

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'



**Narrowboat 'Cecilia' Returns to Alvechurch for a
Champagne Reception (*see inside for more information*)**





Canal Society Annual Lunch

Bromsgrove Golf Centre

**Time to book your place for the society
annual lunch at Bromsgrove Golf Centre**

When: Sunday 12th March

Time: 12 midday for 12:30pm

Price: £18 adult, £12 child

**Please phone David Wheeler on
07970 711038 to book your place**

The Magazine of the Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

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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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Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

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

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Chair's Notes

At the recent welcoming home of 'Cecilia' it was apparent that many new members/volunteers did not know the true history of how we became involved with the boat.

Around the year 1996, the Society was holding its Annual Boat Gathering at the Boat and Railway pub when 'Cecilia' came through the moored boats asking what was going on. The skipper of the boat was a guy called Mark Johnson and he had on board several down syndrome people. It turned out that Mark ran a home for down syndrome people in Oxfordshire and had named 'Cecilia' with an 'i', because it was the goddess of music, and down syndrome people relate to music. Mark moored up and joined us for the weekend and we became friends, so much so that 'Cecilia' arrived at every boat gathering from then till the year 2000. The summer of that year Mark telephoned me to say sadly he had decided to close the home and was looking for a suitable recipient to take on 'Cecilia', which he offered it to the canal society. No-one on the committee was interested in taking responsibility, in fact I was faced with negative comments like, "what about the cost, who is going to look after her, what about maintenance?" I was convinced that it was a wonderful opportunity for the canal society so I decided to take the responsibility and Julie Kirkbride, our local MP at the time, came to the Engine House, by lock 57, to take the keys from Mark and officially hand over 'Cecilia' to the Canal Society. I looked after 'Cecilia' pretty much on my own for over 15 years until the 'Cecilia' volunteer group was formed after a moan by Denis Pike. The rest, as they say, is now history. It is nice to see that my original decision to take 'Cecilia' was the right one and she is now being used as I first envisaged.

Can I remind members of our Annual Dinner to be held again at the Bromsgrove Golf Centre on Sunday 12th March 2023. Please let me know if you are attending so that we can inform the golf club of the numbers (*details inside front cover*).

Planning for St. Richard's Canal Festival is now well underway. As always, we will need the volunteer support to help make the Festival successful. Anyone who can offer help please contact Neil Franklin. Last year was probably the best organised Festival we have had, let's try and match it again this year.

David Wheeler



St Richard's Canal Festival 2023

Friday 28th April 5pm - Monday 1st May 5pm





Editor's Notes

Hello Readers

Welcome to the first edition of 2023. 'Water water everywhere' once again, or at least it has been this year with some major outbursts of rain which have certainly been topping up our canals and reservoirs. I seem to recall a similar scenario in the last edition but the levels were lower then unlike now. The downside of this is the risk of flooding and drains into the canals bringing much silt into the waterways which can subsequently lead to shallowness in particular areas. A point mentioned in the last edition which is still there in the usual places, but we really do need the water. Not sure that our friends at Anglo-Welsh at Tardebigge Old Wharf would completely agree, as their yard looked like there was another marina being developed, such was the rainfall. There also appears to be some pending damage on the northern end of Shortwood Tunnel where water has been taking its toll on one side of the tunnel entrance. We'll need to monitor that one.



Good to see 'The Wanderer' back in action for the society work parties – possibly 3 years since the last one would you believe? Even then the boat has not been able to move on a few occasions as the cut has been frozen. That doesn't stop the society's intrepid band of volunteers though as the work parties stayed on the towpath and completed much litter picking and clearing the towpath of cuttings, along with general tidying up. It's just amazing what is sometimes found in and around our canals but more about that later on.



Readers may recall a feature some time ago about the cottage above the Southern portal of West Hills Tunnel. '58' found out that even though the cottage may at one time have been the tunnel keeper's home, the property was not owned by Canal & River Trust, presumably sold off some years ago. While being boarded up and security being in evidence, the property was clearly deteriorating. That situation now appears to have moved on with work being in progress to renovate the property which may at some point in the past have had clear connections with the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. If any readers have any information about past residents and any connection to the canal we would be pleased to hear from you.



While on the subject of cottages, in past editions of '58' much has been given over to the restoration of the Bittell Reservoir lock cottage on the W & B. The cottage itself was described to '58' by C&RT'S CEO Richard Parry, as an environmental project. Further information has come to us about this, as yet unoccupied property, which appears to corroborate Richard's assertion. Not only are solar panels installed on the roof of the property but underground heat pumps as well. Estimates of the cost of heating the cottage for 12 months are, we're informed, about £400 and that figure even with today's inflationary energy prices! Anyone interested in living at such an idyllic location may well be encouraged by that assertion. Watch this space!

While catching up on some other past items, the society has of course been busy with many other activities. The St.Richard's Canal Festival organising committee continues its work in the build up towards the long weekend commencing April 28th. Society meetings have continued as usual with the last speaker going down a real treat for those present - more on this later on. The society shop is having a break from business for a while as there has not been any suitable events to attend but Lynne will no doubt have used the time to take stock of things (*pun intended!*) in order to prepare for future events later on this year. The big event, which included much media coverage, was the return of the society's narrowboat 'Cecilia'. Delayed by about a week because the canal was frozen over, a crowd gathered to welcome the boat back to Alvechurch with a speech from a local civic dignitary – again more on this later on.

