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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Association's 37th Annual General Meeting was held at 2.30pm on Sunday 15 April in an upstairs room at The Old Ship Inn, which stands beside the entrance lock into Heybridge Basin on the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation. Perhaps because the venue was near one side of our extensive area, the attendance was lower than usual; but we were particularly glad to welcome David Tomlinson, a member of more than 40 years standing, all the way from Stafford and Mr & Mrs John Ford who had travelled down from near Lowestoft.



The weather was idyllic – bright and sunny – and Heybridge was busy as our party assembled at 11.30am. Appropriately it was high tide and two yachts came into the ship lock before we boarded the trip boat ELVER for a two-mile cruise up the canal to Beeleigh.

ELVER, supposedly half of a Welsh coal boat, but resembling one the horse-drawn trip boats operating on the Shropshire Union Canal at Llangollen, is

operated by Mark Coverly. He has been hiring out rowing boats at Heybridge for three years but last year introduced ELVER, which operates public trips or can be hired for private parties.

Part way along the canal we passed Colin Edmund, the Navigation Manager, clearing branches and other debris from the waterway. At Beeleigh ELVER passed through the flood gates, and tied up below Beeleigh Lock, giving members the chance to inspect this unusual waterways junction, where the river Blackwater crosses the canal. Two volunteers were at work clearing obstructions from the River Blackwater as it is hoped to get this dredged out and create a passage to the Museum of Power at Langford, a short way up the reach.

And then it was time to make the return voyage – we met only two other cruisers on the entire journey – one on the way up and the other on the way back – but there is a fascinating variety of craft moored at the basin. We then retired to the Old Ship for a meal, which organiser Bob Kearney had had the forethought to order by mobile phone on our return cruise, as the pub was very busy.

After the meal Chairman Roger called the meeting to order and the agenda was soon polished off with the Director's Report and the Annual Accounts being approved and Leslie Heaton and David Revill re-elected to the Council. This was followed by a Council meeting when we were particularly glad to have Spencer Greystong with us to give helpful advice about the work parties on the North Walsham & Dilham.

NORTH WALSHAM AND DILHAM CANAL

The work parties, led by David Revill, Roger Hopkinson and Marc Lynes, have made further excellent progress. On Sunday 25 February there was a return to Honing Bridge and the short Honing arm when Chris Black, Ivan Cane, Darren Cooke, Alan Faulkner with Roger, Marc and David launched a further attack on the trees that had either fallen into the water or were growing across the channel. For the first time this included work on the western bank. Some hand dredging with an improvised pull-spade proved invaluable in removing a large quantity of silt and debris that was then used to reinforce and build up the east bank. The water is now flowing much more freely through the site and a peaceful river scene is now visible from the bridge.

On 25 March a group of seven that included Mary Black met at Ebridge and pruned back some of the trees on the east bank both above and below the weir and also on the promontory on the west side of the lock. Meanwhile the grass and reeds on the west side of the lock were cut back during which the balance beam off one of the lock gates was discovered and subsequently hidden for security reasons as it is a valuable artefact. As a result of this work there is now a fine unobstructed view of the river from the road bridge upstream for about 200 yards.

Some work was also carried out on the downstream side of the bridge with a view to gaining access to the water; the approach steps being completely covered with brambles and other natural growth. Whilst so engaged they had an agreeable meeting with Mr William Donald of Old Hall, Witton, who farms the land on the east side from the bridge down to the boundary with the Honing Estate, and who was supportive of the work being carried out.

Since our last issue two other meetings have taken place – the first at Ebridge on Sunday 4 February when David and Roger met Councillor Roy Haynes from North Walsham, together with Alex Hurrell, a journalist from the *North Norfolk Press*, Paul

Gibbons, who owns the land to the west of the canal, and Laurie Ashton, the owner of Bacton Wood Mill, to discuss plans to improve the millpond area and also to consider setting up a locally-based canal trust, which we see as essential if the restoration scheme is to move forward . This resulted in an article about the canal in the *North Norfolk Press* and another in the *Eastern Daily Press*.

One of our problems is the continuing uncertainty as to the exact boundaries of the canal company's property. For instance it is not clear if the soke dykes that run parallel to the river are included. Through the good offices of our long-standing member Tom Carr and with the help of the company's agents, who also act for the Honing Estate, efforts are being made to try and clarify the position.

Then on 7 February David showed Spencer Greystong and Colin Turner, leading members of Ipswich IWA's working party group, around the Briggate, Ebridge and Bacton Wood sites to get their expert advice on future possible works on the canal.



(Left). Both bottom gates at Briggate were formerly completely covered in ivy and other growth but last year the team succeeded in clearing them, thus revealing the historic cast-iron balance beams in all their glory.

