

Man And The Christchurch Avon

The Story of Navigation on the River Avon and in *Christchurch Harbour— by D. A. E. Cross, M.A.*

C.T. 1963

NEXT year (1964) will be the 300th anniversary of the "Clarendon Act"—an Act of Charles II's time, not yet repealed, which authorised the making navigable of the Hampshire Avon from Christchurch Harbour to Salisbury in Wiltshire.

The author, who has carried out much research into the economic geography and history of the Avon, hopes that this story of the trade and commerce of Christchurch and of the efforts to navigate the Avon, may be of interest to all those who love the harbour and the River Avon, and who would like to know a little more about its fascinating history.

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(1) EARLY TIMES TO THE CLARENDON ACT

Although various theories have been made as to the use of the Avon for navigation in pre-historic times the only one which bears a possibility of truth is that the huge Prescelly stones for Stonehenge were transported by raft over some part of its distance (or possibly up the whole river if they had come by sea) to a spot near Amesbury and so overland to Stonehenge. An original water-colour by J. Browne, the Avebury archaeologist, in 1823 (in the Red House Museum, Christchurch) gives his impression of this scene and shows the river flow running at a much higher level than at present. This higher river level is doubtless true, and thus water transport would be easy.

Christchurch Harbour was well known as an anchorage during very early times, and the Bronze and Iron Age settlements on Hengistbury Head and St. Catherine's Hill were no doubt sited there because of the convenience of the haven for Continental traffic. The harbour was well adapted for the boats of Bronze and Iron Age times, though the river itself was probably not penetrated to any extent overland, trackways along the sides of the valley being preferred.

The "Hengistbury Head Report" (1915) suggests that much of the pottery found at the Head was probably acquired direct from France—only a short section of the Channel crossing being actually out of sight of land for any period.

O. S.G. Crawford, the Wessex archaeologist, emphasises the importance of Christchurch Harbour by stating that "Christchurch is the natural port of Wiltshire", which was the chief settlement area at this time, while the suggestion that Christchurch began as a settlement nearer the harbour in Roman times as a "migration" from St. Catherine's Hill comparable to the move from Old to New Sarum is also made by Crawford and further emphasises the attraction of the river and harbour as a means of transport.

LIGHT GOODS

Certainly the river was gradually developed as a means of transporting light goods inland by Saxon times as the valley woods were cleared and settlement began at certain crossing points (e.g. Ringwood) and along the valley terraces. Weeds, shallows, mudbanks and fallen trees were no doubt still a problem, and little accurate information can be learned of the use of the river until the Middle Ages—we can only surmise that the building of "wades" (or fords), bridges, weirs and mills quickly counteracted any possible early navigational use on any large scale.

The use of Christchurch Harbour by the larger ships now existing was limited by sand and weeds and the low water at the entrance, though it is recorded that the Danes and Saxons engaged in a sea battle in Bournemouth Bay in 877 A.D., and Christchurch Harbour may have been entered. There were Viking raids

on the harbour area in 980, 997 and 1006 A.D. and on Poole in 998 A.D. Galleys searched the creeks during these periods and took shelter in the harbour in stormy weather.

Detailed references to the port of Christchurch during mediaeval times are not very common. Though it is certain that small vessels visited the harbour, their trade went unrecorded. The Prior frequently brought wine by sea from Southampton and the Southampton Port Books (1428) record the arrival from Christchurch of one boat loaded with teasels. It is recorded that, in the reign of Henry VI, Salisbury played a part in the 100 Years War for since "the Avon was navigable from Christchurch to Salisbury until the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the city was technically a sea port and as such it built and manned a ship---the Trout which helped in the defence of the Kent coast".

In an attempt to avoid obstruction of the harbour channel, Masters of any vessels could be fined 39/6 under an old Christchurch Manorial Law. This perhaps emphasises the difficulties of the harbour navigation even in earlier times.

GREAT ATTRACTION

Fishing was a great river attraction and though the principal and obvious means of catch was the shore net; boats were also used both in the harbour and along the shores of the Bay.

During Tudor and Stuart times more information as to the use of the Harbour and river for navigation becomes available.

The economic problems of this period in connection with the use of rivers and river transport have been generally discussed by other historians elsewhere, and much of their survey of general economic problems would apply to the Avon. We have, however, some information of the specific problems and plans for the Hampshire Avon. In 1535 the Commission for the River Avon was appointed to order the removal of all weirs and obstructions on the river. This suggested plans for opening the river to navigation and the improvement of the port of Christchurch but nothing more is known of the work.

In 1623 John Taylor, the "Water Poet", travelled by water from London to Salisbury by wherry and described how the river might be made properly navigable. The mills need not be moved, he stressed, though the weirs would have to be bought out. The main economic factor conditioning this proposal was the scarcity of fuel in the inland districts now developing but lacking good land communications. Wood was often transported down river to the coastal towns where it competed with sea-borne coal and made fuel there too cheap while the poor in-landers froze in winter for lack of it.

The developing iron industries also used vast quantities for charcoal and furnaces, and Taylor emphasised that boats could carry 20 wagon-loads of wood as well as dispensing with the need for 18 horses, while seacoal, beer, bricks, corn and charcoal could also be carried up and down river.

