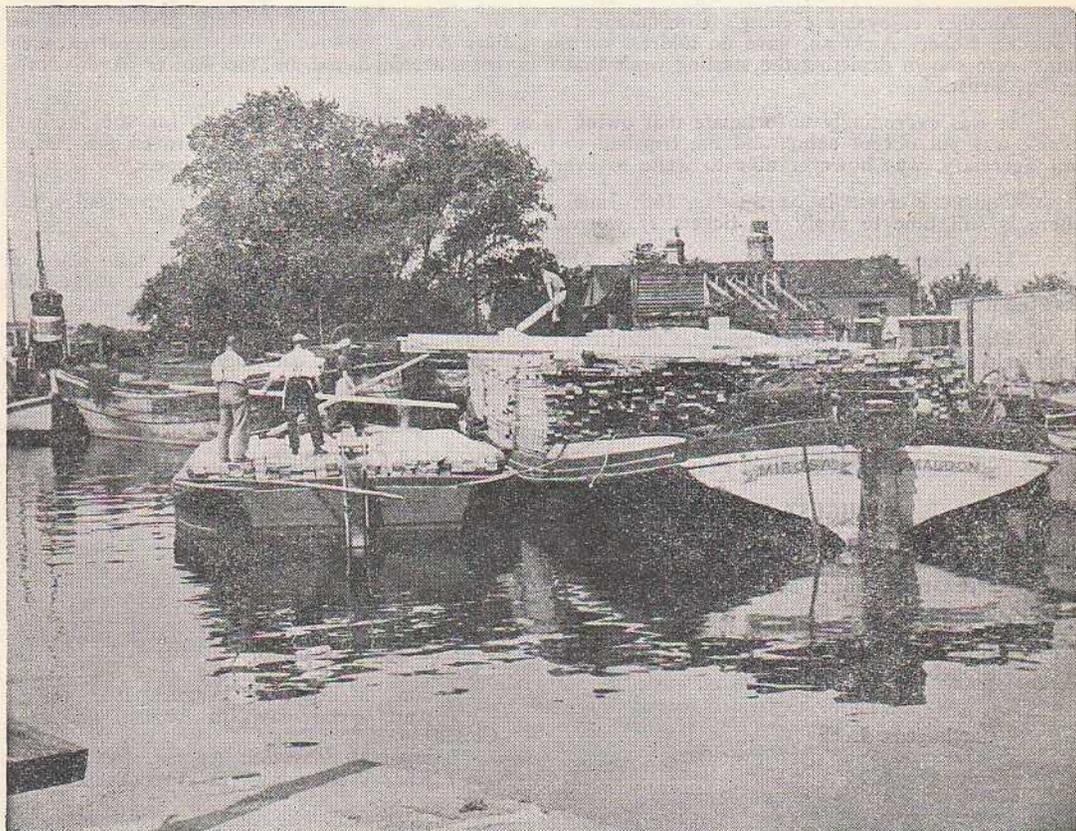


THE WINDLASS

Vol. I No. 5. JUNE 1957



"Timber being transferred from estuary barge to canal barge at Heybridge Basin."

*Photo by courtesy of The Editor "Essex Review"
and Messrs. Benham & Co. Ltd.*

"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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The Chairman's Column

Another enjoyable evening's entertainment was offered our members on 28th March when our Founder, Robert Aickman, gave an address on the Lower Avon. Following this, three most excellent films were shown depicting the sterling work that has been accomplished by the Lower Avon Navigation Trust.

It was exceedingly unfortunate that owing to an accident, the launch booked for the Medway cruise was put out of action and the trip had to be cancelled at short notice. Mr. Groves, our Assistant Secretary, was however able to write to everyone and tell them in sufficient time.

Our next cruise is on Sunday, 16th June, by Salter's steamer from Windsor to Henley and there is still time to apply for tickets, *if you do so immediately*.

Most important of all however is the Annual General Meeting which is due to take place on the evening of 5th July at the Princess Louise. That is the opportunity for you to make suggestions for the following year's programme, to let us have your ideas on the "Windlass," etc.

The Lee & Stort Development Committee is now in operation and two meetings have already been held at Bishop's Stortford to formulate a constitution and plan of campaign.

FROM THE WATERWAY AUTHORITIES.

AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY ARRANGEMENTS AND STOPPAGES.

