

Archaeological Excavations at Ventiford Basin on the Stover Canal, Teigngrace, Devon

May 10th-19th 2014

First Interim Report



South-West Landscape Investigations



Dr Phil Newman MIFA, FSA

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Report prepared on behalf of the Stover Canal Trust
by
Phil Newman of South-West Landscape Investigations

[www: philnew.co.uk](http://www.philnew.co.uk)

October 2014

THE STOVER CANAL TRUST



Council for
British Archaeology

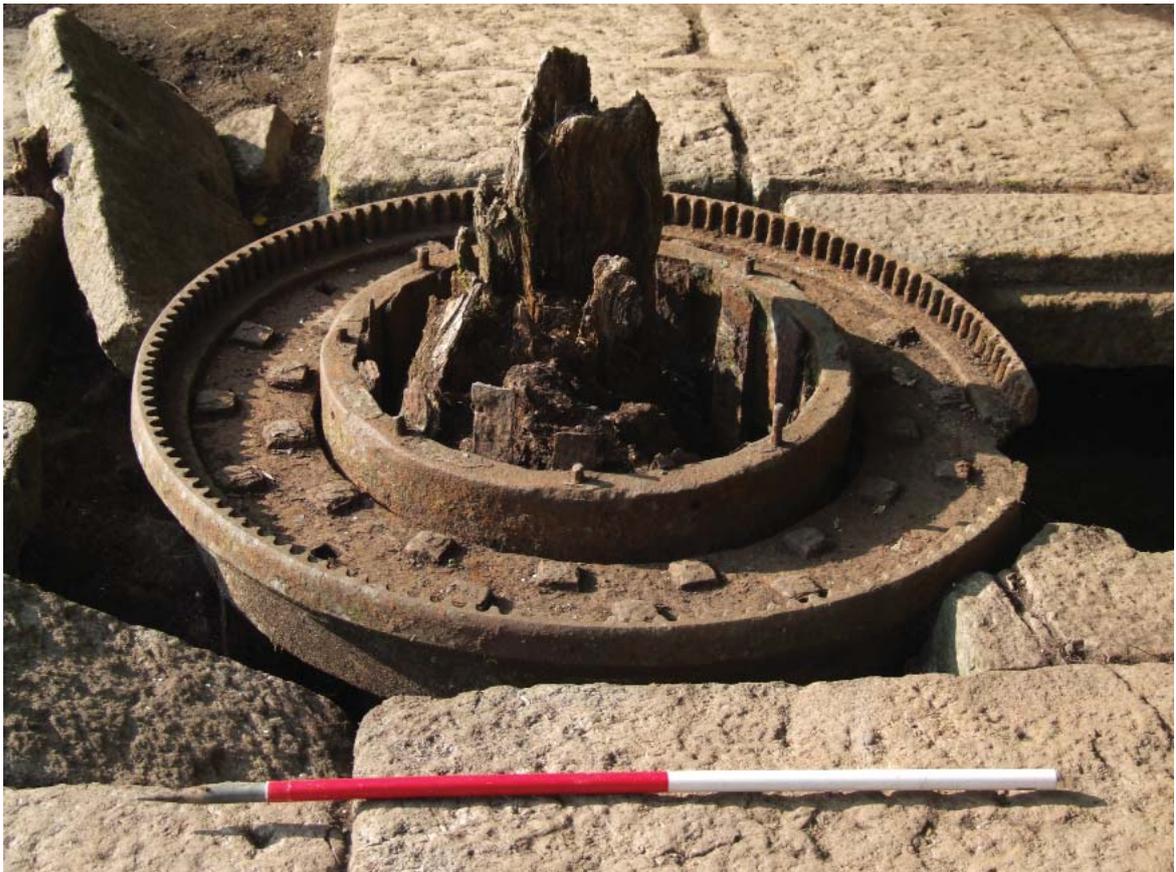
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Summary

The first season of archaeological excavation at Ventiford Basin on the Stover Canal in Devon is described. The excavation took place over nine days in May 2014, when eight trenches were dug to answer specific questions about the site, including how it was constructed and what cargoes were carried in the barges that plied the canal. The opportunity was also taken to begin excavation of a hulked barge, known to have been abandoned in the winding hole of the canal.

The work revealed that the canal basin was constructed in a rather *ad hoc* manner, and that what survives is unlikely to represent a single period of construction. Materials unearthed included minerals transported on the waterway, including clay, coal, flint, iron, and a specialist ore known as micaceous hematite. The hulked barge was successfully located and partly excavated revealing surviving timbers from the lower part of the vessel. Volunteers from local heritage amenity groups took part in the dig, including many for whom this was their first involvement in an archaeological project.

Historical Summary

Stover Canal is a 2.8km-long disused waterway, which extends between its basin at Ventiford, in the parish of Teigngrace, to the tidal waters of the Whitelake Channel, on the outskirts of Newton Abbot in Devon. The canal was dug and opened between 1790-92. Its original purpose was to transport ball clay from the rich deposits of the Bovey Basin, down to the River Teign, via the tidal Whitelake Channel to Teignmouth. From there, the clay could be trans-shipped and exported for use in the pottery trade, in Staffordshire and elsewhere. The canal was conceived and paid for by James Templer (1748-1813) of Stover House, who owned the land through which the waterway was cut, and the rights to the mineral resources in the area, including clay. Templer was much applauded by his contemporaries, not only for the vision he had shown in his industrial exploits, but also for the massive improvements in the quality of the land that surrounded the canal, which, prior to its existence, was extremely low-grade farm land subject to flooding; after the opening of the canal, and the improvements to drainage that it provided, the value of the land was said to rise from £500 to £1500 per year (Vancouver 1808, 383).

