

Mick's Musings

Counting the Cost?

Unless you've been living off grid for the last few months, you should be aware that the government subsidies paid to the Canal and River Trust for the upkeep of our waterways has dwindled to the point where things are becoming critical. The maintenance crews cannot keep pace with repairs, and boaters are seeing more delays and stoppages than ever before, whilst vital work is carried out to keep the system functioning safely. To be fair to CRT, their income is not solely dependent on Whitehall, as alternate revenue streams add to the budget available to carry out these much-needed tasks, but without an influx of government cash, I am not sure they will cope for much longer.

The cost-of-living crisis affects us all and belts are being tightened everywhere, so where does that leave us, a small provincial restoration group with big dreams?

Well, on the face of it, as a charity and doing good things in the public sector, you would think that we would be a shoe-in for many of the grants available, but with so many other groups in the same position as ourselves, trying to get a share of the spoils, this is patently not the case.

So, we have to stand out from the crowd, get ourselves noticed, puff out our chest and become somehow unique amongst a myriad of lookalike contenders. Easy to say but hard to do you might think, but here at MOWS we have a USP that trumps lots of others - history.

I love pop music which you could argue started back in the mid-50s, but that is just a mere 70 odd years ago. Likewise, Leicester City fans will crow about their heritage, but let's face it, at a mere 140 years old, age-wise they appear as juniors compared to a 270-year-old waterways system that became the arteries that carried the lifeblood of this country's industrial revolution and changed the face of Britain forever.

The Melton and Oakham Canals brought prosperity to an area that was regarded as somewhat of a backwater by bringing in goods such as coal and timber and exporting the dairy produce that the area is now rightly famous for. Let the "goods" we bring in be tourists, and using our history we have, ready-made, a recipe for success. How we achieve that is a whole other debate, but we must keep pushing our history to the fore rather than looking back.

Mick

Mick Clowes

AGM Report

The 2023 Annual General Meeting took place on Saturday 4 November at the Sysonby Knoll Hotel in Melton.

The chairman, Glynn Cartwright, reported on events during the past year and, when taking on this role in March, said that he would only be chairman until the next AGM. He announced that his successor would be Sharon Butcher.

There were a number of resignations/changes during the past year due to various reasons. Our Treasurer for the past few years, Lorrie Forman, decided it was time to hang up her abacus and we thanked her for all the hard work she has done during that time. Our new Treasurer is Diana Patterson and we wish her well in this role.

Our other committee newbie is Mike Patterson (yes, this is Diana's husband). He is also leader of our Footpath Rangers.

Our current committee line-up now comprises:

- Sharon Butcher (Chair)
- Glynn Cartwright (Membership Secretary)
- Mike Patterson (Footpath Rangers)
- Eric Brown
- Jerry Filor (Secretary)
- Diana Patterson (Treasurer)
- Dave Andow
- Mick Clowes

If anyone is interested in joining our committee, or would like further information, please email or ring one of the society contacts on page 4.

The minutes of the AGM are available to read on the society's website: meltonwaterways.org.uk.

Footpath Rangers

Our society is seeking footpath rangers for Hoby and Kirby Bellars to help maintain the footpaths along the 16 miles length of the navigation between Melton Mowbray and Syston. MOWS has issued a popular booklet of short walks along the navigation route and needs help to keep the footpaths featured in our booklet accessible to walkers.

The role of footpath ranger is two-fold. If there are obstructions in your designated area, such as a fallen tree, these may be reported to Leicester County Council via the lead footpath ranger. Also, where footpaths are overgrown, light and regular cutting back of brambles and undergrowth with secateurs really makes a difference, especially at those times of the year when growth is fast. The role might suit those who are regular walkers in these areas local to their homes.



If you are interested in volunteering or want to know more about what it entails, please e-mail your phone number to Mike Patterson at mcp21@btinternet.com.

Mike Patterson

Childhood Memories of the Melton Mowbray Navigation (Part 2)

Continuing Fred's story ...

Life was due to change for young Fred in 1938. Dad could no longer cope with the change to mechanised farming. He understood little beyond his beloved Shire horses, and forms and paperwork were quite beyond him. Severely wounded on the Somme in WW1, the physical strain was also telling on him. A lighter job on the then Holwell Iron Works Estate was offered to him and we left the child's paradise of Hoby for a rented house on Asfordby Road in Melton. I was shattered. The town had no place for me. However, new events soon softened the blow. The parents of Margaret Payne (in my form at school) lived on Asfordby Road below the embankment of the old Northern Railway and had 2 large wooden Canadian canoes, usually kept on the stream below the embankment and, with Margaret's brother, Sam – and others – I was able to paddle around the loop which surrounds Egerton Park to regain the old MMN. There had been a stop bar there, but this could be crossed. We often canoed down past Sysonby Grange to Rhubarb Island, which was the local name for Eye Kettleby Lock island. With access to the river by the Bill Smith's smallholding (he was a friend of the Paynes) I wasn't too badly served after all.

