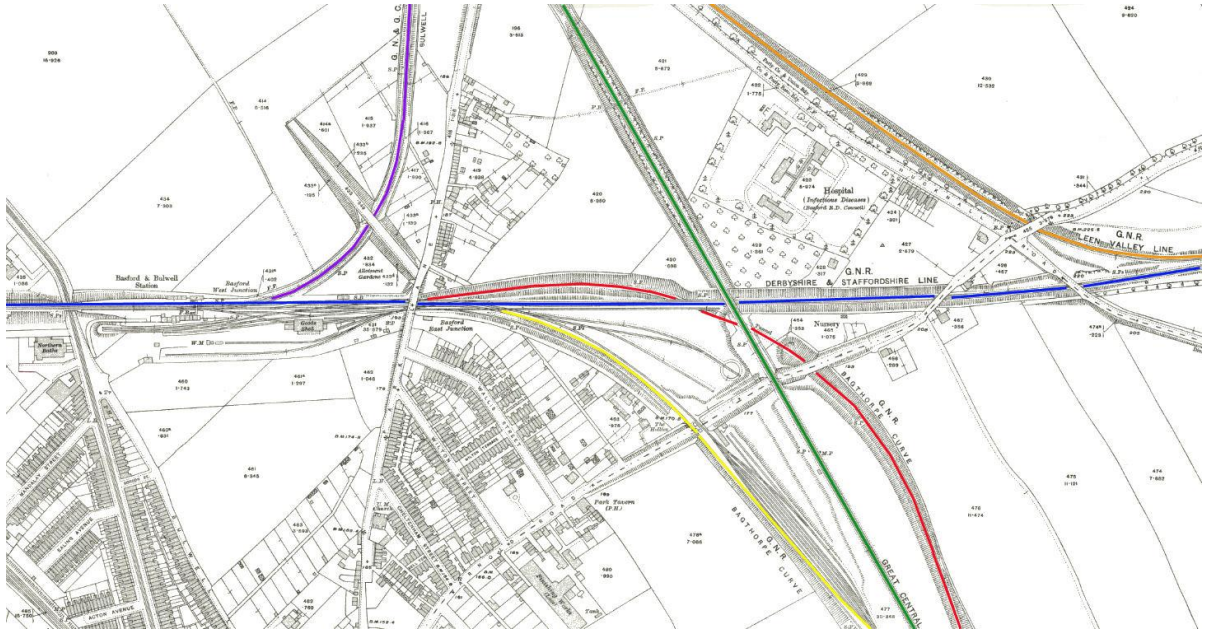
(Above) The yellow lines added to this Google Earth image show the old line of the track bed under Arnold Road. Hucknall Road is on the right and Basford & Bulwell Station is about  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile (1km) to the left.

(Below) This picture shows the relative position of the track bed (between the yellow lines) to the modern housing and road layout. Mayfair Gardens is in the foreground and the view is looking southwest towards Basford Crossing.



About 270yds (250m) west of here the line crossed the Gt Central Main line running north-south from Bulwell to Carrington. The Gt Northern built two lines on the south linking to the Gt Central line. These were known as the Bagthorpe Curves. They also built a northern link, the Bulwell Curve, providing access from Derby onto the Gt Central line and Leen Valley line going north. If trains travelling west from Daybrook wanted to head south on the Gt Central line they first had to go into Basford and Bulwell Station and then reverse out; it was a very rare event.





This map is from my article on the [Gt Central](#) and shows how the various lines at Arnold Road were interconnected. The blue line was the Back Line running east-west from Colwick to Derby Friargate. The green line was the Gt Central main line running north-south (north is at the top of the page). The red line was the southern Bagthorpe Curve that allowed trains from Derby to pass south from the Back Line onto the Gt Central mainline and on to Victoria Station. The yellow line allowed northbound trains from Victoria Station to turn west onto the Back Line to Derby. The purple line was the Bulwell Curve that allowed eastbound trains from Derby to turn north onto the Gt Central line, and the orange line on the right was the Gt Northern Railway's Leen Valley Line to Bestwood Colliery and Annesley.



(Above) This is one of the very few photos showing the Back Line passing under the Gt Central line. The view is looking west towards Basford with the locomotive running tender-first on the Up line to Daybrook (right). The houses on the right are in Sunrise Avenue.





After passing under the Gt Central main line the Back Line continued west under Park Road bridge shown above in 1980 and below in 2009. Part of the track bed on the right in the lower picture is the site of a children's playground off Britannia Avenue that was once Basford East Junction.



