

The Wharfinger

**Newsletter of the
Herefordshire and
Gloucestershire
Canal Trust**



**Edition 54 • Summer 1997
50p – free to members**

WHO DOES WHAT . . .

VICE PRESIDENTS

CHAIRPERSON

VICE CHAIRMEN

FINANCE:- Treasurer/Chairman
Committee

RESTORATION:- Gloucestershire

Herefordshire
Plant & Training Manager

SPECIAL PROJECTS:- Chairman
[Oxenhall Locks Site] Vice-Chair
Secretary
Committee

TRUST ADMINISTRATOR

LOCAL AUTHORITY LIAISON

PLANNING LIAISON

LANDOWNER LIAISON

PRESS/PUBLICITY:-

Social/H&GCS Events
MEMBERSHIP:- Secretary
Covenants

FUNDRAISING OFFICER

SOCIAL:- Events
Outings

MINUTES SECRETARY

IWA NOMINATED MEMBER

THE WHARFINGER:- Editor
Postmasters:- Leader
Team

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R. E. Barnes TD, Sir John Knill Bt.

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Brian Fox, Tom Bennett

Liz Connors

Brian Fox, Tom Bennett,
David Penny, Nigel Jefferies

Steve Delacourt-Smith, *Simon Hayward,*

Ray Moses

Brian Fox, Mike Potts, Tom Bennett
Tom Bennett

Peter Moore

David Penny

Steve Gittins

*Richard Hamblin, Bill Cronin (FoDDC),
Steve Delacourt-Smith, Paul Johnson,
Shawn Price, Roger Tutt, Alan Lines,
Simon Hayward, Gareth Griffiths*

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David Penny

Cliff Penny, David Penny

Brian Fox

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Mike Potts, *Joyce Potts*

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D & M Gray; I & F Roper;

Nigel Jefferies, Mike Potts

Those in italics are not Directors on the Council of Management, although they may be co-opted members

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LOGISTICS GROUP

BOATS:- Chairman

Committee

Joyce Potts

Penny & George Shetliffe

Steve Hughes, Chris & Mark Blunden, Steve Gittins

Dick Skeet

Ray & Barbara Moses, Pat Skeet, Derek Gray

Please see CONTACTS, inside back cover, for addresses/phone numbers.

HONORARY POSTS:- AUDITOR *Davies, Edwards & Co., Leominster.*

SOLICITOR *Sue Newbould, GABB & CO., 25 King Street, Hereford.*

Editorial

We are very pleased to announce that the Inland Waterways Association has presented the Ken Goodwin Trophy for 1996 to the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust. This trophy is awarded to the canal society or trust who are regarded as having made the most progress during the year in question. As Linda Palmer was unable to attend the award ceremony, former Chairman Cliff Penny received the trophy from Robin Higgs, Chairman of the IWA's national Restoration Committee, who said that the decision had been a hard one with a number of nationally well known major projects in the final selection round. Cliff said that he believed the award recognised *"both clean and dirty progress"* by the Canal Trust; *"progress with both pen and spade."* The receipt of this national award is a tribute to the hard work of an increasing number of active volunteers. *To all who made this possible - raising yet further the image and reputation of the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust - the Council of Management extend their grateful thanks.*

Hopefully the Ken Goodwin Trophy will be on display at the Annual General Meeting - to be held in Ledbury on Thursday 22nd May - full details are to be found on the centre pages of this issue. Please do try and attend; you will be made most welcome and we do try and keep the formalities as short as possible.

There will be a number of important announcements at the AGM this year. After a year in office Linda Palmer is standing down as Chairperson (having made it clear at the outset that she was "caretaking" pending the selection of a longer-serving candidate) and there is likely to be at least one other significant change to our inside front cover announced at the AGM. *Intrigued - why not make a note of the date in your diary now?*

As reported in our *Committee Matters* [page 8] the Steering Committee have invited tenders for the independent Consulting Engineers studies into the whole length of the Canal. At the time of writing the 5 tenderers have been reduced to just two and the final choice should be known very soon - yet another item on which to get up to date at the AGM - after the formal business as this is happening in the current year and not the year under review at the AGM!

The last edition of *The Wharfinger* hinted at the very heavy drain that was being placed on our finances by the extensive work (and acquisitions) on our main Gloucestershire restoration site at Oxenhall. To say that the Treasurer has been finely balancing the books on an almost daily basis would not be exaggerating the point. We are, therefore, especially grateful to a number of IWA Branches and Regions, throughout the country, who have responded to a special funding plea; *thank you.*

Editorial . . . continued

Recently we had the opportunity to sell **Grand Holiday Draw** tickets outside Sainsbury's in Hereford - a small number of volunteers sold over £100 of tickets - just think what a few more would have achieved! *Please let Liz Connors know of your willingness to assist and help to swell our depleted coffers!* Thank you.

The ongoing support that we receive from **Dwr Cymru-Welsh Water** is greatly appreciated. Apart from our continued use of a small store at Broomy Hill Water Works in Hereford for our display material, our van now has a safe home there, and we have recently been donated some second hand concrete fence posts

to help make our newly acquired compound in Gloucestershire secure. For the 3rd year running the Company has also sponsored all of our envelopes - a most welcome gesture.

This is the time of year when the highest level of subscriptions are due (a legacy of the "old days" when all renewals fell due on the 1st April regardless of the date of joining) - *so please, if you don't pay by bankers standing order (or continuous credit card authority) and your subscription was due in April (or is due in May!) please pay promptly.* Not only does this help our cash flow but it also saves voluntary time and effort (and postage) in sending out reminders.

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It has been our pleasure to support the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust for over 4 years, and we will continue to *work together in the present, to revive the past, and secure a better future.*

For further details please
contact Simon Hayward -
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Very rapid progress is being made on the Oxenhall Locks Project Site.

