

A Circular Walk from Kidsgrove Railway Station
Exploring Three Canals, Two Unusual Canal Junctions and a Mineral Tramway
An RCHS North West Group & West Midlands Group Walk
Thursday 29th September 2016

Today's walk focuses on canals to the north and north west of Kidsgrove railway station. We start at the station car park (OS ref SJ836545). The present Kidsgrove station opened in 1848 as Harecastle, was renamed Kidsgrove Central in 1944, and became Kidsgrove in 1964 following the closure of Kidsgrove Liverpool Road. The latter was opened as Kidsgrove in 1875 and, along with Kidsgrove Market Street (aka K Halt) was on the Potteries Loop Line. All three stations were opened by the North Staffordshire Railway.

After exiting the station car park (formerly the site of sidings and a goods shed) we follow the towpath of the Trent & Mersey Canal (opened 1777) for 1.6 miles passing Hardings Wood junction and the six locks of the Red Bull Flight. Crossing the fields to the east of the canal (OS ref SJ820557) we pass both Lawton Church (Grade II*) and the (restored) remains of the Lawton Hall Estate. The church was founded towards the end of the C11th. The body of the church was destroyed by fire in 1798 and rebuilt by 1803 in a neoclassical style. However, the west end tower and the west end of the interior date back to the C16th, and a Norman doorway which also survived the fire has been reset in the south wall of the nave. Lawton Hall has a chequered history and is now a complex of private residences in a sympathetically rebuilt Hall.

We continue in an easterly direction to join the T&M's Hall Green Branch (opened 1831) at bridge 94 (note: numbering of the bridges on the Hall Green branch continues the numbering of the Macclesfield Canal bridges). At this point we turn north towards the Hall Green stop lock and the Macclesfield Canal.

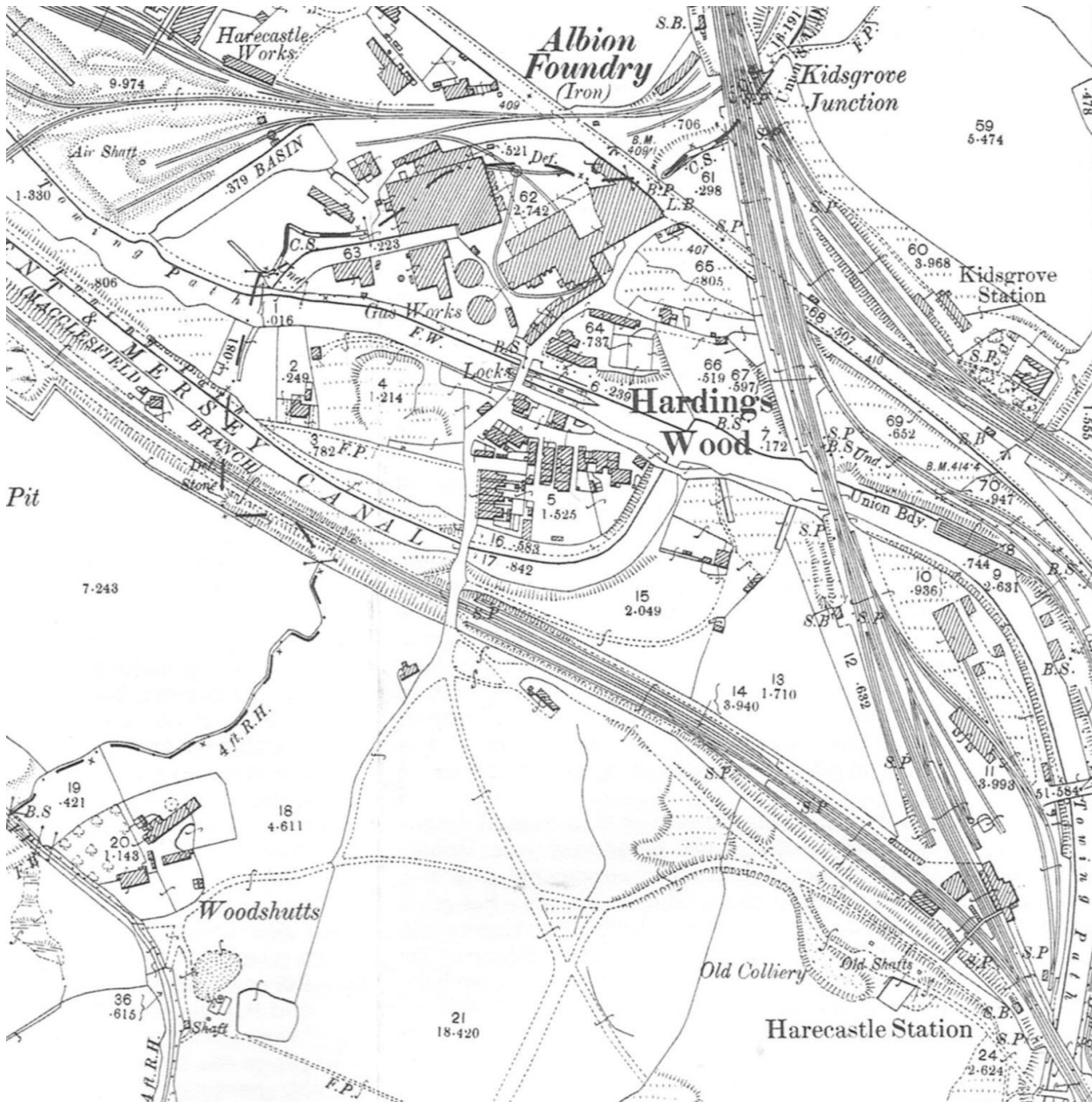
The stop lock we see today is the northerly of a pair of (end-to-end) locks: one for the Macclesfield Canal (opened 1831) and the other for the T&M Canal – resulting in two lock keepers cottages that are extant today. The locations of the lock gates for the T&M lock are evident from examining the sides of the canal.

