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**PROGRESS ON THE NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL**



As most members will know, the efforts of the voluntary working parties have been concentrated on the dry section north west from Bacton Wood, and beyond to where the canal is still in water. The remarkable clearances are well illustrated in this picture showing what is now almost a normal canal scene. It was taken by Alan Bertram on 10 August 2014 and shows the position just upstream of Royston Bridge that carries the road from North Walsham out to Bacton. We hope to include an article by our archivist Ivan Cane about this section of the canal in our next issue.

## RESTORATION BETWEEN HORSEWAY AND WELCHES DAM

**PRESENT POSITION:** The three and a half kilometres of Vermuden's historic Forty Foot River between Horseway Lock and Welches Dam Lock remain tantalizingly un-navigable. This is despite work on the locks in recent years, and the passage of boats, again in recent years, the latter brought to a hopefully temporary end by the Environment Agency's piling of the entrance to Welches Dam Lock from the Old Bedford River. Recent visits indicate that the banks and locks appear in basically sound condition, with the intervening channel drained and weedy.

The problem is seepage or leakage. The canal crosses over gravel beds and this is likely to be where the leakages are. However it is by no means certain that the gravel beds are localized or along the whole length. In company with IWA Peterborough Branch we are embarking on a reinvigorated campaign to see this stretch of waterway fully open to navigation once more.

**ADJACENT GRAVEL EXTRACTION:** To the south of the Forty Foot is Block Fen/Langwood Fen, containing extensive gravel beds under a clay overlay. The Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) Block Fen/Langwood Fen Master Plan (Supplementary Planning Document) adopted 19 July 2011 envisages major gravel extraction and the subsequent creation of lowland wet grasslands.

This CCC Master Plan includes for the sealing with clay of the southern boundary of the Forty Foot River, with the aim of restoration of navigation. Gravel extraction is now underway.

### PROPOSED STEPS FOR FORTY FOOT RESTORATION:

1) Aerial Photographs: Crop markings on the Fens adjacent to the Forty Foot viewed from the air are likely to give indications of where the gravel beds going under the channel and the leakages are. Arrangements for aerial photographs have been made. These will enable us to target the specific areas that will require sealing repairs.

2) Weed Clearance and preparation of channel: Install paddles (slackers) to the temporary piling at Welches Dam, or other means, to permit raising of water level temporarily in the Forty Foot. Float weed-cutter boat to cut back weed growth. Re-drain channel.

Prepare channel profile where leaks have been identified in (1), with dragline/excavator/digger.

3) Dumping of clay from Block Fen/Langwood Fen gravel extraction: The CCC Block Fen/Langwood Fen Master Plan envisages dumping clay overlay from the adjacent gravel extraction works on the exterior of the southern bank of the channel. Instead of outer southern wall reinforcement, our reasoning is that the best place to dump the clay is along the insides of the banks, both southern and northern, and on the bed.

Our outline plan envisages loading of dumpers with stiff blue clay from the gravel extraction sites and transporting it across to the Forty Foot and offloading it into the pre-prepared channel at the sites identified in (1) and prepared in (2). This can then be spread on the inside of the channel banks and bed, profiled and consolidated, to provide sealing.

The water level can then be raised and checks to ensure leaks are eliminated undertaken. The major work to reopen this waterway will thereby be achieved.

**PROGRESS TO DATE IN 2014:** The first series of aerial photographs has now been taken. These will be analysed and conclusions drawn.

Negotiations with the contractor undertaking the gravel extraction on Block Fen/Langwood Fen for the supply of stiff blue clay overlay from the works are underway, and agreement in principle has been informally reached for its supply either from these sites or from others nearby.

The total volume required will be determined following the identification of the lengths of the waterway that require sealing from the aerial surveys. The contractor is then willing to give a quotation for the supply of clay.

It is perhaps apt that Cambridge County Council are brought into the picture sooner rather than later, particularly as their foregoing Master Plan for the site envisages the dumping of clay, without our own involvement, along the southern bank exterior of the Forty Foot. This opens up the possibility that we may perhaps obtain the clay as free-issue or with a possible financial contribution from CCC.

