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Edited by Alan H. Faulkner  
 43 Oaks Drive, Colchester, Essex CO3 3PS  
 Phone 01206 767023

E-mail [alan.faulkner22@btinternet.com](mailto:alan.faulkner22@btinternet.com)

### **A SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS**

The IWA Peterborough Branch's cruise for the Old Bedford had been planned for the weekend of Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2009. The entrance to the Old Bedford is via a tidal sluice, which can only be opened briefly when the tidal river Great Ouse is at low tide. Back in 1973, when the Old Bedford was the only open route through the Middle Level for those attending the IWA's Ely Rally, over 40 boats were able to use the sluice on the one tide. Today, the silting of the Great Ouse below Denver has meant that it is over a year since a passage had been attempted.

During the previous week the Environment Agency had brought a floating Smalley excavator and a land-based dredger, to open out the entrance into the Old Bedford, and the channel sides were re-profiled. To "test" the work on the Friday, the narrow boat cruiser *OLIVE EMILY* had locked out of Salter's Lode Lock (Well Creek) just before low tide and attempted to enter the mouth of the Old Bedford, but unfortunately not enough silt had been dredged from below the waterline for the boat to enter. Not wishing to miss the "window" of opening of the tidal doors John Revell, the boater, decided to reverse in, using his propeller to carve out his own channel, and he managed to reach the Old Bedford. It was then hoped that the EA dredging contractors, now realising that some further deepening work was needed, would complete this on the Friday afternoon. However no further work was undertaken.

On the Saturday morning Peterborough Branch Chairman Alistair Chambers locked his boat *HILLPENNY* down from Salter's Lode before low tide, but was unable to manoeuvre, despite many attempts, through the mouth of the channel. Eventually, the boat became completely stemmed up and it was not until the incoming tide refloated the boat that it was able to move. By this time the "low tide window" for entry through the Old Bedford Sluice was past, so *HILLPENNY* retreated back into Salters Lode.



Meanwhile having got into the Old Bedford John Revell decided to see how far he could get – it turned out to be about 100 yards before *OLIVE EMILY* ran onto a mud bank in the middle of the channel. Not without some difficulty John managed to get clear and to turn the boat round but then he had to wait until the following morning before the tidal doors allowed him to leave the Old Bedford. Even then the boat went firmly aground at the exit into the river. All attempts to free *OLIVE EMILY* having failed, some water was let down through Denver Lock but this was insufficient to refloat the boat. More extreme measures were now called for and the EA then opened the Little Eye sluices which made a most impressive sight and had a dramatic effect, giving John sufficient depth to refloat his boat and escape to safety through Salters Lode.

*Our picture shows HILLPENNY aground at the entrance to the channel into the Old Bedford River.*

So whilst the EA had tried to enable entry into the Old Bedford, their contractors had not dug out those last few cubic metres to give the 7-foot wide channel and 2-foot depth required. Tried, but need to do much better. Let's hope this will occur for the next attempted cruise in the spring of 2010.

*This was based on a report by Ivan Cane*

## HERE AND THERE

**JAMES WILLIAM NICHOLSON HOSEASON:** We regret to report the death on 7 November 2009 of our long standing member Jimmy Hoseason aged 82. He was one of the best known entrepreneurs in the travel business and specialised in holidays afloat. Jimmy was born in 1927 and following the death of his father, he took over the family's small boatyard at Oulton Broad in 1950. This had started hiring boats as holiday homes in 1944 on behalf of their owners during a fuel ban because of the Second World War. Under Jimmy's guidance the business expanded dramatically and in the 1970s moved into letting holiday cottages and bungalows across the country. He retired in 1999 and the business, then catering for more than a million holidaymakers each year, was sold to a finance company.

Hoseasons were long standing supporters of EAWA and Jimmy was a personal member for many years. He was a member of the English Tourist Board, had many other involvements and was appointed a CBE in 1990 for services to tourism.

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY WEBSITE:** The EA recently launched new websites covering its five rivers in Eastern England specifically to promote their recreational use. To access the Great Ouse website - <http://www.visitgreatouse.co.uk/> and the others can be reached by substituting their name – Ancholme, Nene, Stour, Welland

– for Great Ouse. The sites are nicely presented but it has to be said that the Great Ouse site initially contained a fair number of errors and some misleading information. The Agency has undertaken to amend matters but we would welcome any comments from members.

**BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY TRUST:** Following the completion of the first important structure for this project – namely the provision for a navigable culvert under the A.421 main road – the Trust is negotiating to hand over responsibility for the project to a consortium of local authorities and other agencies. Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council are among the authorities involved along with the Marston Vale Forest Trust, Renaissance Bedford and the Environment Agency. So far £2million has been raised to help fund the project. Another boost is that planning permission has finally been granted that could allow over a mile of the new waterway to be created following the excavation of construction material needed for the road.

