

# GRAND TRUNK



*The Cheshire flight drained*

*See pp. 14-17*

*Photo Tony Walker*

**Winter 2025**

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

## *Chairman 's Bit*

So, we've had a bit of rain (but not enough yet to fully reopen all the canals!). Now, of course, it is time for the Winter stoppages to start. All (except one) of the stoppages on our canal are pre-Christmas, so hopefully (given enough rain) we will be able to resume normal cruising along our canal from December 20th. The exception is Lock 76 at Dutton which will be closed from 19<sup>th</sup> January to 20<sup>th</sup> February keeping us off the remaining part of the Bridgewater Canal.

Our society Christmas Meal will be at Red Bull on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December. Contact David Clegg for more details of menu, timings, etc.

The Cheshire Locks work parties take a break in December, but will resume in January.

Rather than ramble on I have included pictures below taken when vandals almost drained the pound above Kings Lock in Middlewich shortly after the Cheshire locks were drained.



## Editorial

Hello everyone

Such a lot has happened since I started to put this magazine together! Canals have been closed through lack of water after our very dry summer and (sadly) through vandalism, allegedly encouraged by social media.

The dry season now seems to have ended, but has left behind it a backlog of repairs. News about the Anderton Boat lift is worrying (see p.13) and the future of our waterways seems to be in jeopardy.

On a brighter note, chairman Roger and I spent the whole of October in Australia (no canals there). We started out in Vancouver and flew out to Vancouver Island by float-plane (something we have always wanted to do), then flew on to Sydney and travelled to the Blue Mountains and Canberra by camper van (a boat with wheels!).

We handed the van in at Melbourne– a very vibrant and busy city with its own river– and then flew to Uluru. No we didn't see the spectacular sunsets but were treated to some amazing storms.

Finally we went to Cairns, snorkelled at the Great Barrier Reef and enjoyed the rain forests. We were lucky enough to see crocodiles during a trip on the Daintree River, and hope they do not emigrate to our canals!



## Margaret's Boating Recipes

I thought these recipes might be of interest– the slow cooker recipes are very handy for leaving cooking while working a flight of locks!

*if anyone would like to share their favourites, get in touch!*

### Chilli Con Carne (slow cooker recipe- can be used in oven)

**Ingredients:** Vegetable oil, 1 large onion, chopped, 2 garlic cloves (chopped finely), 1 green pepper (or other handy vegetable). 250gm minced beef, 1tsp chilli powder, 1.5 tbsp flour, 4 tbsp tomato puree (or mix with tomato ketchup) 1 tin chopped tomatoes, 1 tin kidney or black beans, salt and pepper.

**Method:** add oil, garlic and pepper to cooking pot, fry until soft. Add mince, fry until lightly browned. Stir in tomatoes, make a paste with chilli powder, tomato puree, flour and seasoning- add to pot. Add kidney beans after about an hour (or straight away if there are locks in the way). Cook for about 4 hours on medium (about an hour in oven). Serve with boiled rice or baked potatoes.

### Liver Casserole (as above)

**Ingredients:** Liver, cut into thin strips, enough seasoned flour to coat liver, 1 large onion, 1 large carrot, chopped, swede, sliced, 1 stick celery, chopped, stock or water, 3 medium sizes potatoes, Worcester sauce.

**Method:** Toss the liver in the seasoned flour. Layer the vegetables on top and cover with boiling water until just covered. Add a good dash of Worcester sauce. Slice the potatoes thinly and layer these on top. Cook on Medium for 4 hours (1 hour in oven). Before serving, remove the potatoes with a fish slice and slide these onto a flat plate. Brown under the grill. Stir gravy granule into the casserole to suit. Serve with browned potatoes on the top.

### Bolognese (Saucepan or slow cooker)

**Ingredients:** 250 gm minced beef, 1 large onion, 1 celery stick, finely sliced, 1 tin chopped tomatoes, a few mushrooms, any other vegetables to suit, about 150 ml stock (from cube), heaped teaspoon of dried oregano (sage will

do), 2 tbsp tomato ketchup/puree. Salt and pepper.