By 1820, Templer's son George (1781-1843) had expanded this transport system by connecting it to the Haytor Granite Tramway. This, one of Devon's very early rail systems, was built to move granite from quarries sited on Templer's land at Haytor Downs on the edge of Dartmoor. Advances in quarrying techniques in the late 18th and early 19th century had allowed granite to be exploited economically on an industrial scale, and it was much sought after for the building of large public and commercial buildings in Britain's growing cities, especially London.

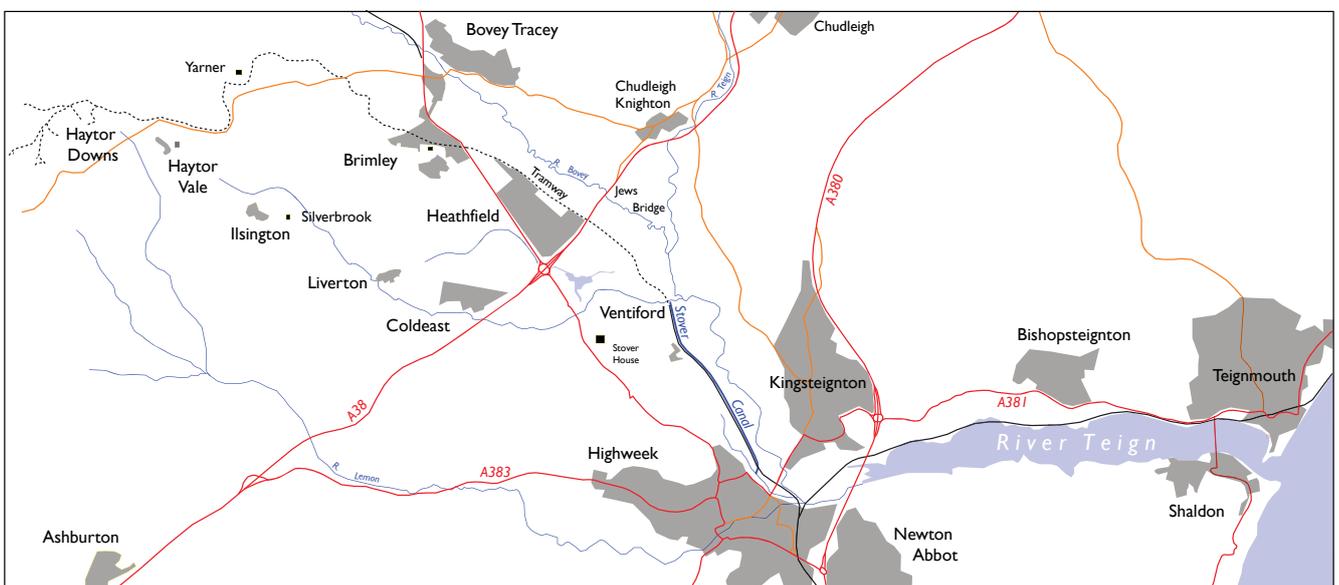


Fig 1 Location map showing the Teignbridge area, Stover Canal and Haytor Granite Tramway. Contains Ordnance Survey data ©Crown copyright and database right (2014), from OS open data sources.

The tramway is a remarkable and unique heritage asset in its own right, extending for 12km across the edge of Dartmoor, descending approximately 365m through Bovey Tracey and Bovey Heathfield, eventually arriving at Ventiford alongside the canal basin. Unusually, the rails were cut from long, narrow blocks of granite, known as sets, laid end to end. Flanges were cut along the sets to guide the wheels on the track, rather than having the flanges on the wheels, as with the more conventional iron rail systems.

Upon arriving at Ventiford via the tramway, the granite was loaded onto barges, to continue its journey to Teignmouth, where it was transhipped on to coasters and exported to cities all around the country. A new loading quay (New Quay), was built by the Haytor Granite Company at Teignmouth, between 1825 and 1827, especially for handling these loads, and it survives today.

In 1829, the Stover estate – including the house and gardens, the canal, the quarries and the tramway – was sold by George Templer (allegedly to cover debts) and passed to the Duke of Somerset. From about the 1840's, the Duke leased the canal to various clay companies. Although work continued intermittently at the Haytor quarries until about 1860, in 1862 the Duke sold part of the tramway, and the canal, to the Moretonhampstead and South Devon Railway Company (MSDRC). By then the tramway was disused and the new railway was built over parts of its course between Ventiford and Brimley, including the section adjacent to the quay at Ventiford, completely effacing it. The MSDR was opened on June 26th 1866 (*Western Times* 29-Jun-1866).

With the tramway connection gone, the upper section of the canal was used less, and it is believed soon fell into a state of neglect. Although the date of the final barge journey to or from Ventiford is not recorded, it would have been during or before the 1880s, as by 1891, passengers travelling on the MSDR reported disused sunken barges visible in the upper section of the canal (*Western Times* 13-Nov-1891). As to the remainder of the canal, the lower section between the lock known as Graving Dock at Teigngrace, and the sea lock onto the Whitelake Channel, continued to carry barge traffic until 1937. It continued to hold water until 1951, when it burst its banks and flooded the nearby claypits. Since then, the entire canal has been dry.

