The Landmark Trust

# LENGTHSMAN'S COTTAGE

# History Album


Written and researched by Caroline Stanford

Updated February 2020

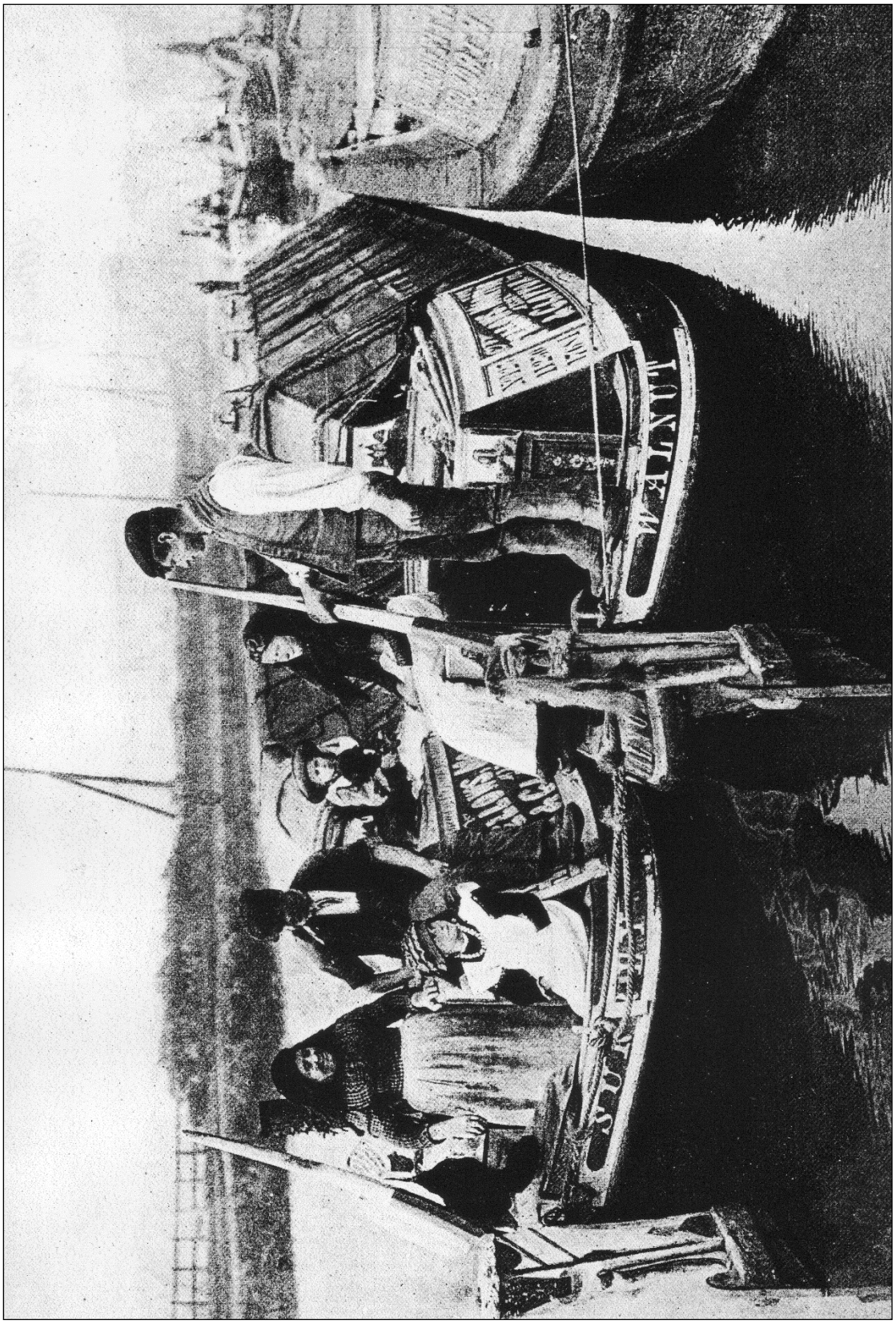
The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
*Charity registered in England & Wales* 243312 *and Scotland* SC039205

*Bookings* 01628 825925 *Office* 01628 825920 *Facsimile* 01628 825417
*Website* www.landmarktrust.org.uk

## BASIC DETAILS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Built:** | **c1813** |
| **Engineer:** | **William Whitmore** |
| **Chief projecteer:** | **William James** |
| **Listed:** | **Grade II** |
| **Acquired by Landmark:** | **1993** |
| **Tenure:** | **Freehold** |
| **Opened as a Landmark:** | **2006** |
| **Landmark project manager:** | **Alastair Dick Cleland** |
| **Advising architect:** | **Will Hawkes of Hawkes, Edwards & Cave of Stratford-upon-Avon** |
| **Contractors:** | **Sapcotes of Birmingham** |
| **Site manager:** | **Derek Monaghan** |
| **Kitchen & landscaping:** | **Landmark Furnishings Team** |

## Contents



**Life on the canals in the late nineteenth century.**

**SUMMARY**

Barrel-roofed cottages are a very rare feature on Britain's canals and the South Stratford canal has one of the best sets to survive. Six were built originally, between Lapworth and Preston Bagot. Landmark's cottage at Lock 31, now known as Lengthsman's Cottage, is the least altered from its original form. It was known first as the Lock House, then more recently simply as Ned's Cottage, after Ned Taylor who lived here for most of his eight decades. We have named it Lengthsman's Cottage after the lengthsmen (or often lengthmen) who cared for a 'length' of canal and its towpath. (It also allows us to distinguish between Landmark's other Lock Cottage, at Stoke Pound on the Worcester canal.)

The South Stratford canal was built between 1812 and 1816, to link the river Avon into the main Midland canal network. The northern stretch of the canal came first, between Birmingham and the junction with the Warwick to Birmingham section of the Grand Union at Kingswood, constructed by engineer Josiah Clowes after an Act of Parliament in 1793. This was the great age of canal building, in the years just before steam, when waterways were seen as the transport of the future. Great profits were expected by investors – but the Napoleonic Wars put paid to that, as the country's economy moved onto a war footing. Credit was squeezed and the cost of raw materials soared. By the time the canal reached Hockley Heath in 1796, the budget for the entire route through to Stratford had already almost been spent.

The scheme was in deep financial trouble, but in 1797 a bright local land agent named William James became involved. James re-surveyed the line and a further Act in 1799 enabled more funds to be raised. By 1802, the 18 locks down from the summit at Hockley Heath to Kingswood had been completed and the junction to the Warwick & Birmingham canal accomplished – but then work stalled again. James, however, had a vision of an integrated transport network and did not give up on the idea of linking the canal to the Avon. Backed by credit he had built up on other activities, he bought out other shareholders. In 1812, he was able to start work on the southern section, under William Whitmore as engineer. James and Whitmore saw that cost control on the northern section had been somewhat lax. They introduced (perfectly serviceable) cost cutting measures, and it is these that give the South Stratford canal its unique character. Farm lanes were bridged not with brick arches but with prefabricated, cast iron split bridges These allowed the towrope to pass between the two leaves, so that the horse could remain attached to the boat while walking up and over the narrow bridge, with no need for a wider span to take the towpath. Stretches of narrow gauge railway were used to haul bricks and the tons of excavated spoil cheaply and efficiently over soft ground. Locks were reduced to a single narrowboat's width, with single-leaf gates at either end, halving their cost.The cottages built to house the men who would care for the canal were built using the materials and techniques already available for bridge-building – simple rectangular brick boxes spanned by iron ties and brick vaults. The one at Lowsonford does not even have foundations, standing simply on the puddle clay used to seal the waterway. The cost of each cottage fell from £150 to £80, yet snug and durable dwellings were created that have stood the test of time. By 1813, the

canal had reached Wootten Wawen, suggesting that Lengthsman's Cottage was built around 1812-3, and in 1816 the long-awaited link with the Avon was achieved.

Yet steam came hard on the heels of the canals and their heyday was brief. By the mid-19th century, the waterways were already on the decline, bought up by the new railway companies who cared less for their maintenance than investing in the rail network. By the 1900s, the South Stratford was already a backwater, bypassed by the Grand Union, which lay above a tortuous stretch of locks for those travelling northwards from Stratford. By 1947, when authors and Inland Waterways Association campaigners L T C Rolt and Robert Aickman applied for passage through the bridge at Lifford Lane, the whole Stratford canal was all but impassable to narrowboats. Then in 1958, Warwickshire County Council applied for a Warrant of Abandonment for the canal, on the grounds that no boat had used it in the past three years. Fortunately, two canoeists were able to provide licenses proving that they had used the canal in that time – and so began a campaign to save it. In 1960 the National Trust took on the South Stratford and employed a local architect and canal enthusiast, David Hutchings, to oversee its restoration for leisure use. The project became a celebrated example of canal restoration, achieved mainly by non-skilled labour – volunteers, prisoners from Winson Green, Royal Engineers, boys from Borstals, TocH: all played their part. In 1964, as part of the quartercentenary celebrations of Shakespeare's birth, the South Stratford was re-opened to traffic by Her Majesty the Queen Mother.

Meanwhile, through all these years of decline and rebirth, Ned Taylor had been quietly living in the cottage at Lock 31. Born in 1921, Ned was one of a family of eleven children. The Taylors' tenancy survived the various changes of ownership of the canal in the 20th century, and when in 1992 the National Trust transferred the canal to British Waterways and later the cottage to Landmark, we also took on Ned's life tenancy. The National Trust had somewhat modernised the cottage when they took over the canal in 1960, but Ned's needs were modest and so the cottage survived without the larger extensions added to the other barrel-roofed dwellings.

When Ned died in 2005, little more than a refurbishment was needed. Externally, the chimney stack was unstable and so was carefully taken down and rebuilt. Cement render was removed from the rear elevation and replaced with breathable lime render, and the 'eyebrow' beneath the eaves on the canal-side elevation was carefully re-rendered. The lean-tos, holding today's kitchen and bathroom, date back to the 1900s at least; the buttresses were put up in the 1930s.The cottage seems always to have been limewashed at most, rather than entirely rendered. Internally, we kept the original cast iron range, as well as the practical gloss paint finishes of Ned's time and the insulating plasterboard installed to the walls by the National Trust. We re-wired the cottage and fitted a new kitchen, and new heaters. The sitting room and rear lobby floors are as we found them and early (those in the bedrooms are new Norfolk pammets and those in the kitchen and entrance lobby are modern quarry tiles as found). New iron casements were made for the windows to match the single surviving original that faces the canal. In Landmark's care, the

cottage will continue to play its part in this congenial conjunction of canal, road and village, testimony to William James's exemplary value-engineering.

## Introduction

> '"How can a man care for that devastating march of civilisation," said I, "when it means the ultimate destruction of such places in the world as this? God knows we must progress; we cannot stop still. The mind must grow, or it will atrophy. But if ever a plant needed light in which to bear its flower, that plant is the mind."'
>
> - Temple Thurston, musing as he cruised the South Stratford canal in 1911.[1]

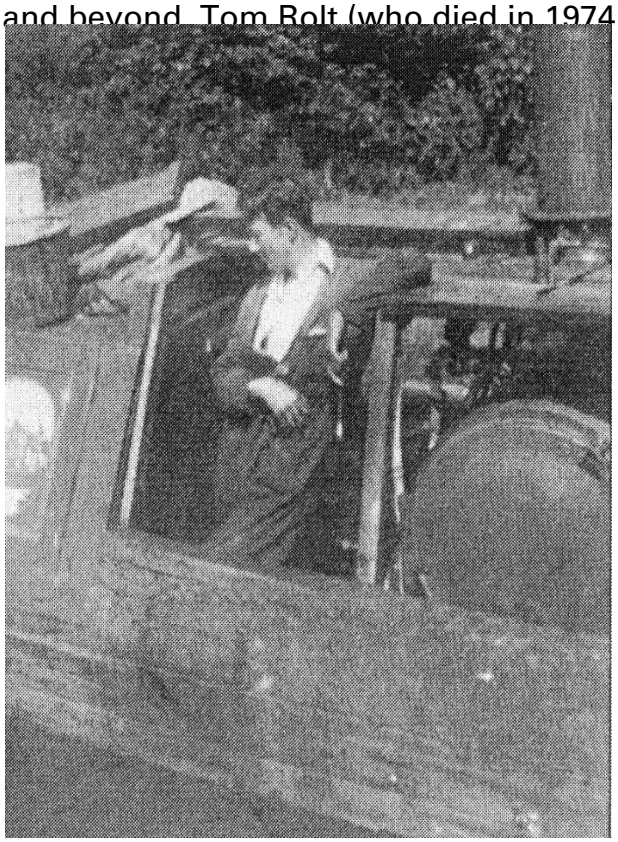
Canals hold a special place in Landmark's history, and the South Stratford canal holds a special place in the history of canal conservation. It was thoughtless destruction of canal buildings that provided the catalyst for the formation of Landmark. The original Handbook entry for Landmark's other Lock Cottage at Stoke Pound in Worcestershire, written by Landmark's founder Sir John Smith, sums up the frustration he and others were feeling:

> 'Until the nineteen fifties many such handsome and unpretentious buildings served and graced our canal systems; but the Transport Commission of that day ruthlessly demolished them by dozens, in spite of everything I and others had to say. Indeed it was, in particular, the destruction of Thomas Telford's Junction House at Hurlestone on the Shropshire Union canal which maddened us into starting the Landmark Trust.'

Landmark's connection with the canals runs still deeper. In 1944, a now legendary meeting took place on a narrowboat called *Cressy* at the top of the 30–lock flight at Tardebigge on the Worcester canal, not far from Lock Cottage. The meeting was between the owner of *Cressy,* writer and historian L.T.C. (Tom) Rolt, and another writer called Robert Aickman. The same year, Tom Rolt had published *Narrow Boat,* his account of life on the canals aboard *Cressy*. It was to be a quietly influential book, as an increasing number of people began to be moved by awareness that so far unsung and unvalued ways of life were slipping silently beyond reach. This was a time when individuals who cared enough really could nudge the flight of the cannonball of Progress, and Tom Rolt, Robert Aickman and

[1] E Temple Thurston *The Flower of Gloster*, 1968 repr., p.135.

later John Smith were to have just such an influence on the future of the canals and beyond. Tom Rolt (who died in 1974) and John Smith became firm friends.



**L T C Rolt and the engine room on *Cressy* in the late 1930s.**

**Sonia Smith (later Rolt) on the butty boat *Warwick,* on the Grand Union Canal in 1950. A butty boat is one without power, towed by another.**

**Sonia Rolt working on the books at Lengthsman's Cottage, November 2006.**

Tom was survived by his second wife Sonia, who, during the war before their marriage, had been one of the doughty band of women whose contribution to the war effort was to keep the narrowboats usefully cruising the canals. Later, Sonia would become Landmark's first furnishing manager (such tales of haring round the countryside with vans of furniture and crockery), and afterwards took on the task of choosing and maintaining books in the Welsh Landmarks, which she did until 2008, among much other vigorous campaigning for historic buildings and waterways alike. The books in the bookcase at Lengthsman's Cottage have all been chosen by Sonia.

