

S&N News

Winter 2005

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Issue 17

The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust is a Registered Charity, no. 1088706 and a Registered Company, limited by guarantee, no. 4075920.

ANNO REGNI
GEORGI III.
REGIS
Magnae Britanniae, Franciae, & Hiberniae,
TRICESIMO TERTIO.

At the Parliament begun and holden at *Westminster*, the
Twenty-fifth Day of *November* *Anno Domini 1790*, in the
Thirty-first Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord
GEORGE the Third, by the Grace of God, of *Great Brit-
tain, France, and Ireland*, King, Defender of the Faith, &c.
And from thence continued, by several Prorogations, to the Thirteenth
Day of *December 1792*; being the Third Session of the Seventeenth
Parliament of *Great Britain*.



L O N D O N :
Printed by CHARLES EYRE and ANDREW STRAHAN,
Printers to the King's most Excellent Majesty. 1793.

The Shrewsbury Canal Act 1793 (see page 11)

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Membership

We are very pleased to welcome as individual and family members:

Tim & Karen Brogan & Family of Telford; Joy Hollamby of Shrewsbury; Derek & Daryl Pilcher & Family of Newport; Christine White of Newport; Joseph Lucas of Withington, Shrewsbury; and Ray Evans of Leominster, Herefordshire.

Dates for Your Diary

Thursday 17th March – 7.30p.m. Trustee’s meeting. Meetings now rotate between Newport, Shrewsbury & Wellington. This meeting is due to be in Newport and if you wish to attend please contact a Trustee to confirm exact location.

Saturday 16th April - Annual General Meeting and Illustrated Talk (see back cover for further details)

Saturday 30th April 2005 - Sunday 1st May - 2nd May Day Canal Festival at Norbury Junction - see page 7 for further details.

Thursday 19th May – 7.30p.m. Trustee’s meeting. This meeting is due to be in Shrewsbury and if you wish to attend please contact a Trustee to confirm exact location.

S&N Mugs for Sale

Coffee mugs - bearing the S&NCT logo on one side and a list of the towns, villages and hamlets adjoining the original canal bed on the reverse – are being produced and will be on sale at the AGM. Cost will be £4-75 per mug, but watch for a special offer on the day!

Request for Hand Tools.

The S&N Canals Trust has now reached a stage at which work parties are needed. Clearing undergrowth to expose the old canal bed, removing ivy and saplings from the brickwork of bridges and locks to prevent further damage, even exploring lengths of bed to find if there are any remaining traces of the old canal.

What the Trust requires is a 'pool' of sturdy hand tools for volunteers to use to cut, slash, trim, dig and clear away whatever is hiding "our" canal. Specialist working groups and contractors will follow on, but the basic grafting work needs the enthusiast and a few basic tools to make the first inroads.

If you have items - such as bow saws, heavy duty secateurs, long handled slashers, strong rakes, strong spades, mattocks – that you would be happy to donate them to our working group inventory, please contact your nearest Trustee and arrangements will be made to collect.

A Call to Members

When you joined the S&NCT you may recall passing on details of ways that you might like to support the Trust's work in a practical way. Whether with a spade, kettle, keyboard or calculator there will be many more opportunities for involvement over the next year or two than has been the case hitherto. Hence, if you did indicate a wish to support us in this way you may find us getting in touch in the future. In the meantime, we have some particular needs to address and these include:

- Assistance in staffing stands at shows and other events (see note elsewhere)
- Help with matters financial – are there any accountants or bookkeepers out there?
- Liaison with local communities. If you are a member of one of the communities along the canal it is particularly helpful to be able to work through local people in our liaison activities.
- Expertise in environmental matters
- Fund raising support

If you feel you can offer help in any of the above areas or you are willing to give support in any other way please get in touch initially with our membership secretary, Dee Nelson, to find out more. You can contact her through membership@sncanal.org.uk or on 01743 761447.

Buttermarket, Flaxmill, Sundorne...making the connection.

Those of you living in Shropshire will be aware of the developments at Sundorne, to the north of Shrewsbury town centre, and perhaps on going saga at the Flaxmill.

The Buttermarket in Castlefields was the original terminus of the Shrewsbury Canal; it was under threat of demolition in the early seventies, but a few of us got a petition together to stop this vandalism, and the campaign grew to such an extent that all plans for the area were dropped and the building was refurbished and has since become a very successful venue for performing arts and a night club. Immediately behind it was the canal basin, partly filled in and used and owned by Morris Oils and the Post Office. The canal proceeds north past the Canal Tavern, through Spring Gardens to the Flaxmill. The canal then crosses St Michaels Street and makes its way to Sundorne; it is breached by the Telford Way just east of Heathgates, and then skirts the Sundorne Seven Pitches site before making for Pimley.

The Buttermarket is in private ownership and is not under any threat. Fact. The old canal basin is now the subject of discussion regarding a possible development brief for the area. Fact. The future of the Flaxmill is still the subject of litigation, and heated discussion between SABC, the owner Richard Capp and English Heritage. An implicit part of the planning consents for the Flaxmill is the restoration of the canal. Fact.

For the last four years the idea of a super Sports Village at Sundorne has been discussed by the Borough Council. Very early on it was suggested that the canal could be re instated as part of any development. Fact.

Last month, the final plans for the Sports Village were submitted to the Development Control Committee at SABC, completely ignoring the existence of the canal. Fact.

Despite our representations, and having the support of council members, the necessary consents were granted, and work has started on the new development. The council, whilst disregarding our protestations about the integrity of the canal, has left the door open by stating that it supports the restoration of the canal, and that they want to meet us at a later date to discuss the way forward.

