



A CUT AROUND SUTTON COLDFIELD

D J Redwood



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Stories of the Birmingham & Fazeley canal from Dunton to Minworth

Introduction

In 2014 personal interests in canals, family and local history came together during a quest for a new research paper. In examining the 1841 Census for unusual occupations in Sutton Coldfield, I noticed some entries that indicated canal based employment. From this small amount of information, I set out to discover what happened to some of the families who lived alongside the 'Cut' on the southern boundary of the Royal Town.

It is unlikely that the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal had any major economic impact on many of the townspeople. Indeed, for much of its existence, it would have been quite remote, except for those families who lived in the small villages and settlements close to Sutton Coldfield through which the canal was cut in the late 18th century.

This paper will focus mainly on those who lived in the 19th and early 20th centuries along or near the 3-mile pound from Dunton where the A446 crosses the canal near Curdworth Top Lock to where the A38 is taken across the waterway at the start of the Minworth Locks. Additionally, the role of the canal in the building of the Minworth Sewage Works will be explored as it played a key part in its' construction and in the movement of supplies and materials. During my research, I came across a small number of other items related to the length of canal I have focussed upon and these have been gathered together as *Snippets*.

Beginnings

In the 18th century canals spread throughout England as the impact of the Industrial Revolution began to demand improved methods of transportation. Led by landed gentry such as the Duke of Bridgewater, who recognised the potential of waterways as a more efficient system for transporting coal, and industrialists, including Josiah Wedgwood, who needed to move their goods more safely, canals were soon covering the country.

James Brindley, an early canal engineer sought to link four of the country's most important rivers – the Mersey, Trent, Severn and Thames - believing this to be the best way to bring the benefits of water-based transport to the growing number of cities and towns with their factories, mines, ironworks and potteries.

This plan effectively placed Birmingham at the heart of the canal system as the network of canals grew. The decision, in the latter part of the 18th century, to link the Trent & Mersey Canal to Coventry was to lead to a further link from Fazeley, near Tamworth, to the heart of Birmingham itself – the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal was born.

As with many canals, the building of the B&F Canal was not without its challenges. Principally these were caused by objections from other canal companies, fearing a loss of trade, and private landowners who preferred other routes.

In 1770 a meeting was held in Lichfield to *'consider a canal from Walsall, a coal-producing area which had been largely untouched by the Birmingham Canal, by Lichfield to Fradley on the Trent & Mersey (Canal)'* (*Hadfield – The Canals of the West Midlands).

This proposal came to nothing, following opposition, and little happened until August 1781 when a meeting in Warwick considered a canal from Wednesbury by Fazeley to Atherstone where the Coventry Canal originally finished. An amendment to the route was proposed whereby the canal would end at Fazeley with a branch to Birmingham.

The line proposed would have taken the canal further south, after running just parallel to the current route from Tyburn towards Minworth. At this point it was planned to turn towards Water Orton before swinging back to Curdworth. It is likely that this was not acceptable to some of the local landed gentry.

In a most interesting book covering the history of the giant Castle Vale housing estate, the author, Geoff Bateson, notes that –

“the extension of the canal from Birmingham to Fazeley was opposed by the Earl of Dartmouth and his relative Heneage Legge on the grounds that building the canal across their land would “cause Gentlemen’s Estates and Pleasure-grounds to be cut to pieces and annoyed”. The canal was eventually built, running from Legge’s land at Aston to Bagot’s estate at Berwood. This construction did not remove much land from the Berwood estate but did bring in considerable compensation for the disturbance caused to the Bagots (although one suspects that it was in reality the tenant farmers who had the most disturbance).”

Unfortunately, this aroused the shareholders of the Birmingham Canal who saw the proposal as a threat to their company. In January 1782, they stated that they considered it *'not only unnecessary that any other Canal should be made to this Town but that the same, if made, would greatly prejudice the present Undertaking and that such Measure is not warranted in Equity or Justice.'*

In consequence, the proposal was finally defeated. Having explored other options, such as making the River Tame navigable to Tamworth (a proposal examined for viability by the renowned engineer, William Jessop), the canal once again failed to be taken further.

A further proposal led to discussions with several other canal companies, including the Trent and Mersey, Coventry and Oxford companies. Agreement and funding was announced in Coleshill in June 1783 but this only spurred on the Birmingham Canal Company to set out plans for a new company that would build, among other works, a canal from Farmer’s Bridge in Birmingham to Fazeley.

An Act of Parliament was passed and agreement reached with the shareholders of the B&F Company to purchase their shares and finally, in 1784, both were amalgamated to become the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal Company.

John Smeaton oversaw the building of the new canals and, in 1786, their contractor, John Pinkerton (1740-1813), believed to have been born in Lincolnshire or the East Riding of Yorkshire, began the link to Fazeley. He was one of several Pinkertons who worked as engineers on the new canals. His brother, James, was possibly more successful than John. Several nephews also worked as engineers, including George Pinkerton.

John had most recently worked with the Dudley Canal Company but this was, like many of the early canal projects, a fraught occasion, according to Peter Cross-Rudkin in his research document entitled *Canal Contractors 1760-1820*, a very informative paper.

Relying on the views of local miners, rather than a ground survey, the work that Pinkerton supervised as excavation began to create the Dudley Tunnel was beset with difficulties and he later negotiated a withdrawal from his tender with the canal company.

Pinkerton then contracted with the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal to work on the eastern half of the new canal, now being built. The Resident Engineer for the B&F, James Bough, had been a fellow contractor with John on the Birmingham Canal (1783).

John's nephew, George, found that Bough's levels were incorrect. Thus, John Pinkerton submitted a revised, cheaper, tender based on more accurate quantities. By now, however, the contractor engaged on the other part of the new canal was employing most of the available navvies.

So, the new work suffered, partly because the labour force was less experienced. Interference by Bough, together with allegations of bad workmanship supervised by Pinkerton, led to a dispute between the various persons involved.

Pinkerton clearly caused several difficulties himself during this construction period. He was told to rebuild some of the infrastructure but declined. This led to his dismissal in February 1789. As has been noted, Pinkerton was involved in a few canal projects that ran into difficulties, often through poor workmanship and the use of sub-standard materials.

"The Birmingham-Fazeley Company claimed he bodged the puddling and built the locks of stacks of poor unbonded bricks and brick-ends. Only the bricks facing outward were good. On top of that he drove them a tunnel at Curdworth when they distinctly asked for a cutting."

'He was too moderate,' Pinkerton said of himself in the third person, 'and too gentle to secure his own interest against the falsehood and calumny, with which little, mean, and envious individuals assailed his character, and poisoned the minds of the Company's Committee.'

He claimed his work was blameless, blaming the envy, lies and spite of the company's officials for what happened to him and the canal. The officials the company hired, he said, were of very low quality." (The Navvyman by Dick Sullivan)

A lawsuit followed, leading to John writing his own account in his defence – “*Abstract of the Cause between the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal Navigations and John Pinkerton 1801*”.

The company claimed £4 800 from him to cover the cost of completion and repairs while he counterclaimed for £550, saying that it was due to him under the contract, and this was accepted by the Company's solicitors who agreed they had overlooked a claim for extras.

Pinkerton did not help his cause as his “*Abstract*” attacked the integrity of the Company's Clerk. Taken to court for libel, he was found guilty and spent three months in prison.

It took another 11 years before the matter was settled through arbitration and he was awarded £436, which would suggest he was in the right.

The Minworth to Fazeley section had been the third to be let originally. Finally, at a cost of £110 000, the new section of canal, with 38 locks, was completed in August 1789.

Other plans

The canal remains much as it was when opened in 1789 but there were proposals in 1910 by the Royal Commission on Canals and Inland Waterways (the Shuttleworth Commission 1906-1911) to enlarge and improve the line of the waterway and introducing inclined planes at Minworth and Curdworth to replace the lock flights.

By now canals were declining in importance, although they remained well used in Birmingham and the Black Country. Like many canal schemes seeking to revive canal traffic, however, it came to nothing.

The Commission did influence the rebuilding of the canals from London to the outskirts of Birmingham, creating the Grand Union and its wide locks, capable of accommodating wide beam boats. The failure to complete the scheme in the centre of Birmingham meant that, other than providing much needed employment, it could never achieve its potential.

The Early Years 1788 to 1841

Primary source material of the building phase and its impact on people living adjacent to the canal is elusive, though much may be awaiting classification in the archives of the Waterways Archives housed at Ellesmere Port. Some evidence can be found, however, in the Parish registers for St. Nicholas Church in Curdworth.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, those working under John Pinkerton were as exposed to death and injury as they were on any other major civil engineering projects during this time. Baptisms address the balance and those relating to canal families were also recorded.

On March 23rd 1788, it was recorded that *“a navigator from the County of Gloster”,* named **Richard Cox**, was buried in the churchyard. Benjamin **Fox**, *“a navigator from the County of Chester”* who was buried on May 5th, followed him shortly after.

A little later in that same year, on 8 August, Sarah, the daughter of *Thomas* and Elizabeth **Price** was baptised in Curdworth. Thomas was described as a navigator living at Dunton.

In 1789, the year that the canal opened, a **Francis Field** was buried on December 20th, having *“accidentally drowned in the Canal (near Curdworth). His age was 32 years.”*

It is not inconceivable that the first of these navigators could have been killed in the building of the Curdworth Tunnel, the construction of which was not in the original plans, as previously noted. Tunnels were often the cause of canal related fatalities.

Accidental drownings seemed to be a reasonably regular occurrence, underlining the dangers that can often be associated with waterways.

Andrew Hackett was a well-known figure in Sutton Coldfield, his family having lived in Moxhull Hall for many years. Sadly, on 29th November 1793, his huntsman, **John Prior**, aged 32 years, was buried in Curdworth churchyard, having been found drowned in the canal.

Other accidental drownings recorded in the Parish Register included –

Francis Goodman, aged 25 years and a pauper and Native of Hinckley in the County of Leicester drowned in a lock and was buried on 8th April 1794.

“Samuel Colledge, a stranger, about 14 or 15 years of age, who was accidentally drowned in a Lock upon the Canal near Plants Brook, Minworth” and was buried on 2nd July 1800. Perhaps he was working alongside a boatman passing through the flight of locks here and lost his footing, slipping into the lock and could not be rescued in time.

“Ralph Hanks, aged 65 years. He was accidentally killed on Curdworth Bridge, having fallen under a wagon wheel, which crushed his head”, buried 12th July 1811. This death illustrates that fatalities were not confined, necessarily, just to the “cut”, but on other structures associated with it.

Then on 12th July 1811, "*William, son of John & Sarah **Harvey** aged 5 years. This child was accidentally drowned in a Canal near Rushall*" (near to Walsall in Staffordshire). His parents lived in Minworth and further reference to this family will be found later in this paper.

One of the first records to show a local boatman working on the canal can be found in 1813 when a baptism was written into the Parish Register. This was a *Faith Cockin*, the daughter of Thomas and Sarah Cockin. As can be seen by the following item, Thomas was described as a Boatman.

21 st Nov.	Faith Daughter of	Thomas Sarah	Cockin	Curdworth Boatman	L. Palmer Curate.
No. 18.					

In that same year the Parish Registers changed and, unfortunately, although burials, marriages and christenings can still be traced, the handwritten entries made by the clergy (*Warwickshire Baptisms, Marriages & Burials 1535 – 1812 Curdworth*) no longer always record the useful additional information about each individual that is included in the above passages.

Thomas **Jurden** and his wife, Mary, were living in Dunton around 1815. At the baptism of his daughter, Sarah, in Curdworth on 29 January 1815 he was described as a lock keeper. A brother for Sarah, William, was baptised by William Palmer, the curate for nearby Kingsbury, on 1 September 1816.

Shortly after the baptism for William Jurden another canal family, Samuel and Sarah **Milner** had their daughter, Christiana, baptised on 31 March 1816. Described as a boatman, it appears that the family had been living in the area for some time. Several other children were baptised at Curdworth including a daughter, Sarah on 3 June 1804. Now the family were living at Minworth Greaves and this would suggest that Samuel gained his work from the wharf situated there.

One later entry, for 19 November 1831, does record that the daughter of another boatman was baptised on that day. His name was Thomas **Hughes**, his wife Hanah (sic) and his daughter was Jane. No further information has been discovered so it is not known where Thomas came from or whether he remained a boatman.

Taken together, the Curdworth Parish Records, give ample evidence of the hazards of life on or near this section of the B&F Canal in the early years of the canal's existence, as well as the lives of the various families that lived there before 1841.

Working for the Birmingham and Fazeley Company

In addition to the Parish records and numerous canal histories, other sources of information can be useful in providing a flavour of the many occupations that ensured the relatively smooth running of local canals, including the section covered by this article.

There was quite evidently a thriving canal-based community along the southern boundary of Sutton Coldfield. The breadth of work is considerable and I am grateful to S. R. Broadbridge (in his excellent book *The Birmingham Canal Navigations Volume 1 1768-1846*) for much of the following detail. The source for the narrative was the B&F Company records.

In the early years of the B&F canal, lock keepers could expect to be paid 10s (50p) p. w. with a house. Their workload soon increased as many were expected to undertake maintenance of the locks, towpaths and fences etc. and so, too, did their wages, in some cases, to 21s (£1.05) p. w.

Sometime in the late 18th century, the company placed advertisements for six tenders to set up annual contracts to repair all canal related works except those that were maintained by the company's own staff, often the lock keepers. 5 contracts were tendered for and accepted but the Minworth to Fazeley section received no offer.

There were 2 lock-houses in Minworth in 1825. One was "occupied by a carpenter who received 21s p. w. (£1.05) plus 30s (£1.50) a quarter" while a third house was to be built at the bottom of the lock. Three existing houses at Curdworth plus another were for day lock keepers, a fifth for a night man and a sixth for a 'good bricklayer'.

A permanent bricklayer in 1813 could earn between 3s 6d (17½p) to 4s 6d (22½p) a day with house, while temporary bricklayers were paid at 2s (10p) to 3s 6d (17½p). Carpenters earned 2s 8d (13½p) to 4s (20p); labourers received 21s (£1.05) p. w. and 'servers' 2s (10p) to 2s 6d (12½p) per day.

By 1820 -

Carpenters were now paid 3s 6d – 5s (17½ - 25p);

Bricklayers 3s 6d – 4s (17½ - 20p);

Stone masons 4s – 5s 3d (20p – 26p)

Blacksmiths 3s – 4s (15p – 20p)

Labourers 1s 8d – 3s (8½ - 15p) and 'occasionals' 3s 4d – 4s 6d (16½ - 22½p)

The company would show some compassion towards 'deserving cases'. This could range from financial support to the widows of drowned lock keepers to a pension for one long serving lock keeper who, at the age of 79, was given 10s (50p) a week in recognition of his 54 years of service. It would therefore seem possible that some of those who worked on the Minworth to Curdworth length may have been the recipients of compassion on behalf of the company, but this was not consistently applied.

Aside from the head office staff of clerk (chief officer) and assistants, there would be wharfingers, loaders, a superintendent, an engineer, a 'walking surveyor' and those lock keepers who supplemented their income as toll collectors.

Throughout the year the canal would have seen some of these examining and undertaking, where necessary, the maintenance of the locks, pounds, bridges, towpaths and the Curdworth tunnel. So, a picture emerges of a busy life for those who were employed directly or indirectly by the traffic that moved along the canal.

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Minworth Wharf advert 1881



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Life on the Minworth to Curdworth section in 1841

The first set of more detailed census records only shows a glimpse of those families who gained employment from canal related activity.

Nevertheless, they do start to build a picture and an understanding of the economy that was created by the B&F Canal. Augmented by other records, such as baptisms noted in the Parish Registers for Curdworth Church, a sense of canal-based family life emerges.

The main areas of interest in relation to the Canal are detailed in the 1841 Census as District 10 within the Registration District of Sutton Coldfield, covering Chadwicks Wood to Foul Slough Lane along with Districts 11 and 12 in Curdworth and the adjacent hamlet of Minworth.

By 1841, the canal had been in operation for just over half a century. With a small number of wharfs situated along this section of the B&F, there were already some established families and canal-related activity evident.



Typical interior for a family living and working on a 19th century narrow boat.

The Minworth to Wiginshill Families

3 distinct families can be identified in Enumeration District 10.

The Jefferies Family

The Census recorded *John Jefferies* (1811-1875) as living in Minworth Greaves. It gave his year of birth as 1816 and his occupation was recorded as a boat builder. The Jefferies family had a significant presence in this part of Sutton Coldfield over several years and evidence of this is to be found in archives stored in the Library of Birmingham, for example.

Dates of birth shown in the 1841 Census were often 'rounded off'. John, for example, was baptised on 7th November 1811, being the son of Henry and Sarah Jefferies who lived in Wiginshill. (Warwickshire Baptisms, Marriages and Burials 1535 – 1812)

John's father, Henry Harris Jefferies, was born about 1788 and was buried in the Parish Church on 11th January 1832. He married a Sarah Mace on 24th April 1809 in St. Martin's Church, Birmingham. Sarah Abbott and William Mace witnessed the marriage.

Henry was recorded as a boat builder in several of the Baptism Records for his children so it is not surprising, perhaps, that his son, John, followed him into the trade.

Henry and Sarah had at least 7 other children besides John - Charles (1810-1848); Thomas (b. 1814); Mary Ann (b. 1816); Elizabeth Morling (1819-1896); Naomi (b. 1826); Jemima Esther (1830-1891) and Sarah Maria (b. 1832). Sarah Maria later married a local farmer from Lea Marston, Robert Raine, on 2 September 1863 in St. Peter and St. Paul's, Aston.

