

## Wappenshall Wharf, 1835-50

### Part 1: The wharf and the Sutherland Estates

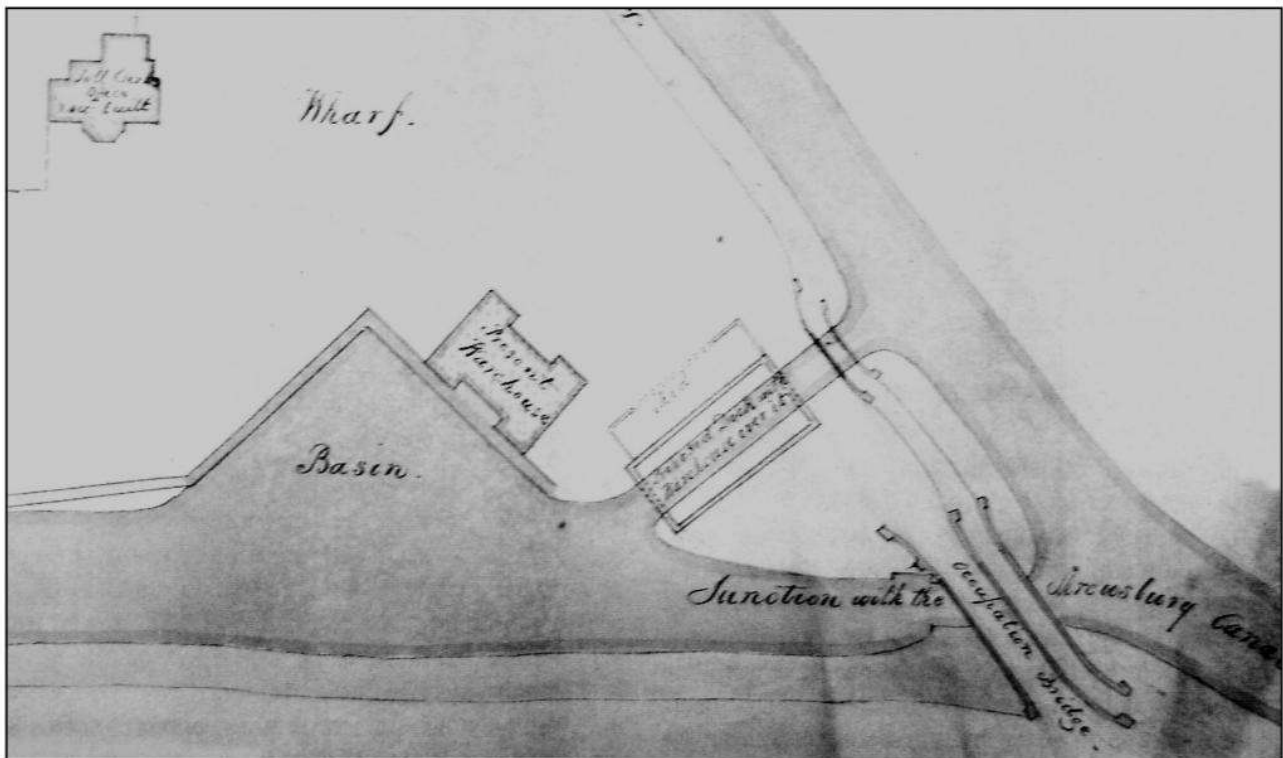
*[This article by Peter Brown was originally published in the July 2005 edition of the 'Journal of the Railway & Canal Historical Society', and is reproduced with the kind permission of the author and editor of the Journal. The second part of the article will deal with the trade and the carriers].*

Wappenshall Wharf is situated 2½ miles northeast of the market town of Wellington in east Shropshire. (Map reference: SJ663146) The Shrewsbury Canal, a tub-boat canal from the coal-mining and iron-founding district east of Wellington to the county town, opened in 1797 but there was no canal connection to the rest of the country until the Newport branch of the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal (B&LJC) was opened through from Norbury Junction on the Wolverhampton-Nantwich main line on 2 March 1835.<sup>1</sup> Although the canal from Wappenshall Junction to Shrewsbury had been rebuilt to take full size narrowboats, the section southeast towards the inclined plane at Trench remained unconverted. The junction was therefore the obvious place to build a wharf, both for the transshipment of goods between tub-boats and narrowboats, and for the unloading of goods destined for the Wellington area.

