



## **SAMPLE PAGES**

The 72-page, A4 handbook for Waterways & Railways between Thames and Severn, with text, photographs, maps, a chronology and a reading list, is available for purchase, price £15.00 including postage and packing.

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## **Waterways & Railways between Thames & Severn**

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**Tuesday July 24th-Monday July 30th 2012**  
**interesting breaks with interesting people**

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**Wilts & Berks Canal:  
Skew Bridge, Swindon (former Midland & South Western Junction Railway)**

## **Wilts & Berks and North Wilts Canals**

The Wilts & Berks Canal (always so called, apparently because of the laziness of a clerk drafting the Parliamentary bill) was originally conceived as a link between the Thames & Severn Canal and the River Thames at Abingdon, intended to by-pass the difficult section of the Thames downstream from Lechlade.

The authorisation of the Kennet & Avon Canal Act in 1794 led the Wilts & Berks promoters to negotiate a connection instead with the K&A at Semington and a 52-mile route *via* Melksham, Wootton Bassett and Swindon to Abingdon, with branches totalling six miles to Chippenham, Calne, Longcot and Wantage.

This route was authorised by an Act of 1795, which sanctioned capital of £111,900, later augmented with a further £200,000 by an Act of 1801.

A proposal to cross the Thames on an aqueduct at Abingdon and to connect with the Grand Junction Canal at Marsworth, 36½ miles away, was never pursued, though it was briefly revived in 1819 and again in 1828 as a 26-mile link from Abingdon to the Grand Junction branch from Marsworth to Aylesbury, which had opened in 1815.

The engineer was Robert Whitworth, who had previously been involved in the Stroudwater Navigation and the Thames & Severn Canal, until 1799 when his son William took over responsibility. Though

<b>Date</b>	<b>Section (Constituent companies <i>italicised</i>)</b>
June 4th 1838	Paddington-Maidenhead Bridge
July 1st 1839	Maidenhead Bridge-Twyford
March 30th 1840	Twyford-Reading
June 1st 1840	Reading-Steventon
July 20th 1840	Steventon-Faringdon Road
August 31st 1840	Bristol-Bath
December 17th 1840	Bath-Wootton Bassett Road
May 31st 1841	Faringdon Road-Chippenham
	<i>Cheltenham &amp; Great Western Union Railway</i> : Swindon -Cirencester
June 14th 1841	<i>Bristol &amp; Exeter Railway</i> : Bristol-Bridgwater
June 30th 1841	Chippenham-Bath
July 1842	<i>Bristol &amp; Exeter Railway</i> : Bridgwater-Taunton
May 1st 1844	<i>Bristol &amp; Exeter Railway</i> : Taunton-Exeter
June 12th 1844	Didcot-Oxford
July 8th 1844	<i>Bristol &amp; Gloucester Railway</i> : Bristol-Gloucester
May 12th 1845	former Cheltenham & Great Western Union Railway: Kemble-Cheltenham
May 30th 1846	<i>South Devon Railway</i> : Exeter-Teignmouth
December 30th 1846	<i>South Devon Railway</i> : Teignmouth-Newton Abbott
June 20th 1846	<i>South Devon Railway</i> : Newton Abbott-Totnes
December 21st 1847	GWR Berks & Hants Railway: Reading-Hungerford
May 5th 1848	<i>South Devon Railway</i> : Totnes- Laira
September 5th 1848	<i>Wilts, Somerset &amp; Weymouth Railway</i> : Chippenham-Westbury
November 1st 1848	GWR Berks & Hants Railway: Reading-Basingstoke
April 2nd 1849	<i>South Devon Railway</i> : Laira-Plymouth
October 8th 1849	Slough-Windsor & Eton Central
June 18th 1850	<i>South Wales Railway</i> : Chepstow-Swansea
September 19th 1851	<i>South Wales Railway</i> : Gloucester-Chepstow East
July 19th 1852	<i>South Wales Railway</i> : Chepstow East-Chepstow ( <i>via</i> Chepstow Bridge)
March 11th 1852	<i>West Cornwall Railway</i> : Truro Road-Penzance
January 20th 1857	Trowbridge-Bathampton <i>via</i> Bradford-on-Avon and Limpley Stoke
July 1st 1857	GWR Devizes Branch: Holt Junction-Patney & Chirton
May 2nd 1859	<i>Cornwall Railway</i> : Plymouth-Truro
November 11th 1862	GWR Berks & Hants Extension Railway: Hungerford-Devizes <i>via</i> Savernake
August 24th 1863	<i>Cornwall Railway</i> : Truro-Falmouth
September 8th 1863	<i>Bristol &amp; South Wales Railway</i> : Bristol-New Passage (ferry for South Wales)



Great Western Railway landmarks: *top* – Paddington Station; *above* – Maidenhead Bridge



**Great Western Railway: Swindon Mechanics' Institute (1986)**

Along with the terraced housing for families, there was a hundred-bedroom model lodging-house for single men, which became known as the **Barracks**. This was converted into flats in 1861 to serve the families of Welsh ironworkers recruited for the Company's rolling mills. In 1869 the building was sold for use as a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. In 1960-2 it was again converted as Swindon's first Railway Museum, which closed in 1999. The building now serves as the Platform Youth Centre.