BRENTFORD—THAMES LOCK:

Open three hours at each high tide.

RIVER LEE:

Bow and Limehouse Locks

Stonebridge Lock

Carthage Lock

Will be open as usual.

Closed

6 a.m., Monday, 5th August, 1957, to

7 p.m., Wednesday, 7th August, 1957

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6 a.m., Monday, 5th August, 1957, to

7 p.m., Wednesday, 7th August, 1957

STOP PRESS:

At the time of going to press the Derby Draw is in full swing and Mr. Brian Ambrose would like to express his thanks to the many members who have already sold their tickets. A list of the prizewinners and details of the receipts passed to The London & Home Counties Branch funds will be published in the next issue of The Windlass.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

JUNE 16th (SUNDAY): Details of this outing, a trip on the Thames, was published in the last edition of *The Windlass*.

Any late applications for tickets should be sent to Mrs. Loveridge, 18, Stonor Road, London, W.14.

JULY 5th (FRIDAY): The First ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Branch is to be held at the "Princess Louise," High Holborn, at 7.30 p.m. Do please attend this most important meeting. If you wish to nominate any member to serve on the Committee please let our Secretary, Mrs. Loveridge, have their name and address in writing not later than Thursday, June 20th. Nominees must be full Branch members and able to attend monthly Committee Meetings in London.

JULY 21st (SUNDAY): DO NOT MISS THIS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY OF TRAVELLING THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE CHELMER AND BLACKWATER NAVIGATION!

11.30 a.m.: Assemble at Chelmsford Boating Club Headquarters, Moulsham Mill Lane, Baddow Rd., Chelmsford. (Turn off By-pass at Army & Navy Public House).

12 noon: Start. 6 p.m.: Arrive Heybridge Basin.

There are no facilities for refreshment en route and members should bring packed lunch. As the craft is open members are strongly advised to bring waterproofs.

TRAINS. The 10.30 a.m. from Liverpool Street arrives at Chelmsford at 11.08 a.m. The barge on getting to Heybridge Basin will proceed to a point not very far from Maldon where a train for Liverpool Street leaves at 7.05 p.m. arriving at 8.33 p.m.

Please apply for tickets to J. E. Marriage, Esq. (Berberis, West Bowers Lane, Woodham Walter, near Maldon, Essex), as soon as possible. Tickets are 10/- members and 12/6 non-members.

AUGUST 31st (SATURDAY): Unfortunately this proposed London Docks Cruise has had to be postponed.

SEPTEMBER 22nd (SUNDAY): Horse-drawn barge trip on the Basingstoke Canal—full details in the next issue of "*The Windlass*."

When applying for tickets for any of the above trips it would be greatly appreciated if members would kindly enclose a stamped addressed envelope for reply.

NEWS OF THE TRADE

There are no less than three new portable grain elevators on the market from about £39 apiece, inclusive of petrol or electric motor. They are very suitable for use on narrow boats and barges and could easily give impetus to grain carrying on our waterways.

Those responsible for the clearance of weeds, will no doubt, want to learn more about the remarkably efficient "Copyu" water scythe that can be operated from a boat or the bank. It is held in high esteem in the horticultural trade.

Anybody interested in outboard propulsion will surely welcome an entirely new English unit—the *Aspin*. It is air cooled and of 5.5 h.p. It has two stage air silencing and underwater exhaust, weighs but 50lbs. and bristles with features which until now have been hard to find on British made outboards.

Messrs. Thames Launch Works Ltd. have recently converted a narrow boat for passenger traffic. She is the "*Water Rambler*" and is to be used by British Waterways. Judging from the specification she is a luxury craft—further details in another issue. Messrs. Thames Launches are embarking on the construction of six steel butty boats for British Transport Waterways.

Waterways of the Home Counties

5. THE CHELMER AND BLACKWATER NAVIGATION

The Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation is one of the few privately owned canals surviving in perfect navigational order although completely isolated from the national system. It runs from Heybridge Basin, near Maldon, on the Blackwater estuary, to Chelmsford, the county town of Essex. The navigation was one of the few not nationalised and remains owned by the Company of Proprietors of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Limited, the original owners, and is still used regularly by commercial traffic.

