

Plane Informer

Winter 2016 No 139



Seasons Greetings



FBS's sales stand Foxglove in operational mode. Everything packed away inside for travelling, but it still turned heads bowling down the motorway behind the Landrover. Mary Sunbathes at the back. See article, 1976: YEAR OF THE DROUGHT



A very wintery looking scene from Bob Hakewill. The wooden bridge on the Harborough arm near the town. Sadly this may be the last winter that we can see this scene, houses are due to be built on the left and the bridge replaced with a modern road bridge. This was a pleasant spot, but as Harborough expands towards Foxton and Lubenham the arm will become more urban.

Editors Comment

By Mike Beech



First may I offer you Seasons Greetings from everyone at the Museum and your Committee.

In this issue we have some very good, very interesting articles, most not written by me! All editors are really pleased to receive good quality material and great for me, as finding time to produce Informer is now harder than before I retired. When in the museum I could write whilst keeping an eye on the visitors, now I am sitting at my home desk when I should be doing the gardening!

I hope you have all spotted the advert on the back page, for the first time ever CRT are organising a big event to draw visitors to the Foxton site in mid winter. We hope you will all support the event and enjoy it. If you have spare time, as always, we will need the help of volunteers. Ann is running a stall for the Illuminated Boats and the museum will, we hope, be attracting lots of visitors.

The event is part of a strategy to get CRT recognised by the public. They still think that it is run entirely by government and don't realise that our canals are now being run by a charity. A charity which is the third largest owners of listed heritage properties in England and Wales.

Ann and her committee is also working hard booking stalls, entertainment, boats and food outlets for the annual festival, if you want to take part please contact them now.

I am pleased to say that the museum is doing very well under Penny's leadership. We have some good volunteers including Vanessa who has also been working as part of the paid staff. Vanessa is a qualified and experienced museum person and as such is adding to our skills.

I mentioned CRT and they have come up with grand plans for their 'Honey Pot' sites. We are one of several such sites which include Anderton, Stoke Bruerne and Pontcysyllte. They are doing what we have long said should be done, capitalising on the assets. We have already seen planning applications going in for a glamping site, and the Caravan and Camping Club are to have a corner of the festival field for a 'CL' which restricts use to 5 pitches. We will also see an application for a lottery grant which could see a big new visitor centre which we have been invited to make use of. The grant would also see the site signage updated and carparks improved.

Can you help on December with the Illuminated Boat event?

Can you help in any way organise and run the Foxton Locks Festival?

Please contact Cathy for more information.

Penny's Piece

an update by Penny Arscott Museum Keeper

October has been a good month. Thanks to the weather we have had lots of visitors. We ran Spooky Halloween over the October half terms (15-30 October). Kaelin, our Duke of Edinburgh volunteer, put together the trail around the site. Mike did the Ghost Walk around Foxton on Sunday 30th which Cathy supported. We are now closed during the week and it's all go with all the winter jobs we've got planned. The air conditioning has been serviced and we have another new bench which was installed on the 1st November. Gabe, Neil, Brian and Mike kindly helped to remove the old bench and make the holes for the new one.

We have brought the paintings and drawings in from the shed. Vanessa has been checking, cleaning and re packing each one. We have cleaned the large showcase and swapped a couple of items. There is meant to be a new panel in there but we need to get a new plastic support designed for it.

In January we will be bringing the collection out of storage to finish our review and rationalisation of it. We are planning a new display area where we can put more of the collection out on view. We are also planning a handling collection. The museum will be closed over the whole of January.

Next year's exhibition will focus on the boat women and families. Katie is putting together the material for this, using some of photographs from our archive. Vanessa is also working on an exhibition which will be shown at the Foxton Locks Festival



next June. Again using the photographs from our archive she is planning to make festival goers aware of the amazing feat of the Inclined Plane.

Mike and I went to Abbey Pumping Station to view a new loan item for the museum, a Bolinder semi diesel engine. It will sit under the stairs with a screen next to it showing a working Bolinder engine with sound. We just need to sort out the paperwork for the loan and work out how we will transport it to the museum.

While we were in Leicester we also popped over to see Martin Lane who has had his model of the Inclined Plane returned to him which used to be housed at Snibston. It is too large to be housed in the museum but we have arranged to take the top section with the winding house and aqueduct. Martin has offered to cut the model for us and make a neat useful model, which we may be able to transport to our festival site.

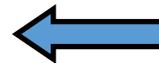
Penny, Ann, I and a few others will be attending the Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Awards on 30th November. The festival is entered in the Favourite Festival/Event category and the museum is entered into the Best Team category.



Fingers crossed!!

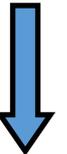
We, that is Mike, Vanessa, and Ann, are going to Ellesmere Port in early December to look at the national collection and talk to them about how everything will move forward.

As you can see we are going to be very busy over winter and I've only mentioned a few of the jobs!



We don't have all the information yet, but the Swedish made Bolinder engine took over from the steam engine, the first being fitted to a boat in 1912. it will make a great exhibit in the museum.

The model of the winding house will add detail to our collection. The wonderful model we have made by Peter Cook works well and is still loved by visitors. This one is larger scale and shows the detail well.



A Hero of Mine

by Mike Beech

Today we are told that a man from a poor household can if he works hard and goes to university rise to the top of his profession and be remembered fondly by future generations. I sense it is true but you don't hear of it very often. How much harder was it for boy born the son of a shepherd in a tiny village on 9 August Glendinning, Weserkirk, Eskdale, Dumfriesshire, Scotland There is a memorial to him at the unlikely named place of Bentpath, which sounds like somewhere in a B move western. I will have to go there next time I visit Scotland.

He was still only a small boy when his father died leaving him and his mother homeless. In a story that reads like a fairy tale friends took pity on them, found them a home and paid for the boy to go to school. He was apprenticed to a stonemason and studied hard getting work which led to grand schemes and the founding of the Institute of Civil Engineers. He also trained himself as an architect. His career led him to build some of the greatest bridges in Britain, hundreds of miles of roads, and some of our most important canals.

If you still haven't guessed who I am

talking about perhaps the following places will give you a clue. He was responsible for the



Holyhead road and my favourite road bridge the Menai Bridge. My favourite aqueduct - Pontcysyllte.

He was county surveyor for Shropshire and got his most prestigious job in Scotland, building the Caledonian Canal.

He was of course Thomas Telford. His name is on so many things north of the border but I had not realised just how much he was responsible for. I don't read many autobiographies, they are usually



hard work but inspired by my recent visit I brought a copy of 'Thomas Telford, Master Builder of Roads and Canals' by Anthony Burton. It is a good read and enjoyable as well as being very informative.

