



The **R**oile **C**anal
& Northern Devon
Waterways Society

Society News and Views

Autumn Issue 2011

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Front cover illustration: *Early morning in October on the Kennet and Avon Canal, Wiltshire*

Photograph by Adrian Wills

Comments from the Chair

Following a successful bid to Heritage Lottery fund for grant-funding for the **'Life's Journey Project'** work is about to start on further raising the profile of the Rolle Canal. *The Journey of Life* is the title of a project which uses the route of the Tarka Trail from Fremington to Torrington to illuminate the diverse landscapes around this area and how they have become modified by man's use and exploitation of the environment.

The first stage of this project is to create a small clearing alongside the Tarka Trail just south of the tunnel at Landcross and build a viewing platform which will enable trail-users to look out over the River Torridge and observe work progressing on the Sea Lock. It is intended that this will have been completed before the end of this year.

A vast amount of work has been undertaken, behind the scenes, to achieve this grant but in some ways the work has only just begun. Making the project a reality is going to require a considerable amount of physical work. Much of this will be completed by contractors. However, volunteers are needed to undertake many tasks such as scrub-clearing but also work of a more intellectual level such as researching archives, presenting talks and preparing and displaying exhibitions.



'YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!'

The committee of the RC&NDWS is working hard to honour its commitments towards the funding promised but welcomes, with open arms, anyone who feels they may be able to offer assistance in any way.

Volunteers do not need to be built like the „proverbial“ navy. Many tasks which the society has to deal with are not physically demanding at all but require time spent in reading, preparing and typing reports, as well as recording in written, photographic and even audio disc formats.

Contact Adrian Wills, (address on back page) if you would like to help.

A TOUR OF STEVENSTONE ESTATE AND ITS LODGES

By Norman Richards & Mrs. Heather Attwood

The Clinton and Rolle seat at ‘Stevenstone House’, near Torrington, had seven ‘drives’, although they may not have all been in use at the same time.

North Lodge, which is in the hamlet of High Bullen, stands just off the four cross way. The garden of the lodge still has the cast iron railings that curve around one quarter of the cross roads.



North Lodge and gateway entrance to Stevenstone.

The pillars are topped with balls, one of which is under repair and the drive continues to a wooded area with fine views of the northern flank of Dartmoor.



Park' or East Lodge entrance to Stevenstone House

Park Gate Lodge

lies in the village of St. Giles, with the drive going in a westward direction with views of the ponds, trees around the house and kennels.

The pillars are each crowned with a lion. The coat of arms is featured on the front wall of the lodge and also on the gate pillars.

On the inside of the 'latch' pillar there is a 'bellpull', presumably, to summon the gatekeeper.



Outside the gate stands the war memorial and village green.



South Lodge, with a large house and tall pillars, is probably the grandest of the lodges. The drive is mostly grassed over but a line of trees follow the route to the house and parkland. This gate has the hallmarks of the Clinton Estate and leads onto the road to Beaford which would give them a more direct route to Exeter and the East Budleigh Estates.

The tall pillars are topped with the Clinton coat of arms and are very similar to the gates at Bicton Gardens. The original gates were taken to help the war effort, and the present gate and pillars are 'Grade Two' listed. This lodge was occupied by the game-keeper but this date is unknown.

Deer Park is situated between the ponds (near the House), and South Lodge and is on a westerly facing slope descending to the valley with the public road on its southern border.



The gate house at Little Silver



Feature over the front door

About halfway down the slope is a Deer Linhay, used to feed and shelter the deer. Although linhays were, and still are in common use for farm stock, it is unusual to find one in a deer park. It is in the middle of the park with no access tracks which gave more protection to the deer. The hedge against the road is big and there is a wall and deep ditch on the park side to keep the deer from escaping. At the bottom of the hill by the bridge, on each side of the road, is a track (or drive, in it's heyday) which probably led down to the lodge at Town Mills.

Allens Week Farm on the right going uphill towards Hatchmoor, is the site of a major confrontation between Royalist and Roundhead troops during the Civil War of 1666.

Little Silver Lodge stands at the main entrance to Stevenstone House on the road from Torrington to High Bullen. The gates have gone but the entrance walls have an elegant curve as they sweep around to meet the public road. On one side of the gate is the Lodge and on the other side are the Dower House, Servants House and converted Stable Block.

