

# Boundary



# Post

**Edition  
209  
Summer  
2015**



Daniel Penn is one of the latest volunteers to crew Atlas & Malus.

At 13 years of age he is also the youngest. We are so keen to encourage such young people to share an interest in the boats and in the canal in general.

We look forward to seeing Daniel along with his Dad Jon enjoying this experience.

*Photo Jon Penn*

**The Journal of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society**  
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## Notes from the Editor

The busiest time of the year for me has just come to an end, There was the Titford Rally, followed a week later by the 24 Hour Challenge and just last week the Longwood Canal Festival. Brian & I did the Burger Bar on all three events and although Brian had a hip replacement in April he was the main worker in this, ably assisted by Brian Holmes for most of the time.

You can imagine that getting Boundary Post together while all this went on was quite a task. It is so difficult getting everything that has happened over the past month or two in this edition. Yet again I have had many items sent in so thank you for those. If you think I've missed something tell me & it will be in next time.

Photo Quiz, I think is easy this time. Wait until next edition Chris Clegg has sent in an interesting one.& I think you will have quite a challenge.

There's rather a lot of history in this edition but that's how it goes sometimes.

I know it's a bit early for Christmas but Dave has worked hard to secure a bit of luxury this time. (see page 30) It will be a good excuse to get your glad rags on & feel really special - see you there?

I look forward to any good items from you relating to the BCN - past, present or future

*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**

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## Chairman's Notes

The year is flying past, and it is really good to see how it has gone well for the Society.

The Titford Pumphouse Rally went well. In addition to the boaters and our regulars, (without whom it would not have happened) we had a lot of local visitors, many of whom seemed to be meeting the canal for the first time. This is great, for if we are to keep the canals as attractive for all as they can be for all, we need to help them to think of it as "their" canal, rather than "somewhere to dump rubbish".

We added to this progress with a development meeting of the Titford Project, led by Ivor Caplan. The groups and organisations with an interest in the regeneration and

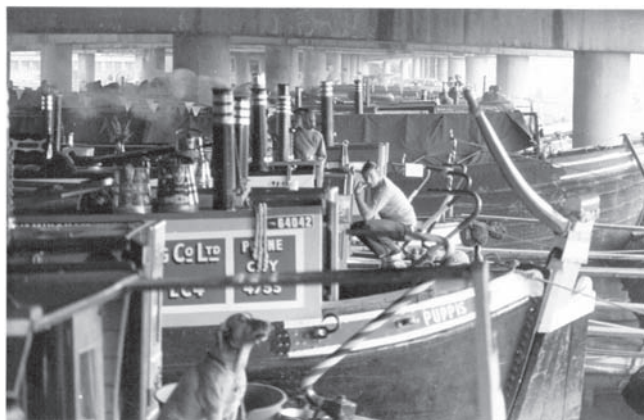
maintenance of the canal and the pools, were looking at the way ahead, and the work needed. The most exciting bit is the very real possibility of available funding - otherwise it all just becomes so much hot air! What would be great is to get the pools to the point where we would be able to hold a rally there to celebrate the major anniversaries coming up for the both the BCN and the Society.

Success depends heavily on a wide community involvement, so we really have to work hard at this. Billie Spake Mon and friends coming round for an evenings entertainment is the next step, and will have happened by the time you read this. The tickets sold out weeks before, so again, this looks like something we can build on.

We had another successful Marathon Challenge - the biggest yet, I believe. Thanks again to Roy, John and all of the others who made it such a success. I suspect there were more boats at Bradley than have been there for a long time - indeed possibly ever! Talking to

people around the canal on the way back emphasised to me the point that was made around Titford, that canal use is appreciated. Again, we need to build on it.

Meanwhile enjoy the summer (says he writing with the rain pouring down in mid June), whether you are on the bank or the boat.



Moored under the motorway - IWA Rally Titford Pools



## Sales Report from Beccy

Beccy is always making little items to sell on the BCNS Stand. This time it's owl key rings but she needs some small white shirt buttons for eyes. If you have any in your button box that you could spare please see Beccy.



The sales stand will be at the BCBF 12th & 13th September. Beccy would love them before that.

## In Memoriam Bob Broomhall

On 28<sup>th</sup> March a small group of family and BCNS members gathered together to say farewell to Bob. His ashes have been buried in the ground of Titford Pump House so that Bob will always be a part of the Society's activities. Joan would like to thank the BCNS Council who agreed to this and to all his family and friends who attended the occasion. Regards Joan

*The BCN Society have lost a great friend in Bob. He is so missed.*

## BCN Photo Quiz



This time our photo quiz shows a part of a building somewhere on the BCN that still exists. To give you a clue it has been focused on over recent years but so far with no firm result.

This should not be too difficult for all our members who have travelled through the BCN. I look forward to many positive responses.



# Canal Tunnel “Pepperpots”

*While travelling through Netherton Tunnel I often look up the huge ventilation shafts along the length and wonder where they come out at the top of the hill and what they look like. Well Phil Wild must have thought the same but decided to do a bit of research & photograph what he found. I have counted seven shafts but there were originally more when the tunnel was built but they have now been filled in though the “pepperpots” remain. Most of us know what the Gosty Hill “pepperpot” looks like as it is so often photographed and published but the Netherton ones are less well known so we shall have a look at some of them here along with Phil.*

*Relevant histories of each tunnel can easily be found via a Google search, or similar.*



**Shaft 4**

I think, without any supporting evidence, they may have been retained for ‘maintenance’ rather than for ventilation. Number 11 was a red, not blue, brick top in the 1950’s with two hinged metal plates and I can distinctly recall, when much younger, climbing it and seeing the canal below through the gap. It was concreted over post 1970 and though it is still

I would just flag up that there appears to be anomalies recorded regarding the number, and numbering, of the Netherton shafts.

This is caused, I think, by the Aston Road one, the one which looks like a roundabout. This is equidistant between numbers 10 and 12 and therefore must be what I refer to as No 11, which historical documents suggests was filled in shortly after construction.

Interesting is that this and shaft 13 are clearly marked on OS



**Shaft 11 Aston Road**



**Shaft 6 in Lower Warrens Hall Park**

hinged on the top, if you go through the tunnel it looks bricked over at the base. Of shaft 13 there is no evidence of it at the surface which I have found, the area became a private housing estate in the 1970’s, with shaft 12 becoming a feature in someone’s front garden.



