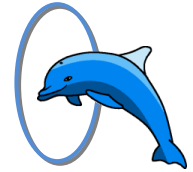




Mick's Musings



Hoop Jumping as an Olympic Sport?

Putting the quadrennial sporting epic to one side for a moment, I have good news!

Following a protracted application process MOWS has now received planning permission for our double boat dock. Hooray! However, anyone who has ever trodden the road to planning Nirvana will know that the path is littered with traps for the unwary.

Filling in the planning forms is a doddle, likewise the drawings. ✓ **Check.** There ends the easy bit, as the immediate future will be punctuated by letters, phone calls, personal visits to the council offices and an e-mail that, due to overuse, may never work properly again.

In MOWS case the dock application received 19 objections (all from the same source - enough said) so would have to be referred to a planning committee and would therefore require an ECO survey. Probably better known as a local survey, we had to pay an arm and a leg just to discover that White Clawed Crayfish don't like Melton and there were no voles, otters and, for all I know, a distant cousin of Nessie or Flipper the dolphin residing in the Eye outside the scout hut. ✓ **Check** (... or should that be cheque?)

Next came the precise instructions for Himalayan Balsam, which must be cut, neatly piled, dried and then burnt, what fun! ✓ **Check.** This came in tandem with the bat box directive; not that we had many bats, but that "they" would like more. ✓ **Check.**

To fence or not to fence? That was the question asked by the Council. Yes, we said, of course we said, safety first and all that, but then discovered you have to have to right kind of fence. It has to be flood friendly and come with its own flood certificate (I kid you not). ✓ **Check.**

The poly tunnel roof, despite being some 7 feet above river level is deemed as a flood risk and had to be removed. ✓ **Check.**

Still following this? MOWS had now earned the right to have their three minutes of glory at the planning meeting. ✓ **Check.**

If hoop jumping is ever adopted as an Olympic sport then rest assured that the selectors for Tokyo 2020 need look no further than the MOWS committee, with our hard-worked Secretary, Dave, as team captain!

Mick

Mick Clowes



Walking the Wreake Valley Way ... and beyond!

Some years ago MOWS created the Wreake Valley Way which follows, as far as possible, the route of the Melton Mowbray Navigation from the Boat Inn at Melton Mowbray to the junction with the Grand Union Canal / River Soar at Syston. The two walk leaflets that were produced are now in need of updating, so my husband Paul and I volunteered to check out the walk over a couple of days.

As Paul is also developing the Oakham Canal Trail he had already walked just over 18 miles from Oakham to Melton, following the route of the Oakham Canal, before I joined him on Thursday evening. We stayed the night at the newly refurbished Harboro Hotel in Burton Street, very close to the old canal basin and an ideal location for those who might follow in our footsteps on an extended walk.

On Friday morning we headed out of Melton, through Kirby Bellars and Frisby on the Wreake, before stopping for lunch at the Blue Bell Inn at Hoby. The afternoon took us through Brooksby, then on to Thrussington. Altogether we walked just over 9 miles, taking us around 6 hours to complete at a leisurely pace including our lunch stop. We spent the night at the Star Inn at Thrussington, a lovely little pub, recently refurbished, with good food and modern well equipped rooms.

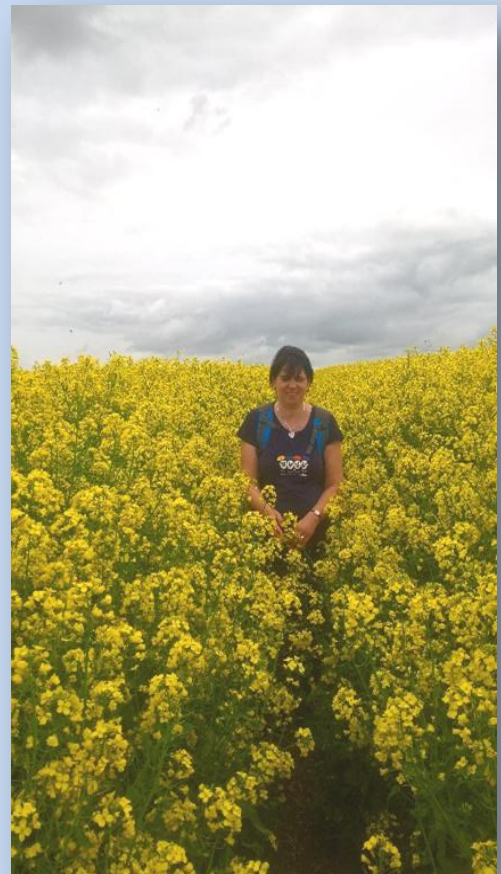
Overnight rain on Friday made the long grass and crops very wet for our walk on Saturday. Our walking boots proved not to be as waterproof as we had thought and several changes of socks were required en-route as we walked the 4 or so miles from Thrussington to the junction with the Grand Union Canal via Ratcliffe on the Wreake. As the forecast rain held off, we decided to continue our walk into Leicester, a further 7 miles, via the Grand Union Canal towpath and Watermead Country Park.

