

Excellent Continued Progress at Isfield Lock

Following a very dry spring in the southeast the volunteer groups working on the restoration of Isfield Lock were able to begin work earlier in the season whilst enjoying good conditions on site.

Having restored the east chamber wall and the upper and lower east wing walls, the next phase involves the restoration of the west wall. Prior to work beginning we were anticipating that this task would occupy at least five years work, restoring short sections per year.



The renovated east wall revealed

The restoration of the west chamber wall requires the removal of large quantities of soil from behind the damaged wall to a depth of 3m and replacing with reinforced concrete. The damaged and unstable chamber brickwork then requires demolition before re-building with a mix of reclaimed and new bricks and being tied in to the reinforced concrete. Back-filling the lock bank completes the work. However, hopes were raised somewhat once digging out behind the first section of the wall began. It was soon apparent that the wall, or certainly the first section tackled, was in better shape than anticipated. That said, the reinforcement of the first section still demanded the removal of a considerable amount of spoil and our "new" dumper (see *article below*) came into its own.



First west wall section restored

The 2010 target was to complete about 5m, one third of the wall, and this has been achieved before the autumn and the rain arrived, although the coping stones still need to be sourced or manufactured.

The next section of chamber wall now awaits the volunteers in the spring of 2011 when it is hoped to repeat the progress made this year with another 5m length of wall. Scaffolding is already in position in readiness for the work to begin. With a successful summer now behind them the working parties have closed down the site for the winter.



Next year's challenge, section 2

Continued good progress next year will once again require the regular attendance at the site of the restoration team led by Paul Morris and co-ordinated by Ted Lintott, as well as a repeat of the fine weather experienced this year. *(Text and photos courtesy of Terry Owen)*

A Dumper for SORT!

SORT is the proud new owner of a 2-tonne dumper, courtesy of the IWA National Festival at Beale Park. Each year, the IWA offers a grant for the region hosting the National Festival to give to local waterway projects. This year, with the festival being held at Beale Park, the IWA gave a grant of £2,000 to SORT to help fund the purchase of a replacement 2-tonne dumper.

We already have a suitable tracked excavator, courtesy and property of the Isfield project manager Paul Morris, but the aged dumper we had been using until this year has expired, leaving us with the prospect of hiring in a suitable dumper for the work season at significant cost to our meagre restoration fund. We just couldn't afford this expense, so a number of the working party members decided that the best way forward would be to club together and buy a used 2-tonne dumper in reasonable condition and hold it in shared ownership until such time as SORT could buy it from them.

It turned out that used 2-tonne dumpers are akin to hen's teeth and rocking-horse droppings - the fact that they can be trailed behind almost any vehicle makes them very sought-after and many are snapped up and exported to Eastern Europe. However, Paul Morris and Ted Lintott eventually managed to track down a suitable machine and the deal was done. The Benford Model 2000 was cleaned up, repainted and fitted with a new handbrake and roll-over bar and has been in constant use all season, saving us a considerable amount in hire fees - money better spent on the materials needed for the restoration work proper. The receipt of the grant cheque from the IWA has allowed the working party members involved in the initial purchase to be quickly refunded and allows SORT to continue to fund the materials needed for restoration. Work on the first section of the western wall at Isfield could not have been achieved without the dumper.

Paul Roper, IWA SE Region Chairman said "I am delighted to offer this grant to SORT. As a member of IWA's Restoration Committee I visited Isfield lock three years ago and I am aware of the good work going on there. Hopefully this grant will help keep the momentum going on this challenging project."



*Cheque presentation at Beale Park;
Paul Roper (L), Bob Draper (R)*

Restoration Appeal

Estimated annual expenditure on each section of the west wall renovation was £1300. However, such good progress has been made in 2010 that funds have been eaten up much quicker than we had hoped – to the tune of nearly £3,000! Here's a breakdown of this year's spend on renovation:

Sand / cement / lime / slabs etc.	£1,468
Fencing / shuttering	£210
Fixings (nails, screws etc.)	£56
Petrol (gennie) / diesel (transport) / gas (tea!)	£160
Resin mat and reinforcement fabric	£207
Site security (renew padlocks etc. after container break-in)	£34
Hire tools (vibrating poker)	£108
Dumper renovation / roll bar	£640
Grand total	£2,883

The Sussex Ouse Restoration Trust will thus require funds and commitment equal and beyond that so far required in the work at Isfield to date, with the badly damaged west wall providing many additional challenges to those so far met. This makes the appeal for funding and work-party volunteers for the tasks ahead of us even more important. If you can help in any way please contact our volunteer coordinator Ted Lintott, via e-mail at tedl@talktalk.net, or by telephone on 01444 414413, or Bob Draper (contact details at the bottom of this Newsletter). Some sort of sponsorship deal with a tool-hire company or building materials firm would be especially useful!