At bridge 91 we divert from the canal to view the remains of the Hall o'Lee Colliery Tramway (see separate Notes) returning to the canal at bridge 89. North of bridge 89, the site of the tramway wharf may be seen – it is now a grassy mound at the side of the canal. Bridge 88 has been removed but the abutments are visible. This bridge was at the end of a lane starting just west of the Rising Sun Public House.

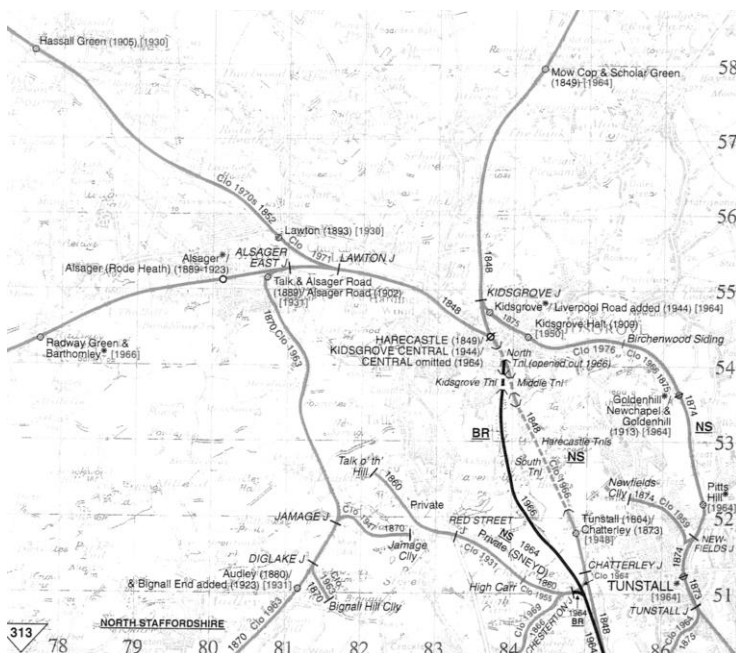
Lunch will be at the Rising Sun (bridge 87). The pub (OS ref SJ839575) is in Station Road, Scholar Green, ST7 3JT, although the station referred to in the road name is Mow Cop & Scholar Green station which opened in 1849 as Mow Cop and was midway between the two villages whose names it assumed in 1923 having become Mow Cop (Scholar Green) in 1897. It closed in 1964. Closer is the site of the canal terminus of the Mow Cop tramway on the opposite side of the canal at bridge 87 – it is now a marina.

We return to Kidsgrove along the tow path of the Macclesfield and Hall Green Branch Canals. However, apart from a change of building materials (from stone to brick) the appearance is of one continuous canal. There are two aqueducts along Hall Green Branch: Red Bull (over what is now the A50) and Poole Aqueduct which carries the branch over the T&M main line. After Poole aqueduct the canal curves to meet the main line at Hardings Wood junction. This is one of only two “flyover” junctions on the English/Welsh canal network (the other being at Hazelhurst on the Caldon Canal).

Before catching trains to return home, there should be time for a short diversion to view the northern portals of the Harecastle Tunnels. The walk, there and back, takes 10-15 minutes.

