The Wolfampcote Loop

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After a brief sortie from the 1997 Braunston Show, further investigation was obviously needed - in particular as to whether the aqueduct was still standing. Last year, after crossing the puddle banks and following the west end of the loop, it became unclear after a few hundred yards which way to proceed so this year we started from the east.

In 1997 we had also walked, on our return, the track from the remains of Wolfampcote Priory across the fields to the A45 bridge by the Mill House pub/restaurant. The line of the old canal can clearly be seen along here until the point where it disappears into the railway embankment. Ironically the, now closed, railway was built *after* the canal became disused and so there is no bridge, and little to be seen on this section, so this year we took a different route. Across the road from the former Nursers yard - originally part of the loop but now Braunston Marina - a lane leads up a steep hill. From this a footpath leads due south (ie through one of the Show car parks). This provides some spectacular views and the aqueduct site is visible across the valley in some trees and scrub.

Eventually the footpath reaches a track which, if you follow it downhill to the right, leads you right to the aqueduct. Yes it does still exist - as you can see in the accompanying photographs. The main aqueduct has two arches but there is a third side arch on the eastern side. About 3m (10ft) has fallen away on the southern (ie upstream) side and about 6m (20ft) on the north - but there is still a substantial bank remaining. The northern end of the arches must once have been curved to follow the line of the river. This section has now collapsed but the invert and line of the walls are still clearly visible underwater. There is also evidence of a former byweir from the navigation. The canal at the top of the bank has been infilled and the aqueduct now carries a track and serves as a bridge across the River Leam for the farmer.



Aqueduct: North/downstream side

The River Leam you may remember was one of the rivers worst affected by the severe Easter floods. There were signs of this still visible at the aqueduct. The aqueduct must have acted as a partial dam, as flood debris was visible some six feet above normal water level and the arches, but this is barely visible in the photographs. The most surprising though was the heap of rubble just downstream of the side arch. At first we thought this was just something dumped by the farmer then we noticed the significant pebble content and the unusual deployment and we realised that this was actually old aqueduct brickwork which had been scoured and deposited by flood water. The brick sizes confirmed this - revealing the amazing power of the water flow even this far upstream at the time of the floods!



Just west of aqueduct

To the east, a depression in the ground still marks the canal bed heading back towards the railway - and Nursers. To the west, a short section, used as a dump, still contains black water. Continuing westwards a bridleway leading back toward Wolfampcote Priory parallels and then crosses the line. Little then remains, apart from the former

towpath hedge, for about ½ mile until a boggy channel reappears approaching the former Great Central Railway embankment. A short infilled section, a perfectly preserved section and then complete obliteration all the way to the other railway follow.



Adjacent to the Great Central bank.

At this point, the Great Central crossed the former railway line through Braunston but the embankment of the former appears to have been used to fill in the cutting of the latter and an enlarged field is all that remains. To the north and east of the former crossing though, the canal emerges and has been recently dredged. There is even a fully dredged winding hole! This has all been done for anglers who now fish the last 1/4 mile back to the new main line past what is known as Wolfampcote Manor on some maps - but just appears to be a large farmhouse. On this section also, is the site of the former 50 yard Wolfampcote Tunnel, but this has either been infilled *or* has been demolished and replaced with a pipe.

This last 1/4 mile was reputedly the last to be used commercially (apart of course from the section now in Braunston Marina) to take coal to the hamlet of Wolfampcote. This presumably explains the winding hole already referred to. Most of this area also is free public access. Ambiguously, the “end” signs at the track by Wolfampcote Manor refer to this freedom not the separate right of way which exists back to the bridge over the mainline. To the south of the railway though, the footpaths already referred to are the only rights of way so permission should be sought to access other sections.



Winding hole and site of tunnel beyond.