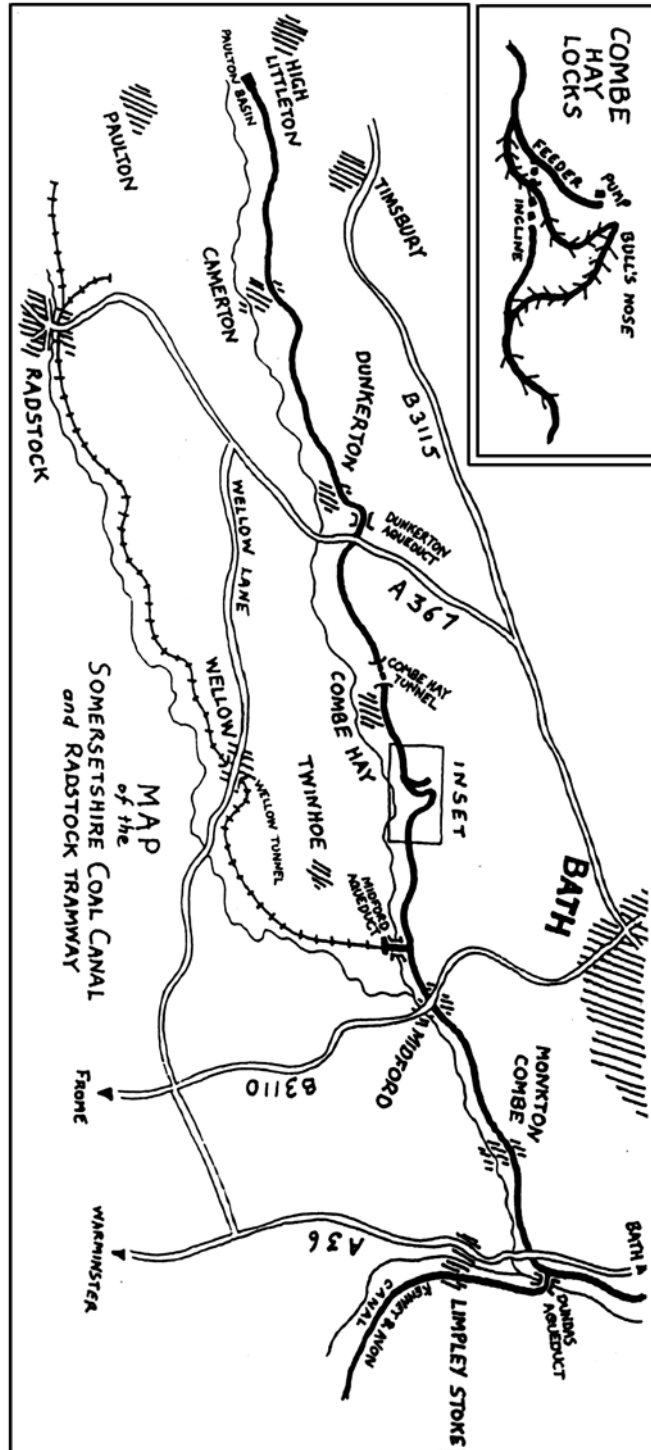


WEIGH-HOUSE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY



Nº 40

AUTUMN 2004

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The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society was founded in January 1992 with the aim:

'TO FOCUS AN INTEREST ON THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE OLD SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL'

The Society is aimed at those people who are interested in finding out more about the history of the canal, preserving what is still there and walking the parts that are still accessible to the public.

The Society does not aim to restore the canal, but to protect the remaining structures (Midford Aqueduct, Combe Hay Locks *etc.*) and line of the canal from decay, dereliction and vegetation.

