

GRAND TRUNK



*'Bill and Ben, the
Milepost Men'*

Photo by Sandra Lawson



*John Lawson and Dave
Sproston complete their
last milepost*

July/August 2017

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

Last issue I announced that we would be adding a whole new section to the website about our famous mileposts. Well, I've started, but so far only three of our 94 mileposts have their own page! First I created an introductory page, then added a page about our milepost campaign (which made very heavy use of both text and photographs from Harry Arnold's milepost talk – Thanks Harry). Next I created pages for the mileposts at each end of our canal (as that made adding inter-page pointers easier) and was just deciding which milepost to add next when Ash Tree Boat Club sent me pictures of their local replacement milepost being unveiled in 1980. Guess which was the 3rd milepost to get its own page (p22, this magazine)...



Currently I'm working on compiling a list of replacement mileposts with their sponsors and unveilers. Once that has been added to our website, it will be time for the next milepost to get its own page, but which to choose ??? . As I said last time, if YOU have a favourite milepost, then why not send me a nice picture of it (by email please), along with any relevant information.

Milepost repainting continues with John Lawson & Dave Sproston now having upgraded all 8 mileposts along the Cheshire Locks section, and *Salt-scape* tell me that they plan to start work in July on those between Middlewich and Preston Brook.

Our "Sales and Exhibition" stand has made 2 outings so far this year (to a rainy Lion Salt Works, and a baking-hot Middlewich Folk and Boat Festival – See report on pages 20/21).

We have also recently decided to take it to the IWA Festival of Water at Ilkeston (on the Erewash Canal, but close to our canal). So why not come along and chat to us, or (even better) offer to help run the stand over the 3 days of the August Bank Holiday weekend.

Editorial

Hi everyone. Since last issue we have experienced the enigma of Naples– sprawling, hot, dirty, smelly and absolutely wonderful! My intrepid *Trent and Mersey Canal* cloth bag has enjoyed the evocative ruins of Pompei and Herculaneum (carrying much-needed bottles of water), considered itself upmarket in Capri, and climbed Vesuvius (on my back). I would be interested to hear if any other T&MCS bag could beat this record. If you would like to buy one to have a go, details are at the foot of this page.



We are about to set off along the good old T&M for a sneak trip around the Four Counties ring, with a detour into Birmingham, hooray! Then we will be off to Ilkeston Festival of Water, where the T&M stall will be at a major festival for the first time since Burton. We have two problems, the first is which T-shirt to wear, as we are site team, WRG(NW) and IWA as well as T&MCS. The other is how we man the stall as well as our other duties-why not come along and see how we manage it?

Finally, *Lion Salt Works* are due a big ‘thank you’ for their friendliness on a very wet and miserable weekend when the stall was in their café. Better luck (and weather) next year!

EXCITING NEW MERCHANDISE!

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

A brief resume of the talk which Jon Honeysett gave while leading a walk around the transport links in Kidsgrove after the Society AGM at the Blue Bell Public House on 6th May.



The Trent & Mersey Canal opened in 1777 with a tunnel through Harecastle Hill designed by James Brindley. Harecastle Tunnel was 1¾ miles long, and craft were legged through by hired men, using their boot-shod feet to walk along the tunnel walls. Some of these men were hired from the Blue Bell, and a niche in the wall, where arrangements were made, survives to this day.

James Brindley died in 1772, before his tunnel opened; it experienced many operating problems. Numerous unmapped mine-workings caused collapses, and because of these delays to traffic, a parallel tunnel, designed by Thomas Telford and with a horse towpath, was built, opening in 1827. Traffic increased following the opening of Britain's last canal, The Macclesfield. The Hall Green Branch of the Trent & Mersey connected with this at Hall Green Stop Lock, crossed its parent canal on an aqueduct near Red Bull and joined the main line just before the tunnel in 1831. At this time both tunnels were in used, one taking northbound vessels and the other southbound.