A girl, named Mary Jefferies, aged 2 months, is recorded as living with Sarah Jefferies in 1841 but it is not clear who her parents were and she could not have been the daughter of Henry who had died 9 years earlier.

John Jefferies' wife was a Sarah Short (1817-1883) born in Water Orton and they had 2 children at the time of the 1841 Census – Sarah Ann, aged 2 years, and Elizabeth.

Already he had 2 servants – Jane Sanders, aged 15, and Thomas Nash, aged 12. In addition, living in his household, was a Joseph **Hart**, aged 14, who was a Boat Builder's Apprentice. This would suggest that boat building was reasonably well established by then in the area.

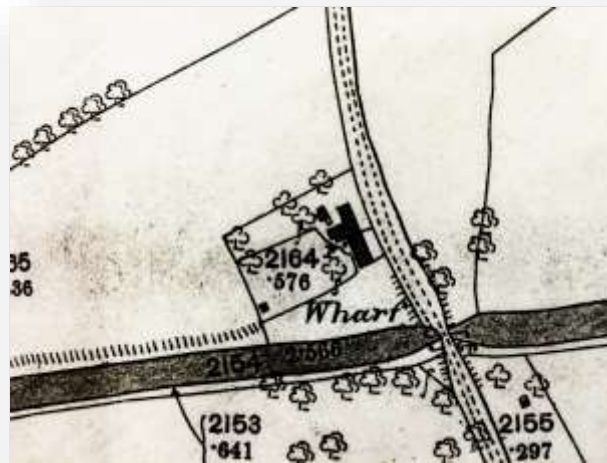
John (his father, Henry, was now described as a timber merchant) was recorded in 1841 as a timber merchant of Sutton Coldfield, not the boat builder mentioned earlier in Parish Records.

He was married to a Sarah Short (father Edward, a farmer), who was described as a Minor from Water Orton in the Parish of Curdworth, in the presence of Charles Jefferies and Mary Ann Short on January 8th 1838 (Curdworth Marriage and Banns 1754-1937).

By 1851 he was no longer described as a boat builder or timber merchant but was now a farmer. He owned 23 acres and employed 1 labourer. Living with John and his wife were four daughters – Sarah Anne (b. 1840), Rebecca Jemima (b. 1842), Louisa (b. 1843) and Mary E. (B. 1843).

Farming, as an occupation recorded for John, once again changed to boat building in 1861. By now he was living with his wife and 3 of his daughters – Mary, Rebecca and Louisa. As his wealth increased over the years he was recorded as a landowner and farmer in the 1871 census. He died in 1873 and was buried in Curdworth on May 10th.

John is to be found in several other records. For example, in the Sutton Coldfield Directory for 1854 he is shown as a boat builder living in Wiggins Hill while a later edition, 1866, shows the breadth of his working life when he is noted as a boat builder and farmer.



Wiginshill Wharf

The Library of Birmingham archives hold a few very interesting documents that refer to John. These include MS 3049/7/31, MS 28/997 and 998.

The latter two concern the will of a John Lloyd dated 20 March 1834 where John Jefferies is shown as a Trustee.

The main papers, all handwritten of course, relate to indentures that were added to the will in 1839 & 1843 and are a fascinating insight into the complex language of the legal profession in those days. They can be found in the Birmingham Central Library's Wragge & Company archives, a company of solicitors who had been established in Bennetts Hill, Birmingham by George Paulson Wragge and Clement Ingelby in 1834.

On 25th March 1839, a settlement was made on the Marriage of Miss Mary Ann Jefferies with a Mr. William Wallis detailing the appointment and endorsement of new Trustees.

In a further document, dated the same day, and related to the marriage it was agreed that the sum of £400 £3% Consolidated Bank Annuities was to be transferred to John Jefferies, Charles Jefferies and a William Naylor Morrison.

An indenture written at the same time confirmed that John Jefferies, said to be of Minworth, was a boat builder while his brother, Charles, was a farmer near Bedworth who died in August 1848.

It set out - In addition a further £2 677 3s 9d Bank Annuities, standing in the name of the Accountant General of the High Court of Chancery to the separate account of 'the said Mary Ann Wallis in trust in a suit.... Morrison versus Jefferies and all the monies funds and securities to which she was or might become entitled under the Will of John Lloyd late of Nelson Square in the County of Surrey deceased and all his right and interest in his residual personal estate were assigned to John Jefferies, Charles Jefferies and William Naylor Morrison.

Morrison later agreed to pass his trusteeship to a James Wallis.

By 1870, Mary Ann had remarried, was now known as Mrs. Nightingale and lived in Lichfield Road, Aston.

When the case reached the Chancery Court, around 26th June 1875, one of the plaintiffs, William Naylor Morrison (formerly a silversmith from Surrey) had died and another plaintiff, Henry Edward Lampkin Lloyd, an executor for the will of John Lloyd was in dispute with William Wallace (deceased former Chymist and Druggist (sic) who had died insolvent), his wife Mary Ann (nee Jefferies), and her sisters, Elizabeth Morling Cox, Naomi Cox, Jemima Esther and also Sarah Maria Jefferies, who was the daughter of Sarah Jefferies, also now deceased (18th January 1861).

John Lloyd, of Nelson Square, Christ Church, Surrey had been very generous in his will to members of the Jefferies family.

Each of the 5 sisters had been bequeathed £1 000 each in trust by their great uncle, Henry, to be released as each attained 21 years of age. Mary Ann was also left a further £2 677 3s 9d when she reached that age.

Interestingly, when Mary Ann died in 1898 she left just £15 11s 9d to a House and Estate Agent named Tom Banks. It begs the question as to where all her money went.

Sarah Jefferies (see above) was the widow of John Lloyd's nephew, Henry Jefferies. She was bequeathed £2 000 with her money to pass to William Naylor Morrison and Henry Edward Lampkin Lloyd upon her death.

Their brother, John, had been left a dwelling house, shops and premises in Bull Street, Birmingham "by way of mortgage". He had died in 1875 and, whilst this may be coincidental, it is quite possible that his death precipitated the legal actions in that year.

Clearly a considerable sum of money was involved as mention is also made of £14 708 15s 5d 3% Consolidated Bank Annuities that was 4/5 of the residual estate in dispute.

Unfortunately, there are no other papers in the Birmingham archives so the outcome of all the legal processes is not clear. Nevertheless, together they do demonstrate the stature and position of John Jefferies and his family in the period covered by these documents.

The Harvey Family

Near to the Jefferies family, in Wiginshale (Wiggins Hill), were *John and Elizabeth Harvey*, both born around 1819, and their 1-year-old daughter, Sarah. John (Henry) was noted as a Journeyman Boat Builder and they lived next to Hen Pitts Hall.

John was baptised on April 9th, 1819, according to the Curdworth Parish Register (*Warwick Baptism Records 1813-1910*). His parents were John, a labourer and living in Minworth Greaves, and Sarah. Curdworth Parish Records show that his parents had at least 4 other children – Sheba (b. 1803), William (1806-11), Sarah (b. 1815) and Elizabeth (b. 1820).

As has been previously noted, William sadly drowned in the canal near Rushall. Gaps between the birth years of these siblings would suggest others were born but may have died during labour or in early childhood.

Over the next few years John (b. 1819) and Elizabeth had 3 more known children – John (John Henry - b. 1843), Mary (b. 1846) & George (b. 1847).

By 1851 John, now widowed, and his children had moved to Rushall, suggesting some family connection with this area. Here he was working as a boat maker looking after the 4 children and helped by his sister-in-law, Mary (Ann) Mitchell, who was born in Kings Norton in 1830 and was his housekeeper. The development of industry made this a sensible move as there was plenty of trade connected with coal and other minerals.

Interestingly Mary Ann (b. 1819) married John on 22nd June 1851 in St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Aston, Warwickshire. At some time in the next 10 years, John died (possibly in 1857 when a record exists for a John Harvey who died in Walsall) for, in 1861, Mary Ann Harvey is living as the Head of the household in Rushall with John Henry and George who have clearly followed their father into the boat building trade. A nephew, John H Silk is working alongside them, suggesting a fairly successful business.

John Henry continued the family's boat building tradition and can be traced to Daw End & to Norton Canes in later census records (1881, 1901 and 1911). He married an Ellen Powell from Little Dawley, Shropshire on 9 December 1861 but they had no children and she died in 1905.

Moving to live in Norton Canes made considerable commercial sense for John Henry. Norton Canes was a major centre for collieries within the Cannock coalfield. Although there were important railway links, much coal would have been moved by fleets of day boats so there would be constant work for John Henry, not just in the building of new boats, but also in repairs and maintenance.

In 1911 John Henry was living near The Turf Inn, Norton Canes helped by an older widow who acted as his servant. On his death on 28 January 1915 he left £56 1s 1d to be shared by a John Hall, saddle tree maker, and a Richard Edwin Powell, coal miner and nephew. This was not much for all his years working as a boat builder.

Little further evidence for his brother, George, has been uncovered but a George Harvey, born in Rushall about 1848, was living in Balsall Heath where he was working as a salesman and living with his wife, Mary Ann. Perhaps this was him.

The King Family

In 1841 the large King family lived close by the Harveys.

William King (1801-), the head of the family and aged about 76 years, was a sawyer. His wife was Sarah (born abt. 1770).

Presumably he had passed on some of his skills to his son, also called William, who at the age of 40 was a journeyman boat builder, too. He was baptised in Curdworth on November 23rd, 1800. His wife, Mary, born in Minworth and of a similar age, looked after the 9 children who lived with them. 2 boys were wire drawers, a very common occupation in this part of Sutton Coldfield at the time, but Thomas, aged 21, followed his father's trade and is shown as a Boat Builder.

By 1851 most of the older children had left home, a common practice, and the parents lived with their other children Henry (b.1839), Sarah (b. 1840), and 3 new additions to the family - Emily (b. 1843), Helen (b. 1846) and Esther (b. 1850)

William continued to build boats, as recorded in the 1861 census, which shows the 3 youngest girls were still living with them. By now, however, they had moved into the ecclesiastical district of Boldmere, Sutton Coldfield, where they lived in Sutton Road, at no. 27. (*The enumerator was a James Cramp, the Headmaster of Green Lanes Boys' School – see The History of Green Lanes Schools, Sutton Coldfield by D. J. Redwood*).

A change in employment is indicated in the 1871 census as William is now described as a labourer, Mary as a labourer's wife and living with their 3 remaining daughters.

It has not been possible to confirm when William died.

In 1847 **Thomas King** (b. 1819) married Sarah Pratt (b. abt. 1819) on 22nd January 1847 at Holy Trinity Church in Sutton Coldfield. Thomas was recorded as a boat builder at the ceremony, continuing the trade noted for him in the 1841 census.

In 1851 they had settled into a cottage just a short distance away from his parents in Wiggins Hill and Thomas remained a boat builder. Sarah hailed from Austrey (Newton Regis) in Warwickshire, some 18 miles from Minworth. They had a son, George, who was born in the previous year.

Next door to them lived a brother, James, and his family. He was not working in a canal related activity but was a wire drawer.

Another neighbour, at The Greaves, was Sarah Jefferies (see family history above).

The family grew over the years and George was followed by Edwin J. (b 1852), Clara (b. 1858), Elizabeth E. (b. 1864), Alice (b. 1867) and Mary (b. 1868). Gaps seem to suggest children lost in childbirth.

By 1861, Thomas was no longer a boat builder and was described as a labourer or agricultural labourer in subsequent records.

Life on the Dunton to Curdworth section in 1841

Moving now to the 1841 Census Records for Curdworth's Districts 11 and 12, it soon becomes apparent how much the Canal influenced the lives of families living close to it. Minworth was included in the Curdworth Enumeration Districts but is treated separately in this article.

In this hamlet, there were several families of interest.

These were – the Horton, Jones, Butler, Brown, Young, Barnbrook, Heape & Milward families.

Aside from these kinfolds, there is one intriguing and isolated Census record for the Four Oaks District of Sutton Coldfield. A Thomas Hotty (possibly Holty), born "out of County", was recorded as a Navigator. Unfortunately, there appear to be no other records referring to him.

The Dunton to Curdworth Families

The Horton Family

The 1841 census tells us that *Job **Horton*** (1788-1865) had a wife, Elizabeth, who was born in 1796 and 3 children. The elder daughter, Eliza was born in Minworth around 1834, Henry around 1837 and Hannah about 1839. They were all living in that village in 1841, presumably in one of the lock keeper cottages.

Job was born in Tanworth in Arden and was baptised on 19 May 1788. The Parish Records show that his father, Thomas, and his mother, Hannah, were Paupers.

Job apparently married at least twice. His first marriage took place in St. Bartholomew's Church in Edgbaston and, on 31st October 1814, he married a Katten Palmer, witnessed by Joseph and Sarah Horton. The minister's overly ornate handwriting makes it difficult to be certain of Katten's correct name (the Ancestry web site transcribes her both as Fatten Palanes and Katten Palmer in 2 different sources) but it could be Katherine, or even Catherine, possibly?

It is likely that Katten died in childbirth. There is a Parish record for St. Philips', Birmingham showing a Cattern Horton, age 25 years, being buried on 6th February 1818. Her husband was Job.

Job, recorded as a widower, married Elizabeth Bates, a widow, in St. Philip's on 24th May 1829. It is not inconceivable that he married someone else in the period 1818 to 1829 but, to date, no other evidence has emerged to support this.

We learn from the 1851 census that Elizabeth was born in Alvechurch, Worcestershire. Possibly she, too, had lived by the nearby Worcester and Birmingham canal and it was there that she met Job, moving with him, as he became a lock keeper on the Minworth flight.

Their children no longer appeared to be living with them at that time yet, in 1861, they are back with their parents. Eliza was a dressmaker, Henery (sic) was an agricultural labourer but no occupation is shown for Hannah.

On April 26th, 1865, Job, recorded as being from Tyburn, Minworth, was buried in Curdworth graveyard.

The Jones Family

It appears likely that *Benjamin Jones* (1800-1881), who was recorded as a lock keeper in 1841, had a first wife was called Phoebe, although no marriage record has yet come to light. As one of the children has the same name, it would seem very probable that this is correct. There is, too, a burial record for a Phoebe Jones buried in Curdworth on 8th February 1842 but no evidence has been found to show where she lived at the time of the 1841 census.

It can be surmised that she died in childbirth having already produced at least 6 children – Sarah, Phoebe, Jane, Eliza, Maria and Benjamin.

In 1851 Benjamin was still living in one of the Minworth lock houses. The lock keeper had remarried and his new wife, who had been born in Leicester, was Sarah A(nn) Read. They married on 30 March 1843 in Aston Juxta Birmingham.

Still working as a lock keeper, Benjamin and Sarah now had his son, Benjamin living with them by 1861. At that time Benjamin Jr. was a spirit level maker but, by 1871, he was married and had become a bricklayer. Clearly, he did not follow in his father's footsteps. Neither did his other son, Joseph, as he became a carpenter.

The enumerator fails to give the location details but it is likely that the family still lived in the same lock keeper's cottage, next to Job Horton.

Sarah died during the next decade and Benjamin left Minworth to live with one of his daughters, Martha and her husband, Thomas Dallman (?) in Hizzard's Building, Thimble Mill, Aston. Benjamin was still employed as a lock keeper. Interestingly he is recorded as being born in Halesowen, Staffordshire. That is not consistent with other records.

A final move led to Benjamin living with another daughter, Jane, and her family on The Green, Aston. Jane's husband, Charles Jones, came from Castle Bromwich. Later in 1881, August 26th, a Benjamin Jones is buried in Castle Bromwich. It seems plausible that this is Benjamin the lock keeper, as there is a family connection with the village through his son-in-law.

The Butler Family

We learn from the 1841 Census that *Thomas Butler*, a 40-year-old Boatman, lived in Minworth with his young wife, Charlotte and their 8 children – William, George, Esther, Charles, Charlotte, Jane, Thomas and Sarah.

Living with them was Thomas's father, George, who was a Coal Dealer. This provides evidence of one of the trades that relied on canal transport now.

A record for a *Thomas Butler* (1797-1855) is to be found in a catalogue of graves that lists those in Curdworth churchyard. It records a Thomas Butler born in 1801. This matches his age given in the 1841 census.

A George Butler was buried in the same churchyard. He was born in 1771. It is very likely that he was Thomas's father (see above).

There is a slight discrepancy in the date of birth for Thomas highlighted in the Warwickshire Burial Records for Curdworth 1813-1910. He is recorded as being 59 when he was buried on 1 June 1855. This difference is probably explained by the common practice of 'rounding off' birth years in the 1841 Census.

By 1851 Thomas, now said to have been born in 1797, had moved from his work as a boatman and had taken over his father's role, working as a coal wharfinger (a keeper or owner of a wharf). He and his family live at Hurst Green, near Walmley Ash. This would suggest that his family's wharf was in Minworth.

Working with him, was one of his sons – George (b. 1830), working as a boatman. George died in 1853 and was buried in Curdworth on 7th June. Could this have been a canal related death?

There was also an Edward (b. 1814) living with Thomas who was working as a boatman. Edward is a slight puzzle as there are no other obvious records, other than him being listed in the 1851 Census as a 'Brother' but it is not clear to whom. His birth year suggests he is Thomas's brother, rather than a son.

