



**THE EASTERLING**  
**JOURNAL OF THE EAST ANGLIAN**  
**WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION**  
**VOLUME NINE, NUMBER NINE**  
**JUNE 2014**

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## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The 44<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 18 May based on St. Mary's Church Hall, Westry, March in Cambridgeshire. The day started off with a visit to the nearby boatyard operated by Fox Narrow Boats where we were met by Paula Syred, daughter of the late Charlie Fox who had established the business in 1959.



Members were given an interesting presentation of how the company had developed before looking round the marina and being able to inspect two of the current hire boats – *Leisurely Fox* and *Silver Fox* - both of which looked extremely smart.

And then it was back to St. Marys where we were

fortunate in being able to look round the recently restored church that had suffered an arson attack four years ago. Members then enjoyed an excellent luncheon laid on by Margaret Martin and her team before turning to the formal business of the day.

The Director's Report and Accounts for the year ending 30 June 2013 were duly approved before Alan Faulkner, David Mercer and Jeff Walters were re-elected as Directors and John Cordran was re-elected as Accounts Scrutineer. Chris Black then gave a full report about the progress on the North Walsham & Dilham Canal and the meeting concluded with a report by Chairman Roger which centred round the Environment Agency's reduction in dredging and maintenance. On a more positive note Roger reported the likelihood of a £1 million grant for investment in the Ouse Washes and held out the hope that this might possibly include some funds towards restoring navigation through Welches Dam Lock.



## HERE AND THERE

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY, ANGLIAN REGION:** The number of vessels registered and the income they generate are included in these figures from the Regional Navigation Group.

Vessel	31.03.12	£	31.03.13	£	31.03.14	£
Unpowered	1,603	56,781	1,201	50,358	1,283	55,411
Powered	4,419	1,624,041	4,176	1,659,785	4,280	1,782,509
Visitors	677	27,823	875	67,247	1,122	70,051
Total	6,699	1,708,645	6,252	1,777,390	6,685	1,907,971

*The 2014 powered figures include 161 vessels and £34,712 registered through the Interchange Agreement with the Conservators of the River Cam. The unpowered vessels include 736 under the block registration via British Rowing, an unspecified number of canoes under the British Canoe Union block registration, 45 sailing craft, 57 houseboats, 89 tenders and 356 other canoes, kayaks and rowing boats. Enforcement up to 1 May 2014 involved 376 offence tickets which equated to £154,068 of potentially lost income but £83,762 has so far been recovered.*

**RIVER ANCHOLME:** Winter storm damage has led to severe bank erosion on parts of the river and to the loss of many boat moorings. The Ancholme River Trust is working with the local authorities to attract funding for remedial works and also to

carry out weed cutting on the river. Weed has been causing major problems. Meanwhile the loss of income is preventing the replacement of Harlam Hill Lock tail gates and the lock is closed until further notice.

#### **RIVER SLEA:**

Following dredging organised by the Sleaford Navigation Trust and carried out by a private contractor the shoal below Lower Kyme Lock (Taylor's Lock) has been cleared enabling boats to reach South Kyme once again. The work that was carried out by contractor Phil Wright between 12 and 14



March was funded following an appeal launched by the Trust and to which EAWA contributed £1,000. The funding was such that a short extra stretch of the river was dealt with as a useful add-on to the programme.

As a result and after a gap of two years the annual boat gathering took place over the early May Bank Holiday and 14 boats were able to join in the celebrations at South Kyme. Traditionally boaters are invited to take part in a special service in St.



Mary & All Saints church and this year it was made very special by the presence of the Right Reverend Christopher Lowson, the Bishop of Lincoln who blessed the visiting boats before travelling to the church by water on board the narrow boat "Wigford."

**WOOHALL SPA MARINA:** Plans have been announced to build a 300-berth marina on the outskirts of Woodhall Spa and involving a new mile-long canal and a lock to link the proposed site at Kirkstead to the Witham. The plan could feature up to 250 new homes being built overlooking the marina together with a cafe/restaurant, office accommodation and boatyard facilities. Part of the significant construction costs could come from the sale of extracted sand and gravel.

**FENS WATERWAYS LINK:** In order to attract more boats to the waterway a 13½-foot wide slipway has now been constructed at Hubberts Bridge (3<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> miles from Boston) alongside the Wheatsheaf public house and a coin-operated pump-out facility and water point are being provided together with car parking and a picnic area. Meanwhile the “official” head of the navigation is Donnington High Bridge (11½ miles) where the main A.52 road crosses but many craft can venture well beyond this although the nearer one gets to the Black Hole Drove pumping station (19½ miles) the shallower and narrower the channel becomes.

