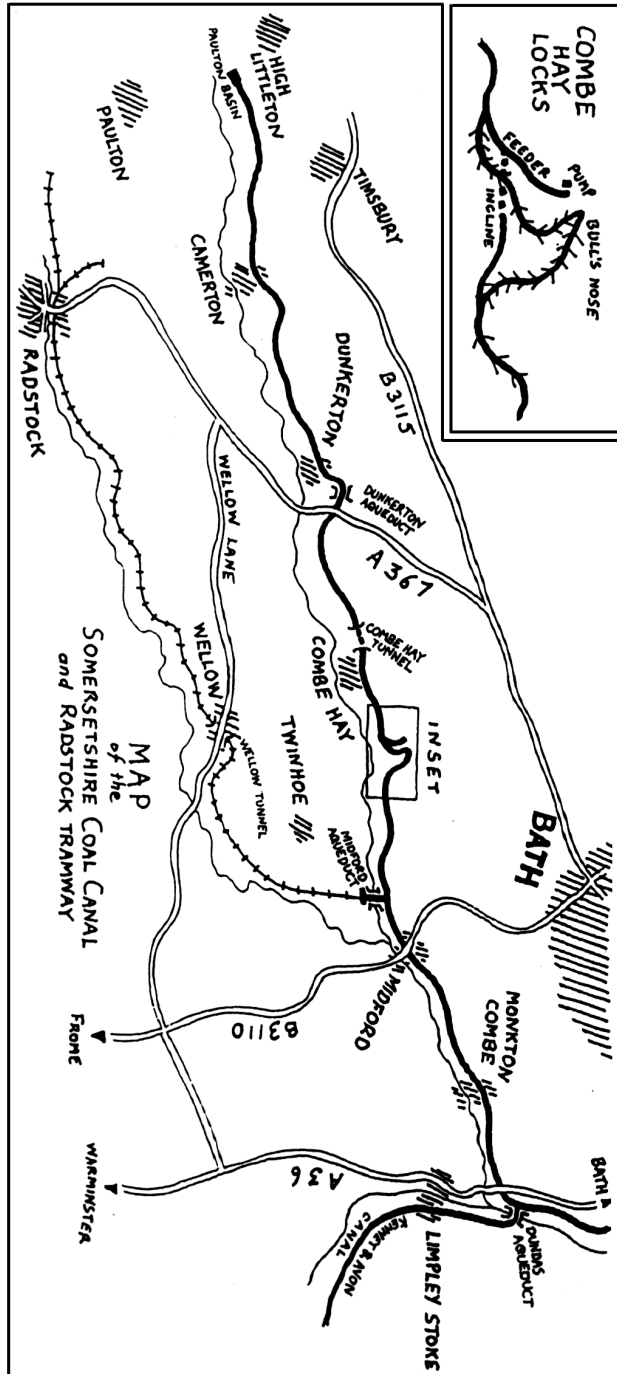


WEIGH-HOUSE

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY



Website: <http://www.coalcanal.org>

Nº 63

AUGUST 2012

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Website: <http://www.coalcanal.org>

The Somersetshire Coal Canal Society was founded in 1992 to:

'FOCUS AN INTEREST ON THE PAST, PRESENT AND
FUTURE OF THE OLD SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL'

The Society became a registered charity in 1995 and now has the
Objects:

- 1) To advance the education of the general public in the history of the Somersetshire Coal Canal
- 2) The preservation and restoration of the Somersetshire Coal Canal and its structures for the benefit of the public

Registered Charity N^o 1047303
Registered under the Data Protection Act 1984 N^o A2697068
Affiliated to the Inland Waterways Association N^o 0005276
Inland Revenue reference code for tax purposes: CAD72QG

MEMBERSHIP FEES

(as at 1st June 2003)

£7-50 (Family / Individual) £5-00 (Senior Citizen / Student)
£150-00 (Life) payable by lump sum or four annual instalments

Membership Application Forms are available from
the Membership Secretary, **John Bishop**
73, Holcombe Green, Upper Weston, Bath BA14HY
☎ 01225 428738 E-mail: cesjtb@bath.ac.uk

Society Website: <http://www.coalcanal.org>

THE VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS MAGAZINE DO NOT
NECESSARILY REPRESENT OR CONVEY THOSE OF THE SOCIETY

The Editor welcomes any letters, articles, photographs *etc* for inclusion in
WEIGH-HOUSE and will try to include them in full, but reserves the right to shorten
them if space is limited.

Please send articles and correspondence for the next edition of WEIGH-HOUSE to:
Adrian Tuddenham 88, Mount Road, Southdown, Bath BA2 1LH
☎ 01225 335974 E-mail (not HTML): adrian@poppyrecords.co.uk

Sunday 21st October —10:00

WALK — CARRYING COALS TO DUNDAS — 1. Paulton to Camerton

Meet: Goosard Bridge, Paulton.

For further details please see website or contact: *Mike Chapman* ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 4th November —10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact: *Derrick Hunt* ☎ 01225 863066

Thursday 15th November — 19:30 [*Note: This is not our usual 3rd Thursday of the month!*]

SOCIAL EVENING — “PAULTON FOUNDRY”

with several expert guest speakers

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club.

For further details please see website or contact: *Patrick Moss* ☎ 07736 859882

Sunday 18th November —10:00

WALK — CARRYING COALS TO DUNDAS — 2. Camerton to Dunkerton

Meet: Bottom of Red Hill by the Old Post Office

For further details please see website or contact: *Mike Chapman* ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 2nd December —10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact: *Derrick Hunt* ☎ 01225 863066

Sunday 16th December —10:00

WALK — CARRYING COALS TO DUNDAS — 3. Dunkerton to Combe Hay

Meet: Dunkerton layby on A37

For further details please see website or contact: *Mike Chapman* ☎ 01225 426948

Thursday 20th December — 19:30

SOCIAL EVENING — “THE WORKING LIFE OF THE S.C.C.”

by Patrick Moss.

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club.

For further details please see website or contact: *Patrick Moss* ☎ 07736 859882

Walks

These are all circular walks unless otherwise noted. You only need to arrange your transport to and from the meeting point. Any walks marked † tend to be in the form of detailed explanations of short sections of the canal and its relationship with the locality; and, as such, are less suitable for young children.

Dogs are normally welcome (except where indicated) and must be kept on leads at all times.

Check the website for any last minute changes: www.coalcanal.org

Work Parties

Venues are often arranged at short notice, always check with the contact person listed for that particular event.

Gardening Parties

These take place on Saturday mornings to undertake light work — tea and cakes will be provided.

WEIGH - HOUSE N^o 63

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EDITOR'S NOTES

The motivation of most of the original S.C.C. shareholders is obvious, many owned land, coal mines or other enterprises that would benefit from a new canal, others were speculators who saw canal shares as a good investment. One shareholder, Richard Valpy, is enigmatic because he doesn't fit into any of the usual categories. In this edition of *Weigh-House*, Derrick Hunt summarises what we know about Valpy's life and asks why a schoolmaster in Reading would buy shares in the S.C.C.

Following on from his previous article about the recent discoveries around the Workshop Basin near Caisson House, Mike Chapman looks at each excavation site in turn and, using a mixture of historic facts and intelligent deduction, gives us a detailed picture of the various phases through which the basin and its surrounding works went during the lifetime of the canal.

