

A HISTORY OF THE COLEORTON RAILWAY



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - AUGUST 2022

FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH

The former Coleorton Railway bridge over Aqueduct Lane - early 1900s

SUGGESTED COMPLIMENTARY READING ON THE AUTHOR'S WEBSITE

"The Charnwood Forest Canal and its Tramways"

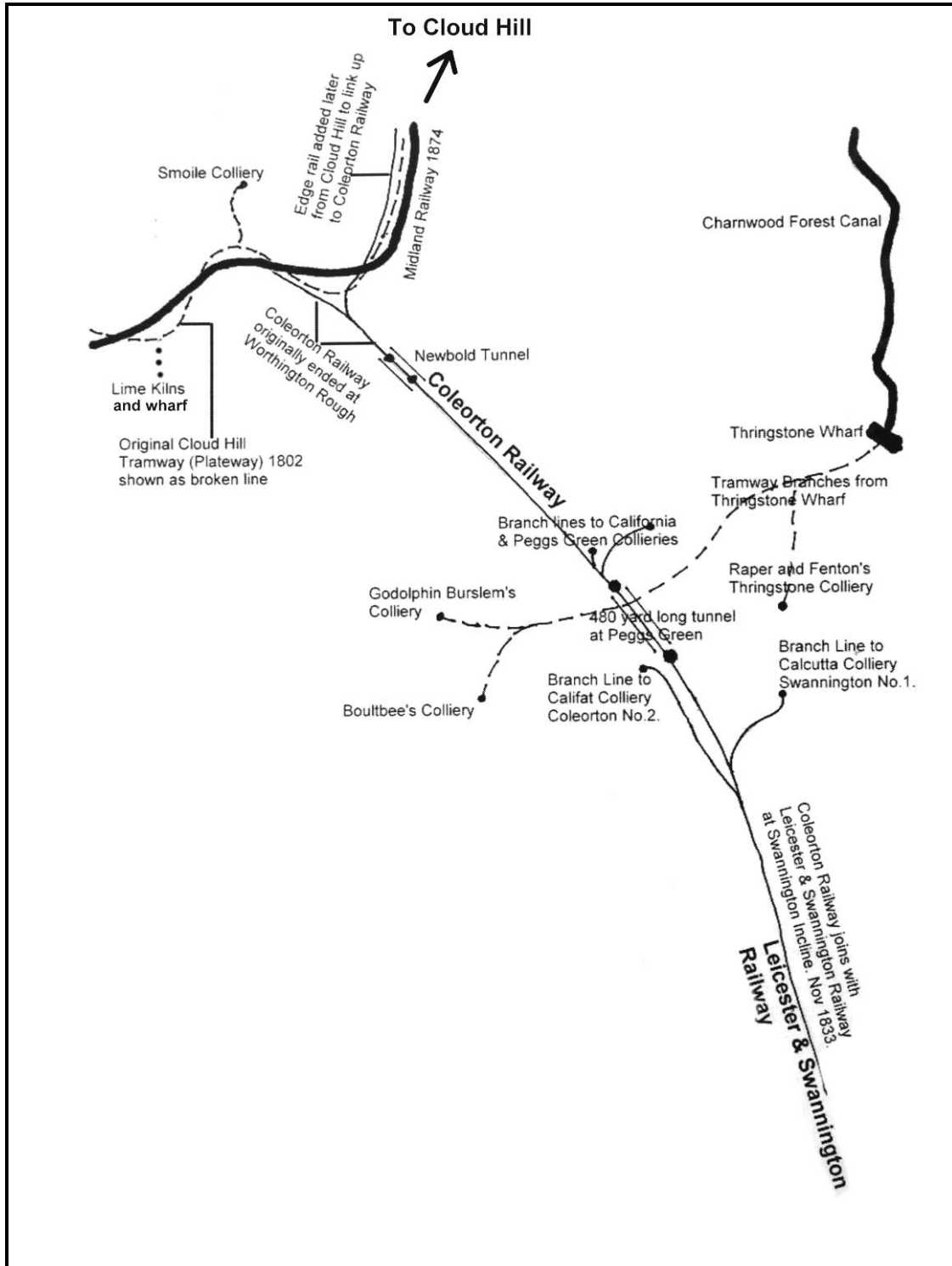
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COLEORTON RAILWAY

A SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM (NOT TO SCALE) SHOWING THE ROUTE OF THE COLEORTON RAILWAY FROM THE LEICESTER TO SWANNINGTON RAILWAY AT SWANNINGTON INCLINE TO WORTHINGTON ROUGH, INCLUDING THE TRAMWAY BRANCH LINES FROM THE CHARNWOOD FOREST CANAL AT THRINGSTONE WHARF TO THE COLLIERIES AT THRINGSTONE AND COLEORTON



Sir George Howland Willoughby Beaumont, 8th Baronet of Stoughton, was responsible for the promoting, building, and a substantial part of financing the "Coleorton Railway", and also for the promoting of the "Coleorton Railway Act", passed by Parliament on June 10th 1833, which permitted the railway to be operated. Most of the land on which it was built was owned by Sir George, so his contribution to the cost would have been more than what it actually appeared. The total money raised was apparently £15,240, of which Sir George contributed £5,500 (36%). He held 109 of the 340, £50 shares, and was the major shareholder. **The primary purpose of the railway, was to serve Beaumont's collieries in the Peggs Green and Coleorton areas, however, other key people like the Earl of Stamford & Warrington, the owner of Cloud Hill Quarry, and Lord Ferrers with his mining and quarrying interests would have had an involvement.**

Sir George had seen the Leicester & Swannington Railway project as containing both potential and threat. Yes, it would bring the new railway network into the Leicestershire coalfield, but it would stop short of serving all his potential colliery interests. Sir George had inherited the Coleorton estate and other lands in 1827 from his cousin Sir George Howland Beaumont, 7th Baronet of Stoughton.

Before the Bill was presented to Parliament in March 1830, Sir George spoke to a number of MPs asking them to oppose the line unless it extended to serve Coleorton too. On behalf of the Leicester and Swannington promoters, Sir Charles Hastings and Mr Keck responded to the danger of this threat. They agreed with Sir George.....*"to render you every assistance in their power to enable you to communicate by a Branch to the main line of the Railway, and that in the case of your being compelled to apply to Parliament to effect that objective, that the expenses to be thereby incurred, should be repaid to you out of the tonnages which might become payable for Coals and other minerals conveyed from your works..."*. On the last day of March 1830, the Coleorton agreement was confirmed, and on June 10th 1833 the Leicester & Swannington Railway obtained its Act.

Sir George had not managed to persuade the promoters to build his line, but he had at least ensured that legal costs associated with it would be refunded to him. In fact, the Leicester & Swannington Railway Company was rather shrewd in all its dealings, only actually paying for two (Bagworth and North Bridge) of the six branches which brought additional traffic over its route in the coming decade. The main line from Leicester to Bardon and Bagworth Colliery was completed in two years, and was officially opened on July 24th 1832. By 1833, it had reached Long Lane, Whitwick, and was soon extended to the 1 in 17 Swannington Incline.

George Stephenson reported to the Board on his survey of the extension beyond Swannington, including levels. Samuel Smith Harris later stated that these included inclined planes and a branch to Cloud Hill Lime works. In August, Sir George Crewe requested that any such extension should serve his Ticknall Lime works. At the end of September, Sir George expressed a willingness to promote a railway from the Coleorton and Peggs Green Collieries, under the terms of the Coleorton Agreement, and the Coleorton Railway project was officially announced in the Leicester Chronicle of November 20th 1832. During the winter of 1832/3, Samuel Harris (an architect and surveyor, as well as being a partner in Whitwick Colliery) drew up a section of the route. William Dicken was then appointed engineer and finally drew up the plans for submission to Parliament. The "Leicester and Swannington Railway Co" actually supported the project, by paying the costs for processing the Act of Parliament, and also supplied technical knowledge in building the railway.

The contractors for the railway were Messrs Nowell and Son, and one of their first major tasks was to build a 480 yard long tunnel at Peggs Green, which the tramway coming from the bottom of the Swannington incline passed through, before heading North West towards "Worthington Rough".