Following the drive to the House there is a Saw Mill, the north end of the Deer Park (with a unique metal scrolled 'R' on the gate, and a pillar with a stone acorn on top at the corner of the Walled Garden. The latter has tall pillars and doors through which is a drive to the Orangery, Library and the West Wing.

Leighty Water Lodge is near a row of houses by the same name on the road from Hatchmoor to St. Giles. This drive would have led to the north side of the kennels.

Diana Lodge is situated on the Torrington side of St. Giles, was demolished and its place presently occupied by two houses. Diana was the goddess of the hunt and this lodge was probably named after her as it is on a riding route to what is now known as Deepmoor. The drive from this lodge may have joined or pre-dated the present North Lodge.

Town Mills Lodge is situated across the road from what used to be the corn, grist and saw mill. This lodge must have been nearly 2 miles from Stevenstone, all the others being about half a mile radius from the House. Trade from the Rolle Canal and Town Mills would have used this route which was uphill, crossed the Hatchmoor to South Lodge road and continued through the Deer Park.

All seven lodges of the estate are on private property, but most can be seen from public roads. We have tried to be as accurate as possible and would welcome any further information or corrections, as research into this estate is on-going.

17th October 2010

Excellent turn-out for this summer's guided walks along the canal

The Rolle Canal & Northern Devon Waterways Society hosted just two walks on the canal this summer as there were also two away fixtures to fit in. Both walks proved very popular, with around forty participants on the July event and no less than eighty for the Rosemoor walk in August !

The July walk tried out a new start point at Loxdown Cross picnic site, on the A386 downstream of Beam, and followed the route of an old pack horse trail down across the meadows to where it used to ford the Torridge to Weare Giffard in the days when the canal was operating. Then we followed the Tarka Trail across the old railway viaduct over the valley, with views of the Beam Aqueduct, and on to the bridge above Beam weir to see a



Photograph by Trevor J Fordham

heron fishing and the spot where otters regularly play, but not today!

By special arrangement with PGL who now occupy Beam House and grounds, we were able to follow Lord Rolle's 18th century carriage drive to the house gates and from there venture down to the end of the weir itself and see where the water entered the long leat that led down the valley to the mills of Weare Giffard. The carriage drive used to run east from the big house, over Furzebeam Hill and Tantons Plain, and across the commons to Torrington where it also formed part of the road to Weare Giffard. This road out of Torrington is still lined with great lime trees which are a sure sign of the driveway to a stately home.

When the canal was built, there had to be a bridge over it to accommodate the carriage drive and this bridge, restored by Clinton Estates as a millennium project, was the next feature of the walk as it affords the opportunity to see the true profile of the canal and its tow path as it disappears into the trees around the base of Furzebeam Hill. This length of the canal is shortly to be part of an exciting lottery funded project which should see it opened up as a permissive footpath with links to the Tarka Trail behind Beam House and nearer to Torrington station.

A rest was taken on the aqueduct itself to discuss the birthplace of Tarka the Otter (upstream for those who saw the film, or downstream for those who have read the book) and then a final quarter mile walk along the canal bed beside the main road led back to the start point at Loxdown Cross.

The August walk was, as usual, the annual pilgrimage to the head weir at the foot of Darkham Woods in RHS Rosemoor grounds. Either good weather or good publicity (with a write-up



This photograph was taken in 2000, at which time the restoration of this bridge was being completed.

Photograph: courtesy of Lord Clinton

in the Bideford Buzz, Torrington Crier, Crosslet and North Devon Journal, plus verbal mention at meetings of the Torrington Historical Society, Devonshire Association and Devon Wildlife Trust), brought out a record entry for this walk, and what the reception staff at Rosemoor thought as eighty of us filed through I can only imagine.

