

*Stroudwater, Thames & Severn  
Canal Trust Limited*

# THE TROW

*The Official Magazine for Members and Friends  
working to restore the Cotswold Canals.*

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Summer 1987

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30p

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### COPY DATES

SPRING 10th February  
 SUMMER 10th May  
 AUTUMN 10th August  
 WINTER 10th November

THE VIEWS AND OPINIONS IN  
 THIS MAGAZINE DO NOT  
 NECESSARILY REPRESENT THOSE  
 OF THE "STROUDWATER, THAMES  
 & SEVERN CANAL TRUST LTD."

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## Editorial

Production of the Trow every quarter takes up a surprising amount of time and money. Fortunately I recently purchased a gleaming new electronic typewriter which was well worth the expense as it has made preparation of this issue a far easier matter.

A great percentage of membership fees are taken up by the cost of producing a quarterly magazine, so could I please ask members who think they may not pay the current rates to make a quick check with the list in David Boakes' report on page 3. As Editor of the Trow I do hope you think it worthwhile to bring your subscription up to date.

My personal circumstances are about to change as I will soon be moving away from Stroud to work in London. However, I shall continue with production of the Trow. My new address should be available in time for the Autumn Trow, but in the meantime please send your copy to the usual one.

Finally, I hope that this issue holds something of interest to the majority of our readers, be it a Branch report, another poem from Jo Silver or the rather technical account of the official abandonment of the Stroudwater Canal.

FRONT COVER: Clint Taylor sets sail in one of the trip boats from Bowbridge Lock to Griffin Mill Lock.

## Secretary's Report

Since my last report our activities have gained more and more momentum, and each day the state of the canals is improving. We are now assured of an initial input from Stroud District Council of £8,000 which has been matched by a similar amount from the limited resources of the Company of Proprietors.

Our Manpower Services Commission team, under the supervision of Nigel Young and Jim Donisthorpe, is really showing its worth and ability. In fact, we are one of the few Community Programmes that appears to have a waiting list of potential employees. By the time you read this, one team will be working at Coates with the intention of producing a length of permanent water in the Eastern end of the Tunnel and Kings Reach, to enable a trip boat operation to take place later this year.

The Stonehouse Pound is now up to its working water height, since the fitting of stop planks. To the uninformed observer it would appear that the bricklaying team is creating havoc within Newtown Lock. They are in fact carefully stripping out the rotten brickwork in order to rebuild the chamber for gating, and it is anticipated that this work and the remaining work on Blunder Lock will be completed by this team before the end of September.

It is unfortunate that whilst this work is being carried out we are being subjected to apparently organised campaigns of vandalism and theft in the Eastington area. It is to be hoped that the police enquiries will result in the apprehension of the culprits. In the meantime we have lost or had damaged about £2,000 worth of equipment, not counting the timewasting caused by these senseless activities. A prime example was the theft and mindless vandalism of the work boat "Aline" which was found with seven holes smashed in the hull.

On the volunteer front, Tony Jones and his team have designed and built two new trip boats which operate every Sunday at Bowbridge, and Doug Blake and his team are rebuilding the former Ashby Canal steel trip boats to operate at Ryeфорд.

We have been the subject of considerable criticism, mainly from a Mr. David Tait of Thrupp, regarding our restoration activities at Bowbridge. According to Mr. Tait, the Angling Correspondent for the Cotswold Town & Country Magazine, we are destroying the natural environment on this section of the canal. It is most interesting that whilst checking through some Trust records recently I discovered that this prime aquatic habitat was in fact being leased by Gloucestershire County Council for grazing in the 1970's; the present environment is solely due to your Trust's activities but, to quote Mr. Tait, "Canal clearance is marvellous work, but anglers are finding it a mixed blessing, with the gains of clearance being lost to boats, punts, canoes and rafts". It is also most interesting that whilst Mr. Tait claims that the removal of weeds and plants places fish and "toad frogs" in jeopardy, he was glad to see that a large pike was caught and killed at South Cerney, and to quote him again, "Goodness knows how many trout were eaten by this whopper". It would appear that Mr. Tait's sole interest is in angling and conservation for the benefit of the angling scene. What he forgets is that we are creating an amenity for the public at large, and there are many, many people, myself included, who

wish to enjoy this man-made waterway in our own ways, be it boating, walking, bird-watching, fishing or the study of all types of plants and wildlife. Personally I admire that efficient hunting machine, the pike, and abhor his senseless slaughter.

I have been receiving many requests regarding the possibilities of boating on the local canals. The current situation is that for the Stroudwater Canal enquiries should be addressed to Mrs. G. Simpson, Clerk to the Company of Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation, c/o Winterbothams, Rowcroft, Stroud, Glos., and for the Trust waters between Wallbridge and Hope Mill to me. Angling between Bowbridge and Ham Mills comes within the jurisdiction of the Trust's lease, and from the commencement of the new season day tickets will be issued, with a preferential rate to Trust members.

