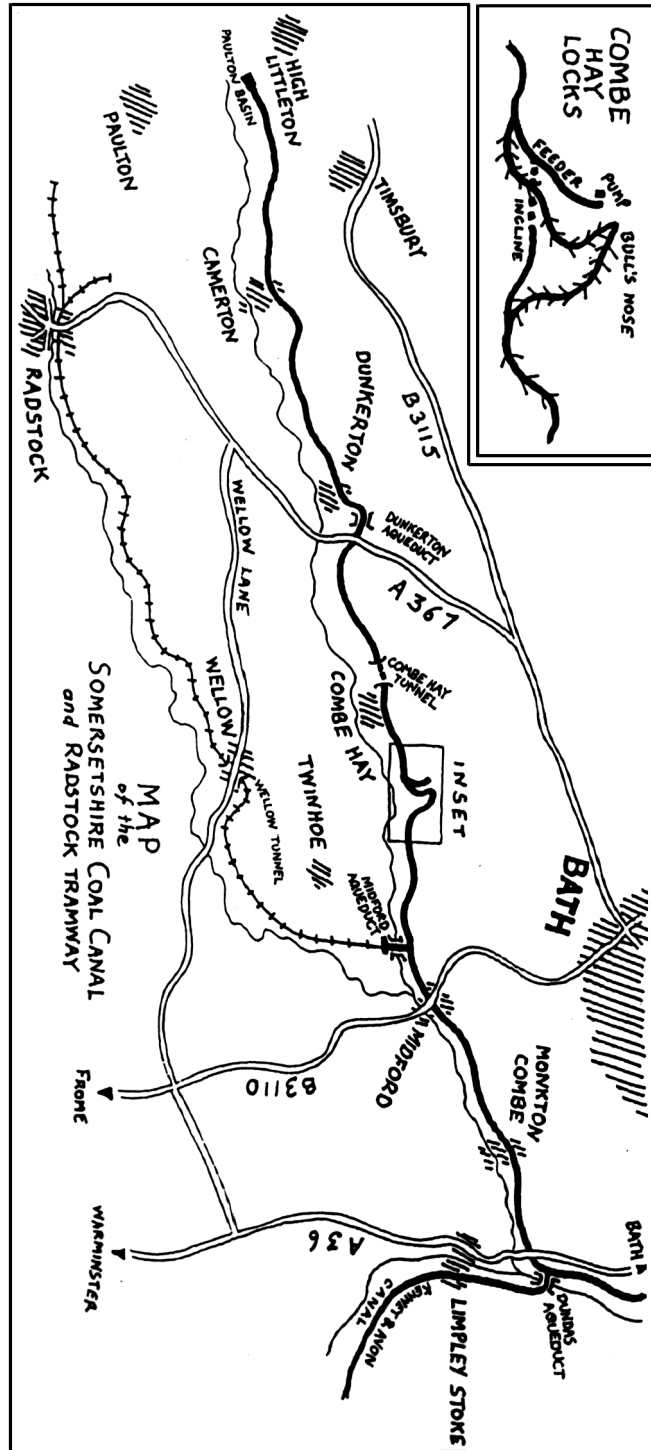


WEIGH-HOUSE

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^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 acting 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): adrian@poppyrecords.co.uk*

Sunday 4th February — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 18th February — 10:00

WALK — WELLOW TUNNEL

Meet Wellow Station car park

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.



THE CANAL BED WEST OF LOCK 1 — A view opened-up by recent hedge trimming

WEIGH - HOUSE N^o 46

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Our recent programme of walks has attempted to broaden the Society's interests and see what we could learn from other canals and similar undertakings. Although a canal was not involved, exploration of the collieries of North Bristol have given us a much better picture of the ways in which coal was transported from the pithead to water-borne transport.

The remains of the 'Dramway' through Willsbridge are much more visible than most of those on the Somersetshire Coal Canal and the wharves are practically intact. Looking at the old photographs and the modern ones taken on our visit in April, it is easy to imagine how Paulton and Timsbury Basins would have looked in when the canal was open. It is also rather sad to reflect that, if modern house prices could have been predicted, the buildings around the basin might have been preserved in a similar way to Avonside House.

As reported in the previous issue of Weigh-House, considerable restoration and research has recently been done on the canal tunnel at Wellow by one of our members, Richard Crook. Following-on from that, we have received some excellent photographs and drawings done by members of his family, which give by far the best impression of how the tunnel appeared during its working life.

Adrian Tuddenham

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Keith Vass Mosson
Ian Willett

Loddon, Hants
Reading, Berks

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Members will now be aware of the successful application by the Society for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund of £20,300 towards an engineering survey of Lock 15 and the former GWR bridge over Lock 16. From this, a proper application for the full restoration of Lock 15 can follow. The steering group, consisting of your Chairman and Roger Halse, with their partners Martin Leathwood of Avon Industrial Buildings Trust and Miriam Woolnough, Countryside Management Officer from B&NES Council, are presently reviewing proposals from four engineering contractors who have expressed an interest in carrying out the survey.

This part of the process has to be considered with some care, as there are many aspects which need to be understood before the cost of restoration can be estimated. The Lock itself will of course need to be restored as closely as possible to its original form; but, since its abandonment, the Lock Flight has acquired an ecological interest which will also need to be maintained. Since it is intended that the Lock should be fully functioning and brought back into water, the pounds above and below it must be made good, together with a sufficient water supply and adequate drainage. Improvements to public access is another important aspect. During our recent walk along the Lock Flight it was evident that the structure of the railway bridge is deteriorating rapidly and this will also need some attention.

An initial view of these proposals has been very encouraging, and the Steering Group should have no difficulty in appointing a suitable contractor within the time scale allowed, which means that the survey can go ahead during October.

