

THE EASTERLING

JOURNAL OF THE EAST ANGLIAN WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION

VOLUME EIGHT, NUMBER SEVEN

FEBRUARY 2007

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A CAMPAIGN CRUISE

On Saturday 2 November two members of the Association undertook a pioneering cruise and succeeded in reaching the head of Methwold Lode, which – dare we say it – few people will ever have heard about.



The lode leaves the river Wissey some two miles upstream of the Wissington New Road Bridge that carries the B.1160 road from Southery to Wereham, and heads almost due east for a mile. It has recently been dredged and is clear right to the banks, albeit the channel is narrow in places. So narrow in fact that the 23-foot NAVI had to be stern hauled back for quite a way before being able to turn. At the end, where our picture was taken, a causeway cuts across the lode and this is believed to be the site of the

original wharf that used to serve Methwold Hythe or Methwold village, both of which lie further to the east.

There used to be a series of small lodes near here covered by the Ordnance Survey Landranger Map 143 for Ely, Wisbech and the surrounding area. The first, 1½ miles from Wissington Bridge at O/S TL 683972 headed due south for some 2½ miles into Methwold Common. Next a ½-mile lode headed north into Stoke Ferry Fen (TL 688973), then comes Methwold Lode (TL 691974) and finally just before the aqueduct over the Cut Off Channel there is a short lode into Northwold Fen (TL 702979).

Not content with their Methwold adventure our intrepid members then headed on up the Wissey through Stoke Ferry and Whittington, despite the water level being low. The river soon narrows after the Stringsides Drain Junction (TL 719996) where a stream flows in from the north, but was still deep. They soon reached Oxborough Ferry, the normal limit of navigation, but carried on to reach Borough Fen (TL 7419965), just under two miles from Whittington Bridge, where they decided to turn back due to the low water level. There was evidence that the weed cutters had been a fair way up the river and that some larger overhanging branches had been removed. On the return trip the explorers tackled some smaller overhanging branches at one corner and at the entrance to the Stringsides Drain Junction so that other boats would see an open way.

RIVER STOUR LEAFLET

In 1962 our Secretary, Ivan Cane, in collaboration with the late John Marriage, produced a small leaflet entitled "*A Guide to the River Stour – for canoes and similar small craft*" for what was then a little-known river. The route from Ballingdon Bridge in Sudbury down to Cattawade is shown in diagrammatic form with the bridges, mills, weirs, sluices and locks being marked with a commentary about the state of the river at that time. Whilst it is better known now, this early guide still remains a useful publication and Ivan has had some facsimiles made and these are available from him (36 Hayes Lane, Fakenham, Norfolk, NR21 9ER) at 50p (plus a stamped addressed 8½" by 4¼" size envelope) with all proceeds going to the Association.

HERE AND THERE

PAULINE MAYHEAD: We very much regret to record that Pauline (better known as Polly) Mayhead died in hospital from heart failure on 19 December. Wife of our long-serving Council member John, Polly had been a member in her own right for nearly twenty years and her interest in the waterways goes back to the early days of the Great Ouse Restoration Society.

LICENCE FEES: Major concern is being caused by the Environment Agency's decision to raise the Anglia Region's navigation fees by no less than 12% for each of the next three years. Using a 50-foot narrow boat as an example, the current 12-month licence costs £532 but three years later it will be £747, an increase of over 40% and the increase is being brought in without any prior consultation. This matches significant rises on both British Waterways and the Broads and seems to have been driven by pressure from the Department for Environment Food & Regional Affairs to reduce government outgoings and expect the boating industry to contribute more. It also comes in the wake of specific cuts imposed by DEFRA in previously agreed levels of funding for the British Waterways Board, which has given rise to nationwide protests.

Whilst British Waterways only controls the river Witham in our area, many EAWA members responded to the call by the Inland Waterways Association to write to their Members of Parliament about these cuts. Typical was Mrs Pat Edwards, who just happens to have Chris Grayling, the Shadow Minister of Transport, living round the corner. Following Pat's approach he came back with a detailed response from DEFRA, but despite this there has been no going back on this highly unpopular decision. The whole business has been a real mess-up.

