

THE HEREFORD WHARFINGER



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THE JOURNAL OF THE HEREFORDSHIRE AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE
CANAL SOCIETY

WATERWAYS
SUMMER

EDITION

OPEN DAY
JUNE 2nd



25p

(FREE TO
MEMBERS)

SUMMER 1985

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NO

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Mr John Startin, 'Conifers', Little Birch Herefordshire.
(Golden Valley 540559).

Mr Peter Woodfield, 60, Whittern Way, Hereford. (Hereford 275244).

WELCOME

We wish to extend a very warm welcome to the following new members:

Mr and Mrs E.J. Brown, Hereford
Miss K. and Miss M.E. Colley, Hereford
Michael Peach and Norma Batt, Malvern
Miss M. Fawn, Holmer, Hereford

RESTORATION NEWS



A small group of excited Navvies assembled at Skew Bridge early one Saturday in April. Eventually, a wagon drew up and we got our first look at the long-awaited Smalley excavator. After a period of instruction and tuition from John Palmer, WRG's plant manager, we spent the morning familiarising ourselves with this rather ungainly-looking piece of machinery. Several members are now competent operators, and we have already removed many tons of silt and accumulated rubbish from the channel. The land has recently dried out sufficiently to enable us to move dredgings along the towpath to a site at Crew's Pitch provided by Major Barnes.

I am pleased to report that Mr Ken Goodwin, National Chairman IWA, has spent a day inspecting the canal. At Monkhide, he discussed our work and plans in detail, and we have just received a £500 grant from National Waterways Restoration Fund towards this work. This award is, I believe, an endorsement of the Society's realistic policy towards restoration and a vote of confidence in the way we are tackling the task at Monkhide.

William Frecknall

WHILE WE HAVE THE USE OF THE SKALLEY
EXCAVATOR WE SHALL BE HOLDING EXTRA
WORKING PARTIES - WEEKENDS OR EVENINGS
TO SUIT VOLUNTEERS' AVAILABILITY.
CONTACT PETER WOODFIELD IF YOU CAN
HELP - EVEN AT SHORT NOTICE

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THE HEREFORDSHIRE AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE CANAL 1985

KYMIN TO WITHINGTON MARSH

by Janet White

The section of canal from Kymin to Withington Marsh is still recognisable as a canal although it would be a massive undertaking to totally restore it. Fortunately the main engineering features are still in good order: the bridges, overflow channels and - although mainly buried - the lock walls.

It is now a marshy infilled gully with encroaching scrub and even fully-grown willows. Nevertheless it provides a haven for wildlife in the intensively cultivated landscape. A count of many species of wild flowers can be made in one small area simply by looking down from one of the road bridges.

There are two footpaths associated with this section of canal, but do request permission before walking them. The first at Kymin follows the canal westwards for two hundred yards before bearing away. Here you may look across and see the overgrown canal on your left - but do not be confused by a small stream which crosses the canal bed and flows out of a small entrance under the road to follow the line of the footpath.

The second footpath is really a bridleway running from Howberry Barn and continuing towards Monkton via Thinghill Court. Along this path the canal may be clearly seen a few hundred yards to the south.

The Lock Cottage (SO 566442), which can be seen from the Withington - Preston Wymne road, has the old lock in its garden, the lower entrance of the lock being under the road bridge. The road bridge itself is original, the date being on the western side of it. By walking down the bank on this side one can also appreciate better the solid stonework of the bridge and lock. Again, the stream passes to one side of the canal in a separate channel.

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Lady Helen - Maiden Voyage

After Christmas and all the excitement, we decided we should get afloat and see something of our environment!!

On a cold and frosty day in January, after reading all the boat books available from the library and the bookshops and other people's literature on the subject, we set out to Preston Brook on the Bridgwater Canal to have a look over 'Lady Helen'. On paper, she seemed to fit the tall order of our requirements as we wanted a boat in which all 6 of us could sail in comfort. We really should have bought the Queen Mary!!

