

Mick's Musings

E.A.?

There are several groups who regard themselves as guardians of our waterways. From householders who enjoy a river or canal abutting their property, villagers who have a waterway running through their parish or groups like MOWS who have aspirations to open up a waterway for the use of all.

However there is only one official body responsible for the River Wreake and that is the Environment Agency, more commonly known by its initials - the E.A.

But in the light of events since I became chairman the initials E.A could stand for something completely different. Take for instance Eye Kettleby Lock which had stood empty and alone for the best part of 130 years, yet when MOWS asked to adopt and re-gate the structure, the EA not only gave a resounding no to the project, but proceeded to fence off and fill in the lock removing the landmark water control gate at the same time. **E**xtremely **A**nnoying. When asked why, they then became the **E**vasive **A**gency, turning a deaf ear to all our questions.

More recently Melton residents became perturbed by the removal of the guillotine gates at Eye Kettleby weir, taking away the ability to "vacuum out" stagnant water and rubbish from the town and drawing down fresh, clean water in the process. The perpetrators of this crime? Well, we could rename them the **E**nvironment **A**ssassins, but when more questions were asked they became **E**xasperatingly **A**loof and said nothing.

Right up to date, and following questions about flooding from Melton Councillor Lumley, one of our committee met the councillor and E.A officials for a walk along the river. Approaching the Lady Wilton Bridge, which is at present massively choked with reeds, the E.A people explained that this was more of a blessing than a problem as the reeds provide much needed filtration for a balanced eco system. What they actually filter is silt, debris, rubbish and every plastic bag within a five mile radius! This weak excuse for lack of dredging earns them the epithet **E**xcruciatingly **A**rrogant.

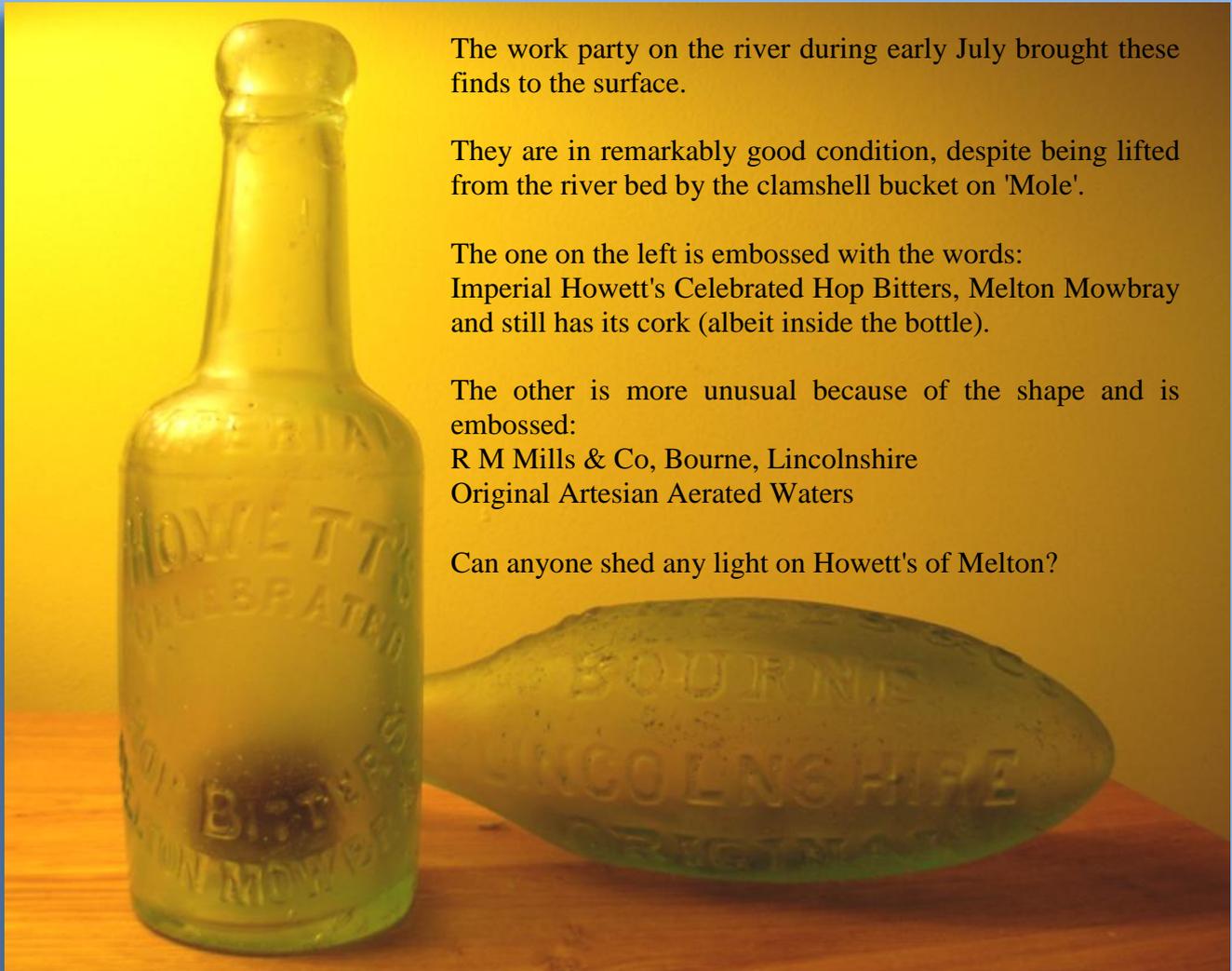
But we live in hope that one day, one gloriously sunny day, we can reverse those initials to reveal an official body who are **A**stoundingly **E**nthusiastic about our future plans.

