

GRAND TRUNK



Replacement Milepost at Marbury

(see pp 4-5)

May/June 2020

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

Covid-19! Disruption everywhere. Our canal has very few boats moving, towpath fishing is banned, but there are lots of extra walkers. Our society has no work-parties, no talks or walks, no sales stand outings, and our AGM has had to be postponed indefinitely. Our committee meetings are being held by email. Even this magazine has had to switch to a different printer (who is 50% more expensive) as our usual printer isn't working. Anyway, we're all still here, and we hope that you are too!



Last issue included a Gift-Aid form as all previous forms automatically lapsed when our new constitution was adopted at last year's AGM. In 2019 we claimed gift-aid on behalf of 78 members, but only 21 of those members have (so far) completed a new form. Presumably a few of the other 57 have chosen not to complete a form because they no longer pay tax, but please will the others re-consider filling in the new form. If you have lost the form, then I can send you a new one (by post or email) if you wish, or simply complete the form online.

Welcome to the 11 members who returned a Gift-Aid form for the first time (5 by post, 6 electronically). Why not join them?

How to complete the new form ONLINE ? Visit our web-site and click on "Gift Aid" in the left-hand column. This will take you to a page explaining how Gift-Aid works and a clickable link (in red) to our "**Gift Aid Form**" which you fill in and then press **SEND**. I will email you acknowledging your form and enclosing a copy of your declaration for your records.

Why? Gift-Aid allows us to claim a "FREE" £2.50 every year on your £10 membership fee (as well as 25% on any extra donations you make) without it costing you anything extra.

Editorial

Hello everybody, welcome to your special *lockdown edition* of our magazine. I have had to rely on archive material and items I could find about the waterways, so apologies for the mish-mash and grateful thanks to those of you who thought of something to send—greatly appreciated!

I had hoped to start off with a report of our visit to Ghent to see an art exhibition that I couldn't possibly miss—of course we were unable to go (and the exhibition had to close anyway). This was followed by being barred from my normal work owing to my great age, the cessation of exercise classes and swimming, no work parties, a run on anything edible in the shops and last and worst—*we couldn't even go boating!*

That's enough moaning, we are here, keeping well and the sun sometimes shines. I am determined to keep *Grand Trunk* alive, so send me anything you think might help. Please could you also return some Gift Aid forms for chairman Roger to cheer him up, and outstanding subs will be gratefully received.

I was amazed how many boats passed us after a dead stop was declared. I expect they were all continuous cruisers seeking a safe haven or hire boats rushing back to base—I admit to feeling a little jealous! Perhaps restrictions will be lifted enough to allow the next edition to be prepared while cruising.

In the meantime, back to weatherproofing sheds and garden furniture, weeding our overgrown garden and dealing with the annual curtain wash. *The Lady Beth* is cleaned and sporting her spring flowers, so we are all ready to go—I just need to buy the usual basketful of processed peas!

Keep well, keep safe and stay cheerful

Margaret English

P.S.

Anyone got any recipes to go with the processed peas?



A Milepost Story

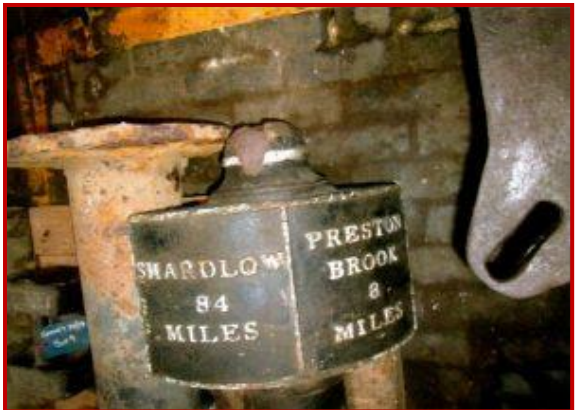
The Trent and Mersey Canal is famous for its mileposts, and many people may assume that they have been undisturbed since they were first installed. However, when the society was launched they were nowhere to be seen. This is because they were mainly removed and buried or hidden during the second World War (like many road-signs) to stop the enemy finding their way if they invaded.

