

GRAND TRUNK



Southern Section milepost painting begins!



May/June 2017

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

At our recent AGM the calendar photo competition was won by Brian Holt with his picture of the bottom end of Lock 47, featuring the very unusual long vertical tow-rope roller. We haven't yet finalised which other pictures to use in our 2018 calendar, but David Clegg's photo of the inside of Saltersford Tunnel (which came second) will definitely be amongst them.



Also at our AGM I announced that we plan to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the beginning of our milepost campaign in 1977 by adding a whole new section to the website about our famous mileposts. This new section will celebrate the reinstatement of those original mileposts we could find, as well as the creation and installation of the new ones we commissioned. Alongside this historical information we hope (eventually, as there are 94 of them) to include recent photographs of all our mileposts. If YOU have a favourite milepost, then why not send me a nice picture of it (by email please).

Speaking of mileposts, the repainting work continues. John Lawson & Dave Sproston are continuing to upgrade (as well as keep those already repainted in good condition) the mileposts along the Cheshire Locks section, and have now managed to do almost all of them. Eddie Kingswell (assisted by Paula Jackson and Andrew Leese) hope to start soon on the mileposts between there and Middlewich. Saltscap plan to do those from Middlewich to Preston Brook later this year. Meanwhile, on the other side of Harecastle Tunnel, David Brewin has started right at the Shardlow end of our canal. He has recently completed his first milepost repaint, so milepost number 3/89 (at Weston Lock) is now looking resplendent. However there are still plenty of mileposts in-between that still need doing. Anybody want to volunteer?

The Cheshire Locks working parties (organised in conjunction with IWA) have finally (despite poor weather) completed Lock 42, and better weather recently has seen great progress on Lock 41 (the top lock at Kidsgrave).

Editorial



Hi everyone, and welcome to Spring! The good news is that we have our beloved boat - *The Lady Margaret*— back with us (with a nicely blacked bottom) and we have been for a cruise along the troubled Bridgewater Canal and up the Runcorn arm. We hadn't been to the Preston Brook end of the canal since before the breach, and I was delighted to see that it is as lovely as ever, even though there aren't enough mooring rings at the tunnel mouth! The bad news is that the pitting problems on the boat's hull turned out to be terminal, so by next January we will be extremely poor people with a brand new boat. She will be black like her sister ship and will be called *The Lady Beth*— watch this space!

We have just had another amazing AGM (see brief account p.21-22). There will be more details in the next issue. Thanks to everyone who attended and helped make the event special. Also in this edition there is an interesting article from April 1st, news of problems occurring on our canal, and of course *Towpath Reflections* and more stories from Terry and Annette— what a fantastic read! If you haven't paid your subscription yet, this will be your last issue, so just think what you would be missing.

As soon as I get this off to the printers we are off to Naples (if we don't sleep in— taxi at 4.15am!) to savour the delights of Pompei and Herculaneum; clamber up Vesuvius and worship before some of Caravaggio's greatest works. If the plane doesn't crash we will be back to embark on another cruise before we set off to work at this year's Festival of Water at Ilkeston.

Hope you all have a great season cruising, fishing, walking or just relaxing and enjoying our wonderful workaday canal full of hidden gems. Don't forget to send me tales of your adventures, pictures, and anything you think might be of interest to members (as long as its not rude!).

See you next issue

Margaret English

*This article was in A Little Bit of Stone on
(you've guessed it!) 1st April 2017*

Council backs new high speed canal network – HS2O

hs2o – Waterways of the future



The council has today backed plans for a new High Speed Canal Network which is being dubbed HS2O.

The new £6.8million network will cut the time it takes to navigate the Trent and Mersey canal from 26 days to 17 days, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2022.

David Watters from the company behind the scheme explains:

“A big part of the time it takes to navigate the canal is because of the locks installed along its length. These locks are necessary to step up or down through the gradient of the surrounding landscapes. HS2O will introduce two new straight through canals that are sloped through the landscape to provide two high speed canal routes with no locks in between. 2 new 1,000,000 gallon lagoons will be constructed at each end of the canal to collect the high speed water and turn it around onto the opposite route.”

A Council spokesman added:

“We see HS2O as being a major infrastructure project for the region and look forward to welcoming travellers who will be able to reach further down in to the county in a shorter period of time. Stone has a rich history with the canal and this additional traffic should be welcomed by the townsfolk. The

initial consultation has identified that there may be the need to make compulsory land and house purchase and we're currently identifying the best route and who will be affected. At the moment we need to work out whether to run the canal to the north of the A34 or the south."

