

THE ROLLE CANAL & NORTHERN DEVON WATERWAYS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTERNo 13 Jan. 2010



Beam accommodation bridge

A.Barnes Dec. 09

Happy New Year to all our members, and who believes in global warming now? Certainly it was difficult to reconcile the snow in mid December with a steadily rising global temperature! But it was a lovely day and too good to miss out on a winter walk to Beam, where the accommodation bridge was covered in snow. I felt grateful to Lord Clinton for the repair work which was done on the bridge at the millennium, which has done a lot to prevent further frost damage, and couldn't help shivering at the prospect of leading my horse at the head of a barge string in these conditions nearly 200 years ago.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your continuing support this year, which is being steadily translated into progress on the aims of the Society: progress which can be seen in the steady increase in public awareness and the project work at Ridd and Annery. Here's to continuing progress in 2010, and looking forward to meeting again during the year.

Society walk to see James Green's work on the River Caen

About fifteen or so members and friends gathered at Velator Quay on the river Caen at Braunton for the Rolle Canal Society's guided walk on July 12th. We were lucky to have a window of warm sunshine with a pleasant breeze in what had been a period of wet weather for our walk along the flood banks that since 1811 have kept the sea out of Braunton marshes.

From the penstock above Velator weir which controls the fresh water entering the marsh meadows, we followed the river down past the quay to Horsey Island where a further 210 acres of estuary delta was enclosed and drained in 1857. Here we were able to see at close quarters Braunton Great Sluice, a high quality three arched structure built by James Green around 1811, and the smaller Horsey Inland Sluice built on the cheap by Nicholas Whitley for the later scheme.

These nineteenth century stone built sluices allow surplus water to drain from the marshes while keeping the salt tides at bay, though inferior structure and poor maintenance have combined to allow a flood of sea water to enter Horsey Island on each tide creating an area of saltnarsh within the drained pasture. James Green's original sluice still holds back this brackish water and keeps Braunton Marshes sweet.

Looking down from the flood banks we could see evidence of the old winding course of the river forming ponds and reed beds in the meadows as well as the 1857 "new cut" that provided a straight course to Velator quay for the schooners, ketches and brigantines that traded worldwide for Braunton ship owners well into the 20th. century.

Chris Hassall

Ed's note: James Green was the engineer who built the Bude and Lord Rolle's canal.

For those interested to learn more about Braunton Marshes and the Caen navigation, the Torrington Historical Society is having an illustrated talk on the subject on Monday Jan 11th. The meeting starts with tea and biscuits at 7.00pm before the talk at 7.30. Non –members are welcome.

The event is held at Torrington Methodist Church at the top of Mill Street



Photo

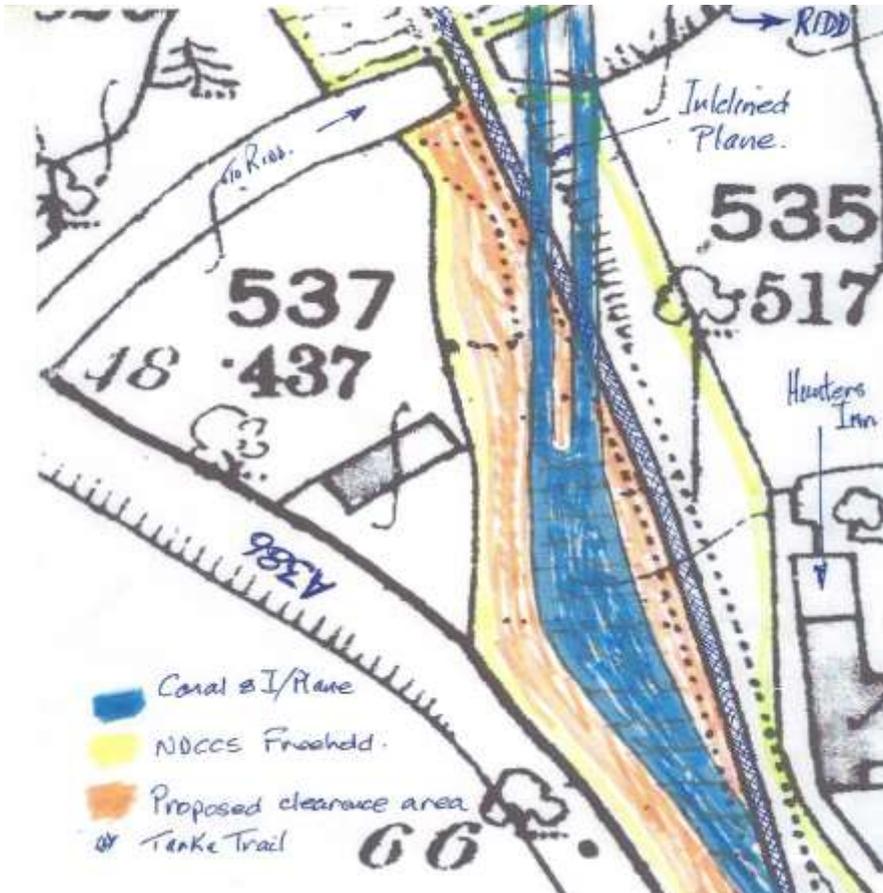
Paul Madgett July 2009

Chris Hassall suddenly discovers a disused badger set while leading a walk along the River Caen at Braunton .

