

Summer 2016 No 137

Plane Informer

Go wild at Foxton this summer

Our new 2016
Special
Exhibition.
See inside for
details.

2016 Festival

Front Cover - The Foxton Swans are nesting on a new site this year, a bit further along the top canal. They have been there for a month. They chose festival week to provide five cygnets, now down to 4, but the visitors love them.



The fun fair keeps the children happy, and Black Pig Morris scare them! The Dog show is a great success this year - it had its own arena and hundreds of people squashed round to watch, particularly the obstacle course. The Music entertained people but the small Room for Music stand seemed to be attracting a big crowd of its own.



2016 Festival and stuff

by Mike Beech

As I write this, the 2016 festival is underway. I am running the museum whilst Ann Bushby and her festival Team are running around trying to keep everyone happy! Ann has kidnapped Penny who has been in charge of camping and lots more besides, but over the weekend she is running a stall raising money and promoting FIPT.

With Penny and all of our Museum volunteers working on the festival site that leaves me! Not many visitors yet so I am grabbing time to finish Informer. It has to be ready for the printers on Sunday night so I apologise that it can't wait for the full festival report. Those of you who follow us on Facebook will already know the results when you see this copy of informer, but I will include a full report in the next issue. It always takes Ann a couple of weeks to recover and start making sense again!

I have included a selection of the pictures, one of my volunteers came to relieve me for the afternoon. As you read this I will be exploring south west Scotland, one of the benefits of semi retirement is more holidays.

I haven't done much of it yet but I am also 'training' to be a volunteer Lock keeper, an occupation I plan to do mainly

in the winter. I am also planning to do a lot more photography and film making movies. A DVD is now on sale in the museum. It contains a couple of my films and one that I present all about the Grand Union. A Very Grand Union costs just £8.95 or £10 if you want us to post it to you. All profits go towards improving the museum so please pop in and get a copy.

From what I have seen of the festival, it is bigger than ever this year. I didn't go to the music event in the evening, I was planning to have a drink and some food with friends but I am suffering badly from Hay fever and decided that I had better have a rest instead.

I am looking forward, when I get back from Scotland, to seeing what Penny has produced for the Wildlife Exhibition. This is her first temporary exhibition for FIPT and she has some great ideas but apart from me providing some pictures and the film, this will be all her work.

LEASE, we have been working towards a new lease for the building. Negotiations were started between us and

CRT by our former Chairman Steve Bowyer. It is now in the hands of our solicitors but is considered low priority by CRT as it is not a commercial property. This is good news for us as we will still have a relatively small rent to pay.

The Committee will be looking at all of the ideas which were put forward after the AGM, this will decide what our next big project should be, we may have to pay for professional studies of the chosen projects. We intend doing our own high level internal study first to weed out

the impractical ideas and provide a sound basis on which to produce the documents we will need to gain permission and start raising the necessary funds. If you have any experience of this work and can spare some time please get in touch with me or the committee.

I hope you enjoy this Informer, I don't seem to have had the time it deserves to give to it, but there are some good and different stories. Please let me know if you like or dislike the content, and I will try and do better next time!



Volunteer Heroes

Without Our Volunteers we would not exist. These are a few of them helping with the festival.



Writing this is dangerous! I am sure I have left someone vital out. In addition to our own team of volunteers we have as usual had lots of help from Leicestershire and Rutland 4x4 Response and a growing number of CRT lock keeper Volunteers. Sorry if I have missed you out!



Penny's Piece ~ Going wild

News from the Museum Manager by Penny Arscott

This summer we are having an exhibition on waterways wildlife. The exhibition will be looking at what you might find living in and around the canals at Foxton Locks. There will be talks and workshops such as pond dipping and maybe a bat walk! You will be able to find more information from our website from mid July.

The museum has got some new additions to it. Thanks to a donation from Sue Speed in memory of her father Doug Gandy we have a new touch screen. Visitors are able to view

photographs and documents from the archive. Mike has put together the material for the screen and is still adding. Only another 2000 images to go!

When we reopened after the major refurbishment it was already well into the season, so lots of things had to go unfinished or stay in storage. This spring we added a discovery chest which was kindly made by Peter the carpenter from Holovis. It sits in the space under



the Inclined Plain rail. Visitors have to work out what the objects are behind the doors or in the drawers. Why not pay us a visit and work out the puzzling objects?

We've had a pair of 1:4 scale model narrow boats donated from Lesley Wainwright. They are radio controlled and were built by her late husband. We have them on display in the shop. A large collection of painted ware has also been donated which is sat on top of a display

case waiting to be properly assessed and catalogued. Some of it may replace our permanent canal art display.

The tunnel brush has come out of storage and is now on display. This is one of the rarest pieces in our collection. We have plans to bring more objects out either on temporary display or permanently.

A new member of staff joined us in June her name is Vanessa and she is a great addition to our team. Vanessa brings a wealth of experience with her, including working with the Mary Rose Trust. she has trained as a conservator, adding to the range of skills available to the Museum team.

We now have a great bunch of volunteers helping with the museum, but we still need a few more to reach our target of having two people on duty every day. This would free me up to get on with some of the behind the scenes jobs, and it improves the health and safety aspect, by having someone around if there is an accident, and letting us have proper breakers for lunch etc.



