
THE BOROUGH COUNCILS OF
NEWCASTLE - UNDER - LYME AND STAFFORD
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

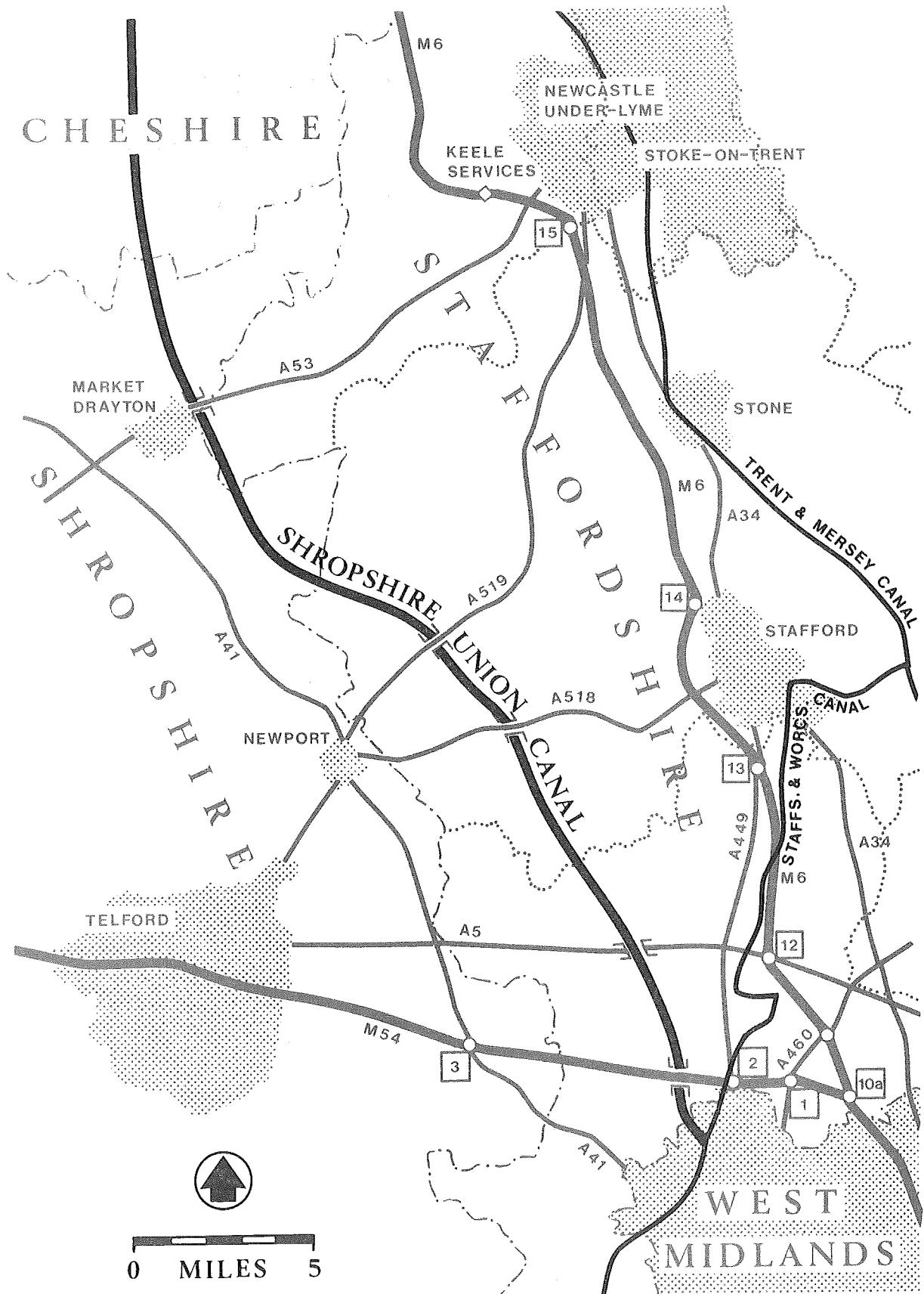
Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area



18th September 1984

The Shropshire Union Canal

Location plan



Plan based upon the Ordnance Survey Maps, Crown Copyright Reserved.

Shropshire Union Canal

Conservation Area

Reasons for designation

A conservation area is defined by S277 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 as an area "of architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Conservation areas are of many kinds and may vary from historic town and village centres to stately homes and their parklands, or sites of industrial archaeological interest.

The Shropshire Union Canal is considered to be of considerable industrial archaeological significance as the last of the major trunk waterways to be built in the Canal Era of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It differed from earlier narrowboat canals in taking the most direct line to its destination rather than following the contours of the landscape.

The canal is notable for many pioneering feats of civil engineering: deep rock-cuttings, high embankments, and aqueducts needed to achieve this alignment. These form a pronounced man-made topographical feature in western Staffordshire and their visual and historical contribution to the landscape is worthy of the special protection afforded by conservation area status. The canal, too, retains in the County a considerable number of original bridges, other canalside buildings and features of historic interest worthy of retention and preservation.

The meaning of designation

Designation of a conservation area draws public attention to its architectural and historic interest and emphasises the need for any new development, either within or adjoining the area, to be sympathetic to its character. Local authorities have certain additional powers of control in conservation areas : listed building consent is required for the demolition of most buildings and structures, and written consent is needed for the felling and lopping of all trees above a certain size.

Most of the land in the Shropshire Union Canal Conservation Area is owned by the British Waterways Board. As a statutory undertaker the Board has wide powers of permitted development which exempt it from many aspects of planning control. The Board is, however, recognised to be a responsible land owner, keenly sympathetic to the waterways heritage. Its Waterways Environment Handbook is a model guide to the sensitive treatment of an historic environment.