*AMS 1 Sept 2014*



*(Left): The entrance to the Old Bedford River from the Great Ouse is becoming increasingly silted up as are parts of the 12½ mile channel beyond that leads past Welney and up to Welches Dam Lock. (Right): A narrow boat cautiously leaves Salters Lode Lock to enter the tidal Great Ouse where silting is also a major problem. With the closure of Welches Dam Lock and the crucial section of the Forty Foot River boaters now have no option but to use the alternative Well Creek route when passing through the Middle Level.*

*Both pictures reproduced courtesy of Ivan Cane*

## HERE AND THERE

**NEW DIRECTOR:** At its meeting on 19 June Professor Andrew Storrar was elected as a new director to the Association. Andrew has long standing links with the navigations in and around the Cambridge area and is particularly concerned with the continued closure of Welches Dam Lock and the alternative route through the Middle Level. Initially Andrew will concentrate his efforts on trying to progress the revival of the alternative route through the Middle Level via Welches Dam. Andrew's address is 48 Station Road, Morton, Bourne, Lincolnshire, PE10 9EY, phone 01778 570610 e.mail [Andrew@andrewstorrar.co.uk](mailto:Andrew@andrewstorrar.co.uk)

**TONY HARRISON:** We very much regret to report the death on 31 July of our member Tony Harrison aged 79. Tony became the IWA's engineering consultant in 1989 and began his involvement with EAWA at a meeting in Colchester on 26 March 1995 when, in company with Roy Sutton, he agreed to carry out a survey into the possibilities of restoring the North Walsham & Dilham Canal up to Bacton Wood. A lock restoration report was produced in March 1996 followed by a channel restoration report in October and these led to a meeting at North Norfolk District Council offices in Cromer in April 1997 involving all interested parties to plan a way forward. And for many years Tony was also actively involved with the Environment Agency in a series of monitoring meetings at Denver dealing with the effect of the abstraction of water and the resultant build up of silt downstream of the lock.

**SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS:** Thank you to those members who responded so promptly to the subscription renewal notices that were sent out at the end of August. A gentle reminder to the few who have not responded and a notification that this may be the last copy of "*The Easterling*" that they will receive if they do not renew.

**2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:** Arrangements have been made for our 2015 AGM to be held based on Sunday 19 April at The Hume Arms in the High Street at South Kyme, overlooking the river Slea. Visits to local waterway sites will be included, Sunday lunch will be available at the pub and there will be an address in the afternoon by the Sleaford Navigation Trust. There will be full details in our February 2015 issue.

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY CHARGES:** In response to an EA consultation about navigation licence fees we have expressed considerable concerns about the charging proposals for 2015/16 and the subsequent three-year period to 2018. Between 2012 and 2014 the increases in the EA's navigation licence fees have been 6.4%, 4.6% and 4.8% representing poor value in comparison with other navigation authorities such as the Broads Authority where the comparable figures were 2.85%, 3.0% and 2.8% respectively. And the Canal & River Trust has frozen its licence fees for a three-year period.

The number of EA boat registrations over the last ten years has been static and we believe there is massive potential to increase boating numbers on its uncrowded waters and hence its revenue base, without any licence fee increase. Meanwhile the EA's record of maintenance of the navigation leaves much to be desired and it continues to pay lip service to the desirability of using volunteers to assist but so far



none have been appointed. Overall we consider there is no justification for any increase in the license but, at worst, any increase should be limited to the CPI inflation figure.

**CHELMER & BLACKWATER:** New toilet facilities have been completed at Paper Mill Lock (No 7) together with new visitor moorings below the lock. At the same time the towpath below the lock has been strengthened and improved as it takes the full force of water from the nearby weir and this was leading to rapid erosion. The wall at Indigo Wharf at Springfield Basin in Chelmsford has been repaired and new moorings created that are to include electric service points. At Barnes Lock (No 2) the cills have been repaired, the lock gates have been repaired and repainted and some dredging has been carried out. The path alongside the south bank visitor moorings at Heybridge Basin has been improved as has the towpath between Barnes and Sandford (No 3) locks.

Meanwhile there has been further development in the Springfield Basin area where apartments have been built on the north quay on land formerly occupied by Jewsons and a Waterfront Restaurant is to be built on the south bank. The Chelmer Canal Trust is anxious that all this development will not prevent the plan to link the basin back to the river in the middle of Chelmsford. At present this could be achieved with relative ease and without the need for a lock because the water level of the river through the town is at the same level as at Springfield Basin. However the new link, which would run alongside the Essex Record Office, will require two new bridges and provision for stop gates or dam slots to allow for maintenance.

One of the planning requirements for the new residential development at the basin was to include a public art project. And earlier this year a sculpture known as "Timber Stack" and designed by Kathryn Sumroy was installed on 27 March and was officially unveiled on the weekend of 5/6 April. It was based on two vintage photographs of unloading timber in the basin and of a passing towed timber barge.

