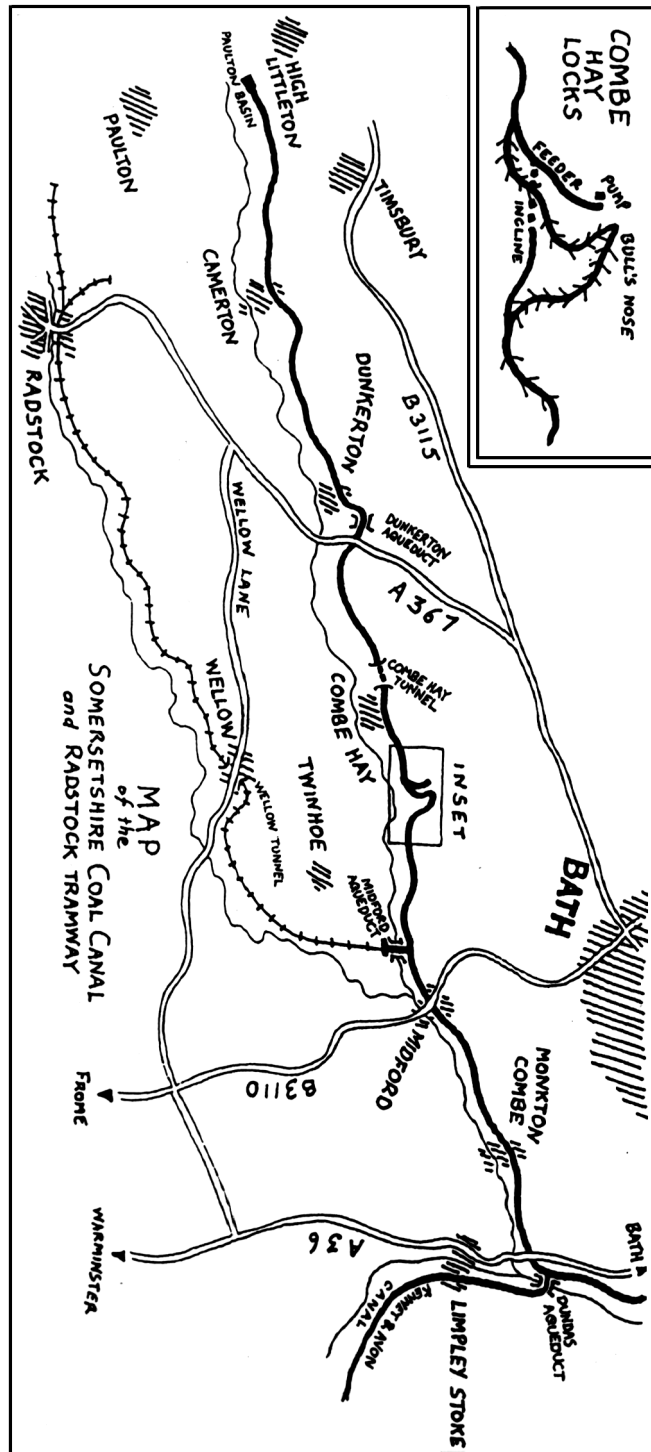


# WEIGH-HOUSE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY



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

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**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 acting Membership Secretary at:  
1, Hillcrest Close, Nailsea, Bristol BS48 2HP ☎ & Fax: 01275 798479  
*E-mail: laurie@gibney.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**

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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 2<sup>nd</sup> July — 10:00

**WORK PARTY — Location to be advised**

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July — 10:00

**WALK — THE WILTS & BERKS CANAL at WOOTTON BASSETT**

Meet at: Templar's Firs Car Park (Next to the Council Depôt)

B4041 Broad Hinton Road, Wootton Bassett.

For further details please contact:

Roger Halse ☎ 01249 652846

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August — 10:00

**WORK PARTY — Location to be advised**

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August — 19:30

**EVENING WALK — THE SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL IN BATH**

Meet outside the West door of Bath Abbey

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September — 10:00

**WORK PARTY — Location to be advised**

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> September — 10:00

**WALK — COMBE HAY LOCK FLIGHT**

Meet in "The Avenue" Combe Hay

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

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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### NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Ms W. Ritson

Mr R. Wright

Hinton Charterhouse

Melksham

### DONATIONS

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

Mr. C. Axon

Ms. R. Bennett & Mr. M. Tennenhaus

Mr. & Mrs. N. P. Hicks & family

Mrs. J. Kennedy

Mrs. V. C. Messam

Mr. G A Pickford

Mr. & Mrs. A. D. Wadley

Mr. & Mrs. D. G. Whitehouse & Family

Mr. & Mrs. E. A. Withers

Brislington

Bath

Nova Scotia

Llansoy

Devizes

Chilcompton

Keynsham

Canterbury

Brislington

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Although the remote situation of the Coal Canal can be seen as fortunate, preserving what remains of it in its original setting, it also means that the general public are either completely unaware of it (or any of the other attractions, natural or man-made, that can be enjoyed outside Bath in the countryside just over the hill to the south), or have difficulty finding it. For this reason we are always interested in any changes in access that might occur in this neighbourhood.

