

Glimpses of the Past

by George Toms

No. 15. The Rempstone Footpath

Several issues ago brief mention was made of the elevated footpath that crossed through the Falcon Works years ago. Older Brush people know of it, but others have expressed surprise over the fact, so here is its story.

A footpath linking Loughborough and Rempstone was well-established by the time the Falcon Works was founded on the present site in the 1860s. One assumes that it had existed for several centuries, if not longer. Our network of pathways and tracks dates back to pre-Roman times.

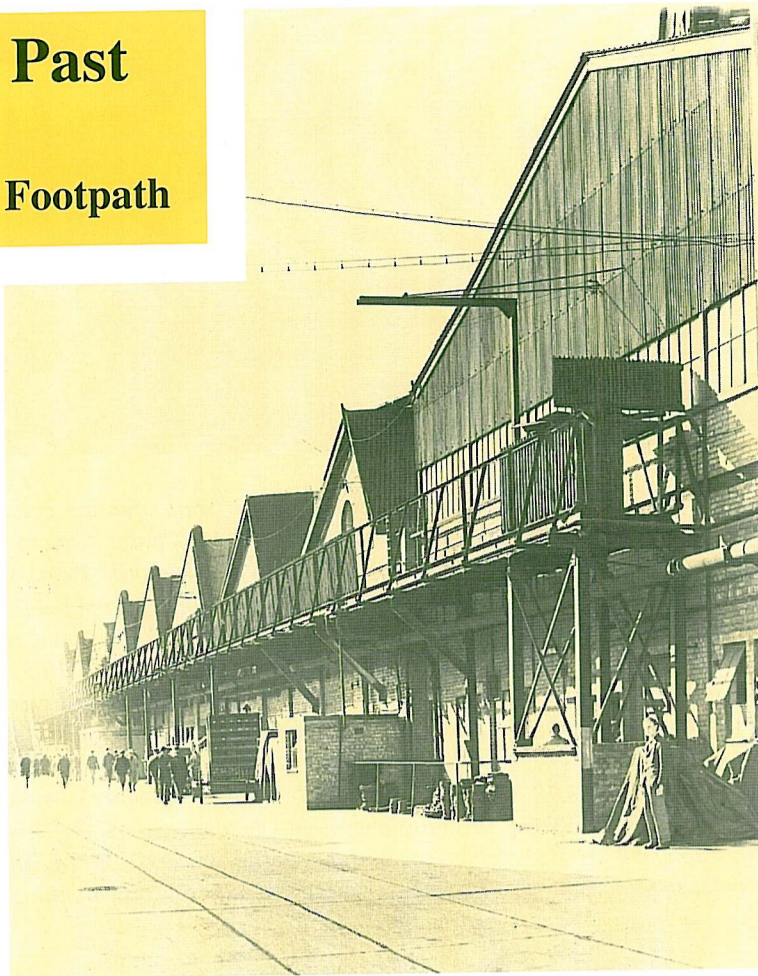
Its course left the town and headed across the Loughborough Meadows, the only obstacles locally encountered being the Summerpool Brook and the River Soar. The Leicester Navigation first interrupted its course and then, in the 1840s, the Midland Counties Railway. The latter necessitated an iron footbridge over it, enclosing with a lattice-work of iron strips. A flight of steps returned the path to ground level near a field boundary, which was later to become the boundary of the Falcon Works for a few years. It posed no problem over the 1865 to 1898 period, but then the works was expanded to beyond the footpath. This was the time when electric tramcar business increased and Brush erected new shops around the turn of the century. The first tramcar shop built at this time has for some years been the home of the Central Machine Shop, with the adjacent shops (12 and 43) following soon afterwards. One result of these new shops being built was that the public footpath ran through the works along a yard crossed by the railway tracks of the works internal railway system – a less than ideal situation for all concerned.

