

## Newsletter of IWA Lee & Stort Branch April 2010

### Welcome to Our Branch

We warmly welcome many members who are transferring from Hertford Branch which has sadly been obliged to close down at least for the foreseeable future. Hertford Branch was one of the first to be formed in IWA. The closure was made necessary because, in spite of many appeals, no members came forward to join or replace those Committee members who had kept the Branch going long after it had been reasonable for them to expect to hand over. Let us hope that we can keep Lee & Stort Branch going strong without encountering a similar problem.

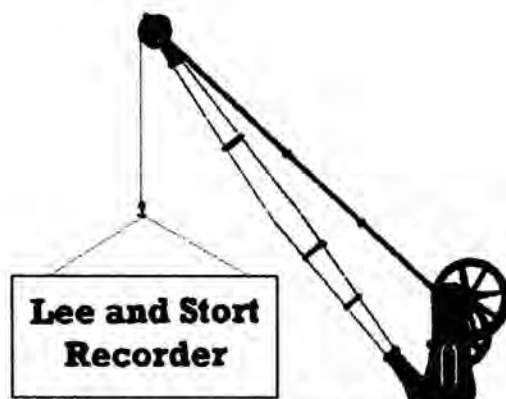
### Save Our System-SOS 2010

The campaign to protect the future of our waterways is being led by IWA's Navigation Committee but there is something that every member, with access to a computer, can do to help. If you have not already done so sign the e-petition on the No. 10 website. Thousands have already signed and this has caused the Government planners to stop and think. The more signatures that are added the more notice they will take. This petition is open until November 2010 so it will still be valid whoever wins the election. Just as important as your own signature is to get all your friends, relations and colleagues to sign as well. Click-  
<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/protectourcanals/> What could be simpler?

You can also find an example letter to send to your MP on the IWA website and if you come face to face with local or national politicians don't miss the opportunity to raise waterways funding issues.

### WRG 40 Years On

Congratulations to the Waterways Recovery Group (WRG) which is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. There is probably no comparable group of such dedicated volunteers. The waterways provide a natural catalyst for enthusiasm and an alternative such as a Motorways Recovery Group would probably take off like a lead balloon. WRG volunteers come from a wide background and many are victims of modern working conditions with constraints which give little chance for self-expression. Computers, central heating, air conditioning and other molly-coddling devices have their advantages but there is



something fundamental in the make up of many people that pine for fresh-air, sun, rain, mud and a make-shift bed in a Scout hut or village hall. The success of the WRG organisation is built on hard work with a meaningful objective, lively and high spirited relaxation and the associated comradeship. And they sometimes drink beer and fall in love! Many miles of canals which we now enjoy would not have been restored without the past efforts of dedicated scrub-bashers, diggers, chain-saw operatives and bricklayers of the WRG. And let us not forget those who plan the work camps and cook the meals. Long may they all wear their red shirts with pride.

### Transport Appeal

If you have a roomy vehicle, which would help the Ware Boat Festival, the Committee would like to hear from you. Short distance transport of items such as tables, the gazebo, and barbecues, is needed to set up the event on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> July and to close on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> July. Road transport can be a problem simply because many of the regular volunteers arrive by boat.

### Vacancies

Checking my file I note that this is my 48<sup>th</sup> newsletter written since 1995 when I innocently put up my hand to volunteer at an AGM. At this meeting someone unkindly suggested that if I was prepared to edit a newsletter I might as well be Secretary as well! Now that so much water has passed under the bridge and membership has changed a great deal I feel justified in repeating an article on River Names which I first used as a space filler several years ago. Which reminds me, is there somebody else out there, recently retired perhaps, who would like a hobby task such as Editor or Secretary? Yes you can!



## Dates for Your Diary

Mon 12th April	Grand Canal, China	Liam D'Arcy-Brown
Thur. 15th April	London Region AGM	Pirate Club, Camden
1st - 3rd May	Canalway Cavalcade	Little Venice
Mon 10th May	Natter & Noggin	
Mon 14th June	Natter & Noggin	
2nd - 4th July	Ware Boat Festival	
28 - 30th August	IWA National Festival	Beale Park River Thames
Sun 5th September	Angel Festival	Islington
Mon 11th October	Lifejacket the prequel!	Banny
Mon 8th November	London Waterways	John Merrill



*All Monday meetings are held at The New Inn Roydon, Essex starting at 8 p.m.*

## Past Events

### Lifejackets - February

On noting this event in my diary I feared that it might not be very interesting and attendance would be poor. I could not have been more wrong. Banny held our attention in spite of, or perhaps because of, diversions to witches and wizards, the laws of thermo-dynamics and pictures of a favourite dog. It was full house in our usual meeting room and we left with a much better understanding of the advertised subject.

