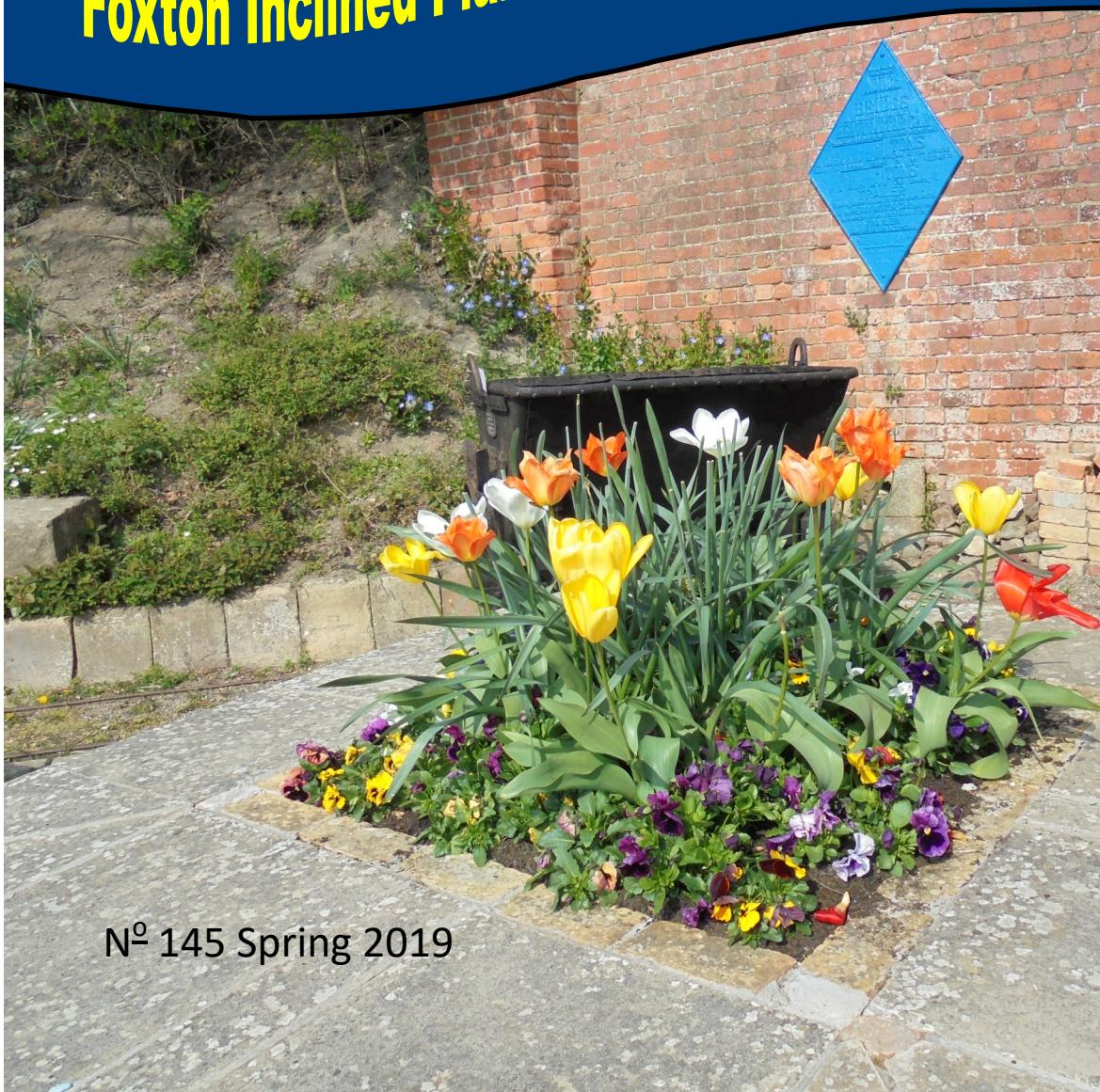


PLANE INFORMER

Foxton Inclined Plane Trust & Canal Museum



Nº 145 Spring 2019

Chairman's Notes

By Sean Park

Welcome to the latest edition of the Informer

Over the last 2 years there has been a considerable change in trustees - A number of new trustees but also for a variety of reasons just as many departing. With this one could argue a lack of stability to take the trust forward. My message to the membership is one of two tales:-

- One representing progress and development - The Museum
- One representing a number of challenges to be addressed - The Trust

The Canal museum epitomises everything the trust is about - knowledgeable staff & volunteers led by Penny who share with the visitors the history and stories of the Inclined Plane and the heritage of the Foxton locks site...and beyond.

A big thank you is warranted for the efforts put in to produce a series of extremely well received exhibitions and for the extensive progress made with the Archiving project.

