

# COATES' CUTTINGS

*The Chelmer Canal Trust's Newsletter*

Registered Charity No 1086112.



**Moored boats below Sandford Lock rising above the landing stage in recent floods**

**Chelmer Canal Trust**

**Issue 40**

**February 2009**

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### **Welcome to a new member:**

Roger Leigh from Brussels

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We welcome members’ photos, articles and other contributions to Coates’ Cuttings. Please e-mail them to [nl@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk](mailto:nl@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk) or post them to Windmill Pasture, Little Waltham Road, Chelmsford , Essex, CM1 7TG.



## **“Caretaker” Editor’s column**

With the recent floods, the new moorings at Sandford (picture on the front cover) had their first real test. While the design of the moorings is certainly not to everyone’s taste, these floods prove that if moorings are installed below a lock, then a considerable rise of floodwater must be allowed for if the boats are to remain safe. These moorings might be symbolic of the changes taking place on the Chelmer. The new vitality which Essex Waterways have engendered is certainly to be welcomed, but with all the “restoration” activity comes the risk that some of the Chelmer’s distinctive and endearing character may be swept away before we realise what we are losing. The Trust is anxious to ensure that this does not happen. Later this year, we plan to host a discussion forum to help identify and preserve those precious idiosyncratic qualities of the Chelmer and Blackwater. The details are still under discussion but in the meantime Dudley Courtman’s article “Prettiness, Seduction, and the Grand Union” his take on some of the issues we face.

While we still seek a “proper” editor for this fine publication, life must go on and I hope you enjoy our mixture of news and historic articles.

Don’t forget that you can also read monthly reports about the exploits of our working parties on the trust website, ([www.chelmercanaltrust.co.uk](http://www.chelmercanaltrust.co.uk)) and we now also have a group on facebook. Look for “Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Enthusiasts”

# **Prettiness, Seduction, and the Grand Union**

Dudley Courtman

As I have journeyed the length of the navigation over many years, often accompanied by bands of aspiring young canoeists, and more recently on missions to remove floating pennywort, I have got to know every reach, quiet corner, weir pool, lock, and bank side. On each trip I have been reminded of how lucky we all are to have such a wonderful wilderness on our doorstep. At every bend a new vista opens set against the backdrop of the Essex landscape, mature trees, water meadows, ancient hedgerows and gentle wooded slopes – a veritable haven of peaceful tranquillity.

But times are changing – and fast. The 200 year old navigation has more or less withstood the post war invasion of new building, modern farming methods, reservoirs, gravel pits and motorways, not without a few unsightly scars. Now a formidable new threat has emerged – “prettification”.

It is a well known fact that although many people purport to love nature they can’t leave it alone. When they get the chance to tidy it up they set to with a will. I have watched with dismay as the character of my local villages has been transformed by new residents. Where they have inherited old farm buildings, large mature gardens and estates they have “tidied them up” by removing old hedges and copses, erecting fences, felling trees and replacing meadows and swathes of wild flowers and plants with short mown grass. Hardly a day passes when I am not buzzed by the whine of a chain saw.

I was reminded of this phenomenon when I read in the latest Inland Waterways Association newsletter that one of their working parties from the national Waterways Recovery Group had been cutting the vegetation along the bank of the canal in Heybridge. This group, apparently, was especially pleased with itself because their work had been admired by some of the local residents who obviously wanted to encourage the efforts of a hard working group of young volunteers. The residents thought that tidying up the bank was in everyone’s interests. This is not necessarily so and it illustrates the seductive part of “tidying up”, it is seen generally to be a good thing – a debatable point.

I would like to think that the Inland Waterways Association, the Navigation Company’s new managers, had good reasons for sanctioning the tidying up of extensive tracts of the bank side vegetation and cutting

down the stands of wild plants and nettles, the brambles, bushes and small trees. Had they considered the effect it would have on the natural eco-system and its constituent inter-related habitats of plants and animals? One would presume this to be the case so there must have been an overriding priority?

My enquiries revealed the answer: to restore the bank and towpath to its former state when horses towed barges from Heybridge to Chelmsford - in those days unchecked bank side growth would interfere with the tow rope. With the phasing out of the horses in the 1950's there was less need to continue with this practice and the Navigation Company – always short of funds- resorted to only cutting overhanging and fallen trees. It was this policy which has, over the years, infused the navigation with its natural mellow landscape which we all admire so much today.

Evidently the navigation's new managers have adopted the national IWA policy on the management of towpaths and banks which is aimed at making them more boater friendly. This to me is misguided. If the Navigation Company was able to use the waterway for many years using a light touch maintenance strategy why change now? The navigation is a mature natural waterway of high landscape value which doesn't need upgrading (prettifying) to Grand Union Canal standard. Regular cutting and clearing the banks will spoil its appeal to all visitors including the boaters themselves.