For example, following the recent opening of the trackbed of the S&D Railway line to the public as a cycle path, it was with great satisfaction that the Society was able to take several walks recently along this route - closely following the southern branch of the canal and its tramway - without the risk of trespass!

It now seems that suggestions are also being made to open up a similar cycle route through the S&D railway tunnels under Devonshire Buildings and Combe Down. While it might be argued that the tunnels would be better employed for some form of public transport, they would at least provide a more direct route from Bath to Tucking Mill - straight to the 'doorstep' of the Canal. We await further developments with interest.

Mike Chapman  
May 2006

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the next Annual general Meeting of the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society will be held on Tuesday 20th June 2006 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.

The meeting will be followed by refreshments and an illustrated talk by Adrian Tuddenham: "Why Did They Build the Canal The Way They Did?"

## MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY WANTED

At last year's A.G.M., Laurie Gibney formally relinquished the post of Membership Secretary. However, he has continued to fulfil the duties of that post throughout the past year in order to give the Society time to find someone to take over from him. With this year's A.G.M. fast approaching, there has been no sign of a successor and Laurie has made it quite clear that he will not be able to help us out for a second year. This places the Society in a most difficult position, as a glance at the list of Society Officers on Page 2 will reveal.

Among our 200+ members there must be someone with an organised mind and sufficient office skills to undertake this task — or someone slightly less qualified but who is motivated to do their best to acquire the necessary skills and help the Society out of a difficult situation.

If you think you may be able to help us, please contact Mike Chapman on 01225 426948 and let him know.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### WORK PARTIES

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

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May — 10:00

### WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May — 10:00 -18:00

### OPEN DAY - BRASSKNOCKER BASIN

K & A Canal Trust

Includes displays, boat trips, guided walks and Claverton Pumping Station in operation.

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> May — 10:00

### FUSSELL'S BALANCE LOCK SITE VISIT - MELLS

With West Wilts Industrial Archaeology Society

See Page 19 for further details or contact:

Derrick Hunt ☎ 01225 863066

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May — 10:00

### WALK — SALT FORD BRASSMILL

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June — 10:00

### WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June — 10:00

### WALK — THE WILTS & BERKS CANAL at CALNE

Meet at: Station Road, Calne.

For further details please contact:

Roger Halse ☎ 01249 652846

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June — 19:30

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING — Radstock Museum.

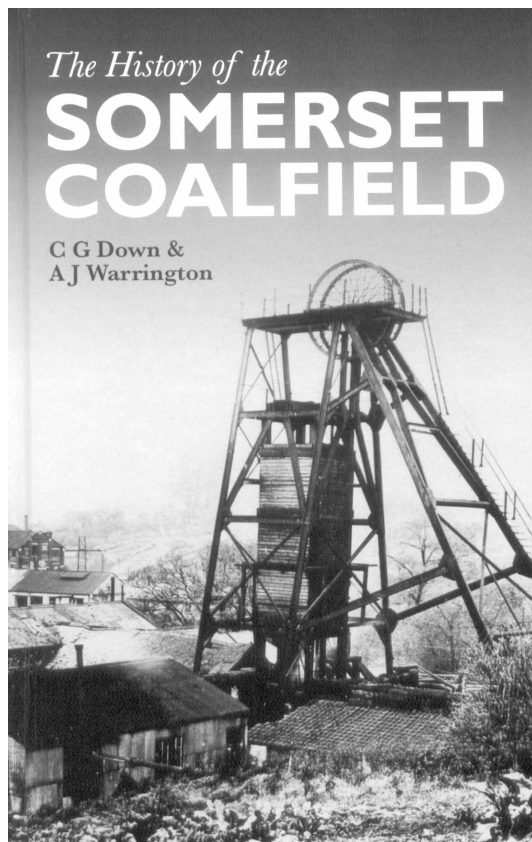
Followed by a talk by Adrian Tuddenham

"Why Did They Build the Canal the Way They Did?"

## HISTORY OF THE SOMERSET COALFIELD - BOOK REPRINT

The History of the Somerset Coalfield by C. G. Down & A. J. Warrington, originally published by David & Charles in 1971, has been reprinted by the Radstock Museum. The 288 page book, widely thought by many to be the definitive history of the North Somerset coalfield, contains many photographs, maps and diagrams of coal mining in Somerset. Included are some of the numerous pits in the Welton, Radstock, Timsbury and Paulton areas which would have, at one time or another, been linked to either the Somersetshire Coal Canal or the Radstock Tramway.