Mike's other major article is based on one of his recent walks. Although it started out as a repeat of a previous walk, this time it has led to a whole series of interesting discoveries about the canal and railway in the area of Combe Hay Tunnel and Aqueduct. It is amazing how much work was involved in building such a short length of canal and railway.

To those readers suffering from withdrawal symptoms arising from the delayed production of this issue of *Weigh-House*, I offer my apologies. To those who feel they might like to contribute something of interest to the next issue I offer my strong encouragement.

Adrian Tuddenham

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

These notes are being written on my return from a lengthy cruise along the Kennet and Avon Canal from Brassknocker Basin to Crofton. I'm sure it will surprise no one that this included a visit to Crofton Beam Engines. It was remarkable to see the 1812 Boulton and Watt Engine in steam, and to reflect that a very similar engine once worked on our own canal at the appropriately named Engine Wood. By coincidence the society A.G.M. talk was about the Crofton Beam Engines, reflecting common interests of the Kennet and Avon Canal and the Somersetshire Coal Canal.

The A.G.M. was well attended and delivered several key decisions for the Society, one of which concerned the size of the committee. I'm sure none of us wish to get too embroiled in administrative or legal language, but the need to increase the committee on the basis that the constitution restricted it to ten members when we now have eleven was a milestone; not so much because of the decision itself, but because it needed to be taken. It shows that the Society has expanded so much beyond anything we originally anticipated that it now requires more volunteers if we are to keep on top of our activities.

Society membership has gradually crept up over the last five or six years, which is defying the current overall trend for groups such as ours; this is in part due to increased public awareness of the society. I would emphasise that the future of the canal and the future of the Society are entwined, and have been ever since the Society was formed. In the first years of the Society's existence, the overall focus was on the history of the canal and recording an archive of that history, this was the primary interest of most of our members. Later came the formation of the work parties, an increasing level of liaison with landowners and a greater involvement in local matters which affected the S.C.C. Thanks to these activities, much has been done to prevent the canal from deteriorating beyond recognition. Although we are now regarded as leaders in this field, there still remains the major problem of trying to encourage a wider interest in a waterway, the majority of which doesn't actually exist.

For this reason, Tony Yates and Veronica Bucknell instigated a second series of work parties that aim to maintain the appearance of the canal, linked to organising guided tours of the canal at Combe Hay as part of the National Heritage Open Days event in September. To make this event work the lower locks at Combe Hay need to be maintained, and it would be useful to have additional help. Members may wish to volunteer, or may wish to suggest to a relative or friend that this could be an enjoyable way to spend some spare time. I am in effect asking those who are reading this column not to assume that someone else will always put their shoulder to the wheel, but to offer either their own or someone else's services!

On a final note, you will see that we once again have an active programme of social events for the coming winter. I look forward to seeing our members then.

Patrick Moss

DONATIONS

The Society would like to thank the following members for their generous donations:

Mr. K. Vass Musson
Mrs. D.J. Ware

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY — 2012

Sunday 5th August — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact: *Derrick Hunt* ☎ 01225 863066

Sunday 19th August — 10:00

COMBE HAY PUMPING ENGINE SITE

Meet: Opposite Bridge Farm, Combe Hay. (You might want to bring secateurs!)

For further details please see website or contact: *Mike Chapman* ☎ 01225 426948

Sunday 2nd September — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact: *Adrian Tuddenham* ☎ 01225 335974

Wednesday 5th September — 17:45

OPEN EVENING at FUSSELL'S BALANCE LOCK †

Meet: Talbot Inn, Mells

For further details please contact: *Derrick Hunt* ☎ 01225 863066

Saturday 8th & Sunday 9th September — 09:30 - 16:00

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Meet: Railway arch opposite Bridge Farm, Combe Hay. BA2 7EE

See page 20 for further details.

[Note: No walk on Sunday 16th September]

Sunday 30th September — 11:00

VISIT — THE CROFTON PUMPING ENGINES

Meet: Crofton Engines car park, Great Bedwyn, Nr. Hungerford.

For further details please contact: *Derrick Hunt* ☎ 01225 863066 / 07986 972984

Sunday 7th October — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

For further details please contact: *Derrick Hunt* ☎ 01225 863066

Thursday 18th October — 19:30

SOCIAL EVENING — “THE S.C.C. ARCHIVE: Maps, photographs and more”

by Roger Halse.

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club.

For further details please see website or contact: *Patrick Moss* ☎ 07736 859882

→

CARRYING COALS TO DUNDAS

A series of walks begins in October which will cover the length of the Northern Branch of the S.C.C. from Paulton to Dundas, following the route taken by the coal which made the fortunes of this canal and the North Somerset Coalfield. Mike Chapman will be your guide and ensure that the walk is suitable for complete beginners as well as more knowledgeable members. We hope to advertise this series of walks in the local press, so as to attract potential new members and give existing members a chance to share their knowledge and make our visitors feel at home.

WAVERLEY EXCURSION

Once again S.C.C.S. members have the opportunity to enjoy a cruise on the *Waverley*, the World's last ocean going paddle steamer, on Wednesday 29th August. This year the cruise starts from Clevedon at 14:00, calling at Penarth, then arrives at Minehead at 16:45 for time ashore; or passengers can stay aboard and take a cruise around Porlock Bay. We leave Minehead at 18:00 and return via Penarth arriving at Clevedon at 20:45. The cost to Minehead alone is £27 (OAP £25); if you include the cruise around Porlock Bay, the price becomes £29 (OAP £27)

The *Waverley* has full catering facilities on board including snacks and hot meals, a coffee shop as well as a bar. If you would like to book a place please phone David Chalmers 01179720423 and tell him whether you only want to go to Minehead or wish to continue to Porlock Bay. Cheques should be made out to David Chalmers and sent to him at 40, Greenleaze, Knowle Park, Bristol BS4 2TL. Please enclose an S.A.E. Closing date for bookings is Tuesday 14th August.

CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE

On September 8th and 9th many of England's historic properties will be opening their doors to the public as part of the national "Heritage Open Days" event. Organised by volunteers for local people, Heritage Open Days is England's biggest and most popular voluntary cultural event. Last year the event, under the guidance of English Heritage, attracted around one million visitors. To play its part, the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society is planning a two-day event at Combe Hay Locks. Visitors will be able to learn about the history of the Somersetshire Coal Canal and take a guided tour of a section of the lock flight and the remains of the Boulton and Watt pumping engine site.

So if you have ever wondered how many locks the Combe Hay flight contains or how much coal was moved each day on the canal why not pay us a visit on the 8th and 9th September 2012 and all will be revealed.

Venue: Railway arch opposite Bridge Farm, Combe Hay BA2 7EE

Volunteers are also required over the weekend. If you can spare a little time to meet and greet members of the public, please contact Tony Yates on 01225 781312

THE VIADUCT INN AND BREWERY

"The Viaduct Inn and Brewery, Monkton Combe, Bath" by Bone, Chapman and Ward, is the title of a detailed article in the latest issue of *BIAS Journal* (Nº 44) which will be of interest to S.C.C.S. members. It traces the history of the building, originally called "The Chequers Inn", from the late 1820s to the present day, giving a comprehensive picture of the road and canal connections which ensured its success. The report is illustrated by 5 line drawings, 3 maps, 3 photographs and 2 historic prints, which clearly show the course and features of the S.C.C. from Dundas Aqueduct to the newly-built Viaduct and beyond.

Left: MIKE CHAPMAN on a recent walk explaining the connection between the Viaduct Inn and the S.C.C. at Brassknocker Basin.



NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Mr S. Grudgings	Whitchurch
Mr. M.S. Witcher	Trowbridge
Mr. J. Jones	Bournemouth
Mr. A. McGovarin	Midsomer Norton
Mr. A. Davis	Larkhall
Mr. S. Gould	Frome

OBITUARIES

DAVID TEW

We were saddened to learn of the death of David Tew, author of *Canal Lifts and Inclines*. This book, published in 1984, remains a standard text book on the subject and has valuable sections on the Somersetshire Coal Canal, including both Weldon's Caisson Lock & the temporary inclined plane at Combe Hay.

We owe a great debt to this early pioneer of researching and publishing canal history.

D.J.H.

DICK DAVIS

One of our founding work party members, Richard Norman Davis died recently after a long illness. His quiet and unassuming nature hid a wide and detailed knowledge of many branches of engineering with a pragmatic approach to dealing with awkward situations and people; no matter what problem we encountered, Dick would come up with a straightforward solution that was so simple as to elude us at the time but which seemed perfectly obvious in retrospect. Whilst happily 'mucking-in' with the lads on work parties, he gave no clue that he was also a skilled mechanical and electronics engineer, radio amateur, glider pilot, yachtsman and an inventor with many ingenious and eminently practical inventions to his name.

Although he was never in the limelight and his name rarely appeared in official Society business, Dick was always there in the background as someone we could turn to for guidance and good sound practical advice. He will be greatly missed.

A.N.T.

SHAREHOLDERS OF THE SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL

Rev^d Richard Valpy D.D.

(1754 — 1836)

Shareholding: £300

Headmaster of Reading Grammar School

All the previous shareholders in this series have had obvious connections to the Somersetshire Coal Canal, some were landowners in the area, others had business interests. In the case of Richard Valpy, however, no evidence has emerged of any connection which might have led him to invest in the canal. As the biography below shows, neither he nor his family were connected with the West Country, they had no agricultural or business interests and, despite living in Reading, he had no shares in the Kennet and Avon Canal.



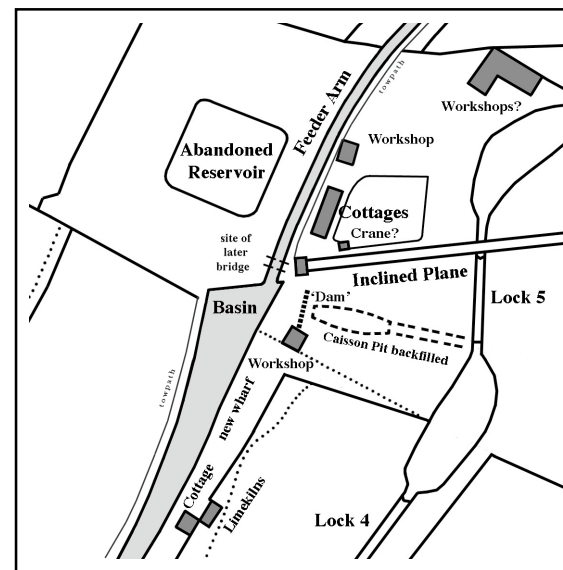
RICHARD VALPY

by Charles Turner, Published 1811
(after John Opie, exh. RA 1801)

Biographical Details	
Born:	7 December 1754 Jersey
Married:	1: 1778 Martha Cornelius 1 daughter
	2: 1782 Mary Benwell 6 sons, 4 daughters
Died:	28 March 1836 London
Notable descendants:	Abraham John Valpy William Henry Valpy

Richard Valpy was a tall and imposing figure who had a passionate interest—fuelled by an exceptionally retentive mind—in politics, military and naval affairs, agriculture, and education, especially of the poor. Early in his life he had gambled heavily. He was born in St John's, Jersey, on 7 December 1754, where his wealthy family had owned an estate for generations, the eldest of the six children of Richard Valpy and Catherine, daughter of John Chevalier. After some local schooling, in 1764 he was sent to the college of Valognes, Normandy, where he became fluent in French but acquired

The bolt, about 3ft long, was still lying *in situ* at right angles to the top step, just clear of a square recess or hole cut into the riser to accommodate the nut at the end, and may have been left behind when the wall was buried owing to corrosion of the nut, causing it to jam inside the recess. This bolt held together four 8-inch timbers, presumably part of a framework which rested on the steps, the recess for the nut allowing the base of the frame to fit flush into the second step. In this case, recesses for other bolts in the frame could have been provided elsewhere along the unexamined part of the step. A framework of some sort may well have been useful here when the Caisson Lock was being dismantled. The systematic removal of masonry from the Caisson chamber, some 46 feet deep, would have been a difficult (not to say dangerous) business, and it is highly likely that some form of lifting gear (derrick,



DETAIL OF THE BASIN taken from the OS 1886 map, showing the 'boathouse' and other features at the northern end of the Workshop wharf.

sheer-legs, &c.) at the top of the excavation would have been employed. It would be useful to know if this has any connection with the High Court dispute mentioned by Ken Clew, in which the Bath coal carriers opposed an additional toll claimed by the Canal Company for goods passing down the inclined plane in 'remuneration for the additional expense of erecting cranes and other machinery required when the Caisson failed'.

Unfortunately we have no contemporary account of how the structure was dismantled, nor of how the stone was conveyed from the site. The lower tunnel of the Caisson would seem to provide the obvious outlet for material needed below lock 4, but it is also possible that stone could also have been taken by boat along the upper level of the canal for the construction of Locks 1 to 4 higher up - an explanation perhaps of the mysterious 'bay' shown on the early canal maps extending from the north side of the pound between locks 1 and 2. Whether the workshop wharf was constructed for this purpose, as the Variations Plan of 1801 might suggest, is not certain, but could be confirmed by inspection of the inner side of the wall, where only a rough facing would be necessary to hold the rubble and clay foundation of the wharf behind it, as seen in trench 3a.

Some comment can be made about the two adjoining minor walls: only the footings at ground level remained of the one running towards the tunnel, with no direct connection with the ashlar wall. It is shown on the 1840 title map as a boundary wall closing off the northern end of the wharf between the basin and a lean-to extension or compound attached to the north side of the workshops. This wall was removed for vehicular access from Caisson House in the early 20th century, leaving the lean-to still standing until eventually demolished about ten years ago. The other wall, running out from the face of the ashlar wall, appears to have been merely an un-coursed dry-stone revetment at the sides of the excavation to prevent soil erosion and down-wash, and immediately fell to pieces as the face of the ashlar wall was cleared.

Naturally we hope some of these questions will be resolved when the opportunity arises for a further examination of the ashlar wall and its environs. Meanwhile, one can only speculate, once again, on the ingenuity and resourcefulness that was expended on the construction of the canal over two hundred years ago.

