OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST

London and North Western Railway

OXFORD REWLEY ROAD SWING BRIDGE

(including the arrival and future development of the railway industry in Oxford)

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Background to Rewley Road Swing Bridge

Why did the London and North Western Railway (Buckinghamshire Railway) serve Oxford?

- An attempt by the Grand Junction Railway and others to put an end to Brunel's Broad Gauge and also stop the Great Western Railway expanding their network in order to gain access to the West Midlands.
- To reduce cost and increase speed of delivery of coal and other merchandise from coal fields and industrial centres served by the LNWR to an expanding Oxford City, The canal company charged £1.47 per ton and the railway rate was £0.80 per ton.

Why Rewley Road?

- Ideal site to give good access to the City.
- Christ Church wished to dispose of the former site of Rewley Abbey, a Cistercian Monastery, having recently sold the last stones to raise funds for the Lady Chapel in St Mary Magdalen Church.
- Access into Oxford City via Wolvercote from the main line at Bletchley was an easy and cheap route to construct using rural land. Crossing Port Meadow was opposed by the Freemen of the City. However, this was a problem easily resolved by offering to finance a new school for the children of the Freemen. (The school was never built but instead the funds were used for pensions)

Why build a Swing bridge?

- Reduced cost by constructing the railway on land at existing levels.
- The option of a swing bridge over came the need for a fixed bridge and extensive earthworks in order to satisfy the Act of Parliament for construction of the railway requiring a minimum clearance above water level of ten feet at any crossing point of the waterways used by the Oxford Canal Company.

The swing bridge was in use for railway operations from 1851 until 1984

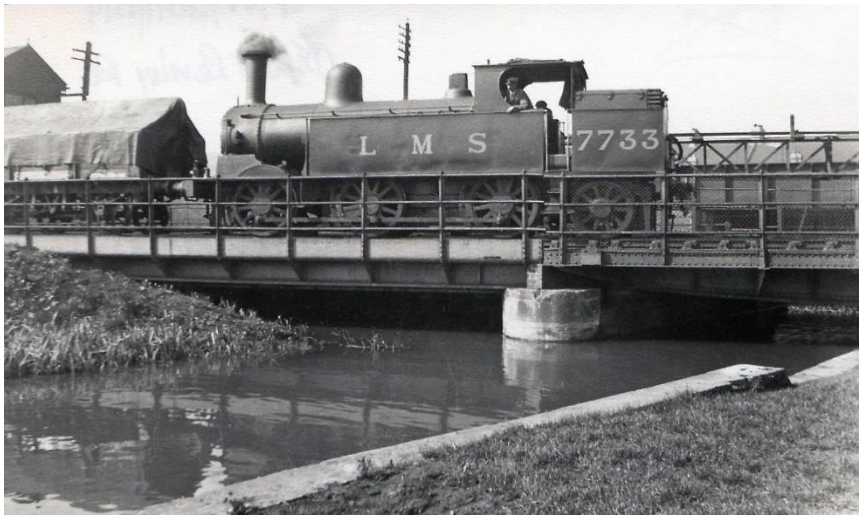
- The first passenger train crossed the bridge from Rewley Road Station at 7.30am on the 21st May 1851
- The last time tabled passenger train crossed the bridge at 4.45pm on 4th October 1951
- The last coal train crossed the swing bridge on the 11th May 1984. The track was removed and the bridge locked in the open position in the Summer of 1985

Swing Bridge Restoration Project

- The swing bridge was lifted early in 2019 to ensure the cast iron turntable was still capable of being turned back into position after standing thirty five years without being moved. The whole of the bridge deck was lifted in November 2020 and placed on temporary supports to enable work to be undertaken on the underside of the structure and gain access to the original (1850) turning mechanism. All the original gears and the sixteen roller bearings apart from one cog wheel with broken teeth were in excellent condition and have been cleaned and reassembled. The cog wheel which was damaged in 1986 when an unauthorised person attempted to turn the bridge has been replaced with a new casting identical to the original wheel. The main bridge beams have been restored and repainted. (Analysis of the existing paint samples has ensured the correct paint colours have been restored as they would have been when the bridge was first constructed). New deck plates and wooden track support beams have been fitted. Original London North Western Railway rail chairs along with other examples along with the 95lb rails that would been have been fitted on the bridge deck in the period between 1900 and 1950 have now been fixed in place.
- The main swing bridge section along with the main gears and winding gears have now been fully restored to working order. This work was completed in October 2021. Two short sections of the Up and Down Main Line leading to the former station have been replaced on the fixed span and a steel fence constructed around the whole site in July 2023.The next stage will now be ongoing with the general improvement of the environmental appearance of the whole site including enhancements and gradual replanting of the Sheepwash corridor setting including the creation of patches of wildflower meadow.
- OPT have raised the majority of the funds required for the first stages of the restoration of the actual bridge structure and the north landing and are now looking towards securing funding to restore other aspects.
- In 2024, OPT started up a monthly volunteer group to assist with the maintenance of the site.
- The project would not have been possible without the support of our partners Historic England, Network Rail, Chiltern Railways, The Railway Heritage Trust, Oxfordshire CPRE BPT, Oxford City Council and many other interested parties.

If you can help support the next stage of this project please get in touch with us at info@oxfordpreservation.org.uk.

