

LINFORD WHARF AND THE NEWPORT PAGNELL CANAL

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The Newport Pagnell Canal was 1¼ miles long, with seven locks. It opened in January 1817, linking the town to the Grand Junction Canal at Great Linford, where a wharf, basin and warehouse had previously been the nearest point of contact with the canal system. The principal traffic on the canal was coal from the East Midlands: other goods carried included stone, manure, bricks, grain, timber, malt, oil cake, salt and coal tar. While the canal never generated the level of income anticipated by its proprietors, it made a modest profit. In 1864, following the rise of the railways and proposals for a line from Wolverton to Newport Pagnell and beyond, the canal company sold most of the canal route to the promoters of the railway. The canal was closed in September 1864 and much of its route was used for the railway, which survived until 1964, when it fell victim to the Beeching axe.

This article traces the origins and history of the Newport Canal, with a particular focus on Great Linford Wharf, its buildings and inhabitants. It also describes the canal route and its surviving elements today (2019).

ORIGINS

Proposals for the construction of the Grand Junction Canal (GJC) from London to Braunston in the late 18th century prompted several communities not directly served by it to request the construction of branch canals. Among these communities was Newport Pagnell, whose citizens approached the Grand Junction committee in 1793 to propose construction of a branch linking the town to the GJC main line. An initial survey was undertaken by engineer James Barnes: based on this, the committee decided not to proceed. A second approach was made in 1802, with the same result. At the time, the Grand Junction committee was short of funds. Furthermore, the water supply for the branch would have come from the long pound from Fenny Stratford to Wolverton, which had just been opened and was itself suffering from water shortage. The committee concluded that Newport would be adequately served by provision of a wharf at Great Linford, the nearest road access to the canal.

However, the desire for a branch canal persisted in Newport Pagnell. In January 1813 a meeting was held in the town at the Swan Inn, 'to consider the making of a branch canal from the Grand Junction at Great Linford to the town of Newport Pagnell

under the powers and provisions of the Grand Junction Canal Act'¹. The meeting was chaired by William Praed of Tyringham Hall, a London banker and chairman of the GJC committee. The merits of constructing either a branch canal or a railway from Great Linford were discussed and a committee was set up to pursue the railway proposal, but the idea was dropped soon afterwards. Once again, the branch canal proposal was turned down by the GJC committee.

Following these setbacks, the citizens of Newport decided to promote the connection themselves². At a second public meeting on 20 August 1813, chaired by the local Member of Parliament, it was decided to apply for an Act to construct the canal³. A subscription list was opened and £7,825 was immediately offered. Local lawyer George Cooch was appointed clerk and solicitor. The promoters proposed to continue the canal to Olney or Bedford, creating a link between the Grand Junction and the Great Ouse and forming a major east-west waterway between the Midlands and East Anglia.

The canal route was surveyed by Benjamin Bevan, an engineer from Leighton Buzzard working for the Grand Junction Canal. He estimated that the section from Great Linford to Newport would cost £12,650 to construct. Bevan's

plans were approved at a meeting on 9 November, when a 2½% call on shares was made to meet the expenses. There was little opposition to the bill, though the GJC, which had agreed to supply water free of charge, imposed conditions to protect its own waterway in times of shortage. The Newport Pagnell Canal Act⁴ received the Royal Assent in June 1814. Sixty-eight promoters, incorporated as “The Company of Proprietors of the Newport Pagnell Canal” were named, with power to raise £13,000 in shares of £100, £50 or £25 and a further £7,000 if necessary. The company seal (Fig. 1) shows Newport Pagnell Church and the Iron Bridge (built in 1810), with a horse pulling a narrowboat and the inscription ‘NEWPORT PAGNELL CANAL COMPANY MDCCCXIV’ with the motto ‘EN NOVUS UNDIQUE PORTUS’, which translates approximately as ‘Come now from everywhere to the new harbour’. ‘Novus’ and ‘portus’ are most likely a play on the name ‘Newport’. Tonnage rates were fixed at a maximum of 6d (2½p) per ton for manure, 1s 6d (7½p) for coal and coke, and 2s 6d (12½p) for all other goods. The canal to Newport may have been short but the Act was not, consisting of 100 clauses, many of which were themselves long. Among them was a clause prohibiting bathing in the canal, offenders being subject to a fine of 40s (£2), or one month’s imprisonment⁵.

The new company advertised for tenders for the construction work at the end of November, specifying the canal was to be built to the same specifications as the GJC Northampton branch, then under construction⁶. The canal was to be 1¼ miles long, with seven locks. The contract was awarded in December: work probably started in early 1815. In May 1816 the GJC gave permission for the connection to be made with its waterway. It was anticipated that construction would be completed on 2 December 1816⁷, but the opening was postponed until January 1817⁸, possibly because of frosty weather.

No details have been found of any opening ceremony, as was common for most transport enterprises at that time. However, the *Northampton Mercury* carried the following announcement on New Year’s Day 1817:

‘Newport Pagnell and Great Linford Wharfs, To be Lett, And entered upon in February next,



FIGURE 1 Newport Pagnell Canal Company seal

‘The well known and extensive WHARF at GREAT LINFORD, on the Grand Junction Canal; consisting of excellent and convenient Warehouses, Cokehouse, Limehouse, and Kiln, &c, &c; together with a private wharf in Newport Pagnell, which will be completed without Delay, according to a Plan now to be seen; and the Tenant may in the mean Time be accommodated with a part of the public Wharf now fitted up with a counting House, weighing Engine, &c.

‘The above Wharfs are particularly recommended to the Attention of Merchants, Traders, or others, who are desirous of undertaking a large and extensive Concern; as united they form a very superior Situation for carrying on the Business of a General Merchant, and must necessarily command the principal coal Trade in that populous and extensive District.

‘For Particulars, apply to Mr. COOCH, Jun. Clerk to the Company. The canal from the Grand Junction to Newport Pagnell is now open for Trade.’

HISTORY

Despite the above announcement, it is clear that in the early years of the canal, things did not always run smoothly. On 2 March 1822, the following notice⁹ appeared in the *Northampton Mercury*:

‘GREAT LINFORD WHARF’

‘Thomas Taylor, resident at Linford Wharf House, respectfully informs his friends and the Public that he has taken the above Wharf of the Newport Canal Company, and intends entering upon it on Lady Day next [25 March], humbly soliciting their countenance and support, assuring them that the utmost care and attention shall be paid to all goods consigned to him, which will be expeditiously forwarded to Newport, Olney, Bedford and other adjacent places.’

‘As the present lessees of Linford Wharf, whose term expires on Lady Day next, have thought proper to shut it up until that time, J. Taylor will thankfully receive goods on his own premises, adjoining the canal, from this period to the above time, after which time the wharf will be re-opened, with all the former accommodations. Those persons who may be pleased to favour him with their trust and confidence, may depend on every exertion being made by him to give the most perfect satisfaction.’

‘P.S. A constant supply of coals, cokes, bricks, lime, etc.’