Work is progressing on the East/West Bypass and we have established excellent relations with the Contractors and the Glos. County Council site engineers, and we must re-emphasise that there is a plan, previously published in the Trow, for which we have outline planning permission, to ensure the continuity of the waterway link around the road. At present this will not be constructed by Gloucestershire County Council, but will be part of our 6½ mile Pike Bridge to Hope Mill programme. The cost of the new section is estimated commercially at about £450,000 and cannot commence until after the Bypass is completed.

A careful check on our membership income indicates that a high proportion of you members do not pay the current rate. I am instructed by the Trust Council to inform you that you should now pay the current rates, which are:

Adults	£8.00 (minimum)
Family	£10.00 (minimum)
Youth (under 18)	£5.00 (minimum)
Pensioner	£5.00 (minimum)
Affiliation	£10.00 (minimum)
Life	£200.00 (minimum)

Whilst you will remain a member of the Trust, you will no longer receive copies of the Trow after this issue. All members in this position will receive individual letters requesting that they pay the increase. We are losing approximately £2,000 a year due to these oversights, and quite frankly we can no longer afford to subsidise people in this way.

We would also ask that should you not already do so, that all members consider making out Deeds of Covenant for their subscriptions as this increases our income from this source by approximately 30%. Details from all Council Members or the Membership Secretary.

#### People Facts

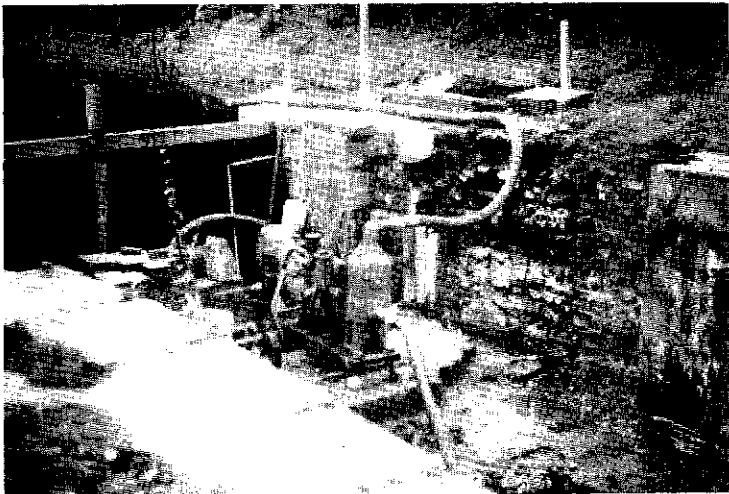
Mrs. Enid Airey is a founder member of the Trust, but she was actively campaigning for the retention and restoration of the Stroudwater Navigation in the 1950's. Almost single handedly she fought, at her own expense, very nearly successfully, the 1954 Abandonment Order. In recognition of her great interest and

support to the fledgling Stroudwater Canal Society and more recently the Trust, your Trust Council has offered Mrs. Airey Honorary Life Membership. We are delighted that she has accepted this accolade.

Our recent M.S.C. Senior Supervisor, Howard Lucas, has recently resigned in order to return to his first love, historic sailing ships. Our present progress on the M.S.C. Scheme is largely due to Howard's perseverance and efforts. We wish him every success in his new venture.

The Trust Treasurer, Mrs. Anne Garfitt, has recently tendered her resignation, and we thank Anne for her perseverance and dedication over the period of her treasurership when the Trust has expanded to its present size. She saw the Trust through the difficult times when it moved from a mainly volunteer, to its present employing organisation. The Trust would welcome any offers from suitably qualified members to continue Anne's good work as soon as possible.

DAVID H. BOAKES



The head of Newtown Lock showing the stop planks, pump, and the walls in various states of repair.

## M.S.C. Work Report

The Winter period saw a large drop of morale amongst the ranks of our M.S.C. workforce. However, the bad weather wasn't the worst of our setbacks. Five chainsaws and a strimmer were stolen from our site hut at Newtown, along with various tools which we had borrowed from the volunteers' workhut at Eastington. This of course was a severe blow to our financial status from which it will take a while to recover. Increasing vandalism of a vindictive nature has also been a major problem; one of the worst examples to date being the sickening destruction of the "Aline" which was moored above Newtown Lock. Many hours of skill and hard work had gone into the construction of this work-punt by Tony Jones and his group of dedicated volunteers. The co-operation of the police and public will, we hope, help to eradicate such nonsensical behaviour.

