

TRAMROAD REMAINS IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

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Introduction

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a network of horse-drawn tramroads developed in the Forest of Dean, to transport coal and ironstone to the local ironworks, and, following the development of docks on the Severn at Bullo Pill and Lydney, to ship coal and other Forest products to markets further afield. With the introduction of railways to the Forest, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, the tramroads were progressively superseded, in places physically overlaid, by the new transport system, though some continued as feeders to the railways well into the 20th Century. Many traces of the old tramroads remain, sometimes as footpaths following a trackbed, or as remains: stone sleeper blocks, earthworks, bridges and other structures.

In the 1990s, the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) department of Gloucestershire County Council, at the request of Forest Enterprises (a Department of the Forestry Commission) began work on a project to research and record the historical routes taken by the tramroads. The results of this record were plotted by computer on to maps derived from the modern 6 inch Ordnance Survey. When printed out, an extensive network of routes is revealed. From the maps it is obvious that large parts of the network lie buried under later industrial, residential and transport developments. Nevertheless, the maps show several sections that might have escaped such a fate. The object of this project was to walk the routes where possible, noting and recording the areas where stone blocks and other structures remain.

Methodology

In this first phase, attention was concentrated on the line of the 1807 Forest of Dean tramroad, from Bullo Pill via Soudley and Ruspidge to Churchway, including branches. The tramroad was eventually acquired by the South Wales Railway in 1852, and in some places was built over, but in others the railway took a different route; it seemed that enough remained to warrant investigation. The Sites and Monuments Record kindly provided print-outs of their maps; the routes were followed on foot where possible using these and the O.S. 1:25,000 Outdoor Leisure No. 14. R. J. Morris's book on *The Forest of Dean Tramroad*(1), was used, and aerial photography archive at the National Monuments Record at Swindon was consulted. The National Grid references of features noted were taken on the ground using a Global Positioning System unit (Magellan GPS 310). It should be noted that the "wobble factor" originally incorporated into the system by the U.S. Government to slightly degrade the accuracy for nonmilitary users, has now been eliminated.

Work started in the summer of 2000, reaching the northern end of the mainline at Churchway, and feeder branches as far as north as St. Annals to the east and Crump Meadow to the west. However it became clear that some sites, now deep in the forest, would be better re-visited in the following winter and spring. Unfortunately the winter of 2000-1 turned out to be the wettest for a very long time, only to be followed in February 2001 by the foot and mouth epidemic which resulted in most sites being out of bounds. What follows therefore, is in the nature of a preliminary report.

The Route

The dock at Bullo Pill was dredged and new gates fitted circa 1989, however in 2000 the gates were permanently open and the dock was silting again. Its reservoir is close by. On the dockside, at SO 6907 0981 there is a pile of stone blocks, some with a single drilled hole. These may be original tramroad sleeper blocks. In the 1830s the dock capacity being inadequate, a wharf was built at Box Meadow (2). The tramroad, now a track, runs south from the dock to the site of the wharf, where a few timbers and three or four stone mooring bollards remain by the riverbank. From the Pill the tramroad track runs west, crossing the A48 and passing a building once associated with the tramroad, later an inn, and now private. Beyond, its route is crossed by the embankment of the railway, itself now abandoned, running to Haie Hill east portal, where the original tramroad tunnel was enlarged to accommodate the railway. The tramroad took a much more circuitous route to the tunnel, gaining height via a long loop to the north of the railway line, followed by one to the south. A field visit to search for traces was not possible, but an aerial photograph taken in 1946 clearly shows these "ox-bows" as marked on the SMR map, and they are also visible, though less clearly, on another photograph taken in 1970.(3)

From the west portal at SO 6649 1041 a tramroad branch ran south to the site of the foundry(4) at Bradley House. The track is now a footpath. From the portal the railway headed north-west across the Soudley Brook through Bradley Hill tunnel to Soudley Crossing. The tramroad circuitously headed north along the modern tarmac lane past Furnace Crossing to join the B4227 by the bridge at SO 6649 1041 (parking space) thence following the modern road north then west past Camp Mill, now the Dean Forest Heritage Museum, to rejoin the railway at Soudley Crossing, SO 6610 1050. From here, the railway trackbed and the road run in parallel, westward to the White Horse Inn, but a track, known locally as "The Dram", runs just south of the railway, reaching Tramway Road thence to the inn, and this appears to be the course of the tramroad.

