

Tramways and Railways – Four Generations at Poynton

K.A. Jagers January 2005 (from notes written in 1985 and updated as necessary)

1) Setting the Scene

The now-prosperous village of Poynton is situated 10 miles south of Manchester, but just outside the conurbation boundary in rural northeast Cheshire. It has been augmented in recent years by extensive commuter-residential development and, as at many other places, is blighted by present road traffic levels. The older housing however betrays its origin and life until some 70 years ago as a pit village, accommodating the miners of the Poynton Colliery Co and their families over a period of some 170 years.

Driving through the village nowadays, there is little visible of the former complex network of mineral tramways and railways serving the pits, but closer inspection reveals evidence of the whole sequence of development from the earliest days of railways to their demise hereabouts.

That this is possible today is due firstly to the fact that Poynton's pits, though on the same geological structure as those better-known mining areas of Wigan and Leigh to the north, and Staffordshire to the south, were never extensively worked by modern methods, so that earlier features were not generally obliterated by later development.

Secondly, enlightened planning and conservation has ensured that the majority of the former transportation routes have been retained as rural pathways running between the areas of new housing, and not encroached upon unduly. Leisure use is promoted by Macclesfield Borough's Groundwork Trust, in a series of informative leaflets relating the former significance of these pathways, the buildings, the canal, and many other features of present-day Poynton.

2) The pre-railway era

Until about 1765, such mining as existed was, as elsewhere, in small shallow pits worked by one or two men, widely scattered, constantly moving about in the fields along the exposed, out-cropping coal seams, and providing poor quality coal for local domestic use only.

Our picture shows the characteristic remains of two of these "bell pits" in a field on the east side of the Macclesfield Canal, above the Hagg Bank footbridge. There are many others still visible in this area.

Transport at this time was by packhorse, or baskets carried on the miner's backs. About 1765 however, various factors started to dramatically change the situation: factories and mills were being set up in towns, driven by steam and demanding increasing quantities of easily accessible, cheap fuel.

The better coal too could now be more easily got, since use of the steam engine in mines allowed deeper exploitation of the seams by de-watering, leading to concentration of plant and access shafts at defined and relatively permanent points in the coalfield.

Thirdly, the mines and markets were being connected by a network of vastly improved roads by the Turnpike Trusts, and by canals.

Both Manchester and Birmingham were being supplied with very cheap coal by canal before 1770, so it was natural that the Poynton mine owners should look to the modern means of transport to develop potential markets, particularly Stockport, the nearest expanding industrial community.



Various early local canal schemes were however thwarted by political and monopolistic activity; construction of one such, intended to go to Stockport was actually started (see our Walk 1) but soon abandoned. Coal continued to be carted to and on the Macclesfield – Stockport turnpike road, completed in the 1760's (nowadays the A523).

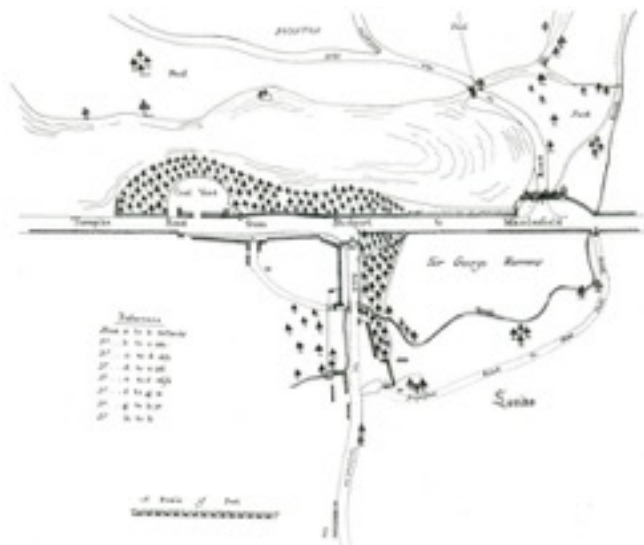
This 1789 plan is centred around the junction of the main road with what is now Vicarage Lane, but was then the turnpike road to Wilmslow. The coal yard is shown on the site of the later council storage area, now derelict, between the A523 and Poynton Pool.

The highway authorities had erected a side toll bar on the Wilmslow road, so that carts going to and from the coal yard had to pay tolls in both directions just to travel a few yards each way.

The landowner Sir George Warren threatened to build a bypass road, as shown on the plan, so that the carts could avoid the toll.

It has been suggested that the matter was settled amicably and the new link was never actually built. However some residents of Tulworth Road whose gardens now lie on the route shown have found evidence of a brick-paved roadway about 2 feet down, on the native clay bed, and numerous pieces of scattered small coal around it, demonstrating that the threat was actually carried out, and the new road used, for a while at least!

It is upon this scene that the new-fangled railways began to appear, late in the eighteenth century.



3) Four generations of railways

There are several surviving references to “plateways” or “gangroads” at Poynton in the 1790s, one at least of which indicates a route down to the turnpike road which probably superseded the “coal pits road” used by the miners and packhorses. These do not appear to have lasted long. This is probably partly due to high tolls on the turnpike – there were various schemes proposed for avoiding these – but the embryo railed systems were undoubtedly inflexible at a time when pits were still fairly mobile, as knowledge of coal seam geology matured.

After this brief venture into railed transportation, there was a general depression of trade due to the Napoleonic wars, and there was still no sign of the promised canal. Methods returned to the old ways.

A canal finally appeared late on the scene, in 1831, and this opened up the possibility of trade to the Macclesfield and Ashton (East Manchester) areas. However, apart from some small pits adjacent to its banks which used water transport, the Colliery Company continued to turn its back on the canal in favour of the established Stockport market; the second phase of tramroads built from around 1839 led once more to the turnpike road.

These almost certainly used the modern type of edge-rails rather than the cast-iron “plateway” type, but they remained horse-worked and of narrow gauge, using small-wheeled tub wagons. This system was expanded by the early 1840's to connect several main pithead areas to a coal yard by Norbury Gate – near the present Brookside Garden Centre.

