



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

News Letter No. 36 — Winter 2008

Dear Supporter,

Thank you for your continuing support and I'm sorry that the Autumn newsletter is late, you will see it has now been conveniently entitled Winter 2008.

Consuta Social Luncheon

Our winter's social luncheon will be at Shiplake College on Saturday 14th February. The College proved a popular venue for our social last winter so we decided to arrange a repeat visit. Many thanks to Derek and Sandra Brown who have made the arrangements and will be taking the bookings; please use the booking form with this newsletter. Note that the Trust have extended an invitation to members of the Steam Boat Association to join us.

Consuta operations over the later part of 2008

Continuing the narrative from the summer newsletter. After the very successful Goring and Streatley Regatta we moved Consuta down river to Charvil ready for a day at the River and Rowing Museum. This combined museum day was very popular with museum visitors, so we will probably arrange a combined event again in 2009.

Following this event in August Consuta was moved upriver to Beale Park ready for the Steam Boat Association rally based on the park lake. During the Friday prior to the weekend there was torrential rain and by evening the river looked very angry and rather muddy, this seems to have been a common occurrence this summer. One steamboat owner said he didn't fancy using river water for his boiler feed, because it was too muddy. Surprisingly however river levels were not that high and the lake swing bridge was usable on the Saturday, so most of the boats attending (about 20 altogether including Consuta) steamed out to head up river. River currents however were high so most boats wisely stopped for lunch at the Swan, Streatley just above Goring Lock. Even a small stern wheel paddle boat made this destination, although the crew did say at times they did wonder if they would make it probably only travelling at half a knot over the ground (*bet they had a quick trip back though*). Yellow boards were out at the locks in the morning indicating stream increasing, and by late morning these were replaced by red boards.

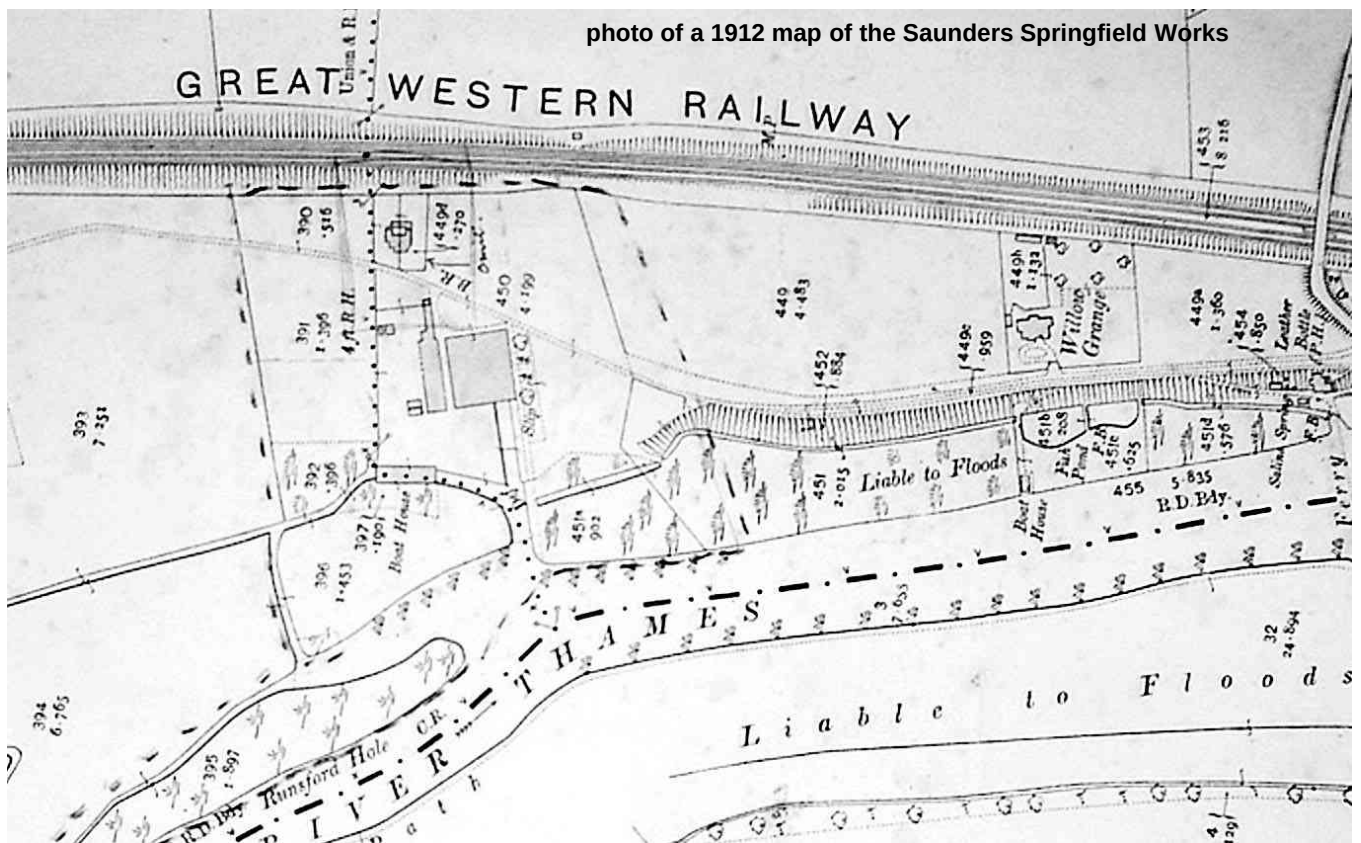
The river remained in flood for over a week after this event.



