

## *Wartime Waterways*

The economic stability of canals suffered a permanent decline during both the First and Second World Wars, because of dramatic rises in wages and prices. Staff shortages appeared when male employees were called up for service in the forces, whilst others left for more lucrative employment elsewhere. In both wars, canal transport initially had a low priority, particularly in the First War when the tonnage being carried was still significant in overall terms. Also, the cost of sending goods by the government-controlled railway remained at pre-war levels, while the cost of canal transport rose. It was almost impossible to keep boatmen on canals, with their low wages and poor conditions, and boats were often tied up for lack of crews or because there were insufficient men to repair them. The women trainees of the Second World War are probably the best known of the wartime replacements for boatmen on British canals, but several other schemes were tried in an effort to increase the traffic. These usually concentrated on the more successful canals such as the BCN, Grand Union or Leeds & Liverpool. However, as conditions on the railways deteriorated through lack of maintenance, bomb damage (during the Second World War), and the loss of skilled men, the Government took control of the main independent canals as a way of improving deliveries of fuel, materials and food.

### **The First World War**

Railways and railway-owned canals came under the control of the Railway Executive Committee of the Board of Trade at the beginning of the war, and this allowed the Government, who gave financial support, to keep railway charges static, despite increasing costs. Until 1917, independent canals and canal carriers received no such support. Lack of Government control also meant that canal workers could be called up for service in the armed forces. Amongst these were two boatbuilders from Riley Green, near Blackburn, who were sent to repair boats on French waterways. Lack of staff meant boats were soon laid up because of both lack of crews, and the transfer of goods to the cheaper, Government-supported railway and road transport. However, the railways became over-burdened, and to overcome this, the Government was to bring the independent waterways under their control.

To some extent, Government was already involved. As with other industries, some canal workshops were used for the production of munitions, the Weaver Navigation repair shops at Northwich producing shells throughout the war.<sup>i</sup> The Weaver Navigation was also preparing for air raids in 1916. John A. Saner, Manager and Engineer, warned navigation users that all lights and signals at the locks would be extinguished in the event of an enemy raid, and the lock gates closed. “...vessels should if possible be drawn up where they would be out of the fairway in case of accidents”.<sup>ii</sup>

Towards the end of 1916, the Director of Munitions invited various canal companies and canal carriers to meet him to discuss ways of relieving pressure on the railways. A committee was formed<sup>iii</sup> and among their requests to the Government they asked that there should be no more withdrawals of staff for military service, that additional men be provided, and that a War Bonus be paid to staff as already happened on the railways. A badge to show that canal workers were employed on work exempt from military service was also requested. The employment of women was also raised as it was pointed out that this already happened on narrow canals and broad canals with few locks. However women were considered unsuitable for employment on broad canals where boats worked onto tidal estuaries, or for work as warehouse porters.

On the financial side, the canal companies pointed out that working expenses had risen, which had caused a similar rise in canal rates. The railways had not had to increase their rates as the Government paid most employees a War Bonus and also guaranteed the companies an equivalent net revenue to that in 1913<sup>iv</sup>. Canal income had also been reduced because of the transfer of goods to rail. It was thought that unless Government gave financial support to canals, many fleets would soon be completely idle, perhaps permanently.

As a result, by an Order dated 22<sup>nd</sup> February, on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1917, a Canal Control Committee was set up by the Board of Trade to co-ordinate traffic between canals<sup>v</sup> and to help improve conditions and staffing. There were ten members, at least four coming from inland waterways<sup>vi</sup>. There were also four sub-committees, three covering the northern, midland and southern areas of England, and one for

Ireland. Income corresponding to the canal companies 1913 results was guaranteed. Only the main independent canals were taken under control, with the Bradford, C&HN, Erewash and New Junction being added in April 1917. August saw Irish canals brought into the scheme, then in November, the SUC was removed from the list as it was realised that it was railway owned, so already under control. The Glamorganshire (1918), Stourbridge (1918) and Stroudwater (1919) were later brought in, bringing the total to 32 canals. In 1918 six independent carrying companies, with 384 boats, also came under control.<sup>vii</sup> Only carriers with more than ten boats were concerned. Compensation was much the same as for canal companies, with provision made for estimating the number of boats in service based on a boat carrying around 25 tons. There were also clauses covering maintenance, wear and tear, and interest on additional capital.