On an unrelated note, we are pleased to welcome to our Committee a new Membership Secretary, Sarah Mercer, who stepped into the post at the last Annual General Meeting. She has also volunteered to act as Minutes Secretary for Committee meetings. This gives me an opportunity to say thank you to Laurie Gibney who previously held the post for many years, keeping track of our members and maintaining the society's affairs in pristine order.

The number of members turning up for walks has been dwindling for some time. This has highlighted a problem: many of our established members have already seen most of the main features of the canal and no point would be served by visiting them time-and-again; on the other hand, our visits to other canals have been criticised as being outside the interests of many of our members.

In an attempt to keep the walks SCC-related and simultaneously increase membership by encouraging outsiders to join in, we arranged an evening walk, open to the public, to look around the centre of Bath and view buildings associated with the history of the canal. Unfortunately the press release was not published and no members of the public turned up. Then, most gratifyingly, our most recent walk around Combe Hay attracted a large number of non-members, who showed a great interest in the canal and also expressed an interest in joining the Society.

With all this in mind, an Autumn/Winter programme of walks had been arranged which is particularly designed to help familiarise new members with the main aspects of the canal. We hope it will prove enlightening to anyone who has joined the Society recently and hasn't had a chance to explore the canal in detail for themselves — and the 'old hands' will still want to come along and see how things have changed since they last visited these fascinating sites.

Mike Chapman
September 2006

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

WORK PARTIES

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

Sunday 15th October — 10:00

WALK — THE CANALSIDE FEATURES BETWEEN DUNDAS and AVONCLIFF

Meet

For further details please contact:

Roger Halse ☎ 01249 652846

Sunday 5th November — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 19th November — 19:30

WALK — MIDFORD

Meet Twinhoe Lane (do not park in Hope & Anchor car park)

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 3rd December — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 17th December — 10:00

WALK — BRASSKNOCKER BASIN

Meet Visitors' Centre car park

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 7th January — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 21st January — 10:00

WALK — DUNKERTON & WITHYDITCH

Meet at layby on A367 (by telephone box).

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

THE DIARY OF A ROWING TOUR FROM OXFORD TO LONDON IN 1875

By Howard Williams

— Book Review

This book was brought to my attention by Robin Pike on a BIAS walk of the Gloucester and Hereford canal. It reminds one of *Three Men in a Boat*, by Jerome K. Jerome, which it predates by fourteen years. It was published in 1982 by Felicity Catmur, who inherited the diary and many drawings from her mother. It gives a fascinating picture of the canals, rivers and pubs and scenery along the route.

Five young men, the author, his brothers George and Thomas, plus friends Eustace Clark and Fred Broad, hired a light pine pair-oared gig from Messenger of Teddington, together with a comprehensive list of stores, so that they could row the boat, scull it, tow it, or lift it out of the water and roll it on rollers. The boat was delivered to Paddington station on Saturday July 31st 1875, and conveyed with the crew to Oxford.

They did not take the easy way to London, they set off to Fenny Compton on the Oxford and Warwick canal. Thence they proceeded to Warwick via the river Cherwell, the Warwick and Napton canal and the river Avon. Using the rivers Avon and Severn they reached Gloucester. They then went north again up the Gloucester and Hereford canal. They were not daunted by the mile and a half long Oxenhall tunnel ('very small and narrow, looking more like a sewer than anything else') and got through it by hand and foot in 35 minutes, having sung heartily all the way through to keep their spirits up.

They next transferred to the river Wye, which they descended to Chepstow. The rapids around Symonds Yat were very exciting, everyone got wet, some stores were lost and the boat was damaged. Repairs were organised at Chepstow.

The next port of call was Bristol. I imagined they would put the boat on the train to get there, but these chaps were heroes. They engaged two oarsmen with a bigger boat to row them across the river Severn, towing the gig behind them, for the sum of 35/-. The crossing was successful, but on arrival it was discovered that they had left part of the stern of the boat behind in a boatyard in Chepstow. The author returned to Chepstow with the oarsmen, collected the stern part, and returned to the party by train.

They spent some time in Bristol, and some in Bath, where they stayed in the Christopher hotel. They then proceeded along the length of the Kennet and Avon canal to Reading. They did not like the huge locks, they took so long to fill, and their windlass was too small to open the sluices. They managed to borrow or hire a long lever for the purpose. The only trade on the canal was stone from the quarries at the Bath end. They did not meet a single barge between Devizes and Reading.