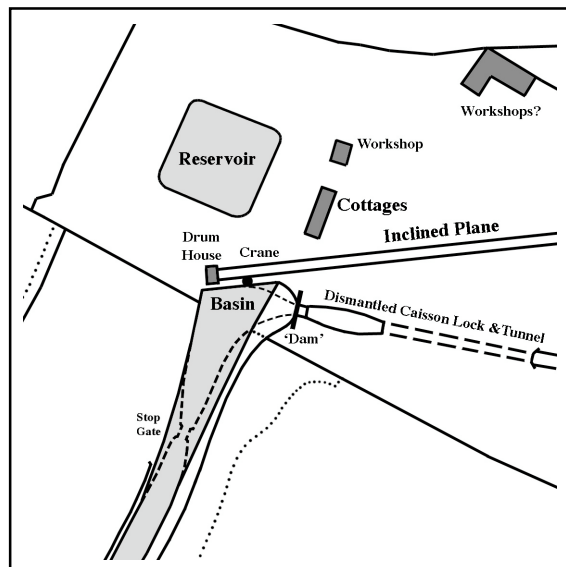
sheer-legs, &c.) at the top of the excavation would have been employed. It would be useful to know if this has any connection with the High Court dispute mentioned by Ken Clew, in which the Bath coal carriers opposed an additional toll claimed by the Canal Company for goods passing down the inclined plane in 'remuneration for the additional expense of erecting cranes and other machinery required when the Caisson failed'.

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The most difficult feature to interpret, however, was the massive concrete wall leading northward from the end of the Workshop, roughly on the site of the entrance tunnel of the Caisson Lock (Site 3b). Part of this wall, some 5 feet thick and at least 35 feet long, had already been encountered at the surface in 2008 when excavating a hole for a gatepost (*Weigh-House* 51, p.14-17) and was assumed to be a simple retaining wall separating the canal basin from the backfilled space occupied by the dismantled Caisson Lock. However its fine vertical outer face, constructed of 'ashlar' blocks with stepped offsets, was unexpected, and implied a more specialised purpose. This wall had evidently remained free-standing for a number of years while the Lock Chamber was being dismantled but, having fulfilled this purpose, was buried along with the Lock pit during the final backfilling.

Although the Caisson Lock was officially abandoned in February 1800, it was still standing in May 1801 when mentioned by Jane Austen in a letter to her sister, but could have been dismantled soon after. The Lock is omitted from the Variations Plan for the intended Lock Flight dated September 1801, and it is just possible that masonry from the Lock Chamber was used for the three lower locks and basin below the inclined plane railway, completed in November 1801. However, it would certainly have been needed after June 1802 when the construction of the rest of the Lock Flight was started, to supplement the main supply of stone from the Combe Down quarries. Whatever the case, all or most of the Lock masonry would have been removed by the time the Flight was officially opened in April 1805, allowing the Lock pit to be backfilled. This agrees with the finding of an 1806 George III half-penny among the top layers of the infill during the trial archaeological excavation in Caisson Field in September 1997 (*Weigh-House* 21, pp.10-15), and all traces of the Caisson Lock had disappeared by the time of the Cruse map, now dated to about 1809 according to the watermark in the paper found during recent restoration work. From this estimation, the minimum length of exposure of the wall would be four years (between 1802 and 1806) or a maximum of eight (1801 to 1809), sufficient time perhaps for the growth of the ivy which was found still adhering to its surface.

Details of the structure itself provide few clues as to its purpose. Indeed, we do not know its exact height, nor yet its full length. The stonework is not 'ashlar' in the sense of sawn facing stone, but dressed blocks squared with axes. David Pollard informs us that dressing stone with stone axes i.e. 'scappling' or 'scabbling' with 'scappling axes' was common in the Bath Stone area where block stone was squared and trimmed that way up to at least the 1950s, and it would be unnecessary to bring French workmen into the picture. Of a rougher character was the fragment of massive walling which formed the terminus of the stepped offsets at the northern end. About 5 feet thick and underpinning the wall at right angles (i.e. on the alignment of the Caisson Lock), it may have been a remnant of the Caisson structure (such as the entrance tunnel) retained for additional reinforcement. The ashlar wall would certainly have needed a firm footing here, perched on a shelf overlooking the Lock pit, but the iron bolt found lying against the steps suggests further possibilities.



THE BASIN AND INCLINED PLANE — c.1803

an accent that some found execrable. In 1769 he transferred to Southampton grammar school and subsequently to Guildford grammar school, where as a pupil he published by subscription a volume of nondescript verses, entitled *Poetical Blossoms*.

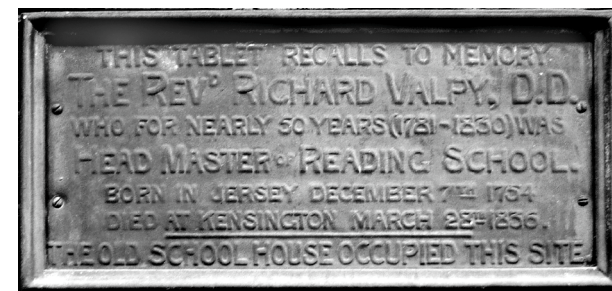
At Southampton, Valpy had longed for a naval career, only to be dissuaded by his mother's entreaties. Shortly afterwards, his enthusiasm shifted to acting and he resolved to call on Richard Garrick for advice, but his courage failed him on that actor's doorstep. Instead, in 1773 he entered Pembroke College, Oxford, as a Morley scholar. Having graduated BA, and following his ordination, in 1777 he became second master at Bury St Edmunds School and in 1781 he was appointed headmaster of Reading School. His first marriage, in 1778 was to Martha, daughter of John Cornelius of Caundé, Guernsey; they had a daughter. His second marriage, in 1782 was to Mary, daughter of Henry Benwell of Caversham and sister of his pupil William Benwell. Mary, who was totally deaf, gave birth to six sons and four daughters.

Reading School was at that time struggling, with only twenty-three pupils. By 1791 Valpy had raised their numbers to 120, of whom many were the sons of Berkshire magnates and gentry. His boarding fees of £50-£60 a year were steep but he energetically tackled the poor state of the school buildings. He persuaded Reading corporation to lease him the headmaster's house, at that time rented on an annual basis, for the period of three lives; he added a hall, a library, and an extra wing. Teaching took place in the basement of the town hall, constantly disrupted by the noise of borough business overhead; the civic fathers having refused to pay for new premises, in 1790 Valpy built a separate schoolroom with his own funds. Hitherto boarders had been billeted in the town but he leased from the corporation the abbey's former hospitium, remembered as both insanitary and draughty.

Notwithstanding these physical discomforts pupils held Valpy in high esteem and affection. Accepting him as a mighty flogger they relished his playing the part, as an actor manqué, of a character unafraid to mock himself. He made all the boys take plenty of exercise, from cricket to swimming, but his reputation rested mainly on the high quality of his scholarship. In 1788 he was elected fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and a few years later he proceeded BD and DD. Of the pupils he encouraged a number are noticed in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Bulkeley Bandinel, Sir William Bolland, Peter Paul Dobree, John Jackson (1811-1885), Sir John Keane, John Lemprière, Henry Alworth and John Merewether, and Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd. His alumni were regularly supportive; in 1800 they subscribed for a portrait of him by John Opie, and after his death they erected a statue of him, by Samuel Nixon, in St Laurence's Church, Reading.

He declined two bishoprics and also the headmastership of Rugby, disliking that school's curriculum and fees and citing Mrs Valpy's reluctance to move.

He eventually moved to the rectory at Stradishall, Suffolk, a living he had held since 1787. By then his sight was failing and he became accident-prone. He died on 28 March 1836, at his eldest son's house in Earl's Terrace, Kensington, London, after breaking his leg in a fall, and was buried in Kensal Green. His wife had predeceased him.



