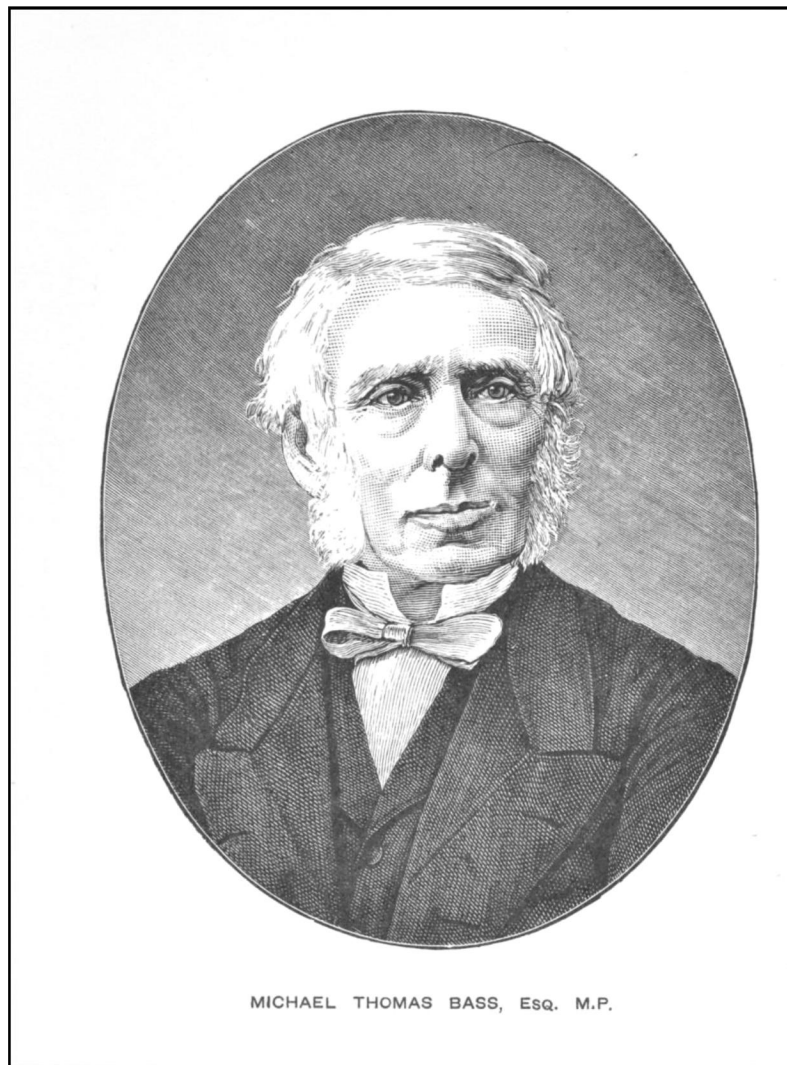


Railway & Canal Historical Society

Alrewas & Burton Tour March 25th, 1984



1880 Engraving of Thomas Bass

RAILWAY AND CANAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY - WEST MIDLANDS GROUP
ALREWAS AND BURTON TOUR, Sunday, 25th March 1984

Twenty years ago, on Sunday, 8th September, 1963, the East Midlands Group of the Society toured the Burton upon Trent area. Much of the research which was carried out at that time, particularly concerning the many road and railway intersections, is no longer relevant to visibly surviving remains of a once extremely complex network using some thirty or so level crossings. Other histories have appeared, and the Bass Museum has managed to assemble a collection of illustrative material which, to a remarkable degree, recreates the railway network in facsimile format. The opportunity has therefore been taken to reset the tour notes in a form more suitable to the revised itinerary, taking into account such new information as has subsequently come to light and concentrating particularly upon the waterway aspects of the tour.