If the meeting at Tardebrigge saw the beginning of a collaboration between Rolt and Aickman that would lead in 1946 to the formation of the campaigning Inland Waterways Association, it was the plight of Stratford Canal that prompted what might be described as the pair's first 'direct action.' In 1947, they forced Warwickshire County Council to fulfil its legal obligations and grant them passage through the then impassable split bridge at Lifford Lane at King's Norton. Thirteen years later, the South Stratford became the first example of a volunteer-propelled canal restoration project, the National Trust having taken it on at the prompting of John Smith. Both canal campaigners and the Landmark Trust were inspired by the same vision, of the potential of the objects of their attention to survive in the modern world by becoming useful and self-financing by satisfying our need for connection with the past. H J Massingham's foreword to L.T.C. Rolt's *Narrow Boat* (1944) sums this up in a wider context than it first described. 'To regard [it] as nostalgic is, therefore, wholly to misinterpret it. He is pleading for something that is part of the soul of England.'

## Key Dates: Stratford-upon-Avon Canal

1793 Act of Parliament authorises construction of a canal link between Birmingham and Stratford.

1796 Canal opens as far as Hockley Heath.

1802 May 24th: canal opens to the junction at Kingswood.

1813 July: canal reaches Wootton Wawen

1816 June 24th: full route open from Birmingham to Stratford.

1821 Reservoir built at Earlswood to help maintain water levels

1838 Passage of coal on the canal peaks at 181,708 tons in the year.

1856 Canal sold to the Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton Railway Co.

1865 Great Western Railway buys the canal.

1944 L T C Rolt's *Narrow Boat* published.

1946 Inland Waterways Association founded.

1948 Ownership of the canal system passes to the State with the nationalisation of the railways.

1956 Stratford Canal Club reconstituted as the Stratford-upon- Avon Canal Society.

1957 June 12th: Warwickshire County Council applies for an Act of Abandonment for the canal.

1959 May 22nd: application for warrant of abandonment rejected.

1960 September 29th: the National Trust formally takes over the southern stretch of the canal.

1961 Work begins to restore and re-open the canal.

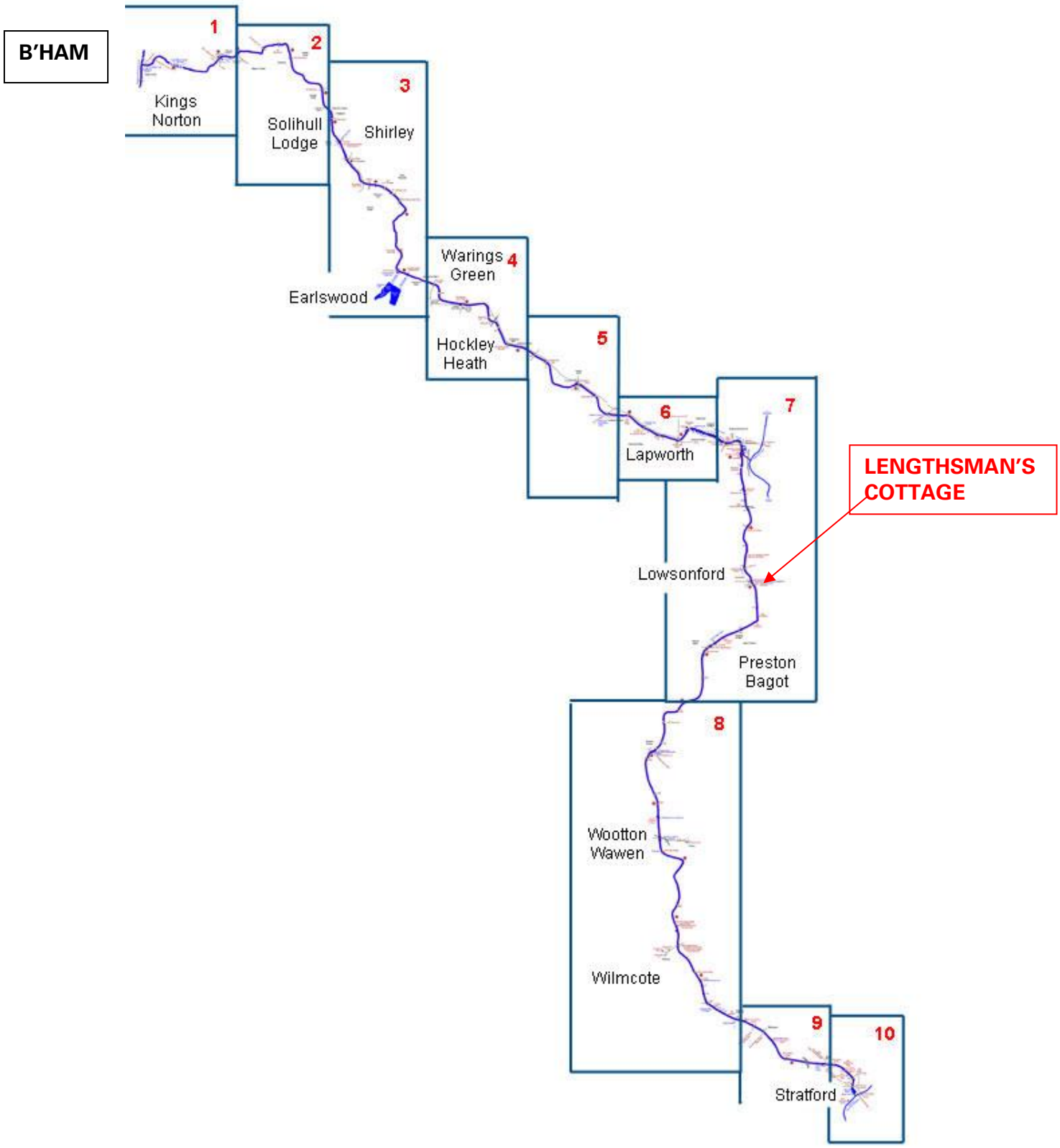
1964 July 11th: Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother reopens the canal to navigation.

1988 April 1st: responsibility for the southern section passes to British Waterways. Cottages remain in the care of the National Trust.

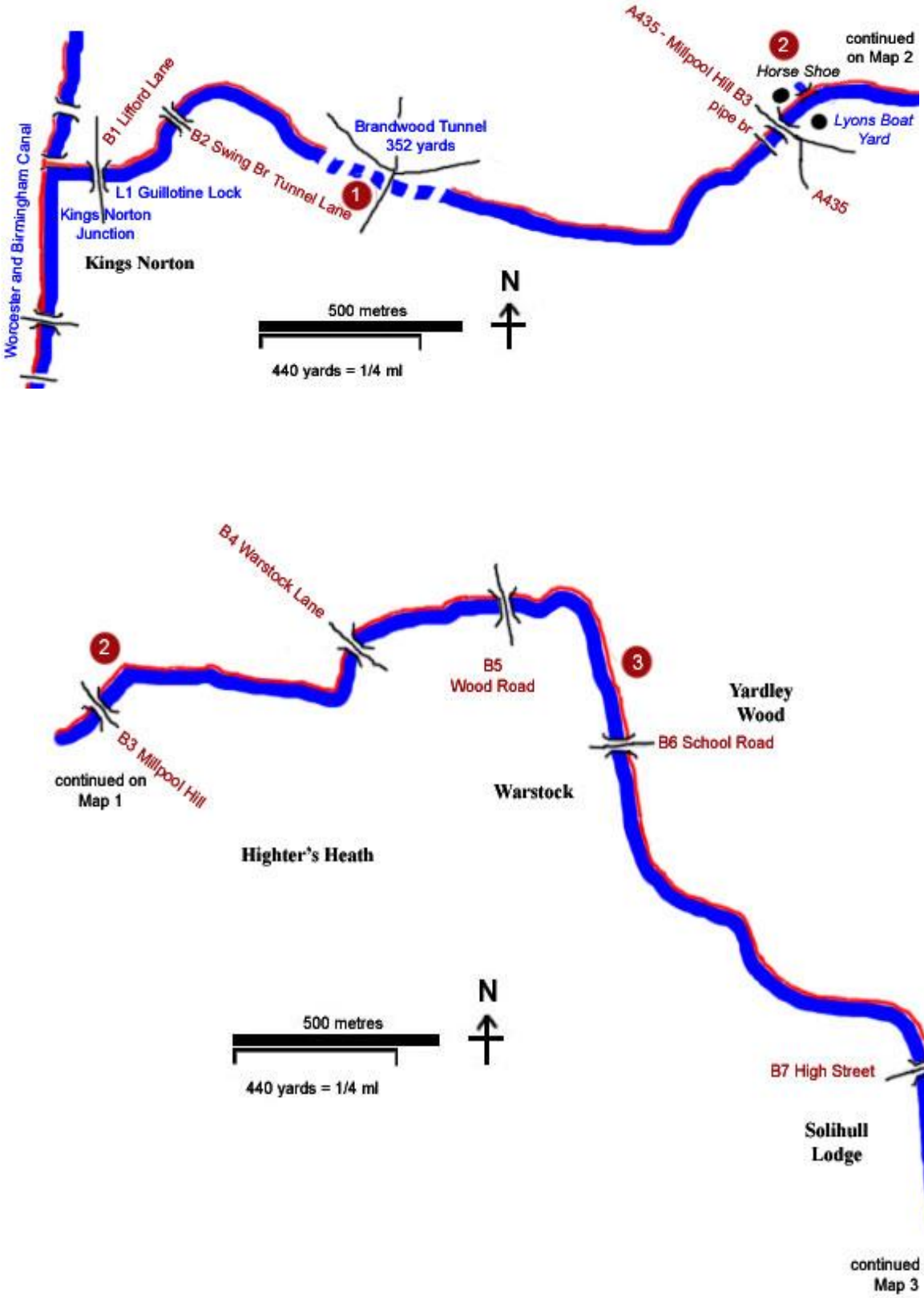
1993 The National Trust passes ownership of the cottage at Lowsonford to Landmark, with life tenancy for Ned Taylor, who died in 2005.

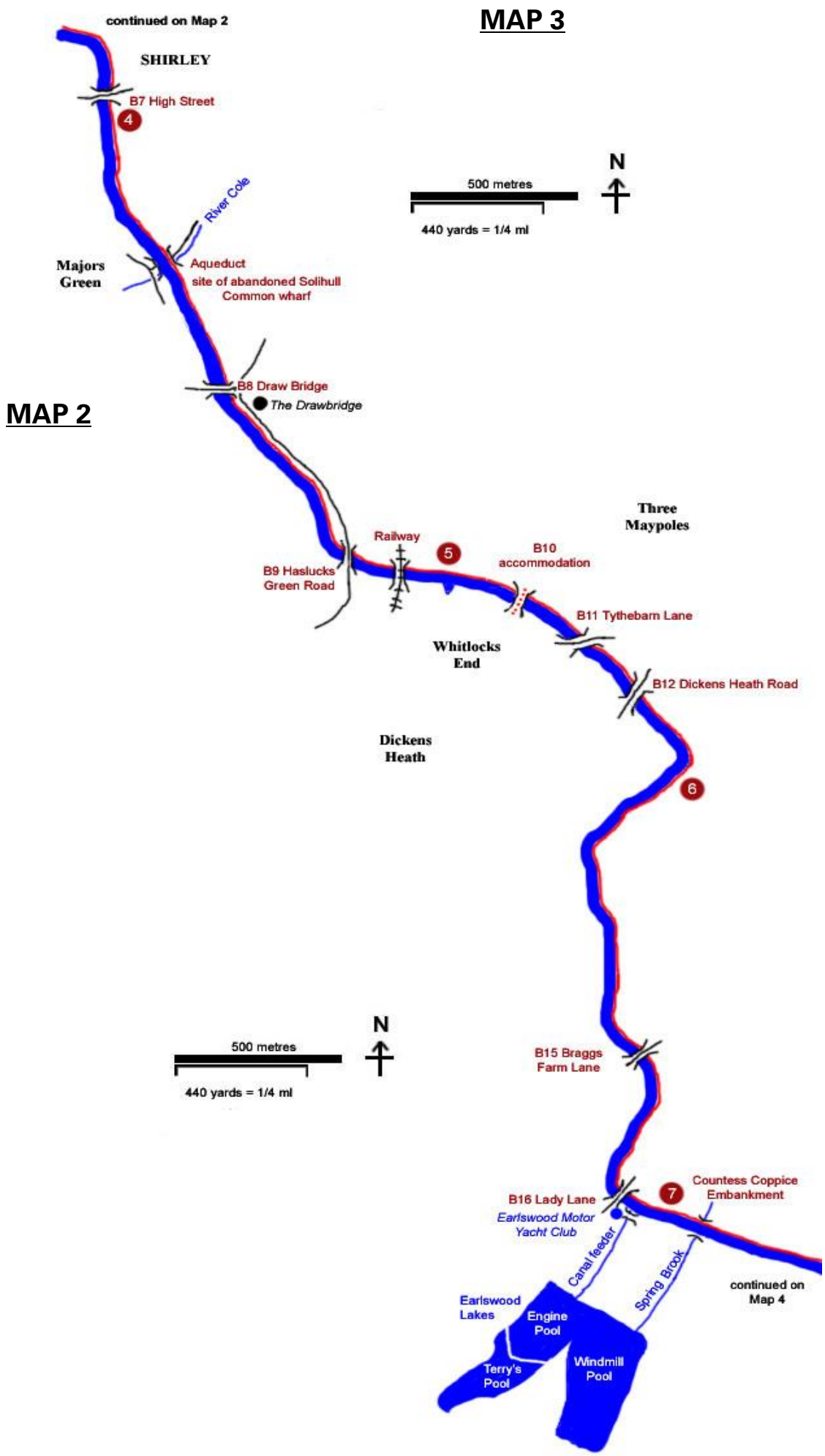
# MAPS OF THE SOUTH STRATFORD CANAL

(Source: www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk)

