

## Stroudwater Canal Company's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

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After a series of meetings at the George Inn, Stroud, the Company that built the Stroudwater Canal was formally established in December 1774. The inn was off the south side of the High Street, with a gated yard on the line of the present Union Street and a fine assembly room spanning the yard. At that time, the George was the chief inn in town, regularly hosting balls, assemblies and official meetings. So it was the natural meeting place for the local businessmen who wanted to build a canal that would supply the district with cheaper coal.



Making the River Frome navigable from Framilode to Stroud had been authorised by Act of Parliament in 1730, but practical measures had not been successful. In 1774, a new generation of entrepreneurs believed they had the means of achieving the objective by building a canal that would be largely independent of the river. The main enthusiasts were from the local area, particularly six clothiers, a shop-keeper, a soap-boiler, and a water supply contractor, and they were supported by many other leading local inhabitants and their relatives.

Following several meetings at the George Inn, the first concrete step was for 90 subscribers to sign and seal a complicated document dated 8 December 1774. This committed each of them to pay £100 per share towards the estimated £20,000 cost of constructing the canal and to agree articles setting out how the undertaking would be managed.



This huge statement of confidence paved the way for a first formal meeting of the Company at the George Inn on 29th December 1774. At that meeting, the subscribers chose two Clerks and a Treasurer to run day-to-day business, and they elected a Committee of 13 to manage policy. The Committee quickly made a first call on the money promised by the subscribers, and they arranged for construction to begin. It is well known that questions were subsequently raised as to the legality of the work carried out, and it was not long before construction work was held up until a new Act of Parliament was obtained in 1776, but it was the Company formed at the George Inn in December 1774 that went on to build and operate the canal.

The Company was soon paying a good return on the subscriber's investment, and it provided a major boost to the economy of the Stroud district for over one hundred years. To read more about life along

the Stroudwater Canal and to view many original documents from the archive,  
visit <http://stroudwaterhistory.org.uk>