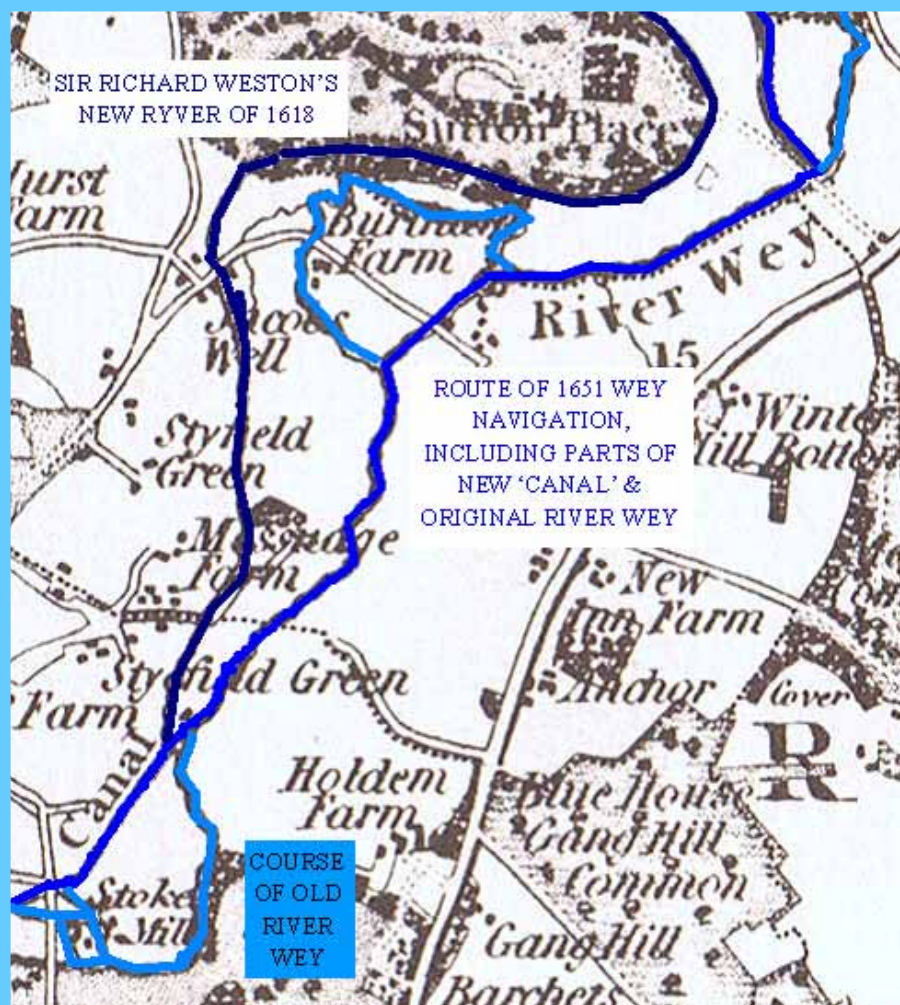


SIR RICHARD WESTON SHOWS THE WEY

Iain Wakeford 2014



Weston's man-made waterway left the River Wey at Stoke and headed north towards Jacobs Well, before turning east to skirt the hill of the Sutton Place estate.

took its water from the River Wey (just like the streams that flowed from the Duke of Bridgwater's mines supplied his 'revolutionary' canal). The only difference it seems is that Sir Richard didn't make so much of a fuss about it and no 'New Ryver Mania' was recorded!

The original Stoke Lock, built in 1618, was the first pound lock to be built in this country.

Most history books will tell you that the Bridgwater Canal, built in 1761, was the first canal in this country, but if by 'canal' you mean 'a man-made waterway used for navigation', then canals were in use in this country in Roman times!

They had no locks however, so you could argue that they were not 'true' canals (as we now know them), but if it is a man-made lock, that makes a man-made waterway, then simple 'flash-locks' were in use in this country since Medieval times. The Thames was certainly navigable in places in the early 13th century.