### Towpath Tidy

On 1st March our IWA Branch was well represented as part of a large group of volunteers at Bishop's Stortford. We cut back vegetation and cleared litter. It was also a great opportunity to network with BW and the Mayor of Bishop's Stortford.

### AGM-March

It never ceases to surprise me that we always seem to make our AGM a well-attended social evening. There was a worthwhile discussion and we were pleased to welcome, James Kennerly our new London Region Chairman introduced by our retiring Chairman Roger Squires, and our other old friends Doug and Molly Beard.

*Copies of the Minutes of this meeting are available on request from the Secretary.*

## Future Events

### The Grand Canal of China- April

By the time you read this newsletter it will probably be too late to remind you to come!

### Canalway Cavalcade

Several boats are going from this branch and anyone coming up by Public Transport will get a warm welcome.

### Ware Boat Festival

If you have just joined our Branch you will soon realise that this annual event is our biggest undertaking and calls for volunteers to help. This year the theme is 'creatures great and small'.

## Towpath Improvement

It was good to read that a further section of the Lee towpath was improved last autumn between Waltham Town Lock and Cheshunt Lock. It was also good to see 'Clitheroe', a Liverpool wide-beam boat being loaded at Rye House with the building materials used.

## Local River History

You can find a great deal of information on the Rivers Lee & Stort on the website which has been painstakingly prepared by local historian Richard Thomas. [www.leeandstort.co.uk](http://www.leeandstort.co.uk)



## Man, Horse and Barge

When walking or cruising the Lee you can still see relics from the days when horses pulled barges up and down the Lee. The most obvious evidence is the granite cobbles set across the towpath to help horses to get a grip on bridge gradients. Those horses were absolutely huge in the eyes of a small boy. I still have a very vivid image from when I stood watching a horse starting to move a stationary barge which had just come up through Ponders End Lock.



As the horse struggled to move forward it produced impressive showers of sparks generated between its steel shoes and the granite cobbles. I remember leaping back to a safer distance from this awesome, fiery monster. But what was it really like for those men and their horses? Fortunately a record has been made by Branch member and waterways historian Richard Thomas. The following information has been taken from Richard's tape recording of Sam Bell who worked as a horseman on the Lee for several years before driving the Lee's first barge-tractor.

"We were what they called horse-drivers. I was 16 at the time and I am 79 now so it was 1937. I came out of London to Ware. That's when I first went horse-driving. Then I learnt the ropes bit by bit. Where the water was deep." Sam was given empty barges to work before taking on loaded 100 tonners which had a draught of 5-feet.

Sam recalled the names of some of the boats. On the Ware run the 100-ton barges were Walton, Warsaw, Ware and Wogan. On the Stort the barges carried 60 tons with a 3.5 feet draught. There was Stormont, Stormy, and other names starting with 's' and also Quebec, Quinton, Quartz, Quail, Quick and Quarry.

Sam referred to the heavy sacks of corn men used to load on to lorries.

"Believe this or not\* they were 2 cwt and a quarter bags (114 kilograms) ..... you'd get them on your back and walk them to the lorry.....I had one or two goes at it, I was 16 then and I used to tremble at the knees. But you got used to it all. You had to do it because they were stricter it the jobs in those days."

*\*Editor's note- Yes I do believe you because I also had a go with one of these 'railway' sacks at the age of 18. Not only did my knees tremble, the weight pushed me flat on the ground!*

Sam mentioned that early in the war a firm called Izzards transported coal from Hertford basin to the Small Arms works at Enfield Lock.

"The Conservancy didn't look after the river like they do today. (Don't let BW read this!) The towing path was in a

terrible condition, deep mud. Sometimes it was difficult to get the barges moving, but we could use barge poles and so on. The tow-ropes were flax in the early days, big heavy things that were difficult to coil and aim. But then they finished up with cotton about as thick as your thumb. We had different lengths for different jobs. You were handicapped by what they call cattle gates. You'd be behind the horse and call out or just pull it over, the horses knew their job, trained to it. But with a tractor you had to keep one eye on where you were going and the other on the barge behind you."

When boats passed they did not pass port to port. The loaded barge would pull over, lower its tow-rope and give way to the faster-moving unladen boat.