**Towpath and bank clearance at Beeleigh**

Bank clearances, as well as being unnecessary, seriously impinge upon the biodiversity of the natural environment. The habitats of so many plants, insects, birds and animals are unwittingly destroyed. Even the regular cutting of the towpath itself prevents the growth of a variety of plants, some locally rare; in order to improve plant biodiversity a well designed cutting programme involving various cutting heights and frequencies could be used rather than the present regime of a uniform closely mown two metre wide path.

In the autumn boaters love gathering the profusion of blackberries overhanging the water as much as the door mice and birds enjoy eating them. The stinging nettles along the path are a valuable source of food

for the caterpillars of red admirals, commas, small tortoiseshells and peacock butterflies.

Rare dragonflies use the bank side vegetation for basking, for platforms for hunting from, and for



territorial watch towers. Hedgehogs are afforded cover from predators amongst the rampant growth of the big weeds. Linnets and gold finches feed off the thistle seeds and visiting siskins feed on the alder trees (now cut down and burned). Voles, an endangered species once prolific along the navigation, need bordering strips of vegetation for protection and food supply. Similarly otters, just making reappearance after a long absence, use it for cover, migration routes, and breeding purposes. One could go on.

The 2007 survey by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs revealed that the range of plants along the country's river banks has fallen by 8% over the last ten years. Do we want to contribute to this trend?

Whilst on the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation we are removing waterside plants other canal restoration groups are making provision for them. On the Grand Union Canal in Northamptonshire rafts of floating vegetation are being used to help improve water quality and to provide wildlife habitats for dragonflies, damselflies and amphibians. On the Droitwich Canal the reed beds destroyed by the restoration works are being replanted. On the Cotswold canal restoration ancient wood and craft skills of coppicing are being taught to young people. Faggots thus created are being used to stabilise the banks and provide wildlife habitats.

At least it is comforting to know that in other parts of the country the canal managers and restorers are guided by sound conservation principles. The numerous piles of burnt out embers of trees and bushes at Heybridge, Beeleigh and Borehan suggest that we have some lessons to learn. It was such a pity that the heaps of cut vegetation were not left on the banks as cover for wildlife.

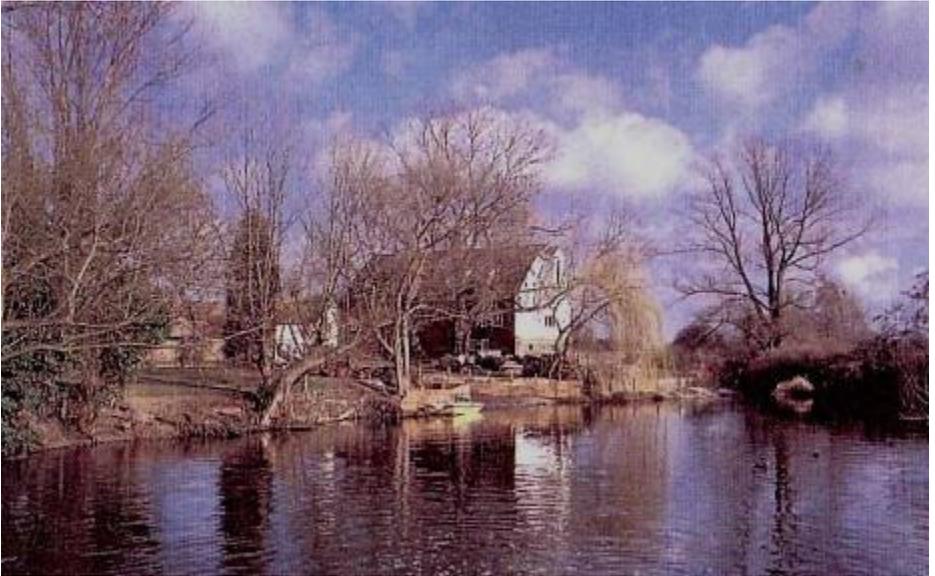
I am very concerned about what the future outcomes might be if the cutting of the bank side vegetation continues. The natural attractiveness and charm of the navigation will be spoilt. The biodiversity of plants and animals will be drastically reduced, some species lost altogether. The navigation and its towpath (probably asphalted over) will become like a mini, soulless Grand Union Canal. Perish these thoughts! There will be those amongst us, like the Heybridge residents, who might approve of tidying up the banks, but I hope that you, like me, will want those of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation left alone: tidying, prettifying and recovering them is not required or welcome.



