

Fairfield for Droylsden

Fairfield station sat in what was once known as the Township of Audenshaw, close to the border with Manchester. Today it resides in what is now Tameside, a sprawling metropolitan borough that encompasses neighbouring Ashton-under-Lyne, Droylsden and Stalybridge. The suffix 'for Droylsden' was, in typical railway fashion, a trifle disingenuous, the district in question being some way off, on the north side of Ashton New Road. Fairfield is best known for its famous Moravian Settlement established in the township as far back as 1783; the Moravians were the oldest Free Church in northern Europe. Fairfield became a focal point on the GC (then still MS&L) main line when the 6½ mile connecting line opened in 1892 from here down through Fallowfield to Chorlton-cum-Hardy in South Manchester. There it joined the Midland's main line to Derby out of Manchester

E.M. Johnson

Central. The original Fairfield station dated from 1841 and this served for many years until, a quarter of a mile or so to the west, a second station opened in 1892, with the Fallowfield line. When the line between Ardwick and Hyde Junction was widened in the early 1900s this second station was rebuilt to accommodate no less than six platforms. After local traffic through Fallowfield ceased in 1958 the two platforms at the south side fell into disuse. Further rationalisation came in 1973 when the four-track alignment from Gorton through to Guide Bridge was done away with. Only two platforms remain today, bringing the wheel of progress back, full circle, to 1841.

Fairfield's most famous resident, at least so far as the railway goes, was the GCR's locomotive engineer, J.G. Robinson. 'JGR' arrived at nearby 'Boothdale Villa' from Heaton Chapel, near Stockport, in 1903. Here the Robinson family resided until 1915 when they upped sticks and moved to nearby 'Mere Bank House', their home until

the end of the Great Central in 1922. It is still shown on the 1934 Survey, and still at a decent distance from the terraced tide.

Audenshaw and the Lost Junction

Moving away from Fairfield in the direction of Guide Bridge the railway continues through the town of Audenshaw. Historically the area was a mix of farms interspersed with small industrial premises – brickworks, a leather works and a wadding factory. At the western side of the town was a well-known marmalade and jam works; this was Robertsons of Golly fame, and many duffle bags, of countless spotters, held a sandwich full of the company's jam deep inside, wrapped in greaseproof of course – no baco foil then. The landscape on the railway's south side had been altered drastically in 1884 when

the Audenshaw reservoirs were commissioned. These held some 1.4 million gallons of water piped down

from the Longdendale Valley (close to Woodhead) to supply the needs of Manchester. The reservoirs survive today, fringed by the M60 motorway which occasionally floods due to seepage.

Some three-quarters of a mile east of Fairfield Junction was Audenshaw's 'lost junction'. Part of the Oldham, Ashton & Guide Bridge Railway (OA&GB) this was Audenshaw Junction where a curve, 28 chains long, veered north to join the connecting line running north from the GC main line at Stockport Junction, Guide Bridge via Crowthorn Junction and Ashton Moss to join the L&Y's main line (the 'Ashton branch') from Manchester Victoria to Stalybridge. A short distance along the L&Y main line a second section of the OA&GB, three miles long, reached Oldham (Clegg Street). A joint concern managed by the GCR and the LNW, the OA&GB was incorporated in 1857 and survived as an independent entity until Nationalisation. The connecting curve from Audenshaw

