Walsall Tour Notes 1993

The West Midlands Group organised a walk that followed the Wyrley & Essington Canal from Walsall to Sneyd and used the newly re-opened passenger route from Bloxwich North to visit Churchbridge Railway interchange basin and the now demolished South Staffordshire Railway House near there,

These notes reflect a time prior to the railway privatisation, when Regional Railways had charge of local services and Intercity operated the express trains in this region.

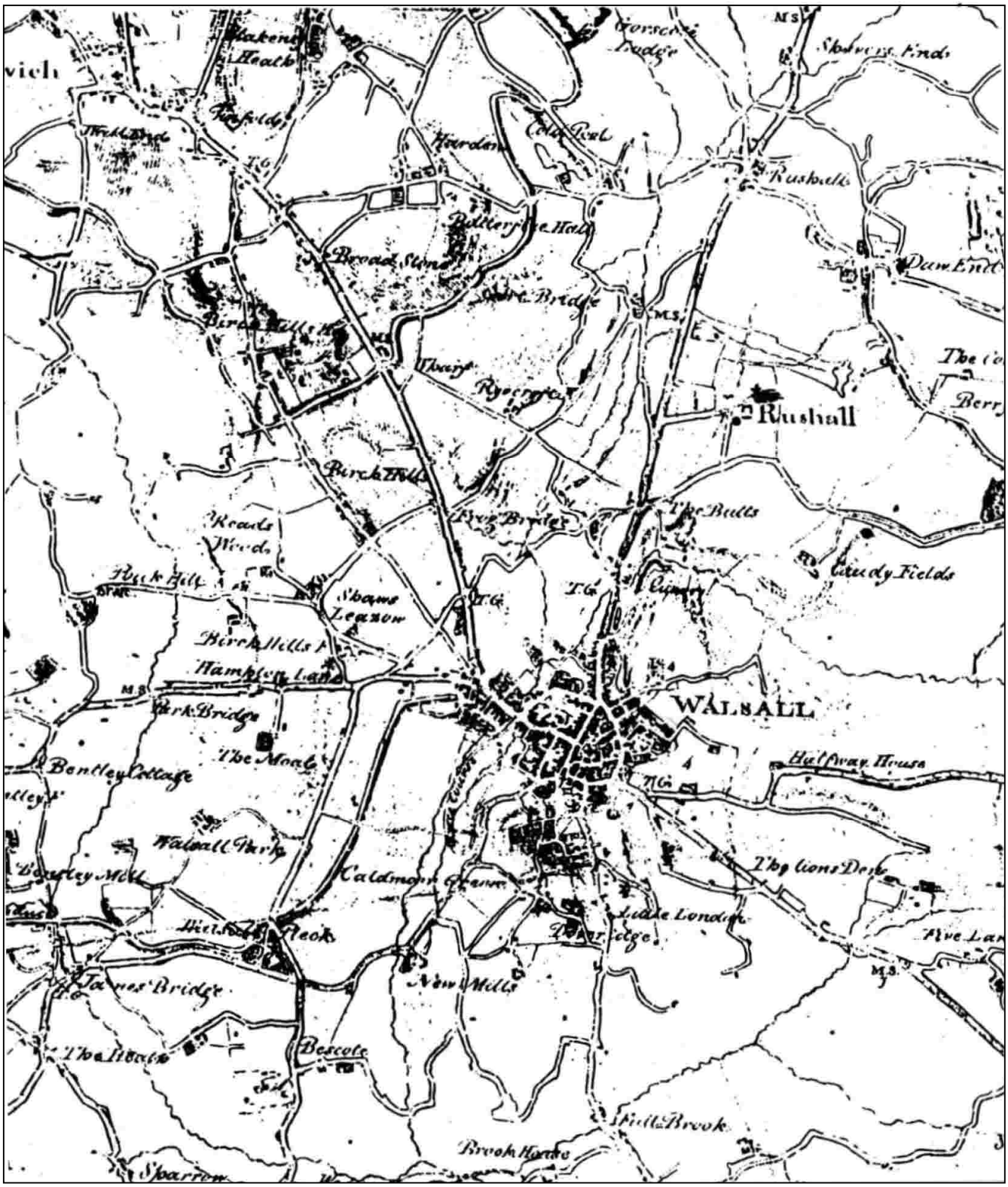
Members from the East Midlands, West Midlands and North West groups attended.

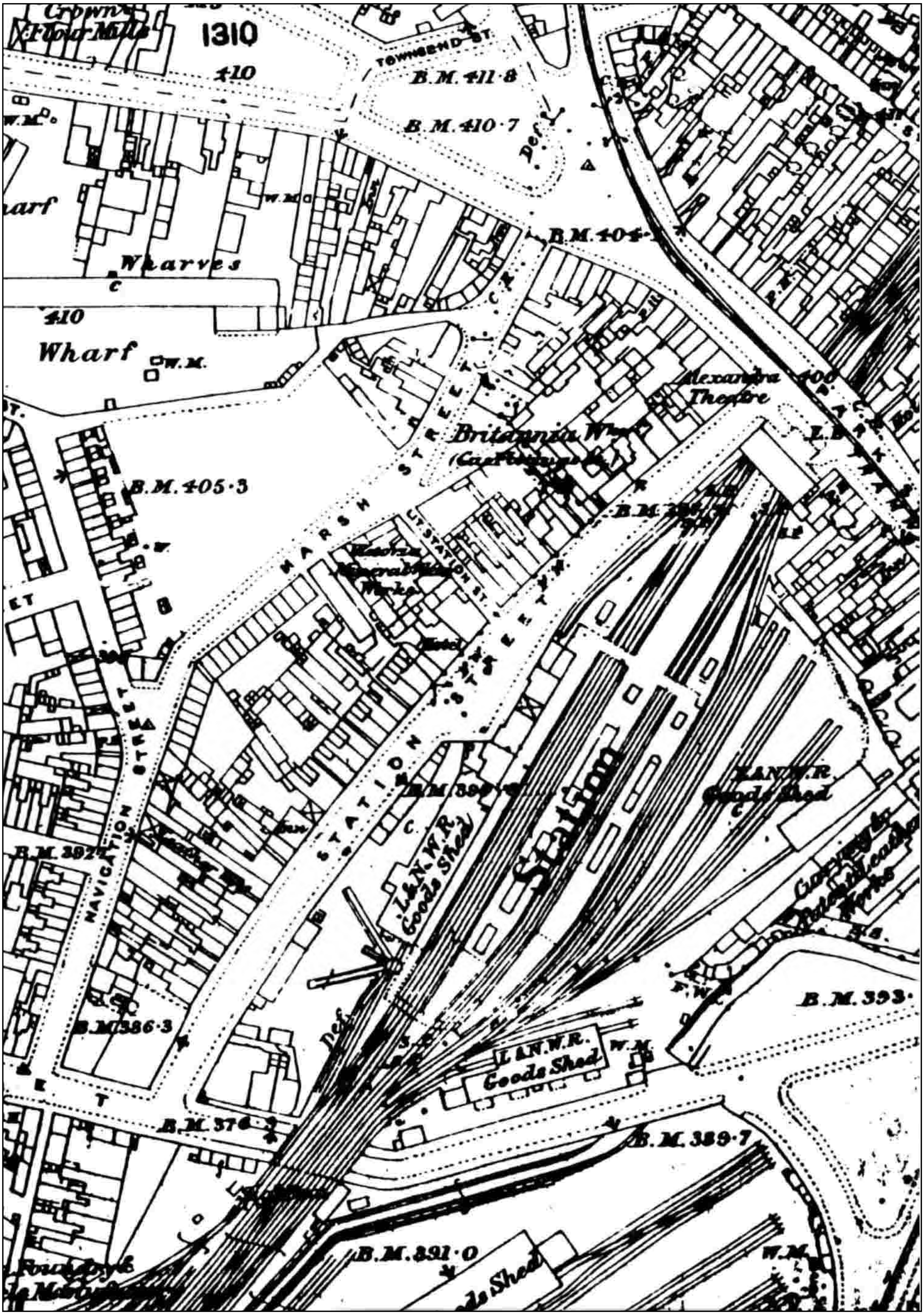
Lunch was arranged at the public house built beside the infilled locks at Sneyd.

Tour leader ; Ray Shill.

Index

ESCAPE FROM WALSALL





1310
TOWNSEND ST.
B.M. 411·8
B.M. 410·7
410
Wharves
410
Wharf
W.M.
B.M. 404
Alexandra Theatre
Britannia Wks
B.M. 405·3
MARSH STREET
LT. STATION ST.
STATION STREET
NAVIGATION STREET
L.&N.W.R. Goods Shed
Station
L.&N.W.R. Goods Shed
B.M. 386·3
L.&N.W.R. Goods Shed
B.M. 393
B.M. 389·7
B.M. 391·0

The walk begins at Walsall Station and the group assembles in the Saddler Centre. It is a modern brick and concrete structure, a product of 1970's architecture. Many will probably remember the old station, its wooden circular booking hall and frontage to Park Street. Some may even recall the transition, in 1978, when the old booking office was demolished to leave a gaping hole above the tracks below. In this period the station entrance was effected from Station Street across a temporary footbridge to an equally temporary booking office on the island platform.

Then there was only one passenger service. Electric units, usually 304s, trundled from New Street to Walsall and back. Their diagram's might have involved exotic places such as Bletchley or Manchester, but for Walsall folk the train only went to Birmingham. If they wanted anywhere else it was simply change at Brummagen.

Walsall Station has seen several transitions. It was first served by the South Staffordshire Railway whose main line ran from Wichnor Junction, through Lichfield and Walsall to Dudley.

The future of the line looked promising from the start. The route cut through the heart of the Black Country when the coal and iron industry was flourishing. Moreover new coal mines had opened on Cannock Chase which were to provide a lucrative traffic on the railway in later years.

Two established railway companies were eager to gain an interest in the South Staffordshire Railway when it was proposed. Bitter battles were fought between the LNWR and Midland Railway over the matter. Finally a democratic compromise was found where the Board who managed the SSR comprised three parties. One was sympathetic to the LNWR, another favoured the Midland Railway whilst the third supported the wishes of the shareholders.

At first, only a short section of railway was completed. It ran from the former Grand Junction line at Bescot to a temporary station in Walsall, at Bridgeman Place, next to the race-course.

A passenger service was commenced between Birmingham and Walsall on the 1st November 1847. The first train of 9 carriages arrived from Birmingham at 9.25 in the morning. The motive power and presumably the carriages was supplied by the LNWR. The process of uncoupling, running round and re-coupling the engine and tender to the train took only five minutes. The train then returned to Birmingham in 23 minutes. It would seem that even today, such schedules, would be hard to maintain!

On April 9th 1849 the SSR was completed to Wichnor Junction. A passenger service was then instituted to Burton-on-Trent. A new two platform station was completed at the same time, whose main entrance faced, a road which linked Bridgeman Street with Park Street. It was not long before this road became known as Station Street.

Work continued on the line to Dudley. It had to be completed by the 1st November 1849. This was the date set by Parliament, if the SSR did not run a train by that date, the GWR would be empowered to complete the line themselves.

The deadline was met, and a special train did run to Dudley, although the stations along the route were far from complete. The official opening did not, in fact, take place until the 8th May 1850.

Meanwhile dissent amongst the board members had led to the unusual step of leasing the SSR to John Robinson Mc Clean, engineer for the line.

In a short time the prospect of an individual privately operating a British railway may happen again. But historically it is not a rare event, several people such as Thomas Brassey, Colonel Stephens and John Waddell are amongst those who have tried.

Neale in his book entitled Railway Reminiscences credits Mc Clean as being the first to lease a railway. But of course, he was probably not aware of John Hargreaves and his lease of the Bolton **&** Leigh and other related lines twenty years earlier.

Mc Clean commenced his lease on the 7th August 1850. It was to last for 21 years, but he surrendered it in January 1861. From the 1st of February, the new Lessees were the LNWR.

THE SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE RAILWAY COMPANY AND ITS TREATMENT OF PASSENGERS.

To the EDITOR, *of the* BIRMINGHAM JOURNAL.

Sir, - Will you allow me, for the benefit of the public, shortly to narrate how I fell into a trap the South Staffordshire Company seem to have set for their passengers. I am a clergy-man, and three or four weeks ago had occasion to go to Lichfield on a Sunday morning to supply the place of another who was detained unexpectedly from returning home. On arriving at the New Street Station.. I took my ticket, was shown into a handsome new carriage by the company's porter, and assured that I was all quite right for Lichfield. On we proceeded past the Bescot Junction to Walsall. At Walsall there was a little delay, during which I remember among other discordant sounds. hearing some of those unintelligible cries which no savage can at any time rival, and only railway porters produce. However, having been assured of my being all right for Lichfield, and not being aware of the trap, the unnatural sounds gave rise to no misgiving. Presently, however. puff-puff began to be heard in the rear, and after the usual jolts of a new start, the train was found to be moving off back to Birmingham. Now came serious misgivings, which turned out too true. The company's trap had caught its bird and instead of arriving at Lichfield I had the pleasure of being deposited at Wednesbury, glad of course to escape upon any terms,

If the company's trap should be equally successful in any future case, should the person caught in it be disposed to take warning by my fate, if, (unlike yourself, he is not precluded from legal remedy by a peaceful profession) he will put the case at once in a lawyer's hands, and enforce intensification. If like myself, he thinks an injury a lesser evil than the remedy. he will spare himself a useless application to the company.

I enclose my name and address, to vouch for the authenticity of the above narrative,

And remain, your obedient servant.

A PASSENGER WHO WAS CAUGHT IN THE TRAP.

THE FATAL ACCIDENT ON THE SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE RAILWAY.—The inquest was resumed at the New Inn, on Friday. It appeared from the testimony adduced, that the train which caused the accident was driven by incompetent persons, who were ignorant of the gradients, and, in fact, of the whole line; that Lawson ("Chuff,") who was in charge of the first engine, had control over the driver of the second one; that proper signals had been exhibited at Ryecroft and Homebridge Forge Crossings, but Lawson pursued his frantic course, and that his neglect of the flags was the main cause of the accident. The rules of the two companies (which are identical,) were put in evidence, and it was proved that a standing regulation was, that the drivers of trains should approach any station, with caution, even supporting the "all right signals" (white flags) had been exhibited. The following verdict was returned by the Jury:-. "Manslaughter against John Lawson," and the verdict contained. the subjoined addenda:— "That they thought great culpability attached to the London and North Western Company, for employing strangers and inexperienced men as engine drivers on the South Staffordshire Railway ; and that John Lawson has been guilty of great recklessness and want of caution in driving at a furious and unusual pace, and in disregarding the various signals properly shown between Pelsall and Walsall. The Jurors also thought the system of signalling on the South Staffordshire line might be made more efficient, and they recommended the erection of a semaphore near the Ryecroft crossing, and that the distance signal should be so elevated as to be visible at a greater distance." The proceedings did not terminate till half-past three o'clock on Saturday morning. The Coroner made out his warrant for the committal of John Lawson, who was immediately taken into custody by the police.