Although actually built at the height of the canal mania, proposals to construct the waterway, which is actually the River Chelmer made navigable, were made as early as 1677. A detailed plan was prepared in 1733 in which the total cost was estimated at £4,355. This could not be raised and the idea was dropped. The proposal was revived in 1765 and in the following year an act was passed authorising navigational works between Chelmsford and Maldon. Again sufficient money could not be raised and the project was shelved.

These schemes were strongly opposed by the citizens of Maldon who considered that they would lose income from the waggons taking supplies to Chelmsford as well as from wharfage and warehouse dues. Other opposition came from the millers who thought that their mills would suffer due to loss of water.

However, in 1793 another Act of Parliament was passed and the present company were given the right to canalise the River Chelmer. Due to the opposition from Maldon the navigation was not allowed to enter the borough and so a three mile cut was constructed skirting the boundaries and passing instead through the village of Heybridge and terminating lower on the estuary. Here was constructed Heybridge Basin.

Constructional work began in 1795, the engineer in charge being John Rennie, who was responsible for the construction of many other British canals. These were completed in two years and on 3rd June, 1797, the first brig sailed into Heybridge Basin with coal for Chelmsford. Cost of the navigational works exceeded £50,000 and although well used no dividends were paid for twenty years.

As canals go the Chelmer and Blackwater is quite short; it is only thirteen and three quarter miles long. In that distance there are 13 locks. There are wharves at Heybridge and Chelmsford Basins, at Heybridge village and halfway at Little Baddow. Nowadays only the terminal wharves are used.

For many years cargoes of timber, coal, stone and lime were carried up the waterway to Chelmsford and the surrounding countryside. In return corn from the mills was exported. There was also a weekly carrier service from Chelmsford to London via Maldon. For a long period the navigation was the main trade artery for the area.

An unusual feature of the waterway is the fact that it has a statutory depth of only two feet and so is the shallowest in the country. Despite this the barge will take a load of twenty-five tons, which is achieved by the barges having a beam of 16 feet and a length of 60 feet.

With the construction of the Eastern Counties Railway from London through Chelmsford to Colchester and Ipswich in 1843, trade on the waterway began to fall away. Today, only foreign timber is brought up the canal although the Navigation Company claim that it would still be cheaper to bring coal to Chelmsford by barge. Until recently the barges were horsedrawn but they have now been replaced by new diesel powered barges.

The import of foreign timber goes through several stages. Owing to the size of modern shipping, timber vessels cannot venture all the way up the Blackwater estuary to Heybridge Basin. Instead the timber is unloaded into dismasted Thames Barges off Osea Island, about five miles downstream. These barges are then towed into the Basin and the timber transferred to the canal barges. This latter operation is necessary because the flat bottomed barges cannot venture on to the sometimes stormy estuary.



“Ulting Church as seen from the River.”

*Photo by courtesy of The Editor “Essex Review”
and Messrs. Benham & Co. Ltd.*

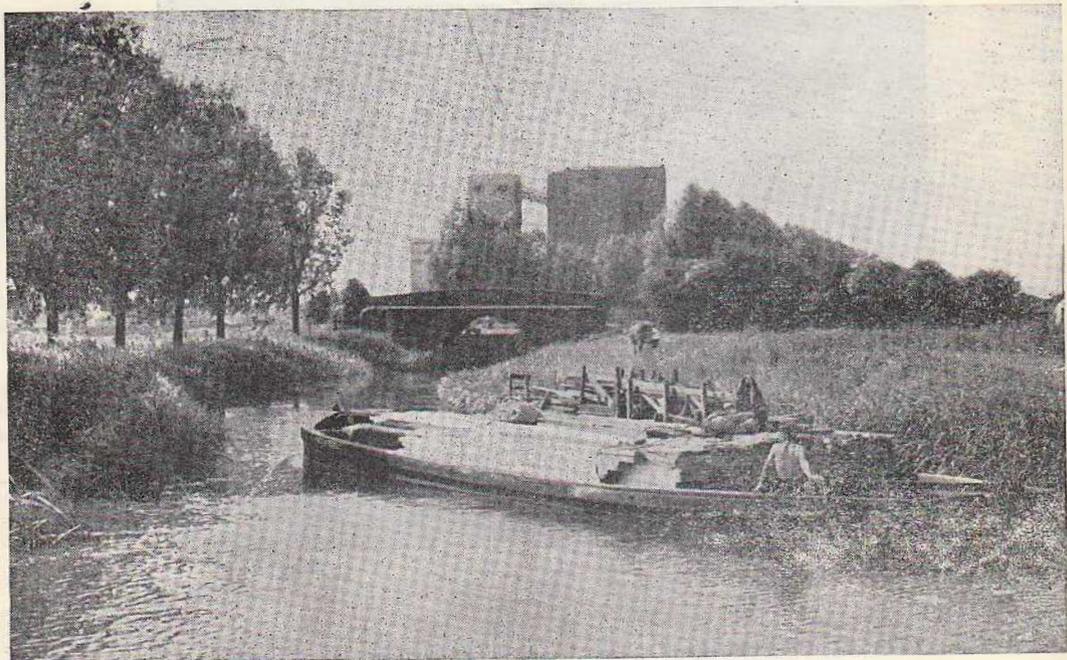
An interesting custom which still survives is the annual inspection of the waterway by the directors of the Company and their guests in a specially decorated horsedrawn barge. The cruise takes six hours, and during that time a magnificent luncheon is served. Once this ceremony was common on other waterways, but this is believed to be the only survivor.

