

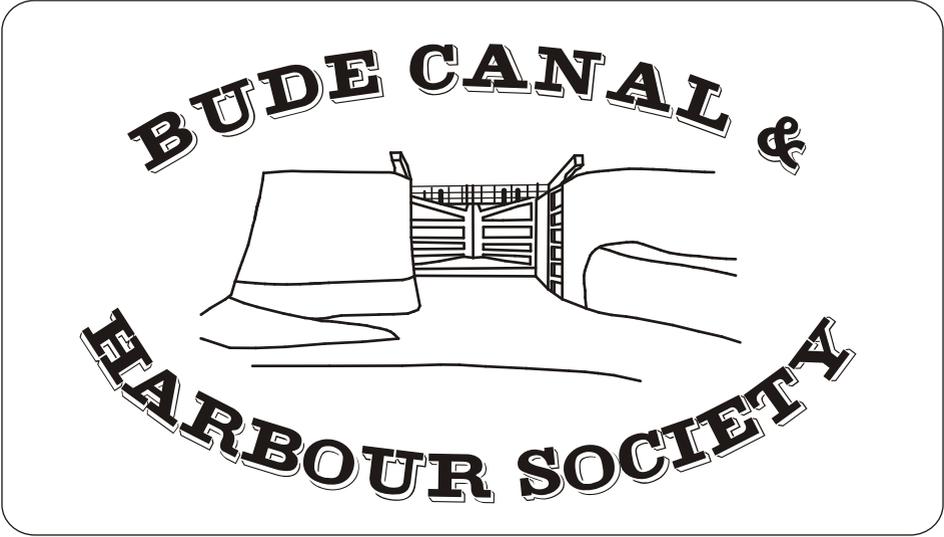
# THE TUB BOAT

Newsletter of the Bude Canal & Harbour Society

No. 44

Summer 2008





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Cover Photo: View from sea lock towards Lower Basin. Photo by Mike Moore

## National Trailboat Festival - A Grand Western Weekend

Instigated specifically to publicize and promote isolated waterways unconnected to the national network, this annual festival is one of the IWA's most important summer events. A decent length of navigable water and a site offering all the possibilities for a good public two-day show are imperative before the enormous task of planning can even be contemplated.

The Grand Western Canal in Devonshire offers eleven miles of beautifully restored broad canal between Tiverton and Loudwells lock, beyond which the canal becomes derelict and of tub boat dimensions. The show field at Halberton near Tiverton where the 2008 festival took place is bordered on one side by the canal making it an ideal venue for hosting the show. This year's festival was run by IWA West Country Branch and hosted by Devon County Council Canal Rangers.

The visiting boats, all beautifully decorated with bunting, were moored on the 'off side' of the canal close to where all the business was going on and very accessible to the interested public. To reach the towpath an ingenious 'bridge' consisting of a flat-bottomed pontoon type boat had been rigged up. Manned by the sea cadets and worked by hauling on ropes tethered on both banks, this was doing non-stop, (if not exactly brisk), business, since the various trip boats, all much in demand, were operating from the towpath bank. Among these, moored judiciously round the bend out of the sound of the enthusiastic noise coming from the jazz drummers, brass bands, and others in the show ring, was the famous Tiverton horse-drawn narrowboat, as always a great attraction.

Visiting societies, mostly canal orientated, began setting-up their gazebos and stalls soon after 9.00 am which had meant for most of us a very early start to the day.



Boats at Trailboat Festival. Photo: Betty Moore

The weathermen had promised rain in abundance so we were well prepared, but in the event the rain stayed away and only a keen and very blustery wind tried unsuccessfully to spoil things. Food and drink were plentiful and the glorious aromas emanating from the premises of the vendors of pizzas, pies, pastas, pasties, hot dogs, soup and the like, ensured a brisk trade and constantly working jaws throughout the day.

We met many old friends who came to look us over and say 'hallo' among whom was Helen Harris, co-author with Monica Ellis of 'The Bude Canal', the definitive book on our canal, a copy of which Helen autographed for our lucky membership secretary, Mike Moore.

Trade was poor on our stall, not at all what we are used to and though this was a meticulously planned show and very well attended despite the bad weather



Our Chairman with Helen Harris and her daughter.

