

Grantham Canal News



September 2008



The Newsletter of the Grantham Canal Society

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Grantham Canal Society 2008

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Editorial

Hello and welcome to the third edition of Grantham Canal News.

It is really good to have positive feedback about Issue no 2 from a number of our readers. At the last Members Meeting we were even congratulated and told it was the best Grantham Canal magazine ever. As the former Editor of Bridge News that I produced in the 90's, I took this as a bit of a double-edged compliment, but maybe they weren't members then, which lets me off the hook.

I'd also like to thank those eagle-eyed readers who took the trouble to point out the rogue apostrophe in one of our picture captions, especially the sender of the anonymous postcard. These apostrophe's just creep in when you're not looking – I don't know where they come from but if any of you would like to take on the role of proofreader, do get in touch!

Our Members Meeting was well attended and we heard some very encouraging reports about developments along the canal. We were delighted to see members from as far afield as Peterborough who had taken the trouble to drive over. It's nice to know that the Grantham inspires support and affection amongst people who rarely get the chance to enjoy its many charms. Our distribution list includes addresses in London, Edinburgh and many other parts of Great Britain. I'd love to hear from our far-flung supporters and to know how your association with the canal started and what keeps you interested.

In fact, I'd love to hear from anyone who has a special interest in the canal or a story to tell. I've included a few stories of my own in this issue – about the iron-ore mining along the Vale and the bell-tower at Cropwell Bishop church – but there must be many other memories that readers would like to share with us, so don't hold back. These pages are for you to fill with the things that interest you. E-mail, handwritten – even on a postcard! – we don't mind how it reaches us.

As I write, it's more like November than August outside, but that's the great joy of our British climate. I hope it won't spoil anybody's fun and that I shall see you along the towpath. By the way, in case you don't already know, there's more information about the canal, its history and the work that's already been undertaken on our website at www.granthamcanal.com. Like everything else we do, it's still work in progress, but well worth a visit.

All the best

Martin Day - Editor



PS I reckon the heron on the front cover is thinking "I hope they're going to do something soon or there won't be any fish to catch". We're on the case!

“Just a few more words from the Chairman “

In the last edition of the newsletter I talked about some of the physical challenges facing the society today. You will read elsewhere how work on those projects is progressing.

We have other less obvious challenges and many of these are in areas where you may be help the society. We need volunteers who bring with them skills that will assist us in looking after the Grantham Canal.

Ah! You reply; what can I do? Well we can find roles for anyone who can make some time available to us. Let's look at possible areas of voluntary participation ...

- **Your local environment** – if you regularly visit or walk a length of canal towpath you can act as our 'eyes and ears' and report any changes or issues you find. These may relate to litter, fencing and hedge maintenance, grass cutting, etc. All things you observe when walking the towpath.
- **Angling liaison** – talk to us about the problems you experience as an angler and we can work with you to try to find ways of overcoming them.
- **Administration** – we need assistance with record keeping, project documentation, membership communications, etc. Much of this work can be done from your own home.
- **Physical restoration** – many projects require volunteer input which can range from clearing brambles to laying bricks or, if you have the necessary certification, operating machinery or renovating water courses.
- **Operating boats** – we intend to have a public trip boat offering cruises on the navigable section of canal from Woolsthorpe to the A1 in 2009. We will need several crew and certified skippers to share in this work.
- **Local community liaison** – acting as a representative of your village or estate and letting us know what is happening in your community. This could include delivering our quarterly newsletter, making sure the local shop has stocks of our publications, chatting to others about the canal, etc.

- **Structural engineering** – we have many bridges to replace along the canal and we need to develop a range of designs suitable for different locations.
- **Project planning** – there are several major projects for which skilled advice and planning assistance is essential.
- **Fund raising** – whether by organising small local events or applying for grant funding or sponsorship. Money is, unfortunately, essential if we are to reopen the canal from Grantham to the River Trent.
- **Team leaders** – people with experience of planning and organising groups of volunteers so that we can provide facilities, particularly for younger people, to participate in the canal and the environment.
- **Cyclists liaison** – there are many cyclists who use the canal towpath but have little or no contact with the society. Lets work together to enhance your experience.
- **Conservation** – This is a very important subject and help from those of you with practical experience in this field would be most welcome

Now, is there nothing that might interest you?

How much of your time do we require? No more than you feel able to offer. We will be grateful for any support you can give whether it is one day per year or one day per week. We will try to accommodate your needs.

So what do you do next?

Please complete the following form and post it to me, Mike Stone at 7 Crow Park Drive, Burton Joyce, Nottingham NG14 5AS.

Alternatively, if you have access to the web please e-mail me the information using the form you will find on our website www.granthamcanal.com/volunteering

I look forward to hearing from you.

