

The **R**oute **C**ana
& Northern Devon
Waterways Society

SOCIETY NEWS and VIEWS

SUMMER ISSUE

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Front cover: A very late brood of Mallard ducklings at Sea Lock

Picture by A.Wills

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR!



The somewhat unexpected and rapid move from cold, wet and late spring to a prolonged period of hot and sunny weather has enabled considerable activity regarding Lord Rolle's Canal but has also created a few problems.

Work undertaken by volunteers, contractors and staff of North Devon Coast & Countryside to erect interpretation boards has just about been completed. The ground into which the supporting posts had to be sunk, being a combination of railway embankment ballast and bedrock, has not been achieved without considerable effort being applied. The permissive footpath along the Furzebeam section of the canal running from the Tarka Trail through Clinton Devon Estates and Torrington Commons is also just about finished and hopefully will be formally opened within the next few weeks.

Chris Hassall continues to guide groups of people along sections of the canal and such is the popularity of these walks that he has to organise not one but two trips from Annery Kiln to the inclined plane site for members of the Bideford Bridge Rotary Club recently.

Investigative and some restorative work is planned for the site at the top of the inclined plane and wheel pit starting in September which promises to be very exciting.

As always, volunteers will be required for a range of tasks and anyone interested in helping can contact me or any other members of the committee. (Contact details on the back page).



Down at Sea Lock work continues although it has also been affected by past weather conditions – too cold for working with mortar and concrete; too wet for working with mortar and concrete and now too hot and dry for working with mortar and concrete! The hot and dry weather has been causing problems for the tub boat building project as well. Floor and cladding timbers are drying and shrinking dramatically opening up considerable cracks and splits. Timbers, left soaking in order to help them bend for cladding the sides of the lead boat, keep drying out. More information on this project is included later in this newsletter.

Historically, one of the major issues of concern with Lord Rolle's Canal was the limited supply of replenishing water. This year is proving to be no exception. What little fresh water is flowing into the loading basin and lock chamber is barely a dribble at the moment. Unfortunately the rising tides continue to bring silt in but none is being washed out again by out-flow. More time-consuming and tedious dredging will need to be undertaken soon. More about this problem also follows in this newsletter.

Ironically I contacted Deep Moor Refuse Centre some time ago. I was told that the site is in desperate need of top soil for covering the refuse deposits. The managers would probably be happy to take my silt if I have it analysed and it is found to be free of anything nasty. All I need to do then is pay them to take it away! I don't think so!

Does anyone else want a few tons of very fertile silt for their gardens? It's free to a good home!

Adrian Wills

THE FORGOTTEN SHIP

Michael Guegan continues his account of the ship building at Sea Lock

The *Sedwell Jane* is remembered as the largest vessel to be launched above the bridge and as my article (Spring Issue 2013) on her revealed, she was remembered by her surviving crew members and others in great detail; however, almost forgotten is the fact that a second vessel, almost identical in size and appearance, was constructed on the same site and by the same builders, for the same owners.

When the new vessel was launched in 1870 the North Devon Journal gave only a few lines to the fact that this other vessel had been launched but with nothing about her going under the bridge. Even her port of registry was different. All the previous ships had been registered at Bideford, but the *Aspasia*, as the new vessel was christened, was to be registered at the port of London. There is not much information about the *Aspasia* so I will start with a comparison between her and the *Sedwell Jane*

Sedwell Jane:- 115.5 feet long x 22.2 beam x 12.9
depth of hold — 201 tons

Aspasia:- 115.5 feet long x 22.6 beam x 12.6
depth of hold — 202 tons

Both were identically rigged as 3 masted brigantines and probably were identical in their deck layout. Both were yellow metalled from new. The *Aspasia* was sent to Liverpool to load a general cargo for South America.

The first master of the *Aspasia* was a local man, Captain Philip Bowden of Appledore I believe. A copy of the 1870 Lloyds register that I have gives her port as Torrington! However when she left Bideford it was as she had never existed. She was never again mentioned in the local papers.

When the *Aspasia* was registered at London, in September 1870, her original owners were the Rolle Canal Company of Torrington, but only two months later she was sold to Frederick Howell, who was described as a ship-owner of Torrington. He purchased her on a mortgage, the amount not given but at 10% interest. In 1873 he sold 11 shares (out of 64) to James Tatem, a master mariner of Appledore. Tatem also took out a mortgage on his shares which was still open in 1881 at which time Mr Howell was declared bankrupt.

