Uxbridge: where the Great Western Railway went wrong and what it left behind

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Introduction

The basic dates of the two branch lines which the Great Western Railway (GWR) built to serve Uxbridge are well documented, so this article only repeats some key dates. It explores in more detail what should have been a short link between them and describes what remained to be seen in October 2019.

Railway History

The GWR opened its broad gauge line from London to Bristol in 1841, with a branch to Uxbridge, later named Vine St, in 1856. There were a passenger station, goods shed and sidings. The line was converted to standard gauge in 1871 and doubled in 1880.

In 1862 a line backed, and later taken over, by the LNWR was opened from Watford to Rickmansworth. Several independent schemes were floated to join the two branches by a seven mile line to form a through route, with an Uxbridge & Rickmansworth Railway (U&R) Act being passed in May 1896. Meanwhile, east–west railways through Uxbridge had been proposed, of which only one came to part fruition, in the form of a District Railway sponsored branch which was built by the Metropolitan Railway (The Met) from Harrow on the Hill to Uxbridge Belmont St.

The GWR in turn had planned a New Line from Acton to High Wycombe, joining its Maidenhead–High Wycombe–Princes Risborough–Oxford series of branch lines in its GWR (Additional Powers) Bill that was authorised in 1897. Work was paused west of Greenford while negotiations took place for it to form the core of a much more significant Great Western and Great Central Railways Joint Committee line (Joint Line) that would be a main line for Great Central trains from Northolt (whence their own line to Neasden) to re-join their main line at Grendon Underwood, north-west of Princes Risborough. This received its Act in August 1899. Five years later the GWR submitted a Bill in the 1905/6 Session for its own line from what became Ashendon Junction to Aynho, south of Banbury, giving a fast route to Birmingham. The Great Central must have sucked proverbial teeth at having helped fund part of an important GWR main line.

Noting the proximity of the New Line to Uxbridge, and being aware of the potential threat from the U&R, the GWR realised a short branch from a junction could use the route already authorised for the U&R. The outcome, after some manoeuvring, was the GWR planning its own line from a triangular junction on the New Line via the authorised U&R route to and through Uxbridge to join its Vine St branch, the last piece of the jigsaw being authorised in 1899. The U&R received a notional £2,500 ‘goodwill’ payment. It was revised as a proposed shorter line from Rickmansworth to join the New Line with two arms to junctions with running powers to both Denham and Ruislip stations. But that attracted no financial interest.

The ‘Loop’ itself needed bridges to cross three main roads in Uxbridge. Over High St it would be part of a viaduct. The other two would comprise brick arches from abutments at the ends of sections of embankment. Property was purchased for the route to and through Uxbridge in a flurry of transactions in June and July 1901. A single contract was awarded in the summer of 1901 to Messrs Pauling & Co Ltd of Westminster for the line from Northolt to High Wycombe, plus most of the branch to, but not across, Uxbridge.
Pauling employed a workforce of navvies, living in wooden huts. One such settlement was near Greenford and a second, apparently, at Uxbridge, where the Council’s Waterworks Committee was soon asking about ‘sanitary regulations’ for such properties – but without an indication of where they were. There may have been two separate camps, as The Met’s Uxbridge line was also being built.

Pauling needed to work from existing railheads and on 30 July 1901 asked Uxbridge Council for permission to lay a temporary railway which would cross public roads and footpaths. The firm was soon in trouble for making road level crossings before a formal agreement had been signed, and later for the style of gates used. The plan submitted for this line is not with Council papers, but the route must have been at ground level through property already acquired by the GWR. Being just single track, and not needing the land width of embankments, it could use the available space flexibly. An agreement was reached for supply of water to Pauling’s locomotives at ‘Uxbridge station’. Locomotive Magazine for 1903 has a photograph of two outside a modest shed of metal sheets over a frame, but again without giving a location. The article also mentions Pauling’s use of ex-London Brighton & South Coast Railway tank engines on coaches of workers trains from Uxbridge to work sites. There is no indication if they ran through Uxbridge or, as would appear more likely, started from north of the High Street. The O.S. 25-inch map for 1912 shows earthworks alongside the west side of the embankment north of High St station, which must have been for Pauling’s works trains to get onto it from ground level. There is now no trace.