We really do need your support; people built the canal in the 18th century and it is people who will rebuild it in the 21st century.

Mike Stone



What's been happening.....

Meeting with Robin Evans, CEO British Waterways

Robin Evans has been holding a series of country-wide meetings to talk and listen to BW customers. He was at the Sailing Club at Adbolton early one morning in July and discussed current issues for about 90 minutes with a group of about thirty people from various interest groups. By prior arrangement the Grantham Canal then became his focus of attention and he toured the area, currently the subject of the Green Infrastructure Project, with a small team including Tony Wilkinson, Peter Stone, Mike Oliver, Kevin Mann and Mike Stone. We visited Holme Pierrepont, Bassingfield and Cotgrave.

During this time we discussed many relevant topics and gained an understanding of BW's position with regard to the future of the canal.

Here are some of the CEO's comments:-

- As the Grantham Canal is a 'Remainder Waterway' and as such is a low priority for expenditure by BW it will receive normal maintenance but nothing more at this time.
- BW is desperately short of funds and therefore is concentrating those it has on navigable waterways. The future may look different but that is the situation today.
- He recognises the value of volunteers – he has had previous experience of them whilst at the National Trust – and needs to make more use of them by BW.
- To demonstrate his commitment he has appointed Ed Moss as National Volunteering Officer, reporting to Caroline Killeavy.
- He explained the difficulties he has in getting BW culture changed to reflect a more welcoming aspect and communications with voluntary bodies improved.
- He is supportive of the work on the Grantham canal and will try to make things easier for the GCS to operate but we must still work within the Health & Safety umbrella.
- He encouraged us to continue with the restoration plans for Lock 18 and supports this work.

- He stated that BW needs to get more use / better value out of its assets and is still supporting canal restoration viz. Droitwich, Liverpool development, etc.
- There is likely to be an upsurge in volunteer capability and a downsizing in BW resources.
- BW is lobbying for changes to the Community Infrastructure Levy arrangements, to permit existing infrastructure to benefit
- He was very interested in the Trent Link developments and considered these a very positive step forward.

All in all it was a very positive meeting and the points raised are being followed up by both the Partnership and the Society

Lock 18

There has been considerable effort put into finding a contractor to rebuild the off-side lock wall at an affordable cost. We've attended meetings, received competitive quotes, considered different working methods, consulted BW and thenhad to start all over again while the estimated costs continued to rise. Happily I can report that we do now have a contractor with whom we would like to place the work. Next, where's the money coming from?

We are very lucky that the IWA has agreed to fund a significant part of the cost but we still need more money. Fortunately we have friends who recognise the importance of this lock to the overall restoration of the canal and the money has been sourced from various places. Full details of these benefactors will be announced in the next edition.

What is the final cost likely to be? Well neither we nor the contractor will know without some investigation work so by the time you read this I hope a trial hole will have been dug to find out the situation behind the collapsing wall. The results of the investigation should determine a final price, and then we will know whether we have sufficient funds to enable work to proceed.

We hope to complete the task by Christmas but I am not saying which year until all the i's have been dotted and the t's crossed! Walk along the towpath and see what progress is being made.

Harby Bridge

Nothing new to report but expect to see markings on the highway restricting traffic to the centre of the road in the future.

Property Developments near Cotgrave

There have been a number of applications submitted to Rushcliffe Borough Council for residential developments close to the canal. Current difficulties in the property market may change or delay some planned activity but we are in close communication with the Borough Council and have had discussions with developers to ensure that the canal forms a key element of the regeneration and growth of the area. The Green Infrastructure Study (see pages 16/17) is also looking at the development of that area and at possible routes to connect the canal into the national waterways network.

Harlaxton Wharf Fundraising

A quiz held in Harlaxton Village Hall on Friday 6th June 2008, raised over £400 for The Grantham Canal Society.

Lesley and Roy Holden organised the quiz for Villagers and members of the Grantham Canal Society. The proceeds are being used to start the process of restoring The Harlaxton Wharf on the Canal at the bottom of The Drift.

Chairman, Mike Stone gave a short presentation during the interval.

He updated us on news of the activities, future plans of the Society and encouraged people to join the Society. He promoted the "Romantic Canal" book and the latest Canal guide which are available in Harlaxton Village Store.

A ploughman's supper was served by Sue Carr, Jane and Peter Hawkins and Carole Harris. The Raffle was sponsored by local businesses including Harlaxton Village Store, The Gregory, Watkins of Westgate, The Welby Arms Denton, Harlaxton Picture Framing Service as well as prizes from generous villagers. Kevin Lawry gave a vote of thanks to the team of people who had helped to make it such an enjoyable and successful evening.