(Right) Earlier this year an important clearance was made on the west side of Ebridge lock, where the team is shown enjoying their well-earned lunch break.

In May two further sessions were held at Honing Bridge – on the last two Sundays. On the first two large coils of electrical cable that had clearly been chucked into the river from the bridge, were removed with a grappling iron. Further progress was then made in clearing the east bank of trees overhanging, or growing in, the river and more weed and debris were removed enabling the river water to flow freely through the site.

Future Sunday sessions are planned as follows: - 24 June Honing Lock; 29 July Bacton Wood Lock; 30 September Honing Lock; 28 October Ebridge Lock; 25 November Briggate Lock; 16 December Honing Bridge. As usual there is no session in August.

We are extremely grateful to our three organisers, to whom great credit is due. Their contact details are: David Revill 01603 738648, mobile 07762 218239; Roger Hopkinson 01692 407127, mobile 07708 138019; Marc Lines 01263 720265, mobile 07887 994800.

HERE AND THERE

FENS WATERWAYS LINK: All the funding is now in place for the new lock to be built at Boston to recreate the link between the River Witham and the South Forty Foot Drain, the latter also known as the Black Sluice Drainage and Navigation. Final technical studies are being carried out but it seems that the lock could well be combined with one of the new sluices at the outfall and virtually on the site of the original entrance lock. Jim Anderson is the Environment Agency's Project Manager and we wish him well with this exciting development.

FOUR MILE BAR BRIDGE: A major impediment to the Fens Waterways Link has been removed with the raising of this footbridge across the River Welland between Spalding and Crowland. The old bridge had the lowest headroom of any – a mere 5½-feet – but this has now been raised to 10-feet effectively opening the upper reaches of the river to most craft. The old structure, built in the 1950s, had four spans supported on five pre-cast piles but the new bridge has a handsome single span nearly 150-feet long and 6½-feet wide and with gently sloping approach ramps. A formal opening ceremony took place at the bridge on Wednesday 18 April.

HERMITAGE LOCK: The major works on the lock were sufficiently far forward for the lock to be re-opened on Sunday 1 April, albeit a fair amount still needed to be completed. The work had three main aims – to replace the outdated machinery that opens and closes the lock gates; to enable the lock-keeper to operate both sets of gates without him having to cross the busy B1050 as in the past, and to provide better facilities for both staff and boaters by demolishing the old lock building and replacing it with a larger and better-equipped new building.



The work has not come cheap. Over £350,000 alone has been spent on installing new power packs, cables, actuators and electronic control panels replacing the old obsolete system. The new building is four times larger than the old and besides housing the lock controls has an information room and toilets and showers for boaters to use. New traffic lights have been installed to control the passage of boats through the lock. Our picture shows a cruiser leaving the lock on the re-opening day.

BRANDON LOCK: There seems to be a vendetta against the lock and sluice at Brandon. On the night of 4 January vandals, armed with a pickaxe, broke into the control panel of the sluice, raised the sluice gates, apparently in an attempt to drain the river, and then disabled the controls. They then moved over to the lock that was electrified last year and used the pickaxe to destroy the control box and rip out the electronics making it completely inoperable.

With the water level beginning to drop rapidly, monitoring equipment at the lock alerted the Environment Agency's emergency control room and a repair team was immediately called out and they managed to close the sluice and regain control of the site. Perhaps fortunately there was a fair flow in the river meaning the water level did not drop as quickly as might otherwise have been the case. Hence the damage to fish stocks and to the environment was largely prevented.

Vandals also struck at Brownshill Lock forcing the Environment Agency to issue an emergency closure notice between 16 and 20 April to enable essential repair work to be carried out. This followed the theft of the mains power cabling, leaving the whole site without electricity.

LITTLE OUSE: On 1 March Alan Faulkner, representing the Association, met up with Bob Wells of the Great Ouse Boating Association and Derek Bradley, the IWA's Eastern Region Chairman, to discuss tactics for the way forward for the floundering campaign to restore the navigation from Brandon up to Thetford. This was a prelude before going on to attend a meeting at Thetford Town Hall with Susan Glossop, the Town Manager, several other representatives from the local authority, and Carol and Mark Stamp from the Little Ouse Group.

The main aim was to try and underline that if Thetford wanted its navigation restored it would have to start actively campaigning, as indeed the late James Forsythe was urging them to do as far back as March 1976 in an article in the *Eastern Daily Press*. Up to now there had been thoughts that the Environment Agency would lead the campaign but John Adams has made it clear that the Agency has other priorities at present.

