

John Ward and the Kennet and Avon Canal

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In the progress of any great enterprise the record of events that led to its fruition are often to be found in the official minutes of the concern. Behind those bland words lies a wealth of controversy. If the real reason for a particular course of action is to be understood, then it is necessary to get beyond the official record and to have a view into the committee room or the parlours of the members. To examine the course of an event we need to find a personal correspondence to or from someone intimately connected with the event.

In the planning of the Kennet and Avon Canal we are fortunate that the leading landowner in the Marlborough area was the Earl of Ailesbury, a leading figure in court circles whose duties kept him from his Savernake estates for long periods. During his absence he maintained an almost daily correspondence with his agent, John Ward, who was also to be closely concerned with the planning of the Canal. The letters from Ward to the Earl have been preserved as part of the Savernake Collection in the Wiltshire Record Office, and I am most grateful as I am sure will other scholars of the history of the waterways that Kenneth Rogers, the County Archivist brought them to my attention. The letters are especially detailed for the period up to the passing of the Act, the period on which this account will concentrate.

Wiltshire Record Office



John Ward

John Ward was a native of Staffordshire, born in Cheadle on 30 June 1756, who came to Marlborough in Wiltshire to succeed his uncle, Charles Bill as agent to the Earl of Ailesbury. He became a leading citizen of Marlborough, founded the Marlborough Bank and, as an attorney, started a firm of solicitors which still practices in the town as **Ward Merriman's and Co**; he was elected a member of the Corporation and was Mayor several times.

The Ward family had a historic connection with the development of inland water transport. Whether or not John Ward was connected with the Earls of Dudley has yet to be demonstrated. However, one of the first proposals to unite the Rivers Severn and Trent was proposed by Congreve in the 17th century in a pamphlet addressed to Sir Edward Ward of Staffordshire.. Charles Bill, Ward's uncle had a great interest in canals, being a committeeman on the Trent and Mersey Canal and also intimately concerned with the Rochdale Canal. It was natural, therefore, that when in 1788 a meeting was called by the citizens of Hungerford to discuss an extension of the Kennet Navigation from Newbury on to Marlborough, Ward attended, not only to represent Marlborough interests but also as one with a particular knowledge of canals in the Midlands.

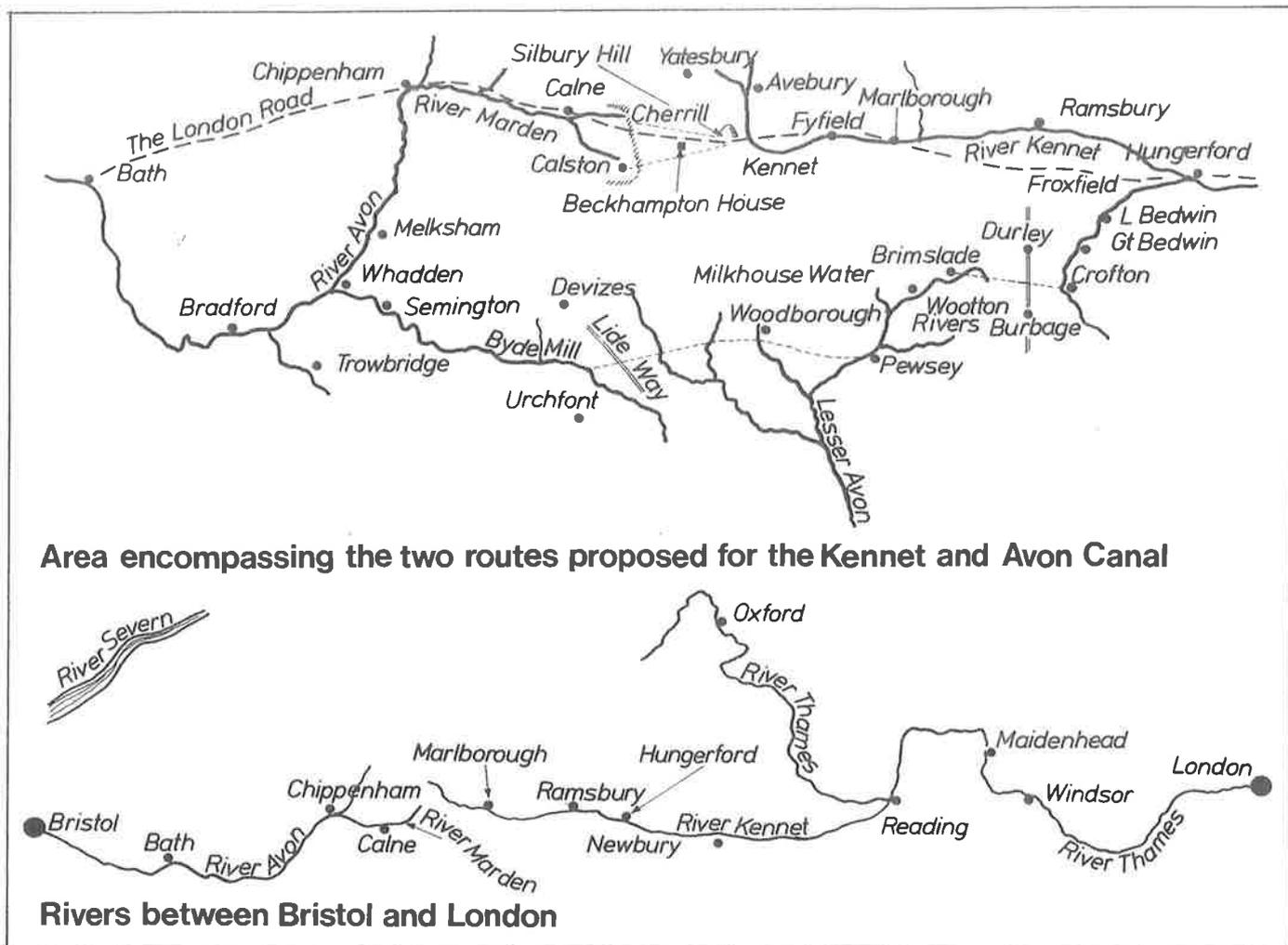
Following the meeting Ward wrote on 6 April 1798:

I shall lay a copy of the resolutions before my brothers . . . For my own part I do not see what carriage is to be had in sufficient quantity to pay interest on the money it would cost to make such a navigation, but if there was, it would be a good thing for Marlborough, in all probability by causing a great quantity of corn to be brought into the town as well as other goods, and might in time raise the value of the houses here if the navigation flourished.

Ward was aware of the difficulties that faced such an undertaking; he goes on:

However, I do not think Sir William Jones would like a navigation so near his house, it may also deprive the mills and water-meadows on the river of a proper supply of water, and it must certainly injure the tolls on the London Road.

Ward did not have long to wait for the expected outcry from the Earl's neighbours. Sir William Jones lived at Ramsbury Manor and, like his neighbour Mrs Popham of Littlecote House, had improved his property taking advantage of the river which flowed through their estates. Neither of the landowners would wish the river canalised, nor would they wish boatmen passing within a few hundred feet of their homes. The experience of people in the south was much more with the River Thames on which boats were manned by up to six crew, and often hauled by gangs of men. It is likely that their opposition would have been less had they been aware that in the Midlands canal boats were run by a crew of two and a horse. On the 16 April the expected letter arrived, Ward wrote:



Sketch maps showing the areas involved From plans in Wiltshire Record Office

I had a letter from Sir William Jones this morning mentioning his disapprobation of the navigation being extended to Marlborough as impracticable for want of money, injurious as tending to hurt the corn farms and other interests and disagreeable and unsightly with respect to his improvements at Ramsbury, which he desired me to signify today at the meeting.

At the meeting a more momentous decision was made:

It seemed to be the general opinion that nothing short of an extension of the navigation to Bristol by Marlborough Avebury Cherril Calne Chippenham the Clothing Country and Bath would be likely to answer.

It was also decided:

To employ Mr Whitworth to view the proposed line of the Navigation and to report his opinion upon the practicability of carrying it to Bristol . . .

Reassuringly Charles Dundas and the Lord Craven, the two principle Berkshire landowners were 'ready to support any plan which appeared to be of public benefit'. Ward pledged his master's support, but with the proviso that the Earl would be sorry if there were a difference of opinion or interest between himself or his neighbours. Charles Dundas, who acted as chairman asked Ward to 'reassure Sir William that nothing would be attempted unless it meet with a very general approbation'.

As a result of the meetings in 1788 a pamphlet entitled *Observations on a Scheme for Extending the Navigation of the Rivers Kennett and Avon* was prepared setting out the advantages that were likely to accrue from the proposed Western Canal as the undertaking was named. From the style of the pamphlet it would seem probable that it was written by Ward. Although only the route via Marlborough had previously been discussed, two are described in the pamphlet, the Northern as described above, and for the first time, a suggestion that the line might run to the south through the Pewsey Vale. The anticipated traffic is described as coal, freestone [Bath Stone], building materials, lime, peat ashes, manure, corn, malt, cheese, chalk and flint; in other words, the writer was emphasising the canal as a means of transporting those products produced along it rather than as a link between the cities of London and Bristol. A surprising omission is cloth and wool,

Provision for compensation for damage to property was allowed for, particularly 'every attention ought to be paid to gentlemen who have their seats and grounds contiguous . . .'. Finally, the anticipated costs of construction were examined, with a conservative estimate of £180,000 based on the cost of construction of the Basingstoke Canal. The estimated dividend payable on completion was 10%.

Through 1789 to 1792 there are scant references to the

canal. On 21 August 1789 Ward writes, 'The business of the canal wears a very cordial face . . .' and 12 months later ' . . . I have heard nothing lately about Mr Whitworth's intended visit . . .'. It is clear that the hopes of the committee, as set out in the pamphlet of 1788, were not realised and that there was no enthusiasm on the part of the public for the scheme.