*Copies cost £25 (plus £2.75 postage & packing) and are available from The Radstock Museum, Waterloo Road, Radstock - Telephone 01761 437722.*



## FUSSELL'S TRIAL BALANCE LOCK SITE

Sunday May 14th

There will be another opportunity to visit the excavations of the world's first balance lock or boat lift for those members who may have missed it last time. This includes a chance to view some of the recovered artefacts and to discuss James Fussell's ideas for the Dorset & Somerset Canal.

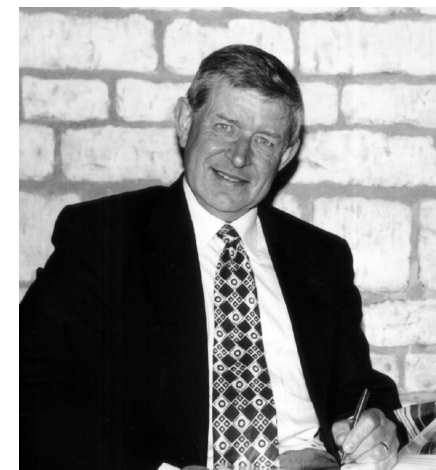
Meet at the bus shelter west of the Talbot Public House, Mells, Somerset at 10am.  
A joint meeting with the West Wiltshire Industrial Archaeological Society

Cost £2.00

## CHRIS HANDLEY - A TRIBUTE

*The Society was saddened to hear of the passing of long serving member Chris Handley aged 62.*

I first heard of Chris Handley through the publication of his booklet *The Railways & Tramways of Radstock* in 1979. As someone who was just beginning an interest in the Somersetshire Coal Canal and the Radstock Tramway, this short, but informative history was very welcome, providing much detail about the canal, tramway and subsequent railways in the Radstock area. Publication of Chris's two books on the railways in Radstock (*Radstock Coal & Steam - Volume 1* in 1991 and *Volume 2* in 1992), both of which are highly praised by railway historians, further encouraged my research and in 1993, Chris and I began a regular correspondence.



*Photograph courtesy of Dennis Chedgy  
Reproduced by permission from "Five Arches", Issue 54, P.9*

**Chris Handley signing his second book, 'Radstock Coal and Steam', at Radstock Museum.**

Chris's enthusiasm for the Radstock area, the place of his birth, was well known, and he was only too pleased to give the Society both a talk about, and a guided walk along the route of, the canal and tramways in the Radstock and Welton areas. He seemed to know where every single remaining stone sleeper block was, despite the many changes to the landscape since the tramways demise.

In 1996 whilst I was editor of *Weigh-House* and struggling for articles to fill the next edition, the issue being as per normal (late!) my post arrived with another excellent article on the SCC at Radstock from Chris. The article being so long that I was then in the position of actually having too much for the newsletter!

Publication of any article about the Radstock canal/tramway would often result in another snippet of historical information coming my way from Chris.

In 2001 I was privileged to collaborate with Chris on a small booklet for the Radstock Museum on *The Radstock Branch of the Somersetshire Coal Canal*. Chris taking the time to check through my writing and correct my somewhat ropey English grammar, and importantly to check that I had not made any glaring mistakes with the historical information!

Chris was always helpful with answers to my many questions on the canal/tramway, however odd they may have been! He will be sadly missed.

Roger Halse

## NAVYING NOTES

### *The Floating Bonfire*

Autumn turned to Winter in Combe Hay, and with it came the wintry weather. By mid afternoon the cold didn't matter to the Work Party because, by that time, they had a bonfire 15ft across to keep them warm; but getting it started first thing in the morning was another story.

The root of the problem is the canal itself. Canal beds, as a rule, are supposed to be waterproof and this one is no exception. Although the stream which flows down the valley, from somewhere just below Southstoke, soaks quietly away near Lock 10 in the Summer, by Autumn it is beginning to gain strength and find its way down the lock flight. At the end of a long rainy spell, it has even been known to fill Lock 15 to a depth of several feet.

As winter progresses, the beds of the pounds between locks become wetter and wetter. Work boots are replaced by work 'wellies' and each working day begins with a search for somewhere dry enough to light the bonfire. By December, there was nowhere dry left, so a bit of lateral thinking came up with the idea of having a floating bonfire. Some tree rings were duly cut and rolled to a suitable spot, the fire was then built upon them.

To our great disappointment, the fire never actually floated away, but it certainly looked impressive surrounded by water - which, by the end of the afternoon, was seen to be steaming gently.

### *The Sinking Photographer*

We soon learned which bits of the pound to avoid, where the deep mud clung tenaciously to our wellies, threatening to pull them off. Unfortunately we forgot to mention this to Sam Farr, the photographer for the Bath Chronicle, who turned up at our January work party to take a photograph for the newspaper.