I have always believed that the engineers we know of were very good at self publicity. Telford did this by taking an interest in art so that he could converse with the 'gentlemen' about subjects which mattered to them and they understood. However from an early age he was a poet. He worked very hard, not having a house to call his own until the later part of his life. He was good company and apparently when one coffee house where he lived when in London, changes hands the new owner paid £75 because Telford was considered to be a big asset, a lot of money in the early 1800s. He also studied science and metallurgy in fact anything that would help him understand the materials he was working with.

He travelled all over the country, at first surveying routes himself, but later looking at routes suggested by people he had contracted the work to. In those days there were maps of the roads where they existed but nothing about the topography. In Scotland the best roads in existence were built by General Wade to move troops in order to suppress the still Clan based war lords who didn't really recognise the government of a combined Scotland. The highland clearances had done nothing for the prosperity and peacefulness of the bulk of Scotland. The roads were not suited to sensible 'modern transport'. I have walked some of them and driven others, but I would be fool to try some of them in mid winter. But Telford followed thousands of miles of potential new routes

to join the ports with the bigger communities. He must have been a pretty strong chap. Even the route of the Caledonian Canal had poor communications before Telford.

He was apparently very anti long distance railways. He was interested in them but only if they could link mines etc to canals. The steam powered railway engine was still not perfected, so it was horse drawn railways with steam powered inclined planes. In fact he must have know quite a lot about inclined plane lifts. He designed a double wheel barrow platform lift to take the strain out of getting spoil out of cuttings. This consisted of a wheeled trolley with horizontal platform on the top, with ropes going up to a horse gin and another trolley descending with the empties. He sometimes worked for free in Scotland if it improved the country he loved. He improved harbours including the one at Wick, so that the fishing industry could improve and provide food for the masses. He also designed the harbour close to Tower Bridge, now a very executive place to live, St Katherine's Dock.

He produced standard designs for churches and chapels all over Scotland.

Now if they made a TV series about his life I for one would watch it.



Chairmans Notes

by Cathy Fleming.



Further to my notes in the previous edition of Informer we have had a meeting with Canal and River Trust, South East Waterways Partnership about their plans for Foxton, which is one of their "honeypot" sites. CRT have a document, The Foxton Management and Development Plan which is aimed at creating the sustainable development of Foxton Locks to increase the number of visitors and enhance their experience of the site. The plan is to build a Visitor Centre , 1500 - 2000sq metres on the old boatyard site, bottom right of the approach road to the car park. The centre will have a cafe, shops and office space. It would be beneficial for the Museum to move into the Visitor Centre as once people have gone into the centre they may not want to walk further to the Museum. We would like to see the BoilerHouse Museum building used as an educational centre for the many schools that visit Foxton. Other uses will

be defined at a later date. CRT are also planning accommodation, including a seasonal campsite, "glamping" in 5 self catering narrow boats and 20 Ecopods.

The BoilerHouse ran " Spooky Foxton" again this year. Children followed a trail, solved clues and then using the initial letter of each word worked out the anagram. There was also a Ghost Walk, with Mike. I supported Mike in this event wearing a witch's hat but without a broomstick!!

We had a few people on the Walk but hopefully by making this a regular event there will be more interest in future years. Well done to Penny for organising " Spooky Foxton" and Mike for researching and telling the Ghost stories.

We are fortunate to have gained a seasonal employee, Vanessa, who has a great deal of experience in museums and

conservation. She is currently looking at a plan to conserve the boats on the slope up to the Museum and the large boat at the top of the Inclined Plane. This will be a good project as the boats need some attention to preserve them. We have a new volunteer Carl who will be working with Vanessa on this. As the project cannot be started yet, Carl will be doing some garden work at the front and back of the Museum. Carl prefers to work outdoors and has already along with Vanessa and Ann Hoxley made a big difference to the coal store and the front of the museum, weeds have been removed and bushes cut back. For some time now we have been looking for new volunteer Trustees as our numbers have fallen in recent years. We have been contacted by Mark, who has experience of canals. He has attended a Committee meeting and should be joining us as a

Trustee. The next big event at Foxton will be the Illuminated Boat Festival on Saturday 17th December from 3pm- 8pm organised by CRT. Boats will moor at the top of the locks, there will be fundraising and food stalls and a pyrotechnic display in the triangle field. The Museum is offering children the opportunity to make a lantern using a battery candle and then parade (with a parent) alongside the boats. There will also be Folk / Christmas music in the Museum. We have a selection of goods in the Museum shop that could make interesting Christmas presents and we would like to offer Trust members a 15% discount on items they would like to purchase. There is a voucher within this edition of Informer. Wishing you all an enjoyable Christmas and a Happy New Year.



Foxton Inclined Plane Trust

Members Only

15% discount

And Free entry to the boiler House
on all goods purchased from The BoilerHouse
Shop from now until 18th December 2016.

Please present this voucher to get your discount

LOCAL CANALS & THE INTERNET & other observations

an update by DAVE GOODWIN. . .

In the past I have written at length concerning my research into the correspondence of canal manager T. W. Millner and The Grand Junction Canal Company. Since that may have proved a little indigestible to some readers(?) I now try a different tack suggesting you fire up your internet and dial up 'aerial ropeways', tick the 'images' box' and be prepared to 'visit site' too.

WHY. . . ?

(try this link http://opensourceecology.org/wiki/Aerial_Ropeways ED)

Hubert Thomas (Father of Foxton Incline's Gordon Thomas) busied himself in a failed attempt to install a haulage wire through Braunston Tunnel. If you have investigated the images suggested and persisted with the information on site, the 'Claughton Brickworks' pictures in particular should be most revealing. They show the whistling wires running over several small cast iron wheels - not unlike the arrangement depicted in early Incline drawings. They show hanging buckets akin to Foxton's tipper trucks. Best of all however, the full text discusses installation problems and the viability of such systems at some length.

Further; a businessman approached Millner about an idea to build a ropeway from Wigston Brickfields - to carry clay to the boats on the lower Leicester Line. This plan stalled over the question of guaranteed back-loads and never came about. BUT, again, look at more of the pictures and you can see what a small scale



system might have consisted of, . . Tiny sections of angle-iron towers set on a concrete base - two or three in all totalling some 20ft. - dotted down a mile or so towards the water? Can you imagine the problems encountered erecting same?

I now suggest you tap in 'Trolley Canal Boats' - once more try the 'Images' and 'visit site' boxes. I know, weird wording, but the pictures were loaded by Americans, they are still of interest and the subject covered is the towing of canal boats from the bank. Read Hadfield and one is left with the impression that motorised tractors up the Hanwell flight is as far as we go. There were a few other railed systems tried and several versions at Harecastle, but delve into those 'trolley' pictures, read all the words accompanying the various 'sites' and you get a much wider impression.