A campaign to restore all the mileposts on the canal was launched by the Trent & Mersey Canal Society in 1977. Original mileposts removed during the war were found (many after extensive searches), cleaned and painted before being reinstalled. Not all of them could be found however. Unfortunately we only managed to reinstate 60 of the 93. The other 33 were either unable to be located, too badly damaged (usually by rust) to be reinstated, or were on display elsewhere and we weren't allowed to retrieve them (e.g. at Stoke Bruerne Museum and at the Longboat Pub Birmingham). We therefore had "replicas" made (but with a different makers plate so that they couldn't be mistaken for the original) of the other 33, and installed them to replace the missing ones. This happened between 1979 and 1985, each with a plaque at the base. The mould and patterns for these replacement posts are now on display in The Island Warehouse at Ellesmere Post Boat Museum.

So, 34 new mileposts were cast and installed with due ceremony. An extra 94th milepost was added at Derwent Mouth. The final replacement milepost was unveiled in October 1985 at Brownhills, near where the first sod was cut when the canal was built.

DISCOVERY

Last month, Chairman Roger was told that the boat museum have one of the original mileposts currently stored in their Lime Shed, but that the Lime Shed is to be cleared and that the future of this milepost was uncertain. He therefore wrote to express the interest of our society in the future of this milepost. From photographic evidence, the





head appears to be in generally good condition (with a piece of the very top missing, as is the case for at least one milepost we reinstated). The makers plate is wrongly repainted, suggesting that it is badly worn [it should read R & D STONE 1819]. Unfortunately the status of the below ground section of the post cannot be ascertained as it isn't in the photos.

CHAIRMAN'S SUGGESTIONS FOR THE MILEPOST'S FUTURE

Roger wrote:

'Ideally we would like to see this milepost on display, so include four suggestions below. You may prefer to simply move it to a different storage area when you clear the Lime Shed (and it is of course your post to do what you want with), but we would like to know where it is for the future if possible please. Should you decide to "dispose" of it, then we would like to be involved in any discussions. Anyway here are our 4 suggested display locations :-

- 1) In the Island Warehouse alongside the mould and patterns for the replacement posts (which are already on display there).
- 2) At Anderton Lift (about a mile from its original location). Probably the most obvious place is next to the big mural by the picnic tables.
- 3) At Lion Salt Works (about a mile the other side of its original location). This is run by West Cheshire Museums, so would actually be a disposal.
- 4) Back at its original site (towpath by Marbury Wood), alongside the replacement milepost which we planted there on 16th November 1980. It could possibly be publicised as a "40th Anniversary" re-instatement'.

Previous chairman, Steve Guest, thinks the milepost was probably found when the canal was re-routed into Marston New Cut in the 1950s, however, the boat museum was not founded until the 1970s, so the milepost's hiding place before that remains a mystery. It seems unlikely that a Trent and Mersey milepost would have been appropriate to the inland port terminus of the Ellesmere Canal.

Photos courtesy of Norman Stainthorpe

A Boating Lament!

In these troubled times, it would be so wonderful to set off on *The Lady Beth* and revisit all our favourite waterway haunts. We have put our flower boxes on the roof, but not taken the front and rear covers off as our resident pigeons are very fond of the boat!

Neighbours say (from the approved distance) ‘if I were you I would get on your boat and sail away!’



Here's why not.....

CRT response to Corona Virus

Our priority is to strictly follow Government advice to support the national effort to keep people safe and help fight the pandemic.

We are asking leisure boaters to stop all non-essential travel and not to visit their boats if they do not live aboard permanently. As a result, and to help

those who live-aboard (along with those who would need to travel to their boat in order to move it) we are suspending the requirement to move every 14 days. We ask everyone to be considerate and make sure that vital boater facilities and services are accessible to those that need them, moving a minimal amount when necessary.

