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THE RIVER STORT NAVIGATION

TRANSCRIPT OF SHORTHAND NOTES OF PROCEEDINGS of a
CONFERENCE

AT THE GREAT EASTERN HOTEL, LIVERPOOL STREET, LONDON, E.C.

ON FRIDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 1909, at 11.30am

PRESENT

Mr Herbert Nield, M.P. Chairman
of the Special Committee of the
Lee Conservancy Board re River
Stort Navigation, in the Chair.



Other members of the Lee Conservancy Board

Mr W.J. Barker

Dr R.M. Beaton, J.P.

Mr Geo: Billings, J.P.

Mr W.D. Cornish, J.P.

Mr F.C. Edwards

Mr Thos. Gardner, J.P.

Mr C.G. Musgrave, J.P.

Mr Edwin Oakley, J.P.

Mr W.R. Pryke

Mr John Sheehan, J.P.

Mr Richard White, J.P., and

Mr S.R. Hobday, Clerk of the Board

Mr C. N. Tween, M. Inst. C.E., Engineer & Manager

Mr E Harvey Cook (Messrs Clapham Fitch & Co, The Board's Solicitors)

Hertfordshire County Council

Mr H. Bushby

Mr W.T. Coles, J.P.

Mr Edward Pigg

Mr Colin Taylor

Mr C.E. Longmore, Clerk of the Council

Mr Urban A. Smith, M. Inst C. E., Surveyor to the Council

Essex County Council

Mr Edward Good

Mr V W Taylor, J.P.

Mr John H. Goold, Clerk of the Council

Mr Percy J. Sheldon, M. Inst C. E., Surveyor to the Council

Bishops Stortford Urban District Council

Mr S Edwards

Mr F Flinn

Mr T Swatheridge, Clerk of the Council

Hadham Rural District Council

Mr W Jackson Hart

Mr J.S Symons, J.P.

Mr A.G. Gwynn, Clerk of the Council

Sawbridgeworth Urban District Council

Mr G. Day

Mr H.A. Roberts

Ware Rural District Council

Mr Joseph Pearce, J.P.

Stansted Rural District Council

Mr Martin Burls

Rev. C.R.W. de Cerjat

Epping Rural District Council

Mr F.T. Basham

Mr J.T. Coleman

Mr T.R. Lawrence

Metropolitan Water Board

Mr C.E. Hearson

Mr John Sheehan

Mr W.J.G. Norris Asst: Clerk of the Board

River Stort Navigation Limited

Mr Wm Gee

Millers or Millowners

Mr E.C. Frere & Mr L. Frere, Twyford Mill

Mr G.A. Wallis, Hallingbury Mill

Mr Thos. Burton, Sawbridgeworth Mill

Mr John Barnard, Harlow Mill

Mr Alfred Savill, (Agent for Owner) Latton Mill

Mr Edward Seabury, (for John Kirkaldy Ltd), Burnt Mill

Mr R.E. Smith, Parndon Mill

Mr C. Gayton, (For Mr G.E. Phelps) Hunsdon Mill

Mr E.A. Ayling, Roydon Mill

Traders

Mr G Albany

Mr Lewis Brace

Messrs John Taylor & Sons

The CHAIRMAN - Gentlemen, have you all entered your names on the attendance list and the capacities in which you come? If anybody has not done so I hope they may in order that we can have a correct record of the attendance,

A DELEGATE - Only our names ?

The CHAIRMAN - And the interests which you represent, that is what I mean.

The DELEGATE - That is what I am afraid we have not done.

The CHAIRMAN - Perhaps you will before you leave take an opportunity of doing so because it makes all the difference.

The DELEGATE - Quite right, it ought to be so.

The CHAIRMAN - Gentlemen, I am sorry to think that Mr Croft - the Chairman of the Board - is not sufficiently well to be here today to occupy the Chair and neither is Mr Barnard able to be here. Therefore as Chairman of the Stort Committee, which now consists of the whole Board, I have the honour to preside today and put before you the views of the Conservancy, which have been very carefully considered. I propose to read this memorandum to you.

“This conference of the various Authorities and persons interested in the maintenance of the River Stort as a Navigation has been called together by the Lee Conservancy Board in order to see if it is possible that some arrangement may be come to in the endeavour to accomplish that object.

The present Government in their first session appointed a Royal Commission to enquire into the condition of the Canals & Waterways of England as a means towards their being brought into greater use for the conveyance of traffic and also presumably to aid industry in the provinces - and there can be very little doubt that the recommendations of the Commission will include the question of the ownership of these waterways therein and proposals for any rights therein being dealt with by drastic legislation as well as their future control being in the hands of public or quasi-public authorities e.g. river boards.

I may pause here and say that as a Member of Parliament, I only received yesterday the Third Report of the Commissioners, in which they say they have now finished taking evidence and that they will issue their report in a few months.

The question of the acquisition of the Stort has been for many years under the consideration of the Conservancy Board and quite recently overtures have been made to them in the endeavour to induce them to take it over and resolutions have been passed by many local authorities in the Valley with that object. It has been the subject of several inspections by the Conservators and their Engineer has made complete surveys of the River and exhaustive reports from time to time to them as to its condition and the expenditure which would be necessary on their part to put it in such a condition as to enable the traders to use it for traffic to its fullest extent.

These proceedings have entailed considerable expense upon the Conservancy, and as the result of such surveys and a recent inspection by the Conservators it is manifest that to put the Navigation alone into proper condition would entail a capital expenditure exceeding £10,000 quite apart from the considerable annual outlay that would be required in the future for maintenance.

But in addition to the maintenance of the River itself it is found that various other liabilities and obligations are imposed by the Stort Navigation Act upon the owners, especially in connection with the maintenance of bridges carried over the Navigation. There are also the claims of the Millers relating to head levels – some of which are I cannot but think, based upon a misconception and were they tested in a court of law might prove to be considerably less extensive than is supposed. I apprehend that nobody connected with or interested in the Stort is desirous of spending money in litigation, least of all the Lee Conservators.