Nonetheless, land in other ownerships is included both in the Conservation Area and immediately abutting it throughout its length. The purpose of designation is to reinforce the work of the British Waterways Board in protecting the canal and its setting from unsympathetic pressures for change, while allowing it to adapt to meet modern amenity and recreational needs.

Future Action

Designation of a conservation area delineates the architectural or historic interest of an area. This is only a first stage which will be followed up by proposals from both local interests and the local authorities for the preservation and enhancement of the area. Discussions will be held with the British Waterways Board over such matters as towpath clearance, tree felling and planting and the repair and maintenance of canalside buildings and features. Local people, amenity groups, canal users, parish councils and others are invited to come forward with suggestions for schemes which might be carried out for the benefit of the canal and its setting.

Policies for the control of development within or alongside the Conservation Area have been, or will be, set out in the Local Plans prepared by the relevant District Councils. In accordance with previous practice special working arrangements will be established with the British Waterways Board for consultation over development within their permitted development rights.

Shropshire Union Canal - Conservation Area

The Shropshire Union main line canal, originally known as the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction, was built between the years 1827-35 and marked the end of major canal development in Britain. It was also the last major work to be undertaken by its originator and engineer - Thomas Telford.

Linking the Midlands by a direct route to Ellesmere Port on the Mersey it was an attempt by Telford to show that an improved canal could compete with a railway. With the emphasis on speed of conveyance a route was chosen which could allow goods to travel from Birmingham to Liverpool in 45 hours. The trade for which it was constructed comprised of iron (accounting for 36% of the total volume carried in 1836), general merchandise (32.5%), coal and coke (13%), building materials (6%), lime and limestone (12%), road materials, manure etc. (0.5%). In later years under strong railway competition the canal managed to hold some of this trade, primarily iron and coal from Wolverhampton to Liverpool, and established some new trade in the products of the Staffordshire pottery industry, though not enough to substantiate Telford's earlier claims of canal superiority.

Construction of the canal was fraught with difficulties: costs of purchasing the land rose dramatically during the project, obstructive landlords who refused to allow the canal through their land necessitated expensive deviations from the intended route at Shelmore in Staffordshire and Nantwich in Cheshire, and repeated slippages of embankments and cuttings at one stage threatened abandonment. But work continued and on the 2nd March 1835 the first boat navigated the 39 miles from Autherley Junction on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal to the Nantwich basin on the Chester canal.

Throughout the next ten years competition with the railways ensured close working of the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction with neighbouring canals particularly with the Ellesmere and Chester Company. In 1845, the year of 'railway mania' the two companies merged and one year later combined with the Shrewsbury and Montgomery Canals to form the Shropshire Union Railways and Canal Co. The object of the new company was to convert the canal lines to railways but the proposal never seriously materialised thanks largely to the involvement of the London and North Western Railway Co. (L.N.W.R.) who, seeing the Canal Co. as a potential dangerous rival, leased the canals in perpetuity from the Shropshire Union in 1847. The L.N.W.R. were happy to see the main line canal continue to operate and draw trade away from its arch rival the Great Western Railway Co. through whose territory it ran.

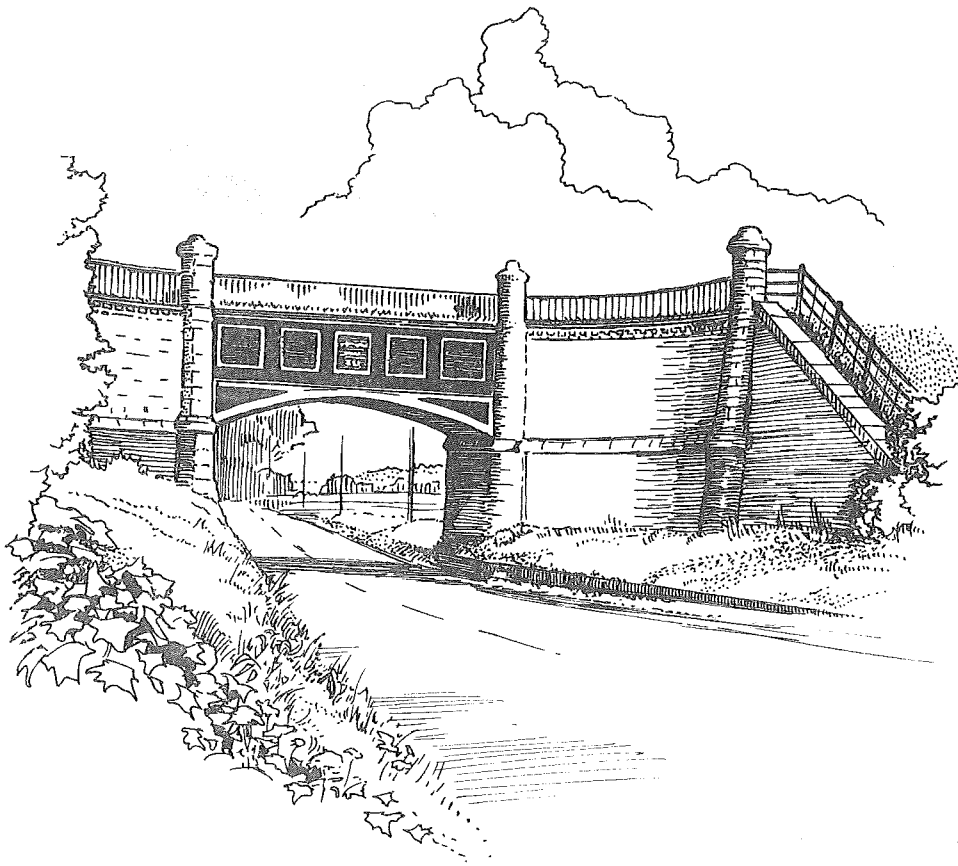
The canal continued to work profitably throughout the 19th century and up to the 1914-18 war but from then on went into rapid decline. In 1922 it was, together with the rest of the Shropshire Union network, bought out entirely by the L.N.W.R. The canal remained open despite continual decline and an Act passed in 1944 to close it. Nationalised in 1947 it continued to carry commercial traffic up to the late 60's. Since then, however, the canal has grown in popularity as a pleasure cruising waterway. In 1968 it was declared a 'Cruising Waterway' which assures its maintenance by the British Waterways Board to standards prescribed in the 1968 Transport Act.

