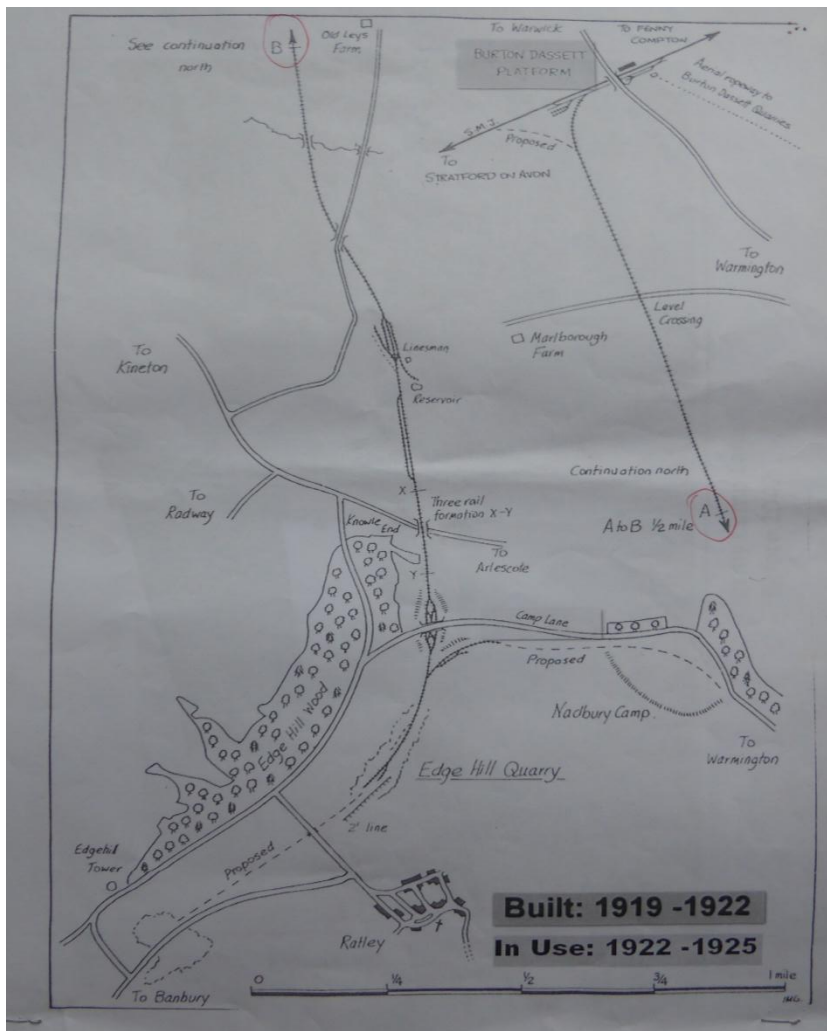


Light Railway of Yesteryear

Villagers from across the region joined Horntonians for an April presentation by Andrew Baxter, looking back at the extraordinary former Edgehill Light Railway which began operating in 1920. It was built to exploit the vast ironstone beds on the escarpment and designed to carry ironstone from the quarries to Burton Dassett.

Its origins are in the last year of WWI when iron was in great demand, but work to build it only began in 1919. In the middle of the line, there was a challenging cable-worked inclined plane at 1 in 6 with the quarry at the top. Infamously known as 'a dead duck of a railway from inception', plans for its second section, skirting around Hornton and a line around to Shennington, were abandoned. The line closed in 1925, when iron ore deposits became uneconomic, though it was not dismantled until 1946 and, for railway enthusiasts, the legend lives on. Parts of the line are still visible and recalled by older villagers who played on derelict engines left in the countryside.

A follow-up walking tour, led by Andrew again, of part of the old track attracted a crowd on a sunny April Saturday, followed by lunch at the Rose & Crown in Ratley to reward them for scrambling up that steep slope!



Map of the railway line, from the main Stratford line, top of the map.

Crossing over the Army Camp Lane, then the Arlscote road before rising up the main escarpment and under the top Camp Lane and around towards Edgehill.