The Joint Line crosses the River Colne valley on two viaducts, far above land on which the Uxbridge branch was built. When building contracts were drawn up, it was reasoned that spoil from the cutting between Gerrards Cross and the Colne valley could be used to build up the land at and from the triangular junctions. Later, further surplus soil was sent along the part-completed line from excavations for carriage sheds at Old Oak Common. It would be logical that as soon as the temporary line was built Pauling would receive supplies at Uxbridge Vine St and transfer them to his own wagons for conveyance via the temporary railway to work sites, but there is nothing to confirm this. In March 1902 the first mention of supplied materials – fencing posts and ballast – says they were being delivered ‘to ground’. This could suggest to work sites by cartage, to railheads (Greenford, Uxbridge, High Wycombe), or by canal either to convenient wharves in Uxbridge or a potential unloading place next to the foot of the piers of the Joint Line viaduct where it crossed the canal. By July 1902 Pauling was definitely receiving ballast by rail at Uxbridge, and soon after also permanent way materials – rails, rail chairs, bolts, keys (wooden wedges to hold rails tight in the chairs) and fishplates, plus sleepers coming the short distance from the GWR’s Creosoting Works at Hayes.

Although land had been purchased, the extent of Pauling’s contract for the Uxbridge line was only to the end of an embankment, finishing in the middle of where a new Uxbridge passenger station would be built. The existing Vine St one would then become goods-only. The GWR envisaged some trains at least doing a suburban London to London service, using the south to east junction with the New Line, everything being double track throughout. There was also a potential route from High Wycombe via Denham, Uxbridge and West Drayton. It was odd, therefore, for Pauling to be awarded, in August 1904, the contract for a rather basic High St station on the embankment a cost of £5,602. There was only one platform with a run-round loop and a signal box, and no sidings. Wooden piles supported the 400 ft. platform (the same length as Ruislip), ones beneath the station buildings being capped by metal pads to carry girders supporting the brick, concrete-floored, structure. There would be a sloping (1 in 20) approach road as well as a parallel footpath, but it seems only a version of the footpath was constructed. Intriguingly, a plan to show a small piece of land that still needed to be purchased appears to re-use an earlier one, which shows a large area of land owned by the GWR on both sides of the new, perhaps intended to be temporary, station.

Meanwhile, something completely different, and apparently contradictory, was afoot. At a GWR Board meeting in November 1904 the General Manager (GM) got approval for a suggested line from Uxbridge
towards Bourne End. The latter station was a junction for Marlow, from which a through London train needed to reverse. Perhaps at the back of his mind was a through service from a revived, previously dropped (1898), proposed line joining Marlow to the Henley branch. Even with just Bourne End trains, the one platform wooden station would be completely inadequate.

Seemingly spurred by the suggestion, within weeks things were ‘put into gear’. On 1 December 1904 £8,750 was voted to build the 250 yard brick viaduct south from the end of the embankment, with girder bridges across the minor Johnsons Row, then High St, followed by arches over wharf premise around a short canal arm. Six weeks later, expenditure of £35,200 was approved for work to complete the rest of the Loop. Plans for houses to replace ‘labouring class’ ones which would need to be demolished were submitted to a Local Government Inquiry on 1 December 1904. The GWR Act for the line had a standard clause that defined ‘labouring class’ and required such an Inquiry if 10 or more houses which they occupied were to be demolished. Any required replacement properties had to be built and fit for habitation before anyone was moved out. The GWR’s proposal, for 19 houses to be replaced by 13 new ones, was formally accepted in May 1905. It would appear that a few of the houses had already been demolished in 1901 to allow Pauling’s temporary railway. Purchase and demolition of houses that were owner-occupied was not covered; they had to look after their own interests.