Since the constitution was changed in 2015 the trust itself has been relatively inactive. With the original main objective - to restore the Boat lift to full working order all but removed, a clear focus going

forward has never been reset. Perhaps new trustees like me with a fresh look have been able to recognise this.

A trustee has two primary duties

- Under the constitution - To run the trust; including amongst other things; managing the finances, membership and full responsibility as an employer
- To think forward - how to develop the trust, develop plans/projects/partnerships

The second point is invariably why most people become trustees ... (in many ways it's a default role - the Trustees, employees and core volunteers are the only group of people who meet on a regular basis).

However until the trust management is effectively covered developing new plans will get stuck at the "Theory stage".

To do this we need active trustees with the skills necessary to both contribute to the running of the trust and then contribute further to progress new plans.

We currently have 7 trustees but for a variety of reasons only a small number are able to actively contribute to running the trust.

This is a major focus going forward - make progress here and future of the trust will be much brighter!

Many of the trustee roles are currently unfilled or under temporary ownership. This is very much a situation that has slowly evolved over a few years but now with ALL aspects of the trust being reviewed we have an opportunity to address all such issues.

Over the last few months the Trustees & employees have been discussing a number of priorities to allow the trust to move forward:-

- **Agree a clear identity** - how to answer the questions; *What is the FIPT doing and What does it want to achieve in the future?*
- **How the trust is presented to the public.** Our local & media/ social media image is somewhat confusing FIPT, Foxton Inclined Plane trust,

Boilerhouse, Canal Museum.....?

- **Identify both required & desirable roles necessary to effectively and efficiently run the trust** (and what is expected from each role)
- **Ensure that the duties & responsibilities of trustees are fully understood and accepted**
- **Ensure all policies relating to employees and volunteers are reviewed and updated to meet our legal obligations as employers**

There is much for the trustees to address but in many ways identifying and acknowledging shortfalls is a good starting point. Ensuring the momentum continues over the coming months is at the top of the list.

Museum Musings

By Penny Arscott

We have taken to closing the museum through January allowing us to get on with various jobs from deep cleaning, changing the temporary exhibition, plus many more. The list is endless!

One of the main projects has been sorting out the collection. We applied to be part of the "Banish the Back log" programme run by East Midlands Museum

Development which we were successful in getting accepted. Mike and Elaine have been mainly involved and have attended various workshops as part of it.

When the museum was refurbished in 2015 the collection had to be moved and put into storage up at Desborough. When it came to bringing it back we had lost the upstairs storage so everything had

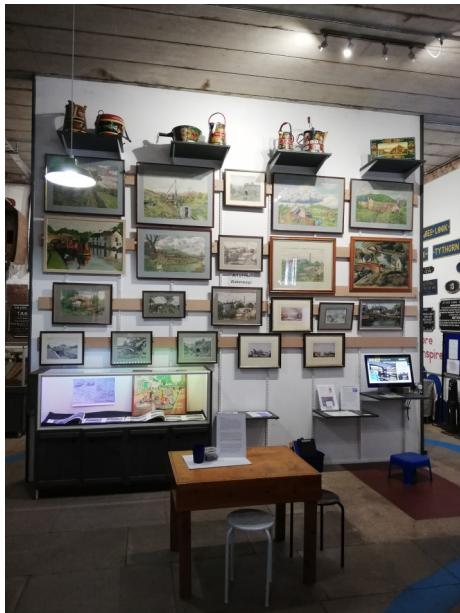
to go into the shed and in various cupboards around the museum. This meant that MODES, the software we use for recording our collection, didn't have the correct information in regards to the location of the collection, ie box number, shelf number and was it in the shed or in a cupboard!

So Mike, Elaine and Giles have been working their way through the boxes in the shed which contains the objects in our collections, checking the condition, if they have accession numbers and photographing them. They have finished this now and will be moving onto the documents and photographs which they are over 4,000. That should keep them busy!

Our exhibition we have on at the moment was sparked by a lady called Val Payne coming into the museum asking if we like to have on loan a painting of the bottom of Foxton Locks to display. The painting was done by her uncle, John Kenney who was an illustrator and sporting artist. He had illustrated various Ladybird books and 6 Thomas the Tank engine books. He got his reputation from being a sporting artist. His paintings included hunting, horse racing and fishing scenes and also African wild animals. John Kenney received many commissions and became popular in the USA. He had a number of exhibitions, in London,

Leicester, New York and Chicago.

Alongside John Kenney's painting we have our collection of paintings on display too which features other artists such as Fred Everett and Stella Benford. This will be on till the 24th June. We then have our Summer Exhibition which Elaine had already written, Locks and Leonardo. It is looking at lock design, starting with Leonardo Da Vinci's design of the mitre lock. We will be having a private viewing night which our members are invited to on the 27th June. The exhibition will be open to the public from 29th June till 3rd November.



