30th March 1974 saw almost one hundred boats on the Titford Canal to celebrate the Restoration made possible by Warley Council, British Waterways and the BCNS.

22nd March 2014 saw a gathering of canal enthusiasts who had attended the Restoration Rally 40 years ago. There were photos to see and a boat trip to the Pools. This photo shows Mayor Councillor Linda Horton with Richard Parry Chief Executive of CRT and Brenda Ward Chairman of the BCN Society.
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bcns.explorercruise@gmail.com

BCNS 24 Hour Challenge
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tel: 01299 879923

Offical Photograher
Kevin Maslin

Press & Publicity Assistant
Martin O’Keefe

Council - 2013 - 2014
President: David Smith
Vice-Presidents: Phil Clayton, Ron Cousens,
Eric Foakes, Martin O’Keeffe, Clr. David Sparks, Rob Starkey,

Membership Application Form
Please return to:- Alan Veness, 43 Pilkington Avenue, Sutton Coldfield B72 1LA

About you
About your Partner (if applicable)
Surname........................................

Title (e.g. Mr, Dr etc)..................
Forenames(s)..............................

Other Family Members to be included
1) Forename(s)..........................
2) Forename(s)..........................

Address........................................
Post Code......................................

Telephone Number .................... email:..........................

Type of Membership required
Membership Types                Annual Cost Number required
Individual (or family at same address) £12.50
OAP £7.50
Corporate Membership £25.00

I enclose a cheque / Postal Order made payable to the “BCN Society” Value:

GIFT AID DECLARATION
Completing this will allow The Society to claim Gift Aid.

Signed:........................................Date:..........................

You must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax we reclaim on your payments in the appropriate tax year.

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

MAY 1st
Martin O’Keeffe
The BCN – a view of the past

Titford Rally
17th & 18th May

JUNE & JULY
No meeting

AUGUST 7th - Walk with Ray Shill
details in next Boundary Post

Future Work Parties

May 10th - Pre Rally clean-up at the Pumphouse
10 am Start

June 7th - Old Main Line, Galton Valley –
ring for details - MIKE ROLFE 07763 171735

July 26th - To be confirmed

August 30th - Pre Tipton Rally clean-up
10am start in Tipton

You will notice a slight difference in this copy of Boundary Post as I have had to use a different programme and add to that I have a new laptop which has Windows 8. Such a change is difficult. In addition to this we are going with yet another Printer so all in all it has not been an easy time so apologies if there are any obvious Mistakes or omissions.

I’m coming up to 10 years editing Boundary Post and wonder if it is time to hand over to someone else. I really have enjoyed it very much but along with being Chairman my time is swallowed up with the BCN Society leaving me with little time for all the other things in my life. I would love to hear from anyone with a desire to do this job and will give all the support needed. Give me a call if you are interested.

Much of the contents this time relate to a variety of information from various groups around the BCN. LHCRT have set up their heritage walk which will make more people aware of the restoration. Lapal on the other hand have a long wait until Sainsbury’s work is complete. Bradley Canal restoration is being considered and the Society has shown its interest by contributing to the feasibility study in readiness for the work ahead.

Hope you enjoy this read. Don’t forget I’d love to hear from you about anything in this copy or an item that has anything to do with the BCN.

Brenda
Chairman’s Report

It seems a long time since the last copy of Boundary Post and during that time several things worth a comment have taken place.

We have sent Phoenix for a repair and service, followed by the Work Party group taking it to Hawne Basin for a bottom blacking and as I write it will be having a paint job. All these things are costing the Society much well earned funds with the exception of the painting which is being paid for by a donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

The next item of expense is Atlas. We knew when we took ownership of the two boats along with Coombswood Canal Trust that it would require a new bottom before long. These two boats need much help to maintain and put into action. They need taking to events and manning while there to explain how they were used. Please see the notice from Paul Smith who has recently taken over from Adrian Smith. Our thanks go to Adrian for the years and effort he has put into Atlas & Malus.

On the subject of thanks I would like to thank Paddy & Gill saving money for the Society by organising the posting of Boundary Post. Alan & Val Veness deal with the stuffing of envelopes then it’s over to Paddy & Gill for the rest.

You will notice on page 6 that the a selection of donated artefacts have been put on display in the Pump House for all to see. We thought there was little point storing them away so we have created a mini museum of interesting items from the BCN. There will be a list to tell all what the items are and in some cases what they were used for. Come & see them.

The work party held on the Wednesbury Old Canal was a subject of controversy. It is now not a complete canal but more of an arm about half a mile in length but with a good winding hole at the end. As it’s not used very much there is an abundance of reed mace growing along the bottom half. This reed has taken over the full width of the canal in a short length. Can we pull it up to allow navigation? Will boats use the canal if we do? Let us know your thoughts and if you would like to help.

The best part of the last few months has been the celebration of the Titford Canal Restoration Rally that took place at the Pump House. I found it interesting finding the invited guests who had attended the rally 40 years ago. The report starts on page 16.

