

GRAND TRUNK



The last (real) milepost

Winter 2024

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

Welcome to our Winter issue. By the time you read this it will probably be too late to book for our Christmas meal on Friday 6th December but, if this issue arrives early enough, then please do contact David Clegg for full details of menu and how to book. It is usually a very enjoyable event. Our winter season of talks will definitely have already started but see pages 20-22 for a full list. Hopefully we will have something for everybody.



Last issue I said that sadly, we wouldn't be taking our stall to Shardlow Inland Port Festival on September 7th-8th after all but suggested that members go along and enjoy it for themselves anyway. Well, we took our own advice and made it a family outing. It was great fun with lots to do and see. Margaret's report is on pages 11 and 12 (plus some overflow pictures on the back cover [Spot the chairman in the bottom picture]).

I'm pleased to say that we have had more contributions from members than usual for this issue. First there is a very interesting "musing" by our newest member on pages 4-5. Then we have a contribution from one of our earliest members, along with a generous donation of memorabilia on pages 18-19.

There is the usual list of Winter Stoppages on page 14. We seem to have got off fairly lightly this year!

Finally, we recently attended (in glorious weather) a Cheshire Locks work party and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves finishing off lock 64. Again, see the full article on page 17 for more information, but do consider coming along and helping at one of these work parties. No experience is necessary. See <https://www.tamcs.org.uk/diary> for details of who to contact and what to bring.

That's all for now. See you in 2025.

Editorial

Welcome to our first Winter edition of *Grand Trunk*. It seems a little early to wish everyone a Happy Christmas, but do take note of the Christmas meal arrangements on page 9. This year I have nothing at all to do with organising the event, so it should be really good!

Just before writing this, Chairman Roger and I (plus 2 boating cats) took the opportunity to slip away in *The Lady Beth* and head for the Monty to explore the newly navigable section. What a wonderful trip it was, wet, cold and wonderful! The Llangollen Canal was busier than we had anticipated, and the lift bridges seem to have got heavier, but we made it to Welsh Frankton for our booking and descended to the quiet peacefulness of the Monty. We cruised all the way to the navigable end and discovered that one of *SUCS* 3-day work parties was in progress. The towpath remained open, so we were able to watch the most efficient working of the various groups as they prepared the next section. We had only intended to walk as far as Schoolhouse Bridge, but fired with enthusiasm, we walked all the way to Llanymynech (where the canal is once again in water) on the Welsh border. It was a very special afternoon.

On the way home, things started to go wrong! My camera refused to work (sorry, no pictures) and we knocked the top off our flue chimney on the famous garden centre lift bridge. When we got home, our television no longer worked, and (worst of all) Roger's computer broke down. We await the next disaster with trepidation!

You will see that we have some very interesting talks arranged for the 2024/25 season and hope to see as many of you as possible in the upstairs room of our favourite public house. There is also a very interesting article from our newest life member about his involvement with canals and there may even be a sequel!

I expect it's also too soon to wish you all a happy, prosperous and peaceful New Year, but I'll do it anyway. See you next year.



A MARINER'S MUSINGS,

Meet new life member, Christoher John.....ED

Margaret asked me why I had joined the Society? It's a rambling answer.

I used to be a Merchant Navy Officer and served on tramps for a long time so went hither and thither never knowing quite where it would take you next. So, there was a lot of water involved. What it taught me was to appreciate each place on its merits and not be disappointed when it failed to inspire.

On coming ashore and working for a shipping company I was lucky enough to have access to 3 company "boats". Superb vessels of teak and mahogany, a cut above your average hire boat. They were based on the Thames, Fens and Broads and cost the princely sum of £10 per week! So, I transferred 20,000 tons to about 5 but still on water.

The Broads were delightful but busy in summer, so we used them off season. This proved a joy as in those days October was quiet. I well remember a week's cruising on the southern Broads and only seeing one other moving boat. The Fens had their appeal - so very different and the Thames was always busy. Of the 3 I liked the Broads the most. I recall mooring at Rockland St Mary on the staithe one night, just us. As it was October it was dark early and the pub opposite was dark. Pubs in those days often didn't open until 7pm. At 7 the light came on and we crossed the road into the entrance. There was a door to the right and one to the left. We chose the left one and entered to find 3 people sat on a settee watching a black and white TV that was showing football. They greeted us and we sat on the other settee. After a while I noticed there was no bar but many pubs in Norfolk went down to the cellar for beer in such times. No one came to serve us, so we decided to move to the other bar which turned out to be the Public Bar and we realised we had just spent 20 minutes in the landlord's front room watching his tele!