The choice of a route southwards from Black Hole Drive has now been narrowed down to just two options both of which involve building a lock around the pumping station and then either widening the existing channel down to Guthram Gowt with a new lock into the river Glen or building a new channel. Both would involve negotiating the A.151 Spalding to Bourne road. Discussions with landowners are taking place in order to develop a business case prior to bidding for funding.

**RIVER STOUR:** At present both Flaford and Dedham Locks are closed due to the very poor condition of the lock gates. The River Stour Trust owns Flatford Lock and it has been successful in raising £65,000 to replace the gates. Of this amount £40,000 came from the Environment Group Veolia’s land fill tax allocation. It is hoped the work will be carried out in September if the river levels allow.

The work on Dedham Lock will be more complicated as first of all the Trust needs to agree a repairing lease with the owners of Dedham Mill. It then needs to stabilise the lock island and then replace the gates. All this could cost some £110,000 and it is hoped the work will be able to take place in 2015. Meanwhile the restoration of Stratford St. Mary Lock is still stalled and talks with the Environment Agency have made little progress. The annual canoe rally (S2C) again was over subscribed and is an excellent way of showing many people the charm of navigating the Stour.

The Trust now runs a small flotilla of trip boats on the river. At Sudbury “*Rosette*” and “*Francis J*” operate but there were shortages at peak times. The lighter “*John Constable*” has also started carrying passengers but there were some teething problems with her motors and she has yet to achieve her full potential. “*Trusty*” operates a very successful waterbus service between Dedham and Flatford on Saturdays. Since the stretch upsteam from Dedham has been isolated, the Environment Agency has allowed “*Kathleen*” to be used on a temporary basis to help raise money for the gate replacement fund.

**WINTER WORKS:** During the winter months the Environment Agency has carried out improvement works to several of the landing stages at locks including the upstream stage at Upware Lock and the downstream stages at Hermitage and Brandon. Locks receiving attention have included Brampton, Godmanchester, Isleham and the lock into the Relief Channel at Denver. Work on the latter took place in February and March and involved removing a large volume of silt and sludge from the chamber, checking the hydraulic system and replacing parts as necessary.

Safety work was carried out at Denver Sluice after engineers found gates had been damaged by storm tides following the December floods. Castle Mills also had problems when one of the three sluice gates failed and was stuck in the open position, the steel ropes becoming detached from the drums. This led to fluctuating water levels above the lock. And further de-silting work had to be carried out below the lock with Jacksons contractors having to clear a bar right across the channel immediately below the lock.

**RIVER CAM:** At the end of March the Cam Conservancy announced that Jed Ramsey had been appointed as its new river manager starting towards the end of May. Previously he was a Team Leader for the Environment Agency's Thames Region managing a ten lock section of the river around Oxford.

**UNIVERSITY BOAT RACE:** On 6 April the teams from Oxford and Cambridge universities lined up on the Thames for the 160<sup>th</sup> time, but 70 years ago the race was held on the Great Ouse at Queen Adelaide, on the outskirts of Ely. This was due to the teams having to seek refuge from the doodlebug bombs that were raining down on London at the time. A veteran from each team met up to commemorate the 1944 race which led to the birth and blossoming of the Isle of Ely Rowing Club.

**BARGE SUSAN:** This important historic wooden vessel used to operate on the Chelmer & Blackwater navigation transshipping cargoes from visiting ships and delivering them along the waterway and to creeks and inlets on the Essex coast. She is currently undergoing complete restoration in a dry dock at St. Osyth and members of the Chelmer Canal Trust and The Susan Trust were invited to inspect her on the dock on Saturday 22 March.

**STROUDWATER NAVIGATION:** Our long-standing member Michael Handford has asked us to mention two books he has written about this navigation that is currently under major restoration. "*The Stroudwater Canal*" is a history of the navigation whilst "*The Stroudwater Navigation*" provides a pictorial record of the changes over the last century.

Both books are published by Amberley Publishing – [www.amberley-books.com](http://www.amberley-books.com) at £16.99 and £14.99 respectively.

