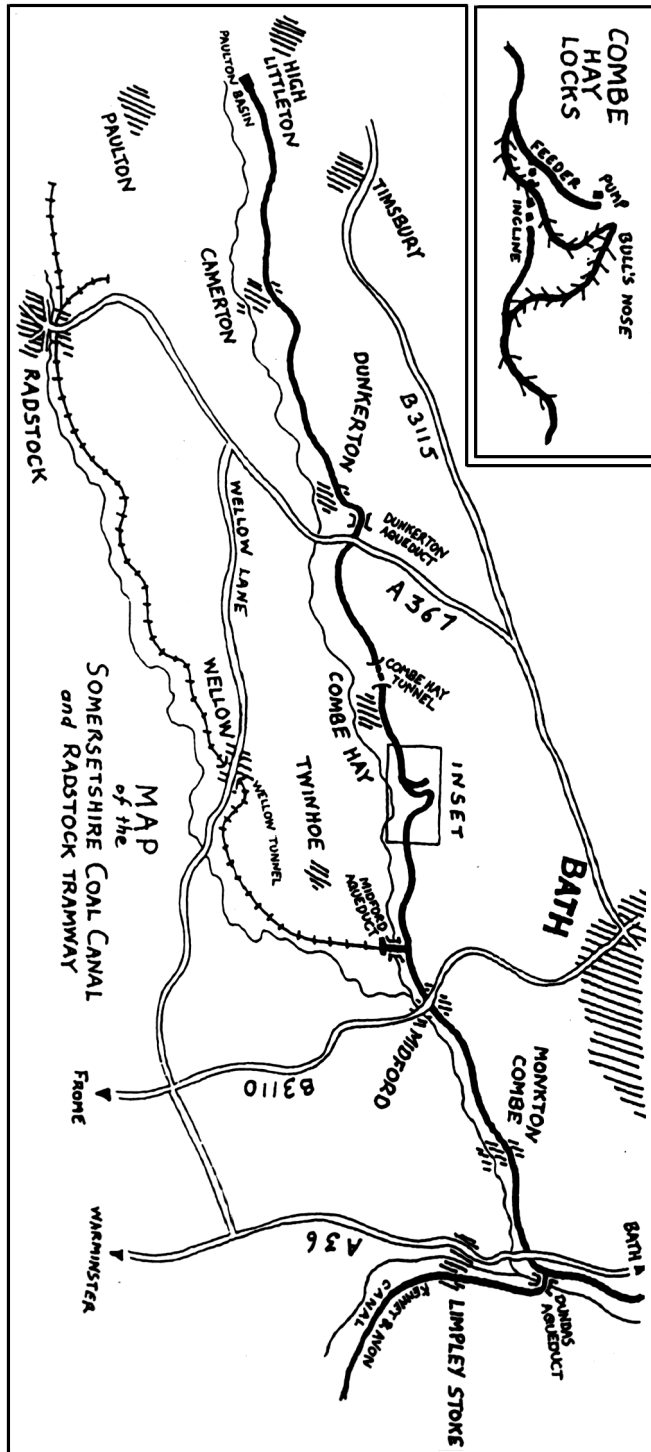


WEIGH-HOUSE

THE MAGAZINE 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 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.

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, **John Bishop**

73, Holcombe Green, Upper Weston, Bath BA14HY

☎ 01225 428738 E-mail: cesjtb@bath.ac.uk

Society Website: <http://www.coalcanal.org>

THE VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS MAGAZINE 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

Thursday 19th November — 19:30

SOCIAL EVENING — Talk TBA

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club,

For further details please see website or contact: Patrick Moss ☎ 07736 859882

Sunday 6th December — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Thursday 17th December — 19:30

SOCIAL EVENING — Talk TBA

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club,

For further details please see website or contact: Patrick Moss ☎ 07736 859882

Sunday 20th December — 10:00

WALK — Camerton and its association with the S.C.C.

(2 miles)

Meet: Near the Old Post Office, Red Hill, Camerton

For further details please contact:

Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 3rd January — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:

Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Walks

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

Check the website for any last minute changes: www.coalcanal.org

Work Parties

Venues are often arranged at short notice, always check with *Bob Parnell* ☎ 01225 428055

WEIGH - HOUSE N^o 54

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EDITOR'S NOTES

This edition of Weigh-House is notable because it contains articles covering the greatest variety of subjects of any issue yet published. Mike Chapman's article on the Fullers Earth mine at Hodshill is particularly interesting because it sheds some light on the later years of the S.C.C which have not been covered in detail in other publications about the canal. Barry Thompson explores another aspect of the canal which brings us right up to date: the leisure use of parts of the canal route and their inclusion in the National Cycle Network.

Patrick Moss's informative article on narrow locks continues from Weigh-House 51 with a survey of other canals which used this form of construction. In the third article of the series (which I hope to publish in W.H.55 without further delay) he will use the knowledge which we have gained from looking at these details of construction to tell us more about the S.C.C.