The History of the Coal Branch

By David Bick

[Originally published in
"English Life in the Nineteenth Century"]

The only branch associated with the Hereford & Gloucester Canal began at Oxenhall, about ten miles from Gloucester, and was projected to serve part of the tiny Newent coalfield, a mile to the west.

There have been doubts as to the extent of its use, or even completion, but a scrutiny of the company minute books does suggest at least a few years of sporadic activity, as is shown later.

Coal pits existed in the area before 1775 and provided important stimulus to the promoters of the canal, the Act for which was obtained in 1791. After a slow start, construction got underway in 1793 and at the end of the year the company began to consider mining for its own purposes; permission to bore was sought and there was talk of 'fire engines' for pumping.

Success was first reported in 1794 on the land of Mrs Phillips at Lower House, where pits had been 'working with good profit' a year or two before. Sinking a shaft took five months but the coal 'not promising from its general appearance to be fit for any other purpose than lime-burning and the like', it was determined to sink another pit.

Soon afterwards, terms of one seventh royalty were agreed with Mrs Phillips on the value of coal at surface, the small coal being worth only about three shillings per ton. In January 1795, ten wagon loads went to the poor at Newent, at the Rev. Foley's expense. (The Foleys were big local landowners).

At this time a seam over 6ft thick had been reached and a 'railroad or small collateral cut' was discussed to carry the coal to the main canal, via a possible extension westwards to limestone quarries at Gorsley, about a mile away. However, the new seam proved disappointing and in May, 1795 a further pit was sunk on the land of a Mr Wood at Hill House. This became known as Hill House Colliery and carried on in a small intermittent fashion for many years.

“ By 1795
the Canal
proprietor's
speculations
had lost a
net £ 515.
”

Meanwhile the Lower House pits were still working and in June 1795 an agreement was drawn up with one Robert Miles to haul 200 tons of coal to the canal head at Newent, though only a portion of the waterway to Gloucester then appears to have been completed.

By November 1795 the canal proprietor's mining speculations had lost a net £515 and an opportunity was quickly taken to

The Coal Branch... continued

hand over to Richard Perkins of Oakhill, Somerset; as an inducement it was decided to build the already discussed branch. Perkins agreed to supply the company with up to 4,000 tons of small coal annually for brick making and lime-burning, to pay 2d per ton for coal over the branch, also to guarantee 70 tons per day if it could be raised and sold. His first action was to dismiss all the colliers including the foreman, who had come from Nailsea in Somerset. He was allowed four guineas expenses to carry his family home.

In June 1796 John Chadwick agreed to construct the branch by the following Michaelmas. The branch ran above and parallel to a 17th century channel constructed to bring water from pools at Gorsley to an iron blast furnace at Newent, via a large storage pond which was alongside the canal at Oxenhall. The channel and furnace fell out of use well before the canal period, though the pond still retains its sheet of water.

A few months later the committee suspected that Perkins was dragging his feet, and wrote that the branch would soon be ready, adding darkly 'get on with sinking your new shafts ... as a disappointment in this instance will be big with consequences the most disagreeable to yourself and the Company'.

“*A disappointment
in this instance
will be big with
consequences the
most disagreeable
to yourself...*”

A swivel bridge was ordered where the branch was to run under a road at Oxenhall and by November 1796, £1,400 had been spent. Perkins was now erecting a steam engine and expecting to raise coal before Christmas. There were 'hopes of great pecuniary advantages' to the company.

Coal of a sort was available from the existing pits, but the company refused it, having already been obliged to buy from elsewhere. Worse followed, for in February 1797 a mortifying request was received in the

form of an application from a trader for a boat to bring 'foreign' coal to Newent from the Severn at Gloucester - opening this section, instead of stimulating the local collieries, had rather the reverse effect.

Nevertheless, the branch seems eventually to have been completed early in 1797 (apparently without an Act) and in August of that year plans were considered for a feeder from the Brockmorehead brook west of the pits. This however was not ordered to be carried out until December 1800, perhaps as a means of supplementing water supply to the summit level.

About the end of 1797 Perkins became involved with Moggridge of Boyce Court near Dymock; schemes came forth for erecting limekilns and exploring a coal seam discovered in Oxenhall

The Coal Branch... continued

tunnel. This latter idea however, was refused by the canal company who were concerned by the fact that although considerable tonnages of coal were now being raised, only part was going over the branch. Letters of complaint apparently received no attention and in May 1800 the clerk reported that the colliery at Oxenhall 'is entirely enveloped in mystery ... little appears to be doing'. But a month later it was thought important to keep the branch open, and towards the end of the year Moggridge junior requested a reduction on tonnage for coal from their colliery (presumably Hill House) which was destined for clothiers on the Stroudwater Canal.

From 1801 to 1812 there is a regrettable lack of entries in the minutes, but in August 1817 the committee became more active. It began by inspecting the canal from Ledbury to Gloucester and recommended *inter alia*, 'The land cut, to make the branch to Colliery.' It is not certain what this meant, because a week later (30 August 1817) it resolved to apply to the proprietors adjoining the branch and ascertain if they would repurchase the land.

Minutes are again sparse from this period until 1828 when Stephen Ballard had taken over the clerk's duties. The question of land occupied by 'the colliery

arm' cropped up several times in the next decade and about 1832 it was stated that the branch had 'for many years been abandoned'. In 1838 or 1839, Hill House Colliery started again but on 27 August 1839, the committee resolved to offer the land to Miss Foley 'as soon as it ascertained that the colliery now in work near Oxenhall to which the branch leads, is not likely to produce a sufficient quantity' in order to warrant its ongoing retention.