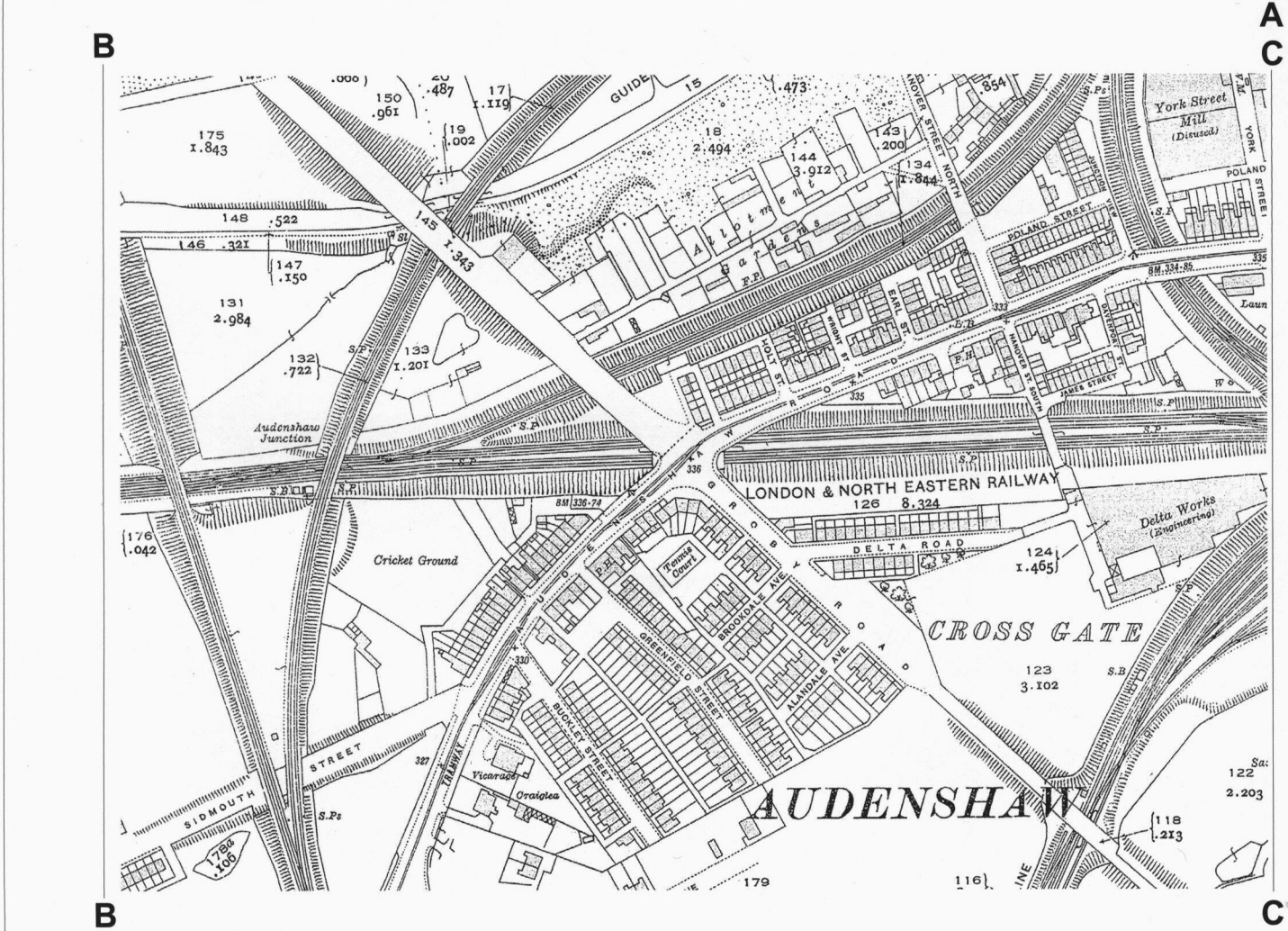
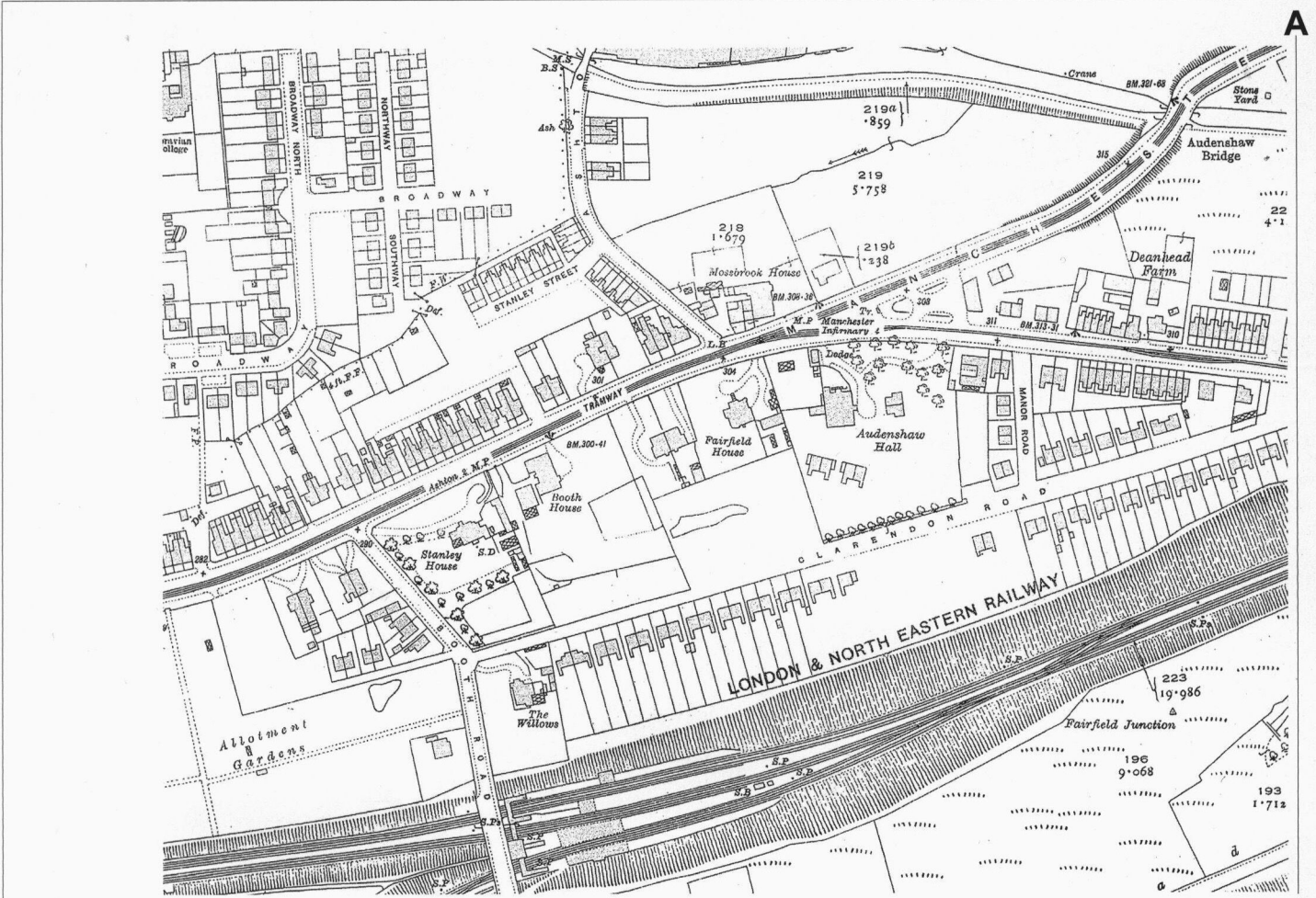
Pictures taken at Audenshaw Junction are, to say the least, rare. So it was with delight that I stumbled some years ago across a number of glass plates, believed to have been taken by the Manchester press photographer, William Lees. Bill Lees worked for the old Kemsley newspaper group in Withy Grove and, apart from being a competent photographer, was an ardent railway enthusiast to boot. Little of his work has come to light, so BRILL readers with an LNER bent can indulge themselves with this splendid shot of B7 class No.5482 storming along the up slow line in the mid-1930s with a special (No.465), probably for one of the East Coast resorts. Three ex-GC main line coaches, the first a clerestory, the second a vehicle freshly ex-works complete with white roof (that wouldn't last long in Manchester back then!) form the front of the train. Notice the middle section is made up of eight six-wheelers – then still in use on former GC suburban lines out of the city – a fourth main line coach brings up the rear. (Anyone for a 400-mile round trip in a six-wheeled coach?) Before you admire Mr Bound's splendid signals, spare a thought for the lamp men who had to perform trapeze-like manoeuvres up spindly ladders in all weathers to replenish the oil lamps for the top home and distant arms. The semaphore arms are air-operated, the cylinders can be seen below the arms. Branching left, about a hundred yards ahead of the loco is the OA&GB connecting line, avoiding Guide Bridge. Photograph William Lees.