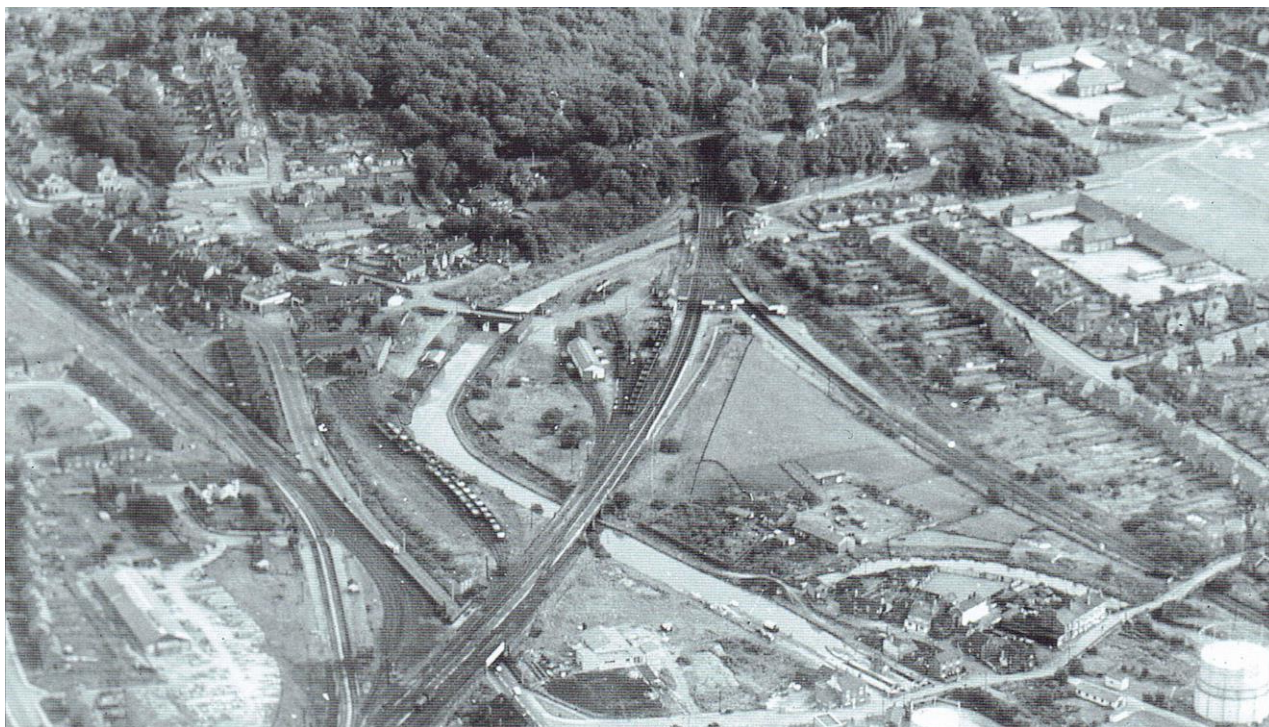


Railways and canals around Kidsgrove & Harecastle railway junctions and Hardings Wood canal junction (1897).
(Alan Godfrey Maps Sheet 6.15)

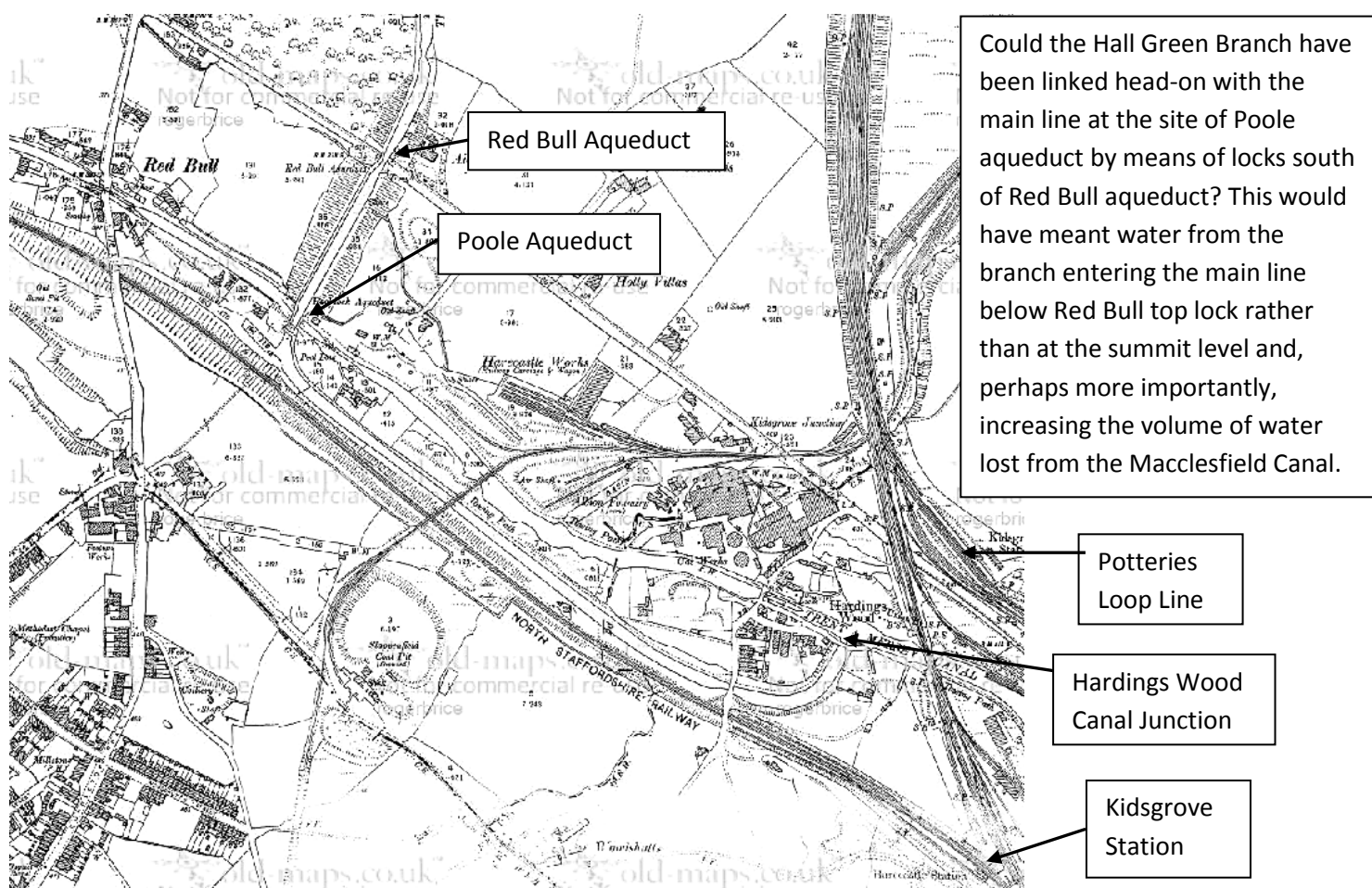


Railways around Kidsgrove (Cobb Atlas)

Other than the Harecastle Tunnels avoiding line, all railway lines around Kidsgrove were opened by the North Staffordshire Railway: lines to Stoke, Macclesfield & Crewe in 1848; to Sandbach in 1852; and the Potteries Loop Line in 1875. The Harecastle Tunnels avoiding line, with its short tunnel at the northern end, was necessary for overhead electrification and was built by BR in 1966; at which time the three Harecastle tunnels were closed. The southern end of this line included a south to west junction on to the line to Chesterton – the line was closed in 1969.



