

# 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'*



See page  
6 for more  
details

*Some photos from both ends of Shortwood Tunnel.  
There was a landslide in October blocking the canal and towpath.*



The Inland  
Waterways  
Association

Keeping our waterways alive

Corporate Member



Worcester-Birmingham  
& Droitwich  
Canals Society



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

Issue 571 Jan/Feb/Mar 2024

# Monthly Meetings

## Society Meetings

**7.45pm start**

**6th February 2024**

Charlotte Parry and Engineer J from River Canal Rescue on some of the perils and disasters that could face boaters and how to maintain narrowboats in order to avoid them.

**5th March 2024**

Early beginnings of the Staffs and Worcester Canal by Julian Souter

**2nd April 2024**

The Life and times of a canal coalman. By John "Jacko" Jackson.

**14th May 2024**

"Chasing the boats" by canal photographer Kev Maslin.

**4th June 2024**

A fresh look at the "Lost 60 miles of the BCN" by Duncan Moore  
(This will be a hybrid Zoom meeting at the Weighbridge).

*Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch, B48 7SQ.*

*Free admission. Small charge for hot drink and biscuits.*

*Non members very welcome.*

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

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

Issue 571 Jan/Feb/Mar 2024

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We have a vibrant **Facebook** page, why not pay a visit and 'like' us?

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

We are also on **X** (formerly known as **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 2024**

# Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

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

**(Registered Charity No 500159)**

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# Chair's Notes

**Happy New Year everyone and welcome to the first '58' of 2024.**

Let's hope that the new year turns out to be a good one.

Can I remind you that on Sunday 17th March 2024 will be our annual dinner at Bromsgrove Golf Centre; I would like to make it another one to remember so can you please confirm with Gill or my self. Price will be similar to previous years. We will be presenting the 'George Bate Trophy' so make sure that you get your vote into Neil Franklin the current holder.

Planning is now underway for the St. Richard's Canal Festival to be held in Vines Park, Droitwich from 5pm Friday 3rd May till 5pm Monday 6th May 2024. We will need as much help as we can get to set up and take down, so if you can spare a few hours on any of the days from Tuesday 30th April till Tuesday 7th May inclusive, please let Neil know so that he can put a plan together. If anyone can sell any Duck Race tickets then please let me know.

Last year Canal & River Trust (C&RT), in their wisdom, proposed that they would put a levy on anyone organising festivals along their waterways. We objected and lobbied against such proposal, and I am glad to see that C&RT have now agreed that no levy will be added to societies like ours that after all are organising festivals to encourage people to visit the canals.

This time last year I wrote in '58' about the history of 'Cecilia' and how we came to own her and the efforts in those early years to get people to use her. I have to praise the volunteers who now reach out to a wide selection of groups which is not only good for 'Cecilia' but is good for the Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society.

Have a good year.



*David Wheeler*

## **Surviving on My Narrowboat in Freezing Temperatures: YouTube video**

For those hardy souls like Chris and Ken, who like boating in the Winter when things are a little quieter, the following link sent into '58' by a reader should be really enjoyable. Much of the footage has been taken on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal which many readers may well recognise.

<https://bit.ly/48zCFfA>





# Editor's Notes

## Hello Readers

Happy New Year to all of our readers of this the first edition of '58' in 2024. Since the last edition of '58' the weather appears to have not done much apart from rain, rain and yet more rain! So much so that substantial damage has occurred to several parts of our aging waterway system as well as stopping navigation under the M5 on the Droitwich Junction Canal.

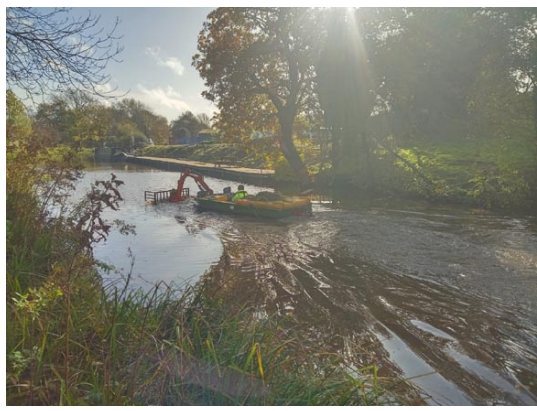
One of the biggest weather related issues was here on our own patch i.e. the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. The large land slip at the Tardebigge end of Shortwood Tunnel received national news, certainly within waterway related news outlets. Boats were literally stuck at either end of the tunnel as all navigation and towpath usage was curtailed. There were hire boats, shared boats, private boats as well as liveaboards all taking up so much of the towpath mooring space with little anyone could do about it other than wait for the repairs to take place.

When the work boats arrived they also needed mooring spaces having to travel daily up to the Shortwood site and back. No real road access around Shortwood. The staff worked really hard and while the clearance may be incomplete, the canal was re-opened to navigation towards the end of 2023, having been closed for several weeks. Very well done to Canal & River Trust, along with their external contractors, who literally did 'pull out all of the stops!'

The towpath is still closed, however, so '58' awaits any development with that part of the repair. Several land drains make their way down into the canal through that cutting, so more specialist work will no doubt be required at some point soon, subject to the weather again. More on this appears further on as well as subsequent blockages which have been caused mainly by the very wet weather.

Somewhat amazingly, several of the boaters actually received emails from C&RT while this stoppage was on-going, saying that they had been seen mooring in one spot for more than 2 weeks and should move on. One or two actually received a second email along the same lines and No this is not a wind up! Perhaps it is, however, an indication of a classic bureaucratic system where one department does not know what the other is doing? Having said that we would've thought that the staff reporting the moored boats, presumably on foot from the towpath, knew very well about the stoppage? Perhaps someone from C&RT could explain this to '58' as we are keen to pass on to our readers? A copy of one of these emails is available should any readers wish to see for themselves.

On a slightly different note, our local canals have been suffering from almost an invasion of surface weed, much of which is actually invasive, and must inevitably have had a negative effect for the local wildlife as well as for navigation. Some reports indicated that it had never been known to be as bad. C&RT contractors certainly came to the rescue some weeks ago and the canals are looking far cleaner now. So well done again C&RT and thank you to all of those involved.



Also in this edition, we will have reports of the society's recent meetings, 'Cecilia' and volunteering news, nature notes, reports from such as the Lapal Canal Trust and surrounding areas. '58' also extends a warm welcome to the new owner of Bridge 35 Chandlers - Martin James. Many many thanks to all who have submitted things for publication and if any readers are still trying to figure out a New Year Resolution then here's one – "I promise to send in something for '58' during this new year!"