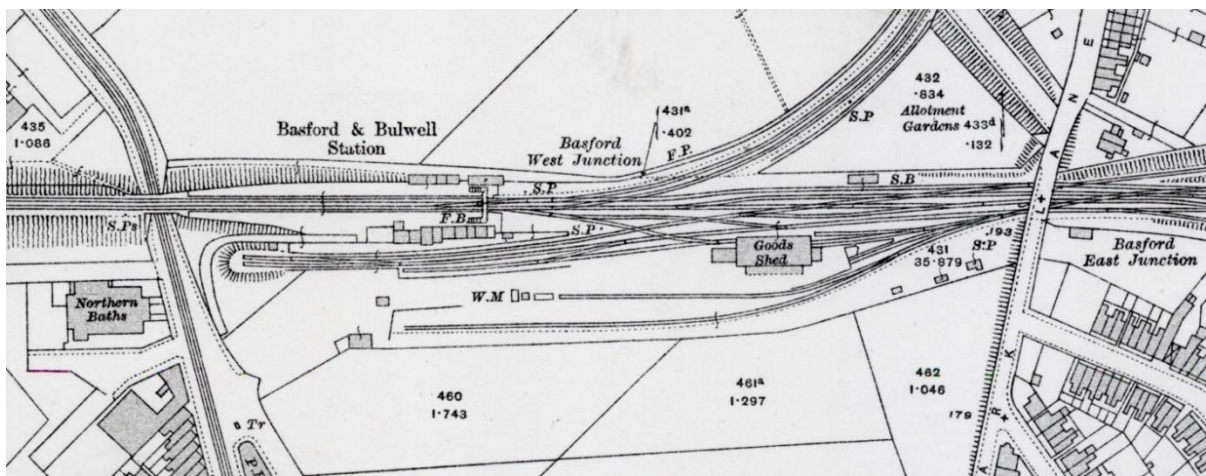




(Above) West of Park Lane the route is now occupied by industrial units at Northern Court.



(Above) The remains of Basford & Bulwell Station in 1979 and (below) as it was on the OS Map in 1915.







(Above) This picture from 1947 shows a Class B1, 4-6-0 loco pulling the 12:50 Grantham to Derby service into Basford and Bulwell station. The bridge in the background is at Park Lane and the goods shed on the right is that shown on the map on the previous page. The line on the left was the Bulwell Curve that linked the Back Line to the Gt Central line just south of Bulwell Common Station.



(Above) This 1963 picture is one of the few photos of Basford North Station. The view is looking east towards Park Lane. The station opened on 1 February 1876 as New Basford but was renamed Basford and Bulwell in August that year. In September 1953 it became known as Basford North to avoid confusion with other Basford/Bulwell stations – there was a Basford Vernon station on the Midland line, a Bulwell Common station on the Gt Central line and a Bulwell (Market) station on the Midland line at Bulwell. (Copyright: Ben Brooksbank.)