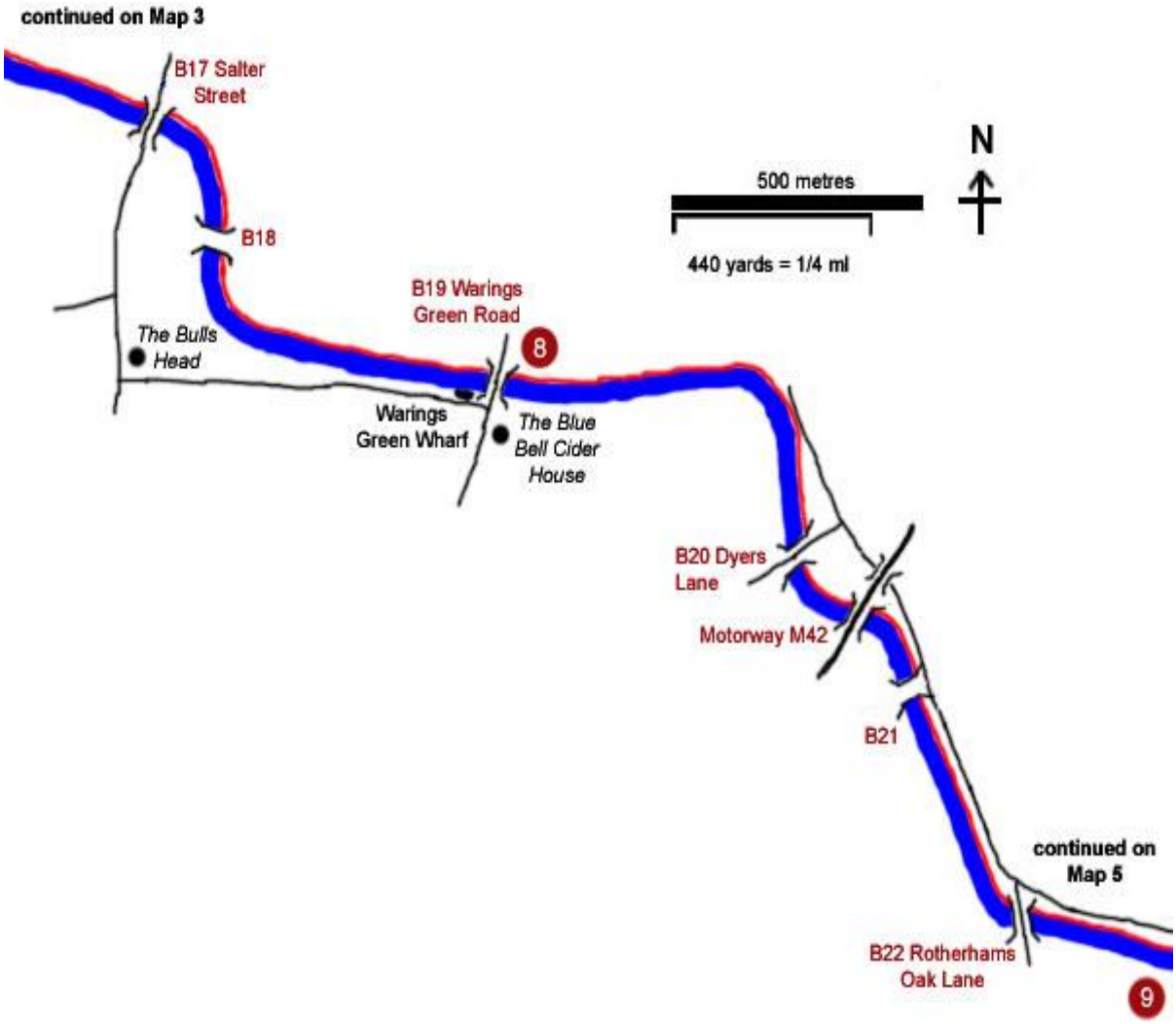


## MAP 1

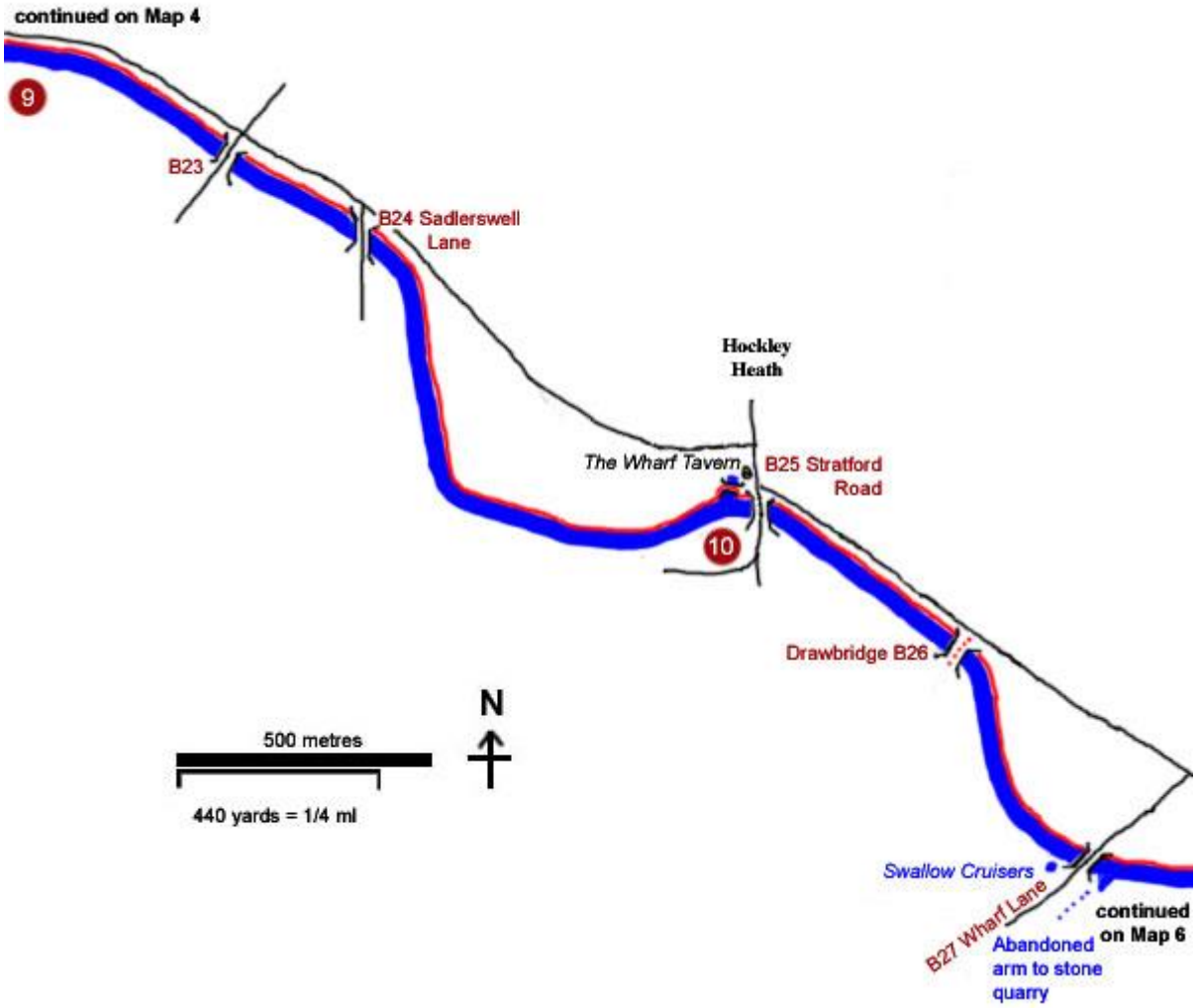

A435 - Millpool Hill B3
2
continued on Map 2
Horse Shoe
Lyons Boat Yard
pipe br
A435
B1 Lifford Lane
B2 Swing Br
Tunnel Lane
Brandwood Tunnel
352 yards
1
L1 Guillotine Lock
Kings Norton Junction
Kings Norton
Worcester and Birmingham Canal
N
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 ml
B4 Warstock Lane
2
B5
Wood Road
3
Yardley Wood
B6 School Road
B3 Millpool Hill
continued on Map 1
Warstock
Highter's Heath
N
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 ml
B7 High Street
4
Solihull Lodge
continued on Map 3


MAP 3
continued on Map 2
SHIRLEY
B7 High Street
4
River Cole
500 metres
N
440 yards = 1/4 ml
Majors Green
Aqueduct
site of abandoned Solihull Common wharf
B8 Draw Bridge
The Drawbridge
MAP 2
Three Maypoles
Railway
5
B10 accommodation
B9 Haslucks Green Road
B11 Tythebarn Lane
Whitlocks End
B12 Dickens Heath Road
Dickens Heath
6
N
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 ml
B15 Braggs Farm Lane
B16 Lady Lane
7
Countess Coppice Embankment
Earlswood Motor Yacht Club
Canal feeder
Spring Brook
continued on Map 4
Earlswood Lakes
Engine Pool
Terry's Pool
Windmill Pool

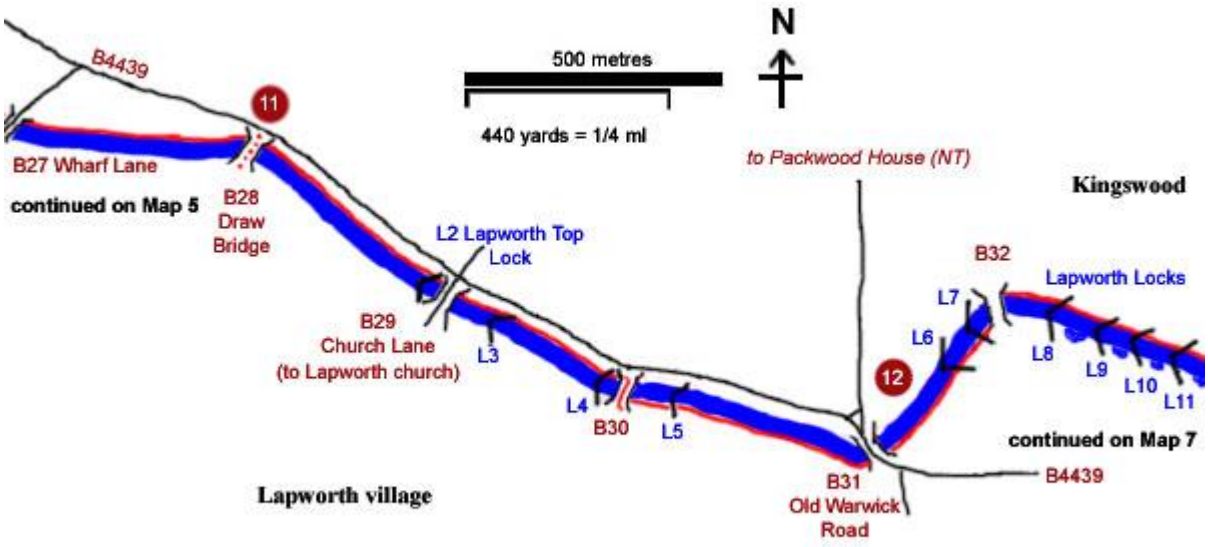
## MAP 4

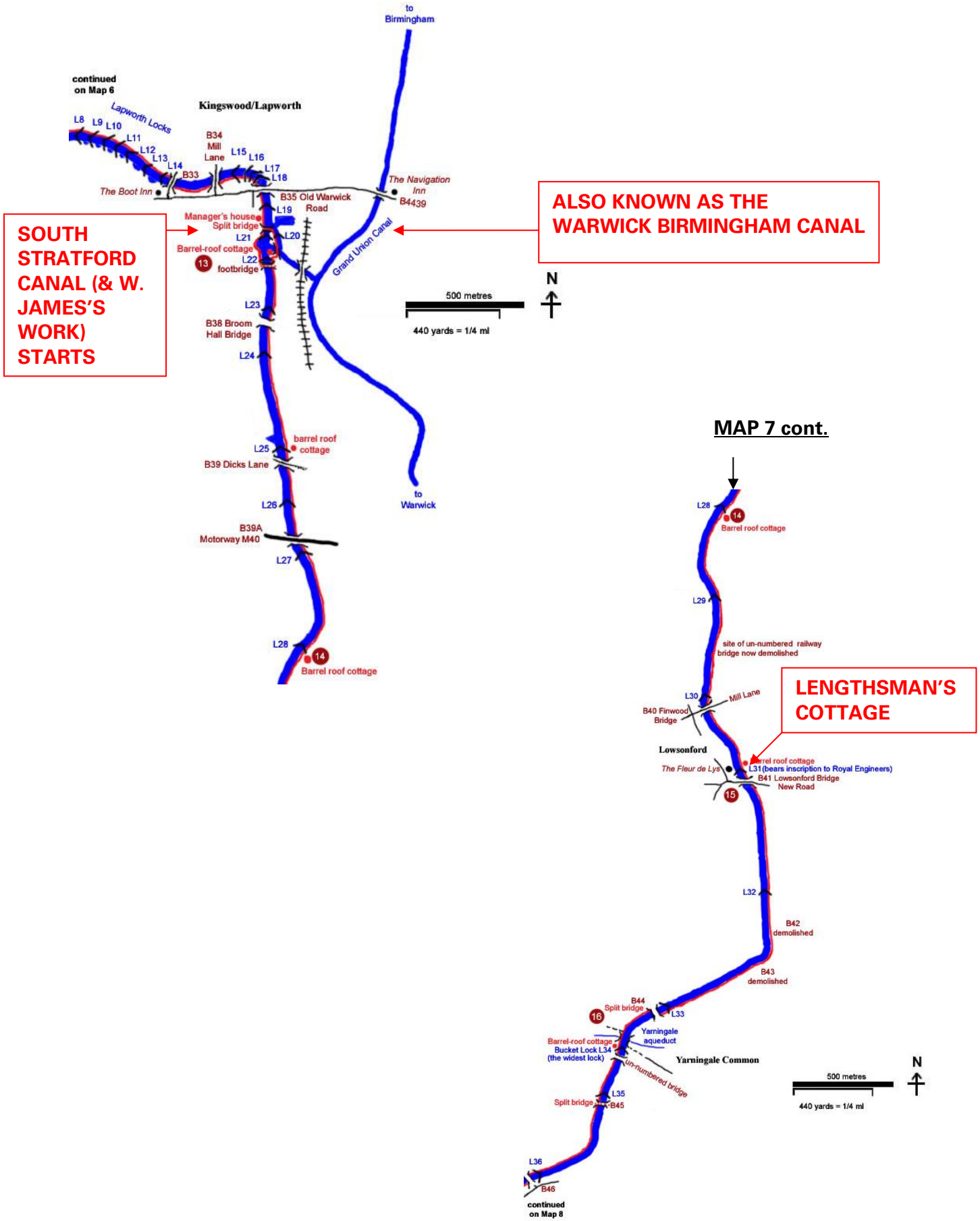

continued on Map 3
B17 Salter Street
B18
B19 Warings Green Road
8
The Bulls Head
Warings Green Wharf
The Blue Bell Cider House
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 ml
N
B20 Dyers Lane
Motorway M42
B21
continued on Map 5
B22 Rotherhams Oak Lane
9

## MAP 5

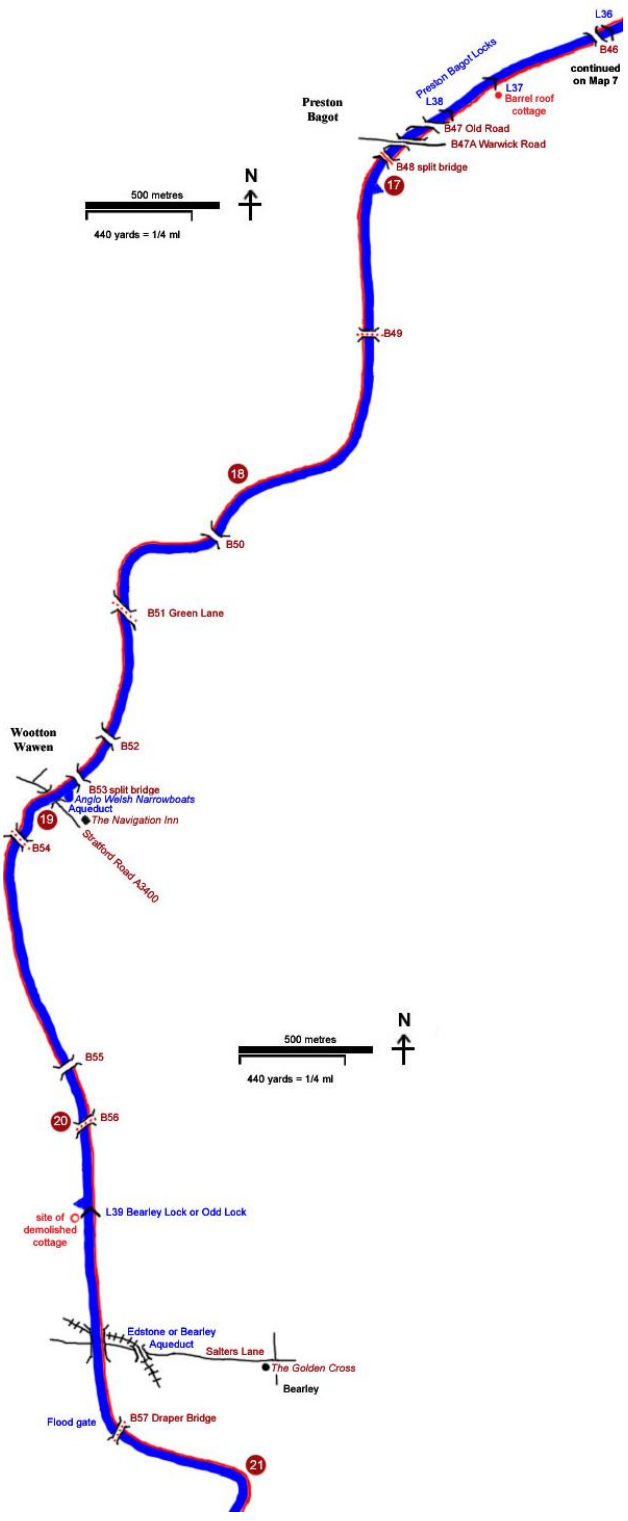

continued on Map 4
9
B23
B24 Sadlerswell Lane
Hockley Heath
The Wharf Tavern
B25 Stratford Road
10
Drawbridge B26
N
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 ml
Swallow Cruisers
B27 Wharf Lane
continued on Map 6
Abandoned arm to stone quarry

