

MR. TEAGUE'S RAILWAY SOME NEW INFORMATION

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Introduction

"Mr. Teague's Railway" is of interest because it was the first tramroad to be built in the Forest of Dean. Although referred to as a railway or rail road by contemporary documents it and other tramroads were not railways in the modern sense. These tramroads were constructed to facilitate the carriage of minerals and the produce of heavy industry. Their routes were carefully engineered in respect of gradients and were surfaced with cast iron rails or tram plates which had an L shaped cross section. Upon these rails or plates ran flangeless wheels carrying a cart or tram. These vehicles were pulled or braked by horse and where the topography demanded major changes in altitude along the route, self acting inclines were usually installed. Tramroads were an essential feature of the exploitation of minerals in the Dean and the general courses of some of them later became railways.

Harry Parr's researches into the tramroads and railways of the Dean have revealed that by 1801 a private tramroad was in existence or under construction to the north of Coleford. It began at the Engine Pit of James Teague which lay between Mile End and Edge End. It ran north for about 3 miles to the River Wye at Lydbrook via White Oak. A summary of the known history based on H.W.Parr's work is as follows: (1).

James Teague of Coleford was a freeminer of Dean and as such exercised his "rights" by sinking coal pits and constructing accesses to them. These freemining "rights" had developed over previous centuries when the mining was on a much smaller and less mechanised scale but Teague and others interpreted them in the widest possible sense. Their actions were of concern to those whose job it was to grow timber on the Crown lands. Whilst Teague had done no more than other coal owners of the day by sinking pits and erecting steam engines to work them he was singled out by the Crown officials as a threat to the timber of the Forest most probably on account of his "Railway". In 1801 the steward of the Court of Swanimote (the Verderers' Court), wrote to John Robinson, the Surveyor General, about the making of rail roads in the Forest by James Teague and his partners. He described the latter as "a number of opulent persons from the north of England". He stated that the opinion of the Verderers was that if the Crown did not order the rail road to be thrown up and destroyed, the Forest would be laid open to the speculations of adventurers from all parts of the Kingdom.

In 1802, Thomas Blunt, the Deputy Surveyor, reporting on these matters referred to "James Teague and certain Shropshire gentlemen" in connection with the Engine Pit and rail road. An accompanying plan depicted the course of Teague's Railway and disclosed the identity of the partners as Teague, Biston, Phillips & Co. Matters attracted the attention of the Attorney General and the Solicitor General who ruled that the rail road could be legally abated by the Crown Officers and that notice should be given to the parties that if they did not remove it and restore the ground, then the Attorney General would file an Information against them for trespass.

H.W.Parr's conclusions were that the line was probably removed soon afterwards as it did not figure on any plans then examined after 1803. The plans also suggested a variable course, some showing an eastern and others a western branch near White Oak with the continuation to Lydbrook springing from either.

The purpose of the "Railway"

The purpose of the tramroad was to carry coal from Teague's pits to the Wye for shipment by barges upstream to the City of Hereford and elsewhere. An account of 1805 provides valuable comment on the coal trade in Hereford (2):

"The price of coal varies according to the distance from the pit, and the means of conveyance. When brought to Hereford in barges on the Wye from the Forest of Dean, it now sells at 2¹/₄ shillings a ton; when conveyed by wagons it brings 3 or 4 shillings more; and the latter mode is in favour with the consumer from the size and superior quality of the article, the refuse of the pit generally being mixed with the heap designed for the barges. A still inferior sort is sold for use of the blacksmith's forges, from 12 to 1¹/₄ shillings per ton.

"These prices appear very high, when it is considered that the distance from Hereford to the collieries is only 21 miles, of which 18 are a good turnpike road; and that a river flows within a few miles of the spot, which is often navigable to Hereford during several months together. This article has advanced no less than 7 shillings in the ton within the last seven years and no effectual plan has been adopted to lower the present rates, or even to guard against a further increase".