Lady Helen lay in the water, moored at one end of a line of half-submerged wrecks. Her uppers were school green - was it for camouflage? and the window curtains were closed against peepers like us! Her hull was black, the little we could see of it, as she lay very evenly in the murky water. She looked cold and unloved, steel cold, 36 feet long. A narrowboat, a replica of those built for the commercial era of the canals and updated and made habitable for pleasure seekers. We felt she was built for us and we wanted her though we hadn't seen inside at all!

Her owner was an oldish man, who talked a great deal, and fumbled with the keys as if he hadn't used them much. Eventually he found the right one and we were inside. Although cold, it seemed to be very welcoming. The walls were lined with pine panelling and gay curtains covered the windows. These were pulled back and light came in and brightened up the interior. Two bunk beds were visible as seats and two others were folded away (stowed away)! above them. The whole length of the boat was a narrow gangway which was carpeted in the living area and made one forget that it was a floating steel container! The ceiling was pine panelled too, giving the whole a cosy atmosphere. The forward space housed a loo - a chemical toilet within a closet just large enough for an adult of normal size, to be admitted comfortably.

On the opposite side, was a shower which had obviously not been used for its prime function as it was filled with tarpaulins, ropes, buckets and other impedimenta for boating. Through the doorway into the bows, a most uninteresting small area presented itself, which we were later to discover was the most peaceful place on board: there was just enough room for one person to sit and watch the world go by.

The galley was superb; a full size cooker run by calor gas, stored in the stern hold, and also a calor gas fridge which was an entirely new idea to me. Cupboards were adequate and I could immediately visualise china stacked there. As this was no doubt to be my domain for most of the time, I was pleased that there were no obvious problems glaring up

A hatch on the stern deck was raised to expose the diesel engine which meant little to me, but would mean so much more later on in terms of progress. Mr Nash explained everything to us in great detail, but by now we were anxious to get under way!

After casting off, we pulled gently away from the moorings with Mr Nash at the helm. Our collars were turned up against the wind and the engine throbbed beneath our feet. It seemed like freedom as we went along albeit at 4 mph. We each tried steering Lady Helen for short spells; we experienced being below in the cabin while the boat was moving, and we were excited. Although cold, both above and below, we could visualise scorching hot days, leisure hours packed with relaxation, going places, the freedom of the waterways. How naive we were!



But we bought her: she was ours!

The members of the committee wish our "Wharfinger" editor Mike Potts and his partner Malcolm Brindley the very best of luck with their new business venture. They are opening a new photographic centre in Hereford on Friday the 17th of May. Mike does all the photography for the Canal Society and he and his partner have many years experience in the trade, they are both well known in the photographic scene.

WHY NOT ADVERTISE YOUR FIRM, PRODUCT OR SERVICE IN THE WHARFINGER FOR JUST A SMALL CHARGE. THE WHARFINGER IS READ BOTH LOCALLY AND IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY BY YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE.

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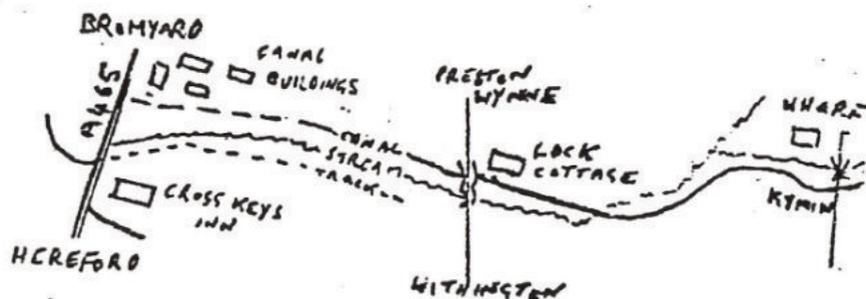
or

James Dunn

(Address inside front cover.)

At Withington Marsh a small track begins opposite the road to Sutton Hill and follows the canal eastwards. Soon one may see the old Wharf House to the north of the track. There is a whole group of very interesting canal buildings at Withington Wharf. One has the words "William Bird - Wharfinger" still just visible on its eastern end. Here again, a stream runs alongside the canal, and the Water Authority have 'canalised' the stream between Withington Wharf and a new reservoir about half way back to Lock Cottage. This is part of a new flood alleviation scheme, and in places the bank between the old canal bed and the stream has been cut through to allow excess water to run into the canal in times of flood.

