



## From our Chairman

Since the formation of BCRS we have, thanks to the help of many, made slow but steady progress towards our aim of restoring the locks of the Bradley Canal. Thank you for joining us on this journey, we need your membership support to show to interested outside parties that we are serious about restoring these locks as a local amenity and improving the locality. Many canal and river restoration schemes have been working away for well over 20 years; now I am not going to be foolish enough to set a target date for completion but compared with some schemes this is a "Quick Fix". So far over the recent past we have produced a constitution that was submitted to the Charity Commission, rejected, then modified and recently finally accepted. Being registered, as well as helping us when approaching potential funders, gives us a position of legitimacy in the eyes of these organisations and the wider community in general.

The year 2019 started with extensive dredging of the Bradley Canal by Land & Water (CRT appointed contractors) from Deepfields Junction where the remaining section of the original 1772 canal branches off what is now the main Wolverhampton to Birmingham canal route, to the CRT Lock Gate workshops at Bradley. You will know the expression "give a dog a bad name" well this in boating circles applies to the Bradley canal. It was a little difficult but now is fully cruise-able and we have produced a video (Bradley Dredging 2019) on YouTube that will dispel this belief (a full report and photographs appear later). This was the result of ERDF "Blue Water" project funding spearheaded by Wolverhampton City Council and supported by Canal & River Trust, there may be more funding from this source in the future, or whatever replaces it! Early indications are that more boats are venturing up the arm which increases interest in our objective. As I write one of the main canal guides (Nicholson No.2) is in the process of being updated and we are hopeful that the notes about the canal can be amended to state that the dredging has been done and the canal is fully navigable.

Two BCNS (Birmingham Canal Navigations Society) "Explorer" cruises visited the workshops and having moored overnight at the workshops and toured them in the morning we set off for a walk along the route of the locks. Several other groups also discovered the canal route by joining our walks over the route of the canal. Currently mooring rings for visiting boats should be in the process of being installed by Glasshouse bridge and the terminus but is suspended due to the current emergency regulations.

In September the Society had a stand at the Black Country Boating Festival at Netherton generating interest, new members and the first outing of our large donated BCRS banners which were certainly eye catching.

At a presentation in October the BCNS gave us £1000 for our funds and subsequently the local IWA (Inland Waterways Association) Branch followed this up with £500. When we commence "Engineering Feasibility Studies" we will need every penny we can garner. Towards the end of the year an application for funding was submitted by Wolverhampton City Council but was unfortunately unsuccessful. As well as the lock restoration this would have funded several other Bilston area improvements. Apparently, it is not unusual for first applications to be rejected so hopefully a further submission may be more favourably looked upon.



Receiving a cheque from Martin O'Keeffe of the Birmingham Canal Navigation Society

This year we have had a litter pick on the canal, which was well supported, helped greatly by the loan of a boat from Ian Braine of Canal and River Services Ltd. This coincided with the annual BCN clean up, an event organised by the IWA and local canal societies. Work was based on the Walsall canal including around Moorcroft Junction where a BCRS sign has mysteriously appeared! Using the BCNS workboat "Phoenix", a short way was opened into the Bentley canal to photograph the overhanging trees. With the relevant permissions shortly, we plan to clear this up to the bottom lock. Hopefully the "Wergies" (IWA Waterways Recovery group) who have a licensed forestry group will help in this work.



25 PEOPLE TOOK PART IN THE BRADLEY LITTER BLITZ. WE HAVE CALCULATED YOUR HOURS AND IT MEANS A VALUE OF £875 IN MATCHED FUNDING WHEN THE TIME COMES. THANK YOU. 😊

What of the rest of 2020? It was planned the BCNS Spring Rally would potentially bring some 50 boats to the canal terminus. Along with the two Explorer Cruises they have all had to be cancelled due to the present restrictions, which means that our opportunity to spread the word is temporarily lost. Maybe we will take a stall at Bilston Market to interest more local people – would you help?

We were represented at the House of Commons at the IWA Parliamentary Waterways Group where useful contacts were made amongst the parliamentarians attending.

As well as substantial banners we have also received donations of window stickers (please email us if you want a supply) and the new sign at Moorcroft Junction (pictured opposite).

Recently we held a Virtual Committee meeting which seems to be the way to go in the future. We agreed to try for permission to erect a sign stating our objects by the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> locks of the flight and exposing a little of the remaining lock chamber brickwork.

