

## **The River Gipping Trust**

In February Gerry Crease came to talk to us about the history of the River Gipping and its rise and fall as a commercial waterway. He also expanded upon the Trust's work to maintain and restore historical features along the river and their efforts to make them more accessible to the public.

The River Gipping arises as a spring in a field opposite the Mendlesham mast. Up until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the whole stretch of the river was known as the River Orwell. (Now the name changes at Stoke Bridge in Ipswich). In those days it took all day to move one ton of cargo by road from Stowmarket to Ipswich. Therefore, it made sense to use the river and make it navigable. A survey was carried out in 1790 which led to a parliamentary bill to raise £14,000. Errors in the first survey led to a second survey in 1791. Brick bridges rather than wooden ones needed an extra £12,000. 16.7 miles long, the river stretched from Stowupland bridge to Stoke bridge and finally opened in 1794. A problem with flooding meant that it wasn't fully open until 1798 when it played a large part in establishing Stowmarket as the malting capital of East Anglia. Horse-drawn barges carried coal, slate, hops, barley and salt. Night soil was also brought from London as fertiliser. Later sails were used in smaller versions of the Thames barges.

From 1900 steam barges owned by Fisons and Packards were the only permitted commercial traffic on the Gipping. They operated from Bramford Quay. Edward Packard built a warehouse at the side of the Gipping at Bramford. He pioneered the production of artificial fertilisers for horticulture on an industrial scale. Packard was joined by Joseph Fison in 1858 who constructed his chemical works nearby. A lock was constructed with a quayside through a dock gate. Its remains can still be seen upstream of the railway bridge. The arrival of the Great Eastern Railway line from Ipswich to Norwich eventually led to the decline of river trade.

Over its course, the river falls nine feet and boasted 16 locks, now 15. Gerry first became involved with the restoration of Baylham lock with the help of the Waterways Recovery Group whose members slept on camp beds in the village hall during the work.

Current restoration work has included maintaining the path between Needham Market and Roots and Shoots Garden Centre and Café. Badley Lock is thought to be one of only four remaining turf and timber locks in Britain. These turf and timber locks were most common before the 1790's. Full brick locks prevailed after this time. Badley Lock is due to be restored in the coming months, and similarly Creting footbridge. Much needed funds are raised in various ways. The scrap metal collection at Baylham is proving to be popular and helps towards the Trust's running costs.

For more information visit The River Gipping Trust website <https://www.gippingrestoration.uk> , and a book The Ipswich to Stowmarket Navigation – John Rennie's First Canal Project is available to buy.