

The **R**o **t**e **C**ana  
& Northern Devon  
Waterways Society

**SOCIETY NEWS & VIEWS**

**WINTER ISSUE**

**FEBRUARY 2013**

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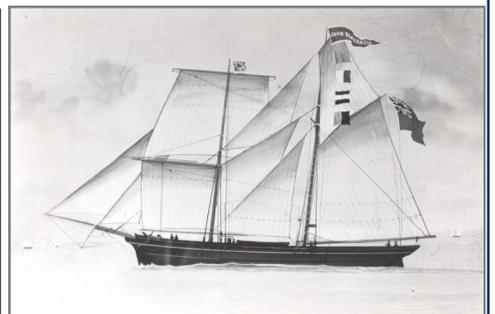
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**Front Cover:**        *A picturesque although rather sad view of the North Devon Trading M.V .Advance taken recently during a combination of a very high tide and flooded fields.*

Picture taken on January 30th, 2013 by Adrian Wills

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

The appalling weather experienced across the whole of our country towards the end of last year and into this has brought a wet and muddy stop to most work underway on the various sections of Lord Rolle's Canal.

Although many people continue to unofficially walk the length of canal running along the foot of Furzebeam Hill, connecting Torrington Commons with that belonging to Clinton Devon Estates, the surface of the towpath is exceedingly muddy and slippery and voluntary work here is temporarily suspended. Work at Sea Lock has also ground (slid?) to a halt and the wharf surface here resembles something more of a battle field than a restoration site. Repair and restorative work will resume as soon as the weather permits and once again new volunteers will be sought and old faithfuls recalled '*to arms*'.

Well, here we are at the beginning of not just another year but one that is somewhat auspicious for the **Rolle Canal & Northern Devon Waterways Society**. This society has now been in existence for a decade!

# Happy 10th Anniversary RC&NDWS!

This is also the year when our society will be shortly celebrating the completion of a successful partnership with the ND Biosphere and Clinton Devon Estates to create and officially open to the general public the permissive footpath along the Furzebeam section of Lord Rolle's Canal.

Since its inauguration in 2003 the RC&NDWS has had an enormous impact on raising public awareness of the canal and generated a huge amount of interest in its existence, history and future. Those people serving on the committee, past and present, have earned the right to be very proud of what has been achieved during the last 10 years. We have a thriving, vibrant society, driven by a hard working committee which is well supported by its membership.

Please be aware that [MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS for 2013 are now due!](#) You can send your completed form, along with a cheque made payable to '**The Rolle Canal & Northern Devon Waterways Society**', to the address supplied, pay in person at the AGM or set up a standing order if you wish. Prompt payment is greatly appreciated.

The RC&NDWS committee, not content to sit on its laurels, is drawing-up plans for 2013 to investigate the structure of the inclined plane and wheel pit. Wearing hats of another society, Chris Hassall and Greg Smith have been involved in some work with the North Devon Archaeological Society at the foot of the plane and near the Roving Bridge on CDE land. The results of the NDAS research are likely to lead to the requirement of more voluntary involvement from our society in a 'Time Team' kind of way.

The continued well-being of our society is dependent on volunteers. If you feel you can offer help in any way, then please get in contact with any member of the committee or Tony Barnes in particular if you wish to help on the permissive footpath project. If you would like to be involved in helping run the society then get yourself nominated on the slip inserted and return it to the secretary (address on the form) no later than March 31st, 2013 for election at the forthcoming AGM.

To be a committee member no particular skills are required and no onerous duties need to be undertaken, only a keen interest in promoting Lord Rolle's Canal and the aims of the society is necessary.

Notice of AGM is as follows:-

**Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> April starting at 2.30 pm**

**The Rolle Canal & Northern Devon Waterways Society**

**A.G.M. 2013**

**R.H.S. Rosemoor Gardens Lecture Room,**

**Torrington, EX38 8PH**

Following the AGM there will be an illustrated talk on

**The Restoration of the Wilts' & Berks' Canal**

presented by

**PETER WILLIAMS**

I am really looking forward to Mr Williams' presentation, partly because of my own involvement in canal restoration work but also, thanks to Roy Sutton's intervention, I found myself on an IWA sponsored scaffolders course on the W. & B. at Wootton Bassett in 2003 just in time to host the first Waterways recovery Camp at Sea Lock in which I had to erect scaffold throughout the length of the lock chamber. At the time of the scaffolding course I worked with others on a brick-built lock which wasn't connected to a canal on either end so I am eager to see what progress has been made 'in joining the dots'. Incidentally this lock chamber was for a narrow canal, something like 6 feet 6 inches wide. I jokingly made some rather disparaging remarks that relative to Sea Lock this wasn't a lock, merely a scratch in the ground. When I showed my fellow scaffolders pictures I had of Sea Lock they actually agreed!

**There is no entry fee for this event and in honour of the society's anniversary some refreshments will be available. All are welcome, bring your friends!**

Once again the RC&NDWS is very grateful to the directors of **R.H.S. Rosemoor** for not only making available the splendid facilities of the Lecture Room for our AGM but allowing those attending the meeting free access to the gardens afterwards as well. That alone is not an opportunity to miss!

**Adrian Wills.**



## ‘LIFE’S JOURNEY’ points the way!

Not only has the Rolle Canal & Northern Devon Waterways Society been working hard to provide the opportunity for members of the public to explore lengths of Lord Rolle’s Canal in private ownership, but it has been heavily involved in the development of ways and means with which to publicize the existence and purpose of this waterway.

Following considerable discussion and the ‘throwing around’ of ideas and layouts a final draft for the design of six interpretation/information boards have been agreed between the RC&NDWS and ND Biosphere and shortly will be erected in prominent positions along the Tarka Trail between the tunnel at Landcross and the old railway station, now the Puffing Billy public house, at the foot of Torrington Commons. The company commissioned to create the boards has been given the go-ahead for the production of the finished article and it is hoped that they will soon be put in place.

Each board features different aspects of the Tarka Trail and has an outline map running its length so that each location can be easily identified and orientated. Pictures, drawings and text are provided to create an attractive and informative ‘punctuation mark’ to this section of the trail.

Where will they be found?

Heading south along the Tarka Trail from the railway tunnel:-

**Board 1** will be sited by the new viewing platform and provides a brief explanation of the existence and function of Lord Rolle’s Canal as well as providing a condensed explanation of Sea Lock.

