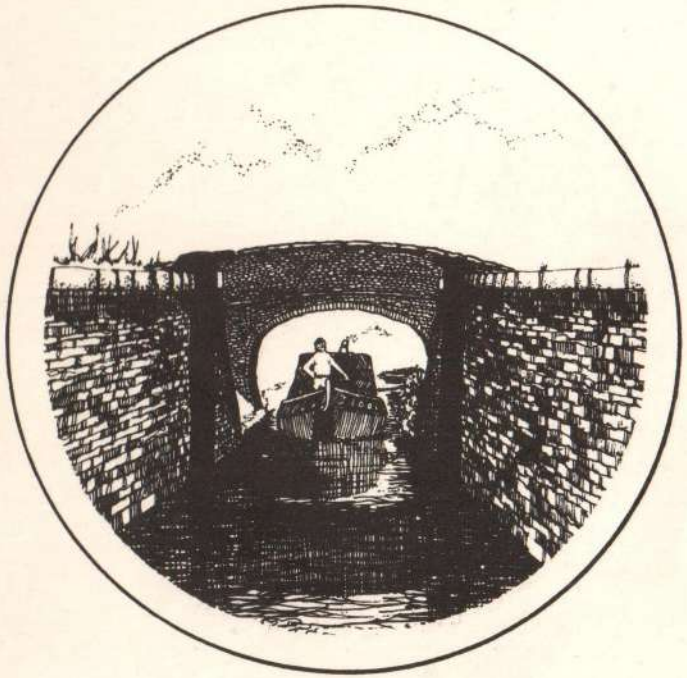
THE GRANTHAM CANAL



early days

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THE GRANTHAM CANAL

EARLY DAYS

A detailed history of the first 25 years.

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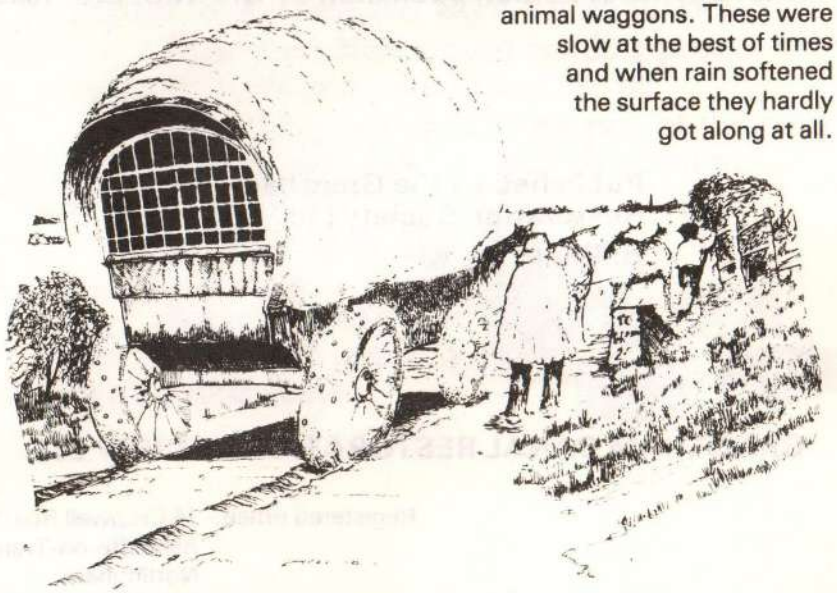
THE GRANTHAM CANAL : early days

1. Pressures and plans.

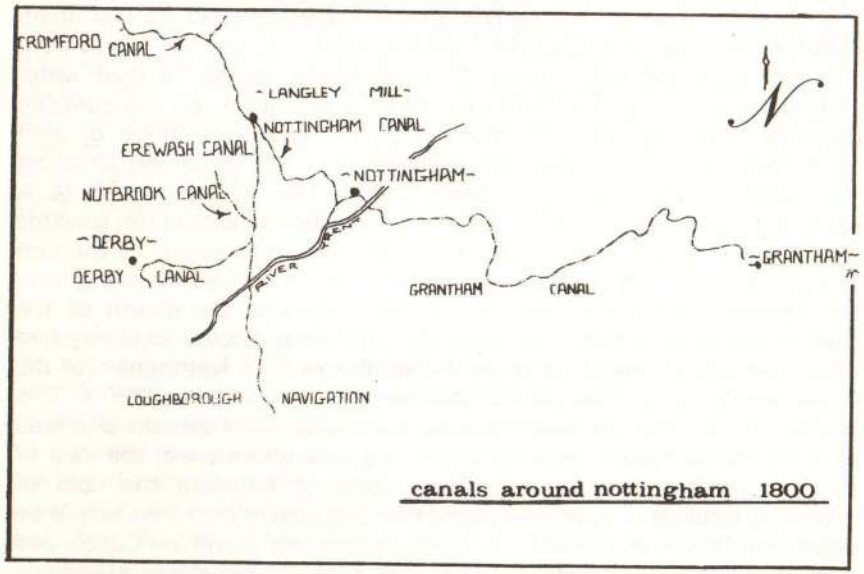
We take quick, cheap and reliable transport so much for granted to-day that it is hard to imagine life without it. Yet, before the steam engine became commonly used for locomotion, land transport and communica - tion was heavily dependant on the horseman, the animal cart and the passing stagecoach. Their speed and efficiency in turn depended upon the condition of the roads which, in country districts, were no more than tracks. In an attempt to improve matters a number of Turnpike Acts were passed in the C18th to allow for the creation of toll roads on some main thoroughfares. The intention was that monies paid at the toll gates would go towards the upkeep and repair of a particular section of road and Parliamentary Acts to provide for Turnpikes from Grantham to Foston Bridge, Stamford, Nottingham and Melton Mowbray were passed in 1725, 1739, 1758 and 1780 respectively. The establishment of such a road was not in itself a guarantee of a well kept highway however. After a carriage ride on one such local improvement the contemporary commentator Arthur Young remarked:

"Grimsthorpe to Colsterworth is eight miles called by courtesy of the neighbourhood a Turnpike; but in which we were either buried in a quagmire of mud or racked to dislocation on pieces of rock they termed mending".

But the Grantham Canal was not built to rival the stagecoach. Before the navigation was built commodities such as groceries, timber, corn and coal were transported to and from Grantham in heavy, wide wheeled animal waggons. These were slow at the best of times and when rain softened the surface they hardly got along at all.



Too much use of a road by such carts would rut and damage the surface so as to make it unuseable by other vehicles. The unreliability of the carriers tansport in turn affected the cost of the delivered article. The local coal trade for instance was in the hands of Lincoln merchants who had the fuel brought from the south Yorkshire pits by boat to Newark and then transported overland to Grantham. The final part of the journey was expensive (and hard too for the animal teams that had to drag the laden waggons over Gonerby Hill) and the high price of coal in the town restricted its use to the more well-to-do members of the community.



canals around nottingham 1800

This unsatisfactory state of affairs was made worse after 1750 as the increasing food demands of the expanding manufacturing centres were felt in the Grantham district. More efficient farming methods in the clay vale to the west of the town, coupled with the gradual change from pasture to arable farming on Kesteven Heath, meant that the area around Grantham was increasing crop production, but the easy export of cereal and farm produce and the import of bulky fertilizers was inhibited by land carriage problems.

Thus the unreliability, slowness and high cost of bulk commodity movement were the main reasons for the evolution of the Grantham Canal plan.

Grantham Corporation first gave serious thought to bypassing the road carrier in 1770. The minute book reports.....

"....it would be of great benefit.... to have the River Witham from the New Bridge at Belton Lane to the River Trent made navigable.... it is ordred and agreed that Mr. William Grundy, Engineer of Spalding, be employed.... to view the same".

Grundy was probably chosen since he had been responsible for the preliminary survey of the Louth Canal in north Lincolnshire. This, begun in 1765, was nearing completion in the spring of 1770. Although Grundy spent a considerable amont of time on his Grantham work (being paid £111.7.2d for it in 1772) the Corporation did nothing further once it was complete.

In 1774 an idea was mooted to link Grantham with Sleaford by a continuation of a projected waterway that was to connect the latter town to the Witham at Dogdyke. The Sleaford link did not materialise however (though it was talked about as a practical proposition until well into the C19th.) and it was not until the 1780's that a realistic plan to link Grantham with the Trent gathered support. There was some opposition to this from the very beginning (the Witham Commissioners fearing for their water supplies) but the idea was too good to be abandoned and the question arose as to where the connection would be made.One group of men advocated a canal to Newark and their scheme found support amongst the traders and Corporation of Newark and the Lincoln coal merchants. A second group however considered that the navigation should run towards Nottingham and weight was lent to their arguments by events by the turn of the 1790's. In 1779 the Erewash Canal had been opened. Running from the Erewash Valley coalfield to the Trent opposite the mouth of the Soar, this had provided Loughborough with cheap access to Derbyshire coal. Now plans were afoot to build a waterway from Nottingham to the Cromford Canal, an extension of the Erewash completed in 1780's. This seemed to offer a more direct route to the central canal network and thus to the Midland markets and the more progressive farmers of the Vale of Belvoir and Kesteven saw an opportunity of reducing the cost of importing fertilizer. It was anticipated that Derbyshire crick lime would be transported relatively cheaply via the Cromford and Grantham Canals and whale blubber, soot and the excellent 'muck' (the mixed street sweepings and privy contents) of Nottingham were highly valued additions to the ordinary country compost. Crucially, the 4th Duke of Rutland, owner of much of the west of the Vale of Belvoir, also owned coal mines in Derbyshire and looked favourably on the opportunity of bringing cheap fuel to his castle and the surrounding villages. The Duke died in 1787 but his Agent, William King, exerted a notable influence during the minority of John, 5th Duke of Rutland, and actively encouraged efforts towards the realisation of the Grantham to Nottingham line. This was fortunate for without his support it is doubtful if the canal would have been built at all. King was an itelligent and forward looking estate manager. He was however suspicious of industrialisation and of the effects that this was having on the erstwhile peasantry in towns such as Nottingham. His prime interest in the canal was in the opportunities it would bring to the Belvoir farms and to the agricultural community as a whole and he did not want 'stockingers or manufacturers' established in its wake and took care to see that there were none within the bounds of his jurisdiction. With his help support was canvassed amongst a wide section of the local population including the local aristocracy, farmers, clergy and traders. Money was subscribed for a survey and William Jessop, a noted canal engineer who had been consulted over the initial stages of the Nottingham Navigation, was asked for advice on the matter and proposed a canal that would connect with the Trent at Radcliffe. He estimated the cost at £58,000.

