

THE TUB BOAT

Newsletter of the Bude Canal & Harbour Society

No. 106

Winter 2023/24



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Forthcoming Events for 2024:

Sunday 18th Feb BCHS AGM at The Castle Heritage Centre, Bude (see page 5)

Contributions for the next edition of the Tub Boat should be sent as an e-mail attachment to editor.bchs@gmail.com or copied onto a USB memory stick or CD and sent to Mike Moore (Tel: 07790 744823) to reach him by 15th March 2024.

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Registered Charity No.1086646

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Cover photo: Dredging pontoon on the Higher Wharf

Creaks from the Chair

Unfortunately, Chris has been unwell recently and was unable to provide his usual “Creaks from the Chair”, but we do have “Scribbles from the Secretary” – see below.

Mike Moore

Scribbles from the Secretary

At the time of writing this, Chris Jewell, our Chairman, is sadly in hospital. I am sure you would all like to join me in wishing him a speedy recovery. So, instead of “Creaks from the Chair”, you have “Scribbles from the Secretary”. *(ED - Chris is now back home and making an excellent recovery.)*

There are a number of physical issues around the Canal at present:

- Dredging of the lower parts of the Canal is proceeding. The dredgings are being kept for a period of time in containers in the Crescent Car Park so that the invasive Zebra Mussels die off before the material can be taken elsewhere. Many of you will have seen the dredging equipment and the storage facility. As far as we know, this is all proceeding to plan. (see reports from Cornwall Council and Cormac on pages 18 & 20)
- The Sand Railway embankment. Geophysical surveys have shown some voids within the embankment, and these will have to be dealt with (by grouting) before further consideration of works on the sand railway. We do understand, however, that widespread concreting of the sand railway ramp is looking less likely since it actually speeds up the waves and their reach.
- Rodd’s Bridge. This is closed at present because remedial work/replacement is necessary to the bridge deck and the abutments. We have written to Cormac to suggest that the opportunity is taken to install either a swing bridge or a lifting bridge which would allow restoration to navigation. We have put them in touch with technical staff from the Inland Waterways Association and the Canal & Rivers Trust. As an alternative we have suggested a higher fixed bridge with 7-foot headroom as provided at the Whalesborough Accommodation Bridge. We will maintain contact so we can see how things develop.

- (ED – I wonder if a high-level bridge might well be appropriate as, if sea levels do rise as predicted by the Environment Agency, the present bridge over the river will also have to be raised if the road across the valley is to be retained).

The Society's AGM is approaching and will be held in the Willoughby Gallery at Bude Heritage Centre on Sunday 18th February 2024. Details are shown below and I would urge you all to attend if you can.

By the time you read this we will be into the New Year, but I hope you all had a good Christmas.

Peter Daniel

Apology

I apologise for an error which appeared in the last edition of The Tub Boat where, on page 2, the date of the AGM was shown incorrectly as "Sunday 21st February". The correct date is Sunday 18th February - see below.

Mike Moore

AGM – Sunday 18th February 2024

The AGM will be held on Sunday 18th February 2024, between 10am and 4pm in the Willoughby Gallery at the Castle Heritage Centre, Bude.

There will be a display on some aspect of the Canal which will be available from about 10.30am.

At 11.00am there will be a presentation by John Puddy of the SS Freshspring Trust. The SS Freshspring is an historic steamship, built as a water carrier in 1946, and is registered as a Vessel of National Importance. She is currently being restored to working order at Bideford.

At 12.30pm members will, this year, be able to make their own arrangements for lunch. Those wishing to use Café Limelight should contact them in advance so that they can ensure that they have sufficient food available.

At 2.30pm there will be the Society's AGM followed by a chance for questions to the Committee. The room must be vacated by 4pm.

Peter Daniel, Hon Secretary

Membership Report

Firstly, on behalf of the trustees I would like to thank all renewing members, we greatly appreciate your financial support. There do remain a small number of outstanding annual memberships who will have received a separate letter with this newsletter. I sincerely hope that you wish to remain a member of the society.

Secondly, we are very pleased to have welcomed 2 new annual members since my last report (1 Family and one Adult). We hope that you enjoy being part of our society and are able to attend some of our events next year.

Membership cards have now been issued to all renewing members so if you haven't received yours please let me know. In order to save on ever increasing postage costs some cards have been included with this newsletter rather than being issued upon receipt of payment, as previously advised would be the case.

Thank you all for your continued support and should anyone require any further information please contact me directly on 01288 356367 or bude.canal@gmail.com

