

GSIA PROJECTS IN SUPPORT OF THE RESTORATION OF THE STROUDWATER CANAL

Ray Wilson

One of the first excursions made by the newly formed GSIA in 1964 was to the Stroudwater and Thames & Severn Canals. Our leader was Humphrey Household who published his detailed history of the Thames & Severn Canal in 1969. Similar walks held over the years have always drawn a good attendance. Indeed, many of our members are also members of the Cotswold Canals Trust which has for more than thirty years (under different names) vigorously promoted the restoration of the two canals. Through a combination of practical work and campaigning the Canals Trust have kept alive thoughts of a full restoration of both waterways. They were rewarded in 2001 when The Cotswold Canals Partnership was formed to build on the work already carried out by volunteers and to drive restoration plans forward.

The project to restore the Cotswold Canals is planned to be undertaken in phases:

- The restoration of the Stroudwater Navigation from Stonehouse to Stroud and 4km of the Thames & Severn from Stroud to Brimscombe Port and the establishment of a walking trail to Saul Junction (phase 1A)
- Restoration of the Stroudwater Navigation between Stonehouse and Saul Junction (phase 1B)
- The restoration of the Thames & Severn Canal from the Thames at Inglesham to the Cotswold Water Park running close to Cricklade
- The creation of a walking trail along the entire length of the Thames & Severn Canal between Brimscombe and Inglesham
- Connecting the Cotswold Canals to Swindon through the North Wilts Canal
- Restoring the Thames & Severn Canal from Brimscombe to Sapperton Tunnel west portal and from Sapperton Tunnel east portal to the Cotswold Water Park
- Restoring the 3.6km (2¼-mile) Sapperton Tunnel

In January 2006, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) formally awarded £11.9 million towards phase 1A of the restoration. At the same time the project was offered match funding of £6 million by the South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWERDA) £2.5 million by Gloucestershire County Council and £1 million by Stroud District Council.

Funding for phase 1B has been sought from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) Living Landmarks Programme. The BLF is responsible for giving out half the money for good causes raised by the National Lottery, and currently has a budget of about £630 million a year. Grants of between £10 million and £50 million will be made to a small number of successful projects. A key aim of this programme is to bring communities to work together to improve their quality of life and their environment. There were over 700 entries at the closing date in January 2006 and this number was subsequently reduced to a final short list of 23 projects in August 2006. The 23 projects have all received £250 thousand to develop their final bid. One of the key things needed that the applicants must demonstrate is that they have secured the

active involvement of the community at large. The Society was very keen to offer all the support it could and members and friends have responded by carrying out (or at least starting) no less than 29 projects related to the history and archaeology of the canal. All of this has been completed in the period November 2006 to May 2007 when the final bid for £18.9 million was submitted by the Cotswold Canals Partnership. The results are expected to be known in October 2007.

An overview of the projects is given on pages 12 to 19 of this issue and the following three articles were all produced as part of this work programme. Summaries of all 29 of the projects are given below. Much of the output of the work programme is available at the GSIA website (www.gsia.org.uk/canals/projects). Where there is material available on the Internet an asterisk (*) is shown against the relevant project title below. If the full report or article from a project is available online this is shown by the addition of a dagger (†) against the title of the project.

Whilst we very much hope that the canal bid will be successful, the work carried out is a valuable contribution, in its own right, to our understanding of the two canals, and the Society is keen that these activities will continue during the period of the restoration of the canals.

LIST OF PROJECTS

Project S01

Stroudwater Canal Features Influenced by the Ship Canal to Gloucester *†

by Hugh Conway-Jones

This paper highlights features along the half-mile stretch of the Stroudwater Canal from Saul Junction to Whitminster Lock that have been influenced by the needs of the Gloucester & Sharpness ship canal which was built across the line of the earlier Stroudwater Canal in the 1820s. Information is given about how these features that can be seen today illustrate past concerns about forming the junction, the collection of tolls, water supply, dredging, land drainage and lock design and operation.

