



THE EASTERLING

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THE MINISTER'S LETTER

As a measure of our concern about the lack of progress on the repairs to Welches Dam Lock and on other outstanding matters, our Secretary Ivan Cane felt the need to air these matters in higher quarters and, on 24 August last year, wrote to Richard Benyon MP, the Minister at DEFRA who deals with the Environment Agency.

Ivan's letter featured first on Welches Dam, which was last repaired by the National River Authority but with a major input of volunteer labour, and was formally re-opened by Lady Helen De Freitas on 30 March 1991. The lock has effectively been closed since the middle of 2006 as it was in a dangerous state and the Environment Agency has been trying to disclaim any responsibility for the work, as the lock is not included in the schedule of waterways in the Anglian Water Authority's Act of 1977 which supposedly governs its responsibilities.

Ivan's letter went on to touch on other causes for concern such as the state of the Old Bedford River which has deteriorated seriously and is no longer passable, on the state of locks on the Great Ouse, such as Castle Mill and Offord Locks which have seen emergency closures, on the situation on the river Stour where volunteers and prisoners from Hollesley Bay Prison have been prevented from continuing with the restoration work at Stratford St. Mary Lock, on the closure of Swaffham Bulbeck Lode by downgrading the entrance lock to a flood control weir without any consultation, and on the recent loss of grant monies for the Fens Waterways Link due to slippage in the EA's work.

The Minister came back on 21 October with a detailed response stressing that despite the delays that had caused the loss of grant monies, the EA was still fully committed to the Fens Waterways Link project. The claim about Welches Dam Lock and the 1977 Act was repeated – but one wonders how the NRA was able to justify

its 1991 involvement. Likewise Swaffham Bulbeck Lode, which has been a statutory navigation for centuries, is not now regarded as such, simply by its being omitted from the 1977 Act. The supposed ability of apparently being able to remove statutory protection simply by being omitted from a list and without any other reference, can only raise serious legal questions.

Ivan's letter, and the Minister's reply, underlines the necessity for the Association to remain eternally vigilant and especially with a period of financial stringency upon us which can only adversely affect the whole future of the waterways in Eastern England.

ASSOCIATION AFFAIRS

The Annual General Meeting is to be held on Sunday 8 May and will be based in Norfolk. Whilst full details will be circulated to members nearer the time, the plan is to assemble in the morning at The Museum of the Broads, which is based at The Poors Staithe, Stalham where members will have the opportunity to visit the museum, take a trip on the Victorian steam boat "*Falcon*" and spend money at a boat jumble sale that is being held there that morning.

It is hoped that a new gazebo, recently acquired by the Association for publicity purposes, will be on display and in full use.

This will be followed by a carvery luncheon at the Sutton Staithe Hotel in Stalham with the short formal AGM following on immediately after in a room at the hotel.

Normally the AGM would be followed by a Council Meeting, to which members were always welcome to attend, but instead this year there will be a presentation on the North Walsham and Dilham Canal setting out achievements and outlining plans and aims for the future.

It is then hoped the North Walsham and Dilham Canal Trust will be able to arrange a tour of the main areas where the working parties have been active – Honing Lock and pound, Honing Staithe Cut, Briggate, Ebridge Lock, Bacton Wood Lock and possibly the breach site upstream of the lock, and even as far upstream as the former Wherry Inn.

THE EASTERLING

Going through his files, recently, your Editor has found he has three complete sets of "*The Easterling*" from when he first took over as Editor to date. The run starts at Volume 6, Number 1 in September 1991 to Volume 8, No 18 in 2010. There are twenty issues in each volume.

Whilst one set is kept to form part of the Association's archives, and one is the Editor's personal copy, the third set seems somewhat unnecessary and is available to a good home. Anyone interested, please contact the editor, details on page 16.

Meanwhile we are still looking at systems whereby "*The Easterling*" can be e-mailed direct to members but there was a very limited response to the note in the last issue.

HERE AND THERE

NEW MEMBERS: We would wish to extend a very warm welcome to all those new members who have joined us between October 2010 and January 2011.

