

Spring 2025

# Cuttings

*Journal of the Shropshire Union Canal Society*

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All photos are by the author of the article except where stated.

Click on photos to view a higher resolution version in your browser.

Cover photo: The Montgomery Canal just south of Crickheath Bridge (photo: T Fulda).



## Editorial

Well, here we are at the beginning of 2025, another year with exciting prospects ahead – something interesting is always happening with our Society... I'd literally just typed these lines when the wonderful news arrived – permission has been granted by Powys Council for a new bridge to carry Carreghofa Lane over the Montgomery. Work includes the removal of the existing crossing. For full details of this huge step forward, see page [24](#).

So, here's to a successful 2025 – it's certainly started very well and with all the work put in by your committee, I'm sure there will be more good news before this year is out.

Jan Johnstone on behalf of the Editorial Team

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## New Trustee Barbara Cowie

I was first introduced to canals as a student by my husband John in 1976. We went to Birmingham and saw Gas Street basin which was then full of ex-working boats with smoking chimneys and surrounded by brick warehouses. We caught up with Caggy Stevens, one of the last working boatmen on the BCN, who needed someone to steer a pair of boats up to Tipton. John took the motor and I was assigned to the butty and given the briefest of instructions concerning how to steer 70ft of boat containing pungent rubbish on the end of a long line behind the tug through bridges, narrows and into the gathering mist and darkness.



*Barbara at Crickheath South*

We also went to a few work parties on the now-restored Droitwich barge canal while we were students where I definitely caught the canal restoration bug.

We spent a summer steering trip boats near Northwich, Cheshire, then bought a 40ft narrowboat which we lived on for about two years, later moving to a house in Worcester with a canalside mooring. Having done up and sold the boat, we concentrated on bringing up four daughters until they were teenagers when we started boating again, first with borrowed boats, then we acquired the burnt-out hull of Twiggy, our current boat. It took the best part of seven years to renovate it but we have since travelled to some of the more remote corners of the waterways system including Tewitfield and Ripon. Our next plan is to go across the Wash.

We have walked and cycled a multitude of derelict canals including the Wilts and Berks (in 1977), the Huddersfield Narrow (before 2000) and the Lichfield and Hatherton (several times).

We began volunteering on the canal at Crickheath during lockdown in 2020, shortly after we moved to Wrexham, and John is often seen wielding the angle grinder or sorting out first aid kits while I particularly enjoy feeding bonfires and lining and blocking, although I will generally take on any task that needs doing, which is probably why I have ended up on the council!

Barbara Cowie



## Chairman's Report

My first and very pleasant task is to wish members a very happy new year. The year just gone was a notable one for the Society on land, in the ether and on the water. As well as exciting developments to look forward to in the next twelve months, we are also looking a bit further ahead still. The 60th anniversary of the founding of the Society is in 2026 and Council is considering ideas for suitable celebrations. Any ideas on this from the wider membership will be most welcome.

The recent progress at Crickheath is really stunning with the old tramway wharf restored to its former glory and the channel back in water. There is a full description of the work on page [20](#) but if you haven't seen it, make a note in your diary to visit. I am sure that you will be impressed. It is also notable that quite a lot of recent volunteer effort has been in the Schoolhouse Bridge area. Much of this work is in preparation for the planned move of our restoration base during the coming year.

Our enhancement group continues to beaver away at Ellesmere both on and off the water. A C&RT workboat has been used to clear overhanging offside vegetation, and on dry land, work has included tree and hedge planting,



*Planting trees in March 2024*

towpath maintenance and painting of bankside furniture. There is an account of their activities in 2024 on our website — see [shropshireunion.org.uk/the-enhancement-group-in-2024](http://shropshireunion.org.uk/the-enhancement-group-in-2024). The work has been well received by boaters and towpath users alike and is a very pleasant way of spending one Saturday a month. New volunteers are of course always most welcome.

Our social media team continue their excellent work. At the time of writing, we have close to 3,000 Facebook followers on our main public group, a ten-fold increase on the number a couple of years ago. There has been evidence over the past year that our social media channels are helping with recruitment of members and volunteers and also with fundraising – remember our successful raffle in the summer. Taken together, our publicity efforts across social media, website, press/TV/radio and, of course, our Society stall at external events are doing a great job in publicising the Society's work in the wider world.