"In 1832 it was stated in the Canal Company minutes that the branch had for many years been abandoned."

Nevertheless there was a strong reluctance to abandon this first and last hope of indigenous mineral traffic, for a year later the committee

would only reconvey the land provided the Foleys guaranteed to allow a reopening, or to lay a 'Railroad', should good coal be found within seven years.

In the event, half a century of hope finally evaporated before the stipulated span. The committee agreed to transfer the land in November 1836, so bringing the Oxenhall branch to an ultimate end.

There was however a mining revival in the 1870s when Newent Colliery was sunk, and equipped with modern plant about 400 yards north of the old Hill House pit. According to a local man in 1957, the first load of coal went to the George Hotel at Newent, where the committee held its meetings in the formative years. The new

The Coal Branch... continued

colliery might have revived interest in the branch, though in view of past experience the company was hardly likely to make the first move. The venture did in fact quickly rush into difficulties - sulphurous coal, heavy pumping expenses and a trade recession - and was wound up in 1880, being the last serious attempt at exploiting the smallest of Gloucestershire's coalfields.

After the passage of well over a century, exploration can still reveal distinct signs of the Oxenhall Coal Branch. [The junction is heavily obscured by foliage, except in winter, and is immediately to the south of the wide restored section; to the north is the rapidly progressing Oxenhall Project site - Ed.]

The route of the branch for the first quarter mile is clearly visible. Beyond, as far as the old Gloucester-Ledbury railway, the course has been ploughed up, though it is revealed by shadows in the evening sun. (The railway was largely built in the early 1880s on the canal route, though not in this immediate area).

Much the best remnant is on the western side of the railway, being a substantial embankment showing the canal's section, with a large brick culvert underneath. Within the railway boundary fence the route is quite obliterated. The tight curves on this part of the branch as revealed by old maps, suggest

that it was not navigable to Long Boats.

From this point there are virtually no traces until near the old Newent Colliery, (the tips remain as a landmark). Here the route turned sharply south, crossing the Brockmorehead brook which passed below in another brick culvert, still extant. The final hundred yards or so to the Hill House colliery is practically levelled, and was not shown on the 1841 Pauntley Tithe Map which includes this section.

The layout near the colliery is not clear; there are no signs of a basin though the pit itself is marked by bramble-grown mounds and hollows. Neither are there any definite signs of the Brockmorehead feeder - it was perhaps never constructed. One query is the need for such a feeder; the canal at the colliery was alongside the Ell brook which could have been diverted into it.

Roderick Murchison the geologist, writing in 1838, believed that these futile coal workings pointed to more valuable deposits to the east and advised a search away from the line of disturbance. Had this been done, the unfortunate Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal might have justified its promoters' dreams at last.

[Please do not stray from rights of way - thank you.]

“Newent Colliery was wound up in 1880, being the last serious attempt at exploiting Gloucestershire's smallest coalfield.”

Committee Matters

Two Council of Management meetings are reviewed by our Editor in order that our Members and supporters are kept up to date...

JANUARY COMMITTEE

- Details relating to work in the vicinity of Lock Cottage, that were essential prior to sale of the Cottage, were discussed and agreed. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to fully complete restoration of the by-weir.

- All aspects of our Insurance were being reviewed by our Treasurer in liaison with the IWA Head Office; a significant increase in premiums appeared inevitable.

- Mike Potts reported the outcome of the Member's Questionnaire as a result of which he was planning a number of outings - the first being a weekend away exploring the Canals in Manchester and Liverpool [details on p.1 and 13 of the last edition - Ed.]

- Hereford City Council were seeking a Compulsory Purchase order for land at Aylestone Hill, Hereford, the extremity of which included the line of the Canal. It was agreed that there should be discussions with the land owner (a member of the Bulmer family), and Hereford City Council, to ensure that the best interests of the Canal were served. This was particularly important as the land in question was needed for spoil disposal when restoration on the approach to Aylestone Tunnel was undertaken.

FEBRUARY COMMITTEE

- Due to pressure of work Linda Palmer resigned as Chairperson to the Special Projects Group; David Penny was elected in her place. Linda was thanked for her 18 months leadership of the Group.

- Budgetary approval procedures were re-affirmed and everyone was reminded that expenditure could not be committed without following the prescribed system. This was particularly important with so much work going on in Gloucestershire.

- Arrangements for the AGM were agreed; Ledbury would be the location as this is approximately central along the line of the Canal [see centre pages].

- Our Chairperson, Linda Palmer, reminded the Council of Management that she had stressed that she was only willing to fill the role for 6 months to allow more time for a suitable replacement to be found. Having served for 12 months pressure of work meant that she would not be able to continue in any role after the AGM. The Council of Management thanked Linda for filling the role whilst a replacement was found.


- The Restoration Plant Manager reported that our second "new" excavator had been delivered.

Committee Matters (ii)

• Our Treasurer reported that, after further detailed investigations, there was no overall financial advantage in the Canal Trust voluntarily registering for VAT at present.

• The Steering Committee (comprising all 7 of the Local Authorities along the line of the Canal, plus both Regions of the Environment Agency, Southern Marches Partnership, Rural Development Commission, Heart of England Tourist Board and the Canal Trust) had gone out to tender to 5 firms of Consulting Engineers. This was in respect of essential independent studies into engineering feasibility, water resources, economic benefit and environmental issues relating to the whole length of the Canal. *[Since this Committee meeting, a great deal of hard work has gone on "behind the scenes" and the number of short-listed Consultants reduced to 2; more details in the next edition - Ed.]*

• It was recorded that a book of 'Special Resolutions' be established and maintained by the Minutes Secretary - the first entry being *"That a book of 'Special Resolutions' be established and maintained by the Minutes Secretary."*

• The Trading Company van engine had been repaired by volunteers incurring the low materials/machining costs of £110. This voluntary effort was greatly appreciated and should make attendance at events during 1997 considerably more profitable. 



