

# 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'*



***We wish all our readers a Merry Christmas & A Happy New Year***

## A Crisp Winter's Day At Tardebigge Top Lock



The Inland  
Waterways  
Association

Keeping our waterways alive

Corporate Member



Worcester-Birmingham  
& Droitwich  
Canals Society

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

Issue 553 Winter 2020/21

# Monthly Meetings

Our meetings are usually held in the meeting room  
behind The Weighbridge, Alvechurch B48 7SQ

**Our regular monthly meetings will be  
reinstated as soon as it is safe to do so**

## **'Virtual' Music Quiz**

**with Tony on 'Zoom'**

**Tuesday 8th December 7.45pm start**

## **The Montgomery Canal**

**a 'Virtual Talk' with Danny Spike on 'Zoom'**  
**at 7.45pm on January 5th.**

## **Future Meetings**

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

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

*Members will be emailed shortly before any online meeting with information on how to join in.  
Please ensure that our Membership Secretary has your current details.*

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

Issue 553 Winter 2020/21

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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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**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: January 14th 2021**

# 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

Hi everyone, what a funny year, I always knew it would end up in tiers!!!

I have to say that I now feel very sorry for all the businesses that have been, and are still, affected by the lockdowns and the tier system. Our friend Paul Cooksey, who so generously supports us by donating beer for St. Richard's Canal Festival, is one of those hospitality venues who having come out of lockdown finds themselves in tier 3 so still cannot open the pub. Paul did a brew in anticipation of opening and ordered more hops, Liz (his wife) had organised Christmas meals and afternoon teas which is all now in danger of going to waste. They are obviously only one of thousands of businesses that are affected and they all must be very worried as to how they are going to survive.

I have to say that I viewed the 'Zoom' members meeting with some trepidation as to how it would work but on the night everything turned out absolutely perfect. We had a very interesting talk followed by questions and I am sure that the 20 or so members who attended thoroughly enjoyed it. Thanks were given to Margaret, Tony and Denis for putting together the evening. Let's do it again I say!!

I hope you all are able to enjoy Christmas. Have an absolutely wonderful time and let's all hope that 2021 turns out to be a better year.

*David Wheeler*

## Committee Positions

As readers will be aware, the society has an annually elected committee who take charge of the society affairs. There is also a 'Cecilia' sub-committee which deals with much of the day to day issues concerning the boat.

If anyone has any interest at all in finding out about, or possibly serving on, our committees please do get in touch. Organisations such as WB&DCS are often on the lookout for new people who can sometimes bring new ideas forward.

The society may be looking to recruit a new secretary at our next AGM, the date of which is not available at present due to the pandemic restrictions. The needs of the role can easily be shared if anyone is interested. Please give this your consideration.



# Editor's Notes

## Hi Readers,

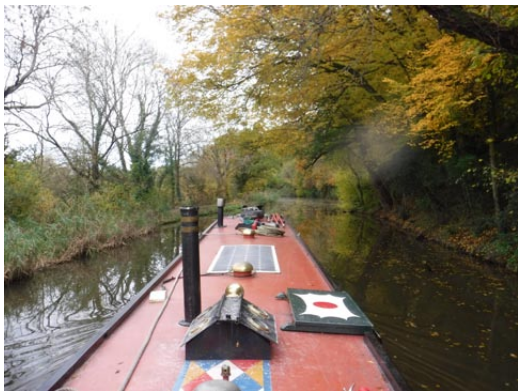
I hope you have all been keeping safe, well and socially distanced. Not easy we all know but necessary if we are to control this wretched covid. Fortunately many of our readers have access to canal towpaths and surrounding areas in order to at least get some fresh air and exercise. Social distancing of course still applies and can be done if people are careful.

By the time that this edition of '58' will have come out we have all been through another lock down which has had a massive effect on so many of our activities. The canals have been very quiet with only those needing essential services being allowed to move their boats. No-one, unless 'live-aboards', has been allowed to stay on their boats and hire bases have suffered many cancellations. Hopefully this situation will ease somewhat but we all still need to be vigilant.

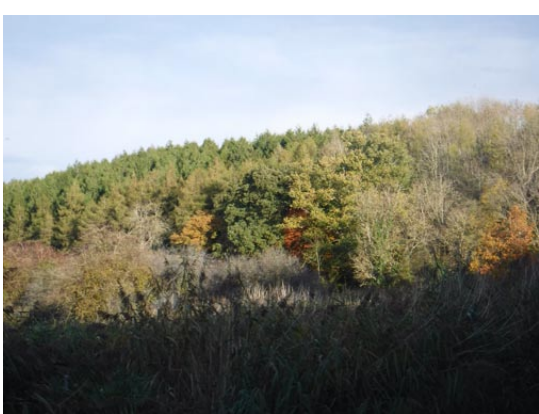
The last edition gave mention to Canal and River Trust's latest campaign 'Stay Kind and Slow Down.' There does still appear to be a lack of notices about this on our local towpaths but... are we correct in thinking that there has actually been a marked slowing down of cyclists generally on the towpaths? Or is this something to do with the current covid lock down? Hopefully the former but we do need evidence please, albeit anecdotal, so if readers agree or disagree let's hear from you please. It would also be good to hear from C&RT for their take on things.