At this time of the year, many society thoughts lean towards the Annual Lunch which this year takes place on Sunday March 12th from around noon at the Bromsgrove Golfing Centre. This is also the occasion when the winner of the coveted George Bate Trophy is announced following a poll of all paid up society members. More information about this appears elsewhere but if members wish to nominate a person who, in their opinion, has made a real positive difference to the society during the past year, then please send in to last year's recipient Al Gibbs on 07398 709048 or email him at alangibbs456@btinternet.com.

Many thanks to all of this edition's contributors and enjoy the read.

John Hemingway

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Membership Matters



Many thanks to everyone that has renewed their membership for 2022/2023.

Unfortunately our membership has dipped somewhat so if you know anyone who would like to join our society then kindly point them our way. Please invite them to visit our website: www.wbdcs.org.uk where they can find out all about us.

More Membership Matters

The society's long standing active member and current President, Sandra Radmore, has in fairly recent times, been busy along with her daughter Emela, providing hot drinks and biscuits at our usual monthly meetings. However, due to health issues Sandra is currently unable to attend society functions.

Emela sent us an email just prior to the January meeting offering the usual seasonal good wishes to all and explaining the situation:

Mum became very poorly at the beginning of November and spent about 2 and a half weeks in hospital. By the end of her stay she was so debilitated that a return to her home was impossible. She is now in care and improving slowly although very frail. She is getting back some of her spirit and good nature and it's good to see her smile.

I am starting to take her out for a while but meetings are too late. I hope that I'll be able to bring her to an event when the weather is warmer.

'58' sends its best wishes to both Emela and Sandra and looks forward to seeing them both at some point later in the year.

Alvechurch Picnic In The Park

This very popular event is due to take place on Sunday, May 28th. We will be having our society gazebo there this year, staffed by our brilliant team of volunteers. We won't be selling anything but are hoping to drum up some membership and encourage more people to volunteer for us.

If you'd like to help out on the day then please contact our Volunteer Coordinator Neil Franklin. Contact information is on page 4. It was estimated that over 3000 people attended this event in 2002 and it included a fly-over by a Lancaster Bomber. This is planned to happen again this year.

If you're unable to volunteer then do pop along and bring a picnic. It kicks off with a dog show at 10.30am. Lots of stalls and live music throughout the day.

Society Meeting: December 2022

December's meeting took the form of 'Natter n Noggin' or put another way 'Quiz Night'. Denis and Tony as usual pulled out all the stops in preparing for this fun night with so many different brain teasers. Use was made of audio and visual media as well as the more traditional style of questioning. There seemed to be so many prizes for people to access both during the quiz and afterwards. Members brought along food which was devoured mainly during the break.

A very good and well planned fun night, so many thanks to Denis and Tony for their efforts, but also to everyone who brought food to share and for turning out on a dark winter's night.

Society Meeting: January 2023



*Ogof Ffynnon Ddu 2 - Pendulum
Passage - Helictites*

The January meeting was as different again with visiting speaker Keith Edwards taking us through so many underground places that most people possibly wouldn't know about, and if they did, wouldn't dare venture into. 'Caver Keith' as he is known, is a member of the Dudley Cavers group who are also involved with rescues, and took the meeting to some spectacular places underground using superb photographs with audio back-up as well as his own input. Many of the underground water courses may eventually end up feeding canals well as other rivers which was a point made early in the presentation.

Keith shared some of the spectacular scenes underground including stalagmites, stalactites and



Caver Keith: Videographer

curtains all which were given as reasons for this not without risk, hobby. Keith actually described an accident that he had had himself which required months of treatment and rehabilitation even if his group made a funny presentation of this which we all saw.

The members and guests present were absolutely enthralled with Keith's presentation which throughout could be heard 'Wows' and applause as well as in some instances, laughter. Several questions were asked at the end of the talk with Keith receiving a well-earned accolade afterwards. Those unable to make the meeting missed a treat but Keith sent us these pictures to share in this edition of '58'.



OFD with Abigail



Bat Passage



Curtains



'Nature Notes'

Mary Green

It's proving to be a winter with cold icy conditions alternating with spring like warmth. This is fairly common and it shouldn't adversely affect wildlife. However, if these variations are too extreme, the plants and creatures that make up our ecosystem can get out of balance and species will suffer. For example, the winter moth lays its eggs on broadleaved trees exactly when the leaves they eat will be at the tender stage for their caterpillars when they hatch. A great-tit lays its eggs when the fledglings will hatch at the right time to eat winter moth caterpillars, their main diet. All these depend on the temperatures in early spring and can go out of synch.

Some spring plants came unexpectedly into flower in November, such as garlic mustard by the canal. But so far species movement seems OK this year – not too early or late. Male hazel catkins and their little red female flowers are ripening together at the right time, which they sometimes don't.

