



THE EMPIRE'S LAUNCH

The Consuta Trust

The advancement of education in the history of steam launches, by preservation, maintenance and exhibition of the steam launch **Consuta**

Patron: The Rt. Hon. Lord Strathcona & Mount Royal

Consuta Trust Newsletter - Autumn 2016

Dear All,

Operations during late summer 2016

The boating season.

After the rush of all the events leading up to Traditional Boat Festival in July, the months of August and September have been very quiet indeed.

Two supporter outings and a wedding function were arranged, unfortunately the wedding outing had to be cancelled which was a great shame. It was a difficult decision but the EA issued a weather warning of gale force winds and heavy rain showers for the day, so we really had no other option.

The first of the two supporter events was a trip up the Kennet and Avon on Wednesday 16th August, starting from Charvil. Consuta had a full complement of crew and passengers, and we set off from our mooring at about 10:30 with arrangements to pick up two of our party at Blakes Lock on the Kennet.

The weather was perfect, but then a chalked notice at Sonning Lock said that Fobney Lock on the K&A could not be used because of a sunken boat; oh dear and if still closed we would be unable to reach the Cuning Man Inn at Burghfield. I've never seen a sunk boat in a lock before, so the trip still looked interesting and all agreed worth going as far as we could.

There are two locks on the Kennet before Fobney, both in Reading, first is Blakes lock then shortly followed by County lock. Blakes lock is EA Thames river territory but County lock is the first one on the Canal and River Trust patch.

Arriving at Fobney Lock there were two narrow boats, a butty with it's tug on the lock mooring; their cargo was coal.

Crowds of people were present at the lock plus several CRT rescue vehicles, and sure enough there was that sunken boat in the bottom of the lock.

Now County lock is quite big and deep, about 115ft long 17ft wide with about an 8ft drop. The problem about removing the boat was because there is no access for road based lifting gear, it seemed that the sunken boat had been there for a week.





Reading High street bridge - checking clearance



A few remaining Victorian cottages in Reading



The guides says County lock only has a drop of 14 inches



Narrowboat and butty at Fobney Lock with Consuta alongside



The Oracle shopping centre in Reading



Tea Gardens at Sonning Lock

We watched the activity for a while then decided that there was no point waiting, so considered which would be the best way to turn Consuta around. You need to appreciate that the Kennet is quite narrow and always seems to have a significant current. There were various conflicting pieces of advice offered for this manoeuvre, Consuta would be in public view and nobody likes to make mistakes in public. However the turning was performed without any difficulties but the current did carry us through some shallows on setting off down stream – oops.

We took the back route channel through Reading past the Abbey ruins – I believe that this was the original course of the river. There are two low bridges here both required the funnel to be lowered, finally stopping at the Bel and The Dragon Inn moorings for a pub lunch. This inn is on the site of the Blakes Lock museum which barely exists any more, which is a pity because in the past it used to be such a delightful museum.

The journey back on the Thames was pleasant with a stop over at the Sonning Lock tea gardens – accessed here is from a mooring on the weir stream above the lock. A notice at the lock proclaimed that Fobney Lock was now operational, maybe we should have waited to see how the CRT raised that sunken boat.

Our last supporter's trip this year, again with a full complement of 12 people, was on Wednesday 14th September, on another lovely warm sunny day. My own plans for the trip were quite ambitious, a day outing as far as Clifton Hampden lock from Beale Park and return. Consuta was in steam and through the cut onto the Thames before 10:00am. We picked up three of our passengers just above Goring Lock at Nuns Acre. The river was quiet except about a mile before Wallingford there were several racing fours practising or maybe they were racing; we were tempted to join in but resisted the urge.

The River Thame from Dorchester enters the Thames about half a mile downstream of Days lock, so for the rest of upriver trip we were now on the old Roman River Isis. I've always like the reach above Days lock with some lovely riverside properties and so isolated, then noticed one quite long boathouse which had a vent cowl, could this have been built for a steam launch?. After passing Clifton Hampden bridge there was some indecision whether to moor up for the Barley Mow, or go further up the weir stream for the Plough Inn at Long Whittenham. Perhaps a notice stating £10 to moor near the Barley Mow decided the issue.

I wondered how easy would it be to turn Consuta around in the weir stream – oops we got stuck in the mud – well the prop did. All moved to the bow and rocked the boat, Consuta finally came free.



Clifton Hampden Bridge



We wondered was this boathouse originally for a steam launch?

On other occasions it has only been possible to get free in the mud by hand turning the prop shaft backwards, the problem is that the big blades stick out so far below the bottom of the boat then work like a mud anchor.

Suitably refreshed the journey back was lovely with fine views of the Wittenham Clumps on the approach to Days Lock. We had time to stop for ice creams from the café at Benson. Finally arriving back at Beale Park after 6:00pm; as someone remarked it truly was a “Grand Day Out”.

The new boiler project.

The Trust are very close to submitting our HLF grant application for the work. This will be a project which not only aims to construct, install a replacement boiler with fittings, new pipe work and boiler casing but will also involve a small exhibition unit at the park to attract interest and support from the large numbers of Beale Park visitors. This project, if we are successful getting a grant, will start early in 2017 and last for about 18 months. A wide range of activities is being planned for a wide variety of interests.

The HLF grant programme is called “Our Heritage”; so fingers crossed.

The museum project

Progress here is rather slow but we should hopefully by Spring 2017 have all the planning issues resolved. West Berkshire Planning allegedly have a reputation of being the most awkward in the country, certainly in our dealings with them this reputation is quite secure, they are placing every planning objection they can muster against this museum project – such a shame and lack of support for an important and undervalued part of Thames history.

Consuta Winter Social

Nothing has been decided yet but we have several ideas and once firmed up the details will be sent out with the Christmas posting.

Many thanks to all for your continuing support and encouragement. Incidentally if you would like to take a more active role in the Trust you can either come along to the work parties or the cruises on Consuta, or perhaps you might consider becoming a trustee. Contact me if you would like to know more.

If you received this newsletter by post but have an email, please do let us know so that we can save the print and postage costs and send you all future newsletters (in colour) by email.

Best wishes from The Consuta Trust

Brian Smith, October 2016

Below two photos below showing:- work – descaling a check valve and pleasure – cruising on the Thames





This map uses google maps with an interesting piece of software called Google Fusion and has produced a map showing the location of our Consuta supporters. The online map which is not publicly available can be used to give details of each pin locator.