Project S02

Stone on the Canal *†

by Arthur Price

This short paper gives an account of the stone used in the construction of the Stroudwater and Thames & Severn canals. It also discusses the use of the canals to move large quantities of stone as a cargo in the first half of the 19th century. Some of this went to South Wales, some to the Midlands and some as far as London as well as locally. Local stone was used in some highly prestigious projects such as St Georges Chapel in Windsor Castle in 1820 and the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament in the 1840s. The wealth of information available from the canal companies' tonnage books for the entries relating to stone is explained.

Project S03

Coal and Canal: The Impact of the Stroudwater Canal on the Domestic and Commercial Life of Eastington *†

by Stephen Mills

For centuries fine woollen cloth had been made in the parish of Eastington and as the industry became more mechanised, steam engines began to play an increasingly important role. These

required a reliable supply of coal throughout the year, but the often poor state of local roads frequently made this difficult. It was not until the long-awaited Stroudwater Canal eventually cut through the parish that Eastington, along with many other industrial centres along its route, finally had a reliable lifeline to the outside world. Throughout much of the canal's working life, it was the transport of coal that was to be the most important cargo, although alongside coal, large quantities of stone for building and road maintenance were also moved by water.

In its earlier days, it not only acted as a conduit for goods and commodities, but also as a provider of news and information, carried by passing boats. Its impact must have been significant, perhaps as great as when the M5 cut through the parish during the 1970s. Like the M5, it was doubtless the object of much local attention and even today, in its current non-operational form, it continues to impact on the locality and provide a focus for study and activity associated both with its past and future.

Project S04

The Stroudwater Pillboxes: A Review of the WWII Pillboxes Along the Stroudwater Canal *†

by Alan Strickland

This report has been produced by volunteers from the Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology. The report reviews the WWII pillboxes situated along the Stroudwater Canal, examining the reasons and purpose for their construction and locations as part of the overall defence strategy of the period. The design and construction of each pillbox is individually reviewed and illustrated, identifying particular features of interest. The historical significance of the pillboxes at local level and as part of our national military heritage is discussed and considered in relation to their long term conservation as part of the proposals for the restoration of the Stroudwater Canal. All illustrations and photographs are included as appendices at the end of the report.

Project S05

Stonehouse Parish: Tithe Survey 1839 and 1841 Census

by Janet Hudson *†

This study has identified the ownership and occupiers of buildings bordering the canal in Stonehouse in 1839 using the Tithe survey. A small amount of additional information has been taken from the 1841 census for Stonehouse.

Project S06

Eastington, Whitminster and Fretherne with Saul Parishes: Tithe Surveys and 1841 Census *†

Compiled by Paul Davies

This study has identified the ownership and occupiers of land bordering the canal in Eastington in 1839, Whitminster in 1839 and Fretherne with Saul in 1839 using the Tithe survey. A small amount of additional information has been obtained from the 1841 census for these parishes.

Project S07

Traffic on the Stroudwater Canal: 1775 to 1822

Compiled by Alan Tucker *

This project provides an overview of the trade on the canal between 1775 and 1822. It has resulted in a number of summary documents and spreadsheets being produced to assist workers on the social and economic history of the canal. The study is based mainly on the Tonnage Books of the Stroudwater Company but some use has been made of the Tonnage Books of the Thames & Severn Company.

The newly produced documents give details of such things as the accounting procedures of the Stroudwater Company, biannual cash totals in the tonnage books handed over to the treasurer, the vessels and their masters. Of particular interest is the wide range of goods that was handled including large quantities of copper. The files provide a wealth of information and are now also available on the Internet.

Project S08

Traffic on the Stroudwater Canal: 1881

Prepared by Hugh Conway-Jones *†

This paper presents a summary of the vessel movements and cargoes recorded in the tonnage books for the Stroudwater Canal in the early months of 1881 with some analysis. In this period, there were over 800 cargo-carrying trips, mainly conveying goods eastwards into the Stroud valley and only a few taking goods outwards. Most of the cargoes comprised coal brought by barge from Lydney or Bullo Pill, coal brought by narrow canal boat from the Midlands or Bullo Pill and roadstone brought by barge from Bristol or Chepstow.