Registered Charity N^o 1047303
Registered under the Data Protection Act 1984 N^o A2697068
Affiliated to the Inland Waterways Association N^o 0005276
Inland Revenue reference code for tax purposes: CAD72QG

MEMBERSHIP FEES
(as at 1st June 2003)
£7.50 (Family / Individual) £5.00 (Senior Citizen / Student)
£150.00 (Life) payable by lump sum or four annual instalments

Membership Application Forms are available from the Membership Secretary at:
1, Hillcrest Close, Nailsea, Bristol BS48 2HP ☎ & Fax: 01275 798479
E-mail: laurie@lgibney.freemove.co.uk

Society Website: <http://rtjhomepages.users.btopenworld.com/scc2.html>

THE VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS NEWSLETTER DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OR CONVEY THOSE OF THE SOCIETY

The Editor welcomes any letters, articles, photographs *etc* for inclusion in **WEIGH-HOUSE** and will try to include them in full, but reserves the right to shorten them if space is limited.

Please send articles and correspondence for the next edition of **WEIGH-HOUSE** to:
Adrian Tuddenham 88, Mount Road, Southdown, Bath BA2 1LH
☎ 01225 335974 *E-mail (not HTML):* sccs@poppyrecords.co.uk

Sunday 6th February — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 20th February — 10:00

WALK – PUMPING ENGINE ADIT, Combe Hay

A chance to explore the surface features which led to the discovery of the underground adit

Meet at The Avenue, Combe Hay.

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 6th March — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 20th March — 10:00

WALK – WILLIAM SMITH AND COMBE DOWN

Meet at Shaft Road, Combe Down.

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

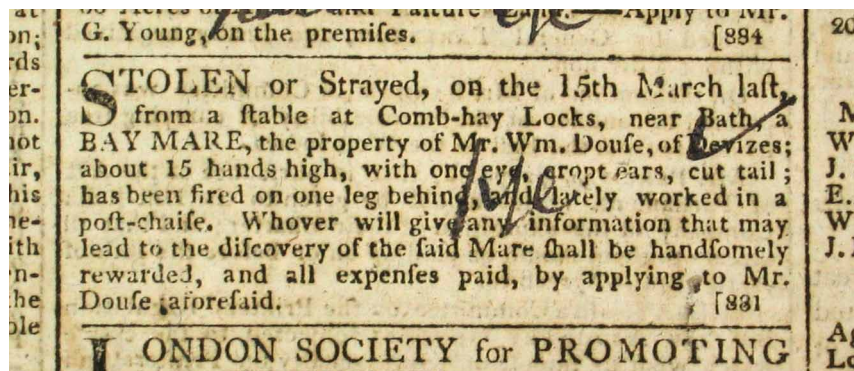
WALKS:

These are all circular walks unless otherwise noted. You only need to arrange your transport to and from the meeting point. They tend to be in the form of detailed explanations of short sections of the canal and its relationship with the locality; and, as such, are less suitable for young children.

Dogs are normally welcome (except where indicated) and must be kept on leads at all times.

WEIGH - HOUSE N^o 40

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Bath Chronicle — 10th April 1811

Contributed by Daniel Brown

EDITORIAL

Canal historians are currently living in exciting times. It is not often that something as important as Fussell's Trial Balance Lock is discovered and excavated. Although not actually on the S.C.C., it is extremely significant for this canal in particular, because it fills a gap in our knowledge of the development of boat lifts and may assist in our interpretation of the Caisson Lock. Our work party's involvement in the clearance and excavation is a tribute to their standing in the canal preservation world; and the invitation to take part in the Lime Kilns project is further proof of their good reputation.

Having explored most of the S.C.C. in previous years, our walks are now being extended to cover nearby canals and other areas of canal interest. This helps to establish the background against which the S.C.C. operated and, like the discoveries on the Trial Balance Lock site, assists us in the interpretation of features of our own canal.

ADRIAN TUDDENHAM – Editor

October 2004

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

With the completion of the series of walks earlier this year along the public routes described in Niall Allsop's book "The Somersetshire Coal Canal Rediscovered - A Walker's Guide", we would once again like to advise members that most of the important remaining sites on the canal are now on private property and therefore inaccessible to the public at large. In most cases, such as Wellow Tunnel (mentioned in walk 6 in the last issue), the owners are happy to allow visitors, but only through prior arrangement through the Society, so let the Committee know of any particular sites you are interested in seeing.

Indeed, the Committee would welcome any ideas from members for future walks, events or visits - whether along the canal or further afield. Visits have recently been made, for example, to various sites on the K&A canal which have some particular relevance to the SCC (reported elsewhere in this issue), but there are numerous other topics associated with the canal and its times which might be worth following up.

