

GRAND TRUNK



The Malcolm Grey Award

Spring 2025

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit

Welcome to our Spring issue. It feels more like mid-Winter as I write this, but such is the world of publishing that issue names always refer to the “coming-soon” month or season. I don't really know why, but I guess that they don't want the issue to sound out-of-date as soon as it is published. Recently I received the “February” issue of a canal magazine just before Christmas!

Anyway, I hope that you all had a happy Christmas and a not-too-merry New Year. Personally we had a thoroughly enjoyable family Christmas followed, as usual, by New Year on the boat. Sadly our cruise was cut short when the domestic alternator failed and we had to rush (at no more than 3mph of course) home before the batteries ran down and left us sitting in the dark without a fridge/freezer or a water pump!

I feel that I must apologise to members for two recent cancellations of society events. The January Cheshire Locks work-party was cancelled because it was too cold and wet to do any painting (or indeed any other useful work on the locks). Our January talk also had to be cancelled at short notice because the Red Bull Inn suddenly told us (only a few days beforehand) that the upstairs room wouldn't be available until February. [They have promised that it will definitely be available before our February meeting]

Our society Christmas meal on Friday 6th December went very well and was thoroughly enjoyed by around 20 members. Don't forget that you can join us for a meal before any of our monthly talks. Contact David Clegg for full details of the menu and how to book.

We would normally include details of our AGM in this issue, but are still trying to finalise the arrangements. Suffice it to say that Saturday 17th May is looking very likely. More details will appear on our website as soon as they have been confirmed.



Roger Evans

Editorial

Happy New Year to all our members and readers. Our New Year started a little early. Chairman Roger has already mentioned our battery problem. We spent New Year's Eve in the dark (apart from firelight) wondering if we were going to make it home. We therefore declared a Cypriot New Year (2 hours ahead of UK); wished each other the compliments of the season, downed a small glass of port and went to bed! We had intended to cruise up the Macclesfield Canal as far as we could go, but had to turn round at Congleton Wharf. I was very disappointed in the numbers of twin locks on the Cheshire Flight which were out of order. The paddle gear was also very stiff and, of course, the ground was very muddy and slippery.

On a more cheerful note, we were delighted to take delivery of the Anderton Lift booklet written by Sandy Wright. Several members have already purchased copies. These are for sale at £3.00 each (see pp.14/17) at meetings and events.

We are happy to post copies out but owing to the high cost of postage, have to ask for an additional £2.50 for postage and packing. If you would like to order a copy by post, then let Roger or myself know. You can pay by PayPal through the website, send a cheque or use Direct Bank Transfer– please get in touch if you would like more details.

There is also good news about the threatened Anderton mural (p.8/9). Now we need some cheery news about the Southern end of our 93 mile-long canal. All contributions gratefully received!

The Lady Beth now has a fully functional set of domestic batteries and has been valeted after her short (but extremely grubby) trip. She is snoozing quietly under her covers, waiting for the human and feline crew finding time to embark on their traditional Spring trip around the Four Counties Ring. I notice there are already Easter eggs in our local shops!

Watch this Space!

Margaret English



LATER VOYAGES INTO THE UNKNOWN!

Our voyaging or journeying continued with a return visit to the Warwickshire Avon. A river of sweeping bends and superb views. We enjoyed Pershore and Evesham as night moorings. Evesham was reputed to hold a “cider house” in those days and we went off in search of it. After a great deal of hunting we found it down a dark alley.

On entering this one bar hostelry we were met by bare boards, bare walls and a bare bar. The room was fitted with wall benches which a few customers partly occupied. I couldn't see what was on offer as there was nothing on show, and I mean nothing. So I asked the silliest thing “Do you serve cider.” “Yus” states the landlord. What sort do you serve”? “we serves ‘rough’ an? ‘medium rough’”! Making a choice was an interesting conundrum and I opted for the medium rough which turned out to be ideal to polish your boats' brass!