**Enjoy the read.**

*John Hemingway*

## Obituary

'58' is sad to report that Hugh Humphreys' wife Ivy sadly passed away just before Christmas. Ivy had been ill for a long time with Hugh being her principle carer. As well as being a member of WB&DCS, Hugh is also a very proactive CEO for the Lapal Canal Trust, which was particularly challenging while caring for Ivy.

'58' hopes to see Hugh as soon as possible and in the meantime sends its deep condolences to both Hugh, his close family and friends.



# Society Meetings

**The November meeting** proved to be a first for WB&DCS in that it was actually live streamed into the meeting room. The presentation was given by Cath Turpin who gave all present a fascinating insight into the way tunnel tug boats were used on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. This included the steam tug 'Worcester' which was shown on page 7 of the last edition of '58'.

Prior to the introduction of tug boats, craft used to be legged through the tunnels, so this innovation saved much time and therefore money. The towing animals, usually donkeys, were walked over the top to meet the boats at the other end. Many of the structures used to house the tugs when awaiting craft are still present today e.g. the remains just North of Wast Hills Tunnel on the non-towpath side. There are also several small winding holes still present near the tunnels which just allowed the tugs to turn around. The Tug Cottages at Tardebigge were built specially for the tug boat operators.

This was a really interesting talk which was well received by the members present.

## December's Meeting

This meeting was the usual 'Noggin and Natter' where members brought in some food to be shared and the end of year quiz. This was delivered by Danny Spike and Mary Green who proved to be able presenters. Much good humour was to be shared with the winning team receiving their just deserts.

## January's Meeting

The first meeting of the New Year was once again very well attended and involved a presentation by Tony Condor, who used to work for British Waterways, which was the body in charge prior to the inception of Canal & River Trust. Tony's presentation was in 2 sections and commenced around Sharpness Docks and all points between up to Gloucester as well as including the River Severn. He ably showed just how difficult it could be to navigate the Severn and enter the river lock at Sharpness with several mis-calculations shown. It was particularly challenging for sailing vessels whose skippers had to rely on the wind as well as the tide.

The meeting was shown several past scenes from Gloucester Docks and the trains of boats being towed up the Severn to such as Tewkesbury, Worcester and Stourport. Craft were then towed by animals along the adjoining canals including the Worcester & Birmingham. When boats were fitted with their own, usually diesel engines, this practice declined somewhat.

The second section of the illustrated talk tended to focus on narrow boats, loaded and unloaded, being moved by animals along the towpath. Several scenes from the past were still clearly identifiable e.g. the Cadbury Wharves along the W&B. Cadbury's invested heavily in canal transport which included their own craft.

Tony's excellent presentation was very well received with the members present showing their full appreciation.

# Raffle Prizes

The society's monthly meetings, excluding the Summer walks, usually take place in the meeting room behind the 'Weighbridge' pub in Alvechurch. The room clearly has to be paid for which part of the membership subscription is utilised. However, Sue and Martin Hancox organise a raffle to supplement the society's costs and prizes are always needed. If anyone has anything which could be deemed to be a suitable raffle prize, such as an unwanted gift, do please consider donating to the society. Sue would be very pleased to receive at any of the society meetings. If by some chance Sue is not available, please give to any other committee member and it will be passed on.

Many thanks.



# Sandstones At Droitwich

The society has been keen for a number of years to move several large pieces of sandstone which are currently stored in the 'Pamela May' Trust's yard in Droitwich. At least 2 of the stones are shaped in readiness to be placed as mile stones somewhere on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal as several others have been. However, there are several other unusable pieces which the society would really like to donate to any interested parties. Some pictures, kindly provided by society member and volunteer Ed Butcher, are below for information. Assistance with moving them may be possible if required.

If any readers are interested at all, or know of someone who may be, please let us know and we can arrange things accordingly.

**Contact Ed Butcher. 07866 667 502. edwardgbutcher@gmail.com**

**A MIXED LOT OF SANDSTONE BLOCKS, 38 PIECES IN TOTAL**

**18 LARGE BLOCKS, SIZES AS PER LIST:-**

**All pieces are undressed rough rectangular unless otherwise noted**

## Dimensions in Cms

100x50x30

100x50x40 (tapers to 100x40x30)

100x50x30

95x45x20 (with cast concrete base on steel rods)

90x60x30 (one corner tapered)

80x50x20

80x73x50

80x60x46

80x50x30

80x50x30 (second piece)

80x35x20

75x50x20

73x46x18

70x45x20

70x50x30

60x50x50

50x50x40

45x45x20

+20 further smaller pieces, the smallest being 40x35x20

**FREE TO COLLECT FROM DROITWICH SPA. YARD HAS HEAVY VEHICLE ACCESS**





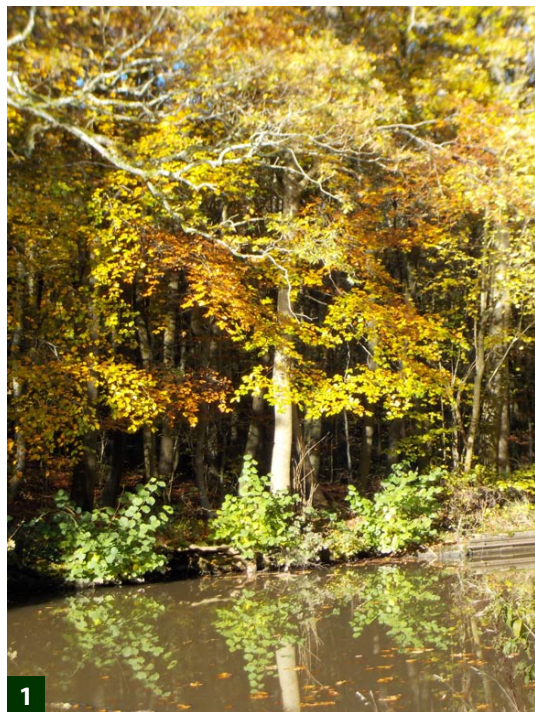
# 'Nature Notes'

## Mary Green

I'm getting used now to a long mild autumn before winter hits the canal. In November there is still greenery by the towpath and canalside though it has mostly finished flowering. It is shedding seeds and dying back down. We shouldn't really call it "dying back" because it is far from dying. Perennial plants (those that come up every year - most of our native plants) take nutrients back into their roots over the winter. There they interact with fungi and bacteria and produce more food for their next year's growth, and lock the carbon into the soil. Perhaps we should call it "hibernating".