DREAM TAKES SHAPE

"Methinks", he wrote. "I see already men, horses, carts, mattocks, shovels, wheelbarrows, handbar-rows and baskets at work clearing the river". This dream began to take real shape by the middle of the century.

F. Mathew in 1656 supported the idea, and in the years 1664-1665, under the impetus of fuel scarcity, a Public Act (known as the "Clarendon Act") was passed with the Lord Chancellor or Lord Keeper of the Great Seal as undertaker of a scheme to make the river open to navigation from Salisbury to the sea, and also to develop Christchurch Harbour.

Many other such Acts were also passed during this period. The Act gave permission for the Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery to make the River Wylye navigable for boats, from Harnham Bridge, Salisbury (the limit of the Clarendon Scheme) to Wilton if he so wished with similar provisions. No wharf or quay was to be built in the City or within a mile of Harnham Bridge without the City of Salisbury's consent. Lord Clarendon owned the Manor of Christchurch-Twynham at this time, and actively promoted this Navigation Act and Christchurch Town Quay was built in 1671 when land was granted for the purpose. This famous Act, now almost 300 years old, has never been repealed, and the story of the efforts to make it effective will be described in the next instalment.

(II) Making the River Avon navigable—early plans for developing Christchurch Harbour.

The 1664 Act (the Clarendon Act) authorised work to begin on making the River Avon navigable from Christchurch to Salisbury, but very little was done about the plan for some ten years, though "much discourse took place in Salisbury".

Two writers of the time were very enthusiastic, and one, in 1675, envisaged Salisbury as a second Bristol. (I) Andrew Yarranton surveyed the river in 1675, on the insistence of Lord Salisbury. Yarranton emphasised that it could be made navigable, mentioning that on completion of the scheme, timber might be brought in for 4s. a load instead of £1 4s. 0d. from Portsmouth by land. He also recommended exploitation of the local ironstone and emphasised the possibilities of Christchurch Harbour.

Enthusiasm was finally aroused, and Salisbury City Corporation decided to support the scheme (in July, 1675) by granting £2,000 and appointing a Committee of Management with Samuel Fortney in charge. The Bishop of Salisbury cut the first spit of the "new waterway" on September 20, 1675. However, lack of money caused the Corporation to discontinue its support the following year.

In 1677 the Salisbury Corporation suggested that private undertakers be invited to carry on the work with profits for ever or until the Corporation redeemed the work at the cost of expenses plus 10% interest. Henry Hodges, Thomas Bennet and T. Dennett were carrying on the work in 1685 and the navigation works were completed in 1687 when a code of regulation and tolls was issued. Six years later, however, other managers were still at work (Rob. Woodward, Th. Pitt and Wingfield Brockwell). In 1692 an inspection of the Navigation is recorded and a report was issued in 1693.

- The Avon navigation—25-ton barges once sailed up the Avon to Salisbury.
- John Smeaton—the builder of the first English lighthouses, once planned to improve Christchurch Harbour for £5,000.
- The Avon navigation could once have been rented for 1000 years at £20 a year!

GREAT ATTEMPT

In 1695 the Committee Revenue was considering discussing "matters touching the making of the river Avon) navigable, and in 1695 Celia Fiennes, during her travels, wrote that "there had been great attempt to make the Avon navigable, which would be of great advantage, but all charge has been lost in "it".

The Hants. Victoria County History states that a flood washed away the works and this seems to be the obvious answer. What is more important today is whether the right of navigation under the Act was ever established, and here evidence seems to prove that it was.

In fact, a number of vessels used the navigation before Christmas Day, 1685. Pope's "Salisbury Ballad" describes Bishop Ward of Salisbury as the man "who brought the vessels to Harnham", whilst Daniel Defoe mentioned in 1727 that the river was still navigable to within two miles of Salisbury.

A recent authority, Charles Hadfield, in his book on "The Canals of Southern England", states that 36 miles of the work was done and locks were built, but no trace can be found of locks or boat traffic records, though "it seems possible that a few barges passed upstream".

FLOOD DISASTER

With the disaster of the floods, work on the Avon scheme was halted. At least £6,000 had been spent on it. Attention then was turned to improving Christchurch Harbour,

In 1693 the "Clarendon Cut" was begun through the low sandhills to the east of Hengistbury Head to improve the Harbour entrance and an ironstone breakwater built on the south-east side of the Cut. The scheme had been suggested by Yarranton and the "pier" is recorded on a map produced in 1698.

In 1697-8 the Board of Admiralty engaged Edward Drummer and Capt. T. Wiltshaw to make a survey of the Ports on the South-west Coast of England. The report states:—

"The river disembarks into the sea as a bay within the shingles and about three leagues without the Needles. Westward the Town lies about two miles from the mouth of it and yet the Flood Tyde scarce washes to it and also there falls into this Haven two considerable freshes, the one from Salisbury and the other from Blandford and yet 'tis no port for other vessels than of 30 tons downwards.