Coal, in Hereford, was thus costing 17/- per ton in 1798 and 2¹/₄/- per ton in 1805. One can but sympathise with the citizens, particularly when it is known that in 1808 the Whitecliff Ironworks were paying but 2/₆ per ton for the same product delivered to the furnace yard! Clearly, Hereford was a market worth cornering. A "Coal Company" existed in Hereford at this time but its ownership is not clear. In 1802 it had formed a connection with Teague and the Shropshire Gentlemen and was preparing to erect an engine at or near Surridge with a view to getting the coal trade in its own hands (3).

Evidence for the use of Teague's Railway after 1803.

Evidence is presented elsewhere in this Journal to show that Teague and his partners in the Railway were also in control of the Whitecliff Ironworks. Research on that site has provided information which shows that Teague's Railway was built and functioned at least until 1808 and most probably for some years afterwards.

The first evidence that matters between the Attorney General and Teague had not been resolved in 1803, appears in a letter of 3rd December 1808, written to David Mushet by Thomas Halford (4):

" ... Teague has been in London for some days to answer an Information filed against him by the Attorney General for laying a railroad from his coalpit to the River Wye and for having sunk a pit in an intended inclosure for timber.

"I have reason to think he has fully answered the Information and prevented any action that might be brought against him...."

A few days later Halford wrote again (5); the subject of the letter was a suggestion by Lord Glenbervie that the miners rights be limited:

"Spicer and myself entertain no alarm respecting the information my solicitor tells me. He thinks it will all drop and nothing more be heard of it. I mean with respect to the rights of the miners to get coal, iron ore and timber for the use of their works. How far it will affect Teague's rail road is not quite so clear"

Halford also sent to Mushet a copy of the representations made by Teague's solicitor, Tho. Tovey of Newnham, to Lord Glenbervie earlier in the year. At that stage, matters were apparently in hand for the charges to be answered in December. These representations are so interesting that they are reproduced in full (6):

"To the Right Honourable Lord Glenbervie, Office of Woods & etc,
London.

"My Lord,

I have conferred with Mr. Teague respecting the Crown Prosecution against him. He says as to the first two complaints of his digging coal and his taking timber that he has only done so as he considers with the consent of the Crown; the first through the medium of the Gaveller's Assignment and the other under a warrant from the Steward of the Swanmote Court. And he says that the land in which the coal pit is, is considered to be open to the waste of the Forest, that it was formerly intended to be an inclosure but that he believes it never was completely made so and that it has been open to the whole of the Forest for more than the last 25 years And as to the Railway, he say that if he has err'd in laying that down it has been intirely from supposing that he might make his road with any materials and in any way he thought best so that he did no more injury than by the commom roads and that the Rail Road has not been a quarter part so injurious as the others, also that by making it he did not cut down a single tree.

He represents also that by his rail road the greatest part of the City of Hereford is supplied with coal and that were it now destroyed it would not only greatly injure him but that the City of Hereford would suffer very materially. I mentioned to him that your Lordship said the Information was filed not only to try the right to the Rail Road but also to the mines and timber. However he still hopes as to the first two points your Lordship may be induced under the above representation to withdraw the prosecution against him and if so he is willing to take up the Rail Road if your Lordship would allow him to use it 'till the General Rail Roads are completed or for some certain time in which 'tis probable they may be completed. He is very desirous of avoiding contention with the Crown and I will beg to be favoured with your Lordship's Answer to the above Proposal or suggesting any other which your Lordship may approve for settling the Suit. As to the contention about the mines it may occasion a good deal of alarm among the persons who have mines, also I have told Mr. Teague and others what your Lordship authorised me to say that the mines were not intended to be taken away. And as to the timber when the General Rail Roads are made I hope the claim for it will be but small."

I am my Lord & Etc. Tho. Tovey. Newnham. Glo'shire,"
Sept. 16th 1808.

Lord Glenbervie's reply was brief:

"Sir,

I have nothing to add to what has been already and so often written by myself or under my directions on the subject of Mr. Teague's business.