The work of previous writers

Stover Canal has never been subject to a recorded archaeological excavation, but was the focus of an archaeological survey in 1991, when an assessment of the remains and documentary evidence was compiled for the purpose of informing conservation (Pye 1991). The canal, along with the Haytor Granite Tramway and quarries, is the topic of two books (Ewans 1964; Harris 1994 & 2002), both of which discuss the history of the canal and aspects of its physical remains.

Current status

The Stover Canal Society (SCS) was formed in 1999 and the Stover Canal Trust in 2006; the two were merged in March 2014 and continue under the name of Stover Canal Trust (SCT). Both were instigated with the intention of undertaking some restoration of the waterway, but primarily to conserve the remains, which continue to be threatened by Newton Abbot's urban expansion and changes to local infrastructure. The canal and the towpath are owned by Network Rail but, since 2010, SCT has taken on the lease and is responsible for management of the dry canal as an amenity and for formulating a programme of works, including partial restoration and re-watering.

The canal is a major component of the Templer Way, one of Devon's premier long-distance footpaths, managed by Devon County Council. This path incorporates both the canal and the Haytor Granite Tramway, as well as parts of the Stover Estate and Teign estuary, providing access for the public to almost the entire route taken by the granite from Haytor to Teignmouth. Recent progress by the SCT has allowed for the whole canal to be accessible as part of this pathway, including the Ventiford section.

Work on a new cycleway, running parallel with the canal, will commence in October 2014, bringing potentially many more visitors to the site when complete, and increasing the need for greater understanding of the remains and further interpretation, through a variety of media.

The Basin (Figs 2-3; cover photo)

Ventiford canal basin (SX 8483 7471) is the upper, northern terminus of Stover Canal. It is located on level terrain at the edge of the small hamlet of Ventiford, 225m west of the River Teign. Today the Ventiford Brook, a small tributary of the Teign, runs west to east a few metres to the north of the canal basin, and meets the Teign 170m ENE of the basin; this stream once formed part of the water supply to the canal. Early maps (i.e. before the canal was dug in 1790-2), such as that by Benjamin Donn in 1765, show the Ventiford Brook flowing south from this point and running approximately parallel with the Teign (Fig 2). It met the larger river much further to the south than today, near the outskirts of Newton Abbot. However, by 1809, on the 1st edition OS map, the brook had been diverted into the canal, and its former course was no longer shown.

Where Ventiford Brook passes the head of the basin, its channel has been lined with masonry and the remains of a sluice, to regulate the reservoir of water above the canal, survives *in situ* across the brook. A stone-lined, square-section, underground culvert diverted water into the head of the canal beneath the current footpath. This survives intact but is plugged with concrete at the northern end. A second supply of water was channelled via a leat, which had its headweir on the River Bovey near Jew's Bridge. About 850m of the leat's upper, northern section is buried beneath clay waste, but to the south of Brock's Farm the channel is still visible, from where it can be traced down to Ventiford; it has at least three arched culverts still *in situ*. No part of this infrastructure has been investigated as part of the current season of work.

The western edge of Ventiford Basin is bounded by the bottom of the railway embankment, constructed between c. 1862-6; this has overwhelmed a large portion of the working area at the quayside, and completely effaced the granite tramway at its terminus on the western side. A narrow wedge of land survives beside the quay, which includes a granite platform and the cast iron base of a crane, used to transfer granite from tramway to barge.

A winding hole is located almost adjacent to the crane. This bulge in the outline of the canal was where barges were turned in preparation for their seaward journey, and survives today as a noticeable curving earthwork.

Much of the quayside is revetted with stone, including a section on the western bank, south of the crane platform, and some sections of the basin itself. The eastern quayside is partially revetted, but the majority of it, along with the winding hole has no trace of stone and only an earthwork slope survives. Where present, the granite used along the quayside had origins at Haytor Quarry, but the building sequence is yet to be resolved.

The eastern quayside and immediate environs has survived apparently undisturbed since abandonment of the canal. Various 19th-century maps depict up to three buildings in this area. The easternmost of these survives as a fragment of stone wall foundations at SX 8486 747, and is yet to be investigated. There is also a small 'shed' marked beside the quayside on a map of 1861 (DRO DP270), of which no trace has so far been recorded. The largest building is a few metres east of the winding hole (SX 8485 7468) and appears on several maps. It has a long narrow footprint on the OS map of 1889 and may have been about 25m long. The approximate outline of the building survives as a subtle earthwork in places, but no foundations are visible.