At around this time also, in a seemingly curious development the main mining area around Prince Albert pit in Princes Wood was connected to the coal yard by a standard-gauge “railway” route, co-existing with the narrow-gauge tramways along what is now Towers Road down to the turnpike yard, no doubt built as such in anticipation of the arrival of the main national rail network in Poynton.

However, the main-line connection, as with the previous canal promises, was slow to materialise. Poynton was to have been on a main route to London, one of which proposals actually ran right through the coalfield, but as a result of devious manipulations the main route had gone via Crewe, and the collieries ended up being served only by a branch off a branch, up a cable-worked inclined plane, in 1845.

This third phase, the initial standard-gauge era, rapidly developed into a comprehensive horse- and gravity-worked system serving the main pits, also extending up to the canal, and later connecting with the new Macclesfield – Marple railway on the level, thus breaking the former monopoly of the London & North Western Railway, and supplying into all major markets within about a 20-mile radius. This period, lasting from 1845 until about 1880, encompassed the heyday of the collieries, with output reaching ¼ million tons annually, nearly all of which went out by rail.

The fourth and final phase of development, that of conversion and upgrading for steam locomotives, came late, when markets were already beginning to decline and increasing competition demanded much-improved efficiency and consolidation of assets. Completed by around 1890, the modernised railway system of the collieries was to remain virtually unaltered for the longest period of its varied history, for about 45 years until final closure of the last pit in 1935.

4) The routes described

4.1 1st generation – the “plateways” or “gangroads” c 1793-1810

Although it is certain that plateway-type rail systems operated in Poynton from around 1793 to 1800, the exact routes are not known.

There are no known surviving large-scale maps from this short period, and previous or following maps show nothing of them. There are thought to have been at least two main routes, that from Sir George Warren’s pits between Middlewood Road and New House Farm down to the turnpike road, and that constructed by Nathaniel Gee from his around Hilltop Farm, possibly connecting with the former in the vicinity of Garman’s pool.

Examples of plate-rails and stone sleeper blocks have been found, but these were undoubtedly re-used having served their original purpose, the latter as walling blocks identified by their telltale spike fixing holes. These components are similar to those which were used on the Little Eaton gangroad (near Derby) of 1795, and on the tramways at Peak Forest and Marple in the same decade. Benjamin Outram, engineer of these and the Peak Forest Canal, was probably friendly with Poynton Collieries owner Sir George Warren; if so, the Poynton gangroads just predate all this other much better – known work. The relics have been collected together for exhibition at the Anson Pit Museum in Poynton.

The possible routes of the gangroads are shown on this plan.....

However it should be noted that not necessarily the whole length of these was laid out as a railed-road; it may be that some parts were never more than graded, brick-paved track-ways to ease the lot of the pack horses.



Starting for convenience at the western end, as we have already seen the coal-yard in the 1790's period was situated north of the turnpike road, at the site which later became a coaching inn and more recently a council storage yard, known as "The Crescent".

The tramway would surely have run along the top of the artificial embankment holding back the waters of Poynton Pool, at a few feet higher level than the coal yard, so that the wagon contents could be tipped into storage bunkers or directly into road carts waiting below. With some imagination it is possible to visualise the tramroad then turning across to the far side of what is now South Park Drive, in front of South Lodge, and continuing eastwards along the right hand side of this road, the levels suggesting probably more on the line of the verge / pavement than the road itself.

It would have followed this route almost to the junction with Towers Road. The large bungalow on the southwest corner of the road junction is built on the site of "Poynton Towers", which at the time of the tramway served as the stable-block, dairy and estate workshop for Poynton Hall. Later this building would be enlarged and converted to form the new hall itself, but in the 1790's the tramway would probably have run right through the middle, with some at least of the pack-horses being kept overnight here.



On the other side of Towers Road, by passing through the field gate (right) the route of the tramroad can be followed easily for some distance eastward.....

About 200 yards from the gate it is crossed by a later railway route which heads off southeast up an inclined plane.

This picture looks back westwards from this point. The gang road route runs from the middle of the left hand side, defined by the tractor ruts, towards the white bungalow at top centre on Towers Road. The later route crosses from bottom left to middle right in a shallow depression.....



This should not be confused with the original plateway route, which continues to turn slightly northwards and climbs steadily around the flank of a small hillock.

This picture looks eastward from almost the same point as that above, clearly showing the gang road route as a flat, level grassy track.....



At about 1/3 mile east of Towers Road, the much later locomotive-worked railway route to Park Pits crosses at right angles at a higher level (just behind the trees running left to right in the above picture), and for the next 200 yards or so the old tramway route levels have been upset by later development, and is also now often extremely muddy.

After another 200yds, a split in the route is evident, with one arm heading steeply northeast in the direction of New House Farm (where there remain some interesting old stable-buildings, right, which are probably contemporary with the gangroad). After passing through the farmyard, this route curves north through a field with much evidence of small coal-pit workings, to terminate somewhere along the steep hillside overlooking Middlewood Road, in the vicinity of what were Engine, Brook, Resolution and Speedwell pits.



The other arm from the junction continues just south of easterly, then east again, for 1/3 mile towards Middlewood Road at German Lodge.



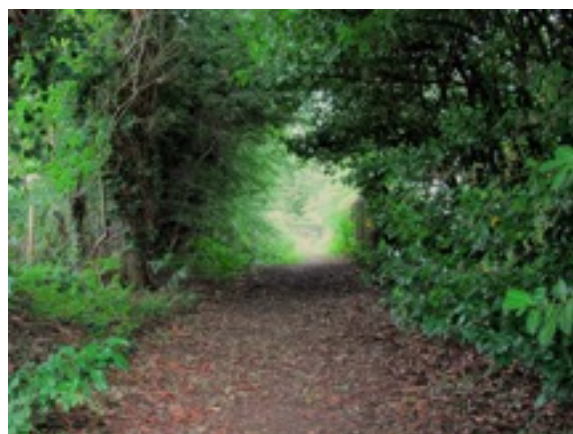
This part of the route is very clear (right), being part in a shallow cutting, and part on built-up embankment, along the field edge and marked by hedging. It is of course much easier to see these details in winter, with minimal vegetation, but again mud makes the route virtually impassable in places along here. The ideal day for exploring and photography would be one of those rare very bright sunny days with crisp winter light, when the ground is also rendered solid by being deep-frozen!

