

windlass

no91 december 1970



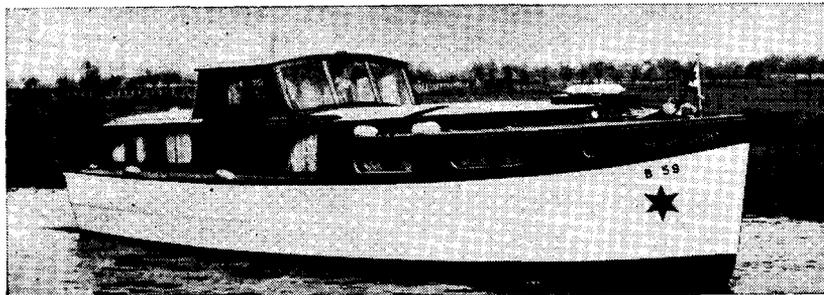
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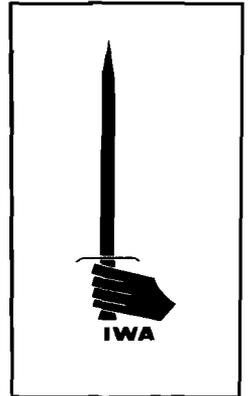
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THE INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION LTD
General Office: 114 Regents Park Road, N.W.1.
Chairman: John Humphries
General Secretary: Robert Shopland

COVER: Higham Tunnel on the Thames and Medway Canal the out-back portal at Friendsbury, showing the tunnel cross-section near its entrance See page 5

DESMOND BRISCOE RESIGNS

It is my unfortunate duty to have to report that Desmond Briscoe, our Chairman for the past 2½ years, has resigned. In announcing his decision to the Branch Committee, Desmond expressed his regret at having to take this step but explained that the increasing pressures of work would not allow him to carry out the work associated with the job of Chairman.

Everyone who has had any contact with Desmond will appreciate the amount of work which he has put in as our Chairman, especially during the past months when he led the Rally to such success.

Oliver Turner is taking over as Acting Chairman immediately and all matters concerning the Branch Chairman should be addressed to him, until further notice.

The end of another year is nearly here and most of us are maintaining our interest in waterways from the warmth of our homes. So spare a thought for those who have had to work the canals in the worst of weathers, as you read Mr Chapman's letter -

"For the past twenty six years, readers of the Inland Waterways Publications have generously assisted me in giving Christmas Parties and presents to the little less fortunate on the Canals. Now of course our former boatmen and their families are well established in local communities. Over the years I have kept in touch with them, especially at Christmas and to most of them we have given a small present for old times sake.

"But the bulk of our giving has recently been to old pensioners of the Canal, both in and around Brentford and Braunston. Last year we gave a Christmas grocery parcel to 205 such folk - Widows, Widowers, Housebound and infirm.

"This year will be my last Christmas Tour of the Canals. I want to visit nearly 300 of our old people. We have two Christmas Parties arranged.

"Please may I, through the courtesy of Windlass, invite your readers to share with me the joy of this final Christmas effort. We need very much tea, sugar, biscuits, tins of soup, fruit, sweets, and a few toys."

Mr F J Chapman, Canal Boatmen's Institute,
The Butts, Brentford, Middlesex.

I hope all our members are selling plenty of draw tickets. This is the only fund raising venture organised by the South Eastern Branch and we hope that this annual event will be as well supported as in the past.

The draw will be made at the Christmas Party, but ticket stubs must be back with the organiser by December 12th. As the Christmas post will affect all communications, it will be wise to use first class post and send your letters in plenty of time (if you have not already done so).

Prizes for those who sell most tickets will include stainless steel bracelets for the ladies and stainless steel cufflinks for the gentlemen, and also sets of canal books. Please note there is no January edition of Windlass, so winners' names will be published in February.

When you get your new 1971 diary, and you have entered your personal measurements and particulars, make a note of these two dates -

March 18th - Annual General Meeting

January 15th - IWA National Dinner, tickets 52s 6d. Bookings and details from -
Mrs J Humphries, 21 Parkside, Wimbledon,
London S W 19.