Mr & Mrs John Bedingfield, Dorridge, South Midlands
 Michael Brett, Rockland St. Mary, Norfolk
 Mr & Mrs Bryan Colley, Briggate, Norfolk
 Bruce Elson, Ludham, Norfolk
 David Flood, Benfleet, Essex
 Mr & Mrs Philip Harrison, Coltishall, Norfolk
 Andrew Mitchell, North Walsham, Norfolk
 John Parker, Lakenheath, Suffolk
 Mr & Mrs Richard Sanders, Warwick
 Ms Denise Troughton, Willington, Bedfordshire
 Ms Diana Velhagen, North Walsham, Norfolk
 Peter Webb, Leamington Spa, Warwick

WEILS DISEASE: Otherwise known as Leptospirosis this is a disease that can be caught through contaminated water. Recently the skipper of a narrow boat had to be hospitalised due to the disease and an Olympic rower was similarly affected. The disease can be extremely serious and indeed fatal in some cases.

The infection is spread to humans through water contaminated by infected animals, particularly rats. It can occur after swimming or partial immersion in such water. Children, young adults, especially males, are most likely affected. The incubation period is usually ten days and the symptoms are headache, fever and muscle pains, which may be followed by jaundice, blood in the urine, meningitis or kidney failure. With bed-rest, antibiotics and treatment for any complications, the outlook is good and most patients recover. With working party involvement with water the recent cases serve as a sharp reminder of the need to be aware of the disease.

FOSSDYKE TRAIL: This trail was originally planned to run from Saxilby alongside the main A.57 road and roughly parallel with the Fosdyke Canal to join an existing trail at the Pyewipe Inn near Lincoln. The route of the southern section has now been amended to follow the top of the canal's flood bank which is a much more attractive option. Both routes would involve having to cross the river Till at Odder, and the bridge there has now been completed. Some work has also been carried out on the next section which involves a crossing of the A.57 to enable the path to reach the canal but it is expected the main work will take place in the spring with the materials needed being brought in by barge.

WITHAM NAVIGABLE DRAINS: The Lincolnshire Branch of the IWA is organising a campaign cruise on the drains over the late May Bank Holiday 28-30 May weekend. A new map of the system with details of winding points, bridge heights and availability of services is now available along with cruising notes and an informative street map of Boston.

RIVER SLEA: A well illustrated and informative article entitled “No Progress? Cobblers?” by restoration expert Martin Ludgate was published in the January 2011 edition of the monthly “*Canal Boat*” magazine.



On the front page of our last issue we attributed the boat shown, “Bobbles” owned by John Parker of Lakenheath, as being the first to use the new slipway. In fact that privilege fell to another Wilderness boat – “Olive” owned by Derek & Jean Smith of Cheshire. Our picture, taken across the river whilst the new the slipway was being officially opened, shows “Olive” at the far end, then “Bobbles” and then “Schandelle” that was launched after the ribbon had

been cut. We apologise for this error.

Also in our last issue we reported that the Council had offered the Sleaford Navigation Trust £500 each towards two projects to improve the river in Sleaford. It has since appeared that both these projects may take some time to materialise. As a result Council decided at its meeting in November to switch its offer to help with an improvement scheme that is taking place at South Kyme in conjunction with the villagers and the Parish Council. This is the creation of a new mooring and water access point to make the village a focal point for visiting boats. The money has now been paid over and we have received a grateful letter from Mrs Chris Hayes, Chairman of the SLT.

WISBECH CANAL: Tests have revealed that the material used to fill in the five-mile long Wisbech Canal some forty years ago were not toxic as had at one time been feared. Following proposals last year to redevelop parts of the land and hence disturb the in-fill material the local authorities in the area issued warnings about possible toxicity. Five months of tests, however have revealed no risks.

DOG IN A DOUBLET SLUICE: This sluice, which was built in 1937 and controls the water level through Peterborough, has been undergoing work costing £1.2m. This involves automation of the lock’s electrical operating system, work on the sluices including un-jamming the mechanism of the north sluice, and general repairs.

NENE RALLY: The Inland Waterways Association is holding its National Campaign Rally over the May Day weekend 30 April to 2 May 2011 at Northampton. This will help celebrate the 250 years that the river has been navigable up to Northampton, to encourage its greater use and better facilities, to help towards the process of re-connecting the town with its waterfront, and to mark the opening of the new marina.

MIDDLE LEVEL FISHING: Early in December a man was arrested near Beggars Bridge on the Twenty Foot River for shooting at fish in the waterway. He was among a group of men caught carrying fishing nets who are believed to be targeting pike for

food. Recently there have been several confrontations between local anglers, who return their catch to the water unharmed, and migrants who steal the fish to eat. New fishery by-laws mean it is an offence to remove certain fish from rivers to eat.

