

GRAND TRUNK



Autumn 2024

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Report

Welcome to our Autumn issue. As Margaret mentioned in the previous (May/June) issue we have decided to reduce the number of issues per year from 6 (bi-monthly) to 4 (quarterly) rather than increase the annual subscription. It was slightly sad as **Grand Trunk** has been bi-monthly since the middle of 1990, but we really couldn't afford to stay at 6 issues per year much longer as production and postage costs were rapidly approaching the annual cost of a subscription. There was also the fact that Margaret was having to research and write ever more of the magazine herself with fewer and fewer articles being contributed by members. Please do consider whether you could write something that would be of interest to other members.



One consequence of going quarterly is that this (Autumn) issue is the last one which you will receive in time to book for our Christmas meal on Friday 6th December (as the Winter issue won't reach you until late November or early December). Therefore we are asking people to let Dave Clegg know if they are interested in possibly attending. You aren't committing yourself to attending by contacting David now, just expressing interest. David will then let you have a copy of the menu during November so that you can book if you do decide to attend. See full details on page 9.

This week we attended (in glorious weather) a Cheshire Locks work party and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves cleaning-down and starting to paint lock 64. Again see the full article 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.

Sadly, we won't be taking our stall to Shardlow Inland Port Festival on September 7th-8th after all, but do go along and enjoy it for yourselves anyway.

Roger Evans

Editorial

Hello everyone! Welcome to our first Autumn issue. Roger has already mentioned that my name appears far too often in the pages of this magazine. The report of our travels reminds me of our much-missed member, Peter Sibley, who wrote *Towpath Reflections* for so many years.

I took the opportunity to list some of the things which distress me about our canal (see pp14/15). Perhaps you would like to tell me about some of your concerns (with pictures would be great)- I'm only an email away!

I recently had a cataract removed from my right eye, and was told to keep away from grass, soil, dust, and exercise for at least 2 weeks. I did try to behave for 2 days, then worked out ways to sidestep this problem. Anyone passing lock 64 may have noticed a paint-bespattered gremlin, hiding behind industrial goggles, rubbing down and painting the lock ladders. It wasn't me your honour!

On our way home from our eventful cruise (pp, 10-13) we met a boat coming through a bridge hole on the narrow stretch of the Shroppie. We reversed at speed, went over a large rock and knocked our rudder out of its cup. We couldn't re-position it, and neither could the many helpful boaters who had a go. We limped home with very heavy steering and are now landbound until *The Lady Beth* can be craned out of the water and the problem fixed. We could not get a booking for this until mid September, so we cannot get to Shardlow.

We are very disappointed about this. If anyone who is attending would like to write a piece for the magazine (with pictures), it will be very gratefully received.

Finally, please note the very interesting talks starting in October and don't forget the Christmas meal.

If you see *The Lady Beth* out and about after her rudder is fixed, do give us a wave.



Margaret English

AGM at Apedale

On 11th May 19 members and a family of newborn kittens attended the society AGM at Apedale Heritage Centre in Newcastle Under Lyme (yes, I did mean kittens!). It was a glorious sunny day and the room we had been promised was neatly set out with the right number of chairs, a water heater, cups, coffee, tea, and biscuits- luxury! The walls were covered with historic pictures of the area and a bookcase full of mining records.

Now to explain the kittens. Member (and new minutes secretary- hooray) Jean Clegg works for an animal charity which cares for cats in need. Jean had been alerted the previous day that a feral mother had abandoned her newly born kittens after being frightened by a dog. Jean waited until dusk, but the mother did not return. The kittens were moved into a heated basket and taken to Jean's home in Mow Cop, where she bottle-fed them during the night. They could not be left so they became our newest members, being fed throughout the day. Jean managed to stay awake but could not take part in the mine tour as she could not leave the babies. They will be transferred to the main cattery after the weekend and will hopefully survive to be rehomed.

After the AGM business and a delicious lunch, eight people were left to take part in the mine tour. What an experience! We wore hard hats with lights attached and had to leave all items with batteries behind in case of sparks. The mine closed in the early 1980s and is cared for by the volunteer guides (who were all working miners). It was dark, cold, slippery underfoot and extremely interesting and well-presented. In the hour available we learned about conditions when women and children worked in the mine, the changing machinery, safety measures and the problem of dangerous gases (and how Davy lamps work). We discovered that mines had a locked box cemented into a wall, containing prepared measures of morphine. The box could be opened by 'the deputy' if a serious injury occurred. We were not allowed to take photographs, but I can recommend a visit to this amazing place.