**HALESWORTH:** A letter in the Eastern Daily Press called back memories of the traffic on the River Blyth up to Halesworth which came to an end in 1911: -

*"....the main transport between Halesworth and Southwold was courtesy of a fleet of wherries. The last three were broken up at Wenhaston, as the passage to Halesworth was blocked by a broken lock. The last wherry was the "Star" owned and run by Fred Lambert of Halesworth. A block from this wherry is in the Halesworth museum. One of the other wherries broken up for timber at Wenhaston was the "Blyth" which was somewhat larger than the "Star". Large amounts of coal &c were shipped from Southwold and corn in the opposite direction. It did add to the prosperity of the area."*

## A VISIT TO HORSEWAY

On Saturday 5 April Roy & Lois Parker on a campaigning journey passed through Horseway Lock, maintained by the Middle Level Commissioners, in their boat *Marie II* which then poked its nose into the Environment Agency's overgrown section of the Forty Foot River. This was during an event organised by the IWA's Peterborough Branch highlighting the continued closure of the route through to the Great Ouse.



(Above) *In the lock and looking north along the navigable section of the Forty Foot. (Top right) Venturing a little way into the overgrown section of the Forty Foot. (Below right) Looking back to the lock from the closed section.*

(Pictures courtesy of Ivan Cane).

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** After the formal business of our Annual General Meeting on 18 May Alan Faulkner showed a selection of some of his slides starting with pictures of boats negotiating not only the crossing of the Great Ouse at Denver but the exit from, and entrance back into, the Old Bedford River in August 1973. The boats were all from the main canal system and were visiting the Inland Waterways Association's National Rally of Boats at Ely and they were having to use the Old Bedford route as at the time the Well Creek route was impassable.

This had led to the formation of the Well Creek Trust on 23 March 1970 to campaign for the re-opening of what is now the main route between the Nene and the Great Ouse. At that time work was needed to restore Marmount Priory Lock whilst part of the channel between Outwell, Nordelph and Salters Lode was completely blocked by

silt and was threatened with permanent closure by Norfolk County Council to enable part of the A 1122 road, that runs parallel to that part of Well Creek, to be re-aligned and improved. Repairs to Marmount Priory started in the autumn of 1971 and from 29 October 1972 the Well Creek Trust began a series of work parties under the slogan of "Fenatic" initially to clear the channel between Upwell and Outwell. This included several major sessions to clear the silted up Outwell Basin where the Wisbech Canal used to join Well Creek. Eventually major dredging work was carried out mainly between Nordelph and Salters Lode enabling the section to be cleared and a portion of the road re-aligned and the route was re-opened on 1 June 1975.

Once re-opened Well Creek quickly became the preferred route through the Middle Level and the Old Bedford route declined and eventually became impassable due to the condition of the locks at Welches Dam and at Horseway. Action by our Association, the IWA, the Middle Level Watermen's Club and others led to Horseway being repaired by the Middle Level Commissioners and being duly re-opened by Mrs. Gwen Sutton, wife of the Chairman of the MLWC, on 23 June 1985.

It took much longer before work at Welches Dam was started by the then National Rivers Authority but the lock was formally reopened by Lady Helen De Freitas, our President, and John Young, the IWA's Regional Chairman, on 6 April 1991. However Well Creek remained the popular through route, matters not being helped by the discovery of leakages in the stretch of the Forty Foot River between the two locks that resulted in the water level having to be kept down with navigation only being possible at selected weekends. Not surprisingly the route rapidly deteriorated, became impassable and it remains so to this day.

As members may well be aware the Association along with the Peterborough Branch of the IWA and others have been campaigning for action to be taken at Welches Dam and the site has been visited by experts from the Waterways Recovery Group which show that much of the work could be carried out by volunteers. The lock is now owned by the Environment Agency who have attempted to deny its ownership which is somewhat surprising as the lock clearly shows as one of its assets in the 2010/11 Asset Investment Plan under reference number AN-035.

More recently there have been thoughts that this section of the Forty Foot River might eventually be incorporated into the Fens Waterways Link, but as matters stand at present this would appear to be a long term objective. Whatever, the restoration of this alternative route through the Middle Level remains one of our Association's top priorities.

And as many members will know there are now associated problems on the Old Bedford River at the Salters Lode end due to heavy silting. The entrance sluice there was fitted with new steel doors powered by hydraulic rams in April 2006.