There is a road bridge under the Ratley road although the line never reached that far.

The Edge Hill Light Railway.

By G. J. ASTON, J. R. HOLLICK and D. S. BARRIE.

OF the many unfinished chapters of British railway history, few are more fascinating than that of the Edge Hill Light Railway—a line the construction of which was suspended with such apparent haste that after a lapse of several years the mechanical excavator employed is still to be found with its grab half-raised to load a bucketful of earth! On this line the locomotives and wagons still stand on the tracks in the positions in which they were left, apparently, when the constructional work ceased, and there are many other evidences of dereliction which seem strangely incongruous in the heart of England.

The story of the Edge Hill Light Railway is in fact one of the most remarkable that has ever attended railway development. The line, which was promoted in association with the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction Railway (now amalgamated in the L.M.S.) had its origin in the opening-up of the rich ironstone deposits which have been known for many centuries to exist in this part of the South Midlands, and which are still tapped by light railways in the vicinity of Banbury and elsewhere. War-time requirements intensified the demand for British ironstone, and the E.H.L.R. was promoted to tap those deposits which exist in the immediate vicinity of Edge Hill.

In 1919 confirmation was given of a Light Railway Order for a line 5 miles 58 chains in length, from a junction with the S.M.J. at Burton Dassett sidings to Nadbury Camp and Sunrising on the top of Edge Hill, and it was stated that "great developments" were anticipated from the opening-up of the ironstone field. The fact that the line was not opened until after the cessation of hostilities, when the changed economic conditions occasioned a gradually lessening demand for British ore, may however have had a considerable effect in bringing about the fate which ultimately overtook the railway. The chairman of the company in

1922 was Mr. Harry Willmott, chairman of the S.M.J.R., and the chief officers of the Edge Hill Light Railway were also those of the S.M.J. Rather less than four miles of the line were actually laid for traffic or commenced, but quarries on Edge Hill were worked until January 27, 1925, when the last load was brought down the E.H.L.R. to Burton Dassett. Since that date the line has been disused.

The Edge Hill Light Railway, which is of standard gauge throughout, starts from a junction with the S.M.J. (L.M.S.) at Burton Dassett sidings, approximately half-way between Fenny Compton and Kington stations on the Stratford-Blisworth line, and adjacent to the main road between Banbury and Warwick. The L.M.S. company still maintains a goods depôt here, and there is also a platform which was constructed for the use of the workers at Edge Hill quarries, but which was never brought into service. The shelter on this platform now serves as an office for the goods depôt foreman. The light railway branch leads out of a siding on the south of the S.M.J. line and quickly curves away to the south-west. It is protected by a signal of S.M.J. pattern, while 100 yards up the line there is a runaway siding. The limit of L.M.S. maintenance is marked by a plate on the sleepers not far from the point of junction.

Single throughout, the branch runs over slightly rising ground for $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles to the foot of Edge Hill, where a series of sidings are provided. The face of the hill is ascended by a cable-worked incline of about half-a-mile in length and set on a gradient of about 1 in 9. The first 250 yards of this incline is single track, followed by a double-line loop, which in turn merges into a three-rail formation in which the centre rail is common to trains in both directions. Working on the incline was controlled by a small foreman's cabin located at the top. From the summit the line runs over level ground for some three-quarters of a mile, with several intermediate sidings, to a point at

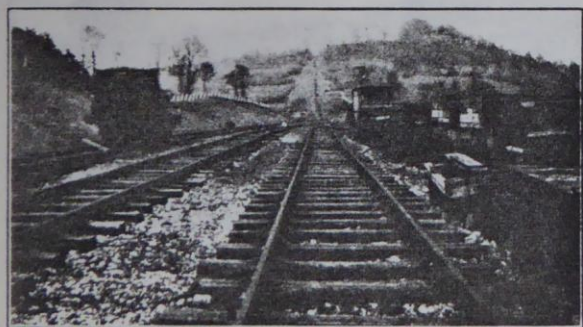


BURTON DASSETT JUNCTION FROM E.H.L.R.