Having got a suitable picture of our group "watching the birdie", he took a short cut across the mouth of Lock 12. We were so busy recovering after the ordeal of standing still for 30 seconds (instead of working continuously, in our accustomed manner) that it didn't immediately dawn on us that he had suddenly acquired a much shorter stature. He drew our attention to his plight with a display of physical and verbal gymnastics, and there was a further delay while we recovered from our laughter - so by the time we went to the rescue, he was already well on the way to extricating himself, and his valuable cameras, unaided.

### *Clearing the view*

The most recent work parties have moved down the lock flight to the towpath side between Locks 14 and 15. To avoid any confusion, it should be noted that the towpath was on the inside of the Bull'sNose hairpin, not on the side with the present-day footpath. An old photograph of the area, discovered a few years ago, proved difficult to identify at first because it showed two locks at a considerable angle to each other, which no-one could remember seeing on this canal. Now the pounds have been cleared, it is obvious that the canal experiences a considerable change of direction at this point and the locks in the photograph must have been numbers 14 and 15.

To improve the appearance of the area, it was agreed with the landowner that we would remove a thick patch of scrub which obliterated the towpath and completely blocked the view of the lock flight from Lock 15. Work has begun on this, but it is expected to take more than one work party to completely tidy up the site

*A photograph of the view recently opened up by the clearance of the pounds is on Page 19.*

*Anyone who would like to join the work party please contact Bob Parnell on 01225 428055*



*Photograph: Tania Glyde*



**SOME OF THE IRON ARTEFACTS AND BOTTLES DISCOVERED DURING EARLIER EXCAVATIONS IN WELLOW TUNNEL**

itself may have been altered, as suggested by the absence of stone copings along the top of the shelf wall - perhaps robbed out when the tramway was laid down. The total height, measured from the apex of the roof to the bottom of the bed (hampered by the large quantity of water which began to seep into the trench), was estimated at 4.20m (13ft 8in) - giving the tunnel a slightly oval shape.

Although it was disappointing to find that all traces of the tramway seem to have been removed from this part of the tunnel, including even the sleeper blocks, there were clear indications of the formation which supported it. This seems to have been built up initially from alternate layers of coal debris and compacted hard-core or mortar which, burying the towing path shelf, provided a central formation of sufficient width to accommodate the 3ft 6in gauge of the plateway. At some later stage (presumably when the tramway was abandoned) this profile seems to have been regraded with an infill of boulders covered with a further layer of compacted hardcore and mortar.

Although details about the tramway still remain unanswered, we now have a much clearer understanding of the construction of the tunnel, and our thanks are due to Richard and Ann for making this possible.

Mike Chapman

### **NATIONAL WATERWAYS FESTIVAL - HELP WANTED**

The Society will be having a display stand at the IWA National Festival & Boat Show, 26th - 28th August 2006 at Beale Park, Pangbourne on the River Thames. Any member wishing to volunteer to help man the stand will be welcome. Passes for volunteers are available (saving members the admission price of £7.50). Please contact Roger Halse on 01249 652846 or email [roger@halsescs1956.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:roger@halsescs1956.fsnet.co.uk) for further details.



*Photograph: Sam Farr*

**THE WORK PARTY - above Lock 13, January 2006**



**NEAR LOCK 12 - Another dead tree is felled into the field from top of Lock 12.**

## A WALK - THE CANAL AND THE FULLER'S EARTH MINES AT COMBE HAY

Sunday 19th June 2005

Following our recent tour of the Bath Stone mines and quarries on Combe Down, new information has also come to light about the local Fuller's Earth mines. Very little is known about the relationship between these mines and the canal, as the casual nature of the early Fuller's Earth industry left few records until 1890, when the large concern known as the Fuller's Earth Union was set up to meet the needs of the American oil industry - just when the canal was reaching the end of its career. Nevertheless, it is evident that the works at Tucking Mill (established 1883) initially made use of the canal, and the strange masonry platform overlooking the canal near the South Stoke accommodation bridge appears to be associated with a Fuller's Earth drying kiln nearby. This kiln, now the site of Underhill Cottage, was connected by a tramway to the mine at Hodshill which operated between 1886-94. What was not suspected however is that something similar may have been planned for the Combe Hay mines. With this in mind, a walk was arranged to look more closely at the remains of these particular sites.

