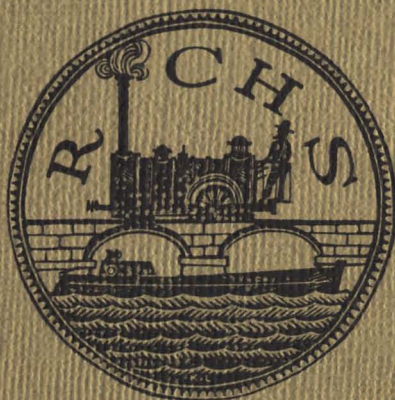


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NEW BOLINGBROKE—A NINETEENTH CENTURY CANAL TOWN?

By Frank Sharman

John Parkinson had three ambitions in life: to plant a forest, to sink a coal mine and to found a city. With three such "vaulting ambitions" it is not surprising that in the end they "o'er leapt themselves"; indeed, what is surprising is that he achieved any of them in any measure. It is a pity that no one has yet seen fit to chronicle the life and achievements of so remarkable a man; the short essay which follows is intended to do no more than indicate what may be discovered by a persistent researcher.

The available records of John Parkinson are so scanty that it is not even clear who he was. According to one version¹ he was a wealthy landowner of The Hall, Old Bolingbroke, Lincolnshire, who expended his own fortune on his schemes. In another version² he was the land agent of Sir Joseph Banks—and he may, therefore, have expended more of Sir Joseph's money than his own. Even Parkinson's dates are unknown; he must have been born before 1800, and almost certainly before 1790, and he was still alive in the 1830s.

The date of his attempt to achieve his first ambition and to plant a forest is unknown, but for the purpose he acquired land in the area of Lincolnshire now bounded by Woodhall Spa, Kirkby-on-Bain and Coningsby, and there he planted fir and oak trees, presumably over a sufficient acreage to satisfy himself that, once the trees reached maturity, his ambition would be fulfilled. He employed as agent for the work one William Ostler; when Parkinson eventually was ruined, Ostler bought the forest, after whom the present remnants are still named.² "Ostler's Plantation", a sizeable wood, still remains today, about two miles due east of Woodhall Spa.³

The attempt to sink a coal mine was, on the other hand, a total failure, but it had a curious result. For reasons which are totally obscure Parkinson thought that coal would be found in a deserted tract of scrubland in Lincolnshire, at a spot where Woodhall Spa now stands, but which was then practically deserted. Boring began in 1811 and, despite difficulties with a spring of water that entered the shaft, continued over a number of years until it was, allegedly, 1,000 feet deep. Parkinson was induced to keep boring because the workmen he employed, in order to stay in a remunerative job, occasionally took lumps of coal with them down the shaft and, at evening, re-appeared with them as earnest of the mine's prospects. But coal was never in fact found and eventually Parkinson gave up. He never did sink a coal mine, but the shaft filled with water from the spring that led into it and began to overflow. It was not long before stories began to circulate locally of the curative properties of this water which, on analysis, was found to be loaded with iodine and bromine. The local landowner built the Victoria Hotel on the spot in 1835 and from that beginning the town of Woodhall Spa grew up.⁴

But by the time this town had arisen—in a roundabout way as a result of Parkinson's exertions, Parkinson had already embarked on his own plans for fulfilling his ambition to found a city—an ambition he achieved with only a tiny degree of success. But its importance in the present context is that the present writer believes that it is likely that Parkinson's city was to be dependent on canal transport—and that a canal was in fact dug for the purpose. No other new town—of which there were a number in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—was so provided; Stourport is the opposite case, in that it sprang up where the canal was first, and the same applies to Saltaire. This new development appears not to have been noted before.

The fenland of the Witham valley in south Lincolnshire, with which we are here concerned, appears to have been first effectively drained in the first decade of the nineteenth century. On the new agricultural land thus created a number of new agricultural communities were founded by those allotted the new land—places such as New Leake, New York, Frithville and Midville. Parkinson bought¹ or leased² some of this new land from the Crown and on it set about establishing not a new agricultural community but a new industrial city; he called it New Bolingbroke, it being founded on land within the ancient Parish of Bolingbroke.⁵ The land lay on each side of a newly laid out road,⁶ and on each side of the road houses, shops and other facilities were built. Most importantly, it was given access by water.

White's *History . . . of Lincolnshire*³ records that Parkinson built New Bolingbroke "in such a situation that it might have a water communication with Boston, and nearly all parts of the surrounding fens, by means of the navigable drains". An examination of the map shows this to be true enough: the Medlam Drain runs nearby, down to Boston, but it is about half a mile from the new town's centre. It is submitted that the existing length of waterway that now connects New Bolingbroke with the Medlam Drain was specially cut by Parkinson to provide his new foundation with water transport. Certainly it seems too large merely to be a lateral drain; the others in the area, which bear a similar relationship to the main Medlam Drain, are much smaller. The only explanation of this cut's size is that it was intended to get boats up it.

