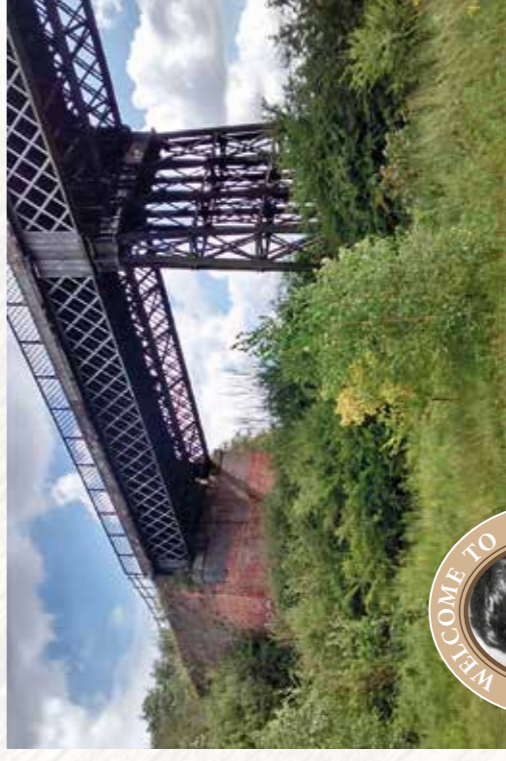


**Discover this magnificent wrought iron railway viaduct and a wealth of heritage in this corner of DH Lawrence country**



# Bennerley Viaduct

**THE IRON GIANT OF THE EREWASH VALLEY**

Rediscovering

## Location

Bennerley Viaduct spans the Nottinghamshire/ Derbyshire border between Awsworth and Cotmanhay



**Walking & Cycling**  
A great way to get to the Bennerley area is by bike or on foot along the many paths and trails. Canals pass close by both ends of the viaduct and the Erewash Valley Trail follows these for much of its route. This beautiful 30 mile largely traffic-free circular trail has multiple access points. Visit: [www.erewashvalleytrail.co.uk](http://www.erewashvalleytrail.co.uk) for information.

**Rail links**  
Langley Mill is the closest train station from where it's a pleasant 3miles/5km ride south along the Erewash Canal to the Bennerley area.

Long Eaton train station lies 8miles/13km to the south from where it's an excellent ride north along the canal to Bennerley.  
Visit: [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) for train times

**A NEW STATION IS CURRENTLY BEING BUILT FOR ILKESTON.** Once completed it will be a short bike ride or walk to Bennerley.

**Bus links**  
From Nottingham catch Trent Barton's 'The Two' to Bridge Street, Cotmanhay from where it is a short walk to the Erewash Canal. Visit: [www.trentbarton.co.uk/services/two](http://www.trentbarton.co.uk/services/two) for bus times.

From Derby catch Trent Barton's 'Ilkeston Flyer' to Bridge Street, Cotmanhay from where it is a short walk to the Erewash Canal. Visit: [www.trentbarton.co.uk/services/ilkestonflyer](http://www.trentbarton.co.uk/services/ilkestonflyer) for bus times.



LOTTERY FUNDED

**Facebook:** [Bennerley Viaduct Friends Group](http://www.bennerleyviaduct.org.uk)

**Email:** [MidlandsandEast@sustrans.org.uk](mailto:MidlandsandEast@sustrans.org.uk)

**Web:** [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

**Phone Sustrans on:** 0115 853 2953

Find out more about Sustrans and the progress on conserving Bennerley Viaduct and bringing it into use as a walking and cycling route:



Photo by Steve Cole

**Sustrans**

JOIN THE MOVEMENT



## Find Out More

here: [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

Sustrans is the sustainable transport charity that's enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day and the charity behind the National Cycle Network. Find out more about Sustrans

## Bennerley's Heritage Value puts it in the top 8% of listed structures in England.

Built between May 1876 and November 1877 to carry the Great Northern Railway's line over the Erewash Valley, Bennerley Viaduct has great heritage value. It is an outstanding example of the railway architecture of the time surviving in an almost unaltered state. It is also one of only two wrought iron viaducts left in England. The other is Meldon Viaduct in Devon, however Bennerley is much longer. Because of its importance and to help protect it, it has been given Grade II\* listed status since 1974 which puts it in the top 8% of listed structures in England. It spans the Erewash Valley for 440 metres (approximately 1/4 mile) with its deck standing 18 metres (60 feet) above the valley floor.

