

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kennet & Avon Canal project

BRITISH Waterways, working with the Trustees of the Town and Manor of Hungerford and Natural England, is to carry out a £400,000 project to improve a section of the Kennet & Avon Canal.

Over 1500m of eroded canal bank will be reinstated and a 2800m section of the canal from Cobblers Lock and Hungerford Swingbridge and also between Dun Mill Lock and Wire Lock will be dredged, removing around 5000sq m of silt from the canal.

The stabilisation of the bank, which will be protected with pre-planted coir rolls, will reduce the risk of water passing from the canal to the River Dunn and affecting the game fishery, and the dredging will improve the depth of the canal making it easier for boats to travel along this stretch of the waterway.

Remembering slavery

INTERNATIONAL Slavery Remembrance Day will be observed at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, on Sunday 23 August. The anniversary of the 1791 Haitian slave rebellion will be marked with interactive discussion, live performance, music, singing, and poetry. Starting at 11.30, all ages are welcome, admission free.

Disposing of flares

THE process for disposing of time-expired pyrotechnics (TEPs) – the distress flares which coastal and river boaters carry – changed in April. The number of HM Coastguard sites which are able to accept TEPs has been reduced to 17 licensed locations, see www.mcga.gov.uk

HM Coastguard will only accept TEPs from recreational water users but these facilities should only be used if all other disposal options have been exhausted. If you have out-of-date or damaged flares you should first contact the supplier from whom you originally brought them to see if they offer a take-back scheme; some local authorities also operate disposal facilities.

The RNLI also has one facility that is licensed to accept TEPs.

Tweets from Foxton

THE Foxton Inclined Plane Trust is urging supporters to following the museum's news on Twitter. "The more followers we get the higher up the listing we go and the more publicity the Foxton Inclined Plane Trust and Foxton canal museum gets," said curator and company secretary Michael Beech.

He added: "If you have something about Foxton which is worth tweeting about please send it to me."

■ <http://twitter.com/DigitaCanal>

Seeking descendants of waterways visionaries!

A SEARCH has begun to trace the descendants of a eight signatories responsible for shaping the Grand Union and River Ouse waterway between Bedford and Milton Keynes during 1811.

The search project was launched to coincide with the Bedford River Festival held by the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust (B&MK) which, following over ten years of intense campaigning has pushed the infamous 'missing 26km link' between the waterways network to the top of the agenda among a number of key agencies and bodies.

The signatories were, John Foster (1765-1831, a landowner of Brickhill House, who also owned sugar estates in Jamaica); John Rawlins (wine merchant); RW Robinson; John Emery; Samuel Gifford; William White (corn merchant and miller at Kempston Mill. He died in July 1815 after falling from his horse in Clapham Road); Charles Bailey and Richard Leach. Each signed the pivotal petition during a meeting held by the then Mayor, Charles Short, on 4 November, 1811 at Shire Hall.

Readers who think they can help are asked to contact Alan Mayo tel. 01234 409737 email alanjbmayo@ntlworld.com or Neil Hayes tel. 01234 826216 or email Nhayes@aol.com

Sail of the century

Clive Tully takes part in a special celebration

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: CLIVE TULLY

IT HAD all seemed so easy up until now. I'd had the tiller in my hands and was steering *Albion* along the River Bure quite comfortably. But now we'd reached an open stretch of river where the wind could catch her great black sail, and we no longer needed the small tender with its outboard nudging us along from behind. Now suddenly the tiller required a gargantuan effort to push it over. No power-assisted steering here!

"Try and keep her away from the bank," advised skipper Henry Gowman. We had a couple of reefs tied in the sail as it was, so I had to conclude that I probably wasn't built for sailing wherries. And to think that in their heyday, these boats were crewed simply by the skipper and a boy.

