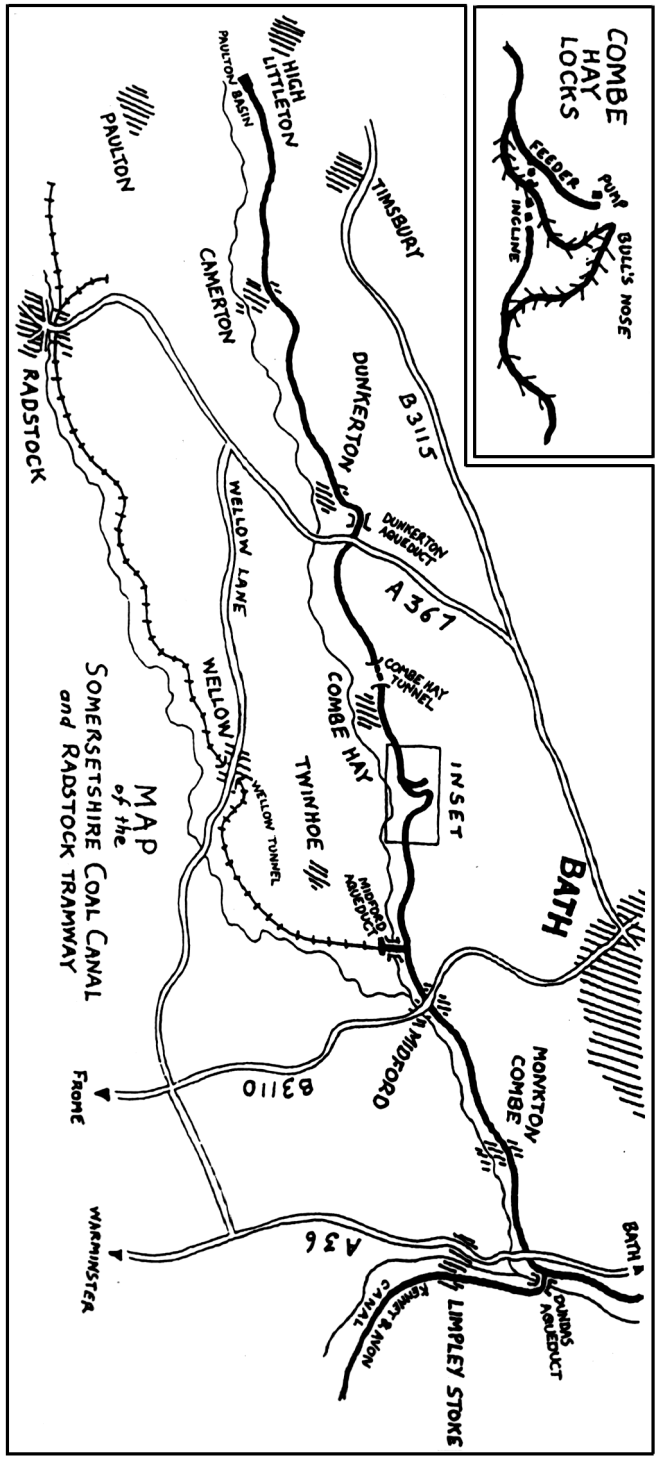

WEIGH-HOUSE

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY

№ 49 JANUARY 2008

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The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society was founded in January1992 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 aims to preserve the remaining structures of the canal (Midford Aqueduct, Combe Hay Locks *etc*.) and to protect the line of the canal from decay, dereliction and vegetation.

****

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MEMBERSHIP FEES
(as at 1st June 2003)
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Membership Application Forms are available from
the Membership Secretary, Patrick Moss at:
IMA Transport Planning 11, Kingsmead Square, Bath BA1 2AB
E-mail: PMoss@ima-tp.com

Society Website: **http://rtjhomepages.users.btopenworld.com/SCC2.html**

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THE VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS MAGAZINE 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):* **adrian@poppyrecords.co.uk**

Sunday 20th April — 10:00
WALK — MIDFORD to TWINHOE †
Meet: Twinhoe Lane, Midford. (Do not take up parking space at the Hope & Anchor)
For further details please contact:
Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 4th May — 10:00
WORK PARTY — Location to be advised
For further details please contact:
Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

These are all circular walks unless otherwise noted. You only need to arrange your transport to and from the meeting point. Any marked † 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.

WORK AT THE BULL'S NOSE — January 2008
Bob Parnell attempting to re-open the canal single-handedly?

WEIGH - HOUSE Nº 49

EDITOR'S NOTES

Four years ago, in Weigh-House 39 (pp.14-16), we printed a map which Daniel Brown had discovered in the County Archives at Taunton. It showed the inclined plane connecting the upper and lower canal reaches at Combe Hay, before the lock flight was opened. Also visible was a much fainter line which had been partly erased; this, we believe, showed the intended course of the canal when the caissons were being planned and built. From our knowledge of the contours in that area, the intended position of all three caissons becomes abundantly clear. I have reprinted the map on Page 4 of this issue, to accompany Mike Chapmans notes on further research into the site of the top caisson, which was the only one known to have been completed.

