

GRAND TRUNK



Hedge trimming on a November Afternoon

(You can just about see the men)

See P.8

Photo Roger Evans

January/February 2021

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

We have just returned from a twice shortened New Year cruise. Originally we planned to see the New Year in on the Montgomery Canal. Then the Covid-19 "Tiers" changed and we could no longer leave Cheshire, so we turned after Wrenbury, make a side trip to Beeston, and then planned to pass home and head North on the Trent and Mersey towards Preston Brook.

However, whilst we were at Beeston, "Lockdown" was announced, so we had to head straight home instead. The cruise was cold but very enjoyable. [We had hoped to take some pictures of the mended culvert near Broken Cross, and the replacement Railway Bridge near Whatcroft Hall for use in this issue of Grand Trunk.]



Currently we are concerned about 2 proposals by CRT which could impact future cruising on our canal. You can see details of the first proposal in John Tackley's article on page 21, but basically CRT are considering closing Anderton Lift for "2 seasons" to carry out major repairs. Nothing definite yet, but very worrying.

The other CRT proposal is to reduce the hours when we can use Harecastle Tunnel and to insist the all passages are pre-booked online. During Summer 2020 there were far fewer boats moving than usual (because of the Covid-19 crisis) so CRT decided to offer much reduced hours (8-12 on only 4 days a week in June; 8-2 daily from July to October) and insisted that all passages were pre-booked. We have written asking that they re-instate the previous hours (8am-5pm Spring & Autumn, 8am-6pm Summer) for 2021, and stop insisting on pre-booking.

We have pointed out that not everybody can book online from their boat; that estimating an arrival time accurately in advance is very difficult especially when coming up the 26 Cheshire Locks, and that having to work to a timetable planned in advance is against the spirit of canal boating for many people.

Editorial

I'm not going to say 'happy' but 'hopeful' New Year!

Chairman Roger has already told you about the changes to our pitifully short New Year cruise. We had no internet access beside Beeston Castle, so were in happy ignorance.



It was very cold, icy, dangerous and wonderful! On coming back into internet access we discovered we were now in tier 4 and returned home without delay. We enjoyed working the double locks on the Chester Canal, even though Bunbury Staircase seemed to have been constructed in the middle of a sheet of glass (we were very careful)! We do realise that we are much luckier than a lot of folk as our beloved boat resides at the bottom of our garden and is an extension of our home; so that is where the 'hopeful' comes in— we hope to finish our cruise very soon—when everyone is safe and the crisis is over!

Now, of course, we are in full lockdown again and carefree boating seems a world away. Towpaths remain busy as walkers take their daily exercise. Enjoy them and take care!

I apologise for the lack of information on our Southern section in this edition. We are forbidden to travel far (at the moment, at all), and I no longer have reporters in that area. I am aware there was a pollution incident which should have been mentioned, but I could find no details about what actually happened.

All contributions to this magazine are welcome, just a few lines always makes my day.

Please bring me up to date on Southern matters!

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 March/April 2021 edition is **22/02/2021**.

Bridge 99 – the bridge to nowhere

Due to travel restrictions last autumn we spent time on the Kennet & Avon Canal rather than by the canals in France. We really enjoyed the lovely Wiltshire countryside especially between Wilton Water and Little Bedwyn. Close to the historic Crofton Pumping Station which supplies water to the



Little Bedwyn Lock

summit level is Bridge 99. It is alleged to be the first skew bridge designed and built by the canal engineer John Rennie and was built in about 1807 following a masterplan devised by the great landscape gardener Capability Brown. The canal passed through the grounds of Tottenham House, owned by the Earl of Ailesbury, and Brown planned to link the Grand Avenue in the Savernake Forest with another Avenue in Wilton Brail so that

guests from Tottenham House could ride between the two. Although the bridge was positioned to make this connection, the two rides were never actually joined up. Usually locks and bridges were built next to each other but Bridge 99 was built mid-way between two locks. The reason for this was so that the upper classes riding their horses over the bridge wouldn't hear the boatmen's colourful language as they rode by!

