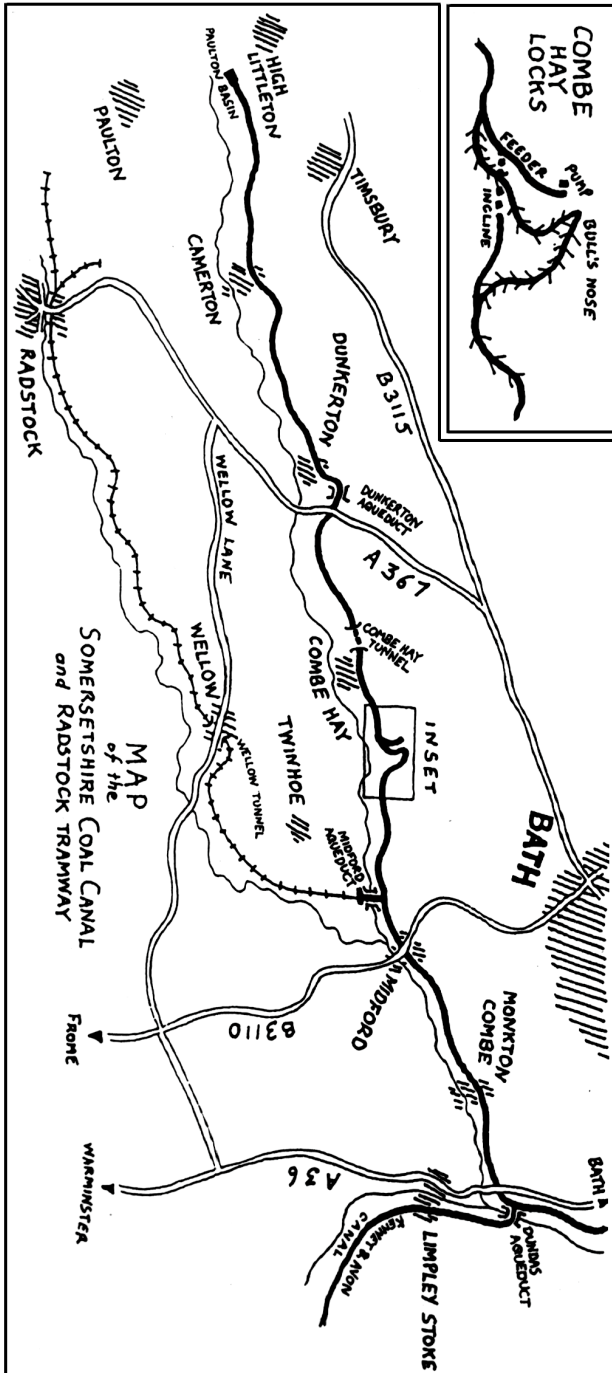


WEIGH-HOUSE

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL SOCIETY



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



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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:
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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY — 2013

Sunday 6th January — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

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

Thursday 17th January — 19:30

SOCIAL EVENING — “FILM LOCATIONS ON THE CAMERTON BRANCH LINE”

Ghost Train, Kate Plus Ten and Titfield Thunderbolt

by Terry Paget.

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club.

For further details please see website or contact: *Terry Paget* ☎ 01761 412787

Sunday 20th January — 10:00

WALK — CARRYING COALS TO DUNDAS — 4. Combe Hay

Meet: The Avenue, Combe Hay

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

Sunday 3rd February — 10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

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

Sunday 17th February — 10:00

WALK — CARRYING COALS TO DUNDAS — 5. Combe Hay to Midford

Meet: The Avenue, Combe Hay

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

Thursday 21st February — 19:30

SOCIAL EVENING — “COAL MINING IN HIGH LITTLETON AND ITS CONNECTIONS WITH THE S.C.C.”

by Barry Maule.

Meet: The Radstock Working Mens' Club.

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

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 64

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EDITOR'S NOTES

The history of Caisson House at Combe Hay has puzzled researchers for a very long time. Although there are several old maps showing various buildings on the site, there were so many variations between them that it was tempting to think that the maps themselves must have been at fault. It was only when Mike Chapman was engaged to prepare a proper historical survey of the house and given free access to the present-day buildings, that the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle began to click into place. The result of his work in collating the known facts and tying them together with logical-deduction is a report which will stand historians in good stead for many years to come.

The exploits of the work party occupy more space in this issue than they are usually allocated; this is because no mere words could do justice to their most recent triumphs and I felt that the results of their hard work would be better described in pictures. It is extremely difficult to take 'before' pictures for comparison with 'after', but I hope those on page 8 manage to convey the extent by which the Dry Dock at Paulton has been transformed.

Our shareholder featured in this issue did not actually hold shares in the S.C.C., but contributed to the Lock Fund instead. Very little has been published about the Lock Fund shareholders, so I hope the article by Bob Lawrence on page 9 will be the beginning of another new line of discovery.

Adrian Tuddenham

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

With the first winds of Winter beginning to blow, the relatively warm days of early September are already beginning to seem a long while ago; but this is the first opportunity I have had since those balmy Heritage Open Days to thank everyone who was involved. The publicity we gained has put this Society firmly on the Heritage map. Similarly, the enthusiastic public response to Mike Chapmans first walk of the "Carrying Coals to Dundas" series, and the interest shown in the work at Paulton Basin, demonstrates that we are making steady progress towards our goals of greater public awareness and support for restoration.

This is the second year we have had a visit from the London branch of the Waterways Recovery Group and it is amazing to see the progress they have made at Paulton in just one weekend. Another W.R.G. group, "Bit In The Middle", is due to visit us this month and we look forward to similarly spectacular progress at Combe Hay.

