

THE EASTERLING
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40TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday 18 April saw the officers and a party of members of the Association take to the train, as a prelude to the annual meeting which, this year, was held based on the Nene Valley Railway at Wansford Station, off the A.1 road north of Peterborough. Whilst the river Nene is alongside the railway here, sadly there was no possibility of a trip boat being available. Instead members boarded the 11.50am train and after a short delay to hitch on a steam locomotive to the rear of the carriages, a diesel engine towed the train westwards through a tunnel to Yarwood Junction. The diesel was detached and the steam engine now took over and we returned eastwards through the tunnel first to Wansford and then along the line to Ferry Meadows, Orton Mere and Peterborough NVR stations. This takeover drill was necessary as the railway is not allowed to push the carriages but must always tow them from the front.



At Peterborough the steam engine, No 73050 appropriately named "City of Peterborough" ran round to the front of the train and hauled us back to Wansford in time for a pre-ordered lunch served aboard a railway coach positioned alongside the main station building. After the meal everyone repaired to an upstairs room for the formal AGM, which was accompanied by an illustrated account of the work on the North Walsham and Dilham Canal. During the proceedings we were delighted that both Michael Lyons, a

long-standing member of the Middle Level Watermen's Club, and Christopher Black, one of the leaders of the NW work parties, were elected as new directors of the

Association. At the same time we were sorry to have to announce that Leslie Heaton has given up his directorship having served for over 40 years, firstly on the committee of the original unincorporated association, and subsequently as a director of the present company.

The business of the AGM over, we moved on to a meeting of the Council to which everyone was invited to stay. Whilst discussing the Fens Waterways Link Ivan Cane gave an illustrated presentation showing some of the problems that need to be overcome to create the link between the South Forty Foot River and the river Glen and reporting on his recent trip on the Glen. And the need to safeguard the course of the route to the east of Peterborough through to the river Nene was highlighted and included the logic of using Car Dyke as part of the route.

HERE AND THERE

We very much regret to record the deaths of two long-standing members of the Association. Barry Green, a former Chairman of the IWA's Eastern Region died on one 27 February following a heart attack. He had been in hospital from some time following heart surgery and latterly he had represented us on the Broads Forum. And at about the same time we were informed of the death of Andrew McAdam from Kings Lynn, who had been a member since May 1979.

ABBERTON RESERVOIR: On Monday 29 March construction work on a £150 million scheme by the Essex & Suffolk Water Company to extend this reservoir near Colchester began in earnest and will take three years to complete. The intention is to raise the water level by three metres enabling it to hold an extra 15 billion litres to meet the growing demand from South Essex. A stretch of the B.1026 from Layer-de-la-Haye for over a mile will have to be diverted and overall the reservoir will be five times its current size. The water required will come, as at present, from the Great Ouse at Denver via the Ely Ouse Water Transfer Scheme and whilst the press has been full of the benefits there appears to have been little thought of the deleterious effects this will have on the Ouse.

BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY: The original B&MK Waterway Partnership held its final meeting in March as on 12 February the first meeting of its successor body, the new B&MK Waterway Consortium was held. The new body comprises the Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Councils, the Environment Agency, British Waterways, the two local growth agencies – Renaissance Bedford and the Milton Keynes Partnership, two local charities – Milton Keynes Parks Trust and the Marston Vale Trust, and the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust.

Meanwhile three new information boards have been erected in prominent riverside places in Bedford and an investigation has been carried out into improving the river from Kempston Mill through Bedford and nearly down to Castle Mill. Essential work will include dredging up to the mill, some bank protection work, and somehow improving the headroom under the main line and Bletchley line railway bridges in Bedford. Longer term the need to re-site both Duck Mill Lock in Bedford and Cardington Lock are seen as being necessary.

CHELMER & BLACKWATER: Earlier this year Essex Waterways completed its fourth major lock restoration project since it took over responsibility for the navigation some four years ago. This has been on Stonham's Lock No 5 some four miles downstream from Chelmsford Basin where the dewatering of the lock chamber revealed one of the walls was unsafe and required complete rebuilding. Meanwhile a badly eroded buffer beam had to be replaced together with both cills. New lock gates have been fitted along with new lock gear. The extended closure of the lock did cause some disquiet amongst local boaters but the work was essential and those affected have been exempted for an increase in mooring fees that have been imposed elsewhere on the navigation.