The situation changed suddenly and dramatically at the end of 1792. A wave of enthusiasm for canals was sweeping through the country; the dividends being paid by earlier canal companies such as the Trent and Mersey, the Oxford and the Birmingham were now considerable. The slump which followed the end of the American War of Independence was over and investors were seeking new projects. An ever increasing spate of proposals for new canals culminated in what was to become known as the Canal Mania.

Naturally the Western Canal proposals which had lain dormant for four years were the subject of much interest, not this time by the landowners and merchants who wished to see it built for the improvement of trade and the good of the country, but by the men of money of Bristol who sought to take over the concern for the profit they hoped would result from it.

A meeting of these parties was secretly held at the White Lion Inn in Bristol under the chairmanship of Mr Daubeny, a leading Bristol merchant. Ward wrote on 11 December,

Mr Daubeny's letter explains so fully what is going forward that I need not nor have I time to enter fully on the navigation scheme for which I suppose we shall have to resist instead of solicit subscriptions, it appearing that much more than what is wanted was subscribed last night at a most respectable meeting at Bristol at which Mr Daubeny presided, and nothing can be more handsome than their conduct towards the country gentlemen.

The following day the extraordinary event which became known as the Race to Devizes took place in response to an advertisement placed in the Salisbury Journal. The events of the day are graphically described by Ward,

I hardly know which way to begin to explain to you the canal business about which I have been in a very fatiguing scene of bustle and hurry ever since I wrote last night to your Lordship -- a deputation from Mr Daubeny's Bristol meeting, and another from Bath (with another list of subscriptions amounting to £120,000) met me at Devizes, the whole subscriptions amounting to £400,000 -- Besides these, an immense crowd [sic] of people of all descriptions came yesterday from Bristol and Bath in consequence of the anonymous advert in the Salisbury paper. Carriages in Bristol were so scarce that one gentleman paid £10 for a chaise to Bath, and beds at Devizes let for a guinea, and several rooms at the Bear full of company who were obliged to sit up all night in companies of 20 or 30 in a room. They appeared much displeased with Mr Daubeny's party looking on the subscription as a smuggled business. The room at the Bear and the Town Hall was much too small for the company who assembled in the open air in the market place. The author of the advert was a long while called for without venturing to appear. At last, it turned out to be Mr Bartley, one of Mr Daubeny's list of subscribers and one of the deputies sent to Devizes, which appeared very insidious and he will have much ado to quiet Mr Daubeny's or the other party. It seems as though he inserted the advertisement to draw the attention of the populace from the Newbury and Bath

Canal (to which the White Lyon Junto, as Mr Daubeny's meeting was called, had smuggled a subscription) to a new project of a canal from Bath by Devizes to Salisbury (for nothing has been said by anybody about the Pewsey and Crofton line) and the advertisement was so artfully worded that it could not be known whether a Newbury or a Salisbury Canal was meant,

Both my friends here -- the Bristol gentlemen, and Mr Dundas agreed in wishing me not to engage in anything, which I took care not to do, and I went very little amongst them except into two roomsful of the leading gentlemen to vouch for one of the White Lion party's assertion of the particulars of Mr Daubeny's letter to Your Lordship that that party meant to hold only £500 shares each man for himself, and to hold the rest in trust for his fellow citizens.

It was agreeable enough to see the parties both from Bristol and Bath look towards Your Lordship with the highest deference and respect, professing that the subscription should be decided by Your Lordship, but I suppose you would much rather be excused settling that trifling point amongst all the men of property and speculation in Bath and Bristol, and leave them to settle it amongst themselves how they can taking care that the country interests shall have what shares they please, which it is supposed will sell for a premium. This is so much the case at Bristol that the change and ale houses are as full of gambling stockjobbing speculators as if they were the stock exchanges of London.

By the following night Ward was able to report that as much as £900,000 had been subscribed, and the canal's future seemed assured. Later in the month he was to wryly observe ' . . . the observations were read twice at the meeting of the Bristol merchants at the White Lion, and they were honoured with much attention and were complimented for their candour . . . I do not suppose the observations when published in 1790 were read by three people in Bristol . . .'

A most urgent matter to be resolved, now that the canal was to go forward, was the appointment of a solicitor to the Bill, an important appointment which would add considerably to the reputation of the lawyer who took on the task. Ward had been acting as clerk to the committee, and it is natural that they should ask him to undertake the task. Because of the conflicting rivals in Bristol and Bath, and the fear that a Bristol lawyer might be in the one or the other camp, Ward was asked by these subscribers to accept the position.

With the appointment of a Solicitor, a number of matters had to be settled; first, the allocation of shares in the canal had to be resolved between the various groups of subscribers; second, an engineer had to be appointed; third, the line of the canal had to be settled; fourth, notices had to be prepared to advise affected parties of the plan; fifth, *all* freeholders and occupiers of land within 100 yards of either bank had to be called on and personally shown the plan, no matter where they lived; and sixth, support had to be sought in Parliament to try and ensure a majority in favour of the Bill.

