

SALT, RIVER & CANAL

The Salt Union records show

that early on in the war, the situation of labour was already causing disruption to the industry. The union sent representatives to the reserved occupations committee in London to discuss the provisions in the list of certified occupations respecting trade with a view to the release of more men for the army.

The companies had to furnish information to the committee with regard to the present number of men of military age and fitness in the trade.

The list of reserved occupations was a movable thing and regular updates were issued as the balance of men required for war and British Industry needs was in constant flux.

In 1917 the lists included:

- Captain of Barge and 1st mate
- Chemists
- China and earthenware manufacturers
- Condensed milk factories
- Wharves
- Transport contractors
- Smiths and ironworkers
- Boat Builder's etc.

On the 3rd list produced, salters are added, fisheries trade and carters. Reserved occupations for the Salt Union were for:

- Salt Firemen
- Waller's
- Lump men
- Lofter
- Waterways at Docks, wharves or Captains.

DEFENCE OF THE REALM REGULATIONS. Regulation No. 41a. List of Male Employees between the ages of 18 and 41. (See Instructions overleaf.)									
Name and Address of Employer.		Name and Address of Employee.		Age	Date of engagement by present employer	Employed as a	If in possession of an exemption certificate, insert here.		
Name and Initials	Present Address (If registered under the National Registration Act at that address insert (R) in Column 2a)	Name and Initials	Present Address (If registered under the National Registration Act at that address insert (R) in Column 2a)	Age	Date of engagement by present employer	Employed as a	If in possession of an exemption certificate, insert here.		
32. Thompson S.	15 North Beach Road	R. M.	-	21		Carpenter	Book 3, 24		
34. Lynch J.	33	R. M.	-	23		Captain	- 25. 3		
35. Jeffrey B.	30 Broad Lane	"	"	25		58	- 21. 69		
36. Herbert John	2 Hay Alley	R. M.	-	25		38	- 41. 69		
37. Jones	16 Broad Lane	"	"	20		Carpenter	- 45. 17		
38. Archer John	20 Paradise St. Leicester	R. M.	-	41		Waller	- 46. 47		
39. Brown D.	22 North St. Leicester	R. M.	-	35		By Appointment	- 41. 119		
40. Gough J. H.	14 Seabank, Macclesfield	R. M.	-	23		Art. Gaffer	St. Charles		
41. Gough J. H.	1 Hay Alley	R. M.	-	39		Art. Gaffer	St. Charles		
42. Higgins E.	Seabank Rd.	R. M.	-	23		Engineer	St. Charles		
43. Turner J. H.	19 North St. Leicester	R. M.	-	29		Blacksmith			
44. Gough J. H.	13 Seabank, Macclesfield	R. M.	-	28		Captain of Police			
45. Gough J. H.	14 Seabank, Macclesfield	R. M.	-	30		Engineer			
46. Gough J. H.	22 Seabank, Macclesfield	R. M.	-	23		Waller			
47. Taylor R. H.	Seabank, Macclesfield	R.	-	5. 20		Cart. Art.			
48. Gough J. H.	North Lane	R.	-	5. 21					

Seddon's employee list for the National Registration Act

Volunteer recruiting by 1915 was dwindling and the government needed to raise more recruits. On 15th July 1915 the National Registration Act came into force. All men between 15 and 65 had to register from each trade. In all around 5 million men were of military age and not in the forces.

It wasn't just fighting men the Government were looking at but the roles crucial to keep Britain going which meant a way of 'starring' men who held protected, high or scarce skills. Lists of 'starred' occupations and revisions were constant and local tribunals were held to hear individual cases.

In 1915 Lord Derby was appointed Director-General of recruiting, he brought forward the idea of the Group Scheme, or 'Derby' Scheme. This applied to men 18 to 40 who could enlist or attest. Men who attested under the scheme, who were accepted for service and chose to defer was classed as Class A, those who went into immediate service were Class B. Class A were paid a day's army pay and given a grey armband with a red crown as a sign they had volunteered, they were officially transferred to section B Army reserve. These men were sent back to their jobs until they were called up. Each man depending on age was given a group number. Industry also had its own group numbers and depending on the man's work could appeal for a later call up and refer to local tribunals.

THE IMPACT ON INDUSTRY...

is not to be understated, the Great War proved critical in the long term future of British Industry. Reports in the local press illustrate the fortunes of local companies and their impact on one another. In February the 1915 annual report of salt shipments from various UK ports reached 38,946 tons an increase generally of exports. Improvements are due to increase sales in Asia, Sweden and Norway. The ports which enjoyed better trade were Liverpool, Runcorn and Weston Point. However, due to the drop by coastal shipments this meant that overall for January and February the salt exports were over 19,000 tons below that of last year.