Another major project on this waterway has been to replace a large culvert, known as the Elms Farm Chunker that was built through the embankment of the canalised section of the navigation on the northern outskirts of Maldon. The original elm box culvert dated back to the 1790s and was in imminent danger of collapse. In a major operation it has now been replaced by concrete piping at a cost of over £750,000 to the Environment Agency from its flood defence budget.

STRATFORD ST. MARY LOCK: With generally fine weather over the summer months the River Stour Trust's work parties recommenced on 13 July and were able to complete the remaining 80 metres of gabion walling to the footbridge and to clear mud from the channel in the relatively short period of time it is allowed to work on the river. The efforts of the Trust's own workers have been supplemented by visits by inmates from the Hollesley Bay prison and by men from the Military Corrective & Training Centre in Colchester. By the time the site was shut down in October it was estimated some 2,300 man hours of work had been contributed in 2009 bringing the total to about 10,000 hours since the project began. Next year the clearance of the lock chamber should begin.

Elsewhere on the Stour a new footbridge has been installed at Bures Mill in an effort to improve the waterway for users. The old concrete bridge was so low that canoeists risked injury but the new steel-framed wooden-decked bridge gives nearly 3-feet more headroom.

GREAT OUSE: Significant improvements have been carried out at Willington lock where new upstream and downstream landing stages have been installed whilst there is a new upstream stage at Castle Mills. These stages have been constructed to a high standard with an estimated lifespan of 50 years, and have galvanised steel frames and piles, non-slip mesh decking and ramps rather than steps. Elsewhere the guillotine gates at both Brampton and Offord have been refurbished. New actuators, which control the operation of the gates, and new gearboxes, chain sprockets, bearings and shafts have been fitted.

RIVER GLEN: A visit to this river by our Secretary Ivan Cane in his boat NAVI has highlighted several problems some needing consideration now and some more particularly when the Fens Waterways Link reached this far. For instance there is no water tap on the Glen that boaters can use, unless a supply can be cadged from a private house or public house.

The headroom under Surfleet Iron Bridge carrying the A.16 road is limited to 6-feet (1.8-metres), which is barely sufficient for most canal craft and at very least headroom gauges need to be fitted here. And a problem for visiting boats is that there are no public moorings at Surfleet Seas End, Environment Agency owned land above the sluice being fenced off, and there are no moorings on the Welland at the junction with the Glen where boats making the transit have to wait for the tide before continuing up the Welland to Spalding.

The new slipway and canoe portage at Pinchbeck, where Ivan launched his boat, are excellent and there is a good mooring here. There is also a small public mooring at Money Bridge between Pinchbeck and Pinchbeck West. Navigation westwards from Tongue End, where Bourne Eau joins the Glen, towards Kates Bridge and Baston is possible for small craft but in places the channel can get very shallow.



It is completely blocked near Poplar Tree Farm, about 2¼ miles from Tongue End, by a croy as illustrated here. This is a somewhat crude arrangement, designed to hold up the water and has been achieved by depositing a series of large stones across the channel. Signs really need to be erected to warn of this.

SLEAFORD: Construction of the new slipway at Eastgate Green in Sleaford, where an old loop in the navigation re-joined the Sleas, began on 1 February, made good progress and there is to be a grand opening ceremony on Saturday 3 July. A trip boat is being borrowed to enable the Sleas Navigation Trust to offer short journeys on the isolated stretch of the river as part of the celebrations.



At the same time the new hydraulically-operated lifting bridge will also be formally opened. Although largely installed at the end of last year some modifications were needed to ensure it operated properly and these snags had been sorted out by the end of March enabling it to be operated more easily. This all reflects great credit on the SNT.

KING'S LYNN: The regional development funding which was to have helped towards the cost of the proposed new 250-berth marina in the silted up bend of the river Nar has all but dried up. As a result it now seems unlikely that West Norfolk Council will be able to go ahead until the economic climate improves or a partner willing to assist fund the scheme can be found.