Event number 2 concerns Doris, who, at this time lived on the banks of the Grantham Canal in Rutland Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham. She was a friend of one of my cousins and soon became a friend of mine! Sixty-three years later, she still is. But another change was to intervene. My scholarship ended in 1940 after Oxford Matric. Interested in aircraft – I still am – and seeing no other way to gain a technical education (no grants then!) I took and passed the competitive examination to enter the Royal Air Force No 1 School of Technical Training at Halton as an Aircraft Apprentice. Three years later, as a Corporal Fitter Armourer, the next boats I boarded were taking servicing crews to flying boats in Sierra Leone!

Years passed. Doris and Fred married young and Fred left the RAF. They had two children but never forgot the cut. If you have access to the October 2004 issue of *Waterways World*, you'll see our first boat, a small pram dinghy which we built together from plans of the Gremlin in 1954, I think. We had a lot of fun in our camping trips with the Gremlin, which was later lengthened by a couple of feet. Some of these little cruises have been written about in *WW*. Carried on the top of that funny little three-wheeler, it visited the Melton Mowbray Navigation on several occasions. Our son, Martin, showed a lot of interest from an early age and was quite competent and trustworthy to manage the user-unfriendly Seagull and to take his granddad for a cruise on the Wreake above the Old Mill at Hoby. Later, when we had advanced to the home-built camping dinghy "Woodseaves" powered by 4hp Johnson, it was Martin who appointed himself chief engineer, as he has done on every boat we have used since. Twice we organised picnics at the Old Mill. "Woodseaves" was slid off its trailer below Washstones Lock near Frisby and Martin ferried those who didn't want to walk down from Hoby to the picnic site, boarding his passengers from the towpath under the twin-arched bridge. He took great care to avoid the half-submerged wooden pilings under the railway bridge. In those days the weir at the Old Mill was intact and the river level much higher than it was after the weir collapsed. The pool below the sluice was wider, clearer and deeper, and a great place to paddle and swim. Apart from the odd incursion from the Soar and a trailer borne launch near the Leicester Road bridge opposite Egerton Lodge in Melton, when the circuit of the park and a trip to Rhubarb Island was repeated, "Woodseaves" used little of the old cut.

Both our children left home in 1964 for further education and training, and "Woodseaves" became a 'day out' boat. For our own use we designed and built a 16ft Canadian canoe for car-roof transport. Formers were cut from 8mm ply and stringers of Parana pine supported coated fabric from Ottersports. One of the early trips started, again, from the Washstones, fortunately with a portage trolley aboard. All went well, under the railway, round the pool below the Old Mill, past the Waterhouse and under the single-arch bridge, where we Hoby kids imagined the barely submerged stony shape beneath it was a sunken boat. There is no towpath here. Could our 'sunken boat' have been the central pier of the more common twin arches of the MMN?

The 3rd and final instalment in our next issue

Hugh Butler

It is with sadness that I have to report the passing of a great society stalwart, Hugh Butler.

Hugh was at one time both our Treasurer and Membership Secretary and was a regular at work parties, where his wry sense of humour had us all chuckling regularly.

Hugh was a warm and friendly person whose first passion was sailing. He was a real gentleman and I never knew him to speak out of turn.



Dave (pictured with Hugh, above right) said that when he joined the society, Hugh was the first to welcome him and found him very approachable and informative.

We send our condolences to Anne and family at this sad time.

Mick Clowes

(Left) Hugh supervising work boat manoeuvres?

Membership Renewals

Just a reminder that membership renewals were due on 1 February.

If you pay your society membership subscription yearly, you may have already had a reminder. If not, please consider the option of setting up a Standing Order at your bank.

We would be very grateful if you could renew your membership by the end of February at latest, please.

Thank you.



Society Contacts:

Chair: Sharon Butcher
e-mail: sharonbrown987@icloud.com

**Secretary:
(Acting)** Jerry Filor
Tel: 01664 566614
e-mail: jfilor@talktalk.net

Treasurer: Diana Patterson
e-mail: dj.patterson@btopenworld.com

**Membership
Secretary &
Facebook:** Glynn Cartwright
Tel: 07985 632 863
e-mail: meltonoakham@outlook.com

Website: <http://www.meltonwaterways.org.uk>

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