

# THE WINDLASS

Vol. III No. 1. FEBRUARY 1959



THAMES HEAD, October 7th, 1958 ((block kindly lent by the Thames Conservancy).

“THE WINDLASS” is the bi-monthly journal of  
THE LONDON and HOME COUNTIES BRANCH of  
The Inland Waterways Association.

## THE LONDON AND HOME COUNTIES BRANCH OF THE INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION

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J. E. MARRIAGE, Esq. (Chelmer)	S. J. TIMS, Esq. (Thames and Basingstoke Canal)

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## The Chairman's Column

It was with very great regret that at the Committee Meeting held on December, I resigned the office of Chairman of The London & Home Counties Branch in view of the fact that several weeks earlier I had been appointed Chairman of the main Association. It is hardly practicable for me to deal with the considerable amount of work entailed by each of these offices and, in any case, I think it undesirable for two appointments to be held by one member.

Our erstwhile Hon. Secretary, Capt. C. Grundy, M.C., was appointed Chairman in my place by the Committee and our very worthy Editor of the "Windlass," Mr. Peter Chaplin, was appointed Vice-Chairman. These two members are, of course, very well known to all of us and have performed prodigious amounts of work for the Branch in the past few years. I am happy to hand over the task to such very competent people. As regards the Secretaryship, our original Secretary, Mrs. E. Loveridge who is at present Assistant Hon. Secretary, has agreed to take over the job again of Hon. Secretary of the Branch and no-one could be more capable than she. As all these appointments were made by the Committee all will come up for confirmation at the next Annual General Meeting.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my work with the Branch since it was formed in July 1956 and should like to acknowledge the tremendous help and enthusiasm I have received from the other members of the Branch Committee. I am very grateful to them. What progress we have been able to make is entirely due to this fact.

I look forward to helping the cause in the wider sphere of the work of the Association and hope to attend as many Branch functions as possible in the future so as to keep in touch with the members of the Branch.

L. R. MUNK.

## Honorary Secretary's Notes

Members will notice that elsewhere in this issue of the "Windlass" there is given a list of the various social functions which it is proposed that the Branch should hold during this winter and the earlier part of the coming year. These include film shows, talks, the Annual Dinner and Treasure Hunt and, of course, a Summer programme of boat trips on the Inland Waterways of the Home

Counties. Your Committee hope that as many of you as possible will take part in these social activities of the Branch. On the other hand I feel that it is most important that none of us should lose sight of the fact that the Inland Waterways Association is not primarily a social organisation and that the most important thing about boat trips and similar entertainments is that they enable us all to get to know better the waterways of our part of the Country and our fellow Members of the Association who, with us, are fighting for them.

The Inland Waterways Association is, first and foremost, a fighting organisation: Some members may feel that now the Bowes Committee have reported and their recommendations contain so much with which the Association can agree, the fight is over: This is not in any way so, and we now have to make sure that the recommendations of the Bowes Report are implemented and that no waterway for which the Bowes Committee did not see a future as part of the "prescribed navigable system" is allowed to be abandoned. We must also continue our campaign for a National Waterways Conservancy which, it will be recalled, was recommended by only half of the members of the Bowes Committee.

In fact, although we have made great progress, we still have a considerable way to go and we cannot afford to relax our efforts. It is most important that the Membership of the Association should not be allowed to decline and I very much hope that no Member will now decide to leave the Association feeling that our work is done as this is far from being the case; in fact, now is the time for us to make a very great effort to increase the Membership of the Association and all your Committee hope that every Member will do his or her utmost to encourage their friends to join the Association as it is only by having a large and enthusiastic Membership that the Association can exert its influence and achieve its aims.

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## Christmas Draw 1958

The Christmas Draw is now behind us and I am very pleased to announce a net profit of £133-1-9. Rather less than the last Christmas Draw but nevertheless almost double the amount received in the 1958 Derby Draw.

Once again our most grateful thanks are due to all of you who co-operated so splendidly in selling tickets and to those members who donated a total of £4-17-0 towards our funds.

Our thanks are due also to W. B. Hcseason of Oulton Broad who so generously donated the first prize of a week's cruise on the Broads, and to Capt. O. M. Watts for various gifts.

A list of winners is given below and I have copies of the prize-winners' list for any member who would like one:—

Messrs. A. J. Aird, S. Rayner, L. T. Connell, P. M. L. Lewis, A. V. Grey, E. R. L. Day, B. Hartley, M. Robinson, Miss M. A. Murray, Messrs. L. Low, H. Gibb, Miss M. O'Farrell, Miss S. Bradley, Miss C. Thorpe, Mrs. Hudson, Mrs. M. M. Stone, Miss M. E. Harden, Messrs. E. Billingham, A. H. Clifford, Mrs. Reed, Mr. B. Ash.