SWAFFHAM BULBECK LODGE



These four pictures featured in the Tuesday Night Club's report of their tour in 2004 which included a trip up the river Cam and visits to both Swaffham Bulbeck and Bottisham Lodes on Friday 11 June. Swaffham Lock was described as "*knackered pointy bottom gates and electric/manual guillotine at the top – rather weed infested.*"

The pictures would appear to indicate the boat proceeded some way up the lode, but in fact the bottom right hand picture is a spoof as the Environment Agency's alterations to the top gate prevented it being raised more than a few inches, thus prohibiting boats from using this statutory navigation. The lode is some 3¼ miles long with no other lock apart from at the entrance. Two footbridges, a former railway bridge and a pipeline cross before Cow Bridge carrying a road in Swaffham Bulbeck reached. The lode, which finishes at Commercial End in the village, was first recorded in 1279 but is probably Roman in origin.

The Tuesday Night Club also visited Bottisham Lode and we will include pictures of this trip in our next issue. The club seem to concentrate on visiting as many of the little known and little used waterways as possible. For some reason, however, they appeared not to know about Soham Lode, as this was not mentioned in their report.

There was no need to visit Burwell, Reach and Wicken Lodes as these are included as part of the Environment Agency's system of waterways.

BROADS NOTES AND NEWS

BROADS AUTHORITY: We regret to record that Professor Matthew Aitken Clark, OBE died in April aged 74. He was the first Chief Executive of the Broads Authority when it was set up in 1979 and served until 2001. The Broads were very much run down when he took over but under his leadership water quality has been improved, habitats have been restored, lost rare wildlife has returned, boating has become more environmentally friendly, and there is much wider public access. He led the campaign to save the Halvergate Marshes from being ploughed up and saw the restoration of Barton Broad between 1995 and 2001. Professor Clark was a great supporter of the iconic Norfolk wherry and after his retirement he became Chairman of Wherry Yacht Charter, which preserves the pleasure wherry HATHOR and the wherry yachts NORADA and OLIVE.

Meanwhile a new appointment to the authority from 1 April has been Sir Peter Dixon who has a long-standing connection with the area and a home overlooking Hickling Broad. He sails the Broads cruiser CIRRUS and owns a 1920s Ernest Woods motor launch, a canoe and a sailing dinghy.

DUCK BROAD: An innovative scheme to restore a lost island near Hickling Broad has been approved by the Broads Authority's Planning Committee. Some 300 steel baskets lined with polyethylene bags and standing on the bed of Duck Broad will be filled with mud dredged from Heigham Sound to create the perimeter of the island. Then the void in the middle will be filled with more mud from the river and the island will be planted with reed. Eventually the island could be over 270 yards long and some 45 yards wide. Without this there would have been no way for the Heigham Sound dredging to go ahead due to difficulties in finding mud disposal sites. As it is the channel has silted up to just 3-feet in places, causing sailing boats to go aground. The work, however, has caused considerable disquiet amongst local anglers who fear the dredging work could trigger a bloom of the same killer algae *prymesium parvum* that caused fish stocks in the area to be devastated in 1969.

As a result the Authority is to experiment with a small trial scheme involving an area of just 400 square yards and this will be monitored for a year to assess its viability and stability with a close check on water quality. If the trial is successful and subject to the approval of Natural England, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency the whole island of some 2.3 acres will then be restored.

ALBION: Ten years of restoration work costing some £200,000 came to an end on Friday 19 February with this historic vessel now returned to her former Edwardian glory. This was included £125,000 over the last three winters replacing a hogged keel, the entire bow section and the large timbers that support the tabernacle and keep her 50-foot mast upright. Her skipper reports that she is now in the finest shape that she has ever been in since she was first built in 1898.

ALBION has been named the first ever runner-up in the Flagship of the Year adjudication carried out by National Historic Ships. The competition was fierce but ALBION's entry was so strong that the panel decided to award a runner-up prize and a £250 cheque for her.

MUSEUM OF THE BROADS: Despite the harsh cold winter an extensive maintenance programme was carried out including a new quay heading and walkways. Additional interpretation boards have been erected, walls have been repainted and a boat-shaped bar built at Horning by H. T. Percival boat builders has been donated by the Malsters public house at Ranworth. Coupled with a new floor in the Wherry building and a new computerised till system the museum reopened on Sunday 28 March for its 2010 season.

INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES: As mentioned in our last issue this is a growing problem, not only on the Broads but throughout the country as evidenced by the cost of clearing Japanese knotweed from the Olympic site at Stratford which has reached over £70 million. Under the Broads Norfolk Non-Native Species Initiative (NNSI) six aquatic plants have been identified as causing the most concern – Australian swamp stonecrop; Floating pennywort; Giant hogweed; Himalayan balsam; Japanese knotweed and Parrot's feather. Due to the nature of its connected waterways and landscape the Broads is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of these species. To start combating the position the Broads Authority has gained Defra funding and Environment Agency support for a flagship project to eradicate the highly invasive floating pennywort from the Waveney and at Rockland and this is already underway. The plant is at an early stage of invasion so this rapid reaction will potentially save time and tens of thousands of pounds. The Authority is also running projects to control other invasive species including both giant hogweed and parrots feather in the Ant valley and Australian swamp stonecrop at Lound Lakes.

More than 60% of these invasive species are garden escapees and have been put into the waterways due to a lack of basic understanding of safe disposal methods and of the impact these species can have in the wild. An important part of the work of the NNSI is to raise public awareness about these species and ways to prevent them spreading.

VEGETATION: Following Royal Assent being given to the Broads Authority's Act procedures are being established to cover the removal of the vegetation. In the past by working with local landowners the Authority has usually been able to manage trees and vegetation that overhang the water and create a hazard to navigation. On certain occasions the lack of suitable powers has greatly restricted the Authority in clearing such hazards. The Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union are being consulted and operational procedures are being established and in most cases the existing amicable arrangements for dealing with such hazards will continue. However if the landowner cannot be identified or cannot carry out the removal works within a suitable timescale the authority now has powers to carry them out using its own resources.

ROLLESBY: On 29 March a new tourist attraction opened at The Waterside offering boating, fishing, wildlife spotting and a tearoom and restaurant after five years of planning and an investment of well into six figures. Subsequently a 12-seater Victorian launch built by Classic Boatworks at Woodbastwick arrived to provide hourly tours around the broad.

PROMOTING THE BROADS: On 23 February the largest campaign ever to promote the Broads as a leading tourist destination was launched at the Boat and Caravan

Show at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. The Broads Authority joined forces with the Broads Tourism Group and using the slogan “Enjoy the Broads”, a record 175,000 copies of a glossy 24-page brochure has been designed to attract holidaymakers and this is being widely distributed.

Since then it has been announced that 500,000 Euros of European funding has been made available to promote green tourism on the Broads over the next three years. An immediate benefit will be the launch of the Broads Authority’s new tourism website (www.enjoythebroads.com). Other areas will be improving interpretation and visitor facilities between Ludham Bridge and How Hill, the establishment of a conservation fund to which visitors will be encouraged to contribute to fund enhancement projects, an increase in the number of electric charging points and the promotion of the Green Tourism Business Scheme.

NEW LONG-REACH DREDGER:

The Broads Authority has acquired a new specially designed JCB excavator which features a specially extended arm enabling it to get to parts of the river other dredgers cannot reach. This will enable it to access disposal sites and set-back areas on river banks which the traditional grab dredgers cannot deal with. The new machine has already started unloading sediment from Haddiscoe Cut into a setback area on the Yare near Polkey’s Mill. The dredger is the first



significant piece of new equipment purchased for many years and the Authority is hoping some of the cost can be recouped from a bid for European funding under the Interreg Two Seas Project, a part of the European Regional Development Fund.

MUTFORD LOCK: This lock was built in the early 1800s to keep the fresh water in Oulton Broad separate from the seawater in Lake Lothing and is currently owned by Associated British Ports which manages Lowestoft harbour. The Broads Authority, however, has been operating it for several years and is keen to secure a second opening from its network of waterways to the sea, the other being via Breydon Water and Great Yarmouth. The lock is of limited commercial interest to ABP whose operation is confined to Lake Lothing and Lowestoft and a harbour revision order is being completed for submission to the secretary of state to finally approve the transfer.

BRIGGATE MILL: Plans are being made to try and get the land around this long disused watermill recognised as a public open space and protected from development. There is to be a two-day public inquiry in July at County Hall in Norwich and many residents in Briggate are preparing claims that the land has been used by the public for more than 20 years for such purposes as dog walking, picnicking and blackberrying amongst others since the site was abandoned by its former owners in 1974. The site is immediately opposite the mill pond where our volunteers have already made a major clearance.