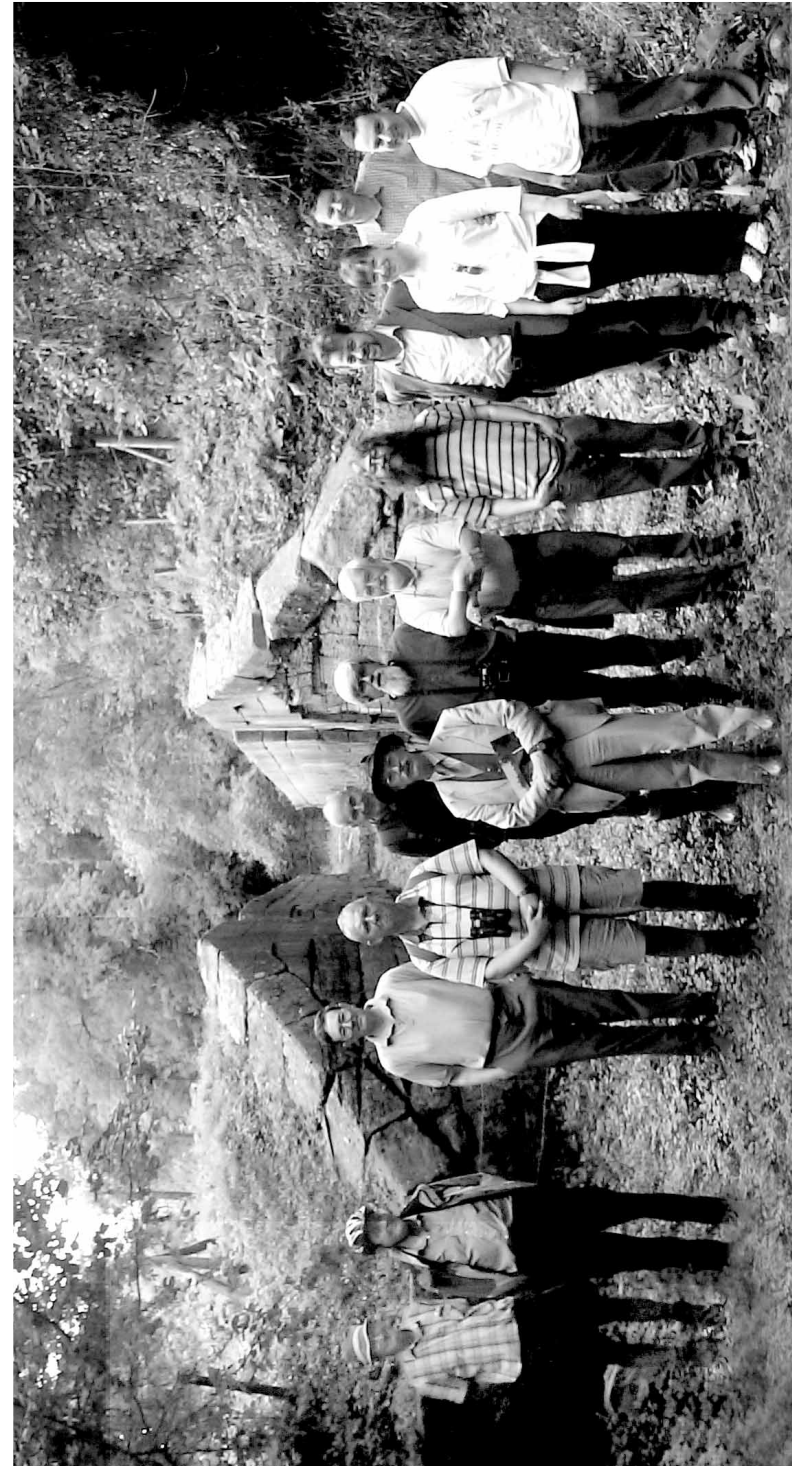
After that the Thames seemed very busy and lively. They arrived back at Teddington on August 22nd, having travelled 454 miles, passed through 321 locks and 4 tunnels.

They stayed at hotels every night, always sharing rooms and often sharing beds. They seem to have lived mainly on ham and eggs, cake, bread, and equal volumes of milk and beer. They spent every evening smoking. They bathed in the rivers on several occasions.

The book does not record how much money they spent on the trip, or what Messenger said on seeing the condition of the boat when returned. It is clear that these fellows planned and executed a splendid trip along the waterways of southern England, lived to tell the tale, and recorded it very thoroughly. As well as the written word there were many sketches, which also appear in the book.

The book was published by Alan Sutton in 1982, ISBN 0 904387 69 0. I read a copy obtained from Oxfordshire libraries.

Terry Paget



NAVYING NOTES

Planned maintenance

After many months working only on the Combe Hay lock flight, other sites along the canal were beginning to look somewhat neglected. In particular, Severcombe Aqueduct at Dunkerton was sprouting a heavy growth of weeds. Our September work party had planned to deal with this.

The long ladder and the special tools, with extension handles to reach the sides of this enormous structure, were got ready; but as the day dawned, we found that heavy overnight rain had made conditions too dangerous to work on ladders at such a height. Bob Parnell and Richard Hignet set about strimming and scything the top of the aqueduct and the rest of the party was diverted to an alternative venue — back to Combe Hay lock flight again.

Unplanned maintenance

The first-ever SCCS work party had been on this flight, clearing scrub from inside Locks 15 and 14. Since then, they have been spruced-up several times; but brambles and ivy are incredibly persistent weeds with no concept of where they are not wanted, so by the end of the Summer they had all come back with a vengeance.

Perhaps these weeds were newly-grown and hadn't had time to develop deep roots and woody stems; or, more likely, our work party has acquired skills and stamina over the years that are denied to mere mortals. Whichever was the case, we made incredibly short work of the job and managed to clear one lock in the morning, another in the afternoon — and still go home early.

Future maintenance

With only one work party meeting once a month, long periods can elapse before we find the time to re-visit sites that we have cleared. Many hours of patient hard work are slowly eroded away as the weeds invade again, until the sites can scarcely be recognised as those we once left in pristine condition. Disheartening as this may be from the point of view of appearance, our underlying objectives will still have been achieved if we have managed to rid the site of saplings. These are by far the most damaging plants if they are allowed to become established and grow into trees. The force exerted by a growing tree is truly amazing, as can be seen from the damage done to lock sides where huge coping stones, weighing many hundredweight, have been forced out of place and sometimes displaced by several feet.



MASSIVE TREE DAMAGE AT LOCK 3

The coping stones have been lifted several feet into the air

Fortunately saplings take several years to develop into the rampaging monsters that have done such damage to the features of the canal, so if we can muster enough helpers to visit a site at least once every two years, we stand a good chance of preventing the worst of the damage.