**Board 2** will be accessed via a new footpath leading down from the Tarka Trail overlooking the newly created flood alleviation, wild-life pond and this board provides information about the impact of the Rolle Canal and how dramatically more recent developments in agricultural practises have changed the local landscape.

**Board 3** is to be erected at the foot of the inclined plane and gives a précis of the loads the canal was built to carry and why it was such a monumental step forward in the transportation of heavy goods into the heart of rural Devon.

**Board 4** will be situated at the top of the inclined plane and describes the brilliance of the Victorian engineering that enabled tub-boats to be raised and lowered from one level to another.

**Board 5** is to be erected on the new permissive footpath running behind Beam House and explains the means by which horses towing boats could change from one side of the canal to the other without having to be detached and reattached from their loads. This is the site of the restored Roving Bridge.

**Board 6**, or of course the first board if you are walking in the opposite direction, is to be sited by one of a pair of slot boards situated along the permissive footpath and explains what they are and what they were used for. What happens to the water contained within a canal when the towpath collapses and there is no means of quickly stopping out-flow has recently been graphically illustrated on the Grand Western Canal.

At this point in time no information board has been commissioned for the Beam Aqueduct which I consider to be a significant oversight. However, this has been discussed and it is very likely that shortly after the initial six are completed and erected another board will be ordered to address this lack.

The design of the boards has been very carefully considered and it is hoped that they will prove to be sufficiently attractive to make passers-by stop and spend time looking at them. They are

intended to offer 'bite-sized' pieces of information that will interest and intrigue those attracted by them.

These boards are not intended to give a full explanation of each location but to encourage those using the Trail to think about the environment in which they are, to appreciate how it came to be and, maybe, to want to find out more!

Report by Adrian Wills.

**Board 1**

### TIDE LOCK

**A GATEWAY FOR CHANGE**  
Below you are the remains of the tide lock that linked Lord Rolle's Canal, sometimes called the Torrington Canal, to the tidal River Torridge. It is tranquil now, but at its height it was part of an industrial hub with a bustling ship yard, a saw mill and a large wharf.

The lock chamber you can see is the first (approx. 36m) long and 20 feet (approx. 6m) deep. It was designed to accommodate a ship carrying a large timber load and on the canal basin behind the second (and last) set of gates.

The four original masonry gates were made of cast-iron. Each would have weighed over 2 tons and would have closed at night to prevent the passage of the boats. The pair of gates you can see is an interesting relic. Unfortunately, the lock was built on a site that was later decided to be unsuitable for the removal of sandstone and other local stone quarries.

**A FITTING TESTIMONY**  
Thanks to the efforts of many people and organisations, the remains of the Rolle Canal are now being preserved. The Waterways Society, the story of the canal has been forgotten, to ensure its presence to the benefit and gain of you, Lord Rolle and the West Country English Landscape.

**A SHORT-LIVED BUT IMPORTANT ENDEAVOUR**  
In 1831, parts of the Canal were sold to the Duke of Devon and Cornwall. The Duke had a plan to build a canal from the Rolle Canal to the River Torridge, which would have been a short-lived but important endeavour.

**Board 2**

### SALT MARSH

The river has been embanked here for over a hundred years, including when the Rolle Canal was operating. The man-made banks prevented the tides from flooding the fields and, like the Rolle Canal itself, made agricultural improvement possible.

The river gradually ate away at the old embankment and in 1910 the decision was made to remove the old bank and to flood the fields once more. This is an example of the new approach to flood defence called managed realignment, where the flood water is allowed to return to the sea and create a new natural habitat.

The water causes channels and cracks to develop, creating habitats suitable for a range of species and for the birds that live there.

Since the banks have been breached, agricultural grasses are giving way to more open habitats. The number of visiting birds is increasing, with frequent sightings of osprey, peregrine, sparrow hawk, kestrel and owl.

**POHNA FIELD**  
The shallow, warmer waters in the salt marsh are a haven for a wide range of wildlife. A large area of water with plenty of food that is an excellent habitat for high tide birds such as the Red-throated Loon and the Black-winged Stilt.

**HEAT OF THE MOMENT**  
Imagine how you would have to be in the heat of the moment to be able to work in the salt marsh. The heat of the sun and the heat of the water would be a challenge for anyone working there.

**BALL CLAY**  
Ball Clay, an internationally scarce material, has been used in the past in the manufacture of bricks and tiles. It was used by famous potters like Wedgwood in traditional North Devon. Signatures and inscriptions were such as these.

**Board 3**

### MOVING HEAVY LOADS

The building in front of you is believed to be a stable for the horses that towed the canal's tub boats. It lies at the bottom of the canal's tub boats. It was close to Amney and Ridd lime kilns, a ship yard and the North Devon Pottery in an industrial hub served by the canal.

The canal's primary cargo was limestone and coal from the Devon. These were used in the brick industry to make lime to improve the poor quality local soils. Over 100,000 tons of lime were used in the local industry.

But the limestone, once broken down, was used to make bricks and tiles. The bricks were used to build the walls of the houses and the walls of the canals. The limestone was also used to make lime kilns, a ship yard and the North Devon Pottery in an industrial hub served by the canal.

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**Board 4**

### RIDD INCLINED PLANE

**A FEAT OF ENGINEERING**  
If you were standing where you are now whilst the canal was working, you would be waist-deep in water in the canal's upper basin at the top of the inclined plane.

The Ridd Canal was an inclined plane to bring coal from the Ridd Colliery to the Rolle Canal. It was built by James Ridd in 1831. The canal was 100 feet long and 10 feet wide. It was built on a steep slope of 1 in 10. The canal was built on a stone and brick structure. The canal was built on a stone and brick structure. The canal was built on a stone and brick structure.

**HOW IT WORKED**  
The inclined plane was used to bring coal from the Ridd Colliery to the Rolle Canal. The coal was loaded onto tubs and then lowered down the inclined plane. The tubs were then loaded onto the Rolle Canal and then transported to the Rolle Canal.

**EVIDENCE FROM THE PAST**  
The Ridd Canal was built in 1831. The canal was built on a stone and brick structure. The canal was built on a stone and brick structure. The canal was built on a stone and brick structure.

**THE HUNTER'S INN**  
Just to your right you can see the remains of the Hunter's Inn. The inn was built in 1831. The inn was built in 1831. The inn was built in 1831.

