



Kevin Maslin Held a Photographic Workshop on the weekend of the BCN Challenge. For those of you who missed it he will be planning another one soon.



Mike Anson poling his butty at the top of Titford Locks on the 24 Hour Challenge. He & his wife Jo along with Mike Rolfe towed the butty behind the tug Joanna for the entire 24 hours.



Darren Matthews & family on his cruiser entering the BCN Challenge for the first time - enjoyed it so much he says he will be back next year.



Watching the boats arrive into Hawne Basin at the end of the Challenge



John Dodwell's tug Helen went along with about 15 boats to get into Titford Pools. Pete Sherwood, pictured on the left, is area supervisor for this area he was amazed that access to the Pools was possible and promised to help to improve it if he could.

Boundary Post



**Edition
205
Summer
2014**

**What has the Society been doing in May 2014?
See inside and on back page for more details.**



The crew on Dove got dressed for the BCN Challenge



The Explorer Cruisers get down to a bit of socialising on the Walsall Canal

The Journal of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society
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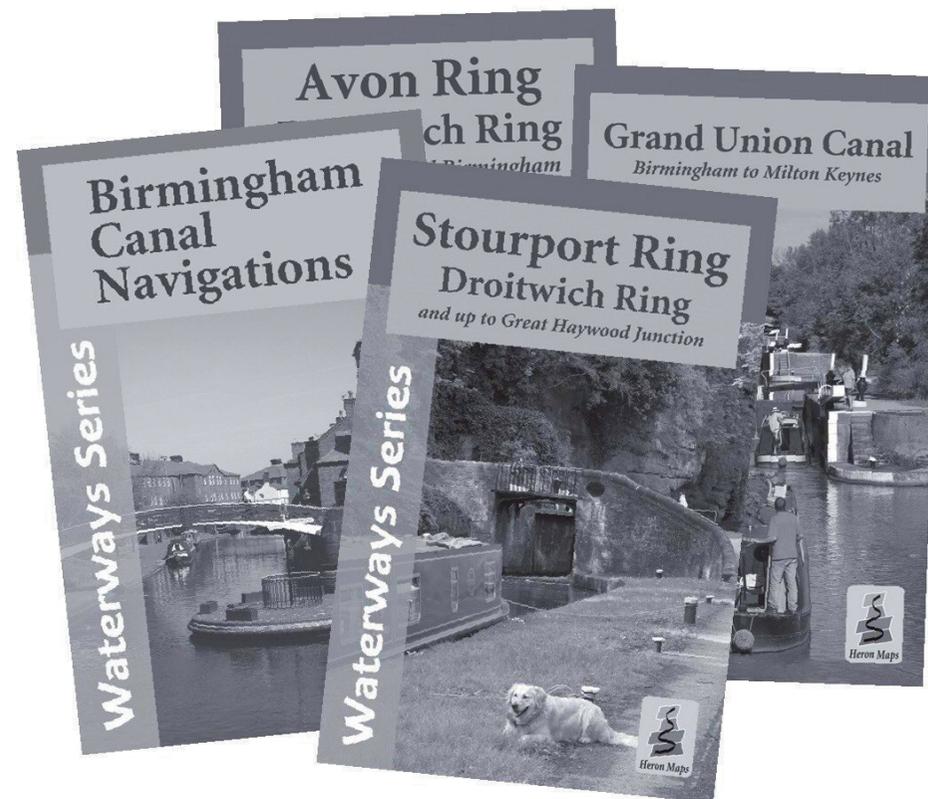
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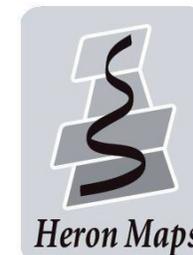
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If you have enjoyed reading the items in this journal and would like to be involved in some of our activities and are not a member, but are interested in joining the BCN Society here's just the form you need!



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The BCN Society, a Company Limited by Guarantee, (Registered Charity number 1091760) exists to conserve and improve the canals of the West Midlands.

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Notes from the Editor

Well what a month May was and we agreed to a bit of colour to celebrate. I have tried to include a bit of everything but if I have missed out something that I should have included then let me know & I'll get it in next time.

As usual thank you to all who have sent items for inclusion. There have been far more than usual this time which is very encouraging but I'm so very sorry I have not been able to get everything in. There were some superb write ups from David & Heather Gray on NB It's 5 o'clock and Tony and Carol Gamble on nb Chance. I'm afraid there was no room to print them this time but perhaps in the future to attract boaters to go on one of the Sherratt's pleasurable Explorer Cruises will be appropriate.

There were two references made to the Wednesbury Old Canal reed clearance. One from Richard Chester Browne a long time member of "The Other 60 Miles" fame and Tom Murkin a more recent member. The Society Council will arrange a time during the winter months to deal with it.

There is definitely something missing from this edition - Ray Shill's usual article. He has been very busy lately with a variety of things but I'm sure we will see him return next time but we will see him on his walk in August see page 29 for details.

Brenda



Next Boundary Post

Editor welcomes any interesting and relevant information relating to the BCN in the form of news items, photographs, letters, notes or articles to be sent by **September 1st**

Email: boundarypost@gmail.com
Address: 9 Wylde Green Road, Sutton Coldfield B72 1HB



Chairman's Report

Summer has arrived and with it holidays and a bit of cruising which doesn't leave me with much time to put this Boundary Post together. I always find it difficult to get my head round BCN Society happenings when thinking of Summer Holidays. We've just come back from a touring holiday of Scotland where we saw the Falkirk Wheel - they wouldn't let us on the trip boat with our dog (although very tiny) so we just watched & walked up to the staircase locks - more interesting I thought. Shame they can't spend that sort of money to restore the Lichfield Canal!

What has happened since the last edition? Well I suppose the Society events in May have been well covered in this issue. Though I must say how hard everyone involved in these events has worked. There is of course the controversial HS2 that threatens parts of the canal in and around Birmingham. These plans take time & I know we will hear more about that in the future. Ivor Caplan is following it for the Society.