In the vicinity of German Lodge were more pits; Ash, Tomlinson's, Wilson's and Dicker's, but the tramway levels hereabouts are unclear and have probably been much altered in the last 200 years.

By all accounts, this point was the further end of Sir George Warren's railed road serving his pits.



However, on the far side of Middlewood Road, through the gate opposite German Lodge, another clear, level evidently man-made trackway leads on (right), skirting round the edge of "German Pool" (another old mine-working) and turning due south, crossing the later railway route of Princes Road at right angles, then in from of the modern bungalows to reach Green Lane.....



Crossing this at a shallow angle, the route appears to turn southwest into the mine yard complex of the old Anson Pit. Could it be possible that this was the “Gee’s Tramroad” referred to in the records, at least as far as the crossing of Green Lane (with the extension to the precursors of the Anson added later)?

If this is so, to reach Gee’s pits in the vicinity of Hilltop Farm, the main route would probably have then followed Green Lane due southeast, then crossing the routes of the later Macclesfield – Marple railway and the canal just north of the Nelson Pit – Canal Wharf complex. All trace of such a route hereabouts has no doubt been long obliterated by these later developments.

4.2 2nd generation – Tramroads and the first “Railway”, 1839 - 44

Returning now to Towers Road, this itself was originally the clear, straight and level course of one of the main tramroads of the second generation, laid down around 1839, running from a new coal yard behind North Lodge at Norbury (on the main A523, once a toll-bar) right through to the Lord and Lady pits at Hockley, a distance of some one and three-quarter miles.

The present day inhabitants of Towers Road would no doubt prefer not to know that their select residential area was once known as “Black Road” and was a colliery tramway!



Just where the later “Princes Incline” footpath crosses Towers Road marks the point of divergence of a 2nd-generation branch tramway turning sharp left from the main route then proceeding almost entirely along a route used also by later standard-gauge railways, to Vernon Pit, Quarry Pit, Anson Pit, then finally up to the then-new canal wharf at Nelson Pit.

The extract above from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey draft map surveyed around 1840 shows the whole extent of this system. It also shows other, isolated short tramways leading from pits down to the canal, at Middlecale and Water pits to the north, and Smithfield and Gees (Elmbeds) to the south. It also looks possible on the ground that the main route could have crossed the canal near the wharf at some time, and continued a short way further to Gee’s Hilltop and Adventure pits, but there is no hard evidence for this.

Back to Towers Road again, this time in a field some ¼ mile north of Princes Incline, on the eastern side was the point of divergence of the “mystery” isolated railway from the Norbury coal yard up to the Prince Albert pit, which must have been built just after this map was made, c 1840-41 and would have co-existed with the narrow gauge tramway along the northern ¾ mile or so of Towers Road. It turns eastward then shortly crosses the 1790 gangroad route as mentioned above.

There are traces of the north-to-east curve earthworks in the field, but the levels have been much disturbed hereabouts.

After the gangroad crossing, its course is however very clear (especially in winter), straight up an inclined plane, to cross the later Park Pits railway route then join up at a shallow angle with the main Princes Incline path in Prince Wood.

This picture shows the c1793 gangroad route more or less along the tractor ruts in the foreground, and the c1840 incline very clearly ascending from right middle into the trees at top left. Our second picture looks back down the incline.....



Despite the lack of direct evidence, we surmise that this route was possibly of standard gauge rather than narrow, from the scale of the incline earthworks, and from the fact that it is described in records as a “railway” (as distinct from the previous “tramways”) and is said in fact to have made a physical “junction” with the later standard gauge route in Princes Wood. Again, it is possible that it could have continued beyond Prince Wood, maybe even all the way up to the canal, on the course of the later line from as early as 1840, but there is no hard evidence for this.

Here then is our hypothetical “2nd generation” route map including all of the above (with the 1st generation shown dotted for orientation):



4.3 3rd generation – Standard-gauge railways 1845 - 57

For the third generation routes, the first with direct connection into the developing national railway network, the situation is much clearer, as we know exactly where the lines went, and when!

It is convenient to start an exploration of these from the present Poynton railway station, on the Stockport – Macclesfield – Stoke electrified main line. This was originally merely the Macclesfield branch of the Manchester & Birmingham Railway, later the London & North Western Railway, opened in 1845, but now, perversely, a major through route carrying the fastest London expresses.

The present station was always the site of the junction for the colliery lines, but as the passenger station it dates only from 1887. The original M & B.R Poynton station was some ½ mile further to the south; its grand 3-storey main building of 1845 still survives in domestic use at the end of Lostock Terrace. The present facility is also not without interest, on account of its carefully tended gardens and collection of old enamel notices and advertisements, well-known local features seemingly exempt from British Railways' imposed "Modern Image" uniformity!

The site of the spur line to the collieries can be seen diverging eastwards in the undergrowth behind the up platform; nearby are remains of the gasworks and a brickworks which were once served by sidings.

This extract from the 1906 edition large-scale OS map shows the layout here, which did not alter greatly over the years.....

The branch may then be followed on the east side of Hazelbadge Road to the former bridge over Poynton Brook, now replaced by a footbridge a few feet to its north.

From here on as far as the A523 road, the former railway trackbed is one of the few sections which has been incorporated into private house gardens, and a detour is necessary.

The site of the broad level crossing on the main road is still clearly discernable; there were coal yards on either side, the western one being an exchange point for the train operations between the colliery company and the L&NWR (later LMS Railway) whose locomotives were only allowed to come this far. This venerable machine is in the western yard, hauling what appears to be a load of cut timber from the Vernon estate.....



