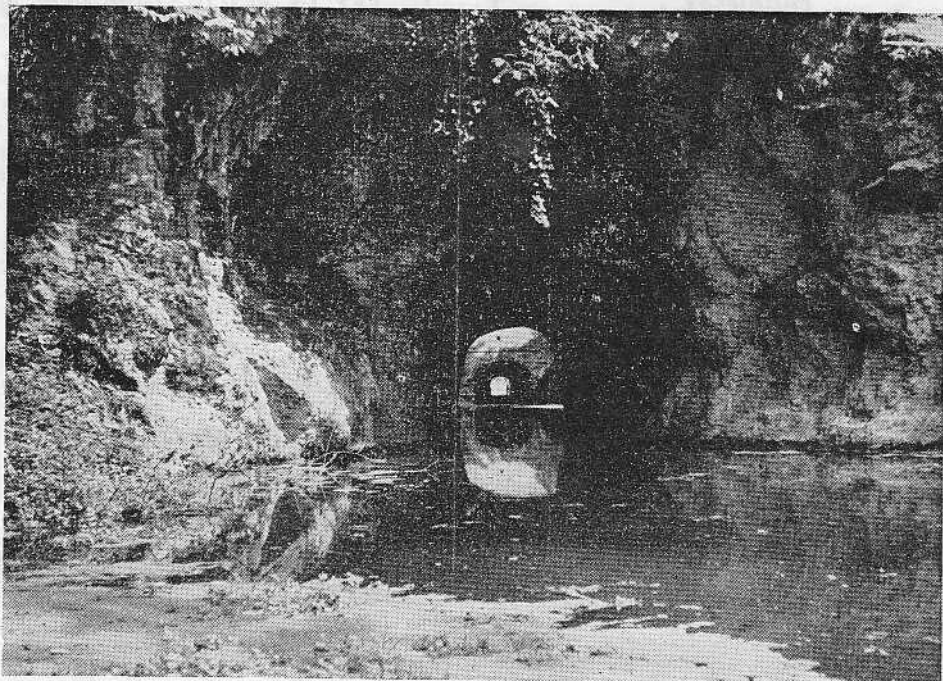


THE WINDLASS

No. 21 DECEMBER 1960



AT DUDLEY TUNNEL

"THE WINDLASS" is the two-monthly journal of
THE LONDON and HOME COUNTIES BRANCH of
The Inland Waterways Association Ltd.

THE LONDON AND HOME COUNTIES BRANCH OF THE INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION LTD.

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COMMENT

The Basingstoke to-day

Summer, such as it was this year, has shifted wetly into a damp, dripping sort of autumn on the Basingstoke Canal. Along the towpath, wide puddles glisten and reflect the changing pattern of the trees against a sky that is more often not a windswept medley of greys: but just occasionally a deep sea blue.

It was on one of these rare latter afternoons in October that I bought a rail ticket to Ash Vale and strolled down the canal with colour-loaded camera, unresistably trigger-happy.

The colour of it! Russets, golds, leaves almost daffodil yellow vied with greens that would remain ever so and paler ones that would not: a kaleidoscope of sun-drenched hues hanging above the water and echoing deep beneath it. The beauty of the Basingstoke is not hard to find.

Progress was slow as I stopped and shot, stopped and shot again, until my Weston Master told me the day was done.

And, very properly, the sun blushed crimson as I reached Frimley Locks, for how in all conscience could it lend colour to the forlorn appearance of that unhappy flight? Gates without beams, not a pound in the fourteen even half full, several of them more resembling water meadows than waterways.

Nobody cares

Gates without beams? Locks that might as well be without gates, for neither pair was closed. Locks without paddles . . . paddles without racks . . .

And who cares? The sun, abashed, had disappeared, scurrying away to cover the shame of it all in the softening mist of twilight. But now the most poignant of questions—what of the future? For today the Basingstoke Canal is veritably steeped in twilight.

Silting up from the numerous surface drains that have been led into it during recent years; banks dried out from want of seeing a full pound of water; towpaths overgrown and prolifically tree-bearing on the wrong side for want of an occasional taste of the bill hook; lock chambers full with fertile growth on the silted bottoms and on the sides; ponderous reeds that would stretch from shore to shore but for the path of swans—these are only a few of the maladies that assail this ailing waterway.

The reasons

From the canal company we hear a string of woeful tales of the ravages of youths, soldiers, and those who should know better: tales as justifiable as they are lamentable; as characteristic of the times as they are contributory to the company's problems.

But the Basingstoke's problems go deeper than that. Little attempt, it seems, is made to improve relations with a neighbouring public as ignorant of their heritage in the canals as they are quick to clamour for its removal. Nor do the owners appear to care what ammunition they provide for these sharpshooters—the reed-infested canal that creeps depressingly through Woking; or the dozen or so narrow boat hulls that lie sunk in the bottom reach.

Thus, the answer to that question remains as obscure as the murk of neglect that enfolds the Basingstoke Canal. But mark this: it is a question that cannot remain unanswered indefinitely.

CHRISTMAS DRAW

In the last issue Miss BEATRICE LAWRENCE described how she won a Fenland cruise in a raffle and the first part of the trip that ensued. Now she concludes her story and her journey . . .

The Old West River once carried the Ouse from Earith to its confluence with the Cam, now marked by the Fish and Duck. Now the Ouse flows down (and the tide flows up) 20 straight miles of the New Bedford (or Hundred Foot) River, rejoining its old course at Denver sluice, and so surrounding the Isle of Ely. The Old West River is now narrow and winding, but its mud banks allow for a wider channel. Standing on deck you can just see over them, to flat arable fields and a very occasional farm. The herons and swans made us feel intruders.

