

# The history of Longcott Canal Wharf

By Neil B. Maw

There had been plans to put in a canal through Wiltshire and Berkshire from the late 1780s. The idea was to link-up the west country with London and the north through the canal system, mainly for the movement of coal. The earliest map produced by the Wilts & Berks Canal Co (W&B) was dated 1793 and, as is shown in the clip taken from it below, there was no Wharf at Longcott and no spur heading north.



Whilst the canal digging was underway, there were plans to link-up the W&B with Thames & Severn to the north and newspaper advertisements appeared in 1800 announcing that intention. (Below. Reading Mercury 15<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> September 1800). However, neither application survived the parliamentary process.

**N**OTICE is hereby given, That Application is intended to be made to Parliament in the next Session, for leave to bring in a Bill and to obtain an Act for making and maintaining a Navigable Canal and Communication for Boats, Barges and other Vessels (with proper Towing Paths) from and out of the Thames and Severn Canal Navigation in the parish of Ingletham in the county of Berks, to join or communicate with the intended Wilts and Berks Canal in the parish of Uffington in the said county of Berks; which said Canal or Cut is intended to pass into or through the several parishes of Ingletham, Sulcot, Eaton-Hastings, Great Farington, Great Coxwell, Shellingford and Uffington in the county of Berks, and the Hamlets or Townships of Little Coxwell and Balking in the said county of Berks.

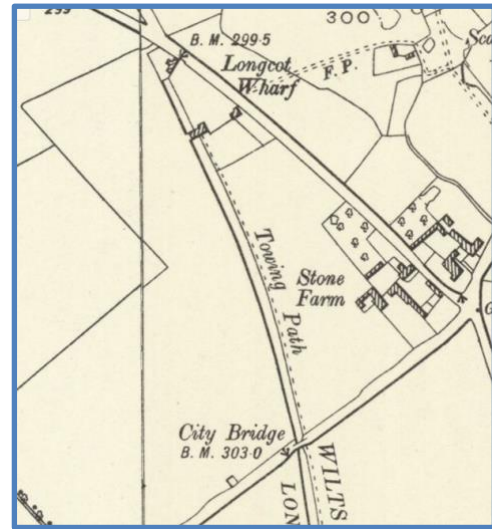
**N**OTICE is hereby given, That Application is intended to be made to Parliament in the next Session, for leave to bring in a Bill and to obtain an Act for making and maintaining a Navigable Canal and Communication for Boats, Barges, and other Vessels (with proper Towing Paths) from and out of the Thames and Severn Canal Navigation in the parish of Kempford in the county of Gloucester, to join or communicate with the intended Wilts and Berks Canal in the Hamlet or Township of Longcot in the county of Berks; which said Canal or Cut is intended to pass into or through the parish of Kempford aforesaid in the said county of Gloucester, the parishes of Hamington and Highworth in the county of Wilts, and the parish of Strivenham and Hamlets or Townships of Watchfield and Longcot in the county of Berks.

Page 23 of the book, *The Wilts & Berks Canal*, by L.J. Dalby, noted that, 'Longcot was reached on 29<sup>th</sup> Nov 1805. The same page also noted that in a progress report dated 6<sup>th</sup> June 1807, the ¾ mile branch at Longcot, not previously allowed for, had been built to extend the trade to the north of the canal. But this is not entirely accurate, as more recent research by Janet Flanagan of Swindon, of the W&B documents held within the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre (W&SHC) at Chippenham, will show.