Physical Features

The Shropshire Union Canal in Staffordshire extends for some 28 miles from the boundary with Wolverhampton M.B.C. in the south to the boundary with Shropshire just south of Market Drayton in the north.

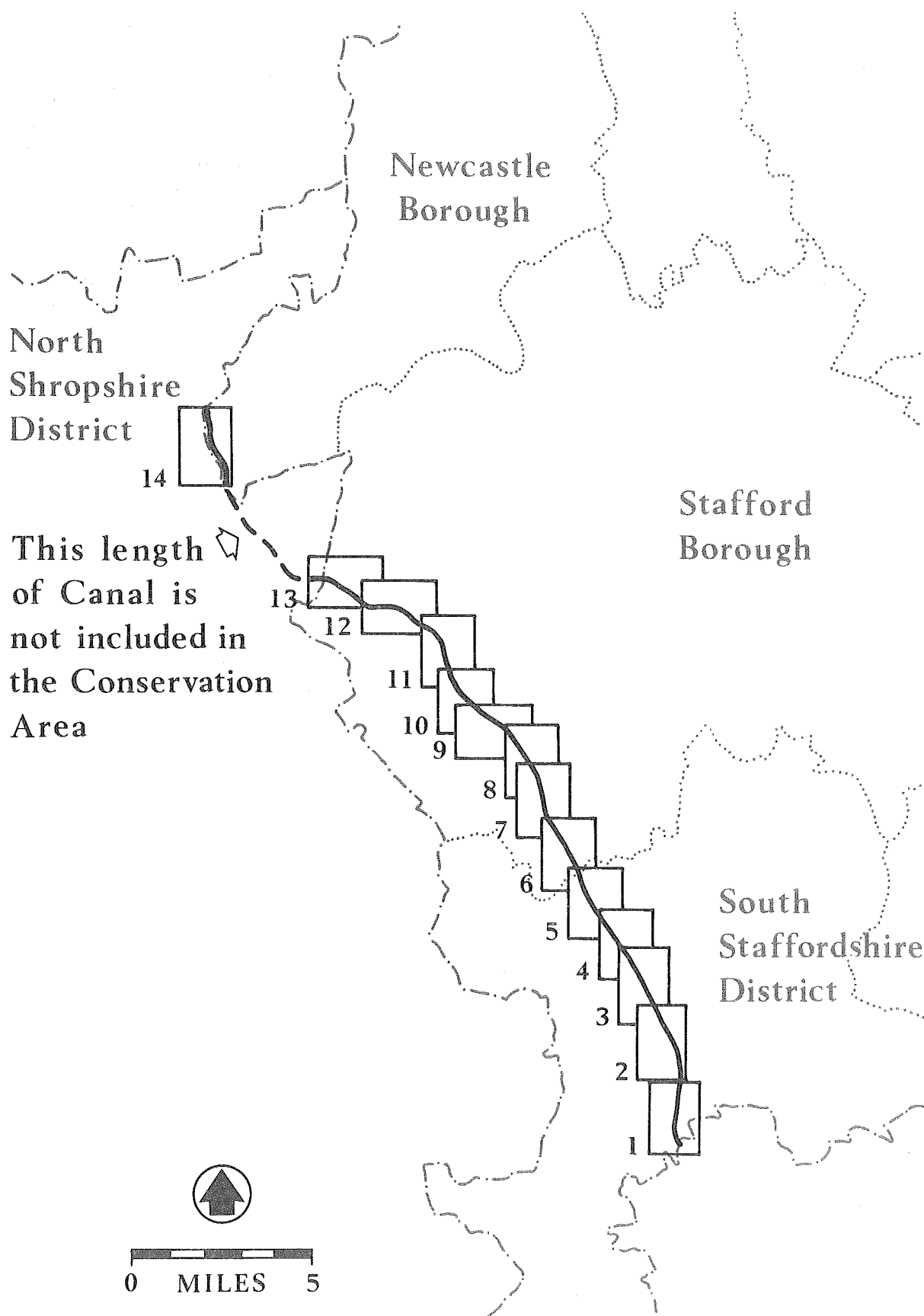
In contrast to the earlier generation of canals which followed the contours of the landscape for cheapness and ease of construction, the Shropshire Union, as a "modern canal", considered speed of conveyance paramount and thus pursued a course as straight as possible. This was achieved at the expense of costly embankments and cuttings constructed to maintain the level using the then new techniques of 'cut and fill'. (The name deriving from the use of spoil from cuttings to make embankments.)

Of the interesting features along the canal the most common are the 46 bridges which punctuate its length within the Conservation Area. Built either of brick or stone and in the tradition of the Telford era, they display carefully engineered curves, simple robust detailing and fine proportions. Locks where they occur are grouped in convenient flights (the exception is the single lock at Wheaton Aston). All are standard narrow locks deliberately chosen to reduce water requirements and increase the speed of passage for single boats. Other notable examples of canal archaeology include the impressive aqueducts at Shebdon, Shelmore and Tyrley embankments, the handsome cast iron mile posts (nearly all of which survive), the warehouses, maintenance yards and canal cottages at wharves and locks, and the isolated and remote canalside pubs. But it is the embankments and cuttings which form the principal features of the canal: long views down straight heavily wooded cuttings to distant bridges and fine views out over the rolling rural landscape of Staffordshire and Shropshire combine to make the Shropshire Union one of the most scenic and popular cruising canals in the country.

