

RADFORD TO STAFFORD

A TRANSPORT SAGA

ROY LEWIS

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1 - CANAL TO RADFORD

The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, from Stourport on the Severn to Great Haywood where it joined the Trent and Mersey Canal, was declared fully open for business on 28 May 1772. Like other early canals, it followed contour lines as closely as possible to avoid major engineering work. Its summit level between Compton and Gailey was 10 lock-free miles long and from there it descended 101 feet to Great Haywood with only 12 locks in a little over 12 miles.

During most of that descent it followed the valleys of the rivers Sow and Penk, being built a little east of the rivers where the ground was slightly higher and above the level of the regular flooding of both rivers. The nearest point on the canal to Stafford town was at Radford, about 1½ miles distant, where it passed under the main turnpike road from Stafford to Lichfield. In 1782 Radford was described as the port of Stafford.

The Birmingham Canal, which meanders through the coal mines and iron works of the Black Country before joining the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Aldersley Junction near Wolverhampton, provided transport for coal, not only to Birmingham but also to every town along the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. Water transport was cheaper than land carriage so that coal barges became the most numerous boats on the canal.

Coal barges and boats carrying other goods destined for Stafford were unloaded at a wharf built at Radford on the town side of the canal and just south of the road bridge. From there it was transported to Stafford by cart. A plan of Radford among the canal archives shows that originally the canal was made a little wider to allow a company wharf the length of two boats to be constructed.¹ A second private coal wharf was allowed on the other side of the canal and just north of the Lichfield road. This was occupied by Mr Lycett.

Unloading was boatmen's work but at the company wharf a fixed crane could be used for a small fee to unload cargoes such as timber, sacks or crates. At the road end of the wharf was a warehouse with doors at each end to give access to both road and wharf. A weighing machine for it was delivered by canal on 30 September 1772. It was described as '1 scale beam, 1 pair scale bottoms, 1 large steelyard, and 80 lbs weights'. A house was built for a wharfinger who kept records of loads and collected a variety of tolls. The first known wharfinger was James Preston (1774), followed by Edward Riley, who died in 1782, and then Francis Poole. Poole was paid only £14 a year plus a house, reflecting the fact that Radford was not one of the major wharfs on the canal.

From the beginning the main trade at the Radford wharfs was in coal. An account for September and October 1772 shows that during those months 17

boats laden with coal unloaded there. The average load was 24 tons so that in just two months a little over 400 tons were unloaded at Radford, almost all destined for Stafford. Some was unloaded at Mr Lycett's coal yard or wharf at Radford for later carriage to the town, other loads were for Mr Clarke, who had a coal yard somewhere in Stafford. There was another coal yard in the town between South Walls and the Sow, which almost certainly predated the canal.

In 1804 Richard Martin, then aged 80, giving evidence in a boundary dispute, stated that for many years before 1780 'I have carried many thousands cart loads of coal' through a gate to it at the end of Greengate Street.² In 1783 the town corporation erected a weighbridge near there. Carters making regular deliveries of coal had a registered unladen weight so that their load could be weighed. William Ward, employed to do the work, collected two pence from the carter for each load.

In September and October 1772 a variety of other goods were unloaded at Radford. Mr Winkle had 7½ tons of slate delivered and there was a wide range of barrels, sacks and crates containing porter, hops, wool, nails and 'sundries'. These came from boats with mixed cargoes which were partly unloaded by the crane at Radford. There is also a note that 7 prisoners from the gaol with 3 guards embarked there on their way to transportation hulks via Stourport.

From the beginning, the tanners and shoe manufacturers in Stafford used the canal. In September and October 1772 3 separate bags of shoe heels were unloaded at Radford. There was also a boat load of lime, probably for a tannery, although lime was also used in agriculture. As the manufacture of shoes increased in the 1790s with new ways of organising the trade, bundles of leather and bags of shoe heels were regularly unloaded at Radford. Some shoes were also despatched by canal. In September 1796, when the Canal Company decided to lease the warehouse at Radford with the crane and weighing machine and the right to collect tolls, the highest bidder was a partnership of William Horton, the principal shoe manufacturer in Stafford, and Samuel Fereday of Upper Gornall, coal master.

The rapidly rising population of Stafford in the 1790s increased the demand for coal but no detailed accounts survive. Coal deliveries from Stafford coal yards seem to have declined. The yard between South Walls and the river is known to have closed before 1800.

On the other hand, deliveries by cart from Radford flourished. In March 1796 John Saddler of Radford announced that he was in a position to supply regular customers and collect his money quarterly. Later the same month Samuel Copestick advertised that he had acquired the coal business and customers of Mr Smallwood and engaged a wharf at Radford from Mr Lycett for his coal stocks. In partnership with Mr Thomas, he could also supply lime from Radford wharf. In 1799 Mr Copestick leased his private coal wharf on the eastern side of Radford Bridge to John Box and from 1799 to Michaelmas

1806, became the tenant and licensee of an inn with a bowling green at nearby Weeping Cross.³ He returned to the coal trade later, as will be seen.

It should be noted that in the 1790s the term coal wharf simply denoted a coal yard and did not imply that the place was sited next to a canal or river. The same usage has been adopted in the following pages to avoid differences between quoted sources and commentary.

