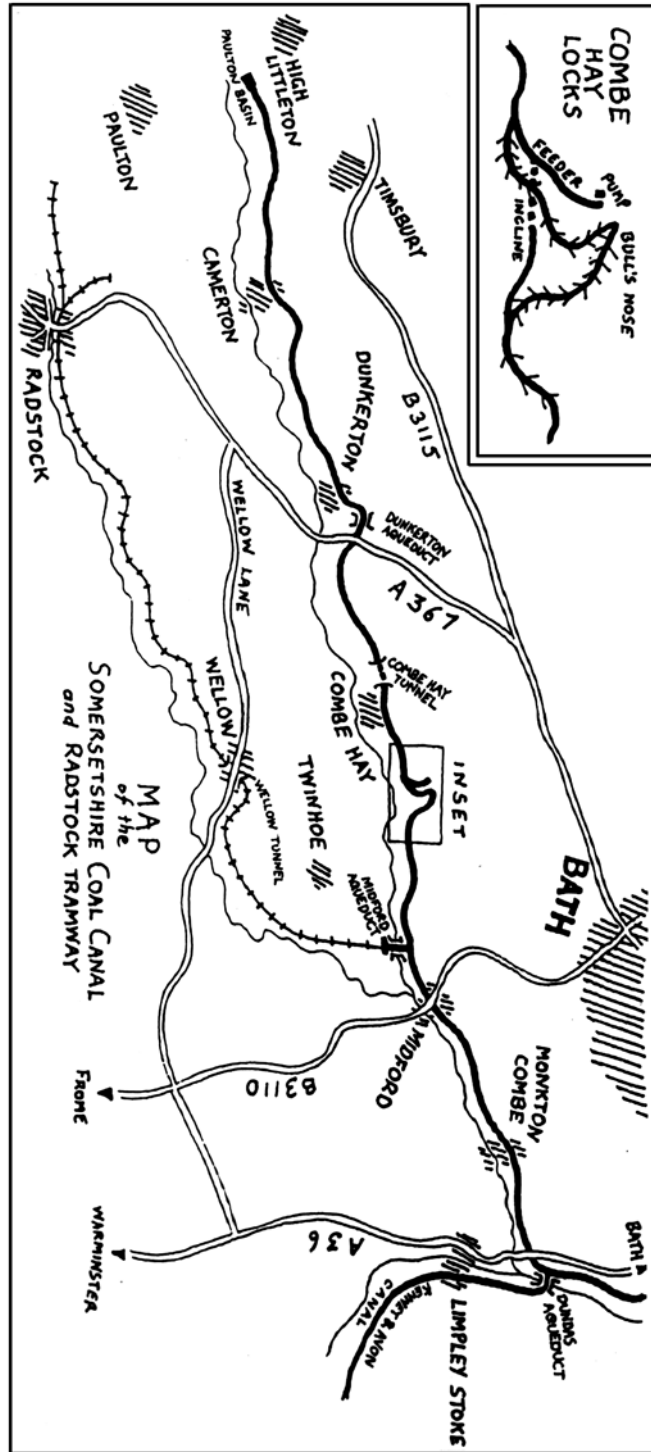


WEIGH-HOUSE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN – MIKE CHAPMAN

51, Newton Road, Twerton, Bath BA2 1RW
☎ 01225 426948 *E-mail:* mike@chapman76.fsnet.co.uk

SECRETARY – VACANT

TREASURER – DAVID CHALMERS

'Shalom' 40 Greenleaze, Knowle Park, Bristol BS4 2TL
☎ 0117972 0423

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY – LAURIE GIBNEY

1, Hillcrest Close, Bristol BS48 2HP
☎ & *Fax:* 01275 798479 *E-mail:* laurie@lgibney.freemove.co.uk

WORK PARTY ORGANISER – BOB PARNELL

34, Wedgewood Road, Twerton, Bath BA2 1NX
☎ 01225 428055

PUBLICITY – VACANT

EVENTS ORGANISER – VACANT

MINUTES SECRETARY – PHILIP WEST

☎ 0117 968 6159

HISTORICAL ADVISOR – MIKE CHAPMAN

51, Newton Road, Twerton, Bath BA2 1RW
☎ 01225 426948 *E-mail:* mike@chapman76.fsnet.co.uk

PROJECT OFFICER – VACANT

NEWSLETTER EDITOR – ADRIAN TUDDENHAM

88, Mount Road, Southdown, Bath BA2 1LH
☎ 01225 335974 *E-mail (not HTML):* sccs@poppyrecords.co.uk

ARCHIVIST – ROGER HALSE

4, Westminster Gardens, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 0DF
☎ 01249 652846 *E-mail:* roger@halsescs1956.fsnet.co.uk

COMMITTEE MEMBER – DAVID FRY

14, Monkton Road, Hanham, Bristol BS15 3JG
☎ 0117 961 4687

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

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

WORK PARTIES

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

Sunday 17th April — 10:00

WALK – A VISIT TO CLEVELAND HOUSE

Meet at Cleveland House, Sydney Road..

See Page 14 for further details

Contact: Derrick Hunt ☎ 01225 863066

Saturday 30th April & Sunday 1st May

WORK PARTY –

FUSSELL'S TRIAL BALANCE LOCK SITE

Excavating the second chamber

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Derrick Hunt ☎ 01225 863066

Sunday 15th May — 10:00

WALK –

FUSSELL'S TRIAL BALANCE LOCK SITE

A chance to view the excavations.