The main thing that causes natural species to suffer though is us. Along the canal, I see evidence of this. One is the American pennywort I wrote about last time, only in the canal interfering with our native wildlife because we introduced the plant into garden ponds and let it escape. C&RT are trying to deal with it and volunteers have done a sterling job round here clearing it out. By the Dead Arm they are experimenting with a biological control using weevils. Introducing a biological control is risky - it might interact badly with other species - but it can work. The pennywort hasn't gone yet, but maybe it will.



Many of us who walk the canal are destroying vegetation too. Where the towpath is muddy people walk more and more into the vegetation both sides, so we get a muddy stretch several metres wide and little plant life. Put your wellies on and keep to the path! Where C&RT has invested in decently surfaced towpath this doesn't happen.

Down the canal from here towards Tardebigge I pass through ancient and newer trees and there is wonderful spring birdsong now. However, on some stretches the farmers manage the hedges, and they flail-cut them severely so they don't flower, fruit or host birds and it goes quiet.

I also pass a field where there were meadow ant hills, providing the main diet of green woodpeckers, which I heard every spring. Last year a farmer ripped out vegetation in this field and with it destroyed the ant-hills, and I didn't hear any green woodpeckers. I think some of the ants are back this year and I will listen out for the woodpeckers. Sadly, many farmers treat native vegetation as a problem rather than something to be managed for the better.

We are still waiting for the promised orchard trees to be planted here by the canal in Alvechurch, but it should happen this month. These will be on two patches of land which again were trashed by humans. One had dredgings dumped on it way back, the other was a plum orchard grubbed out to make a car park when they widened the railway nearby ten years ago. This is an excellent place to replant trees, previously wooded, with established but limited vegetation cover that can be made more biodiverse. Too often trees are planted on vegetation that's already biodiverse and should be undisturbed. Or they are on unsuitable bare ground, or suitably placed but not looked after.

If we all look after what we've got, we can make a difference.



4



5



6

1. OVERCUT VEGETATION
2. FLAIL CUT HEDGE
3. OLD OAKS
4. OVER-TRODDEN TOWPATH
5. SNOWDROPS COMING UP ON TIME
6. WINTER FLOWERS ON GARLIC MUSTARD

Volunteer News

Bill Lambert, that's who I blame for this whole farrago, he told me this job would be nice and quiet just a few emails now and then. But no! the last 2 months have been a whirlwind for me, for 'Cecilia' and for the volunteers.

The highlight was definitely Julie 'catching on camera' Santa in his sleigh flying over 'Cecilia' moored "in the soft moonlight" opposite the crane in ABC's yard (*right*). So luscious that Santa definitely slowed down to take a second look.

This 'miracle' was closely followed by the Chair of Alvechurch Parish Council, Councillor Mark Worrall, welcoming 'Cecilia' home to a champagne reception ably described elsewhere in '58'.

A hard act to follow I admit but we did it with the draw for the Heritage Open Day Raffle. The prize being to take 'Cecilia' out on a free Day Trip. The winner was Lucky Ticket No 13 belonging to David Beauchamp from the Droitwich Pamela May Trust. He said "we made his day" when Wendy gave him the news of his win. We look forward to welcoming him and his 'Pamela May' friends on board this summer for let's face it "the trip of a lifetime!"

Finally, in our recap, was the big sing song that was the Musical Bingo at our 'Christmas jolly'. Who knew that Ed knew the words to so many songs? A big thank you to Tony for organising this and John Davies the guitarist who knew all the tunes! Not forgetting Wendy and Maxine who organised the food and drinks and Ken and Chris who put out the chairs and tables- in the wrong places but they tried so hard, bless their little cotton socks!

Looking ahead we have been asked to assist in planting a 'Pocket Orchard' in Alvechurch by Emily Cowell, the West Midlands Ecologist Pollinator Recovery Project Officer, from C&RT. Mary met her on the towpath and offered our help. Planting is due to take place in week commencing 30th January 2023. More details will be forthcoming when we have them.

'The Wanderer'

As mentioned previously we are now using the 'Wanderer' workboat to remove any flotsam and jetsam from the canal between Tardebigge and Wasthills Tunnel. We are also cutting down any overhanging vegetation and removing floating pennywort from the waterway. If you are interested in joining the crew let me know and I will include you in the email news round robin. Volunteers taking part in this work so far have been John Hemingway, Ken Robinson, Ian McGarr, Al Gibbs, Neil Franklin, Bill Lambert, Gerard Nash, John Herring, Phil Goff, Ed Butcher, Nick Hadley, Nick McCowan and Peter from CRT.

Details of 'Wanderer's' journey from Droitwich to Tardebigge were as follows :-

Day one Wychavon Wharf to Hanbury Wharf - helm Ed Butcher, crew Nick Hadley.

Day two Hanbury to Queens Head - helm Neil Franklin, crew Bill Lambert, Al Gibbs and Nick Hadley.

Day three Queens Head to Tardebigge - this trip up the flight was dedicated to Bill (grease monkey) Cooper who died in 2020. He could always be relied on to be there to help on any Lock Challenge - helm Ed Butcher - crew Mark Saunders and Neil Franklin with the help of Lock Keepers Tina and Frank.

