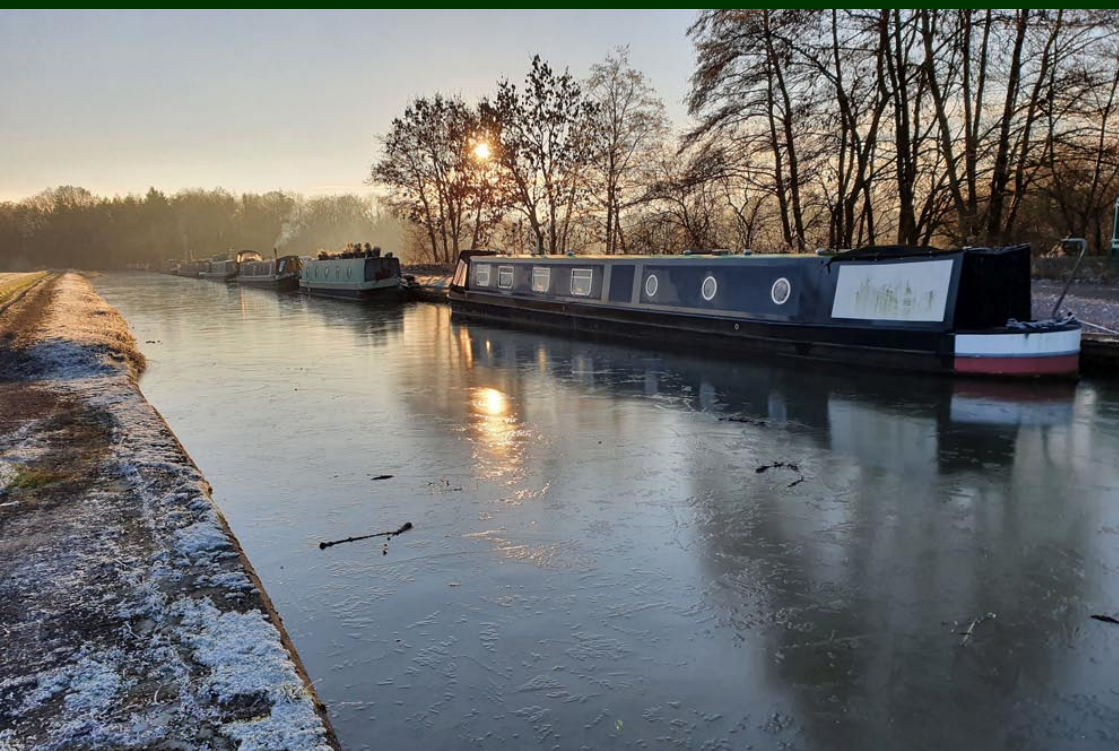


# 58 | Fifty Eight

## 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'*



### *Icy Conditions on the W&B at Bittell*

# Monthly Meetings

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**

## The First Canal

**a 'Virtual Talk' with David Shimmings on 'Zoom'  
at 7.45pm on March 2nd.**

## 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.*

**58 Update:** Please note that Fifty Eight is now 'interactive'. This means that where you see a web link or an email address you should be able to simply click or tap on it to take you directly to the web page or to send an email. If you spot any links that don't work then please let us know.

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

Issue 554 Feb/Mar 2021

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

We are also on **Twitter** please follow us @wbdcs58.  
View videos on our [YouTube channel](#)

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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: March 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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**VICE PRESIDENT: Sir Peter Luff**

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# Chair's Notes

## Hi Everyone

I might just be on the outer limits of what is socially acceptable when I say "Happy New Year."

Back in the early autumn we all thought that we could look forward to a better 2021. Well how wrong we were. We appear to be in lockdown restrictions until the end of March and even after that we will still be faced with social distance restrictions until everyone has had the second vaccination.

Taking all of that in to consideration we have taken two very difficult decisions. The first one is to cancel the Annual Dinner in March and the second one is to cancel St. Richard's Canal Festival in May. The Bromsgrove Golf Centre is currently closed and are not available to even discuss the situation but if schools are not going to be allowed to open until at least the 8th March at the earliest, we could not see us being allowed to hold a dinner for around 70 people a week later. We might look at the possibility of having something later in the year. We also discussed what to do about the awarding of the George Bate trophy and the Bridge 63 Trophy both of which are currently on hold. With regard to St. Richard's Canal Festival we have to commit to spending in the region of £10,000 in advance of the weekend. Wychavon District Council also have to commit to supporting the Festival in advance which until the Government gives the all clear for mass gatherings to be held would not be forthcoming. Our profit comes mainly from the bar and again we have to commit to breweries in advance. So again taking all this information on board decided that we had no alternative but to cancel again for 2021. This will put tremendous strain on our finances but it is a decision that is totally unavoidable.

Many of our older members that were associated with the Weighbridge Cruising and Social Club will remember the tragedy of losing Angela Daly at a very young age to cancer. Gill was told yesterday by Sue Rudge that Gerry Daly (husband) had also died last November.

**STAY SAFE**

*David Wheeler*

## Committee Positions

As readers will be aware, the society has an annually elected committee that takes charge of 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 then please do get in touch. Organisations such as WB&DCS are often on the lookout for new people who can 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 current restrictions. The needs of the role can easily be shared if anyone is interested. Please give this your consideration.