Development has not been confined to the Chelmsford end of the navigation for at the Heybridge end a new warehouse has been constructed on the former Bentall's site on the south bank.

**FENS WATERWAYS LINK:** A small party was held on 21 August to celebrate the completion of the new slipway at Hubbert's Bridge alongside the Wheatsheaf public house. The slipway can accommodate boats up to 12 feet wide (3.7 metres) and there is a coin operated pump out facility nearby. Meanwhile the creation of a part of a Black Sluice Trail from Wyberton High Bridge (1½ miles) and Hubbert's Bridge (3¾ miles) has been put out to tender.

Following consultations with the landowners involved the proposed route southwards has now been narrowed down to just one option – widening the South Forty Foot from Donington, a lock around the Black Hole Drove pumping station into a new channel to the A151 road with a lock into the river Glen. Not much work needs to be carried out to extend the navigation south from Donington High Bridge (12½ miles - A.52 Grantham Road) to Neslam Bridge (14½ miles) and Bottom Fen Bridge (16½ miles – B.1397 Gosberton Road). Thereafter the channel does get much narrower

and shallower and we have suggested that rather than wholesale widening, a series of passing bays at say half mile intervals could adequately cater for the volume of traffic likely, hence reducing the cost of the work.

**RIVER GIPPING:** The new timber bridge for the bywash at Pipp's Ford was completed at a farm in Great Glenham in April and on 21 May it was transported by road to the site. By the end of the day the volunteers had the main frame in position ready for concreting in during the following week. It fitted perfectly onto the brick abutments. Over the summer the bridge installation was completed together with the replacement of the coping stones and building up the bridge approaches. During the autumn and subject to an agreement with the Environment Agency, the bywash channel will be remodelled with the old causeway being removed so that it can once again function as an overflow for the lock as it was originally intended to do.

**RIVER WITHAM:** At Bardney Lock a large redundant swing bridge alongside the lock chamber has caused safety access problems for many years. The Canal & River Trust has now agreed to remove the bridge and it is to be transported to a site on the Grantham Canal. At Lincoln there has been a lack of visitor moorings in Brayford Pool for many years but the Brayford Trust now manages the former marina moorings there and has made space for visiting cruisers and narrow boats. And if funding becomes available floating moorings are to be installed adjacent to the east wharf with some older fixed ones near the Harbour Master's office being converted to floating ones.

**BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY:** Despite the bid for funding for the Marston Valley Innovation Park being unsuccessful it is still thought the first sections of the new waterway, which were included in the plans, will be in this area. Hence efforts are being concentrated on getting out detailed route drawings and obtaining planning consent for a stretch of new waterway in Marston Vale. This could include working with the Waterways Recovery Group and the Marston Vale Forest Centre for volunteers to dig out part of the waterway route.

**RIVER BLYTH:** An agreement has been reached to set up a joint committee to run Southwold's harbour lands. There is now a shared determination to improve the harbour itself that constitutes the lower reaches of the river Blyth from Halesworth.

**HOLYWELL:** Earlier this year Holywell cum Needingworth Parish Council announced that it could no longer afford to maintain the piling at the popular Ferry Boat Inn mooring. Instead it was looking to replace it with a sloping bank with rushes being planted in front. This would effectively have prevented the mooring being used. David Mercer, on behalf of our Association, expressed our concern as did the Great Ouse Boating Association and others. Boats have moored there for very many years – certainly more than 10 years – and this has effectively created a right to moor. Subsequently David had a long and positive telephone call from Jane Bowd, the Parish Clerk and it now seems likely that temporary repairs will be carried out to the existing revetment with a view to trying to replace it with a more durable and maintenance free structure in the longer term. David stressed our mission was not to criticise but to try and understand their difficulties and help find a solution.

## **BROADS NOTES AND NEWS**

**BROADS NATIONAL PARK:** The Broads Authority is considering if it should consult on branding the area as the “Broads National Park”. Currently The Broads is a member of the National Park family but with the additional responsibility of maintaining the navigation area. It is felt the present title (The Broads) does not make the special status of the Broads clear. As a result The Broads have been unable to capitalise on all the benefits because of this confusion in the way the area is referred to. It is stressed that if the change is implemented it will not result in any change in its legal status and the Authority’s three purposes (conservation, recreation, navigation) will continue to be given equal weight.

**MUTFORD LOCK:** Mutford is the only working lock on the Broads and gives access to the sea via Lowestoft. As such it is used by large numbers of boats but its control systems were badly damaged by the floods last December, thus putting it out of operation. The Broads Authority has carried out repairs costing £80,000 and the lock was back in action early in June, the funding coming from emergency flood funds allocated to National Parks by Defra.

The tidal surge damaged the hydraulic control and lock gate winding mechanisms and deposited a large amount of sediment and debris behind the lock gates. A new hydraulic and electrical system has now been installed by contractors LEC Marine (Klyne) Ltd to suit the layout and appearance of the lock whilst divers and mechanical contractors cleared the lock gates, sills and sluices of debris and repaired the winding mechanisms.

**DUCK BROAD:** The project to recreate Duck Broad Island by using dredgings from the nearby Heigham Sound on the river Thurne has made good progress and there has been no detrimental effect on the water quality in the area. Initially it was feared that disturbance of the sediment might lead to the release of nutrients that could adversely affect fish populations and increase the likelihood of an outbreak of *Prymnesium parvum*, a toxic algae that has been responsible for killing large numbers of fish in the area.

Starting in the summer of 2010 a series of 250 gabion baskets was used to create the outline of the island and these were planted up with seeds from a mixture of plants collected from surrounding reed beds. The plantings were then monitored on a monthly basis with the number of plants in each basket being counted and their condition being assessed as either Good, Moderate or Poor. With the exception of one basket recorded as Medium all the others were assessed as High. This monitoring will continue until the majority of the baskets are well vegetated. At the same time water quality was monitored on a regular basis with the amount of suspended solids being recorded. Meanwhile contractors Goodchild Marine Services have been pumping 10,000 cubic metres of sediment from the channel into the area enclosed by the baskets greatly benefiting navigation.

**REED AND SEDGE:** The Broads Authority has reported considerable progress in the rejuvenation of reed and sedge cutting through a close working partnership with the Broads Reeds and Sedge Cutting Association over the last ten years. About

12% of the present open fen area of 1,914 hectares is being sustainably managed to produce reed and sedge for thatching. The Authority assists with the training costs of new entrants that involves chain saws, brush cutters, the use of herbicides, boat handling and first aid and thus enables individuals to obtain additional work – such as scrub removal – during non harvest times. Most of the reed cutters do not receive any additional income and a minority still pay landowners royalty payments.

Further expansion of the industry is restricted by factors such as the widening and deepening of dykes that produces large spoil banks and the loss of many acres of reed bed; the restriction of water flow in some areas causing stagnation especially during the warmer and drier summer months; the poor quality of the water in some areas, the lack of any future sustainable management of sites of new reed beds where the emphasis tends to be on deep water; the possible threat on sites should the Yare Barrier go ahead, and the lack of housing which means younger cutters have no choice but to live outside the Broads area and commute to work mainly from Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

**HICKLING PARISH STAITHE:** The once dilapidated staithe at Hickling has undergone major structural and landscaping improvements including the provision of boat launching facilities and was formally opened to the public on Friday 27 June by Dr. John Packman, Chief Executive of the Broads Authority. Over the previous 18 months two rotten wooden slipways were refurbished in concrete to a high standard and equipped with improved gradients and new winches. The work was carried out on behalf of Hickling Parish Council with a £7,000 contribution from the Broads Authority's Upper & Middle Thurne Enhancement Fund, £2,500 from the Environment Agency and £12,500 from staithe berth rentals.

**ALBION:** The wherry "*Albion*" was moored on the river off Wherry Road, Norwich near Carrow Bridge and opposite the Norwich City Football Ground on 13 August together with the Thames sailing barge "*Cambria*" and both boats were open to the public free of charge. And on Thursday 4 September "*Albion*" was moored by The Reedcutter Inn at Cantley together with the Humber keel "*Daybreak*" which has just been named as the National Historic Ship of the Year. Again both boats were open to the public free of charge. "*Daybreak*" was built in 1934 for some flour millers at Doncaster. She is now based on the Thames, was motorised in the 1940s and restored to sail in 1986.

**ECO-FRIENDLY FLEET:** Two of the Broads Authority's ranger launches now have super clean hulls, thanks to an innovative coating that protects both the boat and the environment. Unlike traditional and commonly used anti-fouling paints that contain copper, zinc and other pesticidal chemicals the Authority's new launch "*Martin Broom*" has a silicon based hull coating that feels slippery to the touch with prevents any mussels or dense growths of algae attaching themselves to the boat under water. It also helps the boat glide through the water and keep fuel consumption down. All that is needed for annual maintenance is a quick spray with a pressure washer or wipe down with a wet rag. The other launch was treated four seasons ago and has needed only minor touch ups where impacts have damaged the silicon surface.