**Board 5**

### THE ROVING BRIDGE

The bridge in front of you once carried the driveway to Beam House, the residence of Dennis Rolle. What you see now is the result of careful restoration carried out in 2000 by Lord Clinton, whose family inherited Beam from the Rolle family.

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**ELEGANT AND FUNCTIONAL**  
Look carefully at the bridge and you will notice the arches and the stone. The bridge was built in 1831. The bridge was built in 1831. The bridge was built in 1831.

**A TIGHT SQUEEZE**  
The canal is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide. The bridge is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide. The bridge is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide.

**ROOM TO PASS**  
On the other side of the bridge, the narrow road developed into a wider road. The road was built in 1831. The road was built in 1831. The road was built in 1831.

**Board 6**

### STOP BOARD

**SAVING WATER, SIMPLY**  
Take a look at the canal walls in front of you. Do you see how narrow the canal is and the small slots on the inside of the wall?

When the canal was working, the water would flow through the narrow slots. The water would then flow through the narrow slots. The water would then flow through the narrow slots.

**A CHALLENGING ROUTE**  
The canal is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide. The canal is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide. The canal is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide.

**A HAND-BUILT CANAL**  
The canal is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide. The canal is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide. The canal is just over 6 feet (approx. 2 metres) wide.

**DISASTER AVERTED**  
Only a few feet of the canal opened. The canal was built in 1831. The canal was built in 1831. The canal was built in 1831.

## WEARE GIFFORD SHIPBUILDING -THE FOURTH PHASE

**Michael Guegan** continues his fascinating investigation into the vessels and their owners, built at the site of Lord Rolle's Canal—Sea Lock

After the completion of the schooner *Clara* in 1842, shipbuilding at Sea Lock ceased. It would be another 19 years before the next vessel, the first of two, was built on this site. I can find nothing about what happened in the years preceding 1861, but as ship-building only needed a suitable piece of land, a launch-way and a sawpit, the initial expenditure to start anew would not be too great. By 1861 William Tardrew had died, an acrimonious court case between his widow and George Braginton, in 1855 ably described in Barry Hughes book '**Rolle Canal and the Limestone Trade**' page 70/71 gives details of the proceedings, details of the financing of the canal and also mentions the fact that George Braginton continued to manage the Rolle Canal together with two new partners, Messrs Frederick Holwill and Hubert Henry Pigeon, both of whom were described as merchants of Great Torrington. Again according to Barry Hughes, Braginton's Torrington Bank failed in 1865, and he was declared bankrupt. This was the same year in which all the remaining vessels were sold to The Rolle Canal Company. Whether Braginton, Holwill and Pigeon were still involved in the business I do not know, but when shares of the surviving vessels were sold off by the canal company during 1875 all three purchased some.

On October 10<sup>th</sup> 1875 10 shares in the *Alice* were sold and the names of the owners certainly provide food for thought. Four shares were acquired by George Braginton, gentleman of Plymouth (would this be the same George Braginton as previous or maybe his son?); 2 went to Thomas Merrill Vicary (perhaps the son of George Vicary after whom the earlier schooner was named?) 2 to Georgianna Merrill Braginton (the name Merrill shows a family connection with the Vicary's) and 2 to Alice Jane Braginton (after whom the schooner was almost certainly named). A further 13 shares were later sold to Frederick Holwill. The above was in the ownership along with the Rolle Canal Company, at the time she was lost.

