

## A history of Ripon Motor Boat Club – continued.

### The 1980s.

Four events of importance to the club happened during this decade:

1. The club's cruising facilities were improved by providing pontoon moorings at Langthorpe.
2. The club's boat maintenance facilities were improved by the construction of a crane pad,
3. The club's social facilities were improved by replacing *Enid* with a clubhouse, and
4. The Ripon Canal's derelict locks were restored and reopened.

The establishment of pontoon moorings at Langthorpe was a process which developed stage-by-stage over several years, to which many members contributed, but which was 'master-minded' by the writer.

It had long been intended that the slipway in the club compound should be improved to accept larger craft, and a sub-committee was appointed (c.1981?) under the chairmanship of the writer to undertake this task. However, before any work could commence a lined wooden building, said to be suitable for use as a clubhouse became available, and the improvement of craft maintenance facilities was placed on 'hold'.

The building was situated on Teesside, and was described as being of good quality and in good condition, comprising a number of 8 foot sections bolted together and capable of being dismantled and reassembled in the club compound. It was stated that the building was sitting on a number of separate concrete blocks, and that it would suffice for it to sit on concrete blocks in the club compound. The purchase price was modest, an estimate of the cost to dismantle, transport, and reassemble it was acceptable, and so the committee decided to seek planning permission.

Since the building was intended to sit on concrete blocks it was necessary for it to be sited on flat ground, rather further back from the marina than was otherwise desirable. Plans were accordingly drawn up, planning permission was applied for, and in due course received. A professionally qualified club officer advised Bill Rutzen (Commodore 1979-82) that it had been received (implying that erection could commence) and the work was put in hand.

The writer had previously been involved with the erection of a wooden building for use as a clubhouse at Sunderland, where building regulations had required it to be supported by brick sub-walls on proper foundations. (The roof of York MBC's first timber clubhouse had been blown off into the nearby sewage works). He twice questioned whether the proposed concrete block supports would be satisfactory, and on each occasion the committee accepted the assurance of its 'professionally qualified officer' that it would.

In the event the building proved not to comprise bolted together complete sections, but a number a small individual sections that had been nailed together. Nevertheless re-erection was well under way when the building inspector called. He complained that building regulation approval had not been sought, he considered the concrete blocks to be inadequate, and he ordered assembly work to cease.

The support structure he required comprised a solid concrete base, contained within brick walls on proper foundations. A committee meeting was called at short notice, the considerable extra expenditure was authorized and the work was put in hand. At this stage some of the club's members suggested that it was inappropriate to erect what was clearly a very second-hand temporary wooden structure on a relatively expensive foundation. The committee decided to investigate the possibility of erecting a permanent brick clubhouse, and a club member with suitable qualifications (Brian Walker) was asked to draw up plans.

The planning authorities had agreed to the erection of the timber building without hesitation, but they initially rejected the design of its brick replacement (of exactly the same size) saying it lacked 'vernacular architectural features'. Eventually a modified design featuring divided windows set back in reveals, with the roof line broken by a chimney, was accepted, built, and formally opened on 7 September 1985 by Harry Sanders (Honorary Secretary 1962-76).

With the completion of the clubhouse it was possible to reconsider the improvement of craft maintenance facilities. A number of members had used mobile cranes to lift medium sized craft into or out of the water, and the writer asked Wally Zejma (a member of his sub-committee and a highly qualified civil engineer) to design a support pad from which the club's largest craft could be handled. As I recall, a '25 ton' mobile crane at that time weighed 37 tons, and with a short jib could lift 8.2 tons at a radius of 20 feet. It was therefore important that the pad should be as close to the water as possible, and it would have to carry a great deal of localized weight. The concrete pad Wally designed was 2.5 metres deep (at its deepest) and nowhere less than 0.5 metre thick, reinforced by a welded steel-mesh frame. Wally persuaded a major construction company (working at that time under his direction in his professional capacity) to tender for the work, the committee accepted their (quite considerable) quotation, the work was quickly completed, and has served its purpose well. Wally Zejma later served the club on the Committee, as Commodore (1990-1), as President (1992-4), and as a Linton Lock Navigation Commissioner.

Doubts began to be expressed as to the wisdom of improving the compound slipway; it was felt there was a possibility that driving the necessary piling may cause damage to the nearby 18<sup>th</sup> century bridge, which was thought to lack deep

foundations. It was felt that a better place for a slipway would be into our own water near the head of the marina, and negotiations with Farmer Nicholson for the necessary extra land were initiated, but not brought to a conclusion at this time.