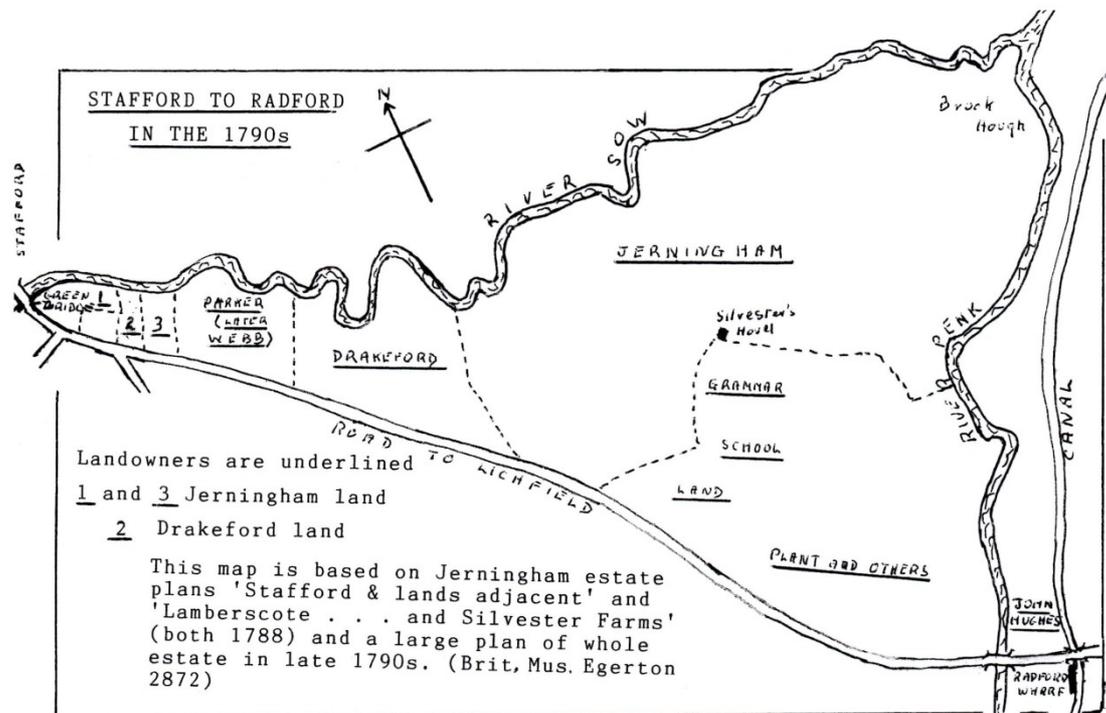


Figure 1: Stafford to Radford in the 1790s

2 – A CANAL TO STAFFORD PROPOSED

If canal boats carrying coal could navigate directly into Stafford, the price of coal there would be substantially reduced. Therefore the idea was attractive, both to townspeople and to a canal company always eager to increase its trade and tolls. However, a branch canal would be expensive, needing an aqueduct over the Penk and having to be authorised by a new Act of Parliament.

Nothing was done until 1787 when Thomas Dadford, the engineer for the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company, drew up a plan. The canal he proposed started with an aqueduct across the Penk a little north of the *Horn and Trumpet* at Radford.⁴ It then passed along the northern side of the Lichfield Road for some distance before sweeping north towards Silvester's Hovel (see map on page 4). It returned almost to the roadside until it approached Stafford, where it again swung north to pass behind the houses built along the Lichfield road. It ended parallel to the Sow just short of where it was crossed by the Green Bridge. A wharf was to be constructed there with access to what is now Bridge Street. The whole canal would be built at the same level as the main canal at Radford with no locks.

Most of the fields through which the canal would pass belonged to Sir William Jerningham and Richard Drakeford, both of whom were prepared to allow it to be built across their land, but the owner of the land between the main canal and the Penk objected to an aqueduct across his land. After the plan was produced nothing happened, there are no references to it at General Assemblies of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company. Presumably the potential income from tolls was not sufficient to justify the cost of cutting the canal plus the legal and parliamentary charges.

The scheme was revived in March 1797 when the General Assembly of the Canal Company passed a resolution 'that a cut is to be proposed from the canal to Stafford and a deputation from the town be invited to discuss it.' There is no record of those discussions but they must have favoured the project since in the following September the Canal Company resolved 'that a Bill will be sought with power to make and maintain a navigable canal from the canal at Radford Bridge to or near the town of Stafford.'

Much detailed work remained to be done before Parliament was petitioned for an Act. A route had to be settled and surveyed and costs reduced where possible. In January 1798 a survey by James Adams suggested two major changes from the 1787 proposals. Adam's route began with an aqueduct across the Penk, as in 1787, but it then followed the Lichfield road closely as far as Mr Drakeford's land, omitting the deviation towards Silvester's Hovel. From there it turned north to cross the Sow by an aqueduct over one of the meandering loops of the river and passed outside the East Gate of the town. It then ran parallel to Back Walls and finished in Gaol Square.

The extension of the canal across the Sow and to Gaol Square would be expensive and had no support from the Canal Company. Omitting the deviation towards Silvester's Hovel would shorten the route, but was likely to

lead to objections from Edward Drakeford, who had recently inherited his father's land.

Negotiations continued and by September 1798 sufficient progress had been made for the General Assembly of the Canal Company to reiterate that it would seek an Act of Parliament to authorise a canal from Radford to Stafford and to announce its intention in *The Staffordshire Advertiser*.

There were still disagreements. In December 1798 a meeting for landowners affected by the proposed canal was called at the Shire Hall to consider 'what measures, if any, it is proper to adopt to indemnify the landowners on the line of the canal and such others as may be affected eventually by the two aqueducts to be erected across the rivers Sow and Penk'.⁵ Whoever called the meeting had obviously accepted that the canal would be constructed but was still thinking that it might be extended to Gaol Square.

By early 1799 Thomas Dadford, the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company's engineer and surveyor, had a line for the canal. The aqueduct across the Penk had been moved a little further north to reduce the landowner's objections. The line then followed the Lichfield road, either by the road side or a little distance north of it, until near Stafford, where it passed behind a number of houses built on the Lichfield road and ended at a wharf parallel to the Sow, near the Green Bridge. The plan was similar to that he had suggested in 1787, but incorporated Adam's shorter route close to the Lichfield road.

A rough plan of this line has survived among the canal archives and a copy was sent to Collins and Keen, solicitors in Stafford, on 20 February with a list of landowners through whose land the canal would pass, the amount of their land affected, and whether the landowner assented or dissented to the proposals.⁶ Rather oddly the list of landowners also includes those who would have been affected if the line to Gaol Square had been adopted. Collins and Keen acted both for the Canal Company and for the County Magistrates in Quarter Sessions. It is probably in the former capacity that the plan was received. A formal, detailed scale plan drawn up by Dadford followed a little later and is now among the Quarter Sessions records.

A second detailed plan was deposited with Quarter Sessions by John Jesson, Clerk to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company, on 27 September 1799. This is identical to the previous plan except that a short stretch of where it passed through both Jerningham and Drakeford land has become a tunnel. Today this would lie between St Leonard's Avenue and the railway bridge. No high ground requires the tunnel so that this was simply a way to hide the canal from any properties that might be built along Lichfield road. It is, perhaps, significant that the tunnel coincides approximately to the area avoided in 1787 by the loop towards Silvester's Hovel.

