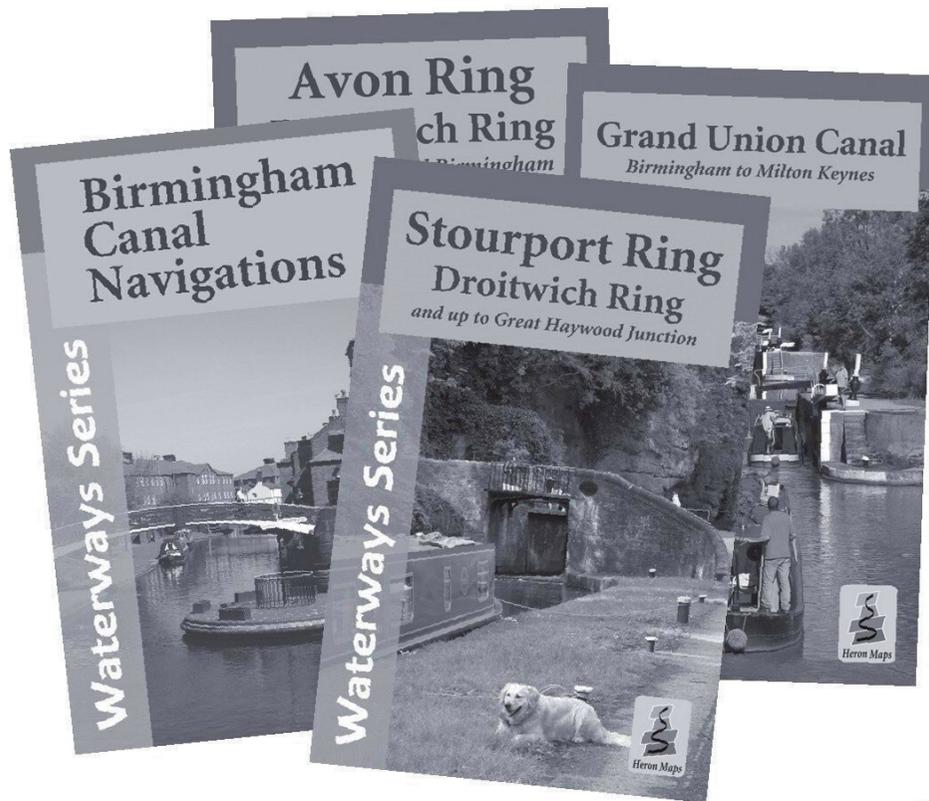


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# Boundary Post



Edition  
206  
Autumn  
2014



I was joined by Ivor Chambers & Brian Ward to meet four representatives from CRT to discuss the reed infestation on the Wednesbury Old Canal. There was Ian Lane, Acting Area Manager, Ian Derby, Maintenance Manager, Paul Wilkinson Senior Ecologist and Alex May, Environmental Scientist. Because of the known toxins in the water the cost of dredging out the reeds would be financially prohibitive at present but various considerations are being made.

Brenda Ward, Chairman

**The Journal of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society**  
Free to members      50p when sold      [bcnsociety.com](http://bcnsociety.com)

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**Press & Publicity Assistant**

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If you have enjoyed reading the items in this journal and would like to be involved in some of our activities and are not a member, but are interested in joining the BCN Society here's just the form you need!

**BIRMINGHAM CANAL NAVIGATIONS SOCIETY****MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM**

Please return to:- Alan Veness, 43 Pilkington Avenue, Sutton Coldfield B72 1LA

About you

About your Partner (if applicable)

Surname .....

Surname.....

Title (e.g. Mr, Dr etc).....

Title (e.g. Mr, Dr etc) .....

Forenames(s) .....

Forenames(s) .....

Other Family Members to be included

1) Forename(s) .....

2) Forename(s) .....

Address

..... Post Code .....

Telephone Number ..... email: .....

**Type of Membership required**

Membership Types	Annual Cost	Number required
Individual (or family at same address)	£12.50	.....
OAP	£7.50	.....
Corporate Membership	£25.00	.....

I enclose a cheque / Postal Order made payable to the "BCN Society" Value:£\_\_\_\_\_

**GIFT AID DECLARATION**

Completing this will allow The Society to claim Gift Aid.

I want the B.C.N. Society to reclaim tax on all my donations to its funds from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise.

Signed: .....Date:.....

You must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax we reclaim on your payments in the appropriate tax year.

The BCN Society, a Company Limited by Guarantee, (Registered Charity number 1091760) exists to conserve and improve the canals of the West Midlands.

## BCNS Social Meetings

are held on the first Thursday in the month start at 7-30pm  
 Titford Pumphouse Engine Street Oldbury B69 4NL  
 All Welcome!

**December 5th - Christmas Social** at The Court of Requests Oldbury  
 Tickets from Charlie Johnston and at the Bonfire Rally

**January 8th - Della Sadler-Moore -Care on the Cut - Sister Mary and Boaters Health**

**February 5th - Keith Eley - A History Lesson?**

**March 5th - Brian Dakin - From the Coal'ole - A journey through Black Country Life in story & song by Billy Spakemon**

**April 2nd - Chris Allen - Pumping Engines**

## 2014 DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Stourbridge Navigation Trust Open Weekend - October 17th /18th  
 Contact: [christopherdyche@hotmail.com](mailto:christopherdyche@hotmail.com)

Allen Annual Social Meeting at Titford Pump House  
 November 22nd - contact - [jenner971@btinternet.com](mailto:jenner971@btinternet.com)

AGM &  
 Bonfire Rally  
 31st October  
 &  
 1st November



The opinions and views expressed in Boundary Post are not necessarily the views of either the Society or its Officials. The BCN Society, a Company Limited by Guarantee, is a registered charity (1091760) first formed in 1968, which exists to conserve, improve and encourage a wide range of interests in the 100 mile network of Birmingham & Black Country waterways known as the Birmingham Canal Navigations. Boundary Post is the journal of the BCNS and is issued quarterly. Readers are invited to submit items of news, general or historical interest to:

The Editor, Brenda Ward, 9 Wylde Green Road, Sutton Coldfield B72 1HB  
 tel: 0121 355 6351 email: [boundarypost@googlemail.com](mailto:boundarypost@googlemail.com)

### Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Council Details</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Editorial</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Chairman's notes</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Atlas &amp; Malus</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Walking the BCN</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Society's Artifacts</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>2015 Events</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Britain from Above</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Park Head</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>CRT Environmental Report</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Ray Shill Tibbington Canal</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Email list</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>AGM Notice</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>BCN 1960's</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Book Reviews</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Walking forgotten BCN</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Otters in the BCN?</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>New Members &amp; Geoff Peakman</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Winter Stoppages on BCN</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Work Party Report</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Talks by Phil Clayton</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Social Meetings</i>	<i>30</i>



## Notes from the Editor

By my calculation this is my 39th copy of Boundary Post! I may be celebrating a ruby anniversary next edition! Should it be red/read!!