An enthusiastic endorsement of this plan came at a meeting in August of1791. Capital of £60,000 for the project was decided on and £40,000 was subscribed within half an hour. News of this success caused alarm in other circles however. In December a meeting was held in Newark under the chairmanship of the Mayor to urgently discuss the viability of a Newark to Grantham Canal. Before either waterway could be established it was necessary for authorisation to be made by Act of Parliament. When the proprietors of the Nottingham to Grantham Navigation made known their intention to introduce a Canal Bill to Parliament in 1792 the Newark group decided to oppose it. They found support for their opposition amongst the Lincoln coal merchants who saw the Grantham to Nottingham line as a threat to their livelihood, amongst some Nottinghamshire landowners and in the Witham Commissioners who feared that this canal would drain too much water from the catchment area of their river. As a result of this concerted opposition the 1792 Grantham Canal Bill failed to pass the Commons.

Undismayed by the check, King and his colleagues set out to placate the opposition and planned the introduction of a new bill in the following year. In the new bill they proposed stringent regulations over the amount of water to be taken from Denton Brook (the only tributary of the Witham to be used as a water supply) allowed a few influential landowners privileged carriage of their goods on the canal and made provision for a junction at Stenwith Bridge for a canal that, it was proposed, would be built from Newark. This latter project in fact came to nothing, but the inclusion in the Bill of the clause providing for the junction was an effective sop to the Newark interest. The main line junction with the Trent was resurveyed and moved to Trent Bridge and the new bill was introduced to Parliament in 1793. It passed the commons on the 8th, the Lords on the 17th and gained the assent of George the Third on the 30th of April. Amid scenes of rejoicing in the town the canal was born.

2. Finance and administration.

A committee to organise the construction and look after the running of the canal was formed as soon as the bill had been passed. In the early days this met every two or three weeks at either the Angel or the George in Grantham, the Blackamoors Head or Whyte Lyon in Nottingham or more rarely the Royal Oak in Bingham. It was usually attended by some nine members though the quorum was five. In 1793 the chairman was Lord Brownlow whilst Mr. Lawrence was appointed as treasurer and Mr. Ostler as Clerk to the Committee. Lord Brownlow and Mr. Lawrence had given up their posts by 1800 but Ostler was to keep his very important position until his death in 1853.

The committee as a whole was charged with fixing tolls and wharfage charges, salaries, rents, wages and the dividend, conducting discussions with owners of land that bounded the canal, setting bye laws, hiring and dismissing workers, ensuring that roads and nearby waterways were kept in good repair and generally looking after the interests of shareholders. They also carried out an annual inspection in the spring to ensure that the canal was in good order. Being a joint stock company there was provision for an annual general meeting of shareholders and facilities for spectial meetings should the need arise. The committee were not paid for their work but they could claim expenses and for liquor consumed at meetings!

The first job of the committee was to raise cash for the canal. Under the Act the company was allowed to raise £75,000 with £30,000 more if need be. The initial £75,000 was to be raised by the sale of shares of £100 each. No individual was to hold more than ten of these and, after a deposit had been paid, the money was to be called for in units of £5 or £10 as the waterway was being built. Between them six members of the aristocracy held 40 shares and 70 more were divided amongst 20 clergymen. The rest were sold off singly or in packets of anything up to 10 shares each, there being 200 separate shareholdings. Share certificates of parchment were issued to each shareholder signed by Ostler and carrying the seal of the company. The list of subscribers and other important documents were kept by the clerk in a large wooden trunk secured by a lock with two keys.