There was no towpath under some of the Lee bridges so the horse driver would carefully throw the tow-rope to the Skipper who would glide under the bridge and then throw the tow-rope to the horse driver at the other end.

"Although I couldn't swim I used to go across the gates instead of going all the way round."

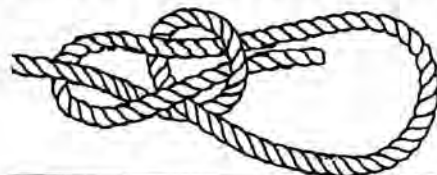
Some of the gates did not have balance beams but were open or shut by pulling on a chain. (*The last of this type was the bottom gate of Ramney Marsh Lock which has now been electrified.*)

"There was a crew of two, one on the barge and one with the horse. Always two of you. You didn't have someone going ahead setting the locks. The horse driver had a whip and he would crack it and it would go off like a pistol. Especially along the river you could hear one of them popping from one lock to another. And the lock keeper would get the lock ready for you. There was no phones but there was a lock keeper at every lock."

The horse was normally stabled at Ware and the horseman would start very, very early in the morning cleaning, feeding, harnessing, and mucking out the stable before, for example, riding on the horse to Waltham Abbey before bringing a loaded-barge back to Ware. Sometimes the horse and barge might be away for three days which meant that the horse had to be stabled away from Ware and the boat left overnight. The horseman then commuted by train.

Sam described his hardest-ever working day. There were 31 tons of flour at Edwards Flour Mills at Bishop's Stortford which had to catch a tide at London. After a very early start he rode on the horse from Ware to Burton's Mill at Sawbridgeworth, hitched up to an empty barge and took it to Bishop's Stortford. There he carried on his back all 31 tons of flour, in 168 lb sacks, along a plank on to the barge where the Skipper stowed them. They then took the barge all the way to Waltham Abbey where another barge crew was waiting to take over.

That was quite a day. That was quite a journey. JS





## River Names

If you study maps of the British Isles you will soon be struck by the repetition and similarity of several river names. For example there are no fewer than five Avons, five Stours and at least three rivers Ouse. There are also variations in spelling such as Wye, Wey, and Medway, Trent and Tarrant, Rea and Rhee, Esk, Usk and the unfortunately named Uck. Trent and Tarrant both mean torrent. 'Afon' is the Welsh word for river which explains all those Avons. Presumably when the indigenous Britons migrated westwards they left their river names behind. 'Cam' means crooked (engineers note camshaft) hence the Cam in East Anglia, the Camel in Cornwall and Cambrook in Somerset. The Tees, which is a boiling, surging river is probably connected with the Welsh word tes which means heat. The Lugg near Hereford is a rushing river of white water which takes its name from 'llug' which is Welsh for light.

Looking further afield there is a likely relationship between the Alt in Lincolnshire and another Alt which is a tributary of the Danube. Likewise the Moselle, a minor tributary of the lower Lee has a much grander cousin in France also called Moselle. There is almost certainly a connection between the Soar in Leicestershire and the Saar, and Serre on the Continent. Incidentally there is not much difference between the spelling of Rhine and Rhone.

The Swales in Yorkshire and Kent are both rapid rivers with a name related to the fast-moving swallow and it is significant that there is a river Schwale in Germany. *If you are still reading this you may not be interested to know that as an evacuee I used to collect minnows in a jam jar in Warwickshire's river Swift which now passes under the M1 near Junction 22.*

Some rivers are aptly named such as the slow-moving Idle in Lincolnshire, the Puddle alias Piddle in Dorset and rivers which meander including the Weaver, Waver, Wandle, Wantsum, Wensum and also the Snake in North America.

The Sow in Staffordshire and Sowe in Warwickshire are derived from an old English word 'seaw' which means liquid or juice. Perhaps you are familiar with the wild plant sowthistle which has a milky sap. Note I use the word 'wild plant' because I fear that 'weed' is probably no longer politically correct.

Derwent means a river where oaks are present and this also applies to the related rivers names Darwen, Darent, and Dart. The Fowey, from the Latin word 'fagus' means the river with beeches and the Ivel, Ive and Yeo probably all mean the river with yews. Thames is thought to mean dark river and likewise Tame, Teme, Tamar, and Tavy. The Taffy in South Wales is probably more of the same.

