

RIVER LEE TRUST

RIVER STORT PURCHASE

To the Most Noble
The Marquis of Salisbury K.G.
Chairman of the Sub-Committee
On the River Stort Purchase.

My Lord,

In order to afford information to the Sub committee of trustees appointed to consider the above subject at the Meeting on the 16th instant, I have devoted two days to an inspection of the River, with the Locks and Weirs, and the Landed and House Property belonging thereto; and beg now to offer the following remarks.

Landed and House Property Commencing at Bishops Stortford there is considerable property along the two terminal docks there, a great number of small Malt Shops, old and in bad repair, all timber and tiled roofs; some offices and houses in fair repair, including the large Mansion occupied by Mr W Taylor, also two eligible plots of garden and meadow ground, containing altogether about 5 acres, very suitable for building cottages, or maltings. There are also Malt Shops at Sawbridgeworth and Harlow, and some land available for Wharves, public and otherwise.

All these I presume to be included in Schedule No 1 attached hereto.

Tumbling Bays Of these there are now only six maintained by the Owner of the Stort, they are not expensive in character or in maintenance and the River is so arranged that none of them require any special attendance, like that of the Weir keepers on the Lee.

The Bridges, 22 in number, are not large or expensive in character, as they are generally speaking only adapted to a mere 13 feet Navigation, and not like those on the Lee which are frequently meant to admit the passage of a large river; several of them are in a dilapidated condition, and the whole will have to be renewed within 15 years.

Locks There are 15 Locks, as per annexed Schedule No 2. Eleven of them are situate at Mills, where a toll is demanded of 6d. each way for every barge; There is generally three feet six inches of water over the Sills, with the exception of Sheering, Fixes, and Harlow Locks, where the depths could be increased without much expense; but the water is under the control of the Millers, who can work it down so as to seriously impede the Navigation, and do so in Summer to a great extent. The Lock sills generally are nevertheless not such obstructions as the shoals in the River where aggravated by the Working of the Mills. The repair of the Locks is generally sufficient, 10 out of 15 being in a very fair state; there is nothing formidable in maintaining them in a sound state, say for £500 a year which if spent or devoted to them continuously for 40 years, would leave the property in better repair than at present.

The Navigation throughout is narrow and shallow; the practical burthen carried is 40 tons, being 85 feet length, 13 feet beam, and 2 feet 9 ins. Depth. The bottom, for 12 out of 14 miles is no more than four feet deep, with shelving sides, so that a barge has great difficulty

in travelling in short water time and much delay and inconvenience would arise with a large traffic, from so great a length of the River not permitting laden barges to pass. It would therefore be a very short-sighted policy, for anyone, to acquire the property without securing the means of dredging the River throughout, so as to make a bottom not less than 5 feet deep for 15 feet wide in the centre. It is probable that if this were done with the alterations of the three Lock sills above named, 60 tons might easily navigate throughout, which would materially reduce the expenses of haulage &c. by the larger quantity carried in each barge.

General Capability of Improvement. The River Stort Locks were originally well laid out for the line of country, and it will be seen that they all have deep falls; it is doubtful even if one could be removed (i.e. absorbed) with any advantage. In this respect the River is a striking contrast to the Lee where five half locks (having 18 inches to 2 feet fall) have been removed within the last 10 years in addition to those now being obliterated by the recent heavy works at Old Ford and Stanstead. The great deficiency is want of depth and width as described in the previous remarks. If a scheme of extensive dredging were to be entered upon it is possible that the River might be advantageously straightened but new cuts in two or three places, in lieu of deepening the old circuitous course; but it would be more desirable to attempt these as matters of negotiation with the landowners than as compulsory works, for they are by no means of urgent necessity, or of so bad a character as some of those that have existed and still remain on the River Lee. The Towing Paths appear narrow and from the want of width in the River require a good deal of Wharfing which is much out of repair

Expense of Maintenance. If on examination the returns of expenditure by the owners for the last five years be substantiated, I should be disposed to accept the average of the years 1855-56 & 59 (viz. say £1,200 – as per Schedule 3) as a guide to what it would cost the Trustees of the River Lee to effect the same purposes and maintain the general works efficiently throughout, with the exception of Bridges and Dredging, for which in my opinion it would be necessary to provide capital.