The distribution of shares was settled at an acrimonious meeting at Marlborough on 13 January 1793. The scene had been set in a previous letter on the last day of the old year, Ward wrote,

About the canal, Mr Daubeny appears to me, and has done so from the first, pretty desirous of dictating things exactly his

own way, and to make it an attack on his integrity and honour for anyone to think his proposals are not perfectly fair and reasonable.

With the various parties gathered in Marlborough, twenty of the Bristol and Bath representatives, twelve of Mr Daubeny's party, the committee of the Devizes and Salisbury Canal and the original committee of 1788, the battle for supremacy could begin. Ward wrote on the evening of the 13 January,

It would be almost impossible to give a history of the written messages and verbal deputations if I may so express them, which passed in the last three days between the members of the Western Canal Committee, Mr Daubeny's party and the other modern subscribers. They produced a very long negotiation between the two Bristol parties on Friday, which ended in nothing.

The Committee sent Mr Daubeny's party word that the other party had handsomely come forward and offered to submit the decision of their shares to the committee.

The committee were determined to proceed in the business of their appointment at this meeting and accordingly a deputation from both parties were admitted and informed that the committee thought fit to divide the canal expence which are supposed to amount to £300,000 into 3000 shares of £100 each and offer one third to the White Lion subscribers who claimed a priority of subscriptions, one third to the other modern subscribers from Bristol, Bath, London and also where, and to reserve the remaining third for landowners and original subscribers. . . Mr Dundas premised his proposition by stating some regulations to be provided in the act to prevent the canal becoming the power of any party, that it should be conducted by a committee of 24, 7 to be elected for Berks, 7 for Wilts, 7 for Bristol and 3 for Bath, to be elected annually.

Mr Daubeny refused to accept this formula, and instead demanded first £150,000 and then £120,000, and finally, in desperation Dundas declared that unless agreement could be given to the committee's plan then all those landowners to the east of the centre of the line would not agree to the canal at all. This had strong effect on the Bristol parties who immediately accepted the allocation. Ward continued,

'The gambling Mr Daubeny apprehended, exits in a high degree, and many Bristol men bought up shares in Marlborough'.

There immediately followed a scramble for shares, with one recent seller being advised not to sell a £100 share for less than £200. Ward and his uncle were unable to compete on these terms, and Charles Bill asked if the Earl could set aside a few shares for him from the landowners' reserve.

It will be recalled that the original survey had been entrusted to Robert Whitworth who had reported that the line through Marlborough presented no difficulties. With the matter now fully in train it was felt that further investigation of possible routes should be made. The Earl of Ailesbury was a friend of James Watt, and Watt passed much work not directly concerned with steam engines to John Rennie. Rennie had been advising the Earl on the building of a silk mill at Marlborough which it was intended should provide work for the unemployed. Rennie was also the engineer on the Rochdale Canal of which Ward's uncle was a committee man.



John Rennie

It was natural that Rennie should be approached on the matter of the Western Canal and, it was hoped, that he and Whitworth would collaborate: unfortunately this was not to be.

Whitworth and Rennie have had a disagreement about the Rochdale and Ellesmere Canals, which is the reason the former does not choose to act with the latter.

The decision to use Rennie was not without its difficulties. He was a busy man, involved in many projects. Ward wrote several letters to him asking for his attendance, finally telling him 'You are more sought than the Philosophers Stone' Ward explained to his master,

It is determined to employ Rennie singly — afterwards it will be considered whether Whitworth, Jessop or any other engineer shall review the lines — possibly Jessop may as the Bristol people have a very high opinion of him — we know something of Whitworth's opinion already.

In the matter of settling the line of the canal, as might be expected, a great number of problems were to arise. The outright opposition of Sir William Jones and Mrs Popham have already been mentioned. From the resurgence of interest in 1792 the line through the Vale of Pewsey was preferred by Ward, and presumably by the committee. The reason for this is hard to see, for although there are numerous references to the preferability of the Devizes line, these reasons are not given. It would not, of course, be unlikely that the opposition of the two landowners at Littlecote and Ramsbury was the real cause of the abandonment of the Kennet Valley line.. In most respects this line appears better, an improved water supply and the serving of

more towns being advantages that should not really have been dismissed. Ward spelled this out to his master,

The line is so obviously marked out by the towns on it that it cannot be mistaken — Reading, Newbury, Hungerford, Ramsbury, Marlborough, Calne, Chippenham, Lacock, Melksham Bradford, Bath and Bristol form such a chain of towns as I suppose cannot be found on any other canal of the same length. . . . a collateral branch might be carried from Devizes to join the Grand Canal near Calne or Cherril without a lock.