This notice and the previous announcement show that the wharf at Great Linford and its operation were leased, rather than being operated directly by the canal company, and that this arrangement was not without its problems. Apart from this item, research for this article has revealed that, following its opening, there appear to have been few noteworthy events in the life of the Newport Pagnell Canal. On the whole, the canal was moderately successful, paying regular dividends to its propri-

etors for most of its existence, though like many similar enterprises it failed to produce the large profits promised by its promoters. In December 1819, an initial dividend of £1.5% was paid (Fig. 2A); thereafter, payments were generally made in June and December of each year. In 1845, the dividend peaked at 5.5%, but in other years, when traffic was bad or maintenance costs were heavy, the shareholders received nothing. Payments averaged £2.7% a year¹⁰.

The principal traffic on the canal was coal (Fig. 2B), mostly brought from collieries in Derbyshire and Leicestershire via the Leicester Union and Grand Union canals to supply Newport Pagnell and surrounding towns and villages. In 1819, 7,212 tons of coal passed along the canal. Tonnage rose to a peak of 11,725 in 1845, when there was a large traffic into Bedfordshire. However, it dropped off following the opening of the Bletchley to Bedford railway in November 1846, slumping to an all-time low of 3,669 tons in 1850. After that, tonnages gradually recovered until closure, though not quite reaching the peak of the 1840s.

Other traffic carried by the canal included stone, manure, bricks, grain, timber, malt, oil cake, salt and coal tar, a by-product of Newport Pagnell gasworks. For 1819 the tonnage of ‘other goods’ was 9,899. It reached a peak of 14,887 tons in 1845, but dropped as low as 5,205 tons in 1850¹¹. The average was 10,160 tons per annum.

In 1819, annual toll revenue (Fig. 2C) was £434; in 1845 it peaked at £728, but dropped the following year when the toll on coal was reduced from 1s (5p) to 9d (3.75p) following pressure from the GJC Company¹². The average annual toll revenue was £425.

Rental income from the company’s wharves at Great Linford and Newport Pagnell produced a steady income, peaking in 1823 at £280. Thereafter it remained fairly constant until the 1850s, when it declined as tenants could not be found so readily. Throughout the life of the canal it averaged £185 per annum.

By the mid-19th century, the writing was on the wall for many small branch canals, as well as some of the larger, less successful waterways, owing to the increasing popularity of railways. In the Newport Pagnell area, the opening in 1838 of Stephenson’s London to Birmingham Railway had transformed the village of Wolverton into a modern industrial town: unsurprisingly,

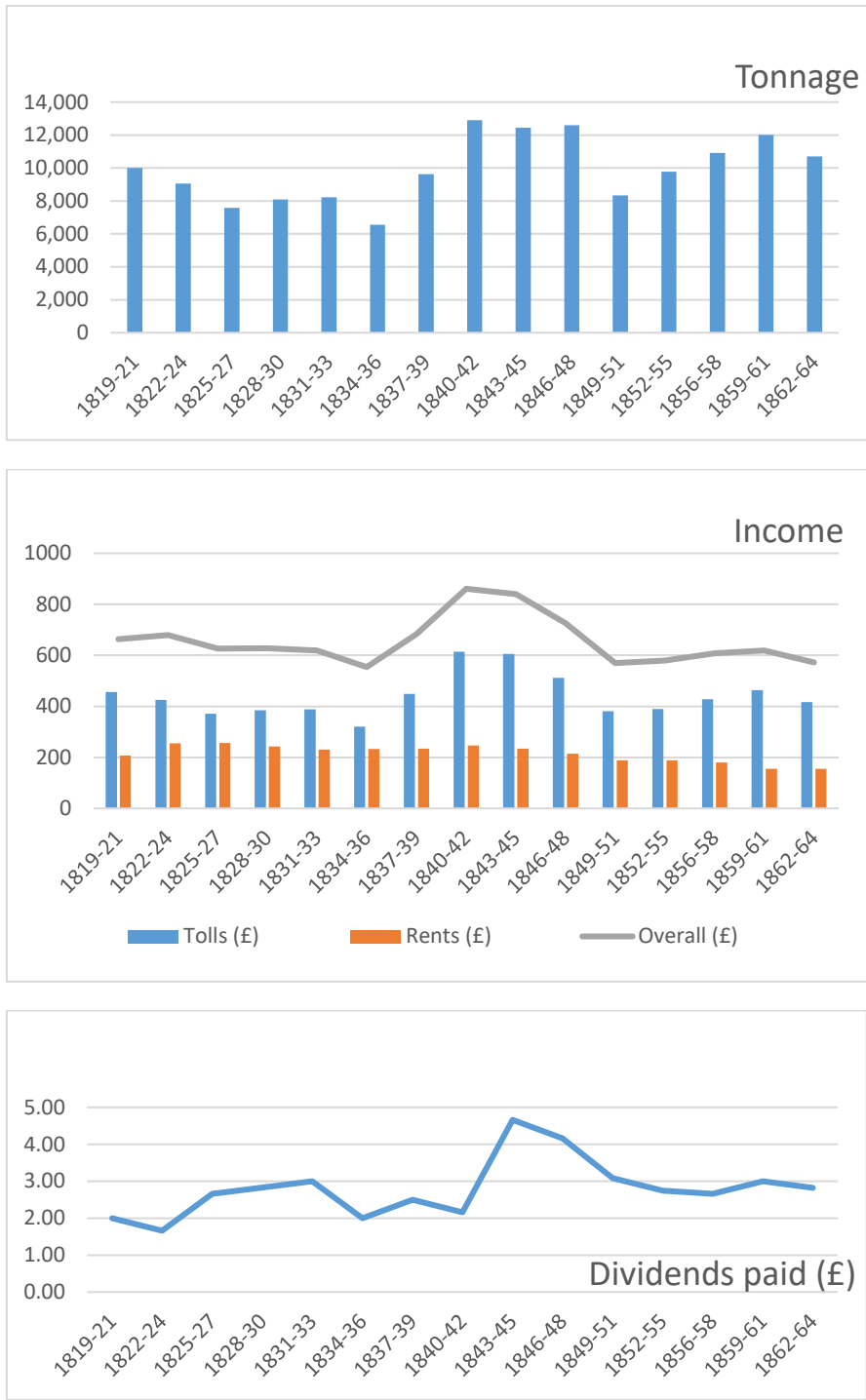


FIGURE 2 Performance graphs: Tonnage, Income and Dividends

tradesmen and others in Newport Pagnell determined to share in this prosperity. In late 1845, a railway was proposed from Wolverton, passing through Newport Pagnell to join the Bletchley to Bedford line, then under construction, near Ridgmont. Robert Stephenson had suggested that the Newport Pagnell Canal could be used for part of the route: the canal company offered to sell out for the issued share capital of £14,230¹³. A provisional agreement to buy the canal for £10,000 was reached in February 1846 and in March the canal company petitioned Parliament in support of the railway enabling Bill. The GJC Company vehemently opposed the transfer of ownership. Because of this opposition and also a general hardening of opinion in Parliament against arrangements between canal and railway companies, the proposal was withdrawn in May 1846.