**Will you be led up the Grand Union garden (tow) path?**

## **Chelmer Mills, Milling and Millers**

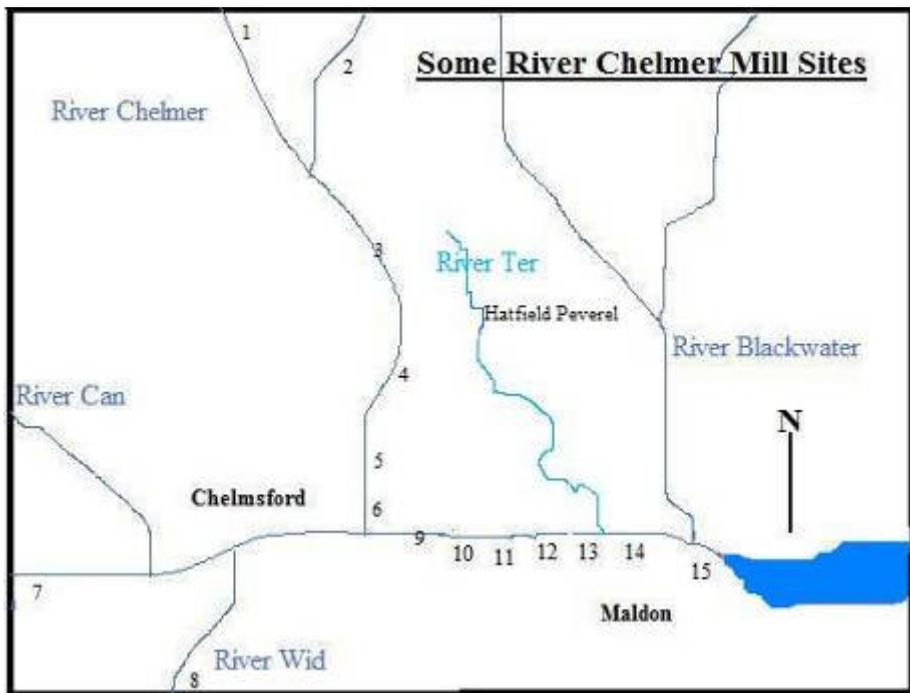
The water mills along the River Chelmer and its small tributary streams were there long before the Norman Conquest of 1066. Their embankments and feeder ponds were probably all dug by Saxon spades, and possibly a few Roman ones. It is hard to envisage today that the mills existed long before the many small churches that are dominant feature of the Essex landscape.



**Barnes Mill Weir Pool**

The working mills were a fundamental part of life from the earliest times because they were used to produce food and clothes. Many have since been abandoned and leave only fascinating site remains, whilst the larger ones, further down the river where the water supply is more abundant, lasted the longest. Many of the smaller ones in the upper reaches have disappeared leaving only invocative house, field and road names as signs of their former existence. That mills were built on the smallest of stream and brooks was due to the fact that they served the basic needs of their local community and didn't have to rely on the primitive road network. Heavier rainfall in those times,

plus the higher falls (drops) would have made mill construction in the upper reaches worthwhile



- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>1. Great Easton</b>   | <b>8. Margaretting</b>   |
| <b>2. Stebbing</b>       | <b>9. Moulsham</b>       |
| <b>3. Little Waltham</b> | <b>10. Barnes</b>        |
| <b>4. Broomfield</b>     | <b>11. Sandford</b>      |
| <b>5. Bishops Hall</b>   | <b>12. Little Baddow</b> |
| <b>6. Springfield</b>    | <b>13. Paper Mill</b>    |
| <b>7. Roxwell</b>        | <b>14. Hoe Mill</b>      |
|                          | <b>15. Beeleigh</b>      |

The Domesday record of 1086 shows that mills were abundant: some 400 are listed for Essex, 20 of which are sited on the Chelmer and its tributaries.