Since it is also appreciated that the routine adopted by the Society over the years of conducting walks on a Sunday morning is not convenient to everyone, it has been decided that, on a trial basis, other days should be included in the next programme of events (*See opposite page*).

MIKE CHAPMAN — Chairman

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mrs. J. Kennedy	Usk, Mons
Mr. & Mrs. J. Webb	Combe Down, Bath.
Mr. M. Barratt	Bristol.
Miss. L. Burgess	Cowplain, Hants.

DONATIONS

The society wishes to thank the following members who have generously made donations:

Mr & Mrs. N.P. Hicks & Family	Nova Scotia, Canada.
Mrs. A.R. Wilson	New Brunswick, New Jersey.
Mr. C. Axon	Bristol.
Mr. D.G. Brown	Batheaston, Bath.
Mr. S.M. Bryant	Farnham, Surrey.
Mr. B.D. Castle	Marlborough, Wilts.
Mr. C.S. Goff	Windsor, Berks.
Mr. D. Goodger	Long Sutton, Lincs.
Mr. E. Watts	Melksham, Wilts.
Mr. & Mrs. J. Webb	Combe Down, Bath.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

WORK PARTIES

Venues may change at short notice, always check with Bob Parnell before turning up.

Sunday 7th November — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Saturday 20th November — 10:00 *Note: Saturday walk*

Pre-pub-lunch WALK – Wheelwright's Arms, Monkton Combe

Park in Monkton Combe, meet at the Wheelwright's Arms

Do not use the pub car park unless you intend purchasing lunch.

For further details see page 4

Contact: Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 27th 28th November — 10:00

LIME KILNS PROJECT — See opposite page for details

To volunteer please contact:

Derrick Hunt ☎ 01225 863066

Sunday 5th December — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Wednesday 8th December

CHRISTMAS DINNER — Inland Waterways Association

Old Mill Hotel, Tolbridge Road, Batheaston. 7.30 for 8pm

Price: £17.50 For tickets and further details please contact:

Geoff & Audrey Harman ☎ 0117 962 3812

11, Lampeter Road,

Westbury-on-Trym,

Bristol BS9 3QQ

Sunday 2nd January — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 16th January — 10:00

WALK – FUSSELLS TRIAL BALANCE LOCK SITE, Dorset & Somerset Canal

Meet in Mells between The Talbot and the bus stop. (Please don't obstruct the road near The Talbot)

For further details please contact:

Derrick Hunt ☎ 01225 863066

SIAS asks SCCS for help

The Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society has partnered with the Fussells Iron Industry Society to win a £7,000 grant from the Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. The grant is to fund the first part of a programme to conserve two redundant lime kilns and improve the wildlife habitat in the Mells Valley.

Two lime kilns will be cleared of vegetation to remove the tree canopy and allow light into the clearings. This will create bat feeding areas as well as promoting greater diversity for wildlife. A five year management programme is being planned to ensure sustainability and to make the site available for educational purposes.

SIAS is asking SCCS for help with the work parties on Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th November 2004 and volunteers will be welcome. All volunteers need to be registered with the Project Director, Derrick Hunt and receive briefings on the work plans and site safety.

To register and for further information contact Derrick Hunt on 01225 863066 evenings 7 pm to 9 pm or by email: derrick@carlingcott7.freereserve.co.uk



These kilns produced lime for the agricultural and building industries using Mells valley limestone. Canals played an important part in the distribution of lime, although the Dorset and Somerset Canal, which would have transported the product of these kilns, was never completed.