The South Staffordshire built two useful branches to the Cannock Chase Coalfield which were completed in 1858. The longest was the Cannock Branch which ran from Ryecroft Junction through Bloxwich and Great Wyrley to Cannock. The second left the SSR near Pelsall and ran towards Norton Canes. Each served new mining ventures. At Cannock an end-on junction was made with the Cannock Mineral Railway which was completed from Rugeley in 1859. Another projected branch ran from Wednesbury to Darlaston, but this was not built until after the LNWR had taken over the SSR.

It would seem that at Walsall there was now an LNWR stronghold. The Midland Railway had running powers over the SSR from Wichnor, but the LNWR still had the important branches into the coalfield.

John Mc Clean now operated mines at Cannock Chase, called appropriately the Cannock Chase Colliery Company. He proposed a new railway from his mines to Wolverhampton which was known as the Cannock Chase and Wolverhampton Railway. In 1864 this railway was granted an Act of Parliament. It was hoped that the Midland might use his line to reach Wolverhampton.

The Midland unfortunately came up with another scheme. In 1865 the Wolverhampton and Walsall Railway had been proposed to provide a direct route between these two towns. Midland directors viewed this new line as a better prospect and gave their support to the venture.

One of the reasons for building the Wolverhampton and Walsall Railway was to shorten the travelling time between the two places. At that time, the options available were to travel to Dudley Port and change trains or to catch the direct *service via* Wednesbury and Tipton Curve. For the adventurous no doubt other options were open but most chose these two routes.

Another reason for the promotion of the Wolverhampton and Walsall Railway was the new collieries and furnaces which had been established at Willenhall. The line was completed in 1872.

The Midland also embarked on a new railway from Castle Bromwich, through Sutton Coldfield to Walsall. This line was finished in 1879. Both railways met at Ryecroft creating a complicated junction where the Cannock, Castle Bromwich, Lichfield and Wolverhampton lines all met.

The increased traffic would have placed an immense burden on the two platform station at Walsall. It was decided to rebuild the station and the railway serving it in a massive reconstruction which took five years to complete (1879-1884).

The new station was given five platforms and two bays on the Station Street side. A new (circular) booking office was built fronting Park Street and *a* wooden covered footbridge served all platforms.

The track was widened and extra lines added from north of the station through to the Pleck. Two level crossings were abolished and bridges constructed in their place. The Midland built their own goods depot on the site of the race-course.

The original SSR loco shed was closed and *a* new LNWR shed built at Ryecroft. At the Pleck the Midland built their own locomotive establishment. Other goods sheds were added. There was even a separate goods shed for the GWR who had running powers from Heath Town to Walsall over the WWR.

The rebuilding of Walsall Station created one unforeseen problem. The work diverted the course of the mill stream which passes through the centre of Walsall. In times of heavy rain water would flow onto the railway and there have been times when the station has been flooded to a considerable depth. The signalbox under the Park Street must have been one of the few in Britain which kept a rowing boat in case of emergencies!

The withdrawal of passenger services between Dudley, Cannock and Birmingham via Sutton during the mid 1960s reduced Walsall's passenger to one. The old station fell into disrepair and the present three platformed station replaced it in July 1980.

Since then there has been an increase in the passenger service again and trains now run to Hednesford. All three platforms are used by a combination of modern Sprinter units and older electrics.

It is a short walk from Walsall Station to the top of Park Street. Here we cross to the car park and from there it is an extra few yards to the canal.

The Walsall Canal terminates here, near the top of Park Street. The old BCN wharf building still stands, although somewhat dilapidated. This part of the canal is presently closed to navigation while the limestone mines near its banks are filled.

The limestone was an important consideration for building the Walsall canal. Several mines sent stone by way of this waterway.

One limeworks was located beside the canal in Wolverhampton Street which was established by the Price family soon after the canal opened in 1799. According to Pearce in his 1813 directory, the limestone was of excellent quality, nearly ten yards thick. Thomas Price then leased the mines and would have used the stone at his furnaces and ironworks. By 1813 Price worked the Bilston Brook Furnaces which lay at the end of the BCN Bilston Branch. Limestone from his Walsall mines would have been transported along the Walsall and Bilston canals to his works.

For the next fifty or so years there were various limestone mining close to the canal which gradually worked closer to the centre of Walsall. At least two other mines existed worked by John Strongitharm and the Daw End Lime Co. Mining apparently ceased in 1862 and much of the land became devoted for other purposes.

There is a large lake, a small lake and wooded area in Walsall which is known today as the Arboretum. The lakes are actually flooded limestone quarries. The larger was worked by the Persehouse family by 1733. John Walhouse later succeeded Persehouse and he in turn let it to a Joseph Griffin.

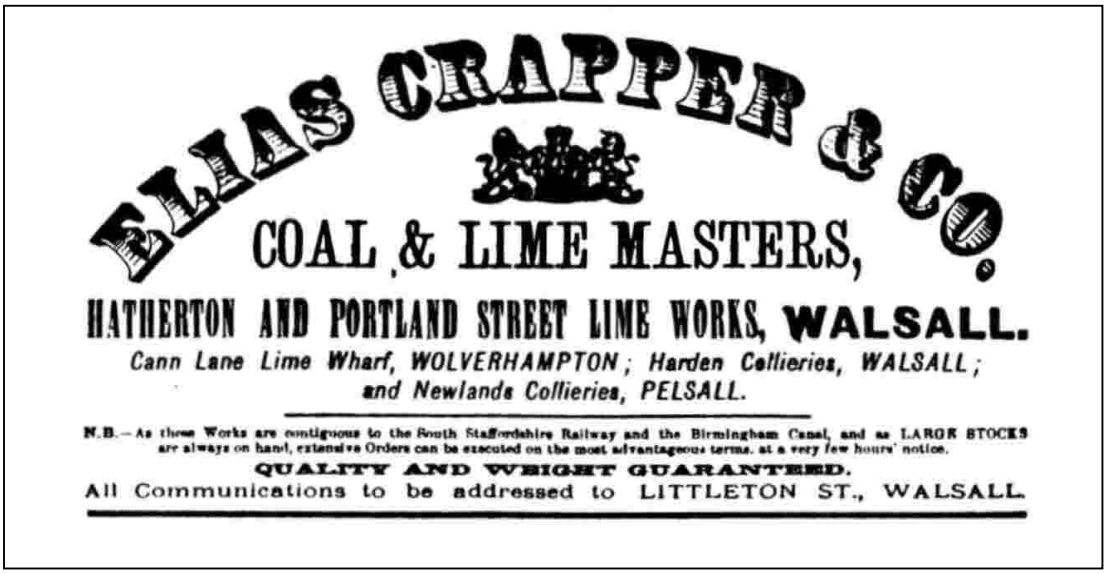
In 1812 there were two plans to connect these quarries to the canal. One involved a railroad, the other a canal. The canal would have joined the Walsall line and continued into the land of Colonel Wallhouse. The scheme which involved two brick bridges would have cost about £10,000. Eventually the railway option was built and this line was in place by 1823.

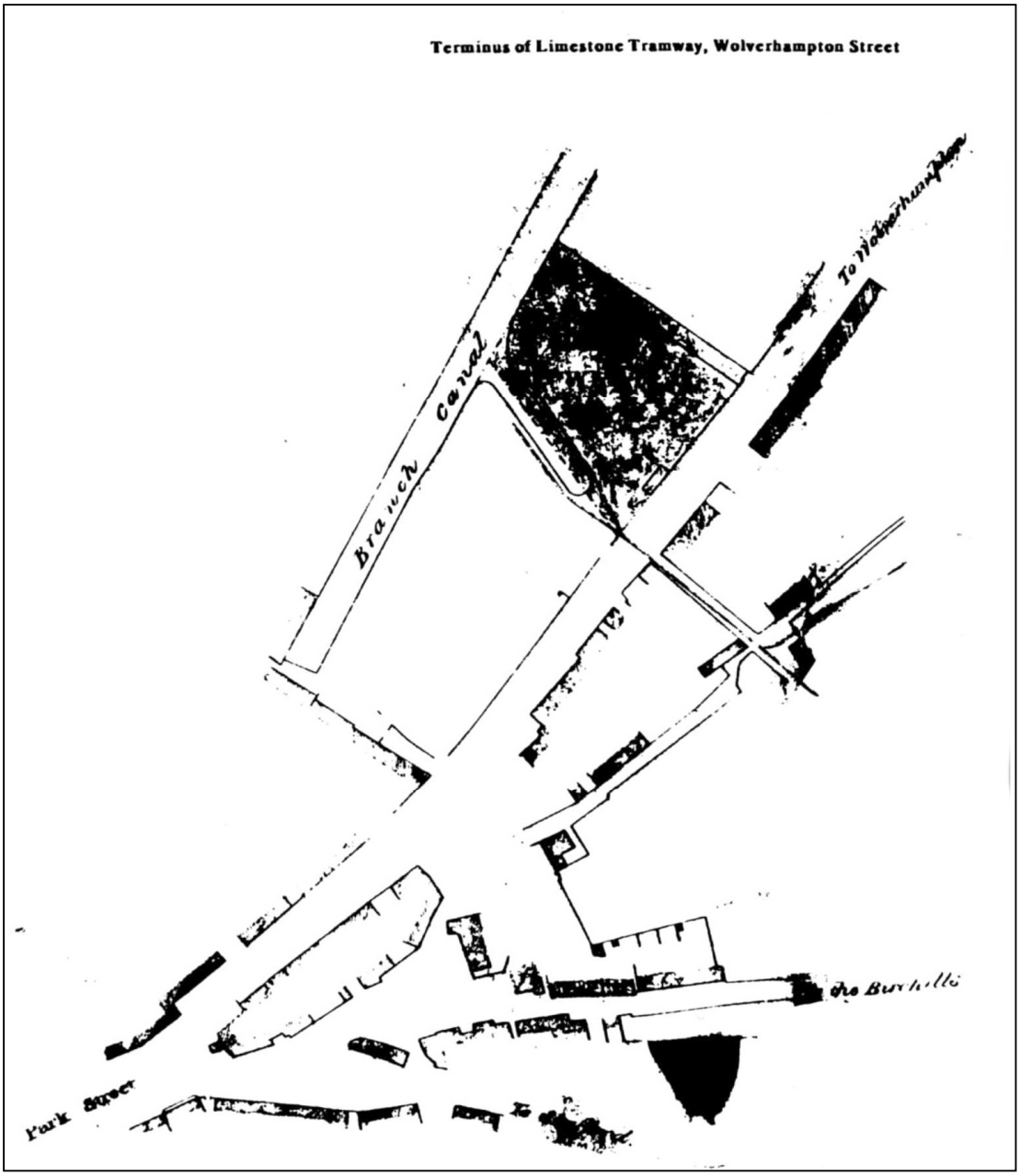
The tramway met the Walsall canal beside *a basin* near the end of the canal opposite the BCN wharf. It crossed Wolverhampton Street and Shaws Leasowe and turned north east towards the Butts.

Wallhouse bought was Shaws Leasowe in 1824 and granted mining rights to William Harrison. William built a tramway northwards to the Birchills Branch of the Wyrley and Essington Canal and also another, it seems, of shorter length, to the BCN.

The quarries at the Butts had closed by 1845, and the top end of the tramway was little used after this date. Other quarries were however opened up along its course. In 1843 Lord Hatherton leased a mine beside Hatherton Street to Emanuel Benton and Job Hollowood who sold the lease to Elias Crapper in 1854

Crapper operated the Hatherton Limeworks for a number of years and sent lime along the tramway to the Walsall Canal. Elias Crapper also worked collieries at Harden and Newlands. He was proprietor of the Can Lane lime wharves in Wolverhampton and owned several canal boats. Crapper regularly sent lime by canal to Birmingham and Wolverhampton. The tramway had been removed by the early 1880's.





The towpath follows the canal from the BCN wharf. The remnants of other past wharves and basins can be seen as we walk . There were several wharves on the Wolverhampton Street Side. Most had names, Old Wharf was the basin used by Wallhouse's tramroad, then there was Providence, Victoria, Albion, Dock and Corporation Wharf. Most stand on the site of the old limestone mines.

Corporation Wharf still contains some interesting buildings, but is scheduled for demolition. Next to the Corporation Wharf was the site of Walsall's first gasworks.

The walk will follow the towpath to the junction with the Walsall Locks branch, cross over the iron roving bridge and follow the path on the opposite bank to the first lock.

There had been many proposals to link the Walsall with the Birchills canal including one *as* early as 1806 by John Wilkinson the ironmaster. Wilkinson was about to open up limestone quarries at Hay Head, which lay at the end of the Daw End Branch. In April 1806 Wilkinson suggested a cut to the Birchills Colliery and Limeworks. In August 1806 Wilkinson offered to do the work at his own expense. It was then estimated that £2000 would be needed. Various surveys were conducted in 1808, but nothing was done.

During the late 1820's the BCN considered the possibility of taking over the whole of the Wyrley and Essington Canal. Several schemes were put forward concerning the merger including new canals which might join the two. Again nothing was done for a number of years.

The Wyrley and Essington finally merged with the BCN in February 1840 and plans for the link from Birchills to the Walsall Canal were put into effect. John Robinson Mc Clean was engineer for the project. Thomas Townshend was appointed contractor in July 1840.

Construction commenced at a rapid rate. At the end of August four fifths of the excavation was completed and the brickwork was at an advanced state. The flight of 8 locks opened 25th March 1841.

Walsall locks have been refurbished in recent years, the towpath repaired and a pleasant walk-way created. Remaining features of interest include the Albion Mill, which still produces flour. Albion and Union Mills were once common canal side features in a large cities. Much of the grain came in by canal boat, as did the coal for most used steam engines to grind the corn.

These mills were built out of public money. Many ordinary people held shares and had *a* say in their operation. The Albion Mill dates from 1848.