Iron-Ore Mining in the Vale of Belvoir

When I was younger I used to visit my aunt's house at Asfordby and could never get over the sight of a huge iron works down the road at Asfordby Valley. It was called Holwell Works and it sat there surrounded by open countryside. We sometimes went for a walk, alongside the works, to see 'The fountains'; these were really sprays erected over a large pond to allow cooling water to cool down before returning into the pond for reuse, but to my young eyes they were magic. When I was a teenager I used to stay at my cousin's house in the valley during the summer holidays, so it gave me a chance to explore more of the works but unfortunately it was being run down for closure by this time.

I had always been interested in the old mineral lines shown on Ordnance Survey maps zigzagging around Belvoir Castle, but never really saw them because they were temporary lines, laid to the quarries, around the area, and the map I looked at showed they were mostly dismantled. My mum and dad used to drive around the area on Sunday afternoon jaunts that were pleasurable in the 50's. Travelling with them, my face 'glued' to the car window, try as I might all I could see was fields.

Years later, I was idling away my time on the internet and came across a site that showed the railway which runs past the works, or did, because now it is the Test Track for new trains. Following the trail, I arrived at Old Dalby and saw several photographs from the past showing the station and one bit intrigued me, namely a reference to an incline used to bring the iron-ore down to the railway. There was a link and upon clicking I found myself in a wonderful web site about the iron-ore fields in Leicestershire. A narrow gauge railway bringing ore from the open field quarries, around Warthaby, used the incline. Now I had been to that village only the previous week to see one of our members and of course never noticed anything so I spoke to Ian, who lives there, and he loaned me a book on the subject by Eric Tonks.

It appears that when the railway, being built from Nottingham down through Melton Mowbray, was being surveyed, various routes were looked at and, at a tiny village called Holwell, iron-ore was found out-cropping to the surface. Samples were dug out and sent by horse and cart for analysis. These showed that the ore was rich enough to be worth extracting. A company was set up to remove the ore that, at that stage, was easy won. (The railway route didn't, eventually, go through Holwell but took another route through Old Dalby and a series of tunnels and covered ways, passing Grimston and Asfordby and on to Melton.) The logical place to build the works was where a valley ran down from near Ab Kettleby and Holwell; this was the perfect

route for the narrow gauge line initially built to bring the ore for smelting into pig iron. The Midland Railway took over the line and converted it to standard gauge to allow the ore to be taken to the Stanton works at Ilkeston without the need for further transshipment. Various other quarries were opened and some closed as the ore was removed. A number of narrow gauge lines were laid to tipping points, which allowed ore to be loaded into larger standard gauge wagons.

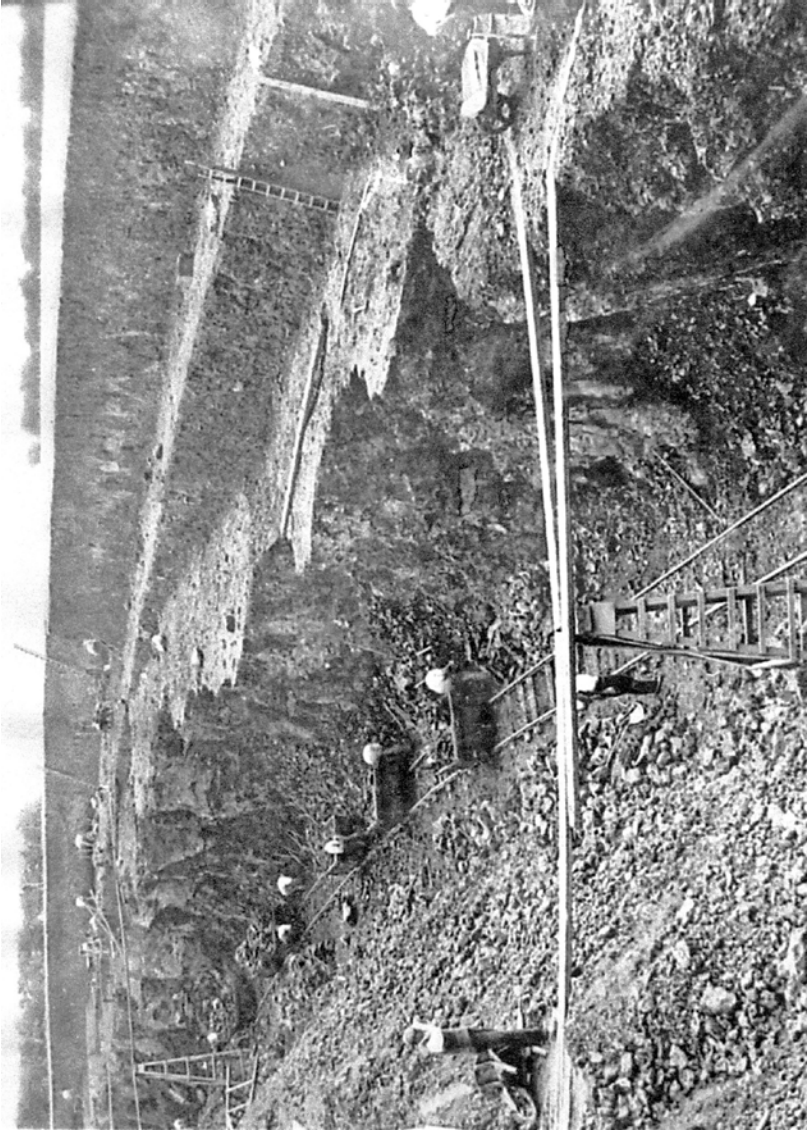
Now, the time we are talking about is the late 19th C before any type of excavating machinery was invented so all the ore was removed **by hand**. As I mentioned, the initial ore outcropped on the top of the southern ridge of the Vale of Belvoir - the same ridge where Belvoir Castle sits on its eastern end. As the seams were progressively worked towards the south and east they gradually dipped so requiring the removal of more overburden. The way the ore was removed was as follows: A strip was dug across the site and the overburden, namely bright orange soil, was stacked in a heap. The exposed top of the ore was chiselled and crow bared to loosen it. The strip of ore was removed to its base creating a trench, maybe twenty feet deep, and narrow gauge rails were laid in the bottom.