As with Fuller's Earth mines elsewhere in the downs around Bath, the adits at Combe Hay were driven in under the scarp of Bath Stone Oolite, in this case in the area of the Odd Down Park & Ride amenity. Here, in Combe Hay Lane, an ancient track branches off into the valley which formerly provided a main route to the village before the present 'Carriage Drive' (Combe Hay Lane) was built in 1868 by Major Samuel Butler of Caisson House. On the east side of this track Major Butler also established a Fuller's Earth mine, later known as the 'Lower Works', in about 1881, although this was not fully exploited until after 1945 when the site was extended eastward. After 1890 the main focus of activity was in the larger 'Upper Works' which Butler set up with his father (also called Samuel Butler, then lord of Combe Hay and resident of the Manor House) several hundred yards further west of the lane, on the top of the Down. It was the Butlers, together with other producers of fuller's earth in the country, who formed the Fullers' Earth Union in March 1890, and it was these works which were to prove the most significant in the area, being the last to close when Fuller's Earth mining ceased around Bath altogether. Although remains of the Upper Works are still visible today, the site of the Lower Works was extensively cleared and nothing can now be seen of its adits and tramway system except for the terraces on which they were situated.

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MEMBERS OF THE SCCS MEETING FOR THE WALK

The Odd Down Park + Ride site is built upon former Fuller's Earth workings



Photograph: Mike Chapman

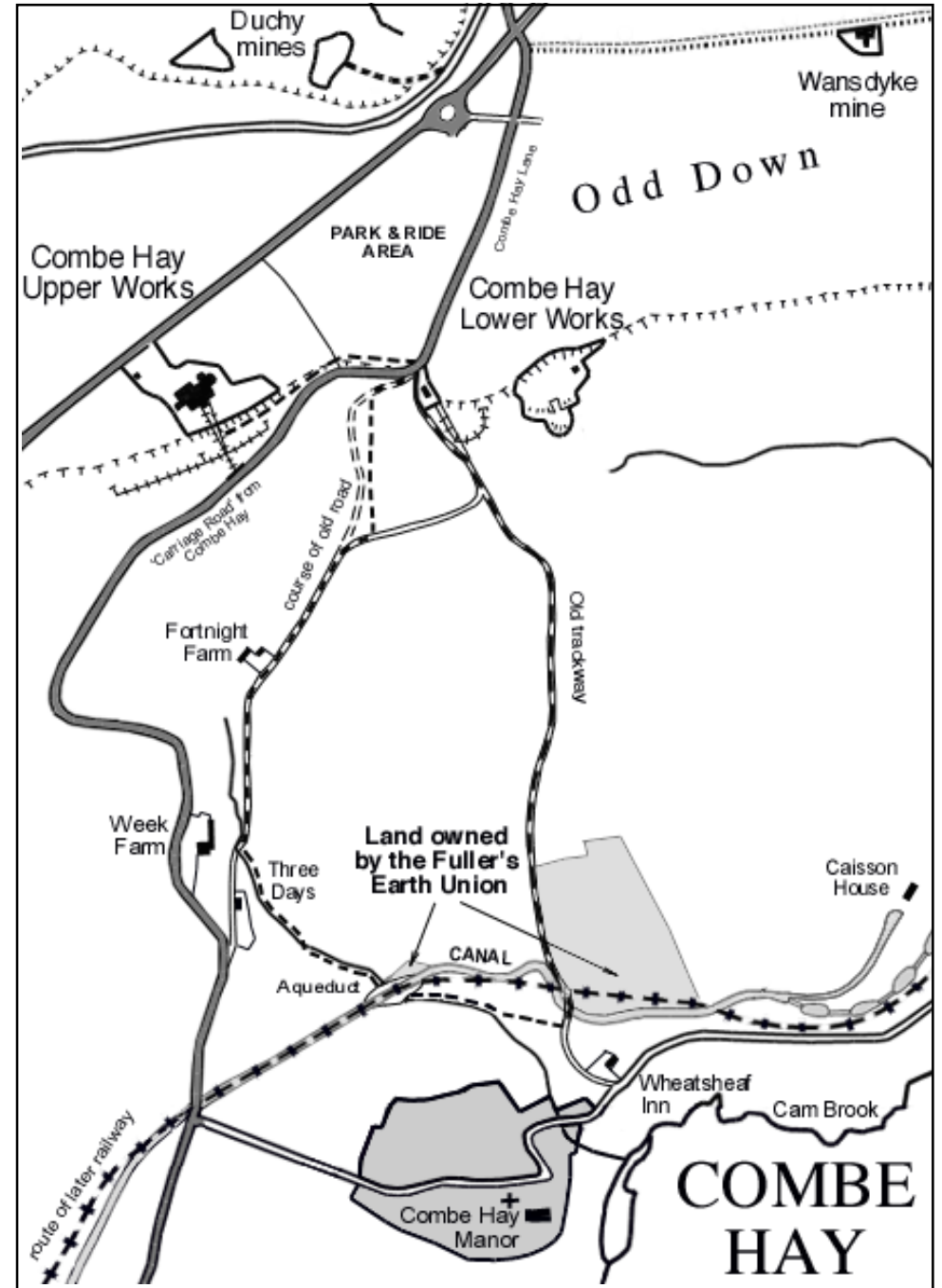
TUNNEL WALL AT THE WESTERN END OF THE TRENCH