The amount of time I have spent on this journal is uncountable as my husband will tell you and it hasn't been without it's problems - crashing computers, printers that go bump, programmes that become incompatible with computers and printers to name just a few. Generally I would say I really enjoy editing Boundary Post. It involves me with so many people & has certainly increased my knowledge.

This time it has some good photos from members. I know we have many members who live away from the Midlands and some who are unfamiliar with much of the BCN never mind it's history so I hope this Journal supplies some knowledge of the past as well as the present.

Bob May gave the Society his photo collection and the magazine "Narrowboat" edited by Hugh Potter is featuring some of them in his autumn copy. Look out for it.

You will notice that Ray Shill is back after a short break - busy writing more books! Also Andy Tidy is continuing with much enthusiasm his series on walking the other 60 miles.

Thank you to all who contribute to make this such an interesting Society Journal.

*Brenda*



### Next Boundary Post

Editor welcomes any interesting and relevant information relating to the BCN in the form of news items, photographs, letters, notes or articles to be sent by **December 1st**

Email: [boundarypost@gmail.com](mailto:boundarypost@gmail.com)  
 Address: 9 Wylde Green Road, Sutton Coldfield B72 1HB  
 Tel: 01213556351  
 Mobile: 07961177553



## Chairman's Report

After three years as Chairman of BCNS I have decided to pass the job on to someone else.

I have found it a very rewarding position and it enabled me to meet so many lovely people. If I could have found someone to edit Boundary Post I may have continued but I'll stick with Boundary Post for at least the next year unless there is an enthusiast "would be editor" feeling the need.

Now to things the Society has been doing. This time of the year is generally quiet until September comes then it's almost every weekend that we are involved in something. Black Country Boating Festival & Park Head are the main two this year. Thank you to Barrie & his team & Eileen on the Jeans along with Beccy on Sales. The Society depends greatly on these two stalls to give us so much needed income. We are a Society with many assets all of which need care and in some cases much funding.

Atlas & Malus are probably our biggest expense this year but we are liaising well with Coombeswood Canal Trust the co-owners of the boats and look forward to some interesting times with the boats in the near future.

For something a little different this year the Society have decided to encourage members to bring their boats out in April to "do the loops & Smethwick Locks" and include non boating members to join them. See details of this and other events next year on page on page 9. I shall email out later with further details & entry form.

Along with the usual happenings that occur during the year with the Society we do get some unusual - a book was dropped through our letter box the other week called "History of the Titford Family" with a letter wondering if it may be possible that there was a connection. Any ideas?

Phoenix has recently been painted & we are now awaiting the signwriting to be done then we will have a very smart work boat. This takes me to the thought of work party volunteers. We will be organising a social to interact with CRT officers to help with information needed for volunteering this will be emailed out later. Also a Thank You evening social will take place early next year for all volunteers we hope you can all be there. If you are not a work party volunteer why not give it a try. See details from Mike Rolfe on page 28.

Finally I would like to wish Bob Broomhall a good recovery from his recent health problems. As I write this he is really poorly. Our thoughts go to his wife Joan too as it's the nearest & dearest that suffer just as much. Good Luck Bob!!

## BCNS Talks and Presentations By Phil Clayton List of current items

*Phil Clayton does the talks for our Society and would like you to know the various talks he does. We know how entertaining he is and turns even the most unlikely subject into an interesting experience. His musical "Birmingham Lads" is especially well worth listening and watching those of you who were at our last Summer Rally at Tifford will know what I mean. Give him a call - details below.*

**Joeys, Joshers and James** – A Birmingham Canals Miscellany - covering the beginnings, growth, working years, decline and revival of the B.C.N. together with the work of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society.

**The Caledonian Canal** – the story of Scotland's major waterway.

**Down the Fens** – a voyage into East Anglia including rivers Nene, Great Ouse and Cam and the mysterious Middle Levels. Cruising, history and natural history.

**Curious Cuts** – looking at some of the has-beens, never-weres, oddities and eccentricities of the waterways.

**A Northerner on Northern Waters** – Liverpool to Ripon and points in between.

**Meanderings** – Walking, Cruising and Musing along British Rivers – this ties in with my book, "Headwaters, Walking to British River Sources", pub. Frances Lincoln, 2012.

**Walking in the Past : Ramblings through History** – a look at our past, from Stone Age Tracks, Roman Ways, Packhorse Routes, Turnpike Roads to the present through a walker's eyes, with several Snickets and Blind Alleys thrown in.

**Mountain Days in Britain** – walking and wanderings in the high places.

**Birmingham Lads** – a live musical, with accompanying visual presentation, on the rise, success, decline and revival of the Birmingham Canal Navigations. The show comprises a selection of original songs as well as traditional boaters' ditties and favourites, illustrated with many historic photographs from the Bob May Collection. (© The B.C.N.Society)

Having entertained Canal Societies, IWA Local Branches, WI Groups, U3A, schools, Local History Societies and Rotary Groups, Phil's Talks and Presentations can be adapted to any particular age or interest group and time span.

For further details, why not give him a ring? 01902 780920 07890 921413  
or e-mail - [phillipclayton@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:phillipclayton@blueyonder.co.uk)

## Work Party Report by Mike Rolfe



**August 30th** Our annual Clean up held before the Tipton Community Rally. Stuart, Phil and I took Phoenix along to Tipton, going down via Caggy's to top up with diesel. Reaching our destination, we were meet by the usual Tipton crew already busy litter picking, weeding and hedge cutting.

Also in attendance was Bittel plus butty, steered as usual by Steve Bingham. A lunch was laid on this year in the 'Fountain' by Owen St. bridge, and very nice it was.

