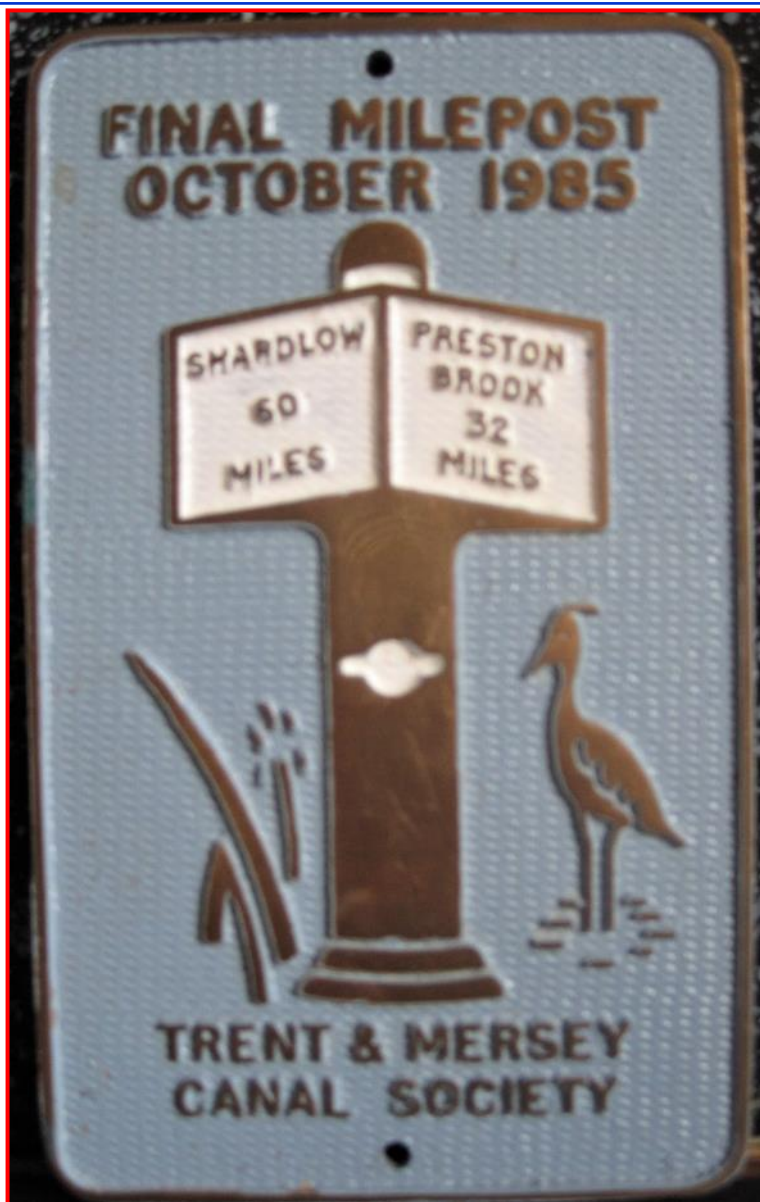


GRAND TRUNK



January / February 2020

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

Our New Year cruise always helps us to recover after a big family Christmas. This year we went to Macclesfield (and back), so spent some time on the Cheshire Flight. Locks 66 and 65 at Wheelock were looking in good condition, with 66 being freshly painted and 65 with painting in progress by our regular TMCS/IWA work-parties. However this wasn't to last as we quickly came upon various problems that weren't mentioned on CRT's stoppages website.



Lock 60 (towpath-side) was out-of-use with paddles locked and orange netting hung over the bottom gates to warn boats heading up the flight. Lock 52 (towpath-side) had extremely stiff top paddles that took 2 of us to raise a little bit at a time. Lock 50 (offside) only had one top paddle that could be used as the other one was inoperable because the paddle-rod was completely missing! [There was no sign that CRT knew of this problem. The alternative (towpath-side) lock was out-of-use and is shown as a "Navigation Restriction" on their stoppages list]. Lock 49 (offside) was out-of-use, and marked with warning tape. Lock 42 (towpath-side) was out-of-use, and marked with warning tape. Lock 41 (offside) had one of the top paddles out of action and taped-up.