The next trace of the tramroad is at the point where it turned sharply north, heading for Shakemantle. It is visible as a shelf on the hillside above the road just east of Soudley Bridge, at SO 6544 1039. Here a short branch led to Findall Ironworks, of which nothing remains. This area is on private land, but a few metres to the east a track heads north-west from the road. This is the old railway track bed, which soon overruns the tramroad, continuing until a rocky promontory is reached. The railway pierced this in the short Bluerock tunnel, now blocked, but the tramroad reappears briefly as a track skirting the rock to rejoin the railway close to the north portal. A few metres on, where the railway begins a long curve to the west, the SMR map shows the tramroad following a loop a few metres to the north, then turning west to cross the railway close to the interchange wharf with the Quidchurch Colliery tramroad incline at SO 6551 1128. This section of the tramroad was apparently overbuilt by the railway's Shakemantle loop siding. At its south eastern junction with the mainline, close to the tunnel north portal, are the remains of the gates which once guarded this siding, and abandoned sleepers, some with chairs remaining, lead north for a few metres until buried, alas, under later extensive landfill.

The Quidchurch interchange site is now thickly wooded, but the course of the railway siding which it shared with Perseverance Ironstone Mine, can still be seen, as can the earthwork remains of the interchange wharf. A GWR boundary marker situated between the siding and the railway, confirms that the siding was a private one. From here the tramroad incline ran south to cross the Soudley to Ruspidge road before climbing the steep slopes of Staple Edge Wood en route for Quidchurch. Between the interchange and the road, the spoil heap of the

former Eastern United Colliery has obliterated all traces, but on the south side of the road at SO 6506 1124 are what appear to be remains of abutments where the incline bridged the road. The spoil heap has also buried the course of the Forest of Dean tramroad where it ran west from the interchange wharf, then turned north to rejoin the railway at the Eastern United site. From here the tramroad and railway, of which few traces remain, ran north to Cullamore Bridge.

This bridge, of which only the western abutment and approach embankment remain, carried the tramroad from Lightmoor Colliery, 800 metres to the west, over the Cinderford Brook and the Forest of Dean tramroad on its eastern bank, to a junction with the private Ruspidge - Shakemantle tramroad (described below), which ran on the hillside a few metres above.

Cullamore Bridge can be reached by crossing the footbridge over the stream from the lower Railway Road at SO 6506 1229 and following the path south to the bridge. From here the Lightmoor track can be followed on foot from the western abutment. After a few metres there is a line of exposed stone sleeper blocks; on the right a spur leads to an old quarry cut into the hillside. The main track ascends the hillside through a cutting, on the sides of which are the remains of bridge abutments; the bridge led to the quarry's spoil heap on the other side of the tramroad. After a few more metres a path trails off to the south, following the line of another tramroad to Staple Edge Quarry. The Lightmoor track continues west to the colliery site, now an open-cast operation, where stands a large derelict and roofless building.

About 200 metres north of Cullamore, near the foot of the modern Railway Road, the private Ruspidge - Shakemantle tramroad trailed in. From the junction it ran almost due south, gradually diverging from the mainline, and climbing, to cross the Ruspidge Road at SO 6500 1169 where the Bible Christian Chapel (now a studio) stands. The first part of this section remains as a track and private drive, but from the chapel it continues, still climbing, as Tramway Road, to end at SO 6525 1133 high on the hillside overlooking the site of Shakemantle iron mine and adjacent to the extensive abandoned quarry workings(5). From the junction near Cullamore the mainline tramroad diverged from the railway, following the modern lower Railway Road, crossing the B4226 and reaching Valley Road via the passage between the Bridge Inn and the adjoining building.