**RIVER NENE:** The following locks are included in the winter works programme that involves full structural surveys, maintenance and repairs. Wansford No 34 (4 to 31 January), Orton No 37 (18 January – 21 February), Water Newton No 35 (8 February to 14 March) and Warmington No 31(1 March to 1 April). Billing Lock No 6 and Lilford Lock No 25 were dealt with before Christmas. Meanwhile planning permission for the new marina at Becket's Park in Northampton has been applied for, all the funding is in place, and the first moorings could become available this summer, although all the work will not be completed until 2011. Meanwhile a new footbridge has been opened across the river at Midsummer Meadow in Northampton replacing a wooden bridge that had rotted and was closed on safety grounds two years ago. Not many boaters will see this bridge, however, for it crosses a section of the river that was bypassed when the Washlands flood relief lake was constructed in the 1970s.

A letter in *The Daily Telegraph* (8 January) about the two spellings, but the same pronunciation, of the river Lee or Lea, led onto the difference between the river Nene (pronounced Neen) or the Nen. This was answered by a letter from a lady in Thrapston in the 11 January edition under the heading "Bridge over muddled water". *"According to local folklore, the bridge that spans the river Nene in the small market town of Thrapston, is recognised as the geographical dividing line between the two pronunciations of Nen and Nene. A good natured agreement to differ has long been accepted within the town where both forms are used."*

**CHELMER & BLACKWATER:** In a welcome change to what is happening elsewhere Essex Waterways, the IWA's subsidiary company that manages this navigation, has decided not to increase the majority of its charges for 2010. Six residential moorings at Heybridge and some newly renovated moorings at Hoe Mill have had electricity installed and they are now designated as premium moorings and justify an increased price. Moorings at Sandford have also been improved but no increase is being imposed there due to the inconvenience caused during the closure of Stonhams lock.

**COLNE SHIPBUILDING:** Today the Colne may not be regarded as being involved in shipbuilding but a new book has been published which traces its quite remarkable

achievements dating back to even before 1786 when official records began. “*River Colne Shipbuilders; A Portrait of Shipbuilding 1786 – 1988*” has been compiled by John Collins and James Dodds. Copiously illustrated, the book has been published by the Jardine Press – ISBN 978-0-9552035-8-0. It is a weighty volume and covers well known names such as James W. Cook at Wivenhoe that closed in 1988 after the completion of the self-propelled hopper dredger “*Kilmourne*” for the Northern Ireland Harbour Authority, Rowhedge Ironworks and James & Stone at Brightlingsea.

**HAWKS MILL, NEEDHAM MARKET:** Last autumn a team of volunteers from the River Gipping Trust spent two days clearing trees and shrubs that were invading the mill pool. The area in front of the mill had been a pleasant public space for many years and previously it was kept neat and tidy by local residents. In recent years this faltered and fast growing trees and shrubs have taken over the banks, overshadowing the pool, obscuring the view of the mill and blocking the visibility for cars negotiating the bend in the road. The mill lies in a conservation area and the work was supported by the Mid Suffolk District Council who loaned a chipping machine to help dispose of the tree cuttings.

**REACH LODGE:** A new bridge is to be constructed over the lode as part of a National Trust scheme to create a network of paths for walkers, cyclists and horse riders between its properties at Wicken Fen and Anglesey Abbey. The bridge will provide adequate headroom so as not to impede navigation on the lode.

**RIVER LARK:** Navigation at Isleham Lock may be restricted throughout February and March as new bank piling is being installed and the downstream landing stage is being replaced. Dredging is also taking place between Isleham Weir and The Old Anchor.

**WITHAM NAVIGABLE DRAINS:** Volunteers have installed mooring rings at the Packet Boat Landing on the Maud Foster Drain in Boston, with funding being provided by the Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership. Previously mooring was difficult here as extra long ropes were required to reach a fence, some 14-feet above the boats. Similar rings have been installed alongside Cowbridge Lock to assist crews operating the guillotine. Meanwhile at the lock a safety grill, fitted by the Witham Fourth District Internal Drainage Board to prevent boats becoming trapped under cross members of the descending guillotine, had effectively reduced the length of the lock by 12-feet, preventing full length narrow boats from using it. The grill has now been replaced by deflector plates below the cross members that push boats away from the guillotine as it descends.