There is also a small museum containing artefacts like lots of different sorts of bricks, tools, signs, mine transport and explanations. We did not have time to do this justice and will be returning.

Margaret English



*Miner with pit prop
Standing guard
Outside museum
door!*

*Miners'
medallion in
stone*



Towpath Taskforce, Middlewich

On 4th June, the Cheshire Locks crew were asked if they would like to join Towpath Task Force Middlewich in a tidying operation around the three locks. This was to make the area attractive for the Folk and Boat Festival- and we were bribed with the promise of cake!

Chairman Roger and I decided to attend (we like cake), but nearly changed our minds when the weather forecast promised drizzle followed by rain. We knew one of the tasks was the weatherproofing of the benches around the locks and walking area of Maidenheads, so we gathered up the weatherproofing tin and two paintbrushes and tried to keep ahead of the rain.



We have walked and boated through the area many times, but never realised how many benches there were. A particularly interesting one was suspended between two trees beside the top lock, and we've never noticed it before! Some of the more venerable struc-

tures were weathered and soaked up their treatment with delight. The volunteer lock-keepers (fortunately) were too busy to sit on the newly-treated benches and the passing boaters pointed out where we had 'missed a bit'.

Other members of the party strimmed, mowed and tidied the paths to make them easily passable for pushchairs and dog walkers. Others gathered up the foliage and bagged it. The whole area soon looked cared-for and pleasant.

At lunchtime a small table and a beautiful (and delicious) chocolate cake arrived, together with a variety of drinks. Thank you, CRT and Towpath Taskforce Middlewich.

Margaret English

More on Barrow Bridge

In the last magazine we reported on bridge 16– here is an update:

The centuries-old Derbyshire hump-back bridge which has been hit by motorists 16 times in the past 20 years has just been repaired again at a cost of £100,000 and several weeks' closure of the road. Derbyshire police are still looking for the driver in the most recent incident at Barrow Bridge at Barrow-on-Trent.

And the Canal & River Trust, which cares for 2,000 miles of canals and rivers, is calling on motorists to slow down when crossing the centuries-old hump-back bridges that span the East Midlands' canal network. It says that valuable resources and time are being diverted away from overall maintenance and the only way the cost of the damages is recouped is through drivers' insurance.

In the most recent incident at Barrow-on-Trent, it is thought that a large vehicle, believed to be a lorry, crashed into the bridge, which forms part of Sinf Lane and crosses the Trent and Mersey Canal. The canal was also closed to boats between Swarkestone and Stenson Lock, with the towpath closed to pedestrians, because of the danger of falling masonry from the bridge.

The Canal & River Trust spent the last four weeks in June recovering bricks and carefully rebuilding the bridge. Owing to the narrow width of the bridge, the road had to be closed throughout the works, but was reopened on completion.

The collision caused significant damage to the brick parapet of the historic structure

Linny Beaumont, trust regional director, said: “Canal bridges, which date back hundreds of years, are such an important part of our local heritage and character so it’s heart-breaking to see them damaged in such a careless way.

From Staffordshire Live

June 2024

See back page for picture of damage.

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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 will 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 email 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 Winter edition is 15/10/24

Market Harborough here we come!

On 18th July The Lady Beth, complete with human and feline crew, arrived at Harecastle Tunnel North Portal on our way to Market Harborough. We found a queue of boats waiting to go South. Apparently, on the previous passage, a lady crew member of the last boat in had the misfortune to fall into the lovely red water inside the tunnel. She kept her head and swam to a safe point while the alarm was raised. The unfortunate swimmer was duly rescued with no injury other than wounded pride and the boat made a second (and successful) attempt to pass through the tunnel at the head of our convoy.

Congratulations to the CRT tunnel keeper and staff who dealt with the situation.