To accompany the second part of Gilson and Quartley's article on the tramways of the Paulton Basin, I have devoted the centre pages of this issue to a section of the Cruse map which covers part of the area described. This will also be of particular interest those members who were able to take part in our recent guided walk in this area.

The article on Lyme Disease on Page 7 of this issue is more relevant to the Society than its apparent medical theme suggests. Because of our programme of regular outdoor events, many in parts of the countryside off the beaten track, active members of this society are slightly more at risk of contracting Lyme Disease than other groups. A little knowledge of the signs and symptoms could help towards an early diagnosis and a successful recovery.

ADRIAN TUDDENHAM

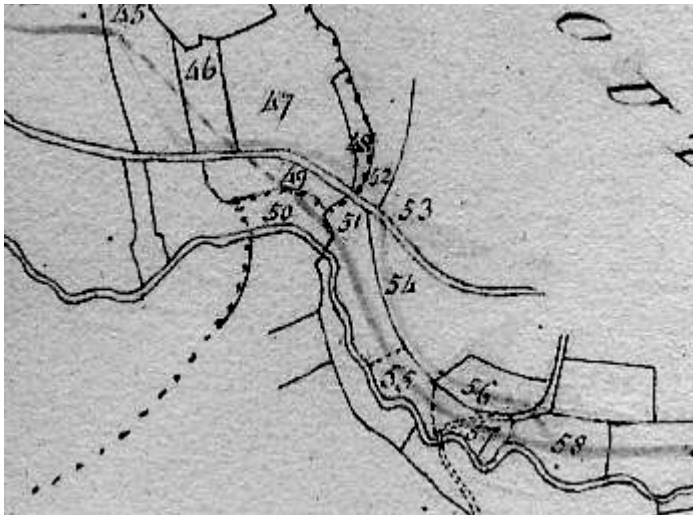
CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Although the Society has carried out various large-scale investigations around the site of the Caisson Lock over the years (not always with the expected results), there are still many aspects of this area which need to be examined, and even the smallest new discovery could prove to be of great significance. Previously our attention has always been directed towards the lower part of the lock, because the main body of its site lies in a relatively accessible position in the field below Caisson House. The upper part, however, where it was joined to the canal basin at the end of the summit level, is less so, being close to the entrance area of Caisson House and workshops, so any new information about it is always welcome.

Much of the difficulty here is due also to the nature of the changes that have been made around the perimeter of the basin during its subsequent history, such as the connection between the basin and the feeder arm along the back of Caisson House which was extended to the pumping engine above the lock flight in Engine Wood. This was stopped up when the engine was removed to Dunkerton (possibly in the 1840s), and there is fair evidence that considerable alterations were carried out along the terminal wall of the basin at this junction, thereby changing its original outline. The old workshops along the outer side of the basin were also a later addition, although they were unlikely to have affected the basin itself. This was not the case however with the short tunnel nearby, in the eastern wall of the basin facing the site of the Lock, the purpose of which has so far evaded any conclusive explanation.

We were therefore most interested to learn that, as part of the restoration work on the workshops, now approaching completion, a hole for a gate-post was dug out at the end of the workshops, roughly where the upper end of the lock would have been located. Not far below the ground surface some masonry was encountered which, after alerting us, Mr.Felix Pole kindly allowed us to examine. Although only a small detail, it was duly recorded, and we await further developments in case any further excavations might be required. In any event, this finding will almost certainly shed new light on the situation, and a proper report will be published in *Weigh House* in due course.

Mike Chapman
January 2008



Photograph: Daniel Brown

PART OF A MAP AT THE COUNTY ARCHIVE, TAUNTON, FROM WHICH THE INTENDED POSITION OF THE CAISSONS CAN BE DEDUCED

The faint diagonal line entirely within plot 45 would have been the location of the first two caissons; the angled line between 56 and 58 was the intended location for the third.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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

Sunday 20th January— 10:00
WALK — THE CAMERTON PITS †
Meet: Bottom of Red Hill, Camerton
For further details please contact:
Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 3rd February — 10:00
WORK PARTY — Location to be advised
For further details please contact:
Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 17th February — 10:00
WALK — THE TRAMWAY TO TIMSBURY (3 miles)
Meet at Paulton Sewage Works
For further details please contact:
Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 2nd March — 10:00
WORK PARTY — Location to be advised
For further details please contact:
Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 16th March — 10:00
WALK — COMBE HAY TUNNEL to DUNKERTON (4 miles)
Meet: The Avenue, Combe Hay
For further details please contact:
Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 6th April — 10:00
WORK PARTY — Location to be advised
For further details please contact:
Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

