

With the war with France over, and the war with America having been settled by agreement, Britain drastically reduced the size of its Navy and many of its sailors found themselves ashore. John Panchen appears to have been one of them. He was replaced as Master on Pactolus in February 1816. Over the next couple of years he found employment for himself as Master (and Captain) of a number of merchant ships, and of at least one warship that was destined for a breaker's yard.

John had married Mary Langman in Plymouth shortly after his promotion to Master RN was confirmed in 1809. They had at least four children born in Plymouth in the years up to November 1819, and two more born in Stratton, Cornwall between 1821 and 1824.

That brings us to the final chapter in the life of John Panchen. By November 1821 John had become Harbourmaster at Bude and had an association with the Bude Harbour and Canal Company, on occasion acting as Clerk to the Company. He also acted as inspector for the Company when work began on the construction of the canal, a position which his experience of overseeing maintenance and repair work in the Royal Navy would no doubt have stood him in good stead. As inspector he frequently walked along stretches of the canal route, sometimes in the company of the Chairman, and reported on the progress of the work.

Sadly, John was never to see the completion of the canal works, even in its curtailed form, because he died on 19th March 1824. He was buried in a corner of the churchyard of Stratton parish church.



The inscription on his headstone says that he was aged 44, but the recently discovered evidence suggests that he was 45 or 46. The inscription also contains the epitaph reproduced below, which is fully supported by character and professional references written by his previous Commanding Officers Captain Aylmer and Captain Hillyer:

He came a stranger into the Country.
But by his upright Conduct and amiable Manners
Made everyone his Friend.
He was equally esteemed
By his commanding Officers
Afloat, and by his Neighbours ashore.
A good seaman and an honest man.

Ken Panchen - August 2018

NB: Bude Canal Harbour Society are most grateful to Ken Panchen for allowing the use of his research into John Panchen. They are not related!



The following are a selection of the entries from his journal:

Thursday 19th October 1820: In company with the Chairman walking to the tunnel, near Hammett's Lane, and inspected the whole of the line of the Canal from that point back to Roydon Moor. Some few of the fences out of repair but in general the whole was in good order. No workmen on this part of the line.

Sunday 22nd October 1820: Remained at Bude, in company with the Chairman, watching the effect of high tide and seas on the Breakwater and Sea Locks. Counted on the work 340 men.

Wednesday 1st November 1820: Found it impractical to cross the Tamar, the waters being so much out.

Here the Journal was approved by G. Call (Chairman)

Monday 6th November 1820: Engaged a cart to carry 20 hurdles to Bude from Whalesboro' where they are not wanted. Returned them into Mr Green's store. Rec'd £2 from Mr Waddington to pay carriage of hurdles, fencing, etc.

Friday 10th November 1820: Parties working on 'Obbacott Downs. House on that part of the work in progress. The culvert at the foot of the Great Incline finished. Paid Thos. Baker 5 shillings for drawing 20 hurdles from Bude to Anderton.

Thursday 16th November 1820: The work from Bude to Helebridge proceeds rapidly – Wm. Bray not at work this day on the Canal.

Monday 20th November 1820: Inspected the line from Breakwater to Marhamchurch in company with the Chairman and Engineer. Discharged Wm. Bray having no longer occasion for him on the Line of Works.

Sunday 26th November 1820: Remained at Vacy with the Chairman.

Monday 27th November 1820: 24 men employed deepening the Channel from the entrance of the Sea Lock to the Great Chapel Rock.

Wednesday 6th December 1820: Placed 12 marks in the sand at Bude per order of the Chairman. Party of masons building a bridge near the Hele Bridge where the course of the stream is turned. The work from that point downwards going on quickly. Parties at work on 'Obbacott and Marhamchurch Incline Planes and about 40 men excavating the Sea Lock Channel.

Monday 11th December 1820: Waited on the Revd. John Kingdon and on Messrs Kingdon and Shearm on Canal business. Went to Bude to make observations on the sand but found all my marks, 12 in number, taken up.

Tuesday 12th December 1820: Mr Green's foreman and party of men setting gear ready for working shafts on 'Obbacott Down.

Sunday 24th & Monday 25th December 1820: At Vacy on Canal business.

Tuesday 26th December 1820: Work open on this section as follows – walked from Vacy to the tunnel. Inspected the line from that point to Burmsdon. On the whole of this line there are but 17 men employed. Not at work owing to the state of the weather. Work on this section as follows. Canal cut from west end of tunnel, say 1 mile or within 300 yards of the road near Stanbury Cross. Manworthy Valley culvert built and embankment about half filled.