We seem to have acquired some of our river names like Soar, Moselle and Alt when Europeans brought their names with them when they migrated to England and the indigenous folk migrated westwards. Is it not significant that the Soar, Moselle and Alt are all on the east side of Britain? JS

## Money Matters

At our AGM in March the Treasurer's Statement showed that the Balance of our Branch's funds at 31 Dec 2009 was £4926.02. Total income for the year was £1183.74 and expenditure was £463.36. Of the Balance, £1985.46 is still designated, or 'ring-fenced' to be spent on the Lee and Stort because money was inherited by the Branch from the former Lea and Stort Rivers Society over 10 years ago. Our Branch has spent some of the inherited money on bridge plaques but it has proved to be difficult to find an appropriate use for this money which would not normally be the responsibility of British Waterways. In the discussion at the AGM a suggestion was made that the 'ring-fenced' sum should be released to the main fund or 'de-ring-fenced' if such a word makes sense. This could only be decided after a vote at our next AGM following a formal proposal to our Chairman at least 6 weeks in advance.

It is not the aim of a Charity to keep large sums of money in the Bank and our Committee welcomes suggestions how the Branch's money should be spent in support of our waterways.

## Planning Matters

### Bridge at Hertford.

Over the last 10 years we have campaigned to keep the Navigation open as far as Castle Hall so that in the unforeseen future community and other boats, can cruise in this interesting part of the town. The threat of a low bridge, suitable for wheelchairs, has surfaced again. We now learn that developers have set aside £180,000 for a bridge to connect the town with the planned Sainsbury's supermarket on the old brewery site. This is not the proposed bridge from Folly Island which would not be a problem for navigation. A plan has not yet been submitted for public scrutiny but we must keep a watch on developments. Perhaps there is need for a 'keep-this-navigation-open' type campaign cruise with appropriate press coverage.



## World First at Cheshunt Wharf

You might prefer to just read about waterways in this newsletter but John Milton, our Treasurer, is a railway enthusiast and he specifically asked me if I knew anything about a little known railway which terminated at Cheshunt Wharf. He thought he might have seen remnants of it as a boy. Maybe.

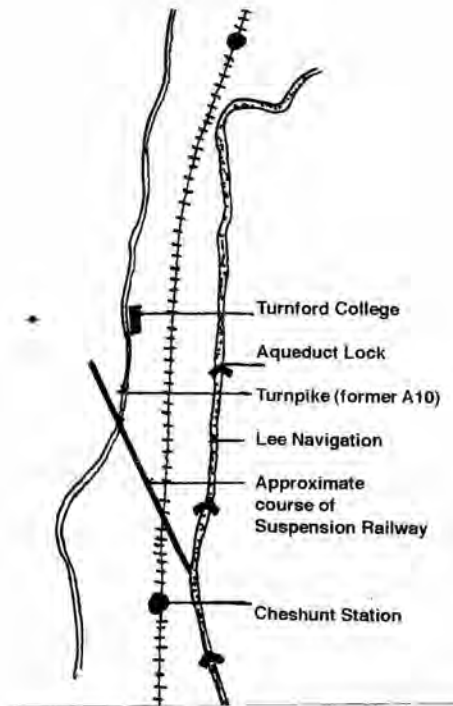
Ask anyone interested in railways what happened in 1825 and you will almost certainly be told about the opening of the first public passenger steam train service between Stockton and Darlington. But this was not the only first-ever railway event that year.

The River Lee and its valley have many claims to be first. The Lee was one of the first rivers tamed for navigation. The first British lock with mitred gates was built at Waltham Abbey and the first all-British heavier-than-air flight was made on the Walthamstow Marshes. On 25<sup>th</sup> June 1825 the World's first passenger-carrying, suspension railway, or monorail, was opened between Gews Corner, Turnford and Cheshunt Wharf. This was 3 months and 2 days before so much attention was focussed on the opening of that other railway at Darlington.

The story begins in about 1806 when London was developing rapidly and when a Mr Gibbs started manufacturing bricks at Rowley's (or Rowland's) Field near Cheshunt. There was a considerable distance between the wharf and the area where the bricks were made from Lee Valley's 'brick-earth' located to the west of the gravel beds. The problem of transporting a weighty product called for an inventor with a state-of-the-art solution. Mr Gibbs got in touch with Henry Robinson Palmer who, not long before, had designed a suspension railway to connect the Thames with the Victualling Yard in the Royal Docks at Deptford. At Cheshunt a metal rail was supported on both sides by posts made from ship's timbers. Large wheels ran along this rail and supported paired waggons on either side.

Henry Robinson had the best contacts to lay his hands on a good supply of second hand ship's timbers. A horse pulled the waggons along the rail.