"Great banks of sand lie before it and not more than two feet of water upon the Bar, nor flows nor springtides more than six feet upright and are insuperable impediments to those offices the work of the

Navy require and therefore utterly incapable of improvement". No reference is made to navigation on the river.

BILL OPPOSED

At the end of the century a Bill was petitioned by those interested in the River Avon Navigation works for payment of their claims. The Bill was opposed by the Mayor and Burgesses Of Christchurch, who said the undertakers "did carry up some barge", but petitioners now demand payment for lands affected alongside the river, e.g., a petition by the freeholders at Ellingham who claimed that the navigation management had levied great fines on them for not cutting weeds, and the freeholders of Ringwood said inadequate compensation had been paid for lands damaged. Salisbury favoured the Bill, but it failed.

It seems likely that the strongest opponents of any further attempts at improving the navigation were the owners of water-meadows now becoming the "fashion" in the valley.

Thirty years later Salisbury Corporation reconsidered the problem and decided to remit all arrears due by the Management if the Avon were made navigable within five years and the Corporation were to have first offer of shares. A further condition imposed was that if the work were not completed within the five years the undertakers were to pay £20 per annum until it was. These conditions were relaxed in 1730 when the Corporation offered a 1,000 years' ownership of the navigation to whosoever "effectually shall go on with the work". The only obligation was a £20 p.a. rent. This magnanimous offer was not taken up either and the whole project was abandoned. About 1730 the Clarendon jetty was damaged by storms. (It finally disappeared in a gale in 1916).

A. Kingsbury, in his "History of Ringwood", mentions that the old navigation channel was still discernable in the river meadows at Ringwood (1898), but does not say which side of the valley.

SMUGGLING

In 1745 it was recommended that Christchurch be adapted as a suitable shipping harbour, but the idea is not known to have been taken up locally, probably because smuggling was more profitable.

However, in May, 1762, the famous John Smeaton, the lighthouse-builder, made an excellent report on the harbour in which he clearly outlined the problem as being due to the short period of ebb-water due to the double high-tide action resulting in insufficient scour. He recommended the completion of the Clarendon Scheme with the building of a second breakwater or pier to the south-west of the old cut—now closed by silting, the river having resumed its own course to the Run. The cut was then to be re-opened and then the Run blocked again.

The dredging of the harbour bars and the increased flow of water would, he estimated, result in a further 2-3 feet of water in the harbour. His scheme would have cost £5,000, but, again, was not followed up.

The possibility of using the Avon for canal navigation was surveyed by Brindley, the canal-builder, in 1771. However, it was decided that a Salisbury-Southampton canal would be preferable and much time and money was wasted on an abortive scheme to dig this. In 1792 and 1795 there were also schemes to link Pewsey on the Kennet and Avon Canal by a canal down the Avon Valley to Salisbury and the sea via the Salisbury-Southampton canal, but these plans fell through. Thus ended in failure the famous attempt of the great canal-builders to bring the increasing trade and commerce of the early Industrial Revolution period through Christchurch via the River Avon Navigation. Soon the coming of the railways and improved roads were to bring far more efficient forms of inland transport to Hampshire, but it is significant that the 1664 Act has never been repealed and it is pretty certain that the Avon was made navigable within the meaning of the Act about 1685.

On proof of this point lies an interesting 20th Century legal case which will be described later on.

Meanwhile, in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, interest turned to developing the Harbour at Christchurch, and the next instalment will describe some of the fascinating surveys made at the time towards that end, and also some details of the smugglers of Christchurch, whose heyday belongs to that period.

(III) Christchurch Harbour during the 19th Century—the smuggling trade—further efforts to make it an important port.

After the failure to establish a permanent navigation on the Avon from Christchurch to Salisbury, more serious study was given to ways of developing the Harbour at Christchurch, and several interesting surveys were made which show that the problems facing the harbour developers in the early 19th century are still with us today.

The Surveyor Murdoch Mackenzie made a survey of the Harbour in 1782-4 and reported that:—

"As Christchurch is a shallow bar harbour and out of the way it is very little frequented except by vessels belonging to the place or such as have particular business there.

"The whole of the interior of the harbour is one entire bed of soft mud except the narrow channels of the river just described, so there is no landing anywhere in it within the haven points except at high water time in small boats on parts where the mud is covered at which time it has the appearance of a fine little harbour—but only the appearance for the above described little narrow channel of the river running through the mud on the south side of the harbour is the only place that vessels can lie in; in the bight of which, a cable's length above S. Haven Port, vessels can lie very safe but they must ground at low water as there is not above 3 or 4 feet; however as the bottom is soft mud, they take no hurt".

FASCINATING STORY

The use of the harbour at Christchurch for the smuggling trade is a fascinating story which does not actually enter into the scope of this survey, but full descriptions of the wide extent of this local "industry" during the 18th century have been written.

Russell Oakley, in his little book "An Illustrated Guide to Christchurch" (published by Hulton's in the High Street in 1920), gives many fascinating accounts of the activities of the Christchurch smuggling trade in his chapter on smugglers, describing how the illicit goods from France were landed along the coast and transported inland into Dorset and Hampshire.

