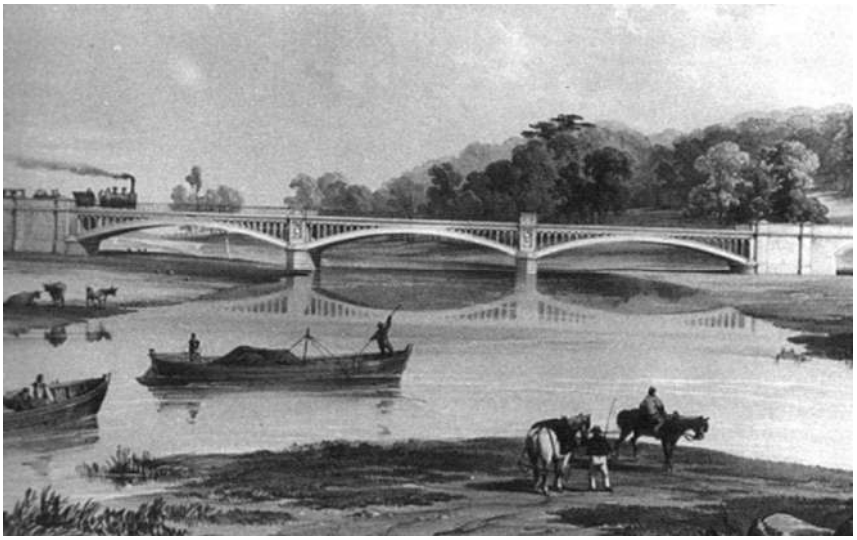
Transport in and around

Long Eaton and Sawley



The Original Bridge over the River Trent
(from a contemporary engraving)

A study of how transport developed in the area from the end of the seventeenth century to the present with particular emphasis on the railway system.

Includes Recollections of the Erewash Canal
(Derby Road Bridge, Long Eaton, to Trent Lock)

And

Some Recollections of 1947
And
German Aeroplane shot down over Long Eaton

By Thomas Godfrey

THE EARLY DAYS

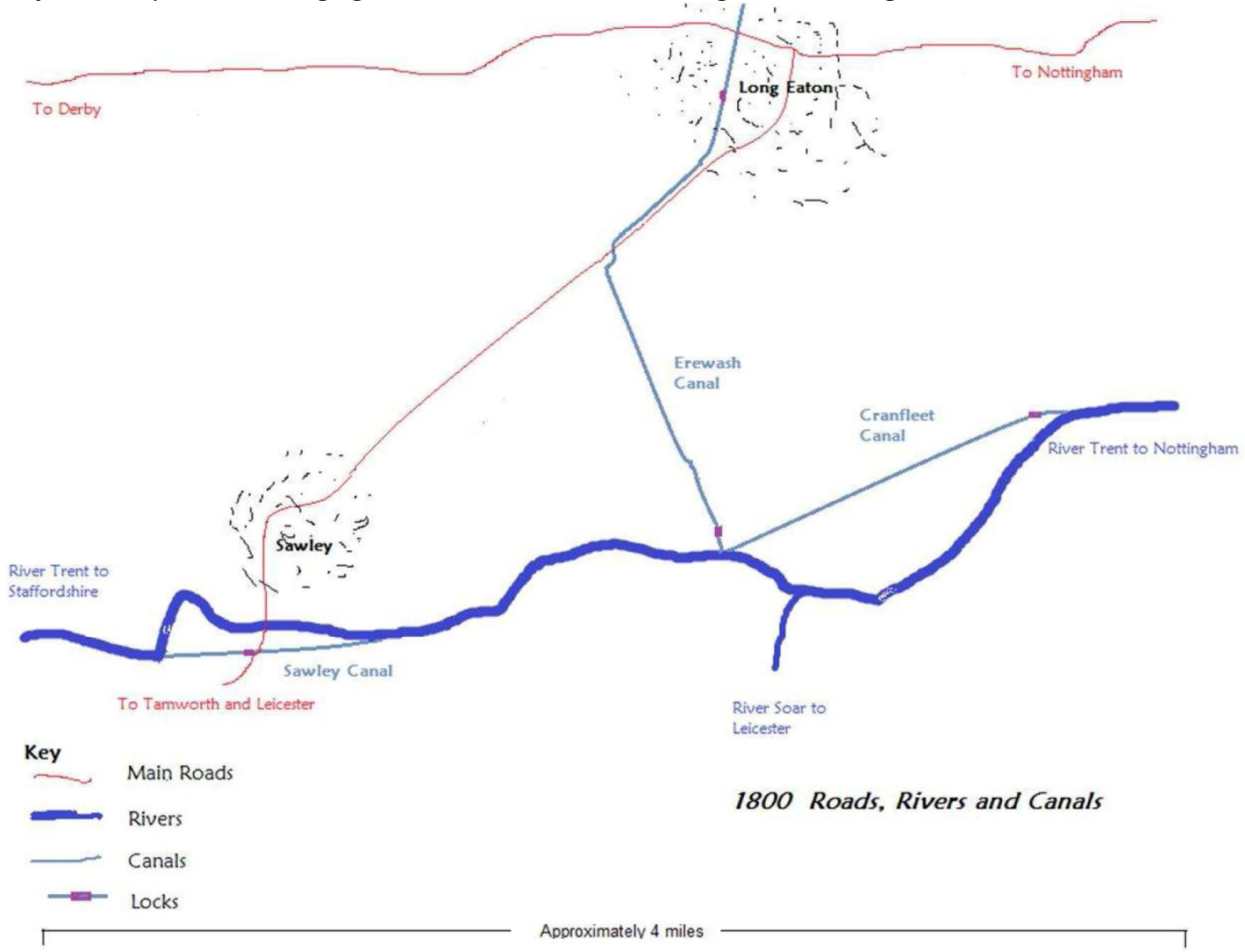
In the early part of the eighteenth century the only methods of transport inland of goods and people were either on foot, on horseback, by packhorse, by horse drawn carriage or wagon, or by boat or barge on such rivers as were navigable.

Long distance carrying of goods in bulk was becoming necessary because of the Industrial Revolution. The construction of canals provided the means of connecting places to rivers that were navigable. A horse could pull a barge load many more times heavy than a cart load and therefore provided a cheaper method of bulk transport. Canals were constructed not only where there was no available river but also to by-pass rapids and similar obstacles in otherwise navigable rivers.

In the Long Eaton area the Erewash Canal was constructed in 1777-79 to bring coal from the Erewash Valley Coalfield down to the River Trent and onwards to Leicester via the River Soar. The River Erewash was too narrow, shallow and meandering to make it worthwhile attempting to make it navigable.

The Cranfleet canal by-passed the rapids at Red Hill and opened up navigation on the River Trent eastwards to Nottingham and the Humber.

The Sawley Canal by-passed the rapids west of Sawley and enabled navigation westwards to Staffordshire both on the Trent and on James Brindley's Trent and Mersey Canal which passed through Shardlow and just over a mile further joined the Trent at the confluence with the River Derwent. Shardlow developed into a major inland port interchanging between the canal narrow barges and the larger river



The Railway Arrives

Railway construction commenced in 1837. The lines planned for the Trent floodplain were of necessity raised on embankments and numerous borrow pits, locally called ballast holes, were dug to provide the vast amount of material. The first line to be opened, connecting Derby to Nottingham, was completed in 1839. This was, at the time of opening, single track but it was not long before it was converted to dual track.

