

CUT

BOTH
WAYS

4

WINTER
1994

**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF THE LICHFIELD
AND HATHERTON CANALS**



**SUPPORTING THE LICHFIELD AND HATHERTON
CANALS RESTORATION TRUST**

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**1.00
IF
BOUGHT**

A WORD FROM THE COMMITTEE

Firstly, a happy and successful New Year to you all. Secondly, apologies for the lateness of this edition !.

Over the last couple of months Julie and I have been trying to catch up with the unbelievable amount of paperwork which a small society seems to generate.

We have also changed the appearance of Cut Both ways and we hope that the results will be liked by all. Efforts will be continually made to improve and we hope to include more photographs as the production process improves. Incidentally, the front cover shows the line of the Lichfield Canal near Cricket Lane, and the Hatherton at Calf Heath. In this edition there is a questionnaire asking Your views on Your magazine. Please take the time to read it.

On the Lichfield Canal a setback with a Derelict Land Grant (DLG) application has led to a reappraisal of the relationship with Lichfield District Council and Eric Wood highlights action to be taken, elsewhere in this issue.

Lichfield Cruising Club objected to the application as they felt that clarification was needed over proposed new facilities for them, to be constructed at the time that the canal is opened.

This does not, however, mean that Lichfield Cruising Club are against the scheme; members have expressed support with the proviso (quite rightly) that the conditions and facilities currently enjoyed by them should continue, even if relocation is necessary.

Lichfield Cruising Club have been invited to contribute material to CUT BOTH WAYS and I am optimistic that this will happen in the near future.

In the meantime I and others shall work to



CRUISING CLUB MOORINGS FROM CAPPERS LANE

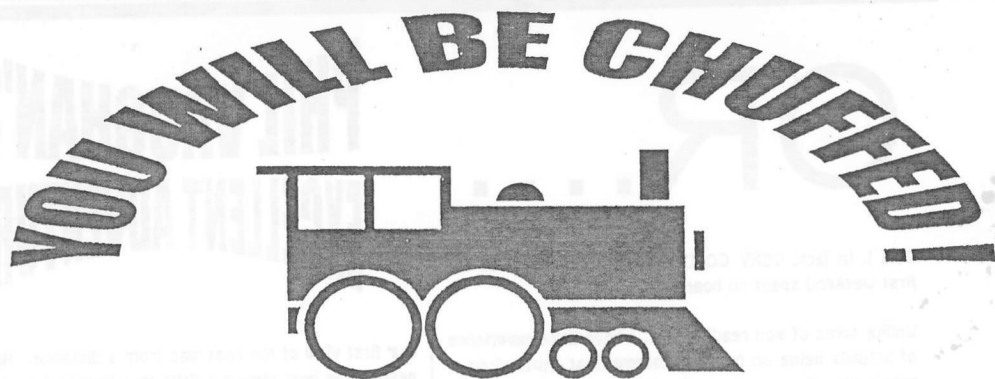
ensure that the Cruising Club is kept fully informed of developments.

Elsewhere in this issue you will read about our event at Little Hay near Shenstone. Please do try to get to the event if you can - we can promise a fun time for all involved.

John Morris

Chairman, Friends of Lichfield and Hatherton Canals

EVENT NEWS 1



On 7th May 1994 we will be holding a miniature railway
extravaganza at

Sutton Coldfield Model Engineering Society

Little Hay, Near Shenstone, Staffs.

Tickets : From Trevor Morris (021) 354-7952.

We have kindly been given the use of the facilities in order to raise funds for the restoration of the Lichfield and Hatherton canals.

The event will run from 1100 to 1700 and admission will be 2.00 for adults. Accompanied under-16's will be admitted free of charge.

MINIATURE STEAM LOCOMOTIVES will haul passengers round the formidable outside track. In addition, there will be refreshments and other attractions. Come and join the fun !.

OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE FRIENDS

OR...

Cold I. In fact. VERY COLD I. That's my verdict on my first weekend spent on board a Narrow Boat.

Unlike some of you reading this, I have little experience of actually being on board a Narrow Boat. Apart from a memorable day spent on the 'Shroppe' with my good friends Charlie and Elsie, from Wolverhampton Boat Club, and an hour spent aboard "Plum" whilst fundraising with fellow 'Friends' John and Julie, I had never set foot on a narrow boat. That is until recently.

During the course of my work, I am involved with a number of young people who are representatives of the High Schools in South Staffordshire.

Because it takes a long time to get these young people to mix, I had the idea of spending a weekend on board a narrow boat for the purpose of 'team building'.

