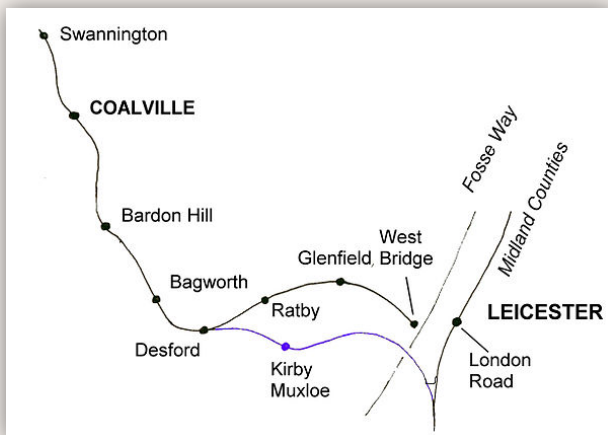


THE LEICESTER AND SWANNINGTON RAILWAY

The large quantities of coal in the area were originally carried to Leicester, by pack mules, and later when the roads improved, by horse and cart. Pack mules could only carry two panniers. This was slow and expensive. The Hinckley to Melbourne turnpike was constructed in 1750, and ran through Newbold village via Melbourne Road to the Lount crossroads.

By the late 1820's, north west Leicestershire mine owners faced competition from Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, as this coal could be taken to Leicester more cheaply, because of the use of barges along the River Soar canal, built in 1776 and the Soar Navigation extension in 1796. A new, more efficient way of transporting NW Leicestershire coal was necessary.

William Stenson, was a coalmine owner from Whitwick, who, amongst other mine owners, considered a railway to bring coal into Leicester. He was aware of the success of the Stockton to Darlington Railway and of the Liverpool to Manchester line which was then under construction. In 1828 William Stenson approached John Ellis, a successful farmer in Beaumont Leys, who agreed to discuss the matter with George Stephenson to check the possibility of a route from Swannington to Leicester, which had been surveyed by Stenson. Stephenson was enthusiastic and immediately came to Leicestershire with his son Robert. The Leicester and Swannington Company was formed in a meeting at the Bell Hotel in Humberstone Gate. However, George Stephenson had so many commitments, that his son Robert Stephenson was appointed as chief engineer. The Stephensons felt this railway was so important, that they moved to Ravenstone and themselves set up a mining company which worked two colliery sites at Snibston.



The Swannington to Leicester Railway was constructed in 1832 by Robert Stephenson. It was 4ft 8½ in wide (now known as standard gauge) using edgerails. Like other early railways, it followed the canal approach of level sections linked by inclines (taking the place of the canal's locks). The small power of the steam engines meant that where the gradient was steep, wagons were hauled up, and lowered by rope, powered by a static steam engine situated at the top of the hill. One such incline was the Swannington Incline with a 1 in 17 gradient. The

system operated for 115 years and the original Swannington steam engine is now in the National Railway Museum in York.

Where the line travelled by Long Lane, at the bottom of the Bardon Hill, two more mines were established and the area became a new town – Coalville.

As the line was only the fifth in Britain, new engineering techniques, particularly for the tunnels, had to be invented, tested and approved. It opened six years before the London and Birmingham railway.



Leicester and Swannington Passenger Ticket