Frederick Howell had opened seven mortgages on this ship over the years and when he was declared bankrupt three of them were still running. An attempt was made to sell her abroad but this failed and in August 1882 she was finally sold to John Taylor, a ship-owner of Guernsey. He soon offloaded 40 of the shares to other Guernsey people namely, Peter Taylor, a wine merchant holding 24 shares; Isaac Patten, a master mariner with 12 shares and Alice Grace, a spinster with 4 shares. this is how the ownership remained until her end. For some reason her port of registry remained London until in February 1890 the owners decided to transfer her to their own port of Guernsey.

This was quite a short lived transfer because in June 1891 she was lost in a collision. I can do no better than show the newspaper reports that were published in the Star, a St Peter Port newspaper on Tuesday June 16th and Saturday July 11th 1891.

COLLISION IN THE CHANNEL

LOSS OF A GUERNSEY VESSEL

During the dense fog which prevailed in the channel on Sunday night, the brigantine *Aspasia* of Guernsey, laden with coal, was run down by the steamer *Science*, of London, fifteen miles off Cape La Hogue, and foundered in ten minutes. The crew were taken on board the steamer, which landed them at the Shambles Lightship, whence they were brought to Weymouth. The brigantine was cut in two at the bows. The forepart of the steamer was much damaged, her bulkhead compartments being flooded; but she continued on her voyage.

The mate, Mr Taudevin and six hands forming the crew of the *Aspasia*, arrived here this morning by the S.S. *Antelope* from Weymouth, the master, Mr Patten, having proceeded to London. He informs us that she was run into between 11 and 12 o'clock on Sunday night, the vessel being off Cape Barfleur at the time. A thick fog was prevailing, as the approaching steamers lights were seen but a few minutes before the collision. The crew of the steamer called out to those on board the steamer 'to port'. This, however was not done and she came into the *Aspasia's* starboard bow at nearly half speed. The result was that she foundered in about four minutes. The crew barely had time to lower away and get into the jolly boat, which fortunately happened to be in the davits. The steamer stopped, took them on board, and they were landed at Weymouth yesterday morning, after being transferred to a pilot boat.

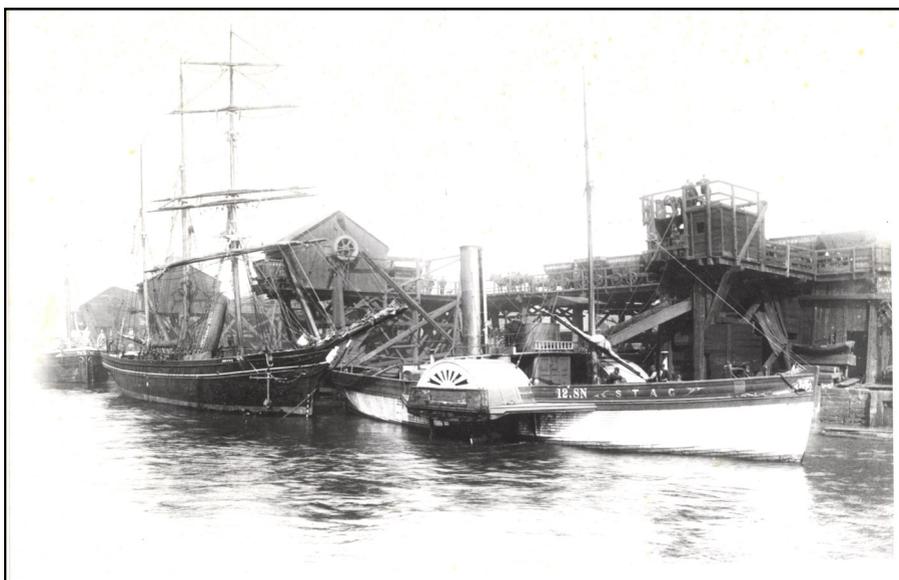
Damage to the *Science* was not quite ascertained, but she was holed above and below the waterline.