A Trip Boat for SORT?

I reported in our last Newsletter that I had been contacted by Mike Berry, until last year the owner-operator of the trip boat operation on the River Rother running out of Northiam. Mike "retired" after selling that business and he expressed an interest in starting something up for us. Unfortunately, we have not been able to make successful contact with Mike since then. Mike, if you're out there and see this Newsletter, please get back in touch!

Failing this, we still need a willing person to take on the task of a feasibility study as to who, what and where a trip boat enterprise might be set up on the Ouse. If that person is you, please contact us.

The Trust Needs You!

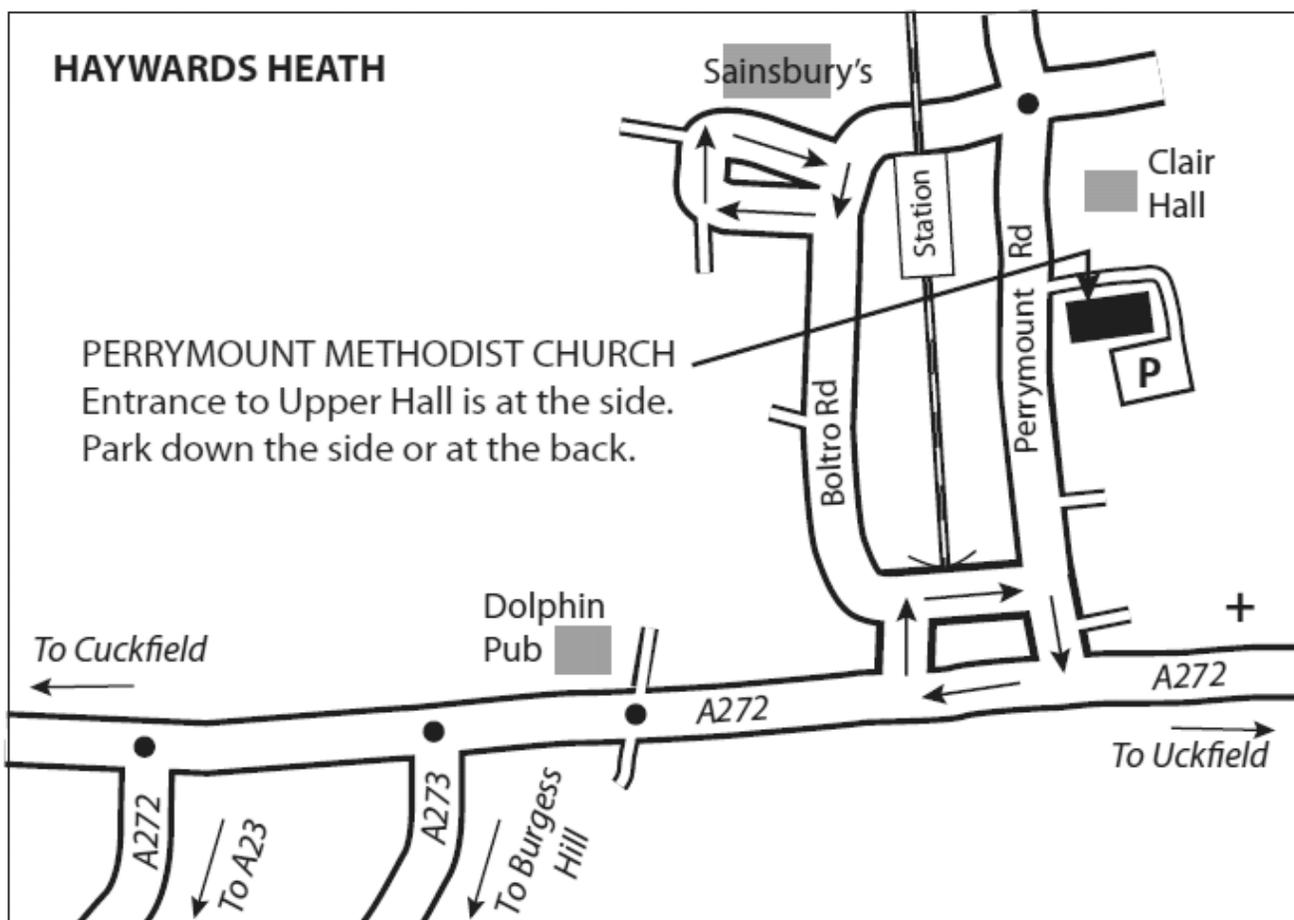
SORT desperately needs more committee members! We are scraping along with the bare minimum to keep the Trust operational. If you can spare any time at all to help with the running of the Trust, please let us know via either Hazel Lintott (secretary@sxouse.org.uk or tel. 01444 414413) or Bob Draper (membership@sxouse.org.uk or tel. 01825 763857). Particular roles might be publicity, fundraising, ecology / environmental, membership, treasurer etc. Whatever it might be, please let us know.