C&RT have recently published their Climate Adaptation Report (see page [40](#)) which describes the impact of climate change on the canal system. This is a very comprehensive, readable and in some ways frightening document. Its implications were brought home to me during and after our December restoration work party. On the first day, we all quietly got on with our work whilst looking forward to our Christmas dinner in the evening. By the time our very enjoyable 'do' was finished, Storm Darragh was beginning to make itself felt. On the Saturday, high winds and torrential rain made working safety impossible and the site was closed mid-morning. Life on site was also very uncomfortable on the Sunday.

However, it was the aftermath of the storm which could have had very serious consequences for our work. The rainfall caused the local watercourses to flood including the river Morda which is culverted under the canal at Gronwen. Such was the flow that the culvert was overwhelmed and water spilled over into the canal. This raised the level of the long pound from Crickheath to Aston locks by 200mm. Fortunately the stop planks at Crickheath Bridge protected our recently finished section of channel. Had this not been the case, our recently installed clay dam would have been in danger of collapse and our compound flooded. A near miss this time but given the frequency and intensity of storms now, it is a problem that will recur.

Last year, we asked members to write messages of support for the Carreghofa Lane Bridge planning application. In total about 100 supportive "letters" were sent in (which was regarded as being unusually high) and these contributed to the recent granting of planning consent. C&RT have now submitted a planning application for the new Wern Pond nature reserve and we are again being asked to mobilise support. As the new reserve site has been bought from Powys County Council, their rules require the Planning Committee to consider the application. So, a demonstration of public support is again valuable. There are details of how to help with this on page [23](#). Please help!

Our AGM was held online on Saturday, 30th November. After the formal business, there was a very interesting illustrated presentation from Richard Harrison of C&RT on the Levelling Up Fund restoration work currently underway in Wales. Richard did a great job in taking us through ecological, design and on-site delivery of the work. There is a summary of the talk on our website, see [tinyurl.com/yvz7xpka](http://tinyurl.com/yvz7xpka), which I heartily recommend. I am also pleased to report that a few weeks after the AGM, Graham Harris, a long-serving restoration volunteer, agreed to become a co-opted member of Council. A warm welcome to Graham.

David Carter, Chairman

## Council Clippings

A selection of discussions, reports and decisions from the January Council meeting (the first since the meeting in September):

- A warm welcome to Graham Harris, stalwart of working parties, digger driver par excellence and recent retiree who has been co-opted onto Council as a Trustee. We hope you 'enjoy' your new role with us, Graham!
- David Carter, Clive Robertson and Sue Ball will continue in their current roles of Chair, Treasurer and Secretary.
- New, updated Health & Safety documents (both Policy and Arrangements) have been posted to the website and are always on display at work parties.
- There will be a formal 'opening ceremony' of the recent Crickheath restoration stretch after 31st March, hopefully attended by invited Shropshire councillors as this was funded by Shropshire County Council.
- Restoration of the Ellesmere Maintenance Yard has begun, under the supervision of 'old' friend to the Society Katie Woodroffe, C&RT Project Engineer. A number of virtual tours are being organised. Watch the website for dates when we know them.
- The recent restoration works, funded by grants from Shropshire County Council's Rural Prosperity Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund, which finish at the end of March, have been completed within the time allowed and within budget. Shows how effective good planning and accounting is, eh?
- The theme for the Enhancement works on the Llangollen Canal in 2024 was 'helping boaters' by improving the channel via offside vegetation clearance. The theme for 2025 is 'helping walkers' so we're tackling towpath clearance.
- The Society is pursuing further and closer links with Oswestry Museum following the mutually beneficial handover of the remains of, amongst other things, the 'Ghost Boat' unearthed, again, at Crickheath.
- St. John Payne has qualified as a First Aider for work parties – a welcome addition to the ranks.
- Many suggestions are being tossed around and debated for celebrating the SUCS 60th Anniversary on 9th November 2026 (put the date in your diary). This will be an ongoing feature of Society business for the foreseeable future – watch this space.
- The Articles of Association, drawn up on the inception of the Society, are to be reviewed. Times have changed and so has our focus and raison d'être. This anniversary seems like a good time so to do.