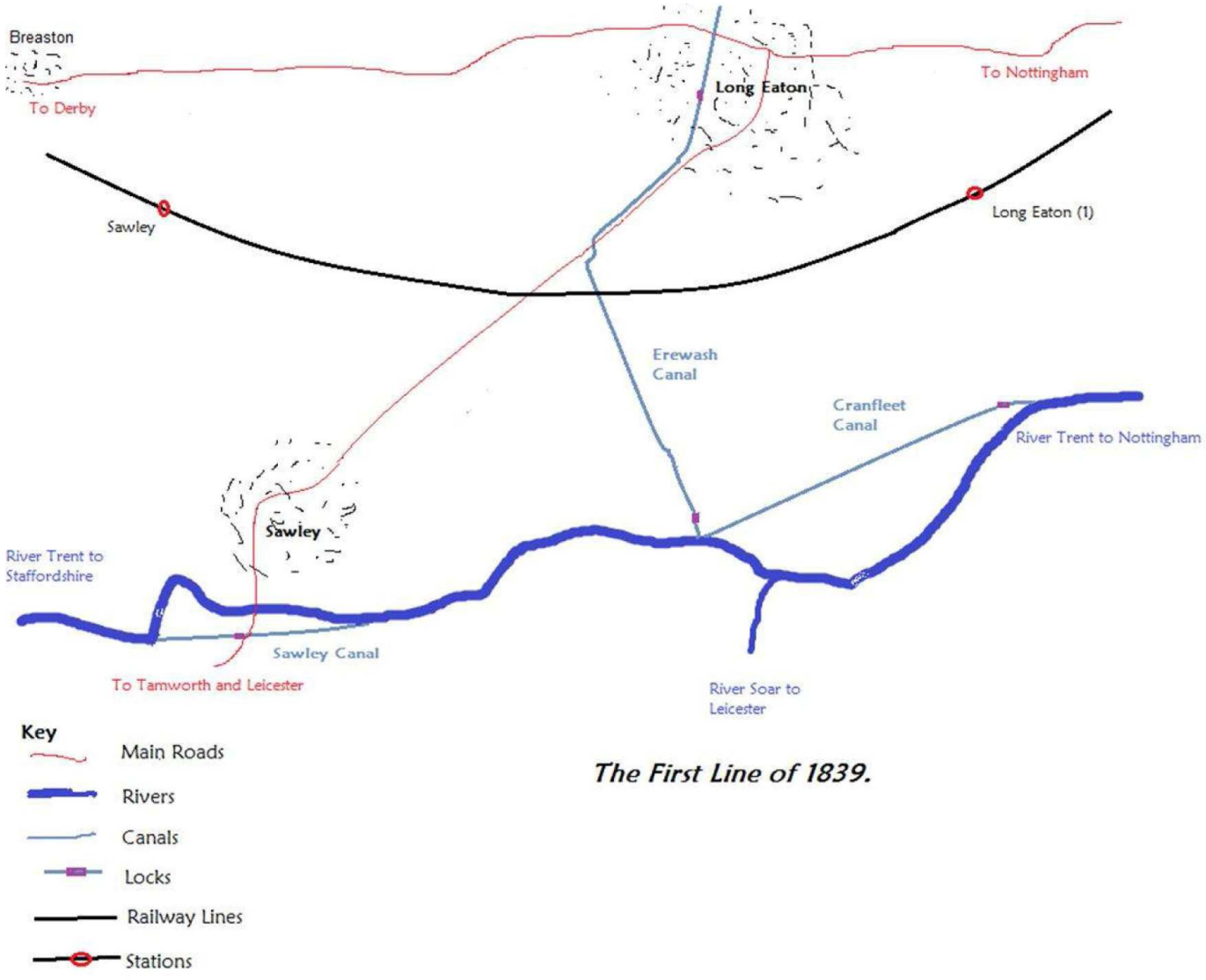
Long Eaton's first station was on Meadow lane, a long walk from the centre of what was then a village not much larger than Sawley or Breaston. A station was provided on the road between Sawley and Breaston to serve both villages but it also entailed a fairly long walk from either. It was originally called Breaston but quickly was changed to Sawley to avoid confusion with Beeston.

It must be realised that in those days people were well accustomed to walking considerable distances so this remoteness was not the hardship we would consider today.

The advent of railways provided a quicker and cheaper mode of transport and over a number of years Long Eaton became a railway town with lines coming together at Trent Station.

This complex developed into one of the most important junctions of the Midland Railway. It has been described as the `Junction for Everywhere': The following slides show how it developed during the nineteenth century and what happened to it later in the twentieth century.

Trent Station was originally intended purely as an interchange station, but was used by the population of Long Eaton to some extent. It was somewhat remote from the town, requiring a considerable walk or a carriage drive to reach it but as the town expanded towards the station the walk was shorter for those living in the new areas. It was a convenient station for those who were prepared to undertake the walk. It remained unchanged from its original design to the end even continuing with gas lighting. When it was dosed and demolished the country lost a unique example of Midland Gothic design, a loss mourned by many who worked there, used it as passengers or came as train-spotters



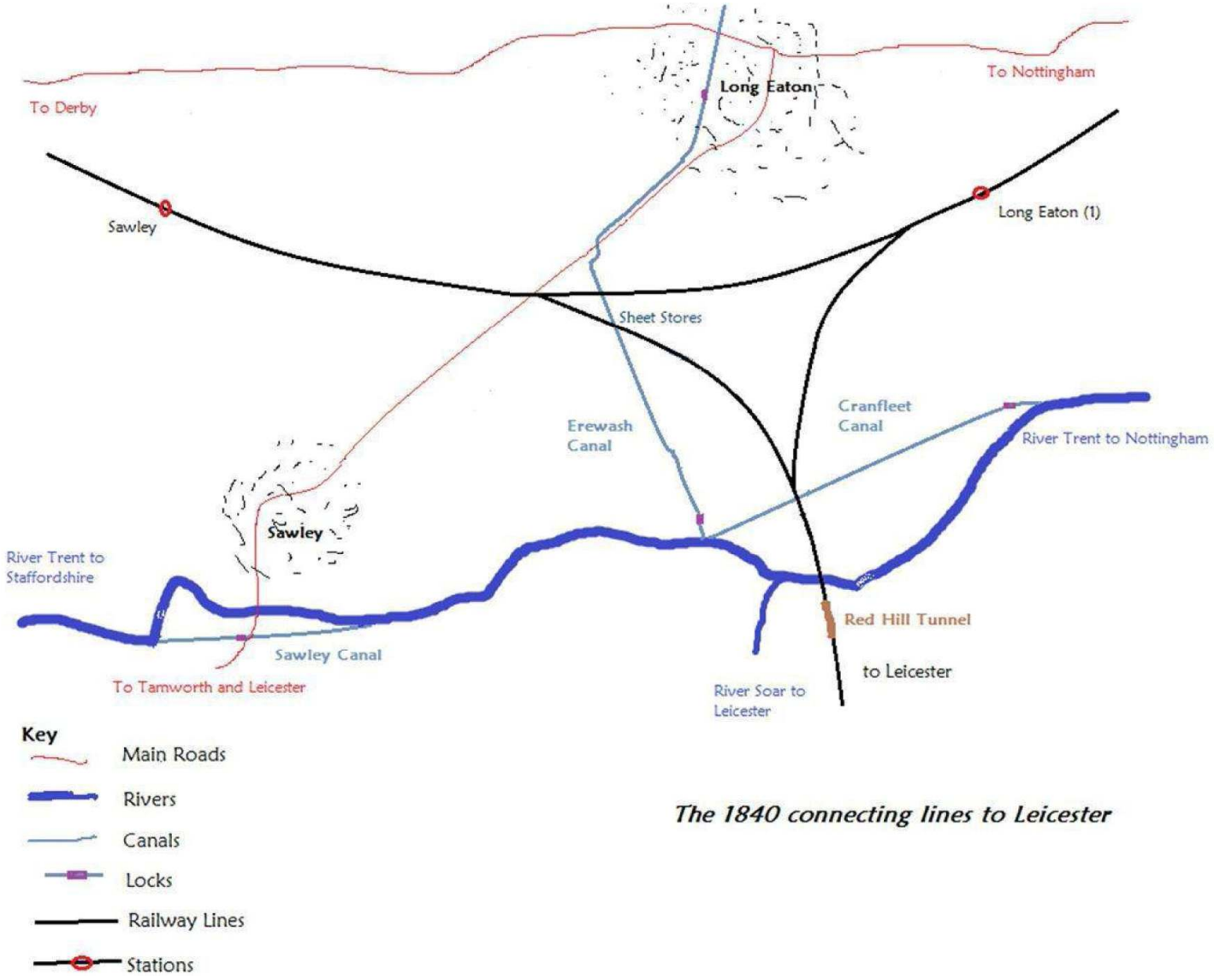
The First Line of 1839.

The Next Stage

In 1840 the line to Leicester was completed with branches to both the Derby and Nottingham lines. The River Trent and the Cranfleet Canal were bridged and a tunnel bored under Red Hill.

The bridge over the Trent was in cast iron with aesthetic proportions which were the admiration of the age. The north end of Red Hill tunnel was adorned with an elegant stone portal in a mock gothic design.

