

# Memories of Old Shrewsbury Canal

by Mrs V Woods and Mrs H Bowers

We moved to 'Buena Vista' on the 16 September 1930. The address at that time was New Inn Lane, Newport Road. It has now been changed to 84 Sundorne Road.

At this time, Sundorne was outside the borough of Shrewsbury. There was no electricity but some of the houses had mains gas. In 1780 it was recorded that an Inn, The New Inn, used to stand at the top of the lane on the right. This was a regular haunt of the 'bargees' from the traffic on the canal and river. In 1820 The New Inn was closed because of the bad conduct from the Bargees. The old bowling green from the New Inn could still be seen right up to 1911. At the bottom of the lane there was a stile and gate leading onto an old iron bridge built on a brick base.

The Shrewsbury Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal (The Shroppie) was looked after by "Lengthman" Tom Adams, known locally as „Tom the canal man". He lived at the canal basin yard behind the railway station (now a car park).

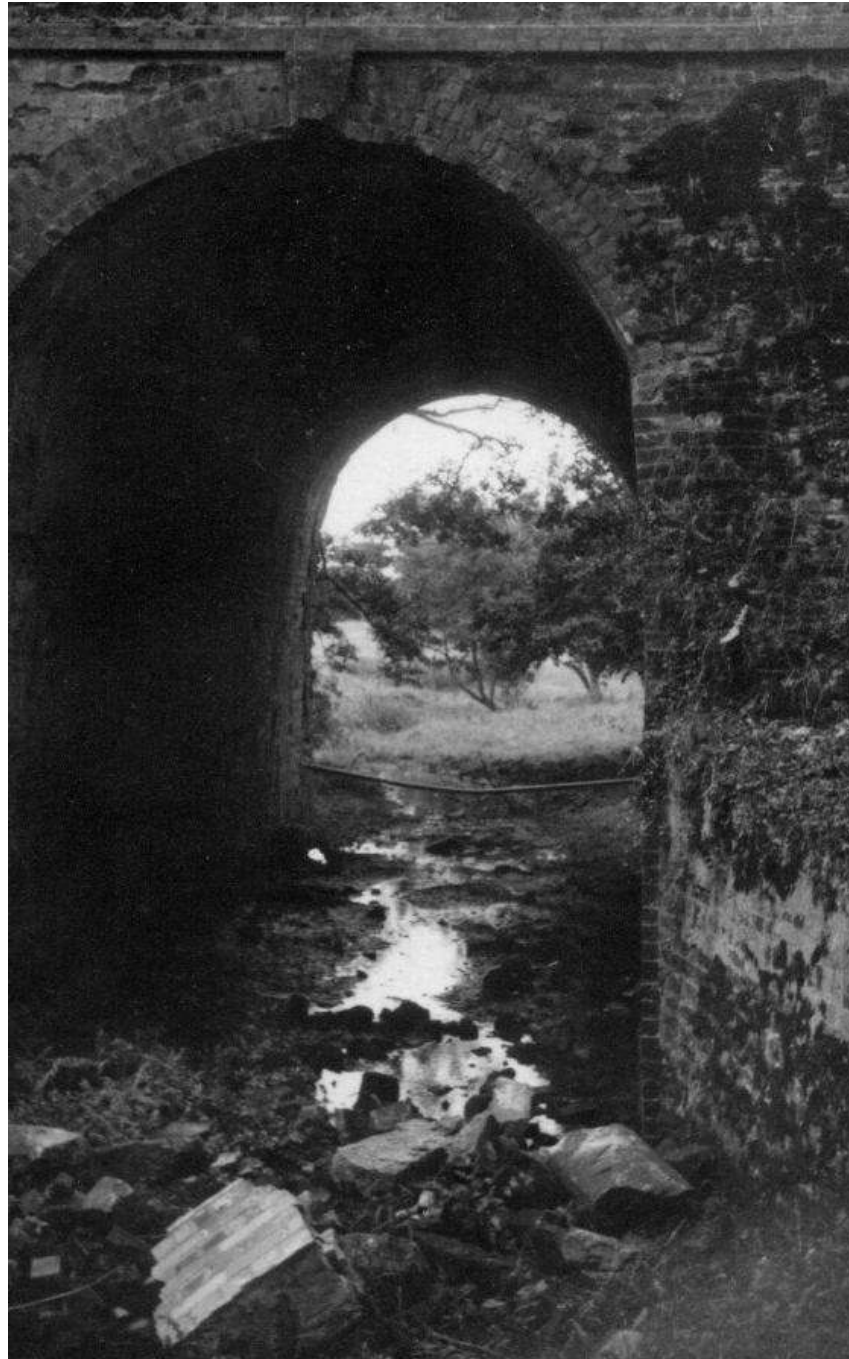
His "length" was from his home to the other side of Upton Magna. On his way out, Tom would clean out the canal and trim the edges and on his return journey would cut the hedges and repair the fences. Tom had a little black barge that he used for shelter and the storing of his tools. His tool kit, by modern standards, was crude, basic and simple. He managed to complete all his tasks with a scythe, a brushhook, a shovel and a few other basic tools. Very often we would see him cycling from his home to wherever he had left his barge the night before. He would then load his bicycle onto the barge and punt it to his next job.

