

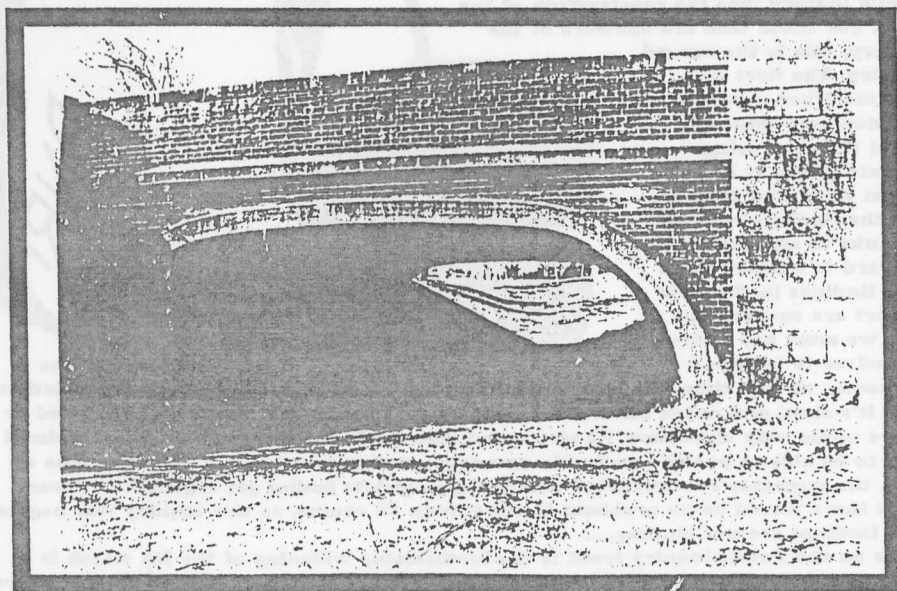
CUT

**BOTH
WAYS**

6

**Late
Issue
1994**

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



London Road Bridge, Lichfield

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

INSIDE

**LICHFIELD CANAL BREAKTHROUGH
LET'S OGLE AT OGLEY
MG WIDENING - THE NEXT PUBLIC INQUIRY**

**1.00
IF
BOUGHT**

A word from The Friends

Welcome to Cut Both Ways number 6 - in common with other society magazines, a little later than planned. This summer has been quite hectic, and Plum has visited several pastures new, having spent most of the summer on the Lancaster Canal. Indeed, both Preston and Lancaster seem like second homes after this season !. More on this summers pleasure in a future edition, but let us not look back at what has been happening, let's look towards the future. Two important developments have taken place since the last edition, firstly the Birmingham Northern Relief Road Public Inquiry has started and looks like it will run..and run. It looks like the case for the canal will now be made during early January 1995.

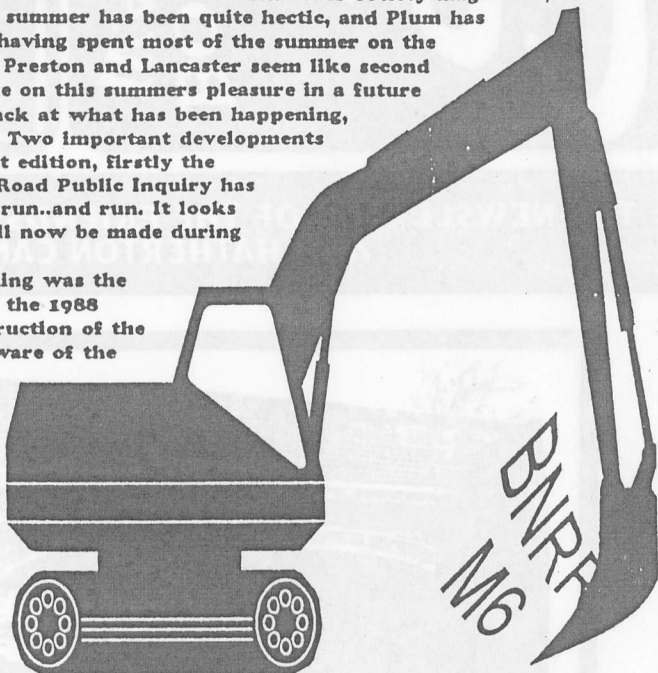
The second important happening was the publication of the findings of the 1988 Public Inquiry into the construction of the road. For those who are unaware of the history, this is the second inquiry, The first was negated when a political decision was made to build the road using private funds. It has taken since that time to get the findings released (thanks to all who lobbied so hard to achieve this). The findings in the 1988 report are encouraging but we must not allow ourselves to become