Without Eleazer Pickwick, the S.C.C. might never have opened. Derrick Hunt and Mike Chapman present a portrait of the man and his numerous contributions to the canal and other aspects of life in 19th Century Bath.

A very wide-ranging collection of articles, every one of which contains a great deal of new information of interest to members of this Society.

Adrian Tuddenham

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Welcome to another issue of Weigh House, number 54 and the first since our AGM in June. At the AGM two new committee members were appointed and duly attended their first committee meeting in July.

It was a great relief to me to have Elaine Morgan taking over the administrative rôle; and it was good to see Richard Hignett immediately get to grips with his rôle as Engineering Advisor to the Committee. Richard's knowledge and enthusiasm is a bonus to us, and is already having a profound impact. One of the first things he did was to acquire an Allen Scythe for our work parties (See Page 6), which will make the job of keeping back the vegetation at Combe Hay much easier. He has also initiated the discussion on what our long term strategy for the canal should be.

Members may recall that, at the AGM, a motion was passed asking the committee to come up with a long term vision for the canal, and a practical phasing over how it might be achieved with perhaps a five year, ten year and twenty year plan. To do this we need to determine what our ultimate objective is. While we have already collected some ideas, and there will be a formal consultation at a later date, your views are most welcome at this stage — so anyone who wishes to put a view to the committee please feel free to email me at: lazydaysafloat@yahoo.co.uk

Elsewhere in the restoration world, I was privileged to be invited to the 'break-through' ceremony for the A449 crossing of the Droitwich Barge Canal. That canal has been blocked since the second world war by a dual carriageway; on the 8th July I became on of the first person to walk under the road on the canal bank, showing that even major obstacles can be tackled with political will, and, in the end, finance. To get to that stage, though, the Droitwich Canal Trust had campaigned tirelessly for over 30 years for the canal's reopening. It is a sobering reminder of the hard work that goes into restoration even before the first sod is cut.

Finally I would like to congratulate Bob Parnell and David Chalmers on their being awarded honorary life membership at the AGM. Both have made a huge impact to the society during the many years they have been involved with it and they are thoroughly deserving of this accolade. We can also be assured of their continuing commitment to the canal and the society.

Patrick Moss

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mr. C. P. Davis	Fishponds, Bristol
Ms. E. Morgan	Wooten Basset

DONATIONS & BEQUESTS

The Society wishes to thank the following member who has generously made a donation:

Mr. C. S. Goff

The Society wishes to express its gratitude to the late A.J. Bishop for a generous bequest

Sunday 20th September — 10:00

WALK — Hodshill Fullers Earth Workings & the S.C.C.
(3 miles)

Meet: Opposite Bridge Farm (by railway arch near Lock 15) Combe Hay
For further details please contact:
Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Thursday 24th September — 19:30

**SOCIAL EVENING — Talk: “Coal By Canal”
by Patrick Moss.**

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club,
For further details please see website or contact: Patrick Moss ☎ 07736 859882

Sunday 4th October — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:
Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 18th October — 10:00

WALK — Lower Conygre Pit, Timsbury.

(2 miles)
Meet: Near the Old Post Office, Red Hill, Camerton
For further details please contact:
Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948

Thursday 22nd October — 19:30

SOCIAL EVENING — Talk TBA

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club,
For further details please see website or contact: Patrick Moss ☎ 07736 859882

Sunday 1st November — 10:00

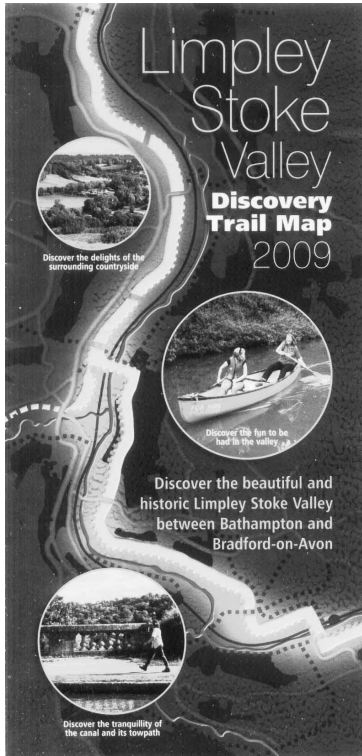
WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact:
Bob Parnell ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 15th November — 10:00

WALK — Withy Mills Colliery, Timsbury.

(2 miles)
Meet: Bottom of Radford Hill at junction with Weekesley Lane
For further details please contact:
Mike Chapman ☎ 01225 426948



A NEW MAP OF THE LIMPLEY STOKE VALLEY

A guide to the Limpley Stoke Valley has recently been published in the form of an illustrated map of the area. Although restricted to a convenient pocket-sized format, it manages to include enough useful information about the canals (the K&A and the SCC), footpaths, cycle routes, railways and numerous other attractions and natural amenities of the area to keep an inquisitive visitor busy for several days. Despite containing all this information, the map is laid out clearly—with canals and the S.C.C. exhibition being given well-deserved prominence.