The Little Ouse Group are important players here and are actively campaigning to establish a mooring at Santon Downham, up to which point the river is effectively navigable and only requires minor work. The landowner involved, the Forestry Commission, is generally in favour but wants the moorings to be on the north bank where there is established public access. This is more than 2½ miles above Brandon Bridge and would be a major, but inexpensive, step towards full restoration. To show our support for the Little Ouse Group we have agreed to inter-affiliate and we will offer them all the help we can.

OUSE IMPROVEMENTS: Spurred on, perhaps, by the IWA's forthcoming National Festival & Boat Show several new water points have been put in such as at Littleport, Prickwillow, Earith and St. Neots. Likewise new 48-hour moorings sites have been created on the island at Eaton Socon, at Hundred Acre on the Old West River, at Goldsmere near Little Thetford, at Diamond 44 at Littleport, at Silt Fen Farm near Denver and at Fidwell Fen at Upware on the Cam.

OUSE MAINTENANCE: High river flows earlier in the year rather upset the Environment Agency's initial timetable for repairs to various locks. No less than four temporary closure notices had to be issued for Castle Mills Lock, all lasting for some four weeks and all with different start dates, for work to demolish and then reconstruct the downstream landing stage. Likewise a four-week closure at Isleham Lock to drain down and inspect the lock chamber had to be deferred from April until May. Similar work at Bottisham Lock was delayed for three weeks whilst Hemingford Lock was

closed for most of March, again to inspect the chamber and also to refurbish the guillotine gate. A new landing stage has also been installed at St. Ives Lock.

Some of this work has been in preparation for the IWA's National Festival & Boat Show at St. Ives from 25 to 27 August and an important development has been the start of major works below Denver Sluice to remove the mud banks that have built up. As well as conventional dredging with a dragline from the bank, the Agency has been using a specially designed plough that is towed behind a powerful boat and stirs up the silt, which is then carried downstream by the tide. A three-mile stretch of the river down to Stowbridge is being covered.

WELNEY WASHES: The Washes featured on Anglia Television on 21 February following complaints about regular flooding. The A.1101 road from Welney to Littleport is flooded to some extent on average for 75 days each year but by mid February this year it had already been effectively closed for 30 days, leading to many motorists having to make long detours. The Environment Agency gently pointed out that the land is part of the flood plain and it could not be held responsible for weather conditions.

WELLS BRIDGE, MIDDLE LEVEL: The navigation of the Old River Nene from its junction with the Forty Foot River to just north of Wells Bridge was closed for just over a week in February to allow Cambridgeshire County Council to demolish and rebuild Wells Bridge.

WELCHES DAM LOCK: The Environment Agency has been considering four options to tackle the problem at this lock. They range from the totally unacceptable course of filling in the lock as a flood defence measure to the construction of a completely new lock. The first option, estimated at £50,000, would also involve ceasing navigation maintenance on the Old Bedford River and on the Forty Foot River through to Horseway. The latter, estimated between £19½m and £28m could also include a new tidal lock at Salters Lode and improvements to the Forty Foot (or even a completely new channel). The intermediate options involve either the repair or the reconstruction of the lock. The agency is now consulting with the relevant stakeholders to determine a way forward. It is important to remember that this is a statutory navigation.

BAYLHAM LOCK: As members will know, IWA's Ipswich Branch has carried out painstaking restoration work on the chambers of two locks near Needham Market and has plans to continue the work at Baylham Lock downstream. The branch's work party organiser is Colin Turner and in winter 2006/7 issue of *Anglian Cuttings*, the branch journal, there is an anguished account by Colin of his efforts to obtain land drainage consent for the work at Baylham.

One would have thought that with a tried and tested track record the Environment Agency would have been delighted that the IWA was offering to restore one of its locks and whilst the consent has been granted it included several imposed and totally unacceptable conditions. Indeed the Agency seemed to be searching for every conceivable excuse to prevent the work going ahead and this was putting at risk a planned Waterway Recovery Group work party that has been planned for this coming August. It was a most frustrating situation to be in, but we are delighted to report that matters have at last been resolved and the work at Baylham can now go ahead.

On Sunday 6 May a party from the Railway & Canal Historical Society were shown round the lock site, but up to that time the only work that had been possible was to establish a base near the lock and to cut the grass alongside the chamber.

THE FINGRINGHOE FLEET: Earlier this year J. J. Prior (Transport) Ltd., who deliver aggregates from a quarry at Fingringhoe on the River Colne to London using a small fleet of coasters, lost contracts to deliver to wharves at Vauxhall, Battersea and Fulham following the takeover of RMC by the Mexican-owned company Cemex. Prior's cement barge GABRIELLA has also been laid up. The good news, however, is that it has a new contract with Euromix Concrete to deliver aggregate to Brewery Wharf in Deptford Creek. The wharf has been refurbished and a 4-ton capacity Stothert & Pitt crane installed. The company has high hopes that work for the 2012 Olympic Games will bring further business opportunities as its ships will be able to work through the new Prescott Lock that is being built on the Bow Back Rivers.