MARITIME DISPOSITION

Report of Isaac Patton, master of the three-masted brigantine, *Aspasia* of Guernsey, 161 tons, from Newcastle, June 6th, at 9 p.m., for Guernsey, with 310 tons of coals----

On the 14th, at 6 p.m., tide being low water, weather fine and clear, wind W. by N., blowing a fine breeze, with a smooth sea, the vessel was four miles to the westward of Cherbourg. Tacked vessel, heading N.W. by N. At 6.30 p.m., a thick fog came on. Reached off on the port tack until 11 p.m., when vessel was put on the starboard tack, heading S.W. by S. under all plain sail, making about 2½ knots per hour. At 8 p.m. deponent had taken charge of the vessel, and the regulation lights were put up, burning brightly. An A.B. was on the look-out forward. The fog-horn was kept going every three or four minutes. At 11.30 p.m. deponent heard a steamer's whistle on the starboard bow; 10 minutes afterwards the steamers masthead light was seen about two points on starboard bow. Deponent and the look-out man shouted to the steamer to port her helm, but no answer was received, and almost immediately afterwards, the steamer heading about E.S.E., struck the *Aspasia* on the starboard bow abaft the cathead, cutting her bow clean off. Lowered boat and all hands got into her and proceeded to the steamer, which had stopped, and proved to be the *Science* of and for London. Ten minutes after being struck the *Aspasia* sank. Deponent and his crew were treated kindly on board the *Science*, and brought to the Shambles Lightship,, where they were transferred to the pilot cutter No.1 of Weymouth and brought by her into Weymouth, arriving there at 8 a.m. this day---Weymouth, June 16th.

Those who read the *Sedwell Jane* history will know that she survived until 1893 and thus outlived her sister ship by two years. The photo below of the *Aspasia* showing her loading coal at Harton Staithes in South Shields, proves that her rig was what we now know as barquentine. In this photograph she is carrying a spike bowsprit rather than the bowsprit and jib-boom that she had when new; probably her original bowsprit was lost at sometime and the new arrangement as shown in the photo was simpler and cheaper to maintain.



In the foreground of this photograph (Circa 1880) is the paddle tug 'Stag' which has been converted for trawling. The 'Aspasia' is in the background.

Taken from Roger Finch's book 'Coals to Newcastle'.

Article by **Michael Guegan**.

PINKERY POND

A NON CANAL ON EXMOOR

A leat, sometimes referred to as a canal, was built to run from Pinkery Pond to the high ground north of Simonsbath.

Pinkery Pond is a small lake about 1½ miles north from the road between the villages of Challacombe and Simonsbath, near a place called Goat Hill. Lying 1,300 ft above sea level it covers an area of 1.11 hectares. The outflow from this pond forms the start of the River Barle.

In 1815 Exmoor was sold by the Crown to an Ironmaster from the Midlands called John Knight. He converted thousands of acres of moor into cultivation and farms and the pond was thought to have been built by the mid 1800's.

He also hoped to extract minerals from the area and opened up several small mines hence one reason for the pond and leat. Another theory is that it was for irrigation but why would anyone want to irrigate one of the wettest areas in the country? The water level is controlled by an overflow tunnel and the leat starts at a lower level near the outside, south of the dam and is not connected.

The leat runs eastwards, about 1100ft along the top of the ridge, following the contours to north of Simonsbath and one theory is that it may have been intended to have an incline to mine workings at Cornham, near Simonsbath. The line of the leat can still be seen, as defined by the stone lower edge. It appears to have been about 2 or 3ft wide and is eroded in places. The footpath leading up to the dam uses the leat for part of the way. The mines were not economically productive and the whole operation failed.

John Knight died in 1842 and his son Fredrick carried on until his death just after the turn of the century when the whole Knight Estate was sold up.

A proposal for a railway was drawn up to run from Prayway Head (north of Simonsbath) around Exehead (the head waters of the River Exe) following the contours north of Exford past Larkbarrow (one of the Knight farms used for target practice during WWII) culminating at the top of Porlock Hill, near the Whitstones. This terminus was excavated and is still there, being the top of the proposed incline to Porlock Weir, about 1000 ft below.

There are reputed to have been two tragic incidences of people drowning; one concerned a farmer who was found after the pond was drained. The other was a false alarm.

Pinkery is sometimes spelt *Pinkworthy* and there are a lot of other place-names in the area ending with 'worthy'.



The Two Moors footpath runs across the dam and access can be gained from Goat Hill corner car park.

More information can be obtained from O.S. maps, or Google 'Pinkery Pond'

Norman Richards

Visitor exiting from the pond overflow.

Picture stolen from the Internet.

