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NAVIGATING THE OLD BEDFORD RIVER

John Revell & Mike Daines (IWA Peterborough Branch) 15 November 2016



In November 2016 I took my narrowboat, based at Fox's Marina in March, into the Old Bedford River via the tidal river Great Ouse at Salter's Lode. This is not as simple as it sounds. It has to be done "on the level" and the Old Bedford and the narrow tidal channel which leads to it are in poor condition. As a result, few boats have been willing or able to do this in recent years.

I attempted the same journey in November 2015 and managed about a mile before being forced to turn round through lack of water and a massive amount of cott weed which completely clogged up the propeller.

This year I emailed the Environment Agency (EA) well in advance on the 7th October advising them that I proposed to navigate the Old Bedford during the period 3 November to 5 November. I further explained that I would aim to cruise all the way to Welches Dam lock and I asked for confirmation that the Welney Guillotine Gate, through which we would have to pass, would be left open in the raised (navigable) position. I never received a reply from EA.

I successfully entered the Old Bedford at 7.45am on Saturday November 5. This was not straightforward (see photo) but the Middle Level Lock keeper and an EA staff member were very helpful and together with a volunteer crew of David Venn, Chairman of IWA, Peterborough branch, Chris Howes, Ivan Cane and Mike Daines, I headed off towards Welches Dam.

We made quite good progress at first and soon we managed to pass our one mile progress marker from the previous year. After another mile or so there was evidence of dredging on the west bank with the spoil piled up along the bank and the digger visible in the far distance. It was this dredging that had quite obviously enabled our progress up to and beyond our one mile limit of the previous year.

Further ahead were the overhead electrical power lines that cross the river around three miles in from Salters Lode. A previous attempt in July 2008 to reach Welches Dam in my narrowboat accompanied by Lois and Roy Parker in their cruiser *Marie 2*, had failed because this section hadn't been dredged for years.

As we approached the power lines the river took on a glazed and milky look and we became engulfed in a mass of cott weed with the water level dropping to a silted muddy depth of just one foot.

It immediately became obvious that we couldn't proceed any further and once again we would reluctantly have to abandon our goal and turn around. With much prodigious poling by the crew *Olive Emily* was slowly extracted from the glue and turned back into deeper water to make her return to Salters Lode.

We had again been defeated by the same problems as last year, insufficient depth of water, lack of dredging and masses of cott weed.

We had failed in our objective to reach Welches Dam lock which was stanked off by the EA in 2006. This lock has remained closed and impassable for 10 years despite the efforts of the IWA locally and nationally, the East Anglian Waterways Association and the Project Hereward team. The "temporary" piling which was installed by the EA in 2006 covers most of the entrance to the lock so it is very effective at stopping boats but rather less effective at stopping leaks which was claimed to be the reason for the piling in the first place.

Two developments occurred between my email to the EA on 7 October and my passage on 5 November. Firstly, I found out late on 3 November that the Welney

guillotine gate was in the down (unnavigable) position. This came as a surprise as I had been assured that it would remain up (navigable) position unless there was a change in river conditions.

I live in East Anglia and I knew that the weather in East Anglia had been dry for some time so the closure of the Welney gate was puzzling.

More importantly, the water level in the Old Bedford had been dropped by a foot in the week after I had notified EA of the dates of my proposed passage. This is even more puzzling and I have been unable to find out why this was done and by whom.

EA is a multi-functional organisation so any part of it might have authorised this action. It might have been done by flood control, it might have been fishing, it might have been engineering, it might have been navigation, it might have been environment. Who knows?"

Whatever the reason, this had made the tidal passage into the Old Bedford at Salters Lode unnecessarily difficult and muddy. It meant that the depth of water in the Old Bedford was shallow throughout. It also meant that an attempt to enter the Old Bedford the previous day (November 4) had been unsuccessful and had had to be abandoned.

The general lack of depth became an insuperable problem when I had reached the stretch of very shallow un-dredged water, deep mud and glutinous cott weed close to the overhead electrical lines. Everyone knows that special precautions must be taken when working near them but this situation arises routinely on other rivers and canals and is easily overcome. Indeed the same overhead lines cross the nearby navigable New Bedford river, Well Creek at Nordelph and the Great Ouse at Littleport.

