

Chapter 15

Don't Dam Rutland

Hilary Crowden

The signs that went up across Rutland in 1968 with the exhortations 'Don't dam Rutland' or 'Don't flood Rutland' were indications of a titanic struggle by the small county. Placing a weak local argument against a national need, the arguments were imbalanced. With limited scope for compromise, Rutland's loss of this battle highlighted the conflict between rural resources and urban expansion and changed the physical face of Rutland forever.



**DON'T DAM
RUTLAND**

**Issued by the Rutland County and Stamford Branch of
The National Farmers' Union in the interests of Food Production**

The origins of the decision to build a large pumped storage reservoir in the Gwash valley, with a dam at Empingham, lay in two pieces of legislation enacted in the early 1960s. The New Towns Act 1965 allowed for three New Town Development Corporations at Peterborough, Northampton and Corby and two expanded town schemes at Daventry and Wellingborough. These were all in the area covered by the Welland and Nene River Authority, set up by the Water Resources Act 1963. This Act empowered the Authority to assess the need for water into the next century. The search for a location for a large reservoir to serve this expanding population extended to 64 sites. The mid-Gwash valley was the site chosen because it achieved the criteria set out by Leonard Brown, the Authority's engineer. It had the right shape with the right geology to support the weight of a dam; sufficient local material to build the dam; a river reasonably near to fill the reservoir; and a location near the new centres of population, to minimise pumping costs. Because of the potential cost, detailed secret planning was required before the private Bill could be put before Parliament by the Welland and Nene River Authority, the promoter, for consideration in Select Committee. Manton Reservoir in the adjoining Chater valley was the second choice. At one stage, both were to be built, with Manton coming second because of its marginally higher operation costs and lower yield. However, common sense prevailed at the Parliamentary stage when Manton was thrown out as being 'a step too far'.

The Welland and Nene (Empingham Reservoir) and Mid-Northamptonshire Water Bill went to Westminster in late 1968.

*A sticker for
the anti-
reservoir
campaigners
and supporters
(Sir John
Conant)*

The promoter's case was simple and convincing. Regional planning policy depended on increasing the water supply, and *per capita* consumption was expected to rise at twice the national average within the Authority's area before the twenty-first century. Alternatives to Empingham, such as a Wash barrage, desalination and the use of the south Lincolnshire aquifers, were not available in the time limit required and would give insufficient yield.

The petitioners against the Bill, Rutland County Council, Oakham Rural District Council, The Country Landowners Association, The National Farmers Union and the Council for the Protection of Rural England, could not match the promoters in time, money or technical skills employed in their case. Their opposition was based around the claimed lack of adequate exploration of alternative solutions, the loss of agricultural land, and the disruption to local life and the landscape. Forty-eight agricultural holdings, twenty of which would become uneconomic, seven occupied cottages and gardens and seven 'miscellaneous units' would be affected, concerning nineteen owner-occupiers and 29 agricultural tenancies. Seven farmhouses and seven occupied cottages would be lost to the proposed reservoir.

*Ivydene Farm
at Lower
Hambleton, lost
to the flood
(Canon John
R H Prophet)*



Rutland levied a threepenny (3d) rate to help pay for the defence but was unable to match the financial resources of the promoter, and eventually the fighting fund was exhausted. It was with resignation that in the end the petitioners fought for the best deal. 'We took it as far as we could but it was just no good,' said Idris Evans, County Treasurer and one of the campaigners. The figures to support the need for water came from local authority development plans and had to be accepted by both sides. The promoter showed some willingness to explore other options, even considering a truncated reservoir at Empingham with two dams. However, this was found not to be feasible, economic or practical.

In the second reading in the Commons, Tom Bradley, MP for Leicester North-east, claimed the reservoir would 'enhance the attractiveness of and



in no way desecrate that delightful county’, but he acknowledged ‘the passion and fury’ over this ‘hydrological Stansted’. Kenneth Lewis, Member of Parliament for Rutland and Stamford, high on rhetoric, if weak on argument, argued against this ‘massive and expensive miscalculation’ and its ‘exaggerated demand forecasts’. He had ‘no wish for another Windermere in Rutland . . . we do not wish to be a kind of towpath around a lake’. He was supported by many rural MPs in a town *versus* countryside division of opinion. The government declared itself regretfully in favour of the reservoir. The Bill spent nine days in Commons Select Committee, before it reported ‘a deplorable and regrettable necessity’ to build the reservoir in the Gwash valley, ‘one of the melancholy consequences of the relentless demands of the urban dweller’, said Keith Robinson MP. However, the Commons called for further investigations of a Wash barrage, to avoid further large shallow reservoirs, and emphasised the need for a national water grid. These misgivings helped in the creation of ten regional water authorities in 1973, Anglian Water Authority incorporating the Welland and Nene River Authority within its domain, but failed to stop the creation of Carsington Reservoir (Derbyshire) or Kielder Water (Northumberland).