## BROADS NOTES AND NEWS

**MEETING WITH THE BROADS AUTHORITY:** On Monday 3 February a delegation from the North Walsham & Dilham Canal Trust comprising our members Chris Black, Ivan Cane, Tom Carr and David Revill visited the Broads Authority and gave a presentation about the canal. Attending on behalf of the authority were John Packman, the Chief Executive, Trudi Wakelin, Director of Operations, Titus Adam, Head of Finance, John Organ, Head of Governance & Executive Assistant, and Andrea Long, director of Planning and Resources. The delegation was very well received with Ivan giving an illustrated talk and there was a full and frank exchange of views.

**25 YEARS OF THE BROADS AUTHORITY:** In 1989 the Broads Authority joined the family of National Parks but with its own special protection under the Broads Act. To celebrate this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary the authority has listed out, in no particular order, what it sees as some of its biggest achievements.

1	Dramatic improvement in water quality – thriving water plants and clear water are the best in half a century
2	Return of rare wildlife – bittern, marsh harriers, otters, cranes, buzzard
3	Barton Broad restored and a new boardwalk built for disabled visitors
4	Britain first passenger solar boat “Ra” launched – it now operates on Whitlingham Broad.
5	Canoe and bicycle hire networks started.
6	Revived the reed and sedge cutting industry in the Broads.
7	Trained millwrights to keep heritage skills alive.
8	Developed Whitlingham Country Park.
9	Helped develop the long distance footpath – The Wherryman’s Way
10	Provided more than 60 free 24-hour moorings all with safety features.
11	Extended electric charging points across the Broads to encourage eco-friendly boating.
12	Took the dredging operation in house – achieving 25% more dredging for less money.
13	Built a new dockyard facility as a hub of its maintenance work.
14	Restored two historic reed beds by reusing dredged sediment.
15	Took over the management of Breydon Water from the Great Yarmouth Port Authority.
16	Invested in high speed heavy duty launch for Breydon Water with year round patrols.
17	Improved safety on the Broads.
18	Took over the management and refurbished Norwich and Great Yarmouth Yacht Stations.
19	Established three visitor hubs each with their own boat trip.
20	New branding has changed the image of the Broads as Britain’s magic water land, a nature lover’s paradise.

**SPEED GUNS:** The Broads Authority has tested a new generation of speed guns to target reckless boaters and they will be helped in their summer patrols by a new police launch built by Broom Boats of Brundall. This has the registration number "999", has flashing blue lights and is based at Hoveton. Between April and October last year rangers issued 7,000 verbal warnings of which nearly 5,300 were for speeding. Written warnings were issued for more serious or repeated offences and more than 600 people were reported for non-payment of tolls. The new speed guns which are hand held, don't need a power supply and are smaller and lighter and will be introduced gradually to replace current kit.

**RIVER CHET:** Following a strong campaign spearheaded by the Loddon & District Business Association the Broads Authority has dredged the Chet between Pye's Mill and Loddon staithe. Last year work was carried out to de-silt and improve the banks at the northern end of the river, but the southern end seemed in danger of being cut off. Some 1,500 cubic metres of silt have now been removed, the work being completed early in February. With work to reconstruct Hardley Weir in May 2013 the Chet has now been given an additional one foot of navigable depth.

**HADDISCOE CUT:** *"After a private discussion at a meeting in Norwich the Land Drainage Committee of East Suffolk & Norfolk River Board agreed to recommend the Board to petition against the section of the British Transport Commission's Bill proposing to close Haddiscoe Cut. A written report by the Chief Engineer Mr R. E. Cotton stated that the effect of damming the Cut would be a rise of about 11 inches in the level of the Rivers Yare and Waveney downstream."*

(This newspaper cutting has recently come to light. Following a public meeting in Norwich on 15 December 1954 a storm of opposition was mounted to the closure proposal and it was eventually withdrawn. The Cut was transferred to the River Board in 1957— Ed.)

**RICHARDSONS:** This well known company at Stalham has celebrated 70 years of being in business on the Broads. In 1944 Robert Richardson purchased the motor cruiser "*Mac Nab*" for £175 and launched a hire business based at the Old Mill House Boatyard on Oulton Broad. By 1957 the fleet had outgrown the Oulton site and moved to Stalham where boat-building sheds were constructed. The yard was sold to the Rank Organisation in 1974 but was bought back ten years later. In 2008 a new generation of cruisers was introduced since when 18 have been added to the fleet. And in an effort to families with young children the company has introduced a pirate-themed cruiser the "*Jolly Richie*" and has produced A Kids Guide to Broads Boating Adventures. The company also operates holiday parks in Norfolk and Sussex.