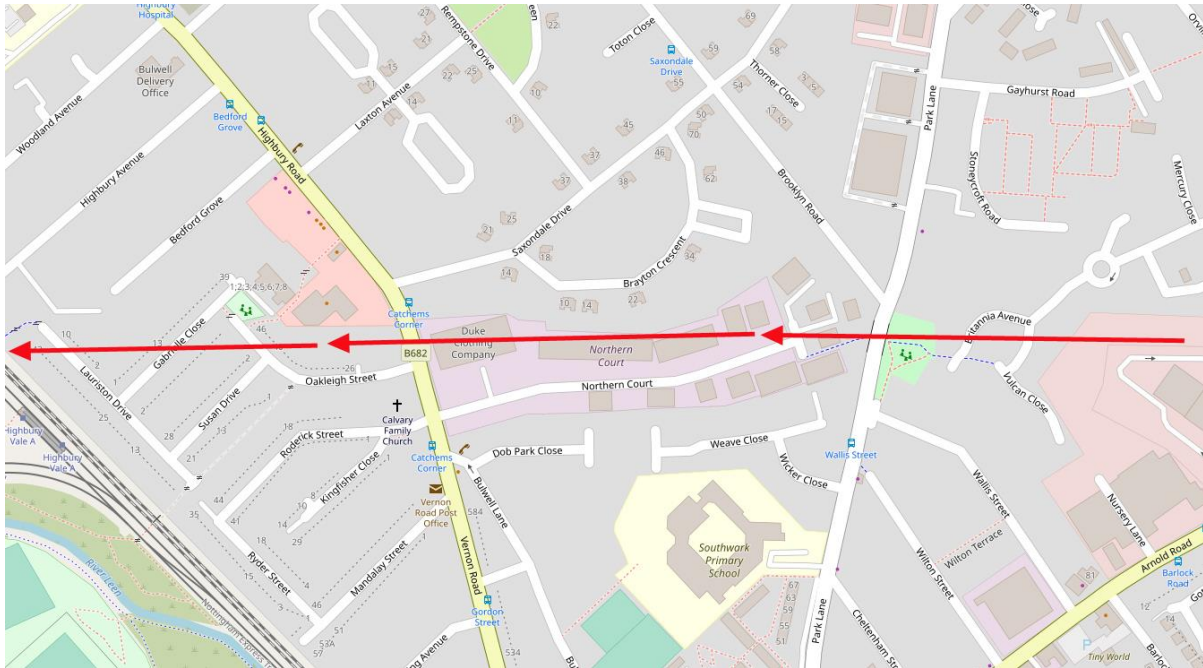


(Above) Basford North goods yard looking west from Park Lane bridge. Goods services from here were withdrawn on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1967. The diesel engine and guard's van are entering the Back Line from the Bulwell Curve. The chimney on the left behind the station building is at Northern Baths on Vernon Road.

(Below) An eastbound train leaving Basford North Station, as seen from Park Lane bridge. The houses in the background are on Brayton Crescent off Saxondale Drive, Highbury Vale.







(Above) It is difficult to see any trace of the old line on the ground near Vernon Road, other than the bridge at Park Lane. This map shows by a red line the position of the track in relation to the modern layout. Northern Court is where Basford North station stood and the Calvary Family Church (†) was once the Northern Baths.



(Above) Even on Vernon Road next to the old Northern Baths, built in 1908, there is no hint of the bridge seen here that once carried the Back Line over the road. Tram service No.3 ran from Trent Bridge to Bulwell Market. In 1933, when trolleybuses were introduced, the route numbers for trams were changed to letters and route 3 became route C. This tram is numbered in the 170 range making it an English Electric 4-wheel TC (top-covered) tram, purchased new in 1920 which dates the picture as sometime between 1920 and 1933. Trams were withdrawn in 1936. Samuel Allsopp & Sons was one of the largest breweries operating in Burton on Trent, Staffs. By 1861 it was the second largest brewery after Bass. It merged with Ind Coope Ltd in 1935.





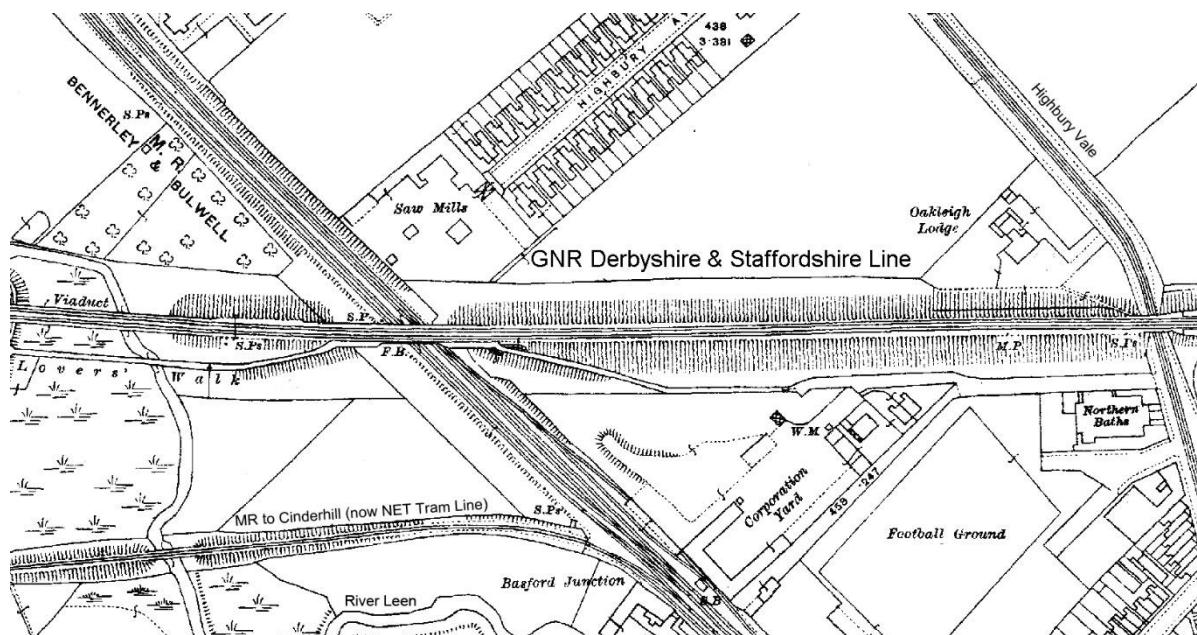
On Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1979 the Gt Northern Back Line bridge over Vernon Road was demolished in spectacular style. This picture is blurred because when the charge exploded the blast knocked me backwards causing camera shake. A photographer from the Nottingham Evening Post stood next to me with his camera on a tripod, which I could not afford; he also had a motor drive whereas I had to crank my 35mm film camera manually! In these pictures, Basford North Station was originally on the left.







