WHAT DIRECTION NEXT FOR SORT?

Yes it’s been 18 months since the last Newsletter and there is a very good reason for that. The news back then was dominated by the one question, “Life Beyond Isfield?” That question, discussed in October 2016, remains high on our agenda as another Spring approaches. The question where do we go from here, with Isfield lock having been restored as far as is practically and financially possible, heads all our Committee meetings and discussion. I will attempt to summarize overleaf the problems encountered with other potential projects.

Over the last 18 months work has continued at Isfield lock. The site has been tidied, the surrounding fencing completed and a gate installed. A rustic information board is now displaying items relevant to the lock and the Navigation and another information leaflet display box has been installed replacing the one that went missing last year. We have continued the on-going task of keeping the grass cut around the lock.

The upper and lower cuts have been cleared and profiled and just await the day when we are able to break through to the river at either end and restore water on a permanent basis to the cut and the lock. During the winter months nature tends to carry out this operation for us and recent photographs show just how close we have been in linking up with the river.

For nearly twelve years the converted horse-box, the work of Paul Morris, our first project manager, has served as store, tea room, toilet and general office. It has served us well. But everything has a shelf life and it has been decided, as part of the general tidying up of the site, to dismantle the box, sell off the metal and burn the wooden sections.

A similar fate awaits the wonderful ‘barrow-lift’ cleverly put together by Paul all those years ago. The only way to remove it from the site is to dismantle it. It has done its job and has to go.

What remains at the site is the container which has served as a store for all equipment and materials and the temporary shelter and enclosure built to house the digger, dumper and other heavy equipment such as scaffold planks and poles. All will be removed once another project direction has been established.
ISFIELD LOCK
(February 2018)

Upper Cut

Lower Cut meets the river

Notice Board

Lock Lower approach walls

Dismantled ‘horse-box’

Looking west across the lock
Some of the problems we have encountered over the last 12 months or more in identifying the next stage of any restoration project were written about in the last Newsletter. This is an attempt to further explain what SORT are up against.

The next lock upstream from Isfield Lock is **Sharpsbridge lock**. The remains of the structure lie about 2 miles north of Isfield lock just east of Sharpsbridge Farm. The site is surrounded by trees and little visible evidence exists at ground level. It is believed that much of the structure lies beneath the ground and tree roots. The site is about 100m off the public right of way on private land. We have approached the land owners but have failed to convince them enough for them to allow us to begin initial excavations or clearance of the site. Sharpsbridge lock would obviously be an ideal lock to restore, extending any future river use to several miles between The Anchor public house to the south of Isfield lock and Sharpsbridge.

The problems with working on **Iron Gate lock** at Sheffield Park have been well documented since we began work there back in 2012. That work consisted of scrub clearance, tree removal and exposing the remains of the lock. The lock lies in a short cut off the river on National Trust land, about 1 mile east of Sheffield park Bluebell Railway station. Unfortunately the N.T. were only willing to discuss partial restoration and were looking to stabilise what remained rather than agree to a full blown restoration of the structure. No work has been carried out on the lock now for over three years.

**Polebay lock** lies west of Sheffield Park station. Our working parties have spent some time clearing the site and exposing the lock and the remains of the structure. Whether Polebay is a candidate for a future full restoration is subject to debate, The main problem with such a project concerns the Environment Agency (E.A.) One arm of the ‘main river’ is shown to run through the lock and any work would require their permission which is unlikely to be granted.

Downstream from Polebay lock lies **Bacon Wish lock**. It is on land half owned by a SORT Committee member. As well as making some restorative repairs to the original bridge over the lower end of the lock ongoing work includes site clearance and removing tree roots from the lock side. An obstacle at this site is the concrete floor that was laid down many years ago by the E.A. and a similar problem to that at Polebay regarding the statutory main river also exists.

**Oil Mills lock** lies on private land which has recently been subject of a change in ownership and a new house is being constructed, therefore it cannot be considered a possible candidate for SORT’s attention. **Fulling Mill lock** too lies on private land and our visit to the site recently showed that hardly any part of the former structure remains.

That is just a brief run down on the problems SORT faces in seeking out another lock for restoration.

**A SORT ‘trip boat’?**

The purchase of a small boat that could be used to operate trips along the navigation has been discussed in the past and the subject has arisen again.

A ‘trip boat’ creates an opportunity to spread the word about SORT’s long term objectives, and if operated in the right area can show off the work achieved to date. It also allows for a steady income through the summer months.

The ideal section of the river for such a venture would be from the Anchor pub at Barcombe upstream to Isfield lock. Once there those on the trip could be shown around the lock site and given an informative talk about its history and the work carried out to restore the lock to its current state.

SORT have qualified boat crew amongst their members but before seeking to purchase such a boat we would need to secure a suitable site for mooring and operation.

To that end we have written to the management at the Anchor pub setting out our ideas. That letter was sent in late January and to date we have not had a reply either agreeing to meet and discuss the ideas or rejecting them.

**New Information / Membership leaflet**

Over the winter months SORT have designed and had printed a new combined Information and Membership leaflet. These have been placed at Isfield lock site as well as distributed around local libraries and Information Centres.
Lock Walks

Over the past four years we have conducted a series of walks to visit the locks along the Ouse Navigation that are accessible and capable of being located. These have included the locks at Hamsey, Barcombe Mills, Pimms and East Mascalls locks at Lindfield, Pole Bay, Bacon Wish and Freshfield and most recently Fulling Mill near Lindfield. Other lock sites at Sharpsbridge and Oil Mills have been visited by members of the restoration team to assess their potential as future project subjects. No further walks are planned until the future restoration plans are decided upon when the lock or locks chosen will be visited.

Your Committee

There have been a few changes to the SORT Committee since the last Newsletter. Bob Draper remains as Chairman, Hazel Lintott as Secretary, Ted Lintott as Project Manager and Terry Owen as Membership Secretary. But Julie Draper has retired from the position of Treasurer after many years looking after SORT’s money affairs. That position has been taken by David Beveridge. Derek Wright continues as minutes secretary and has recently taken on the responsibility of web site manager. Brian Newbury joins the Committee but Steve Linehan has resigned his position. Roy Sutton remains as our invaluable Consultant Engineer.

Autumn Meeting

The date for the joint annual Autumn Meeting has been provisionally fixed for **Thursday 15th November 2018**. That date will be confirmed nearer the time and we are currently seeking out a suitable speaker for the evening, one to match the fascinating talk we were treated to last November by Geoffrey Mead from Sussex University, a talk about the Ouse from its source to the sea.

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