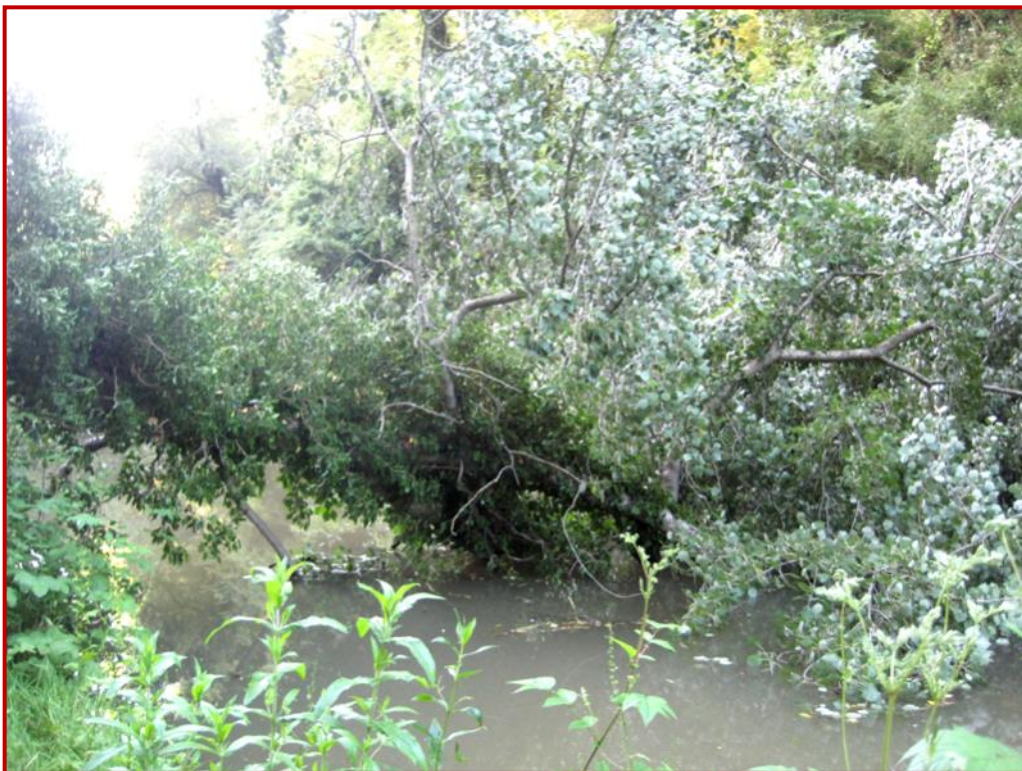
After this excitement we travelled through Stoke, marvelling at the way the vegetation was masking the industry. We had a lovely trip down Meaford, mooring at the bottom overnight. The following day we set off through Stone and the sun was actually shining! We had just finished emptying the loo when a single hander went past and asked me to re-open the bottom lock gates on the lock just above. I raced up and complied 'thank you Sonny' he said. Either he needed to visit the optician, or I was looking even more disreputable than usual.

All went well until we reached Sandon Lock, where the ground paddle was out of commission and there were lengthy queues on both sides. I lost count of how many times I worked the lock but did enjoy egg sandwiches when we finally got through.

We continued without incident, sneaking through Fradley while the volunteer lock keepers were at lunch. On to the Coventry Canal and up the notoriously slow locks at Glascote with minimum fuss. We had fun at the top of the Atherstone flight, where we were moored up and filling the water tank bow in to the bank. A seventy-foot boat arrived and needed to wind in the cut-out which doubles as water point and winding hole. Amazingly, we man-

aged to haul *The Lady Beth* back into the mouth of the top lock and the operation was completed without incident. On to the Northern Oxford Canal: we were enough on schedule to stop for a wonderful meal at Sutton Stop before making our lazy way towards Braunston.

Then disaster! A tree had come down in the recently cleared cutting, completely blocking the canal.



We managed to moor up but could not get close enough into the bank to allow the feline crew to disembark. We passed a somewhat noisy night!

The tree was large, covered the whole width of the canal, and (like an iceberg) obviously had at least as much volume below the water line. CRT advised they would have to call contractors in to remove the obstruction.

The towpath was blocked off just before the tree because it was opposite the site of the recent great landslip. Anxious to view the damage, we slipped carefully past!



the barrier and were rewarded with a view of the amazing work which had been done to stabilise the bank. We were very careful!

We turned round and set off up the Ashby because we like it (and also because there are shower facilities towards the top). Our boat shower is home to the feline crew's litter tray, so we were very excited at the prospect of being clean.

Unfortunately, the showers were no longer there. Undeterred, we filled up with water and decided we would remove the litter tray and shower on board. The only problem was, we luxuriated in so much water that we had to fill up again!

We returned to Hawkesbury Junction and made a trip into Coventry. Our attempts to moor in the basin were hampered by a large number of schoolchildren learning to kayak there. We managed with the help of CRT volunteers and the children were much happier when they discovered they could bounce off our boat!

