The Landmark Trust

LOCK COTTAGE

History Album

Written by Charlotte Haslam, 1993

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KEY FACTS

Original building	**1816 or 1818**
Designed by:	**Samuel Hodgkinson, canal engineer, enlarged 3 times since**
Last lock-keeper	**Dick Warner, 1953-66**
Fell empty	**1986**
Acquired by Landmark	**1991**
Architect for repair & conversion	**Stainburn, Wheatley, Lines**
Contractors	**Gwilliam of Kidderminster**
Quantity Surveyors	**Bare, Leaning & Bare**
Restoration	**1992-1993**

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Lock Cottage

Summary

In 1991, Landmark acquired this, its first canal building, after long negotiations, mainly over access. Lock Cottage is not one of the most architecturally distinguished of Britain's canal buildings, but it has the qualities of simple good design so strongly represented on the canal system as a whole. What it lacks in architectural distinction the cottage has more than enough of in terms of its site, near the foot of the longest flight of narrow locks in Britain, the Tardebigge Thirty. It was at the top of this flight that the idea of the campaigning Inland Waterways Association was first proposed in 1946, on board the narrow boat *Cressy*, home of the writer Tom Rolt, whose widow Sonia has been involved with Landmark almost since the beginning and still chooses the books for Wales and the West Midlands.

The Worcester and Birmingham canal was built to provide a direct route between the industrial heartland of Birmingham and the Severn at Worcester, cutting 30 miles off the alternative route and avoiding the trickier reaches of the Severn above Worcester. The 1790s saw the first lengths on the Birmingham level completed without too much difficulty, despite long tunnels. The scheme even survived the inflation of the years of war with France which slowed work to a crawl, but took the navigable section of the canal to Tardebigge Old Wharf in 1807. Then, in 1809, with new money and an enthusiastic Committee, the Company embarked on planning the final challenge, the descent to Worcester – a fall of 425 feet in 16 miles.

Construction of this last section actually began in 1812. It was a huge undertaking and work progressed slowly. With 58 locks to construct, as well as reservoirs, bridges, wharfs and warehouses, houses for lock-keepers came low on the Company's agenda. Not until 4th December 1814 was the canal was declared officially open and the evidence suggest that the cottage at Stoke Pound was not built until 1816, or even 1818.

A lock cottage had to be roughly in the middle of the length of canal for which a lock keeper was responsible. As a result, each cottage was slightly different, for reasons of site and the land available to the company to build on – this cottage is a particularly good example of how the engineers overcame such difficulties, even faced with a narrow strip above a steep embankment.

When first built, this one was smaller than it is now, with just two rooms – the kitchen and present dining room – on the ground floor, and perhaps an attic bedroom above. There was probably always a yard at the west end, and a smaller one at the east end, with a low cellar under it, for coal. Under the west yard was a well, but this may not have been original. Later, an upper floor with two bedrooms was added, using a slightly different coloured brick. The stair was where it is now, but it may have been little more than a ladder at first, leading into the smaller bedroom.

Some years later again, the house was enlarged at the east end, with a taller cellar, a room above it under a lean-to roof, and a new yard beyond, complete with pigsty and shed. The cellar was equipped with a salting bench, for the pigs at a later stage. The new room, with its own outside door, was a workshop and store, known in canal language as a Hovel. The slot in the back wall, to the left of the window, was to allow ladders or long boat-hooks to be hung on the brackets at the side.

At the same time as the addition at the east end, and in the same mix of red and blue brick, a wash-house was built on at the other end (now the sitting room). The wall in front of the cottage, built to give some protection from flooding, probably belongs to this same phase of general improvement, as perhaps does the paving of the west yard. On its steep site, there was no room for anything more than the two yards beside the cottage. In such cases, it was common for a lock-keeper to have his bit of garden on the other bank.

Finally, perhaps at the turn of the century, a third bedroom was added above the workshop. The last lock-keeper to live here moved in in 1953, and if improvements were made for him, little was done thereafter. The uncertainty surrounding the future of Lock Cottage after the death of the last tenant in 1986 lay not in its rather decayed state but in the lack of any access for a car. The cottage had electricity of sorts, but it had no running water, nor plumbing of any kind. A water main was brought along the track and a septic tank put in the field below – it took three years to negotiate these steps.

Significant structural works were required: neither the wash-house nor the cottage had been built with adequate foundations and were showing signs of movement. New foundations were laid, the yard dug up and the rebuilt outer wall tied to a concrete slab behind. The wash-house was also rebuilt, using a mixture of the old and second hand bricks. The walls of the lower east yard, and its outbuildings, also needed rebuilding. The main roof needed new battens and felt. The surviving tiles were then relaid, all exactly as before. The chimneys were also rebuilt and the roofs of the wash-house and outbuildings had to be renewed entirely.

Cement repointing to the back wall was raked out and the joints repointed with lime mortar. The steps to the cellar were reconstructed, and the cellar door repaired. The windows and doors themselves were repaired where possible, but where they were too decayed, the new work copying the old.