complacent. The Inspector at that time was highly praiseworthy of the Inland Waterways Association and it's aims, and noted the worthy restoration schemes that had been completed or were under way elsewhere. He also noted that the Department of Transport claimed not to be able to provide navigable crossings on abandoned canals. Whether true or not, the Inspector recommended that the appropriate bodies got together to ensure that there would be no problems in the future. Of course, as this inquiry was negated the findings are not binding.....

Also on the Public Inquiry front is the forthcoming widening of the M6 which is mentioned elsewhere in CBW. I am sure that we will be able to muster the same levels of support as we have with the BNRR Inquiry.

We have gradually been developing CBW along the lines suggested by you in the recent survey - it has to be said that the response rate was fairly low so we hope that we are doing things the way that you want them - if not then please do shout up !. Finally, you will find details of our proposed Ogley event next year. It does seem a long way off but we need support and commitment now... Don't let the winter stop your canal activities !

John Morris, Chairman, Friends of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals.



A word from the Trust

By Eric Wood

Please convey my thanks to all of your members for the magnificent response to our appeal for funds. I am pleased to tell you that the cheque for one thousand pounds has been passed on to the treasurer for banking and will be used towards the total cost of four and one half thousand pounds which we will have to pay for the land between Darnford Lane and Cappers Lane to enable the first stage of the restoration to take place.

The Public enquiry into the Birmingham Northern Relief Road which was to have been held in October this year has been postponed and will now be held in January 1995. At this the strongest possible representations for a route for navigation will be made by the Trust.

A large number of alternative proposals have been put forward to the Inspector amounting to over 25 at this stage and the Trust has had to respond to each alternative route. Without the work done by John Horton and Phil Sharpe, who responded to the challenges of the department of Transport with enthusiasm and considerable expertise, I am afraid that the Trust's case would have been considerably weaker. The Trust owes them a great deal of thanks for all of their efforts.

The business of campaigning for two canal crossings, one at Churchbridge, and one at Muckley Corner, is continuing. Both of these represent major projects for the contractors and the Trust have found it essential to seek professional help.

At Muckley Corner where the contracts have been awarded to Ove Arup, the Trust have asked for drawings and initial detailed requirements for an aqueduct at this point. At Churchbridge where the scheme is more complex, W.S. Atkins and Partners of Wales have now supplied the Trust with an interim report on the two possible routes through the area between the A460 and the crossing of the A5.

Consulting engineers of this quality is vital, to secure a

canal route through each of these crossing points, even though it involves the Trust in costs of several thousand pounds

At the Lichfield end planning permission has been granted from Lichfield District Council for the first part of the restoration scheme between Darnford Lane and Cappers Lane, where a gate will soon be installed to enable the work to commence on the first section. Light plant will firstly remove the top soil and a pathway for the canal close to the original route will be cleared. This will allow a walkway to be created along the route to allow public access to the area.

Before heavy work commences it may be necessary to reposition some rather low electricity cable which traverses the canal at this point.

Eric Wood

Chairman, Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust

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EIN
CANALLER



Number 1

Cut Both Ways

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M6 Motorway widening

As many will be aware, the Department of Transport's motorway widening scheme for the M6 is now underway. Anyone who has used the M6 over Thelwall viaduct and up to the junction with the M62 will have had first hand experience of the delays this summer caused by contraflow and reduced speed limits.