As we made the 25-minute train journey from Leicester back to Oakham, along very much the route that had taken Paul 2½ days to walk (and which is probably about the same time as a boatman could have made the journey via the Oakham Canal, Melton Mowbray Navigation and Grand Union Canal), I could see why the railways had caught on!

On the whole the current walk leaflets are informative and easy to follow. Many of the footpaths are well marked across open fields, but there are some areas where the paths are a little narrow and sloping. We met some cows who were not particularly friendly to walkers and a horse who followed us around for quite some distance, seemingly disappointed that we did not have anything to feed it! Oh, and not forgetting the rapeseed which can be a little on the high side at this time of year!

Paul will be updating the walk leaflets shortly, but in the meantime, the existing ones still make for some great walks through this lovely picturesque valley.

Jan Dadford, May 2016



Oakham End Update

I recently had the opportunity to visit Oakham School to look at the southernmost remains of the Oakham Canal and the old wharf. There is a short section of canal preserved in water in the school grounds and the orchestra pit of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre is apparently the old wharf dock wall, with the building itself being the original covered wharf. Few other original buildings survive from the time, although the general layout of the wharf is preserved in the layout of the modern school buildings.

Our efforts to develop a sustainable maintenance solution with local residents at Springfield in Oakham continue. Our proposed schedule of work is now with Rutland County Council for review. The concept of a "Green Corridor", based on the canal, between Oakham and Ashwell is also gathering support, both within the Council and amongst local residents. We are hoping to include the concept in the Oakham Neighbourhood Plan to help us protect the canal remains to the north of Oakham.

We continue to talk to local landowners and work closely with the Oakham Angling Society and Rocks by Rail. The Oakham Angling Society are currently carrying out significant towpath improvements with stone provided by Tarmac. Wilds Lodge School have also been working on fishing platforms, bat boxes and opening up more of the wooded embankment for the enjoyment of walkers.

An 'archaeological'-type dig on two buried lock chambers is planned at Pile Bridge Farm, near Saxby, on Sunday 24 July. For further details, ring Mick on 01509 414140.

A section of the canal at Whissendine recently came on the market and was subsequently sold to an unknown bidder. I am attempting to contact the new owner to see how we can work together to preserve this section which remains very much in water.

The planned Oakham Canal exhibition at the Rutland County Museum is scheduled to open on 15 October and last through to January 2017. We are currently finalising the list of exhibits.

If you would like to get involved in these or our future Oakham Canal projects, please contact Paul at pdadford@yahoo.co.uk, or by telephone on 07870 238688.

Leaflets, Leaflets ...

Our new membership leaflet has gone to press so expect to see this in various locations in the near future.

We hope to publish the Oakham Canal Trail and update the Wreake Valley Way walk leaflets very soon. Paul and Jan Dadford walked them both (see report on page 2).

Restoration Plans

With the replacement of the junction bridge near Syston a few years ago, a proposed water-based leisure development in the area, and with the support of the River Soar and Grand Union Canal Partnership, the Committee feel that there is a great opportunity to push for the restoration of the first part of the Melton Mowbray Navigation from the junction to the Gate Hangs Well public house. We have drawn up an action plan for the work required over the next 18 months to fully assess the feasibility and gain the support that we need from the multitude of stakeholders. We hope to draw up a similar plan for restoration west from Eye Kettleby lock. There are many challenges ahead, but now is the time to see if we can drive things forward.

A Negative Made Positive?

You may remember an article in our Winter issue last year called "A Snapshot of a Life"; well, we have more of the photographs from the magical camerawork of Les Hales, this time with a slight Oakham slant. Les took his camera everywhere but people couldn't understand his reasons for capturing the commonplace.

But now, many years later, we are so grateful he took the trouble to do so. A peek into a lost world ...

[All photographs by courtesy of the Les Hales Family Collection]



Above: Play Close, Melton

Below: Market Overton Wharf, circa 1960



Below: Original navigation milepost



Above (right): Whissendine Brewery used the canal to transport its beer



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