SECTION 6

How was the Canal used?

Activity 2
Activity 2: The following sources may all be found on the website. They represent just a few of the examples of how the canal was used by the local population throughout two centuries. They also show how the presence of the canal helped to grow a variety of trades and crafts as well as serve various industries.

The children can:

• Use the extracts to indicate different historical times and sequence them.

• Understand historical situations, events and people.

• Find reasons for the need for the trades and uses that are indicated by each source.

• Find out how people thought in previous times.

• Begin to find reasons for the decline of the canal.

• Labeling and captioning pictures.

• Start an investigation from raising their own questions.

• Children can also survey their stretch of the canal as it appears now and compare their surveys with the evidence from the past.
Framilode Lock – two views

Trow at Stonehouse Wharf and Early etching of Brimscombe Port

Class at Brimscombe Polytechnic and Barge ‘Alert’ unloading coal at Brimscombe Mills c 1905
Whilst researching my family history I discovered that Alfred Southwood was my Great Uncle. I knew vaguely that he had some connection with Coates, as I can remember my Father saying that his father had taken him to see his Uncle Alfred who lived by the canal at Coates, when he was a child. I often wonder how they got there from Wotton-under-Edge as there would have been no direct transport. My father was born in 1898 so this visit would have been sometime in the early 1900’s.

Siddington was 10 miles further up the canal from Coates and the lengthman at Coates looked after this stretch. Sometime after the 1901 census Alfred and his family must have moved to the Round House at Coates.

In May 1995, before I had looked at the census, I set off to Coates to see if I could discover anything else about Alfred and his family and was lucky enough to meet a lady who was out delivering parish magazines. Her name was Mrs. Wheatley. Something prompted me to ask if she knew anyone called Southwood in the village. To my surprise she replied” old Mr. Southwood, yes I remember him well, he lived at the Round House on the canal when I was a child and would come up every evening with a yoke over his shoulders carrying two pails to collect drinking water from our cottage. He would come across the canal on a plank.” Mrs Wheatley went on the tell me that Mr. Southwood was a tall goodlooking man and that he had two daughters, the elder of whom had gone away to service in London and married a Mr. Russell. They had returned to the village during the War. After delivering her magazine, she returned to tell me more. She said that old Mr Southwood had a beautiful garden down at the Round House and that his soninlaw Mr. Russell played the piano, as a result of which many pleasant social evenings were to be had down there. Unfortunately on one of these occasions, Mr. Russell had had a fall probably because he had a bit too much to drink and had broken his back. His motherinlaw had moved him when she shouldn’t have done and after that he was confined to a wheelchair. When Mr. Southwood died in 1933 the family moved to a council house in the village where Mr. Russell was still an entertaining character and Mrs. Southwood had lived to be over 90. Mrs. Wheatley’s next door neighbour who used to visit her, had only died the previous year.

On a very hot day that summer, I visited the Whitley’s again and they pointed me in the direction of Mr. Smith who kept the church records. He provided me with information on the family deaths.

I would be interested to know if anyone had access to a photograph of Alfred perhaps in a collection of old pictures of personnel on the canal.
Alfred had been buried in Coates churchyard on the 4th August 1933 and his younger daughter Ellen Amelia had died unmarried aged 31 in 1921. Florence Emily had died in 1969 aged 82 and her husband William Russell had died in 1969 aged 76. All were buried in the churchyard at Coates, but not surprisingly, old Mrs. Southwood. Unfortunately there were no descendants. Mr. Smith was also able to enlighten me about Great Uncle Alfred’s sister Anna Maria Southwood who had married Charles Hitchings, then an under shepherd at Tartton, the next village.

My great uncle’s job as lengthman was particularly important, as he had to keep an eye on the water levels along the 10 mile length of the canal to Siddington. If the levels fell he had to drop planks specially fitted with narrow ends and iron handles into the appropriate slots across the narrowest part of the canal, and lift them out again if the water levels were too high. There was a place for the boats to wait in a sidecreek as only one could go along at a time. He worked on an eight hour shift system. I understand that the Round House closed in 1956.

I would be interested to know if anyone had access to a photograph of Alfred perhaps in a collection of old pictures of personnel on the canal.

Norah Barnes, (nee Southwood) October 2003. 20 Old Town, Wotton under Edge, Glos. GL12 7DH Email norahbarnes @waitrose. com
1939-1944

Daphne Hinman

Between the Clement Atlee’s peace and the outbreak of war my father brought our 40 foot yacht from Portishead up to the Junction of the Stroudwater Canal. As he edged the boat (Ulula) slowly into the canal there was a noise like a violin, it was the forestay stretching the main telephone wire link!!

He backed away and Ulula spent the war moored there by Davis’s yard, and I worked as a volunteer in the City General Hospital kitchen.

