

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'



St. Richard's Canal Festival 2025 - see inside for details



The Inland Waterways Association

Keeping our waterways alive

Corporate Member



Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society



www.wbdcs.org.uk

Issue 576 Spring 2025

Society Meetings

Tuesday 4th March

'My Life on Canals' by Graham Wigley

Well-known local live-aboard boater presents slides from his personal collection.

Tuesday 1st April

Phil Clayton will be making an 'April Fool' of himself by talking about Joeys, Joshers and James.

'A Birmingham Canals Miscellany' covering the beginnings, growth, working years, decline and revival of the B.C.N. together with the work of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society.

Tuesday 13th May

'The Droitwich Canals'

Margaret Rowley (WB&DCS Vice-Chair)

After St. Richards Festival ends we will have a presentation on the Droitwich Canals. Their history, restoration and future.

Tuesday 3rd June

'Water to Birmingham' by Lynne Weaver

The story of how water is collected in the Elan Valley and travels seventy miles to sustain the population of Birmingham.

Meetings are held in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch B48 7SQ. 7.45pm start. All welcome. Free admission.

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

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Issue 576 Spring 2025

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

www.facebook.com/wbdcs.org.uk

View videos on our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/@wbdcs7419.

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

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Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society

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

(Registered Charity No 500159)

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Chair's Notes

To start can I, once again, please remind members to put Sunday 23rd March 2025 into your diaries for our Annual Dinner at Bromsgrove Golf Club.

I would like to make it another one to remember so can you please confirm with Gill or myself. Price will be similar to previous years. We will be presenting the George Bate Trophy so make sure that you get your vote in.

I understand that the Navigation Committee of the Inland Waterways are looking at the historical nature of inland wharves and to make sure they survive the rush for new housing. We have a new generation of local Canal & River Trust Managers, and we should make sure that they are aware of the importance of Tardebigge New and Old Wharves and Diglis Basin. Should they and WB&DCS have an input?

Planning is now underway for the St. Richard's Canal Festival to be held in Vines Park, Droitwich from 5pm Friday 2nd May till 5pm Monday 5th May 2025. 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 29th April till Tuesday 6th 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 Neil Franklin know.

Have a good year

Easy Fund Raising

In total we have, between those of us that are registered, raised nearly £400. Not an insignificant amount. Anyone can do the same when you shop online via the 'easyfundraising' website or app. It's easy and free and the small donations really add up. When signing up just add Worcester-



Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society (charity number 500159) as your preferred charity and 'easyfundraising' will do the rest.

www.easyfundraising.org.uk

David Wheeler



Editor's Notes

Hello Readers

Welcome to the first edition of 2025 of your favourite magazine. There has been plenty happening as usual including members and friends' meetings, St. Richard's Canal Festival planning meetings and work parties all of which will be reported further on. As well as our regular features of Nature Notes and Lapal Canal Trust News, there will also be articles about the Bradley Restoration Project, the Tardebigge Tugboat compound and the annual Birmingham Canal Navigation clean up with more besides.

Apart from the usual comments about the weather being so cold, wet and the like the waterways have generally been receiving a reasonable amount of publicity; unfortunately not always of the favourable variety! The big news story was the very serious breach on the Bridgewater Canal near to the site of another breach in 1971. The society had a talk about this



canal some years ago and it was generally regarded as the first navigation which spurred on the cutting of most of the system we know today apart from some earlier navigations such as the Fosse Dyke. This deep and wide waterway, surveyed by James Brindley who also planned the Droitwich Barge Canal, stretches from the bottom of the Rochdale Canal in Manchester all the way down to Preston Brook and the Trent and Mersey Canal, almost 40 miles including branches, and no locks! There are many businesses such as boat yards, pubs and cruising clubs which rely on the canal for their very existence so '58' hopes that the repairs, which will be very expensive, are expedited just as soon as possible. Incidentally this canal is not owned by Canal & River Trust but a private company who is also apparently involved with the Manchester Ship Canal.

Unfortunately still no news about the towpath reopening on the Tardebigge side of Shortwood Tunnel, which has been officially closed for well



over a year now. Not only are towpath users being denied a very popular through route but storm damage on the actual towpath remains uncleared adding to the general deterioration along that stretch of the W&B Canal.

Just along from there at Tardebigge Old Wharf, unfortunately the floating pennywort featured in the last edition of '58', is still present and if not cleared will possibly block the navigation. Some



volunteers have already been clearing small patches of it where accessible, but much remains and will increase as the growing season commences. It is also present near Alvechurch, particularly at the 'dead arm,' and C&RT have been informed from several sources but the problem still remains to be dealt with.

There is some good news, however, and that is the dredging that took place just along from Shortwood Tunnel by Bridge 58, has been carried out and will feature further on in this edition.