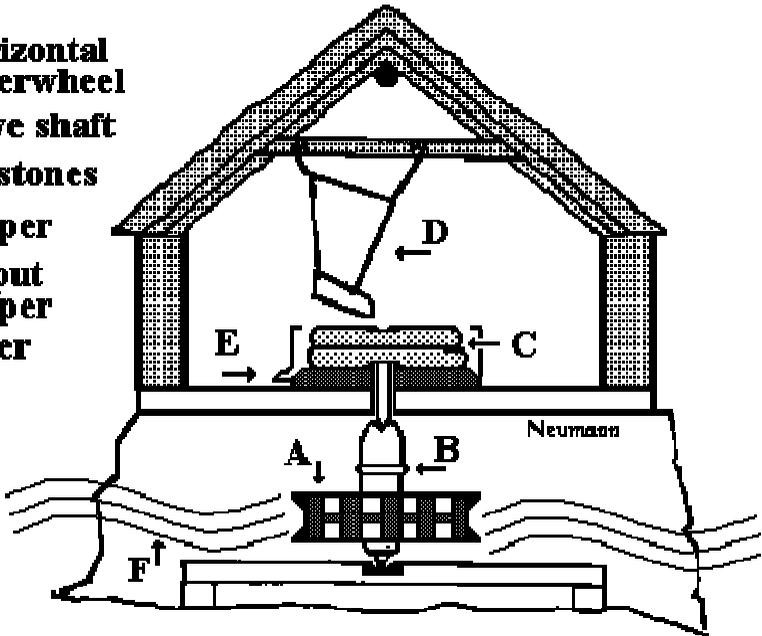
We are indebted to the Norman king, William the Conqueror, because sometime after his victory over the Saxons at Hastings in 1066, and the grand share out amongst his nobles of the spoils of war,

he lost track of who owned what and was worried that he was not receiving all that was due to him. Hence the Domesday Survey. The results revealed some haphazard ownership patterns. Local Chelmer celebrities like Ranulph Peverel - whose name survives at Hatfield Peverel - was linked to mills on the River Ter, on the Blackwater estuary, and at Henny on the River Stour. Another baron, Mathew of Montague, owned mills as far apart as Margaretting on the River Wid and Great Easton on the upper Chelmer. How they both managed to keep a watchful eye on this far flung empire in deepest Essex is hard to imagine.

The mill builders, having first dammed the river to make a pond, had to somehow harness its potential power.

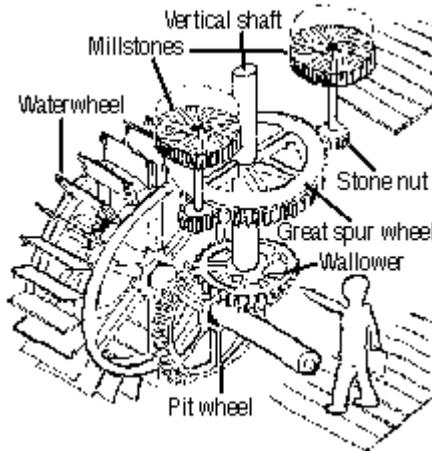
## Horizontal Water-powered Gristmill.

- A) Horizontal waterwheel
- B) Drive shaft
- C) Millstones
- D) Hopper
- E) Output Hopper
- F) Water



In the Shetland Isles the mills used horizontal wheels based on the Scandinavian (Norse) pattern – a jet of water was directed on one side of the wheel to drive it, and its central shaft drove the millstone above. It is thought that it was the Romans who first introduced the vertical wheel which, although it required a larger fall, was more efficient. The early mills were uncovered as no storage space was

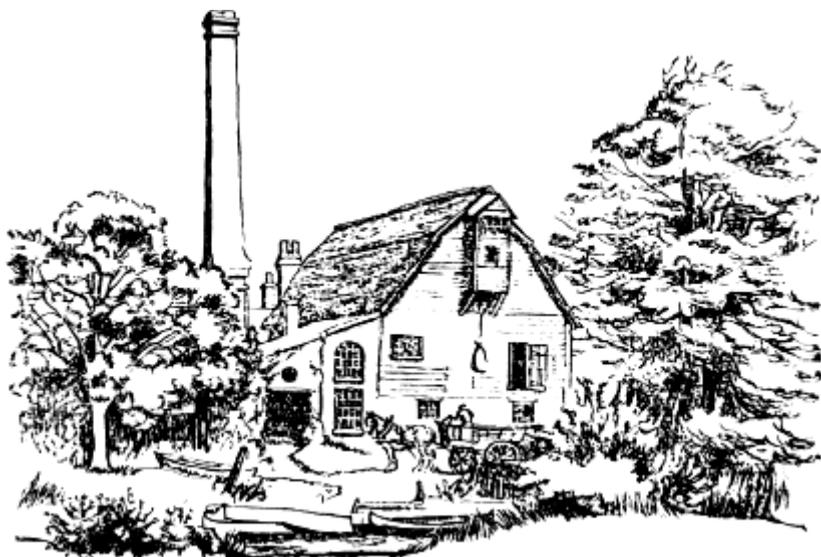
needed. A pit wheel ( the water wheel) , wallower (attached cog gear) and spur wheel (large horizontal secondary wheel) were used to drive the mill stones, which in their turn ground the seeds and grain, or drove a series of hammers to “full” locally made cloth. The first wheels, paddles, shaft and gears were made locally of wood of which a few still survive. That at Springfield Barnes on the Chelmer was still working in 1957 when its shaft finally broke. Its wooden 11ft diameter compass spur wheel now decorates the present mill owner’s dining room.



