

GRAND TRUNK



The Lady Beth
creeps through Bridge 164
(Booth Lane, Middlewich)
in search of a milepost!

Photo Roger Evans

July/August 2020

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

Will July 4th be celebrated as “Independence Day” in England now as well as in the USA??? We have been making a short 1-day cruise each week since they were allowed, but on 4th July we will be heading off for our much-delayed annual “Spring” cruise around the “Four Counties Ring” (and Yes, we have booked Harecastle Tunnel). By the time you read this we will be safely back home planning our next outing (probably the Caldon to see if we fit through Froghall Tunnel).



How do I know that we will be safely back home before you read this? Simple, because it is Margaret and I who will be posting it to you ...

What condition will be find our canal in ? Based on our short local outings, I expect to find the towpath almost invisible from the canal in many places and several bottom lock-gates to be much leakier with locks slower to fill. A couple of weeks of busy boat movements will probably get those gates to swell-up and seal better again, but I suspect that the “invisible” towpaths will take longer to reappear. Never mind, we will enjoy our first week’s cruise regardless and some days we may even forget “Covid-19” still exists. That’s what canal boating is all about.

Thank you to the 14 people who returned a Gift-Aid form (physically or on-line) after my appeal in the last issue. If you meant to do so, but forgot, then here is a reminder on how to complete the 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 acknowledge your form and enclosing a copy of your declaration for your records.

We received a message from long-time member William Rowley (sadly notifying his wife's decease), he asked to be remembered to members and wrote..... We joined T&M in 1982 I think, and regularly attended meetings and other events when we lived in Barnton, within walking distance of the Anderton Lift. I have very happy memories of those days,

Editorial

Hi everyone, and welcome to Summer! As I write this it is sunny and warm, and best of all—*from 4th July we can stay on our boat overnight!* Our passage through Harecastle Tunnel is already booked and we plan to celebrate our release with the traditional cruise round the Four Counties Ring. We will return home to issue this magazine, then off we go again.

You may have noticed that we have gone looking for mileposts on the short trips we were allowed. Chairman Roger is working very hard at updating the milepost records on the website, so please read page 17 and see what you can do. We particularly need input from members at the Southern end of our canal and would love to hear from you.

I was very pleased with the response to the historic obituary of Chocolate Charlie which was featured in the previous (Covid-19) issue of the magazine. It is good to know the *Grand Trunk* is read and found reasonably interesting. Please keep it up, all contributions gratefully received (unless they're rude!).

We had an interesting encounter with a family of swans on one of our walks up the cut. We discovered 4 cygnets chirping anxiously below a lock while the parents were swimming in it— the lock was about half full and they could not get out. Without a windlass, we raised the top paddles filled the lock and the swans clambered out and hurried down the towpath to rejoin their offspring.

'Case closed' we thought, as we continued on our way. However, on our return we found the male swan parading on the towpath, the rest of the family refusing to move from directly in front of the lock gates, and a boat wishing to enter the lock. We deduced the family wanted to be above the lock. The understanding boaters prepared the lock, allowed the swans to enter first, and raised the paddles very slowly to fill the chamber. Top gates opened, the swans sailed regally out to be joined by father swan above.

We saw then next day happily enjoying their new pound!

Aren't boaters wonderful?



More about England

Following the article about Chocolate Charlie and n/b ENGLAND in our last edition, here is some further information from member Steven Bates...



England in Chester Locks in 1940s

Photo Steven Bates

I was interested to read the recent article in Grand Trunk as I am the current custodian of the historic narrowboat 'England'.

We think Charlie had 'England' after July 1938..

England was built in 1904 as a iron composite fore-cabined horse boat at Saltey for Fellows Morton and Clayton and was named the 'Germany', fleet number 99.

On the outbreak of first world war August 1914 it was renamed the 'England' fleet number 99.



England to-day

Photo Steven Bates

In December 1937 'England' was one of 12 horse boats to be converted to a motor boat and fitted with a 9hp Bolinder engine and issued fleet number 340, it retained its fore cabin which is possibly the reason he was given this one with a large family?

