

Mick's Musings

Well, We Tried

It seemed a simple enough idea. Buy some rowing boats, build somewhere to launch them and offer them for hire to the public. Then purchase a 12-seater trip boat and offer longer downriver trips, with both operations raising some much-needed funds for the society, and adding another page to Melton Mowbray's tourism portfolio.

It was pointed out initially that we don't have the volunteers to run these operations, but look closer and you will see that is not the only reason for our present dilemma, as it has become apparent that just about everyone locally wants a slice of the MOWS pie.

The riparian owner wants ground rent for the launching site, (with the legal bill for sorting out the agreement, being charged to the society) in addition to levying a charge for "using their water" which the last time I looked fell from the sky! It's a wonder they are not in contact with East Midlands Airport claiming a charge for planes using "their" bit of sky! The council wants the boats examined and registered (very costly) prior to asking for a yearly rent for each boat, and in addition we have had to purchase a security camera to ensure nothing at the launching site gets vandalised ... and so it goes on.

Meanwhile, having purchased our trip boat, it became obvious that some silt removal was needed in order to get the vessel out on to the main river to run our trips. A contractor was found to do the job (at our expense) but prior to the commencement of the work several wildlife surveys were required (more expense) and an agreement reached with the environment agency (never easy) about the relocation of the spoil. Sadly, this also involved the same riparian owner who wanted to charge us for floating on the water, and this has proved a sticking point which still exists today as I write this. The boat also needs, quite correctly, a safety certificate and insurance, and surprise, surprise the council requires a boat licence fee for this one too, in addition to a very substantial charge to register and licence each volunteer "boatman" that wants to help.

So, with a heavy heart, it has been decided that something has to give, and so the rowing boat operation has to stop – before it really got started, as the financial burden is just too great for a modest society like ours. Now, begins the unenviable task of undoing the hundreds of hours preparatory work and leaving everything the way we found it.

Unfortunately, not everything can be put back the way we found it, as this whole chastening experience has left our bank balance many hundreds of pounds lighter.

What we could have offered, had we not been stifled financially, and frustrated by so much red tape that we could have knitted a jumper out of it, would have been a double boat service with rowing boats around the town "ring" and longer out of town runs for the more adventurous. But whichever way we have tried to make progress, inevitably we have met with various types of opposition, which raises the question: "are the people responsible for tourism in Melton really bothered about promoting the town?" After maintaining the waterway and helping to keep Melton relatively flood-free for over 30 years, surely our society should be supported, rather than thwarted.

What do you think?

Mick

As always, the opinions expressed here are personal and do not reflect the views of anyone else

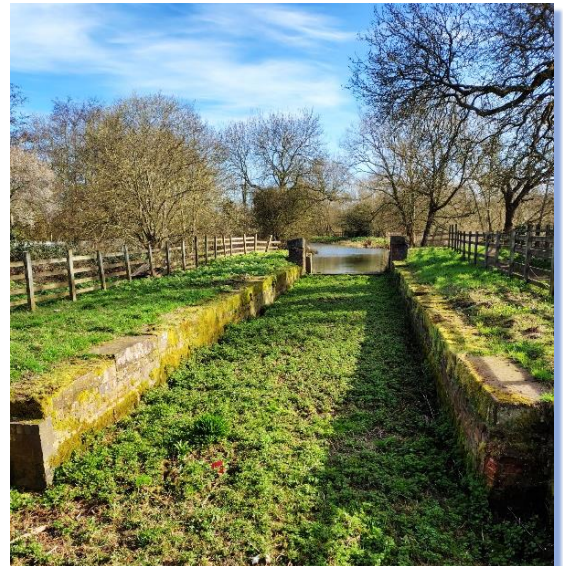
Work Parties

A couple of weeks ago, the volunteers found a tree blocking the river near Sysonby, so this had to be towed back by one of the work boats. It was obviously too big and heavy to pull on board the boat. Once it was somewhere easier to pull out of the river, then the job of cutting it up into smaller and more manageable pieces had to be done.

But, more interestingly, a few weeks after that they found three picnic tables floating in the river (one near the footbridge and other two approaching Sysonby). Not knowing where they originally came from, they took them to the newly cleared Eye Kettleby Lock (below right).



*Picnic
anyone?*



Spot the Boat ... and Volunteer

Perhaps spotting the boat in the first photo is easier, but both photos show just how much cutting back the volunteers have to do to keep the waterway free of objects that cause blockages which make flooding worse on the river.



Interpretation Boards

The society was awarded a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for five interpretation boards to be displayed along the Navigation. These were strategically placed around Melton a couple of months ago, so our local members may have already seen them.

1 THE MELTON MOWBRAY NAVIGATION: 1797 - 1877

The Navigation was conceived during England's canal building mania of the 1780s when men using only picks and shovels dug canals throughout the country.