By April 1900 a temporary level crossing was already in existence along the works section of the footpath and approval was granted by the Town Council during the following month for an additional crossing at the Meadows end. By August 1901 it was obvious that the footpath had become a nuisance to the Brush Company and proposals were submitted to the Town Council to have it raised well above yard level. The Town Clerk made aware the various proceedings and formalities required by law and Brush withdrew its plans the following month.

The next Brush move was to request closure of the offending section, as it was considered unnecessary, presumably because alternative ways existed. To this the Town Council agreed, so long as Brush bore all costs incurred.

The stoppage move soon failed; it is not clear why, but in November 1901 an extension to the Midland Railway footbridge was under consideration as part of the revived plan to raise the works section well above yard level. Clearly this was a non-preferred option, as closure was still desirable to Brush.

At the cost to Brush therefore, the extended footbridge was built in 1901/2. It was elevated at a height of about sixteen feet above the yard level and carried on brackets let into the end walls of the various aforementioned tramcar shops. It was maintained at Brush expense. There the matter rested until July 1903 when Brush sought approval for the making of a pedestrian entrance into the works "for the convenience of their work-people". No objection was raised by the Highways Committee from whom approval was sought, and steps were provided for access into the works yard near to the present-day Old Foundry. Thus regular flows of workers to and from the Falcon Works became normal above the Midland Railway tracks and yard and in Glebe Street beyond.



The elevated footpath (c.1950) attached to CMS and the present Repair Shop. Access from the Midland Railway (seen in left distance) was from steps over the railway line just north of the existing pedestrian bridge.



Corner of 13 Repair Shop (c.1950) looking towards the Loughborough Meadows, where the footpath dropped to ground level by steps, which had been removed by this date.



The Brush site (c.1906) showing the route of the footpath and old tramcar test track.

View from the footpath (c.1947) near its beginning in the Midland Station yard, showing the original Transformer block.

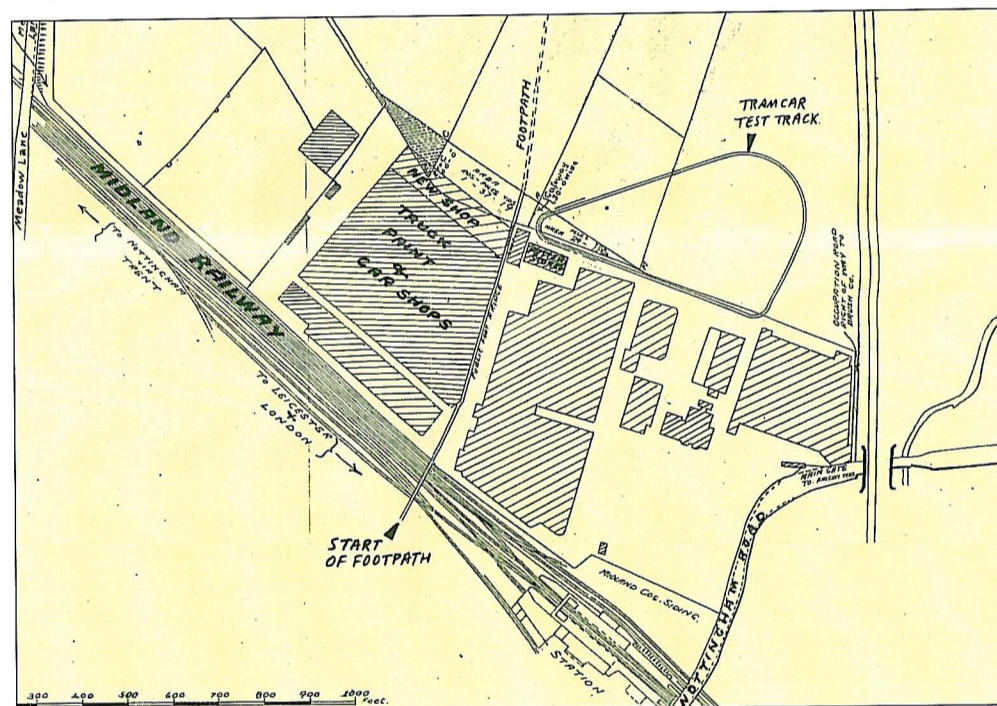
In July 1905, following the erection of the Steel Car Shop (now the Service Division's new repair shop) a new rail link was required around the back of the works and the need to provide a new level crossing arose. Brush proposed that non-climbable fences should protect the footpath and that two-way gates should protect pedestrians from works railway operations. Consent was granted by the Council.

