

## Wappenshall Wharf, 1835-50

### Part 2: The trade and the carriers

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### The surviving records

Luckily many of the wharfinger's records for the period from 1835 to 1850 have been preserved in the Sutherland papers, divided between the Shropshire Archives and the Staffordshire Record Office.<sup>19</sup> However, no one type of record covers the whole period. For most it, bulk cargoes, mainly iron and coal, are dealt with in summary. Most revealing of all, for various periods there are books recording all 'small' cargoes received and dispatched — well over 100,000 individual entries. The earlier books give both the boat number and the steerer, whereas the later records show only the steerer.

Because of this mass of data, detailed analysis was restricted to three sample periods of four weeks:

- March/April 1835, shortly after the wharf opened;
- March/April 1842, whilst the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal (B&LJC) was still independent; and
- March/April 1849, after the amalgamation which created the Shropshire Union, but just before the railway opened to Wellington.

### Bulk loads

The most important traffics were iron pig and iron products being transported from the East Shropshire ironworks to Ellesmere Port for Liverpool, and raw materials being brought in for the ironworks.

The 1835-6 records show the carrier but not the ironworks, and the destination is merely the point where the boat leaves the B&LJC: Atherley (for Wolverhampton or Birmingham) or Nantwich (for Ellesmere Port or Manchester).

An analysis of a four week period in March/April 1835 shows the following boat-loads of iron pig or iron products being sent from Wappenshall:

<i>Owner</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Boats</i>	<i>Av load (tons)</i>
Fairhurst Tilston	Nantwich	26	18.0
Worthington & Co	Nantwich	8	19.3
Henshall	Nantwich	6	10.1
Bradley & Co	Autherley	1	20.0
Hunt & Brown	Autherley	1	20.0
Thornycroft	Autherley	1	20.0
Other		4	4.1

A boat-load was usually between 18½ and 20 tons; one load of 22½ tons was exceptional.

Coal had a more local market, and most of it was sent in trains of three tub-boats, each carrying five tons. Hazledine used one narrowboat carrying 20 tons and one train of three tub-boats which were also loaded to 20 tons. During the same four week period the following loads were dispatched:

<i>Owner</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Trains</i>	<i>Tons</i>
William Hazledine	Drayton	14	280
Thomas Jukes Collier	Shebdon	10	150
Thomas Jukes Collier	Gnosall	1	15
Lilleshall Company	Newport	2	35
T W & B Botfield	Newport	3	45
T W & B Botfield	Houlton	3	60

All these firms owned or leased mines: Hazeldine and Collier at Wombridge, the Lilleshall Company at Wrockwardine Wood, and Botfields at Old Park (Dawley). They were therefore carrying for themselves; none carried back-loads. It took until mid-April for the Lilleshall Company to establish a regular pattern of trade; after that they were carrying 45 tons week to Newport. The Coalbrookdale Company started using the wharf later in 1835.

The other bulk loads dispatched were bricks to Church Eaton and Newport, and one load of lead to Autherley.

Only John Bradley & Co<sup>20</sup> (New Hadley) had bulk loads inwards: in the four weeks one load of limestone came from Nantwich, no doubt originating at Llanymynech. During the two weeks following the end of the period analysed in detail they brought a further four boatloads, this time from Autherley (presumably from the Walsall or Dudley areas).

Unfortunately, the surviving records from 1842 onwards do not give much detail beyond a monthly summary of the weights carried for each company. These show large variations from year to year, reflecting the general economy of the country and the success of the individual firms. The Coalbrookdale Company ceased using the wharf in 1845; Foster & Co, successor to Bradley & Co, in 1846 (which coincides with James Foster's move from Wombridge to Madeley Court) and the Lawley Company in 1847 (when the works was leased to the Coalbrookdale Company). The Lilleshall Company transferred almost all of its canal transport to Lubstree Wharf following its opening in 1844, but in 1847 ironstone and limestone wharfage resumed at Wappenshall, the weights far exceeding those of the early 1840s.

The total tonnages of bulk cargoes passing through Wappenshall in March each year are shown in Table 2 (below). It is not absolutely clear how much is coming in and how much going out. Presumably the 'iron ... transshipped' is ironstone and, like the limestone, is being brought in by canal, whereas the other materials are being sent out. Just over 60% of the 'iron and limestone transshipped' was for Botfields; their ironworks at Old Park is known to have used high quality haematite ores from Cumbria which had advantages over the lower grade local ores. Almost all the iron transshipped under the dock was also for Botfields. The weighing of pig iron was almost exclusively for Ketley and Lilleshall.

