

GRAND TRUNK



Milepost with a difference

Photo Brian Holt

May/June 2024

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

At our recent AGM we said goodbye to two of our committee members. I would like to start by thanking them both for their time on the committee.

Paula Jackson was our minutes secretary for 10 years but, sadly, recently her mother's health has deteriorated to the point where Paula felt that she could no longer continue on our committee. Paula also took the stall to Lion Salt Works on several occasions as well as helping at Middlewich Folk and Boat Festival. She will be greatly missed and, hopefully, she may return to the committee in the future if things improve.



Sarah Honeysett joined us in early 2023 when we were appealing for help with organising talks and editing *Grand Trunk*. She was already busy with her work for IWA North Staffs and South Cheshire Branch, but wanted to be available in case we needed her help. As it happens she wasn't needed in either role as David Clegg organised an excellent season of talks, and Margaret English persevered with editing *Grand Trunk* alone. Recently it was agreed that Sarah will help Margaret this Winter by finding copy for *Grand Trunk* (which is the part of the job that Margaret finds most difficult). Sarah can do this task without having to be on our committee, which will release some of her time for her many other roles.

Luckily we don't need to appeal for a new committee member solely to take on the job of minutes secretary as Jean Clegg (who helps husband David organise the talks) was willing to take over from Paula. She recently produced her first set of committee minutes, which were pronounced to be excellent.

Anyway, enough about the committee. Sitting here watching the rain yet again, I am hopeful that we will have enough water in our canal this year to avoid any problems. Let's hope so.

Roger Evans

Editorial

Hello everyone,

We finally managed to make our Spring trip around the Four Counties Ring; it was cold, wet windy, and absolutely wonderful (see p.7)! We have also attended the AGM at Apedale History Museum. There will be a full report in the next magazine.

One of the items discussed at the AGM (well, 2 really) was the rising cost of producing and mailing the magazine, and the possibility of increasing membership fees to help with the cost. It was decided to drop the number of issues to four per annum (in line with the seasons) and so avoid a subscription increase. The next edition will therefore cover July, August, September and October, and there will be a Winter issue to follow.

This change of plan makes contributions to the magazine even more important, so please tell me about happenings in your area, snippets of canal history, articles about trips, places, and anything else you can think of– all contributions gratefully received.

On the knotty subject of money, if you haven't paid your subs yet, you will find a reminder included. Should anyone feel able to donate a little more to help with expenses, then please do, our treasurer won't mind at all!

If you really want to leave us (I hope not), then please let me know. An email is fine (details on p.23), no need to buy a stamp!

We still hope to be able to take our stall to Shardlow in September, and I am looking forward to meeting some of our Southern members as well as enjoying the cruise.

If you see *The Lady Beth* about, give us a wave!



Margaret English

Towpath work below Croxton Aqueduct

Those of you who walk along the T&M towpath below Croxton Aqueduct will know that the path in the area around the overflow is very near the waterline. In spite of the overflow's best efforts, the canal tends to overtop, and the towpath is a muddy morass (to say nothing of the danger to the bank).

Walkers and fisherman were horrified recently when the nearest lay-by was cordoned off and filled with plant and equipment as CRT solved the problem. They raised the towpath edge in the troubled area by making a clay dam on the edge with rounded sides and protected by netting.



Walkers find it very useful to avoid the muddy towpath by walking along it and this clever idea should solve the problem, for the moment anyway.

Margaret English

***Chairman Roger
walks along the bund***



Chairman Roger demonstrates the curved end

The muddy towpath



The special boat used to lay the bund

Anderton Lift News

On Tuesday 19th March Chairman Roger and I attended the AGM of The Weaver Navigation Society. An interesting talk about the Anderton Lift followed. I took some notes and here they are!.....