Nevertheless, we enjoyed Evesham which has much character. As we travelled above Evesham we entered the Upper Avon. This had only been partly re-opened and I had fun following the buoyed channels where limited dredging had taken place. Second-nature to a seaman but important not to go aground.

We later became volunteer lock keepers at Nafford. This entailed assisting the traffic through the lock on busy Sundays. We owned an outstandingly bright Border Collie at the time and he enjoyed the work! Boats passing though could make a voluntary donation for society funds. We had a tin on both sides of the lock. My wife and our dog “Mit” worked the offside. Mit could count up to 6. He couldn't cope with logarithms or co-sines! The boaters were asked by my wife to name a number 1 to 6 and then Mit would give them the requisite number of paws as a thank you. Unsurprisingly, Mit collected 3 times the donations I did! Lovely days.

We then opted for a one way passage over the Pennines on the Leeds and Liverpool with Shire Cruisers. Starting at Sowerby Bridge and completing in Burnley. It was an interesting contrast of industrial and rural. Both the Aire and Calder are big in places and it reminded me of going up estuaries all over the globe. We were warned about the “bandit country” around Leeds but we opted to moor in Leeds one night near the Tetley Brewery. Very good

moorings but no sleep as the police sirens rang out all through the night. We made Bingley and some outstanding fish and chips and a visit to Damart's factory shop followed by the Bingley 5-rise. A wonderful experience with an excellent lock keeper.



Moving up the valley to Skipton was very attractive and we moored there. An excellent canal pub beckoned. I noticed a beer I'd never heard of (and not since) called "Burglar Bills". I was only charged half price and on asking was told they need to "shift it". It was dreadful. During the evening the price dropped to a quarter but there were still no takers.

After a week we arrived in Burnley having much enjoyed the route and adventure.

The return was by train and it took 20 minutes! In other words, never be in a hurry on a canal!

Christopher John
(Picture: penninewaterways.co.uk)

On the subject of Memorabilia....

.....After reading the article in *Grand Trunk* on interesting memorabilia. I had a look to see what I have in my collection. Some of my Dad's bits .

Steve Bates

(Front cover, The Malcolm Grey Award)



- 1) the Wedgwood limited addition plate of the Roundhouse Etruria .
- 2) the 25 years society plaque.
- 3) The best turned out boat awards when the society had rallies at Cliftons' Farm Shardlow.

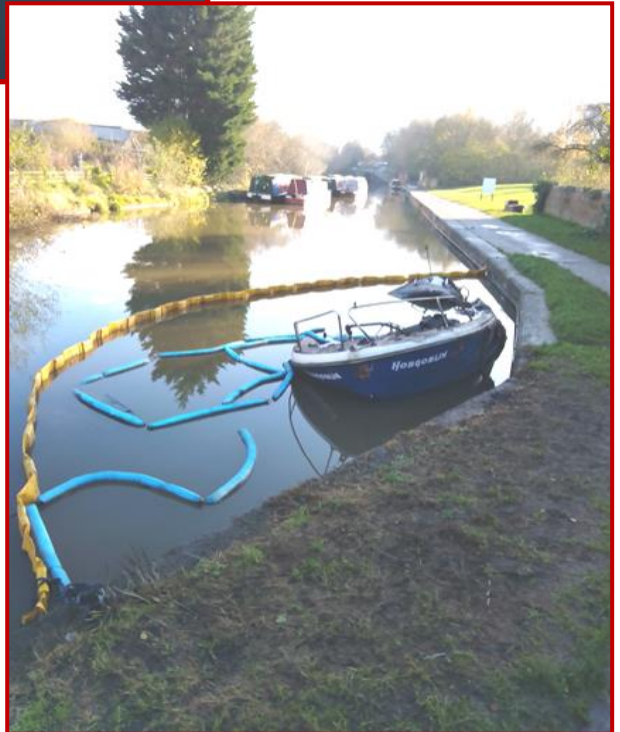


Burnt out Boat in Middlewich

It grieves me to report that this cruiser (*Hobgoblin*) was set alight and subsequently allowed to sink while moored at Town Wharf on the T&M in Middlewich in late November 2024.