So that made 4 locks completely out-of-use (and marked as such, but only one of them is listed as a "Navigation Restriction" on the stoppages website). Of the 3 locks with problem paddles, only one had the paddle taped-up, so I have no idea if CRT even knew of the other 2 problems.

I have emailed CRT with the details of all these problems, asking them to fix the paddles and to list the closed locks as "Navigation Restriction" closures. This would at least warn people in advance, and also let us track how long these locks are going to be closed for (and why?).

By the way, we enjoyed the cruise very much.

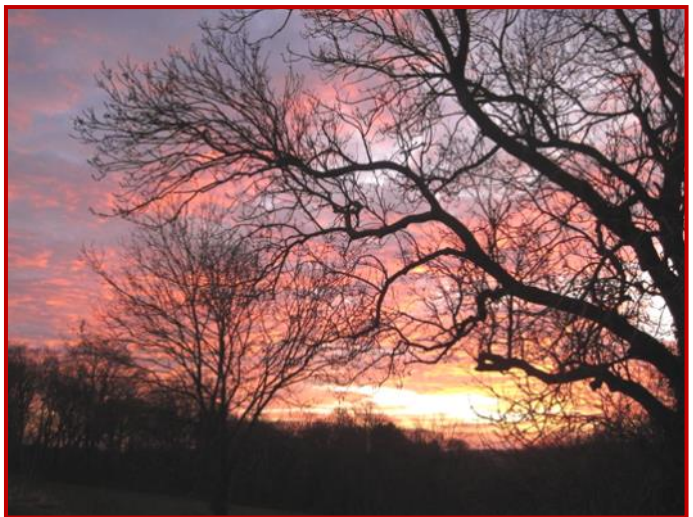
Editorial

Happy New Year everyone! Back from our post-Christmas cruise, I have dealt with the mounds of muddy washing and almost completed cleaning the inside of our beloved (but filthy) boat. I have discovered a new alternative to wattle and daub– cats' hairs and mud make a bond which effectively seals up any holes (like the vacuum nozzle).

I note that chairman Roger has dealt with Cheshire Flight problems on the preceding page. We did indeed however still enjoy our cruise (mostly). We normally head for Llangollen at this special and quiet time of year, but as Hurleston Locks are out of action, this was not to be. We had not been up the 'Macc' for some years, so off we went. I had forgotten just how lovely it is, with amazing views. Boat traffic was very light and Toddbrook reservoir problems did not seem to affect the levels unduly. We spent New Year in splendid isolation at the bottom of Bosley Flight and wandered as far as the last winding hole before the stoppage above Macclesfield.

Unfortunately, our return journey wasn't quite so uneventful. Descending Bosley Locks, Roger went ahead to set the locks, our steerer (not me) was wearing headphones and not paying attention. He let the boat drift back onto the cill. Frantic paddle-dropping could not avoid a soaked boat and a damaged rudder (although we managed to avoid SINKING). I will draw a veil over the subsequent heartache and recriminations– a valuable (and expensive) lesson has been learned.

I will leave you with my favourite sunset picture taken at the beginning of our cruise.



A Wonderful Addition to our Archives!

Some of you may remember a very early member of the society— Ray Murray of Rugely. He was very active, loved boats and had a tremendous sense of humour.

Sadly, Ray passed away in April, aged 92. He lived in his own home to the end of his life and was supported by a loving family. Ray's son, Donald, got in touch and offered to donate some rather unusual artefacts for the archives.

You can see one of these on the front cover, and the other two are pictured below and on the facing page.





Chairman Roger and I met Donald and his family when we collected his donation, we were made very welcome and wished we had known Ray.

Perhaps someone could tell us a little more about Ray and the society in its younger days?

Margaret English

Big Lock gets a temporary Bridge

Remember the problems being caused to local residents in Middlewich by the closing of Big Lock tail bridge?



Here is the temporary structure allowing residents to cross the canal safely (and making it much easier for single-handed boaters to work through the lock).

Not pretty, but certainly effective!



From the other side, showing the damaged bridge.

Photos by Margaret English

Remember the picture on the front cover of the last issue, regarding the strange object beside Clear Water Lock 63, Malkin's Bank?.....

Here is an answer from vice-president Steve Guest

'I was told back in 1973 by Bert Baily an old boatman, who was living in one of the cottages on the other side of the canal that this object was a balance beam, to lift the wooden tow path bridge up so that boats could enter a dry dock, which was at right angles to the canal.

