STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1971

STAFFORDSHIRE AND WORCESTERSHIRE CANAL CONSERVATION AREA

STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL DESIGNATION No. 73

PURPOSE OF DESIGNATION

The pace and scale of modern development threatens many attractive and historic areas with destruction or despoiliation. Such areas, often unique in character due to a rich variation in types of buildings, trees and open spaces, form an important part of the national heritage.

In the past, individual buildings of architectural or historic interest have been protected by legislation, whereas attractive groups of buildings, and areas of character, or historic importance have been mainly unprotected. The Town and Country Planning Act, 1971, empowers local planning authorities to designate as Conservation Areas those "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to conserve and enhance".

Designation draws attention to the wider setting of historic buildings and provides formal recognition of the historic interest of those areas.

Among the areas that may be designated Conservation Areas are those of Industrial Archaeological significance. The Industrial Revolution was pioneered in Great Britain and has left a vast legacy of its working sites, mines, factories, quarries, furnaces many of which are of great historical value.

Much of this legacy is unsightly, and disfigures both countryside and town. As a reaction against the squalor under which many of its working people lived and toiled, contemporary reaction has been directed towards sweeping away the vestiges of the past. The canal system of Great Britain has, in contrast, bequeathed a feature of great interest and beauty besides its three-fold historical significance.

Firstly, the canals were a pioneering network of national transport routes, virtually unknown since the end of the Roman Empire. Secondly,

they are of civil engineering importance, both in terms of technical achievements, and of unprecedented economic and administrative organisation. Thirdly, was their significance in facilitating cheap and reliable transport from the new manufacturing areas of the country to national and even export markets, thus underwriting the massive economic and industrial expansion of the late 18th century and the 19th century.

Canals are still today prominent features in both urban and rural landscapes, and many of their original engineering works remain - locks, embankments, cuttings - as testimony to the technical skill of their builders. Often the characteristic canalside buildings around the locks and wharves form attractive and picturesque groups; frequently these buildings are of some architectural distinction in their own right. Moreover, the canals themselves often run through attractive stretches of open countryside where they contribute to the pleasantness of the scenery.

The attractiveness of canals, and the fact that, by virtue of their original purpose, they run through or adjacent to towns means that they are subject to considerable pressures for change, in themselves or in their settings. On the one hand, there are pressures from tourism, with increasing use of waterways for recreational purposes which may conflict with the very character that provides their attraction. On the other hand are the pressures for new housing or industrial development beside the banks of the canals, which threaten to erode the character of the areas through which they pass.

Within the boundaries of the canal itself, it is hoped that designation will aid and encourage the enlightened conservation work for which the British Waterways Board already enjoys a high reputation. The Local Planning Authority recognise, however, that the Waterways Board have certain statutory obligations and responsibilities to fulfil along the

length of the canal to ensure public safety and unimpeded navigation, and need to carry out certain works of repair and maintenance from time to time. The Local Planning Authorities are anxious that these works will be conducted with the restraint and concern characteristic of the British Waterways Board's normal operations.

Designation of a Conservation Area and measures to afford protection to its setting is being undertaken along the whole length of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal by the Local Planning Authorities through whose area the canal passes. In Staffordshire the County Council, Stafford Borough Council, and South Staffordshire District Council are jointly designating the Conservation Area. In Wolverhampton, the canal runs through the Valley Park Walk-Way established by the Metropolitan Borough Council, and in Worcestershire, the Wyre Forest District Council have designated a Conservation Area along the canal from Stourport.

Designation of a Conservation Area is only a first stage, and will need to be followed up by policies and proposals designed further to protect and enhance the canal and its setting. Much has already been achieved by the British Waterways Board; the success of the Conservation Area will depend on the continuing co-operation and interest of adjoining landowners and developers and of all the statutory and voluntary bodies sharing the planning authorities' concern for this unique heritage.

STAFFORDSHIRE AND WORCESTERSHIRE CANAL LINEAR CONSERVATION AREA

INTRODUCTION

The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, 46 miles long and with 43 locks, was engineered by the greatest of the early canal pioneers, James Brindley. Brindley was born in 1716 at Tunstead in Derbyshire. However, his family, which had long Staffordshire associations, moved in 1726 to live near Leek, and it is with Staffordshire, and especially Leek, that Brindley is associated.

The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal was one of the components, the only one he lived to see completed, of Brindley's "Grand Cross" design for canals linking the Mersey with the Thames, and the Trent with the Severn. The south-western arm of the "Grand Cross" ran from Great Haywood to Stourport on the Severn and the name of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal was adopted. Like the other canals of the "Grand Cross", the Staffordshire and Worcestershire was an immediate success, providing for both local and long haul transport.

The line adopted by Brindley for this canal takes a fairly direct route via the valleys of the Rivers Sow, Penk, Smestow and Stour. The over-riding pre-occupation for an 18th Century canal builder was to minimise the cost of construction of such items as locks, embankments and deep cuttings. Consequently this was an era of contour canals which attempted to maintain long level stretches of water without the need for expensive changes of level. Canals in this period were at the very beginning of the revolution in bulk overland transportation. Their only serious rivals were the pack-horse and the navigable rivers, the range of which the canals were designed to extend. Indirect as they seem on plan, they nevertheless moved more materials, more quickly and cheaply than their competitors of the period.

It is with these consideration in mind that James Brindley's great engineering feat, the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, built between 1766 and 1772 should be viewed.

THE CANAL AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Great Haywood to Baswich

The canal begins its 46 mile journey to the Severn at its junction with the Trent and Mersey Canal (Brindley's Grand Junction Canal) at Great Haywood. Sited close to the wharf is Haywood Corn Mill which formerly obtained its water supply from the Trent as a result of which Brindley had to construct two stone aqueducts over the tail race, one over the river itself. The recently restored roving bridge at Haywood Junction (No. 109) carries the towing path of the Trent and Mersey Canal over the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at this formerly busy junction, and the attractions of this group are already recognised by their inclusion in the Great Haywood Conservation Area, designated in 1969. The canal's sinuous course crosses the Trent by a low, four-arched sandstone-faced aqueduct where the canal narrows to provide a convenient location for the tiny brick toll office, with its elaborate intersecting traceried windows.

Great Haywood Basin

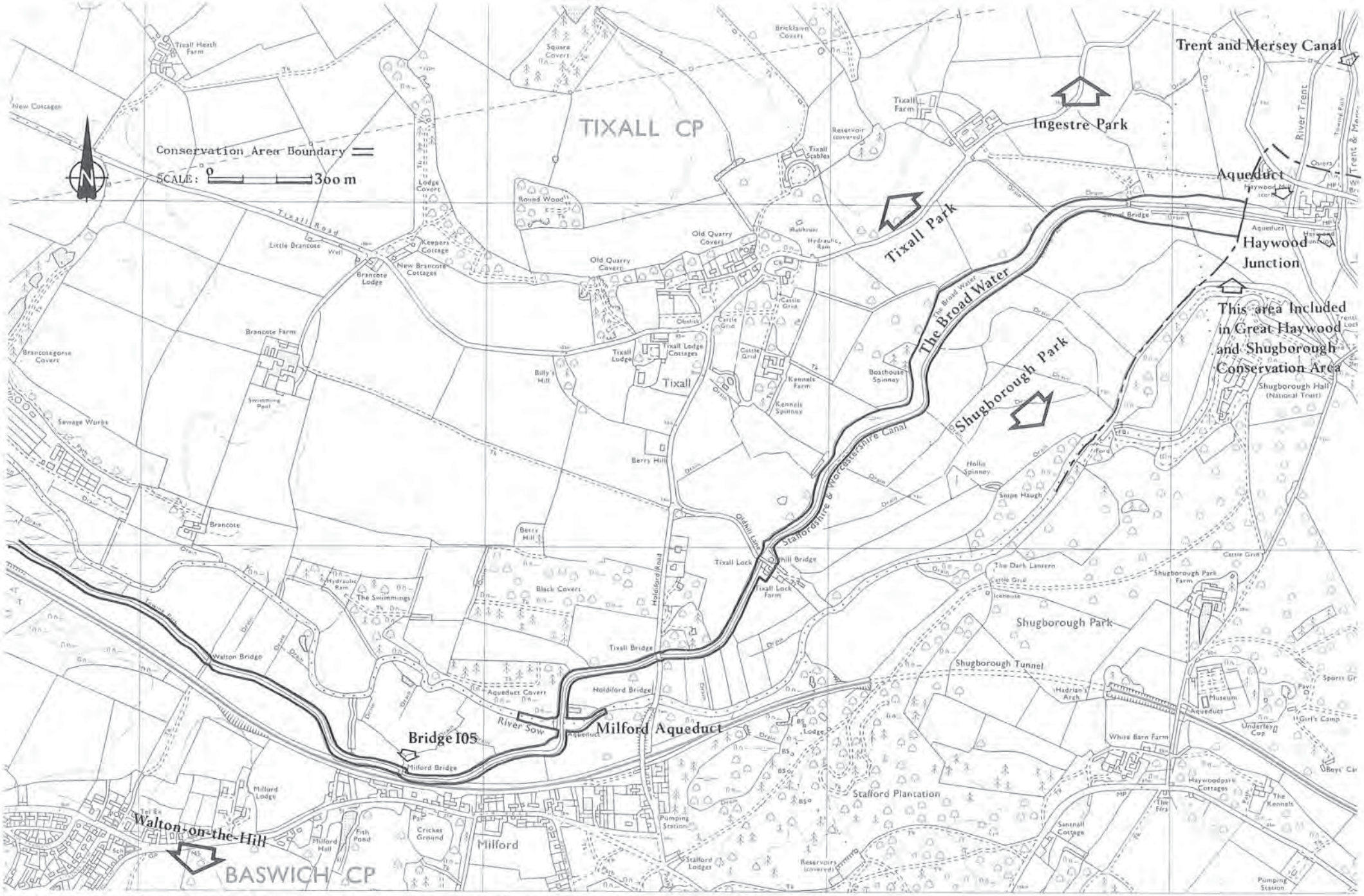
Following the valley of the River Sow splendid views are obtained to the north-west across the landscaped parks of Ingestre and Tixall, and majestic glimpses to the south across Shugborough Park and Milford are afforded by the occasional breaks in the well-grown canal-side hedge from one of the few embankments constructed.

At Broad Water (Tixall Broad or Tixall Wide) the canal widens to resemble a broad lake. Thomas Clifford of Tixall Hall is said to have been prepared to tolerate the canal provided that it did not spoil his view from the Hall. Thus almost a mile of waterway had to be specially landscaped.

Beyond Tixall Lock the canal leaves behind the landscaped graces of the parks for quieter but still serene and pleasant scenery. Milford Aqueduct, which spans the Sow to carry the canal to the south side of the valley is mainly built of Tixall stone; adjacent to this is a World War II concrete pillbox which forms a reminder of 20th Century history.