The Salt Union looks at 'The Menace ahead'

reporting that the industry has suffered under the breakdown of the credit system and then hit by the withdrawal of labour. The Salt Unions Roll of Hour alone was 420 men but the salt industry had to meet the dislocation of both the internal transport and export shipment of goods, 'a condition of things unprecedented'

A favourable balance sheet for the industry was recorded but a 'cloudy' future remained. 'The scarcity and dearness of freights had seriously crippled their salt exports and this has severely hit the fishery trade, while the chemical trade had also shown a slight decline, in terms of shipping. Because of the conditions generally they have delivered more salt than the year before. The imports of foreign solar salt had again increased. "For that they had to thank the strikes in Transport and Coal".'

The Salt Union had not only lost Labour, but also faced demands for higher wages, which in turn impacts on everyone. There's a dilemma over pricing of salt when so many commodities such as coal was dearer. The Salt Union had tried to secure more favourable shipment costs to bring down the price of salt for the home trade.

Female labour has come to stay!

Shortage of at least 50,000 staff in the railways alone! Newspaper reports detail the discussions of using female labour which at the outbreak of war were deemed unjust. But as war progressed, the problem of labour and where it was to come from grew; the Munitions of war act 1915 – came into effect creating new employment and the age of regular female labour within male dominated workplaces.

The salt works were bound by the group system and the list of starred occupations. This list did not always consider how various businesses worked. This is illustrated by complaints from Seddon's at Middlewich that certain jobs and war work required salt, such as food preservation, cheese and butter production, chemical weaponry, textile dyes etc. but failed to protect the workers who produce the salt and thereby did not understand the industry. A salt works labourer would not be protected but a lump-man would. This left a number of problems for salt and chemical manufacturing as a whole.

Everything was strictly controlled regarding movement of goods. Permissions had to be sought to buy and sell boats and a Canal control committee existed. The Weaver Navigation came under the Canal Control Committee – board of trade. Certain restrictions came into force on the waterways; they too were under critical gaze during the war as being important to the army as well as the trades using the system. No sale of barges 'without the consent of the canal control committee' this applied to any craft on the River or Canal.

A general letter was sent out to everyone using the Weaver Navigation, "I am directed to ask you to be good enough to notify this committee when any boats are being offered for sale on your canal"

Because horses were used in WWI, there were calls for owners and farmers to release as many horses as they could for war work, shires were too big but the working horses were ideal and a life line for troops aboard. Hay was one of the commodities to be commandeered. At this time horses were needed in a lot of trades including canal transport and continued to be so, largely, through to WW2. Local trade's people were faced with not getting enough food supply to the many horses still working in Britain. In Cheshire there was a hay crisis, the county was so short that we were getting supplies from other counties. An application exists from Seddon's to Capt. W J Leeming for 'Hay for the men who usually supply our boatmen and many others with fodder for their horses'.

The income on the River Weaver in 1915 was printed in the local paper; tolls on the Navigation were £800 less owing to decreased shipments of 43,000 tons in white salt and 5,000 tons in rock salt. (Winsford Salt Mine not in operation during WWI, rock salt came from Northwich). Other losses of trade were in pottery and sundries, but a rise in Chemicals of 50,000 tons. Docks and ports have 'starred' men but are still hit with reduction of labour to operate at full capacity.

Repair and maintenance costs higher, £272 for contributions to dependants of Weaver employees during the war, this expenditure following out the trustees decision not only to keep the places of the men who enlisted open for them after the war, but to also pay half wages to the dependants of married men while away at varying amounts, according to circumstance to the dependants of single men.

264 men in the Weaver employ, prior to the outbreak of war, 50 had enlisted up to the end of the last month, while over 40 had gone to munitions works of various kinds. Of the 45 who are of military age out of the remaining 170, 19 cannot be spared and must be retained as indispensable to the carrying on of the Navigation. 26 are being encouraged to enlist under Lord Derby's scheme, on the understanding as in previous cases that their place will be kept open for them. Two of the employees have lost their lives so far, Alfred Harrison, a River Banksman and Leonard Walkden. On the Navigation Committee at this time included Mr Falk, Salt Proprietor, Sir Joseph Verdin, Salt proprietor and Mr Roscoe Brunner of Brunner Mond. There are shortages everywhere, affected labour, and higher cost of living resulting in a demand for increased pay. Employees on the Navigation will get a 3s increase. There's an impact on traffic, shipments of salt for seven months being 53,000 tons less, a steady decline. What was picking up is the necessity of chemical shipments, which increased a further 34,000 tons over that of 50,000 tons the year before.

So many vessels having been taken by the Government meant a loss of the fishery trade; this would have affected many of the Open Pan Salt Works. Although brine pumped from Middlewich wasn't generally shipped to ports, but directly to chemical works and the textile industry. This protected companies like Brunner Mond, who had fantastic profits as a result, Electro Bleach Co. and Murgatroyd's.