# Editor's Notes

## Hi Readers,

Trust you are all keeping safe, dry, warm and well in these troubled times we are currently enduring. At the moment, as many readers will know, the canals are still on 'lock down' certainly for non – live aboard boaters who are not allowed to stay on board even if remaining on home moorings. Those living on board are only allowed to move their craft for essential purposes such as the C&RT services. Towpaths are open, however, with the usual social distance health warning and they certainly appear to be getting well used by so many people walking, jogging, cycling etc. making 'Life Better by Water' as C&RT rightly promote.

All well and good when the condition of the towpaths are up to safe standards which many are. However, in some places it can be downright dangerous underfoot so extra care really is needed in order to avoid slips and falls. So where are the towpaths in good condition and where not?

The general pattern does appear to favour town and city areas in terms of well maintained surfaces probably because there are a greater number of potential users. This also applies to some of the more rural areas such as around Alvechurch and the Tardebigge Flight as well as the Droitwich Junction Canal.



The more challenging areas, despite the surfaces, do still appear to be popular these days. The towpath around the Hopwood area, over and just South of Shortwood Tunnel and around the Hanbury Wharf area to name but a few, have particularly slippery surfaces with enough mud to open a brick works! (metaphorically speaking of course). So while people need to take their daily exercise within the current restrictions please do be careful as some of the towpaths are not as safe as we would like them all to be. Perhaps part of the problem is that they are so popular and well used which is great, but with all this rain and melting snow on mainly bare earth, surfaces have in parts become treacherous mud baths.

In the last edition of '58, we described some of the innovative approaches being utilised now that people are unable to join in with activities involving gatherings and travel outside of their local areas. Your society has taken this on board with on-line meetings which are proving very successful – more on the last one later. Canal and River Trust has also been developing this approach with 'virtual tours', quizzes and other interactive features. One such quiz your editor took part in seeing as all of the questions related to Yorkshire Waterways. All seemed ok with the final score being something like 8 out of 12 correct answers. However, the comment at the end of that amounted to 'would probably do better sticking to the questions about the West Midlands'. So did just that and guess what – same score 8 out of 12 and that despite the insult of sticking to the West Midlands! Perhaps some of our readers who hail from other parts of the world ought to try this, see how they get on and share with '58.

While mentioning the information being sent out by C&RT, of which there is an ever increasing amount probably due to the current restrictions, we will be sharing with readers some of the current work programmes taking place in our area. One of these was featured in the last edition as an issue of planning permission being sought by C&RT. This was 'Coffin Bridge' just below Hanbury Wharf Junction on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. C&RT invariably give much information about the work, where it is, what is being carried out, any towpath closure or navigation stoppage. Also given for the benefit of boaters are the nearest winding holes either upstream or downstream. All very helpful until the directions are scrutinised. In the case of 'Coffin Bridge' C&RT state:

*"Upstream winding hole: Tibberton, between Bridges 25 and 26.*

*Downstream winding hole: Junction with Droitwich Junction Canal"*

Hopefully readers are able to spot the error here? If not all will be revealed next time.

Unfortunately the other two items of maintenance work scheduled for the Worcester and Birmingham Canal also exhibit errors in terms of nearest winding holes and a bridge which does not exist according to the canal maps. So if there are any boaters who are allowed to navigate either soon, or more likely when restrictions ease, beware as you may end up getting lost if that is possible on a canal!

This edition of '58, while tending to suffer from all that the current lock down prohibits, still manages to offer readers a variety of waterway related themes to hopefully enjoy. Some of this may not make for such good reading, for example the lack of a St. Richard's Canal Festival again as David has reported in the Chair's Notes. All sadly beyond our control, but here is where you the members can help out by please sending into us anything you think may be of interest to other magazine readers. We still intend to hopefully produce something to mark the 250th anniversary of the opening of the Droitwich Barge Canal and again any input at all from members, or readers generally, will be gratefully received – looked after and safely returned if necessary. Over to you good readers please.

Lastly, as usual, a massive thank you to all those that have been able to send things in for publication in this edition – without this input we would certainly be struggling to get anything out in the way that we continually try to do.

Please keep safe and enjoy the read.

*John Hemingway*



# January Meeting: The Monty

Our January meeting took place on 'Zoom' and was possibly the best attended yet. The illustrated talk, which was delivered by well known speaker Danny Spike with a young assistant, gave attendees an insight to the Montgomery Canal known as the 'Monty'. This canal was abandoned in 1944 following a breach in 1936 near the Perry Aqueduct. It then sank into dereliction. However, over the years a restoration programme involving volunteer organisations, has developed resulting in several miles of waterway being reconnected to the National system at Frankton.

Danny showed us several photographs of various structures along the restored section of the canal as well as along the currently unnavigable sections. The talk was very well received and if any readers would like to see the presentation it's available on our society YouTube channel: <https://bit.ly/3pJeg0U>.



# February Meeting: Wilts & Berks Canal

The society's most recent virtual meeting was held on February 2nd and was again well supported including several new attendees made possible now that travelling is not required.

Following the usual welcoming words by David, Denis then took over and introduced the meeting to Martin Buckland from the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust. Martin explained the history and background to this project whose aim is to *'restore all 72 miles of the Wilts & Berks Canal to create a tranquil public waterside park for walking, cycling, fishing & boating'*.

The canal originally connected the River Thames near Abingdon to the Somersetshire Coal Canal which branches off the Kennet and Avon Canal with subsequent links to the Thames and Severn (now the Cotswold Canals) and the Oxford. The carriage of coal was clearly the main incentive for the cutting of this canal, which opened in 1810, somewhat later than the main canal building era. It thus became an important link canal transporting mainly coal from the West Country coalfields up to the Midlands.