A canal/railway interchange point was created on the branch to Derby at what was to become known as Sheet Stores

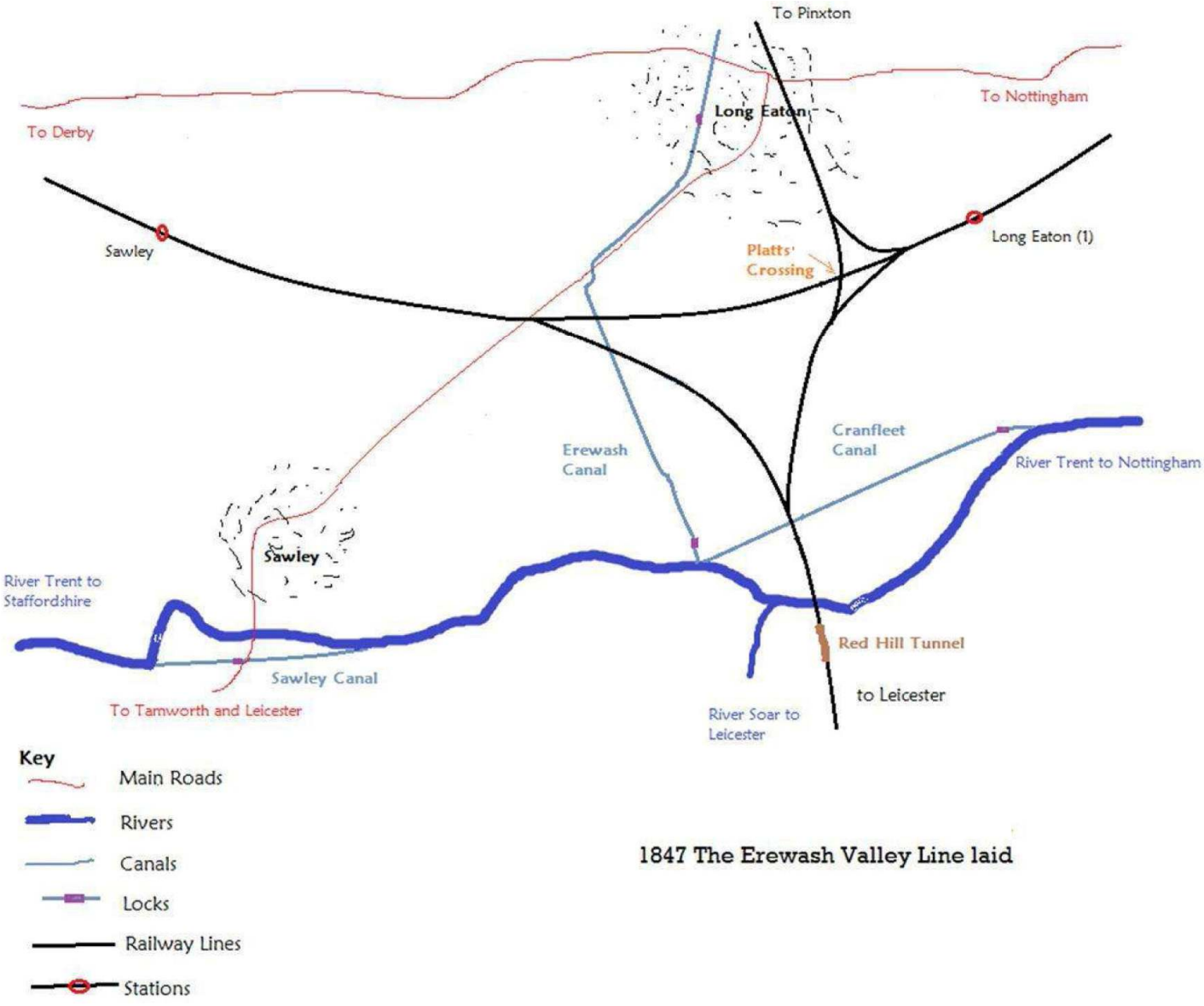


The 1840 connecting lines to Leicester

In 1847 the Erewash Valley Line was opened primarily to allow coal to be transported from the then collecting point of the Erewash Valley coalfield at Pinxton to Leicester and beyond without necessitating using the canal.

This line crossed the Derby to Nottingham line and joined the line from Nottingham to Leicester a short distance south of the crossing. There was also a branch to the east allowing access to Nottingham but there was no access to Derby.

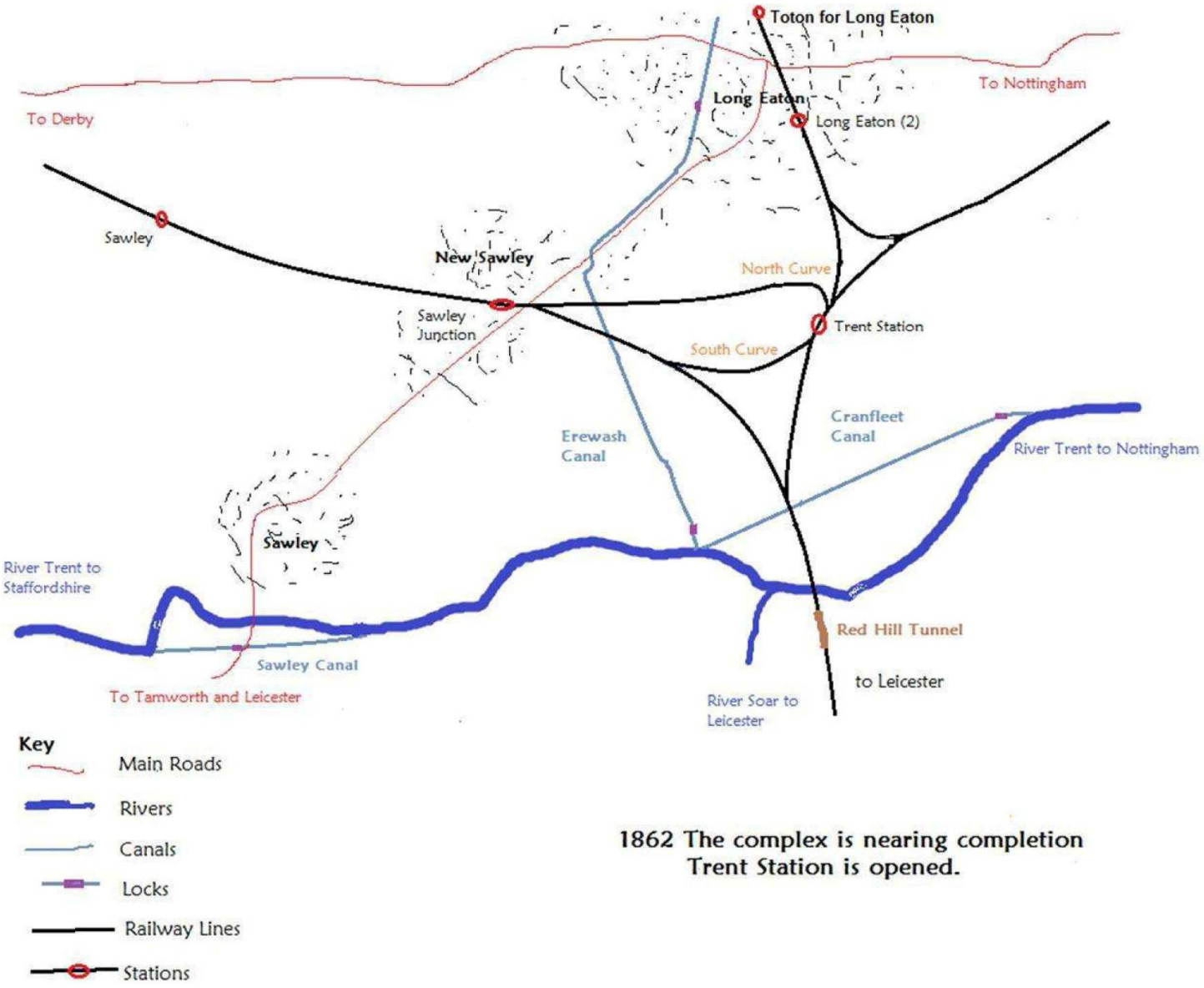
The rail/rail level crossing, known locally as Platts' Crossing, caused problems of timing and hold-ups on both lines. Obviously the layout was unsatisfactory and would have to be altered before too long.



