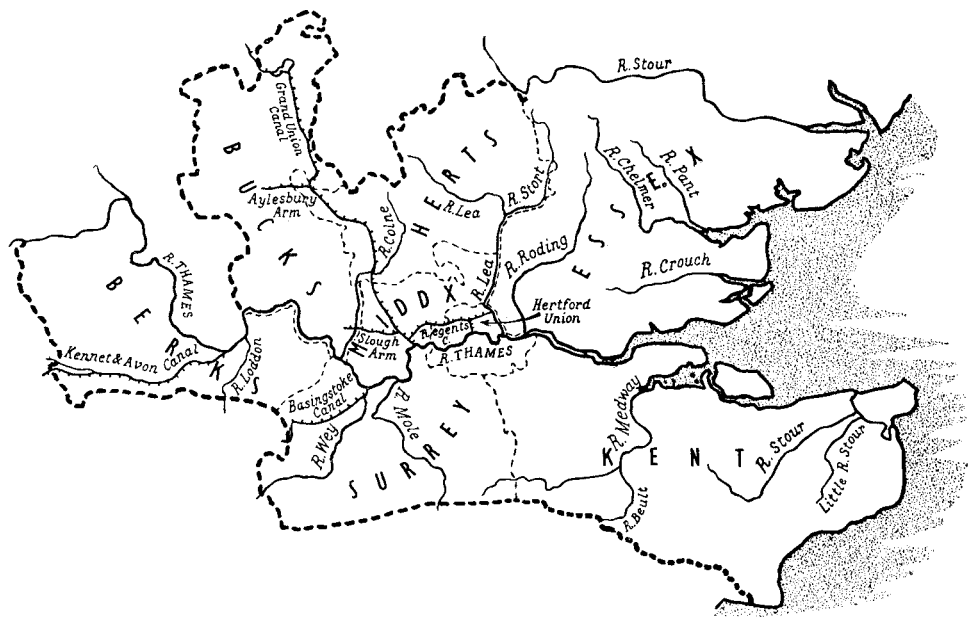


*W. S. S.*

# THE WINDLASS

Vol. I No. 1. OCTOBER 1956



“THE WINDLASS” is the official journal of the LONDON and HOME COUNTIES BRANCH of the Inland Waterways Association.

THE LONDON AND HOME COUNTIES BRANCH OF THE I.W.A.

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*Hon. Editor:* P. H. CHAPLIN, Meadhurst Cottage, Cadbury Road, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex.

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## The Chairman's Column

The 29th June, 1956, was a date to remember for inland waterway enthusiasts of London and the Home Counties, when their own Branch of the Inland Waterways Association was formed. This Branch has been born at a time when the fight for our waterways is at its climax and its immediate task is to act with all possible energy and speed in support of the parent Association. The Committee has already moved rapidly in producing the first number of "The Windlass" and is forming a programme for the Autumn and early Winter of 1956.

May I say immediately that I have been very happy to see how quickly our most enthusiastic and versatile Committee has got down to the task of organising the Branch's activities and they will gradually expand as we gain experience of the support we are likely to receive and the wishes of members. The Committee includes members representing and with first hand knowledge of certain specific waterways, including the Rivers Lee and Stort, the Chelmer, the Stour, the Medway, the Basingstoke Canal and others. A special Sub-Committee has been formed to deal with the Basingstoke Canal. But never let any of us forget that the main task of this Committee is to further the cause of the I.W.A. and to seek public support for their aims, and our second job is to organise entertainment for our members.

We have been fortunate and honoured in that Mr. John Betjeman has kindly consented to be Branch Patron. Many members will recall the several most excellent speeches that he has made on behalf of the cause at Oxford, London and elsewhere.

The Committee as a whole is taking immediate steps to become really familiar with the waterways in the Branch area. Early in October it is making a special tour of the works and navigation of the River Stour and most of the Committee Members are taking part in the cruise on the Lee and Stort which is referred to below.

Members will note that in this first issue of "The Windlass" we have published a map on the front cover which shows the area over which the Branch's activities extend.