**Method:** Put all the dry ingredients into the pot and fry until the mince is lightly browned. Add the tomatoes and everything else. Cook for 4 hours (30 minutes without a lid in pan). Thicken with a cornflour paste or granules if needed. Serve with pasta.

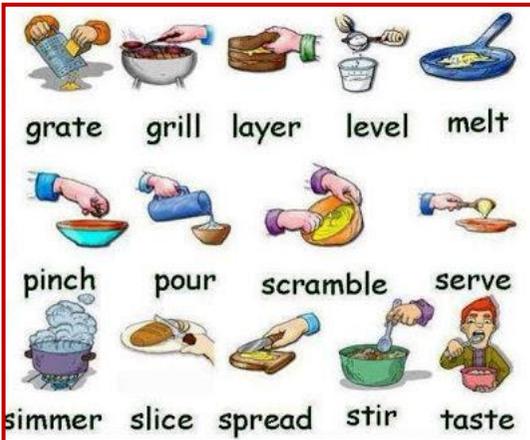
## Macaroni Cheese

**Ingredients:** 225 gm macaroni, 6 slices chorizo (cut into small pieces with scissors), 1 large onion, 1 tbsp cooking spread, 1 tbsp plain flour, 450 ml semi-skimmed milk, pinch of nutmeg, salt and pepper, 100gm cheddar cheese (grated)., clove garlic.

**Method:** Cook the pasta as usual. Chop and soften the onions and garlic (in microwave or pan). Place milk, seasoning, butter and flour in a pan, heat stirring constantly until thickened. Remove from the heat, add most of the cheese and stir. Combine the sauce, pasta and chorizo in a casserole dish, sprinkle the remaining cheese over the top and brown under the grill. Serve with salad or bread buns.

## Oven chips

**Ingredients:** Washed potatoes about one/two 2 per person depending on size. Olive (or other) oil, ground pepper.



Cut washed potatoes lengthways into the number of chips required (not too thin). Arrange in lines on a baking tray (I use toffee trays—they fit the oven!)

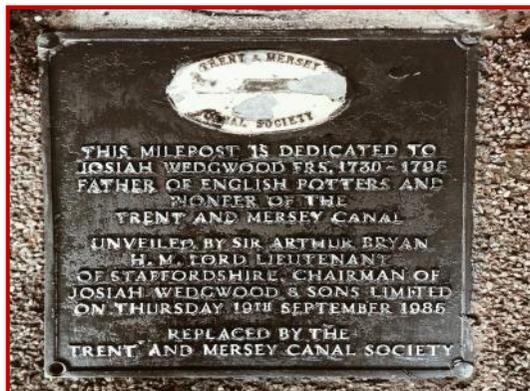
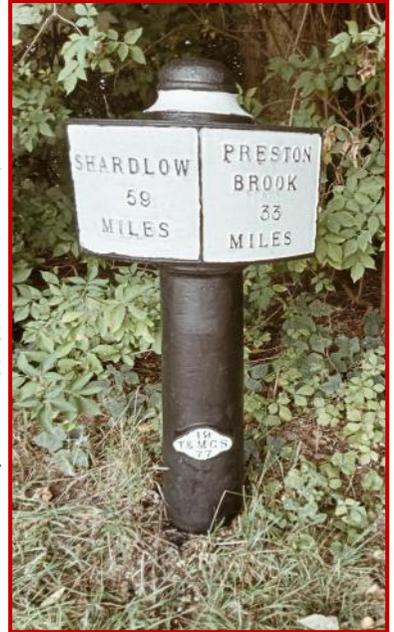
Using a pastry brush, ‘paint’ the chips with oil. Sprinkle with pepper. Cook in a pre-heated oven (fairly hot) for about 20 minutes. Serve with whatever you like to eat with chips!