In order to help the Council understand the significance of the canal in relation to regeneration and amenity value, Dennis Rogers and I are preparing an inclusive development plan embracing the Buttermarket, Flaxmill, Spring Gardens and Sundorne. Clearly the canal has the ability to act as a catalyst for bringing together all these resources in a long term regeneration corridor linking the centre of Shrewsbury with the suburbs to the north of the town.

I don't find it hard to understand and appreciate this opportunity. You don't have to be a canal anorak to recognize the linkage; a footpath, cycleway and ultimately a canal corridor linking all the areas that are in need of regeneration. It fits perfectly into the integrated transport plan.....but will we be able to open the minds of those that make the decisions?

Chris Chambers

S&N Stand at Local Shows – Help Needed.

The S&N information stand will be at a number of local events - to inform, educate and hopefully to recruit members of the passing public. Until now, this has been a small scale operation but now that the project has moved up a gear more help is needed.

If you could spare a day to help man the stand at a convenient location, it would extremely welcome for the group of Trustees who have been looking after the stand until this year. Enthusiasm and a willingness to learn quickly is more important than previous experience. Please contact the relevant Trustee (details inside front cover) if you can assist.

NORBURY JUNCTION – 2nd May Day Canal Festival: 30th April – 1st May.
Contact Rodney Pitt.

SHREWSBURY SHOWGROUND - West Midland Show: 25th – 26th June.
Contact Tam Hazan.

SHREWSBURY QUARRY PARK – Shrewsbury River Festival. 10th July.
Contact Tam Hazan.

NEWPORT SHOWGROUND – Newport Show – Saturday 16th July.
Contact Rodney Pitt

RUNCORN – IWA National Waterways Festival & Boat Show. 27th – 29th August.
Contact Rodney Pitt.

WHITCHURCH – Boat Festival. 3rd – 4th September. Contact Chris Chambers.

ELLESMERE – Festival Boat Rally. 9th - 11th September. Contact Chris Chambers.

NEWPORT CANAL WAREHOUSE – Newport Heritage Days. 9th - 10th September. Contact Rodney Pitt.

Even if you cannot be a volunteer on the stand, please call in if you are at any of the shows and have a chat. Looking forward to seeing you!

The 2nd May Day Canal Festival

Over the May Day Bank Holiday (Saturday and Sunday, April 30th and May 1st) the Trust, together with the Shrewsbury & Border Counties Branch of the Inland Waterways Association, is planning to hold the Second Festival at Norbury Junction to promote the restoration of the Newport Branch and the Shrewsbury Canal.

We hope to attract 30 boats – last year estimates put the total number of boats moored in the area at 100-130 with people mooring up and walking in for over half a mile to come to the festival. At the time of writing, 15 boats had already booked in – all of whom had been there last year so we must be doing something right!

Again we will be having stalls and entertainment although we will be trying hard to maintain the “old-time village fete” atmosphere that so many visitors commented on last year. Already we have the Newport Town Band signed up again and we will once again aim to finish with an open air canalside service since it proved so popular in 2004.

Above all, we will need help from our members – we need stewards, car park attendants, stallholders and many others. Last year proved great fun although it did show that we could do with more helpers.

Similarly if members know of suitable (old-time) stalls, sideshows, entertainments that might fit in then please call me (contact details inside front cover).

If you are unable to help, please put the dates in your diary and tell all your friends – See you there!

Rodney Pitt

A Meeting with Prospective Partners

If a full restoration of the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals it to be achieved it will require significant support from a range of partners, including the various local authorities along the route, other public bodies such as British Waterways and English Heritage, plus organisations from the voluntary sector like the Inland Waterways Association and the Shropshire Union Canal Society. A dialogue is already well established with a number of these partners and we are indebted to several for their support in a range of ways, including the funding of the feasibility study.

With the substantial work which lies ahead in the “post-feasibility” period now is the time to build the framework for a closer working relationship with such partners and hence a very significant meeting was held on 6 December 2004 when our Chairman and other Trustees met with representatives from several potential

partner organisations at Darby House in Telford.

Councillor Charles Smith (Deputy Leader of Telford & Wrekin B.C.) opened the meeting with recollections of the working boat traffic in Birmingham during his own childhood and wished the project well in bringing life back to the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals with all of the benefits that this will bring to the local communities. Our Chairman, David Adams, gave his thanks to all who had helped to keep the vision of restoring these canals alive over so many years and stressed the importance of an effective partnership if the project is to be successfully taken forward.

Our Joint Project Managers, Chris Chambers and Dennis Rogers were then asked to present the case for the partnership, supported by Vice-Chairman, Brian Nelson. Chris strove to allay the fears of any Local Authority that might feel that joining such a partnership would require them to dig deep into their own funds to pay for the project. Rather, it was their position to empower and facilitate the scheme that was required. The Trust needed to formulate a strategy for the restoration which would only work with support from Local Authorities. This would take the form of technical support plus officer time and expertise. Their involvement would also lend credibility to the scheme as well as providing a vital channel through which outside funding opportunities could be sought. The Partnership may also need to appoint and fund a full-time Project Manager into the future in place of the current voluntary arrangement.

Dennis outlined the work already carried out on technical solutions to the restoration. All 13 major road crossings had been identified and investigated and special “fall and rise” locks had been designed to overcome those which could not readily be achieved by more conventional means. He said that a survey of levels for the whole canal had been carried out proving that all the solutions would work and that the project as a whole was feasible. In appraising the options available for restoration the whole canal had been assessed and 48 separate work packages had been identified. Some would be for voluntary work and others for contractors. In some instances, for example the A41 crossing, a complete specification of the work required had been carried out and was ready to go out to tender.

