

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'*



Ducklings on the W&B, Alvechurch

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

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

*Front Cover: Ducklings on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal at Alvechurch.
Picture by Mary Green*

The Magazine of the Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

Issue 551 July/August 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

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

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

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

Copy date for the next issue: August 14th 2020

Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

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

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Chair's Notes

Hi Everyone

What a funny old 3 months we have had. We are still in lockdown but it is good to see some of the restrictions being eased to allow a little flexibility. Boat owners will be allowed to visit their boats and to stay overnight. They can even cruise as long as everyone follows the social distancing rules. How ridiculous then were the scenes at Bournemouth Beach on Thursday 25th June. The Government had just announced that as from 4th July social distancing could be reduced to 1 metre as long as face masks were used. But thousands decided that they could not wait until 4th July and descended on Bournemouth in their hordes totally ignoring the 2 metre rule and very few of them even wearing face masks. After 14 weeks of lockdown with the majority of the population adhering to the rules and acting cautiously these people can only be described as selfish with a total disregard to what pressure they might put the NHS under if they create a second spike. Sorry - that's my rant over.

The business sector of the waterways must be in a very perilous situation with many companies reporting huge losses. Because boats have been locked down the sales of diesel will have been zero, maintenance yards will have lost revenue, hire fleets have lost millions with holidays having to be cancelled and even now with the easing of restrictions the uptake in holidays afloat will be very slow to build up. Many overseas customers are still being advised not to travel to the UK. Many like Gill and me will not take the risk of doing things too early which means that any company that was operating on the brink before the lockdown might never recover.

We ourselves have lost the income from St. Richard's Canal Festival and any donations we might have had from trips on 'Cecilia'. As you know, we reported in the last issue that we had committed ourselves to spending a sizeable amount on sorting out the interior of 'Cecilia'. At the time we were looking at expenditure in the region of £4,000 - £5000 which would have been sustainable. However once the work had started we found that the situation was far more serious than we first thought and to date we have now spent in excess of £10,000 and the work is not yet complete. It is to be commended that members of the 'Cecilia' subcommittee have grasped the seriousness of the situation and are looking at ways of getting a grant from a number of different sources. One of the main obstacles of course is that most grants are given for work to be done; they do not give grants retrospectively so we are having to think outside the box.

I attended Ann Morley's funeral on Wednesday 20th May which was a very sad affair with only 10 people allowed into the chapel. It seemed very strange that Dad had to be 2 metres apart from the rest of the family. It was another heart rending situation coming out of coronavirus.

Looking forward, 2021 is the 250th Anniversary of the opening of the Droitwich Barge Canal and we will be celebrating this anniversary during St. Richard's Canal Festival 2021. Because we have lost out in 2020 John Hemingway suggested that we might consider making 2021 a 4 day event which to be honest I am slowly warming towards. We know from the experience of the opening festival that dignitaries, councillors and other VIPs prefer any celebrations to be held on a weekday so my thoughts are that we could open the festival on the Thursday and have Friday as the Anniversary inviting guests to celebrate. As we did for the opening we could use 'Cecilia' and 'Pamela May 2' for a trip down the Barge Canal. Just initial thoughts which will be discussed once the planning committee is back up and running. If anyone has any other ideas please let me know.

David Wheeler



Editorial

Hello Again Dear Readers

I do hope that you are all safe and well during these unprecedented times we find ourselves in. There has not much really been happening within your society during the past couple of months but that does not mean that the committee has been inactive - far from it owing to on-line conference calls. As reported elsewhere, the society is considering activities for next year particularly the St. Richard's Canal Festival, which hopefully will be celebrating an event at least on a par with 2011 when the two Droitwich Canals officially re-opened. Next year the Droitwich Barge Canal is 250 years old being one of the early ones to be cut within the so-called main canal building era. Yes it may have been abandoned before World War Two, left derelict and unloved for too many years, but since the re-opening it has been a spectacular success bringing so much to so many. More on this in the future.

At the moment the canal system is slowly coming to life but the traffic is nowhere near what it



normally is at this time of year. However, the waters are teeming with fish and water fowl rearing their young (*left*). Plant life too is in abundance which is all good to see as Mary's Nature Notes will confirm. Some of you may have seen on Midlands television news recently, a feature about the Alvechurch Boat Centre, and how they have been planning for an eventual commencement of business. There were a few interviews with staff, all of whom we know as society supporters, with the general theme appearing to be one of optimism. It has since been reported to us that

bookings have now suddenly 'gone through the roof' possibly because whole families may travel in relative safety on a boat and not have to necessarily mix in larger crowds. Not needing to travel abroad may also be a factor at least for British based families. Having said that, many boats have been hired in the past by people from abroad. It remains to be seen if this is the case this year. Perhaps other companies would care to let us know their situation which we can publicise if so wished?

Social distancing on canal towpaths, in parts at least, is not so easy. However, it can be achieved if towpath users are careful and considerate towards each other and not rushing along as though speed is of the essence. C&RT, quite correctly state that pedestrians have priority on towpaths

which should always be respected and so avoid any accidents, which also includes falling into the water which has been observed of late. 'More haste less speed' springs to mind!