'The Wanderer' is now moored at Alvechurch Wharf by Bridge 60.

Thanks everyone for your help.



Neil Franklin - Volunteer Coordinator.

Volunteering on Community Work Boat 'Wanderer'

It's all true!

On the previous page there are details of 'Wanderer's' journey from Droitwich to Tardebigge which was in fact straight forward. The boat has since been carrying out the duties to which it was brought up to this stretch of the canal to carry out. So our editor, knowing that I have nothing else to do, asked me to let our readers know exactly what these duties were.

On our first day of operation we were asked by C&RT to go down below Lock 58 and cut back a tree that was growing over the cut. This was about 100 metres to the north of London Lane bridge (Does it really go all the way to London?) All roads lead to London Ed. This was not an easy task as we got down to the tree okay but the canal is too narrow here to turn the boat around so I had to reverse the boat all the way back to Tardebigge Wharf. Not an easy task and one that still wakes me up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat! However, thanks to John Hemingway looking after us we got back to lock 58 without incident and fished out some pennywort along the way.

Since that day we have been going out most Tuesdays and Fridays on the water. The crew is usually made up of a helm, that's one of Ken Robinson, Ed Butcher or myself. C&RT chose us to be helms due to our good looks - why else?

The crew is ideally four people. This is not prescriptive, we can change the numbers, so if you want to join us please let me know and we will get you out on the water. We have also altered the days to give more people the chance to join us.

'Wanderer' works between Tardebigge and Wasthill Tunnel. We have learnt she turns beautifully in the old tug boat winding hole just outside the northern portal of Shortwood Tunnel. She is generally berthed at Alvechurch by bridge 60.

Our usual day is made up of clearing anything floating in the canal and cutting down bushes or trees overhanging the canal that may be dangerous or become a problem to boaters or towpath users. We make sure there is plenty of time for tea and sandwiches or your special meal from Greggs. It's a great day out on the cut usually in sunshine, not often in showers. Ask Nick McCowen about his days on the water on 'Wanderer' and he will tell you how enjoyable and fulfilling it is and I haven't paid him to say it - honest!

Neil Franklin your volunteer Co-ordinator.

(Thank you Neil and well done to all involved, it really does make a difference - Ed)



'Cecilia' Returns! From Evesham To Alvechurch

Painting of 'Cecilia' in the paint tunnel at Evesham Marina took 6 weeks. Unfortunately heavy rain during the second half of November rendered the Avon unnavigable. We had to wait until river levels and flow returned to normal conditions at the beginning of December. Bearing in mind shorter daylight hours, and much reduced speed going up-stream, the return journey plan was revised to 5 days, with an overnight mooring at Bidford on Avon being arranged with private moorings at 'The Frog' public house. (Many thanks to them for helping us out).

The weather was also very different to the outward journey with multi-layer warm clothing being the order of the day. For readers not so familiar with the route, the journey of 47 miles each way involves 64 locks, 9 of those on the river, 3 lift bridges, one of those a powered unit on a public road, and the over 1.5 miles long 'Wasthill Tunnel', cold, wet, and hypnotically boring to navigate!

There follows a moving account of day two on the return journey by your very own 'Mr Mud', Alan Gibbs.

Day two of the return leg to bring 'Cecilia' to her Alvechurch moorings, the rainy night had given way to a glorious morning when we rocked up at 'The Frog' public house. Waving goodbye to our support crew (Bridget who dropped us off and was also to pick us up later at Stratford), and finding the gate open to the path down to the river as arranged with the landlord, things were looking good.

But then we realised something was amiss, no keys and 'Cecilia' locked, her doors tied shut from inside!

Some frantic phone calls revealed that the newly refitted cabin doors, beautifully repaired and made tight and safe, were unfortunately not lockable as all the old wood now tightened wouldn't allow the lock mechanism to engage.

Trevor announced the advice he'd received was to push the stern hatch open and drop into the cabin, which although heroic, seemed a precarious business but luckily Gerard came to the rescue by leaning into the boat to lasso the retaining bolts thus allowing access without acrobatics.

The gang was soon assembled with 2 extra crew as Alan and Steve arrived with several boxes of tools to perform running repairs to the doors as we got under way.

Post storm waters may have been a little higher than on the Southward journey but the river was not running overly fast and we made better time than expected.

Although there was an occasional spot of rain and it was cold, the biggest problem came at the locks for as the post flood flotsam and jetsam was notable along the bankside, the issue on the path side was mud - lots of it!

It was thick underfoot and made things very slippery when disembarking for lock operation. But like penguins on ice, we managed to waddle through, although when my feet went out from under me as I pushed backwards against a lock, I was flat out, arms and shoulders hanging off the lock with slipping heels lowering me down inches above the mud like a wet lettuce!

Eventually, mud stomped off and full of well-deserved sarnies, Stratford hove into sight and we were roundly 'gongoozled' as we navigated the final lock. And so, with Trev performing a neat reverse mooring manoeuvre, we were docked and done, handing the baton and fixed doors, over to the next day's volunteers. All in all a grand 'Summer Wine' day out!

