

**THE EASTERLING**  
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**IVAN CANE**

We very much regret to report that our knowledgeable and very hard working Secretary Ivan Cane has had to stand down from the role as secretary due to personal reasons.

Ivan has been a member of the Association since August 1993 and he was appointed as a Director on 8 May 1999. He then went on to be elected as Secretary on 2 October 2001 taking the place of Neil Edwards who had resigned from the role in the previous April. Since then Ivan has served with distinction and the Association will be very much the poorer without his very active involvement.

Ivan played a crucial role in the founding of the North Walsham & Dilham Canal Trust, with which he remains actively involved, and with the working parties on the canal. He has also been a very long standing of the Inland Waterways Association and of the River Stour Trust amongst others and has a particular interest in all the East Anglia waterways.

More recently his acquisition of the Wilderness trail boat "*Navi*" has seen him avidly exploring the local waterways and venturing much further afield such as a trip this summer on the restored Royal Canal in Ireland. *Navi*, which was based at Whittington on the river Wissey, has ventured into many locations where few other boats care to go such as the Witham Navigable Drains and members may recall the report of a trip in November 2007 up Methwold Lode, making *Navi* what was almost certainly the only boat to use this particular waterway for many years – a real pioneering exploration. Ivan has contributed two accounts of his trips in this issue.

## RIVER GIPPING

For many years the Ipswich Branch of the Inland Waterways Association has been campaigning for the restoration of the river Gipping from Stowmarket down through Needham Market and Bramford to Ipswich and the sea. In 2008 the branch was responsible for setting up the River Gipping Trust which held its third Annual General Meeting in Needham Market in May 2011.

To this end the branch and the Trust have recently been involved in helping produce and publish two leaflets describing riverside walks – the first from Ipswich to Needham Market and the second carrying on to Stowmarket. The walks have been selected by Roger Wolfe, a volunteer with the Ramblers' Association and are published by the Trust under the name of MARPA (Mid-Anglia Rail Passengers' Association) Station to Station walks.

The Walk 1 leaflet features a fine picture of Baylham Mill on the front; the walk starts from Ipswich railway station and gives a choice of two routes to Sproughton – the first an inland route via Ipswich's Chantry Park and eventually joining the second route that uses the way-marked Gipping Valley River Path and mainly follows the towpath past Handford Road and Chantry locks to Sproughton, from which point the walks combine and follow the towpath up to Needham Market railway station. In all a course of some 11½ miles taking an estimated six hours but this time excludes any detours and stops for refreshments at the several pubs and shops in the villages along the way.

The Walk 2 leaflet features a picture of Badley Church on the front; again the walk follows the towpath northwards to finish to Stowmarket railway station, a distance of 4½ miles estimated to take 2½ hours. However the final section passes through the industrialised outskirts of Stowmarket and an attractive detour is suggested leaving the river just before Badley Mill Lock and striking west to reach Badley Church before turning north through Badley, Combs and Combs Ford to reach Stowmarket a total distance of 6½ miles taking 3 hours, once again excluding refreshments and visits. It is hoped both leaflets will attract walkers to the route and, in so doing, help introduce more people to this relatively unknown waterway. One minor criticism of both maps is that the locks are depicted as pointing downstream whereas all the locks fall from Stowmarket to the sea.

And in the latest issue of the "*River Gipping Trust News*" there is a useful summary of the situation regarding the on-going work to restore the river; work not helped by the fact that the former rights of navigation have been lost and may require an Act of Parliament to re-instate. A major challenge is that little has been done to maintain the depth of the channel and the river has reverted to a semi-natural state in many areas meaning the original design depth of one metre will need to be achieved by dredging and bank work. Most bridges have retained navigational headroom although at Norwich Road, Ipswich, headroom is limited to just under a metre which is just sufficient to allow cruising. Meanwhile the situation of the locks is: -

Stowupland Lock No 1: Not navigable and incorporates flood defence gates meaning it will require a complete rebuild.

Badley Wood Lock No 2: Historic turf-sided construction with alterations. It could technically be re-built on historic lines.

Hawks Mill Lock No 3, Needham Market: Occupied by flood defence works. The structure is substantially intact and could be converted to use with guillotine gates although this would be costly.

Bosmere Lock No 4: The chamber has been rebuilt by the Trust and is in good condition but it requires lock gates and some minor maintenance work.

Creting Lock No 5: Again the chamber has been rebuilt by the Trust and is in good condition but it requires lock gates.

Pipps Ford Lock No 6: The chamber was rebuilt by the National Rivers Authority several years ago but it requires lock gates.

Baylham Lock No 7: Chamber re-building work by the Trust is nearing completion but it needs lock gates.

Sharmford Lock No 8: The chamber was re-built by the National Rivers Authority but alterations will be needed to the recesses before gates can be fitted.

Great Blakenham Lock No 9: Located in a private garden but appears to be sound, just needing gates to be fitted.

Claydon Lock No 10: The original lock was lost under the A.14 main road when the river was diverted. An entirely new lock will need to be constructed.

Paper Mill Lock No 11: Fitted with flood control sluices.

Bramford Lock No 12: Chamber sound but it required lock gates.

Sproughton Lock No 13: Overgrown with trees and shrubs but the chamber seems to be alright. A flood control gate has been fitted.

Chantry Lock No 14: A shallow lock; now a flood control structure.

Handford Sea Lock No 15: Now occupied by substantial flood control works.