In France, Germany and the U.S.A they were trying everything. A line of poles strung along one (or both) banks, a central wire straddling them perhaps, and they have the ability to feed electric power to a motor on board. A little more

complexity and a hook can be controlled from the bank - better yet powered from on board, under the control of an oh-so-modern Captain!

Small wonder in all of this that Hubert Thomas and the GJCCo get no mention. I don't claim that hauling boats was H.T's brainchild - there must have been plenty of references in the engineering monthly press of his time, but I give him full credit for being in charge of things at the GJCCo, having enough nouse to persuade the great and the good to let him give things a trial and become an early U.K pioneer in that sense. Our World - wide friends did not have to cope with steam engine technology (above the Welton end of Braunston), sagging early ropework and rubs against poorly aligned brickwork inside. Full marks for giving it a try!

With the foregoing I have tried to be more pithy while prompting you to explore for yourselves. To tell the tale for those without Internet facilities, but say where an why to look for those who can. Have I Succeeded? Let Me Know.

CONFESSION. . .

I willingly admit to being very wary of horses. They bite, kick and even standing on one's foot can be painful in the extreme. Race horses can be worse of course and naturally come more expensive. Which is why I take a perverse delight in noting the reasons given for having to withdraw same on occasions.

'Not Eaton Up' (a condition virtually unknown personally). 'Going' (meaning anything from soft to good underfoot).

'Bad Scope' (not sure whether this refers to breathing or blood analysis). 'Bruised Leg' - obvious. All in all, in view of the expense and dangers involved, stay well clear. Stick to watching them on T.V - and NEVER bet!

In a somewhat similar vein, trolling around the Internet looking for second hand model railway rolling stock can have it's pitfalls. Some firms go to great length to stress their products are fully serviced before sale, others are screamingly honest about the condition as sold. But I do worry about things described as 'Inconsistent' or 'Poor Runner' and what about 'Reverse Only'. I have definitely seen horses that would match those tags!

So be warned, whether it is your nag that suffers the staggers, or your favourite engine that has suddenly developed a bad case of wobbly running, Both can hit you where it hurts most - in your pocket!

Do YOU have anything to confess?

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY. . .

Some years ago, I became intrigued by someone who had managed to take photos of his local canal from a kite. My researches into the Wreake Valley and it's old navigation structures had made me wish for the ability to do something similar - so much so that while editing 'Union' (the old Union Canal Society Mag) I went so far as to figure out which might be the most attractive sites across the Leicester Line for such attention. I concluded that certain junctions and bridges might be the best places from which to launch, but of



course one was left with the vagaries of the prevailing weather and seemed headed for lots of trial and error to achieve any decent results!

Nowadays with digital cameras - drones even - things have moved on considerably and if you can bear it, I have a couple of suggestions you might care to try on the Internet. Dial up 'Railroad Go Kart - 3 Old Rails Left To Die' (lasting 18m31 secs) and you should be able to witness the antics of a couple of American youths who are obviously as 'into' photography as they are at buzzing along derelict tracks in the States. Their buggy consists of little more than a couple of plastic seats on rudimentary framework, but the equipment that is seen in the latter half of the video consists of a camera strapped to the end of an 8ft(?) lightweight pole. Manipulated by one individual, it gives superb 'selfies' head on/ over the shoulder/ side to side/ even daring between - the - legs shots skimming dangerously close to the ballast!

Better yet, try 'Glenelg Turntable Ferry Skye' (8m28secs). We are treated to drone technology of the very best - and the practical engineering of the Ferry itself is in an unbelievable heart stopping category too. This unique beast carries a revolvable deck capable of holding up to six cars. Watching the handlers bully same into position and lower the end doors into contact with the jetty is a compelling sight,

Even more so the aerial photography which enables one to appreciate the underwater hazards and make up of the slipway. The ferry's engine is never stopped and one is treated to the monster wake as she reverses away, turning to do battle with the strong currents in the strait. Thoughts of the Bonnie Prince being rowed across are prompted by the accompanying soundtrack.

Wind, wild weather and strong sea states can all disrupt passages - how much worse would it have been in the old days? By now however, we have spotted our intrepid drone pilot. That's him, in the blue coat, sitting on his car bonnet. His vehicle will be the last to leave, driven by his wife perhaps when they reach the far side. He

will have caught a shot of a group of motorbikes making their exit and swiftly repositioned himself to capture the deck being finally cleared.

Hours spent watching 'King Harry Chain Ferry Webcam Live' - across the tidal River Fal in Cornwall - has allowed me to compare the two. The Scottish version is hairier in the extreme but there are similarities too, At night they both get moored mid stream, the driver escaping safely to dry land via a small motorboat. Hairy or not, one Christmas night a Cornishman dropped an oar and had to cling desperately to a buoy while phoning the Coastguard for rescue! I won't mention the car sliding into 25ft. of river water, since the disaster potential on Skye must be infinitely more excessive?

There are dozens of different videos taken in the area, shot years apart, with varying run times and degrees of editing expertise, be warned. However, I defy you not to smile at the dog riding in his master's backpack on a motorcycle. Perhaps some dogs smile all the time . . .

Think happy days,

SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL . . .

I am amazed it has taken quite so long for me to understand the attraction on the Internet for items such as 'Go Kart On Railroad Tracks' and in particular the accompanying video sequence '12 Mile Run On Abandoned Tracks' (lasting 33mins.5secs.)

The answer - while a long time coming - was simple. The two American gents who had lashed together various pieces of equipment to form their buggy were enjoying a huge adventure. Not unlike Dave G in the 1960's, who ordered the kit of parts which would eventually become his pride and joy - a road going Lotus Seven. Just like those Yanks, I could feel the thrill of the wind in my hair, a deafening sound track and good vibrations! With legs stretched out, seated low, the scenery advanced at a seemingly faster - than - was - wise pace on occasions. Better was to come.

Ten years in, I had learned from racing the 7 even which bits to accumulate

to make my own lighter, faster version. Most important of all, again like our U.S friends, I had the ability to tinker endlessly. Nothing was sacred, everything that could be modified, was, several times over. I made a glaring error upon realising that female passengers tended to approve the faster one went. Trouble was, I enjoyed it MORE and THEY couldn't climb aboard while doing in excess of 80 mph. My mistake was to stay single!

