



Alan Green writes > Fifty-one years ago, in 1971, when your grandad was a boy, the last of the railway lines in Bestwood was taken up.

The tracks have gone, but they are not forgotten, because railways played a vital part in Bestwood's history for nearly a century before.

Although 21st-century Bestwood Country Park is a magnificent 670 acres of woodland and parkland, in the late 1800s, what was known as the Bestwood Estate covered a much larger area.

By this time, heavy industry was well established on the Estate: a large and highly productive Colliery operated there for over

90 years, and for a shorter time there was an Ironworks close by. There were also numerous farms on the Estate, some of them dating back to the time of Nell Gwynn - but that's another story.

The railways were crucial in transporting coal, iron and other materials to and from the Colliery and the Ironworks. You can still find evidence of these railways in the Park and surrounding area, because several of the lines have been transformed into level and accessible footpaths.

The need for railways in Bestwood

As described in a forthcoming Geology edition of The Dynamo magazine, 315 million years ago,

Nottinghamshire along with much of the rest of the East Midlands was a huge tropical swamp. Subsequent geological events created millions of tonnes of coal there. The first mine shaft on the Bestwood Estate was sunk in 1872, and coal production became properly established in 1876.

By this time, the Industrial Revolution was well underway, largely powered by steam engines and huge furnaces. The owner of the Bestwood Estate, the 10th Duke of St Albans, needed a way to transport his coal to the big markets in areas of heavy industry.

Around the mid-1850s, rail had started to replace the canals as the primary transport method for most commodities, including coal. The Midland Railway Company had become the dominant railway company in the East Midlands - and had pretty much established a monopoly, and blocked or bought out all the other rail companies in the area.

The Great Northern Railway Company (GNR) which transported large amounts of coal around other parts of the country was keen to capture some of the ever-increasing East Midlands coal market, and there were also many frustrated

colliery owners and other businessmen keen for the Midland Railway monopoly to be broken.

In 1872, representatives from the GNR and local businessmen, including the 10th Duke, met and agreed to build a new line, from Egginton Junction, near Burton, to Colwick, near Nottingham. This line would pass through the Bestwood Estate. A branch line up to Pinxton was also part of the arrangement. The 10th Duke was influential in Parliament; he was a Privy Councillor and well acquainted with Prime Minister, William Gladstone, so there was little difficulty in obtaining Parliamentary approval!

The Midland Railway had already built and acquired lines around Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, and had seized the optimal geographical routes, so any options for a GNR line would face many challenges - not least the need to build the Mapperley Tunnel to navigate between Gedling and Daybrook (the station for Arnold), and the impressive Bennerley Viaduct to cross the Erewash Valley. Nevertheless, the GNR line, named the Derbyshire & Staffordshire Extension, fully opened in 1878 although the section around

From kings to coal. For people. For wildlife.

Bestwood opened earlier in 1875.

It is worth noting that Bennerley Viaduct is one of only two wrought iron viaducts remaining in the country. After 54 years of closure, it has been restored, and re-opened to cyclists and walkers in 2022. It is located on the Nottinghamshire / Derbyshire border, and forms part of the original railway line through Bestwood. The viaduct is free to visit at any time.

Passenger Traffic

Although the GNR line was built to transport coal, there was also a demand for passenger services along the line. In the early days it was only by locals' petitioning the GNR that some stations were built. There were no plans for several of the stations, and they were certainly not included in the original budget for the line.

Some years earlier, the Midland Railway had built their Leen Valley Line which runs just to the west of the Mill Lakes, and is still the railway line that operates between Nottingham and Mansfield today. The line first opened in 1848. The two stations nearest to Bestwood are located in Bulwell and in Hucknall, each of which is a couple of miles' walk to the Park.

The railway finally reached Bestwood Village in 1881 when



the GNR's Leen Valley Line opened as a branch from the Staffordshire & Derbyshire extension, with Bestwood Station serving passengers from 1882.