FENS WATERWAYS LINK: Last August Lincolnshire County Council agreed to contribute £4 million to the project to build the new lock from the Witham at Boston into the South Forty Foot Drain. This was followed by £1.2m from the East Midlands development Agency and £800,000 from Lincolnshire Enterprise. It is hoped the £2m balance required can be secured from Europe shortly as funding rules require the project to be completed by December 2008. Much of the 21-mile South Forty Foot – also known as the Black Sluice Drainage and Navigation – is already navigable but some work will be needed at the southern end. This scheme is now separate from, and may now precede, the proposed Boston Barrage that is intended to act as a flood control dam and will hold up water at low tide to facilitate boats travelling between the Grand Sluice and the new South Forty Foot Lock.

LINCOLNSHIRE: On 10 July last year the bid by Cathedral City Cruises to establish a Park & Sail river bus service between Burton Waters and Brayford Pool at Lincoln was approved. This was followed on 11 September with approval for the Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership's £250,000 bid to refurbish the linear moorings at Lincoln on the Fosdyke; and it is hoped to complete the work by this coming August. And on the following day the bid for a new slipway at Surfleet on the River Glen was also approved and the work should be finished by July.

Meanwhile another section of the water rail way alongside the Witham was opened at Bardney in July and work is now underway on the next 2-mile section to Southrey. And at the Five Mile Bridge linking Fiskerton and Washingborough new ramps have been installed providing vastly better access than the steps previously attached to the bridge.

Elsewhere at the Four Mile Bar Bridge near Crowland the level of the Welland was lowered for most of the month of November to assist the building work for the new bridge. Ground conditions have proved difficult here and part of the work has involved pouring concrete into a series of specially drilled holes and then adding reinforcement on top. The bridge was scheduled to open in December.

SLEAFORD: There is exciting news in that the Sleaford Navigation Trust has been awarded a £50,000 Land Fill Tax grant for its Head of the Navigation project in the town. With additional funding from the Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership and the IWA the project can now go ahead. Included are the installation of a new footbridge, with a moveable span, to replace the present low-level fixed structure, the provision of a winding hole and the construction of a slipway. This will then open up the stretch of the river through the town for navigation by small boats. Lincolnshire County Council has come up with a futuristic design for the bridge incorporating a Dutch style drawbridge within a curved superstructure. It will be wider than the present fixed structure and very much easier for pushchairs and wheelchairs.

An un-looked for task for the SNT's work parties was in having to remove part of a temporary dam installed at the Ferry Lane (Halfpenny Hatch) Bridge. This had been put in by the Environment Agency to raise the level to test the water-tightness of bank repairs upstream of the bridge. The dam had been created by using one tonne bags of crushed limestone and on completion of the test; contractors were called in to remove them. They only removed the top layer of bags, ignoring those underwater, which continued to block the river for the remaining 1½-miles up to the current head of navigation at Cobblers Lock. This affected the May 2006 gathering of boats at South

Kyme, as they could not get to the winding hole at Cobblers Lock and had to pair up with one towing the other backwards for the return trip. Remonstrations to the Agency eventually got the contractors to remove more of the bags but even then the river was not completely cleared as some of the bags had split depositing their contents under the bridge and out of reach of the machinery. There was no alternative for volunteers with thigh waders going into the river to removing the limestone manually. One can only hope they have been properly recompensed by the Agency for this service.

RIVER NENE: A new landing stage has been installed at Becketts Park Lock in Northampton; it was intended to have piled foundations but the presence of a high voltage cable on the site has necessitated the substitution of a floating stage attached to the piling. Downstream plans are being drawn up for bypass channels at both Rush Mills and Abington locks.

Meanwhile at Titchmarsh the span of Chain Bridge was removed in April – it was the lowest bridge on the river giving headroom of just 5½ to 7-feet depending on the water level. The bridge abutments were then built up and on 21 September a new span was craned into place, which will raise the headroom of 10-feet. Elsewhere Irthlingborough Lock No 17, Wadenhoe Lock No 24 and Yarwell Lock No 33 have had their guillotine gates electrified – it had been hoped to have the new equipment available for the Easter cruising period, but problems in getting an electricity supply to these sites led to a month's delay. Several sites are being assessed for the creation of new or improved 48-hour moorings - Northampton, Wellingborough, Irthlingborough, Islip, Oundle, Wansford and Yarwell and new pump-out sites at Wellingborough and Thrapston.

KING'S LYNN: The King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council is supporting plans for a £15m 250-berth marina in the run-down Boal Quay area of the town, where the River Nar joins the Great Ouse. Detailed plans are being drawn up for what is envisaged to be a major attraction to the town. There now seems to be no mention, however, of the Nar-Ouse Link that would have provided a non-tidal route from the Flood Relief Channel to the new marina.