Water was drained down into the lower pound via a drain that ran round the back of the cottages.'

Further replies welcome!



Please send contributions for the next issue to me, Margaret English, by e-mail to margaretelm@hotmail.com, by post, or by hand. Remember, this is *your* magazine. Contributions from the South especially welcome!
Last date for inclusion in the March/April 2020 edition is **01/03/2020**.

Festive fun at Mercia Marina

In December the festive season was in full swing at Mercia Marina with Santa's Floating Grotto and musical entertainment among the Christmas offerings.

The marina, in Willington, was festooned with lights and a host of Christmas trees and visitors could take a special fun festive photo to use on social media or to create a personalised card at the bandstand.

There was also a special winter woodland in the Piazza building where visitors were invited to take in festive music and more than 30 illuminated trees.



Santa's Floating Grotto was running every weekend in December up until the 22nd. Each child received a Christmas gift and the cost was £7 for children, £1 for adults who accompanied them and the price included a short boat trip around the marina.

Shops at the marina stayed open late every Friday in the run up to Christmas Day, lit by a bedazzled boardwalk with trees and lights and there was also musical entertainment every weekend from local groups and returning artists, running from 1pm to 3.30pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

Children, parents and staff from Findern Community Pre-School visited the marina during December after walking there as part of their annual Santa Stroll event. Following the walk, they were greeted by Santa himself in his winter woodland and treated to a trip on Santa's Floating Grotto where they received a gift from Santa.

2019 Web Editor What's On

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Look what they've got at Royal Stoke University Hospital !

A new display of artwork celebrating the industrial heritage of the Stoke on Trent region has been installed at Royal Stoke University Hospital thanks to the generosity of those who donate to the UHNM Charity.



Five steel discs depicting the region's traditional and historical industries were erected at the entrance to the hospital's new multi-million pound modular wards.

The steel, mining, canal, pottery and healthcare industries are represented on the pieces which also feature poems and quotes from local people. Alex Smith, Capital Project Estates Manager at University Hospitals of North Midlands said, "Following the successful completion of the modular ward project earlier this year, our Arts Steering Group identified an opportunity to enhance the hospital environment for staff, patients and visitors."

The 8ft artworks, made from 8mm-thick mild steel were designed by renowned local artist Andrew Edwards and made in Chesterton by training provider PM Training.

The next phase of the installation will see interpretation boards installed further detailing the different industries.

The £8.8 million scheme to expand ward accommodation at the Royal Stoke University Hospital site has seen more than 60 new beds open for patients to help ease winter pressures.

Steve Rushton, UHNM Charity Manager said: “We’d like to thank every single person who fund raises for or donates to the UHNM Charity, as it is their generosity which makes projects like this possible.”

UHNM Charity supports patients, their relatives and friends, staff and local businesses and organisations to raise money for the hospital. The charity also works closely with the hospital to make sure that all departments are supported to spend every penny of the money raised on items that will directly improve patient care.

From Press Release



Look what we found on the balance beam of lock 66 (bottom of Cheshire Flight)!

We left it there to greet other New Year boaters.



Harecastle Tunnel - Repairs undertaken in the 1970s

From the Official Reopening document published by BW in 1977

Before letting a contract to Shand Midlands, the Board knew that one repair length was situated vertically below the recorded position of one of the 15 construction shafts sunk by Telford for the building of the tunnel. There is no trace of these shafts on the surface of the tunnel.

The board's engineers were worried that if a shaft existed, the removal of the tunnel lining would allow any material within the shaft to flow, and a new method of repair would need to be designed to overcome the difficulty. The most important thing to do first was to find the shaft.

The centre-line of the underground tunnel was marked on the surface, the shaft's approximate position located, and a 30 yard square was excavated, but the shaft was not found. The search extended another ten yards to the south and here it was located, a nine foot diameter brick-lined shaft infilled with spoil. The shaft was drilled 165ft. to the depth of the tunnel, and the tunnel lining was penetrated successfully. The definite position of the shaft when measured within the tunnel showed that it was 17 yards from its recorded position. This meant that it was just outside the repair length to be undertaken by Shand. Therefore the Board were able to allow the Shand contract to go ahead, but with caution when approaching the vicinity of the shaft.