The soil on the top of the next strip was removed and wheel barrowed across the gap on single planks, supported on trestles and tipped into the area now cleared of ore. The newly exposed ore formed a quarry face to the railway and this was either prized out with picks and crowbars or in later times drilled and blasted to be then hand-loaded into the small hoppers. When the top cover was only a few feet thick and the layer of ore was thin, the trestle bridges were smallish affairs but as the topsoil deepened, and so did the layer of ore, structures of twenty or more feet high were required, still with a single plank.

The picture (opposite) shows the trestles and narrow planks in the Wartnaby quarry. What happened when it was wet or windy does not bear thinking about! This is a copy of the original, now in the office of the wood yard, situated almost on the old track bed of the railway. Ian and I walked along this old track several weeks ago in bright sunshine but both of us could not imagine what it would have been like standing on the tiny footplate of the loco pulling a train of hoppers in a January westerly gale in that exposed position. - I would have loved it.

Martin Day





Iron-ore mining at Wartnaby

The Grantham Canal – a Rich Wildlife Habitat

Flora

The canal is particularly rich in marginal vegetation, these are the plants found alongside the banks but growing in the water.



Reeds, rushes and flowering rush – Kevin Mann

Locally dominant plants are Reed Sweet Grass and Yellow Iris with its beautiful and distinct bright yellow flowers. Flowering Rush has a very pretty multi stemmed flower head supporting small pink flowers, and this is found occasionally along the canal.

Water Soldier, a plant resembling a pineapple top, has a strong-hold within the SSSI, but it is not a plant it was notified for.

Lesser Reedmace is found occasionally, this is a small version of the species mentioned earlier and has a rusty coloured flower spike. Water Mint, Gypsywort, Arrowhead, Water Plantain and various species of sedge and rush are found at several places alongside the canal.

Under the water Rigid Hornwort dominates; this is found in extensive masses in shady areas and as its name implies the whorled leaves are stiff to the touch. It is often growing in close proximity to Nuttall's waterweed. Also dominant is Common Duckweed, a floating small leaved plant that can often look like a grass lawn covering the entire surface of the water. These plants are dominant particularly downstream of Cotgrave.

Between Redmile and Woolthorpe more diverse plant communities exist including Fan-leaved Water Crowfoot, and many of the Pondweeds (broad-leaved, fennel, perfoliate and curled). The rare Grasswrack Pondweed is present between Redmile and Muston. This species is of national importance and is found primarily in backwaters and slow flowing waters. It has been lost from most river systems and canals have become the refuges for the plant. The population in the canal, therefore, is of national importance.

In some shaded areas the delicate Water Starworts are found, with their star shaped whorl of leaves.

Water Soldier – British Waterways



Along the towpath a myriad of wildflowers can be seen in spring and summer. Walkers can see the white flowers of Feverfew, Gypsywort, Meadowsweet and the often found Oxeye Daisy contrasted against the pinks and purples of Burdock, and Cranesbill. Tall plants such as Rosebay Willowherb, Hogweed and Foxglove form the backdrop for the more delicate Speedwell and Pansy. In Spring Celandine will be seen before the summer plants come into flower, and these include the wonderful sunny yellows of Buttercup, Coltsfoot, Lesser Trefoil, Yellow Rattle and Bristly Ox-Tongue. These are only some of the many species of flowering plant found along the canal banks and towpath.

