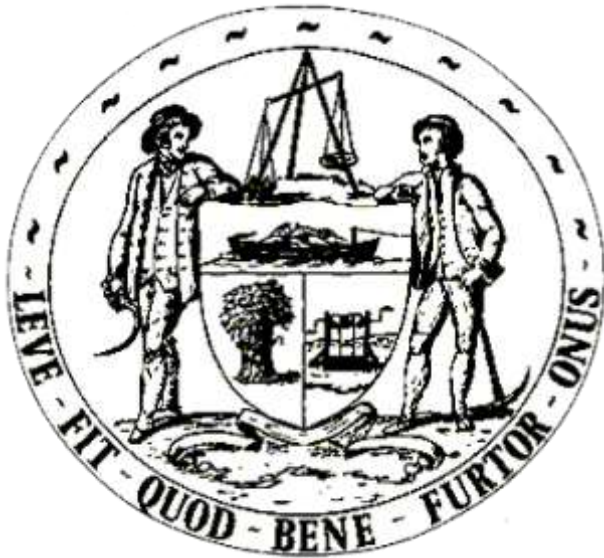


SLEAFORD NAVIGATION TRUST



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Autumn 2017

The Sleaford Navigation Trust: -

... is a non-profit distributing company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales (No. 3294818)

... has a Registered Office at Island House, Moor Road, Chesham. HP5 1WA.

... is registered as a Charity (No. 1060234)

... has a web page: www.sleafordnavigation.co.uk

Aims & Objectives

The Trust aims to stimulate public interest and appreciation of the history, structure and beauty of the waterway known as the Sleas, or the Sleaford Navigation. It aims to restore, improve, maintain and conserve the waterway in order to make it fully navigable. Furthermore it means to restore associated buildings and structures and to promote the use of the Sleaford Navigation by all appropriate kinds of waterborne traffic. In addition it wishes to promote the use of towpaths and adjoining footpaths for recreational activities.

Newsletters

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Articles and opinions in this newsletter are those of the authors concerned and do not necessarily reflect SNT policy or the opinion of the editor

Our thanks to Westgate Print of Sleaford for their help with printing

Editorial

Oh dear another newsletter, running a little late this time, but hope you find the article about Bottom Lock interesting.

This year we've sent the invitations for our Christmas Meal out by email to all known email contacts - if you'd like to be added to this list, for updates and the newsletter itself, please do get in touch - selafor.navigation@ntlworld.com

Debbie Scott, Editor

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Work Parties 2017



Photos:
Mel
Sowerby

At the end of a September day - the coir rolls installed at Eastgate - see page18 for a view of the tree roots that this will help protect .



Dave Collin and Dave Burkitt having a well earned rest after cutting the grass at Taylors Lock this summer. Amazing how fast it grows in the space of 4 weeks! The November working party will be back there to strim, remove reeds, paint and have a general tidy up

Editor's note: it was a privilege to meet Bill and Sue Kirk when they called in at Navigation House earlier this summer. They had fascinating tales to tell of Bill's family's life at Bottom Lock and have kindly agreed that the following article, based on Bill and his sister Shirley's memories and images can be reproduced in this newsletter. The article has previously appeared in a Lincolnshire Waterways publication.

Bottom Lock, Slea Navigation

Oral History – Shirley and William (Bill) Kirk, 7th July 2009



Working at Bottom Lock

Shirley and Bill's father Len Kirk, who was born in 1910, was the Lock Keeper at Bottom Lock from 1937 until 1952. He and their mother Pat (she didn't like being called by her real name Martha) lived in the Lock cottage with their 5 children. Shirley, the eldest, was a baby when the Kirks moved from Chapel Hill to the lock. Gordon, Arthur, Brenda and June were born in the cottage. Brothers William (Bill) and Clifford were born after the family moved from the lock to the Kirton Fen area. You didn't go to hospital in those days – midwife Nurse Everard was called from North Kyme.



Photo: Sue Kirk 1990

Before taking the part time job of lock keeper, Dad worked on the land, and he balanced his part time hours looking after the lock with continuing to work for a number of local farmers. By this time

there was very little boat traffic on the Slea apart from the barges that carried the sugar beet after the harvest. Dad's main job was operating the lock gates to control the flow of water and reduce the risk of flooding. Often was the time a local farmer – who thought he knew better – tried to tell Dad when the gates should be open or closed, but Dad wouldn't be pressured and made up his own mind. The job also included general maintenance of the lock and clearing weed from the water with a grappling iron and rake. Because of the nature of the work, it meant the family couldn't leave the lock for long or travel far.