However, that was not the end of the matter. In late 1862, a railway was proposed from Wolverton to Newport Pagnell, with possible extensions to Olney and Wellingborough. Once again, part of the route of the canal between Great Linford and Newport Pagnell was to be used. The canal company was still keen to sell: in December¹⁴, their asking price of £9,000 was agreed. A contract was drawn up with the proposed Newport Pagnell Railway Company and approved by the canal shareholders at a special meeting in April 1863. These proposals were opposed by the Grand Junction Company, along with some local merchants who used the canal, without success. In June 1863 an Act¹⁵ was passed authorising the closing of the canal and the building of the railway. The canal was closed after 8 September 1864: the railway took over the section from Lock 3 to the basin at Newport Pagnell, paying the canal company £9000 for it. On 26 September a closing-down sale was held at Linford Wharf, when the company sold equipment not taken over by the railway. After settling expenses, a sum of £8,730 remained. This was distributed to the shareholders at a rate of £61.35 for each £100 share¹⁶.

At the final shareholders' meeting on 24 October 1864 a special vote of thanks was given to the company's clerk and solicitor, George Cooch, for his work in winding up the company's affairs and for his services. He was also given a gratuity. Cooch had served the company throughout its existence – over forty-eight years – on a part-time basis, for which he had received a small salary.

The company's only other employee, toll clerk and lock keeper Henry Martyr¹⁷, had served for over twenty-five years. He was awarded a £10 gratuity.

The Newport Pagnell Railway was opened on 2 September 1867. With the opening of the line, the railway company no longer required the wharf and associated buildings at Linford. These were sold by auction at the Swan Hotel, Newport Pagnell, on 28th August 1867 (Fig. 3). There were seven lots, including the wharf, the basin and warehouse, the inn, the lock cottage and garden and other adjoining plots of land (Fig. 3). All the lots were purchased by Revd William Uthwatt of Maids Moreton for £1400: a deposit of £140 was paid at the sale. A boundary dispute between Revd Uthwatt and the railway company arose subsequently regarding the wharf: this was eventually settled in Chan-

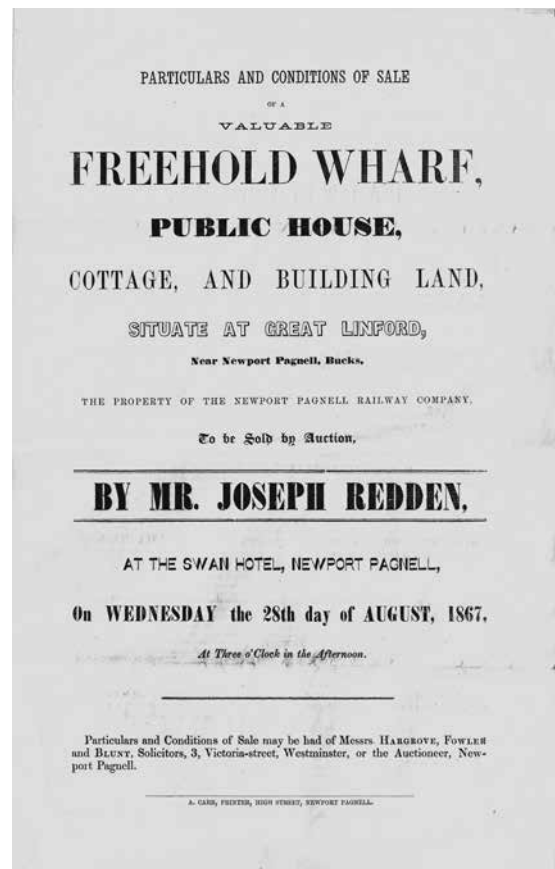


FIGURE 3 Bill from 1867 sale

cery in November 1868, at which time the sale was completed. Revd Uthwatt was related to the Uthwatt family who owned the manor of Great Linford at that time¹⁸.

Although the branch canal to Newport Pagnell had closed, it appears that the basin remained in use for some time after. A photograph, variously dated 1880 or 1910 (Fig. 4) shows Thomas Clayton's wide boat *Chess* moored in the basin, probably waiting to load a cargo of coal tar from the Newport Pagnell gasworks. It is evident that not much trade was passing through the warehouse at the time: the boatman's wife has her washing on a line across the warehouse entrance. The towpath bridge spanning the entrance to the basin appears on other contemporary photographs (Fig. 5). It is uncertain when the basin was filled in and the bridge removed. The inn appears to have ceased to trade in the mid-1930s, becoming a private house.

The Newport Pagnell Railway was operated from the start by the London & North-Western

Railway (L&NWR), but it was never a financial success. An extension from Newport to Olney and Wellingborough was authorised by Acts of 1865 and 1867. Although some earthworks were started along the route and a bridge was built to carry the line over Wolverton Road in Newport Pagnell, the project was abandoned owing to lack of finance and the line was sold to the L&NWR. The branch officially closed on 5 September 1964¹⁹, almost exactly 100 years after the canal.

By the 1950s, the wharf and warehouse was occupied by W.J. Cooper & Co. of Newport Pagnell, who used the site for the manufacture and repair of agricultural equipment. The basin was infilled and covered by a concrete slab supporting a large, single-storey engineering building. Cooper's works subsequently expanded to the area north of the wharf, where the 19th-century *Wharf House* and its outbuildings were demolished and a large concrete-framed, open-fronted shed was constructed. At this time the wharf area