Believe it or not, there are plenty of direct comparisons between those rail riders and my good self. They thrash along through chest high weeds, wearing goggles and bobble hats, brushing the debris off their bodies. Try spinning off into a crop of emerging sugar beet (Snetterton) and the NOISE, even though you have shut down, is tremendous as the huge leaves are torn off, totally blocking the radiator grille. Try something similar at Castle Coombe, with the corn as high as the eye of the proverbial pachyderm and of course you cannot actually SEE your way out. Just scythe your way round in a circle, until you come across the route you look on your way in. Easy really.

As for that neat little mechanism to stab a sleeper, lifting the buggy clear of the rails to turn it around, I spent months modifying a quick lift jack so it would pick up front AND rear wheels satisfactorily, so the tubular framework would also slide away within the confines of the trailer beneath the racer itself. I won't detail the cold morning roller start, the trailer anti jack knife device or the brilliantly paired lorry type rear view mirrors on the tow car, I can see you are bored.

More later, but only if you ASK,

DAVE G.



1976: YEAR OF THE DROUGHT

-40 years on

By Mary Matts

I should have put this in the last edition, but ran out of space, so now you can contrast it with our wet winter! MGB

Those who have come to the waterways in the last few decades tend to take for granted the fact that there will be water in them. It was not always so. From the earliest days of artificial navigations, water supply was an issue. Geology, geography, politics and traffic patterns meant that some areas had constant problems, and the least controllable factor was (and is) rainfall.

There are years like 1998 and 2015 when too much precipitation onto already saturated ground resulted in dramatic flooding that saw

boats sunk and swept away in many parts of the country. And years like 1976, when uncharacteristic absence of rain meant the water table dropped, reservoirs failed to fill, and supplies diminished to a catastrophic level.

It began in 1975, which was dry. Foxton Boat Services took two pairs of boats down to Marsworth piling depot in October, to collect some of the last of their concrete piles for bank protection work. By the return trip, the Leics. summit was about 18" down, and the boats, although only loaded with 18 tons each, against the 30 they were built to carry, scraped along, taking over two days to do what should be a 7 hour journey. Lock restrictions were in place, with flights only open for a few hours a day. The winter then stayed resolutely dry, the ground did

not soak, and reservoir levels did not make up; so 76 started badly and got worse. In this region, the South Oxford was usually the first casualty, quickly followed by the Leicester Line. Historically, our water was always sacrificed to the still commercially busy main-line Grand Union. (Other severe drought years like 1936 saw the Leics. Line drained off and un-navigable.) The thinking still seemed to apply, with the Leics. 'Branch' as it was called then, being the poor relation, and water regularly run down the Watford flight to the Braunston level. The stretch between Foxton and Leicester was virtually a forgotten waterway, with leaky gates and dry pounds, the normal state of affairs. British Waterways stock answers to water shortage were always "evaporation" and "the cows are drinking it". (My mathematician father amused

The Locks drained, with no water left in the reservoirs 1976. the lock gates dried out so that you could see through the joints.



Bottom side pond with Foxton Boat Service work workshop in the background, (now known as the boat house. The Vans are a now rare Commer Imp , and the rear of the FBS van which were Bedford HA based on the Vauxhall Viva.





himself with some calculations, and proved that the temperature needed to be off the scale, and there to be an awful lot of thirsty cows to account for the losses).

As the year progressed, and the top of the canal got rapidly nearer the bottom, it became obvious that things were becoming unworkable. Vagabond was taking over an hour to get to Debdale - the only place it could turn; the hire boats were unable to move for more than a few hours each day, and stayed stuck behind locked lock gates; moorers were tipped over at alarming angles, and visiting boats could not visit. The hire fleets would have to be relocated, and Anglo Welsh in Market Harborough bagged Memory Lane wharf in Leicester, leaving FBS with the old Leicester City Dockyard in Abbey Meadows (opposite what is now the Space Centre). It had been unused for years; the waterspace was occupied by the dredger and old mud pans, the buildings full of musty flags and mouldy kit from their last incarnation as a scout headquarters. We were running five 70ft camping boats then, and their crews spent weeks cleaning up to make the place usable, and decking over the mud pans to provide access to the boats. Hirers all had to be informed of changes of plan (no convenient email then) and many, particularly the groups, were not happy, having already made transport arrangements. The boats had to be serviced from base, which meant gas bottles, clean bedding, lifejackets etc (plus our two small children) had to be loaded up at the crack of dawn and driven to Leicester for the Saturday morning turn-round, and the holiday boats cleaned. A diesel tank was organised, but no toilet disposal, so we had to cart the Elsans up the road through the Saturday shoppers, lift a manhole with a crowbar, and empty them down the sewer.