Our Ryeford based dredging team, now under the supervision of James Donisthorpe, broke all records during the first half of the present scheme. Within six months the stretch of canal between Ryeford Basin and the cycle-track Skew Bridge had been cleared of silt. Sadly we had to abandon the tipping site in April due to the expiry of the lease. However, the Dredging Gang will not be redundant while David Boakes makes enquiries into a new site. They have been busy renewing piling adjacent to Ryeford Swing Bridge where residents' gardens were slowly slipping into the canal. Jim Palmer, our mechanical engineer, has been completing work on the reed-cutter engine. The boat itself was renovated by Doug Blake of the Western Branch for which we thank him profusely. The dredger and crane have also been serviced by our senior plant operators. Future work will involve repairs to the bed of Sapperton Tunnel and the installation of stop planks at Tarlton Bridge and the dam at the Roundhouse. Leaks in the canal bed between these two points will also be dealt with.

The Brick Gang have shown great ability since they returned from a bricklaying course at Gloucester Skill Centre. The two wing walls at the head of Newtown Lock have been completely stripped and rebuilt. The adjacent spill weir was cleaned out and repointed and the coping stones were replaced. At great expense we installed stop planks at the head of the lock chamber to hold back the canal whilst renovation work is carried out on the lock chamber itself. This operation will be time consuming due to the fact that the walls are very badly bowed and will have to be completely rebuilt. Scaffolding will soon be professionally erected to enable us to commence the stripping of the old walls. Luckily, the old bricks seem to be in great demand by builders who specialize in period brickwork.

The Bank Gang have done an excellent job of general clearance between Eastington and Ryeford. Vincent Cunningham, the new ganger, keeps a watchful eye on their progress, one of his major responsibilities being the preservation of the natural habitats of canal wildlife. Within a few weeks the gang will be cleaning the canal bed between the Sapperton Tunnel portal and the Roundhouse. The landlord of the "Tunnel House Inn" has kindly granted permission for us to situate our work hut alongside his barn where, hopefully, vandalism and theft will be kept to a minimum. Now that Spring has arrived we will be forging ahead with all the vigour and enthusiasm we can muster. However, we still need all the support we can get; from the members of the Trust, as well as from the general public.

NIGEL C. YOUNG (SENIOR SUPERVISOR)    JAMES R. DONISTHORPE (SUPERVISOR)

## Thames End Branch

The report for this quarter is mainly the mixture as before, with additions. The lock gates are now finished, after being flipped with breathtaking ease by a large earth mover, courtesy of Roger Constants once again. Our more trendy readers will doubtless have heard of a "mean machine" - well this one had a generous owner and, hey-presto! - our gates found themselves inverted, to the cheers of the assembled work party. Attention has now moved to the pivot arrangements at the top of the lock and how to put gates in, see if they work and take them out again if they don't, probably several times.

Also at the lock, there have been dramatic developments involving the collapse of the retaining wall and causeway at the South end. Most of the earth bank and the retaining wall started to give way, including the bit across the corner which has been supported by a bit of corrugated iron for years. The scaffolding platform from which the pump was removed last Autumn, was pushed over by the large blocks of stone and it all began to look rather messy. Fortunately the responsibility for doing something about it lay with Wiltshire County Council, who arrived on the scene with a very large pump, an excavator and a work party with a five day week rather than one weekend a month.

The results are impressive, decorative even, and it would be nice if we could get the adjacent bits of the canal wet, if not actually navigable. There are now stylish white guard rails, and they were even kind enough to leave a bit which could be removed when we come to clear our machines off the site. Our fast thinking watchdog, Ken Burgin did try to persuade them to build a bridge, but in the present conditions of financial stringency they said they didn't have time to hold enough raffles to raise the cash. It was worth a try, and we suppose that provoking wry smiles in County Hall is good for public relations.

The area now looks greatly improved and we suggest you go out to have a look, noting at the same time the date of the next working party displayed on the notice board. Finally, due to unavoidable absences of Branch Officers, our Branch A.G.M. has been put back to 14th July, usual time and place.

DERYCK WATKINSON



# Western Branch

As I tied up the trip boat on Sunday, a black shadow came between me and the sun and, once again, it was that Trow Editor wanting copy for his magazine! I knew the day was too nice to last, but don't worry Dave, here I am chewing my biro to shreds to try to produce something interesting and informative (?) for your readers.

Of late the Branch efforts seem to have been almost totally committed to getting the boat tripping under way. Both the new boats have now been launched at Bowbridge and the fine weather at Easter got us off to a good start with over 250 passengers and net takings in excess of £100 for the weekend. Doug Blake's merry band are busy at the Blunder workshop refitting the steel trip boats. It was hoped to have them operating at Ryeford for the Spring Bank Holiday but their delapidated state has meant more work than at first envisaged to put them in first class order. The work punt "Aline" within a couple of weeks of being moved to the M.S.C. site at Newtown, has been badly smashed up by vandals. Repair may be possible but in the meantime we are short of a very useful craft. It is sad that these mindless morons seem to get away with it and no one ever sees them in action, or see them and do nothing when it takes no more than to simply inform the police.