"Government have ordered the Prosecution, by the advice of the successive Law Officers of the Crown, who have had the case before them repeatedly, for a course of years. He will have an opportunity of stating the matter of defence or palliation mentioned in your letter, in the answer he will have to put in to the Information. It is needless to add that the Crown has not the smallest intention of abridging the lawful rights of the miners, but it is their interest when duly considered, that the rights should be judicially ascertained and defined."

"I am & etc

Glenbervie"

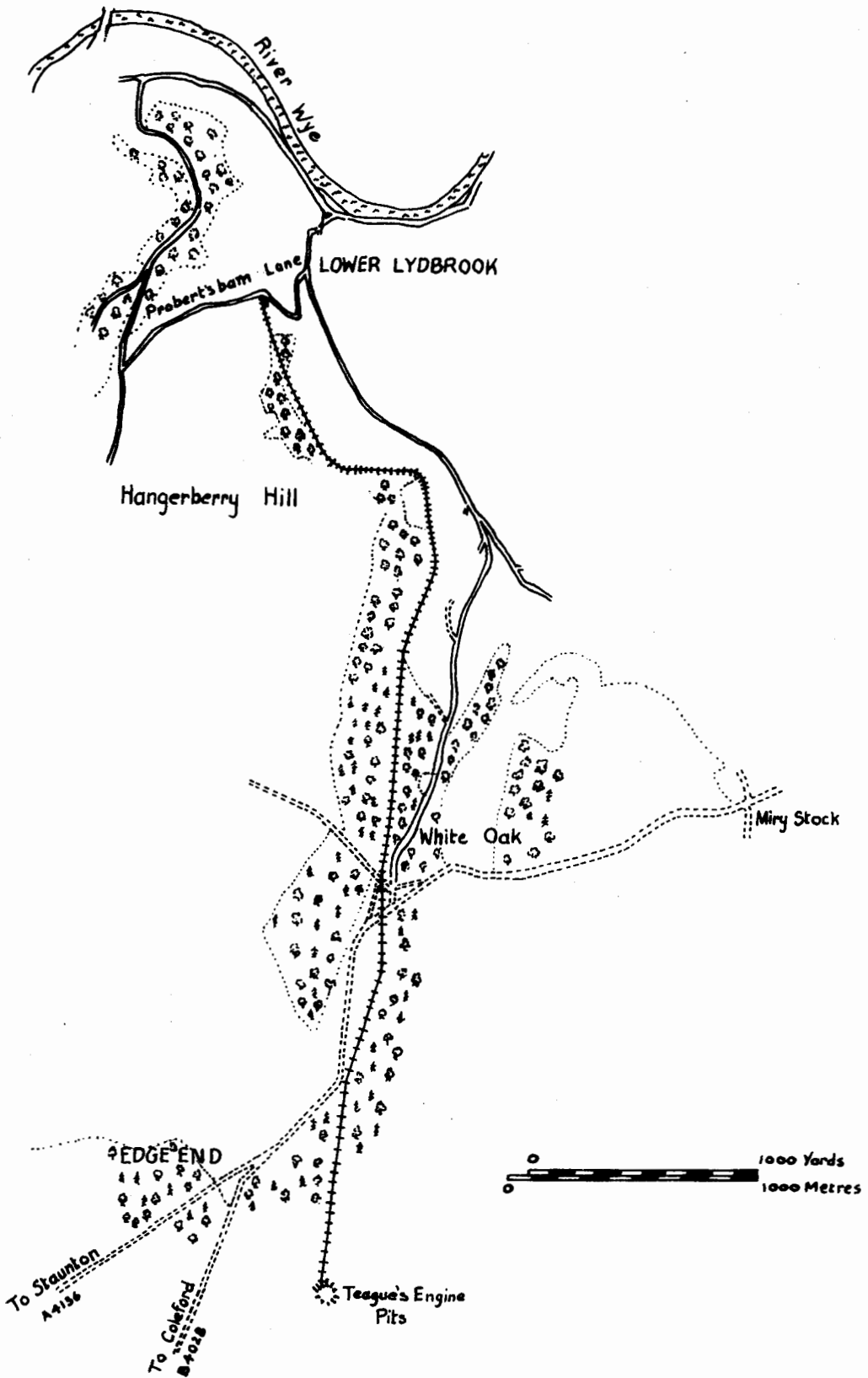
Sufficient evidence occurs in these letters to demonstrate that Teague's Railway was completed and that it was still operational in late 1808. The probability is that it continued in use at least until the Severn and Wye Tramroad was constructed. It may have continued even longer because it is by far the best route from the pit to the Wye and any other route via the S & W would have been extremely cumbersome in comparison.