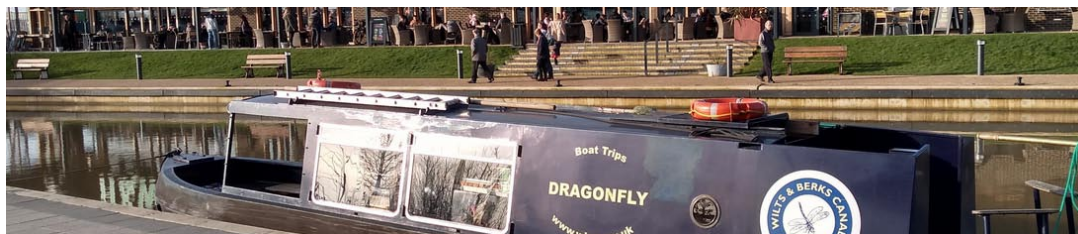
However, like so many inland waterways its traffic succumbed to railway competition and slowly declined during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1914 the canal was legally abandoned and Swindon Corporation, who had promoted this, proceeded to dispose of the assets using the canal as a general dumping ground. After substantial damage to the canal infrastructure, some would say vandalism, by the time the new Wilts and Berks Canal Amenity Group formed in 1977 there were mainly short rural sections which could be preserved for amenity use. In 1997 this became the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust and the formidable plans to restore the canal commenced in earnest.

Martin showed many superb examples of the very impressive work which has been completed so far in this very challenging restoration programme. He did, however, emphasise throughout a number of underlying principles with this kind of work viz:

- Having an overall plan for the whole thing but seizing the chance to do little stretches wherever you can – the “string of pearls.”
- Restoring key features like bridges and locks even if you can only do a few.
- Making a feature of junctions where it joins existing canals.
- Accepting detours where the old route is unviable.
- Getting funding from anywhere you can, and ask for help from anyone – don't ask, don't get!
- Linking up with housing developments and road works – canals add value to housing.
- Becoming part of the regeneration of towns and cities – as may happen in Melksham and Swindon.
- Using IWA's Waterway Recovery Group.
- Making regeneration of vegetation a key part of any restoration as this will restore the wildlife – grow don't mow!
- Having opening ceremonies (with royalty!) and gatherings to mark progress.

**This was a truly inspirational presentation which was well received by all.**

**To find out more please visit: <https://www.wbct.org.uk/>**





# 'Nature Notes'

## Mary Green

Excuse me if my notes are a bit Alvechurch-centred these days. I'm not getting very far afield! The good thing is you don't need to if you want to see the natural world along the canal.

In ancient times, February marked the beginning of spring, halfway between winter solstice and spring equinox, so spring has begun. During January we had sub-zero weather for the first time for a while: the canal was well frozen. Here the mallard ducks gathered together and kept a patch ice-free. It's where we humans come and feed them and near a bridge where the water is slightly warmer. They were joined by Canada geese, moorhens and black-headed gulls. The geese are already establishing territories to nest: the pair who nest here chase off others with loud honking. When the weather warmed up a bit the mallards started mating. We have had a pair of swans around but not in the very cold weather: they are probably nesting up towards Jacob's Cut again.

The disappearing kingfisher has returned to a stream which feeds the canal so I hope to see it around a bit more this year. There's a heron sitting nearby but I have not yet found where they go to nest here.

I heard the first great tits calling in January and now they are in good song in the trees, along with the robin and woodpigeon which sing all winter. The chaffinch will start up pretty soon, then the greenfinch. Much of the canalside here is remnants of old woodland, a great habitat for birds so long as it's not over-cut.

The first flowers are tree flowers – the catkins of hazel and alder. They have been there all winter but become longer and pollen-filled in February. They can flower and set fruit early because they are wind-pollinated, so they don't have to wait for insects to pollinate them. The first true blossom is the cherry-plum, which just started to appear in January but was then held up by cold, and is re-appearing now. Those planted two years ago by the Dead Arm are about to blossom. Next will be the blackthorn, probably in early March, and pussy-willow – all insect pollinated.

At the hedge bottom is another old plant, an early spring arrival and a marker of ancient woodland. This is dog's mercury, a rather insignificant plant with green flower sprays, but once you know it, it will cheer you up as it shows spring is coming. In some places you might find snowdrops, another woodland plant but one that hasn't survived so much by the canal, unless it spreads from gardens. If it's mild, you might see golden many-petalled celandines later this month. These old herbs were once called pilewort, so you know what they were supposed to cure. With them may be coltsfoot, like tiny leafless dandelions, used to cure coughs.

There are already edible leaves along the canal, which would have been used to fill the spring hunger-gap in the days before imported food. I've seen cow parsley, garlic mustard, ground elder (known as goutweed, again for medicinal reasons), wild garlic, daisies, dandelions, nettles, dead-nettles and goosegrass. You can do a good salad, soup or stir-fry from these. By next month you can add some of their flowers too, along with ground-ivy and wild violet. By then the hawthorn leaves will be out, once called bread-and-cheese because they were eaten so often.

All these flora and fauna depend on each other in a complex network of life. Noticing them makes a regular canal walk fascinating.





