



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

SOCIETY NEWS & VIEWS

WINTER ISSUE
February 2015

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COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

Before getting on to more interesting matters I must first apologise for the number of spelling and grammatical mistakes in the last edition of the Club newsletter. Being late in producing it and in a hurry to get copies sent out, I did not have the final copy proof-read by a friend as I would normally have done. Despite always reading it through numerous times myself, it never fails to amaze me how many mistakes I manage to overlook. As an ex-primary school teacher you would think I should know better.

Hopefully this copy will be error-free.

Looking forward, there are some very interesting things about to happen. I have previously mentioned that, accompanied by Norman Richards and my wife Hilary, I had been to meet Jonathan Webster (Curator of RHS Rosemoor

Gardens) to discuss the possibility of investigative work being undertaken by us and other volunteers on the terminus of the canal adjacent to the lime kilns at Rosemoor. We have subsequently had a second visit and further talks with him.

Subject to agreement regarding risk assessment and Health & Safety procedures, we are hoping to clear the edges of the canal basin of invasive vegetation and initially remove a small amount of debris and soil from the canal trough to define the line of the walls. As at Sea Lock, the canal



Hilary and Norman looking into the canal trough at Rosemoor

at this point would have had stone-built edging, probably topped with large coping stones. One half-buried, large, faced stone has already been located but whether it is big enough to have been used to top the wall has yet to be determined. The wall where it was found has been pushed out by the roots of a stunted Sycamore tree. Similarly, other 'goodies' may be lurking, waiting to be discovered in the trough, which is still holding water,

Also looking to the future, the date and venue of the AGM has been finalised. Details can be found on page 21.

Our guest speaker is the manager of the Grand Western Canal at Tiverton.

Following the work to raise the profile and significance of the wheel pit and inclined plane, Tony Barnes and Chris Hassall have been working in close co-operation with Matt Edworthy of the North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to produce a clearly understandable interpretation board for display at that site. An underground water wheel driving an overhead continuous chain for dragging boats up and down a slope is not an easy concept for many people to take on especially considering the dimensions involved.

Text and pictorial content has just about been finalised and is about to be sent to 20/20, the company responsible for producing all the other



Norman, standing in the canal, looking at a possible coping stone.

interpretation boards, for 'tidying up' and printing in a similar format to the others.

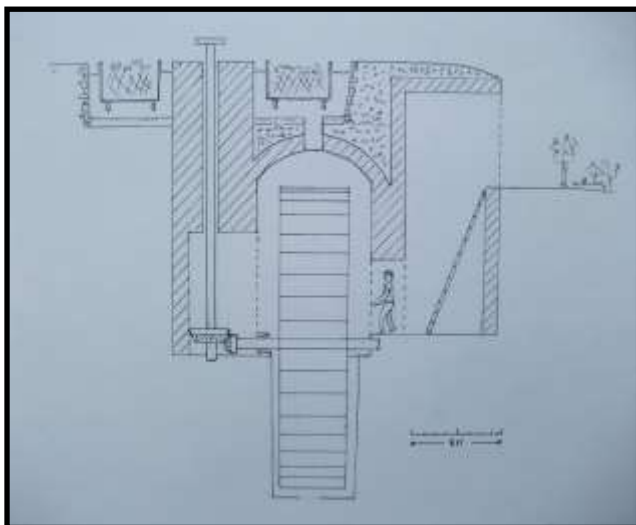
Like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, Lord Rolle's Canal is no longer 'dead'. One of the aims of the RC&NDWS, to raise public awareness of the existence of the canal, has by now been well-achieved. Many people visiting and using the Tarka Trail are now fully aware that sections of it in the Torridge valley have far more history than that of being just a redundant railway line.

Despite lack of recognition of the fact that there were canals in existence south of Bristol in many text books, it is now becoming common knowledge that this is completely untrue. Doug' Hamilton Cox, a recent visitor to the Rolle Canal, has learned a lot about the canals of this country including those in the South West, as you will read on page 12 to 14.