From here to its terminus at Churchway, few traces of the mainline tramroad remain, although much of the route can be followed using later roads and a few tracks, as far as the site of the Cinderford Ironworks. Just north of the site, the Buckshaft and St. Annals branch tramroads diverged, and these also can be followed for much of the way, but as routes only, physical traces being virtually nonexistent. Morris gives useful directions for following these routes, though with reservations regarding the latter branch in Haywood plantation, dealt with below.

The St. Annals branch crossed Cinderford Lower High Street at SO 6549 1457 and followed Albion Road to enter Haywood Plantation. At the road's end, three paths are seen. The centre one follows the branch route as shown on the S.M.R. map. It slopes up quite steeply to SO 6564 1500, where it curves sharply south west through 160 degrees to reach the edge of the plantation at Causeway Road, which it follows to the mine site, the last few hundred metres being an overgrown track to the south of, and parallel to the road. Morris's directions for finding the St. Annals curve from Albion Road read(6) "cross the first stile in Heywood and follow the path for about 200 yards keeping a sharp lookout for the cutting leaving on the uphill side." This spot appears to be the one reached by following the left hand path from Albion Road for about 200 yards. It certainly looks like a tramroad, though not originally marked on the SMR, but at SO 6546 1516 it is too far north for St. Annals, and it does not

curve south but continues north, eventually becoming overgrown and impassable. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch map shows it as a track or tramway leaving the St. Annals and the short Haywood Colliery branches at Albion Road and heading north to the “Haywood Level (Coat)”, suggesting that it is the northern end of the tramroad which (see below) made a junction with the Forest of Dean tramroad, and later an interchange wharf with the railway, at SO 6475 1448.

From Albion Road end, the right hand path, marked on the SMR map and identified as “Tramway at coal drift - Little Dean Walk” slopes up steeply north east to cross the St. Annals path south of the 160 degree bend. From here onward it is obliterated by dense conifer planting.

North of the Cinderford Ironworks site, the branch tramroad from Crump Meadow Colliery joined the mainline from the west. Much of this branch can be followed. It can be reached from Letchers Bridge on the Linear Park, which follows the course of the abandoned railway north from Ruspidge Halt at SO 6492 1265 (car parking). The abutments and approach embankments of the bridge, which was built to take the then new railway under the existing tramroad, remain. The eastern embankment can be followed for some way, but not as far as the site of the junction with the mainline tramroad. Westward a few metres from the bridge, a number of stone sleeper blocks can be seen on the north side of the track, and more are visible 20 to 30 metres on. The track continues uneventfully, forking right to Crump Meadow and left to the Foxes Bridge Colliery site.

Continuing north along the Linear Park, the line of the railway’s Cinderford Branch can be followed as it curves away to the east. The embankment is cut by the modern road. Crossing this and regaining the embankment, at SO 6475 1448 a small bridge marks the route of the mainline tramroad where it crossed below, otherwise obliterated by the industrial developments to north and south. A few metres further on, the path joins the much narrower embankment of the tramroad from Haywood Colliery, and, as suggested above, from the more northerly Haywood Level, where once was an interchange siding with the railway, which replaced an earlier link with the Forest of Dean tramroad.

From the interchange with the Haywood tramroad, the mainline ran north for a short distance then turned west-north-west across Broadmoor to the point where the railway, heading north from Letchers Bridge, overbuilt it en route to Churchway Colliery. Nothing remains of this section of the tramroad, but the railway track can be followed to the colliery site.

