

# THE EASTERLING

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### LITTLE OUSE RIVER

An important event that has attracted remarkably little attention was the effective opening last year of the 2½-mile stretch of this river from Brandon upstream to Santon Downham. For it represents a major step forward in our campaign to restore the former navigation up to the growing town of Thetford.

Last year the Little Ouse Group, mainly through the efforts of its members Peter Barrett and Mark Stamp, dug out a new mooring on the river a short distance downstream of Santon Downham Bridge. The moorings are now being managed by the Great Ouse Boating Association and boats are making regular use of this new facility. For instance over the late May Bank Holiday a contingent of at least six boats from the Upware Boat Club visited Santon Downham.

Prior to the creation of the new moorings there was little incentive to tempt boats to use the stretch beyond the official head of navigation just upstream of Brandon Bridge. For whilst passage was possible with care, few craft attempted the journey as there was really nowhere convenient to moor. But now there is.

The summer issue of "GOBA News" reminded its members that as the new moorings are in the heart of the Thetford Forest there should be no barbeques, because of the fire risk. Boaters are also warned not to attempt to go further upstream and under the road bridge as there are large stones in the river, apparently put there by canoeists to assist with the flow of water. Rather strangely the same issue implies the new moorings are "a mile or so up river from Brandon Town Bridge". In fact, as the following table for the relevant stretch of the river shows, it is well over 2½ miles from Brandon Bridge to Santon Downham Bridge.

## LITTLE OUSE DISTANCE TABLE

Location	O/S Ref	Kms	Miles
Junction with the Great Ouse River at Brandon Creek	608919	00.00	00.00
Railway Bridge – Norwich to Ely line	767871	20.50	12.73
Brandon Lock and weir	778867	21.82	13.56
Brandon Bridge – B.1106 Swaffham Road	784869	22.42	13.93
Santon Downham Bridge – road to West Tofts	817878	26.69	16.58
Possible approximate site for proposed new Santon Downham Lock		26.80	16.65
Santon Downham Country Park footbridge	825873	27.70	17.21
Former site of Santon Downham Staunch No 5	825873	27.71	17.22
Two Mile Bottom footbridge	847870	29.98	18.63
Former site of Croxton Staunch No 4	847870	29.99	18.64
Possible approximate site for proposed new Two Mile Bottom Lock		30.10	18.70
Former site of Turfpool Staunch No 3	854856	31.78	19.75
Abbey Heath weir & footbridge (site of Abbey Heath Staunch No 2)	850843	33.17	20.61
Thetford Bypass Bridge (A.11 Norwich Road)	853834	34.28	21.30
Canterbury Way Bridge, Thetford	860833	34.99	21.74
Thetford Sluice (site of Thetford Staunch No 1)	861832	35.08	21.80
Blaydon Footbridge, Thetford (turnover)	863832	35.35	21.97
Thetford New Bridge (original A.11 road)	867833	35.74	22.21
Thetford Town Bridge (old Norwich road)	868831	35.95	22.34

*The proposed head of navigation is at Thetford Town Bridge due to the minimum headroom of just 2 metres under its arch. Craft not exceeding this height could proceed some 200 metres further upstream to the junction with the river Thet.*

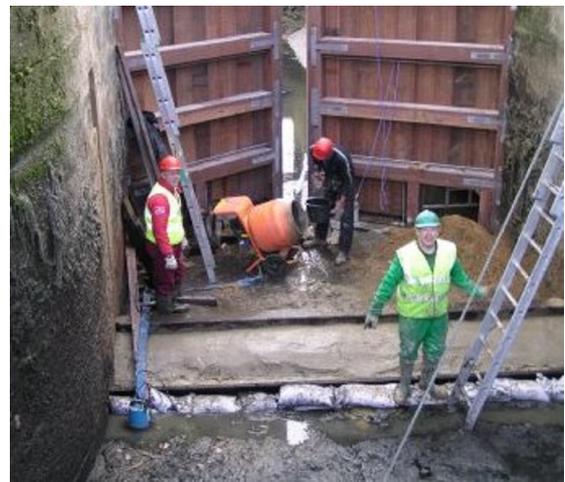
The table shows that the distance from Brandon Bridge up to Thetford Town Bridge is 13.53km (8.41 miles). Of this distance some 4.17km (2.59 miles) is now open albeit needing care at times and another 0.87km (0.54 miles) is navigable from Thetford Sluice into the town. This leaves 8.49km (5.28 miles) needing restoration which could involve the provision of new locks at Thetford, Abbey Heath, Two Mile Bottom and Santon Downham, although it is possible only three might be needed.

The several public road bridges that cross the river all provide adequate navigable headroom but a couple of footbridges will need raising and there will be the need for dredging in some places, depending on the eventual location of the new locks. In other words a relatively simple and straightforward restoration compared to many now taking place elsewhere in the country.

