



Quagmire

The newsletter of the North Walsham & Dilham Canal Trust
Winter 2017/18

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News...

The Trust has appointed Graham Pressman as **Boating Officer** to manage our growing fleet of vessels. Graham has had an involvement with canals for more than four decades and has already been busy in his new role. He has been instrumental in organising weekend and Boxing Day boat trips on the canal. Passengers are able to enjoy a glass of alcohol-free mulled wine en-route.

The trips, on Sundays, plus Boxing Day (subject to wind, rain or ice), run between the millpond at Ebridge and Bacton Wood lock, about a mile each way.

The pontoon Sue B has been equipped with an electric outboard motor so that it glides almost silently through the water. It has been fitted with picnic benches and a table and there is a giant umbrella on board, in case of showers.



Graham



Graham says there is room on board for 10 passengers, and a crew of two talk about the canal's past, present and hoped-for future, as well as the wildlife on the canal which includes otters, kingfishers, little egrets, grey wagtails, water voles, marsh harriers, dragonflies, deer, and many varieties of fish.

A round-trip costs £5 per person and passengers are able to buy a warming cup of alcohol-free mulled wine and souvenirs. Proceeds will go towards the cost of restoring the second-hand trip boat, which the trust was given earlier

this year, and for further restoration work on the canal.

A timetable for the pontoon boat trips is on display on the notice board at Ebridge and anyone wishing to climb aboard can turn up at the advertised times, or book by calling Graham on 07585 160 772. Bookings will be allocated a space first, then walk-ups, as space is available. More trips might be organised according to demand.

(See Graham's item elsewhere.)

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Diana Velhagen has been appointed as the NW&DCT Researcher and will be an occasional contributor of interesting historical snippets about the Canal. Diana returned home to England in October 2012 after 22 years living in Australia where she worked as the National Advertising Manager for the Paramount Pictures Film Studio. Now self-employed as a researcher, Diana has a keen interest in history, having done her BA in Economic & Social History at Leicester University (many years ago Diana tells us!)



As well as being a member of the North Walsham & District Archive Group and Heritage Group, these past two years have also seen Diana read, by distance learning with Leicester University, for a post-graduate diploma in Museum Studies. For her final assignment this summer, she chose to design a fictional exhibition about the North Walsham & Dilham Canal. Diana talks about this exhibition in an item elsewhere in this newsletter. Having now recently passed this last module, she will graduate in January 2018.

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Another new appointment is Tom Webster, who has taken on the role of **Fisheries Officer**. This profile of Tom is taken from a Press Release by Alex Hurrel:

Angling on a unique Norfolk attraction is in the blood of Tom Webster, new fisheries officer for the North Walsham and Dilham Canal Trust.

Tom was taught to fish in the canal as a boy by his dad Roy Webster who, in turn, also cast his first line in the waterway, near his Dilham birthplace.

And now Tom is teaching his nine-year-old daughter Elsie how to fish in the Canal with encouragement from her granddad Roy, 84, who has recently stepped down after 55 years as fishing correspondent with the Eastern Daily Press.

Elsie is already hooked after landing a number of healthy-sized perch on her first fishing trip to Ebridge Mill pond on the canal.

Tom, 44, hopes other young people will also give angling a try, to experience the pleasure of being outdoors, surrounded by peace and wildlife, with the prospect of catching, holding and releasing some of the varied fish in the 19th-century canal. One of his ideas is to start a fishing competition like those he enjoyed in his childhood.

He has also drafted a list of rules for the restored stretch between Ebridge and Swafeld Bridge, which is in the ownership of The Old Canal Company. They are aimed at maintaining harmony between all canal users, protecting the environment and the fish.

Pike weighing up to 20lb have been caught in the stretch, together with perch, rudd, roach and small eels. Their abundance astonishes Tom who remembers how overgrown and neglected the canal had become until volunteers began reclaiming it 17 years ago.

"I'm astounded at how much work has gone into restoring it - they've done a brilliant job," he said.

"Predator stocks are very healthy which means the fish they feed on must be doing well too."

Roy Webster has a lifetime's memories of fishing in the North Walsham and Dilham Canal. During the Second World War he helped feed his family by supplementing their rations with pike steaks and soused bream from fish he caught between Honing and Wayford Bridge.

But it was while angling at the canal in wartime that he had a close shave when a German messerschmitt 210 fighter, fresh from attacking Norwich, flew low overhead and strafed the area. Roy remembers hearing the noise of the machine gun bullets as they spattered into the water nearby. He escaped harm but said a land army girl was hit in the leg.