Chairman's Notes

Cathy Fleming



Everything is a bit frantic at the moment. As I write this, Mike is pushing me to finish my Chairman's Notes, as he is off on holiday after the festival, and wants this at the printers on that Monday. (Having retired Mike keeps disappearing on Holiday. Not sure we should allow that.) I have just spent the day giving out Festival leaflets at Harborough Carnival supported by 2 friends and Ann and Kwik Cabs Taxis who are always a big help. For a couple of years they have offered free transport from the town to the festival! The Festival Team led by Ann Bushby have been working harder than ever this year to build on the success of previous years. This year's festival is bigger and better than anything we have done so far. Please visit our Facebook site for the latest news and the money raised. As usual we are very grateful for all of the work that has and will be put in by the Festival Volunteers; we could not

do it without you.

The AGM has been and gone and they voted me in again, (No Escape!). We gave particular thanks to Lawrence Harrison for his long service as Treasurer. He has been excellent helping us through some difficult and wonderful times. He has put in place systems to help us run everything, and he has been training his successor Chris Graves. The fact they have done a good job is echoed by the fact that our independent examiner was very happy to pass the accounts, and the questions from the floor were easily answered.

We are thankful that Chris has picked up the challenge, a good Treasurer is vital to an organisation like ours. We still need new committee members. If you can spare some time, new ideas and different ways to look at things are needed to lead the Trust into the future. The minutes of the meeting will soon be on our website if you wish to peruse them. After the AGM we had a discussion about the future, what do we want to do next? Mike Beech provided a discussion paper which included ideas put forward by lots of you over several years. We will start by doing some internal in depth studies on the most favourable of them and if they look as if they could be made successful then we

will fund a professional study to take them forward. (a suggestion from Tony Wright is included in this edition)

We have a new touch screen computer showing old photos and documents relating to Foxton. Our thanks go to The Gandy Family who provided a donation of £500 as a memorial to father Doug Gandy who enjoyed visits to Foxton. Thanks also to Mike Beech for the time and energy he spent going through hundreds of photos to select those that would be of interest to visitors.

I have managed to escape from Foxton this year and took a relaxing holiday in Goa, to recharge the batteries. I enjoy going there for the sun, sea and sand and also because I get to meet up with the 2 Indian children I sponsor who are looked after by the charity El Shaddai. They do great work by giving street children a home and an education.



The next level

by Tony Faithfull-Wright

At the AGM Mike asked for suggestions to move the Foxtan site forward, so I would like to make my ideas open to your opinions. As it is now quite clear that the Restoration of the Incline will not take place, I believe we have to take the Museum and site to the next level if it is to take its place amongst the greats.

Having read of, and seen many stunning innovations of revitalisation at historical sites, I feel Foxtan needs a project to equal the restoration of the top arm. There are areas where this could be achieved, and the one that I feel would have the biggest impact on visitor experience would be the reconstruction of the Engine/Winding house and the aqueduct/caisson/arm End.

The rebuilding of these would be both eye-catching and visually informative. Creating a physical reality to the public of the actual lift, and expanding the BoilerHouse at the same time.

Modern materials would be used, but without the need for robustness of actual load bearing or usage. The Winding House would be built using wood and polycarbonate sheets. The interior engine and winding gear fittings of wood and lightweight cast metal alloys, with ample

space for other display and exhibits, the outside wheels and cables constructed in the same way.