### The development of the wharf

At Market Drayton, the Canal Company itself developed the wharf. Not so for Wellington — the major landowner in the area was the Duke of Sutherland<sup>2</sup> and it was the Sutherland estate which developed and managed the wharf. A two storey warehouse of typical appearance was built by the triangular winding hole preparatory for the opening; nothing has been ascertained about who designed this.

As early as July 1835 it was noted that there were delays at Wappenshall because of the lack of room at the wharf and warehouse.<sup>3</sup> In particular, William Botfield, the iron and coal master with works at Old Park and Stirchley, wanted covered accommodation for transshipment. James Loch, the Duke of Sutherland's Principal Agent,<sup>4</sup> considered that the traders should themselves construct the extra accommodation which they were demanding, paying a rent (which 'should not be excessive') and being subject to strict conditions. He was concerned that it was difficult to judge what was necessary: 'when people trade on another's capital, applications will not be infrequent and always pressing', but on the other hand, if one is too cautious 'the prosperity of the place may be improperly repressed'.<sup>5</sup>



*Plan of Wappenshall Wharf in 1836, showing the basin, the junction with the Shrewsbury Canal and the skew occupation bridge, the toll clerk's office, the 'present warehouse' and the 'proposed dock and warehouse over it'*

(Shropshire Archives, 972/175)

However, Loch was over-ruled by the Duke himself. A second warehouse was therefore planned, built end-on to the wharf so as to permit further development, as suggested by Loch.<sup>6</sup> Three storeys tall, it was built over a second link between the Newport branch and the Shrewsbury Canal, enabling unloading or transshipment to take place in the dry. Unusually, a cart road passed through the building. The architect and contractor was James Trubshaw, who was a personal friend of the Duke, having worked for the him both at Trentham Hall and Lille-shall Hall, and who also had much canal experience.<sup>7</sup> James Loch appears to have had misgivings about employing Trubshaw, the implication being that he feared the building would be over-designed;<sup>8</sup> at this time he was very concerned about the rate at which the Duke was spending money generally. Construction of the new warehouse started in February or March 1836 and it was in use by January 1838.<sup>9</sup>

The two warehouses, together with the skew towpath bridge and the wharfinger's house, still stand — the later warehouse is a particularly elegant building, and we can now be grateful that the Duke ignored Loch's advice. The contemporary plan (part of which is reproduced above) also shows a weighbridge. By 1840 an inn, appropriately called the Sutherland Arms, had been built and leased to John Tranter.<sup>10</sup>

## The wharfingers

John Tomlinson was appointed wharfinger early in 1835. From the start he also acted on behalf of the Canal Company, which evidently caused some problems as the following year Loch found it necessary to remind him that he was the Duke's servant, and that his first duty therefore was to the Duke.<sup>11</sup>

The accounts show that Tomlinson was paid £50 in 1842 for 6 months salary and expenses, and £117 in 1843 for 18 months salary and expenses, figures which do not seem consistent. The assistant wharfinger was paid £50 and £97 in the two years, but the periods were not stated. Another man was employed for weighing the iron.

Tomlinson's record-keeping was sometimes criticised, as was the occasional lateness of his traffic returns. Although dismissed at the end of 1845 and held liable for the outstanding arrears totalling £435, one gains the impression that his problem was sloppy accounting and ineffectual debt collection, rather than fraud. The financial mess he left behind him took several months to sort out as it proved necessary to contact each of the carrying companies. He was replaced by Joseph Barlow, who was probably the 'good Bridgewater clerk' referred to in correspondence; also the accounting system was improved.<sup>12</sup>

## Trading accounts

Because the records are incomplete, it is not possible to construct trading accounts for the whole of the period.<sup>13</sup> In summary, the known figures are:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Receipts</i>	<i>Payments</i>	<i>Surplus</i>
1839	303	195	108
1840	521	159	362
1841	593	225	368
1842	579	178	401
1843	507	339	168
1844	484	275	209
1845	486	153	233
1846	495		
1847	731		
1848	630		
1849	486		
1850	231		

By 1846 the total amount expended on capital works (principally buildings) at Wappenshall was stated to be £5,342.