The talk was by Lorna Pederson (CRT Fund Manager) and Fran Littlewood (CRT Project Manager). Lorna began by pointing out that more visitors were needed at Anderton as more money would be needed to fund the necessary work. A 2nd phase request for funding will be submitted to the National Lottery Fund (Regional Family Scheme) in November, pointing out the importance of heritage and the problems caused by climate change. Unfortunately, the costs must be met and then claimed back.

An architect for the site has been appointed, new exhibits are proposed and signage needs improving. The play area is to be revamped and storytelling sessions begun. It is hoped to encourage educational groups to visit. Funding is encouraged from philanthropists, individuals and organisations. The winter appeal was very successful, raising £75,000 instead of the expected £30,000 (but the cost of the campaign was £15,000).

Fran then showed a wonderful archive picture of the lift in 1875. It was scheduled as an ancient monument in 1986, but by the mid-eighties it was in bad condition. Following the success of the astonishing campaign to save the lift, the seals were replaced in 22/23 and the gates improved. The seals to the river gates were changed in days when the lift was closed in order to minimise disruption.

The control system now needs updating, the coating has reached the end of its life, and the safety system needs updating. The position of the lift (entirely surrounded by water) makes it difficult to access and the regulations pertaining to a scheduled ancient monument have to be taken into consideration.

The lift is likely to be closed in 2025 for work to be done, but the visitors' centre will remain open and the presence of the work will hopefully be used to educate visitors.

Margaret English



Cheshire Locks

On our recent trip up the Cheshire Locks (our long-delayed Spring cruise round the Four Counties), we were disappointed by the state of the locks. The Cheshire Locks working parties are doing a sterling job (even without the doubtful help of Chairman Roger and I!). They cannot, however, deal with mechanical and breakdown problems on the locks. Some paddles were very stiff and difficult and a great many of the locks on the upper part of the flight are reduced to single lock working.

We were pleased to see that intensive work was being done on lock 52. Here is the stoppage notice:

Please be informed that essential maintenance and repair works will be conducted at Lock 52 of the Trent & Mersey Canal. These works include the replacement of the top gates on the towpath side lock and repairs to the ground paddle on the offside lock..



Margaret English

Special Anniversary Social Meeting

On 19th April the social evening was dedicated to remembering the early days of the Society and its achievements. Speakers were to include Steve Guest (our first chairman) and John Lawson (work party organiser). However, neither were able to attend because of health problems.

Talks organiser Dave Clegg saved the day by giving an enthusiastic reading of an article about how the society began which was written by Steve a few years ago. Among other things, Steve explained how we needed 2 committees and 2 sets of meetings (North and South) as our beloved canal is 93 miles long! It was just as interesting as when we first encountered it!

This was followed by some memories from Michael Priest, another early member. Michael was unable to attend but sent a letter which was read out by Margaret English. It included details of a horrific murder in the area, when 'The Black Panther' secretly prepared for his crime in a lair very close to Harcastle Tunnel. Those involved in the initial rally were interviewed by the police. Michael will be giving a talk next season (see P. 21).



Chairman Roger Evans told the story of the milepost campaign, using footage and pictures from the late (and much missed!) Harry Arnold. He explained how an additional milepost was placed at the very end of the canal, and how some mileposts were reluctantly returned when theft was mentioned!



This was followed by a talk on the Anderton Lift by John Tackley. He started by showing a picture of the lift when first built in 1878, described the trip to London to deliver the petition to Number 10, and went on to comment on the very worrying current state of the lift (see p.6).

Finally, Margaret assumed a different guise and read out John Lawson's report on the Cheshire Locks work parties from 2012 to date, interspersed with some of her memories of early work parties.

The meeting was well-attended and did not seem to suffer from the late serving of food or the unavoidable absence of speakers. - and it was a very good raffle!

A few days later, member Brian Holt sent Chairman Roger a milepost picture to add to his collection. We were so taken with it, we put it on the front cover!