## Future Plans

The viaduct came into the ownership of Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity, in 1998 as part of a deal to convert 200 miles of disused railways into cycling and walking paths. Working with communities and partner organisations, Sustrans wants Bennerley Viaduct conserved and brought into public use by building a path across it. It will connect with a network of routes including the Erewash Valley Trail and will be a key link in the route between Nottingham & Derby.

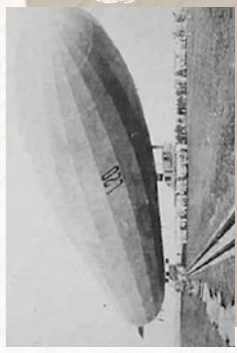


## Zepplin Attack!



Bennerley also survived a Zepplin raid. On Monday 31 January 1916 a fleet of 9 airships, with Liverpool and Manchester as their targets, crossed the North Sea. Due to bad weather, basic navigation and mechanical problems some of the airships became lost or turned back.

One of the airships, the L20 captained by Kapitaneutnant Franz Stabbert, it is thought, was attracted to the glow coming from Bennerley Ironworks and at 8.20 pm loomed over the Erewash Valley. Here several high explosive bombs were dropped with one narrowly missing the viaduct. The bomb fell onto the railway below damaging the line and destroying the signal box. The L20 then headed towards Stanton Ironworks where it dropped 15 more bombs. Two men were killed by the raid: James Hall and Walter Wilson.



## The Survivor

Bennerley Viaduct is a remarkable survivor. Apart from Meldon Viaduct, all other wrought iron viaducts in England have gone. Most were demolished after the lines they carried were closed following the Beeching report. Fortunately the first demolition attempt of Bennerley Viaduct failed because the costs were too high. In 1974 its heritage value was recognised by English Heritage who listed it as Grade II\* affording it some protection. The second attempt to demolish it started in 1975 when British Rail applied for permission, but Broxtowe and Erewash Borough Councils refused. In 1980 a Public Inquiry was held and because of local demand to keep it, demolition was held off. A Bennerley Viaduct Preservation Trust was established and plans to re-open Bennerley Viaduct as a cycleway were put forward.

## The Bennerley Viaduct Story

The Midland Railway Company which formed in 1844 had a monopoly of trade coming into Derby and sole access to the thriving collieries of the Erewash Valley. Colliery owners, businessmen from Derby and directors of the Great Northern Railway Company were keen to break the Midland's stranglehold on trade and they were successful in securing permission from Parliament to construct a new line from Staffordshire to Nottingham via Derby. This 'Friargate' line named after its Derby station was challenging to build as the natural routes following river valleys had been taken up by the Midland. One of the engineering challenges was to take the line across the Erewash Valley and over the Midland's Railway, the River Erewash and the Nottingham and Erewash Canals. To do this Bennerley Viaduct was designed.

Due to extensive mining in the area the Great Northern Railway's designers needed a design for Bennerley Viaduct which would avoid the problems of unstable ground. Resident Engineer Samuel Abbott and Chief Engineer Richard Johnson came up with a wrought iron latticework design that was light in weight and could be built quickly and cheaply.

The ironwork was prefabricated by Eastwood, Swinger & Co. of Derby and then assembled on site by the railway construction firm, Benton and Woodiwiss, the metalwork held together by rivets and cotter pins. Construction was completed by November 1877 and the viaduct opened early in 1878.

The line was very profitable and extensions were built into the heart of the coalfield. A familiar sight on the viaduct was steam locomotives hauling coal wagons from the nearby collieries. The line also meant that Skegness became the locals' seaside resort, reachable on day trips from Ilkeston.