Post war, Roy returned from National Service with the RAF and helped set up a fishing club in Dilham. He said the canal had been the training ground for four anglers, including himself, who were selected for the Great Yarmouth AAA national team of 12 and took part in matches all over the country for a number of years in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Roy watched the canal fall into decline over the decades and is delighted that stretches are now being restored

He said: "It's full of migratory birds, kingfisher, dragonflies, fish, reeds - I think it should be given Site of Special Scientific Interest status. It's thriving again."



Roy, Tom, & Elsie Webster by Alex Hurrel

Graham Pressman – Boating Officer

We had a wonderful December on Sue B. We had trips every Sunday at 2pm all through the month. We had one Sunday when we had no passengers, then a total of 44 during the rest of the month. We did have to cancel the day after Boxing Day on the grounds that the wind was just too bad. Then there were three on New Year's Day. Of those, some have joined as members and a couple have offered up their help as volunteers.

The early part of January looks a little lean at the moment. We will see if we can get walk-ups when we don't have bookings. Of course, once the winter is over, things will certainly look up in terms of numbers. All of those who have signed the visitors' book have been very complimentary.

Sue B is now adorned with 3m x 1m banners each side, promoting trips, thanks to getting a good price and prompt service for those from North Walsham Signs and Canopy Annie has made us a couple of nice cushions for the damp seats. Jane and her family have been a welcome sight upon our return in the cold and wet, on non-work party Sundays. Frankly, the crew and I are cold and tired by that time, so having help to stow the equipment is more valuable than I can adequately express. My sincere gratitude to absolutely everybody who has helped with that!

The work party has done a grand job stripping all the superfluous bits from our trip boat Ella II*. She is now beginning to look the part. The small hole in the front is repaired and she had a test dunking, to prove that she is now watertight. Next comes grit blasting inside and painting for weather protection. The outside will need a good scrape and coats of blacking. Then the ballast can go in and the woodwork can be prepared for spring.

Graham Pressman – Boating Officer

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***ELLA II**

Our trip boat has a new name! You will remember that the Trust has been given a trip boat (previously named Elsa) which is in need of much work. Thank you to everyone who suggested a new name (Trippy McTripboat was swiftly rejected) but it was Ivan, the Trust Chairman who suggested the rather obvious Ella II. After all, the last commercial wherry, Ella, sailed to Ebridge Mill in 1934 and what better way to remember her and all the other wherries that sailed our Canal.



The boat was placed into the Canal for stability and water ingress observations and these were positive. She has since been moved to Laurie's shed and recently, work-party volunteers have been busy removing all the wood and inside bolts, clearing the floor of as much muck as possible, cleaning the holes on the outside with an abrasive wheel etc.

The next stage is shot blasting and painting. It has now been agreed by those with the technical knowledge - that this is now feasible and the best way forward. Several quotes have been received, and Trustees will

be consulted as to whether to accept a quote of c£1400 - this is to shot blast both the inside and outside, then spray 3 coats of paint - red oxide, grey primer and topcoat.

The suggestion is that Ella II is painted black with a white nose and varnished wood gunwales and perhaps raised nameplate at the front to reflect the livery of the wherries that used to ply their trade on the Canal. The consensus is that she should have a solid roof (possibly aluminium) and side curtains. Have you any suggestion as to who could construct these?

The Trust will need to source funding from somewhere in order to get Ella II ready to take paying guests along the canal. Progress will be reported in future editions of Quagmire.

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Recent Events



On **15th October 2017**, with the kind permission of the canal owner, the Mundesley Independent Lifeboat/Flood Rescue team made good use of the canal at Ebridge as a training venue.

With fifteen volunteers, including several new members of the team present, the experienced hands soon had them looking confident in the water.

It was impressive to watch their teamwork as they carried out rescues and transported 'casualties' across the canal. Their enthusiasm and cheerfulness, even when being 'dunked' in the canal, didn't wane throughout.

They were blessed with a beautiful warm sunny day, but the

chances are that these courageous folk will be called into action in far less pleasant circumstances and conditions. I take my hat off to them.

Thank you to Colin, their Coxswain, for allowing me to hang around taking photos. We hope you will use the canal again for your training, although hopefully we will never need your services 'for 'real'!

Perry Hampson, Wildlife Officer

Test re-watering

On Wednesday **10th January 2018** Laurie decided that the time was right to try a test re-watering of the 'dry section' above Royston Bridge. The BBC was there to record the event which was a step towards the Trust's ultimate aim of restoring the whole canal. Trustees and work party volunteers were there to watch the water slowly, slowly creep towards the bridge. Chris Heath was determined to be the first vessel through the tunnel and spectators cheered him through, forgiving him the fact that he had to manually drag his coracle the last couple of feet.