**Celandines**



**Hawthorn Leaves**



**Cherry Plum**



**Alder Catkins**



**Dogs Mercury**



**Red Dead-Nettles**

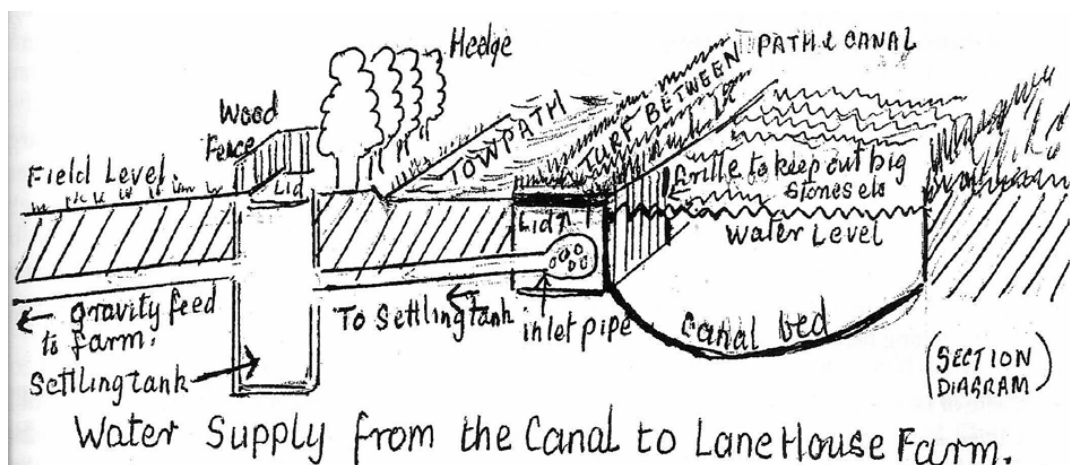
# Lane House Farm

## A Farm using water from the Worcester & Birmingham Canal

Monica Greaves, who was born in 1928, spent her childhood at Lane House Farm in Aqueduct Lane Alvechurch. The house is situated just below the level of the canal on the towpath side adjacent to the aqueduct. Her grandfather was a Mr. Roberts whom 'Robert's Corner' is named after. This is the small area where the traffic island is now at the bottom end of Aqueduct Lane.

The property, which is still very much occupied although no longer as a farm, has clearly been modernised since those times even though the buildings are according to Monica, several hundred years old. This actually pre-dates the cutting of the adjacent Worcester and Birmingham Canal which is on a slightly higher level than the house.

Monica described the house as being quite modern when compared to most others and actually had piped water to the property including a flushing system for an outside lavatory. This not for drinking water actually came from the canal and was apparently an unusual compensatory gesture for allowing the canal company to cut through the farm land. Monica goes on to describe occasions when the gravity fed pipe from the canal sometimes became blocked and she had to almost get into the canal to free the accumulated debris. The diagram below gives an indication of how the system worked. It would be very interesting to know if any of the pipe work or associated structures still exists.



Many thanks to Moira Greaves for this information which was originally part of an article written for 'Alvechurch 1920 - 1960' for which '58' is very grateful - Ed.





# Boats To Trains

## Update on the Heritage Corridor for North Worcestershire

A report on our recent meeting with Attract Marketing.

Recently Bill Lambert, Al Gibbs and myself met Nick Booker of the Attract Marketing Agency who are promoting the Heritage Corridor for North Worcestershire (HCNW). We wanted to find out what it was all about and discuss what part your society could play in it. It would seem that the whole thing is not yet fully established particularly the area it should cover. The corridor was originally mooted by Simon Carter of the Avoncroft Museum to increase tourism in the East of the county. It is now the child of Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils who need to establish the actual area the corridor will cover. Our opinion is that it should stick to North East Worcestershire as we have many attractions that can be linked to the canal and the story of the Industrial Revolution. Our corner of the county is unique in this.

Our society can bring to the initiative local knowledge and a group of volunteers who are prepared to work to get the story of Tardebigge and its part in the history of canals out to a wider public. Included in this is the work to actually build the canal, the boat lift by Lock 58 and features on the flight like the pump house and the reservoir down to the salt works. We are also interested in new and innovative ways to get information to people like QR codes at places of interest and signage at wharfs that are unknown at the moment.

The meeting was held over social media, imagine my delight when just as I was nodding off my attention was caught by the mention of the Lickey Incline, another feature of this corner of the county that Nick Booker is keen to publicise. Not only this but I found that Nick is the Webmaster of the Lickey Incline website ([www.lickeyincline.co.uk](http://www.lickeyincline.co.uk)) or his blog at <https://lickeyincline.blogspot.com>). I was over the moon at this, Canals and Trains in the same Zoom! How exciting and sad at the same time!

We have a long way to go with the HCNW, let's hope the journey is off to a good start and we can promote our Society further in this part of the county of Worcestershire. If you want to get involved with this initiative please contact Bill Lambert or myself.

*From your 'special correspondent' Neil Franklin.*

*Perhaps named canal bridges, as mentioned in the last '58', could be factored into the plans – Ed.*

## The Ribble Link

A few years ago the society's monthly meeting involved an illustrated talk about cruising the relatively new 'Ribble Link'. This was delivered by society friend and BCNS stalwart Phil Clayton. The link takes boaters from Tarlton at the Northern end of the Rufford Branch of the Leeds Liverpool Canal, onto the tidal River Douglas then the River Ribble and up onto Savick Brook and the formerly landlocked Lancaster Canal.

Society member Jeff Carter has kindly sent us the following link which is well worth watching, particularly for those members who enjoyed 'Extreme Boating' with Chris and Jennie Gash.

[Click/tap on the picture for the link.](#)



# Unlocking The Severn

In December 2020 several society members, who are also Canal and River Trust volunteers, were privileged to have an early inspection of the fish pass at Diglis on the bank almost opposite where the Worcester-Birmingham canal meets the River Severn. Our visit was on the day that the construction team were putting in place the flood proof doors. Not before time, because the river Severn has since flooded over the top of the metal defence piles (C&RT drone aerial photograph), as it had done in February earlier in the year.