Three public houses were provided within the village – the Baker's Arms, the Cricketer's Arms and the former Thomas's Beer House, now the Glue Pot.

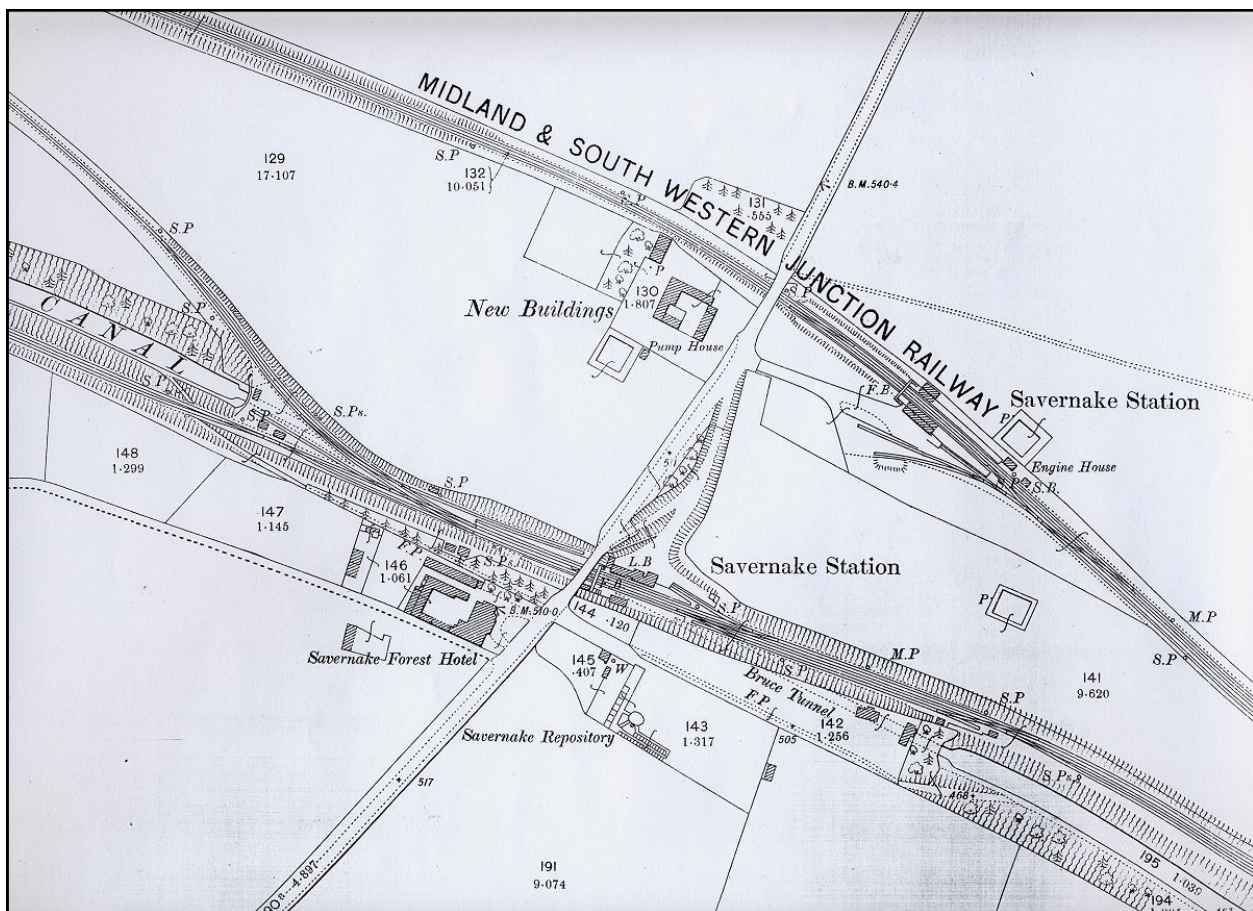
As soon as the housing was under construction, the GWR began to provide the other facilities that a model village community required. **St Mark's Church**, was begun in 1843 and consecrated on the Feast Day of St Mark, April 25th 1845. It was designed, along with the adjacent vicarage and school, by George Gilbert Scott and his assistant William Boynton Moffatt with its tower deliberately placed to the north to make it prominent to passing trains. The chancel with its side chapel and vestry was added by Temple Moore in 1897. In the churchyard lie the locomotive engineers Joseph Armstrong (d June 5th 1877) and George Jackson Churchward (d December 19th 1933). (Most of the Bristol Street School was demolished in 1881.)