Jesson's plan has an attached estimated cost of £4407-13-0, including £400 for unforeseen expenditure. The estimated cost of obtaining an Act of Parliament was £500. The aqueduct across the Penk was estimated at £1,000, the wharf at Stafford at £200 and the tunnel at £300. Ten acres of

land that needed to be acquired at £800, and 5 accommodation bridges required by the landowners at £250. Most of the remaining estimated cost was for cutting, embanking and fencing the canal and towpath.

Three landowners were listed as dissenting from the proposal. Henry Webb was a solicitor in Stafford who had recently bought a large property on the Lichfield road near Stafford. John Hughes owned the *Horn and Trumpet* and adjacent land between the existing canal and the Penk. Mrs Plant owned fields along the Lichfield road.

At Radford, Samuel Copestick gave up his private coal wharf on the eastern side of Radford Bridge. His lease to John Box is dated 1799 and the plan deposited by Jesson in September 1799 already names it as John Box's wharf. The lease included a condition that the rent would be reviewed 'when a canal is made navigable from Radford to Stafford.'⁷

A petition for an Act to authorise a new canal was presented to Parliament late in 1799 and, in accordance with normal practice referred to a committee for detailed consideration. The committee never reported. This suggests that the petition had been withdrawn, although there is no record of this among canal papers. If there was withdrawal, the most likely reason would be unexpectedly strong opposition with the risk of escalating parliamentary costs.

Whatever the reason for not proceeding, the proposal for a canal from Radford to Stafford was never revived.

3 – A TRAMWAY

After the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company abandoned its proposed canal nothing might have been done to reduce the price of transporting coal from Radford to Stafford if it had not been for one man, Omar Hall, and his ambitions.

The Halls had been a well-to-do family in Stafford since the middle of the eighteenth century. At that time churches in urgent need of repair, families made destitute by fire, and other victims of disasters could petition the Lord Chancellor to give them a 'brief'. This was a licence to appeal for donations in churches throughout the country. It would be read out at a church service and donations collected from the congregation. Such appeals demanded considerable organisation and most briefs were put in the hands of professional undertakers, who charged a substantial fee for their work. From 1754 three Stafford men had a virtual monopoly of the work. They were John Stevenson, a banker, John Byrd and John Hall, Omar's grandfather.⁸

John Hall's son and heir, also named John, moved to Radford and then in 1780 took over *The Barley Mow* at nearby Milford. He and his wife, Anne, had six children, including John (1770), Joseph (baptised 30 January 1773) and Omar (baptised 27 June 1776). He died in 1796 and his wife in December 1797.

In February 1797 Omar married⁹ Anne Goodwin, also from Milford. She was barely 18 years old and heir to a farm and land at Drointon near Stowe-by-Chartley. Omar arranged the wedding not at Baswich, but by special licence at fashionable St Martin's in London – an early indication of his character.

Shortly afterwards his brother, John Hall bought a large, old house in Greengate Street, Stafford (Now the site of Waterstones bookshop). He modernised the property with new sash windows inserted in the upper floors and two small-paned, bow windows on the ground floor. In the spring of 1800 he leased it to his brother Joseph, who opened a drapery shop there. Like other drapers, he sold table and bed linen, lengths of cloth to be made up into dresses, waistcoats, breeches etc. He advertised muslin and cashmere at 2s 3d to 5s a yard 'personally selected from warehouses in London and Manchester'. He also sought custom among the wealthy with such items as Indian muslin at 30s a yard.¹⁰

Omar was associated with his brother's shop, living on the premises as his brother did. In August 1801 both brothers were admitted as burgesses, or freemen, of the town. Omar took an active part in town affairs and after a short time was chosen as one of the town council's ten capital burgesses. His ambition was to be more than a shopkeeper.

In 1802 Omar opened a bank in part of the premises occupied by his brother's shop.¹¹ The earliest reference to it in August 1802, when the bank was selling the assets of a bankrupt shoe manufacturer, shows that his brother was a partner. A William Smith, gentleman was also a partner for a time. The fortunes of any bank depended on the reputation of its partners and the trust

placed in them by local people. Two or three well known partners gave a bank a solid respectability, even if some of the partners did not take an active part in bank business. The only active partner was Omar Hall.

The bank was trusted. Omar was the third generation of a well-to-do local business family. He was one of the town's capital burgesses. His brother, a partner in the bank, had a high class drapery shop in the main street of the town. The bank had a licence to print its own bank notes, which were widely accepted in the town and neighbourhood.

For Omar Hall the bank provided a way of accumulating capital from deposits, which could be invested in a variety of projects. Profits, after interest had been paid to depositors, could be invested in more business ventures and enhance his status as an entrepreneur. Like many other small scale bankers, he failed to realise the necessity for keeping a sizeable reserve of readily available cash.

The development of mines on land leased from Black Country landowners was a profitable investment of the day. Omar put together a partnership of himself, John Brawn, Elijah Waring, and Samuel Kent Parsons to develop coal mines and iron foundries at Goscote near Walsall. They traded as Hall & Co. In 1805 he put forward a scheme to transport this coal to Radford and then into Stafford by a horse-drawn tramway. The new company was split into 4 shares, one of which was valued at £810 in 1807 when it was sold. Omar, or rather his bank, had two of the shares, his brother John one, and John Brawn, one of his Goscote partners, the fourth.¹²

The new Stafford Railway Coal and Lime Company bought two canal boats to carry coal or lime to Radford. On 15 September 1805 the Committee of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company agreed to extend their wharf at Radford to the south by one boat length to provide a private coal wharf at a rent of five guineas a year. From there a single track tramway was laid along the southern verge of the Lichfield road. It had flanged, cast iron rails laid on wooden sills. Wagons, each capable of carrying 20 to 30 cwts, with plain iron wheels which ran between the flanges, were linked into trains to be drawn by horses. The line was laid as level as possible so that a single horse could pull a much greater load than could be carried in a cart and thus reduce the cost of carriage.

In 1880 some of the sills were found during the laying of sewage pipes along Lichfield Road just beyond its junction with Wolverhampton Road, others were found more recently at The Green. Town tradition has it that the unusually wide pavement outside what was later *The King William IV* public house and neighbouring properties was a relic of the tramway.¹³

At The Green, the tramway had a blacksmith's shop and machine house. The track then seems to have crossed the Lichfield road, in spite of the ease with which flanged rails could be damaged by passing carts, and went a short way along the eastern side of Bridge Street to a roadside croft belonging to the

Jerninghams but rented to William Horton, the shoe manufacturer. The Jerningham's agent reported, 'Mr Hall has converted part of the croft held by Mr Horton into a coal wharf.' It is marked 'Old Wharf' on the 1811 map reproduced on page 14.