Before setting a date for the actual re-watering, Laurie will determine whether there are any leaks in the banks and also finish building up one of the banks to the correct height. The intention is to advertise the date of the actual re-watering so that everyone who is interested in the Canal restoration will be able to come along.



Chris emerging from the tunnel



Looking north from the bridge – and sailing north on the pontoon



Bacton Wood Lock

On 22nd October the main job for the work party was to fit the base plates and collars to the bottom gates. The first job was to grind the top of the quoins so that they were flush with the brickwork. The holes for the studs to fix down the base plates were then drilled, brushing the brick dust away from the hole as work continued.

Lunch was taken while the epoxy resin set (it mixes in the nozzle as it is squeezed out). After lunch, the plates were cleaned underneath of dust and resin and then bolted down. The collars were then fitted around the west gate and the tension straps fitted. The process was then repeated on the east side and used to test the gate by tightening the strap - more work will be needed to get the gates to be a good fit.



With thanks to Alan Bertram for these words and pictures

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Chris Heath took this photo but by the time he had reached the lock chamber, the pot of gold had disappeared.

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Congratulations to Luke Patterson on collecting the *commended award* in the Best Newcomer category in the *Camping and Glamping* awards for Canal Camping. The Spring Quagmire will include an item about the campsite and the lower Canal.

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Diana Velhagen NW&DCT Researcher

As mentioned above, for my final 5,000 word assignment I had to design a **fictional exhibition**. I chose to do mine on the canal, entitled *From Cabbages to Canoes, Wherries to Water Voles: the story of the North Walsham & Dilham Canal*. The exhibition was planned to highlight the rich 200-year history of the canal utilising artefacts and multi-media elements.

Potential audiences would include residents of North Walsham and district and their relatives, friends and visitors; schoolchildren aged 5-11 years, and the North Norfolk holidaymakers.

The exhibition would be both a chronological and spatial journey, as the visitor moves through three interlinked rooms, “anchored” by four key dates and keywords:

1825 – Optimism - Canal hand dug in 1825 and opened with great fanfare in 1826.

1886 – Reality - As a late addition to the nation’s canal network, the canal struggled as a commercial venture and was sold.

1934 – Decline - Facing stiff competition from the new railways and better roads, the last trading wherry sailed in 1934. The canal then slowly silted up and the lock gates fell into disrepair.

2008 – Rejuvenation - On 30th January, 2008 the Canal Trust was formed and commenced dredging, and rebuilding of locks and canal banks. The canal is now fast becoming a leisure destination – for fishing, boating, wildlife photography and “gongoozling.”

I wanted the overall exhibition to be “more than a book on the wall.” Hence there are interpretive and interactive devices in each space. Elements of the exhibition included:

- Comfortable seating areas for visitors to “Sit and have a Mardle”
- Replica contemporary wheelbarrow and shovel, so visitors become aware of the hard work involved in hand-digging a nine mile canal in just over a year.
- A “dress up” station – where children can dress up in britches, linen shirt, neckerchief and flat cap, and have a photo taken or take a “selfie” (leading to visitor-generated coverage on social media.)
- Cabinets of artefacts with large tables nearby. These tables would be used for regular “hands-on” sessions for schoolchildren, and intermittent “*What lurks beneath?*” sessions where visitors can pay to clean and help identify newly-found artefacts.
- An interactive display concerning crime and punishment. In researching local newspapers I found many stories of “larrikin” activity such as illegal fishing, sluice gate opening plus the accidental canal-side shooting of a child in 1868. The interactive display asks the visitor to decide on the punishment and the “swing” flap below each crime reveals what punishment did in fact occur at the time.
- Interactive audio features (“memory phones”) introduce local voices (with associated photographs), communicating directly with the visitor. Here visitors could also record their own oral recollections for future inclusion.
- A large cube “jigsaw” to assemble, showing the 21st century canal’s restored flora and fauna.
- A TV screen with various button choices to play footage on subjects such as pessimism about the canal in 1962, current restoration work and awards.

I thoroughly enjoyed this assignment! I know North Walsham does not yet have a stand-alone heritage centre, but the Heritage Group hopes to incorporate elements of the exhibition proposal into displays planned in its new heritage centre within the town centre hub, ‘*Mi North Walsham*’ opening at Easter, which will be located in the prominently-situated Saddlers Shop on Church Plain.