**REEDHAM:** At the beginning of the year the Broads Authority announced plans to introduce a £3 per night charge for boats mooring at Reedham to help pay for the services of a ranger. Mooring during the day would have remained free but the plan was met with major concern. Whilst the charge was much less than the £12 per night fee being charged at Norwich and Great Yarmouth traders feared it would drive boats away and Reedham could become a ghost town. At the end of March the Authority decided the financial contribution from the proposed fees to the cost of

providing a ranger was relatively modest and in view of the fears of local residents the proposal was dropped. A ranger has been employed at Reedham Quay for 30 years to safeguard boaters mooring at this tidal stretch of river close to the railway swing bridge.

**PEGASUS BOATYARD:** Whilst EAWA together with others submitted an objection to the revised plans to redevelop the former Pegasus Boatyard on Oulton Broad the application has now been approved with conditions and involves 76 dwellings, new boatyard buildings, office, moorings and a new access road

**HEIGHAM SOUND:** The final stage of the innovative reed bed creation at Duck Broad began with the dredging of Heigham Sound leading to increased water depth. Contractors Goodchild Marine Services pumped 10,000 cubic metres of sediment from the navigation channel into a void created by 250 mud-filled gabion baskets. Once the spit of mud has dried out it will be planted with young reeds to restore habitat and provide a quiet area in Duck Broad, as it was 60 years ago. The dredging was carried out using a mud pumping method that minimises disturbance to sediment with a silt curtain being placed round the perimeter of the new spit, to prevent the spread of any suspended sediment during the filling process.

**WHERRY ALBION:** A new ale has been brewed by the Lake Brewery at Lowestoft and monies from its sale will be donated to the Norfolk Wherry Trust. The ale is appropriately named “Jenny Morgan” after the lady on Albion’s wind vane at the top of her mast and it was launched at the Malsters public house at Ranworth on 1 May. As part of the publicity a firkin of the beer (9 gallons) was loaded onto Albion at her base at Ludham and taken to the pub where her arrival at the Malthouse Staithe was greeted by the Golden Star Morris troupe from Norwich who ceremonially danced the firkin to the pub. One hundred firkins of the specially brewed ale will be sold to pubs across the region with £5 from each one going to the trust.

**THORPE MARSHES:** A new ferry could be created across the river Yare to link Bungalow Lane in Thorpe St. Andrew and Whitlingham Lane in Trowse. This would be a rowing boat for pedestrians and cyclists and a planning application has been lodged by Stephen Ellingham who manages the Kingfisher Boatyard in Bungalow Lane. The journey would take about four minutes and the plan is for it to operate seven days a week during the summer with a pre-booked service in other months. However an objection has been lodged on behalf of Norwich Rowing Club as the ferry would represent an additional hazard to rowers.

**TIDE TIMES:** Boats heading out on the Broads can now use their mobile phones to ensure they are up-to-date with tide times. For the cost of 6p plus a standard message rate boaters can text the word “Tide” to 60777 to receive the predicted low slack water times at Great Yarmouth. This can be vital to ensure boats fit under Yarmouth’s bridges and when the tide at the confluence of the Bure and Yare will be less of a hazard.

## SIR WILLIAM CUBITT

The Cubitt family name has been associated with the North Walsham & Dilham Canal throughout its history. One only has to read the maker's name on the moulded ironworks at the locks to find the first connection. It was E.G.Cubitt and G.Walker who bought the canal at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and established the North Walsham Canal Co. in 1921. Today, the name Sir William Cubitt, nationally, would normally be linked with his role as the Major-General commanding the Household Division, where, amongst other duties, he was the Senior Officer responsible for the Army's presence and activities in London, including the military part in State Ceremonies. More locally, we associate him as a Director, since 2004, of the North Walsham Canal Co. and one who has enabled the EAWA/NW&DCT work parties to clear Honing Staithe Cut, Briggate Millpond, and work on the two lower locks and their surroundings.



