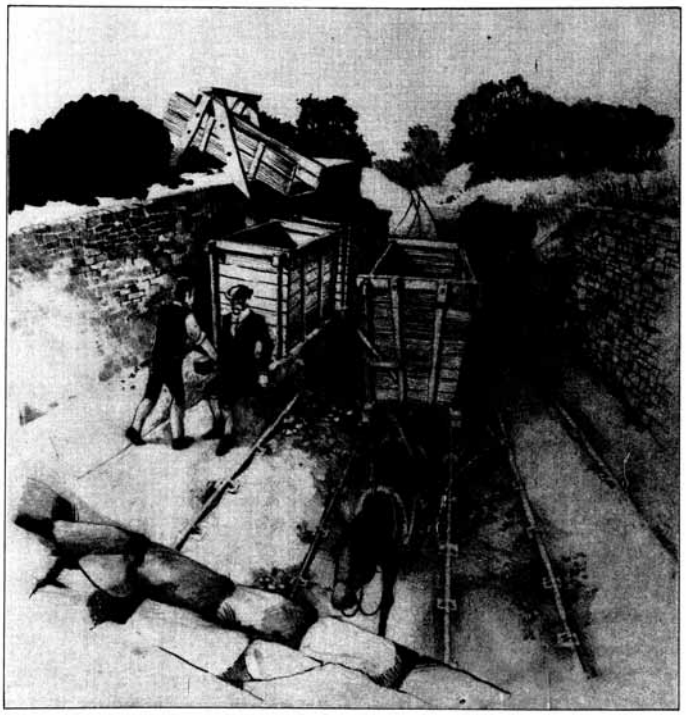
A booklet describing the last horse drawn railway in England. The tramway took coal from the South Gloucestershire coalfield around Ram Hill to the Avon to fuel the fires of Bristol

# The Dramway

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

**by Ross Barber**



Illustrations by John Walker

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**by Ross Barber**

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Cover illustration – a reconstruction showing miners loading coal at Ram Hill Colliery.

Designed by John Walker

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# Contents

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

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

# Preface



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

The Dramway is of an unusual design and in recognition of its unique character and importance as a link to industrial sites in the coalfield it is being preserved as an industrial heritage footpath. This project is being undertaken by the Avon Industrial Buildings Trust (AIBT) and has been supported by the Avon County Community Environment Scheme (ACCES) and the Conservation Section of Avon County Council Planning Department. Local District Councils and Parish Councils have given their support. Kingswood District Council has printed this book and encouraged its production.

Most of the drawings are reconstructions of scenes as they 'might have been'. They are intended to evoke the feeling of the district as it was at the height of its industrial activity. The background historical material is often limited. The drawings may include anachronisms, some intended and some no doubt, unintended. We apologise for the latter and are pleased to receive correction.

Local historians and industrial archaeologists have been aware of the significance of the Dramway for many years. A number of writers have emphasised this. Particularly important are the articles in the journal of the Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society (BIAS) by Matt Southway and Kenneth Clew as is Colin Maggs' book on the two railways (see Bibliography). A number of people have given their advice and help with the historical and technical background to this publication; John Cornwell, David Pollard, Alan Bryant, Trevor Thompson, Tony Woolrich, Ron Fullagar amongst them. I am grateful to these people and others while recognizing that they cannot be held responsible for the interpretation given to their material or for any errors made.

I also wish to thank John Cornwell for his photographs.

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

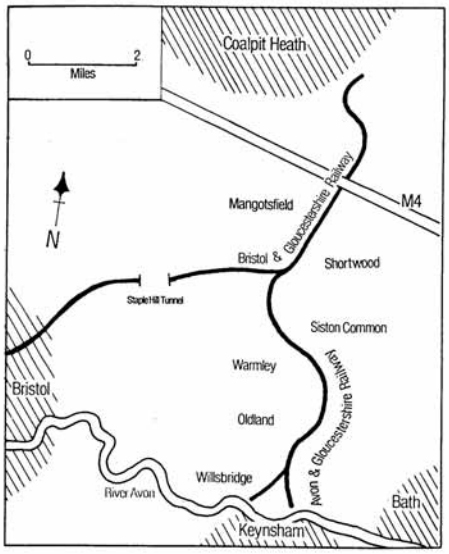
Ross Barber
March 1986

# Historical Background

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

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

Two companies were formed and given statutory permission to build lines in 1828. The Bristol and Gloucestershire company was to build a line from the Floating Harbour in Bristol to Orchard Colliery in Coalpit Heath. The Avon and Gloucestershire Company was formed to build a separate line from the Avon at Keynsham to connect with

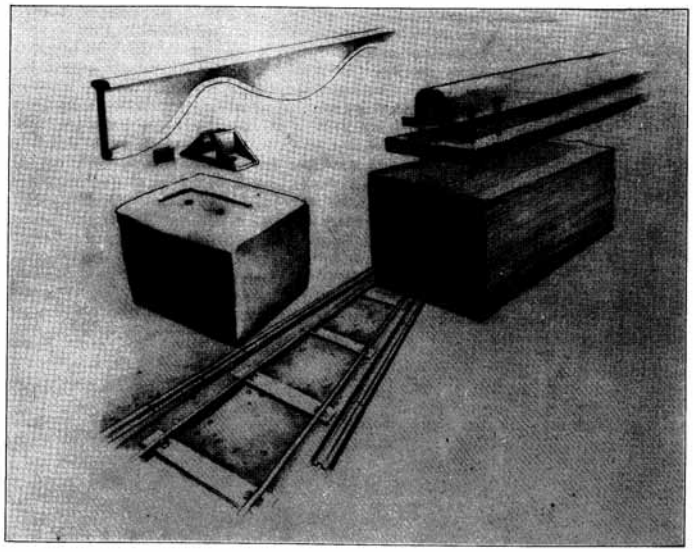





the Bristol and Gloucestershire line at Mangotsfield.

The Avon and Gloucestershire and the northern part of the Bristol and Gloucestershire were opened in 1831. The Bristol to Mangotsfield section, which included the tunnel at Staple Hill, took longer to complete. The whole tramway route was completed in 1835. This development not only eased the transportation of coal to Bristol and Bath but also lowered its prices.

The original lines were designed to accommodate horse drawn trucks and were built to the standard 4'8" gauge. There was a single line with passing places. Unlike many horse drawn tramways which were built of angled plate iron, these lines were equipped with edge rails of malleable lightweight cast iron. The trucks used would necessarily have had flanged wheels. In order to increase the



The rails, chairs and sleeper blocks used on the Dramway (top left). The rails and sleepers used by the Great Western Railway (top right) and the dual carriageway which existed briefly over the Shortwood section (below).

weight-bearing capacity of these rails they were thickened out between support joints thus giving the unusual 'fish belly' profile. Each rail was 15 ft long with five webs between support joints. The chairs supporting the rails were fixed to the sleeper blocks with oak pins. All the rails and chairs have been removed but the 15"x15" limestone blocks can be found over much of the route and are the chief surviving feature of the tramway. Because of the relative slowness of the traffic there was no need to tie the two lines together with sleepers stretching across the track. Such sleepers would also have been inconvenient for the horses walking down the centre of the line.