Crossing the bridge today leads to a metal fence beyond which is the railway that runs from London to the West Country so it really is a bridge to nowhere. On top of the bridge there are four large anti-tank traps as during World War 2 the Kennet & Avon Canal formed part of the defence against attack by Nazi Germany. It was called GHQ Stop Line Blue and these anti-tank traps were placed along the waterway to prevent German troops from crossing the canal bridges (*see top of next page*). There are still many concrete pillboxes to be seen between the canal and the railway line and these were to deter German troops gaining access to the railway should they have invaded.



We visited the village of Wootton Rivers which is a pretty place with many half-timbered thatched cottages and the Kennet & Avon Canal runs through the southern end of the village. Beside the bottom lock there is a large lock-cottage (*picture below*) and both of these featured in the BBC TV series



"The River". There were six episodes which were shown on the television during the autumn of 1988. It was a comedy and featured a very young-looking David Essex who played the character of Davey Jackson - a lovable, cockney lock keeper on a canal near the fictional village of Chumley-on-the-Water.

There are popular moorings above and below the lock with many occupied by wide-beamed boats but we don't know how they would manage to pass each other when travelling in some of the narrow sections of this canal.

Closer to our mooring between Newbury and Reading we saw a little white cruiser moored called "Percy Veere" – something we all need to continue doing!

Annette & Terry (NB Emily and Steamboat Sidney, Kennet & Avon Canal)

The article produced below was written by Harry Arnold in 1980, shortly after the society purchased the joshier. It was originally printed in Grand Trunk July 1980.

I am grateful to Anette and Terry (see p.5) for reminding me that this picture of Kangaroo could be found in Grand Trunk Mrach/April 1992.

More on Kangaroo

After nationalisation of and the subsequent takeover of the FMC Fleet by The Docks and Inland Waterways Executive *Kangaroo* seems to have become based with the Northern Fleet on the Trent & Mersey at Anderton. Her current Lister diesel engine was probably installed in the 1950s and she was at sometime in this period transferred to the BWB maintenance fleet in their Northwich area.

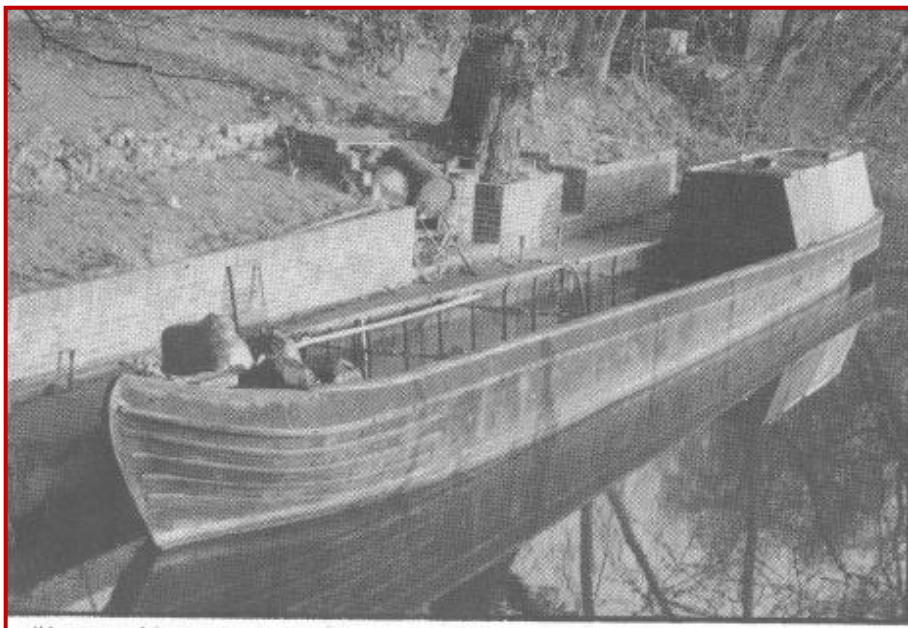
I took a photograph of her at the top of Northgate Locks, Chester- paired with an unknown butty and both fully loaded with maintenance materials- on 20th July 1963. She had been re-registered and carried the new registration number Northwich no. 78. Her livery was then the current BWB blue lined out in yellow and she carried the fleet number 735/57.