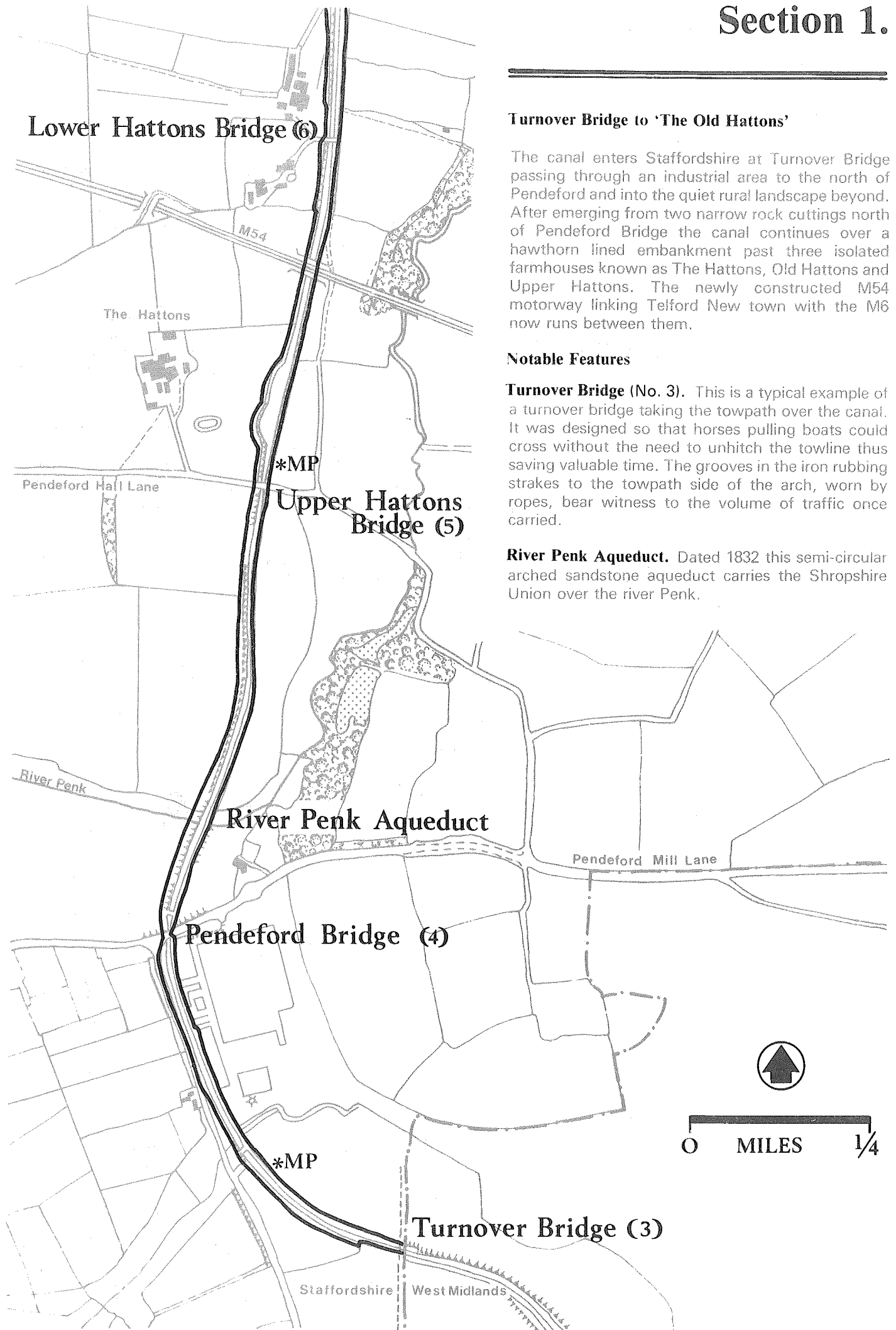


The Shropshire Union Canal in Staffordshire

Index of Sections



Section 1.



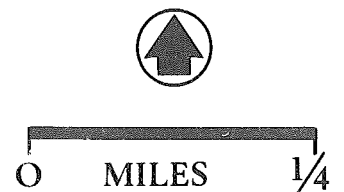
Turnover Bridge to 'The Old Hattons'