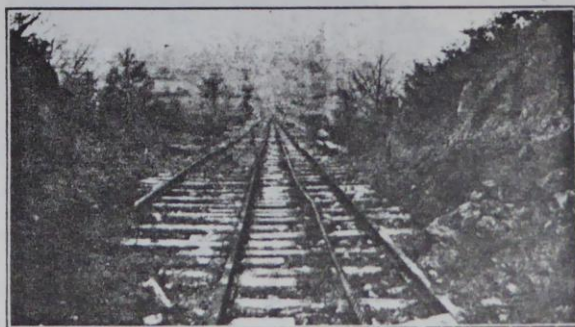


VIEW OF SIDINGS FROM FOOT OF INCLINE.

Photographs by G. J. Aston.

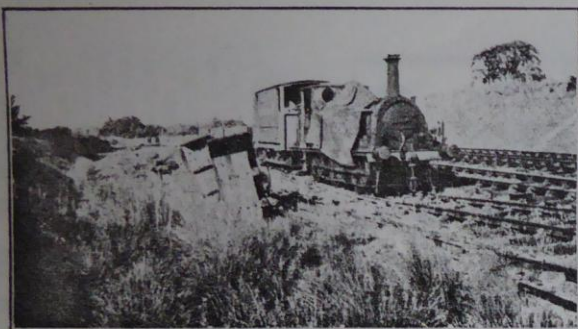


VIEW OF SIDINGS AT FOOT OF INCLINE.

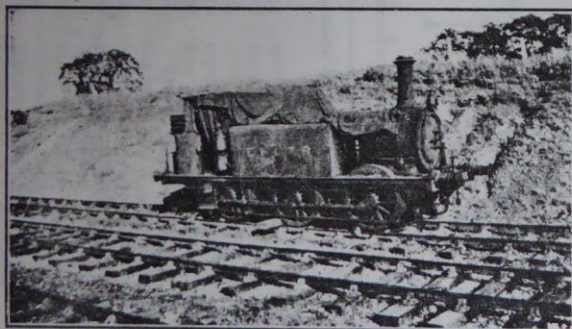


VIEW OF THREE-RAIL FORMATION ON INCLINE.

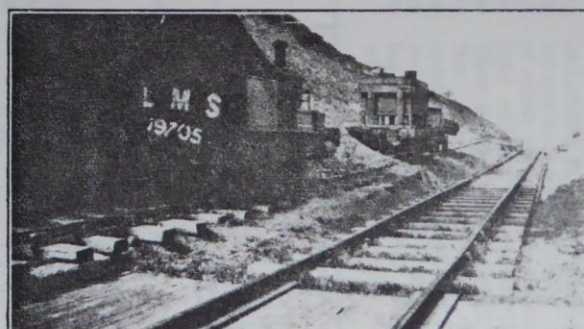
Photographs by J. R. Hollick.

E.H.L.R. No. 2 (Ex L.B.S.C.R. No. 674) AND BRAKE VAN No. 2
AT FOOT OF INCLINE.

VIEW AT TOP OF INCLINE.



E.H.L.R. No. 1 (Ex L.B.S.C.R. No. 673) AT FOOT OF INCLINE.