May is our busy month with our Summer Rally at Titford Pump House alternating with the Pelsall Festival. So far we have about 60 boats booked in. It’s a good way to get boats on the BCN especially up the Oldbury Locks. The other Society events in May will also encourage this trip. We have Stuart & Marie Sherratt to thank for organising two Explorer Cruises again this year. Also to Roy Kenn & John Carrington for organising the 24 Hour Challenge. I believe there are more than last year booked in already. Kevin Maslin has Hill lock flights. As usual the clean up was attended by BCNS, DCT, IWA, WRG, and CRT. Boats attending were Phoenix, Crow, Bittel plus butty and a CRT work boat, all based at the former Sampson Road depot at the top of Camp Hill locks.

The Phoenix crew started Saturday morning on the Ashtead flight, followed by a voyage into Typhoo basin, accompanied by “Moose” and the WRGies. All the usual rubbish was found here including Bikes, Trolleys and Fencing. This was unloaded by Tony and Baz from CRT back at Sampson Road. Another CRT person who made an appearance was Chief Executive Richard Parry, who gladly helped out and got his clothes dirty. He seems a very friendly and approachable person. On Saturday night we were made welcome in the WRGies camp – and the Ale was very good! Sunday saw us heading down the GU towards the Ackers Trust before winding and grappling the adjacent footbridge which produced a pile of “Heras” fencing. We then left Crow with “Moose” and his gang and went to unload another full load of scrap metal from Phoenix onto the BCNS truck for weighing in – the second of the weekend.

After final unloading of Crow at Sampson Road we locked back up to the Birmingham level and went out for a meal – another BCN Clean-up was over.

Thanks to Stuart, Jeff, Phil, John, Dave, Michael, Adrian, Bob, Barrie, Jim, Paul and Lewys for their help over the weekend – and not forgetting Chris Morgan, “Moose” from WRG and the CRT crew.

Mike, John, Lewys & Stuart pose after some hard work!
**Work Party Report by Mike Rolfe**

**January 18th**
Our first Work Party of 2014 involved erecting various exhibits around the walls of our Meeting Room in the Pumphouse. These included several waterway equipment, such as a hand held ice breaker and gauging rods and a variety of bridge plates and lock signs.

A dozen members were present for this Work Party and we also bailed out Crow after much recent rain.

**February 15th**
The February Work Party took place around Ryders Green Junction. Five of us took Phoenix down to Spon Lane locks where we removed a fair amount of rubbish from the top lock area before continuing on to Ryders Green. Here we turned onto the remaining section of the Wednesbury Old Canal where it starts to get very reedy. We were joined here by another eight members who helped clear reeds and assorted rubbish and load it onto Phoenix. Unloading was done back at the Pumphouse after returning on the same route as we had come.

**March 1st/2nd**
This Work Party took place at Hawne Basin and involved rubbing down and painting the hull and hold of Phoenix whilst it was out on the dock. Seven members were present on both days and good progress was made, with work being mainly finished by 2pm on the Sunday.

New anodes were attached and our Treasurer made a nice job of painting the cabin stove which now looks much smarter. Phoenix’s cabin was also rubbed down and painted in the week following – so woe betide anyone who scratches it!

The prop on Phoenix was compared to an egg whisk by some – perhaps we should consider a larger one in the future?

**March 15th**
Our March Work Party involved a small clean-up around the Smethwick Pumphouse on the Old Main Line and was well attended with the Friends of Galton Valley helping out. Steve Lambert, one of CRT’s Volunteer Co-ordinators, was also in attendance.

The offside mooring here and the steps up to the road were tidied up and the surrounding vegetation cut down, with rubbish being loaded onto Phoenix. The usual shopping trolleys were grappled from around the road bridge. One notable find was a rather heavy chassis on wheels which took a fair amount of effort to remove from the cut and load onto Phoenix.

Lunch was taken in the Pumphouse here which was opened up for us by the Friends – well worth a visit if you have not done so already.

**April 5th/6th**
The annual BCN Clean-up – with some Grand Union thrown in. This year’s event took place in the Digbeth area and included the Garrison, Ashted and Camp coincided a Society backed Photographic Work Shop at Titford Pump House. This will take place on the same weekend as the Challenge so they will have boats to photograph. Roy has even given an extra point per lock as an incentive to get more boats there.

I must also add that the Society have booked to attend the Black Country Boating Festival and Park Head Rally in September along with the Stourbridge Rally in October. We need your help on these occasions as the Jeans stall will be going as well as our Sales stand. If you are attending these rallies just an hour of your time will do. We would rather see many of you helping and communicating with the public so see you there!

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**Stourbridge Navigation Trust Annual Open Weekend**
**Bonded Warehouse, Canal Street, Stourbridge.**
**Saturday & Sunday October 18th – 19th October 2014**
Chris Dyche on 01384 375582 for Vehicle Entrance.
email christopherdyche@hotmail.com
Colin Clements on 01384 395216 for Boat Entries & Trade Stalls.
email: Stourbridge-trust@btconnect.com

**Brenda**

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**Atlas & Malus**

**Our New Manager Paul needs your help!**

As some of you know Adrian Smith has resigned as manager of Atlas & Malus due to health reasons (get well soon).

So to introduce myself I am Paul Smith (no relation). I have been a member of the BCNS for nearly 3 years, some of you will know me from the work parties and with helping to crew A&M.

I have always had a keen interest in historic boats and have offered to take over from Adrian.

I look forward to meeting crew both new and old over the coming year so let me know if you’re interested in helping out.

My email address is paul.smith879@yahoo.co.uk
**Society’s Artefacts**

Over the years that the Pump House has been in the hands of the Society, it has acquired a variety of interesting artifacts associated with the BCN. Just lately we received a large quantity from Sheila Smith, widow of Alan T Smith and also from Fred Heritage so we decided to organise a weekend work party to display as many as we could on the walls.

The photo below shows some interesting bridge plates, gauging sticks of varying lengths which would have been used to gauge boats at stops along the BCN so the necessary tolls could be charged.

There are tools for a variety of jobs, many specifically marked BCN.

Not shown in these photos are scoops and ice breakers along with more bridge names and boat gauging plates.

We’ll show these later but these items and more can be seen at Titford Pump House at any time we are open for monthly meetings and of course at our next Rally on 16th to17th May.

4. Use of existing disused arms loops and wharves on the BCN remains an option for small numbers of residential moorings. BCNS campaigned for this to happen on the Engine Arm and it remains as a good example of how successful this can be with services for residential and visiting boats. I have identified a list of these and the prioritisation exercise, looking at land ownership, working through planning issues group availability of access and services and cost of dredging or other work required. We will be taking our proposals back to the Partnership for consideration in its Action Plan.

**Engine Arm, Smethwick 1989 before moorings development**

As I have mentioned before, it is always helpful in obtaining approval for mooring development if we can substantiate demand. So do contact me if you might be interested in one of the above options, absolutely no commitment of course.

**Engine Arm after development in 2007**

Andrew Phasey retires as BSS Examiner

I am sure many of you have used the services of Andrew Phasey when you needed a BSS Certificate for your boat. We will be looking for a replacement for Phoenix to be examined as Andrew did the job as his donation to the Society.
Phoenix gets her Bottom Blacked

Phoenix has been in the possession of the Society since 1997 and in all those years it has received very little care. It has been a superb work boat used by many members in the West Midlands—Ivor Caplan over these past 17 years. 2013/14 are the years that are seeing much attention. Last year it was serviced and repaired and this year it is having a good lick of paint. This costing a great amount of money as you will imagine but we have a secret benefactor who is funding the painting job. We are very grateful.

Readers of Boundary Post may be interested in progress being made by the West Midlands Waterways Partnership in looking at options for new permanent moorings. This came partially from the experience that some Partnership members had in London last year and concerns that the overstaying problems there could spread to other conurbations such as Birmingham. I am not convinced that this will happen or that developing more permanent residential moorings is the total answer but it has encouraged the Partnership to take a proactive approach which must be good.

Our area is certainly very different to London in that the BCN would benefit from more boats, both moored and cruising. The BCNS does its bit with our Explorer Cruises and 24 Hour Challenge but for a lot of the year places such as Walsall Arm lack the interest and vitality that boats bring.

A group from the Partnership has been set up to progress this and has identified several opportunities for residential moorings, some or all of which will be applicable to other areas:

1. Marinas existing and proposed- there was a general agreement that CRT should encourage commercial developers to include a % of residential (10-20 suggested) and obtain planning approval for these. This will be a commercial decision possibly influenced by the current downturn in the demand for leisure moorings but that doesn’t preclude CRT and ourselves encouraging it to happen. The benefits of having some residential moorings, such as increased activity and security are well established. There may be few opportunities for large marinas on the BCN although it is worth noting that the Lapal restoration includes a major marina development at California.

2. New major developments- there is the opportunity of including some residential moorings integrated into plans particularly for new housing sites such as at Icknield Port. A major new development area on the East side of Birmingham City has just been announced centred on the proposed HS2 Curzon Street station. This is part of the BCN in need of regeneration and it is being promoted by CRT as a Canal Quarter, we hope that it will include residential and visitor moorings. Typhoo Basin is one off-line location that could benefit from this.

3. Existing CRT managed moorings could include some formalised residential moorings- eg Kingswood on the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. This could help resolve nearby towpath overstaying problems by giving boaters a legitimate alternative.

The expert skills of Arthur, Barry and Bob were backed up by the willing hands of Mike Rolfe, Michael SK, Ivor Caplan, Malcolm and Dave.

The happy sound of wire brushing the underside and hold area was interspersed with the usual helpful passes by with cries of "you missed a bit" but steady progress was nonetheless made. The rather sorry looking Classic stove also got a partial refurbish (the bits we could reach!) and a primer coat on the tiller and other vulnerable areas was added.

Refreshed by the excellent Catering available in the Hawne Basin Social Club (roast lamb - yum yum) the first side was completed and cutting back continued on the second side, to the extent that a coat of Bitumen was completed for the entire hull and rudder - with the work gang gradually turning as black as the hull. With the intervention of Tony Friar kindly fixing the new anodes, this left the second day gang to continue the blacking into the hold and to get THREE coats on the hull, including several non-slip areas (bird sand - which apparently includes egg shell?).

We also had visits from Danny, who plans to start the Cabin preparation this week and Martin trying to solve the mystery of air in the fuel line.

Sadly the last couple of hours were subject to horrible rain and cold but spirits remained high and the boat looks super.

WELL DONE EVERYBODY!

Dave Dent
I am delighted to report we have successfully secured funding from Arts Council England for another three years of project work (2014-17). Furthermore Sandwell Council have agreed to extend their generous lease of the Aaron Manby, project work will commence in April and I am very keen to use the May rally as one of our first public appearances.

Black Country Voyages is developed by Ikon out of Slow Boat (2011-13), an art-programme for local young people, aged 15-19 years old, on board a canal boat. For Ikon this new project will enable our work on Britain’s inland waterways to continue for three more years, providing an exciting programme of engaging public activities including workshops, live performances and exhibitions.

For 2014 Ikon has commissioned a local artistic collective known as Juenau Projects to work as lead artists for 2014. Inspired by nature and its interaction with society they propose to transform the interior and exterior of our canal boat. We think they are going to be the perfect fit and hope that BCNS members will get to meet them at future events.

This year we plan to work in Smethwick, Langley, Cradley Heath, Stourbridge, Tipton, West Bromwich, Wednesbury and Brownhills. Our main partners for the first year of activity will include the Glass House College (Stourbridge), RSA Academy (Tipton), Sandwell Community Libraries, the Galton Valley Heritage Centre and of course the BCN Society.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about Black Country Voyages (or in fact getting involved) please contact me on:- 0121 248 0708 k.self@ikon-gallery.org

You can keep in touch with the project on-line via Facebook: www.facebook.com/blackcountryvoyages and Twitter: @blackcountryvoyages and blackcountry-voyages

Kate Self
BCNS Youth Officer & IKON Youth Project Leader

Welcome New Members

Robert Haskins - Reading
Alan & Jane Littleford - Cleethorpes
Michael Ward - Telford

We currently have 496 Memberships; 805 individual members and 6 Corporate memberships.

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.

We currently have 496 Memberships; 805 individual members and 6 Corporate memberships.

Details of Ikon’s canal-based project Black Country Voyages can now be revealed.

Welcome New Members

Robert Haskins - Reading
Alan & Jane Littleford - Cleethorpes
Michael Ward - Telford

We currently have 496 Memberships; 805 individual members and 6 Corporate memberships.
2014 Dates for your Diary

Allen Register Boat Gathering 10th/11th May
details from - Martin O’Keeffe - hecla777@hotmail.com

BCNS Titford Rally 16th/18th May
Should be a good one 60 boats booked in already
Entry form from the web site or
Barrie Johnson barryjohnson7@tiscali.co.uk

BCNS 24 hour MARATHON CHALLENGE
24th and 25th May 2014

The BCNS Challenge will start at 8am on Saturday and will finish at 2pm on the Sunday.
The event is open to everyone with a boat licensed for use on Canal and River Trust canals.
Historic working boats and pairs are especially welcome.

Boats may start at any point on the BCN but should finish at Hawne Basin (Dudley No 2 Canal) - See rules for further details. Participants may navigate for as long as they like during the 30 hour period up to a maximum of 24 hours.

The winner will be the entry which amasses the greatest number of points.
Bonus points will be awarded for navigating lesser used waterways and points will be awarded for correctly answered questions at certain places.
Details from:- bcnschallenge@gmail.com

Broad Street Warehouse Wolverhampton
For Sale….. again

By the time you read this the chances are that this grade II listed warehouse on Broad Street Wolverhampton will have been sold. It has been a nightclub for some years owned and run by different organisations. We hope for a good result. I hope I can report this in the next issue.

British Waterways, who owned the building commissioned I.A.Recordings to record the building and the historic cargo handling equipment in action. British Waterways employees and local volunteers (Glyn Phillips, Tony Gregory and Peter Freakley) dressed in 1930s clothing re-enacted traditional canal cargo handling - unloading a narrowboat laden with barrels and sacks with the belt-driven hoists and cranes as well as unloading a vintage lorry from the road-side wharf.
The record of this re-enactment "Warehouse at Work", edited by Tony Lewery, is available on DVD from "Sight Seen Partnerships".

BCN EXPLORER CRUISES
Cruise A is full!! Cruise B - 18th May – 26th May 2014

The Cruise B “will meet on Sunday 18th May after the Titford rally to hand out itinerary and to discuss cruise. Bradley Workshops will be visited on both cruises along with guided walks, talks and socials.

Details from: Stuart & Marie Sherratt bcns.explorercruise@gmail.com

Waterway Photography Workshop
24th May 2014

Kevin Maslin, a former Boundary Post editor and well known taker of some superb photographs is holding this workshop in our Pump House on behalf of the Society.

Details:- workshop@kevinmaslin.co.uk

Boundary Post Spring 2014 Edition 204

For Sale….. again

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24th MAY 2014

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Details:- workshop@kevinmaslin.co.uk

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www.canaltransportservices.co.uk
The Coombswood Colliery Fire

Some of you may have seen this poem before as it appeared in the Winter edition of Interchange, the newsletter for Coombswood Canal Trust. It was written by Phil Mansell. I was so moved by it I felt it should be shared with all of you. We read that the price of coal was halved when it could be carried by canal but this poem makes you think about the real price of coal.

Just a night shift down at Coombswood in the springtime of twenty nine, Engines whirling, cables turning, men are working down the mine. Up above them, families sleeping, wives and children lost in dreams While their menfolk far beneath them sweat and toil to hew the seams.

Then a cry goes through the colliery, there’s a fire down below, Johnson’s sidings started blazing, men are stopped in-nowhere to go. Driven backwards by the fire, tunnels filling with heat and smoke For the lads in Johnson’s sidings nothing left but to wait and choke

Rescue teams are called to action, brave men struggling every one, Fight unresting to save their comrades till all hope of life is gone. Tired and aching, burned and choking still the men stay underground Till the fire’s finished burning and the Johnson’s men are found.

Through the village news is spreading, Coombswood colliery’s all ablaze, Wives and sweethearts, sons and daughters hurry onwards in a daze. At the pithead a silent vigil, each one sharing another’s pain No one knowing, but still hoping that they’ll see their men again.

Now the cage has reached the pithead, dead and injured stretchered out, Faces showing grief and sadness, no more hoping, no more doubt. Eight men lost in Johnson’s siding, eight men caught in that burning hole Eight full lives were cruelly wasted, all to hew the country’s coal.

Lynx seen in a more leisurely time in her life after a life of carrying.

Boatbuilders Sketchbook


Ken Keay was one of the last of the traditional boat builders on the Birmingham Canal Navigations and with this 2013 re-publication of his 1993 Boat Builder’s Sketchbook the HNBC have given all those with an interest in narrow boating on the canals, the opportunity to understand how these boats were, or should have been, constructed. At the age of fourteen Ken joined his father’s boat building firm, Peter Keay & Son as an apprentice.

The book opens with a fine biographical synopsis of Ken’s life.
From every aspect this book is a success. It has the knack of telling the reader exactly what he, or she, wants to know as it traces the history of the Junction from its inception in 1825, its opening in 1835, to the present day.

The engaging text recounts the many characters, who over the years, were to leave their imprint on the Junction. From the Inspector's wife, not quite satisfied with the accommodation provided, to the succession of licensees of the Junction Inn so important to the development of the community of boaters, anglers, day trippers and those who supplied all the needs of a busy boat yard and basin; many of them telling their own stories. Happily the Inn is still there, as are many of those in the boating fraternity mentioned in the pages and known to us today. Luckily the story is not over and there is much for all to see, recognise, use and enjoy in this long standing and thriving community. All in all this is a delightful little book which must appeal to anyone with an interest in canals or indeed with an interest in history generally. Highly recommended.

Raffle Prizes Urgently Required
As most of you who attend our monthly social gatherings and our boat rallies know, we always run a raffle. The money raised helps the Society fund various items e.g. truck, rent on the Pump House, diesel for Phoenix plus maintenance on the societies equipment.

Most of the raffle prizes are donated by members and this is an urgent appeal to you to sought out those unwanted Christmas and birthday presents and bring them along to any of our functions.

Lastly may I thank all those who have donated prizes over the last few years. Bob Broomhall

Exploring the Forgotten Corners of the BCN
By Andy Tidy

6. Bradley Locks and Gospel Oak Branches

Andy Tidy returns to the Bradley Works and uses the C&RT workshop as a base for his exploration of the Bradley Locks and the nearby Gospel Oak Branches. This is a five mile circular walk, exploring what was once one of the tightest tangles of canals in the Black Country.

Leaving the rarely cruised Bradley Arm behind us we head south across Bradley Lane and into public open space, following 1848 Rotten Brunt.

When built Brindley's original 1772 Wolverhampton Canal followed the contour in a big loop to the west, and we will take a look at the on our return.

So for now we cross the shallow valley and soon arrive at the top of the Bradley Locks Branch, built in 1849 to link the Wolverhampton Level to the existing 1783 Scott and Foley three lock branch from what is now the Walsall Canal. Surrounded by all the greenery and open space it's hard to imagine the pioneering industry which proliferated in the area, the blast furnaces above ground and the coal workings several hundred feet beneath our feet. The mines closed over 100 years ago but they still play a vital role in the wellbeing of the BCN, as the Bradley pumps still pull water from the flooded workings and so provides one of the main sources of supply.

Bradley Locks Branch
This linking canal was closed in 1961, but its path down the hill remains clear and fresh. The canal and its margins are now a public open space, with the sites of the locks forming short flat terraces linked by a well made footpath. The area is popular with the locals and if you happen upon one of the older dog walkers you are likely to be told tales of how it all looked as boats worked up
and down the slope.
A walk further down the hill brings you to the bricked up Gospel Oak Road with its cranked pipe bridge, after which the piped canal returns to water and the last two locks which have been semi restored. These locks, either side of the railway bridge, give a good idea of how the flight used to look, followed by several hundreds of yards of canal in water which takes you to Moorcroft Junction and the still navigable Walsall Canal.

Monway Branch
At Moorcroft Junction a convenient footbridge doubles as a pipe bridge and carries you to the Walsall Canal towpath, whereupon you turn right / south for about 1/3rd of a mile, or 30 chains according to my map (80 chains per mile).

One can be tempted to zip along the towpath to Wiggins Mill Pool, but before we do we need to pause half way along where there is an almost imperceptible widening of the canal south of Moorcroft Drive Bridge. This is the entrance to the lost Monway Branch, which extended for over half a mile to service a number of heavy industrial sites, which have all been swept away by redevelopment. The one tantalising link to this arm is Monway Terrace, a modern road which lies a hundred yards or so from the end of the branch.

Gospel Oak Branch
Walk under the railway bridge and you arrive at the junction with the Gospel Oak Branch built in 1800, which heads west for half a mile parallel to the Bradley Locks Branch.

It will take Sainsbury's and their partners; Land Securities, the best part of two years to remediate their almost infamous parcel of land in Selly Oak as they begin the development which should deliver some elements of a Lapal replacement for the former Dudley No 2 Canal across their site. The remediation required to purge the land of its significant levels of toxic contamination (if you know where to look, you can see flames!) is complex and will prevent any other works from commencing, until it is done.

In view of this it gives the canal community time to reorganise its approach to restoration especially the two sections which flank the northern boundary of Selly Oak Park. In particular, the Lapal Canal Trust is preparing itself with advice from CRT and our consultants, Atkins, to begin the paper-chase which will be required to achieve Planning Permission for restoration of these parkland sections.

In particular, it has long been our intention to switch the towpath away from the northern perimeter where it was previously a classic contour-canal feature forming the tops of the gardens of Reservoir Road along the down-hill side of the contour.

We intend its replacement to be on the park-side where it can formalise the already well-used rambler's walkway amongst the trees. In particular, those trees and the open but shallow channel need a range of pre-restoration tasks (e.g. pollarding) which we hope to achieve by way of interim work parties.

The next such work party is being called for April 26th. On the Friday (25th) a few members of LCT will deploy a JCB to dig (and immediately refill) a few inspection holes especially along the brickwork sections of the old Harborne Wharf. This will clarify whether or not such walls must be re-built or perhaps just re-pointed, by the working-party of WRG volunteers in July. All such tasks are designed and scoped to be reparatory of existing structures rather than preparatory ahead of live restoration.

Meanwhile, there will be a tidy-up and make good WP on the Saturday to leave the site safe and tidy.

The principal outcome of all these activities is to reassure the local and canal communities that the project remains alive and active in readiness for the Harvest, Battery Park section to be built.

If you would like to join us on the working party or keep in touch with developments please call Lapal CT Membership Officer, Ray Jones, on 01564 772 155.
Another BCN Might Have Been?

I'm inclined to agree

says Phil Clayton

I recently visited Newtown Primary School, West Bromwich, at the invitation of Becki Woodall the Deputy Head, to talk to a class of seven year olds. They were due to visit the Black Country Museum later in the week and my job was to give them an introduction to the canals. The children were very enthusiastic and we had an interesting hour or so looking at pictures and talking about the canals so they'd be ready for the visit.

I thought I'd better get to know the place a bit before I went and therefore looked at my "Godfrey Edition" reprint of the large scale Ordnance Survey map of the area in 1904 and discovered that the present school is sited virtually at the end of the erstwhile Dunkirk Branch. The branch itself, 333 yards long according to my bit of string and ruler, was built in 1850 and abandoned in 1953. It stretched north-nor'-westwards from the New Main Line opposite the foot of the Gower Branch at Albion Junction.

It's easier to imagine the "brick house, gardens, a windmill, a water-mill on the Tame, and arable, pasture, and meadow" of the Dunkirk estate when you're standing in Sheepwash Nature Reserve now than it would have been when the ordnance surveyors passed this way. In 1904 a partially built up Dunkirk Street wended its way across the old workings, swags and tips of the former Dunkirk Mill Colliery towards the Pumphouse Brickworks. There had been a water mill on the Tame at Dunkirk since at least the late 16th century and probably for much longer, owned for several generations by members of the Ryder family until 1703 when the estate was sold. It remained as a corn mill till the early decades of the 19th century and had been converted into a forge by 1823. Dunkirk Street is now Dunkirk Avenue, the canal Branch is under the school field and the extractive industries have been replaced by the Sheepwash urban park.

During my investigations I happened across an extract from the London Gazette of November 25th, 1892 concerning "the new works" proposed by the BCN Company. Described are plans for two new short canals, one from the Haines Branch and the other from Dunkirk Stop to be linked by "An inclined plane for the transhipment of canal boats from one canal of the Company to another to be worked by cable power or any such other power as the intended Act may prescribe". I drew in some pencil lines on my map and it all seems to fit. Had the scheme gone ahead it would have by-passed the locks at Ryders Green. A similar arrangement of an inclined plane and short branches at the other end of the Walsall Canal, by Birchills, was also proposed. This would have meant the by-passing of 16 locks between the New Main Line and the Wyrley and Essington Canal. Obviously the plans were never carried out and the BCN didn't get its Foxtons but it's interesting to speculate what might have been had they been built and had they survived.

Twenty years ago I wrote that I could envisage the Walsall Canal becoming a popular cruising route within a couple of decades! So much for my predictions - but it would have been with an inclined plane at each end!!

The junction retains one of its two railway interchange basins and some very attractive cast iron roving bridges. The start of the canal is in water but this soon peters out and is replaced by a linear open space which exactly tracks the lockless old canal bed as its wound its way between collieries and furnaces to terminate beside Gospel Oak Road. For a brief period the Dumaresq Branch continued on beyond the garage and up through two locks to the Gospel Oak Ironworks, generally following the line of today's Coronation Road. This arm is squeezed in between the Old Main Line at Asda to the north, and the Upper Ocker Hill Branch a couple of hundred yards to the south. The Gospel Oak Branch closed in 1954.

A mere 300 yards separates the end of the Gospel Oak Branch from the terminal basin of the original bottom section of the Bradley Locks Branch. The line of Gospel Oak Road has not changed and suggests that this branch lies buried between Elizabeth Walk and Myrtle Terrace, but no traces remain on the ground today.

And so we return to the foot of the 1849 section of the Bradley Locks Branch. To complete our circular trip to the Bradley Works we will return to the top lock where we turn left through the trees and then sharp right before Turton Road, following the original half mile loop bounded by Batmans Hill Road and Weddell Wynd.

Before we leave the lock gate works, pause and look at the grassy area where the gates are seasoned. It's the site of another old basin which has been filled in and the basin outside the works building was the start of another lost loop lost when the canal was straightened to Loxdale Street. Just on the other side of the road is the line of the long lost Bradley Marr Canal heading east with its staircase pair. Lot's to see in a very small area.
Lichfield Greenhill Bower Queen Savannah Bennett and Deputy Bower Queen Charlotte Aspley had a very important date on Sunday April 13 when they attend the grand opening of the first completed section of the city’s latest outdoor amenity – the Lichfield Canal Heritage Towpath Trail.

This section of the Trail, from Lock 25, at the Borrowcop Lock Canal Park on the A51 Tamworth Road, to the bus stop adjacent to the A38 bridge, has been made disabled friendly by volunteers from the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust after months of hard work in extremely testing weather conditions.

Wheelchair-users, walkers, runners and cyclists will be able to use the section, which runs alongside the rewatered Pound 26, Lock 26 and Pound 27, which will also be in water later this year.

Work is currently going on to create a winding hole, where narrowboats can turn around, and Pound 27 will be lined with puddled clay before being filled with water. It is hoped to have the first load of clay placed at the end of May.

The Trail passes a section of narrows, before rising on a gentle gradient up to the Tamworth Road. The disabled-friendly section, which will remain permanently accessible, is part of an ambitious programme to create a sevenmile Heritage Towpath Trail alongside the Lichfield Canal, which when restored will run from Huddlesford to Catshill Junction at Brownhills, where the Lichfield Canal links to the Wyrley and Essington Canal.

The Trail will provide a unique community amenity, in close proximity to Lichfield’s cultural and industrial heritage, and an important wildlife corridor, with new nature reserves linking heathland and wetland areas.

For more information on the work of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust, visit the website at www.lhcrt.org.uk

Some of the Lovely Comments of the Day

Just got home after a lovely day marking the 40th anniversary of the restoration of the Titford canal. Thank you for inviting me. It was nice to meet up with old friends from so many years ago - even if some of the photographs of me made me cringe! Good luck with your ventures in the future. Compliments to the team on a lovely day out.

Sally Haynes-Preece

Happy memories, good company, and an abundance of delightful food.
Cheers Roy & Jean Dobbs and Lorraine.

Liz & I had a lovely time on Sat. seeing so many people after 30/40 years break is amazing. Please thank everyone involved especially the boat crew.
All the very best
Darryl Foxwell

Dear Brenda & Brian
A few words, firstly to thank you for inviting me to such a wonderful event at Titford on Saturday last. It was so nice to meet up again with everyone, not least those who I've not met for a long time.
The organization of the whole event was, I thought, just magnificent and everyone involved deserves enormous thanks. All good wishes Malcolm Braine

Mayor of Sandwell, Councillor Linda Horton cuts the celebratory cake made by Jill Best. Photo Robert Whitehouse

Bob Broomhall gives the safety talk before the start of the event. We waited for all guest to arrive then the photos began. Photo Peter Best
Forty years after a Rally that was held to celebrate the restoration of the Titford Canal around 50 invited guests along with The Mayor of Sandwell Councillor Linda Horton and her Consort Councillor Roger Horton and Richard Parry Chief Executive of Canal & River Trust attended an event at the BCN Society’s HQ Titford Pump House.

Guests started arriving at 10.30am and were greeted and offered tea, coffee and cake or biscuits and an opportunity to... as Tor Bay in Devon in the south, Lincoln in the east and Darlington in the north. All thought it well worth the effort.

The day continued with a show of a variety of photos taken by various people displaying views of Oldbury Locks and the Titford Canal up to and including Titford Pools. Some photos showed organised campaign cruises in 1963, 1971 and 1972 showing how difficult it was to navigate the canal and by 1972 it was becoming almost impossible. It was explained that the BCN Society along with financial and practical help from Warley Council, which the day after the rally was changed to Sandwell, much work took place on the locks and canal during 1973. Photos of this work by the Society were also in evidence.

Finally on the weekend of 30th & 31st March 1974 the Restoration Rally took place and some fine photos of the event were shown. Many of our guests remarked on people who were there and during the show reminisced and explained what was happening in the photos. Not only did our guests from the 1974 event recognise people in the photos but our Mayor of Sandwell could name a few including the Mayor of Warley who coincidentally was also a Lady Mayor and others including the Headmaster of her children’s school who had been the secretary of the event. This was followed by a buffet lunch for half our guests while the other half travelled on SLOW BOAT, also known as the trip boat Aaron Manby which is leased by the Ikon Youth Project for the next 3 years. More time to reminisce both on the boat and while eating lunch. Then the second boat trip to the Pools took place while the first trippers had lunch and there was plenty left so no body went hungry. This was followed by the official cutting of a celebratory cake along with more teas and coffees and a piece of the cake.

Guests started to leave at about quarter to four with the last leaving at 5pm saying what a lovely day they had had and were looking forward to the 50th Anniversary!!

This lovely photo taken by Darry Foxwell, who was one of the young members working on the locks in 1974 shows just a few helpers. Does anyone recognise them?

Weed Stops Navigation on the Wednesbury Old Canal

Can it be removed?

This February the Society Work Party took place on the Wednesbury Old Canal. This canal is sometimes wrongly referred to as the Ridgeacre Branch and is just above the top of Ryders Green locks. In 2002 during a 24 Hour Challenge the boats disturbed the water & many fish died. BW then said that no navigation should take place in this canal in organised cruises. This was interpreted by many as NO NAVIGATION so few boats have travelled here and the reeds have taken over. I contacted Dean Davies to see if this could be dredged out and I’m afraid this is the response:-

We will not give up!

If you feel you would like to help the Society to try & drag the weed to the side so navigation can take place please let me know.
On 31st March 1974 Warley Council merged with West Bromwich as part of the local government reorganisation scheme to form Sandwell Council. On 30th March the last official function of the Warley Council was the reopening of the Titford Canal, restored at a cost of £50,000 and was the culmination of 16 months work by BCN Society work parties.

Graham Eyre who was secretary of the Restoration Rally supplied me with a huge amount of paper work which gave details of the work parties before, the rally preparations and the rally itself. The following information came from a pleading letter to members to donate £1. Thank you Graham.

During the 16 months the Society made an appeal for funding as the money from Warley Council had been used up.

A letter to members explained:-

"8 work parties have been held since January and the side pounds of locks no. 2 and 3 are now cleared and work is in progress on no.4 pound. Warley Council have helped tremendously with this project, supplying clothing and equipment for every work party but unfortunately they will no longer be able to provide this help as they have spent more than their budgeted figure on this work and on the restored Titford Canal and Titford Pools area………

To achieve a great stride forward in the clearance of these locks the committee have committed the Society to the hire of an RB10 excavator and lorries to cart away the dredged spoil from the side pounds of no.5 & 6 locks. This will be done on September 1st & 2nd and will cost £500."

Donations must have come in as the Society continued the restoration as we can see in these photos taken by two keen work party members, Nick Yarwood and Darryl Foxwell. They were both very young men in 1974 and were guests at our celebration on 22nd March.

After commercial carrying ceased in the 1960s the state of navigation on the Titford Canal was becoming almost impossible. The photo below shows John Dodwell on his boat being assisted through one of the bridge holes.

Our H&S Officer, Arthur Farge would have had a fit if he had been attending this work party. Though I haven’t heard of any accidents taking place on these work parties. I’m sure we will hear details of these times from some of these workers.

To celebrate all this hard work by the BCN Society aided financially and in many other ways by Warley Council the Restoration Rally was held on 30th & 31st March 1974 and to commemorate this our Society decided to invite as many boaters & volunteers to a day of memories. All who were invited turned up to a really good day described overleaf.