The part east of the main road was an extensive cobbled coal stacking and general sales facility (the “landsale yard”) which has only very recently been built over. Going eastwards past these new houses, the railway route then splits into two separate gentle inclines, originally cable-operated but later worked by the colliery company’s own steam locomotives. They run one on each side of the new “Kingswood” housing development, previously a shirt factory, and both are now maintained and waymarked as bridle paths.

This picture show one of the distinctive Colliery Co. Coal wagons when new.....

They are said to have been originally painted yellow, but this was later changed to a much more practical red oxide.

This one has suffered a shunting mishap in the eastern coal yard, having fallen off a raised section of staging down onto the cobbled yard.....



Princes Incline

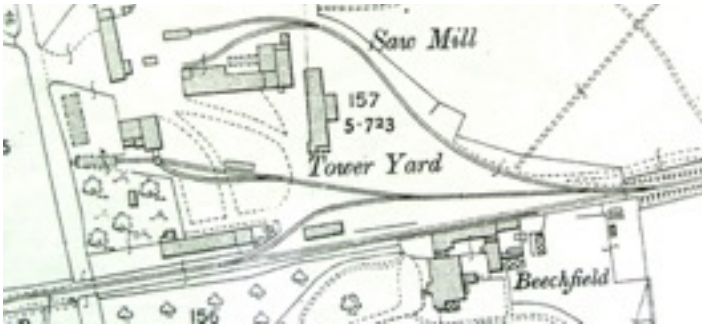
The route straight on is the Princes Incline, on the original route of 1845 thus the slightly older of the two, rising at a steady 1-in-40 to cross Towers Road on the level (though formerly by a very low wooden bridge over the 1839 tramway).

It then widens out into a double-tracked loop formation alongside the red-brick buildings of Towers Farm cottages. This was the half-way point of Princes incline, where in cable-worked days, the downhill-bound loaded coal wagons would pass the uphill empties.

On the way up the lower section of the incline some attractive wood-carvings by a local artist may now be seen.....

These cottages (below) were once part of the extensive colliery railways’ central maintenance workshops complex here, known as Tower (or Towers) Yard, of which most of the other buildings have either been demolished or extensively converted for residential use in recent years....





The incline continues eastwards on an embankment; the site of sidings running back into Towers Yard may be seen, also the lone gunpowder storage house in the adjacent field.....



Around the back of the Towers Yard complex (north side) is the former Tower Pit winding engine house, pictured left. It was built in 1846 and is now a cottage.

This pit was working by 1847, being sunk very close to the Red-Rock fault line (which runs along what is now Towers Road). The workings were very unstable and soon ceased, demonstrating the very limited geological knowledge available even at this late date.



The colliery managers house "Beechfield" just south of the incline was rebuilt from an earlier building on the same foundations and enlarged 1877-79. It was demolished circa 1946 and replaced by the present bungalow, but some Victorian outbuildings, stables etc remain (left), recently renovated.

A little further up the incline, the steep embankment sides have been stabilised at various times by steel piles driven into its soft base.

Many of these will be recognised as an amazing variety of old rails; some "bridge" (omega-section) rails of various sizes from the former colliery tramways, some heavy modern "flat-bottom" railway lines, and some of the special

rails which were once to be found buried in town streets, presumably courtesy of either Manchester or Stockport Corporations after their passenger tram systems closed in the late 1940's.

The pictures (right & below) show this section of the incline; the crumbling under-bridge is known locally as the “Yell”, presumably due to its echoic properties!



Shortly a large private house, “Rabbit Burrow” (pictured) is passed on the left hand side of the incline.

A small central, white-painted part of this is the former engine-house of the Lower Vernon coal pit here, once containing an Atmospheric or Watt-principle steam pumping engine used to keep the mine dry.

Several of these old engine houses still survive in the Poynton area, mostly now converted to houses, but this one has received the most drastic extension treatment rendering it now virtually unrecognisable.



A few yards further along is the site of a triangular railway junction, with the former Princes Incline continuing straight ahead through its centre. The earliest route here now diverges to the right, following the private access road down from the house, and is the 1839 tramway branch mentioned above, which has followed the later incline up from Towers Road, and now diverges to serve Quarry Pit and Anson Pit.....



For a few years after 1845, when Princes Incline was built and until the 1839 tramways were superceded, there must have been interchange points between the narrow-gauge tubs of coal and the standard gauge system using much larger wagons; perhaps the tubs were loaded bodily onto the wagons broadside on, two or three at a time?

Some sort of facility would have been needed both here and at the Towers Road crossing (for the tub traffic from Lord and Lady Pits), or perhaps the standard and narrow-gauge lines were contiguous down the stretch of route which we have just covered, leading to just one interchange point at the latter?

We return to the right hand diverging route later, as it was almost wholly converted to standard gauge in due course, eventually being operated by locomotives. The left-hand divergence of the triangle is now difficult to see across its field, despite being one of the final lines constructed, in this case specifically for the use of locomotives working directly to and from Park Pit. It would have gone roughly where the brown wooden fence is on the extreme left of the above photo.

For now we continue straight ahead up Princes Incline (the muddy track just left of centre in the picture), this part of which was only ever cable-operated, and is steep at around 1-in-19. This section was abandoned with the general introduction of locomotives in the 1880's.

