

MT 52/1? Canal Control Committee minutes p137/12

Note by Mr Sidney Preston on Inspection of Training Boatmen on the 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1917

1. I visited DEVIZES in order to test, and if possible pass, the first batch of men who had completed their training,

I was fortunate in getting Mr. Forrester Clayton to accompany me as I was anxious to have his special technical criticism on the men's work. Mr. Howard Humphreys, Chairman of the Midland Sub-Committee, also came with us, as he was anxious to see what was being done so that he might report to his Committee and circulate the Carrier Companies in the Midland Area as to the employment of these men.

2. Mr. Tyler paraded 12 men as being fit to pass out. They had been put through the test the day before by Mr. Saunders. These 12 men were divided into three squads, and worked as follows:-

1. One squad of 4 men worked two narrow boats, drawn tandem with one horse, through a flight of locks and back to the wharf.

2. A second squad of 4 men started with two boats and one horse, 40 minutes later, so that on their way down they met the first squad on its way up to the locks.

3. The third squad of four men started some time later working two boats singly, i.e. a horse to each boat - so that they met both the two first squads on their return the trips.

I found that the men fixed the sheets over the boats neatly and expeditiously, got their boats promptly underway, brought the boats clearly into and out of the locks, broke the way on the boats on entering the locks in a boatmanlike manner,

Met and crossed each other correctly, and generally, manipulated the boats extremely well - I think, therefore, I may safely pass the first detachment of 12 men, as qualified to act as mates on canal boats. Attached to this note is a memo by Mr. Forrester Clayton stating his opinion of the work he saw done by the men. This is most encouraging - Mr. Clayton considers the test we gave sufficient, and this may be accepted for the future. It will be for Mr. Saunders and myself to see that this is maintained.

I have discussed the question of grazing the horses during Saturdays and Sundays - Mr. Clayton gave me the benefit of his experience in the matter. He said they had given up doing it as they found the horses often got aches and pains. He finds it better to give the horses 3 weeks or a month's rest in the year; I think with this experience we will drop the proposal made in para 7 of my note of the 5th instant, for the present at least.

4. Mr. Saunders showed me the tenders received for the stable manure. These varied a good deal and after discussing them with him; I think that if he can arrange with Mr. Dickenson to take it over for 15/- a month it would be more suitable than selling it to an outsiders especially as his manure is dumped in the same pit.

5. Both the local saddlers have now stated that they are unable to supply new collars as the whole supply of carthorse collars have been commandeered by the Government. Mr. Forrester Clayton has come to our rescue and at once telegraphed to his Head Quarters to send 5 of his collars which have been in to use. Mr. Saunders suggested that it might be advisable to replace the light spreaders by heavier ones. I do not see any necessity for this at present.

6. Some slight alteration has been proposed in the feed of the horses. They say there is insufficient chaff and an unnecessary amount of oats. I have instructed Drew & Co. to deliver one fifth less oats - this will give 8lbs per day per horse - and double the quantity of chaff - giving 6lbs per horse per day.

7. I am glad to say I found the horses in excellent condition and much improved in appearance since we have had them - This reflects credit on the detachment.

8. The with wide boat, hired of from Dickenson & Co. leaks badly, and with about 40 tons of cinders has sat down on the bottom. I ordered the cinders to be taken out to see if the leaks can be

located and staunch. I meant to see Mr. Dickenson about the boat, as I think he should deliver her to us in serviceable condition - but was unable to do so. I shall be glad if Mr. Saunders will report on the boat when the load is out.

9. I found it necessary to warn Mr. Tyler and the Sergeant not to waste more water from the Summit length than necessary. I do not know what the level was then we started work, but think it was about 6 inches below the escape sill at the top lock - it is today 9in, it has therefore fallen about 15 inches if not more. I roughly estimate that one lock of water is probably about 1/24 of an inch in depth of the summit length. If the lock is used 12 times in the day - up and down - this would be the lowering of the depth of 1/2in a day. If this goes on the pound will soon be empty. As it is, one boat with only 10 tons in it, grounded during the test. I think Mr. Saunders should bring the decrease in the level of the water to the notice of the Manager of the Canal and enquire what arrangements are being made to maintain it. It will stop our boating altogether if it falls much lower. In the meantime I have written officially to the Great Western Railway authorities informing them of the Matter.

10. I am told that the black horse referred to in Para, 3 of my note of the 5th instant has been working regularly in one of Mr. Dickenson's carts and is improving,  
17th September, 1917.

#### COPY OF MR. FORRESTER CLAYTON'S LETTER

14th September 1917.

Dear Sir,

At your request I visited DEVIZES today to inspect the men of the Labour Battalion who are being taught the navigation of Canal boats. I consider that the first twelve men examined handled the boats in a businesslike manner and negotiated locks and other difficulties without a hitch; those men are fit to be transferred to the Inland Waterways, where after a few days further experience of practical working they will be quite competent to take complete control of a boat.

The rest of the men inspected (18 in all) should also be fit for transfer after another week or ten days tuition at Devizes.

I think you have chosen an ideal place for the purposes of instruction, as there is an abundance of locks and sufficiently shallow water in the top pound to make it difficult to navigate a boat without going aground.

You are certainly to be congratulated on the success of your bold scheme, which as you are, no doubt, aware, did not meet with whole hearted approval in some directions.

Yours faithfully,

(SGD) FORRESTER CLAYTON