For the formal opening day the waggons of this novel railway were adapted to carry passengers. It was a day for celebrations and events included displays of flags and dancing from many countries. However carrying passengers for one day was probably nothing more than a PR exercise.

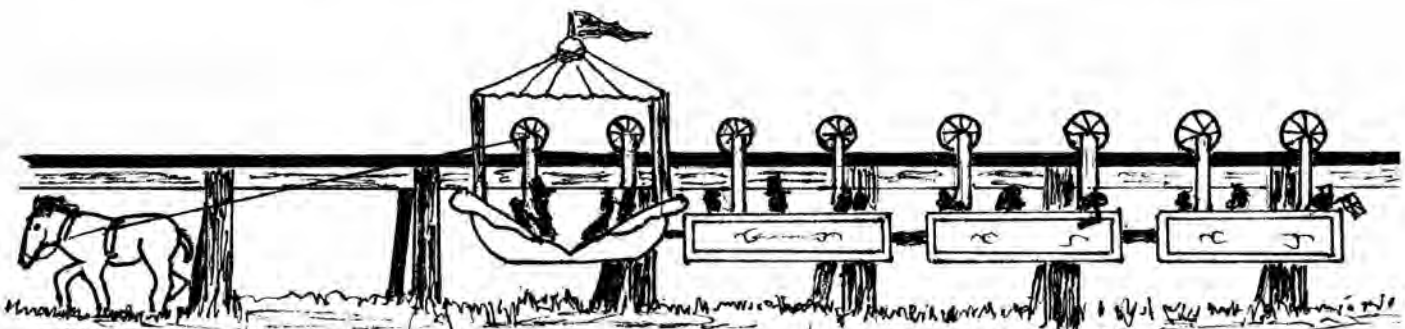


Being the second or third suspension railway in the World would not have attracted as many headlines. Using information from current maps the Cheshunt railway must have been about a mile long. The drawing of the train on the opening day shows a determined effort to separate first class passengers from the 'brick-class'.

An old print shows the railway leading across the marsh to the wharf with a crane and a sailing barge alongside.

By 1825 the Regents Canal was already open and the barge may have been unloaded in City Road Basin from where building materials were then distributed.

It is not known how long the Cheshunt Railway survived because it never got recorded on a contemporary map. The steam railway between London and Bishop's Stortford was built in 1840 and the suspension railway may have had to give way to its superior. There is a record that there was a hinged device in the structure of the suspension railway where it had to cross the turnpike. This must mean the former A10. The Gibb's brickworks kept going for a century and the large pit it created was filled with refuse in the 1930's. JS (also see *Monorails on p7.*)



## Very Able Seaman

*Branch member Roy Bowman recalls his youthful years at sea under the Red Ensign.*

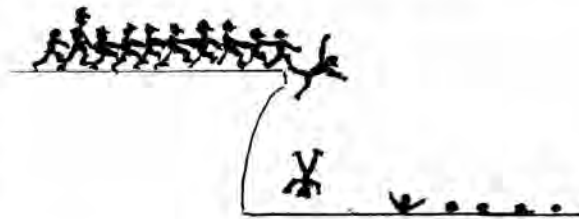
Suspend a small trainee in a blanket and drag him backwards and forwards and his passive co-operation will help you to make a polished floor shine like glass. This was a useful tip shared by trainees, allegedly fed on stale bread and cockroaches and paid just 5 shillings a week. This was 50 years ago and the location was the National Sea Training School at Sharpness also known as training ship 'Vindictrix'. If you were prepared to put up with this initiation, which lasted three months, you really were determined to go to sea and from then on conditions and remuneration could only get better. 'Vindictrix' was a former three-masted, German sailing ship and if you venture to the southern end of the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal you can visit the only pub/hotel in Sharpness and find several photographs and other memorabilia of this training ship which is a landmark no more. In the 1960's the Merchant Navy was very much different to what it has become today. Then merchant ships were very much smaller but typically with a crew of over 100. Roy's really big day, 7th April 1960, began at King George V Dock, London. Here he reported to 'Escalante', as a Deck Boy, bound for the West Indies with a general cargo. It was his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and he was to remain a seaman for the next nine years during which he signed for no less than 29 voyages. Step by step, with an unblemished record, Roy progressed from Deck Boy through several intermediate stages to Able Seaman.