The excavation

Before work could commence on any form of restoration, which will certainly involve disturbing the ground around the canal's banks, archaeological excavations are necessary at certain sensitive points.¹ Ventiford Basin was chosen for the first season because it is likely to feature early in the restoration programme and it has

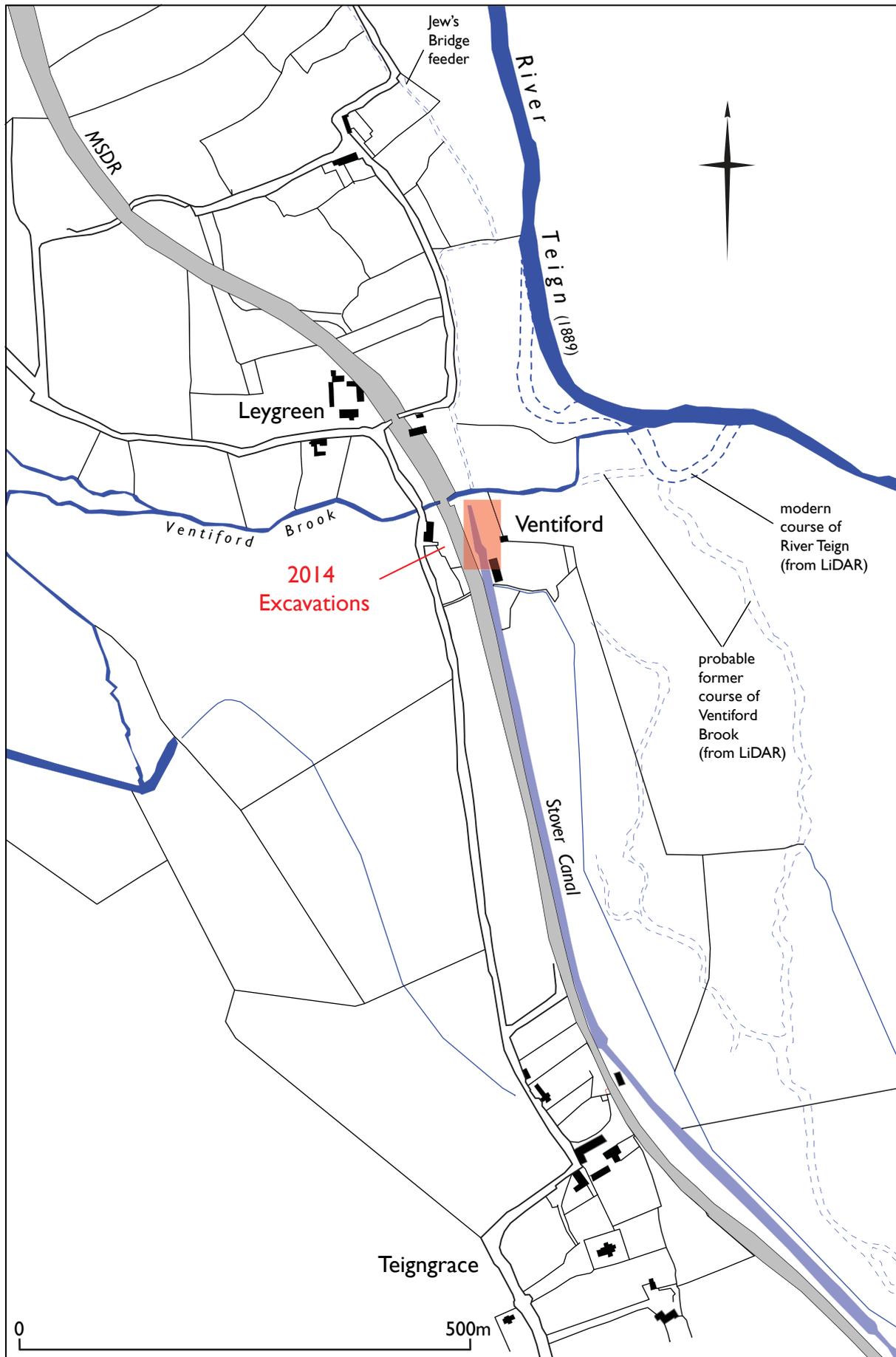


Fig 2 Map showing Teigngrace and the upper section of Stover Canal, including the location of the 2014 excavation at Ventiford. Based on OS 1889 1st Edition 25-inch map, with additional detail transcribed from LiDAR coverage provided by the Environment Agency.

much scope for archaeological discovery, being one of the canal's main hubs from the 1790s to the mid 1860s. For logistical reasons, including vegetation cover, easy access and parking, it was also considered an ideal site as a first dig for an inexperienced team. Historical studies of the canal suggest there is much to discover at Ventiford so the dig and the positioning of individual trenches, has been designed to answer specific questions. The investigation also provided an ideal occasion to remove vegetation from the iron crane base on the western quayside, which was then drawn and photographed in detail (frontispiece).

TRENCH 1

A small trench (1m x 5.5m) designed to establish the character of the ground and any activities that may have occurred in the area adjacent to the eastern quayside. It also served the purpose to disprove a theory derived from an old map of the site, that the tramway linked to the canal on the east side rather than the west. Removal of turf and topsoil revealed a flat gravelly strata of shingle-type stones formed into an approximately level surface at shallow depth. This was interpreted as the working surface of the quayside, formed by the naturally occurring river gravels of the area being trodden into the ground by many years of activity. No trace of the tramway was found in this trench, which dismisses the idea that it traversed this area.

TRENCHES 2 AND 2B (*The Barge*) (Figs 3 & 12)

Among the items retrieved from the Devon Heritage Collection archive is a photograph, thought to be dated to around 1900, showing an abandoned barge in the dried out winding hole at Ventiford Basin. The chances of timbers of this vessel surviving below ground were thought to be high, and two trenches (T2 & T2b) were dug to explore what remained.