Overgrown Lime Kiln, Mells Valley — August 2004

SATURDAY WALK

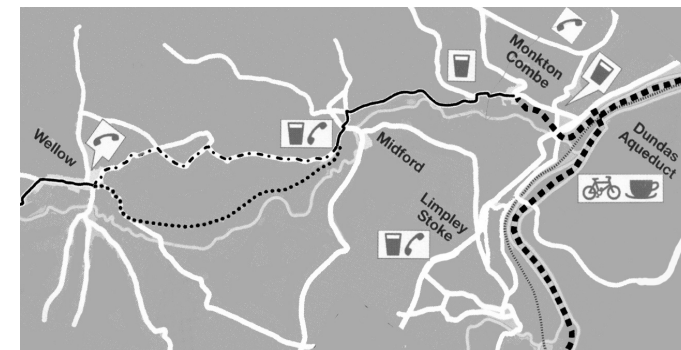
For a long time there have been members who would have liked to join in the walks, but for one reason or another have found Sunday walks difficult to attend. The walk in November has been arranged especially for them - it takes place on a Saturday and ends with the opportunity to have a pub lunch at the Wheelwright's Arms in Monkton Combe.

If it proves popular, we hope to include more Saturday walks in next year's calendar.

THE COLLIERS WAY

National Route 24 of the National Cycle Network will provide a new cycling and walking route from Dundas to Radstock and Frome. A leaflet publicising the route has been published by Sustrans and shows what form each part of the route will take.

The new branch leaves the existing cycleway, which runs along the K & A Canal, at Dundas and is shown running along the route of the S.C.C. which leads to Brassknocker Basin. From there to Foxcote it is currently on ordinary roads but a future traffic-free route is shown, apparently following the alignment of the S.C.C. southern branch, on the section between Midford and Wellow.



The Radstock to Frome route will eventually follow the railway, but in the region of Mells and great Elm it is currently running along ordinary roads.

Another branch follows the railway alignment from Radstock to Midsomer Norton.

Further information can be obtained from Sustrans by telephoning 0845 113 0065

WATERWAYS MUSEUMS' CAMPAIGN FOR GOVERNMENT FUNDING

The Waterways Trust is campaigning to have the three national waterways museums: Gloucester Docks, Ellesmere Port and Stoke Bruerne, funded on the same basis as the national museums for rail, maritime history and mining. At present the waterways museums are having to compete against subsidised-entry museums and are suffering from falling visitor numbers and inadequate funding, this proposal would redress the balance.

How to help

Read the information on the website: <http://www.thewaterwaystrust.org.uk>

Send a fax to your local M.P from the website

Write to your local M.P. at: The House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Sign the petition on the website

Sign their petition at a waterways event.

NAVYING NOTES

Return to Lock 5

Some of the Society's first work parties were on Lock 5 during the 1990s, but since then nature has made a spectacular job of reclaiming it. Trees grew up from each side and met in the middle and from a distance it looked like a wild hedgerow with no visible sign of the lock.

In preparation for our work party, the landowner, Felix Pole, cut down the largest trees. Richard Hignett then went in with his chain saw and completed the job. The next size down the scale of unwanted growth was classed as scrub and this succumbed rapidly to hand-saws and loppers.



INSIDE THE SLUICE OF LOCK 5 — May 2004

that a normal-sized horse could have walked under the bridge without injury.

An interesting feature is a stone let into the edge of the tow path which supports a vertical spindle and shows signs of having once carried a horizontal wheel. This probably served to divert the towing rope where the path turns sharply to one side. The towing animal would have to walk away at right angles, but the boat had to continue in a straight line until it was clear of the lock cutting.

Finally the whole work was rounded off with a huge bonfire which also consumed some large fallen branches from recent storm damage.

Having learned to work with gravity, rather than against it, we had allowed everything we cut to fall into the lock chamber. The next work party had to drag this out into the lower pound and allow it to dry.

Clearing the chamber bottom proved a lot easier than on the previous occasion, when teams of diggers and wheelbarrowers had taken the best part of a year to move the accumulated rubbish of a century. After only three hours the lock floor (the 'invert') was clear and we were able to examine it in all its glory. The sluiceways from the ground paddles at the top cill of the lock were opened up but none of us was small enough to crawl up them. However a photograph taken with a camera held in at arm's length, showed that they were in almost-new condition.