Looking over the Swing Bridge towards Rewley Road Station and Goods Yard, behind the locomotive, with fixed gantry leading to the signal box. The Shipley Coal Sidings, oil depot & Axtell & Perry stone yard are on the left of locomotive. c 1930



Former LNWR 'Coal Tank' on the southern approach fixed span prior to the 1941 works to the midstream abutment. NB. stone yard dumping encroaching into the channel under the fixed span. 29th April 1930

Looking towards the Station and the Jam Factory in the distance, with he stone mason's crane the Shipley Sidings on the left. The two raised disc signals were controlled from the ground frame on the Bletchley side of the Swing Bridge after the signal box closed in 1956 and was demolished in 1965

Barge passing through whilst the four bridge operators remain on the Swing Bridge to wind it back to its fixed position as there was no safe way for the operators to leave the structure to return to the Rewley Road Station side. 1956

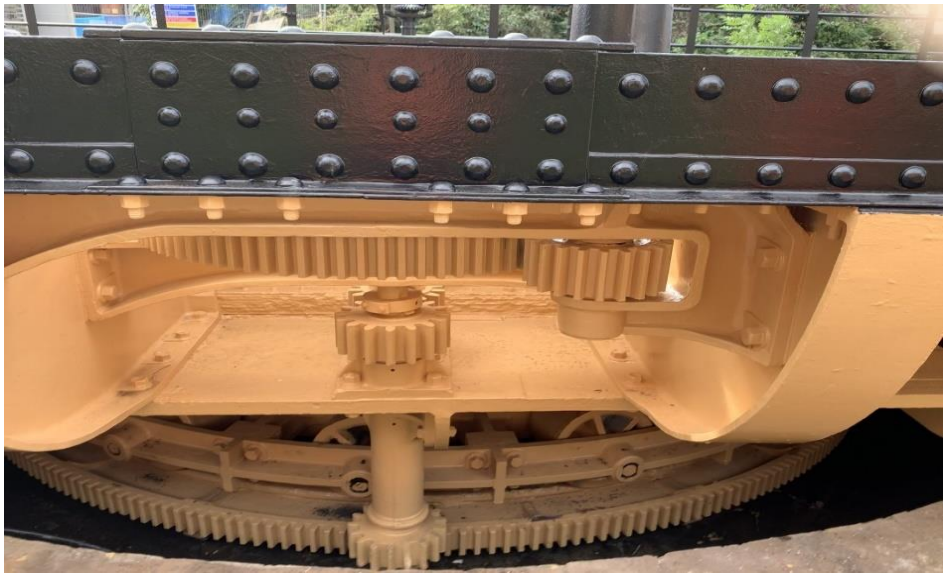
Locomotive propelling loaded coal wagons into Shipley Sidings. The fixed span carrying the signal wires and rodding can be seen at the side of the wagons. The fixed span was removed in 1981

Last train passed over the Bridge 11th May 1984. The sidings were removed quickly and the area converted to a larger station car park. Picture on the top left shows the bridge in 2004

Bridge after removal of track and turned out of use in 1985 before LNWR track recovered from Bicester was placed on top and the gears wedged to stop unofficial use by building contractors until the restoration and transfer to the Oxford Preservation Trust in March 2021

Fixed bridge span on the station side of the Swing Bridge showing the landing deck below the track level with the controlling capstan behind the yellow and black board. 2010

Restoration work in progress – Removal of the 1890's deck plates in 2021



Original 1851 Capstan, cog wheels and turn table restored to full working order 2022

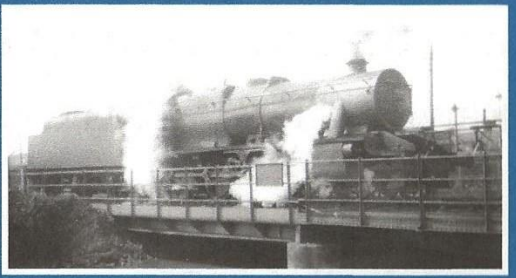
The Completed deck plating and track restored to original design above the original restored 1851 bridge beams and turning gears in 2022

View of restoration work, including the new fixed span track, taken from passing train in August 2023

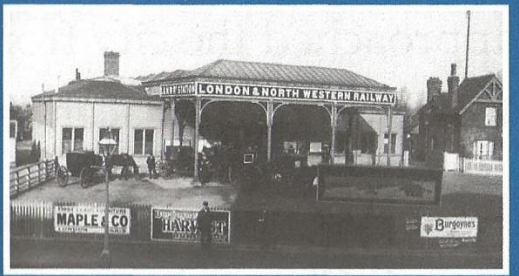
Rewley Road Swing Bridge Restoration Project

The Rewley Road swing bridge was completed in 1851 for the Buckinghamshire Railway, backed by the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) to serve an Oxford terminus and sidings, now the Said Business School and Rewley Park. The bridge is protected as a scheduled ancient monument because it is an outstanding example of Victorian railway engineering, but it also has many stories to tell about nineteenth century transport history.

The last train ran over the bridge in 1984. From then, it was always hoped it could be restored Restoration by Oxford Preservation Trust, with the help of partners, is now finally underway.



LMS locomotive 8106 reversing into over the swing bridge into the 'Shipley' sidings in 1942. Credit: R H G Simpson.



Oxford Rewley Road LNWR Station forecourt in 1914. Credit: Oxfordshire County Libraries.

Robert Stephenson (1803-1859)

Robert Stephenson was the engineer to the LNWR. His father, George, was a railway pioneer. Robert co-founded the world's first locomotive factory, the 'Forth Street Works', in Newcastle upon Tyne. He designed and directed the construction of the prototype steam engine, the Rocket, in 1829. Throughout his life he built a number of other significant locomotives and innovative railway structures, including the Rewley Road swing bridge.