Last year's tour of the Lichfield area, on Sunday, 24th April 1983, terminated in adverse weather conditions on the banks of the Trent and Mersey Canal below St Leonard's Church, Wychnor, where Cow Bridge was receiving extensive repairs. In order to allow members to see the results of these repairs, and to maintain some continuity, this tour will commence with the walk between Alrewas and Wychnor Locks which, but for the weather, might have been accomplished last year. As the notes for that tour indicated faced with the intractably wide and level plain of river meadows, Brindley found it impossible to take the canal over the Trent except by crossing it on the level between Alrewas and Wychnor. He was of course going to cross the headwaters of the Infant river at Stoke and once again, while still constrained within a recognisable valley, at Rugeley, and took the canal over the lower reaches of the Dove north of Burton, each time using his heavy multi-arched clay-puddled aqueducts, virtually a series of enlarged culverts. The stone-faced one by which he took the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal over the Trent at Great Haywood, though shorter than those at Rugeley and Stretton, is perhaps more ornamental. Here, however, the canal locks down to join the tailrace channel of Alrewas Mill and then the main river channel for some 300 yds before this diverges once more over the Great Weir. Much of the flow continues along what was formerly the head leat to Wychnor Mill.

The idea of connecting their town with Hull had been considered by Liverpool merchants as early as 1755, three years before Brindley was commissioned to survey a route for such a canal. Revised by John Smeaton, his plan for the section between Burslem and Wilden Ferry was published in 1760, indicating possible branches to Lichfield and Fazeley. By that time, however, a prospectus had already (on 1st December 1759) been issued for the stretch from Lichfield to Donnington, based upon Brindley's estimate of the probable cost, it being expected that this would serve Birmingham and the whole of the Black Country in place of the scheme to make the Trent and Tame navigable to Willeford. The Trent and Mersey scheme, with its associated connections to reach Thames and Severn, promised much greater facilities, overshadowing and finally eclipsing the Lichfield one. Since it had become quite clear that any canal serving both the Potteries and the Black Country would require to be carried across the Trent between Alrewas and Wychnor, John Barker, Erasmus Darwin and Robert Bage, all of Lichfield, joined industrialist Samuel Garbutt in a scheme to build a rolling and slitting mill hereabouts.

Negotiations with the then owner of the manor began in 1763 for the making of a cutting 14ft wide and 990yds long from Wychnor corn mill across the turnpike to a pool supplying power through a fall of seven feet back into the river. Permission to make an arched stone bridge beneath the road was obtained with no great trouble (two of the partners being trustees) in May 1764. Persuading the miller to remove to the disused establishment at Alrewas, Barker proposed that Wychnor Mill, control of which was vital to the partnership's operations, into a forge to serve the slitting mill, there being insufficient power to site their ironworks itself at this point. By 1765, when John Levett bought the manor, the cutting, pool and works had all been made at the expense of the partners, who then negotiated a 59 years lease.

Begun in 1766, the Trent and Mersey Canal approached this area from the north alongside the turnpike, joining the ironworks cutting by means of Wychnor lock, which ensured that, save for the small amount needed for lockage of boats, all water passed back to the river between Wychnor Bridges and the corn mill the cutting was sold to the canal company on terms 'very advantageous' to the ironworks partnership. Forty years later, when the banks of the cutting were raised some three feet, a sluice was installed at the junction between the canal company's portion of the cutting and the remaining section which passed beneath the turnpike. After Barker's death and Darwin's removal from Lichfield the Ironworks were sold, being held by John and Charles Mold in 1818. Seven years later, when a new lease was taken up by Stephen and Edward Hawksworth, Thomas Woolley, William Ward and Benjamin Tyler, the works were described as a mill for rolling sheet iron, a mill for rolling bars and a forge for drawing bar iron. They remained in operation for some eighty years, being shown on the one-inch Ordnance map of 1834 (which designates the substantial farmstead at Wychnor Bridges as 'The Flitch of Bacon Inn') but not the six-inch one of 1884, when the pool had silted up considerably. Substantial sluiceways and wheel-pits, by which the remaining water not passing away farther along the canal is still returned to the river, indicate a sizeable establishment, A range of cottages survived into the 1960s. Permission to inspect this site has generously been granted by Mr. P.J.E. Mallaber.