MIDDLE LEVEL MOORINGS: Recently new moorings have been provided at March east of the town centre and south of the park. The work has involved piling and landscaping. At Benwick on the Old River Nene a 60-foot timber mooring is planned as are moorings at Stonea and Three Holes on the Sixteen Foot River. This all reflects great credit on the Middle Level Commissioners. On 19 January the Peterborough branch of the IWA presented a cheque for £1,080 to Jeff Walters, Commodore of the Middle Level Watermen's Club, towards the provision of the public visitor moorings at Benwick.

SOHAM LODGE: In so far as the Environment Agency is concerned this lode is purely a drainage channel, as it was not included in the list of navigable waterways in the 1977 Anglian Water Authority's Act which governs the situation. Soham shares this fate with Swaffham Bulbeck Lode, with Bottisham Lode and seemingly with such structures at Welches Dam Lock. Despite this it is possible for shallow draft boats to penetrate to Soham (4¼ miles) and for narrow boats can penetrate the first half mile to Barway Bridge, although winding is problematic. It is, therefore, encouraging to learn that the improvement of the navigation of the lode is now an objective in the East Cambridgeshire District Council's Local Development Framework and more particularly in the Soham Masterplan.

BAYLHAM LOCK: Some damage was caused by the very high water levels early last year but this was soon dealt with, enabling work on rebuilding the east lock wall to resume. A week's concerted effort in July saw two hired dumpers and an excavator clear a mountain of brick rubble from the rear of the site. This was mixed with puddle clay and silt and the clean rubble had to be separated by hand which proved to be a long and tedious job but it was then used to re-fill the excavated area behind the east wall. The wall itself has now been completed and the coping stones have been laid. Meanwhile the bridge parapet wall, which had been damaged by tree roots, has been rebuilt and the area below the bridge has been cleared revealing what is thought to have been a waiting/loading area for barges serving the mill. Over the winter when high water levels usually prevents work on the lock the group intends to revisit both Bosmere and Creeting Locks to carry out scrub clearance work and remove some saplings.

CHELMER & BLACKWATER NAVIGATION: Last year the major project undertaken on the waterway during the low water summer season was bank piling at Paper Mill Lock. The poor position of the lower bank between the two weirs at Treasure Island was becoming very apparent and the plastic and timber piles were failing giving the risk of further bank collapse. Meanwhile the upper bank adjoining the weirs was in need of work as erosion had reduced the bank height and bulk and was close to breaching, which would have had disastrous results.

A specialist contractor, Land & Water Ltd, was appointed and despite very poor access brought in loads of heavy equipment by road. The main work involved driving 7-metre piles costing £35,000 and to cope with these a floating piling rig was needed. In turn this involved a large pontoon having to be assembled from twelve

separate sections to carry the equipment. Back filling came from gravel dredged from a shoal in the mill pond and a wide beam barge was used to carry the excavator, the barge being assembled from two large sections brought in on trailers. The piling of the upper bank involved smaller piles. The work involved a major financial commitment for Essex Waterways Ltd but was aided by a £10,000 grant from the Essex Environment Trust.

RIVER BLYTH: At Blythburgh the main A.12 road from the south and carries on up to Lowestoft passes over the river Blyth and in winter months the route is regularly closed due to flooding. This causes considerable disruption to the whole area. Suffolk County Council has been granted £1.8m from the Department of Transport to reduce the risk of this flooding and work on the scheme should have started by now. The most likely option will be raise the height of the whole stretch of the road by about a metre but a wider-reaching solution could be to erect a sluice at Blythburgh and control the water levels on the marshes next to the roads.

BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY: Bedford Borough Council has drawn up a Master Plan for the Marston Vale Innovation Park which lies south of Bedford between the newly-dualled A.421 road and Wootton village. Under the plan a section of the canal will be created as an important part of the park. Alongside the building of the underpass at nearby Stewartby this will be another step forward in the project

A SECRET ISLAND: A few members may be aware that out in the Wash there is a strange circular island that resembles a volcanic crater some 280 metres in diameter and 14 metres high. It was created in 1971, was officially known as the "Outer Trial Bank" and was used to test plans to build a freshwater reservoir in the middle of the Wash. At the time it was expected that the south east of the country could experience serious water shortages by the year 2000 and the bank was the first of what could have been a series of giant reservoirs in the estuary to capture the fresh water from the four main rivers that flow into the Wash.