The scope of the works required to return the full length of the river to navigation is very considerable and progress may be possible only by dealing with restricted lengths at a time and attracting funding through any available grants, local authority support and the like. In the short term the repair at Baylham Lock is to be completed, a survey is to be carried out at Pipps Ford Lock to determine what repairs may be necessary, and to consider footpath clearance and repair at Pipps Ford and repair alongside the railway line at Baylham.

### **COPIES OF "THE EASTERLING"**

Over the years those who retain their copies of "*The Easterling*" will know it has built up into quite a size. From Volume 6, No 1 when Alan Faulkner I took over as Editor, it had reached Volume 8, No 20 with our last issue. This one starts a new volume.

Through the good offices of our member David Mercer, the sixty numbers have been scanned onto a disc taking up just a small fraction of the space of the printed version. David has kindly said he will produce discs for anyone interested. To this end if anyone would like a disc of these issues will they please let the editor know and he will order them from David – it is only right that there will be a charge and we are suggesting a minimum donation to EAWA of £5. In time it may be possible to treat the earlier issues in the same way, but they will need to be unearthed – the Editor donated many early copies to Bedford County Record office and it appears they are still there, although whether they could be scanned remains to be seen.

## KYME EAU AND BILLINGHAY SKIRTH

By Ivan Cane

The weekend previous to the IWA's Witham Navigable Drains cruise, our members Ivan Cane and Darren Cooke slipped their Wilderness Beaver "NAVI" in at Chapel Hill Marina on the Witham, in order to cruise the Kyme Eau and Billingham Skirth, two offshoots of the lower River Witham. The aim for the Saturday was to cruise up to Cobbler's Lock, then return to South Kyme for the evening and take advantage of the strongly recommended pub meal, leaving Sunday to explore Billingham Skirth and look at the work of the Billingham Skirth Regeneration Group.

Having launched, we headed upstream (Kyme Eau being the lower Sleas Navigation), passed through the flood gates and immediately hit weed. Hoping that this would lessen after the next bend, we soldiered on. But the engine was struggling, despite



regular "reversing", so the prop had to be regularly lifted to be cleared. Unfortunately, the situation did not improve around the next bend, a very narrow, clearer, channel, in which it was almost impossible to remain, due to the Fen winds. When stopping for a regular de-weed, we found ourselves blown back into the weed, and on one occasion turned 180 degrees. This meant that, as soon as we started again, we were weeded up. After half an hour, less than half a mile had been covered, and, with the cooling water inlet also blocked, we moored and walked upstream to see if the situation improved.

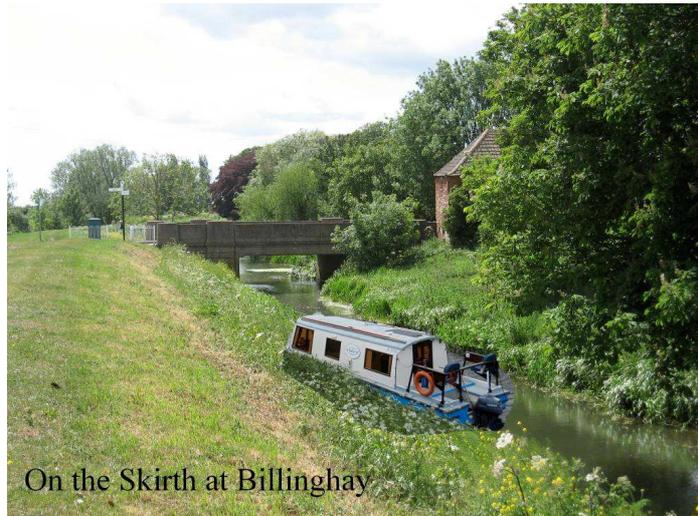
Unfortunately, it didn't – weed covered the Eau almost to the next lock – a distance of about another mile. It was decided to abort, and we returned to Chapel Hill. Yet, only a couple of weeks previously, several narrow boats had navigated up to South Kyme to join the village festival.

Deprived of a "pub meal", we ventured onto the River Witham, upstream, and moored at Tattershall Bridge, enquiring at the bankside pub as to whether or not meals were available, we were told "only until 5.00, as I have to get my husband's meal then". So, we re-embarked and travelled a further hour upstream to Kirstead Bridge. There were two hostelryes here, and we chose the King's Arms on the west bank. There, we were made very welcome, had a good meal, then joined in with the quiz night and card bingo – sadly not winning anything!

The next morning continued to be extremely windy. First, we explored the nearby Woodhall Spa, which also happened to have their Country Show on that day. As well as classic tractors, farm machinery, livestock, food outlets, arena displays and demonstrations, there was also a stand for the Witham Internal Drainage Boards. Here, I discussed the weed problems we had encountered on Kyme Eau (an Environment Agency waterway) and they described the different approach that they took to weed, so as to enable navigation to continue on their waterways. Returning

to our moorings, we found a canoeist training session in full flow, the club having had to relocate from the Sleaford Navigation, due to the excessive weed growth at Sleaford.

We had hoped to try the Timberland Delph, but a combination of the high winds and almost closed gates at the entrance dissuaded us. However, the entrance to Billingham Skirth was open wide, and we fought against the wind to enter the navigation, which turned out to be wide, deep and weed free. After the pumping station the waterway became narrower, but continued deep and clear up to the village. Here, the Billingham Skirth Restoration Group was holding a work party under the leadership of its chairman Reg Johnson. Looking around the village, one can see why it could become an ideal “stopping off” point to refuel boat and body for Witham boaters. I wish them well with their plans.



