

NORTH WALSHAM & DILHAM CANAL.

The Trustees are frequently being asked about the state of the canal. Why are the Work Parties of the Trust no longer working at the, once partly restored, Briggate Mill Pond? Why are those same Work parties not seen in the region around Honing Lock? Generally, it should be re-stated that the Canal Trust does NOT actually own any part or parts of the canal. The whole of the canal is, unusually, in private ownership. From Swafield Locks (Nos. 5 & 6) downstream to a point near to Wayford Bridge it was owned, for most of the 20th century, entirely by the North Walsham Canal Company Limited. Between 1980 and 2010 three parts had been sold off:-

1. Locks 5&6 to Swafield Bridge - Mr M Starling
2. Swafield Bridge to Ebridge Lock - The Old Canal Company
3. Ebridge Lock to Honing Lock (retained) - North Walsham Canal Company Ltd
4. Honing Lock to tidal end of canal - Bindwell Ltd

The work parties work on various parts of the canal with the express permission of the owner of that particular stretch. For nearly two years now we have been denied access, even just to make notes on existing features, to some stretches along the banks. In the case of Briggate Mill pond, earlier work was carried out to clear the pond area including the roadside trees, saving Norfolk County Council the major problems of expense and road closures should those trees have succumbed to storms or other natural causes. The Mill Pond was cleared sufficiently so that water returned from the canal and this permitted the return of many aquatic creatures including fish, birds and thousands of frogs and toads – apart from good low level growth such as grass on the surrounding ground. There was even a photograph taken by an EDP photographer of an egret catching a fish! Not seen in decades! The Honing Staithe Cut was marked out in accordance with land drawings and re-instated. When the Cut was first seen, there was no sign of water in it and the adjacent land was totally covered in trees, bushes and other vegetation such that access was, at first, not possible. A lot of the trees were in a state fit to fall to earth, as many had done blocking the canal entrance to the Staithe Cut. As this site was cleared, grass began to grow once more and a walk was created along the side of the Cut. This walk continued along the canal bank, over a constructed wooden bridge and returned through the woods to Weavers Way. You may recall that this Walk was opened by our local MP Normal Lamb and has been in constant use by many, many walkers of all ages. The actual canal between the Cut and Honing Lock was also cleared of debris, trees etc. thus permitting access for canoes between the two locations and of course, down towards Wayford Bridge via the heavily cluttered tidal part of the canal. Clearing this pound resulted in the water level there falling by several inches, as predicted, thus assisting in alleviating possible flooding upstream. An even greater clearance was made by de-silting at Ebridge Mill Pond (before the Environment Agency issued a Stop Notice) and since then no further flooding has been seen in North Walsham. (Consider the Somerset Levels and Cumbria, recently). In the near future there will be access to a walk along the eastern bank of the canal all the way through from Ebridge Mill Pond upstream to Pigney's Wood and Swafield Bridge. It should be noted that there is NO permitted access to the canal banks between Honing Lock and Ebridge Lock (except at Honing Staithe Cut).

In connection with the canal below Ebridge Lock and for further information on access to those parts of the canal by foot or canoe; what work is planned to be done in compliance with and required by, the two relevant Acts of Parliament (1812 & 1866), please contact the owners:-

1. North Walsham Canal Company Ltd, Company Secretary Mr R P Cubitt, 32 Bridgford Road, WEST BRIDGFORD, Nottingham, NG2 6AB
2. Bindwell Ltd, Company Secretary Mr A J Paterson, Dilham Hall, Honing Road, DILHAM, North Walsham, Norfolk, NR28 9PN
3. Or the Environment Agency