

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name: .....  
 Date:.....Telephone (inc STD code): .....  
 I/We wish to apply for membership of the Society and have completed the Banker's Order Form below.

The membership subscription rates are:  
 £7.50 (family/individual) or  
 £5.00 (senior citizens/student)  
 £150 or 4 annual amounts of £37.50 (life membership)

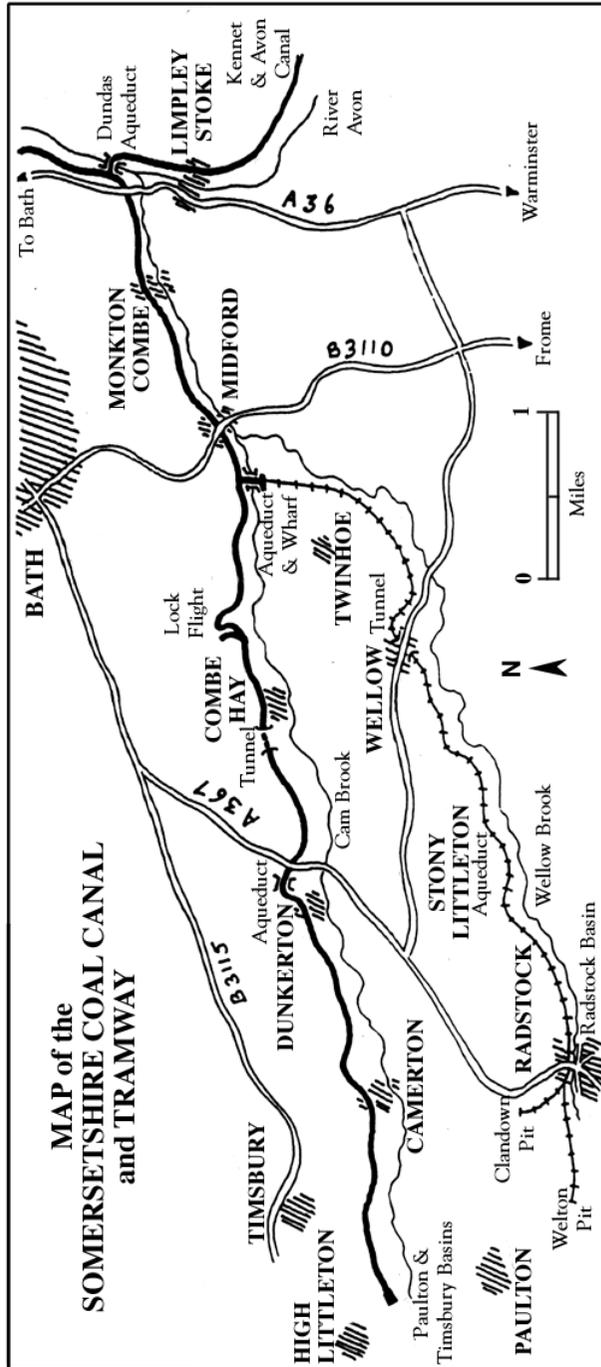
**GIFT AID DECLARATION :** I do/do not (delete as applicable) want the charity to treat all donations I have made since 6th April 2001 and all donations I make from the date of this declaration as Gift Aid Donations. I do pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax equal to the tax reclaimed on my donations, and will inform the Society if I cease to pay sufficient tax.  
 Signed:.....Date:.....  
 Membership Applicant's Address:.....  
 .....  
 .....Postcode.....

**BANKERS ORDER** (Do not detach)  
 To:(name & address of your bank).....  
 .....  
 Postcode.....Bank sort Code:.....  
 Account Name:.....  
 Account No:.....  
 Please pay account No. 15 982 8309, sorting code No. 72-00-00, of the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society, at the Alliance and Leicester Bank, the sum of £7.50/£5.00/£37-50# on the .....\* day of .....\* and each year thereafter until further notice from my/our # account specified above.

Signed:.....  
*#Delete as applicable \* Insert your choice of payment day, month and year – being at least 30 days ahead of the day you despatch this application*

**To Bank: when making payments please quote:**  
 SCCS Membership Ref. No.....

When completed please return to:  
**John Bishop, Membership Secretary,**  
**73, Holcombe Green, Upper Weston, Bath BA1 4HY**



# SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY

Registered Charity No 1047303



The Society was founded in 1992 with the aim

**“TO FOCUS AN INTEREST ON THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE OLD SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL”**

The Society is aimed at those people who are interested in finding out more about the history of the canal, preserving what is still there and walking the parts that are still accessible to the public (most is PRIVATE LAND).

As a member of the Society you will be able to join our programme of guided walks, talks and work parties. You will receive our newsletter “Weigh-House” which will keep you up to date with our activities and research. Your contribution will be helping to preserve our heritage.