Now that trade has largely left the canal the main source of income for the Company is the sale of willow trees grown in profusion along the banks and mooring fees from the many pleasure boats moored at Heybridge Basin when not in use on the Blackwater estuary.

Unlike many other canals and rivers in England there are almost no pleasure boats operating on the waterway except for canoes and similar craft. Their owners are nearly all members of the Chelmsford Boating Club, a corporate member of the Association. This club holds annually a well attended canoe race along the entire length of the canal, attracting some of the finest canoeists in the country. Undoubtedly the main reason for the lack of normal pleasure traffic is the lack of publicity and the restrictive conditions imposed by the Proprietors. This is a great pity as many parts of the river are as beautiful as any in England, although never made famous by any Gainsborough or Constable, and could be enjoyed by many. Today the navigation is almost forgotten and few members of the general public are aware it is any more than a river.

The Essex River Board have announced that they would like to take it over and convert into a channel purely for land drainage. This would mean the removal of the locks and its reversion to a small muddy stream. It is to be hoped that this drastic step will never be allowed but instead that pleasure traffic be more actively encouraged so that the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation can take its place as a major amenity for the growing population of Mid-Essex.

J. E. MARRIAGE



"Timber barge on the way to Chelmsford." *Photo by courtesy of "The Essex Countryside" and Messrs. Letchworth Printers Ltd.*

FROM CAMDEN TO AYLESBURY

The craft in which I made this trip was a nine foot pram dinghy powered by a 1 h.p. "Seagull" outboard motor. Oars and a hauling rope were carried for emergencies.

The real purpose of this expedition was to navigate the Aylesbury branch from Marsworth junction, but as usual the whole trip was full of mishaps. I had previously informed the British Waterways Authorities that I proposed to work through this neglected waterway and they were willing to provide a lock keeper for us, so from the authoritative point of view all was well.

I set out with my partner, John, from our Hampstead home on Thursday morning at the beginning of April. The first stage of the journey consisted of pushing the boat on a pair of old perambulator wheels down to Camden Town. By just after 9 a.m. we were off and made quite successful progress to Cowley, where we had a considerable wait. It was most pleasant working leisurely through Denham and Uxbridge in the last light of the day, and we had almost reached Rickmansworth by night. As I had to go up North on business over the week-end, we decided to leave the boat there and a surprised, but kind lady allowed us to leave the boat in her garden.

We returned on the following Tuesday afternoon, laden with food, sleeping bags clothes and petrol. As we planned to reach Boxmoor that day, it meant working well into the evening. A lock appears most awe-inspiring and monstrous in the twilight, especially when it fills with a roar, and flashes of white foam.

About a mile short of Boxmoor we met a lock-keeper at the Apsley flight of locks. He offered us a private back-water to moor up for the night, he added that it was mainly blocked by gravel. I misunderstood his directions, and ran aground with a jolt. After shoving clear we moored up successfully, and thought no more about it.

I wriggled into my sleeping bag, and looked up at the starless sky. It was tranquil night and we both felt warm, content and tired, the best sedatives for sleep.