Mudford and Stanpit Marsh were among the favoured landing places, and desperate encounters with the Excisemen were common. Even the Quay Mill was, by permission of the one-time miller, "a useful place" for temporarily hiding tubs of brandy. The kegs would be dropped overboard at the entrance to the harbour (the Run) at Mudford after being strung together, and floated up to the mill with the tide flowing. For their guidance a man would swim alongside a considerable distance and, when opposite the Quay at the Stour mouth, would head them off across under the mill wall. Over forty tubs were once concealed here, waiting for removal inland.

The miller, a hefty typical character, was once surprised by two Excisemen whilst disposing of some kegs on Bourne Heath. He overcame them both and left them tied together in the heather, to be found next morning, apparently without being recognised himself.

MOTHER SELLARS

Near Stanpit Marshes the inn, "The Ship in Distress", was also used by smugglers. In those days, the innkeeper, a lady named Sellars, had a great reputation, and Oakley says that "her name exists today in the harbour in 'Mother Sellars' Channel'. The cargo of contraband floated up this channel and across to Mother Sellars' house was usually pretty safe as she was in touch with so many farmers in the New Forest district". The price paid in Christchurch to the smugglers for the finest French brandy was, for many years, around four shillings a quart. A keg containing three-and-a-half gallons in France cost ten to twelve shillings, and was so much overproof that it could still be watered down with two gallons of water per tub and still be the finest quality. As some of the cargoes brought into Christchurch Bay consisted of three hundred casks, the smugglers' profits were enormous. The last case of contraband is said to have been brought into Christchurch at Christmas time, 1876. Perhaps one day, from all official records and local evidence, we may have written a full account of Christchurch's trade in contraband goods.

T. Cox mentions that "several officers (are) employed to look after the Customs (at Christchurch) but it is rather to prevent merchants smuggling their goods in these remote parts than in the expectation of raising money by that Impost on Merchandise, there being no foreign trade worth mentioning".

LEGITIMATE

During this period, however, quite an amount of legitimate coastal trade had been developed by sailing barges with cargoes of coal, corn and timber—the 5½ ft. harbour ironstone bar and sandbanks still restricting the size of ships entering the port. Customs dues, etc., were registered at Southampton—Christchurch being classed as a creek under the port of Southampton, and coal duties, etc., were paid to Southampton.

A 1799 report mentions that the port was there "limited to coastwise trade only without special permission is given". A coast-water superintendent tended the loading and discharge of coasting vessels at Christchurch Quay and there was also a Customs and Excise riding officer. There was also a Customs and Excise cutter of 100 tons with 30 men and a harbour row-boat with a superior officer and six "guardsmen".

This formidable array is again some indication, not of the honest traffic of the port, but of the smuggling trade along the coast. In 1801 a further report mentions the poor state of the harbour at Christchurch and that "the quay is chiefly frequented by sloops which convey beer to Portsmouth and occasionally by small coasters which bring coal and limestone from the neighbouring ports".

This report describes also the "two high-tides" phenomenon of the coast here and suggests such a highwater was due to the Solent ebb via Hurst Castle holding up the water in Christchurch Bay.

A RECORD

No comprehensive statistics of Christchurch trade alone seem available but there is a record of tobacco being shipped from Christchurch to Weymouth in 1691.

The following record from the contemporary diary of the Riding Officer and Supervisor of Excise at Christchurch for the year 1803 shows the state of the legitimate harbour trade.

Inward Bound: From Portland: Two cargoes of stone. From Portsmouth: One cargo brandy, rum and general; one cargo of wheat; one cargo of wine; five cargoes of coal; five cargoes bricks and tiles.

From London: One cargo beer. From Chichester: One cargo household furniture; two cargoes wheat. From Southampton: One cargo coals and slate. From Poole: One cargo stone; three cargoes coal. From Lymington: Two cargoes of coal, tiles and bricks. Total: 26.

Outward Bound: To Portsmouth: Twenty-five cargoes of beer, malt, barley, wheat; two cargoes rushes; one cargo potatoes. To Lymington: One cargo beech planks; one cargo biscuits. To Newport (I.O.W.): One cargo rushes.

To Plymouth: One cargo biscuits. To London: One cargo wheat. To Newhaven: One cargo tiles; one cargo bricks. Total: 35.

Whether the excess of exports over imports signifies "prosperity" in this case it is difficult to judge, as no details or tonnage and values are given. (The original M.S. in Red House Museum). Four small vessels "belonged to the Port of Christchurch" in 1831.

LIMITED

In 1851 the coastal trade of Christchurch was still limited to shallow-draught barges carrying coal, corn and timber, and any Customs dues were payable to Southampton, though a Customs and Excise Officer was still recorded in Christchurch in 1920.

Christchurch parish registers do not give help over harbour traffic but mention is made of sea disasters nearby. A signal-station was maintained at Hengistbury Head for a period during the Napoleonic Wars. In the early 1830's a further effort was made by responsible citizens in Christchurch to develop the harbour and a certain John Sylvester presented a report, now in the Red House Museum. He maintained the obvious points that the problems of the harbour were connected with the very flat country through which the rivers pass, the small tidal rise and fall and the reflow of the tides before low water—all of which reduce scour.

