

S&N News

August 2001

www.sncanal.org.uk

Issue 3



Eastern Portal of Berwick Tunnel - see back page

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Feasibility Study Nearer?

Over the past few weeks John Bentley, our local government liaison trustee, David Adams and Steve Bean have been met officers of Staffordshire County Council and Stafford Borough Council and also Shropshire County Council together with those from Shrewsbury & Atcham Council with a view to securing their support for the project including funding for a feasibility study for the restoration of the S&N.

They were most helpful and constructive in their approach and now it is possible to officially approach members of the councils for their full support for the scheme.

About £20,000 is required for a feasibility study and it is thought that some will be forthcoming from these sources. When the sum is committed various Consulting Engineers will be asked to tender for the feasibility study when it is hoped that a realistic estimate For the cost of the project will be determined.

Government Policy on Road Crossings

In July the government issued new planning guidelines to safeguard the restoration of derelict canals. The Highways Agency must now take waterway restoration projects into account when designing new roads or planning road improvements. Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 has been amended to include protection for derelict waterways. Although this appears unlikely to benefit the S&N as the road crossings have already been made for Newport by-pass and the A5, it will certainly benefit another local scheme, the Lichfield & Hatherton Canal, where the contractor has now been instructed to build a £345,000 navigable culvert under the Birmingham Northern Relief road.

"A Case For Restoration"

As mentioned in the last issue of S&News the Trust published this document in May. The Trustees have decided that it should be available free to all members. You can collect a copy at any meeting or at the open day in October, or if you would like one earlier please send 54p (preferably in stamps) to cover postage to Steve Bean.

Open Day

On 20th October it is planned to hold an open day at Norbury Junction to mark the first anniversary of the Trust. Further details will be sent when the full programme has been arranged, but it is hoped to include tours and boat trips (on the Shropshire Union main line as unfortunately the S&N probably will not be open by then!!).

Welcome to New Members

We welcome as members: Stefan Bielecki of Didsbury, Manchester; Charlie Stroud of Newport; Pete, Sue, Peter & Lydia Walford of Newport; Jane, Dan & Irene New of Shrewsbury; Margaret & Ralph Phillips of Newport; Shrewsbury Tourism Association; John Amos of Bromley, Kent; Diana Harmer & family of Shrewsbury; Richard & Dorothy Lee of Newport; Donald Meredith of Novara, Italy; Robert & Patricia Swann of Telford.

Membership of the Trust now stands at 174.

Website

The Trust's website has now been greatly expanded with more information about both the Trust and the canals. The former section now includes past copies of the newsletter, whilst the latter includes additional maps and photographs. The site can be found at <http://www.sncanal.org.uk>. There is further scope for development so please have a look and let me have any comments or ideas for what you would like to see.

Steve Bean

President

The Trustees are very pleased to announce that Mr Tom Manning of Newport has accepted their invitation for him to become the first President of the Trust. The Trustees were unanimous that Tom's great interest in canals, both local and further a field, be recognised.

In the 1940s and 50s he took many photographs of the waterways which have become an invaluable record. On the formation of the Trust he generously donated the negatives of those of the Shrewsbury & Newport and these have been used to illustrate our publications and website, including the front cover of this issue. He also donated some hand drawn maps incorporating many photographs, which will be put to good use in displays.

Dates for Your Diary

Thursday 20th September - 7.30p.m. Trustee's meeting*, Guildhall, Newport.

Saturday 20th October – Open Day (see page 3)

Wednesday 31st October – copy date for next *S&News* – please submit any articles, letters etc. to Steve Bean (details inside front cover)

Thursday 15th November - 7.30p.m. Trustee's meeting*, Guildhall, Newport

* Trustee's meetings are open to members. It is suggested that you confirm with a trustee before travelling.

