

WEIGH-HOUSE

The magazine of the
Somersetshire Coal Canal Society



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www.coalcanal.com



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Chairman's Report by Derrick Hunt

There is an incredible amount of activity going on with the Society at present. This will be covered elsewhere in this magazine and in the next issue.

This is due to the many new active volunteers who have joined us recently. The list of Committee members has grown as can be seen on the inside cover. However, sometimes when new people come on board and bring in new ideas and ways of doing things, we lose some of our older members. Liz Tuddenham one of the stalwarts of the Society has decided to resign.

Steve Page has provided this contribution which sums up Liz very well:

I have many memories of meeting with Liz at the talks and walks. Always enjoyable, with our conversations covering a wide range of subjects over the years. Liz gave sterling service to the Society and its members; always willing to share her knowledge with valuable contributions to the topics. Sometimes unexpected ones and not always about the SCC!

Liz also produced handouts for the walks, with sketch maps and diagrams to explain the arrangement of locks, pumping engines, and of course the caisson lock. As editor of Weigh-House, Liz also produced graphics to illustrate articles. For something I had written, Liz was able to turn my hastily-drawn sketches into a series of graphics to illustrate the sequence of events during the operation of a self-acting incline. In order to explain what was required, I had to visit Liz's house, in itself an interesting experience, with numerous obstacles to negotiate, before reaching the room where the computer was situated.

On another occasion, Liz and myself decided to visit Combe Hay to try and find the location of a photograph of the contractor's railway. We were literally crawling along on hands and knees to get through the dense undergrowth to reach the spot where we thought the photographer had stood. Real dedication!

And of course there is the Poppy Records Christmas Quiz, which Liz produces every year. A series of extremely cryptic clues, linked by a common theme, which once discovered, gives you some idea of what sort of answers you are looking for, although much head-scratching is still required!

I am sure that we all recognise her valuable contributions. Too many to mention, but I would say that the work parties and Weigh-House would not be where they are today without Liz's dedication.

-Steve Page

A quick snapshot of some of our activities in addition to our own programme. We have given talks to other societies, been in regular contact with B&NES Council, the Highways Agency regarding Dunkerton Aqueduct, attended the C&RT/IWA Restoration Conference and met with Dan Norris, Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority. Hope to see you at the AGM in June, 2024!

Finally, my theme for 2024 and beyond is:

"Teamwork makes the dream work"

From the Membership Secretary by Steve Page

We continue to receive a steady stream of new members joining, which is very encouraging!

Thank you to everyone who has already renewed their subscription so far this year. If you pay by cheque or via the website and PayPal, please make your payment as soon as possible to reduce the number of reminders I will have to send out later in the year (last year it was around 100!).

If you pay by standing order, please ensure that you have increased your payment amount to the current rate of £10.

The "Groups.io" email address has proved very useful as a means of communicating with the membership. If you are not already receiving messages from the committee by this means and would like to do so, please email me and I will send you a link to join. Please note that if you change your email address, let me know and I will send you an invitation to re-join with your new email - the system will not allow me to simply amend it.

Finally, if you would prefer to receive Weigh-House by email, instead of a printed copy, please let me know. This will help keep our postage costs down.

**Membership application forms are available from
the Membership Secretary, Steve Page**

Phone: 01761 433418

Email: membership@coalcanal.org.uk

New Members

We welcome the following who have recently joined:

Ms T. Andrews, Timsbury
Mr R. Brown, Reigate
Ms J. Clarke, Midsomer Norton
Mr H. Cross, Skipton
Ms R. Dorsett, Paulton
Mr K. Evans, Peasedown St John
Ms K. Ford, Paulton
Mr A. Iles, Paulton
Ms P. Mousley, Keynsham
Ms H. Parsons, Paulton

Donations

The Society wishes to express its thanks to the following for their generous donations:

Ms A. Cannon
Mr & Mrs T. Fisher
Ms A. Johnson
Mr D. Storey
Mr G. Taylor
Mr J. Weeks
Ailsa Hutchings

Thank you!

Editor's Notes by Claire Godden

Welcome to issue number 88 of the Weigh-House Magazine!

With the sudden and unexpected changeover in editors, we had to hustle to get issue number 87 out and, in doing so, forgot to thank our previous editor, Liz Tuddenham, for her many years of dedication and hard work on this magazine! Liz put her heart and soul into the Weigh-House magazine and all things Coal Canal and we miss having her on the team.

I will take the opportunity here to introduce a new member of the Coal Canal family: Kathryn Ford.

Kathryn, originally from Paulton, has recently returned to live here and has graciously taken on the role of Fundraising Secretary. She will be seeking fundraising opportunities to support the canal restoration work. This will involve developing costed funding plans and writing grant applications to potential funders.

Welcome, Kathryn, we are excited to have you on the team!

Changes To Our Constitution And Legal Status By Martin Turner

The Society held an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on the 15th February, 2024, in Paulton Village Hall, to discuss the proposal to change our legal status to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

The committee's aim in proposing this change was to adopt a constitution more fitting to the modern world and to provide limited personal financial liability for the Society's trustees. The new CIO status will also put the Society on a more professional footing when dealing with fundraising and legislative bodies.

The meeting was well attended by members and, following a presentation by the Secretary, Martin Turner, the proposal was put to the vote and overwhelmingly supported by those present.

The committee consequently applied to the Charity Commissioners to make the proposed changes to our constitution and to re-register the Society as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. I am pleased to report that our application has been successful and we have been granted Charitable Incorporated Organisation status!