His many destinations included North and South America, Australia and New Zealand, North Africa and various ports in Europe. He passed several times through the Suez and Panama canals. The established routine was general cargos out of the UK and return with food crops and commodities such as iron ore, sulphur, tallow and guano. After grain had been loaded, for example at Mobil in Alabama, commodity traders would sell and re-sell the cargo several times whilst still at sea. In consequence the Skipper had no idea of his destination port before he set sail! It could be Norway or it could be Liverpool.

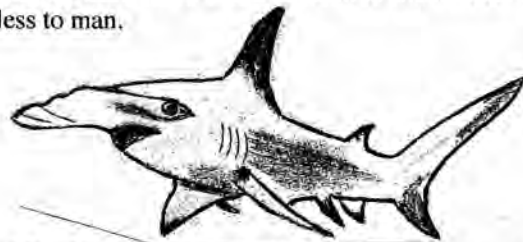
With a very large crew discipline had to be maintained and the usual punishment was loss one or more day's pay. Roy recalled a Scottish Skipper with the nickname 'Two Fisted Cameron' because he loved to fight. When carpeted, offenders would be offered the choice of the loss of one day's pay or a fight on deck with the Skipper. Roy remembers coming aboard once, after a *few* drinks, but remembers little immediately afterward. For his own well-being Captain Cameron had knocked all 6ft of Roy unconscious. On one trip the general cargo included 12 first class passengers and as so easily happens at sea a lady passenger attracted the attention of one of Roy's fellow seaman. For breaking the rules the fine was a day's pay and a further £1 for broaching the cargo!

Another Skipper, who realised that he was dying, had managed to bluff his way through the medical checks because he wanted to be buried at sea. In due course Roy volunteered to sew him tightly into his burial canvas with the incentive of six hours overtime pay and a bottle of top quality rum. In true nautical tradition he had to pass one stitch through the deceased nose to ensure that there was no sign of life. In the meantime the bottle of rum had been delivered to Roy's Cabin. Upon his return, and understandably deserving a drink, he was not pleased to find that his 'shipmates' had consumed the whole bottle!

Roy's main work was to maintain the ship and its equipment and this meant a great deal of painting. But life wasn't all work and no play particularly when in port. He remembers a night of celebrations in the Grand Bahamas involving 16 deck hands and a petty officer. On the way back to the ship through the docks, the petty officer persuaded the merry men to follow him in dancing the conga. Unsteady on his feet he predictably fell into the harbour and in true conga fashion all 16 deckhands followed on--- splash, splash -----splash.



Next morning Roy was sobering up and leaning over the ship's rail when he was absolutely horrified to see a 15-foot long shark swimming where he had been swimming himself the night before. It was some time before Roy was told that this hammer-head shark was a resident of the harbour and was harmless to man.



One of Roy's jobs was to paint the mast which towered some 120 feet above the sea in which the ship was rolling from side to side. The rope supporting Roy's harness was attached high up on this mast and he saw an opportunity for a once in a lifetime joyride. Roy detached his harness from the mast and swung a mighty swing which carried him about 30 feet over the sea beyond the starboard side and then back towards the mast. Soon there was an almighty bellow from the Bridge "Get that man secured straight away!" *See page 7*

There are many more of Roy's adventures at sea which ought to be related. Roy now leads a more sober life under the control of Janet on narrowboat Aloysius. JS



## 'Tear Me Off a Strip'- A Cautionary Tale

Those who attended our 2010 AGM may remember that Lisa Alderman and Bob Dunkley simultaneously presented identical raffle tickets to claim their prize. Under the circumstances this was not too serious because the prizes were, at best, unwanted Christmas presents, recycled and repainted kitchenware and confectionary approaching the end of its enjoy-by date. But we could have been raffling a family canal holiday or a weekend in Paris with Craig Haslam or Banny as tour guide. However the honour of the Branch Committee was at stake. If we could not successfully organise a humble raffle could we be entrusted to organise another boat festival?

Immediately after the AGM a full and painstaking investigation was undertaken and the key evidence was the raffle tickets still in the top hat or picked up from tables when the room was cleared. The investigation team was able to identify three surviving tickets bearing the number 41, and similarly three tickets each bearing the numbers 42, 43, 44, and 45. This clearly indicated that two copies of the offending page, each with 5 pairs of tickets had been bound together in the same book.

Who should be blamed? The ticket book bore the post code MK16 9PX. Milton Keynes already gets enough stick so we will let that pass. The ticket book had been supplied by Banny who should therefore carry the blame for not purchasing raffle tickets of the highest quality.

