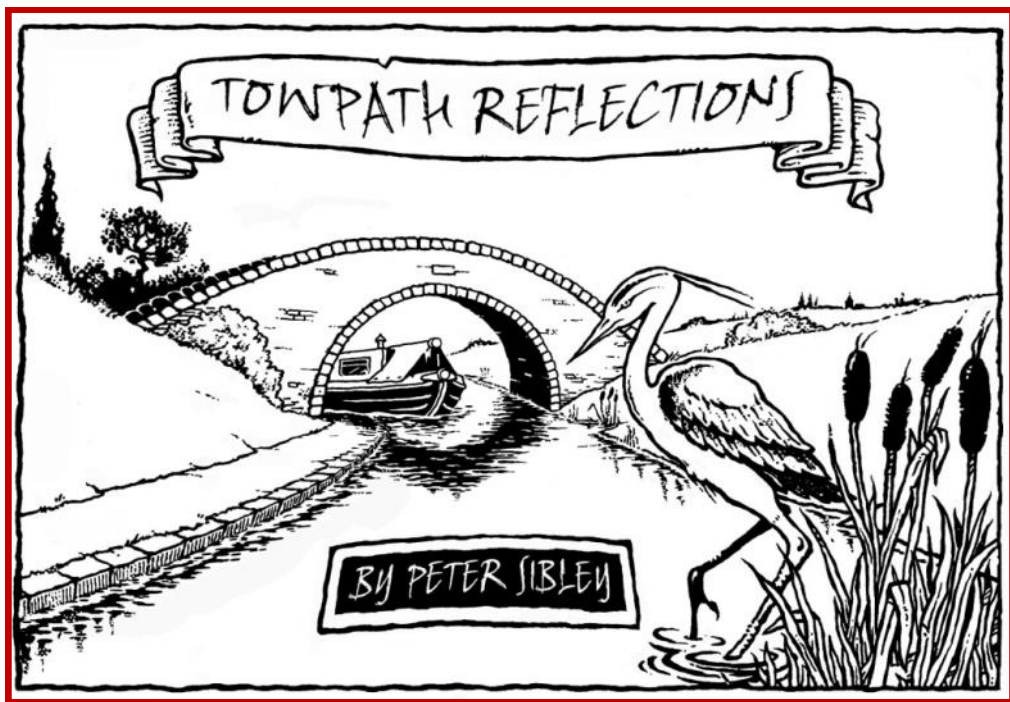


# GRAND TRUNK



*In memory of*

**Peter Sibley**

*1943-2021*

**September/October 2021**

[www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk](http://www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk)

## Chairman's Bit

Sadly I have to start this issue by announcing the death of Peter Sibley, who many members will remember for his long-running series of articles "Towpath Reflections". *See page 6 for much more about him.*

Recently we have been thinking that we need to record personal memories of the early years of our society, as we will be 50 years old in 2024. The idea will be to include them as articles in *Grand Trunk*, with the possibility of putting some of them onto our website in a new "Our Early Days" section. As we were founded in 1974 we have taken "early days" to mean "the first 25 years" or "pre-Millennium". Our first such article ("Horninglow Crane" by Steve Bates) is included in this issue, with more reminiscences about other cranes saved by the society to follow in future issues.



Hopefully we will, in time, be able to feature articles about our founding, the Harecastle Tunnel campaign and the Anderton Lift campaign, plus other early events that I don't even know about! Please do contact me or Margaret if you think that you can help us to document any of these (or have other memories of our early days).

We are currently on our way home from the IWA Festival of Water at Worcester which went very well. As well as helping to setup and dismantle the festival we also worked on the IWA and Waterway Recovery Group stalls. This reminded me that our own stall hasn't been out since before Covid. Hopefully we will be able to resume taking it to local events in 2022.

Finally we are delighted that we can confirm that our Winter Season of talks will start on November 19th at Red Bull Public House. See page 3 for the details.

***No room for an editorial in this issue!***  
***Please note the entry about the Christmas meal on the facing page.***  
***Hope to finally see some of you soon at social events. ....editor!***



## Social evenings Recommence

We are restarting meetings  
Autumn 2021 at our usual  
venue.

7.45pm for 8pm in the up-  
stairs room.

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

### October 15th 2021

*No meeting in October, look forward to November.*

### November 19th 2021

*More Spot the Locks* by Peter Scott. Another miscellany of oddities  
from 50 years on the waterways.

