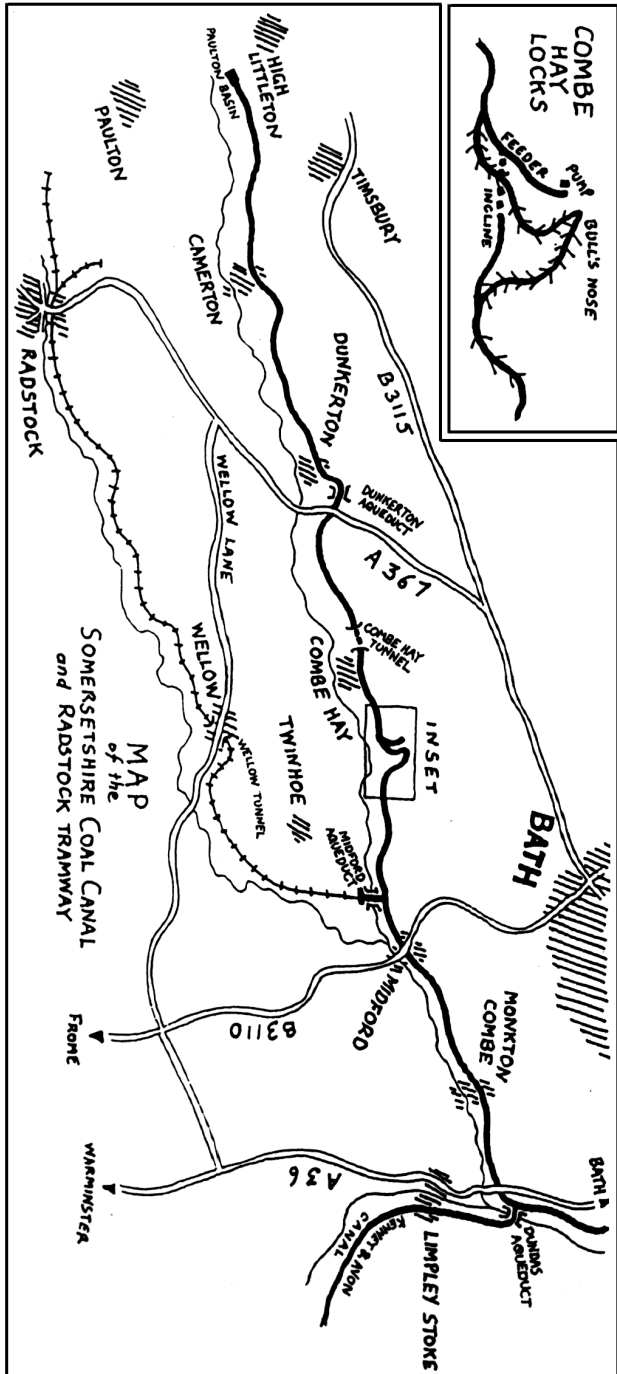


# WEIGH-HOUSE

THE MAGAZINE OF THE  
SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY



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

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No 55

JANUARY 2010

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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.

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Registered Charity N<sup>o</sup> 1047303

Registered under the Data Protection Act 1984 N<sup>o</sup> A2697068

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### MEMBERSHIP FEES

(as at 1st June 2003)

£7.50 (Family / Individual) £5.00 (Senior Citizen / Student)  
£150.00 (Life) payable by lump sum or four annual instalments

Membership Application Forms are available from

the Membership Secretary, **John Bishop**

73, Holcombe Green, Upper Weston, Bath BA14HY

☎ 01225 428738 E-mail: [cesjtb@bath.ac.uk](mailto:cesjtb@bath.ac.uk)

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

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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](mailto:adrian@poppyrecords.co.uk)

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March — 10:00

**WORK PARTY — Location to be advised**

For further details please contact:

*Bob Parnell* ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March — 10:00

**WALK — The Upper Locks**

*Meet:* The Avenue, Combe Hay

For further details please contact:

*Mike Chapman* ☎ 01225 426948

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> March — 19:30

**SOCIAL EVENING — “Restoring Brassknocker Basin” by Tim Wheeldon**

*Meet:* The Radstock Working Mens’ Club,

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

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April — 10:00

**WORK PARTY — Location to be advised**

For further details please contact:

*Bob Parnell* ☎ 01225 428055

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> April — 19:30

**SOCIAL EVENING — “Canals of the South Wales Coalfield, Part 2”**

**by Patrick Moss**

*Meet:* The Radstock Working Mens’ Club,

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

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April — 10:00

**WALK — Both Canal Branches in the Midford Area**

(3 miles)

*Meet:* Lay-by opposite Bridge Farm (Lock 16), Combe Hay

For further details please contact:

*Mike Chapman* ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May — 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](http://www.coalcanal.org)

**Work Parties**

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

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**EDITOR’S NOTES**

Once again Weigh-House is covering a wide variety of topics, some of which are not directly about the S.C.C., but which are nevertheless very interesting, as they shed light on the background to canal and coalfield development. It is interesting to read in the article by Mary & David Byrne how similar circumstances to those which gave rise to the S.C.C. in Somerset were responsible for a tramway and railway in Monmouthshire. The walk around Kilmersdon earlier this year aroused a great deal of interest among those who took part (and who spent a fascinating time ferreting in the undergrowth for industrial archaeological remains). For the benefit of those who missed it, Mike Chapman has summarised the walk and we have obtained permission to illustrate it with a photograph from the John Cornwell collection and two previously-unpublished photographs taken by S.C.C.S. member, Steve Page. Another previously-unpublished photograph appears in Tim Wheeldon’s article on the bridge at Dundas, this time by permission of the “Bath in Time” collection, which is well worth a visit. Finally we conclude Patrick Moss’s series of articles on narrow locks with a look at Lock 23 of the S.C.C. — and that is not a misprint.