I had learned of a 20 ft. boat which has recently been refitted and was being used for community work in the Dudley area. I made contact with the appropriate parties and arranged to use the boat for a weekend for a generous fee. Now I learned a few lessons during this whole adventure. Lesson one - always inspect the boat before agreeing to hire!

Any way, on Friday 16th October, we duly arrived at Hawne Basin, Halesowen. There were ten of us altogether - myself, two colleagues and Don, who came with the boat, and six young people aged between 14 and 18 years.

It's amazing what young people consider as being essential for a weekend away from home. One lad wouldn't go anywhere without his guitar. Another had a rucksack full of King Size Mars Bars and, of course, each of them had to have their own personal stereo.

PHIL VAUGHAN'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

Our first view of the boat was from a distance. As we got nearer, the boat looked a little less impressive with every step.

Even the most silver-tongued salesman would not have been able to describe the inside of the boat as being more than basic. There were ten bunks suspended by a series of chains in various places around the boat, two toilets with doors that wouldn't close, and a galley - well, a cooler and a sink. First impressions were not favourable.

When we arrived at the boat, we had one and a half hours of daylight left and we intended to cruise to Windmill End and then moor for the night.

I had been worried that the young people would be bored, but my fears were allayed within a few minutes of starting our Journey. I don't know whether it was the 'Marie Celest' feel of travelling through the Coombeswood Tube Works or the claustrophobic atmosphere of passing through Gorsty Hill Tunnel, but well before we reached Windmill End I knew that the world of canals had woven it's magic. Do canals have the same effect on everyone I wonder?

AREN'T ALL LED ZEPPELIN SONGS OBSCURE?

By the time we reached Windmill End, it was dark. What an eerie place Windmill End is in the dark! The portal of the Netherton Tunnel guarded by the remains of Cobb's Engine House can be most unnerving and we felt the need for company.

OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE FRIENDS

The 'Dry Dock' public house at Windmill End is a must for canal travellers. The bar is actually the hull of a narrow boat. "Must have had no brakes" was the comment of one of our crew. The 'Dry Dock' is one of a series of Mad O'Rourke's theme pubs. Each of these pubs feature a most varied menu with the famous 'Desperate Dan' pie topping the list. Seven out of ten from our group agreed to tackle these momentous pies. I learned another lesson at this point - no-one under 18 like kidney, so I ended up eating the equivalent of two and a half pies! Fortunately, I was able to assist the digestive system by diluting the kidney with a couple of pints of Lumphammer Bitter.

When we came out of the pub, it was into a beautiful moonlight night. As we walked back to the boat, someone innocently said, "There'll be a frost tonight".

Now the lad who had brought the guitar on board had spent all day tuning the thins, much to the chagrin of the rest of the crew. We had put up with the awful sounds only because we were looking forward to an old-fashioned sing-song. However, when the time came, we found that all he would play was a few bars of some obscure Led Zeppelin song. (Aren't all Led Zeppelin songs obscure?).

After a few songs and a number of games of charades, we decided to get some sleep. Realising that the boat might be cold in the night, we kept a good assortment of our day clothes on before retiring to our sleeping bags. I was

AT SIX FOOT TWO IN A BUNK FIVE TEN, PARTS OF ME HAD TO TOUCH THE SIDES OF THE BOAT.....

asleep in seconds.

I think it was about 2 am, when I woke first. I do not know whether it was my teeth chattering or the pain spreading up my legs from my frozen feet that had woken me. Boy was I cold! At 6 foot 2 inches in a bunk five foot ten, some parts of me had to touch the side of the boat, and where they did, I was frozen. I wasn't the only one though. From various groans around the boat I realised that we were all suffering. We managed to shiver and chatter through to daybreak.

Under the influence of Lumphammer Bitter the previous evening, I had agreed to get up and go running with one of the lads. Another lesson learned - don't get involved in challenges when full of beer! Anyway, out we went at 7.20 am. Everywhere was white with frost. The puddles on the Towpath had completely frozen and our breath turned to vapour. As we started running, a very pale sun showed its face, and immediately Windmill End took on a different perspective. It was absolutely BEAUTIFUL!

I don't know whether it was this early morning vista or a stomach full of kidney, but something inspired me and I'd soon left the young lad behind and strode back. As I ran back to the boat, I was guided by the smell of bacon cooking. What a wonderful world it is, to be sure!

A big cooked breakfast and a sunny morning soon made me forget the numbing cold of the night, and we couldn't wait to start out on our day's excursion.