Time Line

- **1850** Swing bridge designed by Robert Stephenson's engineers.
- **1851** Swing bridge opens for freight and passenger trains.
- **1890** New steel deck fitted to carry 80 ton locomotives.
- **1941** Abutments modified.
- **1951** Last passenger services use the swing bridge.
- **1959** Tracks over the swing bridge reduced to sidings status.
- **1970** One of the original two tracks removed.
- **1984** Last train ran over the bridge.
- **1985** Bridge fixed in open position and abandoned.
- **2019** The bridge turned for the first time since 1985.

The Swing Bridge

The Buckinghamshire railway brought coal to Oxford from the midlands and provided passenger services via Bletchley to London Euston Station and to Cambridge from 1862 (The Varsity Line).

The line approached the city from the north, crossing a branch of the Thames, the Sheepwash Channel, to reach its terminus and adjacent 'Shipley' sidings on the site of the former Rewley Abbey. This Cistercian abbey had been founded in 1281 and was suppressed in 1536.

The Sheepwash Channel was also crucial to the operation of the Oxford Canal, built in 1790, since it connected the canal at Isis Lock, via the Castle Mill Stream, with the Thames at Four Streams. The railway's earthworks contractor, Thomas Brassey, did not have enough spoil to build a high level bridge over the Channel with sufficient clearance for canal barges. Robert Stephenson solved this problem by designing the low level swing bridge.

The bridge's turntable carriage and associated mechanism still work and belong to Stephenson's original structure. Most of the rest of the superstructure dates to a reconstruction of the bridge in 1890; the north and midstream abutments were significantly modified in 1941.

The swing bridge is one of only two scheduled swing bridges in England and is the last significant hand-operated main-line rail swing bridge in existence in Britain.

The terminus itself was built by Fox Henderson & Co who was at the same time building The Crystal Palace to house the 1851 Great Exhibition. Similar cast iron components were used in both buildings. The station opened just in time for direct excursion trains from Oxford to Euston Station, for visitors to the Exhibition for the cheaper 'shilling days'. This innovative building was dismantled in 1999 and re-erected at the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre.

The swing bridge as it stands today, alongside the Sheepwash Channel

Turntable Capstan

Oxford's Railway History

In the mid-19th century railway companies competed to provide links to Oxford. In 1844 the Great Western Railway (GWR) opened a terminus south of the Thames. The track was built by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the GWR's engineer, to a 'broad gauge' of 7 ft. ¼ ins.. In 1850 this line was extended northwards to Banbury and then Wolverhampton. In 1852 the original GWR terminus was replaced by a station on the present site.

Robert Stephenson designed the LNWR to a gauge of 4 ft 8 ½ ins.. This gauge was incompatible with the GWR's gauge so a separate terminus was required. The two stations stood side by side. However Stephenson's gauge became the 'standard gauge'. The swing bridge now stands as a memorial to this so-called 'Battle of the Gauges'.

The Restoration Project

After its abandonment in 1985 the swing bridge deteriorated to such an extent that in 2011 it was included on English Heritage's 'Heritage at Risk' Register.

Since 2002 Oxford Preservation Trust has been taking the lead in the restoration of the bridge and the enhancement of its setting, working with key partners, including Network Rail, the Railway Heritage Trust, Historic England and Oxford City Council.

Chiltern Railways' reopening of the line from Oxford to London via Bicester, achieved in 2016, and the plans to reinstate the LNWR line to Cambridge have brought into focus the dilapidated condition of the swing bridge.

The restoration is now in hand: the project is managed by the Morton Partnership, Avon Construction is carrying out the works, and Oxford Archaeology is recording the structure.

Anyone who would like to get involved should please contact: info@oxfordpreservation.org.uk

RAILWAY HERITAGE TRUST · Historic England · OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST · Network Rail

The arrival of the railway industry around Oxford

The growth of the City over the past 250 years has been closely linked to the development and expansion of its transport links. As the Industrial Revolution developed industry grew side by side with improved transport links. Providing modern transport and communication links with Oxford unlike other parts of Britain was never easy. With the shortage of local timber supplies in the eighteenth century, coal had to be imported by sea from Tyneside via London and the River Thames which proved to be very costly. Communications relied on the Turnpike roads and tracks which were poorly maintained and often unusable for many weeks of the year due to flooding and snow. The cost of providing fuel was having a serious effect on the economy of the area and the colleges were reluctantly looking for a more efficient means of obtaining fuel.

In 1774 James Brindley began the construction of the Oxford Canal which ran from Coventry via Napton in order to gain access for narrow boats via the River Thames for freight and coal from the Midlands to London. The narrow boat canal opened to Wolvercote in 1788 with a link to the Thames via Dukes Cut in 1789. The Hythe Bridge and New Road Wharves opened on 1st January 1790 which enabled coal to be conveyed from the Midlands at a fraction of the cost and proved to be a great asset to the City providing new employment opportunities and access to the benefits of the Industrial Revolution. The canal was one of the most profitable canals in the Country until the Grand Union Wide Boat Canal from Napton to London was completed in 1805. The Oxford Canal between Coventry and Napton was modified to take wide boats by 1840 leaving the Napton to Oxford section isolated as it could only carry local traffic in the obsolete narrow boats. The lock allowing wide boats to enter the Thames via the Sheepwash was narrowed in 1842 following the loss of traffic from the Midlands via Napton..