## MAP 6

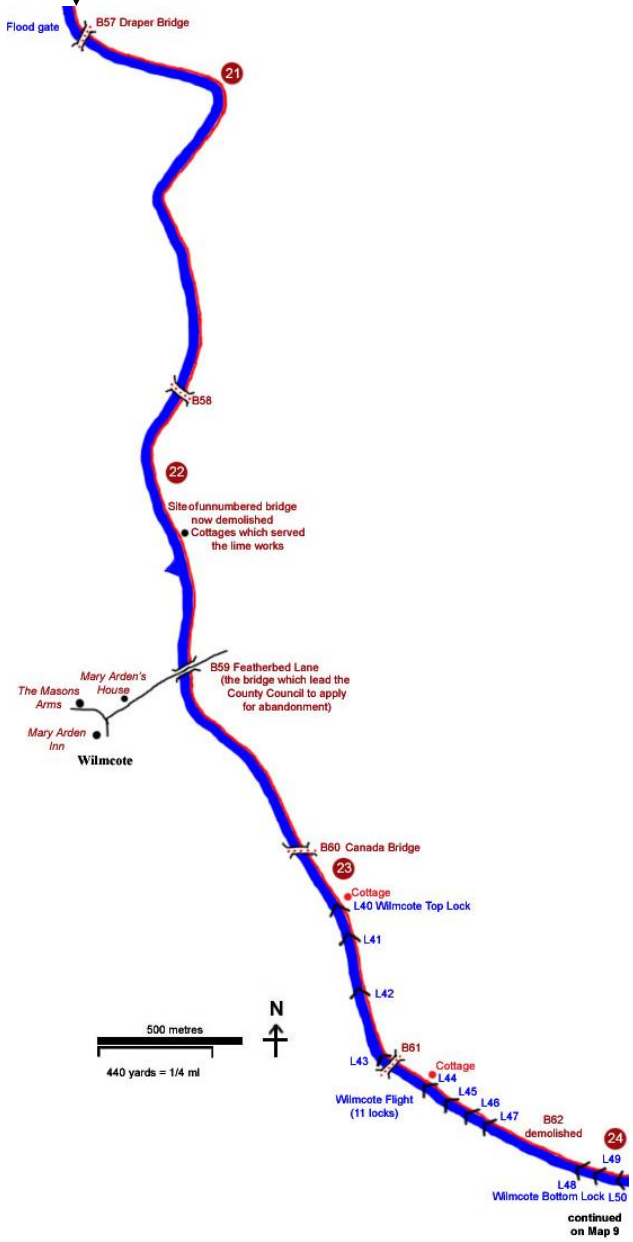

B4439
11
B27 Wharf Lane
continued on Map 5
B28 Draw Bridge
L2 Lapworth Top Lock
B29 Church Lane (to Lapworth church)
L3
L4
B30
L5
Lapworth village
B31 Old Warwick Road
B4439
12
L6
L7
B32
Lapworth Locks
L8
L9
L10
L11
continued on Map 7
Kingswood
to Packwood House (NT)
N
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 ml


MAP 7 cont.
SOUTH STRATFORD CANAL (& W. JAMES'S WORK) STARTS
ALSO KNOWN AS THE WARWICK BIRMINGHAM CANAL
LENGTHSMAN'S COTTAGE
to Birmingham
continued on Map 6
Kingswood/Lapworth
Lapworth Locks
L8
L9
L10
L11
L12
L13
L14
B33
B34 Mill Lane
L15
L16
L17
L18
The Boot Inn
B35 Old Warwick Road
The Navigation Inn
B4439
Manager's house
Split bridge
L19
L20
L21
Barrel-roof cottage
13
L22
footbridge
Grand Union Canal
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 mi
N
L23
B38 Broom Hall Bridge
L24
barrel roof cottage
L25
B39 Dicks Lane
to Warwick
L26
B39A Motorway M40
L27
L28
14
Barrel roof cottage
L28
14
Barrel roof cottage
L29
site of un-numbered railway bridge now demolished
L30
Mill Lane
B40 Finwood Bridge
Lowsonford
The Fleur de Lys
Barrel roof cottage
L31 (bears inscription to Royal Engineers)
B41 Lowsonford Bridge
New Road
15
L32
B42 demolished
B43 demolished
B44
Split bridge
16
L33
Yarningale aqueduct
Barrel-roof cottage
Bucket Lock L34
(the widest lock)
Yarningale Common
Un-numbered bridge
L35
Split bridge
B45
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 mi
N
L36
B46
continued on Map 8

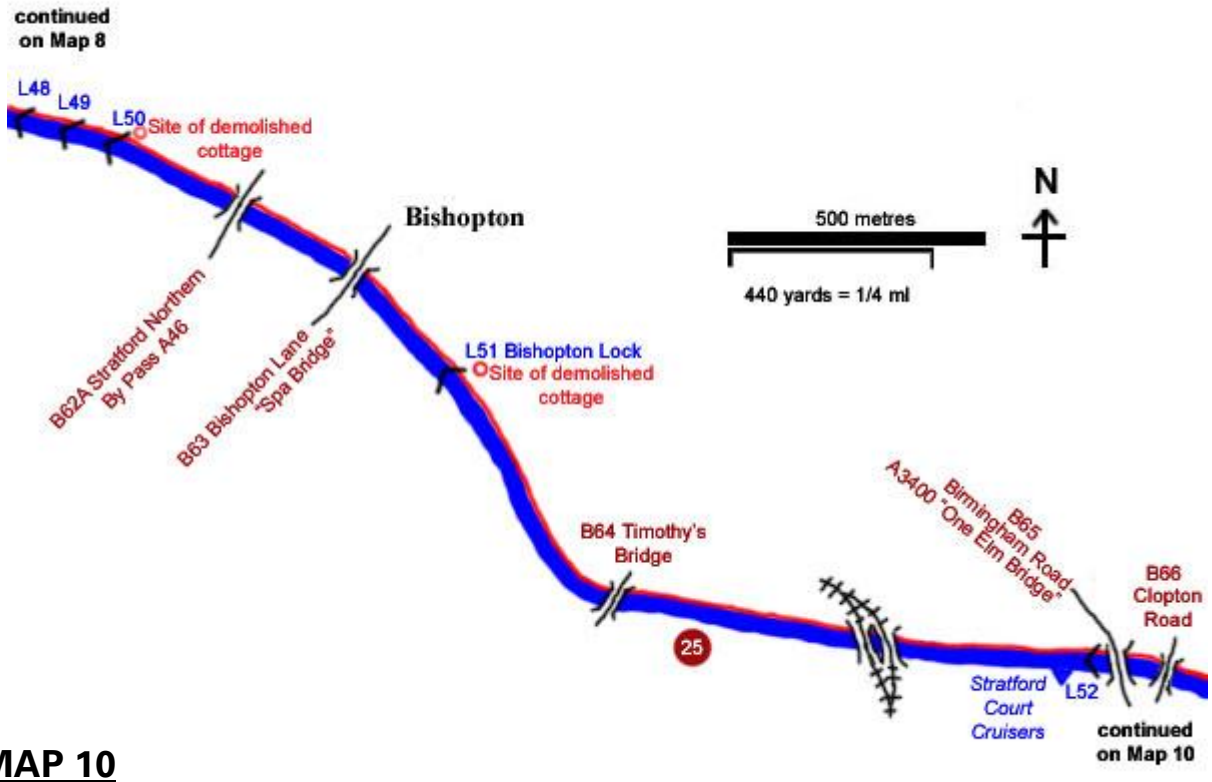
# MAP 8



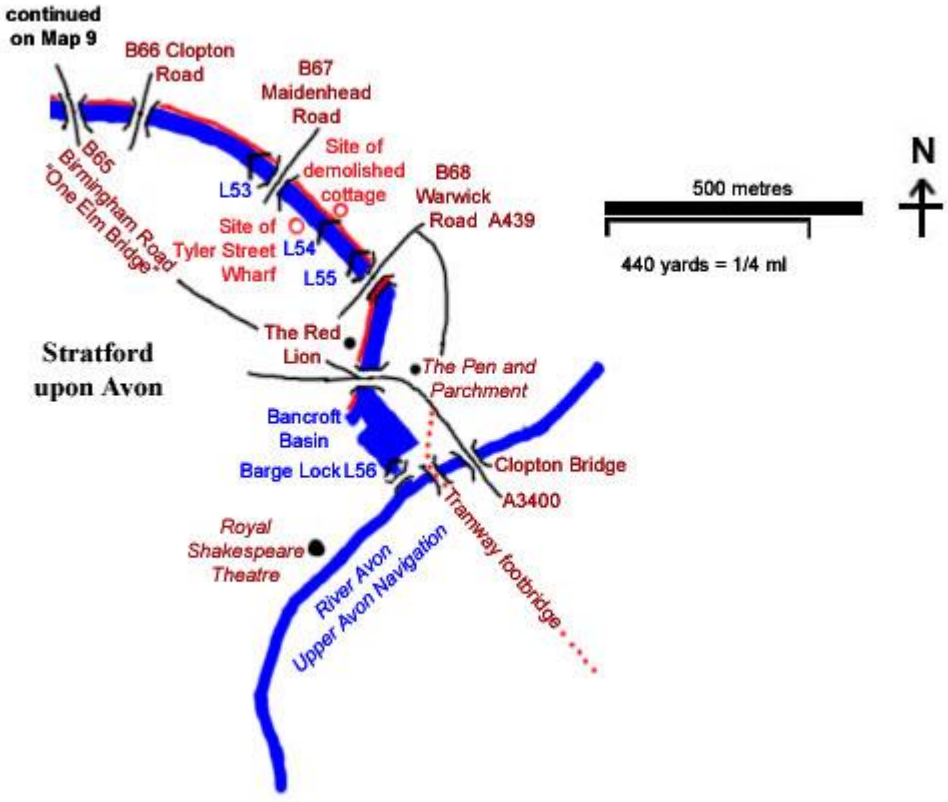

**MAP 8 cont.**



## MAP 9


continued on Map 8
L48
L49
L50
Site of demolished cottage
Bishopton
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 ml
N
B62A Stratford Northern By Pass A46
B63 Bishopton Lane "Spa Bridge"
L51 Bishopton Lock
Site of demolished cottage
B64 Timothy's Bridge
A3400 "One Elm Bridge"
B65 Birmingham Road
B66 Clopton Road
25
Stratford Court Cruisers
L52
continued on Map 10

## MAP 10


continued on Map 9
B66 Clopton Road
B67 Maidenhead Road
B65 Birmingham Road "One Elm Bridge"
Site of demolished cottage
L53
B68 Warwick Road A439
500 metres
440 yards = 1/4 ml
N
Site of Tyler Street Wharf
L54
L55
The Red Lion
Stratford upon Avon
The Pen and Parchment
Bancroft Basin
Barge Lock L56
Clopton Bridge
A3400
Tramway footbridge
Royal Shakespeare Theatre
River Avon Upper Avon Navigation

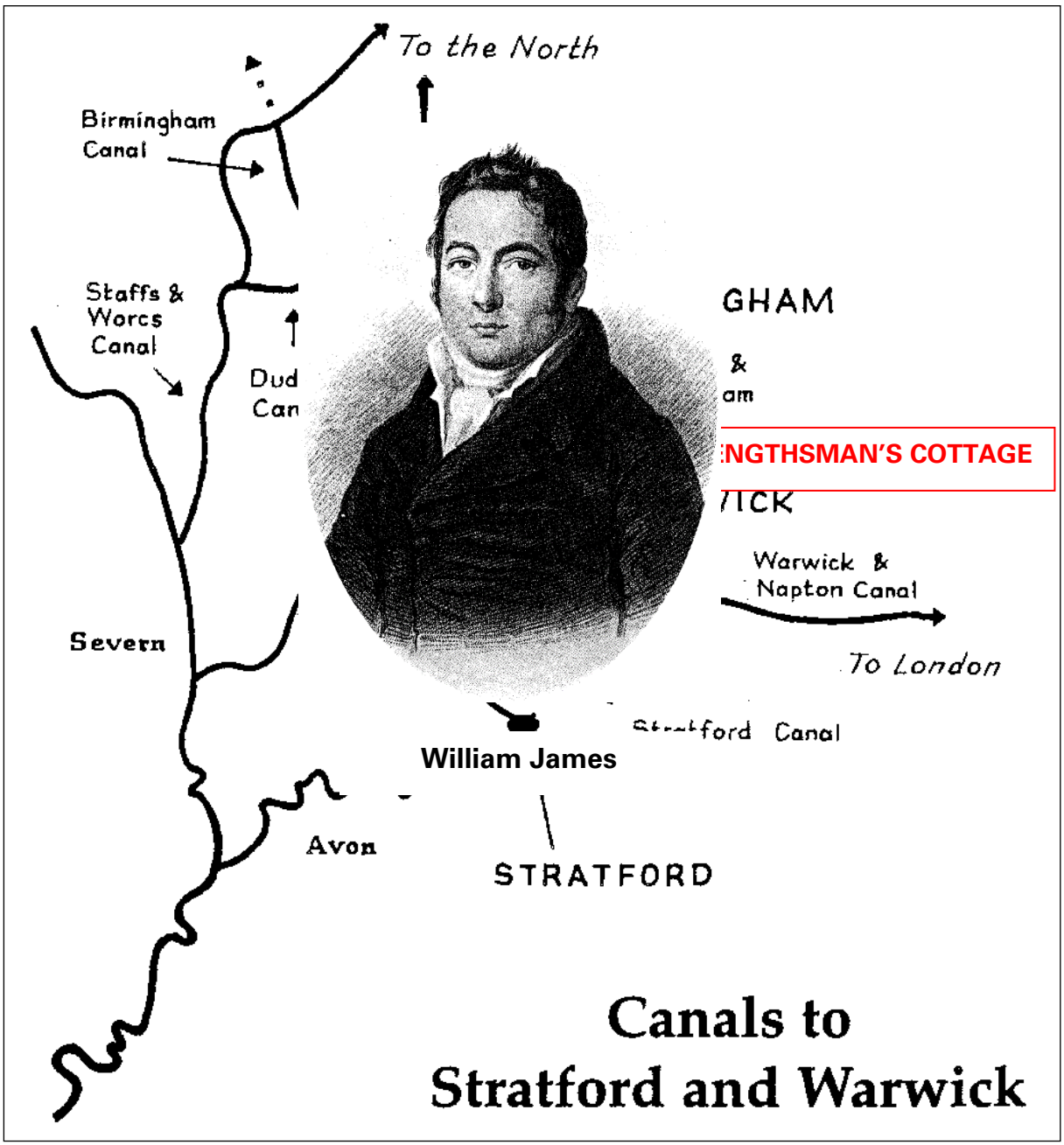
## William James and the Building of the South Stratford canal

After the first wave of canal building in the 1760s, there had been much discussion locally about how the Avon should be linked into the main Midland network, though without any steps being taken. Through the 1770s, the opening of the Oxford-Coventry canal linking in with the Thames at Oxford caused a serious slump in Warwickshire, affecting both land- and water-borne trade. The owners of the Avon navigation rallied through the 1780s and large cargoes still passed along the river from Tewkesbury to Stratford. However, when an Act was passed in 1791 to build a canal from Birmingham to link to the Severn near Worcester, the threat was clear that Stratford and the Avon would be by-passed to the west just it had been to the east since 1789 by the Warwick to Birmingham stretch of what would become known as the Grand Union canal.