PLAQUE AND STREET SIGN COMMEMORATING RICHARD VALPY IN READING

Sources:

Boase, Mod. Eng. biog., 3.1072
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Likenesses:

Opie, J. oils, 1801, Reading Corporation, Berkshire ·
 Turner, C. mezzotint, pubd 1811 (after J. Opie, exh. RA 1801), BM [see illus.] ·
 Nixon, S. statue, 1838, St Lawrence's Church, Reading ·
 Nixon, J.H. lithograph (after S. Nixon), BM

Derrick Hunt

THE JOLLIFFE FAMILY

Further to the Weigh-House article on Thomas Samuel Jolliffe (available on the S.C.C. website at <http://www.coalcanal.org/history/Shareholders/Jolliffe.htm>) and the recently published book *Family Matters*, there is now an article in *Five Arches*, the Journal of the Radstock, Midsomer Norton & District Museum Society (No 73 Spring 2012) on "The Jolliffes of Ammerdown".

The Journal is available from Radstock Museum.

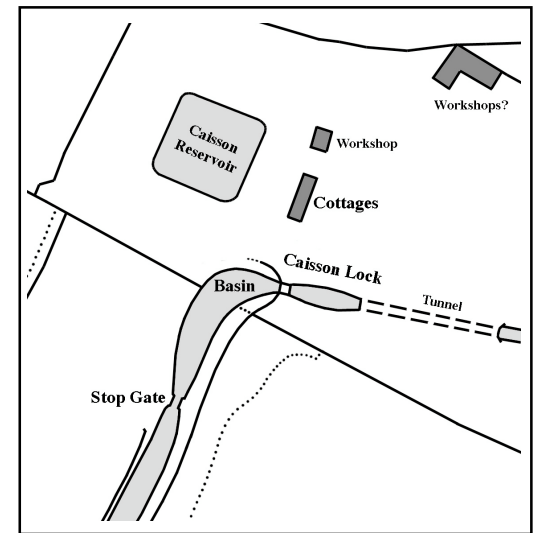
D.J.H

Right: FOOTPATH NEAR PAULTON BASIN
 showing the effects of heavy rain and many pairs of feet



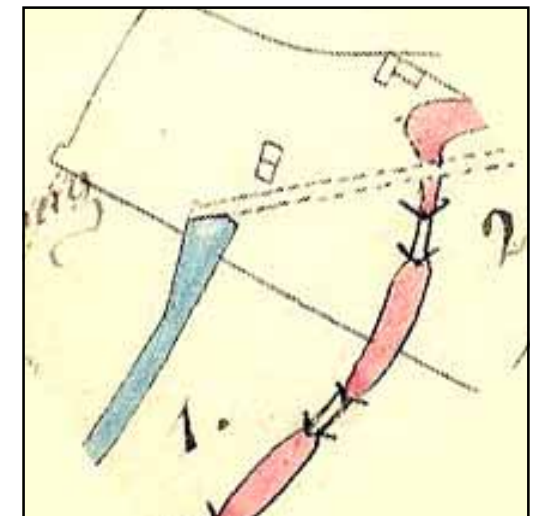
SITE 1

We were also pleased to locate the original northern wall of the basin , site of the entrance of the feeder arm to the pumping engine and of the inclined plane railway which preceded it. It is worth noting that while the Caisson Lock was in operation the basin as such did not yet exist, and the canal merely terminated at this point with sufficient width for boats to turn into the Lock entrance. However, after June 1801 when the inclined plane was installed for the trans-shipment of containerised coal, a wharf was needed here where boats could moor while being unloaded by crane onto the railway. As anticipated, the orientation of this wall aligned well with the course of the inclined plane which can still be traced below Caisson House.



THE SITE WITH THE CAISSON LOCK IN OPERATION — Before June 1801

Since the trans-shipment wharf was no longer needed when the Lock Flight was opened in April 1805, this part of the tramway was lifted so that the feeder arm could be cut through to the pumping engine which came into operation in January 1806. Although we were not able to complete our investigations here, it was already evident that the entrance lay further towards the eastern end of the wall than anticipated. This implies that the feeder arm passed closer to the back of Caisson House than previously thought, a subject we intend to discuss more fully in the next issue in connection with the historical development of the house itself. Since it is planned that the tree which obstructed our progress will eventually be removed, we hope that more details of the feeder arm entrance will come to light - a stop-plank point, perhaps, or even evidence of the bridge which was eventually put across here to provide access from the towpath on the inner side of the canal (now the entrance drive to the house) to the feeder arm towpath on the outer side.



THE SITE WITH THE INCLINED PLANE IN OPERATION — After June 1801



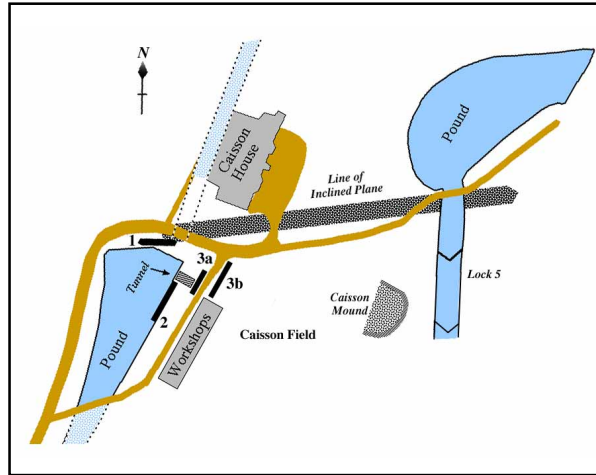
NOTES ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT CAISSON HOUSE

November 2011

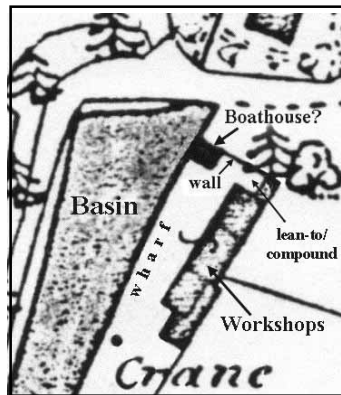
As reported in the previous issue of *Weigh-House*, while our investigations at Caisson House raised many new questions, particularly in connection with the demise of the Caisson Lock, they also cleared up many old ones relating to the construction and development of the terminal basin above it.

SITE 2

We were pleased to find, for example, that the wall of the workshop wharf on the east side of the basin had survived, although in poor condition, and had merely been 'landscaped' in recent times with a covering of soil when the basin was converted to a duck pond. Our hope was also fulfilled that artefacts relating to the workshops still remained in the canal bed which would provide useful information about the maintenance of the canal during its working life. The iron casting, for example, evidently came from a specialised piece of equipment, such as a crane, and could therefore be identifiable as to date and source of manufacture.



SKETCH MAP OF THE AREA AROUND CAISSON HOUSE
Numbers indicate the location of the sites described in the text



PART OF O.S. MAP OF 1886
SHOWING THE BASIN AND
ADJACENT BUILDINGS

SITE 3

Another useful exercise was the excavation of the area behind the back wall of the tunnel. Although the exact function of the tunnel still remains elusive, this at least confirmed that it belonged to a later development of the workshop wharf and was not connected in any way with the Caisson Lock.

As has been suggested, this may not originally have been a tunnel at all. The building which formerly stood on this site, shown on the OS 1886 map, may well have been a roofed 'dock' or boathouse (for a maintenance craft perhaps). In this case it is possible that when the structure was removed (some time after 1923 according to later maps), the remaining gap in the wharf was merely bridged over with an arch.