An outbreak of “Sudden Oak Death”, a fungus born disease affecting, surprisingly, larch trees in Darkham Woods, had caused that woodland to be put in quarantine so our usual route to the weir was closed off and we were allowed an alternative way through the gardens instead. Exiting from the winter garden, a steep climb down through pine woods led to the old

leat which in the 19th century led water from the Torridge to feed the Rolle Canal and Torrington's corn and timber mills, and even before that had powered a tucking mill below what was then called Rowes Moor. A stroll upstream through the riverside meadows brought the party to Darkham Weir where water used to be diverted from the river into the leat and which was the one time site of Healand Docks at the head of navigation for the canal tub-boats. This weir, which Henry Williamson called "the dark weir" features prominently as a meeting point of the otter hounds in the tale of Tarka the Otter, while the river, leat and mills all take their part in memorable and harrowing descriptions of the hunt. Downstream, through an area of re-created riverside

wildlife habitat, the route led to the derelict lime kilns beside the overgrown canal basin. This was where coal and limestone, brought from Wales in sailing ships to Bideford and by tub-boat up the Rolle Canal, was burned in vast kilns to produce lime for improving the fields for agriculture.

John, Lord Rolle, masterminded this enterprise to bring prosperity to his tenant farmers and hence to the district and not least to himself.

Once everyone had mastered the theory and practice of the lime burning industry, they were allowed to make their own way back through the formal gardens, hopefully just in time for some quick refreshment in the tea room.

Chris Hassall



These photographs show the derelict lime kiln complex at the head of the canal, at R.H.S. Rosemoor

They were taken by Chris Hassall, who also led the two walks



A NICE DAY OUT!

Living in Exeter, we don't have much opportunity to participate in the Rolle Canal Society activities, however, on Sunday, 18th September we decided to join a number of other members on a visit to Kelly Mine, near Bovey Tracy. Derek was interested in the working of the mine; Pauline favoured a day out which was advertised as: including lunch at The Cleave in Lustleigh, followed by a guided tour of Bovey Tracey then a cream tea at the Heritage Centre.

The day dawned dull and grey so raincoats and umbrellas were packed but, in the event, not needed, as the weather remained dry. Those participating met at Bovey to share cars as parking at the mine is at a premium. The location of the mine, immediately adjacent to the Bovey to Moretonhampstead road, is a very well kept secret and anybody passing would have no idea of its existence, yet, just a few yards off the road, you enter the world of our industrial heritage where micaceous hematite was produced, primarily for use in rust proofing paint.

When we arrived, we were divided into two groups and guided around the area in smaller numbers.



It was explained to us that as a result of the mine remaining in the ownership of a local family for many years, it was fortunate that much of the workings and machinery remained in situ. Various parts of the mine have been painstakingly restored by volunteers, who obviously have a great deal of knowledge about and considerable commitment to the project, which remains on-going.

We were shown one of a number of adits that existed on the site, lit by candles for our benefit, and a restored shaft now lit by electricity produced by a generator. The beauty and uniqueness of the site was that the whole process from the digging out of the ore, to the barrelling up of the finished product, could be explained and



demonstrated, the power being provided by two working water wheels.



he visit finished with a visit to the small on-site museum filled with booklets and pieces of micaceous hematite for sale, as well as interesting items collected from the site, as a result of the on-going restoration work.

We left feeling very impressed by the dedication and commitment being put into this project by volunteers of the charity

formed to preserve this piece of mining heritage.

Lunch came next at The Cleave in Lustleigh and was thoroughly enjoyed by all, following which we returned to Bovey for a guided tour of the town, once again the rain holding off.

Our guides gave a potted history of the town and pointed out many interesting old houses, many of which seemed to have been established for „fallen women“. One wonders why there was such a need in Bovey Tracey!

Completing our town tour we returned to the Heritage Centre to end a splendid day with scones and cream, sandwiches and

homemade cakes provided by the Centre volunteer staff. All in all a most enjoyable day out with both of our appetites satisfied.



Bovey Tracey Heritage Centre.

Thank you, Norman, for such a well organised day and such good company.

Pauline & Derek Fisher

DID YOU KNOW?