Further Work

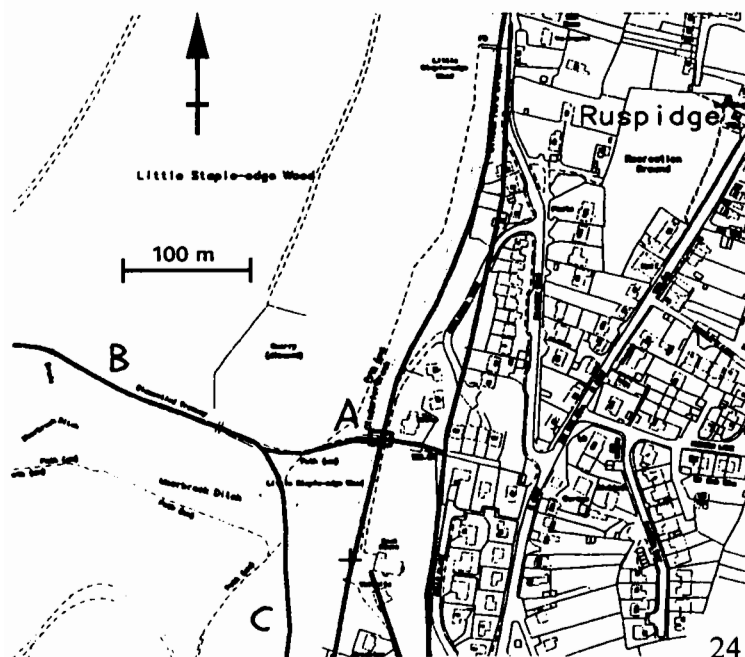
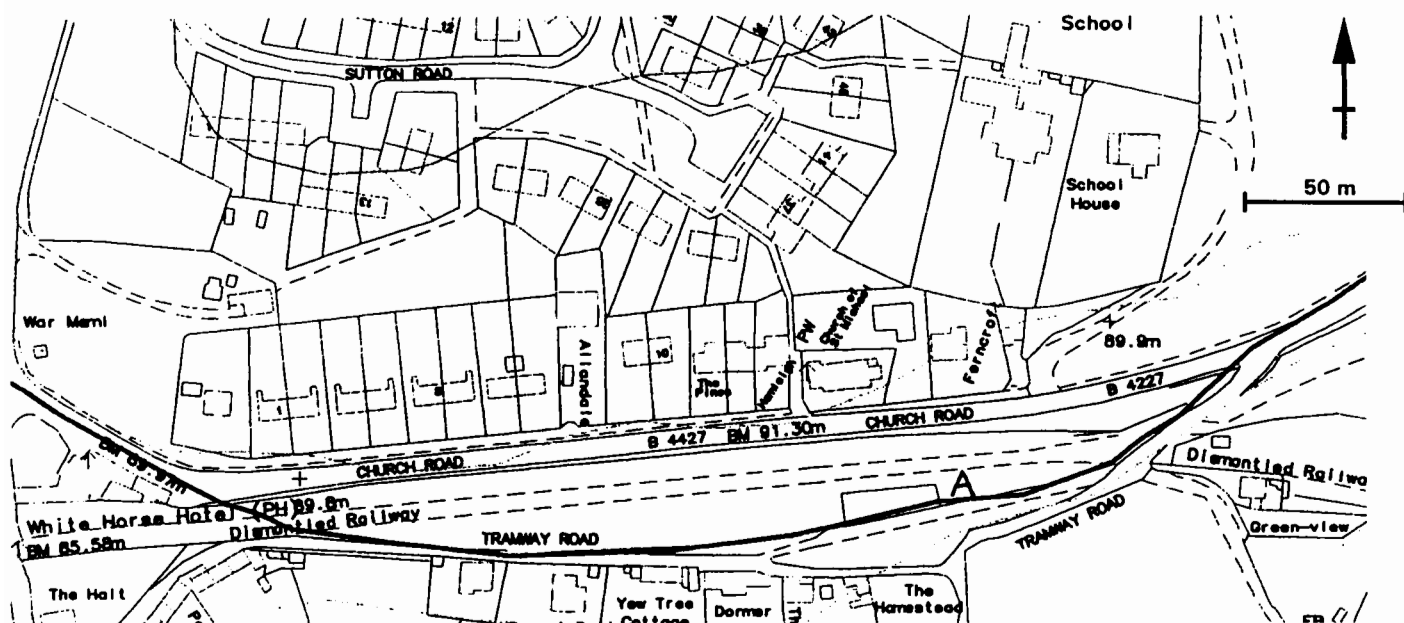
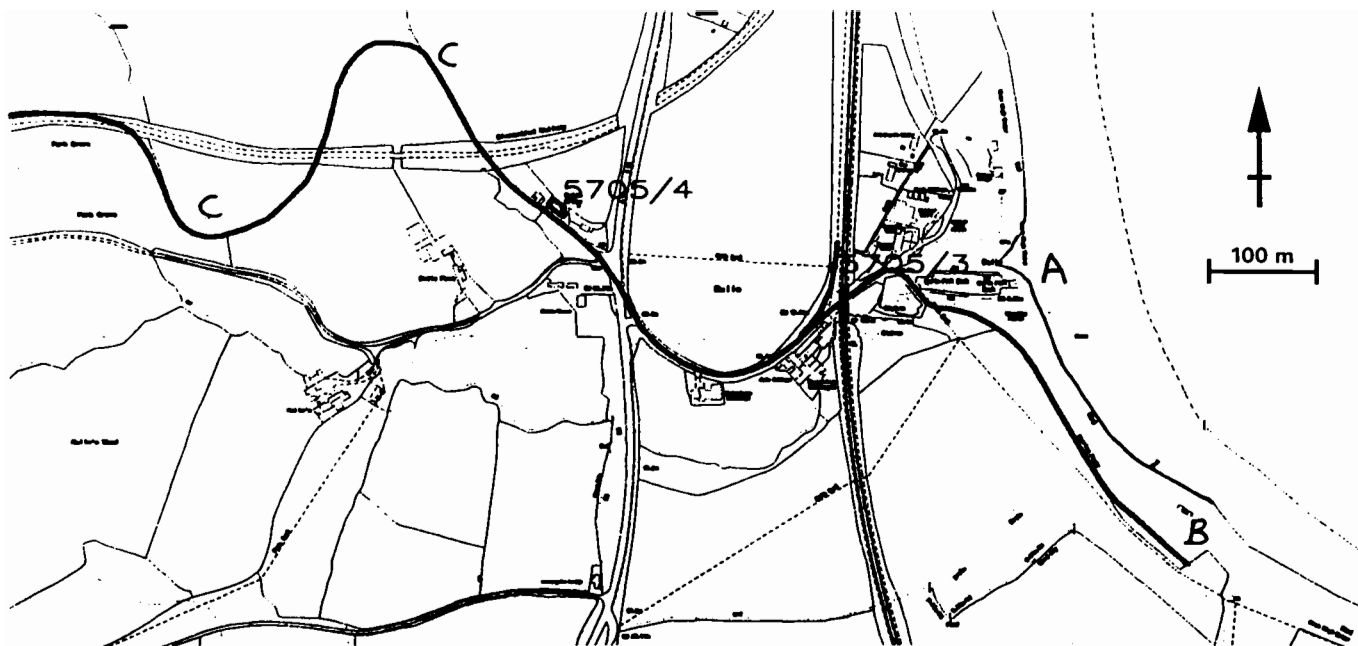
Only a small proportion of the area has been covered so far, and much remains to be done. It is hoped to continue the work in 2001, once access to the Forest is possible, but it is not clear at the time of writing (March 2001), when this will be.