So, what does the rest of the year hold for us?



Moorcroft Junction

Subject to the lifting of the current restrictions we shall, with our gazebo, attend the resurrected BCNS Spring Rally/BCBF and maybe other events locally. One of which is the Tipton Community Festival in October held canal-side.

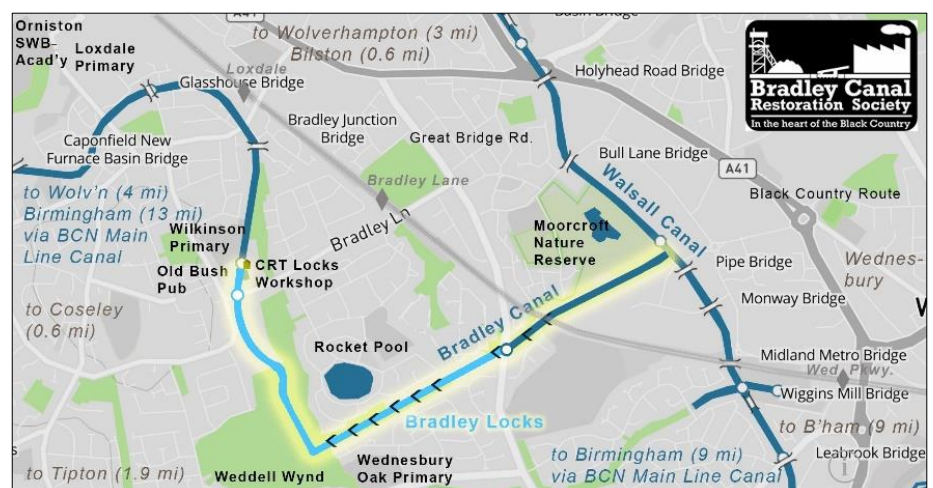
One important factor is to get CRTs written agreement for them to supply water to the restored locks. With this in place the next aim will be to commission an engineering and environmental feasibility study. The fees for this will be substantial and will have to be by an approved CRY professional body. Maybe this will be the subject of a separate appeal unless we can find a generous benefactor!

One of our essential needs is to grow our membership, so as well as renewing yours if you can ask others to join us it would be great!

On behalf of the committee to whom thanks are due for their support.

*Dave Pearson*

An updated map showing the location and route of the Bradley Canal





## Membership Matters!

*John Oakley (Membership Secretary)*

At the time of writing, our Membership currently stands at 97 Full Members, with an additional number of Corporate Members, which from a standing start, last May is a fabulous effort. Your continuing Membership is critical to us, as membership numbers and fees are a significant factor when applying for grants from external funders.

As we grow the Society, we are looking to provide additional benefits for members, but as you can imagine, at these very early stages a growing membership (and positive balance sheet!) are essential.

I will be contacting you in the coming months with renewal notices and the process for renewals.

Thank you, for your continued support.

## Website

Our newly re-designed website can be found [here](http://www.bradleycanal.co.uk)  
[www.bradleycanal.co.uk](http://www.bradleycanal.co.uk)

## Social Media

*Darren Clift (Publicity Secretary)*

Our Facebook presence continues to grow with 1,350 currently following us, a large percentage of whom regularly like posts, share and comment. This is essential as we look to apply for funding as this shows potential funders that we have a vibrant and enthusiastic community.

Please feel free to share amongst your own Facebook community in order to grow the numbers even more.

Each week we add more photographs, images and memories but are always on the lookout for new content to post. Please get in touch if you have anything that you think would appeal to our followers.

You can search for our Facebook site [here](#)

Can you contribute to our newsletter? If so, please contact us at [info@bradleycanal.co.uk](mailto:info@bradleycanal.co.uk)

## Gallery

We are constantly adding to our collection of photographs, images, paintings and sketches of the Bradley Canal. If you have any in your own collection, please feel free to forward them on to [info@bradleycanal.co.uk](mailto:info@bradleycanal.co.uk) and we will include them on our Facebook page, website and publish some of them here.