Now it may be at once stated that the Conservancy have nothing whatever to gain by the acquisition of the Navigation, but on the contrary they will be largely out of pocket for certainly many years to come, And their doing so is only from a sense of the advantages which should accrue to the districts through which the river flows - consequently it must be distinctly understood that in the event of their consenting to take over the River it could only be under any circumstances on terms which limited their liability to the repair and maintenance of the actual Navigation itself.

If it is of advantage to the various districts on the River to keep the River open for navigation, then the Conservancy must be relieved from any obligation or liability with regard to the maintenance of the bridges over the Navigation which should be taken over by the County and Local Authorities and the Millers must agree with the Conservancy's Engineer to maintain such a head level over the sills of the various locks upon the Navigation as he may consider necessary for the due protection of the Navigation. It is also most necessary that the Traders should give some assurance that at least they will maintain the existing trade on the River and as far as they are able to do so will increase it. The Metropolitan Water Board should also make a contribution towards the cost. The advantages which must result from the river being owned and controlled by the Conservancy Board must be manifest. Very extensive works of dredging would very much increase the water pound and the quantity of water for the use of the navigation and for mill purposes. The strengthening of the banks and their continued supervision by the Conservancy's Engineer and staff would not only prevent water running to waste but would remove or greatly minimise the risk of floods and damage to property whilst the reconstruction of locks upon modern principles would considerably facilitate the transport of goods and lessen the time occupied in getting barges through. I mention these matters as having a direct bearing upon the subject and as being of interest to those who are attending this Conference. Under no circumstances would the Conservancy be prepared to pay anything whatever out of their funds for the acquisition of the undertaking; the very heavy financial burden which would be placed upon them if they consented to take over the Navigation and put it into proper working order being the utmost which could be reasonably be expected of them.

It must not be forgotten that the Conservancy Board are Trustees for their Debenture holders who have upwards of £200,000 invested in the Lee Navigation, the interest on which is dependent on the income of the Board which is derived from the tolls they are authorised to levy and the statutory payments made by the Metropolitan Water Board and they would not be justified in voluntarily accepting any liability or obligation which might seriously jeopardise their security.

If, therefore, it is really desired to place the Navigation on such a footing as to be useful to the various districts through which it runs it can only be done by all parties interested sharing the burden and assisting each in their particular way and this Conference has been called for the purpose of ascertaining whether there is any probability of such a state of circumstances being brought about.

The CHAIRMAN – The Engineer has just put into my hands information as to some further facts. We are informed that the condition of things which we have been considering is slightly altered by Sir Walter Gilbey's Company having sold Latton Island property for £400, and also having sold Sheering Mill – the mill was not owned by the Stort Navigation – that may affect the matters we are here to discuss. Well, gentlemen, we want to hear your views now that you are in possession of the views of the Conservators, which have been carefully thought out. I shall be very glad indeed if those who are interested in this conference will make it as effective as they possibly can either for or against any action by the Board. I do not know any of you sufficiently well to ask you by name to take part in the discussion. I do see a very familiar figure here, Mr Longmore, and he may say something to us. I do not know whether he represents the Herts County Council.

Mr LONGMORE (Clerk of the Council, Hertfordshire County Council) – We have come here rather as listeners. I understand that the Lee Conservancy Board would take over the liability to put the Navigation into good condition, but not the bridges.

The CHAIRMAN – No, they would not pay anything for that.

Mr LONGMORE - What does Sir Walter Gilbey's Company now want?

The CHAIRMAN – Well, the last proposal that was made was that they would, as we understand, transfer the whole Navigation for a sum to be subscribed by the Metropolitan Water Board and various local authorities. The statement of the Engineer shows they have cut down the assets – they would take what it had been suggested the local authorities and the Water Board would subscribe, roughly speaking it was a £1,000.

Mr LONGMORE – About £1,000?

The CHAIRMAN – But since then the condition of things has changed, Brick Lock has fallen in, navigation was suspended until lately and the last vestige of tolls appears to have vanished, besides which Latton Island and Sheering Mill have been sold.

Mr LONGMORE – If they were handed a thousand pounds – they would transfer?

The CHAIRMAN – Not now, things have considerably altered. We should want to take over precisely what Sir Walter had purchased himself.

Mr LONGMORE – What has got to be found by the Local Authorities is something like £3,000 for rebuilding the bridges, and about £1,000 say for the purchase money?

The CHAIRMAN – Oh well, that would be for the Conference. What we as a Board are considering is this, to take over the River accepting only the liability to put it into a proper state of repair, and to maintain it, and of course that is subject to an arrangement of the question of millers' rights.

Mr LONGMORE – Yes.

The CHAIRMAN – Well, gentlemen, I shall be very glad to hear your views. We do not want you merely to listen to our statement and then go away.

Mr GOOLD (Clerk of the Essex County Council) – May I just ask for a little information as regards the present ownership of the canal and of the Company – has anybody seen a balance sheet of that Company, as to what their assets are?

The CHAIRMAN – I do not know that we have seen the balance sheet, we have seen the trade and tolls, a statement of the tolls, and they have of course been a diminishing quantity.

Mr GOOLD – Do you know whether they have a reserve fund put away?

The CHAIRMAN – I do not think so. I think the probability is that the object of forming it into a limited liability company is well understood by most of us.

Mr GOOLD – I gather from what you said that they are realising their assets?

The CHAIRMAN – It looks like it.

Mr GOOLD – I take it that the proceeds are still in the coffers of the company?

The CHAIRMAN – Of that we know nothing.

Mr GOOLD – A limited liability company has, of course, I believe now to file its balance sheet at Somerset House?

The CHAIRMAN – That would be open for anyone to go and look at.

Mr GOOLD – Yes. It is put forward on behalf of the Company that they should be paid to be relieved of their somewhat onerous liability and that they should retain the proceeds of the sales of their estates?

The CHAIRMAN – As far as we know, Mr Goold, it was put forward that they should take the various sums that had been promised by resolution of the various authorities along the valley, and they should be relieved from obligation, that is the last suggestion as emanating from them.

Mr GOOLD – Yes, sir, I mean to put it plainly, it occurred to me as we are strangers to the proceedings that the people who relieve the Company of their onerous liabilities should at least take all their assets – the assets are not sufficient to meet those liabilities.