It was this new threat to local business that perhaps gave impetus to a local group of projecteers, the Stratford Committee, who in 1793 achieved their own Act for a Stratford canal as far as King's Norton, known as the North Stratford Canal. Numerous Acts of Parliament accompany each stage of canal development – an often tortuous process, but one required by law whenever a corporation was set up to avoid empty promises of profits to investors after the debacle of the South Sea Bubble in 1720. of Interestingly, this initial Act did not contemplate pushing right through to link with the Avon at Stratford, perhaps because of the strength of vested interests from the Worcester and Birmingham Canal Company, who then might not have agreed to the link with the Warwick & Birmingham at Kingswood.

The idea behind the Stratford link to the Warwick and Birmingham Canal was to pass on through-traffic from the Worcester canal and so avoid the excessive charges of the Birmingham Canal. The line of this link was surveyed by John Snape and work began in 1793, with Josiah Clowes as engineer. Clowes was an experienced engineer, who had been principal assistant to Robert Whitworth on the Thames & Severn canal. The summit level (or highest stretch) ran from King's

Norton to Hockley Heath, which was reached in 1796, having already cost as much as the estimate for the entire canal link to Stratford, albeit including the 352-yard


To the North
Birmingham Canal
Staffs & Worcs Canal
Dud
Can
GHAM
&
am
NGTHSMAN'S COTTAGE
ICK
Warwick & Napton Canal
To London
Severn
ford Canal
William James
Avon
STRATFORD
Canals to Stratford and Warwick

Brandwood Tunnel at King's Norton. It was at this point, in 1797, that a local land agent called William James entered the scene.

William James was born in 1771 in Henley in Arden. Educated locally in Warwick & Winson Green, he went on to study law in London. 'His father having lost the bulk of his property by speculations in the Worcester and other canal shares, rendered attention to business more necessary to success on the part of the son', wrote James's daughter Mrs Haines later. In 1797, James moved to Wellesbourne, to manage a Mr Dew's estate and made a great success of the profession of land agent, moving on to serve the Earl of Warwick, who became his patron and beneath whom he became deputy recorder of Warwick town corporation.

James did not initially invest in the canals, perhaps wary after his father's experiences over the Worcester & Birmingham and Stratford canals. In the mid 1790s, canals had begun to appear less attractive as investments. Events associated with the French Revolution had little effect at first, but once Britain was at war with Napoleon, taxation increased, inflation started to rise and the price of metals

rocketed. Just as James was moving to Wellesbourne in 1797, the government decided to suspend cash payments from the Bank of England. Chaos ensued. A man of an entrepreneurial bent like James, a man too of great energy and persuasive powers and with a finger in many a pie, was in a position to benefit.

So by 1796, the northern section of the Stratford canal had only reached Hockley Heath, accounting for about half the distance to the proposed link with the Warwick & Birmingham canal (known after 1929 as part of the Grand Union) at Kingswood, but including not a single lock. The scheme was in deep financial trouble. The cost of the whole canal had been estimated at £22,000 and £119,920 had already been spent. £22,000 worth of shares had already been defaulted upon, and the value of a £100 share was now £20. William James re-surveyed the line in 1797, which was then altered to bring the canal within ½ mile of the Warwick & Birmingham at Kingswood, and a new Act was passed in 1799 to raise the money for construction to continue.

Against all the odds, work began again under Clowes's assistant, Samuel Porter (Clowes had died in 1795), and the 18 locks down from the summit and the Kingswood junction were completed in 1802, accomplishing the crucial link with the Warwick & Birmingham.

William James, meanwhile, was prospering. The suspension of cash payments allowed lawyers and land agents like James to write promissory notes, effecting a cash-free system of unlimited credit based on physical assets. James 'bought' coal mines in Staffordshire and Coventry and his reputation as a brilliant land agent spread amongst the aristocracy in direct relation to his success in prospecting for valuable mineral resources on their estates. His exploitation of seams of coal and limestone worked to his own and his clients' profit. The war dragged on, but James was thriving, becoming Commandant of the Warwickshire Militia when Napoleon threatened invasion.

James was also keeping an eye on the local canal project. He began to buy out his father's shares, which were proving a heavy liability rather than the route to riches investors had hoped. A deposit of £5 was all that was needed to purchase each £100 share initially, the balance being called in when the company needed it. But by 1803 £150 had already been called in on each £100 share, with no prospects of any dividends for a very long time. James began buying up defaulted shares and, backed by the huge credit he had built up, bought himself into the Canal Company to the point where, almost singlehanded, he was in a position to pay for the southern section to the canal from Kingswood to Stratford. In 1810 James joined the Board of Works to oversee this and within a year he was Deputy Chairman.

James appointed William Whitmore as his engineer. Whitmore had originally worked for Messrs Whitmore and Norton of Birmingham, building weighing machines. However, he had been involved in 1799 with the Somerset Coal Canal and indeed his company had a private branch canal, the Whitmore Arm, to their foundry in Newhall Street. Whitmore too had a vested interest in an efficient route towards the south-east and –west.

James quickly identified that cost and design control on the northern stretch had been somewhat lax. Each lock on the Lapworth flight had cost around £1,600 to build, each bridge about £500. Huge quantities of bricks had to be moved across soft ground for the onward extension and there were 24 more bridges to build before the next stop at Wootten Wawen. James looked for measures to slash construction costs, and his solutions give the South Stratford a unique character.

His first innovation was the use of mass-produced, cast iron, prefabricated 'split bridges' for small farm lanes, rather than the more expensive brick crossings used so far. This kept the farmers happy whose land was to be crossed by this new-fangled system as well as keeping costs down. To keep the bridges simple, and to avoid the need for the width of the cut to include a towpath, a narrow gap between the two decks of the bridges was left, so that the horse's tow rope could pass between the sections of the bridge while the towpath passed up and over the

embankment – an ingenious solution, which cost just £320 a crossing. At Lowsonford, where a more significant road to Henley-in-Arden crossed the canal, a more robust solution was provided for, a neat brick bridge with integral towpath and seemly keystones.

James also purchased seven miles of light gauge railroad, to speed up deliveries of bricks to the locks and to move the vast quantities of spoil and clay dug out to form the channel. Such tracks were already in constant use at collieries regardless of weather or conditions underfoot, horses hauling wagons holding a ton or two for a few hundred yards. James then halved the cost of building a lock to just £800 by reducing the width of the canal at locks to a single boat's width, which then meant only a single leaf closure was required. Last but not least were the cottages built to house the men who would maintain the canal. Though often built at locks for obvious reasons, these cottages were carefully stationed at the centre of the 'length' of canal that these men would look after – not just keeping their locks in good working order, but also trimming hedges and scything banks, keeping the towpath in good repair, maintaining a constant level of water in the pounds in their charge by adjusting the sluices governing the flow of water, stopping any minor leaks in the banks with clay puddle - and calling in the company for larger leaks or when dredging became necessary.

And so a pragmatic approach was taken to building the cottages too, using the bricks and iron girders now easily available whatever the ground conditions and adapting a simple bridge span for cosy living quarters. The South Stratford is the one of the few canals in the country where these barrel-roofed cottages are found. The canal engineers and navvies had no difficulty building walls, but were less accustomed to roofs. So having created a compartment to roof height to a standard size of 16 feet x 35 feet, they simply laid iron bars along the top of the brickwork, joined at the corners to make a rectangular frame, strengthened at intervals by restraining bars. A brick vault was then built arching across the frame, probably using timber formers just as in building a tunnel, to fashion the roof. The iron frame helped contain the enormous outward thrust. Puddled clay was used to stop rising damp, another technique borrowed from the canal.

Six barrel-roofed cottages were built on the South Stratford, all lying between Lapworth and Preston Bagot, at Locks 22, 25, 28, 31, 34 and 37. Today, all survive (much altered) in private ownership, except Lengthsman's Cottage at Lock 31 and the Lapworth cottage at Lock 22, owned by British Waterways . Interestingly, pitched cottages were built at Locks 40, 44 and 54, making the six barrel-roofs an even more localised feature. They must have been a single individual's response to James's call for value engineering – presumably engineer William Whitmore's.

**The barrel-roofed cottage at Lowsonford in days of decline.**

For by 1813, just a year after work had begun again under James's management, the canal had already reached Wootten Wawen (making it probable that today's Lengthsman's Cottage was built 1812-3). Three years later, and after one final Act in 1815 authorising a link to the River Avon, the canal reached Stratford, providing the long-envisaged link between the Avon and the Birmingham canal network. The link was 15 5/8 miles long with 56 locks, 25 of them down from the summit at Lapworth. There were three cast iron aqueducts south of Kingswood: Yarningdale, Wootten Wawen over the Stratford/Birmingham Road and Edstone. Water came from feeder streams until 1821 when reservoirs were built at Earlswood at the summit. Most of the Earlswood supply then had to be pumped into the canal by a beam engine that worked from 1823 to 1936, when it was replaced by electric pumps.

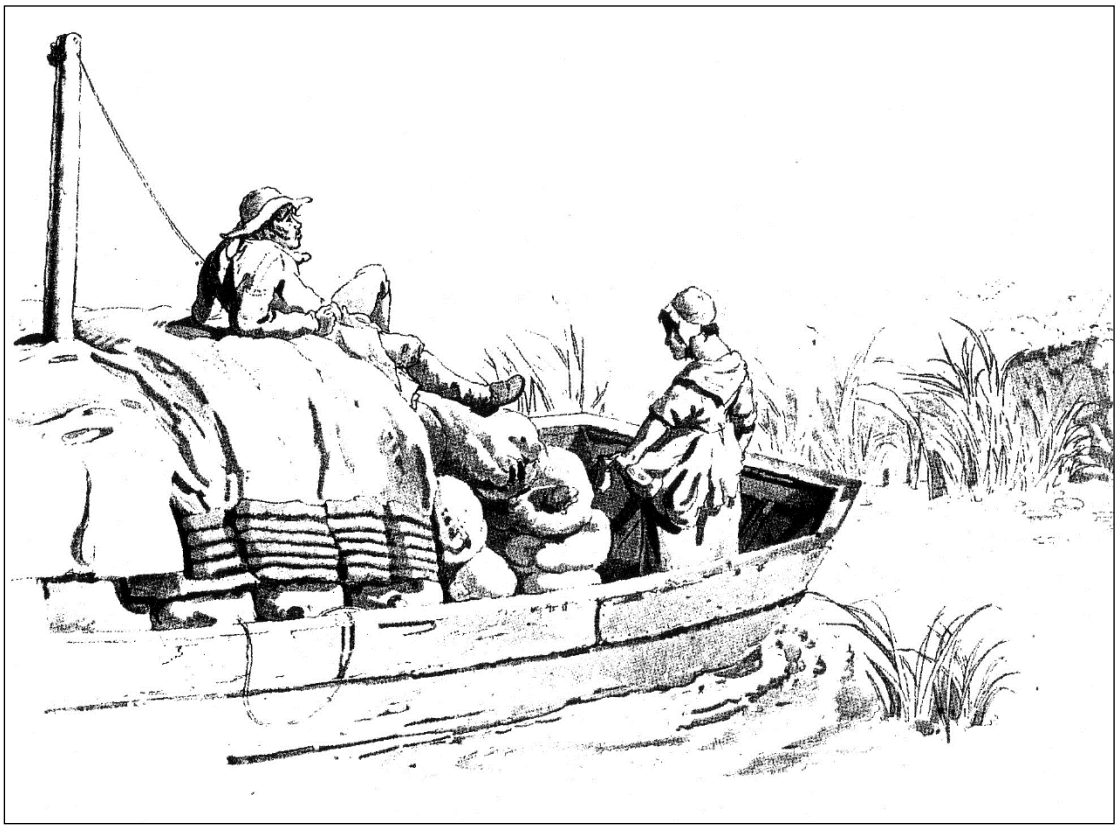


**Illustration of early life on the canals before the boatmen and women developed their own characteristic dress and decoration of their boats. (W H Prynn's *Microcosm*, 1807)**

Before we leave William James, it is worth briefly recounting the rest of his life. Inspired by the potential of his seven miles of rail track, he developed a vision for a fully integrated national transport system – how familiar a ring that still has today.

James was 'the John the Baptist of the railways', wrote L T C Rolt in his introduction to the centenary reprint of James's daughter, Mrs Haines's biography of her father.

