

THE STOVER CANAL AND THE HAYTOR GRANITE QUARRY AND TRAMWAY

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Background information for a West Dart History Group visit - 2 July 2025

The development of the Ball Clay quarries near Bover Tracey and the granite quarries near Haytor was stimulated in the C19 by the substantial investments of the Templer Family. The construction of the Stover Canal and the Haytor granite quarries and tramway changed the landscape dramatically and significant remains can still be visited.

James Templer (1722-1782) was the founder of the Templer dynasty associated with Stover. He was born in Exeter in 1722 and at the age of 14 was apprenticed to a carpenter. After breaking his apprenticeship in 1740 he eventually settled in Rotherhithe and married Mary (née Parlby) in 1745. He continued to work as a joiner and in the 1750s became a naval dockyard contractor employing, and later in partnership with, Mary's brother Thomas Parlby, who was a mason. The Templer and Parlby families moved to Devon in 1756 to fulfil a contract at Plymouth Dock. Templer and Parlby became one of the country's leading civil engineering firms in the second half of the C18 with a near monopoly of works at Plymouth and Portsmouth dockyards. In 1761 James bought the Stowford, later Stover, estate near Teigngrace.

James' eldest son was also a James and is known as James Templer the Younger (1748-1813). He trained as a lawyer and in 1776 he married Mary Buller a well-connected, and wealthy, aristocrat. James inherited his father's estates in Teigngrace as well as others in Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire, and his brother John (1750-1832) inherited estates in Kent. In 1783 the brothers sold all their estates outside of Devon and subsequently bought large tracts of land the east of Stover to enable them to build the Stover Canal towards the Teign Estuary in order to stimulate an increase in the production and shipping of the rich deposits of ball clay in the Heathfield Basin. The Stover Canal was built between 1790 and 1792 following a two-mile route from Ventiford Basin via Teignbridge to the River Teign at Jetty Marsh near Newton Abbot. The clay trade expanded considerably when the canal opened with 1,000 barges a year using the canal, each carrying 25 tons. *Josiah Wedgewood and Sons* was the major recipient of ball clay after a contract was agreed in 1798 until 1815 when trade expanded with other potteries. The lower part of the canal remained in use until 1937 but was formally abandoned in 1943.

James the Younger died in 1813 and was succeeded by his eldest son George (1782-1843). In 1815 George Templer noted the activity of John Hatherly, one of his tenants at Fishwick near Teign Bridge, who was operating a small granite quarry at Haytor Down using horses and carts for transport. Templer conceived the idea of improving the granite trade by the construction of a tramway from Haytor to the Stover Canal and went into business with Hatherly, purchasing Haytor Down in 1819.

The tramway was opened in 1820 at a cost of £30,000 (equivalent to £3.7m in 2025) which necessitated taking a large loan from Sir John Palmer-Acland, a relative of his mother, and put the venture under significant financial pressure from the beginning. It was the first railway of any sort in Devon and was built of granite setts 4-8ft long, flanged on the inner edges to guide the iron truck wheels. At least 17,000 setts were cut and laid to a gauge of 4ft 3in. The main line to Ventiford Basin on the Stover Canal was about 8 miles with a fall on the main line of 1,225ft. Several branches were added over subsequent years to serve

more westerly quarries at Haytor such as Rubble Heap and Holwell. Trains of up to 12 flat-bed wagons, each loaded with three tons of granite, descended by gravity for 5 miles with braking provided by a man with a long pole pulled against the rim of a wheel of the last wagon. Horses hauled the trains the final 3 miles to Ventiford Basin and the empty trains back to the quarries. Only the outer quarry branches such as that from Holwell Quarry required horse teams of 18 Shires to haul the loaded wagons uphill. At Ventiford the granite was transferred to sailing barges which moved it along the canal and the Teign estuary to Templer's New Quay at Teignmouth where it was transhipped to coastal vessels for conveyance to London.