The existing canal network is limited to a maximum speed of 6mph but the proposal is for the new network to almost double this to 10mph. This speed increase with there being no locks are the main reason for the reduction in navigation times.

Waterways bird network has raised concerns about the danger that the high speed route will pose to local wildlife.

Emma Butters says:

"Although the new canal network will be great for boaters we must consider the change of pace that the waterways wildlife will see. There will be an expectation for boats to be travelling at a particular speed and therefore we're looking at ways that we can introduce the high speed traffic with the minimal impact. We're running a trial at the moment using an old life boat and a stretch of water to see the outcome. Unfortunately at the moment we are finding mallards to be the least responsive to the changes in speed. We are working with specialists in Peking, China to see what can be done with the ducks."

Welcome to New Members

**Mr and Mrs A. Chalmers
Of Sandbach**



**We hope you enjoy being members
of The Society.**

All Change at Peaceful Branston Lock

The Branston Locks development occupies 400 acres of land immediately west of the A38 developed with 2,500 new homes, a range of community facilities and a 50-acre employment site, which will be known as Quintus. It will also include retail, health, leisure and recreational facilities, as well as provision for older people. Separate developments on land nearby will see new primary and high schools built by Staffordshire County Council. The total investment in the area could be over £800million.

A new bridge is being built at Branston, bypassing the existing one, giving access to this huge housing development on the offside, running along the stretch of what was open countryside by Branston Lock. This will take traffic from the A38 over the Trent and Mersey Canal to the new development on a realigned Branston Road. The existing bridge will link up with Tatenhill Lane.



Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership chairman David Frost CBE said: “We are delighted to see such rapid progress on this scheme. It is an excellent example

of how we are working together across the public and private sectors to create new jobs, sustained economic growth and flourishing local communities. Branston Locks is one of a whole series of exciting new developments taking place across our region illustrating that Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire is an increasingly attractive place for businesses to locate and grow, and a great place to live.”

Unfortunately, it will completely change this part of the T&M.

*Picture courtesy of Waterway Images,
information Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Enterprise Partnership*

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News From the South

A while ago the Society's ex-minutes secretary, an active Southern Section member retired from work. The intrepid Dave Brewin, in spite of acquiring several part-time jobs, has taken on the task of painting the mileposts on his 'patch' (see front cover).



***Dave Brewin
beside his
completed milepost***

Dave has also attended the recent user group meeting on behalf of the Society.

A section of his subsequent letter is reproduced below.

Thank you Dave.

Southern Section Problems

I have just attended the latest user group meeting on behalf of the Trent and Mersey Canal Society where I raised two issues:

The society is disappointed that the recent stoppage at Aston Lock does not seem to have addressed the long standing issues of badly leaking gates, both top and bottom that create regular low water levels in the pounds above and below the lock. I am sure the stoppage notice listed gate repairs but the only work that has been completed is the replacement of the upstream stop plank grooves. Even the non functioning ground paddles which have been inoperable for over 12 months are still not fixed although I understand you have

instructed your contractor to fix them ASAP. I would welcome confirmation when this has been completed. It is disappointing to learn that the much needed gate repairs are not now scheduled for a further two years. Whilst I understand that you assess repairs in order of priority I would suggest, as a regular user of this stretch of canal, that Aston Lock gates are in a worse condition than both Shardlow and Swarkestone locks which have had gate repairs.

With regard to Bridge 9, I explained to Dave that this Bridge belongs to Hansons but that I received assurances from Will Burnish this time last year that they had the matter in hand with south Derbyshire District Council and progress was imminent. Alas there has been no visible progress in the last 12 months. It is now well over a decade since the society first raised this issue with BW and SDDC and we are extremely frustrated that the bridge continues to deteriorate. It has recently been subjected to what can only be classed as an act of vandalism by Hansons, who have driven metal barriers into this listed structure. Whilst the society appreciates that CRT do not own the bridge it is frustrating that you appear to have been reluctant to pressurise Hansons to carry out the much needed repairs before the bridge reaches the point of no return. The society would therefore greatly appreciate your assistance in working with us to get Hansons to fulfil their obligations and repair this grade 2 listed structure.

Please let me have your thoughts on how we take this matter forward.

Kind Regards,

Dave Brewin.



***Bridge 9
damaged
parapet
(1st reported
May/June
2016 edition)***

Advance Notice: Another exciting social event!

Skittles Tournament!

