



THE EASTERLING
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WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION
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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the 45th Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on Sunday 19 April 2015 at 2.30pm at The Hume Arms, High Street, South Kyme, Lincoln, LN4 4AD. This pub is situated beside the river Slea on the B1395 road. In turn the B1395 branches northwards off the main A17 about midway between Sleaford and Boston or southwards off the Sleaford to Horncastle road A153. Prior to the meeting there will be a guided tour of the Upper Sleaford Navigation, with a talk by Steve Hayes, on the River Slea, in the afternoon. See below for further details.

AGENDA

- 1: Apologies for Absence.
- 2: Minutes of the 44th Annual General Meeting held on 18 May 2014 in March.
- 3: To receive the Directors' Report for the year ended 30 June 2014 (this is set out on pages 3 & 4).
- 4: To receive the Accounts for the year ended 30 June 2014 (see next page).
- 5: Election of Directors. Under the rules one third of the directors have to retire but they may stand and seek re-election. John Hodgson, John Mayhead and Roger Sexton offer themselves for re-election as does Andrew Storrar who was elected during the course of the year.
- 6: Election of Scrutineer. John Cordran offers himself for re-election.
- 7: Chairman's report on the year's work
- 8: Report on the North Walsham & Dilham Canal work parties.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES for the year ended 30 June 2014

Incoming Resources	General A/c Unrestricted £	Restricted Funds £	2014 £ Total	2013 £ Total
Subscriptions & Donations	904.50			1297.50
Weeping Cross Fund	1000.00			1250.00
Every Click	24.41			---
Gift Aid	255.20			---
Investment Income	26.36	9.07	35.43	54.04
Annual General Meeting	200.00			110.00
Total Incoming Resources	2410.47	9.07	2419.54	2711.54
Resources Expended				
<u>Costs of charitable activities</u>				
Easterling Newsletter	427.17			183.27
Working parties insurance & costs	371.00			269.03
NW&DC Restoration Document	---			580.07
Sleaford Navigation Trust (dredging appeal)	1000.00			
<u>Management & Administration</u>				
AGM expenses	195.01			30.00
Postages, stationary & meeting room hire	74.40			49.74
Company Registration & Web Site Fees	53.26			13.00
Membership Leaflet	---			225.00
Scrutineer's fee & subscriptions	109.00			137.28
Total Resources expended	2229.84		2229.84	1487.39
Net Incoming Resources	180.63	9.07	189.70	1224.15
Total funds brought forward	8429.30	2903.78	11333.08	10108.93
	8609.93	2912.85	11522.78	11333.08

BALANCE SHEET as at 30 June 2014

Current Assets	2014	2013
Cash at Bank – Current Account	3593.22	3750.67
CIOF Charity Deposit Account	9082.56	9047.13
Total	12675.78	12797.80
Current Liabilities		
Sundry Creditors	----	191.72
Life Membership Fund	1153.00	1273.00
Total	1153.00	1464.72
Net Current Assets	11522.78	11335.08
Represented by Income Funds, General Account	8609.93	8429.30
Restricted Funds	2912.85	2903.78
Accumulated Fund	11522.78	11,333.08

For the year ended 30 June 2014 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 2014

Results: Income at £2,419.54 exceeded expenditure by £180.63 on the General Account and by £9.07 on the Restricted Account, the position again being influenced by some generous donations including £1,000 from the Weeping Cross Fund. For the first time income includes a small but welcome contribution from EveryClick when members who have registered for the service purchase items on line from a wide number of retailers, who then make a contribution to the Association, but at no extra cost to the member.

Expenditure at £2,229.84 included a £1,000 contribution to the Sleaford Navigation Trust's dredging appeal which has enabled a stretch of the river at the first lock to be cleared meaning that boats can reach South Kyme again. Other expenses have been modest; particularly in the printing and distribution of "*The Easterling*" where the new format that now includes two pages of colour have been welcomed. A number of members receive "*The Easterling*" by e-mail and this has contributed to a significant saving in postal costs.

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).

Fens Waterways Link: This project, which was pioneered by our Association and by the Lincolnshire Branch of the Inland Waterways Association, continues to make slow progress. The wisdom of using the original route of the South Forty Foot River from Boston down to the Black Hole Drive pumping station has been accepted and there are currently just two options southwards from there both of which involve a new lock at the pumping station and a second new lock into the river Glen at Guthram Gowt.