As the two downstairs rooms were very small, the wash-house on the west end became the sitting room. The original idea was to keep the wash-house chimney, with its hearth and copper, but the chimney fell down before we finally bought the cottage, so a new central fireplace was made in the existing main chimney breast. The 1950s kitchen range was falling to pieces and so was replaced. A new window was inserted to light the stairs, once the bathroom had been inserted. Overall, the cottage retains the feel of a simple working man's dwelling.

Introduction

Lock Cottage represents in some ways a full circle for the Landmark Trust. It is a good example of Sir John Smith's core purpose in founding the Landmark Trust in 1965, and a fitting close to Sir John Smith's 25 years as its founding trustee. According to the account of Lock Cottage that he wrote himself for the Landmark Handbook:

"Until the nineteen fifties many such handsome, unpretentious buildings served and graced our canal system; but the Transport Commission of that day ruthlessly demolished them by dozens, in spite of everything which I and others had to say. Indeed it was, in particular, the destruction of Thomas Telford's Junction House at Hurlestone on the Shropshire Union canal which maddened us into starting the Landmark Trust."

In spite of these beginnings it was not until 1991 that the Landmark Trust actually acquired a canal building, and then only after long negotiations over access which emphasised the difficulties that can arise when saving a building no longer needed for its original purpose.

This Lock Cottage is not one of the most architecturally distinguished of canal buildings, but it has the qualities of simple good design so strongly represented on the canal system as a whole. It was also, for a time, under threat of demolition, although to save it the local area manager proposed using part of it as a tool store. Few cottages are needed for canal employees now, and while many have been sold and make successful homes, the future of this one, because there was no way of getting a car anywhere near it, was less certain. However, the Worcester and Birmingham Canal Society suggested that Landmark might be undeterred by this disadvantage - and indeed might rather like it - and the British Waterways Board subsequently agreed to the sale.

What it lacks in architectural distinction the cottage has more than enough of in terms of its site, near the foot of the longest flight of narrow locks in Britain, the Tardebigge Thirty. Moreover it was at the top of this flight that the idea of the campaigning Inland Waterways Association was first proposed in 1946, on board the narrow boat *Cressy*, home of the writer Tom Rolt. In the words of his widow, Sonia Rolt, herself a former boatwoman and long-standing friend of Landmark (she chose the books for this cottage), it stands "*amid the flight of locks, the top mooring of which may have had such a crucial effect upon the continuance of the canals*." At the same time it provides a taste of "*that misty, moisty, tow-path life in a setting which becomes increasingly rare.*"

Lock Cottage before repair in 1991.

Construction - the canal

The full story of the construction of the Worcester and Birmingham canal, and its later history, is told in Charles Hadfield's *Canals of the West Midlands* (on the bookshelf) and a fuller version has been written by Rev. Alan White, *The Worcester and Birmingham Canal: History of the Cut*. To summarize, the purpose of the canal was to provide a direct route between the industrial heartland of Birmingham and the Severn at Worcester. Not only was this route some 30 miles shorter than the existing alternative, but it avoided the trickier reaches of the Severn above Worcester. Opposition from rivals was inevitable, vociferous, and for a while successful - the bill was defeated on its first passage through Parliament in 1790.

It is hardly surprising that there was lavish celebration when the bill became an Act in 1791 - the financial rewards were clearly expected to be as great as those hoped for by winners of the Olympic bidding process today, and the rejoicing was in equal measure. The following years saw the first lengths on the Birmingham level completed without too much difficulty, despite long tunnels. The scheme even survived the inflation of the years of war with France which slowed work to a crawl, but took the navigable section of the canal to Tardebigge Old Wharf in 1807. Then, in 1809, with new money and an enthusiastic Committee, the Company embarked on planning the final challenge, the descent to Worcester - a fall of 425 feet in 16 miles.

Construction of this last section actually began in 1812. The first and most difficult length, from Tardebigge to Body Brook in the parish of Hanbury, was to be cut by John Woodhouse, formerly the company's engineer (and designer of the famous boat lift which once stood at Tardebigge Top Lock), who resigned his post to act as contractor. William Crosley was appointed as engineer in his place, on the recommendation of John Rennie, on whose Lancaster canal he had worked in the 1790s.