After two hours we were glad to reach Hermitage Lock and Earith, and the broad sweeping tideway which runs for about a mile up to Brownhill lock, flanked by watermeadows. From there the river begins to soften, and assume the grace and charm which I think makes it the loveliest waterway I know.

At tea time we came to the beautiful old bridge of St. Ives and moored up at the cobbled quayside, edged by tudor houses. Michael phoned his father at Royston, and when I returned from leisurely shopping, there Ivan was. He had been all set for a meeting of the local chamber of commerce, so he promptly reset his course for St. Ives and Merlin. Brenda popped out and bought another mackerel, and we moored up by a pleasant watermeadow above the bridge and we all enjoyed some dinghy sailing. Brenda valiantly gave Margaret her first lesson, and found her an apt pupil (as with helmsmanship). We chatted far into the night and then escorted Ivan back to his car, feeling very glad our own beds were so near.

Next morning the girls set off in the dinghy as soon as we had finished breakfast, and Mike and I cleared up at leisure and caught them up at Hemmingford lock. This is the first of the self service locks. Ivan had brought the necessary keys, as we had forgotten to ask for them: but at each lock there is a notice giving an address where they can be borrowed. One gate, usually the bottom one, is a guillotine, and has to be wound up from a platform high above it. It is not hard, but would have been tedious but for my lusty crew. This stretch is perhaps the loveliest of all this beautiful river, with its charming old waterside villages, and gracious gardens dripping with purple aubretia.

At mid-day we came to the fine old bridge of Huntingdon and moored up beside the grass covered ruined castle. By climbing up 50 feet of bank we got a strange and very pleasing impression of height.

Last day

As this day had to be the limit of our outward voyage I was eager to press on as far as possible, as one of my objectives was to contact a family of cousins who lives at Blunham, three miles up the little Ivel, which joins the Ouse at Tempsford. We drew in to St. Neots in a chilly wet dusk, and the cooks had supper ready. This was the only rain of the week.

In the morning I crept out, leaving a note for the sleeping crew. St. Neots looked as charming as its name suggests. I found I could get a bus to Blunham at eight o'clock and be back by ten-thirty, so I joined the family for breakfast and returned with a selection, namely Antony (nine) and Penny (six). We had a happy but extremely strenuous voyage back to Huntingdon, and I came to appreciate the sobriety of my crew. I appointed Brenda chief life saver. Penny kept up a continuous circulation in and out of cabin windows and on to the top deck and, as I was loathe to damage her nerve, I could only preserve mine by looking away.

Antony was good at steering, but resistant to authority. I remembered, at his age, scandalising my parents because I didn't at all see why Gram-papa should get so bossy, and everyone else so meek, just because we were in a boat. Antony stems from my other grandfather, and has NO inhibitions about the use of power. He learnt by experience where the mud banks were, and the trouble of getting off them, and also, I hope, that grown-ups can be right.

It was a glorious sunny day, and most of us bathed before lunch but found the water VERY cold. Brenda and I embussed at Huntingdon with the children and delivered them home to supper, Antony shouting, "Mummy I'm STARVING: we only had bacon and potatoes for tea." We enjoyed seeing the countryside, and some mellow red brick stately homes from the top of

a double decker; and it was delightful to come back to our cosy little home and peep through the lighted windows, and then warm our cockles with hot chocolate.

Return voyage

Next day being Friday, we had to cover most of the rest of the return voyage, to be ready to hand over at ten o'clock on Saturday morning. It was another gorgeous day with a strong following wind, and we were able to sail the dinghy all the way to Earith, catching up and changing crews at the locks. After lunch we found we had left a rope behind at St. Ives lock, so the others steamed the two miles back for it while I sailed on alone—an exhilarating feeling, to be suddenly cut off even from the cares of such a carefree holiday. The Heron handled like the bird her namesake.

After tea at Earith we chugged along the Old West river till dark, Mike stowing the gear in the dinghy, Brenda practising her accordion, Margaret cooking the supper. We consulted whether to go on in the dark in defiance of regulations, but Mike volunteered to get up at first light and start the engine; and so indeed he did, and in due course I made him some tea and put on a large saucepan of porridge, and we moored below the Fish and Duck in time for a leisurely breakfast and clean and tidy up. We were charmed by the sight of a baby in a dinghy being rowed to the dredger works. When we waved the mother unwrapped the baby from her shawl, and waved its hand back.

We steamed into the boat yard on the stroke of ten. Our one regret was that Mr. Lincoln was on holiday, so we could not thank him

personally for our lovely prize. How often had I said to myself "... and I might have sold that winning ticket for 6d. ...!"

Holiday in April

To judge by the boat yards we passed, I think these waterways must be populous in the summer. Adding this experience to several Easters on the Broads, I can heartily recommend April for a cruising holiday. The prospect of it shortens the winter and you come back fully alive to the enjoyment of spring and summer. The golden rules are—lots of warm clothes, and bed with the lamb, up with the lark.

And, should you happen to be feeling low next winter, I recommend cornering all the tickets you can for the next Christmas Draw. For to this testimony should be added that of the winner of a bottle of rum (well down on the prize list). She told me she came home one evening depressed at the thought of a lonely Boxing Day, with no zest for making plans, to find the bottle waiting. She laughed till she cried and then rang up a friend and spent Boxing Day in a party of fifteen. (She didn't mention the Dead Man's Chest).

* * *

At the time of going to press, Mr. Brian Ambrose was preparing the 1960 Christmas draw. Please give it, him, me, and the branch all the support you can in this important project. Several other branches have written to me lately complimenting us—or Mr. Ambrose—on this money raiser, and even expressing veiled envy. It is important—very important, if the branch is to be able to do its job properly. And you may even have the luck of Miss Lawrence: good luck to you.—EDITOR.

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following:—

BUCHANAN, Mrs. John, The Old House, Bledlow Ridge, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.