CROSSING THE CANAL

Continuing a look at the bridges over Lord Rolle's Canal and where to find them by **Chris Hassall**

Loxdown Cross

An important east – west pack-horse trail led down to the Torridge from Monkleigh to cross the river by a ford to Weare Giffard and so on to Barnstaple. This trail came down a narrow side valley and the new Bideford turnpike road made a sharp loop to form a crossroads here while the canal passed over the ancient lane by short “dry aqueduct”, so called because it crossed a road rather than a river as the great Beam Aqueduct does. When the railway came, it ran alongside the canal and crossed over the lane on a new iron bridge but, in the 1960s, the main road was straightened and employed a reinforced concrete span right on the canal route, totally obliterating the dry aqueduct. Careful examination of the stone facing of the road bridge reveals that one abutment may well be actually incorporating the original aqueduct masonry. This historic site is easily accessed from the lay-by and picnic site signposted at Loxdown Cross where the old pack-horse trail is still a public highway and has an official road sign indicating the ford ahead across the meadows.

Beam Aqueduct

This is the iconic symbol of the Rolle Canal and carried the canal across the Torridge valley at a high level, avoiding a long loop of the river where the steep valley side is subject to frequent landslips, and even the present highway suffers

frequent maintenance problems. The aqueduct comprises five stone arches on tall columns and is 270 feet long by 22 feet wide carrying the water trough of the canal with a path on each side. As with the rest of the Rolle canal, no engineers drawings are known to exist but it is conjectured that the canal may have been contained in an elm trough bedded in clay lining. After the canal ceased to trade, the trough was filled in and the aqueduct became the main driveway entrance to Beam House, linking it to the main Bideford -Torrington road and making the old Carriage Drive to the east of the house redundant. The Aqueduct is referred to as “Canal Bridge” in Henry Williamson's “Tarka the Otter”, and downstream along the east bank were the twelve great oak trees under the last of which Tarka was born (unless you saw the film, where he was born just upstream!).



Beam Aqueduct, (now viaduct) looking south.

Roving Bridge

The original Carriage Drive from Beam House to Torrington ran eastwards around the back of Furzebeam Hill and along an avenue of lime trees across the Commons to the town. The canal ran through a cutting in the higher ground behind Beam House and a stone single-arched accommodation bridge was built to carry the carriage drive across the cutting and the canal. In canal terms, this is what is known as a “roving bridge” as it also served to allow the barge horses to cross over from one side of the canal to the other, necessary at this point because the tow-path is always on the side of the canal nearest the river since a strong wide bank is needed to support the canal on that



The Carriage or Roving Bridge

side. This is the only true canal bridge still in existence on the Rolle Canal and its survival is due to its still being in the original

ownership and having been restored as a millennium project by Lord Clinton, the successor to Lord Rolle. There is a project under way to establish a permissive foot path along the canal from the Tarka Trail behind Beam House, under the roving bridge and around the bottom of Furzebeam Hill to Torrington Commons, but at present, 2012, this is still private property and only accessible to the public on guided walks by the Rolle Canal Society.

Staple Vale

There is nothing to be seen of the canal and any bridges where it was crossed by the Bideford Turnpike at Staple Vale, until the canal route is re-defined upstream beside the Torridge in the form of the Rolle Road, a broad public walkway leading to Taddiport. The railway station and associated goods yards, and subsequent realignment of the main road, have removed all trace. The railway viaduct carrying the Tarka Trail over the Rolle Road and the river Torridge was built subsequently to the closure of the canal.

Taddiport

The road over Taddiport bridge, just before turning up Mill Street, crosses the line of the canal and careful examination of the low stone wall on the east side of the road will reveal the very top of an archway that has become buried through successive building up of the road level over the years. This was the arch that originally carried the road over the canal at this point, and was rescued by the Torrington and District Historical Society at a time when the road was being rebuilt. A short distance further east along the Rolle Road is the point where a footpath down Castle Hill to Taddiport Bridge crossed the canal on a swing bridge as shown in the next photograph.