Meanwhile efforts are being concentrated on encouraging more boats to use the 12½ mile stretch down to Donington High Bridge where the Grantham road (A.52) crosses over the navigation. A new slipway has been completed at Hubberts Bridge enabling craft to be launched into the waterway and a pump out facility and water point are being added to the existing moorings there. Adventurous boaters can actually proceed further south from Donington although the channel gets narrower and shallower the nearer they get to Black Hole Drove.

North Walsham and Dilham Canal: The day to day organisation of the voluntary working parties, which were started by our Association in December 2000, was handed over to the North Walsham and Dilham Canal Trust (NW&DCT) in October 2013. The Association, however, remains fully supportive of the work and has agreed to continue to cover the insurance requirements and has promised to be sympathetic to any requests for financial assistance, particularly on the Ebridge reach.

The Stop Order imposed by the Environment Agency on the Old Canal Company Ltd. (OCCL) over carrying out any further dredging work on the Ebridge pound remains in place, but constructive dialogue has taken place with the Agency and some modest works have been allowed such as removing trees that were completely blocking the navigation. As a result the OCCL's substantial work boat was able to navigate virtually up to the tail of Bacton Wood Lock in 27 April, the first sizeable vessel to do so for many years.

Elsewhere regular work parties sessions have been held at Honing Lock, at Honing Staithe Cut, and at Briggate to safeguard and improve on the work that has already taken place and several successful open days have been held at Ebridge to publicise the canal. Many work parties have been held north of Bacton Wood Lock with the channel being cleared and obstructions removed. This work is in preparation for restoring the water to this dry section and restoring water to the mill at Bacton Wood. At the landowner's request, work has also been carried out to clear Swafield Lower Lock which was completely overgrown and stands on the abandoned section of the canal.

The Broads: We continue to hold a watching brief over the area and it is encouraging that some of the arrears of dredging are being tackled as part of a scheme involving funding from the European Union. The Association joined with others in objecting to certain aspects of plans to develop the Pegasus Boatyard on

Oulton Broad and whilst the appeal was not successful some improvements were obtained. And we support the work of the Bure Navigation Conservation Trust and the River Waveney Trust and the.

Welches Dam: One of the biggest challenges facing the Association is the continued closure of Welches Dam Lock at the entrance to the Forty Foot River and which forms part of the alternative route through the Middle Level Navigations. The lock is owned by the Environment Agency which initially claimed it had no liability for the lock. Its list of properties, however, clearly shows its ownership and its predecessors, the National Rivers Authority, were involved with the extensive repair works that took place in 1991. To try and overcome this situation we are setting up a small task force to investigate the situation and try to come up with solutions to this problem which has been outstanding for far too long. It is worth remembering that a large number of the boats from the main canal system attending the Inland Waterways Association's National Rally of Boats at Ely in August 1973 used the route via Welches Dam, as it was the only one then available. Coupled with the Welches Dam situation is severe silting that has taken place immediately upstream of the sluice into the Old Bedford River at Salters Lode.

Elsewhere: The Association continues to maintain its watch over its widespread area, taking action where necessary, giving help and advice where it can, and supporting the activities of like-minded bodies with whom we are linked, such as 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. Weather conditions and high river flows have continued to cause problems leading to the build up of silt on crucial places.

Directors: The Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 18 May 2014 at St. Mary's Church Hall, Westry in March and was preceded by a visit to the nearby boatyard of Fox Narrow Boats. The directors who served during the year were: - Christopher John Brian Black, Alan Henderson Faulkner (Treasurer), John Hodgson, David John Mercer (elected 2 July 2013), John Raymond Mayhead, David Edward Revill, Roger George Sexton (Chairman), David George Tomlinson and Jeffrey Alun Walters (elected 10 October 2013).

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)

ARRANGEMENTS for the AGM on 19 April 2015

The day will start with a guided walk round the head of the navigation in Sleaford to see Navigation House, the new slipway, the lifting foot bridge, Cogglesford top lock and the watermill. Members should assemble by 10.30am in the East Gate car park which is in the centre of the town and off the B.1517 and close to the National Centre for Craft & Design. There they will be shown the work carried out by the River Sleas Trust with the support of our Association and we will then adjourn to the Hume Arms for lunch at about 12.30pm.

For lunch there will be a choice for the main course between Roast Beef with roast/creamed potatoes and two vegetables or a Chicken or a Vegetarian alternative. This will be followed by a choice of sweets from the trolley (including Apple Crumble and custard) and will finish up with coffee and mints. Cost per person £17.50.