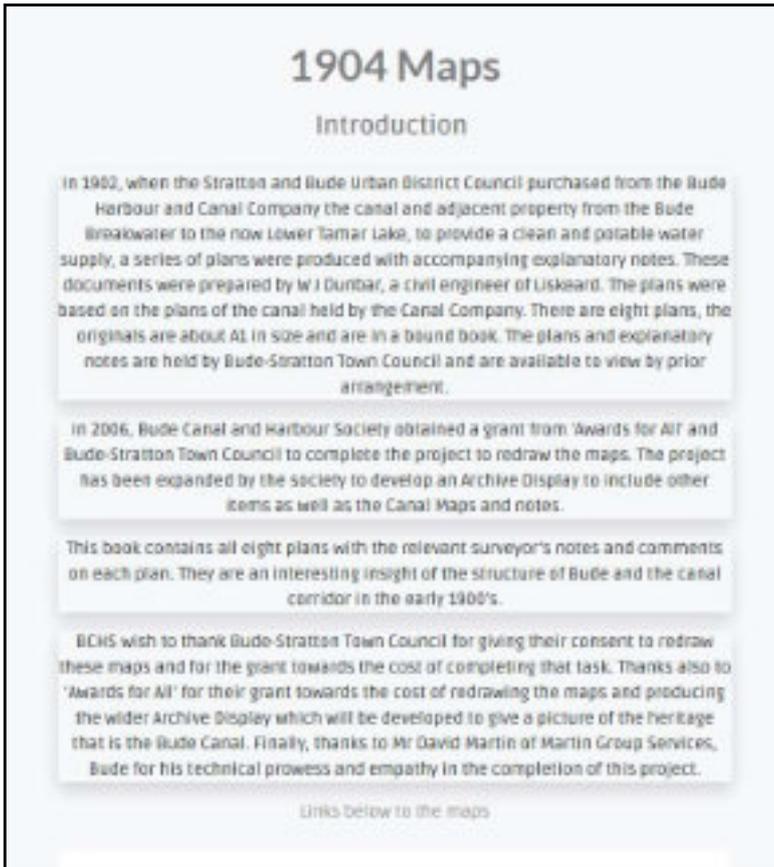
Martin Shannon, Honorary Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Bude Canal website and Social Media

It's about 9 months since I mentioned our website and social media.

Our fledgling Facebook page is beginning to gather momentum and has over 80 followers at the moment. Peter Daniel is definitely the one driving this with his fascinating facts and great pictures which mean that more people are now engaging with the page. We are linking with some other carefully chosen sites such as Nostalgic Bude and Bude Area Tourist Board and gradually our presence will grow although we are not (yet) avid Facebook users!

The website continues to have many visitors and slightly strangely for this time of year showed an 18.6% increase last month. In fact, in the last nine months there have been well over 10,000 individual visitors. The front of the site is now much more colourful and informative so perhaps this has helped traffic and engagement to increase.



The 1904 Maps once again proved the most visited page after the index page links and the Canal Project. The Tub Boat and History pages continue to interest visitors.

Looking at how people find the site over 60% come direct and know exactly what they are looking for. Search engines are valuable also, but the site can appear several sites down as a search for Bude Canal tends to throw up Air B&B and accommodation along the Bude Canal first as these are paid for placings!

Although the site is now fully responsive and working properly on mobile phones the majority of those looking are using computers running on Windows (10 mostly but also 8 and 7) and the search engine most used is Chrome. This might suggest that we are still mainly attracting the older generation although Safari on Apple mobiles is now up to 10% and counting. One of the challenges the Society faces is to appeal to a younger audience, and we are actively working towards this.

We had an invitation from the Bude Chamber of Commerce to become affiliated members and of course we were delighted to accept. We are therefore shown on their website and in redesigning our own links page they have provided us with some text on their organisation. In fact, we are gradually improving our links section but only with sites we feel fit in with our ethos and aims.

We try to keep up to date with Cornwall Council's remedial works and flood prevention and, with the recent publication of "A Vision for Bude" from the Town Council and Bude Town Team, these give us all plenty to think about.

A new website from Bude Area Tourist Bude and introduction of The Bude Way are all things we hope to become involved in and to promote on our site. The Bude Climate Partnership is another very important development to be a part of. Yes, 2024 is a crucial year in our future and we look forward to sharing the many things which are happening here.

Jacki Stephens

Digital Guided Walk

Recently, we have been liaising with Nick Cole who is working on a project to create a digital guided walk along the Bude Canal. After reviewing the original text, I suggested some amendments and offered to loan two images relating to George Casebourne. Further meetings are planned as work proceeds on this exciting project.

Chris Jewell

Christmas Dinner

On Friday 15th December, our trustees had their annual Christmas meal at the Molesworth Arms, Pyworthy. Many laughs were had, toasts were made to absent friends, and we would like to thank our hosts for an absolutely lovely evening.

Stuart Spooner, Events Secretary



Minibus tour of the Bude Canal

I arrived at the Sea Lock at 9.00 on Saturday 7th October to make sure that I could park in Breakwater Road next to the canal but it wasn't a problem as there were many free spaces. It was a glorious morning, so it was a great opportunity to get some beautiful photographs before the walk started. By 9.35 another four participants had arrived including Chris Jewell, the Chairman of the Bude Canal and Harbour Society who was the leader of the tour. The other three were members of the society including Sandy Wright, the new editor of the Sou'Wester.



L/R - Chris Ball, Lesley Moores, Sandy Wright and Chris Jewell

Chris spent some time at the Sea Lock explaining the history behind the reason for building the Bude Canal and how it had changed the geography of the Bude Bay and ultimately led to the development of Bude into the town we have today.

Following the walk along the canal passing the Lower Wharf, we crossed Falcon Bridge, stopped to see the old Lifeboat House and walked past Higher Wharf as far as Casting House Cottage where there was a lay-by where boats were moored when not in use.

Returning to the Crescent Car Park we joined Peter Daniel, who was our minibus driver for the day. Our next stop was Helebridge where we disembarked to walk back along the canal to visit Whalesborough Lock, one of the two inland locks on the Bude Canal. All the other changes in levels on the canal were achieved using inclined planes of which there were six. Before boarding the minibus for Hobbacott, Chris opened up the Barge Workshop at Helebridge Basin for the visitors to examine the only Bude Canal Tub Boat on public display as well as other canal artefacts.

On arrival at Hobbacott, we walked along the track to the canal basin at the top of the incline where the weather was still glorious giving us superb views towards Marhamchurch and to the coast beyond. Due to time constraints, we were not able to walk to the bottom of the incline, but we did examine some of the remaining stonework showing the location of the top of the wells which contained the buckets which, when filled with water, provided the propulsion to drive the chains which ran up and down the incline to which the Tub Boats were attached. This arrangement was unique on the Bude Canal as the other five inclines on the canal used large waterwheels which were underground at the top of the incline to provide the power.