It was a complex project involving large earthmoving machinery and giant floating cranes and a special hovercraft platform was also involved. Initially an Inner Trial Bank was built and this is still in place near Terrington St. Clement and accessible on foot. It was followed by the Outer Trial Bank, two miles offshore from Sutton Bridge, as a scaled-down version of one of the proposed reservoirs, to check that water would not leak out or be contaminated by sea water. Both trial banks were successful but huge costs were involved and the idea was eventually abandoned. Today the inaccessible Outer Bank has found an important new role as a bird sanctuary with some 7,000 gulls making it their home.

GREAT OUSE WORKS: The winter months have seen a series of restrictions at various locks to enable important repair work to take place. At Cardington the guillotine gate drive system needed parts being repaired or replaced and the control system needed replacement. Modifications were needed to the balance beams on the downstream mitre doors, and paths have been created on both sides of the lock. The work started at the beginning of November but due to the bad weather looks like lasting until nearly the end of February.

Elsewhere essential repairs were needed at Willington, Roxton and Eaton Socon locks. At Denver the pump out facility was closed for most of January whilst the landing stage was being replaced, Great Barford Bridge underwent major repairs, and the installation of a new bridge and conveyor belt over the Wissey at the Willington Sugar Beet factory led to restrictions over nearly four months. On the Lark a 2½ mile virtually straight stretch of the river running parallel to the B.1104 Isleham road from Soham Tunnel Mills southwards to the Old Anchor is being dredged in a five-month programme lasting until the end of March 2011.

NOSTALGIA SPOT: Taken in the autumn of 1993 this shows David Stephenson's boat "Black Swan" squeezing through the tidal doors at Salters Lode after attending the IWA's National Rally at Peterborough. When the doors had been winched open David was at first unable to overcome the inward rush of water before a level was reached. He then dropped back to allow another boat "Bobbles" to try; it got through but could not get as far as the main channel due to the lack of depth.

"Black Swan" could now follow and the doors were closed behind her at which point both boats shot out like corks from a bottle on full throttle as the significant current slowed and the water level rose.

It is thought these two boats were the last to pass through Welches Dam and the Old Bedford route for some considerable time.



(Picture by John Parker)

This lack of use is partly due to the fact that the "publicised" and recommended route through the Middle Level is via the Old River Nene to March, on to Upwell Basin and then via Well Creek to Salters Lode and this is the route the vast majority of boats now usually take. The alternative route via Benwick and the Forty Foot River has tended to be reserved for the more adventurous navigator resulting in only a small minority using it. Yet if a route is to be properly maintained it needs to be regularly navigated.

During the IWA's National Rally at Ely in 1973 the alternative route via Benwick was the only one then available and it was heavily used, but its usage shrank dramatically after the re-opening of the route through March and this resulted in the rapid deterioration of the state of the channel and locks. To try and counter this Horseway Lock on the Forty Foot River was re-opened on 23 June 1985 with Welches Dam Lock on 6 April 1991 but sadly usage patterns did not change and few boats were attracted. Hence maintenance standards slipped again leading to the present situation of leakages in the Forty Foot giving rise to passage being possible only at limited pre-arranged times and Welches Dam is once again impassable. If the route is to be restored there needs to be a commitment of regular usage to justify the cost; the leaks in particular are likely to be very costly to cure.

FENS WATERWAYS LINK

On 18 November Ivan Cane attended a meeting that was arranged by the Environment Agency in Spalding to provide an update on the current situation. The project was set out in six separate sections and covers works directly connected to the navigation together with improvements alongside the waterways.

Phase 1: The Boston Link Lock and re-opening the Black Sluice Navigation to Donington Bridge. This was achieved in March 2009 but the work has gone on to refurbish the disused lock cottages at Boston to create a Visitor Centre and cafe, to install moorings at Boston, Hubberts Bridge and Swineshead and to provide picnic sites and fishing platforms and landscape and environmental improvements. Future plans include providing a car park, water point and sanitary facilities at Hubberts Bridge and similar facilities at Donington Bridge.

Phase 2: The Boston Tidal Barrier: Funds have been allocated to complete an appraisal and feasibility study for this barrier and three locations below Boston Grand Sluice are currently being investigated as to just where the barriers will be located.