But the GM had got it wrong. Negative reaction to the proposed Bourne End line was swift – even Uxbridge Council got a protest letter from a Commons & Footpaths Preservation Society – and the GWR Solicitor reported in February 1905 of ‘great opposition’. He ventured that a line to the south of that proposed might be accepted. Presumably that could not fit the required layout at Bourne End. The idea was dropped.

Nevertheless, it looked as if the GWR was preparing to complete the Loop. As soon as the Inquiry approved their plans, and in anticipation of demolitions, tenders were invited to build the 13 new houses and a contract awarded on 20 July 1905. Getting down to detail, exactly how to bridge a particular footpath was the subject of correspondence between the GWR and Uxbridge Council. But although the northern part of the viaduct, over High St, was built, the southern end was not. No contract was ever awarded for the final section of the Loop. In 1906 the Council, rightly concerned by lack of activity, asked the Clerk to take steps to ‘compel’ the GWR to finish the line, as required in its Act. The only action taken by the GWR, April 1907, was to extend the time it had set to complete the work. Meanwhile, once the station north of High Street was ready, in May 1907 a meagre rail motor passenger service from High St to Denham was inaugurated. There is suggestion that a through Paddington service was tried and quickly withdrawn. The fact was that Uxbridge’s London traffic was already secured by the existing Vine Street line and the now-established electrified Metropolitan line. Nothing has been seen in GWR papers about any debate on why the easy task of building the Loop was not undertaken. Late but unspoken realisation that it was a mistake would be understandable.

Further polite approaches from the Town Council, plus the local Chamber of Commerce, were ignored. The route, with some houses already empty, remained just that for some years. In March 1913 the GM reported that he had sounded opinion and judged a deal was possible if the Council was offered something in exchange for accepting abandonment of the Loop. The GM must have contacted at least some of the Council members, as it was prepared to negotiate – not that it had any other realistic option. In July 1913 a draft agreement was reached and the GM was sufficiently confident to state publicly that the Loop would be abandoned. Main elements of the deal were:

- new low level goods sidings alongside High St station (the GWR already had the land)
- extra trains from High Street, most going to Gerrards Cross
- GWR to give the Council some land to build a road between The Greenway and Vine St and make a contribution of £500 toward the cost (a northward extension of Whitehall Rd)
- the Council to get, gratis, most of the land and some of the premises on the route between the south side of High St and the intended junction at Whitehall Rd
removal of the bridge over High St, the girders being donated to the Council.  

A ground level mileage goods yard, just two tracks, was opened at High St in 1914. Loop land was formally conveyed in to the Council in May 1915. A Town Improvement Committee set up to recommend what to do with houses inherited as part of the deal reported back within a few weeks. Its recommendations are shown in the Table (p.37). The new road was built, albeit delayed by spending restrictions until after WW1. In 1922, when it came to removing the never-used bridge over High Street, the Council accepted £350 and let the GWR keep the girders. Nothing was done immediately with empty spaces which the Council had acquired.

The High Street line was soon made single track and the rarely-used south to east part of the triangular junction removed. During WW1 its passenger services were suspended. It took until May 1920 before they were restored. There was, however, a replacement GWR bus service (nothing’s new!), four a day, between Uxbridge and Denham. The GWR was warned about the driver speeding – perhaps he was challenged by the rail motor schedule of between 6 and 9 minutes?

Impending closure of The Met’s Belmont St goods yard saw the GWR extend facilities in 1938/9 at High St (two extra lines) and Vine St, mostly for coal mileage traffic. High Street’s passenger trains were again suspended soon after the start of WW2 and never reinstated. The station buildings survived, perched on the embankment, until demolished in about 1955, although parts of the viaduct remained and it was 1981 before the remnants were removed.