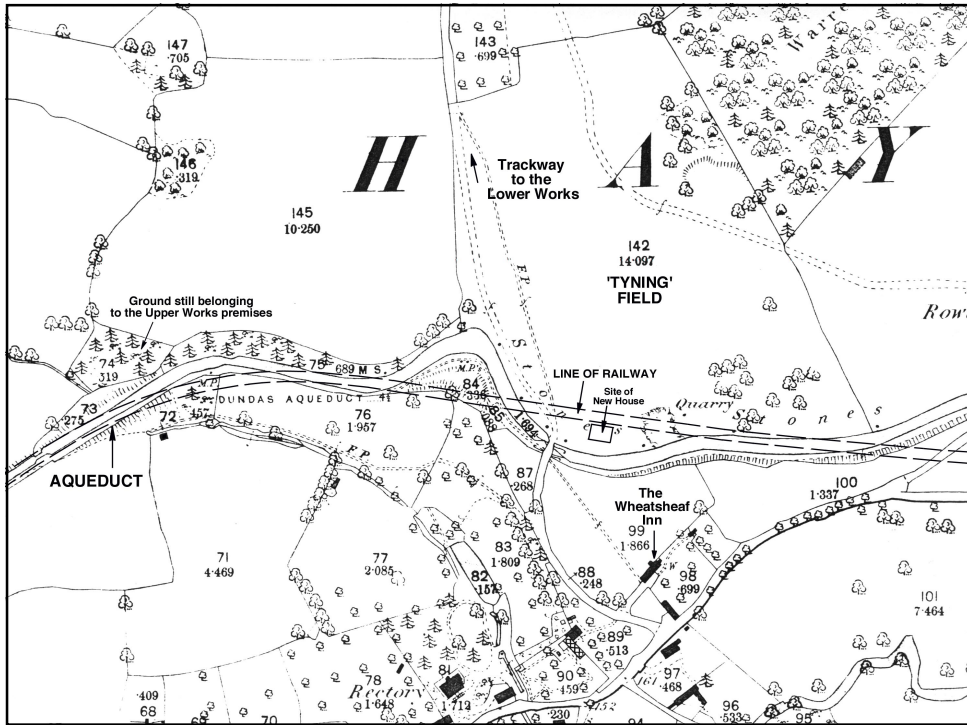
Photograph: Mike Chapman

TOWING PATH SHELF WALL AT THE EASTERN END OF THE TRENCH



Drawing: Mike Chapman

THE LOCATION OF THE FULLER'S EARTH WORKS BETWEEN BATH AND COMBE HAY



**DETAIL FROM O.S. MAP SHOWING THE COAL CANAL ABOVE COMBE HAY IN THE 1880S.**  
 Parts of field no.142, 'The Tynning', was sold to the GWR by the Fuller's Earth Union between 1808-1811.  
 Plot no.74 still belongs to the former Upper Works premises.

Continuing down the valley, the old track crossed the Canal by a bridge (originally a swivel bridge but later probably stone arch) just above the Wheatsheaf Inn. This was presumably demolished soon after the closure of the canal, and all that can be seen today is a short section of the canal bed on the west side of bridge site, overlooking the village cemetery. When the Limpley Stoke to Camerton railway was built just above (and roughly parallel to) the canal, the trackway was provided with a new railway bridge, 'Tynning Bridge', the parapets of which still remain. It also appears, from the British Rail property map discovered by Roger Halse at the Public Record Office, that sections of a large field called 'Savings Tynning', adjoining the upper bank of the canal on the east side of the lane, had been bought by the GWR from the Fullers Earth Union between 1908-1911 for the deep cutting which passed under the new bridge. This suggests that the Union had previously acquired this land as a potential site for a canal wharf (no longer needed after the canal closed) which could easily be connected to the Lower Works by means of a tramway laid along the old lane. After the railway too was closed, a house (now being rebuilt) was erected on the piece of ground next to the canal, with the rest of the field, including the filled-in railway cutting, being planted with a vineyard.

We also learned that another piece of ground next to the canal, adjoining the aqueduct further to the west (later converted to a railway viaduct), still belongs to the former Upper Works property today. This was found to be a small irregular plot along the steep bank at the north-eastern end of the aqueduct, and for what purpose it was acquired by the Union is now difficult to imagine. Returning via another old lane, past

