



# The **R**oile **C**ana & Northern Devon Waterways Society

**SOCIETY NEWS and VIEWS**

**SUMMER ISSUE**

**August 2014**

# CONTENTS

**COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR** Page 3

**GETTING ALL STICKY AND WET** 5

It's not what you think! A report by Adrian Wills

**ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR?** 9

Margaret Shambrook reports on a day out at Bude.

**BACK TO THE BEGINNING** 11

Adrian Wills revisits an old dream

**IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY** 14

Chris' Hassall describes the next guided walk

*Front cover :*

Replica tub boats in lock chamber of Lord Rolle's Canal

Photo' by Trevor Fordham - July 2014

## COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

In the February 2014 issue of the RC&NDWS newsletter I included a report on the Rolle Canal by Patricia O'Neill entitled, "Tribute to Devon Canal pioneers". Her article clearly and in a style that easily held one's attention, laid out the background to the Rolle family and the history of the canal. At the time of plagiarizing her work I had no idea as to its vintage. I was very pleased to receive an email from society member Derek Fisher which provided some information about a lady with this same name.

Derek, who has a keen interest in researching family histories and also happens to be my very dear brother-in-law, is the person who so generously donated a sprig of Parrot's Feather (*Myriophyllum aquarium*) to me from his concrete lined, ornamental garden pond to help oxygenate my section of canal. The Parrot's Feather ran riot, loving the clay-lined canal bed. Growing at extraordinary speed, it very quickly completely blanketed a large area of the canal basin but at long last it has finally been killed off, hopefully never to return. Irrespective of his attempt to get back into my good books with bits of historical detail, I have forgiven him anyway!

It appears that Patricia O'Neill was a poet and a free-lance reporter who wrote, amongst others, a series of articles under the title of 'Forgotten by the West' which were published in the Western Weekly News and initially advertised in the Western Morning News, (probably from the same stable) on Friday, November 25<sup>th</sup> 1932. This date is considerably earlier than I had guessed it to be.

It seems highly likely that this lady is the same person who wrote the article that I stole. It is very nice to receive feedback from RC&NDWS members as to what is published in the newsletters. The information given out from this publication is, to the best of our knowledge, correct BUT.....!

Please do not be shy about sending your thoughts, comments or criticisms about what you may read in the RC&NDWS newsletters or about the way in which your society is run. Your committee and your editor endeavour to provide as interesting and factually accurate presentations and events as they can but are always open to suggestions for improvements, additions or alterations.



Harking back to invasive plants, there has been considerable action by IWA volunteers on the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal recently to remove swathes of Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera* – picture left) from the water's edge of

the canal. This plant lives up to its Latin name and wastes no time in colonising any damp, areas and water margins. Sadly we are not immune to it and those of you who have enjoyed walks led by Chris Hassall along the banks of the River Torridge from the old ford crossing at Weare Giffard and even to the head of the leat at Darkham Weir will have seen this very pretty plant growing in abundance. Please pull it up where ever you can. Fortunately it lifts easily but sadly it spreads like wildfire and ruins our waterways!

**A.W.**

## **JOLLY JACK TARS and LEAKING APRONS**

Don't worry this article is not about some strange fetish rather an update on activities at Sea Lock!

The glorious weather we have been experiencing for several weeks now has been causing problems for the tub boat project. The timbers used to form the base of both butty and lead boats are slabs of well-seasoned Oak from cut down redundant balance beams. Before bolting them to the chines of the boats each was carefully planed and clamped up tight with a sandwich of thick bitumastic and a sisal caulking in between to form a waterproof seal.

The butty boat was craned into the basin some time ago to keep the timbers damp and to create more space on the wharf side whilst the second boat was being constructed. The lead boat is just about finished but has been lying upside down on the wharf side and exposed to the full strength of the recent wonderful sunshine. Unfortunately this has caused the timbers to dry out and shrink dramatically. Gaps of over a centimetre wide opened up between the bottom boards which had to be filled with long, thin battens and more sisal caulking . The final solution was to acquire some road tar, melt it and pour it into the gaps in the hope that this would seal them up again.

A 25kilo block of road tar/bitumastic was bought from a local contractor and the next problem was how to melt it sufficiently to pour easily . As it happened the block began to melt by itself, even when stored inside. A galvanised tar can was bought and lumps of tar, cut with an axe, thrown in. Setting the can on top of a couple of flat sections of stainless steel

supported by bricks, a gas torch connected to a propane tank was placed underneath and aimed upwards. Once lit, the heat from the torch soon melted the tar to a liquid state.

Even with the tar inside a proper tar can (a large watering can design), pouring it into the gaps proved a tricky and messy process. The hot weather continued to create problems because the tar remained liquid, refusing to solidify, for a long time and in several places dripped right through the gaps. After two separate attempts to fill all the seams it was considered prudent to get the boat into the water as soon as possible in order to cool and harden the tar and to allow the timbers to

swell.

Both lead and butty boats are now residing in the lock chamber and both are half full of water. Water tight they are not!

However, this must be the first time in nearly 150 years since tub boats were last seen floating in the chamber at Sea Lock.