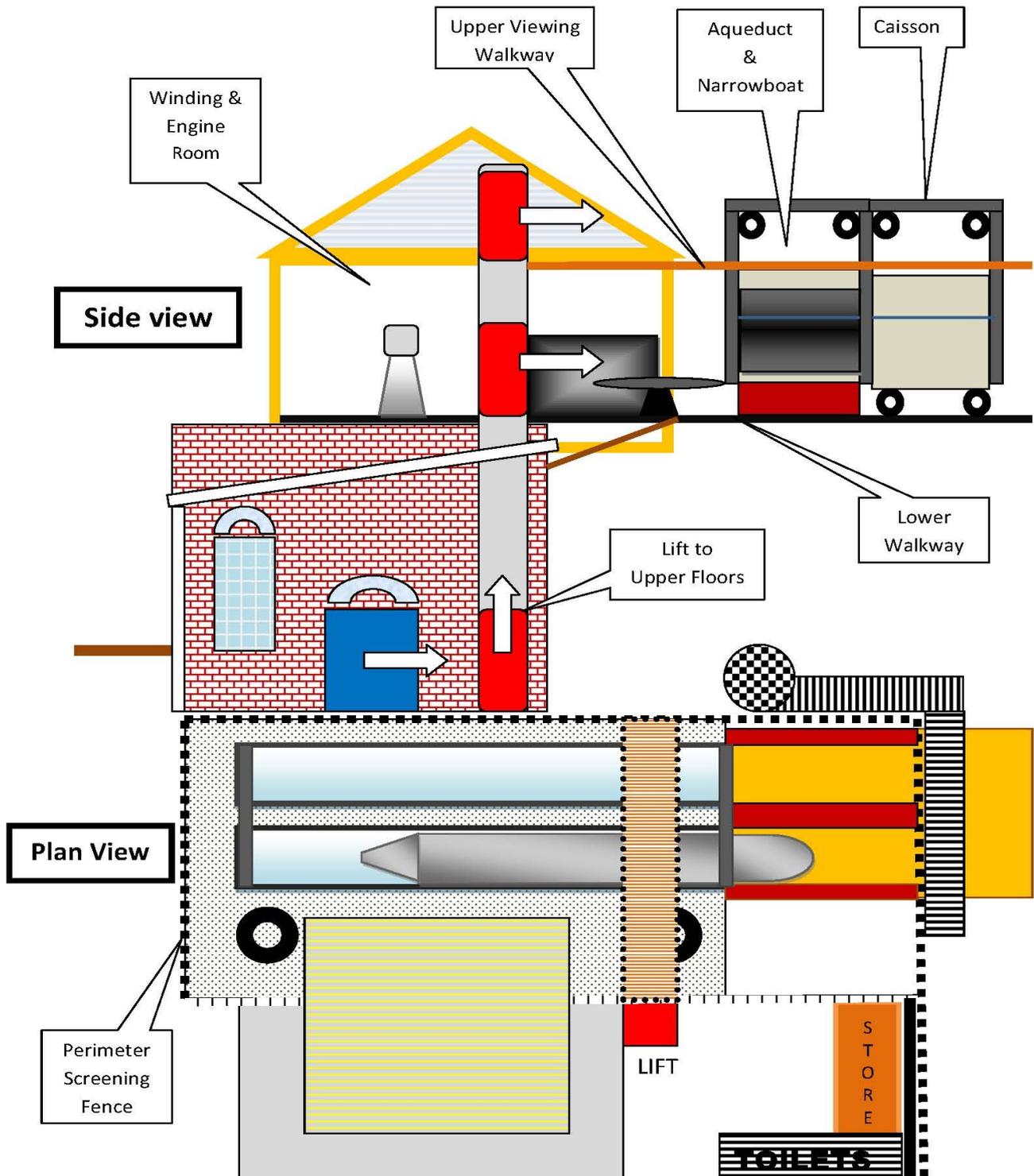
The end of the canal arm should be rebuilt using suitable bricks and lintels, and fitted with false gates. The existing aqueduct piers should be rebuilt using suitable bricks, and a thin alloy sheet metal constructed aqueduct placed on them. All gates would be constructed using both wood and metal fittings. Finishing it should be possible using the piers as load bearers to position the present narrow boat (or a newly constructed one) partly in and out of the aqueduct. Using a similar construction as the 'SS Great Britain' in Bristol, it would be easy to assemble a false water level in polycarbonate plastic.

As well as a walking path around the structures, a viewing walkway would need to be constructed to enable the visitor to see the structures from above. Both will be accessed from a lift making the site accessible for less able visitors.

The whole project should be complemented by the reconstruction of the outside coal area with toilet

facilities, stock storage, exhibition space and a lift to the upper levels. The complete area then covered by a translucent roof. The rebuilt area would need to be fenced off so that entrance is through the BoilerHouse only. This will give the Museum visitor a chance to see both the virtual reality presentation and

the actual physical reality for their entrance fee. We need to think big and I feel that this is a worthy project to forward and would generate enthusiasm for raising the necessary funds. be presented for several awards, never a bad thing.



Foxton Boat Services reaches its 50th anniversary!

by Mike Beech

Foxton Boat Services Ltd, based at the Locks, was founded in May, 1966 by Tony Matts.

He and some friends had bought a sunken boat at Foxton as a project.

"As he worked on the boat, people kept asking him where they could get an ice cream or a cup of tea locally," said

Tony's wife Mary. "Eventually he gave up his job as a physicist and opened a small shop and tea room here at Foxton Locks."

The family developed the business into a thriving boat yard and diversified into several related activities.

Today, four members of the Matts family are involved in the company - Tony, his wife Mary, their son Sam and their daughter Hannah Hemington.

They have seen major changes and the growing pains of the tourist industry on our waterways. They have adapted to the demands of the modern visitor and changes in the management of the Foxton site.

The company currently runs the Bridge 61 pub, a canalside shop, a trip boat, day hire boats and a boat maintenance and

repair service.

"I think the key is we've always tried to cover what was needed here at Foxton Locks," said Mary. "We even built a pub, because at the time there wasn't one here.

"We've just responded to what visitors want here, and the boaters that come through want here."

