

# 58 | Fifty Eight

## The Magazine of The Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

*'Promoting the upkeep of the canals to ensure that  
the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy'*

### Welcome to our Alvechurch 'Spring Special'



Bridge 60 Alvechurch (*picture by Kieran Durrant*)



The Inland  
Waterways  
Association

Keeping our waterways alive

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Worcester-Birmingham  
& Droitwich  
Canals Society

[www.wbdcs.org.uk](http://www.wbdcs.org.uk)

Issue 550 May/June 2020

Free 'Spring Special' Digital Edition

# Monthly Meetings

Meetings are held in the meeting room  
behind The Weighbridge, Alvechurch B48 7SQ

**Regular Monthly Meetings will be  
reinstated as soon as it is safe to do so**

## **Future Meetings TBC**

**Walk and Slides on the History  
of the Water Supply to Birmingham  
*by Lynn Weaver of Bartley Green***

**The River Arrow and its Influence  
on the History of Redditch  
*by Anthony Green***

**Summer Walks**

***All welcome - you do not need to be a member to attend our meetings***

Our front cover picture depicts a quiet looking scene but at the moment there are several boats moored there owing to cruising restrictions, with some quarantined. It has been heard that many of the canals have not been as quiet as they are now since the 1960s when traffic never recovered from the long frozen up Winter of 1963.

# The Magazine of the Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

Issue 550 May/June 2020

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We have a vibrant **Facebook** page, why not pay a visit and 'like' us?

[www.facebook.com/wbdcs.org.uk](http://www.facebook.com/wbdcs.org.uk)

We are also on **Twitter** please follow us @wbdcs58

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An email group has been set up for members to share and receive information relating to the society. To join in please send a blank email to: [wbdcs@yahoogroups.com](mailto:wbdcs@yahoogroups.com)

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**Opinions expressed in Fifty Eight are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Society, but are published as matters of interest**

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**Copy date for the next issue: June 14th 2020**

# Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

**'Promoting the upkeep of the canals to ensure  
the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy'**

**(Registered Charity No 500159)**

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# Chair's Notes

## Hi Everyone

I hope that you are all keeping safe in these difficult times. People are now asking for a strategy as to how we can get back to normal but I am wondering what 'normal' will be after we get through this. I cannot see us getting back to where we were because I guess some things will change forever.

It was sad news that we received from Joe Morley on 17th April advising us that Ann had passed away peacefully in the care home where she had been suffering with dementia. Ann was a stalwart of the canal society for years. She ran the shop, became treasurer and in the latter years was membership secretary. Ann will be missed and our love and thoughts go to Joe and his family.

The majority of us are all locked down at home and any plans we had for April, May and June have all been scrapped. Mon Amour (*below*) was supposed to have gone into dry dock soon 14th April and then down to Droitwich for St Richard's Canal Festival.

At the moment I am not even sure if Mon Amour is even still afloat! Like many others she's missing the normal love and tender care that she would normally expect.

Lets hope that we all come through this crisis safely and that we will all be able to meet up again - stay safe.

*David Wheeler*



*Mon Amour & Cecilia moored alongside each other at a previous St Richard's Canal Festival (picture by Jo Lodge)*





# Editorial

**Hello Readers,**

Gather not many of you were expecting an edition of '58' during this current National Emergency so we are pleased to disappoint those expectations by having a digital copy only this time. Seriously though, all on the '58' team really do hope that everyone is able to keep as safe as possible during these very difficult times. Times that have been likened by some as worse than war time insofar as the enemy we are all facing is somewhat abstract by not being actually visible, but unfortunately we know only too well of its presence.

So many of the planned waterway activities have had to be cancelled or at least postponed. Our society's 'big one' this year would have been St. Richard's Canal Festival which was to have had a theme of commemoration 75 years after the end of the war in Europe. BCNS's event at the Bradley Arm, Selly Oak Festival and most recently the Inland Waterways 'Festival of Water' in Worcester which was due to be held during the August Bank Holiday weekend.

Paul Rodgers, IWA National Chair said *"I know that this will disappoint a great many people, many of whom travel from around the country to join us, but with the continuing uncertainty surrounding the spread of the virus, we felt cancelling the event was the right decision to take. The safety of our volunteers and staff, and of everyone who contributes to the event, is obviously paramount. The festival team will be contacting our traders, caterers and exhibitors."*

Jane Elwell, Chair of the Events Committee, said *"Team members have already invested a great deal of time and effort in organising the event and I thank them and the many supporters of our wonderful Festival. We look forward to working with you all again next year. We will however be bringing the Festival of Water to Worcester at August Bank Holiday 2021."*

WB&DCS was due to have a presence at all of these events and more besides. The actual loss of business will probably run into many thousands of pounds but just cannot be helped. At the time of processing this edition, it is unclear if the usual events in September and October are to go ahead but as with all these situations we await any developments.

As far as this society is concerned all of our activities for the foreseeable future are on hold pending Government instructions. This not only includes our normal members' meetings but also committee meetings, work parties and the interior work on 'Cecilia'. However, we feel sure that once the current emergency is safely out of the way our activities will re-commence with renewed vigour. So any readers out there who have been feeling a little bored by the current situation, fear not because the society will be there to rescue you with loads of volunteering opportunities being made available. Can just see volunteer co-ordinator Bill's list of tasks growing by the minute!

Prior to the current emergency, there were certainly some society activities taking place including the annual lunch and George Bate Trophy award, all of which will be reported on later. Some canal work parties also took place with the society's use of the work boat 'Wanderer'.

At times like these it is perhaps even equally important to keep physically and mentally active. While the use of the canals and towpaths is extremely limited at this point in time, looking through your own archives and sending to us here at '58' is certainly not. So please don't be thinking that we won't keep for further consideration as that is certainly not the case.