### December 3rd 2021

#### *Christmas Meal*

*If you would like to join us for our Christmas meal, make sure Margaret English has your name and email address, She will get in touch the moment she has the menu!*

### January 21st 2022

*The changing scene and history* of the Shropshire union Canal by Ian Wilson

### February 18th 2022

*Warrington Transporter Bridge* by Margaret Ingham, chairman of *The Friends of Warrington Transporter Bridge*.

### March 18th 2022

*Ampère in Ireland* by Malcolm Bridge. An illustrated talk on the Irish waterways.

## Warwick revisited

Last May we went to Warwick and had an interesting walk beside the River Avon where giant swans, mallards, flamingos and dragons were seen cruising along the waterway – many containing up to six people with those in the front-seats pedalling like mad! We walked by the Avon until we reached an aqueduct which took the Grand Union Canal over the river. Reaching the canal via a steep flight of steps we walked along the towpath to the two locks, above which is the Cape of Good Hope pub. There are moorings for two narrowboats outside but if they are already occupied and you wish to

visit the pub you will need to moor on the towpath side and go over the lock to get to the pub – not easy if it's dark on the way back.



*The lovely Saltisford Arm  
See next page)*

When Annette and her Mum and Dad cruised to Warwick in a wooden cruiser in 1974 Dad sent a postcard to his elderly parents which read “The weather is fine and we have just passed the Cape of Good Hope.” I wonder where they thought we were!



We viewed the Saltisford Arm from the road bridge by the entrance. This once derelict arm has been attractively restored and is now used for moorings and there is also a sensory garden, day-boat hire, visitor centre and shop. Unfortunately during our visit in May the public were not admitted due to social distancing rules but it looked to be a very pleasant area.

A short walk from the arm is the bottom lock of the Hatton flight of 21 locks which are known as the “Stairway to Heaven”. It is thought they were called this by working boaters because of the hard work involved in working up the locks followed by an easier run to Camp Hill where they received their pay. It’s nothing to do with the wonderful song by Led Zeppelin of the same name which, once you start singing, you can’t stop for ages! The 21 locks raise the canal 144 feet in 2½ miles. The flight was originally single-width but a new flight of wide-beam locks was built in the 1930s while the original single-width locks were retained in order to keep the working boats on the move. They are now used as overflows.

Ten locks up the flight near bridge 53 the unusual name of “Asylum Wharf” appeared in our old canal guide. Investigation revealed that the wharf was very close to the Warwick County Lunatic Asylum which opened in 1852 and at its peak housed 1,600 patients. Huge boilers provided heating and hot water for the asylum and the wharf was on the towpath side of the canal. boats used to unload coal there to keep the boilers working at the asylum and the trade continued until after the end of WW2. However there is no evidence to be seen of the wharf now.

At the top of the flight we saw a narrowboat begin the decent of the 21 locks but unfortunately it started to rain heavily. The boat’s name included the word “happy” but the retired lady working the locks was anything but happy as she was doing all the work and getting really soaked whilst her husband was more concerned about the paintwork on the boat and not helping her at all. Amusingly, the Göta Canal in Sweden where there are 58 locks is known as the “Divorce Ditch”!

*Annette and Terry*

*NB Emily and Steamboat Sidney*

*Kennet & Avon Canal*

## Peter Sibley

Peter was born on 4th February 1943 in the village of Bexley, Kent in a south east Borough of London. It was of course still wartime and Peter's first memories were from March 1945; a V2 rocket fell in the night destroying a house on the avenue just a few doors along from the family home. Worried for their safety, Peter's father decided it would be better that Peter and his mother stay with an aunt in Par, Cornwall.

He had 2 younger siblings, Trevor and Jill and with neighbouring children, they would have many adventures in the garden and disused land around. Peter was a resourceful child and, at an early age rigged up power from the house to a tree house situated in land behind the garden. His father was not so impressed with the electrical cable they had nailed along the fence citing, "You're not running 240 volts down the length of the garden lad!" So Peter's dad was later surprised when he returned home one gloomy evening to again see a glowing light from the end of the garden, when Peter was confronted by his dad and reminded of his forbiddance, he retorted with, "It's ok, I've transformed it down to 12 volts!"

