

= Stamford Canal =

Stamford Canal , now disused , is one of the earliest post @-@ Roman canals in England . It opened in 1670 , around 100 years before the start of the Industrial Revolution which brought about the " golden age " for canals in Britain . Parts of the route can be traced on the ground , though only one lock survives intact . It was part of the Welland Navigation in Lincolnshire . First authorised in 1571 , during the reign of Elizabeth I , construction did not start until 1664 , under powers granted in 1620 and ratified by James I. It ran for 9 @.@ 5 miles ( 15 @.@ 3 km ) from Stamford to Market Deeping and had 12 locks , two of which were on the river section at Deeping St James . No plans of its construction survive , although one of the locks was documented by a visiting water engineer in 1699 . It contributed to the wealth of Stamford , allowing barley to be transported to the town for malting .

Plans to link it westwards to the Oakham Canal , northwards to the South Forty @-@ Foot Drain and southwards to the River Nene in 1809 came to nothing , and it closed in 1863 , soon after the arrival of the Midland Railway in the area . Although Stamford Corporation attempted to sell it after closure , its ownership was disputed , and they were unable to do so . Its course and some of its structures can still be traced in the landscape . These include warehouses at the terminus in Stamford , and a weir which regulated water levels on the River Gwash , which it crossed on the level .

= = History = =

The River Welland was one of the earlier on which improvements , in this case to allow navigation to Stamford , were authorised by an act of Parliament . The act was granted in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in 1571 , and the preamble explained how Stamford had prospered as a result of the river , but also stated that mills built between Stamford and Deeping had resulted in it no longer being navigable , as they had diverted the water . Powers were granted to restore the river using either the old channel or the new one , although it is not clear exactly what was meant by this . There is no evidence that any work was carried out under the terms of the act .

However , the powers were revived in 1620 , when Stamford Corporation was given permission by the Commission of Sewers to build a new artificial cut , which would run from the eastern edge of Stamford near Hudd 's Mill , to Market Deeping , where it would rejoin the river . The corporation estimated that it would cost £ 2 @,@ 000 to carry out the work , and the act enabled them to charge tolls for its use , set initially at three pence ( 1 @.@ 25 p ) per lock , which could be charged once the work was completed . The decision was ratified in 1623 by a grant of James I , and the corporation expected to have the work completed by 1627 . However , they were unable to find a suitable contractor to carry out the work , and failed to reach agreement on terms with David Cecil in 1636 , and two other potential contractors after that . Nothing happened until 1664 , when an Alderman from Stamford called Daniel Wigmore took the job . He built the cut and 12 locks , which included the High Lock and the Low Lock on the river at Deeping St James , at a cost of £ 5 @,@ 000 . In return for his expenditure , he was given the lease of the tolls for the next 80 years , for which he paid a rent of one shilling ( five pence ) . The cut was the longest canal with locks in the country , when it was opened in 1670 . Its construction preceded the ' canal age ' by around 100 years , making it one of England 's earliest post @-@ Roman canals .

There are no known contemporary documents describing the design or methods of construction of the canal and nothing about its opening . However , a report from 1632 on alterations to the river noted that 600 men were involved in the work , so presumably there was sufficient labour locally for such tasks . Wigmore probably used handbills at local inns to recruit his workers , since there were no newspapers to carry advertisements . The work would have been done using pickaxes , shovels and wheelbarrows . The excavated ditch was then lined with blue clay to make it watertight . Excavations for a sewer in 1974 and work on a rubbish tip in 1979 revealed the layers of blue clay , and there were clay pits near Stamford , which supported a pottery industry , although their precise location is unknown .

The canal enabled goods to reach Stamford from The Wash , which was 34 miles ( 55 km ) away , by way of Spalding and Crowland . The lower 24 @. @ 4 miles ( 39 @. @ 3 km ) used the course of the Welland , after which the two river locks and weirs at Deeping St James were encountered . Beyond Market Deeping , the course consisted of an artificial cut with 10 more locks , by which it reached the eastern edge of Stamford , after which it rejoined the river to reach the town wharf . The length of the cut was 6 @. @ 5 miles ( 10 @. @ 5 km ) , although the length of the canal is usually quoted as 9 @. @ 5 miles ( 15 @. @ 3 km ) , to include the improved river sections at both ends . Just below Stamford , the canal crossed the River Gwash on the level . There was a weir on a bypass channel and a sluice on the main river channel , which enabled the river levels to be controlled , so that barges could cross .

#### = = = Operation = = =

Trade thrived , for Richard Blome recorded the prosperous Stamford malt trade in 1673 , which depended on barley being carried by boat . With the death of Daniel Wigmore , his son @-@ in @-@ law Charles Halford became the owner of the toll rights . In 1695 , he was receiving between £ 400 and £ 500 per year , most of it derived from the carriage of sea coal . The trade amounted to 3 @, @ 000 chaldrons that year , and he tried to get the tax on sea coal , which Parliament had approved , reversed . He did not succeed , and failed again in 1706 , by which time he stated that the tax had decreased the amount of coal carried to just 500 chaldrons . Besides coal , the canal carried malt and agricultural produce , groceries , timber , slate and stone . Boats used on the canal were small lighters , 35 feet ( 11 m ) long by around 7 feet ( 2 @. @ 1 m ) wide , capable of carrying from seven to fourteen tons , and normally worked in trains of four vessels .