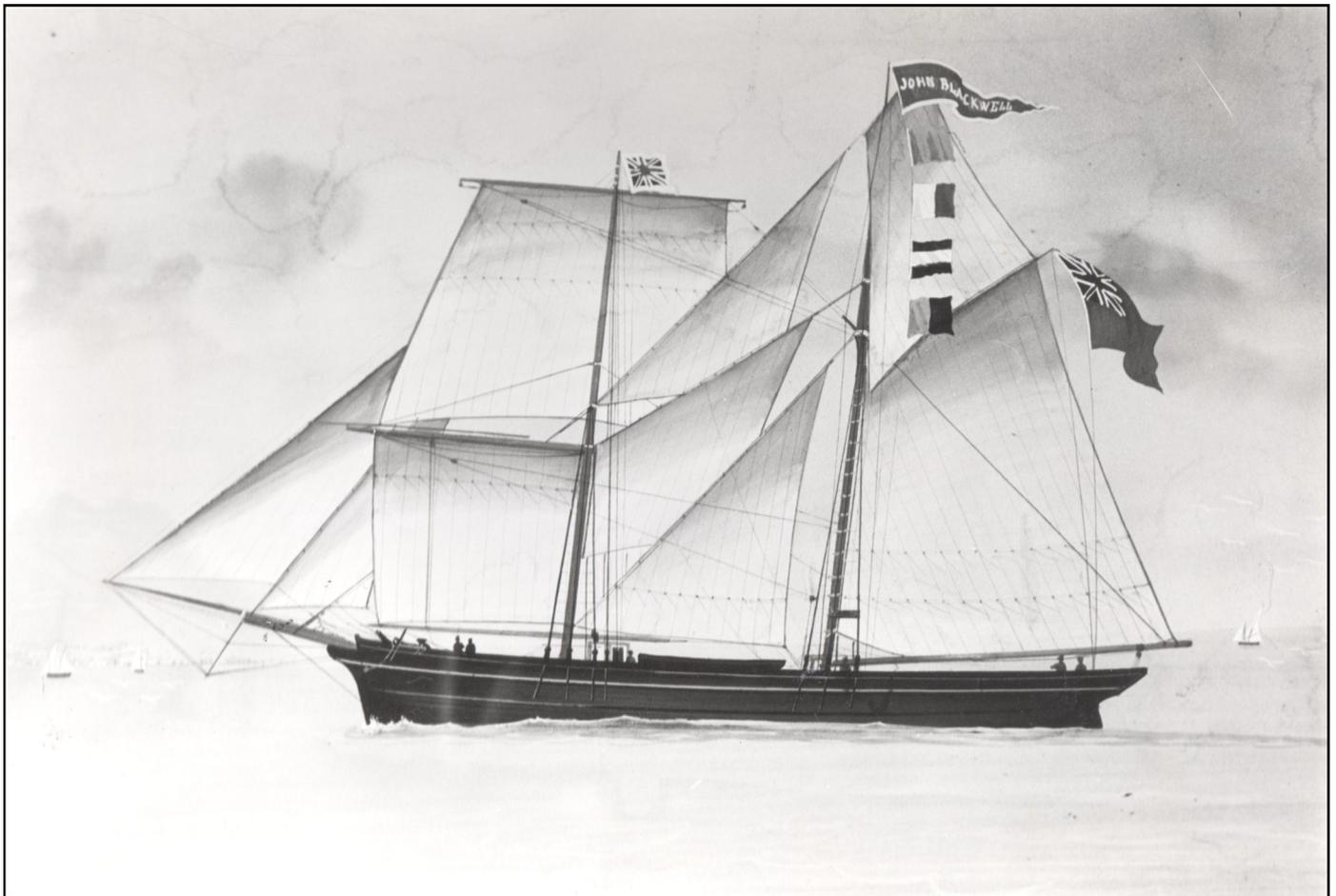
### ALICE

The North Devon Journal dated February 14<sup>th</sup> 1861, states that the Rolle Canal company had launched a vessel at Monkleigh for the foreign trade, and that it would barely go through the widest arch of the bridge. This must have been a slight exaggeration as the unnamed vessel, which was of course the *Alice*, had a beam of 19.6 feet and a depth of hold of 10.8 feet and the much larger *Sedwell Jane* of 1869 had equivalent dimensions of 20.05 feet and 12.5 respectively.

The builder of the *Alice* was William Waters, the son of the Bideford shipbuilder Thomas Waters who's yard was situated at East-the Water. After squeezing through the bridge, the hull was taken, probably to his father's yard to be completed. The *Alice* was 68.9 feet long, was rigged as a 2 mast schooner and carried a female bust figurehead. Her tonnage was 84.03 tons gross. Her owners were, as stated above, George Braginton with 21 shares; Frederick Holwill with 22 shares and Hubert Pigeon with the remaining 21. She was registered at the port of Bideford on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1861 number 13. Four years later on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1865 her ownership was transferred to the Rolle Canal Company. She was reregistered at Bideford on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1866 having being lengthened by 26 feet making her now 94.6 feet long and increasing her tonnage to 126.74 tons. She was also fitted with a third mast although she retained her schooner rig, at least in official documents. I say 'at least' because both the *Sedwell Jane* and the later *Aspasia* were both listed on official documents as schooners, although they were using the modern definition 'barquentines' and I believe that the *Alice*

may have carried the same rig. However, in the absence of any illustrations, we will never know. I will enlarge on details of ship rigs in a future article.

When the North Devon Journal reported her launch, it was stated that she was intended for foreign trade and whilst I have never bothered to check any of her voyages, her final voyage shows that she still travelled far from home. Her Bideford registration is cancelled with the notation 'wrecked at Monte Video, 1879' and closed on August 27<sup>th</sup> of the same year. Her loss was not reported in the local papers, but Lloyds List reports that a telegram from Monte Video states that the British 3 mast schooner *Alice*, Valencia to Buenos Ayres, that had gone ashore and been abandoned on the British Bank, had been taken off and towed into Monte Video; all hands saved. The yearly Board of Trade wreck returns reports that on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1879 the *Alice* of Bideford, from Valencia to Buenos Ayres with general cargo had gone ashore on the *English* Bank in the River Plate and that all six crew had been saved.



### JOHN BLACKWELL

The Bideford Gazette of January 7<sup>th</sup> 1862 records the launch of the *John Blackwell*, as follows—"A launch took place last Thursday morning at Sealock, near Landcross. She is to be schooner rigged and was built by Mr Waters junior. Her name is to be *George Braginton*, and she is to be fitted out at Mr Cox's yard. Another vessel of 300 tons is to be laid down immediately".

Three details stand out from this article. First, her name was changed but who was John Blackwell? Second, was the statement that she was to be fitted out at the yard of George Cox, at this time situated at Bank End, where the Council office block now stands and thirdly, just what was the 300 ton vessel that was to be laid down 'immediately'? I must confess that I have never checked the Lloyds building survey reports to see when the future *Sedwell Jane* was laid down as this would

show if she was laid down and abandoned for several years or if the Gazette report was a piece of wishful thinking that took many years to come to fruition.

The new vessel was completed and entered in the Bideford register book on January 27<sup>th</sup> as the 65 ton Polacca schooner *John Blackwell*. She was shorter by 5 foot than the *Alice* with all other dimensions in proportion. Her owners were as the *Alice* except that Holwell now held 21 shares and Pigeon had 22. As with the *Alice*, she too was transferred to the ownership of the Rolle Canal Company in April 1865, but sadly she did not last very long as she was wrecked off Cephalonia (Greece) on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1865. At present I have no more information than that stated.

As for illustrations, I know of two of the *John Blackwell*; one was in the possession of the late Basil Greenhill and the other owned by the late Michael Bocquet. It is Michael's painting that is shown above. The picture below is a fascinating painting, owned and on display by the Burton Art Gallery in Bideford. It is a view of Bideford from Upcott Hill; however in the river above the bridge coming downstream is a small vessel, (minus its super structure) which could be the *John Blackwell* as the painting is certainly of the correct period.

By **Michael Guegan**



Photograph of the painting, courtesy of the Burton Art Gallery.

**Editor's note:** This painting is of particular interest because of the many different, historic features it shows such as the coal shute from the Bideford Black mine, the first steam-powered ferry crossing the river mid-stream below Bideford Long Bridge, and the lime kilns where Jewson's now stands.

Neither the name of the artist nor the date the picture was painted is known but the railway is not portrayed indicating the painting was created before 1871 and probably in the mid 1860's.

## LIVE THE LIFE OF A LORD!

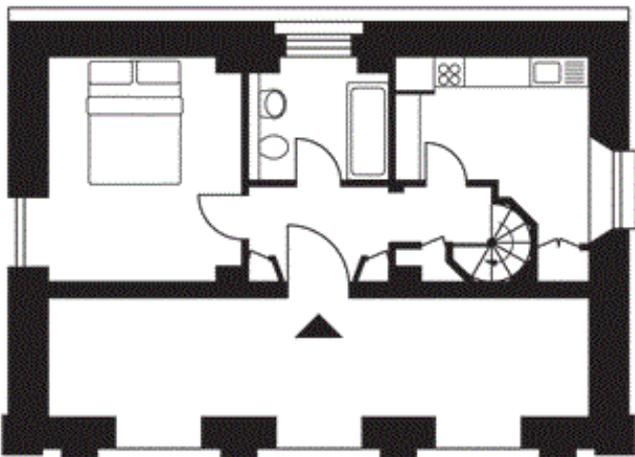
Today, most of the existing buildings of Lord Rolle's former residences are privately owned and closed to the public. However, should you wish to experience a modicum of the lifestyle once enjoyed by the Rolle Family, then why not take a short break, or even longer if your bank balance will permit, and relax in the pleasant surroundings of The Library in Stevenstone Court?