Changing the subject a little, the society's narrowboat 'Cecilia' is currently undergoing a 'trim finish' inside. The main carpentry work is done with just some edge trimming etc. which volunteers are able to do. After that it is a matter of filling some holes, sanding and varnishing which again are tasks that the ever willing band of volunteers are able to complete. The exterior has already been sanded, scraped and cleaned by volunteers and antirust treatment has been used where needed. The volunteers are really appreciated and we are all looking forward to being able to use the boat in the not too distant future – covid permitting!

On a different note again, the last edition mentioned about the state of the canals with one area in particular being criticised. However, on a recent trip down the Worcester & Birmingham, then up the Severn to Hawford and on up through both Droitwich Canals to Hanbury Wharf Junction, the opposite of criticism is the truth. The waterway scenery is superb helped in no small measure by the beautiful Autumn colours. It is just staggering to think that both Droitwich Canals were abandoned, albeit at a difficult time in our history, and here they are now being part of a superb mid – Worcestershire cruising ring. The Barge Canal, as reported last time, will be 250 years old next year and to think it was all but lost to future generations were it not for so many voluntary organisations particularly the DCT. Some of the pictures here should show what a stunning canal it is; deep, wide fresh water teaming with fish, fowl and flora throughout.







One slight criticism is the lack of mooring places for boaters and did notice several panicking a little asking where they could moor as Autumn darkness was fast approaching. Not just hirers either. Occasionally it has to be by a lock which is not a good practice but sometimes needs must. Yes the Droitwich Barge Canal is beautiful but really does need more mooring spaces so that boaters can enjoy it even more.

As a result of the pandemic restrictions many organisations have become quite innovative in order to keep active albeit with limitations. Your society is no different where committee meetings have taken place on line thanks to Lynne and Brett for arranging. Last month was the society's first ever on-line members' meeting and those of you who were unable to join in missed something quite special and that includes the presenter himself, Andy Griffie – more on that later. Our friends from the Lapal Canal Trust and the Bradley Restoration Society have also been making use of on line meetings. The wonders of modern technology and keeping people in touch never ceases to amaze. We are quite fortunate as a society to have volunteers who are able to organise such things and again a big thank you on behalf of all of our members. The next one is scheduled for Tuesday December 8th which could well be our annual quiz night – read this edition to find out!

Lastly, a massive thank you to all of our society volunteers and to those who've contributed to this edition of '58' - the last one for 2020. Without this interest, at whatever level, we would be so much the poorer. Any thoughts, ideas, views etc. about your society please get in touch, contact details as usual on page 4.

Enjoy the read.

*John Hemingway*

# Membership

Has everyone remembered to renew their subscription to the society? If you're not sure please check with Joe Morley who will be pleased to advise.

If any of your contact details require amending in any way please let Joe know as we are hoping to make more continued use of electronic mail where possible.

## New Notice Boards

Many members have already reported to the society the removal of most of the notice boards along the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. These are the ones which society volunteers are responsible for maintaining the various inserts from time to time.

C&RT have been removing them but unfortunately the replacements, as good as they may be, are not being installed as quickly as the old ones were removed. Consequently we have a number of areas where there are currently no notice boards at all which does not seem to be too good a practice. Do we remove windows before the replacements are ready to be installed - springs to mind?

However, the ones that are slowly being replaced do look much better than the old ones and hopefully will keep the rain out - see below:



'58' hopes that all of the ones removed will be replaced as soon as possible as there has been a suggestion that they may not be. The society has had several ideas where new ones could be installed in other places e.g. Hanbury Wharf Junction and Kings Norton Junction. There may also be a need for one in Selly Oak when the Lapal Canal re-opens. Watch this space!

## Former Reservoir Near Halfway House

Just alongside the road bridge on the off side at Upper Gambolds Lane halfway down the Tardebigge Flight, is an area which has been a source of controversy to the society a few years ago. It was being used as dumping ground by contractors but eventually that was resolved and '58' is pleased to note that the area is now a small gated car park for the particular use of Volunteer Lock Keepers – some of whom are society members.