Notes From the Editor

Mike Beech.

Given that no one has offered to take on this interesting job, I am still your editor. However this relies on all of you providing material in plenty of time. Come the summer I will be editing from my campervan somewhere in the British countryside. If the reports don't come in, then informer will be late, I can't write about events that I didn't witness so the only articles I will be producing are either historic, or about other waterways I have visited.

This edition should have started with HAPPY NEW YEAR. Sorry it doesn't, a number of things got in the way including changes to who is doing what, and settling the AGM Date.

Sadly these have been a number of deaths in the canal world since the last issue. I think with my own friends the tally is now up to 12. There are too many to do full obituaries here, they would take up the entire publication. Some you may know :- At the top of this list is Tony Matts, He passed away on Sunday 21st of April. Tony set up the boatyard and first pub on the site and was a major contributor to how the site looks now. Mary Matts has promised an obituary for the next edition.

John Rainbow, former Chairman of the Trust. He was also manager of the Harborough Building Society and served us well.

37th AGM

Thursday 27th June, 7pm

At the museum

See insert for details, documents available on the Internet from 1st June. If you do not use the internet please drop us a line and we will post the documents. (we try and save money by posting the documents on line.)

Please come along, we need a minimum of 14 members under the Constitution for a quorum. This has not always happened in the past.

Boat names By Mary Matts.

With pictures by Mike Beech

Boat names are a complicated subject, about which quite a lot has been written, and they still cause puzzlement, amusement and sometimes controversy today. We can only guess what deliberations went on with the original canal companies when they had to choose names for their boats. With the smaller fleets there was a distinct trend to girls' names, usually members of the owners or directors families, or names that had some significance to them. Whether this was affection, lack of imagination or sycophancy who knows. Later as fleets got bigger they usually went for 'themes' eg. flowers, birds, trees etc. of which there is an almost unlimited supply.

The Grand Union Canal Carrying Company, formed in 1929 ordered many new boats to build up a modern efficient fleet. The names they were given cause the most speculation. The first batch were stars. Outwardly simple, but I have often tried to picture the illiterate boatman's face when presented with Bellerophon, or Betelgeuse. Also the signwriters! These were artisans, used to painting shop fronts, carts etc., and would probably be given a piece of paper with the names to copy.

Sometimes this did not quite work out, and there are several cases of mistakes, some of which were retained - whether because no-one spotted them, or because there wasn't the time, or they couldn't be bothered, to change them. 'Star' class Antares spent most of its working life as Antries; 'tree' class Cypress is still the anomaly Cyprus. (This still sometimes happens - ask Mike Beech about Tatterdemalion!) There are cases of letters, and sometimes whole names being in reverse on the other cabin side.

The second batch of GUCCo boats were towns. Again straightforward, and used in alphabetical order. But asked to name a town beginning with A for a London-Midlands canal boat would you come up with... Aboyne? Likewise B: Bainton? Bournemouth? Brighton? All miles away from any canal. For many years we had the 'Town Class' Baldock, and our boatman often got asked "How did you get here from Baldock?" Alison Smedley of the Historic Narrowboat Club is preparing a detailed article on this subject, which I await with great interest.

Back to the sign-writer: from my experience of painting boats, I can concur with Dave Goodwin that



Mary painted this can for me. My next boat had a much shorter name UNUS.

MGB

'Owl' is definitely preferable to 'Josephine Margrette', particularly if the owners want it on both sides of the bow, and cabin, and round the stern. And yes, it is quite easy to accidentally miss out a letter, step back to admire your work... and say ***** (Followed by much



scrubbing out with white spirit, mess, and more swear words). To digress, go into any churchyard and find the old hand-carved headstones. You can be sure there will be some where the mason has started out confidently, then run out of space at the end, and had to squeeze some letters up a corner).

One boat fitter was panicking as his job was overdue and the customer was coming to collect at the weekend. He asked me to do the name ASAP. "OK, what is it?" "er..Shonagolo" "Are you sure?" Luckily there was a witness, who said to him "Don't you think you ought to check?" "No no, that's it" (unwilling to contact the less-than-happy client). Come the weekend and the new owner. "Lovely!" he said, "except that it should be Shongalolo". Cue much burning of midnight oil and a double fee to do it again.

Buckby cans often had a name round the middle band, of either the boatman or the boat; very popular now for presents. I used to make a small extra charge for a name. One Christmas I was asked to paint a can for someone. I gave the price, took the money, and asked her to send me the name (always preferable to have it in writing for the avoidance of doubt; there

are more variations of standard names than you might imagine.) "To Douglas and Marjorie from Christopher, Rosemary and the Family". Price per letter from then on!