The towpaths have certainly helped people to 'escape' daily lock down routines even though C&RT was advising in the earlier stages that extreme care should be taken in relation to other users and if possible to avoid using at all. Hopefully we have moved on from then even though care, respect and social distancing still apply. It is such a shame that some, clearly a minority, have chosen to deface some of the structures on our local canals. We are not talking about properly planned and presented street art as is being developed along the canals such as in the Sheffield area, but what appears to be just mindless graffiti.



'58' is unsure at this point in time just how this damage is to be rectified but if the help of this society is required please do let us know, particularly Bill Lambert our Volunteer Co-ordinator.

Changing the subject a little, as part of the society's need for volunteers, we are always pleased to see other people taking part with a particular success story being the 'Cecilia' group. However, if there is anyone out there who fancies helping out with committee work, or even this magazine, please do get in touch even if just to find out what goes on. This canal society has a reputation of 'punching above its weight' and hopefully we can continue this but we always need help with the many varied tasks that require volunteer input. So please do have a think and come along to ask or even just put your name forward particularly during these difficult times. There will always be a welcome - sounds a bit like a song!

The last on-line edition of '58', which was the largest ever we believe, made use of some old photographs which had been donated to the society some time ago by long standing member and activist Colin Scrivener. Unfortunately we omitted on the main copy to credit Colin for these and so we are very happy to correct the error in this edition. Colin has had many years' experience of boating on the canals particularly when they were in serious decline and in danger of being lost all together. One of the pictures of a full boat trip looking as though it is attempting to moor up near 'The Crown' at Withybed Green, actually shows Colin with the boat pole. You haven't changed a bit Colin! The article submitted by the Lapal Canal Trust was taken from Colin's memoirs for which '58' is again very grateful. However, Colin was not content with this and has sent '58' even more tales from the past which readers can enjoy further on.

At this point in time it is very difficult to give any indication of when the society will be able to re-commence its usual very varied activities. This of course includes our regular monthly meetings, Summer walks and the Annual General Meeting which we have to arrange in order to comply with our charitable status. The notices will have to go out at some point but it may be that the current committee has to remain in position longer because of the situation. Watch this space and social media!

Many many thanks to the subscribers of articles to this edition which will again be going out on-line and for the foreseeable future. Please do let us know if any membership details require amendments particularly including email addresses.

Enjoy the read and please keep safe.

John Hemingway

'Around & About'

Canal Features in Worcester.

This wood carving of a swan (*below left*) is one of the latest additions to the canal and river bank in Worcester. '58' is unsure who completed this work of art and would be grateful of any further information about this.

Meanwhile where is this much older structure (*below right*) and what actually is it? Let's know your suggestions in the usual way.



Burger Van

'58' received many comments about the burger trailer (*right*) that had been left on the C&RT car park at Alvechurch for several months. It was moved at least once onto an area within the car park that was possibly due to be planted and has at last been now been cleaned and taken away.

We do not know who owned it or whether they had permission to leave it there and so those readers who jokingly thought a new service was to be provided on the site now know that will not be happening. '58', however, remains concerned that the access gate to the site appears to be left wide open on too many occasions.



Kingfisher Sightings

One of the most attractive of birds we sometimes see on our canals is the Kingfisher (*left*). They are stunningly beautiful, fly very close to the water's surface and are notoriously difficult to photograph being particularly shy.

We have been lucky enough to picture this one close up near Tardebigge Old Wharf. If readers have any other pictures to share please let us know.

Letter to The Editor

Hello John

Just read the Spring edition of '58' Magazine, which I enjoyed very much, especially the historical material. My thanks to you and your colleagues for producing the online magazine.

Like you we are missing the canal and the Weighbridge. Hope shortly to pay a visit to our boat for a day, then maybe a few nights.

Hope you are well. We are ok, in complete isolation.

From Ian and Vivien not on 'Persephone'

Virtual Committee Meeting June 2020

The committee held its second virtual meeting on 18th June. (The first, on 21st May, was reported in a recent '58 Update'.)

The main points were:

- Treasurer Trevor Hyde presented the monthly accounts. Financial activity has centred on the work on Cecilia, which has restarted. Up to now over £10,000 has been spent on the current repairs. The committee asked for an update on how many more days Rico would take to complete the essential repairs, which are all we can undertake to fund.
- Trevor reported a small grant from Waitrose, originally for the St. Richard's Festival but which we would still receive.
- The 'Cecilia' subcommittee are working on a bid for a small grant to assist with the cost of repairs.
- Bill Lambert reported that volunteering for physical tasks would be possible now with suitable safeguarding measures. However, due to the age of most of our volunteers we are unlikely to start yet.
- The committee considered whether to have a Virtual AGM in September but decided instead to postpone the AGM to January/February 2021 and hold a real meeting then.
- The annual accounts have been audited so these can be presented to the members through 58 at the normal time, and the return made to the Charity Commission, rather than wait for the AGM.
- The committee agreed not to raise the membership subscription but keep it at the same level. It would be useful to have more funds, but this year members have not enjoyed the benefits they usually did. Members can give an extra donation if they wish.
- Planning for next year's St. Richard's Festival will restart as soon as meetings can begin.
- We don't expect to be able to run our usual members' meetings at the Weighbridge in September, but will await government guidance on future meetings. It may become possible to organise a walk, and we may be able to meet in larger premises with social distancing. No decisions will be made yet.