Stafford Boat Club

8th September 2017

7.30 pm

Competing Teams-

Broken Cross Boat Club

IWA North Staffs, South Cheshire

Trent & Mersey Canal Society



Fish and chip supper in the middle (bring own crockery and cutlery and take home to wash).

More details in next magazine, names to Margaret or Roger please

Stoke on Trent Boat Building Co Ltd

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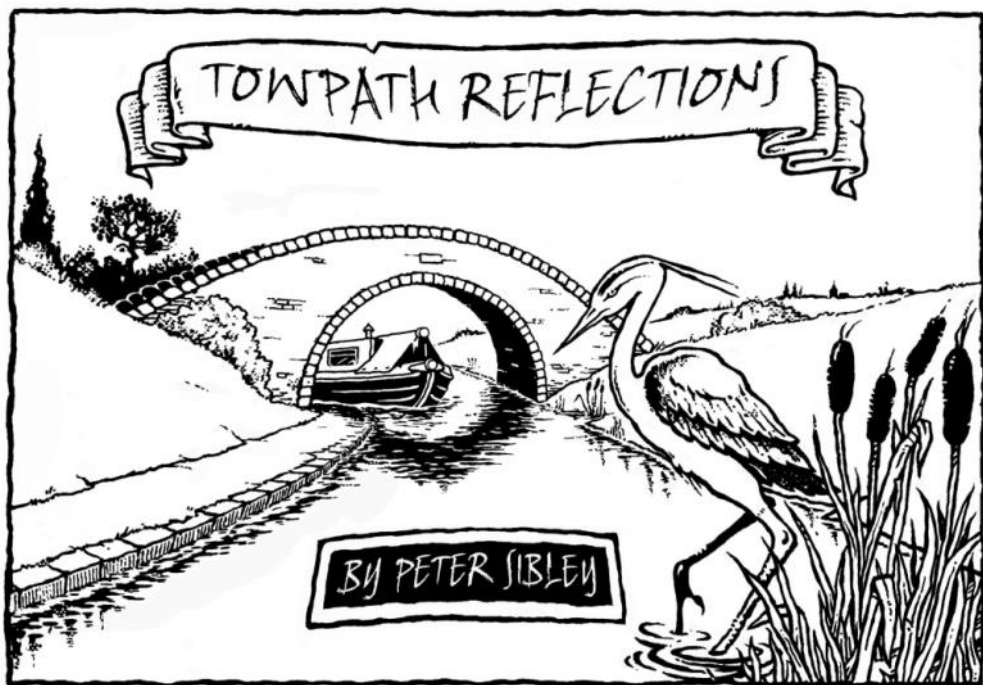
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We left Val and Peter pursuing Henry the tortoise below Atherstone Locks.

Monday the 2nd of June.

We travelled from our moorings just past Hopwas (Tamhorn Farm Bridge) to Fradley where we had a shower in the facilities block. After lunch we set off up Fradley Locks helped by a couple of volunteers. We travelled through the peaceful wooded sections of Bradley Wood and Ravenshaw Wood (which could be spoilt if the HS2 rail gets the go ahead). The line is planned to cross the canal 3 times in this area; however campaigners are hoping to get the route realigned in order to cause less environmental damage. We stopped for the night just before Handsacre at bridge 67. The weather that had been gloomy all day had brightened up, so we went for a short circular walk down the lane by the bridge through to Handsacre and back along the canal, where we saw another steam powered boat moored up.

Tuesday 3rd of June.

We set off for Rugeley about 8:15 a.m. We arrived just before 10 and were looking for a mooring when we saw another boat approaching from the

opposite direction as we were passing a row of moored craft. It turned out to be a working narrowboat loaded with coal towing another coal-laden barge on a long line. We just managed to pass without contact! After mooring up we had coffee and biscuits and went for a walk around town. The covered market was very run down and barely survives, I would think. A town centre *Morrison's* could draw people into the town but a brand new 24 hour *Tesco's* on the opposite side of the canal is probably enticing shoppers away.

After lunch we found the graves of Christina Collins and victims of the famous Rugeley poisoner in St Augustine's Churchyard. Christina Collins was the unfortunate passenger on a Pickfords long-distance narrowboat travelling from Preston Brook to join her husband in London. The crew drank heavily from the journey start. Christina fearing for her own safety, walked a lot of the way.

The lock keeper at Colwich remembered hearing screaming coming from the boat. Later her body was recovered from the canal. The crew was charged with murder, two were hanged and the other sentenced to transportation to Australia. The Rugeley poisoner was a local doctor, William Palmer who became notorious in the town. He was publicly hanged at Stafford.