Fergie looks on in consternation while Pat tries not to laugh.

Clearing the scrub at the top of the inclined plane at Ridd

David Lovell, a new member of the committee, agreed to take on this project and has made spectacular progress in clearing this section of undergrowth and locating what appears to be the stone wall of the top basin. Working with the permission and assistance of North Devon Coast and Countryside, and with his teams of volunteers from TVB, Wings, and the Prince's Trust, the area is now recognisable as a canal basin (some imagination required!). The intention now is that NDC&C will remove a small number of trees and create an open area which can be accessed by users of the Tarka trail. An interpretation board will be produced to keep visitors informed.



The area was a hive of activity when the canal was running, with a stables, a bridge across the canal connecting the Hunters Inn to the new Torrington Road, and the lime kilns at the rivers edge.

In the map, annotated by David, the inclined plane has been superimposed on the line of the railway (Tarka trail) showing where the top basin is believed to be. The bridge was demolished when the railway was put through, but the parapet can still be clearly seen at the S. end of the Hunters Inn. The building on the W of the Railway is believed to have been a stable, as it was likely that the horses, which would be disconnected from the barges at this point, would need somewhere to be housed , fed and watered. A much smaller building is to be found at the bottom of the plane, where it is unlikely that stabling would be needed after the short journey from Annery, the horses immediately returning to Annery with the down barge, or being walked up to the top.



Is this the basin retaining wall ?

Tony Barnes 2009

Visit to old canal bed at Staple Vale, Torrington.

The course of the old Rolle Canal has been cleared excellently by the Torrington Conservators where it runs through the wood at the base of Torrington Common (find it through the newly cleared access point ¼ mile North of Torrington Station on the Tarka Trail.)

There the old canal emerged from the woods and crossed straight across where the Tarka Trail tarmac now is. But then, frustratingly, its line is completely lost to sight behind the thick impenetrable hedge of the field opposite. It's easy to see the line of the old canal on a map as it became the field boundary and there is a hedge there now, but the line of the canal is hidden from public view till it emerges on the far side of the A388 Torrington/Bideford road. Here it was converted to become the bed of the Rolle Road, and the conservators have restored the tow-path.

It was a great opportunity to see all this hidden part when Dr. Reed, the owner of this section, invited the society to see this part which is usually obscured from public view and not accessible.



Old bed of the canal (drive to Staple Vale)

There is still a marked indentation in the field as the canal curved round with its thick hedge on top of the old tow-path. It continued on beneath the drive to his house and included a short aqueduct where the canal passed over a stream which descends from Torrington Common. Then it passed under the car parking area in front of the old station which was built for the new railway line and which replaced the canal.

It is not easy to visualize the line of the canal here as the land at the access to the station has been hugely raised to accommodate the levels required to raise the station access road to join up with the A 388 and the new bridge over the Torridge.

Dr.Reed's house there was originally a farm with extensive sheep rearing, and the fleeces were taken down to the river by the old Rothern bridge where they were washed and dried in huge sheds there and placed on tenterhooks which stretched them prior to being sent to market. The Commons at that time looked completely different as there were very few trees or undergrowth, and the whole area was grassland cropped by flocks of sheep.

The society would like to thank Dr.Reed and his family for their invitation and for all their time spent preparing for the visit.



View downstream from Rothern Bridge

A.Barnes 2009

An update on the state of the Canal Leat at Rosemoor and its associated structures - June 2009.

The Weir.

Healand Weir is believed to pre-date the Rolle Canal itself as it was built to raise the level of the Torridge and divert water down the leat to power the Tucking Mill below Rowe's Moor. It was subsequently remodelled in 1837, along with a new quay wall to form Healand Docks. These were at the head of a widened leat bringing canal boats from the basin by the lime kilns right up to the Torridge.

The weir has suffered some erosion, particularly towards the far bank, where the coping stones and quite a lot of the spillway have been washed away through many years of floods. There is a large tree trunk wedged against the near abutment which is causing extra water pressure on part of the stonework adjacent to Lord Rolle's 1837 commemorative stone, and some of the masonry has been dislodged.