Vine St closed to passenger and parcels traffic in 1962 and both stations closed to freight two years later, being eclipsed by new coal-handling facilities at West Drayton. London Transport’s passenger station, with concrete bogie wheels atop the 1938 façade, thrives. The Belmont St site of the original passenger and goods stations is carriage sidings.
The houses and other sites from West Drayton to Uxbridge

A local builder designed and erected the GWR’s replacement houses on the east side of Waterloo Road, 1–13 Great Western Terrace. Blocks of six and seven houses with a passage between, they remain as 153–165 Waterloo Road. GWR records show that, as railway property, they were regularly painted and maintained. They became Council houses in 1968 (Figures 1 & 2).

Following most of the route of the line between West Drayton and Uxbridge is possible, although with little to see. The land has been redeveloped since 1965, when the track was lifted, including that of a short siding at the West Drayton end which closed in 1979. However, at West Drayton there is something of interest. A goods yard was on built-up ground alongside the curve of Uxbridge branch. The approach road is protected by lengths of GWR bridge rail, albeit attached to later flat bottom rail uprights (Figure 3). Holes show where the rail was attached to longitudinal timbers. Redundant bridge rail often was re-used, cut and shaped as end straining posts for wire fencing.

Otherwise, from here an embankment which carried the line’s route has been completely lost until where it crossed Cowley Rd by a bridge just north of Moorfield Rd. On the east side of Cowley Rd is a footpath signposted to St Clements Close. (Bus 222, Uxbridge–West Drayton Station–Hounslow, stops nearby.) This, and continuation footpaths, lead past the hump where Peachey Lane crossed the railway and the site of Cowley station, where a solitary wooden topped fence post remains as the path rises to the removed Station Rd bridge. Diagonally left, Whitehall Rd runs parallel to the west site of the line, its former cutting initially occupied by housing. In the 1990s Brunel University and the Transport Trust sponsored laying of a section of broad gauge track in part of the cutting, placing bridge rail on longitudinal timbers. This area is within a bush-enclosed nature haven, seen and accessed only via a locked gate. The track timbers were beginning to decay when seen in 2018. Only a section of Brunel’s tubular bridge across the Wye at Chepstow is easily seen, to be part of a display of Brunelian artefacts. From here on, the adapted site of the line continues toward Vine St, where all traces of the terminus and even railway land boundaries have disappeared.
But an indirect link remains at 12 High St, the former ‘Kings Arms’, near the tube station. At Uxbridge, as elsewhere, the GWR contracted out cartage to and from its goods depot. The carter’s death in 1896 prompted taking the work in-house. Until the GWR’s new stables were ready, stabling was arranged in the yard, now redeveloped, of these premises (Figure 4).

The Loop would have started by running north-west across the site of Whitehall Rd (which at the time did not run further north, hence talk of extending it in the ‘deal’), immediately north of the junction of Walford Rd. The corner, formerly railway land, has a bungalow and there are garages on Whitehall Rd at the ends of gardens extended over the start of the curve. The line would have needed to be in a shallow cutting here to join the Vine St line, and O.S. maps show earthworks of one. These have been identified as the start of work on the Loop, but as there was never a contract for that, there may be another explanation. Pauling’s temporary track would have needed a junction here; a cutting was needed to facilitate it. Beyond the garages a children’s centre is at an angle to the road, reflecting the line of the Loop. There is nothing more to see of its route for some distance except houses where it crossed Cowley and Rockingham Roads. Intended embankments would end in bridge abutments, up to which the width of land needed was far more than for just two tracks at ground level. The GWR purchased roadside houses that it would need to demolish, but the temporary railway, at ground level, did not need all the purchased space, so just a few houses were removed where needed. The remainder were still standing when the Loop was abandoned, some being inherited by the Council as part of the land acquired under the ‘deal’. The table shows, as far as can be ascertained, what happened, assuming the Council did as recommended in 1915. Current street numbers, not always the same as those of the time, are used (Figures 5 & 6).