While speaking about this area of the W&B, '58' has been informed that 'Trinity Boats' from Dunhampstead appear to have taken over the Tardebigge Old Wharf site. 'Anglo-Welsh' vacated the area some time ago and it has been looked after in a caretaker capacity during the past year



or so. We have no further information about this or what will happen to the Dunhampstead Wharf site on the 5 mile pound.

The '58' team would like to take this opportunity to thank once again all of the contributors to this month's edition. Whether regular or otherwise, these voluntary contributions all count towards making this magazine what it has become. Thank you all so much and hope to see readers at the annual lunch or the next meetings – details of which appear on page 2. BTW did you recruit a friend as a New Year Resolution?

Enjoy the read.

John Hemingway

New Members

'58' would like to extend a warm welcome to new member:

Christopher John of Melrose

We hope that you will be able to join in and meet as many members of the society as possible at future meetings and activities.

Raffle Prizes

The society's monthly meetings, excluding the Summer walks, 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.

Annual Lunch & George Bate Trophy

The annual occasion featured below is also the time when the winner of the George Bate Trophy is announced. This is awarded to the person, or persons, who have received the most nominations from fully paid up society members. Last year's winner was Trevor Hyde, who under normal circumstances would have received this year's nominations. However, very sadly Trevor passed away a short time after his George Bate Trophy award and so the previous winner, Ken Robinson, has kindly agreed to receive this year's nominations instead.



If any members would care to make a nomination for the person whom they believe has made a particularly significant difference to the society during the past year, then please send along to Ken whose contact details are on page 4 of this magazine. Nominations should be sent to Ken no later than March 17th.

It's time to book your place for the Society Annual Lunch at Bromsgrove Golf Centre.

See details on the flyer on the next page.



Canal Society Annual Lunch 2025

Bromsgrove Golf Centre

**It's time to book your place for the society
Annual Lunch at Bromsgrove Golf Centre.**

Family and friends welcome.

When: Sunday 23rd March.

Time: 12 midday for 12:30pm.

Price: £23 adult. Child under 12 TBC.

Contact David Wheeler to book.

07970 711038 ... drewheeler@aol.com



'Nature Notes' Mary Green

During the cold days of January with ice on the canal for several days it was hard to think of spring coming. The canalside vegetation here hasn't all been cut down: it bedded down naturally during the mild autumn, was beaten down a bit by the wind and rain of storms, and then iced over to finish the process. You could still see the seedheads of meadowsweet, loosestrife and willow-herb glinting in the hoar-frost. Dozens of mallards and a pair of swans got together and kept a patch of water ice-free by where the humans feed them!

There are signs of spring. On the hazel trees are catkins, male flowers. These grow in mild winters, holding back in the cold, until they become long and pollen-covered in late February. By this time the tiny red female flowers appear. To help them cross-pollinate, male and female flowers don't all appear quite at the same time so some of the pollen will blow on to the flowers of another tree. Alder has early catkins too, and willow a bit later usually out in February and March. Most catkins are wind-pollinated as there aren't enough insects around that early to pollinate them. However, pussy-willows are insect-pollinated, and early bees, especially bumblebees, love them.

On most other trees, leaf buds are visible. Ash buds are very recognisable, blunt black ones. The flowers open in March/April, the leaves later. There are some ancient ash trees along the canal near Alvechurch, not as obvious as old oaks because often ash was coppiced so has several trunks rather than one big one.

Horse chestnuts are another large tree quite common along the canal. They have "sticky buds" which come in winter. In cold weather



they stay as they are but as it warms up they get bigger and stickier.

By the time this comes out you should see flowers on cherry-plum, the first blossoming tree, and flower buds on blackthorn, the next one. The first leaves of hawthorn should have broken out of their buds, often the first green leaves on the hedges.

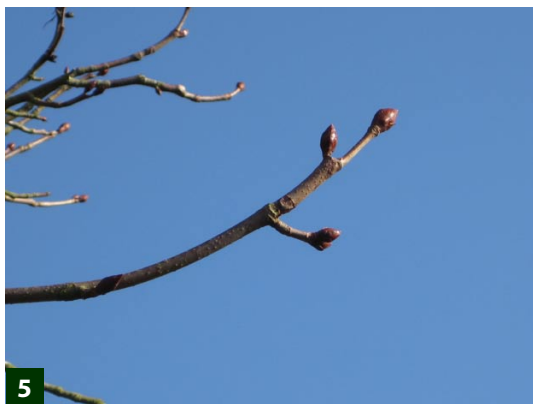
By the hedge there is fresh vegetation coming for spring. The leaves of cow-parsley, garlic mustard and white dead-nettle are everywhere, even in winter, producing occasional flowers in the milder winter days. The first true spring flowers are coltsfoot and celandine, coming in February or March. Both are yellow, the preferred colour of many early insects. Both can close up if the sun goes in and it turns wet or cold.