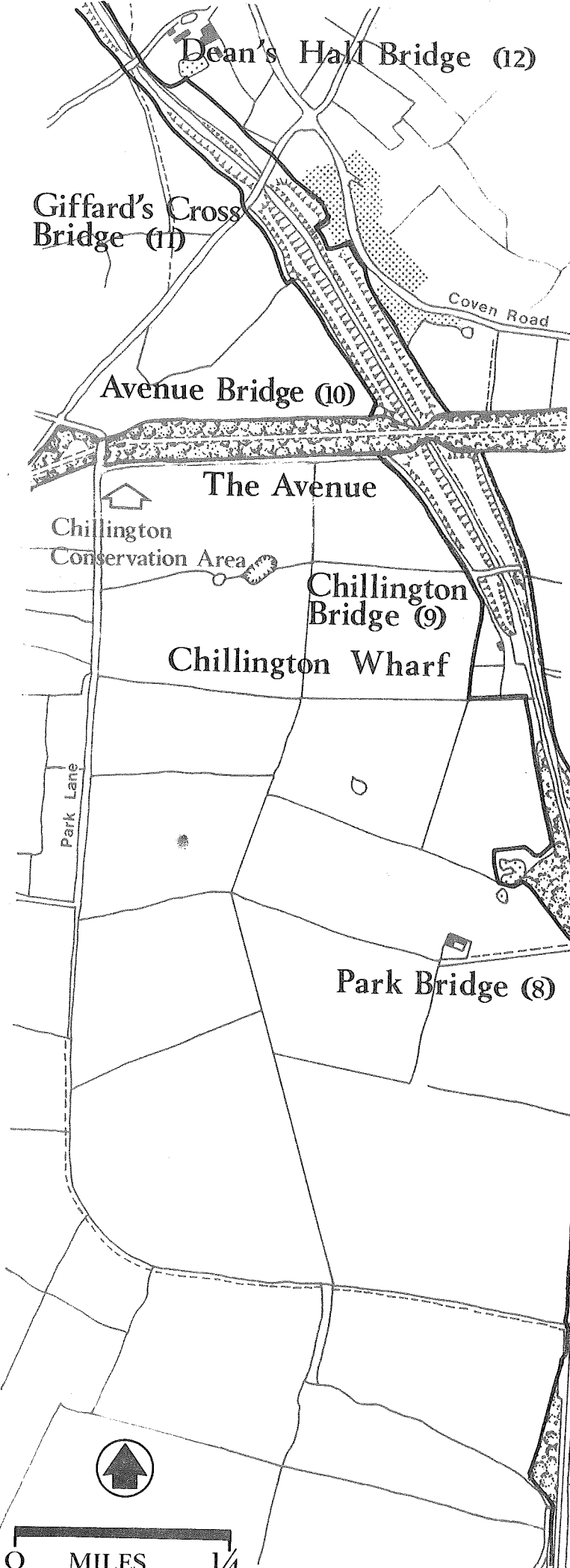
The canal enters Staffordshire at Turnover Bridge passing through an industrial area to the north of Pendeford and into the quiet rural landscape beyond. After emerging from two narrow rock cuttings north of Pendeford Bridge the canal continues over a hawthorn lined embankment past three isolated farmhouses known as The Hattons, Old Hattons and Upper Hattons. The newly constructed M54 motorway linking Telford New town with the M6 now runs between them.

Notable Features

Turnover Bridge (No. 3). This is a typical example of a turnover bridge taking the towpath over the canal. It was designed so that horses pulling boats could cross without the need to unhitch the towline thus saving valuable time. The grooves in the iron rubbing stokes to the towpath side of the arch, worn by ropes, bear witness to the volume of traffic once carried.

River Penk Aqueduct. Dated 1832 this semi-circular arched sandstone aqueduct carries the Shropshire Union over the river Penk.





The Hattons to Dean's Hall Bridge

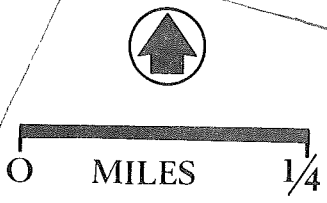
At Chillington Wharf the canal enters a long, deep heavily wooded cutting which takes the canal past 'The Avenue' belonging to Chillington Park at Avenue Bridge (No.10.) (fully described in Conservation Area document No. 35*) and on to the south-west of Brewwood village.

Notable Features

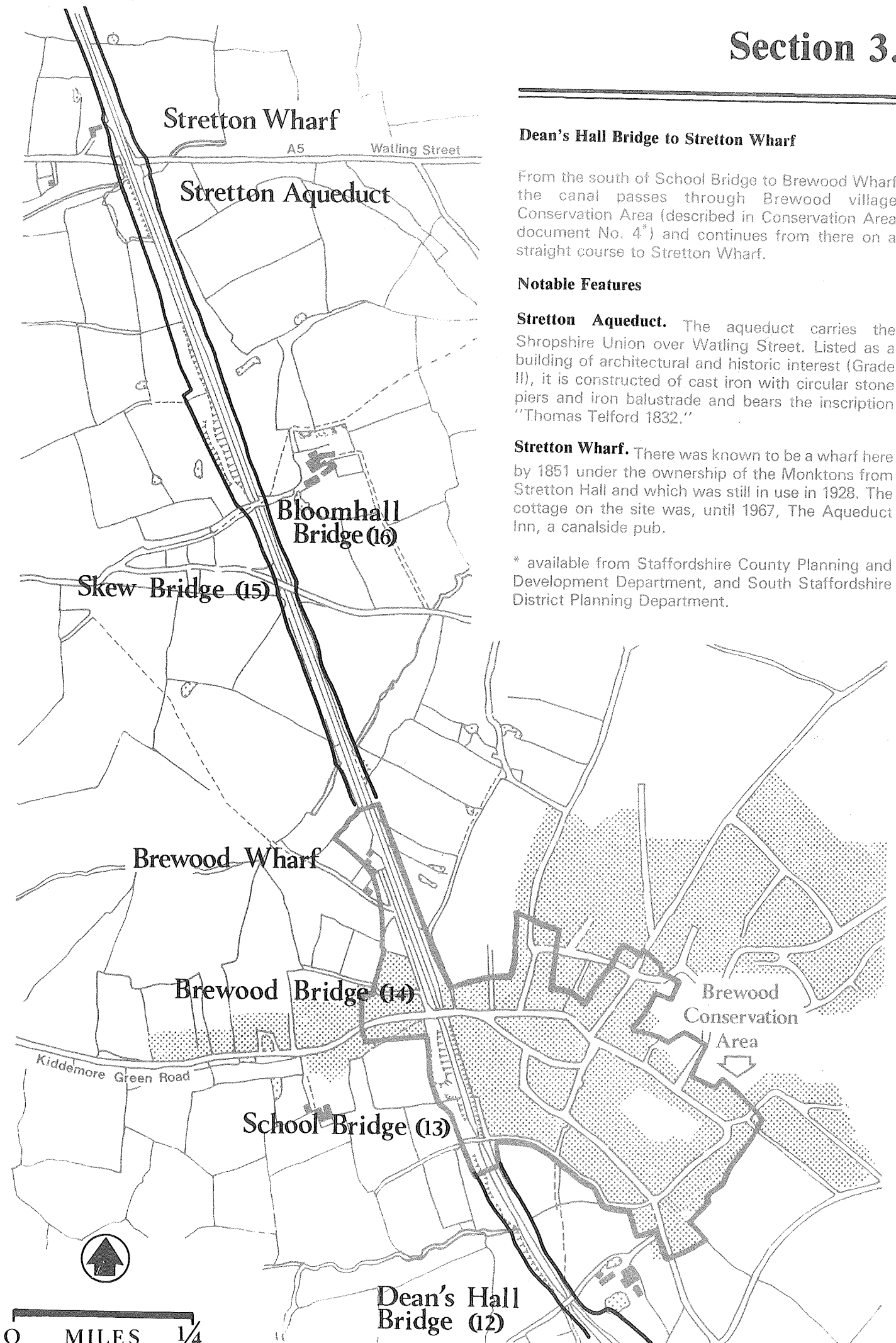
Chillington Wharf. The wharf and wharf cottage at Chillington were originally built for the use of the Giffard family at Chillington Hall. Extensive recent repair work on the cottage has resulted in the loss of its original character.