Correspondence in the local press recently has produced a number of letters concerning the effect of the Trust's clearance work on the canal's flora and fauna. These have ranged from intemperate allegations of wholesale destruction of the wildlife habitat to more reasoned suggestions that some work is ill advised. The correspondence continues, both for and against, but can do little to resolve these differences of opinion, nor do well intentioned environmental lectures to volunteer workers on the cut side (we can discount one "nature lover" who has physically threatened Trust volunteers). Meanwhile, our boat trips at Bowbridge are giving the public a close range view as the little grebes, ducks, water voles, moorhens, etc., continue to go about their business. Would that the tolerance of the wildlife of our intrusion on their private lives was matched by their vociferous "friends"!

Once again, Luciano and Aline of the "Clothiers Arms" are giving their generous support to the Trust. Half the proceeds of their Woolsack Race on June 20th will be donated to our funds. Branch member Bernard Donovan is a principal organiser of the event, we shall be running a barbecue, the sales stand will be there and we shall be giving all possible help. Please mark the date in your diary. Offers of help would be most welcome, but do come along and support what promises to be a most entertaining (and profitable) event.

Details of our Annual Raft Race have yet to be finalised, but the date is August 16th and the venue is the Ryeford pound. Help in the organisation and on the day is needed urgently. Potential raft entrants get in touch with us as soon as possible. A "field" of at least thirty is hoped for. The best restored pound in the country has plenty of room and, unlike Wallbridge last year, anyone attempting to walk and push their raft will need scuba gear!

It is encouraging to note the increased numbers of canoes and small boats using our canal. The local Sea cadets are boating on Ryeford



pound, their first use of the canal for training in over twenty years. Such activity is tangible evidence of our progress and welcome encouragement of our efforts to achieve a fully working waterway.

The bypass work at Wallbridge is accelerating. Despite our hopes, no provision was made to maintain a through supply of water, and the pound below the workings promises to be pretty noisome and stagnant ditch come Summer. Hearteningly the piling is in for the beginning of the diversion loop under the new road bridge and the contractors are showing a sympathetic interest in our plans. The Trust Secretary/Manager is apparently keeping in close touch with them to ensure the work does not inhibit our future development of the site. In informal contact (i.e. in the bar of the "Bell") with the site workers, I am struck by the keen interest they show in our work and a well informed interest in canal construction and restoration. The general opinion is that they could have done our canal loop and the marina concurrent with the road work, as a mere incidental item! But then, the workers always know better than the planners?

To conclude these somewhat discussive items (well you did say you wanted plenty to fill up the Trow Dave!), the Western Branch is, as usual, stretched to its limits. New faces are continuing to appear at Branch Meetings and old hands are showing a renewed interest in the Trust's activities. In lessening the load on the hard core of members this trend is most welcome. We all need a break occasionally to dig the garden, paint the house, rebuild steam locos, take a holiday (?), so please give us your active support, each and every contribution you make is important.

TONY JONES

Last trip of the day as Clint takes the stragglers up to Griffin Mill Lock





Two views from the new trip boat. Stanton's Bridge is above  
whilst the present trip boat limit, Griffin Mill Lock, is below



## Woolsack Races

In June, the Trust is to benefit from an unusual source of funds. Each year the "Clothiers Arms" public house in Stroud organises a Woolsack Race to raise money for charity. The landlord, Luciano Magalotti, first thought of the idea four years ago and since then, like Topsy, it has "just growed" raising several hundred pounds each time. This year the Trust is to be a beneficiary and, for those members who don't know what a Woolsack Race is, and are afraid to ask, it entails teams of stalwart young people running with bales of wool over 200 yards of rough, hilly terrain. The men's sack weighs 75 lbs. and the ladies' 35 lbs.

The teams consist of three men or women and the idea is to complete the course in the shortest possible time. You may think this sounds like masochism, but they actually pay to enter! They also raise further money from sponsorship. During Stroud's heyday in the woollen industry such races were held annually. That such an English eccentricity should be revived and gain so much support is interesting. That it was revived by an expatriate Italian is remarkable, and Luciano has always given his enthusiastic support to the Trust.

This year the races are being held on 20th June and it will be a day for families to enjoy. In addition to the main event there will be children's races, demonstrations of spinning and weaving, a barbecue and lots of things associated with the woollen industry. Local shops and businesses have generously donated many valuable raffle prizes, the licencing hours are being extended in the afternoon, and tea, coffee and soft drinks will be available all day.

Local Trust members will be providing much of their help, including running the barbecue. Perhaps some, like me, feel they do not do enough to support the Trust but don't know how to help. This is our opportunity to overcome those guilt complexes and have an enjoyable day into the bargain - possibly even enter a team! Details from Stroud 3801.

We hope other members and their families will join us on the day, so please come and provide much needed support for the Trust. The "Clothiers Arms" is just outside Stroud centre on the Bath Road and racing will start at 1.00pm with lunches available from 11am.

**BERNARD DONOVAN**

Calling Radio amateurs in the district. A Trust member from North Nibley, near Dursley, is interested in hearing from you. His call sign is G1 ABT. Perhaps if contact is made, you could drop us a line to inform us of your success?

