

THE STAFFORD RIVERWAY LINK (SRL)

historically known as the

STAFFORD BRANCH CANAL and SOW NAVIGATION

by D.J.Jones

Introduction

This is the story of an almost unknown navigation that time nearly forgot, a waterway that until recently dared not speak its name, a navigation that once linked the county town of Stafford with the National Waterways Network.

This Navigation was a branch of the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal. It left the main canal at Baswich, near St.Thomas' Bridge (Bridge 101), opposite the site of the former Baswich Salt Works (now the Baswich Industrial Estate) and there was an elegant Roving Bridge at the junction. There was then a small pound (about 100 feet long and 20 feet wide) with sandstone walls, and a lock house on the left. The channel led to a trough aqueduct over a drainage channel, before entering a lock, which was known as Baswich Lock or St.Thomas' Lock. The lock was built to the same dimensions as locks on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and had a nominal fall of 6 feet 6 inches but the actual amount depended on the river level. Boats would leave the lock and turn left to enter the River Sow directly. After about a mile upstream, boats would enter a short channel that led to a wharf just before Green Bridge in the centre of Stafford. (Ordnance Survey Landranger Sheet 127: from SJ 945 228 to SJ 923 230).

The Navigation forms the first part of Stafford Borough Council's Littleworth to Baswich Bridge Waterside Doorstep Walk and the towpath is used as a footpath.

From Stafford Town Centre there is footpath access to the River Sow at Green Bridge (Bridge Street) and there is convenient car parking nearby. Part of this route has access for disabled people.

There is also a public bus service from the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Radford Bank (A34), which is accessed from the towpath at Bridge 98 (Radford Bridge).

1799: First proposals for a Branch Canal

When the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal opened in 1772 the closest approach to Stafford town centre was at Radford Bank where there was a wharf and initially goods were carried the 1½ mile by carts. To improve communications a Branch Canal to Stafford was proposed and this was given some credence by Parliament in 1798 and 1799. It included aqueducts over the Rivers Penk and Sow. A meeting was held at the Swan Inn in Stafford and there were over 200 signatures in support of the venture. The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company (S&WCCo) considered the proposals at a meeting in Stone on 25 March 1799 and at a General Meeting of Company on 11 April 1799 at the Red Lion in Wolverhampton there was a suggestion for a Branch Canal at Stafford on Sir William Jerminham's land – he was the 6th Baronet Stafford (1736-1809).

However, the proposed Branch Canal never materialised and was abandoned in favour of building a narrow gauge Tramway or Tramroad.

1805: The Radford Bridge to Stafford Tramway

The 1½ mile Tramway from Radford Bridge to Stafford opened on 1 November 1805 and was operated by the Stafford Railway Coal & Lime Company. The Company was owned by John Brown, John Hall, Omar Hall and Edward Harding. 30 cwt (1524 kg) of coal or lime could be carried in the horse-drawn wagons. The Tramway started from a basin behind Radford Wharf, crossed a field to a bridge over the River Penk (which had been rebuilt in 1804 with an extra arch over a drainage channel that ran alongside the canal), then along Lichfield Road before crossing over it close to the town centre. The terminus was at Railway Wharf (or Stafford Wharf) by Green Bridge.

The tramway could not have been a sound proposition – in July 1811 John Hall had cut his losses and sold his £810 share in the Company to James Cramer for £254. In September 1810 the idea of a Branch Canal resurfaced, and Omar Hall sought permission from the S&WCCo to make the Rivers Penk and Sow navigable into Stafford, with a lock at Radford joining the Branch Canal to the Main Line. It would appear that any negotiations came to nothing. And in August 1812 there was even talk of an inclined plane linking the Sow and Penk to the main Canal.