Behind the scenes, several of our Committee have given talks on the S.C.C. to groups around this area and sometimes much further afield; the word seems to be spreading, because the number of new bookings is beginning to increase. The talks are obviously appreciated and guest speakers are now being asked to come back again and give a second talk, which sometimes stretches their resources trying to find new subjects to cover.

Finally, as an indication that we really are making good progress, our membership is increasing steadily at a time when other societies are struggling to keep up their numbers in these times of financial austerity. This is not just luck, it is because of the hard work and enthusiasm of our members

Patrick Moss

NEW MEMBERS

The Society welcomes the following new members:

Ms. J. Hayes.	Avoncliff	Mrs. H. Ware.	Northolt
Mr. P. Adams.	Bristol	Mr. L.A.Sims.	East Harptree
Mr. G. Stokes.	Bath	Mr. K. Vassmusson.	Hook
Mr. B.J.Roe and family.	Odd Down	Mr. E. Watts.	Melksham
Ms. C. Rubery.	Doynton	Mr. P.A.Hughes.	Pontypool
Mr. R.Rees.	Llanwrda		

DONATIONS

The Society wishes to thank the following members who have generously made donations:

Mrs. Lillian Edwards	Mr. R. Rees
Mr. J. Davison	Mr. E. Watts

The Society would also like to thank Barry Wright for his generous contribution of historic O.S. maps.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY — 2012

Sunday 4th November —10:00

WORK PARTY — Location to be advised

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

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

Thursday 22nd November — 19:30

[*Note: This date was given incorrectly in W.H. 63, it 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: *Derrick Hunt* ☎ 01225 863066

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

→

CARRYING COALS TO DUNDAS

Mike Chapman's first walk in this series was a great success; 35 people turned up for the event, not just from the immediate locality, but from far and wide. The date coincided with the first Waterways Recovery Group work party at Paulton Dry Dock, so the walkers not only heard about the history of the canal, but had a chance to see, at first hand, the beginnings of the restoration work in the Paulton area.

We hope that, on subsequent walks, members of the S.C.C.S. will be able to turn up to welcome newcomers and make them feel at home, as they did in October.

On Sunday two visitors joined us from Chard following a recommendation from a lady at Chard Museum who turned out to be a member of the S.C.C.S.; a “thank you” to her for spreading the word far and wide. We all hope the Chard Canal will eventually be able to replicate the success that the S.C.C. has achieved.

From the feedback received it was clear that all the visitors had a thoroughly enjoyable visit and appreciated the time, knowledge and effort shown by the S.C.C.S. volunteers. A big thank you to all those volunteers who helped to make the day a success and a special thankyou to the owners of Caisson House and Bridge Farm for their continued support and assistance which is very much appreciated by the Society.

Let's hope that next year will be even better. And if you feel that you may be able to help with running the event please get in touch. Next year's dates for the diary are 14th-15th September.

Tony Yates



Photograph: Tony Yates

VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS AT LOCK 15

NEW BOOK

**THE COTSWOLD CANALS — TOWPATH GUIDE
THE STROUDWATER NAVIGATION
by Michael Handford**



EASTINGTON WHARF ON THE STROUDWATER CANAL

Michael Handford's history of the Stroudwater Canal was first published in the 1970's, before restoration work had begun; this completely revised new edition reflects the changes that have taken place in recent years and brings the story of the canal up to date. It contains 100 black and white illustrations, many of which are published for the first time.

Price: £12.99
ISBN 978-1-84868-843-8

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Adrian,

I was very pleased to read in our latest issue that Mike will be doing "Carrying Coals To Dundas". Since joining the Society I have had the good fortune to join walks covering almost the entire length of the canal and a number of tramways. Sometimes I have walked the ground before, but every time I learn a great deal and look forward to the next one. In *Weigh-House 38*, David Heathcote expresses my sentiments entirely, and much better than I could.

Bob Barwise.

"I have only come to know the SCC in the last couple of years and, while I have managed to track down various publications, there is no substitute for being on the ground and able to share the knowledge and experience of Mike and other society members. I believe that even the "old hands" - including Mike himself - discovered something new on nearly every walk. [...] I am reminded of a line from Shakespeare's Henry V Agincourt speech, "And gentlemen in England, now abed, shall think themselves accursed they were not here!"

David Heathcote"

QR CODES

Little squares with black and white patterns looking like demented crossword puzzles have been appearing in increasing numbers in public places and on advertising material — there is even one on the back cover of this magazine. These are "Quick Response Codes", a kind of two-dimensional barcode which can direct a mobile 'phone or hand-held computer to a webpage.

Far from being just another irritating gimmick of the modern world, QR codes offer a huge opportunity to increase public awareness of the S.C.C.; they can link interesting objects and sites along the canal to specific webpages, giving the enquiring visitor a brief description of what they are looking at and acting as a guided tour.

A pilot project has been started to equip a small area with QR 'targets', linking mobile 'phones to a section of the S.C.C.S. website designed with small-screen viewing in mind. Not only is the information displayed in printed form on a webpage, but audio descriptions in several languages* are also available.

The 'target' design represents a typical S.C.C. milestone in appearance and carries just enough information to let the passer-by know what to expect. The relevant website address is printed below the 'milestone plate', so that the user of a 'phone which does not read the code visually can type it in instead.

Dundas Basin has been chosen for the first trials because it has a large number of visitors who are seeing the S.C.C. for the first time. With permission from the landowners and the Canal & River Trust, small plastic targets have been fixed to fences and posts alongside historic structures to act as miniature interpretation boards. If the trial is a success, we hope to extend it to the rest of the canal in due course.