While this line was being promoted, the people of Devizes, especially those hoodwinked by the meeting of 12 December 1792, pursued the idea of a canal to Salisbury, styling themselves the Devizes and Salisbury Canal sub-committee. This group moved fast. Lord Lansdown, whose estates were at Bowood near Calne, wrote to Ward on 27 December, 'a Salisbury plan has been sent to me with cuts to Calne, and Marlborough'.

Despite his previous allusions to the Devizes line Ward wrote to the Earl,

From the conclusion of Lord Lansdown's letter, as well as the conference desired by the Devizes committee, I foresee an attempt intended to be made to take the canal by Bedwyn, Pewsey and Devizes, which will be a most unpopular thing at Marlborough and will be considered as ruinous to the place, and yet, the Pewsey line in every other respect is infinitely preferable and I *secretly* wish it to go that way on account of the very great improvement it would be to Your Lordship's property.

Ward here was in a dilemma. As solicitor to the canal bill he had to do the best for his committee, as steward to the Earl he was obliged to serve the best interests of the estate, while as a leading citizen of Marlborough he was expected to look after the interests of his fellow citizens. He carries on, voicing this dilemma,

This [improvement to the Earl's property] is so evident to everyone that I suppose a warm support of the Marlborough line would be justly considered as a high obligation to the town.

Not unnaturally, the people of Marlborough were incensed at the idea that the town might not after all benefit from the canal. Ward's neighbours, 'declared that it will be the ruin of the trade of Marlborough if the canal is not brought that way, and no collateral branch or other provision can compensate for the loss of it'.

Ward continued 'on the other hand, the superiority of the Pewsey line in every point of view is apparent'. In May of 1793, Ward once again made his preference clear,

I am sorry Lady Jones appears so averse to the Marlborough Line which has difficulties enough to contend with without that. I speak now as a Marlborough man. As a solicitor and Your Lordship's Agent I cannot say I am Sorry.

As it became more and more apparent that the Marlborough line was not to be followed, the search for a viable means of serving the town continued. In March of 1793 Rennie was sending men to take levels for a tunnel from 'either Castle Mill [in Marlborough] or Preshute to East Wick or Clench Hill or from Clatford to Ramscombe'. By May, the Earl was calling for the cut to be made by way of Crofton and taking much criticism from the townspeople who 'conceive

that it would ruin the town . . . as goods from the south would be cut off and cheese might be carried to Hungerford instead of Marlborough'.

By September, the line of the canal had been settled through Pewsey, the tunnel to Marlborough had been decided against, being impracticable, and the opposition of the land-owners on the Kennet had convinced the committee that a branch thence from Hungerford was impossible. Despite a generous drawback offered on goods to and from Marlborough there was still a hard core of opposition to the loss of the canal. To circumvent this a clause was inserted in the bill permitting a branch from Hungerford with the proviso that it would not be constructed without the consent of the land-owners. To make sure that the company was not saddled with an expensive and unwanted branch the Earl asked to call on the two objecting ladies to reassure them that nothing would be attempted unless they agreed. Despite the partiality detected in this and the emergence of a group calling themselves 'the agents for Marlborough' the opposition seems to have been finally satisfied that there was nothing to do but accept what had been offered.

A major problem that had to be resolved, with the decision to follow the Vale of Pewsey, was settlement with the committee of the proposed canal to Salisbury, who had prior right to land between Devizes and Pewsey by virtue of having had surveys made of possible routes. In July of 1793 Ward wrote,

The Devizes people have a scheme for going from Pewsey by Collingbourne, Ludgershall, Biddesden and Abbots And and to Andover and from thence to Basingstoke, but I think that the country lies too high between Pewsey and Abbots And.

In September a meeting of the two committees was held,

We communicated to the Devizes Committee our plan and heard their pretensions which were that we by the resolutions of 1790 and by advertisement in December last had confirmed ourselves to be the Calne and Cherril line, and that they having conceived that that side of the county was to be left out though confessedly the best line entered into a subscription for a canal through the Pewsey Vale and that they had expended a large sum of money under those apprehensions, and now we had pirated their line . . . (by the bye, they disclaimed all connexion with Devizes, and called themselves a committee of subscribers to a canal from Bristol to Salisbury and Southampton and London).

Offered £15,000, this being the limit of unallocated shares, the Devizes committee refused, and intimated that £50,000 was the sum they had in mind. Finally, it was agreed that the interests of the two bodies should be united, that the Devizes subscribers should receive £35,000 as 350 shares, and that they should nominate three of the seven Wiltshire committeemen for the length of the line from Pewsey westward. It was also agreed that they could continue to prosecute their line from Wootton Rivers onwards. The subterfuge which had led to the Race to Devizes, and the formation of the Salisbury and Southampton committee had proved expensive in every way.