Five hundred yards to the south-east, at Wychnor Junction, lies the confluence of the one-time South Staffordshire Railway with the metals of the Birmingham and Derby Junction section of the Midland Railway, the latter having been opened as early as 12th August 1839. The line from Walsall to Wychnor was authorised in 1846 as the 'Trent Valley, Midland and Grand Junction Railway', while an extension from Walsall to Dudley was to be made by the South Staffordshire Junction company, with permission to seek amalgamation. Duly reincorporated, under the new title of 'The South Staffordshire Railway', opening of the line between Walsall and Wychnor took place on 9th April 1849. Intersections with and deviations of the Wyrley and Essington Canal were inspected on last year's tour (for further details of which see postscript notes). Closely associated as it was with the London and North Western company, this smaller concern found little favour with the Midland Railway, having to maintain a separate establishment at Wychnor Junction where traffic was handed over for operation by the latter concern.

George Potter Neele, later to become Superintendent of the Line in the service of the London and North Western Railway, was born on 12th December 1825 in Kentish Town, removing with his parents to Walsall in 1838. Abandoning the opportunity of being articled to a solicitor, in the autumn of 1847 he entered the service of the Eastern Counties Railway. After two years with that concern he moved back to Walsall as Chief Clerk of the South Staffordshire Railway, being offered the post of Passenger Superintendent of the Central District when this company was taken over by the LMWR in 1861. He retired, at the age of seventy, In 1895, was elected to Watford Urban District Council and became Chairman in 1900. Four years later he published his 'Railway Reminiscences' and spent the remainder of his long life annotating his own copy. He died on 4th January 1921, the book being republished (by EP Publishing Ltd) in 1974. It contains some interesting comments upon the working of the South Staffordshire line.

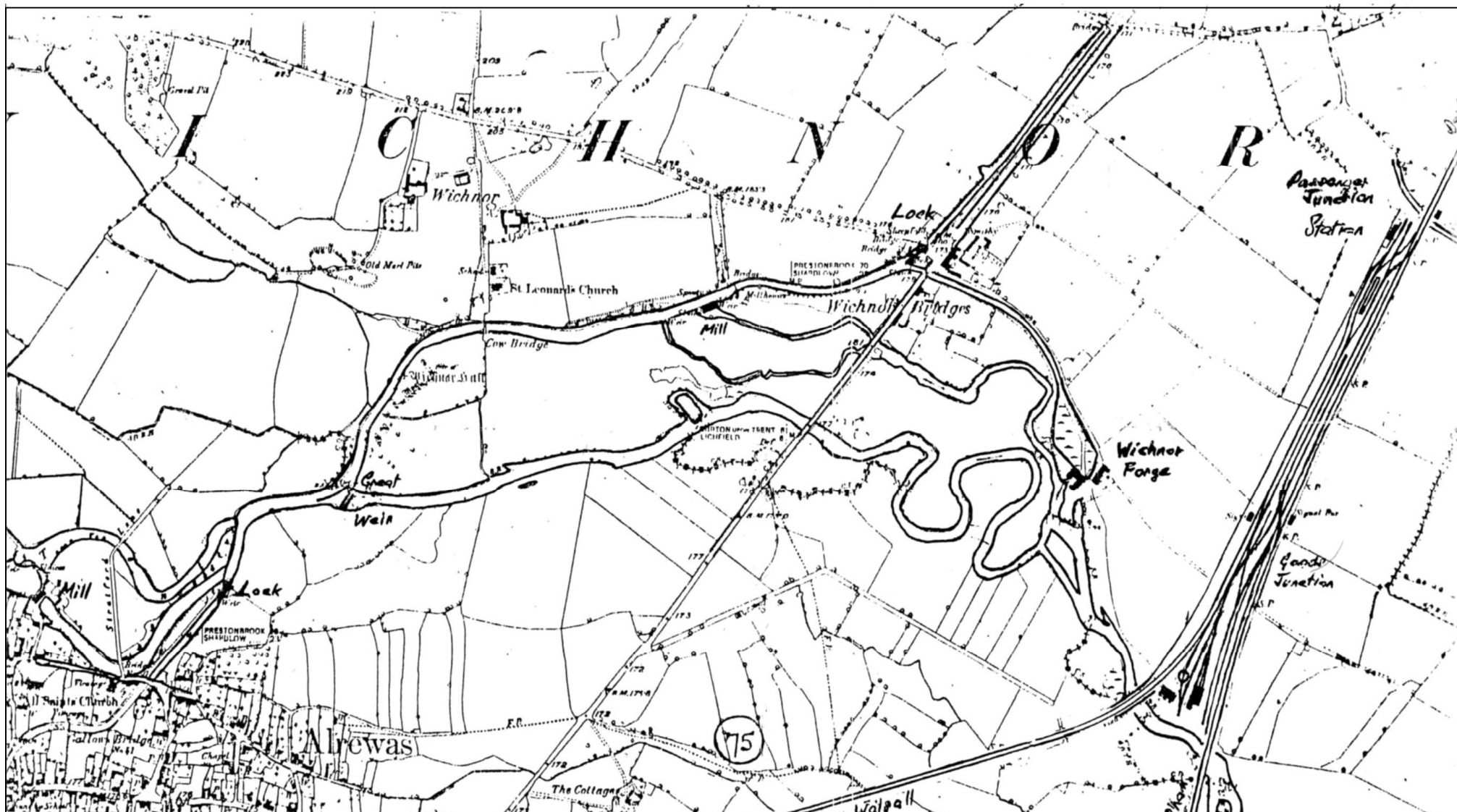
A service of four trains each way was adopted as a commencement, so timed that there was no need of any terminal service to be done by the Midland Company at Burton; the trains started from Walsall in the morning and came back there at night. On 21st January 1850, without precedent, the railway was leased for 21 years to John Robinson McClean, previously the company's Engineer. While very relations had sprung up in traffic matters between the LNWR and the Lessees, the Midland company did not work so cordially, especially with the advent of James Allport as General Manager, the effect being to curb any extension of running powers. In the first place the goods traffic was required not to be taken by South Staffordshire engines into Burton; sidings had to be constructed at Wichnor for the exchange of traffic. When notice was received that the 'hauling of passenger trains beyond Wichnor must also cease, a small local booking office and platform had to be constructed, as well as an engine shed and locomotive depot and, in April 1855, 'Wichnor Junction' appeared in the time-tables, and through carriages to and from Burton were attached to and detached from the Midland company's trains at the junction, the South Staffordshire service being entirely subservient to the times adopted by the Midland. As a compensation Neele had hoped that carriages would have been taken through to Derby, instead of requiring passengers to change at Burton, but Allport proved inexorable on this point. The effect on the traffic and on the train running was extremely serious; trains had to wait the arrival of the Midland in both directions, as well as the extra work of separating and shunting the vehicles.