Acknowledgements

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References

- 1 Morris, R. J. (1997) *The Forest of Dean Tramroad*, Coleford.
- 2 Morris p.16
- 3 National Monuments Record, Swindon, CPE/UK/1913, Frame 3155, Library No. 538, 30 Dec. 1946; and OS/70123, Frame 194, Library No. 10522, 24 May 1970.
- 4 Ayleford Forge (Morris p.16); Bradley Foundry (SMR).
- 5 Morris implies that the tramroad line descending via Tramway Road was the mainline, rather than the private branch recorded on the SMR See the captions to plates 6 and 7 and the Ruspidge paragraph on page 48. This route seems unlikely, since the mainline would have to climb from near the north portal of Bluerock tunnel, just above the level of the Cinderford Brook, to high on the hillside above (as shown in Morris's plate 6 upper left) only to take the long descent to regain the level of the brook just north of Cullamore. The route shown on the SMR map, which follows the valley floor, is taken from an 1856 Board of Guardians map (the SMR department kindly supplied a photocopy) which shows the then recently completed railway and vestigial sections of the mainline tramroad not directly overbuilt by the railway, including that part later overlaid by the railway's Shakemantle siding. Also shown is the private tramroad from near Cullamore Bridge, running south via Tramway Road to its terminus on the hillside high above Shakemantle, the railway and the mainline of the Forest of Dean tramroad.
- 6 Morris p.51



Top. Figure 1. A: Bullo Pill dock
B: tramroad extension to Box Meadow wharf.
C: "ox-bows" on route to Haie Hill.