The Old Bedford is not a dead end waterway leading nowhere but is part of a long established route that needs to be restored to full navigation. It would make an interesting cruising ring. It has been navigable since 1637, well before the main canal era started. It is a statutory navigation and it needs to be maintained.

Although the Old Bedford remains officially open it will remain off limits for all but the most determined boater until it is deep enough, and dredged properly.

The Canal and River Trust (CRT) has built on the long experience of British Waterways in managing rivers so that they remain navigable most of the time but are closed when flood conditions require. Just think of the Rivers Soar, Trent, Severn, Avon, Weaver or the river sections of the Trent and Mersey or the Caldon or the Calder and Hebble to name just a few.

Would the current lamentable state of affairs in this part of the Fens be tolerated elsewhere on the system? Would this have been allowed to go on for so long if CRT managed it? Would it not be better if responsibility for navigation matters on waterways that are currently managed by EA be transferred to CRT?

HERE AND THERE

BOSTON'S NEW FLOOD BARRIER: Up until early 2015 the plans for a tidal surge barrier across the river Witham at Boston included a parallel lock together with improvements to the waterfront at Boston but both these were then deleted from the scheme, presumably on cost saving grounds. These deletions have caused considerable concern in several quarters and have led to the Inland Waterways Association calling for a public inquiry into the whole matter. As a result, in November came the welcome news from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Andrea Leadsom MP, that an inquiry will now be held in the New Year into the Transport and Works Order application for the barrier.

No one questions the need for a surge barrier to protect Boston from flooding. But the deletion of what were seen as important navigational enhancements to the scheme and their subsequent elimination a retrograde step and will particularly affect the Fenlands Waterways Link where access would have been improved. The original scheme was also seen to have considerable financial benefits for the port of Boston. But under the present scheme there is little likelihood of the water level management through Boston, the associated water front improvements, and the prospect of constructing the parallel sea lock from ever happening.

LINCOLN'S SWANS: The Brayford Pool in the centre of Lincoln has been famous for its colony of swans that have graced its water for nearly 1,000 years. Bishop Hugh, who was appointed to oversee rebuilding work at Lincoln Cathedral in 1185, was famous for a swan that followed him around and guarded his bed at night. Until a few years ago there used to be more than 200 swans but the number has now reduced dramatically. Just 41 were recorded in the Wetland Bird Survey in 2014/5 and the number has fallen further in the past two years.

This decline is blamed on the regeneration of the waterfront since the University of Lincoln was established there in 1996 and a string of bars, hotels, and blocks of student accommodation has sprung up around the birds nesting sites which in turn has led to a major increase in the amount of discarded rubbish. Currently no one is responsible for the swans and perhaps there is a need for an official "swan-keeper" to be appointed to watch over the remaining birds and safeguard their interests.

LOUTH NAVIGATION: East Lindsey District Council has commissioned Sustrans to look at the possibility of creating a multi-user path stretching from the mouth of the Humber to the river Witham. The path would use the towpath of the Louth Navigation as its northernmost section and it would create a thirty-mile route linking up with the existing Water Rail Way multi-user path that runs from Lincoln to Boston and mostly along the river Witham.

The Council is also now working with the Louth Navigation Trust and is exploring funding opportunities to restore the 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile waterway. The Trust has been working to reinstate the canal and has created a popular footway along its length with numerous stopping points, a series of picnic areas and even a boules green at Ticklepenny. However the footway is not fully accessible for, or suitable for,

bicycles. Founded in 1986 the trust occupies the historic Navigation Warehouse that was restored in 1999 at the head of the navigation. The canal is unusual in that it is still in water throughout its entire length despite the fact it was closed as a navigable waterway by order of the Ministry of Transport on 8 August 1924. It had eight locks, all with scallop-edged locks (Louth Top Lock, Keddington Lock, Ticklepenny Lock, Willows Lock, Salter Fen Lock, Alvingham Lock, Out Fen Lock and Tetney Lock) should be easily restorable given sufficient funds.

NEW A14 ROAD BRIDGE AT OFFORD: Contractors Stanska have started preliminary work on the new road bridge that will carry the re-aligned section of the main A14 road across the Great Ouse near Offord at Grid Reference TL 21622 68282. The contractors have a work boat and a floating pontoon at the new site and there are likely to be delays of up to 30 minutes whilst the construction is in progress.

