



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

SOCIETY NEWS and VIEWS

SPRING ISSUE 2012

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Chairman's report to AGM.

Held at R.H.S. Rosemoor Gardens April 15th 2012

It is hard to believe that the RC&NDWS was inaugurated nine years ago. The time has passed so quickly. On the other hand since its inception a huge amount has been achieved and enormous progress has been made.

Its aims to raise awareness of the Rolle Canal, to inform, investigate and restore where possible have been achieved time and time again.

Another very successful programme of illustrated talks and well supported guided walks has been produced. There is generally a far greater understanding and appreciation of what the Rolle Canal was and how it still has influence locally and nationally.

As well as appreciating our immediate historic inheritance, some members of our society enjoyed a fascinating visit to the village of Pentewan, following Roger Evans very interesting and informative talk at last year's AGM. It was good to be joined by members of the Bude Canal & Harbour Society for this visit which consequently invited Mr Evans to speak at its AGM.

The visit to the Kelly Mines was also very successful and provided a fascinating insight to the mining activities on Dartmoor and Devon generally.

The successful application to Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant towards the Life's Journey project, explained by Matt Edworthy (North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Biosphere [NDABS]) at last year's AGM, has opened a huge opportunity to highlight the existence of the Rolle Canal.

A viewing platform has already been completed, overlooking Sea Lock and has created tremendous interest in to what is going on at the site. The views both up and down the River Torridge valley from there are also inspiring.

Work has been undertaken on the stable building at the base of the inclined plane, although this was by the Environment Agency on their recently acquired flood meadow land and again opens up the possibility of increased access and archaeological investigation of that part of the canal structure. A length of cast-iron rail from inclined plane has already been recovered from a spoil heap there and is on show today.

Plans are being drawn up for further investigation of the top of the incline and the wheel pit on which time has been spent cutting back invasive vegetation.

Committee members of the RC&NDWS will soon be involved in consultation with representatives of NDABS and DCC Archaeological Dept as to how to best proceed with this site.

It is planned to outline the route of the canal, as it crosses the Tarka Trail from inland side to river side at the top of the inclined plane, with white bricks laid flush to the trail surface.

Agreement has been reached between Clinton Devon Estates, NDABS and the RC&NDWS to create a permissive footpath along the stretch of canal beneath Rise Point.

Work here has begun in earnest with the felling of trees which are dangerous or growing in awkward places as well as cutting up and clearing a large quantity of fallen trees and branches.

Part of the RC&NDWS commitment towards the awarding of the grant is to provide a volunteer force to help clear the resultant piles of timber and brash. Volunteers are desperately needed for help in this task and on Wednesday 2nd May Tony Barnes will be organising a group to make a start.

It is much easier being Chair of this society than I had anticipated simply because its committee are such friendly, co-operative and hard-working people. They do all they can to make this society a success but now seek help from its membership and friends of members to meet its commitments and further raise the profile of Lord Rolle's Canal and to show what a great and active society we have got.

The Restoration at Sea Lock is progressing steadily but is suffering from a shortage of good quality building stone. A plan to make the inner gates hold back water efficiently is about to be put into place. A pair of outer gates is still being sought.

The tub-boat project is also progressing and it is hoped that one boat at least will be finished before the end of the year,

On Sunday 9th September there will be an Open Day corresponding with the national Heritage Day, at Sea Lock and visitors will be able to see for themselves what progress with these projects has been made.

Another major step forward that the RC&NDWS has undertaken very recently is to join **Facebook**. This will enable a far wider access to the public and hopefully raise greater interest, involvement and discussion about our canal and what we are doing with it. Please have a look and click and '*like*'.



HARRY JUNIPER TALKS TO THE AGM

Immediately following the AGM, the well respected, local potter **Harry Juniper**, presented an illustrated talk on North Devon Pottery from the 17th Century and its influence on his work. His presentation was very interesting, highly amusing and thoroughly enjoyed by all those present.

Adrian Wills.