Towards the end of the period studied, the records show the carriers for the out-going loads, as well as the originating ironworks. Thus in March 1849 Botfields were using their own boats (1,028 tons), whereas the other ironworks were employing carrying firms: Shropshire Union Railways & Canal Carrying Company (674 tons), Henshall & Co (530 tons), Tranter (236 tons) and Crowley & Co (130 tons).

The Lilleshall Company was dispatching regular loads of coal to Norbury in its own boats and to Market Drayton in Hazledine's boats. The only other bulk loads mentioned were sacks of grain, Jobson bringing in about 100 sacks of grain each week every year until 1848, and crates of wood.

	<i>charge/ ton</i>	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850
Iron & limestone transhipped	1d	3,350	1,810	3,196	3,577	2,338	3,237	2,401	1,729	2,433
Wharfage of iron	1½d	1,841	3,128	1,950	2,864	1,188	2,830	2,005	2,544	1,614
Wharfage of small castings	10- 10½d	15	12	30	-	-	-	61	121	10
Wharfage of castings	4d	143	25	16	446	-	-	2	416	24
Iron transhipped under dock	2d	70	60	130	-	-	20	400	600	320
Pig iron weighed	6d	310	340	320	160	90	241	-	10	7

*Table 2: Tonnages of bulk cargoes in March each year from 1842 to 1850*

## Goods

The most striking thing about the goods received at Wappenshall is the variety. The following list shows all the entries in the wharf books in the year to April 1849 which mentioned specific goods — plenty of other entries merely stated 'box', 'truss', 'parcel' etc, or were indecipherable:

- Bacon, codfish, herrings, oysters, cheese, flour, rice, biscuits, nuts, potatoes, pease, beans, fruit, figs, prunes, oranges, currants, raisins, tea, coffee, syrup, treacle, salt, spice, pepper, mustard, vinegar, lard, snuff.
- Soda water, ale, porter, cider, wine, spirits, rum, whisky.
- Drapery, bedding, sheets, feathers, flocks, yarn, thread, hats.
- Brushes, brooms, carpet brooms, stails [handles], soap, starch, soda, naphtha, turpentine, candles, wicks, blacking, plates, tin plates, congraves [friction matches], paper, stationery, ink.
- Furniture, chairs, sofa (for Rev Bird, Preston), bedsteads, pictures.
- Paint, nails, wire, hoops, screws, bracket castings, rods, tubes, slates, glass, cement.
- Deals [floorboards], pine and mahogany boards, pine logs, birch logs, scantlings, glue, varnish.
- Shovels, riddles, files, lathes, grates, ash pans, fire irons.
- Furnace bars (for Lilleshall Iron Co), pumps.
- Iron bars, sheet iron, steel, tin, zinc, sheet zinc, lead, coils of lead pipe.  
lead, coils of lead pipe.
- Plough, hoe, plough-shares, harrow, scythes, whips.

- Wheat, oats, oilcake, seed, rye grass, bran, meal, hops, linseed, twigs, soda ash, potash, manure, guano.
- Oil, tallow, bark rosin, grease, ropes, empty casks, leather, sacks, organ pipe.

The weights of the individual items varied considerably, some being as low as a few pounds. Few exceeded a ton.

The wharf served not only Wellington but also the coalfield settlements. Analysis of a typical day's arrivals (7 April 1849) shows the following ultimate destinations for the goods:

<i>Destination</i>	<i>Distance (miles)</i>	<i>No of customers</i>	<i>No of items</i>
Wellington	2	20	37
Ironbridge	7	6	16
Madeley	6½	3	4
Dawley	4½	2	8
Wappenshall	½	2	3
Allscott	3½	2	2
Broseley	8	1	3
Ketley	3	1	2
Horsehay	5	1	1
Walcot	5½	1	1
Cold Hatton	5	1	1
Edgbolton	7	1	1
Haughton	1	1	1
Kinnersley	1½	1	1
		43	81

Judging by the number of items, the best customers on this day were A Baynton & Co, linen & woollen draper of Ironbridge (10 items), J Webb, linen & woollen draper, Market Place, Wellington (6), John Danby, grocer, Walker Street, Wellington (5), and Michael Bailey, shopkeeper & grocer, Dawley (5).

Out-going goods was only about an eighth of that coming in. Mostly it is described by its container, 'box', 'truss', 'chest', and the like; specifically-named items include ale and bacon (for London), glass (Shrewsbury), tools (Nottingham) and brushes (Walsall). On the day surveyed in detail, there were no out-going items; during the previous week there had been only six.