1847 The Erewash Valley Line laid

In 1862 the problems associated with Platt's Crossing were resolved by the laying out of the North and South Curves. This provided an alternative route from Derby to Nottingham and allowed short lengths of line either side of the Erewash Valley line at the crossing to be removed. It also provided access from the Erewash Valley line to Derby.
Trent Station was constructed at the interchange point to allow passengers to change trains in comparative comfort and timetables were compiled allowing this to happen without unnecessary delay. Originally the only access from the town was by a long lane leading off Meadow Lane to an underpass below the lines with steps up to the platform. The footpath alongside the Erewash Valley Line came later.

- The old Long Eaton Station was removed and a station on the Erewash Valley line was erected north of the Nottingham Road called Toton for Long Eaton. This was very soon closed and nearer the centre of the town the new Long Eaton Station was erected.
- Sawley Junction Station was erected to serve Sawley and the New Sawley area of the expanding Long Eaton but the old Sawley Station remained in use until 1930.



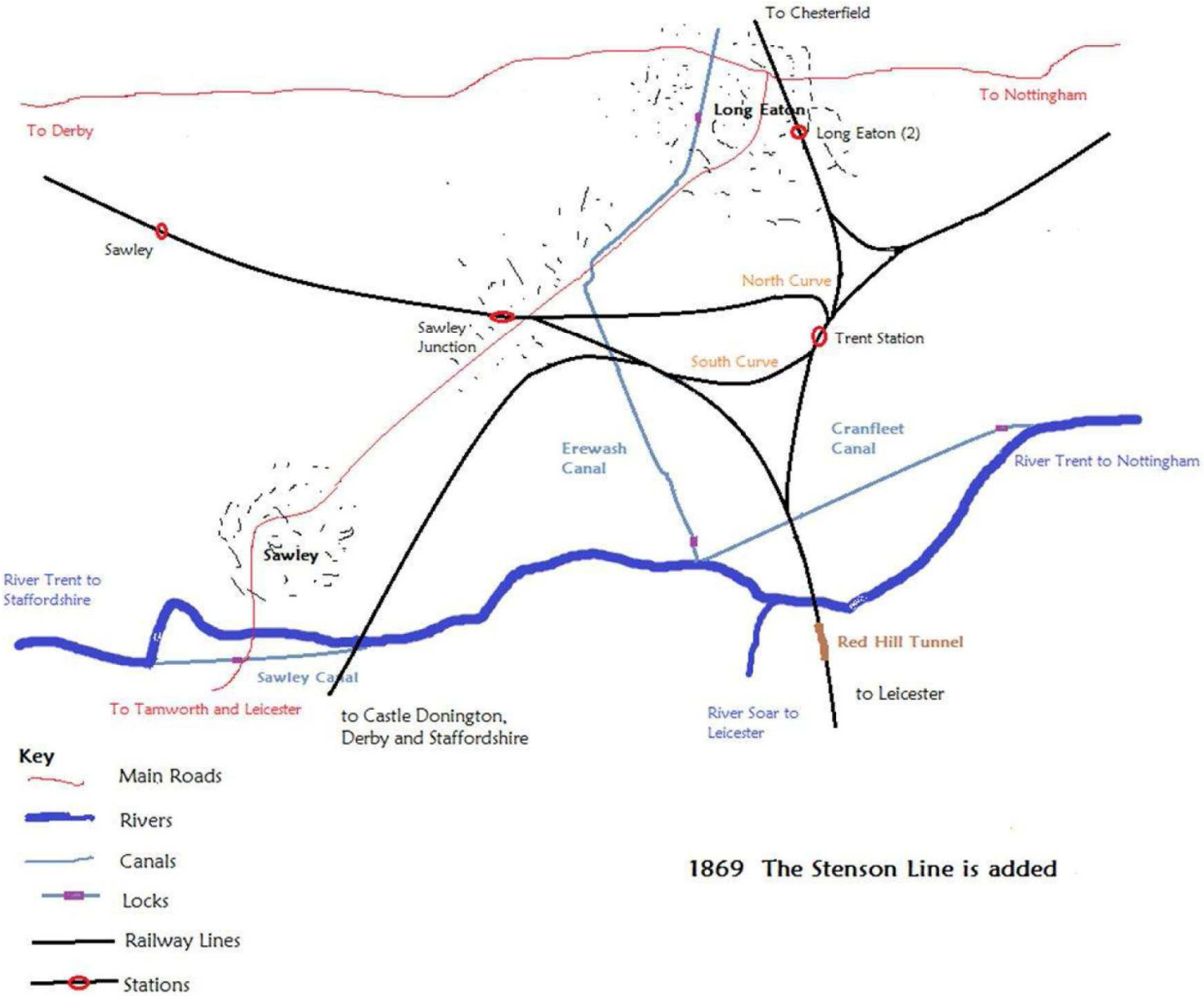
1862 The complex is nearing completion
Trent Station is opened.

The Stenson Line

In 1869 The Stenson Line was opened. This served the villages upstream south of the Trent and joined the Birmingham to Derby line at Stenson Junction. It provided an alternative route to Derby and directly to Birmingham and Staffordshire bypassing Derby.

Passenger traffic was originally fairly regular but in later years it declined and by the 1930's was only for occasional special excursion trains particularly the holiday trains from Nottingham and Chesterfield direct to Llandudno and the North Wales coastal resorts.

Freight usage remained extensive well past WW2. Coal trains from the Erewash Valley to Willington Power Station being the main users in later years.

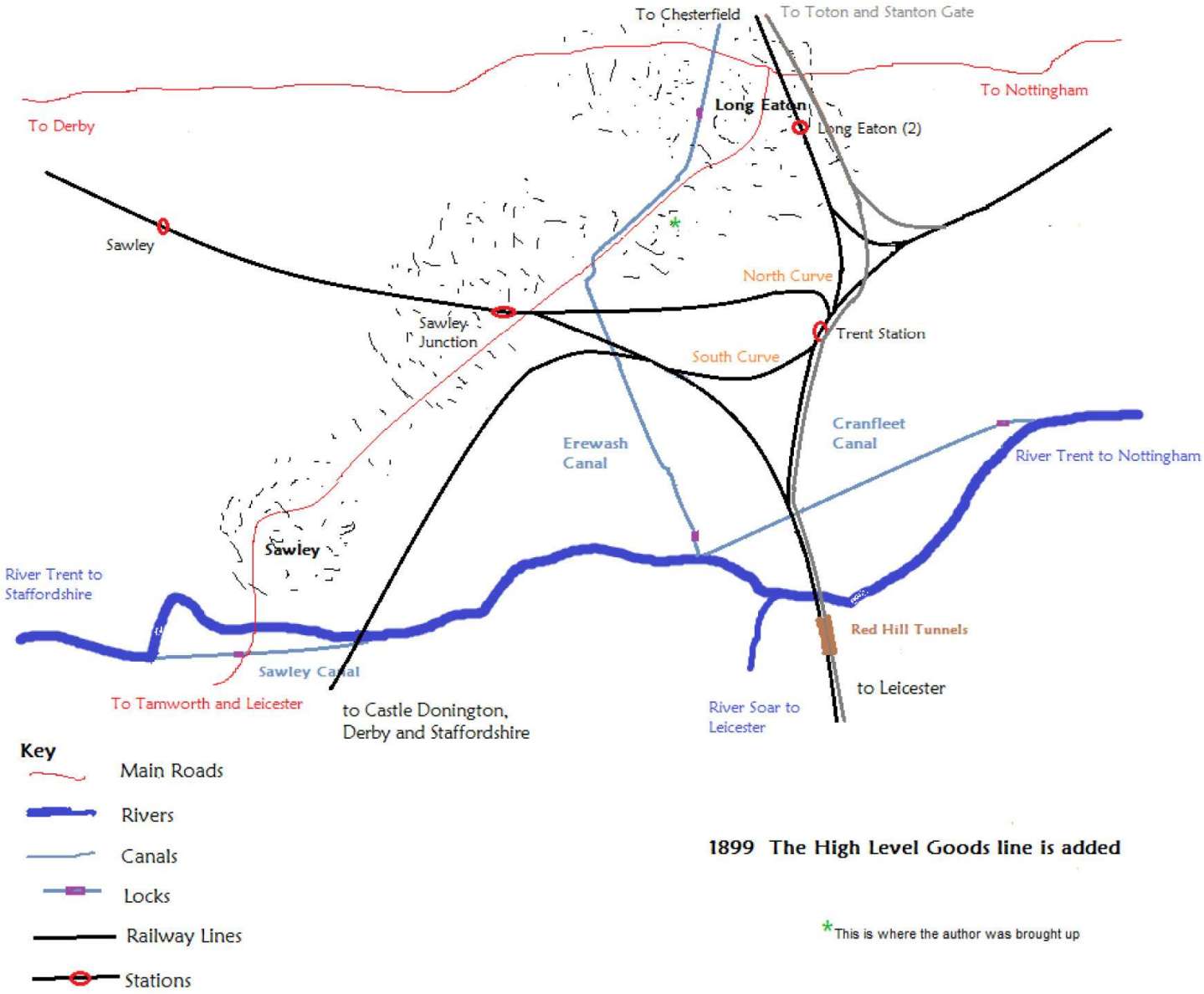


In 1899 the additional freight line direct to the marshalling yards at Toton and Stanton Gate was completed to cope with the very large volume of coal traffic up to London.

