GRAND TRUNK



T&MCS stall at Midsummer Middlewich
See P.4

Photos Jean Clegg

Autumn 2026

www.trentandmerseycanalsociety.org.uk

Chairman's Bit



What a Mess! CRT navigation closure notices arriving every day with locks being closed, opened, closed again for work to reduce leakage, opened for reduced hours, and even some locks padlocked closed (without a stoppage notice) after reports of paddles being left open and draining whole sections of canal. Hopefully, by the time you read this, things will be improving. However, I must admit that I am far from confident that we will be able to take our planned cruise round the four-counties ring in September! [At least we are floating again after being solidly sat on the bottom at our home mooring for 2 days]

For many years we have been asking for help in repainting mileposts along the canal. Those from Preston Brook to Harecastle have all been done, as have most onwards through Stoke-on-Trent. Recently we heard that some (not quite sure how many) in Rugeley had been repainted. We don't know who painted them, but they certainly used a very non-standard colour scheme. They are quite striking, but the mileages aren't easy to read with the whole head being the same colour instead of black letters and figures on a white background. See pictures of one milepost, both before (looking very sad and in need of a little TLC), and after later in this issue.

Our society stall was at "Midsummer Middlewich" as promised, making around £100 for the society. Four members helped Margaret and I run the stall (NOT all at the same time!). Many thanks to them, and hope they enjoyed it as much as we did. We are told that the event will happen again over the weekend of June 19th-20th next year, and we look forward to taking part again. No news yet of which events are being planned to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the opening of our canal next year, but we expect the stall to be out at some of them.

Editorial

Hello All.

As I write this the nights are growing longer and we have even had some rain. Who would of thought we would be less than delighted by a hot, dry summer? Our boat, *The Lady Beth,* has spent a lot of time sitting firmly on the bottom and feeling sorry for herself as the canal around her became progressively short of water and closed, restricted or locked.

I felt very sorry for the hire fleets struggling to operate and the holiday-makers looking forward to a stress-free cruise. We had no festival to boat to this year (probably just as well) so my fencing skills have not been needed. We have, however, been able to help several boats who became stuck near our home as the water diminished.

On a cheerier note, please see page 5 for details of our Christmas meal, always a fun event and well worth attending. There are details of a historic interview with Maureen Shaw on pages 14-17, while those of you further South might like to go on a golden milepost hunt (see page 11). Articles for this magazine are always welcome. Someone once told me that when the editor has to write most of the publication themselves, then it's time for them to move on.

This will be the last magazine I will put together using *Microsoft Publisher;* the software will not exist from October and will disappear from my laptop. Chairman Roger has promised to teach me how to produce the magazine using *Word*– **wish me luck**!

We recently spent some time in Krakow. No canals, but we crossed the River Vistula at least twice every day. The weather was warm (not hot!) and the people were wonderful.

It almost made up for not being able to go boating!



Midsummer Middlewich

Those of you near the Northern end of our canal probably know the sad tale of Middlewich Folk and Boat Festival. This popular event hit problems over the last couple of years when financial difficulties caused the events removal to a field far away from the canal and it seemed the 'boat' part of the festival was no more. The event folded completely this year after the proposed festival date was changed.

A group of enthusiastic volunteers worked very hard to bring back the atmosphere of the old gathering and the very first 'Midsummer Middlewich'was born. The Society was happy to bring our stall out of mothballs and join an excited crowd on the Salinae Field just below the Middlewich three locks. We joined 2 children's rides, a beer tent, a duck race, numerous other stalls and lots of lovely food! The weather was amazing and Middlewich came alive again. Oakwood Marina ran short boat trips with their dayboat and trade boats were clustered around Big Lock. Our stall attracted lots of visitors keen to try our amazing nail game (only 10p a nail-what value!) and pick from Anne Chetwyn's lucky dip.



Conversation centred on the problems of the Anderton Lift (no good news there) and everyone seemed pleased to see us. Unfortunately no new members signed up, but a great time was had by everyone.

I hasten to add that the pictures were taken early in the morning while the field was quiet—it did get very busy later on!

Margaret English

Christmas Meal 2026

This year's wonderful Christmas meal is on December 4th
(save the date)

The venue is our usual room in **RED BULL PUBLIC HOUSE**

The time is 19:00 for 19:30.



There will be the usual free raffle, picture quiz and general knowledge quiz.

If you would like to attend, please send your name to David and Jean Clegg (David@the cleggs.co.uk).

Menus will be emailed to the happy participants by Monday 23rd November. David hopes to have these by the meeting on 20th.