We were able to wind (just) and returned to Chapel Hill, to moor “NAVI” ready for her Witham Navigable Drains cruise a week later.

I contacted the Environment Agency regarding the state of Kyme Eau, where, over the last year, the Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership, the Environment Agency, the Sleaford Navigation Trust and South Kyme have all encouraged boaters to South Kyme with improvements to lock gearing and through other work, only to have those boaters discouraged by the lack of weed clearance! The official line was that weed clearance can only occur once a year, usually towards the end of July – as part of flood prevention work, there are no funds for other clearances unless the “navigation authority – the Sleaford Navigation Trust” (sic) - wishes to fund such work. This, to me, does cause concern for the 2012 South Kyme Festival, which is being held in June rather than in early May. They may find that few boats will be able to navigate if the weed growth continues as this year, and no cutting takes place before their event, unless financed.

## **THE WITHAM NAVIGABLE DRAINS**

By Ivan Cane

My wife Terry and I returned to Chapel Hill the following weekend to join the late Spring Bank Holiday Lincolnshire IWA Cruise on the Witham Navigable Drains. The wind was still as strong as the previous week, which made coming alongside the six boats already moored outside Anton’s Gowt Lock rather tricky. However, we moored alongside EAWA member David Tomlinson’s narrow boat. In fact, as his narrow boat and our beaver tended to match the length of most other boats in the flotilla, we found that we were usually moored together (also, the organisers were wary of squeezing our glass fibre hull, so they looked after us well).



On the Saturday, we locked down into the Frith Bank Drain, before turning left towards Maud Foster. A team was operating Cowbridge Lock, which, given that there are no landing stages as such, made it easier for the boats locking through. Cowbridge Lock has a guillotine top gate, and stiff bottom gates with no beams – usually opened by standing on the chain that attaches the end of the gate with the wall, and closed by pushing with a pole. The journey down Maud Foster was pleasant – with many waves

exchanged with people passing along the roads, or in the houses on either bank. We cruised right down to the sluice – the final two bridges, although wide, are very low and tricky in the blustery conditions. Returning to the Packet Boat steps for mooring, I had always imagined these as wide as at Worsley – but, in fact, they are a narrow set of steps set in the wall, resulting in seven boats being breasted up, presenting an interesting walk across sterns to get to the bank. What is surprising is that there are two other sets of steps on the west wall that could be used as moorings, but both are closed. The moorings are in the town centre so we visited the market, Boston Stump, and had afternoon tea in the Maud Foster Windmill.



Leaving Boston the flotilla then headed north back towards Cowbridge before entering the Stonebridge Drain to Northlands. Here we wended in the entrance to East Fen Catchwater. Two boats had found the last, slightly askew bridge, troublesome, one breaking its cratch and another seriously damaging its tiller, which is the highest point on their boat. A pleasant overnight stop moored at the fishing pontoons – and most of the population (ten?) turned out to see the “spectacle of boats on the Drain”.

The blustery weather continued on Sunday. Returning to Cowbridge, David Tomlinson and I investigated East Fen Lock, that once linked down to Cowbridge Drain, which would add another 25 miles of navigable waterways around Hobhole Drain to the system. The lock is infilled, and, as I found to my cost, in direct line for



golfers teeing off. However, the drains below looked very navigable and inviting, and perhaps one day the Witham Fourth Internal Drainage Board might be able to restore the lock to navigation.

Locking back through Cowbridge, we continued straight up the West Fen Drain, the wind on one occasion forcing us broadside into the bank. At Frithville, Steve Hayes, David Tomlinson and "NAVI" continued north up Medlam Drain, with its classic red brick bridges (three of them in five miles). As we progressed up the drain, with its remarkable variety of wildflowers on its banks, it narrowed, and we hit weed along the final couple of hundred yards to the junction with the New Bolingbroke Drain, where the boats wined and returned. Meanwhile, the other boats had continued up West Fen Drain, so would be tackling a circular route back to Anton's Gowt via the Newham Drain. Two others even ventured towards New York. Meanwhile, we returned to



Anton's Gowt, where we rejoined the flotilla for the Sunday evening.

The return up the Witham to Chapel Hill on the Monday morning was into driving rain. Once moored, we slipped out and trailed "NAVI" back to its home mooring on the Wissey.

Our thanks to the Lincolnshire Branch of the IWA, who organised the cruise, and who gave us the opportunity to "tick off" another area of, to us, unexpected waterways.

#### **EDITOR'S NOTE:**

The approximate distances involved on this little-known system were:

Frith Bank Drain: Anton's Gowt to the West Fen Drain Cowbridge Lock 2.06 miles  
 Maud Foster Drain: Cowbridge Lock south to Boston 2.63 miles  
 Stonebridge Drain: Cowbridge Lock north to East Fen Catchment Drain 4.31 miles  
 West Fen Drain: Cowbridge Lock north to Frithville 2.00 miles  
 Medlam Drain: Frithville north to the New Bolingbroke Drain 6.47 miles  
 West Fen Drain: Frithville westwards to the Newham Drain 2.85 miles  
 West Fen Drain: Newham Drain north east to Hough Bridge 2.56 miles  
 Newham Drain: South east to Anton's Gowt 3.35 miles

The distances shown are for a single journey only. In Ivan's account several of the sections shown would have been covered twice – on the outgoing and then on the return journey.