The area was actually a small reservoir mentioned by George Bate in his memoirs and in more detail by the late great Alan White in his book 'Chronicles of the Cut'. Alan states that the small reservoir could hold up to 150 lockfuls of surplus water which ran, and still does, over the lock weirs above it. It may have been used as a sort of a large side pond or a much bigger version of those on the Hanbury 3.



Perhaps C&RT, along with WB&DCS could consider organising some kind of interpretation board, rather like the ones in the tug compound at Tardebigge New Wharf? This could then inform the many people passing by just what used to be there and to help look after it. Unfortunately even now it is being used as a bit of a dumping ground but not as bad as before (see below):



Just behind the hard cored car park there are several clues as to its past particularly the lovely bull rushes growing there in what presumably is now boggy ground. This probably supports much wild life and so again is worth looking after.

As an aside, this area has a connection with the large reservoir at Tardebigge. Again Alan White's book is helpful. Apparently a valve operated brick culvert was built from the bottom of Tardebigge Reservoir with an outlet into the canal under the wing wall of the bottom gate of lock 43 which is just above the small former reservoir by Upper Gambolds Bridge.

## Lock 58

In the last edition of '58' we posed a question about the whereabouts of a 'Lock 58'. Was it the one we all know at the top of the Tardebigge Flight or somewhere else?

Our society's in-house expert Colin Scrivener rallied to the call and correctly identified the lock, which is not at Tardebigge but is Hassall Green bottom lock on the Trent and Mersey in Cheshire.

Even those readers who are not familiar with that area may well have been past there as the M6 roars past in the background.

Colin writes:

*Hi John,*

*Hope you had a nice easy road down Heartbreak Hill. You may have needed ear muffs when working lock 58 right next to the M6 at Hassall Green. At least you could have slaked your thirst in the 'Romping Donkey' if it's still there.*

Thank you for this response Colin but unfortunately the pub, post office and shop appear to have all closed even though there is a small boating community there as well as villagers.





# 'Nature Notes'

## Mary Green

It's been a strange year for wildlife as well as people. Remember the extremely wet mild weather at the start, a couple of late frosts, the unusually sunny and dry spring, the mixed summer with days of record-breaking heat, and the very mild autumn. Climate change makes our weather unpredictable, impacting on wildlife.

Plants, fungi, animals, birds and insects depend on each other. If some of them grow and reproduce at different times, that affects all the others. For example, each species of butterfly depends on particular plants to feed its caterpillars, and nectar for the adults. Many birds depend on particular caterpillars being available to feed their young chicks on. Their eggs also need specific temperatures to survive and hatch. You can see how easily this can all go wrong if a particular flower grows unusually late or early or if there are unexpected hot and cold spells.

Where I live, we had gains and losses. For some reason, our kingfishers have gone. We suspect the extreme wet last winter affected their habitat and they moved. The waterfowl had fewer young, although many swans and ducks had a second successful brood. Canada geese didn't breed well and their false-migration and settling in the autumn was later than usual. Moorhens had problems due to their nervousness of people during increased footfall. Canalside predator activity increased during the first lockdown possibly through reduction in commercial rubbish.

Insects seemed to have suffered most. We had a good showing of early butterflies but not of the later ones. We had far fewer damselflies and dragonflies than usual. Wasps were really scarce, very surprising given the good fruit year. This is worrying as insects show us the health of our natural environment.

Fungi have popped up at unusual times, waiting for the warm wet they like. But they are always there underground helping nature recycle itself.

The good fruit year coincided with a "mast year" when nuts and other tree seeds are plentiful. I've never seen so many acorns on all the oaks. They will help a lot of other species over the winter. The excess of seeds also means there will be good growth of new trees next year. Ash trees are heavy with keys – I know my garden will be full of little ash seedlings in future! Alder, beech, hazel and the other nut trees were all laden. Lower growing plants had good seeds too – like hogweed flowering and seeding all year long and providing food for insects and birds.

The fruiting trees – hawthorn, elder, rose, spindle, guelder-rose, blackthorn, apple, cherry, holly – were all wonderful following a spring and summer of undamaged blossom. (The early cherry-plum was the only exception – it blossomed beautifully but caught the frost.) All these fruit will be a boon for the birds this winter. Usually flocks of redwings and sometimes fieldfares come through and feed on them, especially on hawthorn. Both these birds are in the thrush family but unlike thrushes move in big flocks. There is a myth that the trees bear heavy fruit before a cold winter. That's not true: it's because of the year they've had. That doesn't mean we may not have some cold weather of course!

The ivy had been especially good this autumn and the winter berries are setting now, our latest. The flowers went on well into November and were covered with insects, even some late wasps. Winter is a dying-down time, but there is something in flower along the canal all year. You can already see the hazel catkins for 2021. Happy new year!





