

AN INDUSTRIAL VILLAGE

Man should be prouder of having invented the hammer and nail, than of having created masterpieces of imitation."

Georg Hegel 1770-1831

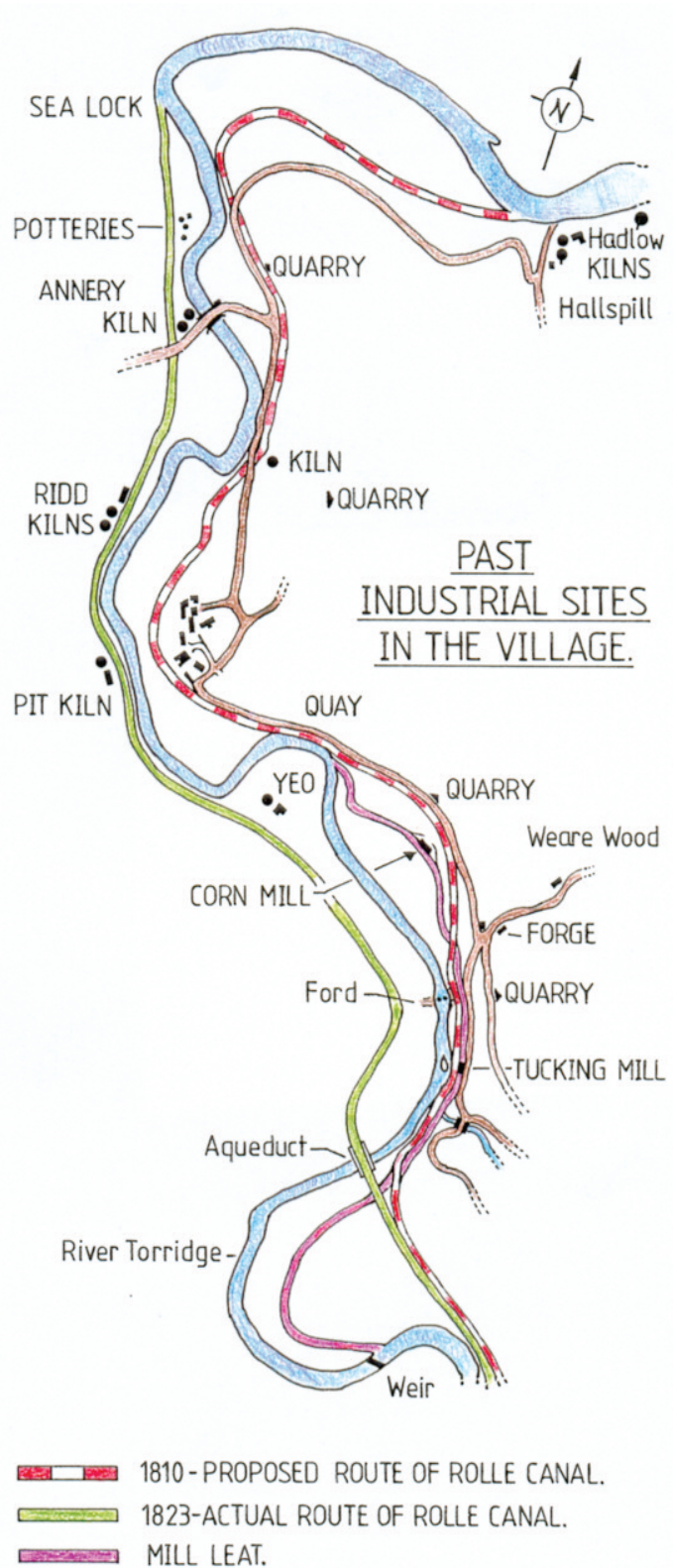
It is somewhat difficult today in the 21ST Century to think of Weare Giffard as any- thing but a peaceful, beautiful and somewhat remote village, lying quietly on the banks of the tidal River Torridge.

Yet in the very words "tidal" and "river" lie two clues to a very different past - an industrial past, of noise and smoke; of machines and quays; of inclined planes and canals; of ships and trains.

We devote this section of our story to our forefathers who recognised the value of a point on the river that would take sailing vessels out to sea; that via its water could lift barges inland; and via its contours could build railways.

After reading this story, we feel you will agree, that once, Weare Giffard was indeed "an industrial and industrious village".

Let us take a journey around this industrial area, where Sea Lock joined the river Torridge at the entrance to the Rolle Canal, on past the potteries, Annery Kiln and upstream where there were Quarries, the Corn Mill and on to the Tucking Mill across the mill leat, ending with the village carpenter and blacksmiths.