Something completely different, as they say, Andy Tidy whose walks of forgotten canals have been featured in Boundary Post over the past couple of years has offered to put them together with more exploring to publish an updated version of "The

Other 60 Miles". He intends calling it "Exploring the other 60 miles" thus maintaining some continuity with Richard Chester Browne's original. If you don't have a copy of TO60M the Society do still have some copies at £5 each available from our sales stand or email Becci our Sales Lady and she will sort you a copy.

Atlas & Malus must have a mention as we now have a new manager for the boats as you can see from the report opposite. Coombeswood Canal Trust with whom we share ownership of the boats have received funding for a youth officer and will be working with Paul to make more use of the boats and of course encouraging much needed youth to the canals. I hope to report favourable happenings next time. If you are prepared to help or know of a youth group that would be interested please get in touch I would love to hear from you.

Now the other boats in the Society, Phoenix & Crow - Phoenix has just been painted and the next job is the sign writing. We decided to keep the colour the same but the style of writing has not yet been decided. If you would like your say then please let me know. Crow on the other hand needs a new floor so that's a job for later in the year. Help needed!!

Bob Broomhall - Many of you will know Bob of "All sorts of Jobs" fame. He is listed as Building & Heritage but does 101 jobs besides. Well he is not at all well at present and when he finishes operations and treatment he will have to be on "light duties". We wish him a speedy recovery!!

On Saturday morning Phoenix was taken back up to the Smethwick Pump House by Stuart Sherratt and me, where we met up with Steve Lambert from CRT and some of the Friends of Galton Valley group. After a briefing from Steve, we moved on towards Summit tunnel where there is a storm drain leading into the canal. This out flow is surrounded by steel piling, and to this we attached the Coir rolls and secured them with wire.

These should eventually grow up around the piling creating a better view. It rained heavily again as we worked and the drain soon began to run with storm water. Tea was then taken in the Pumphouse with the friends.

The bridge just beyond the tunnel was then grappled and some litter picking done. Stuart and I then returned Phoenix to the Titford Pumphouse, before going for a meal in Oldbury.

Future Work Parties

July 26th. Titford Pumphouse. Various jobs around the site. 10am start.

August 30th. Pre Rally Clean up in Tipton. 10am start.

BCNS Social Meetings

are held on the first Thursday in the month start at 7-30pm
Titford Pumphouse Engine Street Oldbury B69 4NL
All Welcome!

August 7th — Walk with Ray Shill—meet at the lock house at lock 12 on the Perry Barr flight at the end of Deykin Avenue. Ray will take the walk down to Salford Junction and up part of the Aston flight. Walkers may catch a train back to Witton or walk back.

September 4th - David Lowe - Freight by Water - An under utilised resource?

October 2nd - Keith Hodgkins - Beers & Brewers of the Black Country

Just one of the good pubs & breweries of the Black Country and where the ale at our Rallies comes from - Ma Pardoe's



Work Party Report by Mike



May 10th. Pre-Rally Clean up on the Titford. This involved ten members doing various jobs around the Pumphouse and along the canal as far as the Pools. Phoenix was taken for a trip down to the Pools, checking the bridge holes and removing floating rubbish as we went. Among the objects pulled out were an old bath tub and part of a roller shutter door which was quite heavy.

Crow was used as a platform on the Tat Bank Branch in order to cut back some over hanging branches to improve the moorings here, which is quite useful during the rally. Litter picking was done and the path around the Pump House was weeded by Malcolm Bates.

I would like to say Thank you to the Allen Register for the entertainment in the Pump House later, which was part of their 2014 Boat Gathering.

May 14th to 18th Our Spring Rally at the Pump House. Another successful rally with over 70 boats attending. All the usual jobs were done here, which included erecting the marquee and tents, setting up the PA system, preparing the catering units and stalls and various other smaller jobs. Dismantling was done Sunday afternoon, before a well earned drink in the Pump House, Thank you Charley the Barman.

One final job for Phoenix was helping to tow a Council member's boat out of the Tat Bank Branch after it ran aground due to the level being down a little.

June 7th. Phoenix was taken down to Icknield Port earlier in the week to be loaded with rolls of Coir matting by CRT. This contains coconut and plant material. It rained heavily all the way.

Many members worked hard over the weekend of the Summer Rally & many before. During the work party the previous weekend among the many volunteers our usual Barrie, Mike, and Phil with John Baylis, a member for many years who is well known for his work with the Erewash Canal and IWA as well as at all our events.



PELSALL CANAL FESTIVAL 2015
This is where I appeal for extra help especially if we are to put on the Pelsall Festival next year.
Pelsall relies on a great deal of help please contact me with your offer. A decision will be made if offers of help are forthcoming.

Finally it is with much regret that we say good bye to Eric Foakes who remained an active member from the very beginning of his time with the Society. Even after moving to Suffolk he kept in touch with items of interest and sending donations to the work parties to supply bacon butties, teas & coffees. Thank you Eric.

Brenda

Atlas & Malus

After attending the summer rally at Titford pump house it was decided that Atlas & Malus needed some exercise. A training run was organised with the intention to train up new crew members, and to refresh the skills of existing ones! After an initial move of A&M from Titford to Edgbaston the run properly started in early June. We left Edgbaston under grey skies which soon turned into heavy rain, but as the afternoon came the weather turned much brighter. Our mooring for the week was at Swallow Cruisers at Hockley Heath, arranged by Brenda. A big thank you to Alasdair Lawrence who very kindly gave all the crew a lift to the station.



The second leg involved heading down the Statford canal to Kingswood junction. Excellent weather and a good turn out of crew meant the Lapworth flight were dealt with surprisingly swiftly, we even had time for a lunch break!

Thank you to all who have turned up to help and for those that haven't where have you been you're missing out on a great opportunity!

If you do want to get involved with these historic boats do email me at paul.smith879@yahoo.co.uk

The itinerary for the next few months is:-

Starting on 31 May Titford to city centre.
7 June City centre to Swallow Cruisers.
14 June Swallow Cruisers to Kingswood.
21 June Kingswood to Warwick.
28 June Warwick to Kingswood .
5 July Kingswood to Tyseley.