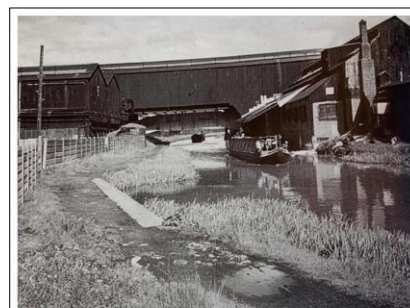


The approach to Bradley Workshop  
at Loxdale Sidings

We have recently been producing  
“Now & Then” pictures. See our  
Facebook page for memories.



The stretch through GKN Sankey,  
now a housing estate



The view from Glasshouse  
Bridge towards Bradley

## A Brief History – Roy Perry, Committee Member (and Resident Historian!)

The section of canal now known as the Bradley Arm was opened in September 1772 and was part of the original main line into Birmingham. It was built primarily to give collieries in the area a waterway to carry coal, which had previously used horse and cart. It was built by James Brindley and later Thomas Telford extended the canal at Deepfields and a tunnel was dug under Roseville which carried on into Birmingham, this was known as the New Mainline Canal.

The sharp left-hand turn, from the New Mainline, into the Bradley section was always called Deepfields Turn by the boatmen and it was here that the Bradley Canal began its route through Bradley to service the coalfields and industries along the route.

It was later that industry started to emerge alongside the canal, one of the first being the iron works of 'Iron Mad' John Wilkinson, who built his blast furnace at Bradley and is believed to be the very first blast furnace in the world of this type, being coal fired and using air blast from bellows to smelt iron ore at higher temperatures. He also developed the first boring machine tool to accurately bore cannons and pistons for steam engines.



Deepfield Junction

At Pothouse Bridge, an early boatyard was established by John Toole a boat builder and canal carrier, mostly carrying coal from local collieries and building wooden canal boats. Just past Pothouse Bridge was a left turn from the main canal. This was a loop that served collieries on what is now called the Royal Estate. The Bradley Bar Ironworks and the Gun Barrel Ironworks were also situated along this loop canal.



Pumphouse at Bradley Workshop

It re-joined the main canal just before Tup Street Bridge, on what is now the Canal and River Trust Bradley Lane depot. The depot has a pump house that pumps water from a bore hole, to keep the canal topped up with water, as this is a summit level and you must go down locks to leave this stretch of canal. The pump is electrically operated today but originally housed a Boulton and Watt beam engine to pump water. The canal terminates at this point but used to carry on to the top lock in a flight of nine known as Bradley Locks.

About five hundred yards before the top lock, was the Wednesbury Oak Loop Canal that served collieries and iron works at Batman's Hill and re-joined the canal past the top lock on the section that went to Tipton

where it joined the Ocker Hill branch canal.

At Bradley top lock was a lock keepers' cottage. The last lock keeper was Mr Element and his family. The cottage was demolished in the late 1950s between locks 6 and 7 where an arm went into Thompson Brothers works. Adjacent to lock no 7 was another lock cottage. The last lock keeper was Frank Williams who lived there with his wife Mary and son Paul. This was also demolished in the late 1950s.

By this time the locks had fallen into disuse and later were drained of water. The paddle gears were gradually removed by British Waterways and used elsewhere, although the gates remained in situ and some were still there when the canal was filled in in the mid-1960s. The ground was then landscaped, and a walkway constructed.

The last two locks; numbers eight and nine, are still visible and have had some remedial work done to them to prevent further decay. Although the canal is not in water, a culvert; which used to be a stream and ran into the lock flight above the pound of lock number seven; was piped and runs out under Great Bridge Road canal bridge.



Lock-keeper's Cottage at Bradley



The scene today



## The Environmental Case for Restoration – Neil Wyatt (NW Environmental) and BCRS Committee Member

In the middle of the 20th century much of the UK's canal network started to fall into disrepair. Many parts of the maze of waterways across the Black Country disappeared from the map. One such canal was the Bradley Arm, a mile or so of canal with eight locks joining the Birmingham navigations with the higher Wolverhampton navigations. Once linking the Moxley Foundry with Bilston and Wolverhampton, there is now a gap of about a mile between the Canal and River Trust workshops on Bradley Lane and the bridge linking between Meldon Drive and Elizabeth Walk.



Line of the canal near Moxley

Following on from the pioneering work of Tom Rolt and other canal pioneers, much of the canal network has been restored, and some canals that were completely lost have been re-opened. Across the Black Country the remaining canals are now in good condition, maintained by the Canal

and River Trust. These waterways are an essential resource for recreation but are also important wetland corridors, linking wildlife sites across the urban landscape.

