

New Evidence of Mineral Tramways on the Route of The Pucklechurch to Seabank Pipeline

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Tramway near Dudley and Puffer Pits

Introduction

During 1996 and 1997 archaeological work carried out along the route of the Pucklechurch to Seabank Gas Pipeline produced evidence of a previously unrecorded mineral tramway and further information relating to three previously recorded mineral tramway/railways. The following extracts have been taken from the archive report *The Archaeology of the Pucklechurch to Seabank Pipeline: Final Report, Volume 1*. SMR numbers relate to the South Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record. 12000 series numbers mentioned in this text have been allocated for features identified during this project.

A previously unrecorded tramway at ST 69440 78384 was initially identified during evaluation work in a field to the north of Dudley and Puffer Pits, just south of the village of Westerleigh. Both pits are believed to have been operational during the mid nineteenth century, and to have become disused by around 1890 (SMR 6087).

The tramway is shown on Wyld's 1830 map of the county (Fig 1) and the 1845 Westerleigh tithe map to have connected the pits with the Keynsham to Bitterwell Lake section of the Ram Hill mineral railway network (SMR 5913). As such it is believed to

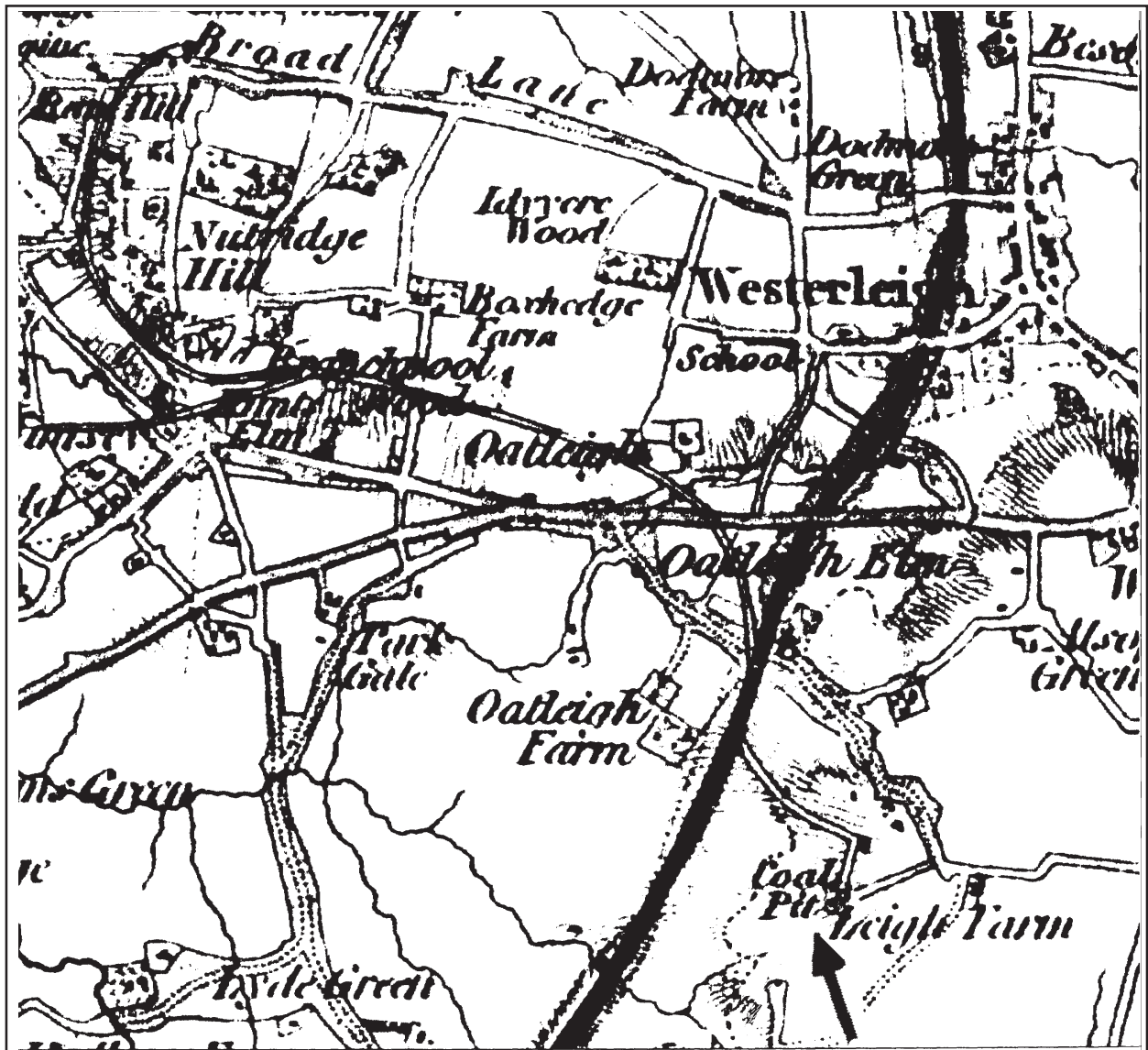


Fig 2 Extract from James Wyld's 1830 Map of Gloucestershire and Bristol. Dudley Pit near Leigh Farm (bottom right) with tramway (SMR 12701) leading off to the north and west to connect with the main railway (SMR 5913). Note the branch of this line to the west (SMR 59120) leading to Ram Hill.