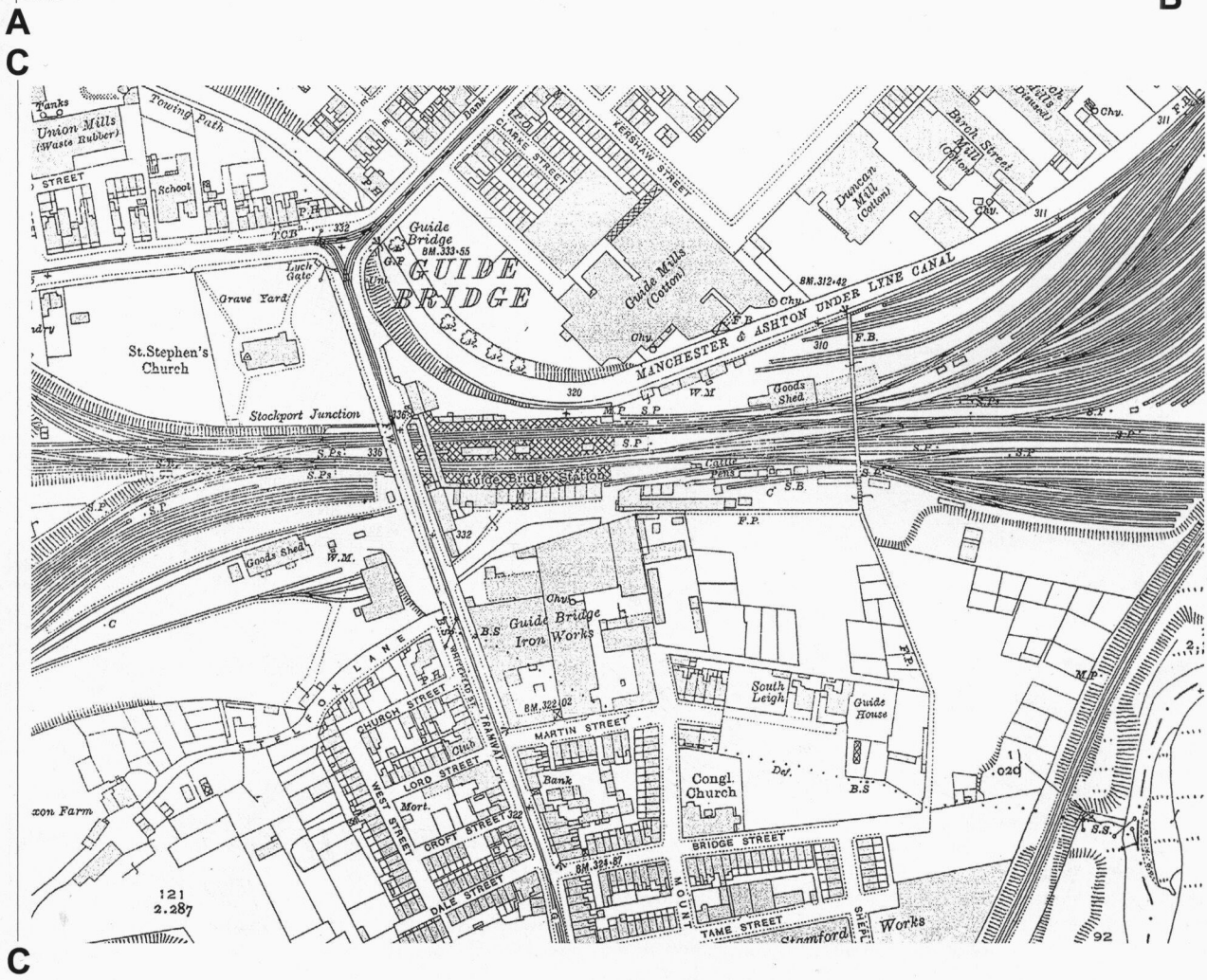