Nonetheless, there are still important gaps in the old network, many of which are now impractical or even impossible to restore, either because they would have little function, or the route is blocked by later development. The Bradley Arm stands out as a clear exception – its restoration would restore a valuable link between navigations with benefits as a cruising route and also to the management of water levels and resources across the whole Black Country. Not least, it would provide a second route for water from the Bradley Borehole, a lifeline for the area's canals when, as in the past, supplies from the Cannock reservoirs are limited by drought or maintenance.

This practical case for the canal has been made in greater detail elsewhere, and I would like to focus on the environmental case for restoration of the Bradley Arm.

Historically, most major canal restoration projects have worked with the remnants of old canals through largely rural landscapes. Often what remains of the old canal is a chain of relatively undisturbed wetlands and pools. Naturally, these are often important for wildlife and sometimes exceptionally so. In the past this has led wildlife and conservation organisations, including Government agencies, to view restoration with scepticism and occasionally hostility. Fortunately, over the years restoration groups have learned many lessons about how to protect and encourage wildlife, after all it's one of the main attractions for most canal users. In turn this has led to greater understanding by and cooperation with conservation groups with the result being better outcomes for all.

The Bradley Arm offers an opportunity to take this another step forward and demonstrate that canal restoration can do more than respect the environment, it can be the driver behind what planners love to call 'transformational change'.

First, the benefits spread wider than just the local area, because Bradley provides an almost unique opportunity to create a new wetland corridor within the urban landscape; rather than simply being a narrow passage between settlements and industrial areas it passes by a whole series of important green spaces, such as Moorcroft Wood LNR, the Weddell Wynd and Rocket Pool, and these in turn link into a wider landscape dotted with green and criss-crossed with blue, for example the recent environmental improvements at Bilston Urban Village. Ultimately, greenspaces across Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton would be drawn closer in the ecological landscape.



View across Weddell Wynd

Why would this restoration be so effective? Because it is not simply a narrow canal corridor between walls and factories. There are six locks and potentially six balancing pools each of which has the potential to be a nature reserve in its own right. There is so much adjacent greenspace, even at the narrowest points, that there is the space to create not a ribbon but a broad sash of green across the Black Country landscape. In

effect restoring the canal doesn't create a simple link, it creates a major new wildlife site with its own intrinsic value.

Equally important is the fact that this is the Black Country, a focus for some of the most exciting and innovative urban environmental initiatives over the last quarter century: The Black Country Urban Forest creating dozens of woodlands; Black Country Living Landscape's unprecedented programme of community engagement; the Black Country Urban Park; England's first urban Nature Improvement Area and the world's first urban UNESCO Geopark. The latest such initiative seeks to build on these successes by the establishment of a National Park across the conurbation, focused on its landforms and waterways. Few, if any, comparable areas of the UK have seen so much focus on environmental quality right from community grass-roots level up to regional government.



Infilled locks near Rocket Pool

The area is right at the centre of the Black Country, close to the four boroughs and surrounded by communities who haven't enjoyed the benefits of easy access to the big, quality greenspaces that are mostly around the edges of the area. This is an unmissable opportunity to give many thousands of people easy access to what would effectively be a country park along the line of the restored canal.

This means that not only does restoration of the Bradley Arm make ecological sense, it fits into a wider vision of a thriving urban landscape and healthier communities.

To achieve this means that we must set our sights high in planning this restoration; as a relatively short section of canal costs will be less than many other restorations. Compared to the costs of restoring the canal itself creating and managing wildlife habitats will be relatively modest. Even so there will still be big numbers and funding challenges. It will be easy for bean counters to suggest making this pond smaller or not including that adjacent land to trim a bit off the budget, here and there.

I believe trimming back on environmental ambition would be a huge mistake. Not only would it miss one of the key points in favour of restoration, it would take away what makes this project singularly outstanding and appealing to a wide range of potential supporters and funders. Most significantly it offers real benefits to local communities who may never step onto a narrowboat.

Achieving such a big and beneficial change won't be easy or happen overnight, but the potential rewards for wildlife, local people and the Black Country are great.

Restoration of the Bradley Arm could be the biggest and most visible environmental project in the region. The impact of a project like this would be recognised not just in the UK but internationally, it would become a potent symbol of the Black Country's environmental transformation.