It's good to see it's been left uncut - mostly. It was cut too early up to and along Lower Bittell and you can see the nettles and grass coming back, probably meaning less diversity next year. Hibernation is more obvious with trees. Deciduous trees lose their green colour and turn yellow, red or brown then shed their leaves. Or should do. This year many have just gone dirty green and have often shed their leaves without becoming colourful. At least there was some lovely beech colour through Shortwood in late November.

Trees need the change - it means they are taking nutrients back into the roots for next year. The odd weather this year has stressed trees. But many have fruited well, especially berry-bearing trees (like hawthorn and holly) and key-bearing trees (like field maple and ash) so there should be good fruit for birds and mammals this winter. However, next year's growth may be less good.



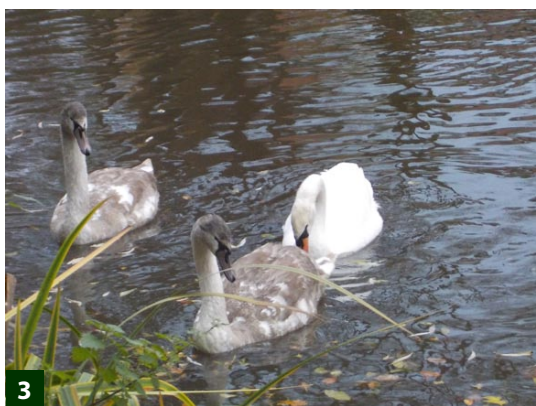


So-called evergreen trees do lose their leaves, but gradually throughout the year. They really don't take kindly to being cut back and I'm always sad to see holly cut back in a hedge, so it doesn't fruit and has to replace its leaves. Often holly like this flowers in a mild winter, instead of May, but the flowers can't come to anything.

I'm so pleased to see that C&RT have cleared the American pennywort from my stretch of the canal, except currently for a big patch near the Dead Arm which could cause trouble. Removing it allows the native water plants to flourish and the fish, birds and invertebrates to benefit. It will come back of course but hopefully not till late next year.

We have a pair of swans here which have successfully raised two of their three cygnets to adulthood. (John Burman, a founder member of this society, has named them Noel and Noella after an altercation the cob had with other swans last Christmas!) The grown-up cygnets are just getting their first white feathers, and it will be a pleasure over winter to see them finally shed their buff colours - and get driven out of the family. Swans are territorial, hence the altercation with the resident pair up by the aqueduct last year. Noel and Noella spent much of the year by the Dead Arm but have settled temporarily in other patches along here too, so it will be interesting to see where they nest next year – and where their young go.

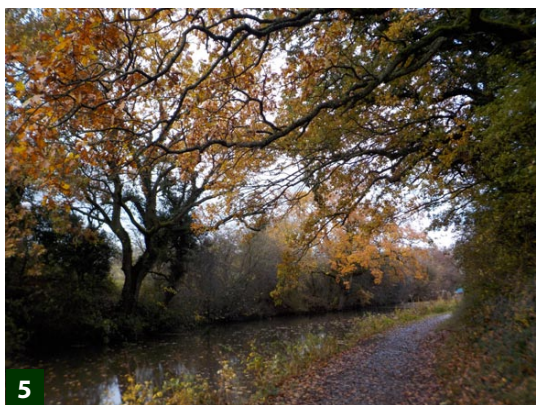
I have not yet been able to visit the site of the landslide south of Shortwood tunnel. That stretch is ancient woodland remnant, and I would imagine we have lost some good biodiverse plants and their insect life. The canal is a great resource for ancient woodland habitat, which once covered the whole area. It remains where the soil hasn't been cultivated: even though old trees may have gone, flowering plants and ferns and their accompanying fungi can remain for centuries.



3



4



5

1. BEECH TREES, SHORTWOOD
2. PREMATURE FLOWERING HOLLY
3. CYGNETS CHANGING COLOUR
4. FULL-BERRIED HOLLY
5. OLD OAKS ON THE CANAL

# Crime Secrets of Britain's Historic Canals

Riots, unsolved murders and a dramatic explosion that blew up central London, are some of the true crime dramas revealed in a new book exploring the hidden history of our waterways.

Hard-hitting tales of rough justice are brought vividly to life in *Dark Side of the Cut. A History of Crime on Britain's Canals*, which uncovers the secret world of the Victorian waterways set apart on the edge of society.

Author Dr Susan Law, a historian and former newspaper crime reporter, has spent two years researching the book. A volunteer for the Canal & River Trust charity since 2017, she hopes the book will get people talking about canal heritage, and attract support for new campaigns to protect our waterways, which are under threat from government funding cuts.

'We are so lucky today that canals are such peaceful places for us to relax and escape from the pressures of modern life. But it was very different in the past. I was surprised to discover the dark, hidden history of the waterways, and it's important that lost way of life is not forgotten,' she said.

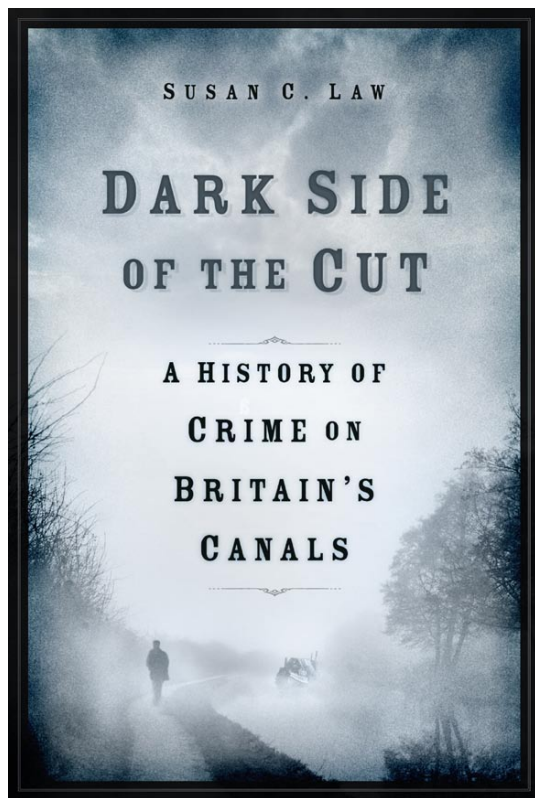
The book is dedicated to the forgotten navvies who dug out 'the cut', and the generations of hardworking canal-boat families who endured a tough existence to survive the hardships of that lost way of life. It covers more than a hundred canal crimes, including a desperate fraud that halted construction of the Regent's Canal in 1815, audacious thefts, unsolved killings, pub punch-ups, violent confrontations between police and angry mobs, drunken riots, and inner-city youth gangs on the rampage.