Carrying goods by horse-drawn boat was far quicker than using carts on rutted tracks and people flocked to invest in the motorways of their age. There were soon more than 4,000 miles of canals and more than 2,000 miles still exist today, mainly used by leisure boaters.

The Navigation opened in 1797. Because it followed the course of existing rivers, it was called a navigation and not a canal. Over a 15-mile route, it joined Melton to the Grand Union Canal near Syston.

Horse-drawn barges carried coal, building materials and agricultural produce. Barges paid tolls depending on what they were carrying.



An AI enhanced picture of the Melton Basin from an original held in The Record Office, Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland

THE MELTON BASIN

The picture above shows how the area where you now stand would have looked during the 1800s. This was the terminus of the Melton Mowbray Navigation which enabled horse-drawn barges to arrive here carrying goods from all over the country. A barge lies alongside the wharf. On the right, a bridge under the road leads to the 15-mile Oakham Canal.

Below is an artist's impression of the area with supporting buildings including warehouses, stables, a coal depot, a granary and malt stores. The basin is top right and, just over the road (as today), is the Boat Inn.

From here a canal linked the basin with the river. Walk into the park in front of you and you'll see a double line of trees which marks the route.



A single horse could pull a barge carrying 40 tonnes of goods.
Drawing by Diana Patterson.

NAVIGATION MEANT CHEAPER COAL

Proposals for the Melton Navigation in the 1780s were met with opposition from Leicestershire colliery owners who were concerned that Derbyshire coal would suddenly be available in the local market at a cheaper price.

Eventually the necessary Act of Parliament was passed in 1791 and construction work started almost immediately with the canal completely open by 1797. It was not only coal prices that dropped dramatically, but many types of building material, meaning a considerable boost for the local economy.

The Society was founded in 1997 to restore the Melton Navigation so that boats from the national canal network can once more sail into town.

MOWS volunteers work throughout the year clearing and maintaining the rivers.

www.meltonwaterways.org.uk





CONNECTING TO THE NETWORK

The building of the Navigation connected Melton by water to much of the country. Near Syston, it joined a branch of the Grand Union Canal from where it is possible to travel to London and, via other canals, across vast areas of the Midlands and the North. Six boats a week, operating round the clock, linked Birmingham to Melton.

THE COMING OF THE RAILWAYS

For many years the Navigation prospered but trade dwindled with the coming of the railway. Melton Station opened in 1846 as part of the Syston and Peterborough Railway.

The Navigation company attempted to keep operating by slashing freight rates and even tried to get the railway company to take them over, but closure was inevitable – as with most canal companies throughout the country, it officially ceased operations in 1877, although some sections of river were still used by mill owners as late as the 1930s.



NAVIGATION TODAY

Despite 150 years having passed since the Navigation operated, much evidence of its existence remains. Ten of the 12 locks which operated can still be seen. The nearest is at Eye Kettleby, about a 20 minute walk from here along the river.

The Boat Inn, alongside the terminus basin, where thirsty barge crews refreshed themselves, is still serving pints, but there is no evidence the basin.



Have Your Say

How should MOWS grow next?

We're looking at how we can improve membership, attract more volunteers and make a bigger impact ... and we would like your input. The survey takes 3-5 minutes and will directly shape what we do next. Please press 'ctrl' and click on the link below or see our Facebook page to complete the survey.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdWXXbzbqQgq3693eRoqOiZ3maJreHVtKWj62KnlAMChGHkQA/viewform?pli=1>

If you've ever volunteered, been a member, or are just interested - please fill this in. It will really help us plan our next steps.



Membership Renewals – REMINDER!

Just a reminder about renewing your membership if you have not already done so. It would help us greatly if you would consider setting up a Standing Order. To pay by Bank Transfer, our bank details are: Account No. 41280783, Sort code 40-32-14.

For Sale

Cambridge Kayaks Neptune Single Sit-On-Top Kayak. Unused and still in original packaging. Length 263cms x 75cms x 35cms (8ft 6in x 2ft 4in x 1ft 1in). Weight 21kg. Max User Weight 150kg. Supplied with padded seat, aluminium paddle, 3 carry handles & individual carrying strap. Currently on sale at Cambridge Kayaks @ £269.99. Will take offers around £120.00. Buyer to collect. Phone Jerry on 01664 566614 for further details.



New Treasurer Wanted

Do you have some time to spare?

We are looking for a new society Treasurer.



If you think you may like to help the society and volunteer for this role, but wish to know more, please contact one of the committee members listed opposite. Training could be given should you be interested.

Society Contacts:

Chair: Sharon Butcher
e-mail: sharonbrown987@icloud.com

Secretary: Jerry Filor
(Acting) e-mail: jfilor@talktalk.net

Treasurer & Membership Secretary: Diana Patterson
e-mail: dj.patterson@btopenworld.com

Website: <http://www.meltonwaterways.org.uk>

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