These accounts show that the wharf was clearly profitable, even after allowing for the investment which had been made in warehouses. However, because the capital cost was so great, the return on capital employed was only about 5%. James Loch was proved right: if the Duke had taken his advice and licensed the traders to make the extra accommodation they wanted, rather than providing it himself (made even more costly by employing a regionally-respected architect/contractor), his investment would have been only about £1,500 instead of over £5,000, his return on capital employed would have been much greater and his financial risk significantly less.

### Payments

The detailed figures for payments are tantalisingly incomplete and do not agree with the totals above because the latter excludes capital items such as 'making canal basin'. In summary the figures for the two years for which records survive are:

	1842	1843
	£	£
Employees	129	272
'Making canal basin'	172	-
Maintenance	46	31
Other	8	12
	—	—
Total payments	355	315
Income	579	508
	—	—
Surplus for the year	224	193

'Making the canal basin' cannot refer to constructing the triangular winding hole, which was done by 1835; perhaps it was enlarged or improved. The amount seems too big for it to refer to dredging.

### Receipts

Analysis of the monthly cash receipts from mid-1841 to mid-1849 shows little seasonal variation. The peak month tended to be March, the lowest months June and July. This appears to have been typical for canal revenues; Pickford's payments to the Oxford Canal show exactly this pattern, which has

been attributed to the timing of manufacturers' export shipments.<sup>14</sup>

Railways came late to Shropshire. The railways from Shrewsbury to Wellington and on to Stafford (and hence to the main population centres and ports) and to Oakengates opened on 1 June 1849; the line from Oakengates to a temporary station at Wolverhampton opened on 12 November that year. The immediate effect on the trade at the wharf is clear from the monthly income for 1849:

January	-	£48	July	-	£49
February	-	£41	August	-	£54
March	-	£63	September	-	£28
April	-	£48	October	-	£24
May	-	£45	November	-	£23
June	-	£38	December	-	£25

The railways had a significant, if brief, effect on the revenues in another way: the record year of 1847 included a substantial amount of rails, chairs and other iron products for railway construction.

	<i>Wharfage &amp; warehousing</i>	<i>On delivery of goods</i>	<i>Transshipping under the dock</i>
	d	d	d
For every package not exceeding ½ cwt	1	1	½
above ½ cwt not exceeding 1 cwt	2½	1½	½
above 1 cwt not exceeding 3 cwt	3½	2	1
above 3 cwt not exceeding 6 cwt	5	2½	1½
above 6 cwt	7	3	2
All articles not in packages per ton	7½	4	3
NB Cranage will be charged on all packages exceeding one ton as follows:			d
above 1 ton not exceeding 2 tons			4
above 2 tons not exceeding 2 tons			6
above 3 tons not exceeding 2 tons			8
above 4 tons not exceeding 2 tons			10
above 5 tons not exceeding 2 tons			1 / 2
above 7 tons not exceeding 2 tons			2 / 6

*Table 1: Schedule of charges for wharfage, warehousing and carnage, 31 December 1835*

### **Charges for wharfage, warehousing and cranage**

After the wharf had been open for a year, James Loch somehow gained the impression that no charge was being made for warehousing, writing to William Smith, the Land Steward or Sub-Agent responsible for looking after the Duke of Sutherland's interests in Shropshire: 'You may build warehouses

as big as the Wrekin, and if you put no rent on them they will not satisfy the trader.<sup>15</sup> In fact charges were made according to weight. The schedule as at 31 December 1835 was as set out in Table 1.

A note appended to the schedule stated, 'The person using the cranes must be liable for all damage done to them when moving weights exceeding 6 tons,' implying that there was more than one crane, and that they were operated by the traders' employees.

The legal basis for these charges must have been queried, because early in 1839 James Loch sought a counsel's opinion from Loftus Lowndes. The answer could not have pleased Loch: the charges for wharfage and warehousing were in excess of those permitted under the Act authorising the canal, and there appeared to be no statutory power for charging for crantage. Normally private businesses could charge whatever they wanted, unlike entities set up by statute (such as the canal company). However, Section 145 of the 1826 Act which authorised the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal explicitly regulated the charges at both canal company and private wharfs. Loch has appended a footnote to Lowndes' letter: 'The dock under the warehouse is private property, not part of the Parliamentary line. I apprehend the Lord may make a charge for that... accommodation.'<sup>16</sup> This seems a dubious interpretation of the legal position.