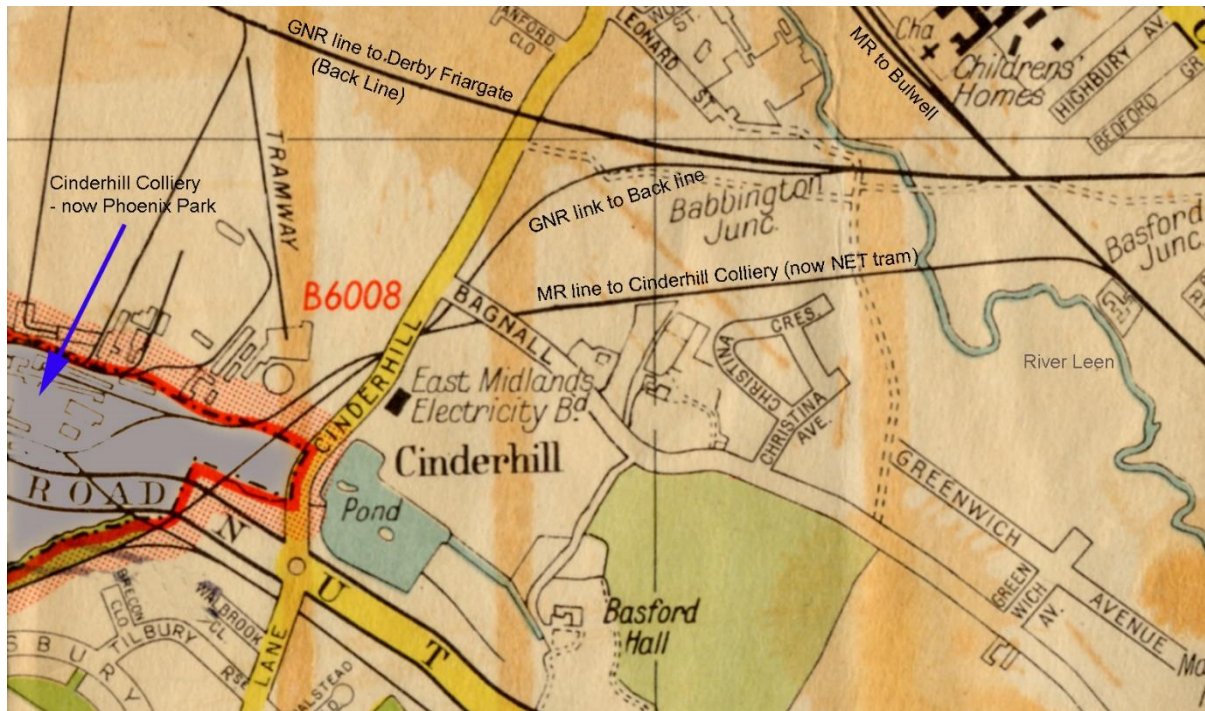
(Above) About 390yds (363m) west of Vernon Road, the Back Line crossed the Midland Mainline to Bulwell on this steel-lattice bridge. Today this site is occupied by a steel footbridge carrying a footpath from Lauriston Drive towards the River Leen near Neston Drive, Highbury Vale.