RIVER STOUR: We are delighted to report that on Saturday 12 May the River Stour Trust has at long last been able to formally open its Visitor and Education Centre just downstream of Great Cornard Lock. Whilst the building was largely completed months ago, there have been inordinate delays in services, such as electricity, water and telephone, being laid onto the site and in providing a proper access road through the Barratt Homes development site. The Trust's Administrative Assistant, Catherine Burrows, now divides her time between the Granary and the new Centre and is helped by a band of willing volunteers.



Meanwhile clearance work on Stratford St Mary lock has continued and on his way home after our Annual General Meeting at Heybridge on 15 April, our Hon. Secretary Ivan Cane visited the site to inspect the progress.

The Trust now has to apply for land-drainage consent and once this is obtained a major fund-raising effort will be needed to find some £100,000 to complete the project.

The well-known actor, director, producer and writer Griff Rhys Jones has accepted an invitation from the Trust to become one of its Vice Presidents.

BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES LINK: At the beginning of the year the Outline Planning Application for the Waterways Park, the first section of this proposed new canal, was submitted to Milton Keynes Council. It covers almost 4½ miles of new waterway leaving the Grand Union Canal at Newlands, just north of Child's Way Bridge 82a, dropping down by six locks to cross Willen Lake, with six more then taking it up to the course of Broughton Brook across the river Ouse valley and ending up (temporarily at least) about 1¼ miles short of the M1 motorway.

The application comprised four main sections. The Planning Application Statement outlined the development, the design, access, community involvement and

sustainability. Meanwhile the Environmental Statement covered such varied things as water resources, biodiversity, soil and geology, landscape and visual impact, socio-economic effects, noise and much else. A Flood Risk Assessment demonstrated that the plans to canalise the Broughton Brook would not increase the risk of flooding. And finally there were drawings of the route, cross sections and outline designs of structures such as bridges and locks.

Some 35 copies of each of the four documents were supplied together with a stack of CDs, containing the information in digital format, plus a box containing an entire set of the project drawings on large (A1) paper. It was truly a monumental undertaking, mostly done by Halcrow, but with input from many Trust members and others and largely funded from the Big Lottery.

Then at the end of May the final key presentation was made to the Big Lottery Fund and the fund's inspectors are due to visit the site in June or July with a decision expected in the early autumn.

RIVER SLEA: By now work on the new lifting footbridge in Sleaford may well have started as most of the details had been sorted out by the beginning of April. Likewise there may have been a decision on the Sleaford Navigation Trust's planning application for the winding hole and slipway in the town.

Elsewhere there was an informal boat gathering at South Kyme over the weekend of 5-7 May and the Trust's series of work parties continues. In January a session was held at Bone Mill Lock, which had not been worked on before. Much of the invading ivy was cleared away and trees overhanging the lock and near the by-pass bridge were cut down. A follow-up session in February completed the work on the west wall, exposing the brickwork and coping stones. The March and April sessions carried out general maintenance to Bottom Lock.

LICENCES: Licences issued for the Anglian Region covering the Ancholme, Glen, Great Ouse, Nene, Stour and Welland rivers have been as follows: -

Totals	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Manually propelled boats	599	499	474	458	490	496	490
Sailing boats	119	126	98	108	101	106	109
Mechanically propelled boats	3207	3210	3286	3467	3932	4048	4216
House boats	11	11	10	12	19	23	35
Boats on the tideway	75	73	55	53	57	73	73
Gold Licences	118	124	173	140	145	110	111
Other Visitors	179	165	183	142	56	76	33*
Others	3	10	3	2	2	1	2
Grand Total	4311	4218	4282	4382	4802	4933	5069

* This figure has not been updated and does not include all visitors – e.g. At South Ferriby)

In the 2006/7 year the revenue that these licences generated was £852,095 for the Great Ouse and the Nene, £21,196 for the Ancholme, Glen and Welland and £289 for the Stour, a total of £873,580. This compares with £1,642,241 for the Thames and £98,191 for the Medway. The Agency has been looking at the very different charging regimes currently in use across its three regions to see if they can be harmonised, leading to greater equality and significant cost savings.

BROADS NOTES AND NEWS

BROADS AUTHORITY MEMBERS: From 1 April Stephen Johnson, John Sharpe and Tony Stapleton have been appointed as members of the authority for a four-year term. Stephen Johnson has spent his entire career in heritage management including being a Director of Operations with the Heritage Lottery Fund for ten years. John Sharpe is Conservation Manager in Eastern England for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and has been a member of the Broads Forum since it was established in 2002. Tony Stapleton has a background in academic and business environments and was served as the first chairman of the Broads Forum. He is a keen sailor and canoeist.