Once the station was open, day trips to the coast became possible for the villagers:

Skegness was the popular seaside destination for East Midlands.

However, passenger traffic waned as buses and trams became quicker options for travel, especially into Nottingham, and Bestwood Station closed to passengers in

1931. The Station House still remains in the village.

Demise

The Ironworks were mothballed in 1928, and the assets eventually sold off in 1939. The Colliery thrived for much longer and is renowned as the first mine in the world to produce 1 million tons of coal in a 12-month period!

Circumstances changed over time, though, and the Colliery finally closed in 1967.

Much of the railway in Bestwood was centred around the Colliery - and the Winding Engine House and Dynamo House were at the heart of the Colliery.

The surrounding flat, largely grassy area to the west contained extensive railway sidings. The path leading west away from the Dynamo House is on the line of the tracks where the empty coal wagons were positioned before coming back to be filled.

The branch into the Ironworks and Colliery is no longer evident within the current boundary of the Park.

Similarly, additional lines to the Colliery from the Midland Line - called the Midland Colliery Branch - were also built, but there are no obvious signs of the route today.

Walking the track beds

However, several of the former lines leading into the Park to the Colliery and Ironworks are still

The Friends of Bestwood Country Park

Bestwood Country Park is the gateway to the ancient Forest of Sherwood. As a community we are committed to the preservation and enhancement of this heritage site and its wildlife, for now and the generations that follow.

From kings to coal. For its people. For its wildlife.

To find out more about our wonderful Park contact our information hub:

info@fbcp.org.uk

Visit our website <http://www.fbcp.org.uk>

Join our Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fobcp>

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identifiable; they have been re-purposed as level and accessible footpaths.

The path along the GNR Leen Valley line runs parallel to the A611 Hucknall Road and the B683 Bestwood Road through Top Valley and Rise Park.

Prior to the 1940s these housing estates didn't exist and several of the farms from the original Bestwood Estate have given their name to the housing developments subsequently built, including of course Rise Farm and Top Valley Farm.

In 1898 the Great Central Railway (GCR) became the third railway company to build a line through the Leen Valley.

For a short section, the Great Central Railway shared the GNR line, joining at Moor Bridge Junction. The GCR line came up from the former Nottingham Victoria Station (where the Victoria Shopping Centre now stands), running alongside Bulwell Forest golf course, and crossing Hucknall Road to form the junction.

The old track bed then continues as a glorious tree-lined, elevated footpath heading north where, at Bestwood Junction, the line splits - east into the Country Park, and on towards the Winding Engine House.



Bestwood Junction

The GNR main line then crosses Moor Road, where the current footbridge has replaced the old bridge, passing Mill Lakes, on to Hucknall and further north.



Moor Road

Calverton Colliery opened in 1952 and was connected to the rail network between Moor Bridge and Hucknall. The line was built by British Railways, as by this time all the rail companies had been

nationalised. Calverton colliery closed in 1993.



Calverton Line

The line joined the Midland Leen Valley line at a junction simply called Calverton Branch Junction and runs just to the north of the Mill Lakes. A section has been developed into a multi-use footpath and cycleway through to Moor Road. There are footpaths that broadly follow close to the line to Calverton beyond Moor Road.

Future

Look out for future editions of The Dynamo magazine for more of the Park's railway history.

There is also a Friends of Bestwood Country Park

Industrial Heritage Group which you are most welcome to join...

Especially if you have photographs and documents to share, or if you have particular memories to tell! Nothing is unimportant or trivial - you may be the only person to have your particular "gem" of information. We love the unexpected "black diamond"!

If you would like to find out more about this aspect of the Park, please email us at info@fbcp.org.uk or browse our website www.fbcp.org.uk for details.

Alan Green is a retired IT Solution Designer, and Secretary of Railway Ramblers, a national club that organises walks and encourages interest in disused railway lines throughout the UK

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