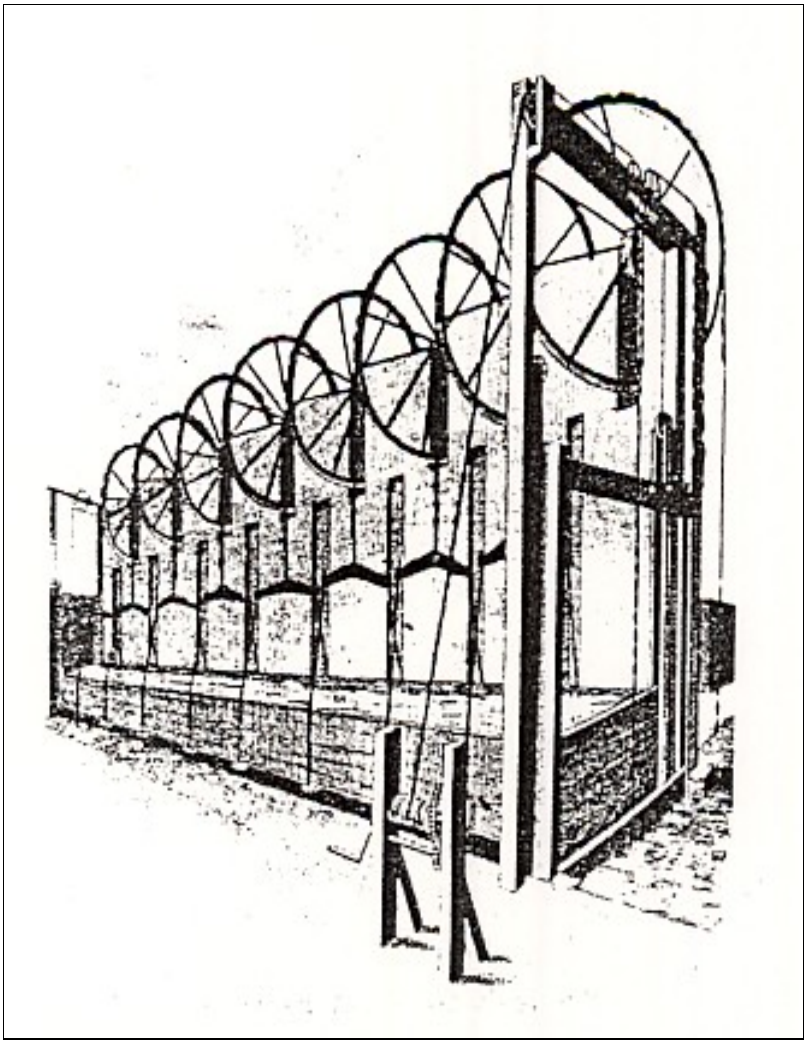
Other contractors were working on the rest of the canal at the same time, but work progressed slowly, and was still far from complete in 1814, in spite of the Committee's repeated complaints. However, John Woodhouse was given permission to pass boats bearing materials as far as lock 30 (numbered from Worcester, as they are now) in May, 1814, and five locks further (to Stoke Wharf therefore) in August, provided that there was no greater depth of water than 3 ft 6 ins, and all the works were well guarded.

Crosley's report in July, 1814, gives an idea of the scale of the work.

"The brickwork of 35 of the locks to be built by Mr Woodhouse will be finished this week and the gates in their places. There will be 6 bridges finished and 4 more in a forward state; he will then have 6 locks and 6 bridges to begin. In these locks and bridges, including the 4 bridges in progress, will be 1,600,000 bricks to lay including the masonry. He has also some 33,000 cubic yards of earth to remove. The digging will require 60 men and 10 horses eleven weeks and the brickwork will require 50 bricklayers, masons and labourers well supplied with materials to finish in the same time. I found on the work this morning 66 diggers, 7 horses and 37 bricklayers, masons and labourers, exclusive of those employed in hauling and providing materials."

A year later the canal was still some months from opening, and the committee resolved that Mr Crosley's appointment as engineer should end at Michaelmas, 1815, after several complaints of neglected duty. This was a common enough experience with chief engineers who, if successful, tended to become involved in several projects at once, while each committee wanted their undivided attention. His place was taken by Samuel Hodgkinson, who had helped with the initial survey of the canal, and who seems to have continued as an assistant, or perhaps as resident engineer in charge of the daily supervision of the work. He certainly had the necessary experience, having previously worked for thirteen

years on the Kennet and Avon canal and for six on the Birmingham canal, in each case as resident engineer.



Tardebigge Vertical Lift

Construction - the cottage

With 58 locks to construct, as well as reservoirs, bridges, wharfs and warehouses, houses for lock-keepers came low on the Company's agenda. It was not until 24th March, 1814, that the minutes of the Works Committee record that William Crosley, then still chief engineer, was to be asked:

"to report to this Committee the number and situations of Lock Houses necessary to be erected between Tardebigge and Worcester and that he prepare a specification, plan and estimate of erecting said Lock Houses of such dimensions and in such manner as will in his opinion be proper."

Whether William Crosley in the end provided designs for the cottages is doubtful. In May, 1815, the Committee had ordered that in addition to the completion "without delay" of all the Wharfs, Machine Houses and Warehouses between Tardebigge and Worcester, seven lock houses be built. However, this order was repeated in November, when the Committee ordered that the seven lock houses be built under the direction of Samuel Hodgkinson, in "situations to be approved by this Committee." It seems likely that it was Samuel Hodgkinson, therefore, who actually designed the cottages.

Time was running out, however, and the pickle in which the Company found itself was born out by an order later in the month, to build a temporary lock house between Offerton and Blackpole. On 4th December, the first boats passed through to Worcester, and the canal was declared officially open (the Committee was so excited by this novel experience that the first meeting in January, when new regulations and tolls were to be set, went on until 2am, only to be adjourned till 9 the next morning).

So the employment of lock-keepers had to go ahead, but there was nowhere yet for them to live. However, in March 1816, the Committee decided that while lock-keepers to date had been paid 18 shillings a week, from 17th March they

would be reduced to 15 shillings. The higher wage had presumably been to cover rents for rooms in local farms and cottages; while the new level must similarly reflect the fact that cottages were now ready to move into. The engineer's report to the General Committee in July confirmed that six lock houses had been built. Additional cottages were built in 1818, presumably where experience showed more supervision was needed, though where these were is not specified. We can reasonably conclude that the cottage at Stoke Pound was built by 1818, therefore, and possibly two years earlier.