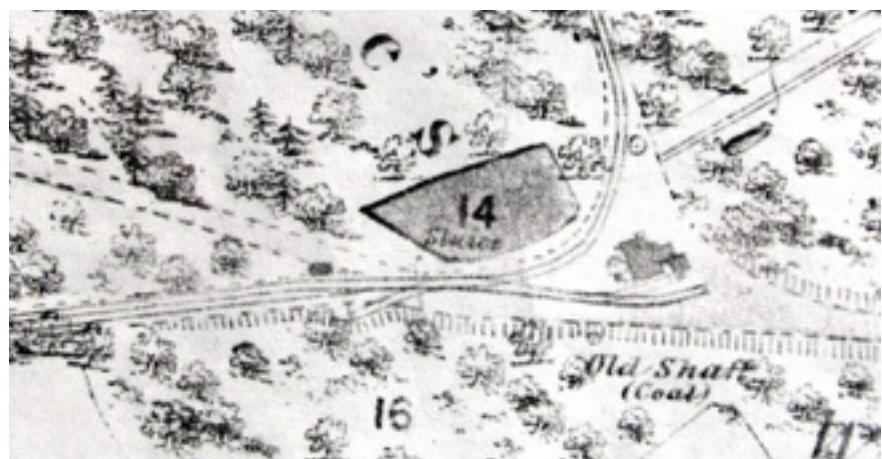
Shortly the third side of the triangle, the other loco-worked line from Park Pits to Anson Pit, is crossed at right angles, and the grade of the original route was disturbed when it was built. The incline now enters Prince Wood on its final stretch, being joined by the old c 1840 incline coming up on its left. The 1845 route then terminates just beyond the site of the incline cable-winding house, at the former Prince Albert Pit.

Here there is a council way-board explaining the layout at this point, and an extract from the 1871 edition of the large-scale OS map.....



Princes Incline is shown coming up from middle left, and the 1840 railway incline path is between the dotted lines on the left, coming up to converge with it.

The track on Princes incline is shown correctly as a 3-rail arrangement on this its top section, since no wagons would ever need to pass each other in this stretch.



A short siding runs south of the incline winding house, and the line curving northwards leads to the then route into the Park Pits. Unusually this led down an incline into the pit area, so that loaded coal wagons had to be hauled upwards! This required a steam winding engine, contained within the same building (which unfortunately no longer exists) as the ropes and drum of the Princes Incline.

The map clearly indicates the site of a third side to the triangle of railway lines here, running from N to E.

Extension up to Canal Pit

By 1848 the standard-gauge route had been extended from here for a further $\frac{3}{4}$ mile or so due eastwards, possibly on the alignment of an 1839 tramway or else newly laid out. This section was relatively level, and horse-worked. Its route can be seen continuing eastwards on the above plan.

It served firstly Horsepasture pit, then crossing Middlewood Road past German's Pit, intersecting the conjectural line of Gee's tramroad as mentioned above, and a modern residential road.

The levels are now apparently all wrong, as the present path ascends steeply to cross the former Macclesfield – Marple railway line, now the Middlewood Way, by a stone bridge, and descends on the far side.

The old colliery route had however been abandoned as a railway even before the latter was constructed in 1869, so the original track we are following would have been almost level at this point. It runs on, to finally terminate just a few yards short of the Macclesfield Canal, and below the level of it, at the former Canal Pit.



This working was very short-lived, but an engine was maintained here long afterwards to help keep the other mines dry, and the foundations of this and the pump rodding supports may still be discerned, in the picture above. It was originally used also for winding the cages up the shaft, and the old photo shows the complexity of the gearing necessary to achieve the dual functions.....



On the far side of the canal, an old tramway route runs alongside a field hedge in a southerly direction for a short distance towards some old pit shafts around Barlow House Farm.

There may also once have been a low-level wooden swing-bridge across the canal here, connecting the workings on either side.

Lady's Incline

So far, we have covered the 1845 railway route and its extension, over 2 miles long running almost directly due east. Other branches were constructed off this, the first, up the second main incline forking right at Kingswood was completed by 1848 to serve the Lord and Lady pits, superceding the last part of the 1839 tramway running along the bottom part of Towers Road.

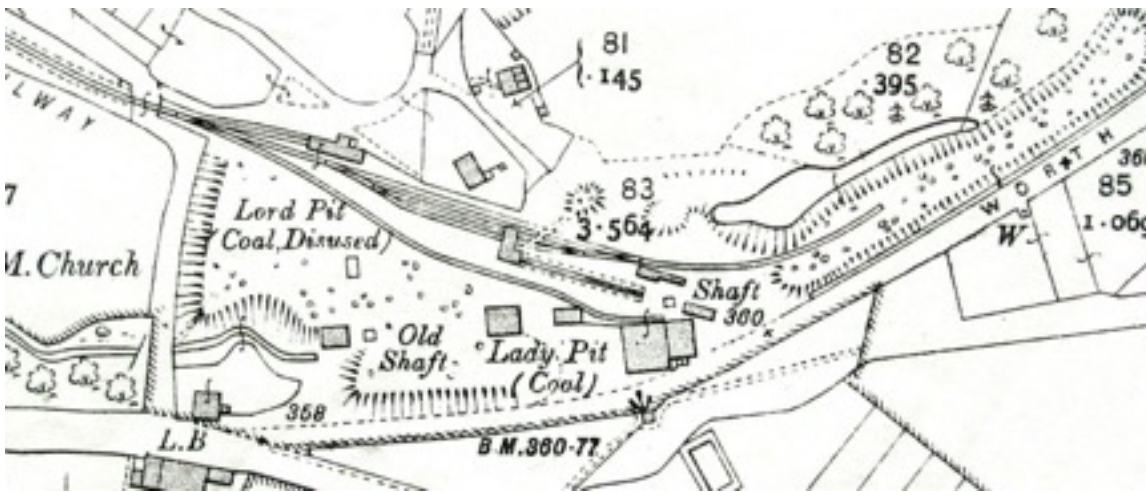
It is called Lady's Incline, 600 yards long at a very shallow gradient, and quite featureless nowadays.

About $\frac{1}{2}$ way up, in the trees on the left may be seen Woodside House (pictured); this



was built in 1907 for a colliery manager on the site of an earlier dwelling.

Just beyond the top of this incline, the railway crossed the southernmost end of Towers Road at Hockley village, and runs into the main Lord & Lady Pit area.....



