



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

**FEBRUARY 2012**

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)

**PROGRESS ON THE NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM**

As members will know there was a major problem north of Bacton Wood Lock where the canal had been breached, thus severing the route up to Swafield. At the same time the water in this northern stretch was diverted leaving the bed dry at least up to Royston Bridge. Indeed when the Environmental Study was carried out in the mid 1990s the lock and the canal northwards was omitted as at that time the problems of surmounting the obstruction seemed too great to overcome.

Following its acquisition of the canal from Swafield down to Ebridge, the "Old Canal Company" has been able to carry out works as a prelude to re-watering this stretch and hence restore water to the mill at Bacton Wood. Not only has this work included the re-building of Bacton Wood Lock but it has also seen the filling-in of the breach with the water being piped under the line of the canal.

As a result much of the effort of the work parties has been to clear the very overgrown section of the canal from Bacton Wood northwards to Royston Bridge. This has revealed that some piling will now be needed at the former wharf serving the old Wherry Inn. At its meeting on 24 November Council agreed make a £1,000 contribution to purchase materials for this necessary work which will be carried out by the volunteers and will be assisted by the owners of the Wherry House. At the same time many of the tools used by the volunteers are nearing the end of their useful lives and Council has agreed that the balance of the £1,000 can be used to help replace these tools.

Meanwhile the work parties have continued with two sessions normally being held each month on alternate Sundays. Details are available from our work party organiser David Revill - [davgis@live.co.uk](mailto:davgis@live.co.uk)



Our pictures show (left) the cleared stretch of canal bed near Royston Bridge and (right) the canal just south of Bacton Wood Bridge with the green ex British Waterways dredger "Weasel" in the background round the corner. (Pictures courtesy of Ivan Cane)

### **"THE EASTERLING"**

A search has uncovered some earlier records of the Association covering the period from the summer of 1973 to October 1983 when, of course, Teddy Edwards was the editor amongst his many other roles. This ten-year period includes the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> volumes of "*The Easterling*" each containing 8 issues, and 10 Newsletters making 26 items in all. The intention is to include them in the index that is currently being prepared to cover from 1973 to date. The very early records of the Association are deposited with the Bedford County Record Office.

Although not everyone prefers receiving magazines and Association information via the "net", there is no doubt that it can save our Association a substantial amount of money over the year. For example the cost of sending the October *Easterling* was 93.5p per recipient. Those members who have already signed up for an *e-Easterling* are saving the Association £60 a year to be spent on the waterways themselves. To sign up for the *e-Easterling*, please email your name and address to [eawaeasterling@btinternet.com](mailto:eawaeasterling@btinternet.com)

On the same day as the *Easterling* is sent to the printers, you will receive an e-mail giving you two ways of seeing the journal on line – in FULL GLORIOUS COLOUR – to either download as a Word file, or follow the online link to the <http://issuu.com> website and read it there. This means that you will receive your copy up to two weeks in advance of a Royal Mail posted copy.

Thanks to David Mercer, copies of all *Easterlings* from September 1991 to June 2011 are available on disc from the Editor for a minimum donation of £5. Not only are these worthy of reading in their own right – they can also be searched, giving a fantastic archive of 20 years of East Anglian waterway history. The *issue* website also carries copies of the *Easterling* from Volume 8 No 16 February 2010 to the current edition.

*Ivan Cane*

## BEDFORD WATERSPACE STUDY

As reported briefly in our last issue, this study was launched in August having been commissioned by Bedford Borough Council and the Environment Agency and carried out by Richard Glen Associates of Staverton in Northamptonshire. It covers the river Great Ouse, divided into nine sections, from Bromham Old Bridge, 5 miles upstream of Bedford Town Bridge, down through Bedford to Willington Lock 6 miles downstream. Each section covers six priority themes – 1: The River as a Destination; 2 – Riverside Communities; 3 – Access Opportunities; 4 – Bedford: Welcome Ashore, 5 – Waterspace for Everyone; 6 Navigational improvements.

Most sections include plans to improve access to the river and to the various riverside features with better signage being installed. A water taxi service and a Park & Glide (Ride) service is planned to operate from Kempston Mill with a series of stops down to the town centre and on to Newnham and also from Bedford Lock down to Priory Marina and possibly beyond. The establishment or improvement of canoe launching and portage places are included through the sections and fish passes are proposed at several locations. Investigations into hydropower could be considered at the largely unused Bedford Boat Slide and at several other locations.

This review concentrates, as one would expect, mainly on the navigational issues.