This will bring with it numerous advantages, including the ability for the Society over time to acquire any land and structures that will be necessary to support the restoration of the canal.

Our new CIO constitution can be viewed on the *Contact us* page of our website: www.coalcanal.com

What Are Stop Plank Slots For? By Martin Turner

Stop plank slots are a common sight along canals. They normally occur at regular intervals, especially when the ground is not so good, and are often incorporated into the abutments of bridges. They allow sections of the canal to be drained for maintenance.

This recent picture shows an impressive set of wooden stop planks inserted into slots in the walls of the Kennet & Avon (K&A) canal between Dundas Aqueduct and Avoncliff. The Canal and River Trust have recently drained a section of the canal to make repairs to a leak in the canal bed.



This section of the K&A is well known for leaks and so there are a large number of stop plank positions along its length to allow relatively short sections to be drained while work is carried out.

New Interpretation Board At Combe Hay By Martin Turner

The society has recently erected a new interpretation board alongside Lock 15 of the Combe Hay Flight.

The board includes a map of the lock flight from the Jeremiah Cruse survey of circa 1810 and an image of The Boulton & Watt design for the pump assembly installed at the lock flight when it came into operation.

Our thanks go to the landowner for giving us permission to erect the board and to Bathscape for providing funding for the work.

The new board is shown surrounded by members of the Combe Hay work party.



Narrowing the Somerset Coal Canal Bottom Lock

By Neil Hardwick

On the 25th September, 1817, the Kennet & Avon Canal Company (K&A) Western Sub-Committee meeting was about half way through when the Superintendent, John Thomas, informed the attendees that the Somerset Coal Canal Company (SCC) were to narrow the entrance to their fourteen foot broad lock:

“Mr Thomas reported that the Coal Canal Company have made a Resolution that the entrance lock of the Coal Canal at Dundas Aqueduct should be rebuilt and made wide enough only to pass 25 ton Barges, which will prevent the Kennet & Avon Barges from loading Stone on the Coal Canal as they have been accustomed to do for many years back. Resolved — that such an alteration of the Lock will be injurious to this Company and that a statement be made to the Clerks requesting their opinion as to the power of this Company to prevent such alterations.”

As stated, the K&A boats, with their 67 ton payload, would be prevented from loading not only stone at the Brassknocker Wharf but also coal at Midford. This latter trade was now substantial. In the year to May 1817, in excess of 73,000 tons had been dispatched by water from the coalfield.

It would be thought that the common interests of both canals would lead to commercial co-operation. However, the evidence is that the SCC regarded the K&A more as a rival. As far back as 1798, the K&A suggested building a shared wharf at the canal’s junction, a notion the SCC rejected. In response, the K&A exercised their option to buy the first 100 yards of the SCC that gave them rights over the lock itself. This anomaly had its roots in the period when the course of the K&A was to follow the left bank of the River Avon from Limpley Stoke to Monkton Combe before John Rennie altered the line in 1794.

On the 14th May 1818, the K&A’s solicitor, Mr Merriman, was asked to:

“...write to the Clerk of the Coal Canal Company and inform him that the Company consider that in removing the Lock at the junction of the two Canals as being very detrimental to their interests and that he is instructed to remonstrate with them, and to request that the Coal Canal Company do not proceed in making this alteration. Mr Merriman will also examine the different Acts to find whether this Company are authorised to prevent this measure from taking place. If so, to take steps without delay for that purpose. No time should be lost, as the Canal Company are taking steps to make this alteration immediately.”



Cruse Plan of Dundas c.1812

On the 11th June 1818, it was reported that the sub-committee had conducted an inspection of their own:

“The Committee proceeded up the Canal to the Dundas Aqueduct, where they landed and viewed the work now carrying on by the Coal Canal Company for for contracting and narrowing the entrance Lock to their Canal, and perceiving the same to be very injurious to the interests of the Kennet & Avon, and perfectly unjustifiable on the part of the Coal Canal Company, they directed Mr Merriman to take immediate steps to indict the said Company at the ensuing sessions as the present measure, if persisted in, will utterly prevent the navigation of the Barges on the line of the Coal Canal.”

It was around this time that the committee decided to construct a “stop gate” in the Coal Canal, it being noted that its water level was frequently lower than that of the K&A:

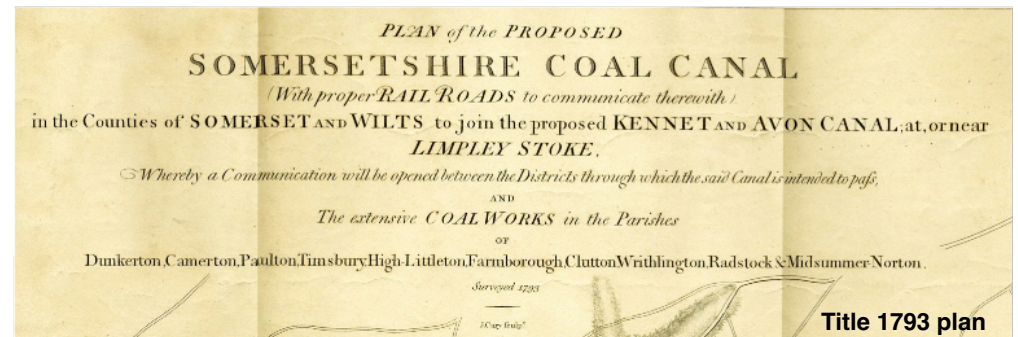
“Duncan Mackintosh, having reported that the water in the Coal Canal being frequently lower than the Kennet & Avon, a great loss of water was occasioned thereby, the Committee determined that a Stop Gate should be erected as near as may be convenient to the entrance of the Coal Canal for the purpose of preventing such waste of water, which might be of material importance to the interests of the Kennet and Avon Canal Company.”