### **Mill wheel mechanisms**

Barnes, built boldly across the river, encapsulates in its architecture all that was special about Essex mills. You can still admire the mansard roof with its “hip” junction half way down which provided the attic space needed once mills became more productive. The attic floor space was invaluable as it formed the basis of the top down manufacturing process. To get the sacks of grain to the top floor a lifting box, the lucam, was fitted at attic level on the outside wall forming a platform with trap doors for the sack hoist. The power for this was provided by a roller driven by a spur wheel. Its use dispensed with hand hauling but it had its drawbacks. One poor worker caught his fingers in the chain and was dragged from the ground up through the lucam’s trap doors! Another story recalls how a local wheelwright used the system to his advantage by winding the chain around his foot and hitching a lift up through the trap doors!

Iron work gradually replaced the wooden paddle wheels and shafts. The Chelmsford firm of Christy and Norris set up its own iron works at Broomfield solely for making mill machinery. The millstone grit grinding stones were imported from France or transported from Derbyshire. These were expensive items. In 1590 a new stone for Margaretting mill cost 53s 7p with an extra 5shillings for cartage which must translate into a considerable sum at today's prices. Once installed millstones lasted a long time. When Springfield mill was decommissioned in 1939 a sixteenth century coin was found embedded in a crack in the millstone.



**“19th century sketch of Barnes Mill when it was steam and water powered, Note chimney, boiler house, hip roof, lucam and sack hoist.”**

The invention of the steam engine in the early 1800's changed the character of the wooden mill Tall chimneys with brick built boiler houses were attached to many of the Chelmer mills: Moulsham, Barnes, Boreham, Sandford, Springfield, Highlands, Little Baddow and Writtle. Joseph Marriage converted Moulsham mill to steam in 1839. In most cases the steam was used as a separate entity to assist the water wheel rather than replace it. The steam engines, chimneys

and houses are now all gone save for the priceless treasure at Beeleigh where the original Wentworth beam engine and Elephant boiler survive. The steam era lasted from 1840 to 1880 when it was superseded by new horizontal grinding rollers electrically driven by turbines. Roxwell mill continued to use steam until 1901 when its boiler blew up in dramatic fashion.

The development of mill rollers and electric turbines encouraged enterprising millers to move away from the river to new sites with good transport links: Marriage's modern Chelmsford mill is sited next to the railway station; similarly Baird's at Witham is beside the railway, and Green's mill at Fullbridge at Maldon is next to the port.

In feudal times the Lord of the Manor was the miller in charge and he exercised considerable power by insisting that all grinding was done in his mill at his price which could have amounted to several days work in his fields. Over time mill ownership gradually passed to those business men with enough capital to either build new mills, or maintain existing ones. The main milling families in Essex in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the Strutts and the Marriages. Their names crop up everywhere. The grandest nouveaux riches were the Strutts. One of the first Strutts, William, is mentioned in a 1607 law suit at Colchester, and a John Strutt in the 1600's ran Chelmsford's Moulsham and Springfield mills which were passed on to sons, one of whom left an interesting record of his tenure of Moulsham mill- a mounting block there bears the inscription "John Strutt March 29<sup>th</sup> 1712". He moved to Terling where in 1726 he built Terling Place and went on to become MP for Maldon where he led the resistance to the construction of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation in 1793. The Strutt milling dynasty extended to Moulsham, Springfield and Bishops Hall mills in Chelmsford, Maldon, Hoe mill at Ulting, Wickham Bishops mill on the Blackwater and probably others. A beam in Mousham mill has carved in it the inscription: "John Strutt, Miller, Millwright, built this mill, Bishops Hall, 1716". One assumes from this that at the time he owned and lived further upstream at Bishops Hall mill. Mills stayed in one family for years and the birth of sons ensured that the business developed. Another John Strutt sold Hoe Mill in 1780 and became a

famous physicist, President of the Royal Society and the winner of a Nobel Prize.



**Barnes Mill**

In the nineteenth century the Marriage family took up the Strutt mantle of mill ownership. They extended the empire to other mills at Little Waltham, Barnes, Stebbing, Broomfield and Colchester. The Christian faith, particularly non-conformism, played an important part in millers' lives. Francis Marriage, who farmed at Stebbing, is credited with being a founder member of the Society of Friends in 1647, the Quakers. The name Quaker was used because of the terrifying delivery of their sermons which made everyone quake! Francis Marriage was twice imprisoned in Colchester castle for his faith. The Marriages were Huguenots who had fled persecution on the continent, and like many refugees throughout history, they responded with vigour to their new environment. Inspired by their faith and work ethic they soon established themselves in the business world. Like the Strutts they lived comfortable lives in commodious mill houses next to their mills of which many fine examples still exist. Although the Essex millers became wealthy merchants who could indulge in life's natural pleasures and pursuits they played an important part in community life. When William Marriage, a grandson of Francis of Stebbing, died at Barnes mill in 1774, an obituary spoke of his patient and kindly nature: "...has conducted an extensive business with much reputation: he discovered remarkable

economy in transacting the same probity and punctuality, without hurry or emotion ”.