Life on the 'island'

The lock keeper's cottage was on an island in the middle of the river. Access to the cottage on one side was via a bridge across the lock gates and from the other via a walkway made from 2 railway sleepers laid side by side with a railing to hold onto. It was very narrow and Shirley recalls the post woman getting the wheel of her bicycle stuck in the gap between the 2 planks.

Mum was worried to death about the river. When the children were young, she kept them 'fenced in' and the gates were tied with washing line to stop them getting out. As they grew older, they had more freedom, but their mother always worried about them falling in. She was always checking where they were and was anxious if she couldn't find them. Neighbors and people who knew them always told her if they had seen the children where they shouldn't have been. Amazingly though, none of them was ever taught to swim and Mum was very proud that they all obeyed her and none of them ever fell in once!

Very sadly, a local boy was drowned in the river – the Kirks knew his family, both Shirley and Gordon had often played with him. She recalls her father being called to fetch the grappling irons to help find his body.

Being surrounded on all sides by water was a precarious position

in times of flood. Water would come up through the bricks of the floor. Neighbors brought their parents copies of the weather reports in the newspapers when there was going to be bad weather - they were worried the whole island would be submerged under water. The family wouldn't have stood a chance to escape. Shirley feels they were lucky to have survived such was the danger sometimes.

The cottage itself had 2 bedrooms and a small box room upstairs with a sloping ceiling. The windows had tiny glass panes. It didn't have electricity and they used paraffin lamps and so-called 'blow up' tilly lamps – these could be dangerous. Dad planted fruit trees by the cottage. The apple tree is still there and a few years ago Bill brought back an apple for Shirley.

When Mum and Dad moved out of the cottage, Dad didn't want the trouble of taking the old iron bedsteads with them, so he threw them in the river. Bill thought he saw them in the water a few years ago when he was walking down by the lock. They are believed to be still there.

Near Neighbours

The Kirks nearest neighbours lived in a small row of cottages a short distance down the bank towards Chapel Hill. Kit and Carrie lived in one of the cottages. Carrie had a truck which she pulled along with her shopping. It annoyed Dad that during the war they never bothered to put up black out blinds. One time, he went over there and nailed some up himself. He was worried that if the cottage lights were spotted, they might all be bombed. The cottages were pulled down some time ago, but you can still see some bricks in the field where they were.

There were also farmhouses across the fields. Even so, they still felt isolated. It was about a 3 mile walk along the river bank to the nearest shops in Chapel Hill. Shirley and the older children

were sometimes sent by their mother to buy provisions. Shirley dreaded being sent – it was such a long walk, especially in bad weather – “I walked my legs off”. She also walked to Dogdyke to a local farmer who had a sideline business charging the accumulator batteries used to power the radio. They had 2 batteries so they could use one while the other was being charged. Some trades people delivered though, the baker from Walcot and Mr. Wilson from South Kyme who sold everything. He came down the bank in his van “they looked after the family very well”.



Photo: Sue Kirk 1990

Going to school

The Kirk children went to the village school in Billingham. To reach the school bus, the children walked along the river bank which could be treacherous in bad weather. The bus – run by Mr. Twells,

would collect children who walked from outlying farms and cottages to the nearest lane where the bus would wait. Shirley remembers that the bus was sometimes driven by old Mr. Twells, whose eyesight wasn't so good – on several occasions he drove the bus off the road! It was a worrying experience. One of their friends not only had to walk along the banks, but across 2 fields as well. Sometimes there would be a bull in the field, which terrified the children.

The children went to church twice on a Sunday – in the morning to Sunday school and back again later in the day for evening service with their parents.



Photo: Sue Kirk 1990

Catching the Sunday dinner

Lock keepers and farm workers at this time were not well paid, so Dad like many others did a bit of poaching on the side to put a

rabbit or pheasant on the table for Sunday dinner. He would go out very early in the morning to catch one in the neighbouring fields, which were owned by his farmer cousins Jess and Fred. It wasn't until years later that they let on that had often spotted him, but had turned a blind eye, as they knew he had a lot of mouths to feed!