The intention is to widen the section to 8 lanes in the Calf Heath area, where the M6 crosses the Hatherton Branch. In the 1960's when the motorway was built a small culvert was put in which did not allow for navigation.

As if the crossings of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals by the Birmingham Northern Relief Road were not

enough, the prospect of a public inquiry into the M6 widening is now very real, with draft line orders having been published by the Department of Transport.

As part of the widening scheme the Trust are progressing towards the aim of including a navigable culvert in the scheme. The provision of such a culvert has the backing of both Cannock and south Staffordshire District Councils and also has the blessing of British waterways,

through the local Manager responsible, Roger Herrington.

At a recent meeting held at the offices of Stafford County Planning department of all parties involved, there was optimism that the Department of Transport would provide a culvert of navigable dimensions. It should be

remembered that the argument is one of culvert size and cost rather than whether to have a culvert at all.

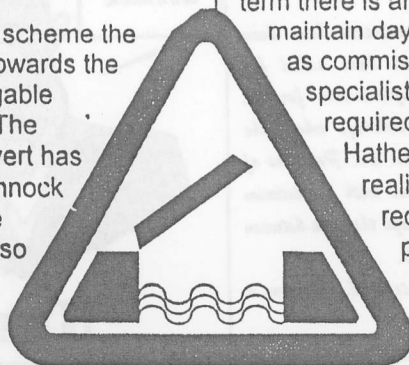
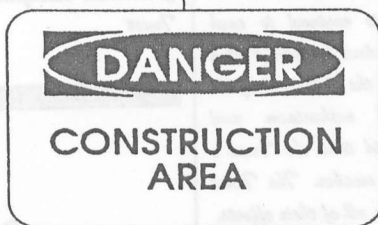
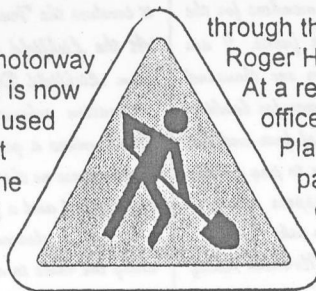
By providing a navigable culvert British Waterways will have the potential to

maintain the currently isolated canal using boats rather than land based plant. Local housing values are also expected to rise where land is adjacent to the canal.

Letters have recently been dispatched to all boat clubs and marinas in the Midlands, seeking financial assistance.

Although the Trust is solvent in the short term there is an urgent need for cash to maintain day to day activities, as well as commissioning the inevitable specialist advice that will be

required before restoration of the Hatherton Branch becomes a reality. The Trust has recently received two thousand pounds in donations but every little extra helps - please dig deep !.



Towpath Tale - Part 6

Arthur Truby remembers commercial traffic on the BCN -

During my early years, commercial traffic on Black Country canals was heavy; boats could always be seen on the move and locks were constantly in operation. Horse-drawn boats were employed in large numbers and the less numerous long-distance boats were also to be seen, trading between Gloucester the Mersey, The Potteries and the Midlands.

Coal was conveyed to the Black Country from the Cannock Coalfields, often by means of tugs drawing three or more loaded boats.

The decline really set in after 1945 and was accelerated by the two severe winters of 1947 and 1963, when the majority of Black Country canals were frozen for weeks at a stretch, despite valiant efforts by ice breaker crews. I had heard parents talk of the sixteen weeks frost of 1894, which must also have adversely affected canal transport, but in more recent years there were alternative means of moving goods. The motor lorry was there, ready and willing to take over. In 1960 I talked to Harold Gater of British waterways Birmingham staff. Our subject was originally pleasure cruising, but it was not long before we came round to reminiscing about former days.