In 1948, the railways were nationalised. In 1963, following a report by Dr Beeching, the government made plans to close thousands of miles of railway lines and over 2000 stations. The Friargate Line was closed with the last passenger train crossing the viaduct in 1964 and the last goods train in 1968.



rediscovering

# THE IRON GIANT OF THE EREWASH VALLEY

## Bennerley Viaduct forms a grand centrepiece to a part of the Erewash Valley rich in industrial and natural heritage

### Paths & Trails

The Erewash Valley is great for walking and cycling. The map shows public paths and trails around Bennerley Viaduct including part of the Erewash Valley Trail - a 30 mile circular trail along both sides of the Erewash Valley and following the canals most of the way. Visit [www.erewashvalleytrail.co.uk](http://www.erewashvalleytrail.co.uk) for information. Please drop your pace when cycling on canal towpaths.



### Erewash Canal

Running for 11¼ miles between the River Trent and Langley Mill, the Erewash Canal was completed in 1779, built largely to transport coal from the Erewash Valley pits.



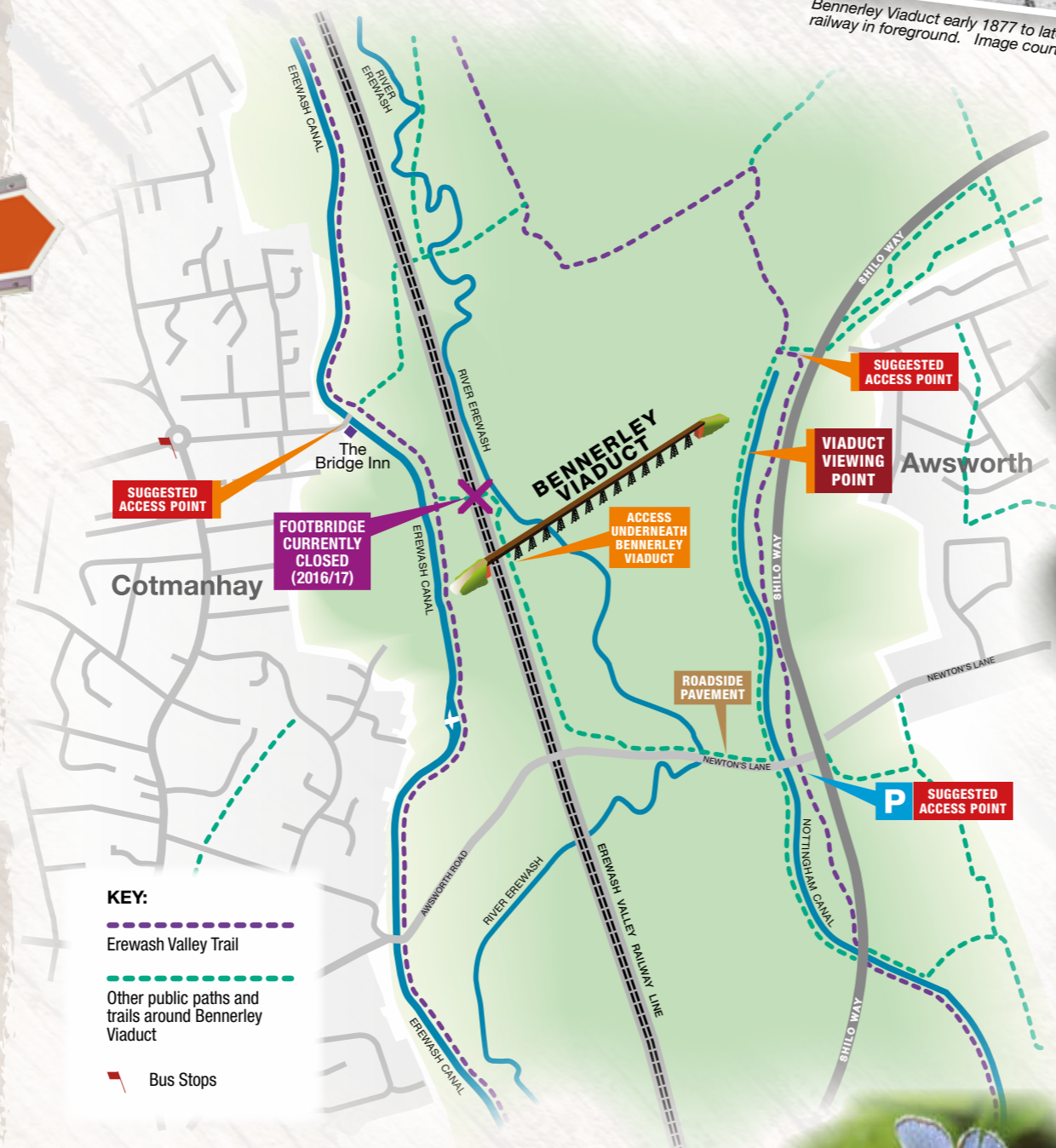
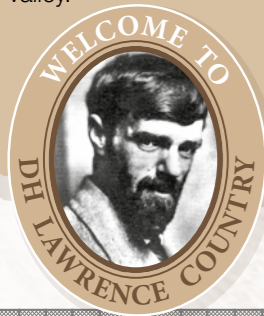
More commercially successful than the Nottingham Canal it was never taken over by the railways. Managed today by the Canal and River Trust, it is still open to boats for its whole length and connects to the inland waterway network.