It entailed a second bridge over the Trent and a second tunnel through Red Hill. The tunnel had a portal matching the first tunnel. The bridges over the Trent were now of steel girder construction nowhere near as elegant as the original cast iron bridge.

From south of Trent Station to the north this new line was on a higher level to bridge the existing lines and the town roads.

The Trent complex is now completed.



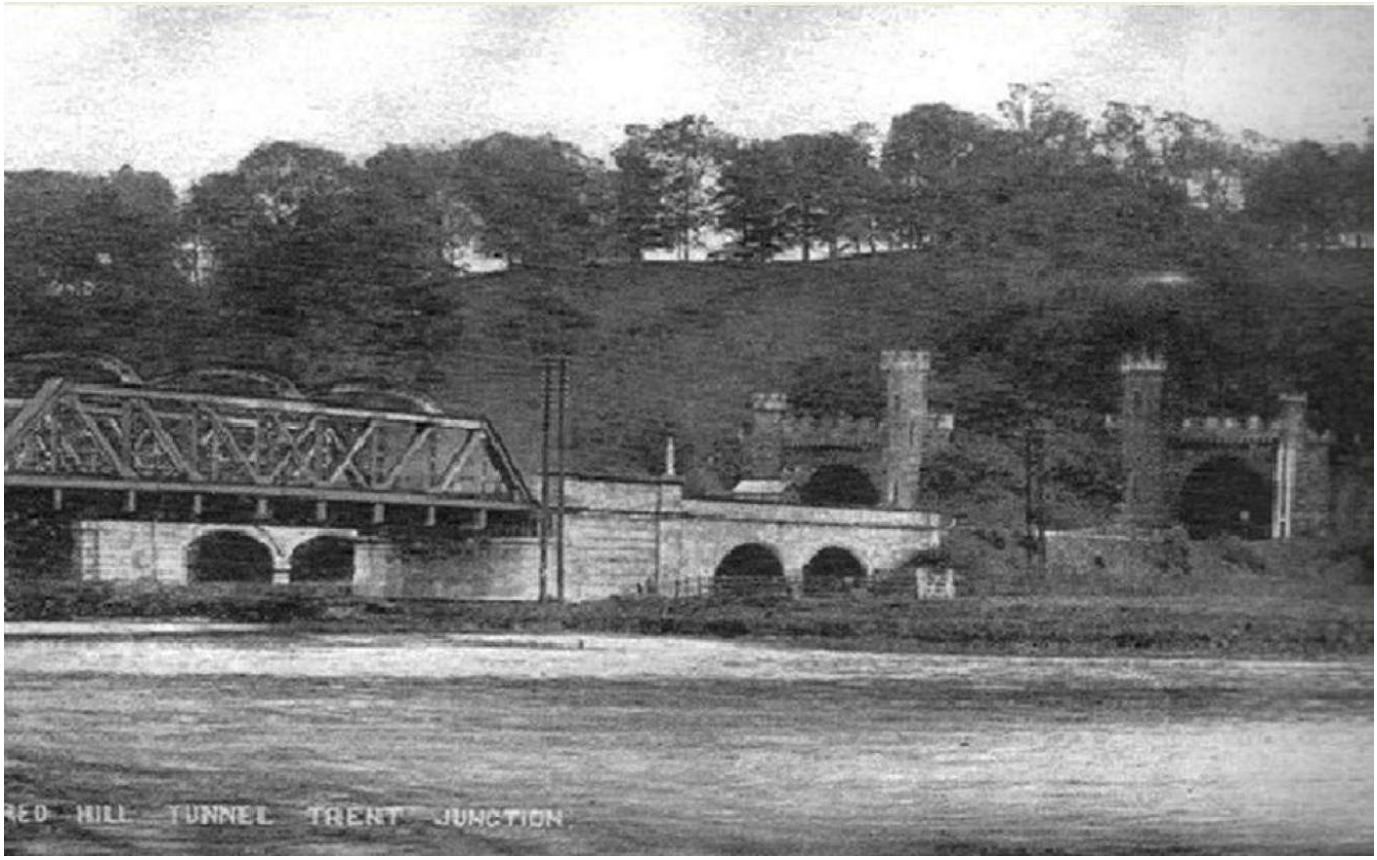
Other developments associated with the Railway

At the old canal-railway interchange point the Midland Railway built the Sheet and Sack depot to manufacture and repair the many tarpaulin sheets and heavy canvas sacks required for protection of goods in transit by rail in the open wagons. The site also contained the private gas works which supplied the Sheet Stores as it became known and also Trent Station

At the junction of the Erewash Valley line and the branch to Nottingham the Company founded by S. J. Claye developed a works for the repair of the multitude of goods wagons required by the Midland Railway and the many private companies transporting the variety of commodities along the network. Clayes Works was a major employer of carpenters and metalworkers and used specialised machinery to manufacture and repair the variety of iron and steel components. Sign-writers were employed to label the wagons with the many company names. A selected few of the Company's employees transferred to work for the Midland Railway as wagon inspectors at Toton and Stanton Gate marshalling yards for defects requiring attention. All wagons carried a card visible in it's holder showing their repair status. The cards which inspectors hated to issue showed a diagonal black cross on a red background that indicated "Empty for one journey only to Breaker's Yard".

Note: The author's grandfather was such an inspector.