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

IWA NATIONAL WATERWAYS FESTIVAL REPORT

The Inland Waterways Association Waterways Festival held over the August Bank Holiday weekend at Beale Park adjacent to the River Thames at Pangbourne gave the Society an opportunity to promote its aims to a wider audience.

Although the IWA festival is held every year, this was only the fourth time in the fifteen years since the formation of the SCCS that the Society had attended, the Society limiting its presence to venues that either have a some kind of link to the SCC or those that are within a couple of hours drive from Bath.

Again the display was organised by myself. It consisted of a number of panels showing the work of the Society, copies of some of the old photographs of the canal, maps of the canal showing its link to the Kennet & Avon and Wilts & Berks Canals, and a copy of the 2003 Heritage Lottery Funded SCC Photographic Project display panels. The later being one of the most useful aids in having a map showing both routes of the canal along the Cam and Wellow valleys.

The Society hired a marquee sited next to the main arena which, depending on your particular view, was either a benefit as it drew crowds to pass close by the SCC stand, or was deficit as it drew people away. The appeal of watching medieval jousting or falconry displays proving to be more of an attraction than a long disused and derelict canal!

Despite this, the stand had a steady stream of visitors, most knowing about the short section of the SCC restored to moorings between Dundas Aqueduct and the Viaduct Hotel on Brassknocker Hill, and not realising that the canal originally travelled for a further 17 miles. The 1880's map of the locks generating quite a bit of interest. There are not many canals in the country that have 22 locks in just a mile and a half!

Sadly recruitment of new members was very poor, although our Treasurer will be pleased that we sold almost all of the publications we had for sale (*The SCC - A Pictorial Journey* now being classed as 'Out-Of-Print'). The main reason for those reluctant when asked to join the Society seems to be the fact that we are not a canal restoration organisation, the most frequent questions seemed to be "when are you going to restore the canal" and "where can I put my boat on it"? If the Society had been working on a commission we could have made quite a sum of money from those asking if we had moorings available!

Thanks must go to members Andrew Mathieson and Cyril Dean who gave up part of their weekend to

help man the stand while I took a few hours to look around the festival site for myself. Their help was most appreciated as standing for 8 hours a day, for three days in a row, answering the many questions about the canal does tend to take it out of you.



Photograph: Dave Dawes - IWA

**ROGER HALSE MANNING THE SCCS STALL
at this year's I.W.A. NATIONAL WATERWAYS FESTIVAL**

**ROGER HALSE
Honorary Archivist**



Photograph: Guy Howard-Evans

LOOKING DOWN THE INSPECTION SHAFT IN WELLOW TUNNEL



BEFORE — Lock 14 awaiting clearance



Photograph: Guy Howard-Evans

**RICHARD STANDING IN THE INSPECTION SHAFT
WITH THE SURFACE OF THE TOW-PATH AT NOSE HEIGHT.**



AFTER — Lock 14 about two hours later

A VISIT TO THE 'DRAMWAY' WHARVES AT KEYNSHAM

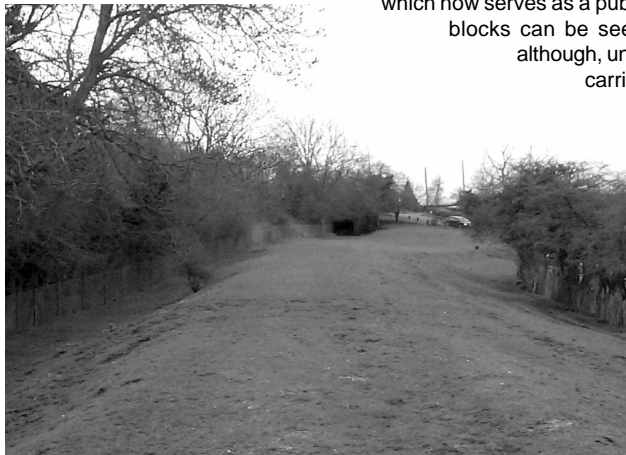
Sunday, 16 April 2006

In November 2001 the Society visited part of the route of the horse-drawn railway known as the 'Dramway' which carried coal from the Kingswood Coalfield to the river Avon. Though built in 1832, this line bore a close resemblance to the Somerset Coal Canal tramways built some 30 years earlier. On that occasion, only the northern section, between Siston Common and its terminus at Coalpit Heath, was examined, and it was always intended to visit the southern section, particularly around the tramway wharves which joined the river opposite Keynsham. Although the Dramway was eventually superseded by later steam railways, this section continued to provide a useful outlet for the California Colliery in Oldland, and was only dismantled after the colliery closed in 1904. As a result, much of this part of the line can still be traced today on public footpaths. (See map on Page 14)

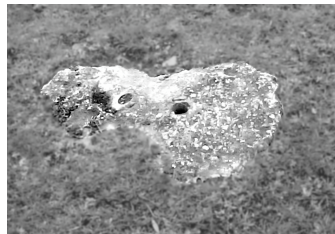
As before, the most convenient meeting place was at the Avon Valley Railway Station at Bitton (on this occasion 'in steam' and busy with visitors), before continuing a few hundred yards further along the A431 towards Bristol. Opposite the junction with the Keynsham Road, a narrow cutting can still be seen leading up to a 150-yard tunnel (now stopped up) which brought the Dramway through the steep side of the Willsbridge Valley. From here the line crossed the main road on a level crossing, without gates, and a few yards further along the Keynsham Road was a depot siding and weigh-bridge, built at the request of the Bristol Turnpike Trust. Although the siding was cleared away long ago for road widening, the railway formation is still clearly visible as it emerges from behind the hedge on the west side, running parallel with the road. Along this formation, which now serves as a public footpath, remains of stone sleeper blocks can be seen here and there through the turf, although, unlike the original SCC plateways, these carried iron shoes which supported 15ft long wrought-iron edge- rails.