Ahead of the canal reaching Longcot, there must have been a clear intention to establish a yard for brick manufacture there. Thousands of bricks would be needed for the numerous bridges and structures along the course of the canal. The site chosen would need to be carefully selected for accessibility, availability of material, and crucially, access to water. James Dobson was the company brickmaker and their accounts show a payment to him in October 1804, 'By bill for the day work trying for day in Longcot Common and bringing water to the Brickyard.' (W&SHC 2424/28 dated 4<sup>th</sup> October 1804, Page 4). The original use of the word to try, being to test or investigate. But the wording makes it clear that the Brickyard was in place at that point. The following year, Dobson was producing bricks as shown by a payment for £323.15.0 for, '370,177 statute mould bricks made at Longcot yard in 1805 at 17/6 per thousand.' (Page 4 as above). He was also making the site ready for the Wharf as there are payments to him, 'By 2103 cubic yards of cutting in the canal on Longcott Common at 4½d per cubic yard.' The following year he was trying to make good his water supply as he was paid for 'trying for day cutting drain from the cutting in Longcot Common'. (Page 4 as above 6<sup>th</sup> May 1806). But where was the brickyard located? A good clue is provided by another payment to James Dobson when he received a payment of £3.8.6¼ 'By wheeling 72,612 bricks out of the Brickyard at Longcot to the canal, 7 chains @ 1½d per chain per thousand bricks.' (W&SHC 2424/28 Page 211, 1807) In the old imperial measurement there were 22 yards in one chain, meaning that Dobson wheeled the bricks 154 yards to the canal.

The photograph below shows that the Brickyard was next to what would become the Wharf. The location is in an area where there is good clay all around, but more importantly, a water

supply from a tributary of the River Ock. The scar of the water channel can clearly be seen on the right of the yard in the green field.



The implication of the above information is that the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile spur or *Branch* from the main course of the canal to the south, was put in specifically to link up with the Brickyard and had been pre-planned. Other documentary evidence confirmed this. The land on which the *Branch* passed through belonged to the Barrington Estate at Beckett. In the W&B archive there are documents that show the land passing from the Barrington Estate to the W&B (W&SHC 2424/135). It showed that a deal was agreed much earlier from when the *Branch* was cut, as a Declaration of Trust quoted a legal Release dated 30<sup>th</sup> September 1803, between the Trustees of the Estate and the proprietors of the Company. A second Indenture showed that £660 was paid by the company to the estate (W&SHC 2424/112 dated 21/2/1807).

Company documents showed that George Roe was the contractor who cut the *Branch* up to the Brickyard & Wharf. The accounts included an entry, 'By 12,389 Cu Yds cutting in the Longcote Branch @ 3.5d per yard.' Also of the same date, 'by making 1135 yards of T/Path on Longcote Branch at 4d per yard' (W&SHC 2424/28. P.147 dated 7/8/1806). Further evidence that the Wharf and Brickyard were already in place before the canal Branch was put in come from other payments entered in the company accounts; Contractor William Simmons, 'by bill for pavement at Longcote Wharf and milestones' (W&SHC 2424/28, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1805). Contractor Thomas

Nock, 'by bill for plastering, slating and paving at Longcott Wharf.' (W&SHC 2424/28, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1806). Also, of the same date to Thomas Angell for Carpenters work and materials at Longcott Wharf, and 'three pairs of Deal window shutters' (W&SHC 2424/28, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1806).

C O A L.

**T**HE Wilts and Berks Company are selling the best Somersetshire Coal at the following Prizes, viz.—

	£	s.	d.	
At Swindon Wharf, - - -	1	7	0	per Ton.
At Marlton Wharf, - - -	1	8	0	Ditto.
At Longcott Wharf, - - -	1	9	0	Ditto.

The best Smith's Coal from Haul Lane may be had at either Wharf, and is 3s. a Ton higher priced.

N. B. A Drawback of 1s. 6d. per Ton will be allowed on Coal taken from Swindon or Marlton Wharf, a Distance of six Miles, and the like Drawback on Coal taken from Longcott Wharf, a Distance of six Miles on the South Side of the Canal, or three Miles on the North Side of the Canal.

The said Company carry Corn to Bath, at the following Prices:—

From Swindon Wharf,				
	s.	d.		
Oats, - - - - -	1	8		per Quarter.
Barley, - - - - -	2	0		Ditto.
Wheat, - - - - -	2	5		Ditto.
Beans, - - - - -	3	0		Ditto.
Malt, - - - - -	1	4		Ditto.