A plan of the drains was produced several years ago by the Lincolnshire Branch of the Inland Waterways Association and this has been reproduced on page 16 of this issue. An important issue has always been the headroom under the various bridges and many of these are marked on the plan.

## HERE AND THERE

**THE BLACK PRINCE LIGHTER:** In 1972 a group of volunteers led by John Wilson attempted to raise "*Black Prince*", a derelict Fenland lighter that had been sunk in the Roswell Pits at Ely in the 1920s. The work involved building a mud and timber coffer dam around the hull and pumping out the water. Initial attempts failed but a small group of dedicated folk persevered and in 1974 succeeded in raising the hull, which was found to be in remarkably good condition. The boat was then floated up to the Museum of Technology in Cambridge and lifted out of the water at Cheddars Lane Pumping Station in the hope that it could be restored. Detailed measurements and drawings were made of the vessel for posterity. Left to dry out in the open on chocks it languished there for some 5 to 6 years by which time parts had become rotten, leading to suggestions that it should be burnt.

Instead it was cut into three sections and transported by lorry to the Norfolk Punch at Upwell where a shipwright hoped to be able to restore the parts and stick them back together again. This did not happen but one section was moved to the Collectors World Museum at Downham Market. In December last year this part was acquired at an auction and has been moved to a workshop near Cambridge for restoration as far as possible. It will then be displayed at Stretham Engine House near Ely on the Old West River as a tribute to the original craftsmen who built the vessel that was once so numerous in the Fenlands.

It is believed *Black Prince* was built around 1860 or earlier and she was probably the only surviving lighter that could have been restored. John Wilson, who was the co-author with Alan Faulkner of the "*Fenland Barge Traffic*" booklet, has worked long and hard to try and get a lighter restored. There is a picture of him in the booklet examining another sunken lighter on Burwell Lode.

**ABBERTON RESERVOIR:** Work began in March 2010 on the Essex & Suffolk Water's £150 million scheme to enlarge the capacity of this reservoir that lies a few miles south of Colchester by 60% so as to provide more water for the south of Essex. The water will be obtained from the river Stour at Wormingford and will be pumped via a new 10-mile pipe line across country to the reservoir where the level will be raised by some 10 feet raising its capacity from 5,700m gallons to 8,800m gallons. In turn the river Stour will be fed by an upgraded "Ely Ouse - Essex Water Transfer Scheme" which already draws water from the river Great Ouse just upstream of Denver Sluice. The transfer scheme was authorised by an Act of Parliament in 1968; under it water from the Ouse passes through a series of open channels, tunnels, natural rivers and pipelines to feed into the headwaters of the Stour, the Colne and the Blackwater rivers and thus supplies Ardleigh, Abberton and Hanningfield reservoirs.

As such the original scheme has led to major problems at Denver with silting as there is not enough water remaining in the Ouse to flush the mud away and this increased abstraction can only aggravate an already serious problem.

One problem facing the contractors laying the 4-foot diameter pipeline across country to Abberton was how to pass under the main railway line and the busy A.12 main road without causing any disruption. To overcome this, a specialist tunnelling

machine was brought in and lowered down a 65-foot deep well close to the two routes. The machine was similar to those used to build the Channel Tunnel and it went on to excavate a 5-foot wide tunnel to link up with a similar well on the far side. The tunnel was completed on 12 August. Meanwhile work to raise the banks of the reservoir, to divert the B1026 public road and to build the new pumping station at Wормingford has started and is due to be completed in 2013 ready for the summer of 2014.

**LOGS FROM LINCOLN:** The Wooden Canal Boat Society, which has established a heritage boatyard at Stalybridge on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal, is about to commence the restoration "*Hazel*" that was built in 1914 and is the last surviving example of a Runcorn wooden header narrow boat on the waterways. A prelude was to obtain the timber needed for the restoration and two oak logs were acquired from Somerscales sawmill at Keelby in Lincolnshire. Rather than have the logs delivered by road, two narrow boats – the motor "*Southam*" built in 1936 and motorised in 1965 and the butty "*Lilith*" built in 1901 – travelled via Marple, Macclesfield, Harecastle, Stoke-on-Trent, Nottingham and down the Trent to Torksey, arriving in Lincoln five days later. On 13 June the logs, which were up to 35-foot long, were loaded from a Somerscales lorry and the pair set off on the return journey arriving back at Ashton on 19 June. Two days later the pair travelled the short distance up the Huddersfield Narrow Canal to the boatyard where the timber was unloaded.

**SLUDGE BARGE TRIAL:** Early in September a trial took place to see if it would be feasible to transport sewage sludge from Ely downriver to Anglian Water's Sewage Treatment works at Clenchwarton near King's Lynn instead of transporting it by road. Two tugs – one ahead and one astern – together with a large pontoon were used in the experiment which by all accounts was reasonably successful. If adopted Anglian Water would plan to use two 200-ton barges, each trip saving 16 lorry movements. And this could just be the beginning with similar barges handling sludge from Boston on the Witham and from Wisbech on the Nene across the Wash to King's Lynn. On the Great Ouse a very useful by-product would be helping to clear silt from the tidal river below Denver Sluice. River users are now being consulted about the plans.

**RIVER CAM WORKS:** On 4 July contractors Drake Towage of Wisbech started work at Clayhithe to refurbish the river frontage and the slipway there. Then early in September the contractors moved to Baitsbite to remove the existing landing stage and replace it with a new two-level structure able to accommodate both motor cruisers and small craft. Both contracts involved the use of a pile-driver and steel piles and a temporary floating landing stage was installed at Baitsbite so that boaters could continue to use the lock.