The Locks Inn at Geldeston was outstanding in those days. A waterside inn without electricity. No bar just a cellar and candle-lit. The landlady served the ale in a jug and wrote the cost in chalk on the table. We played darts by candlelight, an interesting challenge, and as each round progressed the chalk marks were refreshed. On leaving we settled up with the lovely landlady who then rubbed off our bill.

So when did the canals begin?

This has taken some remembering! I think our first "voyage" was on the Avon, which is of course, a river. The lovely towns of Pershore, Evesham and Tewkesbury made the journey interesting and fun. Beautiful landscape and few, but large locks. My wife and I became lock-keepers at Nafford for a few years on a voluntary basis.

The lure of real canals also began, and we chose the Llangollen with the outstanding passage of the Pontcysllte and a superb bakers in Ellesmere.

Appetites whetted, we chose a larger endeavour next and used the one-way passage of Anglo-Welsh from Trevor to Great Haywood. We elected for the Shropshire route as we lived in Shropshire! We enjoyed Audlem with an early start on the lock flight followed by a full breakfast at the top! The kingfishers were amazing and what a joy the Anchor at High Offley is - a proper pub. So we lost our canal virginity and pressed on.

And so, we came to the T&M doing the "circuit". Contrasting sights of country and industrial, much that was historical. The amazing passage through the steelworks in Stoke (Shelton?) and of course The Harecastle Tunnel. We also diverted onto the Caldon and what an enjoyable excursion that was. The highlight was The Black Lion with a goat tethered on the flat roof and the meal being what was in the fridge that day. Great grub and good beer but watch out as you leave as a steam train line passes the front door. We moored in Nantwich to do some shopping. This was the first voyage with a Border Collie of 10 weeks. Bright and interested in all things, he quickly learnt that if you sit on the doorstep of a butcher's with a knowing look the chances are you'll get something tossed to you. He duly received a cow's shin bone which lasted 2 years. He was also canny enough to work out that as you passed bridge holes you could step off, walk down the tow-path and reboard at the next bridge.

Then it was off to Wales and the Brecon and Abergavenny. Stately trees and lovely villages with a nice town at the top with a superb military museum connected with the film "Zulu". You didn't need a VC to navigate this canal.

So we became more ambitious.....

Christopher John

The Lady Beth goes to Wincham Wharf

You may remember that I mentioned a problem with our rudder in the last issue. Accordingly, on a damp and miserable day in September, *The Lady Beth* set off on her beloved T&M, heading for Wincham Wharf for repairs and blacking (well, she had to come out of the water anyway!).

The journey there was uneventful and we left her waiting to be craned out of the water. We could not stay as we were going to London the following day.

After a hectic weekend visiting art exhibitions and waving flags at the Last Night of the Proms (yes, really!), we returned to our favourite canal to rescue our boat.



She looked great! Rudder mended and blacking done. We watched with trepidation as she was lifted off her perch and craned back into the water.

We set off for home. The *Tata* chemical works through which we had to sail, seemed bigger than ever, with huge coiled tubes adjacent to the canal and the tallest cranes I have ever seen!

My favourite piece of canal in the whole of UK is the stretch of T&M between Northwich and Croxton Aqueduct. Patches of floating pennywort reached out to us from the banksides, but we managed to keep away from them. The trees were just beginning to decide that Autumn had arrived, it wasn't raining and we were bringing our boat home— bliss!

Those of you who boat this stretch regularly will remember the fallen tree which narrows the navigation. The branches have been lopped off but the trunk remains in the canal. As we passed, we noticed a new species making use of the tree. A large terrapin was basking on the trunk and seemed quite at home and happy to share the canal with narrow boats. This is presumably a pet which got a little too large for domesticity. We made him an honorary member of the society!



Meet our latest new member— T&M terrapin!

Margaret English

CANAL CRUISING COMPANY LIMITED NARROWBOAT HOLIDAYS



Dry Docking Facilities

- 3 Dry Docks
(Available for DIY)
- Boat Repairs & Blacking
- Pump Outs, Diesel & Gas
- Welding & Machine Workshop
- Engine Services

Request
your
brochure
today!

Narrowboat Holiday Hire

Choice of Excellent Routes Available

10% Discount for CAMRA, IWA,
CART Members

15% Discount FORCES, NHS
STAFF, POLICE & RESCUE

(See website for full terms and conditions)



Check Live Availability & Book Online!

Taster Day Hire & Overnight Stay

Crown Street, Stone, Staffordshire ST15 8QN
Tel: 01785 813982 Email: mail@canalcruising.co.uk
Web: www.canalcruising.co.uk

Christmas Meal

No, I haven't gone mad!