On the 18th December 1818, it was reported that a further sub-committee had been formed to manage the dispute with the Coal Canal:

“Mr Thomas, Mr Bruce, Mr George, and Mr Sanders are appointed a sub-committee to meet a sub-committee of the Coal Canal Company on the subject of the indictment lately preferred by this Company against the Coal Canal Company for having made an alteration in their lock at the junction of the two canals.”

By January 1819, compromise was in the air. The sub-committee reported that the Coal Canal had proposed that they build a “road rail,” i.e. a tramway, to the K&A:

“The Coal Canal proposed to make a Rail-Road from all the Comb Quarries to the entrance of their Canal, which Rail-Road should convey the stone to the Kennet & Avon Canal.”

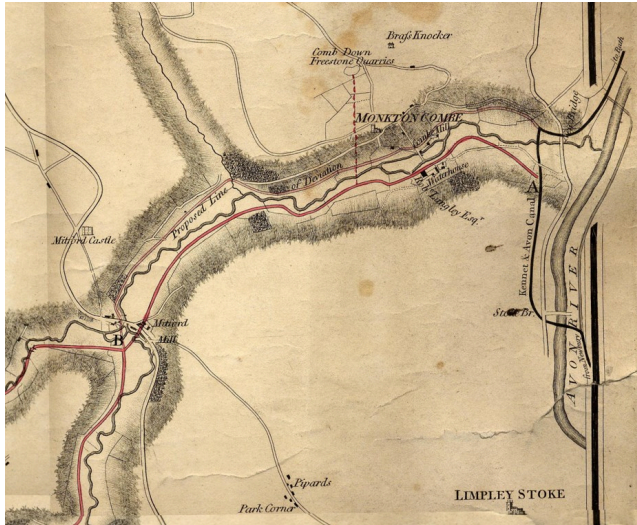


Title 1793 plan

It wasn't until the 13th December, 1819, that an outline agreement, ratified the following month, was made between the two parties. The modifications to the lock would remain. However, in compensation for the loss of trade the SCC would subsidise, to the tune of £300, an access road from the K&A Canal to Comb Lane:

“Messrs. Pickwick, Barton and Parish & Sons, being a deputation from the Coal Canal Company, after discussing a variety of Propositions with a view to obviate the objections of the

K&A Canal Company to the narrow lock lately erected by the Coal Canal Company, at the junction of their Canal with the Kennet and Avon, it was resolved unanimously that the lock should remain as it is and for the accommodation of the K&A Canal Company a road should be made from their Canal near the Lock above mentioned, to Comb Lane, that the K&A Company should undertake the making of such a Road etc, & that the Coal Canal Co. should pay them the sum of £300 towards the expense thereof.”



1793 Deposited Plan (showing original planned route of SCC and K&A).

Another four years were to elapse whilst the various loose ends were tidied up. On 26th September, 1823, the extra 7ft strip of land which resulted from the narrowing of the canal was formally returned into K&A ownership:

“The Clerk produced the Draft of a Conveyance of a piece of Land in the Parish of Monkton Combe from the Somersetshire Coal Canal Company, to this Company, containing special covenants for effecting the arrangement some time ago entered into between the two Companies respecting the size of the Lock on the Coal Canal, near its junction with the Kennet & Avon Canal. Ordered that the Clerk affix the Common Seal of the Company to such a Deed.”

Dundas Basin and its access road, now called Trollops Hill, was completed on the 6th June, 1825, at a cost of £929-15s-8d. In its first two months of operation, it handled 1676 tons of stone. In December 1825, having lost its stone business, Brassknocker Basin was converted into a coal wharf, a redundant K&A crane being removed during Spring the following year.

Sources: RAIL 842/32, 34. Minutes and Reports, Western Sub-Committee, Kennet and Avon Canal Company

Wild About Wildflowers!

By Tracy Craven

Wildflowers are recognised as critically important for providing bees, butterflies, and other pollinators with food throughout the year. At the Coal Canal, we have engaged a team of experts with an impressive background in this area.

We have been fortunate enough to receive advice - free of charge - from a team that have been immersed in wildflowers for over 60 years. They are members of The Wildflower Society and have worked in botanical gardens and with landscaping for many years. They have specialised in countryside projects like native woodland planting and hedge planting and have established a number of wildflower projects.

In the coming weeks, we will receive a report detailing what we can do around the canal to help in this area. Then, subject to funding, we will devise a plan and start planting...

We're really keen and excited to increase the biodiversity around the canal where possible and where practical.



Photo by Claire Godden

A Paulton Puzzle

By Tom Randall

John Watts was, among other things, a tinsmith. He was born in Paulton in 1844 and, when he was aged about 70, he wrote his “Reminiscences of Paulton.”

The original document, although known to have existed c1970, seems now to be lost but, fortunately, a series of extracts were published locally for private circulation, and I was one of the lucky recipients of a collection of these. There is one extract, quoted below, that poses an interesting question concerning the coal canal. I think this event took place in the 1860s.