**RIVER SLEA:** Plans for the winding hole and slipway at Sleaford have gone out to tender and work there should start shortly and the hope is to have this Head of Navigation project completed by Easter. To celebrate the achievement the river Slea Trust is planning for a grand opening to be held on Saturday 3 July when local dignitaries will be attending to inspect the progress. It is hoped some boats, such as those in the Wilderness Boat Owners Club which can be trailed, may be able to attend to support this important event.

## A PERSONAL VIEW ON THE FENS WATERWAYS LINK

By Alan Faulkner

On 26 February 2009 Ivan Cane and I attended a meeting in Spalding organised by the Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership about the Fens Waterways Link. This was shortly before the new lock was opened at Boston on 20 March. After formal presentations those present broke up into small groups to discuss various aspects of the project. To me some of the suggestions were somewhat bizarre – for instance one was that the route should not use the South Forty Foot River at all, but should take an inland route roughly following the coast line round to the Welland – a thought which surely should have come forward years ago if it was to be acted upon.

Another thought was that the entire waterway southwards from Donnington Bridge would have to be widened, the cost of which would be very substantial, even through such a rural area. At the time I suggested that all that was needed was a series of passing places, such as exist on a stretch of the very busy Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal, north-east from Atherley Junction.

What exactly are we trying to create here? Some clearly consider the waterway should be a gold-plated M.1 type facility built to the highest standard, and hence, at the maximum cost. The rather elaborate facilities at the new Boston Lock strengthen this belief although it has to be accepted that the flood prevention measures dictated some of the impressive equipment that has been provided. To those of us more used to manually operated lock gear this was all a bit over the top.

What needs to be considered is what the usage of the new link is going to be, assuming it is opened in stages, firstly to the Welland and finally through to the Nene. For the foreseeable future I cannot see the link becoming as well-used as are some of the canals. Rather it will provide a convenient through route with the traffic more on the level of that currently being seen through the Middle Level between the Nene and the Great Ouse. Hence I think the gold-plated plans need to be significantly watered down and we aim for a much lower standard, but one giving vastly better value for money.

Hence I am unhappy with another suggestion that a completely new route should be taken from Donnington to get to Guthram Gowt as this would open up a whole host of problems. Surely the sensible and best value option is to use as much of the existing waterway as possible. Hence the suggestion for short passing places, rather than a wholesale widening effort.

The channel south from Donnington (12½ miles from Boston) gets progressively narrower and shallower the nearer one gets to the Black Hole Drove pumping station (19½ miles). But the course is almost straight and boats approaching can be seen coming a long way ahead. Hence a series of passing places at, say, not less than half-mile intervals, would cope quite adequately, with an understanding that boats in one direction always had priority, unless the section was already occupied. Such a measure would reduce the land and excavation requirements dramatically and they really might only be needed from Kingston's Bridge (16½ miles) southwards. To some extent this assumes the main users will be narrow boats and smaller cruisers,

although wider beam craft could still be accommodated. And some of the passing places might have to incorporate a winding hole as these will be needed in a few places, notably at Black Hole Drove.

A short bypass canal and a lock may be needed at the pumping station as the water level to the south is kept at a lower level in the interests of land drainage. At present the link is not going to be open for navigation during the winter months and one wonders if there could be an option to raise the water level below the pumping station for the summer cruising season, which is generally drier? This would allow boats to pass on the level although a guillotine stop gate would need to be installed for the winter and for use in an emergency.

The channel to the south is very overgrown and shallow but should be usable most of the way to Guthram Gowt (20<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> miles) where a new connection with a lock will need to be installed through to the river Glen. A narrow watercourse off the South Forty Foot actually passes under the A.151 Bourne road here and reaches almost to the Glen but this is almost certainly unusable and one would imagine the new connection will be made more to the east.

An alternative could be for a completely new route from upstream of the pumping station across to the Glen downstream of Guthram Gowt. This would avoid interfering with existing levels and might provide a better site to pass under the main road.

At Surfleet Seas End, where the Glen joins the Welland, boats can already navigate through the tidal sluice and whilst improvements are being contemplated here, they could well await more propitious financial times.

My concern is that resources should be concentrated where they are most needed in providing the basic link as soon as possible, rather than any available funds being absorbed by useful but non essential enhancements. Apart from the Bourne road there are no major bridge works that need to be performed, although one or two new footbridges may be deemed necessary, and parts of the channel will need dredging.

Getting value for money is an important consideration. One recalls the suggestion made several years ago by consultants for a flight of new locks up to, and down from, an aqueduct over the New Bedford River at Denver to provide a tide-free passage between the Middle Level and the Great Ouse above Denver Lock. A magnificent project but achieved only at vast expense, and when hundred of boats each year are already making the passage at the right stages of the tide.