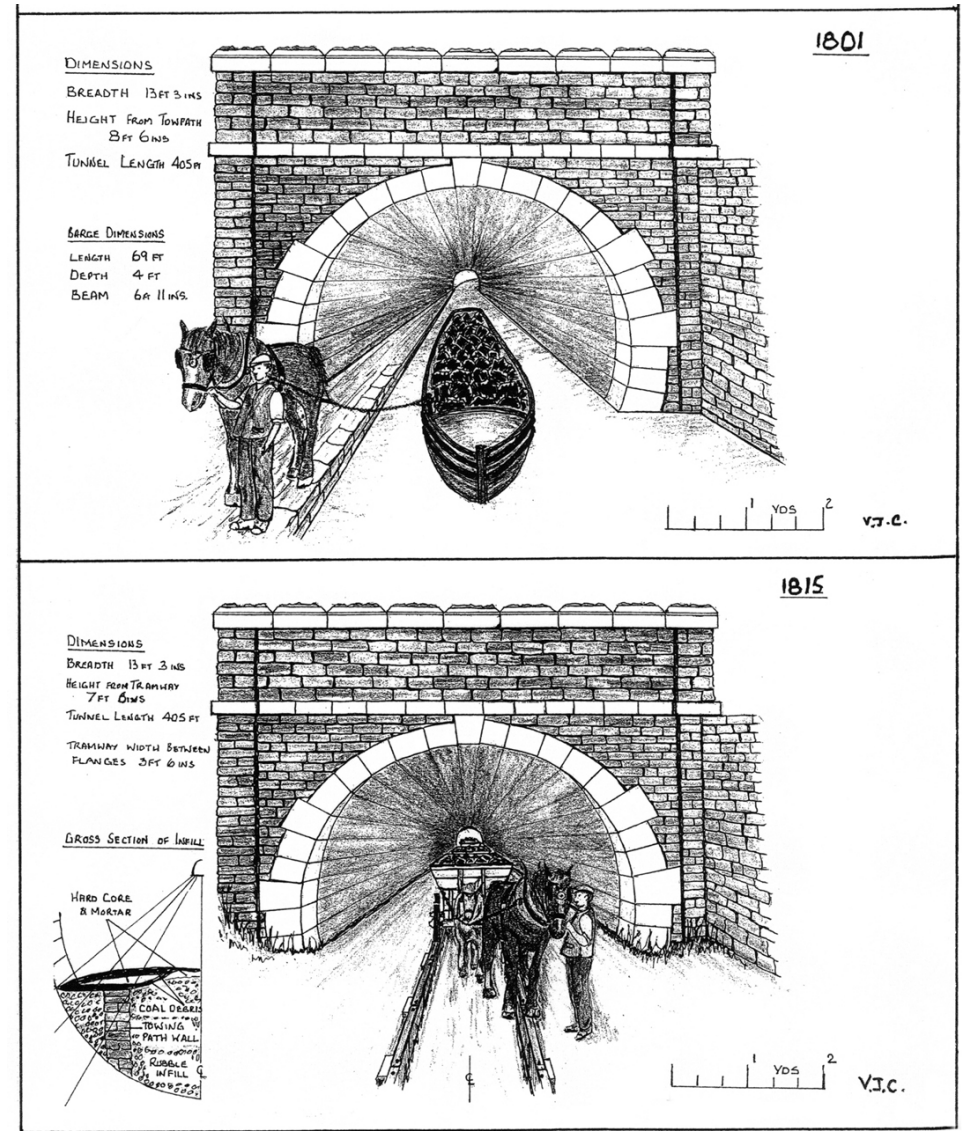
THE DRAMWAY CUTTING at WILLSBRIDGE



THE DRAMWAY ALIGNMENT NEAR WILLSBRIDGE



A STONE SLEEPER BLOCK STILL IN PLACE



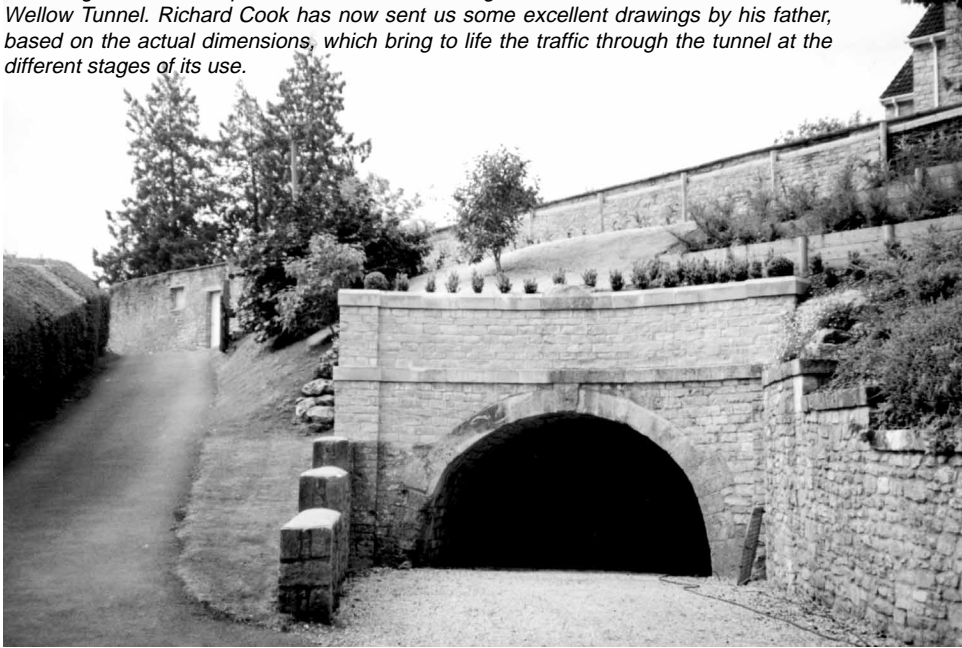
The exploratory trench which Richard recently dug across the tunnel has, of course, now been backfilled, but Richard has since constructed an ingenious inspection pit next to the towing path shelf. This will allow the wall and invert of the tunnel to remain open to view, as well as making it easier to pump out any water that might accumulate at the base.