Will all those intending to come please advise Alan Faulkner, the Honorary Treasurer (details on page 1) no later than 12 April with their choice of main course and send him the £17.50 per head payment (cheques payable to EAWA please.) After the formalities of the AGM Steve Hayes, the Secretary of the River Sleas Trust, will give an illustrated talk on "The River Sleas; Past, Present and Future."

HERE AND THERE

PETER HEWARD: We regret to record Peter's death in hospital from a heart attack after a series of falls. A member for over twenty years and a former director of the Association Peter was particularly active in earlier efforts to restore and promote the Welches Dam route through the Middle Level and on events on the Great Ouse. He loved boats and enjoyed many happy holidays on his own boat "*Birdsnes*" which is currently on land. The funeral was held on 19 December at St. Faith's crematorium in Norwich.

AFFILIATIONS: We are pleased to be able to report arrangements for reciprocal free membership have now been established with the Association of Nene River Clubs and with the River Waveney Trust. Our Founder Chairman, Leslie Critchley, was an active member of the ANRC and we are delighted to have re-established this former link. Meanwhile the RWT is a very active body carrying out a series of improvements to the river.

TALKS GIVEN: On Saturday 1 November our Honorary Treasurer, Alan Faulkner, talked to the Cambridge Association for Local History at St. John's Church Hall in Blinco Grove, Cambridge about the Great Ouse Navigation. It was a well attended gathering with the organisers generously making a £50 donation to EAWA.

CANAL & RIVER TRUST: We are delighted to report that following our completing a return, for the C&RT, and sending it in fairly promptly, the EAWA has been awarded a £50 "prize" which has been gratefully received.

BOSTON BARRIER: During November the plans for the barrier were on public display with artists' impressions of how the new structure will look. It is to be sited immediately downstream of the entrance to the South Forty Foot River and one of the needs for it was shown in a 5-minute video of the flooding that took place in Boston on the night of 5 December 2013. Another advantage is that it will make entry and exit to and from the South Forty Foot considerably easier.

LOUTH NAVIGATION: The Louth Navigation Trust, a registered charity, has launched an e-petition to allow it to restore the full length of the Louth Canal and bring the watercourse back into full operational use. This would encompass renovating or renewing existing locks and associated canal structures including the banks together with an operational being created to enable boats and craft to use as a navigable waterway. EAWA members are invited to take part. <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/70914> The Trust is also working to improve the waterside facilities and the possible creation of a waterside park in Louth. A recent move has been the renovation of the towpath near the head of the navigation.

ELY MOORINGS: A somewhat bizarre situation has arisen at Ely over the control of the moorings on the west (city) bank. For many years the riverside has been looked after by East Cambridgeshire District Council but in 2009 it discovered it did not own the land and hence byelaws issued in 2001 could not be enforced. To rectify the situation the Council applied for new byelaws but was told by the Secretary of State that the Environment Agency already had sufficient powers under the Anglian Water

Authority Act 1977 to deal with the matter and hence the new byelaws could not be made. As a result the Council's existing and proposed new mooring byelaws were withdrawn on 16 October. Meanwhile the Environment Agency lacks the staff and manpower to deal with the situation. Following a meeting of all parties involved the Council has been canvassing views about the length of time visitors can use the moorings, the use made of the moorings and on their future management in the hope that a decision can be reached at a meeting on 3 March 2015.

DENVER: Following the storm surge in December 2013 two of the tidal gates, which form an integral part of the flood defences, were badly damaged. The Environment Agency fitted temporary dam boards to prevent further damage and contractors AMCO were brought in to carry out repairs. These involved the gates having to be lifted out in June and taken away for repair. The works costing £60,000 were successfully completed in September. The opportunity was taken for divers to undertake a full inspection of the sluice and to carry out other minor repairs.

UPWARE LOCK: Work expected to last for one month from the middle of September to replace the upstream landing stage at the lock turned out to be a protracted affair taking nearly 2½ months during which time three of the moorings had to be taken out of general use to serve as a temporary landing stage.

BRANDON: Plans for a northern relief road in Brandon could see improvements to the existing railway bridge over the river to ease the passage for larger craft, a new bridge over the river downstream of Brandon lock, enlargement of the existing short lock to take larger boats and improvements to the riverside facilities. The plans which also involve 1,500 new homes have been submitted by Brandon Strategic Land Development to both Breckland Council and Forest Heath District Council.

HEYBRIDGE LOCK: Essex Waterways Limited has released figures for the passages through Heybridge sea lock on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation.

