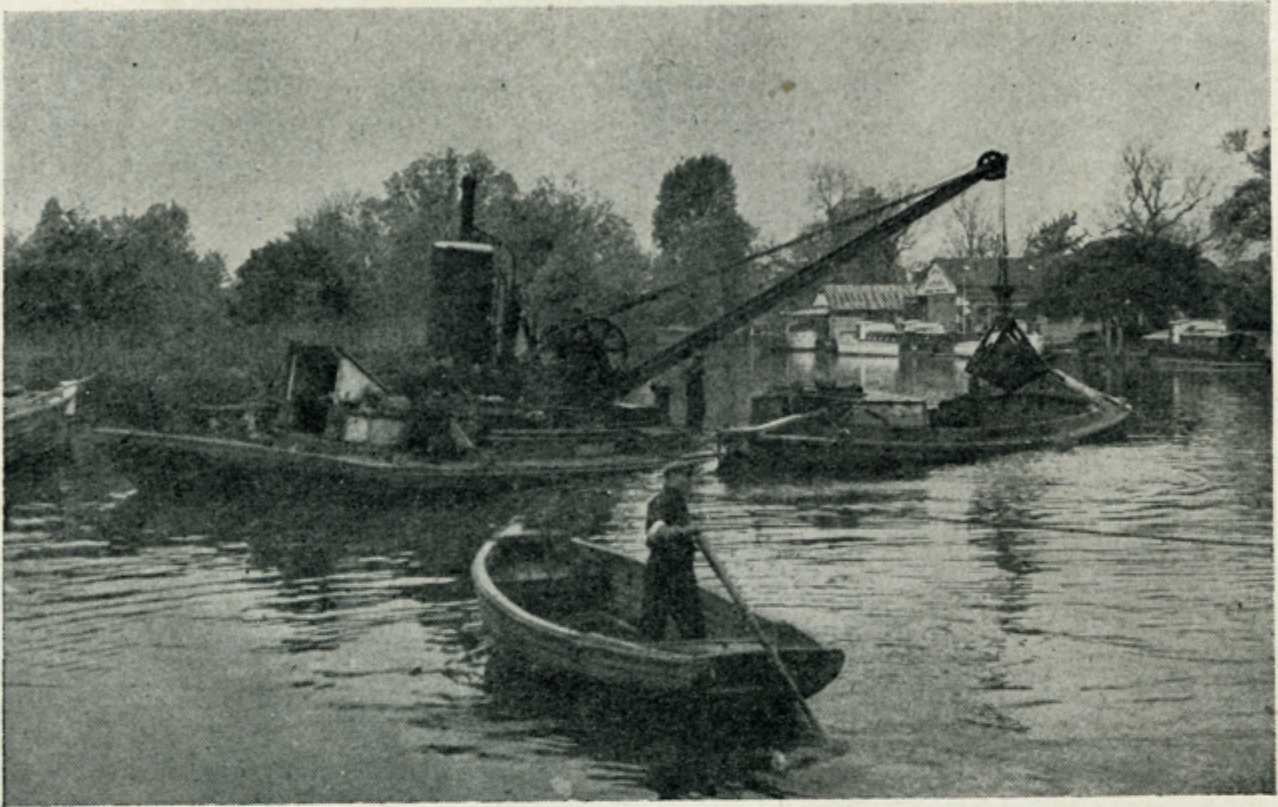




The general scene. The grab is working over the side of the dredger, and depositing mud from the river bed into a wherry alongside. In the background is a Norfolk yacht station.