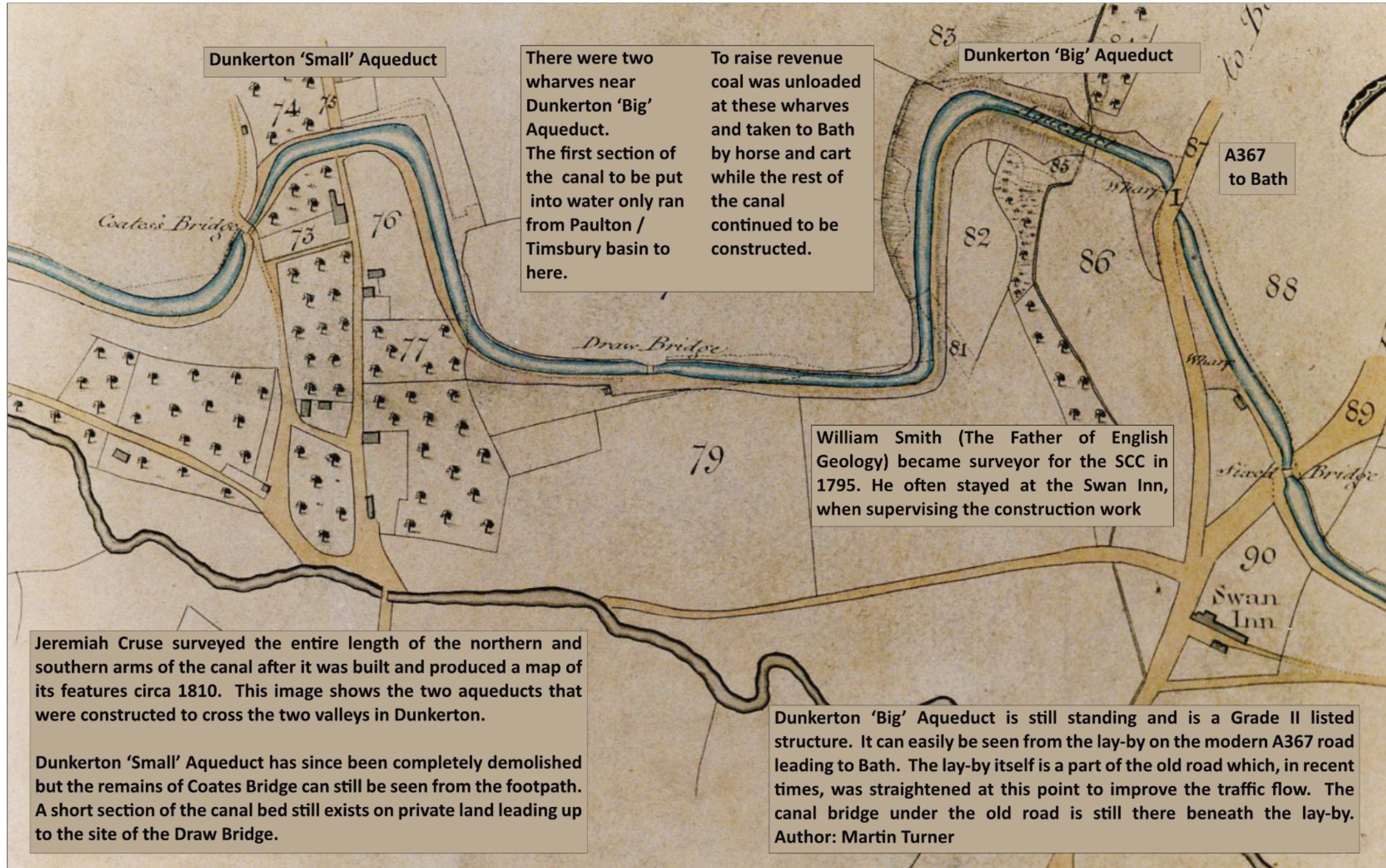
“I saw two women strip to the waist and fight for a quarter of an hour. A ring was made on the other side of Green Close stile by the watchers and each had a ‘picker-up’. Some of these women fighters later emigrated to America, and a collection was made round the village for them. One woman went to Captain Dixon for his subscription and he said, “So you are going to America?” “Yes. Sir.” “Do you think you will like the water?” “I don’t know, Sir.” “Have you ever been on the water?” “Well – yes – I once rowed from Paulton Engine in a boat right down to the ‘Blue Bowl’.” This amused the Captain and he gave her 5/- to help her and wished her a safe journey.”

The question is, where was the ‘Blue Bowl’? If it was a pub, then it is not included in the articles on canal-side pubs in issues 79, 80, & 84.

Does anyone have any ideas?

An Extract from the Cruse Map Showing the Timsbury and Paulton Basins

By Martin Turner



Dunkerton 'Small' Aqueduct

There were two wharves near Dunkerton 'Big' Aqueduct. The first section of the canal to be put into water only ran from Paulton / Timsbury basin to here.

To raise revenue coal was unloaded at these wharves and taken to Bath by horse and cart while the rest of the canal continued to be constructed.

Dunkerton 'Big' Aqueduct

A367 to Bath

William Smith (The Father of English Geology) became surveyor for the SCC in 1795. He often stayed at the Swan Inn, when supervising the construction work

Jeremiah Cruse surveyed the entire length of the northern and southern arms of the canal after it was built and produced a map of its features circa 1810. This image shows the two aqueducts that were constructed to cross the two valleys in Dunkerton.

Dunkerton 'Small' Aqueduct has since been completely demolished but the remains of Coates Bridge can still be seen from the footpath. A short section of the canal bed still exists on private land leading up to the site of the Draw Bridge.