Year	Visitors	Long term moorers	Total through lock
2011	550	178	1456
2012	390	159	1098
2013	423	142	1130
2014	459	154	1223

The high number of passages in 2011 is thought to have been due to the very hot summer whilst 2012 saw the second highest rainfall since 1910. The overall trend seems to be upwards.

FRIENDS OF THE RIVER NENE: On 26 September at a meeting at the Woodford Sports & Social Club a small group of local boaters set up a new organisation intended to try and improve the facilities for river users. The group has secured five new 48-hour moorings sites – at Islip, Ditchford, Thrapston and two sites at Woodford – and additional sites are being considered both at the Northampton and Peterborough ends of the river.

WELCHES DAM: At a meeting on 7 October a Project Hereward committee has been set up between EAWA and the Peterborough Branch of the Inland Waterways Association to progress the plans for dealing with the leaks in the Forty Foot River. Various means of sealing the banks are being investigated and contact has been made with the Wendover Arm Trust which is tackling similar problems on the Wendover branch of the Grand Union Canal. Our representatives on the committee are our Chairman, Roger Sexton, with John Hodgson (who also represents the IWA's Great Ouse Branch), David Mercer, Professor Andrew Storrar and Jeff Walters.

B&MK WATERWAY TRUST: The trip boat "*John Bunyan*" had a very successful first year as it carried no less than 5,955 passengers. It is operated by B&MK Waterway Enterprises Ltd and is looking for a 25% growth in 2015. Notice boards promoting the boat have now been erected at Sovereigns Quay, at Bedford Town Lock and at the entrance to Priory Marina. The boat is operated by an enthusiastic band of 90 volunteer crews who put in literally thousands of hours on the boat together with others the behind the scenes who work covering marketing, training, scheduling, maintenance, cleaning, accounting and general planning.

On 25 November the Trust held its fifth annual partnership conference at the Harpur Suite in Bedford's Corn Exchange. Here, Dan Rogerson MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for water, forestry and rural affairs, pledged his support for the project, which is now being promoted as a waterway park that could revitalise Bedford, Milton Keynes and Marston Vale in between.

WELL CREEK TRUST: The Trust which has been associated with our Association ever since it was established on 23 March 1970 continues to care for the creek as evidenced by its accounts to 31 August 2014 that show no less than £3,230 was spent on improvements. The Trust held its Annual General Meeting on 5 February in Upwell Village Hall; its treasurer is Roger Mungham who is a member of the Project Hereward committee.

FISH PASSES: In recent decades eels, which were once so common in the Fens that they were a staple foodstuff, have been in steep decline. But a special fish pass installed on the Middle Level Main Drain at St. Germans has enabled more than 50,000 of tiny young eels to bypass the giant sluices and pumping station and spread inland. Likewise a fish pass at Stoke Ferry connecting the Cut Off Channel with the river Wissey has enabled rare sea trout to make their way up to their spawning sites.

Now a new fish pass is being planned at Denver to help conserve sea trout and coarse fish in the Great Ouse. It involves a new 75-foot long, 6-foot wide channel that will act as a ladder from the Cut Off Channel up to the course of the main river. Baffles will be included to break up the current and ramps will be fitted at either end to help fish overcome the 6-foot difference in levels. There have been fears that many fish such as roach and bream are lost each winter by being washed down the Relief Channel and out to sea. It is hoped this new channel will be completed by this coming April.

BROADS NOTES AND NEWS

BROADS TOLLS: An increase in tolls for 2015 of 1.7% was agreed by the Broads Authority at its meeting in November. This is the smallest increase in the Authority's history but it will still allow it to maintain its current level of services and to replace vehicles, vessels and equipment and carry on with its work of enhancing the network of free public moorings, improving dredging and ensuring its assets are updated and safeguarded for the future.

TROWSE SWING BRIDGE: Following campaigning by local members of Parliament for an improved rail service between Norwich and London the Government and Network Rail announced at the end of November that action is at last going to be taken. Amongst measures planned is the replacement of the single track swing bridge at Trowse over the river Wensum and close to the entrance to Norwich station with a two line structure. In view of the problems in the past with this bridge and with the other two railway swing bridges at Reedham and Somerleyton this announcement immediately caused concern, as, if the cheaper option of a fixed structure was adopted it would restrict certain craft from reaching the centre of Norwich. Recently the Broads Authority approved plans for a new opening bridge with a 4-metre headroom when closed to serve a housing development about 100 metres downstream of the railway bridge and hopefully this sets the scenario for any new structure.