This link was originally seen as an essential part of the marina development that would simply not be economic without the non-tidal access from upstream. The link, however, would be expensive with several new locks needed together with work on the environmentally sensitive stretch of the Nar. The Great Ouse Boating Association is now supporting an alternative plan involving a small marina close to the tail sluice of the Flood Relief Channel and a new exit lock taking boats back into the tideway.

LITTLE OUSE: In the winter 2006 issue of "*Tern*", the magazine of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, comes news of a project to create and maintain a continuous corridor of wildlife habitat along the headwaters of the Little Ouse. The Trust has acquired a strip of land bordering the north bank of the river all the way from the B1113 South Lopham to Redgrave road westwards for 1¾ miles to the road running from Blo' Norton to Thelnetham. Some non-continuous sections of land are also owned on the south bank.

The project aims to restore the natural water regime on the riverside fens, albeit this is seen as going to be a long and difficult task.

FELIXSTOWE: There was great excitement in Harwich on the afternoon of Saturday 4 November when the huge container ship EMMA MAERSK could be seen across the River Stour estuary arriving at Felixstowe. For she was the largest ship ever to use the port being some 397 metres long (1,302 feet) and 57 metres wide (187 feet). She was loaded with 11,000 20-foot containers filled with 13,500 tonnes of goods from China destined for high streets across the country. Felixstowe is the only port in the UK equipped with cranes that have sufficient reach to work the whole vessel.

RIVER STOUR: There was concern on the river when the Environment Agency announced early in November that it was to stop operating mill floodgates because the structures do not comply with modern health and safety standards. The ban also applies to the River Colne and the Blackwater and covers 18 iron mill sluices. The intention is for some of these on the upper reaches to be left open, thus emptying the river above which will have major implications for the wildlife, fishing and conservation of historic water meadows.

On the lower reaches it is felt the gates have no effect on flooding and can safely be left closed. The ban follows an accident to a member of the Agency's staff four years ago when he badly damaged his arm.

BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY: As part of the MK Waterway Park project the B&MK Trust is in discussions with Anglian Water over how the new waterway could pass through or by Willen Lake. The lake, largely regarded by most as a leisure facility, is primarily used for floodwater management, and its level can rise considerably at times, with excess water spilling out onto a nearby plantation area. The project has to demonstrate it can deal with these changes in the lake's water level and that it will not interfere with the floodwater management function. This is all part of the application for a Big Lottery's Development Grant that has to be submitted in May.

SECRET RIVERS: The programme on 8 October dealt with the River Colne starting from its source near Steeple Bumpstead and following it down for 28 miles before ending up at the Wivenhoe flood protection barrage. Paul Heiney paddled much of the way in his canoe, visiting one of the few surviving water mills near Castle Hedingham and later finding out all about the cricket bat willows that grow beside the river. At Chappel he admired the great 32-arch viaduct that takes the branch railway line to Sudbury over the river – it contains 4½ million bricks.

The final programme covered the River Cam. Here he met the local historian Michael Petty, who told him about the mills on the river. He then visited the famous Byron's Pool near Trumpington, but found it sadly neglected. Taking a break from his canoe he was punted along the famous Backs at Cambridge, learning all about Scudamores, the old established punt hirers, on the way. And finally he enjoyed a trip on one of the Cam Conservators weed clearing machines. This has been an interesting series and it is to be hoped that there may be a second series in the future.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: Advance Notice. Arrangements are being made for the Annual General Meeting (the 37th) to be held on Sunday 15 April based on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation. Further details will be sent out to all members nearer the time.

VOLUNTARY WORKING PARTIES

Led by David Revill, Roger Hopkinson and Marc Lines, the sessions have continued on a regular basis throughout the winter months. On 29 October Chris & Mary Black, Ivan Cane, Alan Faulkner, Roger Hopkinson, John & Gillian Kent, Marc Lines and David Revill assembled at Honing (Dee) Bridge where a considerable number of trees had either fallen into, or were growing in, the main river channel. At the same time there were large fallen trees across the short Honing branch, which has become almost totally overgrown. After creating an access path to the site the party set to and a dramatic clearance was achieved with large numbers of trees being hauled out, giving a noticeable improvement in the river flow. At the same time the mouth of the arm was revealed and one of the large fallen trees was removed with some difficulty. During the proceedings welcome visitors were Tom Carr and Peter Lines.