Dunkerton 'Big' Aqueduct is still standing and is a Grade II listed structure. It can easily be seen from the lay-by on the modern A367 road leading to Bath. The lay-by itself is a part of the old road which, in recent times, was straightened at this point to improve the traffic flow. The canal bridge under the old road is still there beneath the lay-by. Author: Martin Turner

The Museum of Bath Stone By Gavin Gillmore

The Museum of Bath Stone is based in Combe Down, Bath, the heart of the Bath Stone mining industry for many years. The museum was established as an information centre in the village.

The resources to establish the museum came from a Legacy fund that was established by the Combe Down Mines restoration project. This was funded by the Land Stabilisation Programme operated by the Homes and Communities Agency (formerly English Partnerships). The client for the project and designated Mine Owner was Bath and Northeast Somerset Council.

We are a small museum established to tell the story of Bath Stone mines, the people associated with the Combe Down workings, the geology of these mines, their archaeology, ecology, and the complex geo-engineering involved in their stabilisation.

The significance of the workings came to the fore in the late 1980s, when a chestnut tree blew over in Firs field exposing the large cavern beneath. More on this later in this article! It was also in the late 1980s that a utilities contractor broke through to the mine workings. This led to a survey of the underground workings and an exercise in assessing the hazards for the homes in Combe Down that had been undermined. What the survey discovered were Georgian workings covering a wide geographic area. There was at one point around a metre between the road surface and the cavern below, with Victorian properties having sewers that were not connected to the sewer network, instead emptying into the workings, potentially contaminating drinking water supplies, as the Combe Down Oolite is an aquifer.

Combe Down Oolite is a type of limestone formed under warm, tropical shallow seas around 168 million years ago. They can be found in horizontal layers crowning the top of Combe Down. Similar limestones can be found in mines today in Corsham and Box. These limestones are Bath Oolite. Combe Down Limestone is slightly more fossiliferous and was regarded as harder wearing than Bath Stone per se, which is slightly younger than the Combe Down Oolite.

Bath Oolite, together with Combe Down Oolite were classified in 2019 as a World Heritage stone. This is one of the three World Heritage Stones in the UK. The other two being Portland Stone (a Late Jurassic limestone) and Welsh / Cumbrian Slate which varies in age (e.g. Cambrian to Ordovician).

Portland Stone varies in its characteristics, but it can be a very hard wearing stone. All these World Heritage stones have been transported nationally and internationally and can be found in some well-known buildings.



Bath Stone was used in the building of Bristol Cathedral and Guildhall; much of Bath; the Royal Pavilion in Brighton; Dartmouth Naval College; Truro Cathedral; Buckingham Palace and Apsley House in London; the gothic details of Windsor Castle in Berkshire; Lacock Abbey, Longleat, Gatcombe Park and Tyntesfield in Somerset, to name but a few in the UK. Overseas, Bath Stone was used to build the Union Station and the New National Museum in Washington DC, Toronto Bible College, and the Town Hall in Cape Town, South Africa, for example

When the Combe Down mines / quarries were active, the stone was removed by hand tools, using tools with names that we are not familiar with today, such as *scrapping axes*, used to square the stone, *frigbobs*, which are large single-handed saws around 6 foot long, and *slimmer razzers*. Mines operating today use powered saws. We have examples of these hand tools in the museum that were found during archaeological surveys.

Where the Somersetshire Coal Canal is concerned, William Smith was commissioned to survey for this, arriving in Bath in 1791 at the age of 22. The two branches of the canal allowed tramways to coal workings to be linked together. By 1801, the northern and southern branches were complete. The southern branch was abandoned in favour of a tramway along the towpath but the northern branch was very successful, peaking in the 1820s. Smith's work on the Canal gave him the opportunity to develop his understanding of strata, their dip and strike, the importance of faulting and his Table of Strata.

In 1987 a tree fell over in the Firs Field after a storm. This unveiled a large cavern beneath the tree. On investigation, the council realised that beneath Firs Field and the surrounding houses, was a veritable 'Swiss cheese', with around 3700 stone pillars supporting the roof of the workings. Many homes (around 700) were undermined. The main road surface was found at one place to be only a metre or so from the top of one cavern. The Victorians had built properties on top of the old workings and some of these homes did not have sewers connected to the main sewers but emptied into the workings instead. Combe Down Oolite is an aquifer, where Wessex water gets much of our drinking water from. In addition, miners had robbed some of the supporting pillars, which were therefore very unstable. So, something had to be done. After much discussion, bids for funding etc, the old workings were mapped and surveyed extensively by archaeologists, collecting, and recording whatever they came across, such as graffiti, tools, broken vessels, clay pipes etc. Much of this is now in our collection. After this work was completed, the mines were filled with foamed concrete.

There is now no access to the workings except for licensed bat handlers. So, if you want to know more about the workings, what they were like – come and visit the Museum of Bath Stone!



Combe Hay Work Party Report

By Kevin Gibbs

The Combe Hay work party was formed in 2019 and has steadily expanded in to a group of about six regular volunteers who meet each Tuesday.

Our work area covers the length of the canal from Dundas through to the lock flight at Combe Hay. A large length of the canal is bordered by public footpaths. This means our work predominantly focuses on keeping the canal and the historic structures visible to the public thereby raising awareness of the canal and its heritage.

The team has developed good working relationships with local landowners, without whom we would not be able to work on much of the canal. This year the team has spent the winter months exposing and clearing undergrowth from a number of the locks that are located in the private grounds of Caisson House. Although not visible to the public, these locks are key components of the canal infrastructure and our work here will delay any further deterioration.