The MOTOR UNION INSURANCE COMPANY, Ltd., 3/4 Lime Street, E.C.3.

MUMFORD, Robert Frederick Edward, 80a, High Street, Tonbridge, Kent.

ADAMS, Miss Kathleen A., 2, Gerrard House, Cranford Place, W.1.

KENDRICK, Herbert D., 94, Albany Road, Sittingbourne, Kent.

RAVN, Miss Lilian, M.F., The Dene Extension, Church Road, Caterham, Surrey.

WALLBRIDGE, Mr. & Mrs. L. F., 586, London Road, Ditton, nr. Maidstone, Kent.

NEWBATT, Norman William. Merrowdown, 82, South Eden Park Road, Beckenham, Kent.

WHITE, Hugh C., Hillside Cottage, Pinner Hill, Pinner, Middlesex.

AROUND THE WATERWAYS

KENNET AND AVON CANAL

The "modern homes and building supplement" of an unidentified newspaper has devoted recently half a page to the "Fate of Kennet and Avon Canal," complete with a painting of a busy wharf reproduced across four columns.

The writer describes as "a pitiful paradox" the fact that "many of our canals which could relieve the highways of much of its heavy traffic are facing the prospect of being bulldozed out of existence."

The Kennet and Avon has to fight for its life, but the association's campaign is gaining support and "this remarkable stretch of water may be preserved after all," he adds.

He quotes the I.W.A. bulletin and refers to M. Meinertzhagen's project with the narrow boat "Enterprise."

RIVER LEE

Construction of a new lock at Stonebridge and reconstruction of Three Mills Lane Bridge, Bromley-by-Bow, are under way and its width of navigation is restricted at both points. Traders and other users of the navigation are asked by British Waterways to exercise great care in both cases.

RIVER THAMES

Thames Conservancy announce that Culham Lock will be closed for repairs until December 12. Next year the following locks will be closed: Shepperton, January 2 until January 7; Ilfley, January 2-18; Sandford, January 23 to February 27; Penton Hook, January 30 to February 20; Grafton, March 2 until March 16. The dates are inclusive.

RIVER WEY

With a full load of 56 people (writes R.M.), Mr. Nicoll's motor narrow boat "Arcturus" set off from Mill Mead Lock on October 16. It was a perfect autumn day.

The formidably low bridge at Shalford (six feet headroom) was cleared with inches to spare, and a halt for lunch was made just beyond it. The boat was turned round in the entrance to the Wey & Arun Canal and, while this was going on, some resorted to "The Parrot" while others walked up to Unstead lock to have a look at the dry pound that prevented further progress towards Godalming.

Here repairs to a sluice had been delayed by the severe flood of the previous week. The trip was therefore unable to start from Godalming as advertised but it was possible to notify most of the passengers of the change in the point of departure; and the few who turned up at Godalming were transported by car to join "Arcturus" at St. Catherine's lock.

The journey back to Guildford went smoothly except at Mill Mead Lock, where a water level six inches below normal caused "Arcturus" to go aground for a short while at the downstream entrance to the lock cut.

We are grateful to Mr. Nicoll for bringing his boat from the Regent's Canal especially for this trip and look forward to making another and more successful attempt to reach Godalming next year.

STRATFORD-ON-AVON CANAL

On September 29 (writes R.M.) the Southern section of this canal, which has been disused for 25 years, was transferred to the National Trust. There is a lot to do before the section can be made navigable again. Working parties are held every week-end and at least one member of the London & Home Counties Branch (Mr. R. Skelton, of Maidenhead) is assisting. Any others who can help should offer their services to Mr. David Hutchings, Junction Cottage, Lapworth, Warwickshire.

GRAND UNION CANAL

A new pair of top gates (writes W.M.W.) were installed at Lock 98—Osterley—during October.

A Bailey bridge has been erected below the road bridge east of Thames Lock. This road bridge is going to be replaced as part of the reconstruction work under way at Thames Lock. Traffic is not affected by these operations.

A butty was seen recently at Brentford with a newly developed "lift out" cabin. Rings on top are provided for a crane to pick the cabin up. The owners? Bristol (Transport) Waterways. So far nobody has advanced a reason for this novel (and expensive?) invention.

BASINGSTOKE CANAL

Extract (writes R.M.) from "Woking News & Mail" for Friday, October 14th: "The Basingstoke Canal bordering Sheerwater Estate was

within an inch of danger level during the early part of the week. But with the re-opening of an old ditch at New Haw the level was reduced. Mr. W. C. Bridger, superintendent bailiff of the canal, and the lock-keepers worked hard to control the excess water of the canal during the heavy rains of the week-end."

Did they indeed!

And what did they do with the excess water? On October 18th the pound above lock No. 2 was 18 inches below normal, the pound above lock No. 3 was nearly empty, and the pounds above locks 4 and 5 were completely empty. It must be noted that the "danger level" referred to is indistinguishable from the normal level for the Woking pound, which is so rarely attained and is more often than not a foot or two below normal.

We are completely puzzled about the "old ditch" that was opened to reduce the levels, apparently in the empty pounds.

The key to the future of the section of canal between the Wey Navigation and Ash lock is sensible management of water; yet, when for once there is some to spare, panic ensues and it is run off with no attempt to fill empty sections.

The work on lock No. 5 reported in the last "Windlass" remains (at the time of going to press) uncompleted: one gate still has to be replanked and the paddle gear has to be installed.

A new arrival on the canal at West Byfleet is Mr. David Horsfall with his converted butty boat "Adelina."

Quick Quiz

How well do you know your waterways? For instance, do you know . . .