The CHAIRMAN – I cannot reply to this cross-examination any further. I understand that Sir Walter Gilbey's company is represented here today.

Mr GOOLD - Then we may have the information?

The CHAIRMAN – Well probably the Company's representative will make a statement.

Mr GOOLD- It affects our position very much. I take it if the local authorities are asked to come in, it can hardly be until all the resources of those persons legally liable have been exhausted.

The CHAIRMAN - We want to ascertain where we are. If the company is represented here and is willing to make a statement, of course we shall be glad to listen to it.

A DELEGATE - I think, Mr Chairman, you propose to throw some of the liability of the roads on to the County Councils.

The CHAIRMAN - That is a matter for you. All we say is for our part we will spend this £10,000 or whatever is required for dredging and reconstructing this waterway so far as is necessary and of course assume the obligation to maintain it.

The DELEGATE – Of course, our greatest trouble is the bridges. We have got one now practically unsafe, no one can dare to go over it with a heavy load.

Mr GOOLD - It would assist us if the representative of the Company would give us his views.

The CHAIRMAN – I should be very glad if he would.

Mr W. GEE (Stort Navigation Co) - To what effect? I represent the Company.

The CHAIRMAN - Just state the position of what you are prepared to do towards bringing some effective result to this conference. At present, you are the man in possession.

Mr GEE - There is an offer which the Lee Conservancy have, I understand, under consideration. I do not know that I can take it any further than that for the moment.

Mr LONGMORE (Clerk of the Council, Hertfordshire County Council) – I am sorry, sir, to appear to cross-examine you, but do we know anything about the Hertfordshire bridges that it would cost about £3,000 to rebuild them? The Hertfordshire County Council have offered to give £2000 and the local authorities have offered to give £600, is that right?

The CHAIRMAN – I am sure I do not know whether you are correct.

Mr TWEEN (Lee Conservancy) – The local authorities have not promised to contribute to the main bridges.

The CHAIRMAN – At present we are only offered £2000 to build that which will cost £3000.

Mr MUSGRAVE (Lee Conservancy) – I think, with regard to that, the proposal was up to some time ago that Hertford was going to contribute £2000 under certain conditions as to the size of the barges.

The CHAIRMAN – That has been altered since.

Mr MUSGRAVE – I do not think that has been altered, but Essex agreed to contribute to the bridges in their district, exactly following the Hertford terms in regard to it. I do not think we may say that the conference is being quite fairly treated by Mr Gee saying there is an offer under consideration of the Lee Conservancy Board. There was a proposal that the Company should take the money, that is the

£500 the Metropolitan Water Board had recommended should be contributed (after very great difficulty), and the sums which the local authorities had voted, and we should give those to the company in exchange for the assets as they then existed. But since then, as I have pointed out, Brick Lock fell in and was not repaired.

A DELEGATE - It has been repaired.

The CHAIRMAN – Yes, after an interval of six months. I do not think the Company have any right to consider the offer is under consideration any longer. I should think they are in a condition of knowing that not only has the river been blocked for all these months, but that there were no tolls to take over.

A DELEGATE – I gather from you that the assets have been depleted?

The CHAIRMAN – Precisely, I have only just got the information. Is the Company prepared to make any move?

Mr GEE – I am not prepared to make any.

The CHAIRMAN – Or make any statement?

Mr C. TAYLOR (Hertfordshire County Council) – I should like to ask what the Essex County Council are going to do with regard to this. It appears to me that it is rather useless for Hertfordshire to make an offer unless backed up by Essex. As far as we have gone at present Hertfordshire has offered £2000 to the Lee Conservancy if they will take over the responsibility of the upkeep of this canal, and the County Council will relieve them of the expense in the future of the upkeep of the bridges. As a member of the Council and one of those who held the enquiry in regard to it, I may say we were quite willing to do all we could to help, but our responsibility is quite clear, and extends simply to the highway. We are the highway authority and we are responsible to see that traffic is kept over those bridges. The responsibility at present rests with the Stort Navigation, but they are apparently unable to fulfill their liability, and if we were to commence an action against them we know very well that we have right on our side, but apparently we should not be able to get the money that was required, and at the same time the Navigation will suffer and we might be called upon to put these bridges in repair. Now we are advised it will cost something like £3,000 to put those bridges in repair. Our liability is therefore limited to £3,000, but if we are to do anything we want to know what the position is to be in the future. We are asked to take over responsibility for those bridges for all time. We have made an offer of £2,000 which has apparently not been accepted. I think that it is now for the authority that is dealing with it, that is to say the Lee Conservancy, to come to us to make an offer. If you wish that offer reconsidered I think it should be put in such a form that we can then consider any offer which may be laid before us. It appears that the Stort Navigation Board is trying to make the best bargain it can and to save what it can out of the wreck. Well, I think that is entirely for the Stort Navigation to negotiate and to come before us and to say if it will do certain things, we will then take it over. If you make an offer, I am quite sure

The CHAIRMAN – The Lee Conservancy?

Mr C TAYLOR – If the Lee Conservancy will make an offer I think I may say my colleagues would be quite willing to consider any reasonable offer that is put before us and we should be quite willing to try and help in any way that is reasonable. But I do not think you can ask us for a further offer, especially in view of the fact that we have no evidence whatever that Essex has made a similar offer. Essex is liable I understand for four bridges, whilst Hertford has an interest only in three, and the Epping Council has also an interest in the matter. The question is what are the Essex County Council and the Epping Council also willing to pay in their proportion.

Mr MUSGRAVE (Lee Conservancy) – Mr Chairman, may I emphasise what you said in your opening remarks on the subject. You laid down certain propositions which I think may be taken as final as far as the Conservancy are concerned. First of all the meeting may take it that the Conservancy are not going to hang the Stort round their necks till every arrangement is settled beforehand (Hear, hear). They are not going to take it over and then appeal to the various authorities to do what is required of them leaving the Conservancy with the legal obligation. All these matters must be settled before the Conservancy will agree to take over the river.

