

Great Central Railway trackbed description

Woodford Halse to Rugby - part 6 of 6

Between the West Coast Main Line and the M6, the Great Central Railway has been converted to a popular footpath and cyclepath, the Great Central Way. This document follows the route northwards from the West Coast Main Line until the point that the M6 blocks the line.

The route of the Great Central Railway crossed the West Coast Main Line (WCML) northwards at Abbey Street in Rugby (SP 5160 7569). There are still some bridge supports visible amongst the current lines. North of the WCML an industrial estate has been built over the route of the Great Central Railway before the line of the route reaches the road at Butlers Leap at SP 5177 7615. The aerial photo (Figure 1), taken from Google Maps, shows the line (in red) that the Great Central Railway would have taken across the WCML, the present industrial estate and on northwards across the Oxford Canal to the next part of existing walkway at SP 5179 7644.

North of Butlers Leap at SP 5174 7615 there is a patch of currently unused land between the Butlers Leap road and the Oxford Canal. The line was carried on a large embankment across this land. The embankment is visible on old Ordnance survey maps. Now there is a much smaller embankment, I think, intended to force Clifton Brook to flow north around the edge of this field (Figure 2).



Figure 1 Aerial view (Google Maps) of the line the GCR would have taken across the West Coast Main Line. The line of the GCR is shown in red.



Figure 2 Looking north from the road at Butlers Leap towards the Oxford Canal. The Great Central Railway was carried across this area by a large embankment roughly parallel with the existing small embankment on the right (camera at SP 5174 7615).

Beyond the patch of unused land and Clifton Brook, the Oxford Canal crosses the line of the Great Central Railway on an embankment at SP 5177 7635. Just north of this there is a feeder stream to Clifton Brook that passes under the canal via a small culvert. All of this was crossed by a bridge, now missing, that carried the Great Central Railway before reaching an embanked section that is still in place. It is possible to view the end of the embanked section from the area where the aforementioned stream meets the culvert under the canal (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Looking north at the end of the walkway carrying the GCR trackbed. A missing bridge would have carried the railway south here across the Oxford Canal (SP 5179 7644).

Using an access point at SP 5183 7666 it is possible to reach the southern end of this embankment (a view from here is shown in Figure 4), and this is the start of another popular section of walkway, known as the Great Central Walk (the same as the southern section through Hillmorton), which extends northwards for 3km until the M6 is reached.



Figure 4 Looking south from the GCR trackbed at the furthest southern extent of this portion before a missing bridge is reached (SP 5179 7644).

At SP 5180 7652 the trackbed crosses the River Avon on a bridge (Figure 5) and at SP 5183 7666 another bridge crosses a footpath between the canal and Clifton upon Dunsmore (Figure 6). The embankment is still quite high at this point but as the trackbed proceeds northwards the nearby ground rises so that just 150m later the trackbed crosses Staveley Way at the same level (Figure 7). Note that just to avoid confusion, Staveley Way is effectively a crescent, and the line of the railway will intersect with it again further north.



Figure 5 Looking west at the bridge carrying the GCR trackbed over the River Avon (SP 5180 7652).



Figure 6 Looking west at the bridge carrying the GCR trackbed over a footpath between Rugby and Clifton upon Dunsmore (SP 5183 7666).



Figure 7 Looking north on the GCR trackbed at the point where the route crosses Staveley Way (at its southern end) on the same level (SP 5186 7680).

The line of the GCR continues, veering from northwards to north-eastwards, between housing estates, parallel with a street named Crow Thorns on the left. There are numerous access points for pedestrians along this stretch. Staveley Way is crossed again at SP 5207 7726, and as before the roadway is built across the line of the old railway (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Looking south along the GCR trackbed just north of where Staveley Way crosses at its northern end (SP 5207 7727).

At Newton Manor Lane (SP 5215 7740) the road would have dipped below a bridge carrying the railway. The bridge is now missing and there are few, if any, visible remains of any supports (Figure 9). Walkers and cyclists have to come off the walkway and cross the road to continue along the line of the railway. The trackbed continues north-eastwards on a small embankment with the new housing estate on the left and the village of Newton not far off to the right. The nearby ground rises such that the railway is in a cutting by SP 5239 7773, and it passes under a bridge at SP 5252 7791 (Figure 10).



Figure 9 Looking east along Newton Manor Lane at the point where the line of the GCR would have crossed the road, and the current walkway is interrupted (camera is at SP 5211 7742, GCR line crosses at SP 5215 7740).



Figure 10 Looking northeast along the GCR trackbed where the bridge to Newton House Farm crosses (SP 5252 7791).

Shortly after this bridge the trackbed is again on an embankment, and there is a short bridge above a footpath at SP 5275 7822 (Figure 11). After this the trackbed again enters a cutting. A footbridge passes above at SP 5289 7841 and Newton Lane passes above at SP 5300 7857. Both of these are visible in Figure 12. Note that just southwest of Newton Lane bridge the trackbed is quite wide, and there is some wetland on the west side of the line.



Figure 11 Looking northeast along the GCR trackbed at a short bridge over a footpath between the industrial units near Junction 1 of the M6 and Newton village (SP 5275 7822).



Figure 12 Looking northeast along the GCR trackbed with a footbridge visible ahead of Newton Lane road bridge (SP 5286 7838).

Immediately beyond Newton Lane road bridge the railway cutting appears to have been filled in considerably. A series of zig-zag footways take pedestrians up to road level. There is a small car park (SP 5305 7864) and some new houses. It is evident that this is considered the northern end of this portion of the Great Central Walk. But further north the infilling falls away again and there is a final 400m stretch of cutting that is accessible before the line is blocked by the M6 motorway. Figure 13 shows the view from Newton Lane bridge over the ascending zig-zag footpath and the extent to which the cutting has been filled in. Figure 14 shows that the last section before the motorway is easily accessible from the car park near Newton Lane, and it also shows again the extent to which the cutting has been filled in here. Figure 15 shows the last 100m of the trackbed before the M6 blocks the line of the old railway.



Figure 13 Looking northeast from the top of the Newton Lane bridge at the zig-zag footway up to the top of the filled in section of cutting (SP 5300 7857).



Figure 14 Looking south down to the GCR trackbed from the top of the cutting on the west side. The Newton Lane bridge is just visible behind the bank of the filled in section. (Camera roughly at SP 5313 7879).



Figure 15 Looking northeast along the line of the GCR from a point where a footpath (shown on OS maps) crosses the route, just south of the M6. The M6 is straight ahead. (Camera roughly at SP 5323 7888).