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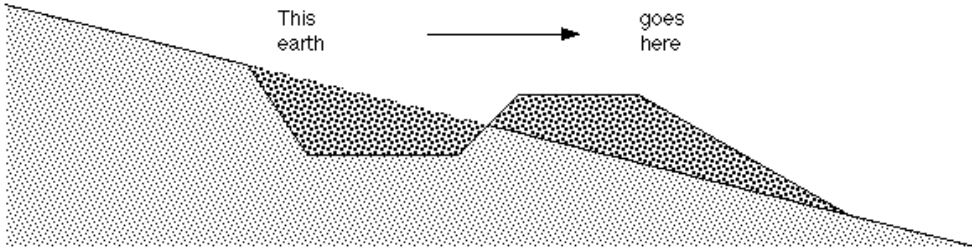


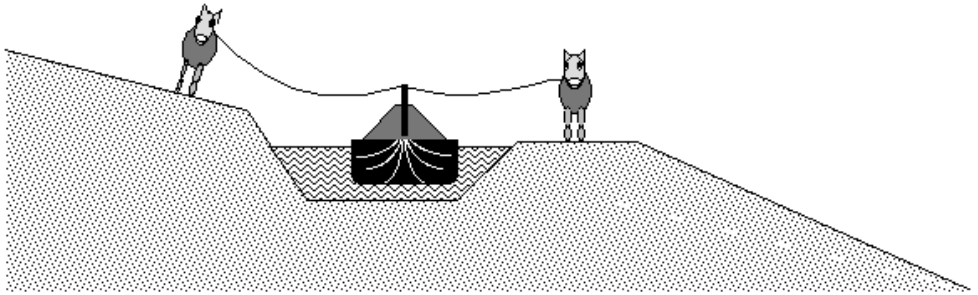
THE EASIEST WAY TO BUILD A CANAL ALONG A HILLSIDE

Let's have a look at what our navvy is doing.

The volume of earth cut from the uphill side has to be exactly the same amount that is built-up on the downhill side, otherwise someone is going to be carrying a lot of spare earth a very long way.

So when our canal has been built and filled with water, it can be used by boats which move goods to and fro, bringing in a nice income from the tolls. On the Somersetshire Coal Canal, we know the boats were towed by animals (they might have been horses, but were more likely donkeys or mules). Which side does our boatman want to put his towing animal?

On the uphill side we have a high steep bank and a sloping hillside (which could, admittedly be cut away level if the extra expense were justified), on the downhill side we have a flat-topped embankment just above water level. All other factors being equal, the sensible boatman will want to put the animal on the embankment, where it is less likely to fall into the canal and won't waste half its energy trying to lift the boat out of the water on the end of a badly-misaligned tow rope (or should that be 'towing rope'?).



TWO ALTERNATIVE POSITIONS FOR THE TOWING PATH

That's why the towing path is usually on the downhill side.

Adrian Tuddenham

THE CORNER OF THE WORKSHOPS — August 2003
The excavator was entering Caisson Field for an exploratory dig and it is standing roughly where the entrance to the caisson might have been situated.

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mr. L. Gibson	Limpley Stoke	Mr. P. Smith	Corsham
Mr. M. & Mrs. L. Westall	Great Torrington	Mr. C. Bruce	Bath
Mr. P. Hughes	Pontypool	Mr. B. Thompson	Fordingbridge
Mr. R. Rees	Carmarthenshire	Mr. R. Wiseman	Gosport
Mr. & Mrs. C. Gosland	Somerset	Miss. V. Travers	Redhill
		Mr. R. Barwise	Portishead

NAVVYING NOTES

Once again our work parties have returned to the locks above Lock 16; this time the work site was at the northernmost point of the lock flight, the "Bull's Nose". We had been told by the landowner that a tree had fallen and was in danger of damaging the canal structure, but this didn't really prepare us for what we found when we got there.

The tree was a massive and ancient beech, or possibly three massive beeches, for it seemed to have an indeterminate number of trunks which further divided every few feet until it was almost as broad as it was high. To say it had fallen was therefore only partially correct, for it had come to rest at an angle of about 45 degrees from its normal position and was prevented from falling any further by two solid branches arranged in the form of a letter 'A' and supporting it like a set of sheer legs. To bring it down to ground level by the obvious exploit of cutting through one of the 'legs', would be to risk dropping the whole tree on the person doing the cutting. Instead, Richard Hignett, our chainsaw man, showed his considerable skill and experience by lightening the tree of a few critical branches first and then lowering it progressively in a safe manner while the rest of the work party looked on in awe from a safe distance.

The base of the tree had been firmly rooted in a wall on the inside of the Bull's Nose bend and had done a fairly thorough demolition job on the stonework - firstly during its lifetime and then, more spectacularly, during its demise. The roots, however, were not giving up, so despite the tree having fallen several months before our work party arrived, the branches had continued to be well supplied with water, making them difficult to cut and even more difficult to burn.

We have now spent three work parties chopping up and attempting to burn this one tree, but there is still enough work, and wet wood, left to keep at least one more work party busy.