PROPOSED TAKEOVER: Negotiations continue between the Environment Agency and the Canal & River Trust over the transfer of navigations between the two authorities and an important meeting was held on 20 October at Mary Sumner House in London. A major area revolves around the control of weirs and sluices and whilst their position and physical condition on the Thames and the Medway are known, due to recent inspections, the case on the AWA side is much less clear and needs to be clarified. In turn this can then determine how future costs are to be split – for example a suggested 80% for Thames, or 90% for Medway and Anglian sluices, not transferring.

HALESWORTH: The new metal work punt was named and launched at 10.30am on Tuesday 31 January on Halesworth New Reach from the steps next to the baseball court near River Lane. The punt will help clear weed and litter from the waterway – such as a recently rescued shopping trolley that was returned to the Co-op.



WORK PARTIES: The Inland Waterways Association's Waterway Recovery Group is planning to hold three work parties on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation in 2017: 11 to 18th February, 29 July to 5 August and 21 to 28 October. These will concentrate on clearing vegetation from the towpath and on repairing culverts.

Meanwhile the Inland Waterways Association's Peterborough Branch work parties on the north bank of the Forty Foot River above Horseways Lock resumed in the autumn with the final session for 2016 being on 14 December when six volunteers worked in glorious sunshine and cleared another 40 metres of overhanging trees and

undergrowth. This was no mean feat as the team had to use hand tools due to the close proximity of a large badger sett. The first session in 2017 was on 11 January.

KING'S LYNN'S WATERFRONT: The river front in King's Lynn has long been in need of regeneration and on 15 & 16 November last year members of the public were invited to have their say on the proposals at a special two-day drop-in-session. The sites being looked at consist of three distinct areas – the first includes the Purfleet and King's Staithe Square where the historic Custom House, built in 1683, stands. The second is the riverfront parking area which includes pontoons and a former grain silo whilst the third is the area that takes in the river Nar loop.

WELL CREEK: From 5 January 2017 the Creek was closed for 6 weeks to allow further dredging work to take place during which there was to be no access for boats.

RIVER GIPPING: Having been put in some twenty years ago by the Environment Agency it is not surprising that the stop planks at Bosmere Lock had rotted and were not functioning properly. Two of the planks had come adrift and the remaining two were so warped that they were no longer any barrier to the flow of water. The warden at Needham Lakes managed to find sufficient funds from his budget to pay for new planks and he appealed to the River Gipping Trust for help to solve the problem. A team from the Trust then spent a morning installing them. The weir is now functioning properly and reflects the versatility of the Trust's working party volunteers.

Meanwhile the Trust's main activity continues to be at Pipp's Ford where the restoration team have had a very busy and productive autumn. Work had been delayed in the spring and summer by kingfishers that had decided to nest on the side of the Trust's excavation but once they had raised their two offspring and moved, work could resume on excavating the rest of the channel. But once the team had reached within a couple of metres of the river bank itself with its small digger, it was realised a bigger machine was needed that could stand on top of the bank and grade the banks back to the required angle to provide a natural profile.

An 8-tonner was hired and after a week of concentrated effort the bulk of the excavation was completed presenting a very neat and tidy appearance. It remains to line the banks at the head of the channel with a coir mat, to prevent erosion when we open up, hopefully in the spring. Meanwhile most of the excavated spoil from the ditch has now been spread evenly over the adjoining banks and into a small pit that was discovered close to the channel.

The Trust continues to keep the towpath clear both upstream and downstream of Pipp's Ford, to keep an eye on the condition of the site at Baylham and doing the odd spot of tree clearance further afield at Papermill Lane.

TWO LOCK GATES REPLACED AT HEYBRIDGE BASIN

(From COATES CUTTING, the December newsletter of the Chelmer Canal Trust.)

Work is well advanced on replacing what is known as the “electric gate” at the sea lock at Heybridge and at the same time this has enabled the replacement of the wooden upstream lock gates to be undertaken. The sea lock was closed on 1 November 2016 and will remain closed until 31 March 2017. Its re-opening on time is crucial as it is the date of a very high spring tide which is needed for a boat – *The Lady of Avenel* – to lock out. Major problems could arise for this boat if it is not possible for it to leave Heybridge on time.