You have all, I hope, bought your tickets for the IWA National Dinner on 15th January. As it is being held in London (at the Waldorf Hotel, Aldwych) most people there will undoubtedly be from our Branch. We would like to see our friends from other areas, however, so we are hoping that we will be able to offer them overnight accommodation.

If you can put up somebody after the Dinner, please get in touch with Bill Logan-Brown, the Branch Secretary.

The remarks on working boats in our last issue have been rewarded by some interested response, and there is obviously considerable support. One of the primary problems in building up and carrying is of course the lack of business, and it is at this point that the hardest work needs to be done.

There must be hundreds, if not thousands, of companies who could make good use of our waterways system. If you can think of any, why not write and suggest it to them? If you would prefer to support a more ordered campaign, join the Canal Transport Marketing Board, which is carrying out this work by correspondence and advertising. The subscription is £1 and should be sent to I Ruddick, 18 King Street, Bedworth, Nuneaton, Warwickshire.

(continued on page 4)

AROUND

THE

WATERWAYS



CHELMER & BLACKWATER NAVIGATION

A meeting was recently held at Little Baddow, near Chelmsford, to discuss the formation of a Chelmer Valley Association with its object of preserving and conserving the beauty of the valley and developing its natural amenities. Representatives of the meeting included the Chelmsford & Maldon Civic Societies, members of various village Conservation groups along the valley, the Inland Waterways Association, Chelmsford Boating Club and British Canoe Union.

Guest speakers at the meeting were Mr Guiver, Conservator to the Essex River Authority and Mr Geep, Deputy Engineer to the Authority both of whom gave an interesting talk about the river. Mr Geep mentioned that in the next decade or so the River Authority will be carrying out flood prevention along the river, which will probably include widening and deepening the river. Also speaking was Mr Stafford of the County Planning Department.

In response to several questions from the floor the Chairman of the meeting said that although invited, the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation Company had declined to send a representative. In answer to questions by me and other persons, Mr Geep said that there was a 99% chance that navigation would not be affected by the proposed river improvements and that the Authority had no plans to stop navigation.

At the Close of the meeting a formal

resolution was passed setting up the Chelmer Valley Association and interested organisations were invited to send delegates to a further meeting which would draw up a constitution and specify the objects of the new Association. A representative of the South Eastern Branch of the IWA attended this meeting and it is hoped that the IWA will have a permanent representative on the governing committee.

PROJECT EYESORE

As their contribution to European Conservation Year, the Gade Valley Improvement Association and the Herts Chapter of the Royal Institute of British Architects are joining forces to clean up a stretch of the Grand Union Canal and its environs, in Kings Langley.

The first stage is the planting of new trees to screen eyesores at Kings Langley Mill. Later, probably in early 1971, it is hoped to repaint some buildings, re-pave a neglected area and to clean up and repaint a couple of foot-bridges. A very welcome recognition by Amenity Groups of the canal's attractions, and a positive attempt to improve its visual surroundings.

KENNET AND AVON

Two more narrow boats loaded with "Nuttie slack" for Crofton arrived at Reading 1st November. They are to be unloaded mechanically into 3 large tippers which should fill the lanes on the way to Crofton.

The Reading Canoe Racing Club holds its 3rd Annual Reading Circuit Race on the 1st November. This was supported by over 100 canoes in classes and in a cold wind some fast times were recorded. The mass starts of the classes were exciting to watch and only one craft overturned in the rush.

R O Radbourne.

(continued from page 2)

A consequence of the declining trade is the disappearance of the traditional narrow boat. The Narrow Boat Trust has been formed to keep craft working on the canals and is calling for members, money and active participation. Minimum subscription is, again, £1 and the Membership Secretary is Rev. R D Howe, The Vicarage, Pottersbury, Towcester, Northants NN12 7PX.

Many of you are, I am sure, handy with a pen as well as a tiller. We are always pleased to receive contributions for "Windlass", dealing with the waterways of the South Eastern area, or your opinions of them, their managers - or us.

A merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.

Colin & Hilary Isaacson.

