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NEWSLETTER No. 256 AUGUST 1992

MEETINGS - 1st Thursday each month at 7.45 pm.
St. John Ambulance Hall, King's Park Road, Southampton.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

- 6th August - Members Slides.
- 3rd September - 'Big Digs & Little Digs' - Jon Sims.
- 1st October - Narrowboat Joinery & Wheelwrighting - Peter Brougham.
- 5th November - Film & Slides on Canal Lifts in Belgium - Hugh Mcknight.

JULY MEETING. If years of service qualify people as speakers then we surely had two experts for our slide show on the 'History and Preservation of the Festiniog Railway'.

Bob Smith, who operated the projector, has been a member since 1954 and David Meek, who gave the talk, joined the Festiniog in 1958. We saw several slides of these stalwarts performing 'Jack of all Trades' jobs on the railway, many of the tasks similar to those performed by canal volunteers.

David has carefully recorded the restoration and was able to show us the rebuilding to the present, efficient railway which carries thousands of passengers annually.

Some pictures showed the brilliantly painted little trains contrasting with the gentle colours of the Welsh hillsides, emphasising the size of the task that the original engineers undertook.

There was a lively question session at the end of the meeting and several members showed interest in visiting the railway.

CIVIC TRUST UK 2000.

CANAL RESTORATION and the VOLUNTARY SECTOR - 1992 SURVEY.

If you are a member of Southampton Canal Society and did any voluntary work on inland waterways in 1991 would you please inform the Chairman (as soon as possible) on which waterways you worked and for how many days.

KENNET AND AVON CANAL. The Kennet and Avon Canal Trust used their 30th AGM to make public the setting up of the next task of the trust - a back pumping system. This is much needed to resolve the continuing difficulties of water shortage.

The Trust have agreed with British Waterways the locations and equipment necessary for the project which aims to recirculate water between Bath and the Crofton summit, rather than calling for new supplies. The scheme to include a new pump at Widcombe flight, upgrading of pumps at Bradford-on-Avon and Seend, and new piping and pump at Caen Hill and between Wootton Rivers and the summit would cost about £1.8 million.

As a remainder waterway British Waterways are unable to allocate funds to the project so the Trust have announced their intention to "go it alone" and hope to present their programme by the end of the summer, including plans for increasing membership, fund raising, sponsorship and possibly assistance from European agencies.

KENNET AND AVON WHIRLWIND. On the Saturday of the Whitsun Bank Holiday a violent but localised whirlwind caused four trees to fall at Dundas. The main obstruction was a large beech tree that came down about 200 yards east of Dundas Aqueduct trapping about 30 boats on both sides. The towpath obstructions were cleared on the Sunday and British Waterways, together with contractors, cleared the navigation channel by Monday afternoon. The accompanying thunderstorm, temporarily reducing the oxygen in the water, was responsible for some fish loss.

LOCK LADDERS. The 26 lock ladders installed during last winter's stoppage programme on sections of the Staffs & Worcs and Shropshire Union Canals are said to have cost £1,200 each as British Waterways continue with their programme to ensure all locks have ladders as a safety element.

RELICS FROM THE ITCHEN NAVIGATION by Jeremy de Montfalcon.

It was during 1979 that a friend of mine who is an amateur archaeologist informed me that the Itchen Navigation near Winchester was being dredged to clear the large build-up of silt at the bottom of the canal.

As a keen archaeologist myself I decided to arrange a trip to the canal with my metal detector to see what I might be able to find, by running my detector over any silt deposits which had been dredged from canal. I knew the canal had been used by people for the last 300 years, so any finds I might make would no doubt be very interesting indeed.

When I arrived at the Itchen Navigation on the outskirts of Winchester I was amazed to see the whole canal completely empty of water! Most intriguing of all was that there wasn't anyone else in the canal with a metal detector, so I had the entire canal to search for myself.

On entering the drained canal with my metal detector I had to be very careful at times for there were areas of deep mud where one could almost disappear! I proceeded to search near what is called 'the Tun bridge', where old coins and other small artefacts might have been dropped, by people from the barges, as they passed under the bridge.