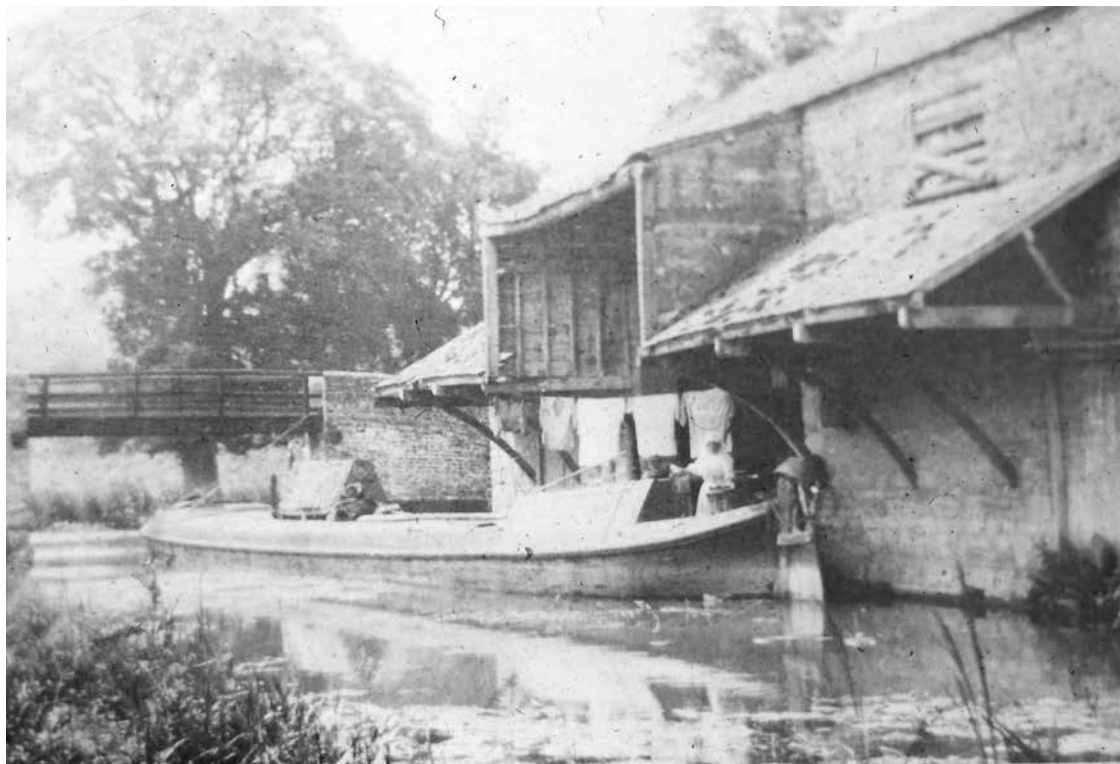


FIGURE 4 The warehouse and basin, c.1910



FIGURE 5 The towpath bridge and warehouse from the south, c.1890

acquired the unofficial epithet ‘Cooper’s Wharf’. W.J. Cooper & Co. vacated the site in the 1990s: the warehouse was subsequently refurbished and converted for residential use and a terrace of new houses was built on the north end of the wharf, following a watching brief and historic building recording²⁰. The northern part of Cooper’s premises had been cleared and redeveloped for housing a year earlier: it was also subjected to an archaeological watching brief, which proved negative²¹.

THE ROUTE

The Newport Pagnell Canal, 1¼ miles (c.2km) in length, branched off the Grand Junction Canal to the north of Great Linford village, close to the point where the road northwards from the village crossed the canal. On the north (towpath) side of the Grand Junction, a cut passed beneath a stone and timber hump-backed towpath bridge into a

basin c.10 x 50m, at right angles to the main canal. Opposite the entrance to the basin was a winding hole, for manoeuvring narrowboats in and out of the narrow opening. On the west side of the basin was a canal warehouse and wharf (Fig. 6). On the east side, a lane linked the towpaths of the main and branch canals and also provided access to the *Old Wharf Inn*, which faced the main canal. It is likely that the inn, the warehouse and the basin were constructed following the opening of the Grand Junction, pre-dating the branch canal.

At the north end of the basin was the entrance lock to the Newport Pagnell Canal (Fig. 7), the first of seven narrow locks along its route, each with a fall of about 7’ (2.14m). On the south side of the lock was the cottage of the toll clerk and lock keeper: to the east of the lock was a bridge linking the aforementioned lane to the towpath on the north side of the branch canal. From here, the canal ran eastwards for c.100m to Lock 2, which had an

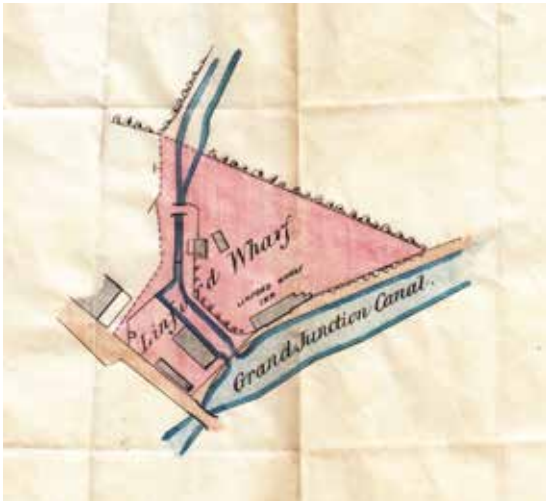


FIGURE 6 Linford Wharf, 1860: title plan included with the Uthwatt documents

occupation bridge to the east. After a further 100m the canal swung to the north for about 100m then turned north-eastwards, meeting Lock 3 and its accompanying occupation bridge. This is the point is where the later railway route joined the canal alignment. From Bridge 3, the canal followed a more-or less straight course for c.650m to Lock 4, and c.400m to Lock 5. At this point later railway route diverged eastwards, leaving the canal following a straight course to Locks 6 and 7, each about 100m apart. It then curved eastwards and southwards along the southern boundary of a large property known as *The Lodge* before reaching the terminal basin at Newport Pagnell.

The basin measured c.80 x 20m, aligned SW-NE, with two narrower docks extending from its north-east end (Fig. 8). Wharves on the western

FIGURE 7 The canal route, plotted on the Ordnance Survey First Edition 6" sheet of 1886