The Red Bull will be advised of numbers and menu choices by Monday November 30th (replies with menu choices to David) please.

There will also be a book sale of exciting transport books donated by our newest member (and some paperback novels from the society stall as we have rather a lot of these!).



A CRITICAL APPEAL –
PLEASE HELP THE CALDON & UTTOXETER CANALS TRUST!

Waterway enthusiasts will be aware of the history behind the restoration of the Caldon Canal back in the 1970s, with the successful reopening in 1974 following on from the creation of the Caldon Canal Committee in the 1960s. That committee was formed by Stoke-on-Trent Boat Club and local Inland Waterways Association members. It went on to become the Caldon Canal Society, a registered charity, which later changed its name to the Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust (CUCT).
CUCT has recently written to its members warning that without an injection of new blood the Trust is in jeopardy.

For more than half a century, the organisation has been at the heart of canal campaigning and restoration in North Staffordshire. From the early days of the Caldon Canal Committee fighting to prevent permanent closure, through the successful restoration led by the Caldon Canal Society, and later the expansion of our mission to include the Uttoxeter Canal and the 2005 restoration of the lock and basin at Froghall, plus the work on and around both canals as part of the Churnet Valley Living Landscape Partnership, we have always been driven by passionate volunteers determined to protect and enhance these wonderful and historic waterways.

Today, however, we face a difficult moment. The current Committee group of active volunteers is too small to effectively continue; especially as some must take a step back after many decades of service.

Without new people stepping forward to get involved, the Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust will have no choice but to wind up at this year's AGM. This will be held on Tuesday 8th September 2026, at Stoke on Trent Boat Club, Endon Wharf, Post Lane, Endon, ST9 6DT; doors will open from 7:30 pm (refreshments available) for the meeting to commence at 8 pm.

Please put the AGM date in your diary now and plan to attend. But in the meantime please do get in touch if you are willing to get involved, whether local to our canals or by participating remotely via today's technology to help with campaign communications.

If you care about the future of these remarkable canals — and the legacy of the organisation that helped to save and nurture them — we would love to hear from you. There are many ways to contribute, whether you have time, skills, enthusiasm or simply a desire to make a difference.



As members of The Trent & Mersey Canal Society, you will be aware that this is a critical time for campaigning for the future of the Caldon Canal as part of Britian's waterways network.

Your involvement is needed as much as ever.

Please contact the CUCT Trustees via alison.smedley@cuct.org.uk if you can help in any way.

Julie Arnold
Chair, Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust

Picture, *WRG Forestry at Bridge 70 October 2013 © Julie Arnold, Waterway Images Ltd*

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 Winter edition is 01/11/2026

A genealogy around the Trent and Mersey Canal

There is a strange feeling you get when walking in the feet of your ancestors- a sense of belonging, a mystical connection with the past. Their lives become that bit more "real".



So it was when my sister Judy and I walked over the road from the Red Bull and across the bridge, looked down and saw the Trent and Mersey Canal in all its sunlit glory. We walked down to the towpath and could be sure that we were treading where our family members, Hugh, Elijah and Orlando Ollier had in Victorian times, trod before.

Ollier is a relatively well known name in Cheshire. Up until the middle of the 19th Century my branch were farmers of one sort or another in the Warmingham, Arclid and Sandbach area. There are also some Stoke on Trent area Olliers who were definitely on the canals (listed as such) but they are not my branch of the family.

With **HUGH OLLIER** we have the first possible link with the canal trade. He appears in the 1851 Census and is located in Elton Moss, Cheshire and shown as a "Boatman". A "boatman" would have been someone who worked on the waterways delivering goods to various parts of the country. They could have owned their own boat or may have been employed by a canal carrying company.

"Elton Moss" is now the name of a Boatyard in the industrial area of Middlewich dealing in narrowboats. However, that firm took their name from Elton Moss Bridge no. 160 on the T&M Canal near Sandbach where Hugh worked, possibly using the wharf just next to Elton Moss Bridge in the process.

Being a "boatman" was not a position of high calling or one of great repute. We are unlikely to establish why Hugh became a boatman and ceased as we would assume, his role as an agricultural labourer. Indeed the canals had been around 50-60 years before he is noted in this role, and indeed the su-

preme heyday of canals came to an end around this time after which competition from railways made the cost/benefit situation much less attractive. Later, he is shown as a farmer with 8 acres.

Although we cannot be sure, it is generally thought that the earliest boatmen were farmers in the locality. They were, after all, the source of "horsepower", knew how to look after horses and may already have been involved in the transport of crops and other goods. Due to the seasonal nature of farming, they may have been able to juggle two roles.