CORPORATE
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MICHAEL STIMPSON and ASSOCIATES

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Dates For Your Diary

By Steve Delacourt-Smith

Social evenings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month at the
Acorn Suite of the Royal Oak Hotel, The Southend, Ledbury.

All meetings are 7.30 for 8pm.

Tuesday, 20th May

"Gloucester & Cheltenham Tramroad"

Member David Bick (author of the book about the H&G Canal)
will talk about another of Stephen Ballard's achievements.

Tuesday, 17th June

"Boating in the 1950's"

Tom Foxon - well known for his book "Anderton for Orders",
will take us back to the waterways scene of the 1950's.

Tuesday, 15th July

"Noggin & a Natter"

No formal speaker, but please come along for a chat
and an update of what the Trust is doing.

Tuesday, 19th August

"Noggin & a Natter"

No formal speaker, but please come along for a chat
and an update of what the Trust is doing.

WHAT WERE THEY LIKE ?

We have a very wide range of speakers, but what are the evenings actually like? Well, we normally have between 30 and 50 people to each evening, Members and potential Members(!), and ask the speakers to split the evening into two ¼ hour sections with an interval in between to refill our glasses, and have a chat. Each evening various announcements are made by a range of key people within the Trust so that those who attend are usually able to hear an item of news on one front or other that is 'hot off the press'. So if you have not come before why not join us ?

Members and non-members welcome. There will be a raffle, and plenty of time for a chat. These Social Events also provide a time and place for the dissemination of the latest news from the Trust. Please contact Steve if you have any queries, or ideas for Social Events [01452 501372].

Thursday, 22nd May - AGM

At the Burgage Hall, Church Street, Ledbury - see centre pages.

HEREFORDSHIRE AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE CANAL TRUST

WORKING TOGETHER IN THE PRESENT, TO REVIVE THE PAST, AND SECURE A BETTER FUTURE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1997

to be held on Thursday, 22nd May, 1997
at the Burgage Hall, Church Street, Ledbury
commencing at 7.30pm.

Annual Report and Accounts for Year Ended 28th February 1997

**[Summary (abridged) Accounts will be included as a loose insert (for Members only). Members may obtain a full set of Accounts by sending a large SAE to the Treasurer; full sets of Accounts will also be freely available at the AGM.]*

Apart from the formal business there will be
a lively mix of slides, overhead projections
and commentary on the successes of the year.

Light refreshments will be available.

Members and friends will be made very welcome.

There will be ample opportunities for general questions after the close of formal business. Prior notice of questions should ensure a comprehensive response and would be greatly appreciated.

AGENDA

1. Welcome and formal opening of the meeting.
2. Chairman's Report.
3. Group Reports.
4. To receive and approve the Report of Council, the Income and Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet of the Trust (and associated Company) for the year ended 28th February 1997, the Report of the Honorary Auditor thereon, and the Report of the Honorary Treasurer.
5. To re-appoint R W Davies Esq., of Davies Edwards and Company, as Honorary Auditor of the Trust (and associated Company).
6. To note that Linda Palmer is standing down due to pressure of work and does not offer herself for re-election. To re-appoint those Council Members retiring by rotation who offer themselves for re-election:

David Penny; Lesley Lowe; Tony Austin-Bailey

7. Close of formal business.

Following the close of the meeting there will be ample opportunities for general questions and a slide review of the work of the Canal Trust.

NOTE REGARDING AGENDA ITEM 6. One third of the Members of the Managing Council are required to stand down each year. All those standing down (listed at 6. above) are offering themselves for re-election unless stated otherwise. The maximum size of the Council of Management is 18 and therefore they will be returned un-opposed.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR ENDED 28th FEBRUARY, 1997

This is the fifth Annual Report of The Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust Limited [a non profit distributing Company (formed in April 1992, No. 2704407), which is a Registered Charity (1010721) and of the wholly owned Trading Company - Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal (Sales) Ltd (2710215)]. They replaced the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Society which was launched in 1983.

The *Canal Trust* is indebted to its *Council of Management*, and to the *Trading Company Board*; during the period under review [year ended 28th February 1997] those listed on page 13 have been Members:-

CANAL TRUST COUNCIL OF MANAGEMENT:

Tony Austin-Bailey; Tom Bennett; Liz Connors; Brian Fox;
Will Frecknall (*IWA nominee*); Nigel Jefferies; Lesley Lowe; Linda Palmer;
Cliff Penny; David Penny; Mike Potts; Steve Delacourt-Smith.

TRADING COMPANY (*H&GC (Sales) Ltd.*):

Liz Connors; Derek Gray(*c*) (*Boats Group Nominee*);
Steve Hughes; Joyce Lynham; David Penny.
(c) indicates co-opted on to the Board during the year.

PLACES; The main event of the last twelve months was our acquisition in August of the Lock Cottage site at Oxenhall, a generous gift from Robin Stiles. It is the first stretch of waterway owned by the Trust and has brought us a major step forward in the restoration of the Hereford and Gloucester Canal. To make sure we all knew what we were talking about, the Council of Management walked all our restoration sites together during one week this year, with the Restoration Team as guides; it is planned to make this an annual event.

PEOPLE; The Special projects group brought together a team of skilled and dedicated people to oversee the Lock Cottage site and other specific restoration projects. WRG adopted us as one of their projects and we have had help from many non-members including three Birmingham University School of Civil Engineering post graduates who undertook a desktop water resources study; from Workmatch who based themselves in Oxenhall village hall for their annual holiday while they spent their days clearing the undergrowth and their evenings sampling the drinks on offer in the local hostels; and from an archeological student who spent his university vacation carrying out a detailed survey of House Lock for us. Still on holidays, the annual canal camp held this year in October, reached the Oxenhall tunnel portal, bringing us another major step forward.