Newport

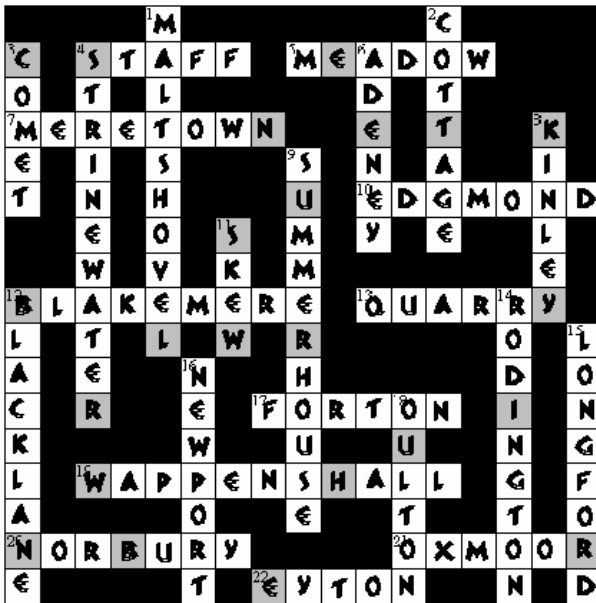
In June Roy Sutton, a consultant engineer from the Inland Waterways Association, visited Newport and carried out an inspection of the whole length of the watered section of canal. He had been asked to come to give the Trust some advice on possible restoration projects that might be put forward to Telford & Wrekin Council to be carried out on this length.

At the time of writing his written report has not been received. However, he did point out a number of problems that will need detailed examination and probable referral to the Council. These mean that it is unlikely that any of the three locks on the length could be easily restored at this stage.

One positive course of action that he did feel was at this stage more important was the maintenance of those structures that do remain, principally bridges. Many of those seen are severely overgrown with ivy, which is damaging the stonework, and some are suffering even greater damage from trees. Geoff Eastgate is therefore to carry out a survey of remaining bridges with a view to liaising with the owners and clearance being carried out during the winter.

Competition Answer

Here is the answer to the crossword in the last edition of *S&News*:



The letters in the shaded squares, when rearranged, gave the two answers 'Berwick Tunnel' and 'Shrewsbury'.

More Memories of the Shrewsbury Canal

In the last issue George Lewis gave his memories of the canal in his childhood in the 1920's. Another member now recalls her childhood and the part the canal played in a different area and age:

In the 1950's I lived at Pimley Lodge with my parents and 2 sisters.

There was little water in the Canal then until you got to Uffington, but it had not been filled in as it has now. The towpath was used regularly for walks, especially to Uffington and Haughmond Hill. The narrow path leading down from Pimley Bridge to the towpath was very steep and slippery. The Canal itself was overgrown with vegetation and I remember picking pussy willow there every year.

Every Sunday morning my sister, Penny, and I would walk along the towpath with our friend from Pimley Cottages to the Sunday School at Uffington Church Hall. Our friend's sister would take us as she was our Sunday School teacher and much admired by me and Penny. Dad, who was the gardener for the owner of Pimley Manor, took us on lots of walks along the old Canal. Chickens used to nest in the Canal hedges at Uffington and so we used to take some of the eggs home. Mum had to be careful though as sometimes the eggs had gone off. What a smell! One year we children found a Pheasant's nest with 2 eggs in it in the bramble undergrowth on the Canal bank. This caused great excitement and Dad had to be fetched to see our amazing find.

The Seven Pitches football fields were farmed then and the farmer lived in one of Pimley Cottages. All the Pimley families used to have a 5th November bonfire on the nearest field and overlooking the Canal. Mum used to bake potatoes in the fire, they were delicious. We only had a few fireworks and Dad used to pretend the jumping jacks were after him. Simple pleasures which gave us much happiness.

The farmer kept pigs the other side of our garden wall and there were lots of bales of scratchy straw in the granary. Great fun was had jumping from the top of the high granary steps. There was an old dusty cart at the front of the cottages under the old barn roof and this was good for playing in. The cart is still at Pimley and all spruced up now.

Then there was fishing in Pimley Brook with a cane and string and one of Dad's fishing hooks. I think we used to catch Chubb and Dad always put them back in the water. The Brook was a lot deeper then than it is now and our friend fell in one day. A neighbour saved him using her dog's lead. We had gone with the neighbour who was walking Toby, her dog. Thank goodness for Toby and the quick thinking of his owner as none of us could swim!

