

GRAND TRUNK



The Swarkestone Canal?

(see pp6/7)

July/August 2021

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

I started writing these notes on the day that we learnt Boris had extended the Covid-19 restrictions beyond the end of June, so they may be more pessimistic than I originally intended!

It is probably no surprise to anybody that we still don't know whether we will be able to hold our Winter Season of talks (due to start on October 15th) at Red Bull Public House. We are unlikely to get a decision from the landlord until all remaining restrictions have been lifted, so the best I can say is "We hope to announce a decision in our next (September/October) edition".



Better news is that our Cheshire Locks working parties continue to make good progress, currently on the Red Bull Flight.

I am also pleased to report that the new booking system for Harecastle Tunnel seems to be working well. Mornings are still "turn up and queue for guaranteed passage", but afternoons are now "pre-book". We booked a 2pm passage (as we knew we couldn't arrive by midday), arrived a few minutes early, were told that we were the only boat booked and waved straight in. About 10 minutes later, another boat (presumably un-booked but allowed in as there was time) entered behind us.

Not on our canal, but we were pleased to see that the leaking and badly warped bottom gates on Stanthorne Lock (Shropshire Union Middlewich Branch) have finally been repaired, although sadly the paddle restrictors on the bottom gates have been left in place so it is still very slow to empty (but now much faster to fill).

Finally, more good news, the original Middlewich Big Lock footbridge has been repaired and replaced (see page 10/11), with the temporary one now being removed. Oh yes, and also, there have been no problems reported with using the narrowed passage past the Soot Hill landslip.

Roger Evans

Grand Trunk

Editorial

Summer seems to have arrived at last! We made our annual trip around the Four Counties Ring in late May after attending the May Cheshire Locks work-party on the way.. There always seems to be different weather on the other side of Harecastle Tunnel, and this trip was no exception. We emerged into heavy rain!



Our trip through Stoke was soggy but fast– everyone else appeared to have moored up. The next day actually started fine, and all the boats started moving again, so we navigated through Stone at a stately pace (the joys of investigating Stone's charity shops seem to have palled). Down came the rain again.

On to the Staffs & Worcs. with everything wet. We squelched through Penkridge, delighted that we had finally learned how to keep the fire simmering all day. Onto The Shroppie, and ready to stop at Wheaton Aston for fuel. By this time it was raining so hard that the drops were bouncing up again, so we aborted refuelling in case we got water in the fuel tank. That day was the first time we had ever stopped early because of the weather!

For me the trip reached its lowest point on the Audlem Flight when I asked a hire-boater not to take the guard off the ratchet when he was winding the paddle up, as it was dangerous. The angry tirade to which I was subjected left me a quivering wreck (not unusual, I know).

As we turned for home onto the Middlewich Branch the sun came out!

We are going round the Cheshire Ring as soon as this is posted– cruising can only get better– or not– I'll let you know!

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 2021 edition is **18/08/2021.**

Branston Lock Holdup

On the Sunday of the May Day holiday weekend I was taking the boat up to Barton Marina to work my shift on the hire boats on the following Tuesday.

All was well until we encountered a small queue of boats waiting to ascend Branston Lock at mid day, just as I was looking forward to my Sunday lunch when we arrived at Barton. A walk up to the lock revealed the reason for the queue – a boat descending the lock was firmly wedged between the bottom gates.

Along with an ever increasing number of other boaters we attempted to free the trapped boat without success. The working assumption was that the boat must be stuck on an underwater obstruction in the lock, but no amount of rocking, pushing, pulling or flushing would shift it an inch in either direction. CRT were called around 13.30 and about an hour later a very pleasant young CRT employee arrived on scene armed with a boat hook (we already had several!).

We went through all of the usual efforts to free the boat again but with the same result, it remained firmly stuck. So, the CRT fast response team were called; two more CRT employees and two more boat hooks arrived at about 4pm. All of the efforts to free the boat were tried again; at one stage we had about 12 people on the front of the boat, full revs on the engine and both top paddles open, all to no avail.



One of the CRT team did manage to get the boat hook around the obstruction, which was on the right hand side of the boat between the counter and the lock gate. We ended up with as many pairs of hands on the boat hook as it would

accommodate and, after much pulling, what looked like a length of half inch half round bar reluctantly appeared from the depths, but the boat still stub-

bornly refused to move. Several blows from a mooring hammer managed to bend the bar sufficiently close to the side of the boat to allow the boat to reverse back into the lock. The lock was refilled, allowing better access to the length of bar which was still attached to the boat somewhere below the counter. A few more hefty blows from the hammer bent it inwards just far enough for us to empty the lock and get the boat out, accompanied by much good natured cheering, it was now well past 5pm with substantial queues either side of the lock.