## Stonehouse Days

We went to live near the canal at Stonehouse in 1924 - I was just three years old and as our house was the bungalow just beside the bridge over the railway line - the Dudbridge Donkey Line - a walk through the fields on the other side of the road was just right for short legs. At that time the barges - mostly full of coal in my memory - still used the canal and the big horses plodding along the bank with the rope dipping in and out of the water were a familiar sight.

One day we saw a barge lying stationary in the middle of the canal - no people, no horse. "Why isn't that barge moving?" I asked. "There's a strike on". - "What's a strike?" "People have stopped work because they're not paid enough". It was 1926 and so the canal taught me at the age of five my first lesson in industrial relations!

One day as we were throwing bread into the water, an angry swan came hissing and flapping across the water. "Run", said my father, and taking a hand each of my sister and me, he ran full tilt back to the road, my feet barely touching the ground. The swan had a nest nearby and the cygnets had just hatched.

In the very cold winter of 1927 the canal froze and we could skim stones across the ice, but weren't allowed to slide on it. I don't remember if people did slide or skate that year, perhaps someone with a better memory knows.

Walks along the towpath had their anxious moments - I hated walking under the bridges! Our voices echoed, it was dark and dank, and the water looked very deep and black - if I fell in there how would I get out? There was no nice sloping grassy bank, only a straight wall and nothing to hold on to.



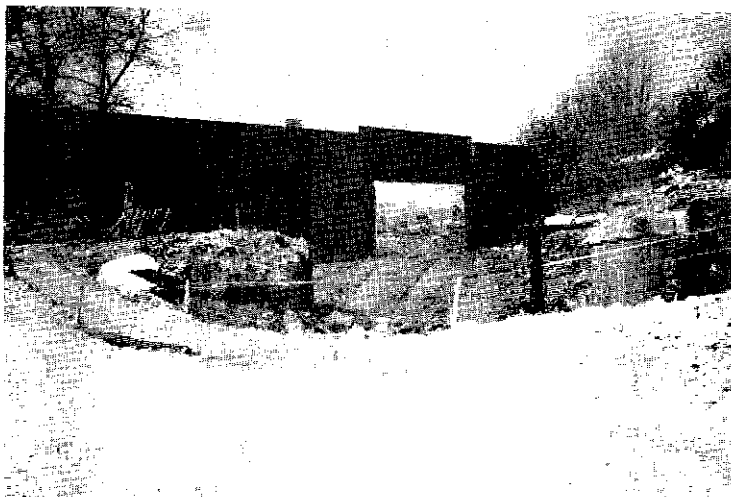
The Stroudwater Canal between Ryeford and Stonehouse.

By the mid thirties the canal had ceased to be used and we had moved to Leonard Stanley, so the canal mainly meant a nice hump bridge to ride over on a bicycle. But I had one more adventure there thanks to our rather stupid Sealyham. I walked him down to the field by the bridge one summer day when the canal was completely covered with a thick layer of duckweed. Bruin rushed across the field, down the bank and on to the nice green "lawn" which promptly gave way beneath him. So a dog who had never swum in his life had to swim, and where did he swim to? Straight under the bridge where there was nothing for his paws to grip on! I'd always known it was dangerous under the bridge. Luckily, I was able to grab him by his beard and haul him out - he was far less frightened than I was.

It's great to know that thanks to the work of the canal restoration volunteers, such dangers will no longer lie in wait for unwary animals!

ANNE SHEPHEARD-WALWYN

## Road Works Update



As an update of the situation at the Road Works for the new Stroud bypass, this photograph shows the same scene as in the Spring edition of the Trow, but now the bridge is demolished (foreground) the level of the infill is now in the process of being built up.

## Legacies & Donations

With the increasing financial requirements of the Trust, members may like to be aware that it is possible to make provision for covenanted donations and/or legacies to the Trust. The following wording (which follows established precedents of English Law) might prove helpful to members when instructing their legal advisers in preparing their wills:

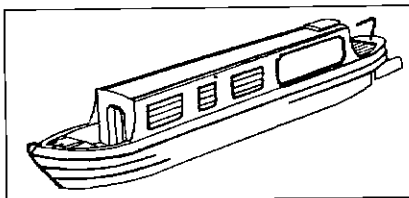
"I give (the sum of.....free of tax) (.....parts of my residuary estate) to THE STROUDWATER - THAMES & SEVERN CANAL TRUST LTD., c/o 1 Riveredge, Framilode, Gloucester, GL2 7LH, to be applied by the said Trust for or towards such lawful charitable purposes in connection with the restoration of the Stroudwater and Thames & Severn Canals as the Council of the said Trust shall in their absolute discretion think proper.

I declare that the receipt of the Chairman for the time being of the said Trust shall be a full and sufficient discharge to my Executors in respect of this gift."