> 'At a time when such a conception must have appeared to his contemporaries as fantastic as space travel, James had a clear vision of an England seamed with locomotive railways. Moreover he cried that vision in the wilderness with such fanatical persistence that willy-nilly he conditioned the minds of even the most sceptical Englishmen to accept the *idea* of railways. By doing so he undoubtedly paved the way for the railway revolution even though he played no part in that revolution when it came.'[2]

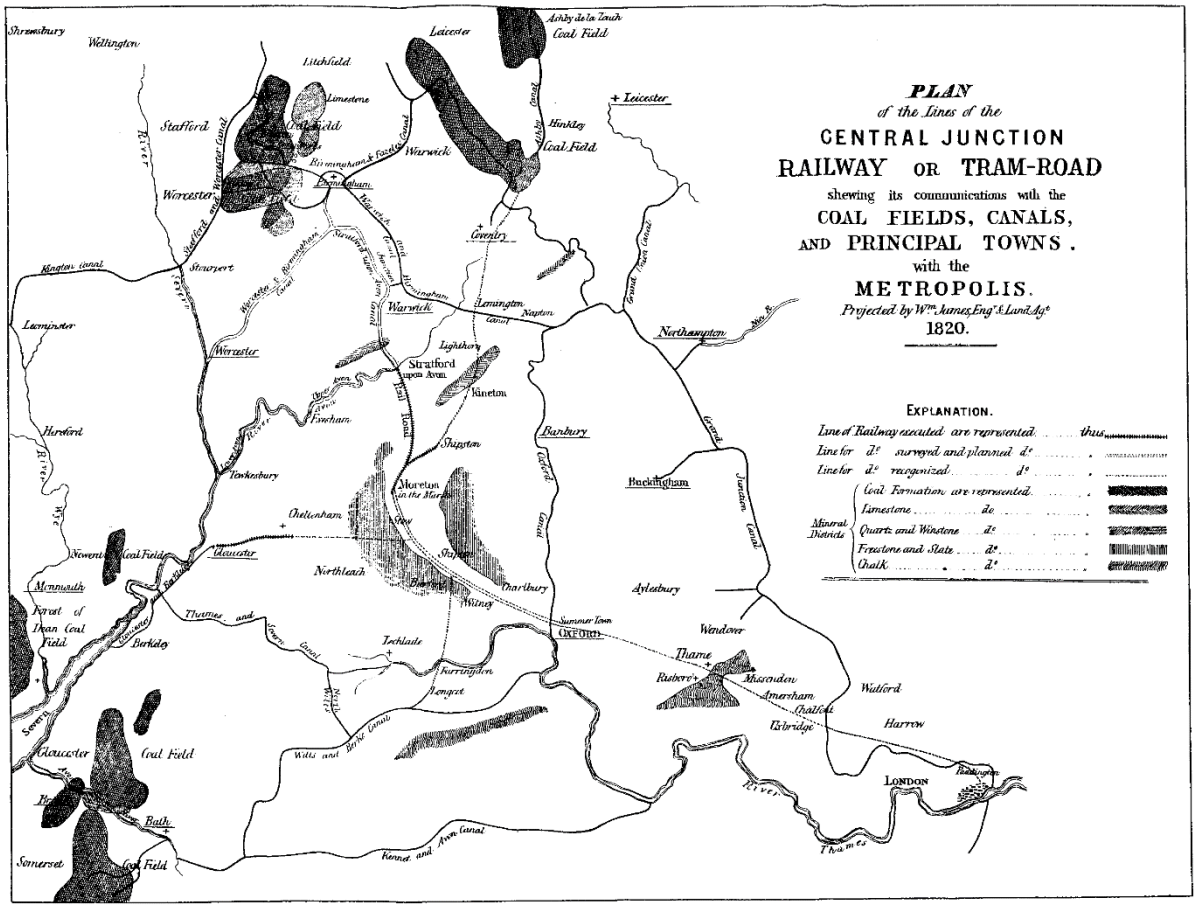
[2] 'E.M.S.P' (Mrs Paine) *The Two James's and the Two Stephensons* (1961 reprint of 1861). Intro by L T C Rolt, p. v.

James had watched a demonstration of Richard Trevithick's steam locomotive as long ago as 1808. Why not, then, a national railway network, on which fast steam locomotives rather than horse drawn trams whisked passengers from city to city, on smooth, wrought iron rails rather than brittle cast iron ones? In 1820, James drew up his 'Plan of the Line of the Central Junction Railway or Tram-Road shewing the Connections with the Coal Fields, Canals and Principal Towns with the Metropolis.' James threw all his considerable energy and equivalent wealth into the promotion of this ambitious scheme, proposing a mainline railway from Stratford to London and going into business with George and Robert Stephenson for this and a dozen other new projects. It was this vision that led his daughter later in the century to write an apologia for the claim for him (rather than Robert Stephenson) as rightful holder of the title of Father of the Railways.

But James had over-reached himself. The full financial implications of the war years only became apparent after 1819, as conversion of paper notes back to cash led to the failure of numerous provincial banks. Mines and foundries lost value overnight and money for investment evaporated. In the event, the closest James would come to achieving an integrated network was a winding, horse-drawn tramline to transfer goods from Stratford to Moreton-in-Marsh and the mainline. The last surviving tram wagon with15 ft of track can be seen today beside the Bancroft Basin in Stratford – essentially a Warwickshire farm cart with railway wheels stuck on! James's reserves of credit collapsed and he was thrown into prison for debt in 1823.

His fellow promoters, not least the Stephensons, exploited the position to their own benefit on their various mutual schemes. James's estate went into receivership and his rights to the Upper Avon Navigation was put up for auction. Virtually ruined and with his family in poor health, soon after his emergence from prison, James retired to the relative seclusion of Bodmin. By the 1830s, after more hard work for local gentry, his luck seemed to have turned and his contribution to the early years of the

railway was being recognised. Widowed, he had married again and started a new




*Plan of the first Railway ever Surveyed in the World*
*Projected and Surveyed at the private expence of the late Wm James Esqr Solr*
*in the Year 1820.*
*Copied from the Original Plan.*

family and his business was picking up when, in 1837, he contracted a serious case

**William James's plan for an integrated transport network, reproduced in *The Two James's and the Two Stephensons* by 'E.M.S.P.' (Mrs Paine), 1866.**

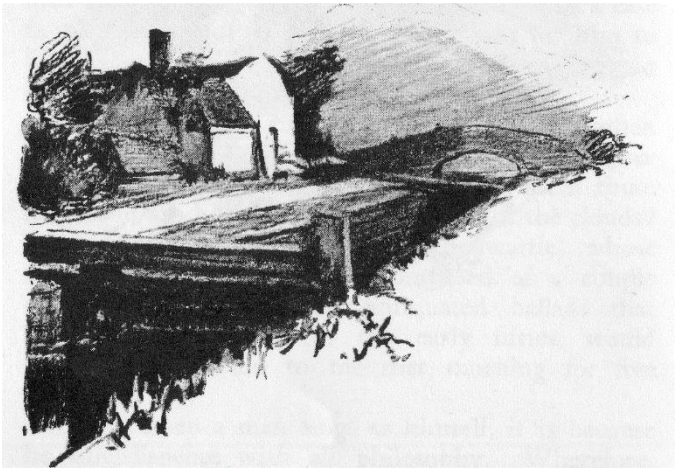
of flu as he hurried home to Bodmin through foul weather to attend the birth of a daughter, and died, aged 66, a few days later. His son, W H James, would make his own contribution to the history of the railways, but the South Stratford canal now stands as chief memorial to James senior, all his more grandiose schemes having come to naught.

The canals, too, were soon overtaken by the railways as the transport of the future. From the years even immediately after the completion of the South Stratford, better roads, greater output, cheaper horse fodder and high canal tolls also made roads more competitive – and they ran door-to-door. The waterways weakened financially almost immediately, losing ground they would never recover. Railways boomed after the success of the Manchester Liverpool line from 1830; the canals maintained their share of traffic initially, but failed to increase it despite the vast increase in goods on the move. From around 1850, the railway companies began buying up the canals. The story was always the same for the smaller canals: canal receipts fell beyond the point where essential maintenance could be justified, the pounds became unnavigable so that remaining traffic could not get through, company meetings were not held and staff were laid off. As each waterway decayed, it became a nuisance and inconvenience to the public authorities delegated to care for it. The South Stratford was no exception.

In 1911, E. Temple Thurston hired a narrowboat called *Flower of Gloster* from Oxford and took a romantic and picaresque canal journey through Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. Even at this date, he found the Stratford Canal a sleepy waterway, but still a beguiling one. The romantic Temple Thurston was depressed and appalled by the approaching squalor of industrial Birmingham as he reached Knowle on the Warwick & Birmingham and was advised by his boatman to turn back to Kingswood and take the link onto the South Stratford. 'I never did a better piece of business', he wrote, 'than when I took Eynsham Harry's advice and turned back to Lapworth.' When he reached Lowsonford (known, he tells us, as Lonesome Ford in earlier times), he finds a world already forgotten, far more than in this age of the car.

> 'You could well spend a summer in the village of Lowson Ford and forget that the world was moving round about you. It is an event, unparalleled almost in excitement, when a barge comes through to Stratford. Then all the little boys and girls rush to the old red-stone bridge to watch it as it passes through the lock. The fat lock-keeper's wife wakes from her long months of somnolence, bestirs herself under the admiring eye of all the children, though she has nothing whatever to do….Oh, Lowson Ford, I can tell you, is wide awake then, when a barge goes through the lock! But the barge goes on its way into the busy world; the smoke of its little chimney from the cabin fire trails round the corner and, blue as it is, melts into the bluer air of the distance. Then Lowson Ford turns on its side once more, and for many a month to come sleeps like a baby in its cradle of hills.'[3]

This description forms quite a contrast with the typical daily scene at Lock 31 today! But Temple Thurston is worth quoting as we follow the story of the South Stratford into the twentieth century, both for the decline he evokes and for his part in the literary genre describing life on the canals, which others were to take up and continue to this day.



**'The cottage at Lowson Ford' in 1911, when *Flower of Gloster* moored alongside.**

[3] Temple Thurston, E. *The Flower of Gloster* (1911, repr. 1968) pp. 140-1.

## The Restoration of the South Stratford canal

> 'Just below the first two locks [outside Stratford] we met an old man mowing the long grass on the banks, and of him I enquired whether any boats ever passed through. He was not only very old, but very deaf also, for I had to repeat my question as he leant on the hand-pin of his scythe and cupped an ear. This time a light of comprehension dawned in his old eye and he nodded in a most encouraging manner, "Oh, ah", he affirmed, "there comes one sometimes", but when I asked how long it was since he had seen the last one he confessed that it was "'bout four years back". He went on to explain how the railway company who owned the canal had killed the traffic by raising the tolls but were forced to maintain it in theoretically navigable order. "If you wants to come along this a-way", he concluded, "they can't stop you, and what's more they be bound to give you the water to see as you do get through, but you'd best come afore the weed be up"…He turned once more to his mowing, handling his scythe with the effortless grace of the countryman born, and we left him, pondering the manifold sins of railway companies, but more than ever determined to make an assault on this canal in the not-so-far distant future.'
>
> - L.T.C. Rolt, *Narrow Boat*, p. 51 (1994 ed.).

The story of the restoration of the Stratford Canal is a tale of admirable obstinacy in the face of bureaucracy, when ordinary people realise they care so much about losing something that they are prepared to do something about it. Even before the war, the Stratford Canal was in a sorry state, locks neglected, silt gathering and a tempting repository for fly tipping.

Already the Cinderella of the transport network, the canal system was marginalized still further when Clement Atlee's government nationalised the railways and canals under the 1947 Transport Act. The canals became a political deadweight, cut adrift from the big regional rail companies that had so far cared for them, at least in theory. The smaller canals, mostly, were left to moulder under this new state ownership. The Stratford Canal was perhaps especially vulnerable: however picturesque, the rise to Birmingham meant a high concentration of locks, slow and tortuous as the twentieth century gathered pace, an outdated mode of transport that seemed to have lost its purpose and had its day. But modern day knights in

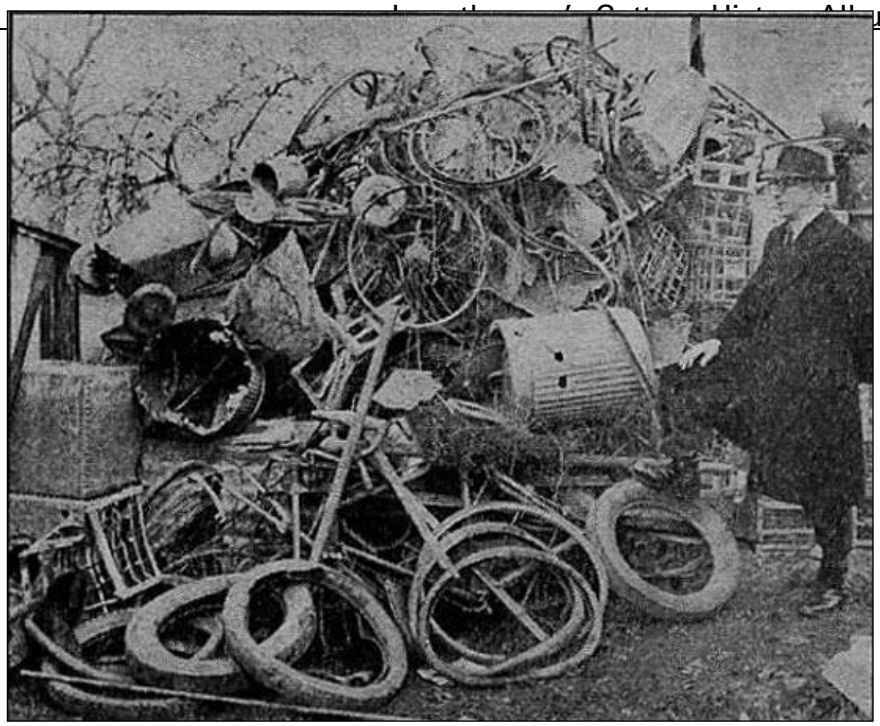
shining armour were about to arrive on the scene, as one of the most important conservation campaigns of the 20th century gathered pace.

L.T.C. Rolt, a motor engineer turned canal enthusiast, historian and author, had published his first book on the canals, *Narrow Boat*, in 1944, which described a 1939-40 cruise along the canals in his boat *Cressy*. In 1947, Rolt decided to test the theoretical right of passage along the Stratford Canal described above at the Tunnel Lane (since often wrongly referred to as the Lifford Lane) drawbridge. This had been impassable for narrowboats for some time because a fixed deck had been installed at a lower level. To enable Rolt to get through (and the for the county council as new guardian to fulfil its legal obligations) the bridge had to be raised by a gang of men with jacks. Rolt was joined by fellow campaigner and writer Robert Aickman on the mission, who described their passage:

> 'We rounded a few more corners and there the crowd was: lining both banks several deep; on roof tops, up trees. A mild sarcastic cheer met our belated advent. The obstruction had been raised by a large gang. *Cressy* passed beneath it, though with clearance of only an inch or two. The applause became a little warmer. We made statements. We posed for photographs. We accepted cups of tea. We proclaimed a great future for the canals of Britain.'

Much valuable publicity was gained and in 1950 a swing bridge put in to replace the drawbridge. Even so, boats still took up to 3 days to complete the 20 km and 19 lock journey through the northern section. By the mid-1950s about 40 boats a year made the passage through the northern section and about ten were kept on it.

The crunch came in 1958. A road bridge at Wilmcote badly needed repair; the most cost effective way to do this, Warwickshire County Council argued, was simply to fill the canal by raising the embankment at that point. On 12th June, the Council applied for a Warrant of Abandonment in relation to the canal, on the grounds that no boat had used it for at least three years. However, they were wrong. Two canoeists – probably the only type of craft still capable of using the waterway – were able to provide licences proving the navigation of the canal within the last three years.



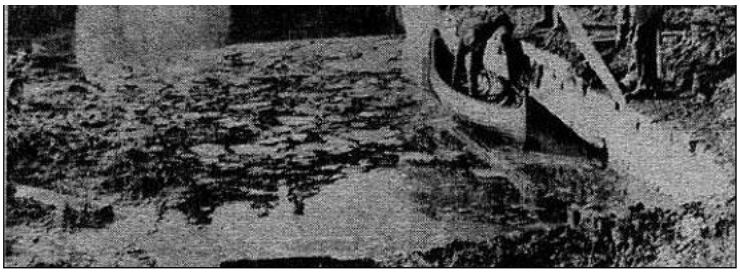
**Articles retrieved from the canal at Yardley Wood in 1957. (SCS)**

**The bridge at Feather Bed Lane at Wilmcote in March 1958, shored up with baulks of timber and passable only to canoeists. It was due to the cost of repairing this bridge that the county council applied for the canal to be abandoned. (SCS)**

There was even photographic evidence of a canoe expedition in 1957 and a protest cruise was made in 1958. A year later, in May 1959, the Warrant was thrown out.