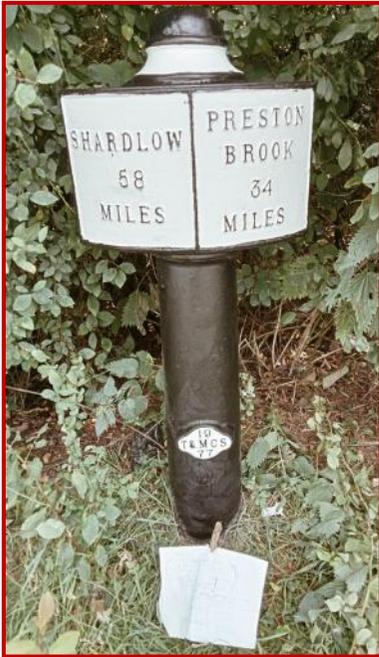
## Freshly Painted mileposts

Members will recall that the late John Lawson did a splendid job keeping the mileposts on the Cheshire Flight freshly painted and tidy. We bemoaned the fact that the mileposts on the Stoke side of the tunnel remained in need of some TLC.



Amazing members, Sara and Jon Hon-eysett, decided to do something about this while out on their boat *Upplander 2*. Here are some photos of their work.





Grateful thanks go to Sara and Jon (especially as Sara has recently taken on the role of Chair of IWA North Staffs and South Cheshire). You will notice that where possible, the plaques have also been cleaned. The one on milepost 57/35 is shown on the bottom of the preceding page.

If anyone else would like to try their hand at milepost refreshing while out and about, let us know. Paint can be provided!

*Photos by Sara and Jon Honeysett  
Text, Margaret English*

Please send contributions for the next issue to me, Margaret English, by e-mail to [margaretelm@hotmail.com](mailto:margaretelm@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 01/01/2026

## Swarkestone Lock

Attached are some pictures taken on 19th October by *Vaughn Wheatley*. They show Swarkestone Lock, which is currently closed.

The lock has been in poor condition for some time now. Both sets of gates leak badly, as seen in the first picture, which has led to a number of occurrences of a low pound between here and Stenson making it difficult for SBC members to get off their moorings.

I was surprised to see that the lock was not on the winter stoppage list; it certainly is now!

If you look closely at the other pictures, you will see that the bottom gate stem post has rotted through so that the balance beam is no longer attached to the gate. The lock would still be usable on one gate but CRT have deemed that too dangerous and closed the lock. It looks like it could be a long job and two of our moorers are stuck below the lock. The stoppage is also causing problems for continuous cruisers who are unable to reach the facilities at Willington.

I have asked CRT for a timescale for repair and if our two club members can use the lock under supervision to get back to their moorings; response awaited! I'm currently unsure if there is enough sound wood for it to be plated back together or if new gates are required.

All in all it paints a pretty bleak picture of the state of our waterways as a result of the current CRT approach of don't fix it until it breaks and it's difficult to see how things will improve any time soon.

*Dave Brewin*



*While looking through the archives, I came across this wonderful article in Grand Trunk, July 1981. I thought it was well worth reproducing and have typed it in to this issue. I have resisted the temptation to meddle with spelling grammar etc, so it just as it was written over 40 years ago.....Ed*

### **Recollections around Rugeley**

My first journey on the Trent and Mersey Canal was with a Sunday School Outing by narrowboat to Little Haywood. I would be about four. I remember I cried with fright in Colwich Lock, but the trip ended a few yards above the lock at Meadow Lane Bridge. There, in a field, we played some games and had buns and pop, the fizzy kind.

One thing did stick in my mind, a horse-drawn bread van came over the bridge. Some of the adults seem to know the driver. I was told it came from Rugeley Co-Op. It had been a long slow journey, further than I had been to date. I came home convinced that Rugeley Co-Op delivered bread to all England.