Hugh had children including **ELIJAH OLLIER** (1834–1909). In 1861 Elijah is described as a "canal company porter". By the 1871 census we have more detail. He and his family are at Red Bull, Church Lawton.

He is described as a "canal porter" – probably someone loading and unloading boats which begs the question "why and what needed to be loaded or unloaded at Red Bull?" We know there was a working coal pit located at the "Red Bull" end of Church Lawton parish and in addition Church Lawton was noted for the transportation of salt and other mineral down to the Potteries so these are possibilities apart from local transportation.

Red Bull lies at a critical junction between Kidsgrove and Alsager. It is a maintenance point and wharf for the T&M Canal. It is also a crossroads for the Liverpool Road and the Congleton - Newcastle Under Lyme Road.

Also at Red Bull that day in 1871 was a canal agent, William Wade and his family and various shopkeepers. There are 4 "houses" in all, 11 males and 14 females. The question which may remain unanswered is whether they had *lodgings* at Red Bull *or* were there accommodation cottages there, *or* did they at times live on the canal in a boat and adjourn to the pub (and other similar pubs) in the evening!. As a "porter" perhaps he did not have a boat. We just don't know.



By 1891 the situation becomes clearer as the census return shows **Elijah and family living at Red Bull Porters House**. Various Red Bull properties

exist including Wharf House, Porters House, and one or two Red Bull Cottages. There is also a grocers shop**.** With regard to schools for their children, the nearest boys school appears to be at Butt lane a few hundred yards to the south of the canal.



Looking at various photos of the Red Bull area I believe I am right in saying that directly opposite the pub various properties were demolished for road widening. Regrettably this may have included the houses or cottages mentioned above.

As Judy and I worked our way back to an excellent Red Bull lunch we felt at one with Hugh and Elijah together with their respective spouses Ann and Elizabeth who had no doubt been quaffing beer in this very spot!
After Elijah and continuing the gradual decline of the canal infrastructure his children ventured into other employment, usually the railways and pub management. The exotically named Orlando Ollier ran various pubs in the Midlands and then settled in Wallasey running a fishmongers and game shop from where our more recent family originated.

Mark Ollier
Ottery st Mary Devon

(in this genealogical research you can never be 100% certain of anything, and so if members have any corrections or comments these are very welcome!)

Golden Mileposts

Member Brian Holt kindly sent us a picture of milepost 33/59 (Rugeley) sporting a golden top. He was unable to photograph the whole milepost as there was a boat moored in front of it. However, subsequent enquiries established that at least the next milepost has also had a golden makeover. The plaque at the base is also painted gold.

While we accept that the mileposts are definitely in need of some TLC, the departure from the historic colour scheme is somewhat worrying. If anyone knows how this transformation came about, we would love to know.



There is a picture of the milepost before its transformation on the back page.

Margaret English

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 21st May – Our numbers were well down on the day due to holidays and other commitments. However, the 4 of us who were able to attend made good progress on the metal fence at the bottom of the lock and on the bottom gates themselves. There's still plenty of work to be done and I expect we'll have to make at least 2 more visits to Lock 42.

Thursday 18th June – Only 4 people could attend, but we did manage to paint lots of woodwork, 2 ladders and some railings.

Thursday 16th July – Six of us this time, and we managed to complete these locks (apart from some bits of the bottom gates of the closed lock that we couldn't reach as they were padlocked shut).

Tony Walker

Remember Maureen Shaw who lived in Wardle Lock Cottage where the Trent and Mersey joins the Wardle Canal? Chairman Roger found this article among archive material and we thought you would enjoy it!

Maureen Shaw talks about her life on the canals in 2002

It is a not an easy admission to make to oneself, let alone to a national readership, that as a child, it seems that my mother did not want me. Her relationship with her husband had broken down, she was on her own, and I was a burden to her. So one evening, when I was about two, she went into the pub to talk to Danny Jinks - a boatman, who she knew, and asked him if he would take me off her hands. I have been told that her actual words were – "Will you take this wench off me?"

Danny, and his wife Nellie, had recently lost their first baby in childbirth, and the hope of having more babies was by no means certain. My mother must have thought that handing me over to them was a good thing for both parties, but Danny's wife Nellie was not at first pleased with the decision that her husband had made, and told him that she didn't want someone else's throw-out. But he must have convinced her, and I am very glad that he did. Nellie went on to have children of her own, but I'm glad to say that the Jinks loved and cared for me as one of their own, and I have always referred to them as Mum and Dad.