Anything at all you feel would help in the production of your '58' please do send along to us. We intend to continue production after this edition but if we do not have sufficient input we may have to think again. No thoughts on being bored now - some of us have never heard of the word!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who have sent in items for publication this time some of whom are regular contributors and some not - with one or two not even in membership - yet! Thank you so much everyone and all volunteers too.

Lastly, while life is perhaps not as we would like it to be at this moment in time, it soon should be if we all do the right thing by sticking to the Government's rules on movement and social distancing. Yes it must be very frustrating particularly for families and those who do not have access to at least a garden but please stay safe everyone and enjoy the read.

*John Hemingway*

## Obituary

It is with great sadness that we have to report on the very recent passing of long standing society stalwart Ann Morley. Husband Joe contacted us with the sad, yet not entirely unexpected, news which incidentally, was unrelated to the current pandemic.

Ann had been ill for quite some time and had been residing in a Kidderminster care home being very well looked after before her passing. Even though many of us had not seen Ann for quite some time, because of her ill health, we should still acknowledge the many years of voluntary work she did on behalf of our society.

Ann's most recent responsibility had been that of society membership secretary. Before that she was treasurer and before that she had been in charge of the society shop plus supporting so many other activities alongside husband Joe. A true WB&DCS stalwart whose former narrowboat 'Joanne' was shown in a 1994 special Evening Mail newspaper, whilst moored in Stourport Basin.

'58' sends its deepest condolences to Joe and all of their close family and friends.



## Annual Lunch & George Bate Trophy

Sunday March 15th at Bromsgrove Golfing Centre was the date and venue for the society's annual lunch. Fortunately this was just before the Government's instructions on social distancing but all present were being very mindful of the pending situation.

As usual this was a very well attended event by both society members and friends. After the well received meal the gathering awaited with bated breath (pun intended) who was to be the next recipient of the coveted George Bate Trophy. Last year's recipient, Ian McGarr, had collated the votes but was unable to be present, being abroad at the time, so it was left to his young apprentice to announce the winner as - Wendy Albutt. Wendy has been instrumental in streamlining and co-ordinating the bookings and crew for the society's narrow boat 'Cecilia'. Well done to Wendy, a well-deserved candidate, who will keep the trophy for the next twelve months.

Following the presentation was the raffle which, as ever, had some super prizes. Then came further entertainment from society friend Heather Wastie. Heather sang and played several canal related songs, particularly relating to the Droitwich Canals restoration, with audience participation being encouraged throughout.

This was a thoroughly entertaining afternoon with thanks being accorded to Gill and David Wheeler for organising. *A selection of photos are shown below.*



## New Members

The following people have recently enrolled in to membership of the society: **Mr. Nigel David and Mrs. N W Jealous** from Weatheroak near Alvechurch, Worcestershire.

'58' offers its customary welcome and looks forward to seeing them at our next scheduled activities.

# Our Alvechurch 'Spring Special' Pages 9 to 15





# Mary's Nature Notes

The canal is quiet but the towpath is busy with walkers and cyclists. If you are near it, which most of us are, you can see lovely things in May. If not you can remember it. I can only see my stretch here near bridge 61. The canal looks good and the waterline vegetation and aquatic life don't seem to have suffered from the disruption of the big dredging we had last autumn. The trees we helped C&RT plant by the dead arm are thriving – some have blossomed and all but a few survived and are in leaf.

Warm weather in April brought blossoms out and with them butterflies and bees. I have seen brimstone butterflies (pale yellow) and orange-tips, peacocks and tortoiseshells. The wild cherry blossom is going over now but the hawthorn or May blossom is coming out. Oaks are in young golden leaf – they started early this year.

Along the side of the canal are common sedge with its black flowers and yellow pollen. Among it will be cow parsley, scented and frothy, and the rather similar hemlock water dropwort growing right on the water's edge, equally pretty but highly poisonous. In some places, especially near Droitwich, you might find actual hemlock on the land side, with its slightly unpleasant smell and spotty stems, also highly poisonous.

In many places there are stunning patches of king-cups, bright golden yellow and bigger than buttercups. Everywhere are little blue forget me nots, and where there are remnants of old woods and hedge lines there are bluebells and sometimes wild garlic and even the now-rare yellow archangel, which grows near here. Cuckoo flower or lady's smock is a beautiful pale pink flower by the water's edge, and cuckoo-pint or lords-and-ladies, with its range of rude local names, has a purple spike sticking up inside a pale green sheath. If you do your daily exercise walk in the evening, the scent of all the flowers will be stunning.

One of the joys of this time is young waterfowl. Mallard ducklings come in big broods and are very vulnerable to the watchful herons, though not as vulnerable as the tiny black moorhen chicks, in smaller broods and less protected by their parents. Canada geese have small to medium sized broods of large yellow goslings which grow up amazingly quickly. Cygnets are very well protected by their parent swans, are yellow and not at all ugly, but grow up very slowly.

You may spot nests near the water – if so leave them alone – social distancing! Geese make a nest of feathers and down from their breasts. Swans build a big dome of twigs and straw, whereas moorhens build a traditional birds-nest very close to water. Mallards hide in fields and gardens, even sometimes up trees or in hanging baskets, so you rarely see their nests.

Above you will hear chiffchaffs, summer migrants, though the bird is a little brown one that you may not see. Blackbirds and thrushes



*Canada Goose Nest*

sing long loud melodious songs, the thrush more repetitive. If you are really lucky, especially if you live near Droitwich or Hopwood, you may hear the cuckoo. It's a rare treat these days but has been around in the last couple of years. It's possible summer migrant birds may do better this year, as so many are usually killed on their way through Europe, and they may not be this year. Swallows often skim over the water, especially near reservoirs, and a couple of years ago a pair nested and brought up a brood under my nearest canal bridge.