Photo: Betty Moore

predictions, we did wonder if it had been worth all the effort to get there, set up and man the stall and pack up with just the few of us. Possibilities of a Trailboat Festival in Bude at some distant date may not be an idle dream. With a newly-dredged canal, workable locks and improved banks now a reality, who knows - movable bridges, a slipway and access under the bridge to Helebridge basin need not be just a pipe dream either. *Audrey Wheatley*

## **Item in "Waterways"**

The Summer issue of IWA's magazine "Waterways" contained an item, "Storm in a Sea Lock" which included the following: "May Gurney, NCDC's engineer contractor, is working to make repairs and re-hang the gate, but it looks likely to be an expensive operation because of the size of the lock gate. In the meantime, a temporary coffer dam has been built under the road bridge over the canal just above the lock to hold water in the upper part of the canal. Around 150 tonnes of sand in one-tonne bags were placed under the bridge, whilst a further 30 one-tonne bags of sand were stockpiled near the bridge in case the cofferdam needed shoring up. With an exceptionally high tide due the day after the storm, Council and contractors had to work fast to avoid further damage being done to the lock structure, canal basin and surrounding area. This work revealed some unexpected finds in the mud at the bottom of the canal, including a shotgun, which was taken away by the police, several supermarket trolleys, traffic cones, and a mobility scooter."

## **James Green Remembered**

In a letter to "Waterways" Brian George referred to another assistant of John Rennie, James Green.

"James Green became county bridge surveyor to the Devon Quarter Sessions in 1808 and in his career built nearly 100 bridges. As he was also allowed to undertake other work, he was notable for being the engineer for the Bude Canal, the Torrington Canal and for widening and deepening the Exeter Canal, extending it to the present outlet at Turf and for constructing the basin at Exeter. Green also extended Rennie's Grand Western Canal from the Devon/Somerset border to Taunton, installing the first lifts to be successfully used in this country instead of locks.

Unfortunately, only the Exeter canal remains in use, but Rennie certainly employed some remarkable civil engineers."

## **Virworthy View**

Last year I reported that a turtle (or could it be a terrapin) took up residence at the wharf. I was reliably informed that the cold winter would kill it and I saw no signs of it during the winter, but ... it is still here and basks in the warm sun. I have no idea what it eats. Perhaps someone with knowledge of these creatures can provide some information.



Virworthy Wharf. Photo: Geoff Rowe

I haven't seen many frogs this year yet – perhaps the turtle's eaten them!

We are back again to cutting down the massive overgrown weeds to keep the footpath open but I'm afraid from Virworthy Mill the path has only just been cut for the first time this year and walking is a little difficult. Representations have been made to get it cut more often in the growing season.

More repairs to the Wharf are now underway to rebuild one corner of the building, which the experts feared would fall down! The work is expected to take about three weeks so the Wharf now looks like a building site complete with piles of sand, a concrete mixer and a bright blue portable toilet!

We have lost one of our white peahens to a fox recently. She had set up her nest in the hedgerow and I feared for her safety but was too late to move her. Another peahen had nested on top of the hay bales in the barn, close to the roof. Two days ago I climbed to the top to give her food but she was agitated and the nest was full of broken egg shells. Fearing that rats had found her nest I consoled her but then heard tiny cheeps from down between the hay bales. All four chicks had fallen down between the bales and I had to remove several bales to extricate them. Transferred to a more suitable abode she is now happy with her brood.

‘Surfing the net’ the other day I was surprised to see so many references to ‘Virworthy’, even an entry in the Domesday book of 1086. Other references provide a wealth of information and show that there is an interest in the history of the canal. *Geoff Lowe*

### **Mud And Optimism**

At two recent site inspections members of The Bude Canal Regeneration Partnership were given comprehensive tours of the work in progress and the situation to date. We began early one evening prior to a standard meeting, with an inspection of all the ongoing works in, on, and around the upper and lower wharf areas. Especially interesting was viewing the outsides and insides of the nearly complete workshops which face the wharf on the far side of the Barkhouse Green. These are most attractive little units of various designs and very light and spacious within. Charlie David, our guide, told us that commercial interest in them is already good so one hopes they will let well and bring life and business to the canal as intended.