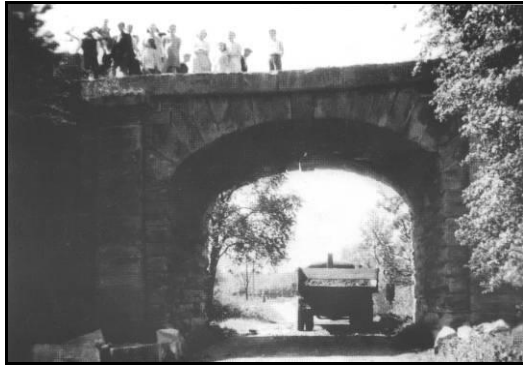
THE ENTRANCE TO THE CIRCULAR BRICK TUNNEL AT ST. GEORGE'S HILL, SWANNINGTON WHICH HAS NOW BEEN FILLED IN

From the estate records, we know that "Coleorton Brickyard", managed by Thomas Thirlby at that time, supplied some 868,000 bricks between August 1833 and February 1835, mainly for the building of the Peggs Green tunnel. The price for these bricks started at 22 shillings per thousand, reducing later to £1 per thousand. *The brickyard was owned by Sir George Beaumont, and had a reputation for making high quality bricks, many of which were supplied to St.Pancras station.*

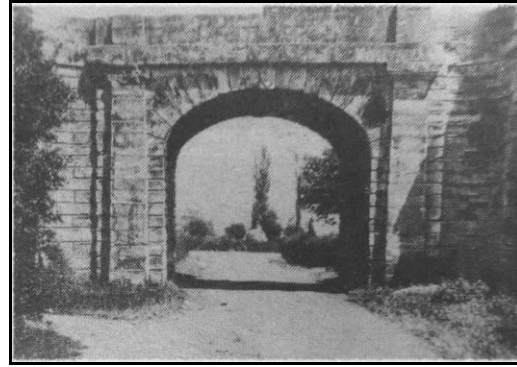
There is a record showing that in September 1835, Nowell & Son and Thomas Platts were paid for fencing, hedging and dykeing along the route.

The line continued onto Gelsmoor via an embankment, which crossed the bridge on Aqueduct Lane, which was / is always referred to by the locals as *Acadoc*. It is thought that it got its name from a wooden sough on stilts which was created at one time to bring the pumped water from a mine shaft which was sunk in the field to the north of what was once Providence Chapel and is now Providence House on Gelsmoor Road, down to the brook at the bottom of Zion's Hill. The shaft was approx 200 meters from the current Rempstone Road and 15 meters in from the current Gelsmoor Road.

The following photographs are of the former bridge on Aqueduct Lane, which the Coleorton Railway once ran over. The first photograph was taken as the bridge was being demolished; note the group of people standing on the top. The bridge, in dressed sandstone, was constructed as part of the Coleorton Railway project c.1834. The side walls of the bridge are still there, and a blue plaque to commemorate it has been installed by Coleorton heritage.