NORTH WALSHAM AND DILHAM CANAL

The sessions have continued as scheduled: - 7 & 21 February Briggate Mill Pond; 14 March & 11 April Ebridge; 28 March & 25 April Honing Staithe, Cut and Canal, 9 & 23 May Bacton Wood breach.



The clearance work at Briggate has been boosted by the regular appearance of Tom Moore and his magic little digger, which has literally transformed the area. Tom has fitted an extended arm to the machine, meaning it can reach considerably further and this has been put to very good use. And on 21 February, when the work party comprised no less than 18 souls, a cherry picker arrived (as shown top left) together with Laurie Ashton and Jeremy Cushion armed with chain saws. This enabled four very large trees growing alongside the road to be brought down to size, a task that would have been beyond our normal volunteers abilities.

At Ebridge the situation has been transformed in that the dredger WEASEL has started from just north of the mill pond with the intention of dredging right through to Bacton Wood. At present the mill pond has not been touched, due to the lack of a site to deposit the dredgings. The machine has been purchased by the Old Canal Company from a marina operator and was originally owned by the British Waterways Board. It took 13 hours to get the machine to Wayford Bridge as it has not got a



very powerful engine but once there it was lifted onto a low loader and taken to Ebridge. Here, in a two-stage operation made necessary by the need to avoid the power cables, a 70-ton crane lifted it into a prepared hole, ready to start work.

On the morning of Friday 19 March David Revill and Chris Black were interviewed on BBC's Radio Norfolk by presenter David Clayton for over quarter of an hour about the canal.

This all came about due to help that had been given for the radio's Sunday mornings "Treasure Quest" programme when a presenter has to find a series of clues around the county. David has been asked to assist and he had placed a clue at Ebridge on the paddle gear at the head of the lock. This was found by Becky Betts and her driver Ian who are shown here talking to David. With another three clues to find, there was no time for any other than a very brief discussion but the subsequent interview more than made up for this.



At Honing the work has been split between further clearing of the staithe cut, making good use of the extended arm on Tom's digger, and clearing fallen and overhanging trees on the canal downstream of the Dee Bridge.



Meanwhile at Bacton Wood it is estimated that 8½ tonnes of brick have been removed from the chamber and relocated by a dumper truck and investigations are being made as to how the breach in the canal bed north of the lock can be overcome. As a prelude to this work the sessions on 9 and 23 May concentrated on clearing brash and hazardous trees from the area around the breach and our picture shows the work under way.

At the lock itself the west side gate hinge is now in place and the east side ground paddle has been bricked in whilst the cill has been repaired and is now ready for the timber cill floor to be installed.

The proposed Work Party Programme for the rest of the year is: -

4 July – Ebridge; 18 July – Honing Staithe Cut; 8 August – Honing Lock; 22 August Bacton Wood area; 5 September – Bacton Wood area; 19 September – Honing Staithe Cut; 10 & 24 October Briggate; 7 November Bacton Wood area; 21 November – Honing Lock; 5 December Honing Staithe Cut; 19 December – Ebridge.

There may be changes and members are advised to check with David Revill, our work party organiser on 01603 738648.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE – FEEDBACK

The response to the questionnaire far exceeded my expectations, with over a third of members responding, some even added several pages of extra thoughts – all of which are much appreciated.

THE ASSOCIATION: The EAWA's achievements noted, tended to reflect the length of time that members have been with us, so included: reopening of the Great Ouse; Dilham Dyke; Project Hereward and the NW&DC. As one member summed it up: "There wouldn't be much navigation in the East without the Association's graft and determination". As to the future 18% saw the Old Bedford and Welches Dam as the priority, followed by the Fens Link and the M&K. Other suggestions included navigation to Bungay, Aylsham, Waxham New Cut and Cam Lodes, as well as support for the existing schemes for the NW&DC, Thet, Stour and Gipping. Several ideas were put forward for increasing youth participation. The support for the EAWA was very encouraging "it punches above its weight" reflected the views of many.

