

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RIVER STOUR NAVIGATION

1705 TO THE PRESENT DAY



NRA

Anglian Region



Sudbury



During the reign of Queen Anne in 1705 an Act of parliament was passed for making the River 'Stower' navigable from the town of Manningtree in the County of Essex to the town of Sudbury in the County of Suffolk.

This was one of the country's earliest statutory navigations and was in continuous use for commercial traffic for over two hundred years. A right of navigation still exists, although nowadays only small pleasure boats are to be found on the river.

The river and its surrounding landscape was made famous by the many paintings of the area by John Constable, who knew the river and its locality intimately as his father, Golding Constable, was the local Miller. Such was his love of the Suffolk Stour that the artist continued to paint scenes of the river and nearby villages even after he had left the area to live in London.



Langham Bridge

appointed 70 new Commissioners to sit with the two remaining members, William Jenners and, Charles Grey. The new Commissioners were not of such high rank as formerly, but the names of many are of interest. Golding Constable (father of John Constable), Samuel and John Gainsborough, Phillip Champion Crespigny, Osgood Hanbury and John Strutt of Terling are among those listed. In 1788 Sir Joshua Rowley and James Round were appointed.

In 1836 the Proprietors commissioned a survey of the navigation to report on what repairs were necessary and the report of the survey concluded that £12,000 would be required to make the river in a perfect navigable condition. One of the works undertaken at this time was the new cut at Wormingford with two new locks, and a lock at Pitmore to replace a staunch. The value of these works was reflected in the report of the Treasurer at the Annual Meeting of the Proprietors in 1846. The average annual income for the last five years being £2,918 with average outgoings of £750.



Flatford

In the 1850s John Constable's brother agreed with the Proprietors to the

Wormingford Cut

closing of the ford and Water Lane just below Flatford Mill on the undertaking of the Proprietors to pay fifty shillings (£2.50p) per annum forever to Constable and his heirs, and also to build a bridge. The Water Lane and ford are the scene of Constable's famous painting 'The Haywain'. The present bridge at Flatford, despite renewal and repair, has retained the appearance of the original bridge.

The building of the railway in the middle of the 19th century saw the beginning of the end of the navigation and with more and more of the commodities originally carried by barge being transported quicker and cheaper by rail, the tolls began to dwindle and by 1890 the Proprietors found themselves for the first time in debt. In 1892 The Company of Undertakers was incorporated in a Limited Company under the title of The River Stour Navigation Co Ltd, and to provide revenue some unwanted land was sold. However, the decline of the



'Firebird' at the Granary

navigation continued and by 1912 the remainder of the real estate was sold and the £1,400 raised paid off an existing mortgage. The following year the Company went into voluntary liquidation with liabilities of £65 and assets of £40.

At this stage the Shareholders of the Company formed themselves into a Trust Company to carry on the navigation which continued up to the first World War, but shortly after this the barge traffic ceased and the last barge is believed to have gone through Boxted lock in 1916. Mr Percy Clover of Dedham, using the navigation up to Dedham, continued to pay tolls up to 1930 when his last payment was 33/- (£1.65p). In 1935 application was made to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies for the Company to be struck off the roll, and by 1937 the Navigation Company ceased to exist.

The 1705 Act named the Mayor and Aldermen of Sudbury of that time and ten other gentlemen as the 'Undertakers', and gave them the necessary powers for making the river navigable. It also appointed some hundred Commissioners to act as referees in cases of dispute between riparian owners and the 'Undertakers'. The Commissioners consisted of '3 Peers, 18 Baronets, 9 Knights and 80 other esquires', but any of nine of these could make a quorum and had full powers. In the year 1706 the 'Undertakers', with a capital of £4,800, authorised Messrs Cornelius Denn and Dean Cock of London to execute the powers granted under the Act, and in 1708 work commenced on making the river navigable.

The following toll table of 1741 gives some idea of the cost of transporting foodstuffs, although many other goods were also carried such as oil, pitch, soap, vinegar, paper, tallow, iron, lead, sugar, butter, coal and bricks. One of the regular items of cargo were grindstones for the numerous mills to be found on the river, and the cost of transporting these from Mistley Quay to Sudbury was:

6ft Grindstones
at 1/6d (2¹/₂p) each

5ft Grindstones
at 10¹/₂d (5p) each

4ft Grindstones
at 6d (2¹/₂p) each

	Qrs	s.d.
Wheat	20	at 3.0 ³ / ₄ (15p)
Flour	20	at 3.0 ³ / ₄ (15p)
Peas	20	at 3.0 ³ / ₄ (15p)
Beans	20	at 3.0 ³ / ₄ (15p)
Barley	20	at 2.3 ³ / ₄ (11p)
Oats	20	at 2.3 ³ / ₄ (11p)
Malt	20	at 1.6 ¹ / ₂ (7 ¹ / ₂ p)
Bran	20	at 1.6 ³ / ₄ (7 ¹ / ₂ p)
Clonseed	20	at 4.8 (23p)
(One quarter =		12.7 kilograms)

The Act of 1705 was amended in 1780 in a fresh Act, partly because all the original Commissioners were dead, and of those appointed Commissioners under the powers of the Act only two remained alive. This second Act



Flatford



THE STOUR NAVIGATION



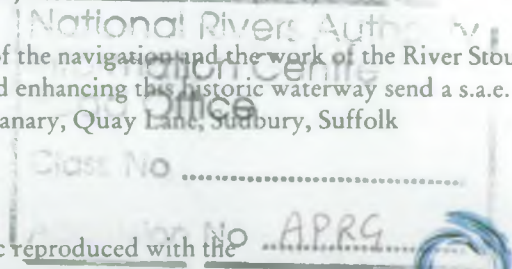
Dedham Lock

This was not, however, the end of the navigation. In 1968 a group of enthusiastic people formed the River Stour Trust with the aim of protecting and enhancing the public right of navigation upon the river, and this right was confirmed under the Anglian Water Authority Act 1977 when the A.W.A. became the Navigation Authority. Since 1st September 1989 the National Rivers Authority has taken over the role as Navigation Authority for the Stour.

INFORMATION

Copies of the navigation and recreation byelaws for use of boats on the river together with boat registration forms and tariff of charges are obtainable from the National Rivers Authority, Anglian Region, Rivers House, Threshelfords, Inworth Road, Feering, Kelvedon, Essex CO5 9SE Tel: (0376) 572091.

For information on the history of the navigation and the work of the River Stour Trust in preserving, restoring and enhancing this historic waterway send a s.a.e. to the River Stour Trust, The Granary, Quay Lane, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 6AN.



RIVER STOUR TRUST

Photographs, etc reproduced with the permission of: J. Marriage, R. Baker, Sudbury Museum, and Essex Records Office.

Published by the National Rivers Authority, Anglian Region and the River Stour Trust.



NRA

Anglian Region