Steven Bates

A Kayaker who sparked midnight tunnel rescue mission:

Dean Bradford and two friends went on a late night adventure through Harecastle Tunnel at Kidsgrove on the night of June 3rd.

But when Dean, aged 20, failed to call another pal to let them know they had made it out safely, the alarm was raised.

Police, paramedics and the fire services then attended the scene at around midnight.

Dean, who filmed the incident on his head-cam, said: "We went when I finished work at 8pm. I was in a kayak and my mates were in a dinghy.

"I paddled all the way through and then had to go back through to get back to Kidsgrove.

"We were 1,300 metres through when we saw a torch behind us. We still had about 45 minutes to go.

"We didn't think that much of it at first and thought it was probably a dog walker. But after half an hour there was a lot of lights in front of us.

"We weren't stuck but I was supposed to ring a friend to say that we were out. It took us a lot longer than anticipated so my friend got worried and called 999.

"I was in front and got out first and explained what had gone on. The Hazardous Area Response Team sent a dinghy in and towed my mates in. They would have made it out on their own in another 20 minutes or so.

"I'm very sorry to the emergency services for wasting their time. We were never in any trouble. It was a massive response.

"I've done some training with the fire service before and my old boss saw me. He gave me a bit of a telling off."

The trio were passed into the care of waiting paramedics who checked them over and discharged them at the scene.

A West Midlands Ambulance Service spokeswoman confirmed one ambulance and two paramedic officers attended the incident.



She said: "On crews' arrival, fire colleagues were already in the water on a boat to rescue the trapped kayakers. Three men were all safely recovered from the canal.

"The men were handed over to ambulance staff for assessment. None of the patients were believed to have been submerged in the water and were discharged at the scene."

A Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service spokesman said: "A water rescue unit from Newcastle was sent to the tunnel's northern portal along with three pumps - with a further appliance being sent to the southern portal on standby.

"Three males - two in a dingy and one in a kayak - were led to safety by our powered inflatable dinghy. They were then handed over to WMAS for check-ups before being discharged."

A Staffordshire Police spokesman said: "We were called shortly after 11.30pm to reports of people being trapped whilst kayaking in the Harecastle Tunnel in Kidsgrove.

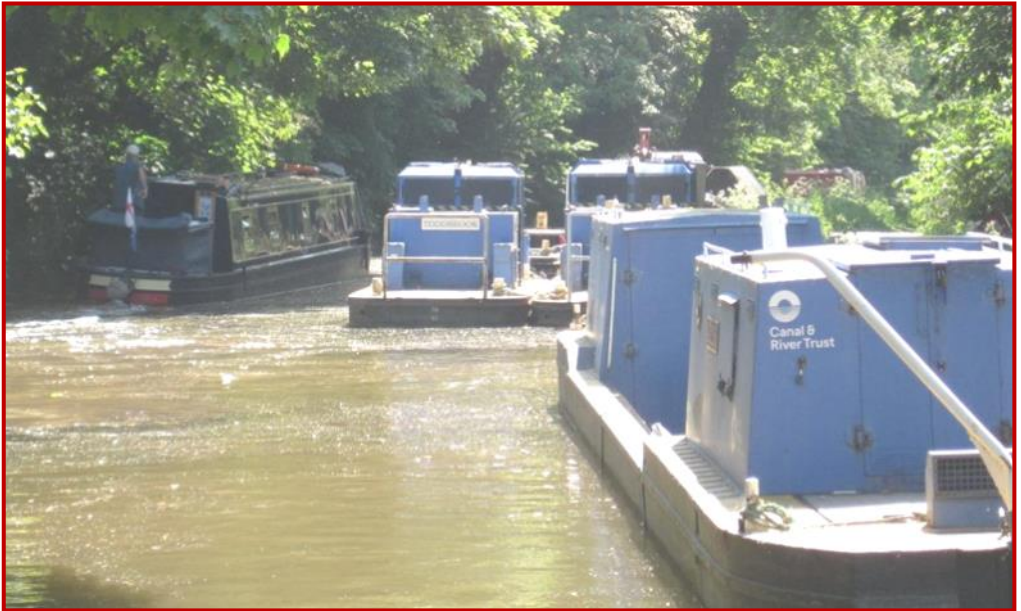
"Officers supported colleagues from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue in ensuring the three males were led to safety. They were then handed over to WMAS for check-up before being discharged."