Correction - Branch Dinner

As readers probably realised, the final paragraph of "Chairman's Notes" in the last edition should have said that there would not be a branch dinner next spring.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ NO 20

- 1) Whit Sunday Pie lock is on the Chesterfield Canal and was so named after a local farmers wife baked a pie on the day the lock was completed.
- 2) The pound above Welford lock (off the summit of the Leicester Arm) is the Highest on the Grand Union system.
- 3) The original source of water for the Thames & Medway Canal was Spring Tides - This later proved insufficient and a steam engine and pump were installed.
- 4) Fellows, Morton & Clayton Ltd were the first firm to pioneer steam powered narrow boats.
- 5) Wormleighton (12 acres), Clattercote (20 acres), and Boddington (65 acres) Reservoirs feed the summit level of the Southern Oxford Canal.
- 6) A Quoin is the recess into which the heel post of a lock gate is fitted.

WINTER MEETINGS

DECEMBER 16th: Illyd Harrington, JP, youngest member of the British Waterways Board, Chairman of IWAAC, will speak on "The Water and Me". Followed by the Branch Christmas Party - entrance 4/- each - refreshments provided. At The Albert, Victoria Street, S.W.1. 7 for 7.30 p.m. Nearest underground station St James's Park - good parking facilities and public transport.

JANUARY 16th: IWA National Dinner - see page 2.

JANUARY 21st: "Engineering on British Waterways Board Waterways" by Mr R H J Cotton, MICE, Assistant Chief Engineer (Operations) BWB. Mr Cotton has wide experience of the Board's Waterways and is now based at Melbury House. His talk should provide an interesting opportunity to learn about the practical problems of waterways maintenance.

FEBRUARY 25th: "Narrow boats and boat building." An illustrated talk by Malcolm Braine.

National Trust. January 6th; 7.15 p.m. David Hutchings will be speaking on the Southern Stratford Canal restoration and the Upper Avon Project, in the Hall of the Royal Society of Arts, John Adam Street, W.C.2. (There will be a collection for the Upper Avon Appeal.)

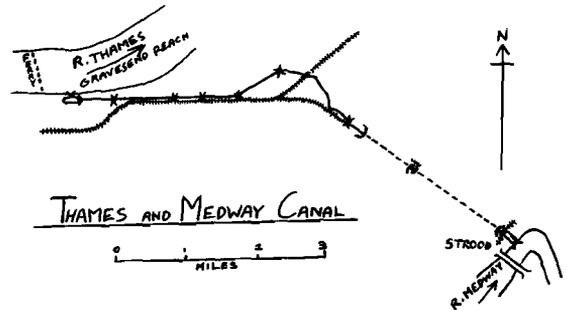
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Part time honorary secretary, with shorthand/typing, required by Appeals Secretary of National Waterways Appeals Fund. Preferably living in Greater London or Woking/Staines area. Write: John Dodwell, Wychbold, Drill Hall Road, Chertsey, Surrey; or ring Chertsey 3278.

THAMES AND MEDWAY CANAL

BY MARTIN DENNEY

If, in 1799 when trade between London and the towns along the River Medway was flourishing, there had been a keeper of the Nore Light and he had been told that the number of ships passing his way by the Isle of Grain was soon to diminish, he would probably have rolled down his spiral staircase in laughter.



At any rate, he would have rolled in vain, for in the following year - 1800 - the act authorising the construction of the Thames & Medway Canal was passed, Ralph Dodd was appointed engineer, and in 1824 the canal was opened, 'amid much cheer' - as was invariably the case with the opening of a new navigation. The canal ran from a basin and its junction with the River Thames at Gravesend, seven miles to another basin and its junction with the River Medway at Strood near Rochester. The canal passed through three locks and a 4022 yard tunnel near Higham. As built this was the second longest canal tunnel ever in this country, but it was later split into two shorter tunnels of 2329 yards and 1619 yards, when a passing place and basin were constructed. The canal never paid a dividend and with the advent of the railways, in 1845, the Canal Company changed its title to 'The Gravesend and Rochester Railway and Canal Company' and applied to be allowed to drain the canal and lay a railway track in its bed, using the canal basins at either end as transshipment points for barges on the two rivers.