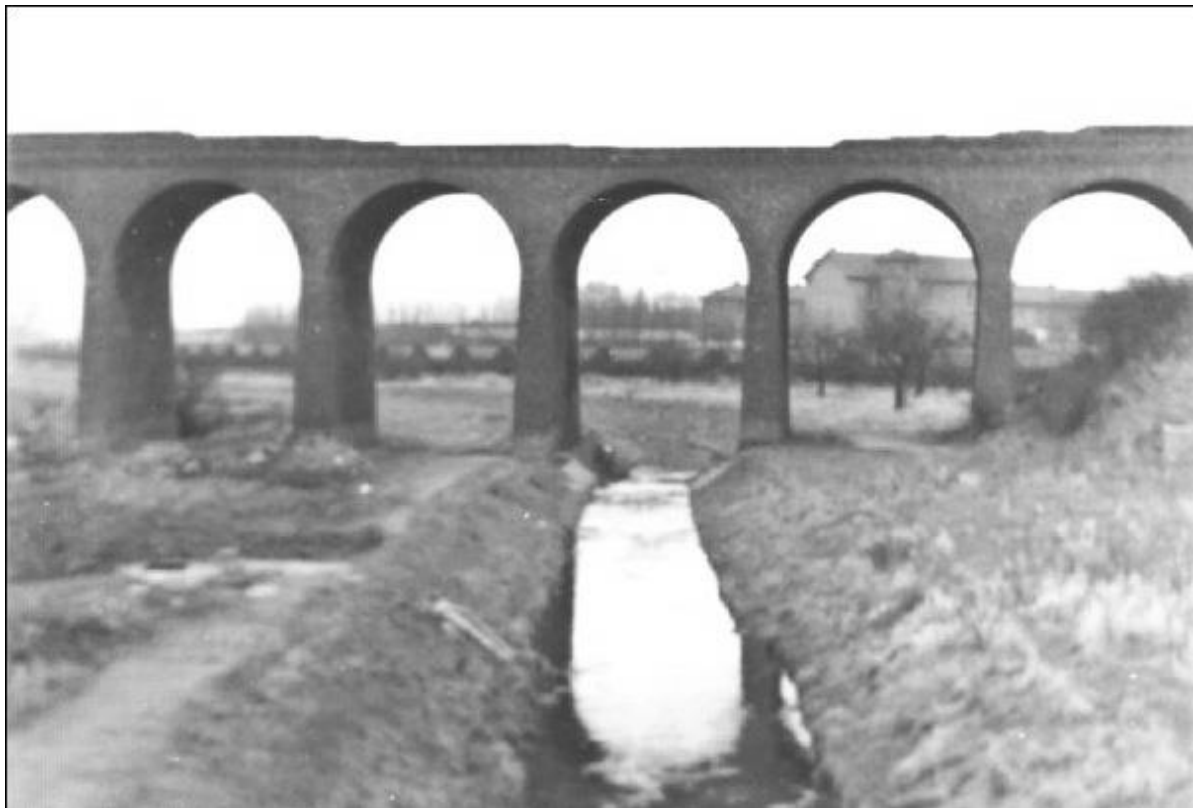
(Above) This extract from the 1914 OS Map shows the Back Line over the Midland Line to Bulwell and Mansfield. The line at the bottom of the map was the Midland Railway's Cinderhill Branch to Babbington Colliery, also known as Cinderhill Colliery. The mine opened in 1841 and was the first large-scale mine in Nottinghamshire. It took its name from its original owner, Babbington Colliery Company. The colliery closed in 1986. There was also a large brickworks on the site next to the colliery. The route is now used by the NET Tram system on the way to Phoenix Park, built on the site of the colliery.

The Gt Northern Railway had a line to Cinderhill, off Babbington Junction on the north side of what is now Neston Drive. It turned south from the Gt Northern mainline alongside Cinderhill Road, passing under Bagnall Road where the Headstocks Pub is today.





(Above) This old street map from the early 1960s shows the position of the various lines at Cinderhill from where the Back Line crossed the River Leen on its route west towards Hempshill Vale.



(Above) The Back Line crossed the River Leen on this tall viaduct, now demolished. The area beside the Leen was very marshy, crossed by a footpath known as Lovers' Walk. A new low-level steel footbridge now occupies the site.





This bridge carries Bagnall Road over the old Midland Railway's branch line to Cinderhill Colliery, now used by the NET tram service. The line then passed under Cinderhill Road beneath the bridge shown below. Cinderhill Road bridge was shared with the Gt Northern Railway, using separate track. When this picture was taken in 1980 all trace of the Gt Northern line had been erased. The NET tram line opened on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2004.