Having gone through the early leisure years, when plastic stick-on letters were ubiquitous (actually quite useful on hire boats, when inexperienced crews frequently visited the bushes and scraped them off) nowadays computer generated lettering and images are the norm on canal boats (and shop fronts, lorries etc) and can produce some stunning effects. The actual names are still as many and varied. It surprises me that people spend up to £100K on a boat, and only call it 'No Name', or 'Godnose'.

Leisure-age hire fleets have the same names dilemma as of old. Anglo-Welsh at Market Harborough (est. 1964) started with Welsh town names, then went on to Anglo ones. Viking Afloat have largely unpronounceable Norse gods and heroes; Concoform at Weedon had ... weed eg. Knotweed, Knapweed. Ours were easy - Foxsomething. Canaltime (now Canalclub) have a huge fleet with a bewildering selection of names, including some which are fairground rides, like Scot's Wonder Waltzer and Tucker's Octopus, but they started in traditional fashion with the names of girls in the office.

Perhaps readers would like to tell us their choice of name for a boat they have had, past, present, or fantasy (and why), or ones they have seen and been intrigued,



amused or even shocked by. 'The Dogs' (from) Bow Locks? 'Piston Broke'?

Funny boat names seen around the local canal this year:

SMYNE

SIR T FIABLE

MOOR and PEACE

Top 10 names on the cut,
from canalplan.org.uk/
Kingfisher 250

Dragonfly 150

Merlin 129

Willow 120

Phoenix 114

Serenity 101

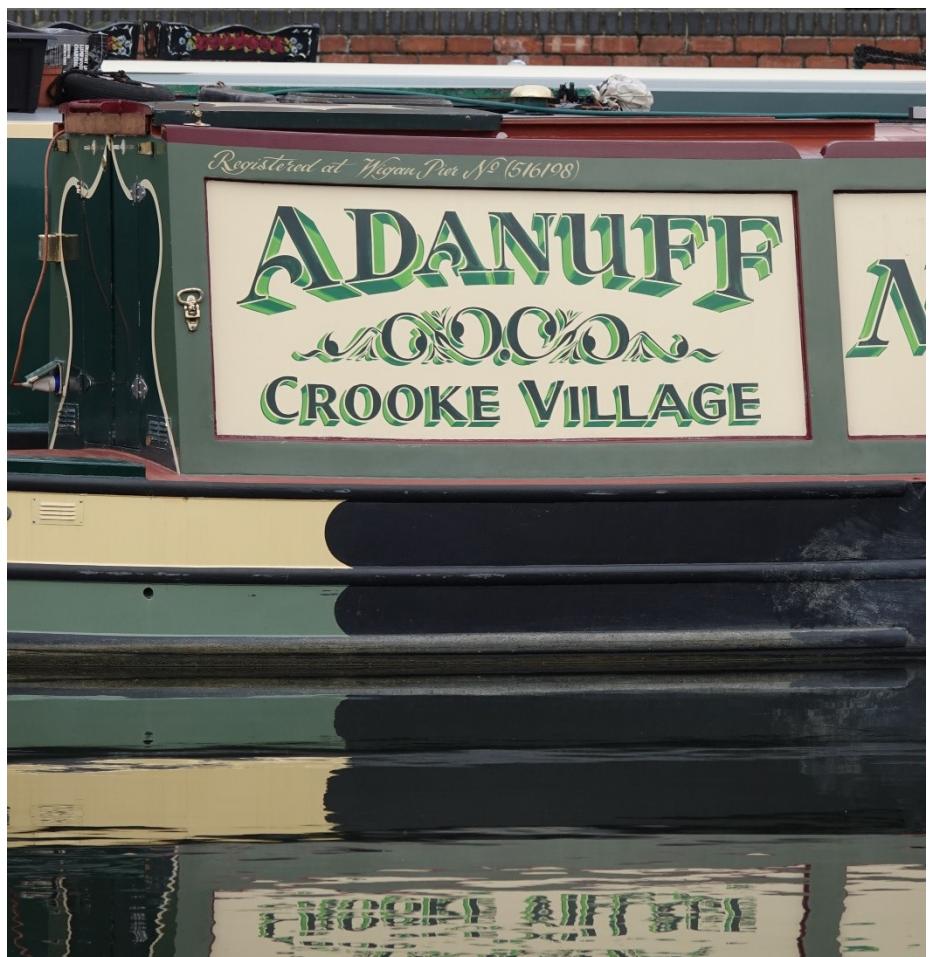
Poppy 101

Sapphire 92

Free Spirit 91

Serendipity 87





Foxton News etc.