THE STUMP AND ROOTS OF THE FALLEN BEECH TREE AT THE BULL'S NOSE
with Bob Parnell and Harold Philips

TECHNICAL TOPICS

Before you skip this page and move on to something that looks a bit less challenging, I need to reassure you that this isn't going to be some erudite treatise full of mathematical formulæ. Whilst the original surveyors and designers of the S.C.C. undoubtedly had an excellent understanding of higher maths; I haven't, so I would only confound myself if I tried to 'blind you with science'.

So why bother about the technical side of the canal at all then? After all, we aren't designing it from scratch or planning the most economical course for it, because it is already there — well, a lot of it is, anyway. We are mainly interested in the history of the canal and, just as importantly, understanding the meaning of the structures which we find along its route. That is where a techical understanding really does become necessary.

A great many eminent historical articles about canals leave out the technical side altogether. They present the reader with well-researched facts — but they make little attempt to put those facts into any sort of meaningful framwork. In the majority of cases this is either because the author is completely unaware of the influence of technological constraints on the way the canal was built, or because he would rather avoid a subject in which he realises his background knowledge is somewhat more sketchy than he would like it to be.

Surprisingly, when the technology is finally dragged kicking and screaming into the limelight (which is where it deserves to be), it proves to be remarkably straightforward - so much so that you would probably end up wondering "Is that all there is to it?".

As an easy introduction to the subject, let's have a look at which side we might expect to find the towpath ...and why.

Why is the Towing Path on the Downhill Side?

The towpath, or 'towing path' as I am told it should more properly be called, is usually found on the downhill side of the canal. This isn't an arbitrary convention, it is there for a number of very good reasons. Let's begin by having a look at a couple of obvious Facts:

1) Canals don't slope; if they did, the water would run out.
2) It is easier to throw earth downill than to throw it uphill.

Taking the first Fact first. It tells us that canals have to be built level, which means that they must follow a contour line. Most of the English countryside is on a slope of some sort or another, so any level canal that is planned along the contour line of a slope will have higher ground on one side and lower ground on the other. No difficulty so far.

Now Fact 2 comes into the story. When the navvy arrives to dig the canal, he is acutely aware of Fact 2. He wants to move the least amount of earth in the easiest possible way; so he takes earth from the uphill side and chucks it downhill until he has formed a deep enough ditch on the uphill side with a high enough retaining embankment on the downhill side. Even if he didn't want to do it the easy way, the canal company, paying him by the day, would probably insist that he did.

→

Photograph: **Ron Gilson**

The Cottage at Timsbury Basin

The concluding part of this article will be published in Weigh-House 50

LYME DISEASE

An area which includes woodlands south of Bath has recently been recognised as a hot-spot for Lyme Disease[†]*. People at risk of infection are walkers and anyone who works in the countryside. As the groups at risk include those who go on canal walks and members of our work parties, some information on the symptoms and effects of this disease may be helpful.*

Until relatively recently, Lyme Disease was almost unrecognised in the U.K., although its dangers have been well known in the U.S.A. since the mid 1970s. It is spread by the bite of the nymph stage of a tick, which is about the size and appearance of a 'money spider'; the resulting infection by one of at least three possible species of Borrelia bacteria can produce a range of puzzling symptoms which gradually worsen. If left untreated it can be fatal.

The 'Bullseye' Rash

A characteristic symptom, which occurs in many, but not all victims, is a rash which is circular and red in colour and can take from 3 to 30 days to appear. It is not painful, but spreads outwards from the site of the tick bite over the course of a few days; the key feature is that the centre of the rash clears, giving a bullseye (archery target) appearance. If you have been anywhere where you might have been exposed to tick bites and notice a rash like this, you should contact your doctor immediately. Even if the doctor rules out Lyme Disease at this stage, you need to make a note of the rash (or even photograph it) because false negative diagnoses are quite common and this information may later become invaluable if further symptoms appear.

Further Symptoms

After the initial rash (or in the absence of one), several weeks may pass with no further signs. Then mild 'flu-like symptoms begin to appear, which can include fatigue, chills, fever, headache, muscle and joint aches, and swollen lymph nodes. These symptoms can come and go in a four-week cycle and the initial bite may be forgotten, all of which can lead to a false sense of security; but treatment with antibiotics at this stage is essential if further illness is to be avoided. If the condition is not treated it will gradually develop into a stage which is more difficult to diagnose and treat. The later stages of disease have several variations which differ according to the species of Borrelia involved, one species can cause neurological symptoms such as headaches, shooting pains, numbness, palsy or suicidal depression. With other species, pains which move from joint to joint or heart palpitations and dizziness occur.

Precautions

The obvious way to reduce the risk of tick bites is to avoid walking through deep leaf litter, dense grassy areas, bushes and thickets where the ticks live; if you are going on a canal walk, clothing which covers your legs and arms will give reasonably good protection. For anyone on a work party, protective clothing is mandatory, so you should already be well protected. During rest breaks away from the work site, when protective clothing may be removed if it is hot and uncomfortable, try to avoid sitting with bare arms or legs in patches of grass which might conceal ticks.