In 1918, a *Handbook on Canals* was published which provided details and maps of those inland waterways under control and of public carriers. Railway-owned canals continued to be looked after by the Railway Executive Committee, though details of all canals were included. It also provides a few details about replacement labour:

*In addition, arrangements have been made for the employment of a number of men of the Transport Workers' Battalions for loading and unloading boats, for carrying out maintenance works, such as the repair of locks, dredging, etc., which it is essential should be done ... and for the removal and breaking up of ice, so as to keep the canals open in the event of a severe frost. For the two first-mentioned purposes, a large number of men from these Battalions are already employed, while for dealing with the question of ice on canals an additional force is held in readiness.*

*... By arrangement with the War Office, applications can be made for men over 25 years of age who have joined the Army for their transfer into the Transport Workers' Battalions, whence they are drafted back temporarily to their previous employers on the canals, although they still remain in the Army. In order to provide experienced boatmen, of which class there is a considerable shortage, men from the Transport Workers' Battalions without previous experience on the canals are now being trained on some canals.*

Eventually some 8,000 canal workers over 25 were exempted from military service. There were also 1,000 men in the Transport Workers' Battalion, though only a few had canal experience. A school was set up at Devizes, men being sent out to canals and carriers when trained. One of these was the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, and its experiences were similar to those on other busy waterways.<sup>viii</sup>

1914 had been difficult on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, with a boatmen's strike early in the year, union agitation for increases in rates, and a prolonged drought, the effects of which lasted into November. February 1915 saw a rise of 2/- per week for those over 18 in the Engineering and Traffic departments, and it was also given to agents and clerks on less than £150 per annum. However, unlike the railway companies, the Board of Trade refused to pay the canal for such war bonuses, even though a second 2/- per week had to be awarded in November 1915. By the middle of the following year, the canal's Engineer reported that a shortage of staff was holding up repairs, and by the end of 1916 several men had given notice because of the low wages compared with other industries. Some idea of war-time inflation can be gauged from the price paid for new boats which rose from around £300 pre-war to around £900 in 1920.

Mr. Peploe, the L&LC's Traffic Manager was appointed a member of the Canal Control Committee at an increased salary of £700 per annum. He may have organized a tour of inspection, the lock keeper at Bank Newton noting that government boat, No. 293 (one of the L&LCC's flyboats), passed through the locks on the 1<sup>st</sup> March with Henry Draper as captain. After the inspection, it must have been decided to approach the army for help. There was already an Inland Waterways Battalion which operated in France, Belgium and the Near East, which had trained boatmen on the Basingstoke Canal. English canal boats had been sent abroad for the use of this battalion, and the front in France was supplied by boats from the local canal system. As far as is known, this Battalion did not operate in Britain. Instead, three transport battalions were set up as part of the South Lancashire Regiment, two

were involved with dock work, whilst members of the 17<sup>th</sup> (Transport Workers) Battalion were to work on canals, including the Leeds & Liverpool Canal.<sup>ix</sup>

It must have taken some time to set up as it was not until 19<sup>th</sup> November 1917 that the Bank Newton lock keeper noted that a steamer and six boats had passed through with a sergeant and 20 men. The steamer had been converted into a house boat though sufficient accommodation could have been provided in the boats' cabins. There was a cook on board, so perhaps the steamer was also used as a mess. The men seem to have come from places such as London, Hull, Newcastle and Liverpool where they may have worked on the water before the war. Some had been declared unfit for active service.

Over the next few months the boats crossed the canal's summit level several times as the men got to know the route. In March 1918 it was reported that 22 men were being trained and by September there were 37 soldier boatmen out of a total of 493 boatmen on the canal. The original canal boatmen did not take too kindly to the army's boats, especially when the sergeant in charge demanded priority at locks as they were on government service. The thought of fighting twenty odd men for a lock must have been too much even for the most hardened of boatmen! Eventually the soldier boatmen were sent to work as mates with experienced civilian boatmen, though they continued to wear army uniform. At least two died whilst on the canal. Private James Jaques, from Poplar in London, was drowned on lock 13 at Wigan on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1918. A paddle was left open as the boat was descending the lock and he was knocked into the water when the tiller swung round due to the pressure of water. Later, on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1918, Private Charles Tullett was also drowned. Unfortunately, a Battalion Diary is only kept when soldiers are abroad, so the Regiment has no records of the work undertaken by its soldiers in the Transport Battalions.

By May 1919, it was estimated that the cost of canal operation had doubled over the previous five years while rates had stayed the same—with the obvious effect on canal income. Government estimated that some £800,000 was needed to put the system in order. To keep canals competitive, railway rates would have had to be doubled as they formed the basis for canal rates. This was obviously impracticable, so the possibility of canal nationalisation was raised; and if they were, so would be the independent canal carriers. The Government discussed nationalisation and the improvement of canals at the highest level. On 21<sup>st</sup> July 1920, Ministers met in Bonar Law's room in Parliament when the withdrawal of subsidy was discussed. The Treasury was in favour, stating: “...*Moreover, the experience of operation without support of a subsidy would afford a good test of relative usefulness, while the absence of State support and the necessity for working canals on a strict economic basis would have a steadying effect on labour*”.<sup>x</sup> This last comment related to a strike by the National Transport Workers Federation, the canal companies finding it difficult to negotiate whilst still controlled by the Government. Canal companies were in a poor financial condition and, six days after a meeting of the Canal Association on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, the Leeds & Liverpool Directors signed an application to be sent to the Minister of Transport asking for the canal to be taken over by the Government. Other canal companies sent similar applications. All that happened was that the war subsidy was officially withdrawn from 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1920.<sup>xi</sup>