Albion is very nearly the last of around 300 or so trading wherries that once plied the rivers of the Norfolk Broads. Before the railways came along, they were the prime means of moving goods around. Their unique design included a counterbalanced mast situated well forward so it could be collapsed in under a minute to enable her to glide beneath bridges over the rivers, and a gaff-rigged sail which could be set high to catch the wind above the trees.

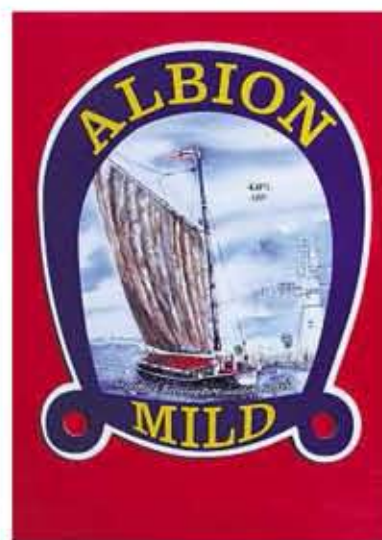
The last time I saw her was before the winter in 2009, when she was about to undergo the last in a rolling 10-year programme of repairs. Now she's back in commission, and I've joined her on a special outing to celebrate the culmination of the £200,000 restoration project. She positively gleams with new bright red paintwork, and for a grand old lady 112 years old, she's looking in excellent health.

Imposing sight

Built in 1898 in Oulton Broad, 60 feet long and weighing 23 tons, with 1500sq ft of black sail, *Albion* was originally sailed by a crew of two, delivering coal and crops to Broads villages. But by the turn of the last century, wherries were already in decline. She was rescued in 1949 by a group of enthusiasts looking to preserve an example of a wherry before they were all lost. As it happened, the one they chose was unique. *Albion* was the only carvel construction (flush planking) wherry ever built – all the others were traditional clinker (overlapping planks).

For the first few years they tried to keep her going as a cargo boat, but it proved uneconomic, and she was converted in much the same way that other cargo wherries had been 50 years previously, with the hold cleaned out and rigged to take passengers on early Broads holidays.

Now owned by the Norfolk Wherry Trust, she has been taking groups out on charters on a regular basis ever since, thrilling not just those lucky enough to be on board, but anyone else who





Albion skipper Henry Gowman.



Albion approaching Lustre, one of the Hunter's Fleet historic yachts.

happens to see her under sail. It's the most imposing sight, without a doubt. The name *Albion* has resonance with the ancient poetic name for Britain, inspired, apparently, by the whiteness of the cliffs of Dover. In a moment of whimsy, I wonder if there's any connection with the large white spot painted on her bow, intended to improve *Albion's* visibility to oncoming traffic.

Special brew

In fact, our celebration outing is something of a multiple whammy. Every year, National Historic Ships, the organisation responsible for our historic ship heritage, holds a competition for 'Flagship of the Year'. *Albion* was entered, and while she didn't win, for the first time ever a runner-up certificate was awarded – to *Albion*. Tying all this neatly together is the Green Jack Brewery from Lowestoft. They have just brewed a special 'Albion Mild' in support of the *Albion*, and I am to sample the very first production on board. This really is pushing the boat out!

The day is perfect – bright and sunny if a little on the chilly side, with puffy white clouds in the sky and a decent breeze to give *Albion* a chance to stretch her legs on our journey from her base in Ludham to Horning and back. Before we set off, we're shown how to reef the sail, tying reef knots as they were originally intended, to secure the rolled-up lower section of the sail. "They should lie flat if you've done it properly," I'm told.

We don our lifejackets, and Henry gives us a safety briefing. There are points we need to remember about the way various bits move, and of course we have to be doubly mindful of the fact that *Albion* was built in an age long before the health and safety culture. Our Honda-powered dinghy nudges us along Womack Water and out onto the River Bure, where before too long we're under sail and marvelling at the unobstructed views over the surrounding marshes. Not unexpectedly, we're also gaining admiring glances and waves from passers-by in their pleasure cruisers.

