

Bridging the Line.

by John Blunt.

In the last few years British Rail has painted a number on the brick-arched bridge that carries the Melbourne Road over the disused railway line near Lount. No. MJ52 39 was extensively repaired five years ago by a specialist firm from Essex.

The bridge was one of many built to serve the Melbourne to Ashby line, opened in 1867. The bridge contractors name was Sigley, and he reputedly came down from Manchester after building Strangeways Gaol. He quoted for the job in the expectation of deriving enough stone from the cuttings to build the bridges, but the stone ran out, and the more expensive brick bankrupted him. The start of the line is now a cycle track, and if you travel along it from Melbourne you see stone until you reach the demolished arch at Worthington.

Mr Sigley was a widower, and his daughter Amelia came with him as housekeeper to the cottage they rented in Wilson. All this is oral history passed down through the family, because Amelia married my great grandfather, Thomas Henry Blunt.

The line fell victim to Dr. Beechings cuts in the 1950's, and opencast coal mining has destroyed all trace south of the bridge. My father and I chanced to see what must have been the last train to travel part way along the line. About 1969 we were working in the adjacent woods when we heard a locomotive close by. Walking across we found an engine stationary amid the trees close to the bridge with three railwaymen aboard. Testing the engine? Out for a jolly? Who knows. Shortly afterwards the rails were ripped up.

As a boy my father travelled this route to school in Ashby. He had memories of being allowed to ride on the footplate, and on occasion seeing the crew frying eggs on the stoker's shovel in the firebox. What would 'elf and safety have to say about that now.

The bridge is strongly built of English bond brickwork with heavy stone copers on the parapets. Under the arch the brickwork is cleverly skewed, because the road does not cross the line at right angles. On the Newbold side are two pairs of rusted steel posts, notched to receive steel hawsers. These were placed here during the Second World War by Frank Hodges, a well known pipeworks owner and entrepreneur. His purpose was to close the road before the advancing German army, and delay their progress. A puny effort it seems now, but a reminder of how very real the threat seemed back then.

Old history this, the thunder of passenger trains long gone. Or maybe not - High Speed Rail to Nottingham and the north is set to pass straight through my ancestors bridge.

December 2016.