Kangaroo was of course worked by one of our best known boatmen, Charlie Adams of *Mendip* fame. Charlie had her with the butty *Norfolk* at the end of the last war. I have a toll ticket in my collection recording a trip from Ellesmere Port to Wolverhampton starting on 30th October 1944; when Charlie took 20 tons of flour aboard *Kangaroo* and 24 tons on the *Norfolk*.

Talking to Charlie about *Kangaroo*, he told me that her first skipper was his uncle, Alf Alcott; followed by Jack Jones, Arthur Green and Bill Taylor, before he took her over. After this he recalls that she lay around Sherborne Street Wharf in Birmingham for about seven years, for some reason. The last time he can remember her being used in traffic was a couple of trips with George Harris and an ill-starred voyage from Manchester to Wolverhampton with 18 tons of aluminium. There were some problems and she eventually changed skippers and was taken on from Middlewich by Harry Theobald.

I have a number of other contacts to see with the possibility of filling in more accurate dates and details- time permitting- of the boat's history. Registration details are hopefully forthcoming also. If you can help, please let me know. Even if it is just a recollection of seeing her in some location in the past on a particular date.

Harry Arnold



***Kangaroo just before her departure after being sold
to new owners by the Society***

A comment on milepost 91/1

Shortly after moving to Shardlow 26 years ago, milepost 91/1 was removed to allow for the building of a bridge for the new route of the A50 to cross the canal. It was subsequently replaced, but in the wrong place.

I regularly run on the towpath (even at my advanced years!) between Shardlow and Barrow on Trent, and do boring things involving mileposts and stopwatches, and am confident from my timings that the milepost is closer to Shardlow than it should be. By my calculations it should be just above the A50 bridge, not below it.

Do you have anyone with access to original drawings, or who could check its position?

John Ledbury

Can anyone help Mr Ledbury?

Also, we have no picture of this milepost– does anyone have one they could send for the website?

Spillway walk

On Thursday 26th November (or should that be Tiers-day?), we varied our usual allowed exercise pattern and went for a rather muddy walk along the good old T&M from Big Lock to bridge 176. We were intrigued by the spillway just beyond the flash. This was inserted a couple of years ago after the canal over topped here in a year marked by much more serious incidents elsewhere. The spillway is always fun to walk over as the surface is composed of a strong mesh and the water can be seen and heard flowing underneath it.



Since our last jaunt in that direction, the escaping torrent had obviously threatened to wash away the bank separating canal from river. A large white plastic sheet had been secured to the bank by lamp-irons to form a sort of water slide, down which the excess water was tumbling into the river Dane. An interesting but hardly long-term solution!

We also came across 5 operatives in bright orange uniform cutting back the towpath-side hedge- all in a neat line (both hedge and workers); it is good to know our canal is cared for. If you look very hard you can see the hedge-trimmers on the front cover.

Margaret English

Facing page.....Team leader John Lawson and his trusty helper (Dave) completed the numbering on lock 65 (see p. 16)- this pair of locks is now definitely finished!

WANTED

Social Secretary

Our current incumbent, Gillian Watson, has been in post for 9 years and feels that a fresh approach is needed. She will not, therefore organise any more talks (although the ones cancelled by the pandemic have merely been postponed!).

Gillian has worked extremely hard over the years, soldiering on through venue changes and unavoidable cancellations. She searched tirelessly for new and exciting speakers, and will be greatly missed.

Duties consist of organising a venue and series of talks (normally held on 3rd Friday of each calendar month) between October and April.

In recent years Gillian has also arranged a Christmas Meal at the beginning of December, liaising with the relevant landlord.

The post includes a seat on the Society Committee. The committee *normally* meet bi-monthly at a member's home to discuss Society matters. Attendance would not be obligatory however.