Mow Mires at Normanton in 1970. It was one of the first casualties of Rutland Water (Jim Levisohn ARPS)

The House of Lords went to the unusual step of putting the Bill into Select Committee to ensure that, in the petitioners’ absence, the Bill received detailed scrutiny. As with the Commons, the compelling case prevailed. Later, the talk in the 1980s of ‘surplus capacity’ in the water industry was to give way by 2000 to further talk of water shortages in the south-east. However, everyone vastly underestimated the cost of pumping the water.

The fact that the petitioners could only obtain broad assurances from the promoter at this stage over disruption, recreational provision, landscaping and restraints on commercialism at the reservoir gave rise to a lot of local scepticism and fuelled opposition to the reservoir. The promoter

appointed Frank Knights to be a link with the local community in a public relations offensive of exhibitions and meetings. More than 3,000 acres of Rutland countryside were taken for the reservoir, and over £30 million spent on the project. Frank Knights ensured that some local labour was employed and that disruption to roads and services was kept to a minimum. Such was the faith of the local community in him that when he moved house, from a cottage beneath the dam at Empingham to a house further downstream in Ryhall, questions were asked at Empingham Parish Council as to whether he knew something about the safety of the dam that they didn't!

After inevitable delays, and the 1976 drought, Empingham Reservoir, originally known as 'Empingham Pumped Water Storage Project' and renamed 'Rutland Water' following an emotive campaign led by a local student, opened in May 1977. It flooded 3% of the county and could hold 27,300 million gallons at full capacity, which was not reached until 1979. What Bryan Matthews called in his *Book of Rutland* 'latent indignation' towards Anglian Water Authority was reflected in the actions of one man who avoided the obstacles and drove across the valley on his accustomed route to Hambleton despite the roads being 'closed' and water washing around his car wheels. This was the last vehicle to make the crossing. He and many other 'locals' refused to pay any charges at the reservoir car parks.

Apart from those who lost their homes and livelihoods, many other local people were affected by the construction works, which extended far beyond the four years of noise and dust which were an inevitable consequence of building the largest ever earth dam. As well as road closures across the twin

*The Gwash
Valley from Bull
Brigg Lane,
Whitwell,
before flooding
(Jim Levisohn
ARPS)*



valleys, new roads were built to bypass Barnsdale Hill, to connect Hambleton back to the Oakham to Stamford road, and to link Edith Weston, via Normanton, to Empingham. Extraction works were built at Wansford and Tinwell to pump water from the rivers Nene and Welland to the reservoir, and this involved driving long tunnels and laying massive pipes. More large pipes were laid between Empingham and Wing where a large water treatment



works was constructed on the outskirts of the village. Further pipe-laying became necessary as a result of the 1976 drought when the reservoir was linked to Grantham, and some years later the Wing to Whatborough pipeline was laid across the western side of Rutland. At the time of writing a proposal to increase the output capacity of Wing Treatment Works is being considered. Although the area covered by the reservoir will not be increased, the draw-down will result in much lower water levels during the summer months. In order to protect the nature reserve habitat at the west end of the reservoir, new lagoons are proposed on farmland around Egleton, and bunds are proposed across Manton Bay and below the Burley Fishponds area.

As Dame Sylvia Crowe said ‘. . . the water would prove an enhancement to the surroundings’ (RO)

There was undisguised mirth in the late 1970s when the reservoir, which by then was almost full to capacity, was found to be ‘leaking’ thousands of gallons a day under the hill and out into the Chater valley, this water then flowing into the Welland ready to be pumped back into the reservoir. Local legend has it that ‘someone forgot to fill in the wells of the submerged farms at Hambleton properly’. Fly swarms in 1977 and toxic blue-green algae in 1989 were both endured as many people recognised the irony in the statement of Dame Sylvia Crowe, the landscape architect employed by the water authority, when she said she ‘. . . believed that the water would prove an enhancement to the surroundings’.