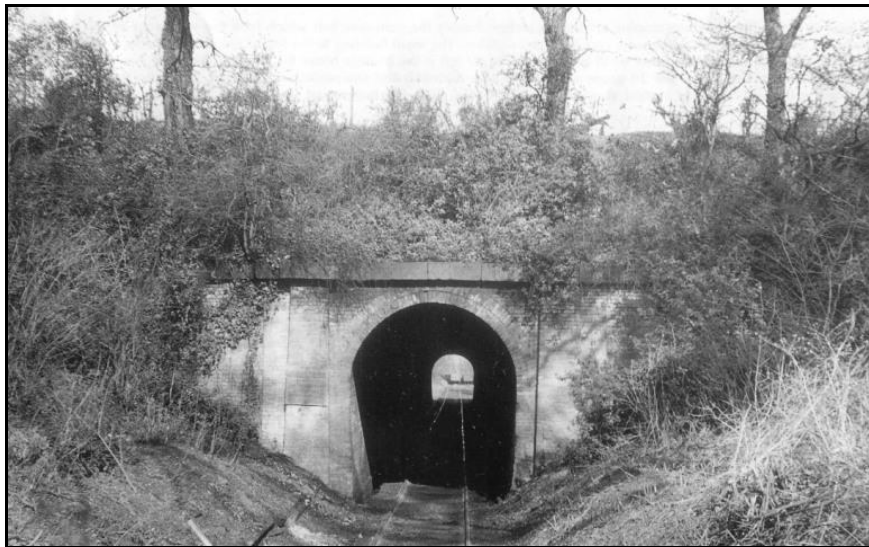
THE BRIDGE BEING DEMOLISHED



**THE BRIDGE AS IT LOOKED c.1900
VIEWED FROM GELSMOOR ROAD**

A circular brick tunnel had to be constructed through the embankment at the bottom of Zion's Hill to allow the brook to pass through, and which still exists today. From this point onwards the railway ran through Worthington Parish. The embankment then continued on to a point close to the "Gelsmoor" on Rempstone Road. "The Gelsmoor" restaurant originated in the 1840's as the "Railway Hotel", the licensee being George Crabtree. It later became the "Railway Tavern" and then the "Railway Inn". Apparently the road crossing at this point was controlled by a keeper, who was provided with a wooden box. The railway also had a wharf at Gelsmoor, next to the Rempstone Turnpike, which was run by George Crabtree, and operated transferring coal, slack, lime and any other items that could be conveyed on the railway, such as pottery from "Coleorton Pottery".

Following pressure from Sir George Beaumont, the line was extended to continue along another embankment to cross the road just below Newbold C of E School, and then via a cutting and short tunnel (c.90 yards long) to the terminus at the Hinckley-Melbourne turnpike, which was originally built in 1750. At this point, the railway had reached the Cloud Hill tramway (plateway) at what was also known as Worthington Rough, and ran alongside it in a westerly direction for a short distance, but did not connect with it at this time (see schematic diagram at the beginning of this section). It was thought to have been completed to this point from Swannington Incline in early 1835. For a relatively short railway (c. 2 ½ miles long), a high degree of civil engineering was involved in its construction.



NEWBOLD TUNNEL

Although the line was the standard 4 feet 8½ inch gauge, and used edge rails, it was worked by horse drawn wagons with flanged wheels and there is no documentary evidence that steam engines were ever used on the “Coleorton Railway” (see later photographs).

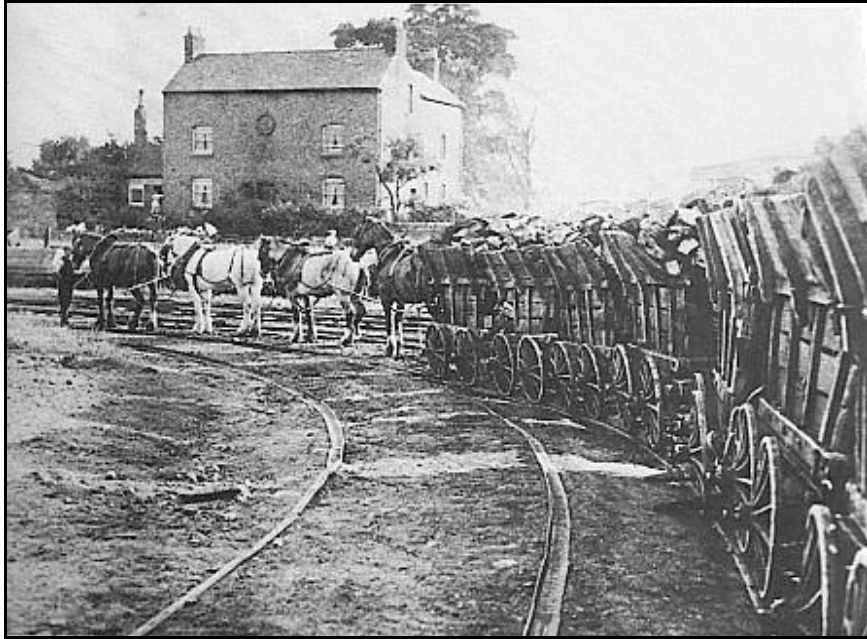
The failure of the original aim to reach “Smoile Colliery” which was leased from Sir George by Benjamin Walker proved costly, and initially coal wagons had to be double loaded from the coal shaft to reach the railway for transportation to Leicester. This was clearly inefficient. It is possible, that an extension of the line to one of the Smoile Colliery shafts was constructed c.1836, based on the submission of a bill from George Chubb for 2 guineas for surveying the extension. He was the surveyor and resident engineer of the railway.