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## An Invitation to Cruise

A cruise on the Rivers Lee and Stort in several cabin cruisers is being organised to take place from 21st-27th October inclusive. The cruise will commence at the "Maid" Line base at Thames Ditton, proceeding down the Thames and via the Grand Union, Regent and Ducketts Canals to the Lee. It is intended to reach Hertford and also Bishops Stortford on the Stort, and it is hoped that there may be an opportunity to meet various civic dignitaries of the towns en route. There are a few vacancies remaining available for members, but application should be made to the Hon. Secretary by return. The cost of the cruise will be about 50/-d. per head, in addition to food of course, which figure will include cost of fuel, navigation permit etc., and a small contribution towards Branch funds. No charge will be made for the use of the cruisers.

# The Crucial Fight

By The Right Honourable Chuter Ede, C.H., J.P., D.L., M.P.

The formation of the London and Home Counties Branch of the Inland Waterways Association will enable a special concentration on behalf of the continuance and improvement of inland waterways in the populous area covered by the designation of the new sub-organisation to be inaugurated and maintained. It is within this district that what may well be the crucial fight for the survival of any hope of a connected system of navigable rivers and canals will take place within the next two years. The outcome of the conflict will depend upon the extent to which public opinion can be aroused and given an opportunity of bringing effective pressure to bear during that critical period.

Anyone associated actively with the Inland Waterways Association knows that such a public opinion exists. Public meetings called by the Association and allied societies attract audiences three or four times as large, at least, as can be assembled for ordinary political gatherings. Those attending show an appreciation of the arguments, economic, social, utilitarian and aesthetic, to be advanced for the retention and expansion of the existing routes, and the restoration under modern conditions of those connecting links, the decay and abandonment of which, have reduced the value of what remains capable of use.

The debates in the current and preceding parliamentary sessions demonstrate that there exists a powerful body of support for the policy of the Association in the House of Commons, on both sides, which can be counted on to keep the waterways open if further efforts should be made to close and destroy them. Without belittling the activities in other places it is safe to say that the really vital issue concerns the fate of the Kennet and Avon Canal. That is particularly a problem for the London and Home Counties Branch, acting in co-operation with the energetic and capably led Kennet and Avon Canal Association which has done yeoman service in focussing public opinion along the course of the two rivers concerned on the importance of the struggle. At the latest this particular phase of the general campaign will be settled one way or the other by the early months of 1958.

It is only by much earnest and continuous effort that even so short a postponement of a final decision was wrested from the British Transport Commission and the Minister of Transport this year. It is true that the opponents of the Commission's Bill were better received by the promoters than they were when objecting to the Bill of 1955, but that was because the unsuspected strength in favour of the inland waterway system had been to some extent revealed during the parliamentary discussions in 1955. It has not been possible to deploy the full force at our disposal yet owing to lack of nation-wide organisation, but the formation and functioning of the various branches of the Inland Waterways Association will remedy that defect.

There is a stiff fight immediately ahead of us. The battle will be decided, both in principle and in detail, in the area of the London and Home Counties Branch. It behoves us, therefore, in the short time left to us before the climax is reached, to ensure that every possible source of support is brought into action to strengthen our resistance to any proposals to which we object and to fortify our advocacy of alternative constructive measures we may advance. If we can succeed in these objectives the controversy on national lines will have been given a definite turn towards the adoption of the Association's policy.

Within our area other proposals have been put forward by the British Transport Commission which need careful examination and on which the application of the views of the Association must be persuasively put forward and convincingly argued so that the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods concerned can realise the importance of the issues at stake. All these projects require careful, constructive study and, when that has been given, a vigorous Branch of the Association will be able to influence public opinion in adopting a realistic and useful attitude towards them.

The increasing crowding and dangers of the highways in London and the Home Counties have reached stages now which call for a thorough and frank reconsideration of the appropriate form of carriage for heavy and slow moving goods. Most pictorial representations of traffic delay on the roads depict vehicles and merchandise which in any comprehensive arrangements for the transport of goods would not be on the roads at all. They would travel with at least equal speed and certainty on an improved system of waterways. By doing so they would enable traffic, both personal and commercial, to go along the roads with less irritation and much greater safety. Any schemes for highway reconstruction which ignore the part canals and canalised rivers can play in the country's transport system will fail to provide the most efficient and economical solution to the problem modern demands for the movement of people and goods make.