TREASURER'S REPORT 2011 - 2012			
Account 1	Balance as at 01..04.11		£720.06
Income	Subscription	£600.00	
	Donations	£102.50	
	Walks/Talks	£271.20	
	Sales	£10.00	
	Grants	£250.00	
	Vistis/exhibitions	£202.00	note 1
	James Green Heritage	£5.30	
	Transfer from Acct.1	£500.00	
	Total	<u>£1,941.00</u>	
Expenditure	Postage	£140.00	note 2
	Secretariat	£120.00	
	T.T.E.F	£40.00	note 3
	Printing	£124.30	
	IWA membership	£49.00	
	Insurance	£265.00	
	Life's Journey Project	£500.00	note 4
	James Green Heritage	£20.00	
	Volunteer Bureau	£20.00	
	Transfer to Acct 2	£600.00	
	Speaker	£25.00	
	Visits/Exhibiton costs	£179.00	
	Total	<u>£2,082.30</u>	
	Balance at 02.04.12		£579.36
	Petty cash at 01.04.12	£8.43	
	petty cash at 02.04.12	£8.43	
Account 2 (project acct)			
	Balance at 01.04.11	£1,429.64	
	Transfer from Acct 1	£600.00	
	Transfer from Acct 1	£500.00	
	interest	£0.63	
	Balance at 02.04.12	<u>£1,530.27</u>	

Notes to the accounts:

Note 1 This figure excludes cost of leader and site fees

Note 2 Includes the forward buying of stamps

Note 3 Taw Torridge Estuary Forum; two annual memberships fell this year

Note 4 The only extraordinary cost this year has been the contribution of £500 to the Life's Journey Project, which is aimed at raising the profile of the Tarka Trail and those sites close to it.

The funds allocated to RC&NDWS allow the development of a permissive footpath along a section of canal below Furzebeam Hill with the permission of Clinton Devon Estates as well as clearing around the inclined plane.

We would like to thank the Bideford Bridge Trust for their generous grant of £250.00, and our members for their continued support and encouragement. Also we would like to thank DCC for major funding of Life's Journey and the work of Matt Edworthy of the North Devon AONB & Biosphere in the preparation, submission and implementation of the project plans.

Anthony Barnes (Treasurer)

A **Canada Goose**, sitting on her nest, covering three eggs and sheltering them from the rain.

She has not chosen a very discreet place for her nest since it is right on the edge of the towpath and in clear view of any passer-by!

This is her second attempt at producing a family since her nest has already been raided once when 2 eggs were taken, probably by a fox.

Photo: **A.Wills** 22.04.12



COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

Sometime ago I sent out a form asking for response from membership as to whether an email or hard copy version of the newsletter was preferred. With the recent, substantial rise of postal charges the cost of posting printed newsletters is having a considerable, negative, effect on society funds. This newsletter unfortunately is therefore likely to be the last printed version you will receive. Members who have already stated that they only want a printed version will receive it in the post as normal. Those members who have not stated a preference will be able to access their copies on line as do members of the Bude Canal & Harbour Society for their publication.

You will be informed in advance of the latest version and how you can obtain a copy through your computer. I am not particularly happy about this move but 'Needs must' as the old expression goes. The alternative solution is to raise society subscription rates which, next year, may have to be done anyway. Please ensure we have your current email address.

Whist thinking about annual subscription please be aware that **membership fees for 2012 are now due**. You will have found a renewal form enclosed.

If you have already paid for this year, **WELL DONE!**

Welcome back to all those of you who have re-joined and the society is very pleased to welcome to those of you who are new members.

If you have recently paid your 2012 subscription is there anyone you know who would be interested in joining us? If so please pass the form onto them and get them to fill it in and return it to the Membership Secretary, address on the back.

You will find on page 17 a report from Tony Barnes on the very successful and enjoyable first Volunteer's Day when a group set about solving tasks on the Furzebeam section of Lord Rolle's Canal. **Well done to all those who took part.**

More volunteers are required to continue the work started and Tony will be delighted to hear from you should you or any of your friends fancy lending a hand.

The next Volunteer's Day is planned for Wednesday June 6th.

COME AND BE PART OF IT!

