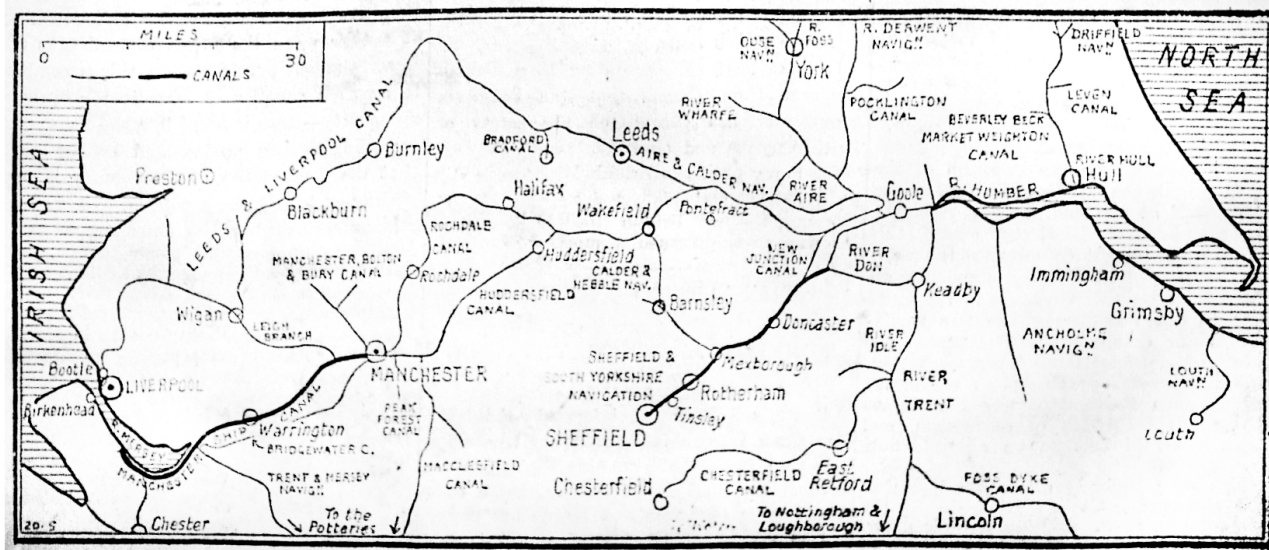


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## STEAMERS FROM SHEFFIELD TO THE SEA?

A SOUTH YORKSHIRE CANAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT.

HOW A THREE-DAY HORSE JOURNEY MAY BECOME A DAILY TUG SERVICE



Sheffield is ambitious to become a port. It is not without a waterway to the sea, but the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Canal, which connects it with the great trade funnel of the Humber Estuary, is a means of transport so inadequate according to modern standards that no town would dare to claim the status of a port on the strength of it. Going out from the centre of Sheffield the canal crosses country for about 43 miles until it joins the River Trent at Keadby. For the first 14 miles it follows the course of the River Don. This route misses Goole; a boat journeying by it would go down the Trent and, entering the Humber at Trent Falls, would proceed thence direct to Hull. Goole, which is 40 miles from Sheffield, may be reached by branching northward at a point some 24 miles from Sheffield into the New Junction Canal.

In a recent report on the condition of the canal, the standard depth of water in the Navigation was assumed to be 6½ feet, but it was expressly stated that this depth could not be depended upon throughout, particularly in the river reaches between Tinsley and Rotherham where a good deal of silt is brought down in times of flood. Many other reaches were also stated to be deficient in depth and requiring extensive dredging. The majority of the locks are only large enough for boats about 62 feet long. The ordinary boats at present trading between Sheffield and the Humber are 61½ feet long, and have a carrying capacity of about 110 tons. But when drawing 6 feet of water (which is the deepest draft that can conveniently be accommodated above Rotherham) their capacity is reduced to about 80 tons, and frequently part of the cargo has to be removed from heavily laden boats before they can proceed. This is one of the more striking facts illustrating the inadequacy of the canal. There are, too, difficulties with respect to locks, bridges, and sharp bends in the course of the canal, which need not be particularised. Clearly the system is out of date.

Nationalisation Urged.

Its inadequacy was recognised long ago, and one public-spirited business man belonging to the district strongly urged a scheme of canal improvement which attracted considerable interest but no financial backing. The Development Committee of the Sheffield Corporation—an active and alert body—have taken up the subject once more, and carried it so far as to enlist the support of other local authorities in the district served by the canal. Some time in the course of the next few weeks a deputation representing these public bodies will go to the Ministry of Transport to urge that “the time is now opportune for the transfer of the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation from the company to the Government or to some politic authority.”

The Development Committee have put on record their opinion that the cost of the improvement of the canal "should be borne wholly by the Government, and that the Navigation should be nationalised," but they are "willing to consider favourably the question of making some financial contribution towards the cost, provided the execution of the work is not delayed, and that the canal is brought under public control and freed from all control or interference by any railway company." The Rotherham Town Council and the Mexborough Urban District Council have expressed precisely similar views.

The Sheffield Development Committee will have a definite engineering scheme to lay before the Ministry of Transport. In February, 1919, they commissioned Sir John Wolfe-Barry, Lyster, and Partners to inspect the Navigation, and report upon its condition. Out of several proposals submitted by the consultants they have chosen a scheme for widening and deepening the canal, and carrying out certain other structural alterations, so that the type of boat at present in use can come in all the way to Sheffield carrying its full load of 110 tons and drawing up to seven feet of water. On the reconstituted canal these boats would come and go in trains of three or four drawn by a tug. At present all boats on the canal are drawn by horses, and whereas the journey to Goole now occupies two or three days, under the scheme in view the distance could be covered in a day, and a daily service would be possible.

Seagoing Vessels in the Future.

A new basin, with warehouses and loading appliances, would be constructed near Tinsley station, which is in the city area of Sheffield, but two or three miles from the centre. It is claimed, however, that from this point goods to and from the eastern part of the city could be collected and distributed as easily as at the Sheffield basin.

The cost of the scheme is put at nearly a million and a half, but the estimate was made twelve months ago., and the figures must therefore be accepted with reserve. It is believed that the whole of the engineering work could be done without stopping traffic on the canal, and its main features are designed with the idea in view of some day equipping and adapting the Navigation for the passage of sea-going vessels of 300 tons right up to Tinsley basin.

It is therefore at Tinsley basin that the history of Sheffield as a port may begin. The canal passes through the rich coalfield of South Yorkshire and through districts capable of great industrial development. This fact will be strongly urged upon the Government if the projected deputation is received by the Ministry of Transport.