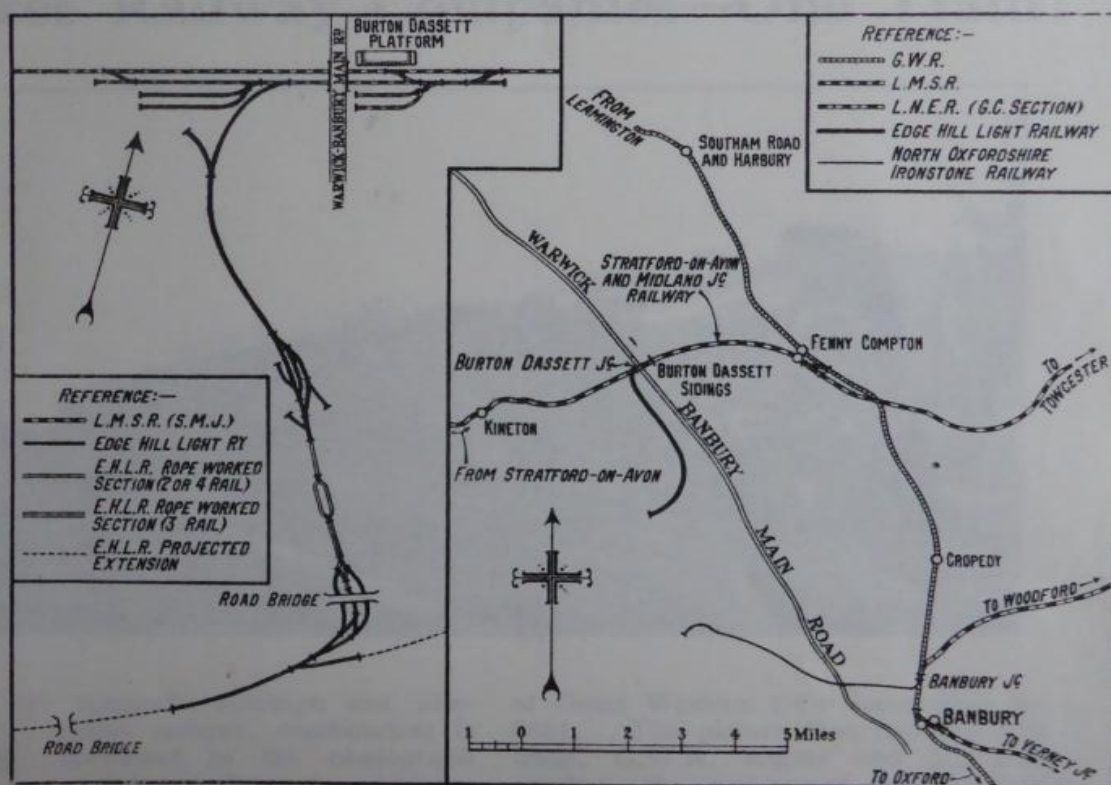


MANNING WARDLE 0-4-0T AND WATER TANK AT TOP OF INCLINE.

Photographs by J. R. Hollick

which it ends abruptly in a cutting, where the steam excavator employed still stands as it was left. A further quarter-mile beyond is a partially completed brick-arch bridge through which the railway was to run on its continuation to Ratley Road, but the bridge has never been properly cleared out beneath, although the presence of a few rails leaves no doubt as to the builders' intention.

ex-L.B.S.C.R. 0-6-0T engines of the famous Stroudley "Terrier" type, many of which are still to be found on various light railways throughout the country. These engines were originally L.B.S.C.R. Nos. 673 and 674, and although re-numbered and lettered E.H.L.R. Nos. 1 and 2, the original "Brighton" painting and lettering still shows through, while No. 2 still retains its Brighton



SKETCH MAP SHOWING EDGE HILL LIGHT RAILWAY.

The greater part of the permanent way on the E.H.L.R. is flat-bottomed, spiked directly to the sleepers, a method much favoured in light and industrial railway construction. Much of the permanent way appears to have been bought second-hand, while in the vicinity of the junctions and in the sidings, chairs and bull-headed rails are used, the chairs being largely of Hull & Barnsley origin, with a number from the S.M.J.

As regards locomotives and rolling-stock, the line between Burton Dassett Junction and the foot of the incline at Edge Hill was worked by two

works plate (1882). Both these engines stand derelict in a siding, partially covered with tarpaulins and in quite good repair considering that they have been for five years exposed to wind and weather.

Traffic beyond the top of the hill was worked by a Manning-Wardle 0-4-0T, which is also standing derelict. A stationary engine operated the cable-worked incline. Two brake-vans, numbered E.H.L.R. 1 and 2, together with a number of four-wheeled open wagons of standard type, are also in evidence.