The lock sides came next with plenty of opportunity for vertical gardening. Lock 5 takes a little longer than any of the other locks because the cutting from the bottom gates to the lower pound almost doubles its length and there is a bridge and a by-pass track which also have to be cleared. The track in question was probably used by mules towing the boats, as it seems unlikely



THE SPINDLE

TWO FLOWERS OF GLOSTER

Book and CD releases



Almost anyone with the slightest claim to be a canal enthusiast will have a copy of Ernest Temple Thurston's book "The Flower of Gloster" on the bookshelf — or at least will have become familiar with it over the years. The original was published in 1911 by Chapman & Hall (or Williams & Norgate?) and, although copies of the text-only version can still be picked up on the secondhand book market fairly cheaply, the illustrated first edition is much treasured and commands a correspondingly high price.

The book has been reprinted twice, once by David and Charles (1968) and more recently by Sutton Publishing (1984). Now two more variations on the book have been released, one examining the story from the present century, the other using a CD recording to make the original more accessible.

"In the Wake of the Flower of Gloster" by John Kemplay

Published by Ronald Crowhurst.

ISBN 0 9518964 2 3 — Hardback 41 pp. 23 blw illustrations

This reconstruction of Temple Thurston's historic canal journey of 1911 examines some of the changes that have taken place over the past ninety years and offers a brief history of some of the waterways he travelled along.

Available from booksellers or direct from the publisher:

Ronald Crowhurst, 5, West End Terrace, Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire. GL55 6AX 01386 841723

"The Flower of Gloster" — Talking book read by Diana Humphrey

Published by Poppy Records.

Set of 4 CDRs in jewel case with sketch map of the journey — Playing time: 4 hours 20 minutes

An unabridged reading of the original 1911 edition. 'Eynsham Harry' and the other characters of the canals and their rural surroundings are brought to life by Gloucestershire actress, Diana Humphrey.

Available from:

Poppy Records, 88, Mount Road, Southdown, Bath BA2 1LH

or on the 'Web' at: <http://www.poppyrecords.co.uk>



THE BALANCE LOCK CHAMBER— August 2004

In the next issue we hope to give more information on the cast-iron artefacts and other discoveries. It is planned to start excavating the second chamber over the May Bank Holiday 30th April and 1st May 2005. The two chambers will remain uncovered for one year with access available once a month. Then the chambers will be filled in.

Please note: This site is on private land, please do not attempt to visit it without the permission of the landowner. The S.C.C.S and the D & S Group rely upon good relationships with landowners, please do not jeopardise these relationships by trespassing. There will be an opportunity for members to visit the Fussell's Trial Balance Lock site on Sunday 16th January 2005 (See Page 22).



VERTICAL GARDENING — Harold Philips working on Lock 5



LOCK 5 — July 2004

A WALK ALONG THE STROUDWATER CANAL

Earlier this year, on a day sprinkled with April showers, the hardier members of the Society met at Eastington to spend a morning exploring a recently-restored stretch of the Stroudwater Canal. It was a striking example of what a canal society can achieve when it has the backing and goodwill of the Local Authority and is intent on full restoration, not merely preservation.

Exploring the canal from West to East, we started on an unrestored section at Westfield and gradually worked our way towards the fully-navigable showcase basin near Stonehouse that has attracted prestige new development. The M5 motorway has temporarily put a stop to navigation from Saul to Eastington, although plans are in place for when the funding becomes available.



WESTFIELD BRIDGE — The only trace of the canal at this point, now left standing forlornly in a field. The lock is buried beneath the grass.

Westfield Lock lies buried in a field, but a short distance to the east we found the beginnings of the section in water. A brook runs underneath the canal, forming what is technically an aqueduct (although not easy to recognise as such). The first lock we reached was Pike Lock, closely followed by Blunder Lock.

Blunder lock has been beautifully restored and is an eye-catching showpiece when glimpsed from the nearby main road. A moored work-boat and a trip-boat nearby showed that this section of the canal is in active use.