Sue Ball, Secretary



## Work Party Dates for 2025

Dates	Type	Location
March 7-9	Restoration	Crickheath
March 22	Enhancement	Ellesmere
April 4-6	Restoration	Crickheath
April 19	Enhancement	Ellesmere
May 2-4	Restoration	Crickheath
May 17	Enhancement	Ellesmere
June 6-8	Restoration	Crickheath
June 21	Enhancement	Ellesmere
July 4-6	Restoration	Crickheath
July 19	Enhancement	Ellesmere
August 1-3	Restoration	Crickheath
August 16	Enhancement	Ellesmere
September 5-7	Restoration	Crickheath
September 20	Enhancement	Ellesmere
October 3-5	Restoration	Crickheath
October 18	Enhancement	Ellesmere
November 7-9	Restoration	Crickheath
November 22	Enhancement	Ellesmere
December 5-7	Restoration	Crickheath
December TBD	Enhancement	Ellesmere

For more information, please contact:

- Restoration WPs: Tom Fulda, 07810 646026, [tom.fulda@shropshireunion.org.uk](mailto:tom.fulda@shropshireunion.org.uk)
- Enhancement WPs: David Carter, 01244 661440, [dcartersucs@gmail.com](mailto:dcartersucs@gmail.com).



## Society Stall

As you hopefully know, the Society stall endeavours to attend events during the year to publicise the Society and our work. Whilst we don't attempt to make this in any way a fundraising affair, it's always useful to have a few items for sale – folks often like to support us by putting a bit of money in the tin. Being two 'ladies in lavender' as we are, we are no longer enamoured, or indeed capable, of carting huge quantities of 'stuff' around, thus we are undoubtedly a slimmed-down version of the past (no comments, please!). Therefore, a decision has been made to only offer for sale items that have some link with the waterways and its way of life, however tenuous.

During the past several months, we have been stunned but at the same time delighted by donations for our stall. All occurred somewhat randomly but were so, so welcome and mean that our 2025 stall emerges well and effectively stocked, ready for action – which is great, as we ended 2024 almost sold out!

Accordingly, we would very much like to thank:

- Clive Buckler, of Chester, for a donation of pre-loved canal books. These always sell well and make people pause, for a browse... And then we get talking...
- Clive and Sue Taylor, of Crewe, for a donation of lace plates from their recently relinquished boat. A really beautiful donation. It will keep us supplied for ages. (We are pricing them carefully, I promise...)
- Ivan Cane, of the Northern Canals Association, and David and Dawn Alwyn, of Shrewsbury & Border Counties IWA – another 'sort out' of books completed and a kind action to donate them to us.

Our heartfelt thanks to these very kind folks and, should you feel inclined to follow in their footsteps, we'd be very happy to hear from you.

Please see the diary on page [42](#) for details of the events that we hope to attend in 2025.

There could well be more additions but we have faithfully promised to keep our webmaster and social media gurus fully informed – so keep an eye on the website and social media for the most up-to-date information.

Do come along and say hello. We'd love to see you!

Sue Ball and Jan Johnstone

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	Linkedin	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/shropshireunion">@shropshireunion</a>

## Are you getting emails from SUCS?

Every month, members who've provided us with an email address will receive a restoration work party report by email and there'll also likely be another couple of emails relating to breaking news.

We've had reports that some of these mails are ending up in member's spam or junk folders. Either your email client or your email provider might be doing this. Please let us know if this is happening so that we can monitor it. You may be able to change some settings to ensure that mails from SUCS don't get marked as spam and go straight to your inbox — let us know if you need help.

Some email providers will block emails that they consider to be spam before they get to your email client and you won't then see them in your inbox or spam or junk folders. Sometimes the Society is notified that this has happened but we're worried that this isn't always the case. Therefore, if you have provided the Society with an email address and aren't getting at least one mail a month from us (ie the restoration work party report), please get in touch.

Please don't mark a mail from the Society as spam because your email provider may then treat mails sent to other members as spam also. Instead, if you wish to unsubscribe, there's a link in every mail.

If you need to get in touch with us regarding any of the problems described above or any other issues relating to Society email, please email [webmaster@shropshireunion.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@shropshireunion.org.uk) or call Richard Feeny on 07920 708255.

Richard Feeny

## Membership News

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members:

- Mr Peter Cox of Wrexham
- Mr Richard Kemp of Ellesmere
- Mrs Fiona M Hendry of Kinnerley
- Mr St John Payne of Oswestry
- Mr Peter Furness of Shrewsbury
- Mrs Vicky Martin of Ellesmere
- Mr David & Mrs Donna Elliott of Shrewsbury
- Mr Christopher Holgate of Shrewsbury
- Mr M & Mrs D Dean of Ellesmere
- Mr Mark & Mrs Joanna Seabright of Shrewsbury.