All users were charged the same fees. In particular, no preference was given to the Lilleshall Company, in which the Duke's uncle, Granville Leveson-Gower, Earl Granville (1773-1846), had a half share.

## **Decline**

The wharf records end in December 1850, implying that the Sutherland Estates ceased their direct management, though no confirmation of this has been found.

Joseph Barlow is shown in the 1851 census as wharfinger, and three wharf labourers are also listed. This seems surprising, seeing that in the more prosperous years of 1842 and 1843 the accounts show that the wharfinger had only two assistants. However, Bagshaw's directory for 1851 lists John Tranter, the licensee of the Sutherland Arms, as the wharfinger; one can speculate that this was under a rental or licence arrangement, rather than as an employee. The Sutherland Estate's rent book for 1860 shows Tranter as paying £200 a year for property at Wappenshall, but does not state what the property comprised.<sup>17</sup>

The 1851 census also lists a boat-builder, John Goodwin.

The decline in the activity at the wharf is evidenced by the Sutherland Arms closing some time between 1856 and 1861.<sup>18</sup> The wharf area continued in commercial use until almost the end of the 20th century, despite the last trade

on the canal being in the 1930s. In the 1960s it was a coal yard, and later a haulage firm was located there.

The buildings are now (2005) derelict and, although listed Grade II, need a suitable new use if they are to survive. It is to be hoped that any new use will be compatible with the eventual reopening of this canal.

### Notes and references

I wish to thank Neil Clarke, Edwin Shearing and Ray Shill for their comments and advice.

1. The section of the branch from Wappenshall Junction to Newport opened on 22 January 1835. The rest of the B&LJC system opened on 2 March according to the Company minutes and the notices in the press, but according to the Wappenshall Wharf records, the first boat arrived from Wolverhampton on 28 February, carrying 6¼ tons of goods.
2. George Granville Leveson-Gower (1786-1861) had become 2nd Duke of Sutherland on the death of his father in 1833.
3. B&LJC Sub-Committee, 16 July 1835: Public Record Office (PRO), RAIL808/1.
4. James Loch (1780-1855) had been appointed Principal Agent of the Marquis of Stafford (who later became the 1st Duke of Sutherland) in 1812. He held a similar office for Lord Francis Egerton (later the Earl of Ellesmere) and was an auditor to the trust estate of the Earl of Dudley. He lost the latter role in 1837, the year he became Superintendent to the Bridgewater Trustees. He was a Whig MP for St Germain (1827-30), then for Wick (1830-52).
5. Letters from James Loch to William Lewis, 28 Sept 1835 and to William Smith, 23 Dec 1835: Staffordshire Record Office (SRO), D593/K/1/5/31.
6. Letters from James Loch to William Smith, 1 March 1835, and to James Trubshaw, 8 May 1835: SRO, D593/K/1/5/31.
7. James Trubshaw (1777-1853) acted as consulting engineer for the Trent & Mersey Canal in the 1830s; he had also been a contractor for part of the Macclesfield Canal. His most notable achievement was as contractor for the Grosvenor Bridge at Chester (1827-32), its 200 feet span still being England's longest stone arch. See Anne Bayliss, *The Life and Works of James Trubshaw*, privately published, 1978: William Salt Library, Stafford.
8. Letter from James Loch to William Smith, 11 January 1836: SRO, D593/K/1/5/32.
9. B&LJC Committee, 18 January 1838: PRO, RAIL 808/1.
10. Robson's Directory, 1840.
11. Letter from James Loch to William Smith, 18 March 1836: SRO, D593/K/1/5/32.
12. Wappenshall Wharf, abstract of debts 1845-50: Shropshire Archives (SA), 972/175; letter from James Loch to the Duke of Sutherland, 11 February 1845: SRO, D593/K/1/5/47.
13. SA, 972/175; SRO, D593/L/4/25.
14. Gerald L Turnbull, *Traffic and Transport: an Economic History of Pickford's*, 1979, 88.

15. Letter from James Loch to William Smith, 18 March 1836: SRO, D593/K/1/5/30.
16. 7 Geo 4 c95; counsel's opinion: SRO, D593/E/7/18.
17. SRO, D593/G/1/24.
18. The Sutherland Arms appears in Slater's Directory of 1856 but not in Hatred's Directory of 1861.

Peter Brown