On 26 November Chris Black, Ivan Cane, Darren Cooke, David Guy, Roger Hopkinson, Marc & Peter Lines and David Revill returned to Ebridge to complete the clearance of the upstream weir and to clear the upstream entrance to the lock. At the weir the last remaining hawthorn tree was removed, the surface of the weir was cleared of the remaining earth and growth, reeds growing between the lower edge of the weir and the canal were cut back to ground level and some clearance was also made to the weir stream. Weed and reeds were then cleared from the mouth of the lock and from in front of the gates. Meanwhile Norfolk County Highways had carried out some work to improve the drainage of the road at the bridge and prevent water cascading down into the "big hole" alongside the lock and hence into the culvert.

A second session was held at Dee Bridge on 17 December when after a great deal of effort, another of the large fallen trees was removed from across the entrance to Honing branch. A good start has been made on clearing the banks of the arm, which will open up a view from Weavers Way. In the afternoon Mr William Cubitt, one of the directors of the North Walsham Canal Co. Ltd, visited the site and had a very useful discussion with David Revill and Ivan Cane. Mr Cubitt complimented us on the work and was generally supportive of what we are trying, and gradually succeeding, to achieve.

On Sunday 28 January it was back to Honing Lock where a hard working team of eight tidied up the site, exposed and cleared more of the brickwork, removed more rubbish from the chamber and to made great progress in widening the turning basin below the lock using the very effective hand-hauled dredging device.

Future sessions are planned for the last Sunday monthly as follows: - 25 February – Honing Bridge; 25 March – Ebridge Lock; 29 April – Briggate Lock

Members can obtain details of the sessions by contacting any one of the "Gang of Three" – David Revill – 01603 738648, Roger Hopkinson – 01692 407127, Marc Lines 01263 720265.

RAMSEY HOLLOW BRIDGE

The project to raise this bridge over the Forty Foot River has been the brainchild of IWA Peterborough Branch for some time. The bridge is one of the lowest on the Middle Level but after several setbacks the branch was able to arrange for the 53 Field Squadron (Air Assault) of the 39 Engineer Regiment to undertake the task. Work started on Monday 4 December and lasted just over a week, the squadron being able to use its own Bailey bridge jacks to raise the existing bridge deck. Considerable publicity was attracted with Nigel Long, the branch's hard working secretary, being interviewed on local television.

Whilst the engineers gave their time free of charge as part of their training programme the new steelwork, including four uprights to support the bridge at its new height, the timber for building the new wooden ramps at each end, other materials and extra equipment have cost the branch in the region of £10,000. Roy Sutton, the IWA's Honorary Consulting Engineer, carried out the design work here.

EAWA had always indicated its whole-hearted support for this project and whilst Peterborough had accumulated much of the £10,000 cost with fund raising events over several years, we were delighted to be able to make a £500 contribution.



Ramsey Hollow Bridge, which is owned by the Middle Level Commissioners, is shown here in its new raised position, thus removing a major obstacle to navigation.

THE 2007 NATIONAL WATERWAYS FESTIVAL

To assist all those attending the festival, our long standing members Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson Ltd of St. Ives have issued updated versions of “*The River Great Ouse and tributaries*” at £9.50, “*The River Nene*” at £7.95 and “*Fenland Waterways*” (covering the Middle Level) at £7.95. We have just received copies and they will be fully reviewed in our next issue but they are obtainable immediately from Imrays – phone 01480 462114 – fax 01480 496109 – e-mail orders@imray.com. Postage is added to all orders.

BROADS NOTES AND NEWS

BROADS BILL: The Bill that is intended to update the 1988 Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act was deposited in Parliament on Monday 27 November. It was to be introduced into the House of Commons by Ian Gibson, the Member of Parliament for Norwich and into the House of Lords by the Bishop of Norwich.

The stated intentions are to make the Broads a safer place to navigate, to enable government funding to be used for maintaining the waterways by combining the previously separate Navigation and General Accounts and to modernise the working on the Authority.

The Bill also brings in the National Boat Safety Scheme, introduces compulsory third party insurance on boats, gives powers to licence hire boats, gives rights to enter land to manage overhanging vegetation, creates a public right of navigation on the Haddiscoe Cut, transfers responsibility for navigation on Breydon Water to the Authority, contains a voluntary agreement to manage water skiing, gives powers to control boats that cause pollution, removes a requirement for a separate Norwich Navigation Officer and widens the range of bodies involved in appointing members to the Authority by the Secretary of State. It is hoped the Bill will complete its passage through Parliament by the autumn and the government has contributed to the costs, by awarding an extra £100,000 National Park Grant.