For further details please contact:

Derrick Hunt ☎ 01225 863066

Sunday 5th June — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Tuesday 14th June — 19:30

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING — Radstock Museum.

To be followed at 8.00pm by:-

ILLUSTRATED TALK - WILLIAM SMITH AND THE BATHEASTON COAL MINE

by Daniel Brown, winner of the BIAS Brunel Prize 2004

Sunday 19th June — 10:00

WALK — THE AREA AROUND FULLER'S EARTH WORKS

Meet at Odd Down P+R

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.

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SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL EXHIBITION

To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the official opening of the Combe Hay flight of locks, a small exhibition on the Somersetshire Coal Canal will be staged within the Museum of Bath at Work, Julian Road, Bath

1st May — 31st July

The Museum of Bath at Work is open daily from 10.00am to 4.00pm

Admission fees are Adult: £4.00, Concessions; £3.00, Bath & North East Somerset Residents: £2.00, Family (2 adults & 2 Children): £ 10.00.

Telephone 01225 318348 for further details.

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EDITORIAL

Exploration continues to be a major theme in this issue. The discovery by Mike Chapman of the probable remains of a stone wharf below the Viaduct Hotel shows that the canal still has many undiscovered secrets. Our walks have been going further afield and allowing us to see the industries which surrounded and supported the canal and to examine some other canals — all of which give us a better understanding of our own canal and enable us to view our discoveries in their correct context. Far from being a dull sterile subject, uncovering the history of the S.C.C. has become a lively and thought-provoking activity.

Two more explorations are planned in the near future: The existence of a 'drop-hole' in the cellars of Cleveland House, allowing messages or tolls to be exchanged with boats passing through the tunnel beneath, has long been talked about - but how many people have actually seen it and was that its real purpose? Now members have a chance to see for themselves, with a visit to the cellars in April. Excavation of the second chamber of Fussell's Trial Balance Lock takes place on 30th April and a walk to view the results is planned soon afterwards.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Having received a contribution last year from Bath and North East Somerset Council towards equipment and materials for the recently completed Fencing Project (described elsewhere in this issue), we are most pleased to learn that the Society has again been awarded £400 from the Council this year to help towards a clearance project for the Lock Flight.

However, application for grant funding for larger projects is a much slower process. Nevertheless, the Canal Steering Group is about to send out a brief for tenders from consultants to carry out an assessment of the stabilisation and conservation of structures along the canal. Once this has been done, an application by the Society can then be submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for planning and (eventually) carrying out the work. The assessment will focus on two main structures, Lock 15 and Dunkerton Aqueduct, but 36 others will also be included. The Midford Accommodation Bridge is also a high priority, but as the issues here are more complicated, alternative procedures are being followed up for its future preservation.

MIKE CHAPMAN — Chairman

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the next Annual General Meeting of the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society will be held on Tuesday 14th June at the Radstock Museum, Waterloo Road, Radstock, commencing at 7.30 pm. Nominations for election to the Executive Committee must be made in writing and be in the hands of the Chairman (acting as Secretary while the post is vacant) two weeks prior to the meeting.

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mr. V. Miller	Wootton Bassett
Mr. C. Ray	Kingswood
Capt. & Mrs. T. J. Woodfin	Bath
Mr. D. H. Woolley	Warmley

DONATIONS

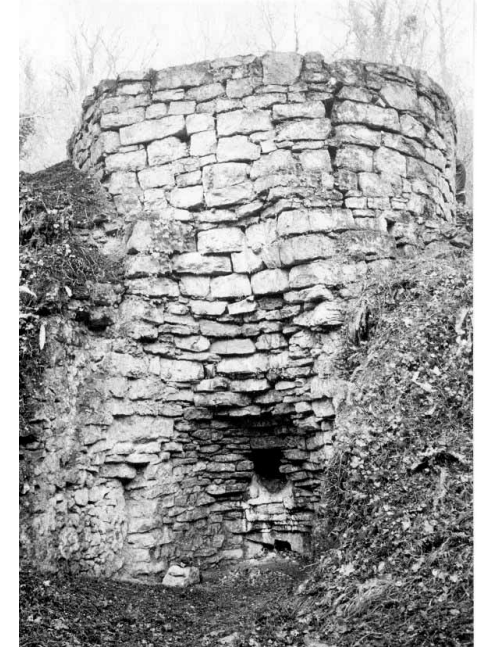
The society wishes to thank the following members who have generously made donations:

Ms. S. Batchelor & Mr. A. Shamp	Dunkerton
Mr. & Mrs. N. P. Hicks & family	Nova Scotia, Canada
Mr. G. A. Pickford	Chilcompton
Mr. & Mrs. A. D. Wadley	Keynsham
Mr. & Mrs. D. G. Whitehouse & Family	Canterbury
Mr. G. S. Woodward	Harpenden

LIME KILN RESTORATION IN THE MELLS VALLEY

The appeal for assistance in WH 40 (*P 20*) resulted in a magnificent attendance. Over 100 volunteers turned out over the weekend. As well as member of the SCCS, there was support from our friends in the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust, the Bradford on Avon Scouts and Wells ATC.

From a half-hidden pile of overgrown ruins, two lime kilns have now been revealed as outstanding specimens of their kind.