I hope everyone stays safe and that remembering the beauty of the canal helps keep you in good spirits. Limit your use of the towpath, but enjoy the glimpses you get.



*Top Left: Mighty Oak*  
*Bottom Left: Hawthorn*  
*Top Right: Cuckoo Pint*  
*Middle Right: May on the Canal*  
*Bottom Right: Orange Tip Butterfly*

# Alvechurch and Its Canal

People nowadays think of Alvechurch as a quiet country village, mostly now a commuter village for people working in Birmingham and Redditch. But it wasn't always that way. It's often described as a "town" in old documents, and its history is a bit like the history of middle England.

The village has always been important for transport. There is an 18th century map in Alvechurch museum (which looks odd without the canal) showing the roads that led from it. Some are still roads, others now just footpaths. One of the key routes was the Salt Way, which leads from near the church, the medieval hub of the village, through fields and lanes to Droitwich. It runs under the canal at Scarfield Dingle under a little aqueduct, near which is an ancient oak tree at least 500 years old.

The river Arrow was an important watercourse, right through the village, and later the canal and then the railway. More recently, the M42 has come as well.

Alvechurch was founded by Aelfgythe in the 8th century was given to the Bishops of Worcester by the King of Mercia. The Bishop's Palace, on the river Arrow, was a base for his hunting grounds. The present church is on the site of Aelfgythe's ancient one and the oldest parts of the village cluster round this hill. Then houses spread gradually out into the flatter land. You can trace the history of domestic architecture through the village.

When the canal came in the early 19th century the "town" was already thriving industrially, like most of the area. This continued until the inter-war years in the twentieth century. The River Arrow was harnessed for water power for milling. Manufacturing in the form of needles, nuts and bolts and other small items was common, not only in "works" but as a domestic industry in outhouses to many of the cottages. By the twentieth century cars were made here. The canal opened up the possibility of getting coal more cheaply and fuelled local industry.

To serve this busy little town, there were services of all kinds: saddlers, ironmongers, cobblers, blacksmiths, haberdashers and of course butchers and greengrocers – a self-sufficient community. There was a grammar school and several girls' schools.

By the canal the Alvechurch brickworks opened in the 19th century and many of us still live in houses built from Alvechurch brick. One of my elderly neighbours told me about working there. The canal was especially used to bring in the clay or marl from the many marl-pits in the area. But perhaps the most famous use of the canal was to bring chocolate crumb up to Cadbury's. When the tugs stopped operating for the night at Wast Hills and Tardebigge tunnels, any boats left between moored at the Crown at Withybed Green and stabled their horses. I know people who can remember being given bits of chocolate crumb as children.

There were several wharves here, at Scarfield, Withybed, Hopwood, New Wharf near Cooper's Hill and smaller ones. As well as coal and brick, the canal carried some strange cargoes. One was "night soil" brought from the privies of Birmingham to be used on the farms – unloaded near Aqueduct Lane. Withybed was originally a couple of old houses, the withy (willow) beds, and a few farm cottages, but the canal and its brickworks brought the rest of the buildings. You can see similar legacies of the canal at Scarfield and elsewhere.

Not long after the canal came the railway in 1859, though canal traffic continued until well into the twentieth century. The combination of canal and railway and the subsequent link into the motorway system has led to Alvechurch surviving as a hub for the area with a school, doctor, dentist, shops and library (just hanging on). But it is a pale shadow of its former bustling, productive mixture of farming and manufacture, and above all transport.

Now the canal brings a small but important leisure trade and is still a form of transport, even if only on foot or bicycle. The marinas are near where the old wharves were, and the Crown Inn hosts the Aelfgythe Morris dancers. The ancient salt path runs over the railway on a bridge and under the canal in a tunnel. The "Dead Arm" and its wonderful wildlife were created when the M42 came to the village. Everything is connected.

*Mary Green*



# Life In Lockdown on a Narrowboat

*Mandy Monger writes from her narrowboat moored in Alvechurch*

Well in these unprecedented times I find myself living on a narrowboat, safely tucked in a Marina. The season started pretty much the same as any other, we had moved our boat for blacking to a local working Marina, then off for a weekend cruise.

Return to work on the Monday when everything changed. The initial advice was for people to continue using towpaths for exercising, but when social distancing was introduced this became unobtainable as constant cruisers were moored up.

So life on a narrowboat in lockdown started.....

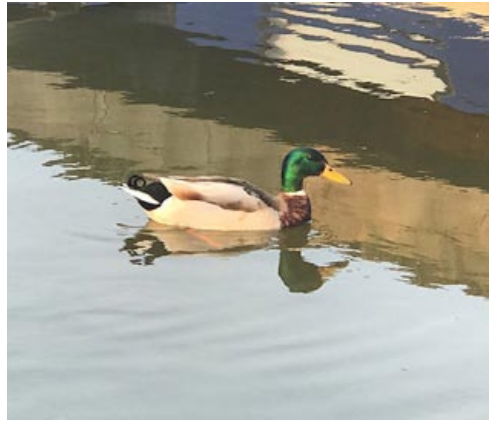
Windows cleaned, brass and boat polished, varnishing completed. Spring continued to come, flowers opened, blossom blossomed, nature continued.

I feel very blessed to have found myself here watching the calves in the field, the herons, ducks, swans, geese, fish and toads in the marina, bees - big ones and butterflies enjoying the undisturbed grass and wildflowers growing. I've watched amazing sunrises and sunsets, pink moons and clear nights full of stars.