By mid afternoon Phoenix had quite a pile of black bags full of rubbish in it's hold, so Stuart and I headed back to the Pumphouse for unloading, taking the quicker route via the Old Main line.

### Future Work Parties

**October 25th** Pre Bonfire Clean up around Smethwick Top lock. 10am start.

**October 30th/November 2nd** Bonfire Rally. All the usual jobs around the site.

**November 8th** Remove nails from bonfire site. 10am start.

*Mike Rolfe and Stuart Sherratt looking for floating rubbish on the canal at Tipton in readiness for the Tipton Community Canal Festival.*

*You can see Phoenix in its fine paint work ready to receive it's sign writing, all of which has been paid for by a generous member of the Society*



## Atlas & Malus



*Paul Smith has worked hard in his first year managing Atlas & Malus, two working boats owned by the Society along with the Coombeswood Canal Trust. Their activities have almost come to an end with the Bonfire Rally the last of the season. There are some interesting plans for next year and if you would like to be involved, even occasionally, contact Paul.*

Here's everyone who's helped me with A&M this summer.

Paul Cardy, John Carrington, Jeff Carter, Mel Carter, Charley Johnston, Steve King, Michael Payne, Allan Richards, Tony Robinson, Mike Rolfe, Kevin Seabridge, Jim Shead, Adrian Smith, John Worall and of course Ivor Chambers.

Atlas & Malus have had a busy summer. After leaving Kingswood junction we headed down the Hatton flight to Warwick, giving the crew an opportunity to run the pair breasted up. Leaving A&M at the excellent moorings in the Saltisford arm for a week we retraced our steps and returned to Kingswood. We then continued along the Grand Union through Knowle and briefly back to BCN waters before heading along the Birmingham & Fazeley canal. Turning left at Fazeley we moored A&M at Streethay Wharf for a few weeks to let them and the crew have a well earned rest!

In mid August we retraced our steps back through Fazeley to stop at Alvecote Marina to attend their historic boat gathering, held over the August bank holiday weekend A&M were in the company of around 50 other historic boats, a great sight.

A four day trip saw A&M head back to home waters through the many locks of the Curdworth, Minworth, Aston and Farmers Bridge flights, before the lock fee run to Hawne Basin.

Once again a big thank you to all who have turned up to help crew on this trip. Anyone wishing to get involved with these historic boats please email me at

[paul.smith879@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:paul.smith879@yahoo.co.uk)

.....Many thanks to Paul and all the volunteers.....

## One man's meat .....



*A while ago I heard from Mike Andrews who said he was walking the BCN tow paths and intended to finish all of them by the time Ray Shill did his walk. He said he would complete this task by walking the last bit to finish at Perry Barr at the lock cottage on Deykin Road. Well as good as his word he managed it no trouble & received a well earned Explorer Plaque.*

*The photo shows Mike Andrews along with 15 other walkers setting off with Ray on their way down the locks towards Salford Junc-*

even if they can't pronounce the name of that big aqueduct. However they looked utterly shell shocked at the thought of walking in what they perceive to be a built up area. They needed to have joined me on my April walk to see what they were missing. The first of the canals in the BCN to be built was from Birmingham( Broad Street ) to Wolverhampton (Aldersley). It is a rare treat. It has 18<sup>th</sup> century history, coupled with the engineering feats of three great canal builders, delightful, functional architecture of the canal furniture interspersed with rural sections awash with gorse and the M5 awash with 20<sup>th</sup> century support pillars. James Brindley, John Smeaton and Thomas Telford may have been the figureheads rightly subject to public acclaim for their designs, but it was their lieutenants and itinerant workforce who in the first instance created the dream of the canal's promoters and later the improvements to the network similar to that mirrored today,

Going to the pub on a Friday night is a must. Our lottery syndicate manager/treasurer appears at 9.30 and we pay our subscriptions to him, if we haven't already used up the loose change in our pockets. The drinking is merely incidental !!! In late March, I told the assembled crowd that I intended to walk the navigable canals of the BCN. They all mumbled disparagingly at how lucky I was to be retired and have the freedom to do so, as most of them are in their 50's and have some way to go to their retirement. When they asked what the BCN covered, I threw in some names of towns and suburbs where I was going to walk for their edification. Most of them have walked the Shroppie in parts and others have driven their cars to Llangollen and enjoyed what the canals have to offer



Farmers Bridge Locks 1982

## 2014/2015 Winter Stoppages:

**Lock 2 & 3 Farmers Bridge B&F**  
From: 10th November 2014 at 07:30  
To: 23rd November 2014 at 17:00

**Coseley Cutting Old Main Line**  
From: 10th November 2014 at 07:30  
To: 13th March 2015 at 17:00

**Lock 13 Perry Barr Tame Valley**  
From: 10th November 2014 at 07:30  
To: 21st December 2014 at 17:00

**Lock 5 Aston B&F**  
From: 24th November 2014 at 07:30  
To: 21st December 2014 at 17:00

**Lock 13 Farmers Bridge B&F**  
From: 24th November 2014 at 07:30  
To: 21st December 2014 at 17:00 inclusive

**Lock 3 Curdworth B&F**  
From: 5th January 2015 at 07:30  
To: 1st March 2015 at 17:00 inclusive

**Lock 8 Perry Barr Tame Valley**  
From: 5th January 2015 at 07:30  
To: 8th February 2015 at 17:00 inclusive

**Perry Barr Locks 2 - 11 Tame Valley**  
From: 9th February 2015 at 07:30  
To: 13th March 2015 at 17:00 inclusive

## Welcome New



**From our Membership Secretary,  
Alan Veness  
He would like to welcome the  
following new members and  
hope they will join us in the**

Judith Hurst - Birmingham  
Judy & Rob Hodge - Pelsall  
Anthony Snowdon - Coseley  
Mariel Bishop - Birmingham  
Philip & Ann Wild - Dudley  
Keith & Gillian Astley - East Grinstead  
David Caunt - Dudley

Current membership:  
513 Memberships, which includes 6 Corporate and 815 individual members.

### Geoff Peakman R.I.P



Sadly Geoff died on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014 aged 71. He was a long and active member of the BCNS and until recently served on the committee as Social Secretary. Geoff's early interest in the canal system resulted in

Geoff was an electrician by trade, he spent half of his working life with Birmid Qualcast ; redundancy intervened and he spent the other half employed as an electrical maintenance engineer, until he retired, at Birmingham ICC. Geoff's trait was that he was meticulous in everything he did that gained him the respect of others and a firm favourite to get the electrical jobs around the yard.