Chris followed up with a consideration of costings and emphasised that the full amount did not have to be realised before effective work could begin. There were several self-contained projects, each effective in their own right and which were obvious hubs of development with adaptive re-use of historic buildings such as those at the Flax Mill or Wappenshall. Some of these developments could secure funding in their own right which would help to contribute to the overall project as these sites were linked up. Brian drew attention to the work that was being carried out with the communities along the route, striving to inform them of what

was intended and listening to their views on alternative approaches. All Parish Councils along the route had been contacted and many of these had organised public meetings in order to give everyone a chance to be involved. The model used in Withington had been particularly productive through the setting up of a working group to co-ordinate feedback through the Parish Council. This could be an arrangement worth replicating elsewhere when detailed plans for the restoration were being taken forward.

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) was represented at the meeting by Vaughan Welch, Chairman of the Restoration Committee. Vaughan is also a Trustee of the S&NCT. Speaking on behalf of the IWA Vaughan referred to the regeneration potential of canal restorations and cited examples such as the one at Stalybridge where the whole town centre had been transformed as a direct result of the canal restoration and where property prices had risen by 20% in the year of completion. Vaughan noted the opportunities for job creation and stressed the importance of effective partnership arrangements with local authorities and others, and gave examples where these had worked particularly well on schemes elsewhere in the country.

Representatives from the various potential partner organisations were invited to give their views in response.

Richard Bifield, Tourism Officer for Telford & Wrekin Borough Council, was very supportive of the scheme and felt that this could be an ideal opportunity to give Newport a special attraction to put it on the map. David Griffiths, Economic Development Officer for Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council felt that the S&NCT had shown a remarkable understanding of the complexities of the restoration process and were now at a good point for moving the scheme forward. He thought that the proposals for development were good and welcomed the suggestions for schemes which could bring in private funding. Bill Klemperer, Team Leader for English Heritage, noted the great enthusiasm for the scheme and progress made to date and stated that, in principle, English Heritage fully supported S&NCT and its aims. He cited a range of ways where he felt that English Heritage could help, including specialist advice, technical expertise and the protection of the historic infrastructure as well as in any funding support.

A discussion then followed regarding the nature of the partnership arrangement and how it would operate. It was agreed that a suitable concord statement should be circulated to all potential partners for their approval based on these discussions and that more detailed presentations could be given to individual partners highlighting matters of particular importance to them. This will be followed by a further meeting in the early months of 2005 both to formalise the partnership arrangement and set the stage for developments into the future.

Waterway Museums Funding

An update on the item in the last S&News from the IWA Head Office Bulletin and action on behalf of S&NCT.

“The Waterways Trust's campaign to win new government funding for the inland waterways collection has started to show positive results, and has benefited considerably from the efforts of many IWA members having written to their members of Parliament.

The Trust launched the campaign at the Burton-on-Trent IWA National Festival in August 2004 to lobby for government funding for £1.1 million per annum for the next ten years to safeguard the museums that house the designated collection at Ellesmere Port, Gloucester and Stoke Bruerne. The museums need more funds for day-to-day management of the collection, to address a conservation backlog that will take ten years to complete, and to increase visitor numbers by providing free entry to everyone.

Most MPs who have been written to by constituents have been persuaded to write to Tessa Jowell, the Culture Secretary. The letter writing campaign has raised awareness of the cause and has prompted discussions with the Department for Culture Media & Sport, which has responsibility for museum funding.

On 11th January the waterways museums were the subject of an adjournment debate in the House of Commons. Andrew Miller, MP for Ellesmere Port, set out the Waterways Trust's case. The Arts Minister, Estelle Morris, responded, acknowledging the importance of the issue, the strength of the campaign and the support the Trust has received. She said, "It is imperative that the collections that they (the museums) hold are preserved, conserved and improved to ensure that not only our constituents, but their children and grandchildren, can understand the importance of waterways and the museums to our nation's development".

Although the minister said that the government had insufficient funds at present to fund the waterways museums, nonetheless, she invited the MPs supporting the Trust's case to work with the Department and continue to make requests that the museums should be added to the list of nationally funded museums. After the debate Mr Miller said that the fact that he and his colleagues were invited to keep pressing the case was encouraging.

In November, there was a short debate in the House of Lords, following a question by Lord Harrison and in the same week the all party Parliamentary Waterways Group passed a resolution in support of the Trust's campaign.

As well as Andrew Miller, MP for Ellesmere Port, the MPs whose constituencies cover Gloucester (Parmjit Dhanda) and Stoke Bruerne (Tim Boswell) have been particularly supportive. Rt. Hon. Frank Field, MP for Birkenhead, and David Drew, MP for Stroud also spoke to support the museums in the adjournment debate.

David Suchet, IWA and TWT Vice President, visited The National Waterways Museum in October to raise the profile of the campaign. As well as IWA, the Women's Institute, the Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs, many waterway societies, educational institutions and local businesses have also backed the campaign.

The Waterways Trust receives a fee from British Waterways towards the annual costs of maintaining the museums, which is worth £4.45 per visitor. The National Railway Museum, the National Maritime Museum and the National Coal Mining Museum all receive government support worth between £8 and £19 per visitor and offer free admission. The Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port was seen its admissions fall by 19% since other government funded museums in the area have offered free admission.”

On behalf of the S&NCT, I wrote to Tessa Jowell MP, Alun Michael MP (DEFRA), Peter Bradley MP (The Wrekin), David Kidney (Stafford), Peter Marsden MP, Lembit Opik MP and Owen Paterson MP. I had replies from Tessa Jowell, Alun Michael and Estelle Morris as well as replies from Peter Bradley and Owen Paterson enclosing copies of the replies that they had received from Tessa Jowell and Estelle Morris – in each case making comments about the fact that I had also written to them!

