

Locks on the Shrewsbury Canal

Following the description of the Shrewsbury Canal by The Baron Dupin published in 1825 which was reproduced in the last issue of S&News, member Peter Brown has written:

I was particularly interested in Baron Dupin's 1825 description of the locks on the Shrewsbury Canal which was reproduced in Issue 29 of the S&News. This stated that the locks were 'divided into four parts by three inner gates, which turn ... on a horizontal axis, lining at the bottom of the lock. The water may be introduced in each of these compartments, and drawn out independently of the three others.'

This can be compared with what Thomas Telford wrote in Plymley's 'Agriculture of Shropshire' (published 1803, but probably written in 1797): 'Each lock has three gates, one of which divides the body of the lock, so as to admit one, three or four boats at a time'. He explained: 'This is accomplished by having gates that are drawn up and let down perpendicularly.'

Thus Dupin said there were five gates, Telford three. Dupin said the three within the lock were rising flap gates (a similar method is now sometimes used in river flow control structures); Telford implied the middle one was a guillotine gate similar to those at the ends. Telford's version sounds simpler and is more logical.

However, I've looked at the remains of two locks (Turnip and Hadley Park) and never noticed hints of a former intermediate gate or gates, nor associated sluice holes. No grooves, no patches of brickwork. Has any member found any relevant archaeological evidence at any of the locks?

Peter Brown

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Continuing the debate on the existence or otherwise of intermediate gates in the last few editions of S&News, member Tony Clayton has written:

I received S&News today, and was interested to read the short article on the question of intermediate gates.

Firstly, may I say that there is indeed evidence of possible intermediate gates on some of the locks, which I observed while working on them during the 1970s.

This information is in the Chapter that I wrote in 'Thomas Telford, Engineer' published as the proceedings of a seminar held at Ironbridge in April 1979.

Lock 4 (Hadley Park) and Lock 6 (Shuck's) show traces of grooves in the lock walls below the original waterline; my recollection is of timber in one of them. That at Lock 6 was on the offside wall as far as I remember. Getting a close look is very difficult in their present overgrown state. Lock 10 (Eyton Village Lock) and Lock 11 (Eyton Lower Lock) both had vertical columns of bricks as if a vertical groove had been infilled.

In all four cases these grooves lie just over 20 ft from the top gate sill, which is exactly where one would expect such intermediate gates.

Sadly, I was unable to get as far as excavating the entire lock chambers, as water still flowed through 4 and 6 at that time, 10 was turned into a weir and 11 is particularly inaccessible. I do have detailed measurements of several of the chambers, and a host of photographs which can be seen at <http://www.tonycanalpics.co.uk/shrewcan>.

My suspicion is that there was a design problem in having an intermediate guillotine as the gate would have to be raised to a considerable height to give clearance for tub-boats ascending the lock from below that gate. The bottom gates did not have to be raised anything like as far.

Tony Clayton
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