

The populace of the surrounding countryside hailed their arrival and the bells of St. Peters rang out. A dinner was provided at the Stanhope Arms with numerous toasts, music and much hilarity.



These full-scaled replicas of the lead or bow tub boat and its mate, the butt tub boat, are as used on the Bude Canal. These boats were built by Adrian Wills (Weare Gifford) and Barry Hughes (Appledore), from drawings as part of a survey on the remains of an original Bude Canal tub boat, undertaken by Dr. Blue, a marine archaeologist, on behalf of Bude-Stratton Town Council. Adrian Wills owns the tidal lock and basin on the Rolle Canal. The Rolle Canal was built by James Green, following his construction of the Bude Canal.

During the first three weeks of operation there was a brisk demand for sand; tolls exceeded expectations and expenses were more than covered. However, capital funds had dwindled and on 26th June 1823 an application was made to the Exchequer Bill Loan Commissioners for a loan of £20,000 which was backed by Thomas Telford, the Commissioner's adviser. The following year the loan request had been reduced to £16,000 and, subject to certain conditions, was granted. During the summer 1824 work commenced on the extensions from Tamerton Bridge to Drupton, the southern terminus of the canal. By this time there were already 100 boats operating on the canal. The shortfall of £4,000 was

still needed and was eventually obtained from the Commissioners before the extension was completed in 1825. The total cost of the canal as built is believed to have amounted to just under £120,000.

The whole enterprise was well planned and exceedingly ingenious and when everything was in order, it all worked extremely well. The inventiveness was not matched by the actual construction and materials used. This resulted in frequent breakdowns, particularly on the incline planes. This resulted in delays and considerable repair costs which in turn caused loss of trade and diminished earnings.

From the time of John Honey, Clerk to the Company 1824-1832, there were constant problems with the fabric of the canal. Mr Honey was a very capable man, held in high regard by many, dealing with breakdowns, accidents, sourcing funds to pay taxes, labourer's wages and trades people for materials and spares. During his period of employment he took up residence at Hobbacott Down. Although his abilities were recognised locally, the day-to-day difficulties were not always appreciated by the Committee who were mainly resident in Exeter, where most of the meetings were held.

In January 1835 the Harbour & Canal Company, with the sanction of the Exchequer Loan Commissioners, engaged the engineer James Rendle to report on the condition of the works on the line of the canal.

He concluded that:

- They were generally in a poor state
- He agreed with the previous findings regarding Hobbacott
- A considerable amount of expense was needed urgently to improve the situation

This prompted the then Chairman, George Call, to ask the ELC for an additional £10,000 to help overcome these problems, guaranteed by the main shareholders. He would take personal responsibility for the management of the works needed and would ensure that the loan was repaid.

The Commissioner's did not reply immediately but then a lengthy exchange of correspondence took place. James Green made comments on James Rendle's report and entered into more correspondence with Revd. N. Cole, a member of the

Management Committee who in turn corresponded with the Secretary of the Exchequer Loan Committee. The effect of this was that the Canal Company proposed to the shareholders that they should apply for an Act of Parliament to extend its powers to raise funds. This was rejected and the whole Committee resigned!

A new Committee of Management was formed with the Revd. Cole as Chairman. Further negotiations followed resulting in:

- James Green being engaged with a contract of 1 year
- Fixing the machinery at Hobbacott
- For a fixed fee to supervise the system during the period of the contract

This had little effect on the ELC who insisted that matters must improve so that debts and the loan would be paid, otherwise they would take steps to seize the Canal and sell it to recover the loan and outstanding interest.

The Committee again wrote to the ELC making the following points:

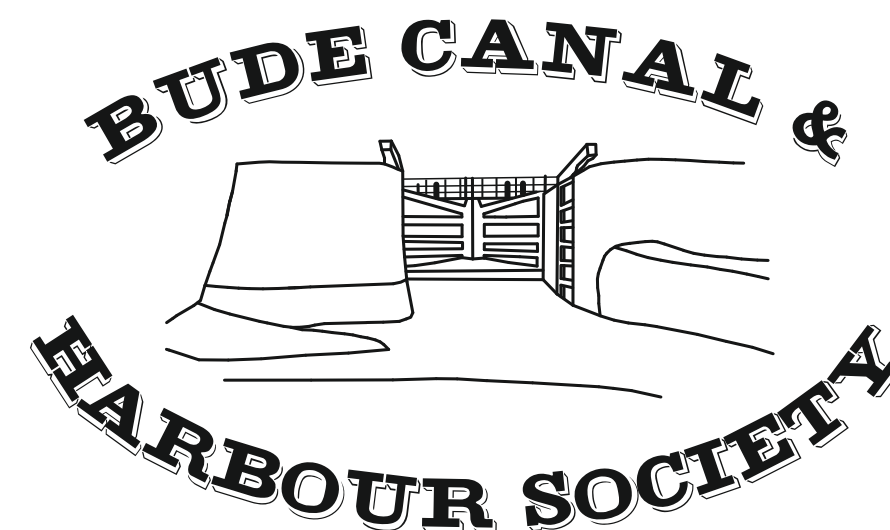
- They expressed concern at the effect that possible sale of the canal would have on the principle shareholders who had invested £45,000
- Highlighting the effect that the canal and trade had on land values
- Trade was still increasing
- Emphasising the contract with Mr Green to carry out work on, and supervise, the machinery
- Requesting an extension on the suspension of the payment of the loan and interest
- The Company to increase tolls by 1/8d

The ELC seemed to be impressed by this and allowed an extension on the suspension of the payment of the loan and interest, BUT on the understanding that no further expense should be incurred on the machinery other than that already agreed. If the machinery failed at Hobbacott during the years extension then the ELC would seek to take the action previously stated.

After 1835 there was a lack of adverse reports and it seems that the Committee of Management of the Canal Company were able to deal with matters and the improving trade brought stability.



The replacement breakwater, rebuilt in 1838-42, by James Casebourne, showing its effectiveness in reducing tidal action in Bude harbour. Circa 2002



CONCLUSION

We hope that this presentation has helped to understand how important the access to coastal trading was to the ancient town of Stratton which was established in the area known now as Bude. This led to increased trade and eventually led to the construction of the Bude Canal and the creation of a safe haven for coastal vessels.

The resultant investment, commercial activity and increased employment in the 1800s was the catalyst that created the town of Bude eventually leading to the diminutive status of the once mother town of Stratton.

As mentioned earlier, this display is based on the information recorded in many books about Bude, its maritime history and the creation of the Bude Canal.

The sources used were mainly from 'The Bude Canal' by Helen Harris and Monica Ellis; 'Bude's Maritime History, Past & Present' by Bill Young and Bryan Dudley-Stamp; a selection of documents held by the Bude-Stratton Town Council's Archive Unit. Drawings of original Breakwater, Devon Records Office – Acland Collection

This year (2019) sees the bi-centenary of the start of the construction of the Bude Canal on July 23rd, something to be celebrated.

The question is, will there still be a canal on the lower areas of Bude? Will climate change, beginning to make its presence felt, change the day-to-day life of Bude or will there be no resemblance to what we know and love today?

Trustees of Bude Canal & Harbour Society – Regd. Charity No: 1086646