Please note that from Monday 30 March, unless there is an emergency or boaters require passage for essential services such as water, pump out or waste, all our employee-operated locks, bridges and tunnels will be closed.

We are advising people to limit their use of the towpath and to be mindful of people living on boats. People should strictly observe social distancing at all times, following the latest advice from the Government.

Please help us communicate this information, Towpaths are not closed, but we are asking others to behave with consideration for boaters who may be self-isolating and discouraging the use of the towpath where boats are moored. If people do approach your boat, there should be no risk to you provided you stay on your boat while they pass; please do not put yourself or others at risk by confronting other people.

Bearing in mind that the towpaths have to stay open for those living along the waterways to access services and facilities, and for our teams to access for their regular inspections and in case of emergency, it is neither practical nor desirable to close stretches of them.

With growing pressure on our resources – with some colleagues having to self-isolate and many volunteers unavailable – our priority is to maintain the waterways safely and provide essential functions such as water control, statutory inspections and keeping vital boater facilities available.

Besides, in many communities, the canal towpath is the most accessible place for daily exercise or a route for necessary trips to shop, etc. With very few moored boats on large sections of the canals, it will only cause unnecessary disruption to the large numbers of people who live close by if we tried to close. Unlike during the foot-and-mouth crisis nearly 20 years ago, use of the towpath doesn't directly contribute to the spread of disease, provided Government advice and the Trust's guidance – that visits to towpaths should be limited and social distancing observed at all times - is followed.

At least we can still walk along the towpath (as long as we take care!)...Ed

Going Dutch!

Like everyone else we've been staying at home as a result of the Covid-19 virus lock-down even though most of us would rather have been boating or walking along the towpath to a waterside pub for a decent pint.

We have used some of our time at home to look into the many full cardboard boxes we have in our loft full of old waterway magazines and see how the canals have changed over the decades.

As well as that we have been the chance to read a book called "We don't go far but we do see life". Written by Keith Harris, it is an extremely amusing book detailing his travels on his 70 feet long Dutch Luxemotor barge "Saul Trader". The trip started in June 2000 from Sharpness to Bristol and then along the Kennet & Avon Canal to the Thames. Needless to say the barge went aground numerous times on the K&A – when we moved our steamboat to a marina near Aldermaston it scraped along the bottom for much of the way too!

The book then details Keith and "Saul Trader" crossing the English Channel to Calais and cruising through the canals of northern France, Belgium and Holland. We particularly liked the account of the Dordrecht in Steam Weekend in Holland and for boatlift lovers there is an account of going up the Ronquierre Inclined Plane in Belgium which raises boats 220 feet. It highlights the trials and tribulations and the many characters met during the trip and *"the names of the characters in this book have not been changed in order to implicate the guilty"*! It certainly is very funny and gives a light-hearted means of escape from all that is going on at the moment.



Details of “We don’t go far but we do see life” appeared in the March 2020 issue of Towpath Talk. If you have already recycled your copy details are available on www.keithharrisauthor.com

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

Postponement of AGM

Given the uncertainties of when (and how) Covid-19 restrictions will be lifted, we obviously have had to postpone our AGM from 11th May.

We have agreed that TMCS will NOT hold our usual AGM day (with food and tour) this year.

The arrangements originally planned for 11th May will therefore be used as the basis for our 2021 AGM day instead.

Instead, our 2020 AGM will take place "at the first social meeting that we are allowed to organise", at about 19:45 (hopefully lasting under 15 minutes). Hence the first potential date would be October 16th, but this would automatically move back if necessary (because of Covid-19 restrictions) without any need to re-announce.

A shortened Annual Report will be issued at the AGM and available by post or email for anyone who requests it.