This is now covered in housing, which regrettably led to the demolition of the colliery locomotive shed in the 1990s. This 1906 map extract shows the junction of Towers Road with Park Lane, Middlewood Road (shown here as Worth Clough) and Coppice Road at bottom left, and the Lady's Incline track comes in at top left.

A fine red-brick winding engine house survives alongside Middlewood Road, renovated and converted to office accommodation. It is above the letter L of Lady Pit on the plan.....



Our pictures show it in around 1990, just after restoration (left) and as it appears in 2010. The much larger pumping engine "Big Ned" to the east of it was regrettably demolished in around 1950. Its flue ran under Middlewood Road to a large square chimney, the base of which still survives in undergrowth. The engine is shown in this c1907 postcard.....



Extension to Quarry Pit and Anson Pit

By 1857, this railway route had also been further extended eastwards, to Quarry pit and Anson pit, replacing the last of the 1839 tubway routes.

Part of the stone abutments of the bridge by which it crossed Middlewood Road just east of Lady pit may still be discerned, and the continuation now forms a terrace in the garden of the bungalow.....

Beyond it, the course of a short incline across the fields towards Anson Road has now been almost completely obliterated.

Its route is shown running along the bottom of the 1871 plan above; the top half of the incline (right hand side) is again 3-railed, and the empty and loaded wagons passed on the ½-way loop, below the figure “46”. Lower down it is just a single track.

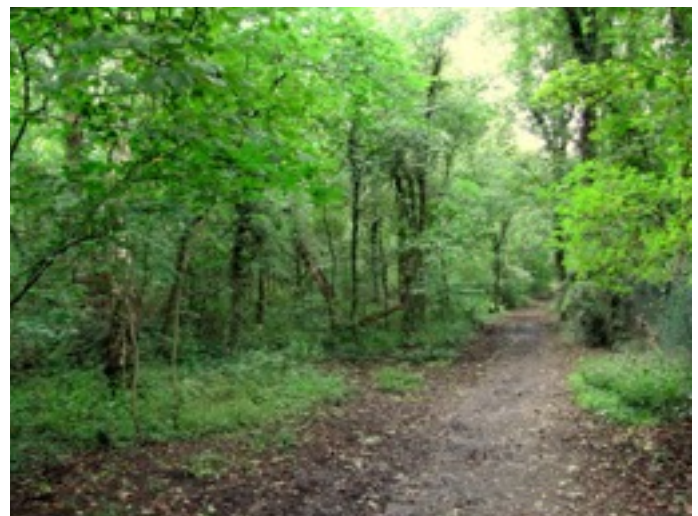
This incline route was itself superseded in turn by the new locomotive-worked line of 1889-90, which reverted largely to the line of the 1839 route, and has lain derelict ever since.

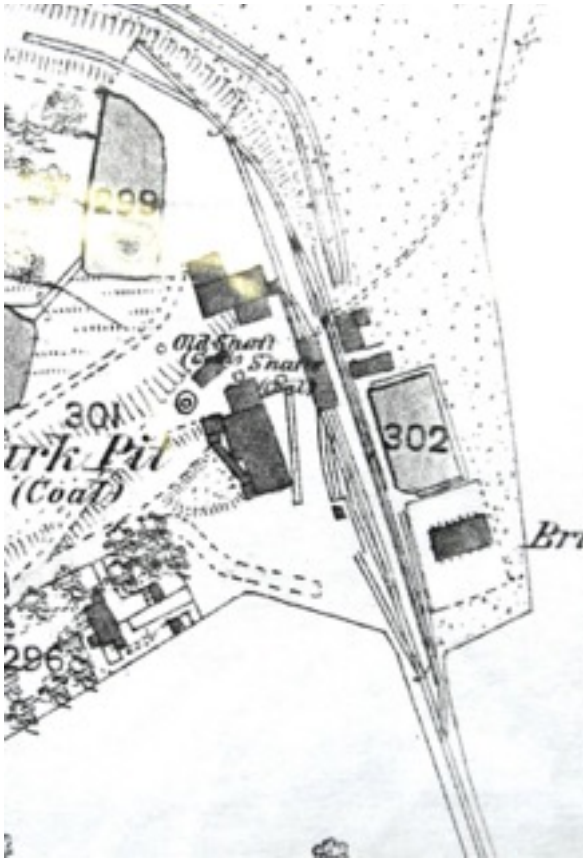
Park Pit

Back now to Prince Wood, another circa 1857 extension led from the main 1845-48 route at Prince Albert pit, northwards for ½ mile to the newly opened Park Pits. This was in shallow cutting, and as we already noted, loaded coal wagons had to travel uphill from the new workings to reach the top of the main Princes Incline. The original junction here faced east but a few years later, by 1862, a sharply curved north to west link line was installed to complete a triangle of rails around the Price Albert winding engine.

Thus, from around 1860-70, this area of Prince Wood was a veritable hive of activity, with pitheads, winding engines, inclines and coke ovens all busy. It is most salutary to stand at this tranquil spot today and try to visualise the scene then.....

The 1871 plan below shows the original layout of the new Park Pit and its incline, coming in at the bottom from Prince Wood.....





A new main line railway

The above then has described all of the “generation 3” standard-gauge railway routes of the Poynton Colliery Co, as they existed up until about 1869.

In that year, the Macclesfield, Bollington & Marple Railway line was opened, running due north-south more or less parallel with the canal, with a passenger station at Higher Poynton, opposite the almost contemporary “Boars Head” pub.

Though, as we have seen, conversion of the colliery lines to make them suitable for use by steam locomotives did not take place until 1882-90, it is convenient to start a description of this era here, some 15 years earlier.

The new line was a joint venture between the Great Central Railway and the North Staffordshire, and broke the monopoly of the London & North Western Railway in the east Cheshire area.