We enjoyed a perfect days cruising. Starting through the Netherton Tunnel, we journeyed along the New Main Line, Gower Branch, Old Main Line, Factory Locks and back through the Netherton Tunnel, in a shape similar to the Staffordshire Knot. We stopped to lunch with the "Tipton Slasher" at the moorings at Tipton.

That evening it was back to the Dry Dock for more 'Desperate Dan' pies, and for the adult, Lumphammer Bitter.

Back on board the boat, it was almost a repeat performance of the previous night except, despite wearing even more clothing, it was even colder. It was with relief that I got out of the bunk at daybreak for another running challenge - again easily won!

We journeyed in the opposite direction on the Sunday. Again it was a perfect morning with the sun slowly melting frost and ice, and warming our hearts. We seemed to be travelling for ages without ever getting any further from Netherton Church until we reached Blowers Green Junction and headed towards Merry Hill Shopping Centre.

The chance for lunch at McDonalds was too great an

OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE FRIENDS

opportunity for our young crew, so we moored at the impressive waterfront complex. By the time all had returned, we only had enough daylight left to retrace our steps back to Windmill End. We had a very embarrassing experience when we reached Blowers Green Junction on the way back to Windmill End. As we negotiated Blowers Green Lock we found that a boat was moored waiting to go through Park Head locks up towards Dudley Tunnel. As we left the lock chamber we managed to ram the moored boat with some impact. We immediately apologised to the crew, who had been brought from below by the collision. After hearing our apologies, they returned below, only to reappear as we rammed the boat a second time whilst trying to manoeuvre back towards Windmill End. As I said, very embarrassing!

Our spirits lowered as we turned towards Hawne Basin at Windmill End. There was no doubt that all on board had been deeply impressed by our first experience of life on the canal.

We very nearly ended our trip with a disaster. With time to spare, we decided to leg through Gorsty Hill Tunnel. Volunteers were found and the boat engine stopped. The

volunteers proved to be particularly eager and we were soon progressing at a steady rate. Suddenly we remembered that the roof of the tunnel dips dramatically, and the two lads leapt down to avoid being crushed. Another lesson learnt - although canals are excellent for relaxation there is a need to stay alert to danger.

At Hawne Basin, we said our goodbyes.

A few days after our return we held a meeting to discuss the weekend. We agreed that it had served to improve relationships and understanding of each other (team building). The weekend had been relaxing and enjoyable.

We couldn't believe how pretty the countryside was along the route, despite (or because of) being in the Centre of the Black Country.

We definitely want to repeat the experience.

BUT NEXT TIME IN THE SUMMER!

PHIL VAUGHAN.

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MANY THANKS

A WORD FROM THE TRUST

Eric Wood is Chairman of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust, the Steering Group for the restoration schemes.

A full presentation of the benefits and possible time scale of restoration of the Lichfield Canal has been prepared by members of the Trust and is to be presented to the Lichfield District Council Planning Committee on January 25th at the Lichfield City offices. This gives the opportunity for the Trust to dispel any fears over the effects of restoration that the Council members may have and to give them the chance to question the restoration scheme as a whole.

It is about five years since the scheme was first put to the Council when it was received enthusiastically. It came as a surprise to the Trust that the Council had deferred the Planning application submitted to restore part of the old canal bed and towing path between Cappers Lane and Darnford Lane. An application for the Council to apply for a Derelict Land Grant had also been turned down pending further details of the Scheme.

The actions of Lichfield Cruising Club in objecting to the planning application, whilst perfectly understandable, did not assist.

(More on this elsewhere in C.B.W. - Ed)

The Trust has always maintained that the fullest consideration should be given to the Lichfield Cruising Club when the Reinstatement of the Cappers Lane Bridge takes place and to this end a drawing has been prepared by British Waterways showing a lagoon mooring adjacent to the club. This was accepted in principle by all parties at a meeting in 1988.

The Trust sees the application for European Aid as essential in the Restoration programme, and indeed considerable sums of cash are available for the specific purpose of Restoration of Waterways. Should the Lichfield District Council fail to enter into the application when 100% grant is available the Trust would then have to pursue alone a course which although not impossible would be very costly to them.

Let's hope that they accept the proposals of the Trust to proceed with Restoration. After all if Lichfield District Council turn down the chance for this cash then some other area will benefit and this amenity would be lost to the area.

ERIC WOOD

? WHAT DO YOU THINK ?

When we started Cut Both Ways our aim was to have a high quality newsletter which did not divert costs away from the real task - Restoration.

Inevitably, restoration schemes tend to produce news worth items in fits and starts, and not just conveniently before print deadlines. We set out to create not only a newsletter but a source of entertainment, and with this in mind have included some general interest stories.