There are two invasive alien plants found in the canal; Water Hyacinth has bright green waxy leaves and a pretty purple flower, but can be very invasive if not kept under control. It has been found near Denton.

Water Fern is present occasionally near Woolsthorpe. This plant can remain dormant as spoors on the canal bed and can grow extensively in some years. It is green during the growing season but changes to red later in the year.

Fauna

The shy Water Vole used to be found extensively on the western end of the canal and although the habitat is suitable it is in serious decline. This may be due to predation by Mink. If Otters return to the canal then they would be in direct competition with mink and this could help the Water Vole.

Hares and foxes are seen on the towpath and even the rarer stoat is occasionally seen. An even rarer and altogether delightful animal is the Harvest Mouse, and nest have been seen in the dry section.

There are several Badger setts along the length of the canal and tracks have been noted at many sites, showing that Badger activity is widespread.

No presence of Great Crested Newts has been found, except in the ponds at Muston Meadows, but Smooth Newts, Common Frogs and Common Toads have been noted. The spawn of Toads are laid in strings whereas those of Frogs are found in a mass.

Grass Snake have been seen in the dry section of the canal, and the habitat along the whole length is suitable for this species. There have been sightings near Kinoulton and Hose. The canal habitat and banks obviously provide a safe haven for one of our few native harmless reptiles.

Bats use linear features such as canals and they like to feed on the insects found over water. Common Pipistrelle is present along the canal and there have been occasional sightings of Daubenton's Bats, a rarer species.



Dragonfly – British waterways

The aquatic invertebrates cannot normally be seen, without sampling the water for them, but the Water Boatman will be seen skimming across the canal surface.

Under the water there are many species of snails along with freshwater shrimp, water bugs, water lice and worms.

The emergent vegetation provides ideal habitat for Dragonflies and Damselflies. The Variable Damselfly, a nationally scarce species, can be seen within the SSSI but many other species may be spotted darting among the reeds and rushes.

The realm of the beetle is one for the specialist but it is known that the Screech Beetle and various Water Beetles are present. The mature bankside trees and deadwood provide excellent habitat for terrestrial invertebrates.

The bird population of the canal is very diverse and varies with the seasons. As birds can fly they can easily move from one section of the canal to another, so although some sections are mentioned for some species they may well be on other stretches.

Our resident waterfowl are Moorhen, Coot, Mute Swan, Mallard and Tufted Duck. The pretty and shy Little Grebe is present in one location near to Kinoulton.

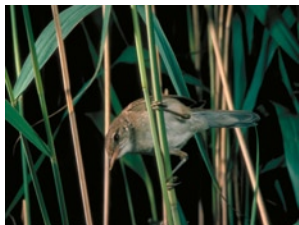
Moorhen – British waterways

Common tern can be seen flying overhead and the mighty fisherman, the Heron, can be found along the entire canal and flying over the adjacent lands. The electric blue of our other clever fisherman, the Kingfisher, is often to be seen. It always seems such a wonder to see this small flash of colour darting from bough to bough or among the reeds.



Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Magpie, Starlings, Rook, Crow, Pheasant and Lapwing can be found on adjacent arable land and woodland. The rarer predatory birds such as Buzzard and Sparrow Hawk can be seen occasionally, with the distinctive hover of the Kestrel a more familiar site. At night the Tawny Owl can be heard.

In the woodlands the Green Woodpecker will be heard and along these woodlands and hedges many of our favourite British birds can be seen or heard. Such as Goldfinch, White Throat, Green Finch, Robin, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Wren, Long Tailed Tit, Yellowhammer, House Martin, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Mistle Thrush, Bullfinch, Field Fare, Grey Wagtail, Willow Warbler, and Great Tit. Summer is heralded by our visitors the Swallow, dipping and darting over the water in search of insects.



However, the key species for the canal are the Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting and for these species it is really important that the reed beds are maintained.

These pages on the wildlife of the canal are an abridged extract from *The Grantham Canal Guide* by Tony Pitman. To obtain your own full-colour copy, see ordering details on the back-cover.

And Today's Top Story is.....

I was sitting at my computer, at home, writing an article for this magazine when the phone rang. A young lady's voice asked if I could help. It appeared she was a researcher for the BBC's East Midlands Today and they were planning to make a series of programmes featuring people and waterways. She had been looking at the web site and had read the magazine and she wanted to ask some questions. I spent a long while telling her all she wanted to know and advised her that WRG East were coming up in July for a tree clearing session. She liked that and so the ball was set rolling for what could be a good programme. Then it all started to unravel. We had intended to work on the land adjacent to Oddhouse Farm for which we already had all the necessary permissions, but the owner was due to be away, so that was out. British Waterways were unable to find an alternative site and, for a while, it all looked as though egg would be making an appearance on the faces of several of us.

