Sorry if this post/report is somewhat brief, but despite being a member of Aditnow for a little while, much of my time has been spent ‘lurking’ in the background and learning from the other contributors of the forum, especially ICLOK. I must extend my gratitude to ICLOK, without whom I would’ve walked past many of the features without giving them so much as a second glance. In addition to my input, I’m sure ICLOK will be along shortly to add to my brief report with some more ‘meaty’ detail.

Whilst the itinerary for the day included sites beyond the remit of the Little Eaton & Denby Gangway, this report will adhere to the subject and associated mining sites.

The first site walkover was within locality of ‘Smithy Houses’ whereupon a small branch between the main line, to Denby Pottery was examined, with a relatively short (and heavily modified) bridge spanning the width of ‘Bottle Brook’ extending towards the existing pottery building in a roughly northwest to southeast trend. The bridge appears to have been rebuilt at some point due to the relatively ornate appearance of the supporting columns and railings in contrast with the poorly reconstructed bridge deck.

Both upstream and downstream of the bridge there were several square Gritstone sleeper blocks discarded within the course of the stream. The most obvious feature of the blocks being the roughly central 4”-5” deep hole which accommodated the wooden plug, into which the pins were driven to fix the plates.

In addition to the blocks, bricks from the local ‘Salterwood’ works were also discarded as well as remnants of second quality products from the adjacent pottery, and a significant quantity of clinker and ash.

Further south towards the centre of Smithy Houses, we walked the track bed of a short section of the line. The line is almost completely obscured at this time of year, although the trees and bushes still mark the edges of the of the embankment in a roughly southwest to northeast direction for approximately 200 yards where the line crossed Bottle Brook once more. The crossing of watercourse on this occasion was in the form of a small bridge/culvert arrangement of local Gritstone of solid construction with good quality dressing evident.
Moving on, we decided to deviate from the main line and onto the branch line which was served the Denby Colliery, Basset Pit Colliery and the Belper Potteries. It is understood that although laid to the same gauge, and operated by the Derby Canal Railway Co, this line was known as the ‘Belper & Morley Park’ tramway (railway), possibly funded from different sources to the main line, but operated as the same concern. Once again, area surrounding the track bed of this branch is considerably overgrown, whilst a public footpath runs generally along the route, firstly underneath the Midland Railway, then in a broadly north westerly direction past the triangular junction to Denby Colliery:

The line carries on as past the Bassett Pit Colliery and onward to Openwoodgate Incline Junction. It is upon the incline that several of the Gritstone sleeper blocks are still insitu, with evidence of heavy wear from the movement of the plates under load. This can clearly be seen on the photos below:

At this point, both ICLOK and myself decided to attempt to prove the gauge of the tramway by locating the opposing line of sleeper blocks and thus measuring the distance between, which we duly managed with little effort:
Digressing with an immense sense of achievement, we retraced our steps back down the incline after making good the excavation and decided to turn our attention to the junction at the base of the incline. David Ripley’s publication ('The Little Eaton Gangway' Published by The Oakwood Press) shows a sharp dog-leg to the west with a two-track arrangement for a short distance, terminating to a single track before the start of the gradient. It is evident from ICLOK’s study of the area that in fact, previous publications neglect to mention that the tramway also continued north from the junction at the base of the incline, towards the Henmoor Pits whereupon the line of the tramway crosses an unnamed brook. Inquisitive as we were, upon closer inspection of this crossing the following was discovered:

What a find! As you can clearly see, the construction of this crossing (referred to as Park Hall Bridge) is almost identical to the bridge/culvert which was explored earlier on the short section of tramway at Smithy Houses. It appears as though the bridges may have been constructed by the same stonemason (or at least to the same specification), as the dressing of the blocks is similar, although at this point, and without any supporting evidence or sources, it remains pure conjecture. The crossing itself appears to have been constructed hastily with the keystone being improperly inserted at the northern portal (as shown above), and with severe post-construction deformation of the arch at the southern portal:

With my family-imposed curfew looming ever closer, we unfortunately had to end of exploration of this branch of the tramway in order to pursue interests elsewhere further down the line in Little Eaton.