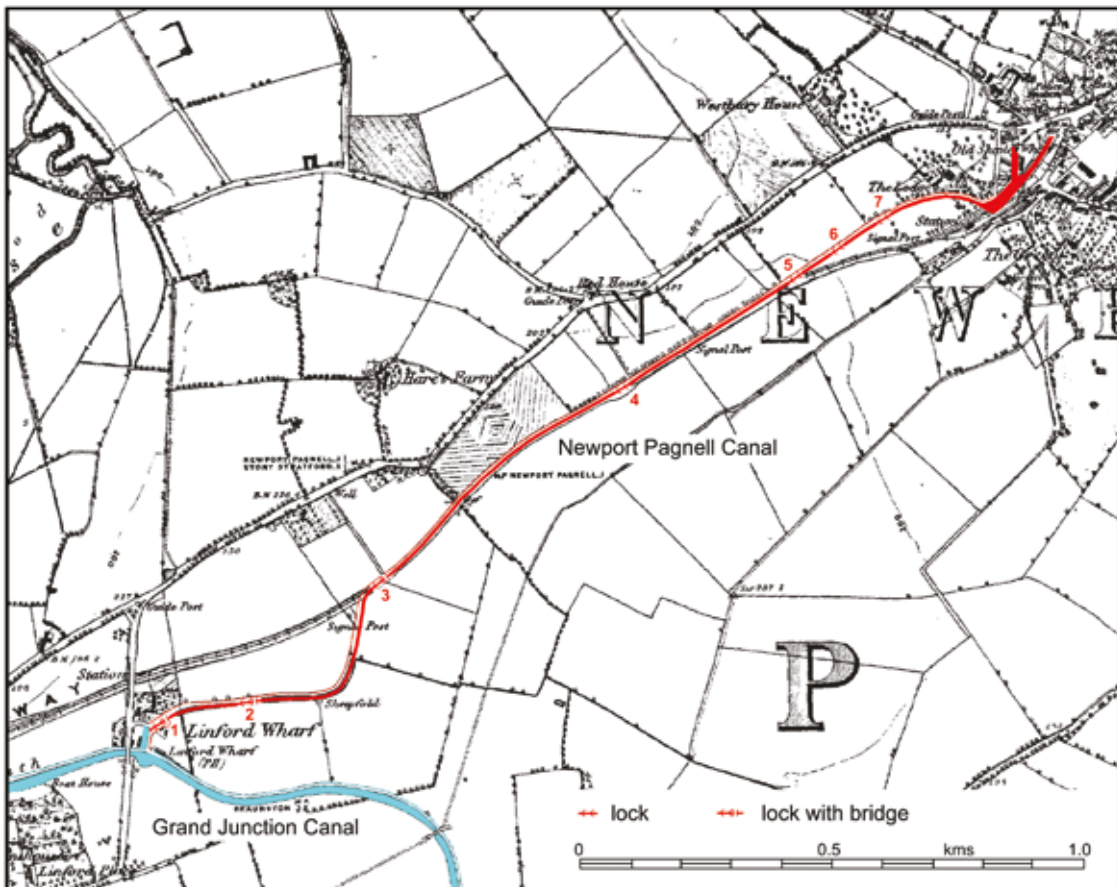


FIGURE 6 Linford Wharf, 1860: title plan included with the Uthwatt documents

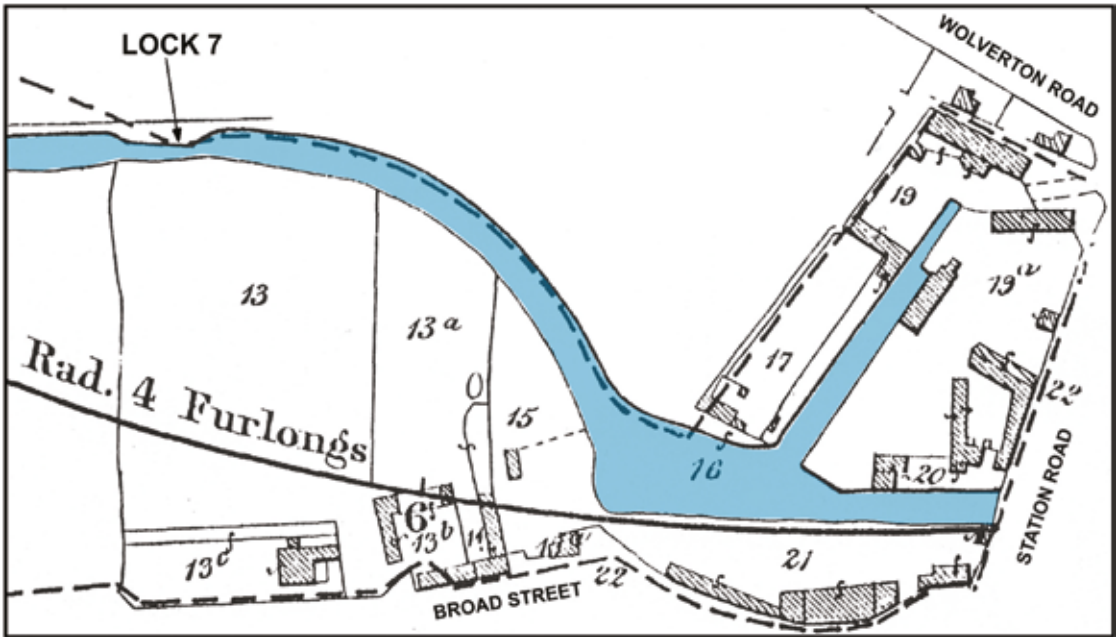


FIGURE 8 Newport terminal basin and wharves, shown on the deposited plans for the Newport Pagnell Railway, 1862



FIGURE 9 The wharfinger's house at Hives' Wharf, Newport Pagnell



FIGURE 10 The entrance to Shipley Wharf from Station Road, c.1960s? The warehouses on the left belonged to Green & Co. and stood on Broad Street, on the south side of the canal basin

arm were used by coal merchant Gervase Smith Hives and the corn and coal merchant's business of the Price family (Fig. 9)²². The eastern arm was known as *Shipley Wharf*, after the high-quality coal which was brought in by canal from Shipley, Derbyshire. On its south side was a brewery (latterly warehouses) built in the 1840s by Green & Co (Fig. 10). When the canal closed, most of these concerns continued to operate: the canal basins were infilled and railway sidings were laid over them.

GREAT LINFORD WHARF

General

The canal warehouse, lock-keeper's cottage and inn formed the nucleus of a hamlet which grew up around the wharf at Great Linford, some distance from the village proper, separated from it by the sweep of Linford Manor grounds. In addition to the three canal-related buildings, late 19th and early 20th-century maps show the development of a

large house (*Wharf House*) and outbuildings to the north of the wharf, a row of cottages north of the entrance lock and a detached cottage and outbuildings (now *Canal Cottage*) to the west of the wharf. Following the opening of the railway, with Great Linford Station to the north of the canal settlement, the hamlet was further extended by construction of the stationmaster's house to the south of the station and a row of brick cottages, *Station Terrace*, to the north.

The Warehouse

The canal warehouse (Figs 11 & 12) is a two-storey building measuring 20.6 × 8.3m overall, and c.8.2m in height. It has a gable-ended pitched roof with a pitch of c.30 degrees, clad with corrugated sheeting²³, with skylights to east and west. The external walls are constructed of local limestone rubble walling, with repairs and alterations in brick. The central parts of the east and west elevations are also constructed in modern stock bricks. Overall, the appearance of the building is similar



FIGURE 11 The warehouse at Great Linford seen from the canal bridge, 2002



FIGURE 12 The warehouse at Great Linford from the north, 2002

to many local stone-built threshing barns of 17th or 18th-century date, with large central doorways to east and west, though it has been much altered, with the addition of various windows and doors. Historic photographs (e.g. Fig. 4) reveal that the eastern door, which faced the canal basin, was sheltered by a distinctive projecting timber-framed canopy, timber-clad and slate-roofed, with a raised central section over a loading bay probably open to eaves height.

Internally, the building was originally divided into three bays, each c.6.0m in length. The central bay, where much of the cargo handling was done, was open to the roof. To the north and south of this were bays each having an upper floor, where there was presumably storage, office space and probably also some accommodation for the wharfinger and his family. It was evident that the building had been much altered internally and little beyond the basic structure survived.

The roof structure comprised four purlins running the length of the building, with rafters above. In the north and south rooms the purlins were supported by two kingpost trusses with diagonal braces, of a type commonly found in 19th-century buildings. In the central bay the purlins were supported only by the internal full-height walls. At eaves height, a substantial timber spanned the bay nearly parallel to the east wall, with vertical braces rising to the purlin above. It is thought that this beam could have supported some sort of internal hoist or crane.

That the warehouse contained accommodation is shown by the Census, which lists the 'Wharf Warehouse' as a dwelling in 1851 and 1861. In both cases the occupants are the Hitching family. In 1851, William Hitching, 'Porter at Wharf' is listed along with his wife Mary and five children. In the 1861 Census, William's eldest son James, then aged 30, is resident at the warehouse with his wife Alice and two sons. James is described as 'wharfinger'. The Hitching family also appear (as 'Hitchin') on the 1841 Census for Great Linford. Although this lists only names and occupations, William's occupation is shown as 'Book-keeper', which may indicate that he was then in the same job.