His main proposal was a practical scheme of keeping the main channel clear by making it as smooth a curve as possible to encourage flow and scour by building stone embankments in places to the main channel. These ideas followed those in earlier plans (as far back as Yarranton except that he and Smeaton favoured

more elaborate efforts to straighten the channel and enter directly at the Haven, with the entrance protected by ironstone jetties). Nothing came of those plans or those of W. Armstrong, who made another survey in the same year.

Armstrong stated that since Smeaton's report the river mouth at the Run had shifted "some several 100 yards north-east during the last 16 years". He made similar points to Sylvester's report as to the confining of the river to increase depth and scour and suggested that a £6,000 effort to straighten and embank the river, keeping its head away from the north-east angle at the Run, was the answer.

SLOOP ANCHORAGE

Small boat-building was a long-established craft near the harbour, and at one time small coastal sculling craft and long skiffs for smuggling were built openly in inland fields (dockyard meads) and brought down river to Christchurch. The harbour remained only a sloop anchorage in fine weather.

The establishment of a small Dutch Colony at Mundeford after 1688 is well-documented, and as Dutchmen were expert in such matters as dredging, their work would prove very helpful in the shallow water of Christchurch Harbour. In addition, they were skilled at shipbuilding, and shipbuilding—the building of small craft—at Haven Beach continued well into the 19th century.

In 1842 a 200 ton vessel was built and one of 255 tons in 1848—"The Enterprise" a brig 96ft. long by 28ft. 8in. by 15ft. was built on stocks at Gervis Point by Mr. Collwood Day. One boatbuilder is recorded in Christchurch in 1855.

Several more attempts were yet to be made to establish Christchurch as a harbour for bigger ships and to attract more trade. Hengistbury Head was developed as a source of iron ore for S. Wales, and there were plans produced to build a railway—The Christchurch Dock Railway—right into the harbour and build breakwaters and quays. These activities will be described in next week's chapters.

(IV) The Hengistbury Iron Ore Industry—the Christchurch Dock Railway—the last attempt to reopen the Avon Navigation fails.

Andrew Yarranton, in the course of his interest in the development of the Hampshire Avon in the middle of the 17th Century wrote:

"At last I found in the area (off Christchurch) great quantities of iron stones lie in a ridge. For in the sea pointing directly upon the Isle of Wight I found the ridge of ironstones was the cause that forced the ground tide about that point (Hengistbury Head) so that it had carried and lodged the sands so as it choked up the harbour. The great advantage is that the King may have all his iron made and guns cast at a very cheap rate. "There is the ironstone in the sea at the harbour mouth and the King hath vast quantities of wood decayed in the New Forest. If two furnaces be built about Ringwood to cast guns and two forges to make iron and the iron be brought from the harbour mouth off the sea up the river to the furnaces, and the charcoal out of the New Forest to the works there be sufficient of decayed wood to supply four iron works for ever."

His suggestion was not developed, neither were his plans for a ship building industry in using New Forest timber.

However, in the early part of the 19th Century J.E. Holloway, a Christchurch coal factor, acting as agent for a South Wales firm, planned to exploit the ironstone deposits of Hengistbury Head and, by loading empty coal barges and returning to Southampton (and thence to South Wales, and also to the Midlands) to exploit the concretions (up to 30% iron) for smelting.

The profit must have been low, for the digging-out of clay, sand, gravel overburden was heavy work. The work of the "Hengistbury Mining Co." began in 1847, the stones being first removed, as in earlier times, from the beach on the south side, but later, via a specially-dug "channel" from workings and jetty on the harbour side of the Head.

COAL-TICKETS

A copy of one of Holloway's tickets shows the scene of a train of the coal-barges drawn by a steam-tug returning to Southampton when South Wales colliers took the ore west for smelting. Over 1,000 tons a week were mined until, after protests about serious erosion on the Head and consequent damage to property and harbour navigation, the Admiralty instituted an enquiry by Capt. Vetch in August 1856.

This resulted in an order prohibiting the removal of ironstone from the Head on 18/10/1854 — especially below high water mark (h.w.m.). Holloway ceased shore removal in October 1854, but legal disputes over the right of the owner to lease the shore and Head to the ironmining company (and proceedings against others raising cement stone from Totland Bay) were continuous. A notice to stop stone-taking was served on those mining on the Head and those dredging in the Bay as infringements of the 1854 Order were still taking place. The notice read :

"Take Notice that you and all others are forbidden to dig and excavate, break, dredge up or otherwise disturb, take or remove any stone, shingle or other soil or matter at or from the shore below High Water Mark at Christchurch Head or the waters adjacent thereto, or at or from any part of the Bays called Poole Bay and Christchurch Bay or the shores thereof, the same being the property of Her Majesty. (Signed) Wm. Robson, Solicitor to the Admiralty." Much of these records are in the Druitt Papers in Red House Museum.

LEGAL RIGHTS

A further Admiralty Inquiry in 1881 resulted in further difficulties over legal rights, and several public petitions were made for Admiralty action. Finally, large-scale work on the seaward Head, even above high water mark, was stopped in 1865 as serious erosion was causing further alarm in Christchurch, especially as the eastward drift of shore debris was seriously affecting the harbour mouth.