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## The End of the Stroudwater Canal Navigation

Once again we are grateful for the chance to reprint articles which first appeared in "Stroud News & Journal" in January 1971. Thanks to Mr. Mason who is Editor of the newspaper.

The articles were first printed in the editions of January 7th and 14th and were written by Geoffrey Sanders.

The Stroudwater Canal from Framilode to Stroud was completed on July 21, 1779 at a cost of £41,000. It was just under eight miles long with 12 locks, able to take craft 72ft by 15½ft carrying about 60 tons. The Thames & Severn Canal, which extended 28½ miles from Wallbridge to join the River Thames at Inglesham beyond Lechlade, was completed on Nov. 19, 1789. The Thames & Severn, which was linked to the Stroudwater, was transferred to the Gloucestershire County Council in 1901 and the navigation was finally abandoned in 1933.

It is not surprising that members of the Inland Waterways Association still cling nostalgically to the plea they put forward 16 years ago that the Stroudwater Canal should be restored for recreational purposes. They are steadfast in their views and no fault can be found in that. In a letter to the "Stroud News & Journal" last December 10 the publicity officer of the South Western branch of the Association said that "probably the demise of the Stroudwater was just a few years too early, for one may speculate the thought that perhaps the same situation would, if now presented, be tackled in a different manner".

When precisely did that demise take place? A mortal blow had been struck to its survival in June 1933, when the Thames & Severn Canal navigation was abandoned. When it came to the turn of the Stroudwater Canal in 1954 upon the promotion of a Bill to bring about the closure of its navigation, the sponsors were merely seeking powers to remove the legal obligations of an undertaking that was fast approaching its end. From the commercial point of view the patient's condition was 'in extremis'.

The evidence showed that the last barge to travel up the canal had been 13 years before, when twenty tons of coal were delivered to the Gas Works beyond Dudbridge. That was the first barge for three years and it had taken two days to reach its destination from the junction with the Gloucester & Berkeley Canal seven miles away. The traffic in the early 30's had been mainly coal barges to the Gas Works and Messrs Strachan and Co., with the carrying back of tar from the former works. Both concerns had taken to using alternative means of delivery by the outbreak of war.

Mr. L. T. C. Rolt, the great authority on canals, in his book, "The Inland Waterways of England" (Allen and Unwin, 1950), wrote: "The problem of a disused canal is a difficult one ... The passage of even one boat per week will maintain a clear channel and check weed growth. When traffic ceases altogether weeds will soon choke the waterway, while small streams and field drains entering the canal will build up 'scours' of silt across the channel. In this way the canal soon becomes so obstructed that it can only continue to fulfill its function as a conduit at a cost of laborious weed-cutting and

dredging. In such circumstances there are only two practicable long-term solutions of the problem; either the resumption of traffic must be encouraged or the waterway must be converted into a pipe-line".

The resumption of traffic as far as the Stroudwater Canal was concerned was beyond the resources of the Company. They received a small income from the mooring of pleasure boats at the western end of the canal, from a few properties they owned and from the sale of water for cooling purposes in a number of factories. From 1946 to 1952 they had made a loss of £568 and the last dividend paid was in 1922.

The heaviest expenditure had been on maintaining the bridges in a better state than the Company was liable under its 1776 Act. Eight bridges carried county roads and legally the Company were only bound to keep them in that state of repair suitable to the roads and traffic of 1780 or 1790. They were consequently quite out of date; a particular instance was the notorious hump-backed bridge at Bridgend, Stonehouse.

The County Council were willing to take over the bridges and make them adequate for modern traffic, but owing to the prohibitive cost they would not do so unless the navigation was abandoned to permit their replacement by flat constructions. The result was the Stroudwater Navigation Bill, which would release the Company from their obligation to keep the Stroudwater Canal open for navigation and would provide for the County Council to take over immediately the responsibility for the repair of the bridges.

The Bill was promptly blocked in the House of Commons by the late Ben Parkin, MP for North Paddington, and from 1945 to 1950 Member for Stroud. He was a Stonehouse man and knew the canal well. As MP for Stroud he had shown himself not averse from dabbling in local government matters, particularly if it suited his sardonic outlook towards anything reactionary, and to find him on Christian name terms with members of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England in their opposition to the Bill was not without its piquancy. Could it be that his 1950 defeat at the hands of the electors of Stroud still rankled and the role of trouble-maker soothed his injured pride?

Parkin's action aroused many protests, but eventually, sponsored by Sir Robert Perkins, MP for Stroud, the Bill received its second hearing on June 30th 1954. Parkin immediately moved its rejection, admitting that it was unusual for a Private Bill to be opposed on Second Reading. True to form, it was not long before he was making jibes against the management. The previous year the clerk, P. R. Snape, had died aged 80 after being with the Company for half a century or thereabouts. He had followed his father. The Chairman of the Company was W. R. Bloxam, a solicitor, 85 years old, and his partner, Major R. J. Caruthers-Little, aged 77, had been a member of the small Committee of the Company (a style they preferred to Board of Directors) for 33 years. Parkin objected to the profits being distributed to the Directors. The truth was that not only had no dividend been paid since 1922 but there were no Directors' fees because by the terms of the formation of the Company there were no Directors. All the Committee received was a sort of travelling



allowance, something in the nature of three guineas a year.