(Above) The Gt Northern Railway's branch line to Cinderhill came south under this bridge on Bagnall Road. The Headstocks Pub, built on the old track bed, can be seen beyond the bridge. (Below) A NET tram stop now occupies the site, the track passing under the old joint bridge at Cinderhill Road.





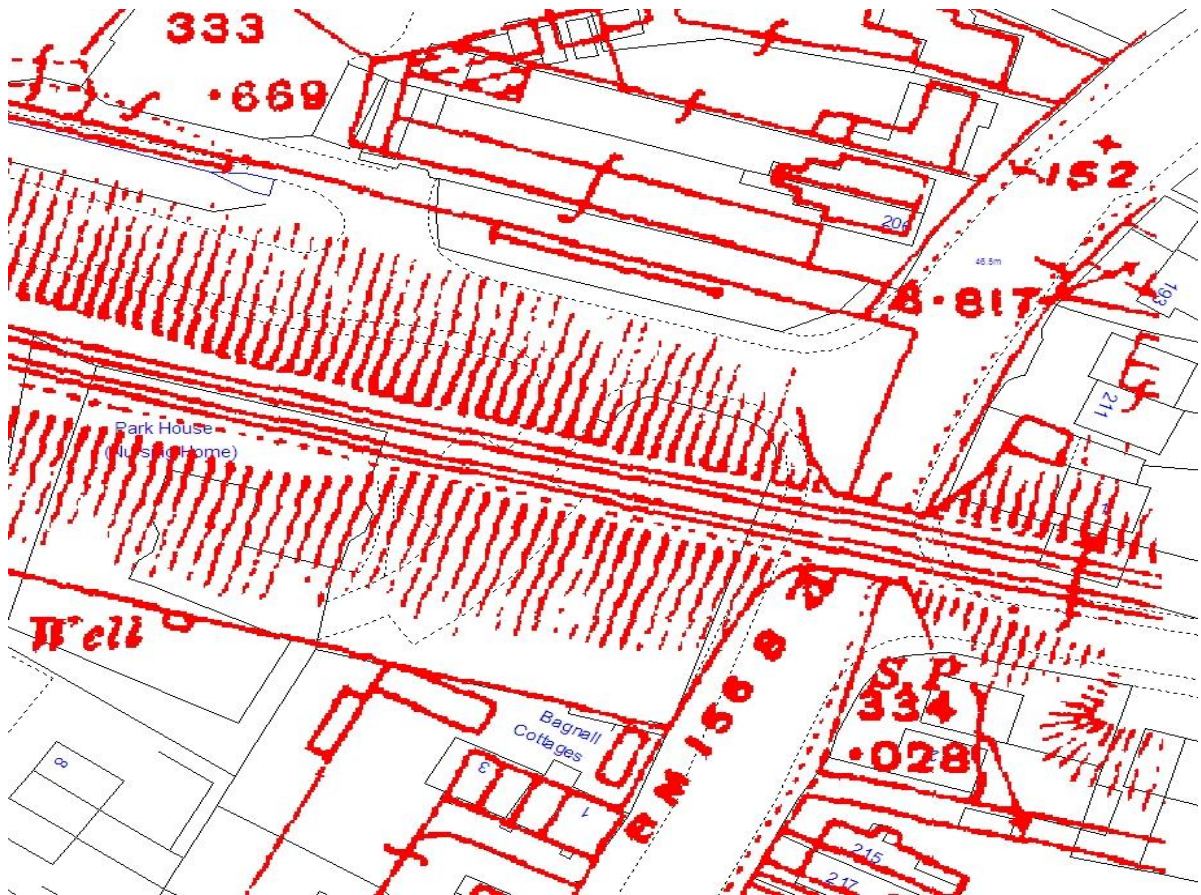


(Above) The Back Line crossed Cinderhill Road on this bridge, seen here in the late 1960s. It has been demolished. The stone houses on the left are Bagnall Cottages and Basford was towards the right.

(Below) Bagnall Cottages backed onto the Back Line where it crossed Cinderhill Road at Bulwell. They were built in about 1800 as miner's cottages for Babbington Colliery and today are Grade II listed.







(Above) This 1915 OS Map overlay shows the Back Line crossing Cinderhill Road. The red detail is 1915, the black detail modern. The road was narrower than it is today. The track bed west (left) is now the site of Park Chase.