1. The name of the canal that began the Canal Era in 1761?
2. Narrow boats, wide boats—but what is a short boat, and where would you expect to find one?
3. The longest canal tunnel in Britain is now disused, but sometimes parties go through. Name and on what canal?
4. From the Trent and Mersey Canal to the River Weaver is a drop of 50 feet. How do boats negotiate this?
5. The longest flight of locks is at a place called Tardebigge. On which canal?

Four years ago the first six locks could be negotiated in about three hours. Now boats can pass through only the first two locks. Deterioration has been fairly rapid, particularly since two of the pounds have been kept empty.

RIVER STOUR NAVIGATION

The River Stour Action Committee (writes J.E.M.) made their annual inspection of the lower river on October 17 and noted the following changes:

Brantham Lock—erosion of the bank behind the lock wall continues but there appears to be no immediate danger to the chamber.

Flatford Lock—timber placed in front of the lower gates by the River Board when carrying out repairs sometime ago still remains. The action committee is to request its removal.

Stratford Lock.—A pole with wires leading into the ground has recently been erected on the lock island by the South Essex Waterworks Company, and a stay has been fastened onto the top of the lock chamber. The purpose of this work is unknown and the action committee are going to point out to the company that they have carried out work on land which, by their own admission, they do not own.

The action committee have now completed their investigations into the present ownership of land in the vicinity of the locks and the information passed to the general office in order that the next stage towards the restoration of a river, as a navigable waterway, can be instigated.

The committee are also investigating whether the proposed trunk road bypass at Stratford St. Mary is likely to affect navigation.

6. By which three canals could you join the Thames if you were travelling by boat from the Midlands?
7. The Thames is said to have on its banks the first university, the most famous public school, two of the finest royal palaces, and the metropolis of England itself. Can you name them?
8. What was a "Josher," and why?
9. The celebrated James Brindley built the first Harecastle tunnel. Later, a second was built. By whom, and on what canal?
10. On which canal are the two famous aqueducts, Pontcysyllte and Chirk? And the engineer?

Just in case you did not know all the answers straight off and have not found them in the meantime, you will find them in the next issue.

A Trip to remember

Somewhere in the region of 25 boats, from narrow boats to canoes and with a full range in between, took part in the protest cruise through Dudley Tunnel on Sunday, October 16th. The cruise began at Brades Hall Locks on the Gower Branch, followed a figure-of-eight course to include Netherton (3027 yds.) and Dudley (3172 yds.) tunnels and returned to the starting point, to cover about nine miles

There were four of us and the "Aerius" in the small grey van roaring up the M1 that morning: the branch secretary, characteristically doing the hard work behind the wheel; the vice-chairman, volubly discussing waterways old and new or merely projected—that again was true to type; Martin, "The Windlass's" cub reporter, compounding unknown thoughts of considerable magnitude; and the editor.

The "Aerius," a Klepper two-seater folding canoe, we picked up at Twickenham on the way, from the home of Mr. G. Reardon, of Portable Boats Limited, and thereafter it nestled in the back in its three bags.

The reasons why the van belted up the M1 an hour behind schedule are in dispute, and it would be grossly unfair for an interested party to discuss here the vice-chairman's breakfasting habits; thus, together with the admirably facile manner in which the founder and vice-president contrived to spirit the editor's electric lantern from the towpath at Brades Hall Locks onto the narrow boat Saturn a mile away, they must be consigned to a merciful obscurity.

The mighty B.C.N., it seems, never gives up its secrets.

Steadily the secretary kept the needle of the speedometer at 60 on the motorway. Despite growing incredulity of its truth, sure enough, the miles indicated on king-size signposts slipped past one each minute. We were doing well, and the fact that we left the M1 before we need, averaging considerably less on the cross-country journey, justifies no blame being put on the vice-chairman. We all misjudge from time to time, and anyway he had said all along it would be quicker by the Grand Union.

We tumbled outboard as the van pulled up in a field at Brades Village. It was 12.5 p.m. Only five minutes late.

Three bags full

The "Aerius" tumbled out after us, its bags falling in line along the towpath. I had neither the time nor the will to count the bits of wood that cascaded from the upturned bags into a heap on the path. But in minutes, with the help of the branch chairman who appeared like

a genie on the scene, it took shape and became a real, rigid canoe.

It was during these activities that the lamp vanished. To name the person who put the lamps out on the towpath would be nasty, vicious, and cruel. It might suggest anything, and such malpractices are alien to the journalist who cares only for factual, unbiased reporting; and goodness knows there are few of us left who do.

So I told him I'd think no more of it, although if he'd been quicker over his breakfast we'd have had less rush and . . . no he needn't buy me a new one.

Then the canoe was in the water and Martin and I boarded her; the chairman and his deputy took to the former's outboard dinghy; and we were off. The secretary? Oh he walked.

There is nothing in the south of England—nor anywhere else in the world, come to that—like the Birmingham Canal network. Vivid description is out of the question, for this is atmosphere pure and simple, once the geographical phenomenon has been absorbed. There is little tangible enough to describe: just the atmosphere of a lingering nineteenth century.

One recalls the manifestations of a century and a half of industrial development, each successive stage still there for all to see in every few miles of canal; the sight and sound of heavy industry flanked by smoke-grimed buildings, seemingly derelict for their want of windows, where men have striven and sweated for God knows how many decades—and perhaps still do. Or the scant-grassed hills around which the canal meanders, haphazardly pocked with one, two, three ancient and abandoned houses, their glassless sockets staring moronically at distant slag heaps.

Iron Heart

Here the heart of live, massive industry beats powerfully and eternally in an early nineteenth century landscape dotted with derelict mine shafts and worn out buildings and crossed and re-crossed by a fantastic canal system that even crosses itself. A profusion, therefore, of iron roving bridges over mainlines and branches leading somewhere or nowhere. And slowly the

truth begins to dawn, not for the first time: for was not this the blood system of arteries and veins that began it all and first set beating the ponderous iron heart of England?