The "navigable drains" of South Lincolnshire are now practically never navigated, but when this land was first drained inland navigation was of great importance: fertilizer and manure came in, grain and other crops went out. "In the fenland, numerous drains provided easy access not only to barges carrying bulk cargo, but even to farmers' wives who rowed to market in small boats called schoutts".⁷ And not far from New Bolingbroke the village of Hagnaby Lock—on a drain directly connecting with the Medlam Drain—still retains its ruined lock chamber. But what did Parkinson intend to bring up his cut and to export from New Bolingbroke? It is said locally that the new town was to be a weaving town and Pevsner tells us that a factory was built "to weave crepes and bombazines".⁸ It seems likely that these products were to be the start at least. Clearly Parkinson must have hoped that,

by the judicious use of water transport through Boston, and via the Witham and Fossdyke to all parts of the country, a new industrial town could be built up. Of course, in this geographical location it would be almost entirely dependent on its water transport for its economic viability.

What happened to this brave new town? At first it seems to have met with some success—although not, according to one source,¹ until Sir J. Banks Stanhope of Revesby Abbey took it over and “spent much money on needed improvements”; another source² implies that the take over was again by William Ostler. Certainly Bolingbroke Fair was established in the new town and a Tuesday Market was started in 1821. By 1831 Parkinson himself was financially ruined and was reduced to applying for the post of Turnkey at Lincoln Jail,⁹ but which of his schemes led to his downfall is not known. The town survived. In 1837 a chapel of ease was built, to be replaced with a church in 1854; a school was built in the same year.²

The population figures¹⁰ are difficult to interpret as they include the population of the old parish on the Wolds. But the population of 361 in 1811 increases suddenly to 753 in 1821. This increase of nearly 400 can be compared with the new agricultural settlements of Eastville, Midville and Frithville where the populations are unrecorded in 1811 (presumably because, during drainage operations, they were practically unoccupied) and in 1821 are given as 118, 139 and 272 respectively. This would suggest that much of the increase in Bolingbroke is attributable not merely to a new agricultural settlement but to something much larger. But it is impossible to say what number may be attributable solely to the plans for industrialization. For the rest of the century the population figures for Bolingbroke increase and then decrease at much the same rate as those for the surrounding parishes, from which it may be postulated that the expansion of the town fell far short of anything Parkinson might have hoped for when he dreamed of a new city. The highest figure ever attained was 1,018 in 1861. By 1856 the Tuesday Market was said to be obsolete and the list of inhabitants indicates nothing of an industrial character.² Indeed, it may be supposed that New Bolingbroke's only hope of success as a weaving town would be that its good water transport would give it something of an edge over the traditional northern centres that were that much further away both from national and international markets. The coming of the railways would have countered this slight advantage before the town was properly established and thereby would have sealed its industrial fate.

A fair amount of the original New Bolingbroke exists today, with relatively few modern additions. Both north and south of the town centre can be seen rows of two storey, brick built cottages, doubtless intended for the factory workers. The field boundaries indicate that several terraces of these cottages may have disappeared. The town centre itself has the head of navigation basin at its north end, the cut being slightly widened here, but not being wide enough to allow a boat of any size to turn. On the north side of this basin, but standing about ten yards from its bank, is the building which Pevsner⁸ says is the

factory. It is a long, low and wide, brick and tile building, which seems rather poorly lit to be a factory—it may have been intended primarily for warehousing. Built on to its west end, and facing the road, is a large red brick dwelling, presumably the manager's house. On the south side of the basin is another building with double bay windows and extensive buildings to the rear; it may have been either offices or a pub.

About 200 yards south of the canal head complex lies the town centre proper. On the west side of the road is the village green, with terraces of cottages to the north and west; on the south is the largest of the houses, and it may have been intended for Parkinson himself. Somewhat off centre on the green is another brick built building, with an undercroft of three arches and three large windows to an upper storey hall; it may well have been the original market hall and town hall. On the east side of the green, and on the other side of the road, lies the most imposing of New Bolingbroke's buildings—The Crescent. This is a building of eighteen bays length, built in a gentle curve. The central six bays are of three storeys and seem originally to have been shops; the two wings of six bays are of two storeys and are residential parts.

This remarkable collection of buildings stands amidst the flat fields of the fens almost like a ghost town. The visitor may feel, on leaving it, that he has visited Ozymandias. It is regrettable that no research has been done on this surprising scheme; almost the whole of its history awaits discovery. The references to this article show how little source material appears to exist in print; a short search in the Lincolnshire Record Office reveals no primary source material directly concerned with the town. Its history will have to be patiently dug out by inference from secondary sources and even, perhaps, work on the ground. But if the theory here advanced, that New Bolingbroke is a unique example of a canal town, proves correct, the effort will be worth while.