In keeping with our ethos that the existence of Lord Rolle's Canal and every other canal is inextricably interwoven with a much wider range of industrial activities than simple lime burning, Norman Richards has organised a trip to the iron ore mines on the Brendon Hills. This promises to be a fascinating day out and not to be missed.

Details of this trip can be found on page 19.

Adrian Wills



A schematic, transverse sectional drawing of the wheel pit, drawn by 'Tony Barnes for inclusion on the new interpretation board.

TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

'KERMIT'

Following my article on the evolution of my weed cutting launch from a shark to a frog in the last issue of the **RC&NDWS** newsletter, Chris Hassall kindly sent me an image of a more 'modern' machine, (seen below) designed for the same purpose.



A weed cutting vessel working on the Grantham Canal.

Unfortunately all canals suffer from invasive weed growth which is a perpetual problem and costs a huge amount of money to keep on top of. The regular passage of boats helps to reduce and slow the weed growth but where the water is sluggish due to lack of flow or limited usage by vessels then nature very quickly reclaims her own.

Last year when travelling in our little boat on the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal, Hilary and I became completely stuck fast in a huge and dense mat of water weed which closely resembled green cotton wool.

This particular water weed had grown with alacrity that year due to the very hot, dry weather. However, for a while it was creating all sorts of problems for boaters and for fishermen.

Now that British Waterways has become Canal & River Trust much of its heavy plant and machinery has been sold off in preference to using volunteers where feasible and contractors when necessary.

I took the following pictures of Kermit's space age relative, at Bathpool, on the B & T Canal, in 2014.



This ultra modern machine is extremely versatile. Its tracks are its propulsive power on the water and on land. By driving one track forward and reversing the other the vehicle can spin on its own axis enabling it to negotiate and manoeuvre in very tight spaces.



Getting it into and out of a canal is also quite simple; it just tracks over the embankment! Its tracks enable it to climb quite steep slopes. Equally, it just drives itself onto and off lowloaders when needed elsewhere.

This is obviously a contractor's machine and used on canals all over the country. Co-incidentally my own 'Kermit' was designed to be used under similar circumstances in that it has built-in lifting 'eyes' so that the launch could be easily craned into and out of a waterway and transported elsewhere. Not perhaps quite as easily as its young relative however!

Unlike the machine in the picture supplied by Chris however, this new model does not collect the cut weeds but relies on another similar version with a multi-pronged fork to follow and clear up after it. So perhaps it is not as advanced as it thinks it is!

AW



'Kermit' when he was still a shark but minus his jaws!

NOT QUITE WHAT YOU'D EXPECT ON A CANAL!

As you may have gathered from previous articles, I have become more and more intrigued by the history and function of canals as well as the vessels that have plied their trade on them. Having invested in a small boat for travelling on canals I have always considered them to be a gentle, almost serene form of transport and a very peaceful restful means of passing time. Recent events on the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal however, have given me considerable food for thought.

A rather formidable boat has made an appearance in the Bridgwater basin. Watched by a considerable crowd of what I guessed to be excited if not somewhat surprised people, and with considerable pomp and ceremony, a very large WW2 Motor Torpedo Boat was



A WW2 Motor Torpedo Boat being craned into the water at Bridgwater Dock on
January 31st. 2015

craned into the water.

I understand this warship is undergoing restoration here although considerable work has apparently already been completed on her. Since my little fibre-glass trail boat is moored at the Taunton end of this enclosed canal but often travels with my wife and me on board up and down the waterway I just hope that there isn't some kind of hidden agenda for this new arrival! Perhaps the local fishermen are getting out of hand or maybe there is a mob of unruly Moorhens that need teaching a lesson. Who knows?

AW



Motor Torpedo Boat at Bridgwater Dock — January 2015

Photographs courtesy of Bob Abbott

Chair of the IWA West Country Branch



11 February 2015 **PRESS RELEASE**

ONLY 500 MILES TO GO!