Autumn Public Meeting

The Autumn 2010 Meeting of SORT will take place on **Thursday 18th November**, 7:00 for 7:30pm, in the **Upper Room, Haywards Heath Methodist Church**, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, RH16 3DN (near the railway station, about 200yds up from the Clair Hall, see map below).

Dr. Peter Brandon will present a talk entitled "Key Sites on the River Ouse". Peter is a well-known historian of Sussex, whose published books include: The South Downs, The Shaping of the Sussex Landscape, The Discovering of Sussex, The North Downs, The Kent & Sussex Weald etc. This will be a joint meeting with Solent & Arun Branch and Kent & East Sussex Branch of the IWA.

Please put the date in your diaries now, look forward to seeing you there.



Charitable Status

It seems that our turnover is too small to qualify for full Charity status under the latest Charities Commission rules. However, we may still be able to apply to HMRC for charitable status and thus be able to benefit from Gift Aid. This will still almost inevitably require some fairly major changes to our Articles of Association and Memorandum of Association, which will need to be brought up-to-date and in line with current Charities Commission and HMRC guidelines. These changes will need to be ratified at an Emergency General Meeting of SORT – watch this space!

Fletching Mill

We were devastated to receive the following e-mailed press release from the Environment Agency (EA) via a roundabout route on 30th September:

“Collapsed Weir Leads to River Restoration

Environment Agency workers have completed a project on the River Ouse at Fletching in East Sussex .

A weir known to be several hundred years old collapsed without warning in the middle of August, blocking the stream and becoming a hazard for visitors.

After an agreement with the local farmer, fishing club, Environment Agency officer Andy Manville was tasked with removing the old structure from the channel and re-using the bricks from the weir to help reduce erosion to the river bank and direct the flow of the river down the centre of the channel.

Andy said: “The construction process was relatively straightforward, but there are a number of factors to consider – the safety of local people, wildlife habitats, and the cost of maintaining the river in the future.

“We reused much of the old material, so there was no direct cost to the work. We also left the apron (the stone base below the weir) in place as we felt this would increase the level of water, which would aid the fishing club and create a small cascade to encourage fish passage to all species. Previously the weir prevented the movement of all fish to a large area of upstream habitat.

“The end result is that the area looks much more inviting and pleasant for local residents. The support we have received from those living nearby, landowners and the fishing club has been amazing.”

The Environment Agency’s team of officers have now completed the work and the benefits to local wildlife are already clear.

The redesigned river will save money on future maintenance costs and allow for improved fish passage for all species.

ENDS”

We immediately responded to this by e-mail on 3rd October, addressed to all those that we considered to be truly interested parties on the original circulation list. To date, we have received no response or even acknowledgement from EA. However, we are aware that an individual has taken up the cudgels on this one and demanded all relevant documentation on consultation, process and so on from EA under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. So far, yet again, no formal response other than a formal acknowledgement from EA head office, stating that our Regional External Relations Office have 20 working days to respond; this was dated 21st October. We also know that the riparian landowners at Fletching are very unhappy with what has been done there. More information on the history and background to the situation at Fletching Mill Weir is available on our website at www.sxouse.org.uk – follow the “Threat to Fletching Mill Weir” link. Here is our own response to the press release in full:

"Dear Sue,

Your e-mailed press release has been passed on to me by Roy Sutton of IWA in my capacity as Chairman of the Sussex Ouse Restoration Trust (SORT).

Firstly, I must put on record how disappointed I am that this piece of news should reach us at SORT by such a circuitous route and after the work has been implemented as *'fait accompli'*. As you should be aware, SORT spent a lot of time and effort in reviewing the original proposals for repairs to the weir at Fletching, including the preparation of a Report on your original proposals by Roy Sutton and participation in the consultations culminating in the presentations at Fletching Village Hall in September 2008. We then commented in writing on the sole remaining proposal given at that time and I have kept in touch from time to time since then given the lack of any formal communications from the EA on the matter. The last e-mail I had from Andy Manville dated 23rd April 2010 read as follows:

"Dear Mr Draper

Unfortunately progress has been slow as we have had to focus on other projects within the Agency... We have looked at various options for the site at Fletching Mill but as yet we haven't made a decision on the way forward.

As soon as a preferred option has been agreed we will inform all interested parties.

Regards

Andy Manville"

Perhaps you can see from this why I was so shocked to receive a copy of your press release via a third party.

Secondly, some of the statements and claims made in your press release prompt me to make my own observations or to seek clarification or additional supporting detail.