All these distances have been taken from the official chainage figures for the river that were contained in the report into the restoration that was prepared by consultants Babbie Brown & Root of Cambridge in 2003. EAWA, along with others such as the IWA, GOBA and the Forestry Commission, contributed to the costs of this survey which was organised through the Keystone Community Partnership Development Trust Ltd of Thetford.

Whilst the consultants reported positively, sadly little action has so far resulted but hopefully the events at Santon Downham will inject new drive into the campaign – and our thanks are due to the Little Ouse Group.

## THE SLEA NAVIGATION



Top Left: Work under way on the refurbishment of the bottom lock on the Slea. This shows the view looking upstream with the temporary piled dam in the foreground which had to be driven to enable the site to be pumped dry. Top Right: Work on fitting the new bottom gates is virtually complete. Centre Left: Grooves have been “carved” out of the lock walls down which an “escape ladder” can be inserted. Centre Right: Parts for the new lifting footbridge at Sleaford were delivered from the Hucknall factory on two lorries on 29 December and had to be erected on site before the structure could be craned into position across the river. Bottom Right: The new structure is in position and nearly complete, apart from fitting the counter weight which is about to take place, and the installation of the lifting mechanism which followed on at a later date.

These pictures should have been included in our last issue to accompany the report of these two major developments on the river but somehow they got lost in transmission. The Editor apologies for this but belatedly found them on his system, although he remains completely mystified as to how they got there.

## THE CHELMER & BLACKWATER NAVIGATION

The February 2009 issue of "*Coates' Cuttings*", the informative newsletter of the Chelmer Canal Trust, contained a historical timeline for the navigation. A slightly edited version is reproduced here.

- 1677 A scheme proposed by Andrew Yarranton to make the river Chelmer navigable was opposed by the Borough of Maldon.
- 1733 John Hore suggests either canalising the existing river (£9,335) or building a completely new canal (£12,870). Both suggestions fail.
- 1765 Thomas Yeoman proposed yet another canal scheme (£16,697).
- 1766 (6 June) An Act of Parliament was passed to make the river navigable from the Port of Maldon to Chelmsford., but with opposition from the Maldon traders, the required funds (£13,000) could not be raised.
- 1792 Surveys for a route bypassing Maldon carried out under John Rennie's direction.
- 1793 (17 June) The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Act was passed with John Rennie appointed to oversee construction.
- 1796 (April) The first cargo of coal was carried from Heybridge Basin to Boreham. (September) The navigation is opened as far as Moulsham Mill.
- 1797 (3 June) Formal opening of the navigation to Chelmsford Basin.
- 1811 William Bentall's iron works open at Heybridge.
- 1819 Gas works built at Springfield, Chelmsford.
- 1832 Sugar Bakers Mill constructed at Hoe Mill.
- 1842 Peak tonnage 60,000 tons carried. Heybridge lock keeper's house built.
- 1860s First cricket bat willows planted.
- 1863: 51,000 tons carried.
- 1875 33,214 tons carried. Beeleigh Mill destroyed by fire.
- 1880 Steam power comes to Sandford Mill.
- 1893 Little Baddow Mill burnt down.
- 1914 12,120 tons carried. Hoe Mill demolished.
- 1925 5,716 tons of cargo carried.
- 1947 2,699 tons of timber carried.
- 1948 Breach in bank caused by floods at Beeleigh weir, closing the canal.
- 1950 Canal re-opened.
- 1952 Annual canoe race instigated from Chelmsford to Heybridge Basin.
- 1953 "Susan", the first motorised barge introduced by Browns, the timber merchants at Chelmsford. She had been built by Prior's of Burnham.
- 1954 Heybridge Mill, a Grade 1 listed building, demolished.
- 1960s Steel barges with diesel powered outboards introduced by Browns.
- 1972 Last cargo of timber carried on the navigation.
- 1973 The navigation became a recreational waterway.
- 1975 Motorised pleasure boat "Victoria" launched at Heybridge.
- 1973-1985 Springfield Basin becomes derelict.
- 1990 The invasive American weed – floating pennywort – first recorded.
- 1993 Restoration of Springfield Basin area by the Inland Waterways Association.
- 1995 Cuton Lock restored (No 4).
- 1996 Foundation of "The Friends of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation". It became the Chelmer Canal Trust in 2001.

- 1997 Bicentenary celebrations held at Springfield Basin and blue plaque unveiled commemorating Richard Coates, the navigation's chief engineer and founder of Browns, the Chelmsford timber company.
- 1998 Ricketts weir collapsed due to erosion by flood water (Lock No 10).
- 1999 Major renovation of Little Baddow Lock (No 6)
- 2000 Floating pennywort now a major threat on the navigation.
- 2002 Chelmsford's first marina under construction at Springfield Basin.
- 2003 (August) The Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation Company goes into administration owing £50,000. Assets including about an acre of land at Heybridge Basin, the lease of the Old Ship public house there, tea rooms at Paper Mill lock, the pleasure boat "Victoria", Treasure Island bungalow and site adjacent to Paper Mill and the lock house at Hoe Mill, are sold.
- 2004 Springfield Marina opened – linked by a lifting drawbridge over towpath – as part of a housing development alongside the basin.
- 2005 (November) Essex Waterways Ltd – a subsidiary of the Inland Waterways Association – formed to operate and maintain the waterway for the public benefit.
- 2006 New gates fitted at Sandford Lock (No 3).
- 2007 Major repairs to Cuton Lock (No 4)
- 2008 Major repairs to Springfield Lock (No 1)
- 2009 Major repairs to Stonhams Lock (No 5)

