

Reclaiming part of the Humber Arm of the Shrewsbury & Newport Canal

Reclaiming a canal



THE CANAL BED before reclamation. The soil from the left-hand bank has been removed for filling in higher up the canal.

IN these days when so much land is being permanently lost to agriculture for urban development and so many farmers' fields split in half by the new motorways, it is pleasant to report on a farm where the reverse process has been in operation.

This has been achieved by Mr. Rowland Ward on his Lubtree farm at Donnington, Shropshire, where some 9 acres of derelict land comprising the disused Humber branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, which formerly ran through the farm, have been reclaimed for farming purposes.

While these additional acres are of direct benefit, an equally important aspect of the work has been that fields on what were formerly opposite banks of the canal are now directly accessible and can be farmed as one unit.

BY ALAN DAY

Thus a 23-acre block has now been formed from what were formerly 5 acres of canal and two fields of 7 and 11 acres. In addition, a considerable saving has been made in the number of miles of travelling involved each year in having to cross bridges, etc.

The full economic benefits of all this are not easy to calculate, but it is obvious that there are considerably more advantages than the potential re-

turns from the 9 acres which have been reclaimed. These were purchased from British Waterways at £5 per acre. Whilst this figure sounds low in comparison with present-day land values, the photographs show that there has been a considerable expenditure in time and money involved in bringing the land into cultivation.

The first job

The first job which faced Mr. Ward and his staff when work began last autumn was to lay 6-inch main drain along the disused bed of the canal. Rock in places added to their difficulties, but the task was satisfactorily completed, using farm labour at a gross cost of approximately £60 per acre. Contractor's equipment was used for the task of filling in and levelling the

land and this involved transporting some hundreds of tons of soil from banks at one end of a quarter mile stretch to hollows at the other.

Delays due to weather occurred and the work was finally completed this spring. The gross cost for this soil transference worked out at some £100 per acre.

Thus the total gross cost for drainage and reclamation has been in the region of £60 per acre. Although this figure may appear to be high, it is still less than the market value of comparable land.

Part of the former canal, after applications of 2 or 5 tons of lime per acre, is already producing sheep keep for this autumn.

All 9 acres productive

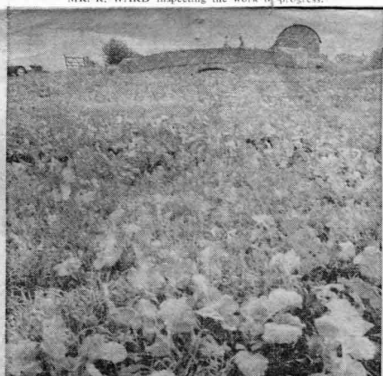
Mr. Ward plans to produce timber on part of the remainder which does not lend itself to arable cultivation, and in this way the whole 9 acres will eventually become productive. The soil should respond well to lime and artificial and on this new land Mr. Ward expects to get some good crops of brassicae and cereals over the next few years.

In this, as in other aspects of farming, Mr. Ward has been a pioneer and there is no doubt that his experiences with this type of reclamation will be invaluable to other farmers in similar circumstances. However, while not all farmers may have disused canals running through their farms, the general theme behind the scheme, namely to reclaim waste land and make larger blocks for easier working, is certainly generally applicable.

There must be many farms where disused ditches and waterways could be drained and filled in, overgrown hedges removed and fields made into blocks of land more suitable for modern machinery than many of the present layouts.



MR. R. WARD inspecting the work in progress.



THE SAME AREA after reclamation and seeding down for sheep keep.

