

# 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'*



To Help  
out at St.  
Richard's Canal  
Festival 2024



# Monthly Meetings

## Society Meetings

**7.45pm start**

**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 572 April/May 2024

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We are also on **X** (formerly known as **Twitter**) please follow us @wbdcs58.

View videos on our [YouTube channel](#)

*Opinions expressed in Fifty Eight are those of the authors and not  
necessarily those of the Society, but are published as matters of interest.*

**Copy Date for the Next Issue: May 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

## What a wonderful day Sunday 17th March turned out to be!!!!

We held our Annual Dinner at Bromsgrove Golf Centre and we had 47 + 1 child. Thank you to Madelaine and her son Jesse for raising £127 from the raffle and thank you to all of those who donated prizes. We were again well looked after by the staff and the food was excellent. I apologise for the price increase but I thought we still had good value.

We had a number of guests who we have to thank for the different ways they all help the Canal Society. Rosie Philpott has painted a scene incorporating Cecilia, the Birmingham Tug and Wanderer.

Rosie presented the painting to Al Gibbs and I understand that the original will be based on Cecilia. If anyone wants to purchase a print then please contact Al or Neil. Mary Green read a poem, Nick Hadley talked about his new book and finally Neil presented the George Bate Trophy to Ken Robinson. Congratulations to Ken, a well-deserved holder of the trophy.

I have booked the Golf Centre again so make a note in your diaries for Sunday 23rd March 2025.

My next push is for St. Richard's Canal Festival; the planning is virtually complete, we have a number of stalls already booked in, food concessions are sorted, entertainment booked all I need to do is order the beer!! Please remember the duck race; I know that we have over 300 tickets already out for sale. It would help if all those were sold in advance. Last year we had the same number out but on the Saturday of the festival I had nearly 200 returned unsold.

As most of you know Gill and myself are emigrating south and our trips back to Bromsgrove will be limited. I am still very proud to be associated with one of the best supported Canal Societies in the Country. See you in Droitwich.





# Editor's Notes

## Hello Readers

This is the edition of '58' you've all been waiting for - the last one before the big count down to St. Richard's Canal Festival in Vines Park, Droitwich. The organising committee will soon be having the last of its monthly meetings prior to the big weekend where it'll be all systems go! Our society volunteer coordinator, Neil Franklin, has made much mention of the plans later on in this edition and needless to say that volunteers are being actively sought. If any readers can help in any way at all please do get in touch with Neil who will be so pleased to hear from you even if your contribution is small - it all counts and really is appreciated.

We could certainly do with some fine weather for this big event - something which has been really lacking of late. The last two or three editions of '58' have made much of the exceptionally wet weather we now appear to be having more of than in previous years. Climate change is certainly an issue for all of us and in particular, our ageing waterway system where floods cause so much damage, as we know on our local canals.



Changing the subject a little, the West Midlands Region of Canal and River Trust has recently announced a new appointment to replace Adnan Saif, who addressed one of our meetings last year. Henriette Breukelaar (*right*) will take up her post in April and '58' wishes her every success in this new career move. Henriette was formerly employed in various partnership settings, including the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, where she was CEO. Perhaps Denis could arrange for Henriette to address one of our meetings in the future?



No news as yet about the towpath over Shortwood Tunnel being re-opened, which is not that surprising considering the amount of rain there has been hampering any due work. We hope to hear from C&RT about any progress and will bring any news either to the next edition of '58', or possibly via our social media outlets.

Speaking of development, C&RT alongside contractors, have recently been busy creating new habitat for water voles actually on both sides of the W&B between Alvechurch and Tardebigge. Let's



hope that the wildlife are attracted to this as water voles still remain on the list of endangered species. It remains to be seen as to whether the 3 otters reported in the vicinity have any effect on this.



In this edition we also have reports about the coveted George Bate Trophy, work on 'Cecilia', the tug boat at Tardebigge, as well as our superb nature notes from Mary, volunteering and reports of past monthly members' and friends' meetings, plus other future waterway based events. It's all in here for readers to enjoy and all provided by dedicated volunteers for whom we are very grateful. Without these contributions '58' just would not be the magazine it has become. Thank you one and all, see you at the next society activities.

As a slight aside, the society received a substantial donation towards the additional work required on 'Cecilia' following an inspection by our friends at 'Crafted Boats'. The kind donor did not wish any mention at all, nor membership, nor a trip on 'Cecilia', in fact absolutely nothing! The society is extremely grateful to the kind donor which just goes to show there are some really caring people out there who want to make a difference for others without any thought for themselves. On behalf of the society, thank you very much once again.

*Enjoy the read, John Hemingway*

# Obituary

'58' has just heard the very sad news that that Sue Freeth, a former society committee member and shop co-ordinator, has passed away very recently. Sue and John used to live in Longbridge, Birmingham before relocating to the North Birmingham/South Staffordshire area. Their boat was called 'Happy Jack'.

At the time of going to press, we have no further information to share. Should anything else transpire we will post on the society's social media outlets.



## 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.

## Society Meetings

The society's meeting in February was delivered by a small team of experts from 'River and Canal Rescue' [RCR]. Both Charlotte and the Engineer J gave some background to the formation of the team and the services they offer to boaters who enrol. It was likened by one or two people to such as 'Green Flag' or the 'RAC' for road vehicle breakdown support. A few people present were already in membership with some being so via their own boat insurance.



They gave much information and stories about some of the issues they sometimes face from some boaters. Those present were also given some very handy tips on boat maintenance both in a general terms and also when 'wintering up' a boat. This was not at all a promotional exercise with any 'hard selling' techniques and they even indicated that they have offered advice to non-members who may then decide if they wish to join one of the various membership categories, or not. The society's narrowboat 'Cecilia' has been covered by RCR membership for many years.