**Among our members we have already found volunteers to speak French, German & Spanish, if anyone has skills in other languages they would like to contribute, we would be most grateful for their assistance*



**A TYPICAL S.C.C. 'TARGET'
Based on the shape of an S.C.C. milestone.**

NAVYING NOTES

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

The bad weather which caused the cancellation of some of our work parties earlier this year had allowed the vegetation in the lock flight at Combe Hay to grow unchecked. With Heritage Open Days imminent, we realised that a huge effort would be needed to make the area presentable in time for our visitors. Not only did the regular work parties try to make up for lost time, but some members turned up in small groups to do extra work at irregular times during the week before the event. The valley echoed to the sound of hand saws, strimmers and the Allen Scythe. This huge extra effort was well rewarded by appreciative comments from visitors throughout the Heritage weekend.



SOME OF THE MANY VOLUNTEERS HARD AT WORK
Veronica Bucknell, Richard Hignett, Tony Yates and Bob Parnell

CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE

Heritage Open Days 2012

On September 8th and 9th many of England's historic properties opened 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.

To play its part, the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society held a two-day event at Combe Hay Locks. Visitors were 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 steam engine site. With kind permission of the landowner, access was granted to areas not normally open to the public. As a consequence visitors were also able to see locks 5-8, Caisson Field and the route of the inclined plane.

A total of 170 visitors attended over the two days, some having read about the event on parish notice boards or in the Press, whilst others happened upon the event by accident whilst on their weekend walk or run. This year no effort was spared and with two Storm kettles and a gas stove on full tilt, visitors were offered hot drinks and biscuits, as well as clouds of smoke to keep the midges away.

The Open day would not have been the success it was without the assistance of a small band of willing volunteers, who undertook a range of tasks including setting up the information displays, greeting visitors, tea making and acting as tour guides. Not to mention the other band of willing volunteers who had worked tirelessly over a number of weekends, prior to the event, to spruce the site up and clear away the weeds and vegetation.

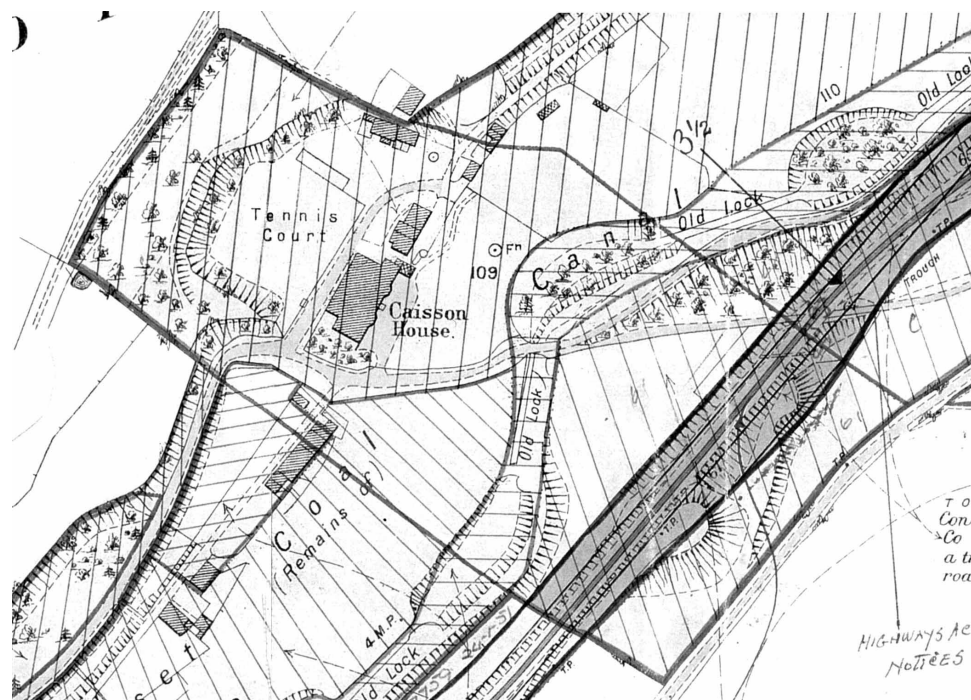
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EARLY MORNING SUNSHINE NEAR LOCK 15
Veronica Bucknell setting up a welcome for Heritage Open Day visitors.

After the appointment of a liquidator in 1893 all attempts to keep the canal going failed, and in November 1898 the order was given for pumping to cease at Dunkerton and canal closed. In 1903 the abandoned canal was bought by GWR which they replaced with the Camerton and Limpley Stoke Railway, started in 1907 and completed in 1910.

While these events seem to have had little impact on Caisson House, in 1904 it was taken over by A.J.P. Miller Esq. who appears to have acquired the freehold of the property. Of more consequence perhaps was the arrival of the motor age, making the house more accessible. Miller remained in occupation up to 1918, being succeeded by members of the Seth Smith family, and it seems to have been this period when many alterations were made to the house. A railway property plan of 1923 shows that various new external features had been added, such as the vehicle driveway at the front and the tennis court at the rear. To make room for the tennis court, the former trackway at the rear of the house was re-aligned, roughly along the filled-in bed of the supply channel, the remaining space adjoining the main body of the house being filled in with service buildings.



DETAIL TAKEN FROM A RAILWAY PROPERTY PLAN OF 1923.
The outlines of the building and surrounding grounds are little different from today.

An architectural plan of the house taken in 1944 by Bath City Surveyor and Architect A.J. Taylor, about the time when the house was in the occupation of HM Works and Public Buildings, shows these extensions in a form very similar to today. Indeed, although various additions of a temporary nature have come and gone since then, the house remains much as it was in the 1920s.