Lime from “Cloud Hill Quarry” would have had to be transhipped onto the “Coleorton Railway” due to the fact that the Tramway was in fact a 4 feet 2 inch gauge plateway (see later photograph). The L shaped line plateway, used narrower wagons with plain rimmed wheels, and therefore this did not match either the rail type, wheel type or gauge of the “Coleorton Railway”. The “Ashby Canal Company” which owned the tramway had anticipated this, and considered Lord Stamford’s (owner of “Cloud Hill Lime Works”) proposal in Feb 1833 to lay a compatible rib (edge) rail from Cloud Hill, to connect with the “Coleorton Railway” at Worthington Rough. This was not carried out, and the “Ashby Canal Company” then considered a proposal in 1837 from the “Leicester and Swannington Railway” board, who had become concerned about the lack of traffic over Swannington Incline from “Coleorton Railway”, to lay down rib (edge) rails parallel with the tramway from its intersection point with the “Coleorton Railway” to “Cloud Hill Lime Quarry”. The canal company went one step further, and requested their company engineer to prepare costings for relaying the whole of the tramway from Willesley basin to Ticknall and Cloud Hill with rib (edge) rails, and also to prepare an estimate for the likely increased traffic. Clearly, this proved too expensive, and the final solution, agreed by the “Ashby Canal Company” on Dec 4th 1838, was to lay a rib (edge) rail on the tramway from Cloud Hill to “The Smoile”, the cost of which was borne by “Bostock & Co” (Lord Stamford’s tenant at Cloud Hill), and “Coleorton Railway” via loans from the Swannington and Leicester Railway of £600 and £633.13s.11d respectively. The work was recorded as not being completed till Aug 5th 1840.

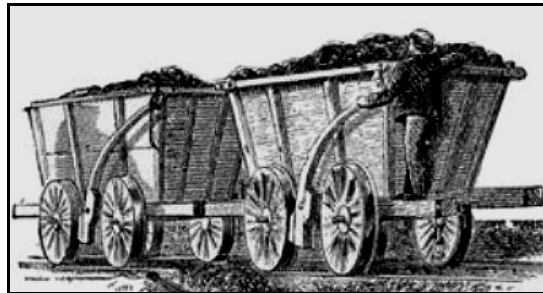
The “Coleorton Railway” and “Leicester and Swannington Railway”, clearly stood to benefit from considerable extra traffic over the line, which proved to be the case. The rib (edge) rail proved to be a success, and traffic from Cloud Hill continued steadily over the line until the building of the Midland Railway from Derby to Ashby took place. From the time the section from Worthington to Ashby was opened in 1874 no further shipments from Cloud Hill over the Coleorton Railway were recorded for obvious reasons.

Although the information available is somewhat sketchy, it appears that “Coleorton Railway” was latterly (by 1862) extended to another of the “Smoile Colliery” shafts in an effort to improve its financial viability. It is recorded that by c.1849, a short branch line had been added to take coal from the “California Colliery” at Pegg's Green, and in c.1853 and c.1855, two further short branch lines had been added to the “Calcutta” and “Califat” collieries and another to the “Peggs Green Colliery”. The following recorded statement was made in Oct 1857 by Charles Smith who was the receiver for “Wyggeston’s Hospital” (a charitable institution) on whose land the Califat and California Collieries stood - *“Mr. Worswick has erected two collieries on the estate (Califat and California), and has far exceeded the minimum quantity of 12 acres per annum. He has recently erected a private railway nearly parallel to the Coleorton line from the terminus of the old Swannington to his newest pit on the common”*.

The “Coleorton Railway” survived for c.40yrs, and had a somewhat roller coaster life, with some high points of profitable traffic, and a lot of lows when traffic was inadequate. Overall, the line was a financial failure, in part, as a result of the very competitive prices being achieved in the Leicester coal market, due to a price-cutting war between the Derbyshire collieries and the new collieries at Coalville. The New Lount colliery used part of the line until the closure of the pit in 1968.



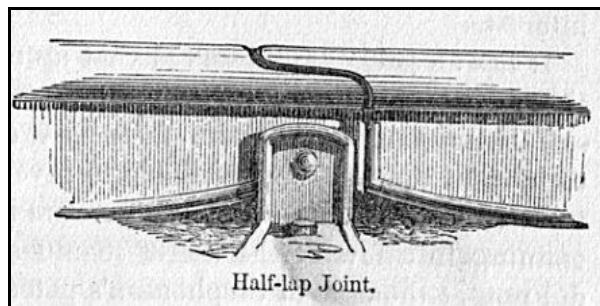
The above photograph shows coal being transported along a plateway rail system by horse drawn wagons. This would have been similar to how it would have been on the Coleorton Railway, except that it was a single track rib (edge) rail line, and the wagons would have had flanged wheels. The original Cloud Hill tramway was a plateway rail system as per the above photograph.