The cost will be:-

Dredging to at least 5 feet deep by 14 feet wide – 12 miles @ £500	£6,000. 0. 0
Cost of new Engine and boats to do the work	£2,000. 0. 0
Repairing paths, purchase of additional width of land, making new cuts, maintaining slips &c	<u>£2,000. 0. 0</u>
	£10,000. 0. 0
Twenty two new bridges @ £230 each average, such cost to include removing several small towing path bridges, culverts &c	£5,000. 0. 0
Cost of purchase of property, Conveyance &c	<u>£1,000. 0. 0</u>
	<u>£16,000. 0. 0</u>

I do not place anything for repair of the buildings at Stortford because I consider that many will probably come down and the space be devoted to better purposes, for the Malt Shops are not suited to the present class of trade, and I have not seen the lease of Messrs Taylor's who hold the major and most valuable part of them as mere landed property. I think them quite equal to 16 years purchase of their rental even taking them as dilapidated.

Prospects of Trade. Malt is the staple of the district and very large new works have been constructed on the River near Stortford, some having no connexion with the rail, and abutting

on the River alone, and others being placed between the Railway and the River so as to deal with both, the course of trade seeming to be similar to that of late prevailing so much at Ware, viz. that barley is brought by the Rail and that after being made into malt it proceeds by River for delivery in the Thames. There is not the smallest chance of any prospective reduction in Trade from ordinary causes of competition by the Rail or any other change. I think also that if the Railway Company were proprietors of the River it would be much to their interest to promote its prosperity on account of the traffic in grain and malt, induced by the successful manufacture in Bishops Stortford, Harlow and Sawbridgeworth.

The Purchase of the Stort involves ---

Say – 18 years purchase of the Nett annual Rental of the Tolls and Property (taking average of 5 years receipts and 3 years expenditure as per Schedule 3)

£17,280

Capital to be expended as above mentioned

£16,000

£33,280

Say £33,000.

If this money be raised at an average cost of 4½% it will be a loss to the Trustees of

£1,498. 10.

In addition to which we have expenses of

£1,200. 00.

£2698. 10.

Say £2,700 per annum

To meet which the average tolls as per return are

£2,160

The Stort trade pays in tolls about £2,000 to the River Lee. This is not all profit as the wear and tear occasioned by such trade is an appreciable quantity, say 10%, leaving a clear loss to the River Lea Trust of say £1,800 per annum. I do not think this possibility one worth consideration either for or against a negotiation for purchase. In fact, if a Tenant could be secured who would efficiently maintain the River Stort it would be far better to leave in other hands. If the trustees by acquiring the River Stort could within three or four years enable 60 tons to be loaded in the same barge that now carries 40 tons there would be an appreciable increase of nett revenue occasioned by the saving of the wear and tear of locks and Works, besides the promotion of trade by the greater facilities thus afforded.

Having reference to the present heavy debt of the River Lee and the certain time that must elapse before present improvements tell in real return and improvement of Revenue, I humbly beg to remark that the resources of the Lee proper are not at present furnishing a sinking fund for their Debt and this would become more serious if additional debt were thrown in without a fair chance of such a sinking fund either for the new debt or the old; it would be immaterial which.

The tolls for Malt upon the Stort are 1s 4d throughout in addition to which about 4d per ton is paid to the Millers for the privilege of passing the Locks as defined by the Act of Parliament. This Malt pays an addition of 1/- per ton for passing upon the Lee, on which River the entire expenses are confined to this sum, the Trustees paying all Mill and other tolls for the Trader. It will from this be seen that the Maltster at Ware, or rather his Client the Brewer in London, pays 1/8d per ton less or Malt in Tolls alone, from Ware &c than from the towns on the Stort. If this purchase is to take place it would only equitable to raise the toll on all Malt passing above the junction at Feildes Weir to 1/4d per ton so that there would be an immediate increase of £800 a year in Tolls to assist in obliterating the cost of amalgamation and all

parties would eventually benefit by the change, as the Stort tolls will of course in future years much aid the maintenance of the main arterial River.