**Adrian Tuddenham**

**CHAIRMAN'S NOTES**

*I will start by wishing all our members a happy and prosperous new year, and hoping you have a good festive holiday. As I write these notes, Christmas is still one week away and the thought of a break is a welcome one indeed. Life has, in all its aspects, been very busy of late.*

It is a pleasure to have such a small space to write these notes, which results from the longer than usual list of new members in this issue. Welcome to you all, and all the others who have joined us in 2009 and we hope that you will all enjoy a long and happy membership of our society.

You all know of our aspirations regarding the canal, resulting from the change in our constitution some eighteen months ago that allows us to consider restoration as well as preservation. I'm sure you also are aware that any restoration of our canal is a difficult task, one that the committee members deliberate on at length. We were charged at the last A.G.M. with the task of reporting our findings back to members; although the next A.G.M. is still six months away, this work is well in hand. The biggest questions are, "Where do we start?" and "How much do we do?" — both of which ask yet more questions of us before we can answer. There is no doubt, though, that the situation locally is changing; and we need to increase our capabilities to match this. One obvious conclusion is that the society's primary rôle will be to promote restoration (in whatever form we decide it should be) rather than undertake large scale schemes ourselves; and that we must seek ways of raising and then managing funding on a scale that we have not witnessed before.

In this respect we can draw strength from the success of others. The Droitwich Canal is largely complete and work began in earnest on the Stroudwater Canal this week. These schemes were also once where we are now, and show us the way ahead.

**Patrick Moss**

**NEW MEMBERS**

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mr. C. and Mrs. P. Maggs	Radstock	Mr. & Mrs. Drinkwater	Charfield Glos.
Mr. K. L. Knight	Portsmouth	Mr. & Ms. Tiffin	Somerton
Mr. R. G. Honey	Midford	Mr. & Mrs. Hardin	Bath
Mr. & Mrs. Mansfield	Billericay	Ms.F. E. Hedges	Corsham
Mr. H. Hart	Weston-super-Mare		

**DONATIONS**

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

- Mr. D. Storey
- Mr. & Mrs. R. Tonge
- Mr. & Mrs. Goff

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> January — 10:00

**WORK PARTY — Location to be advised**

For further details please contact:

*Bob Parnell* ☎ 01225 428055

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

**WALK — Monkton Combe, Shepherd's Walk & Old Midford Hill**

(4 miles & hilly)

*Meet:* Twinhoe Lane, Midford

For further details please contact:

*Mike Chapman* ☎ 01225 426948

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January — 19:30

**SOCIAL EVENING — "Film of Local Railways including Kilmersdon Colliery by Andrew Linham** (postponed from December)

*Meet:* The Radstock Working Mens' Club,

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

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February — 10:00

**WORK PARTY — Location to be advised**

For further details please contact:

*Bob Parnell* ☎ 01225 428055

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February — 10:00

**WALK — Combe Hay to Dunkerton & the Aqueducts**

(4 miles)

*Meet:* The Avenue, Combe Hay

For further details please contact:

*Mike Chapman* ☎ 01225 426948

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February — 19:30

**SOCIAL EVENING — "Boat Lifts" by Terry Paget**

*Meet:* The Radstock Working Mens' Club,

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

Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> February — 10:00

**OPEN DAY — Fussell's Trial balance**

See details P. 20

of traffic now using the road, and one hopes that the Railway & Canal Historical Society, whose guests we were on this happy occasion, will do everything to ensure that the Gloucestershire Highways authority allows it to continue to so, unlike the authority which so readily (and some would say unnecessarily) demolished the little aqueduct at Dunkerton!

The route we followed was from Redbrook to Coleford, stopping frequently to examine disused tunnels (both rail and tramway) and stations and, towards the end, to explore the very impressive remains of the iron smelter at Whitecliff, owned and maintained by the Dean Heritage Museum Trust. Here a very helpful homeowner living next to the remains provided instructive background to its history as so many have done in the past on our own walks along the S.C.C. The walk concluded at the now pretty town of Coleford next to the Railway Museum. Coleford, like Radstock, has become 'gentrified' with the virtual disappearance of its once most important economic commodity.

Some have said that the pace of our S.C.C.S. walks is somewhat leisurely but compared with the 6 hours (albeit with a good pub stop en route) taken to cover the four miles between Redbrook and Coleford, they are, believe me, comparatively sprightly! Sadly this meant that the museum was closed when we arrived back at the car park but it does give us an excuse to revisit the town in the future.