You can contact me about any membership matter at 42, Foyle Road, Blackheath, SE3 7RH, telephone 07920 708255 or by emailing [memsec@shropshireunion.org.uk](mailto:memsec@shropshireunion.org.uk).

Richard Feeny, Membership Secretary



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## Shropshire Union Canal Reservoirs

Reservoirs supporting the Shropshire Union and Llangollen canals serve a double purpose, not only as important sources of water but also for leisure pursuits such as boating and fishing and, more importantly, as home to a variety of wildlife.

### Belvide Reservoir

Work on creating Belvide Reservoir, situated near the Shropshire Union Canal in south Staffordshire and not far from the village of Brewood, began in 1832. Designed by Thomas Telford, it opened in 1835 to supply the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal which in 1846 became known as the southern arm of the Shropshire Union.

With boat usage levels high from the beginning, it became necessary for the company to buy extra water (equivalent to two thousand locks) in the first year from the Wyrley and Essington Canal Company at a cost of £800. In 1836, the situation hadn't improved so William Cubitt, engineer, was taken on to enlarge the reservoir. By 1842, this was completed and if you visit today, you will still see the original circular gear house with its cast iron dome. Grade-II listed, it is also believed to contain the original valve gear which controlled the flow of water from reservoir to canal.

The reservoir, fed from a tributary of the River Penk, covers an area of about 180 acres which fluctuates as water is taken for use in the canal. It is owned by the Canal & River Trust which leases it to the West Midland Bird Club who, since 1977, have managed it as a nature reserve with studies taking place on the outcome of water level changes on bird populations. Home to a variety of waterfowl and migratory birds, it has been visited by rarities over the years such as the white-winged black tern, whiskered tern and spotted sandpipers. Woodland on site also provides nesting sites and food.

The site is registered by Natural England as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and as it is not open to the general public, if you would like to visit, please get in touch with the West Midland Bird Club, which controls access, by emailing [permits@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk](mailto:permits@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk).

### Knighton Reservoir

Knighton Reservoir is situated near to the village of Knighton. It is some two hundred and ninety-two acres in size and was built as a top-up reservoir feeding water to a high point above Tyrley Locks. Built by Thomas Telford to supply the Shropshire Union Canal, it was finished in 1832 and was originally planned to cover fifty acres supplying four thousand locks of water. Unfortunately, it was found to be unfit for purpose as it couldn't hold sufficient water and to compensate, the size of the reservoir was increased.



A popular fishing venue, it is visited by keen bird watchers who have recorded red-necked phalarope, common scoter, snow buntings and in 1995, a rarity, the lesser yellowlegs, similar to the redshank and normally a shore bird.

### Hurleston Reservoir

Hurleston Reservoir, situated north-west of Nantwich, Cheshire was built to keep the Shropshire Union main line canal supplied with water as well as being used as a source of drinking water. In 1959, work took place to enlarge it and it now covers 21 acres and its capacity is 85 million gallons. Water is supplied to the reservoir from two sources: the Llangollen canal and the River Dee at Llantysilio.

During the height of canal building, water supplies to early canals were taken from various sources leading to a less than reliable adequate water supply, particularly in hot summers. The above reservoirs were the answer and today, throughout the country, C&RT are responsible for seventy-one large reservoirs in total which they regularly monitor and maintain. Without this attention, not only boating on the canals would be at risk but also the wealth of wildlife and activities reservoirs provide.

Jan Johnstone

## Peaky Blinders to the Llangollen

Fans of the hit series Peaky Blinders will be interested to learn that in early December 2024, work on the upcoming and final film in the series, rumoured to be entitled 'The Immortal Man', took place at Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Trevor Basin with Cillian Murphy and other well-known faces from the series present. The action involved narrowboats and saw both canal and towpath temporarily closed to the public from 10am to 4pm to allow filming to take place.

The drama series, first aired on the BBC, is based in Birmingham and follows the successes of the Shelby crime family during the early nineteenth hundreds. Currently the feature-length film, set during WW2, is in production with filming taking place in various areas of the UK.

Jan Johnstone



## Dragonflies and Damselflies

Another in a series of articles on the wildlife and nature that can be seen on the SU network...

Take a walk along a canal during late spring or summer and if you take your time and pause in your travels, you will very likely see a variety of dragonflies and damselflies busy about their little lives, there being 36 species of dragonfly and 21 species of damselflies in the UK.

Amongst the first winged insects to evolve around 300 million years ago, at that time the species had wingspans comparable to an eagle (5ft 11in to 7ft 8in or 1.8m to 2.34m).