Kidsgrove, c1960 (Basil Jeuda Collection). Kidsgrove (Central) Station is in the centre of the picture. The lines from Crewe (bottom right) and Manchester (bottom left) join at the station with the line then heading south towards Harecastle Tunnel and Stoke. The T&M Canal can be seen at (the now named) Red Bull Top Lock (#41) coming in past the gas works (bottom right), going under the Manchester line and then curving right to pass under the railway again. The entrance to the Harecastle Tunnels is just to the right of this second railway bridge. The T&M's Hall Green Branch Canal runs behind the larger gas holder after which it swings round to join the T&M main line at Hardingwoods Junction – the towpath bridge at the junction is evident (lower centre right of picture). The start of the Potteries Loop Line and Kidsgrove Liverpool Road station can be seen bottom left.



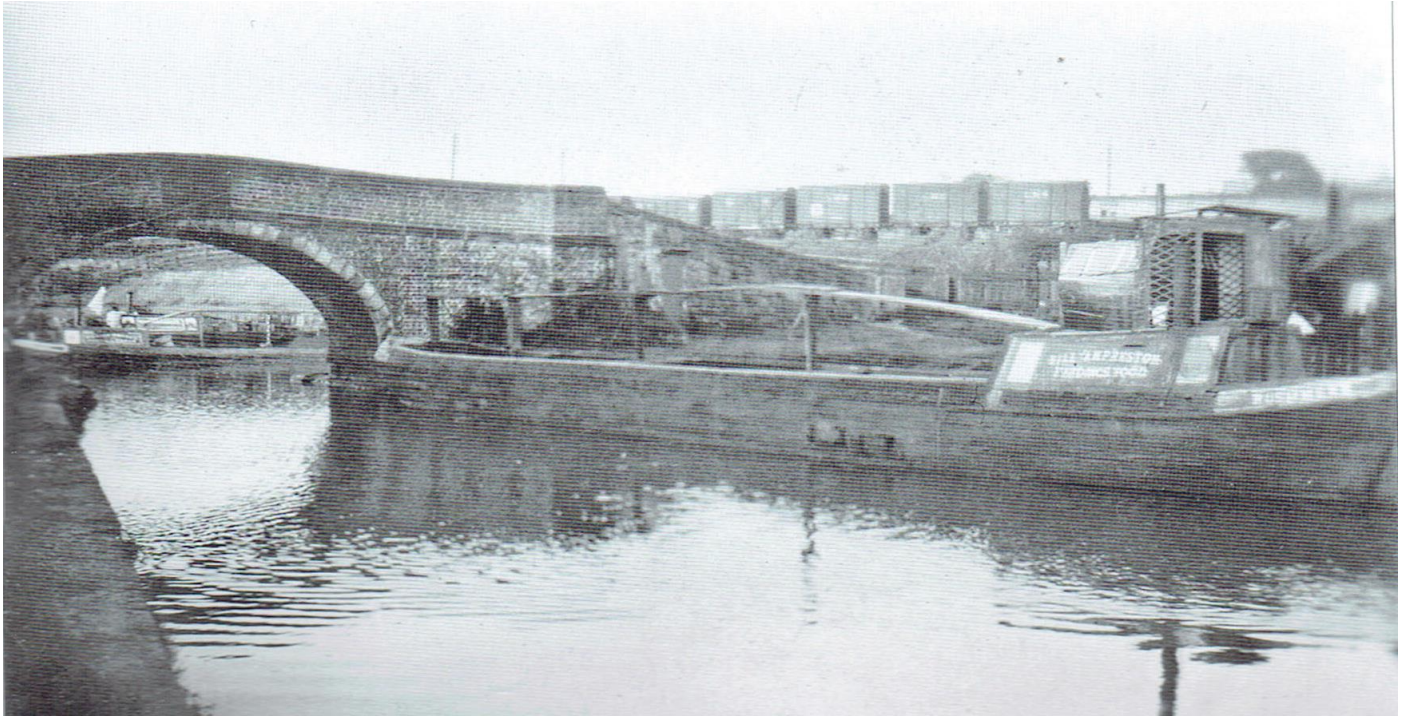
Canals & Railways around Hardings Wood (OS map 1889)