We left our moorings and found a quiet spot between the aqueduct over the Trent and Colwich.

Wednesday 4th of June.

Today was almost a complete wash out. It rained nearly continuously from dawn till dusk. We moved on to Great Haywood and moored up for coffee break. Taking advantage of a brief let up in the rain, we went for a walk across the Old Packhorse Bridge into Shugborough Park and the gardens of Shugborough Hall (during which rain started again!). We saw no one apart from the volunteer gardener to whom we had a brief chat.



Packhorse Bridge

We went back to the boat for lunch then we continued on in the rain along the Staffordshire and Worcester canal as far as Hazeltrine Bridge, where Stafford Boat Club have their headquarters. There is very smart

clubhouse and nicely landscaped grounds and also a superb Lewis steel bridge over the marina entrance. They also appeared to have their own dry dock. The weather forecast on the radio predicted a sunny day tomorrow .



Thursday 5th of June.



The forecasters were right, we had a splendid day although it was a little slow to get going. The sun was quite hot but a stiff breeze kept it pleasantly cool. The canal was very busy, most of the boats were coming the other way, which worked in our favour as we often arrived at a lock just as a boat was leaving. We took on water at Penkrige Lock then travelled to Gailey with its landmark round tower by the lock-side. We

stopped here for lunch then continued on to Coven Heath where we found ourselves a mooring in the long grass. We have noticed that finding moorings along this canal is very difficult. Long stretches of canal side vegetation along the towpath have remained uncut for some time here, which is great for the wildlife!

EXCITING NEW MERCHANDISE!

Just arrived, Society cloth bags.
These have a generous shoulder strap
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up from
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at a social.

Boat Fire on Trent and Mersey

Firefighters from across East Cheshire were called to the canal after a barge (sic!) caught fire.

Fire engines from Congleton, Sandbach, Alsager, Crewe and Middlewich attended the blaze, on Sandbach Road, Rode Heath, at 9.31pm on Wednesday 1st March.

The barge had to be pumped out while firefighters used a thermal imaging camera, with the work continuing for much of the night.

A Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service spokeswoman said: "A canal barge was on fire on the canal by the Broughton Arms.

"Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus began to tackle the fire using hose reel jets. Cylinders were removed from the boat but there were diesel tanks on board.



"Crews had to pump out the barge and used a thermal imaging camera to check there were no further areas of heat."

Bystanders reported that the owners were having a meal in the pub at the time, that they made and sold canalware items, and that the boat

was removed the following day by a recovery agency.

(Report from *Stoke Sentinel*)

And in the Southern part of our canal.....

Car in T&M at Swarkestone

A man was in a critical condition in hospital following a serious crash on a busy Derbyshire road which left him and a car in a canal.

Police were called to a collision between a van and a car in Swarkestone village between the A5132 Barrow Lane and the A50 at 4.30pm on 30th March.

The crash resulted in the car plunging into the Trent and Mersey Canal. A male pedestrian was struck during the crash and also ended up in the water.

Police say passers-by helped the elderly woman driving the car to safety and pulled the pedestrian from the canal.

The pedestrian suffered serious injuries and was taken to the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham where he remains in a critical condition.

The elderly woman was taken to the Royal Derby Hospital with minor injuries and was later discharged.

Police have appealed for witnesses or anyone with information about the incident to call police on 101, quoting reference 675 of March 29.

From The Derby Telegraph

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the [Trent and Mersey Canal Society](#). They are, however, published as being of interest to our members and readers

Cheshire Locks Work Party Report

16th March 2017

The intention is to paint locks, manage vegetation and remove rubbish to improve to maintain the appearance of the area.

Lock 42, Red Bull, Kidsgrove

8 volunteers x 6 hours = 48 hours

Plus 2 volunteers x 3 hours on litter picking the previous day.

Total of 54 volunteer hours in the week.

Painting of lock 42 has ***finally been completed!*** After a number of months where progress has been limited by bad weather, a good team with a good day finished the painting at lock 42. In addition, painting of masonry around lock 43 was done as a safety measure to mark edges; and the steps to the canal at the bridge between the locks were cleared.

The previous day 2 members of the group undertook a litter pick from Rode Heath to Red Bull to generally improve the area.

The next work party will start on Lock 41, the last lock before Harecastle Tunnel. Wow!