My very first signal was received under a large piece of reed that was drooping over the bank of the canal near to the entrance of the bridge. Digging into the soft wet clay I was immediately rewarded with the most beautiful middle 18th century buckle that I had ever found. (See fig 1).



MIDDLE 18th CENTURY BUCKLE
Fig 1.

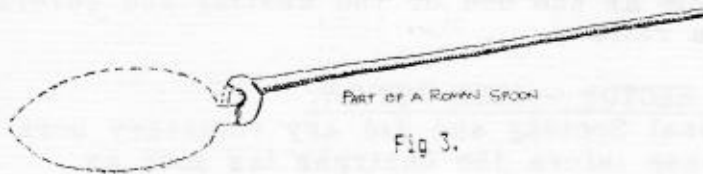
Carefully placing the buckle in a plastic bag I then moved to the other side of the bridge where the dredger had just removed a large quantity of silt. Tuning my detector I then scanned an area almost directly under the bridge and received a loud and positive signal on my headphones. Digging into the clay once more I turned up a very early 19th century lead token in mint condition. (See fig 2). A further search of the area produced nothing else except some pieces of rubbish.



EARLY 19th CENTURY LEAD TOKEN
Fig 2.

Far beyond the bridge I could see a large bend in the canal which looked like a good area where small coins and other antiquities might gather.

Without wasting any time I started to detect my way along the muddy banks of the old canal towards the bend. As I approached the bend my detector gave a loud buzz on my headphones, indicating metal below the surface. Excavating the clay with my trowel I dug out a small and long piece of a very old spoon. This was later identified by an archaeologist at the Winchester Museum as "Part of a Roman spoon. Bronze with 'tinned' surface". The stem is moulded at the end and was joined to the bowl of the spoon (which was probably pear shaped) by a volute, which survives. The bowl is missing. Spoons were mainly used for eating eggs and the point of the stem for extracting snails from their shells" (See figs 3 & 4).



PART OF A ROMAN SPOON
Fig 3.



Fig 4.

A ROMAN SPOON FOUND IN THE REMAINS OF A ROMAN BOWLING ALLEY AT CHESTERFORD DURING THE 19th CENTURY SHOWS HOW THE ABOVE SPOON WOULD HAVE LOOKED HAD IT BEEN COMPLETE.

Only a few yards away from the spoon my detector began buzzing again. This time I disinterred a large round and black artefact which I later identified as a fairly common type of undecorated English Medieval Annular brooch dating back to the 10th-11th century AD, of round section, with a thick blunt ended pin (See fig 5).

Continuing my search of the area I then found a Young head copper Victorian Farthing from the period 1838-1860 in fine condition and a very small Roman coin in poor condition.

Other finds reported by individual detectorists included three discs made of lead, identified as bale seals. These were attached to bales of merchandise such as wool. They usually bear crude designs, including the initials of the merchant and sometimes also a date. These specimens are relics from the years when the Itchen Navigation was used as a canal, from the late 17th to the early 19th century.

One lucky detectorist discovered a gold guinea close to the old lock gate directly opposite the bridge where the railway once ran, near to Hockley traffic lights. Three other very interesting detector finds included the trigger mechanism from a flintlock pistol, a George III Cartwheel penny dated 1797 and an Elizabeth I silver sixpence dating from 1558-1603.

The oldest find recorded was part of a prehistoric bronze axe-head dating to the Middle Bronze Age, that is, about 1400-900 BC. It is part of an axe known as a "palstave".

One of the most unusual finds to be discovered at the canal was a Holy Communion set from the 19th century, which consisted of a solid silver wafer tray, chalice and wine bottle. This was discovered buried amongst the roots of a tree next to the Itchen Navigation canal by a metal detectorist from Winchester. One theory about how the communion set got there is that it was believed to have been stolen from a nearby church, secretly buried next to the canal and never recovered.



ENGLISH MEDIEVAL ANNULAR BROOCH
10th-11th CENTURY AD



A SIDE VIEW OF THE BROOCHES PIN

Fig 5.