Not far beyond the aqueduct the attractive convoluted 'turnover' bridge (No. 105) returns the towpath to the other side of the canal onto the riverside embankment, its "normal" position. The waterway is by now closely bounded on the south by the railway and along the towpath side by hedges and trees so that its aspect is one of a tree-lined avenue of water, depicting a profusion of wild flowers and grasses with serenely beautiful reaches of quiet water offering instantly-changing reflections of sky and trees.

Occasional more extensive views open out to the north across the flood plain of the Sow, bounded by river terraces marked by stands of young and mature trees, and to the south, up shallow side valleys towards Walton village, marked by the distinctive chevron-ornamented spire of its church. The peace of the canal is marred by the proximity of the



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railway which nevertheless isolates the canal scenery lending it a remote intimacy. The canal's attractiveness is much impaired at the old salt works site by settling lagoons and a smouldering tip. The sewage works across the valley is intrusive but readily capable of concealment by suitable landscaping measures.

Milford Aqueduct

Baswich to Penkridge

West of St. Thomas' bridge, where Baswich Lane crosses the canal, it turns sharply southward to round the spur of high ground at Baswich to take up its direct route to the south. Surviving features in this vicinity reflect the important part played by water in earlier history. Here, where the River Sow joins the River Penk there is the channel of the Sow Navigation, a canal link to the Sow which was earlier navigable to the centre of Stafford. The labyrinth of waterways is completed by the mill stream and tail race of the no longer existing mill on the site of St. Thomas' Priory. Further along this stretch of canal a long row of poplars, planted to stabilise the bank contribute greatly to the variety and attraction of the waterside scene.

At Radford Bank where the Lichfield Road crosses the canal, Brindley's early bridge is contained within the enlarged modern span carrying the highway. Beyond, the old wharves, which served Stafford via a short-lived tramway link before the opening of the 'Sow Navigation', are now replaced by the recently built Radford Marina, whose modern structures and activities are as yet unassimilated in the canal-side scene.

Southward, then, following the river with the water meadows of the Penk to the west bounded by Stafford's suburban fringe, and on the east lightly wooded terraces rising steeply to housing at Wildwood, the Hazelstrine Arm formerly used by the brickworks is now in use by Stafford Boat Club. Here was the first place, past Tixall Broad, where a full length narrow boat could 'wind' or go about. At Deptmore (or Deepmore) Lock, the second of eleven that carry the canal up to its summit level, the old accommodation bridge to the lock cottage is replaced by a cast-iron split bridge, the split wide enough to allow a tow rope to pass through.

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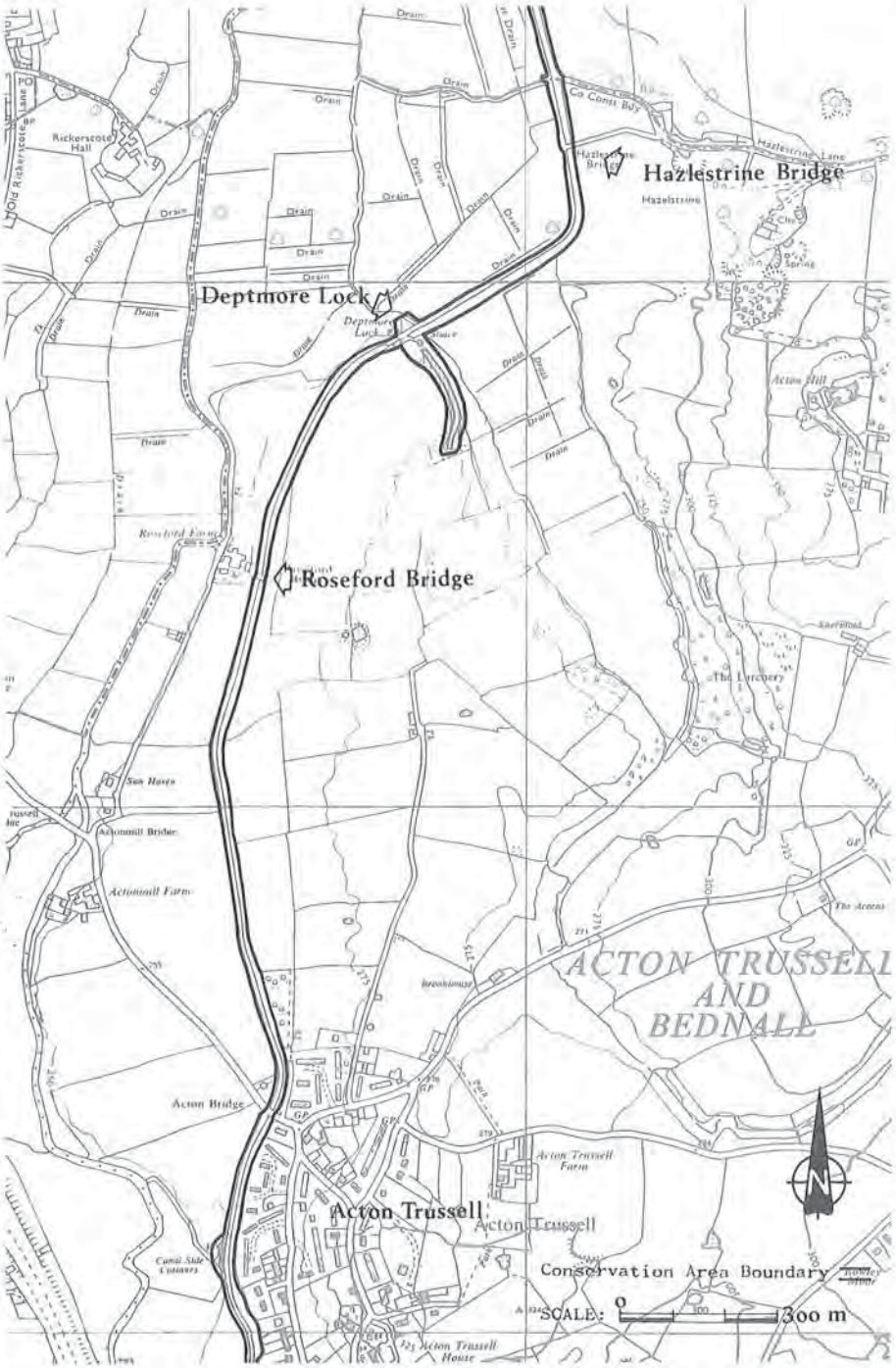

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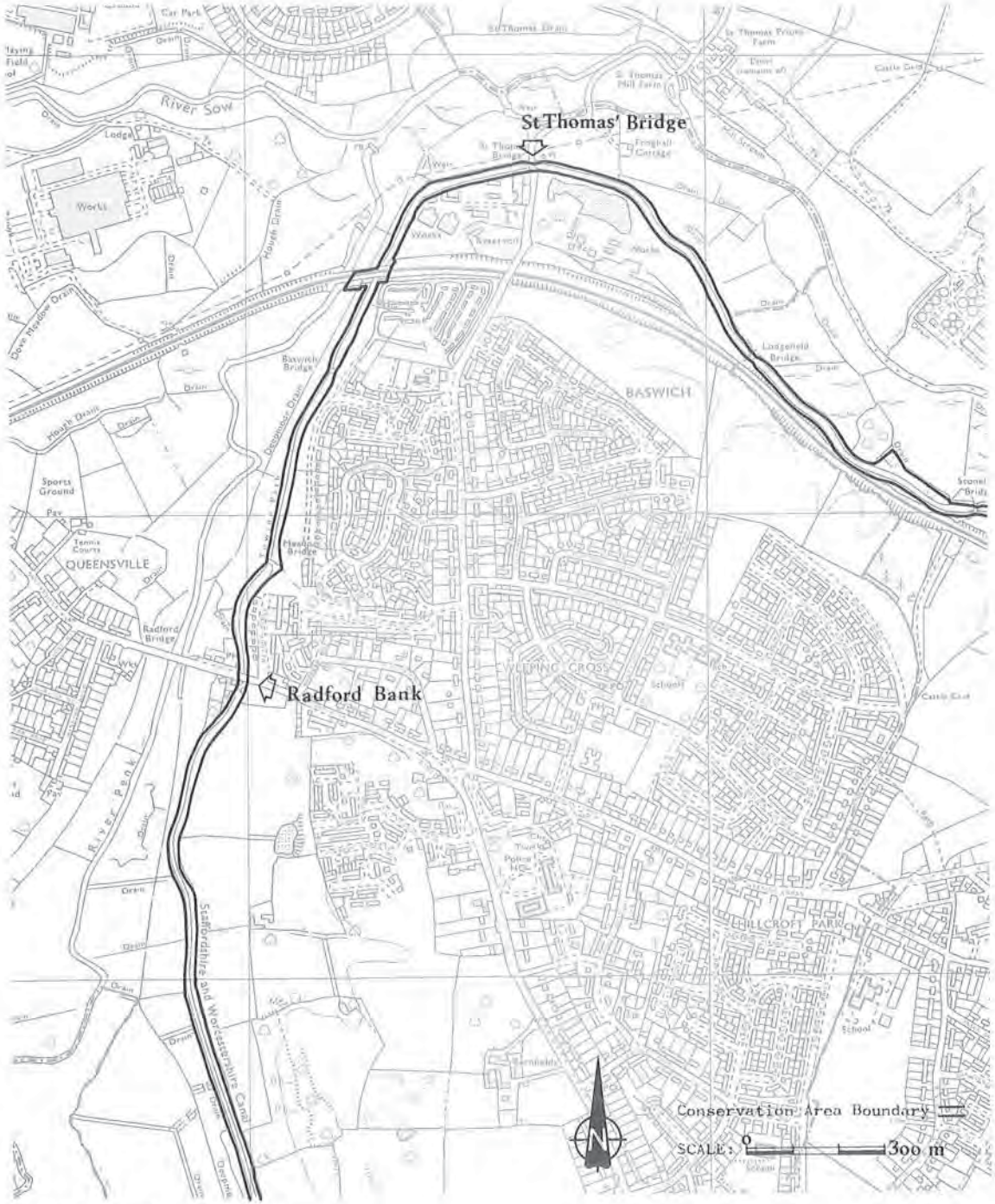

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Beyond Deptmore Lock is Roseford Bridge (No. 94) with its pleasant adjacent group of farm buildings. Roseford is an accommodation bridge which, in common with several other such bridges on the canal, was completely rebuilt at about the turn of the last century to carry the vastly greater loads imposed upon it by the mechanisation of farming with its great steam traction engines and other heavy metal equipment. The scenery at this stage of the canal's journey is pleasant and varied with views across open farmland.

