

THE HEREFORD WHARFINGER

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MEMORIES OF CITY CANAL

I was fortunate to be able to talk to Mr. Stinton of Hereford who has lived near the city end of the canal all his life and whose father could recall the canal when it was still in operation.

The canal, he recalls, was open as far as the gasworks until the end of the Second World War when it was purchased by the Railway. It began then to be filled in with glass bottles from the old jam works in Widemarsh Street. However even before this advancement in the decline of the canal, the water had been polluted and used as a place for dumping. He recalled that the canal was a nice place for a towpath walk, up to the tunnel entrance, but was unfit for boating, swimming or ice-skating, although his father had skated on it some years before. He remembers that the Aylestone Tunnel entrance was particularly attractive and impressive with steep banks, forty or more feet high in the approaching cutting with rocky outcrops and wild flowers on its sides.

The timber company which operated at the Canal Basin was called Jordan's Timber. The brook which remains today, running along the the Police playing fields behind the Railway Station, occupies the former line of the canal and the entire area now covered by playing fields was the loading bay for timber boats. A second large timber company had a loading bay by the Technical College.

The "timber yard brook" continued on past the basin. It was used by a tannery called Heron's Skinyard. This later became the first Hereford gasworks. (Mr. Stinton's father worked here) Ayles Brook which now flows into Yazor Brook (formerly Tan Brook, for obvious reasons) was the feeder for the canal.

The canal used to run under an old stone bridge with iron railings (still existing on Burcott Road). Mr. Stinton remembers this bridge after this section of canal had been filled in. A gentleman called Mr. Blackwell kept a small pony in a makeshift stable under the arch of the bridge with an adjacent paddock to the south. The pony was used to pull a work trap.

Further north, the canal ran under a second bridge for the railway line before entering Aylestone tunnel. This bridge is very narrow, seemingly too narrow for a canal and towpath to pass under. A road now cuts under this bridge to gain access to a factory.

Many thanks to Mr. Stinton for helping me with this information. I hope I have not let him down by reproducing any facts incorrectly.

J. White (Editor)

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We are seeking a volunteer to become Catering Officer for the Society. Duties would include selling tea/coffee and biscuits/cakes at Society functions and delegating the work when unavailable.

Please contact Nigel Jeffries, the Secretary, if you feel you may be able to help.

CANON FROME NATURE WALK

Several members of the Hereford and Gloucester Canal Society met at Canon Frome Court for a walk with a naturalist along the canal and to search out a feeder from the River Frome. It was a "family occasion" with many children in attendance, and the sun not only shone on us but scorched us.

Canon Frome Court, formerly a school now converted into flats, conceals many secrets within its grounds. We left the house walking north west through beautiful gardens to the River Frome. Here we stopped and examined a wooden chalet built in the 1880's (a copy of Queen Victoria's at Osbourne House) and a waterfall. To the right of the waterfall stands a small brick built building constructed in the 1800's by the Canal Company. It now houses at one end a 140 volt 80 amp. D.C. generator which supplied electricity powered from a water turbine. Behind the waterfall we could see the flood gate lying in the bed of the river. Approximately fifteen feet upstream the Canal Company cut a ditch (now filled in) to feed the summit level of the canal. Only when water built up behind the flood gate and topped it by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches would it flow through the cut and culvert the half a mile to the canal. We followed neatly trimmed paths past some boggy ground where beautiful specimens of Yellow Flags were in flower. On crossing a small wooden foot bridge we were shown the brick entrance to the culvert which is in very good condition. The culvert continued underground as far as the road to Canon Frome then crossing a field to the canal. Turning south again we passed over an inspection chamber in the school playing field. This was also in good condition and it has two other drainage pipes connected into it. We followed the line across the fields towards the canal by eye as crops are growing there. Passing between the Church and the house we rejoined the main drive and walked to the bridge which some of us had driven over without noticing. It really is in excellent condition in spite of a fair number of passing cars. The canal below is very reedy but there is still a little water and the course is clearly visible on either side of the bridge. On top of the bridge parapet there is a plaque saying "Joseph Of Bromsgrove 1883". We turned east along the road to Canon Frome and could see two hundred yards ahead, a hump in the road under which the culvert passes. Although shown as open on the 1:25,000 First Series Ordnance Survey map, the cut is now filled in. We crossed the ploughed field to the canal (Grid Ref.: 644427) to a bridge. The canal has clear water here and the trees are very tall on each side. Some trees with their trunks well into the water have died, suggesting that the canal is much wider now than when in operation; a landslip further down perhaps. It really is a haven for wildlife as it is so peaceful here, though someone had managed to bring an old car across the field to dump it in the canal. What is it about canals which brings out the worst in people?