Meanwhile over 800 yards of river bank below Baits Bite Lock have been restored by the Environment Agency and the Conservators of the River Cam using coir rolls pre-planted with native plants. Erosion had resulted in a steep muddy edge to the river which is unattractive to boaters and little benefit to wildlife. The Conservators have used this method successfully on other stretches of the river and the rolls will help create a more diverse habitat and encourage a healthy river system.

**RIVER LARK:** A three-year project to dredge the river from Judes Ferry down to its influence with the Great Ouse was completed earlier this year being carried out by the Environment Agency's Operation delivery team based at Ely and completed by contractors using floating machinery.

**RIVER NAR:** This 15-mile river from Litcham to King's Lynn has become a haven for wildlife and has been ranked by the Environment Agency as one of the most improved in Britain. Sections straightened and over-engineered as part of the original navigation works have been improved by re-instating natural features such as riffles, pools and meanders. Now nearly 80 river plants have made their home along the river which also supports twelve different species of dragonfly, together with kingfishers, grey wagtails, reed warblers and water vole. The work has been carried out by the River Nar Restoration Strategy involving the Norfolk Rivers Internal Drainage Board, the Environment Agency, Natural England and local landowners and angling clubs.

**OUSE AQUEDUCT, WOLVERTON:** During the summer Wolverton and Greenleys Town Council announced that the project to restore the iron aqueduct on the Grand Union Canal over the Great Ouse at Wolverton had won a £60,000 award after the public vote in the Big Lottery Fund's "The People's Millions 2011". The structure is to be cleaned and repainted in its original colours, vegetation is to be cleared to make the structure more visible and information boards are to be replaced.

**BEDFORD & MILTON KEYNES WATERWAYS TRUST:** The Trust's application for a grant for the proposed trip boat from the Jubilee Millions did not succeed, but despite this the fund has already reached £36,841 and is growing every day. Meanwhile to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the very first meeting to discuss a new waterway to link the Great Ouse and the Grand Junction Canal a dinner is being organised to take place in the evening on 4 November 2011 at the Barns Hotel on the Cardington Road in Bedford. The Barns was the birthplace of Samuel Whitbread who led a petition for the proposed new waterway in 1811.

**BEDFORD WATERSPACE STUDY:** On Friday 30 September our Council Member John Mayhead attended the launch of this study by Bedford Borough Council and the Environment Agency. It covers the Great Ouse from Bromham Old Bridge for just over 5 miles down to Bedford Town Bridge and the 6-mile stretch from the bridge downstream to just below Willington Lock. Prepared by Richard Glen Associates, the study takes a detailed look at the river and its surrounds and comes out with a long list of suggested improvements to act as a catalyst for regeneration, to increase the facilities for boaters, canoeists, walkers and cyclists and for much else besides. A more detailed report will appear in our next issue.

**ST. IVES LOCK:** Advance notice from the Environment Agency indicates major construction works are planned for the lock necessitating its closure from 1 November 2012 to 29 February 2012.

**NORTHAMPTON:** On 17 April IWA Northampton Branch members carried out their annual clean-up of the Westbridge Arm of the river Nene and of the main river down to the Town Lock in Becket's Park. This was a prelude to the May Day Bank Holiday weekend (20 April – 2 May) when the branch's regular annual gathering of boats this

year celebrated the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Nene navigation. During the event a number of boats took up the Westbridge Arm challenge and, for the first time for several years, one boat succeeded in reaching West Bridge. Meanwhile the Northampton Borough Council has started work on improving the riverside walk that runs through Becket's Park linking Midsummer Meadow with the new marina. Paths are being upgraded and lighting and seating are being installed.

**NORTHAMPTON MARINA:** The flagship new marina opened on schedule in the spring and offers 82 moorings, six of which are residential with the remaining berths available for short-term visitors and pleasure craft requiring long-term leases. The £2,425,845 funding for the marina came from the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation £1,831,000, Northamptonshire County Council £234,845, the Environment Agency £300,000, Northampton Borough Council £47,000 and St. John Ambulance £3,000.

**BOSTON FOOTBRIDGE:** Lincolnshire County Council is undertaking a public consultation into the design for a replacement footbridge over the Witham at St. Botolphs. The present bridge does not comply with modern standards and suffers from structural defects. It is a busy route from the bus station and car park area to the Market Place and also provides a unique view of Boston Stump. It is expected the replacement bridge will be in place by the end of 2013.

**RIVER SLEA:** On May Day over 20 boats from a wide area gathered at South Kyme for what has become an annual event that is enthusiastically supported by the local parish council and by the Sleaford Navigation Trust. Entertainments are laid on and this year permission had been obtained for the historic Kyme tower and grounds to be opened. A medieval re-enactment of the "Knights of Skirbeck" included demonstrations of hand-combat, jousting and ancient crafts. Sadly all is not well as the Environment Agency's control of water levels and weed growth has caused great concerns and is deterring boaters from leaving the Witham and venturing onto Slea. Earlier in the year SNT work parties removed large overhanging branches and tidied up vegetation in and around the Bottom Lock Island whilst a large willow tree obstructing the navigation in South Kyme was removed.