'Nature Notes'

Mary Green

I am still keeping within walking distance of home, but that means I can cover the canal from Tardebigge to Hopwood. A strange thing here this year has been the lack of young among waterfowl. There have been lots of mallard ducklings, now down to smaller numbers of well-grown young ducks. But the pair of Canada geese who have nested here at Withybed for six years failed to nest after minding their patch all winter. I haven't seen other geese with broods until recently I saw a goose with one well-grown gosling. The swan pair which nest up near Bittell did so again this year and people have seen cygnets, but when I went the nest was empty and the swans have been seen with no cygnets. I haven't seen any moorhen chicks either.

Maybe you've got them all down in Droitwich or up in Brum - please let me know! One thing that worries me is the parts of the canal have become like human motorways during the lockdown with so many people walking, running and cycling. Certainly the site of the swans' nest was on a route once quiet but now busy as it is on a popular app of local walks. I wouldn't be surprised if the parents moved the cygnets away as soon as they could, which might have put them in danger of predators. Moorhens may have nested and lost their young as they are very shy of people and leave their nests when disturbed. There are also reports of more aggression from predators like rats and birds of prey who have less human rubbish to feed on during lockdown. But I'm sure there were fewer nests anyway. After a mild winter I would expect the opposite.



Top Right: Elderflower

Centre Right: Climbers by 'The Dead Arm'

Bottom Right: Hogweed Close Up



They are full of insects and seed for birds. The trees have all done well, with great hawthorn blossom now replaced by elderflower, the last of the fruiting blossoms.

The patch by Bridge 60, stripped by the dredging company, has recovered quite well. There are moon daisies and knapweed, mugwort, camomile and melilot. The worst parts have suffered from waterlogging then drought, and are still rather bare. Even here pineapple-weed, hedge mustard and other bare ground plants have come through. There is still not much of the ground cover like bird's foot trefoil, which brings the blue butterflies. but some medick is starting to return.

I had good walks near Bittell reservoir, where the grounds are all private but you can peep in from some points. There is a good reed bed there which was absolutely throbbing with reed warblers. They are little brown birds, hard to see and identify, but their song is loud, varied and absolutely relentless – they seem to be able to sing for minutes on end without drawing breath.



Reed warblers are host birds for the cuckoo, so I hope some of you heard it this year. Several of my neighbours here in Withybed heard it early in May – for the first time in years. Welcome back! The right habitats – native plants growing in their natural groups – are vital for all our insects, birds and mammals.

Top Left: Reed Warbler Territory

Centre Left: Moon Daisies

Bottom Left: Regrown Vegetation Bridge 60

Above: Hogweed next to 'Cecilia'

However, plants along the canal have done really well. Almost every native flower through May and June has benefited from the warm weather and being near water. Now it's magnificent hogweed, taller than me and as big as plates. No wonder people mistake it for giant hogweed, which can harm the skin. Our native hogweed is a good food plant when young (stir-fried!) and the seeds make a delicious spice.

Reflections On The Cut

Joe Morley writes....

As near as I can remember, it was in the early 70s that the cut came into my life. I was talking to a young pilot who had found flying a helicopter to be not what he was 'cut' out for, and he had just been told that the air force would be taking a couple of weeks to work out what they could do with him. "I think I'll go and do the Llangollen," he said to me. When I asked how one "did the Llangollen" he launched into a description of the canals and how they fitted into his life, how the peace he found there helped him deal with the nastier bits of what it takes to earn a living.

In 30 minutes, I was converted from an ignorant bystander to a committed canalcoholic. Somehow, his words opened up a whole new world which I was determined to explore as soon as my next bit of leave came up. So it was that we hired our first boat and spent a magical October 'doing' the Llangollen. My pilot friend hadn't told me about any of the downsides of canal cruising, like dealing with virtually derelict locks (it was c.1971, remember), or the fact that 4 mph was not only the max speed you were allowed to travel, it was totally unattainable on the Llangollen which was very narrow and had a marked flow of water down towards Hurleston reservoir. Overcoming these problems, I became totally hooked on the cut and everything to do with it. I don't know if it had anything to do with it, but the next time I could afford to go cruising on the cut it was after a change of wife.

By this time, I was an expert. I mean, after several years' issues of *Waterways World*, I knew all there was to know; and, after all, I had 'done' the Stourport Ring in 2½ days in 'Blackbird', a 47ft now-retired Alvechurch Boat Centres hire craft (which may also have contributed to the change of wife). Anyway, there we were, looking round Alvechurch Marina one day, when we came upon two lovely people who turned out to be Barrie and Brenda Morris. They very gently told us that, no, they didn't actually live on their charming little 35-foot boat, *Penshala*, but would we like to come aboard and have a cup of tea?