However, there is also another Sir William Cubitt who hailed from these parts. He was born at Dilham in 1785, the son of Joseph Cubitt, miller, and his wife Hannah. He went to Dilham village school, and then moved to Southrepps, c1790 where he was employed at the mill from an early age. Joseph bought the Bacton Wood Mills c1801, and William joined him here in 1804 (aged 19), having spent four years apprenticed to James Lyon, a Stalham cabinet maker. Here, he constructed a machine for splitting hides, and around this time (1807) he also invented and patented a self-regulating windmill sail, charging £25 for use of the patent. This, after the expiration of the patent, became universally adopted!

He moved to Horning in 1807, setting up business as a millwright. William married Abigail Sparkhall (whose mother was a Cubitt), by whom he had a son, Joseph (who became a well-known railway engineer), and two daughters. In 1812 he entered into a contract with Ransome & Son, the principal iron founding firm in Ipswich, becoming their chief engineer. His work here included designing and installing various iron bridges (including that at Clare in Suffolk and Witham in Essex, 1813-14) and improvements to the town docks and gas works. It was during this time that he was consulted by Norwich Merchants on ways to improve the navigation, for larger vessels of 100 tons, between Yarmouth and their city. His recommendation was to dredge a channel to the south of Breydon Water, and make other improvements.

Once published in 1812, the proposals were objected to by the Yarmouth Corporation, who in turn asked John Rennie for advice. He stated that Cubitt's plans would lead to the silting of Yarmouth Harbour. Another invention of William's, at this time was the human treadmill for grinding corn, amongst other purposes. The idea was adopted by many prisons, as a way of keeping the inmates employed, with the first being built at Bury St Edmunds in 1819. However, his interest in canal engineering had not waned, and in January 1819, his report, proposing a canal from

the Ipswich to Eye, was considered, with one other, at a meeting in Eye. William's plans included a tunnel through the hills at Mendlesham, but, at an estimated cost of over £100,000, it was considered too expensive. More successfully, Cubitt was responsible, at Ipswich, for the cutting of a new channel from the upper end of Lime Kiln Reach to the lower end of Hog Island Reach. It was also during this period that his friendship with Thomas Telford was formed, leading, in 1823, to William being invited to become a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers, of which Telford was President.

His first wife died young, and William remarried in 1820, Elizabeth Jane Tiley of Reading. They had a son, William. This same year, William senior, was again asked by the Norwich Merchants to look at the feasibility of an alternative exit from the Yare to the sea at Lowestoft, which included a 2½ mile canal from Reedham to Haddiscoe on the Waveney and the building of a lock at Mutford. Yarmouth again objected, whereas, both Telford and James Walker supported the idea, stating that improving the navigation to Norwich would not affect Yarmouth. A bill was presented to Parliament in 1826, but was defeated, so, a second bill was presented. The argument that pilferage at Yarmouth, during transshipment to smaller vessels, would be reduced if sea-going vessels could reach Norwich by the new navigation, helped to get the Bill passed in 1827. William was the engineer, with the navigation fully opened in 1833.

In 1826 the Cubitt family moved to London, where William established a consultancy, and became an expert witness at many parliamentary inquiries, this included being a witness for George Stephenson on the feasibility of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway line crossing Chat Moss peat bog. During the late 1820's, his professional relationship with Thomas Telford strengthened.

Telford, at this time, had been involved with the Birmingham & Liverpool Junction Canal (now called the Shropshire Union Main Line), which was the 'motorway' of the day, and built to compete with the new-fangled railways. Cubitt's involvement came during Telford's illness, as consultant, and upon Telford's recovery worked jointly with him. As such, William would have been aware of Thomas's plans for the London & Birmingham Junction Canal, which, if built, would, in conjunction with the B&LJ and improved BCN Main line, provide a water 'motorway' from London to Manchester and Liverpool, via Birmingham. Fly boats may well have completed the journey in three days. Needless to say, other canal companies objected, fearing loss of trade. However, it also encouraged them to examine ways of improving their own routes. The Oxford Canal Company decided to modernise and straighten the Northern Oxford, reducing the distance by over 14 miles. William was a consultant for this work, which included a proposal for a new link between the Coventry and Oxford Canals.