This building which has already been the subject of an article by Norman Richards and Heather Attwood, is presently owned by the Landmark Trust and is available for booking.

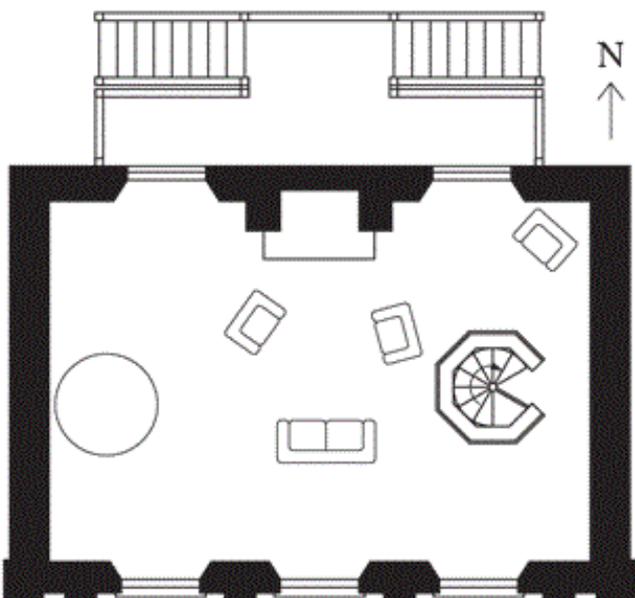
The Landmark Handbook of 1993, of which I just happen to have a copy, states:-

*"The Library, and its smaller companion, the Orangery, stand in well-mannered incongruity beside the ruins of Victorian Stevenstone, with the remains of a grand layout and arboretum around them. Stevenstone was rebuilt by the very last of the Rolles in 1870, but these two pavilions survive from an earlier remodelling carried out at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Robert Rolle and his brother, John. The rich facade of the Library, with its giant order and modillion cornice, is reminiscent of the style of William Talman, who just may have had something to do with it. In 1708 Talman was commissioned by Robert Rolle to build Queen Anne's Walk in Barnstaple, and about this time work was being carried out at Stevenstone.*

Ground floor



First floor



*Why the library in the garden? Probably it started life as a perfectly ordinary banqueting house, and only assumed its more learned character later on. Why it should have done so is a mystery, of a pleasantly unimportant kind. By the time we first saw it, when it came up for sale in 1978, the bookshelves had been dispersed, and the Library had been used as a house for many years, the fine upper room divided and the loggia closed in, while the Orangery was about to collapse altogether.*

*We have put new roofs on both buildings and strengthened shaky walls. On the Library new eaves cornice, with modillions copied from some of the fragments found in the Victorian roof, was carved from 179 feet of yellow pine by a local craftsman, Mr Richard Barnett. Inside we have opened up the main room again.*

*The restoration has been slow and complicated, but very worthwhile, and staying in this particularly handsome building, even without the books, is an enlightening experience.*

*Mrs C.S. Haslam (Trustee)"*

At the time of writing this description by Mrs Halsam, a weekend break in the winter weeks would cost the princely sum of £270 whereas a week mid-August would set you back £612. Today, The Library can still be booked

through the Landmark Trust but the price ranges are somewhat higher and the description of the property has been slightly updated. Details can be found on the following web address should you wish to follow them up.

<http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/BuildingDetails/Overview/190/The-Library>

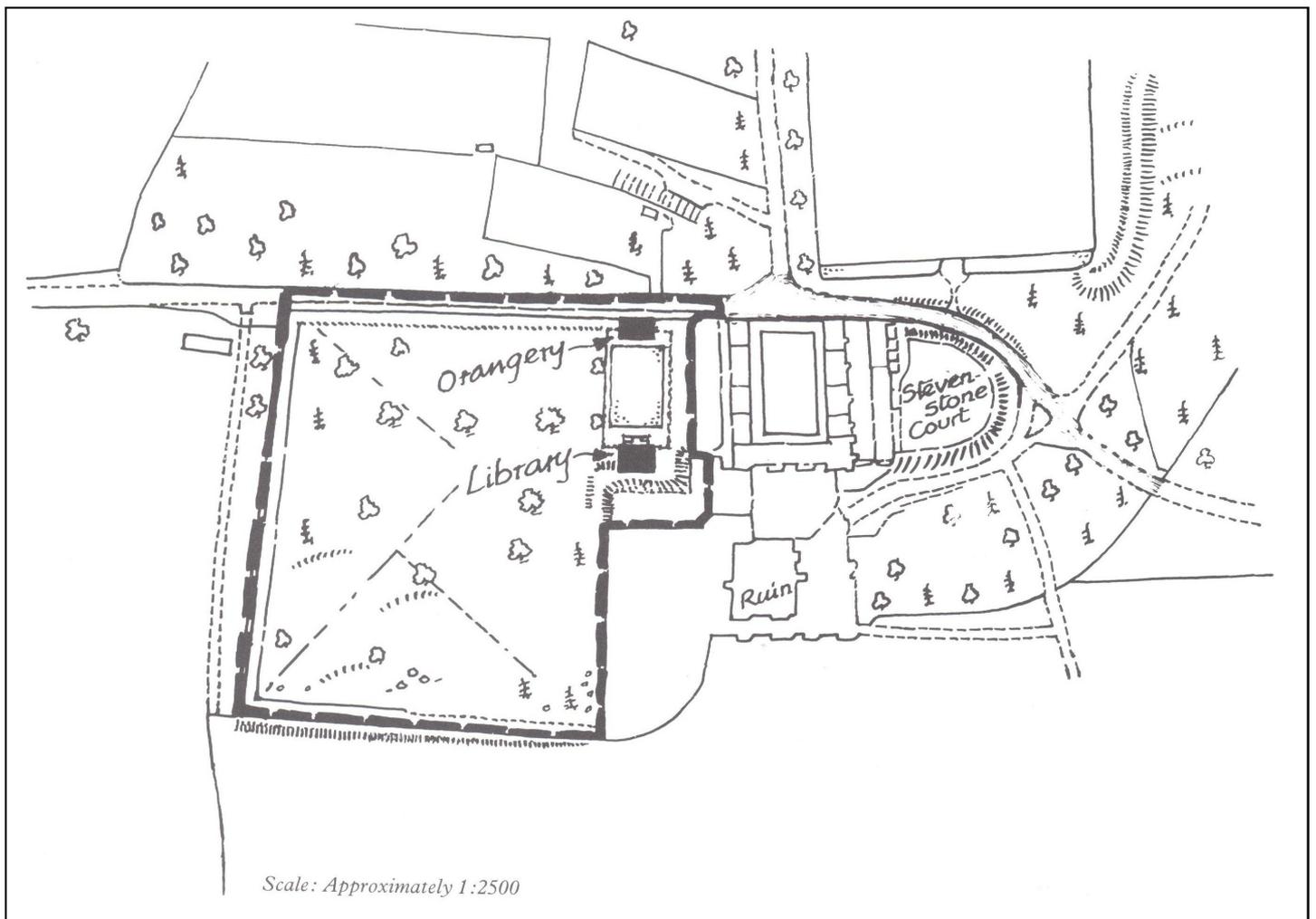
An interesting précis of the history of the estate but with particular reference to the restoration of The Library can be sourced from:-

