



THE HEREFORD WHARFINGER No.4. 6.6.84

PROGRESS AT MONKHIDE

Numbers attending the Society's working parties have held up well over the winter months, with the main task being clearance of trees and scrub from the bed of Major Barnes' stretch of the canal.

On two occasions high winds brought down trees onto power lines running above the canal's southern boundary. By February, this had led to the Midlands Electricity Board providing a well-equipped team to top the tow path hedge and fell the few remaining willows on the towpath side. This work was of great benefit to the Society as this would have dominated the work of our working parties for some months to come. There remains plenty to do however in clearing timber and burning brushwood.

At about the same time Mr. Williams, whose farmland adjoins the canal to the north, felled all the trees rooted in a 200 yd length of the canal bank. We were somewhat dismayed at this development, which has left that particular length sadly devoid of natural cover. Mr. Williams has, to his credit, offered his full cooperation in the dredging of this section.

The Society has recently received a generous grant from the Welsh Water Authority's Amenity Fund for the improvement of this length of canal. As I write, an excavator on hire from Monkhide contractor Peter Ball is digging a drainage ditch which will lower the water level at Skew Bridge by some two feet without the need for pumping. Also, a fine oak gate and posts kindly provided by Major Barnes have been inserted in the towpath hedge a short distance west of the bridge by members of the last two working parties. Once local regrading of the towpath has been carried out, full access to the canal for plant and materials will be possible at this point.

We are now therefore poised to tackle the full restoration of the canal in the immediate vicinity of the Skew Bridge. We have put forward our plan for consideration as a M.S.C. Community Programme Scheme. If successful, such a scheme would provide a supervisor and appropriate labour force to completely reconstruct the towpath beneath the bridge. The Society would be required to provide materials, plant and tools and also technical supervision.

Although our first working party on this site was less than twelve months ago, we have achieved a lot in that time. Our efforts have inevitably disturbed the wildlife of the canal, but we believe that the availability of deep clear water as well as the existing margins with each having areas of light and shade, will in due course attract a richer flora and fauna than could previously have existed here.

William Frecknall

A FEW NOTES ON SOUTHAMPTON CANAL SOCIETY

Southampton Canal Society meet at the St Johns Ambulance Hall, Kings Park Road, Southampton, on the first Thursday of each month. The agenda is varied and includes guest speakers on waterways and canal related topics, also photograph competitions, canal quizzes - if possible in association with other Societies, and evenings when members can exhibit their own slides.

Some of the more athletic members assist in working parties - for example on helping with restoation on the Basingstoke Canal and also on the Itchen Navigation. Also, social outings are arranged and in 1983 for example this included a return trip on the Regents Park Canal in London from Camden Lock to Victoria Park, and also an evening boattrip round Southampton Docks and the River Itchen.

This year the Society has arranged an outing to Gloucester, where members will be taken on a walkabout round Gloucester Docks and go on a narrow boat trip on the Gloucester - Sharpness Canal.

Various fund raising events are held such as draws and auctions. One of the main contributions that the Society can at present make to the waterways is in the form of donations to canal restoration projects.

Cyril Martin



HEREFORD CITY COUNCIL - WILL THEY CLOSE THE DOOR ON CANAL RESTORATION?

The Hereford and Gloucester Canal Society recently proposed to Hereford City Council a joint scheme to restore the section of the canal from the Roman Road to the entrance to the College Hill Tunnel. Our proposal is that the Council should attempt to purchase this section of canal, and the Society would undertake restoration and maintenance work. This section is some half a mile in length and has the Roman Road Bridge at one end and the tunnel, which is in excellent condition, at the other.

Since then, and before we have had time to receive any response from the Council, the cutting leading to the tunnel mouth has been filled in, and an application has been made by the owner for planning permission to build a house on it. At the time of going to press we are preparing to submit to the Planning Committee our case for refusing such permission. The tunnel would be the linchpin in any future scheme to bring a waterway from the city boundary back into the city. We have on many occasions stressed the amenity value of such a scheme.