The family had grown with the addition of Mary Ann (b. 1842) but several of the older children had left home by now – William, Esther, Charles, Jane & Thomas.

Thomas died in 1855 and was buried in Curdworth churchyard.



Curdworth Bridge

The Brown Family

Close by the Butler family dwelt another Boatman in 1841. *William Brown* (b. 1797-) lived with his wife Rose, of similar age, and 2 children - Samuel and Catherine. By this time, it is likely that Samuel would have been helping his father on the family's boat.

William Brown (b. 1797-) was the son of Samuel & Elizabeth Brown. He was baptised in Curdworth Church on 20 August 1797.

His life as a boatman did not last long and by 1851 he was now a labourer, living with his wife, Rosa or Rose, and his daughter, Mary (b. 1826). His wife had been born in Ballycastle, County Antrim in Ireland. He was still described as an agricultural labourer in 1861 living in the hamlet of Minworth.

His son, *Samuel* (b. 1828), evidently followed his father as a boatman. When he was born on 7th July 1828 his father was described as a labourer so, possibly, William was a boatman for a short period only.

By contrast, Samuel appears to have worked as a boatman over a much longer period and would no doubt have been a regular sight on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal. In 1871 (the only Census Record discovered) he was living in a small community of boatmen and their families in Forge Street, Aston. He was married to Eliza and they had 2 children – Rose Mary ((b. 1867) and Isabella (b. 1870). With them lived Richard Jones (b. 1856) who was described as a boatman and servant to Samuel. At least a further 13 boatmen lived nearby in Forge Street (no longer exists) and several more in the adjacent Mill Street. This is not surprising as this was at the junction of the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal and Digbeth Branch Canal that in turn linked to the Grand Union Canal.

The Young Family

Already a lock keeper by 1841, *James Young* (1803-1875) continued to stay in this role until his death. By now, he was living with his wife, Mary and their daughters, Sylvia and Elizabeth.

He must have enjoyed the daily gossip that has always been an important part of canal life as boats passed through locks with their various cargoes and tales of life, marriage, accidents, injury and death.

It seems possible that James was base born to Sarah Young, as there is a parish record of this event in Ryton on Dunsmore for the right period.

He also enjoyed a busy married life. Married to Elizabeth Jordan (Betsy) on 10 July 1826 in St. Martin's, Birmingham, he had 2 children by her – James Young (b. 1827) and Sylvia (b. 1830 in Kingsbury). Possibly Betsy died in childbirth because, on 15 April 1839, James married Mary Ann Dingley in St. Philip's, Birmingham. One of the witnesses was James Barnbrook (see below).

Together they had a further 4 children – Rebecca (b. 1842), Elizabeth A. (b. 1849), George Young (b. 1850) and Herbert Willie (b. 1856).

James Young (b. 1827) kept the family connections with the canal as he, too, became a lock keeper. He married twice and had at least 9 children. Most of his employment was on the Perry Barr lock flight in Erdington, Birmingham where he was described as a lock keeper and later as a toll clerk. He retired to nearby Moor Lane by Witton Cemetery.

Herbert Willie Young (1856-1937) also followed his father's occupation for a time and is recorded as a lock keeper in 1891, living at 1, Bridge Cottages in Erdington. Sometime after this he changed employment and, in 1901, he was a dustman labourer, a job that he continued to do in 1911.

The Barnbrook Family

Another 1841 Census record for a canal-based family was for a *James Barnbrook*, born around 1806. He was married to Mary and they lived with 8 children – Betsy, James, Joseph, Harriet, Edwin, Sidney, Thomas and Charles.

The family can be traced back to the late 18th century. On 27th September 1799, a *James Barnbrook* (b. abt. 1770) married a Mary Glover (b. abt. 1775) in Nether Whitacre, Warwickshire. Shortly after this their son, also called James, was baptised in the same church on 17th April 1800, suggesting that he was conceived before his parents married.

James (b. 1800) married a Mary Belfield (b. abt. 1801) in St. Martin's, Birmingham on 25th May 1820

By 1841, James was employed as a lock keeper at Dunton, near Curdworth. They had been very active in raising a family. Living with them, in what would have been a small property were Bessy (Betsy) (b. 1821); James (b. 1827 became an engraver); Joseph (b. 1830); Harriot (sic b. 1833); Thomas (b. 1836 & became a railway policeman) Edwin (b. 1838 & became a drill instructor in Nechells?); Sidney (b. 1839-1871 & became a Sergeant in 4th Dragoon Guards); Charles (b. 1840). When Charles was born, his father's occupation was described as a labourer in the Parish Records.

James does not appear in the 1861 census but is recorded as being buried in Curdworth on 9 May 1867.

Out of his family, just one son stayed briefly in a canal related occupation. Joseph was described as a boatman in 1851 but, by 1861 and widowed, he was now a cowman and living with his aunt, Mary Bell, in Lea Marston.



Boatman's watercan

The Heape Family

A brief study of this family shows the drift from the land towards the canal as a source of employment.

Samuel **Heape** had been born in Netherseal on the Derbyshire/Leicestershire border in 1805, moving to Curdworth by 1841 where he was living with his wife, Elizabeth and several of his children. Samuel worked as an agricultural labourer and, although living in nearby Bodymoor Heath by the time of his death on 26 March 1882, he was buried in Curdworth churchyard.

It is his eldest son, James, who is of interest in this narrative. Born in 1829 and baptised in Lea Marston, Warwickshire, on 18 April 1830, he had married an Elizabeth Butler (1832-1912) on 6 March 1856 in Curdworth. Described as a labourer at the time of his marriage, he was working as a Plate Layer for the Midland Railway by the following census. Perhaps that occupation did not suit him and the slower life of the canal was preferable to the iron road, as he became a canal labourer by 1871. His wife supplemented their income through her work as a seamstress and their elder daughter, Mary Ann was 'Domesticated'. A labourer in 1881, James was perhaps more accurately described as a 'Canal Laborer (sic) Nav Barge' at the next census. One of their sons, Francis J, was described as a Leveller on Sewage Farm (Minworth).

A canal navvy in 1901, James was only briefly mentioned in a Summary Book for 1911, but it does seem likely that for most of his working life he worked on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal near to where he lived. He died and was buried in Ss. Nicholas & Peter ad Vincula, Curdworth, in December 1916 where the gravestone for both he and Elizabeth can be found.

Another of James's sons, William, was a Clerk at the Sewerage Farm in 1901 and promoted to Foreman by the next census while a grandson, Russell, became a Navvy for the Birmingham, Tame and Rea District Drainage Board.

The Bellfield Family

This family is somewhat of a mystery. They were clearly living at Dunton Wharf in the 1830s, as there are several entries in Curdworth Parish Baptism Records. Other information can be gleaned from marriage and census records but much appears to be missing and it is therefore difficult to build a full picture of them.

*Joseph **Bellfield*** married Ann Johnson (b. about 1812 in Whittington, Staffordshire) on 24 November 1834 in St Martin's, Birmingham. Their first son, John, was baptised in Curdworth on 20 January 1835, followed by Joseph (1836), Ann (1838), William (1840) and Michael (1843). The Baptism Records for the four youngest children show that the family was living at Dunton Wharf where their father was a Labourer.

Census records, however, are few and far between for this branch of Bellfields, although the surname was well established in the area e.g. Kingsbury and Lea Marston. It is possible that Joseph (b. abt 1815) was related to Mary Belfield who married James Barnbrook but this cannot be confirmed through any records yet.

The Milward Family

The story of this family is one of considerable tragedy. **Edward Milward** had been born around 1806 in Whitacre, Warwickshire. On 26 November 1832, he married Catherine Coton (b. 1809 in Curdworth) at Aston Parish Church, Aston Juxta Birmingham.

The 1841 census does not tell us what occupation Edward had at that time, but 10 years later, he was described as a Coal Dealer. Together with snippets of information gleaned from the records for other local people it is possible to conclude that Dunton Wharf had a reasonable level of trade in the early part of the 19th century and enough to sustain several families.

During the 20 years following their marriage Catherine gave birth to at least 7 children. Of these, 4 sadly died within a year of being born – John (1834-35), Thomas (1838-39), Henry (1840-1840) and Ann (1841-41) while another daughter, Sarah only lived from 1833-1840. Harriet lived from 1852 to 1871 and Emma, who was born in 1842, was still alive by the time of the 1851 census.

To add to the toll of death that haunted the family, both parents died relatively young. Edward was buried on 20 July 1858 in Curdworth, followed the next year by his wife, Catherine, when she was interred on 10 August 1859.

Stories like this help to remind us of the many difficulties faced by so many families as disease, poor health and diet all conspired to take their toll.



Dunton Wharf OS Map 1885

The Canal Families in 1851

More families connected with life on the canal are recorded in the 1851 census.

Originally noted as a Farm Labourer in 1841, by the next census a *Samuel **Carter*** (b. 1816) was working as a boatman. Samuel was said to have been born in Minworth although 2 other census records suggest that he was born in Temple Balsall, Warwickshire.

Around 1841 he had married Jane, born in Wolverton, and they had 3 known sons between 1842 & 1847. By 1861 Samuel had changed his employment once more and was now a Market Gardener. This was to be a popular source of income for several families living next to the canal over time as they could easily transport their produce into Birmingham to be sold at markets and in shops.

He handed over the boat work to his sons, William (b. 1842) and Alfred (b. 1847). No doubt this proved a sensible arrangement for the family. Samuel died in 1872 and was buried on 8 December that year.

How long Samuel's sons worked the cut is not entirely clear but, by 1881, William, now living with his mother, was described as a General Labourer.

Alfred had moved to Aston, Birmingham by 1871 and was working as a Coal Boat Steerer. Together with his wife, Elizabeth (nee Stanford b. 1843), and their 3 children they were living on his boat near to Reservoir Terrace, Lichfield Road at the time of the census. Unfortunately, the enumerator's entries have been heavily crossed through and are difficult to decipher. It does appear, though, that a Police Constable Higginson who lived close to the canal had provided the information.

By 1911, Alfred was a widower and described as a Retired Canal Boatman. He was living with his son, Alfred John and family. Also, living with them in Montague Street, Aston was another of Alfred's sons, William. Alfred John had partly followed his father's trade and was working as a Canal Labourer. In all 7 of them were living in a 2 up, 2 down property.

Born in Longdon, Staffordshire around 1783, a *William **Jackson*** was living in Church Road, Curdworth and married to a local person, Mary, in 1851 while working as a 'Laborer'. Perhaps more accurately described in 1861, he was now recorded as a 'Canal Path Labourer' at the good age of some 78 years. This would have been a vital, if uninspiring role, maintaining the towpaths for the horse drawn traffic using the 'cut'. The bargees would not have been happy if their progress suffered through crumbling, muddy or potholed pathways that could cause injury to their horses.

Originally born in Ilchester, Somerset, around 1798 *John **Thomas*** moved a considerable distance to become employed as a local Canal Agent by 1851. Perhaps the Canal Company in Birmingham itself first employed him before job opportunity and later promotion took him to the outskirts of Sutton Coldfield where he lived in Curdworth. This appears possible as his wife, Anne Widdus or Widders was born in Birmingham where they wed on 18 February 1823 at St. Martin.

John and Ann had a large family over the period 1826 to 1847 – at least 9 children, 5 of whom were still living with them in 1851. One was baptised Robert Widdus Thomas in 1835, his middle name providing the clue that enabled the correct marriage record to be identified for his father.

Still a Canal Agent in 1861, John died in 1867 and was buried on 19 September in Curdworth Churchyard, the ceremony being conducted by Reverend Wakefield.

In this census, living next to James Barnbrook, the lock keeper previously mentioned, was a little community of canal families. His nearest neighbour was the Walton family of 8 from Sedgley, Staffordshire who were described as living in a “Travelling Castle”. This would suggest they were Romanies. The head of the family, Richard was a nailor and may well have been helping to repair lock gates, along with a William Williams, who was living next to the Waltons and was also described as a nailor (sic) from Sedgley.

2 boats were moored up in Curdworth. Thomas Crompton born in Longford, Warwickshire in 1815, was working the first of these. He was accompanied by his 2 sons, William (b. 1838) and Joseph (b. 1845), both from Bell Green, Warwickshire.

Next to Thomas was another boat captained by *John Potts* (b. 1828). He, too, was a local boatman having been born in Fosal (sic - Foleshill). James’ father (b. about 1790) was also a boatman and he and his wife, Hannah Millerchip, had 3 children baptised on the same day, 7th September 1817, having married in the same village on 28th February 1814.

As well as the Waltons, described earlier as a Romany family, a *Daniel Meron*, b. 1800 in Over Whitacre, lived nearby. A carpenter by trade he would have been kept busy by repairs needed by passing boats, carts and the demands of the canal structures. With him lived his wife, Mary (b. 1800 in Lea (Marston?), Warwickshire and their daughter, Sarah, who had been born in Birmingham in 1837.



The lime kiln adjacent to the wharf confirms one of the important trades that the canal in the Curdworth section supported in the 19th century. Other kilns were to be found at Dunton. Lime was important for farms seeking to improve productivity and was cheaper to transport by canal. No doubt timber would have been another item moving along this stretch to meet the demands of expansion in Birmingham.

The Canal Families in 1861

The Curdworth District 09 Records indicate that there were several Market Gardeners, such as John **Brookes** (his son, James was employed as his father's assistant) and Richard Bull, as well as Market Women, including John Brookes' wife, Ann, together with Sarah Smith, Mary Wilson and Harriott Quimby.

A feature of many canal-based communities near to major towns and cities was the growing of produce to sell to the market traders. Loading on to the passing barges at the wharfs would have been relatively simple as boats progressed through the Dunton and Minworth locks flights. These local families would have been grateful for the swifter, safer passage of their produce to Birmingham, rather than horse and cart.

A 'Retired Boatman' and widower, John **Dowhes** (?) born around 1779, lived in Curdworth's Church Street which was but a short distance from his place of birth, Minworth.

Not far away from John's cottage was the 'Vickerage' (sic) where lived the Reverend William Wakefield, the vicar of Curdworth. He was also born in Minworth.

As the Parish Records have shown, the canal communities kept the local clergy busy. Birth, death and marriage records were maintained in useful detail by the Vicars or their assistants and, as has been previously indicated, provide a good insight into the local population, particularly those who died in canal related accidents in the early life of the canal.

An interesting link between 2 families working or relying on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal occurs in 1870.

Angela Masfield was one of at least 8 children born to Thomas **Masfield** and his wife, Elizabeth. Born around 1798, Thomas came from Wheaton Aston, Staffordshire, possibly living next to the canal there. At some point, he moved to Sutton Coldfield when he was described as a Market Gardener living in Eachelhurst in 1851.

Families that relied on the canal for their living would naturally have grown up knowing each other well. So, it seems likely it was through her father making use of the boats to transport his produce to Birmingham that she met up with the previously mentioned Henry Horton, a son of Job Horton, local lock keeper.

On 6 June 1870, at St. Bartholomew's Church in Birmingham, Angela and Henry, himself a lock keeper, married. Although they did not apparently live on the Minworth to Dunton length, Henry did later become a toll collector working in nearby Erdington.

The Canal Families in 1871

The **1871 Census** for Curdworth provides a fascinating insight into canal based activity centred on Dunton Wharf and suggests that there was still a thriving community at work here.

In the lock house were the **Mathers** family. The head of the house was Samuel, born 1826 in Lichfield. He was already a widower and had to look after his 3 children Thomas, Mary Eliza and Fanny. His trade was a carpenter and it is likely that he was kept busy repairing the gates on the nearby flight of locks and undertaking running repairs for passing boats.

Nearby in cottages at Dunton Wharf, were 4 families. **John Coton**, born in Curdworth around 1816, was a wharfinger. He lived with his wife, Harriet (nee Orton), and a nephew who worked on a local farm. Wharfingers, who sometimes owned the wharf where they worked, managed the goods that needed to be transported by canal. As noted previously, O.S. Maps show lime kilns at Curdworth and Dunton wharfs. The limestone carrying trade was important to the canals and the production of lime helped to improve the soil and increase the yield from the fields for farmers and market gardeners.

Next door, in Dunton New Wharf House, lived John's son, William. He, too, was a wharfinger. His wife was Hannah (nee Starkey) and they were both born around 1838. William was born in Minworth, Hannah in Wishaw. They had married on 12 May 1859 in Wishaw.

10 years later, William was described as a coal dealer and living with his father, Hannah and a 12-year-old son, William. A small change in the description for his occupation came in 1891 when he was called a Coal Merchant and was living in Wiggins Hill Lane. In the same cottage were a 90-year-old widow, Hannah Ditchfield and a brother in law, Thomas Heape (see above). Another son, John (b. 1869) lived with them and worked as a Post Man.

The marriage of William and Hannah lasted for at least 52 years as they were still together in 1911. Now a Coal Haulier, William and his wife were probably in the same cottage but Wiggins Hill was assigned to Erdington by now.

His neighbour, **Edward Cardall**, a coal dealer, would have kept John busy. Despite only 30, Edward and his wife Eliza, had moved several times as each of their four young sons had been born in different villages, mainly next to the Grand Union canals near Leamington Spa.

Coal was one of the most important of goods transported around the canal system and brought with it cheaper fuel for the local communities. No doubt Edward and his wharfinger, John, would have had daily deliveries to be off-loaded, transhipped into carts for delivery to houses and local industries.