At the same meeting the name of the Company was changed,

a new name was given to the Canal (the old one being stolen from

us) viz — *The Kennet and Avon Canal Navigation.*

From Devizes another major deviation to the line was made. The deposited plan shows the line passing through Poulshot, Bulkington, Keevil and Steeple Ashton parishes before sweeping south of Trowbridge then turning north to Bradford on Avon, and it was opposition to this line which forced the Company to amend the route. The opposition was led by Mr Walter Long of Wraxell, who owned considerable lands on the intended route, and of whom Ward wrote in September 1794, 'he has in his pocket the dissent of every landowner on the deviation, [at Avoncliff] if the committee would vary the line it would alter the case'. Chief of these was Mrs Thresher of Melksham who owned extensive lands between Avoncliff and Dundas as also did Long. Of the 69 chains on the Limpley Stoke deviation, 45 were on lands owned by these two; it was therefore imperative that Long should be placated over the Devizes to Seend section.

Long's chief objection to the original line was that the canal would pass through land which was very fertile and productive. Ward wrote to Rennie later in September that he thought Long could be won round if the line could be amended to pass north of Seend and across Melksham Common. Understandably, with the number of canals being proposed, Long was said to be 'alarmed at the various and number of canal proposals, and that he would not consent till lines were invariably laid down'. Other forms of persuasion could be useful. On the 17 September Thomas Merriman, Ward's clerk, who was to become a partner in the law firm and to succeed as Principal Clerk to the Canal Company, wrote to Rennie, 'Mr Ward has met Mr Long and has found him ready (in consequence of a handsome doucier) to use his influence in obtaining the consents for the Limpley Stoke deviation'.

There was an additional advantage in using this route; the junction with the Wilts and Berks Canal could be made at Semington, some miles east of the original junction at Trowbridge. Since the bulk of the traffic expected on this canal was coal from the Somerset Coal Canal the increased mileage on the Kennet and Avon would give greater revenue.

The last major deviation of the line was at Bath. The intention had been to join the River Avon at Bathampton, and the reason for the change was described by Ward on 28 December 1794,

the most important consideration was that respecting a deviation from Mitford Brook to Prior Park and Bath by a Tunnel of a mile and a quarter which will cut off 2-3 miles in the length of the line (besides 2½ shortened by the other deviations) and avoid a bad river for navigation, and rescue the company from some very exorbitant demands of a gentleman not many miles from Bathampton.

The plans for this tunnel had possibly been suggested by Jessop. Ward had written to Rennie in July of 1794 that

Jessop's suggestion for an alteration below was out of the question as Mr Pulteney strongly objected to the Sydney Gardens Tunnel, which he said would raise objections from the inhabitants because of the damp, which reason could not combat successfully.

There is no other correspondence on the subject of the canal at Bath, although the settlement of the line was difficult. Rennie was to have considerable correspondence with the Sydney Gardens committee to try and allay their fear about the damp from the canal; It is noteworthy however that the line which was finally settled cut through the Sydney Gardens, and did not pass beneath any property except Cleveland House which was used by the company as its offices.

As well as informing the Earl of the major events in settling the line Ward was also active in his capacity as his agent.

There will be many things to be thought and provided for respecting the canal passing Your Lordship's estates. The great banks and heaps of earth from the deep cutting and tunnel must be left as handsome, or as little otherwise as possible, and planted, if anything will grow. And lower down from Free Warren towards Great Bedwyn the canal ought to swell out to a handsome width to be carried in a waving line so as to be as little an eyesore to your pleasure grounds as possible.

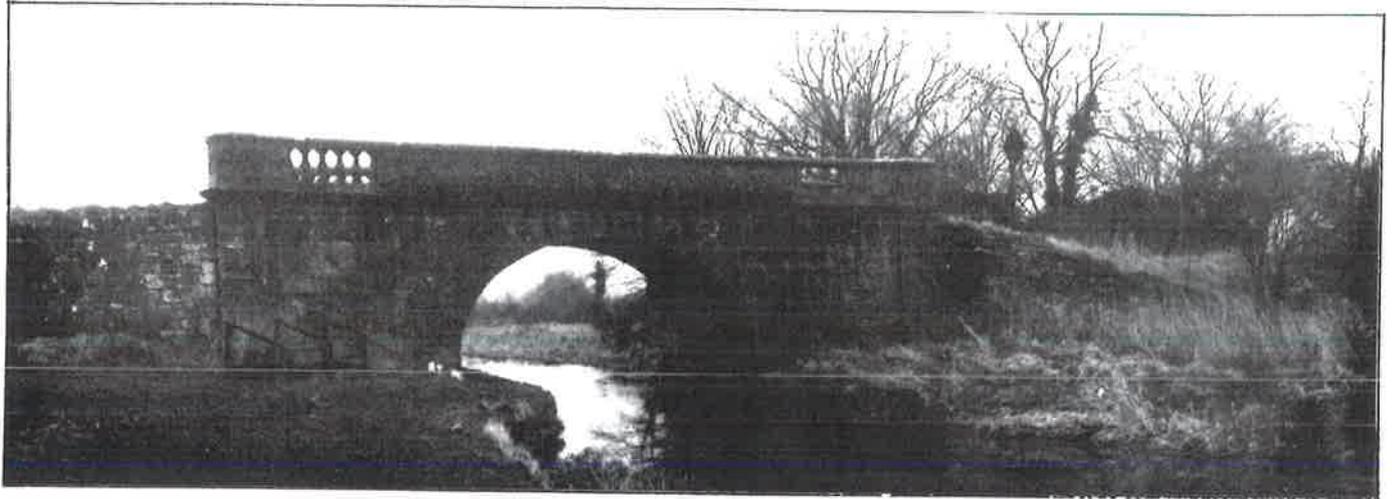
Subsequently, the line of the canal through the Savernake estates was changed. Jessop, who it will be recalled was to review the line, suggested that instead of the 2½ mile tunnel from Crofton to Wootton Rivers the summit should be some 40 feet higher with no tunnel. This new line would have a cutting 50 foot deep through the ridge of hills at Savernake. Ward wrote to Rennie that Lord Ailesbury would want a short tunnel which would be less nuisance than a cutting which would be in sight of the Tottenham Park pleasure grounds.



