

Stoke Bruerne.

Stoke Bruerne is a small village near towcester off of the A5 in between Birmingham and London on the Grand Union Canal.

There was various land owners before 1805, one of them was the 'Saxon lord' swain son of Azor, son of lefs, Lord of Stoke, he in 1086 herd 21 houses with families of 'villains and borders' the total value of the houses was 10 shillings a year.

After swain the 'Saxon lord' died with no heirs a Norman Noble took the land , it then passed from one family to another, it acquired the name Bruerne from sir William de Bruerne, who was a friend of both king Richard the 'lion heart' and his brother King John.

De Bruerne help the manor of stoke and also sitlehanger (shutlanger) and Aldrintone (Alderton) from William de Warenn Earl of Surrey, He was also a substantial Landowner.

At the beginning of the 13th century Sir William was given the manor of Stoke Bruerne, and in 1217 he appointed the first Rector of Stoke Bruerne, named Richard de Rolf.

In Stoke Bruerne the population increased from 609 people in 1801 to 823 people in 1971.

Pre 1805 Stoke Bruerne was a small simple Hamlet, it had a figure of either setting, it had a church surrounded by thatched cottages, and then there was the farms in separate areas.

Most of the people who lived there were farmhands and had very low wages, they also did not have much if any knowledge of other villages/towns, they also rented there houses from landowners like the Hesketh's and the Duke of Grafton, they had poor diets and eat very little meat, they eat any food that was being harvested at the time.

They had a low protein die, and no access to medical care a tall so thee was high infantry mortality (baby's dieing before be fore 12 months of age) there was no dentist and low life expectancy, some people with a large enough garden would of kept chickens and maybe a pig, and would have also grown there own vegetables.

The canal was built for many reasons, one of which was because of transport problems, they had some roads, but they were mostly dirt tracks, there was problems such as rain, snow and mud stopping this, also there were highwaymen who could rob you, and turn pikes slowed down traffic at nights, but stoke Bruerne was close to the A5 which was later improved by Thomas Telford.

Then there was the idea of transporting good's by the sea, but there was problems such as seasonal problems like ice and driving rain, there also was all year gales, it also was quite expensive as boats sank, and there was piracy.

There was another idea of using the rivers, but thee also was problems with this such as flooding and drought, tidal problems, going upstream was difficult, there was also inland piracy, and not all areas have rivers deep enough and wide enough to take a boat.

The speed of the transport was varied, the horse and cart could go around 5 MPH, and so could the river boat, sea ships speeds varied on the wind speed and the direction, but the canal had the most direct route unlike the horse and cart.

From London to Birmingham it was roughly 100 miles, which if you went at 5 MPH non-stop in the quickest route would take 20 hours, but the roads were not the most direct route so it would take longer, and also you needed to stop to give the horses breaks and to sleep, also none of the transport routes apart from the A5 which was built at a later date were direct.

Construction of the tunnel began in 1793 and with over 3,000 men working on it covering nearly 100 miles between Brentford and Braunston, but they had poor roads and lack of instantaneous communication, this made organization very hard and put a great strain on the building of the canal, by the end of 1796 the canal had reached Blisworth from Braunston, with the 2042 yard tunnel at the Braunston summit and high embankment at Weedon and Bugbrooke then work was planned on the long tunnel planned by Jessop and Barnes to pierce the ridge on the southern side of Stoke Bruerne.

The preliminary work of the Blisworth tunnel started in 1703 but cutting stopped in January of 1796, local word says the tunnel collapsed but there's no factual proof of this, Jessop wanted to go for all locks which would be 29 in all, with a short summit with reservoir's, Barnes proposed a new tunnel on a different line, he was supported with Robert Whitworth and John Barnes, the company agreed on principle but could not sanction work until 1802.

After huge economic pressure the company had to act quickly, so they built a toll road over the hill in 1797, it had good benefit but was unable to meet the demands of the trade company's, so then Benjamin Outram was called in to make a tramway over the hill, it was a double track road 4 ft wide.

The locks had been completed and the ancillary works, the canal now awaited the opening of the tunnel, heading from both ends met on 25th of February 1805 and final work was completed on 19th of March, the official opening was on Monday 25th of March 1805, the tunnel had in fact cost £90,003 2s 4d. At 3,075 yards 2 feet, nearly £30 per yard.

We see in the 1844 map how Stoke Bruerne was cut in two by the new canal and how the village street had been re-routed from its ancient line along what is now chapel land to the green by the school, to now going along its present course over the new canal bridge over the top lock.

There were some buildings that changed at the opening of the canal, but some that did not change were buildings like the Church and the Rectory house, and all the cottages near the church there were also new buildings at the opening of the canal like the mill house and more pubs, also the pubs main entrance changed from the town side to the canal side.

While the canal was in its 'Golden Years' stocks went up by more than ten times in forty years, in 1801 the stocks were doubled, by 1810 then stocks had then gone up by 6 times, then by 1821 stocks had raised to up to 9 times more than their first value, and then they had got raised by even more, by 1831 they had gone up by 13 times, this for Stoke brokers was a huge profit and brought great riches to the town and a lot more jobs, the population also had a huge raise.

In 1805 the canal opened, in 1815 the Napoleonic wars were ending, in 1835 the double bridge was built for the big canal to enable traffic to get through easier, in 1838 the London to Birmingham railway was completed, and from there on the canal was failing in profits, economically the village got stronger and more social because of more people were living there and there was a higher demand for goods as many many canal boats passed through daily with their own separate needs, also the new jobs that were available were now better paid because they required a higher level of skill and they were usually very dangerous.