The opening of the new lock at Boston is a great achievement but hopefully is but the start and it is important we try and maintain the momentum.

*Alan Faulkner*

## NORTH WALSHAM AND DILHAM CANAL

In an exciting development the northern stretch of the canal from just above Royston Bridge near Swafield for some 2¼ miles downstream to just below Ebridge lock has been purchased for £10,000 by the Old Canal Company Limited. The North Walsham Canal Co. Ltd retains ownership of the canal from Ebridge down to the tail of Honing Lock from where the 2¼-mile tidal stretch to its junction with the Smallburgh River is owned by one of Mr Alistair Paterson's farming companies.

This move is part of an enterprising project by Mr & Mrs Laurie Ashton to restore water to their Bacton Wood Mill to enable it to start grinding locally-produced grain once again. Associated with this is a project is to recreate a public footpath from Bacton Wood alongside the canal up to the former Wherry Inn at Royston Bridge.



As members will know the Ashtons have made great progress in restoring Bacton Wood Lock with major assistance from our voluntary work parties. The upstream fore bay has been rebuilt, some repairs have been carried out to the chamber, and thoughts are now turning to the building and installation of lock gates.

A major obstacle is the fact that the canal has been breached 400 yards north of the lock where the river Ant used to pass under the canal in a culvert. The river now passes in an open channel, it being thought this breach was created by the local water company years ago, but as a result the canal bed is now dry down to the mill. As part of all this, a working party was held at Royston Bridge on 15 November to start clearing years of growth.

Elsewhere the work parties have continued unabated except that on 10 January at Royston Bridge which had to be cancelled due to the adverse weather conditions. Sessions at Ebridge on 11 & 25 October and 24 January have continued the work of clearing trees and bushes from the canal bed and bank on the north-eastern side upstream of the lock and this has now reached well beyond the mill pool.

On 29 November the session at Briggate continued the clearance of the millpond and Tom Moore's digger concentrated on dragging out old tree roots from a large part of the area. In the main area of the pond there is now only one tree left to be removed, apart from the large ones growing under the roadway and at the western end. Meanwhile the northern bank along to the canal was outlined using fallen trees. The plan here is that the mill pond will soon be completely cleared along with the roadside wall and that will then enable the amount of repair and rebuilding work necessary to be ascertained. The final session in 2009 was at Honing Staithe Cut where work concentrated on improving the path that was created some time ago.

Sessions planned for 2010: February 7 & 24 Briggate; 14 March & 20 June Ebridge; 28 March & 25 April Honing Staithe, 11 April Honing lock, 9 & 23 May Bacton Wood.

## **BROADS NOTES AND NEWS**

**BROADS AUTHORITY TOLLS:** After carrying out a survey of boaters to seek their views about how the authority should prioritise future spending, charges for boats on the Broads have risen by 6% this year to allow the authority to maintain its high level of service. The charge for a small sailing dinghy has risen by £2.62 from £43.60 to £46.22; an 18-square metre yacht has risen by £7.84 from £130.56 to £138.40 and a larger motor boat of 25 square metres has gone up by £13.37 from £222.80 to £236.17.

The decision was made at the authority's meeting on 24 November and whilst it clearly did not meet with everyone's approval, the boaters' survey had indicated that dredging and water quality were the key areas and extra money will now be targeted to them. There has been a 20% improvement in dredging since the authority took over direct responsibility from May Gurney in 2007. New equipment has been acquired and innovative dredging disposal techniques are now being trialled. Other improvements include more moorings at Horning Marshes and the refurbishment of Gay's Staithe.

**BROADS SAFETY:** Following the passing of the Broads Authority's Act of Parliament new safety controls came into force on 5 October covering water-skiing and wakeboarding. These allow the authority to designate zones where these activities can take place, to issue permits, erect signs and issue directions.

Further controls come into force this April that require owners of unpowered boats over 6 square metres and all powered boats to have third party insurance with a minimum cover of £2 million. At the same time all hire craft must be licensed to ensure they are marked for a maximum number of passengers, following a test for stability, and that there will be lifejackets on board for all passengers and that hirers are given proper boat handling instruction. Boats moored on adjacent waters will also have to be registered, insured and carry a boat safety certificate. Meanwhile the Boat Safety Scheme, a four-yearly boat MOT designed to reduce the risk of fire and explosion, is to be maintained in line with the national scheme.

**BROADS DREDGING:** For the second year running the Broads Authority has exceeded its target for dredging by removing 50,000 cubic metres of sediment, which is over 10% more than planned. For the first time since 1963 Malthouse Broad and Ranworth Dam were dredged last year bringing major improvements to these popular boating areas. This was helped by there being a convenient disposal site on the Bure opposite Upton Marshes where 26,000 cubic metres of mud were deposited, enabling the work on Malthouse to be completed a year early. The depth has been improved to 1.8 metres (6-feet) except in the bays and at private moorings.