It was a statutory company, Parkin continued, and as such was not obliged to publish its balance sheet or its list of shareholders, or to give the public access to information about Directors, shareholders and assets. Nevertheless, the Company were criticised for not supplying the information. "Since the Company", he said, "remains so silent about its management, its assets and its activities, it must not complain if the picture presented to the public is that of a dispirited, out-of-date and very old group of people, very small in number, meeting together in the back office of the local lawyer and sharing out the rents of dilapidated cottages and the money received from the selling of dirty water, and doing nothing else whatever".

Parkin did not seem to be aware that the total resources of the Company had by then been reduced to about £3,000, neither did he advance any estimates as to how much it would cost to make the canal navigable again. There is no doubt, he said, that the necessary money would be raised. It would be possible to carry out all that was required without any burden falling upon the ratepayers. "I am now fortified in that belief", he added, "by a succession of opinions from local industrialists who say they think that, if restored, the waterway would have a commercial future".

When the Bill ultimately came to the committee stage, its opponents could only call one local industrialist in support of their case. This witness was asked by the Chairman of the Committee: "Can you, with your business connections in Stroud, think of any organised effort by industrialists, or remember such a thing, in the area to take over the canal there in order to provide themselves with cheaper transport?". The answer was: "No, sir".

Several other Members spoke on the Bill during its Second Reading. Not all of them knew the facts. An exception was Godfrey Nicholson, MP for Farnham, who, unlike Parkin, had found out the financial plight the Company were in. Another of course was Sir Robert Perkins, who spoke of the death blow to the Stroudwater Canal when the Thames & Severn Canal, to which it was connected at the junction in Stroud, was abandoned. Now in its turn the Stroudwater was completely derelict except for one short length at the Severn end. The sluices would not work and could not be made to work, he said. If ever the canal were to be put into operation again, the sluices and locks must be renewed. The canal was badly silted up. It was smothered with weeds and, in fact, was a breeding ground for flies. A firm of consulting engineers had estimated that restoration would cost over £143,000. The County Council were willing to take over the bridges provided it could legally replace them with modern, flat-type bridges. To modernise six bridges would cost £5,500. If the Council had to put up hump-backed or swing bridges the cost would go up to £30,000.

"It is wrong", said Sir Robert, "that ratepayers should be asked to pay about £25,000 more to build obsolete bridges so that hypothetical barges might travel along a dry canal". His thoughts turned to the future - to the Severn Bridge, in those days only a planner's dream.

"I put it in my election address of 1935", he said. "The scheme to build the Severn Bridge means building a new motor road from the Midlands to the bridge. That motor road will cross the canal at Whitminster. If this Bill does not go through, the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, when it builds the road, will either have to build a hump in the middle of it or build a swing bridge. In either case the cost of the road will go up substantially and either the hump or the swing bridge will spoil the road. By passing the Bill we shall remove one of the many obstacles in the way of building the Severn Bridge in the future".

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Here we must leave the story, to be continued in the Autumn issue of the Trow.

## Poem

About two hundred years ago, the navigators came  
 They horrified the local squire and terrified his dame  
 And when they'd gone, the countryside would never be the same  
 For they left behind the Stroud Canals.

An artificial river they had wrought across the land  
 By the strength of each broad shoulder and the cunning of each hand  
 The local dignitaries gazed at it and said "It's grand,  
 We shall make good use of Stroud Canals".

The navvies, as the men were called, were wild and crude and rough  
 They scared the local womenfolk with their accents strange and gruff  
 Six days a week they laboured but one day was quite enough  
 To drain the taverns round the Stroud Canals.

For years the horse-drawn barges had brought wealth to this small town  
 And then the railways took the trade, canals lost their renown  
 They soon became neglected and their towpaths overgrown  
 And we had almost lost the Stroud Canals.

But dedicated men and women beat the weeds so rife  
 Clearing years of undergrowth with a sharp machete knife  
 Removing tons of rubbish that was killing all the life  
 In what was left of the poor old Stroud Canals.

There are fishes in the water now 'twixt Wallbridge and the Bow  
 There's families of mallard and there's moorhens too I know  
 And through the efforts of these folk it's a pleasant place to go  
 BUT THEY STILL NEED HELP TO KEEP THE STROUD CANALS.

JO SILVER

December 1986

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Visiting the canal at Wallbridge during Easter - my first since last year - I was truly appalled at the scene of devastation wrought by the "wreckers" (sorry! road builders) on the formerly beautiful stretch of canal, as depicted in picture no. 1 on page 9 of The Trow Spring issue.