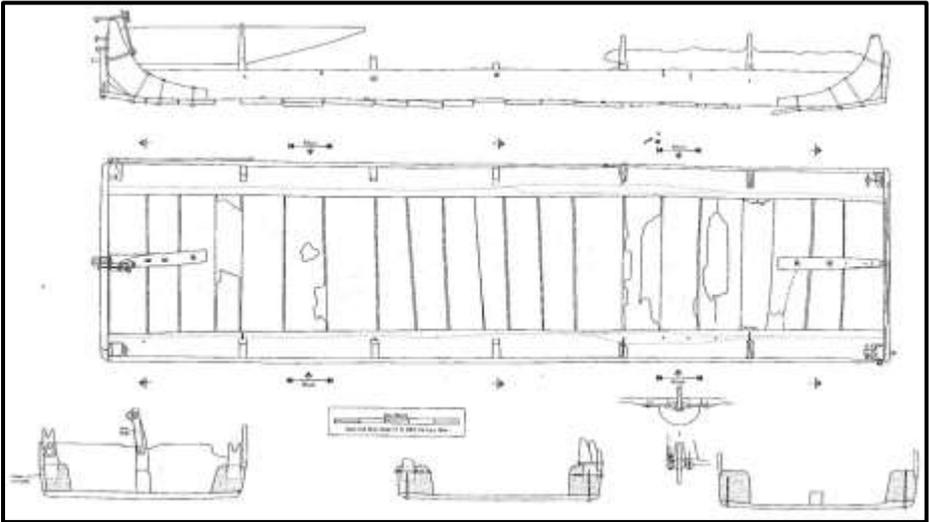
Navy is a shorter form of **navigator** (UK) or **navigational engineer** (USA) and is particularly applied to describe the manual labourers working on major civil engineering projects. The term was coined in the late 18th century in Britain when numerous canals were being built, which were also sometimes known as "navigations", or "eternal navigations", intended to last forever.



Extract and picture stolen from Wikipedia

A TUB BOAT WITH A SHARP END!

Having completed the base of a full-sized standard, rectangular tubboat the attention of Barry, Adrian and Trevor has been diverted towards the construction a lead-boat which has bows at one end.



Copy of a structural drawing of the historic tub boat in Helebridge Basin workshop. Access; Courtesy of Bude Stratton Town Council

Barry had already anticipated the “pointed” tub boat as being a much more complicated build and decided to use the base of the first boat as a level platform and template on which to lay out the second boat’s frame.

He produced a series of drawings as to how timbers were going to meet but once the uncut chines of the lead boat were lifted onto the base of the standard boat a considerable amount of time was spent carefully measuring and recalculating angles and joints.

Once satisfied that a clear plan of action was in place Barry set to cutting the timber with his chainsaw and quickly cut out the required joints and curves. These are only initial rough cuts which will need refining with planes and chisels at a later date.

However, the size and shape of the lead boat is now clear to see and is another exciting step forward.



Having established the main structure of the lead boat its timbers will now be put back into storage and work resumed on the standard tub boat. The ribs and side planking have already been prepared and once suitable timber for knees has been located and cut to shape, assembling everything to the base, subject to time and weather, should not take too long.

Wheels, and their bearings, still have to be sourced but an original wheel has been borrowed from Bude Stratton Town Council from which a wooden template will be made. This template will be taken to a foundry and cast iron reproductions will be manufactured.



Tentative discussions have already been had with the foundry-master at Blist Hill Victorian Village at Iron Bridge with a view to getting this done.



The lead tub-boat takes shape

Thanks to Trevor Fordham for taking the photographs and helping Barry while I was away. (Someone has to keep an eye on him!)

