

The North-Western Regional Canal Committee

The Manchester Ship Canal Company
Bridgewater Department,
Chester Road
MANCHESTER, 15.
25th November, 1941

Dear Mr. Marsh.

Gauging of Canal Boats and Levying of Through Tolls.

The Ministry of War Transport have asked me to obtain the views of the Canal Members of our Committee on the above matters.

It appears there is non-uniformity in the gauging of canal boats on different navigations, and Canals, and Traders are sometimes in dispute as to the correct weight. So far as the Bridgewater and Leeds and Liverpool Canals are concerned, it is the present custom for the carriers to issue a declaration which is accepted subject to occasional check of the boats draught. It has been suggested that the gauge of the Canal from which the boat starts should be the gauge for the throughout journey.

Similarly, it has also been proposed that the initiating Canal should issue a weigh-bill, and charge the toll through to destination, the adjustment of the Through Tolls being settled between the Canal Undertakings on a monthly or three monthly basis.

I shall be pleased to have your opinion on these suggestions at your early convenience.

Yours faithfully,

Norman Bird, Liaison Officer and secretary

To C.M.Marsh,Esq.

December 1st 1941

Norman N. Bird Esq

Secretary, North Western Regional Canal Committee,
Chester Road, Manchester 15.

Dear Sir,

Gauging of Canal Boats and Levying of Through Tolls

I have your letter of November 25th and after having given the matters raised therein careful consideration my comments are:-

GAUGING. This is not found to be a reliable method for assessing the weight of materials in a narrow-boat. On the Weaver Navigation gauge readings are only taken at Saltersford Check Office or at Anderton Lift, in cases where there is any special doubt as to the correctness of the weighed or declared tonnage. Materials loaded to boats at Weston Point Docks for passage inland are weighed while loading and in the case of boats loaded at trader's wharf, the trader supplies the steerer with a manifest declaring the weight loaded, and tolls are based on this declared weight. This appears to conform with the practice of the Bridgewater and Leeds & Liverpool Canals.

It must be remembered that gauging of boats can only be satisfactory if the gauge plates are periodically checked by weighing-in, in order to provide for variations in the set of the boat itself. And further, that when a boat's plates are fixed, they are only correct for operation in water of the same density. A boat with plates correctly set for loading 24 tons in fresh water would require about 24 tons 12 cwts loading into her to obtain the same plate readings in salt water. And vice versa, a boat whose plates had been set in fresh waters if loaded to 24 tons in salt water (say at Weston Point or Runcorn Locks) would gauge about 12 cwt light when checked on fresh water, e.g., on the Trent and Mersey Canal.

In view of the above, my recommendations on the suggestion outlined at the end of your second paragraph are:-

(I) that gauge plates should be checked by weighing in fresh water at intervals not exceeding 2 years.

(ii) That certificate of check be given to steerer and carried on boat.

(iii) That, if a boat starts a journey in tidal waters, the gauge readings to be adopted for the throughout Journey shall be taken only when she enters on non-tidal waters.

THROUGH TOLLS. The system operating on the Weaver Navigation for many years has been to hand to the steerer, in return for the trader's manifest, a Certificate on the attached form for the information of subsequent Navigations.

The proposal outlined in your letter goes beyond this and recommends that the toll for the whole journey be determined by and paid to the proprietor of the originating Navigation and that the appropriate amounts be later paid over by the originating Navigation to the other undertakings over which the boat passes.

In some cases there are alternative routes to a destination and although the owner or steerer might declare the route which he proposes to follow, he might either through choice or owing to temporary obstruction adopt an alternative route involving different tolls from those included by the originating navigation. This difficulty would not occur regularly but provision should be made for it.

The principal difficulty at present about the proposal is that there is no definite basis on which 'Through Tolls' are calculated. 'Through Toll' agreements were made in 1894 and 1896 covering certain journeys by certain canals on the N/W to Midland route, but the rates provided therein have been subsequently modified by the later Acts of the various Navigations concerned. The percentage increases authorised are not identical and are not known in all cases.

In addition, while some of the parties to the old Agreements have charged Through Tolls on the basis of the Agreement figures, increased by later authorised maxima, others have granted exceptional "Through Toll" figures below the maxima to encourage the traffic to pass.

A complete list of tolls charged will have to be prepared and interchanged among the various authorities and the Canals who are not parties to the old agreements will have to be brought into line.

The proposals will undoubtedly benefit carriers and should enable through traffic quotations to be submitted without the present inevitable delay, caused by the Carrier having to enquire from many navigations the rates applicable.

I recommend that the proposal be fully investigated, and am prepared to co-operate.

Yours faithfully,

C.M.Marsh

Engineer and Manager

Weaver Navigation Trustees