Some indication of the proposed diversionary line of the canal ought to be included in each issue of the magazine to enable readers to at least have some idea of the new route. This was omitted from your plan on page 8 unfortunately.

Despite the dreadful "infill" of our canal, I see no reason why the remaining length between the viaduct and "The Bell" should not be quickly tidied up and some boating events held there this summer, and not forgetting lots of publicity in the press and on Severn Sound Radio.

My other disappointment was the apparent lack of interest by the Trust and others in preserving the basin or pool by the Merrywalks road junction. This basin could have formed an attractive "oasis" seen by thousands of travellers passing by. But what do we find? A stark chain link and barbed wire fence and a vast new sprawling builders yard.

It seems that neither the Gloucestershire County Council, the Civic Society nor the Canal Trust cared much about "preserving the environment" of that vitally important site which is the first part of Stroud seen by traffic approaching from Bath and other directions.

What a ghastly impression visitors will now have as they enter the town from the South West and what a missed opportunity!

M. JONES.

Cheltenham.

## Membership Matters

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:-

Mrs A K Whitehorn	Esher, Surrey.
Mrs A M Langford	Cheltenham, Glos.
Mr G H Clegg	Coulsdon, Surrey.
Mr G H Standeven	Forest Green, Nailsworth, Glos.
Mr N Dowson	Swindon, Wilts.
Mr D P Atkinson	Kings Stanley, Stonehouse, Glos.
Mr D Anderson	Hucclecote, Glos.
Mr & Mrs A F Merryweather	Bussage, Stroud, Glos.
Mr C D Stride	Tetbury, Glos.

# Sales

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The following items are available by post from our Sales Manager, Richard Attwood, 7 Hidcote Close, Eastcombe, Stroud, Glos., GL6 7EF. Please add 40p per order to cover postage and packing for any value under £10. Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "S. T & S. C. T. Ltd."

Trust Notelets (8 pack with envelopes) Local canal views	£0.60
A Canal Walk Through Stroud	£1.25
Trust Tea Towels (show several views of canals)	£1.85
Trust Key Fobs	£0.50
Trust comb-in-case	£0.30
Trust Key ring with penknife or scissors or clippers	£0.75
Trust Bookmarks	£0.30
The Flower of Gloster (E. Temple Thurston)	£11.95
Randwick and Roundabout (Evelyn Pollard)	£5.95
Village Heritage (Miss Pinnell and Sapperton schoolchildren)	£10.95
Road Travel & Transport in Gloucestershire	£5.95
Tudor Gloucestershire	£5.95
Cotswold Churches	£4.50
The Aeronauts (L.T.C. Rolt)	£5.95
Birds of Gloucestershire (C.M. Swaine)	£8.95
Gloucester Docks (Hugh Conway-Jones)	£4.95
British Canals (Charles Hadfield)	£12.50
S. T & S. Canals Towpath Guide (Handford & Viner)	£5.95

## SPECIAL OFFERS

British Canals (Charles Hadfield, hardback)	£9.00
World Canals (Charles Hadfield)	£16.00
Bread upon the Waters (David Blagrove)	£8.00
A Hill Called Bredon (Fred Archer)	£3.00
The Changing River (Anthony Burton)	£7.00
Devizes in Old Picture Postcards	£3.00
Observers Book of Canals	£2.00
A Guide to the Industrial Archaeology of Hampshire & I.O.W.	£1.00

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## Dates for your Diary

COME TO THE WOOLSACK RACES SATURDAY 20th JUNE

JOIN US ON THE SPONSORED WALK SUNDAY 28th JUNE

DON'T FORGET THE RAFT RACE! SUNDAY 16th AUGUST

WESTERN BRANCH MEETINGS are held on the first Monday of each month from 7.00pm in the lounge bar of the "Bell" at Wallbridge in Stroud. All members, friends and interested parties are welcome.

WESTERN BRANCH "NOGGIN & NATTER" SOCIAL EVENINGS also at the "Bell" on the third Thursday of each month from 7.30pm. A free buffet is provided, everyone is welcome. Past "Noggin & Natters" have featured Slide Shows, Boat Trips and Barbecues.

THAMES END BRANCH MEETINGS are held on the second Tuesday of the month from 8.00pm at the "Red Lion" at Cricklade. Why not come along to see what we are doing.

THAMES END WORK PARTY is centred on Cerney Wick Lock. New faces are always welcome on the last weekend (Sat & Sun) of the month.

WESTERN BRANCH VOLUNTEERS are now involved in practical work and running the trip boats. Please ring for details - There is usually something going on at the weekend as well as some evenings.

# THE BELL


*Wallbridge Upper Lock*

*J.F.B.O.W.I.*

*Headquarters of*

*J.F. & S.C.T. Ltd.*

*(Western Branch)*



*The Pub on the Cut*

REAR COVER: Looking into Newtown Lock with the stop planks holding back an awful lot of water!

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