The Bridge and the Red Hill Tunnels from a postcard of 1902

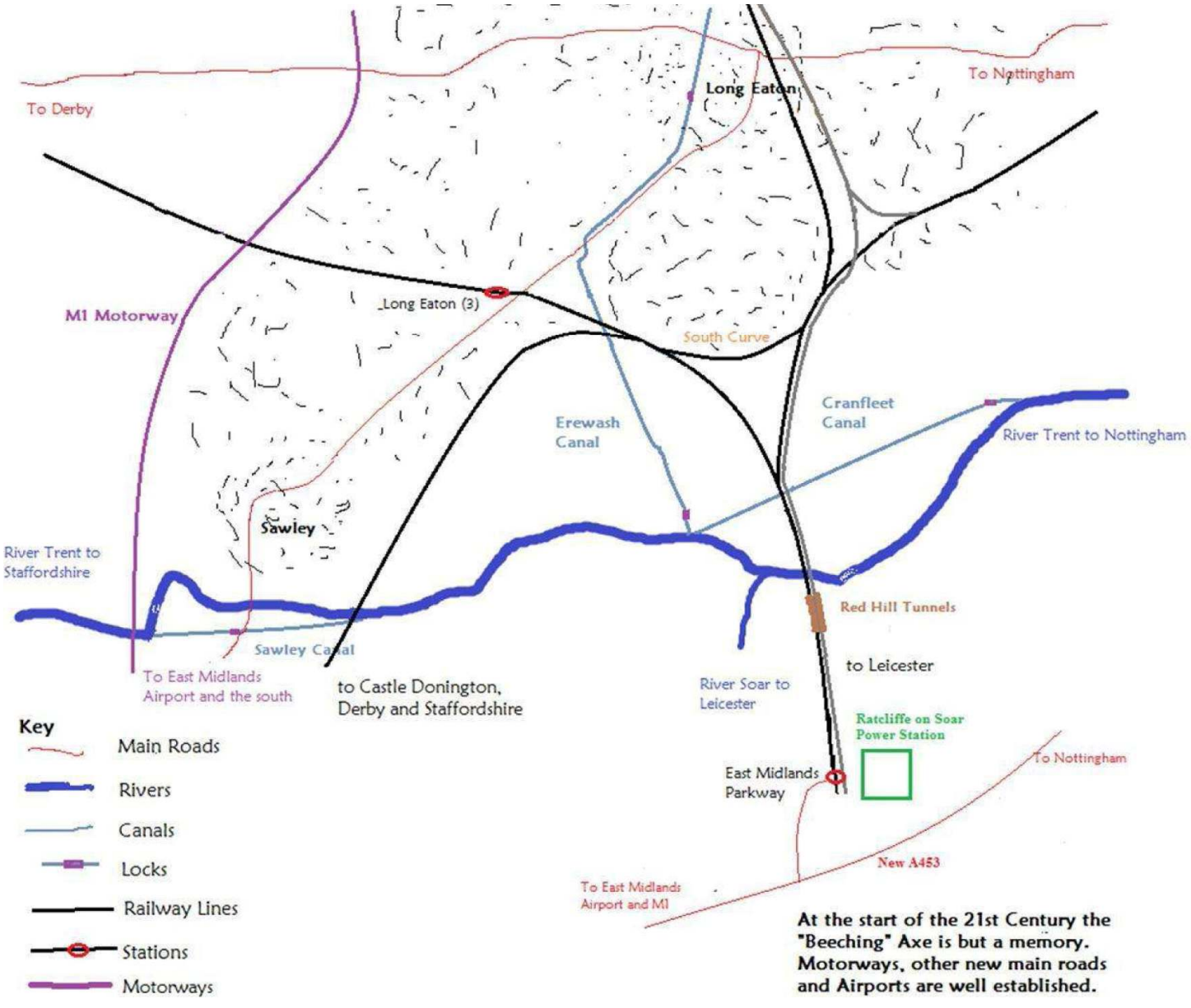


Trent Station in its Heyday from an Edwardian Postcard

THE NEW HIGH LEVEL GOODS LINE from an early 20th century postcard

The goods line starts to rise to a higher level and moves away from the other lines as it passes Trent Station on its way to Toton marshalling yard.

This layout of the railway continued in use virtually unchanged until after WWII. During the war the locomotives, rolling stock and tracks had been grossly overworked and were in need of a total overhaul. This was economically very difficult as the railways generally were making considerable losses.
The death knell of steam was made obvious when diesel powered locomotives appeared in the late 1940s but it would be some years before steam power disappeared from regular use as the major method of hauling trains. The first diesel hauled passenger express to pass through the complex came in 1948 and over the next fifteen years they became more frequent as steam was slowly phased out.
In the early 1960's Dr. Beeching produced his report on the future of the railways in Britain, doing what his political masters directed. In this area it resulted in lines being taken up, Trent Station and the Long Eaton Station in the centre of the town being closed and demolished and Sawley Junction Station being renamed Long Eaton. The underpass under the line to the site of Trent Station was closed and filled in and the footpath access alongside the Erewash Valley Line was also closed.
The introduction of the power signalling and points operating system resulted in the replacing of the old semaphore signals with colour light signals. Virtually all the manually operated level crossing gates were replaced by automatic barriers and the manual signal boxes demolished.
The Trent complex had become a less important part of the railway network.



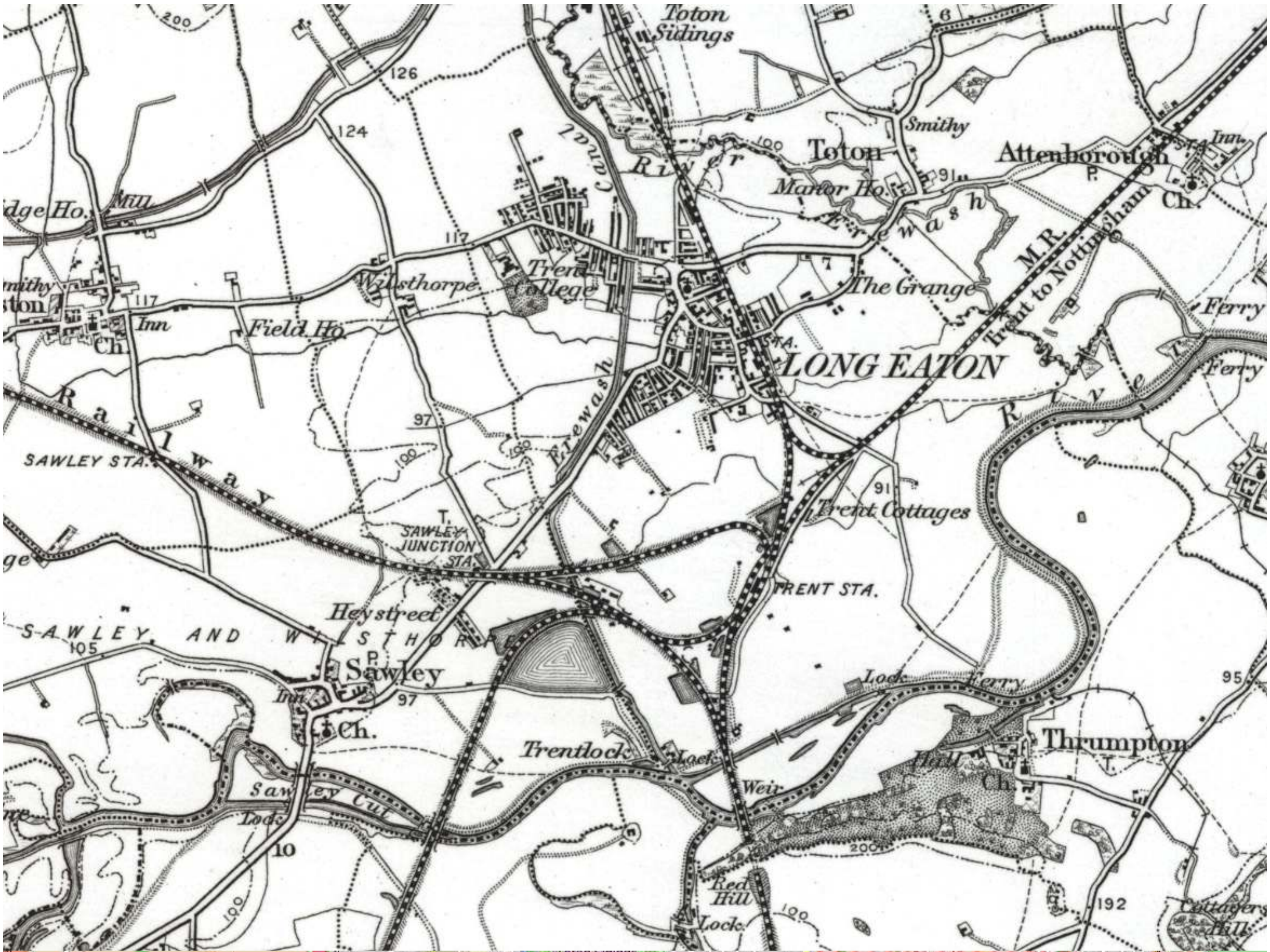
By the start of the twenty-first century the situation has changed dramatically. The built up area of the town now reaches the railway where Trent Station was and if it were still there would have served that area admirably.
The increase in road traffic is evidenced by the M1 motorway with access points to the area at Lockington to the south and to the A52 direct Derby to Nottingham road near Sandiacre to the north. Other new major roads south of the Trent have reduced the importance of the Tamworth Road through Long Eaton and Sawley which was for many years the A453 main road from Nottingham to Birmingham. It is now classified as a B road.
The advent of air transport is demonstrated by the development of East Midlands International Airport. During WWII this airfield was constructed south of Castle Donington to serve as an operational training base and some years after the war the runway was lengthened and widened to become the Airport runway, taxiways and standing areas were provided and new buildings were erected to form a modern passenger and freight terminal. A new railway station, East Midlands Parkway, was constructed on the main line near the Ratcliffe-on-Soar Electricity Generating Station which had been built in the 1950s. New major road systems connected the Airport to the M1 and to this new station.