Expressions of interest to Roger or Margaret please. Gillian is happy to help the successful applicant to find their feet.



The Culvert Calamity

At the beginning of November, a culvert between bridges 184 and 185 (just North of Ye Olde Broken Cross pub, Northwich) developed a serious leak and damaged the towpath. It was not possible to assess the extent of the problem without de-watering the canal, so arrangements were made to call in contractors. Meanwhile, both canal and towpath were closed (did I hear you say 'here we go again'?).

Now into lockdown 2, pumps were set up and dams put into place on either side of the troublesome culvert. Before the canal could be dewatered, a fish rescue had to take place. This was carried out on 12th November, and the section was dewatered so that the damage could be inspected.

By the end of November, working with the local authority, it had been established that the timber box culvert between Bridge 184 and Bridge 185, Grif-fiths, needed completely replacing. If the culvert is of the same approximate age as the Trent & Mersey Canal, it had done rather well!

Due to the constrained nature of the site, and not helped by the presence of a third-party gas main close to the working area, it became apparent that starting works to replace the timber box culvert was going to be more difficult than first anticipated. Permission needed to be obtained from the third-party gas company before CRT could start onsite and gain a better understating of timescales of the repair. In the meantime, contractors had mobilised construction plant and had been instructed to make a start on the repairs as soon as the go-ahead was obtained from the third-party gas company.

Fortunately, the gas company speedily gave permission for work to go ahead. CRT's contractors needed to excavate the canal bed before replacing the culvert over the following weeks. CRT promised to make every effort to reopen both navigation and towpath as soon as possible, including working 7 days a week.

The contractors removed the old culvert, cleared part of the canal bed and formed a concrete pad along the line of the new culvert. They then took down the towpath wash wall over the next couple of days and used a small excavator to remove part of the towpath. Then it was time to install the new pipe and concrete surround before moving their attention to the upstream and downstream connections and reinstating the bed.

The new pipe was installed on 16th December, with further works including bed repairs due to be completed over that weekend. Inspections were carried out on Monday 21st December and it was determined that the section of canal could be rewatered. The test period was successful (hooray) and the canal was re-opened to navigation on 23rd December at 4pm.

Further work still needs to be done on the offside banking, with access to the materials for this. The towpath therefore has to remain closed and there will be some navigation restrictions in the New Year.

It makes a pleasant change to say this- well done CRT!



The T&M between Bridges 184 and 185

I couldn't get a picture of the dewatered canal as the towpath is closed This one was taken by Brian Smith-Goose in 2007.....ED

Canal (almost) jigsaws



We saw an item on BBC Midlands recently about a small art gallery in Burslem which is marketing four jigsaw puzzles themed on Stoke on Trent. Two of these show potteries adjacent to a canal.

We contacted **Barewall Art Gallery** and they sent a picture illustrating one of the puzzles. They are for sale at £20 each, postage free when you buy two. They also stock some canal pictures.

Their website is www.barewall.co.uk

Angela Marks

Anne's Memory of Christmas Quiz

How many words of **4** letters or more, with **NO PLURALS** and **NO NAMES** can you find in the word below?

My total is **63**- which includes one 7 letter word and four six letter ones.

CHRISTMAS

Have a go-there may be many more!

Anne's words overleaf- don't cheat!

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ALL SOCIAL MEETINGS CANCELLED FOR 2020-21 SEASON!



CANCELLED

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

Above is a picture of our usual meeting venue, don't forget where it is! Unfortunately, because of the restrictions on meetings and social distancing rules, it has been decided that there will be **no** social season this year. Speakers have been asked to defer their interesting talks until 2021-22.

We want you all to be safe!

Anne's Christmas Quiz Words

Words of 4 letters

Arch, cast, cart, chit, chat, cram, cash, char, cist, hair, harm, hiss, hast, hart, itch, mart, mast, mist, mash, mass, rich, rash, star, scat, sati, sash, scar, sari, stir, sham, scam, this, tram, trim, tsar.