New units at the Wharf nearing completion. Photo: Mike Moore



Dredging canal below Lower Wharf. Photo: Mike Moore

Of the Barkhouse Green itself, little but a small outer fringe of coarse weedy grass is apparent, the rest being submerged beneath a concrete raft holding all the building plant and equipment behind high security fencing. However, we are assured that in the fullness of time, when all building is complete, the Green, albeit somewhat reduced in area, will be restored to Bude for recreational purposes as before.

Attention then turned to the vast expanse of mud, once the canal basin, where dredging was in progress. There was huge interest and expectations of this from all present but also much criticism; too slow, not thorough enough, rubbish still apparent in places, disbelief that dredging was declared virtually finished and what is left, to be spread over the deepened channel. Despite the complaints though, the wholehearted concern of everyone for the future of the canal was very apparent. There was universal admiration for the meticulous repairs to the basin walls carried out by the masons where serious damage in several places had been revealed as the water receded. Down at the sea lock the storm damage to the masonry and gate fittings has been repaired, the huge lump of rogue concrete at last removed and all is now ready for the gate to be replaced when dredging is

complete. All that needs to be done then is refill the canal.

Higher up the canal a second site inspection took place at the two inland locks, Rodds Bridge and Whalesborough, where work to reinstate these important structures is at an advanced and fascinating stage.

Both the concrete spillway and dam are gone and repairs to the lock walls and cills is taking place.



Rodds Bridge lock. Photo: Mike Moore



Whalesborough accommodation bridge. Photo: Mike Moore



Dredger and barge on top pound. Photo: Mike Moore



Transferring mud from barge to sludge maker in River Neet, south-west of join to River Strat. Photo: Mike Moore



Repaired lock gate in place. Photo: Mike Moore

Remarkable to behold for the first time is the wondrous "bathtub" construction of the lock chambers, only visible when de-watered as at present, with the curved brickwork flooring between upper and lower cills at a far deeper level than expected. At Whalesborough, workmen were still busy reconstructing the brand new timber upper cill and were most friendly and forthcoming in their answers to questions from the assembled gawpers above them.

Higher up still, at Whalesborough Farm accommodation bridge (not navigable height), we were all highly delighted to see boats - large ones - in the water for the first time for well over a hundred years. These were only dredgers of course but none-the-less boats and very welcome ones too. Dredging had been taking place above the bridge at the time of writing, where the two rivers and the canal share the channel adjacent to the weir.

I am curious to know how the dredgers will get past Whalesborough bridge and into the top pound of the canal and once there, whether the true width of the waterway will be restored as promised. The volume of decades of silt here is awesome to behold and no one to my knowledge has ever seen this

pound wider than a little over half its true width when partially dredged many years ago; but usually a deep, narrow, muddy ditch. We will soon know, and remain enthusiastic and optimistic.

All the silt is being pumped up to fields on Whalesborough farmland by arrangement with the owners, the pumping engine and works being sited in the field alongside the waterway. This field is to become two ponds, being low-lying, and a roadway has been constructed between it and the towpath for essential access to the ongoing works and for the future.

The chance to view the work in progress is being offered to interested members of the public and Charlie David is to be sincerely thanked for making this opportunity available. Everyone on these two occasions enjoyed every minute and marvelled at much of what is happening and all who love our canal have much to be thankful for in its secure, foreseeable future. Note: Charlie David's guided tours are at 2.30pm on 26/7/08, 16/8/08 and 20/9/08. *Audrey Wheatley*

## **Bude Canal Regeneration Project**

Since the last edition of *The Tub Boat* in April a lot of work has been achieved and is continuing.

The dredging of the Lower Basin has been completed, as have the essential repairs and maintenance to the sea lock, banks and walls. About 6000 cu metres of silt, in places 4' to 5' in depth have been removed from the Lower Basin. The dredging operation will give a depth of water of 10 feet for most



Foot of Marhamchurch inclined plane.  
Photo: Mike Moore

of the basin. The sea lock gate, removed for repair, is now in situ ready for the refilling of the Lower Basin. This will start on or about 8th July when the tidal cycle is in neap tides. NCDC have consented to pump water into this part of the canal from the adjacent River Strat (often wrongly called Neet. Ed) to ensure a quick return to a sufficient depth to

protect the gates when the next set of spring tides arrives later in July.