Dundas Aqueduct, Claverton, 1805 After J C Nattes

A number of minor deviations were occasioned by the opposition of the landowners, and some landowners were to be won over. A running battle was continued for many years with Mrs Susanna Wroughton of Wilcot. Like many other landowners she was opposed to the canal passing her lands, despite every endeavour by Ward to reach agreement

Lady Jones's bridge at Wilcot



with her, furthermore, every other opponent to the canal could rely on her support. So determined was she in her opposition that on Christmas Eve of 1793 Ward made the unseasonable comment,

The party that waited on Your Lordship were highly pleased with their polite and condescending reception, and still more so with Your Lordship's zeal in the canal cause, which I hope we shall cram down Mrs Wroughton's throat, who is so unreasonable, and is almost the only opponent of consequence ...

So protracted was Mrs Wroughton's opposition to be that not until February of 1803 was John Thomas, the Company's superintendent, able to write,

We have undertaken a new line at Wilcot Estate so as to save an embankment. I have given about 500 guineas reckoning money and an ornamental stone bridge. We are not to have a wharf here, but as we have no embankment we are soon in Pewsey.

Between Wilcot and Devizes the opposition was less vigorous, although there were objections to lands being cut through.

I did not know that the line of our canal touched Mrs Penruddock's pleasure ground — I am glad however to conclude by your not saying otherwise that she is not so tenacious as Lady Jones, Mrs Popham, Mrs Ernle, and the Misses Maynard of Devizes are of theirs, the latter of whom are so averse to having their premises entered that I am actually obliged to get all the notices altered to avoid them by going into another parish.

Naturally there was much concern from millowners and farmers who feared the loss of their water supplies, some ill founded,

Mr Rennie does not like to open the eyes of Mr Hicks Beach and others in the town [Devizes] who foolishly imagine a canal running on so high a level as Devizes and intersecting only 2 or 3 of perhaps 100 of the springs which must be tributary to the River Netheravon, will leave their watermeadows without a drop of water and render them not worth 5 shillings an acre. Mr Hazeland's objections are as absurd — he has only a mill at Woodborough which we cannot take a drop of water from and which will be worth double what it is now from its vicinity to the Canal.

Later, Ward was more forthright,

Mr Hazeland was, as Your Lordship thinks, a true obstinate pighead yeoman, I should think still there was some hope of convincing him that meddling with business not his own he would be disgracing himself and incurring unnecessary expense. He is a lecturing person and I suppose he thinks this is the best way of bringing himself into notice.

One reason that Ward had to take so much care over the line was that he had to comply with Parliamentary rules,

In consequence of Lord Stanhope's clause it will be necessary to make personal application and show the plan to every freeholder and occupier, not only on the line, but those whose lands happen to be within 100 yards of the line, and they must be called upon till seen, though they live in every corner of the Kingdom.

This rule had been brought in to try and stem the canal

proposals flooding into the Houses of Parliament throughout the canal mania, Ward estimated that upwards of 100 bills would be presented in the same session as the Kennet and Avon Bill.

The importance of following the procedure was demonstrated by the failure of the Ashby de la Zouch Canal Bill. Ward commiserated with the Earl, son-in-law to Lord Moira, the main promoter of the Ashby,

It was not the notice in that case that was deficient but the neglect to apply to a landowner for his consent, and in my opinion was a very unjust decision if the mistake was not a wilful one. The consideration of the Bill might have been deferred in that case to give time for an application to the landowner instead of committing a sacrifice of £8,000 upon a mere quibble, but the fact was they wanted to get rid of the Bill, and took advantage of the error which misled the judgement of some of the members. I will answer for it that one half of the bills to be brought in the next session might be thrown out if persons were employed to hunt about for blunders of which the complicated rules of the House must furnish plenty of instances in spite [sic] of the most intimate care and attention.