We approached Netherton Tunnel with the canoe paddles shipped and in the tow of the chair-bearing dinghy—to the vice-chairman's jubilant cries that he at least was using his own energy. With the dinghy steering slightly erratically across the canal because of the tow on its quarter, we entered the tunnel and the light began to recede. Darker and darker it became with our progress into the frightening depths, only a blank wall of impenetrable blackness ahead, pierced by the yellow pin-prick of the secretary's torch from the left hand towpath. A towpath, bordered by a hefty handrail, runs either side of this, the last tunnel to be built. It is lofty and constantly dripping, and the water below is deep, dark, and uninviting.

The reverberation of voices above the scream of the outboard engine added to the eeriness. The "Aerius" has inflated tubes the length of either side, and again and again I felt them and was reassured. Now blackness, broken only by the flicker of a weak torch on one side or the other. The beginning had disappeared and there was no end. Time went on. Then I began to wonder, and I thought, no, that's the stuff out of books. But again—perhaps this was a sort of eternal damnation. Nonsense. The screaming engine, the dripping darkness, no end. Then I knew I was right, for ahead was an ill-defined orange moon, the like of which I had never imagined. I knew it wasn't the end, for the end is a white pinprick of light that rapidly grows larger. This grew larger, but it was vague and orange. Then larger and amber. Then yellow. Lemon-coloured, then clear, white, and silver, and we were out.

Coffee and Sandwiches

The air was dank, but it seemed sweet, although there had been no foulness about the tunnel: just the engine fumes. We changed round, the secretary now riding in the canoe with Martin, the vice-chairman and the editor walking.

We came upon the fleet quite suddenly after rounding a bend below Park Head locks, which three lead up to the mouth of Dudley tunnel. We bought coffee from the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal Society, shared the vice-chairman's and the secretary's sandwiches, and portaged round the locks. Now Martin and the editor took the canoe, the secretary and the vice-chairman electing to negotiate Dudley tunnel in the decent comfort of the narrow boat Saturn. Their choice was an unfortunate if necessary one, for the Saturn was to get stuck and remain so

for an hour in the depths of the tunnel, before crawling backwards and out.

We went through Dudley tunnel towed behind an outboard runabout equipped with the most powerful searchlight. And comfort of the warm, reassuring light made the journey about as nerve-straining as a ride on the Piccadilly Line. Perhaps we lost something of the true atmosphere, but at least it made possible an intelligent observation.

It is a complete opposite of the Netherton. Eight feet wide, it is barely five and a half in height in places and, of course, there is no tow path. Instead, square recesses appear in the brickwork for legging, although, curiously, in places these are as much as five feet from the water. Worn brickwork suggests that the boatmen chose not to stand on their heads but ignore them and "walk" the usual level. But here and there the bricks give way to the natural stone, sometimes little larger than the bricked tunnel, sometimes enormous caverns. When I thought we must be nearly there, I glanced at my watch and it was 4.30. We emerged 35 minutes later. How long we were in the tunnel I do not know, but it must have been a long time.

The Wren's Nest

Before the end, the tunnel opens out into a massive chimney and here children were playing at the water's edge. One informed us that a branch tunnel here was the Wren's Nest. He was obviously better canal-educated than children in the south. Then we plunged into darkness again.

At eight o'clock in the evening we stopped the van in Birmingham for our second meal of the day. Lavishly we ordered most of what was on the menu but, modest house that it was, the bill for four of us amounted to only a pound. I would gladly recommend this excellent eating place, but its name and even rough location escape me.

We found our way through Birmingham's myriad streets easily enough going home, since the secretary chose to navigate as well as drive. The long drive southwards, with pelting rain adding darkness to the night and treachery to the approaching headlights, was the final test of what stern stuff men are made. And the secretary sang at the wheel, excerpts from the opera, anything, lustily joined by the vice-chairman at his side. Or they talked. Talked of the deepest lock, the most impressive flight, the longest pound, anything. While, somewhere in the back, the editor lay silent, sprawled out, semi-comatose, finished. Ah well!

Letters to the Editor

THE FLOOD

Sir,

You might like to know the flood on Monday last (October 10) was the highest flood here since November, 1954, when the water reached approximately the same height of six feet four inches over normal head.

The river level fell more speedily after the flood on Monday than I ever remember. The rainfall on the west side of the watershed was much greater than on the east side.

Yours etc.,

HARRY W. STEVENS.

River Wey Navigation,
Guildford.

* * *

ENLIGHTENED

Sir,

The enclosed cutting from the Colchester Gazette may be of interest.

I do not know whether Mr. Lincoln is a member of the Association, but if not, it is a useful and possibly influential expression of outside opinion.

Yours etc.,

J. F. KING.

Strood House,
Peldon, Essex.

The story refers to the Mayor of Colchester's attacks in October on a £7½ million scheme for improving the A12 road from London to the East Coast. The attacks were at a lunch and dinner on the same day. Also at the dinner, it continues . . .

"The past was recalled by Mr. H. J. Lincoln, past president of the Ship & Boatbuilders National Federation, who, proposing the toast to the society—formed by 25 engineers in 1944 and now 300 strong—urged that the inland waterways of Great Britain, channelled 200 years ago and idle for the last century, should be extensively used to carry cargo and relieve the country's roads of a great bulk of commercial transport.

"I hope you engineers will turn your attention to the inland waterways of Great Britain which are not being used to the extent they are on the Continent," Mr. Lincoln declared. "I feel they could be put to better use for industrial purposes than they are at present."

THE DATE

Sir,

I note that you are unable to affix a date to the 'Quote' appearing in the October issue of the "Windlass."