The March members' evening was presented by Julian Souter who went into great detail about his research into the personalities who were initially behind the scheme for cutting the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal. Julian described the inter linking of some of the families, their wealthy back grounds and what it would mean for them in terms of financial rewards.





The relationships, amongst the parties involved, was a story to be told in itself!

Julian related how James Brindley was employed and how the route selected, while looking somewhat circuitous on a map, was attempting to access a good supply of water. The canal became in the latter part of the 18th century, what it is today, 46 miles long from Great Haywood to Stourport-on-Severn. The latter town, which became a port, owed its existence to the cutting of the canal.

The S&W is regarded nationally as

one of the prettiest on the system, due in no small part to its varying scenery, but in particular the red sandstone out crops all being cut through by hand. The navvies certainly had to work hard. Interestingly, the Droitwich Barge Canal holds several features which are very similar to those on the S&W, no doubt because of James Brindley's involvement in both waterways. The S&W Canal Company was one of the most vociferous in speaking out against the cutting of the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, which was being planned much later. They presumably felt that this new canal would take their trade from the Black Country and Staffordshire coalfields down the River Severn.

Both meetings were given the usual WB&DCS thanks and appreciation.

## Donation

The committee of the The Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society would like to extend its thanks to society member John Talbut for his kind donation of 200 2nd class stamps.

## 'Cecilia'



Just a couple of photos to show the latest updates inside 'Cecilia'. We've recently had the galley refitted and retiled.

# Society Annual Lunch: Bromsgrove Golf Centre



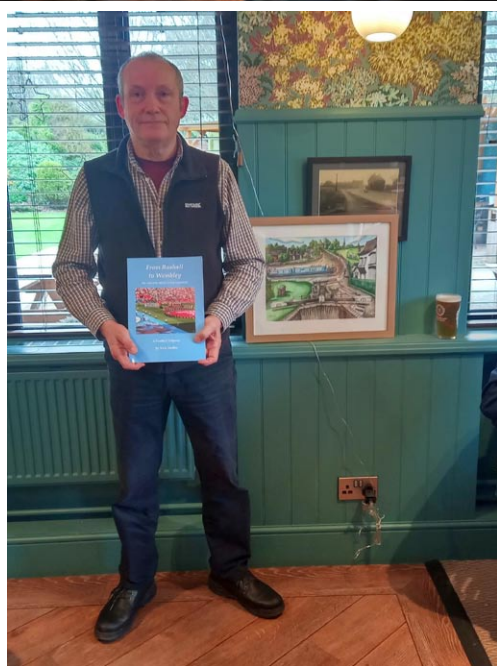
Our society recently held its annual lunch which proved to be as popular as ever. Following the meal, Mary Green read out one of her poems, Nick Hadley gave the background to his latest book (see page 14). Rosie Philpott gave a background to her 'wobbly' picture assisted by Al Gibbs. Kelly Wetherall gave us an update on The Primrose Hospice - the society's chosen charity; every prize was claimed in the superb raffle and the coveted George Bate Trophy was presented by Neil (last year's recipient) to Ken Robinson. Ken was nominated by the general membership for this well-deserved award with Chris Robinson receiving a bunch of flowers for her work on 'Cecilia' as well.

A few members, new to the occasion, commented how varied the whole event was as opposed to 'just have your food and leave'. Many thanks to Gill and David who organised the whole event.





# Society Annual Lunch cont.





# Paintings



*'Wobbly Picture' by Rosie Philpott*



*'Cecilia' by Bob Ryan*



# Beyond The George Bate Trophy 2024

## The Merseysippi Jazz Band

If you were at the annual lunch you would know that Ken Robinson was awarded the George Bate Trophy for his hard work and dedication in getting Cecilia ready for the new season, following the fitting of new doors and windows. He was also a one man 'tour de force' in getting the boat through the Boat Safety Certificate. He worked so hard he needed a few days to recover! During his recovery I thought he might not return to the fold until after the dinner if at all! This came as a blow to me as I already had the trophy engraved with his name - I was bereft, what was I to do? Fortunately he came round and attended the dinner and I was able to hand the trophy to him. I knew he was the man to be Boat Manager as he and I go back a long way. I knew his dad - nearly!

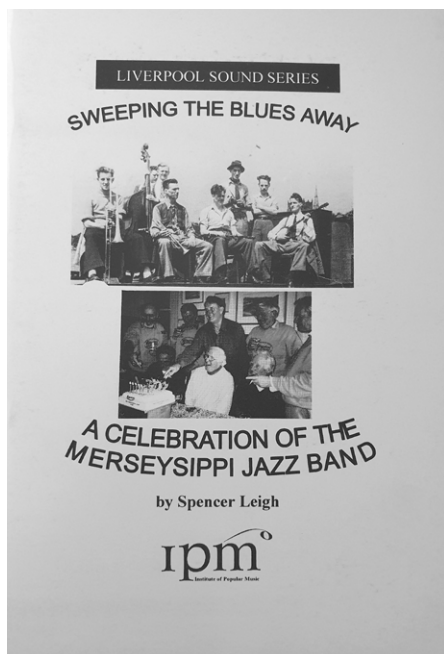
It was in 1967 that we got tickets to a dance at the Prescot Teacher Training College just outside Liverpool, not far from where John Gidlow [formerly Bridge 35 Chandlery] lived. We took the No 10 bus from Old Swan to Prescot. What a night we were looking forward to! Lots of pretty girls vying for our attention, holding hands as we did the cavern stomp. Possibly walk a pretty biology teacher back to her dorm?

