

## TO SERVE THE WATERMEN

### *A study of the inns along the canals in the Stroud area, researched and written by members of the Stroud Local History Society*

Refreshments have always been a concomitant of travelling from the days of the posting-station on the Roman road to the motorway service station of today. Canals have been no exception, and their construction was inevitably followed by the opening of a chain of drinking-places along their route.

Moreover, in the main, the Stroudwater, and Thames and Severn Canals did not pass near to existing settlements, where village alehouses could meet the watermen's needs ... From Framilode to Sapperton the canals followed the course of the river Frome, in some places quite closely, elsewhere at a distance.

The Stroudwater Canal ran its eight miles from near the Severn ferry at Framilode, where there were already two inns, the Passage House, the predecessor of the Darrell Arms, situated near the pier at which the ferry tied up, and the New Inn near Framilode Pill, the mouth of the river Frome. From there it passed south of Whitminster, Stonehouse and Ebley, and north of Eastington and the Stanleys until it reached its terminus at Wallbridge, just south of Stroud.

From the junction of the two canals at Wallbridge the Thames and Severn Canal followed the narrowing Frome valley to Sapperton. Only when Chalford was reached did it approach a village, and there it ran parallel with the High Street, where the Bell and Red Lion already existed, their names on a 1781 list of inns in Bisley Hundred. Apart from serving a few mills, the canal then passed through a lonely countryside to the tunnel at Sapperton.

#### WATERING PLACES

From the beginning, the canal men clearly needed places where they could refresh themselves. For nearly fifty years the Stroudwater had no towing path for draught animals, and the Severn trows and Midland barges using it were pulled by members of their crews. As the Stroud organist William Lawrence put it, in his poem 'Stroudwater', first published in 1824:

The hardy trowmen, vig'rous, stout and strong,  
Bend with the rope, and haul the barge along:  
But when they're favoured with a western gale  
They quit the rope, and briskly hoist the sail;  
Releas'd from toil, well pleas'd they march behind,  
And view the streamer shiv'ring in the wind.

Only in 1825, after a threat by customers to support the construction of a railway, did the canal company provide a proper tow-path.

Also demanding were the 7½ miles on the Thames and Severn between Wallbridge and the Sapperton tunnel, on which were 28 locks to be worked. Moreover, from the beginning the chief cargo on the canal boats was coal from the Forest of Dean or the West Midlands, which had to be unloaded at the many coalyards by the slow and cumbersome means of wheelbarrow. The watermen's need for places of refreshment was obvious.

The Stroudwater Canal was completed in 1779, and the Thames and Severn ten years later. New inns along the route must have been founded in the following years, but the loss of almost all records in the Gloucestershire recognizances before the Ale-

house Act of 1828 hides the process from us. There are traces, however. In 1788, the Rodborough vestry petitioned the magistrates to close the Anchor Inn at Wallbridge. Its title suggests that it must have been established since the opening of the canal nine years before. The vestry action also probably uncovers some hostility to the new inns on the part of the established authorities. Perhaps their clientele was more disorderly than that of other local alehouses.

Another piece of evidence comes from an unexpected source. In the Gloucestershire Collection is a pamphlet written by one Richard Skinner, 'The Memoirs of Mrs Sarah Butler, late of Brimscombe, near Stroud, Gloucestershire'. Sarah Butler was an active Wesleyan and played a large part in the establishment of Methodist congregations at Littleworth, now Amberley, and Brimscombe. Surprisingly, she was also the wife of the innkeeper of the Ship Inn at the latter place, and after his death ran it herself. The pamphlet states that, whilst she was at the Ship, the Thames and Severn canal was cut, and that the workmen engaged in its construction frequented the inn. This suggests that it pre-dated the canal, though it seems likely that its later name followed the canal's construction.

We know also that the two buildings constructed at either end of the Sapperton tunnel as accommodation for labourers working on the tunnel soon became two inns. That at Sapperton was the Bricklayer's Arms when it was sold by the canal company in 1807, whilst at Coates that built and owned by Lord Bathurst soon became the New Inn (now the Tunnel House).