Mike Chapman

PAULTON DRY DOCK

The London branch of the Waterways Recovery Group had arranged to visit us in October, so our work party went to the site at Paulton Dry Dock a few weeks beforehand to tidy things up a bit before they arrived. The state of the site came as an unpleasant surprise; although we had left it reasonably tidy earlier this year, the weeds had rapidly taken over again and we found ourselves tunneling through jungle which was 8 feet high in places. Progress was so slow that we were beginning to wonder if even the resources and hard work of a W.R.G. group would really make much impression on it over one weekend. Another worry was how the local residents would respond to a bunch of navvies taking over their tranquil secluded valley and 'knocking seven bells' out of it.

We needn't have worried on either score.:

The owners of Paulton Foundry threw open their site for W.R.G. to use as base camp (even the use of a microwave cooker was offered, although it eventually wasn't needed). Another resident offered us a water supply when it was discovered that the mains to the Foundry had sprung a leak. During the weekend, we used a nearby farm for vehicle access and, when another resident offered us a digger for the next work party if we could get it on site, yet another resident offered us access *via* his driveway.

The 'WRGies' appeared to get off to a slow start, but this was because they tackled the difficult bits first; by the end of the first day, Sophie Smith, their leader, was quietly concerned that they might not finish the whole job during the weekend. However, good weather, the remains of a hot bonfire from the previous day and a massive effort by everyone, meant that dense patches of straggly weed-infested blackthorn, vicious brambles and dead trees just seemed to melt away on Sunday morning. As the vista opened up, small digging teams from the S.C.C.S. moved in and started to explore the archaeology of the area. By the time they piled into their big red van and headed back to London, the WRGies faces were wreathed in smiles — as were the faces of all the landowners in the Paulton and Timsbury Basin area.

The layout of the Dry Dock is uncertain and there are no details of it on any maps that we have found. During our preliminary digging, we have uncovered something which appears to be a wall — but not quite where we would have expected one — so our next work party in the area, augmented by the digger, should be a very interesting one.

We now have a problem: how shall we find time to continue with the work at Paulton and then be able to maintain the area once we have cleared it, when the maintenance work on the Combe Hay lock flight is already taking several work parties a year? Answer on a postcard are not required but more volunteers on work parties most definitely are.

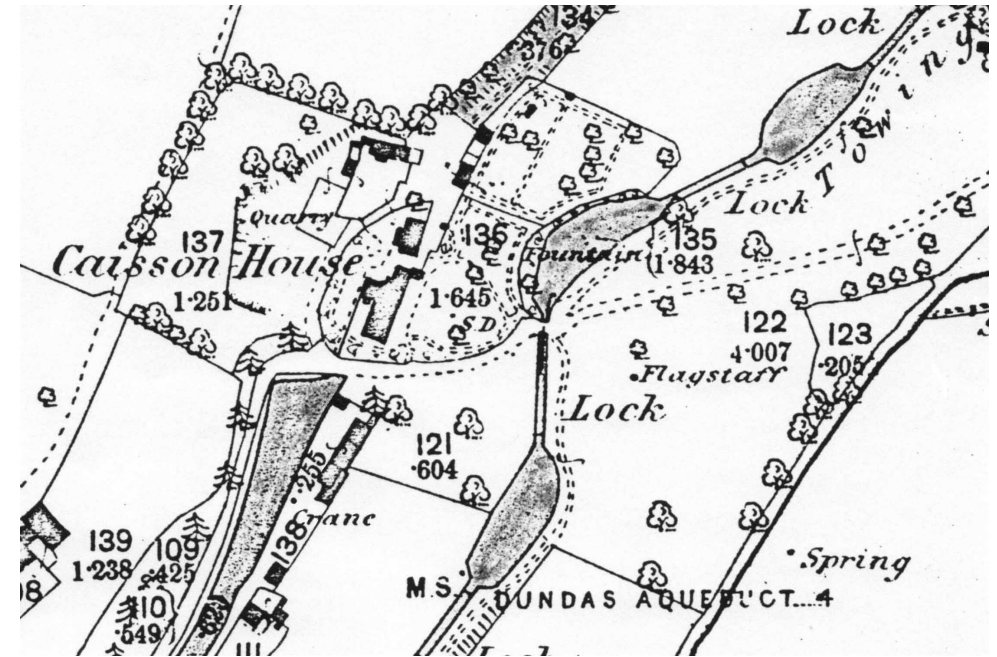
More photographs over: →



'WRGIES' AT WORK IN PAULTON DRY DOCK — October 2012



PAULTON DRY DOCK BEFORE AND AFTER THE WORK PARTIES
(January 2012 and October 2012)



DETAIL TAKEN FROM THE O.S. 25-INCH MAP OF 1886,
— before the closure of the canal and the building of the Camerton to Limpley Stoke Railway. Note the kitchen extension at the rear of the house, and the curved trackway on the west side. The entrance to the front of the house, probably through a wicket gate, is less conspicuous than today, although the garden has much the same layout - including sun-dial.

When William Hill died in 1868, he was succeeded by his son as Company Engineer, but from then on the canal began to fall into decline. William Hill jnr. himself retired in 1882, but he was not replaced, and from about 1884 Caisson house was let to Samuel George Mitchell, builder, director of the Widcombe Bridge Company in Bath, and later J.P. Like most later residents, Mitchell seems to have maintained a personal interest in the canal, and it was apparently he who acquired the canal company records after the closure of the canal, a large proportion of which was unfortunately destroyed by his niece in about 1945.

Phase IV (1884-2011)

To capitalise on their assets, in 1885 the SCC Company sold the freehold of Caisson House and its grounds to the trustees of Samuel Butler of Combe Hay Manor for £1,100, whilst retaining the workshops, sawpit, crane and adjoining cottage at the basin. Although the Butlers, who purchased the manor in the 1850s, were active in redeveloping Combe Hay, particularly in the extraction of Fuller's Earth industry in the neighbourhood of Bath, this does not seem to have affected Caisson House.