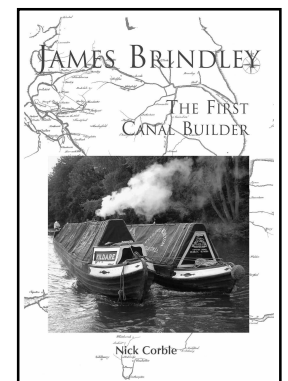
BEFORE AND AFTER CLEARANCE — The Lime Kilns of the Mells Valley

“JAMES BRINDLEY THE FIRST CANAL BUILDER”

Canal chronicler Nick Corble, author of “Walking on Water” and articles in Canal and Riverboat magazine, has just published a new biography of James Brindley.

The book sets out to show the true scope of his achievements and argues that Brindley was the man who put the 'united' in the United Kingdom. It also asks the bigger question of what might have happened if Brindley hadn't come along, or worse, if he'd failed — which he came so close to doing.

Illustrated with dozens of original photographs, many of them in colour, the book is priced at £18.99 or can be purchased online at 30% discount through Amazon or through the publisher at www.tempus-publishing.com





GOLDEN VALLEY, STROUD — A channel diverting water from the Frome into the T&S Canal

It was with reluctance that we returned up one of the woodland paths, catching tantalising glimpses of water and locks, wharves and pounds through the tress. We look forward with eager anticipation to the restoration of this Cotswold gem and the opportunity of visiting again — this time by boat.

DERRICK HUNT

TWO APPEALS BY THE HONORARY ARCHIVIST

Coal Canal References — Waterways World

The Honorary Archivist is asking if any member is a subscriber to *Waterways World* magazine and if they have copies of the *Waterways World* Index for 2001 to 2003?

If the answer is yes, he would be grateful if he could be advised of any references to the Somersetshire Coal Canal contained within.

Act of Parliament 1796 and 1802

The Honorary Archivist is asking if any member has copies of two Acts of Parliament for the SCC. The first is the second Somersetshire Coal Canal Act of 24th March 1796 (36 Geo III, c 48) and the second is the third Somersetshire Coal Canal Act (known as the 'Lock Fund') of 30th April 1802 (42 Geo III, c 35). He is particularly interested in details of the Proprietors and Shareholders contained within the Acts (normally listed at the very beginning of the document) and The Schedule of Buildings, Gardens, Orchards, and Yards (normally given at the end).

Please contact Roger Halse by post at 4 Westminster Gardens, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 0DF or by telephone on 01249 652846 or email at roger@halsescs1956.fsnet.co.uk

OBITUARY — BILL SCHAFER

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Bill Schaefer after a long illness. Bill was a resident of Combe Hay and one of the founding members of our work party. His son, Bob, has sent us this photograph and tribute:



My dad died, after a long illness so bravely borne, on 24 October last year. He was throughout his life unswayed by any passing fashion, he just liked what he liked. In this way he was an anchor in the hurry of daily life. If something interested him then it was a safe bet that it was something worth devoting time to. His knowledge of the history of the coal canal was inspiring. An evening walk around the bull's nose came with a commentary, always insightful, never boring. He was keenly interested in the work of the society, and joined in several of the work parties until he was physically unable to carry on; thereafter he was always there in spirit. Those of you who met and worked with him should know that this good man was enriched by his involvement in the SCCS, and I hope that he was able to touch some of your lives in return in his gentle unassuming way. One of my abiding memories is of being able to go with him to the musical in that little hall in Southstoke all those years ago; he really enjoyed and appreciated the evening – so did I.

When we chose the place where his body would be buried, we were thrilled that it was so close to the old canal wall; if you can look beyond the grief and the loss, there couldn't have been a more appropriate site.

You'll pardon a family bias if I suggest that the world is the poorer for his passing, although heaven is richer, and at some celestial dinner table he has finally been able to find out from the architects and designers the exact location of the caisson – which puts him one up on the rest of us.

Rob Schaefer

NAVYING NOTES

During the course of ten years of SCCS work parties, the workforce has acquired a wide range of skills and tackled many jobs which stretched our resources. It came as quite a surprise, then, to realise that in all that time we had never had any need to learn the apparently simple skills of putting up and repairing wire fencing. Fortunately we were able to draw on the services of Richard Hignett, who agreed to train us in this specialised trade.

The Tools

To start with, we had to purchase the tools for the job and were greatly aided in this by a grant from Bath & N.E. Somerset Council. Our shopping list probably raised their collective eyebrows: it included a strange instrument of torture called a 'chain monkey' and a gigantic rubber mallet known as a 'beetle', which looked like an exaggerated cartoon version of something you wield to win prizes in a fairground.

The Training

So it was, that one damp October morning we turned up at Lock 14 of the Combe Hay flight, equipped with monkey and beetle—a strange *ménagerie à deux*—plus a more conventional assortment of pliers, a bag of staples, some fence posts, a fourteen-pound sledge hammer and a very heavy reel of wire. When we had recovered from moving this lot onto the work site, Richard initiated us into the use of our new purchases.