1: Bromham Old Bridge to Box End: This section is well upstream of the usual navigation limit but there are tentative plans to extend facilities for canoeists from Kempston Weir up to Bromham and possibly beyond. Bromham Mill could be developed as a destination for walking, cycling and canoeing with improved car parking near to the Old Bridge and also at Great Denham with the latter giving access to the Country Park and the Ouse Valley Way.

2: Box End to Kempston Weir: Plans include possibly extending the head of navigation for larger craft upstream of Kempston Weir where a new lock would be needed and a new marina could be located at the Box End Water Park. A new footbridge is planned from Kempston Church End to a new section of riverside path that would run on the east bank from Great Dunham to Kempston Mill.

3: Kempston Weir to Queen's Park: The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway is planned to join the Great Ouse just upstream of Kempston Mill which could also be another marina site. The foot bridge at the mill needs to be lifted to permit navigation (headroom currently 1.65m). The mill is also where the water taxi service could start operating and there could also be a Park & Glide facility north of the footbridge with access to the Western bypass. There would also be scope for visitor moorings. The riverside Kempston Outdoor Centre could be developed for walking, cycling and canoeing. Dredging will be needed in places to provide a 1.5m navigation depth from the mill down to the islands at Queens Park where a new footbridge is proposed across to the Kempston's Hillgrounds.

4: Queens Park to Bedford Town Bridge: At the two main line railway bridges the river could be widened and moved to the north to obtain greater headroom, currently 2.0 metres. Likewise the headroom under the Bletchley line bridge (1.96m) needs increasing. Residential and visitor moorings could be created at the old Batsford

swimming baths, now known as Sovereign Quay and providing a base for the Star Rowing Club and the Viking Kayak Club, but some dredging will be needed here. A new Garibaldi footbridge is planned across the river between the two main line and the Bletchley line railway bridges with another from St. Mary's Gardens to the town centre. The gardens and the river frontage at St. Marys need revitalising.

5: Bedford Town Bridge to Newnham: Support is to be maintained for rowing activity within the town centre and navigational agreements will be required to reduce potential conflict as river traffic increases. Visitor moorings could be created along the Embankment immediately downstream of the Town Bridge and fitted up with water and electricity points. Similar moorings could be installed on the south bank on the Rink Island, opposite the Castle Mound, whilst the existing moorings below Bedford Lock could be improved. A new footbridge is proposed from the Embankment Gardens across to the Mill Meadows. The height of the guillotine at Bedford Lock needs raising to increase the headroom (currently 2.05m) whilst the bridge across the tail of the lock needs raising and widening. In the long term Bedford Lock could possibly be relocated near to the Boat Slide Weir and the current limit of navigation could be extended from the Suspension Bridge down the Embankment to the weir. The iconic Butterfly Bridge needs its decking renewed. Punt and skiff hire need reinstating on Longholme Boating Lake with the facilities at the existing cafe being extended. A potential marina site lies alongside Longholme Way at Everard Meadow accessed off the lower reaches below Bedford Lock.

6: Newnham to Priory Country Park: The headroom under both the Royal Engineer's footbridge (2.10m) below Bedford Lock and the Newnham Old Railway Bridge (2.35m) needs increasing. Priory Marina, operated by British Waterways Marinas Ltd., already provides full facilities. It would feature in the water taxi and Park & Glide operations.

7: Priory Country Park to Castle Mill Lock: The shore facilities at the Cardington Canoe Slalom need improvement with toilets and showers being provided and there is the possibility of white water canoeing below Cardington Sluice. In the longer term Cardington Lock (width currently just 3.15m) could be enlarged and relocated to the west. Visitor moorings are planned above Castle Mill Lock. The Ouse Valley Way could be re-routed alongside the eastern and southern banks of the river from the Goldington Old Railway Bridge down to Castle Mill. A trip boat operation could be established between the Barns Hotel and the town centre.

8: Castle Mill Lock to Hill Farm: A canoe portage has recently been installed at Castle Mill Lock. Gravel workings below the lock could be connected to the river and become a marina site.

9: Hill Farm to Willington Lock: Some development is planned for the Willington Danish Camp site which is currently served by the "*Artful Dodger*" trip boat that operates between Bedford Town Bridge and the camp. The new gravel haulage road bridge upstream of Elstow Brook could provide a new access to the river. A possible marina site could be established on land between the river and the Gadsey Brook. Possible Great Ouse Boating Association moorings sites are to the west of Danish Camp and upstream of Willington Lock.