Our grateful thanks go to our guide and the members of the R.&C.H.S. for their kind invitation to join them on the walk. Perhaps they might like to walk those parts of the GWR Limpley Stoke branch and the S&D railway, which superseded our canal, at some stage in the future when we can return the favour.

Mary & David Byrne

## FUSSELL'S BALANCE LOCK OPEN DAY



There will be a chance to look around the site of Fussell's Trial Balance Lock near Mells on Saturday 27th Feb 2010. Work began on clearing the site in October 2003 and involved several members of the SCCS. Since then there have been only a few opportunities to visit the site, as it is on private land.

No physical remains of the caisson at Combe Hay have been found, but anyone who is interested to see a boat lift from that period will find a visit to these spectacular remains well worthwhile. If you would like to book a place, please contact Derrick Hunt in advance, preferably by e-mail:

derrickjohnhunt@btinternet.com  
— or by telephone 01225 863066

[For details of Terry Paget's talk on boat lifts,  
25th February, see opposite page]

## CRUISEWAY STATUS

*What is meant by "Cruiseway" Status of Canals and how might the current status of the Kennet & Avon Canal be relevant to the future of the Somersetshire Coal Canal?*

### The Current Situation

The 1968 Transport Act created three categories of canals, rivers & waterways:-

- 1 **Commercial waterways**, ie rivers and canals for transport of goods which leisure cruisers can also use. British Waterways has a statutory responsibility to maintain them.
- 2 **Cruiseways**. These are the main leisure cruising waterways British Waterways has a statutory responsibility to maintain them.
- 3 **Remainder**. These canals are the lesser used and some, like the K&A, were not fully restored to navigation at the time of the Act. British Waterways has no statutory responsibility to maintain them.

The continuing existence of the K&A Canal should not to be taken for granted. If a serious breach or similar occurred then B.W. could say "The K&A Canal is a Remainder canal, we have no money, and we are not obliged to repair it." This is unlikely, but the K&A could be used as a pawn in a political game. Years of delay could seriously damage the whole canal. When the SCCS applies for funding there could be an objection because the SCC connects into the Kennet & Avon Canal which is a Remainder Canal.

### Actions taken by the S.C.C.S. to date

The S.C.C.S. Committee requested Derrick Hunt to represent the S.C.C.S. at the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust A.G.M. on 9th May 2009. (Derrick is entitled to attend as K&A Trust member). On behalf of the S.C.C.S. Committee Derrick gave an update on the changed S.C.C. constitution which allows restoration. He then raised the subject of Remainder status. The response by Michael Ancram MP & Terry Kemp was that the publication of the announcements which precede a parliamentary bill would be made within two months. The matter was then raised on behalf of the S.C.C.S. at the A.G.M. of British Waterways. We have since been informed by the Legal Director of B. W. that there are some outstanding matters to be dealt with. B.W. is minded of the importance of next year and the 200th anniversary of the opening of the K. & A. Canal, so have every confidence that it will be achieved in that year.

*Note:* Some of the river sections of the K&A are already classified as Cruiseway, but not the whole of the canal.

## CHANGE IN GIFT AID

Many of you 'Gift Aid' your subscriptions, which we appreciate, as it makes a useful contribution towards our work. If you Gift Aid for the first time after being a member for some years we can, at present, claim back tax on up to 6 year's subscription. From next April this will change to 4 years. So we are asking, if you have not completed a Gift Aid form yet, can you please do it as soon as possible and certainly by March. Please contact the Membership Secretary who can provide the necessary Gift Aid Form. If you are not sure please also contact the Membership Secretary who should be able to tell you if you have completed one.

Thanks for your help.

David Chalmers

## NAVYING NOTES

*Q: What do you get if you cross a motorised rickshaw with a giant hedge-trimmer?  
A: An Allen Scythe.*

*The arrival of the Allen Scythe has been an education to everyone in the work party; we knew very little about them at first, but the learning curve has been a steep one and the knowledge we gained has extended from history through engineering to folklore.*

To begin with the history: Allen Scythes were first manufactured in 1935, to a design which was 'agricultural' to say the least. They continued in production until 1973 and, although there were various models, the basic design remained unchanged - and very basic. In total nearly a quarter of a million of them were made and ours was one of the last to leave the production line. In terms of their intended working life, ours was barely run-in.

The power unit was always a Villiers engine, different models having larger or smaller engines, some 2-stroke and some 4-stroke. This particular model was obviously top of the range, with a 250cc 4-stroke engine and the very latest accessory: a television interference suppressor built into the sparking plug cap. Although spares are still obtainable without much trouble, we realised before buying it that the chances of getting it serviced by an approved agent were negligible and we had better learn how to do it ourselves. Here, the internet proved invaluable as a source of information - some of which was actually useful; the most helpful of all being the manufacturer's handbook which was still available and which contained cunningly veiled references to problems which we later discovered.

Starting is by means of a pull cord. Not the namby-pamby thing found on a modern lawn-mower, but a length of lorry rope with a wooden toggle for grip. The handbook gives instructions that a strong steady pull is needed - but fails to mention that if you are a little slow off the mark, the engine will pull first, in reverse, and wrench the toggle out of your grasp before you know what has happened.