Agreement over the Bill was reached between the Broads Authority, the Royal Yachting Association, the British Marine Federation and the Inland Waterways Association enabling it to receive its first reading on Tuesday 23 January.

BROADS TOLLS AND DREDGING: On 26 October the Broads Authority's Navigation Committee recommended that a further £100,000 should be spent on much-needed dredging in 2007/8 and it went on to recommend a 4% above inflation increase in river tolls for 2007 to fund this extra dredging. This would mean a 9.9% increase for private owners and 6.1% for hire boats, where the numbers continue to decline. The full Authority accepted both these recommendations at the end of November, meaning that a record £750,000 will now be spent on dredging and sediment disposal. Of this £500,000 will come from river users and £250,000 from National Park Grant.

As part of the winter programme, in November dredging began on South Walsham Fleet Dyke where 20,000 cubic metres was to be taken out over the next few months to give a 6½-foot depth at low tide. The mud is being deposited some 2½ miles downriver at Thurne Mouth. Silt has also been removed between Ludham Bridge and Ant Mouth to give a 6-foot depth at low tide with the dredgings being deposited on adjoining land.

Meanwhile dredging on Surlingham Bends on the Yare was completed in September ahead of schedule. As the spoil was contaminated with mercury it had to be taken to a new cell that had been created at the Postwick Tip over the summer. Due to this early completion work began in October ahead of schedule on the Bure at St. Benet's Abbey where shoals were removed. And from January to March more work will be carried out on the Haddiscoe Cut between Reedham and St. Olaves. In all some £650,000 will have been spent on dredging in the 2006/7 financial year.

In so far as it goes, this is welcome as there has been major concern that much of the system, including such crucial parts as Oulton Broad, are gradually silting up and could eventually be lost to navigation. These fears were voiced strongly in the autumn when some local authorities felt that the cost of the new Parliamentary Bill – suggested at £200,000 – would have been better spent on dredging. An on-line petition has been set up by Jamie Campbell, vice chairman of the Broads Tourism Forum, which is to be sent to DEFRA minister Barry Gardiner and this attracted more than 500 signatures in one week and by the end of December the total has risen to 1,450 reflecting widespread concern the deteriorating state of the Broads and at the lack of dredging.

A letter in the East Daily Press on 3 January looked back to the days of the Port & Haven Commissioners, quoting that in one year of a three-year period 60,000 cubic metres was removed with 40,000 cubic metres in both of the other two years, but that the present authority has never reached 40,000 in any year.

Recent research by Cranfield University has shown that considerably more sediment is now being taken out than is coming into the system, but if the users are to be satisfied very much more needs to be done. It is significant that dredging costs have risen substantially in recent years from between 60p to £1 per cubic metre in the early 1980s to an average £13 per cubic metre today. On the Yare where the sediment is contaminated costs can be as high as £30 per cubic metre. On Oulton Broad it is estimated that it would take £250,000 to clear all the silt with a similar sum being needed for a new disposal site. Some work is scheduled for next winter but a new tip at Jenson's Island, at the bottom of Oulton Dyke, needs to be created.

GOLDEN GALLEON: A former Royal Navy motor launch that served with distinction during the Second World War was broken up at St. Olaves in mid November after lying abandoned at Reedham for the last six years. Mass produced in timber at Bangor in 1940 and originally named *Fairmile BML162*, she served as a pleasure boat for many years on the Broads before ending up at Reedham. Her owners had tried to sell the 112-foot long boat, but without success and attempts by a museum in Holland to rescue her also failed. She was uninsured, had been paid no roll since 2001 and was deteriorating fast. In these circumstances the Broads Authority had no alternative but to arrange with the owners' solicitors for her disposal as if she had sunk it would have cost £100,000 to raise her. A sad end to a once fine ship

UPTON MARSHES: On 14 October a fine aerial picture of a long stretch of the Bure down to the mouth of the Thurne appeared in the *Eastern Daily Press* and the picture subsequently appeared in the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's magazine. Flood defence work being carried out here by Broadland Environmental Services Ltd. involves a protective bank being built further back from, but running parallel to, the river to create a new line of protection and new dykes being excavated on both sides of it. The unsightly and costly metal sheet piling guarding the original flood bank is being removed and natural reed bed defences are being planted instead. Whilst earth moving is a fairly drastic procedure it has been handled sensitively with particular attention to protecting the local population of water voles and the end result should be an important boost to the wildlife whilst protecting the grazing marshes and properties.