The Monkey

The 'monkey' turned out to be as full of tricks as its namesake: consisting of a loosely jointed conundrum of strangely-shaped bits of metal, it demonstrated that it had twice as many ways of nipping fingers as it had movable parts. There was a sort of lazy-tongs arrangement which first had to be attached to the fencing wire by an operator with at least three hands. Then a length of chain had to be untangled from itself so as to allow a pair of vicious spring loaded jaws to snap at it, nipping the operator's hand in the



DAVID HEATHCOTE — Getting to grips with the Chain Monkey



WHITEHALL BRIDGE NEAR TRILLIS — May 2004

Unusual Locks

Our first encounter with a Thames and Severn lock was very interesting. Unlike the SCC, where boat sizes were rigidly specified to suit the canal, the T&S Canal had to cope with short wide Severn Trows and long narrow Thames Barges. This led to oversized locks which used large volumes of water and often caused water shortages in the summit level. The locks had been shortened at some time during their lifetime, leading to a curious arrangement of an archway spanning the lock at the upper end. The logic behind this structure has yet to be determined.

Nature Conservation

The area adjacent to the lock flight is known as Siccaridge Wood and has been designated a nature reserve. The issues arising from this are of considerable interest to the SCCS because of the possible impact on future canal restoration. On the T&S, we were told, tree branches overhanging the locks may have to be left *in situ* because they could be used as bridges by some local wildlife. Fortunately this exact situation has not arisen on the SCC but we concluded that the long term benefits to wildlife would be better served by full restoration than by retaining a derelict and unmanaged wilderness.

Keep On Clearing

Another point we noted was that, although several massive work parties had made a very successful job of clearing the locks of unwanted vegetation, the rapidly encroaching regrowth was again beginning to threaten them. The SCCS is fortunate in having Bob Parnell maintaining the areas which the work parties have cleared. A walk up the Combe Hay flight gives convincing evidence for the effectiveness of Bob's work.

The furthest point of our walk was Whitehall Bridge, then we returned on the non-towpath side of the canal. The building of the canal had intruded on the course of the River Frome, which was realigned in many places. Some surviving structures suggested that the waters of the Frome had been diverted into the canal at various locations.

THE THAMES AND SEVERN CANAL NEAR DANEWAY — A WALK

The Thames & Severn Canal is known nowadays as part of the Cotswolds Canals . Our guide on this bright sunny May morning was Richard Attwood of the Cotswold Canals Trust, author of many of their publications and a fund of knowledge on the canal and its surroundings. He led us to the spectacular Gothic Daneway Portal of the Sapperton Tunnel, the starting point for our walk down the Golden Valley, from the summit level

Throughout our walk we admired many examples of the restoration which is in progress on this canal. The Daneway Portal, which until a few years ago had been nothing but a decaying ruin, was now restored to the original builder's glorious statement of the permanence of canals. Unfortunately the canalside cottage which stood beside it within living memory has succumbed to the attentions of vandals and is now nothing but a vague outline of foundations, with once-cultivated plants still to be found surviving in its garden.

Popular Paths

The well used footpaths in this area bear testimony to the popularity with which the restoration has been greeted by local walkers and long-distance hikers — and the landlord of the Daneway Inn must, no doubt, have a favourable opinion of the trade that it brings. The Daneway Inn was once called the "Bricklayers' Arms" and the summit canal lock, at 310 feet above sea level, lies underneath part of the present-day car park. Adjacent to the Daneway Inn is an intact road bridge and below that is a large pound and wharf which is now a private garden. From here we could see the Golden Valley falling away into a lush sea of woodland and flowering plants, this is one of the five valleys leading down to Stroud and is very aptly named.



THE RESTORED PORTAL OF SAPPERTON TUNNEL



Photograph: Olaf Pilor

WHAT A WHOPPER!

Richard Hignett demonstrates the correct way to hold a 'beetle'

The Beetle

Any thoughts of hammering-in fence posts the way you would hammer a nail were immediately dispelled when we realised that fence posts work on a similar principle to icebergs — they are a lot taller before they are hammered into the ground than they appear afterwards. Richard picked up the 'beetle' and held it with both hands above his head, keeping one arm rigid so the hand acted as a pivot and using the other one to bring the business end of the beetle down onto the top of the fence post with a shuddering rebound. This, we were told, gives a square blow which does not split the fence post. We had to take Richard's word for this, because those of us who actually succeeded in lifting the beetle then found they had insufficient remaining strength to control it.

Hidden Talents

When we came to put theory into practice, we realised that our fence posts were mere matchsticks compared with some of the original corner posts which had been installed over fifteen years ago. What is more, the original wires had been fixed with a generous supply of staples driven in until they were below the surface and almost impossible to remove. At this point, Tony Bigwood let slip one vital piece of information, it was he who had put them in in the first place, under the direction of AIBT. Realising that we had an expert in our midst, we immediately delegated to him the job of getting the most recalcitrant ones back out again.

Fencing, we discovered, is a slow business and best tackled in a determined and plodding manner. We have now spent three months determinedly plodding up the lock flight, accompanied by our monkey and our beetle; and we have finally been able to leave the lock sides in a safe and tidy condition.

process and dislodging the lazy tongs allowing the whole thing to clatter to the ground, obliging the operator to start the process all over again.

When the monkey had tired of its amusing antics and finally decided to co-operate, it proved to be an excellent tool for drawing together two pieces of fencing wire and keeping them under tension whilst a joint was made. It was surprisingly effective at this and, if operated a little too enthusiastically, demonstrated that it could also draw together any fence posts that weren't firmly anchored in the ground — and this brings us rather neatly to the use of the beetle.

A WALK ALONG THE K&A CANAL AND GROSVENOR MEADOWS, BATH.