By 1813 the owners of tramway were bankrupt and the tramway closed in 1814. The company assets were sold at auction by Henshaw & Smith at the Star Inn in Stafford on 15 July 1814 starting at 5.00 pm. The notice of sale was dated 17 June 1814 and people who wanted further information or who wished to view the “railway” were advised to contact Mr John Barker at Radford Wharf. The sale was publicised in the Staffordshire Advertiser (2 July 1814) and the following items were listed: “The Railway and Sills (sleepers) between Radford and Stafford, laid with flanch (flanged) rails, a Weighing Machine capable of weighing 5 tons (5080 kg), with a Machine House and Blacksmiths Shop at the Green in Stafford (Stafford Wharf); 2 Canal Boats and 2 short River Boats; a quantity of Railway Carriages capable of carrying from 20 cwt to 30 cwt (1016 kg to 1524 kg) each; a Crane with wheels &c. and sundry other articles”. The basin at Radford Wharf may have been used for a while afterwards but it had been drained by 1880. The old wharhouse, warehouses and other old buildings were demolished in 1972.

1814-1816: Construction and opening of the Branch Canal

By 1814, it had been decided to construct a Branch Canal after all but starting at Baswich, a little further north than Radford, and which would directly lock down into the River Sow. This would complete the link between the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal and Stafford town centre.

Work started on the 1½ mile Navigation in 1814. It involved constructing a Roving Bridge, Lock, Aqueduct and short pound at Baswich, and canalising the River Sow by straightening and deepening it – and over a mile of new channel was cut. This eliminated a series of tight curves as the river crossed the flood plain and left several marshy oxbows to the south of the new cut. The towpath crossed to the north of the navigation to avoid

them. For the last 200 yards in the centre of Stafford, a short channel to the left was cut parallel with the river, about 15 feet wide and about 10 feet from the river with the towing path between. This led to a basin which was used as a coal wharf (reached from Bridge Street), and where the Branch terminated at Green Bridge.

The Navigation was unusual in that it was not a true canal but mainly a canalised river. And unlike most canals, no Act of Parliament was needed because all the land was owned by Sir George William Jerminham (1771-1851). He was the 7th Baronet Stafford who in 1824 obtained a complete reversal of the attainder of 1680 and became the 8th Baron Stafford (Lord Stafford) in 1825, adopting the surname Stafford-Jerminham.

According to Bradshaw, the Navigation could cope with boats up to 72 feet long and beam 6 feet 9 inches; the draught varied between 3 feet 10 inches and 5 feet according to the level of water in the River Sow. The headroom was given as 8 feet 8 inches, but presumably this would have varied too. The waterway opened on 19 February 1816 and there was an immediate reduction in the price of coal in Stafford. Although its main purpose was to carry "coals, lime and merchandise", the waterway eventually became popular with pleasure boaters. And so it was that the Stafford Branch Canal / Sow Navigation was born.

1816 was only one hundred and ninety summers ago. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing and seven months before, the Battle of Waterloo had signaled the end of the Napoleonic Wars. These events confirmed Great Britain's position as the greatest power in the world and the re-coining of 1816, which replaced the gold guinea of 21 shillings with the gold sovereign of 20 shillings, established the economic supremacy that was to last for 100 years. King George III had been on the throne for 56 years but this was the time of the Prince Regent ("Prinnie" to his friends!), George "Beau" Brummell (the dandy pretentious, fashion trendsetter) and John Nash (the renowned Regency architect, creator of the Brighton Pavilion and Trafalgar Square). It was the time of graceful Regency dances such as the quadrille and the waltz. The classical music of composers such as Beethoven, Haydn and Schubert were the height of fashion. For many, these were happy, confident times, the precursor to the Victorian Age. For others, like the important Black Country Industrialist Samuel Fereday, the post-Napoleonic War era heralded depression and bankruptcy, and his nephew John Turton Fereday acquired many of his remaining assets.