Here we are, thinking about Summer and Autumn and hoping for an Indian Summer, so why am I fretting about Christmas?

You will have noticed that after keeping *Grand Trunk* bi-monthly for many years, increasing costs have forced a reduction to 4 issues a year. This means that the Winter edition may not be out until after the date of the 2024 Christmas meal. (see page 21).

No menu available yet, but it will be the usual fun evening at Red Bull, with quizzes, good company and lots of fun.

If you would like to attend, then please send your name and email to our wonderful event secretary, Dave Clegg

david@thecleggs.co.uk
Tel:07429 151313

Dave will send you the menu details just as soon as he has them, enabling you to make your choice.

See you there!



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 Spring edition is 15/01/25

Towpath Taskforce Middlewich

The taskforce has been very busy working on Rumps Lock. CRT volunteer organiser Grace Kennedy was kind enough to let me have the pictures below.



We are always looking for new volunteers to help tidy up and look after our canals, towpaths and structures. The work done by volunteers is crucial to keeping the network up and running and we welcome anyone from any background, with any level of experience.

Our Middlewich Towpath Taskforce is a relatively new initiative, but numbers are growing and there is always lots to

do. We meet once a month and try to make a big impact over a few hours by painting locks, tackling overgrown vegetation, picking up litter and doing small repairs where possible. I would love to branch out and set up other groups to help cover the stretches of the T&M around Sandbach and Northwich. Please feel free to get in touch or simply search "canal volunteer" to view opportunities in your local area.

Grace Kennedy

24-hour turnaround for Trent & Mersey lock

At the beginning of August, we received a report of an issue operating Lock 48 on the Trent & Mersey Canal. Our local team, along with engineers, headed to the lock and found that one of the lock gates had been dislodged from its pot (which the bottom of the gate sits in and allows it to move without causing damage).

The onsite team then made preparations to transport our gantry to the lock and then lift the gate, and reposition it back into place. While the repairs were being done, we needed to lower the canal level to safely conduct the work. This means locking up Lock 46 and Lock 48, preventing access to these locks while the repairs are underway.

Given the time of year, with many out on the water, we worked in the hope that we could fix this as quickly as possible and aimed to complete the work in time for this weekend. We undershot that target by a couple of days.



Lock 28 has listed building status. The towpath side lock was built in 1772-75 by James Brindley. The offside lock was added in the early 1830s, probably by Thomas Telford.

From 'Boater's Update (CRT) August

(picture courtesy of Waymarking.com)

Shardlow Inland Port Festival

For several years we have been trying to get to Shardlow Inland Port Festival, held annually since the village gained inland port status. We had hoped to go by boat (and take the society stall). Sadly, this was not to be. However, on Sunday 8th September we left the torrential rain of Cheshire behind and arrived at Shardlow in glorious sunshine.

We paid our parking fee and were rewarded with 2 programme booklets which each gave us £5.00 off local pub meals. Our first port of call was St James Church, where we were welcomed with tea or coffee and beautiful cakes. Books, jigsaws and bric-a-brac were available for a donation and the church itself was delightful.



Various other watering holes around the village were joining in the fun with live music, a dog show and a barbecue. On the previous day the festival prince and princess had been crowned at the Clock warehouse and there had been a classic car exhibition at the Boat-house in the marina. On Sunday it was the Morris Dancers' turn. Two lovely boat-horses (all kitted out and ready to work) greatly enjoyed the attention they received from visitors.

There were lots of lovely stalls- The Derby Canal Society was there along with CRT. Visitors could learn to paint roses and castles, or buy candles, handmade wooden artefacts and all manner of small gifts.

A walk along the towpath was fascinating. It was lined with historic boats (like *England* and *Biddeford*) and there was a comprehensive floating market. Goods ranged from ice-cream and cheese to crochet work, eco-friendly clothing, art, fairy houses and even the fairies themselves. The atmosphere was alive and friendly, and we made a mental note to try to get our stall there next year.



Sadly, we didn't have time to visit the heritage centre or follow the stone trail, but we did end our experience with a delicious meal in the Clock Warehouse before returning to Cheshire (where it was still raining).
What a wonderful canal our Trent & Mersey is!

Margaret English

More pictures on back cover!



Scheduled Winter stoppages on Trent & Mersey Canal

Trent & Mersey Canal Lock 1 Derwent Mouth, Shardlow

A navigation and towpath closure are required for repairs to leaking gates. The opportunity will be taken to do lock ladders works and chamber brickworks while the lock is closed.
11/11/24-19/12/24.