The Newcastle Canal

NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME CANAL ROUTE

The Newcastle-under-Lyme to Stoke canal was a 4 mile level canal from the Trent & Mersey Canal at Stoke to Newcastle-under-Lyme. It was authorised by an Act of 1795 and completed in about 1800, part closed in 1921 and abandoned in 1935 - subsequently filled in. It was very little used, except by Spode, Minton and Wolfe whose pottery works were adjacent to its Stoke terminal. As a dividend earner, it was a disastrous failure.

**A Topographical Dictionary of England, Samuel Lewis,
1831:**

"A branch canal from this town, about four miles in length, joins the Trent and Mersey canal at Stoke; and another to Apedale is used chiefly for the conveyance of coal hither."

This is a small extract from the *Historical Map of the Canals of North Staffordshire* compiled by Richard Dean



The canal went into two tunnels - one into the Wolfe Street pottery works and one under Stoke town centre and onto the Trent and Mersey canal.

Above the tunnels was a flint mill - to the left were the imposing industrial buildings of Minton, with a long three-storeyed building, rising to four storeys in the centre.

The Civic Centre sits directly on the site of the wharf at the junction of the Newcastle and Trent and Mersey canals



This picture shows a bridge over the canal near to Nursery Street

The bridge is near the start of Glebe Street which then turns left just in front of the Civic Centre. Turning right is Copeland Street. Just at the front of the picture is Wharf Place.

This photo taken from the footpath on the Trent and Mersey Canal

The sign pinpoints the junction of the Newcastle Canal where it ran into the Trent & Mersey Canal near Glebe Street (just opposite the railway station). Until the early 1970's there was a 100 yard stretch of navigable Newcastle Canal here which was used as moorings for Stoke Boat Club; this stretch

was wiped out when the huge A500 by-pass was built.



On the far side of the Civic Centre is the Spode Factory and museum.

From www.thepotteries.org

Canals at Home

Did you know that Canal & River Trust are building up a virtual library of canal-related information that you can enjoy on your computer without leaving the house?

Access the CRT website and follow the link to ***Canals at Home, our best bits.***

There are films, details of adventures, wildlife discussions, details of canal history, virtual tours of waterway museums and much more.



***Canals Then
and Now***

***Visit a
Museum
from your
sofa***



Go on, you know you want to!

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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***

Plans for the 2020-2021 season are well underway Social secretary Gillian has some amazing talks lined up, see facing page.

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.

We don't know at this stage when we will be able to meet together again, but here's hoping to see lots of members in October.

See page 9 re AGM!

Next Season's Talks (Fingers crossed!)

16th October 2020

Liam Cooper

A Canal & River Trust update

The new organisation, maintenance challenges and priorities. Liam is based at Red Bull.

20th November 2020

Peter Scott

More Spot-the-Locks

Picture, stories and oddities from 50 years of navigation. Audience participation encouraged!

15th January 2021

Ian Wilson

The Shropshire Union Canal

The history and construction of the canal: Images 1967-2019 of vanished or changed buildings.
Part1, Nantwich Basin to Ellesmere
Part 2, Nantwich Basin to Autherley Junction.

19th February 2021

Margaret Ingham

The Warrington Transporter Bridge

Why it exists, what the future holds and how you can help.

19th March 2021

Malcolm Bridge

***Ampere* in Ireland**

Illustrated talk on the Irish Waterways based on a year spent there on all-electric *Ampere*.

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Join Us on a Canal Work Party

(When circumstances permit!)

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.