Now, first of all, as the Chairman expressly pointed out, we limit anything that we may consent to do to the Navigation itself. It follows as a matter of course from that, that they will require Hertfordshire, instead of making a contribution of £ 2,000 towards the three main road bridges which are in their district, to entirely take them over and relieve the Conservancy from any obligation with regard to them. The same remark applies to Essex and, instead of accepting a contribution of £1,000 from Essex towards the two main road bridges over the Stort, they will require Essex to do exactly the same as Hertfordshire. There are three minor bridges I think, which are within the jurisdiction of the Rural District Councils – they will require those authorities to relieve them of any obligation with regard to them. Those are the local authorities that are interested in this concern and I believe that there will be no difficulty with them.

Then, notwithstanding that Essex and Hertfordshire and the Rural District Councils agree to do that, the claims or rights of the millers must be settled before we agree to take it over. It would be obviously ridiculous for the Conservancy to spend £10,000 or any other amount upon this river for the purpose of deepening the pounds and putting the waterway into order, if the millers could, at any time, render nugatory the money that had been spent by drawing the water down to such an extent as to strand the barges. Therefore the Conservancy do not think it unreasonable that they should require the Millers to come to an arrangement with their Engineer not to draw down the water below a certain point on the upper sills to be agreed upon between them.

Well then, with regard to the other parties who are interested, the traders, their interests are not so large. The amount of the tolls on the river during the last year was something about £300 – that was before the breakdown of Brick Lock – this year they probably won't be so much – the least they can do is give an assurance to the Board that if this money is spent on putting the navigation in good condition they will maintain the existing traffic and do their best to increase it.

Now, with regard to the existing owners of the Stort Navigation, they are possessed of a property which has been a loss from the very first day they took it over. That loss beginning at a small amount has increased year by year. The total revenue now

is insufficient to pay even the salaries of the lock keepers and therefore will be utterly inadequate when it is taken over and worked as a proper concern.

Well, the Conservancy cannot, out of their funds, consent to pay anything whatever to the owners for the purpose of taking over the concern, which certainly cannot pay its expenses for many years to come.

The Chairman has pointed out that the arrangement which was suggested some time ago by which the owner was to receive certain contributions which were voted by the local authorities was before the Lee Conservancy had formulated the demands upon the local authorities to take over these roads, and I frankly recognise that that may alter the circumstances of the case. The authority may say I was perfectly prepared to give you £100 or £200 or £300, but if you put upon me the obligation of maintaining the roads in my particular district that alters the circumstances of the case I am prepared to do that and I won't give you the contribution I offered previously.

And again, now that Latton Island has been sold that again alters the position of affairs. That property was so far as I know, the only portion of the property which could be alienated, and the proceeds I presume have probably gone in the rebuilding of the lock which has fallen in.

There is one other point. The Conservancy think the Water Board may be benefitted by their taking over this river and that they also ought to contribute something to the very heavy cost which they will be put to.

A DELEGATE – Will the Water Board contribute?

Mr MUSGRAVE – They are all here and will speak for themselves. Now we want to know whether Essex and Hertford and the other authorities are prepared to recommend – we know perfectly well they cannot do it here – their authorities to agree to such a proposal as we have put before them or say that they cannot so recommend, or that they will simply report and take their instructions.

But as far as we are concerned all these conditions must be fulfilled before the Lee Conservancy will put their necks into the halter and take over this river. They are not going to do it without these matters being settled beforehand. That is the reason everybody interested has been asked here today. If they say no, well then, we consider the matter at an end.

If, on the other hand, they think it is probable that such suggestions may be adopted, very well, we can go on with the matter. But it is clearly useless to keep on spending money – the Lee Conservancy have spent some hundreds of pounds in connection with this matter – and we never seem to get any further. The millers do not seem to assist – I won't say the local authorities don't because I think they do – but the Millers do not seem to assist, the traders do not seem to assist us and the people in whose hands the property is do not seem to assist us.

Mr LONGMORE (Hertfordshire County Council) – May we hear what the Water Board have to say?

The CHAIRMAN – We shall be glad if the Water Board's representatives will make a statement.

Mr C E HEARSON (Chairman of the Works & Stores Committee of the Water Board) – I think it is only fair to the conference that I should make one, still more upon a statement which has fallen from the Chairman. I think if I heard correctly the Chairman stated positively that the Water Board would contribute £500.....

The CHAIRMAN – I said that the Water Board had offered to contribute £500 when I spoke about the sums of money to be handed over.

Mr HEARSON – So far that is correct, but I think I should like to disabuse the mind of the Conference that the Water Board itself has actually decided to do that. It was a recommendation that was intended to be made by a Committee some two years ago upon a statement then that the water supply of the Board would be improved. But up to the present I have not heard any way in which I can personally see that the water supply so far as the Board is concerned is going to be improved. I have come here today and I have listened very attentively in the hope of discovering some reasons which would enable me to go to the Board and recommend them to make this contribution.

I may say that the Water Board is always very favourable to the Lee Conservancy, we contribute very largely to its revenue and we find that the Lee Conservancy is always ready to assist us in keeping up the purity of our water supply, but in this matter, which is quite a different one, we shall have to go to the Board with a special recommendation, and I think it is desirable that we should have some good ground for recommending to the Board the expenditure of a further sum, inasmuch as a great number of the members of the Water Board are of the opinion that the sum we already contribute should be sufficient to meet all the needs of the Conservancy for the purposes in which the Water Board is interested. I only make that statement now so that you may not run away with the idea that the Water Board is pledged to it.

The CHAIRMAN – That is perfectly clear. I intended to have said that the Works and Stores Committee had recommended, but that sum of money was not necessarily to be put into the pockets of the Stort Navigation. Now, as to why the Water Board by its committee should be asked to give to this. The reason put forward, and I thought it was a cogent one – was that the water would be preserved, that there would be a larger pound of water by deepening the river all along and cutting away the growth of weeds of many years of neglect. The Navigation may be what you described as derelict, and the contemplated scheme would prevent the water escaping as it does now from time to time through breaches in the banks.

The statement points out that the risk of flooding would be minimised but it ought to be clearly understood (the gentlemen from Hertford just now said something which makes me reply that it should be clearly understood) we have got our own river Lee and we are content to continue to manage the Lee and not to incur any obligation in regard to the Stort unless we have the willing co-operation of everybody.