The Early Leases

The Navigation was leased initially by Messers Fereday & Company of Gornal Colliery and then by the Moat Colliery Company. In July 1825 other boats could use the Navigation upon payment of a special charge when passing through the Lock when Fereday could not supply coal. Coal continued to be landed at Radford Wharf and taken to Stafford by road. Fereday was asked to build a house by the lock, and stop planks were stored there in case of accidents; someone was also needed to take care of the paddles. In 1838 the Moat Colliery Company assigned their lease to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company for £50. The Lease was for the land on which the lock stood, the Sow Navigation and its buildings. The Canal Company carried out improvements and reduced tolls.

The various leases issued over the years give some insight into the Navigation. They gave somewhat protracted geographical details of the Navigation route (i.e. the canalised River Sow and Branch Canal), listed the land, wharves, towing paths, bridges and the lock, and detailed the responsibilities of the various parties.

The 1864-1885 Lease

For instance, in 1864 the 9th Lord Stafford, Sir Henry Valentine Stafford-Jerningham (1802-1884), granted the Lease to the 2nd Lord Hatherton (Edward Littleton), Arthur Wrottesley and Henry Ward. Lord Hatherton's father had been Chairman of the S&WCCo for many years.

This Lease ran for 21 years from 25 March 1864 to 25 March 1885, and was signed on 1 August 1864. The annual rent was £130, payable in two equal instalments on 29 September and 25 March, with the first payment due on 29 September 1864. Problems would arise if the rent was not paid within 20 days of the due date. The Lease could be terminated after 7 or 14 years but the Lessee needed to give 6 months notice.

The Lease permitted the carrying of "coals, lime, goods, wares, merchandise, produce and other articles to and from Bridge Meadow in boats, barges and other vessels" on the River Sow and River Penk to where "water communication" is made with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. The lessees had the "privilege of using a towing path of the breadth of twelve feet". Free and uninterrupted navigation by boats upon and through the Branch Canal owned by Lord Stafford was guaranteed. The waterway could be used by anyone for the purpose of carrying coals, lime etc., provided proper payment had been made. The lessees were to permit the waterway to be open except in times of repair or when being cleansed.

The lessees could repair the banks of the Rivers Sow and Penk, widen, deepen or adjust the channel, and they could lay soil upon the sides provided they made good any damage to the grass and make reasonable compensation for any damage done. They agreed to repair and maintain embankments used as towing path, and to do nothing that would contravene the provisions of an Act of Parliament passed in the 40th year of George III's reign "for embanking and draining the said lands and other low lands in the Parish of Castlechurch". It was also their responsibility to maintain the Lock, Canal and Bridges (assigned for the purpose of conveying hay grass or other produce and cattle), together with any fences and buildings. They had no fishing rights in the Rivers Sow or Penk, and the towing path was to be used only as specified. This Lease also listed the various features of the Navigation from Stafford to Baswich including:

(a) The wharves and basin part of the River Sow in Stafford, known as Bridge Meadow, fronting the Turnpike Road leading from Stafford to Weeping Cross, and adjoining Green Bridge (area: 1 acre 3 roods and 16 perches). This was bounded on the northeast by the River Sow, on the east by the Turnpike Road, on the south by land belonging to Lord Stafford and the Commissioners Sewer, and on the west by land belonging to a Mr Webb.

(b) A narrow strip of land covered with water and used as a Basin to the Wharves.

(c) Another narrow strip of land used as a Towing Path to the River Sow (22 perches). The footbridge here was originally a wooden bridge, which carried the Towing Path from the

Wharf over the River Sow to its north bank.

(ffffffffffffffff) Another narrow strip of land used as a Towing Path adjoining the northern part of the River Sow and extending east.

(gggggggggggggggggggggg) Another narrow strip of land used as a Towing Path which crossed the River Sow (possibly this was the Old Brick Bridge) and extending east on the south side of the River Sow.

(hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh) A small plot of land covered with water forming part of the River Penk and over which was a Horse Bridge and extending east across the River Penk on the northern side.