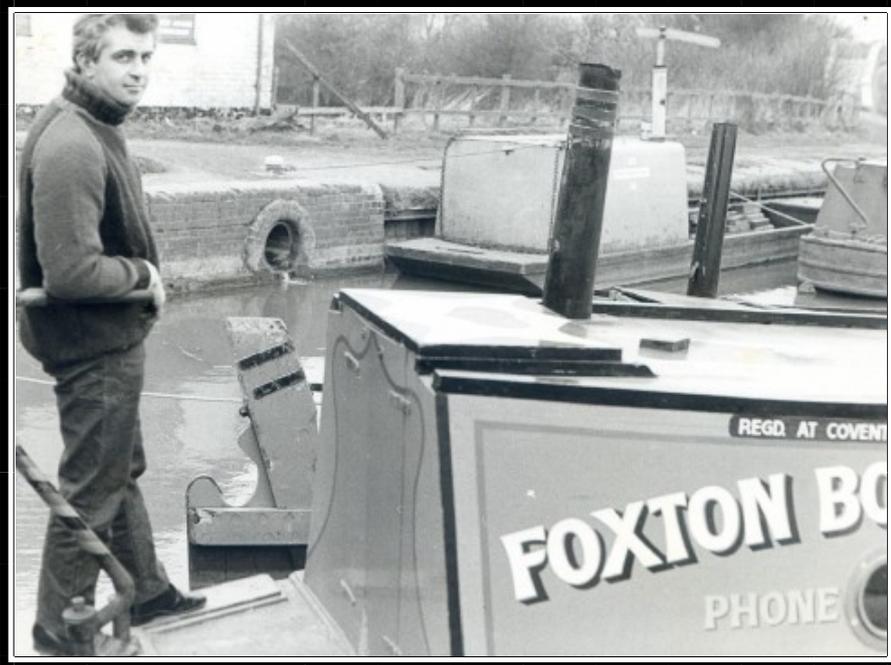
Mary said there had been many changes at Foxton Locks in the 50 years since the family firm first started there.

"People have always come to visit," she said. "But since the explosion in leisure time it's built up and up and up.

"I think the reason why it's still so popular is there's something here for everybody.

"The Foxton Locks engineering is spectacular of course, then there's the history, the wildlife, the boats, the walks, the attractions including the museum and the beautiful Leicestershire countryside. And you don't have to pay to get onto the site."

Around 300,000 people visit Foxton Locks every year.



Top - the original Bridge 61 pub and boatyard (the new Bridge 61 is on the other bank).

Left - Tony Matts in 1976. The boats had to be moved to Leicester because of the drought.

Bottom - The original Vagabond.





The party in full swing. Mary Matts is in the centre holding a plaque with her dog Flo, daughter Hannah is on her right with Tony Matts on her left and then Sam.



Foxton Boat Services in the 1980s with the old pub and boatyard. The boats are hire boats. They now have the pub and shop to the right. Sam will come and fix your boat wherever you are!

July - September

Waterway Wildlife Our temporary summer exhibition in the BoilerHouse. With new film and photographs as well as a wealth of information.

30th July - 1st August

Nature Detectives Explore the site and find the answers to the clues.

Watch our Website for a host of summer events. We are waiting for confirmation of dates before we publish.

27th -29th August

Teddy Bears' Picnic Our annual event where you can bring your teddy or similar favourite furry being.

15th - 30th October

Spooky Foxton

We will decorate the Boilerhouse with spooky stuff - dare you come in?

29th October

Ghost Walk Mike Beech will do conducted site tours talking about the deaths and the Ghost stories surrounding Foxton.

December

Seasonal songs in the BoilerHouse

Gumley Feeder

by Mike beech

Despite the name 'Foxton Locks' the only village visible from the locks is Gumley. Running from the hills near the village is Hall Brook which before the canal ran across the fields towards Foxton, 200 years ago, it was put in a culvert under the canal. It can be seen disappearing in its tunnel in the back garden of Bridge 61 pub and comes out in what was the dredging tip on the opposite bank. When the canal was constructed, the Brook was an easy supply of water for the canal, so in the field above, a new high level channel was built and an arrangement of paddles put in place to control the amount of water going from stream to canal. At some point, I am not sure when, the original stream started to regularly flood its banks and was diverted into the canal feeder channel. The amount of water then allowed to go down



the original stream or into the canal was controlled by paddle gear behind the pub. This all made the original gear superfluous. Mary Matts alerted me to the fact that it is getting very rotten so I popped out and photographed it. I believe this is the oldest wooden canal structure still in place and as such it is important. But it is unlikely to be repaired and is not really something that we can salvage for the museum. There were two of these paddles; one for the canal and one for the stream. The one for the stream is now part of a dam to keep the water in the canal channel. There are ancient rights to the water and it can't just run into the canal, some of the stream has to go on to join the river lower down. There are no longer water

mills to worry about, but I am sure various farmers rely on that water. When we have storm weather the excess water needs to carry on down stream; we don't want it in the canal. This winter the stream flooded the pub garden where it is normally several feet lower!

To operate the paddle in the field, a bar was put in the slot and the paddle levered up. A peg (still there after 200 years) is put in through a slot to keep it in place. I am sure that I have pictures from when it was in use but I haven't found them yet. A simple ratchet system is mounted on the side of the upright so that it holds the paddle up whilst the lever is in use.

The second paddle, now redundant.



Old Boatman visits

by Mike Beech

On Saturday
11th of June.

One of our visitors Charles Doughty announced that he was born on a boat and started to chat about his life afloat.

He told me that in the 1940s he left the boats, aged 12. He had lots of stories and lots of memories; he remembered the canal geography very well. His family had brought him from Ilkeston to Foxton for a day out and a meal. The family worked on the war time boats from Stanton Iron Works mostly transporting crushed slag to spread on the roads. The boats only had numbers during the war. I looked on the internet and the only boat featured without a 'name' is a tug Stanton N^o 1 which I suppose is a name.