**VETERAN WALKER MOVES CLOSER TO COMPLETING HIS
2500 MILE
SPONSORED CANALS WALK
FOR WOUNDED SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN**

In February, 2012 Doug Hamilton-Cox, a former sapper with the Royal Engineers began a series of charity walks which would take him along the footpaths of all of the United Kingdom's canal network. After three years walking in stages he has completed over 2000 miles. This is one of a number of Doug's fund raising initiatives which so far have raised more than **£91, 000** for charity.

There are over 2500 miles (4000 km) in the network of British inland waterways, many built more than 200 years ago. A huge challenge for Doug.

BACKGROUND

In **2009**, Doug walked from his home in Bridford on Dartmoor, Devon to Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire for Help for Heroes. He was moved to do this following attendance at numerous repatriation events in the town and seeing at first hand the courage and dignity of the families and friends of the fallen and the support given by the many thousands attending these events.

In **2010**, he followed with a walk from Devon to Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham, now part of the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Selly Oak is the first port of call for the most severely wounded returning from Afghanistan. The hospital contains the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, which cares for injured servicemen and women from conflict zones.

He raised the remarkable total of **£25,000** for charity from both of these walks.

In **2011**, he walked over 1,000 miles from John O’Groats to Lands End, diverting to towns and villages on the way, raising over **£24,000** for Help for Heroes charity.

In **2012** he began this series of walks along the entire UK canal network. He has raised over **£42,000** so far

By the time the canal walks have been completed Doug will have walked a total of **4000 miles** since he first started in 2009.

All monies raised will go to the charities supporting wounded servicemen and women. Donations can be made through the website

www.bmycharity.com/hamiltoncox

Doug welcomes any support and encouragement that businesses and local people are able to provide.

For more information please see Doug’s website: www.dougwalking.co.uk or contact: **Doug Hamilton-Cox** on **Email:** sue.hamiltoncox@btinternet.com

Telephone (Home): 01647 252259 Mobile: 07847728111

WALKING THE ROLLE CANAL

At 10.00 on the morning of Friday, 20th February, Hilary, Norman and myself joined Doug and his wife, Sue, at the entrance of R.H.S. Rosemoor Gardens at Torrington. Diana Gilding, the Events Manager and Jon Webster, Curator, had kindly agreed to let Doug and supporters walk the length of the Rolle Canal starting at its terminus by Rosemoor lime kilns. It was hoped that others would be available to support him but unfortunately this was not to be.

At the start ,the thick mist that was lying earlier in the morning was burning off and the sun was trying to appropriately ‘put a brave face on’.

Once the front doors were opened to the public we introduced ourselves to the lady at the ticket desk and were allowed through into the gardens where another employee kindly took a photograph of our intrepid little band. Having achieved this we set off to the lime kilns for a brief look at the area where it is hoped volunteers from the RC&NDWS will soon be undertaking some weed clearance.

We walked on to New Town Mills Road Bridge, looked at the remains of the canal around New Town Mills (today—Orford Mill) and the extra arches under the bridge which accommodated the canal and its horses as well as the one for the River Torridge.

Whilst walking Doug told us of his exploits on the numerous canals he has walked including, of course, the Bude Canal which he had covered 2 days before in the company of Chris Jewell.

Being an ex-army engineer and now in 'civvies' a plant operator, he was particularly interested in the high quality of stone-wall building exhibited in the various expansive revetments, especially those along the edge of the permissive footpath and near the head of the inclined plane.



Hilary, Sue, Doug, Norman and me at
R.H.S. Rosemoor Gardens

Arriving at Annery Kiln, we were rejoined by Sue, who had enjoyed a leisurely cup of coffee and cheese scone in the Rosemoor restaurant whilst we were walking. Following a brief stop at my house for a cup of tea and use of loo, we resumed our walk on the remaining half a mile or so to Sea Lock. As we left home we were joined by a couple who had come from Plymouth wanting to investigate Lord Rolle's Canal. Our

now slightly larger party finally arrived at the mouth of this waterway and Doug could strike off another canal walk from his now very short list of ones still to do. Well done to him!

