Features of the Canal – Forton Aqueduct & Skew Bridge

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Forton Skew Bridge

At Forton, between Newport and Norbury Junction, are to be found two structures almost unrivalled on the rest of the canal network. The road from Forton to Meretown crosses both.

The first of these is the Skew Bridge. A skew bridge is one that has its arch set obliquely on its abutments instead of at right angles to them. Since the erection of courses of stone or brick to run obliquely to the walls of a bridge requires more skill and application than does a straightforward job, engineers often made all sorts of twists in roads as they approached bridges in their efforts to cross obstructions at right angles – hence the relative scarcity of skew bridges. In his book *'Navigable waterways'* L.T.C.Rolt writes of "the necessity for crossing existing roads at oblique angles, … confronting engineers with an entirely novel structural problem", and he cannot make up his mind as to the man who pioneered the skew bridge. Not only is the bridge at Forton a skewed bridge, but Telford saw fit to carry a brook directly underneath in a fine stone culvert. Last year Staffordshire County Council carried out strengthening work to the bridge, without any visible indication that anything has happened.

A few yards towards Norbury is an aqueduct which carries both road and canal over the River Meese. This aqueduct-bridge is, in the words of Staffordshire County Council "a Scheduled Ancient Monument, unique in Staffordshire, a most unusual structure in the country as a whole, and an important monument to the technology of the canal". Unlike most canal aqueducts there is no narrowing of the canal at the crossing, which is particularly surprising because with the inclusion of the road the structure is of tremendous width.

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Picture of Forton Aquaduct