So began our introduction to real boating. Whereas I'd been an enthusiastic hirer up to now, I was determined that one day I would have my own boat, but a thousand quid for every foot of boat seemed to put the idea on the very back burner. However, in the late 80s, a profitable excursion into the property market breathed life into my daydreams. To cut a long story very short, we got Mike Adkins at Stoke-on-Trent Boatbuilders to convert our dreams into 60ft of hard steel which we chose to name 'Joanne'. He was so proud of what he'd done that he put her in the 1989 Birmingham Boat Show. Somewhere, I have a photo of my beautiful boat sitting incongruously on the back of an articulated lorry at Junction 10 of the M6 on its way down to the NEC.

Some weeks later we were chugging down the Staffs & Worcs on our way past Penkridge, south to our first home mooring. Suddenly, out from behind a bush leapt two characters who, judging by their dress, had clearly taken refuge there at least a hundred years earlier. Yes, right down to the lovely bonnet and voluminous skirts, and bowler hat at a jaunty angle; it was the same Barrie and Brenda come to make sure we didn't scratch 'Joanne's' gleaming paintwork during its maiden voyage, and had dressed accordingly. Sadly, Brenda was taken from us, way too early, but Barrie and she were a lovely couple and the very core of the extended waterway family. Before long, we had joined the Worcester & Birmingham Canal Society as it was then, and one of the happiest periods of my entire life saw my wife Ann taking on the Society Shop and me (without even a word processor to my name) taking on the Editorship of *Fifty Eight*. We even managed to weave cruising into doing the shop; around 30 years ago you could have found us flogging stuff off the boat while moored in Gas Street Basin. I don't know how many bye-laws we'd infringed, but we had a whale of a time infringing them. ***(article continues on page 16)***

The following 3 pages are reprinted from 'Waterways World' November 1989 and we give our thanks.

Andy Burnett visits two boats which won major awards at this year's IWA National Rally

WINNERS '89



Waterways World Trophy – for the best amateur fit-out. Winner: MUFFIN No 3

As the IWA judge stepped aboard *Muffin No 3*, he announced that he was looking for innovation. "Everything that has gone into this boat", responded a younger Smith archly, "has been tried and tested over twenty years".

Not least the Smiths themselves: husband David is chairman of the North Lancs and Cumbria branch of the IWA; wife Audrey is past branch chairwoman and presently a member of the IWA's North-West Regional Committee. Younger Smiths, having flown the nest, are in the habit of pecking into local IWA activities wherever they alight. The Smiths started boating with *Muffin*, a Teal glass-fibre shell that they fitted out in 1966. *Muffin Too*, a Creighton Inlander-based Smith fit-out took them (in between canal digs) through to 1985 when plans were laid for a narrowboat.

For twelve months they toured boatyards before selecting an R&D Fabrications shell on the basis of price, availability – and low stage payments compared to those required by immediate competitors. Shell plating thicknesses were specified as 10/6/4mm (hull bottom/sides/superstructure) and the boat length as 47ft 6in. However R&D finally built it, by agreement, as a 50 footer for the same price, presumably to avoid having to chop 2ft 6in from standard plate lengths. A Thornycroft/BL 1.8 diesel was also fitted by R&D.

One of the first fitting-out jobs was to install a Squirrel solid fuel stove. It kept the cabin warm and morale high during winter months, when it was mainly fed on timber off-cuts.

Ply hull side linings were faced with the same green/grey flecked berber carpet that was to be laid on the floor, the Smiths reasoning that this would best disguise the unmovable remnants of tar and mud that are brought aboard during enthusiastic cruising. Cabin sides and deckhead are lined in oak-faced ply with mahogany trim, as seen and admired in Len Beauchamp's fitting-out at Colecraft. The oak is satin varnished, although David Smith's first attempts came out glossy. Only after he had taken a couple of cans of paint back did the paint supplier advise that the instruction on the can to stir well should read "stir until your arm drops off, and then keep stirring, to avoid a gloss finish".

The other main visual element of the interior is oak-faced doors – used in the galley and on storage units throughout. These (the doors, not base units) were bought from a kitchen unit supplier but are of real rather than ersatz oak and were selected to tone with the cabin linings. Many are to be found under berths – the Smiths, through experience, are not fans of top-loading storage. Oak doors are also used as an effective visual balance to the Squirrel stove

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Marion Munk Rose Bowl – for the best narrow-beam pleasure craft. Winner: JOANNE.

The Morleys' story could be the fantasy of many boaters. For 17 years they had hired narrowboats, not able to buy their own. Joe Morley, a flight lieutenant in the RAF, knew he was to be posted to Cornwall or to Scotland but couldn't find out which. So he and wife Ann decided arbitrarily to buy a house roughly halfway between the two. When they came to sell the house, they found that its value had risen beyond their wildest expectations. It was then, at the time of the 1987 IWA National Rally at Hawkesbury, that they started their hunt for a new narrowboat. They arranged to visit several builders but on arriving at the second yard on their list realised that they need look no further. The company was Stoke-on-Trent Boatbuilding. To obtain an earlier delivery they agreed to take a boat scheduled for exhibition at the Birmingham Boat Show. There they were flattered to find that their admiration of SoTB's elaborate but precise joinery was shared, not just by the masses that walked through but by hard-bitten professionals. Then to the Rally. Entry for the Marion Munk Rose Bowl was not an SoTB plan but a spur-of-the-moment decision by Joe. He was partly motivated by the boat's success at other rallies, privately entered during the Morleys' extensive cruising this summer.