An unusual task :-

Moving some pontoons from Panbourne college frontage to Beale Park ready for the SBA rally

Photo – Lyn Smith



The last calendar outing was for the Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group visit to the site of the Springfield works. This is the old Saunders boatyard which is above Cleeve Lock and is now owned by a charitable trust as a nature reserve. The map above is a copy of a 1912 map clearly showing the buildings on the site. Note the section marked boathouse; this is still there but now collapsed.

The final Consuta steaming was an autumnal cruise for supporters, the excuse was to blow the boiler down while in steam. Support for this outing was encouraged by the promise of a pub lunch. We travelled down river as far as Mapledurham and stopped to look at the Salters steamer Streatley moored here. Streatley was restored several years ago with it's original steam engine but sadly has not been in service for over a year.

Consuta was craned out for the winter at the end of October. Unfortunately because of the improvements made at the Beale park slipway we now need the use of a 75 ton crane rather than the 35 ton crane used previous years which doubles the cost.

Consuta maintenance.

The ongoing maintenance of Consuta is not always easy without a base because any work needed has to be done either in the tight confines of the Beale Park Cowshed during the winter months, or during summer in the field and without any workshop facilities. A Consuta boathouse base is so important to enable us to continue keeping her in good condition.

The boiler will need a major service next winter so our intention is to lift it out at the end of the 2009 season. Meanwhile there is plenty of work to be done through this winter to ensure Consuta is in tip top condition for 2009. Work parties will be arranged early in the new year; keep an eye on those email circulars, we will be needing your help. (see work list on last page)