Centre. Figure 2. A: "The Dram" at Soudley.

Left. Figure 3. A: Cullamore Bridge.
B: Lightmoor private tramroad crossing brook and F.O.D tramroad to junction with private tramroad Ruspidge to Shakemantle (figure 4, F)
C: Staple Edge Quarry tramroad.

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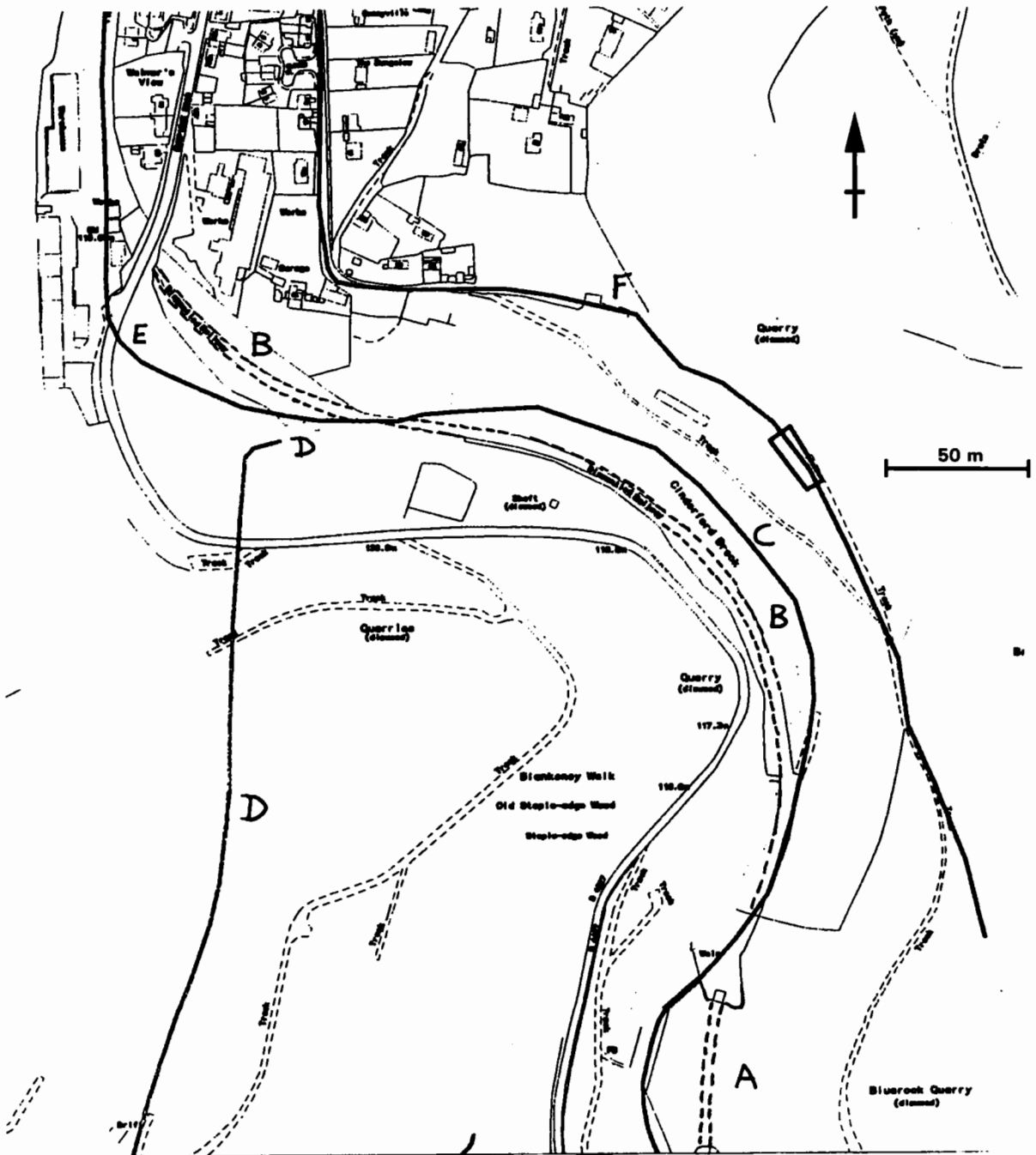