Dredging has continued upstream of Ludham Bridge on the Ant to beyond How Hill with 6,000 cubic metres of mud being removed and the depth restored to 6-feet and the stretch up to Barton Broad is to be dealt with shortly. Meanwhile the dredging plant is being improved. The 50-year old Thames tug CANNONBROOK has been purchased from the Environment Agency; it arrived on a low loader to be launched into Lake Lothing and went into active service immediately moving the dredging grabs around. One of these grabs, built in 1976 and first used on the Channel

Tunnel, has been scrapped and replaced by a machine built in 1984 and with only 5,000 working hours on the clock – this equates to only about a year’s work.

**HADDISCOE CUT:** This cut, which links the Yare and the Waveney, is owned by the Environment Agency which is responsible for maintaining the banks and flood defences. Under its new Act of Parliament the Broads Authority has a duty to maintain the cut as a navigation with the channel depth of 2 metres at average low water.

**CANTLEY:** Work is now underway as part of the Cantley Staithe Project to create a new public slipway to open up the river Yare to a wide cross section of river users. The project was launched four years to create a community area on Cantley’s old staithe area near the British Sugar factory. Pontoons and moorings on a new quay will replace dilapidated jetties and increase the number of moorings by the Reedcutters pub. The work is being financed mainly by two landfill communities fund schemes but with contributions from the Broadland District Council, the Broads Authority, the Environment Agency, the Inland Waterways Association and Cantley Parish Council.

And following the British Sugar Corporation being given to go-ahead for its major expansion last April, an investigation into the feasibility of transporting the imported sugar from Great Yarmouth to the Cantley factory by either train or boat was commissioned in November and should be completed by the end of February.



**BERNEY ARMS:** Last September the Broads Authority purchased the 40 yards of piled moorings between the Berney Arms public house and the mill which serve as a safe haven for boats waiting to cross Breydon Water. The land, fronting onto the Yare, was acquired for £17,500 and will provide free 24-hour moorings.



**ST BENET’S ABBEY:** Towards the end of last October work started to remove two miles of overhead power cables near the 1,000-year old abbey and to place them underground. The work by EDF Energy is costing some £661,000 and will remove two overhead high-voltage lines and 32 wooden support poles so as to give unrestricted views across the picturesque grazing marshes and the landmark abbey.

**LADY JULIAN BRIDGE:** Last autumn a new footbridge was opened across the Wensum in Norwich. The Lady Julian Bridge, which links historic King Street with the modern Riverside development, cost some £2.5m and caters for both pedestrians and cyclists. Work began in January 2009 with £730,000 funding from the East of England Development Agency and the balance from contributions from property developers and a grant from the Greater Norwich Development Partnership. The bridge can swing open to allow tall vessels to pass, but is high enough to allow most river traffic through.

**NORFOLK WHERRY TRUST:** Last year the Trust celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and the 2009 edition of its journal "*The Wherry*" recounts the background to this important event. At one time there were two to three hundred wherries trading on the Broads but by the 1930s their numbers had declined dramatically and by 1945 there were none left under sail and only a few with engines.

On 23 February 1949 a public meeting was held in the Stuart Hall in Norwich at which it was decided to form a trust "*in order to preserve in perpetuity one or more examples of the Norfolk trading wherry.*" In April the Trust purchased the hull of a wherry then known as PLANE from Colmans of Norwich - she had been built as ALBION in 1898 at Oulton Broad for W. J. & A. E. Walker of Bungay. She was repaired at Fellows dock at Yarmouth, reverted to her original name, and on 11 October sailed in triumph from Yarmouth to Norwich. Subsequently she carried cargoes of timber and sugar beet but freights were hard to get competing against road transport and after an overnight sinking in December 1959 at Berney Arms when laden with sugar beet it was decided to use her solely in the summer to cater for parties of people. In this role she has become a familiar part of the Broadlands scene and long may this continue.

**SWING BRIDGES:** In recent months a couple of aerial pictures have appeared in *The Eastern Daily Press* showing trains crossing some of the swing bridges over the Broads; for instance on 14 November Reedham was shown. In February Network Rail started on the first phase of repair works at both Reedham and Somerleyton bridges meaning they will be closed leading to restrictions to boat traffic. The steelwork at Reedham is being repaired and strengthened whilst Somerleyton will be inspected to ascertain what needs to be done in the future. Further work is expected to be carried out over the next three years.

