



PERMISSION: Listed building consent was needed before the Waterways Recovery Group volunteers could work to replace the collapsed retaining wall.

Fancy a dirty weekend?

Greg Chapman finds out about the on-going campaign working to make the Gipping navigable again.

It makes an attention-grabbing impression on the home page of the Waterway Recovery Group's web site. "Fancy a dirty weekend?" it asks – and it really means it! For the group founded in 1970 as a co-ordinating force to help canal and river restoration schemes expects volunteers to really get their hands dirty – and has been hard at it on the River Gipping, five miles north of Ipswich.

This year, group's the first work camp took place before Easter and there are 22 further camps taking place up and down the country right through to the Christmas Camp, which lasts until New Year's Day.

And this is not just about spade work and bramble clearing – a fact driven home by the fact that the group's magazine is called *Navvies!* Work this year has included building a large dam across a canal to allow

PICTURES: GREG CHAPMAN

restoration of a lock and work on a boat lift. "Those who want to play with big excavators and dumper trucks, this could be the project for you," said the magazine. Not stuff for the faint hearted then!

Meanwhile, at Ipswich, a team got together to help restore the Gipping's historic Baylham Lock carrying out brickwork, demolition, landscaping and a big pouring of concrete.

Team members were accommodated in



DIRTY WORK: Perhaps the muckiest job to be done on the camp – collecting clay to plug the holes in the cofferdam.

nearby Somersham village hall and with the maxim about the danger of all work and no play also took part in a variety of evening social activities including a boat trip on the River Stour and a visit to Colchester Spa.

The team comprised about 15 men and women, including Colin Turner, who has been involved in the Gipping restoration for 10 years, nine of them as the Working Party Organiser for the Ipswich branch of the Inland Waterways Association. He is also one of the directors and trustees of the River Gipping Trust, formed last year as a limited company and registered charity to work towards the completion of the project.

Colin explained that a businessman had bought Baylham Mill and much of the area around it in the early 1960s but after he died about a decade ago, the trustees of his estate had particular problems with the mill.

“It was a Grade Two listed building and in need of much work,” Colin continued, “However, the big problem was with the lock and mill race. We started negotiating to work on the lock three years ago, and after the Environment Agency dropped a claim that the lock belonged to them, we reached agreement with the estate trustees about how to proceed.”

This was not straightforward listed building consent was needed for the lock and planning permission and listed building consent for the retaining wall above the lock, all requiring great tenacity to see it through.

But this wasn't the first lock rebuilding project on the Gipping that the IWA had been involved with. In 1996 they restored Bosmere Lock, two miles upstream from Baylham, helping to produce a first class



JOB DONE: Colin Turner looks down at the work completed 12 years ago at Bosmere Lock. The plaque indicates one of the many organisations that have supported the work in restoring the waterway.

feature in a local park.

After that it was Creeting Lock and both are now ready to receive new lock gates to become fully operational.

“If we can obtain permission to fit gates at Bosmere we plan to obtain a boat able to take people on river trips,” said Colin. “This should bring the work of the Trust to the attention of many more people and help draw in the necessary support and money to enable the rest of the waterway to be fully restored – with the aim of making it fully navigable as far as Stowmarket.”

The total rise of the river from Ipswich to Stowmarket is 90 feet with 15 locks along the 16 miles of navigation.

With the winding up of the old Stowmarket and Ipswich Navigation Trust in 1932, the Gipping was subjected to decades of neglect which finally resulted in the navigation becoming impassable.

Restoration work began way back in the 1970s, alongside the establishment of The Gipping Way, a public footpath from Ipswich to Stowmarket which follows the river's towpath.

In 1994 work commenced to restore Bosmere Lock followed by Creeting Lock, work that took ten years.

Camp leader Liz Wilson, of the WRG, was in charge of liaising with the local group to find out exactly what the work camp would involve, assemble the equipment needed and then take charge of the volunteer team.

Now aged 26, she has been involved with waterway restoration for nine years and been involved with camps on the Basingstoke Canal, the “Mon and Brec” and “Wilts and Berks” waterways alongside her full time job