After 1861, the warehouse ceases to appear as a dwelling in the Census. However, James Hitching and his family appear in the 1871 Census, living in 'Wharf Yard', which appears to have been the name given to the row of small cottages north

of the basin. James is still described as 'wharfinger'; along with his wife and five children, he is sharing the cottage with his sister-in-law and her two daughters. By 1881 James had died: Alice Hitching is listed at 'Wharf Cottage' (this property has not been identified: most property names in the Census for Linford Wharf change frequently) with her five children. After James's death the post of wharfinger does not appear to have continued at Linford Wharf.

Lock Keeper's Cottage

The lock-keeper's cottage, now *6 The Wharf*, is a small dwelling with a footprint of 5.5 x 7.4m, rising to 4.7m at the eaves and 6.2m at the ridge. It is constructed of orange-red brick laid in Flemish bond with lime mortar. At first-floor level, a raised band of bricks, three bricks deep, is present on all four walls. The roof is slated, with east and west-facing gables, each having a central brick chimney stack, both with a single pot remaining in situ. Added to the west end of the historic structure is a modern, flat-roofed, single-storey, brick-built extension with a footprint measuring 2.70 x 3.95m.

The cottage is set into the bank which formed the south side of the branch canal entrance lock, hence only its upper storey is visible from the north (Fig. 13). On its south side, the cottage is visible to its full height (Fig. 14). Both elevations have a central door, flanked by windows, all of which are modern UPVC double-glazed casements, set in openings with bonded arch lintels and stone sills. To the south, one of the original window openings has been enlarged and fitted with a modern, three-sided UPVC bay window with a flat roof. The east elevation has a small UPVC casement window at ground-floor level, possibly a later insertion as there is no evidence of a segmental or bonded brick lintel. The west elevation has no openings.

Approaching the cottage from the south, the ground-floor entrance leads into an L-shaped hall, from which all of the rooms are accessed (Fig. 15). Floors all appear to be the original quarry tiles. On the north side of the hall is a row of three brick-walled alcoves, each fitted with doors as storage cupboards. The ceiling above this part of the ground floor consists of brick vaulting, carried on three substantial north-south timber joists supported by the alcove walls. On the east side of the hall is the living room, with a chimney breast with a painted brick fire surround with



FIGURE 13 The lock-keeper's cottage, north elevation, 2018



FIGURE 14 The lock-keeper's cottage, south elevation, 2018

modern grate and small tiled hearth front, above which the chimney breast is clad with vertical match-boarding. The doorway between hall and living room appears to have been enlarged. At the west end of the hall, a steep stairway in the north-west corner leads to the upper floor. Opposite is a small kitchen. Between, a doorway leads to the modern extension, which contains shower room and WC.

Upstairs, the cottage is divided into four rooms. A landing extends from the top of the stairs in the north-west corner to a small lobby inside the north-facing external door. The remaining space comprises three bedrooms. The largest, in the south-west corner, has a chimney breast with a plain, painted timber mantel containing a wide, cast-iron surround with Rococo detailing, probably c.1820–40²⁴. From the proximity of the partition separating the other two bedrooms to the chimney breast against the east wall, it seems likely that these bedrooms were originally a single room. Here, the fireplace has been removed and the opening blocked up.

About 5 metres south of the cottage is a single-storey brick outbuilding, under a slate roof. The building has two rooms, each with its own external entrance. The northern room has two east-facing 6-light timber casement windows, painted brick walls, a brick chimney stack with open fireplace and mantel shelf, and appears to have been a workshop of some kind. The southern room has wide double doors, no windows and rough, unpainted brick walls. It seems likely that it was some sort of store, possibly for fuel, tools or maybe a tradesman's hand-cart. Cartographic evidence suggests that this outbuilding was probably built at the end of the 19th century, replacing a larger structure on a different alignment, probably contemporary with the cottage.

Unfortunately no record has come to light of the earliest occupants of the lock-keeper's cottage. The earliest extant record is provided by the first Census of 1841, which identifies the occupants of the lock cottage as Henry Martyr, whose occupation is listed as 'carpenter', his wife Elizabeth and baby, also Henry. Henry Martyr was born in Chertsey (Surrey) in 1813 and had married his wife, Elizabeth Yeomans, in 1838 at Hawley (Hants). They must have moved to Great Linford soon after, as Henry (junior) was born in 1840 in Great Linford. By 1851 Henry Martyr is identi-

fied as 'lockkeeper [sic] and toll clerk', and had two more sons, Alfred (b.1843) and John (b.1851). In 1861 Martyr is described as 'lock carpenter' and has two more children: Elizabeth (b.1853) and Ann (b.1857). The small lock cottage must have been very crowded!

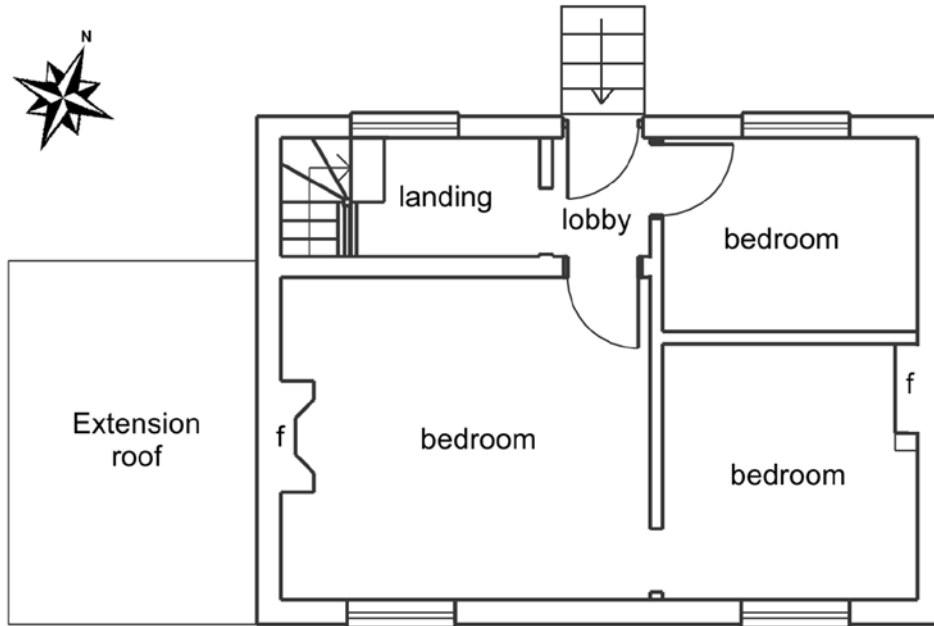
With the closure of the canal, Henry Martyr's employment by the canal company ceased, so he and his family had to vacate the lock cottage and seek employment elsewhere. His service at Great Linford evidently stood him in good stead, as he subsequently became overseer for the Grand Junction Canal at Grove, near Leighton Buzzard²⁵. He died in May 1889, aged 76: probate was granted to his son Alfred. His estate came to £434 10s, or almost £55,000 today²⁶. As the cottage at Linford ceased to be identified as 'lock keeper's house' in the Census after 1861, it has not been possible to identify the names of more recent occupants.