The GWR acquired other properties, some being ‘labouring class’ at Norton or Rockingham Wharf, south of Uxbridge High St; north of High Street; and along Johnsons Row, which ran behind. The whole area has been redeveloped.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address acquired by GWR</th>
<th>Status 1910 rates and/or 1912 map</th>
<th>Ownership after the 1915 ‘deal’ with any Council recommendation</th>
<th>Standing 2019?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70–74 Cowley Rd. Semi-det houses</td>
<td>Owned GWR. Tenants</td>
<td>Remained GWR. Rented &amp; maintained until at least 1940s (GWR records)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76 Cowley Rd. Semi-det ho (with 74)</td>
<td>Owned GWR. Vacant, garden walls intact</td>
<td>Remained GWR. New tenant, rented &amp; maintained until at least 1940s (GWR records)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63 Cowley Rd. Ho</td>
<td>Owned GWR. Tenant</td>
<td>To Ux UDC. To refurbish &amp; continue existing tenant</td>
<td>Newer build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 Cowley Rd. Ho</td>
<td>Owned GWR. Tenant</td>
<td>To Ux UDC. To refurbish &amp; continue existing tenant</td>
<td>Newer build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67 Cowley Rd. 1894 67, 69, 71 tce of 3 ho</td>
<td>Demolished. Site owned GWR</td>
<td>To Ux UDC. To make good fencing &amp; let as land</td>
<td>Newer build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69 Cowley Rd. 1894 67, 69, 71 tce of 3 ho</td>
<td>Demolished. Site owned GWR</td>
<td>To Ux UDC. To make good fencing &amp; let as land</td>
<td>Newer build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 Cowley Rd. 1894 67, 69, 71 tce of 3 ho</td>
<td>Owned GWR. Tenant as shop but living elsewhere</td>
<td>To Ux UDC. To refurbish ho &amp; shop &amp; continue present tenants</td>
<td>Newer build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 Rockingham Rd. Part of tce 51–56</td>
<td>Demolished. Site owned GWR</td>
<td>Ownership not clear. Still empty site on 1934 map</td>
<td>Newer build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Rockingham Rd. Detached ho</td>
<td>Site owned GWR. Demolished</td>
<td>To Ux UDC</td>
<td>Widened access to Barnsfield Pl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Rockingham Rd. Ho end of tce</td>
<td>Owned GWR. Tenant</td>
<td>To Ux UDC. To refurbish &amp; continue existing tenant</td>
<td>Yes, but altered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15, 16 Barnsfield Pl. Terraces</td>
<td>Owned GWR. 1910 both vacant, 1912 map: no garden fences</td>
<td>To Ux UDC. To refurbish, reinstate &amp; fence gardens then let</td>
<td>Newer build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Barnsfield Pl. Terrace house</td>
<td>Site owned GWR. Demolished</td>
<td>Part of Loop land given to Ux UDC</td>
<td>Newer build &amp; access road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Barnsfield Pl. Ho end of tce</td>
<td>Site owned GWR. Demolished</td>
<td>Part of Loop land given to Ux UDC</td>
<td>Access road</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Loop route can be seen as a road alongside 13 Rockingham Rd to Barnsfield Place and on as access to new housing. It ends where covered by industrial premises. Used as allotments in 1921, it escaped a proposal in 1923 to become a road from High St to Rockingham Rd. The site of the Loop is more pleasantly evident to the western side of Fassnidge Park as two parallel lines of trees, between which there are some tennis and skateboard facilities. North from here, where High St becomes Oxford Rd, it is hard to imagine canal arms serving timber yards and a busy High St to the west of the remaining, much altered, Fountains Mill astride the centuries-old Frays River.

**A walk to see what remains of the line north from High Street**

This walk starts after High Street becomes Oxford Road, west of Frays River and Fountains Mill. About 3.5 miles, it includes paths which can be muddy, so stout shoes or boots are recommended.