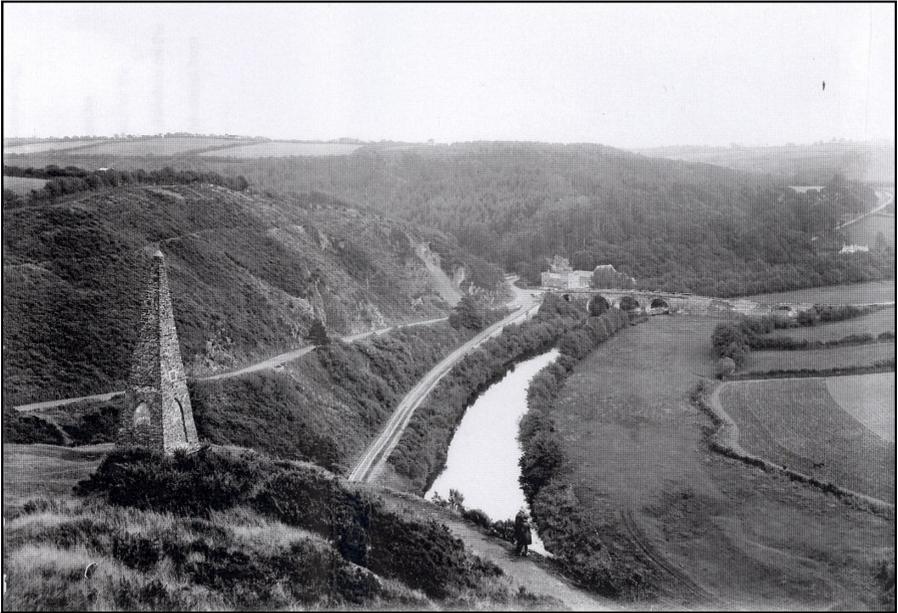
The canal is itself now a footpath and the two paths still cross at this point .



Swing bridge at the foot of Torrington Commons crossing the canal with the hamlet of Taddiport in the background

New Town Mills

The last bridge over the canal proper, before its terminal basin at the Rosemoor lime kilns, is where the A386 Hatherleigh road crosses the Torridge south of Torrington. Here the main road bridge has an extra arch at its eastern end to allow the canal to pass under on its way to the mill pond of Torrington's New Town Mills, now a holiday complex called Orford Mill. Again the canal can not be recognised as such, and the mill pond is now a lawn, but there is a water wheel still in place, and a hundred yards further on past the car park the canal can again be made out heading into the grounds of Rosemoor Gardens.



New Town Mills Bridge, looking south. The canal, (by this time in-filled and called Rolle Road — centre of picture), ran through an extra arch on the left hand side of the road bridge

Rosemoor

The Royal Horticultural Society's property, housing the renowned show gardens at Rosemoor , includes the head waters of the Rolle canal. The main basin and wharf is at the lime kilns that were built to convert imported limestone into agricultural lime for the benefit of the land at Rows Moor and the surrounding properties. To the basin, from another mile upstream, a broad mill leat carried water from the head weir on the Torridge to feed the New Town Mills, a small tucking mill and the canal itself. The leat skirted the edge of the valley and was crossed by three small accommodation bridges to enable farmers and cattle to access the water meadows in the valley bottom. One of these old stone bridges has collapsed and

been filled in while the other two are still used for access and are suffering severe damage due to the size and weight of modern farm machinery.

Chris Hassall



Original bridge built by James Green, crossing the leat

DOWN THE CUT - A guided walk

Sunday, August 18th RHS.Rosemoor

An organised walk, just over two miles long, meeting at RHS Rosemoor Gardens woodland car park, will lead to the head weir of the canal, viewing the bridge above,. The return route crosses the river meadows to the lime kiln complex and tucking mill ruins. A donation of £2 per person is requested.

Following the guided walk participants are invited to visit the formal gardens free of charge

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT SEA LOCK!

Despite extremes of weather over the past few months progress on a number of fronts has been made at Sea Lock

Tub Boats

The replica tub boat project has reached a stage where the lead boat is fully ribbed and awaiting cladding. The timbers for the cladding (21 feet X 9 inches x 2 ins) of the lead boat, unlike the straight sided following boat, are curved. Bending timbers of this size is not easy at the best of times and the churning and clanking of Barry Hughes's, Trevor Fordham's and my brain trying to come up with a workable solution could probably be heard from some distance away.