By Mary Matts.

Commemorations of the 100th anniversary of the WW I Armistice included a trail of knitted poppies leading from the Museum, down the locks, and along the towpath to the village. Made by volunteers from the Inclined Plane Trust, these were very evocative, and reinforced the links, as several men from the locks, some related to village families, went away to fight. The canals featured heavily in both world wars, as vital means of transport when fuel was in short supply. A lot of people over the years have told me they remember horse-drawn boats coming through Foxton in the 1940s. One of the many cargoes was timber for coffin planks.

In the Museum, an excellent exhibition (donated by the London Canal Museum) showed the huge importance of canals on the Western Front. Not just for the obvious reasons - transport for troops, ammunition, materials, food and supplies, but also how bridges were blown up and areas deliberately flooded to stop the enemy, and the towpaths used as escape routes for refugees. The Royal Engineers had a dedicated Inland Waterways division; in England a special top secret port was developed at Richborough, (between Ramsgate and Sandwich) where barges were sent back and forth across the channel. Being relatively small and low in the water they were not easy targets,



and largely escaped enemy attention. Later, barges were specially converted as hospitals, complete with operating theatres etc. First-hand accounts from casualties report how much better the injured fared by being transported slowly and smoothly, rather than by road.

Although initially 'canal boatman' was a reserved occupation, from 1916 all unmarried men under 25 were eligible for call-up, and many of these went to man the barges on the complicated waterway systems of the war zone. Because they had no specific home towns or villages, they rarely appear on any war memorials or rolls of honour, and being largely illiterate, left no diaries or letters home, so it is difficult to ascertain the fate of some.

On Remembrance Sunday, 100,000 poppies were released from the top of Anderton Boat Lift to commemorate the 'forgotten boatmen'.

Canal & River Trust are undergoing yet another internal reorganisation, and report that although they still have big plans for Foxton, there is not much likely to be happening in the immediate future. Areas that need urgent attention include hedge cutting, (scheduled for the spring) improvements to the car park, and re-instatement of the basin swing-bridge (the lack of which is

deterring some visitors, as Rainbow Bridge, 62, can become very slippery in winter weather.)

Works are on-going on the locks down to Leicester, which we hope will cure the persistent leaks, and their subsequent drain on water resources. The reservoirs and ground water are now making up quite well after the summer drought, and the restrictions on lock opening times have been lifted.

There has been another case of break-ins to property at the locks, including the top cottage, where cases of pop and food were stolen from the Coffee Stop store room, attempts at the Museum's storage sheds, and some vehicles. Security has subsequently been enhanced.

The Langton Brewery started life as a small brew-house at the back of a pub, and went on to be a substantial operation, based in state-of the-art premises at Thorpe Langton. From the start they have been very involved in the local community, and have strong links to Foxton. 'Bridge 61' has stocked their beers for many years, and they have consistently supported Foxton Inclined Plane Trust's annual Foxton Festival.

Their bottled beers are stocked in many local outlets, and make excellent presents, especially in gift packs; they can also produce

special bottles to order. (My daughter, on meeting David Stevenson for the first time said "Hello David". "How do you know who I am?" he said; reply - "From your beer label"). Now under new ownership, but with the same core staff (one of them a boat-owner) they have produced a new range of brews, all named after local canal features: Thomas Lift, Union Wharf, Leicester Line and Rainbow Bridge, in addition to their long-time best-seller Inclined Plane.

Sadly another death to report: Sheila Leslie-Miller, on 23rd October, aged 85. Sheila was a well-known local personality, living in Kibworth. After the untimely death of her husband while training fighter pilots (he appears on the memorial at the National Arboretum) she taught for many years at Robert Smyth (the old grammar school) in Market Harborough. She became a councillor for Kibworth, and first got involved with canals with OUCS's fight to save Debdale 'Red' bridge (66, just round the corner from the marina) when British Waterways declared they were demolishing it. This went up to the Crown Court, with Tony Matts, Mary Matts and Dave Goodwin making the case that this bridge was of unique construction – entirely different from Debdale 'Blue' bridge, 65, and although there were some cracks in the

parapets, was essentially in sound condition. (We were unsuccessful, and it subsequently took BW a long time with a very large machine to break the arch.)

Sheila was astonished that so much waterway heritage was on her doorstep, but that she had been largely unaware of it, and from then on became a vociferous spokesperson for all things pertaining to the local canal. Harborough District Council had just appointed its first Tourism Officer, Martin Dean, and the pair became formidable ambassadors for our waterway. (Martin managed to secure Manpower Services teams to re-surface the towpath between Harborough and Debdale, something we have all benefitted from ever since).