Start outside New Buckingham University, 106 Oxford Road, with Sanderson Road to its west giving access to Uxbridge Business Park. A previous road led to canal wharves and the GWR High St goods sidings, with Sanderson’s factory (1921–1999) beyond. That did not have its own siding, although occasional wagons of coal arrived here for the boilers. Go past the east side of the University into Braybourne Close. This curves slightly up to become a long cul de sac on the former railway embankment. There is nothing to identify the site of High St station. For a time after the GWR had bought the land, but before the embankment was built. The Met’s contractors had a short tram road from a canal wharf across this land to their site at Harefield Road, (just west of what was to be the terminus at Belmont St), where they too arranged with the Council for a locomotive water supply. The GWR, of course, charged for the easement – £5 per month for ballast and 9d per 1,000 bricks.
Figure 4. Uxbridge. 12 High St, former ‘Kings Arms’ where GWR rented cartage horse stabling for a few years from 1896

Figure 5. 76 (end) & 74 Cowley Road. Two of four houses here acquired by GWR. The temporary railway must have run where the tree is alongside 76, right
After some distance a grassy patch on the right is above an overspill weir for the Frays River. A few curved GWR bricks mark part of a previous culvert. It is worth going left (west) along a footpath down to the Business Park, to get orientation, although nothing remains. This is roughly where the Pauling’s incline was and, on the flat ground, the four sidings of the goods yard stretching to the south. Sanderson’s factory was to the north. Return to the cul de sac and continue north to the end, where a sign welcomes walkers into Alderglade Nature Reserve. The path immediately drops down to the left, whilst it is evident that the former railway ran straight ahead at a higher level, to the right. This is occasionally accessible, but not walkable. The path then continues, gradually climbing. It is in fact the site of the line to the goods yard, which over half a mile went gradually from the upper level to ground level.

All too soon the Nature Reserve ends. Steps set into the west side of the embankment (not immediately obvious) lead to a short path to join one under a railway bridge which retains its deck (Figure 7). Above is the well-fenced garden of private property. The next access to the trackbed is north of the A40 viaduct. Between the two is a section which has a ‘might have been’ story. For in 1922 the Harefield Light Railway was proposed. Starting at Harefield Mills (then Bells Asbestos Works), on the east bank of the canal, it would have cheekily joined, and used, the vacant half of the formation of then single track GWR railway through here towards Uxbridge until branching off to its own terminus alongside the goods yard. Bells sent its long-distance freight by rail from Rickmansworth Met Railway goods yard and that railway, sensing the possibility of losing the traffic to the GWR, proposed building a relatively short connection from between Uxbridge and Ickenham to join the Light Railway somewhere within the next half mile, with a junction towards Harefield, hinting a passenger service to gain support. The Light Railway never got started, and Bells decided to move elsewhere. The Met in turn now became disinterested and nothing happened.

The GWR line can be regained beyond the A40 viaduct via footpaths. From the west side of the railway bridge take the one north then west over a waterway and north-west towards, and under, the western section of the road viaduct. Part of this path is enclosed by fencing, which in summer 2019 was a bramble climbing frame. An unofficial path through a field to the south, past a pylon, avoided this. The path continues under the A40 and at ground level, still north-westerly, to reach the Grand Junction, later Grand Union, canal where there is a roving bridge. Here the towpath changes sides and the bridge

Figure 6. 13 Rockingham Road (end house), recently altered. Acquired by GWR. Alongside the road is a widened earlier lane covering the site of No 12, acquired and demolished, presumably for the temporary railway.
design allowed a towing horse to walk under then over and continue without unhitching – or vice versa. Adaptation for general walking and cycling means the towpath beneath the bridge is no longer useable.