**Female Holly With Berries**



**Rose Hips**



**New Hazel Catkins**



**Swans, Gulls & Mallards**



**Shaggy Cap Fungus**



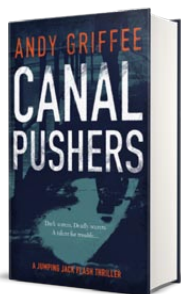
**Spindle Berries**

# November Members' Meeting

On November 10th we held our first ever 'virtual meeting' for members. Using the 'Zoom' App we welcomed author Andy Griffiee (*right*) along to tell us about his novels 'Canal Pushers' and 'River Rats'. The meeting was very successful and we attracted many viewers. Andy's first novel 'Canal Pushers' is set on the Stratford Canals and The Worcester-Birmingham Canal. It mentions many places local to us and is an excellent read.



**Introducing Jack Johnson, in search of a quiet life but with a talent for trouble...**



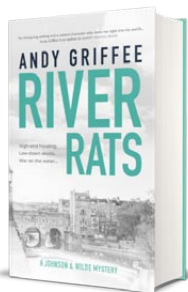
Jack Johnson is newly divorced, recently made redundant and in search of a fresh start. But when a young boy he meets on the canals turns up drowned, trouble seems determined to follow him. With the encouragement of Jack's unlikely companion, Nina, who's come aboard his narrowboat, Jumping Jack Flash, to help him navigate the waterways of the Midlands, Jack is soon tangled up in a police investigation that doesn't quite add up.

Is there a serial killer stalking the towpaths? Jack's got more pressing problems too: can a canal boat outrun an organised crime syndicate and a media manhunt?

Inspired by the real-life story of Manchester's 'Canal Pusher', the widely reported theory that a spike in deaths by drowning is no accident, this debut novel is the first in a new series featuring Jack Johnson and Nina Wilde that explores hidden communities on the canals and waterways.

Andy's second novel 'River Rats' is set on the River Avon in Bath.

**Book two in the thrilling Johnson & Wilde mystery series, featuring journalist Jack Johnson.**



Jack Johnson has a talent for trouble – wherever he goes on his narrowboat, it seems to follow him. Moored up on the River Avon in the beautiful Georgian surroundings of Bath, he's working at the local paper when a prominent magistrate and heritage campaigner is attacked and drowned. Could it be a serial killer copying the Canal Pusher? Or a biker gang who swore revenge on the magistrate? Against his wishes, Jack is pulled into the investigation by his ambitious editor who wants the scoop. Jack and his friend, the war widow, Nina, have also been drawn into another struggle. The moorings of a small settled boating community sit alongside a huge former industrial site that property developers want to fill with luxury housing. Nearby residents are enlisted to petition against the boat people, and as the campaign spirals out of control, lives are threatened. Who is helping their enemies?

Another gripping tale of corruption and intrigue from the riverbank, full of dark waters and deadly secrets.

Andy's third novel is currently at the publishers and is due out in early 2021.

Please visit Andy's website: [www.andygriffiee.co.uk](http://www.andygriffiee.co.uk) for more information.

We have a video of the meeting to view on our society website: [www.wbdcs.org.uk](http://www.wbdcs.org.uk)



# Alarum Theatre

The final piece in our 'I Dig Canals' book (available to buy from our website) is 'Histrionic Water' by Heather Wastie. For the final film in this series of three, she performs the poem at Debdale Lock on the Staffs & Worcs Canal. Heather remembers the poor state of the canals when she was a child, describing the water as 'soap sud soup with beer bottle croutons'. This short film can be seen on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/37ucEAE>



To find out more about I Dig Canals and order a copy of the book, visit [www.alarumtheatre.co.uk](http://www.alarumtheatre.co.uk). This is one of a series of three films made by James McDonald, Clear Picture Productions Ltd [www.clearpic.co.uk](http://www.clearpic.co.uk).

## Withybed Poets

A short fictional story has been compiled which is based on and around the Worcester & Birmingham Canal at Withybed Green featuring The Withybed Poets.

The storyline involves a person visiting 'The Crown' with her partner who is working on developing building plans for the area. The pendant she is wearing is recognised as being from a person previously known to the local poetry group.

The film has several people known to the canal society, including our society secretary Mary Green. It really does show why we all need to be vigilant when development plans suddenly appear.