With this latest stage accomplished the matter rested for only a few months. In March of the following year Brush found it necessary to seek permission to alter the position and raise the level of the crossing by over four feet, together with a flight of steps linking the different ground levels of the works and the Meadows. The new arrangement met with approval, but the plan was soon amended by Brush, who sought to provide a bridge over the crossing as well! Thus sanctioned, the footpath stabilised for a number of years. It was elevated from Glebe Street to the Steel Car Shop, and continued along the ground through the "level" crossing and down to the Meadows.

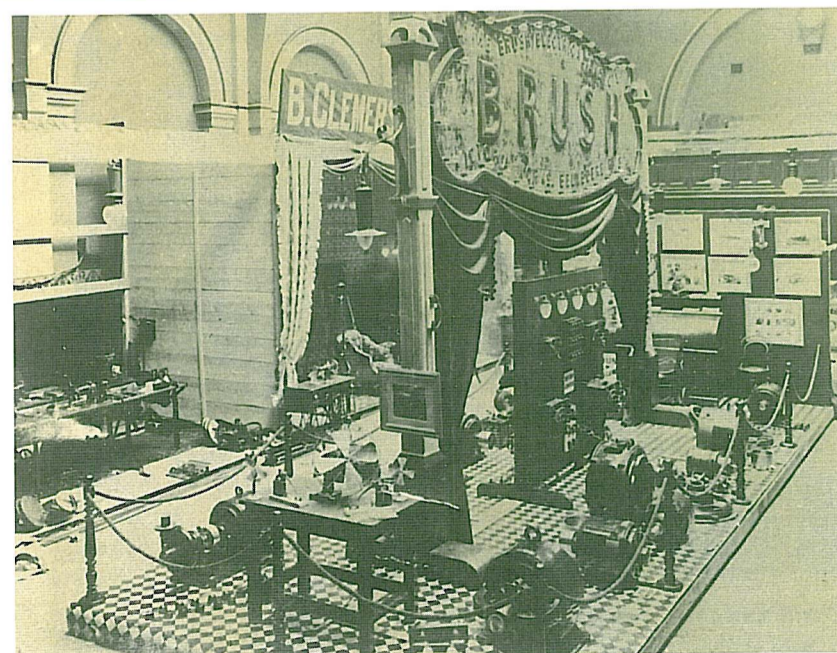
The works entrance section was a popular meeting point at lunchtime, when children brought their father's "snap". The elevated section was popular with children, who dropped missiles upon unsuspecting people below. It was not popular with the Company however, because as time passed the need for repairs became more frequent.

Following the outbreak of World War 2 in 1939, Brush saw the opportunity to have the footpath closed as a security measure, albeit not permanently. This left the railway footbridge and the works access intact.

It was not until 1956 that the whole section between Glebe Street and the Meadows, with parts unused and unsafe, was closed. The footpath was diverted, starting adjacent to the Nottingham Road car park entrance and linking with the old course on the Meadows, alongside the Great Central railway embankment. Today, it is under-used, most people preferring to use the GCR track or cross from Meadow Lane. In the works one can still see the truncated supports, which still protrude from the end walls of the old tramcar shops.



Brush Exhibition c1900



As a contrast to current exhibition stand design, it was interesting to receive this copy print from David Bushell (Personnel), showing a Brush stand believed to be 1900-1904. The venue was Loughborough Town Hall and shows part of an exhibition held there of

local trades and businesses. Part of a sign can be seen of Clemersons, the large Loughborough firm which ran shops selling a wide variety of goods from toys to furniture in the town in addition to a removals business.