From Stokeon Trent Live, 05/06/2020

In search of a Milepost

Now that we are allowed to cruise for short daily trips, we set off to take a photo of milepost 79/13 for the T&MCS website. Off we went down the Middlewich Branch to Wardle Lock, only to find one top paddle out of order and the lock was empty. After what seemed like a very long time the lock filled and we proceeded. I don't think that the boat which turned up behind us was impressed!

We were pleased to see the new tenants of the former Middlewich Narrow-boats site were there and working on their boats. They seemed a very cheery lot as they sent us on our way down the three locks. Big Lock next, and just for once it was almost full. It was sad to see the eponymous hostelry with boarded up windows and scaffolding (it was in the throes of refurbishment when lockdown hit).



Now onto my favourite stretch of canal in the whole system, winding peacefully along through verdant foliage and dappled sunshine. We met a moving boat on a curve; it was unfortunate the CRT had double-moored their work-boats on this same curve when lockdown had forced them to abandon their work strengthening the towpath. The two craft gave each other a friendly nudge and a few wry comments were exchanged.

Now we should be able to locate our milepost. We checked the map carefully and peered into the hedgerow- it had vanished into thin air! We decided to moor up on the flash for lunch, turn and make a further attempt on the return journey. Unfortunately the flash was as full of boats as a festival site. We carried on and turned in the entrance to Park Farm Marina (it doesn't actually say you can't!), moored up and I made lunch. Roger set off to photograph the nearby milepost, here, which is by the path down from a road. He discovered this in good condition, but festooned with cable-ties left from a poster. His Swiss army knife soon dealt with these!



We checked a slightly newer map, only to discover the missing milepost appeared to have moved, so we tried again. Success! Hidden among the cow parsley with only the top visible if you looked hard, was our milepost.

Photos taken and chocolate biscuits consumed by way of celebration- now what excuse can we find to go boating next week?



Margaret English

Big Lock Tail Bridge is removed for Refurbishment

On 11th June, after supporting stonework was chipped away, the dangerous (but listed) bridge was lovingly cradled in steel girders and removed.

***READY TO
BEGIN!***



***GRIDERS
IN PLACE
AND
ROPES AT-
TACHED***

Picture 1, Angie McDonald

Picture 2 Mike Walton



Everyone held their breath as the huge crane took the strain, and the delicate old bridge rose up into the threatening sky. The onlookers burst into applause and then held their breath as the bridge swung out and over the houses built where the old factory used to be.

Photo Margaret English



Over she goes!

The old bridge should return in 12 months or so—in the meantime....see back page!

And safely onto the lorry

Photos M. E



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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.

Next Season's Talks (Fingers crossed!)

!6th 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

Wanted – Milepost photos

(recent + installing/unveiling + pre-war)

With the gradual loosening of the covid-19 lockdown, we have resumed taking pictures of our local mileposts. This has meant that our website now has recent photographs of all the mileposts North of Harecastle Tunnel. We also have a stock of Harry Arnold's photographs (courtesy of *Waterway Images*) of some of the unveiling ceremonies, but (for example) we still need unveiling photographs for 3 of the 4 replacement mileposts on this section.

We are very lucky that Phil Myott allows us to host a copy of his old website (where he photographed all the mileposts between 2002 and 2006 (*follow the link on the "Mileposts" page of our website*)). However we would really like to have a full set of more recent photographs of all the mileposts, as well as photographs of the original posts being re-installed and replacement posts being installed and unveiled. Ideally we would also like some pre-war photographs of the original posts before they were removed (and many lost), although this is a very tall order!