ROLLE CANAL & NORTHERN DEVON WATERWAYS SOCIETY

COMMITTEE FOR 2012

Adrian Wills	Chair
Anthony Barnes	Treasurer
Hilary Wills	Membership Secretary
Chris' Jewell	Rep. to I.W.A.
Mike Harper	Publicity / publications
Chris' Hassall	Publicity / publications
Norman Richards	Archives
Ray Patt	
Colin Neal	
Denise Drummond	Minutes Secretary
Committee members can be contacted through	
Email: info@therollecanal.co.uk or Tel: 01237 477705	

SHIP BUILDING AT WEARE GIFFARD

PHASE 1: *the second half of Michael Guegan's article on the vessels built at the Sea Lock yards.*

Following the construction of the *Stevenstone* at Sea Lock was the ***Bicton***. Built by William Hutchings and registered at Bideford on June 4th 1828 with her details and measurements much the same as the *Lady Rolle*, being 62 feet 9 inches long with a width of 19ft 4½ins, a depth in the hold of 10ft 6ins and 96 82/94 tons. From the start her rig was given as a brig and her owner was again William Tardrew. In June 1835 she was sold to owners in St Ives and re-registered at that port and there she stayed. She was lengthened in 1844 by 9 feet and re-rigged as a schooner.

The *Bicton* foundered off Lundy on about April the 5th 1867. This is another loss that does not appear in any newspaper although I have not yet checked Lloyds List.

Built by William Hutchings and launched only three months later (a remarkable achievement) the ***Hudscott*** was slightly smaller being 54ft 11ins long, 18ft 3ins across the beam, depth in hold of 9ft 8ins and 77 83/94 tons. The *Hudscott* was schooner rigged with a running bowsprit. Her dimensions and appearance were almost identical to the *Stevenstone* being slightly deeper and fitted with two masts instead of one. Possibly in view of the speed of her construction her frames could have been prefabricated when the *Bicton* was still on the stocks using the moulds from the *Stevenstone*. Her owner was again William Tardrew. Only two years later she was altered, becoming a brigantine and the bowsprit being changed to a fixed or standing one. Tardrew sold half (32 shares) to George Braginton in

October 1846. During 1850 the *Hudscott*, by now over twenty years old, was given a major overhaul which amounted to a complete rebuild, being lengthened to 74.0 feet but with almost no increase in her beam.

In 1859 Frederick Holwill of Torrington became a part owner, with the entire vessel being transferred to the ownership of the **Rolle Canal Company**, in April 1865. She did not last long with them, suffering the same fate as the *Lady Rolle*, but at least this tragedy was mentioned in the Appledore column of the North Devon Journal on February 7th 1867,

“The brigantine Hudscott, Captain Bignell, of this place, sailed from Memel about the later part of December last year. No intelligence of their having put in anywhere has caused the friends of all on board to be very anxious--in fact they have given up all hopes of again hearing from the missing vessel. The Hudscott was bound to this port with timber, and it is feared that she was exposed to the gales that has raged, with such violence of late in the North Sea; it is however, to be hoped that some account may yet be received of the crew, viz. Captain Bignell, the mate (Mr Edward Gorvin), the Captain's brother, Captain's son, and William Marshall; also a man belonging to the neighbourhood named Parkhouse. Should no intelligence of the missing vessel soon be received a great gloom will be cast over the town”.

In fact she was never heard of again; the crew, going by their surnames, were all men from Appledore families, descendants of which still live in the area.

The next vessel was the largest yet; built by William Hutchings and completed on June 15th 1829, she was christened **Lord Rolle**. Her dimensions were 64ft 4inches x 19ft 10ins x 10ft 9ins

with a tonnage of 104 85/94 tons and rigged as a brigantine. Her registered owners were William Tardrew holding 48 shares with George Braginton holding the other 16.

Early in 1836 Tardrew, by now her sole owner sold her to John Samuel, a master mariner of Llanelly, who transferred her to that port. He promptly sold 48 shares in various proportions to seven other people, but by the time of his death in 1862 had bought back enough to raise his stake in the *Lord Rolle* to 56 shares. A surviving letter (loose in the Llanelly shipping register) dated April 10th 1851 states.