Peter attended Cray Valley Technical School where he was taught woodwork and metalwork which, combined with his own creative abilities, would define his career path. Peter loved his food and at school he was quick to queue up for dinner and try getting on the first table so if there were second helpings he was in the best place to get some! Despite his good appetite, he remained very slim, his Mum would say "he was a matchstick with the wood scraped off!"

He left school and got work in Hampstead which eventually took him to work in Brighton as a Metal Worker. Initially commuting the 60 odd miles from Bexley to Brighton he would wake very early to catch the early workman's train. It was in Brighton where he met Valerie; he would call into a newsagents on his way back to the station, where she did a paper round.

By January 1961 he found a bedsit locally and went for his meals in a cafe a few doors from where Valerie lived. He started taking the cafe's dog for a walk and one evening asked Valerie if she would like to go with him. They walked to Brighton seafront and passed the Aquarium where the number



one hit, ‘Johnny remember me ‘ by Johnny Leyton was playing, about which Valerie remarked, “It’s a song that has always been special to us!” . As time went on their friendship grew and in October 1966 they married.

They bought a house which needed a great deal of restoration and over the years Peter’s artistic and technical skills were put to good use renovating the house from top to bottom, building cupboards and overhauling the garden. Peter and Valerie had 3 children, Cordelia, Russell and Stuart.

Before the children, back in 1968 they took a boating holiday completing the Oxford circular via Grand Union and Thames from Thames Ditton which they thoroughly enjoyed, and a few years later when the children were old enough, they returned to the water, hiring boats for their annual holidays and began exploring the country’s canal network. With their love of boating, the idea was instilled that they may one day move closer to the canals.

In 1988 they sold their home in Brighton and moved to a house in Barnton, Cheshire that seemed just right and which backed on to the Trent and Mersey Canal, shortly later they bought their own narrowboat completing their earlier dream intentions.



Peter got a job on a farm to start with and then later secured a job in Mobberley (that utilised his metal work skills) for a small firm which undertook a lot of restoration work for the National Trust. He worked there for 19 years until his retirement.

They joined the Trent and Mersey Canal Society in 1989 and became committee members, with Peter as Work Party Officer. They took part in litter picks, events such as bonfire and firework displays at Anderton, and some restoration work. Peter also wrote his regular 'Towpath Reflections' for the society's 'Grand Trunk' magazine which was fondly read by its members from 1991 to 2018 in which he would share tales and observations from his dog walks with their dog Jess and journals of their boating trips or sometimes just his thoughts from the garden gate. In fact, Peter was twice awarded by the society with the 'Wedgewood Award' for his contributions, once jointly with Valerie.

Both Peter and Val were long term and assiduous members of the "Northern Committee" when our management structure deemed that our Society needed two regional committees, and Peter and Val were enthusiastic in their support for the working parties, fireworks displays, boat rallies, Boat Lift appeals, stand manning and other functions as they were created.

Peter's other skills were perhaps lesser known - he was an excellent engineer with creative design skills and a willingness to help others without demur, he was always calm and yet most creative in any venture in which he was involved. Always the true gentleman!

In 2018 Val and Peter sold the boat after 29½ years of ownership, having travelled countless miles through much of the river and canal system, visiting York, Ripon, London, Bishops Stortford, Hertford, Bath, Lechlade, Gloucester and Sharpness to name just a few towns and cities.

Peter and Valerie had 60 great years together, 3 wonderful children, 6 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren and Valerie has so many memories to treasure.

Peter's contribution to the wellbeing of the Society over the years has been considerable, but unassuming. His assistance always offered willingly to

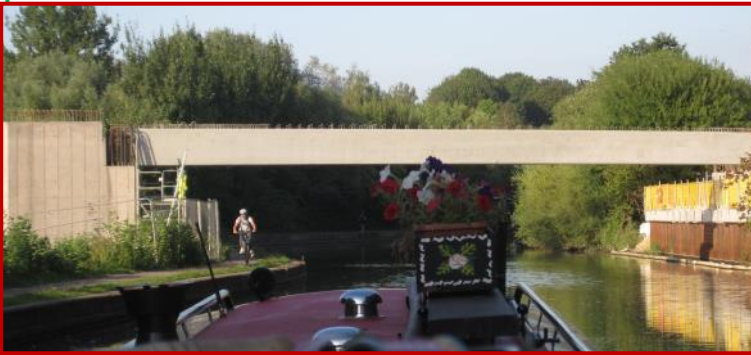


those with difficulties, will be long remembered and will continue to inspire those who were fortunate enough to have known him.