I would recommend it to anyone so next time feel free to come on down.

Overall 14 different society members co-operated in these 2 long journeys, giving freely of their time and arranging car shuttles to get crew on and off the various sections. Huge thanks are due all round, and you know who you are! But just in case you don't :-

The Crews

Day One: Evesham Marina to Bidford Mooring at 'The Frog',
Ed Butcher, Alan Partridge, Ken Robinson, Trevor Albutt. Logistics by Wendy Albutt.

Day Two: Bidford Mooring to Bancroft Basin, Stratford on Avon, Trevor Albutt, Ian McGarr, Gerard Nash and Al Gibbs. Logistics by Bridgett McGarr.

Day Three: Stratford Bancroft Basin to Wootten Wawen,
Nick Hadley, Maxine Quinn, Ed Butcher, Ian McGarr.

Day Four: Wootten Wawen to Bridge 31 Lapworth,
Gerard Nash, Alan Partridge, Mark Saunders and Ken Robinson.

Day Five: Bridge 31 Lapworth to Dead Arm Alvechurch,
John Talbut, Ken Robinson, Trev Albutt and Mick.

We apologise if we have missed anyone out.

If you would like to see the Southern Stratford Canal from Stratford to Edstone Aqueduct, the longest in England, then watch the latest offering from West Country Wanderings on You Tube amazingly called 'The Longest aqueduct in England'.

Also, if you are really keen, you can read The Upper Avon, Chapter 8 in part one of Narrow Boat by L.T.C. Rolt.

We know our stuff in 58!

Ed Butcher, Al Gibbs and Neil Franklin

(Very well done to our intrepid navigators and back-up - all volunteers – Ed)



Champagne Reception for 'Cecilia'

'Cecilia's' return to her moorings was celebrated with a champagne reception!

A large crowd turned out to celebrate the return of our society narrowboat 'Cecilia'. Leader of Alvechurch Parish Council, Marc Worrall, was on hand along with members and onlookers. Many fine words were said and the Bromsgrove Standard was on hand to record the event. Many thanks to Marcus, photographer and Tristan, editor, for their great coverage. The event was also recorded and you can see the videos on our society Facebook page. Our very own Mary Green wrote a lovely poem which was read out on the day (*and is printed below*).

The Standard, Friday December 30, 2022

www.bromsgrovestandard.co.uk

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Refurbished community boat is given a celebratory launch



Left - Leader of Alvechurch Parish Council, Coun Marc Worrall was at the marina to welcome Cecilia home. Picture by Marcus Miggins 5122003MMR1 © Bullivant Media

THE WORCESTER-Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society has unveiled its new-look community narrowboat 'Cecilia'.

The refurbishment included a new floor and seating, a new engine and a fresh coat of paint.

To launch Cecilia on her maiden voyage, the society held a Champagne reception at Alvechurch Marina just after she returned from the printshop in Evesham.

The \$25,000 refurbishment was completed this month by a team of volunteers.

Leader of Alvechurch Parish Council, Coun Marc Worrall said: "It's a great privilege and pleasure of mine to be invited to the launch of this fabulous narrowboat."

"Now that she's back home, over the coming months she will give a great deal of pleasure for many people that have never had the opportunity to enjoy the inlands waterways - we are privileged to have in this parish."

Chairman of Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society, David Wheeler, added: "It warms my heart to see Cecilia back in Alvechurch and being used as she should be."

"Well done to everyone who was a part of the restoration and the Cecilia volunteers who made this happen."

"Cecilia" is a community narrowboat available for any community project to book for half and full-day boat trips along the Worcester and Birmingham Canal.

The boat is usually moored very close to Alvechurch Station by Bridge 60.

She is fully crewed by a small team of volunteers for anyone to use.

Visit wbdc.org.uk or email bookingececilia@yahoo.com for more information.

Coun Marc Worrall and Chairman of the society, David Wheeler, held a champagne/breakfast to celebrate Cecilia's maiden voyage. Picture by Marcus Miggins 5122003MMR1 © Bullivant Media



Oh Cecilia

Oh Cecilia! You're cheering my heart
You're boosting my confidence daily
Oh Cecilia. Just look at you now
In your new blue coat and regalia.
You've cruised our waters, sun or rain
For years without complaining
Brought wonder to the children's eyes
Even if your paint was flaking.
I've been with you to Birmingham
And in and out the tunnels
Watched you climb up and down the locks
I've even walked your gunwales.
Like all of us, you're ageing now

You needed help and refits
It took a while, and much hard work
And now you've lots of new bits.
The volunteers are your best friends
They've loved you back to glory
Bright paint and curtains, comfy seats
Are only half the story:
It's human work and not giving up
That in the end will heal you
So raise a glass and celebrate
The crew who make Cecilia.

Mary Green
December 2022

National Community Boat Association (NCBA) AGM

December 2022

The AGM was held on the first floor of the Nottingham Canal Museum (*below left*) that is housed, in what used to be, a Fellows Morton and Clayton Warehouse. On the ground floor is the Canal House Pub which is built around a dock with two canal boats in it (*below right*).