Mr. Holloway had purchased, in 1856, a piece of land near the Bell Inn at Seend in Wiltshire, and had extracted over 4,000 tons of iron ore from the newly-discovered field there that year, all of which was sent to South Wales for smelting. (Other persons joined in this new enterprise, and 78,000 tons of ore raised from the Seend field in 1855-61 and 86,000 tons in 1871-74). It seems probable that Holloway found this Wiltshire iron ore more profitable to exploit than that at Hengistbury Head, and this would explain a declining interest in the latter.

A small amount of work continued on the north side of the Head until 1880, but the amount raised was small. The records of iron ore production for the years 1859-61 show a decline in the production of Hampshire-raised ore, and almost all that recorded must have come from the Christchurch Harbour workings.

| Hampshire | | |
|------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1859 | 1860 | 1861 |
| 9,725 | 6,119 | 4,008 tons |
| U.K. total | | |
| 1859 | 1860 | 1861 |
| 7,876,581 | 8,024,204 | 7,215,518 tons |

Nevertheless, the totals of thousands of tons a year reveals clearly the cause of the serious erosion problems in the Hengistbury Head area. Ironstones are again accumulating on the beach on the south side of Hengistbury Head and bands of the stones can be seen in the cliffs, while from the air the workings of the old quarry and the jetty in the Harbour can still be clearly traced. Erosion, however, despite the check of fallen stones and the old eastern ironstone-concrete breakwater, continues apace, and it seems likely that the Head will be further seriously eroded by undermining and landslip unless extensive coast-protection works are undertaken in the area.

SILTING PROBLEMS

During the 19th Century, therefore, the busy ironstone-mining increased the harbour-entrance silting problems on which so many surveyors had already given their opinions. In 1860 there were suggestions that the Admiralty might buy Hengistbury Head, put in a harbour groyne and build a Hospital there, but land costs rose with the increase in Bournemouth's influence, and the plans were abandoned. The decline in harbour trade with the coming of the railways and the cessation of the ironstone working caused a lessening interest in Christchurch as a port of any importance, and in 1883 it was described as "silted up and choked with weeds."

With the coming of the railways to Christchurch in 1862 and 1888 and the growth of a nation-wide railway network it would be thought that the harbour improvement schemes would have been dropped. However, it

is most interesting to record that plans were published in 1885 by the Wimborne and District Railway for a docks and a special railway line extension (Christchurch Dock Railway) to be built.

Nimmo & Ives of Wimborne prepared the plans for the railway extensions in great detail. (Now preserved in the Red House Museum). A 1,000 foot breakwater at the harbour entrance was also planned in connection with this scheme. It is possible that the ironstone workings at the Head (1847-1880) had revived some interest in the commercial use of the harbour but this alone would not be sufficient attraction for such a major scheme at this time, which appears to have been seriously considered.

One final action which might have attracted shipping to Christchurch Harbour is mentioned by H. Druitt, who states that about 1900 the Admiralty again considered the possibility of a Naval Hospital (later established at Haslar) on land at Hengistbury Head, but the shallowness of the Harbour and bar made the suggestion impracticable.

DESTROYER ANCHORAGE

The nearest the Navy ever came to using Christchurch Harbour was the destroyer anchorage in the bay off Southbourne during 1915-16. The last survivor of coast trading, a coal barge, the "Charlotte" discharged her last cargo at the Quay in 1906, since when no cargo has been landed.

The "Charlotte" began conveying coal (a 36-ton per voyage average) from Portsmouth to Christchurch in 1872 and an average 1,000 tons a year was imported.

A total of 838 cargoes are recorded in the logbook and these also included some cement and stone from Swanage quarries. Fishing, milling and farming interests had now taken over the ownership of the River Avon water, and the fishing rights' owners actively discouraged any navigation, though some stretches were still passable (with portage over several shallows) and "canoes could still pass up to Ringwood despite weak growth in 1920.

An old print in Ellingham Church shows a small sailing boat on the river near Ibsley bridge (c.1880) and small boats were often used on the river at Salisbury, Ringwood and Fordingbridge for pleasure. Mill-owners often had their own boats and there were several ferries (e.g. Burgate, Avon Castle) owing to the comparatively few bridges below Salisbury.

In 1907 the right to sail a small boat up the river (which hitherto had not been publicly challenged) was denied on Winton Water by the Rev. Mills, who had bought the fishing rights (Mills v. Preston.) A public meeting was held in Christchurch in October 1907 under the Mayor, who emphasised that there were public rights invested in the inhabitants of the valley up to Salisbury under the 1664 Act and a "River Avon Public Rights Committee" was set up to raise money for the case to go to the High Court.

FOR THE DEFENCE

A further public meeting was held in February 1908, and reported in the "Christchurch Times" that month, when it was announced that the Hon. F. Russell, Q.C. had been retained for the defence. His preliminary opinion of the legal aspects of the case suggested that "the burden of proof (of the continuing legality of the 1664 Act) would be on the defence, and that every effort should be made to collect all the ancient evidence to strengthen that already available. The case will be a difficult one, but . . . there is a fair chance of the defence establishing the public right claimed."