Shand Midlands, part of the Lehane-MacKenzie-Shand Group started the work in January 1976 and had four sections to repair, making a total of 75 yards. After experience gained in previous contracts the Board was able to give permission for the tunnel to be relined in two places simultaneously. This speeded up completion of the contract and enabled the engineers to complete work inside the tunnel which would otherwise have had to wait until the next winter.

The contractor decided to open up only 3ft. at a time in order to build an 18" of lining per day, because of the constant danger of further collapse. In fact, Shand hit a very bad section near the beginning of the contract where an abandoned coal working crossed the tunnel leaving large voids behind the old lining. All of this had to be carefully packed and they moved slowly forward with the new tunnel lining. There was also evidence of considerable instability in the strata and also in the structural condition of the tunnel which was collapsing ahead of the work face.

The 8" wide working platforms were built from unifloats. Each platform consisted of two floats linked together, making a working area of around 32"

by 8". The method of repair of the tunnel was virtually the same as Mowlem's repairs, but in addition, sections of towpath were removed and some areas of brickwork were patched up.

In preparation for future repairs of the lining where they may be close to or below former construction shafts, the Board's engineers investigated the location of the shafts. Five of these shafts were drilled and their accurate position inside the tunnel has been established.

All the lengths classified as 'bad' in the original engineering survey had now been dealt with. The Board envisaged at least ten years' further work to be undertaken outside the cruising season. This was to include the rebuilding of about 90 yards of tunnel lining where its condition was classified as 'poor' and the replacement of perished brickwork.

Contributed by Brian Curry for Piper Owners' newsletter in 2005.



Hidden in the darkness of Harecastle Tunnel are glazed tiles marking the distance in yards (x100). Former tunnel keeper Brian Curry believed that the tiles are very accurately positioned.

Nearby, in the west wall, are the bricked-up remains of the underground connection between the old Brindley tunnel and the adjacent coal mine. Very little is know about these coal mines, which may have extended as far as Turnhurst Farm, where Brindley lived.



Due to popular demand.....

For the coming season , **all events will continue to be held in the upstairs room at:**

**Red Bull Public House
Congleton Road South,
Stoke-on-Trent
ST7 3AJ**



***Talks are 7.30 for 8.00pm
(Get a drink and come on
upstairs!)***

***For further information
contact: Gillian Watson
01606 835 606***

There is no charge for attending and no need to be a member. Gillian recommends the food– she eats there before every talk!

Some speakers will bring objects or products to be viewed or bought– we positively encourage interaction!

The room will be open from 7.30pm, talks start at 8.00pm in two forty minute parts with a comfort break (and raffle) between.

Friday 17th January 2020

Down South

Phil Clayton

London, River Thames, Lee and Stort and River Wey

Friday 21st February 2020

Women and Children living and working on canal boats

Bill Walker

Bill will take us through the significant changes experienced by women and children when they had to leave their cottages and live on the boats instead.

Friday 21st March 2020

CRT– speaker TBA

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No New Members to report in this edition !

Let's make 2020 a great membership year!





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 Lawson
07940 878923 John.Lawson@waterways.org.uk

November's work party saw our intrepid volunteers back at Wheellock on a bitterly cold day!



Malkins Side Arm Bridge

A lesson in master blacksmithing and heritage ironwork conservation



I'm well aware of the principles of conservation concerning our historic buildings, and working for the Trust I get plenty of experience dealing with stone, brick, timber and lime. But unlike my Heritage colleagues in Birmingham for example, where they see the lovely cast iron Horsley bridges on their way to the office everyday, I haven't much experience of large scale metalwork.

So working with heritage ironwork conservation specialist and blacksmith Rowan Taylor and his colleague Mike Firth-Letschert has been a fabulous experience. Rowan has done a lot of work for the Trust over the years, and recently has been repairing wrought iron cramps at a Grade II Listed lock in the Peak District, conserving the cast iron parapet on Pontcysyllte aqueduct and working out how to sympathetically add safety bars to some early 19th century cast iron lock tail bridges.

When we knew we had to repair the metal parapet on the bridge which carries the towpath over the side arm off the Trent & Mersey Canal at Malkin's Bank near Sandbach, Rowan and Mike were the obvious choice.

