



Editorial

Paul Huxtable

So the newsletter is a bit thin this month. Nevertheless, in a case of quality over quantity, Adam has again provided a summary of club activity in the Chronicle on page 7. That's where the good news ends. Having had an excess of excellent articles in previous month, in the absence of anything else to include, I panicked and wrote an unfinished article about the history of Exeter Canal on page 3. If that doesn't encourage a few people to contribute something worth reading, nothing will.

Did You Know?



Before **water** was invented, people had to **carry** their boats around!

Therefore, if

- (a) You have anything to say that might be of interest to other paddlers (I know people in the club have been paddling in Greece as well as the Arctic) please send an article and some photos. We'd love to hear more
- (b) If you are relatively new member please send us a sentence or two to say hello. You could also consider sending a photograph.

As always, comments, questions, material to include in future editions:
newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk.



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Rapid reads

Annual General Meeting Notice

Annual General Meeting

Port of Plymouth Canoe Association

SAVE THE DATE

The George Inn, Plympton.
All members welcome.

30
Oct
2025



Exeter Ship Canal

Paul Hewson



Bridge on Clapperbrook Lane

In the absence of much material to include in this month's newsletter, I panicked and decided to offload a brain dump about Exeter Canal. I had been meaning to write this up as a proper article one day, as there are few details I would have preferred to check further. So I'll just have to speculate about the gaps. I do know nowadays you can check all this stuff on the Internet but I don't enjoy that as much as I do going to the library.

I've had a lot of fun paddling Exeter Canal / one of the Exe Loops when my children were small. I've suddenly rediscovered this resource given the need to keep fit without my right knee being asked to do very much. There are a couple of Exe "loops"; they may not be the most exciting paddling around but given some of the alternatives in Exeter include Ikea I would say they are a pretty handy resource. There are a variety of options for parking;



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unfortunately, some so-called genius invented the mobile phone payment app, consequently the wasteland at the end of Clapperbook Lane (Bromhams Farm Car Park) which used to be free now has a sign informing you to pay by app. The first two hours are free which has the advantage of making you paddle very fast and the disadvantage of meaning you need a phone with the right app to “buy” the free parking. If you didn’t know, because Devon County Council and Exeter City Council have car parks in Exeter you need two apps for these, and I can never remember which works where. If that hasn’t sold the idea of a canal paddle, I just need to mention that there is a short loop which lets you turn round at the very attractively named “Sewage Works” in Countess Wear. However, the long loop (and there are actually two of these) sees you carrying on into the Exe Estuary and turning back either at Topsham Lock Cottage or you can continue along the full extension and turn back at the Turf Locks (this is an Inn). There are plenty of places along the way to bribe bored teenagers with pub grub and all in all it’s a reasonably pleasant paddle.



The Double Locks Complex

Anyway, that’s the tourist promotion done, I really wanted to write about the history of the Canal. Unless you count some Roman river-straightening, Exeter Canal is the oldest

in the UK. But for me, the most interesting part of the history was joining some dots. In reading around Dartmoor history I’d heard a lot about Isabel de Fortibus (1237-1293), aka Isabel de Forz (eldest daughter of Baldwin de Redvers). It may or may not be a plotline that Isabel/Elizabeth are different ways of spelling the same name (depending which language you wish to reference). It turns out this very significant, powerful woman in 13th-Century England (one of the richest women in England at the time, with substantial landholdings and influence) is none other than the Countess Wear. That’s the Countess Wear of the sewage works I mentioned before, as well as the Countess Wear of the recently widened swing bridge on the A379 going into Exeter and the part of Exeter called Countess Wear. Some accounts blame her weir for the need to have a canal to Exeter.



This is where I’d meant to do a little more research before writing. There is a widely disbelieved tradition that Isabel de Forz was responsible for the planting (or gifting) of Wistman’s Wood (who said Spin Doctors were a new invention). What she definitely did was



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“confirm” the gift of a lot of land (including Buckland Monachorum and Bickleigh) to Buckland Abbey. So this is the first of my loose ends; why does anyone care that she “confirmed” the gift of land. Her Aunt apparently made the gift. Why do writers only care about the confirmation? Maybe her Aunt was a drunk and the Monks at Buckland couldn’t rely on their income until they got written confirmation, which they eventually got from a more sober Isabel. I’d really love to know what all that’s about.