There were several foundries and ironworks located nearby. Half way along there was *a* brickworks. At the top there was the Birchills Limeworks

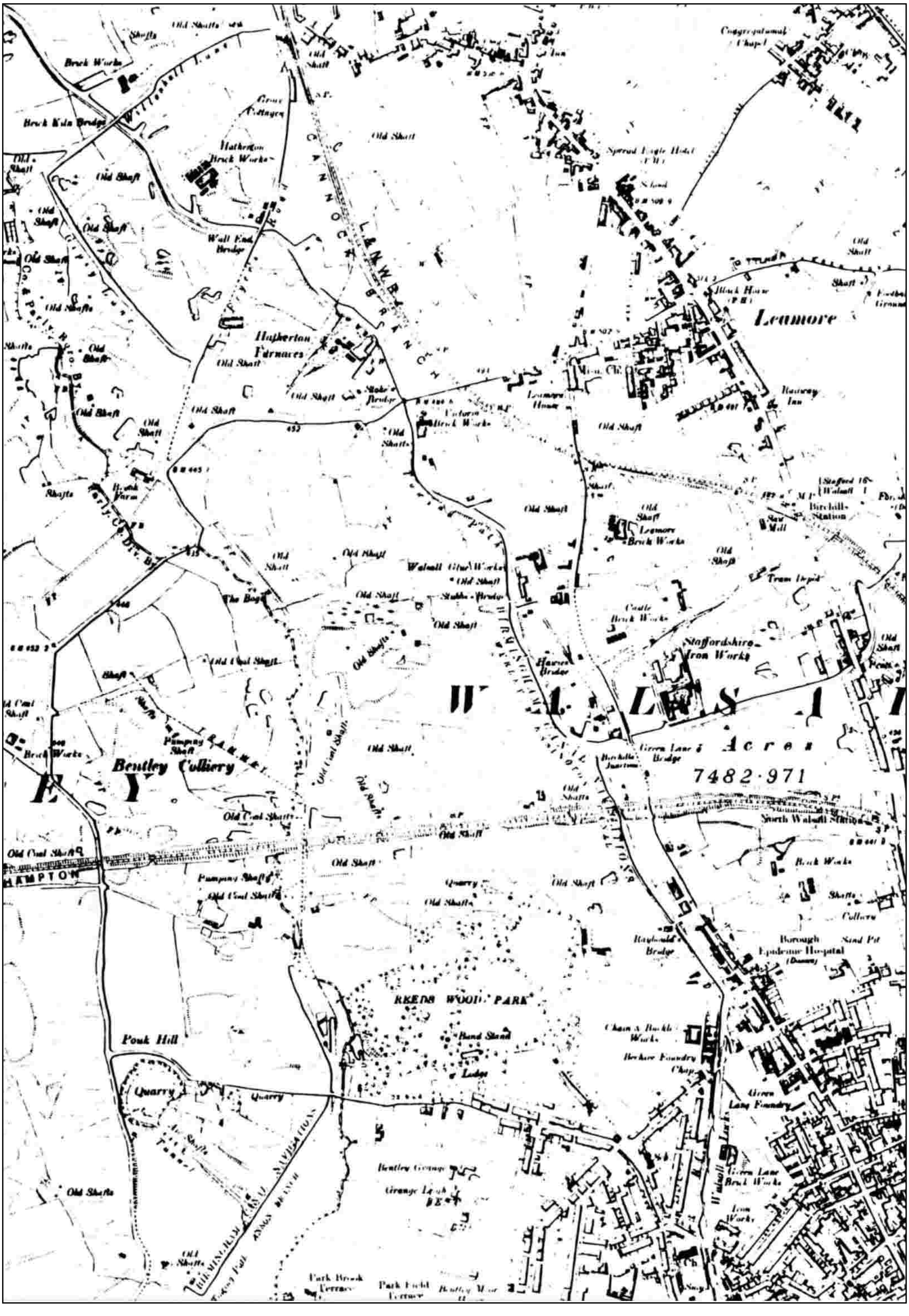
At Birchills we join the Wyrley and Essington Canal. About 1795 a branch was constructed to the Birchills Colliery. By 1806 the branch had fallen in to old colliery working and was closed of. It was reinstated sometime after 1818 and handled traffic from Harrison's limeworks at Shaws Leasowe. Limestone was conveyed along the tramway from his works to the end of the Birchills branch.

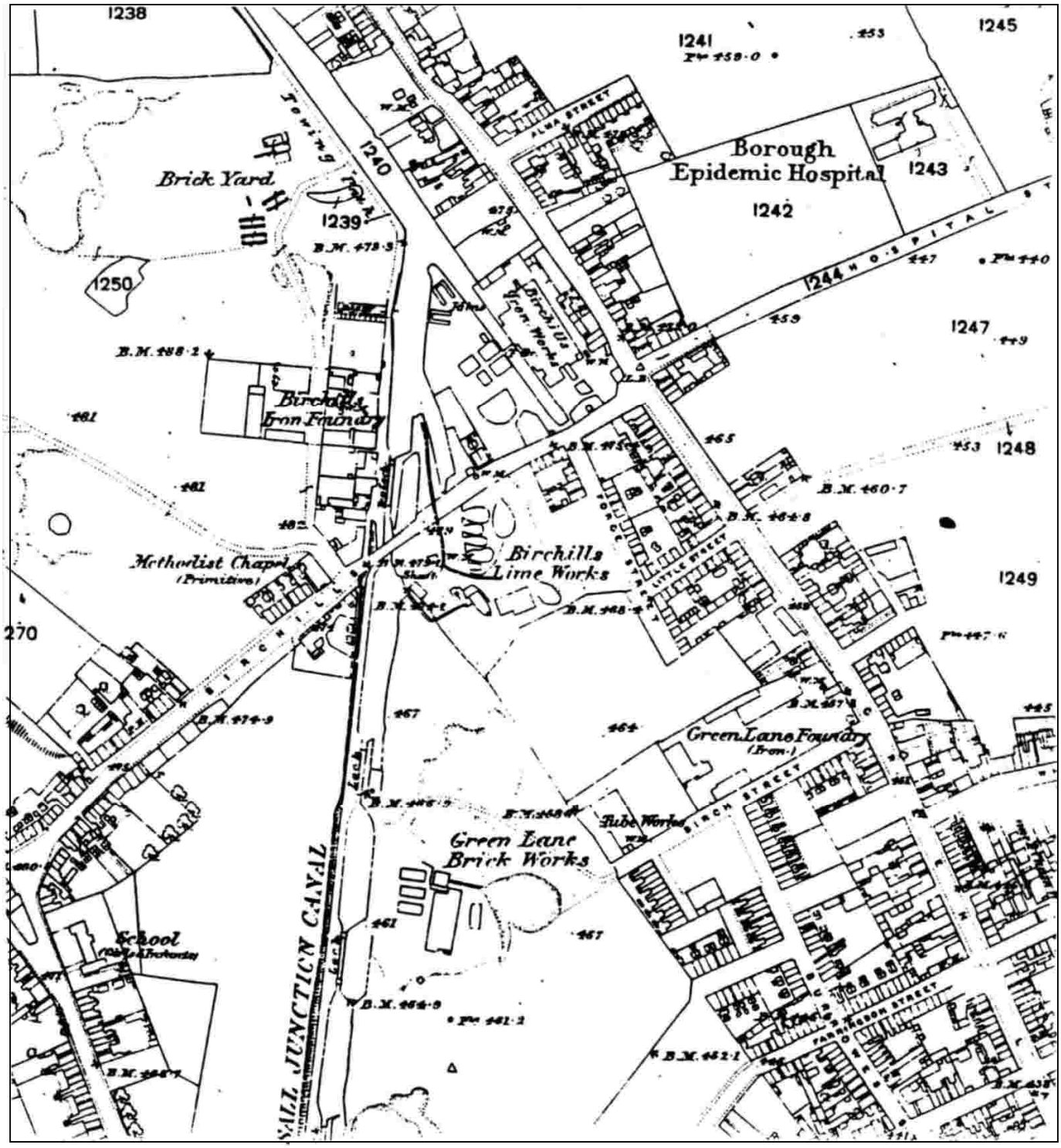
In 1841, when the Walsall Locks, were completed a junction was made with the Birchills branch a few yards from its terminus creating the basin which still exists today. Another basin was constructed closer to top of the locks during the 1840's . It was built to serve the Birchills Limeworks originally worked by James Smallman. These works operated for about fifty years and closed c1892. Much of the lime was carried by the canal. A short tramway linked the pithead with the basin

At the top lock there was a Toll House and a BCN Wharf. In 1899 the BCN erected an engine on the same side as the Toll House to re-circulate water from the 408ft level to the 473ft level. Two triple expansion three throw condensing engines, built by James Watt & Co provided the power. They were taken out of use in October 1923 and scrapped. The engine house had a longer life, however. It was pulled down c1941.

There were two engines on the site prior to 1899. They were erected here during 1864 by Thomas Perry & Sons of Bilston. Both were second hand. They pumped water up a shaft from a tunnel. This tunnel was constructed between 1863 and 1864 and passed under the locks at the 408 ft level to meet the Old Walsall Canal. A statement of the slack consumed by the company engines in 1884 shows that Walsall was a heavy user.

Name	Tons
Ocker Hill	9296
Walsall	6190
Perry Barr	2017
Rotten Park	115
Ashted	425
Smethwick	941
Titford	1058
Parkhead	679
Lappal	217
Cannock	142
Sneyd	458
Lodge Farm	435
	21973

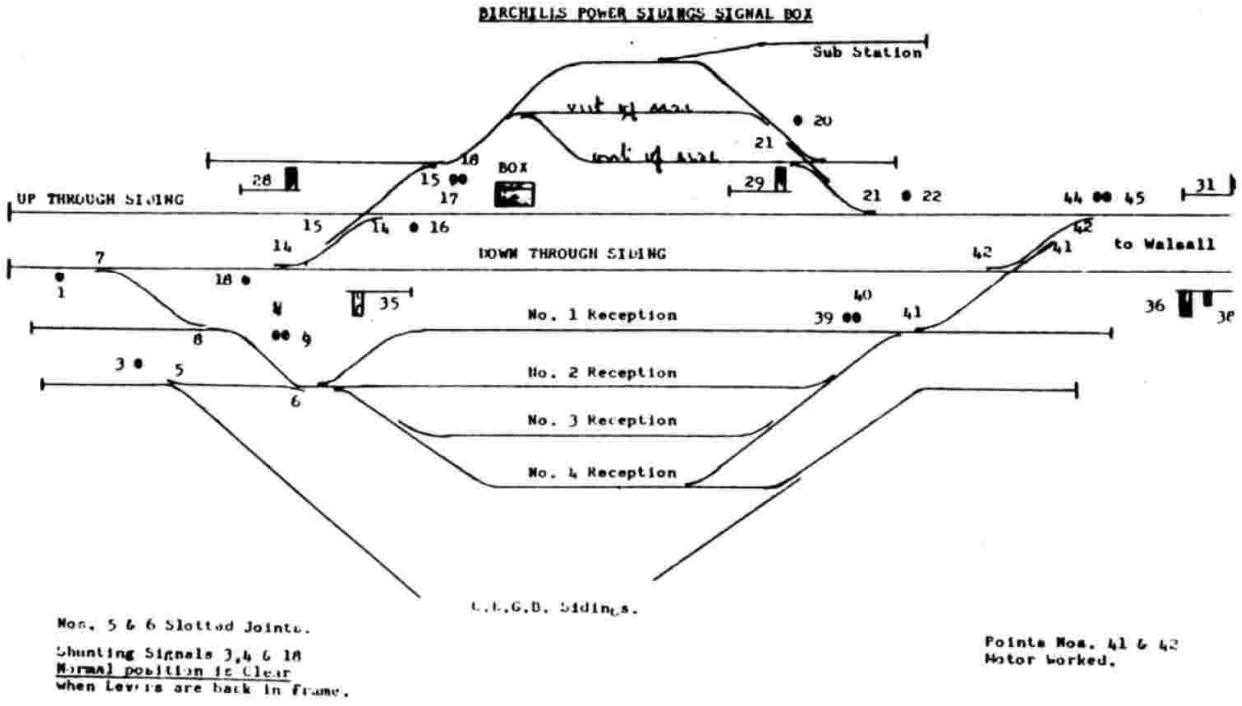

Brick Works
Brick Kiln Bridge
Hatherton Brick Works
Old Shaft
Wall End Bridge
Hatherton Furnaces
Congregational Chapel
Spread Eagle Hotel
School
Black Horse (P.H.)
Leamore
Leamore House
Victoria Brick Works
Railway Inn
Birchills Station
Saw Mill
Leamore Brick Works
Walsall Glue Works
Tram Depot
Castle Brick Works
Staffordshire Iron Works
Bentley Colliery
Pumping Shaft
Old Coal Shaft
Acres
7482·971
Green Lane Bridge
North Walsall Station
Brick Works
Colliery
Borough Epidemic Hospital
Sand Pit
REEDS WOOD PARK
Band Stand
Lodge
Pouk Hill
Quarry
Chain & Buckle Works
Green Lane Foundry
Green Lane Brick Works
Iron Works
Bentley Grange
Grange Lodge
Old Shafts
Park Brook Terrace
Park Field Terrace
HAMPTON



Birchills area c 1885.

There was also a boatman's mission which has been recently converted into the Birchills Canal Museum. Here various items of local canal interest are on show. Beyond the museum is a roving bridge which crossed a basin which served the Birchills Foundry.

British Rail signalling plan of Birchills Power Station Sidings



It is a straight walk from the top of the Walsall Locks to the junction with the main line of the Wyrley & Essington Canal. On this short section it is worth mentioning Raybould's Bridge which crosses the canal. It is a typical example of a Wyrley & Essington Company bridge. Further on the towpath rises over a concrete bridge which once spanned the basin into the Birchills Power Station.

The first power station on this site was built for Walsall Corporation and completed in October 1916. It was a coal fired and all coal was delivered by canal boat. In 1949 a second, (B), station was commissioned by the British Electricity Authority on adjacent land. This larger station had coal delivered by rail. Extensive sidings were built beside the Walsall to Wolverhampton Railway. The canal was still used to carry coal to the old A station. A larger basin was constructed to meet the extra demand.

A short distance beyond this basin, the canal crosses the Wolverhampton to Walsall Railway. Completed in 1872, this railway had mixed fortunes. When owned by the Midland Railway, it served various ironworks and collieries located between the two towns. Traffic dwindled after the first World War and when the LMS took over much of the remainder was diverted onto the former LNWR route. British Rail finally closed the section between Birchills and Wednesfield, but retained the portion at Birchills to serve the Power Station. In 1980 the generating station was closed and remaining section of the old line was finally taken up.

At the junction a roving bridge takes the towpath over the Birchills Canal towards Green Lane. M old basin still remains opposite the junction. This once served Green Lane Furnaces, later Birchills. The landscaped bank was once the site of a busy pair of blast furnaces erected about 1855, but not closed until about 1932. Various people worked these furnaces and mines on both sides of the canal. Thomas and Charles Highway had these works first, and later George and John Jones. They were finally owned by the Birchills Furnace Company Ltd.

Across Green Lane another set of furnaces had been established by George Jones (no relation to the above), the Bilston and Shropshire ironmaster. By 1848 there were two furnaces on the site which later grew in number to five. This was a much larger concern than Green lane with a foundry and ironworks established on adjacent land. The collieries were also quite extensive.

John Jones succeeded George in the family business but was bankrupt in 1864. Various attempts to sell of the property failed at first but later it was acquired by the Birchills Estate Company who disposed of it in lots. Three of the five furnaces were pulled down, but two continued to be worked by the Castle Iron Company for a time.

There was once another long basin which met the main line at the junction and at right angles to the Birchills Canal. A tramway was in place by 1806 which ran due west to the Old Birchills Furnaces. These furnaces had a long life and for a number of years were the property of Philip Williams. By 1860 they had been let to Frederick Perry who renamed them Roughwood.

It was a short lived change of title and they soon reverted to Birchills again. These furnaces remained idle for a number of years, and continued to be owned by the Williams family. They were finally pulled down during the early 1890's.

The walk now follows the route of the old Wyrley and Essington main line as it winds and turns through the Bloxwich mining district. This area was once rich in mines. Both coal and ironstone was mined locally. Much was utilised in the local furnaces but some was exported along the canal to other parts of the Black Country

A number of bridges cross our route and there were others now taken down. A little to the north of Green Lane Furnaces was Hawies Bridge (now demolished). This originally carried a tramway from Highways furnaces to mines near the towpath. It later was adapted to carry a standard gauge private railway from Birchills Furnaces to the Midland Railway.