WAVENEY: With the involvement of The Country Land and Business Association the Environment Agency has entered into voluntary access agreements with the

landowners on four rivers in the country, of which the Waveney is one. This allows canoeists to now have much greater access to the reaches of the river from Geldeston upstream through Bungay and beyond. The *Eastern Daily Press* of 7 October 2006 had a picture of the Sports Minister, MP Richard Caborn, in a Broads Canoe Hire boat at Bungay and helping to publicise the scheme. It would be splendid if a similar sort of scheme could be promoted for the river Ant.

ELLINGHAM: The primary school in the village has raised funding for a £24,000 39-foot high wind turbine to provide electricity not only for the school but also to sell to the National Grid. This groundbreaking project has been backed by a £5,670 grant from the Broads Authority's Sustainable Development Fund.

STALHAM: Following the fire at Potter Heigham that was reported in our last issue, on Saturday 7 October there was a fire at Richardson's Boatyard at Stalham when five boats were destroyed. In attempting to deal with the situation, fire fighters faced the additional hazard of exploding gas bottles.

PEGASUS BOATYARD, OULTON BROAD: Yet another Broadland boatyard is under threat of effective closure as the tenants at Pegasus have been given notice to quit and developers have submitted plans for six-storey blocks to be built on most of the site. Chris & Alison Cooper have run the yard since it opened in 1977. At that time it built Pegasus yachts, and whilst production ceased some years ago, the yard still carried out repairs. It also provided moorings for 50 boats with space for a further 50 to be stored over winter. At one time there were a series of boatyards in the area, but after this closure there will be only one left. Alerted to the situation by our member Chris Groves, the Association has joined with others and put in an objection to the development plans.

BOATYARD FIRE: On Saturday 7 October there was another serious fire on the Broads when five boats were destroyed at Richardsons boatyard at Stalham. *Anglia News* had dramatic pictures of the blaze, which highlighted the problems caused by exploding gas bottles. The fire follows on from that at Herbert Woods boatyard at Potter Heigham in June and raises suspicions about a possible arsonist at work.

POND PLANTS: The Broads Authority is asking people not to dump garden pond plants in natural watercourses as many are invasive weeds that can smother habitats, choke ditches and cause flooding and navigation problems. The species causing the most concern are Floating Pennywort, New Zealand Stonecrop and Parrots Feather.

BOAT SAFETY SCHEME: From 1 April 2007 private boat owners on the Broads have to get a new MOT-style test done on their vessels. Despite several years of notice, by the middle of January only a minority have sent in their Boat Safety Certificates to the Broads Authority. These certificates are needed for motor craft including motorised sailing craft, with engines over 10 horsepower. In many cases some work needs to be done to boats to enable them to meet the regulations and whilst boatyards are working as hard as they can, there is only so much that can be achieved before the deadline is reached. This has led to fears that technically boat owners could face prosecution if they fail to obtain the certificate on time, but it is hoped the Authority will be reasonable in bona fide cases.

NORTH WALSHAM AND DILHAM CANAL



On the left is a view of Honing (Dee) Bridge from upstream and taken by Ivan Cane on 17 December – a picture that it would have been impossible to take before major clearance work was carried out on the river to remove a number of trees fallen into, or growing across, the river. The picture was taken from the entrance to the short Honing Branch canal, from which several major obstructions have also been removed.

On the right the work force is clearing the last of the trees, other growth and debris from the weir upstream of Ebridge lock. It appears that when this stretch was last dredged, much of the spoil was dumped onto the weir and it has taken a major effort to remove it – this making an important contribution to flood control in future. Ebridge Mill is in the background.

RAMSEY HOLLOW BRIDGE



Two more pictures of the splendid work on the Ramsey Hollow Bridge over the Forty Foot River. On the left the old bridge has been jacked up on temporary timber supports (and is that a narrow boat waiting to pass under?). Whilst on the right one of the new steel uprights is now in place and is being fixed. We are grateful to Nigel Long and Jim Shead of IWA Peterborough Branch for these two pictures and that on page 7 of the finished bridge.

BOOK REVIEWS

“The River Great Ouse and the River Cam. A Pictorial History from Brackley to King’s Lynn”, by Josephine Jeremiah, ISBN 1-86077-417-2. 120 pages, 178 illustrations, published by Phillimore & Co. Ltd. of Chichester, £15.99.