Hobgoblin has been moored here for some considerable time and I have often passed her on my way into town (I like to travel by towpath!). I understand CRT have tried for some time to identify the boat's owner without success. The identity of the arsonist remains a mystery.

*Margaret English
Photos: Roger Evans*



Good news from CRT for the Anderton Mural.....

Supplementary Planning Statement

Extension and alterations to the main visitor centre building at Anderton Boat Lift including the addition of a set of external steps and replacement of rooftop plant Anderton Boat Lift Visitor Centre, Lift Lane, Anderton with Marbury, Northwich CW9 6FW

Introduction

This Supplementary Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of Canal & River Trust (hereafter “the Trust”), to provide clarification on proposals for the temporary removal and reinstatement of the mural displayed on the application site.

The Trust has been made aware of four comments made to the planning authority by members of the public, which specifically object to the removal of the mural.

It is acknowledged that the submitted ‘Heritage Impact Assessment and Justification Statement’ refers (at page 35) to the likely removal of the mural in order to accommodate the proposed external steps.

The Trust wishes to clarify that the mural will be temporarily removed in order to protect it while the proposed works to extend the visitor centre building are carried out. Once works are completed, the mural will be reinstated in its current position.

The Trust understands the significance of the mural to the local community, and in particular the volunteers who worked so tirelessly to support the restoration of the boat lift.

Removal of the mural

It is anticipated that the mural will be removed from the Anderton Boat Lift site between October-December 2025 (the expected start of delivery phase), prior to commencement of construction work in January 2026.

It is understood that the mural is displayed on a number of panels which are affixed to the historic wall with screws. The mural will be carefully removed, protected, and transported to the National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port by specialist movers.

Temporary display at the National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port

Following transportation to the National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port the panels will briefly be securely stored in the Island Warehouse, one of our

public exhibition spaces.

The mural will be displayed in the temporary exhibition space in the Island Warehouse throughout the Spring and Summer of 2026 (dates tbc) as part of a wider exhibition about the 'Engineering the Future' project at Anderton Boat Lift. The exhibition will form part of the community engagement strategy for the project and enable the work to reach a new audience.

Reinstatement in its current location

The mural will be reinstated in its current location at Anderton Boat Lift in Spring 2027, prior to the reopening of the Boat Lift and grounds.



Impression of mural after replacement (low resolution)

Courtesy of CRT

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 Summer edition is 01/04/25.

In November 2024 the Society was asked if we could help The Friends of Cromford Canal to restore the windows on their trip boat. A small donation was made and Hugh Potter kindly provided a history of the boat, which is reproduced (slightly abbreviated) below.....Ed

The Friends of Cromford Canal purchased the ex-working narrow boat *Birdswood* to operate as a passenger trip boat from Cromford Wharf. The first part of the boat's history is closely connected with the history of the railways. With the coming of the railways in the 1840s onwards, many canals found it impossible to compete and decided to cut their losses and sell out to the railway company which was taking over their traffic. The Cromford Canal was one of these. By 1923 the canal was owned by the London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS). This meant that in addition to the canals, the LMS found themselves the owners of many boats that had belonged to the various canal companies which were now under their control.

Most of these boats were wooden, but in 1928 the LMS decided to have some new riveted iron narrow boats built. These were 'day' boats', open boats with no cabin and were intended for use at the 22 railway interchange basins which were then very busy around the Birmingham Canal Navigations. The contract to build these boats was awarded to W.J. Yarwood and Sons who operated a shipyard on the River Weaver in Cheshire.