From Longcott Wharf,				
	s.	d.		
Oats, - - - - -	2	0		per Quarter.
Barley, - - - - -	2	4		Ditto.
Wheat, - - - - -	2	10		Ditto.
Beans, - - - - -	3	6		Ditto.
Malt, - - - - -	1	7		Ditto.

And to all Places between Bath and the aforesaid Wharfs, at proportionate Prices.

Advert in the Oxford Journal 14<sup>th</sup> December 1805, showing the canal was open for business from Longcot to the west

By 1808 the Brickyard was producing huge numbers of bricks being conveyed by the canal to other areas where needed. Company accounts show payment for, 'Boating 2, 205,533 bricks from Longcott Common to Locks and Bridges between Grove & Abingdon at 5/- per 1000 made in 1808' (W&SHC 2424/28, Page 328 George Roe). The Wharf also continued to develop for instance; 'By bill for taking up the Engine at Marston and putting it up at Longcott having a dwelling house and warehouse.' (W&SHC 2424/28. Page 185 dated 20<sup>th</sup> June 1808). And then the first mention of a Lime Kiln with, 'Bill for digging the foundations of the boundary wall at Longcott Wharf, repairing the Lime Kiln, boating bricks' (W&SHC 2424/28. Page 186 dated 29<sup>th</sup> July 1808). 'Bill for building a house, warehouse, Stable & Wharf at Longcot.' (W&SHC 2424/28. Page 186 dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1809). And the accounts also gave the information that they had a manager, with a payment to Edward Hill for working at Longcot Wharf. He was employed by W&B on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1810 and quit in September 1812, his salary being 18/- per week (shillings. 20 shillings made £1).

For many centuries Lime was a necessity in the trades of building and agriculture. It was a basic constituent for mortar (cement), outside wall covering, plaster and soil improvement, and many other applications. It was an obvious necessity for the canal company and it would have had a kiln, probably located in the same general area as the brick kiln. From the 'Letters of George Merryweather,' published by Shrivenham Heritage Society and available at <http://www.shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk/listing.asp?listID=1549> there was an abundant supply of Limestone on the Barrington Estate next door. It is most likely that the Limestone outcrops probably extended to the wharf area of Longcot and likely provided the name for the farm just south of it. For information on how a Lime Kiln worked please see this link <http://www.shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk/listing.asp?listID=1547>

In 1810 the canal was opened for business and one of the main commodities carried by the barges was coal. Therefore, it was no surprise to learn that by 1814 there was a Coal Merchants business operating at the wharf called Haines & Wilson and they were there until 1820. John Carter replaced Edward Hill as the Wharf manager in 1812. It was John Carter who had a problem with the supply of Limestone when he wrote to his boss William Dunsford at Swindon, stating that Lord Barrington's Steward was not willing to let him have stones dug from his land. We know that he was referring to George Merryweather who arrived as Steward of the Beckett Estate in April 1815. He had been appointed by the accession of George Lord Viscount Barrington (5<sup>th</sup>) who brought the estate out of its 20 year period of being in Trust. It's interesting that Merryweather stopped the supply of stones, but it was likely a cunning plan for a better price. In one of his letters to Lord Barrington he gave the information that the kiln at Longcot had been built by Messrs Whitworth & Priestley and was not in use at that time. He hoped that he would get the use of the kiln rent free and that they cannot use the kiln, '*without purchasing the Lime Stone off your Lordship at your own price.*' (Letter No 12. 14<sup>th</sup> November 1815). George Merryweather was trying to impress his new boss.

John Johnson was running the wharf from 1817 and was still there in 1824 and he was paid £19 per annum (W&SHC 2424/30). He also rented a Close of land adjacent to the wharf for £1 per annum. By 1828 James Hathrill was the Wharfinger and coal continued to be routinely

landed and distributed by Atherton & Vincent, Coal Merchants, and their agent Edward Stratton.