The brook ran through Pimley Woods with Marsh Marigolds growing in profusion on its banks and there were marvellously shaped trees for climbing and using as

'dens'. The scouts had several 'huts' at Pimley and they used to cook flour and water on sticks over open fires at the brook side. Once cooked the 'pastry' was smeared with jam and eaten. They used to let me and Penny join them sometimes. The scouts also had a skiffle group complete with washboard and tea chest and we used to sit outside the hut listening to this strange sound which we rather liked. In winter there was tobogganing down the steep slope by the stream at the side of the Canal. At the bottom it was very marshy and there were lots of frogs here in spring and summer among the Ragged Robin. Snowdrops grew in profusion in Pimley Woods, like a white carpet.

The owner of the Manor had a gentle black and white curly haired dog called James and he and his mistress took many walks on Pimley Lane which was much potholed then. There was also a donkey named Beauty who lived in one of the outbuildings opposite the Lodge. Mum used to brush her coat as it got easily matted.

I came back to Shrewsbury in 1980. The 2 wooden scout huts have gone and the brick one is now someone's home, as is the store where Dad kept the carrots and beetroots under piles of sand (I can smell that glorious room now). No farmer lives at the Cottages and the pigs have gone. I expect the granary is empty of its prickly straw bales. The biggest change is that the Canal has been filled in right to the top of the Bridge. Where I walked with my sons and where my eldest son now walks with his children is actually where the Canal itself was. Still, it is good to see history repeating itself. I like to think that we are all going in the same direction. Having recently lost my parents, it is good to remember the old Canal and to continue to visit and walk there.

Diana Harmer



Pimley Bridge (1961)

Artefact or Artefake?

Are these scars genuine?

- Users of the canals will probably be familiar with these pieces of foundry-work which we find attached to the masonry at either side of canal bridges. We are told that they were installed to protect the masonry from abrasion from the towropes used for pulling boats along the canal, and that the grooves in the cast iron are the result of the wear-and-tear of thousands of ropes passing over them.

Are these scars real?? Or are we victims of an elaborate hoax??

- Let us consider the evidence against their authenticity.
- These pieces of cast iron are all in remarkably good order considering their alleged antiquity – hardly rusty at all.

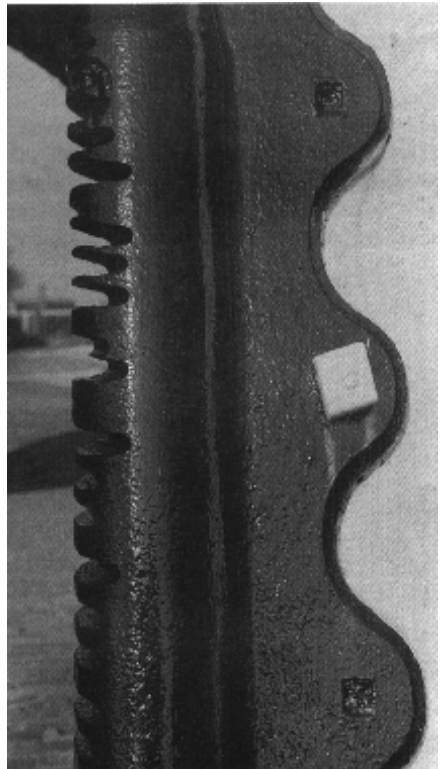
- Why antiquity? Well, the use of horse-drawn boats (and hence tow-ropes) decreased markedly with the advent of the use of steam and internal combustion engines almost a century ago.

- The scars themselves are of a remarkably uniform size - some are much deeper than others it is true, but are almost universally the same width - about ½ inch - and what is more - parallel in the groove and with each other - not a curve in sight.

- All the samples of tow-ropes I have ever seen have been have been 1 inch in diameter or thicker. Are we to believe that boat-masters would use such slender ropes which surely would need constant replacement?

- Next let us consider the ropes themselves - the ropes were not made of steel, but of hemp or sisal or other natural material and yet appear to have worn very deep scars in a much more durable material – they would have to be very abrasive indeed to have caused such wear.