Ticks should be removed from the skin by pulling at the head, not by squeezing the body or using heat or chemicals. If you discover a rash or red spot on your skin shortly after a walk in the countryside, monitor its progress until you are sure it is not developing into the characteristic 'bulls-eye' rash.

Lyme Disease is fortunately still relatively rare in this part of the world; but it is on the increase and rapid diagnosis and treatment are essential to give the best chance of recovery.

[†] http://www.bath.ac.uk/news/articles/releases/lyme200706.html
More information at: http://www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk

FURTHER NOTES ON CANAL TRAMWAYS: DUNKERTON PIT

During one of the Society's recent walks through Dunkerton, various questions were raised about the relationship between the Coal Canal and the site of Dunkerton Colliery. As can be seen from the SCC Company's map of the canal in about 1810 (the 'Cruse Map'), this site then contained a "Lime Stone Quarry" on the north side of the Cam Brook, linked to the canal by a tramway or railway. The material quarried here was Lias limestone, useful for rough building, and it is quite possible that the quarry was originally established by a contractor to provide stone for the construction of the canal itself, such as the aqueducts at Dunkerton. Unfortunately no further documentary evidence has yet come to light about this concern.

The tramway, which had way-leave through several neighbouring grounds to a wharf beside "Cook's" accommodation bridge, may not have lasted very long. On the Cruse map its has been crossed out in pencil, and all that is indicated on the site on the 1840 parish tithe map is a lime-kiln where the stone was evidently being burnt with coal supplied from the nearby Camerton Pits. The 1884 OS first edition large-scale map shows the situation in more detail. The lime-kiln and quarry (the latter by this time much extended into the neighbouring grounds) are still present, but also shown, in the separate

THE QUARRY ON THE SITE OF DUNKERTON COLLIERY
As shown on the Cruse Map c.1810, between Stoneage Lane (left), Splott Bridge (right), and the Cam Brook (bottom)

The canal terminated in a basin near Timsbury (657577) which can still be clearly seen, and from which a number of tramroads radiated †.

Photograph: **Ron Gilson**

A View of the Paulton and Timsbury Basin showing the Cottage

From the south-west of the basin a way leads off to a bridge over the Cam brook, then past an old tip and vanishes into a sewage works. This certainly served the .colliery, and the Paulton engine pit, and may also have served the Evans foundry, a Paulton company now defunct but which once made colliery winding engines and many other types of iron work, much of which can still be seen in the district. The Evans family also had colliery interests and it is interesting to wonder whether the tramroad plates were cast at Paulton. Most of the family records have been destroyed so we can never be certain, but transport to the various places where these would be needed would have been so easy that it appears a strong possibility.

From the south-east of the basin another tramroad can be seen along an embankment, crossing the Cam brook by an attractive bridge and going eventually to New Pit, and what is described on the deposited plan as 'Simon Hill's new coal work' (658562). This route is clearly shown on the first edition One Inch OS map.

To the north of the basin, another feeder shown on this map leads off. This is on an embankment from the basin and goes under the former railway by a bridge (657577), over a stream by a bridge (657578), where stone sleepers in the stream bed show the tramroads' course. From here it divides and the western arm vanishes, although we did find scattered stone sleepers on its possible route. →

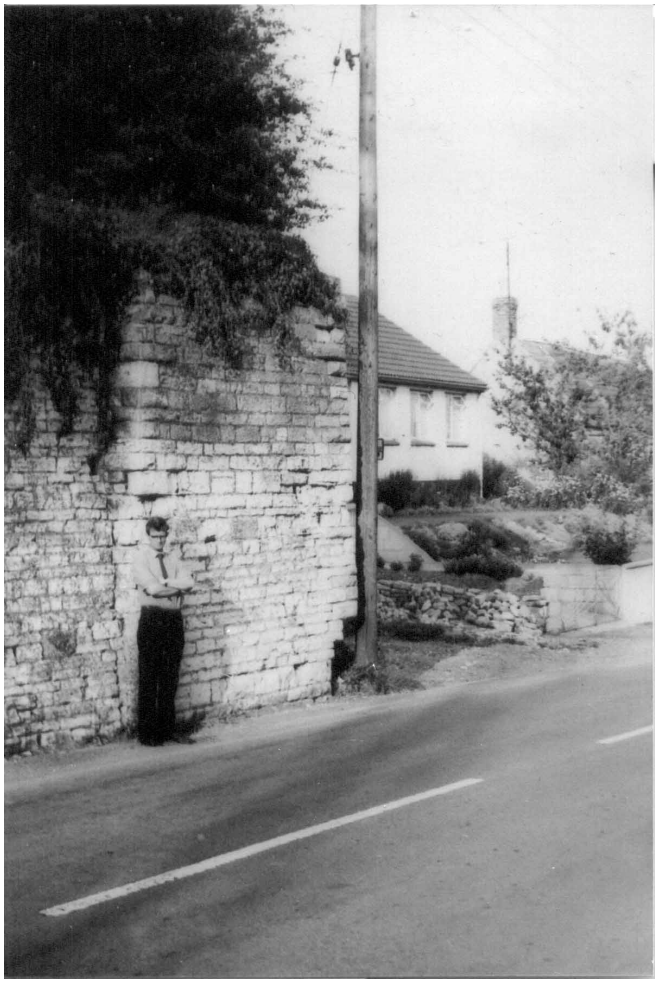
† *Also see Cruse map on Pages 11 - 12 of this issue*

Feeder Tramroads to the Radstock Branch

The first obvious feeder is that to Old Welton colliery which can be seen as an embankment with a narrow, single-arch bridge over the brook (576549), but no details of track can be discerned.