<http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk/otherOptions/HistorySheets.htm#L>

While I find the comment about The Library starting life as a ‘perfectly ordinary banqueting hall’ (Haven’t we all got one? They’re just sooo common!) a rather amusing remark, it is good to know that such buildings as The Library are still highly valued, are being cared for by organisations such as the Landmark Trust and are still being made accessible.

Having had the pleasure of staying for a weekend break in another of the Landmark’s properties I can vouch for the high standard with which their buildings are maintained and how well kept, true to their character.

Adrian Wills



*(With apologies to the Landmark Trust for plagiarizing so much of their material.)*

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF BEAM CANAL BASIN

A report by **Chris Hassall**

Most readers will have visited the roving bridge over the canal behind Beam House on one of our regular guided walks and looked down at the canal bed towards the Tarka Trail. We have always assumed that there would have been a canal basin there and a wharf for unloading supplies destined for the big house, particularly as it was then one of the Rolle family residences.



As part of the “Life's Journey” project that you will have read about elsewhere, and with help from the North Devon Archaeological Society, a small group of joint members have carried out an “Earth Resistivity Survey”. This is a method frequently employed by “Time Team”, and our aim was to disclose any evidence of the canal bed and any wharf walls that may be surviving under the ground. The resistivity meter measures the electrical resistance of the earth below the surface and with the aid of a computer programme appropriately called “Snuffler” a mass of readings is plotted and colour coded onto a site plan. Areas of low resistance indicate soft wet ground while high resistance indicates the presence of rock, masonry, or other items of low conductivity.

Three strips of ground were surveyed, chosen to cross the expected line of the canal at different points between the bridge and the railway (Tarka Trail) boundary. The strip along the boundary fence was extra long to ensure that it intersected the canal bed even if that was not where we expected it to be.

The resultant coloured plan shows the three strips, where the wettest, muddiest subsoil is shaded from blue to violet while the drier stonier areas are green to yellow to red. It is far from conclusive, probably due to very wet surface conditions and the ground having been extensively disturbed since the closure of the canal, but with careful study and a bit of imagination it may be concluded that the bed of the canal ran straight from the bridge to the railway cutting and there may have been a hardened tow-path either side that has subsequently been severely damaged and/or its stonework robbed for use elsewhere.



Due to the lack of continuous outlines of any masonry walls, and the shortage of volunteer workers to carry out any hand dug excavations at the present time, the likely next step will be to continue the Furzebeam permissive path north-westwards from the roving bridge to the Tarka Trail in the form of a raised "tow-path" alongside a shallow ditch to indicate the position of the canal and keep the path drained. This will then connect to the Tarka Trail by a flight of steps down the side of the cutting.

### VILLAIN TAKEN TO TASK!

The following article was found in the North Devon Record Office on October 30th 2005 by Norman Richards.

*The Bideford Gazette 21st June 1870*

*County Petty Sessions*

#### *STEALING WOOD*

*Rhuben Delve, a shipwright was charged with stealing a plank of timber from Sea Lock, near Weare Giffard on the 18th: ult, (18th May) the property of the Rolle Canal Co. P.C. Arnold said he was on duty at Landcross on the day alluded to, when he saw the prisoner carrying the wood towards his home. He asked how he came with it in his possession and he replied that he had taken it from Sea Lock, Mr Leonard having given him to do so, which on enquiry was found to be false.*

*Mr Leonard, foreman of the company, living at Sea Lock, identified the wood and denied that he had ever given the prisoner or anybody else permission to take it away. He was sentenced to ten days hard labour.*



The main road into the village of Weare Giffard was inundated to a considerable depth making access into and out of the village impossible for quite some time and several properties were flooded.

During the flooding crisis period the river water was its more usual mucky colour and yet there have been times since when it has become much redder. The walls and gates of the lock chamber show a distinct red stain where the water level has reached and there are clear red soil deposits along the course of the canal.



The pictures above show the red water flowing through the empty loading basin (left) and out into the lock chamber (right).

While attempting to find out more about soil types and run-offs I looked at some interesting articles on the Internet which had been produced by DEFRA. However the terminology used soon left me somewhat bemused. Reference to '*free draining, silty soils*' or '*free draining, sandy loam*' I could just about get my head around but once the text progressed to Soil Sensitivity Classification where such terms as '*stagnogleyic argillic brown earths*' and '*typical paleo-argillic brown earths*' abounded I almost began to lose the will to live and gave up reading.

No doubt there is someone reading this report who knows exactly what this is all about, why the river suddenly seems to be carrying so much red silt and where it has come from. An explanation in words of less than three syllables would be very gratefully received. Answers on a postcard, etc, etc! Seriously though, I would be interested to receive a simple (if that's possible) explanation.

Yours, deep in thought, **Adrian Wills.**

# Feedback

importance nor highly technical.