Dunton Wharf would have been well placed to manage the shipments from local mines such as Pooley Hall, near Polesworth and Glascote, near Tamworth.

William Allen, born around 1796 in Sedgley, occupied the next cottage. In previous census records he was described as a farm labourer, but, in 1871 and at the age of 76, he was now a canal labourer. Living with his wife, Rachel, who was blind, he would have plenty to do maintaining the towpaths, undertaking brickwork repairs, supporting his neighbours' trades and helping the passing traffic.

27-year-old *Frederick Hughes*, a blacksmith from nearby Minworth, led the final family in this little community. By this time, he and his wife, Mary, had one son called Thomas. Shoeing the horses that pulled the boats, repairing lock mechanisms and paddles, forging nails and bolts would have been just some of the tasks carried out by Frederick.

On the day the census was recorded, 2 boats were tied up at Dunton. On the first boat were *David Pearson*, the 'No. 1', aged 46 born in Oldbury, and *William Gough*, born in Gloucestershire in 1863.

On the second boat lived a married couple, *Isaac and Jane Green*, aged 24 and 26 respectively. Isaac hailed from Sandbach in Cheshire and Jane came from Birmingham. It seems likely that they may have off-loaded their cargo and were taking a short rest before moving on to their next pick-up. Life for any of those who earned their living on the boats would have been tough. 16 hour working days were not uncommon and they had to live in cramped cabins, often shared with their children, constantly on the lookout for fresh water and food, looking after their horse and competing with many other No. 1s trying to use the same waterways, locks, aqueducts and winding holes etc.

Whatever the weather and their health, they had to keep going, or lose the income. It was a harsh life.

A short way down the cut, towards Tyburn, were a few canal related entries for the hamlet of Minworth in 1871.

John Janson, born around 1813, in Curdworth was recorded as a boatman. No other records for John have come to light so it could well be that his place of birth was elsewhere and he spent his life travelling along the canals, transporting his cargos at a slow but steady pace. He lived with Samuel Preston (b. 1808 in Marchington, Staffordshire) and his wife Mary. Samuel was said to be a Licenced Victualler and Coal Dealer so perhaps John transported goods associated with Samuel's businesses.

Another boatman and his wife lived in Minworth - *John and Ann Jewis(h)*. John had been born around 1808 in Curdworth while Ann (nee Haughton), who was listed as a wharfinger, was aged about 70 years and had been born in Altrincham, Cheshire.

John was the son of John and Susannah Jewish (nee Johnson). His parents had married in St. Martin's, Birmingham on 17 October 1805. Their second child, John, was baptised in Curdworth church on 3 April 1808. He had at least 7 other brothers and sisters.

John followed his father's occupation. John Snr. was noted as a boatman, when his son married an Ann Haughton (b. 1809) in St. Martin's, Birmingham on 7 October 1837. The bride and groom were both living at Aston Wharf at the time. John's surname was recorded as Jues.

Ann's father, Samuel, worked as a gardener. John was illiterate but Ann could write her name neatly. One of the witnesses was a Jane Jewish, a sister of John.

In 1851, he was both boatman and wharfinger with Ann recorded as being born in Hale Lodge, Cheshire (a suburb of Altrincham).

10 years later John and Ann, along with 2 nieces, Susannah Jewish (b. 1854) and Ellen Knight (b. 1844) are still living by the canal. In the same cottage is another boatman, Thomas Dutton, born 1830 in Bicknell, Warwickshire. This is likely to be Bickenhill, Solihull as that is not far from the Grand Union canal.

What happened to John and Ann after 1871 has not been uncovered.

In Minworth several trades are mentioned that could be related to the canal – toll collector, blacksmith, wheelwright and coal dealer – but in the absence of other evidence it cannot be confirmed that these were in any way connected with the Birmingham & Fazeley.

Next to the Jewish family lived 4 blacksmiths in 1871, a clear sign that they enjoyed plenty of work, whether canal, farm or transport related.

The census reveals some interesting information about the Minworth water works that now served the growing local population. Not far from John & Ann Jewish lived *Thomas and Richard **Wasdell***, probably brothers, and a *Samuel **Clewell***. They all came from Sedgley in Staffordshire.

The Wasdells had previously worked a colliery engine in their hometown. Now they worked at the waterworks as engine drivers, supported by Samuel, who was a stoker. The canal was soon to have a significant role in the development of the Minworth sewage works as will be explored later.



Plantsbrook Nature Park

The Canal Families in 1881

Few new names appear in the **1881 Census**.

John Coton remained as a wharfinger at Dunton Wharf with his son, William (b. 1838), whose story has previously been explored.

John died in March 1891 and was buried in St. Nicholas, Curdworth aged 77 years.

John Coton	Minworth	March 15 th 1891	77	Henry L. Skinner Pastor, St. Nicholas
No. 428				

In Minworth lived a new Lock Keeper in one of the Lock Houses. *Alfred John Jewkes* had married Sarah Adelaide Robertson from Worcestershire in 1878 in Curdworth, suggesting that he had become a lock keeper sometime after his marriage.

1878. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of <i>Curdworth</i> in the County of <i>Warwick</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Race or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Race or Profession of Father.
118	<i>July 19 1878</i>	<i>Alfred John Jewkes</i> <i>Sarah Adelaide Robertson</i>	<i>32</i> <i>27</i>	<i>bachelor</i> <i>spinster</i>	<i>Clerk</i> —	<i>Minworth</i> <i>Minworth</i>	<i>Edward Jewkes</i> <i>Thomas Robertson</i>	<i>Cord Master</i> <i>Toll Collector</i>
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <i>Episcopal Church</i> , after Banns by me, <i>Thomas Jones</i>								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<i>Alfred John Jewkes</i> <i>Sarah Adelaide Robertson</i>		In the Presence of us,		<i>John Bennett Evans</i> <i>Mary Anne Lock her X Mark</i>		
						<i>Vicar</i>		

Sarah's father, Thomas, was a Toll Collector for the canal company and this would suggest that this was why Alfred decided to change his occupation from clerk to lock keeper.

A gap in his history appears and he is next recorded as a Collector for Photographers in Leicester – quite a change for his earlier canal-based employment.

Living next to the Jewkes in 1881, were Sarah's parents, *Thomas* and *Emma Robertson*, with their other children - *Henrietta*, *William* and *Cathlean* (sic).

Thomas had travelled some distance during his lifetime as he originally hailed from Glenham in Suffolk and appears to have had worked in a variety of trades over time. He had met his wife in Romsley, Worcestershire when he was working as an Agricultural Driller.

By 1871 the family had moved to Smethwick where Thomas worked as a 'Watchman at Works'. It is interesting to wonder why his employment moved from the land to the canal as the years went by, but sometime in the next 10 years he made that transition as he was noted as Toll Clerk. It is not known what happened to him after 1881.

Another lock keeper lived in Eachelhurst Lane, Walmley in the 1881 Census. He was **Henry Horton** (b. 1836), the son of Job Horton who has been mentioned earlier in this document.

Earlier in his working life he was employed as an agricultural labourer (1861). He married an Angela Masefield (b. 1839) in St. Bartholomew's, Birmingham on 6 June 1870.

1870. Marriage solemnized at St Bartholomew Church in the Parish of Birmingham in the County of Warwick

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
121	June 6 th 1870	Henry Horton	34	Bachelor	Lock Keeper	Birmingham	Job Horton	Lock Keeper
		Angela Masefield	31	Spinster		Birmingham	Thomas Masefield	Gardener

Married in the Church of St Bartholomew according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by James Eagle Esq or after James Eagle Esq by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Henry Horton and Angela Masefield in the Presence of us, Thomas Richard Edwards Vicar and James Eliza Drinkwater

We can see from this record that Henry had by now followed his father's employment and this is confirmed in the 1871 census where they were living in Ludgate Hill, Birmingham and Henry was noted as a Lock Keeper.

Henry and Angela moved back to Belmont Row, Birmingham between 1881 and 1891 and he worked as a Canal Toll Collector. By 1901 he was described as a retired Toll Collector for the Birmingham Canal Navigations, living in Oakfield Road, Bromford.

Canal reminiscences in the late 19th & early 20th Centuries

A delightful account of canal side life is to be found in a short autobiographical account by a Susan Sylvester, housed in the local history section of the Sutton Coldfield Library.

Susan was born in 1878 and lived her entire life in Minworth. Aside from fascinating reminiscences about other aspects of her childhood in the small rural village, Susan recorded several memories that related to life on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal as it passed between Minworth and Minworth Greaves.

For her, the village green was *“of several acres and was the main feature of a rather scattered village. Along its northern side ran the road from Birmingham to Kingsbury, and north of this, and parallel to it, ran the canal from Birmingham to Fazeley.*

Whichever side of the canal you lived on, going to the other side was always spoken of as “going over the bridge”

Our favourite place was the meadow between Wishaw Lane and the canal where the Hurst Brook ran – ‘Hussbrook Meadow’ we called it. It was lush and moist, with masses of forget-me-knots (sic), cowslips, lady smocks and great yellow water blobs

It must have been very unpleasant for whoever lived there when they made the canal nearly a hundred years ago before my time and built a great bank shutting out the view and the light on one side.

Near the bridge on the canal side was a one-roomed cottage where old Mrs Wright lived. She looked after the shed adjoining her cottage where the canal boat horses were stabled for the night.....

(The 1891 census records an Elizabeth Wright, born in Ireland, living in Summer Lane near the junction with Cottage Lane. This would place her cottage right next to the canal. She was a midwife. By 1901 she was still living in the same cottage on her ‘own means’.

Elizabeth died in 28 February 1907 and was buried in Curdworth Church. Her address, at the time of death, was given as Canal Wharf, Minworth.)

We were always told to keep away from the canal but we liked to watch the barges go by with their brightly painted cabins and the horses with their shining brasses and the rows of gaily-coloured bobbins strung along their traces. An exciting thing which we used to be on the look out for in frosty weather was the ice-boat. When we heard it was coming we would scamper as hard as we could on to the top of the bridge. It was a flat-topped barge with a rail about three feet high running along the centre from one end to the other. A row of men would stand on each side of the rail gripping it with both hands, each row pulling alternately so as to make the barge rock heavily, while the horses pulled it forward crashing through the ice.....

Another thing that used to frighten me were the fights among the boatmen who brought their barge into the 'basin' as we called it on the other side of the green.....

In the late 1920s, 'Outings were now by charabanc and to Matlock, Malvern and Stratford, not by wagoner to Sutton Park or canal boat to Drayton Manor, as they had 'before the war'



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It shows the bridge over Minworth Bottom Lock and would no doubt have been very familiar to Susan, being situated close to the bridge referred to in her memoirs that is likely to have been the one that took Cottage Lane over the canal.



Minworth Green Bridge

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**Captains took pride in the
decoration of their boats, as
can be seen in these tiller
handles**



The Canal Families in 1891

Occasionally researching historical records can unearth little snippets of considerable interest. This was to be the case when studying the 1891 census for Minworth. On the final page of the enumerator's records a detailed record was made of the '*Canal Boats in the Hamlet of Minworth, Birmingham and Fazeley Canal*'.

Here we not only discover the families who were moored up when the census was taken, but we also know the names of the 3 boats that were there at that time.

By the bottom lock, Minworth, was *Dart*, described as a canal boat or barge with 1 cabin. In this small space lived *Thomas Barnes* and his family. Thomas was recorded as being born in Worcester in 1844 and was 'in charge of canal boat'. His wife, Emma, born in 1848 in Birmingham, assisted him. The couple had 5 children ranging from 1 year 8 months to 12 years. The information regarding their places of birth indicates the canals travelled by their parents. The eldest, middle and youngest children were all born in Birmingham, but the next oldest was born in Warwick and the next youngest in Napton, Oxfordshire. This would suggest that Thomas worked his boat not just on the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal, but also the Oxford and the Grand Union canals.

Moored by the same lock was *Weaver*, a boat with 2 cabins. In charge of this boat (the No. 1) was *Henry Drakeford*, born in 1861 and hailing from Cropredy (sic – Cropredy) in Oxfordshire. His wife and assistant, Elizabeth, together with their 3 oldest children, aged 8, 6 & 2 years, were all born in the famous canal village of Braunston in Northamptonshire. One other newly born daughter, just 6 weeks old, had been born in Winkwell, Middlesex showing that *Weaver* travelled between Birmingham and London.

Henry came from a well-established canal family. In 1871, he had been recorded as being aboard the *Henry James* moored up at Cropredy, along with 4 other boats – *Edward*, *Competition*, *Dauntless* and *Mite*.

The *Henry James* was probably named after Henry's father who was no longer living by this census. Unusually Eliza Drakeford, widow (b. 1817 in Banbury) was in charge. Living with Eliza & Henry James Jr. was 1-year-old Eliza and a Boatman Servant, John Wilkins who was a widow born in 1835 in King's Sutton, Northamptonshire, itself not far from Banbury on the Oxford Canal.

The Drakeford family's canal connections continued into the 20th century as Henry Jr.'s son, Charles Henry (b. 1882) was noted in the 1911 Census Record for Hillbrow Preparatory School, Barby Road, Rugby as a Canal Boatman. What he was doing there is very unclear, as others who are named appear to have been nurses, patients, servants etc. A slight mystery.

There is some evidence that *Dart* & *Weaver* belonged to the well-known Thomas Clayton fleet. Both boats are mentioned in a fleet list to be found in the Narrowboat magazine archives. They joined the company's fleet in July 1889. *Dart* was registered in Birmingham as no. 843 and *Weaver* was registered as 790 in Birmingham; both were described as ex-William Clayton boats.

The final boat recorded is *Plymouth* and she was moored at the Top Lock. The 'Chief Officer' was a **Charles Allridge**, born in 1867 in Wolverhampton. He was assisted by his wife, Emily, born the same year in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, as was their first-born child. Another child was born in Bugbrook, Northamptonshire. Yet more evidence of the importance of the canal based trade with London.

Intriguingly Charles had another assistant on the boat. He was 9-year-old **Richard Humphries** whose place of birth was unknown. Richard's relationship within the family was described as a Member – an unusual entry.

As the census record ends the enumerator notes that this was the '*End of Canal Boats lying and trading through the Hamlet of Minworth on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal*'

10 years later Charles was moored up at Watkins Wharf, Linslade on the Grand Union Canal with his wife and 8 children ranging from 11 months to 13 years. Charles was described as the Captain of a Barge Boat. In fact, he had a horse drawn boat, *Secure* (?) and a butty, *Blue Belle*. Some 19 other boats were moored at the wharf, showing the importance of canal based trade now.

Albert Bonehill (b. 1858 in Wilmcote, Warwickshire) was the son of Thomas Bonehill who was the Foreman of Lime Works adjacent to the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. In 1881 Albert worked as a coal labourer on the wharf while his brother, Harry, helped his father to burn the lime.

By 1891 Albert had married and moved to Bodymoor Heath where he worked as a Lock keeper supporting his wife, Mary, and their 2 young children. 10 years later he was a canal wharfinger living in Cato Street, Aston, Birmingham while in 1911 he was working as a Toll Collector living in the Canal Office at Tyburn, Erdington.

Although Albert did not work on the stretch of canal that is the focus of this paper, he is of interest as he undertook important roles either side of Minworth and Dunton and would have been a familiar figure to the passing boats and their crews. His son Harry, himself a Coal Porter, had been registered as born in Curdworth.



President, built in 1909 in Saltley, Birmingham, a steam narrow boat now preserved and often to be seen at rallies. (Gerald Massey collection).

The Canal Families in 1901 – a time of major change

1901 was a busy period for the canal. The giant sewage farm at Minworth was being reconstructed and both Curdworth and Minworth were almost overwhelmed by navvies, labourers, surveyors, engine drivers and others as a wharf for receiving the barges was constructed and a railway system installed to take waste and materials to and from the works. (See chapter on Minworth Sewage Works)

Several passing boatmen are mentioned as being moored at Minworth Top Lock no. 25.

On 1 of the 4 boats were a small family consisting of *William Daniels* (b. 1861 in Oudey (?), Berkshire), his wife, Annie (b. 1858 in Oxford) and their 2 yr. old grandson, John A. Potter.

Next to them was *David Neal* (b. 1856 in Tipton) assisted by his sons Albert (b. 1885 in Banbury) and George (b. 1884 in Braunston).

David clearly came from a canal background. At the age of 14, and said to have been born in Wedgbury (sic - Wednesbury, Staffordshire) he was working on a boat moored at Ivy House Wharf in Hanley on the Trent and Mersey Canal. He was part of a 'crew' of 9, most of who were the Boat Master's family.

A decade later he was to be found at Snarestone, Leicestershire on the Ashby Canal. By now he owned his own boat and was assisted by an Isaac Thompson from Northamptonshire.

Not unusually he describes himself as being born in Hockahill (sic - Ocker Hill) in 1891. He was one of 18 boats moored up at Cut End, Moira on this occasion. Here we find out that his wife, Rebecca, was born in Hill Morton, near Rugby. Their 2 children, at that time, were Walter and Charles and they had been born in Banbury.

The final record for David in 1911 shows he had a cottage in Grange Lane, Longford near Coventry. He and Rebecca had been married for 31 years, had had 15 children but lost 5 of them. George and Albert, who had been with their father at Minworth, had left the canal work and were now working as *Coal Miners (Labourers below Ground)*. They still lived with their parents, as did 4 younger siblings, 3 of whom had been born in Longford.