1793 was the peak year of 'canal mania' in which 19 new canals were authorised and no doubt many middling men of trade and the professions were tempted to apply for shares in the hope of making a quick profit. Many other investors however seem to have been local people with little capital who sought to invest in a project that would bring benefit to themselves and the community. At any rate the 750 shares were soon sold and all was clear to begin construction.

3. Construction

Work on the canal had already begun when the first call on the shareholders money was made on September 30th 1793. Two engineers were to be employed: James Green of Wollaton and William King. These

were to be paid £200 each for the first year and £100 for each subsequent year of construction of the canal. Green was allocated the line from the Trent to the Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire boarder and King the rest. From time to time Jessop was to check their work.

Their task was the construction of a waterway some thirty three miles long. The total fall from Woolsthorpe summit to the Trent was to be 139 feet 9 inches and they were to build eighteen locks 75 feet long by 14 feet wide. Sixty seven numbered bridges were to span the canal, some of which were made of red brick and some of which were to swivel out of the way of boats on the water and were made of wood. Nine brick aqueducts (two of which were numbered in the sequence of the bridges) carried the water over minor waterways and streams. Villages along the canal were to be served by a wharf (and some landowners were allowed to build their own if they so wished) and a number of winding holes were to be built to allow for the turning of boats. Two reservoirs, one at Denton and one at Knipton, were planned and it was anticipated that Bingham would be linked to the canal by a collateral cut. Except at Harlaxton Drift the waterway was to be wide enough for a pair of boats to pass anywhere along its length.

Samuel Wyatt of Burton on Trent was appointed to value the land needed for construction and on July 22 1793 word was given to the engineers to collect their materials. The supply of bricks was probably put out to tender and the timber bought from local merchants. Craftsmen were employed on a sub contract basis; carpenters for the lock gates and timber swing bridges and bricklayers for the culverts, aqueducts, lock chambers and brick bridges. As for the digging, two types of men were employed, the less experienced day labourers and the more experienced cutters who travelled into the area from workings in other parts of the country. Without machines the only alternative to men's muscle power was provided by the horse and a large number of these were employed for the duration of the work.

The actual digging of the canal probably brought more strangers and excitement to the Vale of Belvoir than had been seen since the Civil War one hundred and fifty years before. As the smoke rose and drifted from bonfires made from uprooted trees and torn down hedgerows, tracks that had carried a couple of carts a day were now churned by the constant passing and repassing of wagons loaded with bricks, clay and all the paraphernalia of construction. Between the working parties of the eastern section rode William King. Mounted on a horse of a quality befitting his station in the estate of the Duke of Rutland, he would pause to check on ground levels or the quality of the brickwork or carpentry and perhaps eye with misgiving the rag, tag and bobtail army of travelling workmen. On the line, sweating in the summer sun and sustained by casks and bottles of ale and bread and cheese, toiled the diggers. Paid for the amount of earth they moved and probably able to average twelve cubic yards of valley soil a day, they could expect some two shillings a day for their labours. The craftsmen did better - their skill could earn them an extra twelve pence.

The low cost of labour was reflected in the cost of constructions. Brick bridges were made for less than £120 each and locks £950, material inclusive. In fact, mile for mile, the Grantham Canal was to be the second cheapest of the navigations constructed in the east Midlands.

It must be remembered that civil engineering was at this time still in its infancy. Even Jessop, an acknowledged master of canal construction could make serious mistakes and although Green had some experience of this type of work, involvement in such a project was new to King. It was not long before the project ran into problems. A surveyor named Hodgkinson was employed to lay the line from Grantham to Cropwell Butler, but his work was deemed to be unsatisfactory and after reporting that deep cuts would be needed at Harlaxton he was fired in the Autumn of 1793.

Mr. Wyatts work was also questioned, but not by the committee. Property owners asserted that his valuations were too low. Provision was therefore made for arbitration by a jury of three and when William L'Anson of Cotgrave went to it over the valuation of two acres and one rood of land he was awarded £123 15 shillings. Payments of this kind, the reticence or inability of some shareholders to pay their calls, hold ups in construction and the general financial havoc wrought by the Revolutionary Wars with France, all had a disastrous effect on the company's finances. In May of 1795 an Annual General Meeting was told that there was not enough money to complete the canal. The optional £30,000 reserve was therefore taken up. More shares were sold (and additional calls made on the original ones though they were fully subscribed) and attempts were made to mortgage the tolls. This was not sufficient however and in October 1796 it was determined to press for another Act of Parliament that would allow still more cash to be raised. This second Act allowed shares of £120 to be sold and compelled the payment of two extra £10 calls on the original issue. It also removed the 8% dividend restriction made in the 1793 Act. It was hoped that the removal of dividend restraint would make the shares more attractive to potential purchasers, but in the event it did not prove a great incentive; all

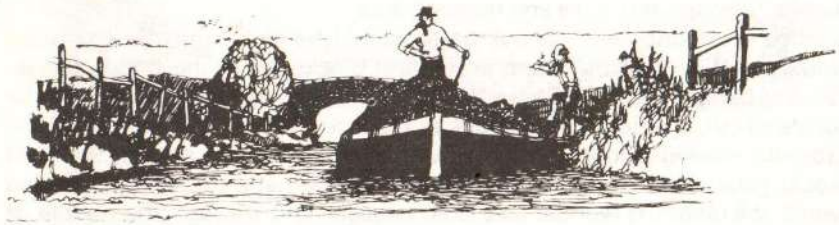
the new shares were not taken up and the final calls on the shares put their cost up to £150 each.