A Kingfisher is delighted by this development and is now often seen perching on the mooring ropes holding the boats as it looks for lunch in the water around them.



Alistair manoeuvres the lead boat around a variety of obstacles.



The lead boat is lowered carefully into the lock chamber to join its mate and get a good soaking..

This is not quite how I had imagined the launching ceremony to be but once the problem of leaking seams is solved work on the boats can be completed and perhaps an official and formal ceremony held afterwards.

Leaking tub boats has not been the only source of problems this year. Sadly attempts to retain water behind the inner gates have proved to be almost fruitless. Whilst water leaks between the heel posts and the quoin stones because the gates are of the wrong size for the openings, there is a considerable quantity of water getting in underneath the wooden apron behind the gates and pouring out underneath the front wooden cill. The solution is to take out the apron behind the gates, drive down steel sheet pilings across the width of the chamber and back fill where the timbers once lay with ready-mixed concrete.

However solving the problem is already underway. A redundant and badly seized piling hammer has been acquired, courtesy of Canal & River Trust which also donated a quantity of second-hand steel pilings, now awaiting collection. Thanks to the hard work of Alistair, Norman and Trevor aided or hindered as the case may be by me, the hammer has been stripped right down, all the rusted, corroded parts cleaned, greased, oiled, reassembled and now appears to be in working order. This in itself is quite an achievement. The hammer is extremely heavy and requires the use of the crane to move it about, the bolts holding it together are enormous, requiring very large spanners which, as Norman so eloquently said, “ Were done up murder tight!”

All that is required now to ‘bash in’ the steel piles, remove the wooden apron timbers and drop in a load of concrete. Simple, really!

Report by **A. Wills**

## **Bude Stratton Heritage Day 27<sup>th</sup> July**

I had been “persuaded” to help Adrian and Hilary with the RC&NDWS display at the Bude Stratton Heritage Day but wasn’t quite sure what I had let myself in for. In the event it was a lovely sunny day and Bude was buzzing and the display was all set up by the time I arrived.

We had a prime position close to the canal and as the gazebo we were using was open on three sides it encouraged passers by to browse the photos displayed on the double sided boards. There was a wide range of people there varying from canal buffs with vast amounts of knowledge to local people who were only very vaguely aware of the existence of the Rolle Canal. There was plenty of opportunity to chat to people and a lot of them said that they would be looking at the canal next time they used the Tarka Trail as many of them hadn’t seen the new viewing point, interpretation boards and permissive footpath. We handed out lots of leaflets and there was much interest expressed in the forthcoming guided walk from Rosemoor – it will be interesting to see whether people were just being polite or whether they will actually turn up!

While I was in Bude I also took the opportunity to visit the Castle Heritage Centre - excellent AND free admission. There was a lot of information about the engineer and inventor Sir Goldsworthy Gurney who, I am ashamed to admit, I had never heard of before. He had a fascinating life and his inventions included a steam powered road carriage capable of travelling at the break neck speed of 14 mph and the Bude Lamp that was so efficient that when 3 were installed in the House of Commons they replaced 280 candles and gave a better light.

Other exhibits included figure heads and photographs from some of the many ships that have been wrecked round Bude and lots of info about the Bude Canal. I would certainly recommend a visit to the Heritage Centre even though I was slightly shocked to discover that some of the swim wear that I remember wearing in my younger days is now featured in a display on the history of the seaside holiday.

Altogether a very enjoyable trip and hopefully we have helped to raise awareness and stimulate interest in the RC&NDWS.



Report by  
Margaret Shambrook

A steam powered carriage  
designed by  
Sir Goldsworthy Gurney  
1793—1875

### **Chairman's Comments:**

The intention of *persuading* Margaret to help at the Bude Stratton Heritage Day was for her to help 'man' the RC&NDWS display, not to go 'swanning off' to look at the opposition. After all, it was the likes of Sir Goldsworthy Gurney who brought about the demise of the Rolle Canal, with his invention of the steam powered, horseless carriage!

*I think I shall have to have a private chat with Margaret!*

Seriously though, I hope Margaret's experiences of volunteering to help at an event for the benefit of the RC&NDWS was actually a pleasant, enjoyable and simple exercise which other society members may wish to try in the future. AW

# STARTING AT THE TOP

Investigating the remains of the terminus of Lord Rolle's Canal, at the foot of RHS Rosemore's Gardens, has been considered by the RC&NDWS committee on a number of occasions since the inauguration of the society but for various reasons, has progressed no further. However, this situation may be about to change!

Following recent discussions with Jonathan Webster, Curator of Rosemoor, plans are being drawn up for volunteers from RC&NDWS to clear the wharf side and canal basin around the kilns of invasive vegetation.



Looking downstream at the head of the canal at RHS Rosemoor prior to contractors flailing this area in July 2014. The derelict lime kiln complex can just be seen to the right hand side of the picture.

It is particularly appropriate at this time, since the next planned guided walk for the RC&NDWS terminates at this site.

Since the closure of the canal this area has become completely overgrown and fallen into a state of dereliction. Just how much of the original structure still exists is completely unknown and desperately needs investigation.



Looking downstream at the lime kiln complex with the canal in water. Circa 1880(?)