Rodney Pit

The Shrewsbury Canal Act 1793

On the front cover of this issue is the title page of the Act of Parliament that sanctioned the construction of the Shrewsbury Canal. As can be seen the bill was first presented to parliament in 1790 and took three years to be passed. On the following two pages are the first two pages that, after the title of the Act, set out “The Company of Proprietors of the Shrewsbury Canal Navigation”.

By the Act they were authorized to raise amongst themselves the sum of £50,000, in shares of £100 each, and, if necessary, a further sum of £20,000 for the purposes of the Act.

As well as setting out the powers for the canal’s construction, the Act also set the tonnage rates applicable when the canal opened as:

For all Iron, Iron-stone, Coal, Stone, Timber and other Goods, Wares and Merchandize whatever 2d per Ton, per Mile

And in Proportion for a less Quantity than a Ton or a less distance than a Mile.

And in addition of One Penny per Ton if passed by Inclined Planes, until the Canal pays a Dividend of Eight per Cent, when this last Rate shall cease.

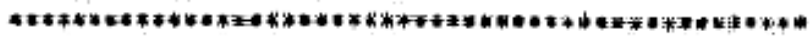
Boats with less than Eight Tons to pay for that Quantity, except when returning.

All Manure (except Lime) exempt from these Rates.



ANNO TRICESIMO TERTIO

Georgii III. Regis.



C A P. CXIII.

An Act for making and maintaining a Navigable Canal from the North End of the *Shropshire Canal*, in the Township of *Rockwardine Wood*, in the County of *Salop*, to the Town of *Shrewsbury*, in the said County.

[3d June 1793.]



WE ENACT the making and maintaining of a Canal for the Navigation of Boats and other Vessels from the South End of a certain Canal at Rockwardine Wood, in the County of Salop, called The Shropshire Canal, to the Town of Shrewsbury, in the said County, will open a Communication with several valuable Mines of Coal and Limestone, and will be of Benefit to Persons residing near the Line of the said Intended Canal, as well as to the Owners of such Mines, and will also be of great publick Utility: And whereas the several Persons hereinafter named are desirous, at their own Expence, to make and maintain the said Canal; but cannot effect the

same without the Aid of Parliament: May it therefore please Your Majesty that it may be enacted; and be it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That the most Noble the Marquis of Stafford, the Right Honourable Lord Berwick, Robert Burton senior, Robert Burton junior, Edward Burton, Henry Bevan, John Bishon, John Bishop, Edward Blakeway Clerk, John Barker, Corbet Browne Clerk, Samuel Yate Beryon, John Corbet, Saint John Charlton, John Calley, William Cherrington, Robert Waring Darwin Doctor of Physick, James Dixon, Mary Dunn, Elizabeth Davies, Thomas Eytou, John Edwards, Richard Emery, Thomas Ellesmere, John Flint, Elizabeth Freeman, Thomas Gilbert, John Gilbert, Theophilus Houlbrooke, Edward Harries, Thomas Horwood, Robert Hawkins, Thomas Hulband, James Hiles, Thomas Hodgkins, Robert Jeffreys, Richard Jukes, Thomas Jones, Samuel Johnson Clerk, Ben Johnson, Edward Kynaston Clerk, Ralph Lecke, Stephen Lecke, William Nickson, Mary Oswell, William Pulteney, Robert Pemberton senior, Humphrey Parton, Edward Phillips, Richard Reynolds, William Reynolds, Joseph Reynolds, William Rathbone, Charles Roe, John Rocks Clerk, Frances Mabel Sparrow, Mary Slater, Joseph Sutton, William Shakeshaft, Robert Smith, Thomas Sandford, William Tayleur, John Wilkinson, Timothy Yate, and William Yonge, and their several and respective Successors, Executors, Administrators and Assigns, together with such Person or Persons as they shall nominate and appoint, under their Hands and Seals, are and shall be united into a Company for the better carrying on, making, completing, and maintaining, the said Navigable Canal passable for Boats, and other Vessels, according to the Rules, Orders, and Directions herein-after expressed and laid down, and shall for that Purpose be One Body Politick and Corporate, by the Name of The Company of Proprietors of the *Sherwoodbury* Canal Navigation, and by that Name shall have perpetual Succession, and shall have a Common Seal, and by that Name shall and may sue and be sued; and also shall and may have Power and Authority to purchase Lands for making the said Canal, and the several Works hereby authorized to be made, without incurring any of the Penalties or Forfeitures of the Statute of Mortmain; and the said Company of Proprietors shall be, and are hereby authorized

The Impossible Restoration

For many years the re-instatement of the Huddersfield Canal was dubbed “the Impossible Restoration”. Whilst of a comparable length to the S&N and left abandoned for a similar period of time, the Huddersfield Canal presented a truly daunting challenge for any would-be restoration project. With substantial buildings over the line of the canal, a canal bed which looked like a linear rubbish tip for many miles, 74 lock chambers to restore and the climb over the Pennines from Lancashire to Yorkshire, not to mention the reinstatement of the country’s highest, longest and deepest canal tunnel at Standedge, this project really was regarded as a no-hoper.

But, undaunted, a restoration group was formed in 1974 at a time when canal restorations were not in vogue. In 1981 Society volunteers restored their first half-mile section of the derelict canal plus two lock chambers and didn’t look back. Following this success and their first £1.2 million grant their campaign gathered momentum and eventually, after further grants totalling over £30 million, the canal was opened by Prince Charles in 2001.

So many aspects of this project are a real inspiration to those hoping to follow in their footsteps and we would like to share this with members through a day trip which we are organising later this year, probably in September. The exact itinerary is still to be finalised but you can be certain of a fascinating day in a mix of mill towns and beautiful Pennine scenery and always the thought that “if they can achieve this against these odds”.