The continuing threat of the railways meant the 1830's were a busy time for William's consultancy from the various Canal Companies. In 1833, Haddiscoe Cut was opened, this same year William took over from the ailing Telford (now 75) as the main engineer for the B&LJC, with the Shelmore embankment a particular challenge, he also drew up plans for a Central Union Canal, later superseded by the plans for the London & Birmingham Canal. Although these ideas did not come to fruition, they stimulated the Grand Junction Canal to consider modernisation projects. Meantime,

in Wales, the consultancy was involved with the building of the Bute Docks in Cardiff for the Glamorgan Canal and advising the Monmouthshire Canal proprietors. Further afield Cubitt succeeded Telford in 1834, working to modify John Killaly's plans for the Ulster Canal, and aiming for a cheaper scheme. More successful was William's appointment in 1835 as one of the Shannon Commissioners, advising on navigation and land drainage issues.

Back in Suffolk, the Stour Commissioners, in 1836, were concerned by the threat of competition from the proposed Eastern Counties Railway, and approached Cubitt for advice. He replied that 'The bill on the projected Eastern Counties Railway ...is too ruinous for even the gullibility of Englishmen'. He also averred that 'he can prove that heavy goods can be taken as cheap or cheaper from the various ports on the coast... and... the Liverpool & Manchester Railway [no longer carries heavy goods] as they find they do not pay for the wear and tear' (Boyes, *The Canals of Eastern England*, 1977, p84). However, the Stour Commissioners were unconvinced, and, on the recommendations of their own surveyor, constructed the two lock Wormingford Cut to eliminate a large loop on the river.

Despite his misgivings about the railways, he was involved with the London & Croydon Railway, which was partially built on the former Croydon Canal, and later was an instigator for the use of the Clegg-Samuda Atmospheric as the method of propulsion for the Epsom Branch. In 1837, William became Engineer-in-Chief for the South Eastern Railway, where he made his reputation six years later by using a charge of 18,000lb of gunpowder to blow down the face of Round Down Cliff, between Folkestone and Dover, constructing the railway along the beach and tunnelling through Shakespeare Cliff. In the late 1830's, his Central Union Canal proposal had been supplanted by the London and Birmingham Canal plans, but this scheme also faded away, following a meeting in his office in 1838. From this time, his involvement with water transport was mainly through recommendations for modernisation, rather than original routes.

In 1839 he was designing inclined planes for the Chard Canal in the southwest and developing Telford's plans for making the Faversham Creek navigable in the southeast. The next year saw him advising the Grand Junction Canal on how to cure the leaks on the Wendover Arm (later, following his advice, over two miles of the canal were lined with asphalt). Around this time he was also appointed engineer to the Severn Improvement Association, a group who were combating myriad vested interests, each with their own views on how that navigation should progress.

The 1840's marked the beginning of the railway mania, peaking in 1845. Many canal companies now turned their attention to the possibility of converting their channels to railways. For example the Eastern Branch of the Montgomeryshire Canal asked for his views. However, a fortnight later, they were bought out by the Ellesmere and Chester Canal Companies, and soon ended up as part of the new conglomerate of the Shropshire Union Railways and Canal Company with Cubitt, Robert Stephenson and William A. Provis appointed as engineers. William, however, retained his waterways consultancy. He had completed the development of Ellesmere Port in 1843, and, with James Elliot rebuilt Scots Float Sluice on the Eastern Rother in 1844. He was also advisor to the Weaver Navigation (1842-50) and gave advice on more than fifty tidal rivers and harbours. More locally, he had been asked, around

1846, for advice on the problematic drainage of the Holland and Black Sluice Fens. This work included consideration of the rivers Glen and Welland as possible solutions, but Cubitt recommended that the Black Sluice (South Forty Foot) should become the principal drain for the area. This included the building of the Black Sluice itself, at Boston, which incorporated a navigable lock. (The same lock that was 'restored' by the Environment Agency as part of the Fens Link in 2009). He continued his work on the Severn, recommending in 1847 a new lock at Tewkesbury. However, his work as consulting engineer to the Great Northern Railway, with his son Joseph as chief engineer for the construction of the southern section, was perhaps his key project during the late 1840's. He became involved with the Great Exhibition of 1851, supporting Paxton's design for the Crystal Palace, supervising its construction in Hyde Park, for which he was knighted. Also in 1850 he had become President of the Institution of Civil Engineers.

Sir William's interests were not confined to the United Kingdom. He was consulted by the Hanoverian Government on the docks and harbour at Hamburg, works for supplying water to Berlin, and on the Paris/ Lyons and the Boulogne/Amiens railways. In 1858 he retired from his business, dying on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1861 aged 76, at home on Clapham Common.