Although the locomotives and rolling-stock are still in good condition consider-

ing the ordeal to which they have been exposed, time and weather have played sad havoc with the permanent way, which in several places is almost buried under falls of earth and subsidences of the cutting walls.

Generally, however, the line does not give the impression of having been left derelict for nearly five years, and no doubt it could easily be re-opened should such a fortunate eventuality be made possible by future trade developments.

Three Railway Companies—One Train!

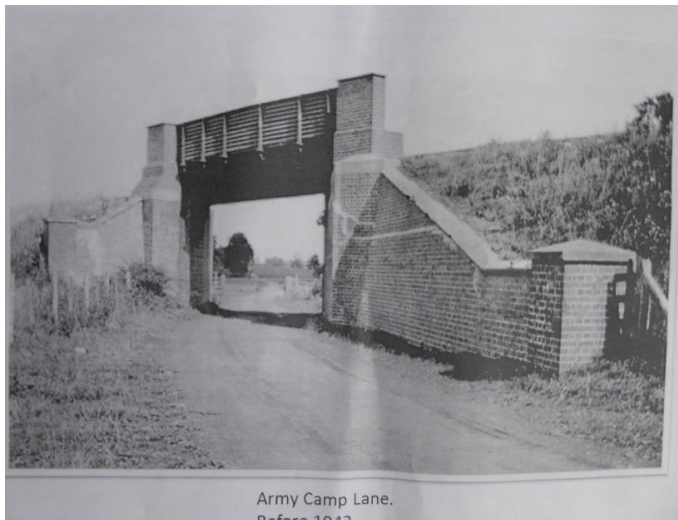


AN unusual, although not altogether unique, combination is portrayed in the photograph reproduced above, for which we are indebted to Mr. D. S. Barrie. He explains that the photograph is of a through excursion train from Sheffield (Victoria), L.N.E.R., to Bournemouth (Central), Southern Railway, taken while passing Brockenhurst (Hants) in charge

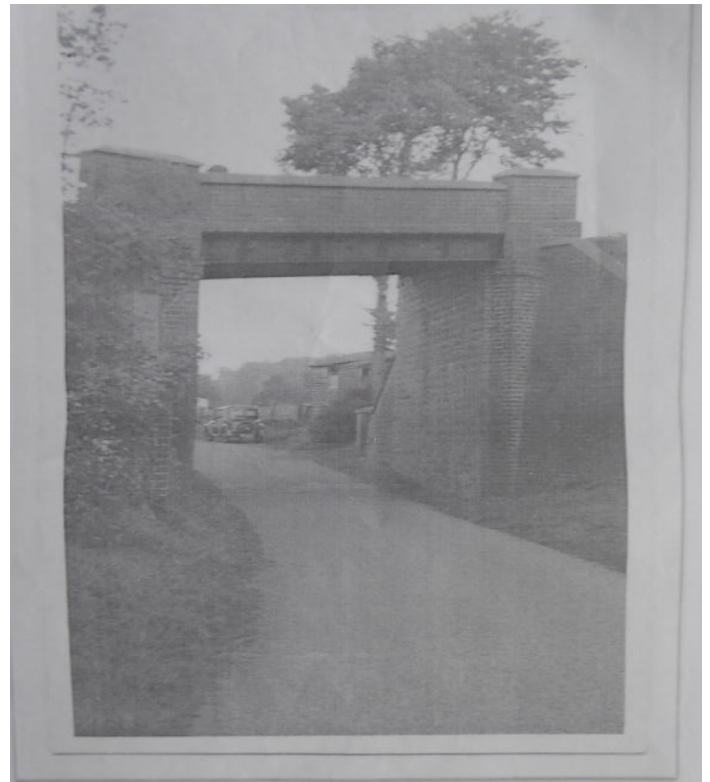
of Great Western 2-6-0 locomotive No. 6381. The picture thus includes S.R. track, G.W.R. engine and L.N.E.R. coaches, the last-named being mostly Great Central section but including an East Coast 12-wheeled vestibule car. The train had apparently worked through on to the Bournemouth line *via* Banbury and Basingstoke, an S.R. pilotman accompanying the G.W.R. enginemen.