Another tunnel was built in 1847, when the North Staffordshire Railway (Manchester to Stoke-on-Trent) and the London North Western Railway opened up the area. This tunnel ran between Kidsgrove and Tunstall, and



ran parallel to the canal tunnels. A further rail link to Crewe was opened in 1848 and further routes arrived during the 19th century.

Although the railways did impact on canal freight traffic, Telford's Harecastle tunnel was modernised in 1914 with the installation of a 110 volt DC overhead line and three electric tugs (these had been battery operated previously). They were powerful enough to haul up to eight 25-ton

vessels, controlled (as today) in single direction operation. The Brindley Tunnel was closed in 1918, but during the First World War, two and a quarter million tons of freight passed through Telford's tunnel, and two and three-quarter million tons in World War II. The wiring was removed in 1954 and the towpath was taken out between 1974 and 1977. Air-blower machinery was installed above the South Portal to clear fumes, and is still in use today.



Kidsgrove Railway Station has award-winning gardens maintained by *The Friends of Kidsgrove Station*, and is now used by more passengers than ever. Following a four-year long campaign, hourly electric Stoke to Manchester services were re-introduced and passenger numbers exceed 150,000 per annum. With its attractive station, canal and historic tunnel, it is hoped that Kidsgrove will become a public transport hub.

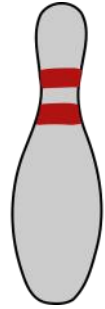
Welcome to New Members

**Welcome back
To
Mr W. Scragg of Sandbach**



Another exciting social event!
Skittles Tournament!

Stafford Boat Club
8th September 2017
7.30 pm



Situated on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, about a two hours cruise from Tixall Lock, Stafford Boat Club nestles in the picturesque Penk Valley overlooking the wetlands and is in the centre of some of the best cruising on the system.

The clubhouse boasts its own 9-pin skittles run and a bar with fantastic beer!

Competing Teams-
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).

Address

Stafford Boat Club
Wildwood
Stafford
Staffordshire
ST17 4SG

Names to Margaret or Roger please

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Reproduced below is part of a letter sent to CRT by Jon Honeysett following the AGM walk

Dear David

On Saturday 6th May 2017, my wife Sarah and I were kindly invited by the Secretary of the Trent & Mersey Canal Society to join them for lunch at “The Blue Bell” inn, Kidsgrove, following their Annual General Meeting, after which we walked along the towpath to the Harecastle Tunnel north portals.

T&MCS members pointed out to me that neither the piers carrying the road over-bridge into the station, or the rail over-bridge by the Tunnel wharf, had notices advising boat crews to KEEP TO THE LEFT, either northbound or southbound, with a possible risk that a boat might run aground under the unused sections, and I trust that this can be resolved as soon as possible, please.

The issue of additional mooring rings between the station over-bridge and the rail over-bridge nearest to Harecastle Tunnel, for use by southbound boat crews awaiting passage through the tunnel, was raised by members, and I was able to confirm that our NSSC Branch IWA award-winning member, Steve Wood, is already aware of the need, and has set aside a number of rings, to be ‘deep-set’, as part of the Cheshire Rings Project.

I am in contact with a Network Rail project manager at Derby, one of a team in charge of the Kidsgrove Station modernisation, due for completion by the end of 2019, who is investigating the possibility of funding for re-painting of the rail over-bridge steel parapets. As you can appreciate, these bridges, particularly that close to Harecastle Tunnel, are ‘eyesores’, contributing to the general atmosphere of gloomy intimidation, greatly detracting from what is a potentially fascinating heritage site, requiring environmentally-acceptable lighting, CCTV coverage, and up-to-date information displayed in the Kidsgrove Town Council notice board.

Whilst at the Tunnel site, we were advised that several children (boys*) had been throwing stones at passing boats, and infrastructure, yet no Staffordshire Police presence had responded – in view of the potential danger to members of the public, I have included Councilor Gillian Burnett in this e-mail to you, in order that she might raise the issue with the Police, and

advise those members of the “GO KIDSGROVE” group. *These may well have been the same group of four boys seen by my wife last year, stupidly playing about near an Occupation Crossing on the Kidsgrove-Alsager line.