We are not persons who are seeking to do a deal. Our idea is that as a public authority looking at the position of both these rivers that they should be in the hands of the Conservators because one is a large feeder to the other; that they should be under one management; and that management the Conservancy Board, for if the Board is not a public authority, I think I may say it is a quasi-public authority – its members are sent by public authorities and by traders – our idea therefore in asking you to come here was that we should play the part of the honest broker. We asked

you to come here today to consider what your interests are, as we are probably the one authority which could manage the thing, seeing that the river is the boundary between two counties and we offer our services.

We have gone to the expense of these reports. In the words of Mr Musgrave, we are not prepared to play the game of the Stort Navigation and get them out of the mess which apparently they have got into by years of neglect of their duties. I speak this plainly and I say that the marvel to me is that somebody has not found under the Stort Navigation Acts a very speedy remedy against those whose assets are apparently diminishing and who while taking profits under an Act of Parliament are desirous of shirking their obligations.

We feel we have done what we could at considerable expense and personal inconvenience to try and meet the wishes of all concerned. We are certainly not going to do anything to jeopardise our funds. It is bad enough to spend this large sum of money without any public return, if we ever do get any return, and it is quite sufficient for us to run that risk without asking us to take on our shoulders a single obligation outside the maintenance, viz. the putting it in repair and the maintenance after it is put into repair.

Mr C TAYLOR (Hertfordshire County Council) – As the Chairman of the Committee of Inquiry in the year, I think, 1905, some four years ago, I should like to say one word or two. I was rather sorry to hear you say that you were not here to be cross-examined. I do not think that that would be in anybody's mind that you were sitting there to be cross-examined, but you must understand that to read rather a long document and I found it rather difficult – perhaps it is my age – I found it difficult to follow that document somewhat hastily read through and to pick up all the points therein contained. Therefore I think you must excuse.....

The CHAIRMAN – That was going rather further than my statement.

Mr C TAYLOR – I want rather to put ourselves right. I did not want to cross-examine you in any way. Our only object and aim in asking questions was to get information.

The CHAIRMAN – Quite right.

Mr C TAYLOR – It is perfectly clear to me that this scheme will go through if every authority and everybody concerned goes at it with a will to pull together (Hear, hear). I was rather sorry to hear my friend on the right who represents the Water Board say that there was a doubt about that £500. Now if we are to begin by doubts of certain amounts of money being forthcoming we shall never get any forrarder, if I may use that word.

I am perfectly certain, speaking as an individual, that the Herts County Council are willing to meet every reasonable point that can be brought before them. I think they would be willing to contribute, I may say, rather handsomely towards this scheme because they believe that the scheme will benefit agriculture. I do not know the river personally and so am speaking out of the book, I have read a great deal about it and at the enquiries, I believe to improve the river would be a very great benefit to the whole neighbourhood, if that river could be kept open and I think if, as the Lee Conservancy say, they take over the liability of dredging the river and making it fit

for navigation and keep it in order, I think they are putting fair terms before this meeting.

I am quite prepared to say that, but at the same time all interests have to be considered and these bridges of course you know make a large pull upon the purses of the Herts County Council. In the first instance we did not throw stones at the scheme, but offered £2,000 towards these bridges and I do not know but that with a little pressure they might not go even a little further than that.

What I wanted was that the Lee Conservancy should put into black and white exactly the position so that we might be able to go back to our County Council – I suppose Essex is the same - and say now those are the bed-rock terms on which we will take over everything. I think that is about all I can say. I only wanted the information and I think it must be clearly pushed down every man's throat here that it is to the interest of all parties concerned that they should put their shoulders to the wheel and not try to draw back but do the best they can to help the scheme.

The CHAIRMAN – Very well, we will have this statement printed and sent to everybody who attends today.

Mr C TAYLOR – It would have been nice to have had it in our hands before.

The CHAIRMAN – Of course that was not practicable.

Mr C TAYLOR – It is difficult to follow.

The CHAIRMAN – It was not practicable to print it beforehand. We did not know who were coming here, but we shall have to get the names and addresses of those present so we can send them a copy

Mr C TAYLOR – Thank you. That is all I have to say and I do impress it upon every authority to do their very best to subscribe that they can towards carrying this matter through.

The CHAIRMAN – Now we should very much like to have a statement from the Millers.

Mr LONGMORE (Clerk of the Council, Hertfordshire County Council) – I was only going to say that I agree with what Mr Taylor, the Chairman of the Committee, has said. We held an enquiry into this matter a few years ago and we were largely impressed by the importance of this river to the eastern side of the County or rather the western side of Essex. We think it is really important as a competitor with the railway company and also generally for the benefit of the agriculturists in the neighbourhood.

Now, remarks have been made today about the present owner of the Navigation, and the Committee of the Herts County Council which went into the matter investigated that very fully, and there is no doubt that there are no grounds whatever for finding fault in the least degree with Sir Walter Gilbey in this matter. I believe he is on that transaction at the present time out of pocket to the extent of some £4,000 and the Committee which went fully into the matter were impressed with the fact that he

really has been a benefactor and if he had not come forward and spent this large sum of money upon it, the Navigation would have been shut up.

In regard to the various interests, I think I may say that the Lee Conservancy have acted in an extremely handsome manner in saying that they are prepared to come forward and take up a large liability amounting to £10,000 and put this derelict Navigation into good condition. I think we ought to be very grateful indeed to the Lee Conservancy Board for the position they have taken up.

Then with regard to the Metropolitan Water Board, I am at all events very glad to find that we have one very important committee that is prepared to recommend an expenditure of this sum of £500, because depend upon it having regard to the fact that this Navigation is in the hands of a company with a capital of only £5,000, with the shares fully paid up, it will I think to get any court to make that company put the navigation into a good condition.