BROADS AUTHORITY BILL: With the agreement reached between the Authority, the Royal Yachting Association, the British Marine Federation and the Inland Waterways Association, the main threat of objections to the Bill had been removed, but four individuals did petition against it. Likewise two local Members of Parliament objected at the Second Reading delaying the move to the Committee stage. Their concern seems to be that rather than being opposed to the measure, they were seeking a debate in the Commons in the interests of transparency. Some minor amendments are being considered, but with the delay it may not now be feasible to introduce some safety provisions, such as the licensing of hire boats on 1 April 2008 as hoped.

BOAT SAFETY SCHEME: Following confirmation from the Department of Transport, the National Boat Safety byelaws came into effect on the Broads on 1 April. The scheme involves three tranches – the first covers hire craft over 30 square metres and motor craft including motorised sailing craft with engines over 10-horsepower and of 21 square metres and above. The second tranche, effective from 1 April 2008, covers any remaining hire craft and private motor craft of 11 square metres and above, whilst the third tranche, due on 1 April 2009, covers all remaining private motor boats and all private sailing craft. Despite considerable notice being given, the introduction of the scheme found many boaters unprepared and, as a result, caused significant pressures on boatyards to get any necessary compliance work completed in time.

BARNBY BROAD: After undergoing a major refit the Broads Authority's mud pump started pumping silt out of Barnby Broad in March to help restore its valuable aquatic life. The broad, which lies about half-a-mile south of the river Waveney in Suffolk, is privately owned and not generally open to the public. It had silted up so much that in places there was only 12-inches of water. Some 9,000 cubic metres of nutrient rich sediment are to be removed over a three-month period restoring the depth to four to five feet. This will allow water plants to re-colonise and provide an improved habitat for birds. The 6-acre broad is just one of the eight the Authority's aims to bring back to life, the programme being funded from an additional National Park Grant.



HORSEY MERE: For many years, dating back at least to the 1920s, the mere that is an important site for wintering wildfowl, has been closed to angling by boat from November to February each year. During winter months anglers seemingly make up the vast majority of boaters using these waters. Despite this, in recent years the waters were being increasingly disturbed causing a negative impact on the bird population. In 2004 a series of voluntary winter refuges was established to provide disturbance-free areas for the birds and these covered not only Horsey Mere but also Martham North and South Broads and parts of Hickling Broad and Heigham Sound. In 2005 a trial system was introduced for anglers to have limited access to the banks of the mere on a permit booking system and this system, with certain modifications remains in place. Initially there were problems with publicising the scheme, leading to several infringements, but a leaflet has been produced explaining the scheme, and this has been widely distributed and seems to be proving effective.

PEGASUS BOATYARD: Towards the end of January the Broads Authority circulated for comment the draft of a Development Brief for the Pegasus and Hammerton boatyards site at Oulton Broad. It has to be said that the draft seemed well thought through and sensible. As such we wrote in, in support of the brief whilst stressing the vital importance of retaining a significant part of the site as a viable boatyard with full facilities. We also stressed the importance of the development not encroaching on the water space, as had at one stage been suggested, albeit we would not object to pontoons close to the bank.

JENSEN'S ISLAND, OULTON BROAD: At the beginning of May the Broads Authority made a planning application to fill in two dykes and use them to deposit dredgings. Both dykes are subject to tidal influence, hence there is a public right of navigation over them, and as such both continue to be used for casual boating. Chris Groves, a long-standing member of the Association, alerted us to the proposal and we have entered an objection to the application.

TIDAL SURGE: On 1 November last year a major tidal surge, the third highest since 1953, it provided a major test for the flood defences in Broadland. They performed exceptionally well with the only breaches occurring where improvement works have not yet been carried out. The main areas affected were on the Haddiscoe Cut, where the railway line was undermined, at Limpenhoe Marshes on the River Yare upstream from Reedham and further up the Yare at Cantley and Postwick Marshes. Less badly affected were several grazing marshes on the river Waveney between Geldeston and Oulton Broad.

HERITAGE SKILLS: On 31 January five trainee millwrights were working at the How Hill National Nature Reserve alongside five trainee reed cutters. Both groups receive Heritage Lottery Fund three-year bursaries for their training that includes practical on the job work together with a day a week at Easton College, leading to an NVQ. The need for the project is highlighted by there being 79 drainage mills in the Broads and only one local millwright. Hence there is a long waiting list, as long as five years for even minor jobs.

