

Dear Proprietor,

In this, the first newsletter issued by the Society, may your Committee take the rather belated opportunity to wish you a very happy New Year and hope that 1978 will be a prosperous one both for yourselves and for the aims of the Society.

As you are probably aware, this year marks the centenary of the closing of the original Navigation and our hopes towards at least partial restoration were raised somewhat at the end of last year. Just before Christmas your Chairman and Treasurer attended a meeting with Mr. David Rollett, the Divisional Manager of the Anglian Water Authority, with the intention of discussing the attitude of the Authority towards restoration of our waterway. A very encouraging reply was received particularly regarding the restoration of Kyme Lower Lock, the first lock up Kyme Eau from the Witham, for which the Authority has responsibility. This lock would have to be the first to be made operative again if vessels are ever again to make their way up to Sleaford. With the Authority's approval, in principle, to such a scheme it is now the Committee's intention to investigate the financial outlay such a project would require, especially the costs of the engineering works. If you have any suggestions, offers of help, know an engineer who would undertake such a survey at a small fee, etc. - in fact, anything which you feel could bring this stage of restoration to a more speedy conclusion, our Chairman, ^{Mr} Martin Chapman, would be only too pleased to hear from you.

Another type of survey which is taking place is being conducted by Committee member, Byron Collins. It is most essential that before restoration work is begun on the river itself we should have some idea of the state of the Navigation and what actually remains e.g. surviving structures, state of the locks, depths of water, amount of weed. This survey has begun and the Committee would hope to have this circulated to you in the not too distant future.

The Lincoln branch of the Inland Waterways Association has been in contact with Martin Chapman regarding the participation of the Society in a waterways display which they want to bring to Sleaford, probably to be located in the public library. The date for this has not yet been fixed but if you have any material - documents, photographs, etc - which you would be willing to lend, again, please contact the Chairman. It is to be hoped that such an advertisement will attract further members to our Society and to the I.W.A. also.

Throughout this Centenary Year a number of fund-raising activities have been planned, the first of which I would like to bring to your attention now.

On Friday, February 17th. 1978, a "Wine and Pate Hour" has been arranged at The Conservative Hall, Northgate, Sleaford, beginning at 8.30 p.m. Good wine, pate and conversation are guaranteed for the sum of £1.25 per person. The bar of the Hall will also be open from 9.30 p.m. Your Committee will be pleased to see all who can attend and PLEASE bring your friends - membership stands at the moment at 42, can we make it 50...60!...70!! ? With your help we can.

For tickets for this function, please complete the tear-off form below and return it, with your remittance, (payable to the Society) to Martin Chapman. Your tickets will be sent by return.

SLEAFORD NAVIGATION SOCIETY

WINE AND PATE HOUR

TO. Martin Chapman,
2, Ripon Drive,
Sleaford.

Please send me.....tickets @ £1.25 per person.

I enclose.....

Name.....

Address.....

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Please make cheques payable to "The Company of Proprietors of the Sleaford Navigation Society". (Co. of Props. of the Slea.Nav.Soc.)

One of the Society's aims is to accumulate and make known information relating to the development and history of the canals and navigations of Lincolnshire, with particular reference to the Sleaford Navigation. Accordingly, a series of short articles is beginning with this newsletter about the people who made the Sleaford Navigation Company a reality in the first place and those who operated it during the 19th. century. The first in this series is about;

BENJAMIN HANDLEY

To most Sleafordians the name, "Handley" probably strikes a chord of recognition - "Ah?", they say, "isn't he the fellow standing on the monument in Southgate?" or, "Oh, yes?" the traffic hazard near the railway station."

In fact, this statue is to Henry Handley, the M.P. for South Lincolnshire in the late 1830's and early 1840's, who was Benjamin's son.