"I remember", said Mr Gater, "when boatmen used to queue at Farmer's Bridge top lock and fights used to take place for preference in working through. All this, mind you, at three o'clock in the morning. Those were the days when the BCN carried eight million tons a year instead of the

present three quarters of a million". Even in 1960 there was always a number of coal boats being loaded at Sandwell Wharf, Smethwick. Their cargoes were destined for Ocker Hill power station, Kings Norton paper mill and various local coal merchants. Horse towing was generally employed, but in the case of coal destined for a merchant's yard on the feeder branch the boatman sometimes wore a special harness and pulled the boat along himself. Clayton's gas boats could often be seen plying between local gasworks and the tar distillery at Oldbury. At least five boats belonged to British waterways own carrying fleet were employed in transporting coal from Hednesford along the main Birmingham Canal and so southwards to the Royal Worcester Porcelain works.

British waterways boats also brought metals from Runcorn Docks to the Midlands and sometimes a convoy of as many as six such boats could be seen passing through the Black Country. A number of rubbish boats operated in the area, carrying cargoes from the back entrances of factories in Birmingham and Smethwick to a tip at Moxley. After the great frost of early 1963 and the closure of several collieries, the number of working boats declined at an even faster rate. Gas works also closed down, thus depriving Thomas Clayton's boats of their cargoes of tar. In 1952 Clayton's operated a fleet of some ninety boats; by 1966 there were less than half a dozen. The only journeys made by them during the final months of operation were to the remaining gas works of Swan village, Smethwick and Walsall. Just over a decade earlier these boats had travelled between Oldbury and Stanlow Oil

Towpath Tale - Part 6

refinery in Cheshire via the BCN, Staffs & Worcester and Shropshire Union Canals. When the traffic ceased hauls were confined to the Midlands, the longest runs then being those to the gasworks at Solihull and Leamington. The Leamington traffic was operated by a pair of boats which conveyed tar from Leamington gas works to Oldbury during the winter and then switched to the Oxford canal during the summer, taking the tar to the distillery at Banbury.

As gas works continued to close down the writing was on the wall for the firm of Thomas Clayton, and the end came on the last day of March 1966. On that day I witnessed the sad sight of the last of the gas boats to use Spon Lane locks as it worked its way up towards Oldbury on its final journey as a commercial narrow boat.

Other boats arrived at Oldbury on the same day from the few gas works still operating. Their cargoes were pumped out at the distillery, and so ended the canal carrying activities of Thomas Clayton (Oldbury) Limited, after a hundred years on Black Country waters.

In 1959 Spon Lane locks were a busy flight at almost any hour; four or five Clayton Boats used them daily, as did a similar number of coal boats travelling between Sandwell Wharf and Ocker Hill. According to one of the last horse boatmen of Midland canals, Spon locks were the prettiest in England; this was not meant literally, but implied that they were well oiled and therefore easy to operate. He was certainly not referring to the scenic attractions of the spoil banks nearby.

Until 1945 at least four coal merchants

used the branch for their supplies, and thirty years later rubbish traffic only remained as the only commercial traffic on any canal which regularly employed horse towage.

The traffic in metals between the Mersey and the Midlands ceased by 1966 and about that time a regular run of many years standing came to an end; the carriage of chocolate crumb between Knighton on the Shropshire union canal and Bourneville. Coal traffic to Worcester ended in 1960 and some of the boats formerly employed on this contract could be seen during the years following, employed as maintenance boats, carrying loads of mud from the dredger to dump. Sorry things they looked, too! Dirty and mud spattered from end to end, a complete contrast to the days when their paint and brasswork shone in the sun.

It is possible to discern along the towpath edge the occasional brick-lined stretch where boats formerly loaded or unloaded, with old and rusty mooring rings still in place to cause that inadvertent trip. Short canal arms led directly into factories at many places, especially on the Wolverhampton level, and the towpath switchbacked its way over these by steeply pitched bridges. many such arms are now either silted up or infilled, with the towpath remaining at water level. In places there may be seen even now the site of canalside chutes down whose metal slide materials were once loaded into boats waiting below.

One of the short canal arms which left the main line in Smethwick was the Cornwall arm, known to boatmen as Tangye's hole, and it ran straight for several hundred yards to a loading basin.