Now that would be one hell of a reversal.

Mick

Mick Clowes

Have You Lost Your Bottle(s)?



The work party on the river during early July brought these finds to the surface.

They are in remarkably good condition, despite being lifted from the river bed by the clamshell bucket on 'Mole'.

The one on the left is embossed with the words:
Imperial Howett's Celebrated Hop Bitters, Melton Mowbray
and still has its cork (albeit inside the bottle).

The other is more unusual because of the shape and is embossed:
R M Mills & Co, Bourne, Lincolnshire
Original Artesian Aerated Waters

Can anyone shed any light on Howett's of Melton?

MOWS On Tour ... Again

The society has been out and about over the past few months.

We had a stall at the popular Loughborough Canal & Boat Festival on Sat/Sun 3/4 May. The following month we were at the Braunston Historic Boat Rally in Northamptonshire on Sat/Sun 28/29 June, where the heavens opened on the Saturday and we got a thorough soaking. Sunday 29 June we also attended the Melton Country Fair, where the society was handed a cheque for £200, kindly donated by the Melton Belvoir Rotary Club which will help towards a permanent mooring for 'Mole'. Another pleasant and successful weekend was spent at the Rempstone Steam Rally on Sat/Sun 12/13 July.



David Brown (left) of the Melton Belvoir Rotary Club handing over cheque to Richard Nicholson

Melton's "Watergate" Affair

On one of our regular work parties, we began to clear a silt island that had built up in the slack water behind the Waterfield Leisure Centre in Melton.

It is at this point that the canal crossed the river on the level, and squarely, much the same as the Derby Canal crossed the River Derwent, to emerge into the Play Close section on its way to Melton Basin. The basin and Play Close section have long been infilled and only the remaining avenue of trees show us the original line. Very little remains today, or so we thought until the day of the work party.

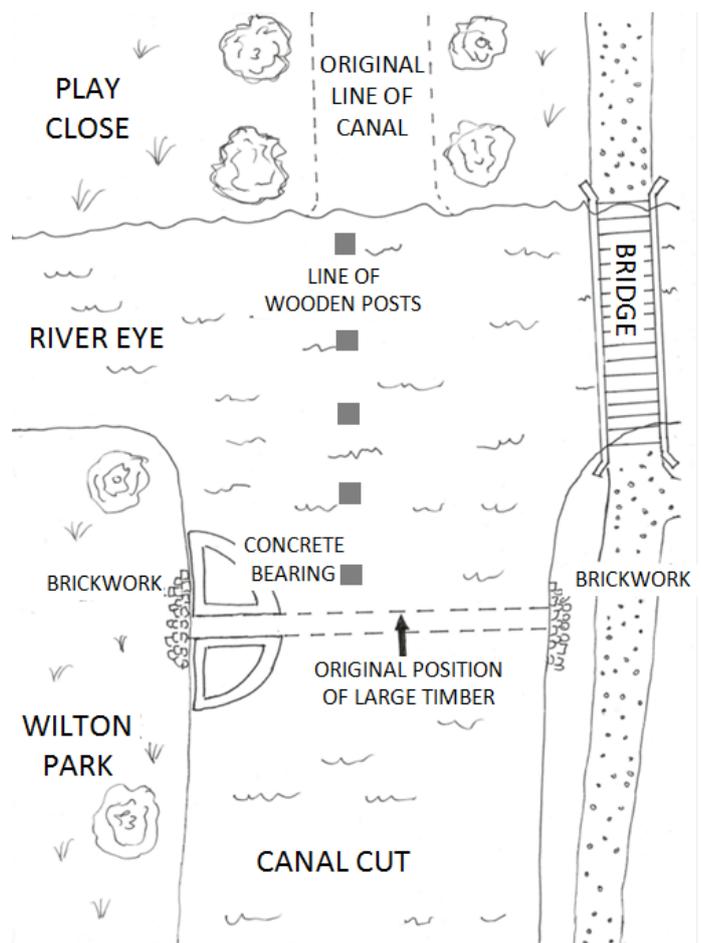
When Mole ground to a halt adjacent the work site, the low water levels revealed that we were aground on an extensive underwater structure made apparently from old fashioned lime based concrete. The structure resembling two back to back letter "D" shapes extended about a third of the way across the canal and was about two feet deep (sorry youngsters, 60cm). The gap between the flats of the "D"s was parallel at around 10" (25cm). How strange!