She became a Trustee of the Foxton Inclined Plane Trust, and was prominent in the hugely successful IWA/OUCS rallies of 1996 and 2000 (commemorating respectively 50 years of the IWA and 50 years of the first Festival of Boats) in Harborough Basin. Deteriorating eyesight meant relinquishing active involvement, but she still maintained an interest through phone calls etc. and passed on relevant correspondence, documents and photos from her time on the council.

In The Beginning.....

The early years of The Foxton Inclined Plane Trust.
By Mike Beech

This is part one of My personal account of the affairs of the Foxton Inclined Plane Trust. I have not looked up all of the dates, it is as I remember it. The intention is to give an idea of what we did. I hope to include an article of this type in Informers for the year or so until we get up to date.

I had moored my Boat Pegasus in the bottom dock of the Boat Lift in the 1970s, at the time the moorings were run by Foxton Boat Services. I increasingly got interested in the history of the site.

In the 1970s the Council For the Protection Of Rural England (CPRE) held work parties to clear about one third of the top of one incline. This was led by Peter Gardener and Frank Foden who were also the authors of the first modern book about the lift. They were also responsible for getting the site listed as an ancient monument. This clearance went on for a few years. If memory serves,



Dave Goodwin adding a safety fence to the fairy path. We used timber from the trees we had trimmed, we were working on a shoe string budget

Trevor Towers and Tony Faithful Wright took part in these. However the CPRE had no mandate for doing practical work and there was no funding for it. Frank was also intending to take a year off cruising the world. They called a meeting in Leicester with a view to setting up a society to keep the section they had cleared in good order. I went to that meeting.

The first meeting was well attended, I think about 20 people. Most of the members of the Original Foxton Inclined Plane Trust were there. My argument was that people would not come back every year to pull up the



An early work party possibly scouts helping to clear the top third of the second incline. A complete lack of health and safety and a big bonfire. We soon learnt that if you want trees cut down you need people keen on the environment. They just love cutting and burning! It took several years more of work parties to get the site looking good. The stumps were all cut at ground level and then the weeds were mowed until they became grass. We had acquired an Alan Scythe a petrol monster with a blade a bit like a hedge cutter. Peter Cook became the expert at this and carried on cutting the grass until BW took over after the big Lottery works. More of that later. We did get Peter a more modern mower and we had a really good modern petrol strimmer which I often used.

same weed as last year. Somewhere along the line I suggested that perhaps we should rebuild the lift and make it work. Surprisingly to me the suggestion was taken seriously and most of the meeting agreed. We then decided to form a society on that basis and somehow I came away as Chairman. I think it was the second or third meeting that we came up with the name Foxton Inclined Plane Society or FIPS for short. We were all practical hands on people, mostly

engineers of one sort or another. We believed that we could rebuild the lift ourselves given time and money, and I think the skills we possessed we probably could! If that is you ignore modern Health and safety rules and the large amount of money needed. We started clearing the upper towpath, making a path along the bottom of the bank, known to us as the fairy path, and painting canal side signs. Most of this was done with no permission at all, no one seemed

interested in the lift. But steadily we started to talk first to British Waterways and eventually to English Heritage who needed to give permission for us to clear trees and work on the lift. It soon became obvious that we needed to be a charity and sound more professional. We changed the name to Foxton Inclined Plane Trust and started the slow job of making the trust name a legal entity and a charity. We achieved this on 29th July 1982. The names on that first "Memorandum and Articles of Association. Were:- Michael Beech, Relocation executive (I trained as a motor engineer but I have had a number occupations.) Antony Clark, Marine Engineer, David Goodwin Hydraulic Engineer, Peter Mayes Mechanical Engineer, Roy Nichols, Consulting Engineer, Neil Smith Warehouse Forman (He trained as a carpenter builder) Trevor Towers Mechanical Engineer, and Tony Wright, Entertainer. We were soon joined by others with varying skills.

Ok I have to admit that there was a touch of the last of the summer wine about our work parties. Most of us were not at all old we were there to enjoy what we were doing and enjoy being with friends.

We were nicknamed by some of the other waterway organisations as the Flat Earth Society. (They were trying to rebuild entire canals and some of them had just as much

of an uphill struggle as us.) We did have considerable support from the IWA, WRG and other waterway bodies. We cleared the top of the incline and with the help of Waterway Recovery Group and various visiting work parties we also cleared the upper arm of the canal to the lift.

