

Steam Passenger Boat at Purton on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal

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I dipped into my postcard collection for this article and am indebted to Hugh Conway-Jones and his books on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal for much of what follows. The postcard was produced from a photograph taken on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal and shows a passenger vessel heading for Gloucester having just passed through Purton Upper Bridge during the early years of the 20th century.



The message on the back of the postcard says “We sailed up this place. Lovely ride. Love Mildred” and was addressed to a Mrs Mayo of High Street, Stonehouse - no house number or name, just “Mrs Mayo, High Street, Stonehouse, Glos”. An Edward VII half penny stamp is stuck on the back and the postmark tells us it was sent from Sharpness on August 21st, but unfortunately the year is illegible.

The map is an extract from the first edition 25” Ordnance Survey map and shows the location of Purton’s two canal bridges and Purton Flour Mill. The chimney of the mill can be seen beyond the bridge on the far side of the canal. The mill was destroyed by fire not long after the photograph was taken, so is missing from the second edition of the OS map.



Purton bridge man's cottage can be seen adjacent to the bridge on the far side of the canal. These cottages were built around 1844 when it was decided the canal must remain open for 24 hours per day to compete with the railways. Purton's bridge man was, and still is, responsible for the operation of both Purton bridges, Upper and Lower.

The passenger vessel is either the Wave or the Lapwing. These boats were operated by the Francillon family for three generations and ran between Gloucester and Sharpness, stopping when required at any of the bridges to set down and pick up passengers. They were very popular with those travelling for business or pleasure, but sadly competition from motor buses forced them out of business in the early 1930s.

I enjoy my regular trips along the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal crewing on the Cotswold Canals Trust's vessels, but it must have been much more fun in Edwardian times on board the Wave or the Lapwing. If only I had a time machine!