Trent & Mersey Canal Shadehouse Lock 19, Fradley

A navigation and towpath stoppage are required for bottom end mitre gate replacements and Lock ladder hoops and associated brickwork repairs.
06/01/25-14/03/25.

Trent & Mersey Canal Star Lock 27, Stone

A stoppage is required for lock landing repairs. The towpath will be closed from the local scouts club HQ to Lock 27, star Lock, below the visitor moorings.
06/01/25-31/01/25.

Trent & Mersey Canal Woodend Lock 20, Fradley

A navigation and towpath closure is required to reline the top lock gate and replace the heads and heels on the bottom lock gate. While the lock is closed, the lock ladder will be completely rebuilt.
06/01/25-14/03/25.

Trent & Mersey Canal Lock 57, Hassall Green

A stoppage is required for replacement of the bottom lock gates. New liners will also be fitted to the top gate and cill to prevent further leakage. The towpath will remain open.
02/03/25 –14/03/25.

Welcome to new life member

***Christopher John
of Melrose***



We hope you enjoy being a members of our society!

I went on holiday to Stoke-on-Trent and my family just asked 'Why?'

It might not be a mainstream holiday destination but it was the starting point for a holiday that definitely suited my family down to the ground. When I told to my children where we were going on holiday, the first question they had was not about narrowboats or canals. It was: “Why Stoke-on-Trent?”

OK, so it’s not a mainstream summer holiday destination. But for us it was a jumping-on point for the Trent and Mersey Canal, the first of the UK’s long-distance canals to be built, connecting the Mersey to the Trent so that goods could be moved inland from the port at Liverpool.

Over 93 miles, it passes through Cheshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire and we spent seven days exploring its middle section. We started at the Black Prince canal boat base in Stoke, not far from the spot where Josiah Wedgwood marked the very start of the construction of the canal in 1766.

*By
Nick Sommerlad
29 SEP 2024 (Staffordshire Live)*

.....And the other side of Stoke!

A man has been shot at from a passing car at a Staffordshire marina. Now police are scouring CCTV footage following the incident in Barton-under-Needwood.

Officers say they had been called out to Barton Marina on Saturday evening where a black Ford Focus had driven past the victim, a man in his 30s. It was then when a rear seat passenger is believed to have fired a pellet gun out of the window.

*Staffordshire Live
8th Oct.*



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

Or Tony Walker **07708 320470 walker.tony31@gmail.com**

Cheshire Locks Work Party Report 19/9/24

Once again the weather was kind to us and we made splendid progress on Lock 64.

8 of us attended on the Thursday (including a new recruit). There was more work to be done on the locks than I originally anticipated but we were able to get most of it done, plus we were able to smarten up the metal mooring posts either side of Lock 64 and those below Lock 63. Additionally, 2 of our crew made a start on prepping and painting the beams on Lock 63.



On the Friday follow-up visit 2 of us were joined by your CRT colleague Andrew who it was good to meet up with again. Further good progress was made including the numbering of Lock 64.

Tony Walker

Some interesting memorabilia

A few weeks ago, a very nice lady called Carol Leech contacted us to ask if we would be interested in some Trent and Mersey memorabilia which had belonged to her deceased husband.

The only problem was, she lived in Oban (Scotland)! Fortunately, Mrs Leech's son was travelling into England and would be on the M6. He agreed to divert at junction 18 (Middlewich) and drop the parcel off for us.

Another problem, we had to be at East Midlands Airport on the day he was passing. It was arranged that he would place his cargo in the special wheelie bin we keep for Christmas shoebox deliveries at this time of year (don't ask!). A recipe for disaster, you might think. Fortunately everything went to plan, so a huge 'thank you' to Mrs Leech and her son.

I have reproduced the email from Mrs Leech below.....Ed.

Memorabilia passed to society

The Wedgwood goblet and the Harecastle plaque belonged to my husband, Bill Leech. He was a canal enthusiast and joined the T&M Canal preservation/restoration society in 1974 when we moved to Stoke on Trent. He was involved with the work and then the eventual bicentennial commemoration in May 1977. (I also was involved in the celebration, being the 'canal queen' for this special occasion!)

Bill maintained a keen interest in the canal system, enjoying many canal holidays, and for 4 years worked for Bijou Line at Penkridge on the Staffs and Worcs. Canal. His knowledge, practical and instructing skills were invaluable for the hirers. He would have been so pleased that these items can be part of your collection.

With kind regards,

Carol Leech

Any memories of Bill Leech which you would like to share? Get in touch!