It was finally decided that we would resort to the well-proven method of steaming the timbers but it would be better to leave this process until the cold, wet weather turned warmer. Later it was decided that it would aid the bending process if the timbers were soaked thoroughly before hand. The timbers were duly moved from shelter out into the open and carefully stacked in the pond of the upper wharf. Unfortunately, just after the stacking was completed, the dam retaining the water in the upper wharf decided to spring a major leak and all the water flowed out, leaving the timber high and DRY! Too much effort would be required to mend the leak, in a dam which ultimately will be removed anyway so it was decided to move the timbers to the lower wharf where there was more lying water. The timbers, heavy enough even when dry, were duly relocated and weighed down in a position which is normally quite wet – not allowing for a very hot, dry spell of weather.

Fortunately these timbers do get a good soaking on high tides and are showing signs of bending where required. It is now thought that steaming them may be unnecessary anyway; just a degree of brute strength, ignorance and the application of clamps in the appropriate places may do the trick. It is hoped to have a go at this within the next couple of weeks.

The hot weather has been creating havoc with all the timber structures at Sea Lock. The cladding on the lock gates has been drying out causing massive shrinkage cracks to appear as is happening in both replica tub boats. It was considered necessary to lower both completed and uncompleted tub boats into the basin of the wharf in an attempt to keep the timbers damper than when being left up on the side. Both had to be weighted down so that water would flood into and over them on high tides to help swell the timbers again. Shrinking timbers in wooden boats has always been a problem and always solved by soaking so it is not insurmountable. All we need is some wet weather. (*Did he really say that?*)



Wharf wall rebuilding

Thanks to a donation of facing stone from Devon Stone at Beam Quarry, the rebuilt section of wharf wall has grown considerably. The scaffolding has been extending along the front of the wall and dismantled at the other end where building has finished. It's a bit like a caterpillar slowly working its way along the face of the wall. Work continues on clearing damaged, loose masonry



and rebuilding when time avails but as with all things, matters crop up which 'throw spanners in the works'. Rebuilding has temporarily stopped but grant funding from IWA West Country branch and a contribution from **RC& NDWS** is ring-fenced for the acquisition of more stone which just has to be collected from the quarry and then reconstruction will start again.

The problems of silting

The dry weather has exacerbated the problems of silting since the rising tides continue to bring in deposits but lack of flow does not wash the silt back out again. Part of the solution to this problem is to remove the silt by mechanical means. The RB22 crane has the capability to dig and lift out large quantities of silt quickly and efficiently. However, its size and weight prevents it working too close to the wharf edge or further up

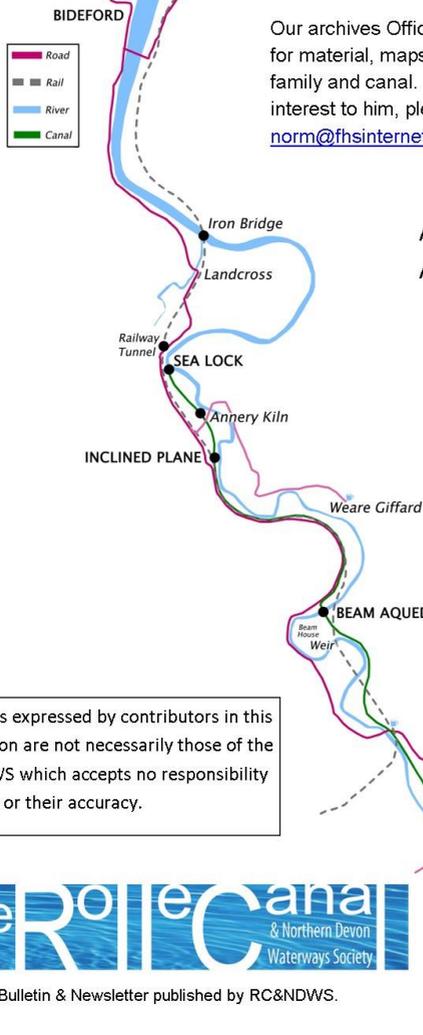
along the canal where the towpath is much narrower. A solution has been found for this too, I hope! I have recently managed to acquire another crane, but this Priestman Cub is a smaller, lighter and much more manoeuvrable beast than the RB. It has been rigged to operate a drag-line bucket which is almost perfect for what is needed. However, drag-line excavating is an art in itself and not to be undertaken lightly by those who do not know what they are doing, like me! My friend Alistair, however, is experienced in the operation of these machines and hopefully he will be able to make time soon to put the Cub through its paces.



Priestman Cub, Mark V1c (1976) rigged for dragline dredging with, its big brother, the RB22 behind



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:

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