Lessons have been learnt. For peace of mind and for a peaceful raffle inspect the tickets and do not invite purchasers to tear out their own strips. Who said that running a raffle is child's play?

## History in the looking Glass( Yrotsih)

In another Region's current newsletter there is a report on a talk by seasoned traveller Chris Coburn who crossed the Channel in narrowboat Progress which had been specially adapted for sea conditions. But did Chris really say this?

"The first trip was for the anniversary of the *Dunkirk landings* in company with the little ships, some of whom had taken part in the *rescue from the Normandy beaches in 1940.*"

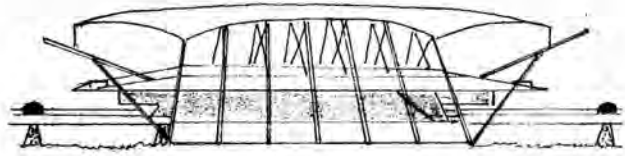
It looks as though somebody's word processor needs attention! This set me thinking about history in reverse.

As the sun set in the eastern sky, good King Harold pulled an arrow from his eye, saved the day, and drove William and his merry men all the way back to Normandy and made them learn to speak proper English. In 1807 a tear rolled down the cheek of MP William Wilberforce when at last he realised his dream of introducing slavery throughout the British Empire. After 1845 there was a massive migration from USA to Ireland attracted by an abundance of potatoes. Throughout the 19th century, the railways found it

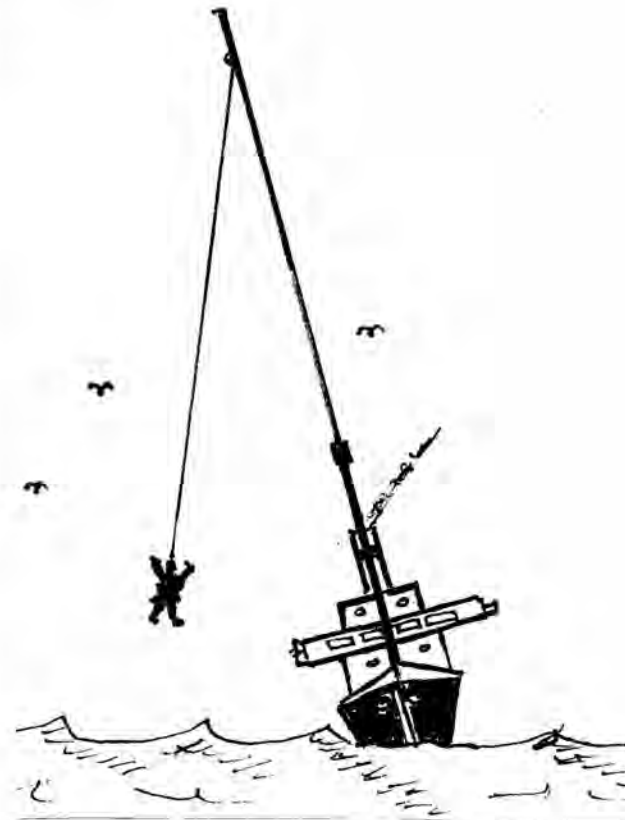
increasingly difficult to compete with the speed of water transport so the canal companies bought them out.

## Monorails

The first ever monorail device, a 'road on pillars' was built in 1820 in the village of Mychkovo near Moscow by Ivan Kirillovich Elmanov. However would we have acquired that incredibly interesting but useless piece of information without access to the internet? Unlike other monorails the wheels used in Ivan's device were attached to the pillars and not to the carriages. Such a primitive, foreign, all-wooden device could never evolve into a self-propelled vehicle.



Engineer Henry Robinson Palmer patented his horse-drawn suspension railway in 1821. Some of his other creations were used in the London Docks. Henry was born in 1785 in Hackney so it might be claimed that the Lee flowed in his veins (Yuk!). Of course Henry Robinson Palmer should not be confused with Heath Robinson, another famous British inventor.