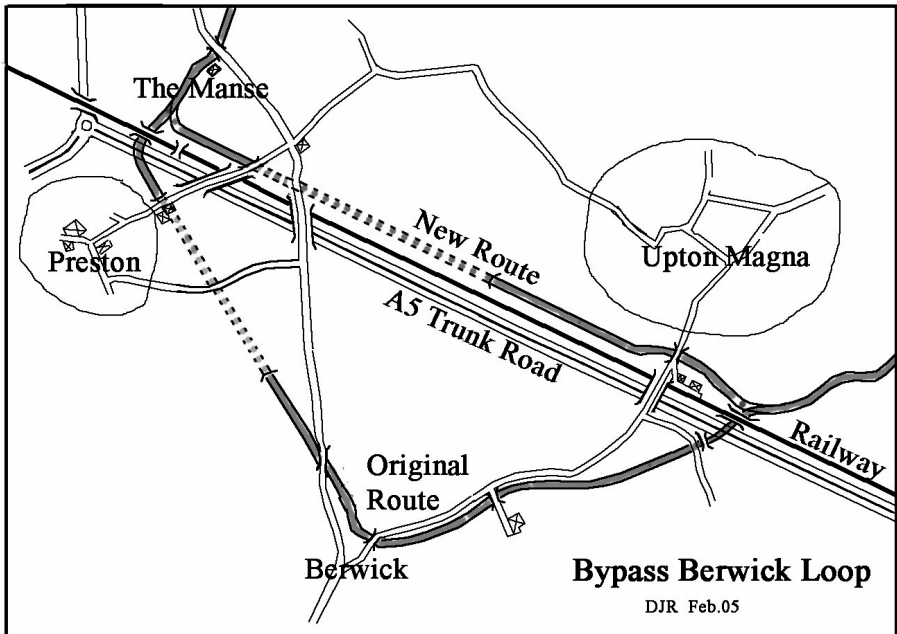
More details will be provided in the next issue of S&News but if you would like to be kept in informed of arrangements as they develop, and perhaps have an input into the pattern for the day, then pass your email details to Brian Nelson (bnelson@sncanal.org.uk) or give a ring on 01743 761447.

Engineering Solutions - Longdon upon Tern to The Manse

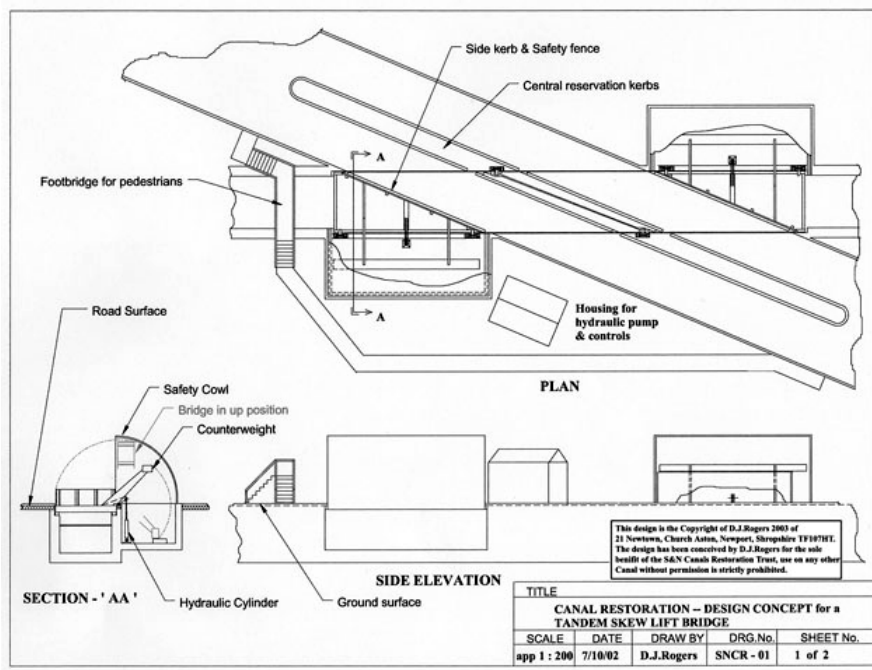
From Longdon upon Tern to the point where the original line of the canal passed under the railway line near Upton Magna the bed is mainly filled and returned to agriculture, with the exception of three short lengths which remain as dry bed. Along the length are six demolished road bridges which it is proposed to replace with modern lift bridges which depending upon traffic volumes will be automatically controlled with traffic lights or manually operated. In addition the stone aqueduct over the river Roden at Rodington has been demolished and it is proposed to replace this with a modern steel structure similar to the one installed over the M6 northern relief road which is required to accommodate the restoration of the Lichfield Canal.

In considering the option to follow the original route, around what we now refer to as the Berwick Loop, it is necessary to cross the A5 trunk road at two locations. Level survey undertaken by the trust engineers, required to authenticate the scheme proposals being considered, have indicated that at the east crossing the road surface is only 370mm above water level and at this location a diversion is not possible and ramping of the road is out of the question. The proposed solution at this crossing was to use the safety drain fall and rise lock, but because there is insufficient space between the road and railway to accommodate the lock a tunnel spanning the road and the railway would be necessary leaving the original rail bridge redundant.

At the western crossing two options were proposed the first option involved an aqueduct over the A5 with a lift tank on each side of the road which would be hydraulically balanced with a lift of 4.6 metres. This was necessary at the original crossing as the water level here is approximately two meters higher than the road surface. In this location the distance from the road and the railway line is such that it allows sufficient space to accommodate the tank between the two, thus allowing the rail bridge to be used in its original form. The second option involved a U shaped detour eastwards to cross the road in the vicinity of the Preston Bridge. The road is at a higher level at this location and a safety drain fall and rise lock could be used involving a drop of 3.2 metres. This would involve a longer tunnel under both road and rail leaving the existing rail bridge redundant.



