

JENKS' GUIDE TO THE STAFFORDSHIRE & WORCESTERSHIRE CANAL (1907)

with particular reference to the Stafford Branch Canal / River Sow Navigation

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One of the first canal *tourist* guide books was probably *The Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal* written by Alfred E. Jenks and published by John Steen & Co Ltd at the Old Grammar School Printing Works (St John's Street, Wolverhampton) in 1907.

Alfred Jenks lived at Neville Lodge, Newbridge Crescent, Wolverhampton. He was a "Breeder of High-class Dalmations or Coach Dogs" and sold "Well Spotted Dogs at Two Guineas".

The 64 page Guide describes the waterway and various features along the route from Great Haywood to Stourport, such as bridges and locks, and includes maps, tables of distances and numerous photographs. The Guide is arranged in two sections: Tettenhall (Newbridge) to Great Haywood, and Tettenhall to Stourport.

Useful information was offered to the traveller, such as the location of convenient fields for camping and the various inns "where refreshments and accommodation can be obtained the year round" as at the Anchor Inn (Coven).

Travellers are told that "the name-plates affixed to the bridges will be found a great help in locating one's whereabouts, and that "strangers to the route and the local traffic will find it safer not to travel by night."

We are reminded that "Private boats, kept permanently on the Canal, take out an annual license; but boats touring through take out a 'pass' at the first toll house."

The Guide was very informative, and gave a very positive up-beat view of boating, the pleasant rural scenery, picturesque buildings, old churches, and numerous craft were mentioned – rowing boats, steam launches, electric launches, motor boats and pleasure craft of all sorts – but there was no mention of working boats, no mention of the unmentionable *raison d'être* of the canal – this was Edwardian England through rose-coloured spectacles in those carefree days before the First World War.

The only hint of possible *unpleasantness* was around Kidderminster Lock with "huge factories and towering chimney stacks all around" where the traveller learns that "We shall not be tempted to prolong our stay here any longer than necessary, as it is a very unsafe place for a private boat to tie up at all; so working through the lock, past the factories, and cautiously weeding our way amongst the barges that are lying about all over the Canal ... we come to Caldwell Lock".

No such *unpleasantness* was mentioned in the context of the Stafford Branch.

The Stafford Branch appears in the first section of the Guide, along the route between Tettenhall and Great Haywood (page 32):

“At Radford Bridge (17¼) is the Trumpet Hotel;¹ at Baswich Bridge² (17¾) are the salt works on the right, and a quarter of a mile further on the left, the entrance to the river lock on to the Sow, or “Stafford River”. Boating is carried on locally between this lock and the bridge³ in Stafford. The water is carried to the lock through a trough, and below will be seen a quaint old wooden bridge⁴ spanning the river Penk, which here joins the Sow.”

The Stafford Branch is actually named in the “Table of the Distances of Locks, Bridges, etc., from Newbridge, Wolverhampton, to Great Haywood” (page 38), and the relevant part is given below:

“Radford Bridge (17¼)
Baswich Salt Works (17¾)
Stafford Branch & Lock (18)
Lodgfield Bridge (18½)”

The distances quoted in the Table were “by courtesy of the S. & W. Canal Co. from their official tables.”

For the benefit of the boater, the “uniform dimensions of the S & W locks” were given on page 18:

“Length: 75 feet
Width: 7 feet
Depth of water over cill: 4 feet”

It is likely that these were also the dimensions of St Thomas’ (Baswich) Lock on the Stafford Branch Canal, mentioned in the Table.

References

- (1) The *Trumpet Hotel* is now the *Radford Bank Inn*, a Crown Carvery.
- (2) Baswich Bridge is Bridge 100. However, the salt works are a little further on, past the Railway Bridge on the right.
- (3) Green Bridge (Bridge Street) in the centre of Stafford, close to the Coal Wharf and the Royal Brine Baths.
- (4) The Ladder Bridge, used as the towpath across the River Penk.

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