About a hundred yards further is Stubbs Bridge which presumably is named after a local landowner John Stubbs. It carried the footpath from Leamore to Bentley. There was once a basin on the Walsall side of this bridge which served a colliery at Leamore.

On the other side of Stubbs Bridge was the Walsall Glue Works which occupied this site for a number of years. A few yards beyond the Glue works was another basin which served a colliery once worked by the Chavasse family. The Newfield Colliery which was located on the other side of Green Lane also had a tramway link to the canal at or near this basin.

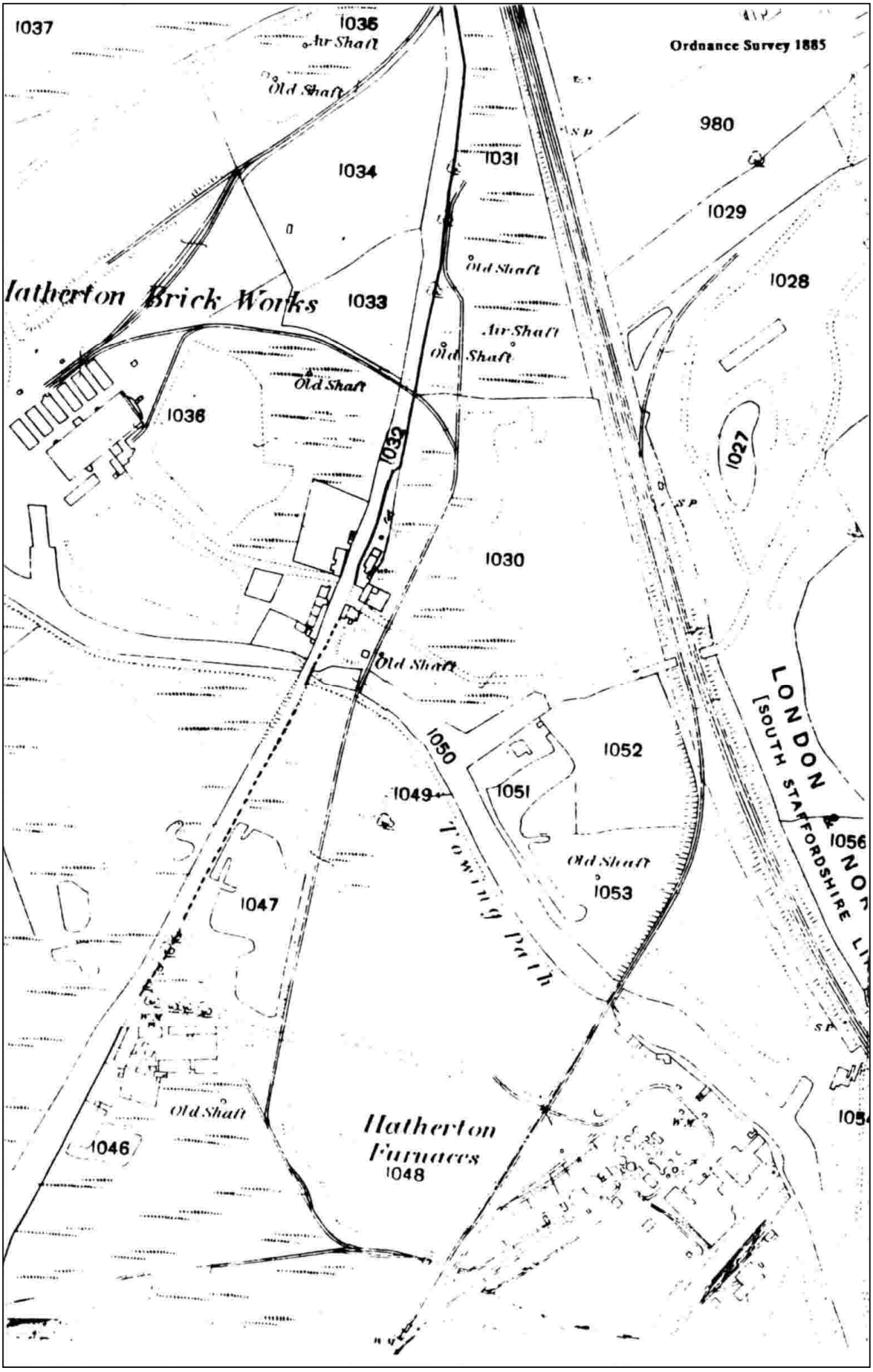
At Stokes Bridge the road from Leamore to Bentley crosses. Stokes and Foster owned several of the fields near this bridge. the Victoria Brickworks was located here. These works belonged to Benjamin Pollard Blockley who lived in Leamore House. Blockley also had other brickworks in the Wellington area. In addition to his brickworks activities, Benjamin was a railway contractor who owned a fleet of locomotives. Sometimes he would hire them out to collieries or furnaces for use on their private railways.

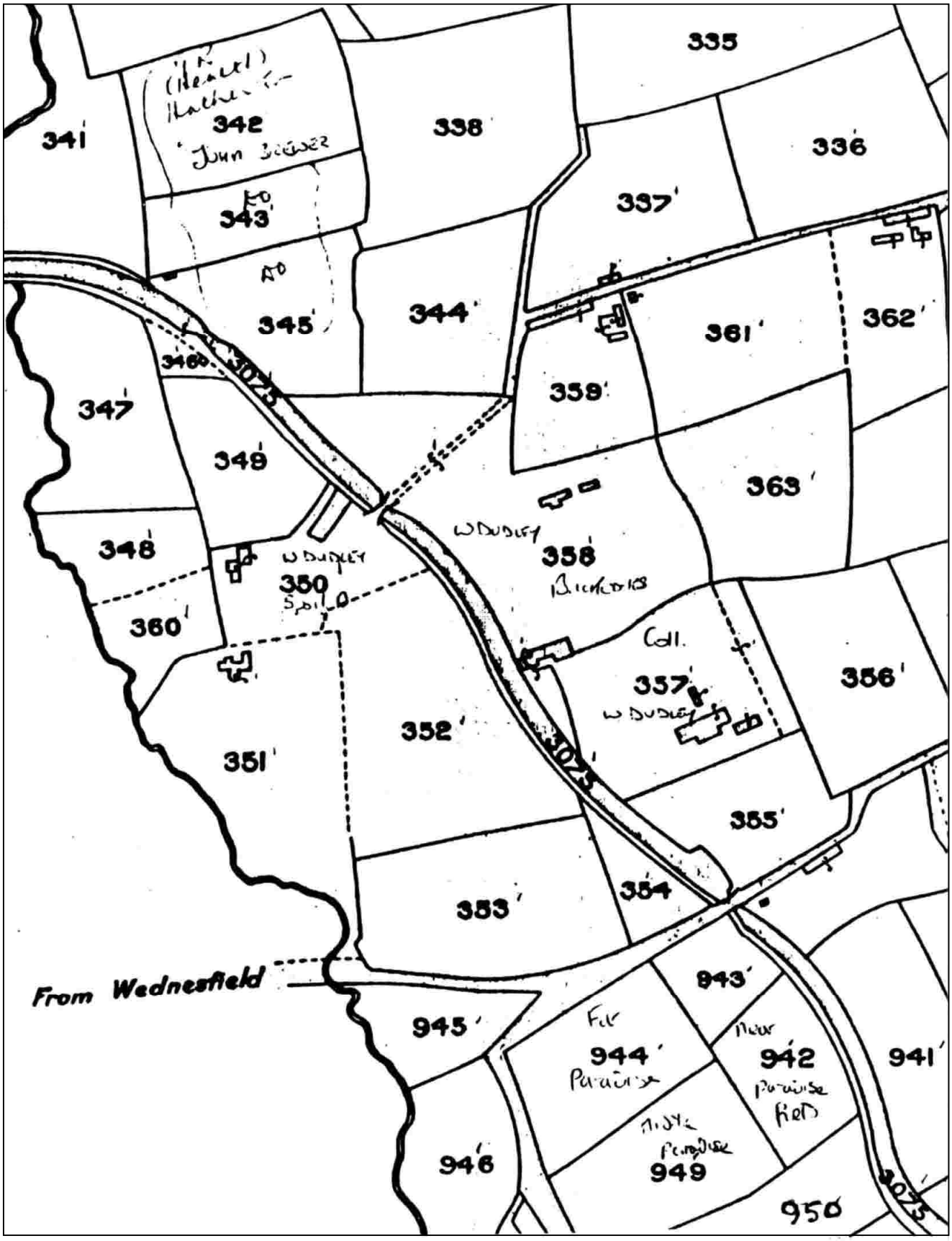
North of Stokes Bridge, there were basins on both sides of the canal. Those on the far side served mines worked by the Fryer family, James Smallman and Richard Thomas.

Richard Fryer and later W.F Fryer were proprietors of the Hatherton Collieries and Furnaces. Much of the land belonged to Lord Hatherton who leased a large area to the Fryers,

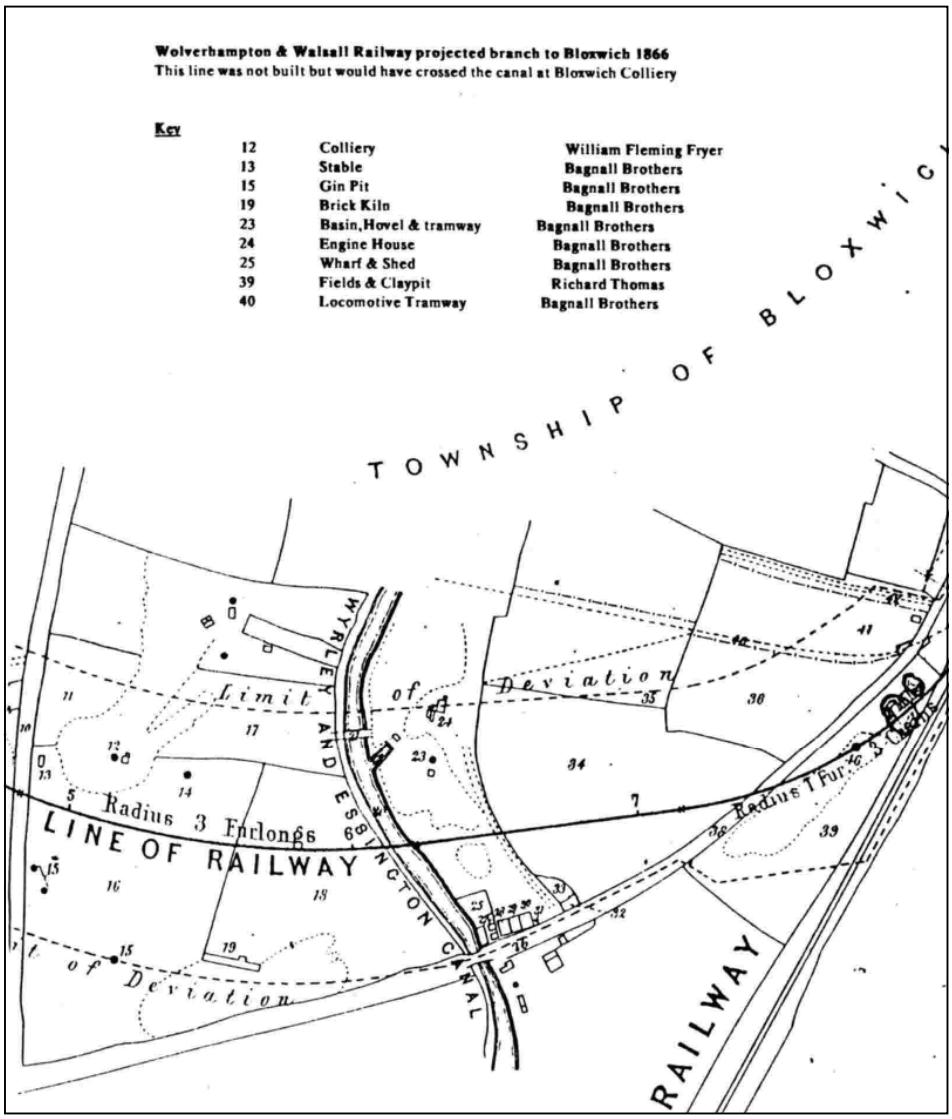
The Fryer family were bankers but owned other mines at Wednesfield. Hatherton Furnaces were erected in the late 1840's to exploit the local deposits of coal and ironstone. Hatherton Colliery was established about 1840 and was first served by a BCN tramway built during that year. It was a single track line which ran south to meet the Ansons Branch.

When Fryer built their furnaces beside the canal other tramways were put down from the colliery to the furnace yard. Hatherton Furnaces were leased to several other ironmasters during the 1850's and early 1860's. In 1869 George and Richard Thomas acquired the furnaces and mines. There were then several pits in work on different parts of the estate. Coal and ironstone was mined near the works, to the north beyond Wall End Bridge or to the west near Bentley. Horse tramways were first used to convey the minerals but in 1816 a steam locomotive was tried on the narrow gauge track.


Ordnance Survey 1885
1037
1035
Air Shaft
Old Shaft
1034
1031
980
1029
1028
Hatherton Brick Works
1033
Air Shaft
Old Shaft
Old Shaft
1036
1032
1027
1030
Old Shaft
1050
1052
1049
1051
LONDON
[SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE
1056
Old Shaft
1053
1047
Towing Path
Old Shaft
Hatherton
Furnaces
1048
1046



Tithe Map 1843. At this time the Hatherton Furnaces had not been constructed. Fields 942,943,944,949 and 950 were part of this site.



Thomas's railway was 2ft l0in gauge , an unusual gauge for an industrial railway. Their choice of locomotive was also unusual. Tenders were requested from various manufacturers and the firm of De Winton, Union Foundry Caernarvon was the most competitive. This firm produced a number of steam engines during this period. Many were made for the local slate industries whose railways were often narrow gauge. Few were sold outside Wales, however. De Winton's locomotives had a distinctive design, the most notable feature was the vertical boiler.

A standard gauge railway from the LNWR at Bloxwich to the Hatherton Furnaces had been proposed by William Fryer in 1860, but nothing was done. When the Thomas brothers took charge, again a connection was proposed and permission was sought from the BCN in 1871 to build it.

At that time all traffic to the furnaces was by canal and naturally the BCN were reluctant to loose revenue. However permission was finally granted and the railway connection made in 1876. G & R Thomas purchased a variety of locomotives to handle their traffic. Most were second hand, but they gave good service until the furnaces closed in 1954.

As local mines became exhausted, more and more minerals were transported into Hatherton Furnaces from the LNWR. The canal traffic did not suffer, however. Coal and slack were carried by canal from the Fishley Colliery at Bloxwich, or Short Heath Colliery near Essington. Pig Iron was also carried by canal boat to different foundries in the Black Country.

Thomas's established a brickworks beyond Wall End Bridge where a considerable number of bricks were manufactured. About half of what they produced went out by rail the rest was sent by canal. Sometimes the BCN was itself a customer. Sneyd maintenance yard used Hatherton Bricks from time to time.