There had always been brickwork on either side of the canal at this point, but seemingly not connected with anything else, until now! The brick protrusions aligned perfectly with the underwater structure, leading us toward the theory of a Melton "Watergate". We thought there may have been a large gate (think lock gate times three) that spanned the river at this point and was closed in times of high water to protect boats in the canal cut from the ravages of the wild river beyond. It appeared to us that the concrete was the bearing upon which this gate pivoted.

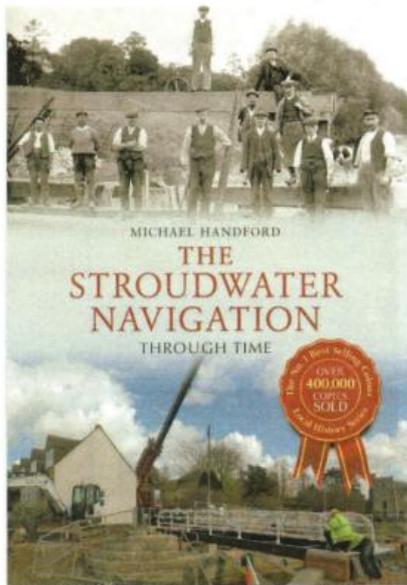
However, volunteers working at the same point a week later unearthed a massive timber "threshold strip" along the centre line of the concrete and anchored to the river bed by concrete filled hessian sacks. This, and the study of an archive photograph showing the remains of an over gantry, has changed our thinking that the gate was in fact a guillotine type as opposed to a hinged one. The gate would have dropped securely between the riverbed concrete forms, protecting all those boats and crews moored behind it.

Further investigation revealed a line of stout posts, in the riverbed, extending away from the gate and pointing straight towards Play Close. It is believed these posts would have had boards fixed between them creating a continuous guard rail across the river to guide the boats safely to the other side, similar to the Derby Horse bridge, but the towing horse in this scenario had its own bridge slightly upstream.

There should be an identical underwater structure adjacent the opposite bank, but this may have been removed or covered when the swimming baths were built.



Get Your Christmas Presents Early ...

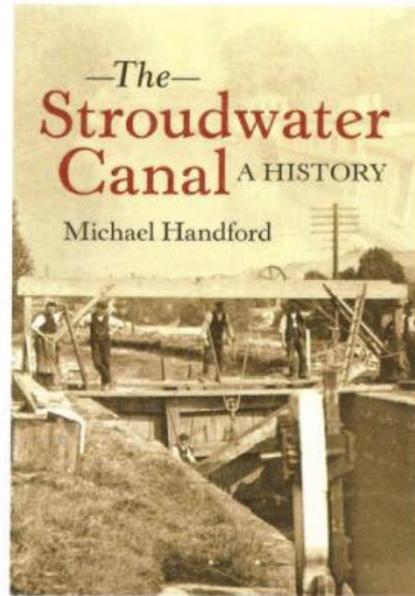


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Built between 1775 and 1779, the Stroudwater Navigation stretched from Framilode to Wallbridge in Stroud, where it later connected with the Thames & Severn Canal to form a link between the River Severn and the River Thames. When completed, the canal was 8 miles long with 12 locks to take Severn trows, but by the beginning of the 2nd World War it had fallen into disuse and was virtually derelict. The canal was finally abandoned in 1954.

This fascinating selection of photographs traces some of the many ways in which the Stroudwater Navigation has changed and developed over the last century.

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Much has happened on the canal since the book was written and it is now being restored to its former glory, when it will yet again break records as a unique survivor of the canal age.

Both available from all good bookshops and direct from Amberley Publishing; tel: 01453 847800; www.amberley-books.com

Situations Vacant

Due to some of our committee members leaving and/or wishing to relinquish their present posts, we are looking for:

Secretary
Treasurer and Membership Secretary

If you think you might be interested in either, but would like more information, please contact Mick Clowes or Richard Booth - contact details opposite.

Welcome To New Members ...

Paul and Jan Dadford
Suzie Smalley

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