In spite of their humble work-a-day employment, Yarwood's boats were built with very attractive lines and a particularly fine shape, therefore not only 'swimming well' as the boatmen say, but were (and indeed still are) arguably the best-looking narrow boats on the canal system. *Birdswood*, as originally built for the LMS, was named *Ross*, fleet number 5, an open boat delivered by Yarwoods on 22/11/1938 as one of the later boats of this batch and gauged by the Birmingham Canal Navigations as No 2050 on 5/12/1938.

It would have been interesting to have been there when the load had reached 33 tons, and the freeboard was just 0.96 inches! Not surprisingly, sinkings in the dock were not unknown! The figures confirm the approximate rule of thumb which applies to all narrowboats that each ton of cargo increases the draught of the boat by one inch.

When the Labour party came to power after World War Two, all transport, including both railways and canals, was nationalised. Therefore, in 1948 all of the LMS boats passed into the ownership of British Railways, who contin-

ued the short haul day boat traffic to and from the railway interchange basins in the Birmingham area until April 1st, 1954. They then ceased all operations with canal boats.

Their fleet of 67 boats was taken over by British Waterways, but the trade was gradually diminishing. After this, 12 of the Yarwoods boats were converted to long distance carrying craft. That is to say they were fitted with living cabins and used in the British Waterways North West fleet to fill a shortage of butty boats, (unpowered boats towed by a motor boat and worked as a pair with the boatman and his family living on board.

Conversion work was done between 1955 and 1957, and BW then re-named these 12 boats after railway stations, one for each of the first 12 letters of the alphabet, and they have been known ever since as ‘Station Boats’. All the station names are familiar apart from *Birdswood*, which doesn’t seem to have a station to be named after. The most likely railway source for the name is Bird’s Wood flyover; the name for the railway flyover close to Dutton in Cheshire where there is a signal box and the line from Runcorn crosses over the West Coast Main line to Scotland. Adjacent to the railway is Bird’s Wood, close by the south end of Preston Brook Tunnel on the Trent and Mersey Canal.



Birdswood was re-registered at Northwich No 50 on 3/10/1958 along with the rest of the fleet.

A period of private ownership followed the end of carrying, then in 1974, *Birdswood* was bought by Bill and Jackie Young and converted to a horse-drawn trip boat which operated from Froghall Wharf on the Caldon Canal. In 1995, extensive steelwork to the hull was carried out and a new cabin, an engine and hydraulic drive unit were installed, although the traditional horse-boat stern end was retained. Trip boat operations then continued at Froghall until the end of 2010.

In early 2013, the boat was purchased by the FCC who converted it to electric drive. It is now operated as a trip boat at Cromford as the next phase in the varied life of this fine historic vessel. It is quite sobering to wonder what the boat will be doing during the next 75 years

John Lawson RIP



John Lawson RIP

John Lawson who has sadly died at the age of 76 will be deeply missed by his many friends and colleagues within the TMCS.

John was a kind and warm-hearted man, always full of enthusiasm, happy to engage with people with a ready smile on his face. He was a great canal enthusiast and had been the driving force behind the Cheshire Locks Work Party for many years. This group of volunteers (founded in 2012 by TMCS and the local branch of IWA in partnership with CRT) has been responsible for the painting of locks on the stretch of the Trent and Mersey between Kidsgrove and Wheelock. John's attention to detail was second to none as can be witnessed by anyone familiar with that stretch. He will be remembered by the CRT and his fellow volunteers for his unwavering commitment to the cause and for his patient, encouraging and optimistic leadership.

As well as leading the work party, he would often return to site in order to finish off the finer details. His artistic skills can be readily seen in the numbering of the lock gates and the lettering of the canal mileposts. Additionally, he took on the role of Towpath Ranger on the Trent and Mersey near his home in Rode Heath. As such, much to the appreciation of his fellow residents, he took an active interest in the recent towpath improvements part-funded by the local Parish Council.