They carried other items including timber and he told me about coming into Redhill lock at the end of the Soar with a boat load of timber. Young Charles was operating the lock paddles and his Dad Charlie was steering the boat; Charlie started shouting to shut the paddles or he would sink the boat. The timber had swollen up and was jamming the boats in the lock. Charles was bent over to look down and see what was happening when the lock keeper's billy goat butted his

rear end, tipping him into the lock!

He did travel through Foxton and remarked about all the new buildings at the bottom and obviously the BoilerHouse was just a heap of overgrown bricks. Everything was in working order but very shabby.

When boating through Husbands Bosworth Tunnel, they were waved down by a troop of soldiers on exercise. They hid in the hold under the canvas whilst travelling through the tunnel and got out further along the canal. He said there were a lot of exercises going on along there and shots and bangs were heard. This led him to say about the German bombers dropping bombs aimed at the boats, thankfully never injuring them.

There were many more tales; I wish I had a tape recorder to catch them all.

The best bit of the visit however was when he sat at the new touch screen Gandy Computer and looked through the archive photographs we have on it. His daughter was reading the text over his shoulder, her face suddenly changed to a look of amazement. She had spotted the name Charlie Doughty on our

Continued →



Ringed are Charlie Doughty and his wife Alice.

Photograph; right hand part of photograph of photo taken at boaters evening in June 1972 at wharf hotel welford. Left to right standing Mrs G Swanwick, Mrs A Swanwick, Mrs Rose Skinner, unknown, Joe Skinner, Charlie Carter, Arthur Swanwick, A Boswell, George Carter and Mrs Peasland.

Left to right sitting Miss Gilbert and Mrs Alice Doughty

Photograph; left hand part of photograph
 Left to right standing Jack Meridith, Walter Turberfield, Maurice Peasland, Jim Peasland, Charles Atkins, Reg Barnett, Charles Doughty, Dick Waterfield, Rose Carter, Ike Argent, Joe Roberts, Sally Meredith, George Bevington and Mrs Bevington. Left to right Mrs Waterfield, Ellen Argent, Mrs Simmonds, unknown (down as Rose Carter but she is already mentioned), and Tommy Simmonds.

Photograph is from the Old Union Canal Society archive.

computer; it Was Charles' dad!

The next picture, which is actually the second half of the first, contained a picture of his mother. (see next page)

He knew a few of the others as well. The picture was taken in 1972 and comes from the Old Union Canal Society Archive. They used to organise boaters' evenings where old boatmen and waterways staff were invited to a pub, with food laid on. I have sent them copies of the picture and hope that some more stories may come back.

Other pictures on the computer brought out more information. The 1950's festival of boats in Harborough was attended by his father, who often went off to events where he might see old boating friends. On the Harborough

picture there are a pair of Ovaltine boats which he said only carried coal, 28tons on the motor and 32 on the butty.

Charlie kept a couple of ferrets. When the got to spots they knew were good, he went off with the ferrets, meanwhile his wife and young Charles went into the felids on the other side of the canal to pick mushrooms. They often came back with a dozen or more rabbits and a small tin bath full of mushrooms. They kept what they wanted, probably a couple of rabbits, then divided the rest of the mushrooms up into bags, that evening the sold rabbits and mushrooms in the pub in the town. This was good off the ration food so they would have done well out of it.



An early photograph of Foxton with an early pleasure boat and skiff hire from the locks.

News from Theodora

Life aboard an old, but not historic, narrow boat.

By Nicholas A Cooke



Introduction

Margaret and I lived in Sproxton (rhymes with boatswain) in the north part of the county of Leicestershire getting on for forty years. It seemed to make sense to move from our big old house a long way from shops and with few buses, to something more suited to us for when we stop being young. We loved living in Sproxton which befriended us right from the beginning. We spent our honeymoon on a narrow boat that we hired from Constellation Cruisers on the Macclesfield Canal and arrived straight back from there to live in the same house that we occupied until we left the village. Deciding to live on a narrow boat at the end of that time has a certain symmetry! Having bought a little old house in Herefordshire and completing the selling of our house in Sproxton we became free to live aboard.

Just so that you have a date to think about, we left our temporary moorings at Sileby Mill on 27th April 2014.

In the next chapters I will try to answer the usual questions. People who aren't familiar with the live-aboard life ask at least these:

1. How do you keep warm in winter?
4. How much does it cost to moor?

Then they go on to ask about the more interesting stuff. I will give answers to these questions and a whole lot more.

Who is Theodora, what is she?

Theodora is a narrow boat, a Brum Tug, sixty feet long and nearly seven feet wide. She was called Theodora when we bought her and we saw no reason to change her name, but she was originally called, long before we bought her in 2006, Kingswood Lady. She is rather unusual in that in the sixty feet of her length only about thirty five of them are enclosed by cabin. The remaining length is taken up with about three feet of space forward of the deck boards. The deck boards are those triangular bits at

the front of a narrowboat which are sometimes painted with roses.

Theodora's roses were painted by Margaret who is in charge of all things decorative. Next comes some five feet of locker space in which we put the folding bikes and the freezer and much else.