Before Nellie had married Danny, she had been in service at a big house, and there, she had received something of an education, which was rare for boat people during the 1920's and 30's. Danny had previously worked on the fly boats, but when I was growing up along with John, Violet, Mury, and Nellie (junior) they boated for Thomas Clayton's of Oldbury.

Their yard, with its blacksmiths, stables and offices was always a busy spot, with their flat topped tank boats coming and going at all hours of the day and night. Some things stick in your mind, and I remember that there was red carpet in the offices, and the boss's Jag and Bentley were parked outside. The yard man was named Dicky Gibbs, his house was also off the boatyard, and I also recall the tragic year that his daughter died after falling from the step.

As a young girl, I was taught how to steer the boat and drive the horse, and I must have clocked up hundreds of miles on foot as I followed those four powerful plodding hooves, along the Oxford and Grand Union canals. From

Clayton's base on the Old Main line (Wolverhampton - Birmingham) at Oldbury, we did many of the Southern routes down to Banbury and Oxford, or to Leamington Spa, delivering or collecting from the gas works in those towns. There was considerable traffic on the canals in the years before and during world war two, and there was much competition to get into the locks, from companies like Barlows and the Grand Union boats.

I recall one winter vividly, for many boats were frozen up near Napton Junction for roughly seven weeks. The ice boats tried to get through, but the water, especially in the locks, had frozen to a formidable depth, and their brave attempts failed. Fortunately the 'Ovalteeners' as we called them, shared their cargoes so that we could make hot drinks, and the Barlows' boatmen gave us coal for the ranges.

Napton hill with its windmill, and the surrounding fields looked pretty clad in snow, but the mothers became increasingly anxious as each week went by, as to how they were going to feed their children. Some of us went to work on the nearby farm, and we were rewarded not with money, but with bacon and eggs - just as good a payment I'm sure you will agree. Mr Thomas Clayton, the big boss, even came out one day to give us money to buy corn for the horse, and that gesture will give you an indication of whom or what came first. Yes, your horse was a valued and well looked after commodity, and to the company, an important asset.

As a youngster, I always had a longing to live in a house and go to school to get educated, and occasionally we spent a few precious days at either St Mary's Wolverhampton or at Ellesmere Port, when we were on the Shroppie runs, but I remember well the continual rivalry between the 'Townies' and us boat children. The Townies would move away from us if we sat near them on the same bench and they made rude comments about us washing in the canal - though of course we never did, and there were regular fights. However there were some Townies that we mixed with. They gave us comics to look at, and we gave them rope for skipping, it seemed a fair exchange at the time. Back on the boat, every child had their chores to do, which included washing the boat down, polishing brasses or assisting with the preparation and cooking of meals.

Once, a lady in a posh tweed suit and a feather in her hat, came to us on the towpath, and questioned us kids about whether we had had a bath, or if we had been beaten lately, but she must have been satisfied with our answers, because all she said to Mum was "Your doing a good job, keep it up."

Eventually, the company changed over from horses to motor boats, and we had the Spey, along with a butty, but Dad, with his corduroy trousers and cap, was a very placid man and could never seem to get the hang of using an engine, so we had a young man named Harry Powell come along as mate.

I liked Harry because he used to read to us. Mom was of small stature, but being a strong personality, she was the real boss of the family, and she taught me such important principles as never telling a lie, and not to borrow from others. It was mom who dealt with the finances, and one day Danny came across the yard with a pay-packet that was ten shillings short - a lot of money in those days. She went over the details as usual with a pencil on a sugar packet, and then armed with the evidence, she sent Danny to confront Mr Craddock, who was in charge of the wages. When he saw him approach he said "Are you still here Danny?" who replied "My Nellies says I'm ten shillings short." At which Mr Craddock replied that if there were many more like his Nellie, he would become bankrupt, and he threw the ten shillings at him.

At the age of fourteen, I became due for my employment card, and Nellie thought that it was time that I learned the truth of my first few years of life, of my real mother, and how she and Danny came to bring me up. To verify her story and enable, and enable me to get my card, she handed me my grubby birth certificate.

Two years later, I was married to John Shaw at Broad St (Wolverhampton) registry office, though everyone called him Jack. He was working for Fellows, Morton and Clayton, and we had become familiar with each other from boating the Shropshire Union.

World War two had been over for five years, but rationing of certain foods and other items was still going on, and I am glad that I kept all my ration books as memento's. John was captain of the 'Dace', but I found the routine of an FMC boat very different to that of Claytoning, and to be honest I wasn't too keen.