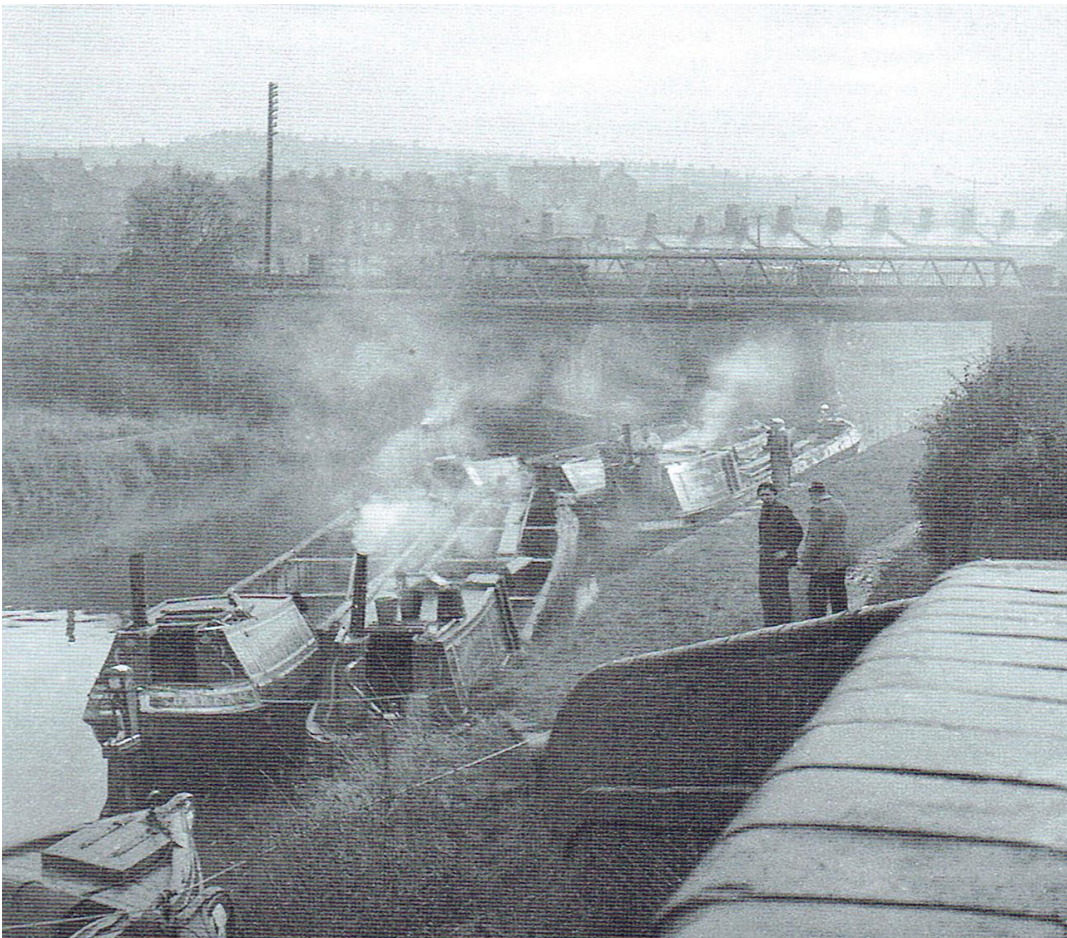
A British Waterways boat passes a couple of pleasure craft travelling south towards Halls Lock (#49) on the Trent & Mersey Canal, c1960. (Gordon Briggs). The scenery on this section of the canal is little changed today. (The location is 400 yds north of where today's walk leaves the canal).



The motor boat Dane, heading south at Kidsgrove towards the Harecastle Tunnels, in the 1950's (Gordon Briggs). The photograph is taken from the towpath a short way south of Kidsgrove station.



A scene at Hardingswood Junction in the 1930's (Basil Jeuda Collection). The T&M's Hall Green Branch is in the foreground. The branch meets the main line beyond the towpath bridge. The branch (1.3 miles) leads to the Macclesfield Canal and was built under Trent & Mersey Acts that prohibited other canals connecting directly with its main line. The junction with the Macclesfield Canal is at Hall Green stop lock – formerly an end-on-end double lock with a 9 inch drop but, since the permanent lowering of the level of the T&M, is now a single lock. The remains of the short pound and the removed (southern) lock are evident.



A scene at Hardingswood Junction in Nov 1960 (Waterway Images Collection). The T&M's Hall Green Branch, leading to the Macclesfield Canal, is entered under the towpath bridge (bottom left) shortly to make a right angle turn and be carried over the main line on Poole Lock Aqueduct.



Poole Aqueduct (Akke at English Wikipedia)

Poole Aqueduct carries the T&M Hall Green Branch over the T&M main line the level of which has dropped by 9ft at the Red Bull top lock. (Bradshaw's 1830 Map of Canals shows this lock as Hardings Wood Lock with Red Bull Lock being #3 in the flight of 6 locks). Note the difference in colour of the water between the two levels. The discolouring in the lower level is attributable to water seepage from old mine workings in the Harecastle tunnels.

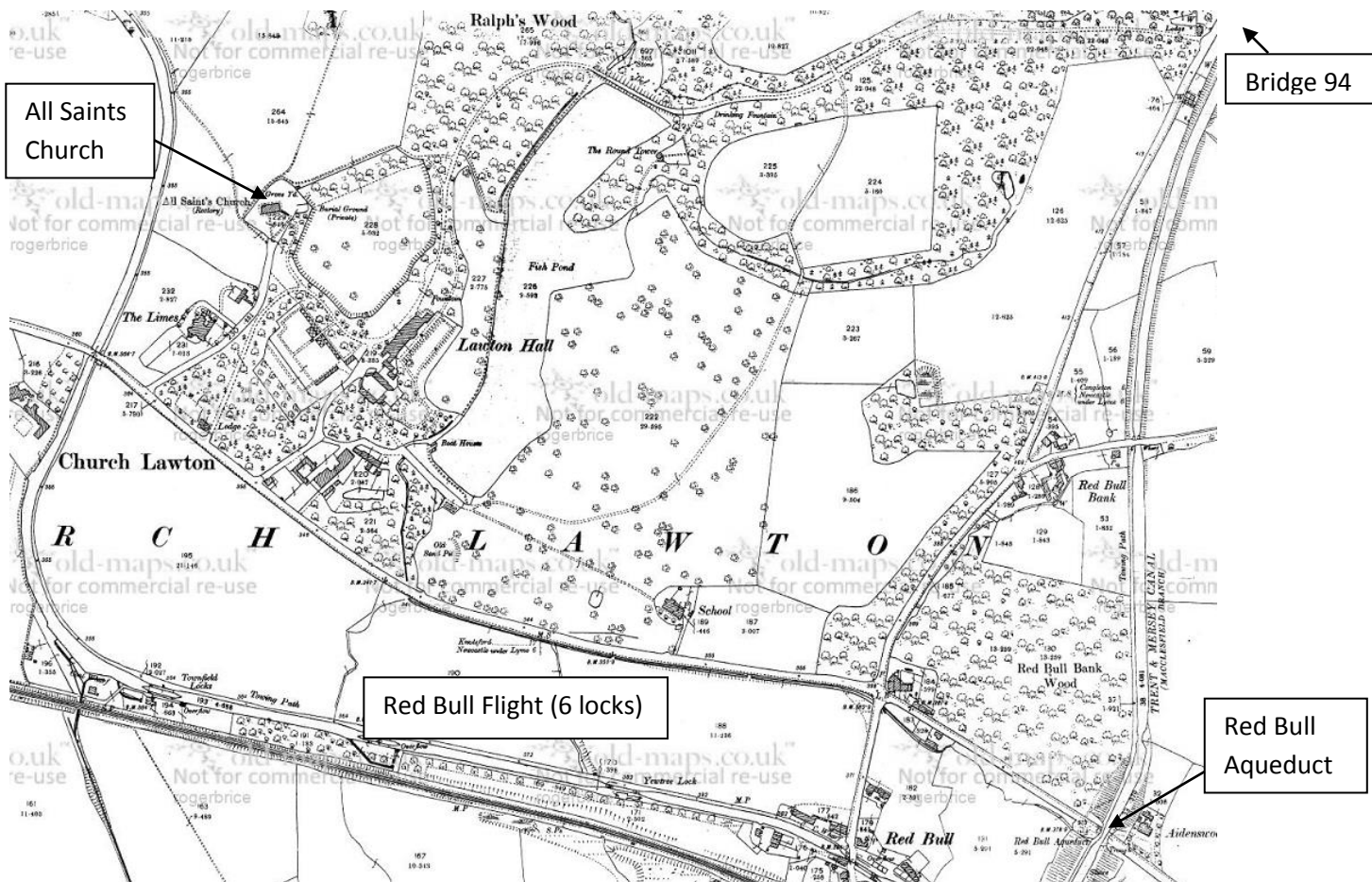
All Saints Church, Church Lawton (Grade II*) stands on a mound close to Lawton Hall. The church was founded around the end of the C11th. The current building dates from the C16th with the tower & the relocated Norman doorway being the surviving external features of a fire in 1798 that destroyed the body of the church. Internally, there is a gallery dated 1717 and some C13th flooring tiles discovered during the 1874 refurbishment. The south porch was added as a War Memorial in 1923.