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and there are no towpaths under the bridges, the motive power for the barges is uncertain.

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THE LOCKS ON THE RIVER WYE

By H. W. Paar

The history of the lower Wye as a navigation is punctuated over centuries by the conflict of three interests, the millers and fishermen requiring the erection of numerous weirs, while the boatmen required a clear passage, either by removal of the weirs or the making of locks. Sir William Sandys made the first locks in the mid-17th century, and two technical questions arise: did Sandys make flashlocks or pound-locks? Was the lock at New Weir (near Symonds Yat) any different to the others? These questions arise because there appear to be no remains to speak for themselves, the contention that Sandys built pound-locks is based on a wrong deduction by Lloyd (see below),¹ and New Weir lock survived and was used for over a century after the others were defunct.

John Taylor, protagonist of river navigations, advocated in 1641 the construction of seven locks at the following weirs: Monmouth, Wilton, Inckson, Carey, Hancocks, Fownhope and Boddenham.² It may be noted that there were many other weirs on the Wye, but the presence of a weir did not necessarily preclude all passage, because boats could be navigated over a low weir when a fresh (a downcoming flood of water) or a high tide was available, taking often uneasy advantage of the essential difference in height between a weir and a dam. The eve of the Civil War was not a good time for lock-building on the Wye, and it was not until 1662 that Sir William Sandys secured an Act to improve the navigation of both the Wye and the Lugg by, *inter alia*, cutting new channels, and making locks, weirs and towing paths.³ Sandys did not accomplish very much of his grand design for the Wye, but he did build locks at some weirs, and their condition in 1696/7 is reported in a survey of the river, as follows.⁴

<i>Name or location of weir.</i>	<i>Condition.</i>
Lynn-Weir	Utterly decayed.
Monmouth	Ruinous.
New Weir	Lock 13 ft. 6 in. wide, in fairly good repair, but not well made.

Lord Chandos's ($\frac{1}{2}$ m. below Wilton Bridge) Utterly decayed.

Hancock's Weir Utterly decayed.

Boddenham's $\frac{1}{2}$ m. below Hereford Bridge. Referred to, in the past tense.

The lock at Lynn-Weir was stated to have been "built in Sandys's time". In two cases, Lynn and New Weir, the lock is reported as being on one end of the weir, and in the case of Hancock's, at the "upper end".

It will be shown that New Weir lock was not of Sandys's construction, but it is reasonable to assume that the others were, one being ascribed to him, and the condition of all suggesting a common origin. As to the nature of Sandys's locks, we can draw no analogy from his work on the Avon, for nothing certain is known of it,⁵ but it seems most likely that those on the Wye were flashlocks, for the following reasons.

Unlike a canal, a river has to accept variable volumes of water, so it cannot be artificially narrowed to the width necessary for manually-operated lock gates. Pound locks could be applied to a river by three methods:

- (1) Construction of a "cut" or deviation, of the proper width to contain the lock.
- (2) Placing the lock on one arm of the stream at a point where it was divided, naturally or artificially, by an island.
- (3) Construction of a membrane wall, parallel to one bank, at a weir, the lock being placed in the chamber so formed.

In the first two cases, a weir would be constructed in the main stream, to ensure a sufficient supply of water to the lock, and to retain the necessary depth of water in the river above it. So far as is known, there are no remains of artificial cuts to indicate the use of method 1, and few if any places where method 2 could have been practised, while pound locks provided by method 3 could be expected to have produced more substantial remains than indicated in the survey, which was made little more than 30 years after the locks were built, as only the most sturdy masonry work could withstand the waters which sweep down the river in wet seasons, and it seems that had such walls existed they would have been reported, for the surveyor said of Boddenham's weir that it was a stone weir 5ft. high laid by masons "and is the first weir from ye mouth of ye river that is soe built"; the side channel serving New Weir forge was also noticed, so it is reasonable that had such substantial works existed in connexion with the locks, they too would have been recorded in a survey specifically directed towards "portation, and fishing". As, in default of positive knowledge, we are so firmly on the road of inspired speculation, it may be further noted that the district appears to have been a poor one, in spite of the

existence of some large estates, and as we know that Sandys left so much uncompleted (nothing done on the Lugg, and apparently no towing path on the Wye, for example), shortage of funds may be inferred, which would encourage the use of simply-constructed flash-locks in the weirs, rather than clearly more expensive pound-locks.