Among the stories featured in the book is a dramatic incident in the early hours of 2 October 1874, when Londoners were woken by an enormous explosion, as a barge carrying five tons of gunpowder blew up on the Regent's Canal. The shockwaves were felt as far away as Gravesend. In Regent's Park Zoo, cages were blown open and exotic birds escaped, while monkeys leapt to safety. Panic spread through the streets as hundreds of residents rushed outside, some screaming the end of the world had come. Over 1,000 buildings were damaged in the blast. The Grand Junction Canal Company was found guilty of gross negligence, and the government hurriedly passed the Explosives Act to tighten up regulations.

A journalist and social historian, Dr Law has a PhD in History from Warwick University. Her work has been published in a wide range of media including London Evening Standard, BBC History Magazine, and The Times Higher Education Supplement.

*Dark Side of the Cut* is published by The History Press [www.thehistorypress.co.uk](http://www.thehistorypress.co.uk), and is available in hardback and e-book from bookshops inc. Waterstones and online retailers.

For more details contact Susan Law by email [suelawhistory@btinternet.com](mailto:suelawhistory@btinternet.com) or phone 07856 659087.



# Fund Britain's Waterways

**Fund Britain's Waterways (FBW)** is a coalition of organisations representing hundreds of thousands of users and supporters of inland waterways. We are campaigning for national and local government to act now and protect the public benefit and natural capital of our waterways.

Join us in the fight to #FundBritainsWaterways by signing our petition. With your help, our canals and rivers may stand a better chance of securing desperately needed funding.

**SIGN THE PETITION | BECOME A MEMBER | DOWNLOAD THE WINDOW STICKER**

If any readers have yet to input the campaign to save our waterways the link is below. ...

<https://waterways.org.uk/fund-britains-waterways>

The Fund Britain's Waterways group has been set up in response to the threat posed to our canals and rivers by inadequate funding. The funding situation is already causing deterioration and will only worsen with the challenges of high inflation and the impact of climate change, which are both at a level unforeseen when current funding was agreed. FBW has come together to campaign to persuade national and local government to ensure that the benefits provided to the public do not continue to be eroded.

Responsibility for managing Britain's 5,000 miles of navigable inland waterways is fragmented between different organisations. The Canal & River Trust is the largest with 2,000 miles. In July 2023, a year behind schedule, Defra announced future funding for the Canal & River Trust and the announcement confirmed our fears of further substantial cuts to the already inadequate level of funding. Other organisations such as the Environment Agency and Scottish Canals face similar problems. Today the entire network is at risk due to significant underinvestment. The consequences of failing to maintain waterway infrastructure were clearly shown by the evacuation of 1,500 local residents in case the dam at Toddbrook Reservoir collapsed in 2019, but it is as if the lessons have not yet been learnt.

The value of Britain's inland waterways was demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic and is acknowledged in Defra's own Environmental Improvement Plan. They are widely understood to provide levelling up, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing benefits for us all. The combined annual economic and social value of CRT waterways alone has been quantified as £6.1bn, including cost savings of £1.1bn for the NHS from active use of the waterways and towpaths – leveraged from current government investment of only £52.6m per year. Despite greater understanding of their value, and the deteriorating state of the infrastructure today, the Government appears intent on significantly reducing its funding for the waterways.



“ These proposed cuts may lead to the closure of canals and rivers, harming businesses and placing communities at risk ”

LES ETHERIDGE – FBW CHAIR

FBW – WITH OVER 50 MEMBERS INCLUDING:



[FUNDBRITAINSWATERWAYS.ORG.UK](https://FUNDBRITAINSWATERWAYS.ORG.UK)



OUR CANALS & RIVERS ARE  
**UNDER THREAT**

We're fighting for **millions** of people in Britain who, like you, **rely** on canals and rivers for work, housing, education, commuting, leisure, wellbeing and social connection.

Sign our petition today: [www.fundbritainswaterways.org.uk](https://www.fundbritainswaterways.org.uk)

We're campaigning for adequate, guaranteed support to retain the huge environmental, economic and social benefits that Britain's thousands of miles of inland waterways provide to us all.

Join the fight to #FundBritainsWaterways.

[FUNDBRITAINSWATERWAYS.ORG.UK](https://FUNDBRITAINSWATERWAYS.ORG.UK)

SCAN ME





## An End of Year Message from Richard Parry - Canal & River Trust CEO.



First, it was with some relief that we didn't suffer a repeat of the long dry period we suffered in summer 2022 which left parts of the network closed for several weeks. A healthy amount of rainfall in July and August may have made boating less enjoyable some of the time but it kept rivers and reservoirs topped up so that – for the most part – we didn't need to close parts of the network to protect water supplies. However, our network is constantly exposed to the extremes of the weather and in October we saw Storm Babet wreak damage across the country, stretching our resources to cope and leaving significant repairs to undertake in addition to our planned works. I'm pleased that we were able to undertake the work to re-open the worst-affected sections relatively quickly.

We've faced other storm clouds this year, with – a year after it was due – the Government's announcement of the outcome of the Grant Review in July. Whilst a further 10 year funding commitment is to be welcomed in principle, the severity of the reduction in

grant over the period from 2027, falling by roundly £300 million in real terms over ten years with the 'gap' increasing year-on-year, was hugely disappointing. Such a significant shortfall will undoubtedly impact the long-term future of the canal network we all care passionately about and which delivers so much benefit to society at large.

That's why we immediately launched our #KeepCanalsAlive campaign and we've been overwhelmed by the positive support we've received. I know how many of you have made your voices heard, with many thousands emailing your MP which, in turn, has caused many of them to voice their concerns. In parallel, the Fund Britain's Waterways Campaign, has united a wide range of passionate waterway organisations to lobby Government to reassess its decision.