We returned to Frome Court across a redirected footpath known locally as the "H1", for our tea. This was followed by a most interesting slideshow of canals in use, canals being restored and of particular interest - slides of "our" canal taken during the last ten years, of great value to the Canal Society as a historical record. We departed after a most informative afternoon

PLANTS OF THE CANAL: Cowslip, cow-parsley, red campion, yellow flag, water lilies.

VERTEBRATES: Rabbit, hare, squirrel, fox.

BIRDS: Duck, coot, swallow, jay, crow, magpie, jackdaw, blackbird, sparrow, robin, thrush, starling, wood pigeon, turtle dove.

INVERTEBRATES: Damsel fly, cabbage white, meadow brown and painted lady butterflies.

IVORY TOWERS AND BALLARD'S BRIDGES

Your Secretary and Chairman travelled recently over to the Ivory towers of County Hall, feeling rather like the backwoods boys coming to town, to look at the plans for widening Hereford's Roman Road, in particular the point where it crosses the canal.

We had been uneasy about this area for some time. It seemed obvious that the widening of the Roman Road was bound to come sooner or later, as anyone who drives along it regularly will know. It also seemed very likely that the rather steep rise from the Aylestone Hill roundabout to the canal would be smoothed out, destroying the canal headroom and with it any hopes of eventually restoring this section of canal.

Although nothing had appeared in the local press about it we wrote to Mr. Jones, the County Surveyor, who in his reply led us to believe that nothing imminent was planned, and such plans as they did have had been drawn up so long ago they would need to be virtually redrawn. Nevertheless we decided to go and have a look at them, and found the true story to be somewhat different.

In paragraph 10.3.2 of the County Council's Transport Policies and Programme, it is stated: "A sum of £250,000 has been included in the County Council's Capital Programme, subject to a contribution of £30,000 by a developer, for the commencement of the improvement of Roman Road, from the Aylestone Hill roundabout towards the existing railway bridge. However a Public Enquiry has been held and the results are awaited. A sum of £250,000 is therefore included in this Submission for 1984/5".

The Public Enquiry has been held and has gone in the developer's favour, the County Council have already purchased a strip of land to the north of this part of the Roman Road, and no doubt the developer is pressing them to go ahead. The widened road would not only destroy the canal headroom (being in fact at water-level) but would also involve complete destruction of the bridge.

The bridge is one of the few remaining canal structures within the city of Hereford. It is far more pleasing aesthetically than the much altered bridge in Widemarsh Street. Seen from below it is markedly "skew", although less so than its famous counterpart, and is entirely stone built. With its original parapets and railings replaced (which would not be too difficult - parts of both are still in existence) it could form a pleasant and interesting feature at the side of the new road, carry the pavement that would run alongside the road and possibly be the end-point of a canal side walk.

At the moment we are compiling a report on the bridge with an artist's impression of how it could look in its restored condition when seen from a widened road that has been shifted a few yards to the north (in the existing plan it does in fact run largely to the north, and only clips the side of the bridge).

Regrettably, any efforts to maintain the canal headroom would be doomed to failure, but for Stephen Ballard's bridge, all is not lost.

Go and have a look at it sometime, from canal level. Then tell us what you think about it.

R.A.

EVENTS

- 11th September Newerk Canal Walk.
- 25th September Working Party at 10am.-4pm. Ref: 607442
- 12th October E.G.M. Also a talk by David Bookes
"Thames and Severn Link - past, present
and future". At School Hall of Hereford
Cathedral School, Castle Street at 8 pm.
- October A canal boat may be hired for a day
from Worcester in late October. All
interested please phone Philip Ashurst
(Hereford 57245)
- October 27th Talk by Ian Walker: "Severn Corridor". At
the Wheatstone Hall, Gloucester. at 7.30pm
There will be an admission charge.
- 9th November Joint meeting of H + GCS and Gloucester
Inland Waterways Authority. Talk by
David Bick on "H + GCS". At Wheatstone
Hall at 8pm. 30p entrance fee.
- 7th December (30p) Talk by Graham Ebbles: "Why canals?"
At Hereford Cathedral School Hall at 8pm
- January Trip to Boat Show. (Earls Court)
- January Slides evening + speaker.
- February Skittles evening.
- 7th March Waterways Film Show.
- 11th April A.G.M. + speakers.
- April / May Annual Dinner.

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