

Great Central Railway trackbed description

Woodford Halse to Rugby - part 4 of 6

This document describes the route of the Great Central Railway from the point where it crosses the A45 near Willoughby, to the point where it becomes the Great Central Walkway through Rugby, starting at Onley Lane south of Hillmorton. Access is limited for some stretches of this section, but photos have been taken where possible, and use made of online satellite images.

The railway would have crossed the A45 just east of Willoughby on a bridge at SP 5240 6718. The bridge is missing, but the support walls can still be seen on both sides of the road (Figure 1). North of here the trackbed continues on an embankment. This is not accessible, and there is some evidence that the embankment is used by some of the businesses on the main road (A45) just below the embankment. At SP 5239 6744 there is a gap and a missing bridge where an access road crosses the line of the railway (Figure 2). North of this gap it is not possible to access the trackbed. It is carried northwards for around 600m on a low embankment, gradually drawing level with the adjacent land, reaching Longdown Lane at SP 5232 6808, by which point the trackbed is in a shallow cutting. The southern half of this stretch between the A45 and Longdown Lane is clear of vegetation, but the northern half is quite overgrown. The line crosses a brook (named Willoughbrook on some maps) at SP 5240 6764, so there will be a culvert here.

At Longdown Lane the track would have crossed the road (SP 5232 6808). The trackbed is lower than the road on both sides, but it is not clear if the cutting is deep enough for there to have been a bridge under the road, so I am not sure exactly how the railway crossed this road. The road might have been built up since the railway closed. Figure 3 shows the point where the track would have crossed Longdown Lane, with the trackbed behind the row of trees to the right of the strip of grass.



Figure 1 Looking north along the A45 east of Willoughby at the point where the GCR would have crossed on a bridge, with the embankment continuing northwards behind the wall (missing bridge at SP 5240 6718).



Figure 2 Looking east at the gap in the embankment near the A45 at Willoughby (SP 5239 6744).



Figure 3 Looking south-west from Longdown Lane at the point where the trackbed would have crossed Longdown Lane. The line was to the right of the hedge that follows the neat line of grass (SP 5232 6808).

North of Longdown Lane the trackbed continues to be inaccessible, in a shallow cutting lined with mature trees. It looks like the trackbed itself is fairly overgrown. Access is limited, but it is easy to view the line of trees from the towpath of the Oxford Canal, and there appears to be the remains of a signal gantry or similar around SP 523 682 (Figure 4). At SP 5218 6879, a short distance from the Oxford Canal, it is possible to reach a small access bridge across the trackbed. The cutting here is still fairly overgrown. The bridge is shown in Figure 5, and a view of the cutting from this bridge is shown in Figure 6.



Figure 4 Looking west from the Oxford Canal to a gantry that appears to be related to the GCR (roughly SP 523 682).



Figure 5 Looking west across the bridge over the GCR trackbed (SP 5218 6879).



Figure 6 Looking north down to the trackbed from the bridge at SP 5218 6879.

Access is still difficult as the line proceeds northwards in this cutting. At SP 5213 6905 a footpath crosses the trackbed at a point where it appears that the cutting has been filled in. The footpath is at a higher level than the base of the cutting on either side. This is shown in Figure 7. From grid point SP 5210 6924, roughly where the trackbed crosses the old contour route of the Oxford Canal (straightened to the present course before the GCR was built), there is a reasonably well-used footpath along the trackbed. As the surrounding land falls slightly, the cutting becomes an embankment. A typical view of the footpath along this stretch is shown in Figure 8.



Figure 7 Looking west across the trackbed where the cutting is filled in, and a footpath crosses (SP 5213 6905).



Figure 8 Looking south along the GCR trackbed (SP 5205 6942).



Figure 9 Looking west at a bridge carrying the GCR (SP 5204 6951).

At SP 5204 6951 the line crosses an access path on an overbridge (Figure 9). The embankment here is walkable and relatively well-used, but the line stops near SP 521 696 where it reaches Dunchurch Pools marina. There is some metalwork across the trackbed shortly before this blockage, which might be a remnant of the old railway. This area is shown in Figure 10.