RIVER WAVENEY: The redundant Homersfield sluice across the river has been removed by the Environment Agency as it was serving no useful purpose and was a barrier to fish migration. Instead a sequence of gravel rifles now maintains the water level upstream. Elsewhere the Environment Agency is putting in new eel passes at its Wainford, Bungay, Earsham and Mendham structures and investigations are under way to see if a pass can be created round Mutford Lock to allow young eels to pass from Lowestoft Harbour and Lake Lothing to the upper reaches of the river.

NANCY OLDFIELD TRUST: This charity which for the last 30 years has provided disabled and disadvantaged people with residential holidays and day trips on the Broads has won the prestigious title of UK National Parks Volunteer Group of the Year. Some 65 trained volunteers take visitors sailing, motor boating and canoeing, whilst maintaining the boats in winter and helping the five members of staff with administration and gardening. The Trust has eight sailing boats, three motor cruisers one of which is electric, with wheelchair lifts, toilets and a galley. It also has several Canadian canoes which are rafted together for stability. In the same week the Trust also received the first Martin Broom Trophy in recognition of its long record in providing sailing opportunities for the disabled.

CANOE LAUNCH FACILITY: On 26 November a new canoe launch point was opened at Carey's Meadow, Thorpe Road in Norwich by Tony Adams, the Chairman of Broadland District Council, accompanied by Judith Lubbock, the Lord Mayor of Norwich. This is part of several new facilities being planned by the Broads Authority and the Wensum River Parkway Partnership to help small boats access the river through the centre of Norwich. Almost 3½ miles are involved stretching from the limit of navigation at New Mills to Carey's Meadow, near where the river Yare flows in.

MAINTENANCE: The warm weather last summer led to prolific weed growth for both aquatic plants and towpath vegetation. The Broads Authority's two weed cutters covered 65 miles on the Upper Bure, Upper Ant, Upper Thurne, Waveney, Whitlingham Broad and the Yare into Norwich. And some 30 kilometres of footpaths had to be cut three times. And under the PRISMA (Promoting Integrated Sediment Management Regional Development Fund) scheme over 67,000 cubic metres of sediment were dredged from places such as Duck Broad, Thorpe River Green, Salhouse Broad, River Chet, Upton Little Broad, Hardley Dyke and the Lower Bure.

POLICING THE BROADS:

Six special constables from the Norfolk and Suffolk police forces have been given special training by the Broads Authority in boat handling, the bye laws and water safety. The plan is that they will be able to carry out high profile on-the-water policing alongside the Authorities rangers. There



has been a recent spate of thefts from some boatyards and some criminals are quite brazen and operate during the day.

WATER MILLS: Halvergate has one of the greatest concentrations of drainage mills in Europe. Its highly engineered flood banks, dyke networks, mill and pump structures are an unsung testament to centuries of human effort to tame the landscape for industry and commerce. Through the Landscape Partnership Programme an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund is being prepared for funding to a series of projects to protect the cultural landscape and its surrounding area. As well as undertaking conservation work to the mills the plan is to reconnect communities with their local landscape, to provide skills training and to improve and make available more information about the history of the area for use in educational projects and interpretation.

AYLSHAM MILL: After a lengthy dispute, a planning victory by Aylsham Town Council means that land outside this historic mill is now available for public use. The mill itself has been partially converted into flats and the owner had intended to build a car park on the disputed land.

THE WHERRY: The 2014 edition of the Norfolk Wherry Trust's well produced journal includes news not only about "*Albion*" and the trust's activities but also contains an interesting article by Alan Helsdon recording references to wherries in literature. A wide range of sources has been studied with details being set out and indexed under author's names, the publication's names, and individual wherry names where these are given. Some works held in the Norwich Millenium Library such as William Dutt's "*Norfolk Broads*" are still be to added and it is intended updates will be available on <http://www.wherryalbion.com/history/literature/>

THE FORGOTTEN RIVER - THE RIVER WISSEY

“Forgotten” – The early guide books – Bradshaw, Westall, Wilson – omit the Wissey. Aickman, in 1970, described it as a beautiful river in its quiet way, but that at Stoke Ferry it is not possible to pass beyond the bridge, and for most of the latter half of the 20th century, few guide books added to this description.

However it was a major highway for many centuries. In Saxon times it joined the sea at Wisbech (Wissey Beach?) and may have been navigable as far as Cranwich (port/landing place) [15m]. However, for the last seven centuries the Wissey has flowed into the Ouse and thence to King’s Lynn. The Domesday Book (1086) mentions the river as being navigable from Oxenburgh [10.5m] to Cambridge and King’s Lynn. Remains of boathouses are said to be found at Northwold [13m]. Cleansing work to 40 foot wide was approved in 1575, and an Act of 1814 appointed Commissioners to “widen, rode or crab” the river between Stoke Bridge and Hilgay. In the 1960’s, the “cut-off channel” was built to help relieve the amount of water entering the Ouse, by tapping the headwaters of its eastern tributaries.