None of this is any use if we are not satisfying our readership, and with our forth edition we have included a questionnaire. Please return this with your membership renewal as it becomes due, or sooner if there are changes which you need making.

The questionnaire is completely anonymous and we intend to publish the result in a future edition.

Thank you for your help.

Julie Fairclough

Secretary

Please tick column that applies to you.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Bothered	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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I would like to see more nature articles

I would like to see more technical reports
(eg. engineering proposals)

I would like to be invited to more events

I would like to see more letters

The Editorial is uninteresting

There are too many adverts

The presentation in CBW is good

I would like more of my subscription
spent on improving the quality of CBW

I am only interested in Midlands Canals

I like to be informed of Schemes elsewhere

I know who to contact if I have a query

I am satisfied with progress over
the first 12 months

I would like to attend Committee Meetings

Please write any other comments on a separate sheet.

Have you been to any work parties over the last 12 months Yes/No

How many

Do you prefer to support financially but not physically Yes/No

Please indicate your approximate age group

up to 24 25-44 45-60 60+



Thank you for your help-Please return this questionnaire to: Julie Fairclough, 70 Spring Lane, Whittington, Lichfield, WS14 9NA

EVENT NEWS 2

THE BOATS ARE RETURNING TO PELSALL

SPRING BANK HOLIDAY 28th -30th MAY

Over 100 letters have gone out to boating and canal organisations to seek their participation at the Pelsall Campaign Festival Rally to be held on the site of the Common over the Spring Bank Holiday 28-30th May. It looks all set for a superb week-end with boaters entertainment planned over the three day period. Please make the effort to come and by boat if possible. Secure mooring will be available both before and after the event.

This Festival is being supported by the Narrow Boat Owners Club and President and Kildaire are to attend. Pelsall presented us with a petition after the last Rally in '87. Let's show them that we are prepared to support their Millennium by a large turn out over the week-end. It is expected to be the largest boat gathering in the West Midlands this year. Are you coming? Perry Barr lock should be much better for this years trip, and boaters are asked to use this route either to or from the Rally.

Considerable work is being done by British Waterways on the Perry Bar Flight where co plastic paddles are being fitted, culverts are being cleared, and much brick sheeting is being carried out. This should make the passage of boats much more pleasurable than in the past.

Considerable dredging has been done on the Wyrley and Essington where I understand some 150 tons of rubbish and silt has been cleared from a single bridge hole. Whether this is the accumulation of rubbish and silt over many years is not known but there is no doubt that illegal

tipping of unwanted items into the Canal still goes on.

Many Boaters will be taking part in the B.C.N.'s explorer award and campaign cruises over the week-end.

The Trust sees this Campaign as a major part of keeping the Restoration Scheme in the public eye, and part of the ongoing aims for the re-classification of the B.C.N. with the restoration of the Lichfield and Hatherton canals.

It's no good crying over the loss of the Ridgacre. We need to move forward to use the B.C.N. now and support this campaign Rally to ensure that the future of the Waterways is secure.

"Lets Cruise 'em. Not lose'em"

ERIC WOOD

Chairman of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust



MORE
INFORMATION
FROM ERIC on
0543-432231

TOWPATH TALE - PART 4

IN HIS OWN INIMITABLE STYLE, ARTHUR TRUBY CONTINUES HIS SERIES ON THE CANALS OF THE BLACK COUNTRY

As commercial traffic on our canals declined so pleasure boating increased, even on the murky waters of the Black Country Canals, and for a time British Waterways operated a cruiser Hire Base at Gas Street Basin, Birmingham. The fleet consisted of several of the sample two berth water baby class, one of the top-heavy looking water miss class, and several of the fine 4-6 berth cruisers which were amongst the best obtainable anywhere on the canal system. The latter boats bore such names as "Water Vallant", "Water Vixen" and "Water Viper".

They were conversions from former commercial narrow boats, and were sturdily built so that they could take any amount of rough usage which novices were likely to inflict. These craft were also well equipped with food cooking facilities, bedding and other necessities. Instead of puttering little outboard engines, these cruisers were fitted with the only "proper" type - great thumping diesel engines which were not only much more economical than inboard or outboard petrol ones, but also gave one a feeling of being professional.