When it begins to warm you may spot the water birds mating. Ducks, swans and Canada geese mate in early spring. Swans and geese form long term couples, but mallard ducks are less predictable and drakes will try to mate where they can, though a paired drake will fight to prevent this. Ducks can mate with more than one drake and carry eggs from them. Swans build solid nests of twigs, geese temporary nests with downy feathers from their breasts, and ducks in all kinds of places including garden hanging baskets!

The earliest butterfly to emerge may be a brimstone or an orange-tip, though you may find red admirals and tortoiseshells that have over-wintered appearing. Last year I saw a brimstone in February.

If the weather blows hot and cold, the timing of plants' nectar and pollen and the insects they live with may be out of synch. This happened last year and led to a lack of fruit.

I hope it's better this year.



1. MALLARDS AND BLACK HEADED GULL

2. HAZEL CATKINS

3. ALDER CATKINS

4. BLACKTHORN BUDS

5. HORSE CHESTNUT STICKY BUDS

6. BRIMSTONE BUTTERFLY IN SPRING

What's This Then?

Regular visitors to the Tardebigge flight of locks might have noticed these strange, small bent metal spikes set into the stonework at the head and tail of many of the locks. Visiting boaters often ask what the purpose of these things are, and usually get the answer. "It's something to do with ropes". Well indeed it is, but exactly what, and why? An intrepid bunch of WB&DCS Society members have been delving more deeply into the story of these interesting little features and now can provide the answers.



These are **BLOCKING HOOKS** and were positioned originally on most of the locks on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal to assist loaded boats in leaving the lock more easily. Without going too deeply into the fluid dynamics involved, a narrowboat fits a lock chamber pretty snugly, and a heavily loaded boat is harder to start moving out of a lock than in open water since there isn't a lot of free space around the hull to allow for the displacement of water. The poor old horse, let's call him 'Dobbin', had a difficult task with a lot of locks in close succession coming up.

How did Blocking Hooks work?

Here we must go back to the classroom for a moment or two, and talk about pulleys and mechanical advantage. Stay awake at the back there!

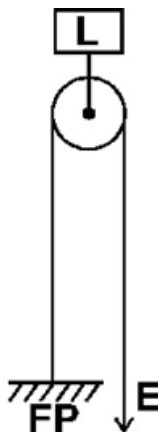
In this illustration, the rope or, more properly the towing line, is shown running from point FP to point L and on to point E.

Point FP the "fixed point" is our funny little bent hook, and the towing line, with a small loop on the end (more of that later) is put over the hook.

Point L "the load" is our heavily laden boat. The pulley block is attached to the top of the towing mast towards the bow of the boat.

Point E "the effort" is in this case provided by poor old 'Dobbin', who has the end of the rope attached to his harness.

Here we see Blocking in action. The picture below shows a boat leaving Lock 20 on the Astwood flight.



The blocking hook, set at ground level at the top of the lock steps on the right, is itself obscured by the gate paddle gear in this picture, but the towing line can be seen running back to the pulley block on the mast, and on towards 'Dobbin', who is ahead of the boat taking the strain.

There are several clever things going on here.

The most important thing being that 'Dobbin' is benefiting from a 2:1 mechanical advantage. Because the line is in effect doubled over the pulley, for every 10 feet the horse moves forward the boat only moves 5, so the effort is halved.

The second clever thing is that there is a "toggle" (imagine a big knot) on the towing line between the mast and the blocking hook, so at a certain point when the toggle reaches the pulley block the line stops running over the pulley wheel, and the 2:1 advantage is lost. The boat, now well under way, moves forward at the same rate as the horse.

The third clever thing is the fact that the towing line, as mentioned earlier, ends in a little loop which is passed over the blocking hook. The hook itself is pointing away from the lock, so as the boat passes the hook, it simply slips off allowing the boat to carry on forward. The boatman doesn't need to do anything, and can retrieve the trailing rope at his leisure. Switching from the bottom of a lock to the top, this picture shows the hook at the top of Lock 32, just by the bypass weir, as used by boats going up. Note that the hook is pointing upstream to allow the looped line to detach itself as a boat leaving the lock passes the hook.



A few other things worth mentioning....

This system is thought to be unique, unless someone can identify other canals with blocking hooks designed and working in a similar manner, in which case we will stand corrected. There are some similar "spikes" on several locks on the Macclesfield canal, used to achieve the same result, but they are vertical, not hooked, and do not allow a looped rope to disengage in the same way. The Maccie is also a very much later canal, opened in 1831, so one might imagine that the similarity is not accidental, and had in effect been copied?

It is believed that 56 of the 58 W&B locks were originally provided with hooks, with the 2 broad locks below Diglis Basin thought not to have had hooks. However, various repairs and replacements over the years have caused some to be removed and not replaced.

It should also be noted that the hooks on the more southerly stretch, from Offerton top lock on towards Diglis, have at some point been painted white, presumably to highlight them as a heritage feature?