THE SHIPYARD:- SEA LOCK

*"Give a man a horse he can ride
Give a man a boat he can sail"*

(James Thompson)

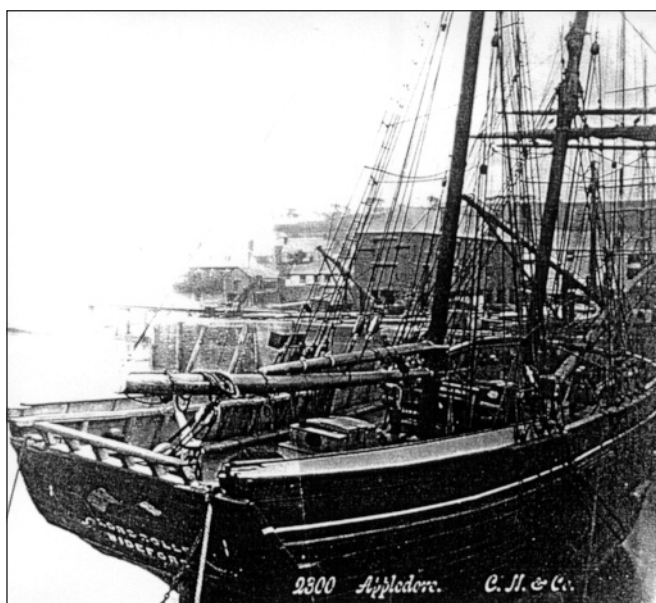
North west of the present lime kiln at Annery Kiln, there was a shipyard at the far end of a field, between the Rolle Canal and the Tarka Trail. A large bend in the river formed a superb natural launching basin some two miles above Bideford Bridge. The yard was known as Sea Lock, constructed between 1823-26 to the design of James Green who was the engineer in charge of the construction of the canal for Lord Rolle.

Grahame Farr writes in 'Shipbuilding of North Devon' that between 1827-30 five vessels were built by the master shipbuilder William Hutchings. The first of these ships was a brig of 92 tons, "The Louisa", the Christian name of Lady Rolle. The local press attributed her as *"laid down by Mr. Chapman whose modelling has always been esteemed"*. Both banks of the river were thronged with people to celebrate her launch, but

her name was soon changed to "The Lady Rolle" - perhaps "Louisa" was considered a little too intimate a name to be bandied around! But there is a long-standing seafaring tradition that it is unlucky to change the name of a ship, and thirty years later "Lady Rolle" was lost at sea with all hands. The "Lord Rolle" at 105 tons was the fifth vessel launched at the yard.

The ships were registered in the name of William Tardrew of Annery House, he being a large shareholder in the Rolle Canal Company. The vessels built at Sea Lock were mostly small coastal ships intended to carry cargoes of coal and limestone from South Wales, but licences were granted later to allow the Rolle Canal Company vessels to trade with Spain, Portugal and the Baltic in all manner of goods. The wharf and the canal were very busy in 1835. Thomas Saunders built the "Margaret", 139 tons and she sailed as far afield as North America, the Mediterranean and the West Indies.

The largest ship built by the Rolle Canal Company in 1869 was the "Sedwell Jane" a three masted schooner of 201 tons. She was built to deck level only and taken through Bideford Bridge, with only one-and-a-half inches to spare, to quay-side where the masts were stepped-in. She voyaged between Cardiff, Rio Grande and Bristol and was re-registered in Australia in 1892. She, with her cargo of 30tons of flour, was lost in a gale whilst at anchor in Algoa Bay, South Africa in 1893.



"The Lord Rolle"

The Rolle Canal Company closed in 1870 but ship building continued under that companies' name until 1875. Fourteen registered ships were built on the site over a period of 44 years solely for the operators of the Rolle Canal Company.

Moored in the canal basin awaiting restoration is the last example of a wooden North Devon gravel barge, the "Advance", which used to work in the Taw/Torridge estuary. The lowest portion of the field, below river level, is

now part of a Saltmarsh Habitat Scheme started in 2000. Two of its ditches, one which encloses a small 'island' known as Goose Island form parish boundaries, and so the field lies within 3 parishes - Monkleigh, Landcross and Weare Giffard.

Sources of information:-

North Devon Maritime Museum Archives.

The Ships of Sea Lock by Allan Bissett.
Ship Building in North Devon by Graham Farr.