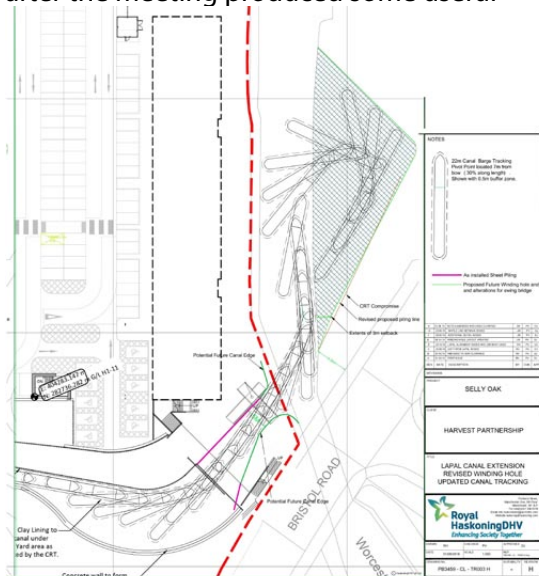
The film is available to view on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/3mDhxgr> and comes with a hearty recommendation from the '58' team!

The video was made by Sutton Coldfield Movie Makers:



# Lapal Canal Trust News

Our friends from the Lapal Canal Trust recently held their first virtual AGM as advertised in the last edition of '58'. People from different parts of the country joined in and an informal discussion taking place after the meeting produced some useful



suggestions as to 'where to next?' now that the arrangements for the new winding hole are planned to commence in February 2021. The winding hole will be on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal directly opposite the new entrance to the Lapal Canal. The work is intended to be complete around April. Some kind of a celebratory boating event has been mooted in order to flag up this development and its part in the staged restoration of the Lapal Canal. Watch this space!

## Leasowes Scrub Bash

Our Programme Secretary and his partner Ute were recently lending a hand at the regular Leasowes Scrub Bash. We always advertise these on our Facebook page if anyone would like to get involved. You'll also find them posted on The Lapal Canal Trust Facebook page.





# Canal & River Trust News: Coffin Bridge

Canal & River Trust have applied for planning permission to improve 'Coffin Bridge' (right) just below Hanbury Wharf linear moorings, which are possibly to be extended by some 500 feet. It involves installing a handrail on the bridge, repairing uneven steps, restraining lateral arch movement by installing anchors, installing steel plate to restrain wet abutment, re-pointing and replacing missing bricks.

The society has commented positively on this application and looks forward to any pictures readers are able to send in as this development progresses. It would be nice if C&RT could place names on the bridges, as on many other canals, because each name has a story behind it. Why not start with 'Coffin Bridge'?



## Canal & River Trust News: Waterways History

'Explore over 200 years of waterways history' is well worth a visit on the C&RT website:

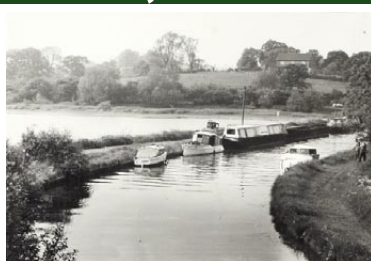
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/canal-history>

You can now search over 37,000 archive records in the online catalogue, including over 22,000 historic images freely available to view. This window on a world that has gone forever includes boat people, bridges, aqueducts and, of course, the vast network of waterways that are such an important part of our heritage. So whether your interest is social history, civil engineering or you just want to lose yourself in the wonderful landscapes of Britain's waterways you'll find something here for you. *Right* are just a couple of the fascinating pictures you can find.

### Research

If you would like to see Canal & River Trust's Research Fellow Dr Jodie Matthews talking about waterways' history just go to:

<https://bit.ly/3g4YJ0K>



*Bittell Reservoir on The W&B*



*Stoke Wharf, Lock 23*

### Knowle Locks

C&RT are currently carrying out £175,000 of repair work at Knowle Locks, on the Grand Union Canal in Solihull. Our virtual open day lets you take a peek behind the scenes without leaving home.

Explore the interactive picture and find out what they are up to at Knowle Locks by selecting the different numbered circles. The videos are best viewed in landscape on a mobile phone or on a computer.

Visit: <https://bit.ly/3IQs2vT> for more details.

# Canal & River Trust News: Waterfront Magazine

While our waterways are a wonderful way to get fresh air and a place to relax, you can also experience much of what they have to offer from home too.

There's the latest digital issue of 'Waterfront' magazine to enjoy and an online Plastics Challenge to accept. Plus, you can visit a virtual Open Day, exploring how you're helping wildlife on the River Severn. Walk along the towpath with us, without even leaving the comfort of your sofa!

One such article makes reference to canal history and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It makes for not very comfortable reading but this story has yet to be told in full. Many of the goods being transported by water during the canals' heydays of carrying involved the produce from slavery. Goods such as rice, tobacco, cotton and sugar were the produce of enslaved peoples. Some slave owners had shares in the canals although some, such as Josiah Wedgwood, were fierce abolitionists. By the time of Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833, most of the canal system had been built but after this period the Government paid out massive compensation to slave owners some of whom were involved in the canal system. What happened afterwards is for another story. Visit: <https://bit.ly/3g2yTRE> to view.