Leigh gave it some thought and came up with a plan for us to do repairs (which are always needed) at Denton Wharf. Even though this is by the canal it is not on the canal and as there was to be no touching of trees etc. the usual restrictions would be fully complied with. A date was set with the Beeb and a cameraman arrived on the day. We set to, replacing the low level square fence along the wharf side while others replaced the rotten and broken square section low level fence that runs up to the slipway. It was a beautiful day and with no wind the water was calm so you could see the hundreds of fish swimming around with no regard for the idiot with a plastic hat staring down at them.

The cameraman did some very nice long shots so you didn't know he was filming you. Our chairman did a piece to camera and the cameraman went off to film other shots we had suggested to him. The piece was shown a week or so later and I think it was good. I say 'think' because I only saw the trailer on the local news during the Friday morning's Breakfast programme, I looked at the TV. screen only to be face to face with myself, not a good thing when you are eating toast! Ian has sent me some stills, which looked very good. This type of interest from the media is just what we need and the BBC will be put on the mailing list for this magazine. If you are reading this at the EMT studios, thank you for thinking of us and don't hesitate to contact us if you need more information, some footage or even a good comedy turn.

Martin Day

What news of a 'Trent Link'?

The Grantham Canal Partnership's No.1 strategic priority is the achievement of a **replacement link with the River Trent** – and, once again, there's real progress to report ...

You may recall that, in February's *GC News*, Kevin Mann reported progress with securing funds to undertake a '**Green Infrastructure Study**' of the area between Cotgrave and the river. That led to the Partnership charging a Steering Group – including officers from Notts. County Council, Rushcliffe Borough Council, British Waterways and Natural England – with commissioning the Study. In mid-June consultants Scott Wilson were appointed to answer a 2-part brief:

- To examine the area bounded by Gamston in the west, Radcliffe on Trent in the east, Cotgrave in the south and the river in the north and advise on the creation of a 'Green Infrastructure' landscape corridor, linking the river and Cotgrave Country Park
- Within that solution, to specify a preferred route by which the restored Grantham Canal should access the river ... and a 'multi-user trail', for increased use by walkers, cyclists (both commuters and leisure) and possibly horse riders

We have known for some time that there are a handful of route options for a new Trent Link ... but also that there are pros and cons for each of them. The Scott Wilson team of specialists is having to study environmental, engineering, recreation, economic and planning factors and a whole lot more, in order to determine the overall 'winner'. And when we do, at last, have an agreed preferred route, that's just the start: all options are expected to be expensive – tens of £millions – and readers won't need reminding that money is in short supply

One important requirement of the project brief was for the widest possible consultation, commensurate with the project budget. With so many different topics to be covered, numerous landowners and a wide range of interested parties, Scott Wilson have had a long list of 'stakeholders' to contact. Equally important, was a **Public Information and Consultation Event** – which was held at Cotgrave Futures on 24th July. Its purpose was 2-way communication – we needed to explain why the Study had been commissioned and what it was about and members of the public were invited to let us know what they thought.

The full day event was well attended and judged a considerable success

With so much talk of housing developments and 'Eco Towns' in the area, it's important that the Partnership makes clear what it and its consultants are up to. It's also doubly important that the ideal 'Green Infrastructure' and 'Trent Link' are established, so that they can be built into local authority plans, *prior to* decisions being taken on developers' planning applications.

On 21st August, Scott Wilson presented their interim findings to a meeting of the Grantham Canal Partnership Executive and the project's Steering Group. The meeting, held appropriately enough at the Nottingham Sailing Club at Adbolton and chaired by Tony Wilkinson, received a detailed presentation and an even more comprehensive CD of the consultants' findings to date. At the time of writing, these are being absorbed and considered by the audience and we hope to have more information for you in the next edition of GC News ...

Peter Stone



Lots of people came along to find out more and express their views

Who Gives a Hoot.....?

Most of us have a soft spot for owls. Because they're beautiful and fluffy and wise and have big eyes and such a benevolent expression. Wouldn't harm a mouse...or a vole. Or would they? They are often to be found along canals and other waterways where there is a rich source of dainty morsels in the banks and hedgerows. Barn owls are a particular favourite and in Rushcliffe there is a group of enthusiasts dedicated to providing breeding boxes, ringing the chicks and monitoring numbers under the auspices of RUBOP – the Rushcliffe Barn Owl Project.

Here are some extracts from the group's regular activity reports:

June

It was too much to hope that our fabulous Barn Owl year of 2007 would be followed by another prolific vole year, but overall, I suppose, if we hadn't had last year's massive numbers, we'd be saying this was a good year.