Finally, in addition to the need for upgrading Kidsgrove’s waterfront as part of the station modernisation, the city of Stoke-on-Trent is submitting a bid for the 2021 “City of Culture” award. I hope therefore, that this e-mail will be forwarded to the Middleport Matters group, and City Council officers, stressing the need for a Day Trip boat for visitors hire from a location such as the “Black Prince” marina – Kidsgrove and Stoke need their canal heritage to be linked to a long-term waterways strategy for the region

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely
Jon Honeysett



***The bridge mentioned in paragraph 2
From the Northern side***

Photo by Roger Evans



Join Us on a Canal Work Party

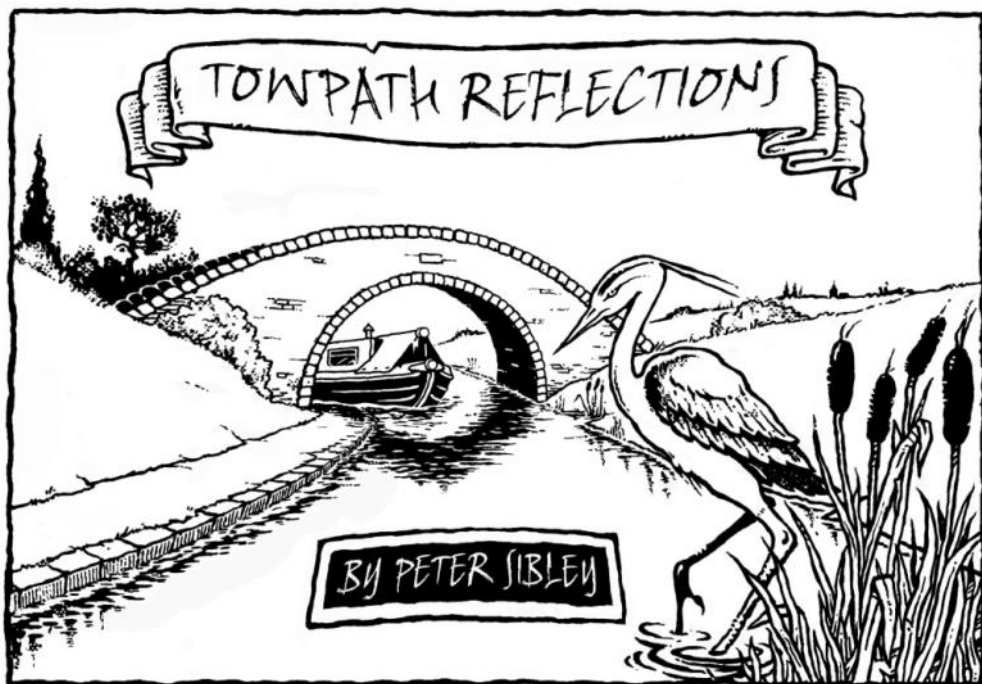
Cheshire Locks, Trent & Mersey Canal
Monthly work party on the third Thursday each month
Jointly with IWA North Staffs & South Cheshire

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



We left Val and Peter hiding in the long grass at Coven Heath!....

Friday the 6th of June.

It was a beautiful day; we cruised gently along the lock free section of the Shroppie to Brewood where we moored and had a chat with a couple of people on our way to the village for a few supplies. We bought a few tomato plants and runner bean plants to put in when we got back home and set off to Church Eaton where we moored for the night. Henry the tortoise had a good long walk along the towpath enjoying the sunshine.

Saturday the 7th of June.

Had a thunderstorm at breakfast time, the rain eased off a bit so set off at 8:30 a.m. and arrived at Norbury Junction, where we had showers in the superb facilities block. Picked up some reading material from the table in the entrance hall and had lunch, then continued on to Shebdon Wharf where we encountered a couple of old friends on *ZigZag Wanderer*. We were invited on board for a coffee and a good long chat. We decided to stay at Shebdon Wharf for the night.