Despite the financial circumstances King and Green pressed on with construction. In February of 1797 King reported that his section was complete and filled with three feet of water. The reservoirs were not finished however and Green was having difficulty with the water supply near Cropwell Butler. Much of the canal ran through clay, an ideal subsoil for a waterway but on the Cropwell Butler section the subsoil was of more porous gypsum. Here then the canal bed had to be sealed with clay through a process known as puddling. This often gave trouble however and the puddle had to be made at Cropwell Butler over and over again. Although on the third Tuesday of April 1797 the committee proudly resolved that.

"Thomas Lockwood of Hickling be allowed the amount of tonnage which he paid for a boat of coals (being the first navigated upon the Canal to Grantham."

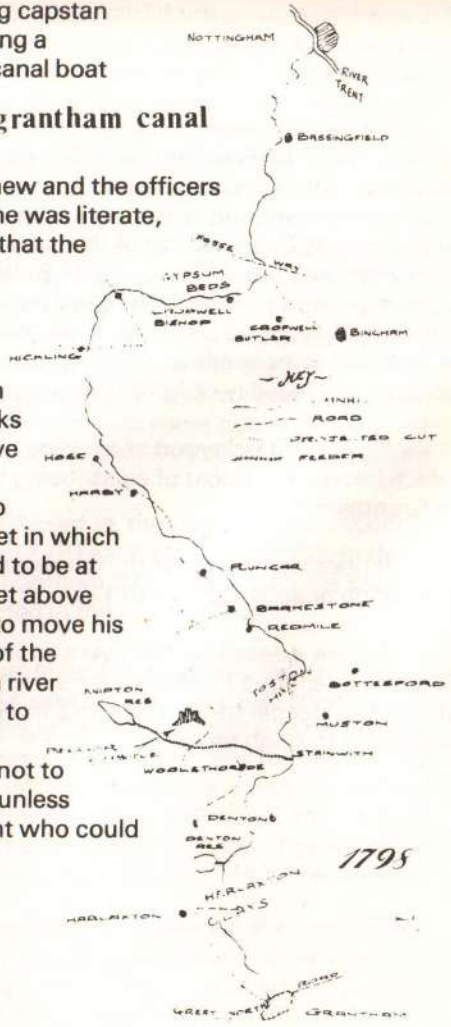
It does not seem that the whole canal was opened to traffic until the late spring or early summer of 1797.

Nature celebrated the event in its own way. On the night of July 30th a tremendous thunderstome swept the Vale of Belvoir and lightning struck the steeple of St. Wulframs in Grantham sending lumps of stone cascading through the roof!



the grantham canal

Brought into the canal by a winding capstan and assessed by a toll collector using a weighing and gauging divice, the canal boat of that first spring would have been towed off eastwards by a single horse or a couple of mules. The canal was new and the officers vigilant. Probably the boatman, if he was literate, had read one of the 1000 handbills that the company had distributed to the public to inform them of the canal bye laws. If he had not however then doubtless interested parties along the way would inform him that the penalty for leaving locks open or damaging the canal was five pounds and that if his boat had no rudder he was liable to a fine of two pounds. He had an hour after sunset in which to find a place to tie up and this had to be at a point which was less than four feet above natural ground. He was forbidden to move his boat until one hour before sunrise of the following day. Should his boat be a river vessel equipped with a sail this was to be stowed for the time that it was on the canal and the boatman was not to move his craft along the waterway unless he was accompanied by an assistant who could either lead or steer the craft.