Lloyd's statement of c. 1870 on Sandys's locks is as follows:⁶ "From the frequent use of the term 'water-penn' in this Act, and what we know of the mode adopted by Sandys in making the Avon navigable, it would seem that he attempted to make the Wye navigable by weirs and locks on the pound lock system. Utilizing the numerous weirs then existing on the Wye, and building other low dams at points where the stream might be rapid, the promoters intended thus to reduce the reaches of the river between the weirs to nearly a dead level, and then by building locks in cuts, artificially made at the side of these weirs, to enable boats to pass easily. . . . This plan suited the sluggish Avon, but not the rapid Wye. Even if not inherently bad and unsuited to the river, the plan both in carrying out and subsequent maintenance entailed such heavy expense on the promoters that after a few years trial they were obliged to abandon their undertaking". The last statement is most probably true, but the lack of evidence for side-cuts, and of the Avon locks, already noted, coupled with the fact that in the Act (as quoted by Lloyd) "locks" are mentioned quite separately from "penns for water-cranes", thus indicating clearly that "penns" is not synonymous with pound-locks, all suggest that Lloyd deduced too much from too little evidence. To give a balanced view, however, it is worth remembering that the Act did authorize "cuts", and pound-locks were used on river navigations, for example the Great Ouse;⁷ but the nature of the Wye makes it difficult to visualize pound-locks on the fairly flimsy weirs in the main stream, unless they were built with sturdy stone chambers—for which there is no evidence.

New Weir Lock.

At New Weir the river, having been diverted from its generally southward course by Coldwell Rocks into a northward course for about one and a half miles, has resumed its natural bearing and makes a spirited dash through a narrow gorge between the Great Doward and Huntsham Hill. An editorial note to Lloyd's work states that the weir was destroyed by riot c. 1588, and that a great frost of 1683/4 also damaged it. From 1684 onwards, however, whatever its former purpose, it became vital to maintain it in good order, for in that year (according to the same footnote) an iron forge was established on the Herefordshire bank,⁸ of which extensive remains survive, including the leat and tail-race serving the water-wheels, the supply to which could only be assured by pounding up the main stream. The Earl of Kent owned the forge, and although he leased it to others for operation it was in his interest to safeguard its power supply. In 1688/9 a new attempt to make the Wye properly navigable was being planned, on the basis of clearing away all the weirs from Hay down to the Severn, and scouring the channel where it was shallow. By 1695, to preserve his vital weir, the Earl "at the request of Sir Edward Harley, and other

gentlemen of the County of Hereford, has lately built a substantial and commodious lock at one end of the weare, which cost near £200 and is sufficient to pass all boats . . . and proposes to keep the same lock in good repair at his own charge so as it shall be sufficient to pass all boats and is content the same shall pass without toll".⁹

The Earl offered to alter his lock, or build a new one according to the requirements of those appointed to effect the navigation, also to build a lock-keeper's house and pay the appointed man's wages.¹⁰ This offer suggests that the lock may have been somewhat on the second-rate side, and the description in the survey of 1696/7 bears this out: "upon the east end of the weir . . . is a locke of 13½ feet wide, in tolerable good repair, but is not well made, being narrow and raised in the sills 3 feet from the bottom of the river, which makes the passage for vessels more difficult and hazardous". Too much emphasis cannot be placed on the significance of odd words, or the absence of them; here, a case could be made for suggesting that the original New Weir Lock was a flash-lock, since it was put in as a salve to navigation when the other locks were already well on the way to the past tense, and since the Survey makes no mention of its length (a vital factor in its capacity to pass vessels) but only its width; against this, however, it may be noted that "sills" appears in the plural, which argues a pound-lock.

The Act of 1696 for making the Wye and Lugg navigable noted that Sandys had done no work on the Lugg, and what he did on the Wye was "performed soe slightly that most of the locks and passages by them made did in a very few years fall utterly to decay and ruine". The undertakers were authorized to pull down all the weirs on the rivers, after compensating the owners, with one exception—the Earl of Kent's New Weir. The Act required him to make and maintain a "good, convenient and sufficient lock", build and keep in repair a house for rent-free occupation by a lock-keeper appointed by the Trustees of the river, and pay him £10 p.a. If the lock were to be demolished by the Earl, these obligations were to cease; if the Earl did not observe them, they could be carried out by the Trustees and charged to him.¹¹ In due course all the weirs concerned were demolished, but the weir and lock at New Weir, like the bay-tree, continued to flourish.

The Earl of Kent had steered a skilful course between the interests of the navigation, the fisheries, and others, had kept his weir and forge intact, and even retained his rights to take fish in the Wye, provided he did not exercise them at the weir, lock or forge. However, the owner of the land on the east bank at New Weir, Benedict Hall, claimed that the east end of the weir and the lock were built on his manor of English Bicknor; he contested the Earl's right of exclusive fishing, as exercised by a tenant, George White. The dispute raged furiously between Hall and White, but the former's suit was eventually quashed.¹²

Isaac Taylor surveyed the Wye from Hereford to "Bixwear" in 1763,¹³ and mentioned in the accompanying text the danger of heavily

laden barges passing New Weir lock, "when there is only a fresh in the river", the water from the lock meeting that from the salmon weir and forming an eddy below the lock, whereby "many have been sunk; it is always with difficulty they are drawn out". The salmon weir adjoining the lock was a requirement of the Act of 1696, which stipulated that it should be made by taking down ten yards in length of the weir a full 12 inches lower than the lowest part, and providing a sloping approach to that level from the bed of the river.