Although there are no known records from the time the canal was constructed , the lock at Hudd 's Mill was documented by Thomas Surbey in 1699 . Surbey was a water engineer , and made notes and drawings when he visited it , during a journey from London to York . The lock chamber was 86 feet ( 26 @. @ 2 m ) long and 11 feet ( 3 @. @ 4 m ) wide . The gates were hung on stone piers , but the banks between them were of earth . The gates were conventional ' V ' gates , similar to modern ones , which included some sort of paddle , but did not include balance beams . Instead , a chain or rope was attached to the mid @-@ stream edge of the gate and to the bank . While this would have made opening the gates possible , it is not obvious how they were shut . The measurements match those of the surviving structures , with the exception of Briggin 's lock , which appears to only be 56 feet ( 17 m ) long . There is no visible evidence that it was shortened at some point , nor any obvious reason why it would have been built shorter than all the others .

#### = = = Expansion = = =

When the Melton Mowbray Navigation was being planned in 1785 , there were discussions of a link to Oakham , which eventually became the Oakham Canal , and onwards to Stamford . The idea of a canal from Stamford to Oakham , 11 miles ( 18 km ) due west , was revived in 1809 , with plans for a 7 @-@ mile ( 11 km ) link from Stamford to the Nene at Peterborough , and a connection from near Market Deeping northwards to the South Forty @-@ Foot Drain , from where Boston could be reached . A bill for this , together with one for a rival scheme to link Stamford to the Grand Junction Canal , which also included a connection to the South Forty @-@ Foot Drain , were put before Parliament in 1811 , but neither met with any success . The idea was raised again in 1815 and 1828 , but no further action was taken .

#### = = = Decline = = =

With the arrival of the railways , river trade declined . The Midland Railway reached Peterborough in 1846 , and opened their line to Melton Mowbray , passing through Stamford , in 1848 . Carriage of coal on the canal stopped , as the railways brought cheaper coal from the Midlands . The locks quickly deteriorated , and there were problems with leakage . By April 1863 , all traffic had ceased ,

and Stamford Corporation tried to sell the line at auction , but failed because their ownership of it was disputed .

Since its closure , the canal has largely disappeared but some parts are still viewable on maps and on the ground . The foundations of the two river locks are visible in the Deepings .

The River Welland is currently only navigable to Crowland but plans for the Fens Waterways Link include a new link from above Crowland to above the Dog in a Doublet sluice on the River Nene . There are currently no plans to restore navigation to Stamford . The Dog in a Doublet sluice near Peterborough was built in 1937 ; the Nene is tidal below it .

= = Route = =

Stamford Wharf was the upper limit of navigation , and was situated below Town Bridge , which carries the A43 road over the river at Stamford . There were buildings associated with the canal on both sides of the river , including a large warehouse next to the bridge , parts of which date from 1671 , and which is Grade II listed . Barges followed the river down past the ruins of St Leonard 's Priory , established in 1090 by the Benedictines , to Hudds Mill , where the cut began , on the north side of the mill . Hudds Mill Lock was almost at the start of the cut . The canal flowed initially to the east , but turned to the north east to cross the River Gwash at right angles . It then entered Uffington Park , where the remains of the weir that regulated river levels at the crossing can still be seen . The Gwash now has much less flow than it did when the canal was active , since the construction of the reservoir at Rutland Water further upstream . The earthworks of the canal continue through the park .

The route of the canal is just to the north of the river , and a public footpath follows it through Uffington Park until it reaches the Uffington to Barnack road . The adjacent bridge over the River Welland has three arches and dates from the seventeenth century but the canal bridge has been filled in to protect its structure . There were three locks in open countryside on this section before the canal reached Tallington where Tallington Village Lock was located just to the north of St Lawrence Church , parts of which date from the 12th to 15th centuries , with later additions . Remains of bridge piers were uncovered during archaeological excavations carried out in 1998 when a water pipeline running from Tallington to West Deeping was installed . No details of the bridge have survived , but the levels suggest that it was probably a movable bridge . The canal then passed close to Tallington Mill , a water mill dating from around 1700 , to reach Horse Holmes Lock . A railway line crossed the tail of the lock , but after the demise of the canal , the line was widened , and the lock is thought to be buried beneath the embankment .

The canal then looped around the northern edge of Horse Marsh to reach West Deeping , where there was another lock . There are visible remains of this lock , indicating that it had stone piers at both ends to support the gates , with turf sides between them . It then crossed King Street . An enclosure map dating from 1810 shows that the road crossed the canal by a ford , but that there was also a footbridge to allow pedestrians to cross the canal without getting wet . From West Deeping to Market Deeping , the canal was close to the northern bank of the northern river channel . There were two more locks in open countryside , and another at the western edge of the town , after which the cut rejoined the river . The final two locks were built on the River Welland , Briggins Lock in Deeping St James , and Low Lock to the south @-@ east of the village .

Points of interest