A raised earthwork on the east side of the winding hole was assumed to represent the silted hull of the barge, in the approximate position depicted in the photograph, and the first, 1m-wide, Trench (T2) was cut at approximately 90° to the assumed axis of the hull, with the intention of confirming the location and layout of any remains. This was very quickly achieved, as iron nails were revealed at approximately 0.4m below the surface,



Fig 3 Trench 2b showing the part-excavated barge.

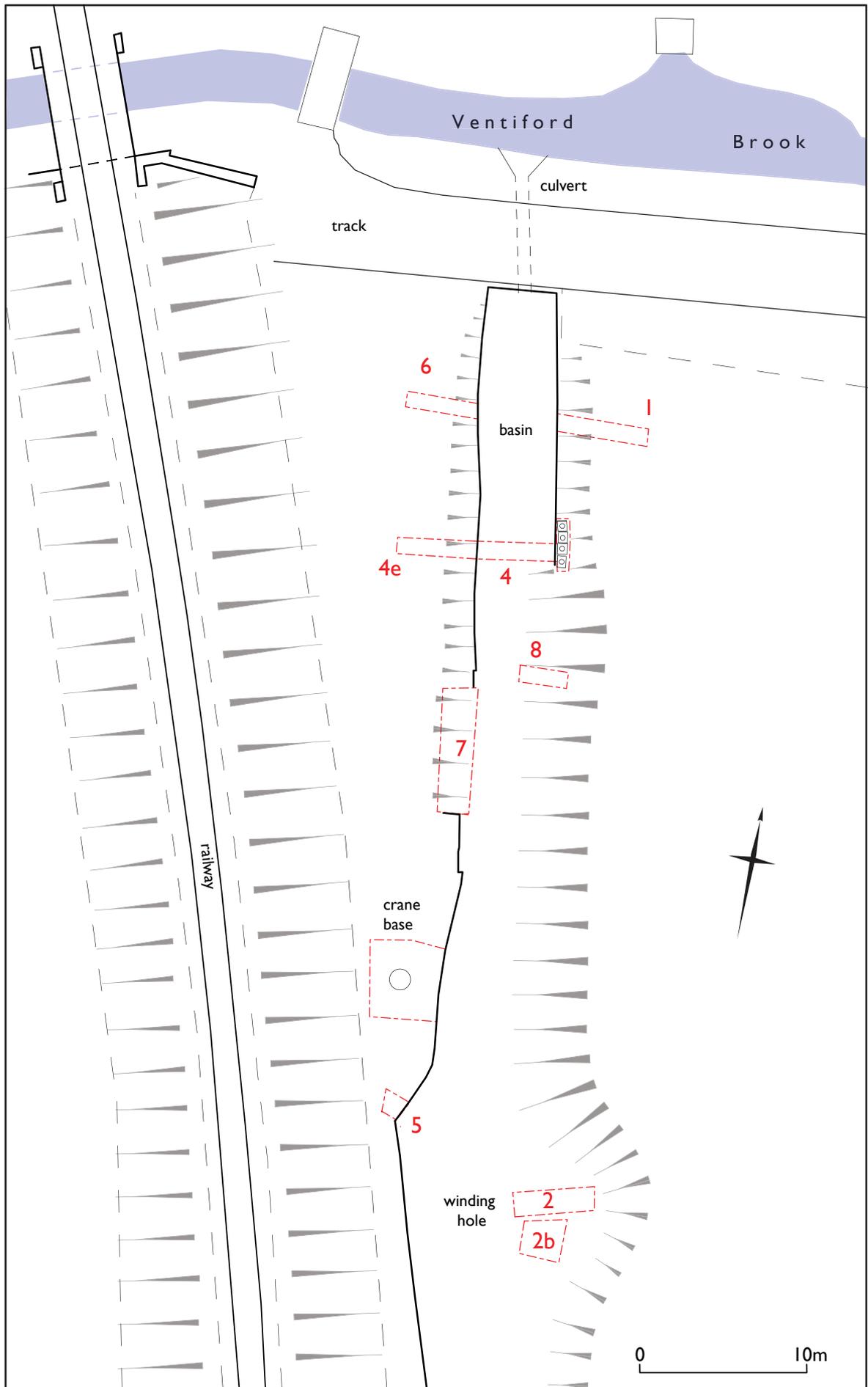


Fig 4 Plan of Ventiford Basin showing excavation trench locations. Based on survey data collected May 2014 with additional material (railway and fences) from a 1:500 scale plan by Paul Taper of SCT (2000).

and a little deeper the first timbers began to emerge. A second, larger, trench (T2b) was then started adjacent to the first, with a 0.5m balk left between the two, to allow access to excavate because the timbers could not be walked on.

Over the seven days of work, the timbers were revealed along with much iron work, mostly nails, some of which were still *in situ*, lodged in the timbers. Only the very bottom section of the vessel has survived. The timbers, although wet, were still firm, and although the surrounding silty-clay soil was not easily hand excavated, the moisture it contained did help keep the timbers damp. However, the unexpectedly sunny weather in May 2014, caused problems of rapid drying, so polythene sheets were necessary to cover part-excavated areas when not being worked on.

The excavation reached down to the ceiling² of the hold, revealing its planked structure, nailed to the floors³ with hand-made 5 or 6-inch iron nails. In places the ceiling was rotted away, at which points the floors, with lower sections of the frames still attached at the ends, had become exposed. Sections of the bottom planking were also visible.