And what a community!! We are using local shops delivering, we put our orders together so one delivery. We have quite a few key workers here and



are humbled as they continue their work, if one person goes out then a message is sent to all for any essentials to be picked up.

We are blessed to have open space for dog exercising and personal exercising and just by nature of boaters we do



socially distance, I have spoken to more of my neighbours since lockdown as we would all normally be cruising and lifelong friendships have been made. So back to sewing uniform bags for the NHS - you'll hear us every Thursday evening, horns honking, tunnel lights on and everyone of us clapping for all the Key Workers as we Thank them all.

As we all look forward to the present day restrictions being lifted I hope you all Stay Safe!

*Mandy Monger*





# Kieran Durrant Photography

**Kieran Durrant** is an Award winning photographer based in Alvechurch who specialises in not only portraiture and event photography, but also enjoys andscape and street photography. Kieran has been photographing for 10 years now and has been accoladed in various publications and gallery shows.

Kieran has kindly supplied '58' with a set of photographs of the Worcester & Birmingham Canal around the Alvechurch area (*below*) which we thought readers might enjoy viewing (*also see this months cover photograph*).

There are lots more photographs on his website. Details at the bottom of this page.



To find out more about Kieran's work please visit: [www.kierandurrant.com](http://www.kierandurrant.com).  
To purchase any prints or photographs please get in touch through the website.



All photographs on pages 14 & 15 are the copyright of Kieran Durrant and published with his full consent.

## Walking alone

Keeping my distance, I walk by the celandines  
Stark open in the sun, illegally close together  
Hear the chiffchaff's first spring song  
Imagine that little brown body, taut as a trampoline  
Bouncing the sound across the water to me.  
The wakening wood is clotted with primroses -  
Someone has brought Devon here secretly -  
And by the path I see a bit of paper tissue  
But it's not, it's the first wood anemone  
Bright white and moving in the wind  
Carrying no harm and promising the wood  
Will go on, the oaks will continue  
To talk to each other under my feet  
The blackbirds will load up their bills with liquid gold  
These things I can stay close to  
When my friends are at a distance.

## Whitsun

From my bed, I see a hilltop woodland  
Winter mornings the sun comes up through it  
The stark twigs become defined, and make shapes  
There's a bush like a walking elephant, then  
A perfectly round hole through the trees  
Leading to who knows what other world.  
I watch these on cold mornings, dreaming warm.  
Today the gaps have closed, the elephant  
Disappeared in a froth of green oak, hawthorn  
And feathery ash, and the apple blossom  
Splashes it pink and white. May is no time  
For dreaming, no time for a visiting spirit  
But for real life: birth, love and death,  
To dance in this world and forget the next.

# May moon

Full moon in May and I am mad as a hare  
I walk the towpath at midnight, moon behind me  
Silvering the crowded may blossom  
And starry ethereal cow parsley  
Which honey the soft rain-cleared air  
Boat lights strung along, goose-shapes  
And duck-shapes quietly resting, the path  
Taking me away, taking me home.

## Towpath conversation

Another towpath conversation. We lament  
The demise of the moorhen's nest: every time  
Someone said they had pictures of the eggs  
I knew she had skittered off across the water  
And then once too often. Rats or heron.  
Then he says "The swans have hatched"  
And I have to go. There they are, still  
Under her wing, but out in the sunshine  
By the musky hawthorn tree, shielded by scrub  
Guarded by her cob, standing proud  
Watching across the water, safe from us.

## Return of the migrants

The swallows swoop and weave  
Under the canal bridge, settling  
On the girders underneath a moment  
They are carrying mud, reeds, twigs  
Last year they raised a brood here  
Little mouths and fat feathered bellies  
I watched them fledge and leave  
They found their way back here  
Across continents, seas, meadows  
Lacing their patterns in the air  
Skimming through my life, my words.



# Society Meeting March 2020

## Jennie Gash: The Droitwich Fingerpost Challenge

Many of us have looked at the beautifully carved fingerpost in Vines Park (right), but may not have realised that it points to the furthest north, south, east and west navigable canals in England and Wales. Jennie and Chris Gash and their friends decided to visit them all by boat.

They started with Godalming in the south, via the river Wey which was made navigable in the 17th and 18th century. Jennie pointed out historical buildings, like old mills, and local stories, like a memorial to the wireless operator on the Titanic. She advised us about where there were plentiful moorings, and even where you could wheel your Sainsbury's trolley easily to the boat! They visited Guildford, Arun and Godalming and benefited from the lovely weather of 2018.

Next was Llangollen in the west. This is on a canal that was once closed but now had become one of the most popular leisure canals. It has famous aqueducts, which they crossed – Chirk, on the Welsh-English border, and the highest of all at Pontcysyllte, designed by Thomas Telford. This is drained every ten years, quite an undertaking and causing a big waterfall into the river. And then there were real waterfalls, the Horseshoe Falls which you can visit by train or horse-drawn boat. These too were human-made, again by Telford. Water is drawn from the Dee here for the canals and the water supply.

Brandon was the east challenge. It was made more of a challenge because they decided to cross the Wash again, having done so before in lovely still weather. This time there was a strong wind against the tide, and the video clip of the crossing showed the narrowboat riding the waves like a sea-going ship! All the drawers in the boat were taped shut for the crossing. They followed the Little Ouse and Great Ouse and passed through towns like Ely, St Ives and Godmanchester. Sometimes the river was packed with boats, sometimes quiet. Finally they reached Brandon, where boats had previously traded flint, fur and forestry.

The north journey was to Tewitfield. This included travelling the Leeds-Liverpool canal, the Lancaster canal, and the Lune aqueduct. They took the little train to Ravenglass, a former granite railway that was closed and then reopened by a local preservation society. They had the special experience of that part of the world, being "by the seaside in a narrowboat".