## The carriers: 1835 to 1841

In the four weeks examined in March/April 1835, six firms carried general goods. Detailed analysis indicates the following boat usage:

<i>Carrier</i>	<i>Boats in</i>	<i>Average tonnage</i>	<i>Boats out</i>	<i>Average tonnage</i>
Fairhurst, Tilston	32 (14)	4.6	8 *	5.8
Crowley	11	7.0	11 (1)	5.4
Pickford	9	3.0	9 (3)	0.9
Whitehouse	8 (1)	4.9	8 (1)	2.5
Henshall	8 (1)	2.2	5 *	7.2
Turton	5 (2)	5.4	5 (1)	6.1

() Figures in brackets show the number of these boats which were empty. The average tonnage includes the empty boats.

\* An asterisk indicates that the other boats left loaded with iron products.

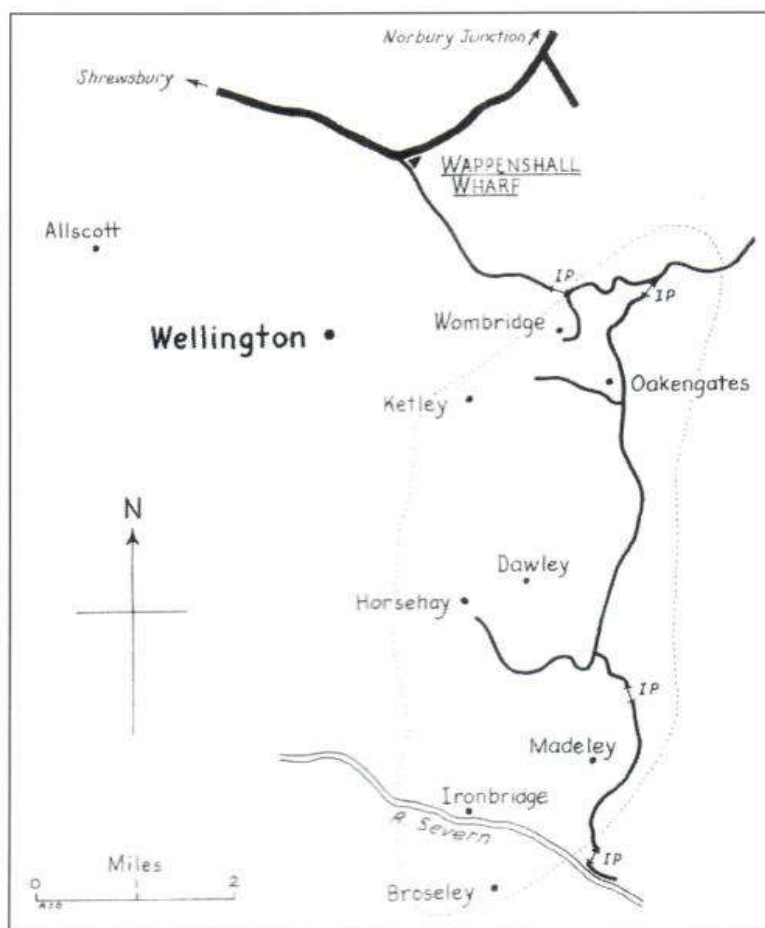
Although tonnages seem low, it must be remembered that these show the amounts unloaded or loaded at Wappenshall, and the boat may have made other calls on the way there.

More fundamentally, the shape of the hull of the stage boats then used meant that the maximum load was 20 tons. A fly-boat designed for fast operation could carry even less: 15 to 18 tons, typically. These figures assume that the cargo was dense (heavy compared with its size) and could be stacked without space being wasted. However, much of the goods carried was relatively light for its size; perhaps it could not be stacked easily; and if separate items were being conveyed for different customers it was necessary to stow them in a way that they could be retrieved conveniently. All these factors led to the total weight of the cargo being less than the theoretical maximum that the boat could carry. Of course, 'sundries' were charged at a much higher rate than large consignments, and this compensated for the inefficient use of hold capacity.

Various observations can be made about the individual carriers:

- As mentioned earlier, Fairhurst, Tilston of Liverpool and Chester were the major carriers of iron products northwards. Many of their boats returned with general goods. Eleven different steerers were recorded, but it is noticeable that steerers never seemed to switch between boats.
- Crowley, Hickling & Co were the second largest national firm of carriers at this date, their base being at the Union Wharf, Wolverhampton. Although three different boats (66, 80 and 112) were used during the four weeks, they all had the same steerer, B Bowater. He arrived and left Wappenshall on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, presumably travelling to Union Wharf.