It still remains a mystery which bit of the boat the metal bar was attached to; it was as if a length of underwater rubbing strake had become partially detached from the boat.

No boat I have seen has a rubbing strake welded to the swim under the counter.

The boat owner was advised to call in to Shobnall Marina, just a couple of miles further on, to see if their dry dock was available so the offending metal bar could be removed.

Anyway we eventually arrived at Barton about 7pm and had a well earned if rather well cooked Sunday lunch.

Also, full marks to the good natured CRT team who had their Sunday afternoon disturbed for what we eventually realised was an issue with the boat rather than the lock.

Dave Brewin

The Swarkestone Canal?

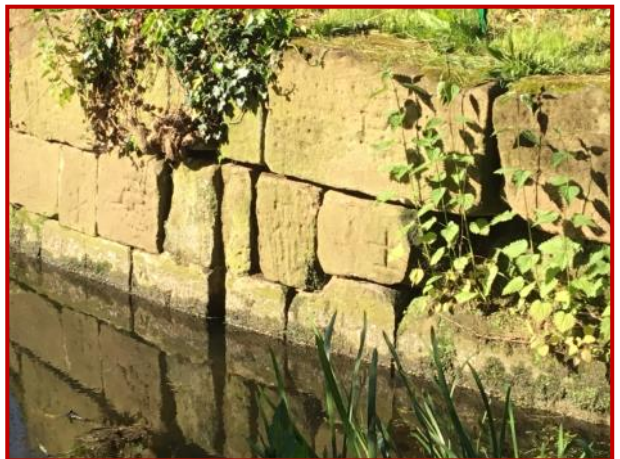
We have been asked for help by a very nice lady.....

I live in Swarkestone, my property is adjacent to the bridge and, in the garden, I have the original entrance to a canal which connected the river with the Trent and Mersey Canal at the top of the village in the late 1700's/early 1800's. Part of the bridge was destroyed in 1795 in flooding, so around the same time period as the canal spur was built, and was possibly designed by Thomas Sykes.



When I moved in the area was full of rubbish and dry. Over the last two years it has been allowed to refill with water and is now a pond, left to be as natural as possible. There is a water source that feeds the pond which I haven't been able to identify as yet.

The stone walls are still visible with the stone-makers marks on them.



I am keen to find out as much information as possible about the canal and would dearly love to find any pictures or maps showing the canal as it was.

If you would be able to ask your members if anyone has information I would be most grateful.

It is an amazing feature to have in the garden and, as part of my investigations into the property, I would love to know more about it.
Thank you

Wendy Matcham

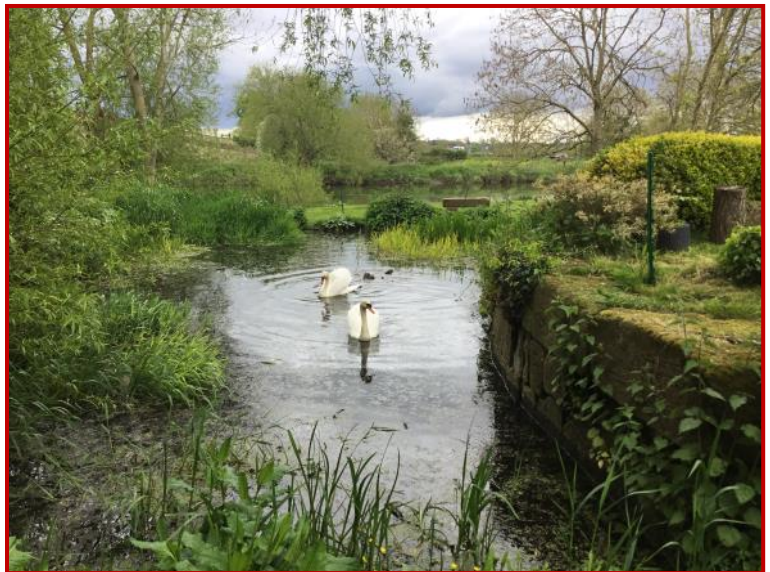
Chairman Roger found the following information:

The canal, whose dividend was limited to 8%, was completed on 30th June 1796. Between Swarkestone and the River Trent there was a three furlong link with 4 locks, and a compensation toll of 1s. had to be paid to The Trent and Mersey Canal Co, on all goods passing along this connection. The connection was a commercial failure.

Jean Lindsay
The Trent and Mersey Canal
1979

Dr Lindsay was in her turn using Charles Hadfield's 1966 book, *Canals of the East Midlands*, as her source material.