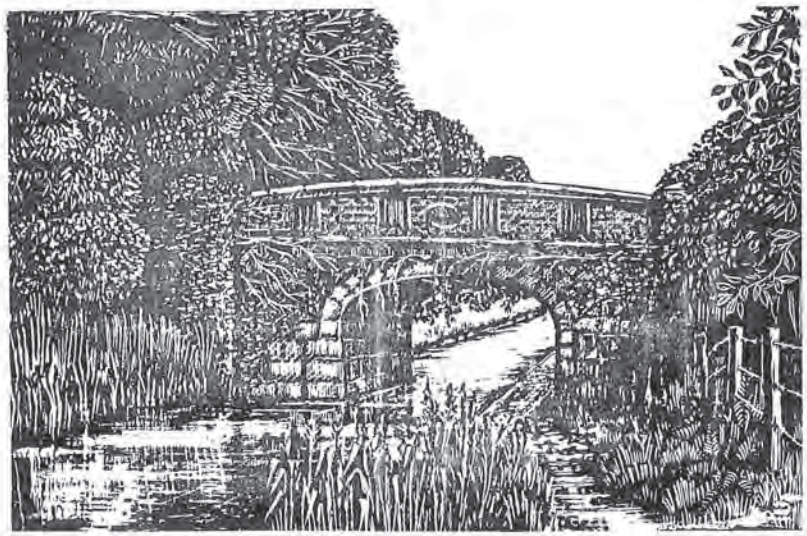
At Acton Trussell housing backs onto the canal which, together with the river, is sandwiched between the village and the M.6 motorway embankment. Acton Moat Bridge (No. 96) draws attention to a particularly interesting feature on the canal, for here Brindley utilised one of the arms of a mediaeval moated manor site as part of his canal channel (he did this again near Bridge No. 74). The remainder of the moat itself survives, and the site is still occupied by a flourishing, and visually highly significant, group of red brick farm buildings. Additional interest has been created here by the landscaping efforts of the farm owner whose provision of extra stretches of water in the form of ponds, populated by water birds, notably Canada Geese, enhances the appearance both of the monument and farm, and of the canal itself. Between Acton Moat and the next canal-side group, Shutt Hill Bridge and Lock, pleasant views open up towards St. James' Church, Acton Trussell on the east and St. Leonard's Church, Dunston on the west.

Shutt Hill Bridge (No. 91), has recently undergone a dramatic transformation with the demolition of the old bridge and its substitution by a modern bridge on a new alignment.

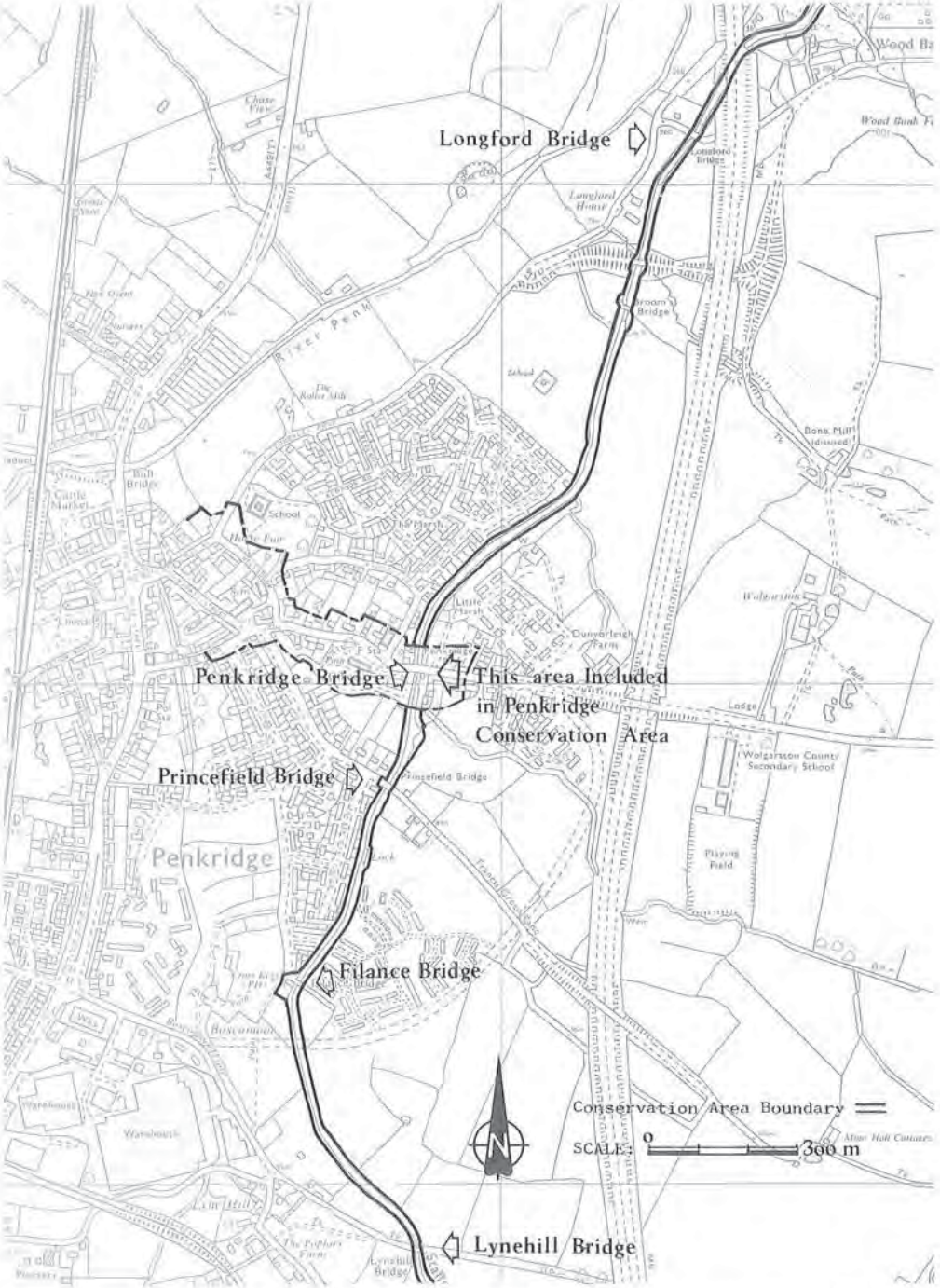
The aspect of the canal is dramatically changed as it runs along the edge of Teddesley Park. The stand of trees, known as the Wellington Belt, provides a very emphatic boundary on the east side, and the

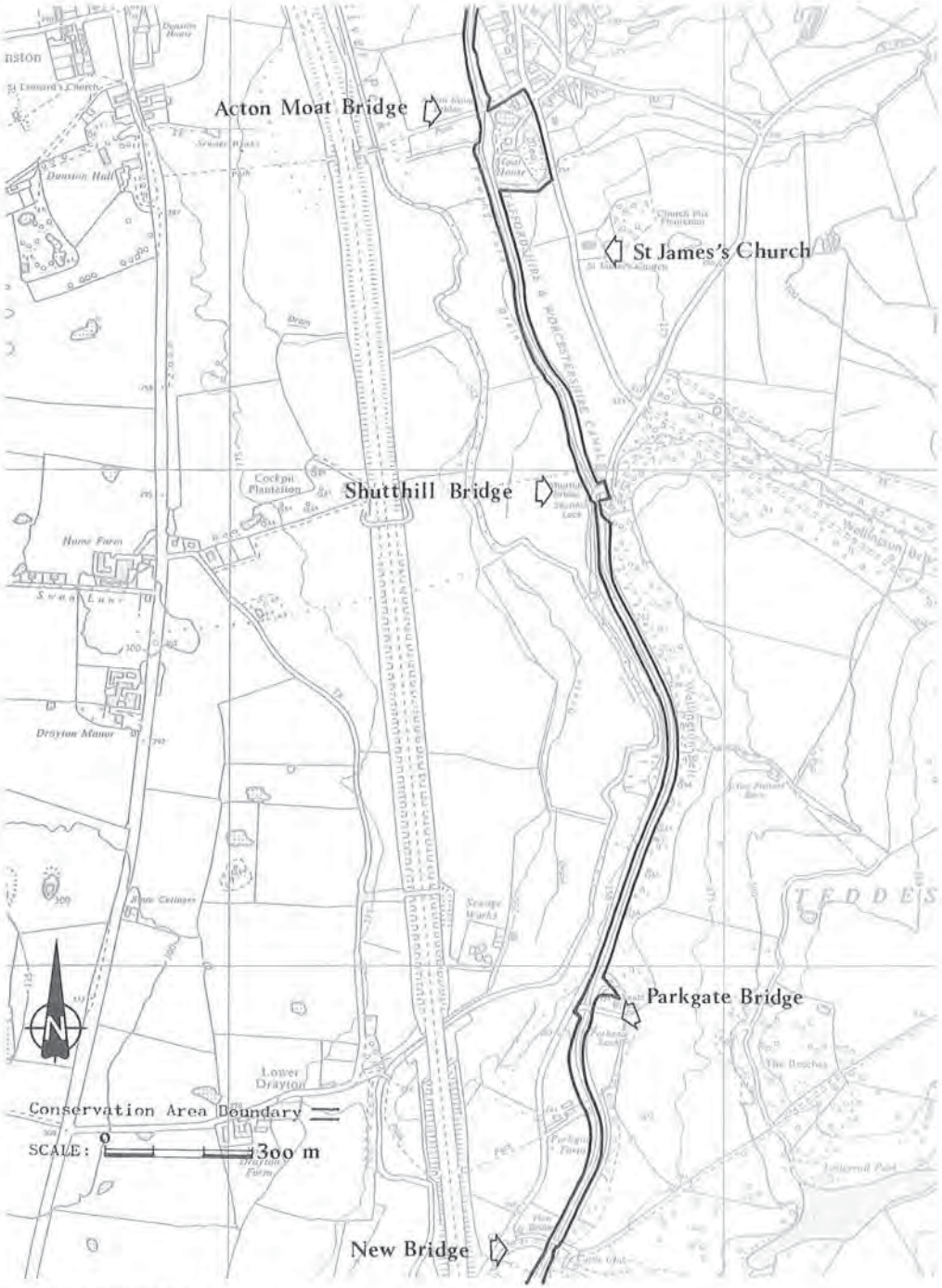
motorway in its cutting a little to the west, whilst not closing off more extensive views does give a real sense of confinement.