Upon absorption of the South Staffordshire concern by the LNWR the Engineer's lease was determined, and in the autumn of 1861 the new owners determined to avail themselves of the old running powers and to run their own goods trains into Burton over the Midland rails. Early on 1st November Neele came down from Birmingham in charge of the first train and, arriving at Wichnor Junction, was surprised to see a large number of platelayers about, two or three engines in steam, and a saloon carriage in the siding. One of the engines with steam up had attached to its tender the V crossing of the junction over which he had to pass. Although he drew forward as far as safety allowed, claiming to be allowed to proceed, permission was refused, it having been rumoured that the LNWR were bringing 300 men and three engines with the intention of forcing their way into Burton. This the Midland company had determined to resist. Having received instructions by telegraph, Neele tried again at the appointed time in the afternoon, by which time the opposing forces had retired, and he was able to make a triumphal entry into Burton on behalf of his new employers.

South of the junction at Wichnor both lines crossed the Trent (and the Midland line also the Tame near to the confluence of the two rivers) on timber viaducts, afterwards reconstructed in blue bricks. At Burton, the station was a small one with a level crossing of the highroad at the end of the platform used both by foot passengers and vehicles, while on the line approaching the station 'a swingbridge had existed over the canal which had had its tale of disaster^s. This bridge, immediately west of Moor Street, spanned a privately built canal with an eventful history. Although not mentioned in either of Wishaw's or Clinker's accounts, Neele^s reference to the bridge is confirmed by a Board of Trade report upon an accident in October 1846 when, 'through some Inattention to the closing of the drawbridge', the engine and tender of a passenger train fell into the canal. The Midland Railway Company promised to replace the offending structure with a fixed bridge and, in order to do so, had to bank up its lines on either side to give sufficient clearance, this 'humping' still remaining clearly visible. Although the canal was afterwards converted into a branch railway, clearance being increased by cutting into the old canal bed, similar attention to the Moor Street under-bridge only managed to achieve a clearance of 8ft 9ins, and the adjoining level crossing was maintained as an alternative access until the 1960s.