In anticipation of doing the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, the Morleys settled on a length of 60ft. *Joanne's* shell is of 10/6/4mm plating. Unusually cabin sides are shot blasted (to prevent mill scale shortening the life of the painted livery). And hull rubbing strakes are continuously welded along top and bottom edges. Joe Morley's verdict on the shell: "As smooth as a baby's bum". The boat's cratch is in traditional style but its outer panels hinge back on a centre post to provide easier access to the fore deck and a view forward through the glazed cabin bulkhead. Cabin side windows are brass anodised.

The Morleys specified a Russell Newbery DM2 diesel because "it is the best". In its engine room, forward of the back cabin, it is not entirely silent but the slow, easy note is never intrusive. SoTB built a comprehensive mesh guard round the front of the engine to shield its various moving bits. Although space was always at a premium at the planning stage, six feet given over to the engine room has proven unexpectedly useful as utility space. It is fully lined and battery banks are panelled over. The boat's low voltage cabin system runs on 24 volts – to reduce voltage drop and to simplify conversion (via the underfloor Redline mechanical inverter) for supplying a 240 volt system. Ann's suggestion that every DM2 should be supplied with a "Tidydry" pull-out washing line to make best use of the massive engine's clothes

Contd on page 61



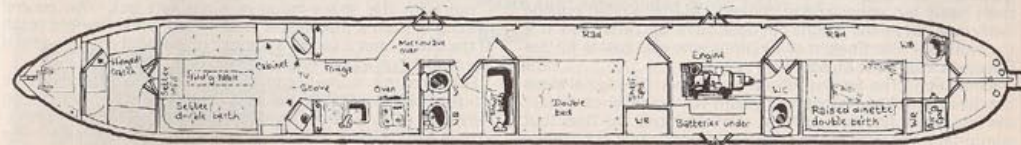
Winner JOANNE continued

drying qualities may turn RN fans apologetic. Among them Joe who is more concerned to secure a set of the brass cylinder head covers first displayed by RN at the Rally.

The chosen cabin layout is unusual. It includes a conventional arrangement of permanent double bed, toilet compartment and open plan galley/saloon, but aft of the engine room is given over to self-contained guest accommodation. This back cabin is a modern version of a boatman's cabin . . . with gold-plated taps. In one corner is a vanity unit with gold taps "because no suitable brass ones were available". It also contains a raised dinette/double berth and its own separate toilet compartment. An Alde central heating boiler is located just to the left of the steerer's step, so that it can keep the steerer's nether regions warm in the same way as a traditional boatman's range. The prop shaft runs under the raised dinette, so the off-set passageway has full headroom. Although this back cabin complex takes up 11ft of cabin space, it has proved valuable in daily use as a utility room for a multitude of activities, like sewing (using a 240-volt machine), route planning – and for eating on the move. It also allows the other crew member to sit in sociable contact with the steerer's feet, rather than at the far end of the boat.

Although *Joanne* is mainly intended for two-handed cruising, it can sleep up to six. Built-in settees in the forward saloon can be bridged to make an occasional double. And a fill-in upholstery section, complete with back rest, can be inserted on the door step to convert the unit to a C-shaped settee when entertaining. A drop-leaf table, which fits into floor sockets, is slim enough

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MUFFIN No 3: Top Left: Settees convert to double beds by dropping seat backrest over a neat slide-out support. Bottom left: Pantry also slides out. Centre top: Honeycomb anti-slip deck matting and Philip Speight's lively decorations. **JOANNE:** Centre bottom: Folding crutch. Right: Nouveau boatman's cabin – useful for guests, as work room and for keeping stealer company.

Winner MUFFIN No 3 continued

latter can be used as a drying cupboard. The boiler supports mini-radiators which run, discreetly behind protective fascias, along hull side skirtings. The boiler can also heat a calorifier, although a separate heating coil exploits the engine's waste heat to provide hot water quickly. Efficient lagging keeps it hot overnight.

Even compared to other spaces in the boat, the engine room is generously large. It is fully lined and the engine is boxed-in. Extending the boxing along the port side of the engine room has provided utility storage and a raised occasional berth. Storage for tools and spare parts is concealed behind other panels: David's on-board preparedness for any eventuality extends to a full workshop toolkit. The engine room's length allows a Di Blasi folding motorbike to be garaged without annoying passers-through. The bike is a valuable aid to week-ending round the country, avoiding the need to position a shuttle of cars at casting-off and tying-up places.