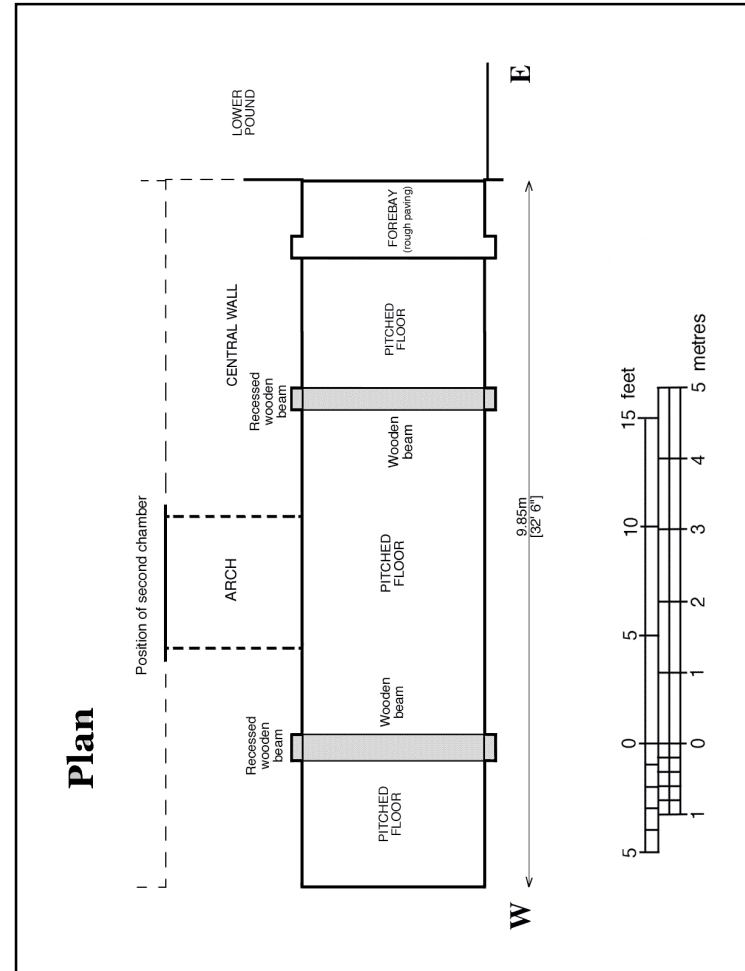


BLUNDER LOCK — A showpiece of restoration

From here we strolled along unobstructed towpath, changing sides occasionally at accommodation bridges, beside a fully-functional waterway with a delightful selection of wildlife.



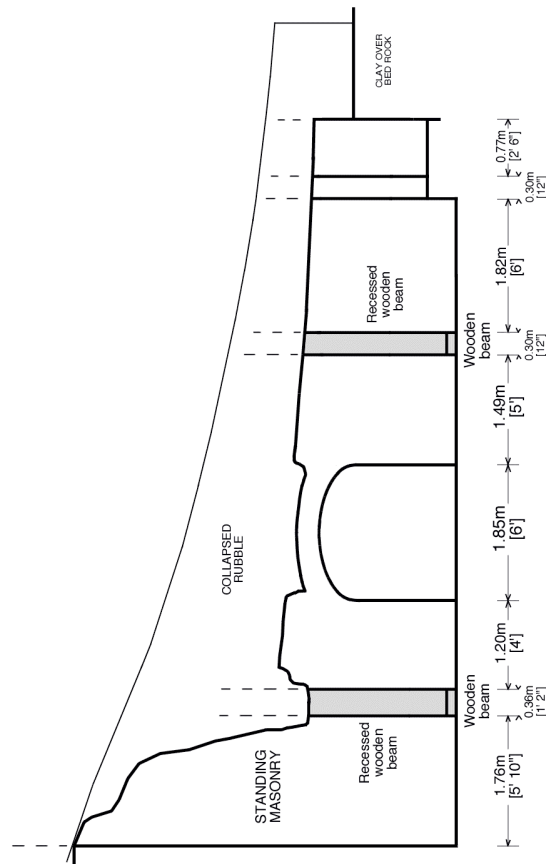
SOME OF THE TOOLS FOUND IN THE BOTTOM OF THE EXCAVATION