On 2 November 1805 *The Staffordshire Advertiser* reported, 'The Railway from Radford Bridge to this town having been completed, the first load of coal was drawn thereon on Thursday, which occasioned a great deal of rejoicing in the town. As the railway promises to be a public benefit, we hope that the spirited proprietors will meet with a commensurate reward.'

The tramway took only coal and lime brought to Radford by boats belonging to the Stafford Railway Coal and Lime Company. At first the coal was bought from Hall & Co, but early in 1806 Omar Hall withdrew from the partnership, which was dissolved at the end of January.

The reason for Omar's withdrawal was almost certainly interest in supplying coal shown by two of the principal dealers in coal in the Black Country, Samuel Fereday of Ettingshall and William Turton of Upper Gornall. The scale of their business can be judged from an agreement with Lord Dudley made a few years earlier. Fereday and Turton guaranteed to take 80,000 tons a year from mines at Parkhead and The Level for sale from wharves along the Dudley Canal.¹⁴ The two men had extensive interests in other mines and were always looking to expand their business.

Early in 1806 a partnership of Omar Hall, John Hall, Samuel Fereday, his son John, and William Turton was formed to take over the supply of coal and running of the Stafford Railway Coal and Lime Company. In March Fereday, Turton and Omar Hall made an agreement with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company allowing them to build lime kilns at Radford. In the autumn of 1806 Samuel Copestick gave up his tenancy of the inn at Weeping Cross and, in partnership with the two Feredays and William Turton, began trading in coal again from his private wharf on the eastern side of the canal at Radford.¹⁵ John Brawn had retained his share in the tramway, although not a member of any of these partnerships. Early in 1807 he sold it to Edward Harding, a member of a local farming family.¹⁶

Early in 1806 Omar and his partners had realised that more traffic needed to be attracted onto the tramway if it was to be profitable. They were unwilling to give up the commercial advantage their monopoly of trade in coal and lime by the tramway gave them, but other goods could be carried. In April 1806 Omar told the Jerningham's agent that 'a small, warehouse containing ground floor only is necessary for our convenience. The expense thereof will be about £70'. The Jerninghams agreed to build it on part of the Stafford wharf and in December their agent commented that 'Mr Hall complains very much of the increased rent for his wharf'.

Meanwhile, Omar had problems that were not linked to the coal trade. His brother Joseph's drapery shop was in financial difficulties and Joseph resigned as a partner in the bank to avoid it being involved. William Smith had resigned some time earlier so that Omar now had no partners in his bank.

In January 1807 Joseph Hall was declared bankrupt. Omar took charge of winding up the business and disposing of the stock on reasonable terms. Joseph's lease of the property where his shop had been was sold by his creditors, leaving Omar homeless and with no premises for his bank.

Fortunately, further down Greengate Street, where the Co-operative Bank is today, was a house owned by John Hughes, who lived at Radford and was linked by marriage to the Hall family. In fact, Hughes had only a life interest in the house and on his death it would be inherited by Omar Hall. Hughes offered the house to Omar as both home and bank premises.¹⁷ About this time Omar had to borrow £650 from Samuel Fereday, using one of his tramway shares as security.¹⁸

Bank and tramway carried on without problems until March 1809. Omar had no strong room so banknotes were kept in a large iron-bound chest. On the night of 13 March thieves broke in and smashed the lock on the chest. They escaped with 1,700 of the bank's own £1 notes and another 300 out-dated notes with the signatures of both brothers, which had been withdrawn from circulation but not destroyed. They also took about £220 in other banknotes and more than a £100 in bankers' drafts.¹⁹ Between 300 and 400 notes, tied in a handkerchief, were recovered from a ditch at the side of the Wolverhampton road. The Forebridge Association for Prosecuting Thieves, of which Omar was a member, offered a reward for information leading to prosecution and Omar added £100 to it, but none of the banknotes was ever recovered.

Confidence in the bank evaporated. Omar had no reserve of easily accessible cash and had to close the doors of the bank. A week after the robbery he was declared bankrupt. Money on loan was called in where possible and all Omar's property was sold by auction on 31 July. There were only four lots: the reversion of the *Horn and Trumpet* and house in Greengate Street after the death of John Hughes, who had a life interest: the reversion of a farm at Drinton in his wife's name, if he outlived her: a quarter share in the tramway: and another quarter share in it subject to repayment of a loan of £650 to Samuel Fereday. The assets were small and loans had not always been made wisely. The final dividend received by the creditors was only 4s 9d in the pound. Nevertheless, there was considerable sympathy in the town for Omar Hall as the victim of the town's first bank robbery.

Samuel Fereday acted quickly. Only two days after the robbery, and before Omar was declared bankrupt, his solicitor drew up papers dissolving not only the partnership of the Feredays and Turton with Omar Hall and his father, but also their partnership with Samuel Copestick. The dissolution to be effective from 1 April and all debts to be paid to William Wood Greensmith and Samuel Nicklin, the wharfinger at Radford.

The exact arrangements made to continue the Stafford Railway Coal and Lime Company are unknown but the Feredays and Turton emerged as the effective controllers of the company. They probably acquired Omar's shares

in July. John Hall retained his one quarter share. In July 1811 he used it as security for a loan of only £264 from James Cramer, a Stafford grocer.²⁰ The valuation suggest that the tramway had been less profitable than expected.

In an effort to boost trade, the company advertised in May 1810 that in future they would supply their best Bilston coal at the Stafford wharf at Radford prices, making no extra charge for carriage on the tramway. Coal from the Stafford wharf would be distributed anywhere in the town, or at any reasonable distance, for 2 shillings a ton. Other types of coal could be obtained on special order but were not stocked. Best Walsall White Lime would cost 14s 8d a ton and Caldon Low lime from the company's own kilns at Radford 15s 8d a ton. Other merchandise, such as bricks, tiles, timber, etc would be carried at proportionally low prices with an annual account, the company pledging that goods would be delivered immediately after their arrival at Radford. The company also announced reduced prices for coal and lime delivered by cart from Radford to a string of villages, including Milford, Acton Trussell, the Haywoods, Tixall and Weston.