Also there was better quality food as there was a higher demand, the food was now usually fresher, also there was a lot more meat which helped to balance their diet, and there was more dairy products, so the health of the community improved and so did the life expectancy, and infant mortality lowered.

Houses also improved, houses were now cleaner, mainly because soap was now carried through Stoke Bruerne, houses were also improved with slate and bricks now that they traveled through Stoke Bruerne, houses were also warmer because coal prices lowered and people became richer to buy the coal with, some houses now also started having glass in their windows, and there was now also a 'school pence tax' which paid for the first school in Stoke Bruerne.

There were not many complaints about the canal because either they could not write a formal complaint or they did not have any power to put their word forward, but one person who did complain was the Rector, he complained because his garden was cut in half, he managed to get a bridge put up so that he could go collect his fish for Friday's dinner from his pond on the other side.

Many people could have complained though, because we can presume that many farmers lost all of their workers, the villagers would have been annoyed about the badly behaved navies, there would have been a lot of noise because of the building of the canal, mud in the village, and dust in the summer, there would also have been a lot of horse muck because of the canal, and also there would have been great dangers of people falling in, also villagers were not rich enough to buy shares so they would not have gained from the canal as the same ways as the land owners did, but ordinary villagers did not complain because local landowners wanted the canal and the villagers were too afraid they would lose their homes to complain.

When the railway was built it hugely impacted the canal and the village of Stoke Bruerne, the canal lost shares drastically from when it was planned to up to 20 years later, it also

lost much of its customers, who could now not only send their goods on the train at a faster and cheaper way, but they could also travel with their goods to ensure their safe transport and if they fancied going to visit someone or on a business trip.

In 1835 the construction of the Railway started, but also at this time they made a double lock canal to help with traffic and also to encourage more canal users, in 1838 the railway opened, the London to Birmingham Line.

The Railway was built as it was a lot quicker than the canal, or any other forms of transport and that it went in a straight line near the canal, the trains traveled at speeds of around 40 MPH, and they also could carry a lot more goods than the canal, a canal carried one canal boat worth, which was not much, a train could have lots more carriages, it could carry as many carriages as it had the power to., a canal boat is about 72 feet by 7 feet, having the railway led to cheaper goods because the transport was cheaper so everyone (apart from the canal transporters) were gaining, either by cheaper transport or cheaper prices, also trains rarely suffered from seasonal problems like ice roads and flooding.

Also it was cheaper too build the railway as the track was set by the canal and already surveyed, and also the canal could transport the equipment they needed like shale timber and sleepers, railways took paying passengers also which helped more money come in, also they had stations with waiting centers and loo's, towns like Birmingham grew and got bigger because they were on the main line of the Railway, but Northampton was not on the main line so it did not grow.

Some social effects were the unemployment for canal workers in the village, but some of them would have gone to the railways, especially the engineers who were greatly needed on the railways, also the navies would have gone to the railways.

Railways were less labor intense so there was less jobs available for it, but people could now commute to Towcester and other big towns and cities, which meant they now would all commute to their job and turn into a commuting village.

In the 20th century Stoke Bruerne got a lot more popular, it had a larger tourism attraction to it because of its turn from a small village, to a village with a major canal running through it which brought a lot more customers wishing to either stay at their Inns, eat there or just to have a break, also there were many facilities there with equipment that boatmen needed to make it through their journey, there were spare boards among other things, but all this tourism led to high traffic problems and a lot of noise for the locals who were not best pleased, there was not much parking space so some local farmers open their fields for people to park in at a higher than average price.

In summer there was a lot of litter, from the many tourists that visited Stoke Bruerne, also the pubs and shops and restaurants had higher than average prices because there was no competition between anyone else because they were very far from any other places, and

sometimes Stoke Bruerne was over crowded which made it an unpleasant place to visit sometimes.

Also there was more noise because of children and there was dangers by the canal side, EG the towpath which they could of fell into if they were not careful, there was also more jobs gained by tourism, but they were seasonal and low paid, also now house prices have gone up in Stoke Bruerne because Milton Keynes and Towcester were close by, and now nearly all the villagers are commuters.

There was new transport routes made as the M1 opened in the early 1960's, and the Beaching Acts shut down the railways in the 1960's also which helped the canal slightly.

In this section I am going to discuss the sources I used to help me complete my coursework.

Extracts, by David Blagrove was written in 1991 and it is a secondary source although he would have used primary information in his research. I could say that he is bias as he is a canal enthusiast, I can prove this by saying that he does not deal with other modes of transport that were competition with for the canal in the midlands at the time e.g. Horse and cart on the A5 would have been the canals main competition. I am able to use other sources to prove Blagrove's Evidence e.g. the 1844 map shows the rector's land split in two.

The second written source is by Whittaker written in 1879, although this is a secondary source it is the earliest written source available to me and he also used primary evidence, it was the only source that contained population figures but its downside is it is a re-write and having not seen the original I am unable to find out weather or not valuable information has been lost.

The Last Written source I wish to discuss is written by Lawrence Wood in 1975. It is a secondary source but Wood would of have had access to primary information such as marriage, death and birth certificates and information from parish records, the biggest problem with this source is that it does not even mention the canal and really it is produced for visitors/tourist's to the church.

The two maps I used were dated 1844 and 1920. The 1844 map shows the layout of the canal side in Stoke Bruerne when the canal was at its busiest showing building bridges and locks. The 1920 map shows that the barge marina had been filled in, proving the canal's decline as mentioned by Blagrove.

Therefore I have been able to prove that the canal's construction through the village of Stoke Bruerne changed the village socially, peoples job's changed, physically, the centre of the village was no longer the church and financially, I can assume that living conditions and health improved and the canal company's made large profits.