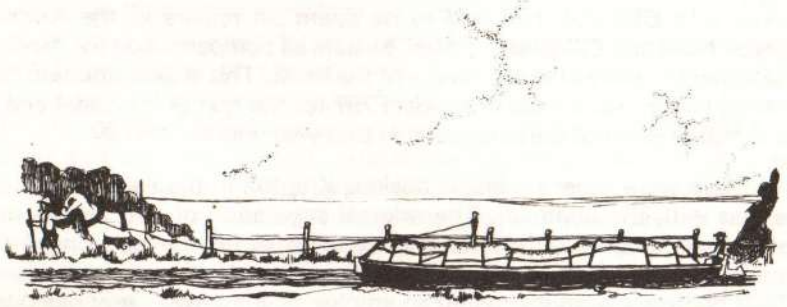


Once started the boat and crew would pass, as they travelled towards Cropwell Bishop, through ten locks and beneath lime washed brick bridges. The oak gates would be tight and the tow rope would chaff against the stone protection blocks set in the bridge bases. Passing beneath the old Fosse Way and by the intended junction of the collateral cut, the horse would pass to the north side of the canal over the Cropwell Roving Bridge. Now in a twenty mile lock free pound, the boat would glide southwards to Kinoulton. Here perhaps the village children would still watch in wonder as a boat passed right through the middle of their little village. A lazily turning windmill marked the approach to Hickling where, thirteen miles from the Trent, the boatman may have tied up his vessel for the night and set off with his crew and horse to find stabling in the village.

An early start next morning set them moving into Leicestershire, crossing the little River Smite aqueduct and passing through the newly enclosed land around Long Clawson, Hose and Harby. Soon Plungar would be passed on the right then the steeple of Barkstone Church and the boat and crew would be in Redmile with two thirds of their journey complete. Now to the north could be seen the majestic steeple of St. Mary the Virgin Church in Bottesford and to the south Belvoir Castle dominated the vale from Blackberry Hill. Turning south through Toston Hill cut, the boat would move towards Muston and Stenwith before encountering the first of the final seven locks that would take it onto Woolsthorpe Summit. With these mastered the rest was easy although in Harlaxton Drift the canal narrowed to allow only one boat passage (passing places were not to be cut until 1801). The steep sides of the cut gave some protection against the eveing wind however and as dusk was falling the boat and crew would thankfully pass to the north of Melton Mowbray Turnpike gate, then through the Earlsfield finally to halt in the Grantham basin.

4. Early days.

During the early days of the canal the committee strove to set the navigation on its feet and recoup some of the money expended by the hard pressed shareholders. The first priority was the establishment of regular trading along the canal and in April of 1797 the committee determined that advertisements be put in the Lincoln papers from time to time to draw attention to the availability of coals in the canal basin. They



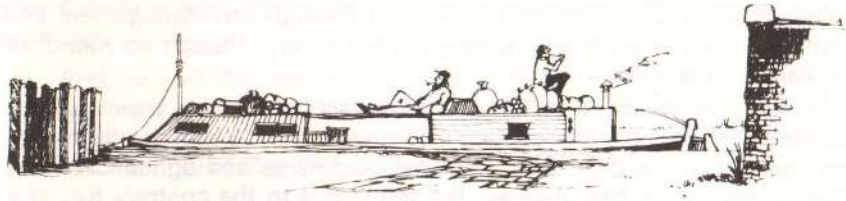
then set to and hired four carrying boats and Ostler, in December of '97, entered a into contract to buy coals from the Nottinghamshire pit head.The rate, in July of the following summer was 15 shillings for a ton of best from Wollaton and sixpence extra for fuel of a superior quality. It was sold for cash in the Grantham basin, the customers being allowed no credit and having to pay for the weighing of the fuel themselves.

Of course the bulk of the canal trade quickly passed to the private carrier, though, when the committee discovered that some boats working the line were owned by Simmons (the Trent lock keeper) they sent orders for them to be removed immediately. Company or private, all boatmen had problems on the canal at the beginning.

During the summer of '98 difficulties with the Knipton reservoir and leakage on the Gypsum beds caused problems with the water level, thus laying a carrier open to the risk of being stranded some twenty miles or so from the Trent with a horse and mate to feed. In the following winter an attempt to remedy matters led to an official stoppage on the canal whilst repairs were effected in the Hickling valley and Edmund Wright (the canal superintendent) set about raising the level of the Knipton reservoir by 3 feet and that of Denton by 12 inches. Despite this work the following summer saw periods of unsatisfactory water levels and finally in September 1802 an advertisement appeared in the Nottingham and Lincoln papers for a contractor to undertake the deepening of the Knipton reservoir by 2 feet and raising the stone facing by the same amount. This work appears to have been completed by April of 1804 and the committee looked forward to a good year with the canal well filled. Alas, in the following month part of the bank caved in and the whole reservoir had to be drained so that repair work could once again be undertaken. Leakage at Cropwell Butler added to the troubles and forced the company to close the canal in July and again in the autum so that repuddling could be carried out. The balance sheet presented to the A.G.M. in May 1805 showed that £365.8.4. had had to be spent on repairs in the Knipton reservoir head and £14 paid to a Mrs. Butters as compensation for damage done to her property after the failure of the bank. This was in addition to a repair and maintenance bill of almost £797 for the rest of the canal and in fact the total profit of the navigation in that year was a mere £30.