With these works now completed, Richard and Ann have kindly invited the Society to arrange a members' visit to the tunnel in its new aspect — an offer we intend to accept in the not-too-distant future.

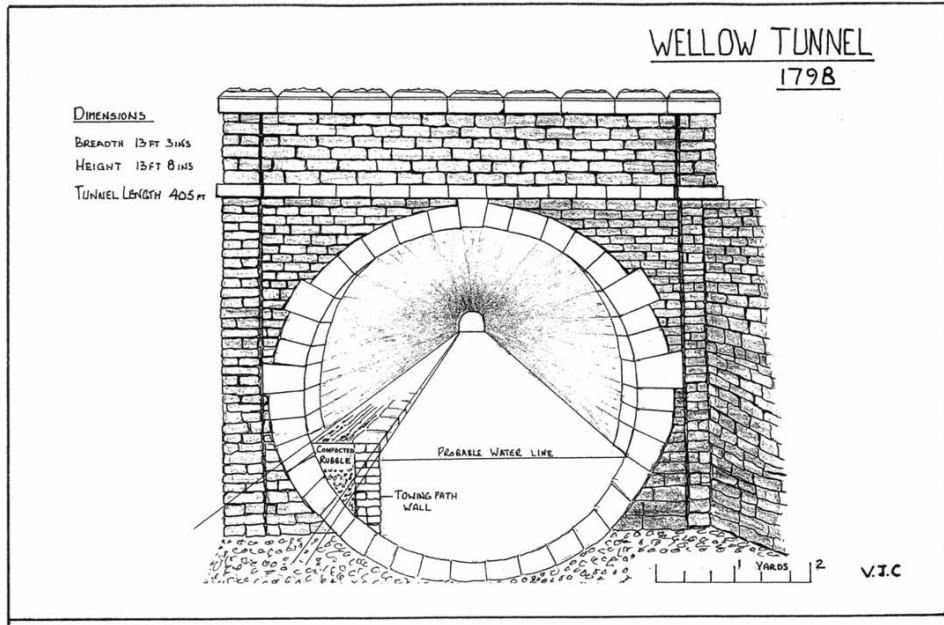


FURTHER LIGHT IN WELLOW TUNNEL

Following on from our report in the last issue of Weigh House about recent discoveries in Wellow Tunnel. Richard Cook has now sent us some excellent drawings by his father, based on the actual dimensions, which bring to life the traffic through the tunnel at the different stages of its use.



Photograph: Guy Howard-Evans



DRAMWAY TUNNEL TO AVON WHARF - under the A4175 road near Chalk Mill Farm

A few hundred yards further on, towards Clack Mill Farm, the track divides, one branch turning left through a tunnel under the road. This then led southward across the fields to the river and the main Avon Wharf which served the upstream traffic. The tunnel has since been bricked up, and the footpath now only follows the second branch to Londonderry Wharf a few hundred yards further to the south-west. This wharf was added at a later stage for downstream traffic, in order to avoid the toll through the bypass lock at Keynsham weir. At the approach to the wharf, a stable building (now in ruinous condition) still stands next to a neat weigh-bridge house which appears to have been recently restored.



RUINED STABLES AND RESTORED WEIGH-HOUSE AT LONDONDERRY WHARF

Nearby is a stone arch bridge which carries the towing-path over the outlet of Siston Brook, and behind it a smaller one which once carried an incline line from quarries on the opposite side of the brook. The wall of the wharf is still intact, with a flight of steps at each end leading to river level, but a crane and the chutes for the front-tipping wagons have long since disappeared, together with a line of coal bunkers at the rear.



LONDONDERRY WHARF from the north around 1900. — The coal storage bunkers, crane and coal chute can be seen on the wharf, together with the small weigh bridge house to the left. In the distance can be seen the chimney of the Polysulphin Works opposite Avon Wharf.

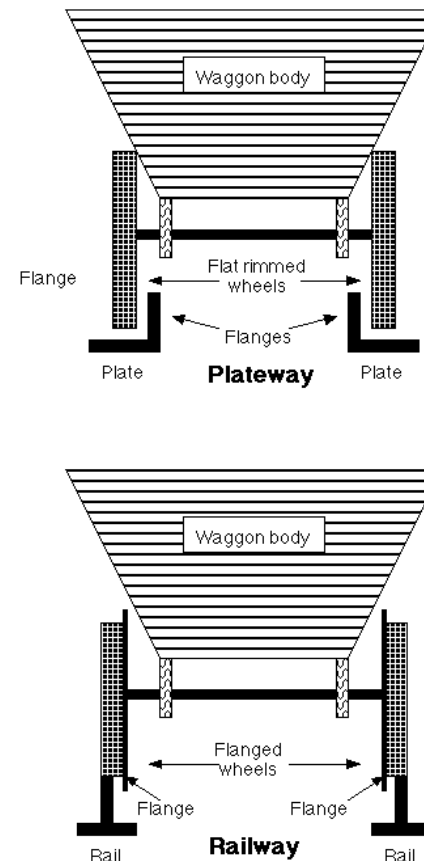


COPING STONES OF LONDONDERRY WHARF STILL VISIBLE
(April 2006)

