

## The Humber Arm

During June of this year I became aware of a planning application for Lubstree Farm from Mr John Ward. Knowing that the former owner, Mr Peter Ward, had sold the farm I was keen to make contact with the new owner and to see if I could find out what, if anything still exists of this branch of the canal. I contacted the new owner and was delighted to discover that he was very sympathetic to the aims of the Trust, although, at that time, he had been told little of what was planned. For this reason I arranged to meet Mr Ward, with Trust Chairman David Adams, on 27th June at Lubstree Farm.

When he arrived, Mr Ward told us that he also farms in Cheshire and is looking to develop the activities at Lubstree. He had brought with him some 1:2500 scale OS maps showing the Humber Arm and the main canal. He listened while David explained about the Trust and what it planned to accomplish over the next 10 years or so, illustrated by samples from David's enormous library of OS maps, showing the former route of the canal. For his part, John Ward explained that part of the Arm still existed and was in water and had been used for some years as a fishing pool. He had looked at the site and was considering developing this fishing facility, not at the Wharf end but down near the Duke's Drive end. However, he was keen to take us round and to show us what was still on his land.

### Lubstree Wharf

We went first to the Wharf end and were delighted to find that a stretch of the canal about one-third of a mile long not only still existed but appeared to be in extremely good condition. Where the farm track crossed the Arm, there was a bridge still in place, although heavily covered in ivy. There was also a rather strange structure, built into the bridge whose ancestry and use was unknown, although it is believed that it might have been some sort of store building. We pushed down through waist high nettles and looked back at the bridge and the store, which stands in a semi-derelict state but strangely built into the bridge with a curved wall.

The canal at this point has been widened on the far side, we understand to improve the fishing rights and the canal had also been dredged to clear it of weeds. Certainly, standing there in the warm sunlight, it was not difficult to imagine laden tub boats making their way slowly up to the warehouse while the small steam locomotive puffed gently, waiting for its wagons to be loaded. We then walked slowly up to towards the warehouse along a stretch where the grass was kept closely mown by the residents of the neighbouring cottage. Along this stretch, there were examples of where fishermen had constructed little platforms.

### The Interchange Warehouse

At the end of the Arm, we were delighted to find the former warehouse still standing.

Not only that, but the original warehouse doors were still in place, as was the jib of



the gantry which had been used to unload and load the barges. The roof was no longer in place, although there were two of the original roof trusses standing in the hedge alongside the warehouse. As we looked back down the Arm, towards the bridge, it was not difficult to picture this stretch in a few years time, with canal boats coming slowly up to the wharf. It is a beautifully peaceful place in which to have a small marina or several moorings.

### **Duke's Bridge End – A Walk on the Wild Side!**

We walked back to the cars, parked on the bridge and then set off for the Duke's Bridge end. The next stretch of the canal has been filled in and is now a farmed field but, when we got about a quarter of a mile down the lane, we came to a heavily wooded section. Out of the cars and then pushing our way through the jungle of undergrowth, we climbed up on to an embankment. It was here that John explained to us that when he had originally investigated the setting, he had imagined that the Humber Arm had run alongside the woods though what appeared to be a natural pathway. It was only upon further investigation that he realised that the embankment on which we were standing was in fact the canal, which had been filled in. We walked down through the woods, along the "embankment" for about a quarter of a mile until we came to the point where it had originally joined with the main canal.

All the way along this stretch we had noticed that the trees and shrubs that had grown up over the years were all young and of no great arboriferous value. It would require heavy machinery to dig out the former canal but it was not insuperable. As we walked, John explained that he could see advantages for him as a farmer and landowner and would be more than willing to pursue further discussions as to how we might proceed. Obviously, as with all farmers, times over the last two or three years have been hard – with BSE, foot and mouth etc – but he could see commercial opportunities that could be developed to our mutual benefit.

### **Future Benefits**

Then came another surprise. John mentioned that he was a trustee of a Charitable Trust, based in Cheshire but also covering Shropshire, which was set up to provide funding for activities such as ours. He was willing to get application forms sent to us to see if we might receive some funding from this Trust. No promises or commitments were made but John did outline that the main objectives were to support organisations that promoted education and environmental activities (these forms have been received, filled in and submitted).

This then was a truly enjoyable morning and one that looks to have tremendous benefits for the Trust. Grateful thanks are due to John Ward for giving up his time and for being so enthusiastic about our plans.

*Rodney Pitt*