Peter Daniel at the top of Hobbacott Incline explaining how the bucket-in-the well system operated

Before lunch we had just enough time to make a quick visit to Lower Tamar Lake which was built by the canal company to act as the reservoir to provide water for the whole of the Bude Canal system. We found that the bridge over the top of the weir had been closed as it had become unsafe due to the rotten timber decking but, fortunately, another bridge at a lower level was available as an alternative route to access the start of the feeder arm which led to Virworthy Wharf and on along the Aqueduct Section of the canal to the junction of the Main Line of the canal at Pancrasweek which we visited after lunch at the Red Post Inn. However, we were able to make a quick visit to Virworthy Wharf before we returned to Red Post for lunch.

We continued to Holsworthy to view canal buildings at Stanbury Wharf and to Blagdonmoor Wharf where we were able to visit "The Barn" which was built on the site of the original wharf building and to a similar style.



Visiting "The Barn" at Blagdonmoor Wharf

The location of our final visit was Chilsworthy to view the embankment and canal at Cottage Farm which was followed by a walk along the public footpath on the opposite side of the main road which leads towards Stanbury Wharf.



Site of the lay-by east of the road at Chilsworthy



The group ready to board the minibus back to Bude

The whole trip was a tremendous success despite such a poor turnout (we had 14 seats available on the minibus) - they don't realise what they have missed! Our thanks go to Chris Jewell who organised the trip, Peter Daniel for driving, the landowners at Hobbacott and Cottage Farm, Chilsworthy and, finally to David Campbell for helping and advising us during the afternoon visit to Chilsworthy.

Mike Moore

Blagdonmoor Wharf

As we come to the end of 2023, marking 200 years since the Bude Canal was opened to Holsworthy, it is interesting to reflect on what can still be seen some 130 years after it was closed. We have four pictures of the warehouse at Blagdonmoor Wharf, taken many years apart. The old photos below show the building in a dilapidated state. The photo on page 11 was taken on the bicentenary minibus tour this year and shows a tasteful restoration of the building.

Peter Daniel



Left - Blagdonmoor Wharf in September 1987



Left & below - undated photos of the old warehouse at Blagdonmoor Wharf



Grey Seal spotted in the river at Bude



On Saturday 11th November, at high water and in the gloom after sunset at 16.42 my wife, Gill spotted a seal in the River Neet. It was swimming in the river behind The Castle, Bude between the bend next to the canal and the old iron bridge next to the lock gates. This is the area where at high water we regularly see the Little Egret, the Grey Heron and the Kingfisher catching fish washed in by the high tide.

High water/Spring tide then turned, so sea water had flowed in and was on the turn flowing back out with water from the river after a lot of rain. Gill said that she had seen its face quite close, and it was a bit shy, so it swam away to the far side of the river, and it was also intrigued by the street lights up along Breakwater Road as it was almost dark by now.

I only just managed get some photos in the dark using high ISO 3,200 so they are grainy/noisy. The lens was set at 800mm (35mm film equivalent) / 16x zoom so it was only by modern lens 5 stop stabilisation and rapid auto focus that I could hand hold the very long/slow shutter speed of 1/13th of a second to even get it to focus let alone take a picture in the dark.

The seal kept diving and stayed under a few times for 3-4 minutes before coming up for air. It seemed to be fishing as the water flowed in then tried to go back out, but waited for the anglers at the end of the lock gates to leave when it got dark as it seemed to be wary of them and their fishing lines.

Jeff Dover

Mistral and Mantis locking in on 30 September

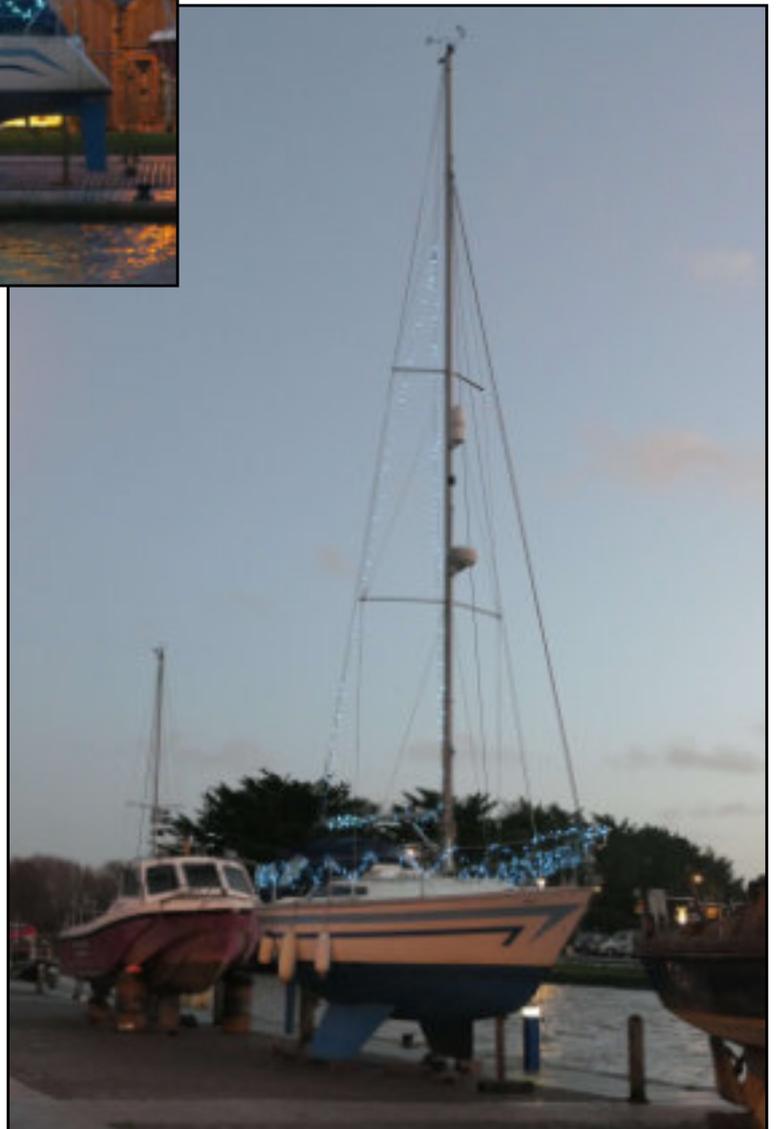
The following photos of the locking in were provided by Jeff Dover. Mistral was returning to Bude to overwinter and Mantis is a local boat also coming in for the winter.