Back at Foxton, the lack of boats for

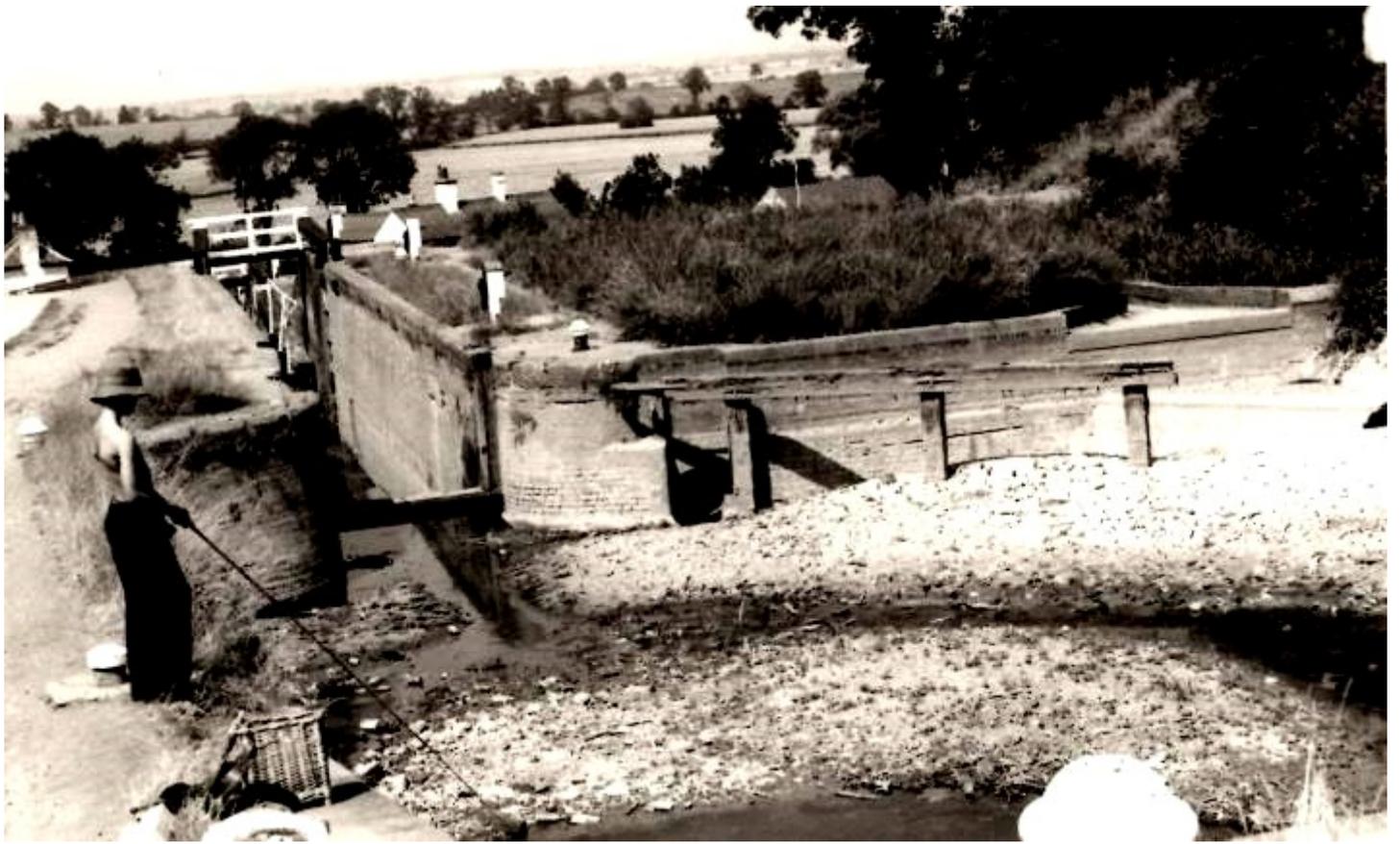
people to gawp at meant that very few visitors came out, despite the months of glorious sunshine. The locks were only open 10am to 2pm, and finally to everyone's dismay, notice came that the section would close completely. Then the word went round "It's shut" so even less people came. The flight drained off to a tiny trickle down the centre of the chambers; the side ponds lay empty, and the clay bottom cracked in great fissures. The grass and reeds died, and dust blew off the (then unsurfaced) paths like the American dust bowl. The hotter it got, the more the water *did* evaporate, the more the cows *did* drink, and the vegetation gasped for what was left.



↑ The mud and clay at the bottom of the canal cracked open. There were fears that it would leak when refilled.

→ A Rather optimistic fisherman tries to carry on his sport in a puddle in the passing pond. This is a good view of how the middle lock looked in 1976, grass not cut, and timber to guide the boats into the lock. But all drying out and dying off.

→ Looking up the flight from the middle pound. With just a few inches of water left for the fish. These days keeping the wildlife alive is high priority.



Some lateral thinking was called for. The Matts family were still living in the big house (now the Locks Inn) and their smaller lock cottage was empty. A few bits of second-hand furniture, a quick polaroid picture, some Roneo-d flyers, and it was advertised as a holiday let (£15 a week for 4 people). Within hours of a small advert appearing in the Times it was booked up for the summer and we became accidental landlords. A smattering of work was to be had mending fridges (in great demand) and lawn movers, installing washing machines, and absolutely anything within our capabilities that anybody wanted doing. If the customers were not coming to us, then we must go to the customers. So a replica butty cabin was cobbled together out of bits of scrap boatbuilding wood, mounted on an Austin A47 chassis, loaded with canal ware, fenders, chandlery, giftware etc and towed around the country behind the Land Rover to boat rallies, country shows, craft fairs, village fetes, Harborough Carnival, whatever. At the venue it cleverly expanded to form a sales stand (and overnight accommodation) and the Land Rover, packed with tools would be put to use doing on-site breakdowns, repairs etc. (Despite quite a hard life it survives, reasonably unscathed as an exhibit/playboat in the Foxton Canal Museum).

Vagabond had made a (quite exciting) voyage down to Leicester the previous year for the Abbey Park Show on the August Bank Holiday, but the water situation meant that a repeat was not possible. So she was craned onto a low loader and threaded through the village streets to make the trip by road. In the park, in order for passengers to get on and off, a special staging had to be built out from the sloping bank, about 3ft above the water. The crowds flocked, the boat did about thirty 20-minute trips to Swans Nest Weir and back (20p adult, 10p child)

feeling her freedom for once, flying along in the deeper waters of the River Soar. Then suddenly it rained; and rained, and rained. People danced in it, and wallowed in the mud as it formed. Water flushing off Leicester's streets and the hard ground tumbled into the river, and the level started to rise. It crept up the bank beneath the staging, then, although customers were happy to paddle, we thought it best to give up when it came over the top. Huge tree trunks, an abundance of traffic cones (favoured missile of football hooligans) and all manner of accumulated debris came crashing over the weir above the Abbey Park pool. (One wheel and tyre looked OK so we fished it out, and it stayed on my van for several years) The Dockyard buildings had marks half way up their walls, which we now realised were left by previous floods. Thereafter nothing was stored below chest height. Mooring ropes had to be constantly adjusted, the stage ended up as far below the water as it had been above it, and the show was abandoned in chaos.

In the wider world, the year was one of serious political and social unrest. The heat and drought exacerbated things, with extraordinary conditions many had never experienced. When the plague of ladybirds descended, it took on an almost biblical quality. Punk and the Sex Pistols outraged the nation. 1976 has been cited as the point at which the 'old order' of class, duty and discipline irrevocably broke down, and gave way to the 'power to the people' modern age. The waterways were a step removed from all this, but, not so many years after they were rescued from near dereliction, the sheer practical difficulties of canals with no water took a long time to get over. With the perfidy of nature, once the heavens opened that late August weekend, heavy rain persisted, and

Foxglove in Harborough
Carnival 1976. They are
passing along St Marys
Road.