Healand weir

Chris Hassall

The Accommodation Bridges.

Two attractive little stone arched bridges were built to give access over the leat to the riverside meadow now farmed by the Squire family. Both of

these have been widened with concrete to enable modern farm machinery to pass, so that each has only one original stone parapet remaining. The first bridge down from the docks had at one time an iron penstock fitted to control the passage of water down the leat (which must have been after the canal was closed to traffic) but that has now been replaced with a concrete block wall which, although heavily eroded, serves to permanently close off the leat from the river. The bridge is reasonably sound but has suffered some damage from farm traffic. The second bridge is the one normally used to access the meadow. It has for some years been reinforced with railway sleepers to take the weight of agricultural machinery but over the last few years suffered partial collapse of the arch. More timbers were added this spring to enable the silage harvesters to pass but examination of the underside of the arch reveals a large cavity where several square feet of the masonry has fallen through. The meadow, leat, bridges and quay wall (and presumably half the weir?) belong to the farmer but the woodland and access tracks are RHS Rosernoor property over which the farmer has a right of access.

The third crossing.

Near the southern boundary of their riverside land, RHS has made a crossing of the leat to give it vehicular access from its woodland tracks. This appears to be a simple infilling with soil and stone and it is not clear whether a culvert pipe is installed. There is no crossing here shown on the old maps. The leat itself is considerably overgrown in both directions but is largely in water.

The Tucking Mill.

Society members did a considerable amount of work excavating the feeder channel, wheelpit and mill race about two years ago, so it is possible to see where the water from the leat ran alongside the structure of the mill to power the wheel, although the building itself is long gone.

The mill race ran under another stone arched bridge to reach the Torridge, but that bridge collapsed under the weight of machinery when the conifer plantation was cleared and it is now replaced by a cast iron pipe bedded in rubble.



Tucking mill exit channel

A.Barnes 2006

The Canal Basin at Rosemoor.

Untouched for many years, the canal basin is still there beside the lime kilns. It is unclear whether there was ever a bridge at this point but a track now crosses between the basin and the leat, which completely cuts it off at that point. The basin is largely silted up and completely covered in vegetation, but quite capable of restoration if the will and resources were available. As with the lime kilns, RHS would be happy to see preservation or restoration take place, but their charitable remit **is** horticulture, not history, so they can not direct any resources in that direction.

The Devon Bat Group recently boarded **up** one cross passage of the lime kilns to form a purpose made bat hibernaculum and last winter at least 14 lesser horse shoe bat were counted there.

Chris Hassall July2009

Engineering survey of the Furzebeam section

The Society was fortunate to be able to have this section surveyed by Roy Sutton, the IWA consultant engineer. He has produced a comprehensive report advising on ways in which the section from Beam accommodation bridge to the Tarka Trail at Staple Vale, could be made more user friendly. This has been sent to Clinton Devon Estates, who own this section, with a view to their consideration of the towpath as a permissive path. It joins up with Torrington Common, where the Commons Conservators have already cleared much of the scrub and small trees from the canal bed. Access from the Tarka Trail has already received the full support of Devon Coast and Countryside, if the project should get the go ahead from Clinton Estates. Much of the remedial work proposed would involve reconstructing parts of the towpath, bridging some gaps, and removing a small number of mature trees, which are already unstable, perched on the side of the embankment.

Grants.

We are delighted to acknowledge a grant of £250 from the Bideford Bridge Trust, which has already assisted the work at the inclined plane, and a grant of £2000 from the IWA Restoration Committee, towards the rebuild of the Bucyrus crane, without which the work at the River lock would not be able to proceed. Our grateful thanks go to both these organisations for their generosity.



IWA SW Branch Sec. Chris Jewell presents a cheque for £2000 to the Soc.

Programme for the New Year

The committee is finalising the programme for the year, which will be issued with the AGM notice in February.

We expect to repeat our series of exploratory walks along those parts of the canal which have access, but also we are hoping to continue clearing the top of the inclined plane and making it accessible to the public, with the permission and help of the Devon Coast and Countryside Service.

We are repeating our open evening at the Torrington Arms, New Road, Torrington, to which we invite all interested parties and landowners to keep them informed on plans and progress, and to which all members are cordially invited.

The date is Thursday 12 March. 7.30

Annual general meeting

The date for this is April 25. Venue not yet determined.

Torrington History Society

Braunton Marshes and the Caen navigation - a talk at the Torrington Methodist Church, at top of Mill Street, on Monday Jan 11 at 7.00 pm

Visit the website at [wwwTheRollecanal.co.uk](http://www.TheRollecanal.co.uk)

Articles from members are welcome, please forward them to the email address below, or snail mail. They are always appreciated.

Published by the Rolle Canal Society

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