These locks were little more than wooden dams that when removed caused a 'flash' of water to run downstream, allowing boats to ride the rapids or be dragged up the more even fall of water. It was not ideal for navigation, but it was better than nothing.

It was the introduction of 'pound-locks' from the continent in the 17th century that more than anything helped to make rivers more navigable. A 'pound-lock' gets its name from the old word for an enclosed area – like the village 'pound' where stray-animals were kept. With two sets of gates enclosing a small section of water, the water was better controlled and the boats could easily be carried up (or down) quite large falls.

So where was the first pound lock built in this country? The answer is on the River Wey at Stoke Lock where Sir Richard Weston (great-grandson of Sir Francis Weston – the gentleman who lost his head over Anne Bolyen) constructed in 1618 what he called his 'New Ryver' for two or three miles through the grounds of Sutton Place.

Of course you could argue that Sir Richard's 'New Ryver' was obviously a *river* and not a *canal*, but it was entirely man-made and only

Another reason why Weston doesn't get the credit he deserves is that his canal and the pound lock at Stoke, were not originally for navigation or for public use. Sir Richard was a great agricultural improver. He travelled the continent looking for new ideas to improve his crops and whilst in Holland he saw how they flooded their fields in early spring to protect them from frost. But the Dutch also used their waterways for navigation, and so in the 1620's Sir Richard began negotiating with other landowners along the River Wey, with the idea of extending his new river to the Thames.

His work meant that he was appointed to a Royal Commission set up in 1635 to look into the navigation scheme, but when the Civil War broke out Sir Richard (being a Catholic and Royalist), had to flee the country and the idea of building the waterway was put on hold. It was not forgotten, however, and in 1651 (in the name of the Corporation of Guildford) an Act was passed allowing the construction of the Wey Navigation.

Whilst in exile, Sir Richard had contacted Major James Pitson who promoted the scheme on his behalf. He secured a pardon for Sir Richard and in August 1651 work began on creating what was to become the Wey Navigation. Weston put up half of the £6,000 needed for the project, and Major Pitson and two others (Richard Darnelly and Richard Scotcher), invested £1,000 each.

From later accounts it seems that Major Pitson was not always as honest as he could have been. Within a couple of weeks of all four signing the agreement Pitson had made secret arrangements with Sir Richard for the 'contract'

to buy land and build wharves etc.

Sir Richard paid him £1,000 of the shareholders money for the work, but it appears that he spent only a fraction of that (pocketing the rest as 'profit')! Meanwhile the cost of other work had increased. Sir Richard spent a further £4,000 of his own money on the scheme, as well as promising another £1,000 to Pitson and the other shareholders. He also used at least £2,000's worth of timber from his own estate and by the time he died on the 7th May 1652, only ten of the fifteen miles of the new man-made waterway had been completed - largely at his own expense.

His son George had no choice but to continue with the scheme. In November 1652, when the Navigation was within a mile of reaching the Thames, the family debts had increased to such an extent that George Weston was arrested and put in prison. It was left to Scotcher and Pitson to complete the work - with Scotcher making the payments and Pitson taking the credit!

The work was completed, of course, although not necessarily to as good a standard as one might like. Being one of the first man-made waterways, there were no experienced 'navvies' to construct it, and local labourers and farmers appear to have been employed on the work. The result was that within a few years the Navigation was experiencing all sorts of problems, not least because of Major Pitson's accounting practices – but that is another story (as we shall find out next week).

Despite the problems over its construction, and the huge losses for the original shareholders (Pitson excluded), the waterway was a commercial success, if not a financial one.

By the early 18th century the waterway was in the hands of two families - the Langtons of Lincolnshire, and the Earl of Portmore and his

family, who lived at Weybridge. The two families were closely connected. In 1770 William Charles Colyear, the son of the 2nd Earl of Portmore, married Lady Mary Leslie, the daughter of the Earl of Rothes, whose widowed mother was married to Bennett Langton.