**WEEDS:** Following workshops in 2007 and 2008, organised by Natural England and the Broads Authority, the Norfolk Non-Native Species Initiative has been set up to coordinate efforts to prevent, monitor and control invasive non native weed species on the Broads. These include the dreaded floating pennywort that played such havoc on the Chelmer & Blackwater, Australian swamp stonecrop found at Lound Lakes, giant hogweed and parrot's feather that has affected the river Ant and Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. Following a successful countrywide day of action in 2009, provisional dates of 10 & 11 July have been earmarked for action days when it is hoped events on the Broads will include Himalayan balsam pulling along several river corridors.

**HUNTER'S FLEET:** This fleet of wooden sailing boats came into being after Percy Hunter and his sons had excavated a dyke and erected a boatshed at Ludham on Womack Water off the river Thurne. Two yachts were then constructed – LULLABY and LUSTRE – and they were offered for hire in 1932. Further boats followed such as LUNA and a second boatshed was completed just before the outbreak of the Second World War. By 1949 there were 13 Hunter-built cabin yachts in the hire fleet as well as two half-decked day boats.

Percy Hunter died in 1966 and his sons decided to sell the yard and fleet and both were bought by Norfolk County Council in 1968. A Norfolk County Sailing Base was established to encourage youth sail training with discounts being offered to Norfolk schools. Hiring to private individuals was continued, but on a somewhat reduced scale. In 1995, however, the county council decided to sell the yard and the fleet as a cost cutting measure but after a vigorous public campaign the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust was set up, £300,000 was raised with £200,000 coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and Hunter's Yard was taken over in April 1996.

The fleet now comprises 20 wooden craft which are maintained by a dedicated team, one of the trust's objectives being to keep the skills of wooden boat building alive. The last boat to join the fleet was LUCENT which was launched in October 2006 to mark the trust's tenth anniversary. She had been started as a Millennium project but took six years to build as the main work at the yard is looking after the existing fleet. LUCENT was a 29-foot four-berth cruiser built with mahogany planks fixed by copper rivets to steamed oak frames along almost identical lines to LULLABY. Prior to this the last new boats had been WOOD ANEMONE in 1947 and WOOD AVEN in 1949.

In 2009 the fleet achieved a hire rate of almost 80 per cent and the advance bookings for the current year are already very encouraging. It should be borne in mind the boats are basic with no engine, no shower and only an oil lamp for illumination. Despite this families regularly come from quite long distances – from Greece, Spain, Germany and France and even further afield such as Brazil, New Zealand and Tasmania to join the loyal following from the British Isles. The trust hopes that a new venture for 2010 will be to offer Royal Yachting Association accredited sailing tuition courses.

**GLOBAL WARMING:** In 2005 the Environment Agency published a map showing those areas around Great Yarmouth that were at high risk of flooding. Substantial areas to the north and east of Burgh Castle and Belton were assessed as high risk with a much wider stretch along the Yare to Reedham and along the Bure to well north of Acle and with all the area in between being at lesser risk.

More recent research has shown a diminished flood risk to some low lying parts of Great Yarmouth with riverside areas such as Cobholm, Southtown and Runham Vauxhall in a better position to cope with floods, such as the 2007 tidal surge. Nevertheless rising sea levels continue to pose a significant threat to the delicate eco-systems on the Broads and the Broads Authority is looking at options that might include such major projects as a Yare Barrier. The latest climate predictions are for an estimated increase in winter mean temperature of +3° centigrade and +3.6° in summer leading to hotter drier summers and warmer wetter winters and the sea level rising off the Suffolk coast by 15 inches.

## A BOATER'S PERSPECTIVE

*By David Mercer*

There are approximately 3000 boats registered with the Environment Agency on the river Great Ouse. The majority of these craft are motorised cabin cruiser boats with typical lengths of 6 to 10 metres. There are also an increasing number of canal-type narrow boats with lengths of up to 20 metres. Boaters pay an annual licence fee to the Environment Agency, ranging from around £300 for an average cruiser to about £500 for a narrow boat. The popular cruising area extends from Bedford to near Downham Market, with several tributaries to explore plus, for the more adventurous, the possibility of going out to sea via the tidal river at Kings Lynn.

The river has been improved and maintained by various navigation authorities since just after World War II when motor-boating first became popular on this river. Major advances were made during the 1970s when, through a successful campaign led by the Great Ouse Restoration Society, navigation through to Bedford was finally restored. A number of new locks were built and major dredging and channel restoration works were undertaken.