We hope the planners will not allow building on this or any other part of the canal within the city. Unfortunately, planners are notoriously short-sighted and plan for the present rather than for future generations. Can those of Hereford prove themselves the exception?

Robin Andrews.

BRITAIN'S SECRET BYWAYS

Hordes of people harass themselves rushing off to the Mediterranean each year, jammed with others all the way, and needing a holiday to recover. Meantime, wiser ones unwind astonishingly without leaving Britain.

They are the ones who seek out our canals - the last secret byways left to us, as different from the rest of our hectic existence as they could possibly be. The knowledgeable ones walk, fish, sit and stare, travel on boats.

Unwinding? Well, it depends. If you are a natural worrier you maybe can't unwind anywhere. But I would defy even the most determined worrier not to relax a little at the sight of a canal.

Walking or just sitting is a start. But obviously boating is the most natural way of canal-unwinding. So may I show you the canals from a boater's angle?

If you have a certain amount of common sense, someone aboard with a strongish arm, no desire to hurry, and a touch of resignation if you come up against snags, the canals are for you. They fit exactly the get-away-from-it-all desire that so many people vainly seek.

Mind you, you don't entirely get away from everyone else, especially on the popular canals in high summer. But there are much quieter ones, and at 3 mph (remembering the "no-hurry" requirement I mentioned above) there's time for many a leisurely chat with the few you do meet. Swapping cruising experiences is part of the activity.

The point is this: once you've stepped from the car or bus or train, and cast off from the bank (or even just walked on the towpath), you're in another world. It has a different time-scale, different values, different distances. Provided you accept that, and don't continue motorway-driving, you're home and dry (or sometimes, of course, wet).

For a cruise, you need a boat, food, casual clothes, rubber-soled shoes, good rainwear, perhaps tough gloves if you have beautiful hands. You can buy a boat, of course, but the better ones are like

buying a small house. Most people hire them, from boatyards all over our extensive system of canals and connected rivers.

You get what you pay for, but most boats nowadays (still to the surprise of many) have h.a.c., shower, flush-toilet, fridge, gas-cooker, electric light, comfortable beds, even TV if you must. You could live aboard, and some people do.

Don't ask about driving licences. There aren't any (and this is a pity sometimes). But the hire firm will - or should - give you careful instruction. There's a throttle, forward gear and reverse gear, and the latter needs a good deal of throttle-power to have any effect. It's important, though, for it's the only way of putting the brake on.

You steer the longer canal-boats with a tiller from the extreme back end - a disconcerting experience till you get used to it. You need a bit of practice to anticipate the course of the boat - watch the front end beginning to swing - but the golden rule is to take it easy, and to know just how to get into reverse and throttle hard in order to stop. Even at 3 mph a few tons of steel boat can make quite a dent.

Perhaps the other chief difference between boat and car driving, besides speed and lack of brakes, is the way the boat doesn't grip the water. For example, the back doesn't just follow the front round a bend, but the whole boat swivels on its middle, as it were, skating a little. One result is that you can't just drive away from the side, for the back swings against it and levers the front in again. Get someone to push off at the front, then steer out at that angle. And always watch the back end when turning close to anything. Watch the wind, too, which may skim you across the water.

It's wise, perhaps, for the beginner to pick a boatyard by a length of canal without locks, to get the hang of driving, steering and stopping. And if the hire firm merely says "Can you drive a car? OK, you'll be all right!" - go somewhere else.

Well, then - locks (though if you really don't fancy these, there are various areas with very few). Most people get to love them.

Some almost eat them for breakfast. And you certainly don't even need to go boating to seek them out and make a study of them.

They are the water-boxes which raise or lower boats to different levels, since canals couldn't be dug with the actual water sloping. So to get up a slope a set of "pounds" were dug at different levels, with locks in between them. The idea is that you go into a lock at one level, raise or lower its water content, and emerge at another level. At times, on steeply-sloping land, locks come thick and fast, such as 42 in 5 miles between Birmingham and Worcester.