Left & below - Mistral on the quayside illuminated for Christmas - Photos by Jeff Dover



Dredging - overview

This message provides an update about plans to dredge the Bude Canal and make repairs to the section of the embankment alongside the Crescent Carpark. Both of these works are being delivered by CORMAC, and specific questions about the works should be directed to them at contracting@cormacltd.co.uk

An on-line copy of the update is available at: Canal Dredging and Bank Repairs Update | Welcome to the Bude Canal and Harbour Engagement Platform | Let's Talk Cornwall.

Bude Canal Works Update

Cornwall Council is delighted to let you know about our upcoming plans to dredge Bude Canal, which has been a priority for many stakeholders in recent years. The project will provide many benefits for canal users, as well as improved ecology and flood risk reduction.

Works to repair the canal bank alongside Crescent Carpark, will follow on after the dredging.

Progress has already been made with dredging, and since November 2022 the inland zone east of County Road (Rodds Bridge) has been desilted. This was a relatively simple operation, with no impact on the use of the canal or the paths around it. We are now in the position to move ahead with dredging the lower zones, from County Road (Rodds Bridge) to the sea lock. However, this is a significant and complex operation over a long stretch of the canal; given the challenges and sensitivities of the site and the heavy plant required, it will have a greater impact on canal users and the community.

In order to give the community time to be aware of upcoming impacts, including canal, path and carpark restrictions we are providing information about the intended timeline, set out below, although, please note that the actual timeline for the operation remains dependent on weather and ecological conditions being favourable.

Works planned to start in early November

The anticipated start date is Monday 6th November, when the operation will begin setting up in the Crescent Car Park. The building of the silt dewatering area will entail fencing off approximately two thirds of the Crescent Car Park with perimeter screening for both public and ecological security.



During the dredging period, activity on the canal will be restricted and day launches will not be available for purchase. Members of the public are politely reminded to follow the information on site notices and follow the request of works stewards for your own and others safety.

The overall dredging operation is then expected to complete by the end of January 2024, however the exact timeline may be impacted by climate and ecological conditions, which are outside of our control.

Following on from the dredging work, repairs will be carried out to a section of the canal bank from Falcon Bridge. These works will require management of access to the footpath for approx. 100m section during which time people will be diverted through the Crescent Car Park.

It is expected that the majority of the car park will be re-opened on completion of the dredging works, however some fenced off areas will remain to allow the contractors to work safely.

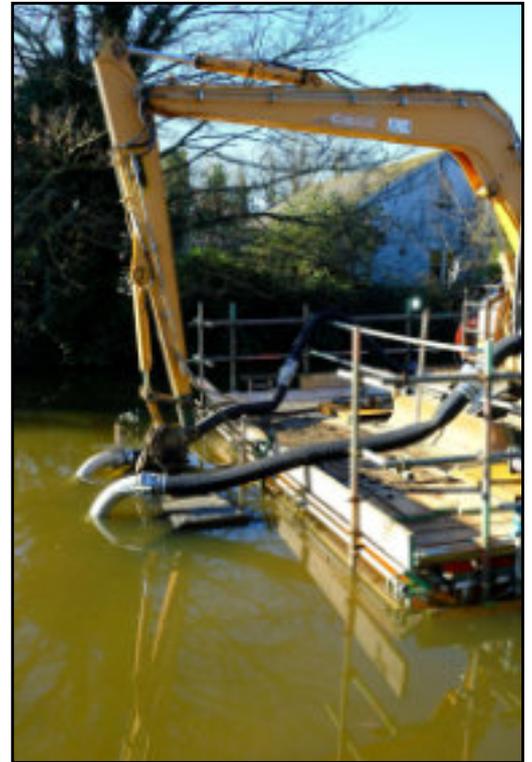
The embankment repairs are expected to complete before Easter 2024.