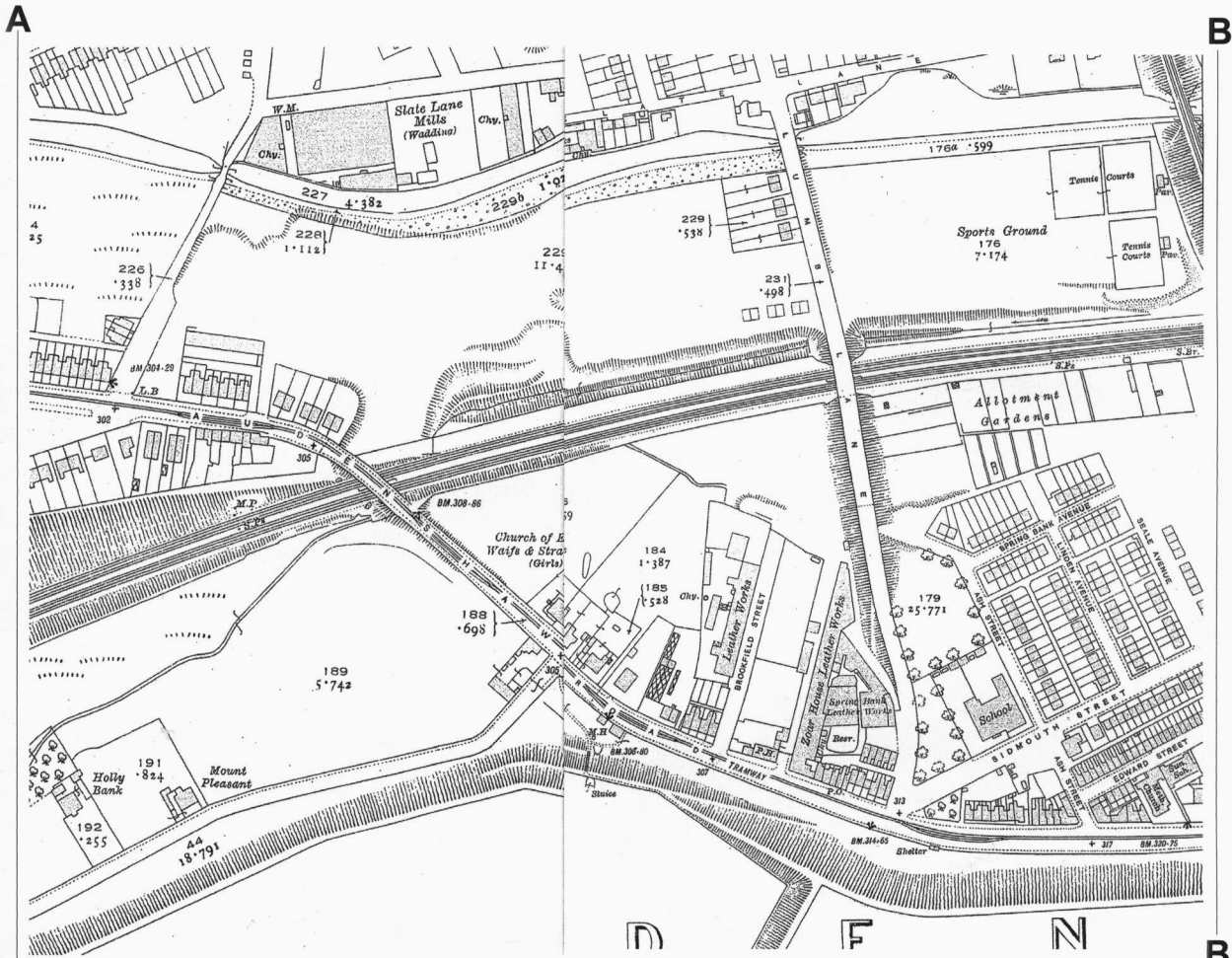