Towpath Tale - Part 6

There was no towpath. The arm followed a grim and grimy course with factory walls rising directly from the waters edge. Not many years ago an old horse drawn boat piled the short branch, conveying rubbish from the wharf at the end. The traffic was operated by the firm of Ernest Thomas of Walsall, and twice a week the boatmen could be seen shafting their way laboriously along the arm whilst their horse stood patiently on the towpath of the main canal.

Then off again would go the boat along the main line to Pudding green, down the eight locks at Ryder's Green and so to the tipping site at Moxley.

It was along this arm in 1960 that several brightly-painted narrow boats of the Willow Wren company, loaded with bicycles for export, started their long journey to London Docks. It was understood that this consignment was only the beginning and that more traffic would follow. However, it was not to be. The expected trade did not materialise and a few years later even the rubbish boat ceased to make it's bi-weekly journey. Land levelling and factory rebuilding caused earth caused earth to be pushed into the canal arm so that eventually a bank of mud stretched right across the waterway. After that the towpath bridge which spanned the entrance to the arm was removed. Tangye's Hole was no more. Also moving rapidly to such a fate in the late 1960's was Sandwell Wharf in Roebuck Lane, Smethwick. Not many years earlier, when the Jubilee Pit on the far side of West Bromwich was in operation, the Wharf was a busy place. Wheels were spinning and grading machinery was rattling as coal was

continually being poured down chutes into the waiting boats below. When Jubilee Colliery closed, so did Sandwell Wharf. Within a few months nature and vandals were at work. The wind whined eerily through the ruins, rattling the rusty iron of the coal chutes. Below the buildings which were now open to the sky, the canal lapped gently against the deserted wharf where boats from Kings Norton, Ocker Hill and Smethwick used to tie up. Opposite the wharf buildings, on the far side of the canal stood a brick shelter at the side of the towpath. Horses and boatmen used to wait there whilst their boats were being loaded. This shelter also became a roofless ruin. Apart from the wind playing its mournful airs among the reeds on the steep banks and howling dismally in the dark untenanted ruins, all was now silence at Sandwell Wharf.

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OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE FRIENDS

Phil Vaughan takes his family
on their first boating holiday....

Do you remember your first time ?

Did you feel alone ?

Vulnerable ?

INADEQUATE ?

This was the situation I found myself in at Wolverhampton top lock on the Tuesday after Spring Bank Holiday. My wife Linda and our children, Peter, 12 and Susan 9, has just boarded the narrow boat "Plum" which had been left moored for us following it's attendance at the Pelsall rally.

I had, for many years, wanted to try life aboard a narrow boat and when fellow ' friends' John and Julie asked me if I wanted to move 'Plum' North, I jumped at the chance. We had arranged to take charge of the boat at Wolverhampton and leave it somewhere near Frankton Junction on the Llangollen Canal the following weekend.

I had previously undertaken a certain amount of instruction regarding the boat but as soon as I stood by the tiller at Wolverhampton I suddenly became unsure of myself I John Had told me that if I had any problems then seek assistance from other boat users and they would be sure to help. Little did I realise I would be summoning assistance before I had even cast off I

Fortunately for me, a man was working on his boat so I swallowed my pride and asked him if he would assist through the first lock. John was right I my fellow boater could not have been more helpful. he took the boat through the first lock for me , supervised me handle the boat through the second then watched us through the third. If the gentleman is reading this article I would like to thank him most

sincerely.

I suppose that if you want to learn how to handle a boat through locks, heading north from Wolverhampton down the 21 Is as good a training ground as any. Actually, we were amazed how efficiently we novices coped with the locks. Linda and Peter operated the locks as if they had been lock-wheeling all of their lives (why IS it that it is always the ladies who operate the locks ?).

The only mishap that we had on our journey down to Aldersley junction occurred about half way down the flight. I had, by this time, convinced myself that I was an experienced boatman, leaping off the boat to close the lock gate behind us. My confidence was misplaced for as I went to regain the boat I misjudged the gap and smashed my shin against the hull. The Injury was most painful - but I learned my lesson and treated boating with the respect it merits.

