

Features of the Canal – The Humber Arm

When the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal was first considered the company looked to make a connection with the Shropshire canal network by building a branch from Cowley, near Gnosall, to the Donnington Wood Canal at Pave Lane. This would have been 7¾ miles long and level. However, this plan fell through and permission was obtained instead for the Newport Branch.

At the same time permission was granted for two branches from the Newport Branch. They were to be built to Edmond and Lilleshall. The latter was to be executed by a canal with 7 locks or by tramroad. Neither of these branches were actually built but the purpose of the latter was later met by the Humber Arm.

The Humber Arm was opened in May 1844, more than 10 years after completion of the Newport Branch. It was about ¾ mile long and ran in a straight line from near the Dukes Drive Aqueduct to the Duke of Sutherland's Lubstree wharf on Humber Lane. This gave the Lilleshall Company a more direct outlet to the national canal network than before and it carried out quantities of coal, pig iron, and fluxing limestone. Tramways linked the wharf with the company's various works.

In 1870 the canal company, who were keen to divert traffic from the Trench Incline, agreed to lease Lubstree wharf from the 3rd Duke and pay a wharfage rate of ½d a ton. In order to carry, what was clearly a substantial trade, they diverted 30 boats from their fleet for the purpose. At the same time a standard gauge railway line was built from the Lilleshall Company's works to the wharf to replace the tramways.

By 1880 the arm was carrying only fluxing stone, despite the toll on iron ore having been reduced to try and promote trade. However, in a further attempt to promote the use of the arm the company agreed specially reduced rates for the Lilleshall Company for 300-400 tons a week of limestone and 100-150 tons of iron ore. They also hoped for an increased coal and pig-iron trade. This must have been a fairly successful move for a further siding was built and in 1891 and 1905 the lease on the wharf was renewed.

In 1922 however, the Duke of Sutherland decided to close Lubstree wharf and the railway line to Lilleshall. Thus the last traffic on the Humber Arm ceased, and along with many other of the Shropshire Union Canals the arm was legally abandoned by the L.M.S.R. Act of 1944.