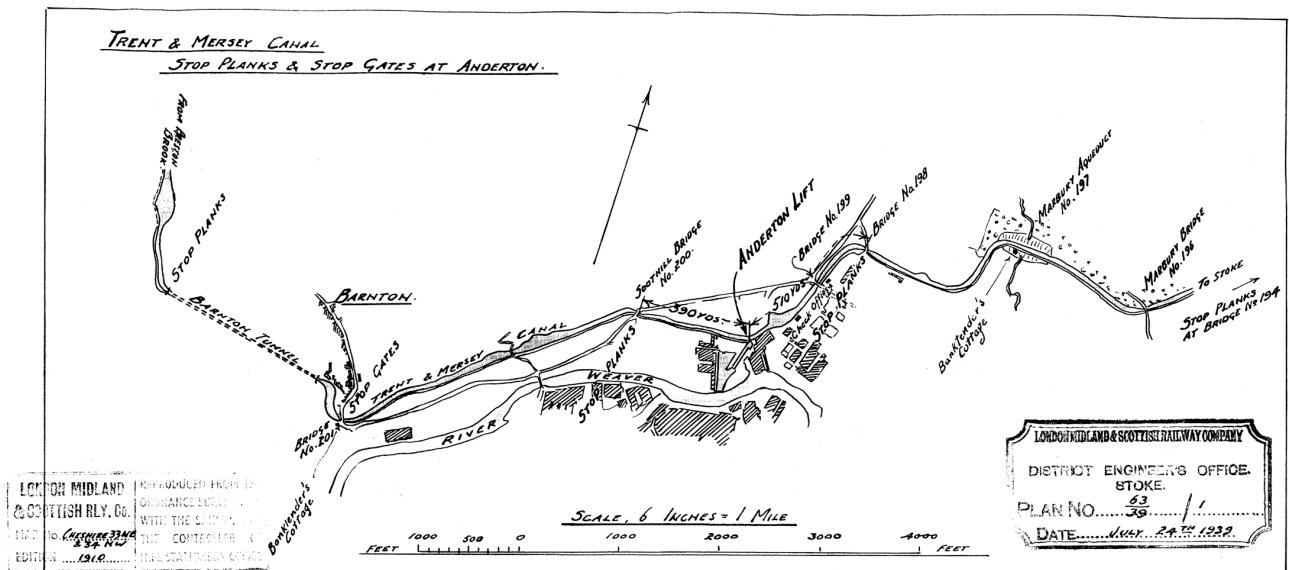
The final compensation payments were withheld for a short while because it was feared that their payment would affect legal arguments over compensation to the railways, whose claim came to £150,000,000. However, canals and carriers had signed legal documents related to their control, whilst railways had not, so the circumstances were different, allowing payments to be made. The Leeds & Liverpool received about £37,750 as compensation for war-time losses. In total, between March 1917 and August 1920, the Treasury paid out £2,301,000 in compensation for revenue to controlled canal companies, and £141,000 to carriers. A further £561,000 and £17,000 respectively were paid for maintenance arrears, and £62,000 and £5,000 for stores. Given the financial damage done to inland waterways during the war, this was insufficient, and monetary problems led to the closure of several canal-owned carrying departments in 1921/2, in particular those of the Rochdale, Shropshire Union and Leeds & Liverpool canals.

Financial restraints also stopped investment in modernisation. The Leeds & Liverpool Canal's Manager presented a report in July 1919 considering improvement of the canal. Enlargement to the

100 ton standard suggested by the Royal Commission would have required the deepening of the whole canal, as well as the lengthening of locks by three feet below Wigan and by thirteen feet above. Because this would have caused difficulties at the lock flights; the possibility of using lifts was considered, again as suggested in the Royal Commission's report. As with proposals for enlargement at the end of the nineteenth century, work was not carried out because of the financial position of the company.

### The Second World War

The problems of wartime canal transport were considered by the Ministry of Transport as early as October 1936. By this time, the importance of canal transport had declined and they expected them only to carry a small volume of traffic. Railway-owned canals would again come under Government control as part of the railway system. The situation was reviewed again in 1938 when there were also air raid precautions<sup>xii</sup> and the implications of the decision to transfer coastal shipping away from the North Sea to consider. For the former, Government grants of 27.5% were available for staff air raid shelters, and up to 50% for measures to ensure continued operation following an attack. Railways, but not railway-owned canals and docks, were to receive slightly more compensation. The Weaver Navigation spent £729 on precautions, the two major items being a second emergency stop-gate for the river sluices, and concrete protecting walls for the lower bridge cabins at Sutton Weaver and Northwich Town.<sup>xiii</sup> In the event of an attack, swing bridges were to be left open to navigation. An emergency control office was set up at Northwich and the GPO provided improved telephone communication, particularly to locks and bridges. Employees were trained in first aid, anti-gas and decontamination, and fire fighting. In co-operation with the Trent & Mersey Canal, new stop plank grooves were installed to protect against a breach at Anderton. Emergency stop plank grooves were fitted to many canals, and their remains can still be found.