Although the towpath is on the west side of the canal, continuing north on a narrower grass path on the east is recommended. This avoids soon crossing the canal by a footpath that runs along the top of the gate balance beams at Denham Lock, though they do have a non-slip surface. Just below the lock, on the right (east) side is an unmarked stile to a path across the field and a bridge over the Frays River. It continues into woodland through which the railway trackbed runs north-south. What appears to be a welcoming path southward, towards the section by-passed, is blocked by a fence, accompanied by ‘private’ notices,
which is within a bridge over Frays River. To view the bridge, continue on the footpath through a gate and into a field, looking back when alongside Frays River (Figure 8). On return, notice near the gate a few top wooden railway boundary fence posts (Figure 9). In documents listing materials, these are recorded as ‘cut out of second hand timbers, 2/1d each’; galvanised fencing staples were 17/3d per cwt. The woods and flooded gravel pits are managed by London Wildlife Trust, whose map displays show the railway trackbed northwards. It appears to be very closely along the east side of, or perhaps dug away to create, Long Lake. But there is a path, so go north, avoiding tempting more-used side paths, until reaching a public footpath across. Uxbridge Rovers, a name on a gate, is a fishing club, which uses the trackbed beyond here for car access. Keep walking until the route is blocked by substantial gates and signs warning potential trespassers. Beyond are several companies occupying the trackbed and space in the centre of the former triangular junction, right up to a boundary with the operational railway. (Figure 10). Large lorries, a narrow road with no footpath, and a security gate at the far road access make venturing further (explored with permission) dangerous with a likelihood of being detained. There is no way round through the swampy woods.

So turn round, and take the path leading from the green bar gate on the left. This leads down to natural ground level, giving an appreciation of the height of the embankment and amount of spoil used, before returning to the trackbed and then to the public path. Now turn right (west), soon over a canal bridge, to the towpath.

Nature Reserve paths, not on O.S. maps, wander off to the west in the direction of Denham station, but none have been tried. From here it is a pleasant towpath walk northwards. Half a mile ahead is the Joint Line viaduct. The GWR Magazine, 1904, records the widest span, across the canal, is 60 ft; the other eight are 47 ft. It adds that the piers are concrete with brick facing. (Figure 11).

Railway minutes for 1901 suggest that the Joint Line would be four tracks as far west as Ruislip and then double track to High Wycombe, but with bridges across, and foundations for bridges under, designed to be converted to take four tracks. This would have been relevant in 1936 when the GWR decided to extend their planned electric railway (present-day Central Line) beyond Ruislip and for which they purchased at least some of the necessary land. But it never happened.
Not far beyond the viaduct, the U&R’s later, 1899, version would have had a junction east of the canal, rising on embankment and its own bridge over the canal to a junction with the Joint Line to access Denham station.

Continue along the towpath for just over half mile to Moorhall Rd, along which the 331 bus runs west to Denham station and Uxbridge (every 20 mins weekdays, half hourly Sundays, 2019). About 300 yards north of this road the U&R would have crossed the canal, having been on the west bank from Rickmansworth, by-passing potential traffic sources from the asbestos works and a quarry with lime kilns. The Harefield Light Railway, to the east of the canal, was intended to serve both.

The area seems to be a magnet for failed projects. Even the GWR’s South Harefield Halt, opened 1928 on the main line just east of the triangular junction, only lasted just over three years. Perhaps the latest – a line which would cross the valley on a viaduct curving to the north-west – will break the spell: HS2.

**Acknowledgements**

The author wishes to thank staff of the following organisations for their help: Hillingdon Local Studies, Archives & Museum Service, located within Uxbridge Library (HLS); London Metropolitan Archives, which has documents on Uxbridge and associated railways (LMA); The National Archive, Kew, which has many railway company records (TNA); City of Westminster Archives Centre, where use was made of their access to Ancestry and ‘Find My Past’ web sites to check census and voters’ registers; and London Transport Museum Library, which has a complete set of *London Railway Record*, including some relevant articles.
Notes and References


2 LMA. MCC/CL/R/LR/2/12. Uxbridge & Rickmansworth Railway Bill, 1895/6


4 LMA. MCC/CL/L/LR/2/17. GWR (Additional Powers) Bill; authorised 1897

5 TNA. RAIL 250/47. GWR Board mins 21/7/1904 & 4/8/1904

6 TNA. RAIL 250/44. GWR Board mins 21/3/1898

7 LMA. MR/U/P/NS/112. Uxbridge & Rickmansworth Railway Bill, 1899

8 TNA. RAIL 250/257. GWR Law, Parliamentary & Estate Committee mins show eleven purchases in six weeks between late June and mid-August 1901

9 TNA. RAIL 239/1. GW&GC Joint Committee mins, 1/8/1901, confirm contract awarded, but no specific a date. It must have been by mid-July 1901