The route from Coalpit Heath to the Avon involves a drop of approximately 400 ft. The whole length of the line was carefully graded so that only empty trucks were pulled uphill to the coal mines and full trucks had the benefit of the downhill gradient. Loaded trucks were equipped with a long handbrake to prevent them overrunning the horses. In spite of this there were accidents; "on at least one occasion, on a down gradient, the driver failed to apply the spragg to the lever quickly enough and the wagon overran the horse and killed it". (Maggs. p.59)

The original plans for the route incorporated several tight curves around hillsides to maintain the gradient. A number of these were eventually straightened by the construction of embankments and cuttings, notably at Warmley, Siston Common and Willsbridge. This may have been done with a view to conversion to locomotive traction which was permitted by Act of Parliament and undertaken on the Bristol and Gloucestershire section. As far as is known, locomotives were never used on the Avon and Gloucestershire line.

Soon after the horse drawn tramway was in operation, pressure built up to convert the line to accommodate steam driven locomotives as the Great Western Railway (GWR) was keen to build a 7' gauge line from Bristol to Gloucester. The section of the Bristol and Gloucestershire line which ran from the Floating Habour to Westerleigh made an attractive start to the route. In July 1839 the Bristol and Gloucestershire Company became the Bristol and Gloucester Company. Under the influence of the G.W.R. they started to convert the 4'8" tramway to 7' railway.

Work started on the 5th of June 1844 and was completed by the 9th July. However,



under the terms of the original 1828 Act, colliery owners at Coalpit Heath had the right to transport their coal in the 4'8" trucks along the line to link up with the Avon and Gloucestershire tramway at Mangotsfield North Junction. Hence the 4'8" gauge had to be left in place. As a result, the section of the Dramway from the weighbridge at Bitterwell Lake to Mangotsfield North Junction was the first dual gauge railway in the country.

At the time it seemed likely that the G.W.R. would purchase the Bristol and Gloucestershire Company, but the Midland Company were also interested in the line and in 1845, to the annoyance of G.W.R., it was sold to the Midland Company. The Midland owned and ran the line until amalgamation in 1923. In this year the Midland Company amalgamated with several others to form the London Midland Scotland which owned what remained of the line until it was nationalised in 1948.

The Avon and Gloucestershire Railway, the southern section of the present Dramway path, was owned by the Kennet and Avon Canal Company until 1851 when it was taken over by the G.W.R. Unlike the northern section it was never converted to locomotive railway and contains many of the most interesting tramway remains.

As horse drawn tramways, neither of these lines had a long or flourishing existence. The Bristol and Gloucestershire section was converted to locomotive power only nine years after completion and although the Avon and Gloucestershire continued to carry coal up to 1850, activity after the early years was negligible. Even in the early years when coal was coming from Hole Lane, Crown and Lower Soundwell pits, receipts cannot have matched the £45,000 which the line cost to build. Nevertheless in these early days a number of extensions were planned from the central line particularly by the Avon and Gloucestershire Company. One, projected for the Golden Valley, Bitton, would have nearly equalled the length of the existing line. In the event only three of these planned extensions were built, all fairly short. They were the line through Hole Lane Colliery to its extension at Bull Hall, the Lower Soundwell branch line and the branch line to Londonderry Wharf. In later years the California Colliery Company made use of the southern end of the line and built an extension to its colliery from the Willsbridge valley.

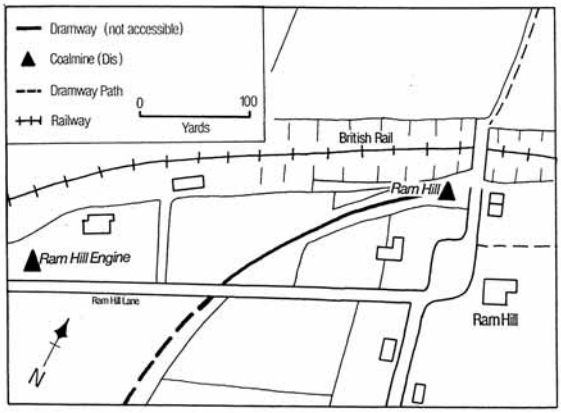
# Ram Hill Colliery

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

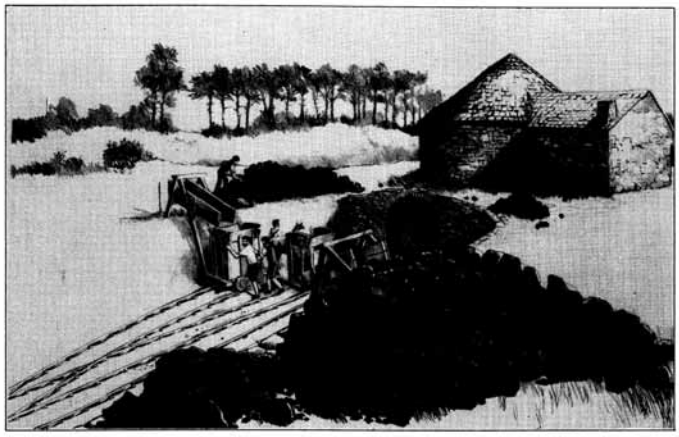
An older pit known as Ram Hill Engine Pit lay 300 yards downhill to the west. The shaft was used for pumping in the enlarged workings. The main Ram Hill pit was sunk about 1830, and in later years was linked underground to Serridge and New Engine pits. It is currently being developed as an industrial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

Though only a short distance away from the Ram Hill and Serridge mines the Frog Lane colliery was separated from them by a deep fault and the underground workings were not connected. The main mine in the late 19th century was Frog Lane pit which remained open until 1949, served by a branch line from the Dramway line built around 1860. There were three separate units in this colliery: Frog Lane pit itself was the principal pit for winding and pumping and the earlier Mayshill and Nibley pits were used only for ventilation and pumping. It was owned by the same Coalpit Heath Colliery Company that owned Ram Hill and Serridge. The only building now standing on this site is the engine house for the horizontal steam winder though the railway track can still be traced to the Bitterwell Lake junction.

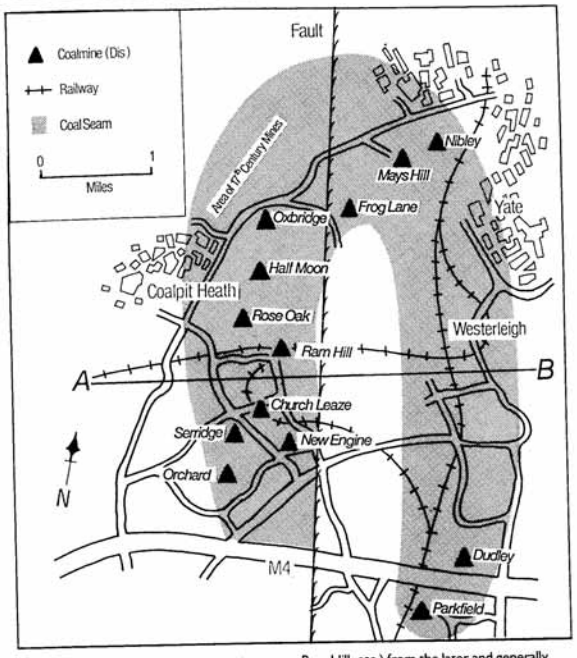
There were numerous shallow mines on Coalpit Heath, as the name suggests, although most have disappeared without trace. Two which are known about were Oxbridge and Half Moon. As with most of this area, mines of one sort or another have been found which pre-date the records.