(iiiiiiiiiiiiiiii) Another narrow strip of land adjoining the River Sow and used as a Towing Path and extending northeast on the south side of the River Sow. After a short distance, the Towing Path bore right (southeast) to the leat of the Lock.(h) A piece of land (3 roods and 3 perches) from the River Sow and extending to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal which forms part of a Branch Canal, and Towing Path and Embankment, and on part of which is a Lock; this land had been purchased by the late Lord Stafford (Sir George William Jerningham) from John Box.

The 1885-1906 Lease

The next 21 year lease ran from 25 March 1885 to 25 March 1906. It was signed on 21 June 1886 between Lord Hatherton, Lord Arthur Wrottesley & Henry Ward and the 10th Lord Stafford. The procedure had not been without complication. The 9th Lord Stafford had died in November 1884 and had been succeeded by his nephew, Sir Augustus Frederick Fitzherbert Stafford-Jerningham (1830-1892), as the 10th Lord Stafford. However, as he was a certified lunatic, an order dated 30 March 1885 stated that his affairs were to be administered by Simon Lord Lovatt and Basil Fitzherbert.

The 2nd Lord Hatherton died in April 1888 to be succeeded by Edward George Littleton as the 3rd Lord Hatherton (1842-1930). He was Chairman of the S&WCCo for 44 years and a member of the committee for 62 years.

In 1892 Sir Fitzherbert Edward Stafford-Jerningham succeeded his brother as 11th Lord Stafford (1833-1913). He was part owner of the Lilleshall Collieries near Shifnal.

The Head of Navigation: Green Bridge and the Coal Wharf

The head of navigation was essentially Green Bridge. This bridge has its origins in the 13th Century. It was rebuilt as a single span bridge of brick and stone in 1781/1782 and the road over it was sealed with tarmac in the 1840s. The present parapet of iron railings probably dates from the 1860s when the bridge was widened by 10 feet – the ornamental keystone shows the Staffordshire Knot and “1860” below.

Some think that at one time the River Sow may have been navigable past Green Bridge, as far as Stafford Mill. Just before the First World War, Ernie Thomas (later proprietor of Calf Heath Marina until he died in 1973) took a cargo of swedes and mangolds to Stafford.

Stafford Mill was a short distance upstream from the Wharf and apparently the Mill had to be shut down before boats could turn.

In the 1860s the wharf at Green Bridge was known as Dimmock's Coal Wharf and later in the 19th Century, William Moss (builder, railway contractor and coal merchant) occupied the wharf. Then there was Henry Michael Belcher (Brickmakers, Coal and Timber Merchants of Gnosall) who held the underlease from 1893 to 1905 and finally Adam Boulton (trading as Messers A.Boulton & Company Coal Merchants of Stafford) from 1906 to 1927.

Stafford Brine Baths and the Stafford Salt Industry

Opposite Stafford Coal Wharf, the riverside scene was enhanced by the construction of the magnificent Brine Baths in 1891, one of Stafford's architectural gems, and Stafford's answer to the Victorian Spa towns such as Harrogate and Llandrindod Wells. It was designed by George Wormald and opened in 1892. The building was extended in 1893 and became The Royal Brine Baths in March 1895 following visit of Princess Mary Duchess of Teck (later Queen Mary, the wife of the future George V). On the side of the Baths facing the River Sow was some brass lettering "ROYAL BRINE BATHS" which proudly indicated the function of the building. The Baths comprised first and second class Brine Baths, dressing rooms and treated patients suffering from various complaints including rheumatism, gout, sciatica and neuralgia. There were various therapeutic pools: Turkish, needle, slipper, fresh and salt water swimming baths. Entrance cost sixpence. Brine is a concentrated solution of sodium chloride (common salt) and was piped from Stafford Common.

Salt deposits had been discovered at a depth of 360 feet on Stafford Common to the north of the town during boring operations about 1881 by Stafford Corporation when searching for a water supply for the town. The Stafford Salt and Alkali Company Limited was founded and the extraction of brine started.