Next comes the open hold space which, in the summer, takes the place of your patio at home and in the winter is somewhat in the nature of a garden shed. Margaret makes sure that it is tidy. She keeps me up to the mark with tidiness, does Margaret. The area between the deck boards and the cabin front can be covered with black cloths made of acrylic canvas. Aft of the cabin is the cruiser stern. Theodora's cruiser stern looks a little like an oversized traditional stern. Under the boards in the stern lives the engine. That is my concern. The highly reliable engine is a stalwart of many canal boats of the latter half of the 20th century. It is a BMC 1.5 with indirect raw water cooling. Theodora is unusual in that the engine is mounted back to front with a belt drive from the engine to the propeller shaft.

The cabin layout is, from forward to aft: saloon, galley, bathroom with small bath and shower, hand wash basin and Portapotti. Unless I get persistent requests to talk about lavatorial matters, I will skirt around this topic. It is one of consuming interest to boaters and when two or three are gathered together the subject is likely to arise.

It seems to me that of the advantages of living on a boat, and there are many, one of the more obvious is that you need to do without most of the stuff that seemed important when you lived on the bank in a house. Living in a narrow boat is good for the soul. The lack of stuff can be very liberating and the consequences of retail therapy mean that it's not at all therapeutic to go shopping for stuff that isn't essential.

In the next chapter, I might write about the move aboard and the first stage of our journeying which was from Sibley towards Worcester, but I might forget and write about something else. We have travelled from Llangollen to the Fens and Middle Levels, and from Skipton to Godalming, from London to Manchester and from Bristol to Goole. Yes, there is much to write about.

I'll be back.

Nick

Twig Balancing at the Cape of Good Hope

11th April 2016

There seems to be something of a pattern developing as this saga continues. The number of words in a chapter seems to bear an inverse relation to the time interval between writing and posting them. This may or may not be good. I leave it to you to decide. We have done a lot since I last wrote so this one might just buck the trend. We will see.

Lent is past. Easter has come and is still with us for some weeks. Whitsun is on its way and all of nature is rejoicing in the lengthening days. As part of nature, we, too, are rejoicing. The log burner is being lit later and turned to a low setting earlier. The clocks have advanced to Greenwich time plus one hour. (I suppose that's all very well but we should be keeping local time. Canal boats travel slowly enough for local time not to be a problem. What does it matter if Oxford clocks lag those in London by four and a half minutes?)

I am quite sure that you are waiting with eager anticipation for a history of the excitement of our gradual progress around and about and up and down the country. I have missed several of the weekly position updates for reasons too boring to mention but I am sure that they will resume so all that remains to write is a summary of what has been happening between the eighth of February and the eleventh of April, 2016. Importantly there have been birthdays for two grandchildren, one son and two sisters. A bit risky mentioning that. It could lead to deep offence if I have forgotten someone. I might get Margaret to check the data. Just in case.

In addition to those important occurrences we have been to Stratford upon Avon. What a place it is! We were early in the season, arriving at the end of March, so the visitor numbers were not too overwhelming. We only had three or four people peering through the windows to see inside Theodora who had been moored there entirely for their

entertainment and historical edification ("They used to carry goods all around England on boats just like this.") One time, we were moored on the Avon just opposite the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. I was minding my own business reading an improving novel in the saloon. Margaret was not on the boat. I believe that she was ashore enjoying retail therapy. In this case the retail therapeutic ingredients involved porridge oats, sherry, leeks and toothpaste or something like that. (I know how to spoil my wife, I am sure you will agree.) *Comme je disait*, I was minding my own business when the rudder was heard to be moving vigorously from port to starboard and back again. After it had done this a few times I got up to see what size of boat was passing too close and creating a disturbing wash. I was mistaken. The rudder was being waved about by a young man who was being admired by a young lady. I am sure that I must have frightened him because in the course of investigation I appeared through the back doors, not three feet (0.9144m) from the tiller and a bit less from the young man. "Excuse me!" I said, politely, "This is our home!" The young lady laughed uproariously but the young man had the grace to look abashed. "Sorry," said he, "I didn't think there was anyone on the boat." I rather think that the boarding a ship without permission is piracy and that piracy is a crime punishable by hanging. On this occasion I allowed clemency to win the day and the young man disappeared with nothing more than a red face for his pains.

The day after, (it was a Sunday, we were just sitting down enjoying the retail therapeutic glass of sherry mentioned in the last paragraph) when I needed to go ashore to adjust the mooring lines or something. I can't exactly remember. This time a group of people exchanged pleasantries and we talked about life aboard. When they asked to come aboard to take photographs I took the unusual step of refusing because the pink fish was done to a turn and Sunday lunch waiteth for no man. I insist that I am usually friendly and enjoy showing off the boat to strangers but I broke my rule on this occasion with a polite word to the effect that it was with regret that I had to refuse because Sunday lunch was ready. I did submit to a group photo with me on the back of the boat though. And I didn't charge any royalties for the taking of the photo of Theodora and me. (Margaret had wisely remained below).