In order to provide an improved appearance to the building, in accordance with its new, more prestigious, function, it is thought that alterations were made to the southern end of the building, to serve as the front, facing the canal basin. This would account for its centralised doorway and ashlar facing, together with the butt joint between this bay and the rest of the building, visible behind the upper storey at the rear. In this case the square room at the south-eastern corner may have served as a reception room with a smaller office on the opposite corner, the rest of the building being used for dwelling space and perhaps, at the northern end, storage. The cellar, with its barrel-run or chute blocked off under one of the bay windows, would belong to this period.

The outlines of the whole complex, still apparent on the 1839 title map of Combe Hay, appear to have covered a wider area than today, the most notable difference being a substantial extension ranging along the south-eastern side of the building as far as the present front entrance. Unfortunately few remaining structures belonging to this phase can now be identified, having been almost completely replaced by the extensive alterations of the next.

It was also during this period that a bridge was built over the supply channel to carry the driveway from Rowley Farm bridge to the house. The house and its immediate surroundings were enclosed with a perimeter wall or hedge to provide a garden on the east side, below which the driveway continued round to the north side of the house for stabling.

Phase III (1840-1904)

The period around the 1840s would represent the 'golden years' of the canal, when it was at its most profitable, and before competition from the railways. Possibly as a result of this, two refinements were made by the Canal Company in this area which appear to have been connected. In about 1840 the Combe Hay engine was dismantled and removed to a better site at the Dunkerton Pumping Station, leaving the supply channel at the rear of Caisson House redundant. Although the engine house was not demolished until later (some time before 1878, for use as building material in the surrounding district), it was probably soon after this event that the part of the supply channel immediately behind the house was filled in.

This seems to have coincided with the reorganisation of Caisson House, including the replacement of the eastern elevation, as appears today. It is noticeable that in the 1841 census only William Hill and his daughter were living at Caisson House, but in about 1845 his son William Hill jnr. (also engineer, and partner) moved into the house with his large family, including his wife, seven children, a governess and two house servants. By the time of the 1851 census the family had grown even larger (two sons and nine daughters) whilst William Hill snr. and daughter are separately recorded as living in a house in South Stoke village nearby. Caisson House had evidently taken on a more domestic rôle.

The new frontage of the house was evidently more in keeping with a gentleman's residence, although the elevation is not quite symmetrical, having to fit in with the irregular layout of the interior. In style it is of the period, as are the interior fittings, except perhaps for certain details such as the iron fireplaces which may have been retained from the previous phase. These fittings are consistent throughout the building and remain in remarkably good condition. The extension at the front was removed, and a new kitchen extension built out at the rear over the filled-in bed of the supply channel. Later plans show that the rest of the canal formation was converted to a garden terrace, bounded on the west (through the site of the present tennis court) by a new trackway, replacing the drive below the front garden. Initially there appears to have been no interior door between the main body of the house into the extreme northern wing, which had to be accessed from a door in the yard at the rear, but this inconvenience was removed by extending the corridor in the western range out into the yard at both ground and first floor levels. In effect, the basic outlines of the house, shown on the later OS 25inch map of 1885, closely resembled those of today.

SHAREHOLDERS OF THE SOMERSETSHIRE COAL CANAL

Levi Ames
(1739 — 1820)

Levi Ames was a shareholder in the Kennet & Avon Canal, and he also invested in the Lock Fund of the Somerset Coal Canal. He was a wealthy banker and businessman in Bristol, and came from a family involved in many different enterprises in that City.



Levi Ames

PORTRAIT AND SIGNATURE
OF LEVI AMES

from:

"Genealogical Memoirs of the Family of Ames"
by Reginald Ames, published 1889.

Biographical Details

Born:	1739 Bristol
Married: 1.	1770 Anna Maria Poole
Children:	Anna Maria 1771-1851
	Sarah 1772-1815
	Phoebe 1774-1851
	Lionel 1775-1851
	Levi 1778-1746
	Jeremiah 1780-1820
	Harriet 1780-1800
	Charles 1782-1803
	John 1784-1867
	George Henry 1786-187
Married: 2.	1796 Elizabeth Ann Wraxall
Died:	1820 Bristol

Levi Ames' grandfather, also named Levi Ames, had come to Bristol in the late seventeenth century from the Evercreech area of Somerset. Levi's father, Jeremiah Ames, established himself in the City, and was originally identified as a grocer, and later as a sugar boiler. Jeremiah was both Sheriff and Mayor of Bristol and owned several ships, jointly with others, operating as a privateer, attacking and seizing foreign-owned vessels and profiting from the prize money. He later became a partner in the Harford Bank. At the time of his death in 1776, Jeremiah was said to be worth over £70,000. In present day value, that is something between 10 and 100 million pounds.

Levi Ames was born in 1739, and married twice. His first wife was Anna Maria Poole, daughter of Chauncy Poole, a merchant with interests in both London and Bristol. Levi and Anna were married at St Giles, Cripplegate, London on 19th April 1770. They had ten children, and four of their sons became very wealthy, through marriage, inheritances from the Poole side of the family, and directly from their father. Those of the sons who married during Levi Ames' lifetime received £10,000 on marriage.

Levi Ames' second wife was Elizabeth Ann Wraxall, probably also a member of →

a family of Bristol ,merchants, whom he married at St Mary’s, Walcot, Bath on 14th July 1796. He was 57, and she was 51. Levi originally lived at 15 Lower Maudlin Lane, Bristol, but later moved to Clifton Hill House, Clifton Wood, Bristol. This large mansion with twin circular bays has recently been in the news as it was occupied by squatters.

