

Passage of events for the conception and construction of the Louth navigation canal according to J. Phil Davies' book, 'Alvingham and North Cockerington'

1756 John Grundy, a civil engineer of Spalding, was appointed by the Louth Navigation Commissioners to project a navigation from Louth to the sea.

1760 John Grundy produced his report and a map of the proposed navigation. His proposal showed 10 locks, with the Louth Navigation routed to the West of the two churches and the mill. John Smeaton, the civil engineer of Edystone lighthouse fame, was called in by the Navigation Company for a second opinion. He proposed 8 locks and a route to the south of the churchyard. This scheme was adopted. Had Grundy's scheme gone ahead, the navigation would have passed through the mill paddock.

1763 The Louth Navigation Act was passed by parliament.

1765 Fredrick Soate was contracted by the Navigation Company to supply 400,000 bricks, sized 9 x 4.5 x 2.25 inches, from a site near Alvingham, at a price of 11 shillings (55p) per 1000. The location of the brickyard is not known.

1768 Messrs Welfit and Bennett, who had been appointed to negotiate the wayleave for the navigation, offered John Maddison £155 for the right to pass through his lands at Alvingham. Maddison held out for more and the issue went to arbitration. The arbitration jury awarded Maddison £162-0-3½d. However, the costs of the case amounted to £41-12-6d, so that he received only £120-7-9½d, and was the loser.

1770 The Louth Navigation was opened from Tetney to Alvingham. For two years Alvingham was the temporary terminus for the loading and unloading of the barges. The Ship Inn was opened, and much trade in coal, grain, timber and other materials was carried out from there.¹

1772 More capital was raised by the Commissioners of the Louth Navigation, and the navigation was completed from Alvingham to Louth. Trading then began at the riverhead in Louth. The total cost of the whole project was £28,000.

1782 John Maddison rebuilt the Alvingham watermill, with the monies which he had received from the Navigation Commissioners. This compensation was paid for the disruption of the water supply to the old mill, caused by the navigation construction work. The navigation passed over the course of the millstream, and the mill tailrace. For this reason, it was necessary to build brick siphons to conduct the two water courses underneath the navigation, which operated with a much higher water level. Both of these siphons still exist, but only the one for the millstream at Alvingham lock is still in service. The tailrace siphon remains, but it is in a dilapidated state. It became redundant when the navigation lock gates were removed in 1941/2, and the water level lowered so that it then became possible for the tailrace to flow into the navigation.

1800 The Ship Inn was closed at Alvingham Lock, and it became known as Lock Cottage.²

c. 1800 John Heston, aged 14, of Alvingham, fell into the Alvingham Lock and was drowned. His gravestone can be seen just to the west of St. Adelwold's church, but is now much defaced by the spalling of the York stone.³

¹ Note: the Ship Inn, open between 1770 and 1800, became known as Lock Cottage when the pub closed. It is currently (as of 2023) the home of Tom and Jane Scott. It was the only pub Alvingham has ever had.

² Note: hence only successfully traded as a pub for 30 years since the terminus of the canal was in Louth.

³ The first of three to drown in the canal.

1811 Shingle from Norfolk was being shipped to Alvingham in the vessel 'Industry' owned by Mr. W. Nettleton, a hay and straw merchant from Hull.

1828 An Act of Parliament for improving and maintaining the Louth Navigation from the river Humber to Alvingham and from thence to Louth received royal assent.

1828 Mr. J.S. Padley carried out a survey of the entire length of the Louth Navigation, for the Louth Navigation Commissioners. He produced a very detailed plan showing all adjacent buildings and fields, and also published a full report of his findings. He described Alvingham lock road bridge as being a timber swing bridge, with 3ft. 6ins. clearance above the water level. Just downstream, the millstream was carried under the canal in a 5ft. diameter brick culvert. A timber swing footbridge near the churchyard was 2ft. 6ins. above the water. A low 5ft. 2ins. diameter brick culvert downstream of the footbridge carried the mill tailrace under the canal. Alvingham high bridge, which was 9ft. 6ins. above the water, was flat, made of wood, and fast. (His use of the word "fast" suggests that this was a swing bridge, but which could no longer be opened. In this condition, it would have been necessary for all sailing barges to lower their mast to pass underneath it. This bridge gave its name to High Bridge Road. However, there is some confusion on this issue. In the 1881 Census, High Bridge Road is referred to as Iron Bridge Road. Since it is most unlikely that an iron bridge could have been in place so early, and no other evidence of the existence of an iron bridge has been found, it can only be assumed that the Census is wrong, and that this must have been a typographical error.

1847 An Act of Parliament was passed to authorize the East Lincolnshire Railway Company to purchase a lease of the Louth Navigation. There is no doubt that their objective was to take away traffic from the Navigation.

1870 Lock Cottage at Alvingham was sold at auction in the Mason's Arms, Louth. It was described by the auctioneers, Mason and Son, as "Recently occupied as an Inn, and a flourishing coal business". It is thought that the property was built in 1770, when the navigation was completed to that point.