Shebdon Wharf

Sunday the 8th of June.

A fine day. We bade our friends farewell as they were on their way to London. The sun shone brilliantly throughout the long narrow steep sided Woodseaves Cutting, showing it off at its best. We squeezed past three other boats coming the other way! Tyrley Locks were busy and we were warned about the force of water from the spillways throwing you off course as you enter a lock. I told her we encountered the same trouble on our outward trip. We moored up at the foot of Adderley Locks and went for a stroll up to village and its unusual church.



Monday 9th of June.

Monday started with heavy rain and thunder but it eased off by 8 a.m., so we set off on the short run to Audlem Locks. We had tackled the first 3 when the heavens opened again. We stopped above Town Bridge for a late coffee and again before Hack Green Locks for lunch, then travelled on to Hurleston Junction (where the Llangollen Branch leads off). We moored for the night. Henry went for another stroll.

Tuesday the 10th of June.

A bright sunny start to the day as we set off from Hurleston. 1¾ miles further on we arrived at Barbridge where we turned onto the Middlewich Branch. There was a queue at Minshall Lock. As I waited yet another boat appeared behind us. The actions of the crew suggested they were new to boating, and I noticed an Aussie flag on the boat. The lady approached me and asked if I was waiting to go in the lock. 'This is our first boat trip' she explained 'and we haven't worked a lock before'. I sent her up to the lock for a few lessons from Val. The lady's husband arrived and explained that they were from Australia, had picked up the boat from the marina at Chelmondston and were taking it to Scarisbrick Marina on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. I got to thinking as we sailed blissfully along the Middlewich Arm (which was at its best that sunny day) of the number of pleasant friendly folk we had met on our holiday. Does canal boating attract certain laid-back folk or does the quiet slow-moving nature of the Waterways bring out the best in everyone?

We stopped for lunch at Middlewich. As we tackled the last five locks of our holiday the cloud which had built up during lunchtime drenched us in a heavy rainstorm. We pulled in and moored up just after Croxton Flash at the point where the near-breach had occurred. This was when the river Dane (which runs very close at this point) had eroded the canal embankment.

We set off for home the following morning. Arriving at Lion Salt Works at Marston, we noticed that the museum was open. It turned out that they were having a practice run before the official opening, so we were lucky enough to get a free conducted tour of the work that lasted well over an hour. We arrived back home in Barnton later that afternoon.

NEW TRENT & MERSEY MARINA AT INGESTRE BRIDGE

PLANNING permission has been granted for a new 196-berth marina at London Road (A51), Pasturefields, Shirleywich, on the Trent & Mersey Canal. In waterway terms, on the south side of Ingestre Bridge No.78, 2 miles north of Great Haywood Junction. As passed, the plans include a service building with offices, laundry, toilets, cafe/restaurant and an apartment for a site manager. There is to be a canalside services block with pump-out, water, gas and fuel etc. and there are twin dry-docks. Berths vary in size, with 30 of the 20-metre berths laid out as super berths - for just one boat each.

The owner – who is a waterway enthusiast of many years standing - purchased the land 13 years ago after an initial meeting with the local authority to establish that there was the likelihood of gaining planning consent for a marina. Everyone was enthusiastic because the original idea was to create a tourist attraction – with everything built in 1700s period style - which would house a Staffordshire canals visitor's centre and much more. Unfortunately, local authority officers rejected this initiative concept.

Harry Arnold



*Photo
courtesy
of
Waterway
Images*

*A boat passes the site of the new Trent & Mersey Canal marina
by Ingestre Bridge No.78.*

T&MCS social calendar October 2016 to April 2017

The location is the Big Lock and can be accessed on 2 levels. For those who prefer not to use stairs, there is access to the room at the back of the building via the door facing the lock, we can arrange for your drinks to be collected from the bar.

There is no charge (we have a raffle to pay for the room hire) and no need to be a member.

If you want to make more of an event of your evening I can recommend the food, I usually eat there before each talk.