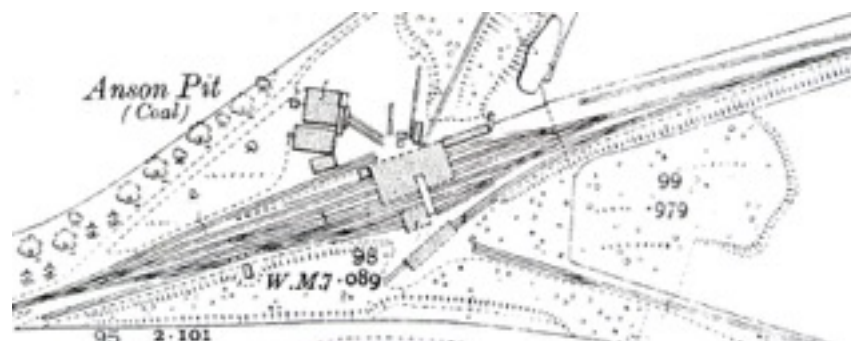
After a lot of wrangling over route, ownership and responsibilities, a short branch “Anson’s Siding” was constructed from the Macclesfield – Marple line just north of the Higher Poynton station, curving eastwards under Green Lane round to the Anson Pit, a mere ¼ mile or so.

The significance of this was that it allowed main-line locomotives to work right into a colliery yard for the first time, though a relatively small proportion of the total output at Poynton ever went out this way. The siding became operational from the end of 1869, a few months after the main passenger route opened.

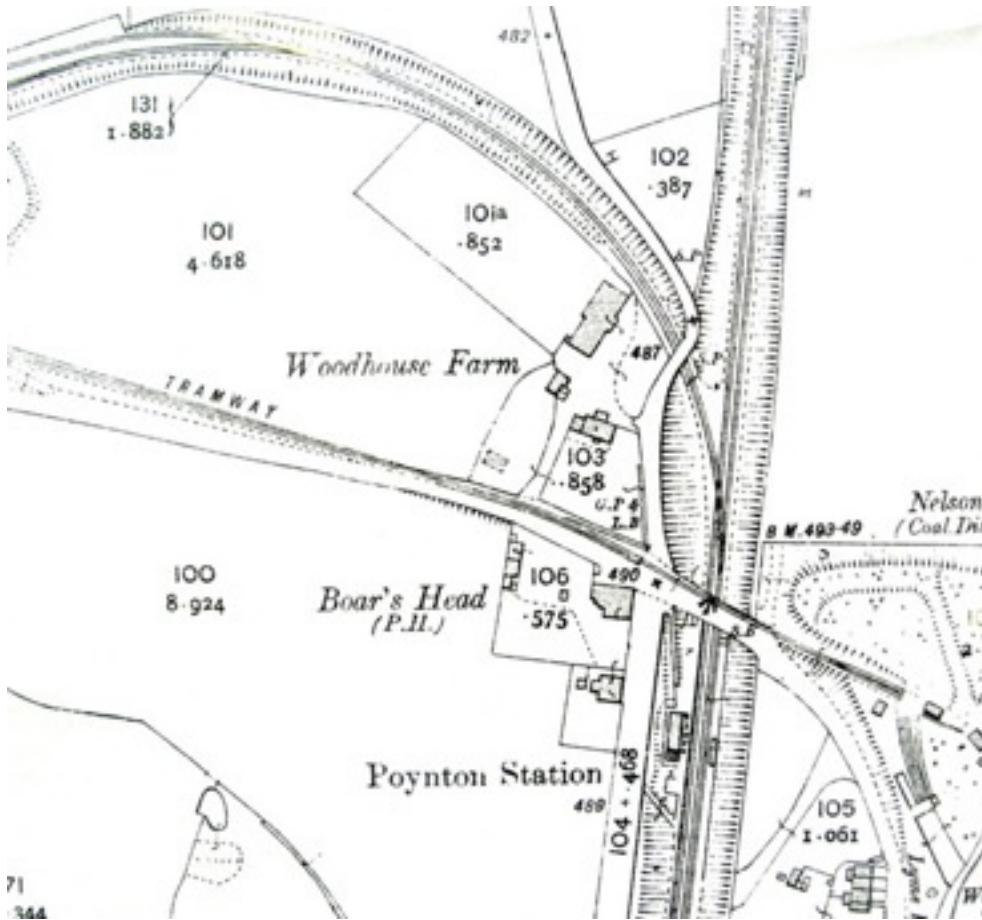
Anson Pit was indeed the best-served by modern transport at this time, as around 1857 a horse-worked (later cable-hauled) narrow-gauge tubway had already been built running directly from it down to the canal at Lord Vernon’s wharf, along the north side of Anson Road. It crossed the new main line railway by the wide new bridge at north end of the station. This 1/3 mile tramway remained in use right up until the end of colliery operations in 1935. The stone bridge parapet over the railway line was heavily scored by the moving cable over many years, but when it was rebuilt in the 1970s the stones were replaced in a random way, so losing the previously-clear pattern!