"Tim, Tim, we're sinking" hummed through a delightful dream, I grunted "shut up," and continued sleeping. Again I was disturbed by being violently kicked, and a voice saying "the boat is full of water, I am getting out." Reluctantly, and sceptically I withdrew my hand from my warm sleeping bag, and felt for the floor boards. The shock was instantaneous, instead of floor boards, I touched icy cold water! I leapt from my sleeping bag and scrambled ashore.

Not being on speaking terms, we stood and shivered on the bank in the cold night air. I looked at my watch and saw it was 1.30 a.m. The night was too far spent to disturb people, so we peered around in the darkness for a hut. As luck would have it we found near the canal a workshop, and finding the door open, we went in, and settled down to sleep on the floor. Just after 8 a.m. we finally awoke, and staggered out of the hut. To our surprise we were grabbed by an irate foreman, who called it "all sauce," and had sent for the local police, who soon arrived by car, followed by a motor-bike! Three young, and obviously amused policemen set about questioning us, about the colour of our eyes, and the size of our shoes! We showed them the half sunk boat, and there ensued a long conversation about canals.

We had to remove many half-pints of water from the craft before she was ready to leave. However, good progress was made and we worked through the flight of locks to Marsworth in fifty minutes.

We reached Marsworth junction by 7 p.m., where we spent the night.

Arising next morning early, after an undisturbed night, we had breakfast in a nearby cottage, and set off down the Aylesbury branch. We were accompanied by an elderly lock-keeper on a bicycle, who was provided for us by the Commission, to work the locks. This was necessary in order to maintain water level, for many of the lock gates leaked. The canal was not in good condition, which was quite understandable, considering we were the second boat to pass down it this year; the other being a British Waterways craft carrying clay.

The lock-keeper told us they were trying hard to keep the canal open, but just at present were fighting a losing battle against the apathy of the people of Aylesbury, who now preferred the more expensive lorry to the steady but slow barge. Their greatest blow being that the chief user, Harvey Taylor, a local contractor, had now turned to road transport. The millers, who are responsible for the preservation of the Wendover branch, have also reverted to more inferior transport by land.

We found the canal most delightful, and easy to navigate, although weeds were numerous, and growing fast. At lock No. 15 we found some vandal had lodged a piece of iron in the lock gates, it was a tedious job removing it and frayed our tempers. We finally reached Aylesbury basin about three o'clock, where the Manager of Harvey Taylor allowed us to leave our boat on his wharf. Dishevelled and weary we staggered, heavy laden to the station. Just before our train departed, another policeman questioned us, on the grounds of our appearance.

So ended an eventful, but pleasant voyage. On the following Sunday we came down by car, to bring the boat back home on the trailer.

T. M. THORNTON.

From the Editor's Cabin

Our Honorary Press Secretary, Mr. Brian Ambrose, upon making a trip up the Thames to Oxford and thence to Braunston became the first person to take a boat up through the new Cookham Lock! He was travelling to a fairly tight schedule and was allowed through before the official opening.

On arriving at Oxford he decided to join the canal via the Duke's cut, but to his dismay found that the entrance lock is operated by a special windlass, no lock keeper was available and he had to take a 5d. bus ride to collect this peculiar but essential piece of ironmongery.

At Easter, five boats of the Wey Cruising Club attended the Holehaven rally in the Thames Estuary. At the Wey C.C. A.G.M., the Gay Dolphin Cup was awarded to Mr. Jack Howard on the Bykenholte Cup to Mr. C. Barson.

The Ealing Folk and Old Time Dance Club made a very enterprising camping trip up the Basingstoke Canal over Easter. The Club's craft consisted of five punts and five canoes and all 28 locks were used, with the exception of Goldsworth bottom lock, which was undergoing repairs. The Club Secretary informs me that the New Basingstoke Canal Co. were most co-operative.

A small party of sea-scouts from Barry rowed across the Bristol Channel on April 21st, in a 12ft. dinghy, they then rowed the entire length of the Kennet & Avon Canal to Reading and so down the Thames to Windsor in time for the St. George's Day Scout Parade, at Windsor Castle, on April 28th.

Mrs. Hampson (of The Floating Enterprise, Uxbridge) has written to me saying she was unable to get on to the Aylesbury Arm of the Grand Union owing to the padlocking of lock gates: however, she forged her way on to the old Tring Arm, or at least, the little bit that is left; Of this she says: "It was a quaint experience to meet such a narrow and meandering canal in this part of the country."