Some speakers will bring associated objects and products to be viewed or bought, we positively encourage interaction.

To find Big Lock by road, :

Webbs Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire,
CW10 9DN

Telephone: (01606) 833489

<http://www.thebiglockpub.com>



The room will be open at 7.30pm,
the talks will start at 8.00pm,
in two 40 minute parts with a comfort break.

Contact: Gillian Watson 01606 835 606

Friday 20th October 2017.....

Ian Rogers

Knot Tying

Ian will talk about the International Guild of Knot Tyers and knot work and demonstrate how knots are tied and used both in boating and decoratively.

Friday 17th November 2017.....

Ann Pollard

Staffordshire & Worcester Canal

Ann Pollard is the Secretary and much more for the Staffordshire and Worcester Canal Society and will give us an insight into their canal that we might not otherwise see.

Friday 19th January 2018.....

Ray Johnson

Brindley and Wedgwood, Chalk and Cheese

An appreciation of the career of James Brindley from contemporary correspondence and writings of his great friend Josiah Wedgwood. Plus video clips of some of the 300th Anniversary events in 2016 and extracts from Ray's documentary on the history of Canals and Canal Boats. Experts, archive film and unique personal reminiscences reveal the changing face of canals and the boats that worked them.

Friday 16th February 2018.....

Bill Walker

Fly Boat Saturn

Bill will talk about the lives and history of the Fly Boatmen and the Shropshire Union Company.

Friday 16th March 2018.....

Derek Smith

Cruising on Remote Waterways

Derek and Jeanne Smith are keen trail boaters and share their experiences in this illustrated talk that looks at cruising on remote waterways, mainly unconnected waterways that are under restoration.

Friday 20th April 2018.....

Phil Clayton

Joeys, Joshers and James A BCN Miscellany

An introduction, accompanied by pictures, words and music, to the beginnings, development, working life, decline and renaissance of that wonderful network of waterways known as the Birmingham Canal Navigations, together with a little about the work of the BCN Society.

*There will be a separate card with meeting dates included in the next issue. In the meantime...**HOLD THE DATES!***

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

Ups and Downs at Fontinettes

At the end of last April we crossed the English Channel to tour North East France in our motorhome. After spending a night in a campsite by the Canal du Somme we headed towards Belgium to visit a steam rally near the Belgian/Dutch border.

We thought an interesting lunch stop would be at Arques near St Omer in the Pas-de-Calais region and as we entered the town we expected to see signs for the Fontinettes Boat Lift. We drove round and round but no signs were forthcoming and having seen a sign directing us back into the town centre yet again we'd had enough and decided to drive down a side street to turn round and head back out of the town. We turned down a road and after a couple of minutes found ourselves by the Canal de Neuffossé which is part of the Liaison Dunkerque-Escaut waterway. We drove next to the canal for a short distance and there was the Fontinettes boat lift. As traffic on the canal increased this hydraulic lift was built to alleviate the queues for the locks here. It was constructed between 1885 and 1888, and 1887 is the year highlighted on the middle of the three brick towers. These towers were used to guide two mobile metal caissons and were capable of lifting vessels of 300 tonnes displacement.



The lift closed in 1967 and the arm to the top of the lift has been filled in. We understand that a group of TMCS members visited here in 2010 and we are sad to report that the lift is in a very uncared for and

sorry state although the mass of pigeons going in and out of the towers seemed to appreciate the derelict structure. The sheet of metal welded to the entrance of the caissons and the caissons themselves looked drab and rusty and it's a real shame that the lift is in such a neglected condition.



There is still a lot of commercial traffic on this waterway – barges and push-tows, all with at least one car on board and many are registered in Dunkerque.

Barge approaching the lock

We watched as heavily loaded barges went by and disappeared into the huge lock that has replaced the lift – 475ft by 39ft with a 43 foot rise. This is about 550 yards upstream and can take up to six barges. The bottom gate is a guillotine gate and the need for 40 foot top gates is not necessary due to a large concrete sill. Inside the lock bollards slide up and down the lock side as water rises and falls so there is no need for 100ft ropes!