AW

Bideford nonagenarian talks of old shipyard days.

Extract from the Bideford Gazette of 21st March 1933.

Research and article by Peter Blackaby

The Bideford Gazette, which is not yet available on the British Newspapers website, can be viewed at the Bideford and District Archive in Windmill lane, Northam. Mon, Tue & Wed. 9.30 to 12noon.

BIDEFORD'S OLD SHIP YARDS.

The reference to the recently published reminiscences of Capt. T. J Jones, Clovelly's Grand Old Man, to the time when Bideford had a brisk and healthy ship-building industry, carried on round the banks of the Torridge, has recalled many things to the memory of others of his generation on the same subject. A quest for additional information of those Victorian days has elicited much interesting data, although to learn that practically the whole of that once thriving trade has diminished until it can diminish no more makes sad reading. Now Appledore at the mouth of the river has the distinction of possessing the only Torridge ship-yards.

Mr J Delbridge of 9, Tower Street, Bideford, a still very active nonagenarian, had a keen recollection of local shipbuilding's more prosperous days, and after a talk with him one can easily imagine the scene in those busier times. Mr Delbridge is one of the very few persons living who can remember the ship yards of 80 to 90 years ago. He has been associated with these yards during the whole of his breadwinning career, and still takes a keen interest in the vessels that arrive in the Port. On occasions he has had the pleasurable delight of seeing one or two of the old boats he helped to build many years ago, moored alongside the Quay.

SEA LOCK AND THE ROLLE CANAL

According to Mr. Delbridge, the actual site of the "Sea Lock" Yard was in Monkleigh Parish, and who should know better its position than one employed there?

“As you come out of the Torrington end of the railway tunnel at Landcross, you can see the place where that yard was.” he said. “Right down below that end of the tunnel was the yard. The Rolle Canal Company owned these premises and the vessels built there were for their use. Ships were built there before my time and exactly sixty-two years ago last June the yard closed down. The reason was the advent of the railway, which took away most of the canal trade. The canal was about three miles long but its course is now all pasture land. Vessels would bring goods from Wales and elsewhere to Bideford and Appledore. Then, the goods were discharged into barges, which took them up to the Sea Lock, where they were transferred into small boats and taken up to the Canal Yard at the bottom of Mill Street, Torrington. Along this time of the year (February, March, April), there were generally four sets of horses, six boats to a set, working on the canal. The only person living now besides myself, who was employed there, is Mr Richard Smale, of Week, near Torrington. As a lad he used to lead the horses along the tow-path. Sometimes as many as sixty or seventy men would be at work there and on an average forty or fifty formed the permanent staff. There were stores all over the neighbourhood.

The biggest vessel ever built locally was the “Sarah Newman”, a fully rigged ship of 2,000 tons. On the occasion of the launching ceremony for this vessel, there were glorious celebrations, and following the ship’s successful plunge into the water the whole staff journeyed to Westward Ho!, where they were entertained to dinner to the accompaniment of selections from a band. The usual tonnage of the ships built at Cleavehouses was, stated Mr Delbridge, from 700 to 2000. Vessels built there included the ‘Buckingham Castle’ and the Bible Castle.’ This yard, under Mr Cox’s management closed down around fifty or sixty years ago. Those extensive properties were sold, and the property was split up into small parts. The main yard was purchased by William Whitefield, who carried out repairs. He also built a few ships and in the Jubilee Year finished the “Jubilee” and the “Queen for the Bideford Pottery Company”. Those two ships were still

in existence as barges and Mr Delbridge stated that he saw the “Jubilee” at Bideford the previous day to that of the interview. “Trade went bad,” averred this old ship-builder, “until it has faded away entirely”.

For the Newfoundland trade, three masted schooners were built while vessels were also built for trading in the Mediterranean. The Sidwell Jane at about 300 tons was the biggest ship built at the sea lock before Mr Delbridge’s time, “Harmony” and “Lord Rolle” were amongst those built there, and those two vessels worked in the canal trade while he was engaged in it. He remembered the completion of the “Sidwell Jane” and the “Lady Gertrude”.