We decided to head for home and remembered we needed to send off our postal votes (for the general election), so we consulted our elderly *First Mates Guide*. This advised that there was a post office in Amington which could be reached from Bridge 67. I needed to cross the bridge and walk to the main road- simple. Unfortunately, the offside of the bridge was now in the garden of a brand-new house. Instead, I had to find a pillar box in Glascote which involved crossing Abbey Road. There was no pedestrian crossing however (if you don't understand this you are too young to remember the Beatles!).



More showers required! Chairman Roger decided we should enter Fradley Junction, then reverse down the junction lock in order to arrive at the facilities block facing homewards. The volunteer lock-keepers (not at

lunch this time) were both amazed and amused, and we were clean!



On the way home we saw some swans carrying their cygnets on their back. I had heard of this, but never seen it. Called 'backriding', it keeps the young birds warm and safe.

I did not manage to take a picture, but found this one on the net!

Margaret English

Margaret's Moans

While cruising towards Market Harborough (see pages10-13), I noticed several things which have bothered me for a while, so this time I wrote them down!

Moan 1



Top lock on the Lawton part of the Cheshire Flight (offside)

As long as I can remember, this lock has been closed, full of vegetation and sinking into ever further decay. Some years ago, the Waterway Recovery Group attended and cleared the lock out– (quite an honour as WRG very rarely works on non –derelict canals). It is now completely choked and no longer even recognisable.



Moan 2

Offside Lock on the pair below

This lock was closed more than 20 years ago for no oth-



er reason than the turn in the short pound between this and the only working lock above was deemed to be dangerously sharp.

In its open days I made that turn on a hire boat without incident. The lock has now fallen into disrepair after years without use.

Moan 3

The uncared-for state of mileposts beyond our reach



The mileposts from Harecastle to Preston Brook are in a reasonable state thanks to the work of a few members and help from a local organisation. As you travel Southwards however, the situation deteriorates. Some are graffitied, others in desperate need of painting, or just look tired! I took a picture of this one because it is rather special.

Moan 4

The plaques on the mileposts through Stoke

They are no longer there! When the towpath was upgraded into a cycleway the path was built up and the plaques buried well below the surface.

I am cheating with the picture here (because I can't take one of a buried plaque!). This is the plaque from the milepost pictured above.

Unveiled by vice-president Steve Guest!





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 June

At long last, we have finished our work at Lock 53. The five of us who were able to attend) took advantage of the beautiful weather to prepare and apply paint to the remaining section of the surrounding metal fence, plus touching up and applying second coats to areas we'd worked on previously. I think the result is a testament to the perseverance and hard work which the Cheshire Locks Work Parties have put in over the last few months, I hope the photos demonstrate this! So, thanks to one and all who contribute. over that time.

One of our members has kindly agreed to take away the wooden name plate to varnish it and apply paint to the lettering. That'll be the icing on the cake. Thank you.

See cover picture!



Subject to discussions with Grace, (CRT work party co-ordinator) our next task could be to carry out much-needed work on Locks 61-64 at Malkin's Bank. Confirmation will be communicated nearer the time.

Tony Walker

Cheshire Locks Work Party 18th July

The work party finally moved on to Lock 64! First worked on 12 years ago and now in further need of TLC, I had a nasty feeling I had painted these lock ladders all those years ago! The weather was dry and hot (yes really) with very little wind and it was decided to concentrate on the wooden gates (apart from me– I can't be trusted with these and am confined to my favourite ladders).

The smartening-up effect of the painting was immediately apparent and passing boaters and walkers were very appreciative. The locks were busy and I had to be careful not to cover the boats with a delicate spray of flaked-off dirty white paint. We hope to finish this lock next session and move upwards to have a second go at lock 63..



*Before
(rubbing
down)*

..and after!



Margaret English

And finally!.....

I am grateful to Dave Clegg for bringing the following snippet from CRT notices to my attention!

19th July

‘Please be advised there is a windblown tree at Bridge 12 on the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal, which is blocking navigation.

Contractors have been informed and we anticipate they will be on site to remove the obstruction tomorrow.

Navigation will remain open, however, wide beams will not be able to pass until the tree has been removed

We politely request all narrowboat customers to navigate through the affected area with care.’



Those of you brave enough to leave the T&M at Wardle Junction and set off up the Middlewich Branch of the Shropshire Union, look out for those widebeams – if they have managed to navigate through the narrow locks and

low and narrow bridges that is!