If any of our members contemplates exploring the area in detail, or just has sufficient casual curiosity to spend an hour or two looking at a few of the interesting features, this is a map which can be thoroughly recommended.

Copies of the map can be obtained free of charge from the Brassknocker Canal Centre or by post (please include S.A.E.) from:

Tim Wheeldon,
Somerset Coal Canal Company
Brassknocker Basin
Monkton Combe
Bath BA2 7JD



Photograph: Nigel Locke

Above and below:
The construction of a completely new lock on the Droitwich canal illustrates what can be achieved



Photograph: Nigel Locke

UNENFORCEABLE BYELAW ?

Sign beside the K&A Canal at Claverton



The Phantom Work Party

In the days when the canals were full of working boats, news travelled along ‘the cut’ rapidly, being passed by word of mouth from one boatman (or boatwoman) to another as the boats met each other. In this way any event worth mentioning would become common knowledge over a hundred miles of canal in less than 24 hours. It might be thought that such an outdated system of communication would have no place in the modern world, but Bob Parnell has recently discovered that something similar is still in use on the S.C.C. at Combe Hay. Whilst clearing the area around the lock flight with a strimmer, Bob usually exchanges friendly greetings with walkers strolling along the towpath, but earlier this year he found he was being asked the same question time and time again: “Is your society responsible for all the work that’s been done down there?”. As the location of “there” was not specified and because many passers-by don’t have a clear idea of where the canal is anyway, Bob just assumed they were referring to some normal farming activity in a field.

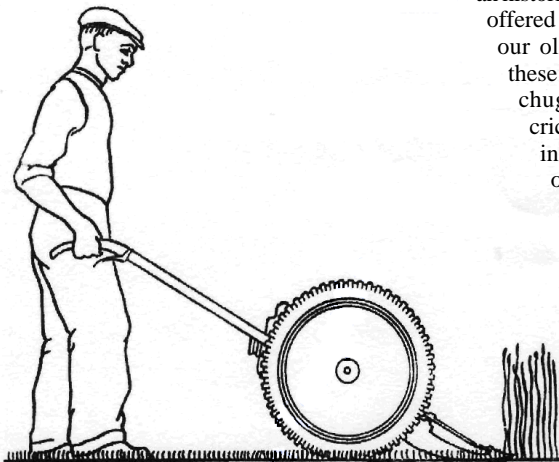
It wasn’t until our evening walk of 25th June that the full significance of these messages became apparent. Walking down the lock flight from Lock 19 towards Midford is always a bit of a disappointment because the final three locks and the length of canal, which used to be in quite good condition until a few years ago, have become progressively overgrown and now present a sad spectacle to visitors. This time, however, an amazing sight met our eyes, Locks 21 and 22 had been cleaned out and the canal between and below them was full of piled up cut brushwood, which pointed to the activities of a massive work party - but who was responsible for this phantom work party?

It has taken months of telephoning to finally track down the benevolent landowner, during which time we have also established contacts with other landowners in that area. It appears that they are all in favour of tidying up that stretch of canal and would welcome an input from our work party, so we can look forward to some interesting work in a new location.

Historic Machinery

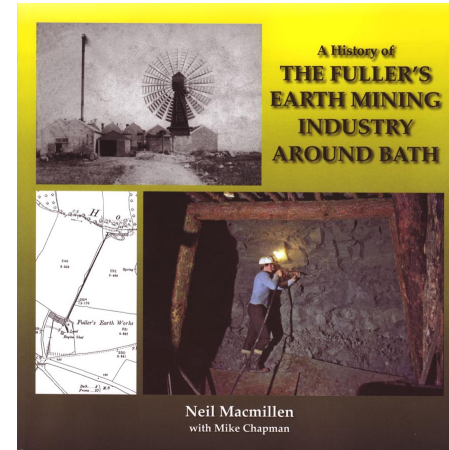
As more of the canal is cleared, the workload of keeping it clear is beginning to stretch our resources to their limits so it was felt that some extra labour-saving, mechanisation would be helpful.

Accordingly, Richard Hignett put in a bid on an historic piece of machinery which was being offered on eBay: an Allen Scythe. Many of our older members will be familiar with these items, which were often to be seen chugging around the rougher parts of cricket pitches or along roadside verges in the 1950s — with a somnambulant operator in tow. For the benefit of younger members who may never have seen one, we reproduce an explanatory drawing from the manufacturer’s handbook.



A full account of this machine’s activities will follow in the next edition of Navying Notes.

A History of THE FULLER’S EARTH MINING INDUSTRY AROUND BATH
By Neil Macmillen with Mike Chapman.



Paperback. 156pp including 4pp colour laminated card cover. 102 b&w photographs, 32maps/plans, 19 drawings/diagrams and 10 illustrations.

Lightmoor Press,
Unit 144B,
Lydney Trading Estate,
Harbour Road,
Lydney,
Gloucestershire
GL15 5EJ.