**COAL TRADE.**  
ATHERTON AND VINCENT

**B**E<sup>G</sup> leave to inform the Inhabitants of Berkshire and the neighbouring Counties, that, in addition to their other establishments, they are now landing COALS, &c. at NEWBURY WHARF, where, as well as at all the other places, their Agents have instructions to sell Coals and Cokes of every description, and of the best qualities, on the most reasonable terms, particularly to those benevolent individuals who purchase for charitable purposes, parishes, and retail dealers.

AGENTS.

Melksham, Simmington Wharf, Joseph Lowle.  
Hungerford, Public Wharf, John Beard.  
Newbury, Public Wharf, Abraham Clayton.  
Reading, Gas Wharf, William Ferris.  
Maidenhead, Ray Mill Wharf, James Bushnell.  
Abingdon, Tith Barn Farm, John Blanchard.  
Wantage, Public Wharf, William Sanders.  
Faringdon, Longcot Wharf, Edward Stratton.

Above: The Berkshire Chronicle 26<sup>th</sup> July 1828

peer man must pay 2d. for the inferior ones,—equally paradoxical is the coal system dealing. Our town is nearly supplied with what is called "Forest Coal," brought from the forest of Dean by canal carriage to Longcot wharf, a short distance from hence, for which we are charged 11. 10s. 6d. per ton; the same coal is conveyed by the same company to Abingdon, 20 miles further, and sold for 25s.—being a difference of 5s. 6d. per ton, notwithstanding the extra locks to pay, extra time, labour, and other extras;—"this is too bad:" the fact is, we want a set of upright, downright, conscientious dealers in all articles.

Above: Berkshire Chronicle 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1829. How Faringdon is supplied with coal

Below: Berkshire Chronicle 4<sup>th</sup> December 1829. How decency in Highworth is outraged with coal from Longcot

to discover the offender.  
**ENGLISH LIBERTY.**—Our feelings are daily outraged with the sight of men yoked like oxen to waggons and carts, drawing coals from Longcot wharf to this town, a distance of three miles!!! We trust that this degrading employment has not led to the committing of those crimes alluded to in the preceding articles. If it has, there are more guilty persons connected with the transaction than we could anticipate.

The opening of the new Railway Station about two miles away at Shrivenham in 1841 must have made many people realise that the days of the canal were numbered. The Great Western Railway line ran close and parallel with the canal at Longcot. When compared with the very slow speed of the barges, the trains must have appeared to move like lightening. The census of 1841 as below, showed John Johnson as the Wharfinger at Longcot Wharf and also William Heavens as the same. The Kelly's Directory for 1848 listed John Johnson as a Farmer, Wharfinger and Beer Retailer.

11	John do	16					
	John Johnson	40			Wharfinger		X
	Jane Carter	85			do		
	Martha do	60			Doys Water		
	Harriet Harrison	20			do		X
	William Heavens	20			Wharfinger		X
11	George Vale	10					X

The census for 1851 as below, listed John Johnson as a Farmer and located at the New Wharf House. The census also listed Robert Jordan at the Old Wharf House, but it is well documented that he was running the Jolly Waterman public house at the Lock, down on the line of the main canal. It seems to be from this period that the Lock and Wharf acquired the label old and new, which isn't accurate.

Parish or Township of		Ecclesiastical District of		City or Borough of		Town of		Village of		
No. of Inhabitants	Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House	Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851		Relation to Head of Family	Condition	Age of		Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where Born	Whether Blind, or Deaf and Dumb
						Male	Female			
22	New Wharf House	John Johnson	Head	Free	51			Farmer of 112 acres & 4 cal	Beckley, Gloucestershire	
		James Johnson	Servant	Free	27			Sheep dealer	do do	
		Martha Carter	Servant	Free	53			Housekeeper	do Stroud	
		Harriet Harrison	Servant	Free	27			Sheep dealer	do Stroud	
		Ann - Bate	Servant	Free	16			do	do Stroud	

There is no entry at all for the Wharf in the census of 1861. It's likely that there was nobody living at the Wharf House at the time. Two years later a Berkshire Directory for 1863 listed under the heading of traders, Charles Binns, agent in Wilts & Berks, Canal Co, Wharf. But an advertisement of 1869 showed that the coal business was still going on there but barely, when Albert Smith, shown below, made his announcement (Faringdon Adver 17<sup>th</sup> July 1869). The W&B company records also recorded that Edwin Evans was a Machinist at Longcot, very likely a large saw blade, driven by a steam engine for the timber trade. He rented the house for £25 per annum and his lease ran from 14<sup>th</sup> March 1866 until 29<sup>th</sup> September 1870.