Images from past and present



Army Camp Bridge (Above)



Arlescote Road Bridge (Right)

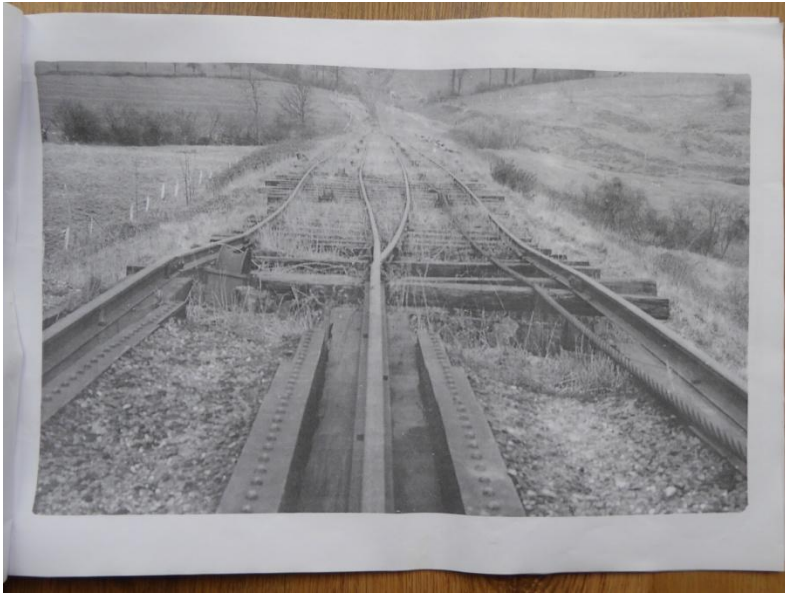
Section just above Arlescote Bridge



Finding part of the track



Looking down the escarpment with the split track



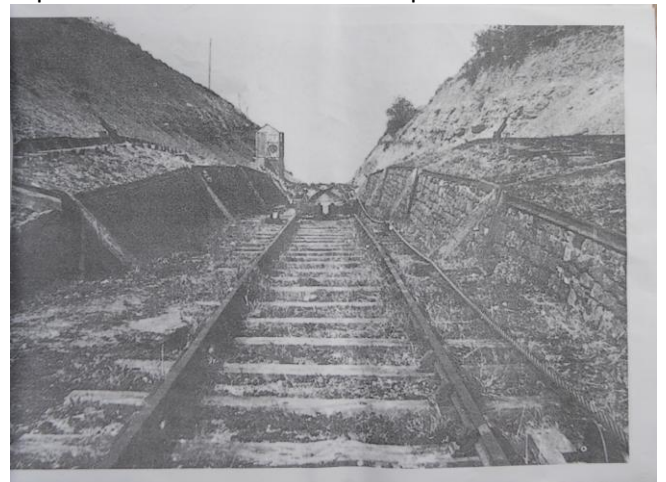
Looking up the escarpment



Part of the pulley system (Below)



Top section before the cross over point



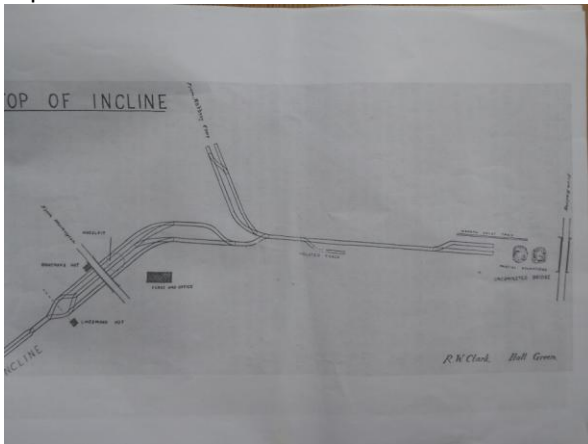
Looking up to the top Camp Lane Bridge



Signal Box



Top track section



Bridge under Ratley Road



So who knows where we are?