A new manager had been installed at Radford. This was John Hughes, who had inherited a life interest in the *Horn and Trumpet* (then called *The Anchor*) about 1790. By 1810 he had let the inn to Thomas Allen and built himself a new house on adjoining land. He had been born in 1760 and had married John Hall's sister Elizabeth at Acton Trussell in 1784. After her death in 1803, he married Hannah Cook Wetton in 1804 and died at Radford in 1838, aged 77.

On 7 November 1812 the tramway was put up for sale by auction. The sale included 4 lime kilns at Radford, the track, two canal boats, 9 coal carriages, 6 stacking carriages, 2 short river boats capable of carrying 10 tons, a crane on wheels, a weighing machine, and a useful wagon horse and mare. An assortment of wheelbarrows, picks, scrap iron, etc were also included in the sale.

The purchasers were the Feredays and Turton, who became the sole owners of the tramway and the only coal merchants able to use it. However, by that time an alternative scheme to bring coal into Stafford had been put forward and was well advanced.

The transport of coal and lime on the horse drawn tramway was coming to an end. Its final months are bound up with the introduction of transport of coal by a canalised river. An account of these final months is included in the next chapter.

4 – THE SOW IS MADE NAVIGABLE

In the 1790s the Sow meandered through low lying meadows between Stafford and its junction with the Penk north of Radford. The map on page 4 shows its devious course with numerous loops. Flooding occurred regularly. After a wet autumn the Jerninghams's agent commented in January 1794 that the meadows had been under water since the previous August.

After the passing of The Forebridge Drainage and Enclosure Act in 1800 there were significant changes. To decrease flooding, water would have to flow more freely. To do this a new, straighter river course was cut where there were meanders and, where the existing course was retained, shallow places were dredged. Low river-side embankments and a series of drainage ditches across the meadows also helped to reduce flooding. Flooding was not eliminated but it ceased to be a regular annual occurrence. The work took several years to complete, but was probably finished about 1805 or 1806.

John Hughes allowed the bankrupt Omar Hall to continue living in his Greengate Street house. Omar remained a capital burgess and a respected townsman. In 1810 he was the first to realise that the changes made to the river offered a direct way to bring coal into Stafford without it having to be unloaded at Radford. The key to his scheme was building a short aqueduct from the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal across the Penk and then a lock down to river level, linking the Sow to the existing canal. The river belonged to the Jerninghams and their permission would be needed to make any further changes in order to make the river navigable by canal boats and to provide a tow path. A wharf would be needed at the Stafford end of the navigation. The least expensive way to do this was to utilise as far as possible the tramway coal wharf near the Green Bridge. Omar assumed that, once canal boats could be brought directly into Stafford, the tramway would be redundant. Fortunately, the existing wharf was only rented from the Jerninghams; there was no long term lease. Omar was also advised that no authorising Act of Parliament would be needed, a considerable saving of legal costs.

Omar's first move came in September 1810 when he appeared in person at a committee meeting of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company 'to solicit them to build a lock below Radford to make a connection between the river and the canal'. He was told that the approval of a General Assembly of the Canal Company would be needed and that he should be 'prepared to answer certain questions'. In the discussions they probably warned him that, even if approval was given, the company would not pay for the lock. Neither the minutes of a postponed General Assembly on 1 October or of the following General Assembly on 19 March 1811 include any reference to his application. Omar had not obtained permission to make a connection, but whether he let this be known is very doubtful.

By 1811 he had a partner, Richard Brown, a limestone merchant from Shenstone. After negotiations with the Jerninghams a short canal was cut parallel to the river near the Green Bridge to form the Stafford wharf (see map on page 14).

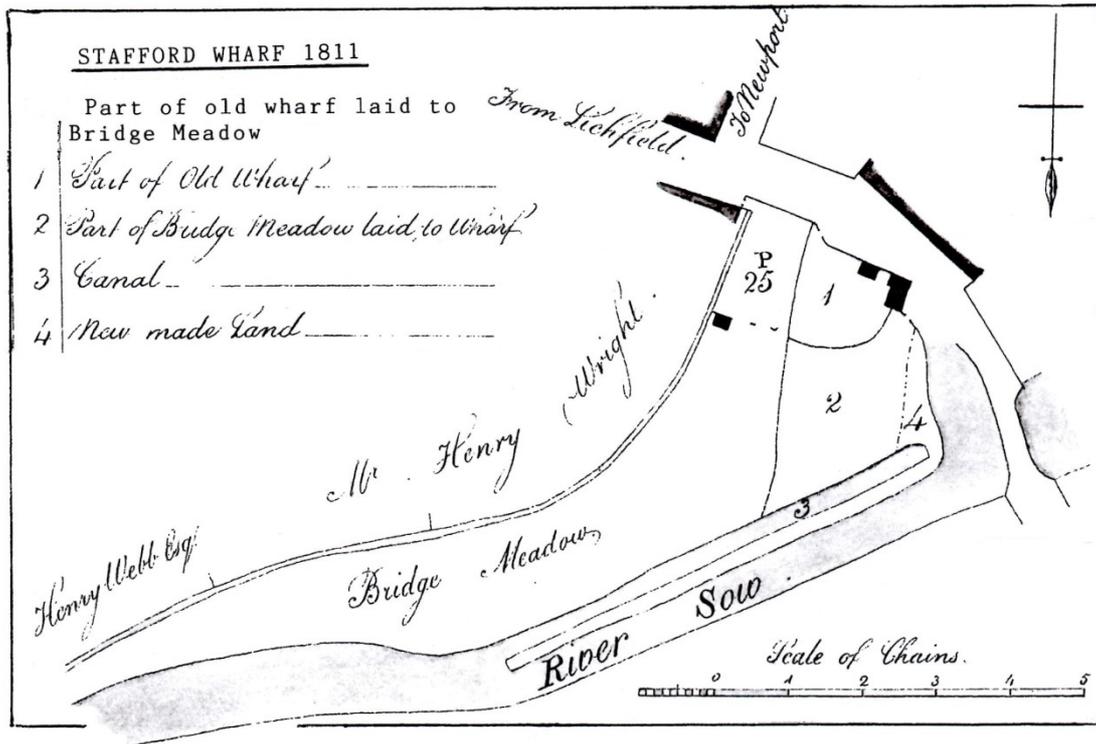


Figure 2: Stafford Wharf 1811

A three feet wide towpath was made from the wharf along the embankment on the north bank of the river with a roving bridge (where Fairway crosses the river today) so that the towpath could continue on the embankment, which was on the south side of the river from that point to the junction of the Sow and Penk. The towpath then continued along the Penk for 50 yards in Brook Hough meadow belonging to the Jerninghams. This was where Omar planned to make a connection with the canal.