Picture Creative Commons



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– further details later, see page 9

January 17th 2025

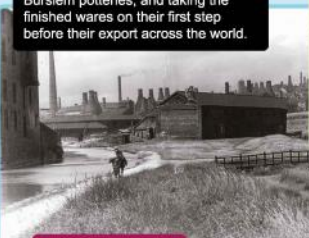
Burslem Port– past, present and future.


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.

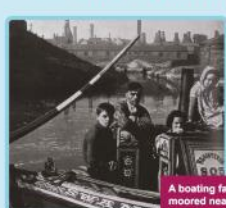


A horse being led towards the Shropshire Union Wharf 1935


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 Dinastale 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 © J. G. Peckham/Chris. Transport Archive

by Dave Broome.

February 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!.



Bingley 5-Rise

Picture: *Creative Commons*

March 21st 2025

Members evening: Details to be confirmed. Anyone who would like to contribute, get in touch with Dave Clegg (details on p.9 or 23).

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.

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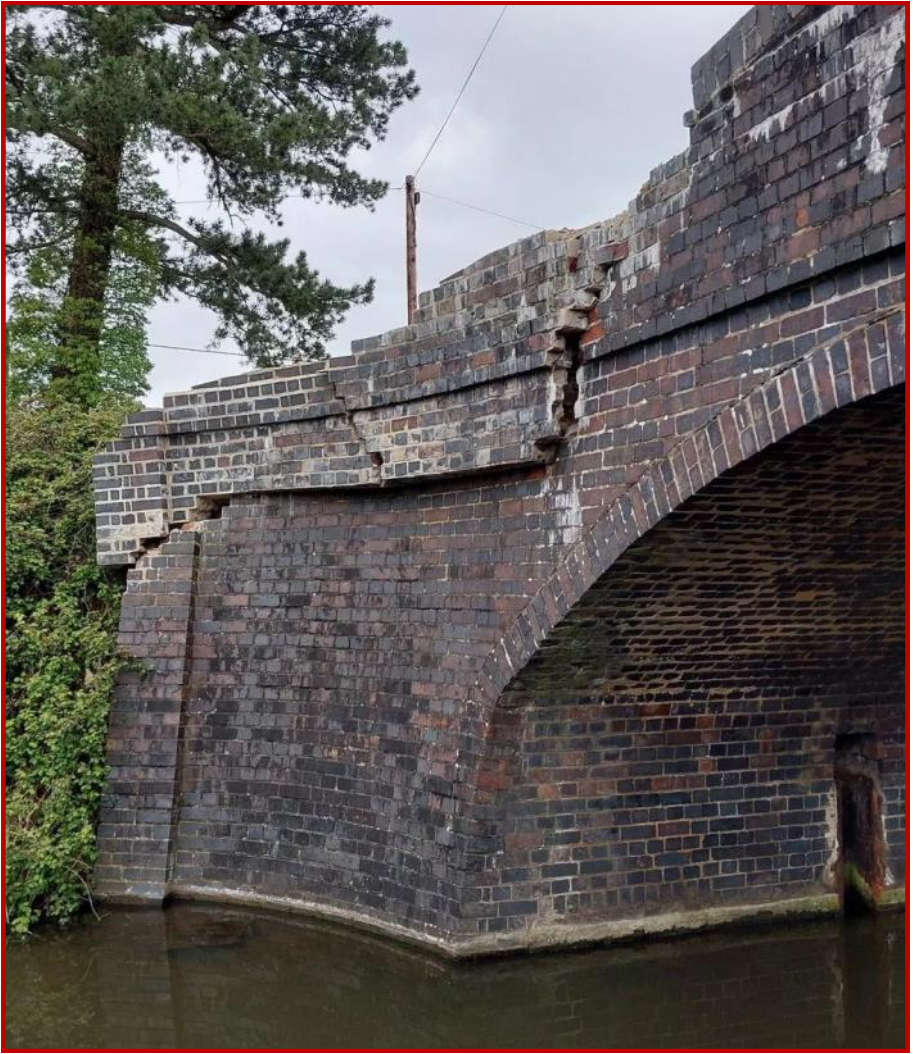
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*The Trent & Mersey Canal Society is proud to
continue supporting Burslem Port
Bringing Boats Back to Burslem*



Bridge 16

Badly damaged by HGV

(see p.7)

Pic courtesy of Mercia Police