There were other problems besides Knipton in the early years too. One was with the boatmen. The original stipulation of two people to a boat proved to be too few for the excercising (in the opinion of the committee anyway) proper control at all times over both horse and vessel. In 1808 boatmen were instructed to employ at least two crew per boat. The crafty bargees got round this bye-law by borrowing or hiring young children to make up the head count. Pleasant as this must have been for the boys and girls - and far better for them than conditions of Nottingham's factories - it would not do for the committee. In 1813 they stipulated that of the three people manning a boat one should be over 21 and a second over 16. No longer could a boatman and two children take their boat to Grantham alone. Overcrowding rather than undermanning was probably more of a cause for concern on the Saturday passenger boat that plied between Cotgrave and Nottingham. This was set to arrive at Trent Bridge at 10 in the morning and return at 4 in the afternoon thus giving the countrymen and their wives ample time to scour the markets. They could not buy too much however - 56 lb was the maximum amount of baggage that could be loaded by one passenger after that an excess fee was charged.

A further problem arose with the Trent junction. It was necessary for the river to be dredged here every so often to stop the build up of silt. The River Trent Navigation Company was responsible for this but was slack in discharging its duty. As early as April 1798 Ostler wrote to complain of the silt and to threaten legal action if it were not removed. Seven months later he had to write to them again. Having agreed to bear some of the cost of constructing a weighbridge the Trent Company seem to have been as slow to pay as to dredge and though Ostler got the money he had to write to the Trent Company over the silting problem on many occasions in his long term as secretary.



Despite these problems the volume of traffic carried by the canal justified the faith of the proprietors and a 250 yard long wharf with a warehouse was constructed in the Grantham Basin. Part of the wharf was leased to independent coal merchants and so much fuel was being unloaded in 1800 that a complaint was made to the committee that there was precious little room for anything else! Instructions were therefore given that a boatslength should be left by the warehouse for the landing of those articles that required quick transit and that part of the basin be reserved for any commodity other than coal. Boats on the wharf were loaded and unloaded by sub-contracting labourers who set their own charges for the work; 20 quarters of corn for instance being moved for on shilling and sixpence. A crane does not seem to have been in use until 1804 but wharf furniture included a rudimentary weighbridge for the assessment of loads transported by the local carriers. The charge for use was twopence for a waggon and three halfpence for a cart.

In the Grantham warehouse and on the wharf a close check of the storage and movement of goods was kept by the wharfinger who was empowered to collect the wharfage dues. These were occasionally changed by the A.G.M. but typical weekly charges for warehouse space in the early years were one shilling and threepence for a ton of corn, sixpence for a hogshead of sugar, twopence for a case of soap and twopence for a thirty six gallon cask of ale or porter. Coal, since it could be left out on the wharf, was charged at only twopence a ton a week.

Wharfage formed but a small proportion of the income of the company however, the mainstay was always tollage. This varied in the 1800's between five and six thousand pounds per annum. The debts of the company ensured that, early on, little of this money found its way into the pockets of the shareholders as dividend - the committee set priority on repaying the loans they had incurred. Except for essential maintainance and the building of a few toll houses, the company expended most money on wages and salaries. Ostler drew £60 p.a., Wright £75 p.a. and Simmons £50 p.a. and there were a few other ill paid clerks and a handful of toll-collector-cum-lock-keepers. The Grantham wharfinger and his assistant were paid out of the wharfage revenue.

Although it had been decided that the Bingham collateral would be started as soon as the main line was completed, it does not seem that any action was taken. Wright was told, in December of 1798, to sell all materials not needed for essential maintence-presumably there being no intention to complete the Bingham line at that stage.

The thrift of the committee proved worthwhile. Many other navigations begun at the same time failed through bad management and John Sutcliffe, a canal engineering contemporary (though no friend) of William Jessop wrote in 1816.....

'30 millions spent on canals in the last 25 years - after such an immense expenditure and the sacrifice of so much land in making them, the public had the right to expect that commerce and agriculture have been served in the best manner; but the fact is to the contrary for, at a time when the assistance of canals is most wanted, many of them are little better than dry ditches'

The Grantham Navigation was not one of these and it was not long before it overcame its early problems and became profitable in the 1800's. Between 1806 and 1810 the dividend averaged some 2½%, not much in comparison with the Loughborough (nearly 90% over the same period) for instance, or the Erewash (nearly 30%), or even the Nottingham (8%), but better than the Derby (a little over 1%) and the Oakham which paid nothing at all until 1814.