I knew that the boat was low on fuel and water [JM's trademark - Ed] so we stopped at the boatyard at Autherley Junction. After filling with diesel and water I tried to move off but found that the boat was stuck on a ledge. Apparently the water level had dropped considerably during the previous day.

We tried to push ourselves off the ledge but couldn't. Eventually we were assisted from the ledge by someone from the boatyard who was obviously used to the problem and knew exactly where to place the pole for best effect. Even expert help could not stop the boat from turning round and it needed three of us to turn it to the right direction again. From Autherley, cruising along the Shroppie in the late afternoon sun was memorable, having worked our way through 21 locks it was doubly so I

The evening was warm and sunlit, there was no wind whatsoever and the woodland around Chillington was at it's prettiest. It hadn't

OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE FRIENDS

taken long for us to be totally captivated by life afloat and we were seriously debating the merits of owning our own boat, having only collected the boat at mid day we had hoped to moor at Wheaton Aston overnight. Unfortunately the delay at Autherley meant that we had to change our plans and so we moored for the night at Brewwood - 'The Admiral Rodney'. We had an excellent meal in what is one of my favourite hosteleries, only spoilt when my son added the contents of his lemonade to my second pint of Entle bitter - sacrilege!

We fell asleep very quickly that night, only to be awoken in the dead of night by our 6" tall son who had become claustrophobic in his bunk and who had been crashing around the boat in his panic.

I did intend to take an early morning run but when I awoke I found that my leg was very swollen and sore so I settled for a limp to the Newsagents and back.

We cast off in fairly warm conditions, pausing briefly to peer smugly down on the heavy traffic as we crossed over the A5 on Telford's splendid aqueduct at Stretton. We stopped at Gnosall to buy groceries and were tempted to an early lunch in 'The Boat'. I enjoyed a couple of pints of Marston's pedlgree whilst ensuring that my son did not contaminate it with more pop!

After lunch we continued our leisurely journey, marvelling firstly at the magnificent Shelmore embankment and then the depth of the cutting at Grub street. I bored my family with comprehensive details of each of Telford's wonders having studied Thomas Telford's work at great length.

We made steady progress due to the total absence of locks. With no work to do my family had no option but to listen to me as I related the virtues of T. Telford Esq. A few minutes later and Telford's name had turned to

mud! - what a nightmare Woodseaves cutting is! For those who do not know it, Woodseaves is a very deep cutting, about one and a half miles long, with a series of abutments which create numerous chicanes. At it's widest the channel will just allow two boats to pass. what's more, we must have reached Woodseaves cutting during the rush hour as there were boats everywhere.

The next hour or so reminded me of one of those modern video games, that my son likes to play. As a test of the boatman's skill it seemed beyond compare. I found it unbelievable that we managed to negotiate our way through the cutting without either touching another boater grounding.

My family were so impressed that they willingly listened to more of my 'Telford tales' although they did seem a little bit too eager to get off the boat at Tyrley locks.

Having negotiated the locks we spent our second night aboard 'Plum' without incident, moored at Market Drayton.

To be continued.....