The Barkhouse Green redevelopment is almost complete. Paving surrounds for the workshops and the reinstatement of the Green itself will complete this part of the project and be a bonus to this area. NCDC reports that they have a lot of interest from prospective tenants for the workshops.

The extension to the TIC in the Crescent Car Park is progressing well albeit behind schedule due to supply problems for the steel girders needed for the framework. However, once done it will be a fine addition to the facilities of the town.

The refurbishment of Rodds Bridge and Whalesborough locks continues with currently masonry work and the fitment of the wooden cills. Dredging of the upper reaches has started and will work its way down the canal to Falcon Bridge. Silt will be removed by excavator from the canal and taken by barge to a site on Whalesborough Farm near Helebridge where it will be transferred to a set of machinery, which will sift it, liquefy, and then pump it to Whalesborough land at Widemouth. The bank repairs and towpath works from Falcon Bridge to Helebridge are due in the next few months. At times this will have the effect of closing the whole towpath from Bude to Helebridge to the public. Unfortunate, but obviously necessary to achieve the Project aims by the end of 2008. (Due to start on 7 July. Ed)

NCDC is awaiting consent from the Environment Agency to construct the paths to connect the underpass with the towpath, thus allowing safe passage under the A39 at Helebridge. It seems to me that there are three speeds for decision-making: reasonable, slow and EA! NCDC has been waiting most of this year for a piece of paper from EA to allow this work to start. Of all the aspects of this important regeneration this one part will benefit the general public more than all of the rest. So you can imagine the frustration of local people who still have to take their lives in their hands when they cross the A39 to continue their walk up or down the canal or elsewhere.

In the autumn Helebridge Basin will be dredged in partnership with Bude Canal Angling Association and work will be done to the bottom of Marhamchurch inclined plane to aid interpretation. The only cloud on the horizon is that due to pressures from the funding bodies the replacement of Rodds Bridge with a lift bridge was removed from the funding bid, which means that NCDC do not have the monies to do this important element which would allow navigation from Bude to the Helebridge area. The cost of this work could be as much as £400,000. To be fair NCDC obviously want to achieve this replacement and Cornwall County Council have no

problems with such a change; the problem is acquiring the funds to secure the work. Both authorities would put monies to the project but need another source and outside funders are very scarce. So, if you know anyone with a spare £150,000 to £200,000 who is feeling charitable point them in the direction of Charlie David, Public Spaces Manager of NCDC and make his day.

Levity aside this is a serious matter and needs resolution ideally before 31st March 2009 when NCDC ceases to exist and we enter the uncertain waters of the Unitary Authority for Cornwall. *Chris Jewell*

## **Car Stickers**

The trustees have decided to promote the Society through the issue of a free car sticker to each membership. The sticker will have the Society's logo plus the website address in white on a green background. The stickers will be sent to members in the next issue of The Tub Boat or with their membership card on renewal. Please display in your vehicle or elsewhere.

New members will receive a sticker as part of their initial package.

## **Bude Canal Day**

Bude Canal Day is on Sunday 3rd August 2008 and will be held in the Castle grounds since the Barkhouse Green is not available.

As in previous years the Town Council's Gurney Day will be held on the same day to celebrate the genius of Goldsworthy Gurney and emphasise the heritage of this area.

There will be displays, steam engines, musical items, stalls, and other entertainments. The event opens about 12 noon and runs until 5.30pm. Conditions permitting, at about 6.30pm the Bude Pilot Gig Club will lock out of the canal through the sea lock accompanied by the skirl of the pipes of Bideford Youth Pipe Band.