Project S09

Some Vessels Associated with the Stroudwater Canal *†

by Joan Tucker

These notes give details of 20 vessels used on the Stroudwater Canal. The notes are the result of research carried out by the Author for her book *The Stroudwater Canal* published in 2003. The dates of the references run from 1795 to 1822. Where possible the information includes where the vessel was built, its owner and master at different times, the nature of the cargoes and where it operated. Much of the information given here does not appear in the book due to limitations of space.

Project S10

Some Vessels in the Purton Boat Graveyard Associated with the Stroudwater Canal *

by Paul Barnett

The Author has made an extensive study of the vessels that have ended their days in the Purton Boat Graveyard on the foreshore of the River Severn just to the north of Sharpness Docks.

During this study some information was found on vessels that had operated on the Stroudwater Canal. This information is provided in these notes.

Project S11

Servants (Employees) of the Stroudwater Company *†

by Joan Tucker

These notes contain details of 37 company servants (i.e. employees) of the Company of Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation. This is a valuable record as it gives an insight into some of the actual people associated with the canal. The dates of the references run from 1788 to the 1930s.

This information was gathered by the Author when researching her book The Stroudwater Canal published in 2003 but much of the information does not appear in the book due to limitations of space.

Project S12

Public Houses Along or Near to the Stroudwater and Thames & Severn Canals *†

The Gloucestershire Pubs website (www.gloucestershirepubs.co.uk) provides histories of all known pubs in the County and includes details of the landlords where these are available. Geoff Sandles, the creator of the website, has kindly agreed that the information on the pubs in the vicinity of the Stroudwater and Thames and Severn canals can be printed out and included in this resource pack for research on the Canal. Also included here is a fictitious account by Geoff Sandles of a boat trip along the Stroudwater Canal in which most of the pubs were visited! Users should note that the Gloucestershire Pubs website is updated continuously and they should refer to it directly for the latest information.

Project S13

The Ford Brothers of Ryeford *

by Peter Ford

In the mid 19th century Ryeford Mill on the southern bank of the Stroudwater Canal at Stonehouse ceased to be a cloth mill. It then became wholly a corn mill owned by the Ford family. This account describes the Ford Brothers' involvement with Ryeford Mill and their use of the Stroudwater Canal for carrying wheat and flour.

Project S14

Tape Recorded Reminiscences of Rev Malcolm Donald Relating to His Campaign to Prevent Closure of the Canal (1954). *†

by Penny Fernando

In 1953-54 the Rev. Malcolm Donald, almost by accident, organised the Stroudwater Restoration Committee to oppose a Bill that was being presented to Parliament which would allow the Stroudwater Canal to be abandoned. The fight to conserve the canal divided Stroud, although the Committee does not seem to have had great support from the man in the street. The Bill was passed and the Canal was abandoned by Act of Parliament in 1954. However the Stroud case made the national press, which brought the plight of canals to public notice and raised popular support for canals to be conserved for recreational uses.

In 1979 Rev. Donald made more than three hours of tape recordings describing the saga and the tapes were subsequently deposited in Gloucestershire Archives . These notes describing the key events back in the 1950s were made in 2007 after listening to all the tapes.

Project S15

Review of Cotswold Canals Heritage Database (Structure and Implementation)

by Ray Wilson

The structure of the Microsoft Access databases created by Cotswold Archaeology in 2003 as part of the Cotswold Canals Heritage Survey has been reviewed. The databases have been rationalised so that the various database tables have been combined into a single table incorporating all the relevant information.

The data is now available on the Internet in a searchable form using a MySQL database. At present, only relatively simple searches can be performed but more complex searches are being developed following feedback from users. It is planned to link the web-based database to the photographs being taken in other projects.

These notes describe the review of the existing database and present structure of the database together with a description of all the fields in the new table. Details of the implementation of the online database are also given.

Project S16

Review of Cotswold Canals Heritage Database (Content) *

by Ray Wilson

The comments and corrections submitted by various individuals and organisations in 2003 on the Cotswold Canals Heritage Survey carried out by Cotswold Archaeology have been reviewed. This report shows how these comments and corrections have been compared with the contents of the Cotswold Archaeology Report and Database as finally issued. The aim was to ensure that the comments and corrections have been suitably addressed or identified for future work.