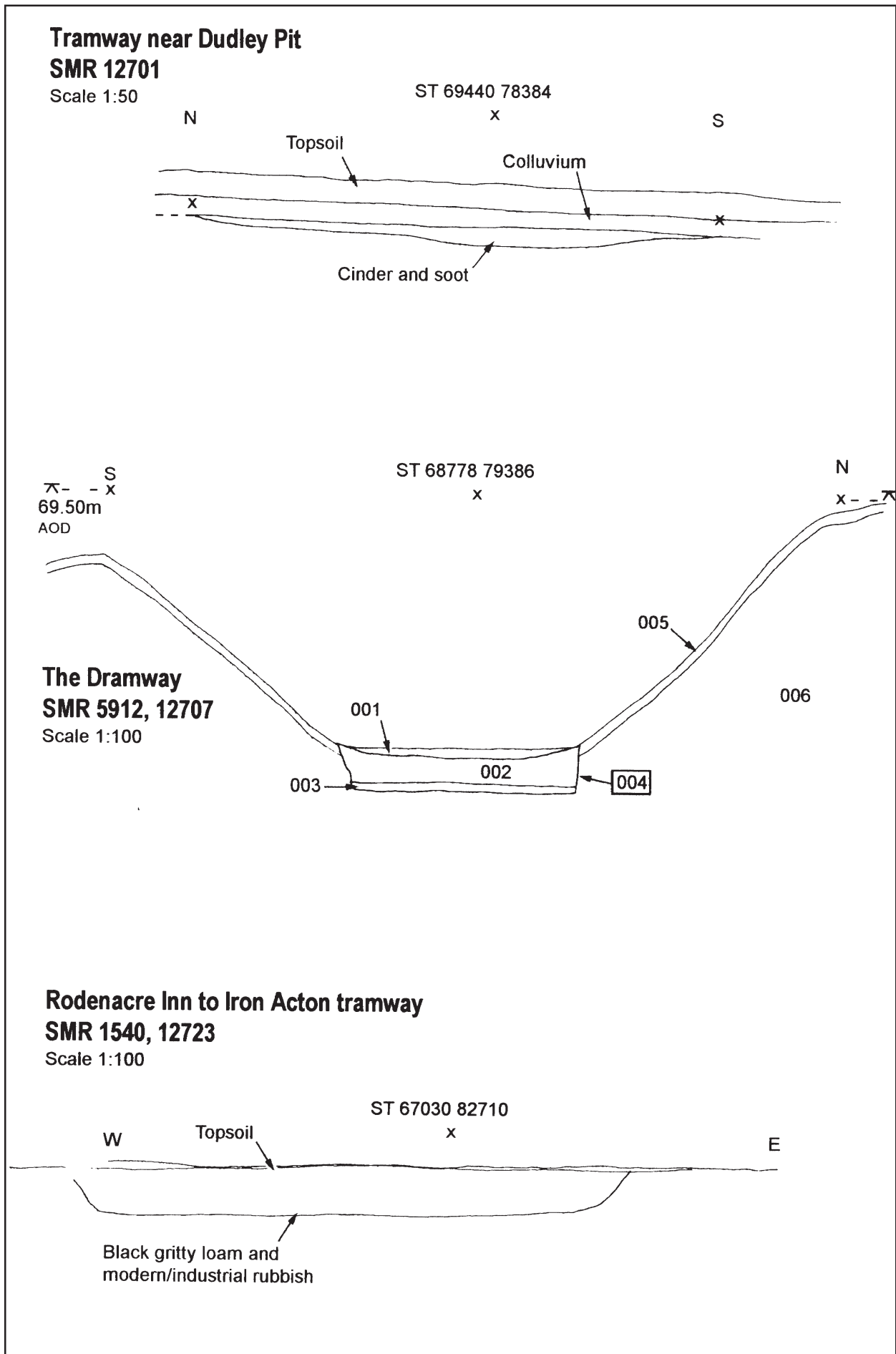


Fig 2 Pucklechurch to Seabank Pipeline tramway sections.

date from some time after the start of construction of this railway in 1828. Its absence from the 1888 Ordnance Survey map suggests that it had become disused by that time.

This feature was exposed for a considerable distance during the watching-brief stage of pipeline construction. It was found to have travelled northwards from the site of Dudley Pit, before executing a turn of 90° to the west and travelling downhill, past Dudley Wood towards the mineral railway.

In total almost 150m of the tramway bed was exposed within the pipeline construction easement: 140m on an east-west alignment and 8.25m on a north-south alignment.

The junction of the feature with the modern railway now on the site of the mineral railway SMR 5913 was not seen during the project: in the west of the field the mineral tramway SMR 12701 was seen to bend northwards before appearing to terminate (this may have been as a result of the feature being masked by hillwash or colluvium in this area – all other evidence points to a continuation of the mineral tramway to link up with the nearby railway).

The tramway was found to be 4-4.5m wide in its east-west alignment, and 6.5m wide in its north-south alignment. The fill was a compact heterogeneous cinder, soot and crushed brick deposit, with a depth of 8-15cm. It did not appear to lie within a cut, but instead appeared to have been deposited directly onto the subsoil, with the present negative profile probably having been caused by compaction.

The area around the 90° bend was found to be an irregular oval shape. This irregular area was later found to overlie the base of a possible coal wagon turntable, detailed below.

Turntable Base

At the bend in the mineral tramway mentioned above, what is believed to be the base of a coal wagon turntable was discovered during trial-trenching operations. This consisted of a circular cut, 4m in diameter, by 1.5m deep with an ash/cinder fill identical to that of the mineral tramway makeup. This overlay a substantial concrete deposit, the depth of which was not found. This occurs at a right-angled junction in the mineral tramway, and it is believed that it would have been to this point that coal wagons would have been hauled before being turned individually and sent downhill (perhaps unaided) to the mineral railway below. No evidence was seen of a building shown

on Wyld's map to the east of the feature mentioned above.

Mineral Railway

The pipeline was installed beneath the modern railway by way of a tunnelling technique, therefore no evidence was seen of the mineral railway SMR 5913.

Section Excavated through 'The Dramway'

Pipe trenching at ST68778/79386 revealed a section through the cutting of the dismantled railway SMR 5912, 12707 also known as 'The Dramway'.