George Griffin (a Vice-Admiral of the White) purchased the weir, forge and other properties from the Duke of Kent, and in 1797 William Partridge, an ironmaster, leased the weir, forge and lock from Griffin for 14 years; there was a cottage with garden "built and enclosed on the Wear Hill for the use of the lock-keeper and for no other use whatsoever", and the lessee was to pay £10 p.a. to the lock-keeper as a salary, in four equal quarterly payments, in addition to the yearly rent of £290, as well as complying with the other provisions of the Act of 1696 affecting navigation.¹⁴

The year 1797 provides the first definite evidence of the lock's design, for the Duke of Rutland describes it thus: "We first had to go through a lock at one end of the fall, close to the left bank. We were kept some time in the middle of it, as the water run in at one end as fast as it went out at the other; we could not open the last gate for some while. They were indeed in very bad repair, and we were some time wrapped up between the walls, while the women and children, who all flocked from the hamlet to assist, formed interesting groups. At last we escaped, and immediately shot the fall. . . ."¹⁵ A view of the New Weir published in 1797 shows the lock, apparently stone-built (as suggested by the "walls" of the foregoing account) and perched on the edge of the weir,¹⁶ while a plan of 1805 shows the lock by the conventional sign for a pound-lock (two arrow-heads) on the east bank.¹⁷ A drawing by a poet, made in 1807, shows the lock, depicting a wall in the stream, parallel with the bank,¹⁸ a man operating a gate, and a rough shelter on the bank, while a watercolour shows a pair of mitre gates at the upstream end (the lower gates are not visible) and confirms the left bank location.¹⁹

Charles Heath gives a picture of lock operation at New Weir in this period: "The barges, in passing through the lock, afford some amusement to the minds of those who are not in the habit of witnessing such scenes. On opening the gates, after the vessel is lowered to the level of the river, the current sets into the lock, in opposition to the stream. In order therefore to bring her into the tide, some force is necessary. No sooner is the signal made for assistance, than young and old, boys and girls, fly to the rope, and, with a zeal the most hearty, soon deliver the vessel from her otherwise stationary situation, to the active current of the river. The boatmen reward their exertions by giving a few of them a halfpenny a-piece. Their services, it should be said, are wanted by each barge for a few minutes only; but having in Spring week 'many customers' they find their time as well paid for, as such transitory labour might reasonably expect".²⁰ Another con-

temporary source paints a rather less complimentary picture—"The beggars of New Weir, men, women and children, bare foot and scarcely a rag to cover them . . . they generally add . . . an oath, to their demands".²¹ The appearance of men with the women and children, and the obvious poverty prevailing, could have been due to the closing of the forge, which took place in this period.

The disappearance of the weir and its lock does not appear to be precisely documented. Early in 1820 a local newspaper referred to "the blowing up of a weir on the Wye which formed a barrier to the progress of salmon up that river . . . it is at New Weir which has sustained the injury but not to the extent which has been stated. . . . The extensive iron works . . . have been abandoned for some time and are now fallen into almost total decay. Hence this weir (as it is not any disadvantage to the lock at this place, the only one noted on the river) may still continue in its present dilapidated state. . . ." ²² The lock was still clearly in use, and there is plenty of evidence that various barges and other vessels were using the river. 1825 heard talk of removing the weir "When . . . the projected steam navigation of the Wye will be materially facilitated",²³ but in the following year demolition was either delayed or abandoned owing to a government engineer's opinion that if it were removed, the stream higher up, at Old Forge, would be only a few inches deep,²⁴ and soon afterwards it was reported that part of the weir had been removed, and a space 30ft. wide had been cleared next the lock, to the river bed—"salmon can now pass freely".²⁵ This would certainly have rendered the lock itself null and void, since there would be no pound of water behind it except when the river was swollen. Under these conditions it seems likely that the remains of the weir and the lock, like the old soldier, just faded away under the action of successive torrent conditions, indeed one fairly recent source says of the weir that it "fell down" c. 1830;²⁶ certainly nothing is shown on the 25 inch O.S. of 1878/87. The foregoing information is at variance with a statement by Lloyd that the weir was partly destroyed by severe frost in 1814, and that soon afterwards the remains of the weir, the lock and the forge buildings were "entirely pulled down"—in fact very tangible remains of the forge buildings survive today, up to gable height in one case. Lloyd adds (p. 48) that at his time of writing (that is c. 1870) there was still a barge or two to be seen at New Weir, occasionally employed in floating timber, but that nearly all navigation above Monmouth had ceased after the opening of the Gloucester-Hereford railway in 1855.