It may be imagined that the need to apply to landowners only concerned the wealthy, this was not the case,

Lady Jones gave me no reason to boast of any extraordinary exertions at her gracious favour, nor did I want any, it was necessary by the strict rules of the Houses of Parliament to ask not only hers, and her tenants' consent to go through

Brimlade, but even old Stringass of Ram Alley must have his consent asked for the canal to go not under, but within 100 yards of his cottage, or rather hovel.

In the case of the wealthy, Ward recognised the need for tact and discretion if they were not to be alienated, 'the applying to the principal landowners for consent to the canal is so delicate a matter that I find it not proper to entrust it altogether to agents'.

The agreements made and the concessions given were crucial to the drafting of the bill which was to be presented in Parliament. Ward was fortunate to have the advice of the Speaker of the House of Commons, Henry Addington, one of the members for Devizes. The other member, Edmund Estcourt also gave valued support.

The final preparation to be made was to ensure that Parliamentary support would be given to the Bill's passage. Equally important was the support of members, it was vital that they should not be alienated by other schemes. From the beginning Ward advised the Earl not to meddle in other schemes, he wrote that Dundas advised.

... not to interfere too much in the Rochdale Canal, but if at all to support the Ellesmere Canal which the Duke [of Bridgewater] means to oppose, which he [Dundas] says is from pique and against all the rest of the country and he wishes you not to commit yourself to the Duke too implicitly, which might occasion an opposition to this Canal.

The Duke of Bridgewater was a powerful force who had to be reckoned with in all Parliamentary battles; he was not the easiest of men to deal with,

My uncle is convinced of Your Lordship's attention and civility and the D of B's unreasonableness about canal matters. He says the Duke once mentioned to him that you had not voted for something he wished under a supposition that your friends were on the other side.

In another letter from the Duke's agent John Gilbert, Ward is requested to ask the Earl to thank Lord Courtoun and his son, Lord Stopford, for their support of the Rochdale Canal, to request their support for the third reading and also to ask them to oppose the Bolton and Bury Canal, the line of which would compete with the Rochdale. Ward advised against opposition which would engender an opposition to the Kennet and Avon.

To raise support in Parliament Ward said he would have a circular letter or card printed,

... and distributed among our friends, for instance a few to Your Lordship, Mr Dundas, Mr East etc with a request that they be so good to give them credit by enclosing one to each of their Parliamentary friends in a very short letter requesting their attention to the subject.

It was important to show that the scheme was well thought out and not a product of the Mania. Ward suggested that Lord Loughborough should be shown a copy of the observations written in 1790, 'which show that the business is well digested and not the mushroom production of the late canal rage, having been in agitation since 1788'.

The card to be used was described by Ward,

The Cities of London, Bath and Bristol, The Towns of Reading, Marlborough etc, The Marquis of Landsdown, Lords Ailesbury, Carnarvon, Craven, Messrs Putteney etc present their compliments to ... and request the favour of his attendance at the Kennet and Avon Canal Bill.

A small plan is proposed to be impressed on the back of the card and a circular letter from Mr Dundas will be sent out with it explaining shortly the design of the undertaking ...

We wish for a house in Parliament Street, that we may sometimes catch a member, that is **waylay** Your Lordship and your associates in your passage to the House, and it may be convenient for members to call as they go.

The careful preparation and attention to detail was well rewarded; the Bill passed through Parliament with scarcely a hitch, and it was a tribute to Ward that following the enactment John Gilbert commented to him that he did not doubt that the Act would be regarded as a precedent. High praise indeed from the agent of the Canal Duke!

The cost of presenting the Act was not inconsiderable. It will be recalled that the Ashby Canal, which was 22 miles long in comparison to the 86½ of the Kennet and Avon had cost £8,000 when its Bill failed. Ward wrote in May of 1794,

I have made a computation of the different heads of disbursements, amounting on a book of 50 pages to £7,600 upwards. I send it to you enclosed. The Act is 109 pages, and the ingrossment of it on parchment measures 324 feet in length, which Lord Bagot might well say was as large as the Bible.

So ended the first stage of the project. Ward's diligence was repaid with his appointment as Principal Clerk to the Canal Company. A further article will recount the events he described to the Earl during the building of the Canal.

References

The letters which have been abstracted for this article are from the Savernake Collection in the Wiltshire Record Office at Trowbridge. The collection is in two parts, the Number 1 collection has been catalogued by Miss Scroggs and has the Accession Number 1300; only a few letters on canal matters are in this collection, the bulk being partially catalogued in Accession Number 9. I have abstracted from both collections the content of the letters relating to canals, and have deposited a copy at the Record Office and another at the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust's Canal Centre at the Wharf, Devizes. A few of the references are taken from the John Rennie Archive which is in the National Library of Scotland under the Accession number 5111. Documents in this deposit relating to the Kennet and Avon have also been copied and may be seen at the Canal Centre when their analysis has been completed.

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