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The narrow boat Kingfisher coming through Thurlwood upper lock during yesterday's opening ceremony

FAITH IN FUTURE OF BRITAIN'S INLAND WATERWAYS

First new canal section for 56 years

By our Industrial Staff

The first new section of canal to be cut in this country in at least fifty years was opened officially yesterday by Lord Rusholme, a member of the British Transport Commission and chairman of the waterways sub-committee. It is a 1,750-foot diversion on the Trent and Mersey Canal near Marston, in Cheshire. The work was completed in nine months (bad weather added four months to the original programme) for a total cost of £30,000.

Earlier Lord Rusholme declared open a new Thurlwood upper lock, a short distance away. The total cost of work on the lock was £61,000. Both jobs were planned to bring under control the threat to the canal from increasingly extensive subsidences from past salt-pumping operations.

The decision to undertake the work was made in the face of some discouraging statistics. Some 60,000 tons of traffic between the Mersey, ports, Manchester, and the Potteries and the Midlands passes annually along the canal at an estimated annual working loss of £30,000. The principal loads are of coal, china clay, and salt, though the salt trade has fallen to only a bare fraction of the volume of 60 years ago. Road and rail freight have taken the balance away from the canal.

Subsidence guard

At the same time British Waterways have a determined optimism about the future. "So many people think—wrongly in our view—that canals belong to the picturesque past that we can take some pride in having shown you to-day that so far from being a lost art, waterways engineering is in fact an exact and exacting science offering ample scope for new techniques and ingenuities", said Lord Rusholme at a luncheon after the opening ceremonies. Lord Rusholme also took the opportunity to note that more people were looking to a trip on the canals for "beautiful holidays".

He recalled that £5,500,000 was being spent on a development programme on the British Transport Commission's commercial waterways, and that nearly £400,000 of that was being spent in the

North-western division. He added: " We are doing this work because we believe that if an waterway carries worthwhile traffic, it can reasonably and readily be developed to do so, the expenditure is justified.

The Thurlwood upper lock is in fact a steel tank, with an overall length of 106ft, an overall width of 18ft, and a depth of 18ft, prefabricated at the contractors' works in Glasgow and delivered in sections by road. Where the traditional type of lock could be breached at any point by subsidence, the tank can move only as a unit, and arrangements have been made so that it can be jacked back into a straight and level position following subsidence. In designing the new cut the engineers also made special allowance for possible subsidence in the future.

Yesterday's ceremonies were carried through in mildly seafaring fashion. As Lord Rusholme stood by with the key to the lock, the general manager of British Waterways, Major-General Sir Reginald Kerr, and his wife, eased their trim inspection craft Kingfisher into the lock. Sir Reginald is currently making a tour of the canals in the Midlands and North-west. Within minutes the Kingfisher had risen gently to the upper level, and as she headed out again into the canal Sir Reginald brought his hand up to his peaked hat in salute.

The opening of the new cut was more traditional. The visiting party boarded two motor-vessels, the Waterwitch and the Water Lapwing, at Marston and moved off towards the diversion. Across the canal a wide white ribbon fluttered. By a short head, the Waterwitch, with Lord Rusholme standing in the prow, reached the ribbon first. He leaned forward, cut the tape, and the canal was open.