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www.lightmoor.co.uk.
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ISBN 13:9781899889 32 7

It is not often that a book has been written as the result of hearing about a load of rubbish, but this new book has partly come about through such an event. The chance finding of some discarded and partly burnt papers, from a disused industrial complex on the edge of Bath, and the subsequent rescue of some 100,000 documents, followed by painstaking sorting and classifying of these papers, form the basis for “A History of the Fuller’s Earth Mining Industry Around Bath”.

Some 20 years after the discovery of these documents, local author Neil Macmillen, with the help of local historian Mike Chapman, has written a detailed history of the mining of a somewhat unfamiliar substance - Fuller’s Earth. This material was, until the coming of modern soaps and detergents, commonly used for absorbing grease and dirt from wool or soiled cloth. Later uses included foundry work, paint manufacturing and oil refining.

Mined around Bath for over 100 years, the book not only covers the main mine at Combe Hay / Odd Down to the south of Bath, but other smaller sites including Southstoke and Englishcombe. The follow-up processes of drying and refining are also very well covered, including sites at Wellow and (of particular interest to the Somersetshire Coal Canal) Tucking Mill, with its canal-side wharf. Transport has its own chapter covering not only water, but road and rail.

The actual mining operations are well covered with many photographs of the works, backed up with information on the working practices gathered from former employees. The many maps, site plans, operational diagrams and illustrations all add further detailed information to the history.

For those with a more mechanical interest there is an excellent Machine List appendix, and for the scientific, a Product Code for the various Fuller’s Earth products. The modern subject of ‘Family History’ is also covered with short biographies on the some of the people employed by the various works.

In short, an excellent history of one of the ‘lost’ industries of Bath.

Roger Halse



Photograph: Patrick Moss

Above: Hawkesbury Stop Lock at the junction of the Oxford Canal with the Coventry Canal.
The boat is already at the lower level as the lock has a fall of only six inches.



Above: An immense pile of brushwood in the canal bed between Locks 21 and 22

Below: Hall Green Stop Lock on the Macclesfield Canal
The lower gate, looking downstream, showing the small fall from the Macclesfield Canal to the Trent & Mersey Canal



Photograph: Patrick Moss

Below: Lock 22 visible for the first time in years



SHAREHOLDERS OF THE SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL

Eleazer Pickwick

Biographical details

Baptised at Freshford 2nd February in either 1748 or 9.
(The entry is marked “of Limpley Stoke”)
Married at St Michael’s Bath 17th August 1775 to Susanna Combs.
Died 8th December 1837 at 10 Queen Square, Bath
Buried 15th December 1837 at Bathford.

In 1779, Eleazer Pickwick started a stage-coach business based on the White Hart Inn in Stall Street, the latter being run (in partnership) by his nephew Moses Pickwick. The fame of the White Hart Inn and the name of Pickwick remain immortalised in the works of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens.

This coaching business became one of the largest and most successful in the West of England, from which Eleazer made a considerable private fortune over a period of 40 years. He was, in effect, a ‘millionaire’ of his day, being worth £20,000 at his death, and invested in other local projects, notably the Sydney Gardens pleasure ground in Bathwick, opened in 1795. As well as his residence in Queen Square, he owned property and farmland elsewhere in the neighbourhood of Bath, and boundary stones marked ‘EP’ can still be seen in the old common fields in Upper Swainswick.

Eleazer Pickwick was one of the original Proprietors of the Somersetshire Coal Canal, named in the first S.C.C. Act of Parliament in 1794. A copy of his share certificate, N^o 460 of 1794, is reproduced on page 50 of “The Somersetshire Coal Canal and Railways” by K.R. Clew. He served on the S.C.C. Committee and it was at his White Hart Inn that the S.C.C. meetings were convened. When the first load of coal from Camerton Colliery reached Dunkerton in October 1798, it was Pickwick’s team of horses which drew it into Bath.

His rôle in the construction of the S.C.C. was crucial, without him it is possible that the SCC would never have been finished. In 1802 the bankers Hobhouse, Clutterbuck, Phillott & Lowder had refused to lend any further money to the S.C.C. and it was Eleazer Pickwick who provided the necessary £10,000. In 1803 he was appointed treasurer to the S.C.C. and lent a further £11,000. In subscribing to the Lock Fund he once again played a crucial role in rescuing the S.C.C., finally setting it up as a profitable operation which was to last for nearly 100 years.

Eleazer Pickwick was a Freeman of Bath, he served as a Councillor in 1819, and eventually as Alderman & Mayor of the city in 1826.

Derrick Hunt & Mike Chapman

design for. Why didn’t they do as the Huddersfield Canal did at Diggle? Well, those bottom gates at Diggle add significantly to water consumption and for the SCC water was a scarce and expensive commodity. Diggle Locks came later, and are the only flight in the country to that design — also there is one telling detail at Diggle: although it was built with only one towpath, a second path very quickly developed up the non-towpath side as boat crews avoided crossing the locks. This could not have happened had the locks been built through agricultural land rather than on open moorland with no fences. Perhaps Brindley was right after all.