We didn't expect a sudden change of mind from Defra but – with our politics being so volatile, and a general election to come in the next year – we are hopeful that our ongoing campaign will ultimately lead a future government to re-consider the grant settlement in light of the overwhelming case for public investment to sustain a thriving and well-cared for network.

So we will continue to lobby MPs and other influential figures on all sides of the political divide. And we'll continue to ask for your support, and support from all those who use the waterways. While boaters are at the heart of the waterways, we know that millions more benefit and value them and mobilising their support will be vital too.

Whilst the funding decision has dominated much of my work this year, the Trust as a whole continues to work tirelessly to operate, manage and maintain our great canal network and to provide the service that boaters rightly expect from us. However, after two years of high inflation, and with our grant frozen and pressure on other income streams, it is becoming more challenging to deliver the scale of works we need to do – especially with essential reservoir investment consuming a large proportion of our available funds.

This has meant we've had to increase boat licence fees by more than inflation, and following our consultation, to changes in the structure of licence fees with wider boats and those without a home mooring paying an additional surcharge from next April. These decisions are never easy ones to make, and we've tried to balance the need to ensure sustainable funding to maintain the waterways with a fair approach to fees. We remain committed to looking at all other income sources so that boaters alone aren't being asked to cover the impact of our increasing costs – but your contribution is valued.

We've also re-doubled our efforts to secure charitable income. Our pre-Christmas 'Keep Anderton Alive' campaign to fund the major renovation that the Boat Lift needs has successfully met our target for this phase of the appeal and we'll be promoting other fundraising campaigns in the new year. We've successfully secured funding from Levelling Up, Towns and Shared Prosperity funds and from Active Travel England, Sport England and the National Lottery. Being in straitened times we will continue to look further afield to secure the additional funding to deliver ongoing care and improvements.

I'm also delighted to report that our volunteering goes from strength to strength with over 500 thousand hours already delivered in the period since 1 April and broader work being tackled – from off-side vegetation clearance to maintenance projects on locks and other assets.

This year we've also engaged boaters to gather your input in a range of other ways. We've done our first boater 'census' which has yielded some useful insights. We've asked for your views on the services and facilities you use when on your boat and have re-affirmed our commitment to provide essential boater facilities such as recycling, pump outs and waterpoints within a maximum cruising distance. Your feedback on accessible boating helped in developing a partnership with the new Accessible Waterways Association, which culminated in, a couple of weeks ago, a successful joint event, Towards Accessible Waterways, which heard from a diverse range of disabled waterway users about how access has been improved and how it can be improved further.

After months of pressing your case we managed to convince Government to extend the energy support scheme to continuous cruisers and we were able to unlock access to around £4 million of funding. Over 80% of eligible boaters have now claimed this vital (and deserved) support.

As we head in to the shortest, and possibly bleakest, days of the year, the Trust will have many of our teams out working hard to complete our pre-Christmas stoppages and do all the vital work to keep the network open and safe through the holiday period. After new year, the second phase of our winter programme will begin in earnest with both face-to-face and virtual Open Days to give you the chance to get behind the scenes and learn more about the work we're doing, meeting some of those working on these vital projects.

I hope you've enjoyed your past year boating on the canal network. Whatever challenges 2024 brings we will continue to do our best to provide the open and inviting waterways that we love and, continue our pursuit of the funding that the waterways need for this and future generations of boaters.

*Richard Parry.*

# Canal & River Trust Notices

The following notices concerning our canals have been issued by C&RT:

## **W&B, Tardebigge Lock 41**

Starts: 22/01/2024 08:00. Ends: 16/02/2024 16:00 inclusive

Type: Navigation Closure - Reason: Repair

Towpath closed? No

A stoppage is required to carry out some repair works to the lock. Resin grouting will be put behind the lock walls to fill up any voids and prevent deterioration of the lock structure.

---

## **Droitwich Barge Canal, Bridge 10 Valley Way Footbridge and Bridge 12 Westacre Footbridge.**

Starts: 02/01/2024 08:00. Ends: 15/03/2024 16:00 inclusive

Type: Navigation Closure. Reason: 3rd Party Works

Towpath closed? Yes

A navigation and towpath stoppage is required to allow Third Party Contractors, working on behalf of Worcestershire County Council, to replace 2 pedestrian footbridges.

## **W&B, Lock 12, Tibberton**

Starts: 02/01/2024 08:00. Ends: 15/03/2024 16:00 inclusive

Type: Navigation Closure. Reason: Repair

Towpath closed? No

A stoppage is required to carry out replacement of the top and bottom gates.

---

## **W&B, Lock 15, Tibberton**

Starts: 02/01/2024 08:00. Ends: 15/03/2024 16:00 inclusive

Type: Navigation Closure. Reason: Repair

Towpath closed? No

A stoppage is required to carry out replacement of the top and bottom gates.

---

## **W&B, Lock 29, Stoke Pound. Starts: 02/01/2024 08:00**

Ends: 15/03/2024 16:00 inclusive

Type: Navigation Closure. Reason: Repair

Towpath closed? No

A stoppage is required to carry out refurbishment of the top gate and replace the bottom gate.

---

## **W&B, Dunhampstead Tunnel North East Portal**

Starts: 28/12/2023 11:00. Type: Navigation Closure

Reason: Vegetation. Towpath closed? Yes

Navigation has had to be closed due to a small landslip at the north east portal of Dunhampstead tunnel.

04/01/2024 15:39: The navigation and towpath remain closed. Our Engineers visited the site and found the landslide is larger than first reported. Taking action to open navigation will be our first task, followed by looking at embankment stabilisation and then repairs. Contractors will be appointed to remove the vegetation from the cutting, and then a depth check will be performed.

---

## **Towpath Closure: Shortwood Tunnel West Portal, Worcester & Birmingham Canal**

Starts: 20/10/2023 11:00. Type: Towpath Closure

Reason: Vegetation. Towpath closed? Yes

A landslide has caused trees and mud to fall into the canal at Shortwood Tunnel West Portal, on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. As a result, we have had to close the towpath along this section.

14/12/2023 13:51: Please be advised the towpath along this section remains closed until further notice while we liaise with the landowner and come up with a plan of action.

# Lapal Canal Trust News



Our friends from the Lapal Canal Trust have been very busy formulating a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in order to progress the restoration project in Selly Oak. The project could well depend on the success of this bid as the next stage has to be commenced by the end of 2025. If this is not done the section 106 money, currently held by Birmingham City Council for the project, is in danger of being forfeited.

Across the other end of the Dudley No. 2 Canal in Halesowen, the next round of work parties in Leasowes Park now has provisional dates. These are Saturday January 27th and Saturday February 24th, subject to confirmation by the park wardens. Peter Fisher, the LCT's technical advisor, will

confirm things on social media as soon as possible. If any readers are interested in joining the work party please look on the LCT web site [www.lapal.org] or contact '58' editor. Several members of WB&DCS serve on the Lapal Canal Trust committee.

## BCNS News

### Icicle Cruise

Our friends from the BCNS are organising their Annual Icicle Cruise. If any readers who have access to a boat are interested in joining in with this social event, please contact BCNS for further details. '58' understands that the cruise intends to take in Merry Hill, the Fens Branch at the top of the Stourbridge 16 and Withymoor Island.

You can download the application form, pictured below, from here: <https://bit.ly/420ku00>

Birmingham Canal Navigations Society



## B C N SOCIETY ICICLE CRUISE



1st—3rd March 2024

#### Contact Details

Name.....
Address.....
.....
Post Code.....
Telephone or Mobile No.....
Email address.....
Boat Name.....
Special Access Requirements.....

The details are:

Following the success of our early season cruise to the Fens Pools in 2023 the Society have planned another short cruise for 2024.

BCN Society Icicle Cruise 1st - 3rd March 2024.

Meet at Merry Hill on the evening of Friday 1st March.  
Cruise to Parkhead Locks and up to Dudley Tunnel Portal on Saturday 2nd March. Hopefully there will be a fund raising "legging" a dayboat though the tunnel if consent can be obtained. Return to Withymoor Island where there will be a bar and possibly food (TBC) for Saturday evening.  
Disperse Sunday 3rd March.

There is no charge for this event but there will be a raffle to cover costs and raise much needed funds for the Society.

Please return completed forms to :- Michael Smith-Keary via email or post.

Email address:- sk63@btinternet.com

Post:- 61 Austcliffe Road, Cookley, Kidderminster, Worcs. DY10 3UP

#### Conditions of Entry

- 1 All information given on this form should be complete and correct at the time the entry is submitted. You should advise changes to the organisers as soon as possible. This entry covers the named boat only and no refunds will be made if you cancel your attendance.
- 2 The BCNS reserves the right to refuse any entry without giving any reason.
- 3 You confirm that you hold third party insurance to indemnity of £1,000,000 (one million pounds).
- 4 You agree to abide by all relevant licensing requirements of Canal & River Trust whilst the craft is moored at the event. This includes displaying the correct craft license and satisfying the requirements of the Boat Safety Scheme.
- 5 You agree to comply with the directions of the harbourmaster including mooring abreast as required. The decision of the BCNS as to the allocation and other arrangements is final.
- 6 Mooring are at the absolute discretion of the BCNS and may be changed at any time. The BCNS reserves the right to move any boat from the mooring before, during or after the event should the need arise.
- 7 The BCNS will not be held responsible for any loss or damage, other than to which the organisers are legally liable as result of their negligence. You should ensure that you have adequate insurance to cover any accidents or other losses.
- 8 You agree not to undertake any trading whatsoever from the boat covered by this entry. Exhibition entry forms are available on request.
- 9 You agree not to leave any litter, or cause pollution to the water way, the towing path, the event site or the surrounding area, this includes not discarding any refuse into the waterway and not leaving excrement from pots on the towing path or surrounding area. Mooring pins to be kept as near as to the towpath edge and clearly identified.
- 10 You agree not to cause a nuisance to other people nearby, whether by excessive noise or other activity. Engines should only be run to charge electrical systems at times stated by the Harbourmaster.
- 11 You agree not to store on your boat any article of inflammable or explosive character (for example fireworks) other than fuel and lubricants, as allowed under the Boat Safety Scheme. This is for everyone's safety in the unlikely event of a fire.
- 12 All information provided by you will be stored in accordance with current legislation. A copy of this information can be made available to you on request to the entire Manager, as named below. The organisers promise not to sell details to anyone else.
- 13 The BCNS warns all attendees of the danger of Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis) and other waterborne infections, but cannot be held responsible should any such disease be contracted whilst attending to or from the event.

I confirm that I have read and agree to comply with these conditions

Signed.....Date.....



## The Saga of the Top Lock

It seems that we must not blame Tom Rolt for originating the myth that the Tardebigge Top Lock gives a rise or fall of 14 feet.

I was recently in the Worcester Records Office and came across a substantial document consisting of "Returns Made to the Board of Trade....in respect of Canals and Navigations in the United Kingdom" for the year 1898. In three sections it gives the details of finances, the traffic and physical statistics for each canal.

For the Worcester Birmingham and the Droitwich Canals together, the total income from tolls, tunnel tugs and rents was £15,003, outgoings £13,283, net revenue £1,720, so these canals were not then a liability to the Sharpness New Docks Company.

The dimensions of all the locks are given, the majority of the narrow locks being 75' 2" long, 7' 3" wide, depth of water on cill 5' 4" and rise 7' 0". Exceptions are the barge locks, with corresponding statistics 85', 19', 7' and 18'; Sidbury the narrowest with width 7' 2" and rise 11'; Blockhouse with width 7' 3" and rise 11'; and Tardebigge Top Lock with standard length 75' 2", width 7' 3", depth on cill 5' 4", and FOURTEEN FEET rise!

So the 14 ft myth was firmly established and official in 1898!

Yours sincerely,

Alan White

'58' issue number 281 published in January 1994, featured an article by the Rev. Alan White, the society's historian, prolific researcher and writer about the Worcester & Birmingham Canal and surrounding areas. There had been in past years and more recent times, some debate about the depth of Tardebigge Top Lock and whether it was the deepest narrow lock on the system. The editor of '58' then was Joe Morley who was also Vice-Chair; Chair, secretary and treasurer were in respective order: Jack Simson, Caroline Woodhead and Margaret Yorke.

The facing page to the above continued the theme of lock depths but this time for the yet to be navigable Hanbury 3 on the Droitwich Junction Canal. Incidentally the canal society was about to celebrate its 25th birthday later that year but more about that in a later edition.

## Droitwich Depths

I was interested to read John Burman's comments regarding the top lock of the Hanbury Road flight on the Junction Canal. From memory - not always accurate in my case! - the top three locks in this flight all have rises/falls of about 12 feet, ie, about the same as Tardebigge Top Lock.