The pass was still a building site so we did quite a bit of clambering up and down steps and over rubble. The pass is now almost complete for watering. Richard Harrison, Project Manager, led us enthusiastically through the series of huge pools that form a staircase that will bypass the 170 year old Diglis weir. Maybe you recognise one of our number following the route the fish will take?

Severn shad (also known as twaite shad and May fish) would have made their migration to spawning grounds up the Severn in their hundreds of thousands. Anglers will possibly be familiar with shad. It was a staple food in the past when people used to eat a lot of fish. Shad can sometimes be seen on the menu of sushi restaurants. In spite of being a very powerful swimmer the shad, unlike the salmon, couldn't leap the two-metre high weir so they were confined to the river below Worcester. Their numbers plummeted.

With other fish passes at Bevere, Lincomb and Holte from April 2021, shad will now be able to make their way even as far as Welshpool. Visitors to Diglis fish pass will have the spectacle of shad and other fish swimming past a large window from within a viewing room. That's £20 million well spent in my opinion.

For more information please go to [www.unlockingthesevern.co.uk](http://www.unlockingthesevern.co.uk) where you will find several informative YouTube clips.

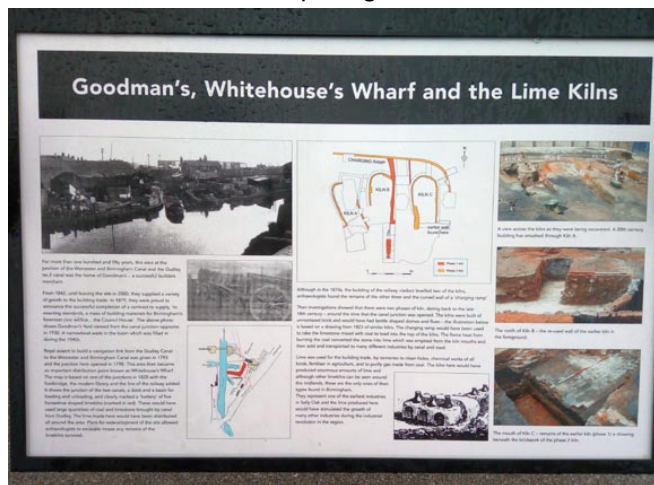
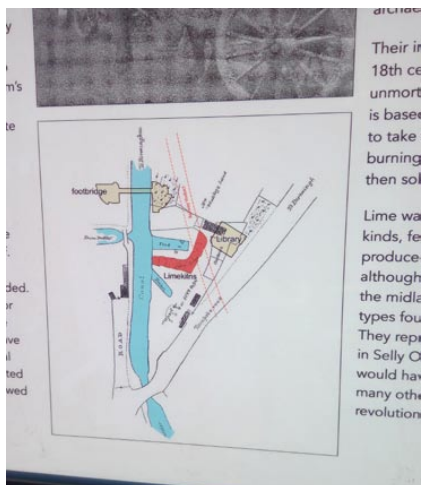
*Ian McGarr*



# Lapal Canal Trust News

Our friends from the Lapal Canal trust have been investigating past uses of the wharf at Selly Oak with some fascinating discoveries.

Further information can be found on the Trust's website [www.lapal.org](http://www.lapal.org)



## Alarum Theatre

### 5th Anniversary Blog Posts

This year marks Alarum's 5th anniversary! To celebrate we gave our wonderful work experience student, Jess Saunders the task of summing up the last five years of performing, creating, producing and boating in five blog posts. Each blog post will be made up of five fun facts and archive photos. A huge thanks to Jess for being an absolute pleasure to have with us! Sadly her work experience has now ended, but we hope to be able to bring her back into the team at some stage in the future, Writing workshops - booking now open Thursdays 2-4pm. Pay What You Can. Bookings via Eventbrite **25th February** Life Writing. **25th March** Bringing the past to life. **22nd April** Writing Monologue.

### Reminder:

Wolverhampton Literary Festival Performance of Isobel's War on Zoom 13th Feb "It's been quite a challenge, adapting the stage version to perform on Zoom in a boat in lockdown! So even if you've seen it on one of our tours, it promises to provide a different slant to the story," says Kate.

On **Saturday 13th February** 1.30-2.30pm Kate Saffin will present a 'Zoom' version of her monologue - Isobel's War (from Idle Women of the Wartime Waterways) for the Wolverhampton Literary Festival Fringe.

There is a nominal fee of £1.67 to secure your virtual seat. A virtual hat will be provided prior to and after the performance.

Any proceeds made through the virtual hat for each show will go directly to the performer.

To find out more about Alarum Theatre please visit [www.alarumtheatre.co.uk](http://www.alarumtheatre.co.uk).





# Reservoir Cottage & Tunnel Keepers Cottage

## Lower Bittell Reservoir Cottage and Wast Hills Tunnel Cottage

The historic reservoir keepers cottage on the off side of the Worcester and Birmingham Canal at Lower Bittell appears to have been unoccupied for some years now. The tunnel keepers cottage at the Southern end of Washhills Tunnel, similarly, has been left unoccupied for a substantial amount of time.

At the moment both structures have an element of physical protection from unwanted visitors, with the tunnel cottage having advertised security in place, whereas the reservoir cottage is overseen by the moorers on site.