WE CLEAN THE RIVERS

By A DREDGER SKIPPER

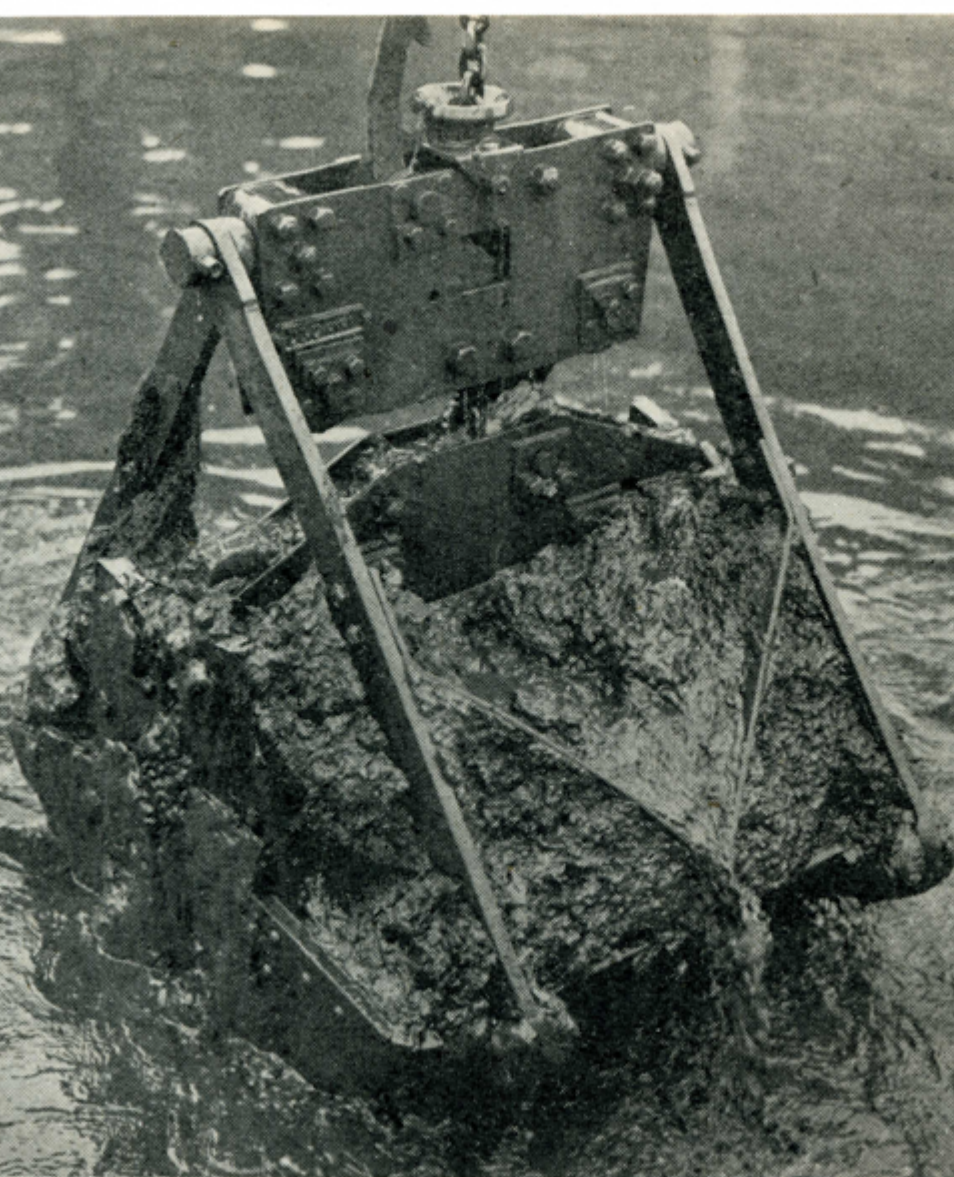
THOUSANDS of motor-cruising and sailing enthusiasts from all over the country visit Norfolk every year, and many of them go home firmly convinced that little is being done to combat deterioration of the lakes and rivers known as the Broads.

But quite a lot is being done. Dredging operations on the rivers Yare, Waveney and Bure are in progress all the year round. Of course, we've a good bit of leeway to make up. During the recent war years, the rivers and broads were closed to nearly all the usual traffic, dredgers included, and it was then that weed and mud gained rather a hold

on the waterways. Rivers, unlike roads, deteriorate more through a lack of traffic than through an excess of it.

Perhaps one reason for pessimism on this subject is that the dredgers are not often seen on the actual broads. We admit it; they are not. Our time is spent mainly on the rivers, and, we often ask, if the rivers became neglected and unfit for navigation, how would anyone ever get to the broads?