Close to the east of this was the Wellsway pit, most of which is now obliterated, but there appear to be two inclines leading from it to the vicinity of the tramroad; the most westerly was definitely a tramroad incline. Scattered along its route are single-hole stone sleepers, and it also has two bridges, one over the River Somer (681548), the other a narrow one under the Welton road (681547). These are numbered 44A and 44B respectively, this being the railway company's numbering. The junction of this feeder with the tramroad is not visible, the area having been used as a rubbish tip. The second incline is less clear; we could not ascertain whether it was actually a tramroad, but it has an interesting bridge carrying the Welton road over it, with closely spaced, massive cast-iron beams. The lower end of the incline has been obliterated by road works when the modern Radstock—Midsomer Norton road was made.

The last feeder we have found on this branch is that to Clandown and Middle Pit from Radstock. The start of this is visible as a cutting, but most of its route has been obliterated by later railway works. No clear details are known about this line, but from the evidence of a heap of stone blocks, some still with wedges in place, the line must have been laid using cast-iron plates, and, again because of the wedges, never relaid using wrought-iron rails.



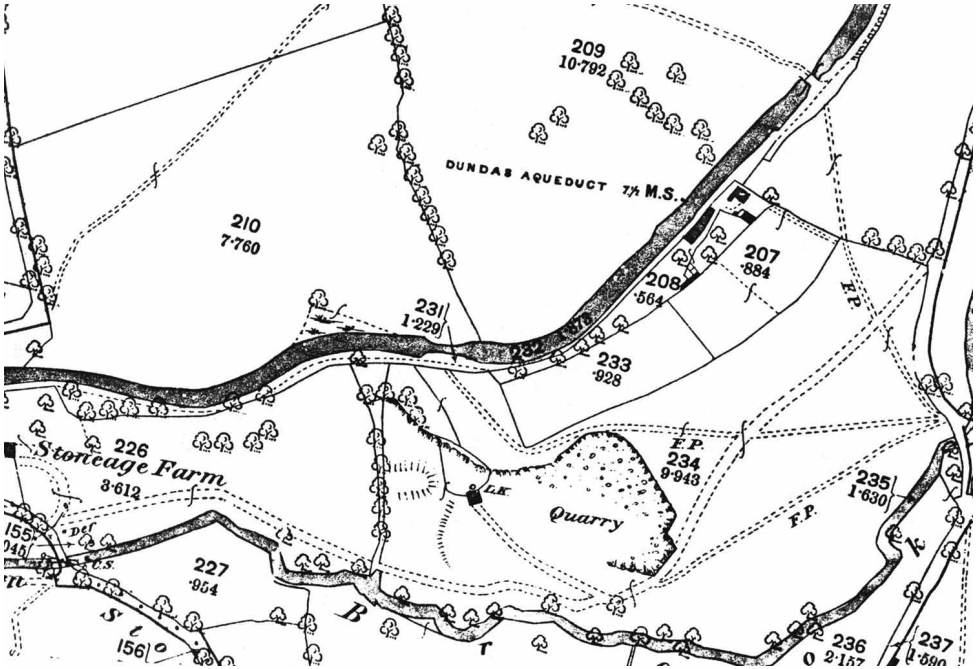
Photograph: Late Robin Atthill
Copy from collection by Gerald Quartley

Abutment of bridge that carried the tramway from Welton Hill Colliery to the GWR in 1960s.
Since demolished

strip of ground alongside the canal, is a complex of new buildings, one of which came to be known in later times as a public house called 'The Boatman' or 'The Barge'. Although not marked 'P.H.' on this map, this building was ideally placed to provide lodgings and stabling for passing boatmen.