Two brass tillers are kept: the longer for long-distance, winter cruising, when the steerer stands inside the doors; the shorter for manoeuvring. On the aft deck, rubber honeycomb matting – similar to the antislip plastic Technotiles used in posh boats but considerably cheaper. Muffin's crisp outside livery was not by the Smiths but does command attention. It is the work of Philip Speight of Skipton, who also paints for the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum.

Innovation? The Smiths' fit-out is not short of original ideas but these have been tempered by hard-won experience. In fact the impact of finding a private craft designed for Real (but comfortable) Boating stirs an uneasy suspicion that the general run of new narrowboats may, in contrast, be heading towards largely immobile floating cottages. 


Winner JOANNE continued

when folded to allow passage through without removing it. Also in the saloon, a Little Wenlock stove and one of SoTBB's specialities – a beautifully constructed glass-fronted cabinet.

But it is the galley that really wows visitors and sends rival boatbuilders away muttering disconsolately. Every detail is precisely constructed and ornately detailed. No joinery item is bought-out and a considerable weight of afrrormsia hardwood is used. The most eye-catching part is the high level cupboard that houses a microwave oven. Its fascia, pierced with ventilation slots, resembles a classical portico. So that it should not intrude too much into the galley, the microwave is part recessed into the toilet compartment where its rear housing extends into a cabinet.

Compared to this splendour, cabin linings are unassuming. Hull sides are covered in carpet, cabin sides and deckhead in t&g boards – although these are given a beaded profile and no end joints can be seen. Furniture elsewhere in the boat also seems muted after the crescendo of the galley but here too are heavily panelled doors and intricate cabinets. SoTBB's craftsman responsible for detail joinery is Bill Shone, reported by the Morleys to be a quiet character who directs any extroversion into his woodworking.

In the 6ft long toilet, a hip bath/shower, vanity unit and Sealand (née Mansfield) Traveler fresh water flush pump-out wc. A canopy over the permanent double in the centre cabin matches duvet and pillow covers. It suggests a four-poster bed – but with the space-intrusive posts left out. The central heating system's thermostat is mounted within hand's reach of the bed so that it can be switched on without emerging from the covers.

For the moment, Joanne provides a weekend retreat. But the Morleys look forward to Joe's retirement from the RAF, when they plan an extended expedition into the inland waterways. This is with a view to finding somewhere to put down roots from which Joe can realise the only ambition that turns him on after flying jets... to be a waterways journalist. 

(continued from page 11) I had grandiose ambitions of cruising every available mile of navigable canal in England. We didn't quite make it, of course, but we did get to the IWA National at Waltham Abbey where 'Joanne' was the Stoke-on-Trent show boat. Little did the hordes of visitors know that this lovely-looking craft didn't have a single volt of electricity to its name, because of a rather catastrophic systems failure. We got to Gloucester Docks, for another rally, and Chester for no good reason except that we just wanted to. As you do.

I'd fondly imagined leaving the RAF and taking up residence on 'Joanne', but Ann exercised her considerable powers of persuasion and stopped us committing financial suicide. She did allow me to get a word processor, though, and I like to think Fifty Eight benefitted from entering the digital age. My first PC boasted 512Kb of memory – almost unbelievable in those days – and you could fit an entire issue on one floppy disc. Remember them? *(over 200mb these days! - Ed)*

We had 'Joanne' for about 6 years before I had to admit that we simply couldn't go on burning the financial candle at both ends. Selling the boat was like selling the children, and we missed her with a passion similar to that usually reserved for losing a beloved dog. But our association with the Society lived on, and so many of the members have been so very kind in their messages of condolence when Ann was taken from us in April. Let's hope that the present restrictions on our activities will soon be but a painful memory, and we can begin resuming life where we left off at the end of March. Quite apart from the sadness at losing Ann, the last few months have been a wonderful opportunity to dig out all my old cruising logs and reflect on all the good things that have grown out of my incurable addiction: that of being a committed 'canalaholic'.

Joe Morley

Lockdown On The Canal

Mary Green writes....

It's been interesting to see the effect of the coronavirus epidemic on our canal, or at least on the stretch I know between Tardebigge and Hopwood. Through the first month the waters went really quiet. The C&RT gave very clear guidance on their website about only using the canal for essential journeys. Boaters on the whole obeyed the ban on moving boats, though one or two people ended up living in unexpected places in lockdown. Some marinas found themselves homes for people stuck there, and some quiet spots became extended stopovers for people who couldn't get where they were going. On the whole it looked well controlled. I only saw one rogue canoeist on an inflatable.

I'm sure those of you who own boats were pleased to be able to visit and maintain them during the slight relaxation in May.

Not being a boater myself, and having wildlife as the centre of my enjoyment of the canal, I found this quietness very welcome. I did miss the anglers though. They too obeyed the ban very well and it was great to see them come back. They are mostly adept at social distancing anyway!

But the towpath became busier than usual. I don't quite know where all the new runners, walkers and cyclists came from round here! I have a public footpath outside my door which is usually fairly quiet except for the odd ramblers' walk and groups of young people doing their Duke of Edinburgh's award, who I have happily helped to find their way in the past. These groups have gone but hundreds of individuals, couples and families seem to have suddenly discovered walking! It's lovely to see them all, but it can cause difficulties on footpaths, including the towpath.