These remarks have been confined to immediate and limited issues. That is because we have a fight on our hands which for over a hundred years has gone steadily and remorselessly against us. Doubts and hesitations, especially in the early twentieth century, allowed a good case to go by default when much could have been saved and even more destruction of vital national assets prevented. The fate of reforms then unsuccessfully advocated should warn us of the criminality of irresolution and slackness at this supremely critical juncture. The publications of the Association give ample bases for the arguments in favour of the policy advocated by its spokesmen. In these days the most powerful arguments depend for their success upon the persistent dissemination of them by as numerous and well-organised as possible a body of those convinced by them on the mass of citizens, not ill-disposed nor hostile but merely unaware of the effect some decision about to be taken will affect them and the future of their country. The London and Home Counties Branch of the Inland Waterways Association and its organ, "The Windlass," can afford the light and leading which will ensure that the cause they advocate shall be known and victorious.

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## Programme of Winter Events

First on the list of events planned to take place in the future as part of our social programme is an outing from Rickmansworth by boat, notice of which appeared in Bulletin 51. As it is not possible to obtain details of train departures from either Marylebone or Baker Street at the time of writing as "they will undoubtedly be changed Madam" members are urged to leave for Rickmansworth from either of these stations at about 11 a.m. It is understood that there is usually a 20 minute service from these stations. The boats will leave from Rickmansworth Lock which can be found by turning right out of the station and going through the main part of the town then bearing left.

A film show will be given on the 18th October at 8 p.m. at The "Princess Louise," 208, High Holborn, W.C.1., to include films of the Northern Waterways, Great Ouse, Thames, etc. It is hoped that either Robert Aickman our Founder and Vice-President or Mr. Edwards, will be joining us to give us the benefit of a well informed and entertaining commentary.

For hardy members a cruise is being organised by Captain Munk up the Lea and Stort to Bishops Stortford, details of which are to be found herein. This promises to be highly adventurous, it is hoped that several Mayors will be dragged from their beds to cheer the party on whilst we on our part hope to impress them with our energy and initiative in pursuit of our cause. Expenses will be 50/- per head for the use, fuelling etc., of the boats, food etc., being provided by the crews. Please make your bookings early for this enterprising venture, as demand promises to be brisk.

Finally, a word about Christmas. The Branch proposes to arrange a Christmas party and dance about the 14th December but no details are available as yet. We do hope that as many members as possible will come and join in the fun at this event as there is no time like Christmas for all members to get acquainted with each other and give the Branch a really good "send off."

We shall always be delighted to hear of events any member feels that he or she would particularly enjoy as we would like to feel that we are catering for all tastes.

HEATHER McKAY.

# Waterways of the Home Counties

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## 1. THE RIVER WEY NAVIGATION.

Construction of the 15 miles of navigation from the Thames at Weybridge to Guildford was completed in 1653. Twelve locks were built and some 10 miles of artificial channel were dug, at a total cost of £15,000. It was extended to Godalming (4 miles distant) in 1762. In 1799 the Basingstoke Canal, which enters the Wey  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Weybridge, was completed and from that time until railway competition commenced the Wey was busy and prosperous. From 1816 to 1871 the Wey was linked to the South coast by the Wey and Arun Junction Canal. The latter was not a successful venture, and was forced to close by railway competition: today only traces of it remain.

Although the present position of the River Wey Navigation is secure, there must be no complacency about the future. The survival of the waterways depends on commercial traffic, and this is gradually decreasing. The biggest factor responsible for the decrease is a lack of barge crews: 3 of the Wey barges are at present lying idle at Guildford. Most traffic terminates at Coxes Mill, only  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles up the navigation, so that the rest of the waterway is used only by an occasional load of timber passing to Guildford. Grain traffic to Stoke Mill, near Guildford, ceased this year with the closure of the mill. Some of Guildford's timber is unloaded from Thames lighters at Walton and taken by road from there. Coal traffic to Shalford, above Guildford, ceased during the war and nothing has reached the timber wharves of Godalming for many years. Nevertheless, two or three times the present volume of traffic could be readily obtained if the boats and boat crews were available.