Entrance gate to the lock

is

These moving bollards would be useful at the deep lock at Sandford on the River Thames where we don't find it particularly easy to throw and loop the rope round the bollard when the lock is empty and the "self service" sign is showing. No doubt our rope throwing provides good entertainment for those enjoying a drink in the pub garden next to the lock!

*Annette & Terry
NB Emily and Steamboat Sidney
Kennet & Avon Canal*

Cheshire Locks Work Party Reports

Thursday 20th April 2017

Remember the rusty and unloved condition of Lock 41 (Kidsgrove Top Lock)? Not a good impression for boaters leaving the tunnel area! Work started this month here and tremendous progress was made. The balance beams were painted and most of the white metal work around the lock was prepared and painted. By the end of the day, the massive improvement was clear for everyone to see.



Photo by John Brighthouse

Lock 42 was completed last month but a small team returned there to add the lock numbers as the finishing touch.

Tuesday 9th May 2017

An EXTRA work party (organised at the request of the volunteers) to progress the work on Lock 41.

Thursday 28th May 2017

Work continued at Lock 41, particularly on painting the metal work on and around the lock. Weeds were also cleared to improve the general appearance of the area.

Thursday 15th June

Railings and bollards were completed. The toll house between the two locks and old toilet block on the non-towpath side were given a fresh coat of black paint on doors and windows (the stone work has to be left alone for historic reasons!).



*Photos by
David Clegg*



Before

The old lamp-post beside the nearside lock was given a facelift with the aid of a paintbrush tied to a long stick, as Health and Safety regulations precluded climbing. Clever folk these lock painters!



After!

Middlewich Fab Festival 17/18th June

Following a damp weekend at Lion Salt Works (although we were inside!), the society stall was basking in the sun canalside at Middlewich. Trade was



brisk and we actually made a profit! Neckerchiefs (for dogs and people), decorative plates and canal books were popular. Both nail games were a great draw, our original one, charting the course of 'Heartbreak Hill', and another kindly donated by IWA North Staffs, South Cheshire (a straight pick for 10p). Thank you very much!

The Fuller's *butty Ilford* was moored beside the stall, advertising a new waterway museum which is to be set up in Stone (more about this next issue). Roger Fuller told us that he had painted our wooden sign more than thirty years ago! Of course we had to have a picture of him with the sign!



(For those of you who don't know, Roger Fuller is a traditional narrowboat builder and artist based in Stone.)



Mid-afternoon, Eddie Kingswell had to leave work on our stall in order to steer the narrowboat containing Middlewich Rose Queen and her retinue. We had a grandstand view from the stall and were able to take a picture of her majesty!

On Sunday, the *Ilford* was moored stern to stern with our old friend *Saturn*. We just managed to grab a picture of the two rudders together before *Ilford* set off.



The next stall outing is to Ilkeston Festival of Water over bank holiday weekend– come and support us there!

Photos by Roger Evans

Ash Tree Boat Club and their milepost!



Milepost 31/ 61 is near Bridge 62 by the Ash Tree Inn

This is a replacement milepost, sponsored by Ash Tree Boat Club, and unveiled by Connie Markham (Commodore of the Ash Tree Boat Club) on Sunday 21st September 1980.

From the Ash Tree Boat Club Archives, here is a photo of the unveiling. In the photograph are ATBC Chairman George Seward, Roger Lee (TMCS chairman) and ATBC Commodore Connie Markham. In the early years of the society (and ATBC for that matter) many Ash Tree members were very involved with the society, four of whom served on the committee.

© *Waterway Images*



Photo © Ash Tree Boat Club archives, courtesy Anthony Wattis

You can see more about this on the Society website!

TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL SOCIETY

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Telephone: 01606 834471

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

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem



The intrepid group[of walkers with guest Jon Honeysett reach tunnel mouth after the AGM (see p.4/5)

Photo by Sarah Honeysett

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 September/October edition is 01/09/2017.