Photograph courtesy of the Tilley Kimber collection

Contractors have already been at work flailing the ground around the kiln but not into the actual basin of the canal.

A team of volunteers will be required to cut back small saplings and much bramble, stacking it to the side where staff from

Rosemoor can process it through their shredder/chipping machine.

It is likely that there will be an amount of discarded material dumped in the canal which will need to be removed and disposed of appropriately. There is also, of course, the possibility of canal paraphernalia being uncovered, maybe the remains of an original tub boat. Who knows?

Formal agreement has yet to be reached with RHS Rosemoor regarding which dates work may be undertaken on, plus of course, having all the necessary health & safety issues identified, addressed and adopted.

This promises to be a really exciting project, with much to discover. Not only will it require volunteers to weed bash but also to make a record of all activities in photographic and digital format.

Should you or any of your friends be keen to be involved in this project the please do not hesitate to contact me on Tel. 01237 477705 or email [info@therollecanal.co.uk](mailto:info@therollecanal.co.uk)

*Volunteers will be provided with protective gloves and the necessary tools. No power tools will be used.*

Report by Adrian Wills.

## ***THANK YOU R.H.S. ROSEMORE***

*The RC&NDWS is very grateful to RHS Rosemore and its staff for generously supporting our society and allowing us access to RHS grounds for our various activities.*

# RC&NDWS Guided Walks

The final canal walk of the season is our annual visit to Rosemoor where, thanks to the helpfulness of the Royal Horticultural Society, we can walk down through their private woodland to the secluded Darkham Weir where the waters of the Torridge are dammed up to supply water for the whole seven miles of the Rolle Canal down to the estuary at Landcross. We trace the line of the leat along the foot of the woods in the valley bottom and then pass, on a firm surfaced path, through the area of re-naturalised wetland where only a few years ago a conifer plantation was felled, native trees planted and undergrowth allowed to regenerate naturally to form a wonderful habitat especially for aquatic wildlife such as dragonflies, frogs and grass snakes.

A look around the ruined lime kilns beside the overgrown canal basin then leads us back into the formal gardens with the opportunity for refreshment at the Rosemoor tea rooms.



The date is Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> August, starting at 2:30pm from Rosemoor's woodland car park (on the left as you drive in). All are welcome, and the only charge is the donation of £2 per person towards the Rolle Canal Society's work of improving the

paths and signage elsewhere along the canal.

At the time of writing, everything is dry and firm underfoot, but if we get rain before the date of the walk the grass may be wet and the ground could be muddy and slippery in places, so suitable footwear is advised.

The distance is little more than a couple of miles and it will probably take about two hours. If you need further information, ring 01237 425357 or email <[hassallc@ymail.com](mailto:hassallc@ymail.com)>.

Chris Hassall. Rolle Canal Society Walks Organiser.

## **A VISIT TO THE SEA LOCK**

**A guided walk around this site is planned for**

**Sunday 5th October**

**Starting at 2.30pm from Annery Kiln.**

**A donation of £2 per person is requested**

**Please be aware that parking at Annery is limited.**

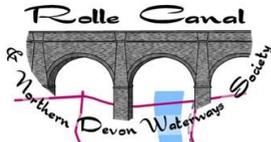
**Share transport if possible.**

## **RC&NDWS on Facebook**

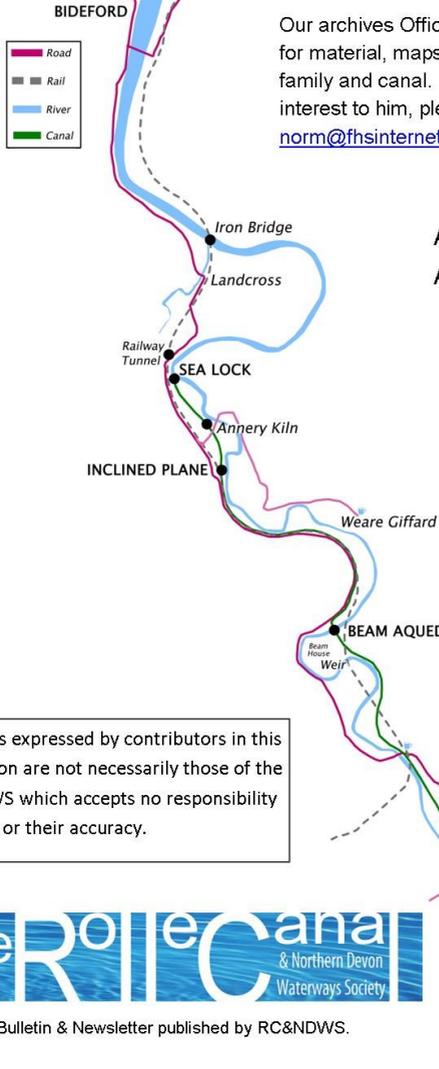


For those of you who regularly access the internet, please be aware that the RC&NDWS has its own Facebook page which Mike Harper regularly updates with information about our guided walks and other items of interest.

When you visit our society's page please also press the 'LIKE' hot spot so that Mike knows the page is being viewed and appreciated.



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:

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