A description of Lock Cottage

A lock cottage had to be roughly in the middle of the length of canal for which a lock keeper was responsible. As a result, each cottage was slightly different, for reasons of site and the land available to the company to build on - this cottage is a particularly good example of how the engineers overcame such difficulties, even faced with a narrow strip above a steep embankment. Some cottages were considered more important than others, too: that at Tardebigge Top Lock was originally going to have been built in stone and though it was in the end built in brick like all the others, it appears always to have been larger than the rest. Within these differences, the cottages followed a similar basic design, of which this one is typical. That does not mean its building history is entirely straightforward, however.

When first built, it was smaller than it is now, with just two rooms - the kitchen and present dining room - on the ground floor, and perhaps an attic bedroom above. There was probably always a yard at the west end, and a smaller one at the east end, with a low cellar under it, for coal. Under the west yard was a well, but this may not have been original. Some years later - how many we don't know, possibly only a few - an upper floor with two bedrooms was added, using a slightly different coloured brick. The stair was where it is now, but it may have been little more than a ladder at first, leading into the smaller bedroom.

Some years later again, the house was enlarged at the east end, with a taller cellar, a room above it under a lean-to roof, and a new yard beyond, complete with pigsty and shed. The cellar was equipped with a salting bench, for the pigs at a later stage. The new room, with its own outside door, was a workshop and store, known in canal language as a Hovel. The slot in the back wall, to the left of the window, was to allow ladders or long boat-hooks to be hung on the brackets at the side. The equivalent hovel of the cottage by Tardebigge Reservoir is described by Pat Warner in *Lock-keeper's Daughter* (a vivid memoir of her childhood, copy on bookshelf) as "*a warm dark home for lots and lots of spiders*", used to store coal, wood, fruit, and fishing tackle.

At the same time as the addition at the east end, and in the same mix of red and blue brick, a wash-house was built on at the other end (now the sitting room). Pat Warner describes how this would have worked:

"*Clothes washing would entail dipping water from the canal, using a bucket on a length of rope. Thus we were able to fill the old `copper' or `furnace' (as it was sometimes called). A good fire soon roared underneath the copper, and as the water came up to boiling point we were able to skim off the scum which floated to the top in large lumps. It looked a bit like the froth on Tommy Thompson's ale. The water was by now reasonably clean, although it still smelled a bit fishy*."

The wall in front of the cottage, built to give some protection from flooding, probably belongs to this same phase of general improvement, as perhaps does the paving of the west yard. On its steep site, there was no room for anything more than the two yards beside the cottage. In such cases, it was common for a lock-keeper to have his bit of garden on the other bank.

Finally, perhaps at the turn of the century, a third bedroom was added above the workshop, this time using nearly all blue bricks, and mostly blue tiles for the roof. The new bedroom was a little smarter than the original downstream one, being finished with a skirting board. There is a similar skirting round the room at the

top of the stairs and it may be that the staircase itself was renewed at this point, on a rather more generous scale than before, and the little landing room smartened up at the same time.

Other minor alterations were made over the years - a new art deco fire surround in the downstream bedroom, a new range in the kitchen which meant widening the chimney, and then later another range again. The front of the cottage was painted white. But the last lock-keeper to live here moved in in 1953, and if improvements were made for him, little was done thereafter. The cottage still has the simple, functional interior of a working family home. To quote Pat Warner again:

"Our living room was cosy, especially at night by the warm glow of the lamplight. A round table stood in the middle of the room and a long sofa beneath the window. Father's armchair was at one side of the table and various other small chairs were arranged here and there. Two long brass shell cases (relics of the First World War) stood in the hearth, one on each side of the fireplace where there was also a copper kettle. A large fireguard surrounded the old-fashioned black shiny range with its two hobs and small oven. This was polished with black lead and lots of `elbow grease'. Another small living room adjoined this one, also with its own small range. There was no other method of heating the rest of the house. Opposite the front door was a large and dark Welsh dresser adorned with decorative plates. Father had built this outside in the `Hovel'; when it was finished, he had had to take it to pieces again to get it through the front door."

The different coloured bricks which show the various stages of alteration and addition are clearly seen here, on the now inaccessible back walls of the cottage, photographed before repair.

The role of lock keeper

"The lock-keeper at Wichnor by whose cottage we moored was even more agreeable than most, which is saying a great deal. Not only did he provide us with a windlass to replace the one we had lost at Swarkestone, but he insisted on making us a present of a fine basket of blackberries. Lock-keepers lead solitary lives, for their cottages are often remote from villages or even roads, so that they welcome a gossip with the crew of a passing boat. Their job is not as easy as it would appear, for their responsibility is not confined to the lock by their cottage but extends over some miles of canal, which may include several more locks. As the prosperity of the canals sinks into eclipse, so each man's length grows longer and longer, intermediate lock cottages being either let to agricultural labourers or left to fall into ruin. In addition to maintaining the locks in working order, there are the hedges to be trimmed and banks to be mown, while the towing path must be kept in a reasonable state of repair. It is also the lock-keeper's task to maintain a more or less constant level of water in the pounds under his charge, by adjusting the sluices which govern the flow of water from feeders and outfalls. Any minor leaks which may develop in the banks must be stopped with clay puddle before they assume serious proportions, and it is his duty to notify the maintenance department of any major repairs which may become necessary, or of sections which may require dredging. The lock-keeper of Wichnor had been born in his cottage, for his father had spent his life-time on the same job. He was a mine of local information, as well he might be."