A formal 21 year lease from Sir George Jerningham to Richard Brown and Omar Hall, who described himself as a coal merchant, was drawn up on 29 September 1811. This granted them the right to carry coal on the river from the wharf to the place in Brook Hough 'where a communication is to be made to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal'. Brown and Hall would be responsible for maintaining and fencing the embankment which carried the towpath, 'as required by the Forebridge Drainage and Enclosure Act'. The existing tramway wharf by the Green Bridge was extended from the road back to the new cut, but reduced in street frontage. At the end of the lease, any buildings on the wharf would become the property of Sir George Jerningham at a sum to be assessed. The lease could not be sub-let without permission and would be cancelled if the rent of £50 a year was not paid. The copy of the lease among the Jerningham papers is unsigned, but all parties behaved as if it was effective.

When the tramway proprietors learnt details of the lease, they pointed out that part of the existing wharf was not included and applied to continue to use it, as 'there is plenty of room for both concerns'. Adding that 'we think competition will be a good thing for the town' and 'If the river scheme should not succeed, Sir George will benefit from the continuation of the railway.'²¹ The application seems to have been successful and the tramway continued to use the wharf.

In the absence of a lock to connect river and canal, Omar and his partner planned some kind of inclined plane across the land of John Box, about 50 yards from the junction of the Sow and the Penk. In 1970 the Broadbridges noticed the remains of a ramp in this area, but otherwise nothing is known of it. The inclined plane was probably never completed. It would have necessitated coal being transferred from canal boat to inclined plane and river boat across the towpath. It is worth noting that among the new bye laws made by the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company in October 1810 was a ban on unloading across the towpath because of obstruction. Penalty 40 shillings.

By August 1812 work on the new wharf and river was completed. Omar and his partner gave notice of a meeting to be held at *The Swan* in Stafford on 25 August to auction a lease of the navigation of the Sow and Penk from the wharf at Forebridge to the inclined plane for connection with the canal, for the conveyance of coal and lime. The Stafford, or Forebridge, wharf was already occupied by Richard Brown and there were conditions that would be read out at the meeting. This appears to be an auction of the lease drawn up in 1811 and does not actually include the use of an incline plane or any other connection to the canal.

Nevertheless, the notice alarmed the Committee of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company. They instructed Collins and Keen, solicitors in Stafford, 'to attend the meeting and represent that there is not any right to open communication between the River and the Canal'. The Day Book of Collins and Keen records their attendance, stating 'the objection of the Canal Company to any communication with the canal', and on 4 September a note – 'Mr Gilbert. Several attendances upon you and Mr Hall about the auction'.²²

The auction was almost certainly cancelled. The townspeople were outraged at Omar Hall's behaviour, which was regarded as deliberate deception. He had left his house in Greengate Street in July 1811,²³ now he left Stafford. The town council vented their anger when they met on 4 September and passed a resolution: 'That Mr Omar Hall, having left the town and his general conduct rendering him unworthy and improper to hold the office of a capital burgess, he is hereby removed from the same.'²⁴

This was the end of Omar Hall's connection with the transport of coal from Radford to Stafford, but his later life throws some light on his character. After 1812, he seems to have moved around the country becoming increasingly impoverished. In April 1817 he was convicted at Warwick Assizes of stealing

a brace of fowl from Stephen Riley of Warwick and sentenced to be transported. While awaiting trial, he had been in Warwick gaol with Abraham Thornton, accused of rape and murder. Thornton was acquitted. A verdict that caused outrage and an arcane procedure known as Appeal for Murder was invoked for a second trial. Omar, then on the prison hulk *Justitia* moored at Woolwich, let it be known that, while they were in gaol, Thornton had made certain admissions to him and he was prepared to testify to this. However, as a convicted felon he was barred from giving evidence. He was therefore granted a pardon and released so that he could testify.²⁵ He later returned to Stafford and died there in 1833.²⁶

Back in Stafford, the cancellation of the auction in August 1812 and the statement by the Canal Company resulted in uncertainty about the future of a canalised river Sow. In October 1812 the sale by auction of the tramway enabled Fereday and Turton, the purchasers, to consolidate their hold on it and they indicated that they were interested in taking up the river scheme. The Jerninghams also wanted the scheme completed as it would be to the advantage of their estate. Their agent, Fereday and Turton all acted on the assumption that the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company could be persuaded to allow a lock to be constructed.

However, on 1 May 1813 the Jerningham's agent reported that 'Messrs Fereday and Turton have abandoned the project of the River Navigation and nothing is now doing on it I do not apprehend that Brown and Hall are able to carry it on and I suspect they will be forced to give up the lease'. In another letter he stated, 'Mr Turton complains of being deceived by Mr Brown as to the expense of the lock and improvements to the navigation, and on that ground justifies abandoning the project'. For some reason Fereday and Turton also closed the tramway. On 2 June the Jerningham's agent reported, 'the town is now supplied with coal by land carriage only, but they are making preparations to work the railway again'.

Another obstacle to connecting the river and canal was that there was 'no proper assurance of the small parcel of land which interposes between the river [Penk] and the canal – where the lock was to have been placed.' The agent continued, 'If Sir George [Jerningham] is to have the River Navigation as a permanent thing, it seems to me advantageous to purchase the small quantity of land in question.' Sir George agreed and on 2 June his agent reported, 'I have contracted with Mr Box of Weeping Cross for $\frac{2}{3}$ acre to connect the canal with the river for £189-0-9½, clear of all expenses'. The land bought was not where a connection had been envisaged in the 1811 lease but a little further north, where a connection would be directly into the Sow.

As soon as Fereday and Turton learnt of the contract to buy the land, they sent 'a very civil message expressing their readiness to co-operate in any plan for working the River and discontinuing the Railway'. The agent 'gave them to understand they would be considered tenants from Michaelmas and looked to for rent of the river'.