Notice is hereby given That the Annual General Meeting

**Will take place at the Village Hall,
Hatherton, on 2nd February 1995
commencing at 19:30.**

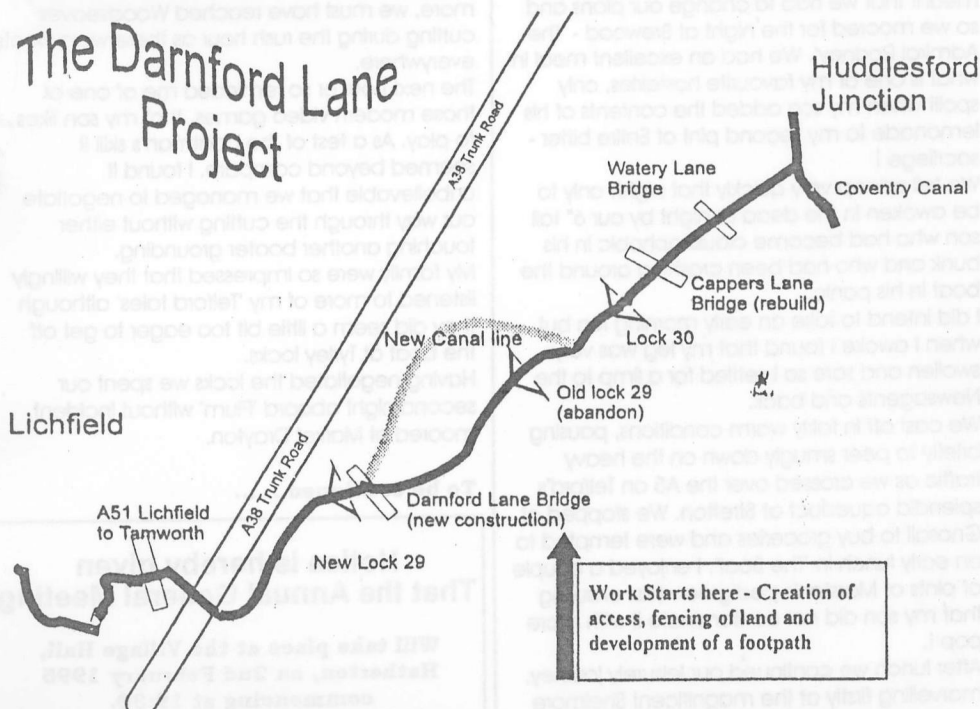
Agenda

**Accounts
Election of officers
Restoration Report
BNRR update
M6 widening update**

**There are a number of vacancies for
committee members**

Developments on the Lichfield Canal

The way is now clear for work to begin on the Darnford Lane section of the Lichfield Canal; with the first work party being held on 6th November at Darnford Lane (opposite the golf range). The first task will be to create a new accessway so that the scheme will not conflict with the needs of local land owners. The plan is to provide a footpath along the route of the new canal - in other words to build the towpath first. The Trust are hopeful that initial earthworks will take place before Christmas - if you are able to help in any way, or are just interested in the site, please contact John Horton on 0543 262466



THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ARE NEEDED URGENTLY

Fencing 400 Metres Wire, 200 Wooden posts

Earthmoving 1-2 weeks use of excavator (& driver ?)

Path Base 45 cu Metres MOT type 2 with aggregate limestone blinding/silted gravel topping - approx 15 cu metres.

Scrap Timber Planks - For temporary profiles

Serviceable metal container - For storage, etc - can be collected from donor's premises !.

Anyone who can help with this appeal for materials please contact John Horton on (0543) 262466

Cut Both Ways

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Let's all ogle at Ogley !

1995 should be a significant year in the history of the Lichfield and Hatherton canals and the associated restoration schemes. Anyone who has studied restoration schemes elsewhere in Britain cannot have helped but notice that a number of major schemes are developing with ever faster pace. Long term schemes such as the Huddersfield Narrow Canal and the Rochdale seem unstoppable whilst schemes previously written off as impossible (such as the Stroudwater, Manchester Bolton & Bury) are well in hand.

Put against the backdrop of such major schemes as the above really does show the Lichfield and the Hatherton restorations in perspective - where there is a will there is a way !.

After the second hugely successful IWA event at Pelsall last May, we turned our thoughts to how we might continue the focus on the restorations from the southern end, albeit on a slightly less grand scale !. We have held preliminary talks with the local land owner and with British Waterways as to the possibility of a gathering of boats at Ogley junction, during mid-1995. It has been suggested that this would take place

either in June or July so that boats on the way to the IWA national rally at Chester could call in, and hopefully explore some of the Northern BCN whilst making the detour. Initial thoughts are for a small gathering of boats but we do need to gauge the likely demand as early as possible.