***Our heartfelt sympathies are offered to Peter's wife Val and their family.***

Valerie would like to thank all those T&MCS members who sent cards, flowers, and messages of support to her. It really helped to know that Peter's memory will be so treasured.

### **A New Bridge !**



While cruising through Stoke, heading for our favourite mooring (right at tunnel mouth ready for the next morning!)-

We discovered a new bridge .

And here is the crane which put it in!

*Margaret English.*



## **Festival of water at Worcester, 2021**

### ***A volunteer's eye view***

#### ***Wednesday***

Our first job was to fence in the workers' compound (at one side of a large playing field). Dogs and their owners found this very interesting, unfortunately we had to unload the panels and blocks from the delivery truck first. Then we erected the two large tents where we cook, eat, wash up, and have a site office. As we had to be aware of the need for fresh air and space, this was more complicated than usual.

The components of the stage arrived, and all had to be unloaded (they were very heavy). Temporary water pipes were set up and dug in and electricity connected. Our first meal was served at 9pm, I was too tired to wash the dishes.

#### ***Thursday***

We began by driving to Titford Pumping Station to borrow an ancient marquee in an even older trailer. We had been told it would need at least four bodies to attach the trailer to a vehicle. As the car belonging to our (excellent) driver had buttons and cameras for everything, a slight touch on our part was sufficient to hitch the venerable artefact. The drive back to site was rather hairy, as the trailer had only one working light- the right indicator!

On our return, we salvaged our conscience by putting up a stall, unloading a van and doing a few odd jobs. I was alert enough to wash the dishes.

#### ***Friday***

An early start putting up the trailer marquee. This involved every spare person laying out a maze of parts, legs, straps, and coverings. Lengthy discussions about method and contradictory instructions followed. No-one was allowed a coffee break until the monster was raised. This rule eventually bore fruit.

After some delicious sandwiches we set off on our trusty bikes. Our mission was the attachment of signs to any post we could find to guide motorists to the festival car park, and to identify meeting points for emergency vehicles. We arrived back, hoping for a cup of tea, to discover that more signs were needed to dissuade visitors from parking in the nearby leisure centre. Off we went again and concluded by putting signs around a bright orange and red ramp which visitors might not see. It seemed a long time until dinner, but the festival starts tomorrow and all we have to do is try to avoid the public while working on stalls.

## *The Rest*

Then we spent three very busy but enjoyable days working on the WRG stall, while colleagues wiped tables, litter picked and kept the site tidy. Finally we took it all down again and finally went back to cruising.



*The  
WRG stall open  
for business*

*The kiddies'  
carousel was  
great fun*



*Passage  
through the  
festival boats  
could be  
tricky!*



## **A Tale of Four Trent and Mersey Canal Wharf Side Cranes.**

### ***Part 1.***

During the the late 1970s to the early 1980s a lot of our canal side waterways industrial history was at risk of being lost to the scrap man.

Thankfully some of our wharf side cranes were saved this fate by the actions of the Trent and Mersey Canal Society and a number of individuals. My father's story starts with the Horninglow Crane back in the 1940's when he used to deliver the morning papers to the Salt Warehouse at Horninglow Basin and the Bessie Bulls pub at Bond End as part of his daily paper round. Both of these canal side buildings have now been lost. He used to tell me that when they were kids they would dare each other to swing out over the canal basin holding on to the crane hook. If the warehouse Forman saw them, they would receive a clout around their ear holes for their troubles.

### ***My involvement starts with the first of the four wharf cranes, in 1979.***

My father and myself were press ganged by Harry Arnold into undertaking work parties with the Trent and Mersey Canal Society on the ex FMC narrow boat *Kangaroo* and the mile post replacement campaign which was being undertaken at the time.

### **Crane Number 1 -Horninglow**



We soon became involved with the reinstatement of the Horninglow Basin wharf side crane which was made by JS.Lee & Co Earlestown Lancashire for The North Staffordshire Railway Company.

The Horninglow crane had been saved a number of years earlier from the fate of the Scrap man by Harry Arnold, Roger Lee and other Society members back in 1976-1977 when the North Staffordshire Railway warehouse was demolished for road widening, with the hope of reinstating it somewhere else.