I was an indifferent Sunday School attender, preferring Sunday afternoon walks. So soon afterwards I was told the legend of The Bloody Steps, even shown the blood stains; I have often wondered exactly what those stains were, certainly not blood, the poor woman was thrown into the canal, dead or alive. The steps though overgrown, are still there after what must be at least two hundred years. About ten years ago, some new concrete steps were built beside them. These alas have been vandalised, rails gone and concrete broken, need I say more!! (sic)

It was a nice walk, across the Springfields onto Stafford Road, down the steps and back to Rugeley along the towpath. I can remember coal being delivered to Brindley Bank Pumping Station by boat. A short length of rails ran parallel to the canal, in the centre of these was a turntable, which turned the trucks at right angle to be taken to another set of rails to the back of the Pumping Station. It was fun to stand in the middle of this while others pushed it round in a scooter fashion. This turntable, I learned a few weeks ago, has now been removed and is in the safekeeping of a preservation society. This at least has saved it from less well-intentioned people, who seem intent on taking everything apart.

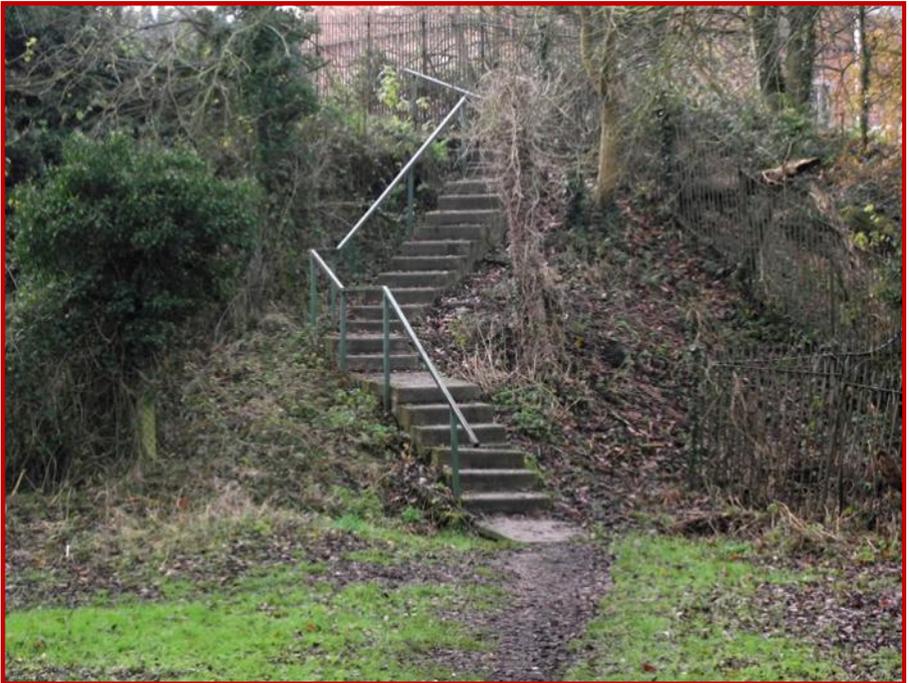
Another Sunday afternoon adventure. Level with the rear of Rugeley Parish Church was a small wooden store shed, in front of which, on the towpath, was a small crane. It was our delight to swing over the edge of the canal on this; until it was locked, for our own safety I suppose. Rugeley tannery, by the town wharf, had window-like openings on the canal side from which hides were loaded into boats. These were later bricked up, and after World War II the whole place was demolished. A local historian has stated that at one time there were fourteen wharves in the Rugeley area, from Colwich to Handsacre. He was probably right, so far I've only found traces of ten.

Rugeley Town Wharf has many happy memories for me. In 1915 I joined Rugeley Boy Scouts. A year later the son of Mr. H.C. James, the wharf manager, was invalided out of the army and took over the troop. We used the second floor of the building as H.Q. and we had part of the ground floor to store waste paper which we collected as a 'war effort'. When we had enough to fill a narrow boat, it was taken to the paper mills at Tamworth by canal. At night a stop plank was swung across the canal and locked. One of us would stand on this while others swung it across the water, it would hit the stop block with quite a force. Most of us finished up in the canal sooner or later.