The copy of "The Book of the Thames" I have to hand, is labelled "New Edition" and prefaced "Second Edition"; and in which the authors claim to ". . . have given such corrections as were rendered necessary by certain changes that have taken place along the border of the beautiful and bountiful river."

The following quote is to be found on page 212: "The death of His Royal Highness Prince Albert was a national calamity, felt even to the present day—twelve years since his "removal" This would date the text at 1873.

The date 1856 was written on the title page of this copy a few years ago. How this date was arrived at can not now be remembered: would certainly not have been put there without reliable authority. Possibly it is the date of the first edition and was obtained through a cross-reference with F. S. Thacker's "Locks and Weirs of the River Thames."

Incidentally, inscribed on the fly leaf of this copy of the Book of the Thames is:

Putney School of Art,
Local Prize,
Shaded drawing from cast,
1889.

I trust that the above will be of interest to you.

Yours etc.,

R. J. HARDY.

51, Brockley Park,
London, S.E.23.

* * *

CHRISTMAS

Sir,

Just now I am in the throes of preparing for the Christmas Draw and I wonder if, in the issue before Christmas, you can insert a short note exhorting members to support it.

Yours, etc.,

BRIAN AMBROSE.

40 Egmont Road,
New Malden.

From the Editor's Cabin

Drydocking facilities for large craft in the London area are not plentiful enough: a slipway at Rickmansworth and a couple of gridirons on London River all but complete the picture. And, with the growing number of barge and narrow boat owners, an increase of these amenities might well be considered expedient.

But no! With their customary awareness of current needs and their readiness to exploit opportunities to add to their revenue, British Waterways have just finished scaling off the entrance to the dry dock near the top lock on the Hertford Union Canal. And, they tell me, splendid progress is being made filling it in.

A happier story reached me recently of private enterprise. Five years ago, Mr. G. Reardon, a keen canoeist, opened an agency at his home in Twickenham for the famous Klepper folding canoes. He operated it from his garage, the expectancy for the first year's sales being, perhaps, a dozen. They sold 40 boats.

Sporttravel Services, as the firm was called, trebled that figure in the next year and went from strength to strength.

New name

From the garage it moved to regular buildings and, with the address, the name changed to the more suggestive, Portable Boats Limited.

With the closing of the firm's fifth year, a total of almost 800 Klepper craft have been sold, as well as other canoes including a slalom boat in kit form designed by and made for Portable Boats Limited.

"We like to think we provide the full service here—every type of canoe and well-found information and advice," Mr. Reardon told me recently.

Two organisations' annual reports published recently concern themselves with waterways.

The National Trust refers to its lease from the British Transport Commission of the Stratford-upon-Avon canal, southern section. It concludes "... funds for the full restoration of the canal are urgently needed."

At the Association's annual dinner at the Hyde Park Hotel at the end of October, at least £5,000 (and probably a lot more) was guaranteed for this restoration.

Recreation Canal

The second report is that of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. There is nothing not already known in it, but reference is made to the council's support of our association for the restoration of the Driffield Navigation; the Lancaster Canal—"it is interesting to note that the canal, as far as Lancashire is concerned, is to be retained for recreation and

amenity." And, of course, the Commons debate last December on the Bowes report.

A warning has gone out recently to the owners of high-speed runabouts. In the autumn bulletin of the United Kingdom Outboard Boating Club, its founder, Mr. B. C. Baker has this to say:

"I maintain that young persons should not, under any consideration, be allowed to handle powered craft.

"By and large I feel that we should all endeavour to educate the newcomers to high speed craft. If we do not, I am afraid that legislation will be brought in, which will be hard to combat and we shall all suffer in consequence."

So take heed!

Cover Picture

In a month's time, if not already, our cover picture this month will be familiar to most members. It is one of three photographs of the interior of Dudley Tunnel, the subject of a recent protest cruise. More about the tunnel elsewhere, but it can be said of the card that it is arresting. It is novel, it is impressive. Its illustrations make it interesting, and it is colourful. If you can think of any other prerequisite for a greeting card, I don't know of it.

They are obtainable from the general office in Emerald Street, price one shilling each—or 10s. a dozen. The sale of these cards, I understand, is an enormous help to association funds.