SHOOTING THE BRIDGE

“The ships were only built up as far as the deck”, he explained, “otherwise they would not have been able to pass under Bideford Long Bridge. The tide had to be at a certain height for this part of the work. By the time a vessel got down to Bideford Bridge, after leaving Sea Lock, the tide would be ebbing fast and to facilitate the passage through the fourth arch from East the Water side, ballast was placed in the hull. That fourth arch was the widest of all. It was a difficult matter getting those vessels through because there was very little space to spare. Further, it had to be very calm day for the work.” Large numbers of people used to gather on the bridge to watch these operations and when a vessel had successfully cleared the arch, vociferous cheering greeted the achievement. Mr. William Leonard (father of Mr. E. Leonard, Coal merchant of New Road, Bideford) was the manager of this side of the work, and under his expert supervision, with the assistance of the contractors, Messrs. John Leonard and Richard Pickard, there was no fear for the safety of the vessels in sliding through the arch. When a vessel had passed under the bridge, she was taken to the Quayside at the bottom of Bridgeland Street where the masts were stepped in and the finishing touches done.

AN OLD TIME PRESENTATION

Just prior to Mr. Delbridge's engagement on the Rolle Canal, members of the staff, for the most part Torrington men, had subscribed and presented the retiring Clerk of the Works, Mr. Robert Brinsmead, with – to quote its printed description – “a practical and devotional family Bible” to mark his 32 years association with the company. Mr. Delbridge is now the proud possessor of that Bible.

“Mr. Robert Brinsmead, having filed the situation of managing clerk, on the Rolle Canal for 32 years, the workmen under his control cannot allow him to retire from his labourers without expressing regret and their loss and at the same time as a proof of their kindly feeling and having him, as a memorial, this Bible. Dec 31st, 1858”.

“Most of those men were working on the Canal during my time.” commented Mr Delbridge. This entertaining gentleman, who is in his 93rd year, commenced working when seven years old but it was not until he was about 18 years of age that he started working in the shipbuilding yards of the borough. Mr Delbridge has progressed with the times with his ideas and when asked which class of vessel he preferred, sailing or steam, he promptly replied:

“Of course you have to keep pace with the times nowadays and that is why Steamboats are needed. Travelling in the old stage-coach is a thing of the past. Why, only this morning I saw two flying machines over Bideford”.

Putting a time line to Mr J. Delbridge:-

Born in 1840 —in his 93rd year in 1933.

Commenced working when seven years old (1847)

Started working in the ship-building yards aged18 (1858)

Mr Delbridge. was just 31 years old when it the yard closed down in June. 1871 and the article written in March 1933, sixty-two years later. *Part*

transcript by Peter Blackaby Devon Family History Society.

Sunday 17th May 2015

INDUSTRIAL SITES ON THE BRENDON HILLS

Meeting at Raleigh's Cross Inn at 10.00am. The Brendon Hills (not to be confused with the village of Brendon, near Lynmouth,) are to the east of the Exmoor National Park and the highest parts are over 1000 feet above sea level. From the summit, looking north, one has a good view out over the Bristol Channel and down to the areas of Minehead and Watchet in the valleys below. From about the mid 1800's, iron ore was discovered and a lease obtained for extraction by the Ebbw Vale Company. The West Somerset Mineral Railway Company built a track, 11 miles long, from Watchet Harbour to the top of an incline. At the top a narrow gauge railway ran both east and west to serve the numerous mines. At the height of the mining era, 200 men were employed and two chapels were built as well as houses which were given names such as 'Sea View'.

In the morning at the start of this trip we will visit the Carnarvan mine, Lime kilns, Miners village and the top of the incline. This will take about 2½ to 3 hours after which we will be booked in for lunch at the Inn. In the afternoon we will visit the Borough Engine House, which used to house a Cornish beam engine. This will entail a short drive, a walk of about half a mile along the old track bed, passing the 'naked boy' on the way.