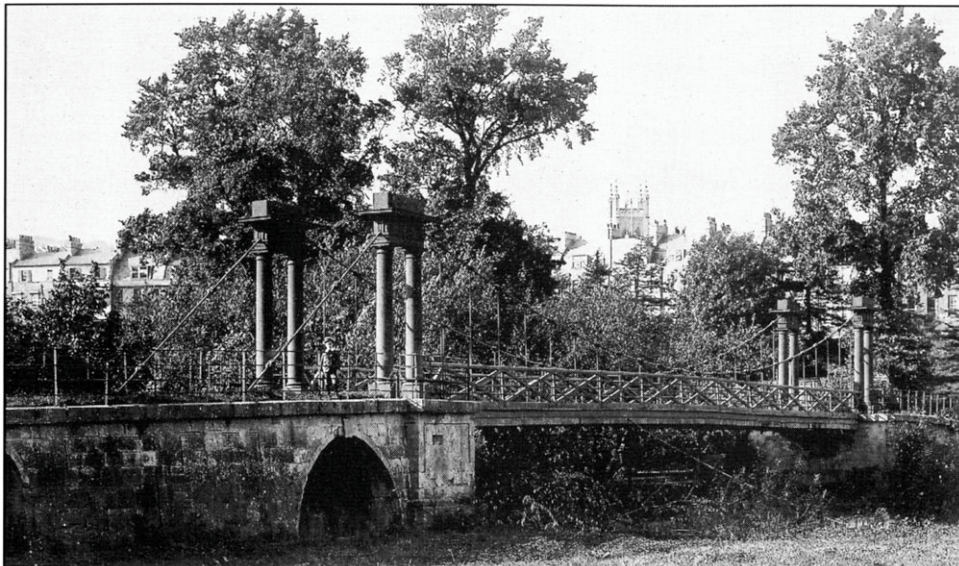
Sunday 15h August 2004

John Skinner's pleasure excursion along the SCC to the gardens at Combe Hay in 1822 (in a coal barge cleaned out for the occasion), with awning, picnic lunch, and music by the Camerton Band, is a reminder that canals were not restricted solely to the uses of commerce. On the K&A Canal on the outskirts of Bath, a city famed for its leisure amenities, this aspect of the waterway is still evident today and provided the theme for this walk.

Near the M.O.D premises on the Warminster Road, is an old footpath which, crossing the canal, runs down to the River Avon where it formerly communicated, via a ferry, with the Grosvenor Pleasure Gardens on the opposite bank. These gardens, laid out in 1791 at the back of Grosvenor Place boasted two bowling greens, an archery field, a maze, 'Merlin's swings', swimming canal, fishponds, and pleasure boats on the Avon, together with refreshments, music and firework displays. When the canal was built in the early 1800s a swing bridge ('Folly Bridge', named after a Farm adjoining the canal below the embankment) was constructed to carry this footpath, which gave access from the Gardens to the fine countryside around Bathampton and Claverton.

Pleasure Gardens

Owing to competition from Sydney Gardens (further along the canal) the gardens soon went into decline and were closed about 1810, but the footpath walk remained popular. In 1830 a wrought-iron ornamental pedestrian suspension bridge (the first in Bath) was built over the Avon near the site of the ferry to capitalise on this traffic, and the farm was converted to a tea-garden and tavern (with brewery). Even after the construction of the GWR in 1840, when the tea-gardens became completely hidden between the embankments of the railway and the canal, it continued to do good business and was adopted as a station for the Bath Humane Society. In 1862 it was again converted - this time to a pleasure ground with shrubberies, fountain, dance floor, illuminations &c., under the name of 'The Cremorne Gardens' - and during the 20th century continued in use as The Folly public house until it was hit by a stray bomb during the Second World War.



Photograph: Bath Chronicle

GROSVENOR SUSPENSION BRIDGE — Early 20th century photograph

Miles	Location	Stone	Plate
1/2	Between Brassknocker Hill, Viaduct Hotel and Monkton Combe	In situ	Missing
1	Between Monkton Combe and Tucking Mill	Missing	Missing
1 1/2	Tucking Mill Wharf	In situ	Missing
2	North of Midford Weigh-House	Missing	Missing
2 1/2	South of Midford Accommodation Bridge	In situ	Missing
3	Lock 21	In situ	Missing
3 1/2	Lock 13	In situ	Survives (elsewhere)
4	Lock 4	In situ	Survives
4 1/2	Between Lock 1 and Combe Hay Tunnel	Survives (not in situ)	Survives (affixed to stone)
5	West of Combe Hay Tunnel	Survives (not in situ)	Survives (affixed to stone)
5 1/2	Between Combe Hay Tunnel and Dunkerton	In situ	Missing
6	East of Dunkerton Wharf	In situ	Survives (elsewhere)
6 1/2	Near to Dunkerton 'Little' Aqueduct	Missing	Missing
7	East of Dunkerton Pumping Engines (Withyditch)	Missing	Missing
7 1/2	East of 'Cooks Bridge' (Dunkerton Colliery)	Missing	Missing
8	East of Bengove (Sellar's Stile)	Survives (not in situ)	Missing
8 1/2	East of Camerton (site of Camerton 'new' pit batch)	Missing	Missing
9	Camerton (rear of 'Jolly Collier')	Missing	Missing
9 1/2	Radford	Missing	Missing
10	Dunford	In situ	Survives (elsewhere)
10 1/2	Timsbury Basin	Missing	Missing

COAL CANAL MILESTONES

For many a bargee travelling along the nineteenth century canals of the country distances played an important part of their everyday life. The miles travelled both helped them determine how far they had to go to their destination, but far more importantly how much they or their employers had to pay for the goods carried. Carriers were charged a toll of so many pence per mile, the rates varying for different types of cargo. On the SCC the 1802 Act of Parliament authorised rates of 2d. per ton per mile for coal and coke, 3d. per ton per mile for stone, tiles, bricks, slate and timber, rising to 4d. per ton per mile for iron and lead.