The river was used to bring Newcastle coals, wine, salt, barrels of fish, pots, timber, bricks, slates and tiles up river, and barley, wheat, wool seeds, locally brewed ales, hides, malt and limestone products downstream. In 1925 Wissington Sugar Beet factory was built by the river – receiving the bulk of the beet by their fleet of 24 lighters and 3 tugs. Farmers would either load their own small boats on the connecting drains and lodes, or by using horse and tumbrels take their beet to river staithes for offloading. During the “non-campaign”, the lighters would be used for bring coal for stockpiling. This traffic continued until just after the second world war – when the road, built by Italian prisoners, allowed lorry access. In 1968, the factory was almost entirely reconstructed and turned its back on the river. The last commercial craft on the river was probably the “*Shellfen*” which delivered diesel to the pumping station near Stoke Ferry until the early 1960s.

The present day river leaves the Ouse, 1.1 miles above Denver Sluice, in a narrow confined, but deep channel, which passes under the King’s Lynn railway bridge. Soon the GOBA two isolated, but pleasant moorings are on the north bank. The river then meanders between the flood banks, which emphasise how much water this river used to carry in times of flood.



Along this stretch, as well as herons and kingfishers, mink have been spotted. The approach to Hilgay is announced by a line of moored boats – some with new landing stages, others in need of tlc – then the by-pass and village road bridge. [2.5m] EA moorings are available directly after the bridge on the south side – a hosepipe by the bridge leads one to find the waterpoint. There are also moorings by a playing field directly after the staithe; however, the public toilets are now shut as is the Elsan point. The village has a butcher’s shop that dabbles in newspapers, second hand books as well as renowned meat and fruit pies. The Rose & Crown like many small village pubs, is closed at the moment – but there is hope that the Hilgay villagers may take over the concern.

Just above the moorings on the south bank is a rectangular open air swimming pool, fed by a stream to the river. These days instead of swimmers – it has the “Beware deep water” warning, and an occasional boat moored by the old diving board. On the North bank the cruisers of the Hilgay Motorboat Club have private moorings. The river continues its meandering, with reeds to the north and pasture land to the south – a pleasant picnic mooring. Isolated, there are many blackberry bushes into which one can push for the evening dessert supplies.

Soon the steaming chimneys of the Wissington Sugar Beet Factory [5m] come into sight. On the right a “wild mooring” gives access to the new Wissey Wetlands Project – 10,000 hectares of restored wetland, funded by the EA, Natural England and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. By contrast, on the left, just after one of the pump houses – you will see (if you stretch high enough) the complex where 8,500 bumble bees are employed.



For here, the Cornerways Nursery covers 18 hectares with the UK’s largest glasshouse, producing 140 million English tomatoes each year. The reason for this is found at the next pipe bridge – where the surplus hot water from the beet factory is piped across to heat the greenhouses. On closer inspection, it can be seen that this pipe bridge was formerly a light railway bridge for the factory. The old wharves of the factory, once catering for 24 lighters, are now hidden behind willow growth – but here throughout the year the beet is processed, and during the “campaign”, the local roads choked with lorries. At the island, keep right, but keep out from the bank on the factory side at the end, just before the bridge, as there is “factory debris” underwater.