Members of the committee try hard to find a variety of articles of interest to publish in the RC&NDWS newsletter, to inform the general membership of Rolle Canal and related matters.

Articles are not intended to be great works of literary importance nor highly technical. It is hoped that some may even prove to be amusing!

It would be really nice to receive **feedback from our members!** Thoughts, comments (polite ones, please) about what has been published or even articles offered for publishing would be gratefully received. Feedback will help make the newsletter better! The next newsletter is due to be published in mid-May so the closing date for any contributions for that issue will be April 22nd.

Please send contributions to The Chair; address as on the back page. **Thank you in anticipation.**

## **New access paths lead to some of the Tarka Trail's hidden heritage**

This February and early March, work will begin to create two new pedestrian access points from the Tarka Trail so that people can discover remains of the old Rolle Canal, one of Torrington's best kept secrets.

The 7 mile canal was begun in 1823, was opened in 1827 before being superseded by the new railway between Torrington and Bideford opened in 1872. The first new path takes walkers from the Tarka Trail, on the former railway near Weare Giffard, down the railway embankment to a field at the bottom where the Rolle Canal's inclined plane used to be.

Mike Williams, from the Environment Agency explains. *"The inclined plane is a feat of Victorian engineering that used a huge water driven pulley system to pull boats laden with limestone up a steep slope to a new upper level 12 metres vertically above river". The Environment Agency bought this field a few years ago for flood management purposes but have been thrilled to discover more about the industrial archaeology hidden in a damp corner. The Life's Journey Project has already enabled us to repair an old stable associated with the canal and this new path will help open this up to other people".*

A new set of steps will also be built near Beam to form the northern link in a walking loop following the canal route to Staple Vale near Torrington.

*"Once the new path is completed Tarka Trail users will be able to leave their bikes and walk along a well preserved section of the canal to see just what an engineering masterpiece it is", says Adrian Wills from the Rolle Canal and Northern Devon Waterways Society. "Volunteers from the Society have been working for many months to improve the path and this new access point is one of the final improvements."*

These improvements are part of a set of linked works and activities funded via the Biosphere Reserve's 'Life's Journey' Project; a partnership project that is working with local communities and volunteers to safeguard and reveal the cultural heritage at three different sites - Fremington Quay, Home Farm Marsh and the remains of the Rolle Canal between Landcross and Torrington. The sites are linked by and accessible from the Tarka Trail shared access cycleway/path and by their shared history of development shaped by people's interaction with the local environment. The project is predominantly funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund's "Your Heritage" grant of £40,800 and will create a lasting, accessible and engaging legacy for users of the Tarka Trail and communities in its immediate neighbourhood by bringing some of the fascinating history of this area to life.

To find out more about the project contact Matt Edworthy, Biosphere Reserve Outreach Coordinator

**Notes for Editors:** (RC&NDWS Editor:- included for background information).

1. The Life's Journey Project runs from January 2012 until October 2013 and involves many different organisations. The Heritage Lottery Fund are the biggest funding contributors (£40,800).

Explaining the importance of the grant award, Nerys Watts, HLF's Head of South West, said:

*"This project combines a programme of repairs and enhancements with volunteer participation and involvement to ensure that the history and heritage of these well loved and significant North Devon sites can be protected and made available to the widest possible cross section of the local community and visitors alike. We are delighted to be able to support this work."*

HLF investment has helped to bring in resources from a variety of other sources including

- Land Fill Tax through Devon Waste Management Ltd
- Fremington Parish Council
- The Gaia Trust
- The Rolle Canal and Northern Devon Waterways Society
- The Environment Agency
- North Devon Museum (Barnstaple)
- Fremington Quay Environment Group

Grants have also been given to the Project from

- The Bideford Bridge Trust
- Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust
- Councillor Rodney Cann, Devon County Councillor for Fremington

£2500 is also coming from visitors to the area through Marsdens Cottage Holidays' Biosphere Visitor Investment Scheme where people booking holidays in the area have donated £1 for projects that improve the area's environment.

**2. North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Biosphere Service (NDABS)** is a partnership organisation based in Bideford and hosted by Devon County Council. It is core funded by Natural England, Devon County Council, North Devon Council and Torridge District Council. The Service co-ordinates and delivers activities set out in the North Devon's Biosphere Reserve Strategy and the North Devon AONB Management Plan, and works with

a wide range of local, regional, national and international partners. It also helps maintain and develop the South West Coast Path and Tarka Trail. More information about the work of the service can be found at <http://www.devon.gov.uk/ndabs>

<http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk>

**3. About the Heritage Lottery Fund:** Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported over 30,000 projects, allocating £4.6billion across the UK. Website <http://www.hlf.org.uk>

**4. A note on the key features and locations included in the Life's Journey project.**

- **Rolle Canal remains between Landcross and Torrington:**

The project will focus on the physical remains of the 6mile long Rolle Canal begun in 1823, particularly; The sea lock at Landcross, the Inclined Plane and upper canal basin at Annery/Ridd and the canal channel at Furze Beam. Consolidation and interpretation of the remains will focus on what they tell us about the clay trade in north Devon and the need for agricultural improvement in the 19th century, how those environmental factors required improvements to transport infrastructure and the design, building and operation of the canal and its eventual decline.

The Rolle canal was built between 1823 and 1827 and operated until 1872 when its route was used to accommodate the new railway between Torrington and Bideford and linking through to Barnstaple via Fremington. The canal carried limestone and coal for the kilns at Weare Giffard and Torrington, and heavy ball clay for export. Like at Fremington, the navigational constraints of the river (Torridge in this case) meant that the canal was needed to increase the volume of this trade. None of the Rolle Canal features that are included in this Project are listed or are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

- **Fremington Quay:**

The Project will be focussing on Fremington's development as a port in the 19th century, the associated railway that connected it to the national trade network and the people that lived and worked in the immediate area.