The important thing for the canal story is that Isabel built the lower weir at Exeter that bears her name. Well, that’s historian speak, isn’t it? I doubt she lifted a finger. I suspect she had people do the work for her. Anyway, it’s having that kind of power that gets you in the history books. Well, a little bit in the history books, buried deep amongst obscure details. Which is a pity. While there is a Countess Wear Hotel, it’s only really named that way because it’s in a place called Countess Wear. Wouldn’t it be nice if there were a few more Hotels/Inns/Pubs named after this remarkable woman. For example, there might be a few people questioning the wisdom of naming their pub the “Duke of York” right now; maybe they should read up more on Countess Wear/Isabel de Forz. Anyway, I digress. According to my notes, it’s not clear when the weir was built exactly. I think I’ve written 1272 or 1284 as possible dates (maybe I should lay off the falling-down water myself before visiting the library). Also, it’s not completely clear why she built (commissioned) the weir; whether she

needed to power watermills, or to control fish/fishing rights, or even whether she was powerful enough to control shipping access to Exeter. Certainly, blocking Exeter from the sea would favour Topsham, and she had interests in Topsham. The thing is, I have a note that suggests the Weir was built with a 30-foot gap left for boats to pass, and that this was later closed by her successor. So perhaps we shouldn’t be blaming her for the need for Exeter Canal any more than crediting her for Wistman’s Wood.

Anyway, the people in Exeter are nothing if not quick to identify and solve problems, so given an annoying weir that was definitely there by the end of the 13th century they immediately petitioned Queen Elizabeth I for a Canal (yes, that Queen Elizabeth, the one from the 16th Century; maybe Isabel/Elizabeth de Fortibus had left such an impression they waited until they could contact someone else in power called Isabel/Elizabeth¹). The responsible engineer was John Trew (he now has a weir in Exeter named after him, the first you meet when following the Exe out from Exeter Quay). It took three years to build from 1563–1566 and featured pound locks; a particularly hot 16th Century high tech solution that made controlled navigation possible unlike earlier flash locks (a far more exciting and worthwhile tech innovation than, say, smartphone apps that make it marginally more convenient for you to pay for car parking and ridiculously more convenient for councils to put up signs in places with no power or internet obliging you to pay for parking). This is still a remarkable

¹If you’re from Plymouth and wondering why they left it so long all I can say is how long did Argyle leave Wayne Rooney in charge when it was obvious to everyone he was going to get them relegated - it felt like the same length of time to me



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canal. The big trend for canal building in Britain didn't occur until around 1760 to 1830.

The canal was extended in 1677 enhancing its capacity. Now, herein lies another story that bothers me. In 1698-1701 yet another enlargement was planned, but the contractor ran away with the money. All I have in my notes is that the citizen's of Exeter "rallied together". Now I don't know about you, but when some ne'er-do-well runs off with my money, "rallying round" isn't exactly my first priority. Surely the "citizen's of Exeter" tried to do something about their money beyond "rallying around". Mind you, it is possible these quick and decisive Exeter folk felt they needed another couple of centuries to organise a posse and the first world war got in the way? So this is another detail I'd wanted to check; surely somebody tried to recover the money? We know they didn't get the money back, which implies something embarrassing happened. Now, unless human nature has changed, that's all the more reason it would have been recorded. Maybe not in a formal history, but at least in a song or poem. Anyway, whatever happened, the canal did get extended. The final extension was built in 1827 which takes in Turf locks. Nowadays this is a rather nice pub, but they didn't build the extension for 21st Century tourists, the real reason was a little more mundane, it provided access to the canal even at low tide.

In 1973 the canal closed for commercial traffic.

It is still navigable to sea going traffic. There are people who over-winter their boats in Exeter Quay and a couple of times a year the council open all the bridges/use the locks as a merry convoy of yachts makes the trip (we paddled alongside it one year).

There's a video here on the history of the canal: <https://youtu.be/dznzShfndN4>

One interesting thing you often see is that because Exeter Canoe Club are notable for kayak and canoe racing, you see a lot of kayak and canoe racers training on the canal (as well as rowing boats and "first time ever in a hired canoe" paddlers). However, Kayak racers use a very distinct stroke which is interesting to watch.

As I say, much better than a trip to Ikea, and, wherever you start, you only need a little bit of portage between canal and river from Clapperbrook Lane to the Exe to make a loop (the tide can be too low in the Exe to make this comfortable, but that's another story).