It's like that all the way to Horning, where we tie up at the sailing club, and a magnificent lunch appears, courtesy of The Galley delicatessen. And then comes the grand unveiling of the first ever *Albion Mild*. Described by Green Jack as a 4 per cent ABV full-bodied mild, sweet and malty with a dry finish, it certainly complements the fine selection of cheeses we have in front of us. Better still, I have a few bottles to take home!

Crossing paths

The journey back goes all too quickly, but we do get one delightful moment where we cross paths with another classic Broads boat. Next door to *Albion's* base at Ludham is Hunter's Yard, which houses a fleet of historic 1930s wooden yachts, all available for charter. Approaching us is *Lustre*, a sloop-rigged, carvel-built mahogany yacht dating back to 1932. She's a lovely looking boat. Interestingly, there are now one or two modern boat builders emulating the style of the classic Broads yachts, which I guess is the best compliment that can be paid to their timeless beauty.

But for just a moment there are two passing boats with a combined age of 190 years. So maybe it's not so much sail of the century, but nearly two!

FURTHER INFORMATION:

www.wherryalbion.com
www.green-jack.com



A reef knot in its natural environment.



Albion's 50ft mast.



Deli lunch courtesy of The Galley in Horning.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Boating in London during the Olympics?

WATERWAYS users are being urged to complete an online survey to ensure the capital's canals, rivers and docks are prepared to support boaters from the UK and overseas during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games.

Commissioned by British Waterways and supported by a range of navigation authorities, marine and boating associations, it will be open to those who would like to state their preferences on moorings and services in and around London during the Olympics. For more information visit the survey website, which includes links to maps, tourist information and the opportunity to register for news updates. www.surveymonkey.com/s/2012moorings

Washer winner

THE lucky winner of the Karcher Pressure Washer competition which appeared in our June edition is Mrs Spencer Hassell of St Agnes, Cornwall. Thanks to everyone for entering.

Kennet & Avon consultation

A SIX-week consultation has been taking place on proposals to re-classify the Kennet & Avon Canal.

Backed by British Waterways, The Kennet and Avon Canal Trust and by canal supporters, it would see the historic, 87-mile long waterway upgraded from 'remainder' status – one step above a derelict canal – to that of a national 'cruiseway'.

After the consultation, which will finish at the end of August, a decision is expected from Defra.

New TV programme on air

UK Boating – Inland Waterways, a new programme about Britain's canal and river network, has launched on Information TV, Sky 166 and Freesat 402.

Sponsored by River Canal Rescue Ltd, the new show will include a wide range of waterways features, and a growing volume of news and information, gathered from the UK's busy waterways community.

UK Boating – Inland Waterways shows at 8pm on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays on Information TV, on Sky channel 166, Freesat 402 and online at www.information.tv

Ten-year boat show deal

A LANDMARK agreement between Marine Industry Events, British Waterways and Albert Dock Liverpool has secured the Boat Show in Liverpool for the next 10 years.

The show will include floating islands which will be able to accommodate the multi-million pound vessels expected to exhibit at the show taking place from 29 April-8 May next year.

British Waterways the organisation responsible for the 35 hectares of waterspace in Liverpool's South Docks complex has agreed to invest in the inaugural Liverpool Boat Show in a deal worth half-a-million pounds.

The organisation, is contributing more than 600 metres of pontoons for the show which are set to become permanent fixtures in the Albert and Salthouse docks.

Search for serial flasher

WEST Midlands police have set up plain clothes patrols on Birmingham Canal Navigations towpaths between Brownhill, Bloxwich and Walsall to try and catch what they call 'a beer-bellied serial flasher'.

Police believe the man has struck on several occasions over the past few months.

He hides in bushes on the towpath and when women or young girls walk by he jumps out onto the towpath either completely naked or just wearing a T-shirt.

Police are appealing for canal users to immediately call the police if they see the 'towpath flasher'.