“Sir, the Lord Rolle has gone thraw a thorough repairs and has took the break deck off but still the same dementions John Samuel” (spellings as is).

The Samuels family held most of the shares in her until 1874 when she was sold to Frederick Howell, the same one whom had shares in the *Hudscott*, and James Tatem a master mariner of Appledore, both men holding half each or 32 shares. Her port of registry became Bideford for the second and last time. Sometime during 1877 her rig was altered to a polacca schooner, the popular North Devon rig. The *Lord Rolle* was broken up in 1889, probably at Appledore and still owned by Howell and Tatem.

The final vessel of this first phase was called ***Jane***, again built by William Hutchings and with dimensions identical to the *Bicton*. In fact they and the *Lady Rolle* were probably all built to the same mould. She was registered at Bideford on May 1st 1830 and as with most of the others owned solely by William Tardrew. He sold her in 1835 to John Swainston and George Cram, Liverpool merchants and this was her last connection with Bideford. She passed through many owners at Liverpool

and Bristol, remaining registered at Liverpool until her loss on July 31st 1851 when on a coasting voyage from Bristol to Liverpool she struck on rocks named The Platters, drifted off and sank. Her crew were all saved.

Author's note:

In order to compress the article to a reasonable length, I have enclosed these few notes

1 William Tardrew; George Bragington and Frederick Howell all feature prominently with the history of the Rolle Canal; please read or purchase Barry Hughes book **Rolle Canal and the North Devon Limestone Trade** for further details on their involvement.

2 All the ships were involved mainly in the local coasting trade between South Wales and North Devon and as their cargos were a vital part of the operation of the canal this trade must have taken priority. There must however have been quiet times and inevitably they then traded where-ever a paying cargo was to be had, but ship movements reported in the local and South Wales newspapers brings their names up time and again, showing that apart from the *Hudscott* they did not stray very far from home.

3 I have the owners names of all the vessels described, from whichever port they were registered, if anyone is interested in further details.

4 I have not mentioned the shipyards and their sites except for the launch of the *Louisa* given as near the entrance to the Rolle Canal. Also I have not yet looked at the Weare Gifford thithe map; this would be about 1840 and might show the side and

size of the yard, it is currently held at the Exeter Record Office at Sowton.

5 Dimensions, tonnage, rigs, shares etc. are subjects on their own consequently I have deliberately not gone into too much detail. Again if anyone is interested in further information I can help.



This is the only known photo of one of the first six ships. It shows her near the end of her days lying in the parlour at Appledore. She has a pair of flags painted on her stern above her name and port of registry. Also of interest is the rot on the bulwark planks at the stern. The photo was taken in June of 1884 (the date being confirmed by the barque *Isabel* of Liverpool moored on the left hand side of the photo). The *Isabel*, 586 tons was owned at this time by W.C. Jervis and had been towed from Dunkirk for repair in the Richmond dry-dock, arriving at Appledore in time to be reported in the Bideford Gazette of June 3rd of that year.

Michael Guegan.

THE LIBRARY AND ORANGERY AT STEVENSTONE

Prior to the ruins of Stevenstone today there were two previous Stevenstone Houses. It is to the second of these to which the Library and Orangery relate. The main house at this time would have been a Tudor brick house surrounded by formal gardens.

We don't know of the names of the architects of these buildings but they could have been started in the 1680's by Sir John Rolle or by his grandson Robert after 1706. Interestingly though, the heraldic shields on the outside of the building belong to Robert's brother, John, and his wife, Isabella. It could possibly have been John Rolle who finished the work on both the exterior and interior of the Library and had the Orangery built at the same time.

It is thought that the Library was not originally built to be used as such. It was probably built as a banqueting house and along with the Orangery survived the remodelling of Stevenstone in 1870 by the last of the Rolle's

By 1796 the building was being used as a library. It is believed that it may have been Denys Rolle, the youngest son of Robert Rolle's brother, who may have converted the building. He was quite an eccentric who loved nature. It is thought that he may have converted

the building into a place of privacy for himself.