Avenue Bridge (No. 10). The ornamental balustraded bridge was built at the instruction of the local land owner, Thomas Giffard, to disguise the fact that a canal passed through his land. 'The Avenue' and the parkland to which it leads was designed by Capability Brown.

* available from Staffordshire County Planning and Development Department.



Section 3.



Dean's Hall Bridge to Stretton Wharf

From the south of School Bridge to Brewood Wharf the canal passes through Brewood village Conservation Area (described in Conservation Area document No. 4*) and continues from there on a straight course to Stretton Wharf.

Notable Features

Stretton Aqueduct. The aqueduct carries the Shropshire Union over Watling Street. Listed as a building of architectural and historic interest (Grade II), it is constructed of cast iron with circular stone piers and iron balustrade and bears the inscription "Thomas Telford 1832."

Stretton Wharf. There was known to be a wharf here by 1851 under the ownership of the Monktons from Stretton Hall and which was still in use in 1928. The cottage on the site was, until 1967, The Aqueduct Inn, a canalside pub.

* available from Staffordshire County Planning and Development Department, and South Staffordshire District Planning Department.

Section 4.

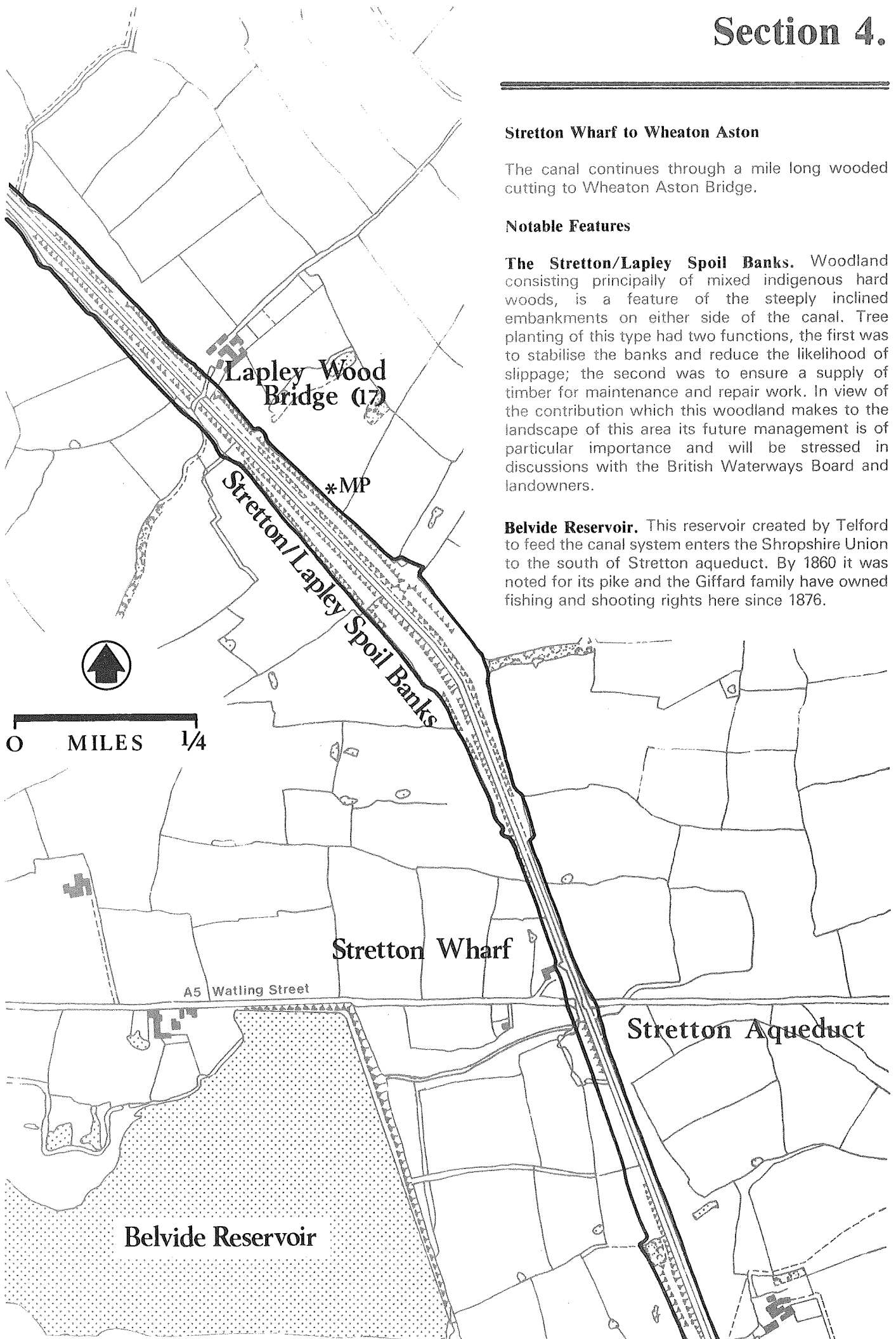