The choice of Birmingham as a cruising base was logical because of its central situation and its possibilities for giving variety in cruising programmes. There are about twenty-five miles of mainly rural and lock free cruising to Tardebigge on the Worcester Canal and to the top of Lapworth locks on the Stratford Canal, and there is the whole of the B.C.N. labyrinth of

waterways, which is certainly not all grime and grease. For those wishing to travel north-westwards to the scenic country of the Shropshire Union and Llangollen Canals, the route commences with a straight and fast run along Telford's main line, the only slow cruising being the descent of the 21 locks at Wolverhampton.

"THERE WAS AN UNUSUAL ACCIDENT ON THE MAIN LINE IN THE 1960'S"

There was an unusual accident on the main line between Birmingham and Wolverhampton in the mid-1960's. West Bromwich Albion Football Club have a training ground near Spon Lane, above the great cutting where the Galton Bridge stands, and through which the new Galton tunnel now burrows. Albion's manager Jimmy Hagan had parked his car on the edge of the embankment, and it is believed that on attempting to leave he reversed a little too near the edge. Down the steep grassy slope went car and manager, right into the canal. It could have been a more serious accident, but footballers are a tough breed and it was not long before Jimmy Hagan was back at his job. His ability was obviously not impaired because some time later he led his team to win the Football League Cup.

Incidentally, as the Albion ground is situated some fifty or more feet higher than the Wolverhampton level of the Birmingham Canal Navigation, the nearest point being about a mile from the ground, it is a simple

TOWPATH TALE - PART 4

matter to examine a canal map of the country and compare levels. The Hawthorns is between 500 and 600 feet above sea level, and when checking on the geographical situations of other clubs in the league it is found that many lie almost at sea level. Many other clubs have their grounds in canal towns and apparently all lie at a lower level than the Hawthorns.

"THE HIGHEST GROUND OF ANY FOOTBALL LEAGUE IN ENGLAND & WALES"

Thus it can be proved that the Albion have the highest ground of any Football League club in England and Wales.

The deep cutting at Smethwick is not only spanned by the Galton Bridge ("Finest I've seen of this type since I saw the one at Niagara", said one American visitor); there is also the aqueduct carrying the feeder arm across the main line from the Wolverhampton level in Smethwick, and this arm finishes at Soho basin, where the once busy branch now terminates in a mass of slime and grease. Yet it carried until 1976 a little commercial traffic for part of its length.

The Gothic-style cast ironwork of this aqueduct is well worth inspection. The cutting itself has, however, been ruined, and has been partly filled in at a point close to Galton Bridge. A new road replacing that that used the Galton, has made it necessary to construct a new 123 yard tunnel to carry the waterway.

Further along the Main Line towards Wolverhampton, Dudley Castle appears on its wooded hill to the left, and beyond it lies Sedgley Beacon. This is no more than seven hundred feet above sea level, yet there are still people living in the district who firmly believe the Old Black Country Fable, handed down as truth from their forebears, that Sedgley Beacon is the highest table land in England.

Slightly elevated above the surrounding Black Country, then are a few fields at a mere seven hundred feet. This would not constitute a footstool-land, let alone a table land. No wonder that the great plateau of Kinder Scout in the Peak District, at 200 feet, seems to frown upon visitors from the Black Country with grim gritstone gloom! Yet it may be true that if a line is taken in one particular Easterly direction no higher land is encountered until the Ural Mountains in Russia.

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BY THE BLACK COUNTRY SOCIETY 1978.

In the next edition, Arthur takes to the water again, this time in the company of a British Waterways hire craft, circa 1961!

Don't Forget !

Your membership renewal may now be due. We hope that you are satisfied with progress over the last year and that you will continue to support us. Renewals should be sent to Trevor Morris, 163 Halton Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands. B73 6NZ.



WORKING PARTIES

Last Years Work Parties were very successful, with considerable progress being made. We are still short of anyone with bricklaying skills (or anyone willing to try !) and anyone offering to help will be made very welcome. Current work parties are being held on the Hatherton Canal (see map below). Dates so far for 1994 are as follows;

Sunday 20th February	1000-1500
Sunday 20th March	1000-1600
Sunday 17th April	1000-1600
Sunday 15th May	1000-1600
Sunday 19th June	1000-1600
Sunday 17th July	1000-1600
Sunday 18th September	1000-1600
Sunday 16th October	1000-1600

WHAT DO I BRING WITH ME ?

BRING OLD, WARM CLOTHES, STOUT FOOTWEAR AND SOME FOOD AND DRINK. YOU ARE WELCOME TO BRING YOUR OWN TOOLS WITH YOU.

**MORE INFORMATION FROM
DENIS COOPER ON 0543 374370 OR
PHIL SHARPE ON 0889 583330**

WHERE TO FIND US

The Hatherton Canal is marked thus :