Not its original function, maybe, but at least the Welsh Water Board have, perhaps unwittingly, safeguarded this small part of the canal for many years to come.



Editor's note.

Summer is on its way and with it comes the opportunity to explore more of the Canal. I would be very grateful for information on sections of the Canal not already covered in this series, any items of interest regarding the Canal or any Canal News.

Please, please, check when exploring the Canal that you are not trespassing, and if in doubt ask at a nearby farm or house. Most landowners do not object providing you follow the Country Code. Remember that dogs if uncontrolled can cause a lot of damage, and that at present many farmers in the County fear the spread of Hop Wilt.

SATURDAY 1st JUNE

PONTYMOILE BASIN. IWA and Brecon, Abergavenny and Monmouthshire Canal Trust. Rally and fete - a varied programme of events.

SUNDAY 2nd JUNE

MONKHIDE - OPEN DAY. A must for all members of the Society! Our contribution to Waterways Summer 85 - there will be a Work Party going on, display of photographs, Canal Sales stall, refreshments - barbecue if fine. A day out for all the family. 11.00am - 4.30pm.

SUNDAY 9th JUNE

ABERGAVERNNEY/BRECON CANAL. Sponsored Walk in aid of the IWA, with 25% of the profits going to the HGCS. In 4-mile sections. For further details see leaflet and sponsorship form enclosed with this edition of the Wharfinger - additional copies if required are available from Mike Potts.

SATURDAY & SUNDAY 6th & 7th JULY

GLOUCESTER DOCKS. IWA (Gloucester branch) Boat Rally for Waterways Summer 85. Also visit the docks area, Antiques Centre, Package Museum and Tall-Masted Boats. And don't forget the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Society's stand! Further details: Marilyn Slimm (Glos. 411040).

SUNDAY 7th JULY

MONKHIDE. Work Party. Come along and get stuck in. From about 10am onwards. Bring sandwiches, wellies, and a spade if you've got one.

Glorious Mud

NEED TRANSPORT TO ANY OF THESE EVENTS? CONTACT OUR SECRETARY NIGEL JEFFERIES WHO WILL PUT YOU IN TOUCH

WITH SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP

EVENTS

SUNDAY 14th JULY

ABERGAVENNY/BRECON CANAL. Meet at St. Martins Car Park (by Hereford Swimming Baths) at 10am prompt. Transport will be by own cars - if you have a spare seat and can offer it to anyone requiring it on the day this will be much appreciated. You may if preferred join us at Abergavenny bus station car park at about 10.30am. Guided walk/drive to Llangynidr locks, Ashford tunnel, Gilwern and Pontymoile to see the restoration work taking place on the Monmouthshire Canal. Picnic by a canalside pub. For further details contact Mike Potts.

SUNDAY 4th AUGUST

MONKHIDE. Work Party. Help us make the best use of the Smalley we have on loan from the Waterways Recovery Group. Lots of Glorious Mud!

SUNDAY 18th AUGUST

If enough people are interested Mike Potts will arrange a day cruise on the Abergavenny/Brecon Canal. The cost for a day's cruise (usually 10.00am - 6.00pm) is about £5.00 per head, a little less if we can fill a 12-seater boat. Stop for picnic or a pint on the cruise. Payment in advance to Mike Potts, by 30th June at the latest (cheques payable to Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Society).

SUNDAY 1st SEPTEMBER

MONKHIDE. Work Party. Your last chance of the summer to fall in.

SUNDAY 22nd SEPTEMBER

Walk/drive exploring the Thames & Severn Canal and the Stroudwater Canal. Details in the next edition of the Wharfinger - mark the date in your diary NOW!

FINAL REMINDER

Have you renewed
your membership
yet?

MEMBERSHIP FEES: Individual £3.50, Junior £1.50,
Family £5.00, Corporate £5.00, O A P £2.00
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Chairman's Report (1985 AGM).