Although these two crossings of the A5 are problematical and very costly they are necessary if the original route around the Berwick Loop, which includes the historic Berwick Wharf and Tunnel, was to be followed. In addition to the A5 crossings the bridges on the Upton Magna and Uffington road crossings are demolished and because of the comparative road surface to water level and the volume of traffic on these roads traffic light controlled lift bridges would be necessary. At the Uffington road crossing the canal line is at a very shallow angle relative to the road line which originally was accommodated by diverting the road line around bends to cross the canal at right angles. When the bridge was demolished the severity of these bends was reduced to improve the road but the relative line of both canal and road still exists. Rather than do the opposite to the original solution and divert the canal around bends in a similar fashion, which would require additional land to accommodate, a special split tandem lift bridge design was prepared.



The tunnel which has a bend in the middle and is only wide enough for a single boat passage would have to be restricted to one way passing times or a traffic light control system both of which, in view of the length of the tunnel, would cause queuing at busy times. Taking all these problems into account it was considered that the better option would be to bypass the Loop and take a new route running parallel with the railway on the north side. This was the preferred option recommended by the trust engineers and which was also subsequently

adopted and recommended by Atkins.

Because the terrain in which this new route passes rises gradually in height between the two original crossings a deep cutting similar to the one on the Shropshire Union at Woodseaves was envisaged, being approximately eleven metres at the deepest point. In accepting this option at the start of the Feasibility Study, Atkins in the first instance proposed the use of two locks either ends of this higher section to lift up and over it. This was considered to be an unnecessary complication by the trust engineers and a subsequent proposal by Atkins involving a cut and cover tunnel was agreed to be the best solution as it had the benefit of the land under which the tunnel passes being reverted back to the landowner. As proposed the tunnel would be wide enough for boats to pass and would include lighting but no towpath. Although some additional cost would be involved the trust engineers considered, that since lighting would be installed, it made sense to include the towpath rather than have a path going up and over the tunnel at ground level and this is the Trusts intention. Once landowner permission is obtained the trust engineers plan to carry out a detailed levels survey of this new route in order to prepare a specification design against which contractors can be invited to tender on the basis of detailed design and construction.

Dennis. J. Rogers.

Postcard: Newport Town Lock

Further to the item in the last S&News, it was good to learn from this member's letter that the card ended up in very good hands. Do you have memories of the S&N that you would share with members - explicit detail can be omitted!

I was startled to see the postcard of the Newport Town Lock in the autumn issue of the newsletter. It's a striking image of course and will have many happy memories for many of us.

Among that number are my wife and I since, just like the writer of the card, we too '*remembered that dear old spot, how many times had we walked two by two*' since that's where we did our courting, across the lock and along the towpath. My wife (a Newport girl, formerly Tania Watson) lived at that time in Chetwynd End which I guess must have overlooked the lock when the photograph was taken. It was always a lovely walk and must have been the more so when the canal was active.

I now work on the canals myself and those early walks were the inspiration for a change in career and subsequently our membership of the Trust. You can understand therefore why, when I saw the card come up on eBay, I too, had to have a go. I hope your disappointment at being unsuccessful in the bidding will be tempered by the knowledge that the card did indeed go to a member, has been

framed with one other and was a tremendous success this Christmas as a rather unusual present.

Keep up the good work, particularly the excellent newsletter which is very good and a pleasure to receive and read. Its hard work, I know, as I do a similar job for a mines group locally, but the results are well worth the effort and appreciated by so many

Ian and Tania Greenfield and family

Thomas Telford: the Fallible Engineer

Following the article on Telford's life in August's S&News an alternative view of his virtues as a canal builder is presented by Peter Brown.

Oh heresy - criticising Telford is not allowed! But I think he made some serious errors when building our canal, including some which an experienced engineer should not have made.

I don't blame him for advocating canals in the mid 1820s when we all know with the benefit of hindsight that railways were to be the transportation success of the 19th century. Indeed, you can make a case for saying that Telford had the greater vision, as he thought that self-propelled road vehicles would become the main transport system, though he had in mind steam-powered vehicles.

No, my criticisms are more practical: the basic engineering of canals such as water supply, embankments and cuttings; excessively expensive designs; the choice of contractors; the delay in opening; and the overspending on the budget.

Crucial to the success of any canal is an adequate supply of water throughout the year. Each time a boat uses a lock, about 25,000 gallons of water flows down. This has to be made up by intercepting streams (but the rights of millers who were dependent on those streams were generally protected in the Act of Parliament) or by impounding surplus water in the winter and releasing it in the drier summer. Because of the lie of the land, the latter was the main method used on the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal (B&LJC), reservoirs being constructed at Belvide (alongside what is now the A5) and Knighton. However, the former was far too small and had to be substantially increased in size after the canal opened at an additional cost of some £20,000, and the latter leaked badly because of the geology of the area. The canal had great problems in its early years, and was rescued from closing several times by purchasing water from the Wyrley & Essington Canal and by Thomas Giffard providing water from his lake at Chillington Hall. The problem is now overcome, but only because the Shropshire Union main line receives waste water from Wolverhampton sewage works — and when the Newport Branch reopens the water supply problems are likely to recur unless back-pumping is installed.

During the construction of Shelmore Embankment (just south of Norbury Junction) there were repeated slippages, mainly caused by unsuitable clay material being used initially. Also the sides of the embankment were allowed to take their natural angle, the ‘angle of repose’, typically 37° but at worst 42°. If a similar embankment were built now, the sides would be sloped at something like 25°. Shelmore Embankment has given recurring problems, and in 2002–3 some £1.7 million was spent on remedial works.