After completing most of our first box inspections, RUBOP has 33 boxes with Barn Owls of which 21 are breeding. We've found quite a few boxes with just a single adult and some with a pair but no sign of eggs.

Quite a few established pairs are not only not breeding but seem to have disappeared completely. Plumtree, Kinoulton, Hickling and Owthorpe all seem to be owl-less this year. Having said that, several boxes that have never had Barn Owls in 10 years are occupied this year. There seem to be good numbers of adults around. Many of last year's chicks have survived the winter and will go on to breed so the future is bright.

August

Things have proved worse than we thought on the ringing round. Where we had expected to ring growing chicks, many pairs had abandoned after laying eggs and these eggs lay unhatched where we had last seen them.

So, we have 18 pairs breeding and we've ringed 40 chicks with, hopefully, a few still to do.

The good thing this year is that the uptake of boxes has been excellent. Looking back at the RUBOP boxes, many of them erected at the start of the project when knowledge wasn't as great as it is now, it's good to see that we didn't get it too wrong. Over the years, nearly every box has been occupied by a Barn Owl at some time.

With not so much ringing to do, we've been busy erecting new boxes and some unused boxes have been moved to better locations. Another Barn Owl project is starting up on the Leicestershire side of the Vale of Belvoir. This will link up nicely with RUBOP, giving a continuous range of boxes from Newark to Melton Mowbray.

If you would like to find out more about RUBOP, and how you can get involved, do contact Howard Broughton on 0115 9374474 or at Plumtreeowlman@tiscali.co.uk



Putting Government in the Picture

In the last issue of Grantham Canal News, Vice-President Chris Tizzard described how influence was brought to bear at the political level in support of British Waterways and, by extension, future investment in the canal system at a time when budgets had been slashed by DEFRA to pay European fines. Chris was later invited to submit a further Memorandum of Evidence to the Special Affairs Committee, clarifying the difficulties faced by BW in the light of budget cutbacks. Here's a brief summary of what he told the Committee:

History. Most of the canals within BW jurisdiction were built by independent canal companies during the so-called “canal-mania” period between the 1770s and the turn of the 19th century and, with few exceptions, are over 200 years old. There were naturally many common features for example the paths on one or (rarely) both sides to allow towing by horses, mules or donkeys. Most canals ran along contours or, where this was not practicable, along embankments or aqueducts and a number required tunnels, some with towpaths through and some where the horses were led over while the boats were “legged” through. However, the canal companies often built to their own size specifications and this would later lead to their own downfall. Large tonnage capacity was more important than speed and maintenance costs were low; horse drawn boats travelling at 2 or 3 mph at best left little disturbance or wash.

While canal companies were trading successfully, funds were available for ongoing maintenance but with the coming of the railways from around the 1840s, trade was progressively lost. Canals were purchased by railway companies who converted them to railway tracks or cut maintenance to a minimum to remain competitive. The introduction of steam and then diesel engines on the barges and narrowboats resulted in increased wear and tear, and as canals became silted and weedy, many were abandoned. After WW 11, the canal system was nationalised and the long winter of 1963 sounded the death knell of most canal workboat trading.

British Waterways inherited a very run-down system. Under the 1968 Transport Act, waterways were re-classified under three headings: Commercial (to be maintained and dredged to appropriate standard), Cruiseway (still navigable, and being used by growing numbers of pleasure craft – to be maintained and dredged to no more than 3'6") and Remainder (only maintained to meet Health & Safety standards and, if need be, disposed of in the most economical way). For many years BW struggled on with inadequate funding, carrying out minimum maintenance but as pressure built up from volunteer organisations such as the IWA and local canal societies and partnerships were formed with local authorities, a waterways revival gathered momentum. Major canal restorations succeeded and regeneration projects recovered more and more mileage.

The Future

Our canals and water-based leisure, national/international tourism industry, with all its benefits of employment, boat building and growing revenue must be supported by proper funding and investment. The whole waterway network is truly a National Heritage site. Its regenerational capacity is enormous. It needs abandoned and disused waterways to be opened up to relieve the pressure points and further enlarge capacity. What must not happen is that the many millions of pounds worth of restoration, carried out by the voluntary sector, be wasted. Some restored navigations are still classified as Remainder; there must be a better method of upgrading to Cruiseway than the present parliamentary process permits. The good work achieved as a result of the government's "Waterways for Tomorrow" policy must not be wrecked by what, in terms of the national GDP, is "penny pinching".



The bells....the bells !

Colin Bryan, a fellow dedicated canal worker, is also interested in Campanology (bell ringing). He lives in Cropwell Bishop and rings on Monday evenings at the local church. He mentioned to me one day that the louvres in the tower had been blocked up to keep the sound down while they were practising new changes. This had worked fine but the problem was that when there were weddings in the church, the bells, at the end of the ceremony, could not be heard very well outside.