L.T.C. Rolt *Narrow Boat* 1944

"Father's working day began at 7am. He was responsible for the stretch of [fifteen] locks from the Engine House to the Halfway House. A daily record had to be kept of the rise and fall of water in the reservoir. [Each lock measures] a little over 70ft in length, while each hill and pound between the locks is about 70 yards. It would be necessary to walk this distance a good many times each day, as well as crossing and re-crossing the locks repeatedly. The towing path was rough and stony, and although providing a good grip for the boat horses, it was very hard on our feet ... Over his socks he wore stout leather leggings and a good strong pair of boots. He repaired all our shoes and would have made an excellent cobbler. His strong and rough clothes were topped with a heavy raincoat and on his head he wore a cap or trilby. Around his waist was a thick leather belt in which he carried his lock windlass. This same windlass had belonged to Great Grandad Warner ... There were two luxuries in Father's life: one was a glass of ale at the Halfway House and other was his pipe of Digger Gold Flake."

Pat Warner *Lock Keeper's Daughter* 1987

The lock-keepers described above belong to this century, but their duties and lives were little different to those of their predecessors a century before. They were expected to work harder for comparatively less money, perhaps, than in the years before railway competition, when canal shares still sold at a healthy premium. But a nineteenth century employer expected as much, and more, from his workforce simply as a matter of course. In return they were offered security from the Workhouse, and a healthy and independent life.

A lock-keeper on the Worcester and Birmingham canal in 1816 had, in addition to his 15/- a week, an annual allowance of 3 tons of coal and 3lb. of candles; and of course a cottage to live in, at least while he was working. In due course he would get a pension, and if his son took over his duties, then there was a chance that he would stay in his cottage for life. He cared for a specified length

of the canal, which in the case of the lock-keeper here was of six locks (numbers 29 - 34) and the pounds between. His general duties were set out by the Works Committee in September 1816, when it was resolved:

"That the lock-keepers be required to keep the fences and towing paths in repair in their respective lengths and that they keep the paddles well oiled and cleaned and that as an inducement to use their best exertions for the interest of the Company in preventing loss of water and injury to the works, the Committee will reward them according to their merits."

The careful watching of water levels was vital - too low and boats couldn't pass along the canal; too high and there was a danger of the banks breaking. Canals, and the flow of water in them, being an artificial creation, there was always a fear that the supply from the top would not be enough to fill water-greedy locks, hence the provision of reservoirs, and contrivances to economise on water use, such as side-ponds which allowed two boats to pass through a lock on only one lockfull of water.

Good fences backed by quickthorn hedges were equally important, to keep stock from straying onto, and damaging, the banks, or falling into the canal. This last may have been more of a concern in the early years, when farmers were still demanding compensation for loss of land, and division of fields (Messrs John and Benjamin Tolley had been paid an extra £10 in 1813 for "*stocking up fences to lay fields together which have been dissected and the further sum of £10 for Fruit Trees destroyed in making the canal through their Estate at Stoke Court*"). The Company wanted no further cause for complaint.

To do his work, the lock-keeper was supplied with tools by the company - the issue of rakes, padlocks and other utensils, as advised by the engineer, was authorised by the Committee in January 1816.

The Company was not a harsh employer and was capable of generosity. In July 1816, for example, the minutes record that a lock-keeper named Duffield was "*paid £5 for the loss he has sustained by the burning of the Lock House inhabited by him (man very thankful for it)*." This and the responsible nature of the work itself led to a continuity which saw families working for several generations on the same canal. The provision of a decent house, together with space for a vegetable plot, hens and pigs, must have been another reason for this record of long family service.

Inhabitants of Lock Cottage

It is difficult to trace individual lock-keepers to a particular cottage. However, Rev. Arthur White, the canal's historian, has managed to find out a little about some of them, and has kindly given us his notes.

The first lock-keeper whom Mr White has been able to link tentatively to the Stoke Pound lock cottage is James Bishop, in the 1890s. He seems to have been followed in 1900 (again the evidence is not cast-iron) by James Waldron, who, sadly, met an untimely end, though one that seems to have been a common hazard among canal workers: a record exists of the death by drowning of James Waldron, lock-keeper, of Canal Cottage, Stoke Prior. The Waldrons were one of the old canal families, their name occurring from its earliest years.

With his successor we are getting into the time of living memory, or at least the living memories of old men when people started asking questions about life on the canals in the 1950s and '60s. Alf Ingram was lock-keeper here from 1909 until 1919. He was a little man who always wore a white waistcoat. He was followed by Jim Pierce, `the onion king' - presumably a famous prize-winner at the local horticultural show. He had a deep voice and a walrus moustache.