## Home EdVenturers: Fund Raising For 'Cecilia'

### Thank you!

Home EdVenturers have enjoyed WB&DCS narrowboat 'Cecilia' for many years, and appreciated every minute of the volunteers' time and care in crewing and teaching our kids all about canals and boating. So when we had to cancel our trips and tell members there would be no more 'Cecilia' for the immediate future, our families immediately asked, "How can we help?"

By the very nature of home education we rarely get time without our children. Most of our adults don't have hours of child free volunteer time for practical work, so, a call for donations went out.

One family suggested "if everyone gave even £1, that's quite a bit" While our families have donated thousands to WB&DCS over the years, with many of those families joining the society and training to become crew themselves, this time, I'm very mindful we were asking for money at a time when many are experiencing Covid salary cuts and redundancies.

In total we raised £590, which with gift aid should amount to £740. Since donating it's been a great joy to see immediate improvements, a completed bathroom being the biggest relief, in every sense!

Comments from our families, received with their donations, show as always, that it's thanks to WB&DCS volunteer crews on 'Cecilia', the fantastic memories they've created and now, the donations those memories have brought.

Responses from Home EdVenturers families:

*"In my mind were glimpses of all the joy the boat trips had brought to so many children and grown ups too"*

*"Just donated, we loved our trip on Cecilia last year"*

Many thanks to all who have worked on 'Cecilia', Home EdVenturers are very much looking forward to being able to book again.

Julie Cranston (Home EdVenturers Chair)

Further information on Home Education can be found at <https://wbdc.org.uk/home-EdVenturers> or by emailing [homeEdVenturers@yahoo.com](mailto:homeEdVenturers@yahoo.com)

*The society is extremely grateful to Home EdVenturers for their enthusiasm and generosity in donating towards the revamp of 'Cecilia'. We are looking forward to being able to make use of the boat again soon, covid permitting – Ed.*



### Home EdVenturers

LET THE ADVENTURE BEGIN!



# Home EdVenturers: Community Garden

## RHS Awards and Gratitude.

Home EdVenturers extend huge thanks to WB&DCS's very own Bill Lambert for his support and help, in allowing our group to work on Tardebigge Community garden recently.

During lockdown many of our home education groups have been on hold, meaning our children can't get together and learn in a group as they usually would.

Carefully following guidelines, it was a complete joy to be able to gather as a small group, outside in the community garden, where our children worked towards their Level 5 Royal Horticultural Society Award.

RHS Levels 1-4 were completed over the summer using our own private gardens, but level 5 required a public space. As a spot WB&DCS volunteers regularly tend, we focused on giving the stream that runs the full width of the garden, its' winter cut back, and clean out.

RHS level 5 requires that children can demonstrate their gardening skills, pass them onto others and that the local community benefits from their work. The benefit to wildlife is a bonus.

Two of the children who took part have also written a short piece about their work as part of the award submission. This is meant to share the garden and work experience with others.

After a lot of hard, wet and muddy work on the day, and writing up what they had learned afterwards, all the children's goals were achieved. This is the highest level RHS award offered to school aged children and a great accomplishment for them all.

Many thanks again to Bill for his support in organising this project, and WB&DCS volunteers who've maintained the garden for many years and helped make this possible.

If anyone does want to volunteer with WB&DCS on the garden area, I'm sure Bill Lambert will be happy to hear from you.

Julie Cranston (Chair Home EdVenturers). *(Bill Lambert's fan club is available free to all society members! - Ed)*

## Home EdVenturers: Clearing The Stream

"The first week of November a small group of Home EdVenturers children went to Tardebigge community garden by Tardebigge Locks to clear the leaves from the stream. We worked together to cut back branches, remove weeds and unblock the stream using a range of garden tools.

First we cut down the big brambles and branches overhanging the dirty brook. Then we went into the waterway and moved the rotten brown leaves out of the way using a garden fork and trowel. We all took it in turns to move the mud from the stream, using a trowel again. After that we trimmed the bushes and trees with the hedge trimmers to get further up the stream.

Using the trimmers was fun! It was really blocked up, so we used the garden fork to move the fallen autumn leaves and mud from the stream. The mud was very smelly! It was hard work but we got the waterway flowing again. We hope what we did really helps, and the stream keeps on flowing. It should help the wildlife move around more too."

*By Emily and Ethan*



1. Before 2. Afterwards 3. Teamwork! 4. Clearing The Stream



# Volunteer News

## Bill Lambert

I do hope you all remain well and have survived the isolation process without too much difficulty. I certainly hope that no one has suffered from the Corona virus.

I am pleased to add a couple of new items from members who support our work parties at Tardebigge. They have been exploring ways of adding public interest to the historic aspects that could be available along the Tardebigge flight and towpath. Please read the items below from Alan Gibbs, Neil Franklin and Ian Hunter. I am sure that these could become a more regular feature.