One place to see them is in Ellesmere along the Llangollen Canal which at one point runs near to Colemere. It is one of the nine meres in the area and it is also well known for its wide variety of wildlife.

Another location is the Prees Branch, also off the Llangollen Canal, near to Whixall Moss Nature Reserve where as well as dragonflies and damselflies, a wide range of other wildlife, birds, voles, and water plants can be seen.

Dragonflies come in a wide variety of colours: vivid blue, green, yellow and red. Particular to the Montgomery and Llangollen canals are the Brown Hawkers: the male's body brown with small blue and yellow markings; the female with yellow markings only. Both have golden-brown wings. They can fly up to 30mph and were known in the past as Horse Stingers or Devil's Darning Needles although they are harmless.



Male Brown Hawker  
(photo: Darkone,  
[CC BY-SA 2.5](#), [Link](#))

The other species you are likely to see is the Southern Hawker, the male's dark body with blue and green markings, the female brown with green markings. Both the Southern and the Brown Hawker species are large and if you are in a quiet area, surprisingly audible when in flight.

The larvae or nymphs of the species hatch from eggs laid in the water and will then spend several years living beneath the surface feeding on other invertebrates until finally they climb up a water-plant stem such as a reed and shed their skins emerging as an adult. After their wings have hardened sufficiently, these are held out at right angles to their body, they take off and begin to seek food, mosquitos, gnats and small bugs. They will protect their

length of waterway they inhabit from other dragonflies; you may even witness fights breaking out as they defend their territory.

Damselflies are a smaller species with folded wings and often congregate together. In flight, they are slower than dragonflies, their wings beating rapidly. On the Montgomery Canal, you may see a wide variety amongst which are the Large Red, Common Blue, Azure and the Banded Demoiselles, the latter



Male (left) and female  
Banded Demoiselles!  
(photo: Quarti, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), [Link](#))

particularly stunning: the male with a metallic blue body and dark wings; the female a metallic green-bronze body with pale brown wings. Distinguishable in flight from dragonflies, damselfly flight is fluttering and similar to a butterfly.

There are many other dragonflies and damsel flies on our canals, so look out when boating or going for a walk for different varieties including the rarer Emperor Dragonfly. Large in size (3in or 78mm) the male is blue, the female green both with a dark line down the abdomen. They can be seen perhaps taking a rest on water plants or hunting and thankfully, since the 1990s, their population has steadily increased.

Jan Johnstone

## HNBC Gathering of Historic Boats

The Audlem Gathering of Historic Boats will take place over the weekend of 26th and 27th July to coincide with the Audlem Festival of Transport. This popular boat gathering is organised by the Historic Narrow Boat Club as a club members' event. All entrants need to be HNBC members and all members' boats are welcome. The HNBC cannot promote it as a public event (due to insurance restrictions) although, obviously, the canal and towpath are open to the public. Moorings will be between locks 12 and 15 in the Audlem flight. There should be a fine display of historic boats over the weekend.

Other moorings for visiting boats not taking part in this event will be available between locks 11 and 12 and also below the bottom lock.

On the Sunday, the Audlem Festival of Transport takes place with around 300 vehicles parading through the village and assembling on the playing field behind the Shroppie Fly for the afternoon – always a great spectacle.

Nick Grundy

## Donation of Artefacts to Museum

During restoration of the Montgomery Canal near Crickheath, the Society found many artefacts including glassware, ceramics and metalwork from both boats and the tramway at Crickheath Wharf. These artefacts have recently been donated to Oswestry Town Museum.



Glassware from the canal  
(photo: T Fulda)



Metalwork from the canal  
(photo: T Fulda)

One of the finds at Crickheath Wharf was ironwork from a narrowboat sunk long ago. It turns out that the sunken vessel was, almost certainly, the haunted ghost boat Usk which had seen the death of her skipper, George Benbow, in a terrible accident, way back in 1887. From that date onward, boatmen refused to work on board and so she was left to sink at Crickheath. (Much more information on Usk can be found on the Welsh Country website — see [tinyurl.com/yuuz6v4j](http://tinyurl.com/yuuz6v4j). The site includes research by Society Secretary Sue Ball and longstanding Society member Jan Johnstone.)

Tom Fulda, Society restoration project manager, said, “As we bring the waterway back to life, we are also uncovering long forgotten artefacts which all tell a story and finding these stories will be fascinating – and rewarding”.