*Wendy's
garden
today*



Does anyone know any more?

Plastic Soup, litter, and deprivation of the canals contd....

Dog walkers

Excuse the pun, but this is my pet hate. Dog walkers, on the whole have got better at scooping the poop, However, the dog walkers who anger me more are the pooh tree makers. You can tell it's the same people every day as they, having taken the care to collect and bag the poo, refuse to take it to a bin or home and instead, hang the bag in a tree, or a fence, or throw it in the canal or over some poor person's garden fence or factory wall. There are still some who don't care at all and just continue to let their pets foul the towpaths and leave it for others to step in. The only action here is prosecution, but we need better surveillance. This would have to be paid for: It seems a shame to penalize the good owners. One way forward, would be to bring back the dog licence, at a rate that would not hit the pocket too much, but would fund the collection of fees, and to provide more staff to police. I know this will be a contentious view and not having a dog myself, it is a very tongue in cheek comment.



Household dumping

Fly tipping is not new and is not restricted to the canals. Its an obvious problem, but when we get cycles and motorbike dumped, one has to ask the question why. Are they stolen? Or just a way of getting rid of old property. Again in my recent 2 week holiday I have seen pulled out by boaters at least 6 cycles and two motor bikes. This is addition to general fly tipping. Its not unusual to see a fridge or washing machine floating in the canal.

Youths

I have never been a one for hanging around in gangs, but more and more we find bridge-holes are the drinking dens of the under age and some even more less savoury activities such as drugs. Its not the domain of just the youths. We see syringes, cans and bottle smashed against the non-towpath side of the bridges. One curious issue to me, is the obvious growing of cannabis, the stench which makes you think the authorities turn a blind eye to, or don't have the resource to follow up.

Gardeners

Many canals have allotments and obviously private gardens that back on to the canal. Whilst most of what they discard into the canals is degradable, it does take time and still clogs up the system. Some allotments have skips, where the garden waste can be disposed of, however these are not the norm. I also have pictures of where gardeners just push broken glass, old wheelbarrows and various other structures to the edge of the canal, which in time just get washed into the water. Some of these gardeners, in time of drought, are happy to illegally take water from the canal, so it's time they gave back a bit by cleaning up their act. As a keen gardener myself, I see no reason why this happens. What I can't compost gets recycled or placed in the general household rubbish.

Boaters & Fishermen

You may find it strange for me to include boaters and fishermen, however we are not without fault. I am a keen boater and also fish from time to time. Let look at the boaters. We still today (as stated previously) pump all our waste water into the canal. This contains soap and things like tea dregs. The canals for years have managed to deal with this; however, with the number of craft on the waters today, we need to make better use of Bio degradable liquid washing products. Our engine bays need regular bilging and contain oils and other wastes, and unless the engine bays are well maintained, there will always inevitably be some pollution. So, as you see, we are not without fault. However there is one group of boaters and I again reiterate, it is a handful of people, who refuse to take their household waste to the designated stations provided at regular intervals on the system. Its hard to imagine, why someone would dump their waste, but they do. Its always on the non-towpath side in black bin bags, so it has to be boaters and I think that I can narrow down the class of boaters who do this.

Just missed the last edition.....

A huge welcome to new member:

Chris Jones of Church Lawton



Big Lock Tail Bridge

Cast your minds back to March 2020, when in the height of lockdown, the heritage listed tail bridge was lifted from the canal and went off for repair—away for a year, we were told.

On Thursday 27th May, with the minimum of fanfare, the bridge returned, restored to its pristine self and once more safe to walk across.



First of all the stonework had to be prepared ready to hold the feet of the bridge.



Photos, Mike Walton

Then the bridge was swung over the houses by crane.....



It was manoeuvred into position *very* carefully.....

Photos Richard Breland





Bridge safely back in place,
time for a rest!

Grateful thanks to Mike Walton and Richard Breland, who kindly allowed me to use their pictures, as I confess to being away boating on this momentous occasion!.....Ed.

Photos Richard Breland

Big Lock Volunteers

Canal and River Trust requested 3 members of our Cheshire Locks Work Party to assist a group of young volunteers from the local Sea Cadets and Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme to prepare and then paint the gates on the Big Lock in Middlewich. The youngsters did an excellent job and were very pleased with the work that they were able to complete at this very well known location in their home town.