Phase 3: Donington Bridge to Surfleet Seas End Link: Funds have been secured to investigate linking the Black Sluice Navigation to the river Glen, the main obstacles being the Black Hole Drove pumping station and negotiating the main A.151 Spalding to Colsterworth road. Some works have already been carried out on the Glen – at Surfleet a slipway and canoe access have been created, moorings have been provided at both Surfleet and Pinchbeck West whilst the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust has created a wetland nature reserve is being created at Willow Tree Farm near Guthram Gowt.

Phase 4: Surfleet Seas End to Crowland Link: A Spalding Waterspace Study is currently looking at waterways improvements in the area including perceived obstacles such as Surfleet Sluice, the tidal section of the Welland and improvements to Fulney Lock. Upstream of Spalding enhancements have included the Crowland Heritage Trail with moorings and canoe access, the Fosdyke Slipway and improvements to footpaths along the Welland.

Phase 5: Crowland to Peterborough Link. A Peterborough Waterspace Study is looking to ways of linking the river Welland with the river Nene. Upstream the Yarwell Project between the Agency and the Nene Valley Railway aims to improve access with new moorings, improvements to the network of footpaths, and a steam boat service on the river linking to a new platform on the railway.

Phase 6: Peterborough to Denver Link. With the success of this Association's Project Hereward campaign a through route already exists between the Nene and the Ouse but a series of enhancements are being investigated such as developing a Denver Hydro Hub to provide information and activities for visitors, improving navigation around Welches Dam Lock, providing moorings on the Hundred Foot Tidal River and providing facilities at Hermitage Lock.

BROADS NOTES AND NEWS

BROADS TOLLS: Over the next four years the Broads Authority is set to lose more than 30% (£1.48m) of its National Parks Grant. Some of that grant has supported dredging and tolls will have to rise to bridge the gap, but toll income and expenditure are ring-fenced so the impact on navigation will be limited. In fact boat owners will face some of the lowest toll increases in more than a decade. For 2011 small boat owners will be favoured with canoeists paying 68p more making £28.08; owners of sailing dinghies will face a 2½% increase of £1.15 to £47.37. A 25 metre² motor cruiser rises by £12.31 to £248.34 (+5.2%) and the largest boats will pay just under 6% more, making the average for all Broads boats 5%. An extra 35 hire boats last year increased income by £32,000 which helped keep the charges down.

BROADS AUTHORITY CUTS: At its meeting on 19 November 2010 the Broads Authority approved cuts that will result in 15 permanent jobs and 10 fixed term contract posts being cut by the end of this financial year with a further six full-time jobs in the year after. In part this will be achieved by slimming down the authority's four directorates; for instance countryside management and navigation will become one flexible team. Three of the authority's visitor centres – Beccles, Potter Heigham and Ranworth – and the field base at Ludham will be closed. However dredging, where there has been a very welcome increase in recent years is to be maintained at the higher level.

GELDESTON LOCK: The Broads Authority, and the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Charitable Trust want to record oral histories of people who worked on or through Geldeston Lock on the river Waveney and are appealing for people to come forward. And at the same time there are plans to try and preserve what is left of the lock. It has long been one of the objectives of our Association to extend the navigation from Geldeston up to Bungay but this could be achieved without restoring the lock and simply deepening the river up to the next lock at Ellingham, above which the level of the river is controlled by sluices.

HUNSETT MILL: Extensions to the 19th century mill keeper's cottage standing close to the mill on the river Ant near Stalham have won two prestigious awards – the Royal Institute of British Architect's Manser Medal and the Norfolk 2010 award from the Campaign to Protect Rural England. Several piece-meal extensions to the cottage have been replaced by an innovative design described by the judges as "more akin to a piece of art than a piece of rural, domestic architecture". In effect two extensions clad in black, charred timber and mirroring the original, have been added, and whilst externally they seem like separate buildings all three are linked together internally.

VAUXHALL BRIDGE: Considerable inconvenience was caused in Great Yarmouth at the end of last September when this bridge, which is used by cyclists and pedestrians going to and from the railway station and the ASDA store, had to be closed for safety reasons after one of its wooden planks had collapsed. The bridge is owned by Railway Paths, which is part of the Sustrans sustainable transport charity, who commissioned a survey to ascertain the cost of re-opening the bridge as quickly as possible. Prior to this a group had been formed to try and help raise £300,000 to restore this box-girder bridge to its former glory.

