

Mick's Musings

Wish You Were Here?

In my 25 years of "messaging about in boats" (inland waters only, for I am no salty sea dog!), I have seen the canals and rivers of this fair land in great detail. From the wide open spaces of the rural waterways to the almost claustrophobic atmosphere experienced whilst passing between high walls or the backs of adjacent factories in some of our most industrialised cities. I loved it all and still do, but whatever the location one aspect has always fascinated me. I cannot pass a junction, large or small, without gazing along the watery arm thus revealed, to some far off horizon, and wondering where does that go? Our all too infrequent trips around Birmingham's mesmerizing maze of waterways usually resulted in yours truly rubbernecking so much at the seemingly endless assortment of arms, wharves, transshipment warehouses and docks, that straight steering was always at a premium on our boat.

Waterways maps and the internet can transport you there metaphorically, but nothing can replace the pioneering spirit (or in some cases trepidation) that a foray along an unknown bit of water can engender. Sometimes the rewards are pretty ordinary - another junction perhaps, or some dreary factory site, but occasionally, just occasionally mind, your efforts are rewarded with a real gem of a terminus.

I recall our first Birmingham trip, where after a long day's locking up the North Stratford and Worcester and Birmingham canals, we arrived weary (and a little apprehensive) slap bang in the heart of Britain's second city.

Brindley Place welcomed us with its Bohemian atmosphere of pubs, shops and cafes nestling down below, and almost hidden from, the frantic rush-hour streets above. Down there all was calm and serene, a wondrous place and a trip well worth making. Other local tourist destinations I can recommend include Coventry basin, Loughborough Wharf and the Great Northern basin (top of the Erewash Canal) and there are many others to find for the inquisitive boater, walker or cyclist.

So where is he going with all this I hear you ask? Well, down at Syston there is a junction, as we all know. I used to wonder how many passers-by gaze up the River Wreake and asked themselves, where does that go? Through the wonders of the internet and, more specifically the Chairman's Gmail account, I am starting to find out that a great deal of people are asking that same question. Our job here at MOWS is to turn that fascination into desire to visit the terminus and support our scheme to open up the river corridor to make Melton the must-see destination.

So local tourism chiefs, listen up. **Melton-on-Sea** for the weekend anyone?

Footnote to the above: Apparently there are more shopping trolleys in the canals of Birmingham than Venice!

Happy New Year everyone!

Mick Clowes
Chairman

2013 Annual General Meeting

The Society's AGM was held on Saturday 9 November 2013 at Sysonby Knoll Hotel, Melton Mowbray.

The Chairman stated that more progress had been made in the last year than in any since he had been Chairman because of interaction with many outside groups and appearances at a number of shows. Proposals are in hand for re-building the old toll house at Syston and the construction of a new marina near the new 'Three Way Bridge'. We are also talking to official bodies about the river pollution in Melton. During the year we have appointed Dave Andow as our new MOWS Press Officer.

Work parties have continued both in Melton and at the 'Rocks by Rail' site on the Oakham Canal and we are talking to the Town Estate about relocating Mole to a dock in the parks, enabling us to use our volunteers more effectively.

Membership has remained fairly steady and we have embarked on a sales drive for quality merchandise. We are, due to illness, two members down on our committee, and are looking for new blood to join the team.

Lastly, the Chairman thanked the committee for all their work and Sysonby Knoll Hotel for providing us with a good base.

Our guest speaker was Michael Jeeves of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, who outlined the trust's work, illustrated by some delightful slides.

MOWS Merchandise

MOWS have now expanded our range of quality merchandise to include notelets, mugs and postcards to complement the popular tea towels, t-shirts and fleeces.

The new additions feature views of the waterway and town in an earlier time in glorious old black and white photographs.

We are also looking into the possibility of reprinting one or both of the books written about the former navigations.

Please contact Mike Handford on 01455 611508 for more information.

MOWS First Aiders

MOWS are looking for volunteers to train as first aiders. Anyone interested, please contact any committee member - details on page 4.