Again the hire firm should show boaters how to work locks, and there are many attempts at written and illustrated instructions.

Rule No. 1: Don't hurry. Rule No. 2: Don't panic. After that, the common sense. There are gears to turn, usually with a vital "windlass" (never put it down), and these operate "paddles" to let water in and out of the lock. Obviously you close paddles when the water is level. Then you open the "gates" to let the boat in, close them, open paddles at the other end, and up (or down) goes the boat, carefully watched and held.

And so on. There's a bit more to it than that, but think it through, and don't let those impatient people on another boat bother you. Leave all gates and paddles closed behind you and then, with a bit of luck, nobody will find a short bit of canal drained empty.

After locks, I'd better mention tunnels. There are a few about, some over a mile long, and some people don't fancy them. They're no bother really if you go very slowly, but there are many areas without one, so consult a waterway map if you're at all nervous. I must say, though, that they do tend to be on the most intriguing waterways.

While talking of hazards (I said you needed a touch of resignation at times) it's only fair to admit that you may well go aground some time or other, for the smaller canals are shallow at the edges. Don't worry. For one thing, you can walk ashore if necessary, or even just jump. But for another, it'll probably be soft mud, and you're thoughtfully provided with a pole ("shaft" in canal language) to push off again. Sending the crew's weight to the end which isn't aground helps, too. And if the back end isn't on the mud, let the propeller help to pull you off.

Keeping away from the sides when moving is always a good idea, though you'll meet people doing it so well that they stay nervously in the middle. That's when you go aground.

There are things under the water, too. The neat British Public, tiring of throwing mattresses into country hedges, dumps them over canal bridges, with prams, bicycles, television sets, and even cars. Don't mind the occasional scrape, then. It reminds you why steel hulls are so popular.

What you are bound to collect is polythene, for this clings lovingly to your propeller, stopping it. That's what your "weed-hatch" is for (hardly ever for weeds, now). Make sure the yard tells you how to use it, and for heaven's sake fix it back again.

Am I putting you off? Don't let me. The odd snag is very rare, and the fact remains that most of the time you're thinking unenviously of the poor mugs packing the airports and the beaches and the half-built hotels, being ripped off left and right.

You're your own boss. Stop where you like, when you like, at a pub or at a church, in a town or in the middle of nowhere, carrying your home on your back but with more room than the snail's. You see places that no car-driver sees, for the canals have their own map, quite different from that of road or rail. Indeed, you can pass under bridges unaware of anything on them. You can, unbelievably, moor under the legs of a motorway in the middle of the Black Country, and not see or hear a thing.

Be a devil, then. Branch out. Feel like an explorer instead of a Majorca-lemming. There are waterways everywhere, so go and look at them and unwind by them. And if you fancy a cruise, there are plenty of adverts for hire-boats to entice you. Or ask the British Waterways Board, Melbury House, Melbury Terrace, London NW1 6JX to help you with information about most of the waterways.

But whether you boat, walk, sit or fish, spare a thought for the Inland Waterways Association. Without it, there would be few if any canals to explore. It's an entirely voluntary charity body, but it has campaigned and physically worked since 1946 to revive our canal

system, against official apathy and even antagonism at first.

Now, though there is still much to be done, the system is there, with many once-derelict miles back in use. And the canals are now accepted, by government and local authority alike. All this, without a doubt, through the work of the IWA, with its branches covering the whole country.

If you appreciate this fact, then - as boater, angler, walker or just plain lover of the peace of waterways - how about asking the IWA for a membership form, from 114 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 8UQ? They still need money to fight, and members to help.

B.W.B.