## HERE AND THERE

**"THE EASTERLING"**: On Saturday 15 August the preserved steam locomotive 70013 "*Oliver Cromwell*" passed through Colchester on a Railway Touring Company trip from Liverpool Street to Lowestoft. And the wording on the engine's headboard – "*The Easterling*".

**KINGS LYNN**: The new marina for the town seems likely to be delayed, but hopefully not cancelled for good, by the downturn in the economic climate. In November 2007 West Norfolk Council was looking to allocate £7 million to the scheme which forms an important part of a major high-quality waterfront regeneration scheme designed to encourage tourism and new businesses as well as provide additional housing. This could be yet another twist in the long running saga in the marina project that has already seen the proposed "inland" connection through to the Flood Relief Channel by way of the river Nar and a short new link dropped.

A more positive event at the beginning of August was the visit of the replica trading vessel "*Lisa von Lubeck*" to take part in the first Hanse Festival in the town. Ships like Lisa, which took five years to build, used to trade goods during the Hanseatic period and during her stay 6,000 people boarded the ship.

**WELLS-NEXT-THE-SEA**: The police at Wells now operate Norfolk's only offshore patrol boat in their efforts to beat coastal crime. Officers will use the rigid inflatable to patrol the town's harbour together with previously inaccessible parts of the neighbouring shoreline such as at Blakeney and Morston. The Wells harbourmaster and several local businesses have helped establish the new venture by providing parts, safety equipment, maintenance facilities and training.

Wells will also benefit under plans to establish a new 88-turbine wind farm on Sheringham Shoal in the Wash as a deal was signed on 24 June to make the town the operational base. This could involve the Harbour Commissioners deepening the outer channel and building a new commercial jetty in advance of the arrival of the new turbines from Denmark in March 2011. Work has already started on digging a trench for the electricity cables from the landfall from the wind farm at Weybourne to Salle, near Cawston, where it will connect with the National Grid. .

**GREAT OUSE:** Between June and December eight of the timber landing stages at five of the locks from Roxton up to Cardington are being replaced in a rolling programme. The old structures were installed some thirty years ago and are at the end of their useful lives; the new structures will be based on those recently installed at Godmanchester and Castle Mills with steel frames and GRP decking.

Meanwhile under the Environment Agency's winter programme, between November and December Bedford and Castle Mills locks are to be drained down and inspected; and Offord and Brampton are due for work on their guillotine gates. Replacement gates are to be fitted at St. Neots soon after whilst St Ives lock is also to undergo repairs. In August new recycling facilities were installed at St. Ives and Hermitage adjacent to the existing refuse containers and will be collected on a weekly basis - one will be for general recyclable waste (cans, plastic and paper) with a second container for glass.

As mentioned in our last issue changes have been made at Brampton. Below the lock the channel that runs to the south of the island has been dredged to give a good depth and width and signs have been installed to direct traffic. During normal flow conditions boats travelling upstream will be allowed to approach the lock direct passing in front of Brampton Sluice but when flows and turbulence from the sluice increases, craft will be diverted round behind the island. Downstream traffic will always use the southern route.

**RIVER CAM:** In an effort to control the strong-arm tactics used by touts to attract passengers to their craft, Cambridge Council has appointed three "punt police" wearing high visibility jackets in an effort stamp out the violence that has arisen on occasion between rival groups. This had led to a major improvement in the situation. There are a considerable number of the large 12-seater craft on the river and these can earn their operators up to £150 an hour.

**EELS:** In mid June Peter Carter, who is the last eel catcher in the Fens, set off from Outwell Basin in his traditional punt and using a 17-foot quant pole, on a 25-mile journey to Ely to deliver eels to the Bishop of Ely and raise funds for charity. In the past eel catchers had to provide the bishop with thousands of eels every year so Peter was reviving an old tradition. The journey took nearly a week. Subsequently Peter featured in the fifth and final part of Griff Rhys Jones' programme on rivers on 23 August on BBC television.

**RIVER LARK:** The river has been prone to heavy weed growth in summer and to tackle this, over the last two years the Environment Agency has dredged nearly two thirds of the channel to remove the silt and minimise the growth problem. The Agency plans to deal with the remaining one third over the next two years. Our

Secretary, Ivan Cane, has recently cruised up to Judes Ferry but could not get the boat to Kings Staunch as the depth was down to just 4 inches in places. However Ivan went on to explore this section and on up to Mildenhall on foot.