There are only five men in our gang, but we're getting things ship-shape as fast as we can. "Tich" Hansel and myself look after the dredger, and Frank



Was it worth it? Not even a kettle or an old boot. Just three quarters of a ton of river mud.

Platford, "Happy" Barnes and "Old Nolly" are in charge of the wherries, of which more later.

From the occasional remark overheard in the homeward bound bus, or in the smoke room of the pub round the corner, it seems that many people think dredging is just a matter of grabbing mud out of the river and dumping it on the nearest bank. If this were the case, our job would be easy. But, very often, river mud has to be dumped in wherries and carried for miles before it can be disposed of. Long stretches of the river banks are the homes of yacht stations, boat-yards and riverside hotels. The owners of these places, though they are very glad to see their part of the river

having a "clean up," are not anxious to have piles of sloppy mud dumped on their front lawn.

Even uncultivated banks don't always like having mud "thrown at them" so to speak. Wet mud is very heavy, and a bank which is well honeycombed with rat holes and rabbit burrows will stand just so much weight, and then, down it goes into the river. Then you start all over again, only with twice as much mud as you began with. And, my dear, the language!

Bank sliding occurs also if we dredge too close to the sides. One boatyard owner asked us to take some of the mud away from his quay heading. We told him it would be dangerous, but he

insisted. When we left, that evening, he had a nice channel all along his frontage. The next morning he had no channel and no frontage.

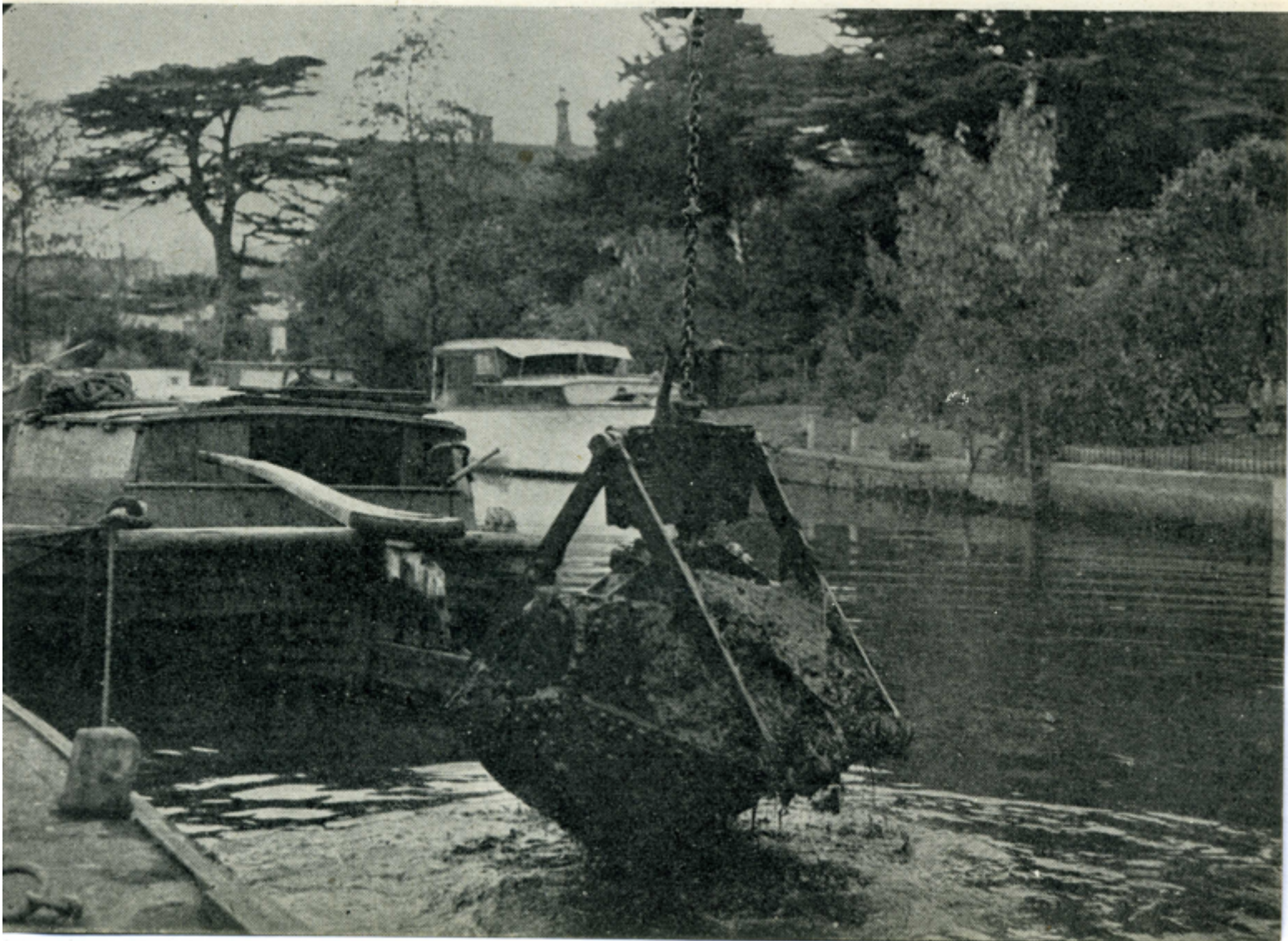
THE mud in these East Anglian rivers varies quite a lot. Much of it is just ordinary mud which gives no trouble, but in other places we find "clay mud." This is very heavy. At times you have an anxious moment, wondering if the cable is pulling the grab up or pulling the dredger down.