## HERE AND THERE

### ENVIRONMENT AGENCY REGISTRATIONS:

Boat Type	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
Unpowered	1,038	1,431	1,485
Powered	4,451	4,524	4,160
Visitors	385	448	348
Total	5,874	6,403	5,993
Revenue	£1,615,287	£1,692,229	£1,579,584

**EA LICENCES:** Whilst by the middle of January there had been no formal announcement from the Agency, it seems that from 1 April 2012 licence fees are to increase by the Consumer Price Index plus 2%, amounting to a 6.4% rise. And whereas the license previously included the right to navigate into the city of Cambridge, now boaters who want to use the Cam above Bottisham Lock will have to buy a special EA/Conservancy licence costing an additional 10% on the standard licence. Anyone deciding to navigate to Cambridge later in the year will have to pay a fee of 15% of their EA licence. Not surprisingly the size of the increase, the creation of the new Cam surcharge, and the lack of consultation has raised major concerns and the Great Ouse Boating Association is leading a protest campaign.

**BOSTON FLOOD BARRIER:** After consulting widely, the Environment Agency has announced its preferred location for the proposed flood barrier across the Witham at Boston. It is where we always hoped it would be - a short distance downstream of the junction with the South Forty Foot – meaning that the passage between the Grand Sluice and the junction will be possible almost regardless of the state of the tide. At the beginning of November a series of drop-in sessions was laid on in Boston to inform people of the project which is to reduce the risk of floods in the town by protecting against a tidal surge Boston and allow safer navigation. Boston Borough council is strongly in favour of the project and its councillors and officers are working with the Agency to take the scheme forward.

**WEED GROWTH:** As reported in our last edition the river Slea experienced excessive weed growth last summer and this spread to the River Witham itself. Here it would normally be flushed out through the Grand Sluice by the normal flow of water, but with a much reduced flow the weed spread right across the main river, interfering with navigation. Despite effort by contractors the growth was such that the Boston Rowing club's national event from Boston to Lincoln could not take place.

It appears there are two types of weed – Duck Weed floats on the surface reducing the water's oxygen levels to the detriment of aquatic life – and Cott that forms on the river bed and eventually rises to the surface to join the duck weed. Chemical treatment using an aquatic herbicide used to be used but the current practice is to remove it mechanically and deposit it on the bank.

**RIVER ANCHOLME:** Land leased from the Environment Agency for moorings by the Glanford Boat Club has suffered from erosion and cannot now be used. To try and increase tourism for the river and for Brigg Town discussions are underway

about creating an off-line marina, providing a suitable water taxi landing area for the Brandy Wharf to Brigg boat, creating a Heritage Trail and displaying a historic wooden boat found in excavations at Brigg.

**FENS WATERWAYS LINK:** The facilities at Hubbert's Bridge, over 3½ miles from Boston, are to be improved with the work scheduled to be completed by the summer. A slipway is to be provided together with a water supply, pump out and chemical toilet disposal facilities with an electrical supply and new sewerage connection whilst additional picnic tables are to be provided close to the Wheatsheaf Inn.

Meanwhile the scheme to develop the Donington to Surfleet project is still alive and £150,000 of new funding has been secured to try and develop the project. As an Association we hope that as much of the existing channel from Donington, the current official head of the navigation 12½ miles from Boston, should be used although it gets narrower and shallower the further south one goes. With dredging and the creation of a limited series of passing places boats would be able to reach the Black Sluice Pumping Station (19½ miles) quite easily and this would be by far the most practical and cheapest option. The pumping station completely blocks the navigation and assuming it has to remain a new 1¾-mile cut may be needed across country to join the river Glen to the east of Guthram Gowt with a new bridge will take the A.151 Spalding to Boston road and a new lock into the river. Two new accommodation bridges would also be needed on the new cut to maintain access to the pumping station and to cater for a public road leading to the South Forty Foot.

**RIVER HIGHWAY:** Longer standing members of the Association may well remember seeing the film "*River Highway*" that was made by the Bedford Film Society in the late 1950s. It was of particular interest to those involved with the Great Ouse Restoration Society but also to anyone interested in the history of the Great Ouse. The film has recently been made available on-line by the East Anglian Film Archives and may be viewed at <http://www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/1068>.

**RIVER GIPPING:** Our member Mike Hanford, who is an acknowledged authority on waterway matters has pointed out that it doesn't need a new Act of Parliament to restore navigation rights on the Gipping; an order under the Transport and Works Act will suffice. Mike says Leicestershire County Council did this for the Ashby Canal.

The work parties on the river have carried on and the work at Baylham Lock is almost complete. The retaining wall on the east has been rebuilt and the brickwork downstream of the road bridge cleaned off and restored, but the biggest task has been the rebuilding of the west wall of the lock. The volunteers also returned to Bosmere where the timbers of the footbridge were replaced and a small copse of trees that had established themselves in the channel above the lock was removed. Parts of the footpath between Pipp's Ford and Baylham have been cleared and work has started on repairing an accommodation bridge at Pipp's Ford.