Being a tourist attraction has many downsides, I am sure that you will agree. Being a tourist, though, has many upsides. We went to see 'Hamlet'. I told my sister, Charlotte, that we were going and she retorted that I should find something else. "Hamlet is a miserable play," she explained, "the grave digger scene is good, though." I have to confess that one of my experiences in life has not been knowing anything about Hamlet. This makes me feel like an out and out philistine (is it racist to say so?). But it was the only play that was on so we went to see it with an entirely open minds. I felt rather privileged, actually. The other 59,999,995 people in the United Kingdom have prior knowledge of the plot. I knew

nothing apart from the fact the words "To be or not to be." appeared somewhere in the course of the action. I watched it much as a commoner in the pit of the Globe must have watched it: keyed up in the action and heart wrenched by the tragedy of Ophelia's death. What a treat! How could I have reached my advanced age and not seen such a play? We will be back in the autumn to see 'The Tempest'. I know rather more about that but haven't seen or read it for more years than I intend to confess to. (I know. A preposition is a bad word to end a sentence with. But I don't care on this occasion.)

We bought tickets, which will last a year, to see all of the Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust properties. We spent much time there and got our money's worth. I hadn't realised that it was an important Shakespearean anniversary this week. We got extra value as part of the general jollification.

As you see, canalling goes from one delight to another. This morning we boated up the Radford Locks going south on the Grand Union between Warwick and Braunston. We caught up with a boat called Travellers' Joy and, since they were wide locks capable of holding two narrow boats, we went up together. We chatted cheerfully about this, that and the other. Toilets were mentioned. Toilets are always mentioned when narrow boaters meet. Have I said that before in an earlier chapter? David and Trishia, in Traveller's Joy are not continuous cruisers like us. They sensibly live in a house in the winter and cruise in the

summer. They asked questions about the life and one of them was "What did we really not enjoy?" That stumped me and it was not until I had discussed the matter with Margaret, that I came up with the tightness of the locks on the Calder and Hebble navigation. I imagine that I would have mentioned it in a previous chapter but the problem there is that the boat is too small for the locks and you have to be a bit creative about using them. I liked the challenge but Margaret is much more sensible and was well aware of the dangers. The point of all this is that we are liking the life very much and the difficulties are as nothing compared with the advantages. I am just thankful that the wide variety of human preferences means that everyone doesn't enjoy continuous cruising on the English canals.

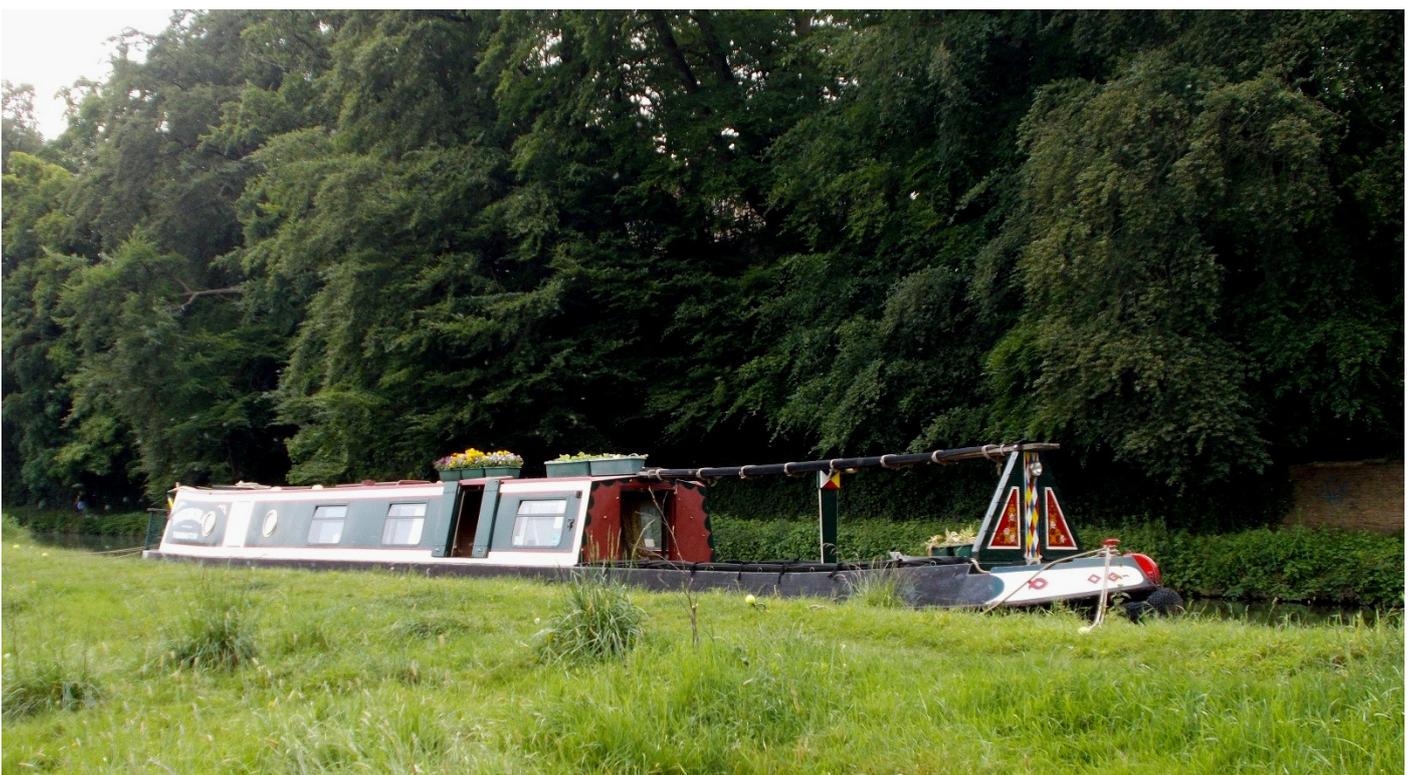
One of the major challenges of recent boating was Hatton Locks. I don't need to go into detail because we have done