John Lawson



“THE TRENT AND MERSEY CANAL (A HISTORY) by Ray Shill”

Firstly, I need to make it clear that my comments are based on a low-resolution PDF with an overlaid security watermark that I was sent by the publisher. Hence I cannot comment on the physical book (e.g., the cover, the binding, or the quality of the printed photographs). Also, I found that the need to enlarge the 2-columns of text per page to a readable size on my computer screen meant that I was constantly scrolling up and down which induced a mild virtual motion sickness!

This new (2021) 160-page book (list price £18.99) is by canal historian Ray Shill and is the first full-length history of our canal since Jean Lindsay's 1979 book. Much new historical information has come to light thanks to Ray's diligent research into newspaper records and archives, including private correspondence. The absence of the original canal company's minutes and records (presumed destroyed after the sale to North Staffs Railways) has, of course, continued to mean that much information has to be implied or deduced. There is a comprehensive bibliography of all Ray's sources even including an acknowledgment to me (for simply answering a few questions by email!). However there are few references within the body of the book (and no “Notes” section at the back) so it is impossible to know which source was used for the vast majority of facts quoted.

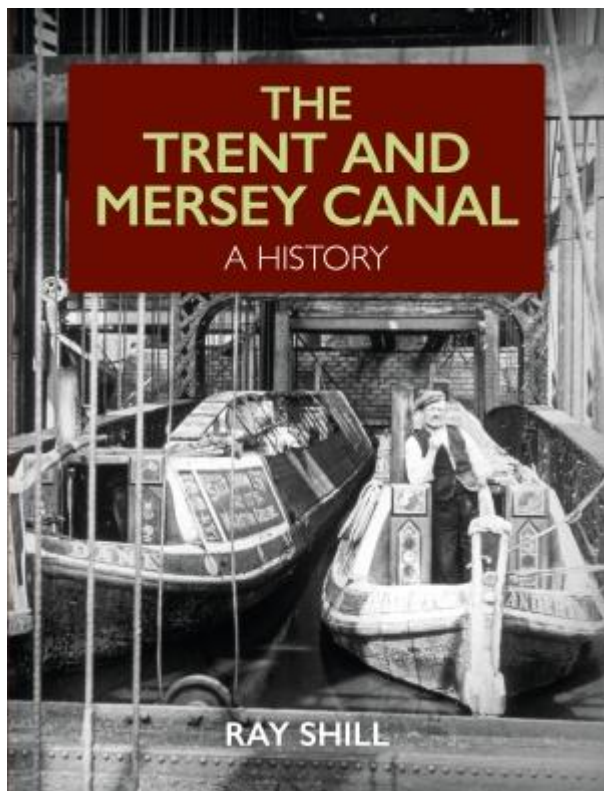
The book opens with a 7-page chapter on the discussions leading to the creation of our canal which was so full of detail that I found it a bit hard going. Then come separate chapters on “Engineering and Infrastructure” (20-pages), “Building the Branches” (10-pages), “Development and Improvement” (24-pages), and “Railways and Railway Ownership” (24-pages). These formed the “meat” of the book as far as I was concerned and I enjoyed reading them very much.

Next comes the largest chapter, by far, “Facets of Trade” (36-pages) which was absolutely packed with small details. Sadly I found this chapter to be the least interesting personally as I wanted to read more about the physical track of the canal, but others may disagree. Then comes “Canal People” (8-pages) which starts with James Brindley and works down to end with ordinary workers and the murder of Christina Collins. Finally there is “Decline and Restoration” (21-pages) which I found very interesting. This chapter brings us right up-to-date with mention of HS2 and both the Uttoxeter and Burslem Arm restoration projects.

One thing that annoyed me throughout was the lack of a date (even very roughly) on most photographs. For example on page 27 the photo captioned “Preston Brook Tunnel, North End” is in colour and could be taken to be a recent photograph. However the building above the tunnel mouth (originally the tunnel-keeper’s house) was, in fact, demolished many years ago.

Overall, I enjoyed the book (despite my niggles above) and look forward to seeing a printed copy to fully enjoy the photographs. However I will NOT be throwing away my copy of Jean Lindsay’s book.