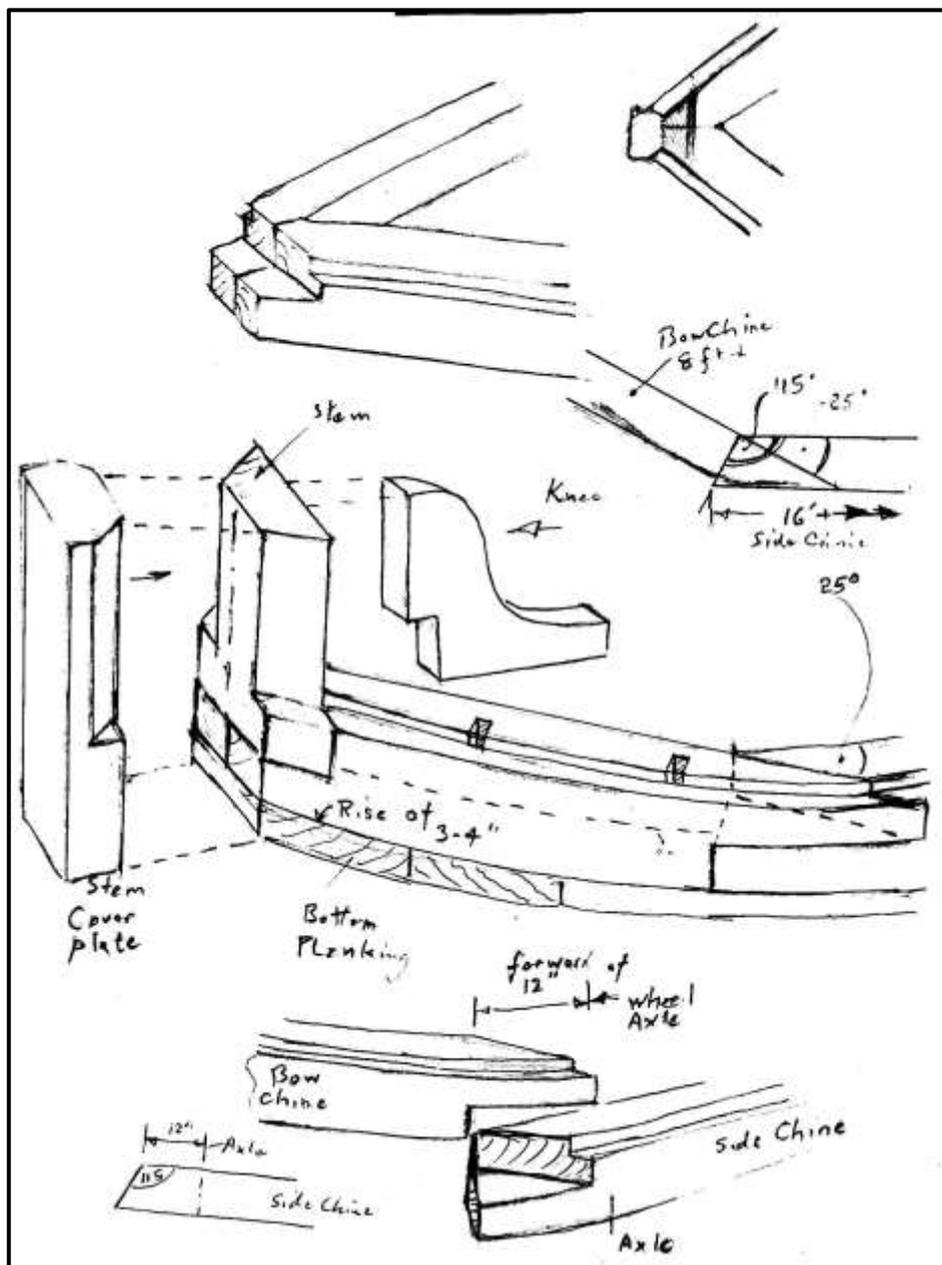
Following the heavy downpours of rain over the past few weeks the base of the standard boat has filled with water and retained it, indicating that it is watertight. If water doesn't leak out of the boat there should be no reason why it should leak into it, once afloat.

But as they say, "That's another story!"

What happens next in the saga of tub boat production at Sea Lock will be disclosed in full, glorious technicolour in the next issue of the RC&NDWS bulletin. Don't miss it!

I think the fumes from the wood preservative are beginning to get to me!

Report from Adrian Wills



Structural drawings of the bow section of the lead tub boat

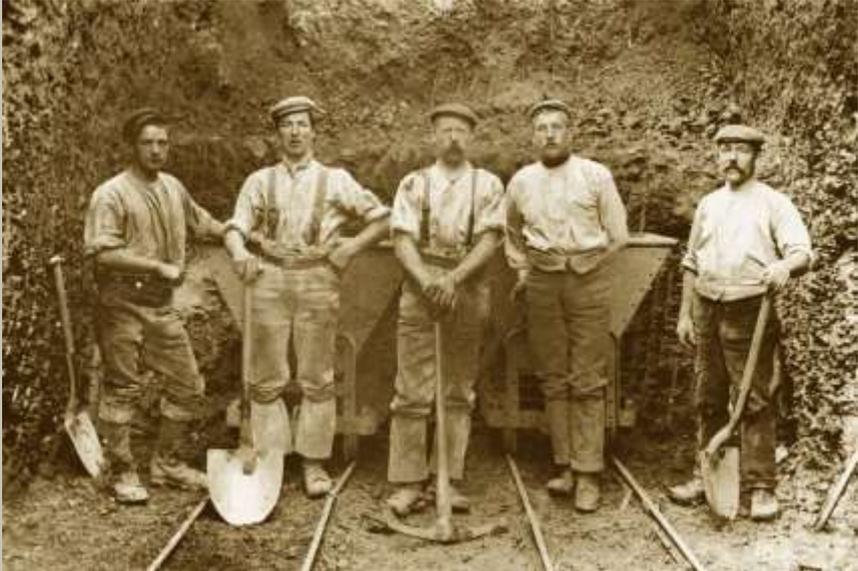
produced by Barry Hughes 2011.