During the century prior to the introduction of canal transport to any marked degree, the growing volume of England's internal trade depended to an increasing extent upon the use of navigable rivers. Below Nottingham the Trent had been used as a waterway for centuries, and by 1650 Gainsborough had become a great river port serving as the limit of navigation for sea-going ships. The Gainsborough-Nottingham section was impeded by numerous shallows but could be navigated by flat-bottomed single-masted ketches with a capacity of 40 tons and a draught of up to 3ft, providing the water level was not abnormally low. Successful use of the river below Nottingham and the inability of road transport to cater adequately for the growing needs of the Midland counties led during the seventeenth century to a series of attempts to extend the navigation upstream and along the main tributaries. The Corporation of Nottingham resisted all such efforts, threatening to stop all interlopers by placing chains across the arches of Nottingham Bridge in 1699. Merchants, manufacturers and the gentry in Derby, Burton and the surrounding towns and villages were equally determined to overcome such opposition.

By the second half of the seventeenth century Wilden Ferry, near Shardlow, had to some extent displaced Nottingham as the head of the navigation. The Cokes of Melbourne had purchased the lease of the Manor of Castle Donington, including the fishery, weir, mills and 'the passage called Willing Ferry', in 1633. Forty years later John Coke appointed Leonard Fosbrooke gamekeeper at Castle Donington, his family having been responsible for the river traffic in coal carried from the Willoughby mines at Wollaton around 1600. On the grounds that they owned the fishing rights and ferry, Coke and Fosbrooke endeavoured to monopolise all traffic between Wilden and Nottingham, being thwarted by a group of Derby merchants dispatching cheese from Shardlow and Sawley, a little farther downstream. Against this background Sir William Paget was authorised to make the Trent navigable between Wilden Ferry and the Fleetstones at Burton under an Act of 1699. Finding the task more difficult and expensive than he had anticipated, Lord Paget eventually agreed in 1711 to allow George Hayne of Wirksworth to take over, he having already agreed to divide the benefits with Fosbrooke. Faced with attempts by other merchants to land goods on the banks, Fosbrooke first blocked the river with his ferry rope and then made a bridge of boats and hired men to defend it, while in 1749 Rayne sank a barge in Kings Mill lock that forced transshipment round it for eight years. Their lease ran out in 1762 and Lord Paget's heir, created Earl of Uxbridge in 1714, renewed it to a new concern, the Burton Boat Company.



Based upon the first edition Six inch Ordnance Survey
map of 1884 (surveyed in 1881-2) Staffordshire sheet XLVII

Railway details from Parliamentary plan for 1859 Session
- line from Wychnor to Burton (Staffs R.O. G/ROm/2086)

Just what improvements had been made it is difficult to discover. By 1745 there was certainly a pound lock with mitre gates alongside the weir at Kings Mill, Castle Donington, the remains of which may still be seen along with those of a similar structure alongside the weir at Newton Mills near Burton. At some date before 1787 the Boat Company and its lessor had built a canal branch upwards from the river at the Fleetstones to a basin at Shobnall. In August of that year they asked the Trent and Mersey Canal Company to extend its wide boat waterway onwards from Horninglow to Shobnall, there to make a barge connection into the basin, whence the Boat Company would widen its waterway to the river. Hopefully, charges along the canal would be similar to those along the river, and the canal company would provide the necessary water. Faced with refusal of this desperate attempt to gain other sources of traffic the Boat Company engaged a set of men 'protected by an armed Multitude' to cut through the towing path and bank of the canal at Shobnall. At the General Assembly in September 1790 the Management Committee of the canal reported that it had taken steps to bring to Justice the proprietors of this outrageous attempt to obtain by violence and force what could not be accomplished by legal proceedings. 'On a little consideration' the Boat Company reinstated the bank and determined instead to support a scheme to connect the head of the river navigation with the Coventry Canal at Fradley, plans for which purpose were deposited with the Clerk of the Peace for Staffordshire in November 1792, September 1793 and again in September 1794, each of them showing the extent of the Boat Company's canal with its one lock above Lichfield Street. Alarmed by these attempts to by-pass so much of their canal, after a meeting in the offices of the Grand Junction Canal in December 1793 the Trent and Mersey company decided that it would itself make the link at Shobnall, depositing a plan for this purpose on 13th September 1794. It appeared to indicate that a narrow stop lock with a single gate at the north end and south facing mitre gates at the basin end would be made in the $40\frac{1}{2}$ yds channel through the 42ft 3ins width of the towing path and canal bank and across the Earl of Uxbridge's land into the existing basin of the Burton cut, whence there was a fall of 3ft 9ins through the lock above Lichfield Street down to the normal level of the river. The petition for the bill claimed that this link facilitate traffic from the Trent and Mersey Canal into Burton and 'open an easy Commercial Intercourse between the two canals'. Despite a certain amount of tactical opposition, an Act sanctioning the link was obtained on 2nd June 1795. When Joseph Wilkes, a leading figure in the Boat Company, died in 1805, closely following other changes in ownership, the undertaking closed down and little, if any, through trade continued to use the river. The Bond End canal continued in use for traffic passing to and from the Trent and Mersey Canal at Shobnall for another fifty to sixty years.