The present authors are of the opinion that much more documentary evidence relating to this matter must exist both in the records of the Attorney General and in the Crown papers of the Office of Woods. The subject calls for another researcher, living closer to the P.R.O., to carry it further.

COURSE OF TEAGUE'S RAILWAY

Scale 1:25,000

#18



MAP 1.

#12

156

362

The Course.

Teague's Engine Pit can be identified on Sopwith's 1835 plan which names it "Old Engine" indicating perhaps, that by then its life was over. Some reworking since then is probable, possibly for the thinner Yorkley Coal which would occur at a shallow depth in the shaft. On the ground, the pit survives as an enormous dirt mound with some building foundations at NGR SO 59951285. From it a low embankment which contains stone sleeper blocks runs north for a hundred yards or so before becoming lost in dense vegetation. This may be the original bank of the tramroad. The route towards a point where it glances the A 4136 is through an area so raked by coal works that no vestige remains. This area was clear of timber in 1979-80 and thoroughly examined. From NGR 597135 to the point where it crosses the A4136 at White Oak the only earthwork to survive appears to be the Buckhold Wall. This structure can be seen on the plan Q.RUM 5, and it is possible that the tramroad was actually built on it. Excavation would demonstrate this. The course of the A4136 at White Oak forms a summit ridge for the tramroad to cross before it begins its steady descent to Lower Lydbrook. All the contemporary plans are constant in the detail they show about the route at this point but it is possible that the junction of the road which descends Hangerbury towards Lydbrook has changed since. An existing ditch can be traced in the correct direction from White Oak into the woods of Hangerbury and soon becomes an incised baulk in the slope. This can be followed (with extreme difficulty on account of the vegetation) as far as NGR 599152 when the course breaks out of the undergrowth to pass above cottages and below the entrance of the later Hangerbury Iron Level at NGR59981534

After this the route takes a decided turn to the north east to get round the massive spur of Hangerbury Hill which towers above the Lydbrook Valley and then, turning more northerly again, passes through the fine old beeches which cling to the steep slope. After a major swing to the west the route enters fields where its course is marked by a well defined bench, at NGR 599160. The route is easily discerned across the meadows, passing between two ruined buildings at NGR595 162 and thence to a gateway into a wood at NGR 594163. This is the wood where a stone sleeper block of unusual design was found (7). North of the wood a stone built baulk passes across fields to Probertsbarn Lane at NGR 594166.

From this point to the Wye the course cannot be traced with any certainty, but an earthen and stone baulk (it may simply be a field boundary) does contour round to a point directly above Dr. Macminn's House close by the Wye, but at an altitude of about 100 feet above the river. Unfortunately, the course of the later railway from the Viaduct to Lydbrook Junction, crosses the area in a profound cutting and totally obliterates all field evidence. If Teague's Railway did cross Probertsbarn Lane (and the old maps show that it did) it must either have descended the 100 feet by an incline or have turned north west to reach the Wye in the region of Lydbrook Junction. There is no reason to preclude this. The final possibility is that the trams entered Probertsbarn Lane and thence to Lower Lydbrook by road. The coal wharves would probably have been upstream of the Lydbrook rapids - which was probably a flash lock in those days, but they could have been below it.

The map, numbered 1, shows the course of the tramroad as evinced from field evidence by the present authors.

The variable course shown by contemporary plans.

