

Bridge 72 takes Meadow Lane into Little Haywood where boaters stabled their horses at the pub.

Shugborough Carriage Bridge is unnumbered because it was built later by the Anson Family for carriage access from Shugborough Hall (now National Trust) to go to Church. Being more recent it is of a totally different design and has metal sides. A second bridge used to continue across the River Trent.

Bridge 73 is beside **Haywood Lock** (with a 4' 2" rise) and the **Lock House** (now a restaurant). It is a high humped bridge the width of a horse and cart and leads to the famous narrow Essex Packhorse Bridge and Shugborough Hall. Along the main road there used to be a forge for making horses' shoes.

Haywood Junction has a **roving bridge** which meant that horses towing boats up and down 'The T. & M.' could cross over the 'Staffs. & Worcester.', or they could go round on a turnover bridge (like Colton) to go on to the tow path for 'The Staffs. & Worcester' without the need to unhitch the horse. When standing on the bridge it is worth noticing that the two bridge sides/parapets are of different styles – one being the 'T. & M.' bridge design and the other

belongs to the 'Staffs. & Worcester.' Company's design! This bridge also acts as a 'winding hole'.

Acknowledgements.

Ref. 1 Historic Waterway Scenes, The Trent & Mersey by Peter Lead.

Ref. 2 'James Brindley – The First Canal Builder' by Nick Corble.

Ref. 3 Many mileposts have been replaced by the original foundry.

Ref. 4 'Waterways World' July 2005 – Brindley's Bank & Colton Mill by Tom Foxon.

Text and research by Julie Thorn, additional information, David and Dorothy Bradbury.

Editors Gill Sykes/Gay Lawrence.

"The Local Heritage Initiative is a national grant scheme that helps local groups to investigate, explain and care for their local landscape, landmarks, traditions and culture. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) provides the grant but the scheme is a partnership, administered by the Countryside Agency with additional funding from Nationwide Building Society".



Reproduction of this publication in whole or part without the prior approval of the Society is strictly forbidden. Copyright Colton History Society 2006.

Colton History Society

The Canal in Colton



Colton milepost (after the aqueduct)

In the mid 1700's the desperate need to transport large quantities of coal cheaply and manufactured goods like pottery safely - where horses and carts could not cope on the appalling roads of England - resulted in rich landowners and factory owners (such as Josiah Wedgwood at Stoke-on-Trent and the brewers at Burton-on-Trent) forming companies to build, run and profit by canal transportation. There was a meeting at Wolseley Bridge, Stafford, on 30th December 1765 to discuss the building of such a canal. (*Ref. 1*)

'The Trent & Mersey Canal' (frequently called 'The T. & M.') is 93 miles in length and goes from Preston Brook (Runcorn – near Liverpool) to Shardlow (near Derby). Having been responsible for surveying and engineering 'The Duke of Bridgewater's Canal' James Brindley was appointed surveyor for 'The T. & M.'. The Acts of Parliament to build both 'The Trent & Mersey' and 'The Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canals' were passed on the 14th May 1766. After various problems 'The T. & M.' was finally completed in 1777. During those 11 years 600 men worked very hard building it with picks, spades and barrows. Sadly James Brindley died in 1772. (*Ref. 2*)

In 1795 there were 211 boats registered on the 'T. & M.' to nine companies. Elizabeth Marsh of Colton had one boat and is both the only local person mentioned and the only woman listed. (*Ref. 1*). Much of the canal looks the same now as when it was built. This early canal followed the contours

of the land, as far as possible, to save on locks and tunnels and therefore tended to be longer. The later gradient canals went the shortest route with more locks and tunnels to save costs on journey times. Cast iron mileposts show the distance to the two ends of the canal. (Ref.3)

There are many different types of bridges crossing the canal and over the course of time a lot have had to undergo repair, but some still look the same as when they were first built. Those which have been built since were usually to carry the railway or a new main road over the canal and lack the high 'hump' of the early bridges.

The original bridges were built by a team of 'brickies' – as distinct from the men who actually dug the canal who were known as 'navigators' which was shortened to 'navvies'. Most 'T. & M.' bridges were similar in design with a wooden arch being placed on the ground and the bricks being mortared in rows across. It was gradually built up to form the bridge, with ramps on either side made from the earth. Once the wooden former had been removed the 'bridge hole' was dug out for the actual canal. The rest of the earth made banks or was moved by

horse and cart to where banks were needed.

Between Rugeley and the Great Haywood Junction with 'The Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal' (often called 'The Staffs. & Worcester.') there are examples of most sorts of bridges and other canal features found on the 'Trent & Mersey'.

Leaving Rugeley (towards The Haywoods) at the bend by the 'Bloody Steps' there was a **wharf for coal-boats** to unload for the Brindley Bank Pumping Station which pumps water from a bore-hole to a reservoir.

In a plan of 1816 there was a '**flint wharf**' on the opposite side (Ref. 4) where flint carrying boats were unloaded from the canal on to river boats to go to the nearby **Colton Mill**, which was on the site of the Trent Valley Industrial Estate.



Canal aqueduct over the River Trent.

There is an **aqueduct** over the River Trent with the tow path on one side of the canal and the public footpath on the other side.

The next bridge is **Bridge 68** and is **Colton turn-over bridge**, where the tow path changes side and so the horse which was towing went up the ramp, over the bridge and down the ramp (on the **same** side of the bridge as the boat), so that the rope did not have to be unhitched from the loaded narrow boat, and then the horse went **under** the bridge to continue towing along the tow path, now on the opposite side of the canal – hence the name 'turn over bridge'. It is also a foot bridge for the '**Staffordshire Way**' footpath, between Colton and Wolsley Bridge, and an accommodation bridge for the farmer.



Colton Turn-over Bridge.

Just beyond this bridge is a '**winding hole**' (pronounced 'wind' as

blows, not a clock key turning) where boats up to 72' (23 metres) could be turned by using the wind and a long pole. There is another winding hole at Haywood Junction.

Wharf Cottage was built in about 1778 as a canal worker's cottage, but its original wharf purpose is unknown. Opposite on the tow path is a storm **water sluice** to a field ditch, which prevents this section of the canal flooding.

Bridge 69 is **Taft Bridge** which is an **accommodation bridge** and was built for the sole use of the local farmer to take a horse and cart or live-stock into his fields.

Bridge 70 has been replaced with a very wide new bridge to carry the main road (the A51) at **Wolsley Bridge**. (There is also a large road bridge over the River Trent. In the 1700s an earlier bridge was washed away by the flood waters of the Trent.) It was along this stretch in July 1839 that the murder of Mrs. Christina Collins took place and her body was removed two days later at the steps in Rugeley – since called 'The Bloody Steps'.

Bridge 71 is another accommodation bridge and is located beside **Colwich Lock.**"