

## Mick's Musings

### *An (Airy)-Fairy Story? ... You decide*

**A** long, long time ago, in a land far, far away, there was a magical place called Melstocne. The people there were vast affrighted by travellers who told tales of strange goings-on far beyond the city walls. They were so perturbed that no-one dared to stray, despite having a water road brimming with opportunity, that led directly to the west and the mythical town of Sistine.

**T**herefore, the city elders decided it was safer to stay home than risk travelling elsewhere and spent lots of their taxes on paving the streets of Melstocne with gold. So, the dangerous journey to Sistine just became stuff of legends and the vast rewards awaiting those who are brave enough to make this perilous journey may never be realised.

*The End?*

*There be dragons here*



*There be dragons here*

## Work Party / Wombles

A joint initiative between MOWS and The Melton Wombles took place on Sunday 14 October.

This took the form of a waterborne litter pick with four people aboard 'Badger' armed with the long-reach pickers that County Hall had provided. The unusually high water level meant that certain areas previously inaccessible could now be reached. This proved invaluable where adjacent the Leicester Road canal bridge pickers could now reach the, literally, hundreds of disposable plastic gloves, which appear to blow across the road from the nearby garage forecourt. In total, a bin and three bags were filled and disposed of in the Egerton Park rubbish container. In addition, frames from several road warning notices were recovered and, again, confined to the skip.



*Yet another plastic bottle gets binned!*

The weather, which had threatened to be inclement, turned out to be cool but sunny, which was appreciated by all. Further joint missions are projected for the future, when the stretch between Melton and Eye Kettleby will be cleared.

Many thanks to our friends from the Melton Wombles.

## Ode to Our Volunteers

This was penned by myself for a competition held in Towpath Talk publication about 8 years ago. However, the sentiment is still the same and if you wish to become a volunteer, please contact anyone on the committee.

Our waterway is undergoing  
A transformation with no one knowing,  
That those who bring about the change,  
Are never fêted and find it strange,  
That what they do is something rare,  
And by their actions show they care.

But eventually all will come to know  
Of their exploits as the restoration will show,  
That getting out of bed on a winter's morning  
And working for nothing brings something rewarding.  
The conclusion of their toil over years and years,  
Our wonderful Melton and Oakham Volunteers!

Mick

# Childhood Years on the Melton Mowbray Navigation

Several years ago, I was given an anecdote with the above title. I can't remember who gave it to me, but it was a lovely little piece and, although it is now 16 years since it was written, I intend to publish it over the next 3 issues of the newsletter.

## Childhood Years on the Melton Mowbray Navigation

By Fred Birden

The September 2007 issue of *Waterways World* had just arrived. A quick skim through and there on page 90 of the Editor's excellent article "Slow Boat to Stilton Country", bottom left of the page, is a photograph of the house where the most idyllic years of my early life were spent.

In 1928, when I was four years old, my father, George Birden, came to the Manor Farm, Hoby in Leicestershire as a Waggoner and later, Foreman. My mother, Emma, was to be cook and housekeeper in the huge house, as John Morris, the owner, was at that time unmarried. In a year or two, after his marriage to Edna, we left the Manor for a tied cottage. Although both my parents continued to work there, my mother as and when she was required, but as her work became less based at the Manor, we moved to the Waterhouse, which was rented from another local farmer. There was no mains water and certainly no electricity or main drainage so Dad carried water from the well in the next field in two buckets on a yoke. But to a child, the Waterhouse was a magical place.

I'd started school at five years old. There were never more than 19 of us in the one room of the village school and one teacher whose competence I can never value enough. Of course, she knew our parents very well and we were all soundly disciplined on both sides! There I soon made friends and playmates – the Boulter twins, Tom Pick, the Gatwards especially – and we tended to gravitate to the Waterhouse. The backwater to the rear of our house was a great place to play, but it was the River Wreake in front of us, the 'cut' as we called it, which was the real draw, together with 'The Old Mill' further upstream. The second building in Richard's photograph was known, inappropriately, as the Boathouse, although it was far too small for any boat likely to use the cut, though, thinking back to my last visit to the interior when the Misses James had bought and modernised the Waterhouse, there appeared to be the remains of a forge and a large workbench. Was this a MMN workshop?

Francis and Teddy Boulter's granddad farmed most of the land down to Brooksby and up to the Old Mill. Above the Old Mill as far as the railway bridge was Morris family land, so we kids learned to respect the property of our elders and betters and our parents knew where we were. There was no expanded polystyrene in the 30s and no plastic containers, but we knew where to look for metal containers down at Brooksby near the sheep-dip and we could straighten nails from discarded fenceposts and recycle all these things into precarious rafts! We lacked the resources and the technology of Arthur Ransome's children in "Swallows and Amazons", but our adventures were just as real.

In 1935, five of the Hoby scholars reached 11-plus age and early one summer morning our teacher, Mrs Perry, took us over to Rearsby by way of footpaths, crossing the river at Thrussy Mill, to the examination room at Rearsby School. She then walked back to open her own school! Dedication to her pupils! The second day, one of Hoby's few car owners took us over to Rearsby. Despite a few errors, I passed, gaining a village scholarship for five years at Melton Mowbray Grammar School. So did Francis Boulter and Dennis Underwood from Rearsby. We travelled by train from our local station. Though our playtime became restricted by academic responsibility, our idyllic lifestyle continued.

Life was due to change for young Fred in 1938 ...

*To be continued in our next issue*

## Committee News

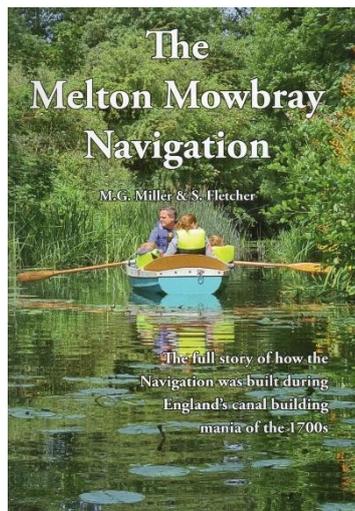
The present Chair, Glynn Cartwright, tendered his resignation at our AGM. When taking up his post Glynn said he would only hold this position until the next AGM. We thank him for his hard work during a time of change and, despite admitting he had never taken on anything in a similar vein, he carried out sterling work. At the AGM, Sharon Butcher was elected as the new Chair. Sharon has pledged to continue Glynn's good work and help the society move our restoration plans forward.

We have had two other resignations during this year. Lorrie Forman, who has been our Treasurer for 5 years and stepped down last month. We thank Lorrie for her marvellous work on the committee over this time. Lorrie is also a member of the Footpath Rangers and will continue with that role. The role of Treasurer has now been taken on by Diana Patterson, to whom we say thank you and send a warm welcome.

The second resignation is Geof Malone, who has been instrumental on several projects while he was a committee member. Firstly, we thank Geof for his hard work on the rowing boats. He spent a lot of his time restoring these to their former glory. And, of course, for revamping and printing of the Melton Mowbray Navigation Walks book and the MMN book – see below. This has been a fantastic undertaking and has been flying off the shelves since it was published.

## MMN Book

Just in time for Christmas ...



This book has been revamped by Geof Malone and is now on sale at the same outlets as the MMN Wreake Way short walks book.

The price is £5.95.

## Welcome to new members ...

M Johnson  
Linda & John Kerry  
?  
?

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