Imagine our disappointment when the reality was revealed. The place was a huge hall not the intimate space we were hoping for. It was half empty and none of the girls fancied anyone in a group of weekend hippies, no matter how good looking they were! The band played Trad Jazz, unthinkable when you lived in a city full of mop headed swinging groups. And the connection to Ken - it was his dad's band. The Merseysippi Jazz Band - a famous Jazz Band well known across the North West. But John Lennon called them "the old buggers" in 1962 and they really buggered up our night!

Ah well, it was the last No10 home and a long walk down Queens Drive to that jumping hot spot Norris Green.

*Well done Ken and your dad was a great Band leader.*

*Neil Franklin*



## The Merseysippi Jazz Band.

Pictures reprinted from a book by Spencer Leigh.

Ken's Dad, Frank Robinson, on piano



# From Rushall to Wembley by Nick Hadley

## One Man's Journey along the highways and byways of the 2022/23 FA Cup. - And the odd towpath too!

Like most good things in my life, this one came about via a chance alignment of events and a spur of the moment whim placed in my mind via a conversation with a friend. As a football enthusiast all my life, I had long harboured a sort of vague post-retirement ambition to follow the footsteps of Brian James, a famous football journalist who had, in 1976/77, followed every round of that year's FA Cup competition, going wherever the victors of each round took him. He wrote a fabled book about his adventures; "Journey to Wembley, a football odyssey from Tividale to Wembley." I knew about his legendary journey but had not actually read his book until very recently. The idea to emulate him was always more a vague dream than anything approaching a hard plan. Let me explain how that dream became a reality and how that chance alignment of events came to pass.

I am an Aston Villa season ticket holder and, on Saturday, 3rd September 2022, I was due to be at Villa Park with my long-time friend and fellow Villa fan, Geoff Collett, to watch the game against Manchester City. Due to our form at the time, and with a high expectation of a thrashing at the hands of Premier League juggernauts City, I decided to give the match a miss and go instead to watch my old hometown club, Redditch United, play in the FA Cup at Rushall Olympic. When I told Geoff of my decision, he casually chipped in with the idea of doing a Brian James. "Why don't you follow the victors of each round all the way to Wembley in June?" he asked.

What the hell. Why not?" I thought. The germ of the idea had been planted in my mind many years before but Geoff cultivated it for me! This is how it all began.

My own version of James' football odyssey began not far from Tividale, ironically. On a warm late summer's day in Rushall, a suburb in the Borough of Walsall, the FA Cup First Qualifying Round tie between Rushall Olympic and Redditch United took place on the 3rd September 2022. It ended on an even warmer mid-summer's day at Wembley on June 3rd 2023 with the Final between Manchester City and Manchester United. The adventures that transpired over the intervening nine months I have documented in a self-published book entitled "From Rushall to Wembley." It does not bear too much favourable comparison to Brian James' masterpiece, but it has the merits of being essentially all my own work in terms of layout, writing and photography. I have also been able to raise over £400 for charity by asking friends who have requested a copy of the book to donate to the "Jeff Astle Foundation"; an organisation that is funding much-needed research into sports related brain injuries. It was established by the wife and daughter of the late West Bromwich Albion and England centre-forward, the legendary Jeff Astle. Known purely by the title "The King" in the blue and white striped leaning parts of the Black Country. He died prematurely of early onset dementia, thought to be linked to his persistent heading of old-style heavy footballs.

# *From Rushall to Wembley*

*The story of the 2022-23 FA Cup Competition*



*A Football Odyssey*

**By Nick Hadley**

***My book. Available at most reputable bookshops!***

The book recounts a history of a journey that started with a random football game and then slowly became something else. A very personal nine-month long odyssey of rekindled memories, travelling on my own along the highways and byways of a game and largely forgotten parts of a country that I have always dearly loved. It tells the story of 15 football matches spread over nine months, of the places those matches took me to and the people I met along the way. From the Lincolnshire Wolds to Cleethorpes beach; from Brighton seafront to the world-famous colleges of Cambridge; from watching parks football in Ashton under Lyne on a rainy day to walking along the Solent in Southampton; from the venerable old Valley Stadium, in my former hometown of

Redditch, to the Great Arch of Wembley; of the kindness and generosity of strangers and the warmth of football kinship. It tells too the story of how travelling alone affords you the freedom to go where your fancy takes you. The delight of making it up as you go along and the excitement of never quite knowing what lies around the next corner. It is part a travelogue, part a trivia-fest for football anoraks only, but it is also at its heart, very much a personal diary of immense enjoyment and quiet reflection.

In terms of the statistics and some of the data behind it all, I travelled a total of 3,678 miles by car, train and bus and my total expenditure on match tickets, travel and accommodation plus other incidental costs, was £2,339. A big slice of all that was the £525 I spent on my Cup Final ticket, which I purchased via a Ticket Exchange website! It was either that or touts outside the ground. The game sold out very quickly, as a Manchester derby was always likely to do. For some time that amount of money was between me, my maker and credit card company. My good wife Glyn only became aware of it much later!

The statistics go on. I watched 12 rounds of the FA Cup (4 Qualifying and 8 Proper) spread over 9 calendar months (September 2022 to June 2023). It included the 3 replays so I watched a total of 15 matches. 1 of the 3 replays involved extra time and penalties. The semi-final, which had no replay option, went into extra time and penalties too. In total, I watched 23.5 hours of normal and extra time plus, I estimate, approximately 1.75 hours of injury time and penalty shoot-outs. Call it 25 hours. That's over 1 day's worth of football!