SOUTH WALSHAM BROAD SLIPWAY: In October the slipway had to be closed until further notice on safety grounds. Parts were rotten with holes below the surface making it dangerous for use by vehicles and trailers whilst the adjacent quay-heading was unsafe for visitors and for boaters and needs to be re-piled. Currently it is hoped the work, which will cost some £4,000, can be put in hand in time for the summer but the Broads Authority is reluctant to pay out this money unless greater public access is allowed. In turn this raises fears locally that un-restricted access could lead to an invasion of small boats on trailers, causing chaos in the small car park and narrow access road. Talks between the Authority's officers and the parish council have taken place and a trial period of unrestricted access but with the barrier being closed at night has been suggested.

SOMERLEYTON BRIDGE: Network Rail engineers carried out a £1.6million programme of work on the bridge at the end of October and into November and originally had wanted to close the river completely to facilitate the operation. As a half-term holiday weekend was involved a compromise was reached where boats with a clearance of 8½-feet at normal high water could pass underneath the bridge at certain specified times. This lasted until 5 November when normal openings became possible again. The work saw the central swing bearing being replaced and the wheels that support the bridge as it swings being renewed. In addition a thorough corrosion survey was carried out at both Somerleyton and Reedham to assess the need for any further repairs.

BOAT CENSUS: A comparison of total boat numbers and boat movements taken at the annual censuses between the 1986, when they began, and 2010 show a steep decline from 2,819 to 1,547 in the number of hire boats, with movements down from 16,501 to 8,005 and the numbers of private craft up from 9,319 to 10,828 but movements are down from 5,561 in 1986 to 3,723 in 2010. Last year's census took place over three days – 20th, 22nd & 24th August – from 14 locations ranging from Irstead, Wroxham, Horning and Thurne Mouth in the north via Great Yarmouth to Chet Mouth, St. Olaves, Oulton Dike and Beccles in the south.

THORPE ISLAND: At the end of January a two-storey wooden structure built on a barge at Thorpe hit the headlines when a planning inspector upheld the Broads Authority's decision that it was a building, and not a boat, and therefore required planning permission. The owners were issued with an enforcement notice to dismantle the structure last July but they appealed and they now have two months to do the work. The somewhat unsightly structure is in a picturesque residential area in Norwich and is clearly visible for the road at Thorpe River Green and from the railway line out of Norwich.

TIDAL GENERATOR: The Broads Authority has given a £7,500 grant from its Sustainable Development Fund towards a prototype tidal generator being developed by a Lowestoft research and development company and being built shipbuilders Small & Co. of Lowestoft. Investigations are on-going into how to develop the prototype tidal energy harvester into a flood barrier with an integrated shutter system that could be built across the river Yare at Great Yarmouth. The grant followed on from the East of England Development Agency, which is also backing the project and has given £92,000 towards the prototype.

MIDDLE LEVEL CHALLENGE - October 2010

By Ivan Cane

The Peterborough branch of the IWA had planned an Old Bedford Protest Cruise over the weekend of 17/19th October, 2010. However, that was also the time when Defra announced the cuts to navigation bodies and as the Environment Agency had reckoned it would cost £20,000 to prepare the river, it was decided that it would not be in the overall best interest to go ahead with the cruise, although both EAWA and the IWA still reserve the right to navigate the waterway.

Three of us - Kevin, Darren and myself – had all arranged to take a long weekend off and decided to go for the Middle Level Challenge instead. The Challenge? To reach Stonea, Nordelph, Ramsey and Holme.

We came across from Denver on the Friday afternoon tide; this was the first time we had ventured, albeit briefly, into tidal waters, but the lock keepers at both Denver and Salter's Lode were extremely helpful and encouraging. We were warned that Well Creek would be low as the pump had stopped working – and it was!!!

Despite this we had a good cruise alongside the main road through Nordelph, Outwell and Upwell, all fascinating villages built on either side of the creek.

At Marmount Priory Lock Maureen asked us to wait for another boat coming through, so we lost 30 minutes, she reckoned we could still make Stonea before dark – but the sun set as we travelled along Popham's Eau. Luckily the Sixteen Foot does not need much steering – so we travelled in the dark, the bridges suddenly looming out of the gloom – occasionally lower than we anticipated. At Stonea, we searched by torchlight in vain for the landing. Then a flash of inspiration – we got out the Canal Boat Magazine (February 2010) which showed a picture of the mooring. Using a road sign in the picture, we were able to judge its position and a lucky jump into the reeds found we had the exact spot – and so were able to reach the Golden Lion for a beer.