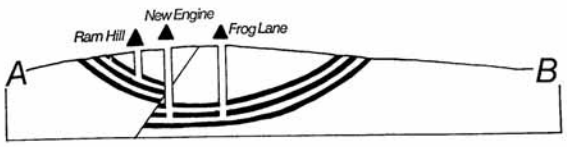



Ram Hill Colliery – two views of the colliery as it might have been operated.

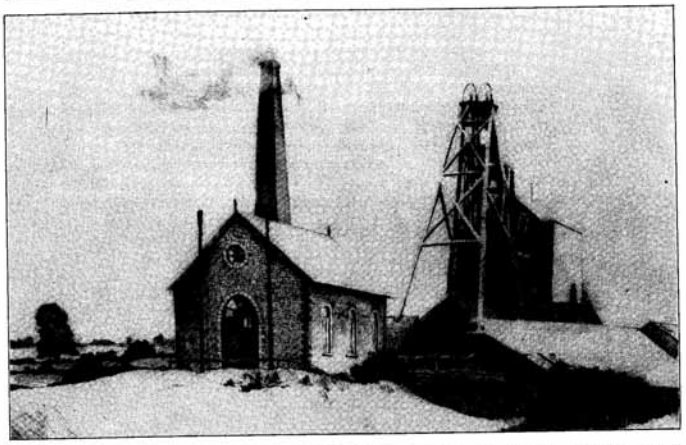


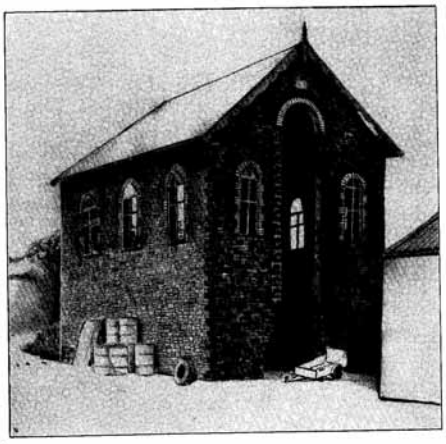

Above. The shading shows the approximate area of the underground workings in Coalpit Heath. The main fault line divides the workings of the older pits (New Engine, Ram Hill, etc.) from the later and generally deeper workings centred on Frog Lane.

Below. Cross section showing the seams in the upper coal series.







Frog Lane Colliery – above, in operation: below, the surviving engine house.

# Ram Hill to Bitterwell Lake

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

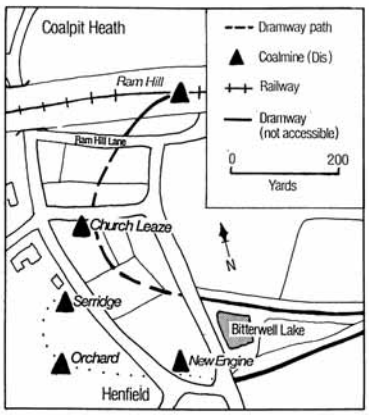
Churchleaze pit lay beside the Dramway where it crosses Serridge Lane. Apart from a declivity in the ground no traces remain.

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

Orchard pit was active at the time the Dramway was built but was superceded by the New Engine pit soon afterwards.

New Engine pit, in the mid 19th century, was the main pit for the Coalpit Heath group of mines. The 1st edition (1881) Ordnance Survey map shows the railway line finishing at the mine. Most coal for this area was drawn from this pit, the other shafts being kept open for pumping and ventilation.

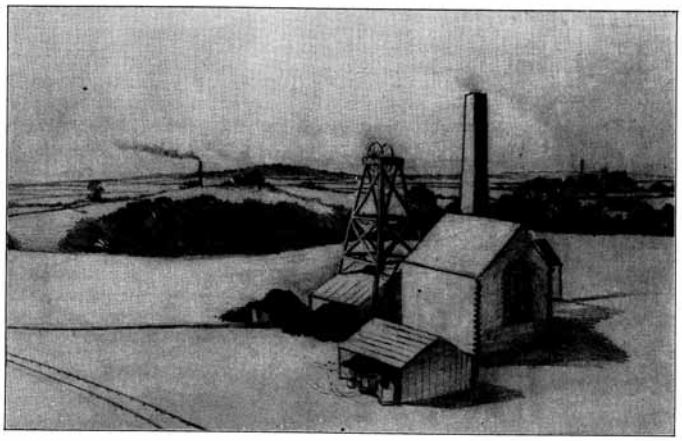
There is some dispute about the functions of Bitterwell Lake in relation to the mines at New Engine. It may have supplied reservoir






water for the mine engines. Sluices run from the lake through the grounds of cottages built on the mining site and within living memory there were structures on the lakeside which were thought to link it to the mine. However, the lake may not have had any connection with the mine at all.

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



Reconstruction of the view looking south from the Dramway by Coalpit Heath cricket pitch. Church Leaze pit is in the foreground with Serridge and Orchard pits behind.

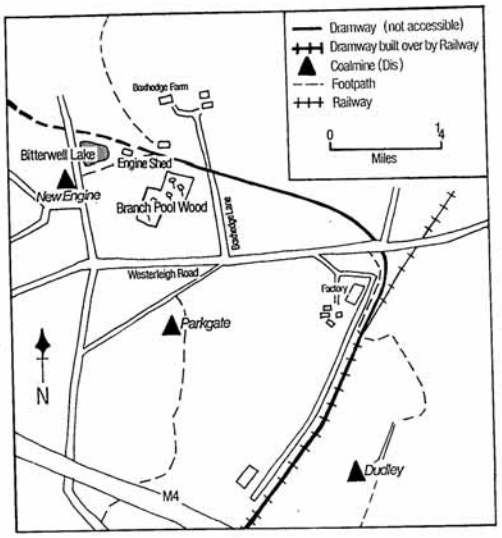
# Bitterwell Lake to the M4

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

The dilapidated barn at the end of the lane from New Engine pit was originally an engine shed. The large engine doors and an old wrought iron haystack boiler used as a water tank are still in place.

The abandoned cottage in the scrap yard was a weighbridge house. It was situated at the end of the line owned by the Midland Railway. A mile post opposite marks the end of the Midland territory. As narrow and broad gauge wagons used this section of the line this weighbridge was equipped with a platform which had both kinds of rails. Both the cottage and the barn are on private property.

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






lines and no Dramway remains are visible.