By 1796 there were only two trustees, but new trustees were soon appointed including the Rt. Hon. William Leslie (brother-in-law of the 3rd Earl of Portmore), the Duke of Ancaster (father-in-law to the 3rd Earl of Portmore), Sir John Frederick (of Burwood Park, Hersham), and George John, Earl of Spencer.

In 1822 the 3rd Earl of Portmore died and the title passed to his son, but because of a family quarrel he did not inherit his father's property

and the Earl's estate passed to a nephew, James Colyear Dawkins.

By 1828 the only surviving trustee was the Earl of Spencer and new trustees needed to be appointed. Viscount Althorp, the Earl's son, was appointed one of the trustees, along with Sir Richard Frederick (the son of Sir John Frederick), and Charles Mainwaring, Thomas Chaplin and Charles Chaplin. It was at about this time that William Stevens was appointed a wharfinger at Guildford.

It was the Stevens' family who brought about a revival of the Navigation. In 1840 William Stevens was operating his own barge – the Perseverance. By 1902 William Stevens' grandson (also called William) had acquired the

shares of the Portmore and Langton families to become sole owner.

The main cargo at this time was corn, flour, timber, coal and chalk, along with bark for the tanning industry, rags for the paper-makers, and after the Great War, gunpowder from the mills at Chilworth. Barrel-hoops (and other iron work), sugar and groceries were also carried, along with cargoes of oil cake, and fertilisers on the lower reaches.

The last commercial cargo to be carried on the Navigation was on the 6th March 1969, when a barge of grain was carried to Coxes Lock at Addlestone. By this stage the waterway was in the hand of the National Trust, having been given to them by Mr H.W. Stevens.

Originally the pound locks had a simple 'hole and peg' method of raising the sluices to let the water in and out (which can still be found at Worsfold and Walsham Gates), before the modern winch system was developed.



THE MYSTERY OF THE MOVING LOCK & COTTAGE

According to the National Trust (the present owners of the Navigation), Papercourt Lock was rebuilt in 1766 and then 'moved' in the 1780's to its present site. I am not certain how you 'move' a lock but it appears that originally there was no tumbling bay at this point to control the water supply, so the present lock was built to the side and the old lock re-modelled to take the

extra water away.

The old lock-keepers cottage was also rebuilt in 1922, with the lock-keeper and his family apparently living on a barge for a few months whilst construction work took place. The story is that when the site for the new cottage was pegged out by the builders the old Navigation employee sneaked out that night and slightly

re-orientated them. The reason became apparent once the cottage was built – from the new angle the lock-keeper had a clear view out of his windows of barges approaching from either direction, meaning he could wait until the last minute before venturing out to work!



JOHN DONNE, ANNE DONNE, UNDONE



One attractive feature along the Wey Navigation at Pyrford is the 'Summerhouse' that was the home of John Donne in the early 17th century – at least that is what the blue plaque on the wall erected by Woking Borough Council would have you believe.

The now famous poet was the secretary to Sir Francis Wolley of Pyrford Place, whose cousin, Ann More (of Loseley House), Donne secretly married in 1601 without apparently getting her father's permission. The result was that John Donne was sent to prison, but on his release the newlyweds were given accommodation by Wolley in one of his cottages at Pyrford – the problem is that nobody knows for certain which cottage that was!

Having said that it was almost certainly NOT the one that has the plaque on it! The Donnes lived at Pyrford from 1601 (not 1600); the Wey Navigation was built in the 1650's and the pretty little summerhouse beside it (also occasionally referred to as Queen Elizabeth's Summerhouse) is thought to be late 17th century in style, so unless they had H.G. Wells' 'Time Machine', neither Donne or Good Queen Bess could have lived here.