On the Saturday, we ventured up the Forty Foot towards Horseway until stopped by a weed boom – so we walked to the sluice. A fully operational MLC sluice leading to a derelict EA waterway!

We then headed for the Lodes End Lock, passing under the recently raised Ramsey Hollow Bridge – which the EAWA had helped to fund. Stopping for a picnic lunch on the landing stage at the lock, we then ventured for Holme. I hadn't realised just how attractive this part of the Middle Level was, especially around Speed the Plough Junction. The lodes became narrower, and a swan swam in front of us for much of the next mile. Eventually we came to Holme and the winding hole. There was a flow here that gently carried us back whilst we had afternoon tea!

Motoring again, we passed a narrow boat also aiming for Holme – and in fact saw more moving boats that afternoon than on any other day. A diversion down to Exhibition Bridge, just to see how low it was – and I think that with a few more bodies aboard we could have scraped under. Returning to Lodes End Lock we turned right

into Ramsey Lode aiming for the town's mooring. Once there, first I needed a hammer to bash the wooden fender in place – then a slasher to find the third bollard, then we were able to moor for the night – but this mooring does need some TLC. A letter to the Town Council has, as yet, gone unanswered. The Four Markers for the Challenge had been reached in 36 hours.

This left with a couple of days to explore further so on the Sunday we returned to the “main line” of the Levels travelling first towards Peterborough to pass through Ashline lock – then back to March for an overnight stop at the town's moorings. Monday we headed for Salter's Lode – stopping at Outwell to explore the Wisbech Canal and surprised to find the Ground Paddle gear still there. Salter's Lode that evening ready to catch the 7.30am tide to Denver on the Tuesday morning. The welcoming lock keeper at Salter's Lode was so pleased that we had used the 16/40 Foot route – only the third to do so that year he reckoned.



carries Well Creek over the Middle Level Main Drain. Bottom right: “Navi” passing through Nordelph.

Top Left: Horseway Lock leading to the overgrown Forty-Foot River beyond. Top right: Holme – this is as far as you can go. Bottom left: “Navi” crossing the Mullincourt Aqueduct that

(All pictures by the author.)

WARWICKSHIRE WATERWAY WALKERS WEEKEND

4th – 6th November 2010

In October our Secretary, Ivan Cane, was asked to lead a walk along the North Walsham & Dilham Canal on Saturday 6 November for a group of enthusiasts – the Warwickshire Waterway Walkers. Due to Ivan's hard work it proved to be a highly successful event.

"We started on time – 8.45am at the same time as the rain. The first party left the Wayford Bridge Hotel in three boats for Dilham Staithe whilst a convoy of eight cars went off to leave the vehicles in the Pigney's Wood car park near North Walsham. The drivers got back to the hotel just as the flotilla arrived back so the second group were away on time to journey to Dilham where they were welcomed by the Chairman of the Canal Trust. Meanwhile the first group had walked from the staithe along Broad Fen Lane to Tonnage Bridge and thence up the towpath to Honing Lock and along Weavers' Way to Honing Staithe Cut. The second group took the shorter route along the Dilham Road to the old mill corner and thence through to the canal at Honing Lock, to Weavers' Way and on to Honing Staithe Cut.

The two groups then combined and walked along Weavers' Way to Briggate to inspect the lock, the mill, the remains of the wheel race and the work on the mill pond. Returning to Weavers' Way the group passed the site of Honing Station and then walked to the Day Centre at Meeting Hill for hot soup, sausage rolls, sandwiches and cakes, to listen to a talk about the village and the Weavers' and to inspect at stands by the Canal Trust and the Norfolk Wherry Trust.

After this welcome break a footpath was taken to Ebridge Mill where the group was surprised to see an ex-British Waterways dredger which had been brought down to the lock area by the Old Canal Company. After viewing the lock, the broken culvert and the dredged area, the path to Bacton Wood was taken and at Spa Common the group was welcomed by Laurie Ashton who talked about his reasons for buying the upper section of the canal and then took the party to inspect the lock rebuilding work where 36,000 bricks have already been used. The party was then able to cross the breach in the canal north of the lock by using the bridge constructed by the work parties and giving access to inspect the newly-rediscovered weir. The final surprise was when the party was invited into the garden of the old Wherry Inn to listen to the reminiscences of the former publican. A final quick walk along the towpath led the party to Pigney's Wood car park.