The Trent and Mersey (or as it was sometimes called the Grand Trunk) Canal had been authorised in 1766, being engineered by James Brindley until his death on 27th September 1772. Planned to take only narrow boats of 70ft length and 7ft beam, at each end of the line the canal was built to accommodate river barges with broad locks at Middlewich and from Horninglow down to Derwent Mouth between Shardlow and Sawley. Horninglow wharf thus became the limit of barge traffic coming upstream along the Trent when this section of the canal was opened between Derwent Mouth and Shugborough on 24th June 1770. Not until May 1777, however, could narrow boats pass beyond Mtdtlewich and into the Bridgewater Canal to reach Runcorn and Manchester. At Horninglow a small warehouse was erected and a second gate was made to collect road tolls on traffic passing into Burton; this gate

was closed under the 1853 Improvement Act, while the original gate at Horninglow remained in use until the Ashby-Burton-Tutbury Turnpike Trust expired in 1873. The warehouse was removed during construction of the Burton Bypass road about 1965, together with part of the canal basin. There is a model of the wharf in the Brewery Museum.

By 1847, when the main lines south of Burton railway station had been banked up to pass over the Bond End or Burton Canal just west of Moor Street level crossing, the Midland Railway company was operating a siding which curved away from the north side of the main lines across the road to reach a warehouse standing over a branch of the canal. Turnplate connections gave access to sidings along the roadside and within the warehouse. Use of this connection must have ceased by 1860, when the railway company obtained powers to take Moor Street underneath the main lines through a passage measuring 21ft wide by 10ft 6ins high, much more generous than the present arrangement. It was to be efficiently lit at night and provided with legible warning notices giving the safe headway clearance. As may be seen, the level crossing was retained for use by out of gauge loads until quite recently. To provide efficient access to the new maltings soon to be erected by Messrs Bass & Co, the railway company next obtained powers, in 1872, to acquire, by agreement with the Marquis of Anglesea and any other owners, the site of the 'disused Burton or Bond End Canal' and adjoining property up to 20 acres, making arrangements to use it either alone or jointly with the LNWR. Part of the canal was quickly filled in and from 28th April 1873 used to accommodate a connection into the new maltings laid upon the site of the old siding to the canal wharf, which once again passed across the road on the level. In 1874 both railway companies applied for construction powers based upon complete or partial usage of the site of the old canal.