Moored nearby was a boat that housed *Arthur Knight* and his family. Arthur had been born in Banbury in 1868 and his wife, Sarah, was born in 1867 in Northamptonshire. With them were three children, Kate, Maggie & Albert all born in Bedworth as well as 12-year-old Ellen Bayliss, who they had adopted, and a nephew, Walter, born in 1890 in Banbury.

The final boat moored by the Top Lock was in the hands of 31 yr. old *John Marston* who came from Foleshill. He had 2 'servants' to assist him – Thomas Taylor from Stourbridge and George Simons from Meacham (sic), Leicestershire.

At Minworth Bottom Lock no. 27, some 2½ miles from Top Lock, there was just one boat which housed *George Holford*, born 1856 in Aston, Hereford and his wife, Emily who came from Ingram, Gloucestershire. *Joseph Harris* hailed from Westerby (sic – Westerleigh), Gloucestershire where he was born in 1863, the son of Charles Harris. In the 1891 census he was working as a Wharfinger, living near Dunton, along with his wife, Eliza, his father and his widowed mother in law, Sarah Chapman. 10 years later he was listed as a farmer, living in The Street, Curdworth with his wife and their 3 children.

By 1911 he had changed his occupation once again and now was recorded as a Coal Merchant, with his farm being managed by his 19-year-old son, Frederick. The family now lived in a 9-room property situated by Dunton Wharf.

Close by, in 1891, lived a *John Harris* who was probably not a relation as he hailed from Sutton Coldfield. John was described as a Labourer Lock keeper. He was one of 9 children born to Thomas and Catherine Harris. In 1875, he had married a Catherine Roney in Aston, Birmingham and 6 years later they were living in the canal based community near the Dog and Jacket public house at Kingsbury.

Sadly, John died on 7 March 1900, his funeral being held in Curdworth as he had moved a little further along the canal to Minworth, probably to manage the locks there. He left behind his wife and their 8 children who, by 1911, had moved to Cranby Street, Saltley with 2 of the sons working as Navvies.

John Medlam (b. 1840) worked as a wheelwright in Minworth. Married to Martha, they raised a family of at least 7 children. Two of the boys, Harry (b. 1876) and Moses (b. 1883) were working as watermen on the local sewage works in 1901. They would have crewed the boats needed to service the wharf that was attached to the works.

Charles Edward York had been born in Rothwell, Northamptonshire in 1871. He had moved to the Midlands during his earlier life and in 1901 he was living in a Canal Cottage near Dunton employed as a navvy or Canal Labourer.

In 1911, he was still noted as a Canal Labourer employed by the Birmingham Canal Company. He had married his wife, Sarah, in 1897 when she was 20 years old. By the time of the census they had produced 6 children, 3 of whom were still living with them, in a cottage near to Dunton and the Curdworth Bridge.

Next door lived a fellow navvy, *Joseph Bird* (b. 1865 in Curdworth) with his wife, Sarah Davies born in Stotterton (Stortesdon?), Shropshire and their 2 children. Joseph and Sarah had married in Curdworth on 7 October 1883.

He had apparently changed his employment over time, being a Farmer's Waggoner in 1891. By 1911 Joseph had become a Lock keeper and his son, Ernest Henry (b. 1887) had followed in his father's footsteps and was now a Canal Labourer. Joseph died in November 1946 in Curdworth.



The gravestone for Joseph & Sarah Bird, Curdworth Church

Living on the Tamworth Road was *Joseph Groves* (b. 1836 in Herefordshire), his wife Catherine (b. 1841 in Coalport, Salop) and a son, Joseph (b. 1880 in Birmingham). Joseph Snr. worked as a farm labourer, but his son was a Waterman on a barge.

Close by, lived another Waterman who worked at the Sewage Works – *John Harvey* (b. 1851 in Ipswich, Suffolk) as well as a young Navvy from Ireland named *Arthur Crown* (b. 1877).

The Canal Families in 1911

George Goodger (1846-1917)

A **John Goodger** (possibly John Jenkins Goodger born 1823 to Hannah Goodger?) and his wife, Elizabeth, were living in Bierton, Buckinghamshire in 1851. Born in nearby Mentmore, they were living not far from the Aylesbury arm of the Grand Union Canal with their 2 young sons, **George** (1846-1917) and Mark (b. 1849). John was described as an Agricultural Labourer.

Sometime around 1856, after examining the births of their 4 other children born in the next decade, it appears that John had uprooted his family and they had moved to the High Street, Brierley where he was now noted as a Hay Dealer.

Their eldest son, George, was working as a horse driver and, in looking at his later records, it is likely that this employment was on the BCN canals and, perhaps, this may have been linked to his earlier childhood when he lived not far from another canal.



George Goodger – kindly sent to me by a relative, Lynn Griffiths

He married a local girl, Emma Britton, in early 1870 and, by 1871, they were living next door but one to his parents in Albert Street, Brierley. George was described as a Labourer. Their first child, Elizabeth Ann was born in 1871, baptised on 13 June in that year but died in early 1872.



Emma Goodger (nee Britton) kindly sent to me by Lynn Griffiths

George was working as a Canal Labourer in both of the next censuses. In 1881, the family were living in 154 High Street, Coseley. They had another daughter, Florence (b.1878). By 1891 with more children – Eliza J (b.1883), Harry (1885-1915) & Hannah Britton (1887-1981) - they had moved to Spring Street in Wednesbury.

For much of this time, as their family grew, his widowed mother in law, Selina Britton (nee Bunch), lived with them. In 1901 George was recorded as a Canal (Bank) Ranger. This entailed George looking after a length of a canal & taking responsibility for such aspects as locks, boat movements and licences. Around this time, he worked near Dudley Castle leading a gang repairing the Dudley canal tunnel walls.

A stroke of luck revealed the connection that George had with this research paper. The Ancestry web site wrongly assigned his 1911 Census Record to a completely different person. Once found, this revealed that George finally moved to the tied Lock House at Dunton, with Emma, and was employed by Birmingham Canal Navigations as one of the resident lock keepers.

By now they had completed 40 years of marriage and all their children had left home to start their own families. Early in the 19th century, their cottage had been extended with an additional two-storey increase on the east side and, then, prior to them moving in, a further extension had been made of the rear of the property.



George, a teetotaler and Emma were devout Methodists. It was through his local chapel that he first learned to read and write. While living at Dunton, it is likely that they attended the Methodist Chapel in Water Orton.

In 1914 an interesting item appeared in the August 8 edition of The Chemist and Druggist publication involving George.

At Coleshill Police Court on July 29, Edgar Arthur Bown, described as of Lock House, Dunton, Curdworth, was brought up charged with stealing a cap and silk scarf, value 7s. 6d., the property of George Goodger, Dunton, and with fraudulently obtaining board to the amount of 3l. 15s. and sums of money totalling 14l. 10s., by falsely representing that he was employed at Birmingham General Hospital as a dispenser and earning 50s. per week. Evidence showed that accused had arranged to enter for a student's course at the General Hospital under the pharmacist, but had never attended. The Bench decided to send prisoner for trial at the Quarter Sessions, the charge of theft being dismissed.

When George died in the autumn of 1917, it was apparently due to a severe stroke that he suffered while on the towpath. Emma had to leave the lock keeper house and she moved to Water Orton to live with her daughter, Hannah and family. Emma died in 1934.

Of their children –

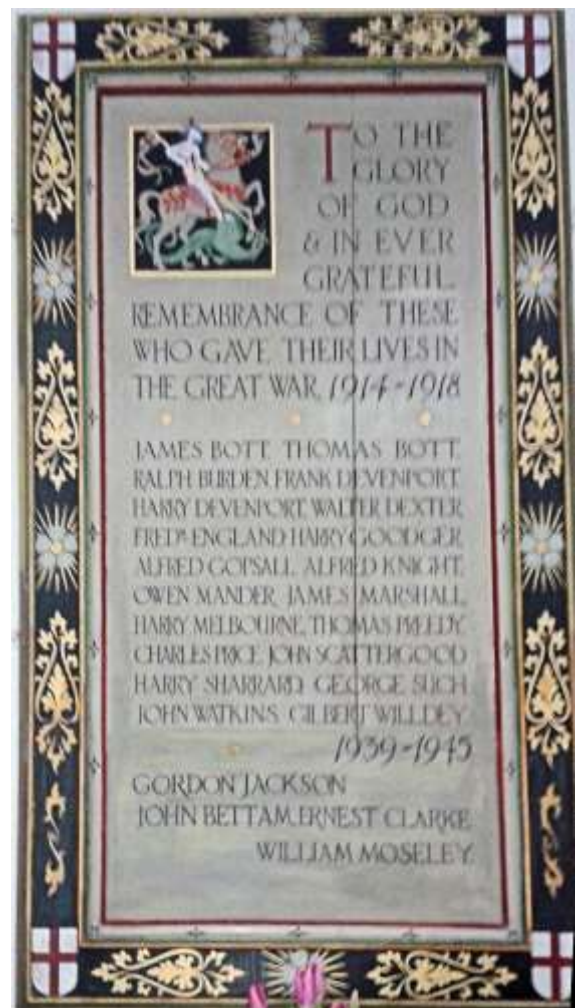
Florence married a Joseph Sharp, described as an excavator, in 1904 and was living in Cambridge by 1911 where Joseph was now employed as a Wood Working Machinist.

Eliza Jane married an Edward Allen in Tipton in October 1902 and were living in Princes End, Brierley in 1911 with their 4 children - Ivy Jennie (b.1903), Florence Gwendolen (b.1906), George Bernard (b. 1908) and Constance Amy (b. 1910).

Harry joined the Royal Navy on 2 November 1904, rising through the ranks to become a First Writer, helping to manage a ship's accounts. His last ship, HMS Princess Irene, built originally as an ocean liner, was converted into an auxiliary minelayer. On 27 May 1915, it blew up while loading mines near Sheerness, Kent with the loss of 352 lives and only 1 survivor, a stoker.



He was buried in a Cemetery in Gillingham and his death recorded on the Curdworth & Minworth WW1 Roll of Honour.



Hannah Britton was working as a domestic servant for Arthur Bryan and family who were living in Minworth Hall, near Sutton Coldfield. Arthur was a Civil Engineer who specialised in Sewage Disposal and was working for the Birmingham, Tame and Rea Drainage Board that was building the giant Minworth sewage works that today serves the whole of Birmingham and the Black Country.

She moved to Water Orton and married a George John Griffiths in that village in the summer of 1920. George died in 1955 and Hannah died in 1981. They had two sons, Robert (b. 1921) and George Harry (1923-1980). Her mother moved to live with her, following the death of her husband, George.

Other families

A 1911 census record for a *Thomas (William) **Spragg***, born in Chadwell, Shropshire in 1873, states that he was employed by Birmingham Canal Navigations as a carpenter. He was living with his wife, Mary Jane, in Curdworth. They had been married for 10 years and had been living in Rotten Park, Birmingham in the previous census. In this census, he was said to have been born in Church Preen, Salop. Mary Jane was recorded as having been born in Shelton, Potteries, Staffordshire. Sadly, their only child was recorded as having died.

*Charles Henry **Rogers*** was born in Aston, Birmingham around 1873. His father, William was a carpenter, born in Edgbaston in 1848. In 1891 the family had moved into Curdworth and Charles worked as a bricklayer. He may well have worked on maintaining the locks, bridges and Curdworth Tunnel. 10 years later he was working back in Aston but by 1911 he and his family had returned to the Dunton area and he was noted as living just a short distance away from the stretch of canal, that is the focus of this paper, at Canal Side, Bodymoor Heath where he continued to work as a Bricklayer and was employed by the Birmingham Canal Company.

His wife, Mary, had given birth to 4 children by now. 2 had been born in Hockley, 1 in Winson Green, both being part of Birmingham while their youngest had been born since they moved to Bodymoor.

His father, however, stayed in Curdworth with his wife, Jane (b. 1849 in Great Haywood, Staffordshire) and in 1901 was now recorded as a Canal Carpenter and Lock Keeper, living in (a) Canal Cottage. He died in 1904 and was buried in Curdworth church on 12 April.

The Canal Route

Physical features from Curdworth to Minworth

Taking the route from east to west of the section of canal covered in this research the main structures built at the time of construction are relatively few.

Dunton Wharf was the more important of the wharves but others could be found adjacent to several bridges e.g. Wiggins Hill & Minworth.



Dunton Wharf arm entrance

Bridges were often referred to as Accommodation Bridges in the past. Most were provided for farmers, whose lands and grazing were separated by the canal.

These bridges needed to meet the standards of the canal builder, allow space for the towpath, sufficient clearance for passing boats and be adequately constructed to be robust, without risk of a collapse blocking the canal.

There were originally 9 bridges on this section.

In his brief history of Curdworth entitled *New Millennium Celebration of Curdworth*, Geoffrey Arthurs believed that the names given to several of the bridges might have been due to the need to appease local, powerful landowners as the canal was being built. This would well explain the change of practice by the canal company along this section as normally bridges were often numbered, not named.

The first of the bridges was Dunton Bridge and, having passed under this as they made their way towards Birmingham, the boats would possibly stop at the first of several wharves along this stretch.

Dunton Wharf was opposite Dunton Basin. Arthurs (see above) said that here *"labourers worked night and day illuminated by portable gas lighting"* to load the boats with bricks and lime from the nearby works and kilns.

Little is left of the old wharf but the entrance into the basin is still there, framed by a bridge. The basin itself has been filled in and is now used by a local haulage firm.

After this came Curdworth Top Lock, the last of the flight that took the canal up through Bodymoor Heath. The height of the pound that took the canal alongside to Minworth was 285' above sea level.

Then came Baylis's Bridge before entering the short Curdworth Tunnel of 57 yards. As this was exited there was a *Manure Wharf* on the offside. Manure wharves were very common along this stretch of the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal, particularly around the Tyburn area where earlier sewage farms at Ashold and Tyburn sought to cope with the daily output from the rapidly expanding city.



Just past this was Curdworth Bridge opposite which was Curdworth PO Wharf, shortly followed by Curdworth Church Bridge. At Curdworth Bridge, Arthurs (see above) said that the quayside here was *"a stopover for narrowboats and stabling for horses"* and was *"demolished after canal transport declined and replaced by private housing."*

Between Curdworth Church and Broad Balk Bridges a new Board school opened adjacent to the canal in 1880. Built alongside the canal it must have been a pleasant setting for the pupils and staff.

Upon opening it, there were 31 pupils registered and the numbers grew quite quickly reaching 81 in 1883 and peaking at 112 in 1899. No doubt the children of local canal families attended and the later rise in numbers may also have been due to the increase in population while the Minworth Works were being constructed.



Today the building has become a popular Guest House known as The Old Schoolhouse

After this came Broad Bulk (sometimes Balk) Bridge with the adjacent Rymonds Wharf situated on the offside.



Wiggins Hill (Road) Bridge had a wharf, too, on the offside. This was known as Dock Bridge Wharf. Near this was a tip with a short arm opposite.

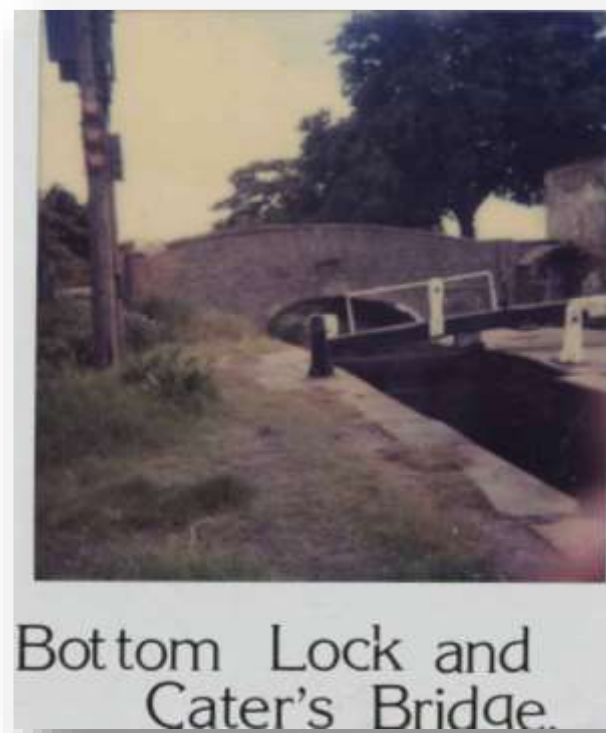


As the boats moved towards the next hamlet they passed another tip on the offside before going under Minworth Green Bridge. Here was Minworth Wharf, again on the offside, just before another short arm, called Minworth PO Wharf.



This arm was where the Drainage Board would later site their extended wharf to supply the new Sewage Farm being constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Dickens Bridge came next followed by Caters Bridge, adjacent to the first Minworth lock.



**Passing under Cater's Bridge brought the boats into
Minworth**

Permission granted by Ellesmere Port Archives to use.



Looking through
Curdworth Bridge into
Curdworth Tunnel

New bridges were needed as traffic increased and so New Kingsbury Road Bridge was constructed taking the A4097 across the canal into Minworth and then past the sewage works to Curdworth and beyond. This left the former road to become a quieter stretch called Old Kingsbury Road that now peters out to the south of the canal.

Later still, the main A38 was upgraded and, as part of the dual carriageway bypass to Sutton Coldfield, the road now straddles the canal creating a gloomy section where articulated lorries and cars thunder overhead 24 hours a day.