This popular view of the two churches is thought to have been taken in the late 1800's, and it contains some noteworthy features. Just to the left of the St. Mary's church tower on the horizon can be seen a faint but unmistakable image of the Alvingham post mill. This is the only known picture of this mill, which was dismantled in 1904. There are no yew trees to be seen in the churchyard, yet in a similar picture, which is, dated 1903, well established yew trees can be seen in locations which seem to match those of the present day yew trees. To the left of the man in a bowler hat is a plank precariously extending over the water. Persons operating the swing bridge would have used this plank as they walked the bridge round.
(Photo: by courtesy of Jenny and Dick Parker).

c. 1910 The Alvingham miller's son, the late Mr. Will Bett, said that as a boy, he used to look out for the sails of ships coming up the canal. He would hurry to the swing footbridge in the churchyard and open it for the skipper. This would have been a heavy task for a boy and it involved walking out over the water on a plank. The reward from the skipper was a ship's hard tack biscuit.

1911 Reg Phillipson and a lad called Stebbings were drowned in the canal in a tragic swimming and horseplay accident. When the alarm was raised, Tom Bett rushed to the scene from the mill and pulled the boys out with his rake, but it was too late to save them.

1920 The Lud is not normally an impressive river. Indeed, the name Lud or Loud is a strange epithet for such a quiet stream. The river once inspired the verse:

*I stand beside the gentle stream,
The sweetly flowing Lud,
One wonders which is here supreme,
The water or the mud.*

George Tagg

However, the Lud is not always passive, as witness the press reports of May 1920.

On the 25th of May 1920, heavy rain began to fall throughout this part of the county. It rained steadily for the next four days. The land was already at saturation point and the river running at very high levels by the 29th of May. That Saturday morning began with rolling thunder and a darkening sky illuminated by great flashes of lightning. At about 4.15 in the afternoon, a cloud burst over Withcall, at the head of the Lud valley in the wolds, about five miles away. This caused a huge deluge to cascade down the valley through the Hallington where it was joined by the equally angry flow of the Welton Beck, and then on through Hubbard's Hills. It brought with it everything in its path; large uprooted trees, fencing, drowned farm animals, and farm equipment washed from the fields and the banks of the river.

The debris soon reached Louth where it blocked the arches of the bridge at the mill in Bridge Street, and then the culvert under the row of cottages in Ramsgate. The water level rose rapidly and a large area of Louth was inundated. Twenty-three people were drowned in the town. Several houses were destroyed, and there was much damage to property.

The surge passed on to Alvingham where both the river Lud, and the canal overflowed their banks.⁴ Two cottages and large areas of land were flooded. Elsie Bert said that "her father-in-law, Tom Bett, the miller, received a message that the flood was coming, and that he should draw the clough⁵ at the mill. He found this to be difficult to believe, and took no action, but went back into the house, leaving his boots at the doorstep. Moments later the great surge of water came down the millstream, and overflowed the banks. His boots were washed into the field to the east belonging at that time to Albert Enderby. They were never seen again".

Gordon Pridgeon, of Highbridge Farm, said "that his father, alarmed when the water began to flood into his farm yard, took a broom in a vain effort to try and stem the flow by sweeping it back towards the canal".

The records show that this magnitude of flooding has occurred in the Lud valley at least once in every century since 1184. It would be safe to presume that the same meteorological condition will sooner or later be repeated. Today, the river authorities have much more comprehensive flood preventative measures in place, so that the risk of such a disaster is now believed to be much reduced.

1924 The Louth Navigation, which had not recovered financially from the 1920 flood damage, was closed by an order of Parliament. This was due to the many complaints about the lack of maintenance of the swing road bridges, and also the silting of the watercourse which was causing flooding. The Commissioner for Sewers took over responsibility of the maintenance of the navigation from this time.

1927 The Louth Navigation timber swing road bridges were dismantled, and new fixed concrete bridges were built at Highbridge Road and Alvingham lock. At some later date the timber swing footbridge by the churchyard was also replaced by a fixed bridge.

⁴ The flood irreparably damaged much of the canal's infrastructure.

⁵ Damboard



A sloop with cog boat sailing the marsh section
of the Louth Navigation.
(Photo: from Mr Stuart Sizer's collection)

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1938 The Louth Drainage Board took over responsibilities for the Louth Navigation from the Commissioner for Sewers. Until this time, Ned Hand had been retained to operate the lock gates, and control water levels at the Alvingham and Outfen locks. Ned Hand was one of the characters of the district. He lived in a small cottage at Alvingham lock, and was paid a retainer to operate the Alvingham and Highbridge locks. This he did very conscientiously, and he would control the water levels to minimize the risk of flooding, particularly downstream of Highbridge lock. He had about an acre of land near to each of the locks, which he used to hand dig. He grew strawberries and vegetables, which were sold at Louth market, and did some agricultural piece work, as the opportunity arose. He is also remembered as a poacher.