**GREAT OUSE WORKS:** Between 9 January and 30 March 2012 the Environment Agency will be carrying out piling repairs at various sites on the river. The Ely Ouse downstream of the Fish & Duck, between Queen Adelaide and the river Lark outfall and between the outfall and Littleport; the river Lark between junction with the Great

Ouse and Prickwillow; Ten Mile Bank between Littleport and Brandon Creek; the Little Ouse near Brandon Creek and the river Cam downstream of Bottisham Lock.

Elsewhere at St. Ives work started in November to drain down the lock to enable a new concrete floor slab to be installed, to carry out general refurbishment and to provide a new floating downstream landing stage; the work should be completed by the end of February 2012. Between 6 February and 5 April 2012 a new guillotine gate is to be fitted at St. Neots Lock replacing the 40-year old structure which is very close to the road bridge. For safety reasons the new gate will be fitted two yards further away from the bridge. And Bedford Lock is scheduled for refurbishment and for the electrification of the guillotine; this being the last unpowered lock on the Great Ouse and it is hoped it may be possible to increase the headroom.

Replacement landing stages are scheduled for Brownhill (D/S), Hermitage (U/S), Denver (D/S) with a new stage for Salters Lode and improvements to the canoe portage facilities are planned at Cardington, Willington, Roxton and Eaton Socon.

**BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAY:** It had been hoped that the excavation of part of the route in a series of linear ponds at the Marston Vale Innovation Park would have started by now but the discovery of the presence of great crested newts, which are protected under European law, has delayed matters. It is hoped this can be resolved to enable construction of the ponds to start in early summer 2012. And at Wootton developer Persimmon Homes has made provision for the route, including excavation for much of it, in their plans which are well advanced.

**CAMBRIDGE PUNT WARS:** Touts have been banned from the river Cam in Cambridge in an attempt to end the escalating "punt wars". New regulations have been imposed when it was found there were 40 illegal punters targeting tourists in the city. The Cam Conservators has ordered that from 1 April 2012 only licensed independent punters and established companies can operate from six official stations and a river bailiff has been installed to enforce the regulations. It is estimated tourists spend some £6 million every year on the river and in the past there have been violent fights between touts and vandalism of punts. The six stations are Granta Mill Pond, the Mill Pit (east and west banks), Trinity College, Quayside and adjacent to Jesus Green (La Mimosa).

**DENVER:** Low river levels and the on-going of silting below Denver are leading to major problems in navigating between the lock and Salters Lode. At the beginning of November our member Brian Holt was navigating his narrow boat "*Harnser*" on a cruise of many of the Fenlands waterways. Arriving at Denver he found the silting is now so bad that the lock is virtually unusable on a neap tide. Three years ago he was able to sail straight out of Salters Lode on the level, up the Ouse and straight through Denver lock on the level. Now nothing bigger than a canoe could get through on the level as there is only about 4 inches of water between the sand banks. The lock keeper was very doubtful Brian could go through but asked if he had a bow thruster; this saved the day. "*Harnser*" crept out of the lock and as soon as he was clear used the bowthruster to pivot the boat round to the left with the stern at the lock entrance. He then slid along between the sandbanks and the front of the sluice until he hit the New Bedford where he turned sharp right and headed

downstream to Salters Lode. Quite an adventure but if he had not done this he would have been held up above Denver for nearly a week. And with the prospect of increased abstractions to cover the growing needs of Essex for more and more water, the situation could only get worse.

**RIVER LARK:** It has come to our notice that what could be construed as efforts to restrict navigation from above Isleham Lock and up to Judes Ferry may be in mind. Certainly the signpost at the junction with the Great Ouse refers just to Isleham giving visiting boaters little incentive to reach the head of the navigation, which is over two miles beyond the lock. It cannot be stressed too often that wherever possible boaters should try and reach the true head of navigation, as otherwise officialdom then tends to cite lack of use as a pretext for abandonment.

**LITTLE OUSE:** Low water levels have revealed that the depth of the new mooring at Santon Downham is somewhat limited and intending moorers should examine the site carefully to ensure there are no underwater hazards. Reaching the head of the available navigation is also relevant here as the Environment Agency notice a short distance upstream of Brandon Bridge indicates that that is the official head of the navigation whereas really it should say the river is now open to Santon Downham.

**RIVER STOUR:** Sadly it is still not possible to report any progress over the dispute between the River Stour Trust and the Environment Agency over the resumption of the work at Stratford St. Mary. Elsewhere an interesting development has been the setting up of a new company, Green Blue Marine Ltd, and its acquisition of a former Environment Agency weed cutting boat at an auction in 2010. The boat was repaired and modified in a workshop at Bury St Edmunds operated by one of the directors, and started work on the Stour in July 2010. Named "Wendy" she only cuts what can be collected on that same day with the cut weed being piled onto a raft and taken to suitable sites to be offloaded. This is a vital contribution to keeping the Stour open as the Environment Agency's policy is just one cut a year.