It is fortunate that the very considerable costs of all the work are largely being met by Essex & Suffolk Water Ltd and not by Essex Waterways as the operators of the waterway. Under the Act of Parliament in 1950 authorising the construction of Hanningfield Reservoir and the use of the Chelmer and Blackwater rivers to supply it, much of the infrastructure on the river below Langford became the responsibility of the water company.

The original metal gate has already been removed under an earlier contract. The next phase involves sealing the lock by installing dams at either end of the area where the work needs to take place. The upstream end of the lock is dammed by sheet piling across its entrance, which includes a narrow spillway intended to allow the release of flood water.

The new upper lock gates have been built on site and will be lowered into place by crane. The new electric gate was made and assembled in Cardiff, before being taken apart for delivery and storage at the Langford Waterworks site. From there they will be delivered individually to the basin and lifted in by a crane mounted on a floating barge.

The electric lock gate replacement has given the opportunity for a number of enhancements to the previous arrangement and a VHF radio and a Tannoy system will be installed at the Operator Position as part of the new system. Once the work is complete and the new gates are in operation locking through the sea lock will return to being much more flexible than it has been for some time.

The “long lock”, where the electric gate is used, will allow for far more boats per locking than is possible just using the shorter lock. This is particularly important at neap tides when the locking time is reduced.

And with less lockings, potentially less water will be used and there will be less lowering of the water level in the Long Pound – this can occur in the summer when there is practically no replacement water flowing in from the river Blackwater at Beeleigh.

BROADS NOTES & NEWS

BROADS TOLLS: In October the Broads Authority announced plans for a fairer structure for charging Broads tolls that would be directly linked to boat size and offer greater flexibility by removing the hire boat multiplier. Even after the annual tolls rise nearly half of boaters (44%) would pay less in 2017/8 than in 2016/7. This proposal follows on from a year of research and a consultation process and would represent the biggest shake up in Broads tolls for more than three decades.

At present, in addition to navigation charges relating to size, there is a fixed cost imposed on every vessel resulting in smaller boats paying proportionately more per square metre than bigger vessels. The new plan is recommending that only a charge based on size is used for greater fairness and simplicity and this would result in smaller boats paying less than previously and bigger boats more, the system has been designed to make it more equitable, simple and flexible. It is also anticipated that the new system would boost entry level boating, which has been in decline while the numbers of larger vessels have increased.

In the light of feedback from commercial operators it has been proposed the hire boat multiplier on 2.55 is abandoned in favour of a fixed amount per square metre specific to each classification of vessel. Seven categories are proposed for commercial vessels and five for private vessels. Rowing boats, canoes and kayaks will pay a fixed charge, which will depend on whether they are private or commercial. And the eight remaining traditional wherries will also see a considerable reduction from the present flat rate to reflect and protect their iconic status and their importance to the cultural heritage of the Broads.

The changes were approved by the full authority at its meeting on 18 November.

RIVER WAVENEY: The Inland Waterways Association's Waterway Recovery Group, working under the auspices of the River Waveney Trust, is planning to hold its first ever voluntary working party on the river at Geldeston Lock, this summer, between 5th & 12th August. The intention is for the group to work on the lock, removing vegetation from the chamber, repairing the damaged brickwork using lime mortar and repointing the chamber walls. (Photo WRG)



Meanwhile the Suffolk Wildlife Trust has announced plans to purchase a large addition to its wonderful Carlton Marshes site. This will add a new dimension to the landscape between Lowestoft and Oulton Broad.

MUTFORD LOCK: The lock is often described as the gateway to the Southern Broads with many preferring to navigate it rather than through Great Yarmouth port. Despite this, usage has fallen with its income dropping from £9,350 in 2013/14 to £5,436 in 2015/6, and meeting just a third of its annual costs. To cover maintenance costs, the Broads Authority's navigation committee had considered raising the current £13 passage fee by as much as sevenfold but have now decided the matter would be best resolved by encouraging greater usage. The Authority is hoping to work with nearby groups such as the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club, which is based near the lock, to better market the passage. The only competitor is via Great Yarmouth but there are not facilities for recreational boaters there. Lowestoft is much better and there is the sailing club and the marina there. Whilst the plans are in their early stages part of the work could include improving the data collected from lock users to better target marketing.

SPEEDING ON THE BROADS: Between May and July last year the rangers who keep a watchful eye on the Broads warned 3,164 boaters they were sailing too fast. This compared with the previous year when only 2,735 warnings were given. Wroxham was a hotspot for fast drivers with 1,427 boats last year, whilst the Irstead launch stopped 648 boats on the river Ant.