### DH Lawrence Country

DH Lawrence knew the area well. He refers to the rattle of trains going over Bennerley Viaduct and the glow of the ironworks which lay immediately to its north. His fiancée lived in nearby Cossall so he would have walked from his home in Eastwood around this part of the valley.



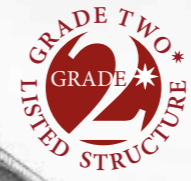
DH Lawrence museum in Eastwood.



Scale: Mile / Kilometre



Bennerley Viaduct early 1877 to late 1878 showing contractor's temporary railway in foreground. Image courtesy of [www.picturethepast.org.uk](http://www.picturethepast.org.uk)



### Nottingham Canal

Opened in 1796 the Nottingham Canal met the Erewash Canal and the Cromford Canal in Langley Mill. Driven out of business by the railways it closed to traffic in 1937 and only short sections are still in water. North of Newton's Lane, much of the canal was lost to opencast coal mining in the 1980's; however, the stretch by Bennerley Viaduct was reinstated on the original course. Today the Nottingham Canal is a haven for wildlife and has Local Nature Reserve status.



The former Great Northern Railway bridge over the Nottingham Canal. Photo courtesy of Michael Golds

### Erewash Valley Railway

The railway line that runs under Bennerley Viaduct today was originally built by the Erewash Valley Railway Company to compete with the canals in carrying valuable coal traffic. Opening in 1847 it soon became profitable and was quickly absorbed into the Midland Railway Company. The Great Northern Railway which Bennerley Viaduct was constructed for was built to compete with The Midland Railway for this lucrative trade.



Barn Owl  
Photographer: Paul Shaw.

Water Vole  
Photographer: Richard Pitman.

### Wildlife

A rich variety of wildlife habitats are found around Bennerley Viaduct with the whole valley forming an important wildlife corridor. Plant life includes several orchid species while animal life includes grass snake, great crested newt and water vole. In the river white-clawed crayfish and otter have been spotted while kingfishers breed in the banks. Barn owls are frequently seen on the viaduct, their presence indicating a rich supply of smaller animals in the area. Bats fly around the viaduct in the warmer months in the late evening, feeding on the rich supply of insects.



Sedge Warbler  
Photographer: Paul Shaw.

### River Erewash & floodplain

The River Erewash gives its name to the valley and forms the county boundary between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire for much of its course between Kirkby-in-Ashfield and the River Trent. It flows south under Bennerley Viaduct into an area that seasonally floods providing an important site for wetland birds.



View south from the viaduct showing the River Erewash and its floodplain.



Common Blue Butterfly  
Photographer: Paul Shaw.



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