*The Three Locks pub on the Grand Union Canal at Soulbury*



In the 15 games of football I watched, I saw a total of 40 goals. I watched 3 goalless draws, 2 of which went into goalless extra time periods too. The two penalty shoot-outs I saw were won by margins of 4-2 and 7-6. That is 19 penalties scored and 3 missed. The total aggregate attendance for the 15 games I attended was 251,233. Just over a quarter of a million people! I watched 13 different football clubs during my FA Cup journey.

A postscript to conclude. As a canal and waterways enthusiast, the book of course had to include some passing homage to our wonderful canal network! The FA Cup Fourth Round on Saturday, 28th January 2023 took me to Luton Town for their tie with Grimsby Town. That was a game I travelled to by car and I navigated a cross country route that took me via the Cotswolds, taking in Broadway, Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton in the Marsh, Chipping Norton, Buckingham and Leighton Buzzard. My lunch time stop on that journey, chosen completely at random as I drove by on the A4146 towards Leighton Buzzard, was the Three Locks pub that was located alongside the Grand Union Canal at the famous 'Soulbury Pump House' and three locks. The pub was excellent and, as a canal buff, the place was an absolute treasure trove.

My 'Rushall to Wembley' book is currently out of print but, talking to Neil Franklin, we are thinking of printing a few more copies for anyone who is interested in having one, with maybe the idea of raising some money for the society and 'Cecilia' by asking for donations in return.

*This was some effort in following your chosen sport Nick! Thank you very much for this article and if anyone is interested in having one of these please let us know – Ed.*



*The famous Soulbury Pump House*



# 'Nature Notes'

## Mary Green

Most days I walk along the canal near Alvechurch village, where Cecilia is moored. That's one of the places C&RT have planted some of their "linear orchard" trees. In February the trees celebrated their first anniversary and are all still standing! Unfortunately, two have had their tops broken off (which won't kill them but might slow them down) and I found one with a dog-poo bag hanging on it once, so they have suffered a bit from passing human beings. I remember the same thing happened to the four cherry-plum trees planted by the Dead Arm in 2019. One was completely destroyed; one had the top broken off. However, three survived and this year their blossom was spectacular in February.

The natural vegetation round here has done well over the winter and early spring. It wasn't cut, unusually, so it all went down back into its roots as it should, and the seed heads stayed for the birds and insects. It should mean the growth is better and more diverse next year and the overwintering insects will survive better. Growth has come back early in a mostly mild winter. Every time plant species disappear from an area, we lose the insects and other creatures associated with them. That's why the variety of plants growing both under the hedge and on the water's edge is so important. The stretches close-cut near moorings are mostly grass and support little wildlife.

I wrote last year of how we wanted to plant the orchard trees on the patch by the bridge which has nicely rewilded itself. It has better soil and was an old plum orchard until ten years ago. C&RT wanted to keep that patch tree-free, and I can see why now, as it's become a headquarters site for equipment to do bank restoration further down. The varied native





plants are being crushed again but I guess they will come back. They asked us to plant the trees instead in a patch of degraded soil, full of brambles and nettles, which is good in a way because they add to biodiversity. However, it makes it more difficult to care for them. So many newly planted trees die in the first year or two, so well done to the volunteers who have looked after these so well.

The hedge-side plants come back first in spring, with celandines, coltsfoot and dead-nettles in flower and willow & hazel catkins and cherry-plum blossom above them. I saw some early butterflies and bees on them in February, and the blackthorn came out early too.

Our pair of swans, Noel and Noella, are still with their lovely almost-white cygnets in January, then they spilt up as expected and we don't know where the two young swans went. The adults have been showing courtship behaviour and will soon be looking for a nesting site. The mallard ducks were mating early this year too and the Canada geese have started squabbling over territory. The lovely hedges along the canal are often the first place I hear each wood-edge bird start its spring song: chaffinch, greenfinch, thrush and blackbird, then the visiting chiffchaffs and other warblers.

There have been several kingfishers nearby over winter. Where the canal runs along the backs of gardens, they fly in and out of the gardens across to the other side, so I don't know if someone's got a pond or they are taking food from bird tables! In another stretch, the far side is along a piece of ancient woodland remnant, with a good bank, and we've seen two kingfishers going in there, where we hope they are nesting.

### Bank restoration between Scarfield and Shortwood

C&RT and their contractors have been undertaking a major restoration job on the banks of the canal between Alvechurch and the Shortwood tunnel. There is a good towpath here and very varied vegetation both sides, some of it old woodland plants. This particular stretch was originally cut through ancient woodland remnants and there are bluebells on



3



4



5

1. NEW CHERRY PLUM TREES BY DEAD ARM
2. HOW NOT TO TREAT A SAPLING
3. NOEL & NOELLA GETTING TOGETHER
4. FULL GROWN CYGNET
5. GEESE & SWANS LOOKING FOR TERRITORY

# Nature Notes cont.

both sides in spring and some fine old trees. However, the banks have become eroded over time and in some places the water comes right to the towpath edge.

They are driving wooden piles into the water and putting coir rolls along where the edge should be. In some places they are using rolls of brushwood instead. The coir rolls are pre-planted with native aquatic fringe plants – usually including things like sedge, yellow iris and purple loosestrife. Then the gaps are filled in. For this they use puddle clay - the same as lines the canal bottom - which won't wash away, then topsoil. They assure me the topsoil is local.

This is different from what they've done in some other places in the past and avoids damage to the existing bank. Scarce species like water voles quite like the eroded banks where they can burrow and get in and out. The coir method of relining the bank makes it possible for them to still come and go easily, whereas a harder edge doesn't.