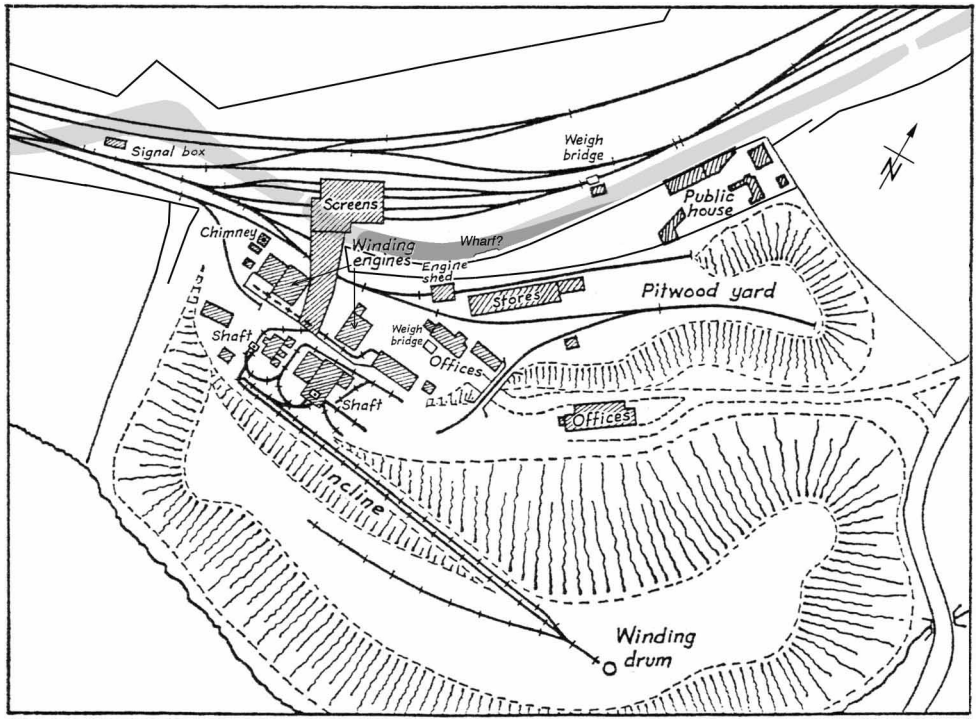
As soon as the canal was closed, Dunkerton Colliery was established on the site of the quarry in about 1903, presumably in anticipation of the completion of the Camerton & Limpley Stoke Railway. Work on sinking the pit was finally completed in 1906, followed by the construction of the railway and colliery sidings a year later. Much of the canal in this area was destroyed by the railway works, but a short section survived in the bend towards the site of "Dando's Swivel Bridge", and it was here that an SCCS Work Party recently discovered a small wharf (possibly for the delivery of coal to the lime-kiln), as reported in Issue 39 of *Weigh-House*.

As a result of the over-exploition of the underground workings, the coal was soon exhausted and Dunkerton pit closed in 1927. Although taken over by Sir Frank Beauchamp for possible reopening, the site was finally abandoned at the end of WWII, since when it has been used for various purposes and is now occupied by a scrap dealer. The public house too was abandoned, presumably when the pit closed, and only ruins now remain, hidden in the undergrowth. Even today however it is evident that these ruins once constituted a fairly large complex of buildings, suggesting a small farm holding rather than just a public house or inn. More surprisingly, a length of cast-iron tramway rail was found amongst the ruins which adds further mystery to the nature of this site. →



THE QUARRY SITE c.1884
Showing the complex of buildings next to the canal later known as 'The Boatman'

A RAIL FOUND NEAR DUNKERTON COLLIERY

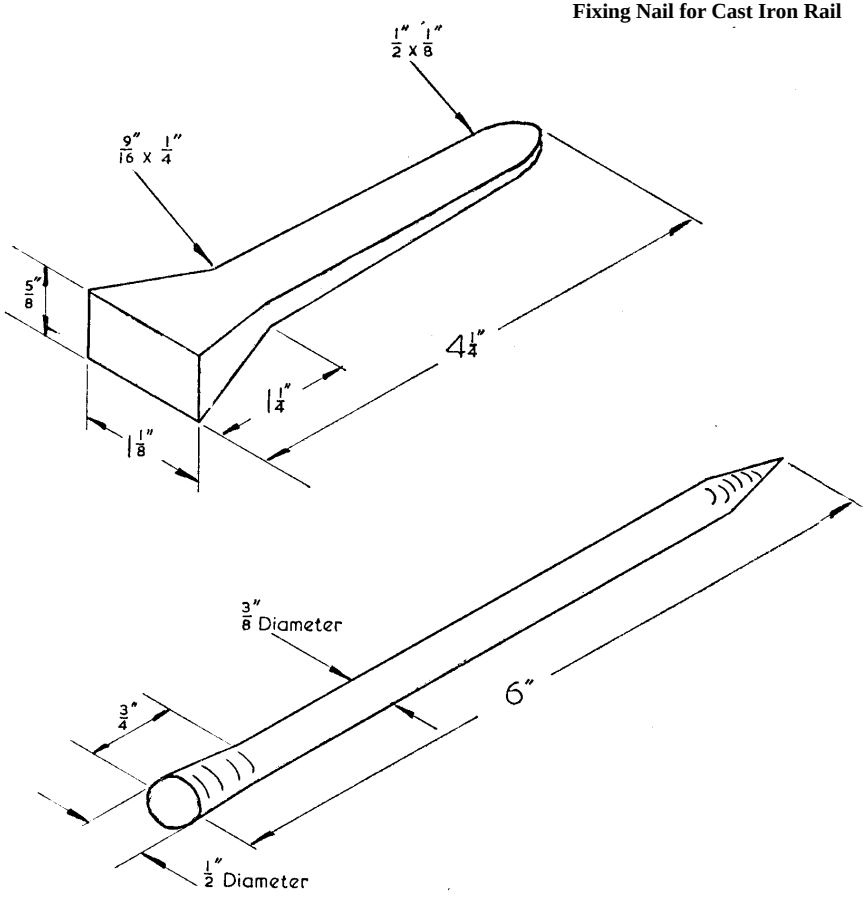


A PLAN OF DUNKERTON COLLIERY c.1920,
Showing (in grey) the former course of the canal