WIDEMARSH CANAL BRIDGE

On Saturday 12th May, the Mayor unveiled a plaque, designed and made by the metalwork class of Aylestone School and presented by Mr Jeffries, on the Widemarsh Canal Bridge. Fortunately the weather was dry and warm while a small crowd watched the ceremony. The Mayor was presented with a board made up of various photographs and drawings of the canal, kindly prepared by Mike Potts. The local Press was present and a photograph and brief description appeared in the Evening News on Tuesday 15th May.

After the ceremony the Mayor was taken to the Green Dragon for coffee. He showed a great interest in our project and came to see our work on the following day. He has promised to help us on a working party in the near future. We are very sorry that members could not be given advance notice of this event but it was impossible to arrange at the time.

Just a few months ago it was discovered that the building standing at the entrance to Jewsons Yard was in fact the original Canal Office. Since this discovery great efforts have been made to save the building from demolition. Nigel Jeffries has spent much of his spare time and energy in trying to save it. Unfortunately while the Mayor was unveiling the plaque, the building was being demolished.

At our working party the following day (Sunday 13th May) we found that the rubble of Jewson's building had been unloaded at the canal worksite for use as hardcore. It was subsequently used to form our vehicle entrance by the Skew Bridge. The length of canal from Crews Pitch to the Skew Bridge has had a drainage channel dug along the entire length. The spoil has built up the towpath and when levelled should form the correct height of towpath. This would be about one foot above the water level.

While everyone was watching Mr Ball and his digger at work on the canal at the last working party they missed the main event - Yours Truly was the first (but not the last) to fall in the canal. No damage done, just a christening!

Our first boat has cruised most of this section! Richard Morely took his canoe along the newly dug channel.

At our next working party we hope to clear the entrance at Crews Pitch for better parking and landscaping. See you there! Working parties are the last Sunday in every month don't forget.

Mike Potts.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members.

Mr.S.P.Glennie - Smith, Lilac Cottage, Victoria Road, Ledbury.
Mr and Mrs M.Godson, Bartestree Court, Near Hereford.
Mr.C.G.Jeffries, 53, Brookfield Lane, Churchdown, Gloucestershire.
Mr and Dr. R.Simpson, Overdraft Lodge, Barrell Lane, Longhope, Glos.
Dr. and Mrs. K.Tomlinson, 9, Somerset Place, Gloucester.
Mr.D.Whitehead, 60, Hafod Road, Hereford

EVENTS

- June 24 Working Party at Monkhide (G.R. 806442). A barbecue will be held at lunchtime to coincide with the working party and give members the opportunity to view the progress to date. This is impressive considering the tools available and should not be missed.
Cooking facilities provided. Please bring your own food and drink. If the weather is wet, the barbecue will be held in the warehouse.
- July 1 Guided walk of canalside features around the Ledbury area. Please meet provisionally at the Ledbury Railway Station yard at 11 am. The tour will stop for lunch at a Public House which provides Pub Grub if required or you may bring your own sandwiches. Children are welcome. Please contact any committee member if requiring transport.
- August 5 Guided walk of canalside features, this time in the Leominster area. Meet at 11 am in the Leominster Bus Station. As before the tour will stop for Pub Grub. Children welcome.
These walks proved immensely popular last year especially with families so don't miss the fun.
- Sept. 9 A visit to Ironbridge Gorge Museum. Meet at 9.30 am at Edgar Street carpark, hereford to travel by cars unless a coach booking becomes viable. Please phone Hereford 56392 (after 6.15 pm) for reservations and details of the advance payment. Also contact this number if you require transport.
- Oct. 5 Canal Boat weekend at Worcester to introduce members to working a canal boat and many locks! Cost will be roughly £17 a head on the basis of ten people attending for the entire weekend and would be lower of course with more participating. Apply for details by phoning Hereford 57245 by 15th September at the latest if interested.

INDOOR EVENTS

- Oct. 3 Guest speaker.
Nov. 7 Visit to Magic Lantern Theatre in Monmouth.
Dec. 5 Waterways Films Evening.

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