The First Air Raid alarm we were told to go into the Bridgeman's House (Mr Holder) and sit on the floor in a passage way. Old Mrs Holder (a nervous lady) was going round with a cushion on her head. ‘OH! Mrs Hinman I had a cushion for you, where did I put it?’

While living there my father formed a civil defence unit, 6 men, 1 rifle of the First War, 1 rifle, German, First War and several pieces of wood in the shape of a rifle and they marched up and down the boat yard!

My father (Charles Hinman) lived on the boat during the freeze up and managed to keep some warmth by a small coal fired stove. His office was in Gloucester Docks. His job was to organize all the petrol barges to bring petrol from Avonmouth to the midlands (That was before there was a pipe line.).

In those days there were a few small barges that still traded up to Stroud, one was the River King. They belonged to the Butt family of Dunstalls Farm. My Father called them Butts Navy !!!

The Boatyard

RW Davis & Son boatyard is still in existence, but not run by Bob, who retired some time ago. I believe he took it over from his father, and was following in the tradition of boatbuilding in Saul and Framilode, either on the banks of the Severn, or the G and B.

There was Frederick Evans of Saul, who in 1878 contracted to build for the Company a replacement boat for workmen to do repairs on the Stroudwater Canal and deliver over to COPS furnished and fit for use in all respects by Nov. 30th for £70. The contract had been made at the end of August.
Richard Owen Cambridge

This area has not produced any persons of fame or notoriety. I am open to be corrected! The only person mentioned in history books, well, literature anyway, is Richard Owen Cambridge, of Whitminster House. You realise I am concerned only with people after the coming of the Stroudwater canal. He was a minor eighteenth century poet and essayist, and succeeded to the estate in 1725. His importance to our story is that he built the first canal in the area by straightening the River Frome or Stroudwater through his grounds from the Severn to the Bristol Road. He set about reconstructing his house, and developing the surrounding land into the picturesque, which was the fashion of the day. A wharf was made near the house for unloading building materials. The adjacent church of St. Andrew of which he was churchwarden was also looked after by him, to quote 'A loftie Tower rears its tremendous height'. One of his other pastimes was naval architecture, and he designed and had built a Venetian barge, and a double-hulled boat, (i.e. 2 keels side by side) which we would call a catamaran. In 1750 Frederick, Prince of Wales was brought to see these wonders and was very impressed.

Richard Owen Cambridge
1778
Painted by Ozias Humphrey
(1742-1810)
Extracts from Eric Blackman’s memoirs of the Air Sea rescue unit based at Saul Junction during World War 2.

We were told to find our way via Gloucester Docks to Saul Junction on the Sharpness Ship Canal. Our kit was loaded on a lorry, which was to meet us there. We were to report to the bridge keeper. We made the voyage without mishap, found the bridge and keeper. He was attended by PC Blick the local bobby. The constable told Owen and me that he would be taking us to our billets and he strongly advised us (as the sergeants) to choose Mrs Honey at Springfield for ourselves. We took his advice and were taken to the little cottage and were welcomed by a rosy-faced countrywoman of about 60. The dining room had a table laid ready with Severn salmon salad, apple pie and cheese. Afterwards in our bedroom Owen said ‘This can't last'. But it did, the whole time I was there until I was posted to Calshot and Ferry Pool.

College Boat House

Our first task at Saul was to take over the little college boathouse situated at the Junction. Tools, workbenches and heavy equipment fitted into the boathouse while the upstairs rooms turned into an office and crew-room. Our parent unit was at Stoke Orchard and they sent all our requests for equipment to RAF Quedgely. We had never experienced such prompt attention to our stores requisition forms before. We were told to reclaim a short reach of the Stroudwater canal and make it ready to receive a number of HSLs for storage afloat. There was a swing bridge which had been let down in its cill and not opened for years.

Sledgehammers, axes, mattocks, crowbars, pickaxes and wheelbarrows arrived in quantity from Quedgely. Soon the canal looked quite navigable. The time was spring 1943. The Air Sea Rescue Service was now firmly established in many new bases around our coasts.

Soon we were likely to run out of mooring space on the canal and eyes were turned to the pound above the grounded swing bridge. Taking advantage of the mechanical bent of some of our U/T Fitters Marine we set them to work freeing the bridge and getting it into the swing again. The bridge opened easily to cheering onlookers and the consternation of the local bread van driver who suddenly appeared round a nearby bend in the lane. Hitherto much of our labours were viewed with indulgent amusement by the locals, especially all those who worked on the cut. The swing bridge episode marked a change of view and all concerned appeared more co-operative.

We had already enjoyed a good deal of hospitality from the scattered residents of Saul. Invitations to tea, supper and drinks from far flung outposts like Frampton, Framilode and Arlingham. Jolly summer tennis parties with the family of the Vicar of a nearby parish, I remember with pleasure. For the full article go to:

www.junctionheritage.org.uk

For the full article go to : www.junctionheritage.org.uk/page_id__124_path__0p2p51p.aspx