Shaft 8 Regents Road

Number 10 became a similar feature in the post war construction of Regent Road council housing. As you can see from the photos Shaft 8 is in need of repair, Shaft 6 looks a recent rebuild. I think the aerial on Shaft 8 is to do with ongoing monitoring of the tunnel structure following major repairs in the early 1900's, 1980's and early 2000's. Local anecdote reports cracks appearing at the Netherton end when the 'Gornal' earthquake occurred in 2002. □



Shaft 12 Packwood Road

\*\*\*\*\*

## Letters to the Editor



## THANK YOU TO ALL BCNS MEMBERS WHO HELPED ON THE BIG BCN CLEAN UP

Please can you thank Mike Rolfe, Barrie Johnson, Stuart Sherratt and others for flying the flag for BCNS at our clean up on the weekend, It was much appreciated to see them there as they are every year. They all joined us for food and beer on Saturday evening.

Lots of large pieces of the M5 pulled out in Oldbury, a lot of tyres, traffic cones, a freezer but no icecream! Lots of scaffolding poles and even a Hindu deity statue. The following quote was given to the press earlier:

"We were welcomed to our accommodation in Tipton by the local boating community who came and enjoyed Saturday evening with us, the people of Smethwick supported our clean up in their area and praised the volunteers. This is the first time we have worked in this area, surrounded by canal heritage and features, the volunteers certainly enjoyed themselves, thank you to all the societies who supplied the work boats to get rid of the rubbish and to the CRT employees who worked diligently to empty the boats, we have already started planning the 2016 event"

Best Wishes and thanks again  
Chris Morgan, Team Leader  
Waterway Recovery Group

# Recollections of the Titford Canal

*As a child Eric Ruff emigrated with his family to live in Canada, but he never forgot his roots in the Black Country and visited frequently and in more recent years by canal as he relates here along with his childhood memories of living close to the Titford Canal.*

Shortly after the First World War my grandparents, Albert and Mary Cotterill, kept the New Navigation Inn, at the top of the Titford Canal. They were moved to the Crosswells Inn, Five Ways, Langley, shortly afterwards. My mother was born there; in 1945 I was born there too, although not in the same building as I understand that it was rebuilt in the 1920s.

As a child growing up in Langley I was allowed to go to the various parks in the area and roam around pretty well at will. Sadly, however, I obeyed the "Don't go near the canals." instruction from my mother. I did, however, get to look over canal bridges: Uncle Ben's Bridge at the top of Langley High Street (on my way to cubs and scouts at St. Michael's school, visiting the doctor, and shopping in Langley Green); Seven Stars Bridge on the way to Oldbury; Station Road bridge, on the way to my Aunt Gladys's house in Rood End or on a trip to Smethwick Park; and the Tat Bank Road bridge on the way to my mother's Aunt Sis who lived in Parsonage Street opposite the Gas Works. I remember that smell particularly.

.From Uncle Ben's Bridge I could see the Slade Brothers' coal wharf and I remember boats unloading there. I did see a swan or two there once on a

spring day – in the days when the canal was a 'chemical' green colour and had a particular smell – I wonder if the swans survived.

From the Station Road Bridge I remember the view of Langley Maltings and, I think, boats tied up to unload oil – they must have been Thomas Clayton's boats because there was some type of BP oil depot nearby on the corner of Station Road and Western Road which led up to Langley Green train station. I remember that smell of oil too. I also recall looking over the bridge at the trampled bulrushes and weeds opposite the towpath and was told that a body had been found there. I think I was on my way to a Saturday matinee at the Regent on that day.

My best memories, though, which also involve smells, were those of the Tat Bank Road bridge. To get there we could walk down "The Oxford" which was the road, now closed, which ran straight through the middle of Albright and Wilson's – strong chemical smells this time. That bridge, as most readers will know, crosses the Jim Crow Locks going up to the Titford Pumphouse. If we were very lucky, my brother and I (by ourselves) would lean over the bridge and watch boats going up or down the



locks. Colourful boats – obviously in Thomas Clayton livery. Sometimes there were horse-drawn boats. I do remember a man with the tow rope over his shoulder pulling a boat into (or out of) a lock. I now suspect that he was pulling a butty with perhaps the motor going on ahead. Since I didn't know much about boats in those days I didn't particularly pay attention to what was happening.

Little did I know that not too far away was the Thomas Clayton boatyard with, I'm sure, lots of activity.

My family moved to Canada in 1957 so I missed the end of the Thomas Clayton boats, the decline of the canals and their initial resurgence. (I've seen a number of the Clayton boats in various locations since.)

In the early 1980's my wife and I, along with two friends, rented an English County Cruises boat on the Llangollen

Canal. We were hooked. I actually chose that canal since I wanted everyone to love canal boating – my intention, even then, was to get us to the Titford Canal. We've been on the canals fifteen or sixteen times since. The highlight, however, was in 2007-2008 when my wife and I spent six and a half months on the canals (980 miles, 690 locks and 202 pubs). I was elated when, underneath the motorway, we turned off the Old Main Line onto the Titford Canal. Finally, I'd made it to my 'home canal' by boat. We tied up just short of the Station Road bridge and went into the pub (then named the Finings & Firkin.) When I asked if it was safe to moor there overnight the answer was "They burned a boat there a couple of years ago." Thankfully, being a long-time member of the BCNS, I made contact with someone and was told that we could moor outside the clubhouse – and we did.

Langley wasn't the place I remembered but we did enjoy The Crosswells Inn. We walked the full length of the canal as far as the New Navigation. The canal was clear enough to see the bottom and there were Canada Geese there. The canal had certainly changed from when I was a kid.



*This photo of the Pump House & buildings above Oldbury Locks will have been the sight that would have greeted Eric when he was a child in Langley.*

## “Canoeing to Rio”



The intrepid BCNS Secretary Ivor Caplan took part in the National Go Canoeing Week-Every Mile Counts on 29<sup>th</sup> May. The three canoes shown were manned by representatives from the CRT West Midlands Waterways Partnership and canoed from the Ackers Trust Activity Centre along the Grand Union Canal to the top

of Camp Hill locks. Peter Mathews, Chairman of WMWP is seen in the middle canoe and Ivor's boat was ably steered by Ian Lane, Waterways Manager. The scheme is aimed at encouraging people to get out on the water and enjoy paddle sports. Distances canoed are all logged and the aim is to total 24,901 miles apparently the distance to Rio. We completed 10 between us so not far to go!

## Photos of Atlas & Beer – Harry Arnold:

*Atlas nipped off on it's own earlier this year to deliver some beer. Harry kindly sent this photo to show what they were up to.*



David Wheeler, chairman W B & D Canals Society, Adrian Smith, their harbourmaster and Paul Cooksey, head brewer at Old Swan Brewery.