*Irony is buying a suit with two pairs of trousers and then badly scorching the jacket*

**IWA Lee & Stort Branch – Committee Members April 2010**

**Banny Banyard (Joint Events Officer)**

1, Churchfield,  
Church End  
Little Hadham, Herts.  
SG11 2DZ  
Tel: 01279 771552  
Mob: 07860 669279  
email: [banny@cwcom.net](mailto:banny@cwcom.net)

**Carole Beeton  
(Membership Secretary)**

4, Lanthorn Close,  
Broxbourne, Herts.  
EN10 7NR  
Tel: 01992 468435  
Email: [robandcarole@msn.com](mailto:robandcarole@msn.com)

**Mike Clark**

c/o 41 Park Meadow,  
Hatfield, Herts.  
AL9 5HA  
Mob: 0794 1282304  
Email: [narrowboatowner@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:narrowboatowner@hotmail.co.uk)

**Les Hunt (Vice Chairman, Publicity Officer)**

4, Carl House, Commons Road,  
Harlow.  
CM18 7SL  
Tel: 01279 860507  
Mob: 07801260579  
email: [boater.les@o2.co.uk](mailto:boater.les@o2.co.uk)

**Terry Stembridge, (Joint Events Officer)**

32, Elm Close, Epping Green,  
Epping, Essex.  
01992 575702  
email: [terry.stembridge@btinternet.com](mailto:terry.stembridge@btinternet.com)

**Craig Haslam (Chairman)**

c/o The Lock Keepers Cottage,  
Amwell Lane,  
Stanstead Abbots, Herts.  
SG12 8DR

Mob: 07956 848025  
email: [boatyboy96@hotmail.com](mailto:boatyboy96@hotmail.com)

**John Milton (Treasurer)**

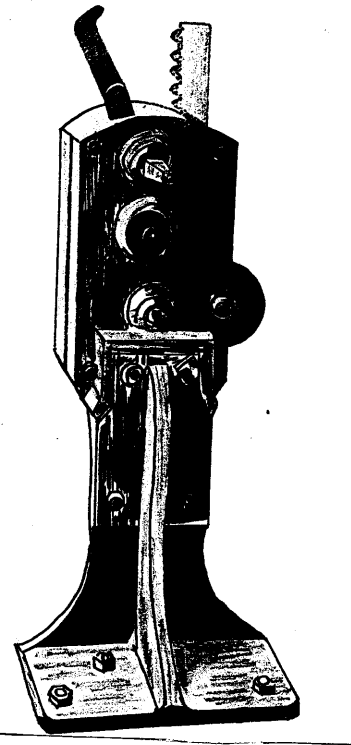
The Lock Keepers Cottage  
Amwell Lane,  
Stanstead Abbots, Herts.  
SG12 8DR.  
Tel: 01920 870068  
email: [stansteadlock@hotmail.com](mailto:stansteadlock@hotmail.com)

**John Shacklock (Secretary, Newsletter Editor,  
Navigation/Planning Officer)**

5, Roselands Avenue,  
Hoddesdon, Herts.  
EN11 9AH  
Tel: 01992 465643  
Mob: 07979 801487  
email: [jmshacklock@btinternet.com](mailto:jmshacklock@btinternet.com)

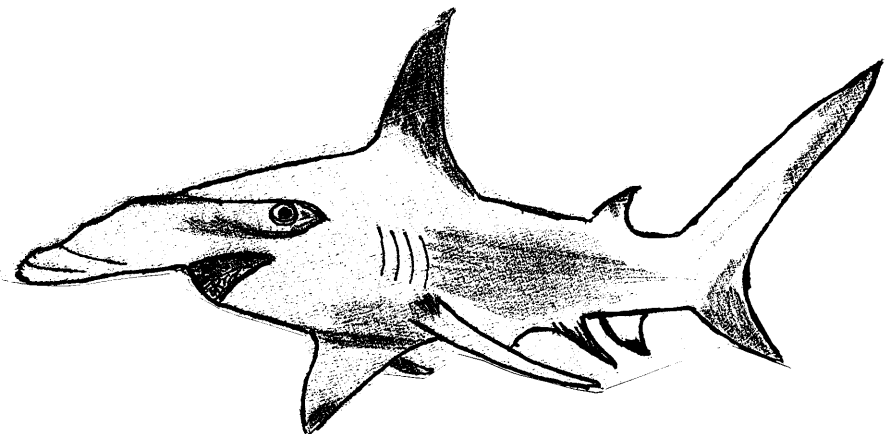
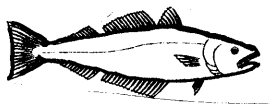
**Frank Wallder**

12 Bray Lodge,  
High Street Cheshunt,  
Waltham Cross,  
Herts. EN8 0DN  
Tel/Fax: 01992 636164  
Mob: 07985013032  
email: [naymenachur@talktalk.net](mailto:naymenachur@talktalk.net)



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*Charity Registration number: 212342*



*"We are going to Ware on 2nd July  
for All Creatures Great and Small"*