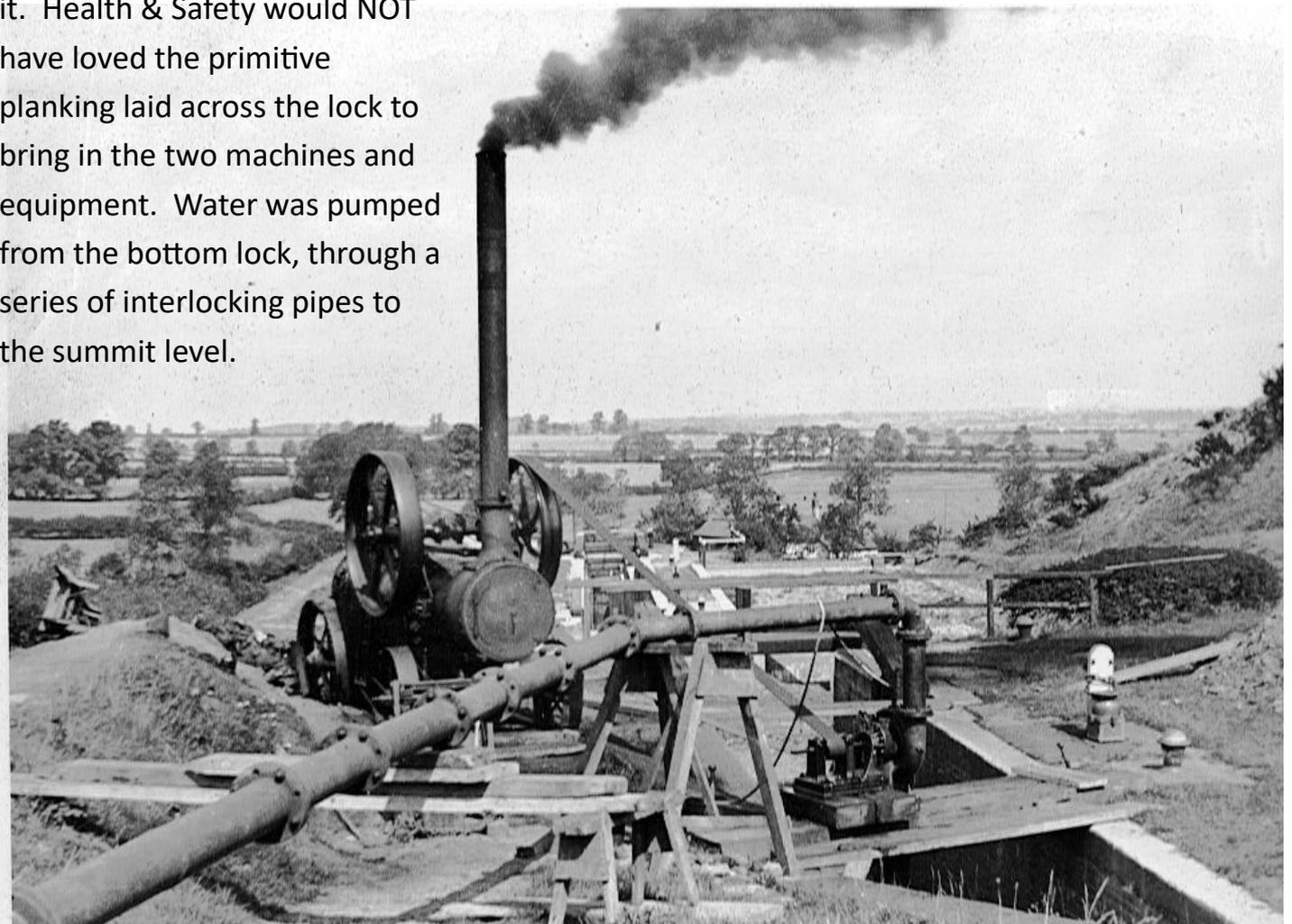
the ground water and reservoirs, so long depleted, filled to capacity within weeks. When the Foxton flight was re-filled, water poured in dramatic cascades through the gaps in the dried-out timber gates, and through cracks and fissures in the side-pond walls. The canal literally leaked like a sieve, from the holes animals had made in the exposed banks.

Modern technology and pumping around the system have largely consigned water supply problems to history (in our region anyway) but those who had to battle through The Drought - including our long-suffering and very tolerant original bank manager, of blessed memory (wouldn't be the same now) - will forever remember the year the canal dried up.

1936...1976....?

There must be something about years ending in 6: Foxton Junction photographed by lock-keeper Alf Cryer with his Box Brownie in 1936. Steam donkey engines were brought into pump the water drained from Saddington reservoir into the Harborough level, up Foxton flight to the summit. Combined with the contents of Naseby, Sulby and Welford reservoirs, it was run down Watford locks to supply the Grand Union Main Line, which still supported a volume of commercial traffic. Note the lack of hard bank edging, absence of trees, and the freshness of Rainbow Bridge, re-built only 9 years before.

Fred Dibnah would have loved it. Health & Safety would NOT have loved the primitive planking laid across the lock to bring in the two machines and equipment. Water was pumped from the bottom lock, through a series of interlocking pipes to the summit level.



Val's Membership Report

by Val Britcher

Hello members

It seems an age since I did my last membership report so here goes with my update.

We have received several resignations this year from our more long serving members who have been with us for many years but who now find difficulty in maintaining membership due to various factors. We are extremely grateful for their staunch support over the years and wish them well for the future.

We haven't had many new members recently except for our new volunteers who are eligible for free membership having done a minimum number of voluntary hours for the charity. Please bear this in mind if you have a few hours to spare as you could well join our merry band.

With regard to payments - those of you who have standing orders in place need do nothing as this is fully automated.

Reminders may be received as renewal dates are set to the 31st December and I will not be in the museum until the New Year so bear with me until I manage to



update our records.

For those members who pay by alternate methods payment must be made before the **31st December 2016**. If no payment is received your membership will expire. We value your membership and need your support to achieve our aims.

Obviously standing order payment would be our preferred method of payment and if you are not currently signed up for this but are interested in doing so please contact me either by phone 0116 279 2657 or by email : membership@fipt.org.uk



If you are able to visit us at Foxton we now have new seating outside of the museum which affords great rural views as well as a scenic view of Gumley village. Please do try to enjoy this experience.

Val Britcher

Membership secretary

News from Theodora 2: Winter Living

by Nick Cook

Mike tells me that you would like to know what it is like to live aboard in winter. I am happy to tell you as much as he will allow space for because I am well versed in this subject. I think that I mentioned in the first article that one of the stock questions that live aboarders (livers aboard?) are asked is how we cope in the winter. So here are all the things that I can think about that will show you that life in winter is pretty good.

Margaret and I like winter. Mind you we like spring, summer and autumn as well. One of the delights of living in northern Europe rather than Singapore is that each season is so different from every other one. We like winter for the long views. At other times of year the leaves on the trees often restrict your view of the surrounding countryside. In winter the views open out and you can see deep into the woods and through the hawthorn hedges. Things hidden are revealed. Margaret read out to me at one point a comment in the Nicholson's Guide that along the Shropshire Union there are many beautiful views. This was true in the past but summer cruising now has it's views restricted by trees that have grown up in the past forty years. In winter you can see so much further. Another rather lovely thing is that you can cruise for days without seeing another boat on the move. When you do eventually see one you are greeted like a long lost friend by someone whose intrepidity you admire while feeling proud of your own.