Anthony Cheetham shows his young son Atlas his namesake boat - the BCNS's historic *Atlas*.

Beer being unloaded at ABC's Alvechurch wharf, (l to r) Darren Mathews, ABC manager at Alvechurch Marina, Ivor Chambers, skipper of *Atlas*, John Humphreys, landlord of The Weighbridge Inn,





# Atlas & Malus Report

**Paul Smith**

*Firstly I would like to give a massive thank you to Gill Reynolds for all the work she has done painting Atlas, those of you who have seen the boat cannot fail to be impressed by the quality of the paintwork.*

A&M's first trip of the year was a DofE residential which included attending the Easter boat gathering at Tipton. The end of April saw Atlas loaded up with 28 barrels of beer from the Old Swan Brewery in Netherton. Some casks were delivered to the Weighbridge Inn at Alvechurch and the rest for St Richards Festival in Droitwich, where Atlas was on display for the bank holiday weekend.

A quick trip along the W&B canal meant Atlas was back in time for the open weekend at Hawne Basin. This event saw Malus being horse drawn along a section of the Dudley No.2 canal on the Saturday, a rare sight these days! The following weekend saw the boats make their annual trip to Titford for the BCNS boat rally. Next on the agenda was the BCN Challenge, which saw the closure of Oldbury locks just days before the start. The problem was that A&M were moored at the Pump House, effectively stranded! Thanks to help from CRT we, and several others, were managed down the flight on the Saturday morning so we could continue with the Challenge. Progress went well until we arrived at Walsall locks where we had to wait for over an hour for water to be let down. Once on the W&E progress was slowed by having to stop to clear rubbish off the prop with monotonous regularity (not easy without a weed hatch). The finish of the Challenge was at Bradley Workshops this year and as the arm is little used progress was slow. We managed to finish at 4 o'clock, only 2 hours late, but we were the first working pair back, in front of Nuneaton & Brighton. A big thank you to all who have helped to crew including Steve, Jeff, Charley, Ivor, Dave, Jon & his son Daniel, Michael, Roger, Dave, Tug and Kirsty. □



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# Building Improvements at Pelsall

The stables & buildings at Pelsall stop at the start of the Cannock Extension was purchased late last year and is gradually being rebuilt. Although not yet complete the difference is in my opinion quite delightful. The planning permission is for commercial use. We will have to wait and see what it will be used for.



As it was when purchased in 2014



As it is now June 2014 Photo Phil Clayton

## Top 10 BCN 24 hour Challenge Results

POSITION	ENTRANT	BOAT NAME	POINTS
1	MICHAEL PINNOCK	CLOVER	354.65
2	JOHN MOSLEY	FIREFLY	335
3	ANDREW HOYLE	DOVE	323.05
4	DARREN MATTHEWS	CARPE VINUM	299.5
5	DAVE BELL	PANATHA	288.6
6	TIMOTHY BARRETT	DORA VENUS	284.1
7	RICHARD POWELL	TAWNY OWL	274.3
8	GLEN ROSE	GOLIAH	267.5
9	STEVE GREEN	GOOSANDER	253.2
10	CAROL KEELEY	MAGGIE MAY	252.3

# Winter Stoppages 2015/2016

Rotton Park Birmingham Main Line

Waterway: New Mainline (alternative route around Icknield Port Loop)

From Date: 2nd November 2015 at 08:00

To Date: 18th December 2015 at 17:00 inclusive

Lock 2 Saltley Birmingham & Warwick Junction Canal

Waterway: Birmingham & Warwick Junction Canal

From Date: 9th November 2015 at 08:00

To Date: 20th December 2015 at 16:00 inclusive

Lock 1 Top Lock Wolverhampton Old Main Line

Waterway: Old Main Line

From Date: 9th November 2015 at 08:00

To Date: 20th December 2015 at 16:00 inclusive

Lock 1 Parkhead Top Lock Dudley No 1 Canal

Waterway: Dudley No 1 Canal

From Date: 9th November 2015 at 08:00

To Date: 20th December 2015 at 16:00 inclusive

Lock 5, Curdworth, Birmingham & Fazeley Canal

Waterway: Birmingham & Fazeley Canal

From Date: 4th January 2016 at 08:00

To Date: 11th March 2016 at 16:00 inclusive

Lock 1, Perry Barr Top Lock, Tame Valley Canal

Waterway: Tame Valley Canal

From Date: 4th January 2016 at 08:00

To Date: 11th March 2016 at 16:00 inclusive

Farmers Bridge Lock 11, Birmingham & Fazeley Canal

Waterway: Birmingham & Fazeley Canal

From Date: 4th January 2016 at 08:00

To Date: 11th March 2016 at 16:00 inclusive

Minworth Lock

Waterway: Birmingham & Fazeley Canal

From Date: 4th January 2016 at 08:00

To Date: 11th March 2016 at 17:00 inclusive

Izon Turnover bridge, Wednesbury Old Canal

Waterway: Wednesbury Old Canal

From Date: 4th January 2016 at 08:00

To Date: 18th March 2016 at 17:00 inclusive



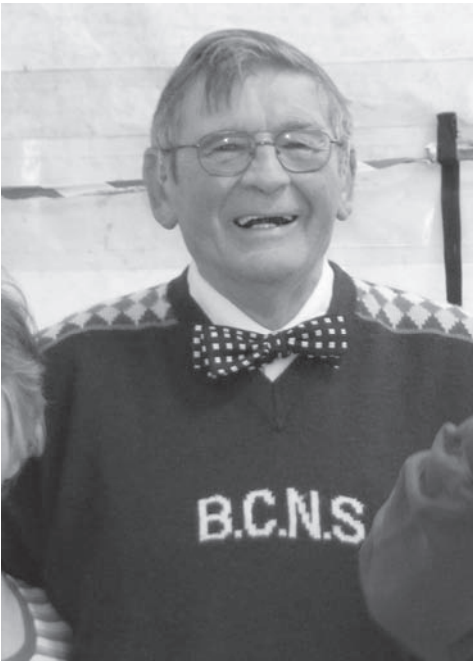
# BCNS PRESIDENT RETIRES

*David Smith has been the Society's President for many years and despite ill health for much of that time has been a most attentive support. He explains here how he would have liked to have done more. For what he did do we thank him very much.*

Maybe one normally thinks that presidents of voluntary organisations just go on for ever, but I felt differently.