A detailed, large-scale plan of the contents of both trenches was prepared at this stage. This can be added to in future seasons as more of the vessel becomes exposed. Apart from secondary finds of pottery, iron and glass in the upper soils of the trenches, the main artefact class was the ironwork which included nails, and larger bolts, also, a heavy bracket with two large lugs, the purpose of which is yet to be identified. Several kilos of iron was removed and retained from these two trenches.

A quantity of coal was retrieved from the northern end of the hold, including large lumps, suggesting coal was among the last cargoes this vessel transported before its abandonment.

Prior to backfilling, a membrane was placed in both trenches, which will ease the removal of soil prior to the next season of work.

TRENCH 3

It is known that a building once existed a few metres from the winding hole on the east side of the canal. It is marked on a map drawn in 1861 (DRO DP270), though it was probably built earlier, and is depicted as roofless on an OS map of 1889 (OS 1st edition 25-inch). The footprint of the building, much overgrown, is now barely visible as an earthwork, so a trench cut across it should reveal its outline and show how it was constructed.

After the removal of turf and topsoil, it became apparent very quickly that beneath the topsoil lay a thick covering of wet ball clay, which was almost impossible to excavate using conventional hand tools and, after concentrating on only a small test pit of 1m by 0.5m, the decision was made to abandon work in this area in the 2014 season. However, the work did reveal that the ball clay layer was over 0.5m thick, suggesting that the material was stored here and that this structure, whatever its form, was probably a clay cellar. A large quantity of terracotta tile fragments (Fig 7) was retrieved; these were from the roof of the structure at the time of its abandonment and final collapse.

TRENCH 4 (Figs 5 & 6)

This 1m-wide trench was cut across the width of the basin to provide a sectional view. The canal basin is today silted to within 30cm of the surface of the quayside so we were interested to know, firstly, how deep is the channel, and how the stone revetments, where surviving, were constructed? It is known that this section of the canal has suffered much disturbance in the past, being used as a vegetable garden in the 1980s, with regular interventions by a rotavator. The trench was excavated quite rapidly with the objective of revealing sectional views on all sides. Turf and topsoil were also stripped away from the stone of the adjoining quayside to reveal additional detail of the construction.

The sections on the north and south side revealed a remarkable depth of silt. The overall depth of the basin is 1.78m but the depth of silt is 1.28m. Thin horizontal lenses of preserved leaf mould at 1.2m and 1.5m deep, have



Fig 5 Trench 4 showing the well-constructed revetment on the western quayside.



Fig 6 Copings with central holes on the eastern quayside.

a layer of silt between them, suggesting a phased natural silting, with periods of still water, punctuated by massive build ups of silt during flooding.

The bottom of the trench had a steady ingress of groundwater and only a small portion, on the western end, was excavated to full depth. This revealed that the underlying natural ground is made up of river gravel; no trace of a puddle-clay floor was observed.

The stone quayside revetments on the west and eastern sides of the basin are constructed in two different styles. That on the west (Fig 5), is built from dimensioned and dressed blocks of granite, neatly laid with a slight batter. The capstones that form the edge of the quay are particularly large at approximately c.0.5m by 1m long.

On the east side, randomly shaped granite has been used and stacked, rather crudely, to form the revetment. The copings along the section exposed comprise four pieces of squared granite with sides between 0.6m and 0.75m long and up to 0.3m thick. Three have dressed upper faces (the fourth may be facing down) and all have a central hole of 0.23-0.25m diameter, with a shallow rebate around the circumference (Fig 6).

These stones almost certainly had their origin at Haytor Quarry, and were probably cut originally for use as the hatches for coal chutes of a type popular in Victorian cities, especially London. A circular cast-iron cover, usually highly decorated, would sit in the flanged hole. Alternatively, they may have been intended for use as drain openings with a circular iron grate; examples of the latter may be seen at Stover House.

TRENCH 4 (Extension)

This trench was a continuation of Trench 4 on the western side of the canal basin, designed to examine the working area of the quayside. A rough rubble floor was exposed containing much micaceous hematite, also some coal.

TRENCH 5

A small area to the south of the crane base was explored by simply removing topsoil. The exposed area was covered in a layer of flint cobbles, which in part rested on the granite slabs of the quayside. A large quantity of micaceous hematite was interspersed with the cobbles.

TRENCH 6

This trench was designed to examine the nature of the working area on the western quayside. Not far beneath the turf and topsoil, a gravelly surface was exposed, similar to that found in Trench 1, and suggestive of sustained human activity, causing gravel and other materials to be compacted over time to form a floor. Nearer the edge of the quay, however, a layer of compacted micaceous hematite was exposed.

TRENCH 7

Although the majority of the western quayside is revetted with granite, there is a short section of 7.6m long, where the stone appears to be missing. A trench was started to establish whether the stone had been robbed or had never been in place, and if so why.

The bank at this point slopes into the basin and after removal of turf and topsoil we would have expected signs of robbing, had that been the fate of the quayside stones. However, instead, a sloping surface was exposed which showed no sign of disturbance over most of its length and contained assemblages of flint nodules (Fig 8) and limestone pieces, apparent remnants of deliberately separate piles of these different types of stone. Individual examples of both types were also scattered over the surface. It is likely that minerals like these made up the cargoes transported by the barges and these represent the residue.