By all accounts this was a most successful event thanks to Ivan's organisational skills and the help of many people. We are grateful to Bank's Day Boats and the boat steerers John and Gillian Kent, and Tom Carr; to members of the Canal Trust such as Roger Hopkinson, Chris Black, Carole Bullinger and Tony & Betty Wiles; to Manning, Mrs Williams and Matthew and to Mr Love for permission to cross their land, to Janet Spink and her team for the refreshments at Meeting Hill, to Rosemary Rix for her address and to Michael Brett, President of the Norfolk Wherry Trust, for his impromptu talk, to Laurie Ashton of the Old Canal Company, to Sally at the old Wherry Inn and to Peter Kaye of the Pigney's Wood Trust.

WARWICKSHIRE WATERWAY WALKERS WEEKEND



Top Left: *Inspecting the bottom gates at Briggate Lock. Top right: The remains of the top gate at*

Ebridge can still held back a head of water. Middle Left: Scaffolding inside Bacton Wood Lock to enable the brickwork repairs and replacement to be undertaken. Middle right: The rebuilt head of Bacton Wood Lock showing the entrance to the upstream paddle chamber. Bottom: The former British Waterways diesel dredger "Weasel" above Ebridge Mill where it has carried out some clearance of the overgrown channel.

Pictures from John Bedingfield and Ivan Cane

NORTH WALSHAM AND DILHAM CANAL

In the past few months the work parties have been concentrating on Briggate with sessions on 10 & 24 October, 14 November, 16 & 30 January 2011. During this time two sessions were held elsewhere – at Bacton Wood on 6 November and at Honing Lock on 21 November but the weather led to the loss of the two sessions that had been planned for December.

The progress at Briggate can only be described as dramatic – a real break through! A turnout of 17 volunteers on 24 October and the arrival of the cherry picker and the digger enabled major progress to be made. The digger created a long trench parallel to, but about six metres from, the road, and used the spoil to create an access track to enable the far side of the pond to be reached. Meanwhile the cherry picker removed the three remaining trees at the west end of the site whilst the volunteers continued clearing the site and burning some of the brash.

The work continued on 14 November but with a lot of attention being given to part of the mill area opposite the millpond and including the site of the mill race building, but excluding the large main storage building. This was to assist the villagers at Briggate in their work in generally tidying up and improving this area. High water levels on 16 January prevented the use of the digger but efforts concentrated on further clearing from the west end of the site and burning the brash.

Then on 30 January the digger started clearing out the inlet channel from the canal to the pool with the spoil being used to build up the north bank. Meanwhile through the good offices of Chris Black and Laurie Ashton a very large tree that was blocking the channel was reduced in size and then removed by a second digger. The long-awaited break through occurred when the final sod was dredged from the channel, allowing water to once again flow into the millpond. This will create a fine environmental attraction with waterfowl and other wildlife returning to the open water. Ultimately it is hoped to allow water to flow through the mill race back to the canal.

At Honing the North Walsham and Dilham Canal Trust, in partnership with this Association and with the Broads Authority, is preparing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding towards the restoration of the lock. Honing is, of course, the first lock on the canal which is subject to tidal influence downstream. Consulting engineer Roy Sutton, who was involved with the original EAWA survey into restoring the canal up to Bacton Wood in the 1960s, has re-visited the site and is helping to prepare plans for the new structure and to estimate the costs involved.

This is an exciting development as, if restored, the lock would open up the river for just over a mile to Briggate as well as the short Honing Staithe Cut. The lock is crossed by a popular footpath and is close to the Weavers' Way walk. There is a measuring weir immediately above the lock that feeds water level details into the Environment Agency's central records – at one time it was suggested this could be relocated at Dee Bridge. Currently there is no control over water levels and as a result the channel is very overgrown in places with heavy reed growth.

EAWA is giving its full support to the bid and members will be kept informed of developments.

LATE NEWS: Notice from the Harbour Master of the King's Lynn Conservancy Board – 01553 773411. Essential upgrading of the overhead power system between

Walpole and Norwich means new power lines will have to be passed over the Great Ouse about 1 mile north of St. Germans Bridge. The navigation will be closed on the following dates between 0730 until 1800: -

Friday 13 May; Monday 16 May until Thursday 26 May. Thursday 2 June until Wednesday 8 June. Monday 15 August until Thursday 25 August. Wednesday 31 August until Friday 9 September. At these times navigation will be possible between 1800 and 0730 next day. A safety boat will be in attendance when the overhead lines are being worked upon.

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