Following the towing-path upstream through the meadows towards Keynsham, the view on the opposite side of the river is dominated by the massive buildings of the Chocolate Factory, built by Fry's in the 1920s. Despite its location, no wharf was built here, and indeed the firm seems to have avoided any use of the river. Reaching Keynsham Lock and the old White Hart Inn, it is now difficult to imagine the layout of this area before the old county bridge over the river was destroyed in the great flood of 1968. The river has since been diverted and a new



COMPARISON OF PLATEWAYS AND RAILWAYS



Many mines were located some distance from a canal or other waterborne transport, so the coal was taken from the mine to the wharf by waggon. In many areas, including the Somerset coalfield, plateways were used, but other coalfields preferred railways, of the type used for the Dramway. Some, like the Combe Hay inclined plane, were gravity-operated with a rope to return the empty waggons; the Dramway and the SCC tramway to Midford Basin used horses to pull the empties back up the hill.

The waggons on a **plateway** had flat-rimmed wheels and were guided by flanges on the track plates. The flat-rimmed wheels made them easy to move around where there were no plates to guide them, but if the waggons ran at speed and hit a stone on the plateway, there was a risk they would become derailed.

Railways had the guidance flanges on the wheels and ran on the top edges of the rails. They could be used at higher speed because stones did not lodge on the running edges of the track and derailments were less likely.

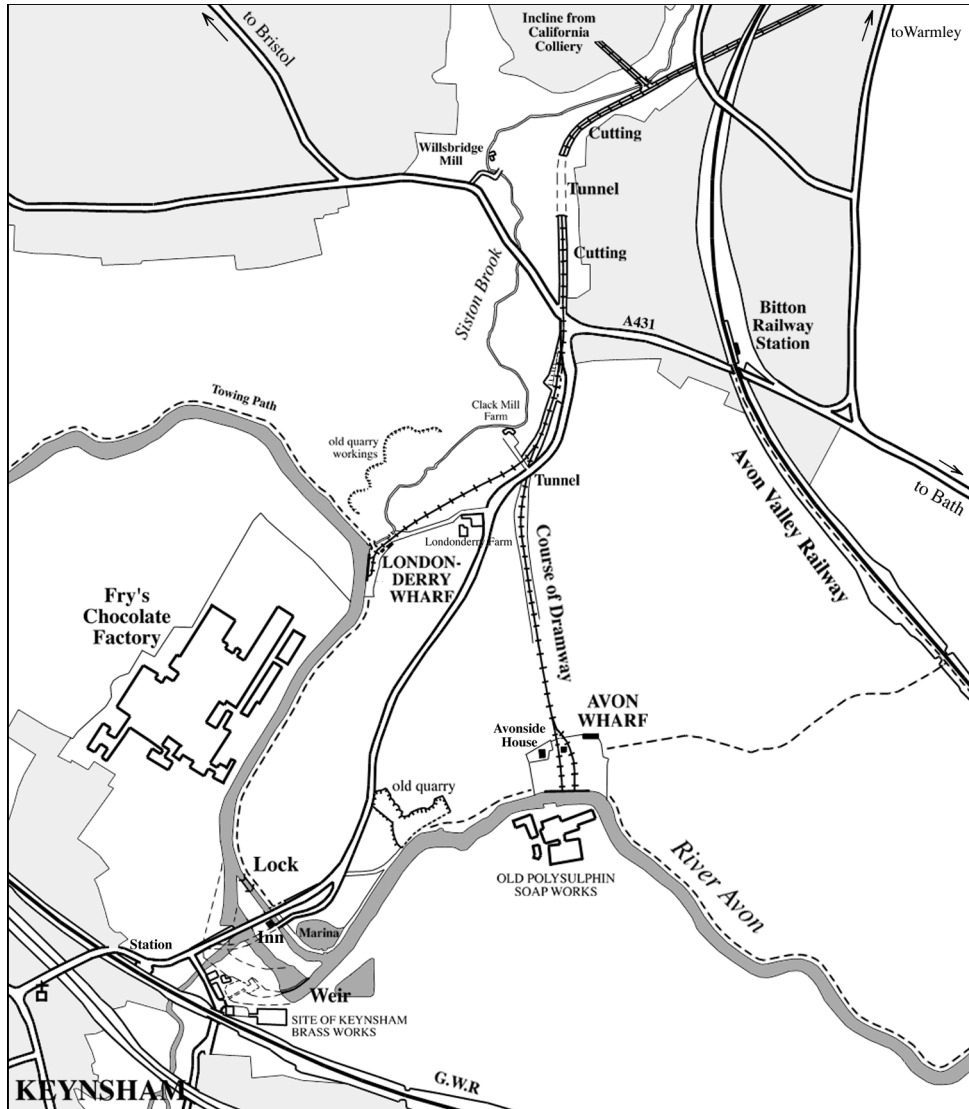
When steam locomotives were developed to run at high speed, railways became the norm and plateways ceased to be considered for new projects.

Drawings: Adrian Tuddenham

Soap Works, built in the 1880s. This had its own wharf where soda-ash was landed from Bristol, and from where detergents were supplied to hospitals all over the country.

From here the walk was able to continue across the fields towards the old Midland railway embankment, now part of the Avon Valley Railway as far as the river at Saltford. This stretch of the track is also followed by the Bristol & Bath Railway Path which (though thronged with Sunday walkers) provided a convenient return route to Bitton station.