In 1833 I.K. Brunel proposed to build a railway from London to Bristol serving the City of Oxford with a locomotive works at Abingdon. As a result of objections from Christ Church the railway was diverted through the hamlet of Didcot and the locomotive works constructed at Swindon. The City had also objected to a direct rail link with the rest of the country and felt a stagecoach link with Brunel's line from Steventon would be more than adequate. However by1840 the City realised it did need faster transport and telegraphic communication links with London and the rest of the country. The canal was often frozen for several weeks a year in addition to the continuing problems with the poor and inadequate road links. The City accepted that a railway would not only provide a reliable form of transport but it would give telegraph connections to the rest of the Country through the hard wired signalling network that was essential for the operation of a safe rail service. By the late 1830s the rail industry saw Oxford as a key location for the expansion of their competing routes.

In 1842 I.K.Brunel proposed a link to his Broad Gauge line at Didcot to Oxford with a view to reaching the West Midlands via two routes one serving Worcester and the other serving Banbury and Rugby. At the same time Robert Stephenson the engineer was involved with the construction of the Standard Gauge Buckinghamshire Railway from Bletchley to Oxford to enable E Miller Mundy of the Shipley Colliery Company, in the East Midlands, to supply coal to Oxford via the Midland Railway and London and North Western Railway. Brunel as engineer for the Broad Gauge railway being constructed from Wolverhampton via Worcester to Oxford also had with eyes on a possible extension to Southampton via Newbury.

Continued

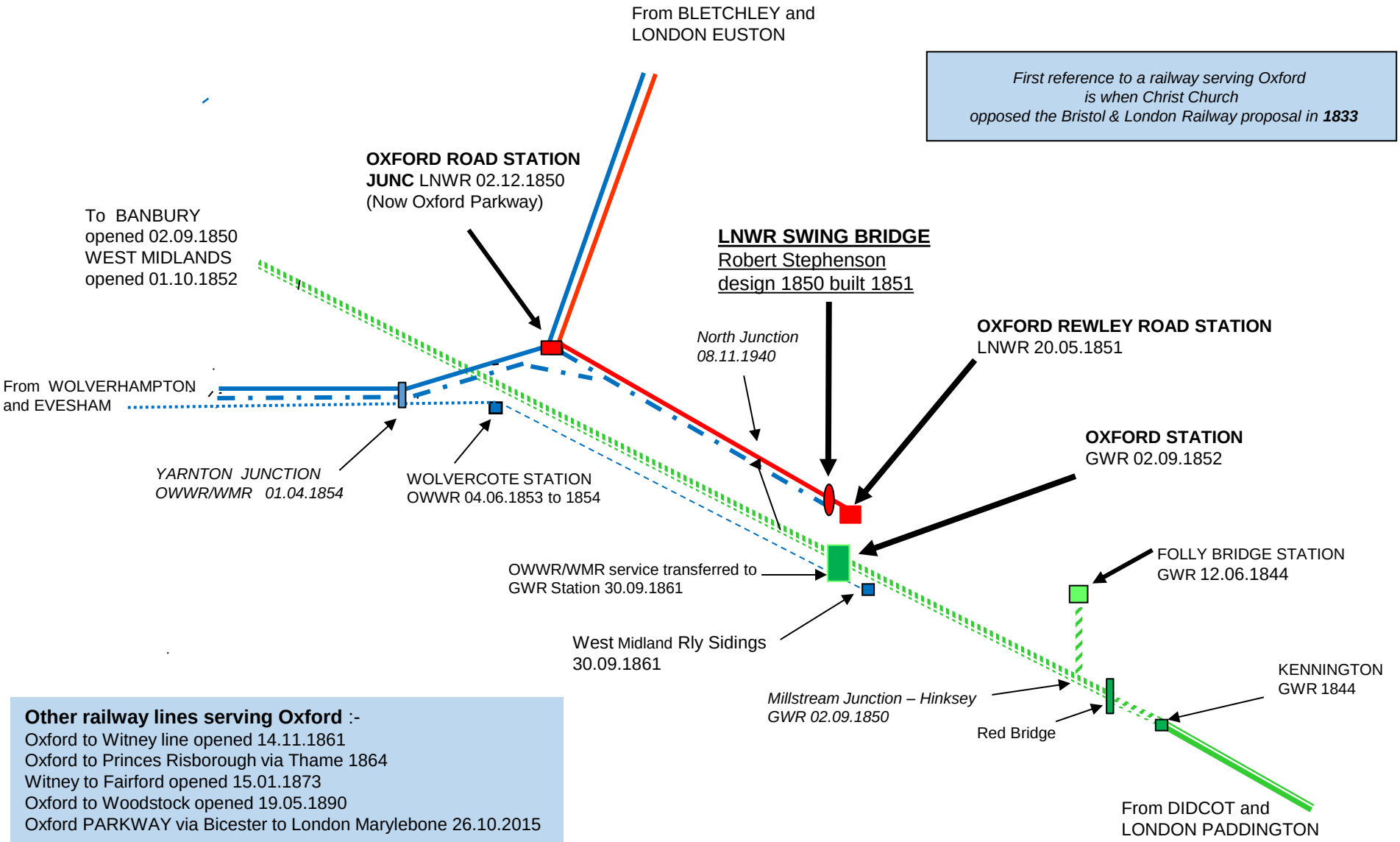
As a result of the proposed rail development in the Oxford area and the confusion that had been caused in the Gloucester area by Brunel's other Broad Gauge links that were conflicting with the Standard Gauge lines under construction a parliamentary debate took place in 1845 to resolve the 'Battle of the Gauges' problem. Gauge Commissioners were appointed and a Regulation of Gauges Act was passed a year later supporting the Standard (Stephenson) Gauge. Unfortunately the Royal Assent for Brunel's line from Wolverhampton to Oxford had been given fifteen days before to be constructed as a Broad Gauge line. Brunel would not accept the change so the "Battle of the Gauges" commenced as he continued to construct his Broad Gauge lines to both Wolverhampton and Banbury despite being aware of the need to change both routes to a mixed gauge.

