

***James Smart of Chalford: Working Life on the Cotswold Canals and Linked Waterways*, by Hugh Conway-Jones (Black Dwarf Publications 2020). 162pp, many b/w and col.ill. Paperback, £18.00. ISBN: 9781903599 29 7.**

This is a beautifully produced book (designed by Neil Parkhouse). It is printed on high quality paper and the many photographs and maps are of excellent quality, an impressive achievement as many of them are over 100 years old.

Hugh Conway-Jones is an accomplished author of many books about Gloucestershire's waterways and the book is well written and organised with a useful index. It is divided into a series of chapters following the route of James Smart's boats from the Midlands down to the Forest of Dean and along the Stroudwater and Thames & Severn canals.

James Smart's business ran from 1869 until well into the 20th century but the book concentrates on his most successful period during the 1880s and 90s. The author has been able to make use of a large collection of letters and postcards preserved at Gloucestershire Archives, along with a wide range of other resources on local canals and waterways.

The use of the personal letters throughout the book makes it particularly interesting from a social history point of view. I was surprised to learn how much money was being sent via the postal system to various docks. Many of Smart's employees seemed to be regularly running short of money to pay expenses and having to request payments to be sent immediately. Some requested wages to be sent to their wives, who were struggling to make ends meet. On one occasion a boatman asked Smart to send one pound "as I must have a wheelbarrow".

The book is very detailed on how a boat business in the late 19th century worked. It seemed a very difficult business to organise with many obstacles in the way of an efficient service. Accidents, illness, bad weather and loading problems all contributed to Smart being under pressure from both his customers and his employees. However he managed to build a very successful business which was carried on by his sons into the 20th century.

The illustrations, maps and photographs, with explanatory captions, contribute greatly to the book and provide a wonderful view into the world of the 19th-century boatmen.

This book will be of interest to industrial and social historians alike with its wealth of detail about the types of boats used, the cargoes carried and the men who worked on them.

Vicki Walker