Ten weeks later, on 14 August 1813, an application was made to the Committee of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company 'for liberty to open a communication by means of a lock between the River Sow and the canal below Radford'. The Committee approved the application 'on condition that they do the same at their own expense, and that this company shall have the right to obstruct such communication as and when they think proper, and that the same shall not extend beyond the town of Stafford'.

It took another six months of negotiation before William Turton, John Turton Fereday and William Turton Fereday (sons of Samuel Fereday) agreed with Sir George Jerningham on the terms of an 18 year lease dated 1 April 1814. Mary Peake and John Hughes, tenants of Sir George's meadows along the river, were also parties to the lease. (This John Hughes was the licensee of *The Swan* in Stafford not the owner of the *Horn and Trumpet*). The lease covered the coal wharf (marked 1 to 4 on the map on page 14)²⁷ and the land recently bought from John Box, with permission to use the river for the carriage of coals and to use a tow path 4 feet wide on the embankment. The rent was to be £25-5-0 a year from 29 September.

There were numerous conditions. The Feredays and Turton could deepen the river and cut a new channel, putting the mud on the river bank. They were to allow anyone to use the river, on payment of reasonable tonnage and wharfage, not exceeding ninepence a ton. But, all coal carried had to be purchased from the mines belonging to the Feredays and Turton, 'which are conveniently situated for loading, as long as the supply is of a quality and price comparable with other mines'. The lessees were to maintain the embankments, keep the tow path fenced, and pay compensation to the tenants of the meadows for any damage caused by the negligence of boatmen. Finally, the Feredays and Turton were to construct a lock on the land purchased from Mr Box within 12 months.

The tramway was finally closed, and on 14 July 1814 its track, waggons, etc were sold by auction. (See page 18).

The twelve month deadline for building a lock was not met. It was not until early 1816 that the Canal Company ordered 'that a stoppage take place on the canal for the space of three days from 17 February to open a communication between the canal and the River Sow'. The link comprised a short pound, with a bridge over it to carry the towpath of the existing canal. This led to a short aqueduct over a drainage ditch and then straight into a lock down to the Sow. Both pound and lock were built to the same dimensions as the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. The lock had a nominal fall of 6½ feet, the exact fall depending on the state of the river.

After 1816 several coal merchants used the Stafford wharf to supply the town. An 1818 directory lists William Titley, Joseph Picken, William Fellows, John Barber, and John Hughes. Hughes also had a coal wharf at Radford, as did Barber, who was the wharfinger there. The directory also describes William Kent, the licensee of the *Horn and Trumpet*, as a coal dealer. On the bank of

Railway, Weighing Machine, Canal Boats, &c.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By HENSHAW AND SMITH,
At the Star Inn, in Stafford, on Friday the 15th day of
July, 1814, at 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

THE undermentioned Property, viz:—The Railway and Sills between Stafford and Radford, being about a mile and a half in length, laid with Flanch Rails; a capital Weighing Machine, capable of weighing 5 tons, with machine house and blacksmiths shop at the Green, in Stafford; 2 Canal Boats; 2 short River Boats; a quantity of Railway Carriages capable of carrying from 20 to 30 cwt each; a Crane with wheels, &c. and sundry other articles.

For particulars or to view the Railway, &c. apply to Mr. JOHN BARKER, of Radford Wharf, near Stafford.
 17th June, 1814

Figure 3: Staffordshire Advertiser 1 July 1814

the Sow, opposite the canal wharf, the Brown family had another coal yard until 1883, when it was bought by Stafford Corporation as part of the site for the new brine baths.

In the 1830s the 1814 lease was transferred to the Moat Colliery Company and, in 1838, a renewed lease was sold to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company for £50, a sum which suggests that there was not a great deal of trade on it. The Canal Company is said to have made improvements to open up its trade on the river.

In 1856 premises on the town side of the river were rented to John Stubbs, a young boat builder, who set out to develop the leisure use of the river. He offered rowing boats for hire to 'those interested in healthy exercise', as well as steamer trips towards Radford.²⁸ The tow path became a favourite walk for gentlemen and their lady friends, although in 1864 one of them complained about 'the indecent practice of bathing in the river, which makes it impossible for ladies to walk there in the evening.'²⁹

Coal continued to be carried on the river until the time of the 1914-18 World War. Many years later Ernie Thomas recalled taking a boat load of swedes and mangels down the river in 1914. The miller at St Thomas, whose mill was just downstream of where the lock joined the Sow, also had grain delivered through the lock and floated downstream to the mill, where it was unloaded

with the aid of a primitive pulley attached to the overhanging branch of a tree.³⁰

By the time the lease of the river to the Canal Company expired in 1927, the navigation was disused and the lease was not renewed.³¹ The owner, Lord Stafford, sold the wharf area near the Green Bridge to Stafford Corporation. In the 1930s they filled in the cut, where the wharf had been and turned the area into a car park. It was later sold as a site for Tesco's store and a multi-storey car park. In 2012 it is about to be redeveloped again.

At the other end of the navigation, the short pound leading to the lock was closed off and replaced by an overflow weir and the bridge there demolished. The brickwork of the lock survived until about 1970, when it was removed as part of changes made to improve the drainage of the Sow valley. An indentation in the ground remains to mark the site of the lock.³²

In 1974 J. Ian Langford in his *Towpath Guide to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal* wrote, 'Familiar towns seem totally different when visited by boat. Navigation could be restored to the Sow without much difficulty or expense'. In 1997 a group of enthusiasts was formed to re-open the navigation primarily for leisure craft.³³

Shall we ever see canal boats on the Sow again?