We have found little history about the side arm at Malkins Bank, which seems to be a later addition to the original canal; but we estimate the bridge and its metal parapet to date from the late 19th to early 20th century. As Rowan pointed out, ‘the unrestricted use of rolled material (the angle iron) would suggest that the oldest date of creation for the parapet would be a late Victorian one, while the quantity and depth of rope burns alongside the general condition of the parapet would indicate an early 20th century as the youngest date of creation’.

I assumed it was a wrought iron structure, but Rowan told me that, based on analysis, the parapet was actually made of mild steel, and is the earliest use of mild steel he has come across. It seems that the turn of the century marks the transition from the use of wrought iron to modern steel.

According to Rowan and Mike’s analysis, the handrail, main uprights and ropelides of the parapet are made from mild steel angle-iron, with wrought iron tube acting as a middle-bar. The wrought iron tube was particularly interesting as it was manufactured using the same industrial forge-welding techniques as were used to produce musket barrels from the 18th to 19th centuries. At some later date, post 1960’s, some flat-bar and round-bar have been used to extend the middle-bar beneath the rope-slides. Rowan and Mike carefully dismantled the parapet and transported it to Rowan’s smithy at Ellesmere yard. Here, rotten material was carefully cut out and replaced with like-for-like material, and they have hot riveted new joiner-plates to install a newly forged section where the original could not be saved. The philosophy is the same as I use when repairing masonry - keep as much historic fabric as possible, remove minimum rot, and ensure new sections are honest and sympathetic.

Years of boats being hauled into the side arm by tow ropes have scored the metalwork and we wanted to retain these rope marks or ‘burns’ wherever we could. The blacksmiths estimated the original thickness of the steel and have carefully transitioned the rope marks into the new material. As Rowan says, this illustrates the preservation of those burns quite well. Everything then received at least seven coats of Linseed oil-based paint, the safe modern substitute for lead paint. Looking splendid back on site, the newly repaired parapet still retains its historic character but is now surely fit for another 100 years.

Judy Jones, Heritage Advisor
News article created on 20 September 2019

As the temperatures drop, some good advicw from CRT.....

Winter Water Safety

Our waterways are beautiful places to visit in all seasons, and Winter with its snowy landscapes and frosty mornings can really be a great reason to head down to the canals for a walk. However, as the temperature drops there are some important potential hazards to be aware of.

Be prepared

To be extra careful around water over the winter months there are lots of things you can do to be better prepared for wintry conditions:

Plan your route – think about where you want to go and how long you want to be out for

Take a friend – it is safer to walk with others

Tell someone where you are going – in case you are out for much longer than you say, you can be found more easily

Stay away from the edge - although you may be able to see the edge of the towpath even in the snow, it may be slippery

Check the weather – look at the forecast and see what's coming your way

Wear the right clothing – waterproofs, sturdy footwear, warm layers can all help your body cope with the wintry conditions

Take your phone (or even a whistle) – if you get into trouble, or see somebody else in trouble, you can call or whistle for help

What to do if you see someone in the water

Don't get into the water, instead:

Call the emergency services on 999 as soon possible

Keep an eye on the person

Keep talking to them, and stay near them

If you can, throw line to them or use a tree branch to reach out to them

Even strong swimmers may face difficulties in icy water

You may feel you can help by getting into the water too, but remember that the water is freezing:

All year round the shock of the cold water can really take your breath away and cause your muscles to cramp, making it very difficult for you to stay afloat

There may be objects hidden under the water that could cause you harm
The water may be deeper than you think. Canals don't normally have sloping sides and there are only ladders at locks so it's not easy to get out – especially wearing heavy, wet clothes and helping someone else.

Staying on the surface is much harder when you are trying to help someone else, they may panic and push you under.

Boaters might not be able to see you in or under the water and won't know to stop – if a boat hits you it can cause serious harm to you and the other person .

What to do if your dog gets into the water

Please keep your dog on a short lead along the towpaths so they don't run off and risk jumping into the water. If your dog does go into the water, don't jump in after it, instead:

Encourage your dog to swim over to you where you can lift them out more safely

If they are unable to do this, try to reach them with a line or long branch

For more advice on keeping safe by the water this winter see the RLSS (Royal Life Saving Society UK) website.



Trent Crossing

The monsoon weather we have experienced this year has resulted in the river section of our canal being subject to frequent closures. Below is an example from just two weeks in December. Unfortunately this is likely to be the pattern for the future!