Barnes mill, the first on the navigation downstream of Chelmsford, illustrates the history of Essex mills. Made by Saxon spades on the Springfield bank of the Chelmer it prospered under the Lord of the Manor, was passed on to local millers who became important corn merchants. In 1408 it was owned by the nuns of Coggeshall Abbey who used it for fulling local cloth, probably the coarsely woven "bays". It was linked to the canal in 1793 and was able to profit from the new link to the seaport of Maldon. It converted to steam in the 1830's and was able to import Newcastle coal. Like Moulsham it suffered from some loss of water when the feeder ditch link was made from the Chelmer to serve the new canal basin at Springfield Basin - the miller reckoned that he lost 3 to 4 loads a week although this was disputed by John Rennie, the canal's chief engineer. Barnes retains its tranquil setting with a picturesque mill pond which once, together with the adjacent meadow, served as a playground for the population of Chelmsford before the days of car and air travel. It has survived the disaster of demolition, and the frequent fires (and an explosion!), as well as the dead hand of local authority urbanisation as at Sandford, its neighbour, which became a waterworks. Along with Moulsham, Springfield Barnes has adapted itself to changing circumstances and is still a heritage treasure of archaeological, social and historical importance. It represents a former way of life and perhaps in many ways a richer one. The Marriages finally left the mill in 1918 when it was taken over by the Fleming family. An inscription on the outside wall below the lucam in the 1920's read: "This mill will never turn again with the water that has passed". In other words "look forward not backward", a maxim that both the Strutt and Marriage families religiously applied. The Chelmer millers gradually improved on the techniques learned from their forebears to create this county's first major manufacturing process by harnessing the natural power of the water in the River Chelmer. They would view with disbelief the changes that have occurred since their passing but I am sure that they would have approved.

## **Festival of Light at Paper Mill Lock**

Roy Brindley

Thanks to the inspiration of two lady boaters at Paper Mill lock, Leila Evans and Margaret Wilkinson, a Festival of Light was held at the lock in the evening of Saturday 13 December. Leila and Margaret with the help of a number of other boaters organised the event which involved the illumination and decoration of boats with festive lights and decorations, the arrival of Father Christmas by boat, a grand raffle and a number of stalls. Lucky number programmes were printed and sold with the kind assistance of Elliot in the Paper Mill tearooms. Invitations were sent to boaters at Sandford and Hoe Mill locks to which there was a good response, although in the event, bad weather stopped a number of them attending. The weather on the day was dreadful, bitterly cold with incessant rain until well into the early evening. Several trees had been felled or pruned previously and a number of the men were able to spread chippings around liberally to make it safer and more comfortable under foot. Nevertheless the support was superb and although the boaters car park was opened up for visitors parking it was quickly overwhelmed with many people being forced to park in the road some distance from the lock. Altogether a very successful event with about a dozen boats being beautifully decorated - a dazzling display thanks to the efforts of all the participating boaters. Carols were sung by the Little Baddow Brownies, the Little Baddow bell ringers entertained everybody, Father Christmas arrived to the delight of the children both young and old, more live music fronted by Terry was played in the tea rooms and the various stalls did a roaring trade. A final grand total of £630 was raised and divided equally between 3 charities - Little Havens Hospice, Little Baddow Wickhays Playcentre and the Inland Waterways Association.

Thanks go to the organisers, participants and visitors all of whom made such a success of the Festival, which hopefully, will be repeated.

## **Any Personal Sightings?**

Member, Mark Hanson, is currently searching for records of the flora and fauna of the Chelmer and Blackwater Conservation Area in order to produce an authentic up to date information dossier that will be accessible to everyone through the Essex Record Office.

There are a lot of records kept by individuals out of their personal interest as well as those kept by established organisations. He wants to bring them altogether before they get forgotten or lost.