Stopping is something which has to be learned, because the peculiar design of clutch on this machine does not automatically disengage when the control handle is released; an additional lever has to be pulled first. Some practice is required until this becomes second-nature to the trainee operator. Since owning this machine, we have discovered that there exists a considerable fund of folklore about the disasters which this particular design feature has precipitated, to the chagrin of several generations of inexperienced or know-all operators who didn't bother to read the handbook.

There isn't much point in describing the steering and brakes — because there aren't any. A pair of substantial wheelbarrow-like handles allows a sufficiently muscular operator to aim the machine in approximately the required direction; and it can be stopped in a hurry by switching off the engine.

By now, gentle reader, you must be wondering what on earth possessed us to buy such a frightening beast in the first place; the answer is that, in one hour it can clear an area which would take a work party the best part of a day. Having discovered that nothing else, ancient or modern, was capable of handling the particular requirements of canal work in such an effective manner, we decided that the effort we would have to put into finding a safe way to operate it would be amply repaid by the work it would eventually do. We initially would only allow the machine to be used by the professional engineers in our work party, so that we could learn from their experience. That has allowed us to write out our own addendum to the operator's manual and to specify a safe method of working. We have also added an emergency stop switch to the handlebars, which seemed like a good idea.

The effectiveness of our new purchase can be judged from the comments of several people that, because of the extent of our most recent work, the lock flight in Rowley Bottom is now looking better than anyone can remember.

## RAILWAY WALKING IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

*What were four members of the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society doing on a pleasant day in September wandering along the remains of a disused railway track in the Forest of Dean and what did they hope to learn from it of our own canal?*

There are some obvious parallels between this site and the area which the S.C.C. served — the mining of coal and the need to distribute it to potential purchasers for one. The existence of a primary waterway route (in our case the Bristol Avon and the Kennet and Avon Canal and, in theirs, the River Wye) and the desire to link collieries with it to broaden and extend potential markets would be a second. Thirdly, the existence of a tramway, superseded by a railway, which had to overcome difficult gradients to deliver cargo from the mines and quarries to the primary waterway, was the most obvious parallel with the Radstock arm of the SCC. The solution chosen, an inclined plane, was of course also that used for some time on the Paulton branch of the SCC, prior to the construction of the locks at Combe Hay.



*Photograph: Derrick Hunt*

### THE INCLINED PLANE BRIDGE ACROSS THE COLEFORD - REDBROOK ROAD

To take the last of these parallels first, the photograph above shows part of the inclined plane used to deliver goods from the tramway to the river port at Redbrook at where we began our walk. The plane was required to cross the main road from Coleford to Redbrook and the bridge was constructed, at some expense one presumes, to allow it to do so. Amazingly it has survived to this day, despite the type



**THE ENTRANCE LOCK AT DUNDAS — March 2009**  
**Showing the middle gate closed to hold back the waters of the K & A Canal**  
**during maintenance work on the S.C.C.**

single gate would be cheaper and easier to operate. Of the narrow stop locks that there have been across the country nearly all had single gates at both ends. One had guillotine gates so that the fall could be either way, and two had double gates at one end (bizarrely in one case, at the top rather than the bottom).

And a wide stop lock? There were at one time three: wide canals did not tend to have junctions with each other, but with narrow canals or river navigations. Ours was the only wide stop lock where a wide canal met a narrow canal. The other two were the junction of two wide canals in Barnsley and at Kings Norton near Birmingham where the Stratford company hoped to build a wide canal to meet the aspiring wide beam Worcester and Birmingham. Both canals ended up narrow for reasons of cost, so that one was narrowed. Ours was also narrowed; presumably it had been felt convenient to allow wide beam boats as far as Tucking Mill, and later this was rethought and the structure narrowed. Our own Dundas stop lock is a microcosm of all that these little known structures were intended for.