***Demolition of salt warehouse 1977***



### *Crane just before removal*

It was agreed with British Waterways Board that the crane could be reinstated at Fradley Maintenance Yard in front of the original remains of the canal wharf side that was once there.

One of my first work parties on it was tightening down the base plate; unfortunately I do not have any photos in my photo archives of the stem post going back up.

Once the stem post was back up it was hoped that the rest of the crane would be reassembled. But due to ongoing society work with the milepost campaign and other projects the crane parts were moved into storage around the back of the maintenance yard. This is where it stayed for most of the 80's.

Till one Sunday work party in 1989 when working on Kangaroo, waterways were having one of their infamous clear outs of unwanted items. It was quickly agreed to look for the crane parts and after spending a morning clearing brambles and cutting back undergrowth the remains of the crane were dragged out and laid out to see if it could be put back together.

Unfortunately it was found that the top collar which fits on to the stem post had gone missing. After looking at the few old photos that existed of the crane it was decided to get a new top collar made. This was manufactured by a local boat builder. So when you next pass Fradley Maintenance Yard look up to see if you can spot the only bit that is not original.

After the top collar was completed a date was fixed for a work party weekend to lift and assemble the crane. This was completed by Society members plus help from members of the Ash Tree Boat Club and Erewash Canal Preservation Society who were at Fradley and gave up their time to assist.

The crane was lifted back on by manpower and using a block and tackle (not something that would be easy to get done today with all the risk assessments and method statements that CRT require)! Note that the lifting chain, top





pulley which we could not fit due to the new top collar and lifting hook were not put back on to make sure the crane could never be used. These were reused in the restoration of another T&M wharf side crane which the society undertook.

**Horninglow Crane being put back  
up at Fradley**  
*Alan Bates, Steve Bates and Bill  
Whitmore*

The official unveiling of the crane took place on 30th September 1990 with a small boat gathering of member's boats and night time BBQ in what is now the Laughing Duck Café.

*Steve Bates*

**The Plaque at the  
base of the crane.**



*To be continued.....*



*Having read the May/June issue of Grand Trunk, Norman Cornwell of the Derby and Sandiacre Canal Trust added the following information.....*



Hopefully I can shed a little more light on the Lock Keepers cottage (s) at Sandiacre, which are Erewash canal cottages. These were built for the opening of the Erewash canal in 1779. The cottages were extended in 1796 when the Derby canal opened. One cottage housed the lengthsmen and the other was the home of the tollkeeper.

The cottages were derelict in 1961, condemned by British Waterways and due for demolition. The cottages were saved and restored by members of the Erewash Canal Preservation and Development Association, who have looked after them ever since. The cottages were purchased by ECP&DA in December 2017.

The cottages are usually open to the public on the third Sunday of every month. We welcome donations of course and we usually provide tea, coffee and home-made cakes.

*Norman Cornwell*





## **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](mailto:John.Lawson@waterways.org.uk)**

## **Planned winter stoppages on our canal**

### **08-11-2021 to 26-11-2021**

Croxton Tank (Aqueduct), Near Middlewich

Lock 12, Alrewas

Lock 57 Hassall Green Top Lock

Lock 61, Cardboard Lock

Lock 66, Bottom Lock, Wheelock

### **08-11-2021 to 03-12-2021**

Canal Cutting, Etruria, between Bridge 117 and Lock 39

### **08-11-2021 to 17-12-2021**

Canal Lock 35, Trentham

Etruria Valley Link Road, at Festival Park, Stoke on Trent, between Bridge 119b Railway Bridge and Bridge 119c Marconi Bridge, Trent & Mersey Canal.

### **22-11-2021 to 17-12-2021**

Lock 28, Stone

### **29-11-2021 to 17-12-2021**

Lock 25, Sandon Lock,

Lock 60, Longcroft Lock,

Lock 23, Hoo Mill

### **10-01-2022 to 28-03-2022**

Bridge 20A Railway Bridge



Please send contributions for the next issue to me, Margaret English, by e-mail to [margaretetlm@hotmail.com](mailto: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 November/December 2021 edition is **18/10/2021**.

## SHARDLOW FESTIVAL 2021

The last time Shardlow Village held a boating event was back in 1992 when the T&M canal society held a rally up at Clifton's farm.

So when I got invited to take my ex FMC work boat *England* along to a new festival event, which the village of Shardlow were putting on, I couldn't say no.