Of those stopped most – 3,105 cases – were simply reminded to keep to the speed limit which varies from three to six miles per hour across the Broads, the remainder were given a written warning. Whilst the number stopped may sound high it is only a small proportion of the boats using the Broads network.

The Broads Authority employs ten full-time rangers who patrol five areas in the summer and four in the winter where they are assisted by seasonal rangers and volunteers. The five zones comprise the Wroxham area, the Lower Bure, the River Yare and Whitlingham, the River Waveney and Breydon Water.

BADEN POWELL: A 116-year old former King's Lynn fishing boat Baden Powell arrived back in Norfolk on 30 November following its partial restoration at the St. Osyth boatyard near Colchester. But it came on a transporter and was manoeuvred into a barn of a farm in Terrington St. John, near King's Lynn, where the final work installing the engine, completing the superstructure and making it seaworthy, will be carried out.

The King's Lynn Norfolk Boat Trust has been behind the ten-year campaign to restore the boat and the Heritage Lottery Fund has granted £76,300 towards the estimated total cost of £200,000. The plan is to complete the work and enable the boat to take passengers for cruises on the Great Ouse next year.

HARBOUR MARINE SERVICES: Based at Southold on the river Blythe this is one of the few independent boatyards left in the country and is run by John Buckley. It refits, repairs and maintains all type of vessel at its base in the harbour and is one of the few places that can still provide a tailored personal service. It moved to its present base in 1988/9 and has retained its staff of 20 who have knowledge and skills in various disciplines which has enabled it to keep its costs down.

EAST ANGLIAN WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION LIMITED

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES for the year ended 30 June 2016

Incoming Resources	General A/c Unrestricted £	Restricted Funds £	2016 £ Total	2015 £ Total
Subscriptions & Donations	1,016.50			1,147.50
Weeping Cross Fund	2,000.00			1,250.00
Gift Aid	526.20			273.75
Charities Aid Foundation	10,000.00		13,542.70	
Investment Income		41.24	41.24	40.75
Annual General Meeting Income	-----		-----	337.80
Total Incoming Resources	<u>13,542.70</u>	<u>41.24</u>	<u>13,584.26</u>	<u>3,049.50</u>
Resources Expended				
<u>Costs of charitable activities</u>				
Easterling Newsletter	247.24			350.08
Working parties insurance & costs	933.25			371.00
River Blyth Project	100.00			-----
Project Hereward	-----			19.44
<u>Management & Administration</u>				
AGM expenses	30.00			397.50
Postages, stationary & meeting room hire	54.78			116.48
Company Registration & Web Site Fees	70.72			50.85
Scrutineer's fee & subscriptions paid	109.00			109.00
Total Resources expended	1,544.99	-----	1,544.99	1,414.35
Net Incoming Resources for 2016	11,997.71	41.24	12,038.95	1,635.15
Funds brought forward from 2015	10,234.64	2,923.29	13,157.93	11,522.78
Total Funds for 2016	22,232.35	2,964.53	25,196.88	13,157.93
Transfer to Restricted Funds as at 30 June 2016	-12,886.20	12,886.20	-----	

BALANCE SHEET as at 30 June 2016

Current Assets	2016	2015
Cash at Bank – Current Account	16,155.33	5,362.30
CIOF Charity Deposit Account	9,164.55	9,123.31
Project Hereward Current Account	1,000.00	-----
Total	<u>26,319.88</u>	<u>14,485.61</u>
Current Liabilities		
Sundry Creditors	-----	74.68
Life Membership Fund	1,123.00	1,253.00
Total	<u>1,123.00</u>	<u>1,327.68</u>
-Net Current Assets	<u>25,196.88</u>	<u>13,157.93</u>
Represented by Income Funds, General Account	9346.1	8,609.93
Restricted Funds	15,850.73	2,912.85
Accumulated Fund	25,196.88	11,522.78

For the year ended 30 June 2016 the company was entitled to the exemption under Section 480 of the Companies Act 2006. The members have not required the company to obtain an audit in accordance with Section 476 of the Act. The directors acknowledge their responsibility for (1) Ensuring the company keeps accounting records which comply with Section 386; and (2) Preparing accounts which give a true and fair view of the affairs of the company as at the end of the financial year, and its profit and loss for the financial year in accordance with the requirements of Section 393, and which otherwise comply with the requirements of the Companies Act relating to accounts, so far as is applicable to the company. These accounts have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies regime.