Then there is the other extreme which we call "slub." The grab comes up laden with slub, and by the time you've swung it round to the wherry, half of it has run through the grab and gone back to where it came from.

But whatever kind of mud it is, it all yields up a quota of rusty saucepans, motor tyres and old boots. Now and again we bring to light something a bit more valuable.

Recently we had to dredge a channel through a half-mile stretch of the river Yare at Thorpe St. Andrew. This particular section lies between two very low railway bridges, and though it is a backwater, it is the home of three motor-cruiser stations and it needs periodical attention. We arrived there with only a small steam dredger, but even so, the steam box had to be taken down, the crane jib had to be lowered to deck level and parts of the winching gear had to be dismantled before we could get under the bridge to start work.

Careful now—don't spill it. The laden grab swings round to the wherry which carries a cargo of about forty tons.



Dismantling occupied us for a day, and it took another day to get everything re-assembled.

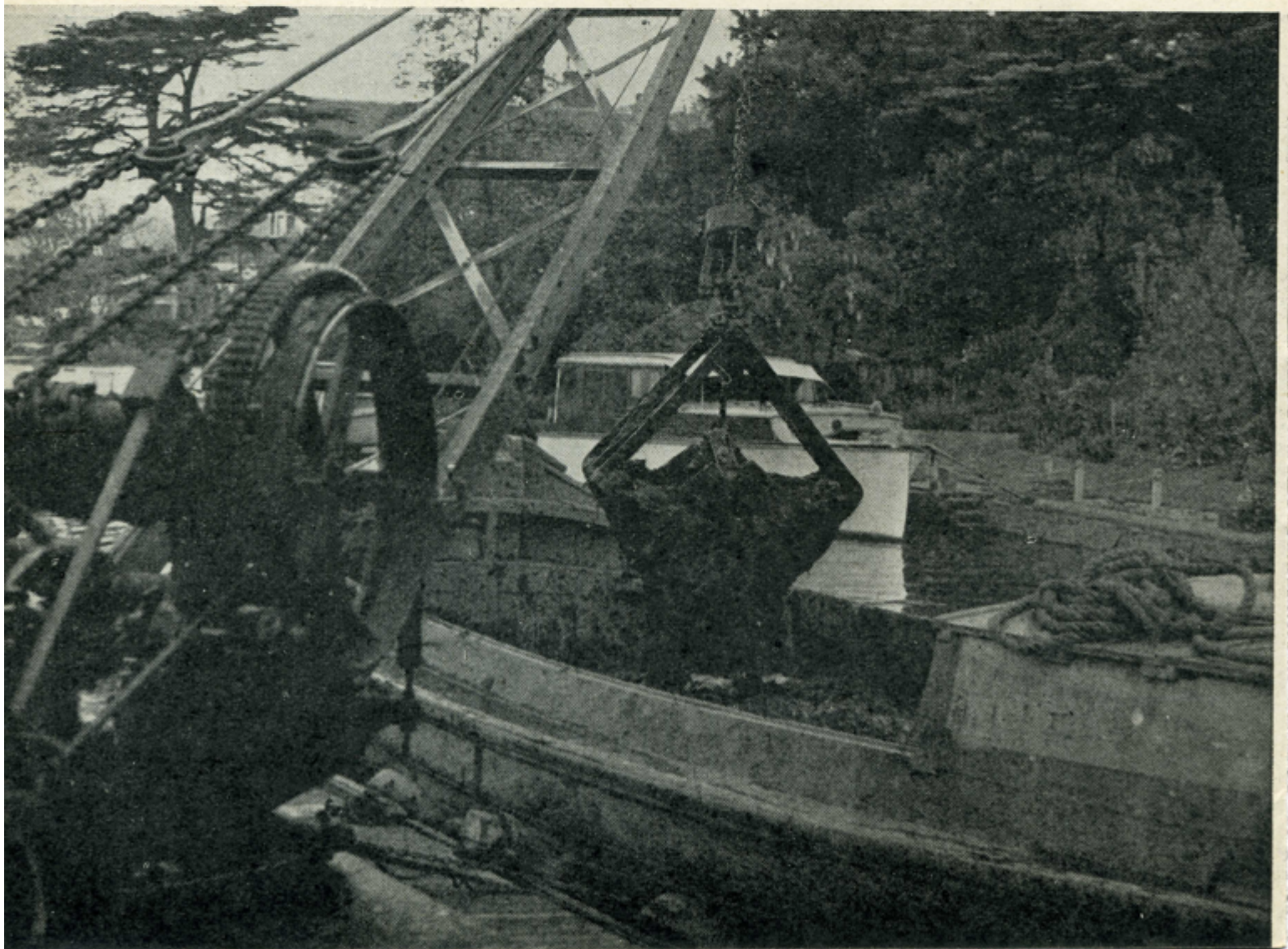
Between these two bridges, things were bad. There were places even in mid-stream where we couldn't find two feet of water, and for a river with an average width of ninety feet, that wasn't much. Of course there was the consolation that we couldn't sink. The dredger was on the bottom most of the time. In fact, the only way we could move it was by laying out our forward anchor and hauling ourselves up to it.