Brunel lost the 'Battle of the Gauges' and had to make a costly decision to accept mixed gauge in order to connect with the other railways. As a result no regular commercial Broad Gauge services ever operated beyond Oxford. An infrequent single line Broad Gauge service did run from Folly Bridge to Banbury from September 1850 for two years. Permission to construct a station on the current GWR site was given on the condition that the line was converted to a double mixed track so as to start the service from the new Oxford Station to Birmingham on the 1st October 1852 along with the closure of the Oxford Folly Bridge Station. Broad Gauge services from London via Banbury had ceased by September 1861 with no through Broad Gauge services ever operating via Worcester.

Brunel resigned as engineer for the Wolverhampton Line on the 17th March 1852. Standard Gauge trains were able to reach London Paddington from Oxford by August 1871. Broad Gauge rails had been removed in the Oxford area by 26th November 1872. Brunel also made history in the area when he was involved in the last private army battle in Britain (20th-23rd July 1851) when he went to war with his contractor building Mickleton Tunnel on the line to Oxford involving three hundred armed navvies (Jackson's Oxford Journal 26thJuly 1851). Robert Stephenson who was building the adjacent line to Oxford Rewley Road certainly did not support Brunel over the gauge issue and there was no direct connection to enable trains to run south of Oxford until the Second World War despite the pair remaining close, discussing many other construction and engineering developments.

Once the gauge issues had been resolved the rail industry settled down to straight forward competition by providing an efficient and reliable service. The Railway Clearing House was formed in 1842 to ensure fair allocation of receipts for running over other companies' lines, transit of goods and through passenger ticket sales for all rail, horse omnibus and shipping services within the British Isles including through links to Europe. Common safety rules, regulations and inspections by the Board of Trade ensured a high standard of safety. By 1862 passenger trains could run at speeds exceeding 50mph.

ARRIVAL OF THE RAILWAY INDUSTRY IN OXFORD



Other railway lines serving Oxford :-
Oxford to Witney line opened 14.11.1861
Oxford to Princes Risborough via Thame 1864
Witney to Fairford opened 15.01.1873
Oxford to Woodstock opened 19.05.1890
Oxford PARKWAY via Bicester to London Marylebone 26.10.2015

Oxford Rewley Road LNWR Passenger Station

By December 1850 the Buckinghamshire Railway (absorbed by the London and North Western Railway in 1879) had completed the railway to Oxford Road Station at Water Eaton. To celebrate the completion of the line to Oxford Road Station (now known as Oxford Parkway) a special ten coach train conveying over 400 passengers left Oxford Road Station at 0730 on the 1st May 1851 arriving in London Euston Station at 0920 in time for the opening of the Great Exhibition at Hyde Park.

The first train service was introduced with a horse drawn omnibus link from the Oxford Road Station to the Angel and Star where the railway had created the first booking office in the City for passengers travelling on the new line between Oxford via Bicester and Bletchley to London Euston. Brunel had refused to let the company join his planned extension from Oxford to Wolverhampton near Wolvercote as the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) had refused to construct their line to the Brunel Broad Gauge. Brunel would not accept the standard gauge for either of his new routes he was constructing in the early 1850's from Oxford to the West Midlands. In the end Brunel lost his battle and the Great Western Railway (GWR) commenced converting the whole of the GWR to Standard Gauge starting with the route to Oxford. The last broad gauge train left Oxford on the 26th July 1872 and the broad gauge track was removed within four months

In order to reach the City Centre the Buckinghamshire Railway plans had to be amended due to the Battle of the Gauges hence the delay in completing the railway into the City. The LNWR were successful in reaching an agreement with the Freemen of Oxford to purchase the site of the Rewley Abbey (a Cistercian monastery c1287) in order to pass over Port Meadow by providing funds for a new school which was eventually used for the Freemen's pension fund. The station was completed along with the Rewley Road Swing Bridge and freight depot and the new station opened on the 20th May 1851 with no connection to Brunel's new lines which were still under construction. The first service consisted of five trains each way between Oxford and Bletchley Junction with connections at Winslow for the Buckingham and Banbury line and connections at Bletchley for Birmingham and London Euston.

The horse drawn City of Oxford Tramway from the Cowley Road Leopold Street Depot terminated in front of the Station from 1881 until it was withdrawn in 1914 and replaced with road motor vehicles operated by the City of Oxford Motor Services.

The Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway Service between Oxford and Wolverhampton via Yarnton and Evesham operated from this station from 1st May 1854 until it was transferred to GWR Station on 30th September 1861. The three daily services from Worcester to Euston via Oxford Road Junction were also transferred to Paddington. The GWR route to London Paddington had been converted to dual gauge prior to 1861.

The LNWR was absorbed into the London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMSR)on the 1st January 1923 and the passenger service from Rewley Road was extended from Bletchley to Cambridge. In 1934 the GWR Station Master took over the responsibility for the passenger station, parcels, freight and road vehicles operating from the station. In 1936 the ownership of the Swing Bridge was transferred to the GWR. Both the LMSR and GWR became part of the British Railways on the 1st January 1948.

