

BULLO PILL TRAMROAD ~ an exposure near Bilson.

Ian Statham

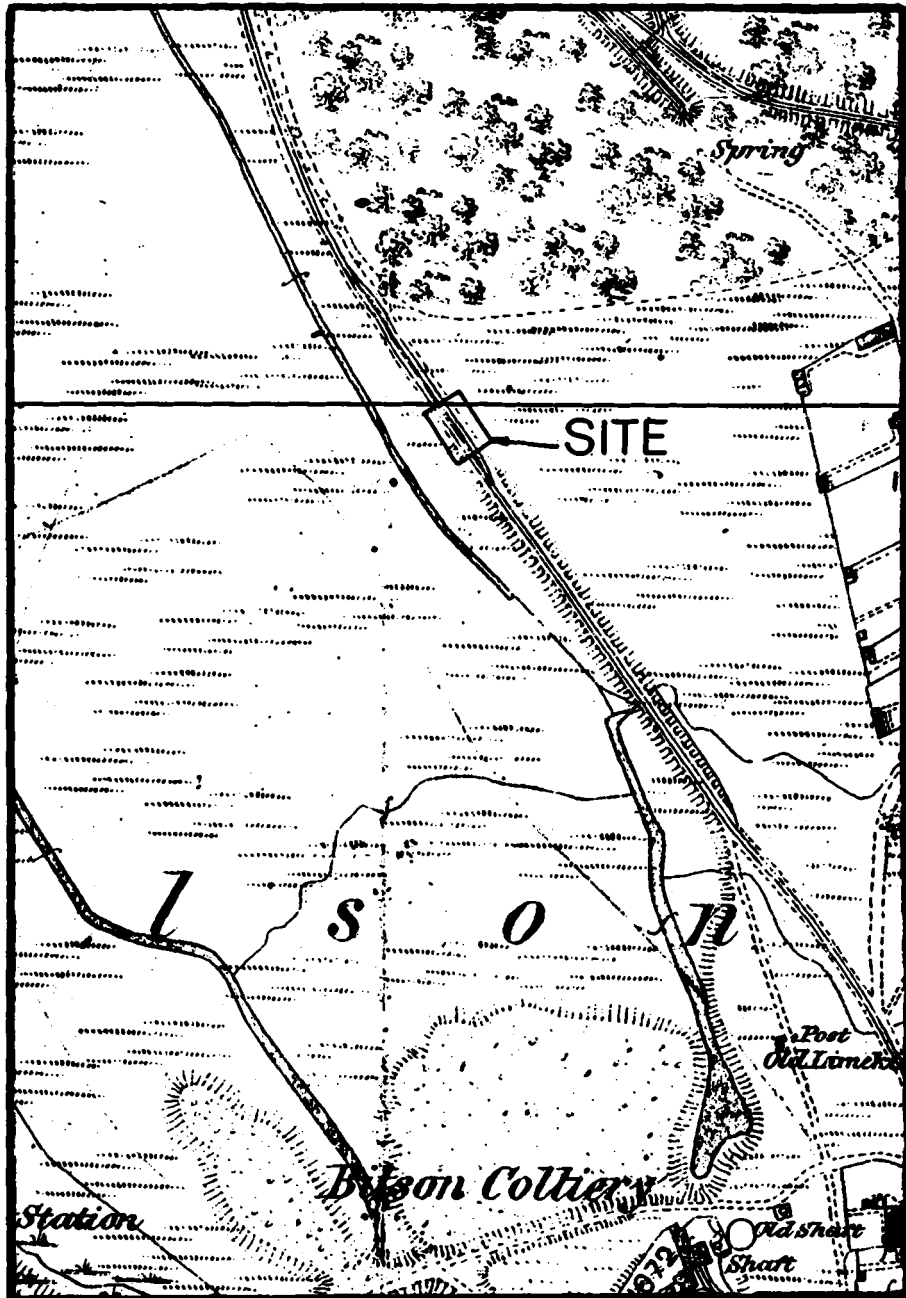


Figure 1. Extract of first edition OS plan
Scale 25in:1mi

Introduction Recent clearance and levelling operations on the Forest Vale Industrial Estate in Cinderford have exposed a cross-section through the Bullo Pill Tramroad. This note describes and locates the site and gives details of the tramroad construction. A cast-iron plate and rail fixing nail were also found on the site, and are described.

Site & Location The section of tramway exposed lies on Plot 15 of the industrial estate, adjacent to the new Forest Vale Road. At this point the tramway runs sidelong across a very gentle, almost west-facing slope, on a low embankment. The first edition 25 in. to 1 mile O.S. plan (dated 1878) reveals that a passing siding or turnout existed here and that the tramroad was originally twin track for about 80 m. immediately south of Hollyhill Wood (Fig. 1). The plan shows the turnout on the eastern side of the main line.