Photo John Brighthouse



Join Us on a Canal Work Party

Cheshire Locks, Trent & Mersey Canal
Monthly work party on the third Thursday each month
Jointly with IWA North Staffs & South Cheshire

Why not join us for our monthly work parties, on the Cheshire Locks between Kidsgrove and Wheelock, carrying out vegetation management and other tasks in the fresh air and good company?

Work parties run from 10am to 3pm on the third Thursday each month (except December) and volunteers are welcome to come for a couple of hours or all day. The meeting place varies each month, so please contact us for details.

All tools and equipment will be provided. Volunteers are advised to wear old clothes, stout shoes and to bring waterproofs in case of rain and a packed lunch if staying all day.

Contact: John Brighthouse
John.brighthouse@waterways.co.uk 07808878317

Our Indian Summer – part 2

Slowly heading south we drove around Cognac and stopped at the village of Bourg-Charente where there is a gem of a 1 star campsite next to the River Charente. We were now in the heart of cognac country and we walked along the towpath to the town of Jarnac where we saw more hire boats on the move. The water was very clear and we spied a couple of large trout.

We walked beside the old and new Courvoisier buildings where masses of barrels were on display, by watermills and over the lock before returning to the campsite using the tow-path.



We did finally make it to the Basque coast of northern Spain and stayed a while at the coastal town of Zumaia where the Rivers Urola and Narrondo meet. By the end of the 14th century the town was well known for ship building and today boat maintenance and ship building yards are still in use near the large marina. The weather continued to be very hot and we sat out wearing shorts and t-shirts till nearly 2300 hrs and when we did retire into our motorhome it was 30° inside!

Returning to France we stopped by the Canal de Garonne which is 120 miles long and travels from Toulouse to the tidal River Garonne at Castets-en-Dorthe and provides a link between the Canal du Midi and the Atlantic. There are 53 locks on the canal and most are automatic. To start this involves careful steering so that a crew member can twist a pole hanging on a wire in the middle of the canal on the approach to a lock. This commences the preparation process of the lock with a traffic light system controlling when the lock can be entered.

The largest town on the canal is Agen which is famous for its prunes and on the western approach to the town is a stone aqueduct which carries the canal over the River Garonne and when completed in the mid 19th century was the longest canal aqueduct in France at that time – 1750 feet long with 23 arches. We stayed near the village of Meilhan sur Garonne in a small campsite on a narrow strip of land between the canal and River Garonne. There are moorings on the canal here and boats ranged from Dutch barges to yachts, cruisers and even two narrow boats – one of which is available to hire.

The village of Meilhan is on top of a hill and it was a steep climb to get to it but the views were worth the effort with the canal and the meandering River Garonne directly below us and miles of



countryside to the distant horizon.

Our next stop was at Saint-Savinien back beside the River Charente. There are weirs and a large lock here. The lock measures 160ft by 26ft and below it the Charente is tidal. The town is built on a broad limestone plateau overlooking the River Charente and in Roman times the limestone was quarried and then transported by river. Later barges and lighters were loaded at the quays with timber, wines and stone for shipping inland to Angoulême or to the sea ports of Rochefort and La Rochelle. There is no longer commercial traffic but the two quays are now used to welcome visiting boats as well as providing permanent moorings.

Having enjoyed a month of sunshine and high temperatures it was time to head home.

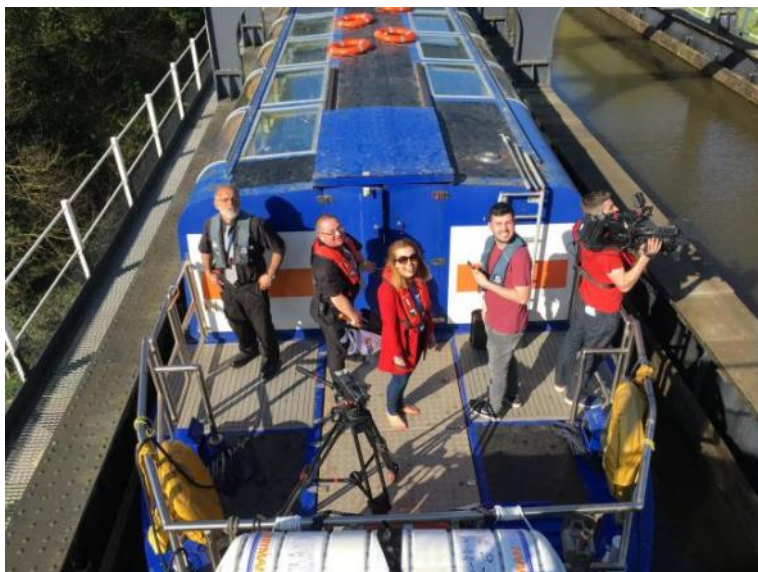
Annette & Terry

NB Emily and Steamboat Sidney
Kennet & Avon Canal

Anderton Boat Lift in focus for BBC 1's Antiques Road Trip

FILMING took place in mid April at the Anderton Boat Lift for BBC 1's Antiques Road Trip programme.