Many readers will be aware that the longer buildings are left unoccupied the more they will deteriorate, particularly at this time of year. Both buildings have heritage value not only to the canal environment but to the wider public interest and at the moment nothing much looks as though it is happening in terms of renovation and/or occupancy. Many of us will be aware of examples of buildings such as these being left for so long they become unfit for purpose and are lost forever.

The canal system has so many examples of this happening and this canal society will not want the same thing to happen to any more particularly having witnessed the wanton destruction of heritage structures at such as Stoke Prior and the arson attack on Kings Norton Junction House. '58' understands that both buildings are under the control of Canal and River Trust so it is here that we must seek information first and foremost about them. So if anyone from C&RT could please let us know the situation we would be pleased to inform our readers accordingly – but we do need to know sooner rather than later for reasons mentioned above.





# Kings Norton Tunnel

A couple of our members recently took a walk along the W&B from Alvechurch to Hopwood. There was a considerable amount of water pouring into the canal just south of the Kings Norton Tunnel.

If members have been out and about along any of our canals then please do send in your photos for all to enjoy.



## Cyclists Slow Down

Canal & River Trust have launched a campaign asking cyclists to slow down.

Visit the Trust's website for more information.

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SLOW  
DOWN**



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# Volunteer News

## Bill Lambert

It is now a little late in the day, but may I wish everyone a peaceful and prosperous New Year. Certainly, a New Year with less turmoil or uncertainty or lockdowns.

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.

### Can We Re-Start our Work Parties?

As we now all know, there operates a national lockdown process so that our work party activity remains suspended. The rules on the matter are quite specific, no meeting up in groups, no travelling around outside your local area and so forth. I read in the Droitwich Advertiser recently that West Mercia Police have issued 700 fines for infringements. I would not like to predict how long this situation can last for, but I think that work parties will remain cancelled until further notice.

So, at the moment it is a case of wear a face mask, wash hands, keep your distance and stay home.

However, in spite of everything our society is continuing our projects as best it can.

### Our Narrowboat Cecilia.

As we reported in the last issue, Cecilia has undergone a significant amount of repair work through last summer and originally it was hoped that our volunteers would be able to finish off the work after the carpenter had vacated. However, with the Coronavirus on the rampage this could not happen so the work is still to be completed. However, all is not completely lost as John Hemingway, bless him, (*yuk! – Ed*) who fortunately lives next door has complied with covid regulations, taken his daily exercise on the boat and quietly made what progress he can.

### A Heritage Corridor for North Worcestershire.

During the last year, a consortium from Bromsgrove District Council, Redditch Borough Council, the Bromsgrove Society and others have been applying for funding and looking at proposals to create a new heritage corridor across parts of north Worcestershire. Our society has expressed an interest in this project and has signed up to support it. We would hope that this would add support in our efforts to conserve the lime kilns at Tardebigge. The consortium has now produced their report with a variety of options to consider which has been passed over to Nick Booker, a director with Attract Marketing Ltd. He has been commissioned to develop the 'Heritage Corridor for North Worcestershire' concept with the ultimate objective of producing an action plan setting out the way forward and underpinned by a business case. Our society attended an online meeting with Mr Booker to voice our suggestions towards this project. The meeting was attended by Bill Lambert, Neil Franklin and Alan Gibbs. Neil has kindly sent in a report about this meeting (*see p.13*). Both Neil and Alan, along with Ian Hunter, are keen to create an expert group within our society for the historical and footpath interest along the Tardebigge area of our canal. There will be more interesting news as events develop I am sure.

Please remember, all work parties are cancelled until further notice.

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 soon.

Many thanks,  
Bill Lambert  
Volunteer Coordinator  
Worcester-Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society.  
Email [volunteers@wbdc.org.uk](mailto:volunteers@wbdc.org.uk)  
Mobile 07 815 986 012

## C&RT Stoppage Notices

### **Lock 25, Stoke Prior, Worcester & Birmingham Canal**

Starts: 11/01/2021 08:00

Ends: 05/03/2021 16:00 inclusive

Type: Navigation Closure

Reason: Repair

Towpath closed? No

Top and bottom gate replacements. Ladder improvements.

### **Lock 39, Tardebigge, Worcester & Birmingham Canal**

Starts: 11/01/2021 08:00

Ends: 19/02/2021 16:00 inclusive

Type: Navigation Closure

Reason: Repair

Towpath closed? No

Top and bottom gate replacements. Ladder improvements.

### **Bridge 34, Coffin Bridge, Hanbury, Worcester & Birmingham Canal**

Starts: 04/01/2021 08:00

Ends: 19/03/2021 16:00 inclusive

Type: Navigation Closure

Reason: Repair

Towpath closed? No

Works to the bridge to repair lateral arch movement and parapets, to replace missing brickwork and repair uneven steps. 01/06/2020: The information above is a draft notice of works planned as part of the winter 2020/21 stoppages programme.



## 10 Years Ago

Perhaps readers would like to share what they were doing ten years ago? The article reproduced below was sent in to '58' ten years ago by our very own Denis Pike. Denis is well known for the work he now carries out both inside and outside of various properties – so beware as readers may find an article being written about your home (only joking Den – Ed).

The cottages described in the article will be well known to many who use the Worcester and Birmingham Canal in that area. They are literally alongside the towpath below the lock.

The editor of '58' at this time was Martin Hancox and this edition would have been one of the earlier ones when the society became known as the Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society.

### *Denis Pike Raising the Rafter*

I wondered if the readers might be interested in a Heritage issue I found out the other day?