PLACES II; Several planning applications that would affect the line of the canal have been presented during the year, and the success for the Trust of the Pritchards site challenge, in an industrial area not far from the city centre, was mainly due to the very many hours Cliff and David Penny dedicated to the cause.

PEOPLE II; Following six very dedicated years as our Chairman, Cliff's retirement heralded a review of his post with several of his responsibilities being shared out amongst other council members. Following the AGM, we welcomed Linda Palmer as the Chairperson of the Council of Management and our treasurer Liz, took over as chairman of the Finance Group.

Mike and Joyce continued organising their popular trips for the Trust while the monthly social evenings welcomed more and more members to sample the delights of the Royal Oak in Ledbury.

In April the HGCT hosted the Southern Canals spring meeting by organising a day of coach and walking tours; add to this some interesting talks, good food and a fine day with a profusion of wild daffodils and you will understand why the day was a success.

Our work continues on seeking landowners' agreements as our database of landowners along the line of the canal grows nearer completion.



THERE'S STILL PLENTY OF TIME TO SUPPORT OUR MAJOR FUND-RAISING INITIATIVE

Every pound counts! And the odds are MUCH,
MUCH, better than the National Lottery!

Herefordshire & Gloucestershire
Canal Trust - H & G C S

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GRAND HOLIDAY DRAW

★ 1st Prize - NARROW BOAT HOLIDAY FOR 3/5 ★
ONE WEEK (April/May 1998) Donated by STARLINE NARROWBOATS

2nd - SANNAN COURT "FINEST IN W. WALES"
One week self catering (in part of former Victorian Vicarage) for 2/3.
(3/1/98 to 23/5/98) Donated by HAMDDEN Ltd., a Hyder Company

3rd - TWO NIGHTS B&B FOR TWO IN LEDBURY
(Prior to 1/4/98) - donated by the award winning ROYAL OAK HOTEL

(All prizes exclude Bank Holidays and are subject to availability.)
Promoter: Mrs E Connors, 18 St. Elizabeth's Close, Sutton St. Nicholas, Hereford, HR1 2SF
Registered with Hereford City Council under Section 6 Lotteries & Amusements Act, 1976

To be drawn at National Waterways Festival, Henley, 25/8/97

- TICKETS 25p EACH -

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Additional
tickets are
available from
our Treasurer
Liz Connors;
at the AGM;
or at the
monthly Social
Evenings.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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you*

POST CODE

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NEW MEMBER ☐ RENEWAL ☐ GIFT ☐

Details, please, of any skills
that might assist us in our work?

Please indicate where you obtained this form *The Wharfinger - Edition 54 - Summer 1997*

Subscription rates :- INDIVIDUAL £ 7.50 ☐ JOINT/FAMILY £ 10 ☐

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RESTORATION UPDATE ~~HEREFORDSHIRE~~ & GLOUCESTERSHIRE

By Brian Fox

First of all a note on the current situation in Herefordshire. The last mention was to say that we had trouble holding water in the latest restored section as there was a problem with the original puddle clay lining. We are now in the situation where we haven't enough water to fill the canal anyway - the rain has been meagre this winter and it hasn't been full since Mike and I took a boat trip down it a year ago last January. We shall be taking advice on how best to resolve the problem of leaky puddle clay and then hope that it rains a lot, but preferably not when we are on a workcamp! In the meantime the grass will be cut along the towpath for the whole length from Monkhide to Barrs Lock giving walkers the benefits if not boaters.

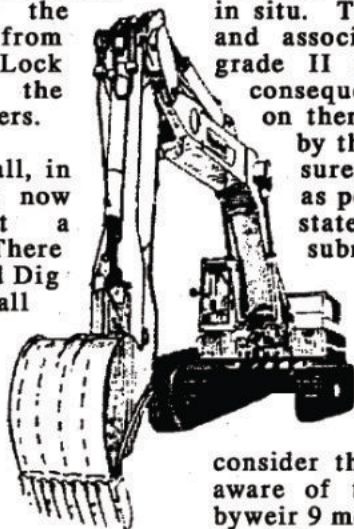
Progress at Oxenhall, in Gloucestershire, is now going along at a phenomenal rate. There have been WRG and Dig Deep navvies from all over the country descending on the Oxenhall site on many weekends this year and our local volunteers have been grafting most others so that significant changes can be seen from week to week. Our current target is to complete all works necessary so that Lock Cottage can be put on the market in the summer.

The cottage itself now has a safe staircase so that potential buyers can see what they are getting and the floorboards upstairs have been repaired, but most of the effort has gone into the area surrounding the cottage, jobs which were considered essential before any conveyance of land could be contemplated:-

1. The byweir culvert which runs under the house has now been rebuilt where necessary and the brickwork repointed for the entire length (about 100ft.)

2. The byweir itself has been rebuilt using bricks recovered from the locality to match those in situ. The whole of the lock and associated features are a grade II listed structure and consequently any work done on them has to be approved by the authorities to make sure it is restored, as near as possible, to its original state. This involved submitting accurate drawings of the structures with descriptions of materials to be used and then waiting for approval. When you

consider that we were not even aware of the existence of the byweir 9 months ago (see Special Pond Group article last autumn) then it has been a terrific achievement in the time. By the time you read this there will be water once again going over the top of the weir as it is diverted



RESTORATION UPDATE ~~HEREFORDSHIRE~~ & GLOUCESTERSHIRE ... continued

around the lock so that work can commence on the restoration without getting wet feet.