**Patrick Moss**



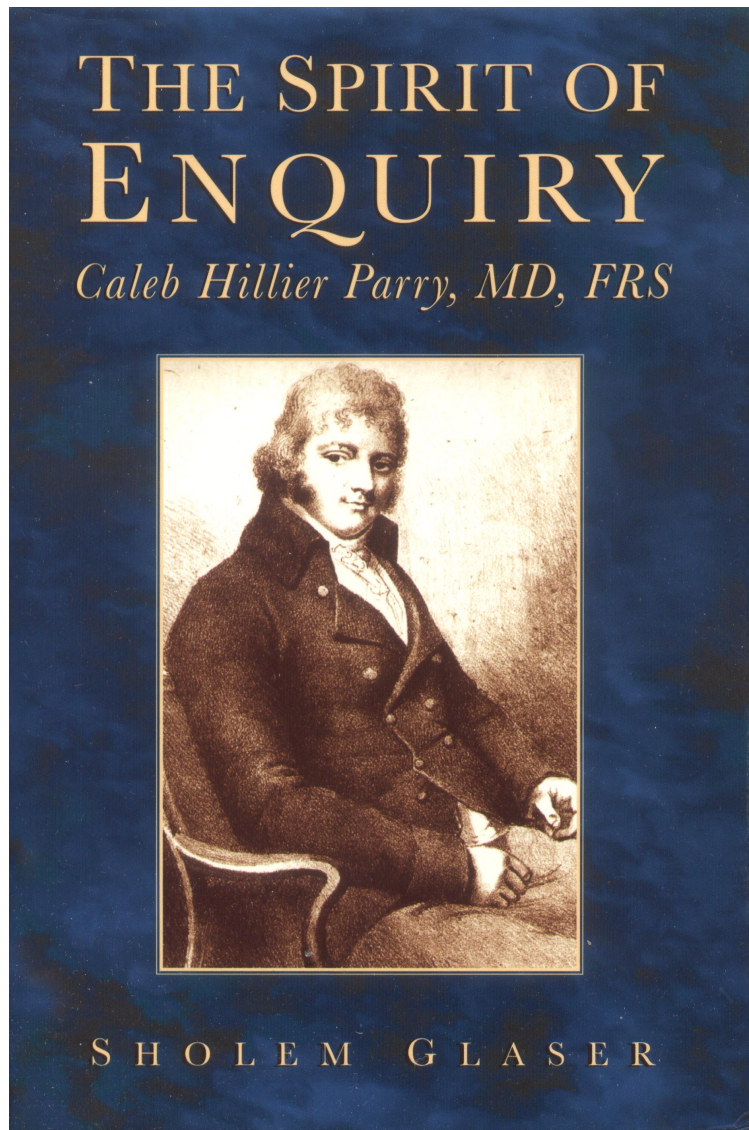
**Above: RICHARD HIGNETT WITH THE ALLEN SCYTHE**

**Below: HARD AT WORK**



## SHAREHOLDERS OF THE SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL

Caleb Hillier Parry M.D. F.R.S.



A Portrait of Caleb Hillier Parry  
on the cover of the book of his life and work by Sholem Glaser  
ISBN: 0-7509-0998-6

Weigh-House 55

## NARROW LOCKS — Part 3

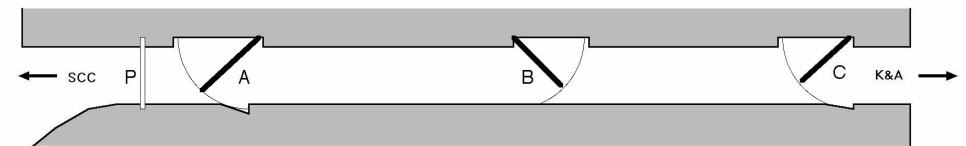
by Patrick Moss

*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. We then looked at how locks developed elsewhere in the country and in particular the type known as the 'stop lock', one of which was built at the junction of the S.C.C. with the Kennet & Avon Canal.*

The S.C.C.'s 23rd Lock at Dundas was different from 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 its narrow form it had only one gate at each end and had a gate facing the wrong way in the middle. The design of this lock raises many questions

Starting with the easy one first, why seven inches? When canals were first built they had to procure their own water supply, often at considerable expense. So it was not uncommon at a junction of two canals for there to be some structure to make sure water movement between them was minimised. Water loss from the S.C.C. to the K&A wouldn't have been a huge concern as without back pumps at Combe Hay the S.C.C. had no use for the water anyway. But the K&A had seven locks in Bath and a long pound to worry about; they did not want leakage from the S.C.C. to drain their canal. A head of seven inches would have given the K&A assurance that the bottom pound of the S.C.C. was not affecting them.