Initial talks with British Waterways have indicated that they will be prepared to help tidy the arm and basin at Ogley if there is likely to be demand.

It's up to you !

We are now looking for a small core of people to assist with planning the event, also for a small number of people who will commit their boats to an early booking. We want to make the event a significant "pull" in terms of publicising the restoration plans, as well as encouraging use of the Northern BCN.

If you can either help or will be willing to commit to an early booking, please write to Julie Fairclough, our secretary. Your name will be put on a list for early advice and you will be contacted as soon as possible. We envisage that the entry fee will be about 7.00 to include a commemorative brass plaque.

Since 1987 the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust has campaigned for the restoration of two vital canals in the Midlands - THE FRIENDS OF THE LICHFIELD AND HATHERTON CANALS ARE THE MEMBERSHIP GROUP GIVING SUPPORT TO THE TRUST THROUGH FUNDRAISING AND PHYSICAL HELP.

THE LICHFIELD CANAL

Running from Ogley Junction near Brownhills to Huddersford Junction near Lichfield, the Lichfield canal is six miles long and had thirty locks. Closed in 1954 as a result of declining traffic levels, the canal would form a vital link between the Coventry canal and the Northern Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN).

The first part of the restoration scheme involves the reopening of the first mile from Huddersford, the reinstatement of two locks and the creation of a small basin for people wishing to visit the Historic City of Lichfield..

THE HATHERTON CANAL

The Hatherton Branch was opened in 1841 with the aim of bringing coal down from the mines on Cannock Chase. It was later linked to the Birmingham Canal Navigations by a flight of 13 locks at Churchbridge.

Although the Hatherton Canal was profitable for many years, depleted coal reserves and competition from the railways brought about its decline and closure in the 1950's.

Below Wedges Mill the canal is substantially in water, being used to supply the Staffordshire & Worcestershire canal at Calf Heath. The first two locks are intact, one forming the access to Calf Heath Marina. Initial restoration work is taking place on the lower length of the canal, where significant progress has been made to date; indeed small craft such as rowing boats and canoes have already been used on this section.

The M6 Motorway widening scheme gives us an opportunity to replace the navigable crossing which was destroyed in the 1960's and consultants have been employed to produce the engineering solution to this crossing. A more long term scheme involves the reconnection of the Hatherton Branch with the Cannock Extension and the BCN.

**Join today and help to restore these vital canals !
fees: 10.00 over 18 and in work, all others 5.00
please send to Trevor Morris, 163 Halton Road, Sutton Coldfield,
West Midlands B73 6NZ**

Help the restoration !

You don't have to be an athlete to join our working parties !.

Everyone is welcome to come along to working parties, be they a world class athlete or just used to pottering about. It's not all strenuous work and no-one will be press ganged into doing something that they feel uncomfortable with. Whatever you can contribute will be appreciated, whether it's hard graft or sound advice, every little really does help.

Where are the work parties ?

On the Hatherton canal we usually meet at the back of the 'Roman Way' Hotel which is situated on the A5 between the junction with the A460 and the M6 motorway. On the Lichfield canal initial work will be concentrated between Darnford and Cappers lanes, Near Boley park, Lichfield.

When are the work parties ?

For the latest information please contact Denis Cooper on 0543 374370 or Phil Sharpe on 01889 583330

Join the Friends of The Lichfield and Hatherton Canals !

We support the Lichfield and Hatherton canals restoration Trust, through membership, fund raising and publicity. It would be unrealistic to suggest that large scale restorations such as the Lichfield and Hatherton canals could be financed through endless bring & buy sales and fetes; however making people aware of the potential of the schemes can reap significant rewards.

European Money is available for restoring derelict industrial sites (including canals) through derelict land grants - provided that local bodies support the work - and if they do up to 100% can be applied for. So it's not just about fund raising, it's also about increasing awareness !.

We currently have a small committee and are always looking for people who are willing to contribute to this work - if you are interested please contact John Morris on (0543) 432103.

Membership details on page 11