All we need is your company and some good Bude sunshine to complete the celebrations. *Chris Jewell*

## **Trip to Grand Western Canal**

At 9.30am on Saturday 28th June, BCHS members and some of the Motor Club membership, 53 in all, set off in eight eighths cloud by coach from Crescent car park bound for Bickleigh Mill first, where we had lunch and



Boarding the "Tivertonian". Photo: Mike Moore



Swans and cygnets on Grand Western Canal. Photo: Mike Moore



One unusual rider on the towhorse. Photo: Mike Moore

sampled some of the delights of the old railway station and water mill there. After this as the clouds gradually broke we travelled on to Tiverton and the Grand Western Canal. Here we found a 67 foot long 10' wide canal boat, the "Tivertonian", a gorgeous, black, shire horse brightly caparisoned, and a crew attired in white shirt and blue trousers, red neckerchiefs and bowlers and an excited black and white dog.

We were given much gen about the boat and the canal and welcomed aboard where there was seating for all and wide windows giving good views as the boat drifted along under one horsepower. By now there was bright sunlight and with a bar at the stern and toilet at the bow (with a red and green light to indicate tenancy) most of our wants were catered for.

At intervals we received a commentary on the canal and its environs and the boat and its history. The crew were most helpful and pleasant and before long we were making new friends amid much hilarity - perhaps aided by the contents of the bar. We were delighted at one point to see the dog riding on the back of the horse. Somewhere over halfway the boat moored and we were allowed half an hour ashore to stretch our legs. There was much lush vegetation and lovely scenery and numerous water birds and insects and two pairs of swans, the first with four cygnets and the second with seven

older ones. With some sadness we left the boat at Sampford Peverell to rejoin the coach for an uneventful return to Bude at about 8.15pm after a most enjoyable day. *Lawrence Wheatley*

## **June 30th 1888**

A recent "Looking Back" in the Bude & Stratton Post under June 30th 1888 has this item: "The commencement of the North Cornwall Railway extension is probable - and the Bude Canal route is now being surveyed to form a line from Bude joining one of the existing lines to Launceston somewhere near the Tamar." Well it didn't happen! Ed

## **Membership Report**

We welcome the following members who have joined since March:

Mr & Mrs R Bender, Hanover House, Bude.

Mr A G Pinchback, Manor Road, Bude.

Mr G Hathway, The Old Steam Laundry, Bude.

Mr P Hulme, Exeter.

Mr R U Lewis, Stonehaven, Scotland.

Mr C Darwin, Bridgerule (Life member).

Could members who have indicated that they do not require printed copies of the newsletter please send their e-mail addresses to the following address; **info@bude-canal.co.uk** if they have not already done so. This will enable them to be notified when the newsletter is available on-line and for us to send any other notifications or booking forms etc. Thank you for your assistance. *Mike Moore*

## **Visit to Stover Canal 6th September 2008**

In conjunction with the Stover Canal Society, we have arranged a visit to the Stover Canal which is near Newton Abbot in Devon.

We shall meet at 10.15 am at Kingsteignton Village Hall for a presentation about the canal. Refreshments will be available. Lunch will be in the "Old Rydon Inn" opposite the hall. A menu will be there on the Saturday morning so that you can pre-order your lunch. In the afternoon there will be a guided walk to visit parts of the Stover Canal. There is a small fee of £2 per adult and £1 for children under 14 to cover expenses.

If you intend to take part in the visit please complete the enclosed booking form and return with your remittance to Chris Jewell, 4a The Crescent, Bude, EX23 8LE by Saturday 23rd August 2008. *Betty Moore*

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# THE TUB BOAT

## Newsletter of the Bude Canal & Harbour Society

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### Forthcoming Events:

Sunday 3rd August	Bude Canal Day and Gurney Day
Saturday 16th August	Stall at Bude Carnival
Saturday 23rd August	Stall at RNLI Lifeboat weekend
Saturday 6th September	Visit to Stover Canal

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Copy for the next edition of the Tub Boat should be addressed to:  
The Editor, Tregua, Lower Upton, Bude, Cornwall EX23 0LS  
to reach him by 29th September 2008.

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### Trustees:

Chairman	Audrey Wheatley
Vice Chairman	David Phillips
Secretary	Bryan Dudley Stamp
Treasurer	Chris Jewell
Events Secretary	Betty Moore
The Tub Boat Editor	Lawrence Wheatley
Other members	Jill White
	Anne Longley
Membership Secretary	Mike Moore ( <i>non-trustee</i> )
Minuting Secretary	Judy Crabtree ( <i>non-trustee</i> )

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