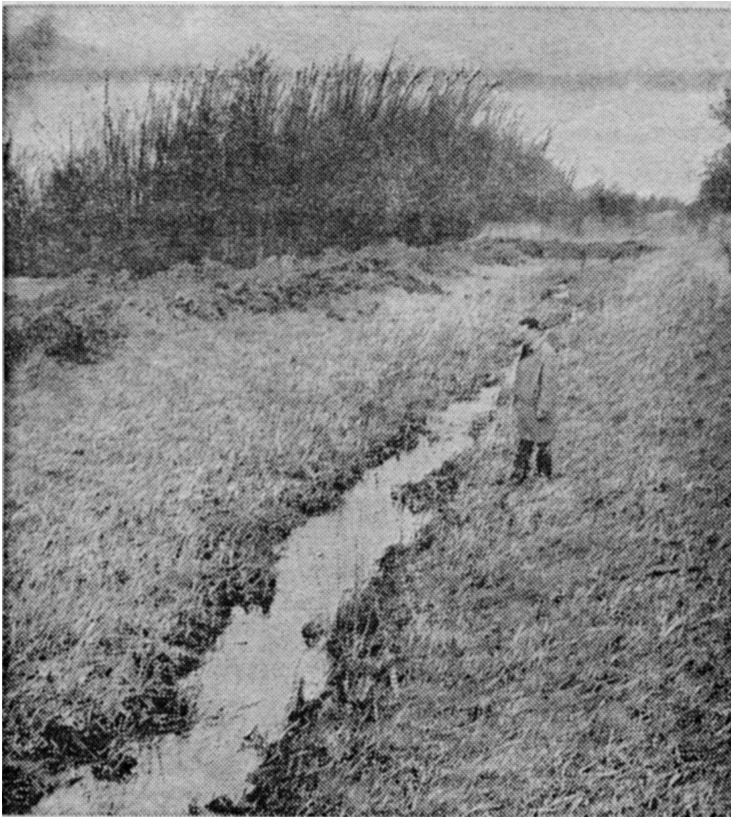


A GENERAL VIEW of the reclaimed land.

Transcript below:

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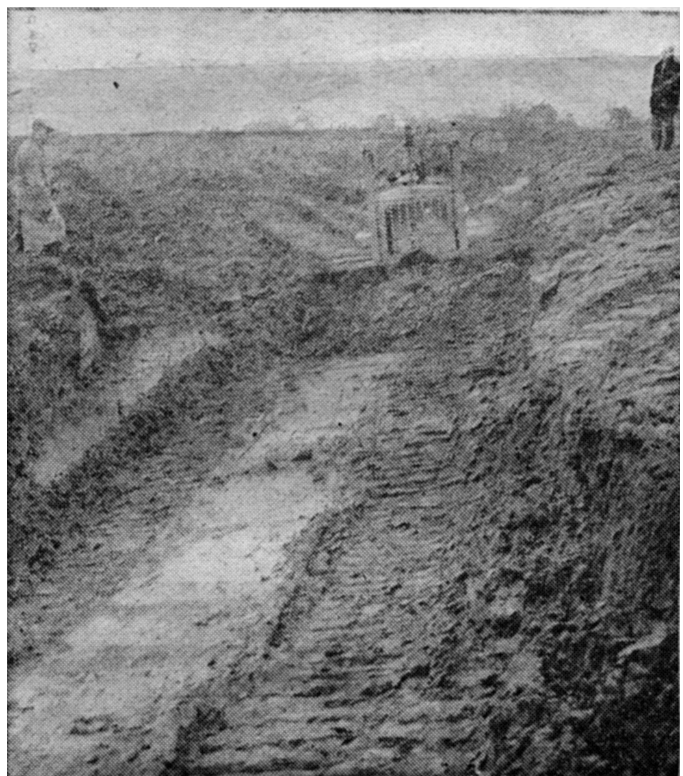
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This has been achieved by Mr. Rowland Ward on his Lubstree farm at Donnington. Shropshire, where some 9 acres of derelict land comprising the disused Humber branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, which formerly ran through the farm, have been reclaimed for farming purposes.

While these additional acres are of direct benefit, an equally important aspect of the work has been that fields on what were formerly opposite banks of the canal are now directly accessible and can be farmed as one unit.

Thus a 23-acre block has now been formed from what were formerly 5 acres of canal and two fields of 7 and 11 acres. In addition, a considerable saving has been made in the number of miles of travelling involved each year in having to cross bridges, etc.

The full economic benefits of all this are not easy to calculate, but it is obvious that there are considerably more advantages than the potential returns from the 9 acres which have been reclaimed. These were purchased from British Waterway at £5 per acre. Whilst this figure sounds low in comparison with present-day land values, the photographs show that there has been a considerable expenditure in time and money involved in bringing the land into cultivation.



MR R WARD inspecting the work in progress



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The First Job

The first job which faced Mr. Ward and his staff when work began last autumn was to lay 6-inch main drain along the disused bed of the canal. Rock in places added to their difficulties, but the task was satisfactorily completed, using farm labour at a gross cost of approximately £60 per acre. Contractor's, equipment was used for the task of filling in and levelling the land and this involved transporting some hundreds of tons of soil from banks at one end of a quarter mile stretch to hollows at the other.

Thus the total gross cost for drain age and reclamation has been in

the region of £160 per acre. Although this figure may appear to be high, it is still less than the market value of comparable land.

Part of the former canal, after application of 4 or 5 tons of lime per acre, is already producing sheep keep for this autumn.

All 9 acres productive

Mr. Ward plans to produce timber on part of the remainder which does not lend itself to arable cultivation, and in this way the whole 9 acres will eventually become productive. The soil should respond well to lime and artificials and on this new land Mr. Ward expects to get some good crops of brassicas and cereals over the next few years. In this, as in other aspects of farming. Mr. Ward has been a pioneer and there is no doubt that his experiences with this type of reclamation will be invaluable to other farmers in similar circumstances. However, while not all farmers may have disused canals running through their farms, the general theme behind the scheme, namely to reclaim waste land and make larger blocks for easier working, is certainly generally applicable.

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