The initial arrangement for this section which had to accommodate both narrow and broad gauge was very short lived. In 1844 the narrow gauge rails were laid between the 7' rails on separate sleepers. It was envisaged that the Great Western locomotives would run on the broad gauge and the 4'8" trucks running from Coalpit Heath down to Keynsham would use the narrow inner rails.

There were two obvious problems. The first concerns the difficulties encountered at junctions and passing places. It was extremely difficult for the 4'8" trucks to cross the 7' line from the outside without interfering with the 7' line as they crossed it.

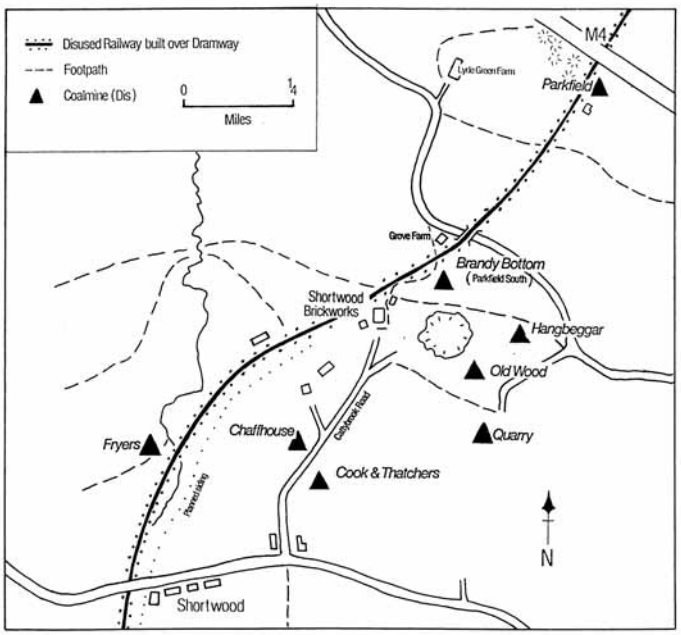
More serious, perhaps, was the problem of safety. Supervision and signalling for a section of railway three miles long which was to carry horse drawn trucks at three miles an hour and steam locomotives at 40-50 m.p.h. was obviously difficult. The Government Inspector thought at first that it could be done. He calculated that as there were only 6 passenger trains running down the line per day there should be at least 2 hours and 20 minutes between each train. As long as the horse drawn trucks waited until a locomotive passed and then set out within 20 minutes they should have plenty of time to get clear of the other end before the next passenger train arrived. This system was obviously unworkable so, later in the same year, a separate parallel line was built for the coal trucks.

At present this section of the line is owned by British Rail. The motorway underpass is fenced off and access to this section of the route is difficult. The construction of the motorway and the current building plans for British Rail land just north of the motorway make it impossible to follow the Dramway route in its entirety. The public right of way which has been constructed from Westerleigh Road to the junction of the Dramway and railway and past the remains of Dudley and Puffers pits (the latter a neat oval shaft) stops at the M4. Possibly the most convenient route at the present time runs from the bottom of Boxhedge Lane, through the fields to Oakleigh Green Farm, past the spoil tip which marks the remains of Parkgate pit. This passes through low lying ground and is frequently extremely wet, particularly near the motorway underpass.

# The M4 to Shortwood

This section of the Dramway is overlain by the disused railway line and is owned by British Rail. The line itself is straight, somewhat exposed and not of great interest. The local District Councils are hoping to purchase this length of the disused railway to create a public footpath and cycleway. Meanwhile there is a public footpath which starts in the corner of the road by Grove Farm and crosses the disused railway to Brandy Bottom Colliery (Parkfield South). From the remains of this old coal mine the path crosses a field and passes through Shortwood Brickworks to Cattybrook Road.

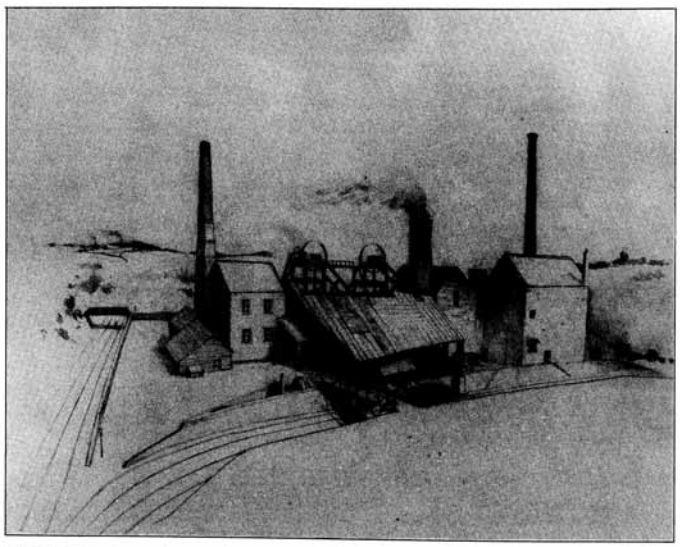
Parkfield Colliery was situated just east of the railway close to the motorway. One chimney still stands although the rest of the buildings have been demolished. On the west side of the railway are extensive colliery spoil tips. A number of earlier pits are recorded here but the main workings were started by Handel Cossham in 1851. The mine was linked






underground to Brandy Bottom Colliery to the south. The 1890 Ordnance Survey map shows extensive surface workings with four chimneys and several sidings. The mine was closed after serious flooding in 1936.

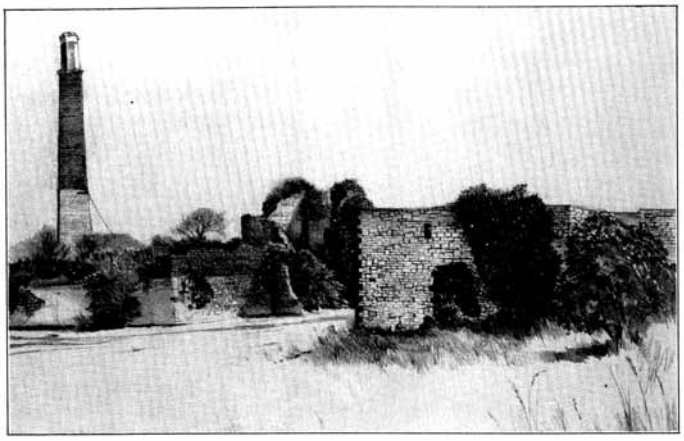
Brandy Bottom is the picturesque name for an old pit on this site. This was also taken over in 1851 by Handel Cossham who sunk a second shaft to facilitate the link to Parkfield. It became known as Parkfield South. This site contains more extensive colliery remains than any other in the area. The chimney is of an unusual and attractive design. The base is square and built of stone. Above this has been built a further square section in red brick. The top of the chimney is octagonal in section with free stone capping. No other chimney of this design remains in the district. There is also a derelict Cornish beam engine house and directly opposite, to the south, stands the more complete structure which housed the later horizontal engine house.



