

## Mick's Musings

### Slipping Between The Cracks?

Regular readers of this publication will know that my "musings" are usually written in a somewhat flippant vein and very much tongue in cheek, however, for this Winter issue (and I apologise to those who have been looking forward to a little light hearted banter) I have to be deadly serious. Let me explain ...

The Melton Mowbray Navigation utilised a canalisation of the rivers Wreake and Eye and when abandoned in 1877, they reverted back to their "river" status, and are these days administered by the Environment Agency (EA). The EA also look after several extant river navigations such as the Thames, Nene, Ouse and Ancholme. In the very near future, and I have mentioned this many times before, these navigations will be transferred across to the Canal and River Trust (CRT), along with any dowry given by the government for their upkeep. Now what perplexes me, is what is going to happen to the EA's abandoned navigations that are in with a good chance of restoration - like ours? I am anxious that the Wreake and Eye and other waterways represented by restoration groups, do not slip between the cracks of the transfer legislation, remain in the uncooperative hands of the EA and the chance of restoration become either a monumental task or worse, lost forever.

The latest figures speak for themselves with CRT receiving an increase in funding from £40M in 2014/15 to £50M for 2015/16, whilst EA's navigation funding has plummeted to £3.5M for 2014/15 with 15% reduction expected over the next four years. There is only one way I can see this going and it won't end in smiles. The transfer is now imminent and bodies such as the IWA are currently pressing for the changeover, so it is of the utmost importance that we act, and act now.

Richard Benyon MP chairs the all party parliamentary waterways group and I have already written to him and I am in the process of lobbying CRT Trustees, but our members can help too by writing to their own MP asking that they ensure the waterways under restoration get transferred away from EA and into the welcoming, pro restoration arms of CRT.

This society has been in existence for 18 years and this is the greatest threat to our continued development I have known in that time. I'm not suggesting for one moment that failing to move to CRT will be the end of everything, as there may be the option of retrospective action at a later date, but our best and easiest chance of making the transfer is to campaign right now.

I for one am not prepared to stand by and watch this wonderful opportunity pass us by.

I hope you will join me.

A safe and happy Christmas to you all.

*Mick*  
Mick Clowes



# Snapshot of a Life

During the time I have been involved with the waterways of this country, it has been my pleasure to meet some genuinely nice people. One of these was Les Hales, who accompanied by wife Freda could be often seen at waterway events up and down the country. He wearing his distinctive peaked cap and never without his trusty camera around his neck, and Freda sometimes wearing genuine traditional boatwomen's costume.

Sadly, no longer with us, Les amassed one of this country's largest archives of waterway photographs, either taken by himself, bought from others or in the form of postcards bought at auctions, etc. Due to a quirk of fate following the amalgamation of two departments at Loughborough University, I now work alongside Les's son John who, along with mum Freda, has sorted out, and given permission to use some, as yet unseen (by me at least) views of the Melton Navigation. Enjoy ..... Mick



We have all seen this view of the old Melton Basin before, but compare it with Les's view shot in 1968.



Washstones Ford Lock

Wot no swimming baths!?! Old shot from Leicester Road canal bridge



Health and safety? What health and safety? Children play in Asfordby Mill lock

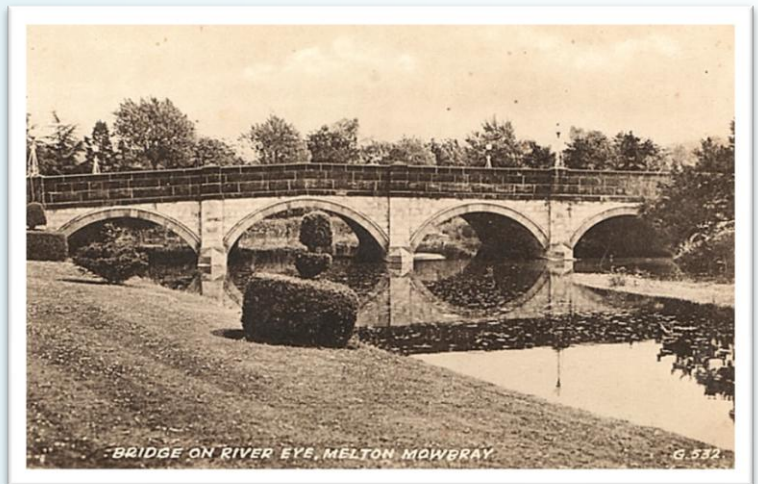


## Snapshot of a Life (cont'd) ...

No work parties required! I bet no-one remembers Lady Wilton Bridge looking as clear as this.