Parkgate Bridge (No. 90), Lock and Wharf, where a marina is now located, was the site of the original entrance to the Teddesley estate. The coal wharves flourished, however, and the main entrance was removed to a more secluded position taking advantage of New Bridge (No. 89), better known as 'Fancy' or Teddesley Bridge. This is, undoubtedly, one of the most charming bridges on the canal. Faced with sandstone and embellished with octagonal columns it still retains fragments of its iron railings and is now entwined in ivy in a delightful sylvan setting. The parapet of the bridge was provided with brick infill and 'fortified' during World War II. In stark contrast to 'Fancy' Bridge the concrete brutalism of the M.6 motorway bridge just beyond, is not devoid of a massive authority. The line of the canal kinks here and the change in direction subjects the whole environment to the full noise of the motorway.



New Bridge





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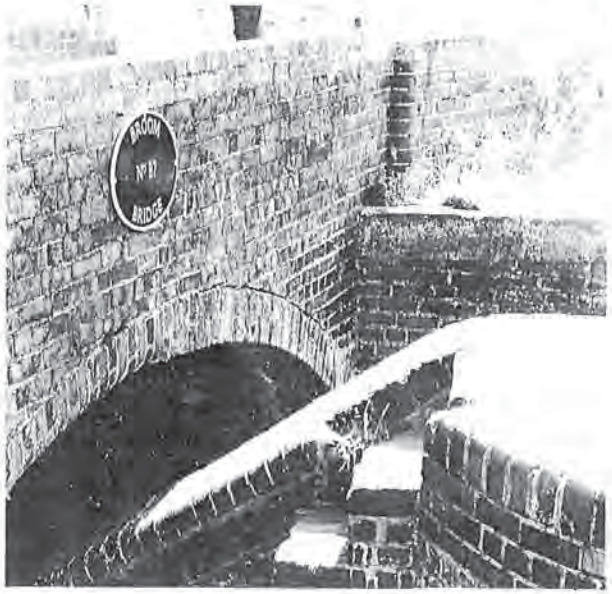
At Longford Bridge the canal is carried on an embankment above the level of the Woolgarston stream which fed the ponds of Woolgarston Bone Mill. The accommodation bridge, Broom Bridge, is a later addition built around the massive stonework of Longford Lock, and carrying the lane across the lock tail.



Broom Bridge

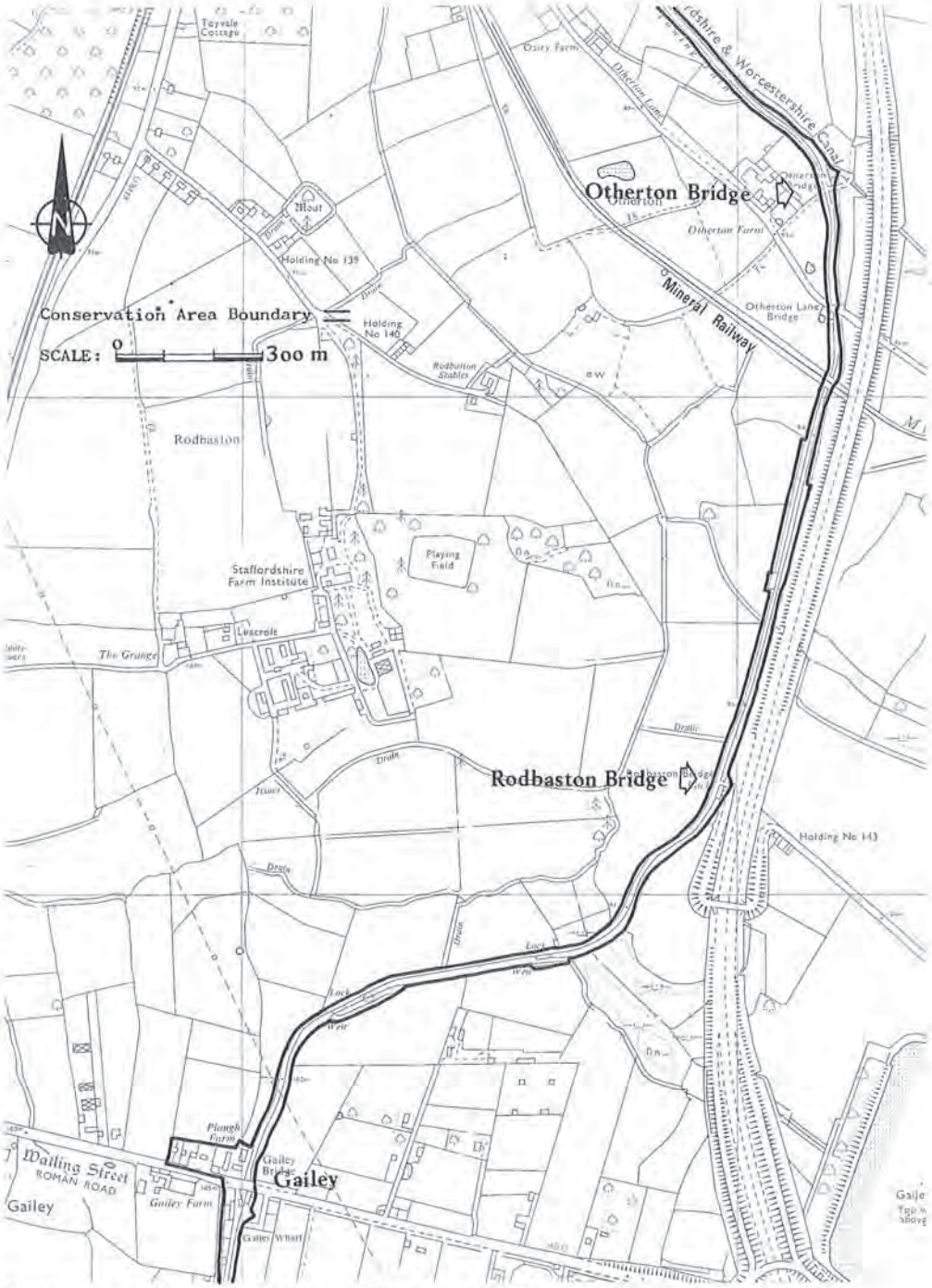
Beyond Longford distant views of the hills and plantations of Cannock Chase are seen and the canal enters Penkridge past allotment gardens and recent housing. Penkridge Bridge, (No. 86), which carried the main Cannock Road across the canal is another variant of Brindley's standard pattern. The semi-circular arch spans only the canal, the towing path has a miniature tunnel, all to itself, apparently of later date. A Marina Company at Penkridge Wharf uses the waterside wharf buildings in a comparatively sensitive manner and the full canal assemblage, bridge, lock, wharf, lock cottage/wharf buildings is completed by the canalside pub, the Boat Inn. As Princefield Bridge is an original one, carrying Francis Green Lane between Penkridge and Pillaton, Penkridge may boast a very complete and unspoilt waterway heritage.

Penkridge to Gailey

South of Penkridge, the canal and River Penk rapidly diverge, the river sweeping away to the west, whilst the canal takes a course along the east side of the valley. The final climb to the summit level begins at the deep Filance Lock and south of Penkridge the canal begins to swing south-eastwards passing under Lyne Hill accommodation bridge (No. 83), which has an unusually shallow curve with straight sides partially built of stone, and sandstone wing walls.

The M.6 motorway is again rapidly approaching the canal at this point providing an effective visual boundary on the east side, the intervening land being open and flat. Canal and motorway run side by side between Otherton and Rodbaston Bridges and the noise is consequently intrusive. The railway bridge, built in 1902, carried coal to the Otherton Canal basin from Littleton Colliery.

Otherton Lane Bridge



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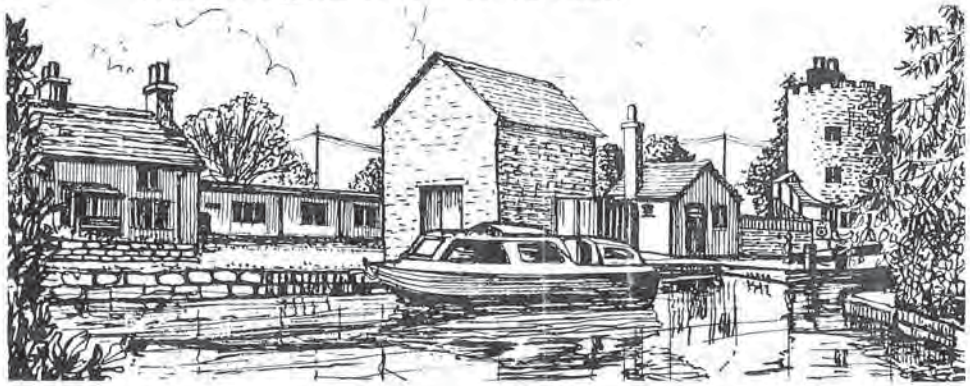
Coal was unloaded directly from the railway into the boats to be carried to Stourport Power Station. Although severely limited on the east side by the motorway, views to the west are more open and, except where obscured by high hedges along the towing path, give views across the pleasantly wooded mixed farmland of the Rodbaston estate - now the Staffordshire College of Agriculture. Rodbaston Lock is the first of four with only about ¼ mile between each. The canal company regarded the four as a flight, and only built lock keepers' houses by the top and bottom locks of the flight.

The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal has now reached Gailey, the end of its 100 ft. climb out of the Trent Valley. The next lock beyond Gailey will begin the descent to the Severn. The Gailey location is crucial because the canal here passes under the arterial A.5, hence the wharf complex which has been here from the beginning. The most eye-catching feature here is the round-house, built in 1804-5, and still inhabited by an employee of the British Waterways Board. The group of wharfside buildings is a remarkably complete assemblage of cottages and warehouses. Even an old crane survives. The wharf here is angled to the main canal to allow for boats to turn and is partly built over the end of the main feeder from Calf Heath reservoir, a principal supplier of water for the canal.



Gailey

Gailey to Wolverhampton

Within the Administrative County of Stafford the stretch of canal between Gailey and Wolverhampton is the most deeply scarred by modern industry. Nevertheless it possesses reaches of tranquil beauty which are perhaps thrown into prominence by the contrasting industrial squalor, the most prominent of which is the refinery complex of the Midlands-Yorkshire Tar Distillery.