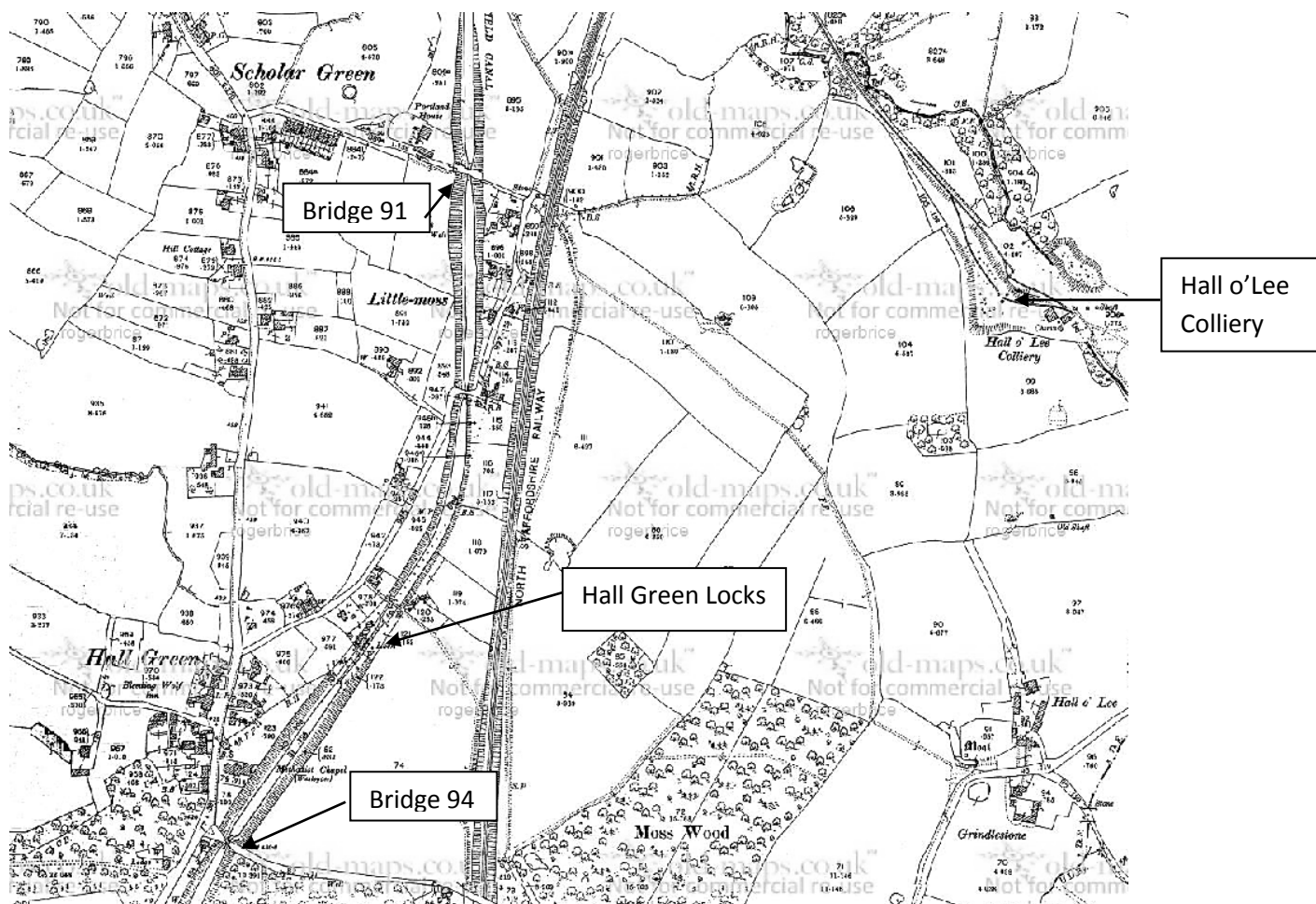
Lawton Hall. The estate on which the house stands was in the possession of the Lawton family from at least since the 13th century. The first house on the site burnt down in the early 15th century. The present house dates from about 1600. It was used as a hotel in the early 1900's and as a Civil Defence Reserve Camp in WWII. Between 1950 and 1986 the house was a school. Around 1989 the building was badly damaged by fire. In 1999 a property development company converted the hall into four houses and five apartments.