No sign of a granite quayside was noted, although the trench was only sunk to a little over 0.5m. There is, therefore, a possibility that this section of the quay was revetted with timber rather than stone. This possibility will be explored next season by excavating a deep trench within the basin, adjacent to the quayside.

TRENCH 8

This trench was located on the eastern side of the basin, where no stone revetment is currently visible, to test why the stone was absent. The soil, was mid-brown and sandy, and appears to have been mostly silt. A number of artefacts and pieces of coal retrieved from this context, confirm that this material is fill rather than natural. More work is needed on this section of the bank to establish the profile of the canal on the eastern side.

FINDS

Ceramics and glass

Over 100 artefacts were catalogued and retained. This included, pottery, china, ironwork and glass. However, it was clear from its position within the strata, that the great majority of the ceramics and glass has been deposited within the past 100 years or so, as a result of dumping, long after the site ceased to function as a canal basin; much of it is even more recent. Among this assemblage was a number of sherds of J P Hartley's conserve jars and two (broken) codd-neck bottles embossed with 'Frank Heppell Upton Vale Torquay'. The presence of fine china and wine bottle sherds confirm that this material was imported to the site as rubbish.

Tiles – A large assemblage of terracotta roof tiles was retrieved from Trench 3, assumed to be from the roof of the building that formerly stood to the east of the winding hole. Each tile was impressed with the word 'Colthurst & Co 3 Patent'. This was a Bridgwater company who were making tiles of this type from about the



Fig 7 Fragment of a roof tile. One of many found in Trench 3.



Fig 8 Assemblage of flint cobbles found in Trench 7.

1840s. Their catalogue shows the tile type as single Roman design. Although this might suggest an approximate construction date for the building in the 1840-50s, it could also represent a re-roofing operation of that date on an already standing building.

Minerals

More significant among the finds is a number of mineral samples retrieved from reliable contexts around the site, which provide invaluable clues about the materials and cargoes that passed through Ventiford in both directions.

Coal – With the exception of Trenches 3 and 4, coal was found in every trench, amounting to several kilos. This would have been a major back-haul cargo for the canal, importing coal, via Teignmouth, as a fuel for domestic and industrial use in the Highweek, Chudleigh and Bovey Tracey districts, and probably beyond. A map of the area, dated 1860, shows a number of coal stores along the canal and the Whitelake Channel, with several near the clay cellars at Teign Bridge (DRO DP270).

Flint – A large quantity of abraded flint nodules was found in trenches on the western quayside, specifically Trenches 5 and 7. The nodules were of a uniform size, about that of a medium potato, and were found in assemblages at two points along the quay, representing remnants of heaps.

Although flint occurs locally, in the Haldon Hills and in the so-called Aller Gravels, found around Kingsteignton, nodules with abraded cortex are uncommon in this district and these appear to be imports, probably originating from a beach.

It is known that crushed and calcined flint was used as an ingredient of certain types of ceramics, and that the Folly Potteries at Bovey Tracey consumed large quantities of the material. In 1850, the favoured sources for this material were Shoreham in Sussex and Beer in West Devon (*Western Times* 19-Jan-1850). Later documentary evidence comes from a period after the Ventiford section of the canal became disused; in the 1880s, for example, shipping records for Teignmouth show that flint from Dieppe, in France, was imported by the 'Bury [sic] Pottery Company' (*Western Times* 4-Jun-1889), and in 1871 it was reported that flint for the Bovey Potteries was still being sourced from Beer (*The Graphic* 9-Dec-1871).

The finds of flint at Ventiford might suggest that flint was passing through the place before the railway was built in 1862, because one of the flint piles revealed, in Trench 5, had been overlain by part of the Moretonhampstead railway embankment, which was built in that year.

Another possible explanation for the presence of flint cobbles may be that parts of the quayside had cobbled surfaces and this needs to be explored in a further season of work.

Lithological analysis of this material may be necessary to help identify the source of this flint before a definitive statement about its source and association with the canal can be made. Further discoveries in future seasons will help to build on the data we have.

Limestone – One assemblage and several scattered pieces of a white limestone, uniform in size, were recorded along the quayside. The assemblage is likely to represent the remnants of a heap of this material. The form of the deposit, and the fact that there is no natural source of this mineral in the immediate locality, suggests that it was imported. Confirmation of this idea must for now await lithological examination of the samples.

Limestone was used widely in the 18th and 19th century to produce quicklime, as a fertiliser and a mortar for building. The process to convert limestone into quicklime usually occurred near its source and it is unlikely that the unprocessed stone would be transported on the canal, for reasons of economy. Lime production was well established nearby in Chudleigh, Highweek, Bickington, Brimley and elsewhere. It is possible therefore that the pieces found at Ventiford were also bound for the potteries at Bovey Tracey, perhaps to be used in glazes. However, these samples will need to be analyzed to establish whether they are suitable for this purpose or if some other explanation for the presence of this material can be found.

Iron Ore – Several lumps of what is probably iron ore, were retrieved from various trenches. However, it was anticipated that this material would be far more common than the finds have, so far, revealed. It is known that an iron mining company occupied a small building, and weighing house, adjacent to Ventiford in the early 1860s (DRO DP270) and Alfred Lyons, an Ilington businessman (probably the owner of the same mine), recorded in his diary having iron ore stored beside the canal in 1862.

