

Fussells Balance Lock

Innovative Technology on "The Canal That Never Was"

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Eighteen members of BACAS were joined by an equivalent number from the Buckland Dinham History Group and were met by Derrick Hunt and Adrian Tuddenham, leading members of the Dorset & Somerset Canal Society (D&SCS), opposite The Talbot at Mells. The group was taken in convoy to Fussells Balance Lock which lies on Barrow Hill in Lord Oxford's estate. The location had originally been identified by Robin Athill and described in 'Old Mendip' (Robin Athill, David and Charles, 1964, p173 et seq).

James Fussell, as well as being an ironmaster who had established an edge tool works in the Wadbury Valley at Mells, had several patents to his name including a method of raising and lowering boats which would eliminate the need for flights of locks on a canal. Derrick explained how the site had been totally overgrown before being cleared by volunteers and then how hundreds of tons of earth had been removed to show the remains of this trial balance lock which had been built and proven to operate successfully. He led the way down a perilous slipway to the lower level of the unfinished canal bed and then the group had the opportunity to climb down to inspect the two chambers in which the tanks holding the boats were lifted and lowered simultaneously. (see Figures 1 and 2.)

The stone work was in remarkably fine condition considering that the lock had been built in 1796; it is unlikely to last a further 200 years with current exposure to the elements.

Following the visit, Derrick answered many varied questions and showed a collection of artefacts that had been discovered during the excavation. These included special castings, a brass bearing block, wrought iron chain links, nails and a caulking chisel.

A detailed report on the excavations by Derrick Hunt and Adrian Tuddenham is available in the Frome Society Yearbook 12 published in 2008 or on the Dorset and Somerset Canal website <http://www.dorandsomcanal.org/fussellslock.htm>

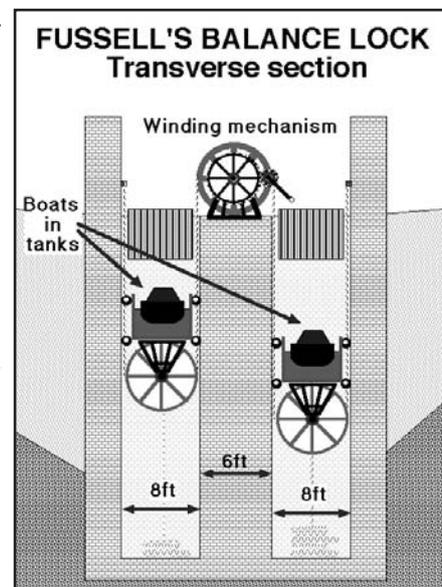


Figure 1 above Transverse Section of Fussell's Balance Lock.

Figure 2 left The Two Lock Chambers.