# FORTHCOMING EVENTS

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20th, 1959

**Annual Dinner at the Hotel Rembrandt. To avoid disappointment please apply for tickets without delay. They are available from Mr. J. Street, 52, Moreton Street, Westminster, S.W.1. Members 25/-. Non-Members 27/6. Noteable Speakers — Special Film.**

## SUNDAY, MARCH 1st, 1959

Car Treasure Hunt, covering Thames, Slough Arm, Grand Union, etc. Starting point: Messrs. Tims Boatyard, Timsway, Chertsey Lane, Staines, Middlesex, at 10.30 a.m. Entrance fee 10/- per car. All entries to reach Mr. J. Street (52 Moreton Street, S.W.1), not later than February 20th.

## THURSDAY, MARCH 5th

SENSATIONAL! A special film on the Volga-Don Canal, at the "Princess Louise," High Holborn, at 7.45 p.m.

## SUNDAY, MAY 3rd

RIVER MEDWAY TRIP.—Maidstone to Tonbridge. Full details will appear in the next issue of "The Windlass." Tickets will be available from Mr. D. Salmon, Springhill Cottage, Yardley Park Road, Tonbridge.

## SATURDAY, JUNE 20th

Trip on the Regents Canal. Details to follow.

## SUNDAY, JULY 19th

Trip on the River Crouch. Details to follow.

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19th

Trip on the River Stort. Details to follow.

## CALLING ALL MEMBERS!

Please support the DEVIZES RALLY of THE KENNET & AVON CANAL ASSOCIATION on EASTER MONDAY, MARCH 30th. Full details from the Rally Organizer:—

R. R. Meinertzhagen, 15, Pelham Mews, Portobello Road, London, W.11.

# The Thames and Severn Canal

On the 19th November, 1789, the first laden craft to navigate the Thames and Severn Canal reached Lechlade, where it was welcomed by a large crowd, and a salute of twelve pieces of cannon from Buscot Park. The junction of the two rivers was hailed as one of the greatest engineering achievements of all time, and one which would confer inestimable benefits on the inhabitants of Southern England.

Only 27 years later, in 1816, the canal was beginning to fail. Weeds choked the waters, lock gates were decaying. In 1881 the revenue from tolls was £3-6-10. By 1910 the waterway was derelict and deserted.

Seldom can high hopes have been dashed so swiftly, or money spent to so little purpose.

There were many reasons for the decline and failure of the canal. Not the least was the coming of the railways—that ubiquitous competitor with increased speed and efficiency. It was an odd quirk of fate that the canals, our first major step forward in transport for centuries, should so soon have been faced by an insurmountable challenge.

A canal joining the Thames and Severn had for long been talked about. Mr. Joseph Moxon, hydrographer to Charles the Second, made a survey of the proposed route of the canal, following the introduction of a Bill in the House of Commons, but nothing came of it. A strong proponent was Mr. Alexander Pope: he and others of like ideas received the enthusiastic support of those who hoped to benefit commercially from the project.

The Stroudwater Canal, eight miles long, from Framilode on the River Severn to Walbridge, near Stroud, was constructed about 1730. In 1782 Mr. Robert Whitworth, an engineer, was engaged to plan and estimate the cost of a canal from the Stroudwater Canal to the Thames. His estimate was £130,000, but £60,000 extra was allowed for contingencies. Work was started in 1783, and finished in November, 1789. According to Tomblason the canal on the  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Stroud to Sapperton ascended 241ft. 3ins. by means of 20 locks. Sapperton Tunnel, nearly  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles long, was cut through Sapperton Hill and at its greatest depth the tunnel was 250ft. below ground. From Sapperton Tunnel the canal continued to Inglesham, a distance of 20 miles 3 furlongs, and fell 130ft. 6ins. through 14 locks.

It is evident, when reading contemporary accounts of the construction of the canal, that the tunnelling of Sapperton Hill was the most difficult and expensive part of the project, and that it was, rightly, regarded as a very great achievement. The tunnel was 15ft. wide, with an arch of masonry at the top, and an inverted arch at the bottom, except where the rock rendered it unnecessary. The cost was about 8 guineas per cubic foot—higher than had been expected. It was found that the hill consisted almost entirely of stone and the engineers had to blast their way through it.

The width of the canal was 42ft. at the top, 30ft. at the bottom; depth was 5ft. The barges were 80ft. long, 12ft. in beam, and when loaded drew 4ft.