Apart from the licensed premises, there were other houses where boatmen could call for refreshment. An example was Wharf House, near the bridge where the Bristol road crossed the canal. Built in 1776 and occupied by Joseph Grazebrook, clerk to the canal company, it was at first a 'one-up, one-down' cottage, where beer was served to boatmen through a window at the side of the house facing the canal. Though later extended, it never became a licensed house.



*The Bricklayer's Arms, Sapperton 1917*



*The Company's Arms, Chalford*

### INN INITIATIVES

As directories appeared and gave an increasing amount of detail, more of the canal inns can be identified. By 1820, the Ship Inn already stood at the corner of the Wallbridge basin. On the Thames and Severn were the Quay at Bourne, and the Carpenter's Arms, the Clothier's Arms and the Greyhound at Chalford. Later directories add more to the list - the Ship and Bell at Framilode, the Junction, known locally as the Drum and Monkey, at Saul, the New Inn at Newtown, the Ship at Stonehouse, the Anchor at Ryeford, the Victoria at Dudbridge, and the Bell and King's Arms at Wallbridge. By mid-century on the Thames and Severn were the New Inn at Bowbridge, the Port and the Admiral Nelson at Brimscombe, the Railway and Canal Tavern at Bourne, and the Queen's Head at St. Mary's, Chalford.

### THE BEER ACT, 1830

In addition, the Beer Act of 1830 gave official sanction to more humble drinking places. Anyone assessed to the poor-rate could now sell beer on payment of an annual excise duty of two guineas. Beershops henceforth abounded, known locally as 'kidley winks'. Magistrates and other respectable people frowned upon them, and the Archdeacon and Clergy of Gloucester petitioned the House of Lords in 1833, 'praying their Lordships to take such Measures with respect to the Beer Act as shall check that Torrent of Vice which it has been the means of spreading upon the Rural Population'. But there is no doubt of beershops' popularity among ordinary people, including the watermen. Also in 1833 two petitions opposing repeal of the Beer Act were sent to the House of Commons from this area. In the ten parishes through which the canals ran between Saul and Sapperton there were in 1838 212 beer-shops compared with 75 public-houses. Some 68 of these were in Stroud, where there were also 27 inns. There is no doubt that some of the later canalside inns originated as beer-shops at this time.

Few, if any, of the canal inns were built specifically as such. Most were just houses in which a public bar had been installed to serve customers. Of these, some deserve particular notice.

First and foremost is the Company's Arms at Chalford. Not quite on the canal, it was formerly the manor-house known as Chalford Place. The north side facing the road dates probably from the early sixteenth century, though the present windows must have been installed much later, when the house was heightened, enlarged towards the west, and given a classical south front. Its size no doubt encouraged the clothier Thomas Cox to convert it into a superior inn in 1803 during the prosperity enjoyed by the local woollen industry in the Napoleonic wars. Chalford's staple product was 'stripe', a coarse cloth exported to the East, and its chief customer was the East India Company. Hence the name given to the inn, which could hopefully give accommodation to the London gentlemen who were the visiting agents of the company. With the opening of the new London road up the valley in 1815, which joined the old road up Rodborough Hill and across Minchinhampton common at the top of Cowcombe Hill, Thomas Cox's son and successor Daniel was encouraged to start a London coach service, the 'Safety Britain', though it does not appear to have lasted long.

At the other end of Chalford, the Valley Inn, formerly the Clothier's Arms, a seventeenth-century building, was originally the house of the owner of the adjacent Valley mill.

The Daneway and Tunnel inns at either end of Sapperton tunnel must now look different from how they looked originally, when they were built to house labourers working on the canal tunnel. At the beginning of this century the Daneway, then still called the Bricklayer's Arms, consisted of two houses, one the beerhouse, and the other occupied by the Whiting family. The structure of the Tunnel inn was drastically changed by the fire which gutted it in 1952. As a result of the reconstruction there is now no third storey.