**Parkfield Colliery – a drawing constructed from photographs taken about 1890 looking across the mine from the hill behind Parkfield House. The chimney can be seen in the background.**

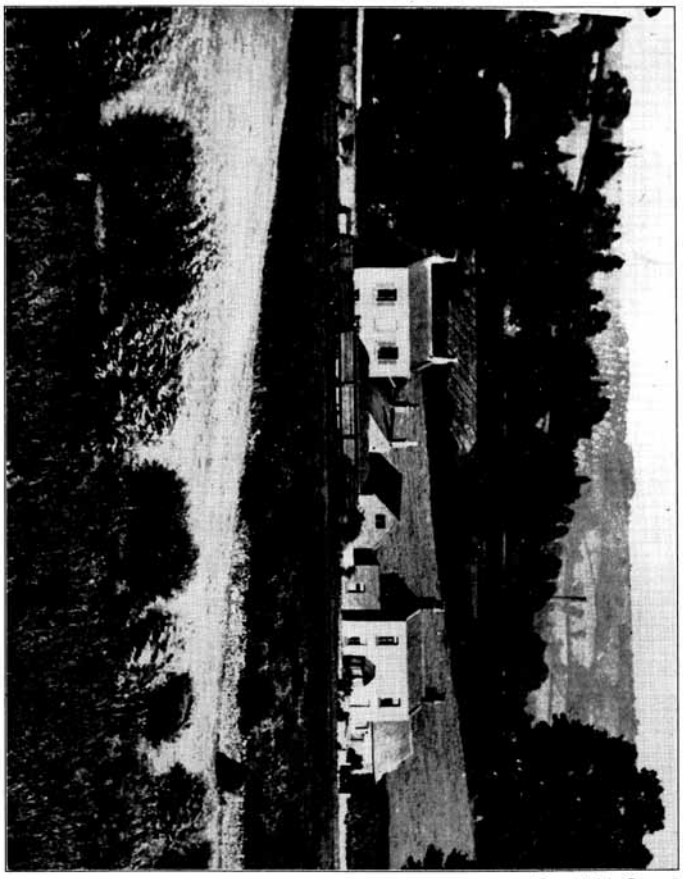
A raised embankment runs uphill across the field to the east. This may have been the link between Brandy Bottom and the sites of earlier small pits: Old Wood, Quarry and Hangbeggar.

Shortwood Brickworks started over 100 years ago using local coal and clay from the deep quarry on the site. In 1903 the Cattybrook Company acquired the works. In 1969 it became part of the Ibstock Group and the Shortwood works ceased production. Most of the buildings have been left standing, though if demand for brick clay rises, they may be demolished in order to gain access to the valuable clay which lies beneath them. Two kilns and their associated drying rooms are to be seen on either side of the path which runs down to the disused railway. The oval shaped Hoffman kiln is easily recognizable and the 50 ft deep quarry and its moveable tramway can still be seen. There was a rail link to the Midland Railway line and



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



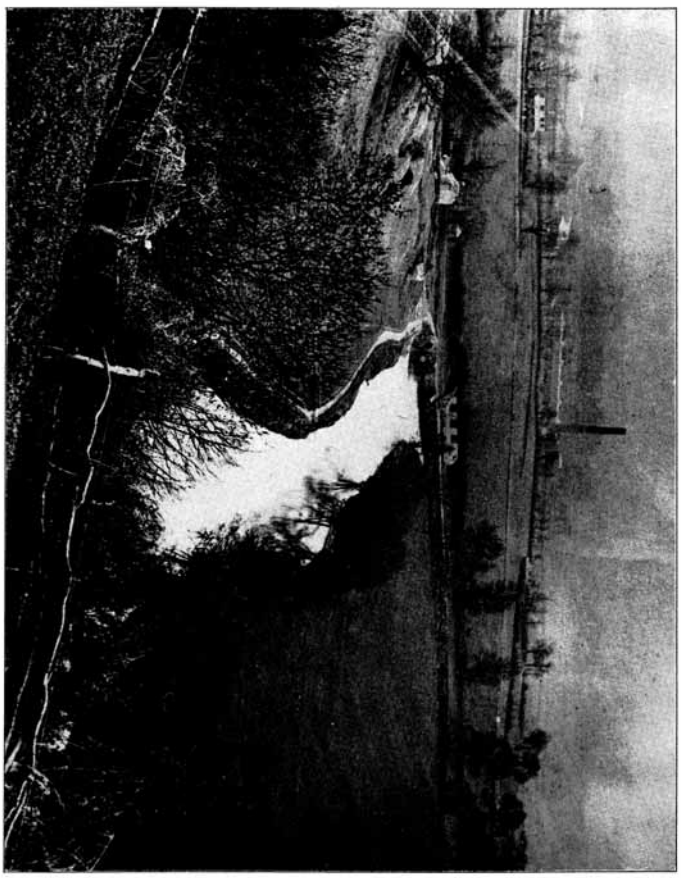


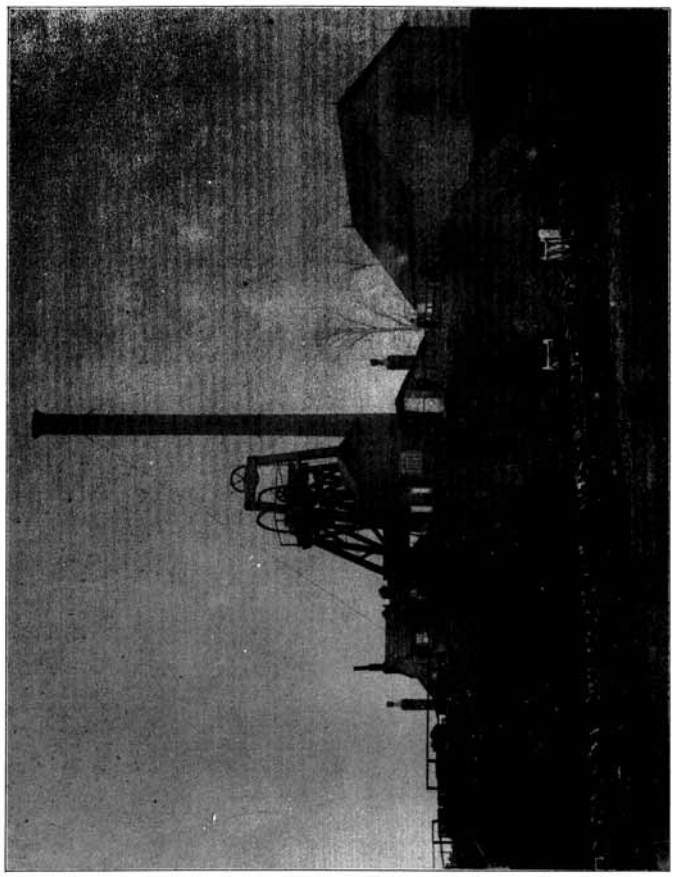
Opposite. The Bath Road Crossing around 1900. Railway wagons from California Colliery on the sidings of the Bath Road wharf.

Overleaf, left. Londonderry Wharf, looking south – a carefully posed picture. The end of the Dramway rail can be seen in the foreground. About 1900.













to the Shortwood Colliery on the hillside above.