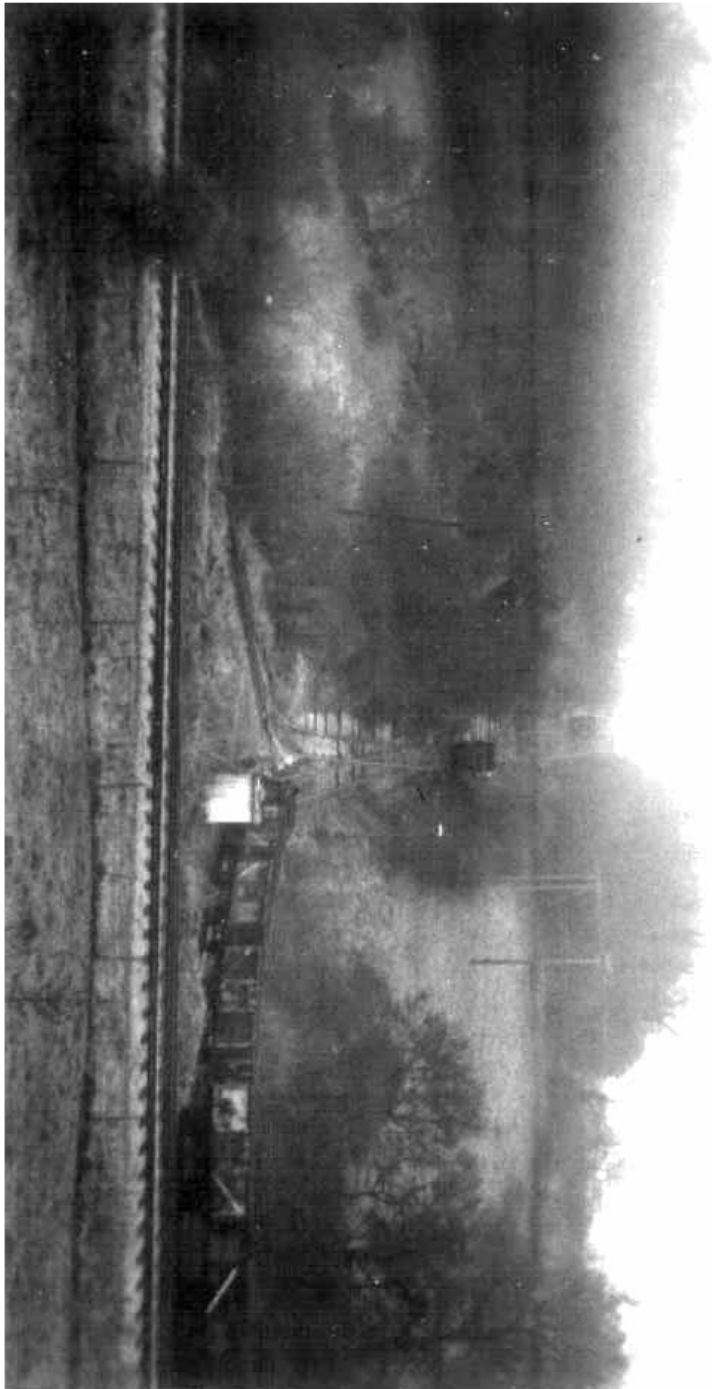
However, while a head of seven inches would have been fine for routine leaks it wouldn't help if the S.C.C. actually breached. The S.C.C. is on sidelong ground for much of its route from Dundas to Combe Hay and a breach was not unlikely. This would result in a rapid fall in levels and within minutes the SCC would be lower than the K&A and the gates at Dundas would be pushed open by a reverse head of water. In all probability that third gate recess at Dundas was to accommodate a gate that would either close automatically with a bucket scoop attached or could be closed in a hurry should a burst occur. As is often the case, there is a modern steel gate in that recess for exactly the same purpose now. While such gates were, and are, common, this is probably the only example of one built into a lock chamber.



A PLAN OF THE ENTRANCE LOCK AT DUNDAS  
The middle gate faces the 'wrong' way.

Single gates at each end? Well, with a fall of seven inches, and being the last lock on the canal, water consumption was hardly an issue, so the extra chamber length required was not a problem. A





Photograph: Steve Page

### Biographical details

Born: Cirencester 21<sup>st</sup> October 1755  
 Married at Palgrave, near Diss, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1778 to Sarah (Sally) Rigby.  
 Died: 9<sup>th</sup> March 1822, Sion Place, Bath  
 Buried in Bath Abbey (monument on the wall of the South aisle of the nave).

Caleb Hillier Parry was the son of a non-conformist minister in Cirencester and the eldest of ten children. He was educated at Cirencester Grammar School, where he formed a lifelong friendship with Edward Jenner.

At the age of 15 years, Parry went to Dissenter's Academy, Warrington, Lancashire, where he met his wife, Sarah Rigby, and in 1773 went on to Edinburgh to study Medicine. After spending two years in London at the Middlesex Hospital, Parry returned to Edinburgh, obtaining his medical doctorate in 1778 with a thesis on rabies. The same year, he became a Licentiate of the College of Physicians of London and married Sarah. The following year he commenced general practice at 13, Catharine Place, Bath, and was appointed as physician to the Puerperal Charity Hospital and subsequently to the Casual Hospital. In 1800 he moved to 27, The Circus and then, in 1817, to 7, Sion Place. His estate was at Summerhill, Bath.

As a physician Parry excelled as physiologist and skilled experimenter. He had a life-long habit of taking detailed notes and his notes and books detail the life of a busy physician who worked long hours, but still found time for research. His major contribution to medicine was the recognition of the cause of Angina.

Like many prominent men of that era, he was a polymath and he made many contributions to non-medical subjects. In addition to being a shareholder in the S.C.C., he was a founder member of the Geological Society; having an interest in geology and fossils he would have come into contact with William Smith. The Reverend Richard Warner, Smith's note-taker, frequently visited Parry. Parry also belonged to the Philosophical Society of Bath and was an active member of the Bath & West of England Society where he won many prizes for sheep, which he bred for high quality wool.

Charles Parry MD FRS, his eldest son, continued in his father's footsteps as a noted physician in Bath, but also had a keen interest in the arts, being a friend of Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth. His youngest son, Admiral Sir William Edward Parry FRS, became even more famous as a noted arctic explorer.

As well as a monument to Caleb Hillier Parry in Bath Abbey, there are two "Parry" wards in Bath Hospitals.

Derrick Hunt

## THE S.C.C. ENTRANCE BRIDGE AT DUNDAS

Some members may know that Daniel Brown, of [www.bathintime.co.uk](http://www.bathintime.co.uk), has recently acquired access to the fascinating photographic collection of George Dafnis who was a prolific photographer and producer of postcards of the Bath area. Amongst them is this, hitherto unpublished, very fine photo of the bridge across the entrance to the Coal Canal.