DOWN THE CUT

What's being planned, and some dates for your diary.

**Sunday 18th December BUDE CANAL & HARBOUR SOCIETY
Annual Mince Pie and Sherry Walk.**

For full details contact: info@bude-canal.co.uk



Sunday, 22nd April 2012

RC&NDWS AGM

Guest speaker and venue to be arranged

Programme of walks and visits for 2012

*A walk from RHS Rosemoor Gardens to the head of the feeder leat at Darkham Weir and back to Rosemoor Lime kiln complex. (2-3hrs)

*An all-day visit to Nynhead to view the current extent of restoration to the Nynhead Lift and other local canal features.

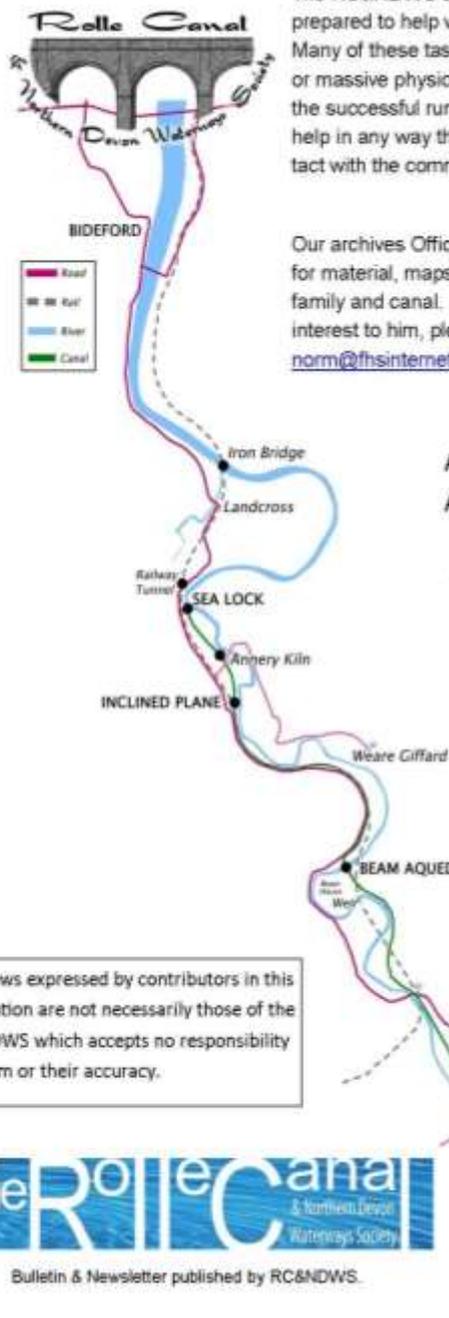
*An **OPEN DAY** at **SEA LOCK** to view the progress of restoration of the site as well as work on the Tub Boat construction project.

*A visit to Braunton Marshes to examine the sluices and drainage structures designed by James Green. (2-3hrs)

*An all-day visit to Bude to view some of its inclined planes and the very impressive Merrifield Wheelpit.

*A walk around North Tamerton looking at the remaining features of the Bude Canal. (2-3hrs)

The dates, meeting places and costs (if any) of these activities are as yet still to be finalised but full details will be published in the next issue of the RC&NDWS News and Views bulletin as well as local newspapers and other community hand-outs at the appropriate time.



The RC&NDWS always welcomes volunteers who are prepared to help with a wide variety of society activities. Many of these tasks do not require long term commitment or massive physical ability but are all equally important to the successful running of the society. If you feel you can help in any way then please do not hesitate to make contact with the committee through the address below:

Our archives Officer, Norman Richards, is always looking for material, maps, pictures or text, relating to the Rolle family and canal. If you have anything which may be of interest to him, please contact him by email at norm@fhsinternet.com or at the address given below:

All other enquiries to the Chair --
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