The Old Wharf Inn

The *Old Wharf Inn*, now rather confusingly renamed *Wharf House* (Fig. 16), stands alongside the Grand Junction Canal towpath just east of the basin. It is a Grade II listed structure²⁷, described as 'House, late 18th century, built as an inn on the canal bank. Rubble stone, part colourwashed, old tile roof with flanking brick chimneys. 2 storeys to canal, 3 storeys to lower ground on north. Attic in roof. South front has 3 bays with 4 pane wide upper floor sash windows and altered sashes flanking central door on ground floor. 2-light attic windows in gables. Irregular openings to north front. Shallow-roofed lean-to against west gable'. In his gazetteer of historic buildings in Milton Keynes, Paul Woodfield also notes that the building has 'Three bays, with central door to hallway'²⁸.

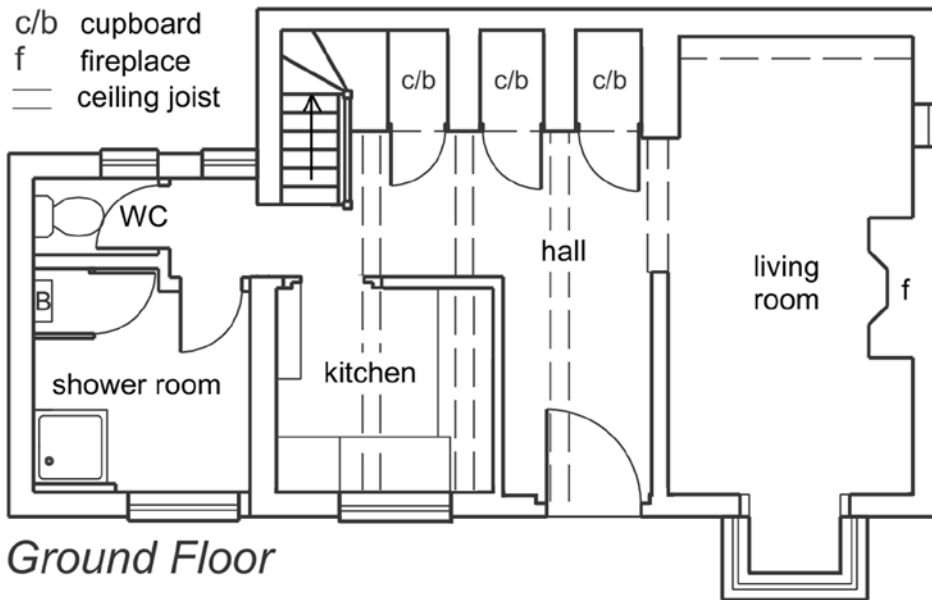
No detailed study of this building ever appears to have been carried out, so little is known of its structural layout or history. It appears to have been built soon after the Grand Junction Canal opened, specifically to serve passing canal traffic. The present lean-to at its west end is a later addition, though it appears on the 1842 tithe map and all subsequent Ordnance Survey mapping. The same mapping also shows structures at the east end of the building, though these do not appear to have survived to the present day.

The first recorded landlord of the *Old Wharf Inn* was John Warren, a local man who is listed in the 1851 Census along with his younger brother



97%

First Floor



Ground Floor

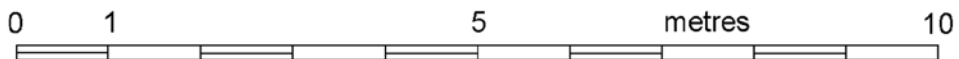


FIGURE 15 Lock-keeper's cottage, floor plans



FIGURE 16 The *Old Wharf Inn*, c.1949

William, a tailor, and his younger sister Elizabeth, who was his housekeeper. By 1861 the landlord was George Atkins of Leicester, who is listed with his wife Mary, their two young sons and baby daughter, Sarah Housen, an 18-year-old servant and two boarders. Ten years later the Atkins family had been replaced by the Elliots from Milton, Northants, comprising husband Samuel, wife Mary, three sons and four daughters, none of them above 7 years old. From the birth places listed it is evident that the family had been at Great Linford for less than two years. A female domestic servant and a lodger are also listed.

This pattern of occupants appears to have continued at the *Old Wharf Inn* until the early years of the 20th century. By 1881 the Elliots had been replaced by the Kemps: Christopher Kemp is also listed in Kellys Directory of 1883 as ‘wharf-inger, canal carrier’s agent & painter’. Apparently it was not uncommon at this time for publicans to have more than one occupation. The 1891 Census lists Charles Draper as publican (he was also a carpenter), along with his wife Ellen, three sons and five daughters. The oldest son, Herbert, at the age of 14 was a printer’s boy in Bedford.

By 1901 the Drapers had been supplanted by the Lacey family. Thomas Lacey, 54, hailed from Northants. His wife, Sarah, came from Oldbury in the Black Country. As four of their five children are listed as having been born in Fenny Stratford, it seems reasonable to assume that they had previously lived there. The Laceys remained at the *Old Wharf Inn* until the start of the First World War at least, as ‘Mrs Thomas Lacey’ is listed as publican in 1915²⁹. Following the Lacey family, the pattern of publicans on shorter tenancies reasserts itself, quite possibly an indication that, with the continuing decline in canal traffic, the pub was becoming increasingly unprofitable. Successive editions of Kelly’s Directory list three landlords following Sarah Lacey; Malcolm Christie (1924), John Foster (1931) and finally William Luck (1935). It seems likely that the *Old Wharf Inn* had ceased to trade by the start of World War II.

THE LINFORD WHARF COMMUNITY

Following the opening of the canal to Newport Pagnell, Linford Wharf became the focus of a small community. Late 19th and early 20th-century maps show the development of the first *Wharf*

House and outbuildings to the north of the wharf, a row of cottages north of the lock and another house and outbuildings to the west of the wharf, as described above. Leaving aside those families who have been discussed above, the Census records reveal a largely settled working-class community. Some families appear in successive Censuses: one, the Barnwell family, are listed in four successive Censuses from 1871 to 1901. On the other hand, a smaller number of residents appear more transient. In particular, the first *Wharf House* appears to have been in multiple occupancy, accommodating up to five families in 1861.

Occupations listed for the residents of Linford Wharf tend to reflect the changing economy of the district. In 1851, most adult males are listed as agricultural labourers. There is also a gardener (presumably working at Linford Manor?) and a boot and shoemaker. One of the occupants of Wharf Yard is a ‘gassmaker’ (the gasworks in Newport Pagnell opened in 1837³⁰). Another is a ‘railway labourer’, presumably working at Wolverton. From 1861 onwards, railway employees appear more frequently in the Census returns for Linford Wharf, replacing the agricultural workers. By 1871, only one agricultural labourer is listed, amongst an engine fitter, an engine driver and a range of canal-related trades, who all must have been employed by the Grand Junction at that time. By the turn of the century, the majority of wage earners at Linford Wharf appear to have been working on the railways, at Wolverton Works or at Salmons & Sons coachworks in Newport Pagnell.