### **FREIGHT WATERWAYS IN EAST ANGLIA (By Robin Adams)**

"I believe there has been a trial run of the idea of moving sewage sludge from Ely to Clenchwarton near King's Lynn. At present I do not know any more about it but one thing I did see was some sheet piling being moved by water from Clayhithe to Milton for the new landing stage at Baits Bite Lock. This was done by Drake Towage, based at Peterborough. And when I was on a trip on the Norfolk Broads I saw some building materials and some rubbish being carried by barge. Meanwhile a cargo of cement has been shipped from Ipswich to Burton on Stather on the river Trent".

"I suggested the subject for the Reader's Debate in *Ships Monthly* – the motion was that the United Kingdom should make more use of inland waterways and coastal shipping. It was accepted by the editor and we had two other readers – one for the motion and one against. A very good debate took place and I was able to contribute this, among other subjects that had been chosen as it was the last debate we had".

### **ADVANCE NOTICE.**

The Annual General Meeting will be on Sunday 29 April based on the Claydon Country House Hotel just off the A.14 road to the west of Ipswich and will be themed on the Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation.

## **BROADS NOTES AND NEWS**

**BROADS AUTHORITY:** In October last year five new members were appointed to the Broads Authority's Navigation Committee.

James Knight, managing director of Waveney River Centre  
 Michael Whitaker, head of operations of the Herbert Woods Group  
 Lorne Betts, proprietor of Riverside Piling & Marine Valet  
 Max Heron, trustee & chairman of Whitlingham Boathouses Foundation  
 Alan Goodchild, managing director Goodchild Marine Services  
 In addition these existing members were re-appointed –  
 Paul Greasley, director of Norfolk Broads Direct Ltd  
 Philip Ollier, management consultant, The Norfolk & Suffolk Boating Association  
 David Broad, chairman Boating Safety Management Group  
 And five members of the Broads Authority constitute the 13 strong committee

**BROADS TOLLS:** Aided by a welcome increase in the number of hire boats on the Broads the increase in tolls for the next financial year has been set at 2.85%, the lowest increase for 17 years. For a large motor boat the payment rises by £12 to £424 and for a canoe by 80p to £28. This has been achieved despite the Authority being faced with taking on the responsibility for the Norwich yacht station from the City Council and the responsibility of Breydon Water from EastPort.

**WILDLIFE STUDY:** A pioneering study carried out by the University of East Anglia for the Broads Authority revealed that, despite its relatively small area, the Broads are a haven for a large number of Britain's rarest species. Conducted over 12 months it pooled 1.5 million records collected by scientists and enthusiasts since 1670. The study identified 11,000 species of which 66 are special to the Broads and 31 are rarely seen elsewhere. On the down side the study revealed that 423 rare species including plants and fish have not been recorded in the last 23 years and 67 of these are known to have become extinct. Many inhabited dry grassland or arable land showing the effect of agriculture and industrialisation over the last 60 years.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND:** The Broads Authority has made grants totalling nearly £270,000 for 31 projects ranging from new boats for sailing clubs to recycling bicycles. For instance £7,700 went towards the development of a tidal electricity generator for use in estuaries, £20,000 for a mooring pontoon at Cantley Staithe, £29,000 for quay heading and a slipway for a new rowing and canoeing centre at Whitlingham and £4,500 for a 32-foot floating pontoon at Beccles Quay to assist people getting to their boats. Although government funding has been reduced to £150,000 for the current year funds are still available for projects involving young people, best practice, well being, health and education.

**NEW BRIDGES:** Following extensive consultations the National Trust is replacing the aged swing bridge over the Thurne giving access to its Heigham Holmes reserve in Ferrygate Lane, Martham. The new bridge will be similar to the current structure but will give improved safety, operation and maintenance. The work is being carried out by the Jackson Civil Engineering Group who started necessary piling work at the beginning of October and should be finished early in 2012.

In Norwich a new £1.5m footbridge, for which planning permission was agreed in 2007, connecting the Barrack Street redevelopment to the Riverside Walk close to the law courts was hoisted into position early in November.

Meanwhile a former ferry crossing from Burgh St. Peter on the Norfolk side of the river Waveney into Suffolk that ceased operating after the Second World War is to be revived in the spring. It will be provided by the Waveney River Centre on the north bank using "*Tern Pike*" a 12-seater passenger boat. And there are plans by Thorpe St. Andrew Town Council to introduce a pedestrian ferry across the river Yare to link the Thorpe marshes and the picnic area at Whitlingham.