So, what of Cubitt and the North Walsham & Dilham Canal? His father, Joseph, was living at Bacton Wood Mill when the Canal was promoted in 1811, and became one of its initial shareholders. William, by this time, was showing prowess with waterway engineering, having been involved with Ipswich docks and soon to be asked for suggestions for the improvement to the River Yare. Yet the three plans for the North Walsham & Dilham Canal were submitted by William Youard and John Millington (2) and not Cubitt. The eventual route chosen varied from Millington's original plans, one can only wonder whether Joseph asked his son for advice on the changes. After all Millington's original plans did not include provisions for the mills. It is known that Bacton Wood Mill underwent substantial modification around 1825 in anticipation of an increase in trade following the building of the canal, so surely William had had some say, if not directly, then through his father. We will probably never know, however, as the history of our Norfolk Canal tells us little of what happened between 1811 and 1825.

As for Sir William Cubitt, he "was among the last surviving self-made engineers, and few men laboured more honestly and uprightly to obtain well-deserved eminence" Obituary - *Institution of Civil Engineers: Obituaries* 1862

The 'other' Sir William Cubitt. The third William (1791-1863) was one of three brothers born at Buxton, all of whom became eminent engineers, mainly in the areas of construction and civil engineering. His older brother Thomas (1788-1855), developed much of Belgravia, Bloomsbury, Pimlico and Clapham Park, and built the east front of Buckingham Palace. His younger brother, Lewis (1799-1883), was the architect of King's Cross Station, whilst William's work varied from tendering for work to modernise the Grand Junction Canal, building much of the southern section of the London & Birmingham Railway, and acting as Lord Mayor of London 1860-1862.

**Ivan Cane, January 2014.** *My thanks to Peter Brown, Alan Faulkner, Sir William Cubitt and Jonathon Neville for their help with this article.*

## NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL

It is good to be able to report some really positive progress thanks to the on-going hard work by David Revill and Chris Black, both EAWA directors and both very active senior figures in the NW&DC Trust. They have been assisted by their band of volunteers whose efforts on transforming the canal have been truly remarkable.

On the Ebridge Pound, the scene of the Environment Agency's Stop Order, delicate negotiations with the Agency could see ways forward. Indeed one such has already happened, when sessions were held on 6 April and 27 April a few hundred yards north of Ebridge Lock, to clear the channel of overhanging trees which were effectively blocking the canal. Sufficient clearance was made at the first session to allow some local canoeists to paddle past the site, much to their delight.

After the second session the arrival of the Old Canal Company's large pontoon at Bacton Wood with eight people on board was a great achievement. The pontoon, which was powered by a weed-cutter boat, was possibly the largest craft ever to reach this spot being considerably larger than the wherries that used to use the canal 70 years ago. This work removes a blockage that could have caused major flooding problems upstream. Work has also been carried out to clear the overflow spillway upstream of Ebridge Lock – another vital defence against flooding in this area.

Much of the voluntary effort has been focussed further upstream between Bacton Wood and Swafield. This section of the canal is dry up to a breach in the east canal bank near Pigney's Wood and this has meant it can be worked on and re-profiled without involving any "water issues" with the Environment Agency.



Above this section the canal is in water and has been very significantly improved by the volunteers who have cleared small trees and other growth. This benefits not only the canal, as shown, but also the footpath. As a result this northern most section on the way up to the Swafield locks almost takes on the appearance

of a working waterway.

Elsewhere the Summer 2014 edition of the NW&DC Trust's newsletter "Quagmire" has appeared in a much improved and illustrated format thanks in no small measure to the work of Ivan Cane, EAWA's archivist, and to Julie Bygrave who is in charge of the Trust's website and Facebook entry.

## GREAT PROGRESS AT EBRIDGE



A major objective was achieved on 23 February when the overgrown spillway, above Ebridge Lock, was cleared enabling it to be able to function by allowing surplus water to flow into the back soke. Some repairs will eventually be needed but in the meantime this important flood protection measure is now fully functional.



For some time the canal has been blocked upstream of Ebridge Lock by a large willow tree growing out from the west bank and stretching right across the waterway and bent so low as to touch the water and make passage impossible. On 6 April the work party were able to access the site by boat and began clearing a passage through enabling a canoe to pass. On 27 April a further clearance enabled the work boats to reach Spa Common for the first time for 70 years. Meanwhile a re-furbished weed cutting boat has made its first appearance on the canal above Ebridge Lock where it will be invaluable in keeping weed in the mill pond and the canal under control.