6



7



8



9



10



11

**6. CELANDINES**

**7. COIR ROLLS BEING SET**

**8. COIR ROLLS ON OPPOSITE BANK**

**9. BRUSHWOOD BEING SET**

**10. TOPSOIL LAYER & PLANTED COIR COILS**

**11. PUDDLE CLAY LAYER**

They are even doing some of this on the non-towpath side where erosion doesn't really matter. This is in places where the bank has hard edging or other barriers to wildlife getting in and out, where they put in the wooden piles and coir or brushwood rolls as "stepping-stones."

I think I saw a water vole last year near Alvechurch, though it was in the evening by torch-light so I didn't get a perfect view. I used to see them more years ago. They're not the only animal that likes a penetrable edge to the bank though – otters do, and birds, amphibians and even insects benefit. They all need proper complex vegetation near the water too.

I think the work on the bank is being done with care for the vegetation, as well as the water-voles. Work done further up near the Aqueduct last year is taking its time to recover and we may have lost some of our more unusual plant species. This time the wooden piles and coir rolls look more sensitively placed. This stretch is also where we have seen kingfishers possibly nesting. The people working there have seen them too, and say they are remarkably undisturbed by all the human activity.

The method being used here featured on Countryfile recently, though the filming they did in Alvechurch (with a quick glimpse of Cecilia!) was before the work here started.



# 'Poetry Corner' poems by Mary Green

## Soap Opera

The canal is calm, beautiful, skimmed with ice,  
Fringed with blackthorn blossom. We notice  
Two mallard drakes, nodding and bobbing  
As they do when courting ducks, then  
One jumps the other and they try to mate.  
Next we see a new swan couple.  
These usually faithful birds split up -  
We were worried, thought one had died  
Then he came back with a new mate  
Smaller, a younger model. They greet us  
In a not very friendly way. Must be getting  
Near the nesting season for them.  
The other pair appears, stately, white  
One of the cobs puff himself up like a snowball  
Hissing and striking towards the other.  
Wife-swapping swans and gay drakes  
Sexual jealousy and defence of territory  
Such daily drama on Leap Year's Day.

## The Dead Arm

It's called the dead arm, a piece of canal  
Cut off when they made the diversion  
For the motorway. It's a place of life.  
Water-lilies making stepping stones for moorhens  
Alders and poplars, willows and brambles.  
The field free of people turns back to scrub  
Young oaks, hawthorns, blackthorn and rose  
And today, the swans. They've had a busy year  
Already, changing partners, escaping dangers  
And here they are nesting. She snoozes  
Atop a dome of sedge and reeds on the far bank  
He sits near, alert, minding the gap, watching for herons  
And rats and mink and screaming seagulls.  
Best parents around, they have a good chance.  
We will come again quietly one day soon  
And the beautiful sun-coloured cygnets  
Will walk full of life across the dead arm.

# Lapal Canal Trust News

Our friends from the Lapal Canal Trust continue to progress the restoration project, particularly at the Selly Oak end. That is not to say that the Halesowen end is being ignored - far from it as



work parties have already taken place this year near Leasowes Park. Much litter picking and 'scrub bashing' (left) has taken place with the Park Rangers due to remove the cuttings as soon as possible before the bird nesting season.

Back to the Selly Oak end and the Heritage Lottery Fund application has been safely submitted with the results being declared sometime in June – fingers crossed all round! This is hopefully to provide the funding to connect the new section to the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, provide a swing bridge over the towpath, excavate the new section and reopen the small tunnel under the ring road into Selly Oak

Park and beyond. Having the small tunnel open up will provide such a safe way for towpath users to get from Selly Oak Park to the Battery Park site without having to manoeuvre a very busy main road.

Thanks to Hugh Humphreys [CEO] and his team for the significant effort of planning and getting the application submitted. They have spent many hours and hopefully will be successful. Many thanks to all of them for this tremendous effort. If anyone would like a copy of the 16 page submission and over 20 supporting documents, please email Hugh on [nbhugh@gmail.com](mailto:nbhugh@gmail.com). He would be very pleased to share it with you.

Meanwhile LCT has been arranging for the IWA's Waterway Recovery Group to complete the wheelchair pedestrian ramp in Selly Oak Park this coming August. This could be used by people with mobility issues as well as those wheeling prams along the towpath.

The trust has also re-commenced boat trips for SENSE (*pictures below*).







LCT has also given a presentation to the Northfield Branch of the National Trust and The Clent Club (where one resident recalled POWs clearing the canal by Netherton Tunnel), as well as being asked to have a stand at the Calthorpe Residents Society AGM. A key requirement of the HLF process is 'community engagement' which the trust continues to demonstrate this very facet and will undoubtedly continue to do so. A few pictures are published below.

Further details can be found on either the link from the WB&DCS web site or [www.lapal.org](http://www.lapal.org)

*Presentation to Birmingham National Trust (below)*



*Presentation to Clent Club (below)*



*Presentation to Calthorpe Residents (below)*



# Volunteer News. Neil Franklin writes...

## St. Richard's Canal Festival (May 3rd - 6th) WE NEED YOU PLEASE!!!

As we look forward to the St. Richard's Canal Festival, we require volunteers throughout the festival week please. Our programme will start on Wednesday 24th April when we aim to begin taking 'Cecilia' down to Droitwich. On the first day we intend to take her down the Tardebigge flight to the Queens Head. The next day cruise on to Hanbury Wharf Junction and then boat down to Netherwich Basin. We are assuming that the silt bund at the mouth of the Body Brook, below lock 6 on the Droitwich Junction Canal, has been removed? Can anyone who walks down that way, please keep an eye on the dredging works there and keep us updated on progress. C&RT are working hard to clear the silt, I am sure they will be successful, but an update would be appreciated. On Monday April 29th we will take 'Cecilia' round to her berth for the festival.