Rutland lost its independence in 1974 and became a district of Leicestershire. Rutland Water and the new post-1974 local authorities ushered in an era of planning for recreation and amenities, village conservation areas, ‘settlement planning’, ‘local needs’ and ‘restraint villages’. There was, and in some areas still is, considerable resistance to tourism. ‘Empingham to be the £700,000 playground for the East Midlands’ warned a headline in the *Stamford Mercury*: Sailing, fishing, cycling and walking have all been accepted, but motorboats, other than those used by anglers and the nature reserve, and for safety and rescue purposes, are not permitted.



Sailing is now a natural part of the scene at Rutland Water (Richard Adams)

The nature reserves and their management were welcomed but it took fifteen years for the local community to accept a passenger cruiser on the reservoir and even longer for refreshment kiosks to be tolerated. Caravan parks, camping and golf courses are still contentious issues and the erection of ‘The Great Tower’, then the largest single bronze-cast sculpture in the world at Sykes Lane, Empingham, caused an uproar at the time. The unveiling ceremony, which took place on 9th October 1980, was boycotted by the Empingham Parish Council, while the Australian sculptor, Alexander, was absent suffering from influenza.

The reservoir has not resulted directly in any great increase in employment, but attractions such as Barnsdale Gardens, the Bird Watching Centre and the Nature Reserve, the annual Birdfair, the Falconry Centre, the Butterfly Centre, Normanton Church Museum, trout fishing, sailing, windsurfing, cycle hire, tracks for walking and running, time-share holiday accommodation, picnic areas, cafés, and a Tourist Information Centre, as well as public houses and hotels which have been developed around the reservoir, have made tourism a substantial contributor to the local economy, eclipsing that of farming. Despite the assurances in Parliament, ‘a lot of farmers had a rough deal . . .’, stated Frank Knights.

‘Alexander’, the bronze-cast sculpture on the North Shore of Rutland Water at Sykes Lane, Empingham (Richard Adams)



Compensation was set at 1970 values, woefully inadequate by the time it came to be paid in 1977. No allowance was made for inflation. Some farmers retired, some diversified, only to have to fight planning regulations stopping them fully exploiting their land. It was no longer considered 'their' land, 'their' barns or 'their' property. It belonged to the community. The agricultural interest no longer ran the county. There were strong feelings at a public meeting and one farmer asked the 'invaders' what they knew about rearing hamsters. When asked what he meant, he declared that with the amount of land left to him by the invading water authority 'hamsters are all I can reasonably put out to pasture!'

Frank Knights also had his public relations work cut out when 1,500 trout fishermen turned up on the first day of the fishing season, causing 'great consternation'. One lady had to wait two hours in her car to gain access to her driveway. It wasn't helped by the fact she was a local magistrate!

Idris Evans summed up local feeling: 'It put us on the map, there's no doubt of that, but did we really want to be on the map?' In the early 1970s Rutland County Council did not object to the name 'Empingham Reservoir', which had been

Sailors and bird lovers — and now the anglers

THE sailing enthusiasts and bird watchers have already flocked to Rutland Water.

And now this, the largest man-made water in Western Europe, stands poised for the greatest invasion of them all — that of the fly fisherman. The water opens for fishing at 4.30 am on Friday, May 6. And, like all great events, be it an Oval Test Match or Wembley Cup Final, that first weekend will be all-ticket only.

Quarry

Well over 1,000 anglers will fish from bank and boat on each of the opening three days. They will come from all parts of Britain — and overseas too. Many will spend those last pre-dawn hours sleeping in cars or hastily-erected tents as they wait to snatch the favoured hotspots.

Some will stay for the three days. Others have already booked summer holidays locally so that they can tackle not only Rutland Water, but nearby Eye Brook and popular Grafham Water, which is little more than an hour's run down the A1.

The quarry of these enthusiasts? Brown and rainbow trout, the game, leaping fighters of all our reservoirs.

At Empingham, they will be hunted with imitation fly and aquatic life patterns which go by such exotic names as black and peacock spider, whisky fly, amber nymph, invicta, Mrs Palmer Lure, appetiser and baby doll!

Above:

adopted by the Welland and Nene River Authority for the new reservoir, although other names such as Rutland Water and perhaps less seriously 'Ruddle's Puddle' were discussed. 'Ruddle's Puddle' is a reference to Sir Kenneth Ruddle of Langham who was a leading light in the campaign against the local government reorganisation which was to

*Stamford
Mercury 7th
April 1977*

BRITAIN'S biggest man-made lake opens to anglers this week with the promise of 200 trout to each of the 3,000 acres of water.