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

Another old mine known as Fryers was situated just west of the railway half a mile north of Shortwood Road bridge. No traces remain. The whole of this section from the motorway to Shortwood Road bridge is frequented by pedestrians although there is no official right of way. Should a right of way be established access would be made easier. If not, a number of alternative paths which give access to most of the sites named have been marked on the plan.

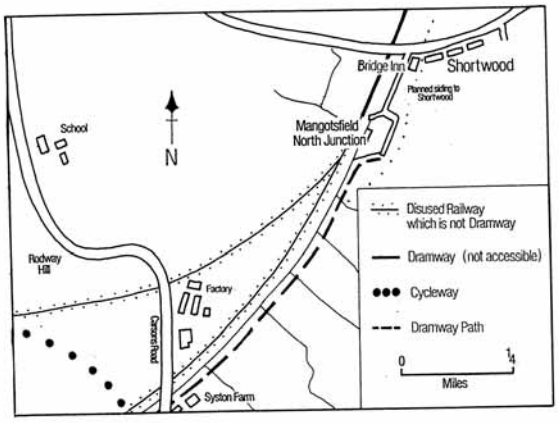
**Opposite. California Colliery around 1900. The remains of the spoil tip can be seen today in the middle of the modern housing estate.**

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

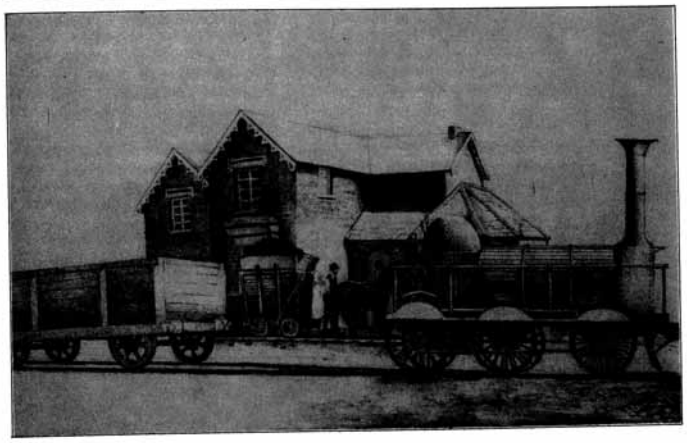
# Shortwood to Carsons Road

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

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





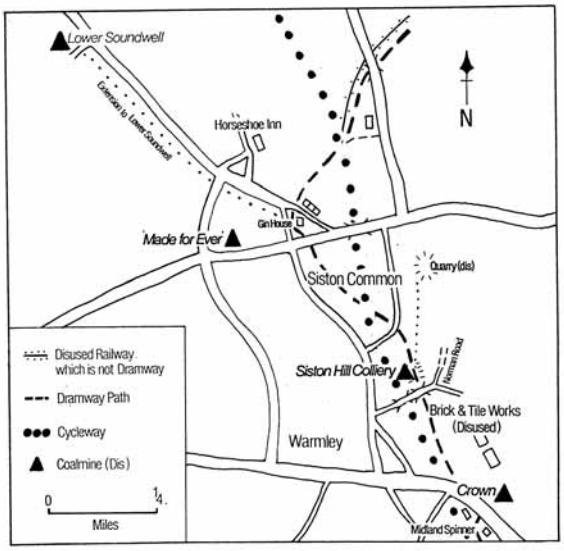
Mangotsfield North Junction. Above a reconstruction showing G.W.R. rolling stock in the foreground with a horse drawn truck behind. Below, a recent photograph.

# Carsons Road to Warmley

A public right of way extends over the whole of this section. The Dramway passes underneath the road embankment through a long narrow brick-lined tunnel. About 100 yds south of Carsons Road the Dramway is crossed by a well constructed ashlar block footbridge. This bridge was made redundant by the construction of the Midland Railway. It leads from nowhere to nothing but makes an attractive arch over the pathway. About 50 yds south of the footbridge the Dramway crosses the disused railway (now the cyclepath) and curves around the hill at Siston Common, crossing back over the cyclepath near the "Warrens". When this Mangotsfield to Bath section of the railway was built in 1869 the Midland Company was anxious to avoid a double crossing of their line by slow horse drawn coal wagons. In order to avoid this they built a second tramway line running through the cutting built for the railway.

The small building, keyhole shaped in plan, which stands on the common beside the Dramway, originally housed the horse gin for a small pit. It was later converted into a cider mill. In recent years the floor has been concreted over and it is now used as a garage.

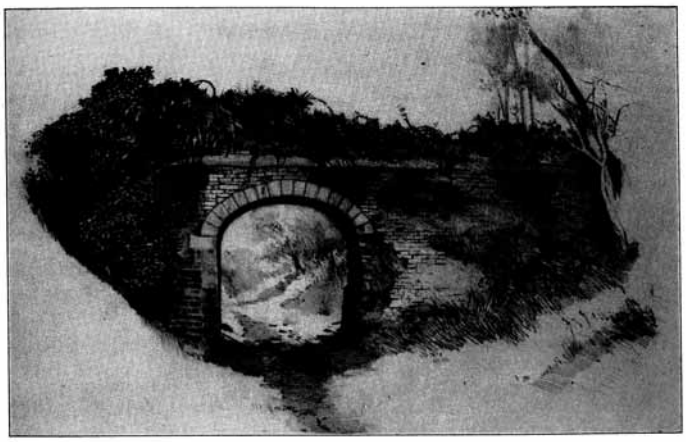
This section of land on Siston Common is most interesting from a historical point of view. The common itself is a very old piece of the pre-enclosure ground surviving on the edge of the Bristol suburbs. Near to the gin house can be seen the traces of rabbit warrens which probably date from late Norman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






Across the brook can be found some spoil tips which may have been the site of the 'Made for Ever' pit. At this point the Dramway crosses a sizeable embankment with a well preserved culvert underneath. The original plans were to contour around the hillside at this point. Such a route would, however, have entailed fairly sharp curves and the straighter route was finally chosen.

Siston Hill Colliery was situated just between the Dramway and the Midland Railway (cyclepath). A short branch line was built from the Dramway into this colliery which was active between 1804 and the 1870's. A few overgrown spoil tips and some



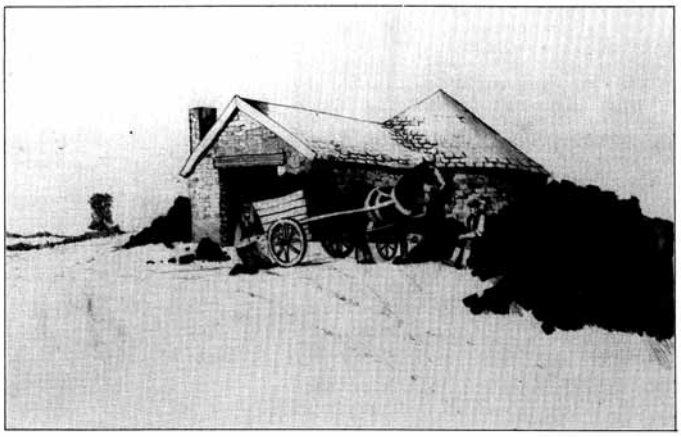
**The 'Ghost' Bridge – the isolated footbridge crossing the Dramway just south of Carson's Road.**

large foundation stones are all that remain to identify the site.