Mark Hignett, from Oswestry Town Museum, said, “We have been involved with a huge range of different projects and programmes over the years and we are very excited to get involved with researching the life and time of the local canals in more detail as I’m sure historical treasures will be found and will shine a light on a lost world”.

The Society and the museum plan to work together to develop further research projects in the coming year.

The museum website can be found at [oswestrytownmuseum.co.uk](http://oswestrytownmuseum.co.uk).

Chris Bryan-Smith



Tom Fulda (left) and Mark Hignett discuss the ironwork from Usk  
(photo: H Hignett)



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# Restoration Update

This report covers the period from December to February. The winter period typically involves a heavy focus on environmental work such as clearance and hedging but this season was also accompanied by some pretty harsh weather. The December work party coincided with Storm Darragh which brought immense damage and flooding to many parts of the country. We fared better than some but, nevertheless, the Saturday work party was pretty much a write-off. January was exceptionally cold and frosty whereas we got off relatively lightly in February with merely cold, grey dampness and a biting wind. Despite this, the environmental programme was completed in full and excellent progress was made elsewhere thanks to good numbers of hardy and dedicated volunteers.

In total, a further 74 metres of hedge was laid which looks stunning, 720 hedging whips were planted in various locations, including to thicken up areas of the laid hedge, and 170 metres of channel was cleared of scrub.

All very gratifying but it didn't stop there. The two sections of channel north and south of our compound that were completed last year were rewatered. Phase 1A by Crickheath Wharf was rewatered just before Christmas by cracking open the stop planks at Crickheath Bridge and, at the February work party, Phase 1B south of the farm crossing was rewatered by deploying the temporary pipe connection to Phase 1A. Although still rather bare of vegetation and precious little opportunity recently to take photos in bright weather, the results do look impressive. The banks will be seeded with a native grass and wild flower mix in the spring. The huge progress made over the last 12 months is evident.



*This season's hedge-laying*



*Phase 1A April 2024*



*Phase 1A January 2025*



*Phase 1B February 2024*



*Phase 1B February 2025*

In the area beyond these rewatered sections, work continues to profile a further 130 metres of channel in readiness for lining and blocking this spring. This will take several months to complete but, when finished, we shall relocate from the Crickheath compound to our new home at the Schoolhouse Bridge compound, expected to be sometime in the second half of the year.



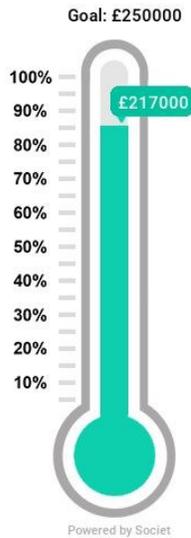
*The current section*

As ever, outside of the work parties there continues to be much preparation for future tasks. The design of wash walls by Schoolhouse Bridge has now been finalised. A modest amount of channel realignment either side of the bridge is required and this too has been spec'd. Work in the channel itself requires a licence from Natural England. The site is currently being surveyed in order to obtain the licence by mid-summer.

Tom Fulda

# Restore the Montgomery Canal!

## How is fund raising going?



The Public Appeal being run by the Restore the Montgomery Canal! group (of which the Society is a member) has now reached (as at 4th February 2025) £217,000 (including the initial £50,000). So just over 80% of the way to its target of £250,000 to help towards the costs of the next phase of the restoration in Shropshire – to help to close the Shropshire Gap and reach Llanymynech at the Welsh border.

£37,500 of this money has been allocated as half of the match funding for the Rural Prosperity Fund grant mentioned below with the other half coming directly from the Society's own funds. As the match fund is 30% of the whole cost, this means that we get 100% worth of work done but only need to contribute 30%.

One of the main reasons for the increase since the last report is a £18,000 grant from the SR & PH Southall Trust, spread over three years. This is a trust based in the Marches which donates to local good causes and which has been impressed by the results of the restoration efforts of Society and other volunteers in recent years. We are especially grateful to them for their generosity. They hope that others will follow their example.

As reported on page 20, Society volunteers have been hard at work rewatering the dry section between Crickheath and Schoolhouse Bridges in Shropshire. Part has been shown to be capable of holding water anyway and so has not needed the Sahara relining/concrete blocks treatment. This has enabled progress to be quicker than might have been expected. The work in this section (funded by the UK Government's Rural Prosperity Fund (and allocated by Shropshire Council)) is being finished ahead of schedule and within the budget.

So members can see that donations have been put to good effect. The money has been used to buy materials and to hire equipment for the volunteers, so avoiding the need to bring in contractors.

Some members make monthly donations and this is very much encouraged. We always need to plan ahead and knowing we have monthly income helps us to do that. Please see the relevant part on the donation webpage which can be found at that [localgiving.org/appeal/MontgomeryCanal](http://localgiving.org/appeal/MontgomeryCanal). Alternatively,

donations can be made by sending a cheque (payable to "Restore the Montgomery Canal") to Tixall Lodge, Tixall, Stafford, ST18 0XS

Larger donors will receive a framed certificate – Gold for £1,000 or more; Silver for between £500 and £999.

## Progress in Powys

Members may recall that the Montgomery Canal in Powys is both a Special Area for Conservation and also a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Hence it has the highest level of habitat protection. Also, that the Conservation Management Strategy for the canal, agreed some twenty years ago, provides for restoration with the conservation of protected flora and fauna. So part of the proposed restoration works include the creation of new nature reserves echoing in some way what has already happened in Shropshire. One of these new reserves in Powys is planned to be adjacent to the bottom sump pound of the canal at Wern, a little way north of Bank Lock. It would be on the non-towpath side. The design of the new reserve has had the benefit of advice from a panel of ecologists.

Canal & River Trust have submitted a detailed planning application to build this new reserve – a vital part of the next stage of restoration in Powys.

We urge members to write in to support this application. Frequently, planning officials only hear from objectors and the "silent majority" go unheard. So in this case, we want the planning officers to hear from people in favour. Given that some people are opposing restoration and are saying it will cause too much damage to the ecology, it is all the more important to emphasise that this is not the case and that new nature reserves are to be built.

You can go online to support this planning application as follows:

- Go to [tinyurl.com/3aa2fppy](http://tinyurl.com/3aa2fppy) (Powys County Council).
- Enter your contact details.
- Specify an appropriate "Commenter Type".
- Select the "Support" stance.
- Ignore the "Reasons for Comment" section as this relates to objections.
- In the "Your Comment" section, put your own reasons for supporting the planning application.
- Click on "Submit".

Your own reasons for supporting the planning application could be:

- Restoring the Montgomery Canal is a good thing and the building of the nature reserve will help.

(Continued overleaf)



- The building of the nature reserve will further the canal’s restoration to the benefit of the local community.
- This will help improve the local economy and add to people's well-being.
- This will enhance the built and natural heritage of the canal and its corridor
- Restoration of the canal is in accordance with the Council’s Local Development Plan (paragraph TD3).

Alternatively, you can write to Planning Services, Powys County Hall, Spa Road East, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, LD1 5LG quoting planning application number of 24/1422/FUL.

You may see reference to comments needing to be made by a certain date. However, these can be ignored as all comments will be considered up to the time the Planning Committee meets but the sooner, the better is a good maxim!

If you live outside Powys you can still give your opinion and you could emphasise that this is a matter of more than local interest, it is of national interest.

Many members responded to our request to write in support of the earlier planning application in relation to the new Carreghofa Lane Bridge, just south of Llanymynech and breaking news is that this application has been approved (see below). We understand the planning officials were impressed by the support and so please write again in connection with the Wern Pond Nature Reserve.

John Dodwell

## Carreghofa Lane Bridge

Wonderful News! Announced on 3rd February was the welcome news that permission for a new bridge to carry Carreghofa Lane over the Montgomery canal as well as removing the existing crossing had been approved by Powys Council.

Plans also include the re-alignment of Carreghofa Lane and a new junction with the B4398, re-aligning canal and towpath and improving the play area car park. Also to be undertaken, the laying out of a new public open space north of the canal including landscaping.

An application for planning permission had been submitted in July 2024 on behalf of the Canal & River Trust in Wales who are working in partnership with Powys County Council to restore the Montgomery Canal after obtaining funding through the Levelling Up Fund. Funding is part of the package for the construction of a new bridge in Llanymynech replacing the existing bridge No



93 (Walls Bridge closed to vehicles many years ago and replaced with a crossing which blocks the canal) which has been deemed ‘no longer suitable for modern vehicular traffic’.

Once completed, the scheme, part of the Montgomery Canal Restoration Project, will maintain unrestricted access for vehicles and other road users via Carreghofa Lane, the current canal crossing will be removed.

In approving the application, the council’s report stated: ‘...The application is accompanied by a Heritage Impact Statement which concludes that the proposals have been developed to take full account of the relationship to the historic environment and that the development will secure substantial public benefits to both the canal corridor and its historic structures as well as the wider rural communities through which it (canal) passes.