In order to help the bargees know their location on the canal and help calculate the tolls to be paid, the canal company sited at every half-mile along the canal a milestone, affixed with a distinctive cast-iron plate, indicating the distance from the junction with the Kennet & Avon Canal at Dundas.

On the northern arm of the canal (sometimes referred to as the 'Dunkerton Line' or 'Main Line') there were between Dundas and the terminus basin at Timsbury 21 such milestones. Following the abandonment of the canal in 1904 some of these were lost during the construction over the canal of the GWR Camerton to Limpley Stoke branch line, others through infilling, farming or development.

In the 1960's the remaining milestones known to have survived were photographed by society member Terry Paget and in 1987 the location and condition of all the surviving milestones, some still with cast-iron plates, were recorded by Mike Chapman. Unfortunately in the intervening years between Terry's photographs and Mike's survey some milestones had seen the arrival of the 'collector' who had removed some of the cast-iron plates.



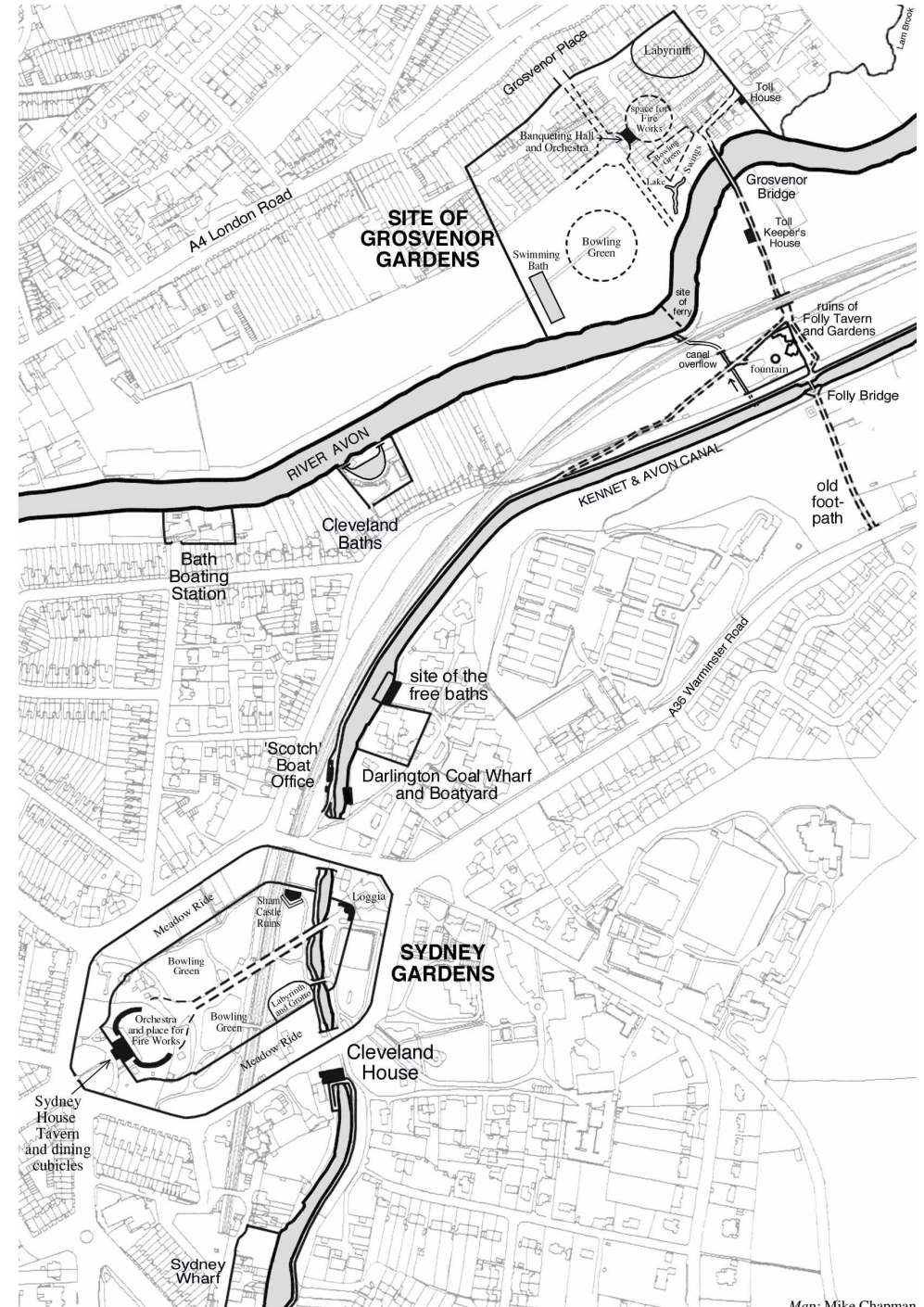
THE 2½ MILE STONE SOUTH OF MIDFORD

In 2004 only 11 of the original 21 milestones survive — alas, only three complete with cast-iron plate, and only one of these in its original place. Three other cast-iron plates survive separately from their stones. The following list shows where the milestones were sited and their condition, if known.