Words of 5 letters

Astir, amiss, aitch, charm, chart, crass, chasm, chair, crash, marsh, match, mirth, march, trash, smart, stair, shirt, smash, sitar, scam, scrim, smith, strim.

Words of 6 letters

Mastic, racist, racism, starch

Words of 7 letters

tsarism

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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

Vandalism at Wheelock

On 15th October CRT advised that the shower unit at Wheelock stables (much loved by boaters) had been vandalised. Further reports warned that the damage was considerable and would take some time to fix although the toilet and elsan remained open. No further details were posted.



A month later on 16th November there was mention of fire damage, oh dear!

It just so happened that on 19th November I was attending a Cheshire Locks work party at Wheelock (in the open air and socially distanced-oh and the nice CRT lady bought us mince pies!).

As the only female in the group I trekked to the facilities when nature called. The shower door was not locked. How I wished I had a camera! Then I remembered I had a very new smartphone in my overall pocket. I took my first ever phone picture. So here is a rare picture of the fire damage at Wheelock.

Margaret English

Tourist Attraction?

You will see before you two pictures taken from a canal towpath separated by about 100 yards, or should one say 90 metres?



The first shows the current state of the towpath eastern entrance to Saltersford Tunnel. This Tunnel has a single bore, with boat entrance permitted from the Eastern portal for only 20 minutes in any hour, so most craft have to moor here, or sit in the water to await their turn in the queue and, as can be seen, some

mooring bollards have been provided for waiting craft.

It is a pleasant spot to wait, if you can brave the mud - and - by walking a few yards back, incidentally passing the notice shown in the second illustration, one can see a lovely view of Saltersford Lock and the Weaver Valley below.



Also, immediately beside these obviously inadequate moorings is a canal rarity, a horse trough, provided about 250 years ago for the benefit of the boat horses as they were released from their craft prior to the narrow boats being legged, or, later, drawn by a steam tug, through one of the earliest, and arguably, the wonkiest, tunnel on the whole British canal system.

Horse troughs are a rarity on the canal system because canal horses drank canal water. An old boatman told me, many years ago, that canal horses preferred canal water to fresh water because, as a child, his responsibility was always the family's horse, which he fed and watered on a daily basis.

So, why was the horse water trough provided here. The answer is simple, the canal water here is saline! This is Cheshire. Horses will not drink salty water, so a separate supply was necessary, sourced from a local spring in the adjacent hill.

But - the trough is not maintained, as no one needs it, and, horror of horrors, recently a tree collapsed close by, partially obstructing the navigation. After about a week, when I informed CART that the navigation was obstructed, as no one else who was using the canal had told them and they apparently have no other way of finding out(!), they promptly sent out a team of contractors to clear the towpath and navigation obstruction.

But, where did they put all the trunks, branches and other debris they had cleared, but had not been told to remove, you've guessed it in one. ON TOP OF THE HORSE TROUGH.



They could not really be blamed as they had presumably not been briefed, and the trough was somewhat obscured by brambles.

I think the trough will survive, as it is a hewn stone trough, but if it has been dislodged by the debris, both the supply source and the overflow located beneath the towpath may well have been damaged, because, YES, until that debris was dumped on it, and despite having not being used for its intended purpose for at least 80 years, it still did work!

So, as you put on your boots to moor up your boat on the muddy towpath and read the almost illegible sign which tells you it is an accredited dredging site - that hasn't been used for at least 50 years, to admire the lovely view of the Weaver and Lock, that nobody has told you about, you might glance across the canal and see the steam tug dock, dug almost 200 years ago to accommodate the tunnel tug that you also didn't know anything about, and you might catch a glimpse of the plaque that states the tunnel was reopened by Sir Frank Price after extensive repairs, which isn't true, because he wasn't present when it was reopened, but nobody took the sign down that he was supposed to unveil, then you might have spent an interesting few hours enjoying a break, admiring the scenery, marvelled at the ingeniousness of some brilliant engineers instead of floating in the middle of the canal waiting impatiently for the time to pass until it was time for you to continue on your journey, in ignorance.