ERIC EDWARDS: On Thursday 31 May, Eric Edwards, who has been cutting reed and sedge at the How Hill National Nature Reserve for 40 years, retired from the Broads Authority's service. Eric, aged 67, had kept the Broads traditions alive with his

trademark smock, hat and neckerchief and was one of only two reed cutters in the Broads still to use a scythe. He was featured on Channel 4 Television's New Paul O'Grady Show on 26 April attempting to teach Essex twins Nick and John Morgan how to cut, dress and tie reed in "the old way" at How Hill. In future the reed and sedge on the 360-acre reserve will be cut commercially by self-employed cutters. Eric's wife, Ruby, has cooked at the Howe Hill Environmental Study Centre for 30 years.

BOAT CENSUS: Officers of the Broads Authority, aided by a significant number of volunteers carried out the four-yearly census of boats on Sunday 20th, Tuesday 22nd and Thursday 24th August 2006. The numbers are revealing:

Year	HIRE BOATS	Motor hire %	Sail hire %	Day boats &c hire %	PRIVATE BOATS	Motor %	Sail %	Day boats &c %
1994	12,605	57.1%	5.1%	15.8%	6,225	11.4%	2.4%	4.7%
1998	13,933	54.9%	5.0%	17.6%	6,840	11.8%	1.6%	4.5%
2002	14,073	50.1%	5.0%	17.4%	6,977	13.9%	2.0%	6.2%
2006	11,340	47.9%	4.3%	18.4%	5,584	15.8%	2.5%	3.7%

Large sea-going cruisers, passenger vessels, row-boats and canoes make up the balance of the percentage figures.

NOSTALGIA: The Eastern Daily Press (31 January 2007) featured an interesting picture of dried sugar beet pulp being loaded onto a coaster at Cantley, on the River Yare on 11 December 1985, for shipment to livestock farmers in the West Country. Under the heading of "River traffic a boost for beet factory" the paper commented that being on a tidal river it made sense to ship bulk commodities in this way. Latterly fuel oil was brought to the processing factory by sea, but sadly today nothing now comes or leaves in this way.

MUSEUM OF THE BROADS: The museum re-opened on 1 April after its annual winter closure and it remains open every day from 10.30am to 5pm until 31 October. During the winter the museum buildings have been repainted and the floor in the Marshman's building has been replaced and the display of the artefacts improved. The steam launch FALCON was stripped of her boiler and engine to enable the hull to be repainted and the machinery overhauled. She will again be operating river trips this year and it is intended to increase her sailing days. Meanwhile the lateen-rigged sailing boat MARIA has been painted and is looking truly immaculate.

CORACLES: These craft are more usually associated with Ironbridge on the river Severn and on some of the Welsh rivers such as the Towy and the Taf. So it may come as a surprise to find that Jason Kidman, a lecturer on countryside and estate management at Easton College, has been building coracles in Norfolk for some time. He has three designs all costing about £350 and appropriately named after the rivers he uses them on – Bure, Wensum and Yare – and it takes him three days to make one. His designs are all made to order in a shed at the bottom of his garden at Coltishall and they are eco-friendly in that the materials used (ash, hazel, pine and willow) all come from sustainable local sources.

It seems the earliest record of coracles dates back to the time of Julius Caesar – in 49BC he ordered his troops in Spain to make wickerwork boats covered with hides, similar to ones he had seen in Britain some years previously. And there is now a Coracle Society website – see www.coracle-fishing.net.

THE BEDFORD RIVER LAUNCHES (Part 2)

In October 1943 Mr. & Mrs. E. H. Smith, who operated a haulage business in Bedford, purchased the assets of the Bedford Steam Boat Company. At the time the boats were not operating, having ceased just before the war broke out. Four launches were included in the purchase – ALMA, LODORE, LADY LENA and LORNA DOONE all of which were sunk in a backwater at Cauldwell House in Whitbread Avenue, Bedford. None were usable - ALMA was broken up soon after, LORNA DOONE had her back broken when she was lifted out of the water and had to be written off, LODORE was left to rot on land and only LADY LENA was in anything approaching a serviceable condition. She had been built in 1890 by Burgoine of Kingston-on-Thames and in June 1891 had been licensed to carry 24 passengers. She was now rebuilt, being renamed SILVER STREAM and was granted a new passenger certificate in 1945, her last one being in 1938.

The Smiths started their river business – aptly named Silvery Ouse Pleasure Craft – in August 1944 with SILVER FOAM but shortly after SILVER SPRAY joined her. Both were open boats purchased in London and were then fitted out for electric propulsion – they were just over 25-feet long, about 6-feet wide with a draught of 3-feet. SILVER STREAM joined them in 1945 and the three became a familiar sight on the river for many years. SILVER FOAM, which had been built at Cowes in 1924, could seat 20 passengers, SILVER SPRAY could take 10 and SILVER STREAM could now take 30.