Jennie's talk was a great mixture of memories and well-researched information, accompanied by tips for those who wanted to take up "the challenge." One member of the audience said to me afterwards "I felt as if I'd been on a lovely holiday."

*Mary Green*



*Fingerpost in Vines Park*



*South - Town Wharf, Guildford on the 'Wey' to Godalming*





*Top Left: East -The Wash crossing on the way to the River Little Ouse  
Top Right: East - Brandon, the end of the River Little Ouse*



*Above: North - The sanitary station at Tewitfield, the end of the Lancaster Canal  
Below: West - The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct on the way to Llangollen Top Right:*





# Volunteer News

## Bill Lambert

Regrettably, but inevitably, the report for this month is going to be very short indeed.

We have all been affected by the isolation process caused by the Corona Virus which has brought all our society events to a complete stop. We were completing our programme of work with workboat Wanderer in mid-February, but we stopped this early to allow self-isolation. Since then the process has become more stringent so that all work party gatherings have been stopped.

Unfortunately, I can only reiterate that all our volunteering activities remain on hold until further notice. How long this will be we cannot say but I imagine it could be for most of this summer at least. My thanks go to everyone who has given me their support in the past and I hope you are able to join us again when circumstances permit.

I do hope you all remain well and take great care to stay safe within this isolation process.

Meanwhile please check out our society website: [www.wbdcs.org.uk](http://www.wbdcs.org.uk) and our dedicated Tardebigge Lime Kilns website: [www.tardebigge.uk.net](http://www.tardebigge.uk.net). Also pay a visit to our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/wbdcs.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/wbdcs.org.uk) where you will find a link to our dedicated volunteers page under 'groups' on the side menu 'wbdcs volunteers'.

Bill Lambert, Volunteer Coordinator

Worcester-Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society.

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# A Look Back at Cecilia's Home EdVenturers Trips

*Julie Cranston writes....*

Hello from my group, Home EdVenturers, to yours.

Home Edventurers have been a very active part of WB&DCS in booking Cecilia since 2016. Current circumstances and our year end reporting, led us to look forward to what could be next and look back, at our wonderful experiences with WB&DCS and Cecilia so far.

For those who don't know, Home EdVenturers is the largest events group for Home Educated children in the Midlands. Our membership includes over 1,300 families and our volunteers organise educational adventures, for home educating families.

Completing our latest annual report, we noted payments to WB&DCS of over £2,300 for 2019 alone. We have always been welcomed by WB&DCS but it was reading Wendy's report in a previous issue, noting all other bookings combined, totalled less than our bookings. We really felt what a huge part Home Edventurers play in Cecilia's life. Our donations are only possible because of exceptional WB&DCS volunteer crew and it is a great privilege to be able to look back at those trips.

In 2016 our trips began with Bill Lambert and his original band of volunteers including John Hemingway and Ian McGarr as crew, their skills, kindness and encouragement gave everyone onboard unique opportunities and happy enduring memories.

By 2017 with Ian as our patient teacher, encouraging kids to speak and sing in different languages, we were able to expand trips, offering Spanish and French languages onboard. Combined with many EU resources this kick started children's language learning journey.

In 2018 we offered the lock challenge experience. Our children took Cecilia down the longest flight of locks in the UK, completing the Tardebigge Flight with a certificate from C&RT. We offer this only to older children as they really do have to focus, listen and work hard. WB&DCS volunteers arranged support from C&RT volunteer lock keepers, and all showed great patience in explaining the engineering and safety of locks, always encouraging great teamwork.

We have offered nature trips with Mary Green volunteering onboard, supporting our kids to discover the wonderful wildlife of the canal, discovering nests along the bank from the safety of the boat, heron, frogs, insects and birds.

2019 brought us 'new' volunteer Neil Franklin, now a driving force on the Cecilia subcommittee, always encouraging us to book more, and expanding trips and activities even further.

Many of our parents were trained to helm and 2019 saw our greatest number of self steer bookings on Cecilia. Many of our families becoming WB&DCS members and volunteers themselves. In 2019, Home EdVenturers volunteered for WB&DCS at St Richard's Festival, and again at WB&DCS 50th birthday celebrations.

While we hoped to build on this relationship further, 2020 has brought unexpected events for all of us, including Cecilia. We look forward to booking again when possible but meantime, since 2016 WB&DCS volunteers have created so many wonderful memories, for so many Home Edventurer families, we are enjoying remembering those for now.

The loudest praise for volunteers comes from those whose children have additional needs. The patience, care and effort to make everyone onboard feel welcome, is hugely appreciated and has truly allowed many to have experiences on the water they would never have been able to access otherwise.

*Ed: We have plenty of pictures from some of the Home EdVenturer's trips on the next pages.*





*All ages learn to helm*



*Aug 2018 Home  
Edventurers & now  
WBDCS members &  
volunteers, Lorraine &  
Sean Savage*



*September 2019 - Learning onboard*



*March 2018*





*Top Left: April 2019: Nature Trip*

*Left: May 2018: Tardebigge Flight Completion*

*Above: Volunteering at the April 2019 WB&DCS 50th Anniversary Celebrations*

*Below: Another Lock Challenge photo from August 2019*





One family who joined WB&DCS because of Home Adventurers, and booked a self steer trip, have shared some wonderful memories of their last trip in August 2019, and sadness that their next booked for May 2020 has been cancelled.

Daughter Ella has drawn a picture of herself, her sister Seren and their 2 dogs. This picture shows the family on board Cecilia watching the sun set. They had a fabulous time and really look forward to taking Cecilia out again when things are back to normal.