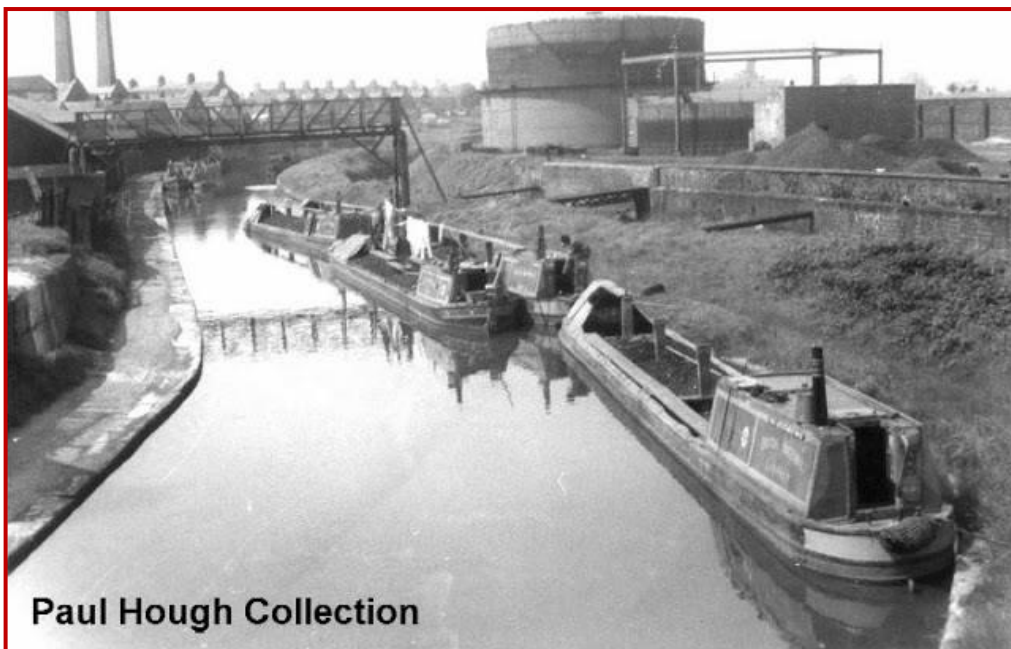
So, how can you help? First by looking at your old photograph albums to see if you have any pictures of mileposts pre-war (I know, that's over 80 years ago!), or of mileposts and/or plaques being installed or unveiled (a mere 35-40 years ago). We are looking for photographs of mileposts anywhere along the canal, as we have no pre-war photos and few of installation and unveiling of replacement mileposts (or of the re-installation of original ones). If you can send us an electronic copy of the original, that would be great. Otherwise I suggest you contact us first, so that we can check if we already have something similar, before you go to the expense and risk of posting the original.

Secondly by going for a walk / cruise and taking photographs of mileposts/plaques. Unsurprisingly we have more of these in stock, but still need photographs of most mileposts/plaques South of Harecastle Tunnel (*follow the "Mileposts Index" link on the "Mileposts" page of our website to see those pictures we already have*). At the moment we need recent photographs for all posts from Derwent Mouth to Harecastle Tunnel except 3/89, 7/85, 9/83, 16/72, 28/64, 48,44 and 61/31 (although even those you may get a better picture than we already have!).

Roger Evans

The 'Workaday' Trent & Mersey through Middlewich in 1960s

Archetypal 'old Middlewich' and a view of boats carrying coke pictured here. This is the reality of that 'lovely old town' which everyone remembers (or thinks they remember) - a grimy, shabby, work-a-day place full of smoking chimneys - 'a mean old town' as Dr Johnson is said to have described it..



That coke is its way to Middlewich Gasworks, which can be seen in the right background, with piles of the black stuff already waiting in the yard to be used. The use of coke to make town gas can lead to a little confusion as, when gas production first started, it was made from coal and coke was one of the by-products.