Micaceous hematite (shiny ore) – This was by far the most abundant imported material found at Ventiford, occurring in several of the trenches. This specialist and valuable form of iron was mined extensively in the Wray Valley between Bovey Tracey and Lustleigh, but also in the Hennock area.

Early uses for micaceous hematite include ‘pounce’ for drying ink on hand written documents; it was marketed as Devon writing sand for this purpose. It has also been used as a substitute for graphite, used in pottery glaze, and mixed with graphite to form black lead. Its most widespread use in later years was as an additive in anti-corrosion paints. It is known that the industry was in existence by at least 1797 (Brooks 2004, I), if not earlier, and the last mine to work this ore, Great Rock, was still working in 1969 (*ibid* iii).

Samples of the ore retrieved included fine particle sands, some of which is assumed to be dressed ore, spilled in transit. In places around the quayside, especially on the western side, this formed strata of approximately 30mm thick. There was also many lumps of low-grade unprocessed ore at the site (Fig 9). The presence of this unprocessed material is something of a puzzle, as this type of ore was always dressed at the mine site to produce a usable commodity. Why it was moved in this raw state remains to be answered.

Movement of this material on the canal was recorded in 1854, when it was stated that the Hennock Iron Mine had 300 tons stored at ‘Teigngrace Canal’ (*Mining Journal* 10-Jun-1854, 387).

Discussion

The first season of excavation on the Stover Canal has proved highly productive. Some of our research questions have been answered in full, and some, partly so; new questions have also arisen as a result of the work. All will require at least one further season, complemented by more documentary research, for us to gain as full a picture as possible. The opportunity to excavate the barge has perhaps produced the most significant result and, together with further work on this hulk, will enable a partial reconstruction of a 19th-century Stover Canal barge.

We have made a start on understanding the construction of the quayside stonework, and the strong associations



Fig 9 Low grade, unprocessed micaceous hematite ore.

between the canal, Haytor Quarries and the granite tramway. Evidence of cargoes, other than clay and granite, are beginning to be revealed, making stronger factual links between this unique transport system and the industries and communities it served. The significance of the canal and tramway was never in question but this work is helping to further emphasise the importance of this set of heritage assets within their 18th/19th century context and that of the other industrial evidence of the region.

The 2014 excavation enabled at least 20 of the volunteers to take part in an archaeological excavation for the first time, introducing them to on-site procedures, digging techniques and, in some cases, site drawing and survey. Hopefully, some will wish to return for future seasons.

Future research

Following on from the success of 2014, it is intended that there will be another season at Ventiford in 2015. This will enable probable completion of the barge excavation and further exploration of the quayside. Volunteers returning to the site will be able to develop their skills and build on their techniques.

Documentary research will also continue to reveal additional details of the canal, its cargoes and its people.

This interim document has been produced specifically to report on and summarize the findings of the 2014 season. Little analysis of the findings has as yet taken place but it is intended that a more complete report, embracing all aspects of the research, will be produced after the completion of future seasons of excavation and following a landscape survey of the canal and its environs.



Fig 10 Site clearance, 25 Jan 2014.



Fig 11 Work in progress in the canal basin, May 2014.



Fig 12 The barge excavation, early stages.



Fig 13 Last day barbecue for volunteers and friends.

The Digging Team

The excavation at Stover Canal has been designed to provide opportunities for local people and members of heritage amenity groups to play a full part in the work. Volunteers who participated were recruited from the Stover Canal Trust, Bovey Tracey Heritage Group, Yarners History Hunters, Devon Archaeological Society.

The diggers were Richard Ball, Rachel Banyard, Frances Billinge, Malcolm Billinge, Lucy Bishop, Matt Bishop, Elizabeth Brooks, Robert Brotherstone, Linda Findlay, Jane Gozzi, Pauline Harrup, John Hayward, Sheryl Healey, Peter Jackson, Reg Lander, Christine Martin, Ken McGuire, Jenny Moon, Linda Proctor, John Read, Di Smurthwaite, Mary Terry, Graham Walker, Tess Walker, Pete Wade, Deborah Welland, Wendy Yates.

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Cakes were frequently contributed by members of the digging team for consumption by colleagues, and much appreciated by all present, and a very fine barbecue was laid on at the end of the dig by SCT members, led by George Whitehead and Di Smurthwaite.

Publicity

The *Mid Devon Advertiser* (23-May-2014, 30-31) produced an impressive double page spread on the dig. Many passersby along the footpath took an interest in the work and personnel were available to answer questions and guide visitors around the site if necessary. Summary reports have been published in the Stover Canal Trust *Newsletter* (Autumn 2014, 8-12) and Devon Archaeological Society (Sept 2014, 4) *Newsletter*. A digger's eye view (by Di Smurthwaite) was included in *Navvies* (Aug-Sep 2014, 25-7), the newsletter of the Waterways Recovery Group.

Notes

1. In the original Project Design of 1999, drafted at the formation of the SCS, six sites with archaeological potential were identified, and flagged for investigation before restoration works could commence. Of these, three will certainly require excavation: Teignbridge Lock – a timber/turf lock; Ventiford Basin and a barge hulk; a second barge hulk above Teigngrace (Newman 1999 and 2013)
2. On a barge, the term 'ceiling' refers to the bottom of the hold.
3. The 'floors' are the horizontal spars which extend across the barge and support the ceiling. The bottom planking is fixed to the underside of the floors.

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