Warehouses, with cranes, were built at convenient places: a branch of the canal was run to Cirencester where a large basin, surrounded by wharves and warehouses, was constructed.

Thames Head was desecrated by the erection of a steam pump for supplying the canal with water. Before the advent of this pump it seems that the spring at Thames Head flowed throughout the year. Thereafter, with the pump, worked by an engine of 140 h.p., sucking up water to the extent of 60 hogsheads every minute, the spring tended more and more to be dry. It received its *coup de grace* soon after when the Railway Works at Swindon sunk wells and started abstracting quantities of water from the sub-soil. Nowadays it is unusual for the spring to flow, except after heavy snow or rain. What a way to treat the birthplace of England's greatest river!

The 1928 edition of Bradshaw gives this epitaph of the greater length of the Thames and Severn Canal:—

“The upper portion of the canal, namely from Whitehall Bridge to Inglesham, including the branch from Siddington to Cirencester has, by Warrant of the Ministry of Transport dated 31st January, 1927, been abandoned, and by Order of the Ministry dated the 10th May, 1927, the Gloucestershire County Council have been released from all liability to maintain this portion of the canal. The canal property is now being conveyed to the several owners of land adjoining the canal.”

It is still possible to trace the route of the although portions of it have been filled in and are indistinguishable from the adjoining fields. But the Round Towers which were the lock houses, still exist, and are a certain indication that the canal passed that way.

Anyone who is fond of treading historic paths and who has a day to spare should make a pilgrimage to what remains of the canal. Unless he is addicted to long distance walking across rough country, he should go by car. By this means he can see what is left of the canal in various aspects between, say, Inglesham and Sapperton.

Starting at Lechlade Bridge Inglesham is reached by walking upstream along the towpath for about a mile. There, the Round House and lock can be seen at the junction of the canal with the Thames. From this point the route of the canal follows the line of the river to Cricklade, where canal and river part to meet again near Thames Head. Motoring along the country roads to Hanington Bridge, through Kempsford and other picturesque villages to Cricklade other Round Houses will be observed at intervals and occasionally the raised bank of the canal. The Round Houses can usually be approached by narrow roads which lead to the still narrower humped back bridges which, in places, still span the canal bed.

For the half mile from the Fosseway to Thames Head the canal and river bed run side by side—both bone dry for most of the year. The canal bed here has great charm: few strangers traverse it and those who do might easily imagine they were seeing some prehistoric earthworks. In the spring primroses cluster on the banks and amidst the grass is a mauve haze of violets. Birds and other wild life go their way in peace and seem oblivious of the planes ripping and roaring overhead. For this spot, quiet in every other way, has been caught up in the jet age. By comparison the railway, which runs nearby, seems silent.

Just above Thames Head the canal bed becomes a jungle of trees and undergrowth and the prudent explorer will forsake it for the open meadow. To complete the trip one should visit the entrance to Sapperton Tunnel about two miles away along a narrow road from the Fosseway.

Alongside the tunnel entrance there used to be an Inn; no doubt an oasis to the bargemen after their long and thirsty journey under the earth.

There is water in the bed here, and from a distance it looks almost like a canal. But closer inspection reveals only a few inches of water and large rocks which would impede even a canoe. The tunnel entrance, strangely ornamental, and covered with the names and remarks of visitors, is the reverse of inviting. One feels that only an enthusiast would venture far inside. Some say that at the centre the roof has collapsed. It would be interesting to know for sure, but peering into the dank depths of the tunnel, I felt that if it depends on my efforts, the question will remain unanswered.

Last spring, on a visit to Thames Head, a small party of us touched the canal at various places down to Lechlade. We were fortunate—if that is the word—in seeing a canal lock on the outskirts of Cricklade being filled in by a bull-dozer. The driver, with whom we had a few friendly words, was performing his task with regret. He told us that the walls were thick enough to test even a bull-dozer, and from the massive blocks of masonry scattered around it was obvious that the builders intended their work to persist for centuries.

Nearer Lechlade the canal in places was being filled in. We saw several of the Round Houses and one of them will forever recall to our minds a strange encounter. Seeing a path leading to the House, and the bridge over the canal bed, we motored towards it. On reaching the bridge we found that the road ended, and it was necessary for us to reverse and return to the main road. Whilst we were doing this an old woman appeared accompanied by a dog. Living miles from anywhere, in the decaying Round House, she could seldom see strangers, and apparently she had no wish to do so. Her appearance baffles description: had she lived in the Middle Ages her looks alone would have ensured her incineration on a witch's bonfire. Matted hair straggled each side of her face, and as she opened her mouth to rain curses on our heads she exposed her few blackened teeth. The dog at her side kept up an incessant barking and had the same malevolent expression on his face. In some strange way, the two of them—the woman and the dog—resembled each other, except that the dog had rather more teeth.