The line began as a mineral tramway opened in 1831 to carry horse drawn trams on a 4'8" gauge between the Coalpit Heath collieries and the River Avon at Keynsham. In 1844 this was upgraded to a 7' railway whilst retaining the original narrower gauge tracks. As such this was the first dual-gauge railway in the country. In 1985 a branch of this line 600m to the east at Bitterwell Lake was recommended for Scheduled Ancient Monument status.

The east-facing section of the cutting was recorded, although safety concerns regarding the depth of the pipe trench at this point prevented hand cleaning of the section face. The cutting was found to be steep sided with a flat base and measured approximately 13m in width at the top and 4.50m wide at the base. At the base of the cutting two distinct deposits of black cinder and ash were observed (Fig 2) The lower deposit (003) was compact and had a depth of 10cm while the upper (002) was less firm and had a depth of 50cm. Context 003 sat directly above the natural clay subsoil (006), whilst 002 was sealed by a thin layer of topsoil (001).

These sat within a cut (004), which appeared to have been excavated through the topsoil (005) covering the sides of the cutting. This suggests that features 001, 002, 003 and 004 may be related to the dual-gauge phase of the line mentioned above.

There was no evidence of rail tracks or sleepers.

Further Information Regarding the Mineral Railway Near Frog Lane Pit

Evaluation work in a field close to the site of Frog Lane Colliery has resulted in further information being gathered relating to the survival of mineral railway SMR 6165.

Immediately east of the former colliery site a heavily wooded embankment can be seen, which SMR

6165 records as being the location of a dismantled railway. Documentary evidence shows this to have been a 7' gauge mining railway owned by the Midland Railway Company and operational between 1860 and 1949. The track appears to have been removed between 1955 and 1969 (OS 1955, 1969). Built to serve the now-closed Frog Lane (SMR 4419) Mayshill (SMR 4422), and Nibley (SMR 4423) collieries, the line was built as a branch off the Ram Hill Line (SMR 5912) through which it accessed an extensive mineral railway network.

The embankment survives to a point approx. 122m south of the Says Court-Mayshill lane, after which it has been levelled and is no longer visible, although the double-arched bridge (SMR 7731) by which the lane would once have crossed over it can still be clearly seen.

Discussions with the current owner of Says Court indicate that this part of the embankment was removed during the 1970s. The ash and cinder makeup was used to backfill the cutting beneath the bridge and two large ponds in the adjacent field.

Although no rails were seen, what may possibly be original sleeper timbers were observed in the undergrowth of the embankment.

The pipeline was installed beneath the embankment by way of a tunnelling technique: the deposits were not therefore disturbed.

The Mineral Tramway From Rodenacre Inn Mine to Iron Acton

An overgrown bank was observed just west of Hover's Lane at ST 57000 82700 during the archaeological pre-construction survey. This bank was thought to potentially preserve beneath it a remnant of the cutting for the mineral tramway from Rodenacre Inn mine to Iron Acton (SMR 1540), which had been destroyed in the area of the pipeline corridor but was known to survive to the north and south. The overgrown bank was fenced off to protect it from disturbance during pipeline construction.

Topsoil stripping immediately to the north of this bank at ST 67030 82710 revealed the remains of the tramway (SMR 12723) in the form of a north-south linear deposit crossing the construction trench. This was composed of industrial and modern rubbish such as plastic, brick and metal. This material was set in a matrix of nearly black gritty loam. This has been interpreted as the modern backfill of the tramway cutting.

Trenching later revealed a section through the cutting. The north-facing section of the pipe trench was cleaned and recorded accordingly. This showed that the tramway cut was 10.60m wide by 0.90m deep. The sides sloped at 45° into a flat base and both breaks of slope were gradual. The single homogeneous fill was as described above. Informal conversation with the farmer of the field revealed that he had recently removed iron tracks prior to infilling the tramway cutting.

This concurs with air-photograph evidence, which showed the cutting to be heavily wooded and presumably therefore intact and abandoned in 1946 (NMR, 1946/7).

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