I think the keynote for this year must be: steady progress. This progress has occurred in many ways, but the most tangible evidence of what we have achieved can be seen at Monkhide. Those of you who know that bit of canal a few years ago will remember it as a very overgrown strip of woodland with what seemed to be a stream running down the middle. Since then it's looked like a timber-storage yard, a drainage ditch - and now at long last it's beginning to look something like a canal. Certainly standing by the Skew Bridge you can begin to see what the canal should look like.

Our aim is to completely restore this stretch of canal, to make it something of a showpiece. Some people seem to think we've got a master-plan drawn up which we follow a step at a time, always knowing what we're going to do next. In reality it's not like that at all. We set out to do whatever we can, often not knowing what will come next, changing our plans to fit changing circumstances, grabbing opportunities when they arise. But we are slowly getting there.

I must put on record our gratitude for help we've received from a number of sources towards this project. First there are all those members, and others, who responded so magnificently to our appeal for the dumper truck, I'm glad to say we have now got the dumper truck and it's already earning its keep - and if anyone would like to see it if you come along on the first Sunday in the month you can usually see it in action. Next there's the Welsh Water Authority, who have given us now two grants, which has enabled us to use mechanical means of clearing a lot of the silt, and greatly speeded up work. We've also received assistance from the Waterways Recovery Group in the loan of a Smalley - which is another piece of equipment which should make work easier. I'd also like to thank the person who owns the canal at Monkhide, Major Robert Barnes, who has taken a great interest in our Society and is in fact one of our Vice-Presidents. He's nearly always at our Work Parties - usually in the thick of it - and whenever we get stuck with anything, he's the chap we turn to for a solution. I just wonder how he's going to get that massive coping-stone out from under the bridge this weekend!

I'd also like to thank our Work Party organisers, Will Frecknall and Peter Woodfield, for all the effort they've put into planning and organising the work. And last but by no means least, I'd like to thank the workers - those of our members who give up their Sundays to help us. Particularly the faithful few who turn up whatever the weather (in some cases coming quite long distances). It takes a lot of effort to keep going when your fingers are freezing and there are only a few people there and it seems as if you're fighting a losing battle. But all the little bits add up, and we are slowly winning.

At the moment we've got a deadline to work for, which is quite a good thing, as we're having an Open Day at Monkhide on June 2nd as part of the Waterways Summer. We won't have finished by a long way, but hopefully by then it will look a lot tidier and cleaner, and at least part of the towpath under the Skew Bridge will have been reconstructed. So do make a note of that date in your diaries, and come and see for yourselves what we're doing.

Although at the moment we're concentrating our resources on the section at Monkhide, we are thinking about the future and trying to define our aims in the wider context. Of course, we've got a list of eight aims in our Constitution, and so far we've pursued some of them more than others. They are, briefly: (1) to generate public interest in the Canal, (2) to record what remains of the Canal and its locks and wharves and so on, (3) to promote the environment of the Canal and encourage its wildlife, (4) to promote the amenity use of the Canal, (5) to encourage use of the Canal as an educational tool, particularly for schoolchildren, (6) to arrange talks, slideshows, etc. for the benefit of members and other interested persons, (7) to establish a reference collection of photographs, drawings, etc., (8) to keep its members

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As I say, we've tried to pursue all of these aims and we've done rather better with some than others. But these are all aims which are the basic requirements of any Canal Society. Sooner or later people are going to start asking, "What are your long-term aims? Are you planning to re-open any of the Canal, and if so how much?" Not least of these people are Local Authorities, because if they know that we are eventually hoping to restore a certain they would, hopefully, think twice before building a motorway along it, or lowering a bridge and destroying the navigable headroom, or giving planning permission for someone to build a factory across it.

Now the Society has been in existence for two years it seems a good time to stand back and take stock of what we are doing and where we are going. There has already been quite a lot of debate about it at committee meetings and I'm sure there will be a lot more. It's no good our saying, for instance, "Our aim is to restore the whole Canal by the year 2000." Unless we could say exactly how we proposed doing it we'd simply lose credibility and no one would take us seriously. We must do our homework first and know precisely what is involved and what we're up against.