A question in Parliament by the Christchurch M.P. to the Attorney-General on the case drew the reply that "it is for the parties or authorities affected by the alleged obstruction to take proceedings."

The Rev. Mills died in March 1908, but the case was continued by his son, Col. J. D. Mills. A sum of £157 had been raised for the defence by April, 1909. It appears that when the case came finally before the High Court money was not available for the defence and judgment was given in favour of riparian and fishing interests over the right of navigation. Today boats are found only below Knapp Mill (highest tidal point), and at Fordingbridge and Salisbury, where the water and riparian owners have rowing boats. Only at Salisbury is it possible to hire a boat for pleasure on a publicly-owned stretch (above the Mill on Corporation water).

The question of public navigation on the River Avon has again been raised recently by the newly-formed Christchurch Harbour Users Association, but the most recent part of our story — and the last — will follow next week, when the latest developments in the use of the Harbour and the River Avon for commercial and pleasure uses will lie described.

(V) Christchurch Harbour today—Ringwood Morass improvements—the future of the Harbour and Avon—conclusion.

CHRISTCHURCH Harbour developed as an important small craft centre with the rise of holiday and tourist industry after 1900. The year 1904 saw the establishment of the Christchurch Sailing Club at the Quay, and soon it held an annual Regatta which has become famous.

Pleasure boat services were inaugurated between the Quay and Mudeford after 1918, and there are now several such "ferry" operators, especially during the summer. Visitors and residents with motor and sailing craft now throng the harbour during the summer season, and sometimes over 80 craft of up to 45 tons (besides many pleasure boats, canoes and rowboats) were in the harbour during the holiday season. Fishing interests, however, oppose all permanent anchorages in the Rivers Stour and Avon, and there are recent demands for some kind of "harbour authority." Christchurch is scheduled as a Fisheries Harbour in the Sea Fish Industry Act (1961) and trout, salmon, lobsters, crabs and other fish are caught by local fishermen.

If the pleasure-boating conditions become too chaotic and interfere with the fishing, the Ministry of Agriculture could set up a Harbour Commission and a Harbour Master would be appointed. The expense of such an organisation would result in heavy mooring fees and, if this failed to meet the expense, the loss would have to be borne by Bournemouth and Christchurch Corporations (In 1958 it was suggested that a harbour board would cost £1,000 a year, plus working costs).

Thus the need for some navigational control and harbour authority must be balanced against the economic result of such an establishment. At present it is hoped that cooperation between fishermen, pleasure-boat owners, Christchurch Sailing Club and other harbour users will be sufficient to regulate the harbour traffic amicably.

BOATBUILDING

Boatbuilding is still carried on at Christchurch, but not at Mudeford. H.S. Bemister Ltd. was established in 1929 and the choice of site (with large river frontage, fairly good depth of water and near the sea) a good one for such an industry.

Boats up to 40 ft. length are built with maximum draft of 5½ ft. and much refitting work is carried out, including that of the famous "Yasme" (lost in the Pacific during 1956 on a round-the-world voyage) and for ocean voyages to America and New Zealand. A standard 23 ft. sloop, a 20 ft. cabin launch and sailing dinghies are also built.

Another boat building firm on the Avon near the harbour is Chas. A. Purbrooks where 4½ ton and 2½ ton Bermudan sloops and 14½ feet sailing dinghies are built. E.F. Elkins Ltd., on the Quay were founded in 1921 and have developed rapidly from one shed to a large boat yard. During the last war the firm built 72ft. motor launches and the firm built a few years ago a motor cruiser of 33 tons (65 tons Thames measurement). There are also several other repair slipways, marine workshops and ships' chandlers around the harbour. Apart from the Christchurch Harbour Regatta, a Carnival "Boat-race" on the River Avon is an annual event at Ringwood and at Fordingbridge. The latter town, in fact, had a rowing and sailing club as far back as 1870, and held a river regatta in Victorian times (The club ceased to function in 1914). The most recent attempts to navigate the River Avon have been made, not as a serious commercial proposition, but in the form of an endurance and time test by assorted crews of local boatmen since about 1920 when the first journey down the Avon from Pewsey (Wilts.) to Christchurch took 59½ hours. (There had been occasional "down-river" races in connexion with carnival events even earlier).

WITH A VENGEANCE

In June 1956 four young Pewsey men rowed a double-sculler with oars, paddles and carrying - strops. They had not left Pewsey long before they discovered with a vengeance that the River Avon from Pewsey to Salisbury is not much of a river after all and that this side of Salisbury is not constructed for rowing. It was a question of lifting, dragging and pushing till they got to Salisbury. After a break at Bodenham they were

able to row, for the river was wider and deeper, and so without great hindrance they reached Christchurch. Damage to the boat was slight. (The actual direct journey from Salisbury to Christchurch took approximately 12 hours, out of the 36 hrs. 50 min. for the whole trip which included a rest break of five hours at Bodenham.)