Meanwhile at Dunton Wharf, not only were new works needed to take the upgraded A446 road over the canal as it took vehicles from Coleshill to the south to join with the A38 bypass at Bassetts Pole to the north, but this was then to be joined by a major project to take the M6 Toll Road across the cut. The new motorway necessitated the re-siting of Curdworth Top Lock.

There were some canal side public houses that could be frequented by the boatmen. These include The White Horse at Curdworth, The Hare & Hounds at Minworth Green and The Boat Inn (originally The New Inn) on the Old Kingsbury Road. There would also have been several drinking houses opened to serve the navvies as they constructed the new Sewage Works for the Drainage Board.

Other than archive photos and some refurbished cottages little remains of the housing that once accommodated lock-keepers and other canal workers.



The Boat Inn is no longer a quiet watering place for passing boats with the main A38 running nearby



Sutton Local History Archives

Other than the Census records and Parish Registers, there is little else about the canal that has been uncovered to date when researching in Sutton Coldfield Library, understandably, as it was peripheral to much of the town's activities and business life.

As has been previously mentioned, local Directories recorded that John Jefferies was a boat builder, but no others are noted.

A sample of Rate Books for the town do provide more interesting information, however.

The town's earliest surviving Rate Book is for 1845. The Poor Relief Act of 1601 had sought to consolidate earlier legislation and introduce a system of rating property. Amended in 1662 to ensure that relief was given only to those within the parish, further changes were made in 1834 through the Poor Law Amendment Act. This moved responsibility from parish vestries to Poor Law Guardians in each Parish. An Amendment Act in 1866 clarified the role of civil parishes in setting their own rate, rather than other forms of administration such as chapeltries and vestries. Poor rates were amalgamated with general rates in 1925 and the role of parishes and guardians in setting and collecting rates finished in 1930.

Examining the 1845 Rate Book, we find that John Jefferies (see above) occupied land owned by Birmingham Canal Company where he had a Wharfe (sic) at Wigginsile (sic). Consisting of 26 perches (approximately 1/6 of an acre) it was assessed as having a Gross rental value of £4 8s 2d with a Rateable value of £3 4s 5d

He also owned and occupied a House and Land at Greaves consisting of 1 acre 1 rod & 37 perches (1½ acres). The Gross Estimated Rental (G.E.R.) was £23 15s 4d and £17 11s 3d in Rateable Value (R.V.). A further 11 acres and 11 perches with a G.E.R. of £20 5s 10d required him to pay a half-yearly contribution of £2 2s 3d.

Not far away lived Richard Benton who occupied a House & Land at Greaves owned by W^o Benton plus land owned by Birmingham Canal Company. This was noted as being 3 rods 17 perches in size, had a G.E.R. of £1 10s 10d, an R.V. of £1 3s for which he was expected to pay 5s 5d.

Richard, born about 1775, was described as a Gardiner (sic) living at Graves (sic) and his family was one of several with the same surname living in this part of Sutton Coldfield.

In June 1848, the Rate Book records that John Jefferies still owned and occupied several properties and land in Grave (sic). & Wiggins Hill. He occupied a Wharf and Buildings on land owned by the Birmingham Canal company consisting of 6 perches with a G.E.R. of £4 8s 2d giving a R.V. of £3 4s 5d.

By this time a Daniel Mercer was occupying a House & Land, also at Graves, owned by the Canal Company and consisting of 3 rods 17 perches. The Rates were quite low as the G.E.R. was just £1 10s 10d and he was charged 11½d, plus 9d for "Recoverable Arrears".

The 1841 Census mentions a Daniel Mercer living with his wife and 2 children in Curdworth and working as a carpenter, living not far from a Thomas Mercer, Gamekeeper living in Dunton. By 1861, Daniel, who had been born in nearby Over Whitacre, had moved near to The Beehive Inn in Curdworth itself and was described as a Master Carpenter.

Another entry relating to the canal in this Rate Book notes that the Canal Company occupied and owned Water (The Description given of the Property rated) at Greaves. It was assessed at 6 acres 3 rods and 31 perches giving a G.E.R. of £200 and an R.V. of £175. For this they paid £7 6s 1½d in June but £5 9s 4½d in December.

The Rate Book for December 1848 show that Daniel had been replaced by a John Benton. John was required to pay 4s 1d in Rates

In the 1851 census, a John Benton (born 1771) and his son, also John (born 1812), were living in nearby Langley and worked as gardeners. It would seem reasonable that they were using the land they now occupied as market gardeners and then transporting their produce by canal to Birmingham.

John Jefferies continued to pay rates for his Wharf and Buildings.

Moving to the 1862 Rate Book for February of that year, the Birmingham Canal Company are recorded as Occupying and Owning Canal, Plantations & Land at Minworth Greaves. It was measured at 7 acres 24 perch, had a G.E.R. of £294 16s, an R.V. of £176 17s on which they paid £3 13s 0¼d.

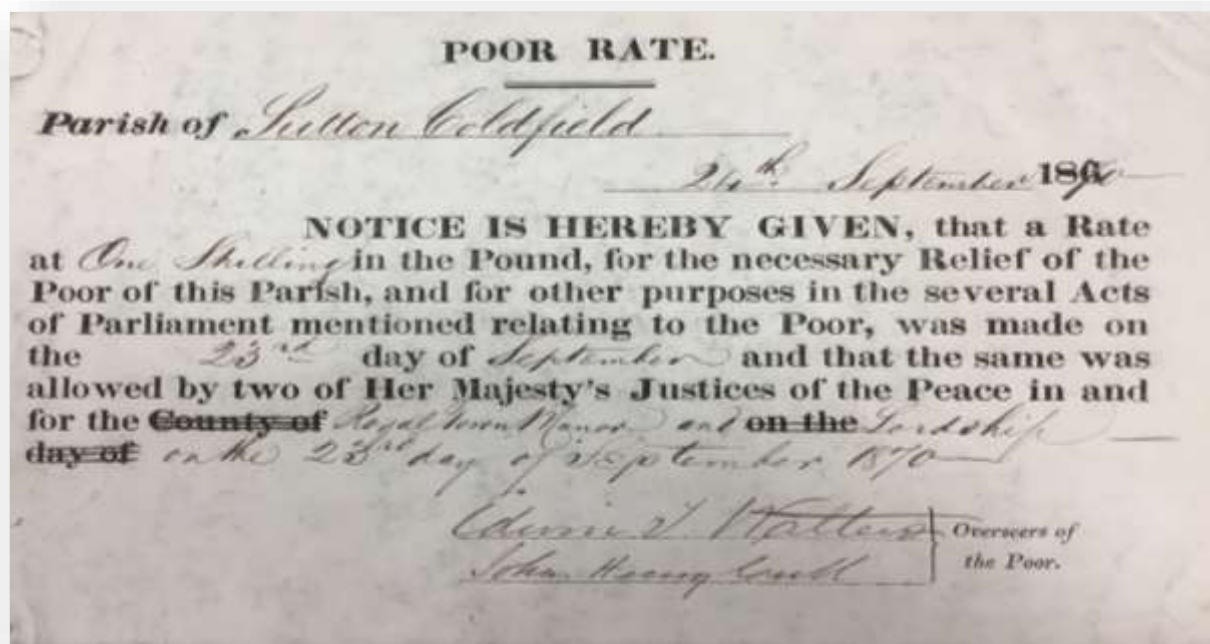
In the August 1862 Rate Book a comment against 1 entry, noted that the Rates for the Canal Company were 'late Jefferies' and, in pencil, was a further note "Has John Jefferies the land late Mrs. Jefferies?" Exactly what the Clerk was referring to is unclear.

It also showed that the Company owed 2s 1d for rates that had not been collected.

In a cluster of other entries, John Jefferies was shown as still occupying 12 acres 1 rod 5 perches at Minworth Greaves & Wiggins Hill for a Boat Yard and Building, the land belonging to the Canal Company; William King occupied a House & Land and Richard Lakin a House and Garden belonging to John Jefferies. Together these paid £2 0s 5¼d in Rates, up from the £1 0s 2½d collected in February.

Jefferies John	Birm. Canal Co.	Boat Yard & Buildings	Minworth Greaves	59
King William	Jefferies John	House & Land	Wiggins Hill	121 5
Lakin R.	Jefferies John	Houses & Gardens	do	31
				31

Entry relating to John Jefferies, 1862 Rate Book



1870 Poor Rate Book Frontispiece

The Rate Book dated 23rd September 1870 shows that the Canal Company contributed £8 16s 10d to the rates.

In May 1889, there is evidence that a Boatyard still existed at Minworth Greaves. Owned by the Canal Company, with a Rateable Value of £4 5s, it was noted as being unoccupied and was assessed at 2s 6d to be collected. The other contribution made by the Company for the canal, plantation and lands was set at £5 3s 10d, well down on the 1870 Rate.

Nearly 40 years later, in 1901, William Coton, Coal Dealer, used the Canal Company's Wharf at Minworth Greaves paying 11s 4d in Rates.

"Hollis Agent" occupied the Company's 7 acres 20 perches of land at Curdworth Road, comprising Canal, Plantations and Land. Initially the Rateable Value had been set at £177 but was reduced, on appeal, to £52. Consequently, the Rates paid came down from £6 5s 5d to £1 16s 9d. (Without further information coming to light, it has not been possible to clarify who Hollis were.)

By this time Birmingham, Tame & Rea Drainage Board were paying Rates for Conduits, Land & (21) Houses, Farm Buildings, (other) Buildings at Hurst Green Farm, Minworth Greaves, Wiggins lane, Curdworth Road and near to Peddimore Lane. The land was measured at 339 acres 1 rod and 25 perch, assessed at a Rateable Value of £799 on which the Board paid £28 6s.

Minworth Sewage Works

(See also separate paper on the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group web site examining Census Records 1891-1911 by the author)

As Birmingham expanded through the 19th century, fuelled by the relentless rise of manufacturing, so its boundaries expanded ever outwards, absorbing in time the Manor of Aston and nearby hamlets such as Erdington and Pye Hayes to the east.

The appalling insanitary conditions in the courts and back-to-backs that housed so many of the vastly increased population that worked in the factories and workshops began to become a major issue for politicians, local government and health practitioners.

Thus, in 1877, the Birmingham, Tame and Rea District Drainage Board was established to treat the city's sewage through land irrigation. Initially, on the east side of the city, it was managed at sewage farms sited in Saltley and Tyburn. Several manure farms were built in the Bromford to Tyburn House stretch and no doubt these began to become increasingly inadequate in coping with the quantities being produced daily, let alone weekly.

It was loaned £164 000 to pay for new works and to use for compensation for any lands purchased

Between 1881 and 1888 the Bagot Family who lived in nearby Pye Hayes Hall sold around 700 acres to the Drainage Board. William Walter Bagot sold the land in 2 tranches - 344 acres of the Berwood Farm land in 1881 and a further 358 acres in 1888. *(A History of Castle Vale – Geoff Bateson in the Library of Birmingham)*

By the end of the century it had become clear that the existing works were increasingly unable to cope with the huge flow of sewage now being generated daily. So, it was, in 1903, that more land was purchased from the Wakefield Trustees. These were the descendants of Edward Darcy who had created the Berwood/Minworth boundary *(Bateson)*. This was to enable *“the construction of a major bacteria bed installation at the Minworth Greaves Sewage Farm”* *(Minworth Works, authors unknown, published May 1981)*. This work began in 1905 and, such was the scale of the project, that construction was still ongoing in 1911, as can be noted from that year's Census.

The proximity of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal was fully utilised in the transporting of materials to a purpose-built dock and adjacent transshipment area that enabled these to be moved to and from the site using a substantial railway system that existed into the later 20th century.

“A system of 2-ft gauge railway with about 14 miles of single track connects most parts of the Minworth Works with the Board's Wharf on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, and a private siding on the London, Midland and Scottish Railway at Water Orton.” Thus, wrote H.C. Whitehead in 1937, who at that time was Engineer to the Birmingham and Rea Drainage Board.

For many years in the early 20th century, the canal remained vital to transport the significant quantities of ash required daily by the sewage works. Offering easy access to Saltley power station, narrow boats could supply much of this item.

Whitehead provided a useful insight into this enterprise.

“Canal Transport is employed to a considerable extent in conveying materials to and from Minworth and Saltley Works. The principal material transported is ashes from the Birmingham Corporation Gas and Electricity Works. Under the Agreement with the Corporation, the Drainage Board collect ashes from the various works and convey them to Minworth for use on the sludge drying beds, railways, roadways or for disposal on their tip.

For the speedy and convenient handling of these ashes, each of the canal boats employed is fitted with eight box containers. On arrival at the Board’s wharf at Minworth, the box containers are transferred by means of the 5-ton electric travelling crane to a train of 2-ft gauge bogies, each bogie accommodating one box. When the train of bogies is loaded, it is hauled away to a screening plant, into which the ashes are tipped by another 5-ton steam crane.”

We also find out how the boats were moved -

“In the upper and lower length of the canal where locks are numerous, the haulage is done by horses. In the middle portion of the canal, a motor tug and motor barge perform the hauling on a level length of nearly three miles.”

I am grateful to Brenda Ward (Birmingham Canal Navigations Society) who kindly provided the following from an article she wrote for the BCNS Journal Boundary Post

An arm, with a bridge over it, used to lead into the sewage works from the B&F canal at Minworth. Alongside this, at the wharf, ran a railway that carried ash into the works for the filter beds. The bridge, now demolished, was still in place in 1996.



Photos taken by Brenda Ward showing the bridge and arm to the wharf.

At Minworth wharf, c. 1922, narrowboats containing ash boxes were unloaded by an overhead crane which then transferred the boxes to bogies which ran on a 2ft gauge railway owned by the Upper Tame and Rea District Drainage Board. A pair of steam locomotives were kept at Minworth to deliver the ash to the sewage works' filter beds.



Minworth Arm & crane

Permission granted to use by Narrowboat Magazine



Early map of Minworth Wharf

Ash Boxes

One busy container traffic was the carriage of ash from Birmingham's electricity and gas works to Minworth sewage works. A new scheme was introduced in 1918 with the construction of a large unloading dock at Minworth which would take three boats abreast. An overhead crane lifted out the ash boxes and transferred them onto bogies running on a 2ft gauge railway belonging to the Upper Tame & Ray District Drainage Board. The ash boxes were then hauled by steam locomotive to the sewage works' filter beds.

To give an idea of the amount of traffic, in May 1928 the Drainage Board received 250 tons of ashes from Summer Lane power station, 1,220 tons from Windsor Street gas works and 1,560 tons from the 'Grand Union Canal'. Thus, they were unloading five or six boats per day.



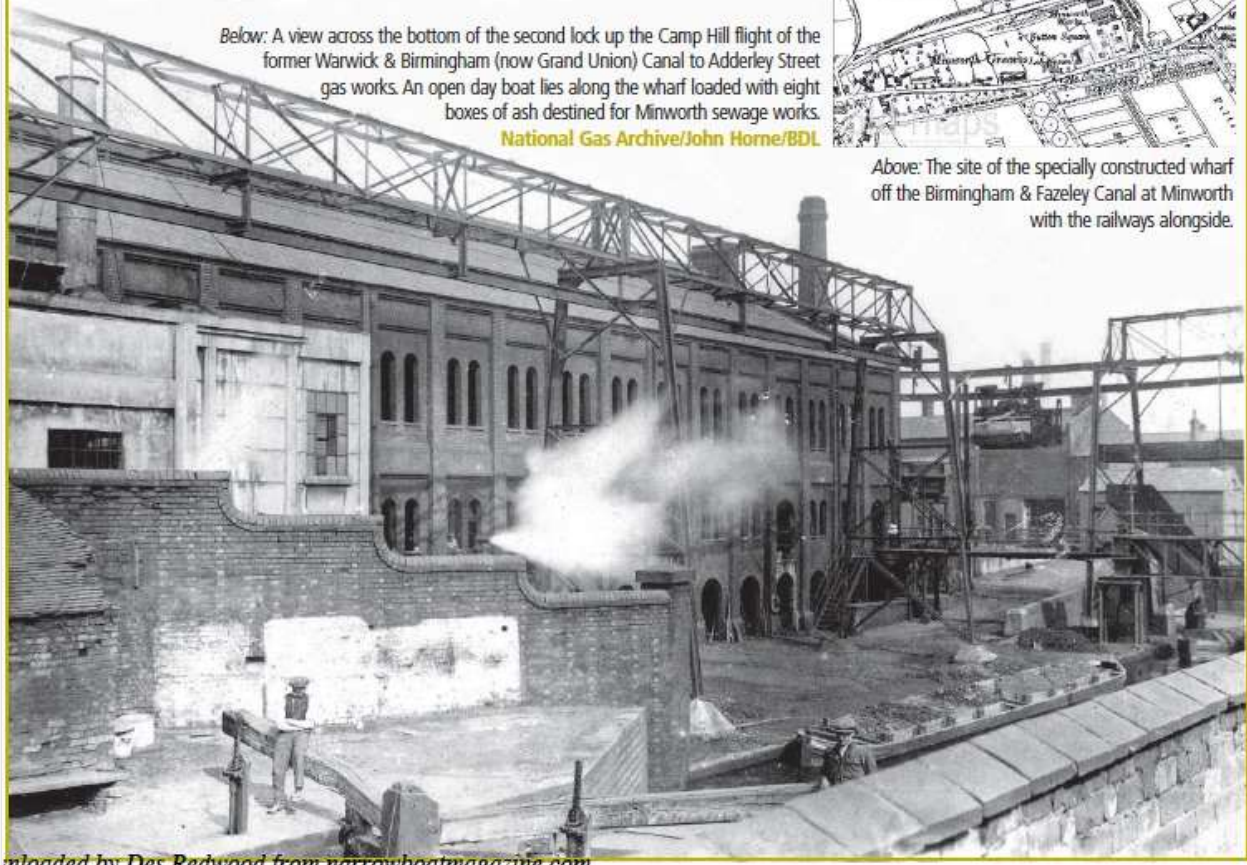
Above: A closer view of the ash containers destined for Minworth, with one of the specially built tugs in the background.