ACTIVITIES: "Social is not the prime function of the Association" was the underlying theme of most responses – although there was support for more "historical visits" or joint meetings with similar bodies e.g. the NIAS. There was huge support for our AGM format, and several ideas given for future venues – although this has to be balanced with comments such as: "formal meeting too long", "too Fen based".

WORK PARTIES: "Too old, too far" was a common reason for not joining in with the work parties, although many wished they could. I would like to point out that one of the regular members of the NW&DC work parties makes a 380-mile round trip and is in his seventies! There was again some suggestions of occasional linking with other groups e.g. Stour, BITM, this is something that the Work Party Organiser is considering for the future.

EASTERLING: Heaped nothing but praise – and well deserved too! Just over half would like to see some colour – so hopefully they will enjoy the colour supplement with this issue. I was surprised that the majority would welcome advertising – but none offered to take on the job of Advertisement Manager! There was demand for more information on what the Council had worked on during the previous few months and most saw "Chair's Notes" as the best way for this. Pleasing to Alan should be that 8 people offered to write articles!

OUR WEBPAGES: Half of the respondents had viewed www.eawa.co.uk and again gave it their full support – with offers again for items for inclusion – and other ideas for extension.

THE COUNCIL and MEMBERSHIP: Ideas for increasing membership: Many feel that there is a greater need for EAWA leaflets to be more widely available plus more and wider publicity. 17 names were offered as recipients of a "free Easterling" and one idea suggested "Gift memberships". 9 put forward their names for Gift Aid and several other offers were made. Most importantly the questionnaires lead to one new Council member being appointed.

MANY THANKS for all who replied, for those who didn't please feel free to still send them in. Over 880 items of data were analysed which will help to ensure the Council's future efforts reflect the ideas of the membership. On the other hand it was reassuring to see that the Council's past work has been on the "right lines" and appreciated.

And thank you, our hard working Secretary Ivan, for suggesting the questionnaire, drawing it up, sending it out and collating all the results – Ed)

END FOR A FINE LADY

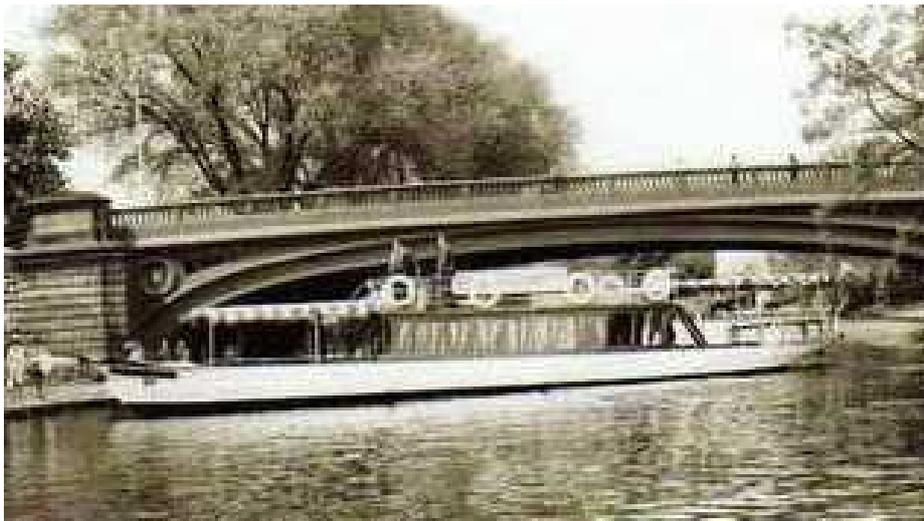
Unravelling the mystery of the “*Viscountess Bury*”, by David Mercer.

For over eighty years the MV *Viscountess Bury* was a familiar and well-loved sight on the rivers Cam and Great Ouse, carrying trippers from Cambridge to Ely and beyond. But in about 1996 she disappeared from the river. Rumours circulated about her fate. There was hope that the story of her being taken away for restoration was true and she would, in time, return to grace the river for many more years.

‘Vi’ as she was affectionately known through her years on the Cam has a fascinating history dating back well over a century. Her life actually started on the river Thames in 1888 where she was built by W.S. Sargent & Co. of Chiswick. She was powered by two electric motors and carried 200 storage batteries under the stern deck.