From our survey completed in February 2025 we can confirm that 28 locks remain with hooks at both ends; there are only 6 locks with no hooks (including locks 1&2 which we believe never had hooks); the remaining 24 locks have just one hook still surviving. A list is available, or of course readers could just walk the flights !!

And finally, just for the record, here's the survey team in action. For those unfamiliar with the characters involved, we were from left to right, Al Gibbs, Nick Hadley, Ed Butcher and Neil Franklin. We were ably assisted by C&RT Ranger Andrew Goddard, who took the picture.

Acknowledgements: *Some of the details and illustrations herein were researched previously by canal enthusiast Chris Deuchar, who published an article on his website: www.deuchars.org.uk reporting on a 1997 event run by the Narrow Boat Owners Club who organised a demonstration of Blocking Hook use on the Astwood flight in that year. We recognise and appreciate their efforts.*



Ed Butcher & Alan Gibbs, February 2025.

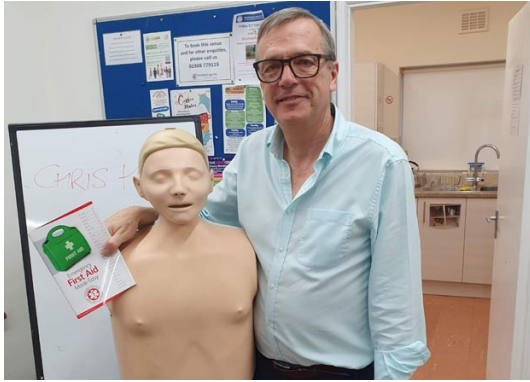
What an interesting article Ed and Al - well done and thank you to all concerned - Ed.

BTW the demonstration alluded to in the latter paragraph, was featured on a DVD called 'Towpath Encounter' which some readers may recall the society showing some years ago. It featured Peter Freakley who is also featured on page 16.

Volunteer News

Welcome to 2025 it may be cold and wet but out on the cut the thought of sunny days out on 'Cecilia' warms our bones!

We have started out the year with a return trip to the First Aid room in Droitwich to say "Hello" to our lecturer Chris Hyde (*left below*) and to renew our First Aid Certificates. During our course Chris



advised that we should put a sanitary bin in the toilet, provide a sharps box and yellow bags for removal of Dressings etc. We are looking at providing them but everything is questionable like who empties the sanitary bin?

Thanks to Wendy's work on the telephone, the trips on 'Cecilia' are being taken up at pace. We are looking forward to taking many groups out along the Worcester and Birmingham Canal. There are some new groups but also many that are returning for another year. It won't be long before we are calling for Helms and crew to take 'Cecilia' out on the water.

We are working with C&RT to use the 'Wanderer' (*below*) work boat carrying out light offside cutting etc on the canal below Tardebigge. We hope to develop this into an ongoing and fruitful relationship with C&RT management and staff. Ed has been talking to our friend Jeff Carter at BCNS on possibly using one of their heritage work boats to look after the offside management of the canal between Tardebigge and Kings Norton Junction. In return we will work with them to use 'Cecilia' to train their members to gain NACB accreditation.



Volunteer News cont.

We are continuing to investigate the refurbishment of the sign post (*below*), with the sorry looking arms, at the junction of the W&B and the Northern Stratford Canal at Kings Norton. Any offers of help would be gratefully accepted. Ian Barley please note!



Returning to 'Cecilia', Ken is continuing to improve the boat and with the help of Ian Barley, they have installed a cover over the stern deck. He is also working on replacing the internal lights and wants to paint the ceiling. Any volunteers please?

Don't forget the Annual Dinner at Bromsgrove Golf Club on 23rd March, 2025. It's a lovely lunch with lovely people. Included is the presentation of the George Bate Trophy awarded to the person members feel has done the most for the Society in the past year. Please let Ken who you are voting for.

St. Richard's Canal Festival will be upon before we know it. If you would like to volunteer to help in the set up please let me know. **We are always looking for people to help behind the bar with Nick, Sue and the team.** It's not that difficult, again if you are interested please let me know. On the positive side of things we have our three drivers so a big thank you to Denis Pike, Phil Goff and Nick Hadley. If you have any ideas on how we can improve the festival please get in touch and I will pass it on to the committee.

Sunny and warm days are coming!
Best wishes from your Volunteer Coordinator.

Neil Franklin.



Volunteer News cont.

Work Party by Scarfields Dingle Aqueduct

Recently a group of WB&DCS volunteers were tasked with clearing up the accumulated rubbish which had been left just below Scarfields Dingle aqueduct on the W&B near Alvechurch. It had been left for a long time with the person staying there moving elsewhere. The pictures below show before, during and after the work party which was thanked by several people passing by and having read about it in the local press. Very well done to all concerned.