**RIVER STOUR:** The electricity company EDF Energy has started to remove overhead power lines from a four-mile stretch of Constable Country between Stratford St. Mary and Boxted Mill. The work to replace them with underground cables is costing £450,000 and will take until the end of 2010 to complete. Dedham Vale is classified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – it covers the river from Brantham all the way up to Wormingford whilst the associated Stour Valley Project covers the rest of the river up through Sudbury, Clare and Haverhill into Cambridgeshire. The Association has been asked, along with many others, to respond to the consultation into the review of the 2009-2014 Management Plan.

A recent positive event in which the Project has been involved has been the opening of a long-awaited new jetty at Stratford St Mary allowing people in small boats to disembark fairly close to the Swan Inn. The jetty is accessed by two small stone steps and is 14-feet long by 4-feet wide – big enough to accommodate the biggest canoe operating on the river.

Nearby, volunteers from the River Stour Trust resumed work on Stratford St. Mary lock on 13 July and we sincerely hope the weather is kinder this year than in 2008 when the conditions were such as to seriously impede progress. The "*Essex County Standard*" of 28 August featured a report of the work with a picture of Roger Brown and Mike Finch, two of the volunteers. The hope is that the 195-yard long gabion wall that is being built alongside the downstream lock channel can be completed. The channel can then be dredged, after which work can start on the lock itself although much clearance work has already taken place there. Access is a major problem as all plant, materials and workers have to be taken across the river to the site on a raft. Once everything is completed unpowered boats will be able to travel for well over a mile up river to Langham.

On 12 & 13 September a record number of more than 300 small craft took part in the annual Sudbury to the Sea event. This covers the 24½-mile course from Sudbury to Brantham with an overnight stop at Wissington and it is estimated some 530 people were involved from lone paddlers to family groups.

**CHELMER CANAL TRUST:** As we have reported before in our pages, for years now volunteers from the Trust have been battling manfully to remove the pernicious floating American Pennywort weed from the navigation. The aim has always been to keep the river open and at one time great rafts of weed blocked it from bank to bank. Boats could sometimes break through these barriers but, in so doing, they often unwittingly compounded the problem by spreading small fragments of the weed to other areas, where they quickly proliferated. Over the years the tactics had to change to a zero-tolerance policy and this has really paid off as each year there has been less and less weed to deal with. Although it has not been eradicated, it can now be kept under control. It is, though, more difficult to spot, for it hides in the winter, doesn't do an awful lot in the early summer, but then tries to catch everyone out by growing furiously in September and October.

Small amounts can sometimes be found in streams and ditches, often hidden by brambles and weeds, and doing no harm but if floodwater washes it out into the main river it could become a potential disaster. So Trust volunteers now spend time in the winter months dealing with bank-side vegetation to remove anchor points for the weed. They are a dedicated band but more help is always wanted – all are welcome (including children aged 13 and over as long as they are under supervision by a parent or carer) and training sessions are held. Details of the work party dates are on the website: [www.chelmercanaltrust.co.uk/cct\\_workparty.htm](http://www.chelmercanaltrust.co.uk/cct_workparty.htm)

**IPSWICH & STOWMARKET NAVIGATION:** The restoration work on Baylham Lock continues to progress, but the weather has not been helpful. A Waterways Recovery Group work camp was held between 11 & 18 July when the main task was to prepare a large section of the lock floor in readiness for pouring ready mixed concrete, matching up the levels to the solid part of the original brick invert. Stop planks had been inserted at the head of the lock and a series of pumps were installed to pump water out of the chamber. It was soon found that some of the brickwork also needed to be replaced, increasing significantly the area to be dealt with. The pour was booked to take place at the end of the week and as the ready-mix lorry could not get right up to the lock, dumper trucks had to be used for the final leg of the journey. Work was well in hand when the weather intervened, first a drizzle, then rain and finally an absolute downpour. Water began to spill over the first of two downstream dams, and then over the second flooding the site and causing considerable damage to the unprotected part of the new concrete floor. This then involved another group having to break up the damaged area before the work could proceed.

The River Gipping Trust held an open day at the lock on Sunday 27 September when there was a chance to look round the site, talk to working party members and discuss plans for the future. Steady progress is now being made and our picture, taken by Ivan Cane on 2 September, looking downstream shows work in progress on rebuilding the eastern lock wall.



**B&MK LINK:** Construction work on this waterway's first major structure – the bridge carrying the new course of the A421 main road from Bedford over the navigation's proposed route – started in June and should be completed in November. Whilst the length of channel created may only be 30 metres long, this could have been one of the most expensive obstacles to be overcome in the entire project. Further good news is that the Highways Agency has dropped its plans to widen the M1 motorway from Luton northwards to Brogborough. This has removed the threat to the cattle creep near Ridgmont railway station that had been earmarked as the route for the new waterway, as there was no guarantee that the creep would have been retained with the proposed widening works.