Loxdale Sidings

#### The 13 Locks

I saw them again yesterday,  
Briefly as I drove over the bridge,  
The thirteen locks,  
A once watery ladder, vanishing up into the murk,  
Broken lumps of grey-weathered oak,  
Weeping sad tears of canal through sprung seams  
Sagging, drunkenly on rust pilled pivots  
Across the cut.

Even I, just thirty, can remember  
The jump-laden, belly-heavy coal boats  
Dropping down from Bradley, slow surge by surge,  
Creeping to the bottom level,  
We were always there to put puny shoulders to the gate,  
Following the coal-grimed, yolk-trousered boatman  
The cast-iron key and the rattling ratchet  
Wide eyed - as the lock worked.

There was an old arm there once,  
Blocked by skeletons of narrow boats,  
Fighting the wet rot of time every inch of the way;  
But the arm is shedded gardens now,  
And nobody cares,  
Except when they find a rusty bolt in the locky,  
But I care - and remember.

We did our courting along the locks,  
As our grandmas and granddads did before,  
Huddled on wet Sundays  
In the draughtily shelter of the humpy bridges  
Against the rope grooved brickwork.  
All ten, I commanded the old, black ice-breaker  
(Hobbled then like a useless, worked out horse)  
On its voyages across the hurricane Atlantic of the cut.  
But it's gone now - to the scrapyards.

Yet they are still there - the locks,  
Even though the red-brick semis leer over their sides,  
Even though the once clear, deep, pike-ridden water  
Is now a weed-choked tickle,  
Running with sewage and littered with the rubbish of progress.

Will I be the last to remember them?  
Dying then but still wanted.  
Bulldozers won't remember  
As they rip the rock-set mortar apart  
And destroy the locks.

But I know they were there -  
And I feel as the old folks feel - about progress.

Terry Langford

A poem about the Bradley Locks  
written some years ago by Terry  
Langford.

*With thanks to Brenda Ward*



## Recent Dredging of the Bradley Arm – Article Re-produced from the BCNS Journal (Boundary Post)

Give a dog a bad name so the saying goes & it sticks. That's the problem with the Bradley canal: a very little used part of the BCN. It has got a reputation of being almost un-navigable, so no one uses it. How many of you have navigated it? The explorer cruises are the only time boats in any number cruise the arm and moor up to visit the lock gate workshops.



Partial dredging has recently been undertaken which will result in trouble free cruising! Well a lot easier at least! Whilst thankfully no human remains were scooped up it did take some effort to “exhume” a complete Ford escort car; it was completely flattened but with wheels still attached. Well over 550 tons were removed, plus all that was deposited behind the Nicospan lining. Three lorryloads of metal were also recovered and sold on.

The photos show the work being undertaken and six-foot two-inch Darren from Land & Water Services (the appointed contractors) wading up to his chest in the middle of the channel therefore illustrating that it is clear enough for even the deepest historic narrowboat to venture along. Special attention was given to the narrows where the old GWR railway used to cross as this is a notoriously bad section for weed and silt. Also, the wind seems to drive the rubbish to collect here. The towpath has been mostly surfaced and so is fine to walk, the current building development of Bilston Urban Village may enable another access point to the towpath.



The work was carried out with funds made available through the EU Regional Development Fund via the “Blue Water” project on which the IWA is represented. Whilst the water is not by any imagination blue it may be when more dredging is carried out. This could be done under the same scheme; funding does not stop after the 29th March. Shortly submissions for the next tranche of funding will be submitted of which some may be directed to more dredging. It has also been agreed to install mooring rings which will be done shortly. £1200.00 is needed to part-fund the installation and support is being sought through local interested organisations.

The canal will now be easier to cruise by boats and the supply of water from the pumps at Bradley will flow more easily to feed the rest of the canal system. Whilst not many boaters use this stretch of canal, when the locks beyond Weddell Wynd are restored to re-join the Walsall canal it will become a through-route again.



### And Finally, ... “A Tantalising Glimpse of What Lies Beneath”

The two photographs below were taken recently by one of our members and show the “riches” which lie just beneath the surface.

We believe this is the curved brick paving alongside lock seven. We are currently looking into how we may be able to expose more of the paving and potentially add some signage to show the history of the locks and our future plans. This is a project for post-lockdown; however, we will certainly ask for helpers when the time is right!