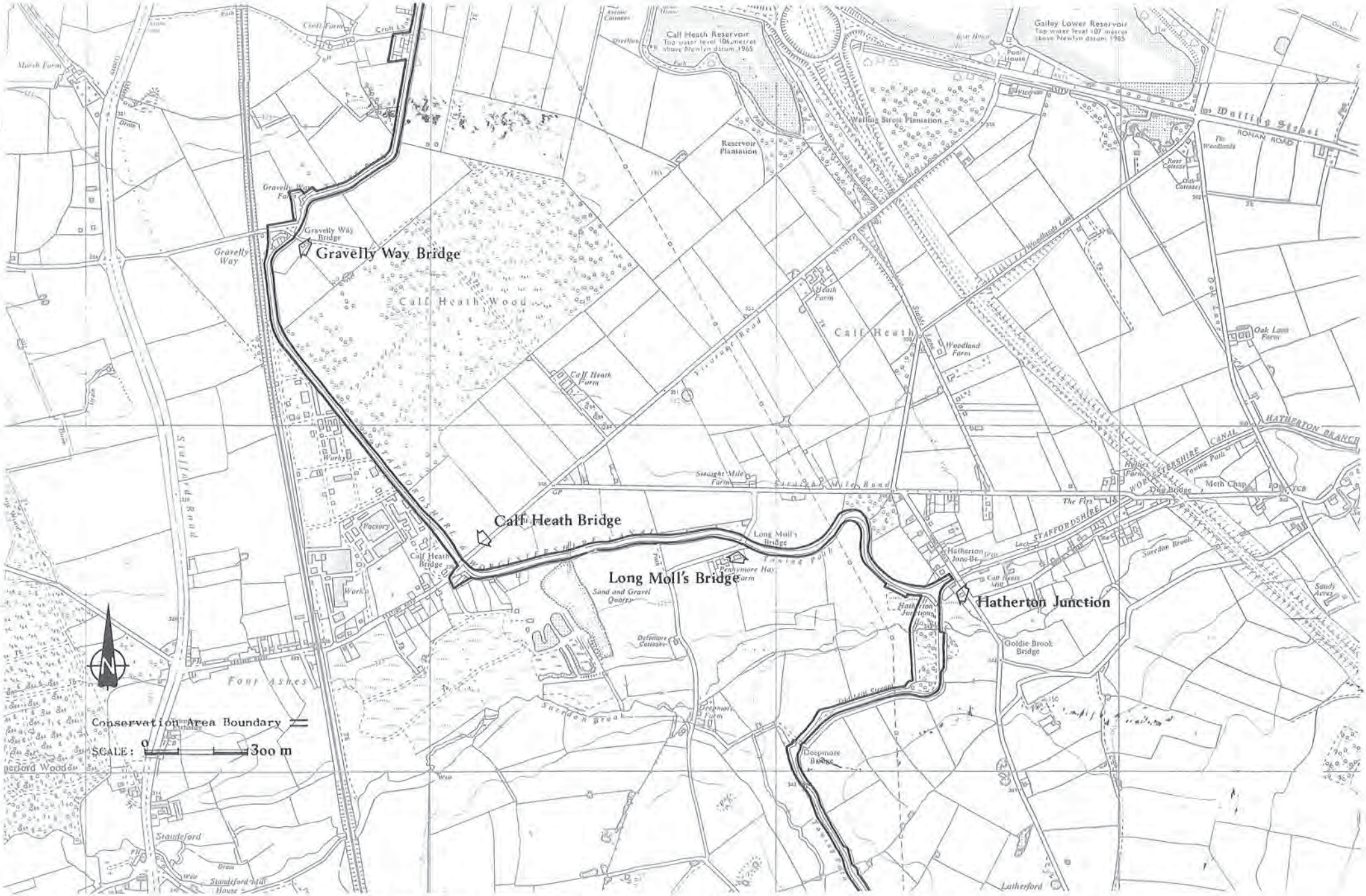
At Gravelly Way there are remains of a wharf beside Gravelly Way Farm, which itself, originally, may have been a wharf house.

At Calf Heath Bridge a wharf and canalside buildings including a warehouse and weighing office once served the local farms and the small forges along the Penk. The wharf continued in use longer than many of its contemporaries because the 'Black Works', where Lamp Black was made, came to be located here close to the canal. Turpentine, one of the principal ingredients of the process, was delivered by canal narrow boats to the Calf Heath Wharf.

Past Calf Heath and threading between extensive sand and gravel workings the towing path becomes impassable beyond the quaintly named Long Moll's Bridge (No. 76). The low lying land to the south of the canal is occupied by stretches of water, the haunt of a considerable variety of wild fowl and other water birds.

"Hatherton Junction" is no longer a canal junction, the later 1840 Hatherton Branch to Cannock and the then expanding South Staffordshire coalfields having been closed. The junction is now occupied by a thriving 'marina'.

South from Hatherton the canal's course is paralleled on its west side by the Mill stream running down to Deepmore Corn Mill with its wharf and bridge (No. 75). The countryside here is much less spoiled by



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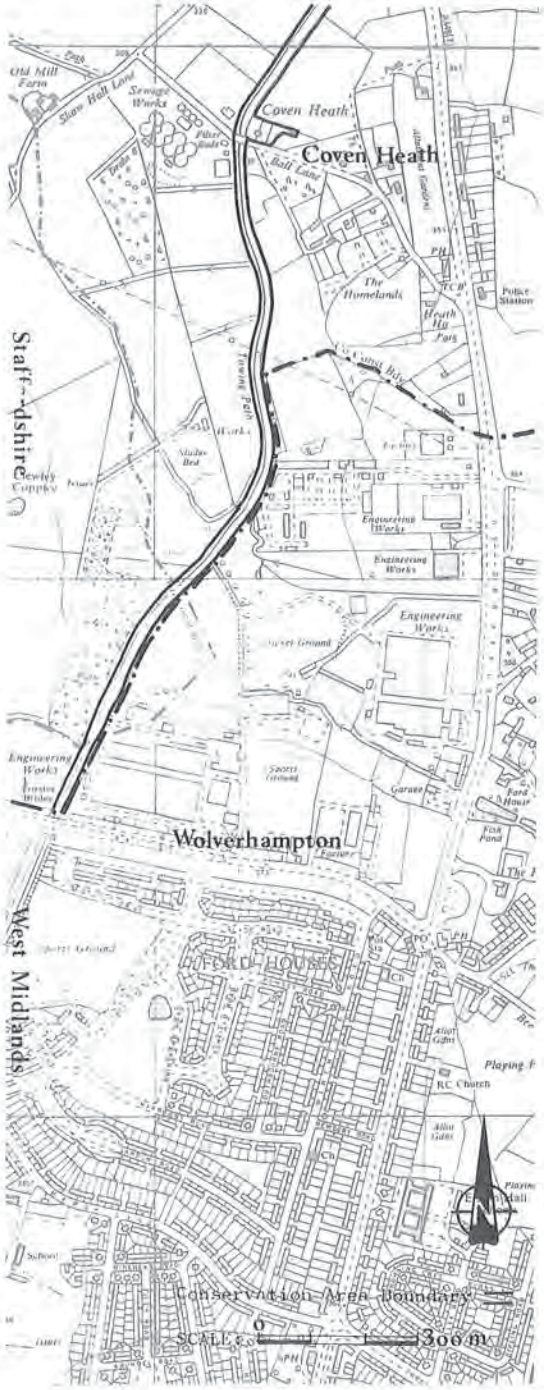

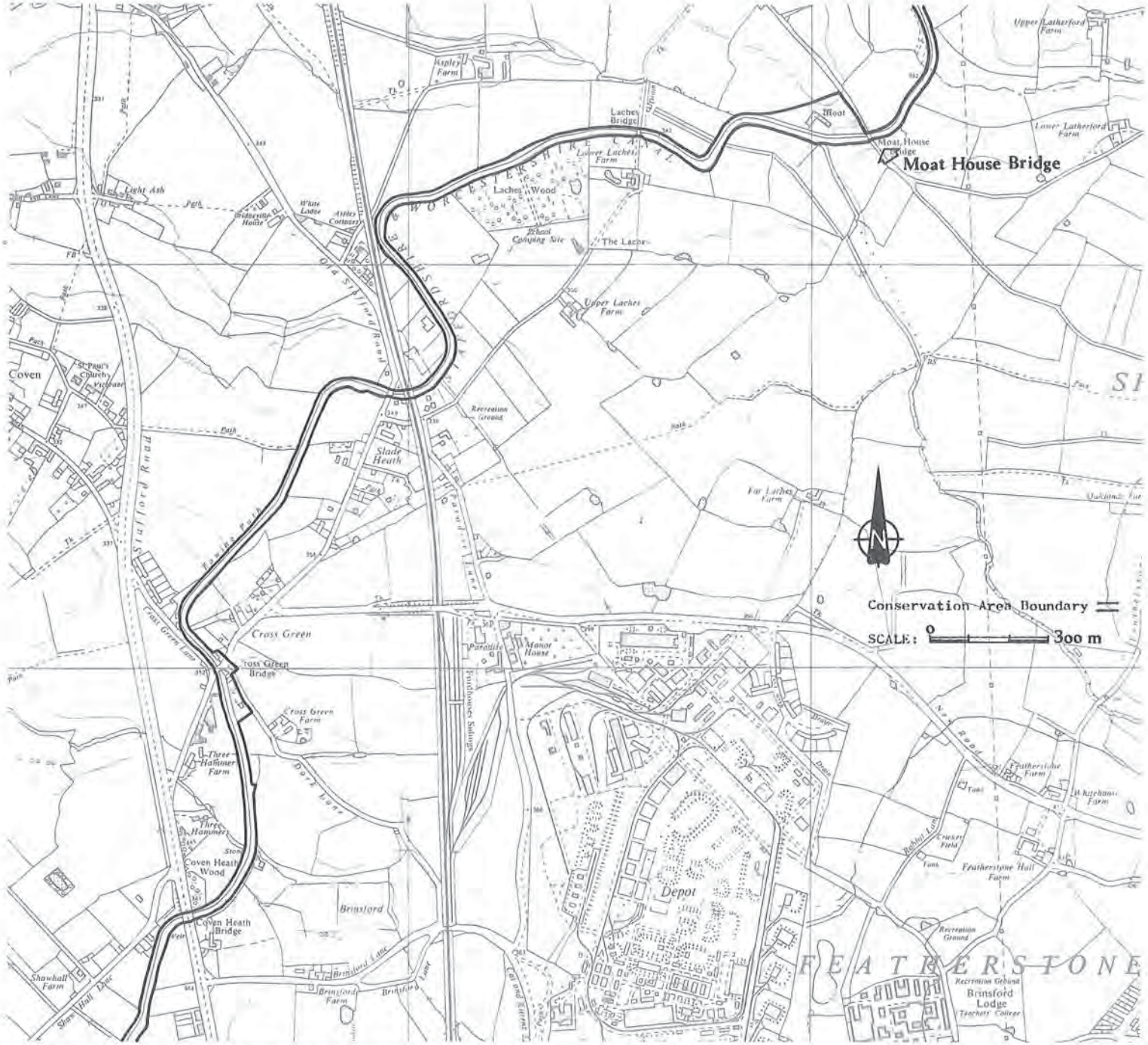

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mineral extraction and industry, offering pleasant open views across lightly wooded farmland open to east and west.

Moat House Bridge has been rebuilt but the interesting feature here is that, as at Acton Trussell, the canal has taken advantage of one arm of a moated manor enclosure ditch. The remains of the site lie north of the canal and evidence indicates not merely mediaeval but also later activity in the early 18th Century.