- Pickford, the largest national firm, also coming to Wappenshall from the Wolverhampton direction, seemed less successful at attracting trade. No boat or steerer appeared twice in the period, perhaps indicating that they were coming through from further afield. The dates of unloading and loading imply that their boats went on to Shrewsbury.
- Whitehouse & Sons were based at Tipton; one boat regularly visited on Tuesdays; this was sometimes supplemented by another later in the week. The three boats used each had its own steerer.
- William Henshall's boats came from Manchester twice a week, carrying quite a lot of items for intermediate wharfs such as Market Drayton and Newport. Thomas Cork (boat 2) arrived each Tuesday and left each Thursday. The steerer for three of the other four trips was Samuel Stevenson. His boat stands out in the records because it was the only one referred to by a name: Cheese Factor.



- Turton's boats came through from the Nantwich direction twice a week, the steerers being William Jacks (boat 4) and Joseph Peak (boat 3). However, they seem to have had a lot of either empty mileage or idle time.

The main settlements served by Wappenshall Wharf.

*The broad lines show the canals used by standard 7ft wide narrowboats; the narrow lines are the tub-boat canals.*

*The dotted line shows the approximate extent of the coalfield. IP — inclined plane*

Towards the end of 1836, Fairhurst, Tilston & Co were bought out by the Ellesmere & Chester Canal for £6,304.15s.10d. The firm continued to trade nominally independently under the name Tilston, Smith & Co; it was not until the passing of its 1842 Act that the canal company had explicit powers to operate carrying craft.<sup>21</sup>

### **The carriers: 1842 to 1849**

From 1842 the records show the steerer but not the boat, so there is no way of telling whether a steerer consistently used one boat or whether the firms switched him between boats. Unfortunately too, it is not possible to link up loads inwards and outwards for individual boats.

The clear distinction between the companies trading north and those trading south continued:

- In March 1842 Crowley & Co's boats were still arriving from the Midlands on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, the steerers being Bowater and Tonks; by 1849 Bowater was bringing a boat in on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, supplemented on some other days by a boat under steerer Skeldon. Crowley's boats were occasionally recorded as going on to Shrewsbury.
- For its traffic from London, Pickford's policy was to use the London & Birmingham Railway as far as Curzon Street, Birmingham, where the loads were transferred into boats.<sup>22</sup> In 1842 Pickford's boats were, like Crowley's, arriving at Wappenshall from the Midlands on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, but their twelve arrivals had twelve different steerers — although Crowley and Pickford were both national firms they obviously then had different methods of organising their local operations. However, by 1849 Pickford's normal days had changed to Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, using only two steerers in the month studied: C Speakman and Vickers. Pickford's boats were also occasionally recorded as going on to Shrewsbury.
- Whitehouse & Co of Tipton was the other carrier from the Midlands until 1848; in March 1842 their boat with steerer Hawkins arrived on two days most weeks, though the actual days varied.

In 1842 Tilston, Smith & Co brought goods from both Manchester and Liverpool (Ellesmere Port) to Wappenshall. In March steerer Davies arrived every Monday from Manchester; steerer Woolsey arrived every Friday. The service from Ellesmere Port was not as predictable, either in the day of the week or the steerer, with 10 steerers being involved in the 25 trips in the four-week period. The usual period for the round trip was a week, though it could be done in six days, occasionally even in five. From November 1842 the business was described in the Wappenshall Wharf records as the Ellesmere & Chester Canal Carrying Company; this subsequently became the Shropshire Union Railway & Canal Carrying Company (SURCCC), though it

wasn't thus described in the records until April 1849. In March 1849 Wilkes had the Tuesday boat and Rowson the Saturday boat from Manchester.

Again the Ellesmere Port service was more intense but less predictable: 16 steerers shared the 28 trips. There were also two journeys from Birmingham or Wolverhampton in the four-week period, both with steerer Bonner.

Henshall & Co had two boats a week from Manchester. In March 1842 steerer Cork arrived on Mondays and either Oakes or Davies on Thursdays; most of these boats also conveyed goods from Liverpool. In March 1849 Oakes arrived on Saturdays and Davies, Cork or Shirwin on Tuesdays; these were supplemented by the occasional boat from Preston Brook, possibly the vestige of the trade from Liverpool. (One of Oakes' boats was notable for having 44 separate loads for 20 different customers.)

- The Neptune Canal Conveyance Company was the other principal firm bringing loads from the north but their last entry was in August 1842. In March 1842 steerer J Speakman arrived every Thursday and Wilkes arrived every Monday, both from Ellesmere Port; there was also an arrival most Saturdays, but the steerers varied. It is noticeable that some of the same names appear in 1849 as working for the SURCCC.