**Two canoes crossing Edstone aqueduct in March 1957. The licence issued for the leading canoe proved the navigation of the canal. Edstone is the longest cast iron aqueduct in England. (SCS)**

**The canoeists were the heroes of the hour, shown here in a newspaper article from May 1957. (SCS)**



Meanwhile, the Bowes Committee was deliberating on the future of the entire network of inland waterways at the behest of the government. Its recommendations were awaited with some trepidation. Landmark's founder, John Smith, had been a subscribing member of the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) since its inception in 1946 to campaign for the survival of the canals. John Smith was also at that time honorary Assistant Treasurer for the National Trust. In January 1958, he wrote to Robert Aickman at the IWA suggesting that the National Trust be persuaded to take on and restore the southern section of the Stratford Canal, at first on a cautious five year lease. 'I am convinced', wrote John Smith, 'that the problem of the canals can only be dealt with at the centre – for example, by building up a pressure group of

Members of both Houses of Parliament.' He suggested meeting and exchanging lists of Parliamentarians likely to be of value to both the IWA and National Trust. Within a month of this initial contact and drawing a parallel with the practice of the then National Land Fund, which bought property and gave it the National Trust to manage as caretaker, John Smith proposed to the IWA that the National Trust might be able to provide an interim solution by looking after unwanted waterways while the internal wrangles within the IWA (for such were occurring) could be resolved and until such time as a national water conservancy or some such body could be constituted to look after the canals in the longer term – exactly the eventual outcome. The Bowes Committee made the recommendation that means should be found to put waterways that were unable to finance themselves through trade (of which the South Stratford was one) back into good working order within five years. They should then be maintained by the state to prescribed standards for the next twenty five years at least so that private investment could be encouraged. British Waterways was founded to look after the commercially viable networks and impetus was added for the National Trust to take medium term responsibility for the others. In 1960 the National Trust took on the South Stratford; thirty two years of guardianship later, it would finally transfer the canal to British Waterways. [4]


**'It costs more to close a Canal than to re-open it'**

[4] The full story may be found in David Bolton's *Race Against Time,* which is in the bookcase.

David Hutchings (1927-2005), a Coventry architect, was employed by the National Trust in 1960 to lead the South Stratford restoration project. Well-wishers and charities contributed £42,000 for the project and David Hutchings' subsequent battles for cash with local authorities became legendary. Lacking manpower for the

huge task ahead, he took the pioneering step of recruiting teams of prisoners from Birmingham's Winson Green Prison as well as the Royal Engineers, TocH, the Boy Scouts and boys from Borstal schools to help with the project. Inland Waterway Association members from other branches also piled in to help.

The restoration project was to become an exemplar for other canal projects, especially for this use of voluntary and 'encouraged' labour. However, the work involved should not be romanticised. As Hutchings described it at the end of the project:

> 'after a few hours of standing up to his waist in cold stinking mud at the bottom of a wind and rain lashed lock chamber with apparently no hope of his ever achieving the somewhat obscure aim of the operation, even a stout-hearted volunteer begins to wonder if he has perhaps made a mistake, particularly as it is not often possible to make adequate arrangements for the drying of clothes and for hot baths.'

**David Hutchings (right) supervising a young 'volunteer' at Lock 54 in heavy rain, late March 1963. Today's Health & Safety Regulations might not be being met!**

'It was our ignorance that got us through', recalled Hutchings. 'Any engineer would have thought it idiotic to try a scheme like this, but we weren't clever enough to understand how difficult is was going to be, so we just blundered on.' Bicycles and

untold tangles of metal were fished from the channels where they had been dumped. Silt was dredged up and, for reasons of economy, often just dumped along the towpath, which is why the towpaths stand so high above the waterline on this stretch of canal. Locks were drained and repaired; leaks were traced and filled.

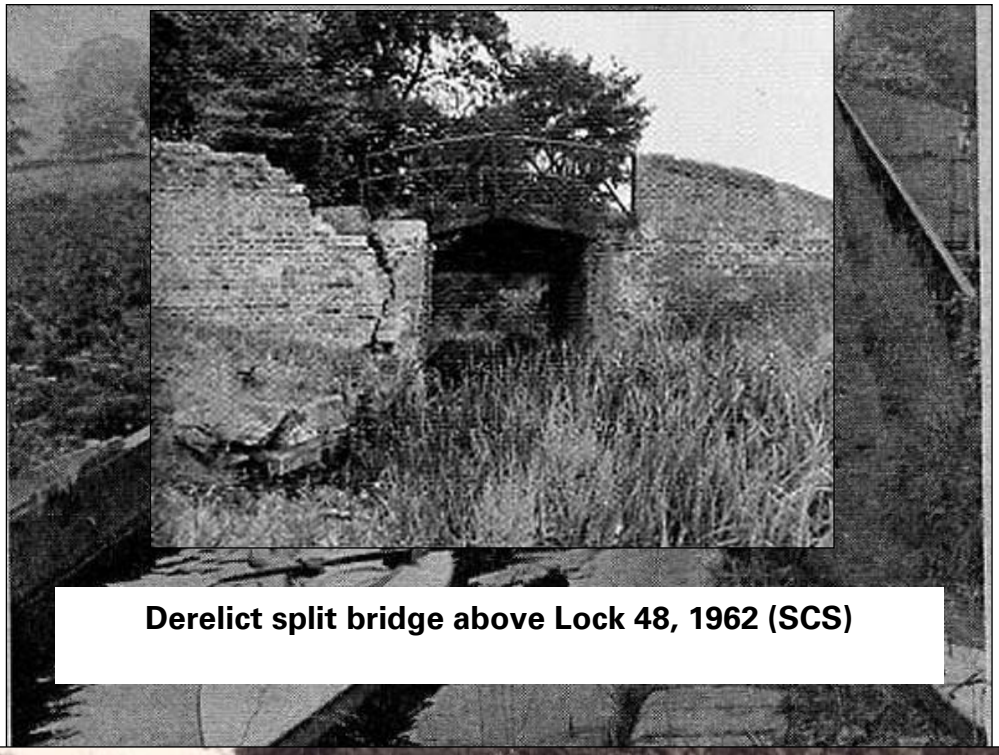
'I want us to reach Stratford before they reach the moon', said John Smith. Just five years after the Warrant for Abandonment was rejected, on 11th July 1964, the southern stretch of the canal was re-opened by HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother to coincide with the celebrations for Shakespeare's Quartercentenary. 'She rose like Cleopatra in her barge as the lock filled', remembers Lady Christian Smith, 'and then went on to the Avon, past the theatre, where all the actors came out onto the balcony. They were playing *Richard II* and the king raised his crown to her.' It was a great celebration - in John Smith's words, 'Not having taken part in the Stratford project was like not having been at Agincourt.' With Stratford-upon-Avon at one end and intimate and picturesque Warwickshire countryside to travel through, the canal quickly became one of the most popular in the country.

When this album was first compiled in October 2006, Britain's canal network was again under threat. Swingeing cuts in British Waterway's funding had been announced by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). It seemed British Waterways would lose some £60 million over the following five years.

.By 2009, British Waterway's budget deficit was £30m and it was receiving only a few grants from charitable sources. In 2012, the Canal & River Trust was formed to replace British Waterways in England and Wales, with the aim of securing a future income through donations, grants and a fixed grant from the government, whilst also expanding the role of volunteering and community engagement. With some 2,000 miles of canals and rivers in its care, the CRT has succeeded in achieving financial stability and in 2015, a Grant Agreement with Defra has given it firm funding until 2027. The future is once again looking rosy for Britain's canals.

(In Scotland, British Waterways continues to operate as a public corporation called Scottish Canals.)

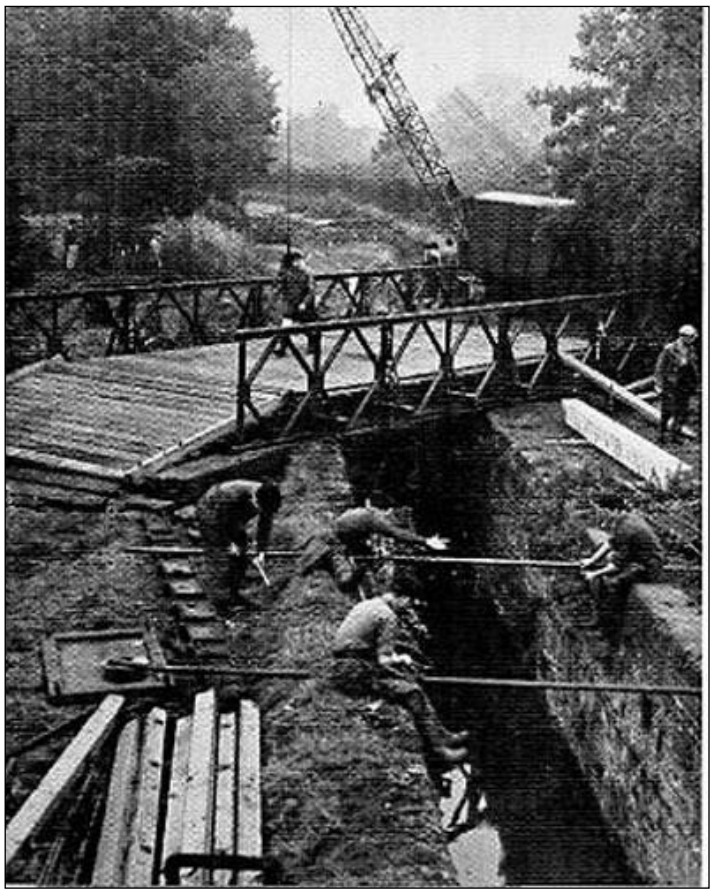
# RESTORATION OF THE STRATFORD CANAL



**Derelict split bridge above Lock 48, 1962 (SCS)**

**Lock 27 before restoration (SCS)**

**Digging out a collapsed culvert at Lock 54, date unknown (SCS).**



**Royal Engineers working on Pound 30-31,1961. (Stratford Canal Society)**

**Dredging at Lapworth in April 1961. Note the mud boards along the towpath. (SCS)**

## The Life and Times of Ned Taylor (1921-2005)

(From notes taken shortly before Ned's 80th birthday in 2001).


**Ned Taylor and his cottage in 2001**

Ned Taylor lived most of his eighty three years in the cottage by the canal at Lowsonford, becoming something of a celebrity and interviewed by television crews and magazine feature writers alike. He was born on 12th December 1921, to be the second of nine children – indeed, his mother suffered three further miscarriages and lost one child drowned in the canal. Such large families were not unusual at the time: a family of fourteen lived at one time in the lock cottage at Finwood.

Ned's father was also born in the cottage (that is as far as oral memory goes, but perhaps the Taylors' connection goes back still further). His father was a farm labourer rather than working on the canal (and Ned himself was only officially lock keeper for three years, until he retired in 1986). It must be remembered that the canal had been in decline since the mid 19th century; as operations gradually wound down, it was not uncommon on any of the canals for each man's 'length' of canal to

grow longer and longer, with intermediate lock cottages being let to agricultural workers like Ned's father or else left to ruin.

Ned's mother, Rose, was a charlady at the farm where his father worked; when they were courting, his father would watch the clock for Rose's arrival and get the other girls to put the kettle on as an excuse for a natter.

The family 'lived on' rabbit, the smell of rabbit stew wafting down the towpath to meet them as they came home from school. Rose Taylor would show the girls how to gut chickens and rabbits on the kitchen table – the boys' job was plucking and skinning. At mealtimes, the parents sat with their backs to the range, the children round the table, for Yorkshire puddings, spotted dick or steamed puddings with jam or syrup to follow. When it was rice pudding, the children argued over who should get the crunchy top.


**Ned reminiscing by the range.**

The laundry was done in the copper (in today's bathroom) and with a large mangle (one of Rose's miscarriages was attributed to using the mangle). The ironing was done with flat irons heated on the range, which Rose always said she preferred to electric. The clothes were dried on the restraining bar across the ceiling or on the fire guard. Once the children were in bed, Ned's father would ask for the clothes to be taken down so he could sit down in more comfort.

The children were bathed in front of the range in an old tub, taking it in turns. The water was brought from the village pump and heated in the old washing copper or on the range – which must all have been quite a performance. The proprieties of modesty were observed by sending Ned and his brother out to play in the fields while the girls bathed. When older, one of Ned's sisters always insisted on washing her hair in rainwater, although another swore by canal water. At bedtime, the children topped and tailed in the double bed. The girls would send the boys to bed first to warm it up – and then put their cold feet on the boys' backs. If it was really cold, they would take the oven plate out of the range and wrap it up or heat a blue brick.

In winter, after a basinful of porridge, they would go sledging on nearby hills. The canal would ice over – Ned remembered the winters as more severe then. They would have competitions to see who could ride their bikes in a straight line over the ice – very difficult until someone suggested letting the tyres down, or even taking them off altogether! The ice had to be broken on the canal to keep it open, by a horse drawn boat which men would rock from side to side. Sometimes, it was so cold that they would return at the end of the day only to find the canal had frozen over again.

Ned called the canal 'the bricks'. Even though he lived beside it for most of his life, he never learnt to swim and the three times he had fallen in were clearly events to be remembered. Death by drowning was a curiously common occurrence among canal folk – but then the cut was not for swimming in.

**'Winters were colder then.' The pound between Locks 54 and 55 in Stratford in March 1963, as the ice began to thaw. (SCS)**

Ned married in due course and 'well', he said, and lived for a while in Beaudesert Road by Henley church ('in the desert', he punned). But the marriage ended and his father had said that there would always be a home for him in the cottage and so he moved back. For Ned, the only thing that is now different about the canal is that the boats are motorised, for he remembered when they were horse drawn. Then, the lock keepers from the six (barrel roofed) cottages would meet at Lowsonford (as the most central) once a week – and then go to the pub. Of course, there was (and still is) a camaraderie of the canals. Once the canal was being used more for leisure purposes, for example, word would spread up the canal when a boat was coming through with a scantily clad girl sunbathing – though Ned was always too shy to go out!

Ned remembered the years of neglect after the canal was separated from railway company care in 1948. It filled with goose grass, with tragic consequences for one 11-year old girl who took it for grass, and drowned when she tried to walk across.

**Lengthsman's Cottage (then known as the Lock House) in 1953 when the canal had passed into state ownership and was in the depths of decline. The adult figure is Ned Taylor's father, Edward. The exterior of the cottage at this date does not appear to be painted, but note the 'eyebrow'. (SCS)**

After a campaign by village shopkeepers, Dennis and Judy Bromelow that he be allowed to stay in the cottage, the advent of the National Trust turned out to be a godsend for Ned as well as the canal, since they refurbished the cottage for him, putting in a proper kitchen in the room in the lean-to hitherto known as the pantry. (The area agent for the National Trust reported at the time 'Mains water and electricity are available nearby but are not connected. Repairs £250, improvement £1,200. Rented by a non-employee, Mrs Taylor, inherited from the BWT.' Unlike some of the other cottages and tenants the Trust inherited, the Taylors continued in peaceable tenancy, and it seems they did more than mere repairs.) As a boy, Ned was told that the fireplace in today's bathroom used to be a bread oven, though he never saw it in action. Ned moved out to a caravan during this refurbishment, coming back amid the scaffolding to cook his Sunday roast on the range.