We reviewed the author’s book about the River Nene in our February 2004 issue and her latest offering follows the same format, tracing the river from source to mouth with a series of well-chosen illustrations along the way.

The Great Ouse rises near Brackley in Northamptonshire and, as so often happens, there seems to be a debate as to the exact spot. It then flows down through Buckingham, Stony Stratford, Newport Pagnell, Olney, Bedford, St. Neots, Huntingdon, St. Ives Ely, Denver, Downham Market and King’s Lynn before reaching The Wash. It has a series of tributaries such as the Lovat (or Ousel), Ivel, Cam, Lark, Little Ouse, Wissey and the Nar and some that are not mentioned such as the Kym.

The author starts off by describing the route and bringing in historical details, some of which are drawn from the writings of previous authors. For instance several of the experiences of C. F. Farrar are included; he wrote *Ouse’s Silent Tide* that was published in 1921 after he had canoed down the river from Brackley to the sea.

Another author quoted is P. Bonthron who wrote *My Holidays on Inland Waterways* after he had travelled from Bedford down to King’s Lynn.

This is followed by an impressive pictorial section, starting at Buckingham and finishing up at Lynn but including the Cam up to Cambridge and a few pictures of the Lark up to Isleham and the Little Ouse up to Thetford.

Many of these pictures were new to your reviewer and are well chosen. As might be expected, Bedford, the principal town on the Ouse, is particularly well covered and includes several pictures of the steam launches that used to operate on the river there and a delightful one of the river crowded with boats on Band Night, with the band playing on a floating platform.

Cambridge is also well featured with pictures of all the bridges over the famous Backs whilst at Ely there are several pictures of the great cathedral standing on its commanding site and giving rise to it being called the “Ship of the Fens”.

The author records the restoration of the navigation up to Bedford that was completed in 1976, but rather disappointingly fails to mention the pioneering work of the Great Ouse Restoration Society, without whose efforts the project would not have been carried out.

This is a minor comment and really does not detract from what is an excellent record of this great river. Apart from the Nene, the author has written about the Bristol Avon, Warwickshire Avon, the River Severn and the River Wye.

The Essex & Suffolk Stour – A History, by Sean O'Dell. ISBN 0 7524 3911 1, 128 pages, 72 illustrations, published by Tempus Publishing, Stroud, £12.99.

Members familiar with the Stour will know that this is the second book about the river in the Tempus series. The first, now out of print, was a pictorial record of the river by the late John Marriage that appeared in 2001.

The author's involvement began when he carried out underwater work for the River Stour Trust at three of the locks. This sparked an interest and he set out to investigate the history of the river from the somewhat incomplete historical records that have survived.

He traces the events through nine chapters; from the first Act of Parliament in 1705, the improvements brought about following the second Act in 1780, the heyday of the navigation before the coming of the railways, the decline in commercial traffic, the dissolution of the navigation company in 1937, the formation of the River Stour Trust in 1968 and its achievements including the restoration of the Quay Basin in Sudbury in 1980, the restoration of Flatford Lock in 1975, of Dedham Lock in 1990 and the building of the new Great Cornard Lock in 1997.

In his conclusions the author attributes the run down of the navigation to the lack of a continuous towpath, the failure to exploit steam power and general lack of drive by those in charge. The towpath certainly caused difficulties as it often changed sides, meaning the horse had to be ferried across at regular intervals, or it was obstructed by fences, over which the unfortunate animal had to jump – the leaping horses made famous by John Constable, whose paintings so often featured the river.

To meet railway competition the navigation company experimented with a steam-powered barge in 1862 but had lost heart by 1867 when the project was abandoned. This differs markedly with the successful use of steam-powered barges on the nearby Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation. The failure on the Stour possibly being due, perhaps, to the lack of leadership; the author suggesting the appointment of a managing director could have led to a different ending.

The book is well illustrated with only a few of the photographs duplicating those in John Marriage's work. There is a small map showing the entire course of the river from its source to the sea, tables covering periods between 1737 and 1891 showing income and some of the more important traffics such as bricks, coal flour, malt and wheat, and five appendixes covering a timescale of events, a glossary, a distance table, a schedule of property, and Joseph Cubitt's 1836 report on the navigation.

The normal waterways convention is that a pound is the stretch of water from one lock to another, whereas the author takes it as being between the top and bottom gates of the same lock. And his mention of a surviving example of an East Anglian staunch at Castle Mills, near Bedford, is wrong as the structure was swept away when the new lock was built in 1986.