Disaster struck in 1983 both for us and the Anderton Boat lift. The Anderton lift was in operation and had been since it was modified to operate on electricity. (a story well worth reading about). The story that we heard about Anderton seems to have been removed from most accounts:- Some boats going up in the lift had a shock when the water started to drain out of the tank. The gate had not closed properly and as it relied on a



Clearing the top arm. Waterway Recovery Group were a very big help clearing the upper arm and hedge laying. These chaps are from "Bitm" {bit in the middle} but Essex were our biggest and longest serving supporters

counterbalance the tank went rather quickly to the stops at the top. After they were rescued and the lift was examined it was found that the 1901 structure added for the electrification had corroded badly. It is not a good environment for metal, being opposite a salt works, with the river Weaver being the dumping ground for salt contaminated water. The result for Anderton was that it was closed with no immediate prospect of ever reopening. The Result for us was that the support we had dried up, everyone wanted Anderton opening before Foxton and in theory as the

Anderton lift was all there this would be the easier thing to achieve. They gained European funding and a hefty Millennium Grant.

So what could we do to convince people that we could succeed and that we could do what we said we wanted to do? After careful consideration and a few pints we came up with the idea of rebuilding the Boiler House as a demonstration.

Next Issue how we built the Boiler House and how it became a Museum.

Foxton Locks Festival

Details of the festival are on the poster on the back page. And on the Internet.

As always we will need help to set up, on the days before the event and take down after as well as lots of help during the event itself.

Please spare a few hours if you can. Please contact
info@fipt.org.uk

Magnetic Fishing

By Mary Matts

A relatively new phenomenon on our waterways which seems to have escalated is magnet fishing. Easily-available strong magnets are attached to lines and used to fish the canals for any interesting or valuable objects. This is predominately an urban occupation, as there is much more likelihood of results, particularly under bridges, where people have dumped stuff. There have been features on TV and Jeremy Vine's programme on Radio 2, which I was recommended to listen to. It was pretty annoying to hear the interviewee insist that he was doing a useful job for CRT, ridding the canal of rubbish. He was asked what happened to it, and said he organised scrap merchants to take it away. Unfortunately my experience this year has been piles of unsightly and sometimes dangerous tangled metal piled up by almost every town-centre bridge hole (ready to be thrown



back in by the next anti-social person).

There have also been several instances of people exposing unexploded ammunition, previously inert deep in the mud, which, as well as being a real danger to the finder and people nearby, then has to be dealt with by costly experts, causing considerable disruption*. A father and son were found dead in the Kennet & Avon, after magnet fishing.

There is a long tradition of 'finding' things in canals -

boatmen would always carry a kedge (a three-pronged curved rake on a long shaft) which would be used when tied up at wharves and sites where coal had been spilt during loading or unloading. (Our camping-boat skippers rarely had to buy coal for their cabin stoves). Also dropped windlasses have always been fair game; I was once with someone who dropped his cherished vintage windlass in a deep lock. When deploying the magnet he inadvertently let it go, so then had to attach another windlass to a line to retrieve it, and subsequently the original windlass! Longer serving members of the Old Union Canals Society fondly remember the regular 'Clean Ups' in Leicester city, where a huge range of objects were found, including guns, safes, a wagon wheel (ask Carl Bedford), motor bikes, innumerable push bikes, and tons of other miscellaneous rubbish.

Dredgings could yield rich pickings in certain areas. Foxton Boat Services was on the contract to dredge the central portion of Leicester when it was still under the control of

Leicester Corporation (a legacy from the flood improvement scheme of 1890 when the Mile Straight was created). A team of three: dredger driver, discharge-crane driver, and tug driver (FBS) would accumulate sufficient metal to weigh-in for scrap at the end of the week and have enough for a decent night out each. (On the occasion I had to do the tug-driving, I wasn't included in the share-out!) Rural areas like Foxton were more likely to produce old bottles, jars etc. although we have found the odd water can or domestic utensil. More of interest from a social history point of view; I have two large shelves full of such items found on the site, which prove that al-fresco drinking and casual litter disposal are nothing new. (Bear in mind we did not have any rubbish collection until the 1970s)

Modern Health & Safety means that it is no longer possible to just dump dredgings on any bit of spare land (the long thin bit to the north of Foxton Basin - still waste ground, and the area to the west of Kibworth Top Lock house) and the licensed

tips are now securely fenced. No more scratching about for treasures.

*At the IWA National Rally of Boats in 1979, held at British Waterways extensive yard at Northwich, kids playing behind the sheds found a bomb. "Oh sorry," said BW, "we dredged it out of the Weaver while preparing for the event, and forgot about it". The whole rally site had to be evacuated while the offending article was covered with sandbags and detonated. The explosion was massive, with the plume of sand going high into the air and covering everything with dust. On leaving the scene, the bomb disposal expert stopped at our stall and bought a Buckby can, which I suppose made up a bit for the loss of several hours trading.