In addition a short programme of walks along the canal for GSIA Members has been completed. Points of interest were noted along the walk, and used in updating the content of the database (in the section from Saul Junction to The Ocean, Stonehouse).

Project S17

Review of Archive Sources in UK Record Offices for Stroudwater Canal Records *†

The National Archives A2A Internet website allows users to search and browse for information about archives in England and Wales, dating from the eighth century to the present day. These archives are cared for in local record offices and libraries, universities, museums and national and specialist institutions across England and Wales, where they are made available to the public.

Printouts have been made from the National Archives A2A Internet web site of all references to "Stroudwater Canal" or "Stroudwater Navigation". These are mainly references to collections held in Gloucestershire Archives, but there are some references to other repositories. Whilst the material in Gloucestershire Archives is relatively well known these listings have shown a number of records outside Gloucestershire which may well extend existing lines of enquiry and start others. Users should note that the A2A website is updated continuously and they should refer to it directly for the latest information.

Project S18

GSIA Journal Articles Relating to the Stroudwater Canal *†

A number of articles have been published in recent years in the GSIA Annual Journal which relate to the Stroudwater Canal. Titles of these articles are provided here and electronic versions are available on the GSIA website.

The Articles are:-

Stroudwater Canal Cranes: (Part One), by Ray Wilson, [1994] pp.57-62 Stroudwater Canal Cranes:

(Part Two) The Dudbridge Crane, by Ray Wilson, [1995] pp.21-25

Coal Pen At Ryeford Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, by Joan Tucker, [2001] pp.30-33

Coal And Steam -The Arrival of Steam Power in Stroud's Woollen Mills, by Stephen Mills, [2004] pp.42-52

Restoration of The Cotswold Canals, by Theo Stening, [2001] pp.22-29

The Cotswold Canals Restoration: An Update in July 2003, by Theo Stening, [2002] pp.44-45

The Restoration of the Cotswold Canals: August 2004 Update, by Theo Stening, [2003] pp.59-61

The Restoration of the Cotswold Canals: October 2005 Update, by Theo Stening, [2004] pp.59-62

The Restoration of the Cotswold Canals: September 2006 Update, by Theo Stening, [2005] pp.28-29

Project S19

Kemmett Canal: A Photographic Survey in 2007 *

by John Berry

This report describes a photographic record of the present state of the line of the partly successful Kemmett Canal (1759-1763). John Kemmett's scheme involved making the River Frome navigable between the various mills along the route. At the mills it was intended that cargoes would be transhipped in containers between boats on the different levels above and below the weir using a crane. It is believed the navigation may have reached Bond's Mill at Stonehouse.

A full index to the 161 photographs that have been taken is provided together with a brief account of the history of the Kemmett Navigation. Proposals are also given for future work to relate the physical features still visible on the ground with the surviving maps of the period.

Project S20

Photographic Record of the Stroudwater Canal (Phase 1b Section) Interim Report

In 2002 Martin Phillips, a canal boat owner, took a series of photographs showing the then state of the Thames & Severn Canal and included these images on his web site. He will be taking a similar series of photographs of Section 1b of the Stroudwater Canal during the Summer of 2007.

It is planned that a significant number of these photographs will feature items identified in the Cotswold Canals Heritage Database which is now available on-line. It is intended that, in due course, there will be direct links between entries in the database and the relevant photographs.

Project S21

Survey of Historic Photographs Relating to the Stroudwater Canal

by Ray Wilson

The contents of what is perhaps one of the best collections of historic postcards and photographs in the Stroud area, has been reviewed by kind permission of its creator, Howard

Beard. The main aim of this review was to identify postcard images and photographs of key items like the swing bridges which have been long since replaced by fixed structures. In some instances the details shown of components like hand rails on the old swing bridges will assist the engineers designing replacement structures as part of the current restoration programme. The most important images are listed in this document.