Figure 4. A: Bluerock Tunnel. B: course of railway. C: F.O.D tramroad, later railway loop siding. D: Quidchurch incline. E: course of F.O.D tramroad, now obliterated. F: course of private tramroad from Ruspidge via Tramway Road; from letter southwards has been quarried away.

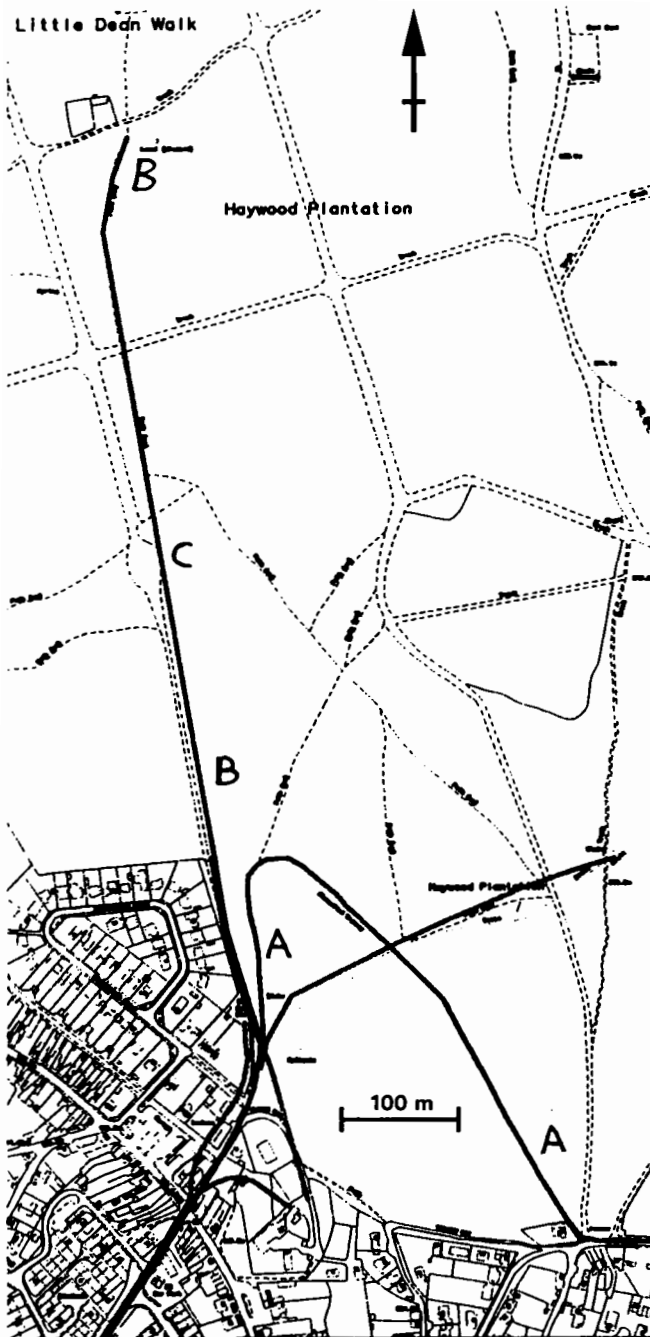


Figure 5. A: track of St. Annals tramroad from Albion road. B: presumed tramroad to Haywood Level. C: presumed site of Morris's "cutting".

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