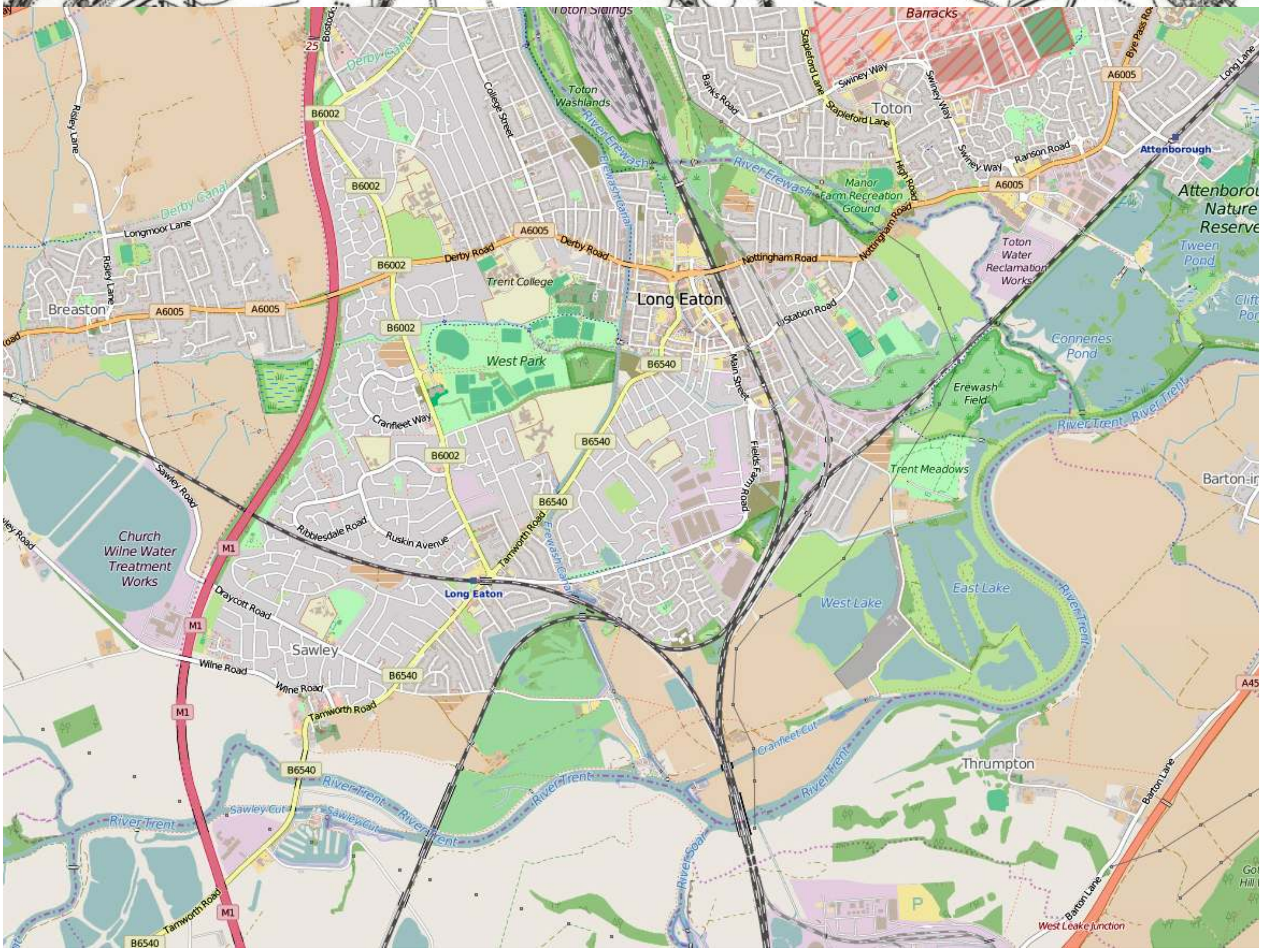
The associated Clayes works which had been taken over by Wagon Repairs Ltd has become redundant. The traditional wood and steel wagons which were the mainstay of their business had been phased out. The site had therefore been ripe for redevelopment which has now taken place.
The Sheet Stores was closed down because tarpaulins and sacks were no longer needed. The Railways generally had ceased to be general carriers and the open wagons had virtually disappeared. The site has become a general industrial site and redeveloped to a large extent.
The railways have changed their emphasis and are no longer a major employer in the area. There are now fewer people who can remember the railway as it was in its heyday. As with many of the traditional industries there are those who regret the passing of the old ways and are doing their best to encourage the keeping alive the memory of a bygone age.

Compiled partly from memory and with grateful acknowledgement to various sources, but particularly to the book: "**Last Train from Trent Station**" by the late **Geoffrey Kingscott**.

Details of how to buy this book are on the Trent Station Website: http://www.trentstation.co.uk/index.html

The maps on the following page are dated c.1885 -1900 and 2015.
Downloaded from The National Library of Scotland website. Based upon Ordnance Survey 1" historical map data and 2015 Open Street Map.


Toton Sidings
Toton
Smithy
Attenborough
Manor Ho.
Erewash
River
Canal
Trent College
Wilsthorpe
Field Ho.
The Grange
LONG EATON
M.R. Trent to Nottingham
Ferry
Railway
SAWLEY STA.
SAWLEY JUNCTION STA.
Trent Cottages
TRENT STA.
Heystreet
SAWLEY AND WILSTHORPE
Sawley
Ch.
Inn
Trentlock
Lock
Weir
Thrumpton
Hall
Sawley Cut
Red Hill


Toton Sidings
Barracks
Derby Canal
Toton Washlands
River Erewash
Toton
Stapleford Lane
Swiney Way
Attenborough
Attenborough Nature Reserve
Manor Farm Recreation Ground
Toton Water Reclamation Works
Risley Lane
Longmoor Lane
Breaston
Derby Road
Nottingham Road
Trent College
Long Eaton
Station Road
West Park
Erewash Field
Connenes Pond
Main Street
Fields Farm Road
Cranfleet Way
Trent Meadows
River Trent
Sawley Road
Church Wilne Water Treatment Works
Ribblesdale Road
Ruskin Avenue
Tamworth Road
West Lake
East Lake
Draycott Road
Sawley
Wilne Road
Cranfleet Cut
Thrumpton
Sawley Cut
River Soar
Barton Lane
West Leake Junction
M1
A6005
B6002
B6540

Recollections of the Erewash Canal

Derby Road Bridge, Long Eaton, to Trent Lock

My earliest memory of the canal must be in about 1931 when as a very small boy I was taken out by my mother and saw the canal from Tamworth Road through the iron railings which prevented access to the towpath from the pavement on the canal side of the road. That view became commonplace as I grew older and attended the Tamworth Road Elementary School. At the town end of the railings there was a brick wall but with a slight gap through which we schoolchildren could squeeze. There were large wooden gates in the wall further towards the fire station giving access for vehicles to the canal and these were open on occasions when one could get on to the towpath more easily. Fishing for minnows with the net and jam jar in the canal was a frequent pastime as was watching the barges pass by. In the early 1930s horse drawn barges were almost as common as the powered ones but by the time war was declared they were only seen on rare occasions. Pleasure boating did not exist.

I was frequently taken by my mother to visit my grandmother who lived off Derby Road. We nearly always walked and if the gates were open we would use the towpath and walk along it past Long Eaton Lock to Derby Road where we would use the steps next to the road bridge to get on to the road. It was on one of these occasions that I first saw flour being hoisted from a moored barge up to the top floor of the Co-op bakery which then backed on to the towpath. The flour was delivered in large sacks from a mill somewhere upstream in a full barge-load usually in an engineless barge and the towing barge would cast off and continue down to Trent Lock with its load for somewhere else and pick up the empty flour barge on the return journey. This method of delivery stopped a year or two before the war and road transport took over.

I very seldom went downstream from the Tamworth Road Bridge unless with my parents. However when I was old enough to be allowed out with my school friends a fair proportion of my time during school holidays was spent on the towpath down to Narrow Bridge, Trent Lock and the river Trent. Occasionally I tried my luck at coarse fishing with only moderate success. Mostly we just wandered up and down the canal watching the world go by. On a clear day we could stop on the footbridge over the cut to the Sheet Stores basin and count the lace factory chimneys we could see. If my memory is right something like 25 to 30 could be seen then. I doubt not that most if not all have been demolished by now. At Trent Lock we would watch the barges moored ready to enter the lock. What we could see of the living accommodation on board was very colourful and immaculately maintained. We were never invited to see it at really close quarters. The old stone house – now a store I believe - set back from the canal just upstream from the lock was then occupied by the lock keeper and his family; one of the sons joined the Navy and lost his life when the Royal Oak was torpedoed and sunk in Scapa Flow early in the war. A younger son was an occasional companion on our jaunts.