So that's just what we're trying to do. Richard Morley, together with Ron Munden our Honorary Surveyor, are embarking on a feasibility study of the whole of the Hereford to Ledbury section. Obviously, many parts would virtually need rebuilding, and we're not for one moment suggesting we're about to embark on that. All we're doing is looking at it from the engineer's point of view, and finding out just what deterioration has occurred during the hundred years it's lain idle, and seeing what the technical problems and obstacles would be to making it work again. I would add we are very grateful to Richard and Ron for volunteering to undertake this quite considerable task.

That's only half the story because, unlike some canals which have been restored, virtually all of it is in private ownership, and each of the many owners will have different views about his particular bit of the Canal. So in addition to the technical aspects, we've got to compile a separate list of all the Canal owners and their attitudes. Only when we've got these two reports, with hard facts before us, can we come to any decisions that are anything more than wishful thinking. But I'm sure it's a healthy sign for the Society to be having this sort of debate, and not losing sight of where it's going.

Other things that have happened during the past year are almost too numerous to mention individually, and I don't think there's a lot of point in listing them all. Our dealings with Local Authorities and other official bodies are important in that they've got the Society known even if they haven't always produced the results we were hoping for, but more of that in the Secretary's Report. I would like to thank the many people who have worked hard to organise events - speakers, social evenings, walks, and so on. Unfortunately I can't mention them all by name, but I think I must make an exception with Mike Potts who has not only arranged many of our social functions but also managed to combine this with editing and producing our newsletter, the Hereford Wharfinger. This has improved by leaps and bounds under his editorship. While I'm on the subject, perhaps I can slip a commercial in here. Mike is always on the lookout for articles and letters - even if it's just a short letter asking a question about something that's been puzzling you about the Canal, send it in and hopefully someone else will reply with the answer.

On a personal note, this is also a valedictory report because, as you probably know, I'm relinquishing the reins as Chairman. I feel that after two years it's not a bad thing for the Society to have a change and bring fresh ideas and a fresh approach on the scene. I've enjoyed my time as Chairman very much, and I hope still to be active in the Society's affairs. There are some very able people in its ranks, and I have every confidence in its future.

VOTE OF THANKS

Our extreme gratitude goes to Robin Andrews who, at April's AGM, stepped down as Chairman. During his two years in the office, Robin has given up a great deal of his time for the Society, which has benefitted enormously from his help and enthusiasm.

The office of Chairman is often demanding and sometimes onerous. Robin has met all his incidental expenses, such as travelling and telephone calls, himself. He has already taken on the role of publicity officer and I know his efforts and enthusiasm will not diminish.

Although there are times when our efforts seem to be frustrated all too frequently, the Society has advanced significantly since its formation, and this is in no small way thanks to Robin.



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WATERWAYS



SOLUTION

To the last edition's crossword.



Our thanks must go out to Mr Bernard Warburton and the Ross-on-Wye Resource Centre for producing our magazine.

The last three editions of the Wharfinger have been duplicated by Mr Warburton and we are very grateful for his help. This has made it possible for us to keep our production costs down while producing a reasonably-sized magazine.

We also extend our thanks to Mrs Kay Garlick of the Much Birch Resource Centre for the use of equipment and for her invaluable guidance.

Mike Potts (Editor)

The Inland Waterways Association are promoting the restoration and use of the waterways this year by holding "Waterways Summer 85." Societies and groups are holding events all over the country in aid of the canals and rivers. Please support them as much as possible.

We are holding a few events ourselves. June 2nd is our Open Day at Monkhide, when the public will have a chance to come and see the progress so far. Do tell all your friends and workmates about it. On June 9th we join forces with the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal Trust for a sponsored walk on the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal. We are also holding two more of our popular canal walks this summer.

Further details of all these are to be found on the Events page (page 8). All are most welcome to all of these events - members and nonmembers of all ages. Please come along and support us. We can usually arrange transport if required - contact Nigel Jefferies (phone no. inside front cover) but please do try to give a few days notice.

We look forward to seeing you!

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SALES

SALES SECTION

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£5.95

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"The Thames And Severn Canal" by Humphrey Household
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