I have recently laid a short stretch of hedge adjoining the canal at Whitford Bridge at the top of the Stoke flight of locks. Most readers will be aware that there are a row of three cottages here - known as Whitford cottages. They are facing the canal and I assume they were canal workers cottages, though externally they almost look too good to be!

On speaking to Mr and Mrs Jim Godwin, they gave me some super information regarding some background of number 1 cottage. They couldn't tell me exactly how old the cottage was, but the more-modern extension on the north end is now ninety years old. The rafters and Purlins in the attic are part recent and part original. The original rafters seem to be almost rough-hewn, curved and bowed from sagging over the years. One of these rafters runs parallel to the canal and on its face it has carved into it the letters W & B C Co.

I have to say I found this fascinating. What is the story behind this beam? Were the letters carved into the beam after building the house? If so, were they there to advertise somehow the ownership of the building? More likely in my mind is that the beam had some previous purpose. The beam can no longer be seen from the outside of the house even if it ever was! So was the timber pinched to build the house, or was it surplus to requirements after completion of the canal?

I imagine the answer will never be known, but, more sadly, the carving is now partly obscured by more modern rafters that prevent even a half-decent photograph for the magazine. Other issues of note in the cottage are a cellar with super arched ceiling, an original pig-sty in the garden, and evidence of original clay-tile drains leading to waste drains directly into the canal.

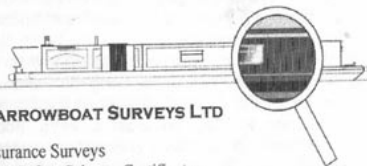
One inhabitant of cottage number three, so I'm told, was the "music-man" who wrote and played his own music named Woodward who was a close relative of Edward Elgar.

Denis Pike

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Whitford Cottages, near Stoke Flight Top Lock



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## 20 Years Ago

The following article appeared in '58' in January 2001. What were our readers doing then? Please let us know but do keep the information printable!

There is at least one recognisable name in this article albeit within a different role. On one of the lower wing walls of the Hanbury Three locks there is a plaque which commemorates this very kind donation towards restoring the Droitwich Junction Canal that we have today.

The then editor of '58' in those far off times was the late great Jon Axe and the Chair of the then Worcester & Birmingham Canal Society was.....???



# The Inland Waterways Association Press Release

Date: 10th November 2000 Immediate Release

## DROITWICH CANALS TO BENEFIT FROM IWA LEGACY

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) today announced that the Neil Pitts Award is to be made to the Droitwich Canals Trust. The Award of £100,000 comes from a legacy of nearly £0.5 million left to the Association by Neil Pitts, an IWA member from the West Midlands area. Although only 11km in length, the Droitwich Canals provide a unique historical combination: the western Barge Canal, connecting the town to the River Severn, was one of the earliest navigations in Britain, while the Junction Canal, connecting to the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, is an example of one of the latest and most sophisticated narrow canals of the 19th Century.

Part of the Barge Canal has already been restored to navigation by the Droitwich Canals Trust. The Trust is a key player in a Partnership with the District and County Councils, British Waterways, the Environment Agency and the Wildlife Trusts, which is committed to achieving the full restoration of both canals. As part of this larger restoration project, the Neil Pitts Award will be used to complete the full restoration of locks 1 to 3 on the Droitwich Junction Canal, with the Trust providing the balance of the cost of the project of £7,900.

The Award will cover the cost of lock gates and the restoration of tail bridges and all lock gear to full operational standard at the three locks. Improvements will also be carried out to the adjacent towing path and boundary hedging, and sympathetic signage will be erected to interpret the lock flight and the Canals' history. The Trust will also put up a cast-iron plaque at the head of Lock 1 acknowledging the contribution of the late Neil Pitts. Much of the work will be done by volunteers from the Waterway Recovery Group, assisted by the Trust's own workforce, under the overall management of a British Waterways project team, and should be completed by the end of 2001.

Locks 1 to 3 are immediately accessible from the junction with the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, where many visitors stop, so the restoration will raise the profile of the Droitwich Canals. The full restoration of both canals will enable a 22-mile cruising ring to be created, including the River Severn and the

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Worcester & Birmingham Canal, which will benefit the local economy through income from visiting boaters. A linear park will also be created as part of the larger restoration project, providing recreation and public amenity for local people and visitors alike.

Margaret Rowley, Chairman of The Droitwich Canals Trust said "The Trust is delighted to receive the Neil Pitts Award from IWA. It represents a vital contribution to the funding package for the restoration of the Droitwich Canals. It also demonstrates the significant commitment of the Trust and its partners towards the restoration project. The Award will help to raise the profile of the restoration project and should enable it to attract further funding from other sources.

Mr Tony Harrison, Chairman of IWA's Restoration Committee said "IWA is pleased to be making the Neil Pitts Award to the Droitwich Canals Trust, which has worked very hard over the years to campaign for the restoration of both Droitwich Canals. Now that a successful Partnership has been formed and some funding has been secured, IWA hopes that full restoration can be achieved in the near future, which will bring benefits for locals and visitors alike."