'Cecilia' News

We have replaced the interior lights on Cecilia as the old ones had the old type bulbs in and were not very bright and kept failing so it was decided to upgrade them to LED. Nothing has been done to the boat recently, but we are in the process of training new helms.

Ken Robinson



Meeting Reports

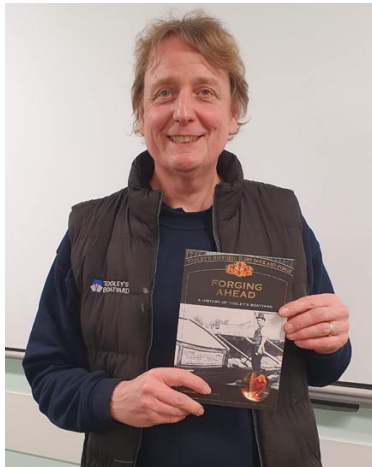
January Report

January's meeting ended up being on Zoom as the weather was so appalling and the speaker would've had to travel from Gloucestershire where the floods were probably even worse. However, marine historian Paul Barnett, who was scheduled to speak about local trade from Sharpness down the Bristol Channel, decided to speak about the 'Titanic' instead, which was fine with all who were able to participate. Paul shared a number of possibly unknown issues about the disaster; these included the suggestion that that the ship had been deemed 'unsinkable' – something that was never stated anywhere at the time and has possibly become 'folklore'; whether the bandmaster, Wallace Hartley, actually did play the last musical piece as generally reported; the socio-economic composition of the people who actually survived as opposed to those who generally did not.



Paul's research, as usual, was very meticulous as was his presentation. Even though the topic was not as members and friends had initially envisaged, it was nevertheless well received with the customary appreciation given.

February Meeting



The February meeting involved a presentation from Matt Armitage about the famous Banbury boatyard known as 'Tooley's'. Matt went into great detail about the history and business of the oldest working boat yard and dry dock in Britain, having been in situ since the Southern Oxford Canal was extended towards Oxford in the latter part of the 18th century.

The boatyard is now an officially listed cultural site despite attempts in the past to close it so that modern developers could make use of the land. The modern development did actually occur but Tooley's yard is still there surrounded by a modern shopping centre. The yard is open to visitors, has a blacksmiths, chandlery and a museum as well as being a fully working boatyard. Occasionally the dry dock, suitably drained, is used for other purposes such as musical presentations.

There remains quite a connection with WB&DCS as it was here at Tooley's that Tom and Angela Rolt had their boat 'Cressy' converted for living on board and travelling the waterways network. Tom wrote the famous book 'Narrow Boat' as he was very concerned at the neglect of an increasing number of canals. 'Cressy' was moored by Tardebigge top lock where a meeting took place with Robert Aickman in 1945, which subsequently led to the formation of the IWA the following year. Actual letters to and from Tooley's yard to 'Cressy' are exhibited in the Tooley's museum.

A fascinating talk delivered by Matt, who actually works at Tooley's yard and well worth a visit, which was very much appreciated by all of the members and friends present.



TOOLEY'S
BOATYARD
LIMITED

Lock Signage On The W&B

Many boaters, walkers and cyclists will probably have noticed the identity signs adjacent to many of the locks on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, all the way down to Worcester from Tardebigge. Readers may not be aware that these were all hand crafted many years ago by one of the society's long standing members, Peter Freakley. Peter is a regular attendee at our monthly meetings and it is testament to his skills that the signs are still in very good condition.

Peter has very kindly loaned '58' a picture of the 'Tolladine' lock sign (*below right*) during its creation. Thank you Peter and now onto the finger post at Kings Norton Junction which has been shown to be in need of repair. However, that's another story so watch this space!



Photo By Norman Field



Tardebigge Tug Boat Compound

In the compound at Tardebigge New Wharf there lies the hull of the Tug Boat 'Birmingham' (*pictured below*). This was a diesel engine powered boat replacing the original steam tug from 1876. The boat arrived at Tardebigge in 1912.



Tug Boat Birmingham's hull at Tardebigge

It was sister to Tug Boat 'Worcester' (right), who worked in tandem, towing boats through the nearby tunnels. 'Worcester' has featured in past editions of '58' and is currently moored at the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum. However, by 1916 horse drawn cargo carrying was in decline and operations were scaled down with the 'Birmingham' being sold off.

The story of 'Birmingham' was 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. The boat was then acquired by British Waterways and returned to Tardebigge to be preserved by 'Friends of the Working Boats'.

WB&DCS volunteers have decided after much discussion, that more could be done to help preserve the 'Birmingham' and to share information about the boat with any interested parties, including the general public. A small number of society volunteers have been meeting with representatives of C&RT and a new local group known as Tardebigge Wharf Community Association, in order to move forward with this.

