

## THE COLEORTON RAILWAY

Sir George Beaumont of Coleorton Hall and the Breedon Limestone & Cloud Hill Lime Works owned collieries in Coleorton and Peggs Green. Lord Ferrers owned collieries at Lount. Both saw the need to extend the Leicester-Swannington railway from Swannington to Newbold, with the terminus at The Smoile on the north-western side of the village. This became known as the Coleorton Railway. It opened in 1833, it used 4'8½" gauge edgerail and used horse-drawn wagons. It joined the base of the Swannington incline up to Worthington Rough near Newbold.

The Coleorton Railway line continued on towards the Lount cross-roads where later, the Derby - Ashby main railway line passed. Coal trucks from New Lount Colliery were brought to this area and marshalled for transport to Derby, en-route to Leicester. Today, Coleorton Railway's route can still be traced from Swannington to opposite the then aptly-named Railway Inn (now the Gelsmoor) and via an embankment crossing the road below Newbold School. From Newbold School, the route went through a cutting and then, by tunnel under Ashby Road. The tunnel still exists.

The Coleorton Railway was mainly for transporting coal, as well as some limestone, and a normal train was 24 wagons of 32cwt each.

The Coleorton railway cost around £90,000; about £60,000 being raised locally, with the balance from George Stephenson's partners in Liverpool.

Limestone was carried on the tramway, built between Ashby Canal and Cloud Hill. This used 4'2" plateway track. In 1839 the section of the tramway from Cloud Hill to Worthington Rough was relaid with L section and edgerail track running in parallel, and a connection onto the Coleorton Railway was made at Worthington Rough. Because of the different gauges, limestone had to be reloaded from one set of wagons to another. Limestone from Cloud Hill was then transported directly to the Swannington Incline via the Coleorton Railway. This Railway was used to transport coal from Old Lount, California, Califat and Calcutta coalmines, which were all around Newbold. The Coleorton Railway was 2½ miles long and ceased working in 1872.



Engines in New Lount Colliery - 'George Stephenson' on the left, 'Thomas Hill diesel no. 1' on the right

By the end of 1833, coal from Whitwick, Ibstock and Bagworth collieries was delivered to Leicester far more cheaply, than from Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The success forced the Nottinghamshire miners to build a rail connection from the Mansfield and Pinxton Railway down the Erewash Valley to Leicester. This later became the Midland Counties Railway.

The importance of the Railway in this local area, is confirmed by the fact that it was constructed about five years after the first railway in the country (which was the Stockton – Darlington railway, with all the popular association with George and Robert Stephenson) and was in-being before any railway at Birmingham.

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In 1845 the Midland Railway, to keep competitors away from the Leicestershire coalfields, bought the Ashby Canal and its associated railways for £110,000. It constructed a line from the Leicester & Swannington at Coalville, through Moira to its recently-acquired Birmingham-Derby route at Burton-upon-Trent. One clause of the agreement required it to "keep the canal intact and in good repair for the purposes of trade until the completion of the railway and as long after as may be deemed expedient".

In 1865, the Midland Railway obtained an Act to extend its Worthington branch southwards into Ashby where it would connect with the Leicester-Burton line. This was laid mainly on the track-bed of the Cloud Hill tramway except where it was straightened to reduce the bends. The tunnel was rebored to accommodate a standard gauge track and, as part of this work, it was shortened at its western end. The new railway opened on 1st January 1874.