On 28 July a major event was staged at the Marston Vale Forest Centre to mark the start of the A421 work, to mark the installation of the waterway's first interpretation board at the Forest Centre, and to mark the purchase of a modest parcel of land to ease the passage of the waterway from Stewartby and Kempston.

The Environment Agency is considering reinstating the head of navigation on the Great Ouse at Kempston Mill, which is over 2½ miles upstream of the present head at Bedford Town Bridge. At one time this section up through Bedford's Queens Park and Honey Hills was regularly visited by punts and it is still passable with care by larger craft. This would obviously be a positive step towards the new link. Meanwhile Richard Wood, who was seconded to work full time at Government expense to negotiate with landowners and local councils to secure the line of the waterway, has had his secondment extended from April and possibly up to the end of this year.

**RIVER NENE:** Between November 2009 and February 2010 Billing (No 6), Lilford (25), Wansford (34) and Water Newton (35) locks will be drained down for inspection, whilst piling work will be taking place downstream of Orton Lock (37) between November 2009 and January 2010. Meanwhile new visitor moorings – over 240 yards in total – have been installed at Northampton (Midsummer Meadow), Wellingborough Embankment, Islip, Irthlingborough and Wansford meaning the Agency now has ten free visitor moorings on the river. Rubbish disposal, pump out and Elsan facilities are due to be installed at Wellingborough shortly.

Another development is that new paddle mechanisms are being installed along the river, replacing equipment close to the end of its useful life. Developed over the last couple of years with guidance from boat users these are easier and safer to operate and require far fewer turns. Elsewhere timber landing stages at Clifford Hill (5), Wollaston (12) and Woodford (20) have been replaced with green anti-slip fibreglass grating supported by steel brackets on timber piles with fender edges in recycled plastic; materials that should have a 50-year life and be virtually vandal proof.

In June Apex Construction Ltd., on behalf of the Environment Agency, started work on a £350,000 plan to improve the locks on the river so as to reduce the risk of accidents to canoeists whilst getting into or out of their craft. Platforms that have been designed in collaboration with the British Canoe Union are to be provided at 34 locks from Rush Mills (2) to Alwalton (36) after a successful trial at Northampton.

**FENS WATERWAYS LINK:** After the successful opening of the new lock at Boston the Environment Agency has taken the sensible decision that, for funding reasons, rather than look at the entire stretch from Donnington on the South Forty Foot through to Crowland on the river Welland, work should concentrate on extending the link southwards to the river Glen. After all the Glen with its existing link to the Welland, and the Welland itself up through Fulney Lock and Spalding to Crowland is already navigable albeit improvements could be carried out if the money was available. Smaller craft can already navigate south from Donnington and some could even reach the Black Sluice Pumping Station but it is not easy to wind there. As it is, to bypass the blockage created by the pumping station; to deal with the section with the lowered water level south from there; to negotiate the crossing of the Bourne Road at Guthram Gowt and to reconnect to the Glen are all important enough projects without having to look further afield.

**SALTER'S LODE:** Sadly a planned March cruise by members of the Peterborough branch of the IWA out through Salter's Lode and then in through the sluice into the Old Bedford River had to be called off. Although the Environment Agency had done their bit by dredging the relevant bit of the Old Bedford's channel and the tides were right, there were problems at Salter's Lode where the lock chamber was still drained down as the newly installed guillotine gate had jammed. Despite valiant efforts by the Middle Level Commissioners the problem could not be rectified in time. A second attempt was due to take place at the end of September. This time, whilst the problems at Salter's Lode had been resolved and the EA had dredged the entrance channel there was still insufficient depth to permit access into the Old Bedford,

**RIVER BLYTH:** Plans are being finalised by campaigners to save the flood defences on this estuary after the Environment Agency announced in September 2007 it could no longer justify the heavy cost of repairs in the face of rising sea levels. Instead it proposed a strategy of managed retreat that would see the sea walls around Walberswick, Southwold, Reydon and Blythburgh maintained for a maximum of 20 years but with some sections being allowed to breach much earlier.

The Blyth Estuary Group which has opposed the Agency's proposals since they were first put forward is now hoping to take on the task and rebuild the mud walls themselves, so that they will last at least a few more decades. The group has submitted plans to Suffolk Coastal District Council that would involve building an access track across the marsh to allow clay from the marshes to be brought in to bolster the defences. It is envisaged 13,500 lorry loads of material would be put in place over the next six years creating flood walls 12 yards wide and stretching for some five miles round the estuary.

Meanwhile a project to restore LEILA, a 40-foot gaff cutter and the fifth oldest racing yacht in the country, has received a major boost as the trustees have received a £50,000 National Heritage Lottery grant towards the estimated £130,000 cost to make her seaworthy again. She had been wasting away in Yarmouth harbour for 12 years where the fresh water had been rotting her frames, planks and stanchions but in September 2008 she was gingerly sailed round to Southwold harbour where the initial restoration work was begun. This involved five tons of cast-iron ballast having to be taken out of her so that she could be hauled out in the shallow harbour. Subsequently she was moved to Lowestoft where students from Yarmouth College will assist with fitting out the vessel. LEILA was built in 1892 at a London boatyard for a wealthy barrister, a member of the Royal Temple Yacht Club, but was subsequently owned by a Lowestoft family who handed her over to the trust for preservation.