Benjamin Handley was born in 1755 at Newark, a town in which his father, William, was to serve three times a mayor. Sometime about 1780 Benjamin moved to Sleaford and established what was to become a very successful solicitor's firm. As he would have been only about 19 years old at the time of the first proposal to build a Navigation along the Slea/Kyme Eau to the Witham had been put forward in 1773, he played no part in those failed negotiations but, with a revival of interest in such a scheme in 1781/2, he appeared on the scene. An initial survey by the engineer John Varley failed to pass through Parliament (at that time it was necessary to obtain an Act of Parliament to establish a Navigation) and Benjamin is first noted at a meeting held at the George Inn, Sleaford, on December 17th. 1782, when John Varley was asked to make a second survey. Benjamin must have been quite influential in the town by then as he was elected to the post of solicitor and clerk to the group of Navigation supporters, which included such locally important people as Sir Christopher Whichcote of Aswarby, Sir Jenison William Gordon of Haverholme and Sir Joseph Banks of Revesby.

This attempt to obtain a Navigation failed in 1784, mainly due to opposition from the landowners on Holland Fen and the idea was dropped for a few years.

When the scheme was revived publically in 1791 Benjamin was there, again acting as solicitor (this time with Benjamin Cheales) and throughout the negotiations, in particular with the Witham Drainage and Navigation Commissioners, he was in touch with Sir Joseph Banks with whom he seems to have built up a close relationship.

When success was obtained for a Sleaford Navigation Act on June 11th. 1792, Benjamin was appointed Treasurer to the new company and, to mark the appreciation of the shareholders for the efforts made by him over the years to bring the waterway into being, on the day of the opening to traffic (May 6th. 1794) he was presented with a solid silver cup inscribed around the base, "The Gift of the Company of Proprietors of the Sleaford Navigation, May 6th. 1794." As far as is known, this cup is today held privately in the Transvaal, Republic of South Africa.

Benjamin was appointed Treasurer rather than Clerk, the post usually occupied by a solicitor because he was also a banker. In April, 1792 he had been co-founder, with Anthony Peacock and William Kirton, of the "Peacock, Handley and Kirton and Co. Bank" in Northgate, Sleaford (today "Lloyd's Bank"). His share of the initial capital for this enterprise would have come from the fortune he had made in his capacity as a solicitor and landowner. Great support for the newly-formed Navigation was given by the bank, including allowing overdrafts at $\frac{1}{2}\%$ below the normal for that period and the partners themselves made loans to the company. A loan of £1,000 made by Benjamin in 1795 was eventually repaid in three instalments between 1812 and 1814 and he would seem not to have taken a 5% interest allowed to him on this amount.

Regarding his solicitor's business, it has been said, "...by great assiduity and intelligence, together with the advantages offered by the vast employ for the profession" (that is, the legal profession) "during the enclosure of the fens, amassed a great fortune." He was solicitor to, amongst others, the Enclosure Bills for Dorrington (1787), Rauceby (1788), Dunston (1793) and Sleaford and Holdingham (1794); for the Nocton and Dunston Drainage Bills (1789) and for the Sleaford to Tattershall Thorpe Turnpike Bill (1793).

He owned land and property in ^Aew Sleaford, Holdingham, Algarkirk, Billingham, Waddington, Heckington and Sutterton and his connections with the landowning society in the Horncastle district were established by his marriage to Frances Conington of that town.

He was made Deputy Recorder for Boston in 1817.

Benjamin held the position of Navigation Treasurer for 32 years, tendering his resignation at the Annual General Meeting of May, 1824. Having first appeared as an active supporter of a Navigation in 18⁷², his connection with the waterway had, therefore, extended over 42 years.

He had only 4 more years to live, dying on April 23rd. 1828 - so this year marks the 150th. anniversary of his death. He is buried in the chancel of St. Deny's Church in Sleaford, where his tombstone can be seen today.

It is fitting that Benjamin Handley should be the first in this series as the evidence would point to him as being the principal local businessman to support the scheme, both in time spent promoting it and in the form of financial assistance given. His relationship with Sir Joseph Banks and the ^{canal} ~~canal~~ engineer, William Jessop, were particularly important in the success of the 1792 Sleaford Navigation Bill and a consideration of this will form the basis of a future account in this series.

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If you have any information about the Sleaford Navigation's history, any stories about the river or anything about the canals and navigations of Lincolnshire - in fact, anything which you think would be of interest to the Proprietors of this Society, please contact the Treasurer, Bill Hunt, 9, Arundel Crescent, Boston, Lincolnshire.