It may be that you know of records for the following:

1. A bird list for the Hoe Mill area including the adjacent fishing lakes.
2. Sightings of the Musk Beetle recently on the Chelmer and Blackwater.
3. Reptiles including grass snake and common lizard.
4. Fritillary Butterflies from 1940's and 50's before they became extinct.
5. Mammals, especially the Pygmy Shrew, Water Shrew and Dormice. Cat kill from adjacent houses as well as road kill would provide useful evidence. Seen any flat hedgehogs lately?
6. Orchids? Bee, Green-winged and Early Marsh have been present

If you can help in any way then please get in touch with Dudley Courtman who will pass the information on to Mark:

dudleycourtman@googlemail.com or 16, Roots Lane Wickham Bishops, CM8 3LS.

*Dudley is also keen to hear from any members who are interested in helping to track mink, particularly in the Chelmsford area.*

*With early signs of water voles and otters returning to the canal, it is vitally important to control the mink.*

## Historical Timeline for the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation

- 1677 – A scheme proposed by Andrew Yarranton to make the river Chelmer navigable opposed by the borough of Maldon.
- 1733 – John Hoare suggests two schemes: 1) to canalise the existing river; 2) to complete a completely new cut. Both fail.
- 1765 – Thomas Yeoman proposes yet another canal scheme
- 1766 – Act of Parliament passed to make the river navigable from the Port of Maldon to Chelmsford. Local opposition from the Maldon traders.
- 1777 – River Chelmer, pre- navigation, shown on the Chapman and Andre map of Essex (surveyed 1772-4 and published 1777)
- 1792 – A fresh scheme supported by Lord Petre of Thorndon and Thomas Branston of Screens, Roxwell, is put forward.
- 1793 – An Act of Parliament, the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Act, is passed and acted upon.
- John Rennie, a celebrated canal engineer, is appointed to oversee construction
  - First meeting of the Proprietors of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation at *The Black Boy*, Chelmsford.
- 1795 – Robert Marriage of well known milling family buys Hoe Mill
- 1796 - First cargo, coal, carried on the navigation in April from Heybridge Basin to Boreham.
- First cargo of flour taken on the navigation from Hoe Mill to London.
  - By September the navigation is open as far as Moulsham Mill.
- 1797 – Navigation completed and first barge loaded with coal arrives at Chelmsford
- 1811 – William Bentalls iron works open at Heybridge.
- 1819 – Gas works built at Springfield
- 1832 – Sugar Bakers Mill constructed at Hoe Mill
- 1842 – Peak tonnage, 60,000 tons, carried on the canal
- Heybridge lock keeper's house built.
- 1845 – Steam engine installed at Beeleigh Mill
- 1860's – First cricket bat willows planted

- 1863 – 51,000 tons of goods moved on the canal
- 1875 – 33,214 tons of cargo moved
  - Beeleigh Mill destroyed by fire
- 1880 – Steam power comes to Sandford Mill
- 1890 -17,022 tons goods moved on canal
- 1893 –Celebration of the Centenary of the Navigation
  - Little Baddow Mill burns down
- 1914 – Hoe Mill demolished
  - 12,120 tons of cargo moved on the canal
- 1925 – 5,716 tons of timber moved on the canal
- 1947 – 2,699 tons of timber moved on the canal
- 1948 - Breach in bank caused by floods at Beeleigh Weir, canal closed
- 1950 – Waterway reopens
- 1952 - Annual canoe race from Chelmsford to Heybridge Basin instigated
- 1953 – First motorised barge, “Susan”, built by Prior’s of Burnham
- 1954 – Grade 1 listed building, Heybridge Mill, demolished.
- 1960’s - Flood alleviation scheme in Chelmsford created- rivers Can and Chelmer widened and deepened, river diverted away from Moulsham Mill.
  - Metal made barges with diesel powered outboards introduced
- 1972 – Last cargo of timber carried on the navigation
- 1973 –Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation becomes a recreational facility
  - Boat Rally to commemorate the ending of commercial traffic.
- 1975 - Building of the motorised pleasure barge *Victoria* at Bingley and launched at Heybridge Basin
- 1973-85 Springfield Basin becomes derelict.
- 1988 – Water Festival celebrates 100 years of Chelmsford as a Borough
- 1990-1991 - Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation becomes a linear conservation area
- 1990 – The invasive American weed, floating pennywort, first recorded
- 1993 – Restoration of the Springfield Basin area by the Inland Waterways Association