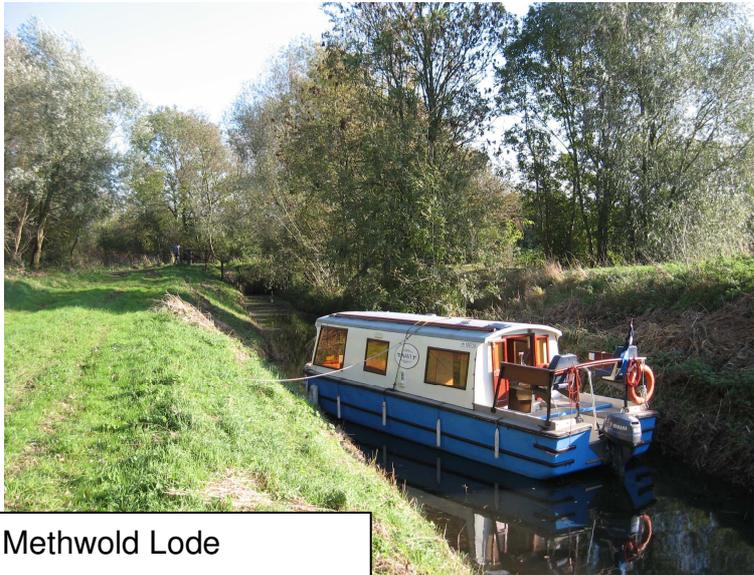


The Lakes

Under the by-pass bridge, turn left onto the first lake – which makes Tixall Wide seem but a pond. Sadly the Sugar Corporation do not allow mooring – but it is not unknown for boaters to just let themselves drift and enjoy the wildlife joining the small boats, with fishermen, that abound. A narrowing of the channel until the second lake, even more isolated is entered. The channel starts its meandering between the flood banks once again, but now large ponds are to be found on the insides of the

bends – more wild life to view.

The river starts to enter a more tree lined stretch, and unexpectedly takes a sharp left hand turn [7.2m] with the Methwold Lode going straight ahead, catching the unwary out. This was one of the many lodes once joining the local farms and habitations to the river. All others have sunk so low, they are now evident only by their pumping stations, but in their heyday, would have been busy feeders to the river. The lighters that serviced the river were about 40 to 50 foot long, 10-11 feet



Methwold Lode

wide, carrying up to 25 tons each. They were usually worked in gangs of 5, but would sometimes also have, as well as a smaller horse boat, a smaller lighter as well – which would be used for transversing these smaller lodes. Also as the boats had similar rounded bows and sterns they could be pulled either way – which meant wider turning areas were not needed.

Methwold Lode, as well as providing a link out to the river for farm produce, was also the route that the farmers would use to take their produce to the weekly Methwold Market – it is said that they called it “sailing into England”. The boats would be unloaded at Methwold Hythe, then goods taken to the main town. The lode has remained unused for decades – but in 2006 was dredged for its mile and a bit length, and now provides an interesting detour for smaller boats. A trip up the Lode, in a 23 foot Wilderness Beaver found the water deep, and except for a couple of overhanging bushes – we reached the end without problem. From here a one-mile

walk brings you to the “Green Man” (01366 728537) – a friendly village local with attached restaurant, a welcoming log fire and real ale. Some reversing or stern hauling is needed to find a wider turning spot – but well worth the diversion.

Back on the main river this is a good place for spotting deer, either in the brush or fields, or if you are very lucky, swimming across the river itself. At a left hand bend, the remains of a pump house can be seen. Derek Crouch beached many of his barges here after his contract on the Great Ouse in the 1960’s came to an end.

A sudden high concrete wall appears on both sides – labelled an aqueduct [8.2m], in truth it is a siphon carrying the Cut-Off channel under the River. Soon afterwards the guillotine sluice gate appears. This is closed in times of flood, and the other sluice gate to the side is opened to allow water to transfer into the Cut-Off – from whence it will eventually turn up in the taps of houses in South Essex.

Stoke Ferry is announced by a row of boats at the bottom of garden moorings. This was the site of the Stoke Ferry Granaries, warehouses, coal houses and maltings, servicing this prosperous 18th century town. Under the road bridge [9m], the former Bull Inn stands on the left. Despite being designated as the “top” of the river, there are no visitor moorings at Stoke Ferry (for The Blue Bell pub, PO and small general store, takeaways and fantastic traditional Thomas Bonnett ironmongers) now – but boats there are. On both sides of the river are a collection of residential and moored craft. Wide boats, narrow boats, wooden and gf cruisers, dinghies and even a swan pedalo. For the navigation does not end here.



Grange Farm Moorings

At Whittington Bridge “Grange Farm Touring Park” [10m] welcomes boats to moor, either for a short stay at their grey jetty just around the bend, or for overnight by the bridge (charged). The facilities of the caravan site are available (showers, elsan & rubbish disposal, water, hook-up). There is also a GOBA mooring here.

However, note, this is an “adults only site”. Across the road, the garage shop (petrol) is an emporium, selling everything from local pies, to paint, wellies and overalls. Further upstream Grange Farm Boatyard provides a good slipway for up to 45ft, provision for DIY maintenance, winter hard-standing and trailer storage. (01366 500075)

Above Grange Farm, there were once staithe(s), which may have existed since the 15th century, and from which, during the 19th century, coal and barley were delivered

to Whitbread's Maltings, and limestone products from the quarries loaded. Other than a pipe marking the end of Water Lane, there is no evidence left these days. Stringside Drain marks the last turning point for longer vessels, but the official navigation, now only for smaller boats, continues up the right-hand river, the character of which completely changes. A high embankment on the north of the narrow river, and grazing meadows on the left.