From Katie Towers and her family  
*"Thank you so much for giving us such a wonderful opportunity and for trusting us with Cecilia. We had a real adventure".*



*From Kelly Dimmick*

Both my children have additional needs. My son has Asperger's and my daughter the brain disorder, Rett Syndrome\*.

We have taken part in several trips aboard the Cecilia, and hope to have many more!

My son started his home education journey with a severe lack of confidence. It was a great pleasure to see him gain enough confidence with the crew to ask questions on board. By the end of the first trip he was taking part, helping the crew and chatting with them. Not only this but he was interacting with other children on the trip.

Since then, his confidence has grown, he still tells me all about locks, and the canals. He can't wait for his next trip.

My daughter has physical disabilities, but was absolutely included in everything. All the volunteers were dedicated in making sure she could join in. She understands everything, but as Rett affects movement she uses an eyegaze operated communication device and was very excited using her communication device to talk about the canal boat experience.

The crew who have experience of working with people with disabilities and mental health issues, were fantastic.

*\* If you would like to find out more about Rett Syndrome and available support please visit: <https://bit.ly/2S1yRP9>*





# Worcester & Birmingham Canal Feeder at Kings Norton

*Claire Simpson writes....*

I wonder whether those walking on the towpath or boating along the Worcester & Birmingham Canal ever wonder where the water to feed the canal comes from? The answer is the River Rea.

When the Worcester & Birmingham Canal Company were planning the route the obvious choice for a Canal Feeder was the River Rea, which caused considerable consternation to the fifteen mill owners down-stream from the point chosen at Wychall, who relied on this small river to keep their various mill wheels turning, particularly as the level of the river often dropped considerably during dry Summer months. The Canal Company agreed to build two local compensation reservoirs, one at Wychall, now part of Kings Norton Nature Reserve, and another at Lifford, this reservoir became a boating lake (*picture below*) in the 1930s.



At Wychall a channel was built round the north side of the reservoir to serve Wychall metal rolling mill. The steam engine which subsequently drove the rolling mill can be seen in Birmingham Think Tank Museum. Hurst Mill was the other mill and the last mill to grind flour in Birmingham, now the site of a petrol station on Pershore Road South. The outlet at the base of the reservoir dam follows the original route of the River. The main River was re-routed round the south side and channelled underground emerging close to Wychall Lane to the start of the Canal Feeder. There is a junction at this point that controls the water entering the Canal Feeder (*picture below*) allowing the River to flow down to join its original route.



The Canal Feeder travels underground emerging at the corner of Kings Norton Nature Reserve near Meadow Hill Road; it then travels under the houses and Westhill Road emerging in a wooded area of Kings Norton Park. Some people are convinced that this is the River Rae and become alarmed when it runs dry when the Canal does not need topping up! (photo 3: Canal Feeder) It is a great bonus for the Park and daffodils line its bank in the Spring. The Feeder then runs under Pershore Road South emerging on the right hand side of the Playing Fields car park. A footpath follows the Feeder, which is hidden by a hedge. At the end the path there is a bridge leading to Chapel Walk where there is a good view of the point where the Feeder passes between two cottages. There is a wall at the end and water from the Feeder goes into a pipe by the cottage on the left into the Canal.

Continue walking round the Playing Fields towards the Canal and you will reach the point where the Lint Brook, thought to be an AD699 Anglo-Saxon boundary, emerges. The Brook rises in the Hawksley Estate and was culverted when the West Hill Tunnel was built. At this point the Canal overflow outlet drains into the Brook, which flows into the River Rae at the far side of the Playing Fields. A path leads to the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. Walk along the towpath to the point between the cottages where the Feeder enters the Canal. Cottages Nos 1 & 3 were formerly a hostelry called 'The Boat' (*right*) much frequented by canal folk!



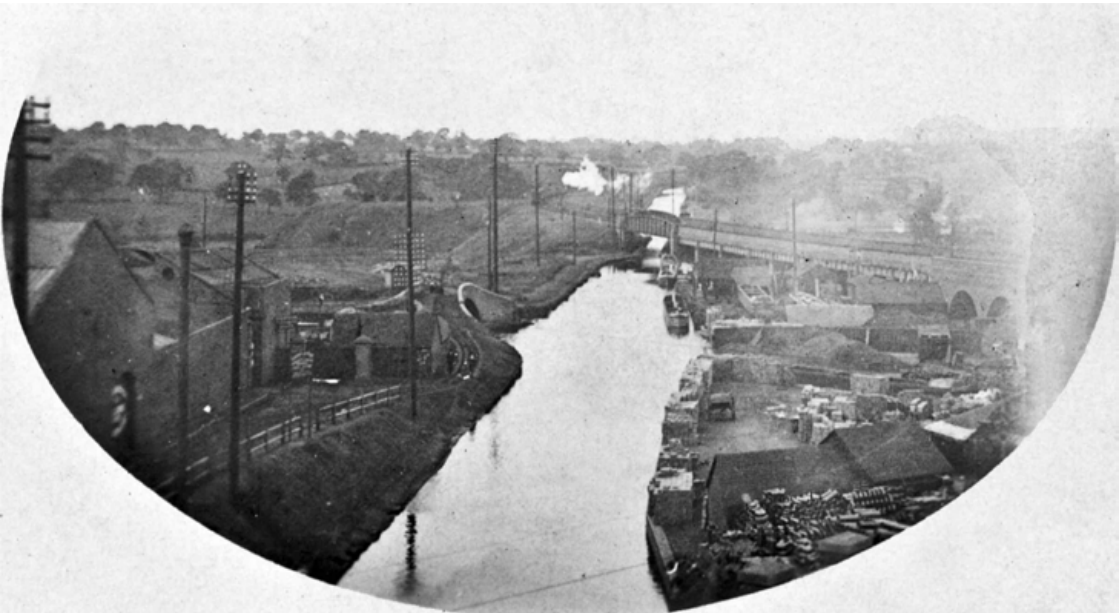


# Lapal Canal Trust

Our friends from the Lapal Canal Trust are looking forward to the excavation of the new winding hole on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal in Selly Oak. As with everything else at the moment this part of the restoration is on hold even though planning permission and most of the funding are in place.