Figure 10 Looking north along the GCR embankment shortly before the line is met by the new Dunchurch Pools marina. Note the metalwork crossing the track in the near distance. (Roughly SP 5202 6963).



Figure 11 Looking south from the towpath bridge across the entrance to Dunchurch Pools marina. The northern end of the GCR embankment is visible ahead (roughly where the orange lifebelt can be seen). (Camera at roughly SP 5202 6977).

The line of the railway has been blocked by the recent building of the Dunchurch Pools marina, which connects to the nearby Oxford Canal. The marina is not yet on many maps but covers the line of the Great Central Railway between roughly SP 521 696 and SP 519 701. There might just still be space for an alternative line between the marina and the Oxford Canal, but the canal entrance to the marina would have to be negotiated. A view of the northern end of the GCR embankment before the marina is reached is shown in Figure 11. This photo is taken from the top of the bridge over the marina's access to the Oxford Canal. The bridge and the orange lifebelt in this photo can also be seen from the south in Figure 10.

North of the marina's grounds at SP 519 701 the line of the railway is overgrown with a small wood between the prison to the west and the Oxford Canal to the east. There is a north-south footpath through this wood, not quite on the line of the railway, but the footpath emerges into open fields at SP 5182 7064 just a few metres to the west of the line of the railway. The railway is carried north on an embankment from here and there is pedestrian access along the top of it for 200m. This is shown in Figure 12.



Figure 12 Looking south along the embankment of the GCR (SP 5185 7072).

At SP 5185 7089 there is a missing bridge across a narrow access point. Just a few metres south of this missing bridge the embankment has been partly demolished (Figure 13, Figure 14). North of the missing bridge the embankment continues for another 300m before a bridge across the M45 is reached.



Figure 13 Looking west just south of the missing bridge at SP 5185 7089, showing how the embankment has been partly demolished.



Figure 14 Looking east at the missing bridge (SP 5185 7089).

The trackbed is carried over the M45 on a bridge that is still in place. The bridge is shown from the level of the trackbed in Figure 15, and from a distance in Figure 16. North of the M45 the trackbed is carried on an embankment that is currently out of bounds to the public. The trackbed appears to be heavily overgrown, although I have a memory of walking this around 2010 and it was fairly clear. The section that is out of bounds extends for one kilometre from the M45 at SP 5181 7127 northwards to the point where a missing bridge would have carried it across an access lane within Lower Rainsbrook Farm at SP 5169 7237. It was not possible to get very close to the missing bridge, but an attempt is shown in Figure 17. This section probably has culverts for watercourses at SP 5178 7142 and SP 5174 7187, as well as a possible farm access route at SP 5177 7154. Note that close to the northern end of this section the embankment appears to have a significant bulge on the eastern side (between SP 517 720 and SP 517 723). It is visible on the Ordnance Survey 1:25000 map.



Figure 15 Looking south from the northern end of the M45 bridge, with Barby Hill in the distance on the left (SP 5180 7129).



Figure 16 Looking west at the GCR bridge across the M45 (SP 5180 7127).



Figure 17 Looking west from the entrance to Lower Rainsbrook Farm at the point where a missing bridge would have connected the short embankment to the north with the longer embankment to the south (camera at SP 5172 7240).

The missing bridge at SP 5169 7237 would have connected the aforementioned embankment to a short embankment to the north. This embankment, about 100m long, is very overgrown at its northern and southern ends, although the central portion is clear (Figure 18). It is possible to access this embankment from Onley Lane at SP 5167 7249. At this point the railway would have crossed Onley Lane on a bridge, since removed. The point where the railway crossed Onley Lane is shown in Figure 19.



Figure 18 Looking south from the northern end of the embankment on the west side of Onley Lane (SP 5167 7249).



Figure 19 Looking north-west along Onley Lane with the point where the GCR would have crossed the road on a bridge in the foreground (camera at SP 5169 7247).