Wednesday 27th December 1820: Walked to Burmsdon. Inspected line thence to Bude. On the whole of the line about 60 men. Owing to frost work can only go in deep cutting. One of the whims at 'Obbacott at work and one shaft expected to be clear of water this night. Plane partly forward and each shaft sunk about 70 feet and the adit driven about 60 feet from the foot of the Plane. To Cann Orchard the ground open but no part can be said to be completed. From below Cann Orchard to the Marhamchurch Incline the Canal is open and in some parts finished, excepting deep cutting in Marshall's field now in progress. Four men employed sloping garden near the bridge at Marhamchurch and a few more at Hele Bridge filling course of old River. The work from this point to Bude may be said to be nearly complete. 6 men excavating the Basin and some getting ready Sea Lock Gates and about 30 men on Sir T.D. Acland's work at Efford Bridge. In

Whalesboro' Meadow complete and at Rodd's Bridge partly so. Whims on 'Obbacott working day and night.

Friday 29th December 1820: Walked from Bude to Holsworthy with letter from G.C. Call to Earl Stanhope and returned to Canal Office with his Lordship's answer.

Wednesday 3rd January 1821: Work stopped by snow and hard weather.

Wednesday 10th January 1821: Inspected Breakwater found sea had breach in facing and hove rubbish over.

Thursday 18th January 1821: Hands employed boating materials from Whalesboro' Meadows.

Monday 22nd January 1821: Took the Lanson Line from Little Bridge to Red Post and from that point to Bude. 14 men working along Thurlibeer and Mead Park, some puddling the bank and others throwing up the fences. Some at Cann Orchard and some at Marhamchurch, some at the Inclines and some on Whalesboro' Meadows where the course of the river is turned into the Canal.

Many men employed boating down stuff for raising the Towing Path below and Masons on the waste weir at Whalesboro' and some on the lock at Rodds Bridge. Another party on Sir T.D. Acland's works and some on the Breakwater. The bridge at Red Post again repaired. Paid Wm. Bray 2s 6d for drawing 12 hurdles from Hele Bridge to Cann Orchard on the 17th instant.

Thursday 25th January 1821: Counted on this line from Bude (to Cann Orchard) 140 men, 30 of whom are working on the Breakwater and the Quarry. The masons building the Basin wall at Efford. Mr Whitewood has informed me that sand may be sent up the Canal to Hele Bridge in the course of 1 month from this date.

Saturday 17th February 1821: Plenty of masons building a Bridge at Anderton and others raising stones from Quarry, others puddling the Canal.

Thursday 22nd February 1821: Inspected the line from Bude to Cann Orchard and counted, on this length, 189 hurdles. Some men working on the Sea Lock, others building the Lighter. Men at work at Efford Basin. One gang at work cutting towards the Incline. Received 50 hand bills from the office. Post 12 about Marhamchurch.

Friday 23rd February 1821: Circulated handbills as to damage arising from trespass of cattle.

Saturday 24th February 1821: Total hurdles in whole line of Canal 750.

Monday 5th March 1821: A large number of men at Efford. The water is let into the Basin; high tide this day.

Thursday 22nd March 1821: Saw Mr Whitewood respecting Wharf at Hele Bridge and saw Mr Waddington as to stores for barge.

Saturday 24th March 1821: Balance Beams on the Sea Lock upper gates; the Swivel Bridge getting on.

Friday 30th March 1821: Employed at Bude on launching Lighter No.1 when put on board 35 tons sand in 2 hours 20 minutes by 3 men. Loaded barge drew 2 feet 10 inches water. Empty, 1 foot 3 inches aft and 9 inches forward.

Tuesday 17th April 1821: Employed at Bude getting the barge ready and laying down stones for the moorings, etc.

Saturday 21st April 1821: Took the barge No.1 out the Sea Lock and put on board her about 24 tons of sand. P.M. At tide time got her into the Basin, the barge drawing 3ft 6ins aft and 2ft 10ins forward. Laid down two buoys with mooring stones to place barge on sand. The easternmost buoy 100 yards from the narrowest part of the channel.

Friday 4th May 1821: In company with the Chairman examined the Breakwater and the works at Bude preparatory to laying down the moorings for the barges to load sand. Painters and carpenter working on the barges.

Tuesday 19th June 1821: Canal almost dry from Anderton to Shernick.

Wednesday 11th July 1821: The Vealand Incline and Burmsdon embankment getting on briskly. They expect to carry the water across in about three weeks.