1940 On the 4th of January, there was a severe frost, the canal froze over and there was ice-skating on it. Heavy snow fell and the cold weather persisted. By the end of January, more snowfalls had stopped all rail traffic in the county, and many roads were blocked. The thaw did not arrive until March.

1941 Louth Navigation was dredged in 1941/2 from Outfen Lock upstream to Ticklepenny Lock, by a pair of steam traction engines, with a dredging bucket winched between the two. This was the highest cost contract ever awarded by a Drainage Board to that date. The lock gates were removed at the same time, and this lowered the level in the entire canal.



The collapsed brick headwall and the inclined outlet of the Alvingham mill tailrace siphon as it emerges from under the Louth Navigation. This siphon was abandoned when the lock gates were removed and the navigation water level lowered in 1941/42. From this time on, the tail race has discharged into the navigation, and not to the Lud as it did previously.
(Photo: The author, November 1995).

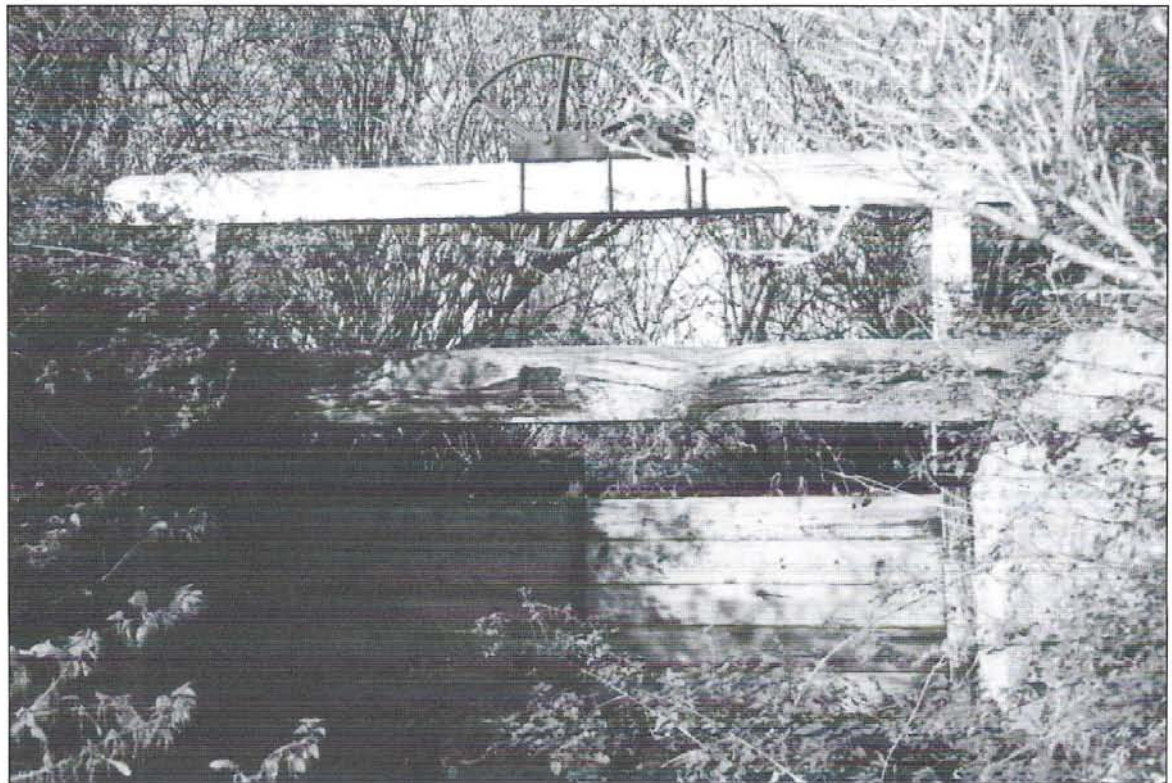
1981 The mill stream siphon, which passes under the canal at Alvingham lock, became blocked with debris. A team of divers was called in to clear it out. Amongst the debris was a cricket bat, which Jeff hand, who lived at Lock Cottage, had lost as a small boy some fifty years earlier. It was still in remarkably good condition.



Workmen clearing out the 5ft. Diameter brick siphon which carries the millstream under Alvingham lock. (Photo: Grimsby Evening Telegraph 1981).



The north west wall of Alvingham lock chamber looking southwest towards the new concrete road bridge. (Photo: the author, 1999).



The remains of one of the penstocks at Eaus Meet. Using these boards it was possible to divert the flow of the river Lud to either the Old Eau, or the Seven Towns North Eau. The Commissioner of Sewers controlled this operation. (Photo: the author, 1999).

2000 On the 1st of April, volunteers working for the Louth Navigation Trust erected a replacement milestone near to the original location on the navigation bank just north of the Alvingham footbridge.

Alvingham and North Cockerington

*A record of some of the events in the
history of two Lincolnshire villages*

By J. Phil Davies



Alvingham and North Cockerington Millennium Project