**BRANDON:** The Brandon Landowners' Consortium has announced plans to build a long-awaited bypass around this traffic choked town. Also included are plans to open up access to the Little Ouse for walking, fishing and boating, to create new areas for sport and leisure activities and to open up a local wood to the community. A public exhibition was held at the Brandon Community Centre on 28 & 29 August for members of the public to inspect the plans, a public examination will take place in January and a planning application is likely to be submitted by the end of 2010. If granted, work might begin in 2013.

## WORKING PARTY NEWS

We are indebted to David Revill for the comprehensive reports he issues after each session – Ed.

**14 JUNE:** Briggate Mill Pond. Being a difficult time of year on the wild life side, mainly due to birds nesting, work had to be confined to clearing fallen trees and other debris to the west of the area already cleared on the pond bed. A large quantity of rubbish was found including fencing panels, electrical fittings, bottles (whisky, milk and wine), plastic containers and broken glass and disposed of in the proper manner. Good progress was made but there is still a large amount of fallen timber to be removed. Likewise the standing trees in the pond containment wall will present quite a problem as their roots grow under the road and could rip it apart if they were to fall. The wall is in poor condition and parts will need to be rebuilt, once the trees are removed. This, though, will be down to the Norfolk County Highways Authority. **16 AUGUST:** During a further session the aim was to clear as much as possible of the brash that had been stacked up and to continue clearance of the pond area. A huge amount of the brash was burned by the team, and the far bank of the pond is now much easier to see. A survey being conducted locally, however, so far has revealed that at present there is very little wildlife in the pond area.

**28 JUNE:** Honing Staithe Cut. Led by Chris & Mary Black a small party of six worked to tidy up the site by moving the grass around the cut, but the main effort was to improve the permissive path that leads away from the river, across the new footbridge and back to Weavers Way. With recent wet weather this had become very boggy in places. Starting from the village end earth was barrowed in to be laid on lengths of fallen timber to create a firm path. A considerable length was “earthed-up” and the timbers were laid down on the rest resulting in a considerable improvement for walkers. It must be recorded that our long-standing member and benefactor David Tomlinson attended the session, travelling over again from Stafford involving a round trip of some 400 miles – a truly noble effort.

**26 JULY:** Bacton Wood Lock (See also next page). The aim was to continue helping with the re-building work at the head of the lock, to clear out and survey the upstream paddle chambers and to continue tidying up the lock generally. One chamber was totally cleared and most of the other although some bricks remain – access not being easy. Their condition was found to be very good. With the use of grab machinery more silt and rubbish was removed from the lock chamber and this has since been completed. At the tail end of the lock weed and other growth was removed from the walls and both ends of the tail walls are now fully exposed, whilst a couple of trees have been removed improving the view from downstream.

**13 SEPTEMBER:** Honing Lock: The party of four volunteers tackled two main tasks – the backsoke and the pathway up to the lock, and the downstream canoe portage point, both areas being very overgrown as though no work had ever been undertaken there before. During the session there was a steady stream of walkers past the site and two canoes came up from Wayford Bridge.

We understand future sessions are scheduled for 11 & 25 October at Ebridge, 15 November Bacton Wood, 29 November Briggate and 13 December Honing Staithe.

## BACTON WOOD LOCK



These pictures, taken by Ivan Cane on 16 August, speak for themselves and show the dramatic progress at Bacton Wood where the head of the lock is being rebuilt, the paddle culverts are being re-created and the chamber, not so long ago filled with trees and rubbish, has been cleared out. This is a prelude to re-watering this section of the canal, so as to enable the nearby restored water mill to be driven by water power once again.

## BROADS NOTES & NEWS

**BROADS AUTHORITY BILL:** On 11 June the Broads Authority's Private Bill had its third reading in the House of Lords, completed its protracted passage through Parliament on 23 June and finally became an Act with the granting of the Royal Assent on 2 July 2009. It was needed to amend some of the provisions in the 1988 Norfolk & Suffolk Broads Act and its main provision relate to safety. At its meeting on 14 August the Authority decided that the "Appointed Day" for a number of the provisions in the Act should be fixed for 5 October which will enable those provisions to be fully implanted by April 2010.

From 1 April 2010 boats hired to the public on the Broads will need to meet a set of conditions and be licensed and from the same date there is a provision for most boats to have third party insurance, although small unpowered boats are exempt. In addition there are measures to amend the Boat Safety Scheme, that was introduced this April, and to keep its provisions in line with the national scheme. All this follows on from a tragic accident in July 2003 when a hire boat with ten people on board capsized and one person was drowned. The report into the disaster recommended the need to introduce the inspection and licensing for hire craft.