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

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

The road bridge carrying Norman Road over the Dramway was built in 1830. It is in a good state of repair with the typical curved parapets of canal bridges built in that period. A public footpath runs from Norman Road



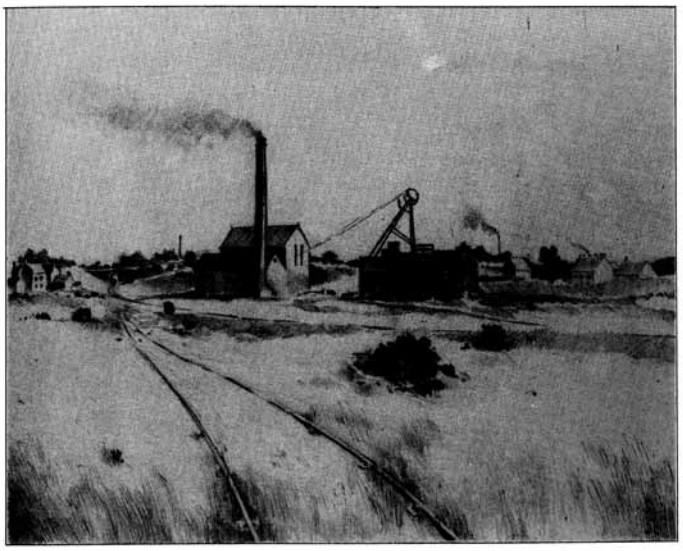
The Gin House on Siston Common – thought to have been part of a colliery before the Dramway was built.



to the level crossing at Warmley. At the road crossing, the line is buried under layers of construction material put down at a later date. A local resident claims to have spotted a section of the original line about 18" down when excavations were being made to lay the foundation of the modern brick wall.

Around Warmley there are a number of structures associated with the Dramway.

Crown Pit Colliery had three shafts situated just to the east of the line and the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map shows a branch line from the Dramway to the pit. The earliest workings were close to the Dramway. By the late 19th century when the mine was run by Davidson and Waters, the

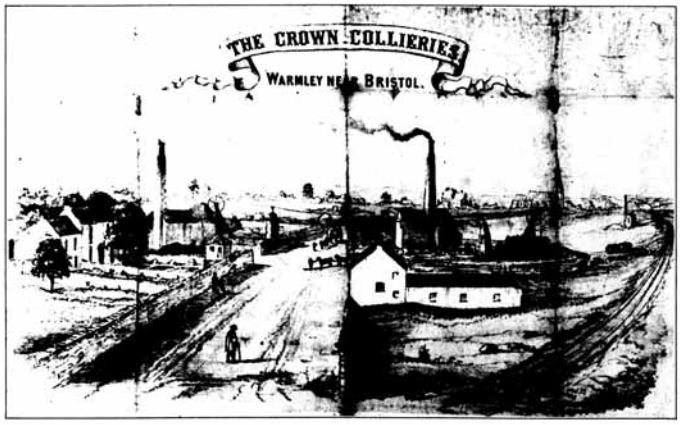


Siston Hill Colliery – from a Loxton drawing. The Norman Road Bridge over the Dramway can be seen on the left.

two main shafts were situated on either side of the London Road. An old drawing shows an engine house on the south side linked by a rope powering a winding shaft on the opposite side of the road. An engine house still stands on this site and the buildings on the north side of the road were used as colliery workshops.

Although colliery and railway have disappeared, two old public houses recall the previous industrial activity of the district. The Crown has become the Midland Spinner and the Old Maypole is now called The Station Master. At this point the Midland railway and the Dramway ran close beside each other.

A cyclepath has been created along the




Crown Pit, Warmley – an old drawing thought to date from 1860. It shows the two main shafts each side of the road, both powered from the same engine house. The older pit standing close to the Dramway can be seen on the right of the picture. The engine house still stands but the chimney was demolished recently.

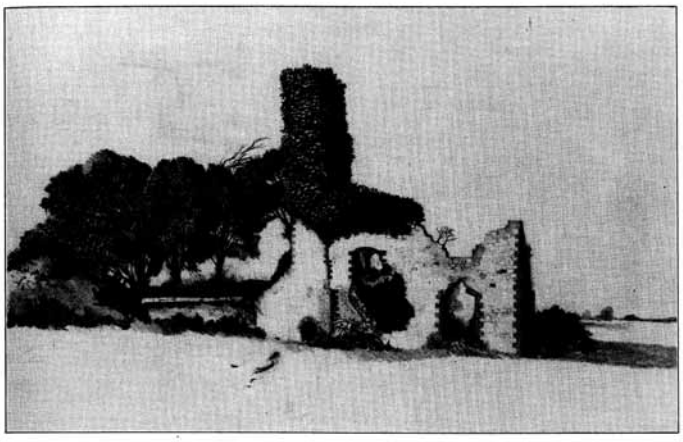


disused Midland lines and the signal box by the level crossing has been renovated.

A mile or so to the east of Crown pit can be seen the entrance to a drift mine at Webbs Heath. This was sunk in later years, in an attempt to reach the further seams.

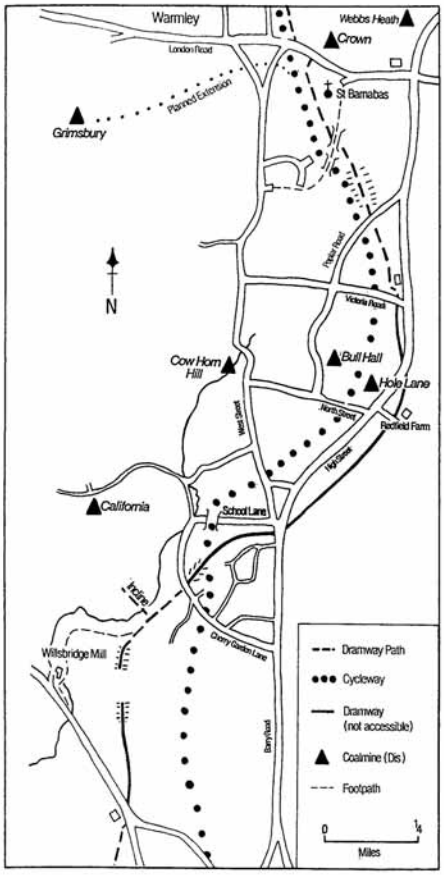
The brick and tile works north east of the road crossing made use of the Dramway in the latter half of the 19th century and may have helped to extend the life of the line.

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



Webbs Heath Colliery – a drift mine near Bridgeyate.