Lawton Hall: turn of the C19th and post C20 restoration & development (Wikipedia)



Church Lawton & Part of Hall Green Branch Canal (OS Map 1899)



Scholar Green & Hall Green showing Junction of Macclesfield & Hall Green Branch Canals and Hall o'Lee Colliery



There were two locks end-to-end at Hall Green forming an unusual double stop lock with a drop of around 9 inches. Whilst the Macclesfield Canal was expected to be at the higher level, this could change. The second lock was deemed necessary should the usual relative levels of the two canals change and the T&M then losing water “uphill”. This requirement became unnecessary after the permanent lowering of the level of the T&M to compensate for subsidence affecting the roof level and clearance in the Harecastle Tunnel.

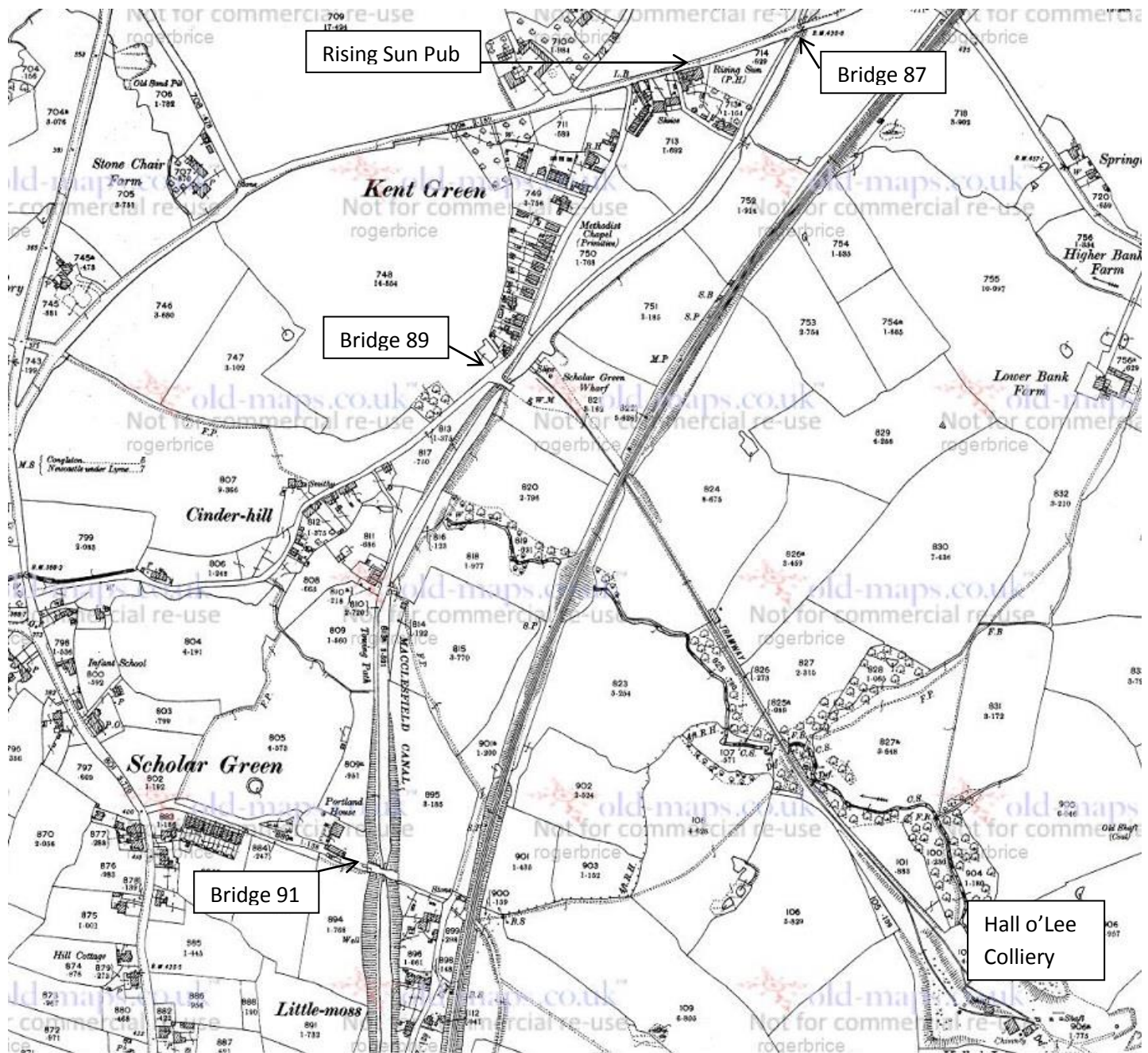
Hall Green Lock, Macclesfield Canal (Macclesfield Canal Society)



Beside bridge hole #88 there is a little house that used to be the Bird in Hand Inn. After the pub closed it became derelict but was restored in the mid-2000's keeping to the style of the old pub. (Macclesfield Canal Society)