Can We Re-Start our Work Parties? Yes, We Can. No, We Can't.

Having just been able to re-start we now have had to stop again. You will be aware that another national lock-down was to be announced for November 5th to December 4th. Whether this will actually end on then remains to be seen, but of course we have no choice but to cancel the days planned for November at least. We must wait and see what happens next, but I will do my best to keep people informed. So, at the moment, it's a case of wear a face mask, wash hands and keep your distance.

Dates for Our Work Parties. Or, at least, as far as we can tell.

**January 2021:** Sat. 9th Sun. 10th Wed. 27th Thur. 28th

**February 2021:** Sat. 13th Sun. 14th Wed. 24th Thur. 25th

**March 2021:** Sat. 13th Sun. 14th Wed. 24th Thur. 25th

### Our General Conditions for Work Parties are:

Our days start at 9.30am and end around 3.30pm.

(It would help if you confirm by email if you can attend, especially now we have to monitor numbers due to the Covid 'test and trace' process).

The usual addresses for work parties is either:

Tardebigge New Wharf, Alcester Road, Tardebigge, Bromsgrove, B60 1NF or

Alvechurch Boat Centre, Scarfield Hill, B48 7SQ

(As Volunteer Coordinator, I will ensure that we have a good supply of soaps, hand towels, face masks, etc.).

**Stop Press:** As the magazine goes to press new Coronavirus guidelines have been published. Many of you who are in Worcestershire are in Tier 2 areas, whereas those of us in West Midlands and Birmingham areas are in Tier 3. I am still reading the guidelines, but it does seem to say that those in Tier 3 should avoid travelling into Tier 2. I will consult with society colleagues and take opinions, but I think that we will have to assume that work parties for December are also cancelled. At least this will give you more time to enjoy your Christmas shopping. There are bound to be new guidelines directly after Christmas, so let us see what happens then. Hopefully, we can restart in January. Or perhaps not.

## Narrowboat 'Cecilia'.

Our dear old boat has been under the doctor through the whole summer period while major repairs are undertaken. She has had major surgery and her insides knocked about, so she is now looking rather dusty and a little careworn. A month back Martin organised a clean-up of the roofline which made her look a lot better and then more recently a few of us met up to give the rest of the cabin sides a good scrub down and apply some rust treatment where needed. More recently still, a few of us met up to look at the finishing off work that now needs to be done to the interior. This was the last opportunity to do anything before the lock-down started. As we have reported there can be no work done now until the lock-down hopefully ends in December. We will keep everyone informed as best we can.

My thanks go to everyone who has given me their support in the past and I hope you are able to join me again sometime.

May I now wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas and I hope the new year brings prosperity and an end to lock downs.

Many Thanks,  
Bill Lambert  
Volunteer Coordinator  
Worcester-Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society.

Email: [volunteers@wbdc.org.uk](mailto:volunteers@wbdc.org.uk)

Mobile: 07815 986012



## Local History: Tardebigge Lock Flight

During the summer between the showers and strictly observing any covid restrictions, a few of us were chewing the fat with the venerable Bill Lambert, wondering would there be value in establishing a small working team project to collate local history knowledge around the Tardebigge flight?

As volunteers for the WB&DC Society and Canal and River Trust there are many people who work along the flight and around the wharf who take an interest in the history of the area. Most of us know some history of the buildings and landscape that we work in and often share this knowledge with a variety of canal users.

We thought that would be useful to pool our information and make it accessible to the wider volunteer / membership community for our own interest and as a resource for canal users. From this simple premise we began to think bigger...

Potentially providing local history information could enhance the experience of those regular canal users or those just passing through.

It is imagined that volunteer Lock Keepers working on the flight and Society members on local adoption projects, or 'Cecilia' boat trips etc. may wish to access information so as to pass on to those members of the public they meet.

For the above to work we would need to have a method of collecting, storing, disseminating and accessing any information. This is where society historian Ian Hunter came on board, as he has an electronic archive covering many local history features which could be used to keep new information, or house information collated from several existing reference sources but in a format more accessible for the public. The above formatting – summaries, topics etc. would require volunteers to produce.

In the past the Society has supported the production of historical information which is displayed on boards alongside the flight. Through Bill's efforts Annual heritage days at the wharf are usually well attended and information around the wharf, tugboat, kilns etc. is well received.

As a further topical point there may be possible fund-raising opportunities in offering "guided tours" as part of 'Cecilia' trips or even standalone visits.

It may be that in the future we could produce leaflets or information for boards.