THE BEDFORD RIVER LAUNCHES

(Adapted from an article in “*The LockGate*”, the Journal of the Great Ouse Restoration Society, Volume IV, No 8, July 1975)

Whilst Bedford would be very much the poorer without its incomparable river many people regret that the launches, which used to provide enjoyment to countless numbers for so many years, no longer operate their regular trips through the town.

The first boat to operate these trips was the steam-driven LODORE. Previously a police launch on the river Thames she was brought to the town by a group of enthusiasts to ply for hire, arriving on a large trailer in the autumn of 1898 or 1899 and being launched into the river at Batts Ford. After a while she was sold to Alderman Henry Burrige, twice mayor of the town, and in 1902 he started a regular service with her, operating from a base near his home, an hour’s trip costing 6d.

The venture proved successful for in 1903 Mr. Burrige acquired the steamer LILLY BELLE to join her. Whilst LODORE could carry forty passengers, LILLY BELLE was smaller and could only take twenty. Their regular run was from the Town Bridge up through Honey Hills to Kempston and back but they also operated a shorter trip from the bridge along the Embankment downstream to Newnham Bridge and back for a 3d fare. By 1911 the business was known as the Bedford Steamboat Company and a third boat, ALMA had joined the fleet. They normally operated from Easter until about the end of September and the most popular trips were upstream for it was a voyage into the unknown, whereas the trip to Newnham could be covered on foot.

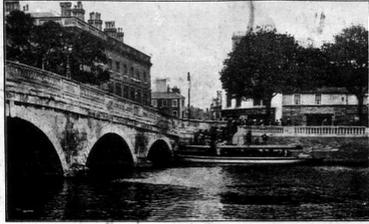


In 1915 LODORE was rebuilt and certificated by the Board of Trade and for several years she seems to have operated services on her own as the condition of both LILLY BELLE and ALMA had deteriorated. The boats had originally been coal fired – hence there were clouds of black smoke at times – but LODORE had now been adapted to burn coke.

There was a new development in 1919 when in place of the tall-chimneyed picturesque steamers came quiet swift electric launches. The first two were LADY LENA and LORNA DOONE, both arriving from Maidenhead and in the following year they were joined by LODORE, the former steamer that had been converted to electric propulsion in Bedford. The trio maintained a regular service for many years and at holiday times they were really busy catering for the visitors to the town. By 1925, however, prices had risen somewhat the hour-long round trip costing 1/-. LODORE could take forty-two passengers, LADY LENA thirty-five and LORNA DONE twenty-five, each boat being operated by a crew of two.

The boats were managed for Mr. Burrige by Alfred Stocker. He had taken charge of LODORE in 1908 and transferred to LADY LENA in 1919 and he remained with the

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FARE: For the Return Journey, 1 hour, 1/-
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The EASTERN NATIONAL OMNIBUS COMPANY will arrange for Special Trips to Bedford from outlying Towns and Villages. Combined Tickets will be issued to include a Trip on River Ouse.

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The Launches can be engaged for Parties, apply—
THE SECRETARY, BEDFORD STEAMBOAT Co., Ltd., Bedford. Phone 2189



business until the boats stopped running with the outbreak of the Second World War. He was responsible for charging the lead acid batteries that were fitted under the seats, as the boats lay berthed in their sheds on a backwater of the river near Mr. Burrige's Cauldwell House.

It is not certain what became of LILY BELLE, which was in poor condition in 1919 and she was probably scrapped soon after. ALMA survived until 1944 when she was broken up – it is known she was never converted to electricity as the steam condensers were still attached to the outside of her hull.

Our pictures show, on page 14, the steam boat LODORE taken from Bedford Town Bridge in 1910 and looking downstream towards Newnham.

On this page an advertisement for the new electric launches operated by the Bedford SteamBoat Company Ltd, and highlighting some special arrangements with the Eastern National Omnibus Company for combined tickets.

And a similar view to that of LODORE but this time showing the small steamer ALMA approaching the steps by the Town Bridge where passengers could board the boats. ALMA survived in a semi-derelict state until being broken up in 1944.

(The story of the Bedford River Launches will be continued in our next edition – Ed)

ARCHIVE SPOT

THE WHERRY-YACHTS

“Bertha,” “Elsie,” “Kate,” “Diligent,” & “Lucy,”

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