



## The Chaplin Family

The Chaplin family were a wealthy landed clan living in Lincolnshire. A study of their genealogy reveals that they were wealthy and significant enough for their sons to marry daughters of the aristocracy, e.g. John Chaplin's son, Thomas married Diana Archer, daughter of Lord Andrew Archer of Umberslade, Warwick-shire; his son, John Thomas Chaplin married Lady Elizabeth Cecil daughter of Brownlow Cecil, the 8th Earl of Exeter. The Chaplin family were upper gentry, with matrimonial links to the aristocracy. At various times they had four bases of power and influence in Lincolnshire: Ryhall Hall (Rutland), Blankney Hall (near Lincoln), Tathwell Hall (near Louth), and Thorpe Hall, South Elkington, Louth. The directories of the period record them as owning many thousands of acres of land. Economically and socially they are on a par with landowners like the Earls of Scarborough and Yarborough, and the Heneages, who all invested in the canals and railways as well as the development of seaside resorts, and the industrial expansion of Grimsby but who because of their huge landholdings had a vested interest in the agrarian revolution.

The branch of the Chaplin family based at Tathwell were a major influence on the development and running of the canal. They were the local landowning family who contributed a commissioner (Charles b:1730) who was also a shareholder in the sum of £1,000, 10 shares, and who subsequently became the manager of the tolls.

As Stuart Sizer points out in his history of the Louth Navigation, the commissioners were granted powers under the Act to lease or let the tolls for the best sum they could obtain. The Act required that the lease period should not exceed seven years." It appears to us that the Shareholders would demand that their interests were rigorously protected and who better placed to oversee their interests but the Chaplin family who seem to have exercised considerable influence from the inception of the canal. However, we point out that despite the terms of the 1763 Act, Charles Chaplin managed to obtain a lease for 99 years, demonstrating the enormous powers the landed classes had to control local affairs at the time, leading eventually to conflict with the users of the canal in the 1820s. This resulted in a further Act of Parliament in 1828 and the Padley survey of that year. Control of the management & tolls became virtually hereditary within the Tathwell branch of the Chaplin family. When Charles died, he was succeeded by his son Thomas, who in turn was succeeded by a George Chaplin, a legatee of Thomas. It is interesting that despite the feelings of the commercial classes of Louth that the Chaplins were not interpreting their role to the best advantage of all involved, they managed to retain control through the serious conflict in the 1820s. There is clear evidence that the dominant and controlling position of the Chaplin family was opposed from 1777 and re-emerged very strongly in the 1820's. When Charles Chaplin was allowed to extend the lease to 99 years in 1777, he was supported by only ten of the commissioners, and some of the shareholders. It was never a situation that achieved wide support. By the 1820s a clear anti-Chaplin faction amongst the commissioners, led by Stephen Gray and John Naull, Louth brick and tile maker, emerged. The opposition seems to have been drawn from a section of those commissioners representing the commercial classes. They were trying to prevent the Chaplins from legalising their position through a new Act of Parliament. The methods they used were to challenge the lease through the Court of Chancery, which in actual fact found in their favour. They then attempted to lobby parliament at the time of the reading of the Bills by presenting a written opposition to be circulated amongst M.P.s. However, the Chaplains were successful in getting their Bill through parliament in 1828. It seems that the Chaplins were able to use their own influence as leading landowners and that of others to gain the support of a parliament which at the time was dominated and run in the interests of the landed classes.

The opposition arguments are clearly stated in a document entitled "Facts and observations in opposition to the proposed Bill dated 25th February 1826. q.v.

Also note that James Pulteney Chaplin and the Rev. Henry Chaplin were major shareholders in 1840, and would still exert considerable influence.

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