If any steps were taken against them they would go gracefully into liquidation and disappear and we should still be left with this river in a derelict condition. I admit that that would be a very great disaster to the inhabitants of Bishops Stortford and I venture to think it would also be great disaster to the Metropolitan Water Board, because I think engineers will tell you that if a river becomes waterlogged and the water way is not kept open, you will not get anything like the same quantity of water as if this navigation is kept open. I hope they will see their way to adopt the very wise recommendation to spend that £500.

What we really require here in this matter is something in the nature of a lead. Mr Musgrave has made an interesting speech on behalf of Essex County Council. I thought that a lead was being given to me, but let it be that we who generally follow in the wake of Essex County Council on this occasion will perhaps have to go in the van.

Mr MUSGRAVE – I was not speaking for the Essex County Council, I was representing the Conservancy.

Mr LONGMORE – As a Member of the Board, I understand./ I see you were giving them a rub as well as the Herts County Council. So far as Hertfordshire is concerned, hat they have said is this; we understand that the three bridges in our county would cost £3,000 to put into a thoroughly good repair and condition. We will contribute £2,000 towards that £3,000 on condition that the local authorities, which I think are Bishops Stortford Urban District Council, Sawbridgewoth and Harlow, will make up the remaining £1,000 between them. The Herts County Council on that being done will take over in perpetuity the liability to repair the three bridges in question.

We thought that was a fair offer but having conferred with the members of my Council who are here, they have authorised me to say that if the Essex County Council will come forward in an equally generous way, they will be prepared to increase that contribution to £2,500, leaving the remaining £500 to be found by the three local authorities, the district councils. That seems to me to solve absolutely the difficulty of the three bridges.

If Essex will follow the same lines, they will solve the difficulty so far as Essex is concerned. All I understand we shall then have to do will be to approach Sir Walter Gilbey. We hope we shall have in hand the contribution of the Water Board of £500 and I hope that will be sufficient to tempt him to dispose of this not very valuable

undertaking to the Lee Conservancy Board. I only throw that suggestion out as a practical solution of a difficult problem, a problem which has been largely solved by the wisdom of the Lee Conservancy Board in regard to taking over the future liability of repairing the undertaking at a cost of £10,000.

The CHAIRMAN – Mr Longmore, I am sure my fellow Conservators realise that Hertfordshire is very generous and is doing good service to the whole district by its offer to go that little step further and take over the bridges.

Mr LONGMORE – What we understood was that they would rebuild them.

The CHAIRMAN – Reverse the position, you ask your local authorities in the county to give you £500 and then you will take over the liability.

Mr LONGMORE – Yes, we will rebuild.

The CHAIRMAN – That is a very fair offer. Cannot we ask the Chairman of the Essex Highways Committee to express his views after what Mr Longmore has said.

Mr V. W. TAYLOR (Essex County Council) – I am afraid I cannot say so very much. If anything more is to be proposed to them the Committee will be most happy to deal with it and make some recommendation, but nothing beyond the offer made in 1906, to the Lee Conservancy or the Stort Navigation or whoever it was, if they will rebuild the bridges, the County Council will give them £1,000 and take them over for all time. That is as far as we have gone. To that offer we have heard nothing.

The CHAIRMAN – Of course, the matter was hung up. Now will you go back to the Committee with the offer of Hertford before you, and ask whether or not you will take over the county bridges? There are two county bridges in Essex, rebuild them yourselves and get such contribution as you can from your authorities in the same way as they.

Mr V. W. TAYLOR – I will put that before our committee.

The CHAIRMAN – We hope you will, and try to approach the matter as Hertford has done with a very real and earnest wish to do something to help forward the scheme.

Mr V. W. TAYLOR – I can only say that we will consider it on the committee and make some recommendation to the Council. I cannot pledge them.

The CHAIRMAN – You cannot pledge them, we agree.

Mr F. C. EDWARDS (Lee Conservancy Board) – I am also a member of the Highways Committee and I shall be very pleased to do the best I can to get them to go to the uttermost in the same way as Hertford has done today.

Mr LONGMORE – Of course, this is conditional on the whole thing going through.

The CHAIRMAN – Oh yes, everything hangs on that. I am particularly anxious to ask the millers to show their public spirit.

Mr COLEMAN (Epping Rural District Council) - On the question of paying a contribution. I think our council would strongly object to pay any contribution towards the funds of Sir Walter Gilbey, but as regards other matters, I have no authority to speak on the bridges, but I shall be very pleased to communicate with the Highways Committee and lay the matter before our Committee and shall be very pleased to recommend anything for the good of the neighbourhood as regards the bridges.

The CHAIRMAN – There is only one in Epping.

Mr F. C. EDWARDS – Only one in Epping.

The CHAIRMAN – Is there anyone here who can speak for the Hertfordshire local authorities? Is the representative of Stansted here?

Mr MARTIN BURLS (Stansted Rural District Council) – I am sorry I am not a County Councillor, then I should have been very pleased to have recommended my Council to follow the lead given by Hertford. We are pledged to a certain amount, we are at the extreme end of the River Stort and it is a very small concern to us, we have guaranteed I believe a ½d rate.

The CHAIRMAN – We do not ask you for money, we ask you to relieve us of a bridge.

Mr MARTIN BURLS - I understood really that is a matter for the County Council.

The CHAIRMAN – Not in your case, there is a bridge which is not a county bridge.

Mr MARTIN BURLS - Of course, we should have to go to onto the cost and that sort of thing. All I can say is that anything I can do to forward it I shall be most happy to do as Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN – That is the Spirit.

Mr MARTIN BURLS – I only hope the Essex County Council will follow the lead given by Hertford.

Mr GOOLD (Clerk of the Council, Essex County Council) – I am sorry to interfere again, but could your Board or the Stort Navigation Company or somebody supply us or the Essex County Council and their Committee with a clear statement of what their assets are, and also a clear statement of what assets will be handed over to the Lee Conservancy or to the counties or to the public bodies who are going to relieve them of their responsibilities? I think that it is a very important question and might assist us in knowing what they really have got and that they would hand over. Let us have a statement like that.

Mr MARTIN BURLS – Have you got any idea what it would cost the ratepayers, this one bridge?

The CHAIRMAN – Oh, very little.

Mr LONGMORE – As far as I can gather there would not be very much difficulty with our three authorities. I think probably if the County Council accept our recommendation they will be all right.