Mike Chapman

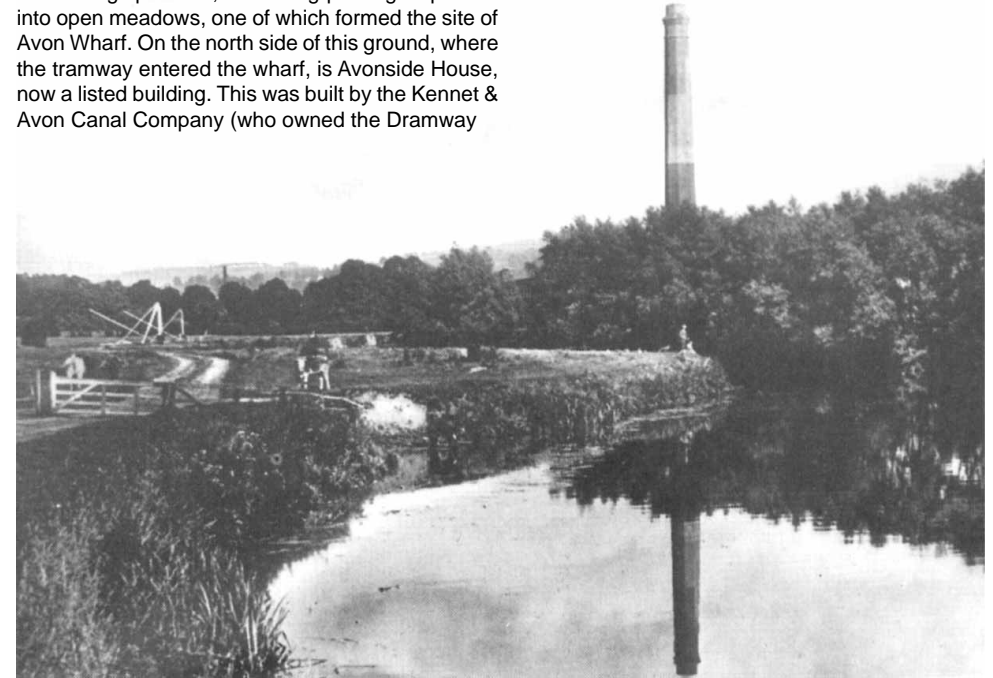


A MAP OF THE DRAMWAY

Drawing: Mike Chapman

until it was taken over by the GWR in 1851) as the headquarters of the tramway sub-committee. On the east side of the ground is the stable block (still in fair condition), and in the centre a conical-roofed weigh-bridge house (also listed) which stands between two clearly marked embankments carrying the track formation to the waterside. Less visible is another line which entered from the west side. This linked up with a quarry (now disused) a few hundred yards downstream, which provided the limestone sleeper blocks for the tramway. Like Londonderry Wharf, the riverside wall is still intact, complete with side steps, and was presumably also equipped with a crane and chutes. In many ways the layout of this site gives a good idea of the appearance of the wharf areas on the Coal Canal around the Timsbury and Paulton Basins. Facing the wharf on the opposite side of the river are the large buildings of the old Polysulphin

bridge built on the west side of the Inn (now called the Lock Keeper pub), though the old bridge over the cut on the east side still remains as the entrance to the pub and its beer garden. At the upper end of the cut a new marina has been excavated behind the towing-path, and only a few buildings of the old Keynsham Brass Mill and Paper Mill still remain on the opposite side of the weir. Continuing upstream, the towing-path again passes into open meadows, one of which formed the site of Avon Wharf. On the north side of this ground, where the tramway entered the wharf, is Avonside House, now a listed building. This was built by the Kennet & Avon Canal Company (who owned the Dramway



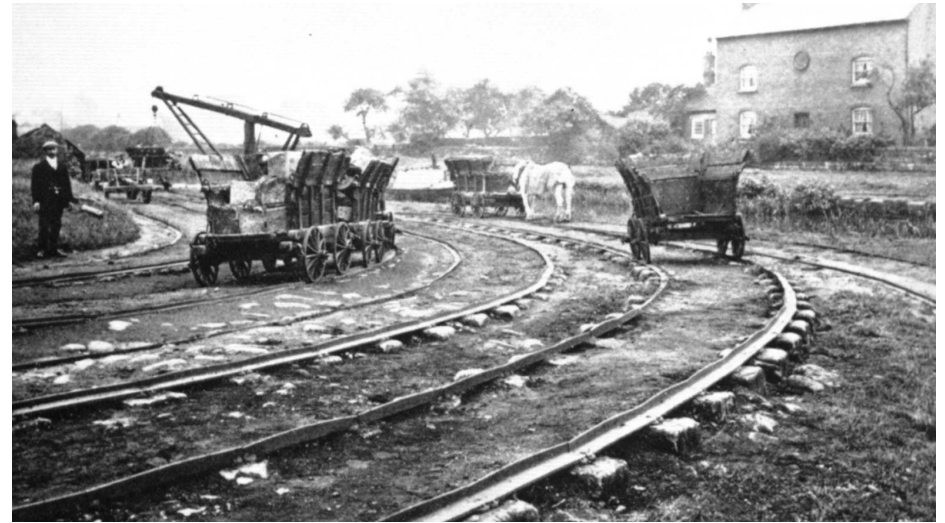
AVON WHARF seen from downstream c.1920. On the right is the Polysulphin Works.'



VIEW ACROSS THE RIVER TO FRY'S CHOCOLATE FACTORY



DRAMWAY WAGGONS —A view from the west of the Dramway depot at the Bath-Bristol Road Crossing around 1900, showing several of the front-tipping wagons from California Colliery waiting on the sidings.



PLATEWAY WAGGONS FOR COMPARISON — similar to those used on the SCC tramways



AVON WHARF — Avonside House and various related outbuildings (April 2006)