Geoff attended many of the boat rallies around the Black Country, particularly the BCNS rallies, BCBF and Stourbridge at which his attendance records were exceptional. He particularly liked to enter the boat handling competitions which brought out his competitive spirit. Geoff will be sorely missed by his family and friends just for being the person he was: - private, unassuming, dedicated and loyal.

**Arthur Farge**

with the hard shoulder of the motorways being upgraded to maximise the movement of traffic. Nevertheless how significant are the differences in equipment over the two centuries, with the spade, barrow and plank of the 1770's to the ubiquitous JCB and heavy CAT earthmovers that created the motorway network. Other canals of the BCN built roughly at the same time in the late 1700's show opposing characteristics. The Wyrley & Essington meanders from Wolverhampton to Brownhills as it achieved its objective of a course of close proximity to colliery outposts whilst venturing today through peaceful oases such as Rough Wood and Pelsall Common. The Birmingham and Fazeley canal however, did its best to emulate a roman road once it had escaped from the B'ham plateau and the 24 locks of the Farmers Bridge and Aston flights .The reason for the directness, is that its purpose was to join with the Trent and Mersey canal at Fradley near Lichfield via the Coventry canal to open an improved trade link with the East Midlands.



The Shropshire Union canal and the Tame Valley canal are strikingly similar with deep cuttings and hefty earth banks. Construction methods were rapidly changing and the necessity to follow contours as the earlier canals did became irrelevant. However the Tame Valley has something to offer and on a grand scale. A row of giant electricity pylons follow the canal never quite sure which side of the cut they wish to be secured. In fairness the Shroppie has its Shelmore embankment rising nearly 60 ft for around one mile but its great height is hidden in the accompanying woods near Gnosall. My friends need to get out more and glory at the heritage of the BCN. I suspect a list of real ale pubs on or near the BCN network would support my case. I have now walked the entire BCN where towpaths allow (without resorting to alcohol) relying almost exclusively on National Express buses and trams to get to and from the canals in question and have a large bank of photographs of bridges, locks and anything else of interest so I have become an official

anorak. I hope with my enhanced knowledge and feel of the system I can persuade them to rethink their position away from their previous stance of .....is another man's poison.

*Ray's walk took the walkers along the canal to Salford Junction under the M6 interchange (Spaghetti Junction) then up Aston Locks.*

## Society's Artefacts

*Ivor Chambers has been responsible for our Society's Artifacts for a few years now & is keen to share them with our members so if you have an interest in any of our items Ivor will be pleased to show you at a time convenient to you both.*

Member and visitors who have recently attended any of the meeting or talks at the pump house will have seen the collection of artefacts displayed on the walls of the meeting room, such as bridge name plates, collection of old lock keys or old tools, just to name a few but also the society own a number of books, magazines, ledgers and a number of photos which have been donated in the last few years.

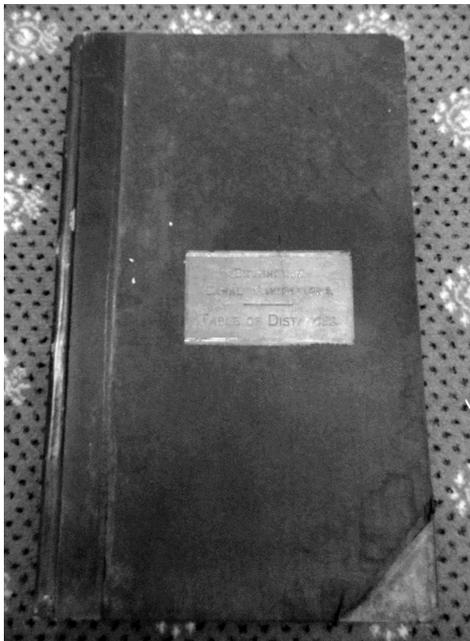
The society hold in safe storage a full set of BCN gauging record books, these measure just over A4 size 8 x 13

inches. There are 68 volumes which cover a period of time from 19 January 1875 the last entry was on the 5 April 1962. One entry records, on the 7 January 1959 the cabin boat type motor "Sunshine" was gauged at Tipton, one ton weights were added, the amount of dry side was measured, in this case 36, 6 inches light also the draught 14. 87 inches was recorded finishing with 33 tons on board  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch dry side and 50.62 inches draught. The boat was then issued with a BCN gauging number 2387 in this case, the amount of equipment was recorded such as 4 beams, floor shuts, 4 planks, side cloths, 2 stands, cratch, pump, engine and 50 gallons of fuel, other information was entered the owners name and address.

We also own a large book "Table of Distances" (shown left) which covers the whole BCN system giving the distance in miles and furlongs along any canal of the BCN. of bridges, wharfs and any basins that went off that canal, which make very interesting reading.

If any of our society members wish to donate any canal books or old documents for the safe keeping or members wish to view any of these books, please contact:

IVOR CHAMBERS tel: 0121 707 1690  
ivor\_w\_chambers@hotmail.com



## Otters in the BCN?

This seemed unlikely to me but it may be possible. Sometime in June a member sent the following information and Paul Wilkinson CRT Senior Ecologist responded.

*"Are there Otters on the BCN? I'm sure I saw one by Smethwick Junction. Something definitely swam across the cut in front of the boat yesterday with just it's head out of the water.  
I've seen a Mink before (not on the BCN) and it was black I think. What I saw yesterday was a lot lighter, a sort of brown/grey colour."*

It is possible. with the mild winter, a lot of our mammals are up in numbers including signs of otters and this could be one exploring new territory. Mink do come in other colours too, but that is rare and they are usually the typical dark brown. Otters have huge territories, 20 -40KM and sometimes get pushed into new areas as they will fight, so yes, could have been.

Paul Wilkinson CRT Senior Ecologist

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Areas to follow and humps in the roads where the road bridges used to be there is plenty to see. Sometimes, you are even rewarded by an isolated road bridge or a pipe bridge lurking furtively at the side of a car park.

The route can be identified by a linear strip of open grassland as it crosses the sites of Dingle Lane Bridge and Monmer Bridge. The canal is then lost beneath lorry parks and industry for three quarters of a mile and a diversion through Ashmore Lake Industrial Park is needed before the line is reacquired at Springbank Bridge, which still carries Sharesacre Street over the infilled channel.