Levi Ames, together with his brothers, followed in his father’s business footsteps, making investments in a number of different enterprises. Levi was Sheriff of Bristol in 1771 and Mayor in 1778. He owned estates in Nova Scotia, was a privateer, a partner in both a tobacco business and a gunpowder factory, and formed alliances and partnerships with other well-known Bristol merchants. In January 1786, he became one of the partners in the New Bank in Corn Street, Bristol, and was also a partner in the banking firm of Ames, Cave & Co. He also held shares in the Bristol Fire Office. Despite his involvement in canals, he did not invest in the Bristol Floating Harbour project in 1800.

At some stage, the Ames family became involved in plantations in the West Indies, where they were slave owners. The partnership of Pinney Ames owned slaves on St Kitts, Barbados and Nevis. The Pinney family of Bristol were well-known plantation owners, and Charles Pinney was Mayor of Bristol at the time of the 1831 riots. Charles’s sister Mary married Jeremiah Ames, one of the sons of Levi Ames. After slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, George Henry Ames, youngest son of Levi, received over £60,000 compensation from the British Government, on the basis of his ownership of slaves in British Guiana, Grenada, St Kitts, St Vincent, and Trinidad.

Levi Ames died on 16th December 1820 and is buried in a family grave at Brunswick Square Burial Ground, Bristol, reflecting his religious background as a member of the Lewin’s Mead Chapel, an independent nonconformist church. Levi Ames’ will runs to twenty-one closely written pages, and he was clearly concerned that his wishes should be followed exactly. He made substantial provision for his wife and the will lists all his various properties, mostly in the centre of Bristol. His hundred shares in the Kennet & Avon Canal Company were divided amongst his five sons, while his shares in the Somersetshire Coal Canal were left to his son Jeremiah, who in the event predeceased his father.

If Levi Ames was typical of an eighteenth-century Bristol merchant, then his surviving sons led more Victorian lives. Lionel Ames, who adopted the surname Lyde to secure an inheritance, is described as a barrister and had an estate in Bedfordshire as well as a London home. John had a country home in Devon, but also apparently a London address. Levi Ames Junior was a banker, with homes in Bristol and London. The youngest son, George Henry Ames, remained in Bristol, living at Cote House, Westbury on Trym. He was also a banker, and an investor in companies like the Great Western Cotton Company. Even in 1861, at the age of 75, he described himself as a West India Merchant.

Railways were the successors to canals in inland transport. It is not surprising therefore that at least three of the sons of Levi Ames were investors in the Great Western Railway.

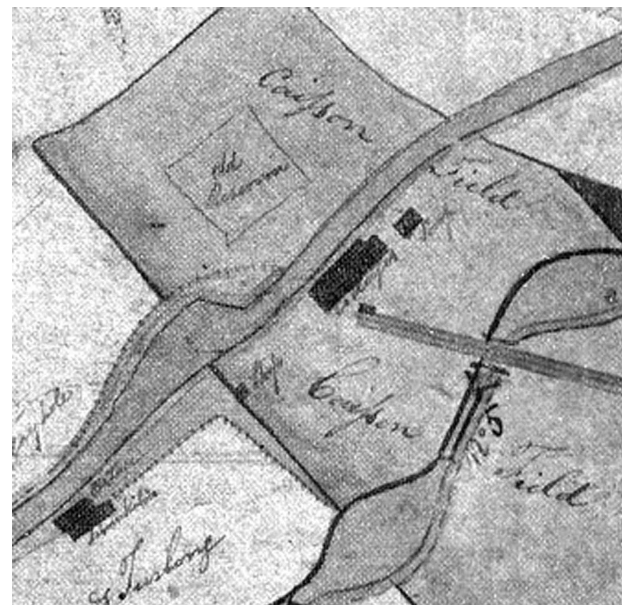
Bob Lawrence

VALPY — A LOCAL CONNECTION

Since the article on Reverend Richard Valpy D.D. appeared in Weigh-House 63 (P6) a local connection with the Valpy family has been discovered.

Richard Valpy’s fourth son by his second marriage, Captain Anthony Blagrove Valpy, lived at Coombe Lodge, Blagdon until his death in 1871. The property was subsequently purchased by the Wills family and today is used for conferences and weddings. Once again this shows that information turns up in the most unlikely places. In this case the facts came to light in an interview with Sir John Wills, recorded by Tony Staveacre and published on the C.D. ‘Blagdon Voices’, issued by the Blagdon Local History Society ^[1].

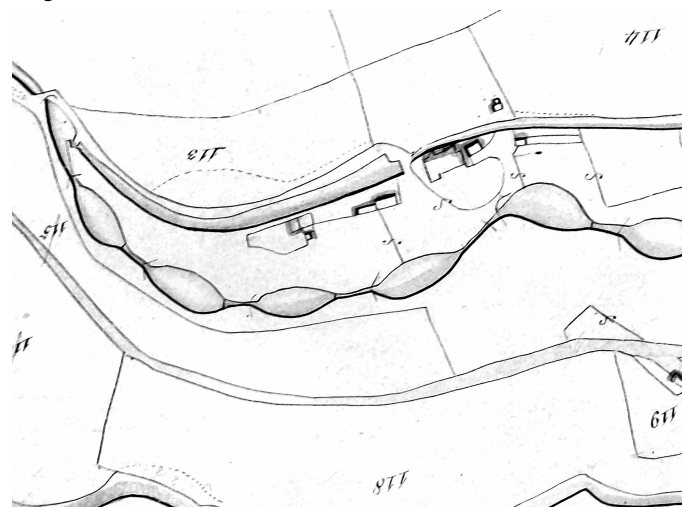
^[1] [http://blagdon.org/wp/index.php/activities/clubs-and-societies/a-z-clubs-and-societies/blagdon-local-history-society/]



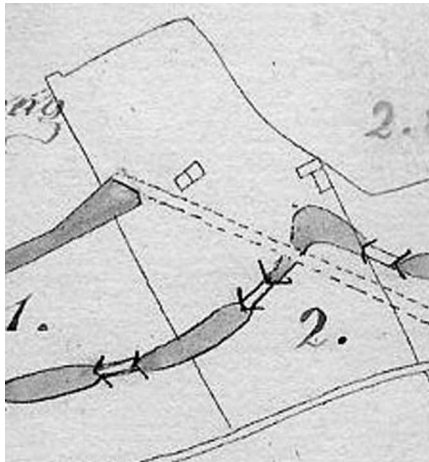
A LATER PLAN OF 1810

The building is shown in more detail, marked ‘Cottages’. It appears to consist of two ranges, and is accompanied by various workshops. The Caisson Lock has been filled in by this time, but the Inclined plane has not yet been lifted.

