

Long-gone mechanism sparks readers' reminiscences



The canal has long been filled in and the old lift bridge has disappeared



Church Farm and Withington Church are no longer connected by a lift bridge

Childhood memories of riding on canal lift

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IT IS many years since the old canal which wound its lazy way through the village of Withington was filled in, but it still has the power to evoke fond memories, as we have learned after publishing this old postcard in Pictures From The Past.

It came from Peter Smith of Dothill, who was trying to trace the location. The case was quickly solved by Shropshire Star readers, with the added bonus that it seems this particular view, from a postcard franked in 1908, is rare and historic.

Mrs Margaret Monether, nee Nicklin, of Withington, said: "It's St John the Baptist Church, Withington. The farm opposite, Church Farm, has been farmed by my family for probably 170 to 180 years and it's still farmed by my nephews, Richard and Peter Nicklin. My brother was farming until he died last year. The actual farm house was a very old Elizabethan farm house. It's been divided into three farm workers' cottages and was sold a few years ago to a couple who have renovated it.

Bought

"The Nicklin family have never lived in the farm house as such. When my father and grandfather were alive they lived at the Rea Farm at Upton Magna. Church Farm was bought by my family. They lived at the Rea Farm and had the two farms together.

"That's the old canal there and at the front of the picture, which you can't see, is the coal wharf where the coal barges came to. You can see the old pull-up bridge. I can remember, and I'm laughing now - I'm 77 by the way - that we were very naughty. We used to pull it up and ride down on it. It was a very nice toy. The old bridge had to be pulled up to let the barges underneath.

"My father died in 1942 when we were very little. My mother continued until the end of the war farming the two farms, and then moved to the Gate House in Withington. That's still in the family.

"I couldn't believe it when I saw the picture. The first thing I thought about was that I lost my father when I was six. I looked at it and thought 'Golly, my father could have put that stack up.'"

Denis Jones, 75, of Harlescote Grange, Shrewsbury, who used to live in Withington,



The postcard view franked in 1908 which turns out to show the village of Withington, near Shrewsbury

said: "I pulled that bridge down a few times when I was a nipper. My mother used to clean the vicarage as well. The old bridge went over to a farm. My dad worked on that farm. For a barge to go under, the bridge had to be lifted up. You pulled a chain down. It was counterbalanced and came down quite easily, and the barge went underneath.

"I was there in the 1940s, 1950s and part of the 1960s and the bridge was still there when we left. I have ridden on a barge on the canal. A man in the village, Jack Granger, used to have a length of it, from Rodington to Berwick Wharf. He kept it clean and pulled the weeds out to stop them fouling the motors on the barges. They were taking coal and coke to the gas works at Shrewsbury. They used to turn round by the Canal Tavern at Shrewsbury and turn back."

Although his name is Denis Jones, the surname of his parents, Joe and Phyllis, was Smith.

"They adopted me but didn't change my name. They are buried in that churchyard."

Sender

Peter Smith's postcard was addressed to a Mr Haycock in Penkridge, and Des Wellings emailed in with a theory about that: "The sender of the card I think would have been Alice Haycock living at No.1, Caernarvon Lane, Withington, who was the sixth of seven children born to Thomas and Ann Haycock. Alice, the last child at home, was looking after her mother who had lost her sight in about 1890. I think Alice sent the card to her brother Edward who was by then living in Penkridge with his own family and working as a gardener.

"Ann, the mother, died in 1913. The fol-

lowing year Alice married a local farm worker, Thomas Kirkham."

Nick Waters chipped in with: "Churches are timeless and the church still looks the same today.

"All traces of the canal and bridge have long gone but the house has been tastefully restored keeping its character and features. I can just remember it more or less as it is in the photo and as a young child was in the church choir in the late 1940s."

Thank you too to Tom Taylor, of The Old Hall, Withington: "The canal fell into disuse, and has been filled in. However, the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust has plans to reopen it.

"Similar photos can be seen on the Withington Community website, www.withingtonshropshire.co.uk.

"However, we've not seen this one previously."