NAVYING NOTES

Once upon a time we were convinced that our work parties were charmed. No matter what the weather had been in the preceding weeks, on our special Sundays the rain-laden skies would clear, the raging winds would die down to balmy breezes and, full of optimism, we would enjoy a short period of calm. This would last just long enough for us to complete our work before the weather closed in again. Regardless of the law of averages, we seemed to get away with it month after month — but this year has been different.

The February work party at Paulton looked all set to go ahead; the weather was cold, but a good bonfire would soon keep us warm. In the early hours of the Sunday morning, sleet fell on the frozen road surfaces, creating what the weather forecasters call "A risk of icy patches". As the work site lay at the bottom of a steep lane, we 'phoned ahead for local knowledge: "You might get here all right, if you don't slide into any ditches on the way; but you won't be going home again afterwards, the laneway has just turned into a sheet of black ice."

Perhaps the weather in March would be kinder to us? What hope! On the morning of the work party the temperature plummeted, a vicious wind sprang up and "a little rain" was forecast, followed by sunny intervals. The work site at Paulton Basin is some distance from road access, and on this particular work party we didn't have Richard with his Land Rover to transport our equipment across the fields, so it all had to be lugged onto the site by hand. Heavy bags of tools were heaved over the stile to be loaded into the wheelbarrow on the other side, from where we squelched along the quagmire that passed for a footpath until we reached the kissing gate. That was even more of an obstacle; not only the tools, but the barrow itself had to be lifted high in the air before everything could be loaded again for the final push, alternately bumping over stones and sinking in mud until we reached the work site.

The "little rain" rapidly became torrential and horizontal and soon the embryonic bonfire began to fizzle and die as rivulets of water ran right through it. Our youngest member became so chilled that he did the only sensible thing and went home. Half an hour later, drenched to the skin, we came to the conclusion that he had more sense than the rest of us put together, so we decided to follow suit. We packed the sodden kit, bumped across the sodden field, lifted it all over the kissing gate, along the sodden lane, over the stile and back to our sodden cars. Shortly after arriving back home, bright sunshine burst through the clouds ...but by then none of us cared.

The weather in April was much kinder, quite like old times, and we had a most enjoyable day at Paulton catching up on our ill-fated Winter programme. May was equally kind to us, and the lock flight at Combe Hay benefitted from an early-season trim.

We knew it couldn't last, so, as the first weekend of June approached, we anxiously checked our weather forecasts. As well as the common-or-garden 'domestic' forecast, we have direct access to the Met. Office webpages, the farmers' forecast and even specialist aviation forecasts. The day before the June work party they were all in agreement: bad weather was on its way and no mistake. We sat at home fuming as the day of the called-off June work party passed in warmth and tranquility, with not a drop of rain until evening, while the weeds at Combe Hay sniggered to themselves and shot up another couple of inches in the balmy sunshine, knowing they were safe from our attentions for at least another month.

However, the weeds were in for a shock, because nobody had told Tony and Veronica of the 'Gardening Party' about the erroneous weather forecast, so they just turned up anyway and got on with clearing as much as they could. The weeds were suitably subdued and the 'Gardening Party' has once again proved its worth and earned our grateful thanks.

COMBE HAY – THE TWO TUNNELS

Sunday 15 April 2012

A visit was made on this occasion to view two former canal tunnels at Combe Hay - one under an aqueduct, the other under a road, both adapted to railway use by the GWR when the branch line was built from Limpley Stoke to Camerton in 1910. At the approach to the aqueduct, the opportunity was also taken to visit a spot nearby in the lane to Odd Down above the Wheatsheaf Inn, formerly the site of a canal bridge.

Wheatsheaf Bridge.

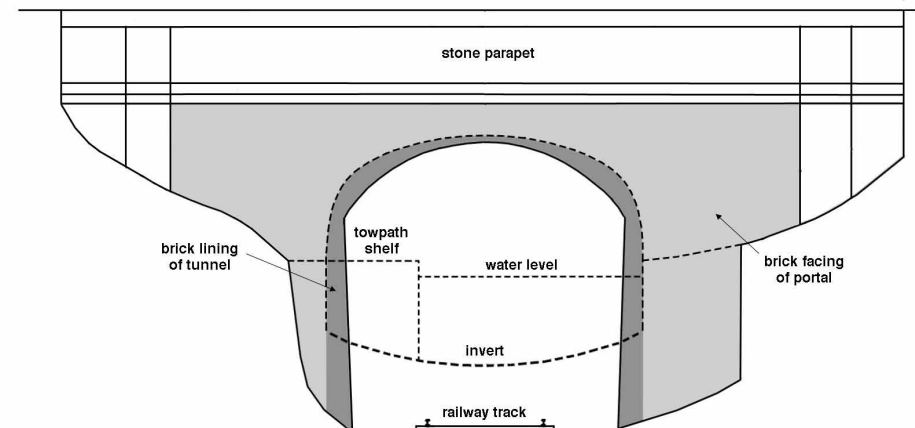
Although nothing remains of the bridge itself, the embankment wall still survives on both sides of the lane. Before the canal was built, the lane followed a straighter course, but was diverted to provide a more convenient crossing over the bridge, leaving a triangular plot of ground between the canal wall and the old lane, later acquired for the site of Combe Hay cemetery. A few years ago, the Society's work party assisted in repairing this wall during improvements to the cemetery.

The bed of the canal on the east side of the bridge has been filled in and is now mostly covered by a large modern house, but a short section of the ditch on the west side is still visible where the canal turned into a sharp 'S'-bend, later intersected by a deep railway cutting a few yards further on. A new railway bridge known as Tynning Bridge had to be built to carry the lane over the cutting, the brick parapets of which still remain although the cutting itself has since been filled in. Until recent times, the other part of the 'S'-bend on the opposite side of the cutting was also visible, but this too has been mostly filled in. Fortunately the 4½ milestone which stood here survived, complete with its iron plate, and was removed to a more secure location. The early OS map also shows several mooring posts on this bend, together with a footpath nearby leading to the Wheatsheaf, where boatmen stopped before descending the lock flight a few hundred yards to the east. This would also have been the mooring for Rev. John Skinner's converted coal-boat which he hired to take his family and friends for picnics in the grounds of Combe Hay Manor.

From John Skinner's Journal

'Before breakfast I sent my servant, Heal, to see whether the coal barge I had ordered to be prepared to convey the ladies to Combe Hay was ready. All being arranged according to my orders, the party arrived about ten o'clock and went almost immediately to the canal. To screen them from the sun there was an awning carried over the centre of the vessel and a table and chairs placed beneath. As all Mr. Boodle's children and two nurses, with the man-servant, were of the party from Radstock we mustered fifteen on board. My horse, under the direction of a man from the coal works, towed us along. We first visited the head of the canal at Paulton Basin, and returned thence through Camerton and Dunkerton to Combe Hay. Having explored the beautiful grounds, etc, we partook of our cold collation under the shade of the elm trees near the cascade, and in the cool of the evening proceeded homewards. Passing the 'Swan' at Dunkerton the Camerton band came on board and played marches and Scotch airs the whole way home. The music and the dressed-out coal barge attracted multitudes, who followed our course along the banks of the canal and lined the bridges under which we passed, which gave a novel appearance to the scenery and a pleasing termination to our rural fête. On quitting the water the ladies drank tea at Camerton, and I accompanied them to Radstock'. 5 June 1822

'Having engaged one of the coal barges, I had it fitted up for the ladies with an awning and matting against the sides, and tables and chairs from the public house, in which we proceeded about eleven o'clock to Combe Hay, where we visited the Mansion House, walked round the premises, and afterwards dined under the trees near the cascade. As the day was delightful, the whole party much enjoyed the excursion ...' Tuesday 9 September 1823



SECTIONAL DIAGRAM (not to scale) showing the modifications to the tunnel by the railway works.