In the 1970's the RMBC had tried to foster interest in the restoration to navigability of the inaccessible section of the Ripon Canal, but the time was not yet right. In the years that followed the canal was increasingly visited by private craft from other areas, and by hire cruisers that were based at York, and later at Boroughbridge. Littlethorpe is a delightful place to keep a boat, but has few attractions for the visitor as a cruising destination, since the amenities of the City of Ripon are inconveniently distant. A number of citizens, proud of their fine City, considered it inappropriate that the waterway that once brought trading craft almost to the shadow of Ripon Minster, should remain derelict and inaccessible to visitors by water. In 1983 they formed the Ripon Canal Society (RCS), with the aims of restoring the derelict sections to navigability, preserving any remaining features of historical interest, and promoting the canal for recreation and pleasure purposes.\*

RSC working parties cleared away the debris of the lost years, and an MSC scheme for the jobless replaced the fine masonry – which had been so needlessly destroyed – with brick faced reinforced concrete. A turning basin was excavated at the head of the truncated upper pound, and British Waterways' Castleford personnel provided the specialist skills needed to build and hang lock gates, refit the cills, and attend to countless other details. On the 7th September 1986 the upper pounds of the canal were formally reopened, and visiting craft were thereafter once again able to moor beside Boroughbridge Road, within walking distance of the City centre.\*

### **The 1990's**

During this decade the Club was improved by the construction of a workshop and storage facilities, and the marina was re-piled with steel piling by its members. But the events that were probably of most significance were the reopening throughout of the Ripon Canal, and the takeover of the Linton Lock Navigation by British Waterways.

During 1995 Ripon by-pass was constructed, which crossed the canal on the site of the old railway bridge at a high level, and made the culverted low-level road crossing which replaced Navigation Bridge redundant. Following the opening of the by-pass in the spring of 1996 the canal upstream of Rhodes Field lock was drained and cleaned out, its banks were timber-piled, Bondgate Basin's masonry was restored, and a footbridge was constructed on the site of the old Navigation Bridge. In recognition of the fact that twelve RMBC craft were the last to navigate the upper canal in 1937, the RMBC was invited to re-enact that historic occasion by providing the first craft to revisit the upper canal. On Saturday the 7th September 1996 twelve RMBC craft cruised to the head of navigation, turned, and moored on the new moorings beside Boroughbridge Road. On the following day the canal was formally reopened by David Curry, MP. #

By 1986 Linton Lock was once again in need of major repairs; it closed on September 30th while the Commissioners endeavoured - unsuccessfully - to persuade BW to assume responsibility. At the RMBC's AGM a levy of £20 from every full member as a contribution towards the cost of repairs was unanimously agreed. Following a spectacular 'Protest Rally' organised by RMBC, a number of temporary repairs enabled the lock to be reopened on 31 July 1987. A period of intensive fund-raising partially financed extensive repairs undertaken in the belief that BW would take over the Navigation when the lock was in good order. But the Department of the Environment ruled that BW could only take it over if certain conditions were met. BW inspected the lock, and decided it did not meet those conditions because of doubts about its long-term stability. However, after prolonged discussions, BW entered into a contract to operate and maintain Linton lock on behalf of the Commissioners, initially for a period of one year commencing August 1993.\*

On 28 October 1993 it was announced that the Linton Lock Commissioners had asked the Department of the Environment to relieve them of their responsibilities. Their Clerk was reported as saying: 'the Commissioners are in a position of being responsible for a structure for which they can never have sufficient resources to properly maintain'. The estimated repair cost exceeded £1 million, and it was suggested that Grant Aid should be sought from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The application was eventually successful, and a sum amounting to 75% of the estimated cost was made available to the Commissioners. The remainder had to be found from other sources. Taking into account their reserves, substantial contributions from BW, the Environment Agency, the sum of £10,770 promised by RMBC, lesser donations from the IWA and others, there still remained £36,000 to raise.#

Repair work commenced in September 1997; at the Annual General Meeting of the Linton Lock Supporters Club held in the RMBC Clubhouse at Littlethorpe on 10 May 1998 it was announced that Linton Lock would re-open on Friday the 15th of May. The members unanimously agreed to the LLSC being disbanded on that date, and they authorised the Hon. Treasurer to transfer all its funds (£7,197.78) to the Commissioners. When, after completion, the contractor's accounts were settled, the conditions imposed by the Department of the Environment were fulfilled, and the transfer of ownership to BW took effect on 18 June 1999. The future of navigation 'From the Sea to Ripon' was at last secure.#

\* These paragraphs were contributed by the writer to the Club's 1996 edition of its *Cruising Guide*.

# These paragraphs were written by the writer for the Club's (as yet unpublished) 2002 edition of its *Cruising Guide*.