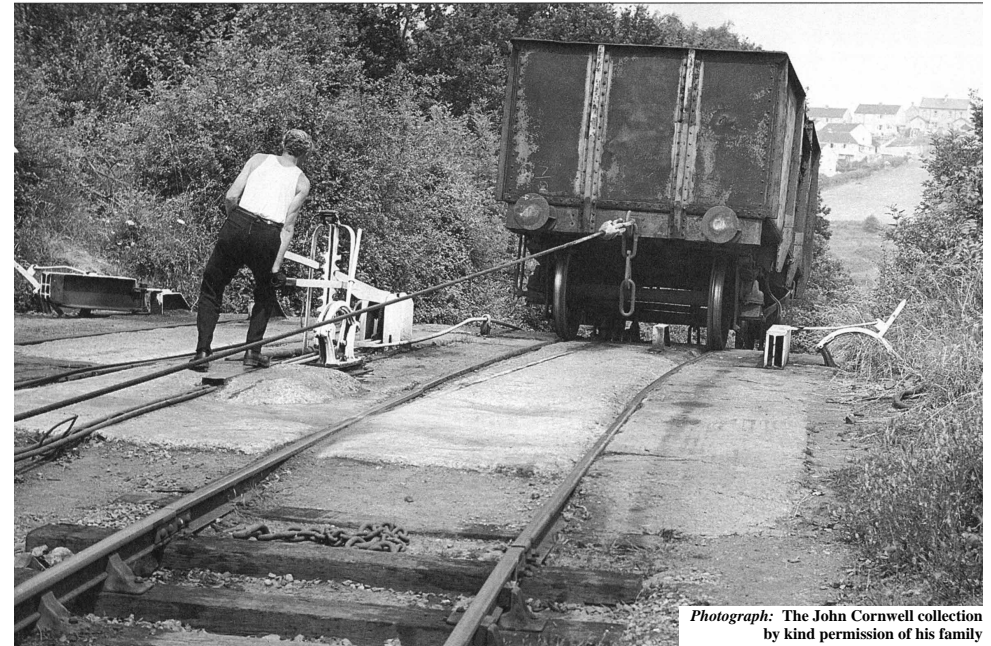


BATH  
IN  
TIME

Copyright picture by kind permission of: "Bath in Time"  
<http://www.bathintime.co.uk>

A number of pictures taken at the same time are of an outing of the Bath Cycling Club so the character featured may well be a member of the club resting on a big log beside the stop lock with his bicycle propped against the bridge behind him. (It looks as though he may have brought his lap top out with him!). The date? Well, officially 1910 but, by the condition of the lock, I would put it a little earlier so let's just say turn of the century.

It happened (serendipity) that at exactly the time Daniel sent me this photo I was building a wall in my garden and had just re-unearthed five of the parapet stones from the bridge. When we first excavated the entrance stop lock for restoration in 1985 these stones were found in the lock. Most of the original bridge had long since been "quarried" and disappeared. These few remaining ones we had "landscaped" into the garden and forgotten about them until it came to building a new edge to a raised bed.



Photograph: The John Cornwell collection  
by kind permission of his family

**Above: WAGGONS AT THE TOP OF KILMERSDON INCLINED PLANE — 1971**  
with Cecil Jones operating the brake .

**Below: THE SAME LOCATION — May 2009**  
With Henry Davis standing in for Cecil Jones. Note the stop-block fittings still in place





Photograph: Steve Page

**THE SHUNTING LOCOMOTIVE AT THE TOP OF KILMERSDON INCLINE — 1970**

Harry Loader was usually the driver. In the foreground can be seen the end of the cable running over a diverter pulley to the drum which is below ground level at the extreme left. To the right of this scene is the brake lever shown in the photograph opposite. The tunnel arch (in the photograph below left) would be located below this level in the side of the embankment between the large tree and the locomotive

**THE ENTRANCE TO A TUNNEL**

which probably gave access to the drum — May 2009



**THE REMAINS OF A PIECE OF HAULAGE CABLE**

— May 2009



It will be seen from the photos of the stones that one of them seems to be a corner. Assuming that the longer end was the horizontal end - and examination of one of the other, closer, photos of the bridge indicates this to be the case - then judging by the angle of its kink this stone was either the south east or the north west corner. It also has rope marks on it which make me think it's more likely to be the north west one, *i.e.* on the Dundas Wharf side - as boats from the SCC would have been towed under the bridge; but I may be barking up the wrong tree on this - or just barking!

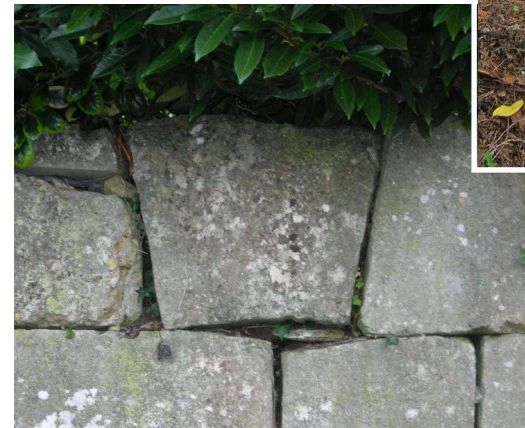


**Above: Parapet stones forming the garden wall**

**Right: Angled parapet stone with rope marks**



**Below: Keystone built into the wall**



Also found in the lock in 1985 was one of the bridge's key stones shown in the photograph [left]. It is now built into the wall of the garden alongside the lock and can easily be seen from any boat using the lock. Sadly, unlike the key stone in the bridge under the B3110 beside the "Hope and Anchor" at Midford, it has no date inscribed on it.

