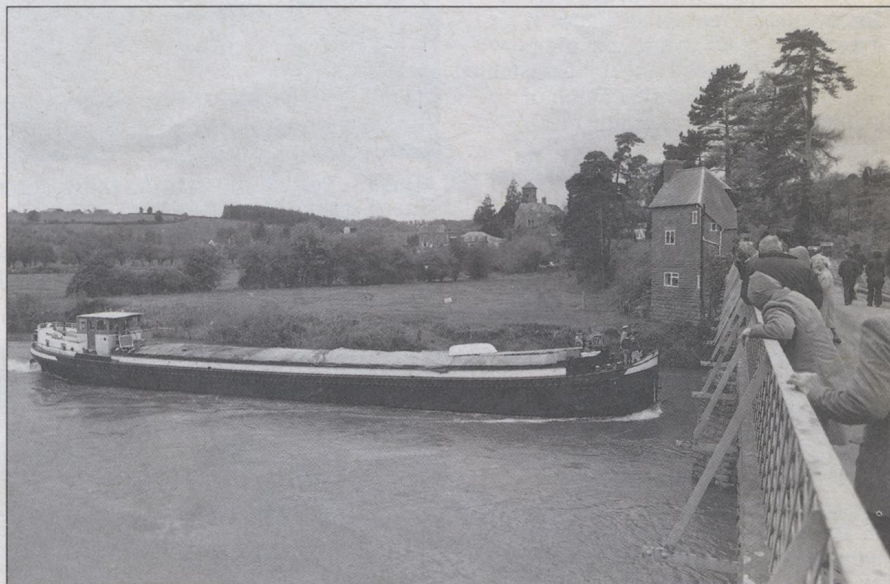


not believe their eyes at this sight on the river. Conditions were too good to linger. The headlamp was switched on and the voyage continued through the darkness to Kerne Bridge, Goodrich, and Wilton Bridge at Ross. Here the barge was deflected unceremoniously across the Wye by a sandbank that no one realised was there.

In the four days following the arrival at Ross the level of the Wye had dropped from 16ft to 18in above normal. Frank Barton saw this as a result of rapid run-off from well drained land and from water abstraction from pumping. "They have pumped water out of the Wye and into the Usk," he maintained. A level of 5½-6ft above normal was the crucial element in getting *Wye Invader* through Wilton Bridge and on 9th November Frank told me the Wye was running 11ft above normal in Hereford which meant there would be 7ft at Ross. On 10th November at ten in the morning the barge safely cleared the third arch from the Wilton side.

More hideous weather forecasts came from radio and TV — "a lot of rain today particularly in Wales and Cumbria" and "localised flooding in Wales and the West" — but it was all good news for the voyage up the Wye. On 11th November the crew left Ross on a 9ft flood but 3 miles up river the bow and stern rudders were damaged by

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Left — *Wye Invader* aground below Wilton Bridge after discovery of a previously unknown sandbank.

Top — *Wye Invader* is the only motor barge ever to have reached Ross-on-Wye.

Above — An audience for *Wye Invader* as she passes Hoarwithy Bridge. (All photos by John Edwards)

boulders that Frank alleges were put in the river by fishery interests. Steering was now difficult. They got through Foy Bridge and later passed through Hoarwithy Bridge with 6in to spare. Mooring for the night was at the Bunch of Grapes, Hampton Bishop, where the rope was wrapped around a notice

declaring "No Landing From Boats Here".

Next day, Sunday 12th November, Hampton Bishop was left behind at 10.45am. The crew's last obstacle, the Hereford-South Wales railway bridge, was safely passed later that day with much pole fending going on from the bows and a nip of brandy to revive flagging spirits. Frank Barton's arrival that day at the Wye Inn, two miles short of the city, was an emotional and magical moment. He planned to take *Wye Invader* into Hereford on 18th November — all 230 tons of her — but owing to falling river levels this proved impossible. At the time of going to press *Wye Invader* was tied up about a mile below the city centre. 