Photograph: Patrick Moss

Diggle — Top gate and both paddles on the same side

The obvious path is not the towpath, which can be seen on the opposite side going under the next bridge

Moving onto the S.C.C.’s 23rd Lock at Dundas, this was different to the other locks in that it only had a rise of seven inches. It also had several other differences, it was built to wide beam but later narrowed; in it’s narrow form it had only one gate at each end and had a gate facing the wrong way in the middle. This lock contains more conundrums than most and is of a type known as a stop lock

At one time, stop locks abounded over the canal system, only four survive now with a rise and fall, although there are others which, like Dundas, have the gates removed and boats now sailing straight through. One of the survivors, Hawkesbury, where the Oxford and Coventry Canals meet, was intended to be level but a surveying error led to a fall of six inches. Although the surviving locks have a small rise and fall, that is not the definition of a stop lock, Lock 20 on the Stratford Canal has a fall of over six feet but is technically a stop lock as it controlled water between the Stratford and Grand Union Canals.

*Photographs of stop locks follow on page 18
The concluding part of this article will be published in Weigh-House 55*

NARROW LOCKS — Part 2

by Patrick Moss

The narrow lock as known to most canallers is almost unique to England and Wales. In the first part of this article we examined how the 'standard' narrow lock design came into being and how the SCC locks at Combe Hay differed from this in one particular detail: their gates were hinged on the non-towpath side. The SCC wasn't an early canal, and narrow locks had been around forty years by the time the locks at Combe Hay were built, so the SCC committee may have had the benefit of seeing other narrow locks and noting that a gate on the towpath side fouled the towrope, especially given the twisting course of the locks at Combe Hay. We will look at how locks developed elsewhere in the country and also briefly examine the SCC's only other lock at the junction with the Kennet and Avon Canal

To demonstrate that such developments occurred it is worth looking at two other lock systems: the newer locks on the Birmingham Canal Navigations (post 1770) and Diggle Locks on the Huddersfield Canal. On the B.C.N., it became common for boats to be worked by one man, rather than a crew, and the committee seemed to have noted that such boats were able to pass through locks with a single gate at each end much more quickly than one with double gates at the lock tail. Certainly the B.C.N. made a conscious decision to build new locks with single gates at both ends, and stuck to this even when a new lock in the Wolverhampton flight was built: It has a single bottom gate while the other twenty have two.

There were two other instances of the use of single gates at both ends of a narrow lock, on the Southern Stratford Canal and the Oxford Canal south of Banbury, in both these instances it is thought to have been a cost saving measure when the companies building them ran into financial trouble, however at Diggle there was a different reason entirely:

The Diggle Lock flight on the Huddersfield Canal was built over ten years after the rest of that canal, as the company waited until Standedge Tunnel was nearly complete before building them. These locks are strikingly different from the other Huddersfield locks, which are otherwise fairly standard. This last flight was built with *all* the furniture, gates and paddles, mounted on the non-towpath side of

the canal, and with no footbridges. As on the S.C.C., this was done to avoid anything fouling the towrope, but unlike the S.C.C., single gates were fitted at both ends of the lock and the ground paddles were fitted in pairs next to each other — all on the off-side.

We can't rule out that the SCC simply built these locks slightly different on a whim, it happened elsewhere; but it seems likely they had seen others and decided that the towrope was enough of an issue to be worth changing the



Photograph: Patrick Moss

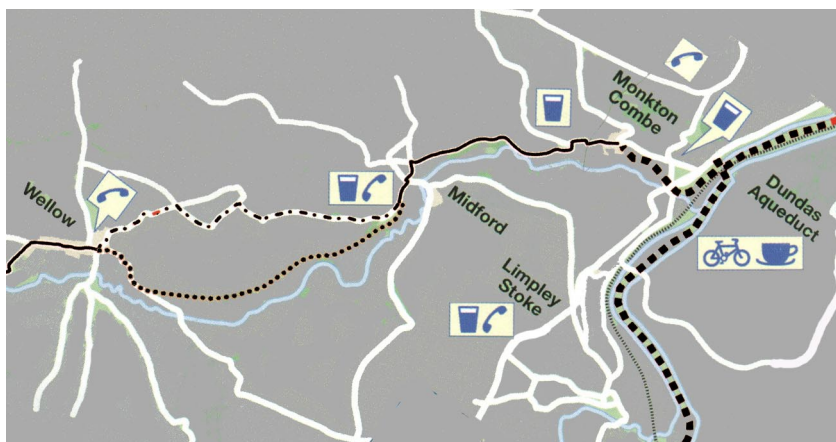
The single bottom gates of Diggle Locks seen from the lock below



ELEAZER PICKWICK
Portrait c. 1803 by John Sanders (1750 – 1825)