The Library with its tall windows, colonnades and slate roof would have been a very attractive building. The upper floor was one large room with five sash windows. The walls were oak panelled and the windows were protected by oak shutters. The fireplace was constructed of marble with an oak mantelpiece above. The ceiling contained beautiful mouldings and the walls were lined with oak bookcases. twelve feet in height.

Denys Rolle's son, John, died childless and the Stevenstone Estate became the property of Mark Rolle. He was responsible for renovating the Library and Orangery and landscaping the area in between.

The Library roof was renewed, the front rendered and steps were built at the back to give access to the upper room. The Orangery was re-roofed in glass and laid out as a fernery.

Behind the Library was a beautiful garden with a



The Library of Stevenstone, 2012

rose covered pergola of 22 arches which led to the Orangery. The gardens surrounding the Orangery and Library were stunning with fir, bamboos, fuchsias, roses, clematis, fan palms, a rockery and fish ponds.

In the 1900's Stevenstone House, the largest mansion in North Devon sadly faded away into the ruin that it is today. Fortunately that wasn't the fate of the Orangery and the Library. They were purchased by the Landmark Trust who had them carefully and tastefully

transformed into the buildings which they now use as holiday lets, giving them yet another lease of life.

Norman Richards & Heather Attwood

VOLUNTEERS AT FURZEBEAM



Lunch break at Furzebeam

Wednesday 2nd May – CANAL DAY. Is this a date to put in the new Bank Holiday suggestions box? Maybe not, but it marked a great start to the preparation of the permissive path along the towpath between The Puffing Billy and Aqueduct.

For several hours the normally peaceful environment was punctuated with bursts of power saw (cutting through rock!) and various thuds and grunts as timber was variously sawn, buried or hurled into the void below the embankment. Progress was made on several fronts, as diversions were begun to take walkers away from the bits of the path which could be a

problem. Good use was made of locally available materials, with huge slices of felled trees being used as stepping stones, and a landslide of boulders five feet across manhandled or beaten into submission with seven pound hammers and cold chisels. Indeed Adrian displayed a hidden talent for dry stone walling which bodes well for the next phase.

Another gang began the task of preparing the way for the entry to the path from the Tarka Trail, widening the towpath under the bridge and removing vegetation from the intended route. The intention is to introduce walkers to the towpath by providing the exact route that horses would have taken as they roved from one side of the canal to the other via the bridge.

Several of the diversions will hopefully be temporary, if, as we intend, later funds become available to repair the embankment where it has been damaged by falling trees. These repairs will require scaffolding and heavy lifting equipment, particularly in one case. The embankment was built in dry stonework, which has lasted well for nearly 200 years, but the combination of heavy frost and trees which have rooted in it and then fallen, has proved too much in one section. (see following picture)

We were fortunate to have Steve Blazey, of *Blazeys of Bideford*, to set up a barbecue and provide everyone with delicious burgers and sausages at lunch as well as providing tea on tap. Many thanks Steve!

We propose to continue with a monthly Volunteers Day (1st Wednesday of the month, excluding August) and welcome any member or friend who is happy to wield a hand-tool or provide muscle. The sooner the path is ready the sooner we will be able to open to the public.

Tony Barnes.



Picture above shows stonework fallen from one of the major revetments, following the effects of two hard winters
Tony Barnes 2012



CANAL ON DISPLAY

In support of Life's Journey Project an exhibition of maps, pictures and text on the history, function and future of Lord Rolle's Canal has been on display at the North Devon Museum at Barnstaple. Officially opened on Tuesday April 17th the display was due to be taken down on Saturday May 5th.

Staff at the Athenaeum have reported that there has been considerable interest shown in the display and have asked that it is left on exhibition until the week ending Friday June 15th. Later in the year it is hoped to have a similar display on exhibition in the Braunton area. If you are in Barnstaple and have a moment to spare do drop in and have a look.

Any comments from members are gratefully received.