Today the Hatherton Furnace site is demolished, although the abutments for the railway bridge and the embankment survive. Beyond Wall End Bridge, Hatherton Brickworks has also gone, but the Spelter Works which once recycled furnace slag remains.

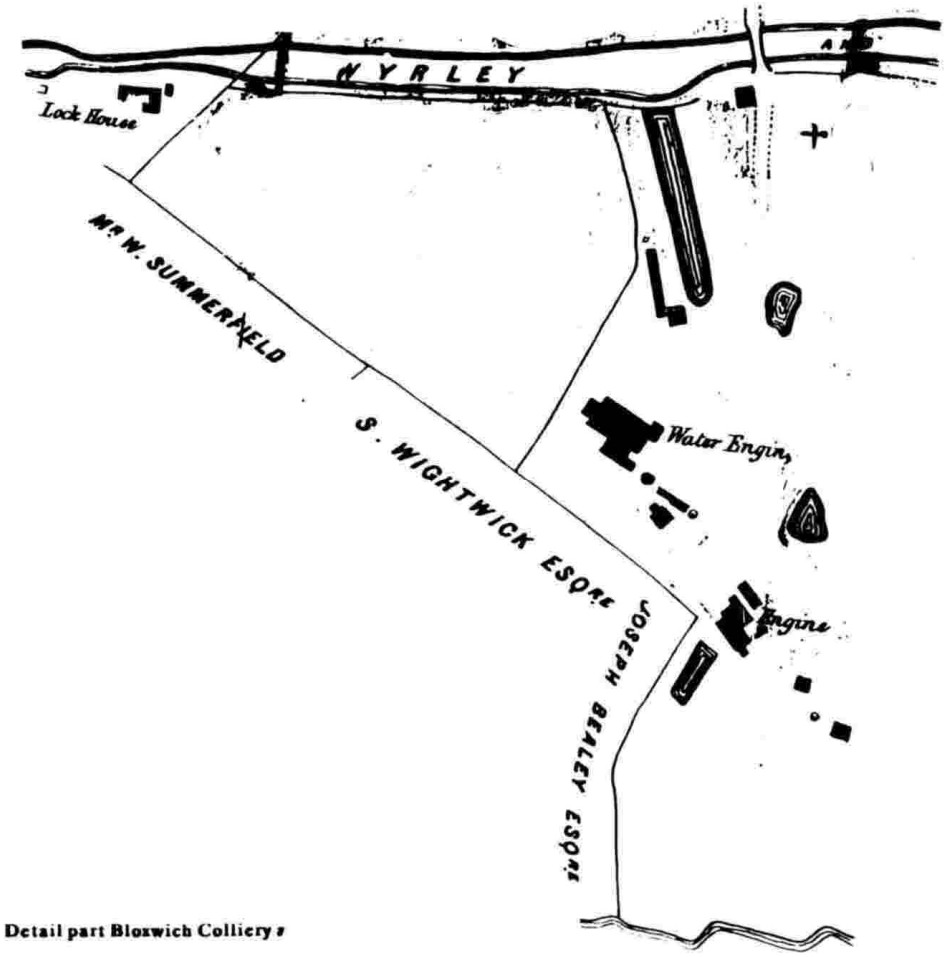
At Brickkiln Bridge there were several basins which once served colliery interests. The brickworks were first worked by William Dudley, who also had coal pits on both side of the canal at this point. The whole concern was known as the Bloxwich Colliery. Dudley worked them during the 1840's until 1852 when they were sold. These mines were later taken by three brothers Charles, John Nock and Thomas Bagnall.

The Bagnall brothers were the sons of Thomas Bagnall, a managing partner in John Bagnall and Sons, who had extensive ironworks and collieries throughout the Black Country. The three brothers operated the Bloxwich Colliery and the neighbouring Ward Colliery until 1871 when the property was then taken by the Station Colliery Company. Charles and Thomas had other ironworks at Grosmont in North Yorkshire which they operated until 1891.

The Ward Colliery was previously worked by William Ward who had blast furnaces at Priestfield near Wolverhampton and New Priestfield at Willenhall. A tramway took ironstone and coal to a basin near the Sneyd Stop.

At the Sneyd the canal swings southwards again towards Wolverhampton. Much of the land enclosed by this loop was later became known as the Wood Farm Colliery. Between 1902 and 1911 what coal remained was worked by the Wood Farm Colliery Company Ltd. Mining conditions were difficult and the pits were often flooded. The cost of pumping eventually crippled firm and they went into liquidation. The Bloxwich Colliery Co Ltd tried to work the mines for another three years. But in 1915 all pits had shut down.

A constriction in the canal marks the site of Sneyd Stop. All other canal-side buildings, engines houses and the old brickworks have gone.



Detail part Bloxwich Colliery

The BCN Maintenance Yard remains although now closed. The buildings line the opposite bank placed neatly between Sneyd Locks and another short branch which served the Sneyd Lane Collieries.

At the western end, there is a roving bridge which we will cross. This point, in fact marks the junction of two canals, although it is not evident now. The reason behind the name of the canal was that it was intended to go to Essington and Wyrley. At Essington there were coal mines owned by the Vernon family and one of the chief purposes of building the canal in this direction was to reach those mines.

Essington was considerably higher than the 472ft level at Wolverhampton. A flight of 5 locks was constructed at the Sneyd to reach a 503ft level. A further set of locks on the Essington Branch took the canal up to its highest level by the colliery. Unfortunately difficulties with supplies of water led to the Essington Branch being disused before 1840.

Several collieries sent coal down this canal, but this traffic had practically ceased after 1926. The walk continues alongside the bottom lock and the disused canal as far as Sneyd Lane.
On the other side the old canal had been filled in and is now a road to the Sneyd Public House. The old Sneyd Reservoir which once supplied water for the canal is situated on the left.

The walk now follows Sneyd Lane back to Bloxwich. We pass the Mossley Estate which was served by the last Trolleybus routes (No 31). We turn right into Sneyd Hall Road and then left into Croxdene Avenue for Bloxwich Station where the morning walk ends.

The Afternoon Trail

The walk starts from the Car Park of Landywood Station. Bloxwich, Bloxwich North and Landywood were new stations completed when the passenger service was restored to Hednesford in 1989. Landywood and Bloxwich opened on the 10th April 1989, the day the first train ran. Bloxwich North opened a few months later. Landywood serves Great Wyrley and Cheslyn Hay once an old mining community.

We leave the car park, turn right and cross over the railway. This first part of the walk follows the existing road, Landywood Lane, to Cheslyn Hay. There is not much to see now, but the route will cross the course of old colliery railways which served the Great Wyrley Colliery Company and the end of the Staffordshire and Worcester Canal private tramway to Walkmill Bridge.

Shortly after the railway bridge there is a side road which leads down to some old buildings. This was once the colliery buildings which belonged to the Great Wyrley Colliery.

The history of this colliery is rather complicated. There had been various shafts sunk in this area, some as early as 1817. They were connected by a tramroad to William Gilpin's Churchbridge Ironworks. Successive generations of the Gilpin family were concerned with the management of the business, which was established about 1800.

Churchbridge manufactured edge tools and was noted for manufacturing quality of goods. These works were carried on for most of their existence under the title of William Gilpin Senior, the firms founder. Some of these mines, however, were later operated under the name of Bernard Gilpin.

It was Bernard who was responsible in 1864 for the building of a second line of railway in the direction of the newly completed Wyrley Bank Canal. This railway met the other near the No.3 pit, Great Wyrley Colliery.

Bernard Gilpin was instrumental in establishing the first of two company's to bear the name Great Wyrley Colliery Co Ltd. He also introduce locomotive haulage on the tramway about 1875. Two engines were purchased to work on the 2ft narrow gauge railway, one was believed to be of De Winton manufacture.

Gilpins railway to the Wyrley Bank Canal crossed Landywood Lane near the stream and ran through the lands of Lord Hatherton at Fishers Farm. A long canal basin was constructed (Gilpins Basin) so that pit tubs could be unloaded into the canal boats.

A new company was established in 1875 to take over the Great Wyrley Colliery and the five pits then in work. This, too, became known as the Great Wyrley Colliery Company Ltd.

The businessmen behind this concern purchased the existing plant from Bernard Gilpin and set about deepening the No.3 pit. This mine then became the focus of their operation. Rich seams of coal were discovered which were to keep the pit in work for many years.

In addition to the narrow gauge railway, standard gauge sidings were constructed in 1880 which connected with the LNWR.

Another tramroad crossed Landywood Lane a few yards away to terminate at a pit near the road. This railway had been built in 1842 by the Bilston contractor Matthew Frost for the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company. Known as the Cheslyn Hay Tramroad, it served other mines such as the Old Falls Colliery operated by Edward Sayer.

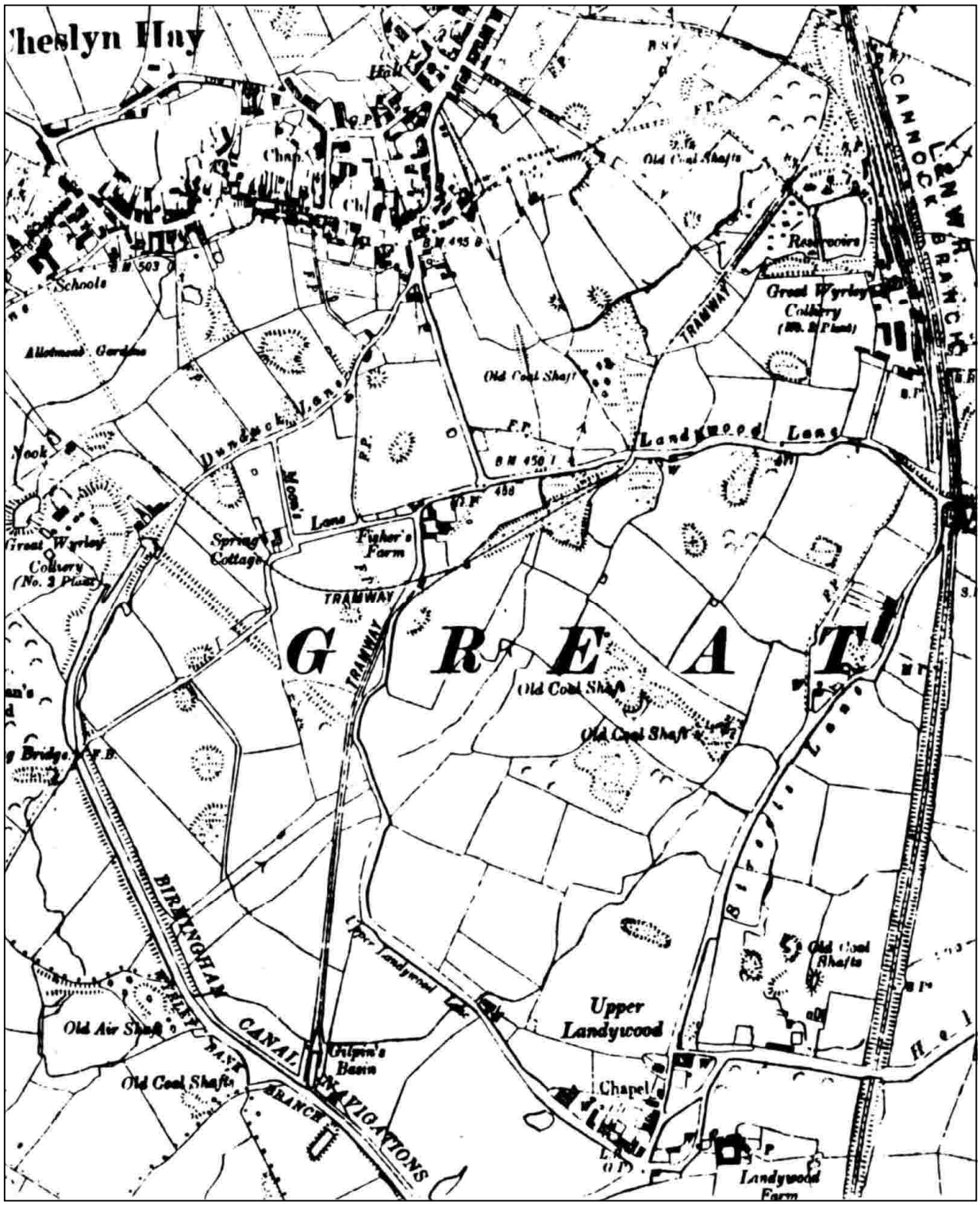
There were, in fact, two groups of coal mines located to the south of Landywood Lane. One group was known as the Chetwynd Pits and belonged to the Great Wyrley Colliery Company. The other group was operated by the Wyrley Cannock Colliery Company Ltd.

The Wyrley Cannock mines lay along the route of the Wyrley Bank Canal and despatched all their traffic by that waterway. Seven pits were worked by this firm, although not all at the same time. No 1 was located near the terminus of the Canal. The mines had been established by 1868, but in 1879 a new joint stock company with the same name was formed to take over their operation.

In 1880, a new colliery, No.8, was sunk at Lower Landywood. A narrow gauge rope worked tramway connected this mine with the No 1 pit at Wyrley Bank. It actually crossed under Gilpin's railway. The section of the Gilpin's tramroad from the Wyrley Bank Canal to near Fishers Farm belonged to the BCN. Permission to build the new tramway had, therefore, to be granted by the Paradise Street Office in Birmingham.

Although the Wyrley Cannock Colliery Company was primarily served by canal, they did also own a few railway waggons. In May 1881 the Birmingham Railway Carriage s Waggon Co purchased four railway waggons from the Staffordshire Joint Stock Bank which had belonged to the late Wyrley Cannock Company. Presumably coal was carted by road to Great Wyrley.

To the West of the Wyrley Cannock mines was a fault which threw the coal measures down about a hundred yards. Wyrley Cannock worked what they could up to the fault. By 1890 most of their available coal had been exhausted and the mines closed.



About 1915 Wyrley Cannock No 1 was reopened by the Great Wyrley Colliery Co Ltd as the Nook Colliery. It closed again in 1924.

Our walk follows Landywood Lane into the centre of Cheslyn Hay. The old canal tramway ran along a parallel course about 50 yards. The name Cheslyn Hay refers to the district as well as the village. In earlier times Cheslyn Hay village was known as Wyrley Bank. Many of the inhabitants were miners and to some it was considered a rough area because of this.

