

Mick's Musings

Uke Must be Joking!

Parts of the following diatribe may not seem to have any bearing on the workings of a waterway restoration society, but please run with it, and your darkness may eventually become light(er).

Some of you may be aware, that I play in The Quorn Ukulele Orchestra, something I really enjoy, whilst raising loads of money for local good causes.

There are a good many similarities between MOWS and THE QUO, we both have a worthwhile goal in mind (restoring the waterways and charity fund raising) and have a structured approach (Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee, etc). We have regular meetings – work parties with MOWS and band practice night in the case of the uke group, but when it comes to membership and attendance that's where the similarity ends.

The membership of the ukulele group is limited by the fire limit on our practice room, which is 70 people, and we have a full membership of 70 with quite a waiting list to get "on the books". Our regular weekly attendance at practice nights is over 50 – which is around 72%. Throughout the year, we also play many live concerts (where the charity fund raising is done) and the camaraderie throughout between the players is quite evident. We also, like MOWS have a public Facebook page which very few people, strangely, seem to bother with.

Contrast that if you will with the fortunes of MOWS, whom I have served since our founding in 1997. Our Facebook page is bursting at the seams with over 2,000 "armchair" members whilst our actual membership and attendance at work parties remains static. As our American friends would say "go figure". No wonder our committee and especially today's author get very frustrated by this situation.

So, what's the answer? Free ukulele lessons to every new MOWS member? Perhaps the promise of a couple of choruses of "When I'm Cleaning Windows" to work party members as we cruise to our next worksite? Joking apart, there is a serious point to be made here. What is the magic ingredient that impels 50 people to turn out week after week, to attend a school hall in a small village, to bash away for 2 hours at a guitar that has been on a boil wash, whilst contrastingly the MOWS promise of wonderful river trips, a healthy day's exercise among friendly, like-minded people and doing something long lasting for the communities of many local places, doesn't even raise an eyebrow in a large place like Melton Mowbray?

Truth is, I don't know. This is the conundrum that we have pondered for some time. But if you have any answers, please let us know, and in the meantime, I'll keep practising my uke barre chords whilst hoping for a sea change in MOWS membership figures.

Mick

Mick Clowes

Wreake Voyager News

Recent work parties have seen the building of improved and safer access to the pontoon that secures the 'Wreake Voyager' trip boat.

As the picture shows, there is now a flat deck and a permanent ladder to allow our volunteers to move equipment to and from the pontoon.



New decking and ladder

Three of our volunteers recently visited Debdale Wharf Marina with a view to transporting our trip boat there to allow a boat surveyor to ensure that it is fit for purpose, advise on safety requirements and, if necessary, carry out remedial work required.

Whilst there, we thought it would be a good idea to get the outside repainted and blacked. A grant application is being put together in anticipation.

CCTV

Thanks to a crowdfunding effort, we were able to buy a second CCTV camera to monitor our rowing boat station adjacent to Wilton Bridge. Plans are in place to fit this as soon as river levels allow. Being situated in a public park, leaves the area open to abuse and vandalism. Extra security measures have also been implemented at the boat compound, where we have recently been subject to another break-in. The camera picked up the offenders (at 1.30am!) but their faces were obscured by their clothing.

Badger

We have submitted a bid to the Southern Trent Community Fund for a replacement of one of our work boats, 'Badger', which is starting to show her age. We have included a new outboard engine in the bid. The decision will be made in early December.

Dredging Update

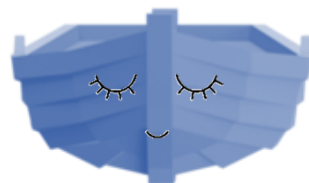
Tom Stretton at Equatic Solutions has applied to the EA for permission to dredge parts of the Melton ring to allow the trip boat to have easier access. EA have come back with some questions and once satisfied, should get back to us in a few weeks' time.

Galliford Try

As part of their remit to interact with the local community, Galliford Try (builders of the MMDR) have agreed to assist us with extending the moorings at the boat compound. Obviously, they are extremely busy but, Gino Salvatore, the company's representative has agreed in principle to help us out in the Spring. The work involved will require a few tons of hardcore and piling assistance to enable us to moor our whole fleet in a flood protected manner, whilst having safe access via the landing stage.

Rowing Boats Hibernation

Recent high river levels has curtailed any plans to extend our rowing boat season into the Autumn. The boats are now upturned on the bank awaiting cleaning and routine maintenance. We hope the boat operation will return early in the new year, but the experience gained over the past couple of months will stand us in good stead for the new season.



MOWS Volunteers Meet with Helpers to Say Thank You

Following the recent successful launch of rowing boats on the River Eye, Melton & Oakham Waterways Society held an event to thank some of the organisations who have helped make the project a reality and discuss plans for next year.



A few of our volunteers with some of our supporters

The rowing boats have been available for hire to the public during a trial period over the past couple of months, but the recent heavy rain, which has caused the river to rise and a strong current, means the boats cannot now be operated safely. They will now be put away until next Spring when the plan is to operate them all weekends throughout the summer months.

MOWS has received help in getting the boats operating from many organisations and individuals and many of those were present at the event, including borough councillors, Melton Mowbray Town Estate and the Fire Service's annual Trumpton Appeal.

MOWS founder member, Mick Clowes, said the society had been formed 27 years ago with the aim of restoring the Melton Navigation which operated in the 1800s and connected the town to the national canal network for nearly 100 years. Since then, volunteers have worked constantly to help ensure that the Navigation route – following the course of the Rivers Eye and Wreake – does not become overgrown and, as far as possible, remains navigable for boats.

He pointed out that towns and villages on the inland waterways network frequently hold special events which can attract hundreds of boats with the resulting boost to the local economy. In addition, waterways provide many opportunities for healthy leisure for residents, including walking, running and cycling.

Now, with the rowing boats operating, the society's attention has turned to getting its trip boat operating. This is 'Wreake Voyager', a 30ft narrowboat, which was purchased last year and it is intended to work on the landing area and other infrastructure over the winter months with the aim of starting trips in the Spring.

The plan is to run trips from the Melton Ring to Eye Kettleby Lock which was the final one of 12 locks when horse-drawn cargo barges came from the Grand Union Canal at Syston to Melton in the days of the Navigation. One of the big jobs to be undertaken to enable that is dredging several sections of river around Egerton Park.

MOWS Chair, Sharon Butcher, said: "We were delighted to have the opportunity to thank some of our supporters and explain our plans for the future. These are exciting times for the society. While we still dream of restoring the full length of the Navigation, the introduction of boats on the river will be an added amenity for residents as well as an attraction for visitors."

Geoff Malone

AGM Reminder

The 2024 AGM will take place this coming Saturday, 2 November, commencing @ 10:00am, at The Best Western Sysonby Knoll Hotel, Asfordby Road, Melton Mowbray, LE13 0HP.

New Treasurer and Membership Secretary

At this year's AGM (see notice above), our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Diana, intends to step down. We thank her for her hard work and wish her well in the future. However, this leaves a vacancy for this important position on our committee. If you would like to help, please contact one of the committee (details below).

Town Centre Design Guide Workshop

MOWS representatives attended the above meeting, held on 15 October and, as always, put a strong case forward to get the local waterway prominence within any local plan.

If you know anyone who already follows us on Facebook, why not ask them to consider becoming a full-time member of the society? Single membership is £15 for the year and £10 for each additional family member.

Welcome to new members ...

Christine Farley
Virginia Farley
Hannah Dalby

Society Contacts:

Chair: Sharon Butcher
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Secretary: Jerry Filor
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