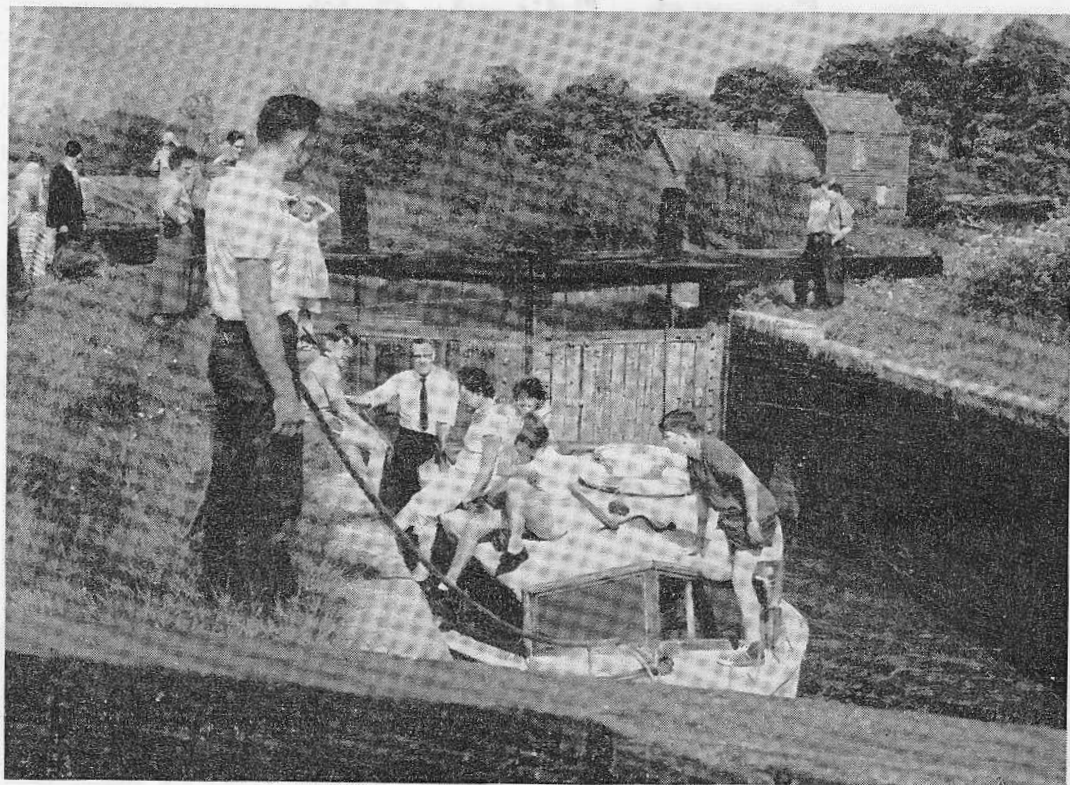
Promotion

It is to my unpardonable discredit that I neglected in the last issue to mention two important events. The first was the chairman becoming **Major** Grundy, and, very belatedly, we offer him congratulations.

Secondly, congratulations go to David Horsfall on being elected vice-chairman of the branch. It is rare to find in one man such a happy blend of well-found knowledge of the waterways and enormous enthusiasm.

And so to bed

Contributors and advertisers, please note. You are both most welcome; essential, in fact. For your guidance, therefore, "The Windlass" goes to press again on December 31 promptly for the February issue, which should appear on the first of the month.



A pleasure boat, a rare sight on the CHELMER AND BLACKWATER NAVIGATION, passing through LITTLE BADDOW LOCK during the past summer. Photo: ERIC BOEGH

Quote

"The canal is climbing out of neglect back to becoming a useful waterway."—From the magazine "Thames," December, 1949. Part of the headline to a feature in which Mr. C. F. Ray describes how he brought his 30ft. boat "Shuna" from Bristol to London. The canal, of course, is the Kennet and Avon.

But that's not all. Scarcely seven months later, in July of 1950, the same magazine published an open letter to the chairman of the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive. It began: **"Suddenly, on May 31, your officials effectively stopped through traffic on the Kennet and Avon Canal by padlocking Hales lock and**

Burghfield lock." The letter goes on to ask why adequate notice was not given, and adds pertinently: **"Does your Executive really aim to strangle the canal and finally abandon it, although traffic is increasing?"**

August, 1950. The reply "Thames" publishes takes up two thirds of a single column, refers to the unsafe condition of gates, and claims that a fortnight's notice was given of the closing. The letter, which is signed, L. A. Goss, Information Officer, Docks and Inland Waterways Executive, concludes: **". . . and the Executive regret they are unable at present to say when the closure notice is likely to be withdrawn."**

Ten years on . . .

Boating for Pleasure

A narrow boat must surely be one of the most graceful types of inland waterways craft ever designed, suggests the owner of one such craft; the slender, steadily moving, form, skilfully steered by the working boatman and negotiating with apparent ease the most tortuous canal turns, creates an impression of almost effortless movement combined with infinite mobility.

Such impressions were far from my mind, however, when I surveyed the sunken, sodden, anonymous hulk lying on her side in the Erewash canal. I had bought the craft (soon to be named "Adelina,"), with the intention of turning her into a home, being partly influenced by the start that had been made by one of her previous owners, who had put a cabin over the length of the hull.

After being opened by the Duke of Gloucester as a Boys' club and enjoying a brief career in that capacity, interest in her seemed to be lost, baling was neglected, and so she slowly sank at her moorings. A succession of owners had done little more than remove such fittings as were of value, until she came into my hands.

Raising was accomplished by the local fire engine and the success of this, combined with the fact that "Adelina" remained afloat, caused a certain air of gaiety to be apparent, which considerably increased when all the mud had been scraped out, and the eviction of the last fish from the bilges had been completed.

The 34 windows had proved attractive targets for the local lads' missiles, so the sensation of living in a corridor was heightened by a chilly November draught; but a stove created from a couple of oil drums, and fed by the dilapidated furniture remaining in the boat, soon started to emit both heat and smoke.

The luxury of the former and the stupefying effect of the latter made the place seem almost comfortable, but in spite of these amenities the basic problem remained: how to navigate a rudderless engineless boat to London.

Doubtful

Due to having been disused for some ten years, her reliability was also in doubt. The problem was complicated by the necessity to navigate part of the Trent in order to pass from the Erewash to the Trent and Mersey canal, this being the route I had selected to bring "Adelina" to London in preference to the more direct route via Leicester.

Not until the following January, when flood waters were covering the surrounding fields, could a start be made. And most of the intervening period had been spent baling, tarring, and

painting. "Adelina" was still rudderless, engineless, and windowless; but by tying a small, powered lifeboat conversion alongside and towing from the front with a pleasure boat, we were able to start.

With remarkable ease the journey from Trent Lock to Derwent Mouth was accomplished, but there (where all helpers had had to depart), modified disaster struck: the whole of the canal, almost to the first lock, was thickly iced over.

By fastening sheets of hardboard on the bows of "Anne," the lifeboat, she was rapidly turned into an ice-breaker, clearing a channel up which "Adelina" could be taken to the lock.

The Canal Tavern at Shardlow being conveniently near, I had arranged to spend the night there. Alas, for the scene expected after reading "Narrow Boat"; though hospitable in the extreme, the present landlord can no longer offer the sort of entertainment described by Mr. Rolt. Gone were the tremulous contralto and the octogenarian dancer; in place of Old Macdonald, a juke box poured out pops to a small audience of village youths.