The AGM was attended by Ed Butcher and Neil Franklin on behalf of WB&DCS, who have summarised some of the issues for readers:

- * It was confirmed that all membership fees for 2023 will be waived as the NCBA currently has sufficient funds to support members.

- * Chair Paul Unwin intends to step down in October 2023.

- * New head trainer is Dave Wright. NCBA wishes to expand body of senior trainers able to visit member projects and offer Certificate in Community Boat Management courses. Existing trainers (Ian and Ed for WB&DCS), wishing to be considered as senior trainers, should discuss with current Chair.

- * Waterways Chaplaincy training is still under development but there is potential for Accredited Training Centres to secure training revenue. This needs progressing with Dave Wright.

- * After lunch informal chats with representatives of other projects and guided tours of local based trip boats.

- * Following clarification of NCBA website login system (WB&DCS now have two logins, one as Trainers, the other as Project). The NCBA Project Profile for 'Cecilia' has now been updated.

The NCBA is a fine organisation made up of people who should receive a medal for the work they do. I am delighted that we are part of their organisation and am hopeful that we can take an active part in any future activities they hold in our area - Neil Franklin (Volunteer Coordinator).



Worcester - Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society



Worcester - Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

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Based at Alvechurch, Worcs nb Cecilia is a 70' Community Trip Boat operated by certified crew to carry 12 passengers. A variety of routes are possible, from short local cruises to full day return to Bham Gas St, or even a 30 lock adventure through the Tardebigge Flight, the longest set of locks in England. Perfect for a team building day out! As an Accredited Training Centre we are able to offer courses from the NCBA curriculum, and welcome enquiries. Contact Ian or Ed at training@wbdc.org.uk

'Cecilia' and our society featured on the NCBA website

Lapal Canal Trust News

Our friends from the Lapal Canal Trust are continuing to make progress with their restoration project. Work parties are scheduled for February 4th and March 4th 10am at the Leasowes Park end of the canal in Halesowen, postcode B62 8DH for car parking, or nearer to the site at Hamilton Avenue which is just off the Hagley Road. Volunteers are asked to let Peter Fisher know if attending for insurance purposes (07966 631648), to wear suitable clothing and bring, if available, any hand tools such as saws, loppers etc. for scrub bashing.

Meanwhile at the Selly Oak end there is also a 'Just Giving Fundraising Campaign' to raise money for the reopening of the small tunnel under Harborne Lane, Selly Oak. This will give towpath users the enormous benefit of going from Selly Oak Park to the 'Battery Park' site, and vice versa, without having to manoeuvre a very busy main road.

Please follow the link below to find out more and donate if you can:

www.justgiving.com/campaign/openharbornelanelntunnel?

The Trust is still awaiting an official opening day for the newly constructed Whitehouse Wharf winding hole, which is opposite what will become the new junction into Battery Park and beyond. Meanwhile work has commenced on installing benches alongside the wharf which should really enhance the experience of people accessing the site essentially for recreational purposes.

The funding for this work has come via a £5000 grant from the Dulverton Trust to install 5 bench seats for the elderly and disabled around Whitehouse Wharf. The seats chosen are supplied by Glasdon and use recycled aluminium cast ends and composite wooden slats, so LCT expects a long life with minimum maintenance. The Trust was concerned at providing concrete bases and so Denis Pike has very kindly arranged to do this. The seats are quite heavy and volunteers can help with the actual installation.

Lapal Canal Trust offers many thanks to all concerned; a nice finishing touch to the Wharf.

Whitehouse Wharf



9% Increase In Boat licence Fees

C&RT has recently announced a 9% increase in boat licence fees to come into effect from April 2023. While clearly not being welcome news the Trust has put out the following information:

Richard Parry, chief executive, says:

"We are all facing the highest levels of inflation in over 40 years and, as the Trust's costs soar, we must address the budget shortfall to safeguard navigation and the safe upkeep of the waterways. We recognise that our boating customers – both private boaters and waterway businesses – will also be feeling the effect of inflation across their personal finances, but we hope there is an understanding that this is an essential step to ensure the ongoing maintenance and repair of the historic canals and river navigations in our care.

We continue to secure as much income as we can through our commercial and charitable activities and focus our resources on those priority works which are required to support navigation, and on controlling our costs where possible. Our network is old and vulnerable, especially to the extreme weather events that are becoming more common, and this winter we will deliver one of our largest programmes of repairs and maintenance to date, with large increases in our expenditure on vital reservoir safety works (which are mandatory under the UK Reservoirs Act) in particular.

Boat licences account for around an eighth (12%) of the Trust's annual income and help fund some of the vast amount of work necessary to keep the waterways safe and navigable; as we set out in our annual Boater Report, our core network expenditure is around four times what we raise from boating. Nevertheless, with our Government grant frozen since 2021, and currently undecided after 2027, this income is more critical than ever. We are doing all we can to generate more income from other sources where possible albeit with the difficult economic environment also affecting investment returns.