Stretton Wharf to Wheaton Aston

The canal continues through a mile long wooded cutting to Wheaton Aston Bridge.

Notable Features

The Stretton/Lapley Spoil Banks. Woodland consisting principally of mixed indigenous hard woods, is a feature of the steeply inclined embankments on either side of the canal. Tree planting of this type had two functions, the first was to stabilise the banks and reduce the likelihood of slippage; the second was to ensure a supply of timber for maintenance and repair work. In view of the contribution which this woodland makes to the landscape of this area its future management is of particular importance and will be stressed in discussions with the British Waterways Board and landowners.

Belvide Reservoir. This reservoir created by Telford to feed the canal system enters the Shropshire Union to the south of Stretton aqueduct. By 1860 it was noted for its pike and the Giffard family have owned fishing and shooting rights here since 1876.



Section 5.

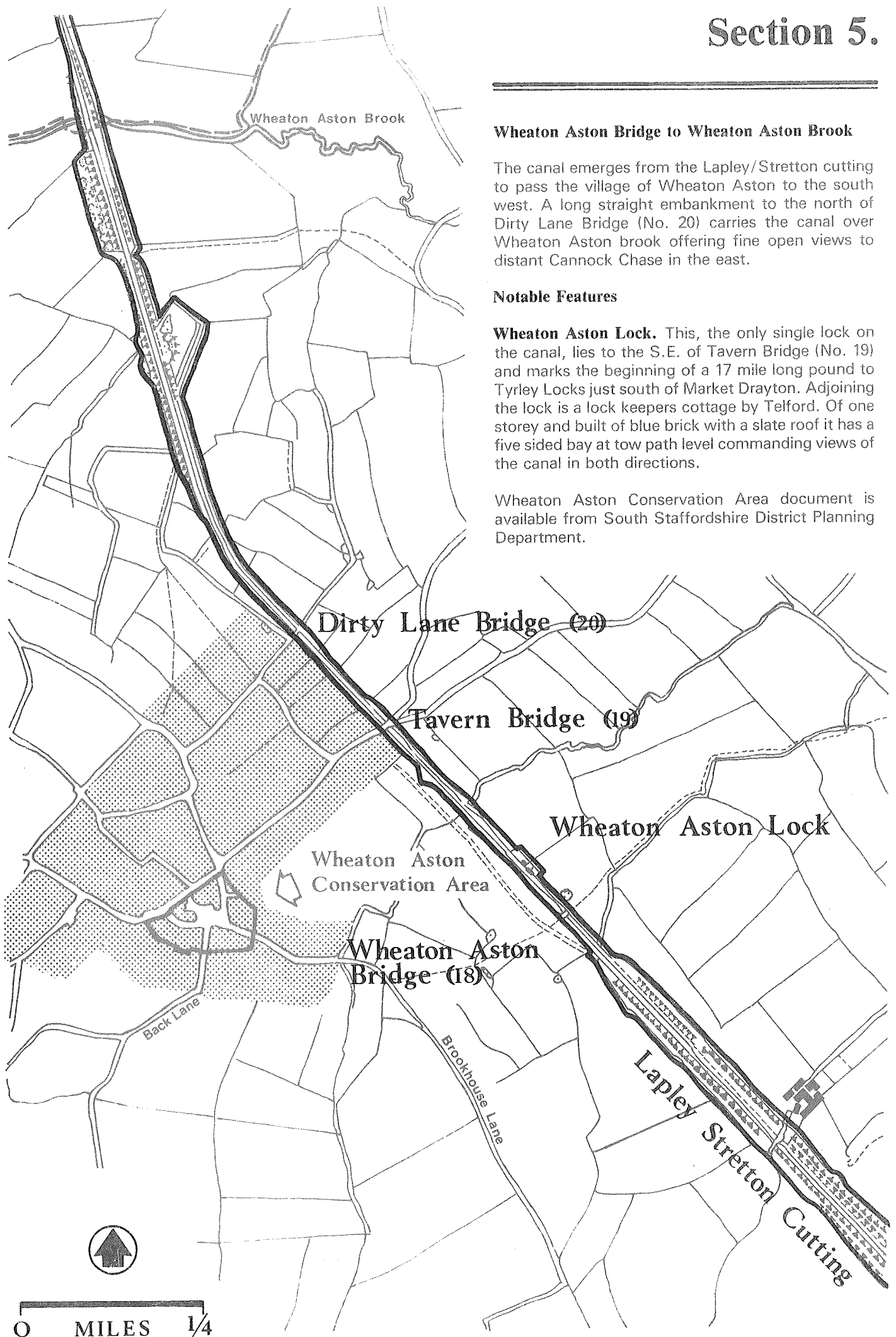
Wheaton Aston Bridge to Wheaton Aston Brook

The canal emerges from the Lapley/Stretton cutting to pass the village of Wheaton Aston to the south west. A long straight embankment to the north of Dirty Lane Bridge (No. 20) carries the canal over Wheaton Aston brook offering fine open views to distant Cannock Chase in the east.