A flavour of the life of the inhabitants of Linford Wharf is provided by two 19th-century local newspaper reports, both of which involved Henry Martyr:

On 18 Jan 1854 at Newport Pagnell Petty Sessions, *James Conquest of Great Linford was convicted of an assault on Henry Martyr on the 16th inst. Penalty & costs £1 3s or one month’s imprisonment. Allowed time*³¹.

Bucks Herald, 28 March 1857: Unfounded Charge. Henry Martyr of Great Linford was brought up on the application of Sarah Hackett, requiring him to find sureties to keep the peace. The complainant’s information was read, in which she stated that the defendant threatened to murder her with a fork, and that she was afraid he would do her some serious injury. Mr Bull appeared for the defendant, and called witnesses to speak to

*the transaction giving rise to the application, who disproved the allegations of the complainant, and the application was dismissed*³².

THE NEWPORT PAGNELL CANAL IN 2019

While the warehouse, lock-keeper's cottage and the former *Old Wharf Inn* survive, much of the rest of the hamlet at Linford Wharf has been redeveloped since c.2003. The warehouse is now a private house and the basin has long been filled in, though the entrance to it from the main canal (now the Grand Union) and the winding hole opposite can still be seen. A row of new cottages stand at the north end of the wharf area. At the north end of the basin, the entrance lock to the Newport Canal was infilled after the canal closed, and the lock site became part of the garden of the lock-keeper's cottage. The branch canal towpath survives as a narrow lane for about 70 metres from the wharf: after this, the canal route becomes a green corridor between modern development on Snowhill Court and Boulters Lock. Meeting Broadway Avenue, the canal route follows the south side of the road through the local park, then swings northward after the linear pond created in the canal bed to follow Horton Gate and then a footpath to join the Railway Walk west of V10 Brickhill Street.

The Railway Walk is a major pedestrian/cycle route traversing the north end of Milton Keynes, laid along the former Wolverton to Newport Pagnell railway line. From this point, canal and railway routes follow this path towards Newport for almost one kilometre. There is little to see of either canal or railway along this section: most authorities state that the railway was laid along the canal bed³³, though there must have been some adjustment of levels at Locks 3 and 4. On this section the route passes between housing on the south side of Wolverton and the north end of Blakelands industrial estate, passes beneath the M1 and continues between modern housing developments on the western edge of Newport Pagnell.

At a point where the Railway Walk is joined by a footpath from Cherry Road to the south, canal and railway part company. The canal route continues as a track along the north side of a triangular field of allotments, while the railway swings to the south of the field. Locks 5, 6 and 7 were on this part of the canal route, though no trace remains of them now. At the east end of the field, the canal

route is blocked by modern housing: beyond this, its course curved southwards through a wooded area to the terminal basin at Newport.

At the Newport Pagnell end of the canal, nothing survives of the canal or railway. The north-eastern part of Shipley Wharf is now a car park: the fire station and medical centre stand on the north-western part, with Marsh End Road between them. The area of the canal basin and railway station have been redeveloped for housing; only the name 'Station Road' provides a reminder of the area's past use.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For me, this study of the Newport Pagnell Canal has been 'unfinished business', which began during my involvement with excavations at Great Linford in the 1970s. Some thirty years later, I was involved in archaeological investigations at Linford Wharf during the redevelopment of the W.J. Cooper & Co. site, including building recording of the canal warehouse, before its conversion for residential use. In 2018 I was also delighted to be asked to record the lock-keeper's cottage at the entrance to the canal, for which I am grateful to the owners, James and Samantha Beechey: the research undertaken for that report forms the basis of this article. I would like to thank all of those who have been involved in this saga: Dennis Mynard, for bringing the canal to my attention; my former colleagues Joe Abrams and Nigel Wilson, for undertaking the watching briefs at Cooper's Wharf, my sister Charlotte, for providing Census information and helping to interpret it and finally MK Council's archaeologist, Nick Crank, for his encouragement and also for making available the Uthwatt documents held by Milton Keynes HER.

NOTES

1. *Northampton Mercury*, 26 December 1812.
2. *Ibid*, 14 August 1813.
3. *Ibid*, 21 August 1813.
4. *54 Geo III*, c98 – 17 June 1814.
5. Markham 1973, 318)
6. *Northampton Mercury*, 26 November 1814.
7. *Ibid*, 23 November 1816.
8. *Pigot & Co's London & Provincial Directory*, 1823/4. An advertisement in the *Northampton Mercury*, 11 January 1817, describes the canal

- as recently opened.
9. Reprinted in the *Northampton Mercury*, 3 March 1922
 10. Faulkner 1993, 190.
 11. Minutes of evidence to House of Lords Select Committee on the Newport Pagnell Railway Bill.
 12. Newport Pagnell Canal minute book, 28 August 1846.
 13. *Ibid*, 28 January 1846.
 14. *Ibid*, 6 December 1862.
 15. 26 & 27 Vic, c110 – 29 June 1863.
 16. Newport Pagnell Canal minute book, 24 October 1864.
 17. Misnamed ‘Henry Martyn’ by both Faulkner (1993) and Sear (1989).
 18. A box of documents and plans relating to this dispute is held in the Milton Keynes Historic Environment Record collection.
 19. Mynard & Hunt 1995, xxiv.
 20. Abrams & Zeepvat 2004.
 21. Wilson 2003.
 22. Mynard & Hunt 1995, 94–100
 23. Now (2019) replaced by a slate roof, which was probably the roofing material originally used
 24. Galloway 2005, 190.6
 25. Harrod’s Directory, 1876
 26. <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>
 27. List entry number: 1310656: Date first listed: 28/08/1975
 28. Woodfield 1986, 53, F22
 29. Kelly’s Directory, 1915. Presumably Thomas Lacey had died: he would have been 69 by then.
 30. Mynard & Hunt 1995, 158–9
 31. *Bucks Herald*, 19 Jan 1854
 32. *Bucks Herald*, 28 Mar 1857
 33. Sear 1989.

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OTHER SOURCES

Trade Directories: Pigot’s (1830); Musson & Craven (1853); Post Office (1864). Directories up to 1915 were consulted, but 1864 is the last mention of businesses at Linford Wharf.

National Census: 1841–1911 (www.ancestry.co.uk)

Milton Keynes HER: uncatalogued box of documents relating to Rev. Uthwatt’s dispute with the Newport Pagnell Railway Co.

Northampton Mercury (NM): various dates

MAPS

1841 Nat Archives IR30/3/74 Great Linford Tithe Map

1881 Buckinghamshire X.5 Ordnance Survey First Edition 25” sheet

1900 Buckinghamshire X.5 Ordnance Survey Second Edition 25” sheet

1925 Buckinghamshire X.5 Ordnance Survey Third Edition 25” sheet

1970 – Ordnance Survey 1:2500 sheet