Next came another Waldron, Harold this time, said to have been a rather rough-looking type, with half-inch whiskers and a greasy trilby hat. He lived in the cottage with his wife and daughters, who would have gone to school in Stoke Prior. He retired in 1952, to be succeeded by Tom Biggs who after only a year missed his footing in fog near the Queen's Head, and drowned. His position was taken by Dick Warner, the last lock-keeper to live here.

Dick Warner was born in 1912 into another old canal family, well chronicled by his cousin Pat Warner. Her father John was lock-keeper at Tardebigge reservoir from 1909 until his death in 1952. Another Warner brother was keeper at

Tardebigge Top Lock between the Wars. Both are warmly described by Tom Rolt in his autobiography *Landscape with Canals* (1977). Dick's father, Fred Warner, worked on the Droitwich Link, and Dick helped him there when he left school at the age of 14. They then moved to Lower Astwood Lock on the main canal, and Dick took over as keeper there when his father died. In 1953 he moved to Stoke Pound. He is remembered walking with a stick, because he had one leg shorter than the other. His wife, Ruth, was the daughter of another lock-keeper, Fred Teale. She grew up at Halfway Cottage, further up the Tardebigge flight.

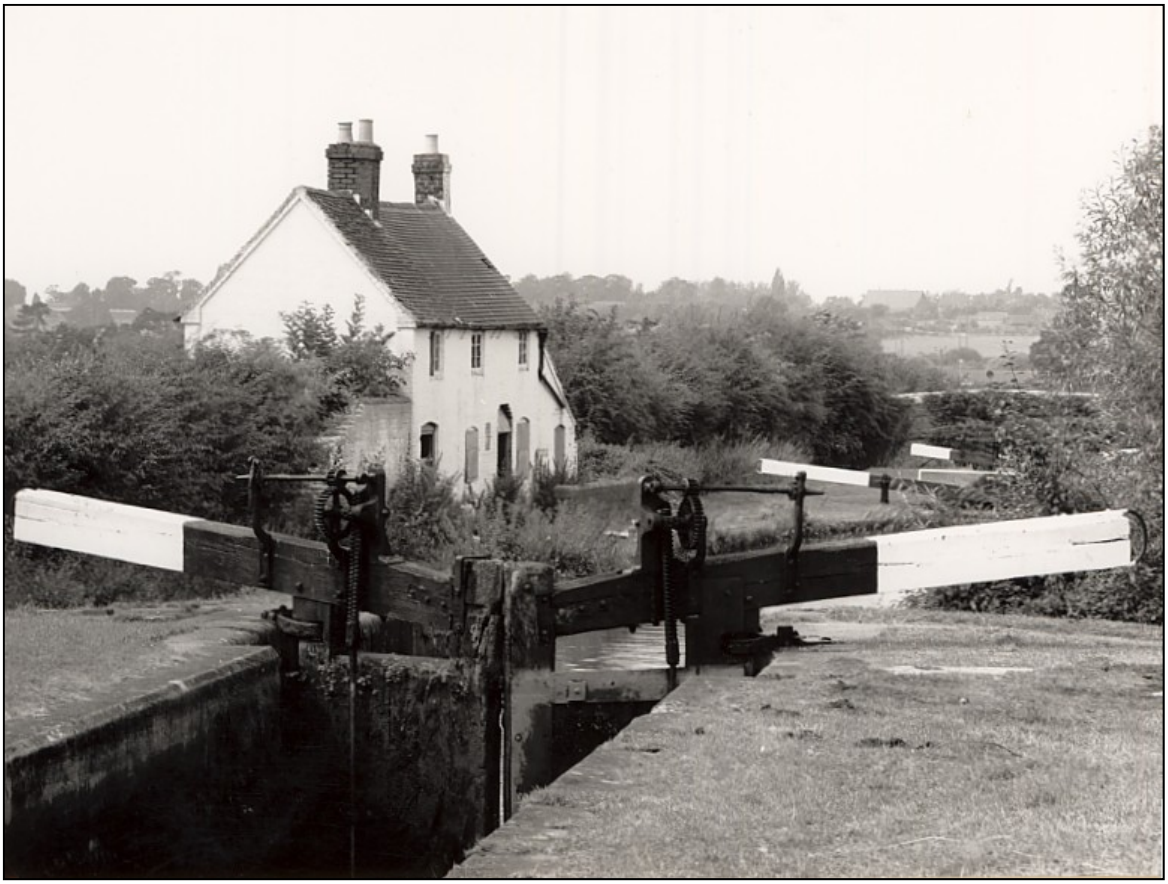
In 1966, tragedy struck the family, with the death in the same year of Dick himself, and of their only son, David, who at the age of 16 was drowned in the canal. Ruth Warner was allowed to live on in the cottage, which was no longer needed for a lock-keeper. She stayed until her own death in 1986.

Tardebigge reservoir and the Warner family 1919

Photographs of 'WB29' from the British Waterways Boards records.

Lock Cottage when still in good repair, probably in the 1970s. The figure outside (below) is Miss Warner.

Lock Cottage in 1991, photographed by Paul Gummer



The wash house – now the sitting room. Soon after these pictures were taken, the copper was stolen.

The kitchen

The parlour – now the dining room.

The middle bedroom, now the bathroom.

The upstream bedroom (above) and the downstream bedroom (below).