The Old Turnpike road from Stafford to Wolverhampton crossed the canal by bridge No. 70, Brinsford Bridge, which was completely rebuilt in the 1930's. As the canal approaches Wolverhampton there is at Coven Heath a small sewage works from which about a million gallons of treated effluent enter the canal each day.

Between Coven Heath and Castlecroft, the canal passes through the Administrative County of the West Midlands. For much of its length the canal runs through the Valley Park, a recreational area being developed by the Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council.

Four Ashes

Wolverhampton to Wombourne

Wolverhampton is left behind at Castlecroft, and the canal passes through an area affording extensive views to the west and north with the land rising to Perton Court in Wrottesley Parish. Passing beneath Mops Farm Bridge, the canal runs beside Pool Hall, a well-proportioned and attractive Georgian farmhouse which, with its outbuildings and the bridge, form a valuable and attractive canalside group. The Pool itself, south of the Hall and alongside the canal, is one of a pair that act as reservoirs for the canal and is also used for sailing, fishing and as nest sites for wildfowl. The amenity of this west side of the canal is considerably marred by the unpleasant scrapyard located between the two lakes. A little to the south, at Dimmingsdale Lock, is a basin and substantial wharf. The basin is now in use for private moorings, and the site is dominated by a water-pumping station in the Graeco-Roman Modern style.

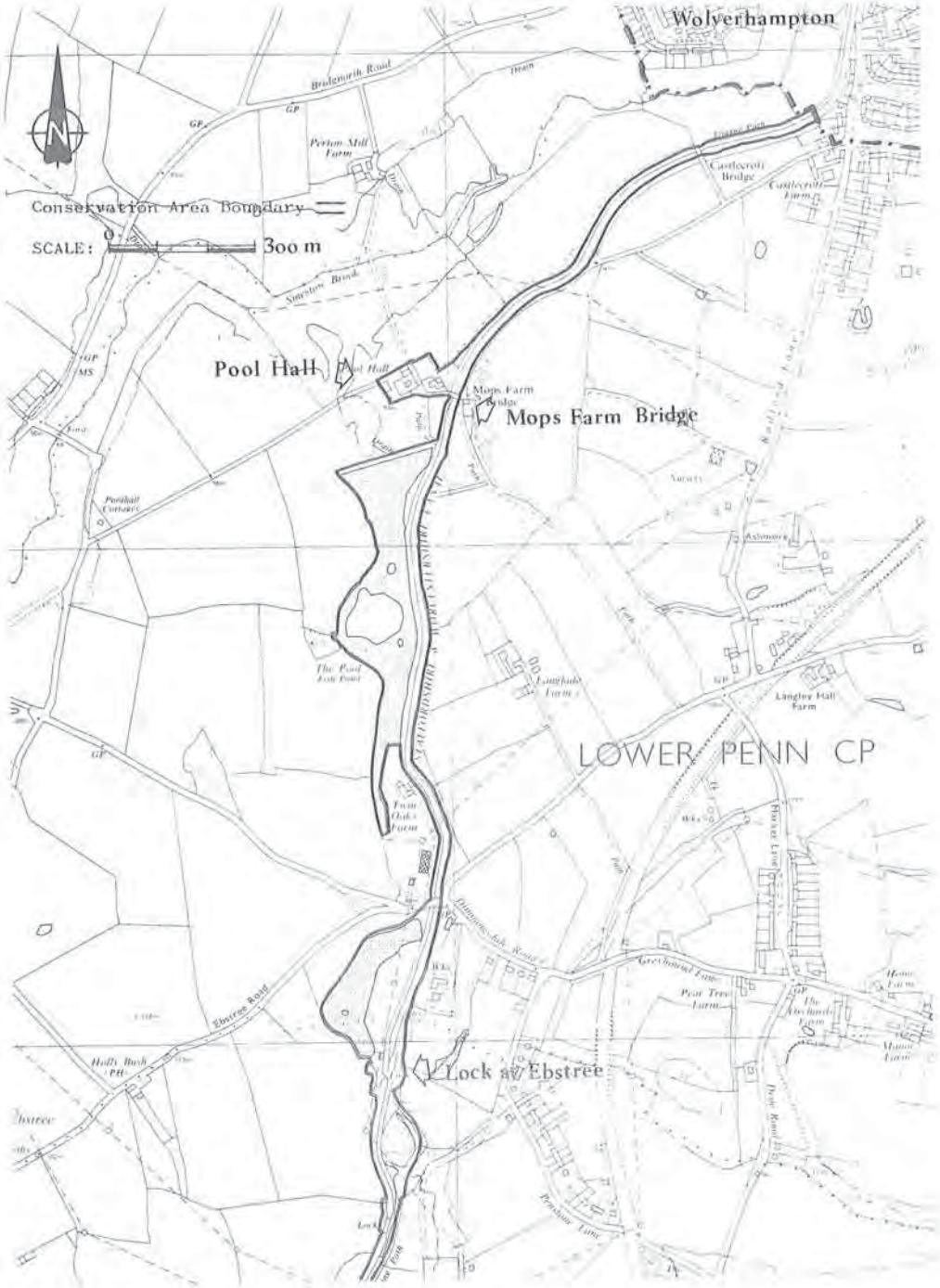
The towpath changes sides at Bridge No. 52, apparently violating the towpath rule, but the explanation for this may be that in crossing the somewhat broken country between Wightwick and Awbridge, Brindley was obliged to forsake the valley of the Smestow and follow a smaller watercourse. There is attractive, undulating, meadow and agricultural land extending east of the canal to the scarp at Blaze Bank and Lower Penn, beyond Orton. To the west of the canal views of the undulating lightly wooded landscape are much more limited.

The lock at Ebstree with its horseshoe shaped weir is dominated by the adjoining switching station but further south the west bank of the canal is lined by a very attractive group of willows which extend almost as far as Awbridge. The farm, lock and bridge at Awbridge make a most satisfying composition. The bridge is unusual, its parapet coping being carried on either side by nine brick piers, and the cast-iron split bridge has a unique circular decorative motif cast into the spandrels; these appear set against the massive stones of the lock and the mature brick of the farm. In addition there is an easily inspected circular weir to complete the group.

Awbridge Bridge

The canal is now moving in a south-easterly direction towards Wombourne, crossing open country which stretches eastwards to the scarp of Orton Hill to which emphasis is added by the fringing Ladywell Wood. To the west the valley of the Smestow is again approached, but the descent does not occur until the 'staircase' of locks at Bratch is reached.

The flight at Bratch ranks as one of the major engineering triumphs of the canal. Originally said to have been built as a three lock staircase, the flight takes the canal through a vertical interval of thirty feet. Fragments of the original work can still be seen, but the staircase was converted at an early stage into three conventional locks separated by 'ponds'. Two very large side ponds accept the diverted excess water produced from the upper two locks, and in 1927, when much reconstruction took place, a large weir with straight sill was built.



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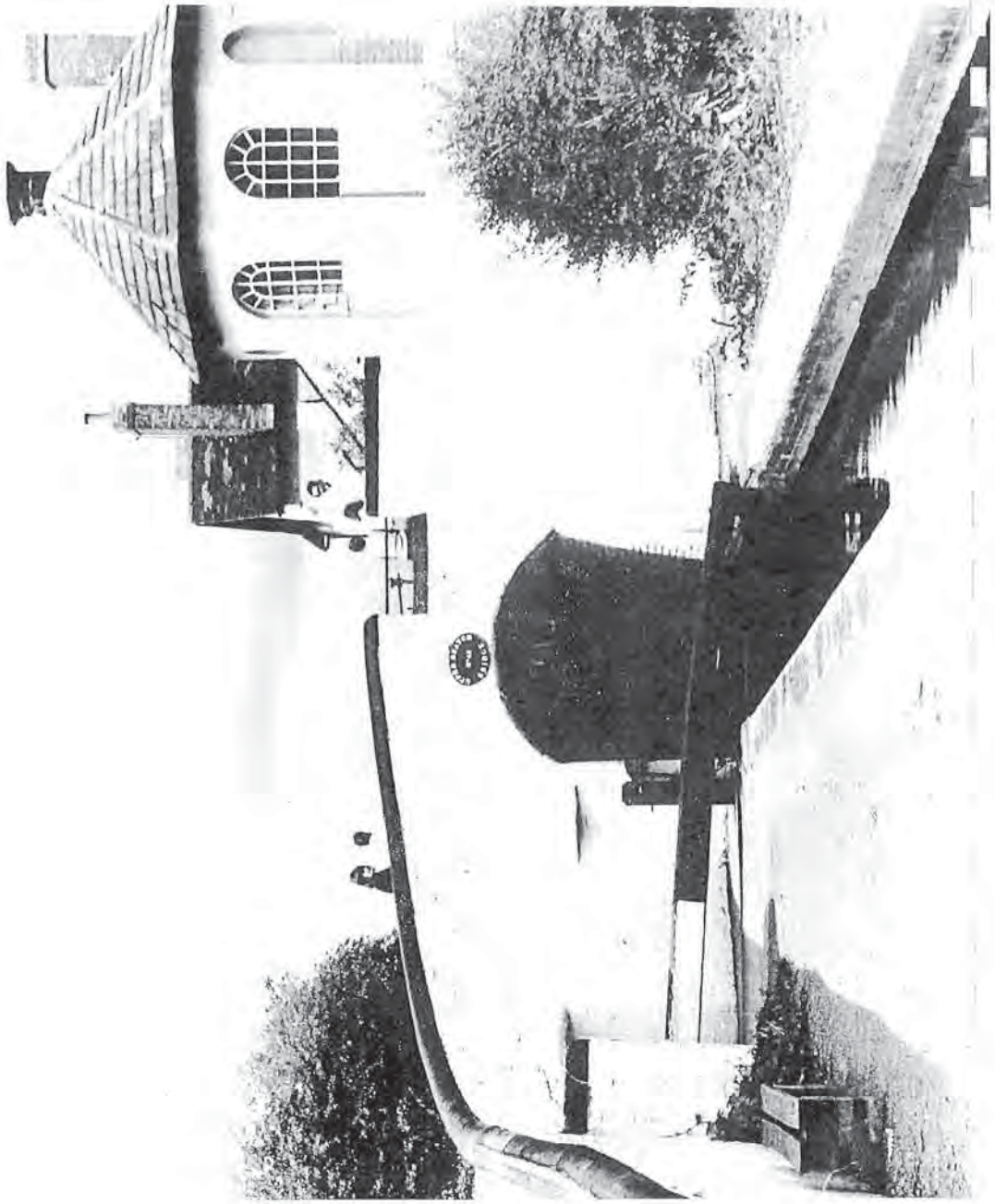
A striking visual element in the scene at Bratch is the small toll-house - an octagonal building with ornamental central chimney, but the Victorian pinnacled "Gothick" architecture of Bratch waterworks building competes for dominance. The pumping engine of the waterworks was fired by coal brought by canal, an explanation that accounts for the location of this and other water pumping stations along the route of the canal and the presence just below Bratch Bridge (No. 47) of a wharf.