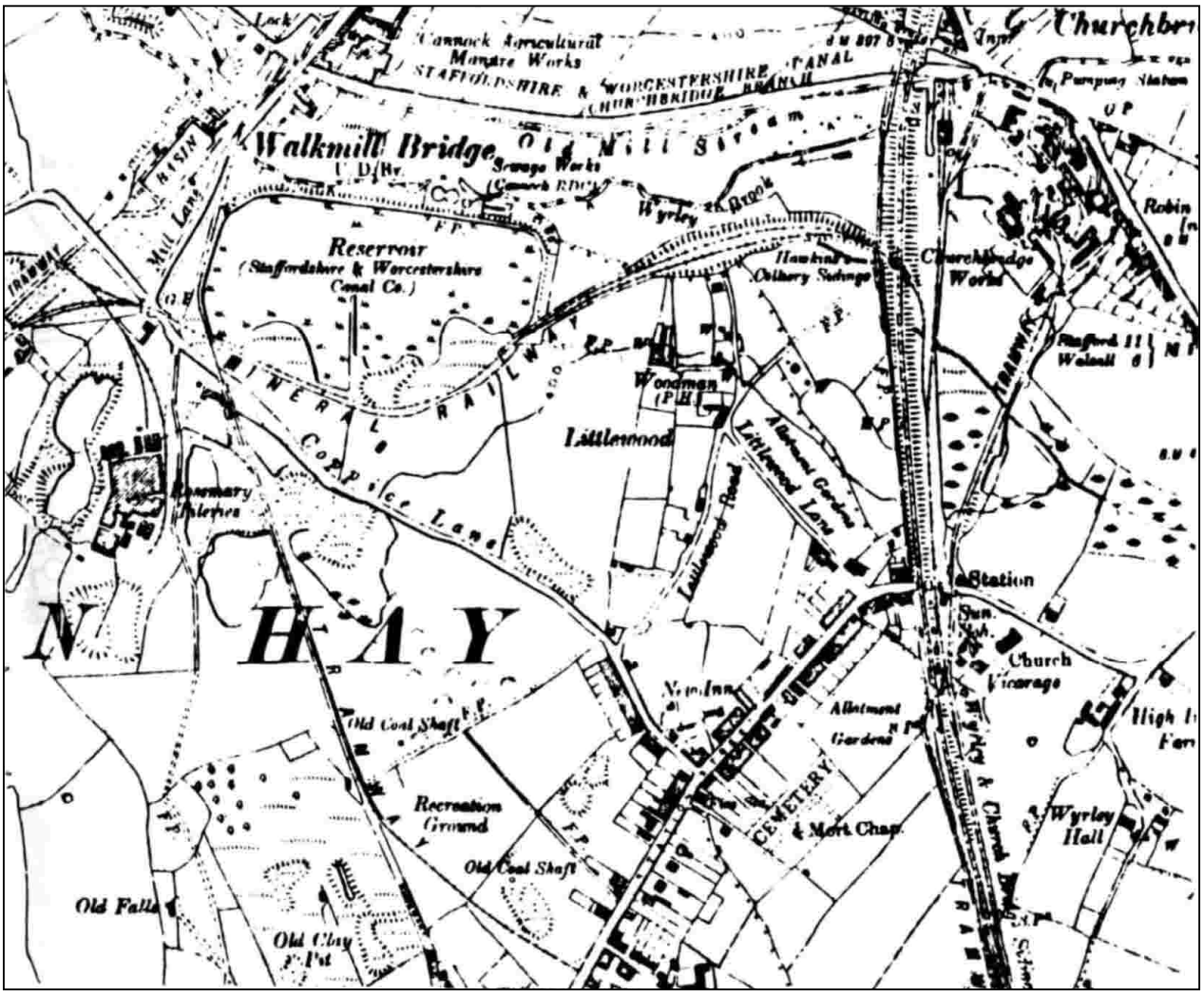
The Canal tramway passed through the centre of the village at the War Memorial and then passed through a cutting across and under Mount Pleasant. Rosemary Road marks the route of the tramway from the Memorial to the canal.

This top part of the canal tramroad had fallen into disuse by the early 1870's. But the bottom part was taken by the Great Wyrley Colliery Co Ltd during 1880. They laid a new line of 2ft gauge track from their No.3 mine and used the track-bed to Walkmill Bridge. There were now three separate tramways which served the Great Wyrley Colliery. One ran to the Churchbridge Edge Tool Factory, the second to the Wyrley Bank Canal, the third now connected with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. The company purchased new and more powerful locomotives to handle the traffic.

Great Wyrley Colliery closed in 1926. It was acquired by a new concern, the Nook and Wyrley Colliery Co Ltd who operated until the National Coal Board was established. During this period coal was sent out by rail only and the narrow gauge system was abandoned. The mine closed, for the last time, in June 1949.

Rosemary Road leads into a track which was the course of both the Cheslyn Hay Traaroad and the Great Wyrley Colliery line. This track terminates beside the Rosemary Tileries.

The Rosemary Tile Works were established during the nineteenth century and for many years were worked by George Warburton Lewis.



Beyond these tileries is mostly open space. But this was the site of the Old Coppice, later Hawkins Colliery. Old Coppice had been established by Edward Sayers and was in work by 1854. Coal was probably carried along the Cheslyn Hay tramroad to the Hatherton Branch of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal.

After Edward Sayers death, Old Coppice was taken by Joseph Hawkins, a mining engineer. Hawkins was at the time working a colliery at Lanehead Bridge near Walsall. Joseph improved Old Coppice between 1876 and 1878 where he laid down new plant. The mine was worked, at first,under the title of Cannock Old Coppice Colliery Company, but later changed to Joseph Hawkins & Sons.

A tramway then existed which conveyed Old Coppice coal to a basin beside the Hatherton Canal. In 1883 a new and larger basin was built for Hawkins exclusive use. A lead was made out of the original basin and into the new basin. A short aqueduct was made to take the lead over the mill stream.

When this basin was completed Hawkins tramroad was diverted to serve it. Plans to build a railway connection with the LNWR at Churchbridge took several years to achieve. The ground had to be raised between Old Coppice and the LNWR before this could be done. Colliery spoil and waste were deposited along the intended route.

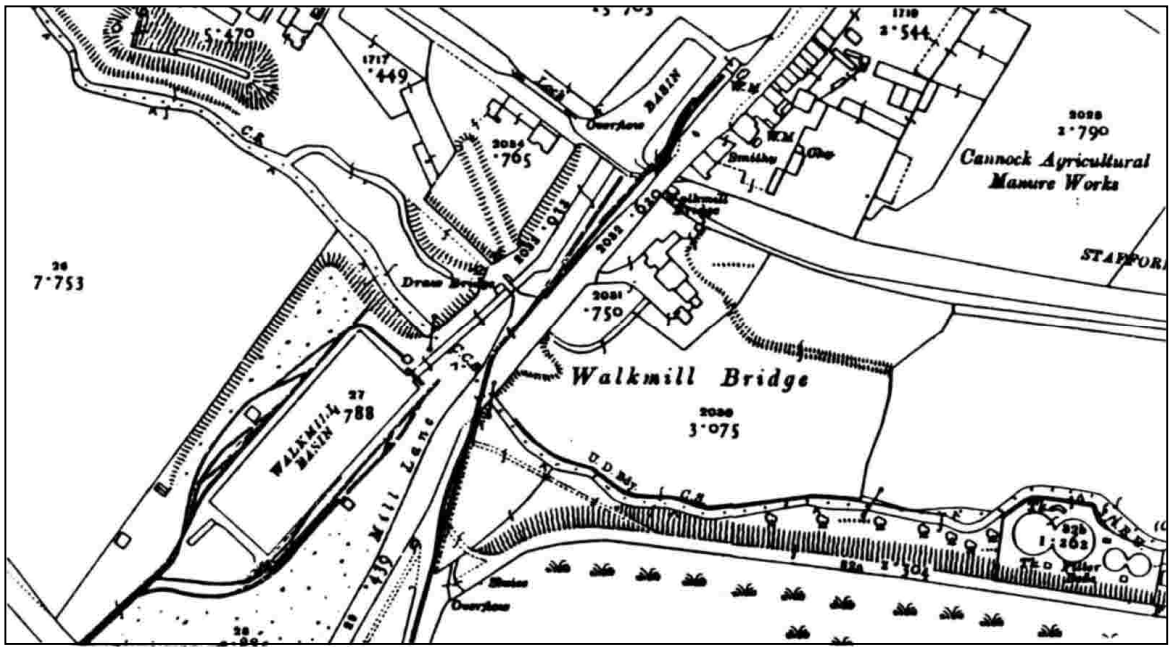
In 1900 a standard gauge railway was laid down from Churchbridge Basin to Old Coppice Colliery. It ran to the south of the reservoir crossed Coppice Lane and terminated beyond the colliery screens. Also, that year, they purchased a locomotive to handle the traffic. It was a six coupled saddle tank named HAWKINS, built by the firm of Thomas Peckett of Bristol. She was to be the first of three the firm were to own.

In addition to their own goods, Hawkins dealt with the railway traffic to and from the Rosemary Tileries. Standard gauge sidings connected their works with Hawkins private railway.

The tile works also had a separate narrow gauge system to bring clay from the quarry. Between 1933 and 1976 a number of internal combustion locomotives worked on this internal railway.

Up to 1911 the Hawkins family had retained control of the Old Coppice Colliery. That year the business became a public concern under the title of T.A. Hawkins A Sons Ltd

Improvements continued to be made to the plant, including a brickworks which was established on the western side of the screens. Canal traffic, however dwindled and the narrow gauge link was finally removed.



During the late 1930's the standard gauge line was re-routed to the north of the reservoir and a standard gauge siding built alongside the canal basin. The Coppice Lane Level Crossing ceased to be used. In 1947 the colliery passed to the National Coal Board who worked it until 1960.

Today the only reminder of the mine is the modern underground pit waggon placed on the traffic island in Coppice Lane.

Our walk follows Coppice Lane to this round-about and then across to the site of Hawkins canal basin. This can still be discerned, even though it has been filled in with colliery waste. The aqueduct over the mill stream also remains. But with regards to the canal, other basins and wharves nothing remains.

We retrace our steps and follow the course of Hawkins original colliery railway where we can. The old reservoir is passed on the right. The Lodge Farm** Reservoir was built in 1841 to serve the Hatherton Branch completed that same year. The contractor for both schemes was Matthew Frost.

It is a walk of a few hundred yards and part road and part footpath. The old railway course diverges just before the path comes to a collection of old and interesting houses and is lost in the undergrowth. It is impossible pursue this any further and so we have to find another route. Our way is to follow the path past these houses into Woodman Lane and then cross over into Littlewood Lane. We then walk along a gully onto a footpath beside the railway embankment. This was once a private LNWR footpath.

We pass beside the abutments of the bridge which carried Hawkins Railway over the footpath. LNWR, LMS and BR locomotives would work trains over this bridge to exchange sidings which lay on the opposite side of the stream.

It is a short walk along the footpath when a pair **of** bridges are encountered. The first spans the mill stream the second the Hatherton Canal, which is still retains some of its water at this point. The towing path would have passed between the stream and the canal. There is little evidence of this now.

At the end of the LNWR footpath we turn right onto the A5 or Watling Street, once a Roman road, and pass under the railway. The South Staffordshire branch to Cannock was constructed by the contractor Francis Piggot and opened in 1858.

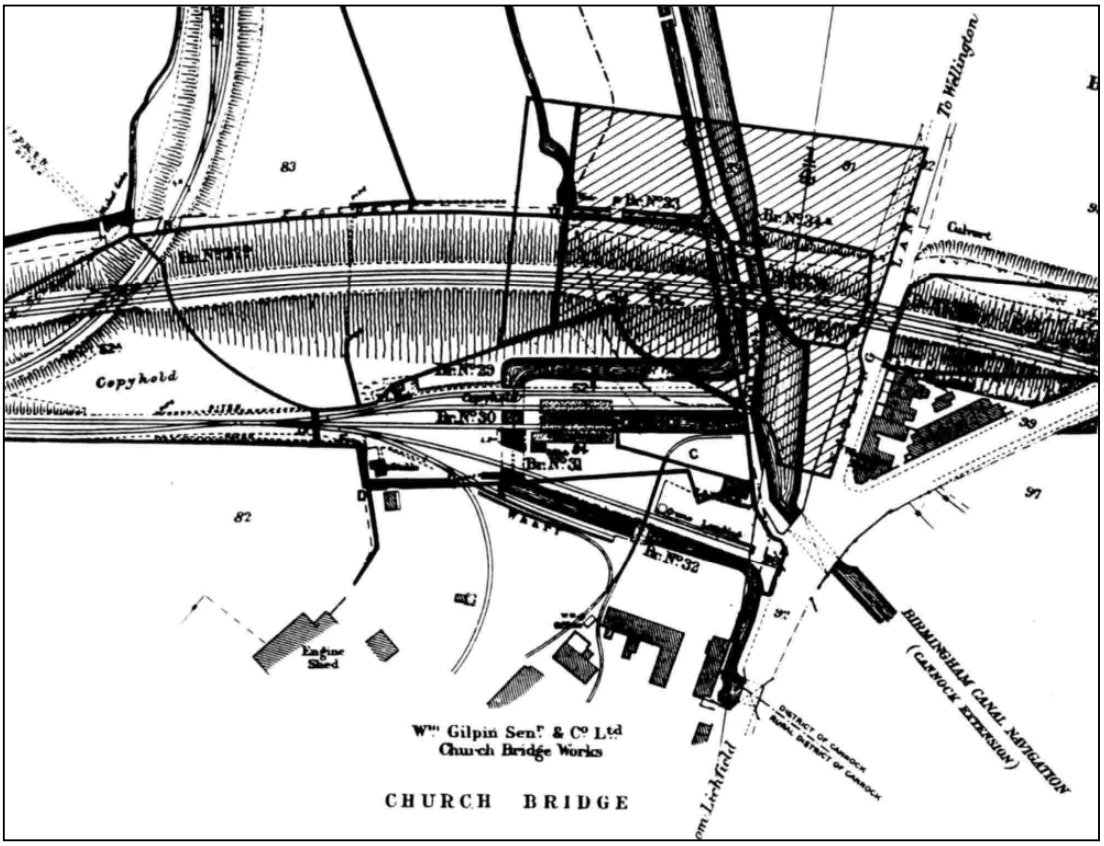
What remains of the Hatherton Branch Canal stops a few yards beyond the railway bridge. This was, in fact, the end of the canal. There was a wharf here which served Gilpin's Edge Tool works.

About 1860 an extension was built from the Hatherton Branch to the new Cannock Extension Canal then under construction for the BCN. A flight of thirteen locks was built to connect the 386 ft level with the 473 ft level. Charles Hadfield, in his book Canals of the West Midlands, states that this venture was financed chiefly by the Staffordshire & Worcester Canal.

Churchbridge Locks became part of the BCN system and opened together with the Cannock Extension Canal in 1863.

**** The Staffordshire & Worcester Canal bought land at Lodge Farm in order to build their reservoir. It is more commonly refered to as Walkmill, today.**

LMS plan 1923 of Churchbridge Wharf and Basin



Two acts of Parliament in 1847 and 1855 had provided for a goods branch to Wyrley, but neither were built. A branch was built, however, down to the canal at Churchbridge where a canal interchange basin was built. Charles Hadfield, states, that this happened about 1860. It is more likely that this goods station came into use about 1863.

When the LNWR goods station was built, the mill stream was diverted from its old course and carried under the railway sidings so that a covered goods basin could be built. Additional sidings were built to serve Gilpin's works. The siding agreement dates from 1864.

Today there is nothing left of the wharf or sidings although there still remains the base of the old crane for the loading wharf hidden in the undergrowth.

Churchbridge Locks and the Hatherton Branch closed officially in 1955 and now nothing of the old locks is left. Opencast mining during the 1970's and 1980's completely obliterated the route. It has since been landscaped and built on.