As far as the tunnel was concerned, in the interim, the canal company laid one track on the towing path and another on the tunnel floor - although quite how this worked in regard to the slope of the tunnel roof I cannot imagine. Later, the railway was taken over by the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway Company which was later amalgamated into the South Eastern and Chatham Railway Company, and the towing path through the tunnel was demolished to make way for the laying of both of the tracks on the tunnel floor, where they are now.

What is left of the canal now? - This is the question the answer to which is very interesting. At the Thames or Gravesend terminus of the canal there are two locks - one river lock with bowed walls and another between the canal basin and the summit of the canal. The canal basin is now used for yacht moorings and consequently there is still a good depth of water; since the widening of the junction of river and canal, one side of the tail of the river lock has been removed and it can now only be passed on the level - at high tide - the top gates acting as tidal doors. Across the middle of the lock there is a narrow accommodation swing bridge - the bridge appears to be swung regularly.

From the river lock, there is a sharp 90° left hand turn towards the second lock, which now forms the limit of navigation. This lock has a single pair of wooden bottom breast gates but two pairs of top breast gates pointing in either direction. The water above the lock is very shallow and in fact barely deep enough to float a dinghy. About 200 yards further on, a wall has been built across the canal.

The bed of the canal, or what is left of it - for it is now merely a reed filled channel or a shallow depression in the ground - then follows a straight course across the marshes before turning south east to reappear as its full width, in the form of a long narrow reed-bound lake, just before it merges with the railway line a few yards to the

north west of Higham Station. At this point it is interesting to note that up until 1937 the canal was officially navigable from Gravesend as far as Higham; and up until the late 1950's - early 1960's the locks were stated as being 'out of use', but maintained in such a condition, that should they be required in the future, reopening would be possible.

Just the other side of the station is the north west portal of Higham (or Strood) Tunnel. The tunnel portal is set at one end of what appears to be a form of quarry - and it is possible that the quarry was dug when the Company extracted chalk for use in the levelling of the tunnel bottom for the laying of the railway track. The tunnel portal is of a rather bleak design, typical of most south-east England railway tunnels. The portal can best be seen by taking the Wainscott road from Higham Station and taking the first farm track on the right, up the hill after crossing the railway. The railway cutting can be seen at the end of the first field on the right up the track and the portal viewed from any gap in the hedge, but beware of climbing through the hedge, since the ground on the other side consists of a sheer 50ft drop.

The central passing place is situated in the centre of a large wood at map reference 726714. Approach the wood via the track which heads

Below Gravesend Basin from No 2 Lock (the River Lock is behind the large yacht on the right). In the last few weeks this end of the canal has been filled in as preparation to building on it



northwards from the road at map reference 729712 (Ordnance Survey sheet 171). On reaching the wood, walk to the left along the edge of it until a gate is reached. The gate will be found padlocked and the land on the other side is the property of British Railways, and therefore, to keep within the law, a permit should be obtained from them to allow entry. The passing place is 64 yards long and is enclosed on all four sides by sheer cliffs. The path to the cutting floor descends from the aforementioned gate via a number of steep and I should think slippery steps. The tunnel portals and therefore the railway tracks are on the south west side of the passing place while the site of the basin is to the north west. It is surprising to note that the towing path was in fact on the south west side of the cutting on the opposite side of the canal to the basin.

The south east portal of the tunnel is in Frindsbury near to Strood Station. Take the road to the station which leaves the A 228, and the tunnel portal can be seen about 160 yards down on the left over the fence. At this end, the portal has been removed, leaving the brickwork shell exposed for about the first 10 feet where the top soil is missing.

A few yards away from the portal of the tunnel is the Strood Canal Basin, which is set in an exquisite landscape of Railway Marshalling yards and coal heaps. This basin is considerably larger than the one at Gravesend but is not used at all, although it contains a certain amount of water and is kept reasonably rubbish free.

The basin can best be viewed from the River Lock where the canal joins the River Medway. The lock can be approached via a footpath which leaves the road that runs along the North East side of the canal basin, at the point where it bends due east to run alongside the Limehouse Reach of the Medway. The path crosses the bottom gates of the lock. The lock is equipped with a single pair of top breast gates, but two pairs of bottom gates pointing in opposite directions, the additional pair being intended to keep out river water at high tide. This lock appears to be almost in working order, except that the fence which surrounds the railway goods yard is attached to the bottom gates preventing them from opening.