6 July Tyseley to Cuckoo wharf
12 July Cuckoo wharf to Curdworth
19 July Curdworth to Fazeley
26 July Fazeley to Streethay wharf
16 August Streethay wharf to Alvecote
23-25 August Alvecote gathering

Anyone interested in crewing on these dates please let me know. Paul

Memories of Bradley Locks 1950s

Terry Langford

Great article by Andy Tidy on the Gospel Oak canals. Took me right back to 63, Bilston Road where I was born and raised, about 200 yards from Shippys. The towpath of the Gospel Oak Branch was part of our short cut to Wednesbury. It ended at a small bridge over the Ocker Hill Road and there were the remains of a lock on the Walkers Iron Works (now sports ground) side of the road and a clear water spring that led into it, later polluted by sewage. The canal was weeded over and we used the remaining channel to play in half oil drums as boats.



This more or less complete lock was the bottom one of the Bradley run, immediately upstream of the road bridge over Bilston/Great Bridge Road. An old ice-breaker was moored in the upstream reach opposite to where the man is standing looking over the wall.

The more ruined lock is still there I think, just below the bridge on the opposite side of the road.



As a river biologist I will remember the overflow arm and shaft of the second lock because it had the only growth of big liverworts I had ever seen. There was also a small arm on the left of the railway bridge leading toward the Thomson site though I don't know if it was ever used. Also a small arm led off almost opposite to it toward the railway bridge/tunnel and this received water from a spring which it may still do. At one time the clear running water culvert was covered by two big iron plates which we used to remove to get at the water. Some years ago (15?) when my mother still lived in Bilston Road, I walked to the long bridge and the little bit of open space with the iron plates was still there. It may still be.

Jim Hanks & Joyce Taylor - Bicester
Christopher Blythe - Tunbridge Wells
Tony Gamble - Bassingham, Lincs.

24-hr Challenge:-

Roy Oakhill - Brighton
Nick Norman - Aberdeen
Piotr Kuflik - London
David Laws - Ashford
Richard Lacey - Newent
Sandra Willis - Swadlincote
Geoff Bailey - Farnham
Mike Bryant - Reading
Doug Swain - Selston, Notts.
Martin Catterall - Brighton
John Kelly - Smethwick
Darren Matthews - Birmingham
Alan Whitbrook - Walsall
Alan Fincher - Berkhamsted
Dave Paine - Birmingham
Lynne Robinson - Ormeau, Australia
Paul Callender - Ellesmere Port
Chris Clegg - Berkhamsted
Benedict Todd - Bristol
Barnaby Ball - Gnosall
Dawn Tigwell - Chelmsford

We've also given Honorary Membership to
Linda & Roger Horton, councillors for Sandwell
Richard Parry Chief Executive CRT

Current Membership: 542 memberships,
of which 6 are Corporate, and 867 individual members.

Welcome New Members



From our Membership Secretary,
Alan Veness
He would like to welcome the
following new members and hope they
will join us in the activities of the BCN
Society

This time of the year sees a huge jump in membership numbers as the Society gives a complimentary years membership to those boaters who enter the BCN 24 Hour Challenge or go on one of the Explorer Cruises. This year we have 41 of this type of membership plus 6 new members joining in the usual way. We welcome them all and hope they will keep their membership & join in with other Society events.

Steve King - Halesowen
Danny & Yvonne Walker - Netherton
Michael & Marion Paisey - Dursley
Keith & Sheila Bowen - Walsall
Richard Alford - Birmingham
Michael Andrews - Wolverhampton

Explorer Cruises A & B:-

Ted & Margaret Ellis - Skipton
Kathryn Doddington - Stoke Bruerne
David & Heather Grey - Belper
Keith Gudgin - Liveaboard / Continuous Cruiser
Martin & Janet Theyer - Sunbury on Thames
Cliff & Joan Francis - Bicester
Pat & Sheila Campbell - Halesowen
Bob & Dot Fox - Kidderminster
Sheila & Dave Chamberlain - Crick
John & Sue Murray - Sutton Coldfield
Gary Harte - Birmingham
Colin & Tina Hobbs - Thatcham
Roger & Lynne Mellors - Preston Brook
Dudley Taylor - Gnosall
David & Rosina Green - Thame
Bob & Lynn Hallam - Dursley
David Alcock - Salcombe

The branch from the Bradley locks went, as Andy said, at the back of Myrtle Terrace toward what was then Davenport's farm or small holding, now subsumed by the housing estate. It probably fed Phillip Williams Iron works and the mines in the Wednesbury Oak area. It was full of rotting old canal barges which we used to play on. There was also an ice breaker boat with its tall poles for rocking moored just upstream of the Bridge on the Great Bridge Road, near where Thompson Bros works were sited. So many good memories of the canals there as our playground.

One of my present research studies is on the canals of that area, particularly their ecology and recovery from pollution. It is so good to see the canals working again and the BCNS so active. I do get a bit concerned though that some canals in various places are now regarded as ecological treasures rather than industrial treasures and am actively engaged in opposing that. They are part of our industrial and transport heritage and should be kept as such and used more. I am happy for members to have my e-mail address.
Terry.langford@btinternet.com

Editors note: Terry is the Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Engineering and the Environment, University of Southampton and a member of the BCN Society.



LETTERS To the EDITOR

Thank you for the Boundary Post, which is always more interesting and better written than the other local canal newsletters that I receive, but this one must be one of the best ever! I particularly like Ivor's piece with photos of the Engine Arm, though Pete Carter who lived on the boat pictured on the left, "The Throstle", was found dead on his boat one morning, and we only found out afterwards that he was a well-known trade union activist: His funeral and wake were a unique experience, with a marquee at Engine Arm and some very unusual speeches. The recycling arrangement with Sandwell Council that Pete set up for the moorings is still in operation. Pete Carter Union leader who fought for the rights of construction workers. His obituary can be found on The Guardian web page.