**BILLINGHAY SKIRTH:** Following work on improving access for walkers alongside the mile-long stretch of the skirth between the villages of Billingham and North Kyme the next priority is to create access to the water with a canoe launch area. Through Reg Johnson, the Chairman of the Billingham Skirth Restoration Society, planning and land drainage consents are now being sought so that once funding becomes available the work can start – the estimated cost is £20,000. The Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership is involved here and believes the cost could be reduced by using Nicospan to strengthen the river bank; this is a pre-fabricated double-weave revetment fabric that is heat-sealed to form a series of open pockets for posts and is particularly useful when bank access is limited. Fund raising has started and it is possible work could start this winter. (*See also Ivan Cane's article*)

**FOSSDYKE:** On 26 July the Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership celebrated the opening of the new dual purpose cycle and footpath beside the Fosdyke, linking Saxilby to Lincoln. The path has been funded jointly by Lincolnshire County Council, the East Midlands Development Agency and Beal Homes.

## **BROADS NOTES AND NEWS**

**BROADS AUTHORITY:** Following a review of national park authorities the government has decided that the Broads Authority will retain its present membership and appointment procedures at least for the time being. Two authorities – the New Forest and the Peak District – will be trialling a system of direct elections from 2013 and if these are successful other parks could begin electing people to their boards from 2017.

On the Broads the question of direct elections was first looked at in 2008 and whilst the idea was supported in principle there were problems about the boundaries that would determine the electorate. There were some 6,370 people living in the Broads of whom some 5,600 are adults and eligible to vote. But the tight definition of the boundaries would have excluded important areas such as Acle, Beccles, Bungay, Hoveton and Wroxham – areas currently represented on the authority by members from six district councils and two county councils.

On Thursday 8 September Martin Broom chaired his last meeting of the Navigation Committee after over two decades in the office. Mr Broom, who was head of Broom Boats of Brundall for over 50 years until he sold the business last year, went on attend his last meeting of the full authority on 23 September after 30 years of service. He had also served on the authority's planning committee since it was formed in 1983 and prior to that he was a Great Yarmouth Port and Haven Commissioner. He remains a committee member of the Norfolk & Suffolk Boating Association and is commodore of the River Cruiser Class.

**DREDGING:** Under a project called PRISMA (Promoting Integrated Sediment Management) the Broads Authority has been awarded around £800,000 from the European Regional Development Fund to develop innovative dredging solutions for the waterways. Working with partners from Holland, Belgium and France dredging techniques will be compared with emphasis on how sediment can be reduced and sustainably removed. On the Broads the key projects are the extension of the island creation scheme at Duck Broad, rebuilding a bank at Salhouse Broad and building a new mud wherry.

It is hoped work at Duck Broad can resume in the winter as a trial of using gabion baskets and geotextile bags has been very successful with the dredged material coming from Heigham Sound leading into Hickling Broad. On the Bure the channel will be dredged between Salhouse and Wroxham Broad with the sediment being used to reinstate a bank lost to erosion at the entrance to Salhouse Broad. Finally the mud wherries used to carry sediment to disposal points were inherited from May Gurney and are rather old. The new funding will help pay for a new vessel, the first of its type on the Broads for many years.

**B.E.S.L:** Broadland Environmental Services Limited is now halfway through a 20-year PFI £117.6m public/private tidal river flood defence contract from the Environment Agency. Comprising contractor BAM Nuttall and consultant Halcrow it is developing a strategy of flood defence compartments with the restoration and improvement of existing flood defences along the tidal reaches of the Waveney, Yare, Bure and Thurne. Existing flood banks are being strengthened, new banks

set back from the previous defences are being installed and life-expired erosion protection is being uninstalled.

In many cases where sheet steel piles needed to be removed it was decided to set back the river line by creating new flood banks, sometimes as much as 50 yards from the original line with material for the new bank being created by providing a soke dyke behind. The area between the two banks was then flooded and left for reed to grow for one or two years, and if all is then in order the old bank can be dismantled and the steel piles removed. To date nearly 9 miles of piles have been removed, with a further 9 miles still to go, and 5 miles of new banks have been created. It is envisaged that all the major works will be completed in 2013 when the remaining eight years of the contract will be spent on maintaining the works. There was a detailed report in the "*New Civil Engineer*" journal of 26 May 2011.

**NORFOLK BROADS DIRECT:** This company, based at Wroxham, is the first in the country to be awarded a new green mark accreditation for eco-friendly boats. The award was made on 8 June during Green Tourism Week and involved Broads Tourism, the Broads Authority and the Green Tourism Business Scheme. In August last year the company led a green revolution with the launch of its "*Fair Princess*", the first Broads hire boat powered by a hybrid diesel/electric engine. The award is based on 25 criteria specially developed for boats and covering eco-friendly design, energy efficiency, waste management and providing green information for hirers.

**WATER BUS PROPOSALS:** A new river bus service has been proposed to allow developers to bypass a site north of the Wensum in Norwich known as the Utilities where a new office complex is proposed but is delayed by lack of money. The service would bring people into the city from regeneration areas in Trowse where hundreds of new homes are being planned. The boats would operate from a pontoon landing stage near the Norwich City football ground into the city and would be free to the public. Planned to operate every day from 6am to midnight it is thought the service would operate for about three years.