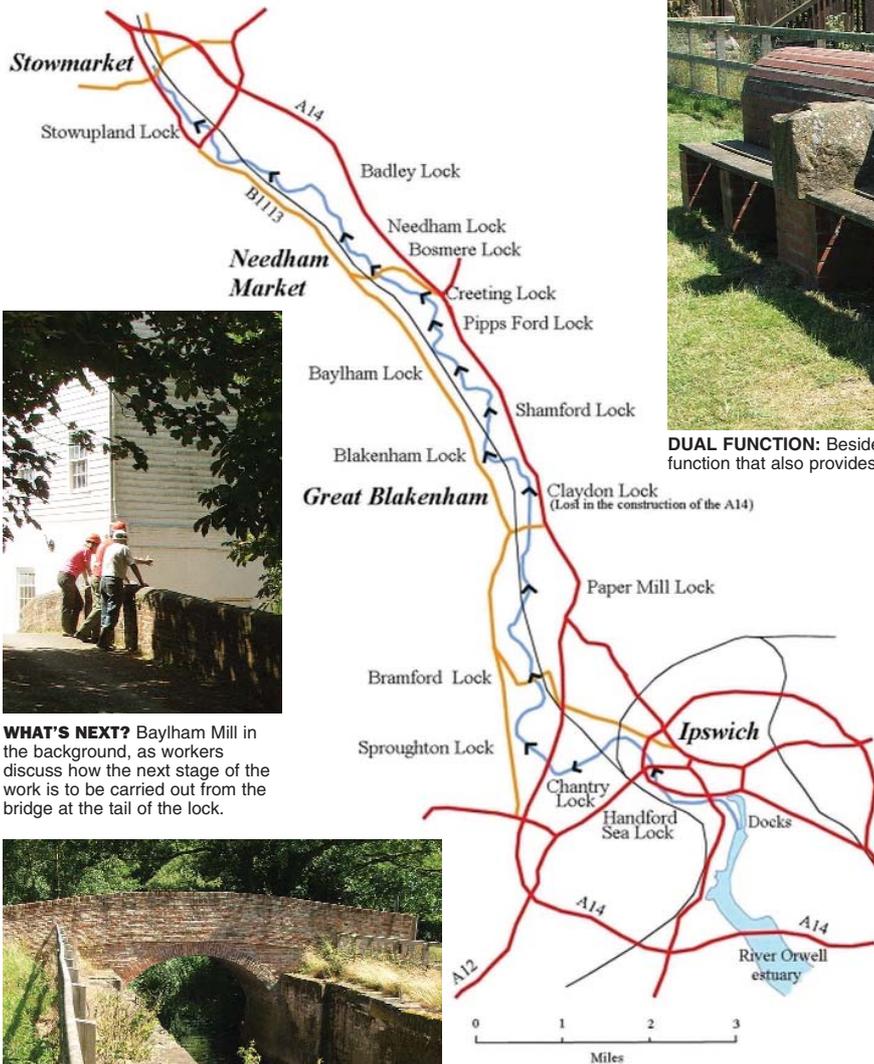
BLOCKED: A mountain of silt in the foreground blocks access to the mill race, while camp members work on installing an additional pump to keep the working area clear of water.

with Network Rail.

Liz and River Gipping Trust treasurer Specer Greystrom negotiated a budget-priced rent for the village hall and the showers at the village football club so the “navies” could feel human again after a long day's toil.

Their fellow volunteers were a mix of boaters and people interested in conservation and community work – or a mix of all three. Some were just passers-by who had seen another camp at work.

Martin Rowe was a typical recruit. It was his first camp and an interesting diversion



DUAL FUNCTION: Beside Bosmere Lock this stop plank store was built with a dual function that also provides seating for the park alongside the lock.



WHAT'S NEXT? Baylham Mill in the background, as workers discuss how the next stage of the work is to be carried out from the bridge at the tail of the lock.



from his desk job as technical author. He writes avionics equipment manuals for Marshall Aerospace in Cambridge and had been looking for a more adventurous holiday when he came across the WRG stand at an outdoor show.

Meanwhile, Sarah Patey, from Woodton, near Bungay, was back on the Gipping for a second year running but had also worked on the Caldon Canal, in Staffordshire, and was finally getting to learn bricklaying, which was one of her aims when she originally signed up.

Finally, I encountered someone who met my stereotype of a canal glutton. Peter Bowers, from Harwich, was just back from a six week cruise of the canal system aboard his own boat. Starting from his mooring at Tring and working up the Grand Union, he had completed passages of the Rochdale Canal and the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. "990 lock miles, single handed." There wasn't much more to be said. I was just left feeling jealous.

CREETING LOCK: Another that has been restored on the Gipping by the IWA Ipswich Branch and WRG members and now ready to receive lock gates. The Environment Agency fences the locks for safety until the locks are in use.



MIXING IT: Mixing the cement for the replacement wall. The stock of reclaimed bricks is stacked outside the large shed, used as the camps headquarters.

More details

RIVER GIPPING TRUST

The main objectives of the Trust are as follows:

- To maintain and improve for the benefit of the public the navigation of the River Gipping
- To advance the education of the public in the history, industrial archeology and natural history of the Ipswich & Stowmarket Navigation
- To promote and develop the recreational opportunities along the river
- To promote and develop the natural environment of the Gipping Valley

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