Roger Evans



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Join Us on a Canal Work Party

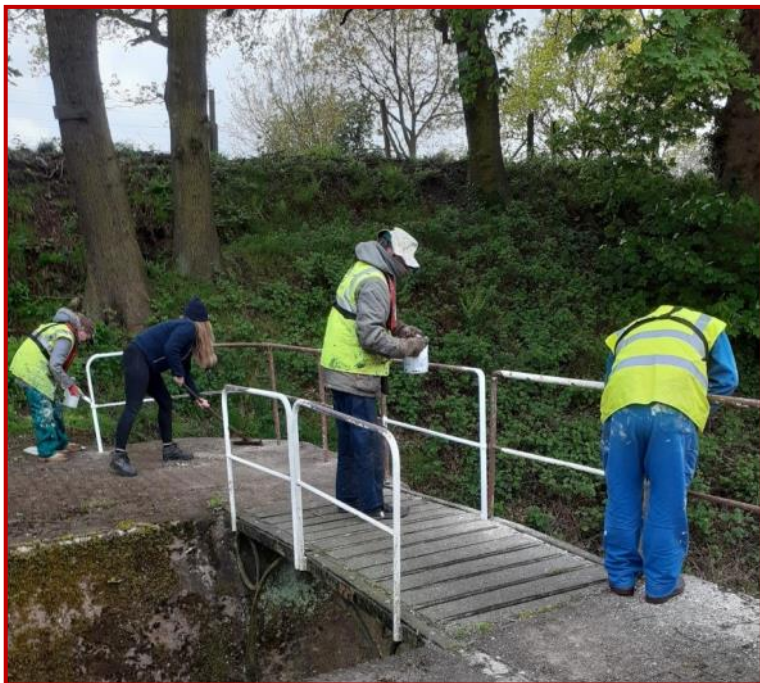
Cheshire Locks, Trent & Mersey Canal
Monthly work party on the third Thursday each month
Jointly with IWA North Staffs & South Cheshire

WE ARE BACK!

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.

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



May Work Party-

work in progress
on Lock 44.

We had 7 volunteers braving the rain. Good progress made preparing and finally painting the lock bridge rails and paddle gear

June Work Party

Lock 44 done!





**ALL SOCIAL MEET-
INGS CANCELLED
FOR 2020-21 SEA-
SON!**

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

We hope to restart meetings Autumn 2021 (Boris and venue permitting-
Watch this space!)

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.

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Burslem Port Progress

The most significant development recently has been the awarding of Planning Permission to Eden Valley Properties for the construction of about 150 homes on the former Co-op Bakery Site. We were instrumental in getting this land scheduled for housing way back in the early days of our project and so it is good to see this idea come to fruition. The development includes a wall along the line of the offside of the waterway and there is room for our restored waterway to follow a new line alongside the embankment. There are still some issues to be resolved but we look forward to working with the developers in the near future.

Since the appointment of Moss Naylor Young (MNY) as our consultants, things are moving along well. A revised masterplan is in preparation and will be ready by the end of July. This will take into account a wider section beside part of the old Coop Bakery site than that suggested in the 2011 AECOM Engineering Study. It will include revised costings.

The Footsteps project, much delayed by Covid, to create a pathway along the line of the former towpath, will get under way again in July. Working parties will resume to prepare the ground by clearing vegetation and picking up litter. The actual laying of the path will begin on the 14th August and run through to the Bank Holiday at the end of the month.

Local architects Ellis Hillman have been appointed to work on the development of the wharf and warehouse site, using the money obtained from the

Architectural Heritage Fund. This will include detailed proposals for the creation of new community facilities on this important part of the waterway.

We have revised the structure of the Trust to include a number of semi-autonomous sub-committees to work on various aspects of the project. One is responsible for acquiring the land needed to recreate the waterway. This involves several landowners, including the City of Stoke and Severn Trent. Another is progressing the idea of the Trust becoming a Registered Charity. This is necessary as many institutions which provide funds for schemes such as ours insist on full charity status.

We continue to benefit from our supporters who are buying Potto Lotto tickets. This gives us much needed monthly funds. If you would like to help, you can join the scheme by going to www.pottolotto.co.uk.

Sadly, we are losing the services of two men who have made a substantial commitment to the Trust. We have benefitted from the advice of Bryan Carnes MBE since the Trust was established. His local knowledge and wise suggestions have helped us a great deal. We thank him and wish him well for the future.

We will also miss the contribution of our Trustee Eifion Jones whose relocation to Wales makes his continuing involvement impractical. We thank him too, especially for his help with the Footsteps project, and wish him good fortune in his new circumstances. These two departures mean we need to seek replacements, so if you can help, please contact me.

Roger Savage

June 2021



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

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem

The Trust seeks to reopen the Burslem Branch Canal, creating new waterside facilities to deliver sustainable leisure, tourism and thus employment.



At the end of May, the redundant housing of a old pipe was removed from over the T&M just above Crow's Nest Lock.

It was so big that it was nicknamed:

RMS TITANIC

Photos by Margaret English



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

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

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem

And finally.....

Big Lock Tail Bridge is officially re-opened!



I hope the spectators peeping over the wall enjoyed the ceremony!

Photo Mike Walton