Talking of scouting, when I was nearly sixteen I went to Sandon on what was then known as a 1st Class Hike. I walked there by road, camped the night and walked back along the towpath. Although I had to stand aside once or twice to let horses past, the towpath was in a much better condition than it is today. I remember the basin on Armitage Road when it was a thriving concern, taking coal from Brereton Collieries to various placers. From the pits a small railway ran down, under the A15 by Brereton Church to the Basin on the opposite side of the A513 to the canal, to which it was joined under a hump-backed bridge. The tunnel under the A51 is now a pedestrian underpass. The lads in Brereton soon found out that they could climb into the returning empty wagons from the A513 to Brereton, jumping out short of the tunnel, a footpath ran from one road to the other. This was a dangerous practice, but I never heard of any mishaps. There is still a row of old peoples' cottages called Railway Row, which puzzles newcomers to the village.

I remember when I was much younger, about 1912, being taken to Armitage to see where the canal had burst its banks opposite the Plum Pudding Inn. We went through Armitage Tunnel, a place of mystery in those days, full of flying bats. A hand rail ran along the edge of the towpath. In those days Flint and china clay was delivered to Armitage Pot Works by canal. The flint and clay went by sea from Cornwall to Liverpool and was delivered to the various pot works in North Staffordshire by Trent and Mersey. I suppose Armitage was that last drop. There was a wharf, mostly for coal, at Handsacre Bridge opposite the Crown Inn. The canal beyond Handsacre was then unexplored ground to me, Cannock Chase claiming my attention. That is until 1934 when a friend and I hauled a fifteen foot open boat from Trent Bridge, Nottingham by river and canal to Rugeley, but that's another story.

*J.W. Hetherley*



***The Bloody Steps***

*Picture , Blogspot.com*

## ANDERTON BOAT LIFT GATE FAILURE

**I attended** the public meeting at Anderton on October 28th to learn more of the background as to why a simple guillotine gate hoist rope failure should apparently be taking OVER 2 YEARS to rectify and cost £2 MILLION to solve.

**The guillotine gate** hoist failure is a simple problem readily capable of solution. Effective safe designs already exist which would only need tailoring to suit the Anderton site conditions

In basic engineering design terms, this installation performs the same function as a two landing passenger lift. The guided guillotine gate is equivalent to the lift cage and the winch mechanism is similar to the the lift drive mechanism.

**There are** many thousands of single storey lifts installed in the UK, most carrying passengers, and they all have their own, SAFE, hoist and lowering mechanisms - a failure would make national news if passengers were killed or injured - and they are used in houses, shops, warehouses, workshops, flats and open sites in profusion, with each manufacturer having their own safe, fully approved and accepted hoist design mechanism.

Additionally, as a bonus, the required safety factor for a passenger carrying device is greater than that required for normal industrial use.

The problem, after the hoist rope failed, should have been immediately addressed in the following manner.

**A simple** commercial approach should have been made to a selection of established, reputable, lift manufacturers, inviting their proposals for the supply and fitting of a new safe operating mechanism. It would be based on their current design lift practice and would replace the faulty winches. This would have produced proposals from the acknowledged lift manufacturing experts of modified existing designs at no cost to CRT!!

**The attraction** of the enquiry, stating that 12 identical units will be needed, would whet their appetites to make a competitive offer and the desire of their sales staff to boast of having installed their Lift machinery in such a prestigious location would be an added incentive.

The above approach should have been activated many months ago, immediately after the failure, in which case the Lift would, by now, be again operational, with the cost and aggravation a fraction of what is currently envisaged.

**Instead,** it is likely that consulting engineers will be approached to produce, at enormous expense, a new and unproven solution to a problem that has already been solved, and tested, commercially in several different ways.

*Why this pathetic inaction. Is there an ulterior motive?*

*John Tackley*

## Cheshire Locks Nightmare

*In the last issue we reported that the Cheshire Flight had been closed from Kings Lock in Middlewich up to Harecastle Tunnel in an attempt to save water during the current drought then....*

### **Notification from CRT 4th August**

The towpath is currently closed between Lock 43 Red Bull and Lock 54 Thurlwood Lower due to dewatered locks.