A typical design of horse drawn wagons with flanged wheels that would have been used on the Coleorton Railway, running on rib (edge) rails.



SECTION OF TYPICAL PLATEWAY RAIL



**CAST IRON FISH BELLY RIB (EDGE) RAIL.
STEPHENSON 1818 PATENT**

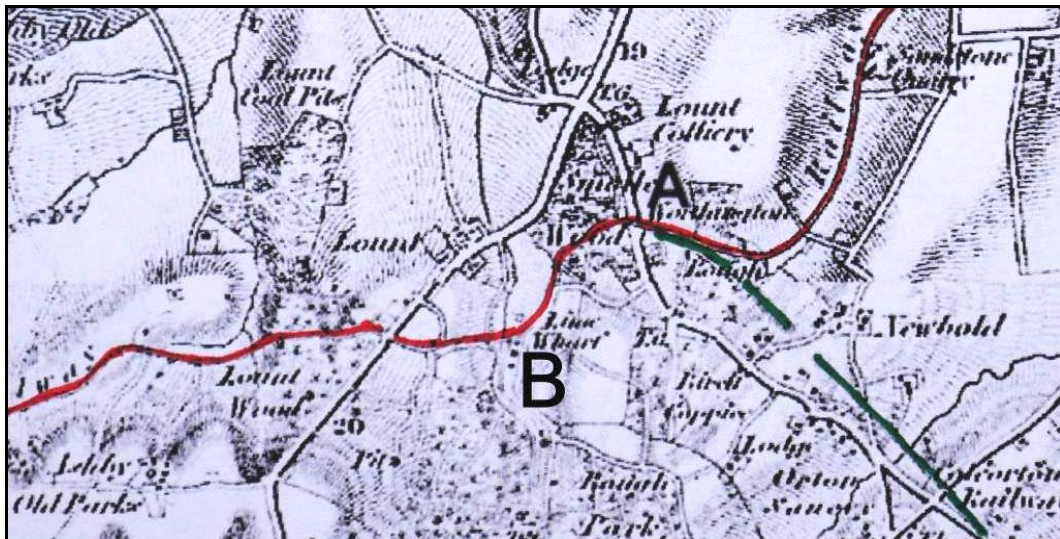
In the early 1800's, George Stephenson held the patents and rights for the best cast iron rib (edge) rails (see preceding illustration), which were typically only 3 feet in length. These tended to be brittle and broke easily. John Birkinshaw in 1820 developed and patented a method of rolled wrought / malleable iron edge rails which could be made in 15 foot lengths. These were technically better in all respects, and Stephenson used these rails on the "Stockton and Darlington Railway" and they were also used on the "Leicester and

Swannington Railway“. It is therefore likely, although no records exist, that the same rails were used on the “Coleorton Railway“. The author recalls these lines still existing in Stoney Lane, and going over the lane from the embankment on either side. They were later taken up by the council.

In “The Leicester to Swannington Railway” by C.R.Clinker (Leicestershire Archeological Society) it is recorded on the only *surviving* shipment document (1832 to 1845) that the following shipments of burnt lime were sent via the Coleorton Railway and Leicester to Swannington Railway to Leicester from Cloud Hill.

	Tons	Cwts	Qt's
First 6 months of 1833	371		
The above would have presumably been transported to Long Lane, Whitwick by horse drawn wagons on the turnpike roads as the railway to “Swannington Incline” was not completed till November 1833.			
First 6 months of 1844	783	11	2
Last 6 months of 1844	2044	9	1
First 6 months of 1845	675	8	3

The above would have been transported by horse drawn wagons on the Coleorton Railway to be transhipped onto the Leicester to Swannington railway wagons at ‘Swannington incline’.



The above extract from the 1835 1st edition O/S map also shows coloured green, the route of the Coleorton Railway coming from Pegg’s Green in a north westerly direction, and going through the Newbold tunnel and finally running alongside the Cloud Hill Tramway, coloured red, for a short distance at “Worthington Rough” where lime from Cloud Hill and coal from the Smoile area was initially transhipped into the Coleorton Railway horse drawn wagons.