The last time tabled passenger service left Rewley Road Station on the 1st October 1951 when the passenger services were transferred to the adjacent Western Region station. The passenger station building was then leased as a tyre depot and remained until dismantled and transferred to the Buckinghamshire Railway site at Quainton Road reopening in 2002 as a museum and the last example of the first modular 'Crystal Palace' style building in the World designed by Paxton.

Oxford Rewley Road LNWR Goods Yard

Coal Yard opened with the passenger station in 1854. - The first freight traffic was Coal from the Shipley Collieries near Ilkeston in Derbyshire which had been distributed from the Oxford Road (Parkway) station since December 1850. The Oxford newspapers dated 2nd December 1850 advertised the arrival of the coal stating “Shipley Coals from Derbyshire” will be available from the Oxford Road station and that ”orders for these coals will be taken at the Angel and the Star Railway Offices in Oxford”. The two “Shipley Coal Sidings” remained in use until the last train ran on the 11th May 1984. The sidings had been the key location for the local coal merchants in Oxford until the coal trade declined and by the mid 1980’s the remaining business had transferred to road transport..

Anglo American Oil Co - opened the first motor spirit depot in the City to receive fuel in rail tank wagons prior to the first World War with an extension adjacent to the Coal Sidings. A rail served **Stone Masons Yard** and sheer-leg crane was located adjacent to the Swing Bridge which was operated by Axtell and Perry Stonemasons until closure of the coal yard.

Goods Yard and Cattle Docks on the opposite side of the passenger station fell into disuse after 1951. The Goods Warehouses were demolished in 1966 and the Goods Yard sidings and docks removed in 1970 to provide a new car park and forecourt to cater for the ever growing demand at the now main passenger station on the former GWR site.

Signalling – The entrance to and from the station was controlled by a basic early form of signalling to ensure the Swing Bridge was safe to cross and the train was safe to proceed. The signalling system also included a unique locking device for the sheer-leg crane to ensure it was in a safe position before any train was allowed to cross over the Swing Bridge. A new Signalbox was constructed adjacent to the Swing Bridge in the 1870’s and the new system of Absolute Block mechanical signalling was introduced and remained in use until the 31st July 1959 when it was replaced by a Ground Frame north of the swing bridge controlled by the shunter. On the 31st July 1973 the former main lines were disconnected at the North Junction and one line was converted into a siding to gain access over the Swing Bridge to a set of points leading to the remaining coal sidings. A section of the second main line track was left on the Swing Bridge to keep it in balance.

Last train left the Rewley Road coal yard on 11th May 1984 and the Swing Bridge locked out of use with a buffer stop fixed to the remaining track still in use on the north side of the bridge. The station yard was cleared of all the remaining track and the fixed signal rodding gantry bridge over the Swing Bridge removed for scrap. The Swing Bridge minus its rodding gantry and track was finally abandoned and locked in open position after being used by a road vehicle in the Spring of 1985. During May 1985 LNWR track on sleepers was recovered from Bicester London Road Station and left on the bridge for the restoration project which had been due to commence in the Summer of 1985.

Planning Application was made in June 1984 to develop part of the former LNWR locomotive site together with part of the old station site not required for the British Rail 1986/7 station interchange and forecourt improvements for the Rewley Road housing development and the Said Business School. Funding for the restoration of the Swing Bridge and interpretation displays to record the history of the whole area including the Abbey is now in place and the Swing Bridge restoration commenced in 2020. The current station forecourt which now stands on the former LNWR Goods Yard site will redesigned to give the proposed new station on the present GWR site an open public square similar to that at London Kings Cross Station.

Oxford (GWR) Station

Oxford Station – A temporary wooden construction opened on the 1st October 1852 with Brunel overall roof and dual gauge 7'01/4" and 4'81/2"track. An impressive stone construction had been designed for Oxford Station but the City Council were unable to make a decision prior to the opening and the plans placed where they remain today in the Bodleian Library. Construction work to extend the Great Western line beyond Oxford commenced in1848 and a single Broad Gauge service ran from Oxford Folly Bridge Station to Banbury from the 3rd August 1850 by reversing at the Red Bridge until the new Oxford Station opened on the 1st October 1852 on the main line extension to Birmingham Snow Hill via Leamington Spa in order to gain access to the West Midlands industrial growth. Brunel lost the **Battle of the Gauges** which led to the line being a mixed gauge and the Broad Gauge tracks were removed by 26th November 1872 and the end of Brunel's entire broad gauge network by the 20th May 1896. The **station buildings** were altered or replaced to deal with the growth of passengers travelling as wooden structures at various times until 1910 as there was still no enthusiasm or support from the City to see a permanent construction. By the 1960's the station was in a state of poor repair with no electric lighting and the entire station buildings on both platforms were demolished in September 1970. The long term Beeching plans anticipated further withdrawal of train services through Oxford resulting in a further temporary timber construction in 1972 on the London bound platform with only a small shelter to accommodate ten people on the opposite platform. Fortunately a change in attitude to rail travel resulted in new business being generated and the proposed withdrawal of further train services was suspended. To deal with the new traffic a small building was provided on the second platform for Birmingham bound passengers and growth in the parcels business in 1974. To further promote additional business a **Travel Centre** was constructed in the front of the Station in 1975 to deal with both UK and European rail travel. By 1980 the station was unable to cope with the continuing growth in business and plans were developed to provide Oxford with a new station and transport interchange. Unfortunately the City was unable to support the proposals and the current temporary building was constructed on the London bound platform in 1987. In 2017 the City Council supported the construction of a new station for Oxford reflecting its status as a world class city. The plans went out for consultation for a new station to provide a **vibrant and integrated transport hub** with a transport interchange which will build on the adopted West End Area Plan for the future. The new track alignment, points and signalling between Kennington and Wolvercote which were completed in 2018 for the provision of an additional platform 5 along with an increase of services passing through Oxford over the next ten years. In September 2022 the majority of track layout north of the station towards Wolvercote was enhanced to allow 75mph running through the various junctions so allowing even shorter journey times and improved reliability to be achieved. Work commenced in 2023 to prepare for the new Botley Road bridge to provide a wider road and cycle tracks, access to the new Platform Five and the additional Botley Road side station entrance. Part of this work including the new bridge over Botley Road has now been delayed. To the north of Platform four work continues to reconstruct road access to the former locomotive depot site now the student accommodation site along with the new rail access to Platform Five..