Hatton a couple of times since we started living aboard. Just south of Hatton the canal passes close to a traditional pub called 'The Cape of Good Hope'; to my shame I have not yet visited. That is a treat in store. It is only two yards from the canal and four yards from the lock. The entertainment for me, as I waited for the lock to fill, was the sight of a wood pigeon feeding on ash buds, sooty brown and nearly as black as they were in February. April has swollen them a little and, if the weather is kind enough to bring the oak into leaf first, will be opening and in leaf in mid-May. The wood pigeon was too heavy for the twigs and pirouetted and flapped and flapped again and flew off. A hungry wood pigeon.

I will be back.

Nick

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Museum Accreditation 1644

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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.

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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

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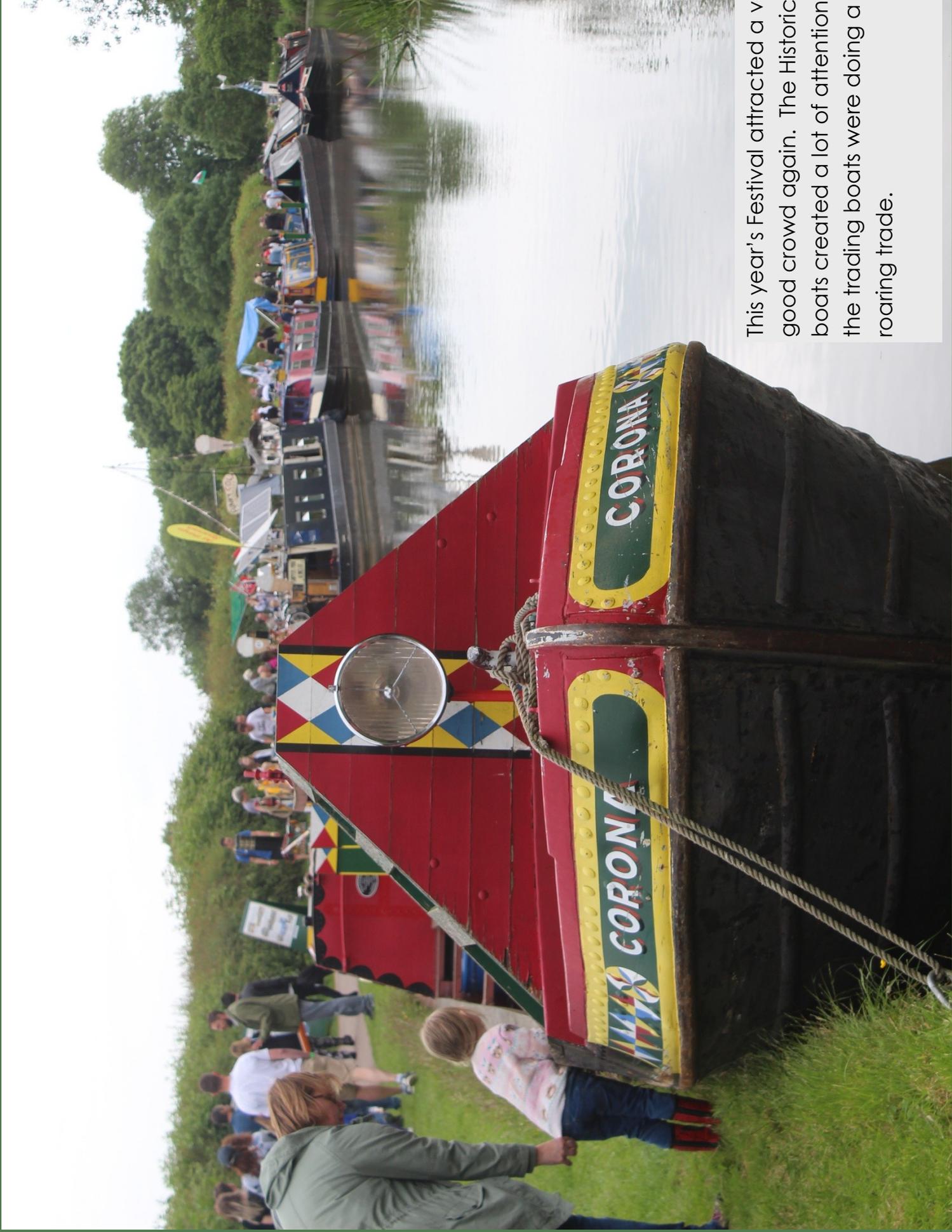


Above - The feeder runs in to the canal near to the bottom lock.

Left - The old feeder control gear.

Bottom—The stream goes under the canal in the garden of the Bridge 61 pub.





This year's Festival attracted a very good crowd again. The Historic boats created a lot of attention and the trading boats were doing a roaring trade.