The company opened a second works in Baswich (on land opposite the entrance to the Stafford Branch Canal) and supplied it with brine (for processing) pumped from Stafford Common through a 2 mile long pipeline which passed through the centre of the town (feeding the Brine Baths) and which followed the towpath of the Sow Navigation. Coal was delivered at the wharf here and large amounts of the finished product, salt, were taken away. To satisfy demand, another works was built between the canal and railway near Lodgefield Bridge (Bridge 102) before the start of the Second World War.

There are two processes for making salt: evaporation and vacuum distillation. In the former process, the water is simply boiled away to leave a residue of coarse grain salt, while the latter involves the water boiling away under reduced pressure at lower temperatures to make finer, table salt. In 1950 the Salt and Alkali Company combined with other companies to form Amasol Ltd., which in turn was taken over in 1959 to become part of the British Soda Company. Amasol produced the popular "Shaka" Table Salt. Unfortunately over the years the brine pumping process was not kind to the environment, it caused subsidence in the north of the town, and after a protracted legal battle salt production in Stafford was banned (1970), and the pumping of brine stopped. This, together with social changes and the effect of time, sealed the Baths' fate. They were closed in 1974 when the Riverside Sports Centre opened a little further to the east, and

were demolished to make way for the Civic Centre.

The 1893-1906 Underlease

The terms of the Underleases are also revealing, they often provide a different perspective and give a different emphasis.

For example, in the 1890s Lord Wrottesley and Henry Ward (of Rodbaston, Penkridge) granted an Underlease to Henry Michael Belcher (Brickmakers, Coal and Timber Merchants of Gnosall) of land, basin, and part of River Sow and premises at Stafford Wharf. This Underlease was to run for 12 years and 9 months from 25 March 1893 to 25 December 1905, and was signed 12 December 1895. The annual rent was £100, payable in two equal instalments on 29 March and 25 September. The Lessors could re-enter the premises if the rent was in arrears for 40 days. If the waterway ceased to be navigable for 21 days, the Lessee could determine the term by giving the Lessors 3 months notice and payment of the rent. There was also a clause recognising that if the business were unprofitable, it would be possible to terminate the agreement. This suggested perhaps that the finances might be delicate and that all was not well.

He was permitted to use the Navigation and existing Towing Path along the River Sow and the Branch Canal, to build and maintain all buildings and machinery as necessary to carry on the business. He was allowed to carry on a coal trade continuously (frost and drought excepted), convey all coal to the Wharves by canal and river but not by railways unless because of frost, drought or other cause beyond the control of the Lessee. He was expressly forbidden to carry on as a coal merchant at the Railway Station or elsewhere in Stafford.

One boat's length of the Canal Basin, together with sufficient Wharf room, was reserved for public use for loading or unloading on payment to the Lessee of Wharfage fixed at 2/6 per boat. The Lessee was "entitled to navigate the River Sow and Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal on payment of a toll of 10³/₄d per ton subject to a rebate of 4³/₄d per ton in respect of all coal and minerals conveyed by him from Haywood to Stafford, and that such rate shall be subject to reduction in same proportion as the S&WCCo shall from time to time reduce the toll to other freighters on similar traffic between the same points". Neither the Lessee nor his workmen were entitled to fish in either the river or the branch canal.

When necessary, the Lessors would properly dredge, cleanse and keep open for navigation the Canal Basin, preserve and maintain the embankments used as a Towing Path, keeping all in good order and maintaining the water level.

At the end of Lease, if Lessee elected to leave buildings, the Lessors would purchase such buildings at a valuation to be made in case of difference by arbitration.

On 14 May 1903 an agreement was reached between the S&WCCo and Stafford Corporation for laying a 15-inch cast iron sewerage pipe under the canal at 3 places near the River Sow, with 542 yards being along the towpath of the Stafford Branch.

The 1906-1927 Underlease

On 19 June 1906 a new lease (underlease) was signed, this time between the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Company and Adam Boulton (trading as Messers A.Boulton & Company Coal Merchants of Stafford). This comprised a lease of offices, wharf and land at Stafford Coal Wharf. The Lease was to run for 21 years, from 25 March 1906 to 25 March 1927. Once again, the rent had fallen, perhaps another indication that it was becoming more difficult for the business to function as a going concern.