Sunday Morning On The River

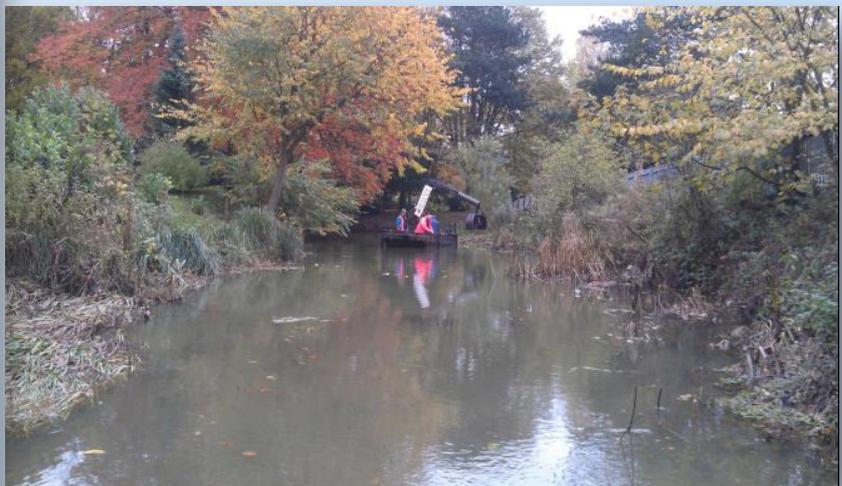
by Nick Cooke

Sunday 17 November 2013: My first work party for the Melton and Oakham Waterways Society. I rushed out of church at 9.58am knowing that I was going to be late. I was. I arrived at 10.30am to find Richard waiting in the car park. He pointed out the boat that was waiting for me and left me to don boiler suit, boots and gloves. The boat is rectangular, flat bottomed and fitted with an outboard motor which was unwilling to start at first but Mick got it going and off we set.

I was introduced to John and told that the morning project was to trim overhanging vegetation to clear the navigable bits. This we did. Lots of it. With a bit of a break in the middle to chat to three others on the dredger boat, Badger. I didn't get to know the names of the gallant lads working the clam shell grab but doubtless I soon will. They were a friendly lot. First impressions. What a lovely section of waterway this is! Around Egerton Park and down to the Sysonby Knoll Hotel. I am pleased that some of the local house owners keep a dinghy or two but won't it be lovely to see narrowboats and others around there? The autumn colours are very beautiful at this time of year so I fished out the camera and took some photos ...



Below: 'Badger' and volunteers working to clear the silt near the bridge



Left: Copper beeches in their autumn colours

IWA Warwickshire Branch Visit Confirmed



The Inland
Waterways
Association

We are happy to confirm IWA Warwickshire Branch's visit to Melton will take place on Sunday 6 April 2014. Their members will have a guided tour of the Melton Ring followed by refreshments and a chance to see the town. Meet Leicester Road Sports Ground 10.20am. Everyone welcome.

MOWS Press Officer

After our request for a Press Officer for the society in the previous issue of the newsletter, we were very happy that member, Dave Andow, came forward to offer his services.

Dave has also been along to many work parties so he has become a real asset to the society and the committee would like to convey their thanks.

Winter Work Parties

We were able to hold a few more work parties during the latter part of 2013, as the weather was, on the whole, much better. In fact, one Sunday 6 volunteers turned up and we were able to go out on both 'Mole' and 'Badger' [see report on page 3]. Although, true to form, the rain has curtailed recent work parties as the river has been very high and fast-flowing, but we were able to concentrate on the river closer to home and have done some running repairs to the landing stage.

Work parties are held on the 1st and 3rd Sundays in the month - weather permitting. If you wish to participate in any of these, please contact Mick Clowes or Linda Hulme, tel: 01509 414140, e-mail: lindandmick@btinternet.com.

The Syston Hub Update

At a meeting of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership held on 15 January, provisional plans for the marina and visitor centre development following the renovation of the old Toll House and the Isolation Hospital buildings, were presented, discussed and approved.

Application for planning approval can now proceed, together with talks with the Canal and Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency.

Messing About On The River

An illustrated, light-hearted presentation was given to the Widows Group of Melton Mowbray by chairman, Mick Clowes, on the afternoon of Saturday 9 November at The Samworth Centre.

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