**RUBBISH COLLECTION:** In May Great Yarmouth Borough Council announced that it was withdrawing waste collection services from 16 June from ten sites near to moorings. The sites affected were at St. Olaves, Burgh Castle, two at Repps, two near Thurne Staithe, Acle, Stokesby and two at West Somerton. A majority of the waste was deemed to be from boats meaning it has been reclassified as commercial waste. In opposing the move it was pointed out that only some 14% of boats on the Broads were hire craft and that much of the waste came from house boats, members of the public on walks and nearby households. It was widely felt this was a detrimental move that would lead to fly tipping, could spoil an area of National Park status and could deter valuable tourism.

**LANDMARK PARTNERSHIP PLAN:** On Thursday 19 June a plan was launched at the River Waveney Study Centre whereby organisations, businesses and people will work together to create healthier water and wetlands in and around the Broads. The Broadland Rivers Catchment Plan seeks to address issues around water quality and shortage, flooding and wildlife habitat but joining up the management of land and water in an area more than ten times the size of the Broads alone.

The plan, produced by the Broadland Catchment Partnership, adopts a new approach that involves local communities in decision making and helps them to deliver local action to improve the water environment. The catchment includes the area that feeds water into the rivers Bure, Waveney, Wensum and Yare and out to sea at Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

It has a strong farming heritage, internationally important wildlife, excellent angling, inland navigation, stunning landscapes and coast, historic towns and includes the city of Norwich. For instance the river Wensum has just won the first ever England River Prize for landscape scale restoration and the partnership is aiming for similar improvements in the other river catchments and smaller feeder streams.

**FAIRHAVEN WOODLAND & WATER GARDEN:** One of the last traditional thatched boathouses on the Broads has been restored at South Walsham. Following an appeal launched by the garden's trustees £35,000 has been raised in just a few months enabling the 19<sup>th</sup> century boathouse to be restored and re-thatched using local Ranworth reed. The work was carried out by contractors A & R. Kelly and it is anticipated the thatch should last for 50 years.

**WHITLINGHAM FERRY:** Plans have been made to re-establish a former passenger ferry between Thorpe St. Andrew and the Whitlingham Country Park on the river Yare. The service could start next spring and an apprentice ferryman is being recruited to run the service, which could operate from May to September taking four people from Bungalow Lane across to Whitlingham Lane for £1 per person. However more funds need to be raised to build the infrastructure including a new slipway, gates, fencing and signs. The leading promoter is Stephen Ellingham who runs the nearby Kingfisher Boat Yard where the new ferry would be based. Some concerns have been expressed by Norwich Rowing Club which fears the ferry could present a hazard on this busy stretch of the river and particularly for higher pace rowers.

## THE LAST BARGE TO LINCOLN

Abridged from an article by Donald Good in the November 1971 & January 1972 issues of *"The Tiller"*, journal of the IWA's East Midlands Branch.

The last regular boat for Lincoln left Hull before dawn one day in August and arrived at the Co-op Mill on Waterside North with 73 tons of Manitoba wheat to make bread. This was the motor barge "Ranby" owned by the Lincoln & Hull Water Transport Co. Ltd of 88 Lime Street, Hull and powered by a 56-horsepower diesel.

To celebrate the passing of an age I caught this last boat to Lincoln and found myself in an entirely different world. Hull docks offer the biggest port on the Humber whilst Immingham supplies deeper berths because it is closer to the sea. But Hull, a city four times as big as Lincoln, is a busy commercial port, handling merchandise from all over the world and for years supplies have reached Lincoln.

*Ranby* was skippered by Harry Brumhead and the mate was Dave Buckle. Once we were all on board the boat lay off from the lock gates waiting for the harbour master's men to lock us out into the Humber estuary. Half an hour and two blasts of the foghorn later Dave went ashore to rouse the men. At last the gates began to open and into the lock we went. The water level began to change, the gates at the far end opened and we steamed out into the river Humber. Our journey had begun.

We had to get out into the river one hour after the flood tide came to carry us on up to Torksey, 70 miles away. The flood reaches Torksey 1½ hours after leaving Hull. "The bigger the tide, the faster we go," said the skipper, "On a really big tide we can get to Torksey in six hours but on a small tide it can take up to nine hours."

As we came out into the Humber visibility was poor. A fine drizzle and misty conditions prevailed. There was no chance of admiring the view but we were bowling along at nine knots with a five knot tide underneath us and we had the prospect of seeing the dawn rise over the Humber.