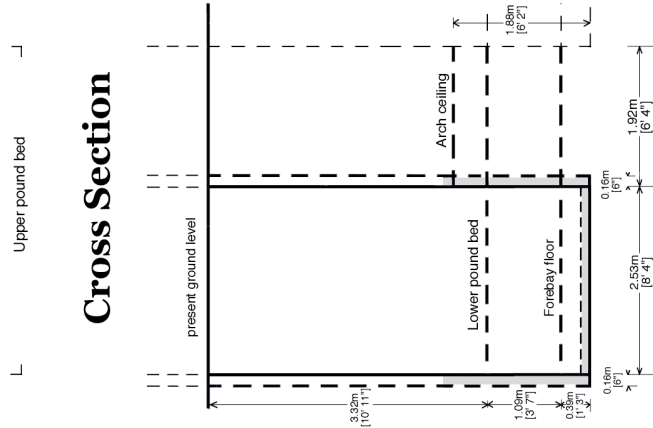
ELEVATIONS (Top) AND PLAN (Below) OF THE REMAINS OF FUSSELL'S TRIAL BALANCE LOCK NEAR MELLENS — May 2004

Drawn by Mike Chapman © 2004

Longitudinal Section



Cross Section



A curious house, looking rather like a roadside toll-house, attracted our attention, with a bridge apparently built into the side of its structure. Several suggestions were made as to its possible purpose; but we were forced to conclude that none of them was a particularly satisfactory explanation.



A TRANQUIL STRETCH OF THE STROUDWATER CANAL — April 2004

The new bridge at Bonds Mill attracted a great deal of interest when it was first built. The main structure is of fibreglass and it was the first of its kind. There is also a complex hidden lifting mechanism which does away with the visual intrusion of counterweights.



Our journey ended at Stonehouse, where a new housing development has benefited from a canalside vista. Altogether this proved to be most attractive restoration project.



Above:
NEW AND OLD AT BONDS MILL
High-tech electro-hydraulic lifting bridge, constructed with modern plastics, contrasts with a wartime relic.

Left:
BASIN AT STONEHOUSE
A new housing development enhanced by the restored canal.

VISIT TO CROFTON PUMP

Sunday 25th July 2004

This is the first of a series of visits recently made to sites on the Kennet & Avon Canal which have some particular connection with the SCC.

The pumping station at Crofton on the Kennet & Avon Canal, now returned to working condition, provides a useful comparison with the pumps on the SCC, which were more or less contemporary and served much the same purpose (i.e. topping up a canal summit level). Crofton came into operation in 1809 - a few years after the SCC pumps at Withy Ditch in Dunkerton (built 1802, of unknown make and performance) and the Lock Flight pump at Combe Hay (1805 by Boulton & Watt). It was the practice on the SCC for pump engines to be erected in separate buildings, even when working side by side, but the Crofton pumping station was built to house two engines under the same roof from the outset. The first Crofton engine had been removed and replaced with a new model in 1846, so it was the Boulton & Watt engine installed in 1812, that was of particular interest during this visit (and 'in steam' on this occasion).

The Combe Hay and Crofton engines, coming from the same manufacturer, had much in common, being single action (8 foot stroke), with separate condenser, parallel motion, and cast-iron beam. Their tasks however were somewhat different. The Combe Hay engine had a 52 inch cylinder and was rated at 57.6 hp, and its 22 inch pump was required to raise water 135 feet - the total height between the two levels of the canal. This, of course, changed when it was removed to Withy Ditch where the lift was only half this height. Crofton however, with a 42 inch cylinder and rated at 32 hp, still has a 30 inch pump with a lift from the Wilton Water reservoir of only 40 feet to the summit feeder leat.

Naturally, improvements were made to the Crofton engines over the course of time; and one in particular may shed some light on modifications to the SCC engine in Engine Wood. When we excavated the Engine Wood site, we were puzzled by a large volume of clay infill on the pump side of the bob wall. From the plans of the engine, there seemed to have been no reason to have a large pit in that position which would have needed infilling.

On one of our earlier visits to Crofton, we discovered that their condenser tank, on the cylinder side of the bob wall, had needed replacement after about 45 years of use. The opportunity had been taken to position the replacement on the pump side of the wall, where it operated on the opposite stroke of the beam and gave a worthwhile improvement in efficiency. From the size of the infilled pit in Engine Wood, it looked as though something similar had been done to the SCC engine.