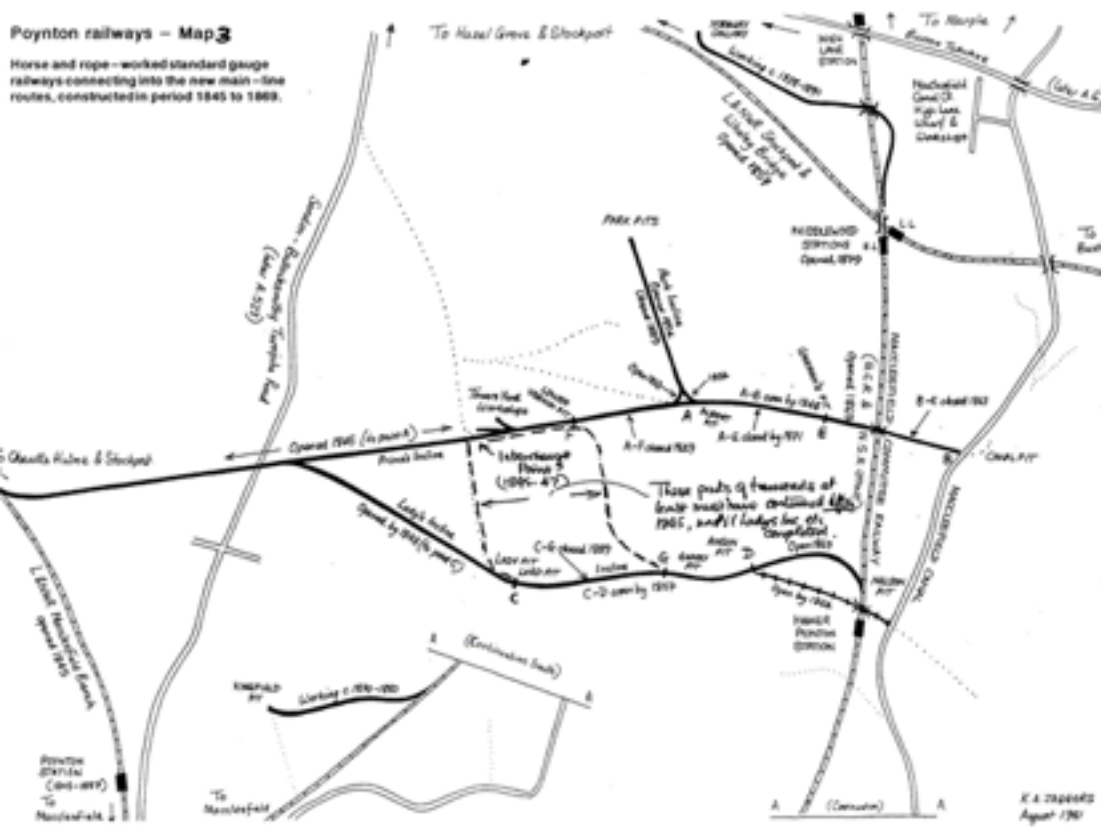
The plans show, firstly, the layout at Anson pit, with the connection to the MB&MR line running north-east, and the narrow-gauge tubway below it, to the SE.....



Next, the same two lines are shown again immediately to the east, where they meet the MB&MR line at Higher Poynton station.....



and finally in this section, our plan of all the "Generation-3" railway routes, with "Generation-2" shown dotted.....



4.4 4th generation – conversion of colliery railways for locomotive use

The Canal Pit extension railway had been abandoned beyond Garmans Pit by 1863, and the remainder from there to Prince Wood by 1871, including the original northeast spur of the triangle to the Park Pit incline.

This left the two main incline routes, Princes Incline – Prince Wood – Park Pit, and Lady's Incline – Lord/Lady Pit – Anson Pit, in use with cable- and horse-traction, from then on up to 1882.

In that year a steam locomotive was purchased by the colliery company to work up the Lady's Incline section, from the coal yard on London Road up as far as Lady Pit.

Having proven itself, others were obtained (examples shown on right), but extensive modifications to the railway system were necessary to eliminate the steeper incline sections up to Prince Wood and down again to Park, also that between Lady Pit and Anson Pit.

Two new lines were laid out. A short one of ½ mile formed the north side of a new triangle at Lower Vernon Pit and ran directly into the now rapidly expanding Park Pits. Its route lay approx 300 yards west of the old Park incline, eliminating both this and the upper end of Princes Incline.



The 1906 plan at left shows the new layout at Park Pits, for comparison with the 1871 version shown earlier. The course of the old incline is seen coming in from bottom right.

The Park line is nowadays used as an access road and is quite featureless, especially since the whole of the Park Pits site had been flattened and comprehensively landscaped in recent years, but it crosses over firstly the 1840 standard-gauge incline up from Towers Road, then the course of the original c1793 gangroad, in turn going northwards.

The picture shows a cattle culvert under the new railway route.....



The other new line formed the east side of the new triangle, then passing south and turning east more or less on the route of the 1839 narrow-gauge tramway, crossing over both Middlewood and Anson Roads at their junction by a substantial double-bridge comprising wooden trestle spans upon red-brick abutments, with the remnants of the latter still visible.

This picture shows the junction of the south and east parts of the new triangle of railway tracks, looking north towards Park Pits.....



This lovely old drawing by a local artist shows the twin bridges, with Anson Road to the right, Middlewood Road at left.....



The route then continues parallel to Anson Road (which gradually rises to the same level) on its south side, joining up with the older route across the field from Lady Pit, crossing the road on the level (pictured circa 1925) and running round in shallow cutting to the Anson Pit yard.

The first new line was opened in early 1889, and the direct Park Pit – Anson Pit connection, completed the system one year later. Here is our final plan, showing the “Generation-4” lines.....



Up to five or six steam locomotives eventually worked on this system, London Road coal yard – Princes Incline – Park Pit, Park Pit – Anson Pit, and Lady’s Incline – Lady Pit, which remained unaltered until the colliery closure in 1935.

LMS railway engines ran from Poynton station as far as the London Road west coal yard to collect trains of loaded wagons from this end, and LNER ones likewise from Higher Poynton station into the Anson Yard.

5. The End, 1935-58

After the closure, the rails were gradually removed for scrap, and the bridge over Middlewood/ Anson Road was taken out about 1938. However, the eastern coal yard at London Road was retained as a coal distribution point until around 1952, run by the Lancashire Associated Collieries Co using road transport, and passing to the National Coal Board upon nationalization in 1948.

The remaining stub siding from Poynton station to London Road was largely removed about 1950, but the actual junction connection into the main line with its associated signal box remained in occasional use as a refuge siding until as late as 1958, when all was removed in preparation for electrification of the Stockport – Macclesfield – Stoke line, and lengthening of the platforms at Poynton station.

The local **Anson Museum**, on the site of the former Anson Colliery yard has an excellent exhibition section on the former Poynton Colliery Railways, with a large-scale model showing the whole system circa 1900, various artifacts, pictures, and this re-creation of a typical mine entrance, with tub wagon.....