I remember during one or two winters the canal froze over and I was forbidden to try and walk on to the ice. Once I saw a skater on the ice but none of us tried to test its safety. Generally we kept away from the canal in wintertime. In 1938 I gained a scholarship to the County Secondary School, as it was then called, and so still had the view of the canal as I walked to school. My out of school activities were now with different companions.
When war was declared there seemed to us to be no immediate change along the canal. However it was not long before the iron railings along Tamworth Road were removed to provide raw material for munitions making as were railings in front of houses. The Fire Service put a pump on a boat but it never had to be used for fire-fighting. The pump was also used to propel and steer the boat by a nozzle fixed under water at the stern. We gained great amusement one day when the connection to this nozzle came adrift and soaked the firemen on board.

My time gaining pleasure from the canal came to an end in 1946 when, as an undergraduate, I came to Cambridge where I now live in retirement. My long vacation time was spent working to earn money to subsidise my student grant which was enough to exist on but not sufficient to provide the extras which the

present day students expect as their right. In 1947 I went home for the Easter Vacation and arrived in the evening at Trent Station to find my way home barred by the flood waters. After getting into town along the high level goods line I spent the night in the Town Hall and next day got home by boat to find our house was on an island in the middle of the flood waters. On graduating in 1949 I was called up for National Service and after those two years my visits home were somewhat infrequent and short lived because I had married and was working away from Long Eaton. The towpath on the way up to Long Eaton Lock was then in places washed away and was quite impassable.

My father died in 1965 and by 1971 my mother had moved to live with my sister Joan in Nottingham so my connection with Long Eaton ceased and I was only able to pay two fleeting visits once in the 1980s and once in the 1990s. Both times I drove down Lock Lane to Trent Lock where I could see some, to me unwelcome, changes. The Ratcliffe power station certainly did not improve the view. The rowing boat ferries over the Trent at Trent Lock and further downstream opposite Thrumpton and Barton-in-Fabis were no longer in use, killed off by the crippling insurance charges insisted upon by the river authority on health and safety grounds. The spit and sawdust pub which I had visited a few times in the late 1940s had become The Steamboat, a more up-market licenced restaurant. The stables were still underneath but of course there were no horses there. The level crossing on Lock Lane was controlled by automatic barriers rather than manually operated gates and was no longer worked by a crossing keeper living in the house by the crossing. Furthermore the crossing-keeper's house where a relative, Miss Ginny Bartram, once lived had been demolished. I referred to her as Aunt Ginny. An old regular patron at the bar of the Steamboat said quite rightly that she has only one nephew, young Harold. I said that her brother married my father's sister and he put two and two together and told me I must be Jack Godfrey's son.

I fear I am now too advanced in years to expect to be able visit my old haunts again but I still have fond memories of the canal which I cherish.

Tom Godfrey
Cambridge 2012

Some recollections of 1947

Much has been written and said recently about the cold weather of the winter of 2010-2011, but the winter of 1946-1947 was much worse. Food was rationed down almost to subsistence level, there was virtually no home central heating and fuel was in very short supply. Creature comfort was a matter of how much clothing we wore. Outside workers called it two overcoat weather. We all had to accept it as a way of life. Now that I am well past eighty years old I felt I should write down the memories of my personal experiences of that time before I become unable to pass them on.

In the early part of 1947 I was an undergraduate at Cambridge University, living in a room in College. The cold weather proved very unpleasant. Though the cold was a real problem to many we were to a large extent indifferent. Our life carried on as usual as far as teaching and study were concerned. The College kitchens managed to feed us adequately but sometimes the menu was very strange. Once we were presented with seal meat stew which was rather unpleasant and was not repeated. The daily electric power reductions meant that electric clocks which then only ran from the mains were constantly slow by as much as twenty minutes during the day but they were always right at four o'clock in the morning. The only way of heating my room was a gas fire which was totally inadequate since the gas pressure was very low. However it was not too much of a trial since I was young and fit. The river Cam became largely frozen over and rowing was temporarily suspended. When one could get out on the river the splashes from the oar blades would freeze on the upper part of the oars. However, we had some fun and made light of the difficulties.

At the end of term the thaw had started and the BBC radio was predicting widespread flooding. I was very apprehensive of what would happen to my home town of Long Eaton and further downstream in Beeston and

Nottingham. These were all in the flood plain of the river Trent. Serious flooding had occurred there on several occasions in recent memory. We were then not on the phone at home so before I set out I telephoned a school friend whose father said the river was rising but there were no serious problems. This was at mid-day. It later transpired that the new Ladybower reservoir up in the Derbyshire hills which was only partly full at the end of the freeze was rapidly filling and this had merely delayed the rising of the waters giving false hopes.

I caught the afternoon train at Cambridge to Kettering along the line now closed and changed for the train to Trent Station which was due in about 8.20 p.m. if my memory is correct. The train passed through Red Hill tunnel and then over the bridge which spanned the river Trent. It was still light enough to see that the water level was almost up to the bridge girders instead of the normal fifteen feet or more below. The railway was on a downward gradient from the bridge so there would certainly already be flooding in parts of the town. The train stopped at Trent Station, now sadly non-existent. It was normally a twenty-five minute walk home. I alighted to find that the platform was dry but the water was beginning to reach the ballast under the track and the station was an island in the midst of the flood. The access from the station to the road went under the railway; the underpass was completely flooded and the road itself was therefore under water. The main line passing through the town was still on a slight downward gradient from the station. It was obvious that Black Pad, the footpath alongside but below the railway together with the part of the town at the end of the footpath would also be flooded and impassable.

There appeared to be no way of leaving the station so I asked the ticket collector for his advice and he told me that the only way into the town was along the high level goods line but I would have to wait until a railwayman with a lamp was ready to leave and that he would escort me. I did not have to wait long. I reached town that way but knew I would not be able to get home. After pondering the situation I called at the Police Station and was told that stranded people could sleep in the Town Hall. By the time I reached there it was well past ten o'clock. I was given a welcome cup of tea and conducted to the Council Chamber where there were already several others preparing for the night. We were provided with blankets to keep us warm. It didn't take long to get to sleep.

In the morning I went in search of something to eat and then made my way towards home. As expected the way was completely blocked but a boat had been requested and it would take five or six at a time past the flood waters. The boat eventually arrived in mid-afternoon and I was told I would be able to reach dry land near my home. Two men wearing thigh waders walked behind the boat pushing and steering it. Thankfully where I lived, Manchester Street, was in a slightly higher area forming an island surrounded by the flood waters. Once home I was able to get food and warmth and join with family and neighbours in bemoaning the situation. We had a vegetable garden and kept chickens on a plot in a lane only two or three hundred yards from the house but a few feet below it. The chickens and their feedstuff had been brought home and the coal shed served as a temporary chicken house. Most plots in the lane were similarly under water and their owners were forced to make temporary arrangements for their chickens and pigs.

We were lucky; the peak water level reached to an inch or two below the ground floor joists of our house before draining away. Much of the lower part of the town was under water and some houses had water above the first floor level. Our town together with Beeston and Nottingham was the area probably the worst hit of all in the country when reckoned on the number of houses and other buildings flooded. Well over thirteen thousand homes were inundated as well as many factories and shops.

When the floods receded and it was possible to get out I cycled to see where the flood waters had washed away the Cavendish Bridge carrying the A6 (now renumbered A50) trunk road over the river Trent near Shardlow. The army had been called in and the soldiers of the Pioneer Corps were preparing the bridge abutments for the Royal Engineers to erect a Bailey bridge. I had my father's old plate camera with me and took a splendid picture of the scene. I have often wondered what happened to that plate or whether any prints were taken from it; I would love to see that view again. It did not take long to get this bridge open but I was unable to see its erection as I had to return to Cambridge. It remained in use as the main road crossing

until a new permanent bridge together with the necessary road diversion was constructed about a kilometre upstream but it was several years before that was open for use. There is now a new bridge in use for local traffic on the site of the old Cavendish Bridge.

Tom Godfrey, Cambridge: December 2011.

German Aeroplane shot down over Long Eaton

At lunchtime at school one day when virtually the whole school was out in the grounds an aeroplane came into view from out of the high overcast almost overhead. It was flying in a northerly direction. I was keen on aircraft recognition and said it looked like a Heinkel 111. A little black cloud appeared near it, then some more in quick succession. The sound of anti-aircraft fire then reached us and a school teacher shouted at us to come inside the school. Very few obeyed and then a piece of shrapnel landed on the school roof and it seemed that within seconds we were all inside. We learned later that a fighter had brought the plane down about 20 miles away and it was deduced from the wreckage it had been attempting to carry out photographic reconnaissance.