

Stratford-upon-Avon – Blisworth main line of the Stratford and Midland Junction Railway, known from its initials as the ‘Slow Mouldy & Jolting’. For a time a through service operated from Marylebone to Stratford via the G.C.R and the S.M.J. Further on Culworth Junction was followed by Culworth and then Helmdon Stations. Helmdon also had two stations, the earlier one standing on the Banbury – Northampton branch, as well as a long brick-built viaduct. The G.C.’s station name board proclaimed ‘Helmdon for Sulgrave’ although the latter village is some three miles away.



*Brackley back garden view 1966. A Marylebone-bound train has just left Brackley’s ‘Top’ (Central) Station and is approaching the 22 span viaduct recalled by Flora Thompson, although it is hardly ‘roaring’. The line was to close later that year and the viaduct was subsequently demolished. The scene is now largely occupied by residential development and the town’s by-pass.*

Just south of Brackley Station, which stood at the north end of the town, there was another, 22 span viaduct. This structure achieved, a little anachronistically, modest literary immortality in the second chapter of Flora Thompson’s *Larkrise to Candleford* – “three miles away trains roared over a viaduct carrying those who would, had they lived a few years before or later, have used the turnpike”. In fact the author was 22 when the line opened, long gone from Juniper Hill, and writing more than 30 years later. At least she was more prescient than she knew. The ‘turnpike’ is now (2008) the dual carriageway A43, carrying traffic – especially freight – which she could not have dreamed of, and which many would prefer to see transferred back to the railway.