COMBE HAY TUNNEL c. 1880

Ken Clew / S.G. Thatcher

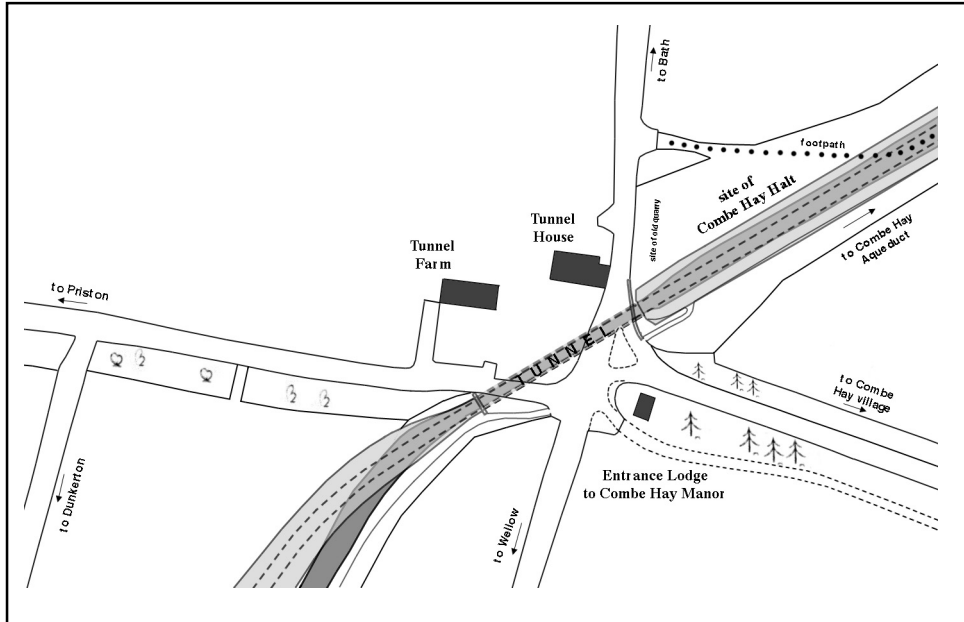
Unfortunately there is no public access to the interior of the tunnel, although the east portal can be viewed from the footpath from the aqueduct at its approach to the Wellow Road, more less on the site of Midford Halt. From the crossroads it is now largely hidden by roadside walls which were initially installed by the Canal Company in stone, but with access gateways or openings down to the towpath on each side. These however were not left open when the walls were later replaced with brick by the GWR.

Mike Chapman

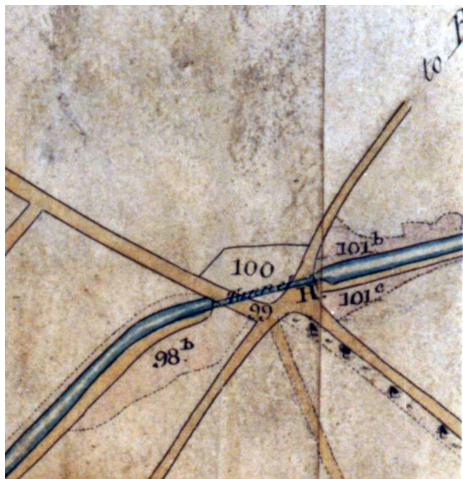
My thanks to Charles Swatton for his valuable research on the Combe Hay Aqueduct and Tunnel.

Combe Hay Tunnel

From the top of the aqueduct, the footpath continues westward along the infilled railway cutting towards the long Combe Hay Tunnel under the junction of the Bath-Wellow and Combe Hay-Priston roads. This tunnel is only 64yds long, shorter than the 135-yard tunnel at Wellow on the southern branch of the canal, but appears to have been wider, although both had a towpath shelf. Since the infill in the cuttings at each end stops short of the portals, the tunnel is still open throughout, and presently provides a convenient 'garage' for a collection of farm machinery.



PLAN OF THE COMBE HAY TUNNEL,
showing the course of the canal (dark tone) and railway (light tone).



Left: COMBE HAY TUNNEL,
as shown on the 'Cruse Map' of c.1809.

To convert the tunnel to railway use, allowing head-room for the locomotives, a deeper cutting was made through the canal bed, the existing masonry being underpinned and the walls re-lined with brick. As with the aqueduct tunnel, the portals were provided with new brick façades, but in this instance some of the original masonry was retained. The parapet over the east portal, together with the pilasters of the wing walls on each side are still visible, but outside the west portal only fragments of the wing walls remain. Inside the tunnel also, several recesses or railway 'refuges' were left in the brickwork, leaving the original canal lining exposed inside.

Combe Hay Aqueduct and Tunnel

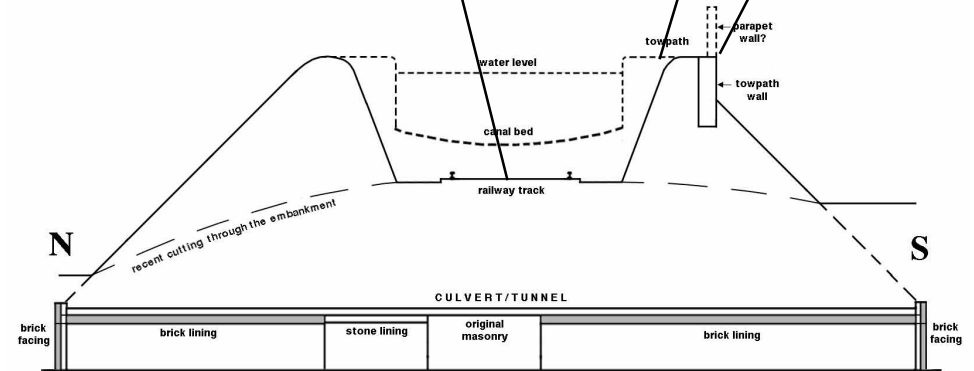
Several hundred yards to the west of the Wheatsheaf Bridge, an aqueduct was built to carry the canal across a ravine formed by the brook which flows down from Wick Farm to the village through the grounds of Combe Hay Rectory. This was later converted to a railway viaduct by the GWR and has largely survived intact, including a culvert or tunnel some 50 yards long under an earth embankment about 25ft high. The tunnel is accessed by a public footpath which, descending from the cemetery, follows the brook upstream to the aqueduct, where it continues through the tunnel. The height of the tunnel, sufficient for pedestrian access, suggests that this was already an old public route from Wick Farm before the construction of the canal. Indeed, at some stage the tunnel was provided with a walkway of large 4ft-long flagstones, possibly to cover the stream, but now in disorder and the bed much silted up.

The façade of the southern portal and the first 70ft of the tunnel is constructed of blue Staffordshire brick, evidently installed by the GWR, as is also the northern façade and the last 38ft, both façades being 32ft wide and about 12ft high. The arch of the tunnel along these sections is 7ft high, the side walls being vertical and 7ft apart. However, in the middle of the tunnel is a section of original canal masonry, about 40ft long, constructed of stone blocks with ash mortar joints and bearing a number of mason's marks. The tunnel is noticeably larger here, being almost circular in section with a diameter of 9ft 6in.