Loaded barges are towed by tug from the Tideway to Thames Lock, Weybridge. Horses take over from there, two being used to tow a barge loaded with 80 tons of grain. Empty barges are often drifted downstream to Weybridge (one man pulling or poling) when a horse is not available. The mode of barge traffic is remarkable in that it has remained unchanged for the best part of 150 years. The locks are capable of taking a pair of narrow boats, but these are not now used on the Wey: the remains of narrow boats on the Basingstoke Canal indicate that they were once used, perhaps during the early part of this century.

The Wey provides a quiet and very beautiful cruising ground, restricted to boats of 14ft beam, not more than 3ft 6ins draught and a height above water of not more than 7ft. (The official head-room is given as 7ft 6ins, but this would mean a tight squeeze at some bridges). Above Guildford further restrictions are imposed by a bridge at Shalford (6ft. to 6ft 6ins. clearance) and by a shoal below Unstead Lock (just under 2ft 6ins depth). The wash from powerful craft can easily damage the unprotected banks, particularly in the narrower cuts, causing silting of the centre of the channel; skippers are urged to avoid causing a wash. Five of the locks have lock-keepers and the remainder are worked by boats' crews. The locks are in good working order, but some are very old and should be treated with respect: the management frowns upon the type of locking tactics commonly employed on the Grand Union Canal! There is a general absence of bollards or posts at lock-sides and above and below the locks, suitable for the use of light craft. A lock windlass is required to work the locks, and although one may be hired for a short period, they are not easy to obtain. Perhaps the I.W.A. could appoint a blacksmith to provide lock windlasses for members of the Association? Despite the attractions of the waterway, particularly between Byfleet and Guildford, relatively few pleasure boats use it; one concludes that the fairly high charges and the necessity to work locks are the main deterrents, rather than ignorance of the existence of the waterway. It must be said, however, that the entrance to the Wey at Weybridge is not at all easy for the stranger to find. A sign-board stating that "This is the entrance to the River Wey Navigation to Guildford and Godalming" would be extremely useful, and the provision of such might be within the activities of the Home Counties Branch.

A curious omission in the construction of the navigation is the absence of a by-pass wier at Pyrford lock, which means that water supplying the 3 pounds below the lock must be run through the lock itself, for which purpose the top-gate paddles are kept raised. This is an obstacle to navigation, in that the time taken to pass through is almost twice that of a normal lock, and it is a nuisance when the uninitiated leave the paddles down, or when malicious youths deliberately lower them: the result is a drop in water level by as much as 12ins from Pyrford to New Haw. The nearest lock keeper (a mile upstream) has to be called out to let the water through again.

Because of the freedom of the canalised sections from flooding and the relative proximity of the waterway to London, permanent moorings on the Wey are in much demand but are very scarce. Apart from occasional vacancies at established moorings, there is very little choice for the newcomer. It is one of the objects of the Wey Cruising Club (A corporate member of the I.W.A., founded 1950) "to endeavour to obtain improvements in the navigation and the provision of better facilities for mooring on the waterway." Members wishing to bring their boats onto the waterway would do well to join this Club. Other objects of the Wey Cruising Club are to give instruction in watermanship and navigation, and to arrange rallies, regattas and cruises. There are some 60 members, owning between them 34 boats.

It is to be hoped that the Home Counties Branch, by organising cruises and day-trips, will help to make its members better acquainted with the function and amenities of the Wey Navigation.