Rutland Water, the size of Lake Windermere, has been the target of 90 phone calls a day and over 4,000 letters asking for permission to fish.

But as happy and lucky anglers flocked from all over the country, many through the night ready for an early start, hundreds have been disappointed.

Reservoir managers have again confirmed that their allocation for bank anglers is full over this weekend and that boats have been booked solidly throughout May.

*Above: Stamford
Mercury 5th May
1977*

*Right: Stamford
Mercury 1st July
1977*

**RESERVOIR
TROUT
FISHING
COURSES
RUTLAND WATER**

Three One Day Introductory Courses will be held on 28th May 12th June and 26th July 1977 Cost £5

—

Week-End Residential Course will be held on 4th to 6th August 1977

Accommodation will be provided at Oakham Public School Cost £25 (including full board, accommodation and tuition)

For further details contact: —
**J. J. Inglesant,
Recreation Officer,
RUTLAND WATER**

20599 195pt20-5

Big bed hunt starts as anglers pack village inns

ANGLERS who raced to Rutland Water for the start of the fishing have brought a headache for residents.

More than 3,000 anglers from all over Europe converged on the reservoir within three days of its opening for fishing.

The problem is where to put them all. Some enthusiasts have had to book hotels as far away as Bourne and Peterborough.

The real worry is for campers and caravan anglers, for whom there are few official sites near the water.

*Left: Stamford
Mercury 5th
May 1977*

Right: Stamford Mercury 29th August 1975

Centre: Stamford Mercury 15th October 1976

Far right: Stamford Mercury 8th October 1976

Or just a puddle?

SIR — With reference to your article last week about a name for the Empingham Reservoir, I would like to suggest naming it after Sir Kenneth Ruddle. Why not call it "Ruddle's Puddle"?

I hope this contribution to your list will add a little variety.

SALLY CRABB
Waggon Cottage,
Manor Court,
Morcott.

Rutland Water victory

SIR, — I should like to express through the medium of your newspaper my great thanks to all those people who helped with the "Rutland Water" petition campaign.

I would never have collected so many signatures if people from all over Rutland and Leicestershire, and indeed the rest of England, had not written to give their support and volunteer their services to help collect signatures.

To all those people I say a big 'thank you'.

Thanks to them the effort has all proved worthwhile. "Rutland Water" is official.

P. JANE MERRITT
Organiser 'Rutland Water' Petition.
101 Brooke Road,
Oakham.

'Rutland Water' victory

RUTLAND people have won their fight to rename the Empingham reservoir "Rutland Water" instead of "Empingham Water".

Members of the Anglian Water Authority's water committee, on Wednesday, decided overwhelmingly that they should back down in the face of a strong protest from the public.

The Anglian Water Authority is expected to make its decision on November 10, following the water committee's recommendation that the reservoir should now be called "Rutland Water".

result in Rutland becoming a district of Leicestershire in 1974. In 1975, the popular mood had changed. There was considerable discussion in the local press and a consensus emerged in favour of renaming the reservoir 'Rutland Water' to perpetuate the county name. Major R Hoare of Hambleton stated, in a letter to the editor of the *Stamford Mercury* in September 1976:

'Surely it would be the wish of a vast majority of the inhabitants of what was our county, that this bit of water . . . which is going to be very beautiful, should be called "Rutland Water" to remind posterity of what used to be a happy and prosperous county before the planners stepped in.'

Anglian Water Authority refused, partly to be consistent, partly because it felt the water itself came from the region and did not 'belong to the county'. They underestimated the support for the name change in the local community. Those outside found the campaign for a change 'ridiculous . . . tiresome . . . compounding an unimportant issue'. Those inside Rutland were incensed how an un-elected board with no representatives from Rutland could obstruct the popular will. They were considered 'meddlesome upstarts'. Mr Lustig of Whissendine, chairman of Rutland District Society of Ratepayers and Residents, threatened to throw any member of the authority who came to Rutland into the reservoir!