- It would also seem that any knots or



Where masonry was subject to constant wear from the towropes of thousands of horse-drawn barges, it was reinforced by iron strips which (it is said) still carry the rope scars.

joins in the tow-rope would tend to jamb in any grooves which were formed, or otherwise wear the grooves wider. No record has been found to indicate this.

- Consider also, if you will, the mechanism of towing a boat. The tow-rope would be of the order of 50 yards long in order to avoid too steep an angle between the boat and the bank which otherwise would cause steering difficulties. The rope would hang in a catenary ranging in height of about 4 feet from the ground at the horse end to about 7 feet at the attachment to the mast and be close to the ground somewhere about halfway between the boat and the horse.

- When passing over the rubbing strake, then, the rope would start almost four feet up it, slide downward until the catenary reached lowest point and sweep upwards again as it was lifted to mast height. The resultant wear should therefore appear as a barrel-shaped indentation heaviest in the middle. Where then do the grooves arise?

- If any reader has any light to shed on this puzzle please contact Charlie Stroud on 01952 550797 or even at Charlie@chasstroud.com

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The Joys of the Canals?

In the industrial heartland of England lies a green limb, its fingers reaching out – North, South, East and West. On road maps it hardly exists, but for boaters the Inland Waterways hold a historic key to communication. Nowhere in Britain have I found communication more simple and alive than on canals. Gathering for conversation, and waving to one-another in passing, seems to be the central theme of canal life today.

Armed with the idea, sufficient funds to buy a narrowboat and a small black Labrador called Alice, we set out to look for a boat.

Our search started at Norbury Junction where we looked at ex-hire craft. Somehow I wasn't quite happy with what we saw, so we took the dog for a walk along the towpath while we discussed the matter.

We were pleased and surprised to see a couple of old friends arriving in their boat which they had purchased a few years earlier. "What are you doin'?" they asked. "Looking for a boat" we said. Leaning dangerously overboard Pauline looked into our faces like a soothsayer and said "If you travel down the canal for a few miles to Goldstone wharf you'll find your boat on the opposite bank. It's called "Owly" or something of the like, and it's for sale".

We found the boat, but it was all locked up on a locked mooring across the canal. Just as we were turning to leave, an elderly boater called to us and offered to show us around "OWL". For me it was love at first sight.

Naomi Stillhere 1997

The Delaware Canal

Last Christmas David Adams visited this canal whilst in the USA. As a direct result we have exchanged memberships with the 'Friends of the Delaware Canal'. This is a brief history of their canal (adapted from their website: www.focd.org):

"The canal is sixty miles long and was built as part of a 1,200 mile network of canals intended to connect Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Lake Erie. Completed in 1832, it runs from Bristol to Easton, where it connects the Lehigh Canal. The primary purpose of these two waterways was to provide a way to transport anthracite coal from the north-eastern Pennsylvania coal regions to the cities on the eastern seaboard. In the most productive years, just prior to the Civil War, over 3,000 mule-drawn boats travelled up and down this route moving over one million tons of coal a year, as well as smaller quantities of other products.

Over its course of 60 miles, the Delaware Canal drops 165 feet through twenty-three locks. Ten aqueducts carry the waterway over small valleys and streams.

As railroads began to seriously compete for freight, canal-generated revenues dropped and in 1858 the decision was made to sell the Delaware Canal to private operators. From 1866 to 1931 the Delaware Canal was run by the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company, the owners of the Lehigh Canal. Canal traffic and revenue declined until the "iron horse" finally beat the mule when the last paying boat locked through on October 17, 1931.

On the same day 40 miles of the canal was deeded to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and made into the Roosevelt State Park. In 1940 the Commonwealth finally acquired all 60 miles of the canal. In 1978 the canal was designated a National Historic Landmark. By popular demand the park was renamed the Delaware Canal State Park in 1989. It is preserved today as the most intact and fully-watered of America's towpath canals."