Margaret English
Photos: *Gillian Watson*

Please send contributions for the next issue to me, Margaret English, by e-mail to margaretetlm@hotmail.com, by post, or by hand. Remember, this is *your* magazine. Contributions from the South especially welcome! Last date for inclusion in the July/August/September/October edition (see above) is **18/06/2024**

Serious Bridge Strike

The T&M is currently closed at Bridge 16 Barrow on Trent after the bridge was side swiped by an HGV this afternoon (23rd April).



This bridge has a long history of sustaining damage from road vehicles but today's incident looks particularly serious in terms of the impact on our canal.

From the eastern approach the bridge looks undamaged but the western parapet has a crack running from top to bottom and a substantial part of it is lean-

ing over the canal at a precarious angle and is in danger of collapsing into the water.

When I spoke to CRT staff on site they reported the crack had visibly widened in the few hours since the incident occurred so both road and canal are closed. It's too early to give an estimate for reopening but it looks like it could take some time. The damage was apparently caused by a foreign registration HGV who failed to stop.

Dave Brewin

Photos, *Vaughn Wheatley*

The canal reopened on 1st May, but the road and towpath remain closed.



The Bridge in happier times

Courtesy of Bing Images

Burslem Port Report

Off to the side of the Burslem Arm there was a short section to serve as a wharf to the Shropshire Union warehouse which I've mentioned before. But now we have to get down to detail as to how we can bring this building back to life alongside a working canal.

Way back in the 1850s when we believe it was built, its purpose was to house pottery brought down from Burslem on a smooth tramway designed to avoid breakages. I imagine the water level to be just below that of the ground floor with two cranes for loading. I've not found any material yet to say how wide this docking arm was, as I've not yet found any detail maps/surveys of the time. Help!

We now move to the possible future some 175 years on, and the position is very different. Our restored warehouse is approximately 1 metre below any canal side. Clearly therefore it cannot be adjacent to the building. Subject to dimensions changing slightly I have drawn up a chart to show how water at a much higher level could sit next to the old warehouse in its new life as a community centre for Burslem. I am happy to show this to interested folk. I welcome your thoughts.

Work Party News

Sadly we did not receive a grant for a possible wild flower meadow. But the good news is that we may be getting a corporate volunteer work day from a company in Stone. It's typical these days that so many folks work from home that staff comradery struggles. What better way to meet your work colleagues than thrashing around at brambles!

Future Work Party dates

June 14th + 28th

July 12th + 26th

August 9th + 23rd

September 6th + 20th

Trolley Nuisance

Our problems with the Supermarket trolleys persist as, to our disbelief, there are more unfortunate folks actually living in various places along the length



of our canal. A very sad reflection of our times.

Dave Broome

Email dave.broome@burslemport.org.uk

Phone: 07974 966253

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T&M TV programme

CRT in *Boaters Update* on 5th May announced "**Step behind the scenes**".

Follow TV presenters Dan Snow and Mark Evans as they join the charity and step behind the scenes to discover what it takes to keep canals alive.

This brand-new series features six ten-minute episodes that will make you marvel at how canals were built so many years ago and the monumental efforts required to look after them today.

episode one

Lock 74 Middlewich

Engineering enthusiast Mark Evans kick-starts our series by visiting our construction teams in Middlewich. Join Mark behind the scenes as they change lock gates, repair walls and refurbish bridges to prepare this section of the Trent & Mersey Canal for a summer filled with visitors, boats and wildlife.

Two links are available:

<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/support-us/our-campaigns/join-us-behind-the-scenes> **or:**

<https://youtu.be/UuHAG2Mz7j8> .





**INLAND
WATERWAYS**
ASSOCIATION

Lichfield Branch

www.waterways.org.uk/lichfield

Wednesday 12th June 2024

**Join us for an easy 4 mile canal based
afternoon walk around Sandon Park
and the Trent & Mersey Canal. There
are up to 9 stiles.**



**Meet 16:30 for a 16:45 start in the car park of The
Holly Bush, Willowmore Banks, Salt nr Stafford
ST18 0BX**

Contact Clive at clive.walker@waterways.org.uk

**Non members welcome. No charge but donations to
Branch Funds appreciated.**

The Inland Waterways Association is a membership charity that works to protect and restore
the country's 7,000 miles of canals and navigable rivers.