I was delighted to accept the post of President of BCNS and my thoughts were that I could do something useful to help. Alas it proved otherwise. Myrtle and I have a tremendous family and we bowed to pressure to move closer to where children grandchildren and now great grand children (3 and counting) were all growing up, the decision was a good one, but the distance from Brum became difficult and health played its part and I was unable to play the role as BCNS President that I envisaged.

The committee's decision to invite Martin O'Keeffe to take on the post is a good one. The work he did bringing Titford pump house back to reality has been the trigger to the pools regeneration, it can only accelerate with Martin's enthusiasm backing the project.



I have always thought Titford was important and recollect when descending the "Crow" that the water leaving the bottom lock could finish in London, Bristol, Liverpool, Hull or Boston depending on the vagaries of water flow.

As I write this note I recollect it was 22 years ago almost to the day that the inaugural Explorer Cruise explored Titford pools. Martin was one of our explorers and maybe, just maybe that exercise led him on the track he has followed.

Myrtle and I retired together and getting involved with the BCNS made our retirement meaningful. May all members continue to enjoy the challenges relating to a canal system built on a hill. I look forward to reading about it. **Farewell BCNS.**

# The Canal to Sandy Turn

## Part 2

Ray Shill

*Here Ray completes his well researched and comprehensive article focusing on the Birmingham Main Line at its very beginnings in 1769.*



The bed of the canal that forms much of the Oozells Street Loop has seen continuous navigation, apart from stoppages for maintenance, since November 1769. In four years time it will be possible to celebrate BCN 250, which will be an auspicious moment. This section of waterway forms part of the first part of the Birmingham Canal Navigation to open. It linked a terminus wharf beside the old turnpike (near the Parade) with coal mines at West Bromwich. Boats taking this route had to climb six locks at Smethwick and then descend again through six more at Spon Lane before regaining the original

canal level and a rather winding route to the mines nears Golds Green and Golds Hill.

In the first part of this article, the development of the canals at Sheepcote Street was investigated up to the period of the 1870's, a time when the Oozells Loop had been in use for a hundred years. During this time the fields and gardens that came down to the waterside were gradually replaced by industrial buildings. Here manufacturing was mixed in between wharves for the reception of bricks and coal. Narrowboats were also constructed on a part of the bank there.

The canalside throughout Birmingham underwent many changes and the factories placed alongside the banks there were regularly transformed as business came and went. The only constant factor was the groups of old buildings that housed such enterprise and even those structures underwent alterations to suit the business needs.

Sheepcote Street was crossed by both the Old and New Main lines of the BCN. Between the bridges lay a once very busy group of factories and wedged in between were homes and beer houses, where local workers lived and drank. Their working class lives being often fraught with keeping employment and enduring the long hours any occupation, of this period, required. There were the labourers, pattern makers, glass makers and boatmen. Amongst their numbers were included the more well-off such as the boat builders, engine drivers (for the factory steam engines), coal merchants and timber merchants.

On the west side of Sheepcote Street a growing number of buildings came to fill the whole street frontage between the two bridge parapets with alleyways leading down to the yards and homes that were crammed in seemingly tight places and surrounded by high factory walls.

The early factories there included the Standard Works where Lawson & Holden made patent axletrees and Thomas Upfill constructed metallic bedsteads. The bedstead factory which had been owned by Thomas Upfill & Son, traded for a time as Upfill & Taylor. Their bedstead trade was given up

about 1873 and iron merchants trade about 1877.

Thomas Upfill had built up an important iron merchants trade, a core part of which was canal based. During the 1830's Thomas & James Upfill had dealt in iron, steel and ironmongery goods at their wharf beside the Newhall Branch. They manufactured iron hurdles, gates, tree guards and fencing. Later Thomas and son, Thomas Bollman Upfill, were in this trade. Their partnership was dissolved in 1846, with T B Upfill in business on his own account. He, Thomas senior and brother William built up the business at Sheepcote Street and included a new branch to the trade, metallic bedstead making. Bedstead manufacture became a key trade in Birmingham and Upfill entered this trade during its formative years. They were assisted in this trading aspect by William Moreton as manager of the Sheepcote Street Works. During 1862 William Upfill and William Moreton decided to set up a new bedstead factory taking over the former Britannia Cut Nail works in Blews Street. Thomas B Upfill retained the business at Sheepcote Street. A serious fire at the works in 1871, which started in the jappanning part of the factory, caused serious damage and despite the property being insured, bedstead making ceased and Taylor left the partnership during 1874. Work was then concentrated on the making of iron hurdles, gates etc, a business which the firm had kept over the years.

The land between the Standard Work and the timber yard was developed as a copper tube factory by James Booth & Sons. On the other side of the timber

yard facing Sherborne Street basin became a cycle factory during 1881. The firm of Quadrant Cycles became an international brand as people chose their robust products. Their Sheepcote Street works despatched their products both throughout Britain and for shipment abroad. Though a canal side location, there is little evidence of canal transport from this factory, unless it was short distance to Monument Lane Interchange Basin, and the bulk of their goods, it would seem, were despatched by rail with road transport being used to and from the factory. Components, such as tubes, would also have been delivered by road. There was an important cycle component trade within Birmingham and cartage was a common mode of transport between supplier and manufacturer. Coal by canal was more common and Quadrant had a basement steam engine that required coal.

William Priest was a force behind Quadrant, who made both tricycles and bicycles and came to have branches in London, Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds. He was instrumental in setting up a public company in October 1895. By this date the premises comprised a three storey building with yards and shopping to the rear. Much of the plant was new. They commenced motorcycle and tri-car manufacture at Sherborne Street in 1903, but public ownership had its pitfalls. In May 1907 receivers acting for the debenture holders advertised the plant and premises for sale.

This included motor and cycle components, machinery, gas engines, two 20hp horizontal steam engines, a Cornish boiler and enamelling stove. Production of

Quadrant vehicles was relocated to Coventry when Priest made an agreement for them to be made there by the Challenge Cycle Company.

D Coleman & Co, furniture makers took over the Quadrant Works.

By 1886 the west side of Sheepcote Street from the Stone Wharf to the Oozells Branch Bridge comprised: Coach and Ironworks, the Standard Works- Robert Grindle & Co Sheepcote Street tube and rolling mills (brass and copper tubes)- James Booth & Co Timber Yard - John Sykes Saw Mills- John Brook's & Co

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Brook's Mill was also sublet to George Skelton (tack maker), Chas Aston (wheelwright), John Mole (Cabinet Brassfounder) and Daniel Wright (wood turner)

Tricycle Works, Quadrant- Quadrant Cycle Co

Ironworks (Hurdles & Fencing) - John Elwell

Brass Tube & Metal Works- Hudson Edmunds & Co

Across that bridge on the site of the former boat dock was the premises that belonged to the Patent Ferrule Company (John Henry Shoebottom proprietor).