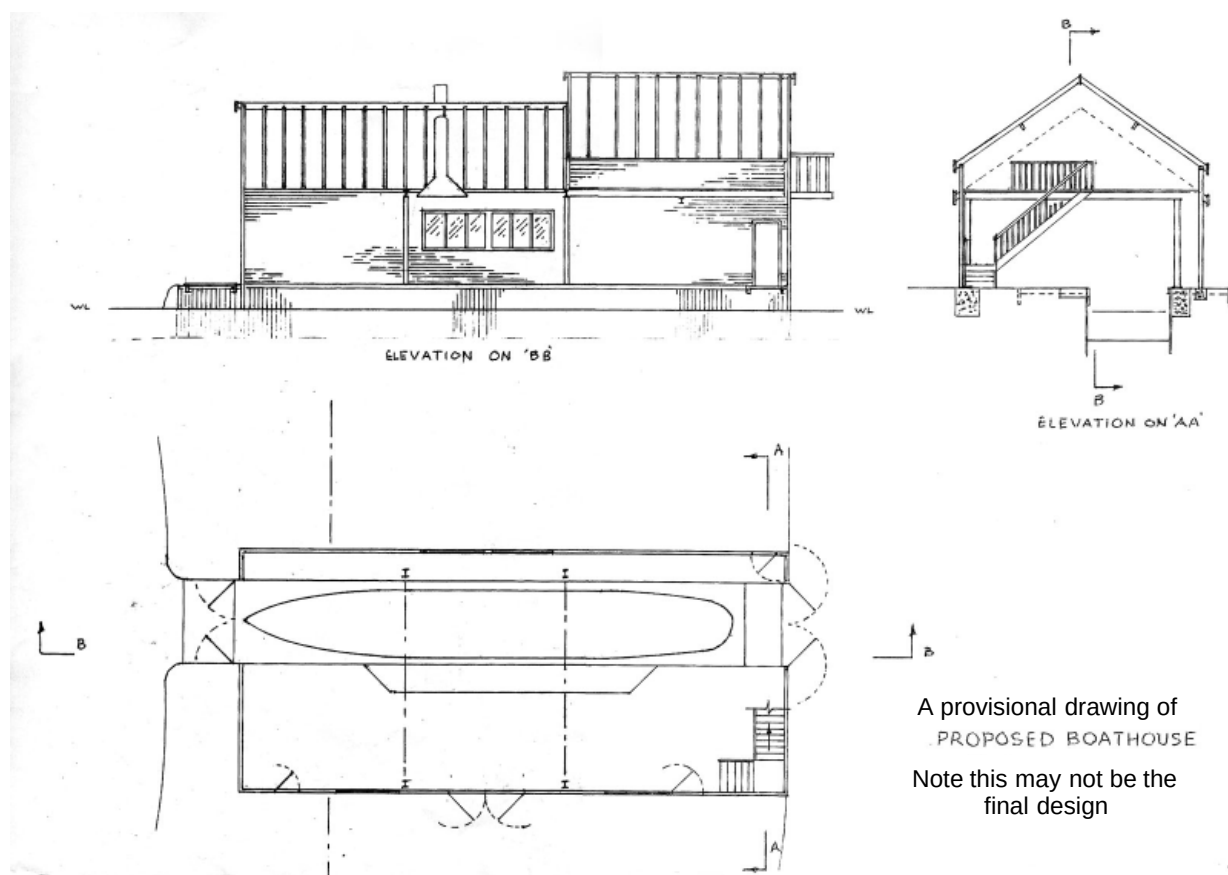
Once we have an all year boathouse base the Trustees have decided that we must then direct our attention to replacing the boiler with a lighter and better design. Design work has already started on this and it looks as though we should be able to save at least ½ ton weight. The crane driver tells us that Consuta weighs 4.2 tons presently with out water in the boiler.

Other tasks such as hull repainting and varnish work will need a major makeover soon. However we will be looking to see if some varnishing can be done in the cowshed now there is more room.

The engine is performing well so only requires minor maintenance work through the winter months.

So what about that floating boathouse. Well it is still a splendid project so we would be very tempted to build one if only we were able to get some funding. We would love to have a base on the Henley reach but there are no solutions to this for the moment.

New ideas for a Wet Dock Boathouse at Beale Park



The Trust are now looking at proposals to build a fixed boathouse at Beale park based on ideas suggested by the park owners. If we can get all the details sorted we could have the use of this boathouse by next winter. However we will need to agree conditions with Beale Park, raise some extra funding, and of course obtain planning permission.

Supporters

The Trust is totally dependant on it's own resources for the continual operation of Consuta. We have no paid employees, nor do we have any regular (annual) grants. We welcome anyone to join us, the only requirement is that you have an interest in our aims for Consuta. You can provide regular monthly donations, even help with operational duties, or just come along for an outing during a reposition. Note that all donations can be submitted for gift aid tax refunds if you are a UK tax payer. Last year we received £1,400 from the taxman by gift aid refunds; that has to be good news. If you are thinking about making a will you might like to consider a bequest to The Consuta Trust. One benefit of this is that any donation is excluded from inheritance tax liability on the estate.

Trust Management

The Consuta Trust is presently managed by six trustees. However as the years pass we do need to think about new blood especially as four of the trustees are already in their 70's. If you have any suggestions, recommendations, or would be interested in being a Trustee, please contact me. Our long serving Treasurer is looking for retirement so we need a replacement. If you think you can help in any way we would be please to hear from you.