Diana Velhagen - Researcher

Items of interest to members:

John Millington, Christmas Lectures and the North Walsham & Dilham Canal

The River Ant was navigable to Dilham prior to 1810, when consideration was given to extending navigation northwards along the course of the river. Plans were drawn up by William Youard and **John Millington** in 1811 and it was one of Millington's two plans that formed the basis of a bill presented to Parliament in early 1812.

The North Walsham and Dilham Canal was his only canal-building venture. Later in his career, he went to the United States of America and wrote *Elements of Civil Engineering* which includes much information on canal building.

John Millington served as professor of mechanics at the Royal Institution and in 1825 **he delivered the inaugural Royal Institution Christmas Lecture**. In 1827, he was appointed as Professor of Engineering and the Application of Mechanical Philosophy to the Arts at the new London University (now University College London). As such, he was the first professor of Engineering in England.

The CHRISTMAS LECTURES were set up to introduce a young audience to a subject through spectacular demonstrations and they have been inspiring children and adults alike since 1825. They have been given every year since they began, stopping only from 1939 to 1942, during the blitz in World War II when it was too dangerous for children to come into central London.

The lectures started with very little fanfare and no one could have predicted how popular they would become. In the 1820s there was very little organised education for young people, especially in science. Michael Faraday himself left school when he was about 13 and continued to educate himself by going to science lectures whenever he could. There had been afternoon lecture courses for adults at the RI since 1800 and probably some people brought their children along, but in 1825 someone had the idea of putting on lectures during the holiday breaks aimed at 'a juvenile auditory'.

CHRISTMAS LECTURES 1825 - 1829

1825: Natural philosophy - Lecturer: **John Millington**

1826: Astronomy - Lecturer: J Wallis

1827: Chemistry - Lecturer: Michael Faraday

1828: Architecture - Lecturer: J Wood

1829: Electricity - Lecturer: Michael Faraday

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Advisory notice:

*Although the **Old Canal Company**, as owners of the Ebridge to Swafield Bridge reaches, welcome walkers, pleasure anglers, boaters and others to use the canal waters and banks for their enjoyment, the Trust would like to remind people that the canal and lands are private and are still undergoing restoration. At times canal maintenance works may mean that not all parts are accessible, water levels will vary and that public use is always at their own risk.*

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A **calendar** has been produced by *The Showcase Gallery*, showing scenes of North Walsham. One of the photographs is of the picnic bench at Ebridge – taken by Julie Kelleher. This is a fine way to publicise the Canal and its restoration. Bear it in mind if you are still in need of a 2018 calendar! Members are already aware that our beautiful greetings cards are available by post via mdablack@btinternet.com. Postage & Packing £1.50 for up to 12 cards, or from *The Showcase Gallery*, 40a Market Place, North Walsham (01692 500928) at £2 per card.

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Dates for your diary

Discard your **Fluorescent** Jackets!

On March 21st, 2018 the Trust will be celebrating both the efforts of the work party and other volunteers, and its Tenth Birthday at Honing Village Hall. **Final details are due to be discussed at the next Trustees' meeting at the end of the month and everyone will be informed via email.**

The event is a big *Thank You* to our volunteers and members for all the work they have put into furthering the restoration of the Canal. As well as a "slide show" to remind everyone of the progress that has been made - and some particular incidents that some may prefer were not captured on film, there will be a presentation of a Bottom Gate Trophy to the person whose actions have given most amusement and a Top Gate Trophy to the person who is "voted" as having deserved it! Other volunteers will be providing refreshments and there may be some other activities, still in the planning stage. Any offers of a Birthday cake?

Whether or not you are able to join us, you may nominate one or more people for the Top or Bottom Trophies. If you know of anyone who you reckon has done something that has boosted the Trust's volunteers' morale or has done something "unfortunate" that has given a laugh, please send to Mary at mdablack@btinternet.com. Even better - with a photo!

Ivan Cane - Chairman

Talks & Presentations 2018

18th April

Dereham U3A History Group

Ivan Cane



Perry noticed a Kingfisher on the pool below Bacton Wood Mill during one of his walks, and took this picture of the Kingfisher. The photo of the Water Rail on the canal was kindly posted to our Facebook page by Malcolm Ducker.

The Quagmire is a newsletter for all members of NW&DCT and members are encouraged to make suggestions for future items.

The deadline for items for inclusion in the Spring 2018 Quagmire (at the Trustees' discretion) is the first week of April. Contact mdablack@btinternet.com