The **Mechanics' Institute** began in 1844, and moved into a specially designed building, provided by the GWR in the guise of the New Swindon Improvement Company, on May 1st 1855. This was designed by Edward Roberts of London, and included an office, a meeting room, a temperance refreshment room, and hot and cold baths. Some of the Institute's members formed the New Swindon Co-operative Society in 1853, and a second group subsequently split to form the New Swindon Industrial Society. An octagonal covered market and reading room was replaced in 1891 by an assembly hall, designed by

The Midland & South Western Junction Railway was an amalgamation of two independent cross-country railways, the Swindon, Marlborough & Andover Railway [SMAR] and the Swindon & Cheltenham Extension Railway [S&CER]. Running against the grain of the established routes of the Great Western Railway, the M&SWJR illustrates many of the absurdities of Victorian railway competition. It was, nevertheless, remarkably long-lasting and though much of its infrastructure has disappeared it retains the affection of rail aficionados, few of whom can now remember it in action.

The **Swindon, Marlborough & Andover Railway** was authorised by an Act of 1873. The line was constructed from both ends and sections were opened in the north from Swindon to Marlborough on July 27th 1881 and from Grafton to Andover at the southern end on May 1st 1882. A plan to tunnel under Swindon Old Town was abandoned in favour of building a station, Swindon Town, with a connection at Rushey Platt into the main GWR station at Swindon Junction. Because of the GWR's punitive charges for running powers, direct trains between Swindon Junction and Swindon Town ceased in 1885, leaving passengers to transfer by road.

There was insufficient capital to complete the gap between south of Marlborough to Grafton, so through services depended on leasing running powers over the Great Western Marlborough branch (opened 1864) and the Berks & Hants Extension Railway (opened 1862). The GWR saw no reason to be helpful, and stipulated that passengers from Marlborough travelling onwards from Savernake must use the GWR station, not the SMAR.



Savernake M&SWJR High Level (top) and GWR Low Level (bottom) Stations, and Kennet & Avon Canal Bruce Tunnel [Ordnance Survey 25in sheet (1903), reduced]



## Background reading

### Overviews

Charles Hadfield, *The Canals of Southern England* (Phoenix House 1955)

L T C Rolt, *Navigable Waterways* (Longman 1969; revised with a postscript by Bryan Marsh, Penguin 1985)

David St John Thomas, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain Vol I, The West Country* (David & Charles, 5th edn, 1981)

H P White, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain Vol II, Southern England* (David & Charles, 4th edn, 1982)

### Stroudwater Navigation and Thames & Severn Canal

Humphrey Household, *The Thames & Severn Canal* (1969; 1983; Amberley 2009)

### Wilts & Berks and North Wilts Canals

L J Dalby, *The Wilts and Berks Canal* (3rd edn, Oakwood Press 2000)

Doug Small, *Wilts and Berks Canal Revisited* (History Press 2010)

### Kennet & Avon Canal and Kennet and Avon Navigations

Kenneth R Clew, *The Kennet & Avon Canal* (David & Charles 1985)

Sapperton Tunnel features in two novels – in the first two chapters of C S Forester's *Hornblower and the Atropos* (1953) and in Mo Hayder's *Gone* (2010)

### Gloucester & Sharpness Canal

Hugh Conway-Jones, *The Gloucester & Sharpness Canal: an illustrated history* (Amberley 2009)

Hugh Conway-Jones, *Gloucester docks: an illustrated history* (Alan Sutton 1984)

### Isambard Kingdom Brunel

Derrick Beckett, *Brunel's Britain* (David & Charles 1980)

Stephen Brindle, *Brunel: the man who built the world* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2005)

Angus Buchanan, *Brunel: the life and times of Isambard Kingdom Brunel* (Hambledon & London 2006)

Tim Bryan, *Brunel: the great engineer* (Ian Allan 1999)

Paul Clements, *Marc Isambard Brunel* (Phillimore 2006)

L T C Rolt, *Isambard Kingdom Brunel* (1957; Pelican 1970)



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