

Fly Run

by Mike Beech

When we decided to have a couple of temporary displays in the Museum each year it was to fulfil a plan that has been hatching for some time: a temporary display to appeal to visitors who have been before, and might be enticed to take a second look to see the display. It was also hoped that it would generate some publicity for us. This year's Anniversaries gave an obvious opportunity, and I naively believed that Fly Run would provide plenty of material. In 1909, the locks at Foxton were refurbished for night use by the steam powered express delivery boats run by FMC. The locks were semi derelict, although I suspect that they were just about usable in an emergency when the lift was out of order.

Having searched the archives, I had enough material to do the locks part of the display. The boats proved more difficult. The following are extracts from the response I received from Richard Thomas who is one of the top historians as far as steam boats are concerned. He is obviously involved with "President". The new book "President The First 100 Years" is a must for everyone interested in boats, at a modest £7.00 from the Museum (+P&P).

Richard Writes - Hi Mike, Wow! how do I answer all of this?

I can start by attaching some research done by FMC and add to it some done by your very own Gordon Thomas. Unfortunately I cannot track down the original papers and I can't ask the man who found them because he's no longer alive.

I also attach part of the text of a new book we are publishing shortly. I appreciate that there are a lot of details about the London/Birmingham trip and little on the Leicester/Nottingham route but no information seems to have come down to us about working the "woolly-back" run, as I believe the Leicester trip was called (unless, of course, you know differently!).

We are pretty certain that President worked the route but there are no "official" sightings as a steamer. We do have a series of inspections between 1927 and 1932 in Nottingham but by then she was a motor.

Other steamers which were inspected in Leicester were Baroness (1899 & 1912), Countess (1896), Duke (1896), Earl (1896), Empress (1892 & 1896), Hecla (1895), Phoenix (1896), Pirate (1895 & 1896), Princess (1888), Speedwell (1889, 1891, 1895 and (amazingly) 1928*) and Victoria (1891 & 1895).

* This sighting of Speedwell was the last recorded for a steamer.

Inspections in Ilkeston recorded Vanguard (1912), Viceroy (1912) Victory (1912 & 1913), and Vulcan (1912). I don't know if they were using the T & M or the Leicester line, though I suspect the latter.

What surprises me is that no inspections were noted for the Inclined Plane years!

The notes continue on the next pages

Notes on the operation of FMC "Engines" when running "Fly" from the City Road depot in London to the Fazeley Street depot in Birmingham.

The London to Birmingham "Engines" used to work to a definite timetable which was made possible by the fact that, in those days, the canal was open 24 hours a day, night lock keepers being on duty on the main flights.

Their time table was such that they would guarantee within a quarter of a mile, meeting their colleagues going in the opposite direction; and certain of them have been known to run 49 round trips in 52 weeks including all canal stoppages.

The craft were run by a total crew of 7, 4 on the "Steamer" and 3 on the butty. Two men were on duty at a time on each craft, the others sleeping and changes of crew were made at definite points.

(A table of the sections of the London Birmingham route were included. Buy the book to see it!)

The crews were paid by their respective Captains - The "Steamer" Captain received £6 5s 2d per round trip, and the Butty Captain received £5 2s 6d.

†Demurrage was approximately £1 3s 4d per trip.

DUTY AND COST OF WORKING A STEAMER AND BUTTY BOAT BETWEEN
BIRMINGHAM AND CITY ROAD BASIN

	Trips accomplished	Tons carried
Steamer	30.5	890.25
Butty Boat	30.5	1403.00
Total carried		2293.00

This equates to an average of 37.59 tons carried per trip. The steamer carrying 14.59 tons and the butty 23 tons. (*Richard has proved that steamers carried more than the 12 tons of cargo usually quoted, they were gauged at 20 tons*)

(A table showing the cost of running the Fly Run is included in the book)

Mr Gordon C. Thomas, Engineer, Grand Junction Canal, carried out an experiment with a Fellows Morton and Clayton Steamer and butty boat travelling under normal conditions. The steamer was loaded with a cargo of 15 tons and the butty with 25.75 tons, a total loading of 40.75 tons, that is 3 tons in excess of the average freight. Owing to the narrow locks extending between Braunston and Birmingham the butty was detached at Braunston and followed the steamer by horse towage to Birmingham. The result of this experiment is shown in a table on the following page. From this it can be seen that the actual net time spent in steaming the 135 miles was 48 hours 1 minute, equal to a speed of 2.80 miles per hour. The time occupied in passing the 157 locks was 14 hours 54 minutes, or an average of 5.70 minutes per lock. The total duration of the journey was 62 hours 55 minutes, equal to a speed of 2.15 miles per hour.