The railway which now uses the canal tunnel is a success, which is one thing that the canal was certainly financially not - until it sold its tunnel. However, it is I always think interesting to reflect upon the number of passengers on the railway that ever realise that they are in fact travelling along the Thames & Medway Canal.



Ian Allan are well known for their books and journals about railways. With one small exception written by our member Roger Calvert in 1963, they have remained conspicuously absent from the waterways field. Canals in Camera by John Gagg (50/- 127 pages) is a personal view of the waterways as seen through the eyes and camera of an IWA member. Largely photographic with short sections only of descriptive matter which serve to introduce the various chapters, the book is reminiscent of Eric de Mare's classic Canals of England published 21 years ago. Subject headings are fairly predictable although imaginatively titled. For example - boxes of water, bridging the cut, cruising underground, junctions and crossroads. Easily read in an hour or two the lasting impression is of a book that describes canals as they are now and as they will tend to become. Pleasure cruises predominate and few commercial narrow boats are seen in the remarkably wide selection of over 200 photographs, all of which have been taken by the author. The reproduction of some of the photographs tends to be rather dark but this may be improved in later impressions. Otherwise a most attractive volume that will appeal to the newcomer and expert alike.

Fifteen years ago Frederic Doerflinger, an American journalist now naturalised in this country, was taken on a trip on the Upper Thames by our member Roger Pilkington of Small Boat fame. He subsequently became a waterways addict and has since cruised our waterways extensively using, in the main, hire cruisers. The author has set down his experiences of selecting a suitable cruiser and planning a holiday in a very thorough yet readable manner in this, his first book, "Slow Boat Through England" published by Allan Wingate at 35/-. Much valuable guidance is given to the reader about the day to day requirements of looking after the boat and ensuring that the crew is well fed and comfortable.

themselves. Several references to worthwhile pubs and eating houses are made. Unfortunately, the author has overlooked the fact that the majority of locks are no longer padlocked at 7 pm, (or has this awful practice been reintroduced?). Whitehouses Tunnel is referred to as Whitehurst on the dust jacket and weekend navigation is said to be restricted on the BCN. The photographs are only average in quality.

These points in no way detract from a really excellent book whose descriptive passages are among some of the best ever written about inland waterways. The second volume covering the northern waterways is awaited with interest. Very reasonably priced and thoroughly recommended. Congratulations also to Wingates for joining the waterways club with a winner.

David & Charles have reprinted The Canals of the East Midlands (reviewed August 1966) but the price has risen from 50/- to £3. To compensate they have reprinted British Canals in a paper-back edition at 30/- which is good value. (reviewed February 1967).

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Letters to the Editor

26 St George's Road
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Middlesex

2nd November 1970

Dear Mr Isaacson,

Your comment on working boats struck me. It is only three weeks since the Wains & the Whitlocks made their last trip, and already scum and duckweed - concealing all kinds of hazards to propellers - are covering the Grand Union.

If there is anything afoot to keep these people moving, please count me in. I have done my small part for the Birmingham & Midland, whose Duckhams contract is gone. So if I have lost there, I would like to start elsewhere. If nothing better, can we not secure at least two butties from Blue Line, so that at least two families can end their lives afloat?

Yours sincerely,

Vernon Rosetti.

Great Walstead
Lindfield
Sussex

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I have recently come to live in this area of Sussex and would like to discover as much information as possible on the Ouse Navigation, especially the non-tidal section from above Lewes, through to the viaduct on the main London - Brighton railway.

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Here is a note of other 1970 canal books:

- Boats and Boatmen of Pakistan (50s)
- Canals of the East Midlands (60s)
- Canals of North West England 2 Volumes (50s each)
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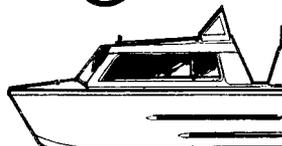
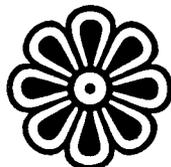
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