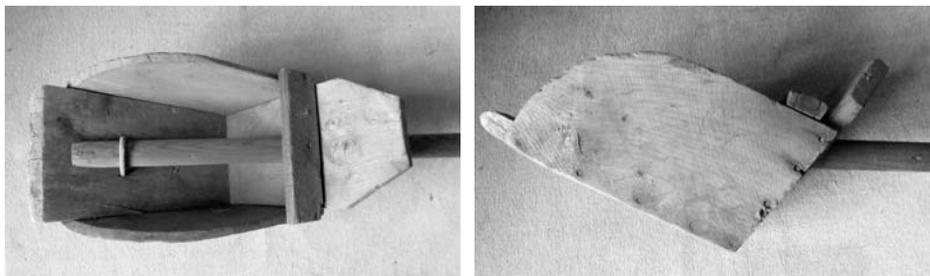
Stuart Field

Dear Brenda,
Two items in the last BP aroused my comment, both related to the same thing: We are celebrating 40 years since Titford was restored, but after that our interest moved on to the Wednesbury Old Canal/Ridgacre Branch. This was when I joined the work parties, never having been involved with the Titford. We restored the Wednesbury Old Canal (in similar condition to what it is today) by 1978, and then I think it was Warley Corporation dredged the Ridgacre Branch itself. BCNS ran a couple of rallies up there before in 1993 the Ridgacre was cut off by construction of the Black Country Spine Road. So the Wednesbury Old Canal now leads even less far. But whilst we will not be celebrating 40 years of its restoration, I think yes, we should be pressing for its restoration. We should replicate the working parties of 40 years ago, though I'm afraid I won't be part of them.
Best wishes,
Richard Chester-Browne.
"The Other 60 Miles" author. Ed.

Society's Artefacts

Wooden Water Scoop

Some of our artefacts were featured last time and it is my intention to illustrate some of the very interesting items in the Society's collection.



Sometime last year Fred Heritage handed over a wooden water scoop to the Society to add to our archives. I had never seen one before & thought it might be the only one left but after featuring it in the quarterly publication *Narrowboat* I discovered that there was at least one other. It is at the Foxton Inclined Plane Museum at Foxton.



The scoop was used to remove the last level of water from the bottom of a lock before repairs could be made. It's rather a heavy piece of equipment and must have developed very strong arm muscles in the men that used them.

I was looking for a photograph showing the scoop in use and Sadie directed me to this delightful illustration.

Courtesy of David Gladwin's *Building Britain's Canals*, printed by Brewin Books.

saying that it was mainly because of Eric and the work of the Society, that we have the moorings and facilities that are now present on the Engine Arm. I can remember some years ago, I was walking the old Harborne Branch Railway, near to Rotten Park, when I bumped into Eric and Betty, walking in the opposite direction. Eric will never be forgotten, but will be missed by all who had the pleasure to have known him. My thoughts and prayers are with his Family.



This lovely photo taken in 2007 shows how Eric was "game for anything" when it was decided to do a re-enactment of a time gone by. The photo shows two of our Vice Presidents, the other being Phil Clayton on the right who will I'm sure tell us what was the story behind this vision.

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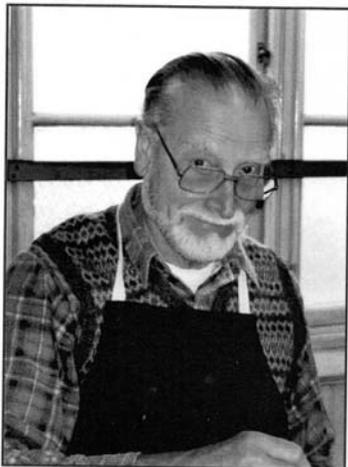
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Eric H Foakes 29th May 1929 - 30th May 2014

Martin O'Keeffe pays the following tribute to Eric



Eric and Betty owned a number of boats over the years but perhaps the most well-known of these was the former Leonard Leigh tug *Christopher James*. Eric told me that *Christopher James* as an historic working boat always ensured that he had a warm welcome at boat clubs he visited whilst out cruising.

Eric was a competent carpenter and there are examples of his handiwork in the cupboards made in the style of a boatman's cabin in Titford Pumphouse. One of his curiosities were miniature wooden cabin stoves which he kindly made as raffle prizes for many Society events.

In more recent years Eric moved to East Anglia to be closer to his family Mary, Margaret & Eddy and it was there that his funeral was held on the 16th June 2014 at All Saints Church in Bury St Edmunds.

Eric was a good friend to the Society and will be sadly missed by us all.

Those who knew Eric from "way back" will know along with his wife Betty, what an asset he was to the Society for very many years. Amongst the many tributes I received when informing of Eric's death was this from Mike Mc Clelland:-

I'm very sorry to hear the news about Eric's passing. I had the pleasure of serving on the committee during the 1990's along with Eric, David Smith, Kev Maslin, Ian Myers, Neil Bough, Barrie Johnson and Martin. I think I'm right in

It is with sadness that the death of one of our Vice-Presidents Eric Foakes on the 30th May 2014, must be reported. Eric who was born 29th May 1929 was a lifelong canal enthusiast although his professional career was that of research chemist. He originally worked in the east end of London but came to take up employment with Albright & Wilson Ltd where he was involved with the use of phosphorus in plastics. Indeed his work resulted in at least one patent for this application. Eric could always be counted on to recant tales of explosions and fires in his laboratory, phosphorus not being one of the easiest materials to work with! His move to the West Midlands brought him into contact with the local waterways and Eric (together with his wife Betty) were early members of the society and Eric was involved with all aspects of its running including membership secretary for many years, although he was particularly interested in youth involvement.

Richard Parry Chief Executive of CRT joined the BCN 24 Hour Challenge

Over the past year we have seen Richard Parry involved in many of our events. He came to the Bonfire Rally, The Celebration of the 40 years of Restoring the Titford Canal, our Summer Rally at Titford & when Richard & Sue Powell asked him to join

Many of you know we had Richard Parry on our crew this year. When we met him at a boaters meeting in Birmingham last year we were telling him all about the BCN challenge with great enthusiasm, and suggested he should perhaps take part. We offered him a place on Tawny Owl if he'd like it, a genuine offer, but we really didn't think he would have time to take us up on it. We are very glad he did.

Our aim was to show him lots of the more obscure bits of the BCN, and for him to be out with real boaters having fun on the system, rather than being shown various schemes and specific projects, which he does regularly. I think we achieved this and although

much waterways related chat was had, we didn't mention any specific problems we thought should be sorted.

Many people asked if he enjoyed himself. He certainly appeared to, and has assured me that he did. He was not on duty, and certainly became one of the Tawny Team, from making tea and washing up to driving the boat and working the locks.

So we were very lucky with our new crew member, he enjoyed himself, and we can confirm he is an enthusiastic and capable boater.

Sue & Richard Powell



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The Netherton Canal Tunnel

Phil Mansel wrote the following as a song in his youth (in 1969) the life of the tunnel was different then but to reflect on the tunnel of today Phil had added the last four lines. Phil has quite a talent and I've asked him "What's next".

From Dudley Port to Cradley Heath, from Brierley Hill to Brum,
From Oldbury town and Alum Rock, to Tividale they come.
The way is long and arduous, the water oil begrimed,
But seventy foot of narrowboat can leave it all behind.

From Tividale to Netherton, they hewed through rocks and clay,
A tunnel was needed to take the cut, so they dug the ground away.
In eighteen hundred and fifty eight the job was nearly done,
At every mile they sunk a shaft to let in air and sun.
Now building men with nerves of steel all came to lend a hand,
Construction gangs and architects, the best in all the land.
For years they toiled and laboured on, there was work for all to do,
They laid the keystone in at last, then let the water through.

The Netherton Tunnel's dim and damp, the tow path's breaking down,
Where once you heard the engines throb from underneath the ground.
As through the dark the boats all crept with loads and loads of coal,
You could hear men say the tunnel route was worth its weight in gold.
From Dudley Port to Cradley Heath, from Brierley Hill to Brum,
The Netherton Tunnel is silent now, there's nothing left to come.
With only ghosts and memories and echoes from the past,
The era of the bargees done, today we live too fast.
From Oldbury town and Alum Rock, from fame to decadence,
No motorway or diesel truck could ever recompense.
The stagnant cuts are rubbish dumps, the locks are overgrown,
Our waterways are choked with rust, and the tunnel stands alone.

But nowadays all things have changed and the links have been restored,
The Netherton Tunnel stands out proud for travellers to applaud.
With narrowboats and rambling folk and cyclists passing through,
The waterway is vibrant now and the tunnel breathes anew.

Phil Mansell



Since the last edition of Boundary Post the *Black Country Voyages* project has really started to gather momentum. Much to our delight the boat has had a re-paint and this year lead artists Phil Duckworth and Ben Sanders, known as Juneau Projects, have been very busy working with our young people at different canal side venues along the BCN.

For more information about this project or to get involved please contact Kate Self at

k.self@ikon-gallery.org or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708

To celebrate Black Country Day on 14 July, Ikon launches www.blackcountryvoyages.org

Our summer programme includes the following events. Do come and say hello!

Black Country Voyages at Saltwells Nature Reserve, Doulton Clay Pits Open Day

Saturday 26 July, 12–4pm – FREE

Saltwells Nature Reserve, off Coppice Road, Quarry Bank, Dudley, West Midlands, DY5 1TF

The activities include walks and creative workshops. www.claygroundcollective.org

Black Country Voyages in Tipton

Tuesday 29 July and Friday 1 August, 1–4pm – FREE Birmingham Canal, Owen Street, Tipton

Black Country Voyages tours to Tipton and moors in Tipton Green. Members of IYP lead practical workshops including painting, badge-making, zinemaking and hosting public talks.

Black Country Voyages in Netherton

Wednesday 13 August, 12–4pm – FREE

Bumblehole Conservation Group Visitor Centre, Windmill End, Netherton, Dudley DY2 9HU

Black Country Voyages in Stourbridge

Friday 22 August 12.30–1.30pm, 1.30–2.30pm, 2.30–3.30pm £2.25 per person, payable on the day

The Red House Glass Cone, High Street Stourbridge DY8 4AZ

Black Country Voyages tours to Stourbridge and hosts a week-long summer school for local young people (for more information contact Kate Self, k.self@ikon-gallery.org). Join us and celebrate the summer exhibition *Nature* (9 August – 13 September), with an afternoon of family-

friendly workshops. Make your own fused glass trinkets, work with Juneau Projects and visit our canal boat. www.dudley.gov.uk/see-and-do/museums



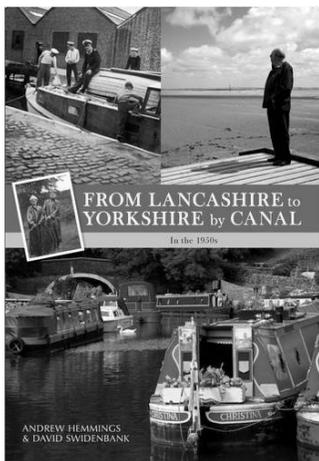
A very successful Sunday was Slowboat was at the Brownhills Canal Festival on 29th June. Unfortunately the Society could not manage a representation but perhaps next year we will.

From Lancashire to Yorkshire by Canal:
In the 1950's,

by Andrew Hemmings & David Swidenbank, 127 pages, 11 maps, 168 b&w illustrations, Amberley Publishing Stroud, 2012, ISBN 978 1 4456 03414, £14.99, available good bookshops or www.amberley-books.com
In 1958, as part of their summer camp, eleven sea cadets with their three officers spent a week on their training ship, a 32 foot cutter sailing the inland waterways on what must have been a real adventure. From the tidal reaches of the Ribble Estuary over the Pennines to the docks at Hull had to be completed between 20th July and 2nd August, and so well did all on board play their part that it worked out in true naval fashion. Fortunately one of the officers has left a wonderful photographic record of the trip which lets us see how the trainee sailors organised their daily life afloat. With just enough guidance the youngsters accepted the responsibility of managing for themselves: as fifteen year old Ben Lynch said "it had been a practical time for practical lads". They rose to the occasion with relish, enjoying the opportunity to meet new friends, learn how to manage a boat and gain new skills that would be useful to them as life went by. The journey ended with a visit to a Sea Cadet branch in Hull with a joint parade in real naval style. This is an encouraging story and shows in how many ways the canals have added to our national story over the years. An extremely enjoyable book.

Norma O'Keefe

Wednesbury: Through Time,
by Ian Bott, 90 pages, 93 colour 107 b&w illustrations, Amberley Publishing, Stroud, 2009, ISBN 978 1 84868 271 9, £12.99, available local bookshops
Wednesbury – 'Woden's- burgh' has a history going back to Saxon times though there is nothing left of this to remind us now. The town's oldest building, Oakswell Hall, extant in 1471 was demolished in 1962; likewise the seventeenth century Crankhall Farmhouse suffered the same fate being demolished by the Council in 2009. However, it is its vast reserves of minerals and its workforce who developed the ability to turn these minerals into an important centre of heavy engineering, rather than architecture that has given Wednesbury its place in our history. With a unique collection of views Ian Bott provides a look at life in this South Staffordshire town from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. These 'before and after' publications will have a special appeal to those who have some first hand knowledge of the location and can bring their own recognition to the images portrayed.



. Nevertheless wherever it happens to be, what we see tells us a lot about the past, the clothes worn, housing record of how it once was.

Exploring the Forgotten Corners of the BCN
By Andy Tidy

7. Bradley Locks and Gospel Oak Branches

Andy Tidy returns to the Ridgeacre Branch in West Bromwich, an area he started to explore 18 months ago. At that time he re-traced the line of the Balls Hill Arm of the Wednesbury Old Canal, following a path from the Ridgeacre Pub to the end of Brindley's first canal at Golds Green, built in 1769. This time we head east and explore a further three miles of canal built in 1828 which threaded around Hill Top, assessing the extensive coal measures in the area and supplying the industries built up using the copious fuel available.

Irritatingly, not all canals offer convenient circular walks, and this set are sprawling and their exploration requires a bit of ferreting around, jumping here and there to find the remains on the ground.

Ridgeacre Branch

It's not many years ago that the Ridgeacre Branch was fully navigable, with boats able to follow the Wednesbury Old Canal from the top of the Ryders Green Locks to the site of the interchange basins and Gas Works and then right into the Ridgeacre Branch. This option was lost in 1995 when the Black Country New Road was built at a low level which cut off half a mile of canal, with no hope of future restoration.

Whilst this arm may be terminally disconnected, it remains in water and is well stocked with fish and is used by a local angling club as a linear fishing pond. Better this end than a stagnant rubbish filled ditch.



You can pick up this canal from the Ridgeacre Pub, following a well made towpath under the railway bridge which now carries the Wolverhampton to Birmingham tram line. Between the railway bridge and the next road bridge which carries Hill Top Road

there was a string of basins to the south serving the West Bromwich Gas Works and the Blacklake Colliery, which was linked by one of many tramways in the area.

The end of the watered section is perhaps a couple of hundred yards short of its final basin at the Coppice Colliery and the Ridgeacre Oil Works. The area is now a Local Nature Reserve, once well developed but now looking sadly run down.

Dartmouth Branch

Just before the end of the watered canal the Dartmouth Branch left heading due north, a line which can be picked up as it tracks Salop Close and along the top of an escarpment which borders Hateley Heath College grounds. The canal track is reflected in a long stand of trees which extends all the way to Coles Lane where a substantial colliery basin exited to the east beneath what is now Monmouth Drive.

A further quarter mile of canal continued beyond Coles Lane and Witton Lane to Cookhay Iron Works. The area has been completely redeveloped in the years since its abandonment in 1954 and sadly there

are no remain in the area today, unless you can tell me differently!

Halford and Jesson Branches

Having explored to the north we now turn south from the end of the Ridgeacre Branch. The junction is still very apparent with a stretch of canal sized woodland squeezed between an industrial estate and a new housing estate, all built on the sites of Waterloo Iron Works, the Cyclops Iron Works and the Ridgeacre Oil Works. But then progress is halted by a big embankment where the ground has been heavily re-profiled.

The walk then has to be interrupted as you skirt round to Church Lane where the line can be picked up beneath Whites Road. Its passing can still be seen by a hump in the road and the bridge itself exited into the car park of the works alongside Gladstone Street.

Just south of Church Lane the significant Jesson Branch continued due south serving the Ridgeacre Tube Works. All trace of the channel itself has disappeared but its line lives on in a stand of trees which



Dartmouth Branch

Finally it's now time for us, with Brenda's help to start thinking about next year's Challenge and how to improve it. We have secured the Bradley Arm as our finishing place with Janet Tynan Workshop Manger agreeing to making the area available. We have asked for the Work Shops to be open for viewing but as it is a Bank Holiday that's not a sure thing yet as it is dependent on staffing. Our hardest task is matching up to the excellent finish but we will do our best.

Roy & John do a superb job organising the Challenge and for this the Society is extremely grateful.

They know that improvements could be made and are constantly listening to boaters to see what can be done. Adjusting the rules each year gives all boats a chance of coming first but as Roy says its taking part that is the important thing - to use the BCN and that was certainly done very well this year. So our thanks must also go to the most important people on this event THE BOATERS! Chairman

2014 DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Withymoor Island Boat Gathering 5th - 7th September
contact david@eurotexsales.com

Black Country Boating Festival – 13th/14th September
contact – www.bcbf.com

20th/21st Sept.....Tipton canal Fesitval.
www.tiptoncommunityassociaton.com

Park Head Rally – 27th/28th September
contact - ste.bingham@talktalk.net

Stourbridge Navigation Trust Open Weekend - October 17th /18th
Contact: christopherdyche@hotmail.com

Dredging the Daw End Canal



Daw End Dredging programme took place earlier this year.

Those on the Explorer Cruises and 24 Hour Challenge who had cruised this canal in the past will I'm sure agree that the Daw End Branch is a much better experience. Thanks to **Paul Fox** Project Manager CRT

BCN Marathon Challenge 2014 Report from Roy & John

Another Fantastic Event this year!

Altogether 41 boats entered, 39 actually took part with 37 of these making it to the finishing line at Hawne Basin. Well done to Michael Pinnock & crew on working boat Clover who won this year. This was pleasing because it is good for this event to have different winners. Once again some amazing challenges were made by various crews but we must not forget those boaters who just take part in order to support the principle of attracting boats onto the parts of the BCN which are not cruised often enough. Thanks are due to everyone who took part.

We must mention here the welcome given to us all by Coombeswood Canal Trust. It really was special. Free food, free overnight moorings and use of the facilities, cheap real ale and such a warm welcome from officials and members of the Trust. We have a hard act to follow next year.

There were water shortages at Walsall Locks on the Sunday morning which adversely affected three boats but most boats had a good passage. Thanks also go to Caroline Whorton for choosing the winning names for the Gosty Tunnel Ogre. A very notable non-winning name to me was Hawne Ted.

terminate at Greswold Street. The Halford Branch continued under the current car park which surrounds the industrial works. Developers are really reluctant to build on old canal beds. Eventually the branch completes a 180 degree turn and loops back under Church Lane identifiable by another rise in the road to terminate in another basin beneath today's Tiverton Drive, which was linked to the Hall End Collieries by a series of tramways. Whilst the Church Lane bridges may have been removed it is clear that both humps are on the

same contour with the canal hugging the hillside.

Of all my lost canal walks this one is perhaps the hardest to follow. The Ridgeacre Arm offers a good starting point, but the rest has been filled in, re profiled and re built to the extent that the old canal tracks are only just discernible, leaving just the lightest of traces on the ground today.

Having completed this section, make your way back to the Ridgeacre Pub for a well earned drink. □



Canal & River Trust

CRT West Midlands Ian Lane Acting Area Manager

It has certainly been a whirlwind two months having moved across from my role as Principal Waterway Engineer into the role as acting Waterway Manager while Dean Davies is on secondment. As you may have heard, the Trust is currently developing our 10 year strategy to ensure that we achieve our new vision, 'living waterways transform places and enrich lives,' and secure our long term future. To determine how we will do this, and how we should be organised to deliver the strategy, a project team has been formed, including Dean, from around the business to take this forward. The project is now roughly half way through and good progress is being made. Whilst this will mean some internal changes we have had some really positive feedback, especially as it's not about cost cutting and redundancies, but about us becoming more customer focused.

I think it's fair to say that it is a massive

task to try and cover for Dean, but my first months have been really exciting, and I have received fantastic support from everyone. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all involved. It has also seen me become exposed to a whole new world including; community engagement, customer interaction, stakeholder meetings, local user forums, numerous boating events and festivals, fundraising and Local Partnership work to name but a few. My next objective is to resolve the grass cutting issues we are facing. I appreciate the impression that this is giving to our customers and the problems it is causing, and I can assure you all that we are really keen to get this issue resolved quickly. We now have extra teams working to address the situation and hopefully we will see an improvement shortly.

Weed Stops Navigation on the Wednesbury Old Canal



After this years BCN Challenge Tom Murkin decided to try & get through the weed on the Wednesbury Old Canal but as you can see here He failed but is prepared to join a work party to try & clear a route. We hope to work with CRT to do something about it early in the new year. We'll keep you informed.

I've just been reading in the recent Boundary Post about the societies attempt at clearing the weed on the Wednesbury Old Canal. We attempted this stretch after the BCN challenge last year but had to admit defeat due to the weed. We had a couple of attempts to get through but were starting to stir up the bottom and following the information about pollution in the challenge pack decided to give up.

We then abandoned the boat diagonally across the canal and walked up to the end, crossed the very busy and dangerous road, and was delighted to find the basins to the left of the pub in such good condition. We then walked a fair way up the Ridgeacre branch before heading back to rescue our boat!

If there was to be a channel cleared through the weeds I can guarantee that we would again attempt navigation to the winding hole at the end, on our way back from next year's BCN Challenge. I would also be happy to help on any future work party clearing weeds on that stretch if I could get the time off work.

I still feel upset that the battle to save the Ridgacre branch was lost although I do remember a hard fight was put up. I feel worried that the remains of the Wednesbury Old Canal will be permanently closed by default if interest is not shown in navigating it, so am pleased that the BCNS are trying to do something before that stretch too is lost forever.

Thank you for your offer Tom.

An Old Member Returns



Pictured left to right are: Barry McGowan (membership secretary), Norma Preator, Peter McDonald, Colin Sidaway (chairman) and yours truly. (As I was under age, my arms are behind my back hiding my pint!)

I was a founder member of the BCN Society and have recently re-joined after a long hiatus due to other commitments. I don't know if the members have seen this before but thought I would send it just in case it was of interest. The Society held a public meeting in

Netherton not long after it started to stimulate public interest in the BCN. The meeting was held in the "Loyal Washington" pub (now demolished) just off the Dudley No. 2 line. There was a turnout of around 20 or so at the meeting.

Steve King

HS2 Bill Petition submitted by CRT

Formal petition submitted to seek protection and enhancement of the waterways

The Canal & River Trust today (23/5/14) formally submitted a petition to the House of Commons in respect of the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill to seek the protection and enhancement of the waterways along the proposed Phase 1 route. HS2 will require the construction of some significant engineering structures over and beside our historic waterways. While the Trust does not oppose its construction in principle, it has been working closely with HS2 Ltd, the Inland Waterways Association, restoration societies and local stakeholders to mitigate any negative impacts and to maximise the opportunities presented by HS2 for regeneration.

You will no doubt be hearing more of this in the future!