Boats for general goods were lightly loaded. On a typical day, 7 April 1849, ten boats arrived for unloading:

<i>Carrier</i>	<i>Steerer</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Number of customers</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Total weight (tons)</i>
Crowley	Skeldon	London	10	17	1.7
Crowley	Wood	Birmingham	3	7	4.0
Pickford	Speakman	London *	14	17	1.6
Henshall	Oakes	Manchester	14	21	12.0
SURCC	Rowson	Manchester	7	7	2.5
SURCC	Fairhurst	Wolverhampton	1	1	0.2
SURCC	Williams	Ellesmere Port	1	1	0.1
SURCC	Jacks	Chester	2	4	3.0
SURCC	Theodore	Station Quay <sup>23</sup>	4	4	0.7
Cooke	Boaz	Ellesmere Port	1	1	0.8

\* — boat went on to Shrewsbury

## Decline

The railway had an immediate impact on general goods carrying. Crowley & Co's last load to Wappenshall was in January 1850, Henshall's in August 1850 and Pickford's in October 1850, leaving the SURCCC to continue virtually alone. (Henshall is recorded in Slater's directory of 1856 as still being

a carrier.) Bulk loads withstood railway competition rather better, though the tonnage halved during the first year of competition.

## Comments

This remarkable series of records shows the huge variety of goods being traded in rural England in the 'canal age', including many items one would have expected to have been produced locally, and also the relatively large catchment area of a canal wharf.

Neither the 1841 nor the 1851 census record any boatmen as living near the wharf.

The wharf did not appear to work on Sundays, nor, judging from the times taken, did the boats. This was not an edict of the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal Company nor of its successor, the Shropshire Union; it was not until 1874 that the latter prohibited all boats working on Sundays except for those specifically required to work 'fly' with urgent traffic on board.<sup>24</sup>

The goods boats generally worked to a set timetable. This did not necessarily accord with what was implied by directories. Table 3 (below) shows a comparison between the information in Robson's Directory of 1840 and the actual schedules. The 'missing' destinations could be accounted for by goods being transferred between boats at strategic places. For example, the Neptune Conveyance Co may have transferred goods for Manchester at Barbridge.

Assuming an average boat speed of 3½mph plus 2½ minutes for a narrow lock and 4 minutes for a broad lock (all rather faster than one can now achieve), it would have taken 10 hours to get to Wolverhampton. This makes the standard two days taken for the round trip remarkable, bearing in mind that the boat would need to be loaded and unloaded twice. The similar calculation for Manchester is 27¼ hours each way, the round trip taking a week. Ellesmere Port would have been rather easier: some 20¼ hours, still normally taking a week for the round trip.

As mentioned, carriers' methods of operation varied. Boats were relatively lightly loaded, and return loads were scarce. It would be interesting to know how profitable this trade was to the carriers.

<i>Carrier</i>	<i>Directory</i>	<i>Actual</i>
Pickford & Co	To all parts daily	Only three days a week; mainly Midlands & London
Tilston, Smith & Co	To Liverpool & Chester daily To Manchester twice a week	Frequent but not daily As directory states
Neptune Conveyance Co	To Liverpool & Chester and also to Manchester	Liverpool & Chester only; no service to Manchester
Henshall & Co	To Preston Brook & Manchester	As directory states — twice a week
Crowley & Co	To all parts	Three days a week; mainly Midlands & London

*Table 3: Comparison of information in Robson's Directory 1840 with actual schedules*

### **Notes and references**

I wish to thank Harry Arnold, John & Beryl Brown, Neil Clarke, Tom Foxon, Paul Luter and Ray Shill for their comments and advice.

19. The records for Wappenshall Wharf in the Shropshire Archives are in 673/7/1-10 and 972/170-176. The first series includes some records of Lubstree Wharf. The Staffordshire Record Office also has some day books and delivery books in the series D/593/N/3/8.
20. James Foster and Henry Bradley entered into partnership on 31 December 1826, trading as John Bradley & Co; on 20 June 1831 they took over the Stourbridge business of Foster, Rastrick & Co: *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 31 June 1831.
21. Ellesmere & Chester Canal General Cttee, 4 Oct 1836 and 6 Mar 1837; PRO, RAIL826/5. E&CC Carrying Committee, 6 Dec 1836; PRO, RAIL826/6. Act, 5 Vic c33.
22. Gerald L Turnbull, *Traffic and Transport: an Economic History of Pickford's*, 1979, 116.
23. The location of 'Station Quay' is unclear
24. Report to the Shropshire Union Railways & Canal Company Executive Committee, October 1882: PRO, RAIL623/18.

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