The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal never actually enters Wombourne proper but skirts it, passing through a group of small delightfully named satellite settlements that grew up alongside the canal - like Giggetty, Houndel, Bumble Hole and Bratch itself.

Bumble Hole has a fine example of a lock cottage with deep eaves and round-headed iron-framed windows. The canal is lined by wharves between Bumble Hole and Houndel which provided for the transport of casting sand for the Black Country foundries.



Bratch Locks

Wombourne to Kinver

The steep sided valley entered via Bratch Locks is abandoned just as peremptorily below Houndel Bridge where lower land opens out at the confluence of the Penn and Wom streams. The Bunter sands which are quarried for casting sand above Houndel here disappear below fluvio-glacial deposits that are themselves quarried for sharp building sand. Thus most of the wharves around Giggetty Bridge (No. 44) were for loading sand; one, however, Heath Forge Wharf, with its collection of old wharfside cottages was connected with Heath Mill, nail-making having been an important activity in the district. The last of this group of wharves is beside the rebuilt Wombourne Bridge (No. 43). The stretch of canal between Houndel and Wombourne bridges passes through somewhat unkempt surroundings with the urban fringe of Wombourne extending towards the eastern side of the canal, with industrial activity extending along the west bank beyond Wombourne Bridge.

Re-descent into the Smestow valley at Botterham is by means of a pair of locks which might be similar to the original work at Bratch. Below Botterham the canal forms a tree-lined avenue, tranquil and beautiful, with the land dropping away to the west.

Towards Marsh Lock the canal, embanked on the towpath side, cuts into the hillside on the east and continues beneath a low cliff. The towpath changes sides at Marsh Lock, Marsh Bridge (No. 41) having been converted to a turnover bridge early this century, allowing traffic to avoid the busy wharves adjacent to Swindon iron works, now demolished. Iron working is said to have been carried on at Swindon since the 17th Century, and there was probably a works here when the canal was constructed.

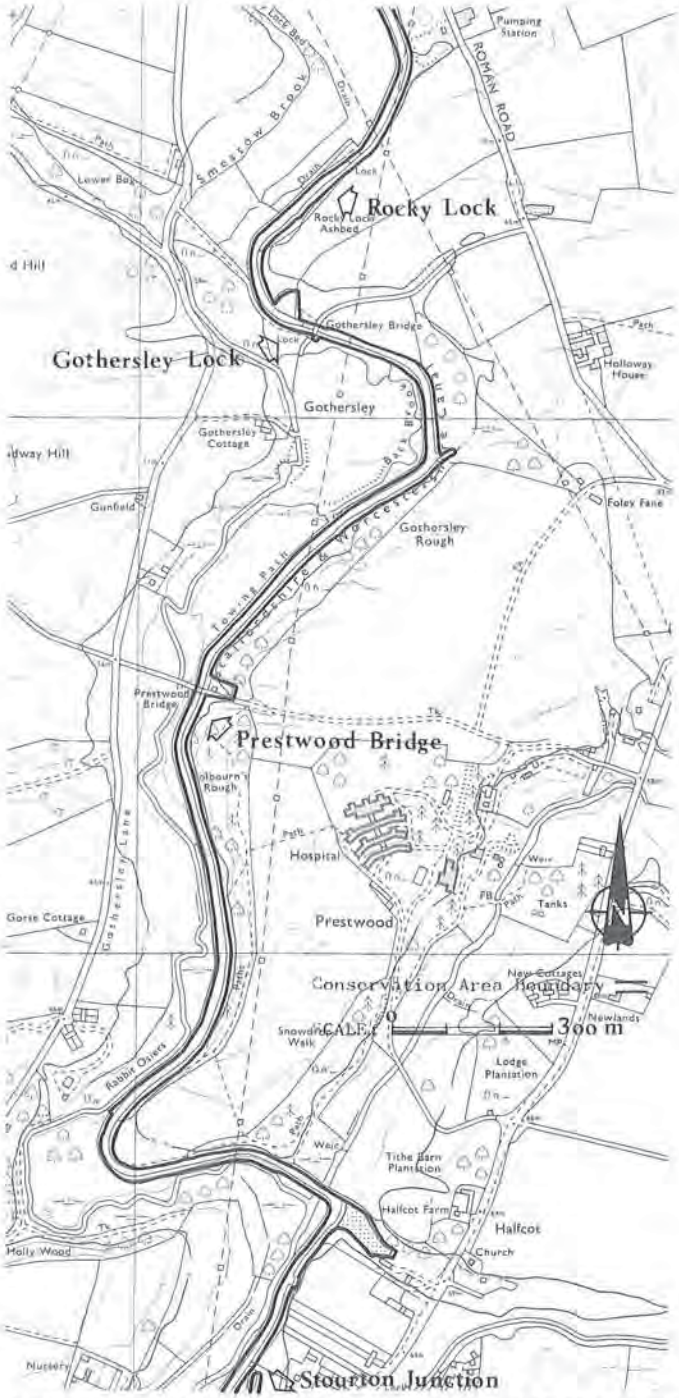
Below Swindon, Hinksford Lock stands quite alone with no evidence of an attendant lock cottage. The weir is unusual, being irregularly constructed in segments. The canal is passing here through agricultural land bounded to the west by a well wooded scarp. The Smestow brook runs very close to the canal and the intervening land has much scenic interest.

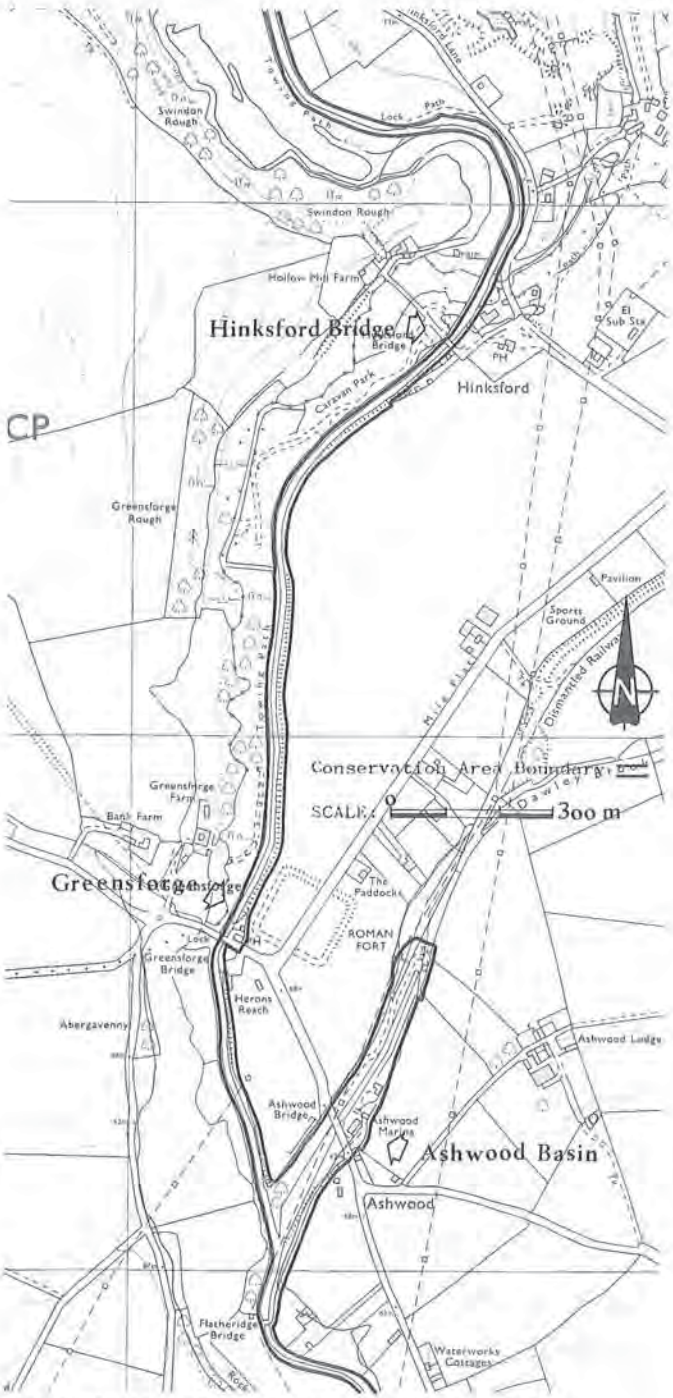
Towards Greensforge, woodland fringes the canal on the west side. The canal cuts into the rising ground to the east and runs in a shallow but significant cutting, being contained on the towpath side by an embankment above the Smestow. A sense of containment is thus imparted to the scene and attractive effects of light are produced. Greensforge Wharf served the mill at Greensforge which survives as a farm. To the east of the canal is the site of a now buried Roman fort, probably dating from the mid first century A.D.

Southward the canal passes through meadowland of the Smestow valley, and opens up south of Greensforge into Ashwood Basin, constructed in the second quarter of the 19th Century by the fourth Lord Dudley. The basin received coal by rail from the collieries of the Dudley estates for shipment to Stourport. Advantage was taken of a natural valley, now spanned by an eleven arch viaduct, to provide the basin, the hillsides being cut back to accommodate wharves, sidings and loading devices. Extensive views are afforded to the east from this stretch of the canal to Ridgehill Woods near Brierley Hill. To the west the views are limited by the tree-lined valley side.

Rocky Lock, south of Flatheridge is situated beneath a sandstone cliff. It no longer has a lock cottage but there is a small cave, similar to other caves along the southern stretches of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, and said to have been excavated as shelters for the 'navigators' at the time of the construction of the canal.

Gothersley Lock, only a little to the south of Rocky Lock, perhaps shared the same lock keeper. The lane which crosses the tail of the lock led in earlier days to an iron works which had mills, forges and





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possibly puddling furnaces, and was linked by tramway to the canalside wharf at Gothersley.