The National Association of Canal Carriers wrote to the Ministry of Transport on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1938 saying that they were in favour of national control for both railways and canals, with no overlap as happened after the First War. Two weeks later the Canal Association also wrote suggesting that there should be a more unified system of controlling transport to ensure that the full potential was used. One letter stated:

*The rates of conveyance were settled prior to the war on competitive terms essentially with the railways. These rates yielded very moderate profits, and made no allowance for heavy increases in working expenses. Those additional expenses have, however, been brought about by war conditions. Owing to the restriction of night working, craft have been longer in passage, consequently involving higher wage costs and other charges. The price of fuel, stores, maintenance, and many other items has been increased, the net*

*result being that the existing rates barely cover working expenses, and there will probably soon be a definite loss.*

The Ministry decided that the Treasury would not assist in the financial support of canals and canal carriers, so the position at the start of the war was much the same as in 1914.<sup>xiv</sup> However, a Canal (Defence) Advisory Committee was set up to advise the Minister of Transport upon the best use of inland waterways, together with six regional committees which dealt with day-to-day operations, including the building and repairing of craft. There was a proposal in January 1940 to take just the Severn Navigation under full Government control to assess the problems, but this was not carried out.<sup>xv</sup>

As in the previous war, goods transferred to the railways because of their subsidised rates, and men left the canals for the forces or more remunerative work elsewhere. Canal income declined. Mr. Rawsthorne, a director of Canal Transport Ltd., general carriers on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, reported to fellow directors in September 1939, "*...that the knowledge gained during the last period of control by the government of the transport industry is sufficient for the experience not to be repeated*". He was of the opinion that railway receipts would increase as traffic was forced onto them by petrol rationing etc. and that railwaymen he had talked to locally expected nationalisation when hostilities ceased. By the following month, it was reported that railway traffic had increased by 33.5% since the war had begun. The traffic on the Leeds & Liverpool most threatened by diversion to rail was grain from Liverpool and Birkenhead to Blackburn. As well as a rise in boatmen's wages, tug owners in Liverpool were suggesting that their rates would soon increase by 2d per ton.

Initially the Ministry of Transport would only give financial help to carrying companies and not to the canals themselves. However, sanction was given for tolls to be raised, and Government assistance to the carriers was equal to 50% of the net tolls paid, though only about half of canal carriers were eligible. The subsidy was paid quarterly and in arrears, the first quarter beginning on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1940. The subsidy also brought the long-standing canal problem of through rates to the fore, as well as the gauging of boats. Norman Bird, Liaison Officer and Secretary to the NW Regional Canal Committee, wrote asking for suggestions in November 1941, stating that there was non-uniformity in the gauging of canal boats on different canals, though the Leeds & Liverpool and Bridgewater Canals required a simple declaration of tonnage, with only the occasional check on draft. C. M. Marsh's reply<sup>xvi</sup> for the Weaver Navigation listed the problems, first for gauging:

*...when a boat's [gauge] plates are fixed, they are only correct for operation in water of the same density. A boat with plates correctly set for loading 24 tons in fresh water would require about 24 tons 12 cwts loading into her to obtain the same plate readings in salt water.*

The Weaver's toll system was similar to that on the L&L and Bridgewater. Regarding proposals for through tolls arranged by the originating canal, his response shows the major problem on canals:

*...The principal difficulty at present about the proposal is that there is no definite basis upon which "Through Tolls" are calculated. "Through Toll" agreements were made in 1894 and 1896 covering certain journeys by certain canals on the N/W to Midland route, but the rates provided therein have been subsequently modified by the later Acts of the various Navigations concerned. The percentage increases authorised are not identical and are not known in all cases.*

The problems of canals and canal transport were reviewed at the highest level in government as reports to the Minister of Transport show.<sup>xvii</sup> One of the main difficulties was the inability of canal companies to work together:

*...experienced observers have urged in recent years that our inland waterways would be far more successful if their parochial managements could be merged into larger and more efficient units. I cannot suggest that we are getting in wartime 100% unified management of the railways...but I am doubtful whether we could get together even in*

*wartime a Canal Control Committee who would in fact succeed in getting any high percentage of unified management of the non-railway canals.*

If canals were supported financially, there was a similar problem with railway-owned and independent docks to be considered, not to mention road transport. Articles on the control of canals appeared in *Modern Transport* (6<sup>th</sup> January 1940) and the *January Dock and Harbour Authority*. At the Ministry of Transport, the Deputy-Secretary reported:

*...The advocates of "control" are vague as to what they mean by the term and the undertakings they have in mind...they appear to think of control primarily as a Government financial guarantee of revenue...*