Construction Details A cross-section through the tramroad embankment is shown in Fig. 2. It is constructed of ash, cinders and coal fragments with occasional fragments of Pennant Sandstone. It appears to rest directly onto the natural organic soil layer, and is about 0.4 - 0.5 m. high. Substantial remnants of a paved surface between the sleeper blocks may be seen, formed from elongated Pennant Sandstone cobbles about 0.10 - 0.20 m. long.

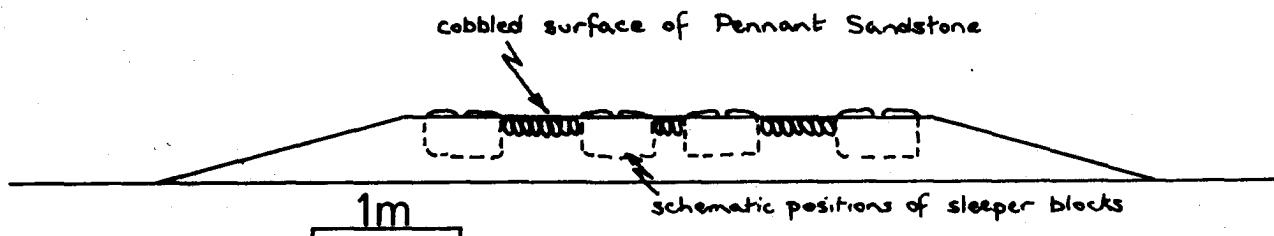


Figure 2. Section through embankment

A trial trench was excavated across the tramway to reveal the sleeper blocks. The details with important dimensions are shown in Fig. 3. Two sets of sleeper blocks were found confirming the presence of the turnout. The sleeper blocks on the turnout are somewhat out of line due to the sharp curve at either end and to the necessity for a fixed rail length. It is interesting to note that the two tracks are of different construction. The turnout has the earlier type of sleeper block, with a central hole designed to receive a fixing spike which located through notches in the ends of the rail plates. The main line sleeper blocks, however, are of the later type with two holes. An iron chair, with two bosses on the underside, located into these holes and in turn supported the rail plate. Paar (1975) states that by 1826 the permanent way of the Bullo Pill Tramroad was in a poor state of repair. Apparently, the fixing spikes on the earlier type of rail were very prone to wear by the passage of wagons and the line was relaid with the later, chair-supported rails. It appears that the turnout exposed at this site was not re-laid, presumably because it took less traffic and was not so badly worn.

Rail Plate Dimensions One corroded and fractured tramplate was encountered. Its length was 3 ft. and its overall design was similar to the Monmouth Railway plate described elsewhere in this Journal. It was, however, narrower, having a width of $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. for tram wheels and heavier, weighing 48 lb. It clearly came from single hole-type sleeper block track. A fragment of much lighter L-shaped rail was also seen. This had a width of $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. but the guard plate was only $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. high. Its probable weight was about 15 lb. per yard. One spike of wrought-iron was found. It was of square cross-section and 4 in. long. It probably came from a chair base rather than a single-holed sleeper.

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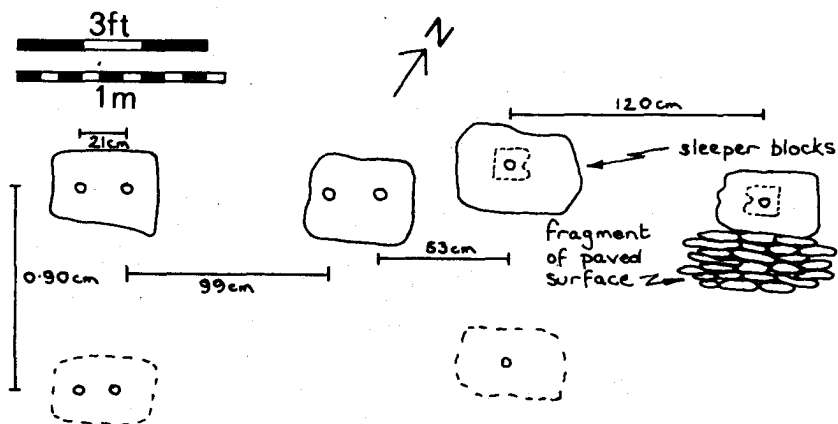


Figure 3. Details of tramroad construction

REFERENCES

- 1 Paar, H.W. The Great Western Railway in Dean. 2nd edn. 1971
- 2 Clissold G. & Standing I.J. 1980. Mr. Teague's Railway: Some new Information. GSIA Journal 1980.
3. Parr, H.W. op. cit.