Initially the boats continued to be based at Whitbread Avenue but in April 1957, but following the restoration of Bedford Town Lock, their base was moved to The Barns at Fenlake. In 1944 the boats operated only in the afternoon but in 1945 a morning service of half-hourly trips down to Newnham was introduced but it was not very successful and was soon discontinued.

In July 1956 a new service was provided with a waterbus, or showboat, from the town, through the restored lock to the Bedfordshire Agricultural Showground for the two days of the County Show. Passengers embarked at the Town Bridge and got off at the Newnham railway bridge and were able to buy a combined boat and showground ticket but had to pay a separate 1/- fare if they returned by boat. The service ran every half hour for ten hours with SILVER SPRAY and SILVER FOAM working together to balance the greater seating capacity of SILVER STREAM.

Our picture was taken on Saturday 24 September 1955 and shows SILVER STREAM undertaking a test run through the newly restored Bedford Lock. On board were (left to right) Mr E. H. Smith, Great Ouse Restoration Council Member and proprietor of Silvery Ouse Pleasure Craft), Mr J. A. Ormerod (GORS Chairman), Mr P. H. C. Banks (GORS Secretary), Mr Lacey (Great Ouse River Board District Engineer) and Mrs Lacey. (Editor's collection



An employee was stationed all day at the lock to work the boats through speedily. On the first day only 200 people used the service, the chilly weather deterring many customers but on the Saturday no less than 585 passengers made the journey. The service operated every year until the County Show moved to Peterborough but latterly the passage through the lock was discontinued and the boats ran along the embankment to Newnham as this speeded up the journey and meant more people could be taken to the showground.

A leaflet issued by Silvery Ouse at this time stressed the comforts of a trip aboard the launches – no fumes, smoke, vibration or noise. A boat left the Town Bridge every 20 minutes and the return fare downstream to Newnham or upstream

Queen's Park was 1/- for adults and 6d for children. In inclement weather an awning could be erected to protect the passengers.



In 1959 the diesel driven PRINCESS was purchased from Broads Tours of Wroxham. She was converted to electric propulsion, was certificated for 41 passengers and renamed SILVER CREST. She was followed two years later by DAWN from Broads Tours – she was converted, certificated to carry for 25 passengers and renamed SILVER DAWN. They enabled the older boats to be taken out of service – SILVER FOAM and SILVER SPRAY with their limited seating capacity and SILVER STREAM after nearly 60 years on the river.

SILVER FOAM in the foreground with SILVER SPRAY behind, both with a full complement of passengers, wait for the lock gates to open and allow them to continue down to the Bedfordshire Agricultural Showground at Newnham in July 1956. (Editor's collection)

Both boats were powered by a bank of lead acid batteries operating at 84 volts and giving six hours of normal running between charges. At Fenlake Slivery Ouse had a mercury arc charging plant with the batteries being recharged every night during the season and trickle charged during the winter months in store. The boats normally operated from May to September starting at 1.30pm weather permitting and continuing for as long as people wanted to come.

The normal route was along the embankment to Newnham - the fare in 1976 being 25p for adults and 15p for children – but trips could be run up to Queen's Park by request at the same fare. They continued into the 1980s when their popularity was declining and the Smiths wanted to retire and whilst another operator provided a service for a while it is perhaps sad that for several years now it has not been possible to enjoy a trip on the river at Bedford.

FOOTNOTE: By strange coincidence a note about the subsequent history of SILVER STREAM appeared in the March 2007 issue of "Waterways World".

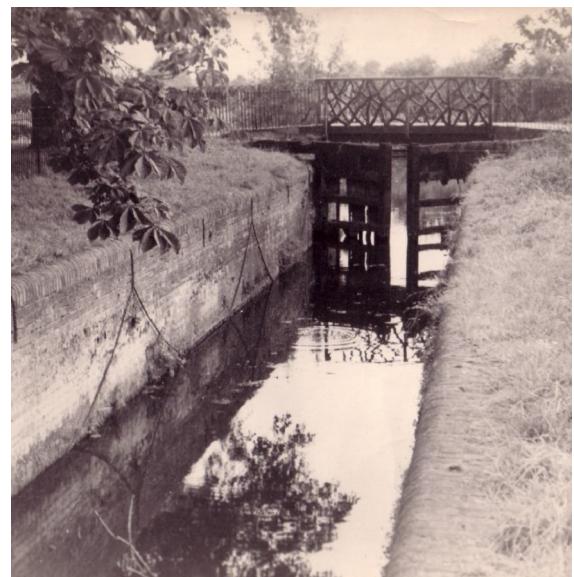
After being taken out of service in 1963 she was rescued by Peter Bridge of Cotterstock near Oundle and was put into store. In 1980 she was acquired by Jenkyn

Knill, the youngest son of the late Sir John Knill, and between 1980 and 1982 was restored by Terry Hardick of Bath. Between 1982 and 1983 Jenkyn installed a 2-cylinder steam engine, fired at first by coal and latterly by oil, and restored her original name of LADY LENA.