There is another thing to like about

winter.

You get to light the stove each evening. There is something rather lovely about the sight of a trickle of smoke rising into the calm air from a boat's chimney. The smell of wood smoke is a treat not to be missed. I find that burning wood on the cabin stove is a delightful thing. It is thrice warming. It warms you in the cutting. It warms you in the stacking. It warms you in the burning. It is very low cost. The Canal and River Trust has a duty to cut trees that are becoming an impediment to navigation and towpath walking. Often they will leave logs beside the canal for anyone to use as they wish. They don't cut them up small enough to put on the log burner. If they did the logs would be devalued by a third.

I have a bow saw. Other boaters have chain saws. I like a bow saw because it is quiet. I have a device called a Smarholder. My dear departed mum said one day that she would like to buy me a useful present and the Smarholder is what I chose. It packs flat and tucks down the side of the hold behind my rather large tool chest. When it opens up it can grip, in steel jaws, logs up to about nine inches in diameter and about fifteen feet long. It can also grip a broom handle and logs down to about a foot long. It presents these logs at a convenient height for cutting. It is, in a word, brilliant! Mum bought me the Smarholder a little after I bought a Smartsplitter at an IWA rally in Redhill

on the River Soar. The Smartsplitter splits wood and is, take it from me, very good at it. It is hand powered and uses gravity. No hydraulics, nothing to go wrong. I like it.

The stove also burns solid fuel. (Is wood not solid?) Always smokeless for me. House coal can be burned and for those, like me, who have reached a certain age, there is a certain nostalgia. The smell of house coal is the smell of my childhood. Yellow Nottingham fogs in the 50's down by the Trent on Victoria Embankment. I now eschew house coal as anti-chimney and anti-social. The acid in it rusts the steel chimney at an accelerated rate and the smeech is upsetting for the local householders who probably live in a smokeless zone. Legally boaters can get away with burning house coal, I believe, because boats, I have been told, are exempt from clean air regulation. The smokeless fuels release carbon into the atmosphere that was last there 100 million years ago so I try to burn as little of this as I can manage but if you need to keep a small stove going overnight (I don't) then there is no alternative.

If you take up life on a narrow boat and have a stove you will soon learn that stoves cannot be bought that are small enough to fire normally and not overheat the boat. The answer, we discovered, is not to put too much fuel in at a time and as soon as it gets going shut the stove down to a suitable low level that you must learn by experience. Of such small decisions is life aboard made up. We all have our own preferences for heating. Fortunately Margaret's and mine are congruent. We like to sit in the warm but like a cool place to sleep. Some people have an Ecofan to spread the heat from the log burner more evenly about the boat. We don't have an Ecofan.

What about the morning? How do we get up on frosty mornings without being chilled? The log burner is not kept alight all night so what do we do? Well, what I

do is I get up at the alarmed time and put the kettle on and the central heating. The kettle on a boat is almost never electric. Ours is gas and much heat escapes around the base of the kettle and heats the air in the galley. This is A Good Thing. By the time the gas kettle has boiled ready to make the tea the boiler has got going and is pushing the first of it's heat through the radiators. By the time we have drunk the tea and I am thinking of getting up the cabin has the chill off it and by the time I am dressed it is reasonably civilised. Winter time is porridge time and the making of that injects a bit more incidental heat into our environment. The second pot of tea for breakfast usually makes the cabin as warm as we want and I turn off the central heating boiler.

Now the central heating boiler is one of the bits of kit on the boat that I really enjoy from a technical point of view. It is really small (about the volume of two toasters), lives in the engine hole and is powered by diesel fuel. It's name is Mikuni, a name that is reviled among boaters, but then so are the names of Eberspacher and Webasto. They are all rather small for the job that they have to do which makes the power concentrated in a rather small volume. Our Mikuni is a treasure, though. It has been functioning faultlessly for the last few months heating the water in the summer months and giving us 45 minutes of central heating now that the autumn mornings are getting colder (I am writing this in mid October). I never service it until it refuses to work which is about every year unless it throws a hissy fit and refuses to start for no apparent reason until spoken to severely. It then gives up and works perfectly well for several months more.

An important thing that the Mikuni does for Theodora is to preheat the engine in the coldest of mornings. This was the serendipitous result of the plumbing that I did when we first did up Theodora after buying her in 2006. It

was only after I had done the plumbing that I realised that the Mikuni would do this and that this was the job for which it was originally designed, to heat up lorry engines on cold mornings in temperate climates. It makes such a difference!

While boating on the Thames a nice man from the boat moored ahead of us at Windsor said that he was not at all sure that he would like a narrow boat because you stand outside in all weathers. The nice man had a very smart gin palace sort of boat which was all shiny and white and had a heated wheel house. Not my sort of boat at all. There is no way that you could take a boat like that through Birmingham except on the back of a low loader. Not one bit the sort of boat for me!

So given that at least one of us has to stand outside all the time that we are cruising, how do we cope. Extra layers, that's how. You allow an extra ten minutes to tog up. Full cold weather gear for me includes long johns, cords, vest, thick shirt, sweat shirt, body warmer, fleece and waterproof jacket to keep the wind out. With that lot on you try to avoid having to bend too much and accept that you might be accused of putting on weight.

After a morning's cruise in the bright frost, biting sleet or teaming rain we come down to a lovely warm cabin. The modifications to the plumbing that I mentioned were to pipe the waste engine heat through the radiators. This was a mean and tight fisted way to penny pinch and not heat up the canal but to heat up the cabin instead at a cost of nothing.

So much for keeping warm which is what most people are thinking of when they ask about boating in the winter. There are other things to consider in the winter too. One is the question of stoppages. CRT and other navigation authorities like the Middle Level Commissioners and the Environment Agency plan maintenance work for the off season between October and March. CRT is quite good at leaving alternative routes

open but you do need to be careful to look at the planned winter maintenance schedule published on the internet.

Another thing to consider is ice. Ice can be a significant problem. If you are living on a boat you really don't want to be caught miles from the nearest water point and place to get rid of toilet waste. The trouble is that a perfectly clear canal when you stop in the evening can be well nigh impassable in the morning and totally impassable on the following morning. The only thing to do is to keep an eye on the weather forecasts and moor where facilities are close if there is a risk of freezing.