Seddon's Open Pan Works was either missing out on orders altogether or struggling to make enough to fulfil orders simply because of fuel and man power. The Seddon's family clearly holding anyway they could to try and get orders out. Arrangements at the differing Salt Companies were key to survival.

A request for Badges is made by Seddon's for their boatmen, it's not required by law but some watermen were wearing them, this is due to the 'white feather' situation, with women being encouraged to shame men they thought weren't doing their bit as a further calling went out for all males between the ages of 18 & 41.

The salt labour shortage also translated to the waterways and companies such as Seddon's which owned 11 canal boats and 2 barges were in danger of boats being permanently moored. The struggle is shown through Seddon's ability to secure 6 men working the boats: Enoch, Thomas and John Appleton, Ben Taylor, Arthur Johnson and J Scragg as Captains and mates.

"We have the greatest difficulty in securing sufficient boats for the carrying of our goods" exclaims Roland Seddon

By 1917, half of the salt boats were moored and these were reported to the Canal Control Committee in December 1917 they sent a letter, "I am informed that you have 9 Narrowboats idle for want of crews. I desire to enquire whether any or all of these boats are for sale?"

Canal control committee (Board of Trade) were notified in 1918 'that boatmen under 25 years of age Class A, will not be released for work on the canals' With this in mind Seddon's decided that 4 boats would be sold, originally at £120 each 'we offer them at this price so that they may be of some use to the country, and they are certainly doing no good lying idle here'

In Jan 1918 Seddon's make an application for "the return of several of our men from the army, and in the event may require all their remaining boats". Seddon's eventually sold four boats in January 1918 via this committee to the Hayes Cocoa Company Ltd. Nellie, stag, forward, otter for £450.

- 'Forward' built by Wm. Nurser & Sons, Braunston, sold with no cloths, built in 1895
- 'Nellie' built by WE Costin, Berkhapstead, with side and top cloths built in May 1901
- 'Stag' built by W E Costin, Berkhapstead, with side and top cloths built in 1902
- 'Otter' built by W E Costin, Berkhapstead, with side and top cloths built in 1902



Roland Seddon

Seddon's had employed two brothers and their wives before the war A C Johnson and J T Johnson. The firm had successfully re-employed AC Johnson but were faced by a previously unseen obstacle. Although Mr Johnson was back working as a boatman he was still in the army, part of the Transport Workers Battalion, and as such could not work with his wife on what is now an army requisition.

The decision certainly surprised Roland Seddon, while female labour on certain jobs was unheard of, wives and families had always worked the narrow boats. The prospect of having to moor up yet another boat, because his wife was no longer allowed on board seemed farcical and expensive.

"Two men working a boat means an increase in expenses which thereby reduces the boatman's wage". Roland continues, "Would like to point out that our position at Present with regard to boatmen is worse than it was before, and we are in extreme need of help". While a decision is reached by the army, permission is granted to allow wives to continue to work along her husband. However the employer must have 'strong' evidence that the women is lawfully his wife and that she has previous experience and has been accustomed to live on barges. Permission was granted in this case only by the army: "This decision is prompted by the shortage of skilled boatmen. By no account will permission be given to any other men to have a female on board his boat" " We have the pleasure in certifying that Pte A C Johnson No 63024 was working with us prior to joining the army on a canal boat along with his wife, and we are pleased to note that he may continue to do so'.

This wasn't the end of the dilemma,

his brother Mr J T Johnson returned from France with trench fever in January 12th 1917. Letter received 9th Jan 1918 written by Pte Johnson recovering in a Military Hospital in Portsmouth. Eager to return to work as a boatman and "hopes for support in his case".

This is great news for Seddon's as he previously wrote: "be glad to know when the next batch of men will be available for work on canal boats. We have made an application for six men for this work and are anxious to get hold of them as soon as ever possible" With regards to Pte James T Johnson "This man was employed by us before the war as a boatman, and is fully qualified for that work"

The Transport Workers Battalion

was raised specifically for urgent work at home required for the war effort. It is noted that some men who returned from France and were not 'fighting' fit were transferred to the Transport Workers Battalion, this also covered Canal transport. In J T Johnson's case the bemusement in the frantic exchange of letters is that Johnson although a boatman was sent by the army instead to work in South Wales Forestry;

while men were offered to Roland Seddon who had no experience of boats at all and experienced women boaters seem not to have been considered!

Problems were surfacing pre-WWI on the canals with new working ethos, education and health regulations. Competition through the shipment of goods through the railways was prominent. The coal strike of 1912 didn't help a great deal and the restrictions to canal transport meant water transport was already in decline by the outbreak of war. Receipts from Middlewich during the turn of the century however, still point to a busy general trade at Middlewich Wharf and the salt works were still transporting by canal although the age of rail had made a great impact.

Thanks to John Goodier who deposited these letters with us for the Great War Project