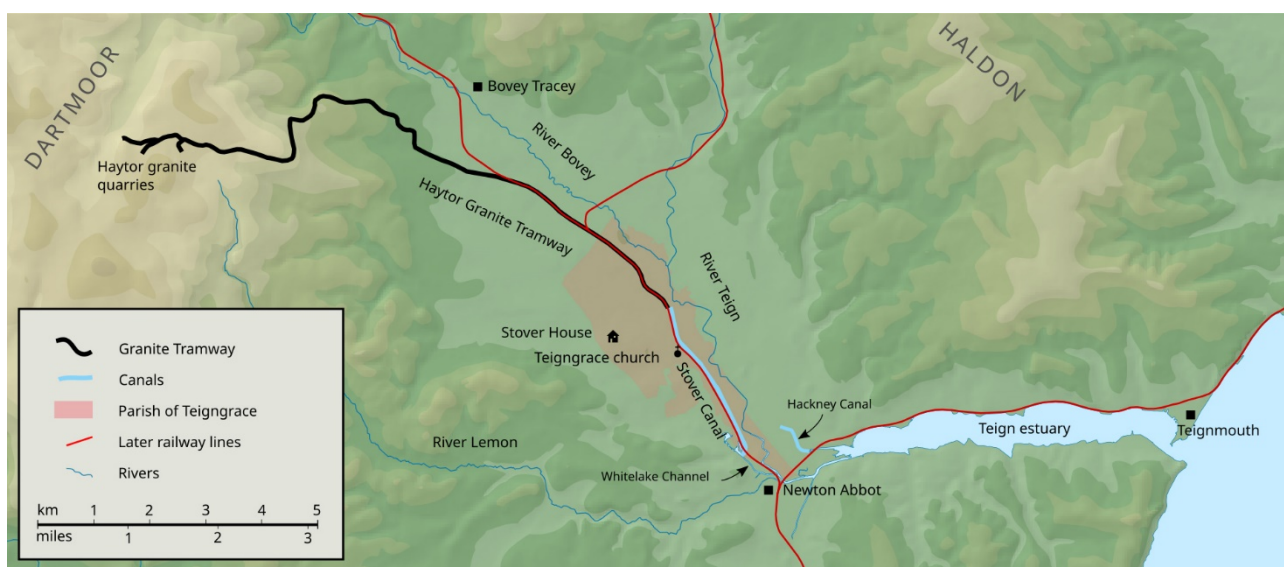
Contracts were secured between 1820 and 1825 to supply granite for the Wellington Monument in Hyde Park, parts of the British Museum and London Bridge and the Teignmouth to Shaldon Bridge. Templer and Hatherly's *Haytor Granite Company* expanded rapidly with over 400 workers, many being housed in new cottages in Haytor Vale. To fund the development Templer increased the level of mortgages on his lands. But by 1825 his company was facing increasing financial pressures from an inability to meet the production levels required to fulfil new contracts, poor cash flow, an unwise investment in an insurance venture, and a somewhat extravagant lifestyle, Templer being obsessed with hunting. By the end of the year Templer was forced to create a joint stock company, largely under pressure from William Jolliffe and Edward Banks, the contractors for London Bridge, and thus lost direct control of his venture. To make matters worse, Sir John Palmer-Acland called in his loan of £12,000 (£1.4m) which Templer settled by remortgaging his estates. Templer also needed to sell land to stabilise his finances but attempts to do so failed and by 1826 Templer was obliged to put his entire estate up for sale and retire to London with his partner of 11 years, Ann Wreyford, and their six children. Ann was a tenant farmer's daughter and Templer's social position had made it impossible for them to marry. But in London that was no longer an issue and the marriage took place later in the year.

In 1827 the majority of Templer's estates, including the Haytor quarries, tramway and the Stover Canal, were bought by Edward Seymour the 11th Duke of Somerset for a sum estimated at £80,000 (£10.8m). Once his debts were paid Templer still had funds of about £40,000 (£5.4m) and was able to sustain a good life style. Templer remained a shareholder of the *Haytor Granite Company* and became its Devon agent in 1830. He was, however, criticised for his lack of attention to the business and the quarries closed in 1835, the lease being regained by the Duke of Somerset who granted it to John Johnson.

John Johnson and his brother William owned the *Dartmoor Granite Company* which operated Foggintor Quarry near Princetown, originally leased from Sir Manasseh Masseh Lopes who owned substantial estates in West Dartmoor. They closed Haytor Quarry for seven years, but in 1839 Johnson assigned the *Haytor Granite Company* name to the lease of Foggintor. It is certain that his motivation for this move was his wish to associate the inferior granite sold from Foggintor with the prestige of the higher quality granite of Haytor, or even to mislead customers into thinking that it came from the closed Haytor Quarry! In 1842 the Duke of Somerset refused to renew the Johnsons' lease on Haytor Quarry. Johnson, however, continued to supply Foggintor Quarry granite under the *Haytor Granite Company* name for many public projects in London and elsewhere until declining fortunes led to the company being wound up in 1863. After this it was worked by other companies until in the face of increasing competition from Cornwall it closed finally in 1906.

In the meantime, the real Haytor Quarries had reopened in 1842 and were worked subsequently on a smaller scale by Robert Pascoe and then John Tickell to provide granite for Devon projects including Ashburton Market and Brunel's sea wall from Teignmouth to

Dawlish Warren. In 1849 the *Devon Haytor Granite Company* emerged but folded in 1855. The tramway had limped on but was probably unused from the 1850s with transport being provided by horses and carts, and subsequently traction engines, to deliver granite to the new Moretonhampstead and South Devon Railway at Bovey Tracey from 1866. The final company to work at Haytor quarries was *J Easton & Son* between 1867-1902 during which time ownership passed from the 12th Duke of Somerset to a local clergyman, the Rev Prebendary Richard Wolfe. The Easton business was mainly concerned with supplying granite for memorials and other cemetery furnishings. One of the company's last customers was a contractor requiring Haytor granite for the construction of the Moorland Hotel in 1902, the year Wolfe died. His properties were sold to Washington Singer, a keen huntsman and Master of the South Devon Hunt between 1907 and 1913. *J Easton & Sons* continued in business using other quarries until the 1950s during which time they supplied granite for Castle Drogo and countless war memorials throughout the country. There was a brief swansong for the Haytor Quarry when Singer permitted its re-opening in 1920-1922 to provide granite for the 30ft Devon County War Memorial by the West Front of Exeter Cathedral.



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