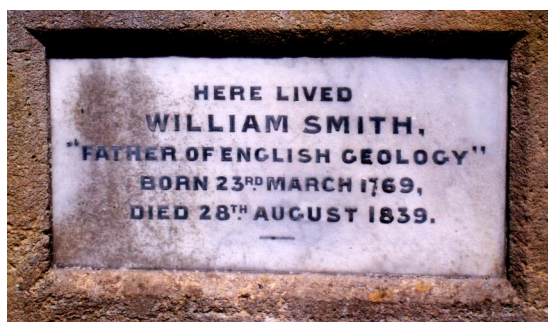
COLLIERS WAY

In *Weigh-House N^o 40 (Autumn 2004)* we described the plans for National Route 24 of the National Cycle Network, part of which followed the alignment of the southern branch of the Somersetshire Coal Canal. This route has now been open for some years and one of our members, Barry Thompson, has been exploring it:



MAP OF THE COLLIERS WAY FROM MIDFORD TO WELLOW

I recently cycled the Colliers Way a recreational path which takes you through some of the most beautiful and fascinating country in Somerset. It gets its name from the route of the old Somersetshire Coal Canal and the railways that superseded it. The route gives an easy access to an area rich in lovely landscapes, ancient history and Industrial Heritage.



Photograph: Barry Thompson

THE PLAQUE TO WILLIAM SMITH
(mounted on the wrong cottage)

Well signposted, it starts at the Dundas Aqueduct where the Somersetshire Coal Canal joins the Kennet and Avon Canal, and runs for 18 miles to Frome via Radstock. From the Canal Basin at Limpley Stoke, the path runs through the grounds of Monkton Combe School, then follows a quiet lane to Tucking Mill. Here there is a wall plaque to William Smith, Father of English Geology. The route then follows the bed of the old Somerset and Dorset

Railway, passing over the viaduct at Midford. A stop here takes you to the Hope and Anchor Inn for refreshment, and a short excursion to the restored Midford Aqueduct which carried the S. C. C. over the Cam Brook.

As to the 'dark path' mentioned by Jack Clifford, it most probably still exists in form of the present public footpath which passes directly behind the platform, leading from the railway bridge in



Public footpath behind the platform
(the arrow points towards the top of the platform).

Combe Lane (opposite the entrance to Underhill) to the bridge over the Cam Brook to Twinhoe. This path was evidently substituted for a section of the ancient packhorse route from Hodshill to Twinhoe which was destroyed by the railway, thereby avoiding the need for two bridges. For this purpose it would have been also expedient for the railway company to adopt a pre-existing private path, abandoned by the fuller's earth works, which had already been opened up through what was previously wooded hillside only a few years before.

It can now be seen that the declining state of the canal was itself a factor in shortening the life of Hodshill mine when viewed within the time-scale of other events. Although the exploitation of fuller's earth in this area in the 1880s had been stimulated by the growing demand in the United States for its use in refining mineral and vegetable oils, the progressive introduction of soap and other chemical detergents in the textile industry in this country had at the same time led to useless rivalries between the individual producers, bringing the price down to almost uneconomic levels. For this reason the owner of the fuller's earth mines in Surrey (the other main source of fuller's earth in the United Kingdom), began buying up the works in the Bath area in 1887, and in March 1890 the Fullers' Earth Union was formed by amalgamating these properties with those in Surrey. The immediate action of the FEU in that year was to purchase the interests of the Butler family in Combe Hay and of W.H.Handley in Southstoke.

The Union not only aimed to inflate the price of earth by doing away with 'ill judged' competition, but also to lower costs by consolidating the sources of production. This meant that from 1891 onwards, the main investment was concentrated on the Combe Hay works on Odd Down (its remains still visible today) and the closure of practically every other mine in the area. The siting of the Odd Down works next to a main road is significant. It was evidently seen as an advantage to be able to convey the finished product by steam traction to the GWR rail-head in Bath, rather than rely on the canal. Since Hodshill had poor road access, it is perhaps no coincidence that Hodshill mine was closed in about 1893, the year that the canal went into liquidation. When the canal was finally closed five years later, the only independent mine to survive was the works at Tucking Mill (not part of the FEU until 1915), because it had access to the S&D railway yard only a short drive along the road at Midford.

Mike Chapman

See 'Dates For Your Diary' on Page 21 for details of a walk around the Hodshill area — Ed.

to the road from what is now Glen Cottage which lies a little way further up from Underhill. This too was destroyed by the railway, leaving only the large stone gatepost which still stands by the road next to the railway arch. In either case, the finished fuller's earth would have only needed to be carried over the road to a wharf on the Lower Feeder Arm. This would certainly have been the nearest and easiest route to the canal. However, there is every indication that the Arm was completely silted up by the 1880s, having fallen out of use as a reservoir for the lock flight pumping engine when the latter was moved to Withy Ditch some 40 years earlier.