Spring Bank Bridge

From now on the channel plays hide and seek, mostly hidden but emerging at the road crossings at Sandbeds Bridge which carried Charles St and Clarke's



Bentley Canal junction with Anson Branch

Lane Bridge, a stretch which used to contain two locks. The next three quarters of a mile is open land but runs through cuttings and can be a bit boggy. The section includes collapsed bridges at Farm Bridge, Wolverhampton Road Bridge and finally the still standing parapet of Hopyard Bridge. The line of the canal is then buried beneath the grounds of County Bridge Primary School before it is completely severed by the new cutting containing the Black Country Spine Road. The tail end of the Bentley Canal ends with more a whimper than a flourish. The canal bed had been turned into allotments behind Wrexham Avenue, at the end of which is a path leading to the Rea Aqueduct. This provides access to the Anson Arm and so to the reeded up junction of the Bentley Canal, still spanned by a lonely pipe bridge behind the Walsall Showcase Cinema at J10 of the M6.

## 2015 Dates for Events on or near the BCN

April 11th - BCNS - Spring Cruise – contact - [boundarypost@gmail.com](mailto:boundarypost@gmail.com)

April 17<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> – BCN Clean Up – contact - [cbmorgan@sky.com](mailto:cbmorgan@sky.com)

May 1st to 4th - WB&DCS - Droitwich Festival  
contact [Adrian.Smith12@virginmedia.com](mailto:Adrian.Smith12@virginmedia.com)

May 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> – Coombeswood Canal Trust Open Day  
contact - [fair.rosamund43@gmail.com](mailto:fair.rosamund43@gmail.com)

May 8th to 15th – BCNS Explorer Cruise  
contact Stuart Sherratt - [bcns.explorercruise@gmail.com](mailto:bcns.explorercruise@gmail.com)

May 15th to 17th BCNS - Summer Boat Gathering Tiford  
contact [barryjohnson7@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:barryjohnson7@tiscali.co.uk)

May 15th to 17th WB&DCS - Alvechurch Beer Festival  
contact - [Adrian.Smith12@virginmedia.com](mailto:Adrian.Smith12@virginmedia.com)

June 12th to 14th Longwood Boat Club Boat Gathering  
contact - to be announced

June 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Brownhills Canal Festival – contact to be announced

July 10th to 12th WB&DCS - Kings Norton Junction Festival  
contact - [Adrian.Smith12@virginmedia.com](mailto:Adrian.Smith12@virginmedia.com)

August 1st/2nd possible Wednesbury Community Canal Festival  
contact to be announced

September 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> BCBF at Netherton. Contact - [info@bcbf.com](mailto:info@bcbf.com)  
and [www.bcbf.com](http://www.bcbf.com)

September 11<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> BCNS Summer Explorer Cruise  
contact - [bcns.explorercruise@gmail.com](mailto:bcns.explorercruise@gmail.com)

September 19<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup> Tipton Community Canal Festival

September 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> LHCRT - Huddlesford Heritage Gathering  
contact [bob\\_williams80@hotmail.com](mailto:bob_williams80@hotmail.com) website: [www.lhcrt.org.uk](http://www.lhcrt.org.uk)

October 17th & 18th Stourbridge Navigation Trust Open Weekend

October 31st BCNS Bonfire Rally - contact - [barryjohnson7@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:barryjohnson7@tiscali.co.uk)

**Looks like a busy year again!! If there are any more that I have missed then do please let me know. Editor.**

## Historic Photos of the BCN *Britain from Above*



Birmingham Canal and environs, Ladywood, 1938  
Photo by kind permission of Britain from Above

**Chris Hubbard** was one of the many who attended this interesting talk and he explains here the project and the benefits that members of the public can derive from this wonderful collection of aerial photographs of the UK. Of course Martin's main interest was of the canal but that's not all you can find on this amazing web site.

Several BCNS members joined the audience at Birmingham Library on 31<sup>st</sup> July for a fascinating presentation on the Britain from Above aerial photograph archive. This illustrates the changing landscape and industry of many parts of Britain over much of the last century.

The session started with an introduction by Aisha Hamis of English Heritage: she described how they were nearing the end of a four year project to conserve, digitise and make freely available to the public on the web some 95,000 images from the Aerofilms collection covering

the period from 1919 to 1953. These are considered the most valuable historically out of a total of more than one million images extending up to 2006. Aerofilms was started by former WW1 pilots who made a somewhat hazardous business of photographing the landscape, especially in the early years with little regulation of flying.

Martin O'Keeffe then looked at the BCN in particular and how the collection can help those with an historic interest to visualise the canals as they were before closures and redevelopment has swept away so

## Exploring the Forgotten Corners of the BCN By Andy Tidy

### 8. Bentley Canal

In this edition Andy Tidy explores the course of the 1843 Bentley Canal, a route which connected the Wolverhampton Level via the Wyrley and Essington Canal at Wednesfield Junction to the Anson Arm on the Walsall Canal, before it was progressively abandoned in the 1960's.

This is quite an extensive route at 3.5 miles long and therefore represents a significant walk. I completed the route by bicycle one frosty morning when the ground was hard, but an alternative would be to use two cars and position one at the far end.

A good place to start is at Wednesfield Junction which retains its neat iron roving bridge and a small basin next to the Nickleodeon Pub which ends with the entrance to the top lock. Looking at it today it's hard to believe that this was the entrance to a bustling canal which descended through 10 locks to reach the Walsall Canal.

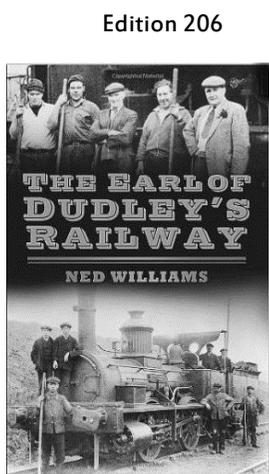
Only 20 years ago a walk on the route would have revealed crumbling lock chambers and a reedy channel, but a massive retail regeneration scheme in the 1990's swept the top four locks away, locks which were navigable into the 1960's. With a bit of searching the Neachells Road Bridge can still be found, still carrying the road over a dry canal channel. Press on a bit further, crossing the sites two more and you arrive at Neachells Branch Junction, built to serve the Neachells and Merrils Hall Collieries. The half mile line of the Neachells Arm can be traced as a winding band of open space, and half way along the channel is apparent with a



*The start of Andy's walk as it would have looked in 1975*

drainage stream cut into its base. The site of the junction is close to the Tata Steel plant and if you ask the security guard nicely they will let you look into the grounds where you will find a perfectly restored classic hump backed canal bridge. The Bentley Canal was almost dead straight and this very tangible remains provides a pointer to the canal bed which can be found continuing in the undergrowth of Fibbersley Nature Reserve to the site of Fly Bridge..