We propose to start work on the festival site on Tuesday 30th April when we take the transport to Lye in the Black Country to pick up some materials for the festival and return to Droitwich. On Wednesday we unload into the marquee area and fetch any outstanding gear. We ensure the area is fully fenced in before we leave. On Thursday we clean the tables and chairs, set up the bar and the rest of the festival site. Friday 3rd May is the final set up day and ready to open late afternoon.

Saturday, Sunday and Monday we make sure everything runs smoothly.

This includes the Duck Race on the Monday afternoon before we start packing the site away.

On Tuesday 7th May we clear the park and take everything back to the depot in Lye.

We need volunteers on every day please! We don't mind if it's a couple of hours or days as any time you give us will be beneficial. Just let me or Bill know when you can make it or just turn up on the day. We don't mind as all help will be appreciated. Thank you all in anticipation of your involvement.

Please don't forget this year you will have a St. Richard's Canal Festival polo shirt to wear thanks to our sponsors BREW 61. It's very fetching and will hopefully make everyone feel part of the team.

## *What's been happening since the last edition of '58'?*

### **Cecilia**

On 'Cecilia' things didn't go quite to plan. Someone got the date wrong so we had to abandon the training and take her up to Tardebigge where Crafted Boats fitted the new windows and new bow doors. They look tremendous. The engine mountings also needed replacing along with some work on the stern tube and rudder.

Steve and Alan Partridge stepped up with Ken to fit a new galley which included the work surface. Our new cooker hob had to be refitted and the sink put in and plumbed in. Steve also got us a new refrigerator whose door stays open by itself when not in use! Thanks again to Steve and his brother Alan. Where would we be without them and of course Ken who organised it all? Martin from M J Craft, who did the gas work, and we mustn't forget John Talbut who just popped in and got the forward lights and horn to work - amazing!

Alan and Steve also put together the window surrounds where necessary. This allowed the finishing team to step up and decorate throughout the cabin. This work was led by Maxine, if you see a note that says rub down and undercoat, then just do it! Also on the team was Trevor who did the roof light surround and made good the floor finish; Ed, who looked after the cushions at his house; Chris Robinson, Al and Chris Gibbs, Nick and Wendy all helped to get the boat ready for the season. A big thank you to you all and anyone I have forgotten. It's the memory you know but as I have read recently it may not be a sign there's anything wrong, I just can't remember where I



read it! And of course I can't forget Ken who pulled it all together.

Ken also saw 'Cecilia' through her Boat Safety Certificate. He was helped by John Hemingway and John Gidlow who worked out how to keep the batteries in place - it's amazing what you can do with a plank of wood!

## Training in 2024

We had to put the training on hold while we sorted out 'Cecilia' for the coming season. We hope to restart training in April particularly while we take the boat down to Droitwich. We will be in touch.

## Wanderer Community Work Boat

Unfortunately the 'Wanderer' is still down on the Droitwich Barge Canal. We are not sure what the proposed programme is as a lot depends on the works around Droitwich and the aforementioned silt bund. We are meeting C&RT soon so we will hopefully be able to update you then. Just to let you know that C&RT's Thursday Work Party recently planted a hedge just north of Porters Mill.

## Tardebigge Adoptions

As previously intimated, we are meeting Dafydd and Sam from C&RT soon so this information may be quickly out of date. However, we did meet the ecology officer Paul Wilkinson, at Tardebigge and had a very productive afternoon with him.

## Tug Boat Birmingham and QR codes?

In our chat with Paul he agreed we could cut the hedge down either side of the gate which has given visitors a better view into the compound and will hopefully encourage them to investigate. However, Al has investigated and discovered that the manufacturer of the information boards, are still in existence (see his article). They are called 'Imagemakers' and are capable of making us a new set of boards for around £6500. If you have deep pockets let us know? We intend to firstly try 'Cultural Compact' for a contribution. We'll talk to anyone! Interestingly Al asked 'Imagemakers' if they could produce the recorded voice device on the board. They suggested we provide a QR code that people can get on their phone and listen to the recording over their phone. Please let Al know what do you think of this idea?

## The Garden

We have a plan which we just need to put it into action. Famous words I know, but with C&RT ecologist Paul Wilkinson's backing, we hope to bring our plan to fruition. During our walk with Paul we saw a water shrew running along the bank of the stream! We have also noticed that the area around the bottom of the apple tree is very wet so a drainage trench will be dug. We are investigating the source!

## Lime Kilns

No further news at the moment but we are still looking for assistance. If you are keen on wildlife, the open air and developing the environment, including the history of our canals, come down to Tardebigge and join us. We need help in developing the area including hedging, bug hotels, making willow fences etc. The next scheduled work party dates are Saturday April 13th and Sunday April 14th. Please let myself, Bill Lambert or Al Gibbs know if you would like to join us.

# 'Cecilia' Activities. Wendy Albutt writes...

As our season starts and bookings are already coming in, we're looking forward to welcoming back a number of groups who've previously travelled on Cecilia as well as some new groups.

This year we've had a number of enquiries from local scout groups and beaver scouts and we're looking forward to finalising details in the near future.

We already work very closely with the Primrose Hospice offering trips to their client groups but we're currently working with them on an exciting collaboration.

This year we will be pleased to support their corporate fundraising opportunities whereby companies can arrange to do a fundraising event. We'll be offering the Tardebigge flight "Lock Challenge" and we're all very excited to get this up and running.