Mr G. DAY (Sawbridgeworth Urban District Council) – We have already promised something. I cannot speak for the Council, but I have no doubt they will be willing to fulfil any transaction that they have promised.

The CHAIRMAN – I am still waiting for the millers. I recognise the faces of those gentlemen with whom I conferred last August, and wasted a whole day of my vacation making a tour of the valley in order to convince the millers of the advantage to accrue to them. I am anxiously waiting for them to come towards this universal millennium.

Mr BURTON (Sawbridgeworth Mill) – I am a miller. We have seen Mr Tween. I think we have met before on several occasions about this. As a miller I really do not know what you want yet.

The CHAIRMAN – I thought I had pointed that out very distinctly. We want you to consent to allow us to have such a reduction of your head level which shall be reasonable for the purpose of conducting this Navigation. I think Mr Tween has in every case given the millers some information of what is required over the sills and in what way that would affect your sill.

Mr BURTON – I may say that I have known the lock for 30 years; we have never had serious complaint of stopping the Navigation. It has always been our object to assist the Navigation as well as ourselves. I know sometimes we suffered loss more than we have stopped the barges.

The CHAIRMAN – We know a certain statesman once said that the way to a certain place was paved with good intentions, and that the way was still paved with the same intentions, which presented the same attractions but they still led to the same place. I am glad to know that the millers have good intentions but we want it down in writing that they will not require such a head level to be maintained as will obstruct the Navigation.

Mr BURTON – Do you want us to give away our rights? Are we asked to give away our rights?

The CHAIRMAN – It is so in this sense that everybody must come into this scheme if this scheme is to succeed.

Mr BURTON – Are we asked to give our rights away?

The CHAIRMAN – No, certainly not, we ask you to agree to a reasonable head level with Mr Tween and incorporate that in an agreement with the Conservancy.

Mr BURTON – I am in favour of the thing being taken over, but we want to know something in black and white as well as give something in black and white. There has never been a real head asked for yet.

The CHAIRMAN – Mr Tween will make a brief statement as to what he will ask the millers to do, what we must ask you to do in copying good faith with the rest of those who are here today from the county and urban authorities.

Mr TWEEN (Engineer and Manager, Lee Conservancy Board) – What we want the millers to agree to is not to draw down the water below a certain point on the upper sills of the lock affected by the mill. For this reason, in most cases to make it a 5 feet Navigation, we should have to lower the sills, both the upper and lower, and of course it would mean a very considerable sum to do that, but it would be absolutely useless from a navigation point of view, to lower a sill from 6 inches to a foot, as the case may be, to enable us to get the barges over, if the millers were to draw the water down an additional 6 inches or a foot, we should still be no better off.

What we want the millers to agree is an arrangement to say they will not draw down the water below a certain point on the lock sills; then we shall know what we have got to do. If they will agree not to draw below 4 feet 6 inches on the upper sill, and if we wish to make it 5 feet we know we have got to lower it 6 inches, we know where we stand. We should not take so much water away from the mills as by closing in the sides of the locks the capacity would be less.

I understand what the millers use is the top water to get as much power on the wheel as they possibly can. If we take it over, we shall dredge out the river and considerably increase the water area of each mill pound. Therefore the millers will be greatly benefitted, because they will have the additional water to draw on. The depth of the Navigation to the miller is of no consequence; it is the top 6 or 7 inches which gives him the effective power and all we want is for the millers to agree not to draw down so as to impede traffic.

We sent round a circular to each miller some time ago asking him to say the height to which he would not draw beyond, some of them gave figures, some did not, and some said they could not agree to any level and that they could not give away any of their rights and that they possessed the right to practically empty the river, which I do not think they do, according to the Act.

But all we want is to come to an arrangement, and a circular can be sent round again if necessary to ask the millers to state the lowest point to which they claim to draw on the lock sill.

The CHAIRMAN – I am very anxious to get a response from the Millers.

A DELEGATE – I am not a miller on the Stort. I think Mr Tween must allow the millers a certain distance to draw at, say 9 inches to a foot below their head line or they cannot work the mills at a profit. They must keep on going. Can you not arrange Mr Tween with them in some way so as to get head levels they say they won't go below?

The CHAIRMAN – That is what we have sent.

Mr TWEEN – That is the point we have been trying for all along. I am well aware the millers must have a varying head or he cannot work.

Mr C TAYLOR – I think we have got as far as we can today.

The CHAIRMAN – We have got nothing as yet from the millers.

Mr C TAYLOR – Can you suggest that Mr Tween should meet the millers?

The CHAIRMAN – We have, I have, and Mr Tween has been twice. We have got the same gentlemen here who can make or mar this scheme. We want to ask them if they really want to help us; that they should today declare once and for all whether they will get into line and help by agreeing these levels. The whole thing depends on that.

Mr J BARNARD (Harlow Mill) – We want to work with the Lee Conservancy as much as we possibly can. On the other hand, I am perfectly certain the Lee Conservancy do not wish to place us in such a position that we cannot work the mills at a profit. Therefore if we get something definite from Mr Tween, to give us a head that we should not draw below a certain level, say a foot and a half, that would be a uniform proposal to every miller on the stream. I think we should then have something to go on. Possibly we could meet together and come to some terms. I do not know about the technical bit.

The CHAIRMAN – I do not know whether, if we adjourn this conference, you would undertake – there is I think a close corporation of millers on the Stort? – to meet and be in a position at the adjourned conference to agree to what Mr Tween will submit to you as a minimum head level.

Mr BARNARD – I should be very pleased to attend any meeting called.

The CHAIRMAN – Is every mill represented here?

Mr BURTON – Mr Savill of the Latton Mill, he has just left.

The CHAIRMAN – Will you undertake to consider Mr Tween's suggestion between now and the adjourned meeting? Let each be in a position at the adjourned meeting to say definitely aye or nay. Mr Tween cannot give a general basis for every mill, it varies according to the location.

Mr BURTON – I think, Mr Chairman, at a previous conference with the millers, you wanted then a penalty - a penalty; are you still pressing for that?