For questions on these works, please contact: contracting@cormacltd.co.uk

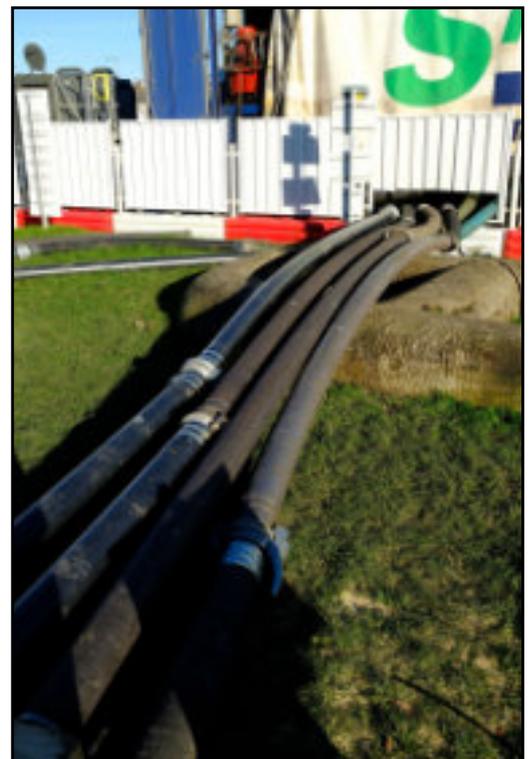
Charlotte Evans MCIEEM MRes, BSc hon,
Countryside Officer – Major Projects,
Cornwall Council, 13 October 2023

Dredging – a detailed update from Cormac

Bit of a brief update on progress on the dredging works on the Bude Canal between Falcon Bridge and Rodds Bridge.



The dredger is working in the wide leisure area of the canal dredging about 350mm of silt. This silt is mixed with canal water as it is dredged to allow us to pump it to the processing area in the Crescent Car Park. The mix is about 50% silt and 50% canal water. In our processing compound up in the Crescent Car Park we have a couple of process we put the silts through.



Firstly, we pump the dredged silt through a primary filter system that take some of the canal water out about 20 to 30%. This gives us a slurry which is pumped in to the second process, the Centrifuge. The centrifuge spins the slurry at 3000 rpm to remove as much of the remaining canal water as possible. The material produced by the centrifuge is then stockpiled in the bunded lagoon, there it stands for two weeks to allow any Zebra Mussels to die off. We can then remove from site. We are expecting this to happen tail end of January 2024.

Once this is completed, we will move the dredger to the narrower section of canal and dredge that section up to Rodds Bridge. For this section of canal, the silts will be pumped and spread on the field adjacent to Whaleborough Lock as a soil improver.

All works will be completed by mid-March with the compound being removed and car park restored to full use by the Easter holiday.

Hope this give a bit of an insight to what we are doing.

Phillip Wooster, Project Manager, Cormac Solutions

Rodds Bridge

At the end of October, the road over the canal at Rodds Bridge was closed to vehicular traffic following an inspection which revealed that there were structural issues which could make the bridge unsafe for vehicles. The width of the bridge

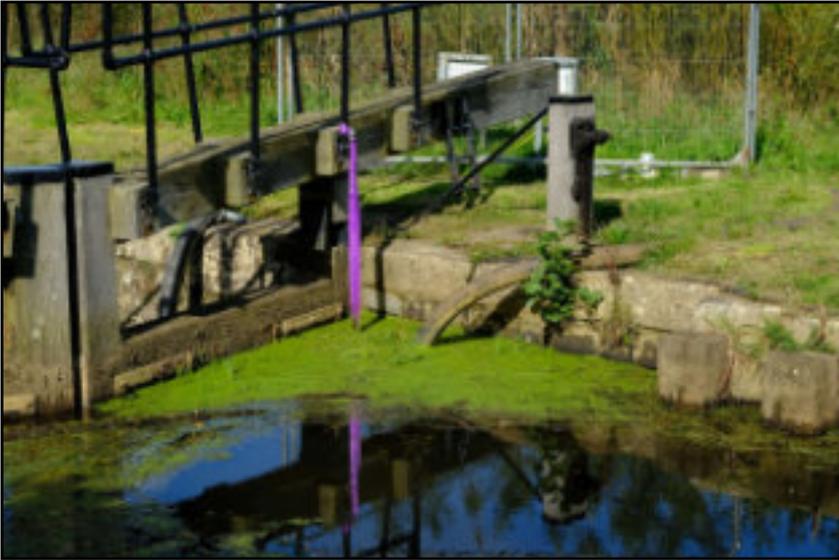


deck was reduced to prevent any unauthorised use but access has been retained for pedestrians and cyclists. A full structural examination is required to enable Cornwall Council to determine the way forward but initial indications are that the existing bridge is beyond economical repair and that a complete replacement will be required. In order to allow navigation between Bude and Helebridge any replacement bridge would have to be either an opening bridge or a fixed bridge at a higher level to give a clearance of 7ft.

Mike Moore

Whalesborough Lock

In order to control water levels in the canal, a temporary pumping system was installed at Whalesborough Lock in September.



Bude Flood Defence Project

This is a £2.1 million scheme to improve the existing flood alleviation scheme, including the earth flood embankment to the rear of Bude Tourist Information Centre running between the canal and Bencoolen Bridge and the masonry-faced embankment on Ergue-Gaberic Way, between the Masonic Hall and Nanny Moore's Bridge. Without action, these defences will continue to weaken and flood risk to nearby properties will increase.

Project progress

The foundations (sheet piles) for the defence have been installed, and work is underway to add concrete to secure them into place.

Next steps

Work next to the Masonic Lodge will start during the week of 16 October and will continue until the end of the year. We will be replacing the earth embankment and increasing its height.

Work to complete the flood wall and align it to Nanny Moore's Bridge will continue into 2024.

The bridge will need to be closed again for a minimum of three weeks, in November/December. We will confirm exact dates nearer the time.

We may have to close the bridge for safety reasons at short notice. At various times during the work, there are exposed edges to the river and open excavations in the ground, alongside potentially dangerous machinery.