Alan Faulkner (Director)

EAST ANGLIAN WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Directors' Report for the year ending 30 June 2016

Results: Income at £13,542.70 exceeded expenditure by £11,997.71 on the General Account and by £41.24 on the Restricted Account, the position again being influenced by some generous donations including one for £10,000 which has been specifically earmarked to be used towards the repairs to Welches Dam Lock.

Expenditure at £1,544.99 was modest, and included £247.24 towards the printing and distribution of "The Easterling" and £933.25 towards the North Walsham & Dilham working party expenses.

Principal Activities: The principal activity remained that of an Amenity Society, working to secure improvements to the waterways in Eastern England for the benefit of the general public. The company is a non-profit distributing company limited by guarantee (No 895405) and is registered as a charity (No 251382).

Project Hereward: As reported in 2015 the Association, in company with the Peterborough Branch of the Inland Waterways Association, has launched a new initiative to reopen Welches Dam Lock and the section of the Forty Foot River through to Horseway Lock under the Project Hereward name. Negotiations have been opened with the Environment Agency to gain access to Welches Dam Lock to enable a proper survey to be carried out and different methods of dealing with the leaking Forty Foot channel are being investigated.

Following the generous £10,000 donation towards the work at Welches Dam, consideration is being given to how these works will be funded and, although it is perhaps too early to launch a public appeal, the Association has begun to set aside monies as Restricted Funds in accordance with the wishes of the original donors. In these accounts £12,886.20 has been set aside. As at the 30 June 2016 funds held for Project Hereward stood at £16,765 and a separate account earmarked "Project Hereward" account has been opened at the bank.

North Walsham & Dilham Canal The association continues to give its full support to the North Walsham and Dilham Canal Trust and it covers the insurance for the Trust's very successful working parties. Following the Association's Annual General Meeting at the Sutton Staithe Hotel on 17 April members were invited to inspect several locations on the canal from Ebridge and northwards. Clearance has now taken place up to the limit of the Old Canal Company's boundary at Swafeld Bridge that carries the B1145 road from Norwich to Mundesley. The transformation is remarkable. The hope is that it will be possible to divert water back into the currently dry section of the canal that leads down to Spa Common Mill. Meanwhile the section from the tail of Spa Common Lock down to the head of Ebridge Lock continues to attract admirers with a permissive path now being available and boats of all descriptions using the restored waterway.

The Broads: We continue to hold a watching brief over the area where some of the arrears of dredging are being tackled as part of a scheme involving funding from the European Union. We continue to support the work of the Bure Navigation Conservation Trust and the River Waveney Trust.

Fens Waterways Link: There has been no real progress on this project as currently it is subordinated to the plans to install a barrage across the river Witham at Boston to protect the town from flooding. Whilst it had been hoped these plans would improve access to and from the South Forty Foot, as now proposed, they will have little effect. And at present funding is simply not available to extend navigation beyond the present official head of navigation at Donnington High Bridge that carries the A.52 Grantham Road 12½ miles from Boston. In practice some boats can continue with caution for a few more miles before the channel becomes too restricted.

River Blyth: Interest in this short river in Suffolk is growing, due to the activities in Halesworth to restore the New Reach section of this former navigation as an asset to the town. In a well-publicised venture, a member of a New Reach Working Group paddled a canoe from Halesworth down through the long disused section of the river and several derelict locks to Blythburgh from where the river is tidal and open to the sea

at Southwold Harbour. The Association has contributed £100 to help group in its project and clearance work has already started.

General: The Association continues to maintain its watch over its widespread area, taking action where necessary, and giving help and advice where it can. Approaches have been made to the Secretary of State regarding the management of the Great Ouse and the tidal section of the river in particular and some progress has been made. The Association played a significant part in the Ely moorings issue helping to achieve a workable solution and our early intervention in the Holywell moorings issue stopped the moorings being removed. A meeting with the Middle Level Commissioners resulted in our offering advice and full support in principle for their proposal to seek new legislation for the registration and management of vessels. Support is given to the activities of like-minded bodies with whom we are linked; these include the Association of Nene River Clubs, the Chelmer Canal Trust, the River Stour Trust, the River Gipping Trust, the Well Creek Trust, the Little Ouse Group, the River Sleas Trust, the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust and the various branches of the Inland Waterways Association.