In conclusion I beg to say that my survey of the Buildings and the depths of the Navigation are from report of the Officers, and from a mere passing inspection.

If the Committee should wish more particular information on these points, it would be better to have the Landed and House property examined by a professional Surveyor and Sections of the River should be taken throughout. An operation which would cost considerable time and money.

I have the honour to be
My Lord
Your Lordship's most obedient humble Servant

Nath. Beardmore (signed)

30 Great George Street
Westminster
January 28th 1858

Schedule No 1

A statement of the River Stort Property independent of the Tolls with the amount of the latest rentals received for the same.

At Bishops Stortford			
Messrs Taylor's - the Wharf house per an.	100	0	0
-do- Malt & Coal Shops (with Wharves)	247	0	0
-do- Coal Wharf	35	12	0
-do- Coal Sheds	16	0	0
-do- Wharf for landing ashes	1	0	0
-do- Ground Rent	1	5	0
William Hughes - Leasehold Premises	5	0	0
-do- Ground adjoining -do-		10	0
J L Glasscocks Leasehold premises &c	5	0	0
Messrs Boulcott, Deal and Slate Yard	10	10	0
-do- Ground for landing timber		10	0
Mrs Patmore, House in South Street	12	0	0
Samuel Trott, Cottage in -do-	5	4	0
Josiah Miller for a meadow -do-	16	0	0
George White for pasture land	9	0	0
Reginald Jennings, Ground rent	1	0	0
House, premises & garden the residence of the Surveyor		No Rent	
Mr Whitnall - 11 Malt & Coal Shops at Sawbridgeworth	20	0	0
John Barnard - 10 Malt Shops at Harlow	21	7	10
	£507	8	10

Schedule No 2

Locks on the River Stort

Name of Lock	Depth on Upper Sill		Depth on Lower Sill		Fall of Lock		Observations
	ft	ins	ft	ins	ft	ins	
Stortford or South Mill Lock	3	9	3	6	5	6	92 ft 10 in rise from Feildes Weir
Twyford Mill Lock	4	6	3	7	6	6	
Spelbrook Lock	5	0	4	6	6	0	
Tednambury Mill Lock	4	5	4	0	6	9	
Sawbridgeworth Mill Lock	4	0	3	9	6	9	
Sheering Mill Lock	3	1	3	7	6	6	
Fixes Lock	3	5	3	3	6	3	
Harlow Mill Lock	3	4	3	3	8	6	
Latton Mill Lock	3	8	3	6	6	4	
Burnt Mill Lock	4	0	3	6	4	0	
Parndon Mill Lock	4	3	3	9	6	9	
Hunsdon Mill Lock	4	3	4	0	7	0	
Roydon Lock	5	5	3	9	5	6	
Roydon Mill Lock	4	6	3	6	7	6	
Feilde's Lock	4	3	5	6	3	0	

Schedule No 3

Comparative Statement of Receipts and Expenditure on the Stort Navigation for Five Years

Year	Tolls	Estate	Total	Expenditure	Profit
1853	1784.7.4	502.16.0	2287.3.4	967.15.5	1319.7.11
1854	1529.14.1 20.15.9	497.1.2	2047.11.0	769.16.9	1277.14.3
1855	1534.16.3	517.12.0	2052.8.3	1016.5.11	1036.2.4
1856	1686.19.8	394.13.10	2081.13.6	1261.11.3	820.2.3
1857	1905.7.2	437.16.5	2343.3.7	1298.10.4	1044.13.3
Total	8462.0.3	2349.19.5	10811.19.8	3576.7.6	5498.0.0
Average	1692.8.0.½	469.19.10½	2162.7.11	1192.2.6*	970.5.5

For expenses the average of the last last(sic) three years only is taken, as during the first two the Navigation was evidently allowed to get out of repair to a great extent.

N.B. The Navigation was taken over by banker Richard Gurney as an act of foreclosure on Sir George Duckett (jnr)'s mortgage in 1854