The safety of the team and the public is our utmost priority, and whilst we appreciate the bridge closure is inconvenient, we must comply with health and safety regulations.

More [details about the work can be found at http://bit.ly/BudeScheme](http://bit.ly/BudeScheme)

Email: DCISenquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency, 12 October 2023

Hele Valley Trail

The land on the border between Bude-Stratton and Marhamchurch which includes the Hele Valley Trail has recently been put up for sale. This is a very popular walking route which is located within the environs of the Bude Canal which encourages us to take an interest in the sale of this site.

On Friday 10th November, I attended a meeting which was held in the Bray Institute, Marhamchurch which involved over 20 people including councillors from Cornwall Council, Bude-Stratton Town Council, Marhamchurch Parish Council and other regular users of the trail.

At the meeting it was agreed to form a new group to be known as "Friends of Hele Valley Trail". They decided to organise a Crowdfunding Site once a bank account had been set up which will be facilitated by either Bude-Stratton Town Council or Marhamchurch Parish Council. A website is to be created and a WhatsApp Group will be set up. The sale comprises of two sites – Plot 1 includes the entrance from Pinch Bridge, the car park and woodland for £190,000 and Plot 2 includes the two fields on the left of the car park plus the small copse at the far end for £150,000.

I urge you to follow the progress of this group and, when appropriate, make a donation to their Crowdfunding bid. Thank you.

Chris Jewell

Latest update

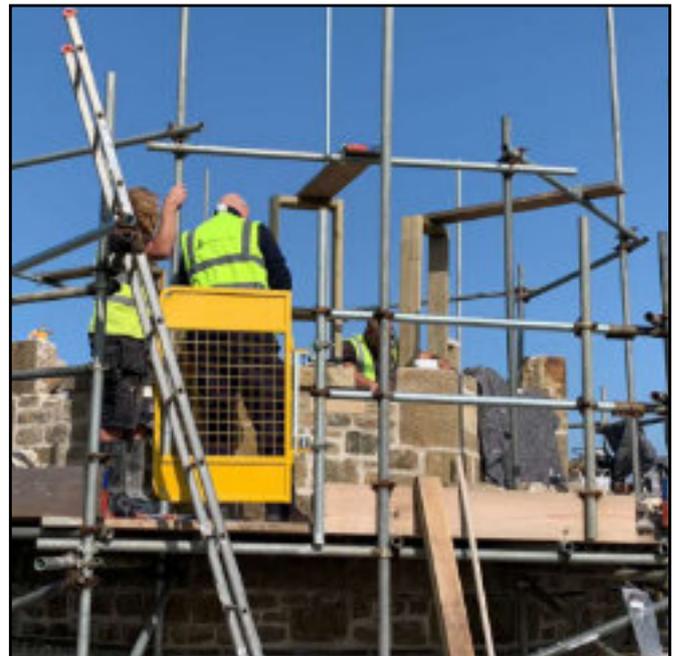
Further meetings have taken place since the initial one mentioned above, and Marhamchurch Parish Council have agreed to offer banking facilities and will explore the idea of bidding for the site. Efforts are now being made to obtain an independent valuation so that they can make an informed decision but there are indications that the asking price is well above the market value. Meanwhile, discussions are taking place to establish whether, as an alternative, it would be appropriate to set up a Charitable Incorporated Organisation if the Council decides not to proceed with the purchase.

Mike Moore

Compass Point update from Bude-Stratton Town Council

Storm Tower Project nears completion.

In a stirring testament to resilience and community commitment, the Compass Point Storm Tower Project is rapidly approaching its completion, ushering in a new chapter for this iconic landmark in Bude. The recent weeks have been marked by significant milestones, bringing the tower closer to its former glory. The meticulous reinstatement of compass directional stones, the placement of final stones, and the precise pouring and setting of the ring beam have laid the groundwork for the impending roof structure.



The most recent development, however, brings a sense of familiarity to the project as the steel roof frame was seamlessly winched into position. This crucial step not only signifies progress but offers a visual preview of the tower's restored silhouette. While the project is not yet fully complete, these advancements underscore the dedication and meticulous planning invested by Bude-Stratton Town Council and the community at large. The tower stands as a symbol of our shared history, and its restoration embodies our commitment to preserving the rich tapestry of Bude.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to our generous supporters who have played a pivotal role in making this restoration possible. We extend our gratitude to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, contributors to our Crowdfunder campaign, and Cornwall Council for their invaluable funding. Recognition is also extended to Sally Strachey Historic Conservation, our specialist contractors, for their contribution to the Compass Point Storm Tower project.

As we enter the final stages, anticipation builds for the grand unveiling of the Compass Point Storm Tower in its new home. Bude-Stratton Town Council is grateful for the unwavering support from the community throughout this transformative journey.

Issued by Bude-Stratton Town Council on 19 December 2023

Letter to the Bude & Stratton Post re Compass Point Storm Tower

During WW2, I lived in Breakwater Road and went to school in Bude, which has forever remained my favourite place on earth, drawing me back to many superb holidays. As a member of Bude Canal & Harbour Society and their superbly Informative Newsletter titled "The Tub Boat", I recently learned that the Storm Tower at Efford Down, Bude, was due to be moved back away from the fragile cliff edge.

I am reminded that towards the end of WW2 an acoustic mine flowed back and forth on the tides in the bay, whilst locally stationed American Soldiers lined the cliffs firing rifles in an unsuccessful effort to explode it in deep water. The mine drifted on the next high tide towards the rocks beneath Compass Point. Police toured the town advising people to open windows and doors to avoid damage from blast. Eventually there was a massive explosion right underneath the Storm Tower and after the smoke and debris had cleared it was great to see the Storm Tower still standing. A cheer went up from people that had collected in the area around the Castle. The mines were apparently laid by our Navy in a prescribed corridor to ambush enemy submarines lying in wait to target Atlantic convoys.