An early start the following morning was to prove all too necessary: two months disuse combined with continuously cold weather had allowed ice four inches thick to build up in the lock. Several hours' work were necessary before the ice was broken through sufficiently to allow the boats to lock up, and the work would have taken considerably longer had not a passer-by given a pull on the lines.

From then on the way was just a little easier; ice barely half an inch thick in the centre, but thickening towards the edges, created a path along which "Adelina" almost steered herself. Pulling the two along, "Anne" fastened astern of "Adelina," by lines fastened fore and aft on the narrow boat was far from easy, but at least they were moving and soon after the lock Shardlow village came into sight.

Unique Village

Stourport is frequently referred to as the principal canal town of Great Britain but Shardlow must surely be a unique canal village. Standing at the now navigable limit of the river Trent, the canal-works are extensive.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the Trent was navigable to Burton—and for wide boats: presumably for that reason, the first few miles of the Grand Trunk Canal—again, as far as Burton—were built with wide locks. But for traffic along the length of the canal coming from and going to the river, Shardlow must have been the main trans-shipping point. Several very large basins opening off the canal, and many smaller arms, in some cases going beneath mills they were built to serve, indicate a flourishing waterborne trade.

The beauty of the great buildings is, perhaps, enhanced by the air of desolation pervading the canal precincts, for, sad to relate, there is now no commercial traffic at Shardlow. Were it not for the activities of a boatyard which has since been opened (by a member of the Association) these wonderful works would be completely deserted, and no craft seen save for the very occasional pleasure boat.

Moorings were now to be found. Not having any knowledge of the depth of the long-disused basins, I preferred to find a place on the main canal. Alongside a small factory there seemed to be a good depth of water, and the owners proved agreeable to "Adelina" being left there.

This carried out, off I went in "Anne" to find a more accessible mooring. As the end of a perfect day, a too venturesome approach to one of the basins proved my fears of insufficient draught to have been well founded; the "Anne" stuck.

I will not dwell on the methods that had finally to be adopted to free her. Suffice it to say that, under certain circumstances, shallow canals have decided advantages.

It is anticipated that this feature will be continued in the next issue.

NEWS ITEMS

Within a day or so of your reading this, a new sight on the upper Thames as far up as Weybridge will be Tough and Henderson's tug "Ham" in a new guise. For, at the time of going to press, her conversion from steam to diesel is nearing completion.

The "Ham" was Dutch built in 1925, and it is a measure of the quality of her construction that, despite her age, the condition of the hull justifies the expense of the conversion.

Her 150 horsepower steam plant will be replaced by a Kelvin T8 of 240 H.P. She is the second of the company's three steam tugs to be so converted, "Sheen" having been done about three years ago. "Barnes" remains a coal burner—a lot of coal!

The fleet is completed by a launch tug, "Teddington," but in winter when the Thames flows full with land water, barges for Walton

and Weybridge are hauled by the larger tugs, "Sheen" or "Ham."

In future that unkind lighterman who earned laughs by saying "Ham" had not steam enough for her whistle will have to think up another one!

New outboard

The latest outboard to be released is an eight horsepower diesel intended for use with workboats. The makers are Woodson Marine, of Slough, and the agents T. Harrison Chaplin, of Sunbury. According to reports, the performance is impressive.

New chandlery

Almost simultaneous with this issue appearing, a new yacht chandlery should be opening its doors near the river at Twickenham. The name is Nautec Limited, and the address, Water Lane.

International Show

This year the Boat Show takes on international status. Starting life seven years ago at Olympia, it moved to Earls Court last year—where, some said, it lost a lot of its atmosphere—and this year it will be bigger than ever.

More than 450 exhibitors will be there and features will include the build-it-yourself-boatyard; boating on a budget; sailing advice bureau; anglers' reach; galley feature (no more details of this); marine artists' display; and a model boat display and competition.

Whatever your resources, it is worth a visit: the range is from £15 kits to £40,000 ocean cruisers.

From the balcony will be seen a mid-summer-in-January setting of a Mediterranean fishing village complete with shops, harbour—and boats.

The show opens on January 4 and continues until the fourteenth. Hours, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., except Sunday.

Canoeing

This is the title of a new magazine for canoeists the first issue of which was due to appear on November 20. Well illustrated and covering every aspect of canoeing, its price is 1s. 3d., obtainable from Canoeing, c/o 1 North Lodge, The Green, Ealing, London, W.5.

Enterprise

The owner of the motor narrow boat "Enterprise," which spends the summer months on a passenger run from Reading up the Kennet and Avon to Burghfield, has decided to sell. Mr. Meinertzhagen intends to give more time to his boat business in Aylesbury. A condition of sale, however, is that the purchaser must continue the service on the K. and A.

Forthcoming Events

THURSDAY, 15th DECEMBER,
7 p.m. for 7.30.

Captain L. R. Munk, Chairman of the I.W.A., will give a talk. The meeting will be held in the Wellington Room (first floor) of The Bridge House Restaurant, London Bridge.

For your diary—evening meetings next year will be at the same time and place on January 17 and March 16.

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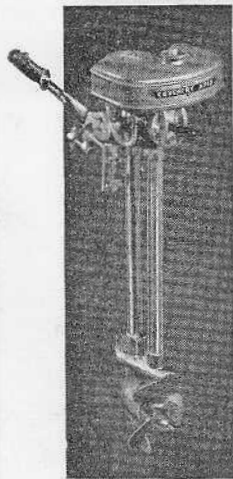
Mobile narrow boat, preferably well converted, wanted for cash. Box 103.

Miscellaneous

Whether you have it and don't want it; or haven't and do, why not try these columns? Threepence per word, minimum three shillings.—Box one shilling extra.

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