*...Starting with a personal bias in favour of development of the use of canals in this country, I have not found in my talks with representatives of the industry any clear indication of the lines of national policy which...would in fact lead to more efficient operation and greater use of canals.*

*...Nevertheless, I venture to endorse your view that we ought not merely to stand by and deplore the apparent inability of the industry to put forward constructive proposals.*

The report goes on to discuss what exactly a national canal manager should do and how it could be justified to the Treasury. The Minister's Secretary replied that, *"I am all in favour of anything which will elucidate from the canal companies exactly what it is they require from the Government to promote their efficiency"*. A further report, dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 1940, was written after a meeting with the Canal Association and the Canal Carriers Association. Once again the Deputy-Secretary *"...was afraid that the canal world still lacks unanimity of view, save on the one point that they would like to touch the Chancellor's purse"*. He went on to say, *"With all the sympathy in the world, it was frankly impossible for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the middle of a war which was costing unprecedented amounts day by day, to start doling out subsidies to this interest and to that"*.

In May 1940, Frank Pick presented a report on inland waterways and their contribution to the war effort. It included in depth studies of several canals and navigations, advocating closure for some and improvement for others. He looked at how to provide efficient organisation and how to retain labour, advocating a scheme of grants and subsidies, together with other Government help with employment. The Ministry was unsure about this, as they considered that wages and conditions for boat crews, particularly on narrow canals, were so unsatisfactory that employment should not be protected or encouraged until the conditions were improved. Pick also looked at maintenance and the improvement of facilities, a subject which would continue to be investigated throughout the war and lead to the post-war standard boat scheme and the 100 ton standard canal. He must have been pro-canal as a note about the Minister ordering the formation of a barge pool for Bristol and Sharpness says, *"The Ministry of War Transport is one-eyed and perverse as Polyphemus"*. On obtaining labour, he went on, *"No chance of getting men in this area. New munitions factories like mushrooms"*.

Sir Osborne Mance was appointed Director of Canals at the Ministry of War Transport in December 1941 to implement the report. The Canal (Defence) Advisory Committee was disbanded and a Central Canal Committee and six Regional Canal Committees formed covering the London, North East, North West, East Midland, West Midland and South Western areas. Unlike in the First War, both railway-owned and independent canals were covered.<sup>xviii</sup> With the committees' formation, canals were finally brought completely under government control on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1942, the control to continue for one year after the end of hostilities. Originally there were 18 canal companies and nine canal carriers under control, a further 14 carriers being brought in later. Small carriers who were excluded continued to benefit from the 50% toll subsidy. By the end of 1945, canal control had cost some £1,330,000, the toll subsidy costing a further £1,282,000. This contrasts with the large profit Government made from railways during the war. No wonder they were so reticent in taking control of inland waterways.

The Regional Canal Committees looked at all aspects of canal operation, not just traffic encouragement and co-ordination, but also ice breaking and maintenance. There was a special Dredging Committee formed in October 1942 as the carrying capacity of many canals was restricted

by their depth. As well as depth restrictions, they recommended the best types of dredger and bank protection. After six meetings, the name was changed to the Engineering Committee in February 1942.<sup>xix</sup> Post-war improvements and standardisation were considered, and they also had to deal with smaller details, such as the reduction, in May 1942, in the boat horse provender ration from 4 cwt to 3.75 cwt per month. That month, the War Office also asked them to find three stretches of canal for storing ammunition.

*The Ammunition would be stored in shelters about 15 by 10 feet and normally some 10 or 12 of these shelters would be erected at intervals of 30 feet with a space of some 100 yards or so between each group of shelters.*

*...The idea is that the ammunition would be brought to a railhead within easy access of the canal, and thence conveyed to a convenient wharf where boats or barges to be operated by military labour would take it to the various shelters. It would be convenient if sites could be found where barges or boats to be operated by the military could work without too much interference with normal traffic,...*

One of the main problems to be addressed was the shortage of boatmen. A national meeting was held between canal carriers and the Transport & General Workers Union in Birmingham in April 1940 when conscription was suggested, but rejected. Mr Venables, the employee representing the north west, outlined the problem:

*In Manchester and Liverpool there was contact with Dockers who had recently received a 5/6d per week increase, whereas the Inland Waterways people could not get an increase at that time. In addition to this, the Chemical and Munitions works were drawing men away.*

By the end of 1940, boats were already tied up for want of crews, and the Canal Carriers Association was pressing the Ministry of Labour to set up a canal training scheme. On the Leeds & Liverpool, Canal Transport Limited had nine boats unmanned, and 3 Belgian bargemen were offered a trial after being interviewed. They turned up for work at Wigan in January 1941 but were stopped by the local police, presumably as aliens. Norwegian seamen were also interviewed but nothing seems to have materialised, possibly as a result of the police action. By July 1941 soldiers from the Inland Water Transport Section, in uniform as in the First World War, were being employed on the Leeds and Liverpool to help with transporting goods. Although useful, their boats were reported regularly as damaged and constantly in dry dock, so management must have viewed their departure for other work in September with some relief. Damage to boats was a constant problem during this war as the blackout made travelling by night hazardous, particularly for bluff bowed barges on the northern waterways.