*Ed - This is fantastic news for the DCT and WBCS members. The Junction Canal was constructed by A Worcester Birmingham Canal engineer, Boddington, so we in the WBCS have more than a passing interest in seeing the Junction Canal restored. The Junction Canal has unique features, but in many ways also incorporates design features common to our own canal. Coming very much at the end of the canal age, built as it was to link the Worcester & Birmingham to the Droitwich Barge Canal in 1854 at a cost of £28,000 for its 1 mile 4 furlongs (2.4 kilometres) length. Cost have risen since the canal was built and a quick back of an envelope calculation suggests something like 70% of this award will be spent to provide new lockgates and fittings. We anticipate WRG will be heavily involved in the restoration project, making good the fabric of the lock chambers, but there will be a role for the DCT's own workforce. Local volunteers have worked to make good the side pond of lock 3, cleared the area of scrub, laid a section of the hedgerow bordering the Hanbury Road and fenced off the site for the protection of the public. Equally important will be local involvement to keep the site secure and free from the interference of vandals who take a peculiar and wanton delight in acts of destruction. Sad as it seems, the task is to insure the grant is spent productively and not wasted repairing damage caused by our social misfits who have already been in evidence on this site.*

## YouTube Videos

Our friends from the Birmingham Canal Navigation Society have kindly sent us the following link which '58' feels sure will be of interest to most readers. There is a great deal of old waterway related video footage here. If any readers wish to review them we would be pleased to receive their observations.

Just click or tap on the picture to be taken to the YouTube channel or visit: <https://bit.ly/3aEnMvW>



# Battle Of The Cressy

## Waging a War in Defence of the Freedom of Britain's Canals

The swing bridge for Tunnel Lane, over the Northern Stratford Canal at Kings Norton, had collapsed and a fixed bridge was erected by the owners which would not allow boats to pass underneath. In 1947 Mr L.T.C.(Tom) Rolt, Secretary of the Inland Waterways, gave the owners of the bridge 24 hours notice that he, on his Narrowboat Cressy, wanted to exercise right of navigation. With the press



notified, the owners of the bridge jacked it up as the deadline expired. Cressy, with Tom Rolt at the helm, travelling from Kings Norton onto the Stratford upon Avon Canal, arrived on time and managed to pass underneath reminding the owners they had a statutory obligation to maintain the bridge. He then travelled a further 12 miles on the canal. His actions stopped any subsequent owners from closing the Northern Stratford Canal.

Cressy was converted from a wooden horse-drawn narrow Flyboat and fitted with a steam engine. Having discovered that steam made cruising through tunnels difficult, he replaced it with a Ford Model T engine.

'Narrowboat' by L.T.C. Rolt published in 1944 has been republished many times. It was an immediate success both

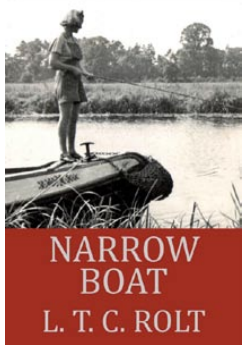
with critics and the general public, with fan mail arriving at the Rolts' boat by Tardebigge top lock where they were then moored.

Below is an extract from 'Inland Waterways' by Hugh McKnight published in 1975 (page 407) in which he states: *"The Stratford Canal passed into railway ownership in 1856, early commercial prosperity declined, and in the last years of GWR control the southern part was quite derelict below Lapworth. One of the earliest successful campaigns was to*

*secure replacement at Lifford Lane, Kings Norton, of a swing bridge that had been permanently fixed by the canal owners. Protests cruises were made by Sir Peter Scott and LTC Rolt in their narrow boats 'Beatrice' and 'Cressy' respectively, with several hundred supporters on rooftops, lining the banks and hanging from the trees. The waterway leaves the Worcester& Birmingham*

THE L. T. C. ROLT LIBRARY

*Canal and passes through a most unusual guillotine stop lock designed to prevent water supplies being taken from one canal to the other. Since Nationalisation the gates have been left raised at each end. There is a heavy swing bridge shortly afterwards, scene of the protests in 1947".*



- Key
1. Sliding hatch.
  2. Fore hatch deck.
  3. Filler of drinking-water tank.
  4. Fore deck.
  5. Hatches to coal-bunkers.
  6. Berths with linen-chests under.
  7. Folding dining-table.
  8. Guest's wardrobe.
  9. Crockery shelves and cupboard.
  10. Kitchen table with drawers under.
  11. Water tank with heater under, supplied by hand pump.
  12. Sink.
  13. Draining board with store shelves under.
  14. Two-burner cooking stove.
  15. Plate rack.
  16. Coal stove.
  17. Easy chairs.
  18. Bookshelves and writing desk.
  19. Spring berth.
  20. Folding bedside table.
  21. Dressing-table.
  22. Hanging wardrobe.
  23. Bath and folding wash-basin.
  24. Independent boiler.
  25. Chemical closet.
  26. Workbench with shelves over.
  27. Petrol tank.
  28. Paraffin tank.
  29. Hatch to aft hold.
  30. Engine casing and controls.
  31. Deck rails.
  32. Tiller.



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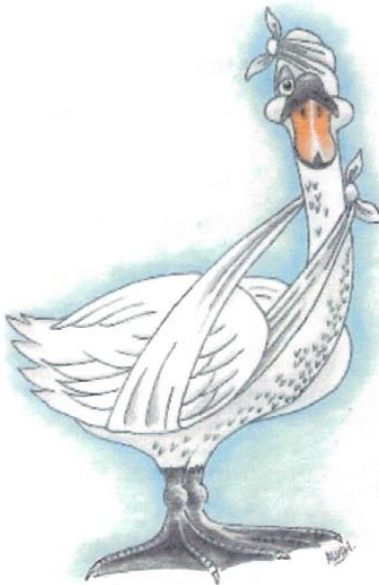
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We hold our regular monthly meetings at the Alvechurch Boat Centre, Scarfield Wharf, Alvechurch, B48 7SQ (just behind the award winning Weighbridge pub). Meetings take place on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm (except July and August when we 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.

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