The census of 1871 showed that the Richens family were occupying the wharf house, with James being a Retired Farmer. There are also two listings for Wharf Cottages which would have been located in what was the Brickyard and would have housed workers for the kilns. In one cottage was John & Ann Enstone and in the other George & Elizabeth Fry with their daughter Sarah. These two cottages are now one house called Wharf Cottage.



**Edwin Richens in 1871**  
 1871 England, Wales & Scotland Census  
 Majors Road the Wharf, Longcote, Faringdon, Berkshire & Oxfordshire, England

View original record   Add to tree   Print   More actions

Household members (6 people)   Copy to clipboard

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
James	Richens	Head	-	Male	55	1816	-	Wiltshire, England
Martha	Richens	Wife	-	Female	49	1822	-	Berkshire, England
Mary	Richens	Daughter	-	Female	16	1855	-	Berkshire, England
Ann	Richens	Daughter	-	Female	14	1857	-	Berkshire, England
Edwin	Richens	Son	-	Male	8	1863	-	Oxfordshire, England
Robert	Richens	Son	-	Male	6	1865	-	Oxfordshire, England

Show 1 fewer row

As the decade progressed the canal trade was in major decline and the W&B Canal Co was sold in 1877 for £13,496.5.0 and was to become part of the company Wilts, Somerset & Berks Canal Traders Association. Longcot Wharf, complete with the house was advertised for sale the same year, along many others as the advert below clearly showed (North Wilts Herald 12<sup>th</sup> February 1877). It also gave the information that the wharf house was occupied by Mr H. Whiting. The canal trade had effectively been killed off by the railway. The line that was connected-up to Faringdon in 1864 meant that coal could be delivered there faster and cheaper.

**THREE SMALL CLOSES of LAND, adjoining Towing Path between Swindon and Stratton, about four acres, more or less, with immediate possession.**  
**BOURTON WHARF, with Dwelling-house and Stable (now in the occupation of Mr. John Dolman), also Sundry Strips of Land, from March 25th next.**  
**LONGCOTE WHARF, with Dwelling-house, Stables, Cottages, Garden, &c. (now in the occupation of Mr. H. Whiting), from June 24th next.**  
**UFFINGTON WHARF, with Dwelling-house and Stable (now in the occupation of Mr. Jos. Goodison), from March 25th next.**  
**A COTTAGE and Sundry Pieces of Land, between Grove and Abingdon (now in the occupation of Mr. Hy. Edwards), from March 25th next.**  
**ABINGDON TYTHE BARN WHARF, with Dwelling-house and Premises (now in the occupation of Mr. James Beesley), from March 25th next.**  
**ABINGDON WHARF, with Dwelling-house, powerful Crane and Stable, now in the occupation of**

Henry Burchall was likely to have been the purchaser of the wharf house, as the census of 1881 listed him there, aged 64, with his wife Sarah, aged 56, and their 8year-old niece Rose

Nicholls. He was described as a Carpenter and it's likely that timber was the main trade still being carried by the canal.

LONGCOT WHARF, BERKS.  
ALSO, TO BE LET, a USEFUL PROPERTY, comprising Dwelling-House, Garden, Spacious Warehouse (with Pulley and Crane), Stable, Cart-Shed, Pig-stys, extensive Wharf and Piece of Land, bounded on one side by the Canal, and on the other by the main road; the Premises are situate about midway between Shrivenham and Faringdon, and are well worth the attention of Corn Merchants and Cattle Dealers, the same being within convenient distances of several good Market Towns; Immediate possession of both Properties may be had.—For rent and further Particulars, apply to Messrs. BISHOP & DAY, Auctioneers and Estate Agents, Faringdon Street, Swindon.