**MUSEUM OF THE BROADS:** Last summer there was great excitement at the museum when Her Royal Highness Princess Anne paid them an unexpected visit. The autumn issue of "Reedlighter", the museum's newsletter, carries an interesting report and gives "behind the scenes" details of the planning to prepare for the visit.

**EBRIDGE & BRIGGATE MILLS:** Ebridge Mill is being offered for sale by Arnolds of Norwich at a guide price of £240,000, meanwhile at Briggate there is growing concern that North Norfolk District Council may take over the mill there and demolish it as it is deemed unsafe. This would be a major blow to the hamlet of Briggate where residents have been tidying up the site and hope to use the building for the community. One problem is that the owner, believed to be a Michael Howard, could not be traced but there is a possibility he may now have been located, although it is not uncertain if this will help.

**IN BRIEF:** Reedham railway swing bridge was featured in the first episode of the new series of Michael Portillo's Great Rail Journeys on BBC 2 when it was reported it was swung 1,300 times last year.

Recycling bins have been installed at South Walsham Staithe, Ranworth Staithe, Upton Boat Dyke, Salhouse Broad, Reedham Ferry, Coltishall Common and at the former Pontiac Roadhouse site on Acle Straight.

Planning permission has been granted and work has started on excavating a new dyke at the historic Hunter's Yard at Ludham. This will enable the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust to offer private boats moorings and so bring in extra revenue to help secure the future of the fleet.

The original "Bungay Loyal and Constitutional Society" that was first formed on 4 June 1795 has been re-constituted and one of its aims will be to encourage support for re-opening the navigation. Further upstream on the Waveney a new group at Diss has been set up to clean-up the river in that area.

A Bronze Age long boat, hollowed out of the trunk of an oak tree, has been discovered at the Must Farm quarry at Whittlesey along the old course of the Nene. Having been preserved in silt and peat it was in pristine condition.

Work Party dates: Briggate (19 February, 4 March, 29 April); Honing (18 March, 13 May, 24 June); Bacton Wood (1 April, 27 May); Ebridge (15 April, 10 June). More details on [www.eawa.co.uk](http://www.eawa.co.uk) or from David Revill (01603 738648) or Chris Black (01508 492025).

## ALBION'S RESTORATION

By Roger Watts

It was in summer 2000 that my head peered over this particular wall as for nearly a year no one had appeared who wanted to take on the responsibility for the welfare of *Albion*. My offer was snapped up! A sub-committee was swiftly formed to concentrate talent & to spread the load and arrangements for an initial survey were made. Paul Reynolds, a respected local boat-builder and Trust member joined the sub-committee and swiftly led the boat survey, with Paul doing the surveying whilst I recorded what he discovered. After a long discussion we agreed to slip *Albion* for an external survey and to invite John Perryman, a previous chairman of the Trust with much previous knowledge of the boat, to assist.

In early December 2000 *Albion* was motored south onto Lake Lothing and the newly acquired slip of the Excelsior Trust for this follow-up survey. After a further



discussion we asked Maynard Watson, a local boat-builder with wherry experience, to do some emergency work. This was duly done and *Albion* returned to her base in Ludham. On her return the major task was to strip all her decks back to bare timber. This was to prepare for a new paint finish that allowed the timber to breathe; one of the

measures we believed would help promote her long-term health.

That spring saw many discussions about her condition and a restoration plan was generated. The key to all this was to devise a long-term strategy to improve condition and establish a level of quality to her fabric that would ensure her continued good health and that would return her to a "young" condition. This would be the keystone for all our decision-making. In addition we decided to implement an annual fungicidal programme as part of this plan and to ensure that the ceiling (hold lining) would not only be removable (by screwed fastenings), but would also be removed annually for applying preservative and for airing.

The wisdom of this decision became clear as we lifted the ceiling and discovered both significant rot and mould growth on the inner surfaces of the hull planking. Armed with scrapers, three sacks of rotten wood and fungi were removed, some

concern being expressed about how much wood remained! Before we left the slip we had booked it again for the autumn of 2001 to enable us to begin our work on the restoration plan.

Back at base we continued the volunteer work that we planned would be a significant part of our restoration and maintenance programme. Over the last eleven years our group of member volunteers has continued to grow and to perform a wide range of tasks that help keep *Albion* afloat and in pristine condition. Without them the job would be impossible. It is a great joy to see the enthusiasm that they bring to their work. We have regular Thursday & Saturday sessions in the winter that are widely supported. We often hear about “golf widows”, well we have “wherry widows” as well; such is the enthusiasm that they bring.

