

**Some Brief Comments on:**

**RAILWAYS & CANALS IN THE CHURNET VALLEY**

**by THE KNOTTY RAMBLERS**

As with previous publications from Allan Baker and Mike Fell this book is extremely well researched, structured and presented. On this occasion Barry Knapper has climbed aboard to form "The Knotty Ramblers", named after the British Rail Special which, in 1972, visited former North Staffordshire Railway lines including the Churnet Valley. The handy-sized volume is complemented by the very professional design and layout.

The book is aimed at a wide readership, beyond those with specialist interest. It satisfies this objective admirably. Those readers who just wish get a basic understanding of the Churnet Valley can do so without getting heavily involved in the Acts of Parliament, the economics of the area and canal and railway development. Even those readers who simply want to flip through it will find just looking at the photographs and illustrations rewarding.

Of course, the publication's raison d'être is the development of the canals and railways in the valley and to this end it does not stint on detail. The reader is taken on a journey starting with the assent of the 1776 Act of Parliament to construct a canal to Froghall and thence a railway to Caldon Low; the subsequent development of a railway throughout the valley in service of industry; to the demise of that industry and its canal and railway infrastructure; and finally a resurgence based on restoration, pleasure cruising and heritage railways.

At all stages the book is packed with pertinent maps, diagrams, illustrations, photographs, annotations and facts and figures.

The various Acts of Parliament are examined as is the primary relationship with the North Staffordshire Railway and the subsequent interaction with the National Trust, British Transport Commission and British Waterways Board.

Specific individuals and personalities involved in the development of transport in the valley are highlighted such as the Tredwell family (including the remarkable Alice Tredwell), Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Druitt (Inspecting Officer of the Board of Trade) and William George Gibbons (probably Consall's first Station Master).

The relatively short-lived Uttoxeter Canal and Consall Plateway are addressed in the early section of the book.

Consall is paid specific attention with ample diagrammatic illustrations of the track, station, platform and sidings layout. This is supplemented with copious photographs (old and new) of the development and use of this section of the railway.

The Black Lion Inn at Consall is rightly allocated its own short chapter given its popularity with practically everyone that passes through this area. The methods of beer deliveries must make it unique! It is fitting that a photograph (taken by Mike) is included of a celebratory lunch at the Black

Lion following the launch of one of Allan's previous books (*North Staffordshire Collieries on the Hill North of Chell*).

Details are also provided of one of the lesser known operations in use by the NSR, LNWR and LMS on the route - the *express freight trains*.

The story is brought bang up-to-date in the final chapter with the news that work is well underway to re-instate the line from Leek Brook to Leek!

The wide range of photographs and postcard images provide the reader with a visual perspective of the valley from the early 1900s to the present day. As well as including images from a variety of sources the authors have incorporated photographs taken by their own hand from the 1970s onwards. The latter photographs illustrate the resurgence and restoration of the area and it is particularly pleasing to see industrial and mainline locomotives under a full head of steam, including some splendid shots of engines at work by Barry.

This then is a fine publication and is required reading for anyone with an interest in the Churnet Valley. The authors are to be complimented.

Gerald