Filming featured antiques expert Christina Trevanion in a boat being lifted 50 feet from the River Weaver to the Trent and Mersey Canal through the Boat Lift.



As part of the filming duty manager Graham Wood was also interviewed about what makes the Lift so special and why it represents high Victorian engineering at its best.

The BBC crew filming at the lift

Antiques Road Trip sees two antiques experts compete against each other. Each has a budget of £200 with which to buy antiques and collectibles, which are sold then at auction.

After each auction, the amount in each expert's kitty after costs are deducted becomes their budget for the next leg. The winner is the expert who makes the greater profit over five legs.

Graham Wood said: "We are thrilled that the team from Antiques Road Trip were able to film at the Lift.

"We are delighted that thanks to the team on the Antiques Road Trip that even more people will know about the history of the Anderton Boat Lift and what the site offers visitors."

STV Productions series producer, John Redshaw, said: "We really enjoyed our visit to the Anderton Boat Lift, and met some fantastic people who made filming a real pleasure. We expect to see this episode in the new series of Antiques Road Trip on BBC1 later in the year."

The Anderton Boat Lift was constructed in 1875 to 'carry' boats between the Trent and Mersey Canal and the River Weaver. The Anderton Boat Lift is owned by the Canal and River Trust and was restored in 2002 after a £7 million restoration made possible due to a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

*From the Middleswich Guardian
17/04/2017*

Trent & Mersey Canal Society AGM

The society's AGM took place on Saturday 6th May at The Blue Bell Inn at Kidsgrove. Not, you might think, the most salubrious of venues. What a surprise we had! This tiny pub is hidden away down a side street behind the twinned top locks of the Cheshire Flight. Inside there are three small rooms and a bar. The furniture consists of padded settles around the walls and proper round tables. It even smells just like pubs used to. In one wall there is a ledge where leggers used to be hired and paid for passage through the Harecastle Tunnels (a fact which is to be added to our T&MCS talk).

We had the rooms for 2 hours before public opening, so were able to vote on calendar pictures and display railway and canal books for sale to members. These had been donated by former Southern section chairman Tony Poulton and it seemed only fair to offer them to members first. Trade was brisk! Also for sale were the Society's brand new cloth bags and neckerchiefs.

Coffee was ready for us on arrival, and the attendees got down to business. Copies of the various committee members' reports were available, so there was no need to read these out word for word (anyone wishing to see a copy should email Margaret). Social Events Officer Gillian Watson confirmed that she now had only one vacancy left for next season's talks and that the Staffs & Worcs. Canal Society had agreed to swap talks. They were prepared to wait for their T&M talk until Gillian retired, as their meetings are on a Monday evening a long drive away!

In general, the reports confirmed that the Society is currently in a very positive and vibrant state, although membership numbers continue to cause concern. Longstanding member and early campaigner, vice-president Steve Guest remarked that it was just like the early days of the Society— we think it was a compliment!

At the end of the meeting Steve raised concerns about the parking charges being levied at Wheelock Wharf. Chairman Roger will look into these and report back.

An amazing lunch was provided by the pub landlady, who obviously thought we all needed feeding up! By this time the pub was open for business, and I am told the number and quality of beers available was remarkable.

Fed and watered, the intrepid members were taken on most interesting guided walk from the Bluebell Inn to the mouths of both Harecastle Tunnels and the surprisingly well-maintained Kidsgrove Station by Jon Honeysett. Seen from the non-towpath side, the canal architecture took on a whole new significance. Jon has kindly given us a copy of his talk which I will include in the next magazine for those not lucky enough to experience it in person.

Thank you Gillian for finding such an interesting venue.

Margaret English

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***The Trent & Mersey Canal Society is proud to
support Burslem Port***

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem



River Charente at Saint Savinien

(see page 19)

Photo by Annette and Terry

Please send contributions for the next issue to me, Margaret English, by e-mail to margaretetlm@hotmail.com, by post, or by hand. Remember, this is *your* magazine. Contributions from the South especially welcome!

Last date for inclusion in the July/August edition is 01/07/2017.