The years 1801 to 1810, so far as transport was concerned in the Dean, were notable for what may be best described as tramroad fever. Many schemes were envisaged of which three were eventually built. Perhaps the most important scheme for the present subject was the course of an intended line which ran from Lydney up the Cannop Valley to Mirystock (sometimes called Surrige) and thence to the Wye on the eastern side of the Lydbrook Valley. This route eventually became the Severn and Wye Tramroad and later a railway. This scheme (and also the Monmouth Tramroad) needed Parliamentary Bills to permit them to pass through various privately owned lands. Teague's Railway, however, was built without Parliamentary Bill or even permission from the Office of Woods and much of its course ran over Crown lands. Only its most northerly portion crossed private lands and Teague must have come to some arrangement with the owners about it. An archival search of the Gage and Machen estate papers at the G.R.O. has failed to reveal the existence of any leases or mentions.

Because of the various schemes for tramroads passing from Mirystock to Lydbrook numerous plans of intended railways were produced. These plans often contained much additional information not directly related to the main subject and the depiction of Teague's Railway by some of them is a good example. The first plan to depict "Mr. Teague's Railway" is dated 1801 (8) and the relevant portion of it reproduced here, as map 2. It clearly shows the road network, the colliery, engine and tramroad, and an old enclosure boundary which is labelled "Buckhold Wall".

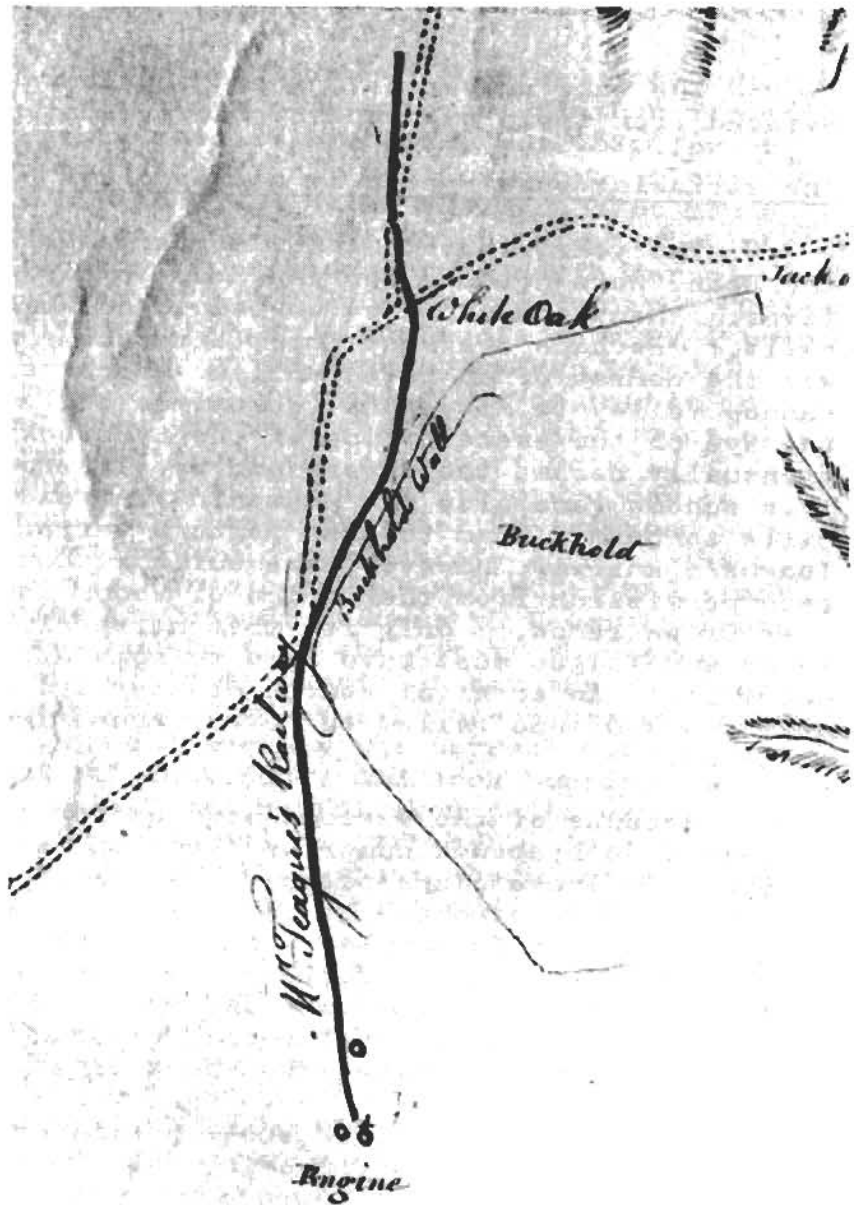
Another plan of 1802 shows a similar state of affairs (9) with Teague's Railway terminating just north of White Oak. It is at smaller scale and the topography depicted, particularly the hachered valleys differ from the previous plan of 1801. Another plan (10), wrongly attributed as 1806, but really 1802 shows similar detail at large scale.