Our aspiration, when funds become available, is that one of the most visible locks on the flight is restored as a showpiece, complete with working gates. In the meantime, we will continue our work, which will be more onerous as soon as the spring growing season starts.



We are always looking for more enthusiastic volunteers so, if you feel like joining us, please get in touch!

Combe Hay Work Party Dates

Every Tuesday 10:00 - 15:00

📍 Meeting location: Combe Hay – BA2 7EE
May 2024 – 14th, 21st & 28th
June 2024 – 4th, 11th, 18th & 25th
July 2024 – 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd and 30th

To join a Combe Hay Work Party, contact Kevin Gibbs at workparty_combehay@coalcanal.org.uk

Paulton Work Party Report

By Stu Ashman

I know you've all ripped open your envelopes to get to this issue of Weigh-House to find out whether our new weekly work parties at Paulton have been a success. Well I can tell you: Yes, they have been! In March, we had 11 attendees! Some serious progress was made!

From my own perspective, the most encouraging aspects have been both the increase in the pool of volunteers, and their diversity. We have more female volunteers than men, plus we have a wide range of ages as well.

We started the weekly work parties in January with a threefold focus:

1. Vegetation clearance from areas identified for potential wildflower sowing/ planting
2. Removal of vigorous reed growth that has been preventing the flow of water through the Basin
3. Clearance of nuisance scrub before the bird nesting season started in March.

Significant progress has been made in all areas but, as we got to March, we started to place the emphasis on continuing to prepare for the wildflowers and more clearance work that won't impact wildlife.

Lots of passers-by have commented on how good it's looking at the basin.

Come and join us!



Paulton Work Party Dates

Every Sunday 10:00 - 15:00

📍 Meeting location: Paulton – BS39 7PF
May 2024 – 12th, 19th & 26th
June 2024 – 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30th
July 2024 – 7th, 14th, 21st & 28th

To join a Paulton Work Party, contact Stu Ashman at workparty_paulton@coalcanal.org.uk or phone/text 07759 336864.

My Connection

By Roy Croton

In 1986, I decided to start researching the history of my family. The reasons for this are another tale for another day. After a discussion with my father, I discovered that his mother, Louisa Ellen BIRD was born in Timsbury 10th November 1867, and that her father, John Barnes BIRD was a miner there. He showed me a picture of him with his wife Hester MEMORY.

John Barnes BIRD was born 29th September, 1829, in Timsbury and was a coal miner from the age of 8. He died 24th July, 1917, and is buried in the cemetery in the Avenue. Being an active miner at that time meant that coal he hew would have been transported by the Somersetshire Coal Canal.

He had been quite well off in his very early life. His father was a Lime Burner in the village, I imagine it was what is now Old Lime Kiln Farm on Radford Hill. Sadly though, his father William died in 1832 aged 33, when John Barnes was only just 3 years old. Cholera had broken out in the village during the year and, although I have no evidence, I feel William, because of his age, succumbed to the disease. He did, however, leave a will in which he left each of his five children a house. These were a row of cottages on The Hook corner. They were pulled down in the 1960's, I understand, and a bungalow, Swansbury Place, now stands on the spot.

His widow, Martha, carried on the business as best she could but, having been given some bad advice, lost the business and John Barnes had to go down the mines with his two older brothers, William, 10, and Robert, 12, to earn an income for the household.

Incidentally, John Barnes Bird's father, William Bird, is mentioned in Rev. John Skinner's published diary, where he greets Mr. Bird on the tow path from Camerton to Timsbury. William was the only adult "Bird" living in Timsbury at the time.

Should you be able to add any further information, especially on lime burning in the area, please contact Roy!

Email:crotonr@yahoo.com



**John Barnes Bird
and Hester Memory
c1916**

William Smith at Rugbourn Farm

By Zanna Beswick/Paterson

William Smith was apprenticed to an engineer in Stow-on-the-Wold for several years before being employed by Lady Jones of Stowey, who had recently inherited Rugbourn Farm, built as a manor house in the 17th century. She needed a survey and valuation of her "new" estate, which was then tenant-farmed (and remained so until the 1960s when the freehold was bought by the then tenants, the Knights).

From 1791 Smith rented 2 rooms in Rugbourn (unfortunately we don't know which ones!) and a stable for his horse. In 1793 he drew a survey map showing which fields belonged to Lady Jones rather than other local landowners such as the Moggs. We have a poor but extant photocopy of this, with the names of the fields marked (subsequently copied by Bennett of Bruton 1799).

He was also engaged by Lady Jones to survey for coal at Mearns where he studied the significance of rock strata and their place in the discovery of coal seams. As he worked and thought, he began what was to be the first geological map of Britain, although it was not published until 1815. He called Rugbourn 'the Birthplace of English geology'. Soon after, he was employed as assistant surveyor for the Somerset Coal Canal - that crucial step in the story of energy and communications in Somerset - at which time he moved from Rugbourn to Tucking Mill.

By the late 1990s Rugbourn was in a state of near collapse and on the SPAB register of Buildings at Risk. The Knights needed 'more land and less house', but whenever they accepted an offer the prospective purchaser's surveyor or builder ran out, screaming 'don't touch it!', according to the estate agents Alder King. And so it had remained on the market for 2 years until Andy and I saw the house and fell in love with it. Andy's architectural practice runs from small extensions to designing contemporary houses and rescuing and repairing ancient ones, so he understood what the structural problems were at the heart of the imploding house.

