William Howlett was by profession a taxidermist. He lived in Barton Mills and was a keen naturalist and fisherman. For many years in the late 1800's he wrote a weekly column called "Notes on Angling and Natural History" for the Newmarket Journal.

Particularly during the 1890 refurbishment and repair of most of the Lark Navigation ("Lord Bristol's Great Steam Venture") he often took long walks along the river, and published accounts of them in his column.

This account of one such walk was published in the Newmarket Journal issue dated 17th May 1890.

Notes on Angling and Natural History.

The River Lark from Bury St Edmunds to Mildenhall.

Having during the last month received a great number of letters requesting me once again to undertake the journey along the river Lark, and to let the public know, through the columns of the Newmarket Journal, how this work of cleaning out the river is progressing, I arrived at Bury by the 11.20 train, and came at once upon an army of nearly 200 navvies and other workmen engaged in the undertaking, under the very able superintendence of Mr Gilmore, chief engineer.

After a friendly greeting from these strong hearty fellows, and a few kind words to them, hoping they had not forgotten the good advice the Reverend Mr Wilkinson, of Icklingham, gave them at the dinner, namely, "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might", and "Be merry and wise", I made a good survey of the whole river.

The new cutting is getting very near the ancient town of St. Edmundsbury. A cutting has been made nearly direct from the Maltings corner, near the Fornham Road, right across the meadows along the old course of the stream. Many of the twisting nooks and corners are done away with, and a good, sound course has been found, some 30 feet or more wide, and over six feet deep, and running to within a quarter of a mile of the town, with an abundant supply of water, not from the old Botanic Garden stream alone, as many persons imagined, but from the powerful Mermaid Spring, near the railway. This stream, for the time being, is diverted, and so runs into the Lark near the old Clough, close to the maltings.

The **first lock** will be about half a mile from the town and will be called the **Old Toll Bridge Lock**. It is to be a very fine lock over 100 feet long. Many remains of old bridges and foundations have been found by the men during the work of excavating along this part of the river, and many different strata, including bog, hard stone, and clay. A very excellent piece of work, this new cutting. As I told Mr. Gilmore, it is the best work done along the whole course of the river.

I come now to the **old Clough** the next gate from Bury. This is not yet repaired.

The next place I came to was Mr. **Wick's mill lock** and staunch. This is complete.

After a chat with Mr Wick, and look at the fish, I got to **Fornham Lock** and gates. These are the **fourth** from Bury and are complete. I saw at these locks a beautiful shoal of minnows, a fish I have never before seen in the Lark.

Pushing on I next come to **Ducks Sluice Lock**. This is complete.

After calling on the good lady at the farm, and partaking of some refreshment, I preceded to **Hengrave Locks**. These are complete, making **six** gates from Bury. The river here is full of beautiful springs, giving an unlimited supply of water.

I next reached the **Chimney Mills locks** and gates, which are complete, and the mill is working. These are the **seventh** gates from Bury.

Having taken having had a chat with Mr Bell, the miller, and partaken of a glass of his good home-brewed, I trudged to **Flempton Lock**. These are complete, and make the **eighth** from Bury.

As a matter of course, I called on my old friend Mr Barbrook, and was kindly invited to partake of some delicious mutton and asparagus. Time being on the wing, I could not stay, so I contented myself with bread and cheese and a glass of his good beer, and off I started again on the warpath.

I came to a new pair of gates called **Boyden Sluice**. This is complete and makes the **ninth** from Bury. Here formerly stood a cloth mill. This part of the river is very pretty, but it is shallow. There are plenty of fish.

On I go to **Dullingham Staunch**. These are complete, making the **tenth** from Bury.

I next came to a large lock and sluice at **Fullmills**, this being complete.

Cherry Tree lock and staunch came next. A very large lock this is, awfully deep and *nearly a mile in length*[1], making a complete harbour for the barges. This is now being repaired, and a tremendous task Mr Walter Godfrey, the superintendent of the work, has in hand here.

Lackford Bridge I now reach, time 3:30. This is complete.

A long walk brings me to the **double locks[2] and gates between Lackford and Icklingham**. These are not yet complete but are now undergoing repair. They make the **twelfth** from Bury.

The river here shallow and full of weeds. Icklingham Three Bridges[3] was the next place I arrived at. This is a new bridge, built by in very excellent style by Mr Whitmore of Gaseley(?). The locks the gates and lock are complete and make the **thirteenth** from Bury.

Call in at the Icklingham Red Lion and have a look around. What a splendid site for a coal and corn and stone wharf is here, the property of Mr C Wing, of Bury St Edmunds. There is plenty of room to make a large dock, with every accommodation for barges and horses.

Resuming my journey, I come across my old 90 year old friend, Mr Benstead, who I found hale and hearty. I have christened him the marvel of the age. The **Icklingham locks** and sluices are nearly complete, making the **fourteenth** from Bury.

Temple Bridge is being repaired, and also the locks and gates. These make the **fifteenth gates** from Bury. I was not at all pleased with the way the river is cleaned out here.

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[1] This seems to be an extraordinary claim.
[2] Sometimes called Lackford Double Lock, but not actually a lock; two staunches about 100m apart.
[3] Farthing Bridge.

Jack Tree Staunch is the next place and is not yet repaired. This makes the **sixteenth** from Bury. There I was overtaken by a very severe storm of lightning, thunder, and rain. There was no shelter so I was fairly drenched to the skin.

Plodding on wet and hungry, I arrived at **Barton Mills**. The lock here is nearly completed, making the **seventeenth** from Bury.

Mr Lambert kindly took me in and provided some hot tea and a rub down, and on again I pushed to **Barton Staunch**. This is under repair and makes the **eighteenth** from Bury.

It was still raining in torrents. I made my way back to **Mildenhall**. The locks and gates here[4] are nearly complete, and this makes the **nineteenth** from Bury. There I found the dredger ready to get into the top waters as soon as the gates are ready to allow the passage.

I look at the gates and staunch near the stream mill, which is now damned at both ends and being repaired. New gates are to be provided, and there is a lot of work at this point[5]. This lock is the **twentieth** from Bury St Edmunds. It being now six o'clock, I made my way to the station to catch the 6.08 train.

Taking a general view of the whole work, I really do not see that there is much fault to be found. It is great undertaking, and many parts of the river and all the locks had got into a dreadful state. One thing I am certain of, Messrs. Wilson, the contractors, and also Mr Gilmour, Mr. Thompson, and Mr Walter Godfrey, have all worked hard and done their upmost to get on with the work, and when completed it will, I am sure, prove a great benefit to the district.

But I do hope we shall see no more misleading paragraphs or statements such as appeared a short time since in one of the papers, to the effect that the first cargo of goods had been conveyed along the river Lark to Bury St Edmunds. Let the public know what is really going on and they will be satisfied.

In the course of a few months, no doubt we shall have the pleasure of seeing the little steamers towing their fleets of heavily laden barges once again along this silvery stream. I am rather afraid the rains of the last three days will seriously interfere with the work.

WILLIAM HOWLETT, Naturalist, Newmarket
May 12th, 1890.

[4] Presumably the Gas Pool Lock.
[5] This is the creation of Mildenhall Turf Lock