To the LNWR were granted powers to make a line from the North Staffordshire Railway at Stretton along the south side of the Trent and Mersey Canal to Shobnall, where the line was to turn southwards along parts of the Bond End Canal and pass into the river meadows to connect with the Midland company's Riverside Branch in The Hay. The Midland company would be given preference to rehabilitate the canal route, however, though the remainder of its Bill failed to pass. In contrast with the LNWR proposals, which involved raising the main lines southwards of the existing crossing, the Midland company proposed to burrow into the canal bed and make its lines follow the whole length of the canal^{al}, which was still intact at Shobnall and below Bond End Lock, where the ground would be raised some 9ft. Level crossings would be substituted for the several bridges over the canal. The branch to Shobnall Wharf was opened on 2nd November 1874, followed by the remainder of the route to Bond End before 1879 and the LNWR route to Stretton by 1884. In place of the old connection across the road, a new curve was made leading southwards into the main lines opposite Leicester Junction. The Bond End branch was closed on 2nd March 1964, but its site remains largely untouched. At Shobnall, where the stop lock appears to have belonged to the Trent and Mersey company, a transhipment wharf was maintained around a small canal basin, latterly developed as a marina.

Relatively close to the centre of Burton, Stapenhill residents were placed at the considerable disadvantage of a tedious journey over the Great Bridge and a ferry had long been operated to Shipley Meadow, whence pedestrians followed a footpath to Fleet Green, crossing the Fleet Stones to reach Bond End until eventually a timber bridge took the place of the stones.



In 1864 a census showed that as many as 10,592 people had used the boat during one fortnight in October; by 1879 the figure had risen to 17,754. In 1865 the Marquis of Anglesey was authorised to build a bridge alongside the ferry, these powers passing to the trustees of his Estate in 1867. Extensions of time were granted in 1870 and again in 1875. Commissioners had originally been appointed to pave, repair, cleanse and light the town and borough of Burton as early as 1779, their powers being extended to cover portions of Burton Extra and Horninglow in 1853. The entire parishes of Horninglow, Stapenhill and Winshill, with the rest of Burton Extra, were brought in upon incorporation of the Municipal Borough in 1878. A flood embankment was built and in 1880 the Corporation acquired powers to take over construction of the bridge at Stapenhill. Ferry toll rights were purchased from the Marquis's Estate for £12,900, to be recovered from subsequent tolls, and Lord Burton offered to build the bridge, laying out some £10,000 upon it and the viaduct across the meadows. A suspension structure of three spans, the centre one of 115ft between the pillars and the side ones each 57t, it was built by Messrs Thornehill and Wareham and was opened by Lady Burton on 3rd April 1889. The toll was maintained at $\frac{1}{2}$ d per head until the Corporation had recouped its outlay upon the ferry rights, being declared free of toll from 13th April 1898. A new road bridge is currently planned to run from the old Bond End wharf.

Burton Bridge itself had, under letters patent granted In 1597 to William Paget, been repairable by his descendants until 1824, when a contribution by the Ashby-Burton-Tutbury Turnpike was authorised. Only 15ft wide, with pedestrian refuges above the cutwaters, the bridge was 515yds long over 37 arches, and carried a chapel from 1322 until 1777. In 1831 it was widened to 26ft from the Winshill end as far as the Trundle Hole, once part of a third river channel, and In 1849 the first two arches on that side were filled in to improve the approach. In 1859 both the Midland and LNWR companies were seeking to build a railway along the river bank, which would require alterations in the bridge structure. They accordingly came to agreement with the Marquis of Anglesey for complete replacement of the bridge at a cost of £15,000 to fall upon the railway companies In exchange for £10,000 value in lands required for the new lines and all future liabilities for maintenance, which would In future fall upon the Counties of Staffordshire and Derbyshire. Actually costing £22,000, the new bridge was opened by the Marquis on 22nd June 1864. Built of Whatstandwell millstone, it was 469yds long upon 32 arches, with a 20ft roadway, --ft, causeways and 3ft 8ins parapets. It was widened to 50ft between 1924 and 1926, with special arrangements to improve the traffic junctions at Winshill. The old structure, except such portions as interfered with the construction of the railway, remained standing until public outcry led the justices to order its removal.

In competition with Matthew Pickford of the Manchester carrying business, established in 1730, William Bass of Stafford owned packhorses for carriage of goods between Burton, Ashbourne and Derby. Delivering ale for one of his principal customers in Burton, Bass decided to combine the brewing and carrying trades, finding his own markets. Seeing more profit In brewing, he turned over the carrying plant to other members of his family and set up in Burton In 1777. To celebrate the bicentenary of this event, in 1977 his successors set up a Museum devoted to the history of the brewing industry. It contains much of interest to the transport historian.

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Peter Stevenson,
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