The deep cuttings at Grub Street (north of Norbury) and Woodseaves (south of Market Drayton) were prone to slippages from the start, the sides being cut too steep. These still cause problems — indeed British Waterways is now proposing abandoning the towpath through Woodseaves Cutting and replacing it by a path along the top of the cutting.

Telford never did anything on the cheap, not even when he knew his employer had a financial crisis. Observant readers of the August issue of *S&N News* may have noticed that his design for locks had mitred (double) top gates as well as mitred bottom gates. William Cubitt, Telford’s successor as consulting engineer to the canal, criticised this for their expense of maintenance; no doubt the construction cost was higher too. More significantly, his design of bridges was unnecessarily expensive: many bridges on minor roads and tracks are skew when a small diversion of the road would have enabled the bridge to be at right angles to the canal. The skew bridge at Forton is an extreme example: it is truly beautiful, but surely there was a much cheaper engineering solution to the problem? Telford’s role was to create an effective and profitable transport system, not a work of art.

Telford did not favour tendering between contractors. Instead, he preferred to estimate the cost then engage ‘a contractor of established reputation for skill and integrity and possessing sufficient capital’ at that price. This he did for the B&LJC. John Wilson was appointed contractor for the sections between Nantwich and High Offley (north of Grub Street Cutting), and between High Onn (Church Eaton) and Autherley Junction; he was a very experienced contractor who had worked for Telford for over 30 years, first at Pontcysyllte, later on the Caledonian Canal. His sons took over the contracts following his death in 1831. The rest of the canal, including Grub Street Cutting, Shelmore Embankment and the whole of the Newport Branch, was entrusted to William Provis. Provis had been one of Telford’s technicians, doing surveys and making engineering drawings, then had been a resident engineer. However, he had little direct experience of being a contractor and was also probably under-capitalised. And it was on his sections that almost all the problems happened. He was helped by being given payments in excess of those due under the contract, the implication in the minutes being that if he was not paid he would become bankrupt, and this would cause even more expense in the completion of the canal.

The canal's Act was passed in 1826, and Telford told the Committee that the main line would be completed by May 1831. In fact it did not open until 2 March 1835, almost four years behind schedule. It is interesting to compare this with the Grand Junction Railway from Birmingham to Warrington, built over similar terrain: this was 82½ miles long, just over double the length of the B&LJC, received its Act in May 1833 and opened in July 1837. The cost per mile was comparable.

The estimate given to Parliament in 1826 for the cost of the whole canal including the branch was £500,000. Telford forecast the cost of the engineering works on the main line as £388,000, to which in 1829 was added £78,000 for the Newport Branch — this latter was a more ambitious scheme than that originally envisaged, which was going only to Pave Lane. Land purchases were originally thought to be about £55,000, the principal other costs being Telford's fees and the Parliamentary expenses. In the end, the total costs were in the order of £750,000. In fairness, some of the overspending was not Telford's responsibility, for example, land cost £40,000 more than expected, and some diversions from the desired line had to be made, which added a similar sum.

In summary, therefore, unlike the author of the article in August's *S&N News*, I do not regard this canal as 'one of his finest engineering achievements'. Although Telford's engineering structures are unsurpassed in their beauty of line, in my opinion there were too many practical and economic failings to call his work here a success.

Peter Brown

A Return to the 'Cut'.

The following article has been submitted by Chris Chambers who first published it in about 1971 when he was editor of Cuttings. After all these years it still stands up and it is hoped will be of interest to members.

A nostalgic title, and no doubt experienced canal enthusiasts will turn over a few pages, and yet I suspect there is a little nostalgia in many canal users. I suppose I started because my home was within 50 yards of the Wyrley and Essington Canal near Pratts Bridge, Walsall - so well described in a recent 'Cuttings'. There was just the bottom of the garden, a small field, and then the 'cut'. What a time we had fishing for 'tiddlers', falling in, playing on the derelict day boats - yes, derelict even in the late 20's and 30's, watching the other boys diving for lumps of coal, for times were hard; nodding a greeting to the boaties on the horse-drawn day boats; watching Ernest Thomas' motor boats pulling their long trains of boats behind them; seeing the boatmen dip their billy cans in the 'cut' for tea water (would they do it now, I wonder?); seeing the F.M.C. boats pull up at the nearby mill, and playing with their 'kids' who came to our primary school, clattering

along in their clogs, and being carefully stuck at the back of the class in case they should come into contact with the 'nicer' boys and girls. I never thought much of any of this, until my work found myself and my family moving to Wincanton in Somerset, yet on every visit back home we always sauntered over to the canal to see how it was getting on - were there many 'tiddlers' this year? - was the pollution getting worse? - we noticed the weeds were becoming more and more in evidence. Then suddenly we realised in the mid-60's that all traffic had ceased, and we wondered why this was so .

So, after nine years of going home yearly we were looking round wondering where to go for our 1970 holiday, and on noticing an advert, I jokingly suggested a canal cruising holiday. 'On the stinking ditch?', said someone. Nevertheless, away we sent for the brochure, and took the plunge. Books were bought - "expect to go aground at least twenty times in one week!" said one, "do not choose a simulated narrow boat", said another (we had chosen one!), "take care one does not fall in a lock, it is highly dangerous for non-swimmers", said another (I, of course, do not swim). So after reading many other cheerful remarks we began to wonder what on earth we were doing'.