We walk across the site of the old goods yard and around the perimeter of the Churchbridge Works. Part of the site is still in use, but many early nineteenth century buildings stand derelict.

Eventually we come to the back gate of the Churchbridge Works where the narrow gauge tramway entered the site. At this point we are standing on the course of the original tramroad. This ran to shallow mines at Great Wyrley and originally supplied the Churchbridge Works with coal.

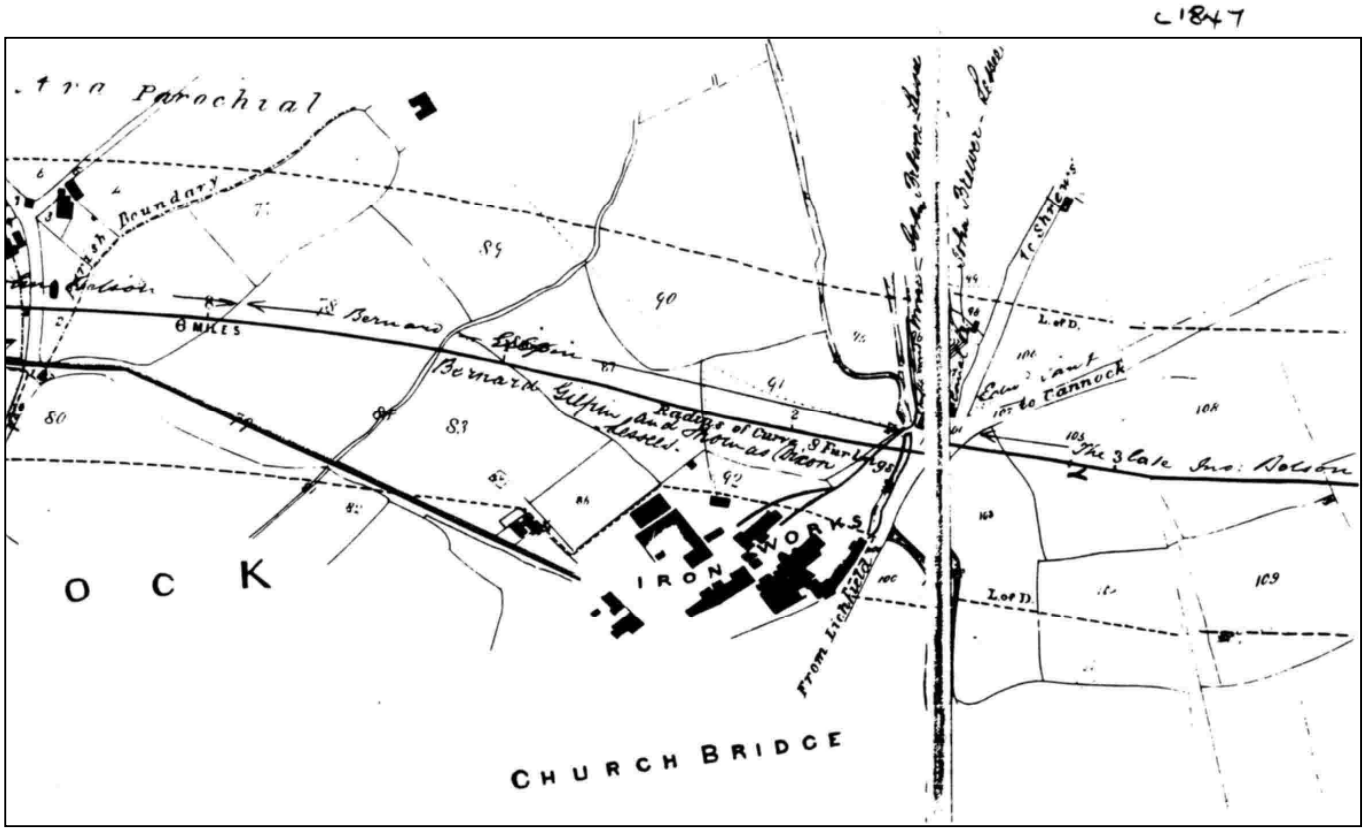
The route of the railway is still a path and we follow it as far as to Station Road. It is worth noting the mill stone bridge which originally carried the railway over the stream.

At Station Road, we come to the site of the old station which opened in 1858 under the title of Wyrley & Churchbridge. In 1911 it was renamed Wyrley and Cheslyn Hay.

There were two level crossings in Station Road; one was for the standard gauge siding to the Canal Basin, the other was for Gilpin's tramroad. Both lines passed either side of the original Station House, which still stands.

The Station House was originally the home of the Station Master and also was the booking office. Ramps on either side led up to the platforms. Later the LNWR built a booking office on the platform.

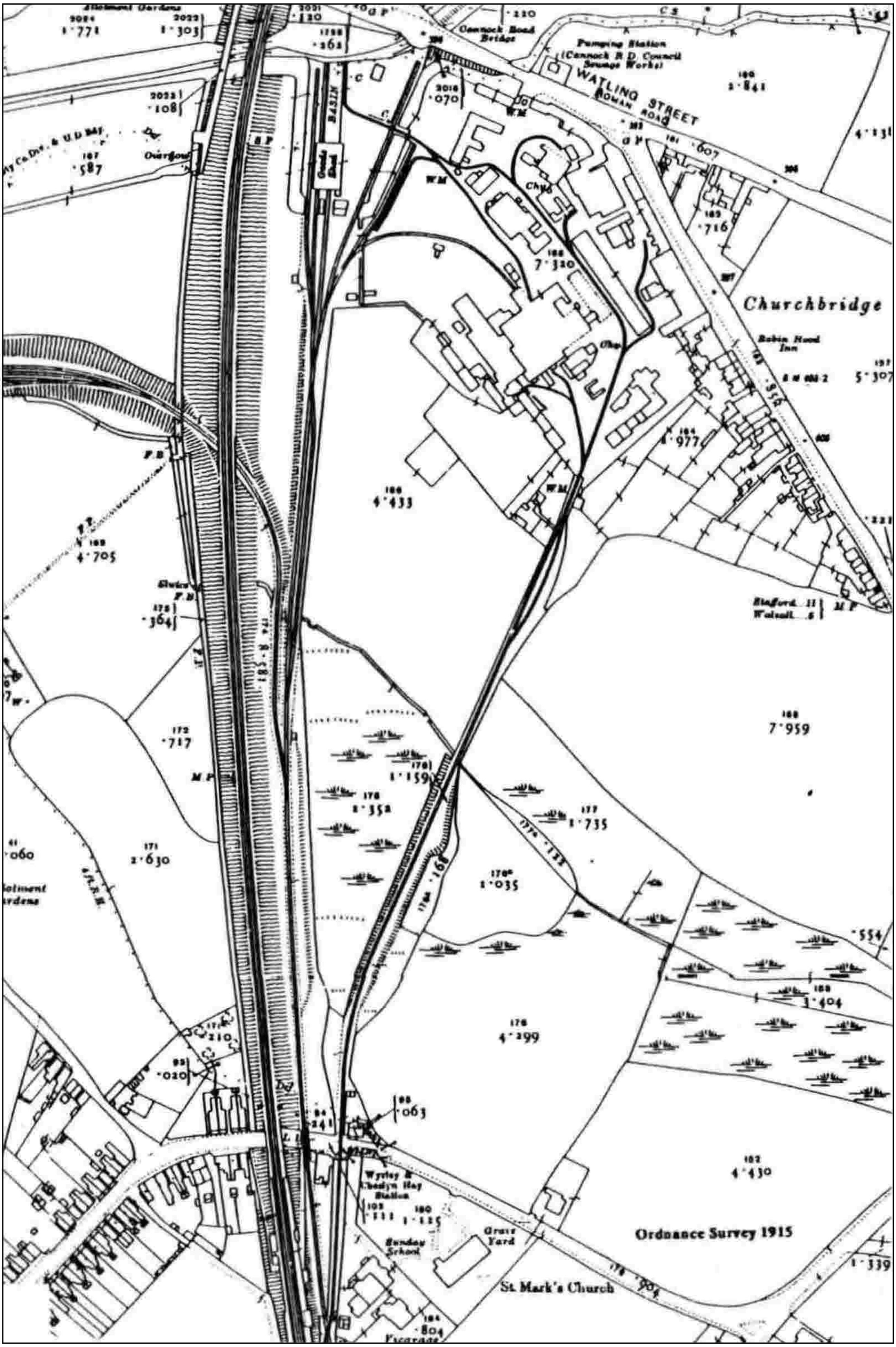
Gilpin's tramroad crossed the standard gauge behind the Station House and then passed under the railway. It is still possible to see where the tramroad ran.



Our route is to turn left into Station Road, right into Quinton Avenue and then right again along a footpath to the Railway at Greens Level Crossing. Quinton Avenue derives its name from a mine known as Quinton's which operated in the 1860's and later. About 1904 a siding was constructed to join Cannock Line. in 1908 Quintons Colliery closed and was dismantled.

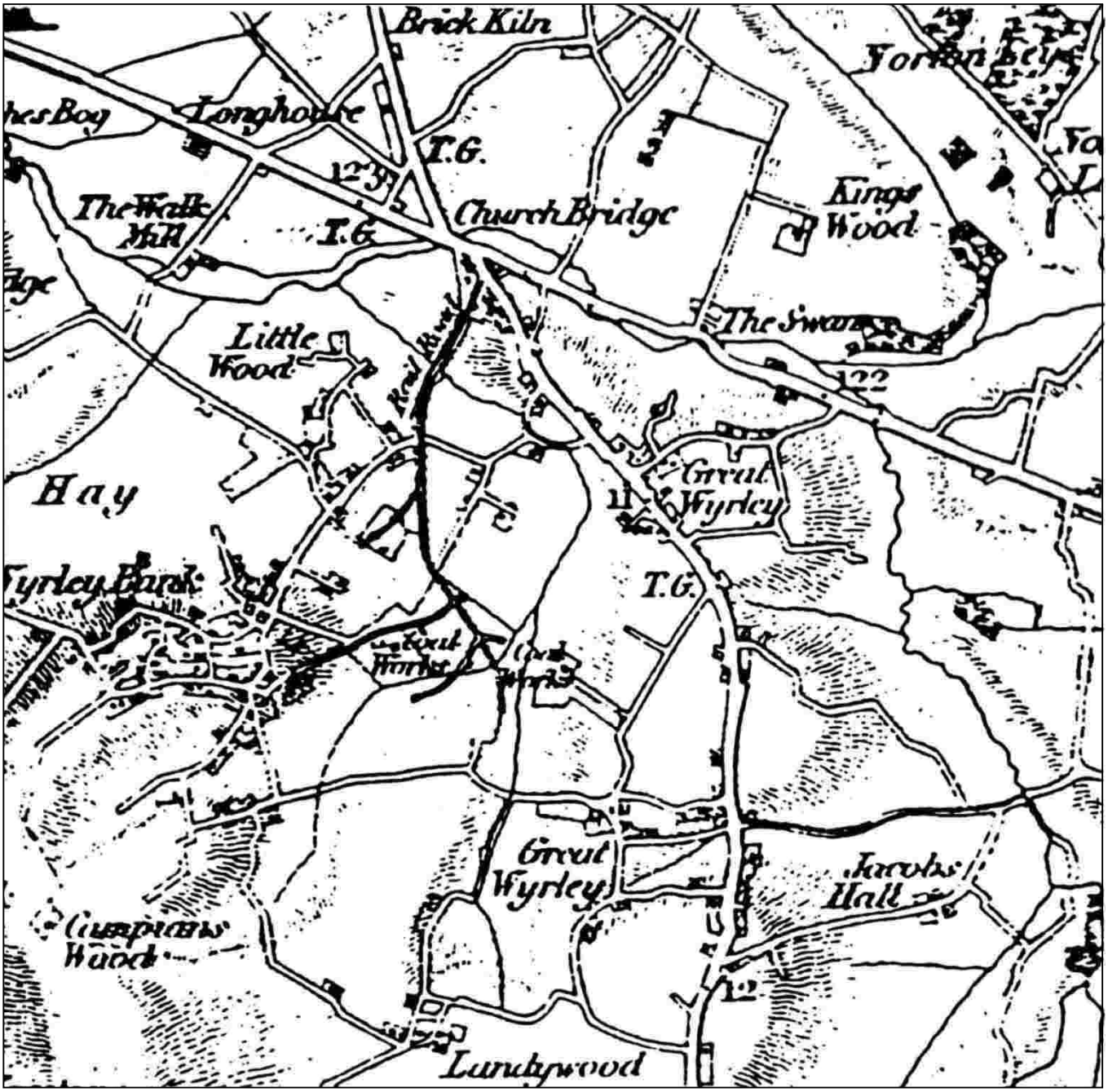
In LNWR and LMS days there would have been many sidings at this point. The Churchbridge Branch joined the main line near here. There were other sidings which came off on the other side to serve Great Wyrley Colliery.

After crossing the railway our walk follows Westbourne Road, Sutherland Road and Chase Avenue to reach the Great Wyrley Colliery. It is still possible to make out parts of the old mine. The loading wharf remains as do some of the original buildings.

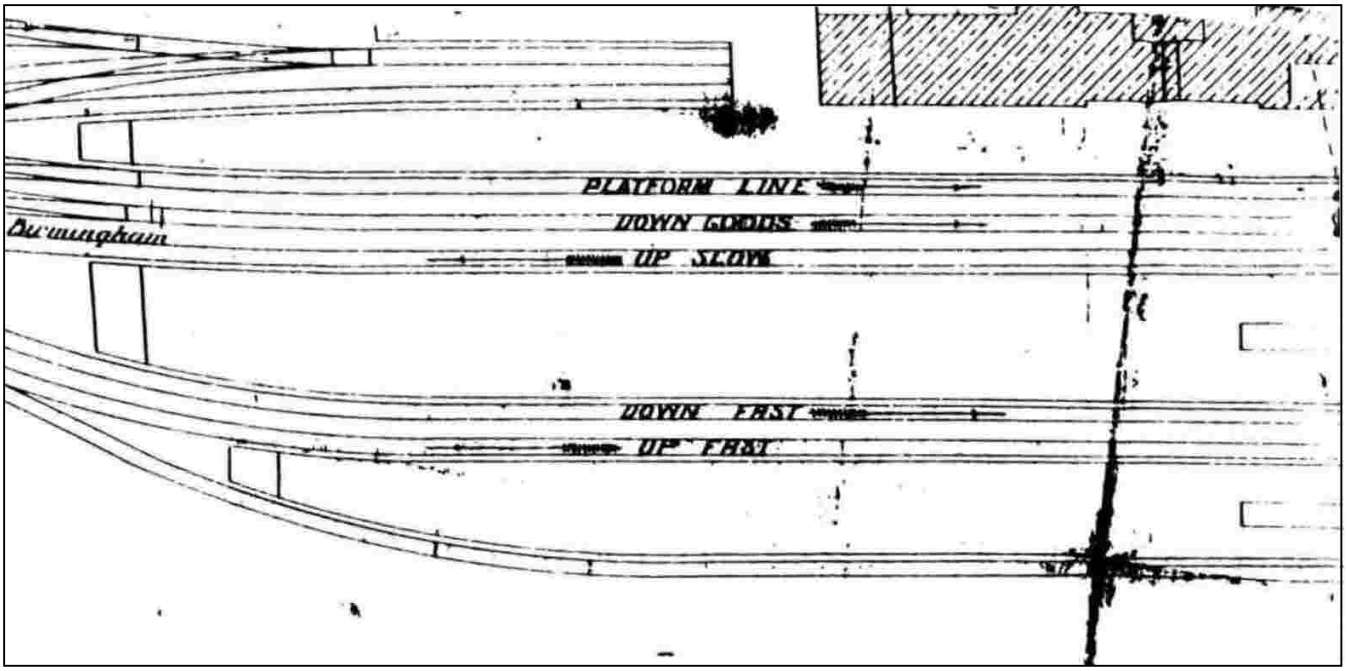

Cannock Road Bridge
Pumping Station
(Cannock R.D. Council Sewage Works)
WATLING STREET
ROMAN ROAD
BASIN
Goods Shed
Churchbridge
Robin Hood Inn
Stafford 11
Walsall 5
Wyrley & Cheslyn Hay Station
Sunday School
Grave Yard
St. Mark's Church
Vicarage
Ordnance Survey 1915

Unfortunately it is not possible to pick out where the narrow gauge lines ran. These were lost when the pit banks were levelled. It should be remembered that there are several layers of history here. The earlier Gilpin tramroads crossed this site during the first few decades of the nineteenth century serving shallow pits named Pennyfield, Queensfield and Rugeley School. The later developments of the Great Wyrley Colliery Company obliterated most these earlier pits. Now more than forty years have passed since the colliery closed and by rights all should have gone. But the remnants still hang on as if in limbo.