**THE WHERRYMAN'S WAY:** This five part documentary was broadcast by Future Radio (107.8fm) between Monday 5<sup>th</sup> and Friday 9<sup>th</sup> September at 12 noon. It explored the 35-mile walk from Norwich to Great Yarmouth and passing through Whitlingham, Surlingham, Rockland, Loddon, Reedham and Berney Arms on the way. Dozens of individuals have contributed to the programme including Steve Silk, the author of the popular Wherryman's Way book, and Mark Wells who inspired the walk in 2005. The series is now available on Future Radio's website ([futeradio.co.uk/wherryman](http://futeradio.co.uk/wherryman)). Meanwhile the Wherryman's Way book, which has 144 pages, with 32 black & white and 113 colour pictures, and 13 maps, remains in print via Halsgrove Publishing – ISBN 978-1-84114-852-6 at £14.99.

**RAILWAY SWING BRIDGES:** Controversy remains over the swing bridges at Reedham and Somerleyton in that Network Rail is planning repair works during the October school half term holiday. Between 22 and 31 October opening times are likely to be severely restricted, yet this is the last major boating opportunity of the season for larger private cruisers and yachts with fixed masts and coincides with high spring tides. Negotiations are taking place to try and minimise the disruption by having specific windows when larger boats will be able to pass. At Somerleyton the

track on the bridge is being replaced with repairs to some of the steel work. At Reedham repairs are to be carried out to the steel work.

**BOOMING BITTERNS:** By 1997 not a single bittern had been sighted at Hickling for 20 years, but following work to create a new network of dykes and open water on the once dry Hundred Acre reedbed Honing is now home to three of country's 80 recorded male bitterns. Further work is planned to encourage more of them to nest and to encourage other species such as cranes where there are currently fewer than ten pairs on the Broads.

**BROADS SAFETY:** Whereas people spend hours learning to drive a car, when they come to the Broads they might be given just 15 to 20 minutes of instruction. To help remedy this situation the Broads Authority has rangers who patrol the waters offering help and advice mainly to boat hirers. Two such are Colin Hart and Steve Williams with their Breydon launch "The Wensum". In August a reporter from the "*Eastern Daily Press*" went with them out on the boat to see for himself the pair in action. A high spring tide meant that headroom under the old Vauxhall Bridge at Great Yarmouth that gives access to Breydon Water was too low for many boats but many hirers seemed totally unaware of the danger. There can be 5ft to 6ft waves on Breydon and the channel is marked by a series of markers, although until replaced by the Yarmouth Port Company recently several had been missing. Another source of concern is the wearing of life jackets which some hirers deem as unnecessary, despite the fact there had already been four deaths by drowning this year.

**GELDESTON LOCK:** During the summer and at a ceremony outside the Geldeston Locks Inn a visitor information board was unveiled detailing the history of the lock. This followed a joint initiative by the Norfolk & Suffolk Broads Charitable Trust and the Broads Authority. Geldeston is the best preserved of the three locks that enabled wherries to trade up to Bungay until 1934 when the navigation was closed.

## NORTH WALSHAM AND DILHAM CANAL

**THE CANAL TRUST:** The North Walsham and Dilham Canal Trust held its third Annual General Meeting at Dilham Village Hall on 1 September. Roy Medcalf has taken over as the new Chairman whilst Roger Hopkinson, the founder Chairman, has been promoted to become the Trust's first Honorary Vice President. Meanwhile Sue Bolton has taken over from Roy Haynes as the Trust's Membership Secretary.

**TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO:** To commemorate 14 September 1811 when 40 businessmen met at the King's Arms public house in North Walsham to agree plans for the canal, the *Eastern Daily Press* of 15 September published an article about the canal including a picture of the derelict Briggate Lock. This showed the gates that are still in situ with one side of the lock clear and tidy and the other overgrown due to the restrictions on access for safety reasons. The article mentioned EAWA's work parties; Brian Wexler, the NW&DC Trust's wild life officer, reported on the return of birds such as herons and kingfishers and David Revill, our work party organiser, outlined the great progress that has been made.

**BRIGGATE MILL:** The long running saga about this derelict mill took another twist in August when North Norfolk District Council fenced off the whole site for safety

reasons. The move followed a structural survey that showed that the granary building was crumbling and that bricks and concrete might fall and injure passers-by. This is a blow to local residents who have been campaigning and working for the mill, whose ownership is currently unknown, to be secured for use by the community. Volunteers from our work parties have been involved in restoring the millrace and hoping to keep the land in public use with a view to ultimately having this recognised by the Land Registry as a community owned asset. As the "owners" cannot be traced it is feared that if the granary has to be demolished the council might try to sell off the site to recover its costs. Negotiations are in hand to try and secure limited access so that residents can maintain their claim of proving continuous use of the land over a number of years.

**WORK PARTIES:** Sessions were held as follows: Honing – 22 May, 24 July & 18 September; Briggate Mill Pond – 8 May & 7 August; Ebridge – 21 August; Bacton Wood – 12 June, 26 June, 10 July & 4 September and David Revill, our work party leader, produces a report after each session to record what has been achieved.

At Honing work concentrated on keeping the Staithe Cut clear and tidy by mowing the strimming the grassed areas, removing ivy and fallen branches and twigs and clearing weed from the channel just above Dee Bridge which was starting to build up and collect flotsam and could have developed into a major blockage. At the lock the grassed areas were strimmed and the path below the lock was cleared to make it easier for walkers and canoeists. Some vegetation was also removed from above the lock to provide a better flow of water.

The two sessions at Briggate concentrated on the chamber island by cutting the grass again but leaving a strip of taller reeds and weeds at the water's edge to encourage wild life. The roadside wall was cleared of grass, earth and roots revealing its frailty. Meanwhile some of the reeds were pulled out of the mill pool by hand and weed was also removed from the north-east lock chamber brickwork in preparation for new lime mortar.