However, we went, and memories came flooding back. Stopping at home for a few days before going to Penkridge, we did a little cut-side exploring, and to our surprise found Peter Keay's boat yard hard at work; two commercial boats were resting there (they turned out to be Duckham's oil boats). We examined the tow rope cuts in roving bridges and in the iron straps by the bridge sides. Walsall and Rushall locks were examined, and to our surprise swung with one finger. There was a lock keeper at Walsall locks, clearing rubbish, and a factory next door to the lock keeper's cottage with an engraved stone to the effect that it was originally a Boatman's Rest, felt once again the thing that few history books care to mention - that here I was standing in an area, a radius of ten miles or so, which was the centre of the industrial world not so many years ago. Then to Penkridge along the motorway, breaking the speed limit at 110 m.p.h. as my friend tried to impress my son; into the boatyard and we were immediately entranced. "Just put your gear in", said one of the partners of the yard. Our groceries arrived and within a few minutes our guide was teaching me the mysteries of steering.

A few more minutes and it was "Cheerio and good luck", and we were on our own. 120 m.p.h. to 4 m.p.h. and how much more enjoyable. We felt at home straight away. My wife was delighted with the amenities of the boat, and my son was entranced. Our first meal soon found us discovering the shallowness of the banks of the Staffs and Worcestershire as we made for Autherley. Later we pulled up for the night at Four Ashes, and on taking a twilight walk were chased by security guards from the Tar Distillery'.

However, not to worry, for with our gang plank up and a glorious feast, we felt in another world. So down to Autherley - not before ringing the boatyard as our

cooker apparently would not work - but our expert arrived before we had returned from the phone, and covered us in confusion by pointing out a knob we had not turned on! No complaints however from our helper, and soon to Ernie Thomas's Marina, and the pleasure of being recognised by his son, whom my father used to teach. Through the narrow ditch near to Wolverhampton Airport and then a 3 hour hold-up because of repair work and a crane blocking the whole of the canal, being pulled down to Atherley. At last we managed to pass at Atherley into the Shropshire Union - Confusion! Do we hold everyone up by filling up with water whilst in the stop lock? Especially with a tap which regularly blew our connection off! So we covered our embarrassment and thumped away. But enough of this -all you regular enthusiasts know all this, so suffice to say we ran out of water (too many showers!) and we began to discover the beauties of the Shropshire Union Cuttings, together with the glorious isolation of it all, especially at night securely moored, when we felt somehow as if we were the inheritors of the canal traditions. Then, too, the helpfulness of a certain Market Drayton firm in helping us to obtain water at their point, and how to approach at tight angles and back out again. (We were not surprised at the civility when we later discovered, spare his blushes, that our Chairman has more than a passing interest in the firm').

So our return to the 'cut' was no longer a return, for we felt as if we had never left it. We joined several societies, became even more interested - especially in the fact that the history is there to be seen; the warehouses, the lock keepers' cottages, canal pubs - but for how long?

The purist will say, no doubt, that these things should not be relics, but in use, and we have read all the details about canal versus road and rail traffic, and the making of new canal systems - but I must end on a controversial note, but I hope constructive one. I have a feeling that all the experts writing in various magazines sometimes fail to remember that 90% of holiday makers using the canals know nothing of their history, care nothing for their commercial use, and are only interested in having a good holiday - and why not? So that if numbers increase on the canals, as they surely will, and there is a demand for more water points, water-side shops and general amenities, then it seems to me that one of the first essentials is that these things are planned properly, otherwise we shall be back to the ghastly obscenities of certain roads. However, apart from this, might I ask that B.W.B. does not block canals without warning, that taps are not placed so that one has to fill up in a lock, thus holding up traffic; that it is essential that the slow running tap at Norbury has to be hygienically placed by the chemical disposal hut?

So as a mere beginner I will do my best by helping on the Kennet and Avon Canal down here in our part of the country and roll on Easter and August when we shall be back at Penkrige ready to explore and experience again a marvellous way of life.

C. Botham.

SHREWSBURY & NEWPORT CANALS TRUST

Membership Application

The annual membership fees are: (<i>please circle category</i>)	Individual Membership	£8.50
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I/We wish to join the membership of Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust in the category indicated above. I/We also wish to make an additional donation of £_____. I/We enclose a payment of £_____ (cheques made payable to "Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust").

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Please post with your remittance to: The Membership Secretary,
The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust, Brookfield, Wroxeter, Shrewsbury, SY5 6PH

Advance Notice

The Annual General Meeting of the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust will be held on the morning of Saturday 16th April 2005 at the Long Warehouse, The Ironbridge Institute, Coalbrookdale, Telford.

Full details will be sent to members.

Following the AGM **Harry Arnold** will be giving an illustrated talk about the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals, and earlier attempts to restore it. Harry is a photo journalist and was the founder and first editor of *Waterways World*. For over thirty five years Harry has been at the forefront of the canal restoration movement, but few are aware that Harry's involvement in the movement started with his enthusiasm for the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals whilst he was living and working at Norbury Junction in the early sixties. He spent many hours recording and photographing the S&N in those early days, and he will be sharing with us all these memories, and no doubt his opinions on the present situation.

There will be a Buffet available at lunchtime, as well as refreshments. The cost will be £4.00 and details of how to book will be sent with the AGM particulars.

We are fortunate to have been able to hold the meeting at Coalbrookdale, for those of you unfamiliar with the area it is an integral part of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, and we hope that many of you will take the opportunity to explore the site on the day. The Ironbridge Institute is attached to Birmingham University, and it seems appropriate for us to have the AGM at Coalbrookdale; the Institute is at the forefront of research in Industrial Archaeology and is the home of the Elton Collection. No, nothing to do with pop music...the Elton Collection is generally regarded as the most complete collection of books and artifacts relating to Thomas Telford and the early days of civil engineering, and was given to the IGMT for safe keeping in the early seventies. Members will hopefully have access to the library on the day. It is worth coming over to see this alone!