John had many other interests in his life. In particular, he was a supporter of the RNLI for which he was a keen fund-raiser. He was also a life-long supporter of Stoke City football club, following them both home and away, through good times and bad. At one time he was Chair of the Official Supporters' Club and contributed in other ways such as being a steward on away coaches and being a member of the matchday staff hosting hospitality guests.

John passed away peacefully at home in the care of his family on 7th December 2024 after a long illness which he bore with true bravery and fortitude. He is survived by his wife Sandra, two sons, two step-daughters and five grandchildren.

Tony Walker (with help from John Brighouse)

Welcome to new member

*Sandy Wright
Of Lifton, Devon*

And author of The Anderton Boat Lift

See below

We hope you enjoy being a members of our society!

Commemorating the Society's battle for Anderton Boat Lift

Back in the 1980s and '90s, the Trent & Mersey Canal Society was foremost in the battle to ensure that Anderton Boat Lift was fully restored, not closed permanently or replaced with a skimpy alternative link between the T&M and the Weaver. (Various forms of the latter were proposed by British Waterways during the first eight years of the Lift's closure).

It was an intensely long drawn out campaign with numerous obstacles along the way. I heard about much of it at first hand as my late parents Ted and Jill Wickens were active members of the TMCS Northern Branch committee during those years. I also kept close tabs on the campaign through my editorial job with *Canal & Riverboat* magazine in the early 1980s.

Latterly, in the 2020s, I've been taking trips down memory lane with my brother Steve, courtesy of our father's photo collection. Old photos of Anderton Lift kept cropping up and we began to wonder whether the story of the restoration campaign had been documented. Our question was answered when I spotted a request on the Trent & Mersey Canal Society's website for someone to provide an article on the subject. Needless to say, I volunteered. It seemed unjust that the herculean efforts of all those involved had not been recorded for posterity.

I knew that a lot of grit and determination had been put into the campaigning by many people. But my research left me staggered by the thousands and thousands of volunteer hours spent in meetings, correspondence, organising activities and writing reports. And, very sadly, the Society lost two Chairs during the process, Peter Smith and Mike Mitchell.

It was fortunate that Steve had kept in occasional contact with Ted Thompson, volunteer extraordinaire at the Lift (with more than 40 years' voluntary involvement there). Ted was keen to meet and share his memories as well as the records he'd kept from his late wife Christine who kickstarted the restoration campaign and never gave up until the official opening by Prince Charles in 2003.

I then got stuck into several months of research. I waded through the Canal & River Trust archives at Ellesmere Port, and numerous publications including archive copies of *Grand Trunk*, held by Roger Evans and Margaret English.

With Roger's help, I was able to follow up a lead from Ted who had a CD of the late William Rowley's photos and notes from the time. William had been Assistant Manager at British Waterways' Northwich Repair Yard from 1981 to 1989, and had taken a special interest in the Lift, even after moving away from Northwich. Roger contacted William's daughter Rachel James who kindly gave permission to use his material.

I think this quote from William Rowley gives a particular insight into what the campaigners were dealing with: "BW did not know what to do, they had no money for a job of this size...local canal enthusiasts led by the Trent & Mersey Canal Society started a campaign to restore the lift, keeping up the pressure on BW who gave the impression that they would like to 'forget' it."

My research led me to concur with William. It was easy to lose track of the number of surveys and consultants, broken promises and false starts along the way. At times, I wondered whether there was some brinksmanship in play and, certainly, some public relations spin. Also some naïveté on behalf of British Waterways.

Throughout the campaign various groups came and went – including Anderton Boat Lift Development Group, Anderton Boat Lift Trust and Friends of Anderton Boat Lift – but one remained a constant, the Trent & Mersey Canal Society.

My initial aim had been to prepare a short article for the Society's website but, having uncovered mountains of interesting material, I ended up creating a 32 page booklet. I see it as an 'anatomy' of the campaign, with per-

sonal commentaries dotted throughout, both from me and the records. It's illustrated with photos from the time, including many of the Society's members who were involved. If you read the booklet, I hope you agree that it does justice to the immense efforts of the Society at the time.