During the year our plans were laid for the autumn slipping. The jobs were to centre around the following; firstly we would remove all of the hull tar coating to enable a thorough inspection of it, secondly the caulking would be removed below the waterline, thirdly the worst planking would be identified, removed and replaced. Paul and I visited the Aldridge timber yard at Quiddenham and selected a stock of 2” & 4” boards and crooks that were delivered to the yard in readiness for the work.



Once on the slip tar was scraped off the hull whilst the boat-builders set about removing the old frames designated for removal on this occasion. As the tar was removed, armed with a drawing board and pencil I produced a schematic of the hull showing the location and length of all planks. This was followed by a condition report on each one ranging from “sound” to “horrendous”.

Further to this some slight modification was made to the hull planks due to be removed immediately.

Once removed a number of decisions were made the key one of which focused on the “doubled” frames. These were fastened together with one or two Swedish nails clenched over. We decided to drill through the pairs and bolt together; each pair receiving five or six stainless steel bolts. Much of *Albion* had been fastened with iron or steel fastenings that accelerate decay in oak. As we came across these we replaced with stainless steel and for anything that we could not replace or which was historically significant, we galvanized it.

With just over 300 feet of planking identified for replacement on this occasion the spiling in began. Whilst planking was progressing caulking of the under seams was begun. With several weeks of easterly winds the hull planks had dried out which aided us to get a tight join that was destined to become even tighter after re-launching. By the beginning of December work was more or less complete and the hull was primed and re-tarred. In writing this, it all sounds so easy but tarring is a hot, dirty job that lasted for nearly three weeks.

Winter 2003 was almost a repeat of that of 2002 but the work centred on the mast tabernacle area, probably the strongest part of the boat, with six horizontal knees, two tabernacle cheeks and two steel vertical knees surrounding five separate frames. In addition the forepeak fittings needed to be removed to gain access so this period was seen as a good opportunity to replace and upgrade them. It was the frames that were the centre of attention with each showing decay. To gain access much of the above needed removal with the exception of the tabernacle cheeks. This was duly accomplished and whilst removing them it was discovered that the steel vertical knees were decaying and one horizontal knee, itself decaying was also hiding decay in the clamp (horizontal stringer holding tops of frames together). In addition a number of previously identified hull planks in this area were removed ready for renewal.



Whilst all this work was underway a new mast was being roughed out at the International Boatbuilding College within 200 yards of where *Albion* lay on the slip. The Trust had obtained a baulk in the mid-1990's and decided to have it worked up as a spare.

In 2004 we had planned not to slip *Albion* but to attend to necessary work to the foredeck that was leaking badly. Once again we sourced our oak locally well in advance of the work and put it in stock to continue seasoning. Once *Albion's* mast was removed at the beginning of October, Maynard removed the counterweight and began to refit it, the sheave and a new galvanized trunnion to the new mast at the Eastwood Whelpton yard at Upton. This work proved to have been done none-too soon as an examination of the old mast, which had a metal band where the gaff jaws rest, was found to have significant rot. At base the old deck was removed exposing

poor deck beams and knees. A thorough replacement followed along with one timberhead.

The following autumn saw *Albion* back on the slip again. On this occasion the main task was to look into the stern of the boat, having first removed all the cuddy (cabin) furniture and floors to gain sufficient access. Several frames and some planking had decayed, but in addition a number had shrunk on their inner faces and were causing substantial weeps whilst many planks were very short. Our plan from early days had been the removal of the short planks that we had identified as they were contributing little to the general strength of the hull. Rounding off this part of the project was a continuation of the replacement of the clamp begun the previous winter.

During 2006 much time was spent planning for the BIG project in 2007. At the time of the initial survey in 2000 it was noted that *Albion* was severely hogged with both bow and stern drooping badly; in elevation her bottom line instead of being straight was in the shape of an aerofoil section. It was clear that for 50 years she had been regularly used with only approximately 5 tons of ballast in her hold rather than the usual 35 tons. With greater buoyancy amidships and little load, whilst at bow and stern having more load and far less buoyancy, she had sagged (hogged). Whilst trying to bring her back into good condition from the material point of view it was patently ludicrous to ignore this defect, clearly seen by her lack of sheer.