3. The towpath, about 100 yds. from the lane to the cottage, has to be graded and levelled ready for small vehicles to gain access. Before this can be done the Canal adjacent has had to be cleaned out and this has now been completed during a week of intensive efforts by a few local volunteers who took time off to drive excavator and dumpers. The usual problems of dumpers getting stuck were encountered and running repairs were inevitably needed to keep things moving but most of the soil has now been removed and deposited in the corner of a field with the agreement of another farmer, Mr. Davies. A temporary dam now has to be built across the Canal just above the lock to divert water through the byweir.

4. Restoration of the lock itself, which is adjacent to the cottage, will begin as soon as we have got it dry. The remaining mud from the bottom of the lock has been cleared using the old fashioned shovel and wheelbarrow routine. There are those who would do everything with a machine but there are limits and those involved found muscles they had forgotten they had but at the end of the day a distinct sense of satisfaction was felt at a job well done.

5. The garden area has been cleared of undergrowth and a layer of good dredgings from the bottom of the Canal will be spread over to give the next

owner a good start to their gardening. The fence may have to be moved over in one place to make room for the future balance beam on the lock gate and then the whole fence will be given a good coat of paint to brighten it up.

Apart from these urgent tasks there has also been much effort put into clearance of vegetation from the Canal bed prior to the start of the nesting season. WRG groups have largely been involved, for which we again thank them and it is now possible to see the bed of the Canal all the way from the aqueduct to the road.

The small parcel of land which the Trust recently purchased from British Rail has also seen some large trees felled which we are hoping to sell to a timber merchant.

continued on p.18

WANT TO GET INVOLVED ?

As reported above we are now working on the Oxenhall Locks Project Site virtually every weekend and several other days/evenings each month. There is a vast range of work to undertake from bricklaying to being trained to drive our plant; from demolition (with care!) to gardening (to make the Cottage and its approach look its best before going on the market). This has been a site where we have made such rapid progress - don't you want to be part of it?

To volunteer to assist in our restoration (and maintenance) work please telephone:

Steve Delacourt-Smith (01452) 501372

Brian Fox (01432) 358628

Simon Hayward (01452) 534232

Tom Bennett (01981) 500258

RESTORATION UPDATE ~~HEREFORDSHIRE~~ ... continued & GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Negotiations have also recently been completed with Gloucester County Council for a strip of their land about 10 yards wide which will give us access through from Horsefair Lane to the old British Rail land and through to our Lock Cottage section in one continuous length. It has been fenced off and means that we now have somewhere secure to park and service our equipment plus storage space for bricks, etc.

The Trust now own two excavators again, having scraped the barrel to find the money (not all the promised grant aid materialised) to buy another JCB 360°, and it has already been put to good use at Oxenhall.

Finally a quick word about the towpath in general and the comments I made a year ago about its use by members of the public which prompted a number of letters on the subject. The problem you may recall was how to accommodate all the different types of users (walkers, disabled, cyclists, horseriders, elderly) on the towpath. Unfortunately the Trust are not really in a position yet to make an informed judgement on the situation and will not be until we actually own or have legal access agreements to much more of the Canal. Personally, I think normal walkers take priority and the other potential users have to be fitted in side by side where possible. Cyclists would clearly have equal rights in an urban area like Hereford where a Canal corridor is an ideal way of getting cyclists off the roads but

in rural areas it is not so important and may depend a lot on the individual circumstances of a given length. Wheelchair access would be nice for shorter sections of canal but would clearly cost more money in preparation of suitable surfaces. Stiles would need to be designed to cater for wheelchairs and also older people who find climbing a problem. Horses come at the bottom of my personal list and as far as I am concerned they should be banned from all towpaths - they do too much damage to the surface!

Once again a reminder to all potential navvies - we are now working most weekends at Oxenhall but please ring Steve Delacourt-Smith to make certain.

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50 Editions On . . .

We continue our review of the earlier Editions of *The Wharfinger*. [Editions 1-26 were covered in Editions 50 and 51.]

Edition 27, Summer 1990 reported on the AGM where Tony Austin Bailey had been thanked for his three years as Chairman; and he was persuaded to remain in active service on the Committee. Cliff Penny was to be the new Chairman and said "through professional attitudes, improved publicity (of which *The Wharfinger* plays an increasing part) and sheer hard work - by pen and spade - we intend to show the local councils that we are an organisation that is worthy of their support. It is only in this way - working together - that we shall succeed in our long term

objective of (once more) linking Hereford City to the inland waterways network at Gloucester." Sir John Knill, one of our Vice Presidents, had donated a 12 seater trip boat, Mallard. London Waterway Recovery Group had cleared and inserted stop planks under Middle Court Bridge, at Monkhide, and plans for our first ever Canal Camp in Gloucestershire were announced. We had contributed to Hereford & Worcester County Council's ten year "County Countryside Recreation Strategy" - placing great emphasis on the benefit to the community even before the Canal was fully restored.

“the line of the
Canal would be
completely blocked
by the road
embankment.”

Autumn of 1990, edition 28, saw the introduction of a new front cover for *The Wharfinger* - based on a rather dark photograph of Skew Bridge and with a map of the Canal on the reverse. Our planned presence, for the first time in a 20ft. square marquee at the National Waterways Festival (to be held at Gloucester the following August Bank Holiday), was much in evidence - with the usual pleas for help. The formation of the Charitable Trust was at an advanced stage. Extensive liaison was taking place with the Hereford and Worcester County Council regarding their proposals to demolish Roman Road Canal Bridge. Official Orders for the proposed Hereford Bypass indicated that the line of the Canal would be completely

blocked by the road embankment. Both vandals and "phantom rubbish tippers" were causing us additional work at Monkhide. We carried our first full page advertisement. One of the commemorative plaques made by Nigel Jefferies had been unveiled at Skew Bridge by the Chairman of Yarkhill Parish Council.