**TREE CLEARANCE:** A meeting was held at Horning on 15 May to canvass support and views on a plan to clear tree growth and scrub along some fringes of the rivers and broads. This would be designed to enhance the scenic value of the broads, to encourage biodiversity, reduce bank erosion and reduce wind shadow. Those attending then boarded the "Belle of the Broads" and cruised upstream to Salhouse to look at examples of clearance work carried out by the Horning Sailing Club and an area cleared by the Wildlife Trust opposite Hoveton Little Broad. Subsequently the Broads Authority has agreed to earmark £20,000 up to 31 March 2011 towards a Tree and Scrub Management Scheme, subject to match funding of at least the same amount coming from the Broads Society and others interested in the project.

**MILLS:** Several mills on the Broads are open to visitors. On the Yare Berney Arms Mill has recently been opened having been closed for six years; it is managed by English Heritage but can only be visited during a day trip on the Southern Belle. Further upstream Polkeys Mill was a working mill and Hardley Mill further upstream had regular opening times. The sails are being added to Hardley and when the restoration works are complete a visitor centre is to be opened. Thurne Dyke Mill was a working mill whilst apprentice millwrights are restoring Stubb Mill, between Hickling Broad and Horsey Mere, in partnership with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

**GREAT YARMOUTH:** Plans are being discussed for a spectacular new £80 million road bridge across the Yare from Southtown to South Denes so as to relieve traffic congestion. The plan has stirred up controversy as it would involve demolishing a series of houses and other property but it seems likely to receive outline approval as the alternative is a £180 million tunnel.

**SWING BRIDGES:** On 4 July a party of 50 passengers on board the "Southern Belle" that was on its way back from Cantley back to Yarmouth was stranded as the railway swing bridge at Reedham jammed shut. Whilst the boat eventually returned to Cantley for a coach to collect the passengers it was unable to return to Yarworth

until late on the following day after Network Rail engineers had fixed the problem. There have been a series of similar mishaps to the swing bridges at Somerleyton, Oulton Broad and Trowse and these are causing increasing concern. A Network Rail engineer explained the Norfolk swing bridges were complex, ageing and rare structures that had suffered for decades of neglect and underinvestment. Some £4.5 million was now being invested over the next few years to improve their reliability and lifespan.

**“BELL”:** The remains of this wherry, which was built at Reedham in 1897 and had laid sunk at Ranworth Broad for over half a century, were broken up on 11 June after a dredger had been called in by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust to clear a berth at its visitor centre for two new electrically powered boats to be used for educational trips. At one stage it had been hoped that the “*Bell*” could be lifted out in one piece as a prelude to her restoration, but it was found she was too badly decomposed to permit this. Nevertheless the incident prompted comparison with the wherry “*Maud*”, a sister craft to “*Bell*”, which had been rescued in the 1980s from the same location and subsequently restored.

**“HATHOR”:** Earlier in the year this wherry undertook what amounted to a “farewell” tour prior to undergoing a major refit. Built in 1905 for the daughters of the well-known Colmans mustard family, HATHOR is now the flagship of a fleet of boats preserved by the Wherry Yacht Charter charitable trust. In the last five years she has sailed over 2,200 miles and carried 20,000 people but she now needs major restoration work and is being laid up, ready to sail again in 2013 if a fund-raising target can be met. The immediate need is £100,000 to rebuild the base at Wroxham prior to starting work on HATHOR and her sister boats OLIVE and NORADA which are also in need of attention. This means that none of the fleet is likely to be available for charter sailing in 2010. NORADA has just undergone three years of extensive hull repairs and has now returned to the water but needs further internal work and work is needed on OLIVE, which sank at her moorings in 2005.

The trust has secured a £492,000 Heritage Lottery grant which covers a third of the total project costs of £1.5m and the rest has to come from matched funding – helped by sponsorship and public donations. Anyone able to help with sponsorship, fund-raising events or wanting to join the friends of the trust, should contact Jane Bryant, one of the trustees, on 01493 751773.

**CANOE NEWS:** As part of a drive to encourage the use of canoes on the Broads earlier this year Fairhaven Woodland and Water Garden at South Walsham opened an evening otter-spotting canoe trail. Canoe parties were taken out for two hours when they should see not only the otters but also birds such as grebe and coot and dragonflies. Normally it is only the gardeners who work at Fairhaven who are able to see the otters. The trips cost £20 each and initially operated on specified dates in June, July and August.

Another incentive for canoes was held on 16 May when ten Broads canoe-hire centres offered free hourly canoe trials on a first come, first served basis between 10am and 6pm. The centres involved were at Bungay, Burgh St. Peter, Geldeston, Hickling, Martham, Salhouse, Sutton Staithe, Thorpe St Andrew, Wayford, and Wroxham.