I did read in recent times that recreational divers discovered two German submarine wrecks somewhere between Bude and Padstow showing evidence they had been victims of mines.

Roy Elsey

The Time Capsule for Compass Point

Following their request (see page 18 of the Autumn edition of The Tub Boat) BCHS have given Bude-Stratton Town Council some items to be added to the Time Capsule which will be incorporated into the rebuilt Storm Tower at Compass Point. These items include both Bi-Centenary booklets, a set of the 1904 maps, a Bi-Centenary mug, the Summer 2023 edition of The Tub Boat (No.104), the booklet "Bude Canal - Some interesting facts", the DVD "The Ups and Downs of Bude Canal" and a Compliments Slip showing the new BCHS logo. We thank BSTC for giving us the opportunity to donate these items for inclusion in the Time Capsule.

Chris Jewell

Bude Canal Trust – Executive Report

Bude Canal Aqueduct land transfer to DWT – Unfortunately, there is little more to report. The matter is still in the hands of the respective solicitors. The BCT has been asked to supply various items of information through our solicitors to DWT's, which has been done. We continue to await further feedback. It has to be said that the BCT is frustrated by the extremely slow rate of progress on this matter. We respond promptly to any request for detail or information, but feedback seems to be glacially slow.

Steve Church, Chairman, Bude Canal Trust

Helen Harris

I have just heard the sad news that Helen Harris had died on 15th Dec. She was almost 97!

In partnership with Monica Ellis, she wrote the standard book on the Bude Canal first published in 1972 and reprinted later by Westcountry Books. She also wrote books on the Grand Western Canal, the Industrial Archaeology of Dartmoor, and many other books on Devon and the Peak District. Chris Jewell went to her 90th birthday in Tavistock but although I didn't go, I did meet her on a number of other occasions over the years including when she visited Bude. I think the last time was when she did a presentation on canals of the South West at Tavistock.

Mike Moore

Without the Canal – Part 2 – What if the Canal had not been built?

In the first part of this article, I looked at what the area was like before the canal. Despite its remoteness the Bude Canal was successfully built and its impact on the area was tremendous.

Bude now had a harbour which could be used with care at all seasons, and this led to other industries developing along the canal including lime-burning, iron foundries, a shipyard/sawmill, and a brick and tile works. Large areas of heavy clay land were improved with the sea sand from Bude; in 1838, for example, 54,000 tons were carried, and this improved the prosperity of the agricultural villages near the canal. The import of products from elsewhere was now possible, principally coal and culm, but also other goods. Exports of timber, bark and other items could now be undertaken. It was a transformation of the area and led to the growth of Bude as a harbour, as a town, and as a destination. Neighbouring Stratton, the old market town and mother settlement, was soon eclipsed.

One of the key people involved was Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, the 10th Baronet. The Aclands, as a family, had land all over the south-west and could quite easily have not taken an interest in their relatively small estate at Bude, which had come to them through marriage with the Arundell family. But, instead, they were very involved, both with the canal proposals, and in the development of the town of Bude.

However, it is interesting to think about what might have happened if they hadn't been so involved, or if other landowners had not been interested, or if the canal had not got its Act of Parliament. It is all pure speculation, of course, but Bude would have been very different.

The landscape of the town would have stayed as it was before the Canal. There would have been no breakwater. Chapel Rock wouldn't have been cut through by the Breakwater and would have stayed as a larger island accessible at low tide. It was after all big enough for a holy man to live on it in medieval times. The River Neet would not have been diverted to the south side of Summerleaze beach. There would have been large sand dunes south of the Castle where the canal and Breakwater Road were actually built.

There would have remained a limited quayside area on the north side of Nanny Moore's bridge, with other boats pulled up on the Strand.

Without a town developing as a result of the Canal, it is likely that Bude would have stayed as a rudimentary small river-mouth port, with few visitors and may well never have had a railway. The London and South-Western railway's interest in North Cornwall dated from 1847 when they (illegally, without Parliamentary approval) bought the Bodmin & Wadebridge Railway (B&W). Once the railway reached Okehampton in 1871 they began to think about how they could reach their far-flung acquisition. Early proposals, in 1873, involved a line through Holsworthy continuing south towards Camelford. In the event only the first part was built to Holsworthy and opened in 1879. A new route to the B&W was proposed in 1882, from Halwill Junction on the Holsworthy branch, through Launceston and this was opened in stages finally connecting the B&W in 1895.

The 1873 proposals included a branch to Bude from North Tamerton but this was never authorised. When the railway reached Holsworthy there was agitation from Stratton and Bude for a continuation to Bude and this was finally built to Bude in 1898. But what if the Canal had never been built and Bude had never really developed. Holsworthy as a railway terminus made sense, it was an established market town, the largest settlement in the vicinity, and had (by this time) good roads radiating north, west and south. Without the Canal it is doubtful whether a line to Stratton or Bude would have been included in the 1873 proposals or whether any suggestion of extension from Holsworthy would have been successful. It seems unlikely the LSWR would have envisaged enough business from Stratton and a few cottages at Bude to warrant extending from Holsworthy.

Inland, without the Canal, there would have been other significant effects. Lower Tamar Lake was built to provide water for the canal; how many visitors to the Lake today make the link with the Canal at Bude some eight miles away. The website of the South West Lakes Trust, that manages the Lake, doesn't mention the reason for the reservoir being built.