I think we all, as we motored safely away, gave a shudder of relief. I, for one, would hate to meet the old lady and her dog on a dark night.

We are all sad at the passing of canals, particularly those which could still be revived with a little effort and expense. But the Thames and Severn Canal has for so long been dead, that a resurrection is impossible: there is, therefore, no reason for undue sadness. The remains of the canal are disappearing, but sufficient will survive to remind future generations that, in the world of transport, however well we plan and build, progress can, in the end, nullify our efforts—but, without those efforts, there would be no progress.

R.R.B.

## From the Editor's Cabin

Prestressed concrete is a comparatively new material that is used for a wide range of applications in civil engineering construction. As far as waterways are concerned the main use is for sheet piles, particularly for the sides of locks. However as the possibility of constructing lock gates of prestressed concrete is being investigated, a few notes on this material may be of interest. The weight of steel in a prestressed concrete sheet pile is only about a quarter of that used in a normal reinforced concrete pile and as the amount of concrete required is also less there is a considerable saving in weight. Normally concrete can take heavy compression, but is weak in tension because the reinforcing steel stretches in taking up tension, so allowing the concrete to open out. The idea of prestressing is to overcome this fault by stretching steel wires very tightly in a desired position, moulds are then erected around the wires into which the concrete is poured. As soon as the concrete is sufficiently hard the wires are released from their anchorage. In attempting to return to their original length they compress the concrete along its full length but cannot slip because of the bond between the surface of the wires and the concrete.

The Thames Conservancy are adopting a uniform system of marking shoals and other obstructions in the river, which should greatly assist holiday makers and those travelling in unfamiliar reaches. In times the system may be extended to replace some of the written notices. Three shapes of topmarks carried on metal floats will be used:—Can, Diamond and Sphere, and their significance will be as follows when proceeding upstream:—

- (a) RED CAN—to be left on your port hand.
  - (b) BLACK DIAMOND—to be left on your starboard hand.
  - (c) RED & BLACK SPHERE—may be passed on either side.
- (Buoys are left on opposite hand when proceeding downstream).

At the Smithfield Show last December the Ford Motor Company were showing a new version of their "Dexta" tractor with an overall width of only 52ins.; one of our members suggested that it might prove useful as a mechanical horse for towing laden craft.

Our member, Mr. John Marriage, has just sent me the following notes about the Chelmer and Blackwater, also the River Stour:—

#### CHELMER AND BLACKWATER NAVIGATION.

"As a result of the opening up of the navigation for pleasure traffic, this year, for the first time two boats requiring the use of the locks were operating on the canal. One of these together with another are now moored at Chelmsford, which is considered it likely to become popular for winter mooring. Already J. E. Marriage has received several enquiries about cruising on the canal during the coming season."

#### RIVER STOUR NAVIGATION

"The River Stour Action Committee recently inspected the lower portion of the river. It was found that there had been no marked deterioration of the navigational works since last year, although of course the sea lock is the only one which (with difficulty) can be operated.

The committee is still investigating the complicated legal position and any members willing to assist in the area would be very welcome."

Our Association's Chairman, Capt. L. R. Munk, is a very keen dinghy helmsman. Not surprisingly he handles a sailing craft with great agility and dexterity, so much so that he has been invited to become Chairman of a sailing association formed for owners of the "Wayfarer" class of sailing dinghy. The Wayfarer is a 15ft. 10in. centreboard craft with from 125 to 141 square feet of canvas according to rig. She was designed by Ian Proctor for cruising, racing and camping and is the IDEAL family boat—no small wonder that it is becoming such a popular craft.

A date for your diary! British Waterways are holding a display of pleasure craft and inspection vessels at Paddington from April 20th to 25th.

Our River Medway Sub-Committee have produced an excellent brochure on that waterway; copies are available from:—Mr. D. Salmon, Springhill Cottage, Yardley Park Road, Tonbridge. Please enclose 3d. stamp with application.

One of the few remaining, privately owned, steam launches upon the Thames, recently went on to the Grand Union Canal. She is the "Pieretta," a steel launch 44ft. in length with magnificent lines; I understand that her top speed is in the neighbourhood of 17 knots and that out on the river she makes little wash. She was built by the celebrated designer des Vignes, at Chertsey, towards the latter part of last century.