Jane Merritt, a Rutland Sixth Form College student and a prominent member of the East Midlands Young Liberals, organised a petition which raised more than 4,000 signatures in support of renaming the reservoir 'Rutland Water'. Kenneth Lewis MP threatened to boycott the opening. Councils, organisations, groups and

Below: Jane Merritt (centre) organised a successful petition which raised more than 4,000 signatures in support of renaming the reservoir 'Rutland Water' (Sylvia Leach)



Stamford Mercury
1st November 1976

EIGHTEEN-year-old Rutland Sixth Form College student, Jane Merritt, faced a television camera on the bank of the Empingham reservoir on Monday morning for a recorded interview concerning her petition to try to persuade the Anglian Water Authority to call the reservoir Rutland Water instead of Empingham Water.

Also interviewed for next Tuesday's "Midland Today" programme was Rutland District Council's Chief Executive, Mr Ralph Francis.

The council, together with Leicestershire County Council and Oakham Town Council have strongly requested that the name be Rutland Water.

Jane's petition has received widespread support and it is hoped it will have around 4,000 signatures on it by this weekend.

She will present it at the Anglian Water Authority headquarters at Huntingdon next Tuesday afternoon and hopes to be back home, at 101 Brooke Road, Oakham, in time to see herself "on the box".

individuals within Rutland were unanimous for the change. Clearly, Anglian Water Authority, confusingly referred to as 'Anglican Water Authority' in one Parish Council's minuted protests, had a potential major public relations disaster on their hands. Eventually, after a year's debate, wiser counsels prevailed. Mr T Hall, a member of the Anglian Water Authority, said at a meeting on 6th October 1976:

'I do feel that public opinion shows we can't steamroller all the little people and it would be a good exercise in public relations, if we went along with them.'

The full board of the authority endorsed the majority opinion of the Water Committee on 10th November 1976. One wonders whether public opinion would have been so agitated about this issue had popular feeling against local government reorganisation the year previously, and the loss of the battle against the reservoir, not been so much in the forefront of community politics. It proved that 'the little people' could still fight back.

Stamford Mercury
12th November
1976

'Rutland Water' — official

THE Anglian Water Authority have accepted the name of "Rutland Water" for the reservoir at Empingham.

The recommendation that the name of Rutland Water be used instead of Empingham Water was accepted without debate at the authority's meeting on Wednesday.

The change of name will take effect immediately.

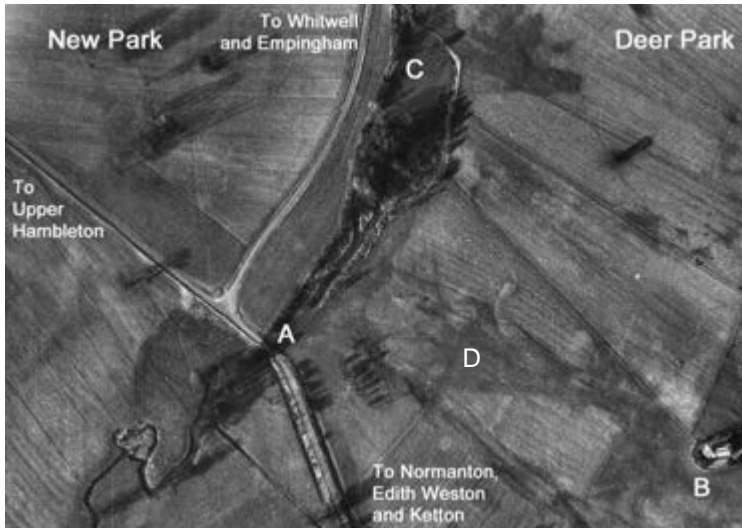
Victory on 'Rutland Water'

RUTLAND residents have won a victory in their long campaign to name the Empingham reservoir "Rutland Water".

Stamford
Mercury 5th
November 1976

Normanton Bridge

Normanton Bridge, now under Rutland Water, crossed the River Gwash just upstream of Normanton Fishpond. It was a Victorian iron girder bridge, often referred to as 'Iron Bridge'. The only road bridge in Normanton Park, it linked the former Normanton Park, a deer park, with New Park on the north-west side of the river (*see* Chapter 11 – Normanton and Chapter 14 – Rutland Waters).



Left: An aerial view of the Gwash Valley at Normanton in 1967 showing: A – Normanton Bridge, B – Normanton Church, C – Normanton Fishpond, D – Normanton deserted village earthworks (Anglian Water)

Below: The upstream side of Normanton Bridge during flood conditions in 1968 (Anglian Water)



Below: Looking towards Normanton Bridge from the Hambleton Road, near Half Moon Spinney, in 1971, when most of the trees had been removed from this part of the valley. The stone pillars (arrowed) are the remains of a former Normanton Park gate (Richard Adams)