The society's narrow boat 'Cecilia' has now commenced trips out on the local canals with several bookings already in place. The very first trip out produced the response below which we have included with the kind permission of the correspondent:

*Dear Wendy,*

*It was lovely to finally meet with you and I just wanted to say a huge thank you to you and the crew who helped our **Primrose Families** enjoy a super day yesterday. It means an awful lot to them and to us so please pass on our thanks and appreciation.*

*Hip hip hooray to 'Cecilia'*

*Thank you,*

*Sharon (Children and Young People Practitioner).*

Very well done to the volunteers once again, including all of those who spent much time getting the boat ready for service. - Ed.



Our first trip of the season has been a 'Wellness on Water' event organised by the Primrose Hospice children and young people team - sponsored by BDC equalities small grants scheme.

"We have all had a great day - and the hand massages went down a treat".

*What a lovely group of people to start the 2024 season with.*

## Tardebigge Lime Kilns Site

The Tardebigge Lime Kilns site is currently inaccessible owing to work being done to rectify the filter bed which has been leaking badly.





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# Adoption & Heritage. Al Gibbs writes...

## A Society Adoption and Heritage Project.

*The hull of the Steam Tug boat 'Birmingham' at Tardebigge New Wharf.*



Some background information taken from the society's booklet, used by volunteers guiding members of the public around the wharf, during the National Trust's Heritage Open Days (HoDs):

...1876. The need for traditional leggers at Tardebigge becomes a thing of the past as the Sharpness New Dock (SND) Company invests in 3 steam tugs (The Worcester, Birmingham and Gloucester).

The 4 cottage terraces, known as Tug Row, to the right of the New Wharf entrance, were built specifically for the tug workers and their families in 1878.

One steamboat would tow boats through the Tardebigge and Shortwood Tunnels, a second would tow boats through Wast Hill Tunnel, with the third on standby when the others were out of use or being serviced.

Crew consisted of an 'engineer' and a 'steerer'. Although costly, the mechanised tugs could haul more cargo at a quicker rate than previous (horse drawn) trains of boats. Records show in 3 weeks 638 boats were towed (3 shillings for a laden boat, 2 for empty).

By 1907 tug towing across the whole summit level into Birmingham was now an option with a charge of 5

shillings for a full boat and 4 for an empty one.

The stables around the wharf were increased at this point as the horses would not be needed until boats made the return journey south.

By 1910, 5 trips into Birmingham and 5 trips back ran daily, pulling around 700 boats a month. 2 new oil powered tugs, 'Sharpness' and 'Droitwich', were commissioned.

## The Hull Compound

In the compound of Tardebigge New Wharf there is the hull of the Tugboat 'Birmingham'. This was a diesel engined boat replacing the original steam tug from 1876, arriving at Tardebigge in 1912. Sister to the tugboat 'Worcester', she worked in tandem, towing boats through the tunnels as described above. However, by 1916 cargo carrying was in decline and operations were scaled down with the 'Birmingham' being sold off.

The story of 'Birmingham' is taken up on a series of display boards as she then saw life as a council rubbish removal boat, maintenance boat, ice breaker, holiday cruiser and education boat before being abandoned in the 1990s. She was then acquired by British Waterways and returned to Tardebigge to be preserved by 'Friends of the Working Boats'.

## Our Current Work

Society volunteers maintain the tug boat compound during adoption work days. The display boards (*top of next page*) and their surrounding frames are looking old and tired and could do with a makeover. Last year we repaired the rotting leg posts but this was a temporary fix.







A further issue which gives us concern is the fact that one of the boards contains an audio track record preserving the voices of past workers from the wharf from the early 1900s. This element is a wind-up device which no longer works. We thought it would be interesting to try to track down the original recording which must be a unique piece of local heritage. We suspected that repairs to this device would prove difficult without technical support.

We then set about seeking more information about the original construction and siting of the boards. Over the years the original groups supporting the project have changed and roles and responsibilities have been lost. The society was lucky enough to have a fascinating talk from Cath and Mike Turpin, some time ago, who were originally involved. Mike coordinated the project and still supports work with the 'Birmingham's' sister tug, the 'Worcester', who is restored and resides at the Ellesmere Port waterways museum.

Mike noted that Canal and River Trust would have taken on ownership responsibility from British Waterways and that the Friends of the Working Boats group is now the 'Heritage Working Boats Group', who have no further responsibility. However, we will contact to see if they have any records. Mike accessed the records at Ellesmere Port but found no further useful information.

Cath's research history of these 2 vessels makes fascinating reading and was published in 2003/4 Waterways Journal Volume 7, and is available for members as a download from our website: [www.wbdcs.org.uk](http://www.wbdcs.org.uk). We would be interested if any society members have any more details or recollections of the original project to site the boat hull at Tardebigge New Wharf.

Our society historian, Ian Hunter, has found a picture from the 2005 siting at the wharf (*see top left previous page*).

We have also tracked down the original company, 'Imagemakers', that produced the information boards from Cath Turpin's research. They retain copies of the original work and have the original audio file of the boatmen interviewed for the installation. However, the cost of replacing the displays in total would be in the region of £6,500. Following this news we also wrote to Jay Blades (Repair Shop and David and Jay's Toolshed programmes)! Jay has apparently finished these programmes for the present, but we remain on the media company books, so who knows?

We think it would be appropriate to update the compound for 2025 which would mark the 20th anniversary of the siting of the tug boat in 2005. We are hoping to apply for funding through the 'East Worcestershire Cultural Compact Project' which is run through the Redditch & Bromsgrove District Councils and the Heritage Lottery Fund, who were also part of the original project.

Of course, this may also be an opportunity to change the display format with new text and links to our society web pages by use of QR codes, which may be more cost effective, but then may lose some of the 20 year heritage of the display compound? It would be interesting to hear from readers what their opinions are?

We have updated the C&RT Heritage Advisor, Caroline Ossowska, who is also searching for any records. So, if anyone has any further information or recollections about the Tug Boat compound, or would like to be involved in the project, please contact Bill Lambert, Neil Franklin or Al Gibbs.