Thinking to the future if the project takes off it may be possible to use "QR" (quick response) bar codes where people can access archived links via their smartphones. As we are aware over the past 12 months there has also been County Council interest in developing the Tardebigge flight as a heritage area for visitors. The Worcester and Birmingham canal conservation area appraisal document provides a baseline highlighting local history points of interest. Future partnership work around the North Worcestershire Heritage Corridor is an area that may well welcome local volunteer support in information gathering or resource management for which we could provide both local history insight and willing hands.

## **This is where our readers come in!!**

Our small group has had some lovely hours spent wandering the fields around Tardebigge looking for signs in the landscape relating to past quarries, old roads, the horse tramways and underground culverts. If you are interested in joining us or have some interesting information about features along the flight, please contact Bill.

We know what you're thinking and you're right, almost all local history information around this area has inevitably been covered in "Chronicles of the Cut" by the Reverend Alan White. But it is fascinating to try to apply this resource to what we can see whilst out walking and try to bring the scenes of 200 years ago to life for those passing through.

We also have questions! For example, we all know about the issues around water conservation and management and we all know that the Engine House pumped water up to top lock but how? Yes, we have a description of the engine in use but HOW did it push that volume of water up hill and WHERE did it empty into the canal? Direct from a culvert – in which case where? Or was it stored in pounds by Top lock and let in as needed, in which case where is the pound?

In conclusion if anyone would like to come and meet with us to share information or discuss what we know and what we might like to find more information on please contact Bill.

On the other hand, just come along for a short local walk to help us guide the process of information giving and how we can present part of our canal to a new generation.

*Alan Gibbs, Ian Hunter and Neil Franklin.*



# North Worcestershire Heritage Corridor

We should explain that the North Worcestershire Heritage Corridor referred to by AI is a concept originally proposed by Simon Carter, Director of the Avoncroft Museum to develop the untapped tourism potential of the North of the county by linking the various historic sites. These include Bordesley Abbey, the Needle Museum, Avoncroft Museum and the jewel in the crown the Tardebigge flight.

Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils saw the potential in this and obtained a grant from Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership to develop the idea. This is where they are at the moment “developing” and we are in touch with them to ensure we get involved in “developing” the concept on the ground.

The Flight has a lot to offer including the original wharf buildings that bear the Sharpness New Docks Company initials, the Lime Kilns, the Tugboat Birmingham and that is only at Tardebigge itself. Further down the flight is the Pump House mentioned earlier by AI the reservoir and many other interesting historical features that could be developed in the future. That is not to forget the beautiful countryside that is such a feature of the whole area.

So once again if you are interested in our local heritage and want to meet young, go ahead, dynamic types don't call us but then again if you want to enjoy days investigating the country side with others with similar interests why not join us. Just let Bill know and we will get in touch.

P.S. Bill is our young, go ahead and dynamic Volunteer Co Ordinator as we all know.

## Member Photos

Society member (and 'Cecilia' volunteer) Ian McGarr has sent us these photos that he took earlier this year.





This photograph is from 1963 during the great freeze on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal by Bittell Cutting when the canals froze solid, nothing could move. Taking advantage of the situation it gave the maintenance men an opportunity to work on the frozen canal to trim the overhanging branches from the trees and bushes. (note the van on the frozen canal). Also note the clothing. Coats and one hat, no gloves in absolutely freezing conditions.

Colin Scrivener writes: *I remember that picture taken in the big freeze of 1963 when the canal was frozen with ice said to be 18 inches thick for about three months. I think it was taken for the BW magazine or local paper (or both). The chap on the right is George Colledge who was the section inspector based at Tardebigge yard. He lived in the detached house by the yard gates and had control of maintenance of the W&B and the Stratford canal northern section. The picture purports to show George delivering the pay packets on Friday afternoon by driving his Bedford van along the canal.*

*The Birmingham Old Prints & Maps 1600 - 1900s Facebook page tell us: On the left is T.W. Mills the Ganger who retired in 1974 after 47 years' service so he must have seen some changes, George Colledge was the Section Inspector who also retired in 1974 having worked for 46 years*

For lots of old, interesting photos please visit: <https://bit.ly/3ooqCdu>. You will need to be a Facebook member to view this page.

**This is where you the readers come in:**

If anyone has old photos of the W&B or the Droitwich Canals and a story to go with them, please send them to the Editor for future editions of '58'.

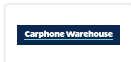


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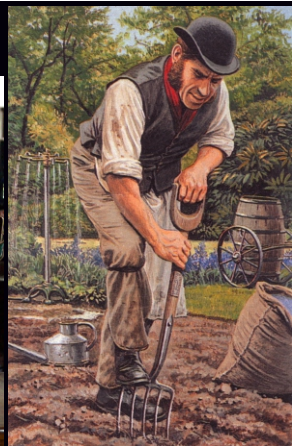
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