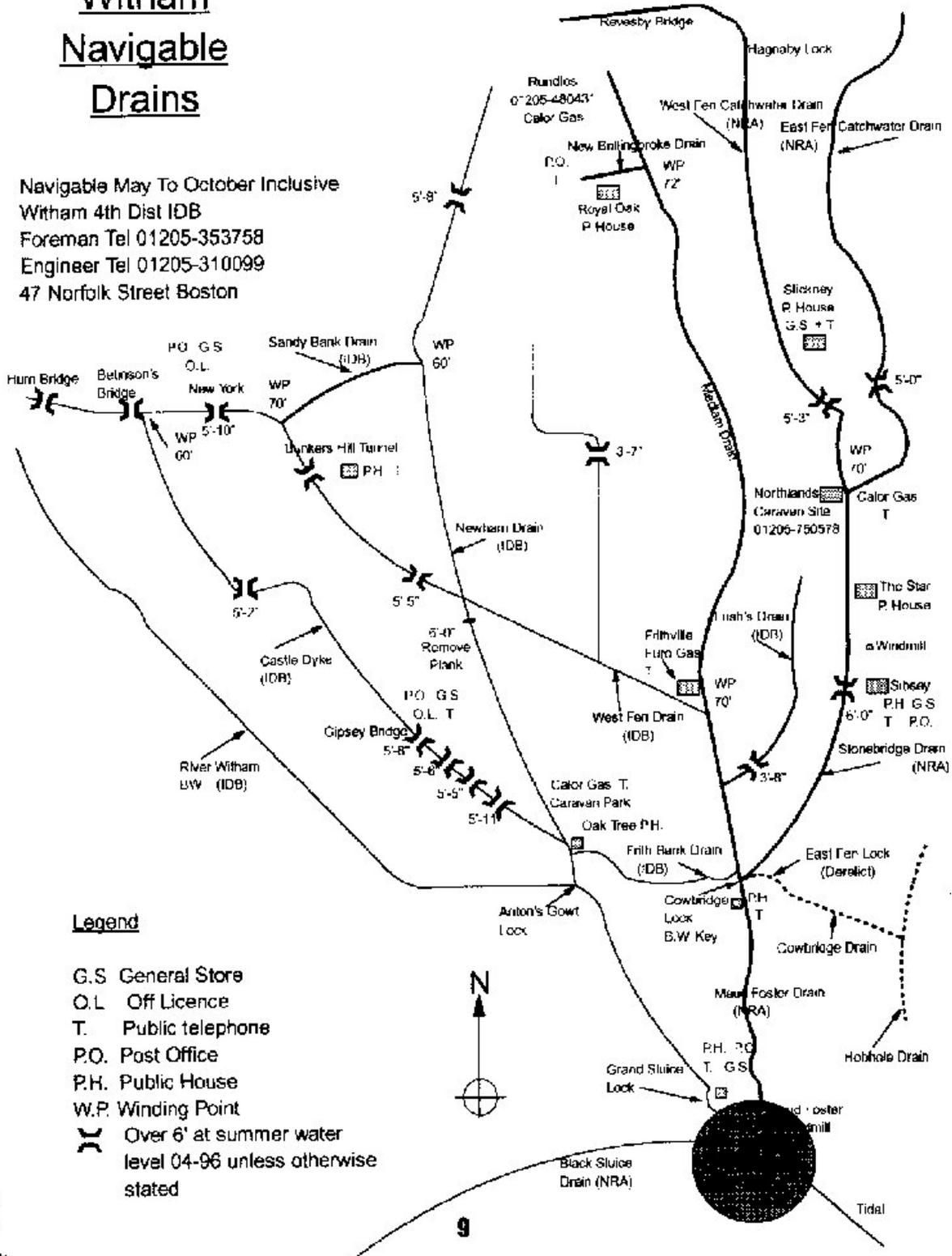
To assist the Old Canal Company at Ebridge a clearance was effected further up the east bank by removing the undergrowth and heaps of brash so as to improve access and enable five or six large trees to be felled and dragged onto the west bank. Rather than use the east bank path a new route was created up the west bank by strimming through very heavy vegetation with temporary bridges giving access across the channel to the east.

Regular maintenance on the site continued at Bacton Wood to keep back the growth. At the weir area brash was burnt together with that from two trees that had been felled in the winter, great care being taken to prevent any birds or animals being burnt. Meanwhile any remaining tree, bush and weed roots were removed from the brickwork together with loose mortar as a prelude to providing for new lime mortar. Above the lock the dry bed was cleared of felled trees and brash as a prelude to cutting the grass and weeds whilst two small temporary bridges erected near the lower breach to give access to the upper stretch of the dry bed were removed.

Work party dates this autumn are: Briggate 2 October & 11 December; Ebridge 16 October; Bacton Wood 13 & 27 November.

# Witham Navigable Drains

Navigable May To October Inclusive  
 Witham 4th Dist IDB  
 Foreman Tel 01205-353758  
 Engineer Tel 01205-310099  
 47 Norfolk Street Boston



**Legend**

- G.S. General Store
- O.L. Off Licence
- T. Public telephone
- P.O. Post Office
- P.H. Public House
- W.P. Winding Point
- (Symbol: two curved lines) Over 6' at summer water level 04-96 unless otherwise stated