She was the largest and finest of a fleet of electric launches operated by the Moritz-Immisch Electric Launch Co. in which *Viscount Bury* was a partner. At 65½ feet in length she was capable of running almost silently at over 5 knots for up to 10 hours after an overnight charge at one of the company’s barge-mounted steam driven generating plants. There was no public electricity supply at the time. Here was ‘green’ technology in operation over one hundred years ago.

Presumably to cater for the immense weight of the batteries, she was constructed to very robust standards with a triple-skinned hull; two of diagonal teak with an outer skin of horizontal mahogany. Her long keel was a single piece of elm. Her elegant lines were completed with a decorative bowsprit and an impressive carved figurehead representing the lady who had inspired her name. Internally, the vessel was luxuriously appointed with figured red velvet upholstery and decorated white and gold. The windows, door panels and mirrors were of fine etched glass.



The *Viscountess Bury* was truly a royal vessel. For her first seven years on the Thames she was chartered to the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, who used her for trips to and from Windsor Castle. Edward had a reputation as a playboy and his earlier, scandalous affair with the actress, Nellie Clifton, had so angered and

upset his father that it would lead to Queen Victoria holding him responsible for her beloved Prince Albert's death just two weeks later.

In about 1895 her cabin and upper passenger deck were lengthened and she became a public passenger launch. At some time in the next fifteen years her electric motors were removed and replaced by a 20 hp. petrol engine and she would make her voyage round the East coast en-route for Cambridge. It seems likely, from contemporary picture postcards, that for a season or two she actually spent some time as a trip boat on Oulton Broad.

It is known that the sea journey via Great Yarmouth, Wells and Kings Lynn was undertaken in stages and proved extremely hazardous at times. It is reported that on the longest leg, from Yarmouth to Wells, in worsening weather, she rolled terribly, being all top and no bottom, and shipped water over the bow. The Viscountess would take shelter in Wells Harbour for several weeks awaiting kinder weather conditions.

Even when the sea leg of the voyage was completed with her arrival at Kings Lynn, problems were not over for the Viscountess. Her helm was mounted on the upper passenger deck, some twelve feet above water level. With very limited clearance at some of the bridges on the tidal Great Ouse she had to wait for the right tide, in daylight, to clear the bridges and avoid running aground on the notorious mudbanks. But she made it, up the tidal river, through Denver Sluice and on to Cambridge where she would be based for the next 60-odd years.

From 1910, the Viscountess Bury was owned by H.C. Banham, the Cambridge boat-builder. The late historian, A. F. Leach, recounted a trip to Clayhithe as a child in 1911 at a cost of sixpence. "She was then all bright varnish and polished brass-work" he remembered.

Banhams were noted for the fine quality of their boat-building. They built and operated the largest and most significant hire cruiser fleet on the Fenland waterways. Some of their pretty wooden-hulled craft dating back to the 1950s or earlier are still in use on the Great Ouse today, maintained in superb condition by enthusiastic owners.

Founder Herbert Banham died in 1953 and around the mid-60s Banhams traditional boat-building business had began to suffer difficulties. The company eventually passed to the Pye radio company of Cambridge. A decade later Pye closed the boat-building and hire business and sold the riverside site alongside the present Elizabeth Way Bridge for residential redevelopment.

In 1972 after her 62 years work on the Cam as a public trip boat, a floating restaurant and a private charter vessel, Banhams had treated the Viscountess to an extensive refit. It cost £2,000. The hull was repainted white, she was given new canopies and awnings plus a 50 hp. diesel engine originally from a council dustcart.

After guillotine gates were installed at Baitsbite and Bottisham locks the Viscountess Bury could no longer navigate into the City of Cambridge. She passed into private ownership, based at Ely and continued as a trip boat through to the late 1980s.

Local enthusiasts assisted with her running and day-to-day maintenance. However, without the Banham professional expertise and boatyard facilities to hand her great age would begin to tell.

It would prove increasingly difficult to meet the requirements of the annual Board of Trade inspection needed for a commercial passenger licence. With many of her internal water-tight bulkheads removed during alterations over the years it was something of a miracle that she was still afloat. Another difficulty arose through the helm position on the upper deck. It was necessary to remove the wheel to pass under some low bridges. It is said that the inspector's attention would be diverted at bridges while the wheel was quickly removed and replaced by the helmsman.