The Camping and Outdoor Life Exhibition at Alexander Palace, is at the time of writing these notes, in full swing. It is an excellent show and of inestimable value to the camping enthusiast. Waterway users are not forgotten, there being several craft on show—canoes, dinghys, a light cruiser and even a houseboat! Barbecue equipment is featured on the stands of several well known suppliers of tents and camp gear. Shortly after arriving at the exhibition I was delighted to bump into a very enthusiastic and long standing member of the Kennet and Avon Canal Association.

PETER H. CHAPLIN.

## NEWS of the TRADE

April 1st will be the opening date of the Aylesbury Boat Company's Marina, at Aylesbury. The flagship of their hire fleet of motor cruisers will be the MALLARD. Facilities at the marina will include mooring, slipping and car parking. I feel compelled to quote from the Company's brochure—"Bri'ain has no Rhine or Riviera but we have a system of inland waterways unmatched in the world—1,400 miles that meander gently through the beautiful countryside of Southern England and the Midlands. . . . there are no billboards, factory chimneys or hot-dog stands. But there are cosy Bargees', pubs, picturesque villages, fascinating flights of locks and magnificent views across rolling countryside. Everything except people."

Our well known member, Mr. John James will be running his celebrated Regents Canal trips in "Jason" again this season, commencing March 28th. A descriptive leaflet and timetable is available from him, the address being:— Barge "Tab," Blomfield Road, London, W.9. Telephone Cuningham 3428.

Canoe camping holidays are the speciality of P.G.L. Voyages of 20, Willan Way, Letchworth. Waterways covered by this service, within the British Isles, are to date as follows: The Wye, Thames, Severn, Teme and the Caledonian Canal. The latter waterway is truly magnificent and indescribably beautiful whether the sun be shining or the soft mist falling; I am looking forward to the day when I have sufficient time to traverse the Great Glen, (as it is usually called) once again. The P.G.L. brochure describes all the trips mentioned besides numerous ones upon the continent.

The Villiers Company who produce the well known Villiers and JAP light engines recently celebrated their Diamond Jubilee and to commemorate the event they held a special exhibition at the R.H.S. Hall, London. Amongst the 350 exhibits were quite a few marine units, both inboard and outboard, of various types and sizes.

Messrs. Brian Ambrase & Company have issued their 1959 brochure, copies of which are available from 40, Egmont Road, New Malden, Surrey. Bookings for their luxury cruisers are already heavy.

Broxbourne Boats Ltd., The Old Mill, Broxbourne, have produced a comprehensive range of boats from 12ft. 6ins. to 23ft. that can be purchased as fully finished craft, assembled and ready to "finish yourself," or as a complete home building kit. A detailed catalogue and price list is available from them at the above address.

The house flag of Tims will become even more familiar this year now that two more craft, "Glaming Water" and "Bridgewater" have been added to the fleet of the very old established boatbuilding firm of John Tims & Sons of Staines, Middlesex. A detailed brochure is available, and other services include slipping, mooring, chandlery, repairs, water, petrol and usual services.

Mr. Jack Howard, who last year skippered "Enterprise," is now offering a personal service to boat owners, inasmuch that he will fetch, deliver or crew craft anywhere on inland waterways. His address is 27, Clitheroe Road, London, S.W.9.

Collier's Cruising Craft (based at Berkhamsted) have a first class cruising service organised by our member Mr. D. Collier who is a waterway enthusiast with great experience.

Sporttravel Services have introduced a new material for canoes, called "Tufskin." This is THE IDEAL covering material for rigid canoes. Full details of this, also canoes and accessories are available from 33, Chudleigh Road, Twickenham.

With the fitting out season drawing nigh owners will be checking up on paint and other requirements. When it comes to a good paint for the underwater surface I must say that Witty's "Goldfish" copper paint is really excellent. Witty's sixteen page catalogue is available from them at Willoughby Road, E. Twickenham.

Our advertisers, Messrs. Apex Engineering have produced a special outboard motor for use in weed congested waters, it is now available for the home market under the name of "Swamp-Master," and should prove very popular.

Messrs. Threestokes Ltd., of Victoria Park Road, London, are specialising in generators, lighting equipment, converters and repairs to light engines, pumps and generators. Marine equipment, boats and outboards are now being handled by Threestokes Marine Ltd., Mile End Road, London, E.1.

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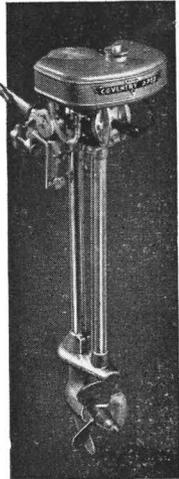
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