"A weir known to be several hundred years old collapsed without warning in the middle of August, blocking the stream and becoming a hazard for visitors." So far as I am aware, the weir at Fletching is (or rather was) on private land with no public access. Could you please support your claim that the collapse of the weir was therefore "a hazard to visitors"? Since the deterioration of the fabric of the weir has been known to the EA since at least early 2008 (hence the consultations on proposals to repair it), it also seems a bit far-fetched to claim that the weir "collapsed without warning".

"After an agreement with the local farmer..." We know from our discussions with the local tenant farmer in 2008 that he was vehemently against the grinding-down of the weir and was demanding that it be repaired and kept in situ as it had been for hundreds of years. He valued the weir as the major contributing factor to the regular winter flooding of his water meadows, together with the increased fertility and wildlife biodiversity that this twice- or thrice-annual inundation brought with it. He was greatly concerned that the proposed removal of the weir would either prevent entirely or at the very least reduce the frequency with which these floods occurred, with a detrimental effect on the meadowland and its increasingly rare habitat. What precisely was the nature of the *"agreement with the local farmer"*, or was this not so much an agreement about the work that was to be undertaken, but simply an agreement to allow access to the site for the workforce? We shall be contacting the tenant farmer to hear his side of the story in the next few days.

"We also left the apron (the stone base below the weir) in place as we felt this would increase the level of water, which would aid the fishing club and create a small cascade to encourage fish passage to all species. Previously the weir prevented the movement of all fish to a large area of upstream habitat." The weir already had a fish ladder in place to allow the passage of migrating fish from below the weir to the deep-water reach above. Are the EA claiming that this fish pass was completely ineffective, and if so why had it not been looked at and improved in the past? SORT had a study done on all the fish-passes on the river about eight years ago and whilst some of them were not perfect and could be improved, none were found to be completely

ineffective. We should be able to track down a copy of this report if anyone is interested in receiving one. From the photographs supplied, it appears that the attempt at increasing the level of water has failed completely, as in both the before and after images there is very little water depth and a strong enough flow to deter almost all coarse fish species from moving over the weir apron. It is possible that salmonids could travel upstream in the right conditions, but according to the tenant farmer they used to successfully negotiate the fish ladder each year anyway, at least until the construction of the sump weir at Barcombe Mills. Since that time he has seen no trout jumping at Fletching weir at all.

The major environmental impact of the removal of the weir at Fletching is the destruction of the deep-water reach that existed above the weir, a perfect habitat for a large number of coarse fish, wild fowl and other species. That has gone to be replaced by a shallow stream running in the bottom of a deep cut. Is this what Andy Manville meant by *"to consider wildlife habitats"* ?

"The end result is that the area looks much more inviting and pleasant for local residents. The support we have received from those living nearby, landowners and the fishing club has been amazing." From perusing the photographs, I would say that this is a subjective matter and should not be a statement of fact. Personally, I find a deep-water river reach with abundant wildlife far more inviting and pleasant than a trickle of water in the bottom of a ditch with expanses of muddy banks. I then find the statement about the support received from those living nearby and landowners to be breathtaking in its audacity. There are two riparian landowners at Fletching weir. We are acquainted with the tenant farmer to one of them and we know his views on the destruction of the weir. The owner of Mill Farm, who owns the west bank, has always been vehemently against the destruction of the weir. Here is the content of the e-mail on this subject that he sent to me a couple of days ago when I made contact with him - he was away from home when the work was actually done:

"Dear Bob

Have been away so have only just received your email. I can confirm that the weir has gone and with it most of the water in the river. What happened was that a couple of months ago the weir gave way from the bottom so that a large volume of water passed under the weir rather than over it. I had a visit from the Environment Agency who in effect said they had no money to be able to repair or replace it and therefore would have to demolish what was left and grind it into hardcore which would remain on the river bed. They also promised to put in some form of fixed barrier so some water would be contained in the river and diverted into the mill pond and mill stream.

The first part has been carried out but we are still waiting for the barrier and in consequence there is little water in the river and even less flowing into the former mill stream. The whole area now looks very sad. Regards"

As you can see, we and the local landowners are devastated by the EA's wilful destruction of the weir, which has only occurred through a systemic failure to maintain the structure properly in the past - a classic example of "a stitch in time saves nine".

"the benefits to local wildlife are already clear." Can you please provide some substantive detail for this claim?

"The redesigned river will save money on future maintenance costs...." Well, at least you come clean in the end and admit that this was really just a cost-saving exercise. It would have been better perhaps if you had been brave enough just to make that statement without dressing it up as a positive environmental improvement.

Only time will tell what impact the removal of this weir has on the speed of water movement in flood conditions and how it will affect the flooding of areas downstream, towards Uckfield and in Lewes. The first winter storms this year could be interesting.

Yours Faithfully,
Bob Draper
Chairman
Sussex Ouse Restoration Trust"