For the internal arrangements of these inns we have to depend upon more recent accounts and photographs, though it seems likely that there had been little change over the years. At the Victoria Inn at Dudbridge, the bar was situated in a one-storey building attached to the house. It stretched the length of the room, with a South American parrot called 'Flint' at the end of it. 'Flint' was believed to be the gift of a seaman. On the floor were sawdust and spittoons, as many bargees made a habit of chewing tobacco. The walls were decorated by a picture of the 'Death of Nelson' and four large cases containing models of sailing-ships. Off the bar was a small back-room, later used by courting couples who used to drop in for a drink whilst they were walking along the towpath.

Many canalside inns must often have had steps leading down to the canal from the bank, and the remains of such steps still exist near the Old Bell at Framilode.

Before the era of restricted licensing hours inaugurated in the First World War, running a public house involved long hours. The Anchor at Ryeford was open at six o'clock every morning to serve 'breakfast beer' to the bargees.

Few of the inns and beerhouses along the canal can have provided income sufficient to support the occupant and his family, most publicans having to combine their selling of drinks with other occupations.

### AUXILIARY ACTIVITIES

One of the commonest of these was the sale of coal. At a number of places along the canals the inns stood next to coal-yards. Even before the canals were built, Thomas Cullis of Passage House at Framilode had a coal-yard and ran the ferry whilst his wife Mary provided refreshment and accommodation at the inn.

At Dudbridge, Frederick Nurse is described as a coal merchant and dealer, and also a retailer of beer, in an 1844 directory. Further up the valley, John Knight, the licensee of the Company's Arms in the 1860s, was also a coal merchant, having a large yard (now a builder's yard) between his house and the canal.

Another common second string was to run a shop, sometimes with a bakery. In 1838, about a quarter of the beershops in the parishes along the canal had chandlers' shops attached. In the 1861 census, James Seal of the Bricklayer's Arms at Daneway was designated 'innkeeper and baker'. At the Anchor, Ryeford, in the parish of Stonehouse, near the public house is the building which contained a bakery, shop and cabinet maker's.

But the jobs which the keepers of inns and beer-shops undertook were varied. Some were also watermen, like Benjamin Banks of the Bell at Framilode and Charles Smith of the New Inn at Newtown, Stonehouse, in the 1881 census. Charles Leech of the Anchor at Wallbridge was given as victualler and maltster in the 1820 directory, and the Ship at Wallbridge was kept by William Knee, whom an 1867 directory also describes as brick, slate and coal merchant. At Chalford, John Jones of the Queen's Head was clearly a man of several parts, as in 1870 he was also said to be a butcher and carriage builder, his inn also having formerly been a turnpike toll house.

In Chalford High Street, the New Red Lion was in 1885 held by George Eddles, who also acted as a carrier. His successor, J.G. Workman, had the misfortune to find that his sideline brought about his dismissal from the inn. Alongside his premises was a large wooden shed known as the 'pop-shop', where Workman concocted and sold his ginger-beer with such success that the inn's owner, the Nailsworth brewery, Clissold and Sons, decided to terminate his tenancy because the sale of beer was suffering.

Some of the keepers of the alehouses and beershops were held in high esteem. In January 1847 the Railway and Canal Tavern at the Bourne, near Brimscombe, suffered extensive damage through fire, and a subscription was got up to help Richard Webb, its proprietor. The two local canal companies and the Worcester and Birmingham Canal Company headed the list, which included



The Victoria Arms, Dudbridge

many of the leading men of the district including one of its MPs, W.H. Stanton (*Gloucester Journal* 29 May 1847).

Fire was not the only calamity which could hit the publican. The *Gloucester Journal* of 3 June 1848 has an advertisement for the sale of the Railway Inn, Brimscombe, for the benefit of the creditors of its late proprietor, Richard Jones.