Our presence at the Gloucester '90 National Waterways Festival had been a huge success, edition 29 of *The Wharfinger*, said it was "...the most effective promotion of the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal to date...". The Dowty Charitable

50 Editions On . . . continued

Trust had donated an unexpected, and most welcome, £500 following their Chief Executive visiting our display. Over 100 new Members - including our first 14 Corporate Members, had been recruited during the three day event. The Wharfinger also reported that we had hosted our first (but not the last!) Southern Canals meeting. This edition carried photographs for the first time. South Herefordshire District Council had fully supported us by formally objecting to the proposed blocking of the Canal by the Hereford Bypass.

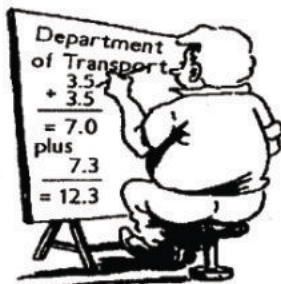
Edition 30, (Spring of 1991) said the local press had reported South Herefordshire District Council's Planning Officer telling the full Council that our proposals were "formidable" but we "... had a realistic approach to the restoration over a long period. To this end it was important that the route within the District be protected in the Local Plan." Our Chairman said "As unpaid volunteers our only reward lies in such successes." Gift Membership was introduced and our Membership was approaching 250 [currently over 750 - Ed.]

The first of two detailed (and amusing) reports of our presence at the Hereford Bypass Public Inquiry was carried in edition 31 (Summer 1991) - according to

Cliff Penny "... a demanding and interesting time!". A simple question as to why drawings at the Inquiry gave measurements that did not tie up with an earlier letter from the Department of Transport led to ribald laughter when they asked for (and were given) an adjournment of a week to add up $(2 \times 3.5) + 7.3$! Accusations that our Chairman had "totally mislead the Inquiry" (by basing our costings for the crossing of the road over the line of the Canal on the use of pre-cast concrete units) "they are not made that big" said the DoT's Barrister confidently - led to some very red faces when we gave the Inquiry Inspector both the name and telephone number of a reputable manufacturer whose pre-cast concrete units were the correct size!

Cause for another adjournment.

Edition 32, in the Autumn of 1991, carried the eagerly awaited second report on our presence at the Hereford Bypass Inquiry. The DoT admitted that our construction techniques were feasible - and that it would exactly halve the costs of providing a bridge for the Canal at the time of the Bypass construction. Written assurances that the DoT would "consider" assisting us in passing under the Bypass *after* it had been built were dismissed at the Inquiry by our Chairman who said the assurance was "... at best a



50 Editions On . . . continued

definite maybe; at worst an insult to the intelligence of the reader." Members were told that we had, therefore, left our fate in the hands of the Inspector. As the the Inquiry had been adjourned for a specialist fog investigation it would be a considerable time before the outcome would be known. There was a plea for more volunteers to help on our display and sales stand at promotional events - "...please don't leave it to the same few each time." Arrangements were well in hand for our presence at the next National Waterways Festival, to be held in the Black Country at Windmill End. The Restoration Group reported that hand excavation of preliminary drainage channels was under way on the approach to Oxenhall Tunnel. We were very pleased to report that Britannia Construction, of Cheltenham, had made a 2.5 ton dumper available to us on loan. [Seemed huge then - Ed.]

Winter 1991 - edition 33 - reported the National Waterways Festival at Windmill End to have been a huge success with the local press reporting over 300,000 visitors over the three days. We had operated two shifts a day with 6 volunteers to each shift and could barely cope with the crowds. The Chairman had been "ticked off" for his repeated requests for volunteers in The Wharfinger - and this edition carried his defiant "...it's

the results that count!". Meanwhile Mike Potts reported on a very successful coach and boat trip to the 'Mon. and Brec.' Canal. Our proposed Land Owner Agreement was being drafted. We hoped for "a more even geographical spread" for Social Events - largely centred on Hereford at the time. The route of the Canal to the terminus basin, including essential diversion routes where it was already obstructed by development, had been lodged with Hereford City Council.

*"two shifts a day
with 6 volunteers
a shift and could
barely cope with
the crowds."*

The formation of the Charitable Trust was proceeding slowly; following advice from the Charity Commissioners it was decided to form a separate Trading Company. "Tommy the tent" featured in part one of an

amusing article regarding our attendance at the Windmill End Festival. Restoration Update reported that we had found a mysterious brick structure in the cutting side at Oxenhall, very close to the Tunnel Portal.

Edition 34 was published in Spring 1992 and announced what was eventually to be a two year sponsorship for the printing of The Wharfinger by the Midlands Electricity Board. The very long awaited launch of the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust was to be at the AGM of the Canal Society that April. The Gloucester Citizen reported one

50 Editions On . . . continued

of our Canal Camps with the heading "*Waterway to spend the weekend*" ! Meanwhile BBC Hereford and Worcester were being taken into Ashperton Tunnel to promote member Bob Simpson's first talk for us about Oxenhall Tunnel - and **The Wharfinger** contained an article describing how it took 8 hours to achieve 15 minutes "airtime" - including the (completely true)

story of the Chairman 'phoning the SAS for help! Unfortunately all this publicity was *too* successful - with a Member describing how some 80 people had to be invited back to a repeat showing due to the huge attendance (over 5 times any previous talk !). Our first ever **Grand Holiday Draw** was launched.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .



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We have a very limited number of back issues of *The Wharfinger* for sale (some of the earlier issues are photo-copies):-

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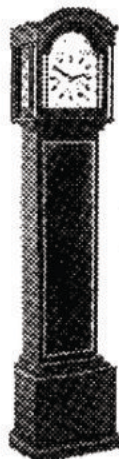
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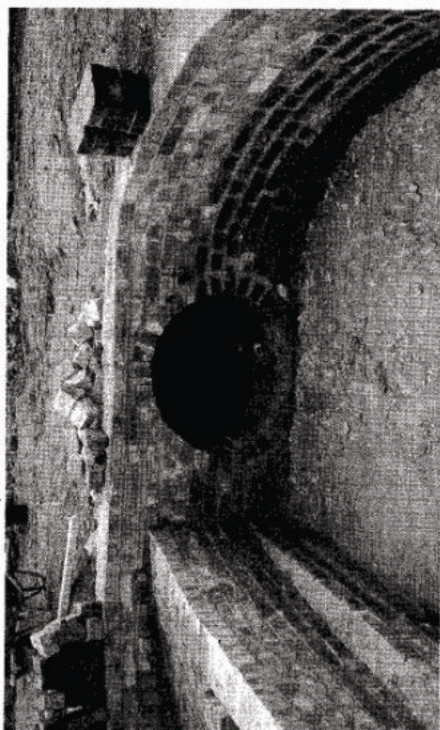
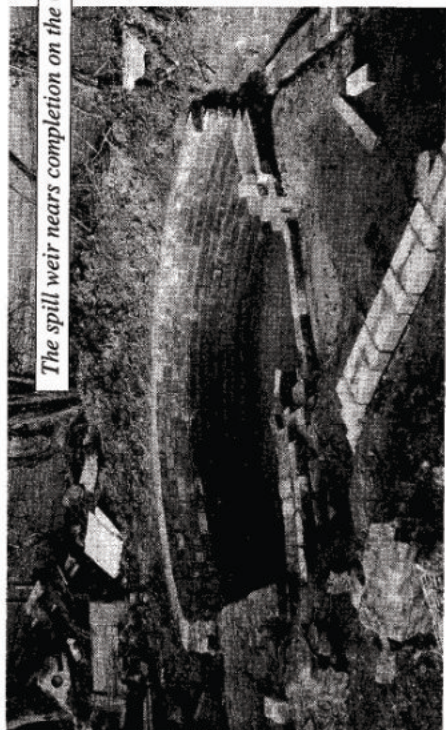
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The spill weir nears completion on the Oxenhall Locks Project Site.



The Last Page

BALANCING THE BOOKS

Whilst outgoings remain record-breakingly high we are very pleased that limited funds are beginning to flow in. To Members, and a number of IWA Regions/Branches, who made a donation - a very special "thank you"; more details next time.


MAIL ORDER SALES

As you will see on the inside front and back covers we have some new volunteers in the Trading Co. We are very grateful to Penny & George Shetliffe who have taken over Mail Order Sales. This is of great assistance to the efficient running of the Trading Company's fund raising.

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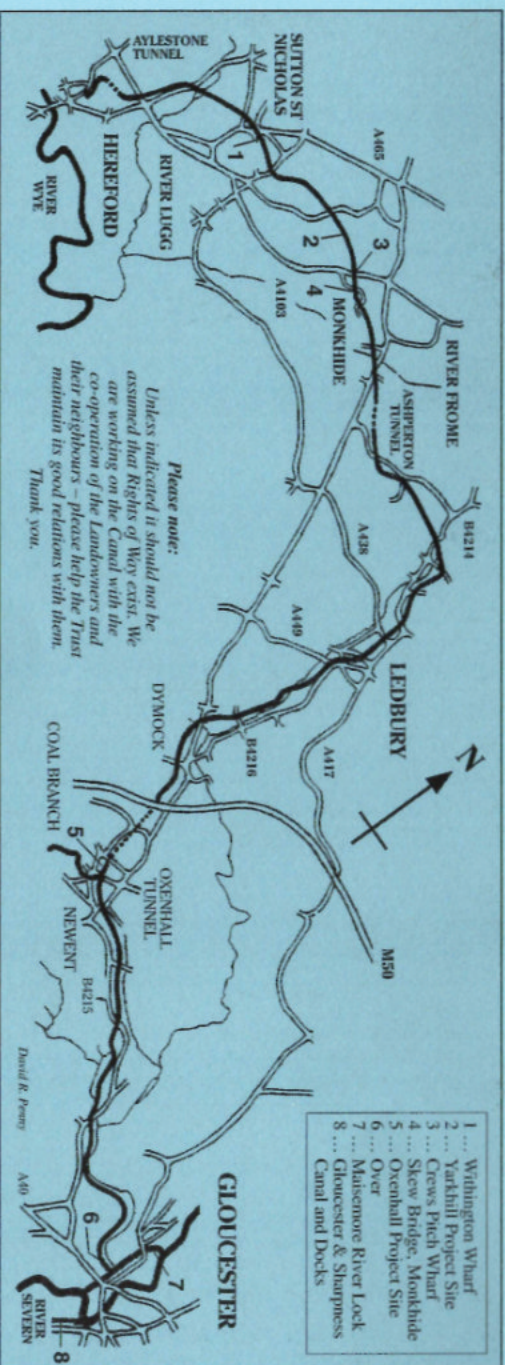
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The Canal Society was formed in 1983 and replaced in 1992 by the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust, a registered charity. The Trust has an ordinary and corporate membership exceeding 700 from all over the country – and abroad! Our objective is to fully restore the 34 mile Canal, from its connection with the 2,500 mile inland waterways network at Gloucester to the centre of Hereford. A Steering Committee of the Local Authorities, Environment Agency, etc. has been formed by the Trust to assist in progressing this objective. We have a major restoration site in each county, which together extend to some 3 miles.