The advertisement above from 1885 gives a good description of what was at the Wharf at the time (NWH 4<sup>th</sup> September 1885). It was unoccupied but it's not clear as to who owned the property. At the following census of 1891 it clearly showed that the Wharf, House and Cottages were still unoccupied. But the following year, the premises was occupied by James Curtis and his family. He was aged 42 and described as a General Dealer. His tenure would begin with tragedy and for him, end in tragedy. In the summer of 1892 an inquest was held at Longcot on the body of 2-year-old Agnes Mary Curtis, who had fallen in the water at the Wharf, but not spotted soon enough to save her. The newspaper article below gave the details (Faringdon Adver 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1892).

### LONGCOTT.

**DEATH BY DROWNING.**—An inquest was held on Saturday afternoon, before Mr W. Jotcham, coroner, on the body of Agnes Mary Curtis, aged two years. The parents of the child live at Longcot Wharf, the terminus of the arm of the Wilts and Berks Canal running through this district, and the child, together with others, was in the habit of daily playing in the large yard through which the water passes. The previous evening (Friday) the girl was noticed playing as usual, but being missed suddenly, search was made, the body (which had not been in the water sufficiently long to saturate the clothing) was found in the canal suffocated. The father, mother, brother, and sister of the deceased gave evidence at the inquest, and the jury, of whom Mr James George was foreman, found a verdict of "Accidentally drowned."

The census of 1901 listed the large Curtis family at the Wharf. But the following year, tragedy was to strike them again. James Curtis was taking a dead horse in his cart to the knacker's yard in Swindon on 30<sup>th</sup> January and had stopped at the Dog Inn, Hannington. After drinking only one pint of beer he left but something caused his horse to bolt and James was thrown out of the cart. His leg was badly injured by one of the cart-wheels passing over it and he was eventually taken to Victoria Hospital in Swindon. Over the following ten days his leg became worse to the point where it had to be amputated. Although he survived the operation he died soon after (Swindon Adver 28<sup>th</sup> February 1902).

### THE ACCIDENT AT HANNINGTON

#### FATAL RESULT.

#### INQUEST AND VERDICT.

It will be remembered by many of our readers that on Thursday, Jan. 30th, an accident occurred at Hannington, near Highworth, to a man named James Curtis, a general dealer, of Longcote, near Faringdon, who was later in the day removed to the Victoria Hospital, Swindon. At first the unfortunate man made satisfactory progress, but about 10 days after admission, his leg had to be amputated, and he became delirious. After lingering on he died on Monday.

The Coroner (Mr. W. E. Nicolson Browne) was communicated with, and he held an

At the end of one article, it stated that, *'Mrs Curtis begs to inform the public that the business will be carried on as usual by herself and sons at Longcott Wharf and all favours will receive prompt attention.'* And carry on she did, as the next Census of 1911 showed her at age 59, with her son Thomas 26, and two daughters, still as *'General Dealers.'* A pencil note on the original form bears the words, 'Wharf End.' But the year before the census took place, her other son Joseph was advertising his trade (NWH 4<sup>th</sup> November 1910). This might seem somewhat gruesome to us today, but this period was the infancy of the age of the motor-car and horses were still the most common form of transport.

**JOSEPH CURTIS,**  
**HORSE SLAUGHTERER, &c.,**  
**LONGCOTT WHARF, FARINGDON,**  
**BERKS,**  
Wishes to notify that he has  
**REMOVED TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS,**  
Where all Letters and Telegrams will receive  
prompt attention.  
**BEST PRICES GIVEN FOR OLD LIVE AND  
DEAD FARMING STOCK.**  
**Animals Removed on the Shortest Possible Notice.**  
NOTE ADDRESS :—  
**LONGCOTT WHARF, FARINGDON, BERKS. (4235**