The essence of our discoveries was that the Radstock tramway was relaid at some point in its history with wrought-iron rails, seated in chairs, and bedded on stone blocks, rarely larger than 12 in to 15 in square, the lengths of rail varying from 4½ ft to 18 ft, butting together and seated in double-holed chairs. At some later point wooden sleepers were also used with the same rail. It is safe to assume from other indications in the area, principally the feeder tramroads, that the line had first been laid using cast-iron rails in 3 ft lengths, and that the same sleepers, apart from the two-hole types, had been used for the later wrought-iron rail. This view is reinforced by the wear on the surface of one sleeper found at Wellow, on which a wrought-iron chair was sitting, but on which the wear could only have been caused by the rounded projections from the ends of a Cast-iron rail.

→

Fixing Nail for Cast Iron Rail

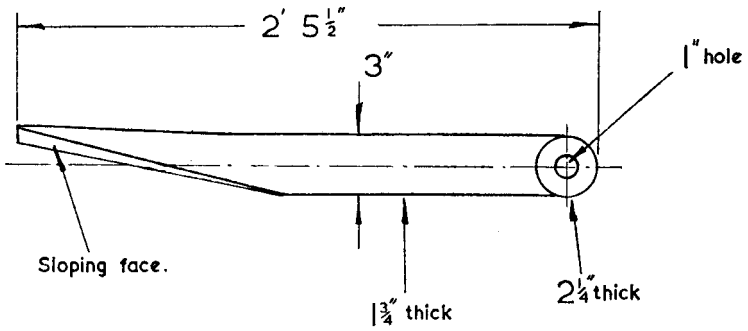


Fixing Nail for Wrought Iron Rail with Chair

Some Technical Aspects of the Somerset Coal Canal Tramways
by R.G. Gilson and G.W. Quartley
Part 2

— Continued from Page 20 of Weigh-House 48 —

On another loop, away from the line of the standard-gauge railway east of Wellow (745584), we once again found stone sleepers, and one cast-iron chair. We also found, driven into the ballast between two sleepers, what we believe to have been a point blade. On a line such as this, with its slow moving, heavy traffic, passing places must have been numerous, and it seems possible that there was one at this point, destroyed by the later railway cutting, as it is unlikely that the point blade, a heavy length of cast iron, was carried far from its original position. This is the only possible passing place site that we are able to suggest on the entire line.



CAST IRON PART
believed to be the swinging piece of a point system
assumed top surface drawn — opposite face flat and smooth

From Wellow to Midford, embankments and cuttings are still visible, the former being the canal towpath, and the latter the length over which the canal was never cut. Stone sleepers were found at 756594 and 757595. It was in this area that we had great hopes of finding many traces of the transhipment point from rail to canal at Midford, and the earlier transhipment point from the little-used canal and its rail section at Twinhoe, which would have been altered when the line was laid on the towpath. In neither place did we find any significant detail.

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The discovery of a tramway rail here would not in itself be unexpected. The colliery made much use of tub-railways to dispose of spoil, etc., and it has also been pointed out that the adjoining brick-works behind Splott Farm did much the same. However, by strange coincidence, the rail was recognised to be of the type seen at Conkwell Quarry during a Society walk there in October 2006, as reported in the last issue of *Weigh-House* (No.48). Since this type belongs to the early 19th century, the possibility arises that this rail is a fragment of the original quarry railway shown on the Cruse map. Unfortunately, it does not lie *in situ*, and it could be argued that it was somehow thrown over the fence of the scrap-yard and had come from elsewhere, perhaps Timsbury and Paulton where these rails are said also to have been used.

PART OF THE EXTENSIVE RUINS OF
“THE BOATMAN’S” or “THE BARGE” PUBLIC HOUSE

Nevertheless, there is still a possibility that it came from somewhere nearby, so the ruins and their surroundings continue to be of archaeological interest. The ownership of this strip of ground also remains unclear, being separate, it would seem, from the rest of the Colliery area. All that can be said for now is that it was once part of a large field (plot 64Æ on the Cruse map) on the north side of the canal, which later became the site of the railway sidings and is now returned to farm- land. In short, further research will be needed here.

Mike Chapman

THE CRUSE MAP
Showing some of the tramroads of the Paulton and Timsbury Basins (c.1810)