CRT Notice Alerts

Location: River section at Alrewas
Starts At: Lock 11, Wychnor Lock
Ends At: Lock 12, Alrewas Lock
Friday 13 December 2019 08:00 until further notice

Update on 17/12/2019:
Navigation is now open, please proceed with caution.

Monday 23 December 2019 08:00
Due to high levels of rainfall the River section at Alrewas is in flood and the navigation is closed

Update on 24/12/2019:
Navigation is now open, please proceed with caution

Lichfield IWA Talks and AGM

Wednesday 19th February 2020 – “The Ribble Link and Lancaster Canal”. An illustrated talk by our member Neil Barnett, who recently ventured down the tidal River Douglas and up the Ribble estuary to the calmer waters of the Lancaster Canal and back. His photos and recollections show how different this is to a normal narrowboat voyage and the challenges it poses. 7.15 for 7.30 pm at Martin Heath Hall, Christchurch Lane (off Walsall Road), Lichfield, WS13 8AY.

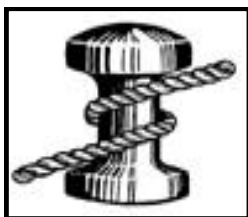
Wednesday 18th March 2020 – Annual General Meeting and Social Evening. Details t.b.a. 7.15 for 7.30 pm at Martin Heath Hall, Christchurch Lane (off Walsall Road), Lichfield, WS13 8AY.

TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL SOCIETY

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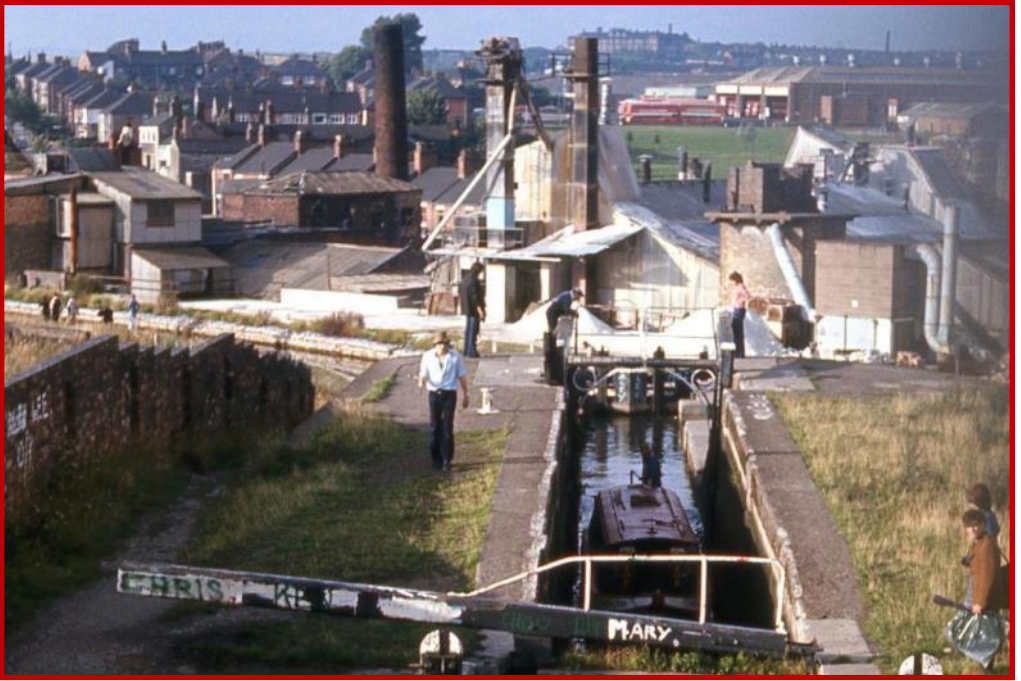
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*The Trent & Mersey Canal Society is proud to
support Burslem Port*

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem

Bedford Staircase Locks in 1977



Open Day, Bedford Street staircase locks, Caldon Canal

February 1st and 3rd

This staircase flight of locks will be drained with visitors able to access the bottom of the lock where repairs are being undertaken at locks 1 and 2.

CRT will be replacing the top end gate and relining two other sets of gates to help save water by reducing leakage through the flight.

In addition, we'll be showcasing repairs to the lock's 200-year old brickwork.

Photo Peter Scott (Wikipedia Commons)