The Environment Agency took over responsibility for navigation from the National Rivers Authority in 1996 as part of its much wider brief to protect the environment nationally. The NRA had assumed the responsibility under the Anglian Water Authority Act 1977 to *"take such steps as are reasonably practicable to maintain the main navigation channels and navigation works of the waterway .... to at least as good a standard for the purpose of navigation by pleasure boats as that to which they were maintained in the period of nine months immediately preceding 8th December 1975."* The view is widely held amongst boaters that the Environment Agency also inherited that responsibility, transferred to it under the Environment Act 1995, although the Agency claim to have merely *"permission to maintain the river"* rather than any statutory duty to do so.

Since the Environment Agency took over in 1996 there have been increasing worries amongst boaters that national policy is over-riding sound and established local practices for good management of our river. Understandably, an authority with such a wide-ranging brief has to balance its activities across a range of responsibilities and interests. However, there is a real fear that almost irreparable damage is being done to the Great Ouse navigation by some current EA policy, albeit imposed from elsewhere.

The Environment Agency has a policy of not dredging rivers although the practice has been found effective and essential on the Great Ouse system for many years. Consequently, boaters have witnessed increasing siltation of parts of the river leading to reduced channel depths. More seriously, the tidal parts of the river – the man-made Hundred Foot River and the river below Denver Sluice have been allowed to silt up. On some sections of the tidal river the bed height has increased by over a metre in the last few years.

Boaters claim that this increasing siltation inevitably slows the dispersal of water to the sea, the primary function and purpose of the river. The Environment Agency justifies its policy by claiming that dredging is damaging to river ecology and

unsustainable as silt quickly returns. The arguments between local boaters and the Agency rage on.

However, an added problem has become apparent to navigators since the completion of the St Ives and Hemingfords Flood Prevention Scheme in 2006/7. This scheme was designed to protect St Ives and neighbouring villages up to a once in one hundred years' chance of serious flooding, partly by embanking or piling parts of the river above St Ives sluice.

In effect, it raised the normal river retention levels above St Ives by several inches. With embankment the river is restricted to a narrower channel and with siltation it is further restricted in depth. In effect the river has less spare capacity to cope easily with flows of water when above average rainfall occurs in the catchment area. This, added to the slower dispersal of water below St Ives through silting of the tidal river is causing increasing anxiety amongst boaters.

### **Effects on Boating**

Whilst the main boating season is considered as March to October inclusive, the river is a statutory navigation and used by some boaters throughout the year. When river flows at Offord gauging station are recorded as exceeding 30 cubic metres a second, Environment Agency "Strong Stream Advice" is triggered automatically and recorded telephone messages are sent to boaters registered for the service. These messages are then relayed through various boaters' networks. The system has been in operation since before 2004.



Although the official notices from the Environment Agency merely "advise against attempting to navigate" Strong Stream Advice events shown here effectively close the river from Bedford to Earith as gates on many of the 15 locks on this 60 km. section are chained and padlocked open for dispersal of flood waters, rendering navigation impossible. In addition to the recorded SSA events, river flows are often above normal and headroom dangerously restricted at some structures for a period of time either side of these dates. The

Environment Agency does include an appropriate warning in messages advising the cancellation of SSA. Thus the 'no boating' period may be extended for several more days beyond the official SSA periods.

Boaters have noticed a distinct change in character of the river since late 2006, coinciding with completion of the embankment and piling works for the St Ives scheme. Levels now rise more quickly with comparatively moderate rainfall in the catchment area and are slower to recede.

A very experienced local boater recently commented, *“What has happened on our river? It rains for 15 hours and the river is closed for 6 days. That never used to happen.”* This is a view shared by many and evident from numerous similar remarks posted on the GOBA boating forum and reports to the association’s EA liaison officer.

There are many recent recorded instances of boaters stuck on the river, unable to complete their trips and prevented from returning to their home marinas, often with substantial added costs, inconvenience and potential danger.

Local marinas and boatyards are also affected with substantial extra workload and costs (which are inevitably passed on to boaters) for adjusting moorings or moving boats to safety. Safe access to boats is often restricted during SSA events.

The hire-boat operations on the river are affected badly by river closures, suffering reduced revenue and increased costs. Boats may have to be abandoned by the hirers when they are prevented from returning the craft to the base at the end of their cruise. The boats cannot then be serviced and prepared in time for subsequent bookings. The hirers, often first-time boaters, may be discouraged from returning to our river through disappointment after their holidays are curtailed or their cruising waters severely restricted.

Major works to river structures are traditionally carried out during the winter months to minimise disruption to navigation but there has recently been a noticeable increase in emergency closures for repairs to lock structures during the boating season which may well be as a result of the longer periods of strong stream causing damage through deposition of silt and debris around gates.