Dad also supplemented the family income on occasion by catching and skinning otters - something which wouldn't happen nowadays. These otters had got trapped in the lock pit when both gates had been closed. The skins were sent away by train and Dad got paid Ten shillings for each skin. Shirley recalls what a horrible sight it was to see – they had to hold the lamp for Dad or fetch his knives for him.

Visitors to the lock

Visitors to the lock included the boatmen and women who worked on the barges transporting sugar beet from the fields to the sugar factory at Bardney. Because the land could be waterlogged, it was easier to get the sugar beet out by boat – Lorries wouldn't have been able to get to the fields. The barges would tie up for a couple of weeks on the river while the beet was loaded. Shirley remembers the bargees coming across to the lock keeper's cottage in the evening to play cards and chat to her parents. Jess Overton was one of the barge owners. He gave Dad a number of clay pipes – Dad smoked so much he could wear a pipe out quite quickly.

There were a lot of tramps around too. Sometimes they would knock on the door - 'cup o' tea missus?' they would ask. They frightened Shirley – when she looked out of the bedroom window in the morning she sometimes saw one asleep by the bank. Her mother always told her not to speak to anyone she didn't know. When she was out doing an errand, she would keep her head down to avoid looking at them.

Crowds of anglers, mostly from Sheffield would come to fish. They came by train to Dogdyke station, or by coach. The family got to know some of the regulars and Mum would make them cups of tea. In return, they would bring sweets and chocolate for the children or pieces of cutlery for Mum. Subsequently, the Kirks had the best knives and forks for miles around!

One particular visitor was a well to do gentleman who owned a sweet factory in Sheffield. He would arrive in a 'posh' car – cars could get right up along the bank in the summer. The banks were impassable in bad weather though. Dad would give him a ¼ of one of the pigs he kept after it had been slaughtered - there was rationing then so the man would have been grateful and he brought sweets for them. In those days, anyone with a large enough garden, or plot of land would keep a pig. It was a big occasion when the 'pigman' came to slaughter it. The water was put on to boil in the copper washing tub at 5 in the morning so it would be hot enough when he arrived at 7 to kill the pig. The boiling water was used to scrub the slaughtered pig and remove the bristles.

The man also 'loaned' Dad a shotgun – it was a very fine gun, a Purdy possibly, the Rolls Royce of guns. At the time Dad had an old fashioned single barreled 12 bore gun. Dad always regretted not buying the Purdy when the man offered it to him at a good price.

Mum's father came to stay at the cottage for a while. Grandad had cataracts and could hardly see. Nevertheless, he would take a gun and listen for the crows – shooting at them wildly. He was a nuisance recalled Shirley and a danger to everyone!

A wartime tragedy

One Sunday, in March 1941, the family were sat having their dinner when they heard a plane flying low over the roof. Suddenly there was a loud explosion – the shock waves travelled through the water and shook the cottage. The pumping station nearby at Chapel Hill

had been bombed by the enemy aircraft. It was thought afterwards that the pumping station had been mistaken for a factory because of its tall brick chimney. Dad rushed to see if he could help, but the Richardson family who lived in the station house had been killed instantly. The pumping station itself was untouched and the engine machinery, or 'engine' as it was known locally, was still pumping away. John and Annie Richardson, their sons John and Thomas and daughter Annie were buried in the churchyard at Chapel Hill. Their other daughter Ena survived as she wasn't in the station house at the time, she had been invited to Sunday lunch by her fiancé's parents Mr. and Mrs. Maplethorpe.

Dad always said the most vivid memory he had of the awful scene was the strange sight of little fluffy yellow chicks scrambling about the bricks of the wrecked house. They heard later that fighter planes from RAF Digby shot the enemy aircraft down over the Wash.

The site, like many other bomb sites, wasn't cleared for years and Shirley always hated having to go past it when she was doing errands as it scared her. During the war, Dad would often stand on the island and watch the Lancaster bombers flying out and returning back to base after their mission – sadly not all of them did come back.

Friend, or Foe?

Dad worked hard and so looked forward to his Saturday nights at The Crown in Chapel Hill. He enjoyed chatting to locals and any new faces that appeared. He would often invite people back to the cottage and Mum would find complete strangers in the house the next morning!