As dawn broke the skipper headed for Trent End, keeping to the starboard of the channel lights. Beyond the lights that marked the deep water channel was the Lincolnshire coast but the barge hugged the Yorkshire bank. Dawn was a disappointment; a diffused light spread imperceptibly over the sky in the murky conditions. You knew it was getting brighter as you could see the mud in the water.

The Humber can conceal a few surprises but at that moment conditions were calm enough. When a north-westerly gale hits the estuary it sends steep head seas rolling across the decks. A man would be washed overboard if he were foolhardy enough to leave the protection of the wheelhouse aft, or the warm cabin with its coal stove burning brightly in the fo'c's'le. Everything has to be lashed down and battened and the battens held tight with wooden wedges. The open top of the barge is covered by wooden planks mounted on seven-inch square beams running fore and aft. The whole lot is covered by heavy canvas secured with battens, lashings of rope and wedges. The Humber waves have smashed the reinforced glass in the wheelhouse

on more than one occasion and the wheelhouse has been awash with water with the helmsman drenched to the skin.

We reached Reids Island in the centre of the estuary. It has one house on it and a local farmer grazes cattle there. Today it is the haunt of many species of wild duck, which breed there. We then passed two manned lightships of the middle and upper Whitton. These anchored vessels are constantly in contact with land and on the lookout for vessels in trouble.

As the Apex light came into view the Humber ended, branching right into the Ouse and left into the Trent. We were travelling fairly fast on the tide as we passed through Flixborough. We saw three German coasters at their moorings; these boats have taken away the bargemen's trade as they go right upriver instead of unloading onto barges. We were heading past the Trent-side villages to Gainsborough and passed Kidby Bridge and Furley's Wharf where there was one loaded and two empty motor barges, like our own craft, moored to a jetty. Then came Gainsborough Road Bridge which takes the main road over the Trent to Bawtry and soon we came to Torksey Lock. It had taken us five hours and 50 minutes to get there.

Here Herbert Cutler, lock-keeper at Torksey all his life and his father before him, let us into the 300-year old lock with its wooden gates. We were going into the old Roman Canal, the Fosdyke now. As *Ranby* waited to go through, dozens of tiny pleasure craft thronged the waterway.

The skipper told me that he used to be the skipper of an old sailing barge that traded up to Lincoln until 1938. It was a wooden vessel with lee-boards, iron bracings and 2 inch thick planks on either side. He remembers sailing up the Fosdyke with 7 square yards of sail billowing from his masthead and the wind rushing him along. In those days barges used to bring 100 or 110 tons of cargo but at Torksey a small 30 to 40 ton lighter would be brought out of the canal and loaded with part of the cargo as they could not get in with the 6½ feet draught of the barge. By unloading part of the cargo the barge rose higher off the bottom and the lighter would then be towed along behind into Lincoln.

Through Torksey we saw the other leisure time love of Lincolnshire people – fishing. All along the banks were the angling enthusiasts, seeking their own sheltered spots, tall and short, young and old, women on their own, young boys, seasoned anglers and even whole families had come out to greet us.

Here the skipper decided to show me how a motor barge tows a lighter along behind. He had promised a man a tow some time ago. The lighter had been brought from Hull by someone else and was moored at Torksey. The owner was waiting to get it to Boston. He had cut away the bow and fixed a moveable ramp which was lowered to let in water so that a yacht could be floated inside, then the ramp was raised and the water pumped out, making a handy dry dock for repairing small boats. So the old lighter was put on a couple of crossed lines and off we went.

Torksey Long Wrack is a lengthy straight stretch of the Fosdyke canal with green banks. At Drinsey Nook, where the Saxilby Road parts for Gainsborough and

Sheffield, conversation turned to the Eagre – where the Trent rises in a wall of water two to three feet high, at the point where the flood-tide hits the ebb-tide. “*Ranby*” travels up-river with the flood and does not meet the Eagre but occasionally hits it when returning empty.

The 21-year old steel barge has three-eighths of an inch steel plate on the bottom. It is good for another 20 or 40 years, says the skipper, “In two years we have only had two repairs to the bottom and the Gardiner diesel has been trouble free. But you can wear away one eighth of an inch in no time”, he said. Along the Fosdyke we kept bumping with our  $4\frac{2}{3}$  feet draught.

This slowed the barge and the lighter behind kept coming. Suddenly there was a bump and we drove up the bank. It took ages to get off again. Twice this happened before we realised the steering was damaged. The lighter had struck the rudder and bent it round and three cogs had snapped off the cogwheels of the gypsy steering mechanism. We began to limp home, the skipper fearing he might lose control under the narrow bridges.