The Chelmsford Boating Club has kindly offered the use of their Club pontoon (moored at Heybridge Basin) to all members of our Branch. The cost is 2/6 per person per night.

SECRETARIAL MATTERS

Our Social Secretary, Mrs. Talbot, will be leaving us very shortly as her husband has taken a position abroad. At the last committee meeting a very hearty vote of thanks was passed in appreciation of her excellent services. Our Assistant Secretary, Mr. C. Groves, is also leaving us on taking up an appointment in another part of the country. His help and very keen support will be greatly missed.

Mrs. Loveridge will be in need of an assistant, mainly to keep the index cards of members up to date. Would any member prepared to undertake this job please contact her direct?

PETER CHAPLIN.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I have read the article by Mr. Patrick Saunders in the April issue of 'The Windlass' and his comments on Mr. Ive's paper.

Mr. Saunder's calculations are based on five days per week for the lorry, and seven days per week for the canal boat. In so doing he ignores the most important part that whilst the boatmen do work long hours the receivers' works are closed at the week-end, and they are therefore unable to discharge the boats.

It would be a happy position indeed if we could ignore canal tolls, but the cost of maintaining the waterway has to be paid by someone.

Very interesting, isn't it?

Yours faithfully,
W. L. IVES,
for General Manager.

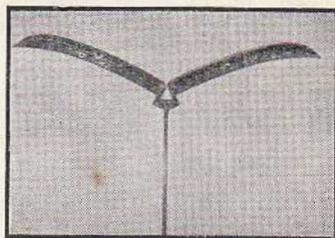


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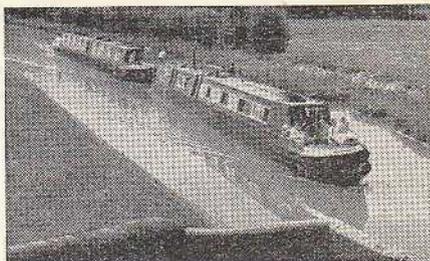
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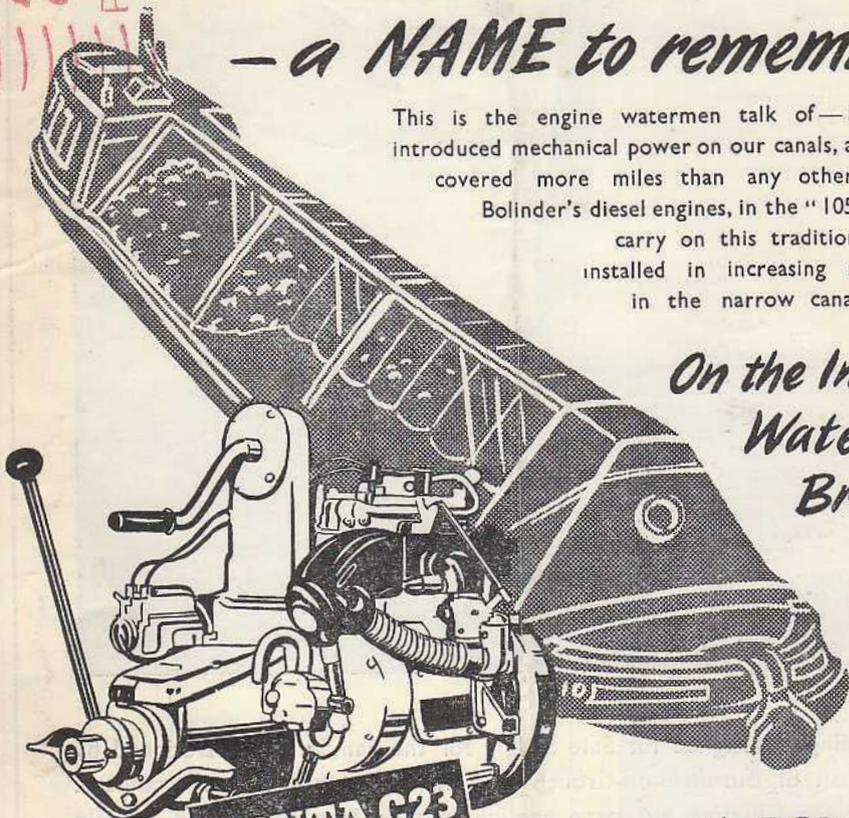
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