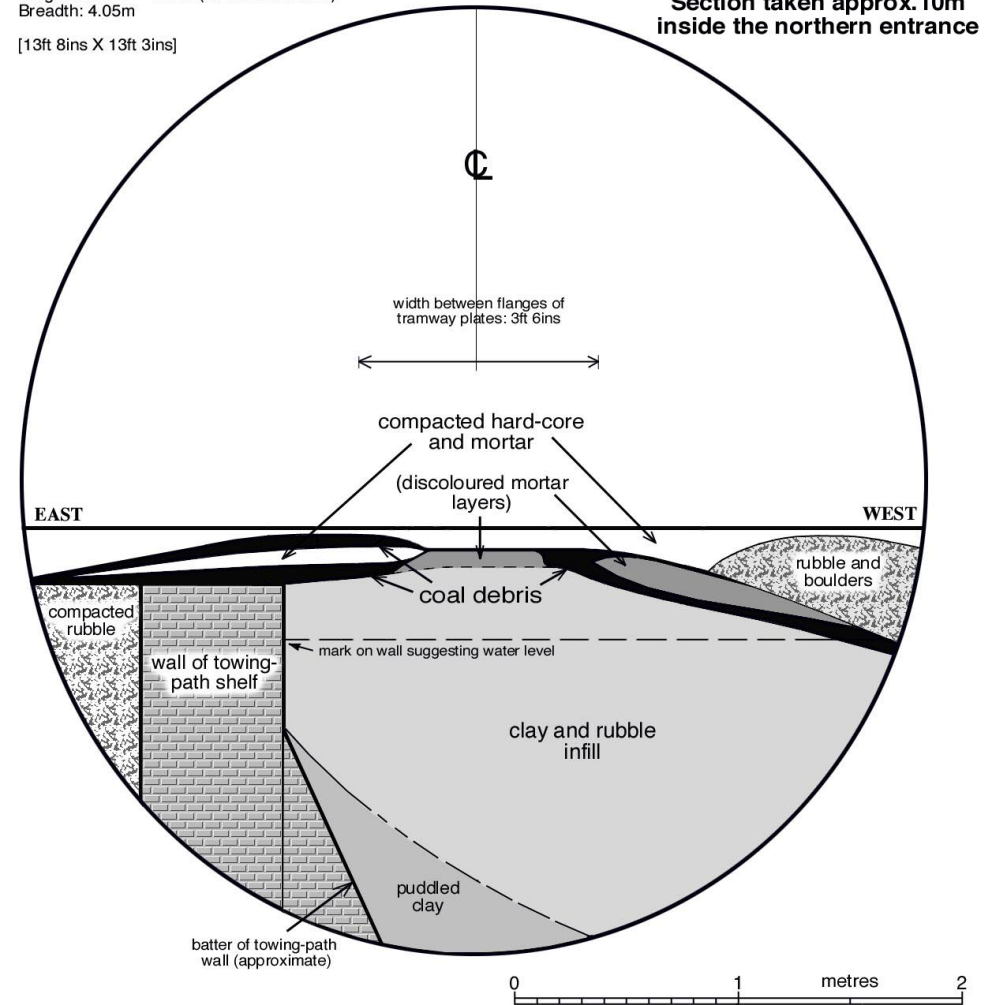
**DIMENSIONS.**

Height: 164ins = 4.17m (4.20m estimated)  
 Breadth: 4.05m

[13ft Bins X 13ft 3ins]

**WELLOW TUNNEL**

**Section taken approx.10m inside the northern entrance**



*Drawing: Mike Chapman*

**A CROSS-SECTION OF WELLOW TUNNEL**

## NEW LIGHT IN WELLOW TUNNEL

Readers will be aware that, over recent years, the northern portal of Wellow Tunnel has been opened up and the entrance progressively restored by its owners, society members Richard and Ann Cook, providing useful information on its structure and use. In July 2005, the opportunity was also taken to see what lay below the present floor surface of the tunnel, when several members of the committee were invited to record the results of a trench excavated across its width.

From documentary sources it was known that the tunnel had a towing-path shelf along the outer (east) side, and that the bed of the canal had been filled in to accommodate the tramway in 1814. This was confirmed by the trench, excavated about 10m inside the northern entrance, as shown here in section across the tunnel. The shelf wall, constructed of rubble blocks, was in good condition, and for additional strength was found to have been battered out at its base where it was sealed with a waterproof layer of puddled clay. The rest of the canal bed was filled in level with the top of the shelf with a mixture of clay and stone rubble. Behind the wall, the tracking of the pathway consisted of the usual packed rubble hardcore.