A question often asked is "when was the bridge demolished?". Roger Halse reckons it was still standing when the SCC was bought by the GWR in 1904. I have a postcard dated October 1918 showing the bridge replaced by a culvert with just a few stones providing an edge to the towpath. So obviously it came down in those intervening years. Has anyone any further information on this?

Any member is welcome to come and have a look in my garden at Dundas at these surviving bits of the lovely old bridge. Just let me know in advance.

## A VISIT TO THE SITE OF KILMERSDON COLLIERY AND INCLINED PLANE

Sunday 17 May 2009

When Kilmersdon Colliery at Haydon on the south side of Radstock was started in 1874, it was immediately connected to the GWR Frome to Radstock line by a self-acting inclined plane (the canal tramway having been superseded by this time), remains of which still provide interesting information on a technique once common throughout the coalfield. The colliery itself was sunk by the Writhlington Collieries group on Lord Hylton's estate in the parish of Kilmersdon, the incline to the GWR being completed in 1877, a year before the first coal was landed. Despite initial delays, Kilmersdon proved to be a successful enterprise. Renowned for its low accident rate and good industrial relations, the pit remained in operation until 1974, being the last (with Lower Writhlington) to close in the North Somerset Coalfield; Kilmersdon's winding wheel now stands as a monument outside the Radstock Museum. Also, the incline (which remained in use until closure), and another at Whitehaven, have the distinction of being the last of the gravity-operated inclines to work in this country.

For this visit, a route was taken past the Radstock parish church of St. Nicholas to the footpath which follows the stream up to Waterside. Here, along the northern edge of the valley, several WWII pillboxes can still be seen, remains of the defensive line which linked up with the coal canal through Wellow to Midford. Further upstream, on the south side of the valley, the main spoilheap of Kilmersdon colliery comes into sight - still a prominent feature despite later landscaping, and affording fine views of the surrounding coalfield and beyond. Spoil from the pit was carried over Kilmersdon Road to this point, along the colliery railway now marked by a public footpath. Also of interest nearby is Tynning Farm and Barton Meade Farm, first home of the Radstock Museum.

On the opposite side of the road the course of the railway now serves as an entrance to a housing and industrial development recently built on the colliery site, where virtually nothing remains of the mine itself except for a few walls. However, by making a detour in front of the miners' cottages in Kilmersdon road, the course of the railway from the colliery to the incline can be picked up again a few yards along Haydon Hill. The railway crossed the road here, and the track formation and its boundary hedges still exist on the east side, now used as a footpath past Haydon Farm. After several hundred yards the footpath emerges on the top of several substantial spoil heaps, now wooded, which constitute

the summit of the incline. This was the initial tipping area until 1900 when the railway was extended to the main site on the west side of Kilmersdon Road.

Initially horses were used to work the traffic here, the first known locomotive arriving in 1896. One of the locos, an 0-4-0 Peckett acquired from Bristol in 1929, was still working when the colliery closed, but by then two others had already been bought for preservation. Diesel locos were also introduced, but did not prove satisfactory. Full standard gauge 16-ton wagons descended the northern track of the incline, pulling an empty wagon up on the southern track. The speed of the wagons was controlled by two brake levers between the tracks near the summit, which acted on brake bands on the two horizontal cable drums in the winding house at the head of the incline. Two stops were placed at

the head of the incline to prevent wagons from accidentally plunging over the edge. By comparing the site today with photographs of the incline while still in operation, we were surprised to find various fixtures and fittings associated with the winding gear still remaining in place at the summit, together with the unexpected discovery of an arched structure under the embankment below the landing area. The 1883 OS map suggests that few changes had occurred in the neighbourhood since then, except for some additional tipping on the south side of the incline (before main tip was opened up), and on the north side to provide an enlarged area for extra sidings at the summit in about 1900.

Following the incline down to the base, where the two tracks joined, we were able to identify the line of the branches which joined the sidings on the main line. Originally there was only one branch, to the south, but a second branch to the north was added in about 1899, and the masonry bridging which carried the branches over the brook alongside the main line still exists in relatively good condition. On the opposite side of the main line, a few yards to the south, was the terminus of the 2ft 8½in gauge tramway incline which had brought coal over Frome Hill from the Writhlington collieries to the GWR since the 1860s. Early plans show screens and coke ovens at this point, but the line was closed in 1940, and although the site was not investigated on this occasion, little seems to have survived.

From the base of the incline it is still possible to return to Radstock along the course of the main line, although only as far as the former GWR wagon repair workshops. Here the railway has been fenced off in anticipation of the Radstock re-development plan, and a new footpath has been opened up through Meadow View to connect with Kilmersdon Road and St. Nicholas Church.

Mike Chapman

[There will be a chance to see a film of the Kilmersdon Inclined Plane in operation at the S.C.C.S. Social Evening on 28th January 2010: See "Diary Dates", P. 21 ]