So, is there a moral? Neglect, apathy, disinterest, parsimony by those that should be concerned minimise the attraction of a small jewel in our heritage. The criticism is not directed wholly at CRT, they have to cut their cloth to suit government edict and the local council should take much responsibility for the towpath condition, which they would certainly improve if it were their responsibility and they should also be highlighting the elements of local history and geography, as they would if they existed adjacent to their highways or parks or in the middle of a proposed new building site!

We need to maximise our tourist potential, as never before, but the background to this little story could be repeated hundreds of times throughout the country. Public authority indifference, inbuilt reluctance to take decisions, seeking consultants recommendations unnecessarily, certainly lack of funding and an organisational behemoth nor fit for purpose are all conspiring to minimise our nations heritage, achievements, interest and attraction

JohnTackley

Anderton Lift Problems

At a recent Canal and River Trust User Group Forum a statement was issued saying that the Anderton Boat Lift will shortly require major maintenance, comprising new lifting rams, computer control systems and site refurbishment! It was also suggested that the actual Lift would be out of operation for two seasons!!

In response to a question posed at the (Zoom) meeting by Jim Mole, Chair of the River Weaver Navigation Society, asking for further clarification, the written response to his enquiry was:-

“Some major works are needed over the next few years; it has been nearly twenty years since Anderton Lift was restored and reopened and much of the structure and the systems need refurbishment or replacement. We are looking at how best to undertake this work to minimise disruption but there will have to be significant closures.

When we have more detailed plans we'll let people know. We also need to raise funds for the work as it will involve exceptional costs of potentially circa. £5m.”

This is a truly alarming statement and seems ill considered and under researched.

To suggest that £5m. might be needed for refurbishment only 18 years after a £7.5m. complete rebuild of the Lift is unbelievable, as the lift has been only lightly used and under massive supervision to ensure lack of abuse throughout this time.

The initial lift design, similar in theory to the current one, was in use for over 30 years and worked at a faster rate and for much longer hours with much heavier boats. These would be capable of creating much greater impact damage and it is certainly unlikely that it received the planned maintenance the current Lift receives.

Perhaps the greatest difference is that the first lift used ground breaking engineering technology, with all its faults, whereas the current Lift redesign could incorporate all the features that 100 years of hydraulic engineering research and knowledge that are now available to ensure trouble free service. The suggestion that the rams need replacement is also questionable and hugely expensive. I was, (over 60 years ago, it is true), a crane and lift surveyor, whose job it was to approve the safety on site of cranes, lifts and lifting equipment.



I therefore visually inspect, automatically, as closely as I can, from a distance, the ram surfaces, whenever I visit the lift, as I know that was the trouble spot of the original design, and they appear in good order.

We must, in every way possible, challenge the detail of this alarming statement, as a prolonged closure of the Lift will markedly reduce the usage of the River Weaver as a nav-

igation and a tourist playground, and Cheshire will be denied its greatest unrealised tourist asset.

We will be raising these issues with C&RT initially through the medium of the, “Mid-Cheshire Waterways Strategy,” a Committee chaired by Cheshire West and Chester Council, who are intent on deriving the maximum benefit from Cheshire’s multiplicity of Waterways for tourism, sport, exercise, environment and job creation.

Finally, it must be said that the Trent and Mersey Canal Society were the LEADERS in raising the funds and the publicity necessary to RESTORE the Lift. This needed enormous effort which was unreservedly given by so many members, and in which I played a small part, and this effort must not be jeopardised.

I will report further as we learn more.

John Tackley

Picture, Wikipedia

November work party report

On a dry (but rather cold day) the intrepid volunteers finished the painting on locks 65 and 66 and declared them finally completed. Mince pies were consumed in celebration.

No work party in December because it’s Christmas Eve!

As we go to print in a new year, we enter a 3rd lockdown!

TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL SOCIETY
a charity recognised for tax purposes by HMRC

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Bringing Boats Back to Burslem



Wharcroft Railway Bridge is prepared for demolition

Photo taken by Tom Kitching on Spey and reproduced with his permission.