In 1838 Mudie commented that "there is abundant water for making this river (Avon) the means of an inland navigation ramified along most of the valleys in South Wilts., but the main channel and (Christchurch) harbour are unfavourable for this purpose." The clue to the problems affecting the navigation of the Avon lies in Mudie's last phrase. The difficulties of Christchurch Harbour with its shallows, bar and changing entrance are well-known, and have been the subject of reports and surveys from the 17th-century to the present day. In November, 1883, in 1910 and in 1935 severe autumn South-West gales broke the long North-East spit extending the Run towards Highcliffe and opened a new mouth off Mudeford, in 1910 shortening the sailing distance into the harbour by a mile. In 1916 heavy flooding occurred in Christchurch, and a committee was appointed and investigations made into the silted state of the harbour.

Flooding has occurred periodically ever since (especially along the Avon), and main riverside and harbour residents have cause to fear periods of heavy rains and Southerly gales. The sand-spit off Mudeford began to lengthen in 1957, and again affects navigation in the harbour mouth and creates dangerous bathing conditions in the Run at certain tides. (This particular feature has been the subject of several recent technical reports in professional journals).

DREDGING

Dredging of the main harbour channel from the Quay to Steamer Point was suggested in 1954, but was dropped on account of the cost—£10,000. It seems therefore inevitable that Christchurch Harbour will never, unless a very large sum of money be spent on it, be turned into a harbour suitable for large ships of any kind, and so far there are no economic reasons for so developing it.

However, it would seem quite feasible that it can be turned into an attractive boating harbour for small craft, providing recreation and pleasure for many and an economic asset to the town from tourist trade, shipbuilding and repair yards etc.

It is to be sincerely hoped that every local interest will combine to preserve Christchurch Harbour as one of the ever-decreasing number of places along the South Coast where one can walk, sail, swim or merely sit and admire the attractive scene without a skyline dominated by the buildings, chimneys and cooling towers of heavy industry.

Mudie's second point regarding the main channel of the Avon reminds us that if, as suggested, the original Avon navigation works were destroyed by flood the difficulties were too great. The problems of cutting a firm and sufficiently deep river channel for the canal through the lower Avon valley of alluvium, sands and gravels with considerable downwash from Tertiary Forest streams without extensive and proper banking artificial sidewall protection and tributary control must have been enormous. Even with modern equipment such a task would be gigantic, while the provision of satisfactory arrangements for many mills and water meadows must have been an impossible task at that early period.

FLOODING

Flooding and the problems of efficient drainage along the lower Avon Valley below Fordingbridge have long concerned the Avon and Dorset River Board, and its predecessor, the Avon and Stour Catchment Board. The low gradient of the river—only 3.4 ft. per mile between Ringwood and Christchurch—and the width of the flood plain has caused the River Board authorities to spend much time and energy in improving and maintaining the flow, and, at the same time, ensuring efficient drainage via tributary streams, installing proper fish passes, encouraging river line owners and protecting—most effectively—the river against serious pollution. The good work that the present board is doing along the Avon is worthy of much more widespread recognition, since they are actually concerned in ensuring that the Avon — almost alone amongst the Southern chalk rivers— remains attractive, unpolluted and as economically useful as possible. One of the major board drainage and reconstruction works in recent years was undertaken at Ringwood during 1936-38, when the new Ringwood By-pass was constructed North of the town. The road works entailed the construction of new embankments and bridges to cross the Avon Valley, and, at the same time,

the opportunity was taken to improve the river flow at the causeway, thus draining more efficiently the famous "Ringwood Morass" below Up Mead.

There was probably a roadway—a staked causeway or "wade" crossing the valley from East to West at Ringwood since prehistoric times, and in mediaeval times, the two old bridges (Stoning Bridge and Scutts Bridge) in West Street were built. The damming effect of the causeway over the centuries, however, built up a huge marshy area to the North of the causeway, which became a vast lake in flood-time—the "Morass". An 1847 large-scale map of Ringwood in the Red House Museum shows the extent of this "lake", whilst an aerial photograph taken before and during flood time before the 1936-38 alterations to the channels, (for the "Avon Biological Report") is also impressive evidence of the need for better drainage.

The results of the work have generally removed all flood danger from the town, but lower down above Christchurch the Avon still presents problems to the drainage engineer, and the builders of the recent Christchurch By-pass across the valley had to contend with difficult water conditions during the winter.

A HOPE

So must end our story. One can only hope that the lovely River Avon will long remain free of feverish building activity and industrial development along its banks, and will continue to delight the country-loving ghosts of those, like W. H. Hudson, Isaac Walton and William Cobbett, who knew and loved it. Even the poet Robert Southey wrote of the Avon Valley at Burton:

"A little while, O traveller! linger here
And let thy leisure eye behold and feel
The beauties of the place; yon heathy hill
That rises sudden from the vale so green
The vale far stretching as the view can reach
Under its long dark ridge, the river here
That like a serpent through the grassy mead
Winds on, now hidden, glittering now in sight,
Nor fraught with merchant wealth, nor famed in song,
This river rolls an unobtrusive tide,
Its gentle charms may soothe and satisfy thy feelings."

And so the Avon flows into Christchurch Harbour, with its mudflats and saltings, pleasure cruisers and yachts, past the great headland of Hengistbury into the sea.

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