This area became a popular location for the making of ferrous and non ferrous tubes that had a variety of uses and some of which were used as boiler tubes in boilers and steam locomotives. The canal retained an important use in the transport of coal for the various heating processes required for raising steam or fuel for the many furnaces

required for metal treatment. These included annealing furnaces and enamelling stoves. Whilst town gas sometimes replaced steam as source as motive power, driving the large internal combustion engine, known as the gas engine, there were also more compact plants where coal was carbonised to power engines on site.

By 1900 the many factories and works in Sheepcote Street formed a skyline that was like all areas subject to change, but many features remained until the 1960's and some elements remained until the drastic redevelopment of this street where modern apartments have replaced industrial premises.

One time long survivor was Hudson, Edmunds & Co, whose premises and signage in Sheepcote Street was a feature long after the official winding up proceedings in 1980. This firm had been located on this site for some hundred years then. The original partnership of Harvey Hudson and John Edmunds had started off as a maker of brass tubes, but also under John Edmunds had ventured into the trade of cycle maker. The company had been registered in January 1894, but creditors seeking payments had forced receivership in 1895. Despite these setbacks a new company was formed that operated from the works and continued to make brass tubes. □

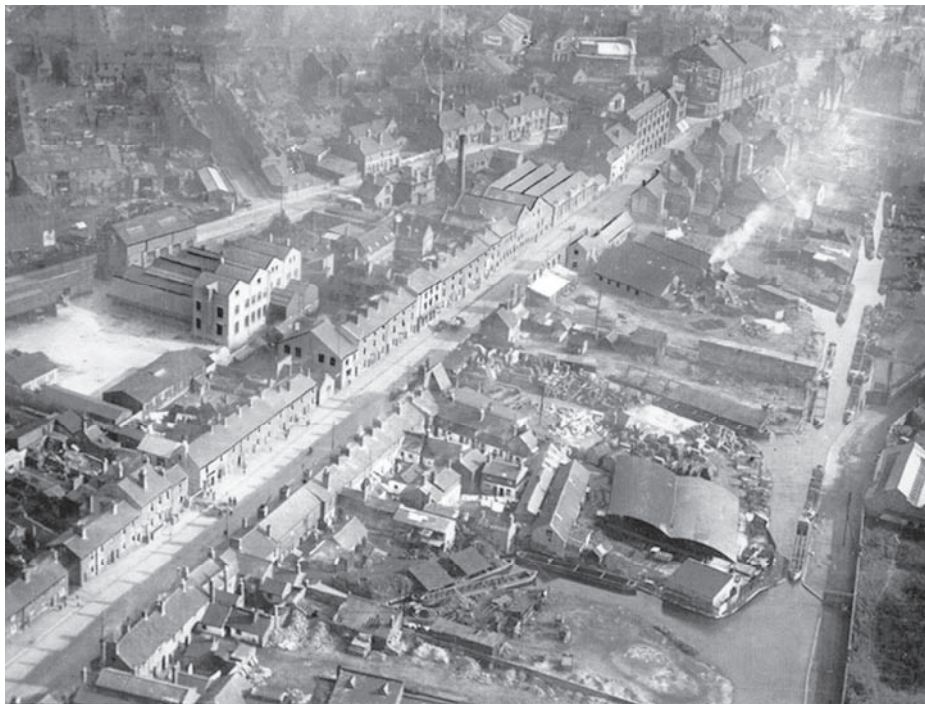




# Walsall's Town Wharf

## A cut above the rest

*Some time ago while speaking to Jack Haddock he told me what an interest he had in Walsall and its canal. This photograph of the arm from the Bob May collection with its wharfs reminded me of his history of this area so here it is by kind permission of Jack.*



Around the turn of the last century, canal traffic supplying the needs of Walsall's trade and commerce peaked. Along the Wolverhampton Street side of the Walsall Canal arm was a line of small wharfs mostly used for factory and domestic coal deliveries.

The first wharf from the Walsall Canal end was Corporation Wharf, which supplied the town's gasworks from 1850-1877 when it moved to Pleck Road.

From 1895-1916 this site also supplied electricity for Walsall and district. In addition, the gasworks provided outgoing supplies of coke and other by-products. After 1916, the Public Works Department took over the yard with its buildings and wharf.

Between Corporation Wharf and the bottom of the canal arm were the following wharves: Dock Wharf, Albion Wharf, Victoria Wharf, Providence Wharf, and the Old Wharf.

With all these and their basins extending practically onto Wolverhampton Street, this street, before the coming of the railway, must have been a hub of activity, with horse transport distributing local goods for canal transport, and many tons of coal moved from these wharfs for domestic consumption. The other side of the arm was the towpath, and was fairly wide to accommodate the many horses awaiting turnaround, before the days of motorised narrow boats. During a normal working day the Walsall Arm would be filled with approximately 50 to 60 narrowboats, as recalled by Len Wilson from his first journeys on the Walsall Arm with Shropshire Union boats during the Great War. Those were hard times, and Len remembered that by age 16 he was working a boat of his own in company with his father, due to the great manpower shortage during that war, and at the time food supplies were the main cargo into Walsall, comprising grain, cocoa and sugar, as well as boxes of tinned meat and fruit, and barrels of Guinness Stout for the local pubs.

On the towpath in the 1880s, three ironworks needed many boatloads of coal. The Bradford Ironworks was under the management of W. M. Lester, Iron Manufacturer, of Bridgeman Street. The Globe Ironworks was known as the British and Colonial Horse Shoe and Machine Co. Ltd, of Charles Street. These works were still busy during around the time of the Great War, but the nearby Waterloo works had closed in the 1890s.

Marsh Lane, leading off Marsh Street to the main Walsall Arm canal towpath,

was one of the most notorious parts of old Walsall, as many local folk still recall. It was well known for the prostitutes who plied their trade and took advantage of the stationary cabin boats on cold, dark winters nights in this poorly lit area.