The masonry platform near Lock 19

Fortunately there is an 'eye-witness' account of these operations, by Jack Clifford, who was a member of the Southstoke family of builders involved in the erection of the windmill at the Odd Down works in the early 1900s. He is reported to have said that the finished earth was taken in sacks down to the pound on the canal near the Southstoke 'packhorse' bridge, and that there was a crane there to load the earth which had been brought by horse and cart from Underhill along what he called 'the dark path'. There is indeed a substantial masonry platform still standing next to the canal at this point, overlooking the junction with the Feeder Arm between Lock 19 and the site of the bridge, although it is difficult to see how this method would have operated. Not only would the tail-gates of the lock have been completely blocked by a boat being loaded at this point, but there is little sign of wear on the canal wall below the platform which might be expected from boats mooring against it. One can only assume that traffic through the locks by 1886 was already sufficiently intermittent to allow a boat to be occasionally loaded at a wharf here, which in any case may not have experienced heavy use during the short time when Hodshill mine was in production.



**THE FROME TO RADSTOCK RAILWAY LINE
with cycle track alongside**

Photograph: Barry Thompson

At Wellow the route leaves the railway track and follows deserted country lanes to Radstock. The Museum here is a 'must', giving a fascinating insight into the life and work of the Somerset coal miners and their families.

After Radstock, the route joins the old G.W.R. branch line to Frome. Surprisingly, one track is still there hidden in the undergrowth with saplings growing up between the sleepers. It is easy to imagine steam trains pulling truck loads of coal along these rails in days gone by — in your mind you can hear the engine whistling and puffing as it climbs the gradient.

The route continues on the railway track to Great Elm and then by lanes (quite hilly) to Frome where I spent the night in a B and B. In Frome the medieval Cheap Street has a stream running down the centre and the Town Bridge, lined on one side with shops, is similar in date to Pulteney Bridge in Bath.

Before Frome, a detour to Kilmersdon is worthwhile. This little village is the origin of the Jack and Jill nursery rhyme. In the 16th century a couple climbed every day to a well at the top of the hill for water, until one day Jack was hit by a boulder from a nearby quarry and tumbled down the hill. The Jack and Jill Millennium Project rediscovered a mediaeval well shaft in 1999 and a new well head has been built over the 38ft deep well shaft. A stiff climb to get to the top, but well worth it.

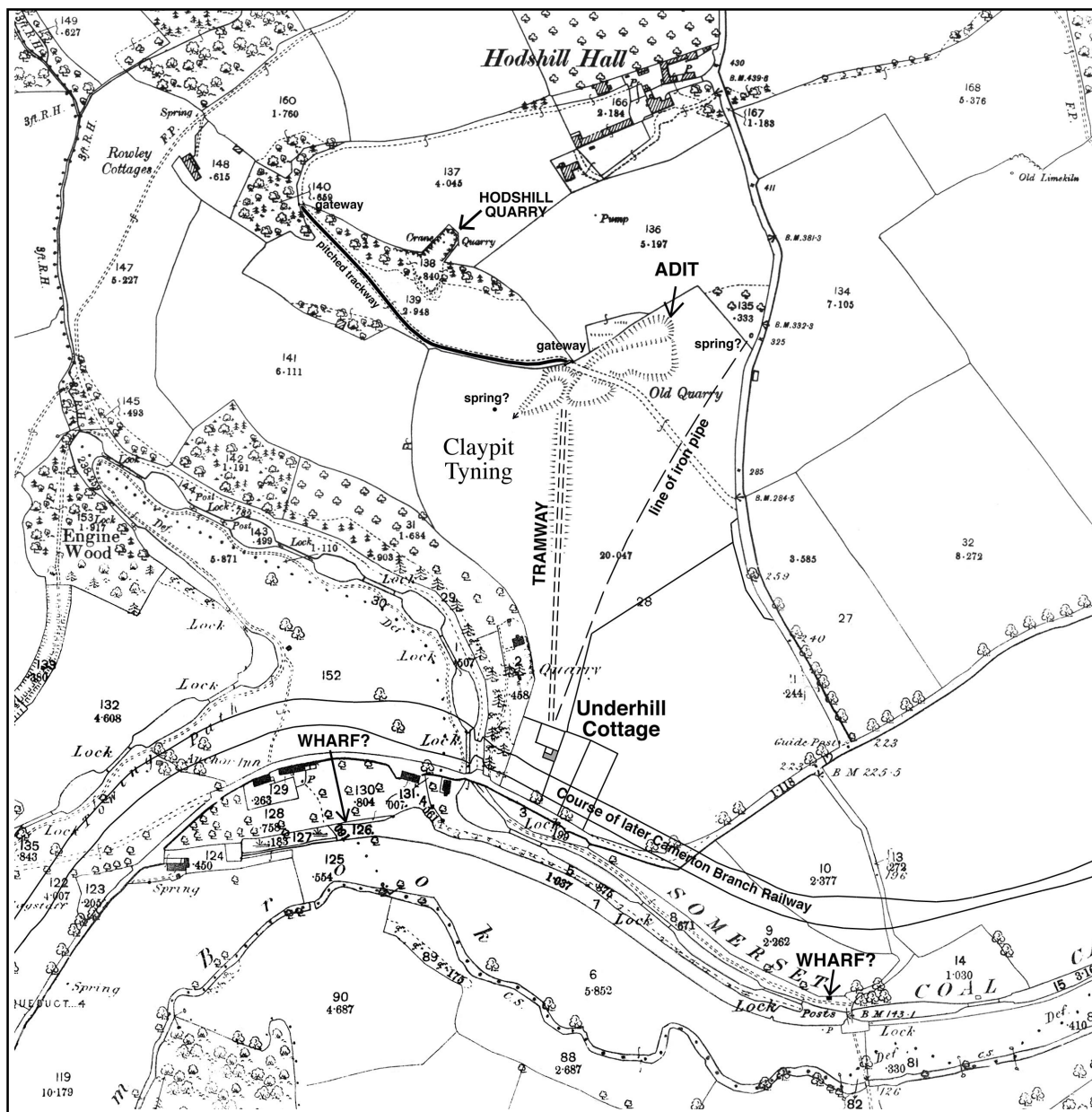
Apart from the 2 aqueducts and the short stretch in water at the start, there is little to see of the S. C. C. on the Colliers Way, but it does pass through an area with a rich mining heritage that dates from 1763 to 1973. At one time there were about 50 collieries connected by a busy network of tramways, railways and canals. Today we are left with a delightful cycle path through a rolling green landscape.