It's slightly further South than the original one shown below.





### **Stephen Rowson asks:**

Can anyone identify the location of the old photograph on the previous page?

There is quite a lot of interest - canal and railway on raised embankment, metal railway bridge and viaduct and brick arches with railway curving away parallel to the canal, boatyard with lots of boats, brick yard and builder suppliers (sand heap and pipes), while on the towpath side is a substantial stone bridge that suggests a canal arm or junction rather than just a basin into the works.

Richard Dean and Tony Conder have each identified the location as Selly Oak.

Looking north, the canal leading away from the photographer is the Worcester & Birmingham, and the one going under the towpath bridge to the left is the Dudley Canal no.2 Line towards Lapal Tunnel. The railway is the Midland Railway's Birmingham West Suburban Line.

Selly Port Junction

LCT has also discovered some memories of the old canal which may 'ring a few bells' with some WB&DCS members. The picture taken by the Bittell reservoir is possibly in the canal society's archives.

## **Old Canal Recollections**

### **The following article is from some memoirs of The Dudley No2 Canal**

1. Canal outing June 1949. In June I was again invited to go on a day trip with the Cornwall, this time in company with Cyril Taplin's converted narrowboat Primrose. This cruise had been planned by the Midlands Branch of the I.W.A. to be a public trip along the Worcester Birmingham canal from Worcester Wharf, Birmingham, to Bittell reservoir and back. The local officers of the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive were becoming worried about all this local publicity so that they had decided that the Board of Trade regulations covering passenger carrying would now apply to motor boats on canals which restricted us to twelve passengers on each boat. Primrose set off first and we followed as soon as we had loaded our quota. At Selly Oak we all stopped to look at the junction with the Dudley canal. The stop lock looked quite usable apart from the heavy padlocks fastening the gates and a dog barked menacingly from the yard of the canal cottages beside the lock to deter a thorough inspection. Here Primrose was only five miles from her home moorings at Halesowen, but separated from them by the collapsed Lapal tunnel.

After the break we set off first. Once past Kings Norton junction we soon reached the next highlight of the trip, the passage of the 2726 yard long Wasthills tunnel. Being the first boat through for some time meant that the air was perfectly clear, so that once we were a little way inside we could see the pinpoint of sunlight at the other end that slowly grew larger until we burst out into the wooded cutting, blinking in the bright light. We made a stop at Hopwood for refreshment at the Hopwood House before continuing to Bittel where the boats were turned. The boats were tied to the reservoir embankment so that people could have a stroll around the reservoir before setting off back. After stopping for tea by the University at Selly Oak we arrived back at Worcester wharf at the end of a perfect June day.

Note:- Cyril Taplin's 'Primrose' (*pictured on next page*) had been converted from a wooden day boat into a holiday cruiser. He had a factory on Mucklows Hill, Halesowen adjacent to the Dudley canal and this was where he normally moored the boat. At that time he was, I believe, chairman of the Midlands Branch of the I.W.A.



*'Primrose' moored at Bittell on the day of the cruise.*

2. Survey expedition October 1952:- By this time I had built myself a wooden dinghy which was powered by an Atco Boatimpeller. I kept this boat on the Stratford canal at Lady Lane Wharf, Earlswood, where there were several small boats moored. Robin Tipping was one of these owners. We tried to keep an eye on the canals in the area and had formed the Stratford Canal Club, forerunner of the Society which eventually started the restoration on the southern section of the Stratford canal.

From my Memoirs:- On a misty late autumn afternoon Robin and I decided to go and see if it would be possible to get a boat along the old Dudley canal from Selly Oak to the Lapal tunnel. We cycled to Selly Oak and approached the junction along the towpath of the Worcester Birmingham canal. We approached very carefully, trying not to disturb the lock keeper's dogs, as we had heard he was not very friendly to strangers. The stop lock with its double set of gates appeared to be in working order but there were chains and padlocks on the gates and paddles. The first lengths of canal past the Birmingham Battery buildings and the old boat dock were not too bad and looked quite capable of being used, even the bridgeholes had a good depth. However once past the reservoir, which was then used as a boating lake, and one reached the council house estate at Alwold Road the amount of rubbish increased considerably. There were two footbridges connecting parts of the estate and under these there was hardly any water at all. The channel narrowed even more as it neared the derelict site of the California brick works, becoming just a muddy ditch at the tunnel portal. We knew the tunnel was closed but were surprised at how small the entrance was. Unfortunately we never had the opportunity to follow this with an attempt by boat.

With hind sight it is a pity I hadn't taken the Brownie Box camera along!!

Tony Whateley, Secretary and Treasurer of the Lapal Canal Trust, has sent '58' some photographs of Goodman's Yard area at Selly Oak (see map on page 28) showing where the winding hole will be built.



The Lapal Canal is the derelict eastern 'half' (5.5 miles) of the otherwise viable Dudley No. 2 Canal in the West Midlands. In 1798, the full 11-miles long canal was opened to provide a lock-free (i.e. level) bypass to avoid canal congestion in central Birmingham. It linked the Dudley No. 1 Canal to the Worcester & Birmingham Canal in Selly Oak, as a 'speedy' route to get coal from the Black Country measures to London. The goal of the Lapal Canal Trust is to restore the canal which was abandoned in 1953. For more information please visit [www.lapal.co.uk](http://www.lapal.co.uk)



All work on 'Cecilia' is currently suspended but she does have her new floor in place!