Britain's New Railway

Steam and Electric Traction From Manchester To Woodhead

Part Four: Fairfield for Droylsden; Audenshaw and the Lost Junction





Junction was taken out of use around 1939-40. Little seems to be known as to what traffic used it, although an MS&L timetable of April 1877 shows a service from Liverpool to Oldham which travelled this way to avoid Guide Bridge. After closure of the Guide Bridge avoiding line the crossovers from fast to slow lines and vice-versa, part of the original junction layout, were retained and kept the 'Audenshaw Junction' title, though now under the control of the signalbox at Stockport Junction. Late in the evening of 20th May 1970 an EMU travelling from Manchester to Hadfield was derailed here, the unit overturning and causing two fatalities. Though mystifying the authorities at first, the accident was later traced to irregularities in Stockport Junction box where a signaller had been in the habit of short-circuiting the electric locking mechanism on the lever slides to speed up operations, thus allowing points to be moved earlier than they otherwise could be. The 'new' junction and the quadrupled track all disappeared in the 1973 rationalisation.



Fairfield as it was before the days of glass and plastic bus shelters and other abominations. This was the new (1892) station built to accommodate the MS&L's new railway via Fallowfield to Chorlton-cum-Hardy. This was a grand undertaking insofar as passenger accommodation went. The architecture had much in common with the four Fallowfield line stations: inlaid brickwork, neat little roof gables with stone lintels below with the station's name and opening year inscribed underneath. And don't miss that lovely little cupola on the roof and the bridges – blue engineering brick with inset panels and dressed stone copings. What a contrast to those Crewe 'sheds' used as stations over on the LNWR! This is July 13th 1974 and the station buildings are sadly on borrowed time; soon the demolition men will be arriving. The photograph is taken from the west side of Booth Road. The trees beyond lead to where 'JGR' lived; the site today of Fairfield Golf Club. That Hillman Imp must have the last word; '4CRY', was this HDB's vehicle? Surely not! Photograph Harold D. Bowtell, Manchester Locomotive Society.



No mistaking where we are on 16th April 1954, as C13 No.67422 rolls into Fairfield with the four-coach 9.30 am Manchester London Road-Macclesfield Central. The train is on the up fast; the slow lines – added in the early 20th century widening – are behind the island platform over to the right. Off to the left, just visible, the Fallowfield line curves away down towards Hyde Road. Notice the overhead cross-gantry for the electrification, then brand new. Heavily engineered and expensive, this was the 'Rolls-Royce' system needed for 1,500V dc. Photograph B.K.B. Green, Initial Photographics.



Clearing Fairfield, having come off the Fallowfield line, the driver of B1 No.61144 puts steam back on as his train crosses over on to the main line and heads along towards Guide Bridge. The train is the 10.17 am Manchester Central to Doncaster, on Friday 16th April 1954. Photograph B.K.B. Green, Initial Photographics.

Audenshaw Junction looking east towards Stockport Junction and Guide Bridge. A mixed freight moves along the up slow, while heading towards Manchester on the down slow is B1 No.61155 with an express, probably a Hull or Harwich boat train en route for Liverpool via Manchester Central. The photograph is taken from the embankment carrying the ex-LNW Denton Junction to Droydsden Junction line via Ashton Moss Junction. Known officially as the 'Ashton branch junction line', it was always 'the Snipe' to railwaymen, so-named after a local colliery and pub. Ahead is bridge No.19, recently renewed for the impending electrification, taking the short connection from Ashton Moss Junction to Crowthorn Junction. A third bridge, just visible, carries Groby Road at its junction with Audenshaw Road over the railway. In the foreground are the points of the fast to slow line crossovers where the 1970 derailment occurred. Today, the whole area has changed completely with the M60, Manchester ring road, striding noisily across the landscape. Photograph Geoff Parrish.