Foot-and-mouth caused a serious delay to our purchase, as all movement of livestock was banned. We finally completed in 2002 and immediately started work to save it. The Knights were eventually able to safely move their own gene-stock dairy herd to their new and larger farm.

By 2019, all the repair work was complete on Rugbourn, and many of its secrets revealed.



William Smith at Rugbourne Farm continued

In 2015, the bicentenary of Smith's geological map, the Somerset Coal Canal Society (of which we are 'sleeping' members, as our energy is spent on Rugbourne!) asked permission to put up an information board on our land; we invited the Society into the house and, in return, the SCCS generously paid for the framing of our excellent print of Smith's 1815 map - which by good luck I had seen in Newcastle and bought for £10 - so that visitors can see it in the entrance hall.

Come and visit us!

Rugbourne is now safe for the next few centuries. In the meantime, we open the house to the public a few afternoons every year through the Historic Houses Association 'Invitation-to-View' scheme.

Tickets can be booked through:

<https://www.historichouses.org/house/rugbourne-farm/tours>

As a much-cherished home, its opening dates are limited to:

Saturday afternoons at 14:30.

Dates remaining in 2024 are: 20th July, and 14th and 28th September.

However, if a group of **SCCS members** would like to arrange a **private tour** on a different date, please email me: zannabeswick@gmail.com or leave a message on 01761 470285.

Events, Visits, and Walks

For further details on any of our events, please contact: events@coalcanal.org.uk

Saturday, 15 June, 2024

Dunkerton Village Day • 12:00 - 16:00
Dunkerton Cricket Field, Church Lane, BA2.
What3words: dangerously.cheese.gossip

Thursday, 20 June, 2024

Annual General Meeting 2024 • 19:30 - 21:30
Paulton Village Hall, Farrington Road, Paulton, BS39 7LW

Come and join us for an update on all of the work the society have been doing in the last year. The AGM is open to all members as well as the general public.

Saturday, 29 June, 2024

Paulton Party in The Park • 12:00 - 16:00
Paulton Memorial Park, Farrington Road, Paulton, BS39 7LW

Saturday, 31 August, 2024

Hallatrow & High Littleton Village Day • 12:00 - 16:00
High Littleton Recreation Club, Butlass Close, High Littleton, BS39 6HD

Come and visit us at this village day and find out more about the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society. You can find out all about the history, learn about volunteering opportunities and become a member to support us in our mission to restore the canal.

Thursday, 17 October, 2024

"The Severn Railway Bridge Disaster" • 19:30 - 21:30
Paulton Village Hall, Farrington Road, Paulton, BS39 7LW

Sunday 20th October 2024

Visit to Twinhoe Basin • 10:00
Meet at the main car park in Wellow, Station Road, BA2 8QB
What3words: pool.expired.unguarded

This four mile walk is in a private section near Wellow on the Southern Branch of the SCC. This is the route of the tramway mainly obliterated by the S&DJR, but with significant evidence in the landscape. No dogs allowed as the walk will use the cycle path.

Thursday, 21 November, 2024

"The Avon Wharf" by Jim Pimpernell • 19:30 - 21:30
Paulton Village Hall, Farrington Road, Paulton, BS39 7LW

This talk uses the results of an archaeological survey of The Dramway site, together with records of early traffic on the line, to provide an insight into how the wharf was used during its short life.

Entry is free, but we would appreciate a donation of £3-4 to cover our costs.

Sunday 24th November 2024

Radstock Guided Walk
Meet 10am in the car park in Waterloo Road, Radstock, BA3 3EP
What3words: awake.laminated.quiet

A guided walk from Radstock along the routes on public footpaths, of the tramways, railways through Writhlington to Paglinch, which was the site of the tragic railway accident. We will take a look at the whole history of the area - remains of the mining industry, its transport links and the site of the mansion which has disappeared!

During Summer 2024, we plan to visit **Hopewell Colliery** in the Forest of Dean.

A visit that includes an underground tour!

<https://www.hopewellcolliery.com/>

However, we need a volunteer to organise this!

If you'd like to volunteer, please contact:

Derrick Hunt at 07986 972984

Email: chairman@coalcanal.org.uk

Somersetshire Coal Canal Company Seal 1794 By Roger Halse

An imprint of the official seal of the Somersetshire Coal Canal Company would be affixed to all official company documents, including Share Certificates. What do the four images on the seal mean?

The late Mike Chapman offered the following explanation:

Top left: Old Father Thames – the River Thames being one of the intended destinations of cargo carried eastwards from the SCC via the Kennet & Avon and Wilts & Berks canals.

Top Right: Beam Engine – an example of a colliery pumping engine – coal being the canal's main trade.

Bottom Right: The coat of arms of the City Of Bath – the city being the head office for the Canal Company.

Bottom Left: A Severn Trow – the River Severn being one of the intended destinations of coal carried westwards via the Kennet & Avon Canal and River Avon.



However, there is an alternative description of what the four images on the seal mean. Extract from *Waterways' Heraldry* by Dennis Hadley (Published by the Waterways Museum, Stoke Bruerne, 1977):

"It is an interesting but scarcely integrated design that combines heraldry – the sword, waters and wall of the City of Bath, allegory – a river god with two urns of flowing water, and landscape. The boat is a typical craft of river navigations, though it was ominous portent to show it so close to shoals, and the pumping engine is unusually well observed, even showing the external haystack boiler."

The original seal still survives and is on display, along with other canal and railway company seals, at Steam – The Museum of the Great Western Railway, Swindon, the GWR having acquired the SCC in 1904.