Besides the design of the engine itself, the visit also provided the opportunity to examine the structure of its associated buildings and its water supply/delivery system. Unlike the engine houses on the SCC, the main building at Crofton consists of an additional bay containing the pump well and rods (usually external to the main building housing the cylinder and its valve mechanisms), so that, in this case, the 'bob wall' lies in the centre of the building. The boilers also have their own house attached at the rear, but the chimney is located away from the main complex on the opposite side of the feeder leat. It was interesting to learn that the pump well was originally fed via an adit from the canal itself (supplemented with water from underground springs) before the artificial lake known as Wilton Water was created next to it in 1836. It was also instructive to witness the everyday problems of supplying the boilers and maintaining the working mechanisms, vividly illustrated during a demonstration of the complicated (and somewhat hazardous) manoeuvres of the pump engineers in starting and stopping the engine.

Mike Chapman



THE EXCAVATION GETS UNDER WAY — May 2004



THE ARCHWAY TO THE NORTHERN CHAMBER

EXCAVATING FUSSELL'S TRIAL BALANCE LOCK SITE ON THE DORSET & SOMERSET CANAL

Having established that a change of level in the Dorset and Somerset Canal near Mells probably indicated the site of the world's first Balance Lock, further evidence was sought. There was little to be found on the surface except a few dressed stones which might have been the remains of a structure. Once the site had been cleared by work parties, the ground around the stones was dug out manually to reveal a wall which looked as though it could have been part of the lock structure. If the remaining structure was still in-situ, it would be so large that mechanical digging would be the only practical way of uncovering it.

As more of the wall was uncovered, it became clear that this was the end of a rectangular structure about 8 ft wide; we did not know what depth to expect because the levels of the canal had become confused by in-filling. As course after course of masonry appeared, our estimates of the depth were continually revised until at last the digger reached the bottom of the chamber, more than 10 ft below our starting point.

The spoil from this excavation was taken away in a dumper truck, driven by George ('Bungle') Eycott of the Waterways Recovery Group, to be sorted by a team of archaeologists led by Mike Chapman. At first, there was nothing much to be found, but after reaching the bottom of the chamber a number of interesting artefacts began to be discovered: a stonemason's chisel, a number of small metal pins and hooks and some scraps of leather.

Then some large curved lumps of what appeared to be cast iron were found, but their purpose was not immediately obvious. They were carefully cleaned and stored, awaiting more leisurely consideration.

As the digging continued, it became obvious that this was indeed the chamber of a lock, probably one of the pair that formed the Balance Lock. The length of the chamber was gradually cleared and an archway was spotted in the northern wall. Although part-filled with rubble, it was apparent that this had connected the 'basements' of the two chambers through the central dividing wall — so the other chamber must lie to the north of this one.

There were grooves let into the walls and floor, which held the remains of baulks of timber. These could have been for guidance wheels to run upon, or they might have been to prevent abrasion and damage between the stonework and the operating chains.

The stonework of the structure did not appear particularly massive and there was some concern that the walls might begin to move with the weight of earth behind them as the pressure of the infill was taken off. Subsequent inspection has revealed that even after several months, the structure shows no signs of significant movement.

Eventually the chamber was cleared, carefully measured and an accurate drawing made for future reference.



MIKE CHAPMAN INVESTIGATING THE DRESSED STONES — Jan 2002



THE WALL IS REVEALED — May 2004



ANXIOUS MOMENTS

Right: Alison Hoskins under instruction from Harry Willis practices starting up the 1812 Boulton & Watt Engine

Left: The engine controls



CYLINDER HEAD GALLERY

Left bottom: Three steam valves for Inlet, Transfer and Throttle (the Exhaust valve is two floors below).

Centre: The cylinder head, packing gland and piston rod of the 1812 Boulton & Watt engine.

Top: Part of the Watt parallel motion linkage.

The Boulton & Watt engine at Crofton is probably the closest working engine in design and construction to the S.C.C. engine at Combe Hay, but the layout of the boilers in relation to the pump is very different.

CROFTON PUMPING ENGINE - K & A Canal, Great Bedwyn — July 2004
From left to right: Boiler house, Engine House, Flues (low lean-to), Chimney.