*Harecastle
1974
Plaque
Photo Roger
Evans*

Trent & Mersey
**Bicentenary
Commemorative
Goblet**

Specially commissioned by
**The Trent &
Mersey Canal
Society**
and produced by
Wedgwood Glass





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

The history and the changing places of the Trent and Mersey Canal between Preston Brook and Harecastle Tunnel.

"The journey compares the scene in the 1930s (a few views) and 1967/8/9, with 2023/4."

By Ian Wilson.

November 15th 2024

BR Southern Region 1948-1994

This talk takes up the continued progress of the Southern Railway, from Britain's railway companies 1923 Amalgamation into the 'Big Four', the largest 650-750v DC 3rd-rail electrified railway in the world, following the Second World War, and Nationalisation.

With an operating rail network 400 miles long from Ramsgate to Padstow, and inheriting a large number of

elderly steam locomotives, the Southern Region, British Railways, planned and delivered electrification of the remaining unelectrified main lines, with diesel traction for secondary routes following the end of steam in 1967, coping with the closure of many lines between 1958 and 1972, many as a result of the Beeching Report.

Modernisation and innovation had a startling effect on the rail network. Often under-appreciated, the Southern can be said to have massively contributed to the prosperity of the London & South East region of Britain.


By Jon Honeysett BA, MBE

December 6th 2024

Society Christmas meal– see page 9.

January 17th 2025

Burslem Port– past, present and future.




Burslem Port Trust

"BRINGING BOATS BACK TO BURSLEM"

Connecting Burslem


The Burslem Branch Canal was a 3/8-mile stretch built in 1805 to connect Burslem industries with the Trent and Mersey Canal.

A horse-drawn tramway up the steep hill of Navigation Road connected the branch canal wharves to Burslem town centre. The canal was an instant success, bringing raw materials to Burslem potteries, and taking the finished wares on their first step before their export across the world.




A horse being led towards the Shropshire Union Wharf 1935


A crew unloading a boat at the Anderton Canal Carrying Company Wharf. The wharf would have been just beyond the footbridge but has since been demolished. 1956




A boating family moored near the Anderton Wharf 1930s



Two men looking out onto the Branch Canal from the Dimdale St. Footbridge 1961






Burslem Branch Canal

Mineral Railway

Trent and Mersey Canal

To explore the line of the canal and find out more about its history, follow the footpath at the bottom of the ramp.



Images © A. D. Pickering/©Hills, Transport Archive

by Dave Broome.

February 21st 2025

Historic Narrow Boats

By Alison and Rupert Smedley

Alison and Rupert own 2 very special historic narrow boats as well as being steeped in all things waterways!

Please note the change to our earlier programme.

March 21st 2025

An Alan Chetwyn film evening about a 1999 voyage to the River Aire via Barton, Wigan, Bingley and Leeds– always an interesting experience!.

April 18th 2025

HS77: Comparing the now abandoned HS2 northern section passing through mid-Staffs with Brindley's escapades in the late 1700s.

By Michael Priest.

May 10th 2025

Annual General Meeting

Venue to be announced.

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

Registered Office: 10 Long Lane, Middlewich, CW10 0BL
Telephone: 01606 834471

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk (or) www.tamcs.org.uk

OFFICERS

PATRON	Ian Dudson CBE, KSt.J Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire
VICE-PRESIDENTS	Steve Guest, Malcolm Gray
CHAIRMAN TREASURER and WEBSITE	Roger Evans, 10 Long Lane, Middlewich, CW10 0BL Tel:01606 834471 Email: rogermartinevans@hotmail.com
DEPUTY CHAIRMAN	Gillian Watson, St. Anns House, 107 St Ann's Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 0AA Tel:01606-835606 Email:gillian.watson@me.com
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY, SECRETARY AND GRAND TRUNK EDITOR	Margaret English, 10 Long Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 0BL Tel: 01606-834471 Email:margaretetlm@hotmail.com
COMMITTEE MEMBER	John Tackley, River View, Leigh's Brow, Barnton, Northwich, CW8 4HT Tel: 01606 76204 Email jtackley@hotmail.com
MINUTES SECRETARY	Jean Clegg: details as David Clegg
TALKS ORGANISERS	David and Jean Clegg, Email: David@thecleggs.co.uk Tel: 07429 151313
BURSLEM PORT REPRESENTATIVE	David Dumbelton, 32 The Lea, Trentham, Stoke on Trent, ST4 8DY Tel: 01782-641765, Email:david.dumbelton@gmail.com



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

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem