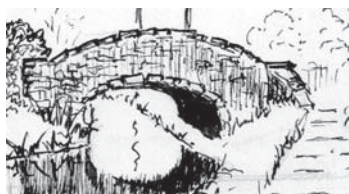
The Dun Cow pub in Wolverhampton Street, long demolished, was a popular meeting place from its building in 1894 until just after the Second World War. Most boatmen also frequented the Barrel Inn, the Flitch of Bacon, Elephant & Castle, Engine Inn, The White Horse and The Albion, all along the Wolverhampton Road and Street. With many boats getting an early start for the Cannock collieries, many local boatmen preferred to wait until just after midnight, and being partly drunk enabled them to summon up the courage to get going on their long, slow journey of many miles. Life on the boats was very hard, being a cut-throat and desperate trade, with none of the glamour or romance that some modern narrowboat owners seem to imagine.

By the 1930s, however, road transport was becoming affordable. Although for some years the lorries complemented the remaining boats, delivering coal and other goods from the wharfs to their final destinations, eventually the idea of using vehicles such as the three-ton Bedford lorry and the Morris Commercial to transport coal direct from the Cannock pits caught on, and with cheap pre-war petrol, the days of canal transport were numbered. There was a respite for the boats during Second World War petrol rationing, but the post-war availability of cheap army surplus lorries was the final nail in the

in the coffin for 'the cut'. By 1958 the Walsall Arm was practically full of rotting and disused boats, and most of those once employed on the canal had found better-paid jobs in local factories.

Over many years, the Walsall Canal became filled with weeds and rubbish, and this once thriving part of the town's commercial life became a foul-smelling and depressing dump. But this was not to last for ever, as in the late 20th century the nation's canals, once forgotten and ignored by the majority of the population, began a revival as a resource for leisure boaters.

Today, life is returning to the Town Wharf. Walsall's prestigious New Art Gallery has been built on the site and attracts many thousands of visitors each year to what was a lonely, abandoned place. The award-winning Wharf pub is providing good beer and food in a now-attractive setting. Already, prestigious canal side housing and retail units have been developed in the area, and much more is hoped for in years to come. Boats are now able to use the canal again, and narrowboat rallies have become a regular occurrence, bringing a reincarnation of many old traditions and the creation of many new ones as leisure has taken over from labour as the mainstay of the canals. The Town Wharf has begun a new and exciting life as a very different hub of activity in 21st century Walsall. □



## Book Reviews by Norma O'Keeffe

### Northern Canals by Ray Shill

*Lancaster, Ulverston, Carlisle & the Pennine Waterways Through Time*, , 96 pages, 80 colour, 55 b&w illustrations, 8 maps & diagrams, Amberley Publishing, Stroud, 2014, ISBN 978 4456 3319 0 £14.99

Ray Shill seems to have the knack of capturing the spirit of the canals he writes about. Here he describes the building of these waterways as challenging and formidable. Obstacles were overcome though, providing an access for the textile industries so important to the region. This is a scenic, but handsome route with its rugged stone bridges, its towering viaducts and the tall chimneys of its mills. Many of the views shown are from the author's own collection, we see towns such as Skipton, Sowerby Bridge and Huddersfield with their distinctive northern look, tempting us as we plan our coming summer cruise, and what could be more enjoyable than visiting and exploring this unique part of the world with Ray's book to guide us? From a wealth of interesting and well captioned photographs the author shows how the idea of a cross Pennine waterway developed from the Ribble Navigation, through the construction of other canals, to ultimately arrive at the its final destination the River Aire.

**Well recommended.**

# A Great Week on the BCN

*Several Explorer Cruisers sent in their thanks and accounts but room only allows for one. This is from Bob June and Ecco on Nb. Autumn Myst telling us how much they enjoyed their week with Stuart & Marie on the Spring Explorer Cruise & the weekend at the Titford Rally accompanied by a photo from David Sargood below.*

I was born in Birmingham and used to wander the canals as a child but to experience them now is great. I would describe the BCN as the canals Hidden Treasures and a Green Corridor through the sprawling West Midlands. There are obviously a few spots which are not as we would like but once through those it was a real treat. A few of the Highlights include Anglesey Basin (Chasewater), Pelsall Common, Walsall Basin, Ten pin bowling at Wednesfield moored in the Bentley Arm, and the visit to Bradley Lock Gate works.

Stuart and Marie aided by Brian did a fantastic job of organising us all and chose some great over night mooring spots. We have made some lovely friends during the week and although we were a bit concerned before we started out about breasting up with strangers we need not have worried because it was never a problem and we would not hesitate in the future. I would recommend anybody to go on future cruises and to explore the BCN on there own.

I do a blog of our travels and if you want to have a look at my daily ramblings and photos - look up **Autumn Myst blogger**.



The Spring Explorer Cruise rests for the night at Pelsall Common

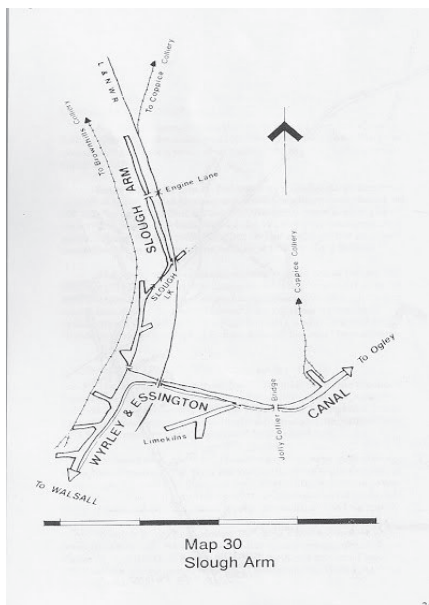


# Exploring the Forgotten Corners of the BCN

## By Andy Tidy

### 11. Slough, Gilpins and Sandhills

*Having recently bought a new home in Aldridge and moved our boats to Longwood Boat Club it is fitting that this article focuses on some of the lost canals in the Brownhills area of the BCN. The snag is that they are disconnected fragments which don't make for a neat circular walk, but a stout pair of boots or a bicycle will help you join the bits.*



#### Slough Arm

This abandoned half mile private arm is probably one of my favourite discoveries in the northern BCN. Access is off the A452 Chester Road, just north of the Hussey Arms in Brownhills turning down Coppice Lane and go to the very end near Coppice Industrial estate and the site of an abandoned railway embankment which now carries a footpath/cycleway.

The branch canal follows a north south route and provided access to the local collieries from the Wyrley and Essington Canal, under what is now a dropped bridge and unusually included one lock.

A visit today will reveal a well preserved brick bridge which carried Engine Lane over the dry remains of top basin and a few hundred yards south will bring you to the distorted remains of the solitary lock, its sides forced in by a mix of subsidence and tree roots. A careful examination at the bottom end will reveal the rotted remains of the bottom lock gates still embedded in the mud.