## THE DILHAM ISLANDS

In our last issue there was a brief mention of a work party held at these islands to assist the owner, Mr James Paterson, open them to the general public on one Sunday in May for the first time for many years. The islands were created in the 1840s by Shephard Thomas Taylor, a land owner who lived at Hill House in Dilham, and are situated just off the Honing Road and to the south of the canal, although they are well hidden from the road and few people knew of their existence.

The 1845 edition of "White's History, Gazetteer and Directory of Norfolk" described them *"as one of the prettiest pleasure grounds in the county which....has been formed at much labour and expense in what was previously a morass of 25 acres. Instead of a bog, this now delightful spot presents a fine lake with six ornamental islands, approached by swing bridges, and one of them having a handsome summer house."*

Kelly's Directory of 1883 refers to *"the pine trees and rhododendrons which flourish here"* and an advertisement for the sale of the islands by Henry Morse Taylor in 1907 described them as *"charming and unique, forming pleasant and beautiful pleasure grounds...one part containing an ornamental brick summer house with veranda, the whole covered with trees of all varieties, rhododendrons and other shrubs, and many pretty views."*

Over the years the islands, which are surrounded by man-made waterways, had a series of owners but during the Second World War it is rumoured that a stray bomb from a Canadian plane fell on the summer house which then rapidly fell into complete disrepair. After the war very little money was spent in maintaining the site and when Mr Paterson's family, who owned surrounding farm land, purchased the property in the 1950s parts were cleared and planted with poplars as part of a government scheme for subsequent use as matchsticks or in coal-mining.

Last year Mr Paterson approached the Dilham village hall committee about the possibility of using the site for one day to raise funds for the hall. This led to work parties from the village, and the session from our volunteers, clearing the walkways to enable members of the public to enjoy the property. For the event walkers were advised to wear wellingtons or strong walking boots as the paths were very boggy and signposts were erected to help them navigate the hour-long walk to ensure they saw the main attractions, such as the lake, and not to become lost in a maze of rhododendrons which cover much of the site.

If, as is hoped, the open day has been successful it could lead to further improvements. Mr Paterson said it has been on his agenda to try and do a degree of restoration – not back to the where it used to be but clearing out the canals and reinstating the bridges. This, though, would depend on financial help being forthcoming; in turn this will only follow if it can be demonstrated there is a significant amount of interest in the site.

And unless you know precisely where the entrance is, you can still drive up the Honing Road and past the site without even knowing it is there.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Sky High NORFOLK BROADS**, An Aerial Journey, by Mike Page, featuring 62 pages of aerial pictures. Published 2008 by Halsgrove, of Wellington, Somerset, price £4.99. ISBN 978 1 84114 701 7.

This small and inexpensive volume will delight all those who love the Broads for it features a series of aerial views of the system and covering most of the favourite places. All the main rivers are featured such as the Waveney up to Beccles, the Wensum to Norwich, the Chet to Loddon, the Ant to Wayford Bridge and the Bure and Thurne. And there are good shots of locations such as the Reedham Swing Bridge actually being swung, the nearby Reedham Ferry crossing the Yare and the wherry ALBION negotiating a small flotilla of cruisers.

**INLAND WATERWAYS OF GREAT BRITAIN**, by Jane Cumberlidge, Eighth Edition, 418 pages incorporating numerous maps and pictures. Published 2009 by Imray, Laurie Norie & Wilson Ltd., price £32.50. ISBN 978 1 84623 010 3

This is the latest edition of a work that first appeared in 1939 and has been regularly updated ever since, including three editions (1950, 1962, and 1972) by Teddy Edwards, the first secretary of our Association. It is a must for anyone with a serious interest in inland waterways and contains an absolute mine of information.

With a succession of changes to the waterways, and especially as a result of restoration work, it is virtually impossible to keep a book like this up to date, bearing publication lead times. This may explain why East Anglia's new navigation – The South Forty Foot River – still does not appear as a separate entry but only as a part of the Fens Waterways Link and with no detail about the route, albeit this information has been available in our own pages and elsewhere for several years now.

On the North Walsham and Dilham Canal the author has got confused about the start of Dilham Dike, the freehold of which was formerly owned by the Association. The dike, also known as Tyler's Cut, is a half-mile long channel running off the Smallburgh River, which in turn is a tributary of the river Ant, and it never had any connection with the NW&DC, which is a canalisation of the Ant. The map of this area has also been wrongly drawn.

These may be minor quibbles and the fact remains that the book contains detailed distance tables for all the main navigations in our area (and throughout England, Scotland and Wales for that matter) together with the governing dimensions of locks and the headroom of bridge. For the Broads the list of staites and public moorings has been greatly expanded reflecting the improvements that have taken place since the last edition of the book was published in 1998. An innovation is that the boat hirers on the Broads are now listed out matching the other navigations although there are only two recorded for the Great Ouse, and one each for the Nene, the Middle Level and the Chelmer & Blackwater.

*"The Easterling" is published three times a year - in February, June and October. Closing date for copy for the February 2010 issue is Sunday 31 January and should be sent direct to the Editor at the address on the front page.*