

## **BRADSHAW'S GUIDE TO THE STAFFORD BRANCH (1904)**

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According to my 1904 *Bradshaw's Canals and Navigable Rivers of England and Wales*, the Stafford Branch was operated by the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company.

Their Head Office was at 87 Darlington Street, Wolverhampton. Mr J. Neve was the Company Clerk and Mr A.G. Butler was the Traffic Manager. The Canal Company leased part of the River Sow which formed the Stafford Branch from Lord Stafford.

The Stafford Branch left the main line of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal near Baswich at a point 42 miles and 0 furlongs from Stourport. It descended through Baswich Lock to the River Sow, the course of which it followed to Stafford Wharf, 1 mile and 0 furlongs away. There were no tunnels.

The vessels using the Branch were narrowboats, most likely hauled by horses - the system usually used on inland waterways in 1904. The maximum size of narrowboats using the Branch was:

Length: 72 feet 0 inches,

Width: 6 feet 9 inches,

Draught: varied from 3 feet 10 inches up to 5 feet 0 inches, depending on the amount of water in the River Sow, and

Headroom: 8 feet 8 inches.

Although there was a towing-path for the whole of the route, my Bradshaw's says nothing specific about its condition but generally points out that "canal towing-paths vary considerably, from the well-appointed and well-metalled way to the neglected track – often in winter nothing but a slough of mire, and bounded by a hedge so overgrown as seriously to curtail the width necessary for the passage of a horse".

Bradshaw's reminds us that traffic on river navigations is more likely to be interrupted by floods and drought than on canals. "When the banks of a river overflow, although there is plenty of water in the channel, the surrounding country being submerged, it becomes a trackless waste, where risk of the navigator losing his way is great, and headroom under bridges is much diminished". It is well-known that the River Sow floods periodically and this would affect the movement of boats. The depth of water is also affected by weeds and this varies according to the season.

However, Bradshaw's also points out that traffic on river navigations is not stopped by frost as soon as it is on canals, since running water freezes less quickly than still water.

### **Source**

*Bradshaw's Canals and Navigable Rivers of England and Wales* by Henry Rodolph de Salis, Henry Blacklock & Co.Ltd. 1904.