We will continue to support boaters who may be struggling to pay their licence fees on a case-by-case basis. This may include arranging flexible payment plans and signposting to relevant services, for example the Waterways Chaplaincy, local authorities and Citizens' Advice."

For more information visit: canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/boating/do-you-know-a-vulnerable-boater



Canal & River Trust

Scheduled Works Programmes

C&RT has given notice of scheduled works programmes affecting our local canals.

- Bridge 4 at Mildenhams on the Droitwich Barge Canal is scheduled for an inspection. This carries Egg Lane over the canal just by Lock 3.
- Bridge 5 at Porters Mill is being repaired although the towpath is scheduled to remain open.
- Footbridges 10 and 12 are being repaired which means both the towpath and canal are closed for the duration.
- On the W&B's Stoke and Tardebigge flights, a stoppage will occur to enable lock maintenance to be carried out at locks 24, 38 and 43. The towpath will also be closed for this period of time.

From The Archives

In March 1993, '58' published a Ghost Story (*below*) that the late George Bate had written some years before his passing in 1977. George, as well as being a long standing canal employee, was also one of the founding members of the canal society. The later paragraphs inform readers of the trophy named after George.

Jack Simson, whose remembrance seat is opposite Bittell Reservoir cottage, was the Society's chair; the President was Rene Dowler and the '58' editor was Joe Morley.

George's Ghost

by George D Bate

This happened when I had just started to work at the Salt Union Stoke Prior Salt Works in October 1914. The mill foreman, a Mr J Barker, collected me to do a job. He said, "Come along with me, I've a job for you," and took me to the centre of the mill where there were railway metals with rail vans here and there being loaded with salt and unloading goods.

There was one space clear where men were removing planks from between the rails; two men then set a plank in position down a dark hole - I noticed it was highly polished with constant friction. Mr Barker said, "Get on that plank and slide down." I did not question why, I did as I was told, very uneasy in mind as I slid down.

Then, suddenly, I saw a shadowy figure in white moving about in the gloom, appearing to be suspended in space. I was just about to lose control of my bowel movement when this figure spoke to me - "Well, George, have they sent you down to help me?"

I quickly recovered my composure when I recognised the voice - it was Mr D Merrell. He was stood in a canal boat which was in the canal tunnel that runs under the salt works which I did not know existed at the time. He had been part-loading the boat with salt lower down the tunnel, and his clothing was lightly covered with salt dust, and the only light he had was a vessel like a coffee pot, with a wick down the spout into the oil. There were a lot of these vessels in use at that time, the ones I have seen were mostly made in copper. However, it did not give much of a light.

The job I had to do was to take the parcels of cut lumps off the plank as they slid down to me and hand them on to Mr Merrell to stack in the boat. I did not go back

up that plank when I had finished the job, I went out of the tunnel in the boat into the main canal that runs through these works. The boat was Henry Johnson's, Holt St Wharf, Birmingham, named the MEDWAY - one of the two boats Mr Merrell worked with his wife, and later on his two sons Jack and Dennis, to Birmingham, two trips every week.

This is a true occurrence, and it stands out in my mind when someone starts talking about ghosts!

The George Bate Trophy

The George Bate Trophy will be presented at the Annual Dinner at The Old Rose & Crown, Rednal, on April 2nd 1993, to a member of the Society who, in the previous twelve months, has made the most significant contribution to the Society, or to the waterway movement as a whole.

This is your last opportunity to nominate YOUR candidate to receive the award this year.

Please write to the present holder of the Trophy, Mrs Margaret Yorke, as soon as possible, naming your candidate, and giving brief reasons for your choice. The address to write to is:

Mrs Margaret Yorke
49 Illshaw Close
Winyates Green
Redditch, Worcs B98 0QZ

to arrive not later than 19th March 1993.

The Trophy consists of George Bate's windlass mounted on a wooden plinth. The windlass was made by George's grandfather at the forge at Stoke Prior, and had been previously used by George's father.

'58' March 1993

Letters from the same edition:

It would appear that Brenda's suggestions about the mooring rings and piling have yet to be carried out. Brenda's son Ken, used to work for C&RT.

Ron Bloore, whose wife Iris has penned the lower letter, was so well known on the canals and a real Black Country character. He used to be the harbourmaster at the Stourbridge Bonded Warehouse weekend.

Letters

Dear Sir,

Having had boats at Tardebigge since 1957 may I congratulate the Society on saving the lock cottage?

Perhaps it would be a good idea to strike while the iron is hot and campaign for mooring rings and piling between the tunnel and the lock, plus more water points - and how about a sign telling boaters where the IWA plaque is? Many people don't even know about it. Then perhaps we could get something done about the state of the towpath between Bittell and Wast Hill Tunnel.

As new members of the Society we would like to see more publicity on the latest campaigns - perhaps posters on our boats is one way?

Brenda Withers
nb LIBERTY
Tardebigge

Dear Friends and Boaters,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the kindness and goodness you have shown Ron and myself in our hour of need.

It is said that friendship is a priceless gift, and we have found it so. How can I say what is in my heart? Just to say thank you doesn't seem to be enough. I know in my heart each one of you will understand - you will all take your memories of Ron, and remember him.