Again, the C&RT gave very clear advice about walking, running and cycling: the difference is that most of these people won't have read it. The towpath is narrow in places but using the vegetation at the side and the frequent wider patches, pedestrians can pass each other with two metres distance. In fact, it became quite a pleasure to see how people stood back for each other and

greeted and thanked each other. We were asked in the early days to avoid stretches with many moored boats, and keep a distance from boats, but I didn't see many people observing this.

Cyclists should give way to pedestrians on the towpath, even when there isn't social distancing in place, and even more when it is. Unfortunately, not many of them know this. It isn't easy but it means things like slowing down and giving an audible signal if you come up behind walkers so they can stand aside for you to get past. It means slowing down or even stopping if you are coming up to a narrow stretch and can wait for pedestrians to cross you on a wider stretch. It certainly doesn't mean riding determinedly on down the middle of the towpath! There was a degree of towpath rage around this.

One thing I did notice was generally an improvement in the way people controlled their dogs. Most people have been keeping them on leads, presumably due to concerns about contacts with other people, and it has improved life on the towpath for people, other dogs and wildlife.

As for the C&RT, we haven't seen much of them round here. I thought at first they were not going to do as much vegetation cutting as usual, but I think their contractors have done more or less what they usually do. They've mown the flowering vegetation down along hard-edged stretches even though no-one's mooring there, which I think is a bit of a shame but they seem to be just trying to keep things normal. There are a couple of derelict boats along my stretch which have been there for months. One drifted loose but it has been re-moored, so someone is looking out for things.

I understand that down from Tardebigge the canal has been the subject of police searches connected to a disappearance and suspected murder. There are also disturbing reports of cyclists being pushed into the canal towards Birmingham. So perhaps our canal has not been as peaceful as I think. Our canal appeared on local TV news recently, showing ABC getting their boats ready to start up again. I saw them filming, and it was great to think that things might start to go back to normal soon.

Covid Update from Canal & River Trust

Being a Good Boater

The Government is now permitting overnight stays at locations other than your primary residence and, while holidaying in a handful of other countries is possible, many are opting for a staycation. Just earlier this week ABC Boat Hire reported a 315% increase in bookings compared to the same week last year.

This means that we can all expect things to get busy on the cut rather quickly as we head into the peak summer months. There's likely to be more first time boaters this year and it'd be great to set an example for them to follow. Some may even appreciate your advice (given while socially distanced of course).

We'll be out and about to help where we can but it may take a little longer to get to you as we all make extra considerations for coronavirus and given that lots more people will be escaping for a day's, or longer, boating.

Long-term readers of C&RT's Boaters' Update may remember that, with your help, we came up with an acronym for Good Boater a few years ago. It listed the things that you said good boaters do:

- Go slow before and during passing moored boats
- Only run your generator between 8am and 8pm and be neighbourly and considerate
- On mooring up at busy spots check you haven't left a big gap and don't overstay

- Don't moor opposite winding holes, on bends, or near to bridges
- Bag it and bin it (especially your dog's) – never fly tip on the towpath
- Only stay on a water point or a lock landing when you're filling up or locking through
- Ask to share locks (and the work) and don't steal those set against you
- Take time to check all paddles and gates are shut after you've used a lock
- Enjoy the Waterways
- Relax!

Of course, given the current coronavirus context, there are other considerations. First and foremost, government guidance should be followed at all times. When out on your boat this means, along with others, observing social distancing and washing hands regularly (and definitely before and after using any waterway structures such as locks and facilities).

The Story behind the pictures in the last 58

Colin Scrivener writes....

During the summer of 1954 I went on several of the I.W.A. Midlands Branch events that had been taking place. About once every month two of the committee members, Frank Matty and Bernard Barker, had been organising public trips down the Worcester & Birmingham canal. At that time British Railways had just stopped using their day boats for local haulage and the fleet was mothballed at the Bloomfield interchange basin near Coseley. Frank, who had a canal haulage business at Deepfields junction, loaned three of these ex railway boats and they had built frames supporting tarpaulin covers to give some shelter in bad weather. He used his tug Governor to pull them. I went on a couple of these outings to help steer the boats, one of which was the Saturn, later sold to Peter Froud to be converted into a hotel boat and since restored. The boats were loaded at Gas Street basin and we went to Witherby Green where we unloaded the passengers so that they could go for a walk or a pint at the Crown while we carried on to the winding hole at Scarfield Wharf to turn the boats. On the return journey we stopped at Lower Bittell reservoir so that people could explore. These outings were very popular with the public and the boats were always very full.

The pictures were taken by Mr Jones. He was a photographer for the Birmingham Post and his wife wrote articles about canals for the paper.

IWA Coach outing to Ellesmere 1954

Colin Scrivener writes....

