

# Topsham Man Unravels Mystery of Town's Historic Landmark – Topsham Lock

**Age is but a number - and few know that more than Tom Epton, who at 85 has written a detailed and impassioned story in pursuit of a long-standing Devon mystery.**

His work - intriguingly entitled *Topsham Lock, the Lower Sluice & the Back Gut* - is an exploration of the history, facts and anecdotes about the lock and its picturesque lock cottage which are cherished landmarks for visitors to Topsham today.

Epton, who has nearly seven decades of experience in the law, takes us on a forensic analysis of the official reports, court case and personalities which make up the twisting and turning history of the lock and its cottage.

The book reveals a fascinating insight into the mercantile rivalry between Topsham and its quay and the city of Exeter – so much more competitive and passionate in centuries past than conceivable today - and the pivotal role of 18th/19th century shipbuilder Robert Davy in the court battle in 1829 on be-half of the town of Topsham for the construction of the lock, following the ill-advised extension of the Canal down to Turf pool, thereby by-passing Topsham and its quay.

Ultimately, the book asks which direction the lock should go in the 21st century.

Should it be fully restored, perhaps as a nod towards the modern passion for sustainability and recrea-tional amenity? Or should it be left in its current decay, a symbol of a time past? A restored

working operational lock – or colossal wreck?

Epton's account is presented in a crisp 164-page book in hardback, laced with handsome illustrations, photographs and first hand accounts extracted from documents of the day, with its Argument based on his original research.

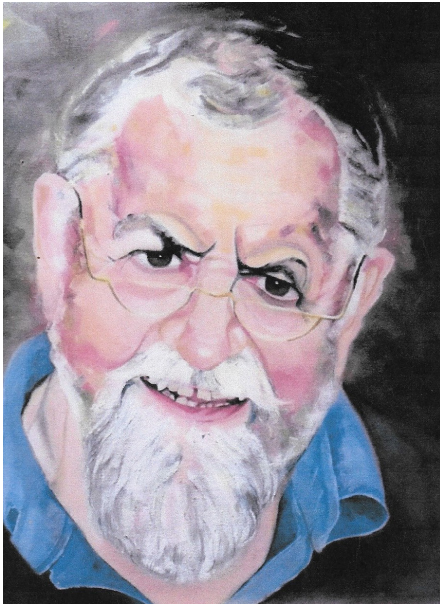
It also carries the unmistakable imprint and voice of the author, a man who personifies the enthusiasm and dedication of modern-day Topsham. He is a keen Member of Topsham Sailing Club and in younger days contributed to the town's Estuary Players amateur dramatic group. He is a strong supporting member of Topsham Museum, which has given integral support and encouragement to the book.

Epton is the Clerk to the Port of Topsham River Commissioners, a body created by statute in 1840, and his popularity is such that the town has been kept abreast of his progress in writing this book, which is his attempt to reveal to the community an aspect of its history which it has been his privilege to research and can now return, with thanks for all the benefits which the community has given to him.

**Tom Epton is available for interview - please call 01392 876457 for further details.**

***Topsham Lock, the Lower Sluice & the Back Gut* is available from Topsham Museum (shop@topshammuseum.org.uk).**





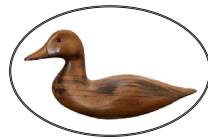
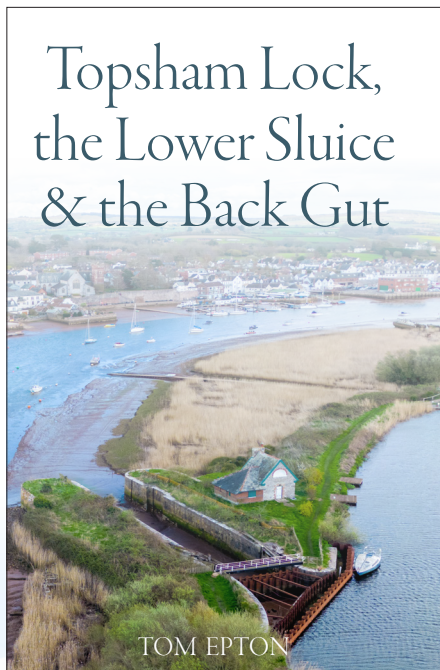
In publishing this Book, at the age of 85, Tom Epton has presented an authoritative Argument as to how Topsham Lock came to be constructed, in 1829, by exploring the Law Suit brought by Robert Davy and others against the City of Exeter. In addition, he has attempted to place this fascinating Story within the wider social, historical, political and mercantile landscape of Devon, for which there exists an abundant scholarship already published and which Tom has consulted and fully credited.

Tom also has left the Reader some work of their own to do, as they bring their own life and experiences into play as they interpret the Story in their own personal way. He has left open doors for any such alternative approaches – but not alternative facts!

Supported by Topsham Museum and as Clerk to the Port of Topsham River Commissioners and a member of Topsham Sailing Club, Tom has researched Topsham Lock as his “special subject” and thereby found a chink in the Tapestry of the Town’s own History.

The Book carries Tom’s very individual Voice, which it is hoped might provide Pleasure as well as Knowledge, both generally for its Devonian context and also to the Reader who is interested in Inland Waterways and Canals in particular.

The Exeter Ship Canal is now at a crucial stage in its practical Revival as a Working and Operational Waterway, of both Use and Ornament - one fit for a 21st Century that envisages an emerging new Leisure and Amenity purpose, so different from its original mercantile function when first cut in 1563.



**Copies of the hardback illustrated Book, are available at £20 per copy (plus postage) from Topsham Museum  
25 Strand, Topsham, Exeter, Devon, EX3 0AX  
The museum shop is open Wednesday-Sunday 2-5pm  
or online at [www.topshammuseum.org.uk](http://www.topshammuseum.org.uk)  
Or [shop@topshammuseum.org.uk](mailto:shop@topshammuseum.org.uk)**