Iris Bloore

In the February 2003 edition of '58' the question of contamination around the Battery Park area of Selly Oak was given mention via the following article. Wonder if this exercise has helped Lapal Canal Trust with the new canal section across there?

The point raised at the end about a certain canal basin (actually Diglis) made reference to the accidental draining of the whole basin due to a contractor's error. The President and Chair of the society in those days was John Gardiner and Brenda Morris respectively while the editor of '58' was Mike Kettle.

As reported elsewhere, Neil has been organising work parties making use of the 'Wanderer' workboat. Many years before this the society often held work parties but alas no workboat then. One such work party took place on the long pound between locks 57 and 58 at the top of Tardebigge. This would have been around the late 1980s where our pictures show Jack Wones alongside Di Greenhall who appears to be throwing a drag line across the emptied canal.

Perhaps she was trying get hold of Len who was well and truly stuck in the mud on the other side of the canal bed? Madelaine Hemingway and Katherine Whitby are also in the mud picking up various items. This work party pulled out many vehicle doors from under the London Lane Bridge, in the background, as well as a safe. The safe, however, contained no valuables but did have a large eel in it!

TUGS ON THE WORCESTER AND BIRMINGHAM?

Developers of the former Birmingham Battery and Metals site at Selly Oak need to remove somewhere in the region of 100,000 tonnes of contaminated spoil, for treatment. British Waterways representatives have suggested the use of the canal for this removal. Bearing in mind the road traffic around Selly Oak, it seems a good idea and may lead to the canal having regular commercial use again at least for a while.

COPY CATS?

Wolverhampton City centre has been declared an Alcohol free zone. Worcester's well known canal basin, not to be outdone, became a water free zone just before Christmas!!



Monthly Meetings

Tuesday 7th February 2023, 7.45pm

Our guest speaker is Keith Hodgkins.

Keith will be talking to us of 'Wartime Boatwomen', including photographs of Daphne March and daughter, the crew of the 'Heather Bell', which brought flour from Worcester to Tipton in 1942 and on to Cannock Chase.

7th March 2023 Bromsgrove Astronomical Society will be giving us some insights into what some planets actually look like closer up.

There will be slides and explanations but also if we pray for a clear sky then the society will set up a few telescopes to look at Earth's near neighbours. **Led by David Jones**

4th April 2023. Roger Butler makes a return after almost 9 years. He has a new talk entitled Wonders of the West Country. Cornwall, Devon and parts of Somerset were completely stand-alone from the rest of the canal network. They had completely different styles of engineering and solutions to create navigations. Little known canals such as Bude, Rolle, Liskeard and Looe, Stover, Glastonbury and Chard will all be examined here.

9th May (Note - not the 2nd May) to be confirmed.....

Hopefully Gavin Hawkins of Bradley Canal Restoration Trust will visit to give an update on efforts to restore this short route through the Black Country

*For those members who only receive a printed copy of '58':
please go to our website for the most up to date information.*

www.wbdcs.org.uk

Please ensure that our Membership Secretary has your current details.



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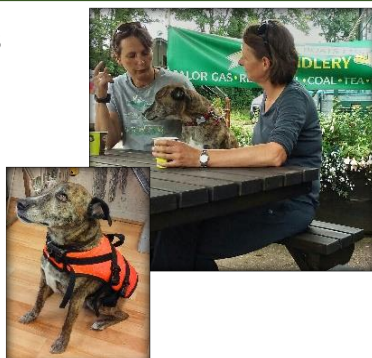
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If you are interested in canals, angling, boats, boat crewing, natural history, walking, cycling, photography, industrial archaeology, local history, canal work parties, preservation and enhancement of the environment as well as meeting up with like-minded people, then please consider joining this friendly Canal Society.

We hold our regular monthly meetings at the Alvechurch Boat Centre, Scarfield Wharf, Alvechurch, B48 7SQ (*just behind the award winning Weighbridge pub*) on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm (disability compliant). If you are in the least bit curious then please come along, as non-members are always welcome (*we publish the programme on our website, Facebook and Twitter pages*). We usually go on summer walks in July and August.

Presentations have included The Bridgewater Canal, Birmingham Roundhouse Restoration, Cotswold Canal Restoration, Idle Women, The Cadbury Story, Lapal Canal Trust Restoration, Hereford & Gloucester Canal Restoration, The Montgomery Canal, The Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal, Stourbridge Extension Canal, and Chance's Glassworks.

You do not need to be a boat owner as most of our members are not. If you require any other assistance please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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 (*fully crewed*) for use by groups or individuals for half day and day trips (*Terms & Conditions Apply*).

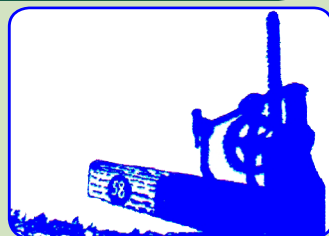
We hope to welcome as many new faces as possible from members of the community.

Please visit our website: wbdcs.org.uk
(where you can also download a membership application form)

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