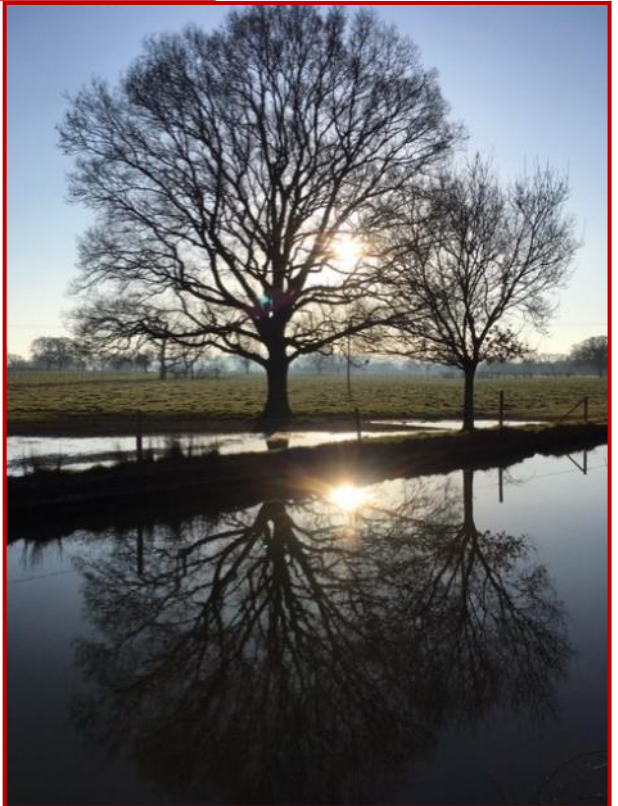
Contact: John Lawson
07940 878923 John.Lawson@waterways.org.uk



Normally there would be a report on work party progress on this page. Of course all work parties are cancelled, so here instead are 2 lovely pictures of our canal peaceful and still without boat movement.

**Lock 55
(pierrpoint)**

**Sunrise south of
Lock55**



Photos by Sandra Lawson

When searching for interesting items for this special Covid-19 edition during lockdown, I came across this obituary from Grand Trunk July 1981, written by our late vice-president , Harry Arnold (I have resisted the temptation to fiddle with Harry's words and grammar!).....Ed.

Charlie Atkins

Charlie Atkins was born in 1902 at Moss Pool Lock, on the Shrewsbury and Newport Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal. Despite railway competition the Shropshire Union still had a large carrying fleet and Charlie's father, James Atkins, was skipper of the fly-boat Rebecca. Even then boating was well established in the Atkins family, and Grandfather John had worked a boat for Griffiths Mill of Chester. The formalities of Charlie's christening were held at Newport Parish Church before Rebecca got under way again- the lady of the lock, a Mrs Moore, officiating as godmother. Childhood was spent learning the techniques of horse-handling and fly-boating with his three brothers on the Rebecca and a later boat, Bombay, mostly doing two trips a week from Ellesmere Port to Whitchurch. At 17 he left to take over his own horse-boat, the Skate with the Chester & Liverpool Lighterage Company.

At 21 he married and also changed companies, staying 12 years with the Midland & Coast Carrying Company and then three different horse-boats- Desdemona, Orion and Ariel. His particular memory of this period is a long partnership with an animal officially known as 'Midland & Coast horse No. 2090- better known as 'Bob'. With Bob and another horse- 'lion', Charlie won several prizes at Midland agricultural shows. Three sons, Charlie, William and Gordon, and a daughter, Eileen, were born to Charlie and his wife and the family moved on to join that most famous of carrying companies- Fellows, Morton & Clayton.

With F.M.C. came a change of motive power and they took over first the motor boat England then the Dragon and its butty Venice, the Kangaroo and butty Norfolk and the Client, working from Ellesmere Post to the midlands, and sometimes farther afield. Traffics were mainly flour, copper and other metals, which carried on until lost in the early days of Nationalisation. During these years, the family grew up, married, and took over their own boats with Fellows, Morton. Charlie's father had died of pneumonia at Morda on the Welsh Canal, still horse-boating with the Cerriog Granite Company of Chirk.