Directors: The directors who served during the year were Christopher John Brian Black, Alan Henderson Faulkner (Treasurer), John Hodgson, John Raymond Mayhead, David John Mercer (Secretary), David Edward Revill, Roger George Sexton (Chairman), Andrew Storrar, David George Tomlinson and Jeffrey Alun Walters.

None of the directors receive any remuneration but can be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses.

On behalf of the Board
Alan Faulkner (Director)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the 47th Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday 23 April 2017 and will be based on the River Great Ouse at Hemingford Grey. The Agenda will be: -

- 1: Apologies for Absence
- 2: Minutes of the 46th Annual General Meeting held on 17 April 2016 at the Sutton Staithe Hotel,
- 3: To receive the Directors' Report for the year ended 30 June 2016.
- 4: To receive the Accounts for the year to 30 June 2016.
- 5: To elect one third of the Directors in accordance with the Association's rules. John Hodgson, Alan Faulkner, John Mayhead and Roger Sexton offer themselves for re-election.
- 6: To elect a Scrutineer. Mr John Cordran offers himself for re-election.
- 7: To receive a report about the North Walsham & Dilham Canal.
- 8: Chairman's report on the year's work.

The plan is to meet up at Jones' Boatyard at St. Ives at 10, the morning, where we have been offered free secure car-parking for the day. Jones' Boatyard was one of the first inland waterways marinas and is still operated by the Jones family, now in its third generation. We will take a short tour of the latest development – an entirely new marina basin below the lock and members may enjoy a visit to the interesting and well-stocked chandlery.

At 11.0 am. we will take to the boats with a one-way trip taking us under the 15th-century St Ives bridge through one of the most picturesque stretches of the river Great Ouse then through the lock to the quay at the historic village of Hemingford Grey. The

environmentally-friendly boats are provided by St. Ives Electric Boat Company and operated by qualified boat masters.

From about 12.0 noon tea/coffee will be served in the * Hemingford Grey Reading Room which is just a very short stroll away from the Quay. Members may wish to briefly explore the village. A visit to the Manor House gardens beside the Quay is especially recommended.

At 1.0 pm. a buffet lunch will be available in the Reading Room prior to the formal business of our AGM at 2.30 pm. After the meeting members will be returned free to their own vehicles at the boatyard (1-mile away by road) by car.

Please advise the Secretary, David Mercer, if you intend to join us for the boat trip and/or the buffet lunch or you require any further details. Cost will be £10 per person (or £5 per person for the lunch alone). david.mercer@eawa.co.uk Tel: 01480 466877

OLD BEDFORD RIVER CRUISE

By Ivan Cane

I have had some unexpected cruising over the last couple of days. A boat from the Peterborough Branch of the Inland Waterways Association attempts to enter the Old Bedford River, at least once a year, from the tidal Great Ouse. They then try to navigate to Welches Dam – 12 miles or so. As members know only too well the Environment Agency has allowed Welches Dam Lock to fall into disuse as indeed they have the Old Bedford River.

John Revell and his boat were meant to get into the Old Bedford on Friday (4 November), but the accumulated silt and tides thwarted him. On Saturday I got there at 7.30am for an 8am attempt. This time successful – by reversing and ploughing through the silt. Having been a photographer I then joined the group for a cruise up the Old Bedford – a trip I last went on in 1963!

We got just over 3 miles before the bottom was too near the top to progress, we managed to turn and return to the sluice. The lock keeper thought we might pass through at 3pm, but the tidal difference was too great. He came back and checked again at 4pm but was unwilling to let the boat out with the darkness coming – and he didn't want to leave it stuck on the mud overnight. So John was left at the sluice, whilst the rest of us went back to our warm homes.

There again by 8am. By 9, the keeper thought it okay to open the guillotine gate and the vee-doors. My turn on the boat and a journey of 50 yards I've always wanted to do, started. We "popped" through the guillotine, then stuck in 6-inch depth of silty water, although resting between the vee doors we were far enough through for the guillotine to be closed, to stop tidal water getting in the Old Bedford. Then, the incoming tide gradually allowed us to inch forward – until we popped out into the Great Ouse, then round to Salter's Lode to lock into Well Creek. So that's three days for about 7 miles cruising.