Past Saxilby Bridge, at the Lindsey & Kesteven fertiliser plant, the steering went. We were in Lincoln Long Wrack. At High Bridge the lighter would not pass under, so we cast it off. The owner had come aboard at Brayford and hauled his craft to a mooring. We glided through Thorn Bridge and came up to the Co-op Mill. We had grazed the bank near Brayford and before the High Bridge, but we had made it.

## **A PICTORIAL JOURNEY DOWN THE WISBECH CANAL**

This is the title of a new book just published by William Smith, a long-standing member of the Well Creek Trust. After an historical introduction the reader is taken on a journey from the canal’s former junction with the river Nene near Freedom Bridge in Wisbech and on through the town and the villages of Elm and Emneth to its junction with Well Creek at Outwell. There are a series of pictures of Wisbech Sluice (lock), of the canal through the town, of the features along the route, and of the Outwell Pen Sluice. Useful maps and drawings help illustrate the position today.

The return journey then looks at some of the developments that have taken place following the canal’s closure in 1926 including the dredging out of the Outwell Canal Basin, the filling in of parts of the canal such as the Churchill Road that was built on the bed of the canal in the centre of Wisbech and the removal of the bridges.

The book contains over 230 images comprising photographs, maps and drawings and around 33,000 words on 181 pages. It is priced at a modest £9.99 (postage £1.60 extra) and can be obtained from Mr. Smith’s web site – [www.carrillson.co.uk](http://www.carrillson.co.uk)

The canal is little known today and so this book should help to redress the balance and be of considerable interest to many. EAWA was actively involved in 1970 in helping to establish the Well Creek Trust that carried out the clearance work at Outwell Canal Basin. In turn this was inspired by our then member Louis Doubleday whilst our current chairman, Roger Sexton, was also actively involved.

## NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL

**FOOTFALL & USER SURVEY** On Sunday 31 August a Survey was carried out at Ebridge Millpond from 7am to 7pm to establish how many people visited the canal over the 12 hour period; an approximation of their age; what activity they undertook; how long they stayed; which area of the millpond they used and their method of travel to the millpond. In addition, when possible, a sample were interviewed in order to ascertain where they had travelled from; their reasons for coming to the canal and what further improvements would they like to see in order to enhance their visit.

Five years ago the area was dry, reeded and overgrown with no visitors – so the survey would show the footfall increase as a result of improvements to the area by the Old Canal Company and the volunteers.

124 visitors were recorded over the 12 hours and the mean average time spent by each user at the canal was 34 minutes. 71% arrived by car, 18% arrived on bicycles and 11% walked; 73% of the visitors were local and 27% were tourists.

	7-9am	9-11am	11-1pm	1-3pm	3-5pm	5-7pm	Totals
Adults	11	16	31	10	24	22	114
Children	2	0	4	0	4	0	10
Dogs	4	6	13	4	5	6	38

The reasons for visiting the canal showed a fair range of activities – 53% walking, especially with dogs; 17% canal interest, 8% sitting on benches just to enjoy the canal, 6% fishing (a recent activity), 5% gongoozling, 4% picnic, 3% cycling, 3% wildlife and 1% canoeing.

Under improvements suggested 33% would like the footpath on the west side of the canal extended to Spa Common, 16% wanted more dog litter bins (there are none at present); there was a call for more angling provision (17%) such as fishing platforms; and another 17% for more boating, such as a slipway to make launching canoes and small boats easier. The other main plea was to continue to keep the canal reed free and clear.

Whilst the survey was being conducted a party of volunteers was hard at work clearing the spillway at Ebridge and clearing some fallen trees further upstream. The group comprised 14 varying in age from 14 to 72 and included locals, others from the west and south of Norfolk (and Suffolk) and a visitor from America. They were not included in the visitor survey as it could have skewed the results.

The survey was masterminded by Ivan Cane and the results formed a crucial part of a presentation which Ivan, with David Revill and Chris Black, made to the North Norfolk District Council's Scrutiny Committee on 10 September. At the end of this the committee voted unanimously to support the North Walsham & Dilham Canal Trust's work and recommended that the full Council should do likewise. In addition the **JOHN SWEENEY AWARD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT** has been awarded, by the NNDC, with a £500 cheque, recognising the Trust's work on the Canal.

**NW&DC WORK PARTIES:** During the summer months the sessions have continued unabated and some truly impressive progress has been recorded. The picture on our front page is typical of how the scene on the canal, especially upstream of Bacton Wood Lock, is being transformed and hopefully will lead to the restoration of water to that lock and to the water mill alongside.