We arrived at Shardlow on the Friday afternoon after meeting up with T&M Society members, Vaughn and Rita Wheatly, who helped me through the 5 wide locks as I was single handling it there.







We were allocated a very nice mooring spot by the crane, a number of canal side traders and other historic boats were already on site by the time I arrived.

Saturday morning we only just had time to polish the brasses before it got really busy from 9.00am. It was one of the few shows that let historic boats run their engines which draws in a lot of interest. There were boats selling assorted crafts, gifts, painted wear, a kid's treasure hunt for painted stones, fun fair rides in one of the many pub gardens, live bands, boat trips, and of course a real ale beer festival.

Sunday was also very popular with a boat jumble and a very well attended dog show.

Overall everyone said that the festival was a successful event and helped to highlight the heritage and importance of Shardlow as an inland port.

Thanks to Sue Hampson, the residents, and businesses of Shardlow for putting this together. I am sure this will be back on the events list next year.

***Steven Bates.***

*Now for the conclusion.....*

## **Plastic soup, litter and deprivation of the canals**



### ***Farmers.***

Most canals and rivers border farms at some point in their journey to the sea. Farmers have over the decades, become better custodians of the rivers and canals, due mainly to legislation and successful pollution prosecutions, however there is a new breed of farmers, who want to diversify and include in this the use of the canals and rivers. They regularly improve the surroundings and make use of the waterways for their watering. We do however still come across waste of differing types which either blows into the canals, or seeps in via drainage. Occasionally we do see farmers trying to save their land by using rocks and boulders and basic building waste. I personally am neither for or against the farming community. Many of us realise that farmers get little or no help in protecting their land from erosion by the canals, so we have to be tolerant of their plight, although the farmers themselves also have to make every effort to stop pollution, wherever it occurs.

### ***Remedies***

There are definitely no quick fixes for this situation and each and every group I have mentioned can assist in improving the problems of litter and just the general appearance of our water ways.

### ***Councils***

They need to be more interactive with the waterways authorities and the Canal & River Trust. They also will be at the fore of any implementation of action plans and working with the community, they also need to make examples of those who continue to litter, just because they can. To impose fines and for serious offences, jail sentences, where life has been put in danger or the wild life made to suffer.

### ***Education***

We do need to educate the public and much like *Blue Planet* series, we need to start here at home, as what we discard today is definitely having an impact on our local seas and wildlife. We need to educate in particular the schools and communities who live close to, and use the canal system. This could be extended to the rivers of our great land. Education needs to be as hard hitting as the likes of *Blue Planet* to pull society into the 21st century of caring for others and the environment.



### ***Volunteers/groups***

Canal societies up and down the country already do lots of good work in restoring and keeping the litter collected where they can, new members are needed, to help restore our muddy canal systems, which presently are not so much mud coloured as multi coloured with bottles, bags and plastics. Again, schools, Scout Groups and local community groups could be educated as to the benefits of a cleaner canal system and encouraged to partake in litter picks.

### ***Canal & River Trust/ resources***

This replaced the once funded 'national waterways board'. While it is very effective, their resources are not as good as they could be, there again is any charitable trust's? We need to find a way to improve their funding, whether it be by way of a surcharge, or national appeal. They are best placed to advise how and where we can collect, dispose and educate people about litter.

### ***To conclude.***

There are no easy fix solutions, but we do need to make a start. I have, as I said at the beginning of this piece, been boating on canals for over 40 years. In that time, when you would have expected with world awareness of our environment, things should improve, they have not. There might have been a shift from water pollutants to litter, but I can definitely say without hesitation, I am maybe at the end of my canalling if we can't find a way to improve the facilities to everyone who uses the waters, both professionally and recreationally.

In the year to date, our shared boat, has only been out on the water for 8 weeks (Feb to end of March) and we have been tangled up with bags, bottles and most recently a full single bed mattress. We need to stop viewing our rivers and canals as some form of out of hours council tips. We need to just get a grip, and value our surroundings, if we don't, then all the good work of *Blue Planet* will be just a waste of time.

This article is to form, part of a larger project, its just a taster to decide if there is scope for any form of media support of the issues raised in this piece.

*Norman English*

***Since Norman wrote this article, he has acquired his own boat and continues his research.....Ed***

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

*Bringing Boats Back to Burslem*

## **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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

***Welcome to new member***

**Mr Neil Silver  
Of  
Barnton**

*We hope you enjoy being a member of  
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