Notable Features

Wheaton Aston Lock. This, the only single lock on the canal, lies to the S.E. of Tavern Bridge (No. 19) and marks the beginning of a 17 mile long pound to Tyrley Locks just south of Market Drayton. Adjoining the lock is a lock keepers cottage by Telford. Of one storey and built of blue brick with a slate roof it has a five sided bay at tow path level commanding views of the canal in both directions.

Wheaton Aston Conservation Area document is available from South Staffordshire District Planning Department.



Section 6.

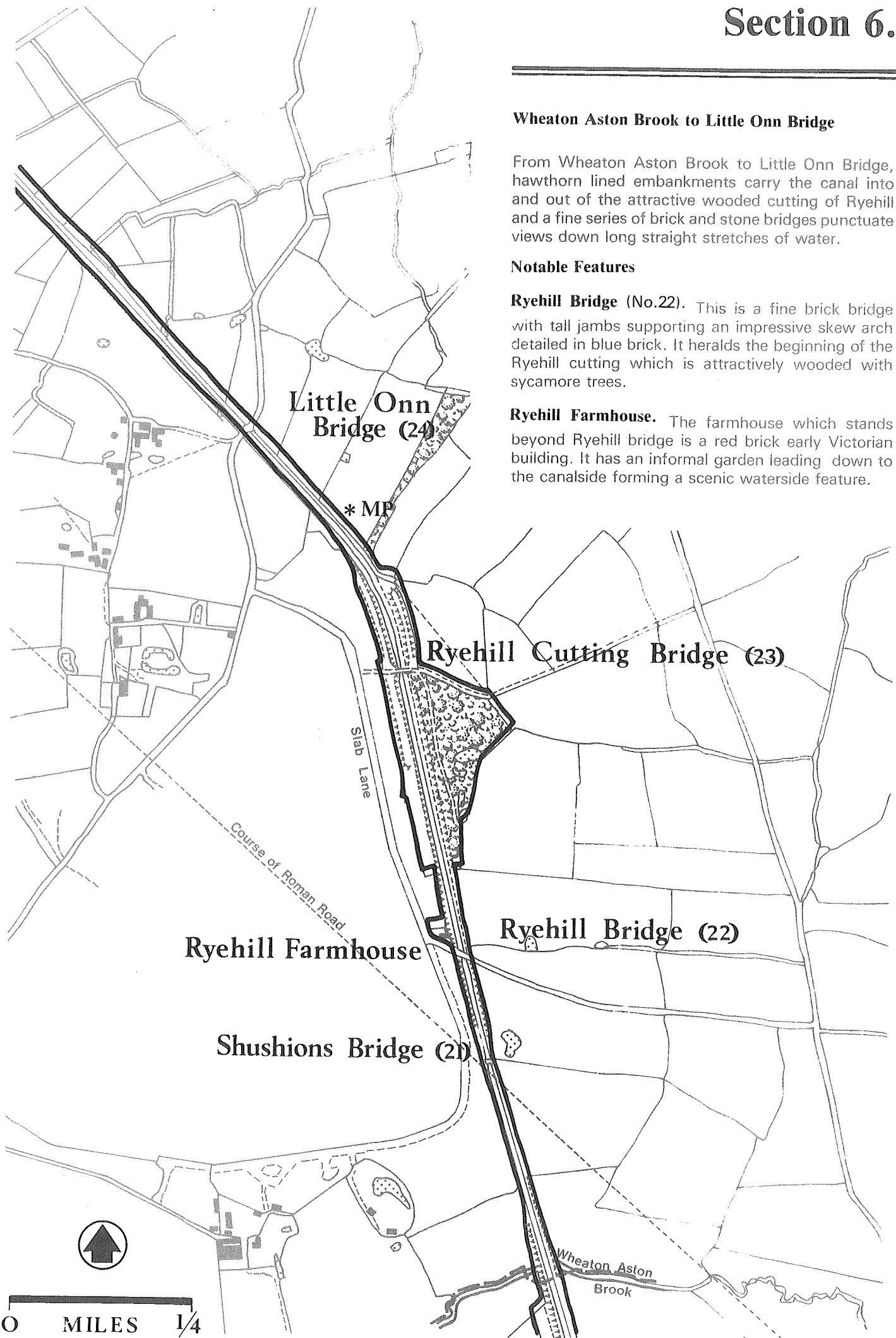
Wheaton Aston Brook to Little Onn Bridge

From Wheaton Aston Brook to Little Onn Bridge, hawthorn lined embankments carry the canal into and out of the attractive wooded cutting of Ryehill and a fine series of brick and stone bridges punctuate views down long straight stretches of water.

Notable Features

Ryehill Bridge (No.22). This is a fine brick bridge with tall jambs supporting an impressive skew arch detailed in blue brick. It heralds the beginning of the Ryehill cutting which is attractively wooded with sycamore trees.

Ryehill Farmhouse. The farmhouse which stands beyond Ryehill bridge is a red brick early Victorian building. It has an informal garden leading down to the canalside forming a scenic waterside feature.



Large scale plans showing the boundary of the designated area may be inspected at the offices of: —

Staffordshire County Council,
County Planning and Development Department.
Martin Street, Stafford. ST16 2LE.

Newcastle Borough Council,
Planning and Development Department,
Civic Offices, Merrial Street,
Newcastle, ST5 2AG.

Stafford Borough Council,
Planning Department,
Civic Offices, Riverside, Stafford. ST16 3AQ

South Staffordshire District Council,
Planning Department,
Council Offices, Codsall, Wolverhampton. WV8 1PX.

Extra copies of the document are available from these offices.