The group, having taken advice from 'Crafted Boats', would like to clean the hull and suitably protect, repair any damage to the protective cover and reproduce some kind of information boards or provide access to this via a QR code. However, there appears to be one piece of the puzzle which is missing and this is where our readers come in. There is a view, although unverified, that the hull was taken to Tardebigge sometime in 2005 and placed in the position it currently stands. So if any readers have any recollection of this, or better still, any pictures of the event then '58' would love to hear from you please. We are checking through back copies of '58' in an attempt to find any articles about this event, although none currently spring to mind at this moment in time.

Over to you dear readers!

Al Gibbs



***Tug Boats Worcester & Birmingham moored at Tardebigge soon after they were built.
Photograph by Perman & Co., who won the contract for building the tugs.***

Dredging on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal.

As alluded to earlier on there has been a real navigational hazard near to Bridge 58 – used to be called ‘Harris’s Bridge’ but many refer to it now as the ‘bat bridge’ owing to the bricks on the underside specially inserted to encourage bats to roost.

On that stretch of the canal are several land drains which feed the waterway in times of wet weather, which has been in abundance of late. Unfortunately the drains also allow much silt to be washed into the canal as well and over time this has led to boats running aground even though in the middle of the waterway. Fortunately at this period of time the level is very high but possibly not so during the summer. Even so boats have still been running aground. Canal & River Trust had been officially informed by several sources and a few weeks ago organised their contractors to dredge the area. They came down from Leeds, stayed a few days, and did a really good job even though they reported more silt coming in when the canal had just been dredged. They literally removed tons of silt from the canal so very well done to them and to C&RT for organising.



**Dredging taking place
on the W&B close to
Bridge 58**

PRESS RELEASE

23 January 2025

Canal & River Trust Chief Executive Richard Parry to stand down this summer.

The Canal & River Trust charity is today (23 January) announcing the decision by Richard Parry to stand down from his role as chief executive this summer after serving 12 years in the post.

A recruitment process for the Trust's next chief executive will get underway shortly.

Richard joined the Trust in 2013, a year after its creation, and has led the Trust through its critical formative years to become an established and well-supported national charity.

Richard comments: "It has been an honour to lead the Trust through such a key period, working to build a sustainable future for our historic canal network, increasing the number of people benefiting from it and wider appreciation of its value to the nation. I have loved working with such committed colleagues and a rising number of amazing volunteers who together deliver the ongoing care that the 250-year-old canal infrastructure demands - and making so many friends amongst those who use our canals and share our passion for them.

"After 12 years it is the right time for me to hand over to a new chief executive to lead the Trust on the next stage of its journey, alongside our Chair, David Orr CBE who took up his post two years ago. My departure this summer will fit into a cycle of succession, so that David and the new chief executive can look to the longer-term future, including strengthening the Trust's partnership with Government with over four years of the current parliamentary term to run. "There is a huge amount of work for the Trust to do over the coming months and I will be focusing all my efforts on delivering our priorities until I hand over later this summer."

David Orr comments: "Richard has made a fantastic contribution, establishing the Trust as a much-admired national charity. He has led the organisation through many challenges and chalked up many achievements over the past 12 years. He has been dedicated to the national treasure that is our canal network, venturing across the country to be a visible, engaging leader.

"We face many more challenges in the years ahead, and the Board and I will be looking to recruit a successor of the calibre needed to follow on from Richard, to take the Trust forward on the next phase in our journey, to grasp the wonderful opportunities we have to use our canals to support many of our national priorities and improve the lives of millions of people."

For further media requests please contact: Jonathan Ludford, Canal & River Trust
mobile: 07747 897783 email: jonathan.ludford@canalrivertrust.org.uk

The Canal & River Trust's Board of Trustees will be assisted in the executive search for its next chief executive by the executive search specialist Odgers Berndtson.

Email: press.office@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Web: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

Twitter: @CanalRiverTrust

Canal & River Trust, National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire



Canal & River Trust News cont.

C&RT usually plan their maintenance work during winter when the quieter periods of time occur. Most of these are notified via their web site and are known well in advance. However, an increasing number of repairs are needed some possibly due to climate change, while others may be for other reasons.

Worcester & Birmingham Canal Stoppage

A long stoppage has recently been announced down the Tardebigge and Stoke flights on the W&B canal. Tardebigge top lock has been found to be bulging inwards which means major repairs are required urgently; lock 28 at the top of the Stoke flight, just below the Queens Head, is also requiring new lock gates and ladders. The whole set of locks between these two are now closed for safety reasons.

You can always find out about the latest stoppages and maintenance work on the Canal & River Trust website: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/boating/notices-and-stoppages>

Lapal Canal Trust News

Society friends from the Lapal Canal Trust continue to progress the restoration with several WB&DCS members also involved. LCT is still offering free canal boat trips to school children, senior citizens and care groups such as 'SENSE'. Society narrowboat 'Cecilia' has also been involved in these community outings with WB&DCS volunteers offering their services again.