North Devon Museum, Barnstaple 2012



'Down the Cut'

Dates of forth-coming events for your diary:

MAY

Wednesday 23rd BRAUNTON MARSHES WALK

Meeting at 2.30pm on Velator Quay for a guided walk, looking at the embankment and drainage system of Braunton Marsh, including the Great Sluice and Horsey Island Sluice, designed and built by James Green. (Duration 2 - 2½hrs)

For more details contact Chris' Hassall

Tel: 01237 425357 or email hassallc@ymail.co.uk

Later on the same day, meeting at the Braunton Countryside Centre at 6.00pm, Mary Breeds will be leading a short walk, followed by an illustrated talk about the Braunton Marshes

For more details contact Norman Richards

Tel: 01769 572 683 or email norm@fhsinternet.com

JUNE

Wednesday 6th VOLUNTEER'S DAY. (2nd)

Meeting at Annery Kiln at 9.30am for more scrub-bashing, pathclearing fun on the Furzebeam section of Lord Rolle's Canal. BBQ lunch, tea & coffee provided. All welcome.

For more details contact Tony Barnes

Tel: 01237 473801 or email anthonybar@gmail.co.uk

Sunday 17th INCLINED PLANE & WHEEL PIT WALK

Meeting at Annery Kiln at 2.30pm for a guided walk viewing the newly created EA flood meadow, stable block at the foot of the plane, the wheel pit site and the remains of the hamlet and access bridge at the top.

For more details contact Chris' Hassall

Tel: 01237 425357 or email hassallc@ymail.co.uk

JULY

Wednesday 4th VOLUNTEER'S DAY. (3rd)

Further details from Tony Barnes (as above)

Sunday 21st A VISIT TO THE BUDE CANAL

An all-day visit taking in many of the fascinating features of the Bude Canal, guided by members of the Bude Canal & Harbour Society as well as the Bude Canal Trust.

9.45am Meet at the library car park at Lower Wharf

1.15pm Lunch at Red Post (pre-booking is strongly advised).

5.30pm A cream tea, at **£3.50 per head**, is kindly offered by volunteers from the Bude Canal Trust

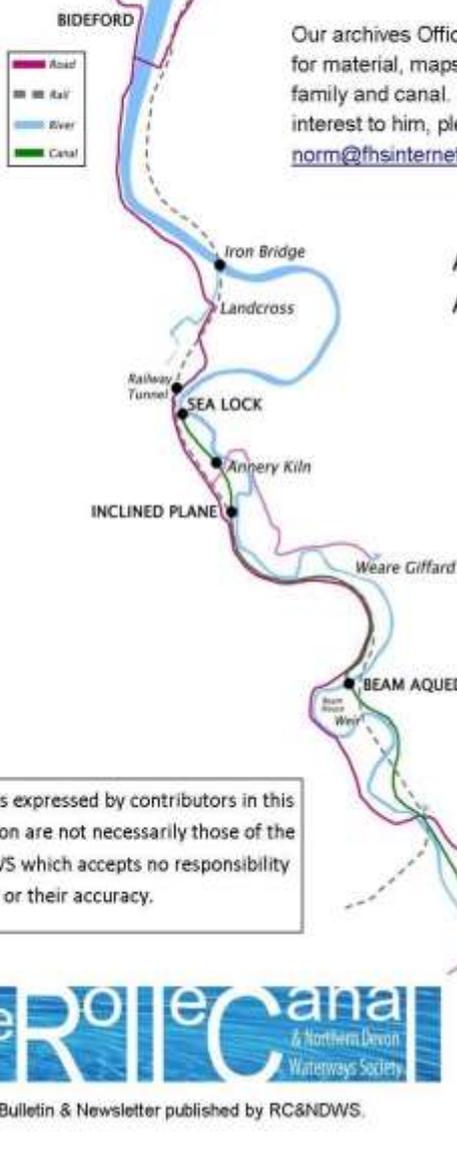
A more detailed itinerary is published on the inserted booking form. Booking is essential and some car-sharing is requested.

The cost of this trip is **£5.00 per person**, not including lunch or cream teas.

Good walking boots /shoes are recommended.



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 --
 Adrian Wills tel. 01237 477705
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