Ned Taylor was a gentle character who came to personify this stretch of the canal and who spoke of his life with a quiet sense of fun. Places of deep history have a way of generating such people, grounded by the long roots that are so often missing in today's more transient patterns of life. Ned is buried in nearby

Rowington – under a headstone organised by his niece, Mary Fisher, which names him as Ted, a name she prefers. Mary and her husband Roy kept an eye on Ned in his declining years and it was a happy coincidence that they became the cottage's first Landmark housekeeper and gardener.

**Ned leaning on the lock beam, shortly before his eightieth birthday.**

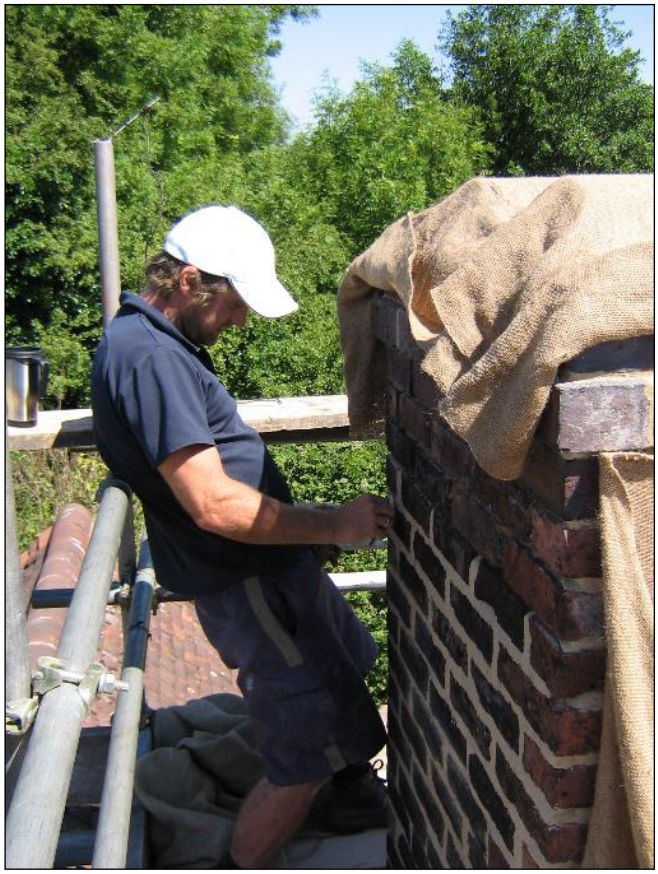
## Landmark's Refurbishment of Lengthsman's Cottage

The cottage had of course been modernised by the National Trust in the early 1960s when they took on the South Stratford canal. It had been kept in good repair during Ned Taylor's lifetime and so needed little more than refurbishment when it became time to let it as a Landmark in 2006. The work was funded by one of our most loyal private donors and carried out by Sapcotes of Birmingham. This was also the last Landmark project overseen as trustee 'client' by Michael Thomas, one of Landmark's longest serving Trustees, who retired from the Board in November 2006. Michael had always been a particular champion of the vernacular, and so it was most appropriate that the opening of Lengthsman's Cottage as a Landmark should coincide with his retirement.

Externally, we found a modern cement render had been applied to the east (rear) elevation. This was stripped off and replaced with a lime render, as the brick work was beginning to suffer.

**The east elevation stripped of modern cement render, and then with re-rendering with lime mortar underway. Use of lime will enable the building to breath and prevent further deterioration of the**

**Rebuilding the unstable chimney stack.**



**Pointing the chimney stack. At the height of summer, as here, lime mortar must be protected by damp hessian to prevent it drying out too quickly and cracking.**

**The cottage has no foundations. It is thought the cottages simply sat on timber floor plates, on a layer of the same puddled clay used to line the canal.**

The eyebrow on the west (front) elevation was redone – a traditional touch. There was considerable debate about whether the cottage would originally have been completely rendered (as we found it, only this rear elevation was rendered). British Waterway's restoration of their barrel-roofed cottage at Kingswood a few years earlier had revealed several coats of limewash beneath render there, and they had decided simply to limewash. Such a finish also seemed more consistent with the economical approach to this stretch of the navigation and some have even suggested that the brick was originally left bare, the limewash applied later as an agricultural rather than aesthetic intervention. Old photos mostly show Lengthsman's Cottage as painted, as indeed it came to us, and this was the route we eventually chose. The pointing was first touched up on all external walls, which were then re-limewashed.

The roof appeared intact and so has been simply recoated with a special sealant paint to protect and unify it. The same paint has been used for the rendered plinth to the cottage. The top of the chimney stack appeared to have shifted as some stage and so it was taken down to roof level and very carefully and skilfully rebuilt. The gutters were all renewed in cast iron. There was concern initially about two significant cracks in the south elevation below the lobby and end bedroom windows. The Morton Partnership (structural engineers) were consulted; they visited and asked for the foundations to be exposed. It turned out there were none - perhaps another example of corners being cut in the original construction phase, yet without affecting durability. The cracks have been 'stitched' with bars inserted into the horizontal joints between the bricks, which is we hope is the end of the matter.

**Position of one of the stitched cracks.**

**Reinstating the 'eyebrow' was a meticulous task.**

**Repairing the bathroom roof.**

The two front buttresses may also have been put in to remedy the lack of foundations. Ned Taylor remembered them as having put in when he was ten (so in the early 1930s). These do have foundations, 'dug waist high', Ned recalled, 'then old rubbish was requested. They used all sorts, including old bikes crushed up.'

The National Trust had rewired the cottage and relined the walls with insulated plasterboard. This finish was kept to help insulate the building and the cottage was again completely rewired, hiding wiring as necessary under the new floors except for a short stretch of plain skirting introduced where the floors are original. In the living room, a single central light was altered to two pendants to light sitting and eating areas. The range is the original. As Ned Taylor remembered, there was originally a door on the left of the range which led through to the kitchen, with steps down into a cellar (though there is no clear evidence for this). The National Trust had blocked the door, creating a new entrance into the kitchen from the entrance lobby and we have kept this arrangement.

We repaired the two front doors, splicing on new bottom sections and kept the modern quarry tiles we found in lobby and kitchen. In the bathroom, panelling was introduced to hide the plumbing and the fireplace was given a simple timber frame. The copper, where Ned remembered the water being boiled for his baths in front of the range, has been kept. Landmark's joiner, Mark Smitten, created the new kitchen, with open shelving to avoid a 'dead' corner in an 'L' shaped kitchen.

Early quarry tiles have been kept in the living room, as have the stone flags in the lobby (it is not clear why this floor was laid in stone, nor if they are original). The floors in the bedrooms are of new Norfolk pammets. An early window overlooking the garden was used as the model for replacing all the modern ones that had been fitted elsewhere. (The living room window on the side elevation is original; the bedroom lobby window is later but was kept as found). They are very simple casements that sit within a rebate in the timber frames (ie there is no frame to the casement itself). Note too that the windows are cleverly positioned to give maximum visibility of the lock. The hinges are simple pintels with blacksmith-made

stays fitted to the exterior cills, with turnbuckles to match the living room window. Several of the windows have new cill boards as well.

It seems the sleeping area was originally a single space – simple accommodation indeed. Ned's nieces told us that it was the National Trust that had both divided the sleeping area into two and inserted the windows into the bedrooms (they also told us how they would turn somersaults over the tie beams!). We moved the partition a short distance to make the first bedroom slightly bigger, and fitted swan neck lights were fitted on either side of the partition. The purpose of the low level grill backing onto the fireplace in the first bedroom is not clear – it may have been a ventilation grill for an earlier fireplace in this bedroom as the chimney stack has two flues

Michael Thomas as client was keen to retain the gloss paint finish that we found on all the joinery and on the wall around the range. He felt it was appropriate for a working man's cottage, being easy to keep clean. So we have kept Ned's dark green colour scheme. The off-white casements and dark green frames to the windows also replicate what we found when we took the cottage back. All the internal doors and ironmongery are as we inherited.

In the garden, some old sheds were removed and Landmark's landscaping team cleared several trees. New fencing and metal railings were put up, painted black on the canal side to match the downpipes and gutters. Tonnes of hardcore brought in to create the car parking area within the garden as it was too low and needed to be raised to allow easier access on/off the road. A new stone path was put in from the parking area to the towpath.

This length of canal is now cared for by British Waterways rather than the lengthsman at Lock 31. In Landmark's care, his cottage's future is also assured and we hope will introduce new generations to the delight on life 'on the bricks' as well as persuading them of canals' importance as a feature in our national landscape.

**2nd November 2006: a picnic on a narrowboat trip to celebrate the opening of Lengthsman's Cottage. Clockwise from left: Roger Eaton, Trustee Michael Thomas, Landmark's Director Peter Pearce, Furnishings Manager John Evetts, Bruce Hall, Sonia Rolt, Judy Thomas.**

**The narrowboat arrives at Lock 31.**

## LENGTHSMAN'S COTTAGE BILBLIOGRAPHY


| | |
|---|---|
| Billingham, Nick | 'William James: the man who killed the canals' in *Canal & Riverboat*, April 2004. |
| Bolton, David | *Race Against Time* (1990) |
| Davies, Jamie (1996) | *Shakespeare's Avon: The History of a Navigation* |
| 'E.M.S.P' (Mrs Paine) | *The Two James's and the Two Stephensons* (1961 reprint). |
| Hadfield, Charles | *Hadfield's British Canals* (1994 ed) |
| Johnson, Guy | *Save the Stratford Canal!* (1983) |
| Kempway, John | *In the Wake of the 'Flower of Gloster'* (2004) |
| Lansdell, Avril 1975) | *The Clothes of the Cut* (British Waterways Board, |
| Paget-Tomlinson, E, | *Illustrated History of Canal And River Navigations* (1993) |
| Rolt, L.T.C. | *Narrow Boat* (1994 ed) |
| Squires, Roger W. | *Canals Revived* (1979) |
| Temple Thurston, E. | *The Flower of Gloster* (1911, repr. 1968) |

## LAND
## An installation by Antony Gormley in celebration of Landmark's 50th anniversary

In 2015, Lengthsman's Cottage is one of five Landmark sites chosen by artist Antony Gormley for an installation called LAND, a collaboration with Landmark in its 50th anniversary year. From May 2015 to May 2016, five different representations of a human figure in cast iron are placed to represent the four compass points - Saddell Bay, Martello Tower, Clavell Tower and SW Point on Lundy, with Lengthsman's Cottage as the fifth, anchoring the whole installation near the centre of Britain, this quiet site on a manmade waterway in marked but complementary contrast with the wide horizons of sea and cliffs at the other four sites.

The Lengthsman's Cottage work is called STAY. It was specially created for the site using 3D body scanning techniques, produced in an edition of 5 plus artist's proof.

Landmark's role as Exhibitor of the works was funded by three very generous Landmark supporters who wanted to support this high profile initiative to celebrate Landmark's work across Britain. The Canal & River Trust contributed to the installation costs at Lengthsman's Cottage as part of their Arts on the Waterways programme and also helped with the installation works. The cost of fabrication of the five works was funded by the White Cube Gallery, who will sell them on behalf of the artist at the end of the installation year.

Landmark also received a development grant from Arts Council England for scoping and developing this public art work in celebration of our 50th anniversary.

**STAY by Anthony Gormley beside the Lowsonford lock on the day of its installation, 23rd April 2015. It will remain at the site until May 2016.**

## LAND – Artist's Statement Antony Gormley

The prospect of making five works for five very distinct locations around the British Isles, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of The Landmark Trust, was an intriguing one. I am always interested in how a work might affect a given environment and possibly add a dimension, a point of focus in a landscape or room. The challenge posed by the Trust's invitation was not simply to offer some form of decoration for the range of historical layers that their buildings embody. The Trust saves buildings that would otherwise disappear and allows us to live within their history. Many of these buildings are detached from their original context of use and social matrix, and are sometimes remote. Some of these buildings were built as follies and towers, made to stand apart, using their isolation as a point of punctuation in the landscape, making a landmark or a point from which to look out at the world at large. This isolation promotes thinking about human history and power relations, and wonder at the very variety of habitats that the human species has created for itself. This being in the world but not exactly of it, through distance in time or isolation in space, is precisely the position that I aspire to occupy in my work. A certain distance is necessary in order for sculpture to encourage or evoke contemplation. It was important to find sites in which the work would not simply become an unnecessary addition, but where it could be a catalyst and take on a richer or deeper engagement with the site.

Each of the five works made for this commission tries to identify a human space in space at large. Where do we live primarily? We live in a body. The body is enclosed by a skin, which is our first limit. Then there is clothing, that intimate architecture of the body that protects us from the inclemency of the weather. But beyond a set of clothes are fixed shelters. We live in a set of rooms. A room coheres into a building and buildings cohere into villages, towns and cities. But, finally, the limit of our bodies is the perceptual limit of the horizon, the edge of a world that moves with us.

In searching for positions to site the five body-form sculptures, I have looked for locations that are not simply conventional places for sculpture (the grotto, the glade, the lawn, the niche or on the axis of an avenues of trees). I have found the most potent places to be where the horizon is clearly visible, and that has often meant the coast. So, I have been drawn to places where the vertical nature of the sculpture can act against the relatively constant horizon of the sea: the promontory on Saddell Beach near Saddell Castle in Argyll; Clavell Tower, the folly on the South Dorset coast; the promontory above Devil's Leap, Lundy; and the Martello tower near Aldeburgh in Suffolk. The work is a register for our experience of our own relative positions in space and time, which has led me to choose positions on the edge; the liminal state of the shoreline.

Of course, all of this relates to our identity. The buildings of The Landmark Trust are detached from their original social function and, mostly, from the city. I think that they connect with the characteristics and psychology of the British as an island people. The British Isles are set somewhat adrift from the great Eurasian continent, with our various associations with the Norse and Scandinavian countries, the Baltic and indeed our friends across the Atlantic. Despite being very aware of our own insularity and separation from the rest of the world, the trading relationships with distant lands - that relationship with the sea, with self and other, with home and the world - has led to water: our identity as an island nation is moulded by our relationship with the sea.

I have selected four coastal sites that are countered by the siting of a fifth body-form that will look down at the water in the lock next to Lengthsman's Cottage in Warwickshire, in the centre of England. The towers and defensive sites on the coastline are here, inland, parried by a state of intimate, domestic exploitation of water as a containable means of transport. I have tried to associate all five works with both their social contexts and the geology of site, using the language of architecture and geology, while acknowledging the skin as a 'weathered edge'.

The challenge was to make every work distinct, to allow its verticality to be a focus, as a kind of rod or conductor for thoughts and feelings that might arise at a site. They are not representations. They are simply displacements, identifying the place where a particular human body once stood and anyone could stand. In that respect they are open spaces, void of ideological or narrative content but waiting for your attention. The works are made of iron: the material that gives this planet its magnetic field, its density, something that maintains it in its particular course through the heavens. Although these works are temporary placements, I would like them to act as catalysts for a reflexive engagement with site: both body and space. In the context of The Landmark Trust's 50th anniversary, it is an occasion to think and feel the nature of our species, its history and future, and its relationship to the huge biodiversity of living beings that exist on the surface of this extraordinary blue planet.