Below: A view across the bottom of the second lock up the Camp Hill flight of the former Warwick & Birmingham (now Grand Union) Canal to Adderley Street gas works. An open day boat lies along the wharf loaded with eight boxes of ash destined for Minworth sewage works.

National Gas Archive/John Horne/BDL



Above: The site of the specially constructed wharf off the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal at Minworth with the railways alongside.



uploaded by Des Redwood from narrowboatmagazine.com

An article in the Narrowboat magazine

(Permission granted to use)

As the article shows a considerable quantity of ash was moved by canal from a variety of sources to be transhipped to the filter beds.

Day boats were specially built for the containerised GKN traffic that ran between Witton and Minworth. Phosphorous was one of the most infamous and noxious cargos that were ever carried by canal.

Tramway

There was once a mineral tramway running underneath Curdworth Bridge along the bank of the River Tame at this point. The tramway was part of the extensive network around Minworth water treatment works. The track was still in place in the 1970s and at least one of the small diesel locomotives is in preservation. The inset photographs (album ref. 0201) show the track in situ in the 1970s. The main photograph is taken from Curdworth Bridge. The metal bridge in the small photograph is visible in the back ground of the main photograph.



Snippets

While researching the history of the canal, several other items and articles of interest came to light. These are presented now, but in no particular order. They will hopefully help the reader to appreciate the breadth of information that can be uncovered in undertaking a focussed research in local history.

The following extracts are taken from an excellent Canal related website that I discovered. Alan and Angela Hawks have scoured local newspapers, parish registers and other sources around the country for articles that concern canals.

Amongst their research are court reports giving details of crimes committed on, or near, canals. They make fascinating reading and are reproduced below, with additional comments where appropriate.

Their website <http://www.spellweaver-online.co.uk> and is highly recommended for all those who wish to explore Canal ancestry in depth.

I am grateful for their permission to use the following in this paper.

Birmingham Daily Post Boatman Articles 1857 to 1880

December 10 1857 Birmingham Police Court

ALLEGED HIGHWAY ROBBERY

John Lakin, a boatman, living at Curdworth, was placed at the bar, charged with assaulting John Beacham, and robbing him on the highway. Between twelve and one o'clock on the night of the 3rd instant, Beacham met the prisoner, who was an acquaintance of his, in Stafford Street, and was asked by him to stand a drop of beer. Intimating his willingness to do so, they went on towards Aston Street, and on arriving at the corner of the street, Lakin put his hand in Beacham's pocket. Beacham remonstrated with him for doing this, and the fellow threatened to strike him if he asserted again that his hand was in his pocket. The prosecutor declared that he had put his hand into his pocket, whereupon the prisoner knocked him down with such force that he became insensible. On recovering, he found 9s missing from his pocket, and Lakin gone. Sergeant Scull apprehended the prisoner from his description, on Monday last, and in reply to the charge made against him, he said he knew nothing about it. In defence, he admitted knocking the prosecutor down, but denied touching his money. The Bench committed him for trial.

Comment:

A John Lakin, Boatman, living in Low Green, Tipton (and born there in 1823) could well be the above person. This area had a significant canal community. By 1871 he was a lockkeeper and his son, John, was a boatman.

October 12 1867

EMBEZZLEMENT

*Yesterday, at Tamworth Petty Session, before Messrs., T Bramall and John Peel M P, **Edward Jennings**, boatman, of Birmingham, was charged with embezzling £1 19s 9d, the moneys of his master, Mr Richard Greenhill, of Cleveland Street, Birmingham on the 3rd instant. The prosecutor stated that prisoner was employed by him to fetch a boat load of coal and slack from the Amington Colliery, near Tamworth, and that he gave him £2 7s 6d to pay the necessary expenses of tonnage &c. The next that he heard was that the boat had been stopped at Curdworth for tonnage. He went there and found that prisoner had absconded, taking with him £1 19s 9d of money belonging to him. He gave information to the police. **Martin Cassidy**, driver of the boat horse, said they had been to Amington and obtained their load, and were returning, when at Kettlebrook prisoner left him, saying he was going to purchase provisions &c, and he was to go on slowly and he (prisoner) would overtake him, but he never did. When he got to Curdworth he was stopped for tonnage, and left his boat and reported the matter to his master. Thomas Walters (220) of the Birmingham Police force, proved apprehending the prisoner. He was committed for trial at the Warwick Quarter Sessions.*

Birmingham Daily Post Boatman Articles 1881 to 1890

July 30 1885

COLESHILL PETTY SESSIONS

*At these Sessions, yesterday, before Mr R F T Croxall (chairman), the Hon Arden Adderley, and Mr Pemberton, **George Goulding**, boatman, Sandy Lane, Birmingham, and **Thomas Wright**, boatman, Tamworth, were summoned by **George Humphries**, canal constable, in the employ of the Birmingham Canal Company, for wantonly and wilfully wasting water at the Minworth locks on the 8th inst. The case was proved by the canal lock-keeper, who saw defendants open the sluices of the upper lock gate before the lower one was closed, thereby causing a considerable waste of water. Wright contended that he was under the instructions of his captain, Goulding, and was fined 1s and costs. Goulding, who did not appear, was fined £1 and costs.*

Comment:

A Thomas Wright from Ruabon, Denbighshire, was recorded as a boatman aboard "Swan" while moored at Wombourne, Staffordshire in 1891. 20 years later he was a boarder in Wolverhampton, still working as a boatman for a carrying company.

(see also article in Tamworth Herald below)

February 12 1886 Warwickshire Assizes OUTRAGEOUS ASSAULT AT MINWORTH

Thomas Lydon (22), James Lydon (58), Catherine Lydon (53), and Maria Lydon (19), members of one family, living at Minworth, were indicted for having maliciously assaulted George Day, labourer, at Minworth, on the 28th December last.

*Mr Nathan prosecuted. On the evening of the day named a supper had been given at the New Inn, Minworth, and was attended by the prosecutor. After prosecutor left the public house he was set upon by several persons, and beaten about the head with sticks and a belt. The night was dark, but he recognised the whole of the prisoners, and a man named McNicholas as being among those who assaulted him. The following morning a cap and belt belonging to Thomas Lydon were found near the spot where the *melee* was alleged to have taken place. Prisoner denied assaulting Day. The jury found Thomas Lydon guilty of wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm, and the other prisoners guilty of unlawfully wounding. James McNicholas (22), soldier, was charged with the other prisoners with having unlawfully and maliciously assaulted **William Carter** at Minworth on the 26th December last. Mr Nathan also prosecuted in this case. Prosecutor, who is a boatman, living at Minworth, stated that he left the New Inn on the evening of the 26th December, about eleven o'clock. He was standing under a tree when McNicholas came up and struck him across the head with a stick or a poker, inflicting a serious injury. He had been under medical treatment ever since. After McNicholas struck him the other prisoners came up and also assaulted him whilst he was on the ground. Subsequent to the assault, McNicholas absconded, and enlisted in the Artillery. McNicholas was found guilty of wounding with intent. His Lordship said the outrage was disgraceful and atrocious. Thomas Lydon, who had been in gaol some time, was sentenced to eleven months imprisonment : McNicholas to twelve months imprisonment ; James Lydon to three months imprisonment; and the female prisoners to one months imprisonment each.*

7	Thomas Lydon -	Wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm	✓ Plea "
8	James Lydon -	Wounding	✓ Plea "
9	Catherine Lydon -	Wounding	✓ Plea "
10	Maria Lydon -	Wounding	✓ Plea "
11	James McNicholas -	Wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm	✓ Plea "
12	Thomas Lydon -	Wounding	✓ Plea "
13	James Lydon -	Wounding	✓ Plea "
14	Catherine Lydon -	Wounding	✓ Plea "
15	Maria Lydon -	Wounding	✓ Plea "

Comment:

A George Day from Minworth was noted as a farm worker in the 1891 & 1911 censuses. A record of the sentences given out to his assailants exists. It shows that they were sentenced at Warwick Winter Assizes on 17th February 1886. Interestingly all the Lydon family were immediately acquitted but McNicholas served his sentence.

March 28 1887

THE SHOCKING DISCOVERY NEAR BIRMINGHAM

An inquest was held on Saturday, at Tyburn House, Castle Bromwich, by Dr Iliffe, coroner for North Warwickshire, upon the mutilated remains of a male infant, which were found in the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal at Tyburn on Wednesday last. **Frank Fellows**, toll-collector on the canal, said that about 4.40 on the 23rd inst, he saw the body of a male child on the towing-path of the canal. The body was in a nude state, with a piece of flannel and some loose string near it. It was headless, armless, and the legs were cut off about an inch and a half below the thigh joint. Witness took the remains to the toll office, and sent **John Harris**, the lock-keeper, for a policeman, to whom the body was given in charge. At about 3.30, **William Latham**, boatman, of Richard Street, Birmingham, had apprised witness that the body was on the towing-path. He told witness that he had pulled a bundle out of the canal, and he had left it on the towing-path, as a barge in charge of a boatman named **Joseph Marriott**, living at Sutton Bannington, Nottinghamshire, was following up close. Marriott too had seen the bundle in the water. The boatmen were not present at the enquiry, and the Coroner, commenting on their absence, said the evidence before the jury seemed rather meagre, though this would probably not prevent their coming to a decision. He understood that the doctor would say that the child had had a separate existence; and presenting such a mutilated appearance as it did it must have been cut and hacked about by some person anxious to get rid of it. If the jury thought, after hearing the evidence, that it was a clear case of murder against some person or persons unknown, then the matter would remain in the hands of the police; and if they should succeed in bringing anyone to justice then the two boatmen could be called as witnesses before the magistrates. When this matter first came to his knowledge he looked upon it as one of those cases where the remains of children had been brought in debris from Birmingham.

They had never been able to trace how the bodies got there, and he was afraid that the difficulties would be very great in unravelling the present case. However, it was an old saying that "murder will out". The examination of the witness Fellows was then proceeded with. He said he was of opinion that the body had floated down the canal from Birmingham, as there was a strong wind blowing from that direction. A juryman asked which boatman opened the parcel, and was informed that Marriott did. Police-constable Malins, of Water Orton, deposed that a toll-collector named **Pickering** had seen the parcel floating in the canal near Bearwood on the 22nd inst. On the 25th witness and Police-sergeant Walker examined the canal for about two miles in the hope of finding some of the missing limbs, but they were unsuccessful. The foreman of the jury informed the witness that he thought the two boatmen should have been present at the enquiry, and witness in answer stated that he had not had an opportunity of seeing either of them, as they had been on voyages with their boats. Dr Jones, of Coleshill, who had made a *post mortem* examination of the remains, said the trunk measured 11 inches, and was about 4lb in weight. It was part of the body of a child about a month old, and the lungs gave evidence that

it had had a separate existence. The remains had probably been in the water a few days. In consequence of the mutilated state of the child it was impossible to say what was the exact mode of death, but the natural conclusion was that it had died from mutilation, although it was possible that the mutilation might have been done after death with the view of hiding the real cause. The Coroner, in summing up, hoped the police would leave no stone unturned to bring the perpetrators of the crime to justice, for a more horrible and inhuman case had never before come under his notion. The jury returned a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown".

Comment:

Joseph Marriott still worked on the canals in 1911. He was part of a 3-man crew on-board a working boat moored up in Holborn. He was born in Nottingham.

Constable Edward Malins was born in Alcester, Warwickshire. In 1891, he lived with his wife and their 2 children in Keresley, Foleshill. 20 years later, he had retired from the constabulary and was a jobbing gardener living in Kenilworth.

July 28 1887

VIOLENT ASSAULT AT MINWORTH

*At the Coleshill Police Court, yesterday, before Major Dilke, the Hon A Adderley, and Mr H Fisher, **Alfred Davis** (19), boatman, Cromwell Street, Birmingham, and Joseph Baxter (21), Cuckoo Road, Nechells, were charged with assaulting Police-constable Pearson at Minworth on the 17th inst. On the morning in question, about a quarter past three, the two prisoners were observed by Police-sergeants Walker and Pearson proceeding in the direction of Birmingham. The officers had five men in custody on a charge of garden robberies at Coleshill and the district, and seeing that the two men had something bulky in their possession, Walker sent Pearson after them. Baxter declined to say what was in the bundle, and immediately struck the officer a violent blow in the mouth. They closed, and Baxter threw the bundle he was carrying towards Davis. Police-constable Malins, who was some distance away, noticed Davis throw something from the bundle into the hedge, and then strike Pearson two violent blows. They eventually secured the prisoners, and conveyed them to the lock up. Davis, who is well known to the Aston police, was sentenced to four months' hard labour, and Baxter*

Comment:

Constable Malins was kept busy during 1887 (see previous article). The report finishes without informing the reader of the punishment given to Joseph Baxter.

Birmingham Daily Post Boatman Articles 1891 to 1900

December 27 1894

SINGULAR DEATH OF A BIRMINGHAM BOATMAN

On Christmas Day a boatman named William Bates met his death at Tyburn, near Erdington, in a somewhat extraordinary manner. With other men, Bates went from Birmingham in the morning to fetch a boat which was on the canal near Tyburn. In the course of their progress along the towing-path, the horse of which they were in charge, from some at present unexplained cause, fell into the canal, and in attempting to rescue the animal, it was so injured that it had to be destroyed. So far as can at present be ascertained, the men then went to the public house known as Tyburn House, where they spent some time, and later in the day Bates left for the purpose of fetching some food from the boat, which was close at hand. Almost immediately afterwards, some men who were passing the canal saw him in the water, and although he was promptly got out, life was found to be extinct.

Comment:

An article that once more shows the dangers that canals have always presented, not just to humans but also to the horses that for many years were the only motive power to transport cargoes around the canal system.



The Tyburn House Pub circa 1920. This photograph was placed on the Birmingham History Webring by Moma P. Wendy.

At the time of this tragedy, the publican was a Richard Reynolds.

Tamworth Herald Boatman Articles 1870-1903

5 November 1870 Coleshill Petty Sessions

HIGHWAY

Francis Woodhouse, boatman, Bedworth, was charged with allowing an ass to stray on the highway at Curdworth on the 17th October. Defendant pleaded guilty, and was ordered to pay the costs.

Comment:

Donkeys, usually working in pairs, were used instead of horses to pull the boats. Being smaller they could climb into the boat if cargos allowed when boats were passing through tunnels without towpaths.

Francis Woodhouse was born in Foleshill, Warwickshire in 1857. In 1861 his family were living on an unnamed boat at Crick in Northamptonshire. His father, Benjamin was described as a Boatman and his three oldest sons were recorded as Boatman's boys.

The census record for 1881 describes him as a "Boatman Barge", living with his parents at the time. His father was now a Licenced Victualler.

16 September 1876

STEALING A COAT

On Wednesday, Jas Watton, a boatman hailing from Minworth, Warwickshire, was charged before Mr Bramall with stealing a coat, value 4s, the property of Thos Ball, servant of the Navigation Inn, Fazeley. Prisoner and a companion were stopping at the Inn whilst their boat was loading on 11 inst and after they had left, the coat was missing. Prisoner being suspected, the prosecutor, accompanied by PC Hall, followed him to Minworth and found the coat in his possession. He said he had only borrowed the garment and intended returning it. Remanded.



1 August 1885 Colehill Petty Sessions

George Goulding, boatman, Sandy Lane, Birmingham, and Thomas Wright, boatman, Tamworth, were summoned by George Humphries, canal constable in the employ of the Birmingham Canal Company, for wantonly and wilfully wasting water at the Minworth locks on the 8th inst. The case was proved by the canal lock-keeper, who saw the defendants open the sluices of the upper lock gate before the lower one was closed, thereby causing a considerable waste of water. Wright contended that he was under the instructions of his captain, Goulding, and was fined 1s and costs, Goulding, who did not appear, was fined £1 and costs.

Comment:

In 1861, a Thomas Wright, boatman, born around 1839, was recorded as being 1 of 2 crew members on the boat named "Swan" while it was moored up near Wombourne in Staffordshire. Wasting water through mishandling has always been considered a serious matter, especially in the days when so many livelihoods depended on the canals.



Leaky locks are still a problem now!

28 March 1903 Fazeley

SINGULAR ACCIDENT

*On Saturday, **Armplas Bradshaw**, wife of a boatman named **John Bradshaw**, residing at Birmingham, was in charge of a boat travelling from the latter place to Hockley Hall colliery, her husband having charge of another barge close behind. On reaching Curdworth locks, she was crossing over for the purpose of winding up the lever to let water into the lock to enable the boat to pass through, when she suddenly fell into the water. Her husband stated that it appeared as though a gust of wind got around the woman and blew her straight over. The woman was rescued as quickly as possible by her husband and daughters, and conveyed to Fazeley, she being attended to on the way. On arriving at Fazeley, Dr McColl was called in, between 6 and 7 pm, and prescribed for the woman, but at eight o'clock on the same night, she expired. Mr T E Auden held an inquest on the body at the Navigation Inn on Tuesday afternoon, when the jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death".*

Comment:

The death of Armplis (sic) Bradshaw, at the age of 64, was recorded in the Tamworth Registration District in early 1903, but no other record for her has come to light.