Long evenings in a house often mean more time for telly. Telly on a narrow boat is really something that is not to be relied on. Some of you will not remember that when you first get a new television you have to go through the installation routine to find the transmitters local to you. This can take several minutes. A quarter of an hour, even. On Theodora the routine for watching TV starts with an important decision. Do we really want to watch it? Second decision. What do we want to watch? This is a branched decision. Do we find out if there is a good program and risk the disappointment of being unable to find a signal or do we go to the trouble of finding a signal and going through the searchy bit on the installation routine and then find that there is nothing to watch. Let's imagine that we decide to set up the box for viewing. First I clamber up and fit the aerial on the special socket on the roof (We absolutely never boat with the aerial fixed because we believe that it looks really scruffy. There are aerials that don't look scruffy but ours does so we don't show it off more than we need to.) Then I look around to see if I can see a house aerial from our mooring. It's good if I can because it gives me a clue as to where it should be pointed. I duly point it in the correct direction and then go and switch on the little box which tells me how strong the signal is. No blue lights means

that there might not be a signal strong enough to make the telly work. Three blue lights means that there is sufficient signal to make the telly work faultlessly and at the same time warm up my night time cocoa. This is not a hard and fast rule. We had two blue lights once and no telly. If the clever circuitry in the television finds stations I go through the electronic programme guide. If I find that there is nothing, simply nothing that either of us wants to watch we are mightily fed up to have gone to all the trouble for nothing.

Now imagine that I take the second decision and look on the Internet to find a must see programme like Bake Off. I then go through the set up routine and find that there is not enough signal of the right sort. We are then mightily disappointed. Of such earth shattering decisions in the live aboard life made.

I am sure that you will be reading this with the intention of being treated to an anecdote. Here it is.

In February 2015 we found ourselves on the Stourbridge Extension Canal. That's within a day's cruise of Merry Hill about which I could write another anecdote. We moored up on the visitor moorings which, considering the very workaday name of the canal, are surprisingly pleasant. We planned to leave in the morning. The morning dawned bright and fair and very cold. The thin skim of ice which was no problem had thickened to an inch or so. This is not a problem for normal progress but we had to back out to the junction, rotate 90 degrees to port and then head off towards Merry Hill. We slowly back out with Margaret steadying the tiller and me with a boat pole breaking the ice around the stern to allow Theodora to make stern way.

I am sure that you will appreciate that while going backwards Theodora had to break through about a 7 foot width of ice because that is how wide she is. We arrived at the junction taking about ten minutes for the 100 yards and then tried to

turn. Turning means braking and 60 foot width of ice because that's how long Theodora is. The force exerted by the engine and rudder is much less in turning than in moving ahead. Turning was a problem. When there is a problem a solution often presents itself in the form of the kindness of strangers. In this case the strangers were a group of ramblers who stopped to watch our antics. I asked for assistance. They accepted the challenge and took a bow line (We carry long ropes and heavy ones so that they can be thrown long distances. They pulled at right angles to the bow to attempt the anticlockwise turn. The attempt failed and we were too far from the bank for me to rig the block and tackle to multiply the force by five. The next part of the solution involved my walking up and down the gunwale with the boat pole and using it to break the ice along the length of the boat. This all went well until I became a bit blasé about the task and a foot slipped off the rather narrow ledge. This caused gasps of alarm from all but me. I was too busy grabbing more firmly the edge of the roof to prevent myself having an icy ducking. I do hope that I was wearing my life jacket but I really can't remember. It is a decidedly bad idea to fall into an icy canal. I didn't fall in and carried on with the good work. The people on the bank pulled and I stabbed the ice with the pole and Margaret worked the engine back and forth as appropriate and eventually we were around and off towards Merry Hill making rather lovely scrunchy ringing noises as we went.

This article is copyright and must not be used by anyone without permission from the author

Foxton Inclined Plane Trust:

Chairman

Chairman and Volunteer Coordinator

Cathy Fleming cathy.fipt@gmail.com

Treasurer Chris Graves treasurer@fipt.org.uk

Fund Raising and Events

Ann Bushby

festival@fipt.org.uk

Tel. 07710 795057

Heritage and Site

Mary Matts

marymattsfoxton@btinternet.com

Publicity

Derek Harris

Membership Secretary

Val Britcher - contact as BoilerHouse

Museum Manager

Penny Arcscott

0116 279 2657

boilerhousemuseum@gmail.com

Museum Keeper & Editor of the *Plane Informer*

Michael Beech

foxtoncanalmuseum@gmail.com

Museum Assistant & Minutes Secretary

Michael Cooper

Committee Member Rosemary Eaton

Festival assistant

Visit us on [www.facebook.com/
FoxtonCanalMuseum](http://www.facebook.com/FoxtonCanalMuseum)

Foxton Inclined Plane Trust:

Registered in England: Number 1654756.

Registered Charity : Number 513241

Museum Accreditation 1644

Registered Office: The BoilerHouse (at Foxton Locks, Middle Lock, Gumley Road, Foxton, Leicestershire LE16 7RA

Tel: 0116 279 2657

E-mail: info@fipt.org.uk

President: Stephen Bowyer

Vice Presidents: David Goodwin, Roy Nichols, Trevor Towers

Membership is open to all who have sympathy with the aims and objectives of the Trust upon payment of the appropriate subscription:

£9 Single- renewable Jan 1st

£12 Family - renewable Jan 1st

£150 Individual Life

The BoilerHouse is run by the Trust and its volunteers. It holds extensive collections of artefacts, models, archives, and photographs of the Lift site and associated waterways. The Museum has won numerous awards and contains something for everyone and all ages, including touch screen interactive displays, a play boat, working models, the boiler game and large screen projections. Refurbished in 2015.

Plane Informer Nothing printed in these pages may be construed as Trust policy or an official statement unless stated otherwise. The Trust and its employees accept no liability for any item in this journal.

Press Dates For copy to be included in the Plane Informer, it must reach the Editor, at the BoilerHouse, before these dates:

Winter: Mid-November Spring: Mid-February

Summer: Mid-May Autumn: Mid-August



Stourbridge Extension Canal &
nb Alton, Telford warehouse, Chester. see page 23





Canal &
River Trust

Free Admission

Foxton Locks

Illuminated Narrowboat Festival

Saturday 17 December 2016 3:00pm to 8:00pm



**£250
VOUCHER**
for best
dressed boat*

Illuminated narrowboats from dusk

Illuminated boat parade and fire sculpture at 6pm

Festive boat trips (weather permitting) | Lantern procession

Lantern making & festive singing at the Boiler House museum

Harborough Brass Band | Great variety of hot food

*to take part in boat display, contact Steph Furniss on 07545 616474

To find out more please visit:

canalrivertrust.org.uk

© Canal & River Trust charity number 1146792