Unfortunately, the canal was emptied following vandalism over the weekend, and due to limited water supplies after a very dry spring, we're currently unable to refill it.

To keep everyone safe from the risk of falling from height, the towpath will remain closed until further notice. We're really sorry for any inconvenience this may cause and appreciate your patience and understanding. Navigation through this stretch is also temporarily closed due to the low water levels. .

*The leader of our Cheshire Locks work parties agreed to investigate the seriousness of this further disaster.*

I visited the T&M on 5th August and took lots of photos. These show how low the water is between Locks 42 and 45 as evidenced by the newly-formed "sandbank", the duck "walking on water" and the exposed piers.

Then we have the empty pound between locks 51 and 52 including the submerged bicycle "preserved in clay".

But by far the worst of all are the last ones which show the empty stretch between locks 49 and 48. I've never seen anything like it! One photo shows the partial collapse of the towpath side wall which was already evident before the recent vandalism but is now exposed in all its "glory".

I hope CRT have noted that this needs attention sooner rather than later.

*Tony Walker*





*See next page for press report*



## Drained canal

*from Liverpool Echo 11/8/25 (Photo Staffordshire Life)*

An investigation has been launched after two miles of the Trent & Mersey canal were drained last Saturday. Several locks on the canal, running along past Kidsgrove, were left open in an apparent act of vandalism.

The Canal & River Trust reported the incident to Cheshire Police after they discovered the water had been lost between locks 44 and 54 on Saturday, August 2. The charity believes the canal was destroyed deliberately in a bid for online attention, reports Cheshire Live.

"This can cause massive problems for the boats that are moored in the area and the fish and other wildlife that lives in the canal.

"We believe that this vandalism may be motivated by people looking for social media 'likes', and we're asking people to let us know if they see anyone misusing the canal locks.

"A two-mile stretch of canal between locks 44 and 54 was affected, with every lock opened.





## **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 25th September**

A week later than usual, but we struck lucky with the weather to start work on Locks 41. 5 of us were in attendance on Thursday and 2 for the follow-up on Friday and we made full use of the pleasant weather conditions. We prepped and painted as much of the woodwork as we could given that the locks are currently closed. We were also able to tackle the lock ladders and some metal mooring posts. There's plenty of metalwork on the lock gear and surrounding rails and fence work yet to be started which will keep us busy on the next couple of visits.

### **Thursday 16th October**

Ideal weather conditions and the fact that the double lock was open to traffic at long last meant we were able to make excellent progress. We concentrated our efforts on the lock metalwork and surrounding fences/railings. There's still plenty to be done including some woodwork but another good visit next month should mean the lock will be in a good state going into winter.





**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.*

### **November 21st**

An Alan Chetwyn film evening with a trip from the Oxford Canal to Worcester via the River Avon in 2002 followed by a trip on the Droitwich Canal in 2014.

### **December 5th**

***Christmas meal– save the date!***



There will be the usual quizzes and fun. Menu to follow as soon as possible.

If you would like to attend, please contact David Clegg. Menus will be circulated as soon as they are available

**David@thecleggs.co.uk**

Tel: 07429 151313

## Talks in 2026



### January 16th 2026

Canals of the Eastern USA  
by Pete Gurney

### February 20th

The Shrewsbury and Newport Canals (Speaker TBA)

### March 20th

TBA

### April 17th

The History and Restoration of the Caldon Canal

(1981 John Cunningham Documentary)

+Wedgwood and Brindley Chalk and Cheese

Both presented by Ray Johnson (Staffordshire Film Archive).

### May 9th

Annual General Meeting.

Venue as yet undecided, but will be somewhere unusual and interesting.

*If you have any ideas about this, please pass your suggestions on to David and Jean Clegg*

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

*Bringing Boats Back to Burslem*



*Damaged coping stones in low water  
Kings Lock Middlewich*

*Photo Roger Evans*