



# MOWS Newsletter

Happy  Easter

Spring 2016

Registered Charity No 1078752

## Mick's Musings

### Restoration Progression

Next year sees the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our society's foundation. I thought it prudent to stand back and take stock of what milestones we have passed and what we need to achieve in the next 20 years, although if things go to plan and our restoration takes on a logarithmic progression, we may not need the full twenty!

I remember a youthful Richard Fairhurst standing up at the end of an IWA social evening at the Gate Hangs Well pub in Syston and asking if anyone was interested in looking at the possibilities of "doing something" with this waterway, and voila! here we are. Older and hopefully a little wiser.

One of the most important allegiances we have formed is with the Town Estate who, as riparian owners give us the scope to carry out our river clearance activities. The idea to have a boat built to use on the river was a great step forward and it doesn't seem five minutes since we took our first trip around the Melton Ring for some "jungle bashing". Actually, it was over ten years ago! Since then our fleet has expanded to three (see page 2) giving us a choice of working platform dependant on the plans for that day.

From the word go it was obvious that the flat deck concrete bridge down at the Syston end would have to be changed for something a little more user friendly, and we campaigned for many years before in 2012 things started to happen. Looking at it now it would seem to have been there forever, but we must not be complacent. The navigable headroom is there for a reason and this fact seems to have inspired the landowner there who has plans for the future of the area.

In those formative days the society put together a series of walks along the whole length of the two waterways, which were well attended. I think these, particularly the ones along the Oakham Canal opened people's eyes to the enormity of the task, but I believe that if we keep "chipping away" (thanks Paul) great strides can be made.

So, to the future ... I have an agenda in mind, and it may differ from your own, but as long as we are all singing from broadly the same hymn sheet it doesn't really matter.

I believe we have become somewhat blind to the fact that the Melton Navigation has seventeen miles to it and not just the three or so around Melton and that the Oakham has enormous possibilities for future leisure use. We need to have a more holistic view and, in the case of the Melton, I think the upcoming East and West partnerships will address this. On the Oakham we have a few stalwarts who are changing public and council perceptions, but they cannot do this alone and we need more help in this area.

Assuming the EA don't give up our waterways to the Canal and River Trust, and continue to see them as just drainage ditches, our progress must be made almost by stealth. We should cultivate better relationships with the landowners all along the route and get permissions to use the waterway where we can. We already have a working relationship with the Syston landowners and it may be useful to site our new boat there for our joint use. Every little helps.

There is an inspirational film made by the CRT and, if you have a computer, I hope you can spare five minutes to watch it, <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/our-work/restoration/the-benefits>. Happy viewing and here's to the next 20 years!

Mick

Mick Clowes

## Better Safe Than Sorry ...

On a recent work party around the Melton ring, progress was halted by a large metallic object in the water. Fridge-freezer? Filing cabinet? Closer examination revealed it was a stolen safe and the indent in the bank shows it had probably been dumped from the back of a lorry or van and bounced its way down into the river.



The attempts at opening it had seemingly been unsuccessful but had left the cabinet back open enough to give the bucket on “Mole” good purchase against the hinge opposite, and thus it was recovered to the bank side. The police were duly called and the safe was removed. An exciting interlude in our work schedule!

## ... But Almost A Step Too Far?

The Town Estate had requested our help in the removal of an old broken concrete, stone and brick step from the river. Little did we know how big this lump would be! We estimated the weight to be around 1.5 tons, which is around the maximum capacity of the 'Mole' lifting gear. But she did us proud and we all breathed a sigh of relief when the leviathan was safely on the bank.



## And “Toad” Makes Three?

The Society has acquired another boat, expanding its working fleet to three vessels. Our thanks go to the workshop staff of Pilling’s Lock Marina who donated the craft. But what to call it? Keeping to the Wind in the Willows theme following “Mole” and “Badger” it ought be “Toad”, but as we do not have a motor for it yet maybe that should be spelt “Towed”. It is all steel construction and around 12 feet long and of shallow draft with an overhanging front to allow a mini-digger to board from the bank side. Many thanks to the MOWS volunteers who helped get it onto the trailer and especially Mark, who spotted the boat originally, and Dave, who towed the loaded vessel to a temporary home, where it will receive some TLC before officially joining the MOWS ever expanding “Navy”.



# Oakham News

Good news! We have finally managed to set a date with Rutland County Council to discuss the maintenance of the Springfield section, to the north of Oakham.

The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust are kindly supporting us in this project, lending their environmental knowledge and technical skills. Let's hope we can achieve a positive outcome that not only preserves and improves the canal, but also engages local residents. We are also hoping to discuss with the council our vision for a "Green Corridor", based on the canal, between Oakham and Ashwell.



*The Springfield section to the north of Oakham (pictured right)*

Preparations for the Oakham Canal exhibition at the Rutland County Museum in the autumn are gathering momentum. The display panels have been drafted and sent for consultation. There is work to be done at the Leicestershire Record Office to review and identify potential exhibits. We have an interview planned with Rutland Radio, during which will launch an appeal for canal memories from local residents that we can use in the display. The exhibition will be a great opportunity for us to attract new members, raise the profile of the canal in the community, launch our Oakham Canal Trail leaflet and sell merchandise. We have been asked if we could develop an education programme based on the Oakham Canal following the exhibition. I have asked the Canal & River Trust to look at how they could support us in this.

I am currently looking at events that MOWS could attend this year. As last year, Stapleford Steam, the Market Overton Feast Weekend and Rocks by Rail steam events seem to be the most suitable. Let's hope the weather doesn't defeat us this year as it did last!

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

## Mountsorrel Lock Open Weekend

During the commercial boom years of waterway transport any boat travelling from the North toward Melton, would have traversed the Soar Navigation, passing through, amongst many others, Mountsorrel Lock.

Over the weekend of 27/28 February, Canal & River Trust were allowing visitors to walk through the 200 year old lock. They had drained the chamber to do essential works and to fit new locks gates and some of the MOWS team went along to have a look.

The event proved to be popular, with staff from CRT answering questions about the works and the history of the navigation. There were also stalls from Mountsorrel Heritage Society and the Leics & Rutland Wildlife Trust.



## Himalayan Balsam

The river is a marvellous way to distribute weed seeds, and again this year we shall be working on the task of reducing our waterways weed problem.

The principle problem around Melton Mowbray is the Himalayan Balsam. You will have seen this tall annual plant and its purple flowers all along the banks. It seeds freely and shades out all other plants beneath it.



It is the tallest annual plant in Europe and the seed capsule of this plant explodes and fires the seeds up to seven metres. The flower is shaped like a policeman's helmet. The Victorians loved it and introduced it into their gardens. Unfortunately it is a very successful noxious weed and is invading all our waterways including our own rivers Wreak and Eye.

So one of our tasks for the summer – chasing the Himalayan Balsam!

## Subscription Renewals 2016

Thank you to those who have paid promptly and especially to those who have given a donation along with their annual subs. We would also be grateful if those of you who pay by standing order would consider completing a Gift Aid form. This would be like giving the society an extra 20% on your subscription. Please contact Linda Hulme if you would like a form.

Just a gentle reminder to members who have not yet renewed their subscription. For those who I sent a renewal form by e-mail but do not have a printer, please let me know and I will send you a form by post.

## Change of Personal Details?

If you have recently gone online and now have an e-mail address, would you please let our membership secretary, Linda, know? (details opposite).

We realise we are probably not first on your list of informing relatives, friends, British Gas, BT, etc, but if you have moved house, we would be grateful if you would let us know your new address.

## Welcome To New Members ...

Liz Sanders  
Kate Worthington



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