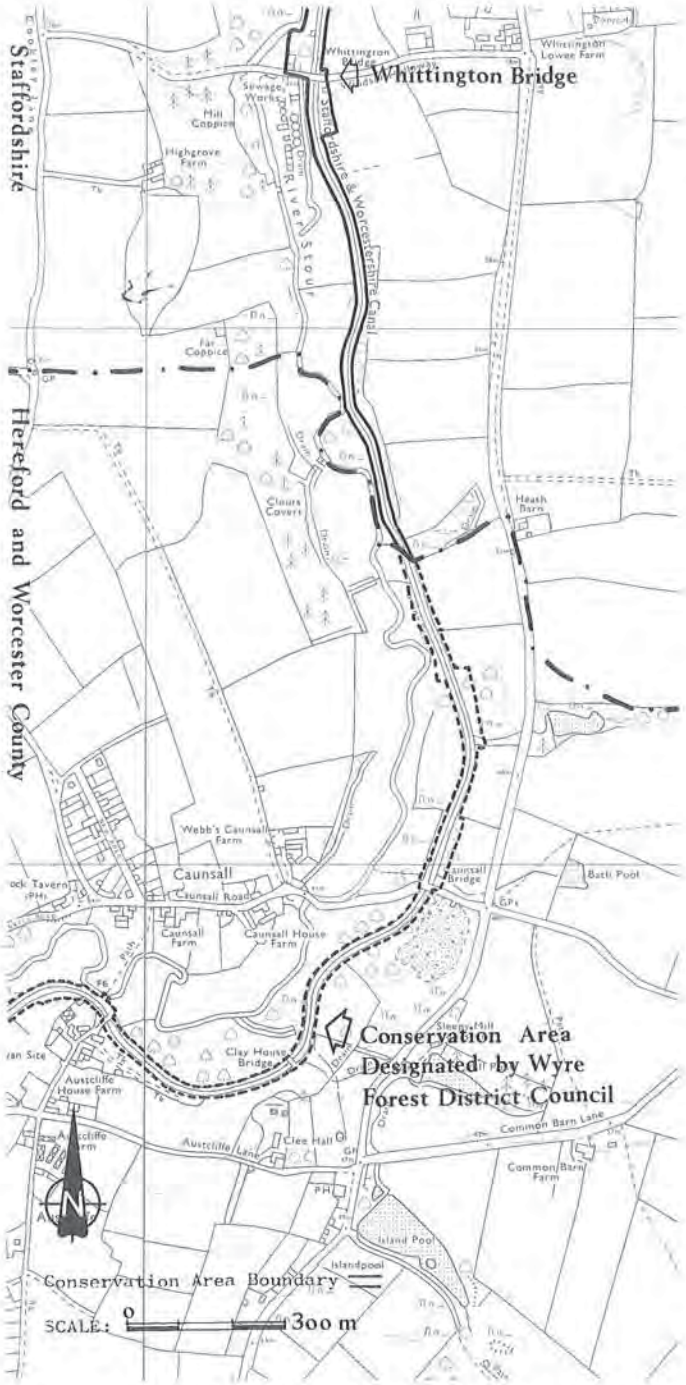
The Round House

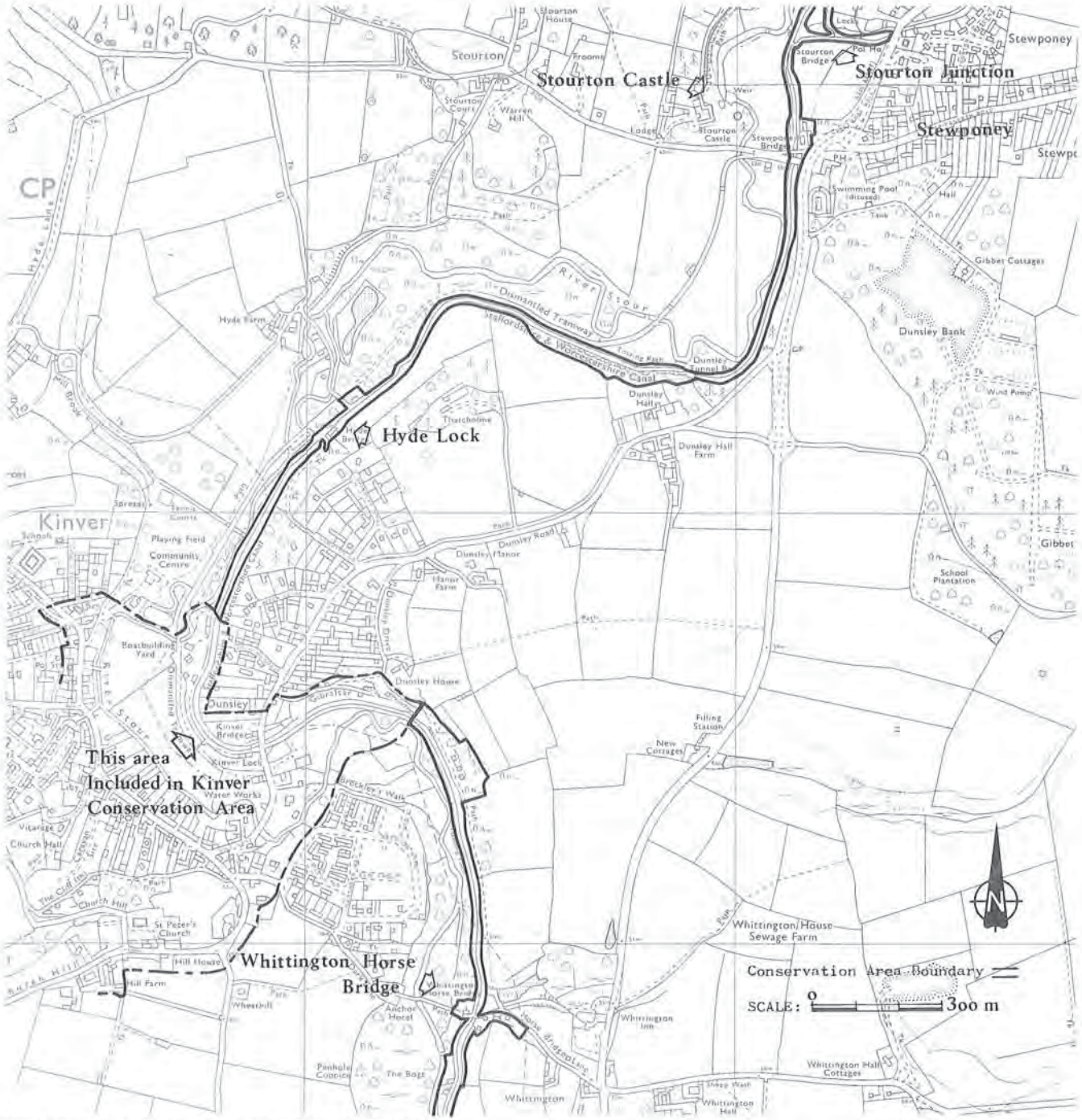
The now much-ruined round house was occupied by the clerk in charge of the wharf, and like its counterpart at Gailey was constructed about 1805.

The charm of the Gothersley stretch of the canal is very considerable. Tree-lined stretches of quiet water are varied by sandstone cliffs on the east side, with occasional broader views to the west across undulating agricultural land set with splendid stands of trees, forming a landscape composition of the highest value. Similarly, at Prestwood the canal passes through a landscape of surpassing quality, the canal itself a complementary element in the whole scene. Past Prestwood Bridge (No. 34), a perfect and unaltered example of Brindley design carrying the back drive to Prestwood Hall, the canal executes an exaggerated loop to pass by an aqueduct over the river Stour at its confluence with the Smestow and follow the east side of the Stour valley southwards. Devil's Den is another cave, which, it has been suggested, was a 'navvies' shelter; it seems more likely, however, that it always served as a boathouse for Prestwood Hall. Extending beyond the Stour aqueduct is a splendid 200 yard stretch of water running eastward away from the main canal and now tragically marred by a wire and corrugated iron screen. A recently found plan for the Stourbridge canal shows it entering the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at this point and the pool appears to have been work towards implementing this proposal, abandoned in favour of Stourton Junction.

Prestwood

South of the aqueduct at Stourton the canal is joined by the Stourbridge branch which opened in 1779. The roving bridge was constructed by the Stourbridge company in 1777-79 and was typical of the bridges on the Stourbridge Canal, differing from the bridges of the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal in having shaped brick springers to the arch; unhappily it has lost its parapet.





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A little beyond the junction is Stewponey which at one time was the focal point of the whole canal. Around the wharf are a lock house, toll office, cottages, warehouses, stables and a carpenter's shop operated by the canal company. A trestle bridge here carried the Kinver Light Railway across the canal (now replaced by the present road bridge) and there was an ironworks nearby in the grounds of Stourton Castle. The surviving canalside buildings have been somewhat unsympathetically converted to a marina complex.

Below the lock at Stewponey the canal is for a short distance, closely followed by the A.449 road, before the canal turns westward following the Stour towards Kinver. There are pleasant views west and north-west here across meadlow land to Stourton Court and the woodland south of it. Having turned westward to follow the Stour, Brindley was forced to construct the first of the tunnels on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal; one of the earliest on any canal. Only 23 yards long, the tunnel is unlined, hewn through the outcropping pebble beds; there is, however, a towing path, an unusual feature in early tunnels. The margins of the canal are again here fringed by trees and sandstone cliffs on the south side. Near to Hyde Bridge was Hyde Ironworks which was one of the oldest in the Stour valley. The canal gave impetus to the extension of the ironworks providing a link with the Black Country. By the end of the last century there was a 400 ft. canal frontage, and an arm leading to the works. All that now remains are a house and mounds of debris to mark this important site. The lock at the Hyde is certainly one of the most attractive on the canal, set beneath the wooded hillside with its sandstone cliff. Below Hyde Lock fine views of Kinver Edge are revealed but the canal scene is spoiled by untidy moorings and a marina development.

At Kinfare Bridge the canal makes an exaggerated eastward sweep avoiding the centre of Kinver and passing along its northern margin. The rock

Cliffs at Kinver

outcrops north of the canal are in places occupied by former cave dwellings - a characteristic of Kinver. South of this loop the canal margins are, unfortunately, down-at-heel and partially derelict, rather spoiling the potentially attractive setting. The canal soon resumes a southerly course towards Whittington Horse Bridge (No. 28), a bridge built at the same time as the canal for pack horse traffic to and from the nailers' forges and ironworks of the Stour valley. The bridge has been marred by the removal of its parapet. There is a wharf and winding hole near the bridge, perhaps implying that traffic was diverted from the pack horse to the canal after its construction.

A little to the south is Whittington Lock and Bridge. Traffic along the narrow lane connecting the A.449 with the upper part of Kinver has not so far required the modification of this bridge, and the lock house, bridge and lock together in this wooded, secluded valley make a most pleasing group. The lane over the bridge is carried to the west on the dam at the end of the pond of the former Whittington Ironworks.

Beyond Whittington the ground rises to the east with a tree-lined sandstone bluff east of Far Coppice, across land with pleasant westward views to the wooded Kinver scarp and the canal reaches the Hereford-Worcester County border near Heath Barn.

Whittington Bridge

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