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Creek Chronicle

Adam Coulson

Wet Training Events

- Tuesday 2nd September Clive lead 9 paddlers on an Intro+ session
- Tuesday 2nd September Terry took four paddlers on an introduction to Sea Kayaking session



- Tuesday 9th September. Although the rec paddle was cancelled Terry lead an Explore session.
- Tuesday 9th September Similarly, Andy took four on an Intro plus session



- Tuesday 16th September Clive says there were just 2 of us on the intro plus session. We wandered over to the Barbican and spent the evening practising forward paddling. It's a small world. I had never met Lee before, but it transpired that I **knew his parents**.
- Tuesday 16th September Terry led an Explore session



- Tuesday 23rd September The last outdoor evening training session of the year; Adam laid on an alternative to the recreational paddle (albeit slightly less popular) and a group of four of us

practised some more advanced Sea Kayak Safety and Rescue skills. Well done Haidee and Vicki on being both enthusiastic and successful in a Hand of God rescue of an unconscious paddler; Scoop rescue of an injured paddler; Emptying of a flooded hatch; Mocked up boat repair on the water; Technical Landing, stepping out; Landing and launching by swimming. It was great fun, and we could also watch the sunset!

Warm Wet Training Events

- Tuesday 30th September Pool Session

Wet Recreational Events

- Tuesday 2nd September Andy led four on a recreational paddle
- Friday 5th September Brim led four on a recreational paddle
- 6th September Sea Kayak paddle cancelled due to the wweather
- 6th Septmber Short recreational paddle cancelled due the weather.



- 9th September Recreational paddle cancelled
- 12th September Friday paddle cancelled



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- 13th September Recreational paddle cancelled



- 16th September Nigel led fourteen paddlers on a recreational paddle
- Friday 19th September Brim led the recreational paddle
- Saturday 20th September Andy led the recreational paddle, and I think he must have done something to upset the gods who really turned against him (with apologies to monotheists). Original plan was for Penlee Point and a nice blow back. The first challenge was staying out of the way of the start of a yacht race off Mountbatten breakwater. There were a lot of claxens! Crossing to Drake's Island it was a little windy but we pressed on towards Picklecombe. Some of us put our noses out beyond Lady Emma's Cottage but it soon became apparent that there was no way the group were going to be crossing Cawsand Bay into the wind. So onto Plan B which was to paddle up towards Millbrook for a spot of lunch. However, after a relatively short distance (at least out of the wind) we ran out of water instead, it being low water on Spring tides around the equinox. So, plan C and we returned to the Mount Edgecombe Beach for lunch, in some torrential rain. Suitably fortified by a soggy lunch we crossed back to Devil's Point and had a slightly challenging paddle in a significant wind and now some swell along the Hoe. It was fun for some but a

few gritted teeth and white knuckles for others. Finally, we duelled with returning Phantom sailors who were going at some speed, to cross back to Mountbatten. Andy leadership skills were proved today! p.s., Just in case you were wondering, a phantom sailor is not a character from the Pirates of the Caribbean but rather a person sailing a phantom dinghy. Sorry, to be clear that's a Phantom Class Dinghy.



- 23rd September The last official Tuesday evening recreational paddle of the season was a warm sunny evening with a glorious sunset. Pete must have pleased a higher authority to have arranged such a perfect evening and a group of 18 "stayed out late" to enjoy the spectacle. Can you identify the silhouette? (Answers on a postcard to the editor)



- 27th September Seven club paddlers led by Clive headed out towards Bovisand into the S breeze and a bit of swell. Clive's plan was to paddle to the Renney Rocks, which we achieved after a bit of paddling and a fair bit of bouncing



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around. A leisurely lunch at the rocks. The return was even bouncier but very quick with the wind assisting. A very enjoyable paddle and the rain stayed away.

Dry Events

- Wednesday 10th September Committee Meeting



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The PPCA Committee

PPCA is a friendly Club, and we'd love to hear from you! The Club is run by a committee of unpaid volunteers, most of which work full-time. Contact details are listed below. For non-urgent enquiries, please email the person you require rather than telephoning.

If you are new to paddlesport or thinking of taking it up then please contact our Intro Coordinator who can point you in the right direction. Our Intro Coordinator can also answer any questions you may have about our Club, courses on offer etc, drop them an email at intro@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk

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If you send an email and don't receive a reply, please could you try sending it again, but type the email address in manually. ². Please type in

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