- 1995 - Cuton lock restored
- 1996 – Foundation of “The Friends of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation”- became The Chelmer Canal Trust in 2001
- 1997 – Bicentenary celebrations held at Springfield Basin and blue plaque unveiled commemorating Richard Coates, the navigation’s chief engineer and founder of Browns, the Chelmsford timber company.
- 1998 – Ricketts weir collapses due to erosion by flood water.
- 1999 – Major renovation undertaken at Little Baddow lock
- 2000 – Invasive weed, floating pennywort, now a major threat on the navigation
- 2002 – Chelmsford’s first marina under construction at Springfield Basin
- Pennywort removal campaign is started by the Chelmer Canal Trust
- 2003 – August: the Chelmsford and Blackwater Navigation Company goes into administration owing £50,000 Assets include land at Heybridge Basin (approx one acre), the lease on the *Old Ship* public house, the tea rooms at Paper Mill lock, the tourist motor Barge *Victoria*, Treasure Island bungalow and site adjacent to Paper Mill, and the lock house at Hoe Mill are sold.
- December; the 1874 portfolio of original maps of the navigation drawn by the Royal Engineers goes missing from the Company Office – presumed stolen.
  - Hoe Mill lock restored
  - New water treatment plant opened at Langford. Recycled water fed into the Navigation above Hoe Mill
- 2004 – Springfield marina opened; linked to canal by lifting drawbridge over towpath
- 2006 – New lock gates are fitted at Sandford
- 2008 – Floating pennywort under control on the navigation but not eradicated, still abundant in some feeder ditches and ponds

This timeline illustrates how the history of the navigation reflects national economic and social trends:

- The protectionist behaviour of the businessmen of Maldon and the millers along the Chelmer.
- The importance of coal in the growth of the railways, manufacturing industries and gas production.
- The deleterious affect of the new railway network on the cargo tonnages carried on the navigation.
- The building of a sugar mill to encourage the abolition of slavery.
- The development and use of steam engines by the millers to augment water power.
- The planting of willow trees to make cricket bats
- The transportation of timber in place of coal as the main cargo.
- The effect of floods and war on canal operations.
- The start of long distance canoe racing.
- The replacement of horse drawn barges with diesel - engined powered steel barges.
- The decline of canal transport and the change from commercial use to that of tourist and recreation.
- The recognition of the importance of canals and navigations to cultural life and the introduction of conservation policies.
- The threat posed to natural environments by the introduction of foreign invasive plants and animals

We are indebted to member, Mark Hanson, for drawing up the above historical timeline to tell the story of the development of the navigation over 200 years. Needless to say that he has chosen more events for the recent years than the earlier ones! It may well be that you would want the question the dates of some of the entries - they might be wrong or you think that some other, more important ones, have been omitted. If so please let the editor of Coates Cuttings know.

# This Edition's Interesting/Unusual Sightings

All explanations/suggestions/guesses welcomed



200 year old elm cill removed at Springfield



Clapper gate at Beeleigh



Barnes mill stones and winding gear



High tide at Beeleigh  
Where did the weir go?



American Floating  
Pennywort washed down  
Beeleigh falls



Safety barrier above the  
automatic weir at  
Chelmsford

*If you have any comments or contributions to Interesting/Unusual Sightings, please send them to [dudleycourtman@googlemail.com](mailto:dudleycourtman@googlemail.com) or 16 Roots Lane, Wickham Bishops CM8 3LS*

## Events Diary

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Saturday 7 <sup>th</sup> March<br>9.00 am - 12.30 pm  | <b>Work party</b><br>See our website for details   |
| Tuesday 10 <sup>th</sup> March                        | <b>Maldon District Winter Heritage Talk</b><br>The historian Beryl Board will describe ‘The repair of the sea wall at Fambridge in 1906 by the London Unemployed’, documented by contemporary black and white photographs.<br>Organised by the Conservation Team at Maldon District Council  |
| Saturday 28 <sup>th</sup> March<br>9.00 am to 1.00 pm | <b>Chelmsford River Litter Pick</b><br>We will be doing the clean up on Saturday, starting from the Essex Records Office, Wharf Road Car Park. As on previous occasions, there will be free parking for volunteers in Wharf Road Car Park and refreshments in the Sea Cadet Headquarters.<br>(the bacon rolls and doughnuts are highly recommended!) |
| Saturday 4 <sup>th</sup> April<br>9.00 am - 12.30 pm  | <b>Work party</b><br>See our website for details   |

### **Some useful phone numbers:**

**Chelmer Canal Trust** — 07791 615634

**Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation (IWA/Essex Waterways Ltd);- 01494 783453**

Colin Edmond, General Manager - 01245 226245

Hugh Turner, Moorings Manager - 01245 222025

Martin Maudsley, Heybridge Basin - 07712 079764

**Ron and Judith, Blackwater Boat Trips** — 01206-853282

**Heybridge Boat Trips** — 07835 657462

**Paper Mill Lock, Tea Room and Boat Trips** — 01245 225520

**Environment Agency** — General Enquiries: 08708 506 506 (Mon-Fri 8-6)  
Incident hotline: 0800 807060 (Freephone\* 24 Hour)

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