Although the Environment Agency’s SSA warning system is effective it only comes into operation once river flows reach a potentially dangerous level. There is no advance warning and boaters must rely on general weather forecasts and their own observations when planning their voyages.

In the three years 2004 – 2006, SSA was only triggered on 2 occasions, with a total of just 14 days which were all outside of the summer boating season. Arguably, 9 of those days (in November 2006) were after the new flood embankments had been constructed between the Hemingfords and St Ives.

In contrast, during 2007 and 2008 there were 19 instances of SSA, for a total of 121 days, including 60 in the busy boating season.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Days</b>	<b>Sea Days</b>
2004	19 – 24 November	5	0
2005	--	0	0
2006	24 November – 3 December	9	0
2007	31 December – 4 January	4	0
2007	7 – 22 January	15	0
2007	11 – 17 February	6	0
2007	26 February – 10 March	12	10
2007	28 May – 4 June	6	7
2007	4 – 9 July	5	5
2007	22 – 27 July	5	5
2007	17 – 22 October	5	5

2007	21 – 26 November	5	0
2007	10 – 13 December	3	0
<b>2007</b>	<b>Total of the ten events</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>32</b>
2008	12 – 25 January	13	0
2008	16 – 23 March	4	4
2008	28 May – 1 June	4	4
2008	3 – 9 June	6	6
2008	6 – 13 September	7	7
2008	3 – 7 November	4	0
2008	11 – 16 November	5	0
2008	14 – 18 December	4	0
<b>2008</b>	<b>Total of the nine events</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>28</b>

*The Editor welcomes unsolicited contributions from members, such as this one from David Mercer, the only proviso being that the views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Association.*

### **PETER BENDALL, Your Web Master**



I was born in 1936 near a reach of Hogsmill River (unnavigable as I found out) in the town of Ewell whilst my grandmother lived in Diss on the Waveney. I have had an interest in boats since I was quite small, and sometimes travelled around with my father to see them. I read “*Swallows and Amazons*” as soon I could read (my copy has been replaced four times) and vowed that I would get a boat as soon as I was older. Meanwhile I had to make do with hiring a sailing dinghy by the hour.

The wait was even longer than I thought. I went to Horning every weekend as I was then living near Norwich, aged 13, and I nearly got a sailing dinghy but the finances would not suffice. I had to wait until I left school when I purchased the *Merry Miller I*. This was an 8-foot long dinghy with one sail and an outboard motor. She travelled with me to the Basingstoke Canal in January 1958, though she was based at Barton Mills to which we had moved.

The next stage was the Hostelboat Year. I was in the R.A.F., the horse drawn narrow boats were on the Oxford to Llangollen route and I chose to have a two week holiday, and later crewed a boat from Harefield Flash to the bottom of the Stoke Bruerne locks. I was getting used to the hobby as I collected a boat from Autherley Junction and worked it southwards. The outboard motor didn't arrive in time, so I bow hauled it

I was amazed to find that I had been posted abroad, so the boat ended up in Hillmorton Workshops instead, but when I came back she had been broken up. I was going to Cambridge as my new a job demanded so I ordered a new sixteen-foot, three-berth outboard cruiser *Merry Miller II* and had four years of enjoyment.

Then my mother passed away, I sold *Merry Miller* and accepted a post with a circus. The time passed until 1975 when I ended up in I.T. and left England for Germany.

## The Web Master & “Forum“ Post

I took over the webmaster’s post over a year ago and conceived the Idea of the common header for the pages with an eye to the other waterways sites on the web. This seemed to be unlike other sites, and would be simple to realise. It would be simple to arrange the web page to use many of the commercial procedures, but I just wrote the whole suite in Hyper Text Mark-up Language (HTML), thinking we could share or hand over the suite if I wanted to in the future. This would be easy because this person will not have to be comfortable in any system. The pages are based on the ideas of the Hon. Secretary and me as Web Master. I maintain the “Link” Page, as Google makes checks on the links only if changed and I update the work party pages every time the status changes, for instance.

The “forum” is essential. It has the motto “now have your say” deliberately. It is the main way of seeing what members think of everything to do with EAWA. The “topics” are arranged into the waterways, as are listed in the general site. Members having comments to relate in relation to waterways, or EAWA, can do it in the forum when they login.

I would like to get contacts in each waterway, and get them to answer queries about individual waterways; we will promote them as moderators on their waterway.

If you think that opinions are not right, don’t send an e-mail – Login with your name, or nickname, and tell us with the forum. If you haven’t got a name registered in the forum, you have to register – it’s simple. You answer the few questions and wait for an e-mail, then quoting the “authorisation code” you log in. By the way, don’t put spaces in your name; the software does not like it.



*Peter’s group on his hostel boating trip.*