A plan of 1803 (11) shows Teague's Railway complete to the Wye and is reproduced as map 3. The depicted course pays no respect to the topography north of White Oak and is not possible. Furthermore close examination suggests that the penmanship of the line north of White Oak is by a different hand and instrument to the portion south of White Oak. The scale is small and part of the line has merged with the Buckhold Wall where their courses coincide. Just south of White Oak the courses diverge and north easterly trending Buckhold Wall gives all the appearance of being a branch tramroad. The "eastern branch" is thus not a branch at all.

A further plan, dated exteriorly 1806 (12), but closely resembling an earlier plan of 1802, also shows similar details but with the course of Teague's Railway north of White Oak crudely added in pencil whilst scruffy ink additions have been made elsewhere on it. None of the other plans at G.R.O. show Teague's Railway. As most of them are serious plans to accompany the Bills

of 1808 and 1809 they would be unlikely to depict Teague's troublesome enterprise!

One further plan is of interest at the G.R.O. (13) for it shows that north easterly trending portion of the Buckhold Wall which looked so like a branch tram-road on one earlier plan. But artistry has taken over and it is depicted as a little stream with no outlet. All the above plans with the exception of the last are surveys by H.Price. Examination of them suggests that only one survey was carried out by him which was drawn up at various scales and then used time and again for plotting the several different schemes of their main subject. The amount of additional and other information varies from plan to plan and was clearly sketched on by way of embellishment.