He was a great character and took immense pride in his work. His stretch of the canal was always immaculate and a joy for the public to behold. He was good to us children too. He would often let us ride on his boat and we found it great fun even if he only moved the barge a hundred yards. A walk along the towpath in summer was a joy and a riot of colour. Plants like Meadow Sweat, Purple Tufted Vetch, Yellow Meadow Vetchling, Purple Loosestrife, Ladies Bedstraw and Cross Stitch Wort were abundant and their perfume made the air a pleasure to breathe.

There was also an immense amount of insect and wildlife, butterflies, moths, dragonflies, newts and the spawn from the frogs and toads produced many, many tadpoles. The hedges were kept low and neat. They were a haven for nesting and feeding birds. Most years swans, ducks, water hens and coot would nest and safely rear their young.

On Good Fridays, there would be a procession of people walking the tow path

– getting out of town and going to Haughmond Hill for a picnic. A Miss Campbell lived at Pimley Manor in those days and just past the manor was an aqueduct that has sadly been destroyed for the new A49. Just before you get to the manor, if you look carefully you will be able to make out the arch and parapet of the old Pimley Bridge.



*Beneath Sundorne Aqueduct*

The old sewage farm was managed by a Mr Brightwell and Mr Ellis. They always seemed to be smoking their pipes but when you were down wind of the works, you could understand why.

Some winters when it was extremely cold the canal would freeze over, but

skating was dangerous because where small streams entered the canal the ice was much thinner. In January 1940 the ice was very very thick. We used to leave school, walk down to the canal at Pimley and skate all the way home to the daisy bank. The daisy bank lived up to its name in the summer. Smothered in daisies, a great place for a picnic and a starting place for the foolhardy that swam in the Severn. In the winter it also provided us with a place to go sledging. We loved our childhood and still love our memories of this wonderful place. At the side of the daisy bank is „Jenny Hoods Well“. Our neighbour collected his fresh clear spring water every day from this well. He lived into his nineties so it must have been good for him.



*The path over Sundorne Aqueduct*

The wood between the river and the canal is known as Pimley Rough and is part of the Sundorne Estate. In those days the Chatham brothers (they were animal dealers) used to keep ponies and cattle on the land. This kept the grass down and the bushes trimmed. It is sad to see how it has deteriorated. During the war years a small aircraft crash landed by the canal at the rear of the Coracle Inn. In 1947 we had one of the highest floods ever recorded. I remember that year also because it was the year they started to fill in our beautiful canal. Sad as we are about this and other damage that has been done since, we feel privileged to have spent so much of our lives in such an idyllic part of Shrewsbury.

*Mrs V Wood & Mrs H Bowers*