The CHAIRMAN – I do not know we did, but if we did we are in a most conciliatory mood now and only want to make the navigation effective. No, nothing is said about penalties.

Mr BURTON – There was a penalty before and you said something about black and white.

The CHAIRMAN – I do not think a penalty was mentioned, we wanted an agreement, then we should know where we stand.

Mr BURTON – We want to know where we stand too.

The CHAIRMAN – Most of you are not dependent on the river, you have got steam power.

Mr BURTON – I paid for water rights and I want the benefit of them.

The CHAIRMAN – You've got them in suspension. You do not use them apparently.

Mr BURTON – Oh yes, we do.

The CHAIRMAN – What we want is to make a point for every one of the mills to draw to, so that the river may be preserved and not run away. Well, Mr Tween will send to each of you the irreducible minimum of the top sill, if you consider that between now and the adjourned meeting and be ready to come to a conclusion and give us an answer, because it does depend on you, whether such a scheme is possible.

Mr C TAYLOR – In order to save time, can the millers be asked to meet Mr Tween at some time and endeavour to get them to come to terms? Then at the next Meeting they could come not with a verbal promise but to prevent misunderstandings with a formal document which may be signed and handed in, so that we may arrive at something final. It seems to me important from the millers' interests as well as from the general public that this matter should be settled. I appeal to the millers to be eminently reasonable in this matter. I quite recognise that it is very difficult for the millers to at once say they will agree to a scheme, the details of which they have not had before them. I think Mr Tween ought to see the millers and agree a headline and then try and get them all into line. Surely that might be arranged and then put their hands to a document which can be brought up at our adjourned meeting and the whole thing carried through. It is also contingent on the local councils doing their share and that can also be reported at the adjourned meeting.

The CHAIRMAN – My colleagues quite agree. You ought to know we have approached the millers again and again but got nothing. It also depends upon the Stort Navigation, who hold the key of the situation.

Mr ----- - I think with a gathering of Millers they will want the terms of the agreement. I think they have all agreed personally.

The CHAIRMAN – We will send them a draft.

Mr EDWARD SEABURY (John Kirkaldy Ltd, Burnt Mill) – Not a panel agreement, that is, I think, what they want to guard against. Everything else has been agreed I think.

The CHAIRMAN – We will give them all a draft agreement. We will do everything we can.

Mr MARTIN BURLS - And give us information as to the cost of the bridge.

The CHAIRMAN – I do not think we have the figures of that.

Mr TWEEN – Roughly £200 or £300.

Mr F EDWARDS (Lee Conservancy Board) – There are the figures of the one in the Epping district. I will send them on to you. I do not think I have them here. It has been going on for so many years I have forgotten them.

The CHAIRMAN – We will try to give everybody all the information in our possession. Can we get any advance at all from the owners of the river?

Mr Gee, can you make any statement at all to help forward what you see is the universal desire?

Mr GEE – I am quite sure the owners of that company will do anything which is for the public good..

The CHAIRMAN – Will they go so far as to come here and say what they will be prepared to do?

Mr GEE – I cannot say.

The CHAIRMAN – Everything depends on that. Are you prepared, Mr Gee, to be able to come to the adjourned meeting with some authorised and definite thing as to what should be done?

Mr GEE – I do not quite see how it affects the Lee Conservancy Board.

The CHAIRMAN – Only this, that we are the only body that can come in and move the wheel. We have got nothing to gain by it, but on the contrary we have got a great deal to lose. If you want to keep the river you have only got to say so and all our efforts will fall to the ground. Are the traders present? We should like to hear the views of the traders, they are the only other body we know. Is Mr Taylor here? We should like an expression of opinion from the traders as to maintaining and increasing the tolls.

Mr MARSHALL TAYLOR (Messrs John Taylor & Sons) – It is of the very greatest advantage to keep the work as far as traders are concerned on the river.

The CHAIRMAN – Yes, what we want is you to help us if you can between now and the adjourned meeting and ascertain the views of your fellow traders on the river and

others in the towns served by it as to the prospect of there being an increase, if the navigation is put on a commercially sound basis, an increase of the river traffic.

Mr MARSHALL TAYLOR – Of course, if the scheme were carried through it would be to the advantage of the traders to do as much as they possibly could on the river. We have done that as a firm, we have kept all our traffic on the river and we are the only people on the river who do so. I cannot answer for other people, because there is hardly anybody to answer for.

Mr MUSGRAVE (Lee Conservancy Board) – We assume the tolls on the river are £300, would the traders give us an assurance that the tolls on the river would at least come up to that amount?

Mr MARSHALL TAYLOR – I could not possibly say that. As far as our firm are concerned we will use the navigation to the utmost as we have done in previous years, but as to saying they will guarantee it, it is no earthly good my saying so because there are only two other people using the navigation at the present time.

The CHAIRMAN – Would you do this, as you have done your best to support the river tolls, would you communicate with the other gentlemen who are traders in the neighbourhood and get the consensus of opinion?

Mr MARSHALL TAYLOR – I can give you the information now. We shall be only too glad to do the best we can.

The CHAIRMAN – That's yourself, could you be the medium, of trying to see how far persons doing business in the Stort Valley at present by rail would be induced to transfer to the river? You could help us to that extent by trying to get a consensus of opinion from the traders in the valley. That would be a great benefit if you would.

Mr MARSHALL TAYLOR – I do not see how I can in that way. It is rather a large work.

The CHAIRMAN – If you will try and do the best you can by the adjourned meeting we shall be most grateful.

Mr MARSHALL TAYLOR – I will do what I can to help in the matter, but I cannot make rash promises about other people.

The CHAIRMAN – You do not follow what I mean.

Mr MARSHALL TAYLOR – Yes, I do.

The CHAIRMAN – You know pretty well nearly all those who do a large transit business of goods by rail; now as a trader interested in the river can you approach them between now and the time we meet again and ask them if they will use the river?

Mr MARSHALL TAYLOR – I will do what I can, I am a very busy man.

The CHAIRMAN – We will ask Mr Tween to come and see you.

THE CONFERENCE then STOOD ADJOURNED
to 12th NOVEMBER, 1909, at 11.30 am.