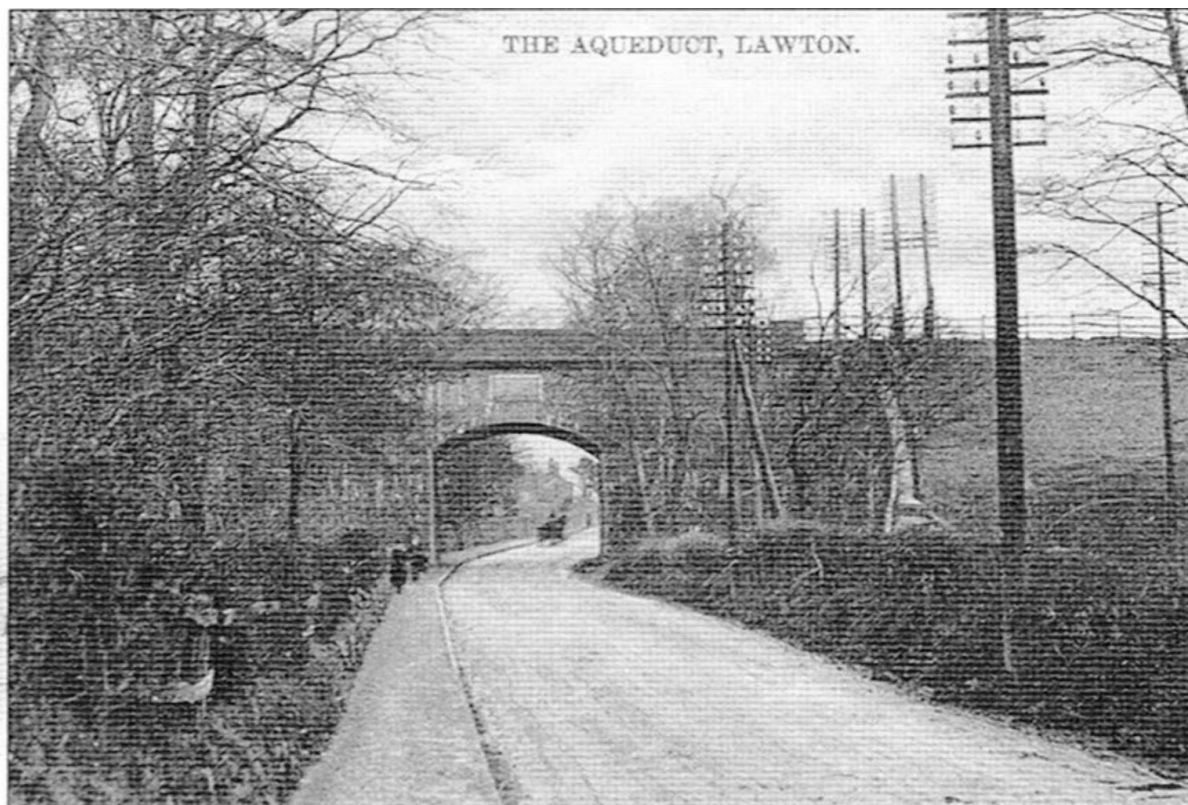
At bridge 90 there is a row of three lengthmen's cottages. The bridge itself was once a swivel bridge and not the poor apology of the swinging plank that is there today. (Macclesfield Canal Society)



Macclesfield Canal around Scholar Green and Kent Green showing location & route of Hall o'Lee Colliery Tramway.
(See separate notes prepared by Paul Teather for further information on the colliery and the tramway)



The alignment of the Hall o'Lee Tramway as it passes under the main line between Kildgrove and Macclesfield. This is the only known photograph of the tramway - today it is much overgrown but recognisable. (Paul Teather, RCHS Collection & others)



Red Bull Aqueduct at Church Lawton looking south towards Kidsgrove, c1906 (Basil Jeuda Collection)
The aqueduct carries the T&M's Hall Green Branch over the A50. Pool Lock Aqueduct (the start of the embankment) is to the right; as is Hardings Wood Junction.



A North Staffordshire Railway spoon dredger tied in the approach to Brindley's Harecastle Tunnel, c1910 (John Ryan Collection).
The entrance to Telford's tunnel can be seen extreme right of the picture (above & to right of the boat). The railway bridge is visible beyond the towpath bridge



The north end of the Harecastle Tunnels at Kidsgrove in the 1920's (Basil Jeuda Collection). The tow line of the horse drawn boat (leaving Telford's 1827 tunnel, travelling north) is placed around the fore-stud to pull the fore-end of the boat around the sharp turn. The Brindley tunnel, completed in 1777, is to the right (centre of picture). This tunnel (referred to as "The Legin Tunnel" in the photograph) with a smaller bore than the later Telford tunnel did not have a towpath and required boats to be legged through. It was closed to traffic in 1914 due to subsidence making the roof too low for even loaded boats to pass through.



An alternative entry/exit guidance system. A tunnel tug and battery boat waiting at the Kidsgrove end of Harecastle Tunnell, c.1930s. Both tunnels can be seen. (Virtual Waterways Archive Catalogue)



OS Map 1920's (Memory Map)

The photographs, and associated captions, on pp3, 4 (top), 5, 10 & 11 (top) are from Tom Foxton's book *The Trent & Mersey Canal: Trade & Transport 1770-1970*; Black Dwarf Publications, 2015. Others are from the sources noted in the captions.

These notes are intended for the personal use of RCHS members attending the walk or who are otherwise interested in them. They should not be copied or stored in any retrieval system; electronic or otherwise.

Roger Brice, 26th September 2016.