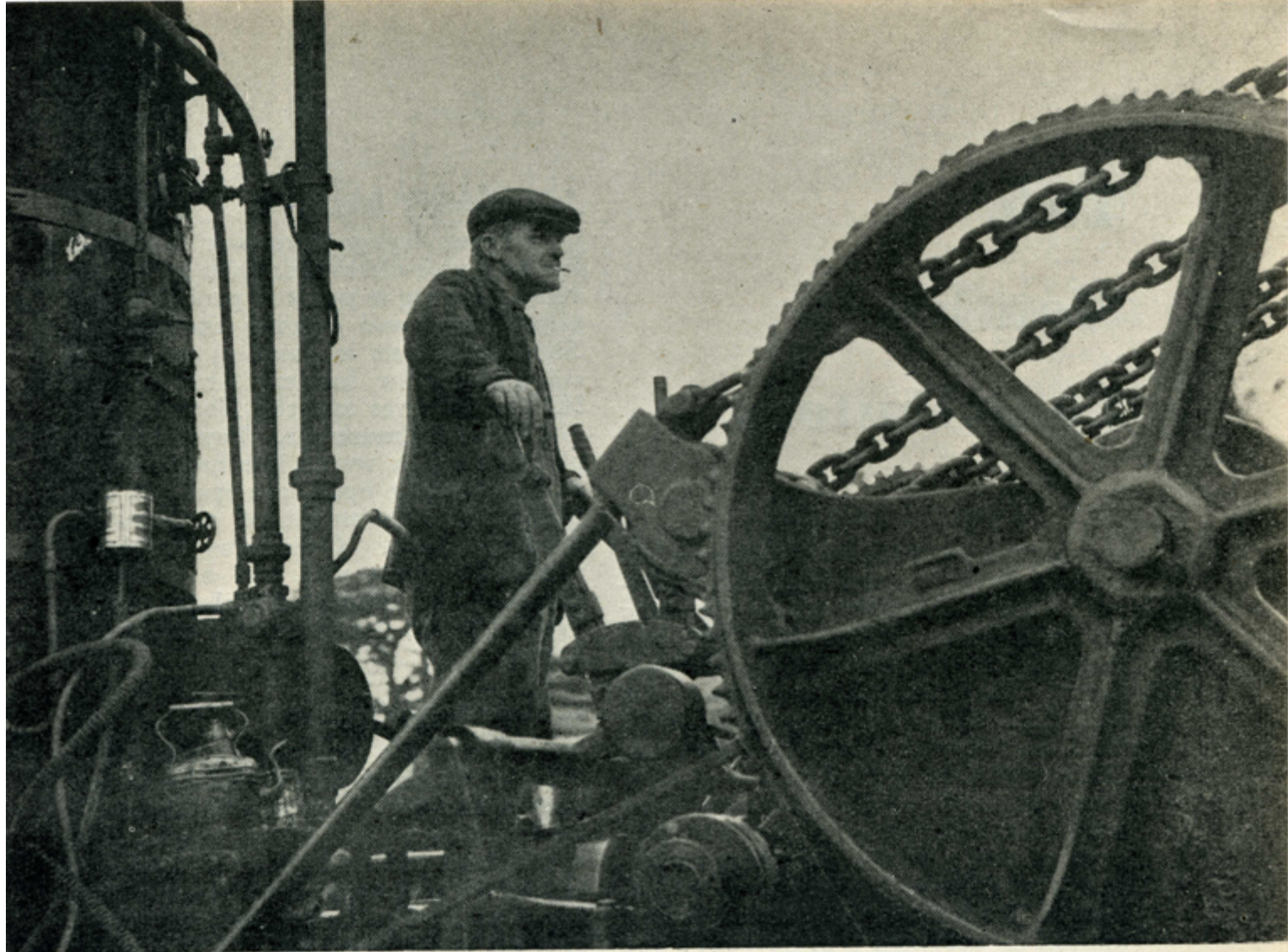
Here, there was the usual problem of disposal. All the mud and rubbish that we lifted had to be carried away in the wherries to a point where static grabs unloaded it and dumped it on a low-lying part of the marsh.

Often enough on this stretch of the Yare our own wherries used to get stuck. When they did, we had to take a few grab loads of mud away from their bows to give them a bit of a channel to start in. Once they had moved a few feet, their Kelvin engines and their own weight kept them going.

Some of these wherries were built sixty years ago and they are still doing good work. Though battered and patched up they make a pleasing picture as they move along, heavily laden, with about five inches of freeboard showing amidships. They were built when the rule was "Wooden ships and iron men." A friend of mine asked me if I thought that the old axiom had since been reversed, but we told him we'd rather keep an open mind about the matter.

The grab opens its jaws and the mud is dumped into the wherry.





The man at the controls—with the kettle handy, for it's thirsty work.

SO, you see, something is being done about the broads. We can't please all the people all the time. Things have to be done in order of importance. The mud which is barring the entry of a coal boat into Norwich has to be removed before we consider

the problem of Bertie Blank who finds he can't get his cabin cruiser into Surlingham Broad.

Given time, we'll attend to everybody from the boatyard owner down to the man who pays six shillings a year for his rowing boat licence.

THE £5 WIFE.

A woman who had eloped from her home in Kent with a horse dealer was found by her husband in a house in St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich. She refused to return to him. The dealer offered to buy the woman for £5. The husband, agreeing, placed a halter round her neck and surrendered all right and title to her for the sum named.—*Norfolk Chronicle*, 9 February, 1805.