Barry Thompson

A NOTE ON HODSHILL FULLERS EARTH MINE AND THE SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL AT SOUTHSTOKE

In order to clarify the somewhat obscure relationship between the SCC and the local fuller's earth industry, the Society has occasionally made visits to some of the mine sites, as reported for example in issue 45 of *Weighhouse*, 2006. However, a welcome aid in this study has recently become available in the form of Neil Macmillen's long-awaited book, *The Fuller's Earth Mining Industry Around Bath* (reviewed on P19 of this issue) which brings this relationship into focus. More particularly, the book also brings forward new information on the Hodshill mine at Southstoke and its connection to the canal near the lock flight.

Little is known about Hodshill mine because it did not last very long. It is said to have been in operation from 1886 until 1894, although official mining records say it stopped in 1892. Consequently nothing appears on the site on the 1884 OS 25in map (except for a small freestone quarry further to the west), and by the time of the next map (1904) only the abandoned workings are shown. These workings, merely indicated on the map as a quarry, became a suitable site for the army during WWI as a rifle range. There is also some confusion between this and another mine which was being worked on the north side of Southstoke parish at about the same time. The manager at the Hodshill mine from 1886-91 is listed in the directories as Uriah Handley, living at Hodshill Lodge, but the owner of 'Southstoke mine' is recorded as W.H.Handley of Hodshill House (later Hodshill Hall) under the name of 'The Minerals & Mining Company'. This presumably refers to both mines. Local tradition recalls the proprietor of the Hodshill works promising that when the first load of fuller's earth was mined and sold, 'Every woman in the parish could be measured for a piece of material for a dress' (W.H.Handley was a draper by trade).



THE 1884 OS 25inch MAP OF THE HODSHILL MINE AREA superimposed with details of the Hodshill works provided by Jeremy Hignett. Not shown is the present public footpath between the abandoned railway bridge under Combe Hay lane (opposite the entrance to Underhill Cottage) and the bridge over the Cam Brook (lower right).

Fortunately, remains of the mine site were investigated some years ago by Jeremy Hignett, whose family formerly lived in Hodshill Hall. Traces of an adit were found south of the house in 'Little Hodshill' field, although there was very little spoil associated with it, probably because the main extraction was by the open cast method. Also, the workings may not have been very extensive, and any adit must have been well supported, as there was no sign of subsidence in the ground above. Leading from the workings, there was a gravity tramway which ran south across 'Cottage Field' (formerly two fields, 'Clay Pit Tyning' and 'Lower Tyning') on a slightly raised clay embankment towards the processing works at the bottom of the field. Here there were two rectangular settling and washing tanks supplied with water by a pipeline from a spring higher up next to Hodshill lane. Unlike the works at Tucking Mill, the earth here was not refined by the slurring method but was simply dried and then ground. For this purpose there were two drying ovens or kilns in the bank towards the rear of the site with four furnace doors, while the milling to provide the fine powder took place in the building later known as Underhill Cottage. Although Underhill Cottage still exists, it was converted to a dwelling in 1911 and completely renovated in the 1970s, so nothing remains of its original use.

However, some doubt still remains as to how the finished product was moved from the works to the canal a short distance below (or how, in return, coal from the collieries further along the Cam Valley was brought back up for the kilns and milling engine). It has been suggested that there could have been an inclined tramway from Underhill Cottage down to the Combe Hay road, but any evidence of this would have been obliterated by the later building of the railway embankment. Another suggestion is that the works shared an old track down