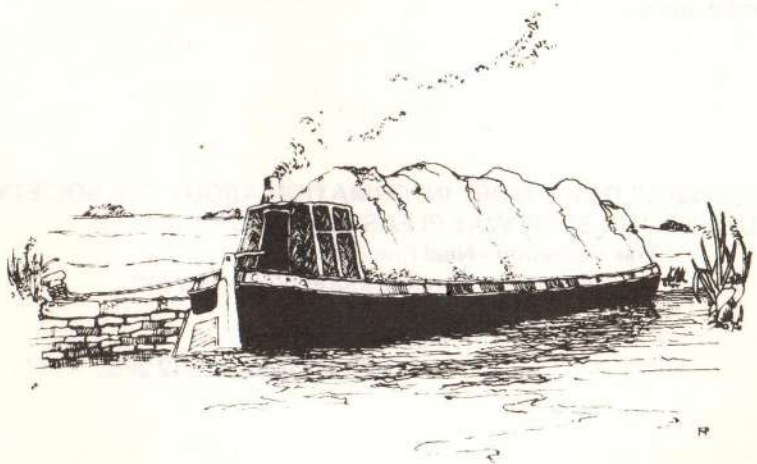
The impact of the canal on local trade was considerable and immediate, the slender line of water becoming a focal point of routes of commodity movement. Since roadstone could be moved quickly and cheaply, canal side roads soon gained an improved surface and in 1798 the committee even agreed to improve the link road between the Melton Mowbray turnpike and the Great North Road at its own expense. In Grantham and the navigation served villages, building materials, groceries and manufactured goods would have become less expensive whilst the farmer found that he could import his fertilizer and export his produce at much reduced cost. Some people suffered of course; the long distance carrier and some merchants of Newark must have looked askance as the digger went about his work, but the Newark to Grantham waterway came to nothing and no doubt some transport men adversely affected by the opening of the canal found employment in the work that it created.

In the longer term the canal was important to the economic development of Grantham in several ways. In providing a cheap form of

transport for raw materials and especially coal it gave a firm basis to Grantham's own small industrial revolution. A number of small firms involved in the manufacture of agricultural implements and machinery (such as Seaman and Hornsby and the enterprises of John Foster and James Coultas) were established in the 1820's and 1830's and their success was, in part, owed to the economic advantages offered by the canal. When Grantham's industry was able to expand even more quickly after the coming of the railway, there existed a pool of skilled mechanics and technical know-how on which to draw. This was a result of an industrial development to which the Grantham Canal was a major contributor. The waterway was also important in making Grantham a collecting point for farm produce from a wide area. By the 1840's there was nine firms of corn dealers and fifteen firms of maltsters in the town and the expanding coal trade, also serving a substantial area, had encouraged the establishment of no fewer than seventeen firms of coal merchants and coal dealers. In turn, to serve the commercial expansion, two banks were established; Hardy, Turner and Company in Westgate and Holt, Kewney and King in High Street. The Grantham Gas, Light and Coke Company was created in 1832 and became a major user of the waterway.

And so, on the whole, the canal was of great benefit to the communities it served and especially to the town of Grantham itself. Perhaps the dream of that annonymous lyricist who contributed to the Stamford Mercury of May 17th 1793 was realised!

And thanks to Heav'n since tis perform'd,
The poor will now be clothed and warm'd,
'Gainst wintry winds and tempest arm'd,
The old and yound with equal joy,
Will raise their voices to the sky,
And children yet unborn will cry,
Bless'd Grantham Navigation.



This booklet has told you about how men looked to the future and against all difficulties put before them built a transport link that improved the lives of people in the Vale of Belvoir and Grantham. In later years the canal fell into decline as a result of competition from the railways and then the motor lorry. Even before the canal was officially abandoned in 1936 some parts of the navigation had begun to look like a ditch, whilst the towpath became overgrown and the water shallow, slow moving and smelly.

It was not until 1969 that real attempts began to be made to remedy this sad state of affairs, but in that year the Grantham Civic Trust decided to clean up the area around Earlsfield Lane which was then being used as an unofficial tip. From this event came the Grantham Canal Restoration Society Limited and members of this Society are again looking to the future. During the time since the Society was formed much has been done to bring the canal back to life. It is now possible to walk from Grantham to Nottingham away from the smell and noise of the motor car by using the 33 miles of towpath, some sections have been restocked with fish after the silt has been dredged and a boat operates along a short section (near Hickling) giving passenger trips at weekends. These activities are only the tip of an amenity iceberg that could be exploited while the canal continues its important roll of land drainage for the Vale of Belvoir. On the political side the Grantham Canal Trust has been formed which brings together all groups or individuals interested in improving the canal, members of the Trust include County Councils, Local Councils, Waterway pressure groups, amenity groups and environmentalists.

The Grantham Canal Restoration Society is of course a member of the Trust and has an important roll to play by providing volunteers, cash and ideas that will eventually lead to full restoration and again allow people of Grantham and the Vale of Belvoir access to the 2000 miles of navigable inland waterway.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SOCIETY OR COULD HELP IN SOME WAY PLEASE CONTACT :-

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