CRT Rules. Water safety and magnet fishing

Our waterways are enjoyed by thousands of people everyday. And many of you take an interest in the weird and wonderful items that sometimes find their way to the bottom of the canal. Removing these items from the canal bed however, can be dangerous without the appropriate support. It's great that people are interested in getting rubbish out of the canal, however we don't allow magnet fishing as it can be extremely dangerous. Items dragged out by magnets could be sharp or heavy and cause you to be dragged into the water. We've even had reports of people fishing out old war bombs and dumped weapons.

When people leave piles of metal on the towpath it can cause problems for other visitors, for example families with young children.

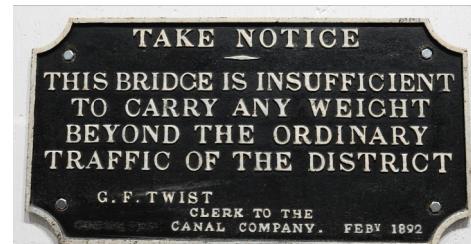
Bridge Restrictions By Mike Beech



The earliest dated sign I have seen is the above is From April 1875. It is a canal bridge sign, from the Ashby canal Midland Railway owned it at the time. It seems to be a standard pattern for all of there bridges. Were they paid by the word?

I love old cast Iron signs. With the invention of heavy traction engines and lorries it became necessary to impose weight limits to save the bridges from overloading. The first road safety signs were put up by Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC), the National

Cyclists' Union (NCU) and the Scottish Cyclists' Union (SCU). By the early 1880s all three organisations were erecting their own cast -iron "danger boards". Importantly, these signs warned of hazards, rather than just stating distances and/or giving direction to

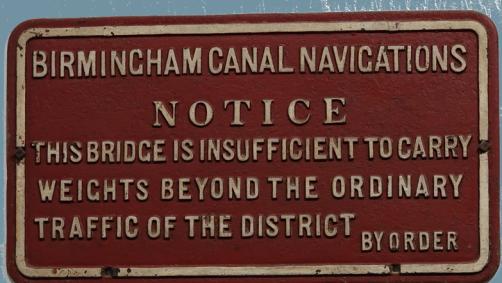


This much more legible 1892 example is believed to be from the Grand Junction Canal Company, but the name has been removed, possibly when it became the Grand Union.

places. It was 1888 before any road law about signage was introduced, but then responsibility split up into local Highway Districts. Each having its own rules. The AA

A newer version, undated and painted red with white lettering. I believe this was a legal colour scheme, but when they became redundant, they were either left to rust, or were painted in company colours, or just black and white. They seem to have been left in place after they were made redundant. I suspect many were taken by scrap men or collectors.

There were a few survivors, but I am not sure if any exist in the wild now.



got involved in 1896 putting there own signs up.

Under the Motor Car Act 1903, four national signs were created, supposed to be set at least 8 ft (2.4 m) from the ground and 50 yards (46 m) from the reference point. These signs were interesting in being based on shape, rather than text or image; a white ring (speed limited as marked on a small information plate below it); a white (sometimes red) diamond (a "motor notice" such as a weight restriction, given on a plate below); a red disc (a prohibition); and a red

open triangle (a hazard or warning). These latter two could be given detail by the attachment of an information plate below, but often it was left to the motorist to guess what the sign was referring to and local variations as to the definition of what was a prohibition or just a "notice", for instance, were common. In spite of this confusing beginning, this format of sign was to develop into the British road sign that was standard from 1934 until 1964. Before this time, until 1933, when regulations for traffic signs were published under powers created by the Road Traffic Act 1930, "national" road signage specifications were only advisory.

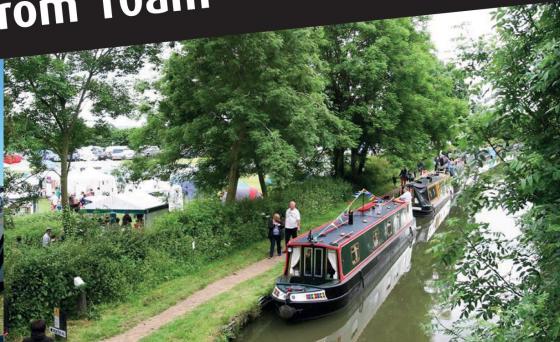


In the early days It was left to the owners of bridges to put warning signs up to prevent overloading of the bridge. A lot of the early ones only specified 'above that of the local traffic'. Wording was often long winded, were they paid by the word? Or more likely it was words provided by the company's legal advisor.

Left is one of the diamond signs dated Road Traffic Act 1896 and 1903. the design is rather clever. At the bottom a space is left for the attachment of a plate stating the owners name and address, in this case Grand Union Canal Co. it also has spaces for the weight limit which could be set by agreement with the bridge owner. It is also the first time when actual weights are imposed. There seems to be drawback, could all of the drivers in 1903 read?

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