Many hours were spent debating the problem, several solutions were thought of and many problems were both anticipated and solutions were devised to get round them. But our vision of *Albion* not only being sound, but looking as fresh as she had in her youth drove us on to the only possible solution, that of putting a steel "I" beam under her in place of her slipping keel. Timber and other materials were sourced, the plan was laid and in early October *Albion* was on the slip again for a week while we took final measurements, checked details and made templates ready for 2007

By the time the boat returned to the slipway in October 2007 the plans had been finalized and the work team was prepared for the task ahead. *Albion* was set up on blocks to gain height along her keel and at the turn of the bilges. Her bow was chained forward and an Acro was fastened to her sternpost to keep her in place on



the slip. The procedure was brutally simple. Her old wooden keel was sawn off, old bolts drawn and a template of the new boltholes was fastened to the underside of her hog. All new boltholes were drilled and the new keel/girder was

slid into place with keel bolts loosely located forward, aft and amidships. During the following week and a half jacks were used at each bilge support point to raise the hull, remove some packing and then to lower the hull back onto the blocks. In this way the hull continued to be supported whilst about half an inch was lowered at a time. Eight working days later *Albion* had been lowered by 13 inches at the maximum point down onto the "I" beam and the 18 keel bolts were finally caulked and secured. Our biggest concern, the hog cracking as it straightened, had been unfounded and even the hull showed no signs of cracks along seams below the water line.

With things having gone so smoothly a number of new planks were put into the upper hull and after tarring she was launched again early in the new year with a splendid new sheer. Of course not everything went according to plan. The standing right-ups went dramatically into compression whilst *Albion* was regaining her shape and required easing scarphs, cut with a chain saw. The aft deck also shifted a little. However, when you consider how radically she had been changed and the fact that much timber had been put into her whilst in the earlier hogged condition the final result was little short of a miracle.

Basking in our glory *Albion* was returned to the rivers early in April for a trial run and we were most impressed by the results; so much so that we returned to the slip in the autumn once again for another large project.

The main job was to be the replacement of the sheer planks and the number 2 planks all the way round the boat. Little has been mentioned about these particular planks, but whilst doing the hull-plank audit in 2002 these were found to be in appalling condition. Our solution at the time had been to fill all the holes where timber had rotted away with tar, so cosmetically the boat looked good, until mid-summer when the temperatures softened the tar and her wrinkles began to show. Whilst dealing with these planks we needed to remove the plank sheer and also the binn irons. The latter were in a poor condition, rusted through in many places, so new material was sourced and the new lengths, after measuring and cutting/drilling, were galvanized.

It must be noted that as these parts were being removed three of the timberheads were found to be decayed so were added to the work plan.

The other main thrust for 2008 was to work on the stem post. This had been soft for several years and had already had a number of new sections let in. It was duly removed and the apron behind was also found to be very poor; both were replaced. What had seemed to be sufficient work for this project had mushroomed somewhat, but Maynard and his team rose to the occasion and once again the hull was being tarred over the Christmas/New Year period for an early January launch.

The 2009 work moved to the early months of 2010 and was completed on the water at our Ludham base. The tabernacle knees had been identified as a problem some while earlier and an amount of rotten wood had been dug out of them, the remainder had been treated and fashion pieces of plywood were used to disguise things. Six inch oak bends were installed as was the surrounding dead hatch whilst another length of clamp was replaced.

Autumn 2010 saw us nearing the end of the plan that we had implemented eleven years previously and beginning our new plan that runs to 2030. This is essentially a maintenance and inspection plan with a two-yearly slipping when a survey will be carried out, keel bolts drawn and inspected, the hull finish tidied up and any minor works from her operations attended to. Every fourth year some more significant work will be attended to as well, for, being a wooden boat there will always be something that needs doing. The first part of this process went well and in February 2011 the last project of the first plan was completed; once again at our base and on the water.

In 2007 when straightening the hog we found the standing-rightups bending and we had eased them with scarp cuts. It was this that was addressed as the last part of the project. In the past the standing rightups had been fitted, not only to a flat plankway (side deck) but had been cut short at the front of the cuddy, whereas when originally built these boards ran right through to the aft of the cuddy. This was duly done complete with new metal work in stainless steel & new moving rightups were also fashioned.



This has been a massive project that has taken *Albion* from the point where she was in appalling condition and leaking badly to one where she is in excellent condition structurally, stiffer, with a better shape. To round things off her ballast has been increased a little to set her lower in the water (her natural position

for sailing when in trade) and to help act against the bending forces that will still beset a boat of this type, therefore working with the girder/keel. Her skippers enjoy sailing her more now, she responds more swiftly to the tiller and does not crab as much and she looks superb.

For more details of *Albion* see [www.wherryalbion.com](http://www.wherryalbion.com) to join the Trust & help to support her contact: Trevor Hipperson (email) [membership@wherryalbion.com](mailto:membership@wherryalbion.com) & finally to experience her at her best, enjoy a sail on her by contacting: Pam Shallcross (email) [charter@wherryalbion.com](mailto:charter@wherryalbion.com)

*(We feel very privileged to have Roger's detailed account of the work to maintain this superb vessel in service, hopefully for many many more years to come – Ed)*