# Canal & River Trust News

Canal & River Trust are 'upping their game' in terms of lobbying Central Government about funding for the Inland Waterways - 'Keep Canals Alive'. The latest development is the presentation to MPs and Peers of both main political parties of the 'Impact Report' which tells the human stories of how canals change lives:

*"We are continuing to keep the pressure on to #KeepCanalsAlive and are very grateful for your ongoing support.*

*We have continued our programme of government engagement to keep the profile of our campaign as high as we can with politicians, and prospective politicians, from all sides. This has involved more detailed stakeholder mapping and many meetings with MPs, including visits to all regions of our extensive canal network and to many of our 'Winter Works' events.*

*We are seeking to promote greater use and appreciation of our canals and the benefits they bring to communities and to the country, and to have greater understanding of our role in caring for them - hence to build both public and political support.*

*On 6 March we took our campaign right to the heart of government, with a reception in the Houses of Parliament. We demonstrated the important role that the canal network and the Trust itself can play in helping address national challenges - such as infrastructure resilience, water security and nature recovery - as well as providing the social value that we traditionally think of in connection with our canals.*

*We were heartened to receive ringing endorsements of the value of our canals from MPs on both sides of the house, including Robbie Moore MP, the Minister for Water and Rural Growth at Defra, Toby Perkins MP, the Shadow Minister for Nature and Rural Affairs, and Wendy Morton MP.*



***Minister for  
Water & Rural  
Affairs, Robbie  
Moore, with  
Richard Parry,  
chief executive.***

*During the event, we had the opportunity to share our Impact Report which showcases the profound significance this unique network of canals has in people's lives today and how it can shape our futures."*

Further details of this important campaign can be located on the C&RT web site.

# Canal Stoppages

There have been several recent canal stoppages in our area, some of which have included towpath closures as well. Most of these were featured in the last edition of '58'. The Droitwich Barge Canal has had bridging works, the Droitwich Junction Canal has had to be dredged again, particularly around the entrance to the M5 low tunnel where the Body Brook enters the navigation, and some lock gate replacements have taken place on the Tardebigge and Offerton flights of the Worcester & Birmingham Canal.

The stoppages on the W&B, which saw several boats waiting to get through, lasted quite some time and several of the pounds both above and below lock 29 had to be drained despite all of the excess water coming down. '58' is however, pleased to report the works have been successfully completed and the navigation is now open. Well done to all of the contractors and C&RT staff who possibly couldn't have asked for much wetter weather for these significant tasks.



Another emergency stoppage (now cleared) occurred at lock 6, Gregory's Mill top lock in Worcester. A narrow boat somehow became stuck while descending the lock and sank. '58' has not heard any details of how this actually happened, which hopefully did not involve any personal injury to anyone. The boat presumably needed to be pumped out and moved so that the navigation could be reopened.





Bradley Canal Restoration Society (BCRS) are holding an annual rally on Saturday 15th June at C&RT Bradley Workshops. This is now becoming an annual event that helps promote the restoration plans and gets a heavy local involvement with the surrounding community.



The BCN Society helped get things going with the rally in 2022 but now BCRS are going it alone and would naturally appreciate support. A boat entry is available from this website: <https://bit.ly/3PSFYax> but please do let them know if you able to assist at the event.



*Photos above from previous events*

# Restoration Conference

The Conference advertised below is open to society members. If anyone is interested in attending please book your place directly asap and let us know in case shared transport is required. A few society members and Lapal Canal Trust members intend to be present.

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A strong focus throughout the day will be given to environmental challenges in waterways restoration. With Eoin Harris looking at the key environmental drivers relating to restoration; a series of workshops will focus on diversifying and supporting a wider bank of volunteers, on campaign and membership management within a small team, and on management of traditional hard skills in restoration. Temporary works will be discussed, and the final session will look at some of the key points to consider and navigate in succession planning in restoration.

There will be plenty of time over lunch for networking and for learning more about the Fund Britain's Waterways campaign and their many upcoming events along with various demonstrations from other speakers and organisations.

After lunch, a 30min walk organised by the IWA Northampton branch will offer the chance to explore the River Nene which runs alongside the university campus, passing through Becket's Park, to the Town Lock and Northampton Marina.

Delegates are requested to prebook and pay £10 contribution for lunch, refreshments, venue and parking. There is no requirement to book parking, which is only chargeable at £1.00 per vehicle per day. To learn more and book your place:

Verena Leonardini (Events and Restoration Hub co-ordinator)

The Inland Waterways Association

Tel: 01494 783 453 Ext 607

website: [www.waterways.org.uk](http://www.waterways.org.uk)

Members may be interested in the below presentation in Alvechurch. £3 admission.  
You do not need to be a member of the historical society to attend.

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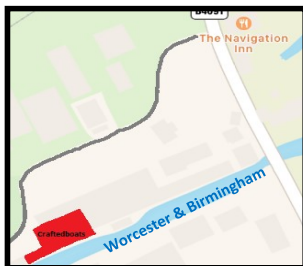
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[www.wbdcs.org.uk](http://www.wbdcs.org.uk) | X @wbdcs58

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 River & Canal Rescue, Bradley Canal Restoration, Staffs & Worcester Canal, Life and Times of a Canal Coalman, Chance's Glassworks and lots more.

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.

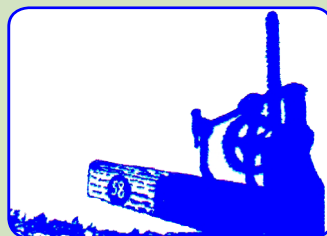
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