R. MACK.

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## From the Editor's Cabin

A recent trip up the Kennet and Avon Canal from Reading to Burghfield was really delightful, and I hasten to suggest that members with small craft upon the Thames should make greater use of this delightful, but little frequented waterway.—A word of warning though! If you keep your boat below the lovely Clevedon reach of the Thames you have only limited time in which to make this trip, because from Oct. 1st, Cookham lock will be closed for six months. The new lock promises to be a masterpiece in civil and electrical engineering, but that is a dear reward for hardworking boat firms and keen boatowners whose activities will be severely curtailed for half a year. With events such as this we can hardly expect commercial traffic to increase upon the Thames and it is with sorrow that I have just learnt that the stately old up-river tug "Pamelalice" has been sold. After somewhere about 25 years service on the upper river she will be starting a new career at Southampton. The subject of commercial traffic and navigational improvements reminds me that £864,000 is to be spent on improving the Lea from Bow to Enfield, the work on this small section of a fine waterway will take between three and four years to complete. Unfortunately the top half of the Lea and the adjoining Stort, although needing urgent attention, are being neglected. Mr. L. A. Edwards (Hon. Sec. I.W.A.) issued an important statement on the matter, this being given due publicity in *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. However in spite of all these trials and tribulations, the waterways have their brighter side, and in the sporting sphere this year Doggett's coat and badge race from London Bridge to Chelsea was of a higher standard, even if the winning time of 29 mins. was a little slow. For the first time in the history of the race (242 consecutive years) all five entrants sculled in brand new clinker boats provided by the Fishmongers Company.

There were six entrants in this year's Thames sailing barge match, and that magnificent craft of Messrs. F. T. Everard & Sons Ltd., the 50 year old *Veronica*—romped home to first place. In the Medway barge race, the place of honour went to the I.C.I.'s *Dreadnought*. It seems that as long as the P.L.A. explosive regulations remain in their present form, so will I.C.I. run a fleet of sailing barges.

I would like to conclude these notes with the following news of the Basingstoke Canal:—  
"The New Basingstoke Canal Company Limited offers a limited number of free moorings in the Woking and Byfleet area of this private waterway in the return for services as Bailiff to assist in its protection against possible hooliganism and damage, particularly in the evenings and at weekends. Excellent train service and easy access to London. For full particulars apply to Mrs. J. Marshall, General Manager, The New Basingstoke Canal Co. Ltd., Greenways, Fleet, Hants."

Peter Chaplin.

## Hon. Secretary's Report

Members will now be aware that there is a London and Home Counties Branch of the Inland Waterways Association. All Members residing in the Counties of London, Essex, Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Hertfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire are eligible for membership of the Branch. If you wish to become a Member of the new Branch you will be asked to pay 5/- per annum subscription falling due when your National Subscription becomes due. Until your National subscription is due you are automatically an honorary member of the Branch. We have over 900 Members on the record cards and hope that all of them will become Branch Members.

Your Hon. Secretary attended the Lincoln Rally from 13th to 16th August. There were nearly 100 boats there from converted narrow boats, de luxe cruisers to "home made" conversions and, although the weather was very much against us, I think all present enjoyed themselves. The Rally was held on Brayford Pool, an ideal setting and the Sea Cadets were kept very busy providing a ferry service back and forth between the boats and the quayside.

A Dinner was held on Monday evening and a Supper-Dance on the last night, well attended too. At the latter function the Prize Giving was carried out. My admiration goes out to the two young lads who canoed from Macclesfield and won the award for the longest canoe journey. They were certainly a credit to the Association and an example to many of us.

I have only one complaint to make—the public were not afforded sufficient facilities to see over the boats and meet the boat owners although I understand that several new Members were enrolled whilst at Lincoln.

*E. LOVERIDGE.*

### STOP PRESS.

It is likely that an assistant press representative will be required, will volunteers kindly contact our Hon. Secretary.

BISHOPS STORTFORD—a public meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 27th, regarding the rivers Lea and Stort.

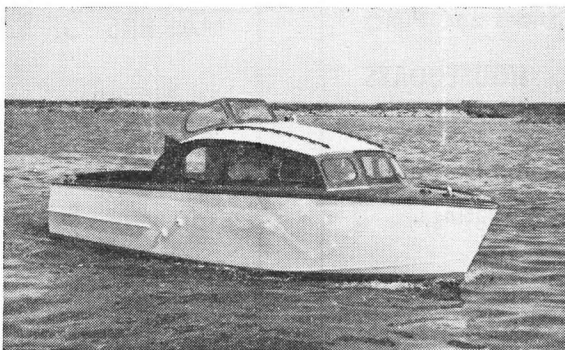
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