## Canal & River Trust Coronavirus Update

With the Government extending the Coronavirus lockdown period to 9th May 2020, the Canal & River Trust is accordingly extending the suspension of the normal requirement for boats to move every 14 days to 9th May. During this period, boaters do not need to contact us to tell us they will be staying in one location for more than 14 days.

Boaters who are not currently occupying their boat must not visit or take short trips or breaks on their boat at this time. Those living aboard are strongly advised to limit their navigation, moving only a minimal amount to access essential facilities or services when necessary – or to move along to a quieter mooring if they are finding the towpath too busy for them where they are.

We ask everyone to be considerate and make sure that vital boater facilities and services are accessible to all those that need them.

We will be doing whatever we can to support our customers and protect the waterways so we can return to enjoying them fully when the crisis is over – including continuing to maintain essential boater facilities, with pump out cards available from our online shop, and waste collection etc.

We will keep the situation under active review and update you in line with changing circumstances and Government guidance.

*More information can be found on the Canal & River Trust website.*

# Heritage Photographs

Our society has an archive of historical photos pertaining to our canals. Many of them are in black and white. We've now started on getting them colourised. Here's a selection for you to view.



**Above: Narrowboat 'Governer' enters West Hills Tunnel 1954**



**Above: IWA trip to Withybed Green, Alvechurch 1954**



**Above: 'Saturn' & Passengers at Bittell 1954**



# Canal Word Search

H	H	Q	X	G	O	S	N	L	I	K	E	M	I	L	G	V	B	J	S
R	S	G	N	I	L	K	C	U	D	L	O	C	K	H	N	W	R	E	D
K	L	T	A	O	B	W	O	R	R	A	N	F	Y	A	J	S	I	L	R
P	D	F	L	V	W	I	N	D	I	N	G	H	O	L	E	C	D	O	T
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P	F	H	D	S	C	E	N	U	P	G	O	S	F	Y	Y	R	H	X	D
S	E	T	Q	A	O	M	N	B	N	H	Q	I	F	K	X	E	B	H	D
O	S	D	T	L	O	Q	C	N	U	T	J	L	O	F	V	T	I	G	D
Y	T	R	S	D	C	E	I	U	U	R	E	T	P	W	T	S	R	N	T
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R	L	W	H	A	H	P	H	N	O	D	E	D	F	R	Q	O	G	O	A
G	E	I	W	I	C	G	D	O	L	B	S	B	W	U	N	W	H	M	T
K	A	C	N	L	U	E	W	A	I	R	E	D	D	U	R	Y	A	D	H
K	C	H	U	A	R	T	N	G	V	G	T	I	L	L	E	R	M	U	E
M	B	F	G	E	S	A	G	H	W	A	L	V	E	C	H	U	R	C	H
A	J	U	R	A	C	E	G	N	E	H	R	O	O	M	P	K	U	I	Y

ALVECHURCH  
BOWHAULING  
CECILIA  
FESTIVAL  
HANBURYTURN  
MOORHEN  
RUDDER  
TILLER  
VINESPARK  
WINDINGHOLE

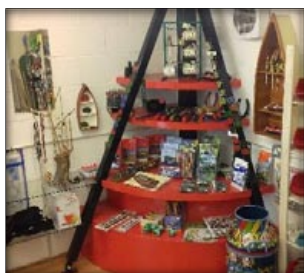
ASTWOOD  
BRIDGE  
DROITWICH  
FLIGHT  
LIMEKILNS  
MOORING  
SILT  
TOWPATH  
VOLUNTEERS  
WINDLASS

BIRMINGHAM  
CANAL  
DUCKLINGS  
GUNWHALES  
LOCK  
NARROWBOAT  
TARDEBIGGE  
TUNNEL  
WANDERER  
WORCESTER



**In Line with Government regulations regarding Corona Virus some of the advertisements on the following pages may not be available to you at the moment.**

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We normally hold our regular monthly meetings at the Alvechurch Boat Centre, Scarfield Wharf, Alvechurch, B48 7SQ (just behind the award winning Weighbridge pub). Meetings take place on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm which are currently suspended (except July and August when we enjoy a summer evening walk). If you are in the least bit curious then please come along, as non-members are always welcome. You do not need to be a boat owner as most of our members are not. The Weighbridge Pub is just at the side of the meeting room if that helps! The meeting room has wheelchair access for those that require it. If you require any other assistance please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Presentations have included Historic Environment of the Canal in Worcester, Coal For The Ashby Canal, Cotswold Canal Restoration, Idle Women, The Cadbury Story, Lapal Canal Trust Restoration, Hereford & Gloucester Canal Restoration and Canal du Midi to name but a few.

Further details are available on our website, Facebook and Twitter where you can find out lots more about us (details below).

Our own society narrowboat 'Cecilia' is available for use by groups or individuals for half day and day trips\* (crews available). Self Steer cruises require you to be a member of the society. \*Terms & Conditions Apply.

We hope to welcome as many new faces as possible from members of the community.

**Please visit our website: [wbdcs.org.uk](http://wbdcs.org.uk)**

**(where you can also download a membership application form)**

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At this unprecedented time, our priority is to support the national effort to keep people safe.

- Whilst our towpaths remain open, **use of them should now be limited**
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- Strictly observe social distancing at all times
- Follow the latest advice from Government

For the latest information please visit our website:  
[canalrivertrust.org.uk](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk)

For information on coronavirus, visit [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://gov.uk/coronavirus)



Canal &  
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