Winter Work schedule

The trustees have set a very ambitious Winter work programme for Consuta:-

- Clean tubes and empty smokebox of all ash
- Check condition of boiler tubes in the firebox, this will require a boiler hydraulic test.
- Make a tube stopper for service use should it be required.
- Clean all gunmetal fittings on boiler.
- Clean and repaint boiler backhead
- Replace insulation in smokebox front blanket (the material got wet and has collapsed)
- Clean off all the hardened oil coating on the engine (it's a deposit from the lubrication oil we have been using). Unfortunately it does not dissolve with any of the usual cleaners.
- Whitemetal weighshaft bush (forward one on the engine).
- Check all engine bearings for wear.
- Check all engine oil wicks and either replace or de-fat them
- Complete installation of rev counter and valve chest pressure gauge. This has been tested and works well so is to be fitted above the port side coal bunker.
- Refit engine compartment fire extinguisher into a new position on the starboard side.
- Check steering components including an inspection of the cable.
- Check paint and vanish work. This will probably involve revarnishing of the fore and aft decks
- Repair port side mid section top side paintwork there is a small but deep scratch.
- Antifoul
- Repaint the funnel in non staining white paint to make for easy cleaning.
- Check escape pipe for easy slide down the holding bracket. For some time now it has been a bit difficult to fit due to distortion of the pipe. We think somebody stood on the end of it!
- Tidy up lagging on engine steam pipe where it is flaking.
- Generally clean boat interior and bilges.
- Check condition of floors to see if they need repainting.

There is a lot to do, so we will be setting work party days early in the new year., probably arranged for Saturday mornings. I will pass details of dates via email circulars. If you are able to help but don't have email or are not on our regular supporter email news please contact Brian Smith:- brian.smith@consuta.org.uk or 01488 658795

Consuta Calendar for 2009

We are always looking for new ideas where Consuta can be steamed and shown to the public. There are some events which will be annual fixtures on our calendar but we would also be interested in any thoughts or suggestion you might have so please do let us know.

So how important is Consuta to our heritage – West Berks planning don't think very much.

Consuta is a list vessel on the historic ships database, but historically just how important is she. An internet search on Google/Yahoo is quite revealing. There are so many reference links about Consuta. Even GKN have a couple of history pages about Consuta; they are the present day successors to the Saunders Company.

The hull construction was of major importance for early motorboats and aeroplanes. Consuta was the first plywood boat of monocoque construction, lighter than any hull of her period. Even as late as world war two the MOD still highly prized "**consuta**" plywood for its strength and durability.

Consuta has been involved in some very high profile events over the years. As a steamer she was the umpire launch for the annual university boat race during the early 1900's, she carried the Prince of

Wales in 1912, she was a regular umpire training launch at Henley. In 1949 (now with a petrol engine) she was used as the BBC commentator boat fitted with a camera to provide TV coverage of the whole course of the Oxford and Cambridge boat race, this was the very first live TV coverage of the boat race, she continued this annual task until the late 1950's. Even by the 1970's Consuta was still being used as a tripping launch. This was a long service history for a boat built as light as possible and is a testimony to the strength and durability of the Consuta plywood construction method.

The SBA archivist Brian Hillsdon provided a testimonial for Derrick Mills a founder member of the SBA who died this summer. An except from Brian's letterl included the following " *The story of my friendship with Derrick starts in early 1965, when I visited the engineering works of Tom Taylor & Sons on the Thames just upstream of Staines Bridge, a mile or two from where I live. On the scrap heap in the yard were three rusty launch engines, plus another inside in use powering the steel plate bending rolls. At the time they had a contract for repairing the large mobile cement mixers mounted on the chassis of road vehicles.....* " James Taylor another SBA member who died recently had told us during a visit to one of Consuta's first outings after restoration that he remembers visiting Tom Taylors yard in the late 1950's with his father. When his father saw a steam engine driving the bending rolls he asked " *which boat did that come from? and was told that he should remember because he was the one who had helped remove it from Consuta in 1923.....* "

It is impossible to prove that our engine is the original from Consuta, because it's not numbered. DesVignes never did number his engines and there are no surviving records that can help. However it seems to me there can be no doubts on this issue.

BWS 1/12/2008



The Swan at Pangbourne
photo by Alan Douglas



Above:- Members of the Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group at the Springfield works site

Below:- Consuta as umpire boat at Twickenham Regatta – May 2008:
Consuta still capable of doing the job she was built for in 1898