Unfortunately, without any surviving records, or company minutes, we simply do not know the intended meaning of the images used. If anyone has any alternative thoughts, then please contact Roger Halse, at archive@coalcanal.org.uk

Images: Black/white photo: Somersetshire Coal Canal Company Seal – British Railways, Western Region. Illustration: Somersetshire Coal Canal Company Seal – Duncan Harper/Roger Halse. Colour photo: Somersetshire Coal Canal Company Seal,



The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society was founded in 1992 to
"Focus an interest on the past, present and future of the
old Somersetshire Coal Canal"

We were first formed as a historical society in 1992. The main work of the Society was to research, document and preserve the canal. In 2008, it was apparent that there was a huge local appetite for restoration. The constitution was then changed to include restoration.

The Society became a registered charity in 1995.

The Society was re-registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2024.

The Society's objects are:

- ▶ To advance the education of the general public in the history of the Somersetshire Coal Canal by carrying out historical research and by providing information in published documents and in public meetings.
- ▶ To promote the conservation, protection and restoration to a waterway of the physical and natural environment of the Somersetshire Coal Canal and its structures for the benefit of the general public

Due to the work that was done in the early years of the Society, we have one of the best researched unnavigable canals in the country. This is something that we are incredibly proud of!

If you have any questions that you would like to ask, please see the first page inside the cover of this magazine and select the team member that best suits your enquiry.

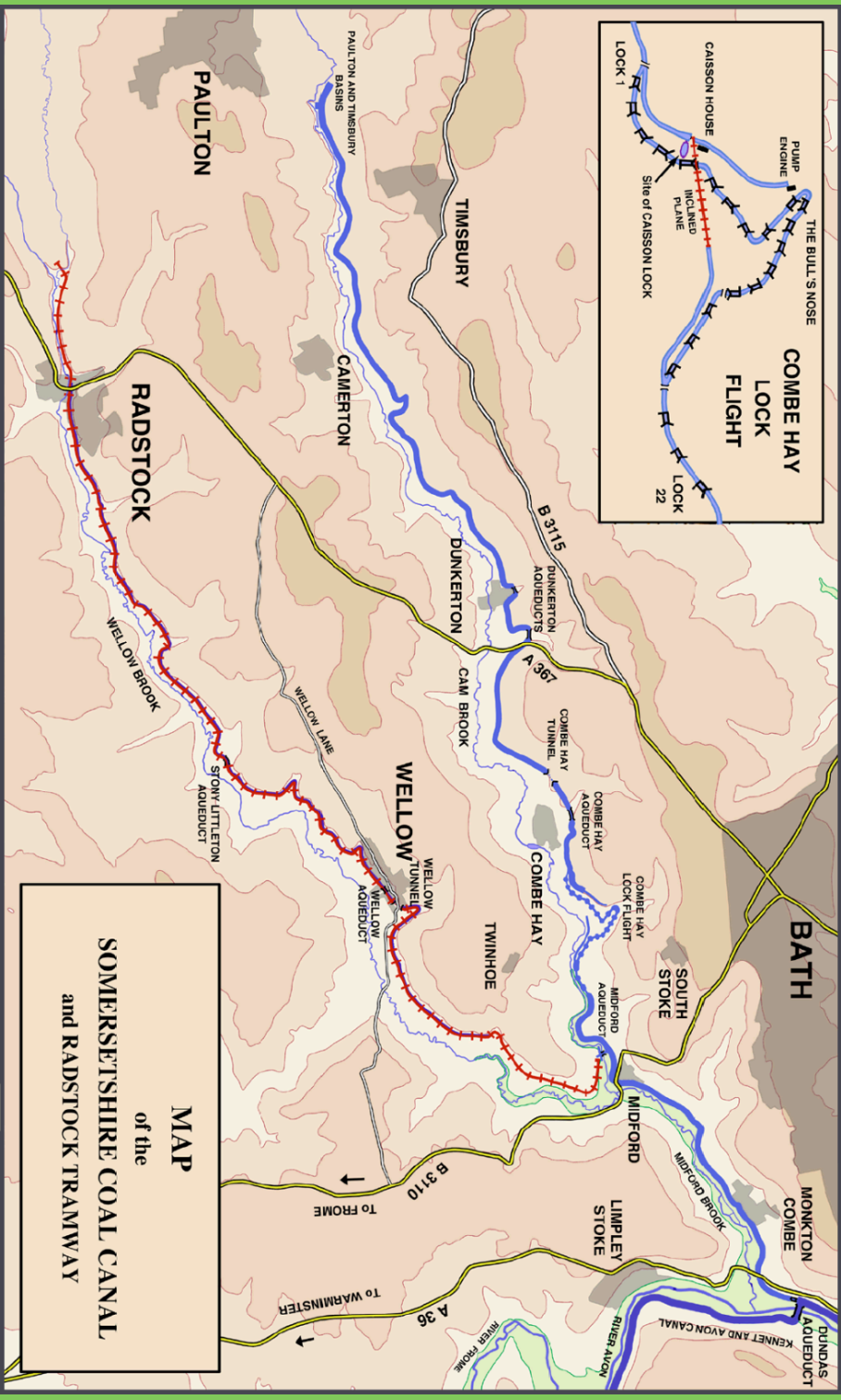


Registered Charity No. 1207513

Affiliated with the Inland Waterways Association, No. 0005276

Inland Revenue reference code for tax purposes: CAD72QG

Website: <http://www.coalcanal.com>



MAP
of the
SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL
and **RADSTOCK TRAMWAY**