Generally the line of the Bentley Canal remains visible and is easy to follow on well made cycle tracks, but you have to be careful not to be misled by the abandoned railways which cross the area. These can easily be mistaken for canals and you find yourself on an incline or an impossibly narrow embankment trying hard to convince yourself that it is a plausible canal route. Built remains are few and far between, but with linear open public



**The Earl of Dudley's Railway**  
 by Ned Williams, 157 pp, 2 maps, 194 b&w illustrations, The History Press, Stroud, 2014, ISBN 9 078 0 7524 9308 4 available [www.thehistorypress.co.uk](http://www.thehistorypress.co.uk), £11.99

With a wealth of interesting photographs Ned Williams charts the history of the Earl of Dudley's Railway, sometimes also known as the Pensnett Railway. Following the opening of the Dudley and Stourbridge canals in 1779 and the building of a small furnace in 1784 the Earl's mining and iron working interests in the Brierley Hill/Park Head area were greatly extended. By 1820 with further development of collieries and iron workings it was agreed that the Earl's agent would build a railway to facilitate the movement of minerals between Baggeridge Colliery and the Round Oak Iron Works. Construction of locomotives at Stourbridge, to serve the railway, began in 1827 and many fine engines were built

including *Agenoria* which has survived to the present day and can still be seen in York Railway Museum. The Earl's Railway also carried passengers in the 1920's and 30's to fetes at Himley Park. There is little left to see now of the Earl's Railway, with the demise of steel working in the 1970' the railway's usefulness came to an end. The author's wonderful collection of images helps to fill the void, with its pictures of the engines and their crews: of loco building, plate- laying, the permanent way and the signalling equipment to recall the system that once worked its way over this part of South Staffordshire.

## Thomas goes to his last mooring place.



BCN Society member Roy Hallam was the owner of Thomas, a very special whippet who wrote in many editions of Boundary Post telling us about the good pubs around the BCN where he felt welcome and the beer & pork scratchings were the best.

Those of you who knew him will be sorry to hear that Thomas is no longer with Roy as he was so seriously ill that the vet had to do the unmentionable. He was indeed a very exceptional dog & will be missed by all of us.

much of the past. The collection comprises oblique views of the subject - often multiple images as the plane circled – and Martin took us through several examples where he compared the aerial views with historic maps of the location and pictures from towpath level. In some cases he suggested that these may be the only photographic record of parts of the network, which otherwise are now recorded only in old maps.

Cataloguing and labelling the photographs is an ongoing process in which the public is encouraged to get involved. Each photograph can have one or more Keywords (Tags) which describe the scene in general terms, such as "BCN", "Birmingham" or "Canal" and these are listed and can be searched for on the website. Within each image Pins can be placed on specific features, for instance a bridge name, boat yard or factory and

a detailed description added to it. Martin has himself located and tagged as "BCN" more than 600 images, although pictures are still being added and there may be more yet to be discovered – not to mention the rest of the network. There appears to be little control over the use of Keywords so there are a variety of terms and spellings in use for similar features.

Both speakers emphasised the importance of Registering to use the website, which then allows full access to the collection for browsing, to participate in the tagging and identification process or download low resolution copies for personal non-commercial use.

If you have not already discovered it, then do take time to explore this fascinating archive at: [www.britainfromabove.org.uk](http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk)



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# Mike Rolfe & Park Head Locks 1991

They say "Life is full of Surprises" well Mike Rolfe has been our Work Party Co-ordinator for quite some time now & up until very recently he communicated via mobile phone as he had no internet connection - well now he has and we are learning a great deal about Mike that we didn't know before.

Mike sent me a few photos of Park Head Locks with the following message:

*In December 1991 I visited Park-head locks, which were closed at the time due to work being carried out in Dudley tunnel. This was before the second re-opening of the tunnel in 1992. I took the following pictures on slide film, since copied on to digital.*

*If I remember rightly, the railway viaduct was closed by this time, so it was possible to climb up and get a good view. The scene looks quite different now. Mike Rolfe*



Netherton Hill in the distance with Blowers Green Pump House, HQ of Dudley Canal Trust and Steve Bingham's house on the right of the photo.



Photos above show the area from various viewpoints; top left further back than the first view, bottom left shows top lock with railway viaduct and the photo above shows the closed up portal of the Dudley Tunnel.

I know there are many of our members who could tell us more about this and for sure Vic Smallshire would tell us all about it if he were here - Oh we shall miss him!!!



### Steve King wrote:

A great article on Alfred Matty in the Summer edition of "Narrowboat" magazine got me to dig out some photos I took in the late '60's which may be of interest to the readers of "Boundary Post". The first four show "Stratford" and a day boat turning out of the Gower Branch onto the New Mail Line and passing where we were moored to head to the waste dump. The last two are another "pair?" which passed shortly after. I think this might have been the motor "Aldgate".

*Perhaps Nick Wolfe the present owner of M.B. Aldgate will recognise if it is indeed the boat in question.*



## Stratford & Aldgate in the 1960's



*Just recently Steve King, a newly rejoined member sent these super photos taken in the 1960's. Not only are they interesting for the boats that appear on them but the long gone industry at the side of the Gower branch with the railway that connected to the*

*Main Line on the other side of the canal. There are some of our members that will tell us more about these boats and places and I look forward to printing it next time.*



## Vic Smallshire R.I.P.

Many of you will have known Vic or known of him. He was a "shining light" in the 60s when Dudley Tunnel was closed & he thought it should be open. Throughout his life his involvement with the waterways was so dedicated. He was Chairman of Dudley Canal Trust for more years than I know of and continued to be so up to his death on 14th September. He will be missed by many not just as a particularly nice man but as a great waterways enthusiast.