By 1994, under new ownership, she was languishing at Brandon Creek on the Little Ouse below Ely with her deteriorating condition causing great concern. It was rumoured that her owner, desperately unable to maintain her properly, was threatening to take a chainsaw to her.



A group was formed, led by Linda Ashton and calling themselves 'Friends of the Viscountess Bury' and they succeeded in buying the boat and towing it back to Ely Waterside to generate some publicity. An ambitious plan to save the Vi was hatched.

With support from the Electric Boat Association and Heritage Afloat, a public meeting was called at Ely Maltings in December 1994. Over seventy people attended to hear a talk on the options available to try and save the historic vessel. Subsequently, the Viscountess Bury Trust was formed by a small group and its first task was to arrange a feasibility study into the possibility of restoration and future 'Vi-ability'. The hope was that she could return to use as a passenger craft, once again generating commercial income to support her upkeep. It was seen as an ultimate aim to install a modern equivalent of her original electric power plant as part of the restoration. Initial estimates of the cost were around £40,000.

The sheer enthusiasm and commitment of this small band of supporters could not be faulted. They appealed for help and rattled their collecting tins around Ely but never

the less raising the substantial sum would be difficult task. The boat was moved to the River Board yard at Roswell Pits where she was taken out for inspection.

Perhaps inevitably, there were differences of opinion within the Trust. Some members thought she could be repaired sufficiently by local voluntary labour for casual use. Others maintained that only a full professional restoration and licensing for commercial use was a feasible way of sustaining her future.

Ultimately, the full restoration option was agreed. Using the funds raised, the trust paid to have her lifted and taken by low-loader to the International Boatbuilding Training College at Lowestoft. Her return to Oulton Broad would be almost as precarious as her voyage to Cambridge eight decades earlier. It was feared that she may just fall to pieces but the move was completed successfully, at least in part. The Trust would continue to try and raise money for college students to restore the Viscountess Bury whilst learning traditional boatbuilding skills.

And there the mystery starts - until several years back when, simultaneously, a number of people began to make enquiries at the IBTC about progress. No one at the college seemed to know anything about the Viscountess Bury. Although the college had changed hands during the intervening period, staff there maintained that they would have kept records of the boat even if she had subsequently been destroyed. One enquirer was told, "You are the third person to be asking about her this week". For some reason it seems she never actually made it to the college. So where did she go?

Paul Rogers, one time owner of the Boathouse Restaurant at Ely and now living abroad was one of the merry band of volunteers who had operated the Viscountess in the 80s. He was determined to solve the mystery. On a hunch, he decided to widen the search to other boatyards in Lowestoft.

Nearby is Newson's yard. Paul's email to Keith at the yard produced a response that would finally provide the answer. Keith told him, "The boat in question came to us, not the college. She was in such a bad state that all that could be salvaged were a few items. The lines of the hull were taken before she was broken up and burned. We did want to rebuild her but the trust that owned her did not have the funds I believe and she was taking up the entire workshop and costing money whilst there".

Why she was taken to Newson's instead of the college as intended is a mystery. It is likely that her ultimate tragic fate would have been the same as the Trust was never able to maintain interest and raise sufficient funds once she had left Ely. Perhaps today it would be possible to seek grant funding from the National Lottery but back in the 90s awards were only available for more major "Good Causes".

Too late for the Viscountess Bury, but this noble lady will long be remembered on the river at Cambridge and Ely. What a long and eventful life she had; a tribute to her original builders and those who worked so hard to keep her afloat for over a century.

David Mercer

EAST ANGLIAN WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION

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(We hope to include short biographical notes about our three new Council Members - Chris Black, Graham Brown and Michael Lyons - in our next issue – Ed.)

LESLIE HEATON: It is appropriate to record here Leslie's long and faithful service on the Council and from which he finally retired at the recent Annual General Meeting at Wansford. Les joined the Association in February 1964 and was appointed to the Council soon after – the exact date is uncertain as the Association's early records are in archive storage. In his quiet unassuming way he contributed to the Association's work in many ways including in the early days of the North Walsham & Dilham work parties when he visited Briggate Lock with a tree surgeon friend and cleared the lock side of mature trees to prevent them causing further damage to the structure.