If any readers know of any groups, as mentioned above who would like a free canal boat trip, please do let '58' know with any contact details asap.



These ventures are grant aided and demonstrate that LCT is actively involved with communities, which is a requirement for any subsequent Heritage Lottery Fund application.

The Trust recently carried out a promotional day, thanks to Sainsbury's in Selly Oak, which is just next to the soon to be restored canal section into Selly Oak Park. There was so much interest reported from local people who were very supportive including offering donations to the cause. Much literature was given out with many wishing to study the display board which shows all of the areas included in the restoration project. Several people positively recalled the canal being in water many years ago, canoeing and angling, and even now could not understand why the waterway was ever filled in.



Lapal Canal Trust News cont.

LCT work parties are continuing particularly at the Halesowen end of the canal, at least until the bird nesting season commences. The last work party took place in March. If anyone is interested in finding out about future work parties then please contact the Editor – details on page 2.



The Trust is currently exploring another potential grant from Severn Trent which will be aimed at reopening the bridge underneath the ring road into Selly Oak Park. This would be such an improvement, particularly for any towpath users who would not then have to manoeuvre the busy road above, in order to exit or enter the park area.

You can read an article about this area on the Birmingham Live website 'Mystery of Birmingham's path to nowhere as walkers find canal route blocked off' <https://bit.ly/3Xgg981>

Further details of the Trust's work, including the newly revamped website, can be found on www.lapal.org.

The Trust also has a very active Facebook page.



AGM: Monday 17th March 7.30pm

For our annual Buffet Supper last month we welcomed Henriette Breukelar, CRT West Midlands Regional Director as our speaker. She gave us a frank account of the situation facing the waterways (financial and environmental), but also some of the opportunities, in particular ways to raise more revenue.



IWA Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch AGM.

The 2025 Annual General Meeting will be held at Coombeswood Canal Trust, Hawne Basin, Hereward Rise, Halesowen B62 8AW. Following the AGM there will be two short presentations:

Mark Ellse from the Lapal Canal Trust will talk on Teaming up to Restore a Canal.

Neil Cocksedge will give a short look at how French canal lock operation has changed from a lock keeper winding paddles to a machine that dispenses a zipper that empties and fills locks at the touch of a button.

The usual raffle will be held and a variety of refreshments will be available.

Meetings are held at Hawne Basin at 7.30pm (Coombeswood Canal Trust, Hereward Rise, Halesowen, West Midlands, B62 8AW).

Bob Fox, Secretary.

Tel: 01494 783453 or 07855 817318

Wright's Bridge, Dudley No 2 Canal

Work has started on the complete rebuilding of Wright's Bridge (just north of Gosty Hill tunnel) on the Dudley No 2 canal, isolating Hawne Basin. The work is scheduled to take ten weeks – a reflection of how long projects now take compared with the days when there would have been commercial carrying on this canal.



Restoration Conference 2025

The 2025 Annual Restoration Conference, jointly organised by **IWA** and **Canal & River Trust**, is taking place on Saturday 26th April 2025 at the National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port, Cheshire.

This year's Conference will focus on the challenges of delivering sustainable restorations from different viewpoints featuring a lineup of experienced speakers.

Presentations and seminars will include The Grand Union Canal transfer project and wider implications of water transfer for restoration; Youth Engagement in restoration will be looked at through a deep dive on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. A strong focus will be given to the Restoration for the Future, and what sustainable plans and designs will need to consider going forward while also ensuring a commitment to heritage preservation.



With its collections and archives focused on Britain's inland waterways, including canal boats, traditional artefacts and historical photos, the National Waterways Museum will provide a unique and exciting location, with the chance to visit the Island Warehouse, the Power Hall and the blacksmith's forge where the ironwork for the canal and its boats was made.

The conference is a valuable chance for those involved in waterway restoration to experience new insights into the important topics facing restorations today. Delegates will have the opportunity to network, and attend in-depth sessions and workshops led by experts across the field.

The conference will run from 9.30am with an optional tour of the Museum in the afternoon. More information, including the programme of the day, will be published in due course.

Spaces are limited - to secure your place and learn more: [Waterway Restoration Conference 2025 - The Inland Waterways Association](#)

We very much look forward to seeing you on 26th April.

website: www.waterways.org.uk

Verena Leonardini

Events and Projects co-ordinator

Bradley Canal Restoration News



Society friends from the Bradley Canal Restoration, which is near Wolverhampton, have been working hard on the early stages of the canal's actual restoration.

Readers may recall a talk some time ago about this project delivered by one of their stalwarts, Gavin Hawkins. Gavin, unfortunately, has been suffering from ill-health of late and '58' sends its best wishes to him and hopes he feels as comfortable as possible despite the restrictions described to us via email.

The pictures below, courtesy of the Inland Waterways Association, show the progress that is being made by the Midland Metro bridge towards the lower end of the restoration project. The contractors are on the C&RT's approved list - The Rothen Group.