After a mile two poles mark Oxborough Ferry [10.5m], and the head of the original navigation. (They are used to hold a weed boom at times). Mooring on the North Bank, a track (once used by people from Oxborough to catch the ferry, so that they could catch the Lynn -Thetford Stage or to get to the Methwold Monday Market) leads up to Oxborough Hithe,



Site of Oxborough Ferry

where there were granaries for corn and coal yards. From here another mile walk brings you to the National Trust Oxburgh Hall and the busy "Bedingfield Arms" (01366 328300).



College Farm

Above Oxborough Ferry, the channel is narrow but deep, and corners sharp as the river passes through grazing land, spooky woods and marsh. EA weed boats clear the channel annually and "NAVI" has travelled another two miles to College Farm, others have ventured even further towards Northwold.

Another 18th century village – where the "Crown" (01366 727317) serves reasonably priced bar meals – well worth a tramp over the fields.

So don't forget the Wissey when in this part of the world.

Ivan Cane: December 2014

(I regret that Ivan's article on the upper reaches of the North Walsham & Dilham has had to be held over until the June issue – Editor)

NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM & CANAL TRUST

On Thursday 6th November an important meeting was held at Honing Village Hall when Ivan Cane delivered another of his illustrated talks about the canal, both past, present and future, in a Canal Briefing to an invited audience comprising 22 representatives of Norfolk County Council, North Norfolk District Council, Broads Authority, Broads Drainage Board, Royal Yachting Association, several parish councils and some other interested bodies. This was followed by a conducted tour starting at Briggate Mill Pond before moving on to Ebridge Mill, to Bacton Wood Lock where the situation about the diversion of the water to the former sewage works at Spa Common and the plans to restore the water to the canal were explained, and finally to Royston. The guests then enjoyed a prepared lunch together with hot drinks.



This was followed on 13 November by a coffee morning being held at St. Benet's Hall, in Vicarage Street, North Walsham that was open to the public and attracted a large number of people. A hard working team of ladies laid on light refreshments for sale and raised over £130 for the Trust. The event was boosted by the local Member of Parliament – The Rt. Hon Norman Lamb – attending.



Our pictures show (top) David Revill, Chris Black, Norman Lamb and Roger Hopkinson and (below) Norman Lamb with the catering team who made it happen – Julie Kelleher, Mary Black, Sue Boulton and Gisela Revill. Not shown are Helen Gosling and Carole Bullinger both

of whom were also involved in the arrangements.

And on the evening of 20 November an information meeting was held at St. Nicholas Hall, Vicarage Street, in North Walsham when Ivan made another of his presentations about the canal. All this activity reflects great credit on the Trust in getting support for the canal and for the restoration project.

NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL



Pictures from recent working parties.

Top Left: *Tom Moore at work with his digger of 9 November clearing that part of Briggate mill pond that lies alongside the road. Despite earlier efforts the reed growth is deeply rooted and soon re-asserts its presence.*

Top Right: *Our intrepid photographer inspecting at close quarters the upstream end of Briggate Lock on 7 December. The brickwork there has been seriously undermined by the constant flow of water through the lock hence making it unstable and dangerous. For safety reasons the work parties no longer keep the growth in check on that side of the lock, as opposed to the west side where the chamber wall is regularly cleared.*

Lower Left: *Taken on 12 October this shows Swafield Lock No 6 which has been partially filled in. With the aid of a small digger a part of the chamber has been unearthed to reveal the bottom gate recess. During this work some lock gate metalwork was found. The tops of the lock walls were deliberately left covered with ivy to act as protection against frost.*

Elsewhere: On 23 November the volunteers re-visited the Honing Staithe Cut to tidy up the area. It proved too wet and muddy for Tom Moore to bring in his digger to clear some of the reeds. Instead a tractor flail mower was used to mow the west side of the staithe. The trail through the woods was in fairly good condition but will need some more bark chippings to improve it and a large tree has fallen into the canal. Both matters will be dealt with in a future session. Then on 4 January 14 volunteers revisited Honing Lock and tidied up and improved the site with the public footpath being cleared, rotten fence posts alongside the path being replaced, small saplings growing in and beside the lock wall were removed and the general area was strimmed and left in a tidy state. And on 18 January the group revisited Swafield to continue clearing the canal and the upper lock.