All photos reproduced courtesy of The Hales Family Archive.

More to follow in future editions if space permits.



## 2015 Annual General Meeting

The Society's AGM was held on Saturday 14 November 2015 at Sysonby Knoll Hotel, Melton Mowbray. A well attended meeting saw Jan Dadford and Dave Andow elected as Treasurer and Secretary respectively and three committee members retiring by rotation, re-elected.

The Chairman's review of the year, highlighted the society's frustration at several projects that were thwarted by red tape (and other reasons) at the last minute, leaving things unfinished. Amongst these were the setting up of the East and West partnerships and the building of the boat dock.

On a more positive note, he praised the immense amount of River clearance and tidying done by our volunteers, and the Syston end landowner who is making great strides at improving things around our "front door". The day to day activities of the society were said to be ticking along nicely, with a steady membership and sales of merchandise bringing in a regular profit, whilst our attendance at shows increased a little this year when we included Grantham Canal's Discovery Day. He said this and our attempts to get one or two more boats on the river were the best ways to improve our public profile.

The chairman also thanked our hardworking committee, welcoming new faces and thanking those retiring for a job well done. He highlighted Paul Dadford's tremendous work on the Oakham section and a special mention for retiring secretary Richard Booth whose 18 years service had seen him many times attend to matters over and above his normal duties. His final thank you's were to the owners and staff at Sysonby Knoll Hotel, who have given the society a wonderful home, and to the members whose patience over the years has to be applauded.



*Ready ..., steady ..., go ... Chairman Mick on the countdown to start the AGM*

# Oakham End Update

Efforts to preserve, conserve and increase awareness of the Oakham canal continue (I am 'chipping away' as I tell Mick!) but we desperately need more members, particularly active members, to support us (mainly me) in this work. This month saw the launch of the Rutland County Council Local Plan review. It may surprise readers to learn that the canal does not feature in the current plan despite the Council's heritage, environment and leisure commitments. We will therefore be asking the Council to consider protection of the canal remains and to recognise the potential leisure, heritage and environmental opportunities which its preservation and conservation could bring.

Our dialogue with other departments of Rutland County Council regarding the ongoing maintenance of the Springfield section seems to have stalled somewhat, so we are talking with local Councillors to see if we can't get things moving again soon.

Efforts are continuing to create improved canal side access. We are currently working to achieve the permanent diversion of the E154 public footpath to the north of the Oakham bypass to a line closer to the canal. Hopefully, this will be the catalyst to begin some conservation of this section and will help to preserve the remains for the long term.

A change of management, and the construction of a new exhibition centre, has also stalled our talks to develop a strategy for the canal at Rocks by Rail. Hopefully we can pick this up again in the new year.

On a positive note, I am pleased to report that we have now reached agreement with the Rutland County Museum to host a temporary exhibition about the Oakham canal in Autumn 2016. This will be a major step in increasing public awareness and (hopefully) attracting valuable new members. We now need to spend some time at the Leicestershire County Record Office to build an exhibit list and to story board the exhibition. Volunteers to help are still required!



I recently visited Pile Bridge Farm near Saxby. The landowner has discovered remains of the original locks at this location. They intend to carry out further excavation works there next summer and I am hopeful that MOWS can support them in this work. Some mysteries are yet to be solved, including how many locks are actually buried, why one appears to have a change of level and how the canal crossed the River Eye? If anyone wants a bit of hands on industrial archaeology, please do let me know. What was planned may not be what was actually built!

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).

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## STOP PRESS ...

The boat dock planning application was resubmitted to Melton Borough Council on 23 November.