The boat had been built of oak and mahogany in 1890 by Burgoyne of Kingston-upon-Thames for the General Electric and Traction Company and in June 1891 was licensed to operate on a river service and carry 24 passengers.

For the last two years, however, Jenkyn has been returning the launch to electric propulsion, making her probably the oldest electric launch in service. With the work completed she was re-launched into the Kennet & Avon Canal at Bradford-on-Avon in mid January and cruised to her mooring – the floating boathouse at Hampton Wharf, Bathampton. A fine picture of her appears in the magazine.

ANOTHER REMINDER OF THE PAST



The Great Ouse River Board started work on the restoration of Bedford Town Lock (or Duck Mill Lock as it is also known) on 7 March 1955. The crane is driving piles across the head of the lock whilst the dilapidated bottom gates wait for attention.

At the time the Great Ouse Restoration Society agreed to contribute £2,500, being some 20% of the cost of restoring both Bedford and Cardington Locks. In the event it only paid over £1,250 for this lock as the work on Cardington was deferred and was not started until September 1962. (Editor's collection)

BOOK REVIEWS

The River Great Ouse and tributaries. A guide for river users by Andrew Hunter Blair, 102 pages, spiral bound, ISBN 978 085288 9435, Imray Laurie Norie & Wilson Ltd, 2006, Wych House, The Broadway, St. Ives, Cambridgeshire, PE27 5BT, £9.50

The River Nene. A guide for river users by Iain Smith, 70 pages, spiral bound, ISBN 978 085288 9442, Imray Laurie, 2006, £7.95

Fenland Waterways. A map and commentary on the waterways of the Middle Level by Andrew Hunter Blair, 56 pages, spiral bound, ISBN 978 085288 9947, Imray Laurie, 2006, £7.95.

As reported briefly in our last issue Imray Laurie have re-issued three guides in preparation for the IWA's National Waterways Festival and Boat Show that is to be held over the August Bank Holiday weekend in St. Ives. They are invaluable for all attending the rally and indeed for all the other users of these waterways

Each guide follows a similar format – starting with a general map of the river (for the Middle Level guide this is contained in a separate map at the back) giving details of locks and distances. This is followed by general information such as licensing details, marinas and moorings, pump outs, distance tables, boat clubs, tourist information offices and other useful addresses.

The guides then trace the courses of the navigations in clear and informative maps showing all navigational and surrounding features and accompanied by a detailed commentary giving much helpful and historical detail.

The narrative on the Great Ouse guide starts at Denver before passing south through Ely into the Old West River and then all the way up the river through St. Ives, Huntingdon and St. Neots to Bedford and ending at Kempston Mill. It then traces the Wissey up to Whittington, the Little Ouse up to Brandon Bridge, the Lark up to Mildenhall, the Cam up to Cambridge, and Reach and Burwell Lodes.

The Nene guide is slightly different in that the narrative comes first before the detailed maps; both start at Gayton Junction, on the Grand Union Canal, and cover the Northampton Arm before joining the Nene at Cotton End and then passing on down through Wellingborough, Thrapston, Oundle, to Peterborough before finishing at Dog-in-a-Doublet Lock. Helpful details are given of those locks that have been electrified and those now with mitre doors at both ends. The dreaded Nene guillotines are rapidly losing their supposed deterrent to boating on the river.

The Middle Level guide narrative begins at Salter's Lode and deals firstly the tricky tidal passage across the Great Ouse from Denver Sluice. It then passes through Outwell, Upwell and March to Stanground and the Nene before dealing with the Twenty Foot River route that bypasses March to the west. Next comes the route from Floods Ferry via the old course of the Nene into the Forty Foot River and the Old Bedford River and back to Salters Lode before tracing the route from Well's Bridge to Ramsey and into the southwest of the system. The only sections not covered in detail are the dead end Bevill's Leam and the through route via Popham's Eau and the Sixteen Foot River.

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The Association has links with the Association of Waterways Cruising Clubs, Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterways Trust, Chelmer Canal Trust, Great Ouse Boating Association, Inland Waterways Association (Cambridge, Ipswich, Lincoln, Northampton and Peterborough branches), Inland Waterways Protection Society, Little Ouse Group, Middle Level Watermen's Club, Norfolk Wherry Trust, Peterborough Civic Society, River Stour Trust, Sleaford Navigation Trust, Waterway Recovery Group, Well Creek Trust.

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