He had the idea of opening up the louvres and installing sound boxes, fitted with a lid, which could be opened for loud ringing, at weddings, or closed, for soft ringing, when practising. But there was a snag: the tower is a listed structure so, no drilling etc would be allowed. I said, I would love to help him and so we bought several 8'x4' sheets of exterior grade plywood, cut them up, to allow them to be carried up the very steep spiral staircase and installed them, after repairing and painting the old louvres with preservative. In church towers, with a clock installed, there is a rope connected to the striking hammers used for the chimes and hour striking which pulls off the hammers to allow the bells to swing when rung.

In my junk box I had two windscreen wiper motors, that we modified into winches, to pull off the hammers and to open and close the lids on the sound boxes. The drives were fitted with limit switches to allow them to operate automatically. The hammer's motor pulls a stainless steel rope to disconnect the striking arm on the clock mechanism. The louvre's motor opens and closes the lids by driving one stainless steel rope up to an equaliser that maintains the correct tension to each of the four ropes connected to the lids. The clock, made by Cope and Co in Nottingham in 1907 and being listed too, was not to be interfered with. By pulling down the arms, which the clock mechanism pulls down, for every strike of the bells, the hammers can be safely pulled off.

There is a great national following of bell ringers who love to visit other towers, to ring, so any control of the louvres and hammers had to be simple and fool-proof. We installed a small control panel in the ringing room with a button for 'loud' ringing, one for 'soft' ringing and a reset button to restore the system when ringing is finished. Coloured LEDs show which button has been pressed and the position of the louvres and hammers so the ringers know when it is safe to start ringing. It works really well and is loved by the bell-ringers.

In the next edition I will explain how we converted the clock from manual winding to automatic.

Martin Day

Grenville Murden -thanks for the memory

At the May committee meeting I was very pleased to hear that we were going to receive a donation in memory of one of our supporters but when I heard the name of the person I was saddened because I used to go to the same school as him. He was actually in my brother's (who is three years older than myself) class at Dunkirk Junior School in the late 50's.

Grenville was a member of the Derby Boat Club and members had also contributed to a marvellous total of over £700. We will make sure that it is spent wisely to buy something permanent and useful for the benefit of the canal and its members.

I know a letter has been sent thanking the family but I would like, via this magazine, to say thanks to Grenny (as we knew him at school) for being such a good friend of the Grantham. I am sorry you have gone but your picture is there on Friends Reunited for us to remember.

Martin Day

Dates for your Diary

Sept 10th AGM and Members Meeting (Cropwell Bishop)

Oct 15th Members Meeting (see website for venue)

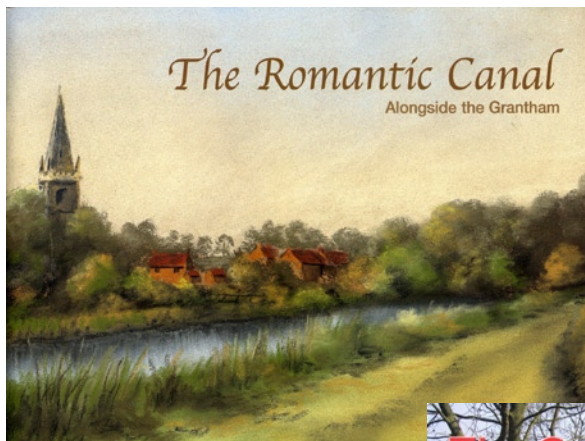
Nov 12th Committee Meeting (Cropwell Bishop)



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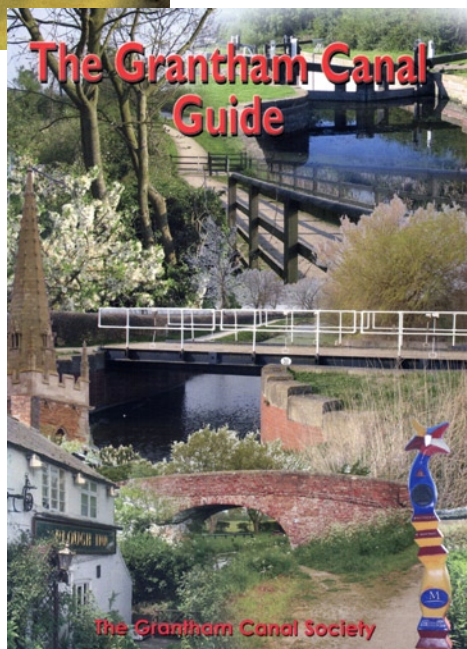


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Both publications are available from Grantham Canal Publications, Pasture View, The Green, Kingston on Soar, Notts. NG11 0DA