Agricultural land along the Canal benefited from the widespread application of sea sand which neutralised and broke up the heavy acid clay soils.

It would be difficult to identify the result of this in the landscape some 150 years later. At the time it may have been reflected in land rental values. It would have meant marginally more prosperous communities along the canal that might be able to support more people; but this aspect would be hidden by the universal 25-40% drop in population in rural south-west villages after 1841. Perhaps the main indicator is the fact that for nearly 70 years landowners and farmers bought tens of thousands of tons of sand each year for land-spreading; it must have been worthwhile to them at the time.

But undoubtedly the biggest impact if the Canal had not been built would have been on Bude itself. It wouldn't have developed as a town until much later, and probably wouldn't have had a railway. Bude as a holiday resort would not have developed until twentieth century motor transport, from the 1920s onwards, brought visitors who did not rely on trains. We might imagine, perhaps, a Bude similar to Polzeath, Mawgan Porth or Trevone, with few nineteenth century buildings and many bungalows.

It's all speculation, of course, but it's an interesting thought.



Chapel Rock

From the end of the Sea Lock, in dull light, it is easier to see how Chapel Rock was once a larger tidal island before the gap was cut when the Breakwater was built.



Indicative of how involved the Acland family were, and the 10th Baronet in particular, is the fact that the Upper Basin was originally the private Acland basin.

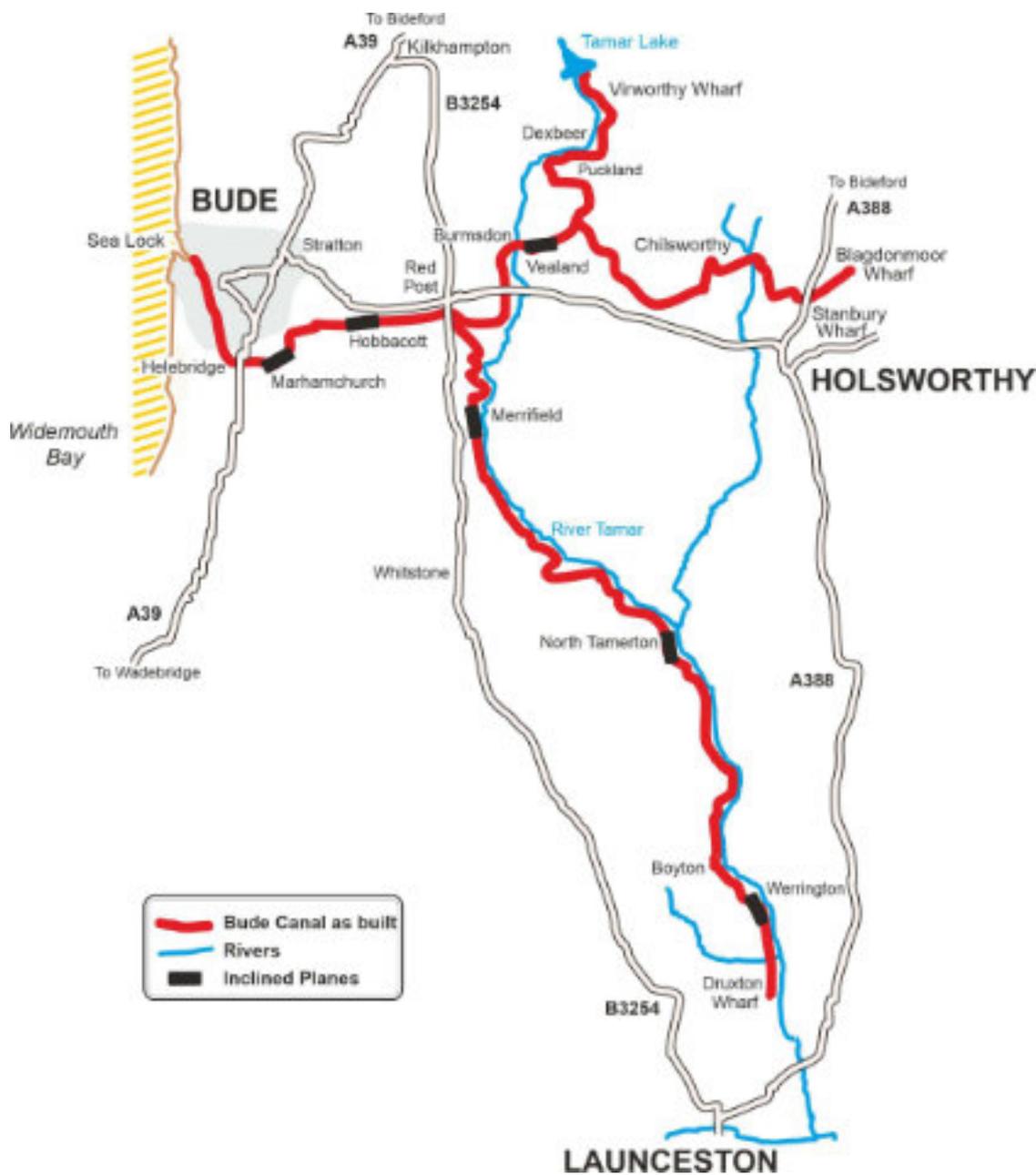


Lower Tamar Lake built in the 1820s as the water supply for the Bude Canal.

Peter Daniel

THE TUB BOAT

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Enquiries to the Hon. Secretary (Tel 01288 341653)

New Inn House, Week St. Mary, Cornwall EX22 6UZ

www.bude-canal.co.uk · info@bude-canal.co.uk

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