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THE PROPOSED INCLINED PLANE AT NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME

by Peter Lead

The purpose of this article is to examine the evidence as to whether or not the proposed inclined plane, to join the Newcastle-under-Lyme Canal and the Newcastle Junction Canal, was in fact ever constructed. Charles Hadfield in his account of the canals has stated that it was not built, but despite this assertion the inclined plane is still the subject of a great deal of local controversy.¹

As part of Newcastle's Octocentenary celebrations in 1973, a film-strip was produced, which strongly suggested that the inclined plane had been built, although conceding that "positive evidence for the building of this plateway still has to be found".² The writer adds a touch of originality to the debate, by suggesting an alternative route, which he justified by saying that the "long steady incline from Hawkestone Close to London Road corresponds very closely to the markings on Hargreaves 1832 map".³ This unmetalled road may well have been used by traffic to and from the terminal wharf of the Junction Canal, but it was most certainly not a tramroad in 1832, as Thomas Hargreaves clearly marked those on the other portions of his map.⁴ Likewise, the first edition of the Ordnance Survey (1836), marks every tramroad then operational in North Staffordshire, but marks no tramroad in the immediate neighbourhood of Newcastle.⁵

The first reference to the incline having been built was made in 1818, when it was stated in a directory that "a communication by Canal and Railway is also made between the first named Canal (the Newcastle Canal) and the late Sir Nigel Gresley's Canal under the authority of another Act passed in 1798".⁶ From the wording of this reference it is obvious that the writer based his account on the Act and not on personal observation. The same is true of Joseph Priestley, who wrote that the Newcastle Canal ended "at the town of Newcastle, in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Junction Canal"; and then proceeds to discuss the proposed inclined planes or railways.⁷ Yet it is on the strength of such accounts that many of the erroneous statements about this proposed incline have been based.

The Minute Books of the Newcastle-under-Lyme Junction Canal Company, for the period 1825-1863 have survived and from these it is possible to ascertain that the proposed incline had not been built by 1825.⁸ However, in 1831 interest in constructing the linking incline revived among the shareholders of the Junction Canal Company; but they were also sufficiently progressive to think in terms of laying down a railway along the line of Gresley's Canal and of the Junction Canal, with a connecting incline to the Newcastle Canal.⁹ The Newcastle Canal Company were also interested in the project, as they agreed to pay one-third of the cost of a survey to decide on the practicability of the scheme. George Stephenson was commissioned to undertake the

survey, and on 31 December 1831 he reported that "the abruptness of the curves occur upon it (Gresley's and the Junction Canals) render it but ill adapted for a Railway".¹⁰ Instead Stephenson suggested that an inclined plane should be constructed to carry boats from one canal to the other, but like the original suggestion nothing came of it.

Professor S. H. Beaver has said that both documentary and field evidence for the incline having been built was lacking;¹¹ but in fact the documentary evidence points to the opposite being true. The lack of field evidence must represent the strongest line of proof for the incline not having been built. The distance between the two canals was about 700 yards and there was a difference in height of 70 feet. In addition the incline would have had to have crossed the Tittensor-Talke turnpike road, which would have necessitated extensive earthworks. Embanking would have been necessary in the meadows at Brook Lane, for even the most rudimentary of tramroads, but a search of the area before it was levelled in 1971, proved to be completely fruitless.¹²

Therefore in view of the evidence it now seems beyond all doubt that the proposed inclined plane, to join together the Newcastle Canal and the Newcastle Junction Canal never got beyond the planning stage.

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CORRESPONDENCE

The last Midland trains to Kings Cross

Sir,—As some doubt appears to exist as to when Midland Railway trains ceased to run over the Great Northern Railway from Hitchin to Kings Cross I think it as well to put on record the facts as far as they can be ascertained.

The last passenger train left Kings Cross on the evening of 30 September 1868, the last arrival was the up night mail from Leeds on the night of 30 September–1 October 1868 which was due at Kings Cross at 4.15 and records of both the G.N. and the Midland say the mail duly arrived at Kings Cross on the morning of 1 October. St. Pancras passenger station was opened at 6 o'clock on that morning; the first departure was the 6.15 to Leeds and the first train to arrive was a local from Luton.

As regards goods services the evidence is not altogether clear. In 1862 the Midland built a separate goods depot known as Agar Town, St. Pancras, connected with the G.N.; also with the North London by way of the G.N. This depot was enlarged and apparently from 2 January 1865 all Midland goods were dealt with thereat arriving and departing by way of the G.N., also through St. Pancras Junction N.L.R. and the London & North Western Railway.

The first train to use the new line from Bedford was a special on Saturday 7 September 1867; there was a return trip on Sunday and a regular service began on Monday 9 September 1867. A direct curve, known as the North London incline, was brought into use in 1867. This enabled traffic to be exchanged with the L.N.W. and N.L. Railways. The physical connexion between the G.N. and St. Pancras goods station was probably removed in 1868 but some merchandise continued to be exchanged between the two Companies via the N.L.R. sidings.