During the war, factories were able to pay high wages, and it was a constant effort for Canal Transport Limited to keep boatmen with the low wages they could offer and strenuous conditions on the boats. At the beginning of November 1941 the boatmen went on strike for a week, increasing the problems of keeping traffic moving. Early in 1942 the company suggested to the Ministry of War Transport that boatmen should be released from the army, but this was not taken up.

Instead, they found another way around the problem by bringing in Irish labour. In October 1942 Ben Walls, one of the directors of Canal Transport, went over to Ireland to assess whether Irish workers would be suitable for English canals. In Dublin he talked to Mr. Scott of the Grand Canal who was not encouraging. With the shortage of fuel in Ireland, the government there was having 20 boats built for the turf trade. (Some were built at Arklow, on the Irish Sea coast south of Dublin. The boats had steel bows and sterns, though the sides were made from wood to reduce the use of scarce steel) Before returning to England, Ben Walls interviewed around 60 men and selected 20 to work on the Leeds and Liverpool. They had arrived in England by the end of the year. Walls returned to Ireland in November on behalf of the Canal Control Committee with a list of men required by canals, carriers and boatyards right across England. He not only visited Eire, but also Northern Ireland, though this time he was not so successful in obtaining labour. Representatives from many other industries were seeking labourers

and skilled men, and canal men were in short supply. Once again the low wages paid by canal companies were a problem, though there was no difficulty recruiting for the Trent Navigation and for the Grand Union where good wages could be earned. Other industries offered better wages. For example the Great Western Railway was looking for 400 men and could guarantee 60 or 80 hours work each week.

Ben Walls continued to visit Ireland looking for men, but by early 1943 labour was even more difficult to obtain. Word was getting around that the canal jobs were no good and that wages and conditions were poor. Some of the men sent to the Birmingham area complained that to get to work they had to travel several miles by bus and that there were no canteens. Wives were also bitter that their husbands were only sending 30/- a week to them, while men employed in other industries were sending £3 or more. Altogether 190 Irish men came to England to work on canals, but by December 1943 only 93 remained, 74 had asked to be released for other work or had returned to Ireland while 23 had just disappeared.

Grade and number posted	Numbers remaining	Numbers who have left		Of those who left with permission	
		with permission of N.S.O.	without permission	Transferred to other work in this country	Returned to Eire
43 maintenance labourers	28	11	4	10	-
2 engine drivers	1	1	-	-	1
10 dredgers	4	3	3	1	1
3 shipyard labourers	1	-	2	-	2
49 boatmen	9	32	8	14	6
16 boatbuilders	11	5	-	1	-
41 goods porters	22	13	6	7	-
4 shipwrights	3	1	-	-	-
14 carpenters	10	4	-	4	-
1 blacksmith	1	-	-	-	-
2 tugmen	-	2	-	-	-
2 marine fitters	-	2	-	2	-
2 ships platers	2	-	-	-	-
1 ships smith	1	-	-	-	-
<b>Total 190</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>10</b>

The largest numbers went to work on the Trent Navigation (24), on the Leeds & Liverpool for Canal Transport Ltd. (22) and for the Grand Union (19), though others were scattered all over the English canal system with 49 working for various firms around the BCN and 35 on the north eastern waterways. Unfortunately the men did not settle down easily. In the north west they were considered inexperienced and were soon attracted by the higher rates of pay in factories, while in the west midlands they did not realise that they would have to work with horses on narrow, heavily locked canals.

Canal Transport had Irishmen working with four of their most experienced motor boat crews, each motor boat towing a loaded dumb boat, three Irishmen crewing this whilst learning from the experienced boatmen. The motor boats involved were *Saturn*, *Lune*, *Nidd* and *Aire*, steered by Captains Lamb, Melling, Baldwin and Abram respectively. The boatmen were paid a fixed wage of £5 per week to compensate for the time they lost teaching the Irishmen about boat handling etc. They were also to receive a bonus as the trainees were transferred to working independently. Not only Irishmen were to be trained. It was suggested that women and boys could also make up the crews of

the dumb boats. Crews were needed desperately as younger boatmen were still being called up. Each pair of boats was to operate separately, Ben Walls reporting that this was “...to prevent them congregating too much, the results of which we know from experience are to the benefit of neither the men or the Company”.

Although the Irishmen were not a success, there was a new training scheme for women operating at the beginning of 1945. By this time Canal Transport had 17 boats (out of a total fleet of 68) hired out to other firms or laid up as they could not find sufficient crews. The scheme was not to be widely publicised as steering boats and working cargoes on the wide northern canals was considered to be much harder work than on the narrow canals in the midlands. However it was thought that little could be lost by the trial.

<i>North Eastern Region, 35</i>			<i>South Western Region, 18</i>		
Aire & Calder Navigation, Leeds and Goole	3 maintenance labourers 2 warehouse porters	5	John Harker Ltd., Gloucester	3 labourers 1 ships' plater	4
Calder Carrying Co., Halifax	3 boatmen 3 boat repairers	6	Severn Commission, Gloucester	6 dredgerhands 2 steam crane drivers	8
John Harker Ltd., Knottingley	1 shipsmith 2 marine fitters 1 ships' plater	4	Sharpness Dock Co., Gloucester	6 labourers	6
Leeds Industrial Co-op, Leeds	1 labourer	1	<i>North Midland Region, 24</i>		
Sheffield & South Yorkshire Navigation Co.	5 maintenance labourers 1 boat repairer 7 goods porters	13	Trent Navigation and Trent Carriers Ltd., Nottingham	6 bank rangers 18 goods porters	24
Calder & Hebble Navigation, Halifax	4 dredger hands 2 carpenters	6	<i>Metropolitan Region, 21</i>		
<i>Midland Region, 49</i>			Lee Conservancy Board, Middlesex	2 barge captains	2
J. Toole Ltd., Bilston	6 boatmen 4 boat repairers	10	Grand Union Canal Co., Islington, Brentford & Southall	19 dock and general labourers	19
E. Thomas, Walsall	7 boat repairers 8 boatmen	15	<i>North Western Region, 44</i>		
L M & S Railway, Wolverhampton	1 boatman	1	Canal Transport Ltd., Liverpool	15 boatmen 7 warehouse porters	22
Worsley Ltd., Walsall	1 boat repairer	1	F. J. Abbott Ltd., Salford	3 boatmen	3
T. & S. Element Ltd., Birmingham	4 boatmen 2 boat repairers	6	Leeds & Liverpool Canal Co., Liverpool	3 carpenters 1 blacksmith 3 dredgerhands	7
Thos. Bantock & Co.,	1 boatman 2 canal porters	3	Manchester Ship Canal Co., Manchester	3 maintenance labourers	3
Fellows, Morton & Clayton, Birmingham	2 boat repairers	2	T. & J. Hodson, Blackburn	2 boat repairers	2
Spencer Abbott & Co., Birmingham	2 boat repairers	2	Rathbone Bros., Manchester	4 boat repairers	4
H. Hingley & Sons, Dudley	2 boatmen	2	James Mayor & Co. Ltd., Wigan	3 boat repairers	3
King Bros. Ltd., Birmingham	1 boatman	1			
L. Leigh Ltd., Birmingham	6 boatmen	6			

There was some adverse comment about the quality of Ben Walls canal experience when hiring the Irishmen. In his report he states that he was conversant with all aspects of canals (His family had worked on the Leeds and Liverpool for several generations. He was a director of Canal Transport Ltd. and had been responsible for the running and maintenance their boats and their boatmen during the 1930s) and that he only sent men he thought were experienced in canal work. He wrote that: “A great deal depends on the way the men are handled on arrival here, and once you get an Irishman really upset he will never be satisfied until he has moved on to another job”. It was also suggested that some of the men had deliberately misrepresented their experience in order to enter England so that they could obtain the better paid factory jobs. Ben Walls was certainly disappointed with the results of his work, blaming the poor rates of pay and conditions as the main problem, while working during winter reduced the amount of overtime that could be earned. Of 49 boatmen taken on, only 9 remained by December 1943. A few of the Irishmen continued working on canals after the war. At Hodson’s boatyard in Blackburn, boatbuilder Jack Shear was still employed in the 1950s, and presumably others stayed on, but little has been recorded.

At the end of the war, labour shortages continued. The Calder & Hebble even considered using prisoners of war for repairs in the Halifax area where there was a particular shortage. However, “In the circumstances, it is not considered to be worth the trouble to make application for German Prisoners, with all the attendant difficulties of supervision, transport, etc.”<sup>xx</sup> The Regional Canal Committees seem to have stayed in control until the Docks & Inland Waterways Executive took over on nationalisation. In December 1947, the NE Committee was organising ice breaking, with a total of 310 men employed on the L&LC, A&CN, C&HN and S&SYN. Each man was allowed extra food: 3 oz tea, 6 oz sugar, 1½ tins condensed milk, 4½ lbs tinned beef, pork or fish, and 4½ lbs biscuits. This was to last six days. The Ministry of Food warned, “Before permits are issued an undertaking must be obtained from each authority that the stocks will only be consumed by canalmen called out to work on ice-breaking duties”.

Throughout the war there were discussions on a post-war canal policy<sup>xxi</sup> which included standardisation of boats, facilities and administration. Certain canal routes were also identified for improvement.<sup>xxii</sup> However, nationalisation was the only outcome. It was realised that railways would have to be nationalised after the war, including railway-owned canals, so independent canals would also have to be included to maintain the 'integrated' system. It was nationalisation which saved Britain's inland waterway system. Had the canal companies been left in their precarious financial situation after the war, there is no doubt that many would have sold off their assets, and the channel would have been filled in so that the land could be sold. Although the nationalised industry did abandon canals in the 1950s and '60s, it was probably at a much slower rate than would have happened had the industry remained private. The two world wars of the twentieth century certainly drove the last nail into the coffin of canal transport in Britain, but their effect was also to ensure the system's survival as a heritage asset and for leisure.

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<sup>i</sup> The Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation Box 47/5. The fitting shop where the author served his time, at Pilkington Bros. St. Helens, was known as the Nose Shop because of First World War shell production.

<sup>ii</sup> The Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation Box 64/30, letter dated 8 Feb 1916

<sup>iii</sup> The waterway companies represented on the committee were:

Aire & Calder Navigation, Birmingham Canal Company, Grand Junction Canal Company, Leeds & Liverpool Canal Company, Rochdale Canal Company, Staffs & Worcs Canal Company and Severn & Canal Carrying Company Ltd, Anderton Company Ltd, W. Bleasdale & Company Ltd, Thomas Clayton (Oldbury) Ltd, Fellows, Morton & Clayton Ltd, Mersey Weaver Carrying Company Ltd

<sup>iv</sup> A statement prepared by the Canal Joint Committee in February 1940 stated that: 'During this period of control railway rates and charges were not increased although working expenses, wage costs etc. went up very considerably: in fact more than 100 per cent.'

<sup>v</sup> The total length of inland waterway in England and Wales was considered to be about 2,500 miles, of which 2,251 miles came under Government control.

<sup>vi</sup> Sir Maurice Fitzmaurice CMG (Chairman), Mr Sydney Preston CIE, Sir Ernest Moir, Bart, Ministry of Munitions, Mr E G Moggridge, Board of Trade, Lt-Col. A S Redman, War Office, Colonel Saner, VD, Weaver Navigation, Mr A J Ash,

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Messrs Fellows, Morton & Clayton Ltd, Mr Alfred Peplow, Leeds & Liverpool Canal, Mr I T Williams, London & North Western Railway, Mr R B Dunwoody, (Secretary)

vii PRO MT52/8. The carrying companies under control at the end were H. J. Abbott Ltd., Anderton & Co., F.M.C., H. Mousell, J. Cjarburn & Co. Ltd., J. Rice & Son, S&SCCCo., and Picton & Co.

viii Much of the details related to the Leeds & Liverpool Canal come from the correspondence files which are still within the operational archive files held by British Waterways which are not available for public inspection.

ix Ich Dien,

x PRO, MT52/8

xi Canals were de-controlled one year before the railways, with the result that railways were able to secure traffic on uneconomic terms compared to inland waterways, the latter having no guarantee of income at this time.

xii ARP Memorandum No. C7: Air Raid Precautions for Canals, Navigable Rivers, Land Drainage Channels and Tidal Embankments was published in 1938 for the Home Office. There is a copy in the Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation 47/4.

xiii Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation 47/5a

xiv Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation 55/35. J. A. Saner, former Engineer and Manager of the Weaver Navigation, wrote to the journal *Modern Transport* in 1939:

'...I was disappointed when the Minister of Transport announced in the House of Commons, that it was not considered necessary to apply to canals generally a scheme of control at the commencement of an emergency.

This, as you say, was the position taken in 1914-17, and it was a very heavy task which confronted us when we were asked to re-organise and make as full use of the waterways as possible.

By then everything was out of gear and most of the independent canals on the verge of bankruptcy although the salaries and wages of their officials and servants had remained as pre-1914: in spite of the fact that other wages as well as materials had advanced 50%, 75% and even 100%; whilst tolls and charges remained controlled by the schedules of the Canal Tolls and Charges Act 1894...'

xv PRO, MT52/41

xvi Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation Papers

xvii PRO, MT52/41, /105, /109

xviii Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation 52/20. The main canals were: A&CN, BCN, Bridgewater, C&HN, Coventry, G&BC, W&BC, GUC, L&LC, New Junction, Oxford, Severn, S&SYN, S&WC, Stourbridge, Trent, Trent (Nottingham) and Weaver. The carriers were: Samuel Barlow Coal Co Ltd, S. E. Barlow, Calder Carrying Co Ltd, Canal Transport Ltd, FM&C Ltd, GUCC Co Ltd, Severn Carrying Co Ltd, Warwickshire Canal Carrying Co, T. F. Wood & Co Ltd.

xix Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation 52/20

xx Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation 52/23, letter from H. Jackson to C. M. Marsh

xxi Waterways Archive, The Boat Museum, Weaver Navigation 68/18

xxii See 'The Canals of England and Wales - The Future They Never Had', Tony Burnip, in *Waterways Journal* No. 1, May 1999.