This time the annual rent was £60 and consisted of £15 for the Office and adjacent piece of Wharf (in and fronting Bridge Street), and £45 for the Wharf land with the stable and sheds. Excluded from the agreement were the telephone and telegraph posts and wires on or over the premises. The rents were to be paid quarterly by equal amounts on 25 March, 24 June, 29 September and 25 December, and the first payment was due on 29 September 1906. Penalties would be incurred if the rent was in arrears for 30 days or more. The coal merchants agreed to keep the inside parts of the premises in good repair but this excluded the wooden sheds and stabling which neither party was obliged to repair! It was specified that the lessee would "paint with two coats at least of good oil colour and in proper and workmanlike manner" the inside of the premises that have usually been painted, and would paper, whitewash and colour such parts of the inside that were usually decorated in this way. It was agreed that the lessor or his agent would have access to the premises at any convenient time during the day to examine the condition. There was to be no subletting without consent. The lessee was to "provide all necessary Wharfage accommodation for all traffic which the Public are legally entitled to carry to or out of Stafford on the River Sow (except coal and slack) on payment of Wharfage at rate of three half pence per ton, with a minimum payment of two shillings and sixpence for each boat load". For their part, the lessors agreed to "keep the waterway open and navigable except in times of frost or drought or during necessary repairs and cleansing". They also agreed to keep the outside parts of buildings painted and in good order.

At the end of the lease, the lessee could "remove any weighing machines, weighhouse and other trade fixtures" that may have been erected.

The lease could be terminated by the lessee after 7 or 14 years by giving 6 months notice. It was also stated that the Lessors (S&WCCo) held the Lease from Lord Stafford under an Indenture of Lease dated 23 March 1906 and that Lord Stafford could give "the Lessees three months notice of his intention to resume possession of the Office and Wharf". Adam Boulton & Company coal merchants at the Wharf in Bridge Street is mentioned in Kellys 1908 and 1912 Trade Directories, but the 1924 edition just refers to coal merchants at LMS Railway & Wharf.

About 1912 Riverway Bridge was built over the Navigation when a new road was constructed over water meadows, linking Lichfield Road to the Lammascotes. The meadows were filled in either side of Riverway by tipping. The 30 foot-span bridge was designed by William Plant (Stafford Town Surveyor, Engineer and Water Engineer) and made of reinforced concrete. The bridge was officially opened on 15 December 1914 and a plaque commemorates the event.

Below the Lock there used to be an old wooden bridge (Ladder Bridge), which spanned the River Penk at its confluence with the River Sow, and was used by boatman bringing their boats from the canal lock at Baswich.

Almost invariably boats leaving the Lock would bear left and travel upstream to Stafford. However, this was not always the case. St Thomas' Flour Mill was a little way downstream and sometimes boats turned right to deliver their cargo of grain, a manoeuvre not without risk, particularly in times of flood.

Pleasure Boating on the River Sow at Stafford

It must not be thought that only working boats used the Sow Navigation. In 1907 it is recorded that pleasure boating was a popular pastime and carried on locally between Baswich Lock and Green Bridge. Rowing boats and canoes could be hired from "Old Joe" whose boatyard was at the side of the Royal Brine Baths. And the following year, 1908, saw the opening on 15 June of the Victoria Pleasure Grounds (later Victoria Park). It is interesting to note that provision for pleasure boating and cruising on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal was written into the Act of 1766.

Decline following the First World War

During the 1920s traffic using the Branch declined further and the S&WCCo did not renew the last lease from Lord Stafford when it expired on 25 March 1927. There is no mention of the Wharf in Kellys 1928 Trade Directory, so presumably regular trade had ceased by then. The wharf fell silent, there were no more working boats, the channels narrowed with sprawling, choking foliage and the waterway was neglected. The Branch became derelict. The coal wharf and channel in Stafford were infilled in the 1930s. The area was left open and later used as a car park. The wharf is now the site of a multi-storey car park and a former Tesco supermarket.