Project S22

Recording Mr Les Pugh's Memories of the Canal in Operation in the 1920s *

by Ray Wilson

Mr Les Pugh was born on 8 August 1915 in a cottage on the Whitminster House Estate close to the Stroudwater Canal. His family later moved to Eastington and from there he attended Marling School in the late 1920s. Mr Pugh has clear memories of some of the people who worked on the canal and the boats that operated at this time. This account has been written up from notes made during two visits to Mr Pugh in early 2007.

Project S23

The Wharfs on the Stroudwater Canal Interim Report *

by Ray Wilson

This is an interim report of a project focussing on each of the main wharves on the Stroudwater Canal. The aim is to integrate the results of several studies such as historical and modern photographs of the sites, tithe map and census information, details of employees, the vessels that called there and traffic studies.

Ultimately this should provide a clearer picture of the impact of the canal on the community in the 19th century.

Project S24

Stroudwater Canal Walks (Phase 1B) for GSIA Members *†

by Ray Wilson

Three 2½ hour field visits have been organised for GSIA Members to explore the line of the Canal (Phase 1b Section). This is a key activity in the review and updating of the contents of the Cotswold Canals Heritage Survey carried out by Cotswold Archaeology in 2003.

Field Visit 1 Sunday 17 December 2006 Saul Junction to Bristol Road

Field Visit 2 Sunday 28 January 2007 Bristol Road to Eastington

Field Visit 3 Sunday 29 April 2007 Eastington to The Ocean (Stonehouse)

Project S25

Stroudwater Canal Inspection Reports (1908-1978) *†

by Joan Tucker

A collection of 16 20th century Stroudwater Canal inspection reports were recently discovered at the Stroud offices of Goldinghams, a firm of solicitors. They are the successors to Little and Bloxham, solicitors. Mr W R Bloxham was Chairman of the Stroudwater Company for many years and at least one Mr Little was also associated with the Company. The reports have been made available for transcription through the good offices of Mr Michael Little of Goldinghams and they have now been placed in Gloucestershire Archives.

All 16 transcripts are presented here as they contain a wealth of information concerning routine and more major maintenance of the various structures on the canal. The dates of the reports are 1908, 1910, 1912, 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1920, 1923 (two), 1924, 1929, 1932 (two), 1953 and 1978.

Project S26

Geology of the Frome Valley between Wheatenhurst and Eastington *†

by Penny Fernando

This is a review of the geology of the section of the canal where a new line is likely to be needed near the A38 Gloucester to Bristol road. It includes a simplified geological map of the area.

Project S27

List of Maps Relevant to Stroudwater Canal Research Projects *†

Compiled by Hugh Conway-Jones

This note presents a list of maps in the Gloucestershire Archives that are likely to provide information relevant to research projects associated with the Stroudwater Canal corridor. It has been compiled for the benefit of future researchers and it is intended that it will be extended in due course to include the route of the Thames & Severn Canal.

Project S28

“The Trow” 1990–1995: Articles Relating to the History and Archaeology of the Canals

*† Compiled by Penny Fernando

This is a listing of all the items relating to the history and archaeology of the Stroudwater and Thames and Severn Canals that appeared in issues 71 to 90 of the Trow (the Newsletter of the Cotswold Canals Trust) during the period 1990 to 1995. Where an article includes any photographs this has been noted. It is intended that, in due course, further issues will be reviewed and the index extended accordingly.

Project S29

Tithe Map Information for Areas Affected by Possible New Line of Canal (Phase 1b) *†

Compiled by Paul Davies

Road improvements over the years in the parishes of Whitminster and Eastington mean that a new line will be needed in this area for the restored Stroudwater Canal. The new line will lie in a roughly rectangular region intersected by the A38 Gloucester to Bristol road. This region is bounded to the north by the original line of the canal, to the south by the present line of the River Frome, Westfield Bridge to the east and about 500m west of the A38 to the west.

As one aspect of a heritage assessment of this area the relevant tithe maps and apportionments have been examined at Gloucestershire Archives. These date from 1838 for Whitminster and 1839 for Eastington. Listed here is the full information given in the apportionments for the various plots of land in the above area. This information for each plot includes the number identifying it on the map, the name of the plot and the use it was being put to, the owner of the plot and the occupier if different, the area of the plot and the value and type of tithe payable.