Registered Charity number 212342



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**

LOOK OUT FOR THE HIGH-VIS VOLUNTEERS!

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

April Work Party

Finally, after so many false starts, we managed to get some painting done at Lock 53. 5 of us were in attendance. Thanks to the preparatory work done on our previous outing, we were able to start applying paint almost immediately. Good progress was made on *Hammerite* (metallic, anti-rust) painting of the metal fence adjacent to Lock 53 and applying *Sadolin* (water-based) to the woodwork of the Lock itself. We finished half an hour early due to inevitable incoming rain but we should be able to complete both next time out. **Well done everybody.**

Tony Walker

May Work Party

Even though the weather forecast promised rain, 6 intrepid volunteers arrived at lock 53 in the hope of finally finishing the work there (started in August and constantly held up by bad weather). Painting of the railings on the old steel lock side was finally finished, woodwork painting on the lock gates was completed, and the tail bridge railings were given a second coat. In addition the 3 bollards below the lock were rubbed down and treated to a much-needed coat of white paint. The strapping posts were also painted and the last set of railing were very efficiently rubbed down. Unfortunately the promised rain arrived at midday, putting an end to the expedition. We hope to schedule an extra (fine) day to complete the work.



Margaret English

Towpath Task Force Middlewich works on Big Lock

This week (Thursday 9th May) the Cheshire Locks Work Party was asked if any volunteers would like to help at Big Lock. Chairman Roger and I had only half a day free, but offered this.

The CRT volunteers were friendly and helpful and showed me the (still visible) foundations of the lock-keeper's cottage. I have passed through Big Lock many times, but never noticed these before.

I found the entry below in Middlewich Diary 2012

‘As so often happens in our Middlewich Diary, today we find ourselves walking down an already much-trodden path to view once again the lock-keeper's cottage which stood opposite the pub at the Big Lock. Built on a basically similar pattern to the much better-known (and still extant) Wardle Lock Cottage, but never extended in the same way, due to its chronic problems with unstable foundations, the Big Lock cottage was, nonetheless, a picturesque edifice in a quaint, ramshackle kind of a way, and, if it hadn't been for its tendency to threaten to collapse and fall into the River Croco behind it for much of its life, would have made a much sought after canal-side dwelling in the new, modern canal age.’

The cottage was demolished in the early 1980s.....Ed.

We spent a very warm and pleasant morning painting. I rubbed down and repainted the offside lock ladder (of course) while Roger tackled the top gates. The lock was busy and volunteers helped work the boats through as well as doing sterling work on the wood painting and vegetation.

Thank you Towpath Task Force Middlewich.



Margaret English





Red Bull Public House

**Congleton Road South,
Stoke-on-Trent
ST7 3AJ**

Meetings 7.45 for 8pm

*If you would like to join others for a pub meal before the event,
contact David Clegg for details.*

2024-2025 Season Talks

October 18th 2024

A virtual Journey from Barnton to Harecastle.
By Ian Wilson.

November 15th 2024

Southern Region British Rail
An interesting and different talk by member Jon Honey-
sett MBE.

December 6th 2024

Society Christmas meal– further details later.

January 17th 2025

Burslem Port– past, present and future by Dave Broome.

February 21st 2025

TBA

March 21st 2025

Members evening: Details to be confirmed.

April 18th 2025

HSII: Comparing the now abandoned HS2 northern section passing through mid-Staffs with Brindley’s escapades in the late 1700s. By Michael Priest.

Welcome to new member

*Dave Broome
Of
Stoke-on-Trent
(Burslem Port Trust)*



Thank you for joining, Dave!

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

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem



*Mural on top lock island, Cheshire Flight
Margaret English*