So, last Saturday, Mike Woodhead and myself went along to check. Though we had a few difficulties - no wellies, metric tape measure and having to estimate the water level - we were able to satisfy ourselves that the fall is somewhere near to 12 feet.

Regarding Tom Rolt and the mythical 14' fall at Tardebigge top lock, it appears that he relied overmuch on archive material when researching for his books. I seem to remember such an admission in "Landscape With Figures", Tom Rolt's final book.

Yours sincerely,

David Turner

DCT Project Manager, 1976-82

## WATERWAYS LIAISON SERVICE Dates for your Diary

### January 1994

- 2: IWA Lichfield: New Year Walk on the Daw End Canal and its surrounding area led by Countryside Officer Emily Barker. Meet 10 am. Details: Maddy Tate, 0922 684656.
- 10: Staffs & Worcs CS meeting: 'Confessions of a Boat Fitter' with Graham Booth.
- 12: IWA Avon/Wilts meeting. Illustrated talk by Ken Bailey on the restoration work of the Cotswold Canal Trust.
- 19: IWA Lichfield meeting. 'Shroppie Flyboats' by the SYMBOL Restoration Society.
- 19: IWA Warks meeting. 'Watton Locks' by Peter Ballard, lock-keeper of many years.
- 21: Stratford-on-Avon CS meeting: 'The Cotswold Canal Trust.'



20 years ago the '58' looked very different from today, due in no small part to the use of modern technology and the use of more colour printing. The front and back cover was, however, in colour. Going back in time even further, '58' 30 years ago looked as different again although members appeared to write into the editor more than today. Both tended to be much more text based than nowadays.

The following humorous contribution appeared in edition number 391, January 2004, when the editor was Mike Kettle; Chair, vice – Chair, secretary and treasurer were in respective order - Ian Hunter, David Wheeler, Brian Henderson and Lynne Laniosh.

## **WATERWAY USERS FAVOURITE FILMS AND TELEVISION ?**

Thanks to the Waterways Newsgroup!!

Lock Gates and Two Smoking Paddles.

Canal-time Team

Sail of the Century

Canal Knowledge

Windlass in the Willows.

The Pound of the Baskervilles

The Gunwales of Navarone

Ten o'clock News

Inspector Immerse

F-rust

The Sumpsons

Who wants to be a Millenium Link

Two Pints of bitter and a packet boat

(For veterans) The Tiller Girls

(For outboard enthusiasts) Top of the Pop Pop Pops

The Great Escape

A Bridge too far

To Ellum back

Gone with the wind lass

Lord of the Mooring Rings

The Bungle Book - Biopic about George Eycott

The Magnificent Severn

Bridge over the River Wye

The Thames Commandments

The Bhaji - The Bollywood version of the old favourite

The Darling Buds of Wey

Trent and Mersey Beat

Spring and Port Line

Starboards in their eyes

I'm on the Rochdale, Get me out of here

The Vulgar Boatman

To Hull and Back

Decks, Flies & Masking Tape

and LOOK OUT FOR

Bring me the Parkhead of Alfredo Garcia.

# Volunteer News by Neil Franklin

## Volunteer Coordinator's Report: Looking back at 2023 and forward to 2024

### Update on our Tardebigge Adoptions

Perhaps not too many readers know that we were asked by C&RT in 2013 to adopt the Tardebigge New Wharf site and look after it for at least ten years. The area was unloved and rundown. It took us a long time to tidy it up, which included digging out the Lime Kilns from the hill that they had been buried under. In this we were helped and encouraged by C&RT staff. They helped us remove the spoil from the hill and access the garden.

Things slowed down somewhat when asbestos was discovered in the spoil from the kilns and in the surrounding area. C&RT then put a blanket stop on the work to the kilns. This and Covid have forced us to review our adoptions. We have met Dafydd and Sam from C&RT with our discussions giving rise to this update.

### Tug Boat 'Birmingham'

Hidden away behind a hawthorn hedge is the hull of the tug boat 'Birmingham'. The hedge is important for wildlife, but this does mean that no one can see the boat, so we have asked C&RT if we can reduce the height of the hedge. Although there are two professionally produced information boards adjacent to the tug no one knew for definite who actually owns it. Thanks to Denis organising the talk given to the society by the Ellesmere Port Heritage Boats Department, we now know that C&RT own it. This gives us certainty in moving forward with painting the hull and refurbishing the boat. It also gives us a start in refurbishing the information boards. One is particularly interesting as it has a picture of a boat being legged through the nearby tunnel.

### The Garden.

The garden area lacked a plan until Yaz came along. Yaz is from Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and Al invited her over to inspect the garden. We showed her around and discussed the history of the area and what we might do with it and off she drove in her Bedford van. Things went quiet and so we got on with tidying up and talked about what we might do. Then not only did Yaz send us a psychedelic plan for the garden, but she also invited us to join a grassland management course at Bromsgrove School. This included lunch so Neil was well impressed. We are now working up a management plan including a pond, grass rotation and plans to include visits by local schools.

### The Lime Kilns

"They are rather special." This is a quote from Emma Hancox the Worcestershire County Archaeologist. Lord Faulkner and the society agree with her. The site is the best example of lime kilns in the county. For this reason we are now investigating how we can obtain funding to remove contaminated spoil from in and around the site. Firstly we need to ensure the kilns are stabilised to stop them deteriorating any further. Other societies have had problems like this notably 'Friends of Marple Lime Kilns' near Stockport. We intend to contact them to investigate how they overcame their asbestos problem. We believe we owe it to those past generations, who laboured hard and long to extract lime from the raw stone, to ensure this monument to them is retained and made accessible to the people of Worcestershire.

So as you can see there is a lot going on at Tardebigge and it's not all digging either, although that is important. If you think you can help us in any way at all please let us know and you can join the team.

2024 looks like being an interesting year as we have heard that the 'Cultural Partnership' is to be revived. This may give us access to funding but it should also give us the chance to put Tardebigge on the local heritage map.

## **Cecilia Cruises into 2024**

Nb 'Cecilia' has had a busy year taking a variety of people out for trips on the canal. From young carers to the older generation, all had an enjoyable day on the water as can be confirmed by the comments on the feedback forms. We need to thank Wendy for her hard work organising the various groups and our crews. We already have trips on the books for 2024 and we anticipate another busy year. If you want to be involved with the 'Cecilia' crew please let us know as we are always looking for new volunteer crew and helms. Wendy has written about the year's boating elsewhere in '58'.