The Taw Vale Railway & Dock Company was formed in 1838 to build a deep-water quay at Fremington and a horse-drawn rail link to Barnstaple. It was needed to export raw materials from northern Devon particularly clay and other minerals, and to bring in coal and limestone for industry and for the production of agricultural lime. The Taw Vale line was formally opened on 25th April 1848 and opened for freight in late August. Wagons were

pulled by horses but by 1850, haulage on the line stopped because the horses' hooves were damaging the sleepers. The line was subsequently extended and connected to the burgeoning steam railway network and opened for steam trains in July 1854. The arrival of steam helped Fremington become the most important port between Bristol and Lands End. In 1891, 26 men were employed there. In 1929, 20,000 tons of heavy ball clay was exported and on average, 20 wagons of coal per day were sent out around North Devon. Fremington Quay was taken out of use in 1969 and the sidings were removed. The area was neglected for many years but was re-developed in 2001. Although the original buildings have gone, the quay was repaired and a new Heritage Centre & Café opened in a re-constructed station building and signal box.

- **Home Farm Marsh:**

This project is focussing on the natural heritage of the site, its historical and current agricultural management and the environmental story it opens up about our changing coastline and coastline management.

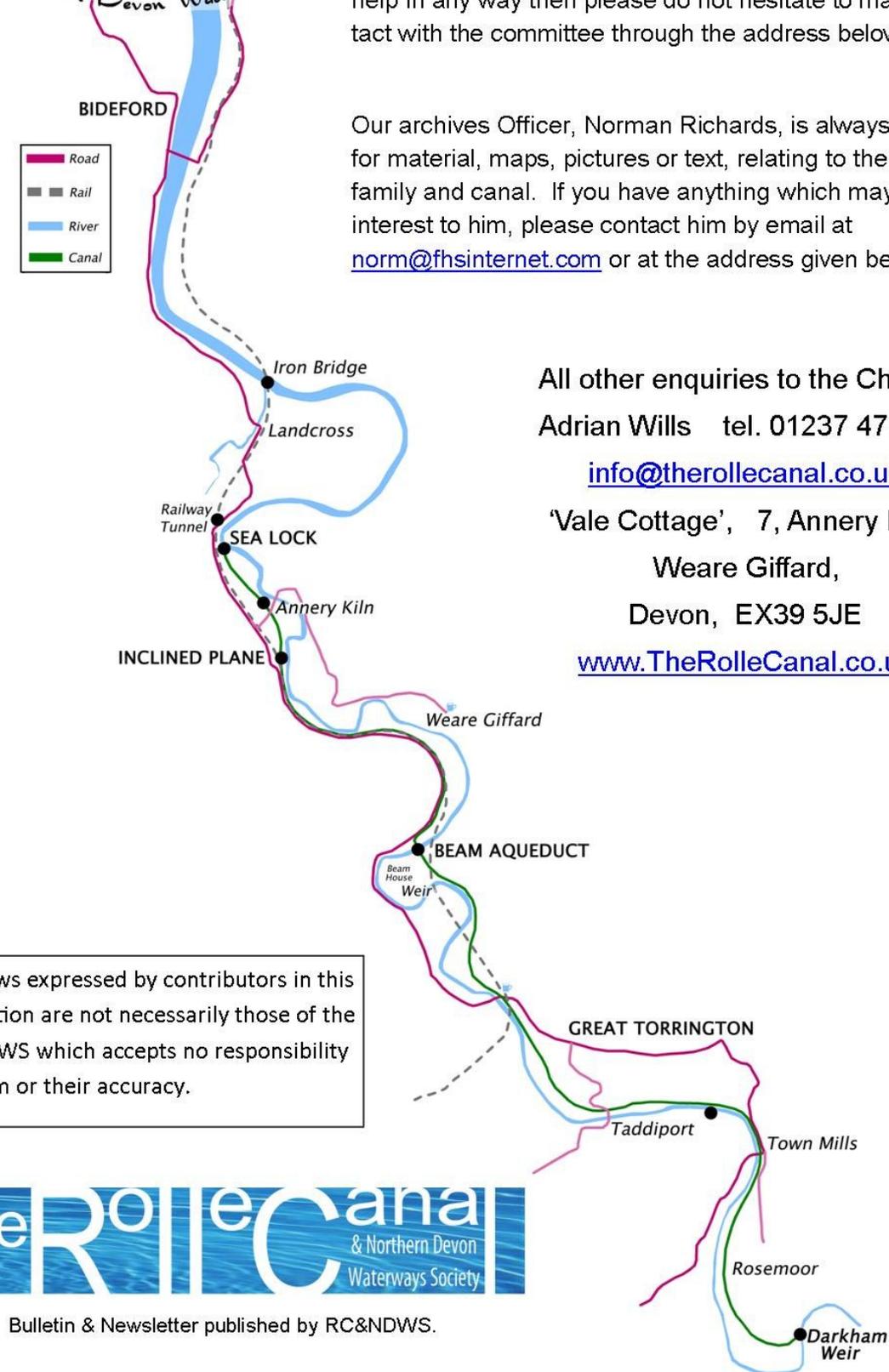
Home Farm Marsh is a 71ha former intensive dairy farm owned since 2002 by the Gaia Trust. Gaia is working to increase the site's wildlife value through conservation management and is looking to restore it to its former status as a wetland. The land was won from the Taw Torridge estuary in the 19th century and is protected from inundation by substantial earthwork sea defences that, in the face of climate change, rising sea levels and resource constraints, will be left through 'no active intervention' to breach over time - letting in the sea and returning the land to the estuary. The site adjoins the Taw & Torridge Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest and Important Bird Area, and lies between Salt Duck Pond and the RSPB's Isley Marsh Reserve, both of which are SSSIs. Home Farm Marsh is not however designated.

- **The Tarka Trail :**

The Trail doesn't just link the places already described. It is itself a cultural resource.

The entire Trail is a 163 mile long 'figure of eight' that links places associated with Henry Williamson's 1927 novel Tarka the Otter. It is made up of footpath, active railway line and, between Braunton and Meeth on the line of the former railway, a shared use trail for pedestrians, cyclists and in some places, horse riders. It is a wonderful place for people to get away from it all and be inspired by the landscapes, wildlife and history of northern Devon and is a significant tourist asset for northern Devon that is estimated to contribute £7million/per year to the area's economy.





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](mailto:norm@fhsinternet.com) or at the address given below:

All other enquiries to the Chair --  
 Adrian Wills tel. 01237 477705  
[info@therollecanal.co.uk](mailto:info@therollecanal.co.uk)  
 'Vale Cottage', 7, Annery Kiln,  
 Weare Giffard,  
 Devon, EX39 5JE  
[www.TheRolleCanal.co.uk](http://www.TheRolleCanal.co.uk)

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