## Jackie Day R.I.P.

Jackie was a lively lady, wife of Kevin Day both being members of BCNS. They were also keen members of Tamworth Cruising Club and for the past year moored their boat on the Dudley Canal at Withymoor. Jackie was taken ill at last years Pelsall Rally. She will be missed by all who knew her.

## SLOW BOAT

Kate Self who runs Slow Boat as a Youth Project for The IKON Gallery is relinquishing her post and begins work on 1st October for Multistory in West Brom. Kate has agreed to stay with BCNS Council & I'm sure will be involved in various ways. We hope to link up with the next person who will be taking over the Youth Project but in the mean time we will be liaising with Phil Lea who is the helmsman for Slow Boat.

## Allen Register Social



The Allen Register will again be holding its autumn social get together at Tittford Pumphouse on Saturday 22nd November 2014 from 11am until late afternoon. BCN Society members, who may not be register members, but have an interest in Allen boats are welcome to join us on the 22nd and perhaps even join the register (there is a nominal membership fee). Hopefully during the afternoon we will show some pictures relating to Allen boats. Teas & coffees will be available along with lunch for which donations are welcome. Contact:- Martin: [hecla777@hotmail.com](mailto:hecla777@hotmail.com)



Canal & River Trust

## **CRT West Midlands**

### **Alex May, Environmental Scientist**

*During my visit to discuss the state of the Wednesbury Old Canal's reed problem I took this photo and spoke to Alex about the toxins that leaked into the canals at various places. This pipe appeared to be discharging something that was deadly to the plants around the outfall and I asked Alex what can is being done about it. She was very enthusiastic and explained that there was a project to prevent this happening as she explains below:*



Earlier in the year, we recruited volunteers in the Midlands to survey sections of selected canals and look for outfalls (pipes and drains which discharge into the canal), note their characteristics (including whether or not there are any signs of pollution), plot a grid reference and take a photo. While many discharges are licensed and the flows are accommodated, unlicensed flows present a significant issue for the environmental and hydrological management of our network and as such both the environment and water management teams have a keen interest. Photos were taken of every outfall and any evidence of pollution observed was noted by the volunteers. In some of the more urban and industrialised areas, unregistered discharges from scrap yards and industrial estates were recorded and evidence of oil was seen, (and we are working with the Environment Agency to resolve these issues). Our colleagues in our Utilities team will start setting up agreements for those surface water discharges which currently do not have one, generating income, and the Environment team will start to look into the discharges which have been identified by the volunteers on their surveys as needing further investigation. As a continuation of this project, we're hoping to raise awareness of pollution prevention with riparian land owners who discharge surface water into our canals using the Yellowfish initiative which simply involves painting a yellow fish on any drains which discharge to a canal or river and promotes 'only rain down the drain'.

## **Notice of the Society AGM**

Birmingham Canal Navigations Society  
Company Limited by Guarantee no: 04306537 Registered Charity no: 1091760

### **Annual General Meeting 2014-09-21**

#### **To be held in the Marquee at the Bonfire Rally**

#### **7.00pm Friday 31<sup>st</sup> October**

Venue: Smethwick Enterprise Centre, Rolfe Street, Smethwick B66 2AR

#### **Agenda**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Approval of the minutes of the 2013 AGM
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. Chairman's report
5. Treasurer's report
- Approval of the Draft Annual Accounts
6. Accept the resignation of those Council Members who are standing down.
7. Election Council Members
8. Presentation of 24 Hour Challenge Award
9. Any other business relevant to the Annual General Meeting that has been submitted, in writing, to the Hon. Secretary at least 7 days before the meeting
10. Close of meeting.

Mr I H Caplan, Hon Secretary BCNS, 105 Trefoil Gardens, Stourbridge, DY8 4DY email: [ihcaplan@msn.com](mailto:ihcaplan@msn.com)

Please contact Ivor preferably by email if you are interested in being elected to Council or wish to nominate someone, obviously subject to their agreement.

If you are able to attend the AGM please bring this copy of the agenda with you as there will only be a limited number of copies available at the meeting.

"Gospel Oak Ironworks" were offered for sale in 1892, but were restarted by the Tipton Iron and Steel Company who kept them in work until 1900/1901. The sale of 1892 included 24 iron boats. The plant then comprised forges and sheet mills. They were offered for sale again in 1901 and from 1902 were finally offered in a dismantling sale. At this time the site comprised 2 large buildings that stretched from the canal basin to Princes End Road. They were then pulled down and later the land was used for mining purposes. Empire Colliery was established on the site of the former ironworks.

The basin was retained for the mining operations and Tibbington Brickworks. This brickworks was variously described as Tibbington and Princes End. The kilns were on the west side of the basin and at one time there was a large circular Hoffman type kiln. Tramways brought marl from a pit. Edmund Howl was the owner and he employed marl getters, male labourers and women slop moulders. In 1916 the Howl family formed Tibbington (1916) Company to work the mines and brickworks with a capital of £5000. The large kiln had been taken down by this date.

## BCN Society email list

As many of you know I hold an email list of Members & Friends of the Society and send out information appertaining to the BCN & surrounds that may be of interest as it comes to me, rather than waiting for Boundary Post to be printed & sent. I'm afraid many of my emails of late have been very sad and have dealt with deaths of our members or friends. Let's hope this will not be the case for the near future.

**If you do not receive such emails from me & wish to join this list just send a brief message to [boundarypost@gmail.com](mailto:boundarypost@gmail.com)**

## Branches & Byeways Ray Shill Tibbington Canal and Basins

***After a short absence Ray has returned with a detailed article in his Branches & Byeways collection.***

The old route of the Birmingham Canal passed through Summerhill to Gospel Oak. This was an area which was extensively mined where both coal and ironstone was taken. The area was split up into mining estates each covering acres of land upon which shafts were sunk to different seams of coal and ironstone.

This land was later developed as a busy iron manufacturing area. The 1919 distance table lists from Glebefield Bridge to Ocker Hill Bridge the following features:

*Pooles iron boat dock  
BCN Princess End wharf  
Tibbington Basin served No 9 colliery and Summerhill Colliery  
Hay wharf  
Phillips wharf  
South Staffordshire Mines Drainage  
Moat Engine  
Accommodation Bridge  
Moat Foundry (Charles Lathe)*

Amongst the original large mining estate were Glebefield, Gospel Oak, Moat Field, Moat and Tibbington.