Our walk ends at this site. It is only a matter of crossing the waste land, turning left into Landywood Road and retracing our steps back to the station.



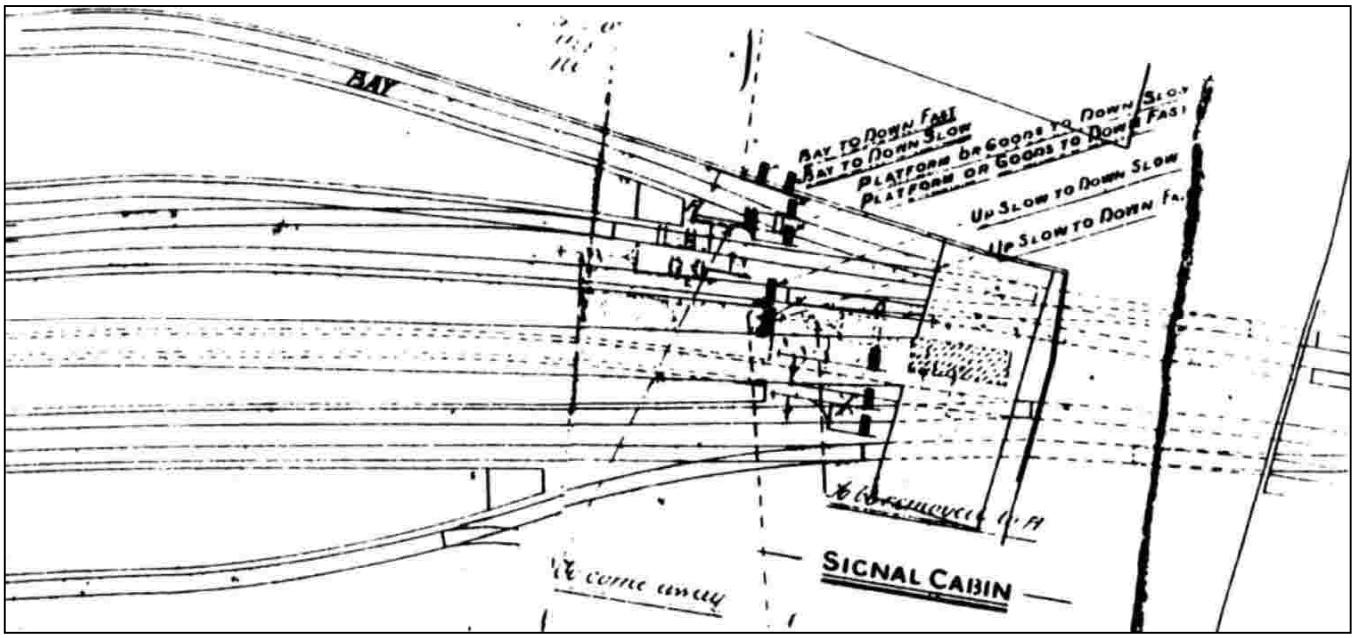
Toll gates are shown on the turnpiked Watling Street and the other turnpike which crossed at Churchbridge



Chronology

Canals

1792	Wyrley and Essington Act 32 GeoIII c81; Wolverhampton to Wyrley Bank, 5 locks. Branch to Essington and branch to Birchills.
1794	Wyrley and Essington Act 34 GeoIII c25; Junction with Birchills Branch to Huddlesford.
1794	BCH Act 34 Geo III c81. Extension of Birmingham Canal to Walsall. c1795 Wyrley and Essington Canal opened to Wyrley Bank
1797	Wyrley and Essington Canal completed to Huddlesford
c1798	Wyrley and Essington Canal, Birchills Branch completed to terminus at Birchills.
c1798	Essington Branch completed
6/1799	Walsall Canal opened.
1800	Lord Hays Branch built.
c1806	Birchills branch disused and damned off
c1819	Birchills branch re-opened
c1829	Essington Branch disused.
c1829	Lord Vernon's private canal built a short distance from end of existing canal at Wyrley Bank



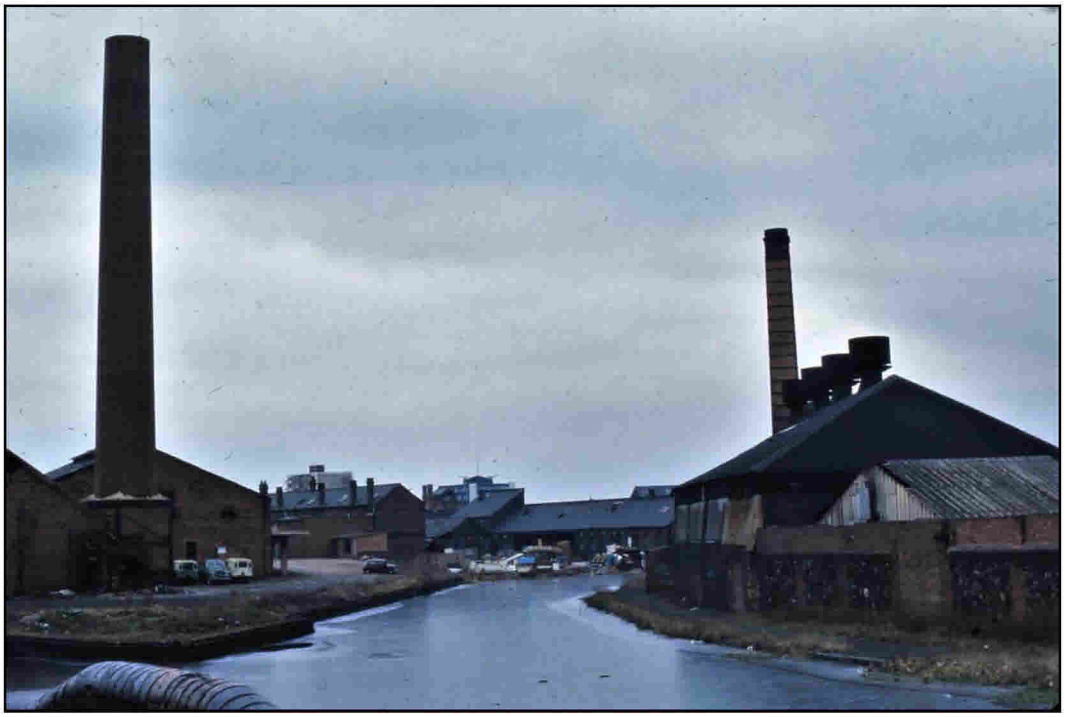
1830	Ansons Canal opened
1840	Wyrley & Essington Canal merged with BCN
1841	Walsall Locks completed
1841	Hatherton Branch, Staffordshire & Worcester Canal, completed.
1842	Cheslyn Hay Tramroad built.
1857	Wyrley Bank Canal completed.
c1859	Cannock Extension Canal opened to end of Churchbridge Branch
1860	Churchbridge Locks branch constructed.
1863	Cannock Extension Canal completed
1864	Walsall Engine and Lock Tunnel built
c1864 '	Gilpins' tramroad built
1954	Lord Hays Canal abandoned
1954	Wyrley Bank Canal abandoned
1954	Wyrley Branch and Sneyd Locks abandoned
1955	Hatherton and Churchbridge canals closed
1963	Cannock Extension Canal abandoned north of Watling Street bridge.

Railways..

03/08/1846	Trent Valley & Midland Junction Railway Act
03/08/1846	South Staffordshire Junction Railway Act
09/07/1847	South Staffordshire Railway Act. Incorporates TVM and SSJ Rlys
01/11/1847	Opened Walsall (Bridgman Place) to Bescot
09/07/1849	Opened Walsall to Lichfield
09/07/1849	New Walsall station opened
01/05/1850	Opened Walsall to Dudley
01/08/1850	South Staffordshire Rly leased to J.R.McClean
02/02/1858	Opened Walsall (Ryecroft Junction) to Cannock
01/02/1861	South Staffordshire Rly leased to LNWR
29/06/1865	Wolverhampton & Walsall Railway Co Act
15/07/1867	South Staffordshire Railway vested in LNWR
01/11/1872	Wolverhampton & Walsall Railway opened
01/08/1816	Wolverhampton & Walsall Railway vested in Midland Railway
01/07/1879	Walsall to Castle Bromwich, Midland Railway, opened.
1880	Midland Railway, Goods Station, Bradford Street opened.
01/03/1881	Pleck Junction to James Bridge , LNWR, opened
1884	New station at Walsall completed
05/01/1931	Walsall to Wolverhampton passenger service via Wednesfield discontinued.
05/1964	Walsall - Dudley passenger service withdrawn.
18/01/1965	Walsall-Castle Bromwich Birmingham passenger service discontinued
18/01/1965	Walsall-Lichfield-Burton passenger service discontinued
1966	Walsall-Cannock-Rugeley passenger service discontinued
1979	Walsall station buildings demolished
18/07/1980	Saddlers Centre Development opened Walsall to Brownhills closed entirely
10/04/1989	Passenger service re-established Walsall to Hednesford
3/1993	Walsall to Dudley closed entirely

The Warehouse at Walsall Canal Wharf

Heartland Press Collection 640278



Walsall Town Arm

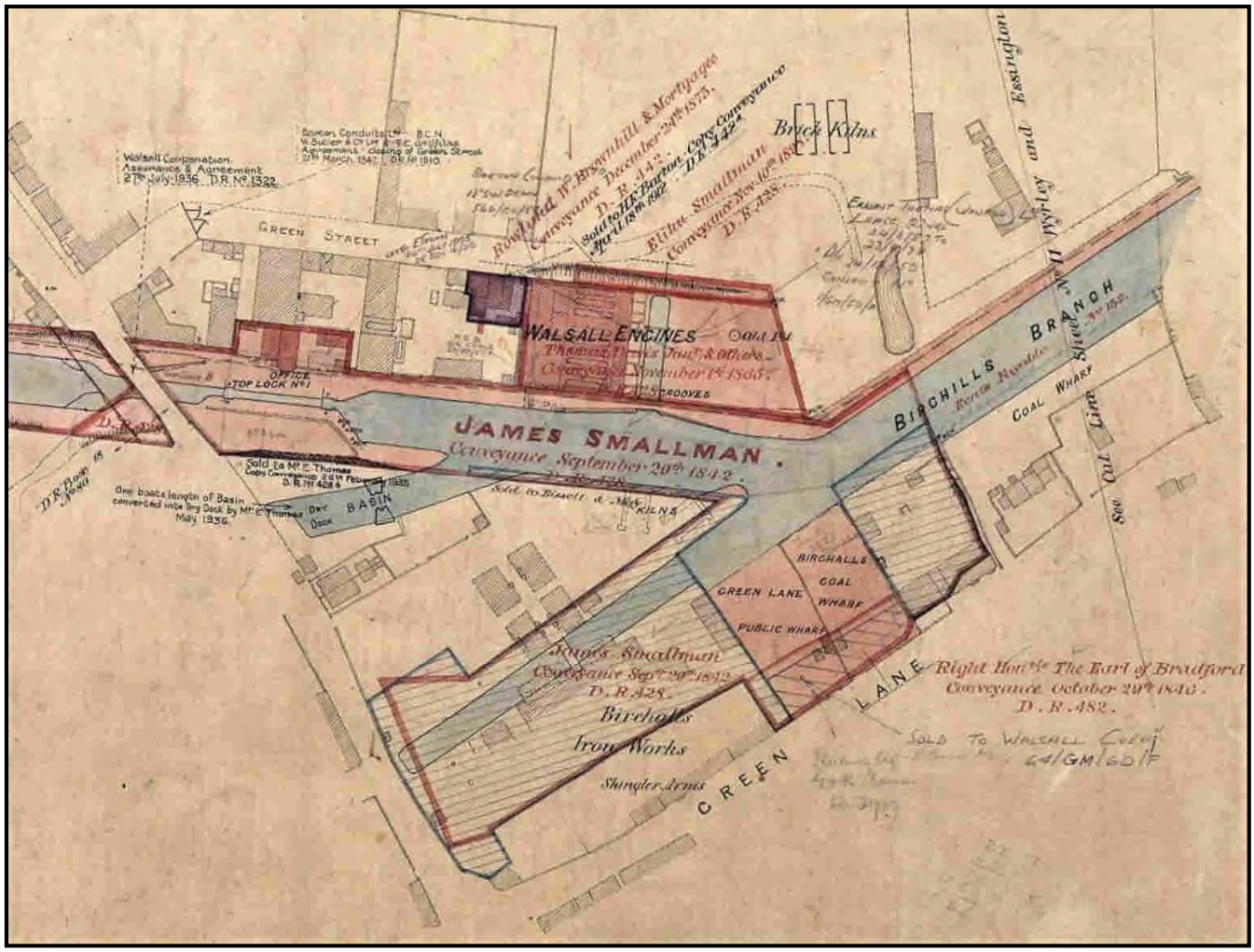
Heartland Press Collection 640202

Toll House & Boatman's Mission, Birchills

Heartland Press Collection 649507

Sneyd Depot, Bloxwich

Heartland Press Collection 637761



Birchills Engine House

Heartland Press Collection 210025

This image was supplied by British Wayerways and shows the Top Lock Engines, Lock House, Mission and the branch terminus of the Birchills Braanch.

The location of the Walsall pumping engines and house were placed beside Green Street and there Was a basin for coal delivery to the bank of boilers adjacent to the engine house.

Walsall Station

Heartland Press Collection 524371

Crossing Keepers House, Landywood

Heartland Press Collection 524722