The Restoration of Lock Cottage

The uncertainty surrounding the future of Lock Cottage after Mrs Warner's death in 1986 lay not in its rather decayed state but in the lack of any access for a car. Landmark had no desire to drive to the front door, but neither did it seem reasonable to expect visitors to transport their belongings along the towpath all the way from the Queen's Head. So before actually buying the cottage, it was essential to come to an agreement with Mr Powell of Stoke Court Farm, the owner of the land on either side of the canal, to allow us to lay a track across his land from the nearest lane. The best route proved to be from the drive to the farm itself, across the fields on the north bank to the accommodation bridge near the cottage. The bridge itself is not strong enough for cars, so there had to be somewhere to park on that side too; and new steps on the south side to give access to the tow-path and the front door.

The cottage had electricity of sorts, but it had no running water, nor plumbing of any kind. A water main would also have to come along the track therefore, and a septic tank would have to go in the field below. Reaching agreement on all these points between three parties, overcoming the worries of the Water Board who had pipes near the track, even surviving a change in policy halfway through on the part of the British Waterways Board, took over three years. Even then, all was not plain sailing. Just as Landmark finally bought the cottage in September 1991, the field below it was sold to a different owner. His concern over the placing of the septic tank nearly scuppered the entire restoration - buildings can be lost for very basic reasons.

A track for cars was not only needed for the people who would eventually stay in the cottage, but also for the builders. Work started in August 1992 under the supervision of the architect Ian Stainburn, of Stainburn, Wheatley, Lines, from Ledbury in Herefordshire. The builders were Gwilliam of Kidderminster, with Roy Boughton as foreman.

The first works were structural. The outer walls of the wash-house, and of the west yard, were showing signs of movement - neither they nor the cottage itself had been built with adequate foundations. New foundations were laid, the yard dug up and the rebuilt outer wall tied to a concrete slab behind. The wash-house was also rebuilt, again with new foundations, but using a mixture of the old and second hand bricks.

The walls of the lower east yard, and its outbuildings, also needed rebuilding. This yard already had blue diamond paviours, so these were relaid, and new ones of the same pattern were found for the upper yard. There had been plain blue bricks there before, but it was felt that these would be slippery in the wet.

The main roof needed new battens and felt. The surviving tiles were then relaid, with second hand ones to make up, all exactly as before, with plain red over the older part and red and blue over the later, upstream, end. The chimneys were rebuilt at the same time. The roofs of the wash-house and outbuildings had of course to be renewed entirely.

The back wall had been repointed not long ago with cement, which was now cracking. This was raked out and the joints repointed with lime mortar. On the front, the brickwork needed repair over the door and in one or two other places, and some repointing, before being repainted with a porous Keim paint. The steps to the cellar had been filled in with rubble. This was cleared out, the steps reconstructed, and the cellar door repaired. It still had old green paint on it, as did the little larder window, and this colour was matched for the new external paintwork. The windows and doors themselves were repaired where possible, but where they were too decayed, the new work copies the old.

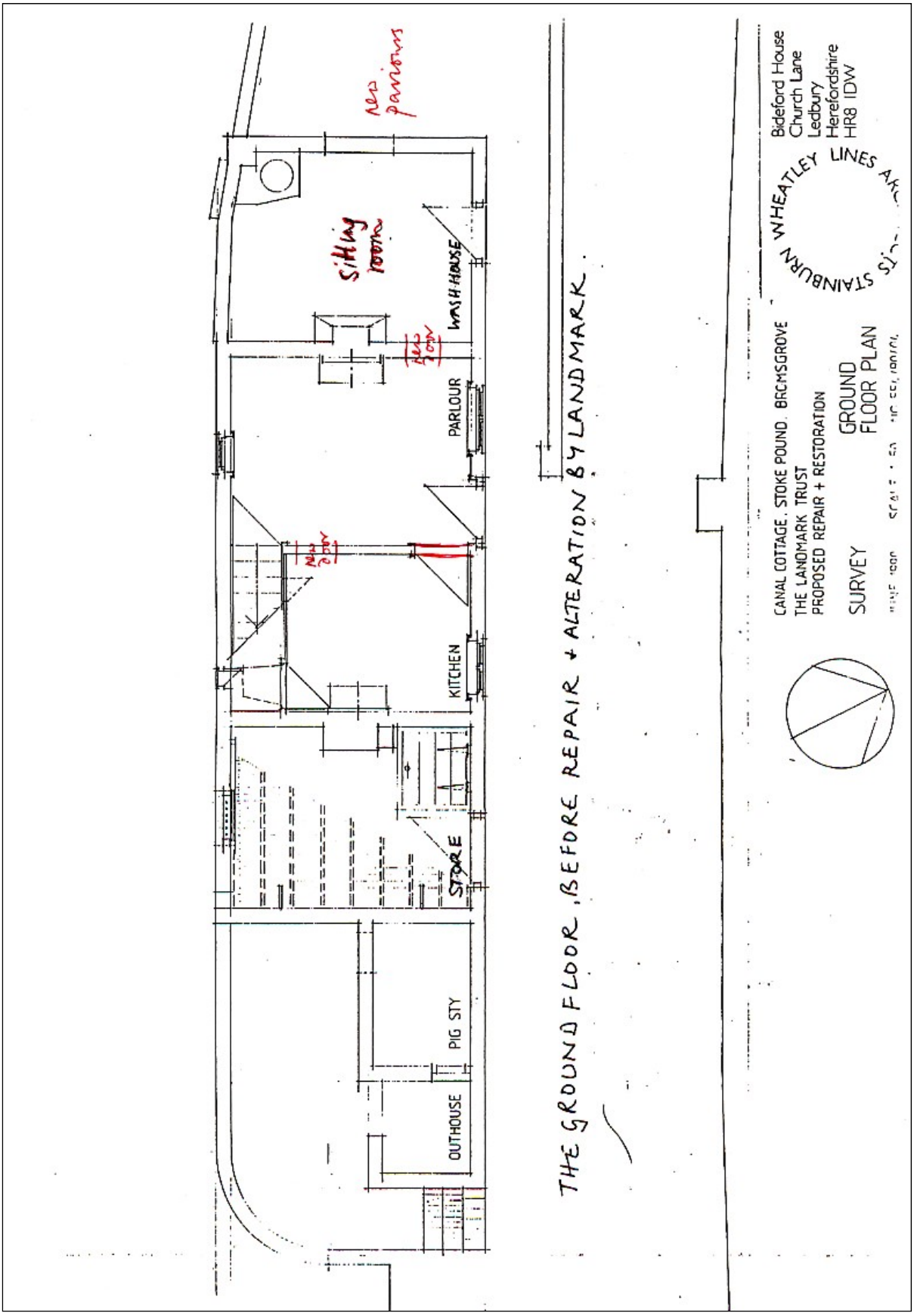
The two rooms downstairs being very small, it was decided to turn the wash-house on the west end into a sitting room, making a new door through into the present dining room. To have used the hovel at the other end would have meant