Photos by Dave Pearson

Our friends from the **Birmingham Canal Navigation Society** will soon be holding their 'Annual Clean Up'. This year it will be concentrating on the Tipton area, which includes the old and new main canal lines, taking place over the weekend of March 15th and 16th. Also involved in the organising are Waterway Recovery Group, Coombeswood Canal Trust, Canal & River Trust and the Inland Waterways Association.



If anyone is interested in helping out the contact details and relevant information is below:

As every year the event aims to recover more than 20 tonnes of waste from the water as well as clearing rubbish from towpaths. Organised by Waterway Recovery Group The Inland Waterways Association branches in the West Midlands, Canal & River Trust as well as Birmingham Canal Navigations Society and Coombeswood Canal Trust, the annual effort will help keep the less well used parts of the BCN and Black Country network from getting choked up with rubbish. The BCN are used by many, not just for boating but for walking, cycling, fishing and canoeing. This rubbish looks unsightly, is a danger to wildlife, causes pollution and can damage boats and injure waterway users. Participants will spend two days grappling with debris including bikes, tyres, wheelbarrows, safes and of course, shopping trolleys. The event is a great opportunity for everyone including local residents to get involved, come along and get dirty.

Location: Tipton areas of the Birmingham Canal old and new main lines

Dates: 15th – 16th March 2025

Accommodation available from Friday night

Cost: £18 including meals and accommodation

Day visitors welcome: If you'd just like to come along for the day or to attend on your boat

please contact Cllr Chris Morgan: morgac15@caerphilly.gov.uk

To find out more and book your space: <https://bit.ly/3DbQZAx>

Rik Mayall Comedy Festival: Droitwich Spa

The Rik Mayall Comedy Festival, Droitwich Spa 31 May to 7 June

For those looking for a lively stop-off, the Rik Mayall Comedy Festival in Droitwich Spa celebrates one of Britain's most iconic and is an event you won't want to miss.

The eight-day event is set to host well known comedians such as Greg Davies who acted alongside Mayall in TV sitcom *Man Down*, Peter Richardson, founding member of *The Comic Strip Presents*, of which Mayall was an original cast member and Helen Lederer who worked with Mayall on shows such as *The Young Ones*, *Happy Families* and *Bottom*.

Other comedians include Shaparak Khorsandi, Red Richardson, Paul Foot and Laura Smyth, who will be performing at the town's flagship venue, the Norbury Theatre. Many other venues across town are part of an open Fringe and will feature a variety of shows, including stand-up, improvisation, theatre and live music.

For those journeying along the canals, the festival offers an ideal place to moor up, stretch your legs, and soak up the fun. With events happening throughout the week, free family activities over the weekends, and a pop-up Rik Mayall museum there's something for everyone—whether you're a lifelong Rik devotee or fancy a good laugh.

For more information and how to buy tickets, visit the festival's website:

www.rikmayallcomedyfestival.com

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THE Rik Mayall

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31 MAY -
7 JUNE
2025



THE Rik Mayall

COMEDY FESTIVAL
DROITWICH SPA, WORCS.

31 MAY -
7 JUNE
2025

RED RICHARDSON * LAURA SMYTH
PAUL FOOT * ROBIN INCE (VIP)

JOHN LLOYD (BLACKADDER, QI, SPITTING IMAGE)
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JOEY PAGE * RACHEL FAIRBURN (VIP)

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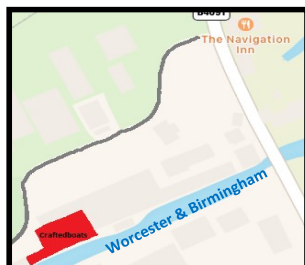
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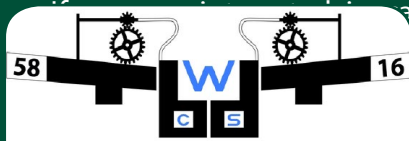
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www.wbdcs.org.uk
Facebook @wbdcs58.org.uk

canals, angling, boats, boat crewing, natural photography, industrial archaeology, local history, conservation and enhancement of the environment as well as educating and inspiring minded people, then please consider joining

meetings at the Alvechurch Boat Centre, Scarfield (located just behind the award winning Weighbridge pub) on the 1st of the month at 7.45pm (disability compliant). If you are interested 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*).

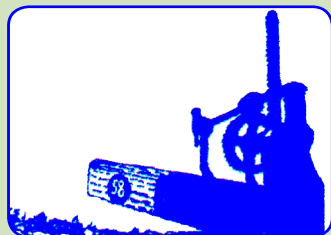
We hope to welcome as many new faces as possible from members of the community.

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

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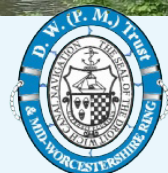
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