My reasons were that there was never any clothing up to do on the oil boats, and every time I ran along the top planks or tried to tie up the ropes on Dace, I nearly fell in. Cargoes for FMC were constantly changing and included all kinds of goods, such s sugar from Tate and Lyle at Ellesmere Port, flour from Sun Mills, and cocoa beans. These goods came South along the Shroppie and were unloaded right in the heart of Birmingham. Metal tubes, and sometimes spelter, went the other way.

Young men were still being called into the army to do their stint of national service, and I had to go back with mom and dad on the 'Spey' and 'Pinn' whilst Jack did his two years. After that we did some work for Clayton's before I left the canals and Jack transferred to "The Company", as the relatively new British Waterways was called. The carrying days were now almost over, and Jack's work was on the spoon dredger, which was a very hard way of getting the muck off the canal bed. We used to say that it was the only way of stopping the bottom from getting too near the top.

Ironically, as I head toward my 68th birthday, I am having more contact with the canals than the last twenty years put together. For since Jack died six years ago, I have been giving talks all over the country following a boat show in London, when I did a radio interview with Cliff Mitchelmore. At the show, the organisers had built a full size model of the lock cottage that we lived in at Middlewich, complete with lock and narrow boat. It was quite a feat, and attracted considerable attention. Thankfully my mind and memory are still sharp, even though I never did learn to read and write, and I shall go on relating our tales of a working life on the canal for as long as I am able.



Narrowboat Spey
Courtesy of Historic Narrowboat Club

While navigating* Facebook, *I came across the noticatione below

Next year sees the 250th anniversary of the Trent and Mersey Canal. To prepare for the celebrations, we are restoring the 1777 North portal by clearing vegetation, repointing and whitewashing, bringing it back to its original condition.

After a sleepness night convinced that this was a joke, I searched the CRT site and gleaned more information!.....ED

We've begun work to restore the north portal wall of the historic Harecastle Tunnel in Kidsgrove, Staffordshire, helping to spruce up the area ahead of the 250th anniversary of the Trent & Mersey Canal.

Constructed under the direction of pioneering canal engineer James Brindley, the tunnel was a landmark achievement of the early Industrial Revolution, dramatically improving the movement of goods between the Potteries, the Midlands, and the Port of Liverpool.

Its creation helped transform Staffordshire into a centre of industrial innovation, and it remains one of the county's most recognisable engineering landmarks. The project focuses on the James Brindley side of the tunnel portal in Kidsgrove, which is the original entrance to the first Harecastle Tunnel built in 1777.

The restoration work has been made possible thanks to generous support from local civil engineering company CPC Civils, which has donated £5,800 towards the cost of the specialist scaffolding required to safely carry out the repairs. The contribution is helping our volunteers and conservation specialists access the historic structure and undertake the work needed to preserve it for future generations.

Working from the scaffolding our volunteers will use hand tools to remove the wall-grown vegetation to reveal the portal's original brickwork. Where possible, native canal plants such as spleenwort and hart's-tongue ferns will be removed and replanted elsewhere along the canal.

These plant species are typical of damp, shaded brick and stone structures on historic waterways and, although small, contribute to local biodiversity by providing valuable habitat for insects and other wildlife. Relocating them will help preserve the ecological character of the canal.

The volunteers will then carry out small masonry repairs and repointing using traditional lime-based materials, finished with a coat of limewash to help protect the masonry just as the tunnel was originally built

This restoration forms part of the wider Staffordshire Waterways Celebration for 2027, a county-wide programme marking 250 years since the completion of the Trent & Mersey and Caldon canals.



The Tunnel in 1905



The Tunnel Today



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.

David@thecleggs.co.uk

Tel: 07429 151313

Talks in new season-October 2026

October 16th 2026

GREATER THAN 6: The Heritage of the City outside the Six Towns.

Heritage Assets, Listed Buildings, buildings of special local interest, scheduled monuments and conservations areas which became part of the Potteries when the City of Stoke-on-Trent was established in 1925.

ANDY PERKIN Potteries Heritage Society

November 20th 2026

The History and Restoration of the Derby Canal.

CHRIS MADGE

December 4th 2026

Christmas meal (complete with the usual fun quizzes and jollity).

January 15th 2027

Narrowboat SPEY

TOM KITCHING



February 19th 2027

TBA

March 19th 2027

The River Danube

JOHN POMFRET

No it isn't SPEY, just a nice picture to liven up the page!

May 15th 2027

Annual General Meeting

Hold the date!

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

Bringing Boats Back to Burslem



Milepost 33/59 before its makeover
(see p. 11)

Photo Roger Evanst