To get to the Raleigh's Cross meeting place, make your way to Simonsbath from South Molton, taking the B3223 toward Exford, changing to the B3224 at the turn off to Dulverton. Keep on through Exford, Wheddon Cross and eventually the road will narrow with a Give Way sign by the Beulah chapel. (This is where the road used to go under the top of the incline, but the bridge is now gone). Continue on for another half mile and meet at the Raleigh's Cross Inn, for the

10 o'clock start. Journey time from Barnstaple is approximately 1½ hours. Some interesting details about the inclined plane are that on it ran a Standard Gauge, double track, down a constant 1 in 4 gradient. The track then wound its way to Watchet on a single track passing under the present A39 road at Washford. At the top of the incline the rails were of standard and narrow gauge, and included an overhead ropeway. The incline was 3,313 feet in length, falling, or rising, 803ft vertically. At the top, under the track were two winding drums each 3ft 3 inches wide and 17ft in diameter, spinning at 5 revolutions per minute. The wire ropes were over 3,280ft long and weighed 3.2 tons. Communication was by semaphore and the wagons took 12 minutes to descend.

Norman Richards

*It would be helpful to know if you are planning to attend.
Please contact Norman, 01769 572 683
Email: npjrichards@gmail.com*



You are cordially invited to attend the
ROLLE CANAL & NORTHERN DEVON WATERWAYS SOCIETY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

to be held on

SUNDAY, APRIL 12th 2015

at

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

Starting at 2.00

Followed by an illustrated talk by

Mark Baker

on

MANAGING THE GRAND WESTERN CANAL

The event is Open to All

Free of charge

and those attending are offered the opportunity to visit the beautiful
gardens afterwards.

Grand Western Canal



MORE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

RC&NDWS Guided walks

Sunday May 17th

ANNERY KILN to the RIDD INCLINED PLANE

Meeting at Annery at 2.30pm

Sunday June 14th

BEAM WHARF and FURZEBAM PERMISSIVE FOOTPATH

Meeting at Puffing Billy (Torrington) at 2.30pm

Sunday July 19th

A look at STAPLE VALE

Meeting at Puffing Billy (Torrington) at 2.30pm

Sunday August 16th

From RHS ROSEMOOR to the head of DARKHAM LEAT.

Meeting at the Overflow Car park at RHS Rosemoor at 2,30pm

The RC&NDWS requests a donation of £2.00 per person for all those attending the walks.

Further details of these events will be published closer to the date advertised or contact Chris Hassall on email: hassallc@ymail.com

The committee of the RC&NDWS is always looking for other sites which its members may wish to visit. If you have any suggestions then please contact Chris (address above) or me via the addresses given on the back page of this newsletter.

Following on from the planned visit to Exmoor, I include details of

another society's programme which RC&NDWS members may find interesting and would be welcome to participate in:-

**Industrial Archaeology Section of the
Devonshire Association**

FIELD TRIP PROGRAMME 2015

The charge for each field trip will be £3 for DA members, £5 for nonmembers.

Booking essential for all trips. By email to IASDA@devonassoc.org.uk

Joining arrangements will follow for all those who book.

1. Wednesday 25 March 2015 2:00pm **The Development of Waterborne Transport in Devon** A talk by David Clements
The Globe, Fore Street, Topsham EX3 0HR
2. Saturday 20 June 2015 10:30 am **Devon Great Consols**
Led by Rick Stewart, author of 'Devon Great Consols: a Mine of Mines'.
3. Thursday 9 July 2015 10:00 am. **Princetown/Foggintor/Swell Tor.**
(quarries and Princetown railway) Led by Peter Stanier.
4. Tuesday 11 August 2015 10:00 am. **Stover Canal**
Led by Phil Newman.
5. Wednesday 9 September 10:30 am **Torrington/Taddiport Town Walk.** Led by Barry Hughes

*Any comments or queries to Brendan Hurley -
brendanhurley@fastmail.co.uk or 01392 439378*

Brendan Hurley

Secretary

Industrial Archaeology Section of the Devonshire Association



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 --
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