The Society aims to preserve the canal and protect the remaining structures: Midford Aqueduct, Combe Hay Locks and the line of the canal, from decay, dereliction and the effects of vegetation.

## HISTORY

The Somersetshire Coal Canal (S.C.C.) was authorised by Act of Parliament in 1794. It was promoted by the mine owners of the North Somerset coalfields as a cheaper means of transporting coal to the markets in Bath, Wiltshire and beyond. At that time the only transport was by pack-horse or horse and cart, which could only cope with limited quantities and resulted in high prices.

John Rennie of Kennet & Avon Canal fame surveyed the route of the canal with the assistance of William Smith, who was known as “The Father of English Geology”.

## ROUTE

The canal had two branches with connecting tramways to the mines:

**The northern branch** ran from Paulton and Timsbury Basins through Camerton, Dunkerton and Combe Hay to Midford.

**The southern branch** was constructed from Radstock through Writhlington and Wellow towards a junction at Midford.

**The main line** from Midford passed by Tucking Mill through Monkton Combe to join the K & A at Dundas Aqueduct.

## CAISSON & INCLINED PLANE

The 135 ft drop in level from Paulton to Dundas was concentrated at Combe Hay where it could be overcome by twenty-two ordinary locks or three ‘Caisson Locks’.

Each Caisson Lock consisted of a large water-filled masonry chamber, in which was submerged a long watertight box - the ‘Caisson’. A boat could be floated into the box which was then sealed and, being neutrally buoyant, was easily moved to a new level before letting the boat out. For civil engineering, rather than mechanical engineering reasons, this failed and was replaced with a gravity-operated railway, the Inclined Plane

This temporary expedient caused transshipment delays which were eventually overcome when a flight of conventional locks, supplied with water from the Cam Brook by a Bolton & Watt pumping engine, was opened in 1805.

## TRAMWAY

On the southern branch, meanwhile, the canal had only been built from Radstock as far as Twinhoe; from there to Midford a tramway was constructed to avoid the expense of a further flight of locks.

Once again, transshipment proved inefficient. The canal was also losing water due to geological problems so it ceased operation and, instead, the towpath was used as a track bed for extending the tramway. This now ran all the way from Radstock to the only remaining transshipment point at its junction with the northern line at Midford.

## SUCCESS & DECLINE

The canal now became one of the most successful in the country and, by the 1820s was carrying over 100,000 tons of coal per year. This prosperity was soon to be halted by the coming of the railways.

The southern branch was the first to feel the effects, when the G.W.R. opened a line from Frome to Radstock. The coal trade on the tramway declined and by 1871 it was sold to the Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway Company who built their Bath to Evercreech line over much of its course. The northern branch lost a large part of its trade in 1881 when the Bristol and North Somerset Railway opened a line to Camerton.

Railway competition was also hitting the Kennet and Avon Canal on which the S.C.C. depended for its markets; furthermore, some of the coal seams in the Paulton area were worked-out. Income fell and the company was placed in the hands of the Official Liquidator in 1894. After he failed to sell the canal as a going concern, closure became inevitable and followed in 1898.

In 1904 the abandoned canal was sold to the Great Western Railway, who, in 1907-10, built the Camerton to Limpley Stoke railway line over much of its course.

Even these railways have now closed; the G.W.R. branch in 1951 and the S.& D. in 1966.

Many of the canal structures remain today: aqueducts, bridges, locks, tunnels and much of the course of the canal itself. At its junction with the Kennet & Avon canal at Dundas, the first 500yards of the canal has been restored and is in use as moorings.

## WALKING THE CANAL

Much of the canal is on PRIVATE LAND but other parts are accessible by public footpaths. If you wish to walk the canal, please keep to these footpaths. The Society obtains landowners’ permission before visiting sites of interest so please do not damage our relationship by trespassing.

## ORDNANCE SURVEY MAPS.

Ordnance Survey 1:25 000 scale Explorer Maps (Orange) covering the area and public footpaths:

Nº 155 Bath & Bristol  
—replaces Pathfinder map 1183 (ST66/76) “Bath & Keynsham”

Nº 142 Radstock & Shepton Mallet  
—replaces Pathfinder map 1199 (ST66/75) “Radstock & Wellow”.

## FURTHER READING

**“The Somersetshire Coal Canal – A Pictorial Journey”**  
Roger Halse and Simon Castens (Millstream Books)  
ISBN 0-9489-755-8X £6.50

**“The Somersetshire Coal Canal Rediscovered”**  
Niall Allsop (Millstream Books) ISBN 0-9489-753-50  
A walkers guide with maps. £4-95

**“The Somersetshire Coal Canal and Railways”**  
Kenneth R. Clew (David & Charles or Brans Head)  
The history of the canal from its planning and construction, through its working life and the subsequent building of the railways.  
*Out of print but available from libraries and second-hand book shops.*

## WEBSITE

<http://www.coalcanal.org>