10 HLS. Council mins 9/10/1901 re report from Waterworks Committee 7/10/1901

11 HLS. Council mins 30/7/1901 re report from Street & Works Committee 25/7/1901

12 HLS. Council mins 29/10/1901 & 26/11/1901 re item from Waterworks Committee 23/10/1901

13 TNA. ZPER 30/7. *The Locomotive Magazine*, 1903

14 TNA. RAIL 239/1. GW&GC Joint Committee mins 8/5/1901

15 TNA. RAIL 250/175. GWR Engineering Committee mins 3/8/1905

16 TNA. RAIL 239/2. GW&GC Joint Committee mins 10/3/1902

17 TNA. RAIL 239/2. GW&GC Joint Committee mins 24/7/1902, 4/3/1903, 3/7/1903

18 TNA. RAIL 252/1350. Detailed specification plus letter awarding the contract

19 LMA. ACC/0500/004. Conveyance, Mrs Eleanor May (Lady of the Manor) to GWR

20 TNA. RAIL 250/47. GWR Board mins 10/11/1904

21 TNA. RAIL 1110/185. GWR half-yearly meeting 11/8/1898

22 TNA. RAIL 250/47. GWR Board mins 1/12/1904

23 TNA. RAIL 250/47. GWR Board mins 19/1/1905

24 HLS. Council mins 29/11/1904.

25 TNA. HLG. 24/191. Papers associated with the Local Government Inquiry

26 TNA. RAIL 250/47. GWR Board mins 2/2/1905 and HLS. Council mins 31/1/1905

27 TNA. RAIL 250/47. GWR Board mins 20/7/1905, giving authority to accept tender of Messrs Grantham Lamas & Co. Part way through building a different contractor was appointed


29 HLS. Council mins 2/10/1906

30 TNA. Rail 250/48. GWR Board mins 18/4/1907

31 TNA. Rail 250/50. GWR Board mins 14/3/1913

32 TNA. Rail 250/51. GWR Board mins 1/8/1913

33 HLS. Council mins 15/7/1913

34 HLS. Council mins 27/5/1915

35 HLS. Council Mins 29/6/1915 re Town Improvement Committee report, 14/6/1915

36 TNA. RAIL 250/179. GWR Engineering Committee mins 9/3/1922

37 HLS. Council Works Committee mins 14/10/1919

38 TNA. RAIL 250/357. GWR Traffic Committee mins 21/1/1937 and RAIL 250/358, 23/3/1939

Also HLS. GWR Society *Journal* No 1

39 HLS. LSC/RLW/GW/54. Article in *Railway World* March 1984

40 TNA. RAIL 253/21. GWR Estates Committee schedule of repairs, 1925–1943

41 HLS. K R Pearce. ‘Waterloo Road – a survey’. *The Uxbridge Record* No 40

42 HLS. Leaflet published by Brunel University
43 Wiltshire Archives, Chippenham. Document in box of GWR papers
44 HLS. Council Works Committee mins 14/6/1921 & 13/2/1923
45 Grace's Guide and O.S. maps
46 HLS. Council Waterworks Committee mins 7/10/1901
47 TNA. RAIL. 250/174. GWR Engineering Committee mins 9/1/1902
48 LMA. MR/U/P/NS/376. Harefield Light Railway Order 1923
49 LMA. ACC 1277 MET 10 416. Metropolitan Railway papers, with indicatory line on map from theirs to join the Harefield Light Railway
50 TNA. RAIL 239/1. GW&GC Joint Committee mins 24/7/1902
51 TNA. ZPER 19/17. GWR Magazine 8/1904
52 TNA. RAIL 239/1. GW&GC Joint Committee mins 6/3/1901
53 TNA. RAIL 250/57. GWR Board mins 9/10/1936. 13 acres purchased at Denham and 25 acres (mainly for a depot) at Ruislip. The electric railway was to be in the GWR's next Bill
54 HLS. LCS/RLW/MS/3. Letter in Railway Magazine June 1958