At first the Midland goods trains ran mainly at night in order to allow the contractors to complete the work and to construct passenger stations and goods sidings between Bedford and London.

The agreement with the G.N. did not expire until 30 June 1870 and legally the Midland were liable for payment for use of the railway from Hitchin and for the use of Kings Cross station until that date. Eventually an amicable settlement was arranged.

H. V. BORLEY

The North London Railway at Poplar

Sir,—To reach the docks at Poplar the East & West India Docks and Birmingham Junction Railway (later renamed North London Railway) had to cross the Blackwall Railway, and that Company was asked to agree to a level crossing, but naturally the Blackwall Company declined. The N.L.R. therefore constructed a bridge.

The date when the line from Poplar Docks to Bow was opened is a little obscure. Sidings for coal had been constructed at Hackney, Kingsland and Islington in 1851 and these were taken over by the Northumberland & Durham Coal Company on 20 October 1851. The

Coal Company worked coal trains with their own engines and men from Poplar Docks to these depots from that date or very soon afterwards. A little later sidings were made at other places and where the railway was above the public streets "coal drops" were provided. The N.L.R. took over the working of the coal trains on 20 January 1858, purchased the Coal Company's engines and wagons and paid compensation to that Company.

From 1 January 1852 the London & North Western Railway worked a service of trains carrying general goods over the N.L.R. to and from Poplar Docks. In 1852 a curve connecting the N.L.R. with the Blackwall Railway, facing towards Blackwall, was brought into use.

About 1865 an additional line was constructed by the N.L.R.; this crossed the Blackwall Railway to the east of the direct line. About the same time Harrow Lane Sidings, to the west of the original line, were brought into use. A physical connexion with the Blackwall at Harrow Lane Junction, Millwall Docks, was brought into use in 1873.

Meanwhile a passenger service between Broad Street and Poplar Station, in the East India Dock Road began on 1 August 1866. The curve of 1852 was reconstructed for through running and the passenger service extended to Blackwall on 1 September 1870. Through bookings from N.L. stations to Woolwich and Gravesend were put into operation, available by steamer from Brunswick Pier, Blackwall. The Blackwall service was however curtailed at Poplar on and from 1 July 1890 and the junction with the Blackwall Railway severed in August 1890.

The original direct line to the Docks entailed a severe gradient each side of the bridge over the Blackwall line. This bridge was replaced in 1875 with a curve, suitably graded, and a new bridge over the Blackwall Railway. This bridge was widened from time to time. There were therefore still two separate bridges over the Blackwall line.

From about 1853 the N.L. had worked Great Northern goods traffic from Holloway via St. Pancras Sidings to Poplar, and some ten years later the G.N. worked their own traffic to and from Poplar. Commencing in December 1874 the trains were routed via Canonbury. For many years the service was from Ferme Park or East Goods, Finsbury Park to Poplar; in the reverse direction the trains usually ran to Clarence Yard.

Beginning in 1877 the North London worked Great Western goods traffic from Acton G.W. to a depot at Poplar rented from the North London.

The grouping of the railways made practically no difference. The Poplar passenger service was withdrawn w.e.f. 15 May 1944. The final closing of the Blackwall Railway east of Millwall Junction Station and removal of the tracks enabled access to Poplar Docks to be simplified. Work on a new direct line to the West Quay was begun in January 1968 and brought into use in May 1968, this resulted in the old high level line becoming redundant and removal was completed about a year later, July 1969. The eastern line, constructed about 1865, also remains in use.

H. V. BORLEY

BOOK REVIEWS

HIGHLAND RAILWAY ALBUM, by Anthony J. Lambert. 112pp., approx. 235 photographs. Ian Allan Ltd., £2.95.

Even people who lack knowledge of almost everything in life have heard of the Highlands of Scotland, and those who know the area nearly always return there. The railway system which served this area may not have been so well known as the companies in the south, but it was loved and admired by railway historians who knew it perhaps only from writings and illustrations. Anthony Lambert has collected together many old photographs of the line in all its aspects, and he obviously went to great trouble to collect a good variety. Locomotives constitute about a third of the selection, but this is a reasonable proportion in a book intended for the railway enthusiast market, for it is a hobby which revolves largely round locomotives. But there are many good photographs of stations, bridges, signals, staff; even accidents (an aspect in which the Highland was a bit lacking). There are interesting comparisons like the old and new stations at Kingussie. There are photographs of snow scenes, for who could be concerned with the Highland without thinking of snow? And there are illustrations of people closely connected with the line: the third Duke of Sutherland, Peter Drummond, David Jones and others. Some of the photographs have that rather flat look which seems to be a problem connected with present-day economy in printing; presumably for that reason the crest on the coloured dust jacket is in black and white, which is a pity. All the photographs are captioned well and some give interesting historical notes, despite the limited space which, together with the Introduction, shows that the author knows what he is talking about. Considering the financial difficulties of today, the price is cheap, and anyone who likes old railway photographs will like this book. It would make an excellent Christmas present.