In July 1954 I went on a Midlands Branch I.W.A. coach outing to the Llangollen canal. We went by motor coach from Birmingham to Bettisfield Bridge where we met Jack Roberts, captain of the horse drawn maintenance boat Pollux which was tied in the bridge hole waiting for us. After a picnic lunch we boarded the boat and set off for Ellesmere. It was a lovely sunny afternoon and we glided steadily through the beautiful deserted countryside with just the sound of the birds and cattle and periodically that of the horse's hooves on the cobbled towpath under the bridges. The edges of the crystal clear water were lined with lush growth including the yellow monkey musk whose flowers nodded to us as the gentle wash of the boat moved the plants. We marvelled at the beauty of Cole Mere and Blake Mere and cooled down during the passage of the short Ellesmere tunnel, where the sounds echoed around us.



Getting Aboard Pollux at Bettisfield



Leaving Ellesmere Tunnel

Too soon we arrived at the maintenance depot at Ellesmere where we explored the fascinating workshops that were topped by a weather vane in the shape of a boat. Here the coach was waiting to take us to Whitchurch for tea. A quick stop was made at Grindley Brook to inspect the staircase locks before heading for home. At the top of the locks one of the new motorised weed cutters was tied up. It was used on the long pound in an effort to keep the water channel clear. In the whole of the magical time on this beautiful canal we had seen no other boat on the move. What a superb day out this had been.

Footnote:- How times have changed!!!! Pictures by M Jones.



Volunteer News

Bill Lambert

I do hope you all remain well and take great care to stay safe within this isolation process. Again, inevitably, the report for this month is going to be very small.

We all still have to wait while the Corvid isolation process takes its course so that unfortunately, I can only reiterate that all our volunteering activities remain suspended until further notice. How long this will be we cannot say but I imagine it could be for most of this summer at least.

I am downloading advice documents from the NHS and others to assess the situation. I also have a report from the IWA who are collaborating with C&RT in producing material for canal conservation and work party groups. For the time being the advice is all work party activity and gatherings remain suspended. One of the difficulties we have to be conscious of apart from the social distancing aspects is that many of our volunteers are over 70 years of age. Being over 70 automatically puts us in the 'At Risk' group who should still be at home self-isolating. I have to confess that I cannot quite adjust to the fact that strong and vigorous as I am, I am still in the 'At Risk' group. However, there may be some light at the end of the tunnel as the Government is starting to relax the process, so hopefully I may have better news soon.

My thanks go to everyone who has given me their support in the past and I hope you are able to join me again when circumstances permit. We will have a party to start off.

Bill Lambert, Volunteer Coordinator, Tel: 02476 726924 email: volunteers@wbdc.org.uk

Lapal Canal Trust

Report from the Lapal Canal Trust

We have raised sufficient money to make a start on the Winding hole for boats to turn and enter the restored Dudley No 2 Canal. Now discussing final detail with potential contractors. We are looking at ways of reducing the cost of puddle clay which is about 15% of the total build cost. Also discussing the cost of the fender and mooring rings or bollards.

Discussions, delayed by the Covid 19 crises, continue with Cadent and Sky about lowering the Gas main and the optical cable running under the tow path.

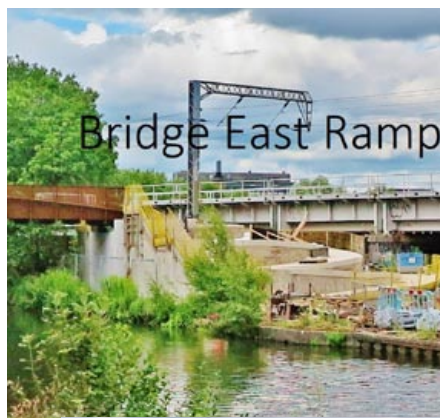
Chair Andrew Hardie is looking at ways of funding the tow path, with the Covid crises we are looking for funds to improve health.

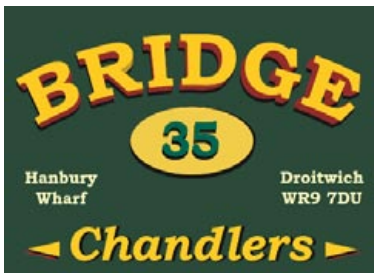
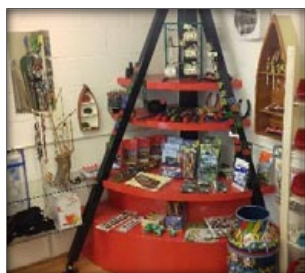
There are 5 new applications for funding in process, last month we received £2000 from the John Feeney Charitable Trust, brings the total of cash and pledges to over £400k, against our target of £700k.

David Scowcroft, who in the past has written for Canal Boat and Towpath, has joined as a member. He is using his writing skills to help present our case by writing personalised letters to people with the finance to help us. He has written over 50 letters including letters to all the Birmingham MPs with reference to the recent parliamentary debate on canal restoration.

Tony, our Secretary, is compiling information to celebrate the 30th anniversary of setting up the Lapal Canal Trust. Any information gratefully received.

Kathy and Lawrence co-chairs of Birmingham University Conservation Volunteers have helped by delivering to local residents the last few Lapal Link Newsletter. 1500 were printed. So now time to produce the next Newsletter – with an even more colourful cover.





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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

(where you can also download a membership application form)

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