Broad Balk Bridge

20 November 1909 Warwickshire Assizes

MINWORTH MURDER CHARGE – DEATH SENTENCE

At Warwickshire Assizes on Wednesday, James Jones (55), labourer, was indicted for the wilful murder of his five year old daughter, Rhoda May Jones, at Minworth on September 15. Mr Ryland Atkins MP and Mr S Foster prosecuted, and prisoner was defended by Mr R F Sawyer. The case for the prosecution was that Jones, a man of jealous and excitable temperament, had threatened to take his own life, and had been strange in his manner. Witnesses agreed that he was intensely fond of the child, but he had been heard to say that he hoped if anything happened to him, the child would go too. On the morning of the tragedy, he had a slight quarrel with his wife and his nephew, and the prosecution asked the jury to find that he then deliberately set out to murder the child and himself.

John Neale, a boatman on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, said that on September 15, he was near Minworth, when he saw Jones jump into the canal within six yards of him. He could not say whether he had a child in his arms, but he (witness) heard a cry of "dadda". With the aid of a mate, witness got a line round Jones, and pulled him from the middle of the water. When they got him near the side, they saw that he had both his arms round a child. He exclaimed, "Oh, my child". By Mr Sawyer : It was very nearly dark at the time. When they threw the rope, Jones seemed to be struggling to get back to the bank. PC Tonks said he asked Jones how he came to get into the canal, and he replied, "I jumped in to save my baby". He added that he came from Blakeland Street, Smallheath, for a walk, and that when he was about to return, he missed the child, adding that he thought it must have "slipped into the water". After this, Jones was charged with murder, and he then exclaimed, "I did not do it, God forbid". He was cold, shivering, and looked dazed. In fact, said Inspector Puckwell, he thought he did not understand the charge. Mr Sawyer : Why? He looked sulky, and put me in mind of a man whose head was not quite right.

Mrs Ingram, a sister-in-law to the prisoner, said Jones, whom she saw about a month before the occurrence, looked very wild. He then told her that it would not be long before he made an end to it, adding, "It won't take me much to make a hole in the water, and when I do, I hope the Lord will call my baby". "I said", continued the witness, "don't talk like that", and he went on, "I'm not boss of my own house ; he is", (meaning his nephew). Witness added that Jones had suffered for a long time from sciatica. Medical evidence showed that the prisoner was agitated, but answered questions rationally. This closed the case for the prosecution, and prisoner gave evidence on his own behalf. He said that on September 13, after a few words with his wife, he met his child coming out of school, and took her for a walk along the canal to Minworth. Suddenly she loosed his hand, as he was turning from the towing-path to return home, and the next moment he saw her in the canal.

He walked into the water some distance to rescue the child, and when the boatmen came on the scene, he cried for help. With tears in his eyes, the prisoner denied that he jumped into the canal with the child. He loved the child, and did not mean to harm it. In cross-examination, he denied having said he would "make a hole in the water" though he admitted having expressed the hope that if anything happened to him, the Lord would call the child too. He denied he was standing in the water when he was rescued. He was on his back, and was almost "done in". He went along the canal side because the child wanted him to, but he could not explain why he took a girl of five years a walk of over five miles.

In his address, Mr Ryland Adkins commented on the improbability of the drowning being accidental. There was only one splash, there was no cry for help, and there was the extraordinary fact that Jones walked so far away on the canal side with the child. Mr Sawyer, in defence, asked the jury to say that the threats of suicide were the idle threats of a jealous man. He commented strongly on the fact that no one saw the prisoner jump into the water with the child; even the boatman, who was only six yards away, could not say that he had the child with him. Did not that bear out his story - the only story he had told - that the child fell into the canal, and that he jumped in to rescue her?

The prisoner was found guilty, with a strong recommendation to mercy. The prisoner was too deaf to hear the verdict, and a warder shouted out the decision. In a low voice, he replied, "I am innocent, I am innocent". The judge passed formal sentence of death.

27 March 1926

GLASCOTE BOATMAN FINED

Two boatmen, Alfred Whitehouse of Minworth and George Spiers of Glascote, were, at Coleshill on Wednesday, fined 10s each for drawing a lock on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal in such a manner as to cause wastage of water. The defendants candidly said they would not have committed the offence had they known they were being watched.

13 May 1933

A CANAL OFFENCE

Albert Fullwood, canal boatman, 32 Legge Street, Wolverhampton, was fined 10s at Sutton Coldfield on Tuesday for drawing the paddle of a lock at Minworth before the bottom gate of the lock was closed. It was stated Fullwood did this to help to flush his boat out of the lock more quickly. Fullwood admitted he received 17s 6d from the employment exchange each week for the three days he did not work and 12s for his work on the canal. The Clerk: You are better off not working than working. That is how we live in England, happy England.

A new plan to control and manage boat movements

In the Spring 2015 *Narrowboat* magazine, reference was made to plans drawn up in September 1951 to install a Boat Control System (BCS) reporting office at either Minworth or Curdworth if a telephone could be installed.

The BCS helped the Docks & Inland Waterways Executive (a predecessor of the current Canal & River Trust) to monitor the movement of boats around the system.

This would cover breakdowns thus allowing DIWE to keep companies aware of delays in shipments.

In January 1952, the Divisional Traffic Office in London, Leslie S. Lee, produced copies of the updated system in which Curdworth was due to have a telephone installed for reporting craft movements with a control board installed at Hawkesbury, on the outskirts of Coventry.

The article does not confirm whether this was implemented but states that Curdworth was an 'active' station, one of 17 covering much of the canal system between London and Birmingham as well as Nottingham, Northampton and Leicester.



A still from the film *Inland Waterways* depicting the Boat Control Board in use at Bulls Bridge.

LHP Archives

Permission to use given by *Narrowboat Magazine*

Discovering other sources of information about this short section of the Birmingham and Fazeley canal is challenging but occasionally they come to light.

In an article in the Birmingham Mail (2nd February 2016) it was said that the building of this canal, along with the Birmingham and Worcester canal, did much to change the BCN as it extended links with London and the south. With fewer locks, perhaps better maintained, than the flight of 20 extending from Wolverhampton to Aldersley Junction, and far less miles to travel it, was understandably a welcome addition to the network of canals in the Midlands.

The boatmen had their own names for the places that they passed by along the canals. Thus, Minworth became Min'orth and Curdworth was Curd'oth. Even today locals refer to nearby Tamworth as Tam'orth and Hopwas as Hop'as.

This aspect of canal life can be seen in the census records that have been examined in this research. At times the enumerator would struggle to make sense of the boatmen's birthplaces as they would often colloquialise them.

Winter perils

The canals always suffered when the temperature dropped far enough to form ice. Amongst those that caused irreparable harm to the existence of the working boats would have been the severe winters of 1795, 1947 and 1963, for example.

But any bad winter could soon affect movements. So, on 11th January 1955, one locally based boatman, Tom Foxon, had to wait at Curdworth until an iceboat could reach him from Salford Bridge to release his loaded boat. 4 days later he was stuck again.

Freeing an icebound boat was not cheap. In 1942 it cost £2 per horse per day with 1 man to break the ice or £3 if an extra man was employed. As an example, on the Oxford Canal there is a photograph was taken of one icebreaker boat being pulled by 15 horses & men with a further 17 men on board to rock the boat as they sought to break up the ice sufficiently to allow boats to get in their way. So, freeing boats could be costly and time-consuming, often undone overnight as the ice re-formed.



Ice breaking could be hard work for the canal workers and be never-ending in the worst of winters.

Backering

In the Spring 2014 edition Narrowboat magazine, there is a photo of a horse that was “backering” at Curdworth (permission given to use). Backering was the verb used to describe a boat horse that was left to follow the towpath without being led by a member of the boat crew.



There is a traditional folk song that refers to backering and includes references to nearby Coventry Canal locations, a route often used by boats moving past Curdworth.

Poor Old Horse

*Old number one came a bacca-ring by,
And we say so and we hope so.
I said, Old man, that horse will die.
Oh, poor old horse!*

*You'll work all night and you work all day,
And we say so and we hope so.
Put him on the inside he'll back her away.
Oh, poor old horse!*

*At Exhall wharf they go to load,
And we say so and we hope so.
Then they comes out on the London road,
Oh, poor old horse!*

*On Atherstone in the Heart's Hill (Hartshill) length,
And we say so and we hope so.
T'was there that poor beast broke his strength,
Oh, poor old horse!*

*And after years of such abuse,
And we say so and we hope so.
You'll salt it down for sailor's use,
Oh, poor old horse!*

Canal people

After nationalisation of the waterways in 1948, one of the local lock keepers at Curdworth was an Albert Flowers.

In 1953 a boatman named James Jackson fell between boat and lock at Minworth. No doubt he was one of many who would have suffered the same indignity, or worse, over the years.

In October 1963, a Sam & Anne Beechey retired from British Waterways and lived in a remote cottage at Curdworth but, finding they could not settle, they returned to the 'cut' and lived on a boat.

Joe & Rose Skinner

Joe was a lover of animals and not in the least interested in having Friendship, the boat that had served him so well, converted to motor propulsion. The death of the Skinner's last mule 'Dolly' (resulting from a chill after falling from a badly-eroded and poorly maintained towpath into the canal one cold November day) in 1957 precipitated Joe's retirement. It is said that Dolly died near Curdworth.

Joe and Rose continued to live on the boat after their retirement, moored at Hawkesbury Junction.

It was said that anyone who met Joe could not fail to be captivated by the merry twinkle in his clear blue eyes under that battered trilby. He was a rough diamond, a stubborn individual who, although he conducted the whole of his working life contracting cargoes on the canals, never learned to read or write, or even swim. Joe died 17 April 1975 aged 82 years from a severe stroke and Rose died the following year on 13 July 1976 aged 77 years.

They are buried together under a cherry tree in the Windmill Road Cemetery at Longford.



**Joe & Rose Skinner
aboard Friendship**

Breaches

The Birmingham & Fazeley Canal burst its banks on 16 and 17 March 1947.

Sutton
Library
photo



Minworth lock No. 2

Another breach occurred on 2nd July 2010. The Birmingham & Fazeley Canal was closed with the long pound, above Minworth Flight, being very low and unnavigable, after the incident.

It was caused by vandals who opened numerous paddles on the lock flight in an overnight attack, with the pressure of water taking part of the canal bank away, with water and silt blocking the A38 trunk road, causing severe traffic disruption.



Maintenance of the canal

The censuses give us clues as to the workforce, living locally, who managed the daily activity on the canal and the running repairs that would be needed to towpaths, locks, by washes and embankments.

One item that needed specialist attention was the dredging of the tunnel that should never have been built – Curdworth.

Normal methods of dredging were unsuitable for the tunnel, which was also known as Paddy's tunnel by the boatmen. It's short length and narrowness needed another approach. The spoon or steam grab dredgers used elsewhere could not be deployed.

The method used by the navvies would be to dredge a hole at each end of the tunnel with the intention that loaded boats, as they passed through, would then clear the tunnel as they pushed the mud in front of them.



A Spoon Dredger

(By kind permission of the Narrowboat Magazine)

Archeology and the Canal

In 2001, archaeologists were asked to undertake a survey of the canal adjacent to the proposed new M6 Toll road. This was necessary as the new road led to the demolition of canal side buildings and the construction of a new Top Lock at Curdworth.

The archaeologists came from the Oxford-Wessex Archaeology Joint Venture Team and their findings make interesting reading, adding to the history of this stretch of canal.

Dunton Wharf

1 The 1886 OS 6" map shows a wharf at this location on the *Birmingham and Fazeley* Canal. The adjacent bridge is called Dunton Wharf Bridge on later maps. There seems to be a small complex indicated on the map with a basin and buildings. To the south of the canal, on the towpath side, a blocked arm is crossed by a very corroded metal roving bridge. The arm points towards a group of modern industrial buildings. There are also some 19th century cottages but they appear not to be connected with the canal. To the north of the canal is a flat open space, apparently a wharf, but with no sign of anything but modern buildings.

2 The top lock was the first in a flight of eleven locks at Dunton and was of typical construction broadly similar to others in the Canal with single gates at each end, manually operated by lock gate beams. The lock walls were of brick with mainly stone copings. There is evidence to suggest that two of the locks on this section failed not long after the opening of the canal in 1789. During the demolition of the lock it was noticed that the south-west lock wall had four composite tie beams. These were spaced at intervals along the lock wall and each made from a section of timber connected to an iron tie rod linked to around brick piers or buttresses, the opposite wall had only two buttresses with all wooden ties. The lock walls were founded on the natural soils and not on concrete as expected.

3 Further report on recording at the lock. The lock itself was of standard design, similar to others on the canal. There was evidence for changes to the design of the lock gates. These changes may have been in response to the failure of two of the Curdworth locks in 1789. The unreliability of the locks at both Curdworth and Dunton remained a continuing problem until 1823 when the faults in their original design were finally rectified.

Dunton Lock Keeper's Cottage

1 The original C18th century brick built cottage had undergone a number of alterations during its lifetime. A two-storey extension was built onto the east during the early 19th Century followed by a further extension to the rear in the late 19th Century.

2 Four phases of development were recorded. These may reflect the need for additional man power to service the increasing traffic along the canal and the consequent expansion of the canal facilities at Dunton.

Additional Research Opportunities

Ellesmere Port archives

The following is an example the extensive list of items held at Ellesmere that may be of interest to anyone wishing to research the canal further.

BW165/14/9 Birmingham and Fazeley Canal

Date 1780s-1947 **Reference code** BW165/14/9

"A Map of the Canal Navigation from Fazeley to Wittington situate in the Parishes of Tamworth, Greenhill & Wittington in the County of Stafford. Survey's and Map'd by Jas. Sherriff 1793"

"A Map of the Canal Navigation from the Coleshill Road at Dunston to Fazeley Junction situate in the Parishes of Curdworth, Lea Marston, Kingsbury, Middleton, Drayton Basset and Tamworth in the Counties of Warwick and Stafford. Survey'd Drawn & Map'd by Jas. Sherriff 1791"

Map of part of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal between Planks Brook Bridge and Broad Balk Bridge

Map of part of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal between Broad Balk Bridge and Dunton Bridge (Coleshill Road)

"Birmingham and Fazeley Canal"

"Profile of the Canal from Minworth to Fazeley"

"Salford Bridge to Minworth Section Bough"

Map showing proposed route of Birmingham and Fazeley Canal through Curdworth
Map of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal between...Wiggins Hill Road Bridge and Curdworth Locks

Map of Birmingham and Fazeley Canal between No 10 lock and Fazeley Junction
Longitudinal sections of Birmingham and Fazeley Canal

"A Map of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal from Aston Junction to the Coleshill Road at Dunston situate in the Parishes of Aston, Curdworth and Sutton in the County of Warwick. Survey'd Drawn and map'd by Jas. Sherriff, 1791"

"A Map of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal from Aston Junction to the Coleshill Road at Dunston situate in the Parishes of Aston, Curdworth and Sutton in the County of Warwick. Survey'd Drawn and map'd, 1791"

Map of part of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal between Dunton Bridge (Coleshill Road) and [Double Bridge]

"A Copy of part of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal from Aston Junction to the

Coleshill Road at Dunton situate in the Parishes of Aston, Curdworth and Sutton in the County of Warwick. Survey'd Drawn and map'd by Jas. Sherriff, 1791"

Plan showing part of the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal in the Parish of Curdworth

Plan of Chester Street Birmingham between junction with Dartmouth Street and Whitehouse Street

"Diagram showing Longitudinal Section of Canal and 50 Cross Sections from Salford Junction to Fazeley Junction"

Map showing Birmingham and Fazeley Canal between Dunton Wharf and Fishers Mill Bridge

Map showing Birmingham and Fazeley Canal between Brace Factory Bridge and Dunton Wharf

"B.C.N. Cross Sections Fazeley Canal May 1914"

"B.C.N. Table No 2. Plan showing Land abutting on the canal, owned by the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal"

Map showing Birmingham and Fazeley Canal between number 2 lock and Minworth bottom lock

Plan and sections showing breaches, flood water and electric cables along canal between No 2 and bottom locks at Minworth.

Acknowledgements

Where permission has been given to use images, ownership has been acknowledged.

Most photographs have come from the author's own collection.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright owners but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the author will be pleased to remedy any omission at the first opportunity.

Sources

Charles Hadfield – The Canals of the West Midlands

Geoff Bateson – A History of Castle Vale

Peter Cross-Rudkin – Canal Contractors 1760-1820

Dick Sullivan – The Navvyman

Lynn Griffiths and family - for allowing me to include the photos of George and Emma Goodger as well as extending my knowledge of the Goodger family and to be able to add more information to this paper

Warwickshire Baptisms, Marriages & Burials 1535-1812 Curdworth (Ss. Nicholas & Peter ad Vincula Church)

S. R. Broadbridge – The Birmingham Canal Navigations Vol 1 1768-1846

George Arthurs – New Millennium Celebration of Curdworth

Authors unknown – Minworth Works

Brenda Ward – Birmingham Canal Navigations Society

The Library of Birmingham Archives

Census records and other associated material available through Ancestry