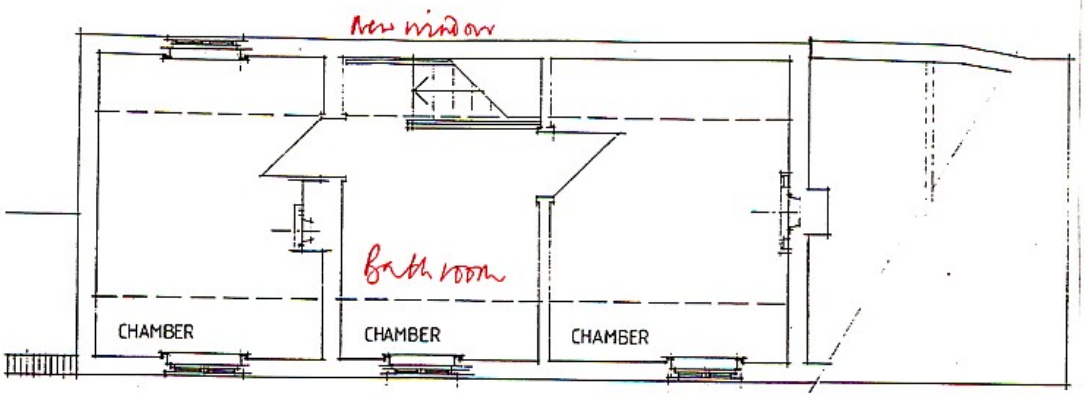
knocking through the wide chimney, a difficult job and one that would have spoiled the kitchen - and the hovel itself. The original idea had been to keep the wash-house chimney, with its hearth and copper, but sadly, the copper was stolen before we finally bought the cottage, and the chimney fell down. Instead, a new central fireplace was made in the existing main chimney breast, diverting the flue which had served the fireplace on its other side.

There had been a rough brick floor in the wash-house, and this was replaced with tiles like those in the kitchen. The former sitting room - now dining room - always had floorboards. Its fireplace no longer works, but it was given a new surround copied from the one in the upstream bedroom (though without the lopsided shelf). The dado panelling is new, both in here and the sitting room - a useful dodge in buildings where rising damp is likely, because the walls can breathe, and the damp evaporates harmlessly.

The old kitchen range had been replaced in the 1950s with a new one that was now falling to pieces. Fortunately, the Landmark had another range in store which fitted the old opening exactly. Finally, the downstairs rooms were painted with coloured distemper, or with plain limewash.

In the room at the top of the stairs, a space was partitioned off for a bathroom. This in turn made the stairs very dark, so a new window was inserted at the back of the cottage. In the bedrooms themselves, the ceilings were repaired, but little else was done apart from hanging new wallpaper.


Bideford House
Church Lane
Ledbury
Herefordshire
HR8 1DW
WHEATLEY LINES AR
STAINBURN
CANAL COTTAGE, STOKE POUND, BROMSGROVE
THE LANDMARK TRUST
PROPOSED REPAIR + RESTORATION
SURVEY
GROUND
FLOOR PLAN
THE GROUND FLOOR, BEFORE REPAIR + ALTERATION BY LANDMARK.
PARLOUR
KITCHEN
STORE
PIG STY
OUTHOUSE
WASH HOUSE
sitting room
new partitions



THE FIRST FLOOR, BEFORE ALTERATION BY LANDMARK

THE FRONT, BEFORE REPAIR