As everyone was leaving, and John had a 5-hour cruise by himself with the gales and rain storms, to return to his base in March, I offered to accompany him part way. Some car shuffling and a windswept 6½ miles trip, part of which we were accompanied by a Bewick swan. I found the paddles at Marmount Priory quite exhausting – seemed to be a hundred turns both ways (perhaps I'm getting old). Then a couple of miles walk back and home – via Whittington for a late lunch and (shhh) nap on NAVI.

NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL

An extremely supportive article appeared in the recent issue of the journal "*Towpath Talk*" which concentrates on canal restoration schemes throughout the country. Written by Janet Richardson, the article describes a visit to England's most easterly canal – the North Walsham & Dilham Canal.

Janet describes how Norfolk wherries once carried offal and bone up the canal to the Antingham Bone Mills at Swafeld for making into fertiliser; this was then transported, along with agricultural produce down to Great Yarmouth and Norwich via the river Ant. Today only small stretches of the canal are in water but it is the ambition of the North Walsham & District Canal Trust eventually to restore the whole nine-mile canal back to navigation in the face of what many would see as insurmountable challenges.

A petition to show support for the process of continuing restoration of the entire canal currently has around 3,300 signatures. The trust has 315 members.

Dedicated volunteers turn out on alternate Sundays throughout the year to tackle vegetation clearance with the help of one of the four riparian owners who has helped to rebuild one of the locks and hopes the wheel will once more turn at his restored water mill at Spa Common.

On a sunny autumn Sunday Janet met 16 members working at Royston Bridge where they have been clearing the back soke – a land drain from the fields which also takes in water that filters through the canal bank – as well as tackling the vegetation encroaching on the waterway.

Work parties start with a health and safety briefing and discussion about what is to be attempted that day. They work from about 9.30am to 3.30 pm but if people get involved in what they are doing, they sometimes stay a bit longer, especially in the summer. The area was infested with Himalayan balsam which has been cleared along with trees, some of which were in the water as well as along the bank and on the area known as Purdy's Marsh. For the benefit of wildlife this will be cleared and Norfolk Wildlife Trust has suggested digging a pond to attract aquatic wildlife and that will also be done. Birds have come back with a vengeance since bits of the water were cleared.

Thousands of tons of material have been used to rebuild the canal banks from Swafeld but no waternot yet. The Trust has it in writing that it can do a trial re-water but there is still much to do.

NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL

Work has been carried out on the Trust's work boat "SUE B" and it now has its full complement of safety railing, making it safer for work party use and for trip boating. The chains have hooks at either end to allow access and egress and the uprights and chains can be removed when bushing or carrying out bank work.

The chains and linkages were provided by Wards Timber and Hardware of Fakenham whilst the uprights came from Fakenham Fabrications. (Report and picture by Ivan Cane.)



WORKING PARTY: The Waterway Recovery Group of the Inland Waterways Association has arranged to hold two Canal Camp sessions on the canal in August – from 12-19 August and from 19-26 August. This is the WRG's first venture into Norfolk in several years and it is looking forward to supporting this new project.

Over the two weeks volunteers will start work to restore the recently uncovered Ebridge spillway. This is in a poor condition with damaged brickwork and a badly cracked concrete slab so there is lots to be done. Volunteers will use an excavator to remove the damaged concrete slab, replacing it with a weed control mat and crushed stone. Volunteers will then reinstate the brickwork and there may also be the opportunity to carry out repair work to the nearby Ebridge lock.

https://www.waterways.org.uk/wrg/canal_camps/canal_camp_dates

The EAWA still holds funds as part of a grant from North Norfolk District Council to carry out improvement work on the Ebridge pound and it will be happy to use these funds to help pay for the materials that will be needed at the work parties.

NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL TRUST



A picture for the history books. Taken by Janet Richardson, Editor of the *Towpath Talk* journal, this shows Laurie Ashton (wearing the boiler suit and cap) and his team of helpers at a typical NW&DCT work party. The picture was taken at Purdys Marsh near the former Wherry Inn at Royston Bridge where the “gang” has been clearing the area, concentrating on pulling out trees growing in the bank of the back soke. The results are quite remarkable – one of these days before much longer we hope to see the canal being re-watered from here down to Bacton lock.