However, improvements made later meant that town gas could be produced from other substances such as oil, for example, and coke which had been made as a by-product of other industrial processes. In other words, rather than making coke, Middlewich Gas Works was, by this time using it to make town gas.

At the time this photograph was taken (probably early to mid-1960s) most of the Gasworks, once the property of the Middlewich Gas Light & Coke Company but by now the province of the North Western Gas Board, had disappeared. This was probably as a result of the switch from using coal to using coke to make the gas.

But could they really be manufacturing town gas in that one small brick building? And how did they get the coke to the works? Did they use barrows to wheel it across that rickety-looking bridge across the River Croco and through that gap in the wall? If they did it would have taken them the whole day, if not more, to unload five boat loads. It 's much more likely that, by this date, they used a tipper truck of some kind and made the short journey from the gasworks, past the old corn mill (now Town Bridge Motors) and along the canal side to empty the boats.

Even so it would still have been a time-consuming and tricky process. It could be that coke, in fact, be destined not for the Gas Works, but for Seddon's Salt Works on the other side of the canal (it was still in operation until 1967). You can just make out, under the pipe-bridge which carried the coal gas into town, more canal boats. Were they unloading at Seddon's and were the boats in the foreground awaiting their turn?

The difficulty with that theory is that, so far as we know, the salt works in Middlewich always used coal (and cheap, low-grade coal too) rather than coke to make salt. So we have to come to the conclusion that those boats were indeed carrying coke to Middlewich Gas Works. Unless, of course, the black stuff in the boats is coal and not coke. But we could go on for ever like this..

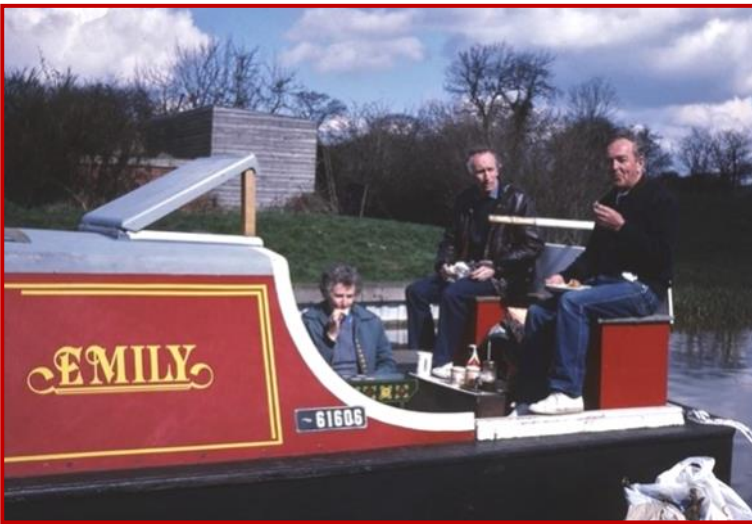
Just a few years later the whole process would be just a memory with the introduction of North Sea Gas. That little brick building, though, survives. It's very much altered and goes under the name of 'Cheshire House' Note that the boats all carry the British Waterways livery of blue and yellow. We've just had to say goodbye to British Waterways, which has been replaced by the Canal & River Trust.

Posted by SALT TOWN PRODUCTIONS at Thursday, August 02, 2012
From The Middlewich Diary
by Dave Roberts

Happy Days!

It was interesting to read the article about “Chocolate Charlie” in the last edition of Grand Trunk which reminded us of our first 2-week holiday on our narrowboat “Emily” when we cruised to the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port and went aboard Charlie’s boat “Mendip”.

Our cruise took place at the end of March 1988 and we were joined by Annette’s Mum and Dad. They hadn’t seen NB Emily before nor had they been to Anderton Marina where we were moored. Dad wrote in the log “Arrived at the marina which was packed with boats – where then was NB Emily? In accordance with previous advice we were told to look for a smoking chimney; sure enough on surveying the scene there was one vessel with a chimney resembling a nuclear test explosion. A sigh of relief – we knew we were in the right place.”