JEFFREY SPENCE

GEORGE STEPHENSON. THE ENGINEER AND HIS LETTERS, by W. O. Skeat, 268pp. Pub. by The Institution of Mechanical Engineers. £4.50.

So much has been written about George Stephenson that we may well suppose there is little left to record. It is probable that nine out of ten believe him to have been the inventor of railways and the steam locomotive, indeed the Engineer himself seems to have believed that he alone held the key to the mysteries of railway engineering. Accounts of the earliest railways reveal his blunt character which so impressed those who met him: the mixture of candour and cordiality which carried him on until he reached the head of his profession and became an acceptable companion for some of the highest in the land. Smiles presented him, over a century ago, as a conventional portrait: the ideal Victorian conception of what a great man should be.

Later biographers were to show how he fought unceasingly against prejudice only to become one of the most prejudiced of men, treating engineers of the calibre of Brunel as heretics. Over the years we have learned that some of the credit he claimed for himself belongs to lesser-known contemporaries.

Our earlier assessments have become somewhat confused and the author of this attractive, careful and well-illustrated book helps to redress the balance by presenting Stephenson through his letters and reports. As the Foreword puts it, we find here "his tenacity of purpose, his transparent honesty and his ability to rise above the humiliation that he suffered at the hands of those who took advantage of his lack of education".

Shortly after Stephenson's death the story was told in *Herapath's Railway & Commercial Journal* of how Herapath met Hudson and Stephenson at Derby and expressed some of his objections to North Midland policy. "If I was to catch you out in a bye lane wouldn't I give you a good thrashing", said

Stephenson, shaking his fist at Herapath. "Pooh", was Herapath's reply, "I never fight with my fists. My weapon is a pen, with which I would fight to the last stump and drop of my ink". "I can easily beat you with the pen", was Stephenson's surprising answer. And, after all these years, it may be that Stephenson's pen will help us towards a clearer understanding of this great man. This fascinating book is not addressed to students only but is likely to appeal to many whose knowledge of Stephenson is, as yet, slight.

G. O. HOLT

THE GREAT OUSE, by Dorothy Summers. 247pp., 10 maps, 31 illus. Col. frontispiece. David & Charles, £4.50.

At £4.50 for fewer than 250 pages this book is expensive even by today's standards. Miss Summers skilfully traces the history of the river from the mists of antiquity to the present day, although a fuller account of the litigation would have been preferred. Much of the spade work for the Stuart period has already been done by her mentor, Dr. Willan and by Alan Faulkner and the reviewer in connexion with L. T. Simpson's ill-fated venture in the 1890s. It would have been worth noting that pleasure boats were exempted from toll because the law saw them simply as unladen boats. The numerous attempts, all unsuccessful, to link the river, or its tributaries, with other navigations are described. Of the tributaries themselves only the Cam received the attention it deserves; the rest get only passing references. The photograph of the steam tug "cutter" on p. 139 cannot be as late as 1924; another recent publication ascribes it more plausibly to the 1890s. The structure referred to throughout the book as St. Ives staunch was rebuilt as a sluice about 1835, and it carries a stone plaque to confirm this. Most of the other locks carry similar plaques recording their rebuilding in the 1840s—obviously a reaction to the threat of railway competition. But these are only minor omissions. Railway historians will find much of interest, not only in the effects of competition, but in the establishment of rail and river transfer points of which Ely Dock is the best known: the almost unknown transfer point through the L.N.W. goods yard at Bedford is not mentioned. Pedants should not lose too much sleep over the faulty opening dates. Two of them are a year adrift, which is not a significant amount in this context.

GEOFFREY WEBB

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It is regretted that the number of pages in the *Journal* has had to be reduced, but this is due to the rising costs in paper and printing, and is beyond the control of the Editor or the Society. Only additional funds will help—temporarily. The cost of paper alone rises before there has been time to implement the previous increase.

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- *These items are in the Society's library.

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CHARLES HADFIELD is collaborating with Professor A. W. Skempton in writing a biography of the engineer William Jessop—a project that was to have been undertaken by the late L. T. C. Rolt, but which had not been begun at the time of his death. Charles Hadfield would be grateful for help from members who know the whereabouts of e.g. reports, original letters etc., or who can give information about Jessop's work outside the canal field, e.g. in drainage and harbour engineering. Information about Jessop's sons William (coalmaster and engineer) and Josias (engineer), and about his father Josias of Devonport Dockyard, who worked with Smeaton on Eddystone Lighthouse, is also needed. Information of any kind would be welcomed by **Charles Hadfield, The White Cottage, 21 Randolph Road, London, W9 1AN (Tel: 01-286 4347).**

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