The lower pound is sometimes in water depending on the season and amount of recent rainfall. The water increases as you approach the main canal and a large triangular basin can be identified. It is very silted, but is immediately recognisable and at one time included a covered wharf. This area appears to be public open ground so you are free to roam without threat of challenge or eviction.

If you would like more information about this fascinating BCN relic, have a look at Ray Shill's article in the Autumn 2011 edition of Boundary Post.



## Gilpins Arm

For the sake of completeness I should mention the 1794 Gilpins Arm which exited the Wyrley and Essington just south of the Slough Arm. The only remnant of this half mile canal built to serve the Newlands Collieries is in the name of the modern road which follows its course.

The best description I have found was by a reader who left the following comment on my blog:

There was a strange little tributary which used to spur off the Wyrley and Essington in Pelsall. If you head from Yorks Bridge to Yorks Foundry Bridge, then continue a short distance until the canal bends sharply to the left there used to be (in the early 60's) a small brook which ran off the canal,

crossed by a small bridge. This ran parallel and between the present day Dovedale Avenue and St John's Road following the line of Gilpin Crescent, ending at Norton Road. Even back then it was mostly dried up.

## Sandhills Arm

This is another mile long dry relic in Brownhills which left the Anglesey Arm just to the east of Catshill Junction and was built in 1797. The junction was obliterated when a major breach was repaired in the area but its contour can be picked up following a modern track across the fields.

This lane ends in a group of buildings which have been converted into attractive houses but a look at their rounded windows reveals their age and their canal connections. □

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# Society's Artefacts



Joe Hollinshead made a presentation to the Society of two gauging sticks. These were accepted by our Chairman, Charley & Richard Parry, CRT Chief Executive, who was visiting our Rally at Titford this year.

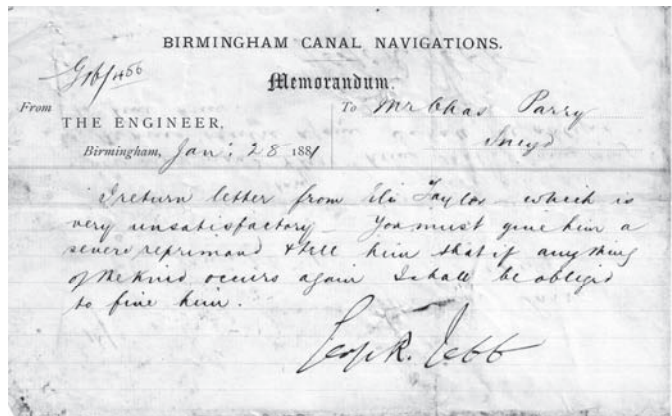
The two gauging sticks were in Joe's possession after they were no longer required by British Waterways and he kept them safely until now.

The larger one was from Camp Hill and was used to gauge the large Grand Union boats and the smaller one was from Winson Green stop and of course used to gauge the smaller BCN boats.

Thank you Joe!!

## Memorandum from George Jebb 1881

To Mr Chas Parry at Sneyd. An ancestor of CRT's Chief Exec? "I return letter from Eli Taylor which is very unsatisfactory. You must give him a severe reprimand and tell him that if anything of the kind occurs again I shall be obliged to fine him." George Jebb The Engineer



# 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

David King - Aldridge  
Nigel Self - Belbroughton  
Des & Margaret Redwood - Sutton Coldfield  
Adam Eddleston - Birmingham  
Martin Danks - Hereford  
Joan Blackley - Cradley Heath  
Robert Starkey - Birmingham  
Iain & Cheryl Douglas - Luton  
David Watts - London  
Nick & Linda Waterfield - Gussage St. Michael, Dorset

Plus 33 having the inclusive year of membership from entering the  
Spring Explorer Cruise or the 24-hr Challenge.

## Explore Cruise:

Jim & Marilyn Coulthart - Downham Market  
Adrian Wood - Norwich  
Tony & Margaret Merridale - Rushden (Northants.)  
Robert & Maggie Kelley - Bristol  
Mike & Marion Lovegrove - Weymouth  
Daphne Inskip - Braunston  
Tony & Jennifer Becket - Braunston  
David & Lesley Sargood - Maldon  
Ray & Gwynneth Buss - Chester  
Andy & Rose Bimson - Market Harborough  
Peter Powell & Ruth Barker - Stroud  
Alan Gossage - Birmingham  
Gloria Harrison - Stone  
Michael & Rebecca Fitzpatrick  
Robert & June Owen - Solihull  
Kevin & Veronica Murphy - Redhill, Nottingham  
Brian & Lesley Evans - Warrington  
John & Barbara Adams - Bristol

### 24-hr Challenge:

Barry Hewitt - Norton Canes  
 Polly Paige - Cosgrove  
 Alan Jones - Milton Keynes  
 Graham Clutton - Alton  
 Chris Kelly - Stalybridge  
 Sarah Levick - Glemsford  
 Stuart McCord - Chilwell, Notts.  
 Jan Acheson - Salisbury  
 Timothy Barrett - Birmingham  
 Carol Keeley - Llanrhyddlad  
 Maggie Young - Thorpe Astley, Leicester  
 Andy Sharp - Ludlow  
 Alan Butler - Ilkeston  
 Matt Smith - Weedon Bec  
 Dave Hull - Sheffield

\*\*\*\*\*

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# Work Party Report by Mike Rolfe



**March 21st/22nd.** This was a two day event carried out at Hawne Basin and involved a re-paint of Crow, both inside and out. Crow was pulled on to the dock the previous day to dry out, and Saturday saw us grinding and wire brushing the hull prior to painting. The floor was cleared of any remaining mud and water which lay beneath the old floor boards. Painting soon followed, with the outside having three coats applied. A new steel floor was also installed in Crow, with several plates being cut to size by Arthur and Barrie, before being dropped in to position. They were quite heavy! Phoenix also received new steel floor plates at this time.

Thanks are due to Arthur for all his work on this project, and everyone else who helped along the way, including Barrie, Michael, Geoff, Brian, new member Dave King and all who crewed the boats to and from Coombeswood. Crow now looks much better in it's new coat of paint. Thanks also to the 'Dinner Ladies' in the Cabin!

**April 18th/19th.** The Annual BCN Clean up, based this year in the Smethwick area. As usual, this event was attended by BCNS, DCT, CCT, IWA, WRG and CRT. Boats attending were Phoenix, Crow, Hawne, Bittel and a CRT push tug, plus their respective

butties, all based on the Engine Branch over the weekend. Phoenix and Crow were taken down from the Titford Pumphouse on Saturday morning and soon started loading at Anchor Bridge, where some WRGies had already began working. A good load was soon aboard our boats, so off we went for unloading on the Engine Branch, done as usual by Baz and Tony from CRT.