Although the stated width of the tunnel, 13ft 2in (4.12m), agreed well with the recorded measurements, the given height of 7ft (2.14m) above water level could not be confirmed. This dimension seems to refer to the minimum height required over the towing-path to allow head-room for the horses, and the former water level may actually have been lower down, as indicated by a discoloured line running along the shelf wall about 0.5m below its top edge. Indeed, it is also possible that the level of the original pathway

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Photograph: Mike Chapman

**A GENERAL VIEW OF THE EXCAVATIONS (Looking Southwards)**



**PARAPETS OF 'TYNING BRIDGE' NEAR COMBE HAY**

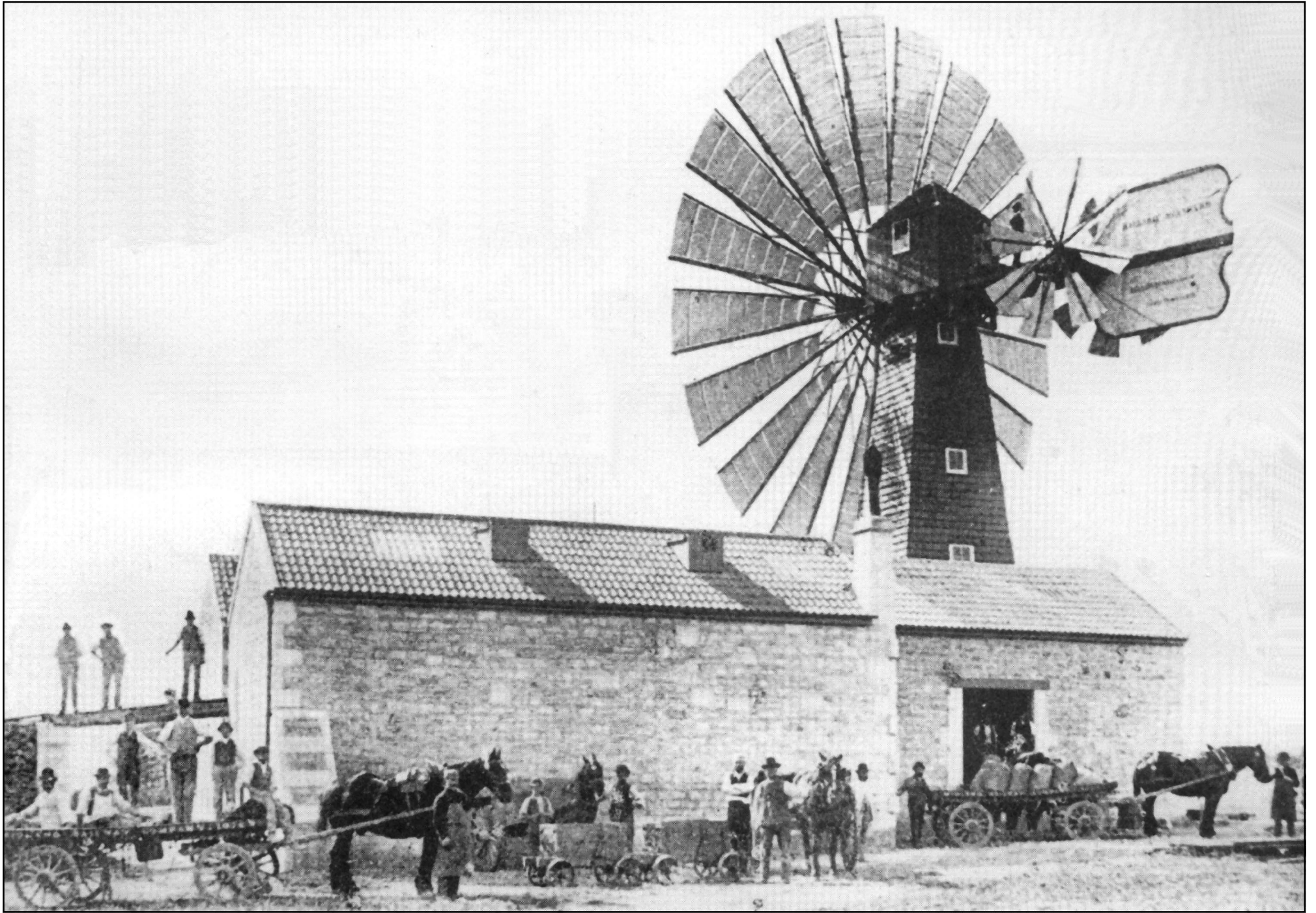
The Fuller's Earth workings were on the hill in the background

Week Farm and Fortnight Farm, we were kindly invited by the owner of 'Three and a Half Days' cottage (shown as "Three Days" on maps) to view various old artefacts which had been collected in his garden before arriving back at the top of the hill where we wished to see what remained of the Upper Works mine. The latter is still a notable feature on the top of the Down, and during the 1890s its machinery was driven by an enormous windmill which formed a prominent landmark until burned down in 1904. Today various original sheds, silos, etc., continue to be used for a reclamation plant, but we were disappointed to find that the slope below it, where the adits and tramways were situated, has been regraded, and virtually nothing now remains except for some loading-bay walls lower down, adjoining Combe Hay Lane.

Mike Chapman



**BOUNDARY STONE IN THE GARDEN OF THREE-AND-A-HALF-DAYS COTTAGE**



THE WINDMILL AT THE FULLER'S EARTH UPPER WORKS ON ODD DOWN NEAR BATH