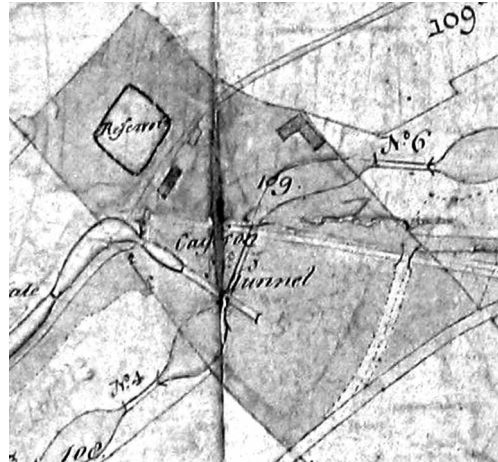
towpath. In any event, the western range appears to have originated as a single storey extension along the back of the cottages, as indicated by the difference in width and floor levels between the two ranges. →



DETAIL TAKEN FROM THE COMBE HAY TITHE MAP OF 1839, — showing Caisson House in its Phase II form, not long before Phase III alteration. Note the extension projecting from the east front of the house.



DETAIL TAKEN FROM THE VARIATIONS PLAN OF 1801 FOR THE LOCK FLIGHT
The site of Caisson House is already shown occupied by what appears to be a two-bay building adjoining the temporary inclined plane.



DETAIL FROM A DRAFT MAP OF THE CANAL BEFORE COMPLETION,
— showing the Caisson and intended lock flight. The building on the site of Caisson House appears below the Reservoir and canal extension at the top

In the meantime, by at least 1801, various buildings connected with the works had been built in the area surrounding the Caisson. On the site of Caisson House a later canal company plan shows a building labelled 'Cottages' at the head of the inclined plane, together with various 'shops' (workshops), sheds and a limekiln in the neighbourhood. These cottages (intended for future company employees) would have been reasonably substantial and relatively well appointed for their day, in contrast to the rudimentary nature of the working buildings, as indicated by the roof timbers and masonry still visible in the present 'gamesroom' on the north side of the house. An unusual feature running immediately behind the cottages was an extension of the canal driven towards a pumping engine further around the hillside in what is now Engine Wood — one of two engines (the other at Dunkerton) needed to supplement water lost through the lock flight. This extension allowed water from the engine (brought into operation in early 1806) to flow back into the upper level of the canal at the terminal basin, whilst admitting (in the opposite direction) boats delivering coal for the engine boiler. It can reasonably be assumed that the Cottages, from their key situation, played an important rôle in the progress of the works as a 'site office'.

Phase II (1813-1840)

The beginning of this phase is marked by the clearing of the works around the terminal basin and the consolidation of the lock site. Although William Smith was recalled briefly in 1811-12 to repair leaks in the lock flight, the canal was otherwise fully operational by then. The chamber of the Caisson Lock had already been filled in (by 1806), the inclined plane lifted and sold off (in 1811), and it would appear that the whole area was being returned to normal. Also, the Canal Company was in a more stable financial position, the payment for the remaining lands around the lock flight being made to Col. Leigh in 1812. All that was needed now was a resident agent and engineer to maintain the whole system. In 1813 William Hill was appointed to this post, having just finished work that year as resident manager of the Batheaston Coal Company in which capacity he had been employed on the recommendation of William Smith while the latter was serving as consultant engineer to the sinking of the Batheaston shaft.

CAISSON HOUSE, COMBE HAY: AN HISTORICAL SURVEY

As part of the recent refurbishment of Caisson House, an historical survey was carried out to help identify and preserve the historical character of the fabric. By the kind permission of the owner, Mr. Phil Honey, the survey report is included here, with a few additions, to illustrate the development of the building in the context of the history of the canal

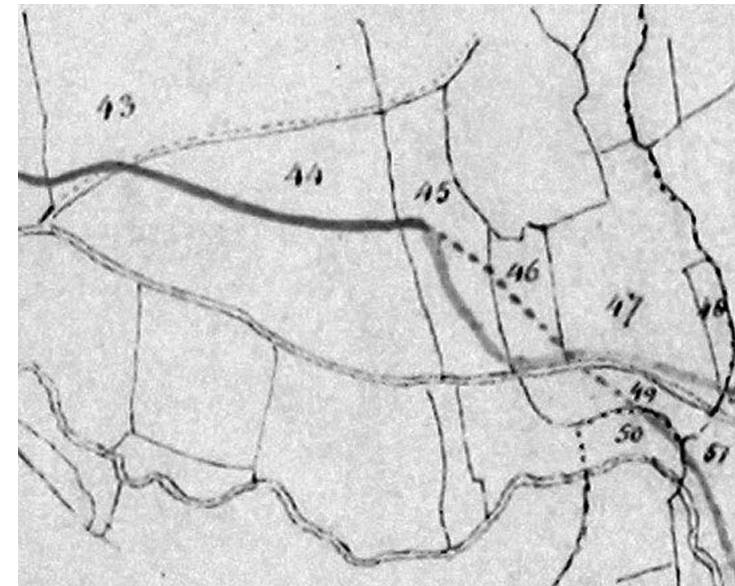
The Site

Caisson House and its immediate surroundings are closely identified with the former Somersetshire Coal Canal, in particular with its famous Caisson Lock which once stood nearby. In addition, it is also associated with William Smith, 'Father of English Geology', and his colleague William Hill. It was Smith's experience whilst supervising the construction of the canal that provided him with the data he needed for his formulation of the principles of stratigraphy. The development of the house therefore reflects the fortunes of the canal and the events following its demise, a process that can be recognised in a sequence of key phases, as follows.