Parcels Concentration Depot – Opened 1975 and closed July 1981 when British Rail ceased to carry parcels on passenger services. Converted into a train crew depot when the Diesel Depot north of the station closed. It was demolished in 2016 to provide bay platforms (1 & 2) for the new Chiltern Railways service via Bicester to London Marylebone services. The new service commenced on 26th October 2015 from Oxford Parkway Station to Marylebone finally extended to Oxford in December 2016. A new service from Oxford to Milton Keynes will commence in May 2025. Platform 1 will eventually become a through platform when the current main station building on Platform 3 is replaced in the future.

Signalling Centre – Constructed on the site of the former Down Bay Platform and commissioned on 13th October 1973, controlling 13.5 miles Wolvercote to Kingham and 26.5 miles Didcot North to Heyford the remaining seven manual signalboxes were closed demolished and all the semaphore signals replaced by modern colour light signalling. The Oxford Signalling Centre closed on the 7th July 2018 when the operations transferred to the new Didcot Signalling Centre. The building was demolished in 2023 to allow construction of the new Platform 5

THE WAY FORWARD

A restored Rewley Road Swing Bridge and a modern Oxford City transport interchange

From September 2021 longer container trains of up to 775 metres in length now pass through Oxford Station (at existing speeds of 75mph) in order to provide more capacity to deal with the growth in the use of containers and also the capacity and congestion problems occurring with long distance road (HGV) traffic. The road industry has also reached an agreement to extend HGVs by almost two metres in 2023 for the same reason. We will see a sizable increase in long distance freight services passing through Oxford to link with the new road/rail freight interchanges currently being constructed in the Midlands and the North.

Major infrastructure works were completed by Network Rail between 2018 and 2023 between Kennington and Wolvercote Junctions along with modern signalling to achieve greater operating flexibility. Work also commenced in 2023 to provide the now delayed replacement Botley Road rail overbridge and a new rail bridge section over the Sheepwash to give an additional Platform 5 along with an additional station entrance on the Botley side. The work will also provide improved pedestrian and cycle paths under the Botley Bridge roadway. The upgrades will eventually result in the overall reduction of journey times and additional capacity to deal with the new freight and passenger services.

Restoration of the direct service between Bristol and Oxford is still a possibility but may not be achieved until the Great Western Electrification from London Paddington is completed. Despite the majority of the infrastructure work having been completed and the materials to complete the work supplied by 2016 the Government stopped the work and the materials still remain in the undergrowth awaiting a decision despite completion offering significant benefits in the immediate future.

The East West Rail Link enhancements between Bicester Village and Bletchley are almost complete and will allow the new service from Oxford to Milton Keynes to commence to link with the existing West Coast and Bedford services in 2025. Discussions are ongoing regarding the enhancement works in the future between Bletchley and Bedford plus the extension to Cambridge and beyond.

The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study published in June 2021 covers the improvements Oxford City Council have supported The plans included the additional main line platform 5 with additional access on the Botley side of the station along with other key transport interchange enhancements most of which should have been completed in 2024. The enhancements also fit with the City's future plans for their West End Development to provide a **vibrant and integrated transport hub for the City.** The plans are set out to encourage the use of public transport as a whole by providing improved bus interchange, taxi and private car drop off facilities and further enhancements The upgrade will result in the overall reduction of journey times and additional capacity to deal with the new freight and passenger services. or cyclists.

The Corridor Study also included the following recommendations:-

- Reopening of the Cowley Branch line for a passenger service to serve the business parks and a possible freight distribution terminal
- Doubling the Cotswold Line between Wolvercote and Hanborough plus an additional platform at Hanborough (Parkway)
- Support for the possible quadrupling of the main line from Oxford to Radley
- Better connectivity between the seven growth hubs in the County with most services running through the new Oxford Station
- Reinstate the Oxford – Swindon – Bristol service

Following the creation of a new public body Great British Railways (GBR) in May 2021, it was envisaged the biggest change for the management of the rail industry in more than twenty five years since the demise of the British Rail Board and is now in the process of taking control of the various parts of the industry

It is important to note all the service aspirations will depend on a sound business case for both the industry and the local economy

Other railway locations within the City

Oxford North Junction – The signal box and a new junction was constructed in 1940 as part of the World War II railway network. This gave a direct link between the various strategic military depots and the ports for the military equipment, ammunition and troop trains. The new Ministry of Defence Depot had been constructed at Bicester and various other strategic depots existed in various rural and secret locations throughout Britain all of which depended on fast and reliable rail connections to a wide variety of destinations at short notice. This was the first direct link to allow through working of trains to and from the GWR Main Line to the LM&SR, West Coast, Midland and the East Coast Lines and proved to be very useful after the War. This will now be reopened as part of the new East West Link. Previous to 1940 the only direct link between the main line companies was that from Worcester to Bletchley via Yarnton Junction.