In 1944 L.T.C. Rolt reported in *Narrow Boat* that the mouth of the Stafford Branch was already blocked up. He also noted the presence of a solitary Day Boat unloading its weekly cargo opposite, at Baswich Salt Works.

Four years later, in 1948, a survey by Stafford Borough Council noted that Stafford's only canal was now very seldom used for traffic and was narrow, weed-grown and neglected, but stated "a revival in the use of the canal is possible. Should this happen, the canal is well placed to serve the potential industrial area which has been planned to the north of Baswich". However times had changed and there would be no revival.

At Baswich, the old channel was converted into an overflow weir. The Roving Bridge, Lock and Aqueduct survived until they were demolished during the improvements to drainage that took place along the Sow Valley in the 1970s, although traces of this Bridge and the pound walls are still visible. The river channel, all the other bridges and most of the towpath into Stafford are still in place. Weir levels on the river have been changed as part of flood relief works, and the Rivers Sow and Penk have been realigned.

Feasibility of Restoration - Benefits to the Local Community and Economy

As early as 1976 many considered that the Stafford Branch could be restored easily in comparison with some of the restoration projects then taking place. Restoration would appear to be feasible. The main issues would be reconciling navigation with flood defence (any scheme would need to integrate with flood defence work on the Rivers Sow and Penk), address environmental impact, land ownership, funding, engaging local support and providing an amenity that would require little maintenance. Clearly any restoration should be guided by the Environment Agency, Stafford Borough Council, Stafford County Council, British Waterways, the Inland Waterways Association, Friends of Riverway and other relevant bodies.

If restoration were to go ahead, the benefit for the town would be enormous in terms of leisure, tourism, the environment, economic regeneration and heritage.

The Link would provide a destination and focus from the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal into Stafford and offer moorings for boaters. The Link would give boaters the opportunity of staying in Stafford, exploring and using the local facilities, so attracting new income into the local economy.

It would create a key leisure and social facility for Stafford and give a focus to local regeneration. It would improve the quality of life by encouraging a wide range of leisure activities, including fishing, boating and photography. The towpath, where possible, would encourage cycling, walking and have wheelchair access.

There would be added tourism value. As well as boaters and their crews coming into Stafford, riverside scenes and presence of boats in the town centre would act as a magnet for visitors and tourists, which in itself would encourage job creation and economic regeneration.

It would enhance the local environment by protecting and improving the natural features of the area. Nature conservation would be an important feature of the Stafford Riverway Link. Rivers and canals are valuable green corridors, especially through urban areas, allowing the movement of animals and spread of flora and fauna.

The area would be much more attractive for investors and create new opportunities for commercial, leisure and, possibly, residential development in an urban waterside environment.

The venture would complement wider regeneration schemes allowing integrated planning between the various local initiatives.

Any restoration would raise awareness of the rich industrial heritage of Stafford. The Stafford Riverway Link is part of Stafford's industrial heritage. As such, it is a valuable education resource for the whole community, enabling a wide range of subjects to be studied, from industrial history to biology and environmental science.

The restoration of this link is of considerable appeal and would significantly enhance the County Town of Stafford as a place in which to live, work and visit.

A restoration pressure group (The Stafford Riverway Link) was formed some years ago. It's main aims and objectives are:

(a) to promote the restoration of the historic river and canal waterway linking the county town of Stafford to the National Waterways Network for the benefit of the community and all interested groups.

(b) to further the preservation, conservation and restoration of the SRL, and to promote and stimulate public interest in protecting its wildlife and respecting its history.

(c) to establish partnerships with local authorities and other bodies that will facilitate this restoration.

Acknowledgements

Sources of information include:

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The Canals of the West Midlands: (Vol.5): Charles Hadfield 1985 (1966) (David & Charles): various references p 130.

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1864 Lease

1895 Under Lease

1906 Under Lease

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