(Below) The road as it looks today with the cottages on the left.





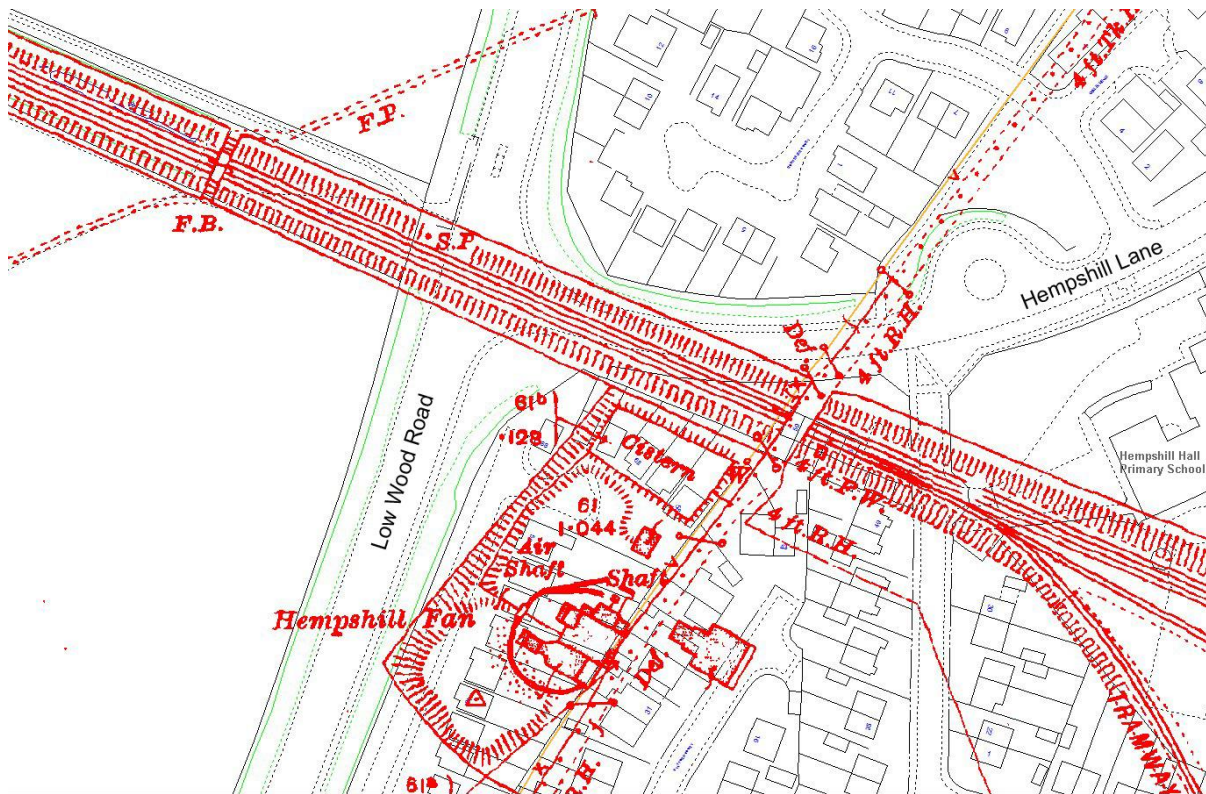


(Above) Park Chase, a new road along the old line of the railway, is off Cinderhill Road. The embankment has been removed and the road leads to a small housing development (Paddock Close) at the side of where the line once ran.

(Below) At the end of Park Chase is a footpath following roughly the line of the track towards Hempshill Vale.







(Above) The last section of the line within the city ran across what today is the site of the A6002, Low Wood Road, which was built after the line closed. The red detail dates from 1915 and the black detail is modern. After leaving the city, the line continued another 12 miles (20km) to Derby Friargate through Kimberley, Awwsworth, Ilkeston, West Hallam and Breadsall.

Today, trains to Derby from Nottingham and the East Coast pass through Nottingham Midland Station on the old Midland Railway's lines. After the Beeching cuts in the mid-1960s, the Gt Northern was history. 📖

Graham Woodward  
March 2021.

## Copyright

The majority of the photographs in this article were taken by me, but some older pictures have been sourced from online sites. I have credited these where known but if I have offended anyone's copyright I apologise and on request will either credit the picture to them or remove it from the article.

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See also <http://www.gwoodward.co.uk/nottm.html> for more guides to Nottingham and more Nottingham pictures.