# Warmley to Willsbridge






Immediately south of the London Road the Dramway has been built over. However, a path starting from beside the Midland Spinner Inn, leads to the next section of the Dramway which can be followed through an attractive cutting and under the bridge by Saint Barnabas Church. Just south of this bridge the Dramway passes through an old quarry and runs out of the cutting across an impressive embankment to Poplar Road. This section is all right of way. At the base of the embankment there is a long culvert for the stream which runs down to Siston Brook. The original plans for the Dramway envisaged a large loop to the east to avoid the crossing of this small valley and the expense of building the embankment.

South of the Poplar Road the path continues to the developing industrial estate on North Common. Over part of this section the Dramway has been preserved, though a length just north of Victoria Road has been built over.

South of Victoria Road the Dramway runs along the edge of the school playing fields, converging gradually with the High Street. It crosses the road just opposite Weston Court Farm. From this point it goes south through Redfield Farm, along the edge of the allotments and down the side of the recreation ground to the small lane called Castle Road. It continues across the land to the Barry Road crossing beside the church hall. Most of this section of the route runs through private ground and is not publicly accessible. There is a right of way from Redfield Hill along the allotments and through the recreation ground to Castle Road. The general alignment of the Dramway is faithfully recorded in the field and garden boundaries, though the track has long been abandoned.

Apart from its industrial archaeological interest the Oldland Common section does not have a lot to recommend it. An alternative route would be from Victoria Road to Cherry Garden Lane by the cyclepath. There is an exit from the cyclepath just south of the bridge which crosses School Lane. A path leads down to School Lane which can be followed to Cherry Garden Lane where the Dramway may be rejoined.

Traces of the mines associated with the Dramway can still be seen. Hole Lane Colliery was situated just off the Dramway on the opposite side of the High Street. A siding was built into the colliery and one of the lines continued through to Bull Hall Colliery which lay a quarter of a mile to the west across the line of the Midland Railway.

Most of the Hole Lane Colliery has disappeared though one of the workshops still stands in a garden. The original pit was sunk on the opposite side of the road. The Dramway originally crossed the road by means of a tunnel just north of the pit. This has now been filled in.

The site of Bull Hall Colliery has been built over, but some traces of the tramway running to it and the bridge over the Midland Railway are still visible.

South of Barry Road the line of the old Dramway runs through the gardens of a private estate of recent construction and under the line of the disused railway (cyclepath) to Cherry Garden Lane. Over this section of the route the Dramway is inaccessible and has been obliterated throughout most of its length.

The tunnel entrance at Cherry Garden Lane can be seen although at present half buried under accumulated rubbish. The tunnel was originally 30 yds long and lined with masonry.

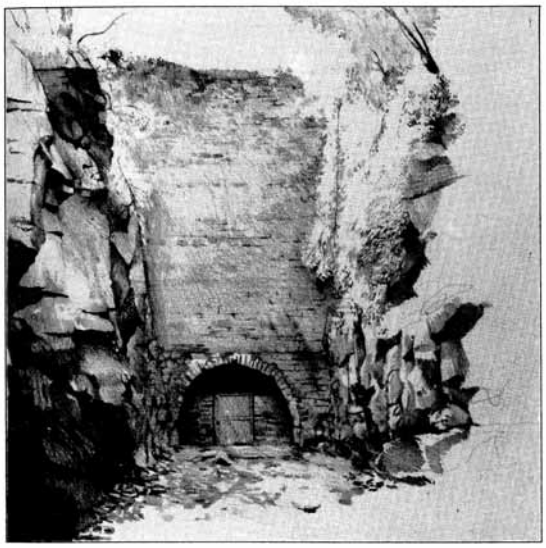
The steep sided Willsbridge valley posed considerable problems for the Dramway engineers. On the original plan the line was to follow a curve which took it close to Willsbridge Mill. This course was abandoned, possibly because of opposition from the local landowner. An extension was planned to follow the line of the brook up towards Cowhorn Hill Colliery; this too was abandoned. The eventual course ran along a large stone sided embankment into a steep sided cutting and through the 150 yard tunnel.

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

In 1876 Abraham Fussell reopened the California Colliery in the hope of extracting the deep seams of good quality coal which were known to lie beneath the worked out upper seams. The mine, which was situated on the south side of California Road opposite the entrance to Orchard Boulevard, was deepened and a tramway built to the edge of Willsbridge Valley and down an inclined way to link with the old Dramway. The incline was operated by gravity, the weight of the full trucks coming down being sufficient to pull the empties back up the slope. The Dramway had been out of use for several years but this section down to the Bath Road and the Avon was revived by the colliery. The enterprise was relatively short lived; by 1904 serious underground flooding had closed the mine which was later purchased by The Bristol Waterworks Company.

A view down Siston Brook showing the California incline.





Willsbridge Tunnel from the north.

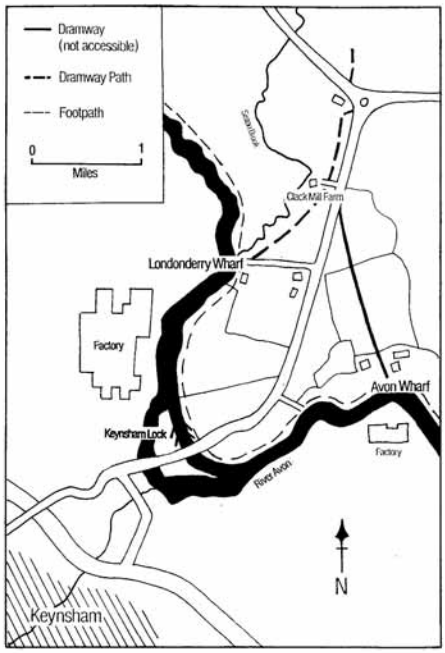
# Willsbridge to the Avon



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

The Bath Road was crossed on the level with no gates. Just south of the crossing sidings and wharves were built at the request of the Bristol Turnpike Trust in 1834. These were considerably enlarged after 1880 when traffic for California Colliery started using the Dramway. There was a weighbridge there and it has been suggested that the small garden building at the house on the corner was originally a weighbridge house.

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




The Dramway path from Clack Mill Farm Lane to Londonderry Wharf is a right of way though all traces of the Dramway have been obliterated. At Londonderry Wharf the small weighbridge house and the stables for the horses still stand but in a considerable state of disrepair. The Wharf is intact and most of the limestone sleeper blocks can be found in the ground.

A large number of iron rails have been reused at Londonderry Wharf to make fences. However they are not of the design originally used in the construction of the Dramway, and may have been used in later years to repair the line. However, there is also an incline line to a quarry on the opposite side of Siston Brook and it is more likely that the rails come from this latter site.

Although the Dramway from Keynsham Road to Avon Wharf has been filled in, quite a lot remains at or near the wharf itself.

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

The conical shaped weighbridge house, also listed, stands beside the clearly marked embankments of the old Dramway structure.

Two hundred yards further to the west is a disused quarry which is now private property. This was where the limestone sleeper blocks for both the Avon and Gloucestershire and Bristol and Gloucestershire tramways were quarried. Part of the line of the tramway linking this quarry to Avon Wharf can be traced across the field.

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

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