The southern ('Radstock Line') branch of the canal may also have had 13 milestones, although of an entirely different size with a smaller circular cast-iron plate. Only one of these stones remains, in situ, but with the plate (photographed still affixed in the 1960's) now missing.

Please note that the majority of milestones that survive are on private land; please do not trespass. Access to photograph some of these (although not all) may be possible when the society has guided walks in the location. The Milestones at 2½ and 8 miles are adjacent to public footpaths.

ROGER HALSE



GROSVENOR AREA AND SYDNEY GARDENS

Map: Mike Chapman



THE REPLACEMENT FOOTBRIDGE

The top of one of the stop gates can be seen behind the prow of the boat.
The remains of the swivel bridge bearing is on the right hand abutment

Early Technology

The swivel bridge over the canal was a very early example of ball-bearing technology. Iron balls about the size of canon-balls rolled in a circular cast-iron groove, taking the weight of the bridge off the central pintle to reduce friction. The swivel bridge structure has now been replaced with a fixed wooden 'up-and-over' footbridge, but the seatings of the original bearings have been left in situ. Also remaining is a pair of stop-gates under the bridge abutments which protect this reach of the canal from bursts in the pounds on each side.



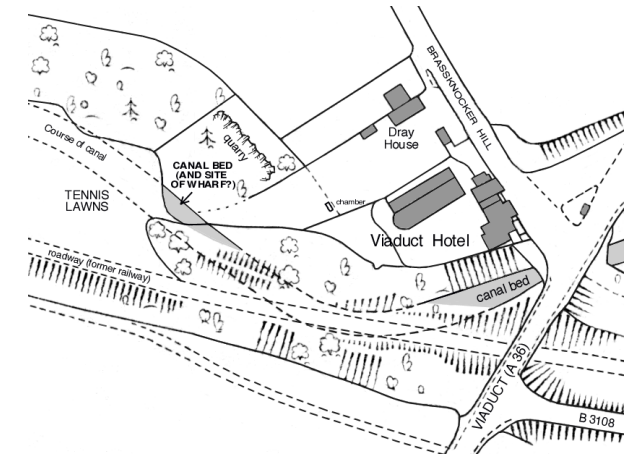
THE ORIGINAL BEARING RING AND PINTLE OF THE SWIVEL BRIDGE

Below the embankment the overgrown ruins of the Folly buildings can still be made out among the trees, but all that remains of the pleasure ground is now a marshy swamp which drains into a canal overflow channel running down the side of the site into the river. The suspension bridge over the river was released from toll (1/2d) in 1925 and replaced by the present rather nondescript ferro-concrete girder bridge in 1929, but the original piers and flood arches still remain. The toll house has gone, but the foundations of the keeper's cottage (also a Humane Society Station) are still visible next to the pathway towards the railway embankment.

A STONE WHARF NEAR THE VIADUCT HOTEL?

Having studied the canal in detail over the years, it is always a surprise to find that unknown sections of the canal bed can still be found here and there, as occurred recently whilst investigating a subterranean chamber built into the bank behind the Viaduct Hotel at the bottom of Brassknocker Hill in Monkton Combe. The chamber, built into the hillside at the top of the slope behind the Inn, was of some interest, as it lies in property which once belonged to the Hotel and its brewery. Constructed mainly of Bath stone, about 7ft x 4ft in plan and between 5 to 6 foot deep with a manhole entry in the vaulted roof, it appears to have originally served for some storage purpose associated with the Hotel. However, the possibility that there was some connection with the canal had to be considered, and on further investigation the inner bank of a 40 foot section was indeed found to have survived at the foot of the slope.

The 1880 OS map shows that this section of the canal later served as a boundary between the Hotel property and the adjoining Monkton Combe School tennis lawns. When the tennis courts were laid out, the outer towing path bank was destroyed, but the canal bed and inner bank survived on the other side of the boundary. More interestingly perhaps, this bank is not only remarkably open and flat, but also covered with partly worked Bath stone blocks showing through the turf. Immediately behind this flat area is an exposed rock face cut into the slope of the hill which the old map shows was then a quarry. An old photograph of the canal through Monkton Combe also shows these features, although the quarry face appears less



Map: Mike Chapman

A MAP OF THE CANAL IN THE VIADUCT AREA



Photograph: Mike Chapman

THE CANAL BED BELOW THE VIADUCT HOTEL — March 2005

prominent than today. Access to the quarry would have been extremely difficult, which suggests that the flat area once served as a temporary 'wharf' attached to the canal, a practice which may well have been employed in similar situations elsewhere along the canal during its lifetime, but now difficult to detect.