Terry and visiting parent enjoy lunch on board

After the transfer of what seemed like at least six tons of stores, clothing and bedding we set off towards Middlewich and quoting from the log: “We were greeted at many places along the canal by many men who were seated on little stools at intervals along the canal bank and who raised long

poles in salute as we passed by!” We moored at Middlewich and started to explore the town but this was curtailed when a light shower of rain began. Then someone up above opened the valve fully and it wasn’t long before the main street closely resembled the canal and water was running right through the butcher’s shop taking all his sawdust with it.

After going up the Middlewich locks and cruising along the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal we turned right at Barbridge Junction. As we got closer to Ellesmere Port we passed mainly petrochemical and other industrial premises. At the Waterways Museum we moored at the only vacant berth behind the exhibition boats but a bit later the Museum staff

moved an ice-breaker which enabled us to moor just inside the Museum complex.



Designed by Thomas Telford the docks were still being used until the 1950s. Within the Museum site there were locks, basins, docks, listed Victorian buildings, stables, a blacksmith's forge and many historic boats.

Emily moored at Ellesmere Port

Whilst aboard “Mendip” we noticed there was liquid in the bilges and someone said “it must be water, it can’t be the locally brewed Greenhall Whitley beer – it’s got a head on it!” Terry particularly liked the engine shed where the steam hydraulic pumps were working but the boss was bemoaning the fact that someone had pinched a gauge the day before. We really enjoyed the Museum and were very glad that we had visited it. Terry had been advised that there was a good fish and chip shop nearby and we set off in the evening and found one in the main street. A query as to the variety of fish available brought forth the retort that they had “fish” and that as far as they were concerned “fish was fish” and that was all that there was to it. We finished up with what looked like cod but was probably coley which quickly disappeared along with a mountain of chips!

To be continued.

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

One of our day trips was to locate newly decorated pipe bridges near Winsham Wharf.....

Margaret English



The metalwork celebrates the salt and chemical industries so important in the area. At the moment 2 of the bridges are decorated in this way, with the others in the series prepared ready for the addition of their artwork. They make quite a difference to this previously rather gloomy section of the T&M.



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 2020 edition is **01/09/2020**.

TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL SOCIETY
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Registered Office: 10 Long Lane, Middlewich, CW10 0BL
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OFFICERS

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VICE-PRESIDENTS	Steve Guest, Malcolm Gray, Roger Davies-Lee
CHAIRMAN	Roger Evans, 10 Long Lane, Middlewich, CW10 0BL Tel:01606 834471 Email: rogermartinevans@hotmail.com <i>See also Treasurer</i>
DEPUTY CHAIRMAN AND SOCIAL EVENTS OFFICER	Gillian Watson, St. Anns House, 107 St Ann's Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 0AA Tel:01606-835606 Email: gillian.watson@me.com
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY, SECRETARY AND GRAND TRUNK EDITOR	Margaret English, 10 Long Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 0BL Tel: 01606-834471 Email: margaretetlm@hotmail.com
COMMITTEE MEMBER	John Tackley, River View, Leigh's Brow, Barnton, Northwich, CW8 4HT Tel: 01606 76204 Email jtackley@hotmail.com
TREASURER and WEB-SITE	Roger Evans, 10 Long Lane Middlewich, CW10 0BL Tel:01606 834471 Email: rogermartinevans@hotmail.com
MINUTES SECRETARY	Paula Jackson, 37 Weaverham Road, Sandiway CW8 2NJ Tel: 07740356286 Email paula.dreamcatcher@hotmail.co.uk
BURSLEM PORT REPRESENTATIVE	David Dumbelton, 32 The Lea, Trentham, Stoke on Trent, ST4 8DY Tel: 01782-641765, Email: david.dumbelton@gmail.com



***The Trent & Mersey Canal Society is proud to
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Bringing Boats Back to Burslem

Big Lock's temporary footbridge remains



***Big Lock Public
House looks sadly
on-
In the middle of
refurbishment
when lockdown
hit***