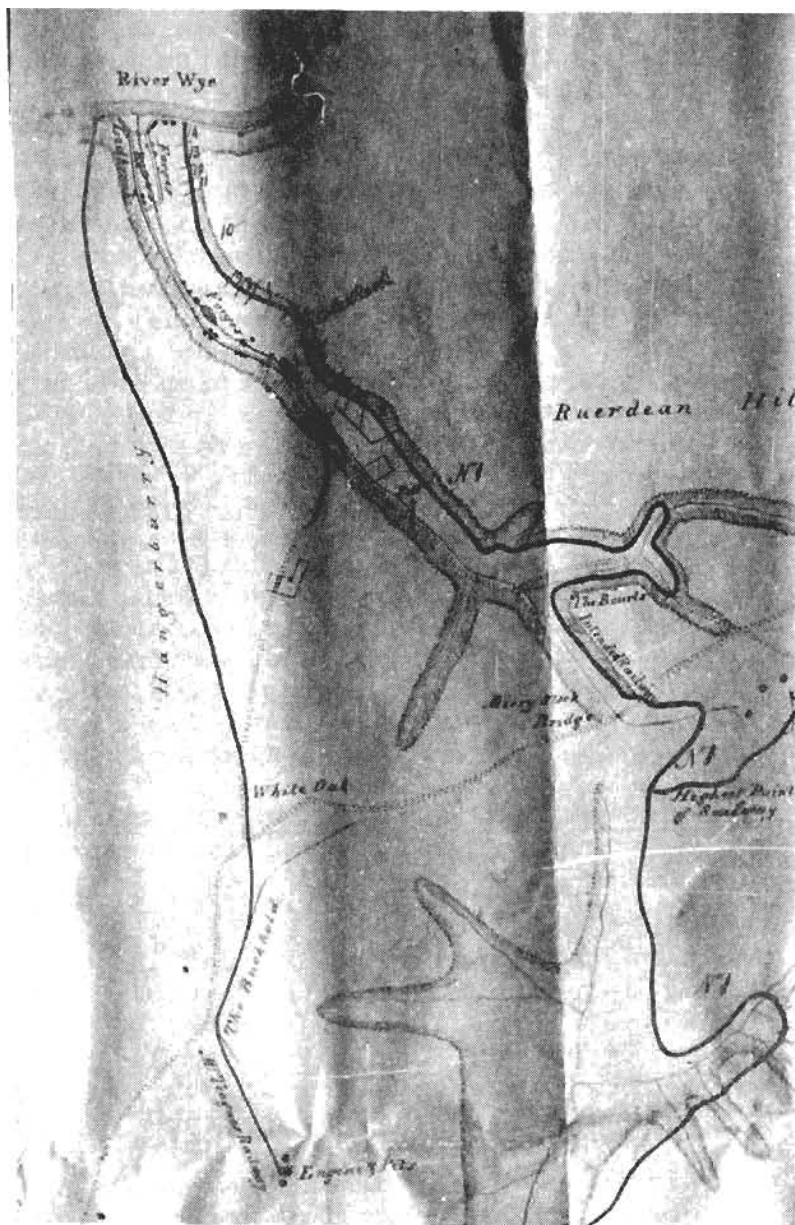
MAP 2

One last plan serves to add total confusion. It is dated 1802 and housed at the P.R.O. (14). The plan itself is, or appears to be, by H.Price but has secondary material sketched on it including Teagu's Railway in its normal course as far as White Oak. But the sketcher has continued its course to the Wye in error, from that portion of the Buckhold Wall which resembled an eastern branch. Moreover, he has sketched the route along Worrall Hill instead of Hangerbury Hill thus getting it on the wrong side of the Hangerbury Valley. In order that the sketched route may end up somewhere in the right position at Lower Lydbrook, the depicted route then steeply descends Worrall Hill and then ascends Hangerbury Hill. If this course was correct then the route would be more suitable for a rack and pinion mountain railway than a horse drawn

tramroad! There is neither field evidence nor any logic to support its existence in this position.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Harry Parr for encouragement and much useful information. They are also indebted to the County Archivists at the Hereford & Worcester Record Office and the Gloucestershire Record Office. Particular thanks is due to the latter establishment for permission to reproduce plans and documents.



MAP 3

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1. Parr, H.W., 1965. The Great Western Railway in Dean. pp 13-17.
2. Duncomb, J. 1805 Report to the Board of Agriculture. p. 141.
3. Parr op cit. p 14.
4. G.R.O. D 2646/52.
5. G.R.O. D 2646/55.
6. G.R.O. D.2646/53.
7. Parr, op cit p. 17.
8. G.R.O. Q.RUM.5. Plan of an intended railway through the Forest of Dean. H.Price, 1801.
9. G.R.O. Q.RUM.8. Plan of an intended railway from Surr ridge Hill to Lydbrook. H.Price, 1802.

10. G.R.O. Q.RUM.18. Plan of an intended railway from Surr ridge Hill in the Forest of Dean to the River Wye at Lydbrook and to the River Severn near Lydney in the County of Gloucester. Surveyed 1802 by H.Price. Deposited 1806 (dated on exterior label). Closely resembles (9) above. The P.R.O. plan MPD 15 is also based on one of the above plans.
11. G.R.O. Q.RUM.10. Plan of an intended railway from Surr ridge Hill to Lydbrook and Lydney, surveyed by H.Price 1803.
12. G.R.O. Q.RUM.19. Title as for Q.RUM 18 above but the plan is undated. The basic plan closely resembles Q. RUM 8.
13. G.R.O. Q.RUM.23. Plan of an intended railway from Surr ridge Hill to Lydbrook & etc. The plan bears no date on its title or surveyor's name but looks possibly, like H.Price's work. A faded label states deposited on 30th September 1807 (? in view of illegibility).
14. P.R.O. M.P.D.57. 1802 The plan accompanied Blunt's report.

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