MIKE CHAPMAN

Although many of these features have disappeared, even today there is a striking contrast between this stretch and the rest of the canal. The proprietor of the gardens at the time was moved to announce that; 'The novelty of the Kennet and Avon Canal which is carried through the Garden and Ride, and completed in the most handsome manner with Ornamental Iron Bridges and with improvements in the plantations, add considerably to the Picturesque Beauties for which this spot has been so universally admired'. The fine ashlar walls which line the canal cutting added to the effect, whilst preventing access to the Gardens for which there was an entrance fee of 6d. Canal boatmen therefore gained little benefit from these amenities, but for the canal proprietors the Gardens were a prestigious and useful adjunct to the canal. The K&A Canal Company set up its headquarters over the southern exit of the gardens, in Cleveland House [see information on planned visit below], and the SCC Company took advantage of its services on the completion of the Combe Hay lock flight. In April 1805, the Bath Journal, reported that; '...the proprietors of the Somerset Coal Canal opened their locks (22 in number) at Combhay ... it being a day of festivity, the parties consisting of ladies and gentlemen attended by the Bath Forum Band, proceeded by water from Timsbury Bason through all the Locks to Sidney Gardens (a distance of about 16 miles) where they partook of a good dinner and the evening concluded with a ball'.

MIKE CHAPMAN

A visit to Cleveland House has been arranged for Society Members on Sunday 17th April. This will include an unique opportunity to explore the cellars and view the legendary 'drop-hole' to the canal below.



SYDNEY GARDENS

Ornamental iron bridge with Cleveland House in Background

Further along the towpath towards Bath, is the site of Darlington Wharf, a once busy coal depôt and boat yard. Little now remains of this except for a few stone sheds, but the cottage on the outer bank, formerly the Bradford Boat Office where passengers boarded the 'high-speed' 'Scotch' boats during the 1830s and 1840s, still survives, together with its Humane Society signboard 'for lifebuoys and dragpoles'. →



THE 'SCOTCH' BOAT OFFICE

Opposite the Darlington Wharf at the entrance tunnel to the Sydney Gardens
Above: From an 1844 print Below: August 2004 Inset: Notice on office wall



THE REMAINS OF THE 'MUD HOLE' SWIMMING BATH (extreme left) AND DARLINGTON WHARF — August 2004

Swimming Baths

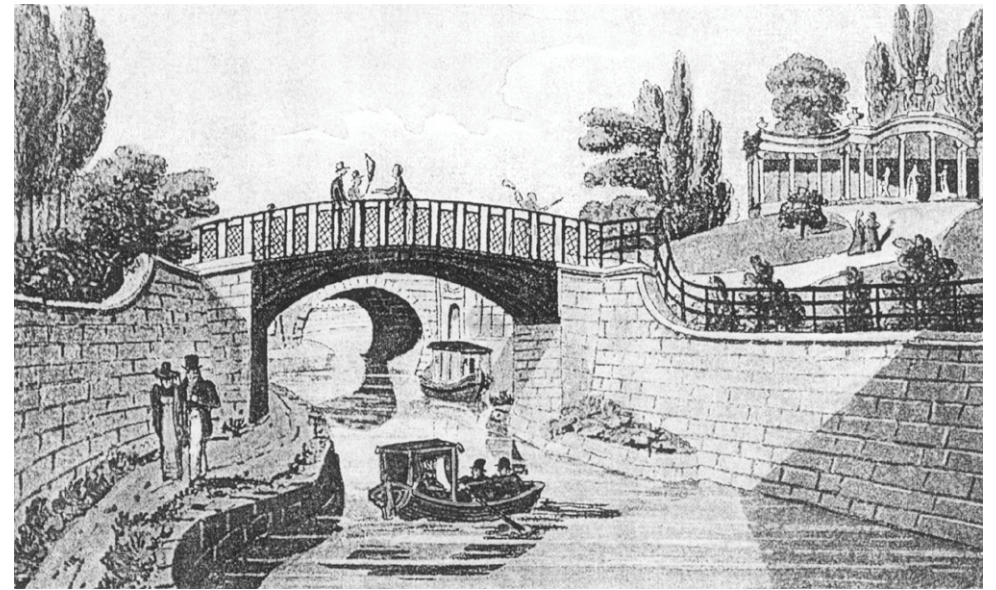
Next to the wharf on the east side, the city's first free public swimming bath was established in 1869 - in the canal itself. For privacy it was fenced off from the rest of the waterway with iron sheets and gratings (supplied by Stothert & Pitt), with fenders at each end to protect it from collision with barges. Sited next to the coal yard, conditions were not ideal (hence its nick-name 'the Mud Hole') and, as a substitute, the Corporation quickly acquired the Cleveland Bath a little further down the hill when it came up for sale in 1900. The latter, established beside the river much earlier in 1815 as a 'gentlemen's pleasure bath', still exists (although presently unused), but all that remains of the 'Mud Hole' is a flight of steps hidden in the undergrowth of the canal bank.

Sydney Gardens

Immediately on the west side of the wharf the canal passes under the Warminster Road bridge into the Sydney Gardens. These gardens were originally laid out in 1795 as a pleasure ground which, although similar to the Grosvenor Gardens, were closer to the city and enjoyed a more enduring success. The K&A Company paid dearly for the right to take the canal through the grounds in 1798, and great care was taken to landscape the waterway so that it blended in with its surroundings. The two masonry bridges which now carry the main A36 roads (originally built for the horse-riding drive around the Gardens) were ornamented with statuary such as Neptune and Sabrina (water deities representing the Thames and Severn), and several ornamental iron 'Chinese' bridges (then the latest technology from Coalbrookdale) were provided for the promenaders. In doing so, John Rennie skillfully negotiated a sham castle ruin, a mock water-mill and a Labyrinth.



NEPTUNE



SYDNEY GARDENS — from an 1820 print showing one of the ornamental iron 'Chinese' bridges and the northern tunnel, with the 'Loggia' of the Garden —to the right.