Locomotive Depots – The LNWR depot was located north of the swing bridge along the side of the canal. It opened in 1854 and was rebuilt in 1870 and remained under the management of Bletchley London Midland Region until it closed in December 1950 and the work transferred to the GWR Depot. It had a large water tower which was unique with its “Crystal Palace” design support and filled from the adjacent stream by a steam pump. Part of the site adjacent to the Swing Bridge is now occupied by residential properties constructed in the 1990s. The rest of the site along with the Exchange Sidings was converted to carriage cleaning and stabling sidings in 1960 and work to expand facilities for the new rolling stock commenced in 2017. The GWR depot north of the Station was opened in 1862 to deal with the Standard Gauge locomotives. Steam locomotives were withdrawn after the last working on the 3rd January 1966. It remained in use for the fuelling and maintenance of diesel locomotives until 1984 and part of the site remains today for the passenger service operations. The office block became a nursery school (Teds Turbos) in 1988. In 2013 the university student accommodation was constructed on part of the site making the national news when it was realised it had obscured the view of the Dreaming Spires from the Western By Pass.

Beckett Street Yard – Cattle Docks were provided for easy transfer of livestock from rail to the Cattle Market in the Oxpens Road until 1970. The sidings for coal merchants and Hebborns scrap metal were located in the yard. Weddals meat warehouse and siding was located near the emergency level crossing used for high vehicles unable to pass under the Botley Road Bridge. The area became the main station car park in 1988.

GWR Goods Depot and South End Yard – Opened in 1870 for Standard Gauge traffic to replace the Folly Bridge Depot. The warehouse and offices were demolished in 1984 and the area sold for the construction of small business units which had all been replaced by 2020. The general freight transfer yard closed in 1979 when the new International Freight Terminal opened at Morris Cowley station (now BMW Mini Plant rail terminus). The road motor vehicle maintenance depot was located on the site of the GWR stable yard adjacent to the Oxpens Road. This building was demolished in 1979 for the new Royal Mail sorting offices to be built. Mail being loaded to the Royal Mail vans at Oxford Station. The siding for discharge of oil and petrol was also located adjacent to the Oxpens Road with pipes under the road to the fuel tanks in the Oil Depot on the opposite side of the road. The small South End marshalling yard at the Isis River Bridge end closed in 1984 and the remaining sidings and freight loops removed in 2017.

continued

West Midland Sidings – Constructed along side Mill Street to the south of the GWR station when the WMR/OWWR services were transferred from Rewley Road in 1861. The final siding was closed in 2016 and removed ready for the major infrastructure works in July 2017.

Oxford Gas, Light and Coke Company Sidings – The gas works, opened in 1818, were located in St Ebbes. Oxford had its first street lighting in 1819. The works expanded on the south side of the river in 1885. A new railway bridge was constructed over the river and two miles of track laid to provide sidings which connected with the GWR line behind Whitehouse Road. The gas works railway opened in 1886 and had its own 0-4-0 steam locomotives to transfer the wagons from the main line. The railway closed in 1956 when the gas works were transferred to a new short lived rail connected site which closed in 1960 adjacent to the Morris Cowley Freight Terminal. The gas storage holder remained in use connected to Southampton by pipe line and could still be seen opposite Huws Gray (Build Base) until it was demolished in July 2022.

Hinksey Marshalling Yard – The marshalling yards were constructed in 1941/2, with the help of Italian prisoners of war, as part of the World War II rail network. The capacity allowed the stabling of up to 1000 wagons. Over a 100 trains per day passed through the yard. In preparation for the 'D' Day Landings in April 1944 over 1200 trains passed through the yard many of which came through the Bicester Depot. The yard ceased as a marshalling yard in 1969 and was remodelled in 1974 to deal with the longer (635metre) continental container trains (which eventually ran through the Channel Tunnel when it opened) from the Morris Cowley Terminal. The yard still deals with the BMW mini plant trains to Purfleet and other destinations including Channel Tunnel traffic. The central part of the yard was developed in 1999 as the Network Rail "Virtual Quarry" for the storage and preparation of ballast for the mechanised relaying trains. Other Network Rail trains are prepared in the yard for many major infrastructure renewal works in the region.

Grandpont Station – This was the site of the first railway station in Oxford which opened in June 1844. As the City did not want a railway near the colleges or City centre it was located near Folly Bridge and access to the station was off the Abingdon Road along what is now Western Avenue. The railway line ran along the embankment behind the Hinksey Swimming Pool to the end of Lake Street and then along what is today Marlborough Road until it reached the River (Bulstake Stream). The station consisted of a single wooden platform and shelter with a run round loop and a siding to serve a wooden goods shed. The track continued beyond the platform and loop to a buffer stop on the edge of the river with simple crane to transfer freight to river boats. The station closed to passenger trains 2nd September1852, freight traffic 26th July1872 and the track and junction to the main line removed by 26th November 1872. The site was then sold and apart from two hand paintings there are no known photographs of the station.

Housing for railway employees – The Town Clerk leased land in Osney Town from Christ Church in 1851 in order to provide housing for the 135 railwaymen involved in building the new railway. The canal company refused permission for a bridge over the canal to link LNWR locomotive depot with the employee's homes in Jerico so making the staff walk via Hythe Bridge. The GWR employees' housing was built in both Mill Street and Crippley Road. The GWR Station Master's house was in the Abingdon Road. The LNWR Station Master's house stood at the side of the Rewley Road station until it was demolished.