The booklet is available via the Society's online shop for £3 plus postage (all proceeds going to the Society).

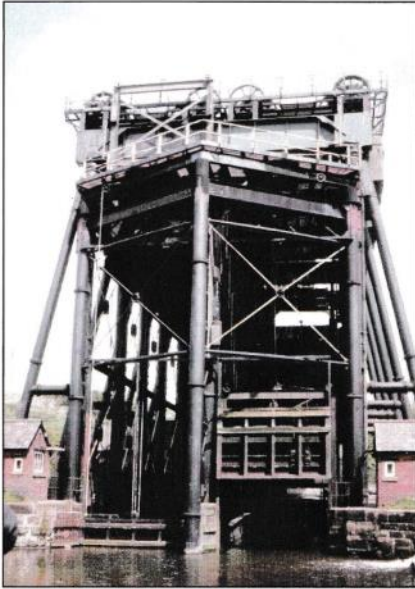
See back page for Sandy with Ted Thompson

Sandy Wright



One of many photos from the booklet: members of the society present a petition to 10 Downing Street in 1985, accompanied by Neil Hamilton MP and his wife. Pictured are (l to r) Harry Arnold, Neil Hamilton, Pat Osborn, Peter Smith, Ken Foy, Chris Thompson and Christine Hamilton. (Photo: Ted Wickens)

Anderton Boat Lift



The
restoration
campaign
years
1983 - 2003

Sandy Wright

*Anderton Boat Lift
shortly before its
closure in 1983.
(Photo: Ted Wickens)*



*The reopened Lift in
2002, before its official
reopening in 2003.
(Photo: William Rowley)*



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.

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

Work Party Reports

Thursday 17th October – There were 9 of us in attendance on Thursday (including yet another newbie) plus our new Volunteer Supervisor Will Leyland which was very encouraging. With such a number to manage I was more than grateful to Roger and John B for their additional team leading skills. Myself, Colin and Rob Pearson attended a follow-up visit on Friday. The weather was again kind to us on both days and so we were able to do a lot of work on Lock 63 and some touching-up on Lock 64. Both locks still have one chamber cordoned off which limits what we can achieve. Will has promised he will check back as to when restrictions will be lifted. We concentrated our efforts on prep and painting metalwork including the foot-bridge fencing.

Thursday 21st November – Our final work-party of 2024 had to be cancelled because of bad weather.

Saturday 7th December– Our previous leader, John Lawson, lost his heroic battle with cancer (see p. 12-13). A number of Cheshire Locks volunteers attended his very moving funeral **service. We hope to erect a plaque in his memory on the Cheshire Flight, which he cared about so much.**

Thursday 16th January 2025– Work party cancelled as a spell of extremely cold and wet weather followed by below zero temperatures made painting impossible.

Thursday 25th February– fingers crossed!



Welcome to new member :

Richard Hovey

of

Wheelock

We hope you enjoy being a member of the Society



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

January 17th 2025



*An Alan Chetwyn film evening about a 1999 voyage to the River Aire via Barton, Wigan, Bingley and Leeds— always an interesting experience!. See *Chairman's Bit*.*

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

Burslem Port— past, present and future. (See next page)
by Dave Broome.

April 25th 2025

Please note change of date

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

By Michael Priest.

May 17th 2025

Please note change of date

Annual General Meeting

Venue to be announced.

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 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

A horse being led towards the Shropshire Union Wharf 1935

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

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. Packwood/Steve. Transport Archive

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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

Dave Broome
Email: dave.broome45@gmail.com



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

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem



Sandy Wright pictured with our very own Ted Thompson at Anderton Boat Lift visitors' Centre (where Ted volunteers)

Thank you so much for all your hard work and research, Sandy