



Eyton Lock, No.10, Shrewsbury Canal

Features of the Canal - Number 3 - Shrewsbury Canal Locks

The Shrewsbury Canal featured 11 locks. These were named Trench, Baker's, Turnip, Hadley Park, Peaty, Shucks, Wheat Leasons (or Leasowes?), Britton, Wappenshall, Eyton and Eyton Lower. Can anyone throw light on the origins of some of those names?

The canal was built for the use of tub-boats, about 20 ft long and 6ft wide, which were pulled along in trains. The locks were each 81 ft long and 6 ft 7 in wide, which meant that

each would hold four tub-boats.

As can be seen in the photograph, these locks featured a guillotine gate at their lower end. The upper gate was of the usual swing type.

However, it is not known if this is the original arrangement.

In 1797 Thomas Telford, who had then taken over as engineer of the canal, wrote that 'the locks are so formed as to admit either one, three or four boats passing at a time, without the loss of any more water than what is just necessary.....This is accomplished by having gates that are drawn up and let down perpendicularly....and each lock has three gates, one which divides the body of the lock'. Did this mean that each lock had three lifting gates, or that it had ordinary gates at each end and a lifting gate between them?

However, the mystery is that there is neither a record of the lifting gates having been moved to the lower ends nor have traces of intervening gates ever been evidenced at the locks themselves. It seems highly likely therefore that Telford was setting out his intention in his writings and that this arrangement never actually came about. It would indeed seem a logical arrangement to save water by varying the length of lock to suit the length of boats passing, but in practice the movement of a single tub-boat would probably be unusual.

Whatever the arrangement, in the original design the guillotine gate was counterbalanced by chains leading over wheels above the gate to a centre weight, a wooden box full of stones. However, starting in 1840 at Wheat Leasons the counterbalancing was altered so that a cast-iron weight sank in a well at the side of the lock as the gate was raised. All locks, other than Hadley Park, were finally converted to this pattern.

In the early 1830s, when the building of the Newport branch was under construction, the Shrewsbury Canal Company planned to widen all their locks and bridges to take the standard narrow boat that would in future have access from the national network. This it seems was going to prove to be too expensive and in the event only the two Eyton locks were converted along with the bridge openings between Wappenshall and Shrewsbury, but the design of the guillotine gate was retained. The locks and bridges between Wappenshall and Trench were not altered and especially narrow narrowboats were used on this section.