First BCNS Photographic Work Shop Thanks to Kevin Maslin

Members will have spotted that BCNS were advertising a photographic workshop arranged by our own resident photographic expert Kevin Maslin in earlier editions of this magazine.

The inaugural "Practical Waterway Photography Workshop" duly took place at Titford Pump House on a very damp 24th May. Twelve members signed up for the event and all arrived promptly for a 9.00am start. Refreshments were very kindly provided by Brenda and Brian Ward who kept coming back during the day to ensure that we were always well catered for.

Kevin provided us with a brief introduction to the history of the Titford Canal and the construction and restoration of the Pump House before gently breaking us into some of the more technical details of photography and the use of Lighting, Exposure, Composition, Lenses and Perspective. All of these concepts were explained with the assistance of Kevin's own excellent photographs.

The plan was that the group would go outside and undertake an initial assessment of their ability but this was before we had seen a weather forecast. The weather was atrocious! What a contrast with the glorious sunshine of the previous weekend when the Titford rally was held so successfully. The rain kept coming and initially the decision to venture out was postponed to see if the situation would improve. It didn't! Undaunted the group did go out and managed to capture the first boat coming up the Crow as part of the BCNS 24 Hour Marathon Challenge. The crew of Blue Nun were somewhat surprised to be suddenly the centre of attention but took it all in their stride.

Returning to the warmth of the Pump House Kevin reviewed each of our efforts and then continued his presentation looking at camera handling, camera support and some of the common errors that photographers can make. Naturally Kevin was at pains to point out that he had deliberately created these errors for the purpose of the workshop and they were not the outcome of poor practice!

Having had some lunch and more refreshments the group was given a series of 6 tasks and sent out back into the rain in pairs to undertake them. Fortunately this coincided with 2 events namely the arrival of the tug Joanna and her Joey ascending the Crow and the easing of the rain and almost some sight of sunshine. The towpath was like a river but the photographers were undaunted and descended upon Joanna like a plague of locusts much to the amusement of the crew.

There wasn't time to review our results but we all agreed to email our best photo for each of the tasks for Kevin to review at his leisure.

The workshop ended with a group photo and undoubtedly everyone who attended gained some new knowledge and a better understanding of how to create the perfect photo. The real work begins now for the group in putting into practice what was learnt.

Our thanks must go to Kevin for his hard work in creating the workshop and for conceiving the original idea and to Brenda and Brian for the timely refreshments.

Michael Smith-Keary

FIVE GREAT BCNS EVENTS TOOK PLACE in MAY

1. Explorer Cruise "A" - Thanks to Stuart & Marie Sherratt
2. The Society's Summer Rally—Thanks to everyone who took part.
3. Explorer Cruise "B" - Thanks again to Stuart & Marie
4. 24 Hour Challenge—Thanks to Roy Kenn & John Carrington
5. Photographic Workshop—Thanks to Kevin Maslin

What a wonderful month we have just had thanks to so many people. As a Society we must feel very proud. The interest & enthusiasm for the BCN has been shown by so many boaters this year. Over the past few years we seem to be reaching more & more different people as well as the faithful boaters who constantly enjoy the interesting & diverse canals that are jointly know as the Birmingham Canal Navigations.

Here are just a few comments sent in:-

The 24 Hour Challenge:-

Team ALBION had a cracking weekend and really enjoyed my first visit to the BCN. Thanks to all the organisers and a HUGE thank you to Hawne Basin/Coombeswood CT for a FANTASIC end of challenge bash.

Back home and absolutely shattered. One of the most enjoyable weekends boating with good friends, despite the rain. Been a while since I laughed so much. Roll on 2015 BCN Challenge!

Despite the rain we had a cracking weekend, the Challenge is my favourite event of the year and I'm already looking forward to next year.

The BCN can be a cruel mistress but this weekend she has rewarded us with some memorable experiences.

It was great to be congratulated by Richard Parry on my last years outstanding performance. This year we did get to Merry Hill on Saturday and get to Hawne Basin for 8.30 am so I could get diesel before they ran out. We did actually do two locks this year.

Not everyone enters to win!!

Explorer Cruises:-

Much work must have gone into the planning and organising of the cruise and we wouldn't have missed it for the world. We were introduced to so many places that we wouldn't have explored on our own, but now that we had been to an area with Stuart and Marie "holding our hands" we feel able to revisit some of the places next time we are in the Midlands. We even went back to Wednesfield for a night after the cruise where we felt very safe and had a very quiet, good night's sleep.

The "mini- civic reception" was lovely, the trip around the Bradley Workshop was so interesting, and the welcome that we were given at Longwood Boat Club was overwhelming.

And while we are handing out the bouquets can we please say how much we enjoyed the Oldbury Rally too?

All in all it was a perfect start to our Summer Cruising. A big thank-you to everyone concerned.

Best wishes
Lynne and Roger Mellors
nb Unique.

What a wonderful few weeks; Explorer Cruises, Summer Rally, 24 Hour Challenge & a Photographic



Charley the Bar Manager tidying up before opening the Bar proving how multi-talented he is!!



Well stocked bar at the Rally ready to go. Charley & his bar staff work hard to supply good liquid refreshment to all the boaters & friends



2 Brians & Dot calling in the customers.



2 boaters who could teach us a thing or 2 Fred Heritage & Jo Hollingshead.



Stuart & Marie lead a walk on the Explorer Cruise to Bradley Work Shop from the Walsall Canal along the line of the Bradley Canal. All were very impressed.



Sadie & Fred won the Trolley Trophy for the Best Dressed Boat at the Rally.



The Mayor of Sandwell & her Escort came to see us. Seen here with Jean & Roy Dobbs



Vice President Martin O'Keeffe presented Stuart & Marie Sherratt with the Presidents Trophy in David Smith our President's absence



Richard Parry locking NB Tawny Owl up the Oldbury Locks. Photo David Fincher



Councillor Bateman meets the Explorer Cruise at the Bentley Arm. He is making a big effort to promote the Wyrley & Essington Canal especially the bit that goes through Wednesfield.