Phase I (1795-1813)

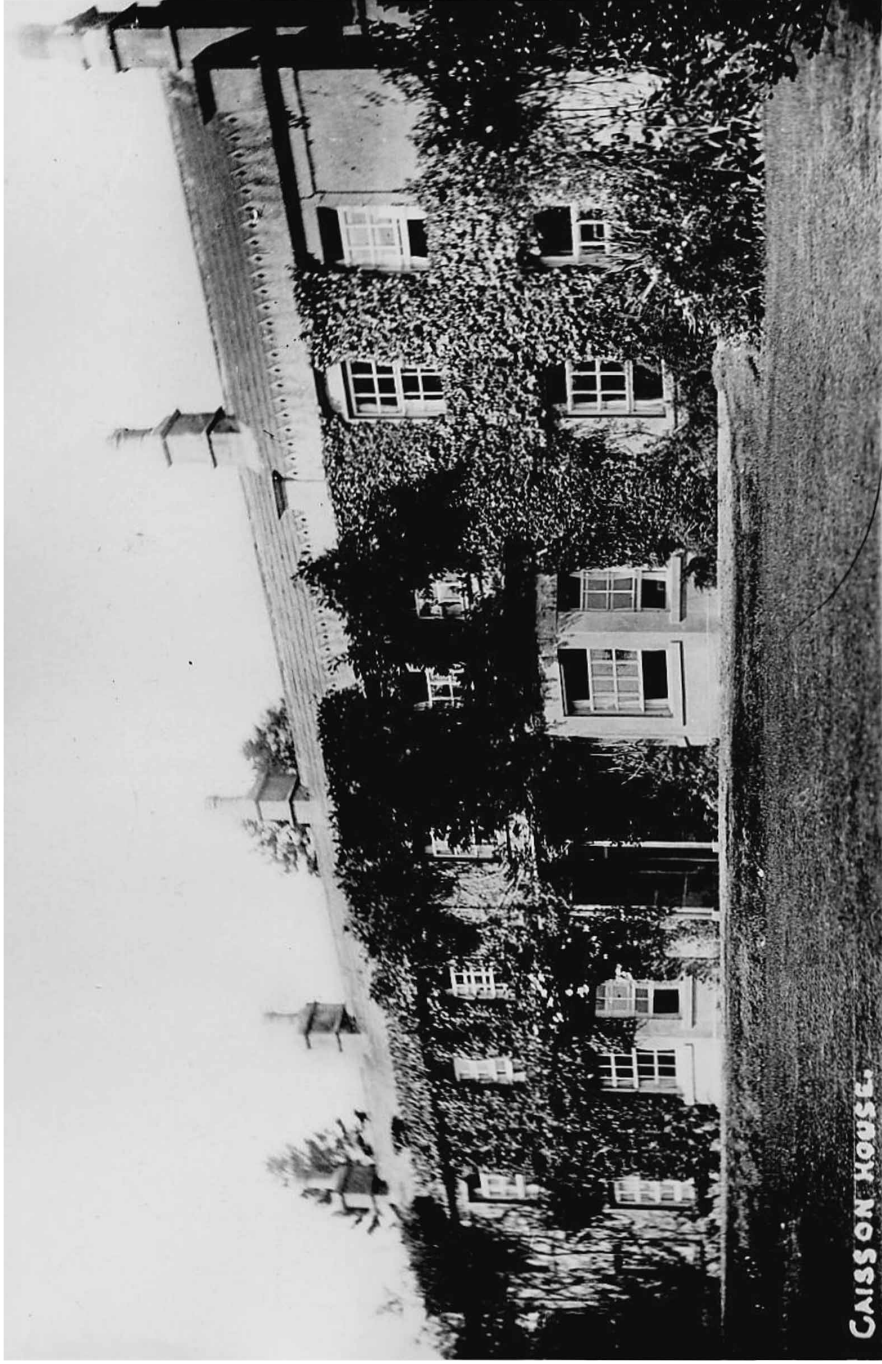
This phase starts from the adoption of the site by the Canal Company in August 1795 as the best position for the terminus of the upper level of the canal, where one or more experimental Caisson Locks could be constructed for the descent to the lower level. A field in Blacklands Furlongs (duly renamed Caisson Field) was acquired for this purpose from Col. John Leigh of Combe Hay Manor, and conveyed to the canal company in February 1797. Work started on the first Caisson early in 1796, and although the lock was ready for trial by 1797, it encountered so many problems that by 1800 it was evident that the project had to be abandoned in favour of a flight of 22 conventional locks. While the lock flight was under construction, between August 1802 and its formal opening in April 1805, a temporary inclined plane linking the two levels was brought into operation in November 1801.

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DETAIL TAKEN FROM WILLIAM SMITH'S DEPOSITED PLAN OF THE CANAL IN 1795

The upper level of the canal approaches Caisson Field (plot 45) from the west through Blacklands furlong (plot 44). The Caisson Lock was to be sited at the junction with the dotted line (the route of a possible inclined plane). The route leading to two lower Caisson Locks is shown by the lighter line continuing down to the road below plot 46.



AN EARLY 20th CENTURY PHOTOGRAPH OF CAISSON HOUSE.