On Sunday 2 June work concentrated on tidying up the grassed areas of the lock side "island" and millpond at Ebridge in readiness for the Open Weekend to be held on 14/15 June. To ensure there was no disturbance to any nesting activity only the top margins of the banks were cut back leaving the reeds and water margin plants untouched. The grassed areas were strimmed and mown and the lock side vegetation and grass was removed to make sure the lock edge was clearly visible.

At the same time floating weeds and debris were removed from the upper lock gates. There were a number of visitors whilst the work was going on and 12 signatures were added to the petition to support the restoration of the canal, taking the total to over 1,900. In the afternoon the Trust's newly acquired work boat that is powered by an outboard motor was tested out travelling from Bacton Wood halfway downstream towards Ebridge before returning. All very pleased with the way it had performed.

On 29 June the volunteers moved northwards to the Old Wherry Pub just below Royston Bridge that carries the Bacton Road (B.1150) to continue the installation of the new quay heading. This involved installing seven tie rod timbers beneath the level of the soil level in the garden, installing the actual tie rods and then adding a 2-foot wide timber walkway at the quay edge. Nine volunteers worked to unload the timbers before excavating the holes where a powered hole borer was very useful but it came down to the trusty spade to dig deep enough, the soil being very hard with chalk and stones.



filled with wood chippings.

It took the best part of the day to complete the holes and install the tie rods. Meanwhile a large digger was able to push in the supporting vertical timbers for the walkway edge rails which enabled several of the walkway boards to be nailed down, making the whole structure very stable. A fortnight later the volunteers returned and the walkway was completed and the quay heading was back-

The session on 24 July included mowing the reeds in the winding hole below Royston Bridge and continuing to chip the canal-side brash in the Pigneys Wood area and to recover any useful size timber.



On 10 August the area in and around Bacton Wood Lock was cleared as it had become overgrown with small saplings and brash. Despite poor weather the site was cleared and was in readiness for a visit by Stuart Agnew, MEP.



**WALKING FOR THE WOUNDED:** On 25 September Doug Hamilton-Cox, a 70-year old ex sapper walked beside the North Walsham & Dilham Canal starting at Swafield and following the towpath down to Spa Common. From there he used the NW&DCT's work boat to bypass a quarter of a mile of unopened towpath before regaining it to walk to Ebridge Mill. From Ebridge to Honing there is no access at present, so public footpaths to Meeting House were used and then Weavers Way to Briggate and Honing Staithe Cut. From Honing Lock the towpath was used to complete the walk to Tonnage Bridge.

With his wife Sue, Doug started his walks five years ago to raise money for wounded troops via Help for Heroes. After a series of walks including from John O'Groats to Lands End his latest aim is to walk all the 2,500 miles of canals in the UK - £84,000 has been raised to date and the aim is to get to at least £100,000 before he finishes. Our picture shows



Sue and Doug Hamilton Cox in their light coloured T-shirts surrounded by NW&DC stalwarts Roger Hopkinson, David Revill, Chris Black and Ivan Cane by the top gates of the restored Bacton Wood Lock.

**FISHING SUCCESS:** Phil Scott-Davies, a brave angler from North Walsham, decided to try his luck fishing in the canal. He rigged up his tackle at Ebridge and his second cast into the canal resulted in a fighting fish – a red-finned rudd. Yet another example of the benefits of the restoration work. A picture of Phil holding his catch appeared in the Eastern Daily Press of 13 August 2014.

## ANOTHER EBRIDGE EVENT



Over the weekend of 14 & 15 June the North Walsham & Dilham Canal Trust with support from the Old Canal Company Limited held another of its very successful publicity events at Ebridge Lock. Both days were well attended with many of the visitors expressing their appreciation of what has already been achieved.

Amongst the attractions was the Trust's work boat that had a new role by providing trips for members of the public whilst at the same time a sailing yacht explored the canal upstream of the lock. On land there was a series of stalls including an important one manned by EAWA archivist, our member Ivan Cane, with an impressive display of documentation about the canal, whilst a collection of vintage tractors provided by members of the Norfolk Vintage & Classic Tractor Club created another attraction for the visitors.

There is no doubt that the series of public open days that have been held at Ebridge have been an important step in securing the impressive environmental improvements that have taken place on this stretch of the waterway up to Bacton Mill transforming it from a weed-infested overgrown channel into a clear and wide waterway that is now an important asset to the surrounding area.

**EASTERLING COPY DATE:** The closing date for articles for the next issue in February (Volume 9, Number 11) is 31 January 2015.