All metals were loaded on to the BCNS truck for weighing in, the rest was put in to three large skips, weighing an estimated sixty five tons or so. One big find on the New Main line below was part of a car, including gearbox, and this took around ten of us to remove from the Cut and load in to Crow. Baz took it out again with his 'Grab' and put it on the truck.

On the Saturday night, several of us were invited to the WRG accommodation in the Malthouse stables, Tipton, where good food and ale were on offer. Thanks Chris!

Thanks this year to Stuart, Phil, Michael, Adrian, Barrie, Ivor and Mike for their help over the weekend. Also to Chris Morgan and 'Moose' from WRG and all the CRT crew. Our boats were returned to the Pumphouse on Sunday afternoon, following another visit to the New Main line, and another unloading by Baz. Now where to next year?

**May 2nd.** Pre-Rally Work party on the Titford canal. Phoenix was taken up to the Pools along with Mike Anson on his tug 'Joanna', Mike going first to check the depth in the bridge holes. Two of these were cleared, the haul producing fencing, bikes, tyres, barriers and a petrol hedge cutter. A fallen tree was also removed which was lying across the canal. This took a fair amount of sawing before Joanna's fore end managed to snap the partially cut through trunk. A heavy safe was pulled from the top pound of the flight, but it only contained mud and water. The skip was rather full after we had unloaded Phoenix!

#### **Future Work parties.**

**September 5th.** Pre-Rally Clean up in Tipton. 10am start.

**October 24th.** Pre-Bonfire Rally Clean up on the Engine Branch.



*While bringing Phoenix to Longwood for their Canal Festival Mike, Stuart & Rob (our latest work party recruit pictured here) collected a load of rubbish including a mattress.*

## Plans for New Bridge at Pelsall Rejected



Proposals to build a new two carriage-way were given the green light last year. Planning chiefs hoped to save the existing historic Yorks Bridge, in Norton Road, plus use additional land from the common for the new bridge and widen the road which is a commuter route from Staffordshire to Walsall. However due to a petition signed by 260 locals this has now been rejected by the planners.

The locals proposed that the existing bridge be strengthened & widened. The Council are disappointed with this decision but remain committed to the scheme and are taking legal advice to consider their next step. □



## ***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 6th - Walk with Ray Shill - 6-45pm**

**This time Ray is taking us off the BCN .... but only just!**

*We will meet at Great Barr Street close to the bridge to get on the Grand Union (Warwick & Birmingham Canal).*

*Ray will take the walk to Bordesley Junction & up Camp Hill Locks to Sampson Road Depot returning on the same route.*

### **September 3rd - Canals from the Air - Martin O'Keeffe**

### **October 1st - Managing Water - too little, too much, just right - Adam Comerford**

### **October 31st - AGM & Bonfire Rally at Smethwick Enterprise Centre**

### **November 5th - Canals of the Stourbridge Area - Ned Williams**

**December 4th - Christmas Social - Marriott Hotel Birmingham (Five Ways)** Dave Dent has secured a good deal so we are "going up market". There is a superb menu - email Dave to book your place & I will email details later by mass email - make sure I have your email address.

The opinions and views expressed in Boundary Post are not necessarily the views of either the Society or its Officials.

The BCN Society, a Company Limited by Guarantee, is a registered charity (1091760) first formed in 1968, which exists to conserve, improve and encourage a wide range of interests in the 100 mile network of Birmingham & Black Country waterways known as the Birmingham Canal Navigations. Boundary Post is the journal of the BCNS and is issued quarterly. Readers are invited to submit items of news, general or historical interest to:

The Editor, Brenda Ward, 9 Wylde Green Road, Sutton Coldfield B72 1HB  
tel: 0121 355 6351 email: [boundarypost@googlemail.com](mailto:boundarypost@googlemail.com)

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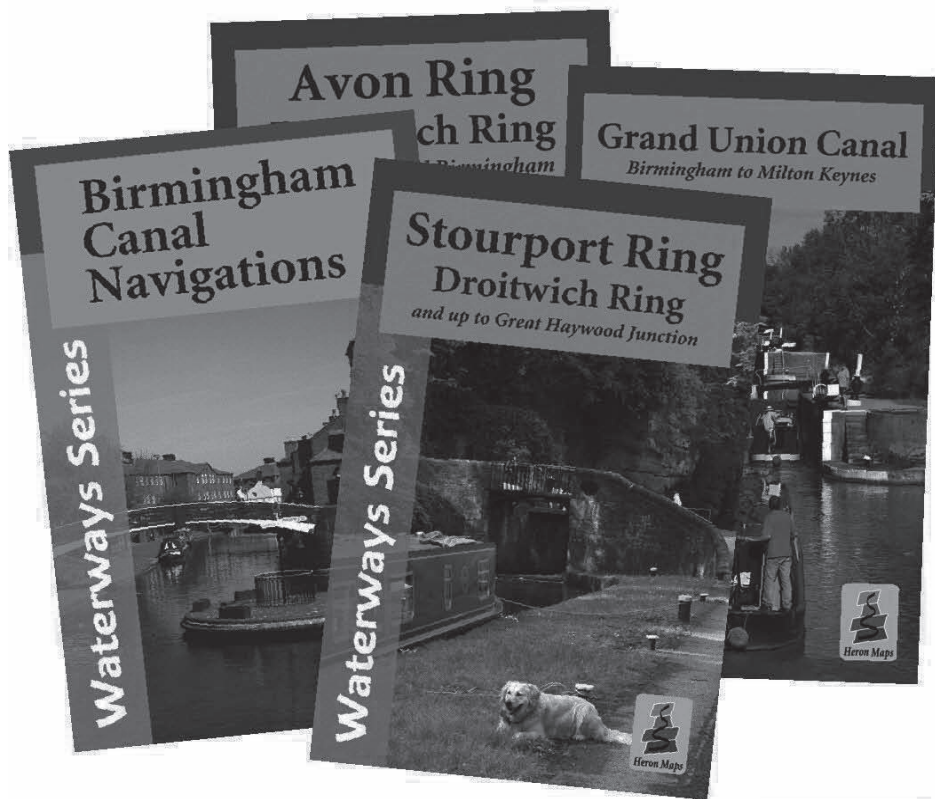
**You must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax we reclaim on your payments in the appropriate tax year.**

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