The largest was the Moat Colliery which had a large frontage to the main canal and the Ocker Hill Branch. The Thick Coal seam at this point was nearly 30ft deep. Like elsewhere in the region this coal was not uniform, but comprised various sub seams separated by various partings. These were named, respectively; Roofs, Top Slipper, White Coal, Tow Coal, Brazils, Foot Coal, Slips, Stone Coal Slipper, Sawyer and Benches. Below the thick coal, were placed the measures of Lambstone, Heathen Coal, Sulphur Coal, Fireclay Coal. Gubbins & Ball Ironstone and Mealey Grey Coal. Moat colliery, in 1818, comprised 171 acres of thick coal. There were 2 water engines to drain the mines, railroads, whimseys and gins. Up to 1500 tons of coal were then produced each week.

The towpath ran alongside the east bank and there were a number of wharves and basins on the opposite side. They included the privately owned Tibbington Basin which served the Tibbington Works, an ironworks, furnace, brick kiln and colliery, which was part of the Tibbington House estate, the home of Thomas Smith and his family. Thomas built an extensive business as a coal master. On his death, son Richard acquired an extensive knowledge of the coal and iron trades and was able to make an extensive contribution to the various partnerships that involved Samuel Fereday. Richard had married Samuel's daughter Elizabeth and strong family ties were maintained

between Smith and the Feredays.

Iron and coal working in South Staffordshire often involved partnerships and the various Fereday partnerships dominated the local industry, with Richard playing an integral role. At Tibbington the major estates included Fereday, Turton and Read. John Read operated the Gospel Oak ironworks and furnaces and also worked the Tibbington mines around the house. An ironworks and blast furnace was erected at Tibbington, which were served by the private basin.

Poor trading in the iron trade from 1810 contributed to Reads bankruptcy and some of Feredays other partners were similarly affected. Eventually both Samuel Fereday and Richard Smith succumbed to the receivers demands. The Tibbington estate was offered for sale in 1817 and the map below showing the basin and ironworks.



Thomas Smith, of Tibbington House, was a strict Baptist coal and iron master. He died in 1808 when he owned some 240 acres of thick coal.

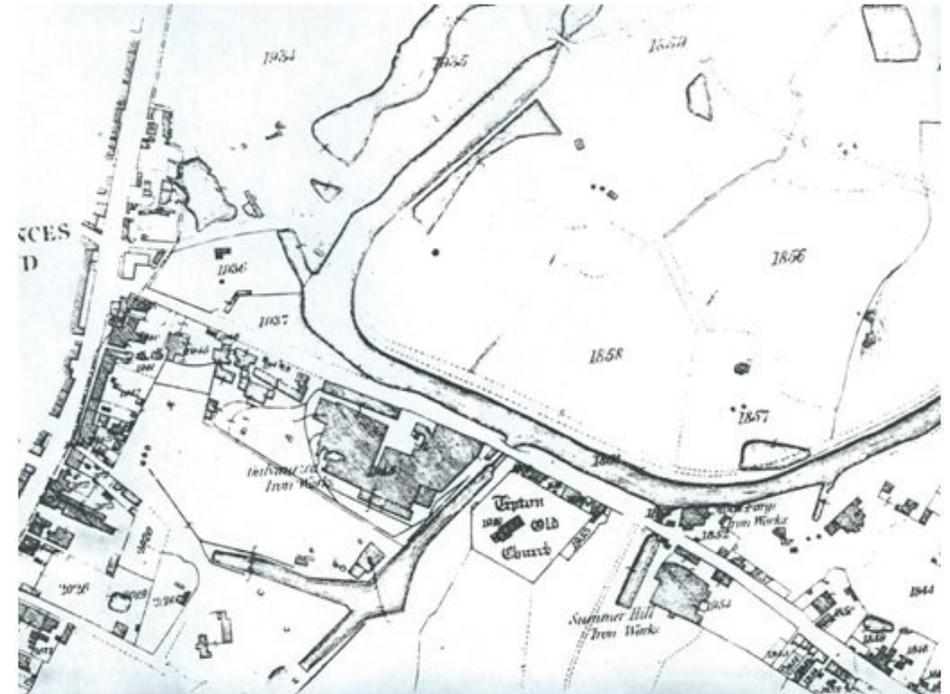
Richard Smith continued to live at Tibbington House where he made a home there with his wife Elizabeth and raised a family. Following bankruptcy of himself and Samuel Fereday he remained there to sort out the tangled affairs of the iron companies and earned a wage as engineer and agent. He dealt with various iron works sales including the Acrefair Ironworks near Ruabon, which passed to the British Iron Company in 1825. His address was still Tibbington House.

Richard Smith then moved abroad building up his experience, before returning to England. He was appointed agent to the Earl of Dudley and came to wield enormous influence on the development of the Earl of Dudleys estate at Brierley Hill and elsewhere. He was instrumental in major transport innovation regarding these properties in both the canal and railway sector. One son had a similar role improving the Duke of Bridgewater's operation near Manchester.

Tibbington furnaces were also known as Old Church, which refers to the church of St John that was the parish church for Tipton, and whose register recorded baptisms, marriages and deaths from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

It is a feature of Birmingham & the Black Country that sites were re-used and adapted to suit new industry. This appears to have happened in the case of the

## Tipton Tithes Survey Map



Tibbington Works, the blast furnaces had been removed and part of the site would seem to have been occupied by the Old Church Iron and Tinplate Company premises, which was composed of 2 forges, a sheet mill, 32 smelting and heating furnaces an iron foundry, refinery and smiths shops. Tin plate was common before galvanising was adopted and several works were once engaged in this trade throughout Staffordshire. Old Church works were offered for sale in 1840 and 1841. The New Forge had frontage to the canal, whilst the Old Forge fronted Princes End Road. 8 oak canal boats were mentioned in the May 1841 sale notice.

Gospel Oak works at Tibbington were subsequently operated by John & Edmund Walker. These were the busy times of the local trade. John Read's interest in the Gospel Oak and Tibbington estates had been taken over by Walker family and it was they who continued to work the mines, and developed the Tibbington iron & tin plate works for galvanising rolled iron. They retained these premises even after their main works at Gospel Oak had closed down and had been demolished. The "Tibbington Ironworks" remained in use and became known as "Gospel Oak". These works were subsequently owned by J Harris and J Evans. An important part of the business was wire drawing.