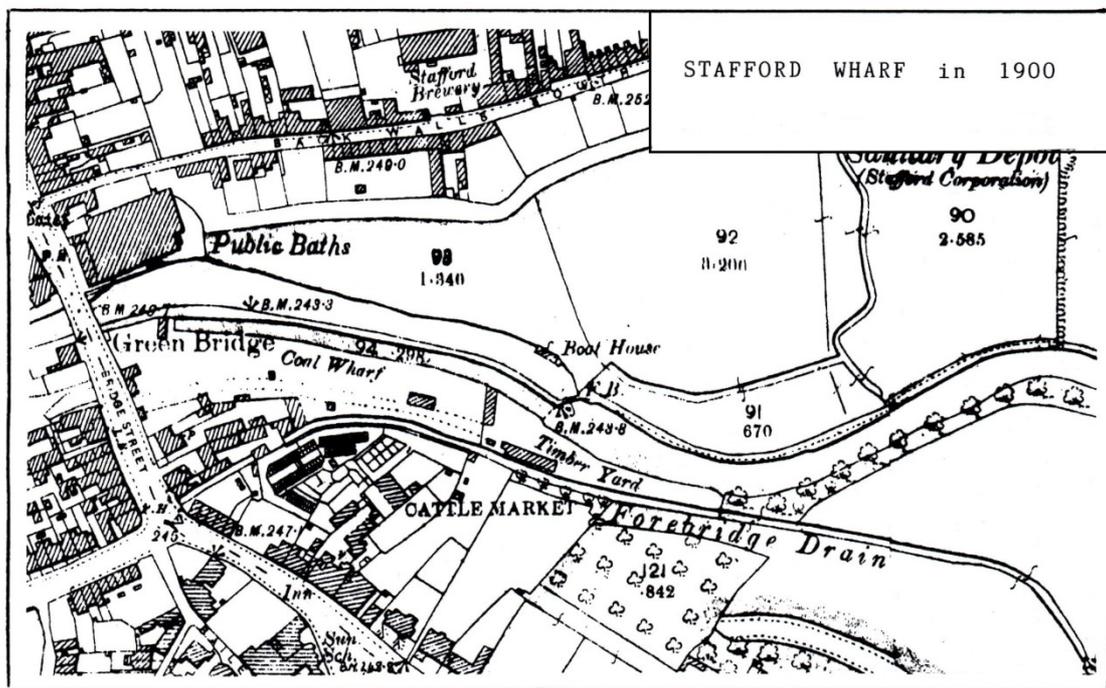


Figure 4: Stafford Wharf in 1900

SOURCES AND NOTES

The tramway was first described in J.L.Cherry: *Stafford in Olden Times* (1890). Almost 50 years later this was amplified by K.Brown in *The Railway Magazine* (Nov 1939). A brief account of the three schemes is in C.Hadfield: *Canals of the West Midlands* (1966), which misnames Omar as Owen Hall. A more detailed account was written by S.R. and E.Broadbridge: *Connections with Canals in the Stafford Area* (Staffordshire Industrial Archaeology Society Journal I, 1970). This remains the fullest account and includes field-work notes. There is an Appendix by P.F.Barker which combines new information with some misleading topography. J.Ian Langford: *The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal – a Towpath Guide* (1974) has a useful account from a different perspective. Other books on canals and Stafford have brief accounts but no additional information. None recognise Omar Hall's central role in two of the schemes.

The primary documentary source is the papers of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company. I made notes from these when they were still in the Canal Office in Wolverhampton. When the office closed, most of the papers were preserved by the initiative of an employee and are now in the Staffordshire Record Office (D3186).

Plans of the proposed canals in the 1790s and a few papers are in the Quarter Sessions Records (Q/Rum 21A and 25). There is a 1799 plan in D3186/8/1/30/120 and of the proposed wharf at Radford (D3186/8/1/6).

Among the Stafford Estate records are the leases of 1811 and 1814 (D641/3/E/31/4/9 and 10). Among the estate correspondence are some letters about the canal 1806-17 (D641/3/E/6/16). There is another copy of the 1814 lease in D660/8/16.

All the notices and advertisements referred to appeared in *The Staffordshire Advertiser*.

The sources for most statements in this booklet can be identified readily from the sources named above or from their context. Any source which is not readily identifiable is included in the notes that follow.

- 1 D3186/8/1/6.
- 2 William Salt Library 26/38/22.
- 3 This paragraph is based on D1789/685/377 and *Staffordshire Advertiser* 26.03.1796 and 06.08.1816.
- 4 *The Horn and Trumpet* was *The Anchor* until 1797.
- 5 *Staffordshire Advertiser* 08.12.1798.
- 6 The map is D3186/8/1/30/120, the list of landowners D3186/8/1/30/7.
- 7 D1798/685/377.
- 8 W.A.Bewes: Church Briefs pp 35 and 56.
- 9 St Martin-in-the-Fields (Westminster, London) Marriage Register 05.02.1797 and *Staffordshire Advertiser* 11.02.1797.
- 10 Roy Lewis: *From High House to Bakers Oven* pp 52-3. The book confuses John Hall with his father.

- 11 *Staffordshire Advertiser* 07.08.1802 and Dawes & Ward-Perkins: *Country Banks Vol 2* (2000), which wrongly identifies Omar's partner as John Hall.
- 12 D1798/685/377. The partnership was not formally signed until 24 February 1806.
- 13 Cherry p 51 and Broadbridge p 21.
- 14 T.J Raybould: *The Economic Emergence of the Black Country* (1973) p 189.
- 15 *Staffordshire Advertiser* 06.09.1806 and Broadbridge pp 10-11.
- 16 D1798/685/377.
- 17 Roy Lewis: *The Swan and its Neighbours* p 35. (See also p 13).
- 18 *Staffordshire Advertiser* 29.07.1809.
- 19 William Salt Library: Handbills.
- 20 D1798/685/377.
- 21 A draft letter survives in D1798/685/377.
- 22 D1798/685/377. James Gilbert was the wharfinger at Radford.
- 23 *Staffordshire Advertiser* 06.07.1811. E Bradley opened a shop in 'the house late Omar Hall's'.
- 24 Stafford Corporation Order Book 4 September 1811 D1323/A/1/3.
- 25 *The Manchester Mercury* 25 November 1817.
- 26 Baswich Parish Church Burial Register 1833 (F3361/1/13) and Stafford St Austin Confirmations, Marriages and Deaths 1833 (RC/12) in Staffordshire Record Office.
- 27 The plan attached to the 1814 lease is identical to the one attached to the 1811 lease.
- 28 *Staffordshire Advertiser* 05.04.1856.
- 29 *Staffordshire Advertiser* 30.04.1864.
- 30 For this paragraph see Langford p 42 and Broadbridge p 21.
- 31 Langford p 42.
- 32 Broadbridge p 20 describes what remained in 1970, with a sketch plan of the lock on p 27.
- 33 *Stafford Riverway Link* Minutes 14 February 1997.

Books listed on page 20 referred to by their author. Sources beginning D are all in the Staffordshire Record Office.

Acknowledgements

The map on page 14 is reproduced from D660/8/16 by permission of the Staffordshire Record Office.

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