Photograph: Steve Page

Right: A CUTTING THROUGH THE BED OF THE RAILWAY, THE REMAINS OF THE AQUEDUCT EMBANKMENT AND THE TOWPATH showing how they relate to the cross-section below.



SECTIONAL DIAGRAM (not to scale) SHOWING THE MODIFICATIONS TO THE AQUEDUCT AND TUNNEL BY THE RAILWAY WORKS

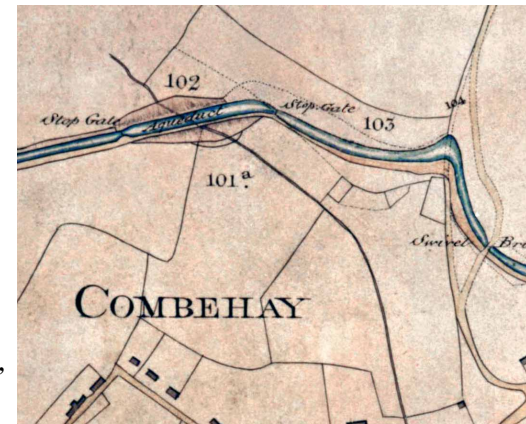
One interpretation of these features has been that the aqueduct was originally a masonry structure, but was buried by the GWR under an embankment of earth which required brick extensions to the tunnel on each side. However the earth embankment is an original canal structure, together with the tunnel, which was originally stone-built but later reinforced with an extra layer of bricks. By the time it was acquired by the GWR, the tunnel stonework was probably in poor condition, and it is noticeable that, even before then, about 20 feet of the masonry section at the northern end had already been lined with an extra layer of stone by the Canal Company. It has also been pointed out that the original stonework of the façades is still visible behind the brick, particularly at the southern portal. In effect, the main structure of the aqueduct has remained unchanged since it was built, as can be seen by comparison with the large-scale maps of the canal. This is therefore the only aqueduct on the canal constructed of earth, presumably from material excavated from Combe Hay Tunnel some 450yds further west.

At the northern end of the tunnel a branch of the footpath leads up to the top of the embankment where further evidence of the original canal structure has come to light. Here it can be

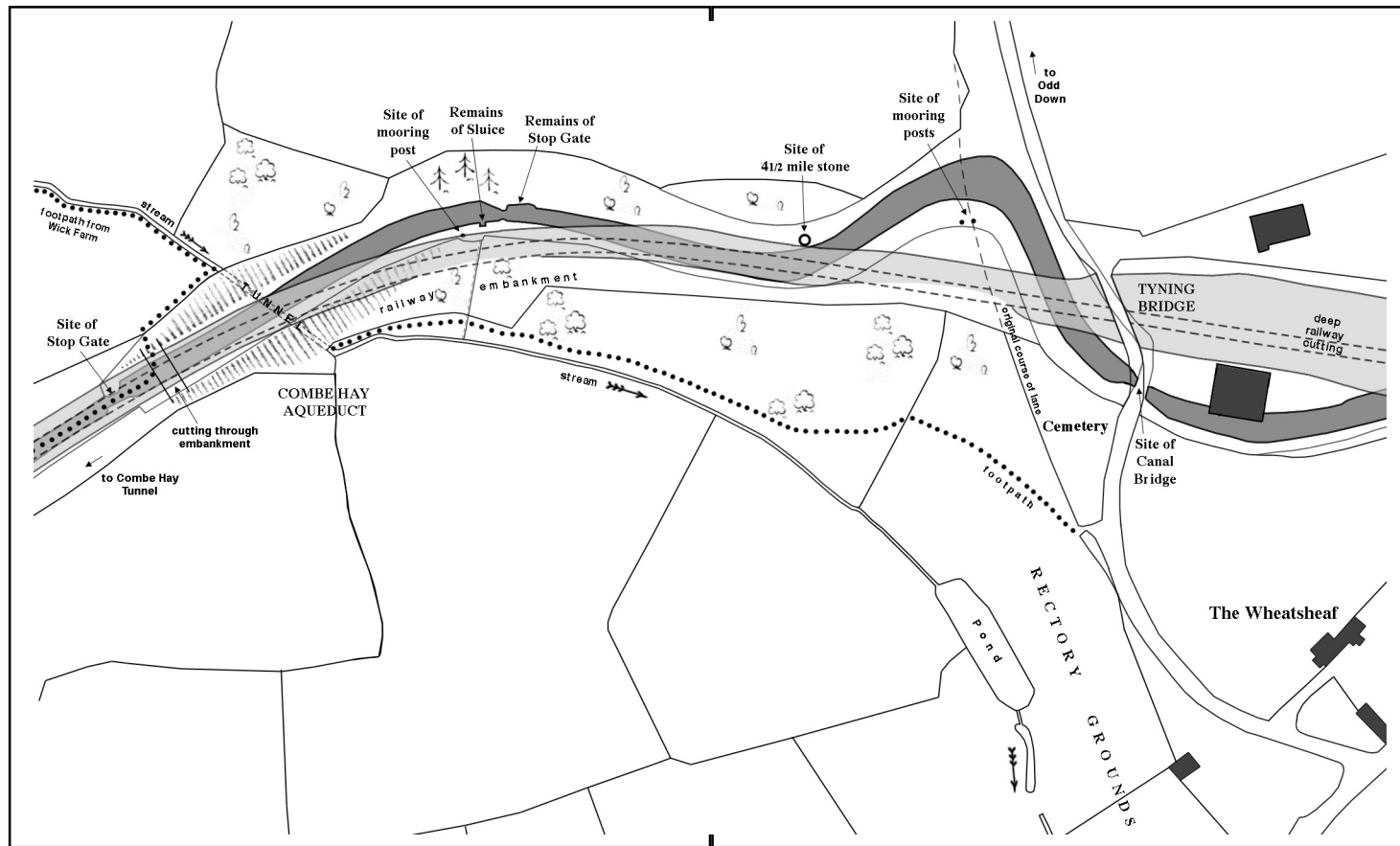


Photograph: Steve Page

Left:
SOUTHERN PORTAL OF THE AQUEDUCT TUNNEL, showing remains of stonework behind the brick façade on the right



Right:
COMBE HAY AQUEDUCT, as shown on the 'Cruse Map' of c.1809



PLAN OF THE CANAL (in dark tone) BETWEEN COMBE HAY AQUEDUCT AND TYNING BRIDGE, showing the course of the later railway (in light tone).

seen that the track bed of the railway ran at a lower level than the canal at this point, and a cutting through the canal bed had to be made, which destroyed much of the aqueduct superstructure. However, a remnant of the towpath, together with its supporting wall about 4ft high, was found on top of the embankment at the western end, its profile outlined in a section cut into the embankment in recent times for farm access. No evidence of a parapet wall could be seen, although the height of the embankment might have made this advisable.

Maps of the canal also show that the aqueduct was secured at each end by a stop gate. The one at the western end, close to this point, was probably destroyed by the railway cutting (now buried with landfill), but the one at the eastern end was situated in a bend in the canal which lay outside the railway cutting and therefore escaped destruction. On inspection of this area, it was found that the masonry of the stop gate, together with drainage sluice and stop plank point, remained in good condition in a short section of the canal bed, although much overgrown with vegetation.