A short while before the outbreak of war, Dad brought back 2 foreign chaps from the pub. They had told him they were traveling round on holiday and Dad said they could put their tent up at the lock. Each day they pedaled off. Mum noticed that they had

expensive looking cameras and tripods. When they returned, Dad would chat to them about what they had been doing and it seems they had been touring the sites of the local airfields at Digby, Cranwell and Coningsby.

After a week, Mum wanted her privacy again and Dad diplomatically told them it was time to be moving on. Some months later Mum and Dad got an envelope through the post postmarked Germany and it contained some great quality photos of the local area. Looking back, could these 2 well spoken foreigners have been spies? It seems very suspicious that they were taking photographs in the vicinity of the military airfields. Or was it just a curious coincidence?

Mum and Dad had fond memories of living on the island and Shirley enjoyed her time there as a child – in particular she remembers some happy Christmas days there. However, it was a very dangerous place and 'it wasn't an easy life'. Looking back, she wouldn't have advised anyone to live there.

(Photo supplied)



Updating to 2017, this year's May Bank Holiday weekend saw the annual boat gathering celebrating 30 years since the restoration of Bottom Lock.

Janet Richardson of Towpath Talk was on hand and has kindly supplied these photographs of the commemorative cake, baked by Penny Carnell, and Pat Taylor 'doing the honours' assisted by her daughter, Sue Sowerby and other members of the committee, David Pullen, Penny, Becky Franks (seated), Mel Sowerby and Dave Carnell.



Cutter Suction Silt Dredging



Photo: Dave Carnell

The Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board continues with its work increasing the flood water storage capacity of this waterway and recently hosted a couple of demonstration days on the South Forty Foot. A Dutch company used the wonderfully-named Cutter Suction Silt Dredger to remove silt from the bed of 11 kms of drain pumping it into reservoirs to dry before being spread to agricultural land. The Board of the IDB is supportive on leisure uses of the waterway, which bodes well for future navigation.

Looks like a piece of kit that could be useful on the Sleat!

Destination South Kyme Update

With a successful application of a stage 1 Leader funding bid specifications have been sent to companies to tender for the stage 2 application works. Meetings with the Trust, the land owner and the Environment Agency have taken place to progress the installation of a “winding hole” upstream of South Kyme.

Needless to say, these applications are very time-consuming and our thanks go to those who've been working on them. More work to do and offers of assistance are always welcome.

Fingers crossed for a successful outcome!

Coir Rolls in Sleaford



For more pictures of the team in action see our page on www.facebook.com

Coir Rolls in Sleaford, continued

As part of the efforts to protect the banks around Eastgate Green, which have been seriously eroded over time by ducks and water flow, exposing the tree roots, SNT volunteers have been working to install coir rolls as shown. The project is supported by Sleaford Town Council, owner of the Green, and the STC Services Team will be backfilling the gap between the rolls and the bank. The final step will be to seed the area.



Photo: Debbie Scott

Membership : If you are thinking of joining please do get in touch or pick up a membership application form from events or at Navigation House in Sleaford. If you are already a member and would like to upgrade to paying by Standing Order please contact Jenny Osborne on 01526 832256. The saving in postage for reminders and trips to the bank will be much appreciated by the Trust and helpers.

New member - September 2017

Welcome to Mr Ian Montgomery

The Tillergraph, Towpath Talk and the Canal Boating Times

are all available free of charge from Navigation House (and other reputable waterside locations), please do drop in and pick up a copy.

Navigation House is now open for the winter season 12-4 Saturdays and Sundays. Summer starts again on 1st April 2018!

A growing stock of postcards, gifts and books is available to buy as well as Navigation Trust items and delicious Dennett's Ice Cream. Pop in and choose from our new selection of Christmas Gift ideas.

There is also an exhibition upstairs by Sleaford Museum Trust and a re-creation of Sir Joseph Banks' desk (or could it be Captain Cook's desk?) by Harriott Brand.

Towpath Talk is also available at the Hume Arms, South Kyme see www.south-kyme.co.uk/the_hume.html

SNT Work Parties go on throughout the year, usually on the second Sunday of the month. Contact Mel Sowerby (01522 856810 or sowerbys@ntlworld.com) for details of upcoming dates and activities

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Membership

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Sleaford Navigation Trust is a member of the Sleaford Sports Partnership (SSP)

All SNT members are automatically SSP members, and are welcome to join in any of the SSP events, which are all held at the David Williams Pavilion, Sleaford Rugby Club, Ruskington Road, Sleaford.