The big news regarding 'Cecilia' is that she is going in to have her side windows, bow doors and windows replaced. Originally the bow doors and windows were going to be replaced in November at Crafted Boats Stoke Prior workshop. Things were going well until late October when, after a heavy bout of rain, the embankment at the south end of Shortwood Tunnel collapsed into the canal. This obviously closed the cut and our hopes of getting the work done disappeared along with the towpath at Shortwood. However, we have regrouped and now have agreed with 'Crafted Boats' to complete all of the work at the end of January, at their Tardebigge workshop.

We need to thank Ken for all his hard work in ensuring 'Cecilia' always looks good and is well cared for. He is in the midst of organising our new safety certificate at the moment and working with Steve Partridge to refurbish the galley.

## **Training in 2024**

As you know we take out many different groups on 'Cecilia' and it has been our intention for some time to ensure our crews were fully trained so that they could react professionally to any emergency. To that end we have been on a First Aid course. However, we now intend to give all our crew a basic training course on boat safety. We want all crew and helms to take the course so that we all have a basic knowledge of what we would do in an emergency and what to look out for on the boat. We want to trial this initially, so at the moment we have set aside Wednesday 17th January and Wednesday 24th January 2024 for the first training days. The trainers are Ed Butcher and Ian McGarr, ably assisted by Ken Robinson. Please let Wendy know if you want to take part in any of these two days. There will be a maximum of four participants on any given day with hopefully more to come.

## **Wanderer Community Work Boat**

We have discussed the use of the 'Wanderer' with C&RT. They have a desire to use her on the Droitwich Barge Canal due to the growth of reeds and lack of attention in previous years. We have subsequently taken her down to Hanbury for our friends from the 'Pamela May Trust' to take beyond bridge 10 (currently closed for repair). We are available to help with the works as we are the Worcester – Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society. The plan is to then take her to Diglis in Worcester to carry out essential work there, but afterwards return to the Birmingham level for us to catch up on our off side work. It will be a busy year!

## **St. Richard's Canal Festival 3rd-6th May 2024**

We would just like to thank everyone for their help at the festival last year. Over 40 people volunteered helping to make it one of the most successful canal festivals yet.

This was helped by 'Cecilia' taking centre stage and being the volunteers' respite as it was always intended to be. So please put it in your diaries - 30th April to 7th May 2024 volunteering at the St. Richard's Canal Festival. All are welcome including partners, friends and families etc. We hope to see as many as possible at Vines Park - you know it makes sense!

***Many thanks to all our volunteers for their help throughout 2023***

# 'Cecilia' Activities

## A Review of 'Cecilia' Activities.

Happy New Year - although by now we are well into 2024.

It's been a time of reflection by me as Bookings Co-ordinator for the society narrow boat 'Cecilia' and 2023 was definitely a bumper year for us having carried out 50 trips over the season. We had some groups who regularly book with us but most importantly had many new groups who have joined us for the first time. We also took 2 fantastic groups out on Christmas trips and everyone (including our own elves) had lots of fun and there was lots of singing going on - something different in the lead up to the 'Big Day' (*pictures on next page*).

We were lucky to be awarded £1000 from the Bromsgrove District Council's equalities small grant fund, which enabled us to offer trips to some new groups within the authority's boundary. In addition we were able to take 6 groups from the Birmingham area sponsored by the Lapal Canal Trust National Lottery grant.

'Cecilia' was present, sporting her new livery, at the St. Richard's Canal Festival and it was good to talk with so many people about what we do. This resulted in a number of new groups coming forward to book trips with us.

During the season we encountered high winds, torrential rain, rail strikes and landslides which had meant that some trips had to be postponed, but safety was as always, our top priority.

We're all looking forward to the new season and already have bookings for:

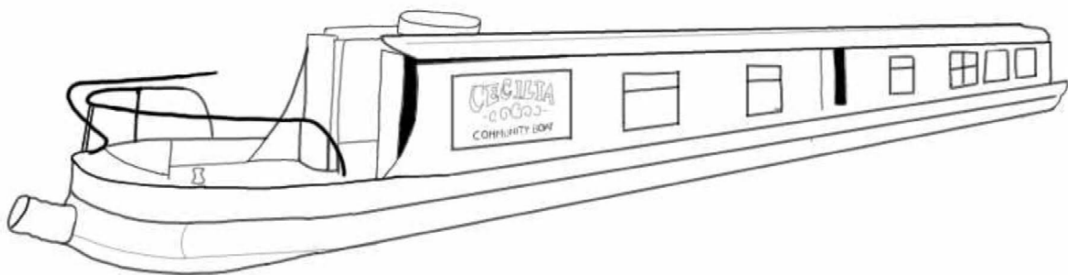
A 2 day 'lock challenge' organised for the Bittell Sea Scouts; a full day for a walking group and a raffle prize winner (re-booked twice due to the weather - so better luck this time!) with several other bookings waiting to be confirmed. We will continue our support for the Primrose Hospice and look forward to our trips with them.

None of this could be undertaken without the help and support of our Helms and Crew - thank you all.

So here's to another fantastic season and all that's left for me to say is that:

**BOOKINGS ARE NOW OPEN!**

**Wendy Albutt – 'Cecilia' Bookings Co-ordinator.**









# Donations

*We have introduced new and easier ways of making donations to our society.*

**QR Code:** We have the facility to make donations direct to the society.  
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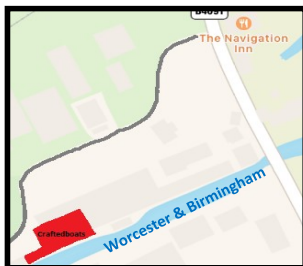
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## Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

[www.wbdcs.org.uk](http://www.wbdcs.org.uk) | Twitter @wbdcs58  
Facebook @wbdcs58.org.uk

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, Chance's Glassworks and Bradley Canal Restoration.

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 and full day trips (*Terms & Conditions Apply*).

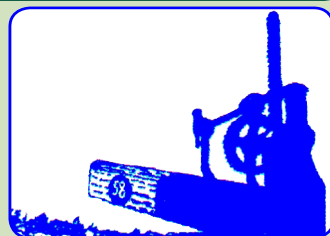
We hope to welcome as many new faces as possible from members of the community.

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

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