### TEMPORARY TEMPERANCE

At least one inn-keeper took action which was unusual for members of his profession. The 1844

Pigot's Directory gave Frederick Nurse as coal merchant and dealer at Dudbridge Wharf, and also as a retailer of beer. These years saw an energetic campaign in the area on behalf of temperance, its leader the redoubtable Reverend Benjamin Parsons at Ebley. The *Gloucester Journal* of 30 July 1842 reported on a teetotal meeting held in an orchard at Framilode belonging to James Nurse, Frederick's brother, and like him also a coal merchant. Sixty watermen with large number of others were present, and the report congratulated the watermen and their friends for their orderly behaviour. Another *Journal* report, of the 13 February 1847, showed that Frederick had by then joined his brother in espousing temperance. It reported on two temperance tea meetings held in the bottom of a new barge being built by Frederick Nurse at Dudbridge wharf, and stated that he was now a pledged member of the total abstinence society. It was added that in the following May, when the vessel was finished, instead of holding what was called 'a drunken launching feast', there was to be a total abstinence meeting. Yet the 1849 Hunt's *Directory* still listed Frederick Nurse as a beer retailer at Dudbridge.

One of the most bustling places on the two canals was Brimscombe, where at first there had to be an interchange of cargoes between Severn trows and Thames barges because of the differences of dimensions of the locks above and below the port, reflecting the differences in size of the two kinds of craft. It was not therefore surprising that a Saturday market took place at the Admiral Nelson, the faded inscription of which can still be seen on the road leading uphill to Minchinhampton (*Gloucester Journal* 29 May 1847).

The middle of the nineteenth century saw the canalside inns at their most prosperous. The canals were still flourishing, the recently arrived railway, running parallel through much of the valley, not yet having greatly eroded their traffic. Afterwards there was to come the long decline, which would see many of the inns disappear.

### CANALSIDE INNS FROM EAST TO WEST

Name	Situation	Present Use
1. Tunnel House	Coates	Public House
2. Bricklayer's Arms (now Daneway Inn)	Daneway	Public House
3. The Oak	Puck Mill, Frampton Mansell	Private House
4. Clothier's Arms	Valley Corner, Chalford	Private House
5. Boat Inn	Valley Corner, Chalford	Demolished
6. Anchor Inn	High Street, Chalford	Private House
7. Old Red Lion	High Street, Chalford	Private House
8. New Red Lion	High Street, Chalford	Public House
9. Bell	High Street, Chalford	Demolished

10. Greyhound	Chalford	Demolished
11. Old House	Chalford	Demolished
12. Company's Arms	Chalford	Private House
13. Carpenter's Arms	Chalford	Private Flats
14. Queen's Head	St. Mary's, Chalford	Private House
15. Railway Inn (later Victoria Inn, now King & Castle)	Bourne	Public House
16. Canal & Railway Tavern	Bourne	Demolished
17. Port Inn	Brimmscombe	Public House
18. Ship Inn	Brimmscombe	Private House
19. Nelson Inn	Brimmscombe	Demolished
20. New Inn	Bowbridge	Public House
21. British Oak	Bowbridge	Public House
22. Bell Inn	Wallbridge	Demolished
23. King's Arms	Wallbridge	Demolished
24. Ship Inn	Wallbridge	Demolished
25. Hope Inn	Wallbridge	Private House
26. Anchor Inn	Wallbridge	Demolished
27. Victoria Inn	Dudbridge	Private House
28. Anchor Inn	Ryeford	Public House
29. Ship Inn	Stoneshouse	Private House
30. Old New Inn	Newtown	Demolished
31. Wharf Cottage (Old Cider House)	Eastington	Private House
32. Junction Inn (Drum & Monkey)	Whitminster	Public House
33. Ship Inn	Framilode	Private House
34. Old Bell Inn	Framilode	Private House
35. New Inn	Framilode	Public House
36. Passage House (Darell Arms)	Framilode	Public House

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### NOTE

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The New Red Lion & Bell Inns, Chalford