It is interesting to note similarities with the S&N. The Delaware was built at almost precisely the same time as the Newport Branch and, although significantly longer, has exactly the same number of locks. It also has a good number of aqueducts, like the Shrewsbury, and the new replacement Tohickon Aqueduct (picture alongside) has a certain similarity to our own Longdon-on-Tern Aqueduct.



SHREWSBURY & NEWPORT CANALS TRUST

Membership Application

The annual membership fees are:	Individual Membership	£8.50
<i>(please circle category)</i>	Family Membership*	£10.00
	Youth Membership (under 18)	£3.50
	Group / Corporate Membership	£20.00

Supplement on all annual rates: for EU £2, for rest of the world: £4.

*Family membership is for people living at the same address: only one copy of newsletters and other material is sent per family membership. Only the person indicated as "applicant" below will be entitled to vote.

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").

I/We hereby agree, if elected, to be bound by all the provisions of the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust (copies available on request).

I/We further agree to my/our membership details being recorded on computer, solely for the Trust's organisational purposes.

Signed:.....Date:.....

Gift Aid Declaration – please sign if you pay tax

I want all donations (includes membership subscriptions) I make from the date of this declaration to be treated as Gift Aid Donations (you must pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax equal to the tax reclaimed on your donation(s)). I will inform you if I cease to pay tax.

Signed:.....Date:.....

Forename

Surname

DoB (if under 18)

Applicant:

Others:
(family
membership)

Address:

.....

.....(Postcode).....

Telephone number: E-mail:

Please post with your remittance to: The Membership Secretary,
The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust, 4 Arscott, Pontesbury, Shrewsbury, SY5 0XP

Features of the Canal - Number 2 - Berwick Tunnel

Berwick Tunnel is the only tunnel on the S&N. It is 970 yards (or for those who prefer such things, 887 metres) long, although originally planned to be slightly shorter with cuttings, at each end. The tunnel has finely proportioned portals faced with stone, the keystone being inscribed with the date 1797. The tunnel is brick lined and a slight bend meant that it was not possible to see through. Although of reasonable length the tunnel is fairly shallow and it is likely that if the canal had been built a few years later it would have been completely replaced by a cutting.

Berwick was remarkable for being the first tunnel of any significant length to have a towpath built through it. Even this was unique as it was of timber, carried on bearers set in the wall. The waterway of the tunnel was just over 10 feet (3m) wide. With the towpath projecting 3 feet (1m) sufficient room was left for single line passage of boats. Although this would have been a fairly tight fit, the fact that the towpath projected from the wall allowed the full width to be filled with water, thus reducing the resistance to passing boats. Although the engineer of the Shrewsbury Canal, Josiah Clowes, designed the tunnel, the towpath was added at the suggestion of William Reynolds. The towpath did not unfortunately survive long, probably because of lack of maintenance, and was removed in 1819; just 22 years after the canal had opened. Boats were then 'legged' through.

The Shrewsbury Canal was operated, until the Newport Branch opened, entirely by tub boats. Each boat was about 20 feet (6m) long and 6 feet 4 inches (1.9m) wide and carried about 8 tons. They were pulled in trains, a single horse pulling up to 140 tons. They continued to be used after this time, and in 1838 the canal company minute book records "when two trains of Boats shall have entered the Tunnel at the same time the party which shall have first passed the Centre of the Tunnel shall proceed and the other party shall return so as to allow the other to pass where both are laden but when one train is unladen such train shall turn back". As canal historian Charles Hadfield commented, "after a boatman had turned back a loaded train two or three times, his language must have been worth hearing"! It also makes one wonder how disputes had been resolved in the previous 40 years of operation - fisticuffs?

Both portals of the tunnel, although bricked up, can still be seen. The western portal is right beside the road to Preston and the western end can be approached along the canal from the Atcham - Uffington road at Berwick Wharf. The length of canal between the new A5 and the surviving bridge at Berwick Wharf, including the tunnel, is still owned by British Waterways and retains some water. BW make periodic inspections inside the tunnel which, apart from the ventilation shafts having been pushed in following the disposal the body of a tragic murder victim in the 1960's, is reported to be in good condition.