In 1948 Nationalisation brought the end of Fellows, Morton & Clayton. At Yarwood's boatyard in Northwich the hulls of the last two famous 'joshers' were under construction- the Malvern and the Mendip. They were taken down to the old F.M.C, Saltley yard in Birmingham to have their cabins fitted by their new owners British Transport Waterways. Fred Morton took Mendip from new, but the following year Charlie took it over to begin a long and lasting partnership. The first thirteen years were those which earned him his now famous nickname of 'Chocolate Charlie'. They were spent carrying 'crumb', a basic material of chocolate making, from Cadbury's factory at Knighton on the Shropshire Union just south of Market Drayton, to the main factory at Bournville. A 14-hour one-way run- two complete trips a week. The locals of villages on the Shroppie such as Brewood. Wheaton Aston and Norbury- many who were children at the time and still remember chocolate crumb with relish- reckon you could set your watch by Mendip passing.

Eventually the crumb was consigned to road transport and Charlie joined the rest of the rapidly diminishing British Waterways Anderton based fleet on what traffics were left. Aluminium ingots from Manchester to Wolverhampton and felspar, a basic pottery material, from Weston Point to Stoke-on-Trent, with a return load of coal to Seddon's Salt at Middlewich. The boats were taken over by Willow Wren for a while and then by the newly formed Anderton Canal Carrying Company. Most of the traditional traffics were finished, although new ones were found, and the Anderton Company carried grinding sand to Norbury Junction and salt locally for I.C.I. A new turn came in Charlie's life with the 'discovery' of canals by radio and television. He was interviewed on both and achieved a certain fame through his appearances in the T.V. canal series 'Flower of Gloster'. Making this series gave him a chance to revisit parts of the canal system he hadn't been on for many years.

After the cessation of canal carrying by the Anderton Company, Charlie continued to live aboard Mendip at Preston Brook. He only moved off the boat on doctor's orders shortly before his death. Mendip is now part of the Boat Museum's collection at Ellesmere Port, but will always be associated with Charlie Atkins.

Harry Arnold

The picture overleaf was taken by Harry in 1967. Grateful thanks to Julie Arnold for finding it for us.



*Charlie Atkins on Mendip
at Preston Brook*

Photo Waterway Images (taken by Harry Arnold)

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 2020 edition is **01/07/2020**.

Chocolate Charlie

a waterways song by Bill Malkin

Chorus

Hey, hey, the children say Chocolate Charlie's coming our way
Bringing packets of chocolate chips, bringing them down on the old Mendip
Charlie lived in a narrow boat home, cooked his food on a little coal stove
Smoked a pipe, twisted his beard, wore a cap on the back of his head

Chorus

Charlie laughed, danced and sang, worked his life a Cadbury man
Carried the load the best he can, from Ellesmere Port to Bourneville Town

Chorus

Children they all knew the sound, Charlie wound his windlass round
A simple Shropshire Union Man, doing the best he can

Chorus

The leaves all rustle, grass it grows, blackbird singing in the hawthorn row
The rooks and the ravens and the carrion crows, they all know his name



The song was written and recorded by the Chester based singer-songwriter Bill Malkin on the CD 'Chocolate Charlie and other folk songs'.

The CD can be obtained directly from Bill via his web-site www.billmalkin.co.uk which contains information about his other recordings.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

A BIG thank you to everyone who has paid their subs this year even though we are living in very troubled times!

As I am well aware that society subscriptions are not the first thing on anyone's mind at the moment, I have decided not to include reminders with this issue of *Grand Trunk*.

However if you would like to pay but not send a cheque, direct bank transfer is fine.

Our sort code is: 20-15-96

Account No. 53603423

Account Name: Trent and Mersey Canal Society

I never thought I would miss sending out reminders!

Margaret English

And finally.....



***Remember Big Lock damaged tail bridge due for removal over winter?
It's still there!***

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 Last (or first) milepost at Preston Brook Tunnel

In need of TLC

Photo Saltscape



In the 70s

Photo Waterway Images



*After painting by
Saltscape*

Photo Saltscape