‘The benefits of the proposed development are recognised in terms of the connection with the wider restoration of the canal and given that all other material considerations have been adequately addressed, the recommendation is one of conditional consent.’

In August 2024, we asked all members for whom we have an email address to support the application. Many thanks to those of you who did so.

Jan Johnstone

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## News from MWRT

### Llanymynech Canal Wharf

The new group running the Llanymynech visitor centre and George Watson Buck trip boat has recently recruited several new members and is now planning to refurbish the boat and has been seeking donations. So far grants have been received from Llanymynech & Pant Parish Council and Carreghofa Community Council with a legacy grant received through the local IWA branch. These funds will enable them to make a start by refitting the galley before trips start again at Easter. The friendly team is looking for more volunteers to join them and skipper, maintain and crew the boat.



*Photo: Llanymynech Canal Wharf*

### Llanymynech Destination Management Plan

This long-awaited plan proposes facilities for the community and visitors to the Montgomery Canal and the adjoining Heritage Area including a picnic area, moorings, car parking, and improved paths and tracks linking the heritage area and canal. Anyone familiar with the area – and if you are not, do visit – will not be surprised by the suggestions but having them all together in the report may help future planning and funding opportunities.

### Dolfor

After an extraordinary length of time, the transfer of a derelict section of canal to Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust has recently been finalised. The canal into Newtown was sold off many years ago as the sewer route to the town's treatment works. The length acquired runs from the entrance to the works through Dolfor Lock (derelict) to the top of C&RT's Freestone Lock, also derelict, the start (or end!) of C&RT's ownership.

### Buildings at Risk

The Montgomery has one of the best collections of canal-age structures. The Canal Partnership's Heritage group has been identifying those most at risk from neglect and decay. A recent offer in memory of a former supporter will help the repair of Aston lock hut which had temporary repairs when the locks were under restoration but now needs more attention. Other structures which it is hoped can receive early attention are Brynderwen Warehouse and the

lock hut at the derelict Dolfor Lock near Newtown and these will have to be funded.

### Triathlon

The Friends of the Montgomery Canal will be making further changes to the popular Triathlon this year, one of which will be to run the event later in the year on 6th September. They are always on the lookout for help with the event as well as for people to take part.

### Local Councils

With the cross-border Marches Forward Partnership of four councils having been brought about through discussions about the Montgomery Canal, we have regular canal meetings with both Powys and Shropshire Councils, most recently for the development of a Marches Tourism Strategy. The intention is to have projects ready to put forward as soon as any funding may become available from Westminster or Cardiff. In Powys another group means that (at long last) ecologists engage in dialogue about the canal.

There will be a council election in Shropshire on 1st May 2025. This is an ideal opportunity to tell candidates in your area why you support the restoration of the Montgomery Canal. If leaflets through your letterbox don't tell you who your local candidates are, I expect they will be listed on [shropshire.gov.uk/elections-and-electoral-registration](https://shropshire.gov.uk/elections-and-electoral-registration) or other local news websites. You can tell candidates, especially new candidates:

- Most of the canal in Shropshire has already been reopened and connected to the national network and you want to see the final Shropshire Gap section reopened to the border at Llanymynech.
- With funding, the canal could be open into mid-Wales in a few years which would bring real value to the border area.
- There is no comparable opportunity in the Marches.
- You support the restoration to safeguard its ecology and built heritage, and to create a tourism and recreation amenity for residents and visitors and opportunities for businesses and jobs.
- You want to see the Council continuing support like the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Michael Limbrey

## Ticket to Ride on the Monty

Volunteers at Llanymynech Canal Wharf who offer boat trips on the Montgomery Canal between England and Wales have launched a new Season Ticket for 2025. The ticket gives the ticket holder and up to three guests unlimited travel on the short section of the canal in the Llanymynech Heritage Area. It is an ideal way for local people and visitors to support the community trip boat operated each summer.



Photo: Llanymynech Canal Wharf

The wharf visitor centre is open between 1.30 and 4.30pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays from Good Friday until the end of September each year and is a popular destination for visitors to the area as well as many local families. Light refreshments and ice creams are always available.

The new 2025 season ticket costs £50 and is available to purchase online or at the visitor centre during usual opening hours.

Said Graham Deakin, Chair of the volunteer group that runs the visitor centre and boat trips: 'We wanted to offer a ticket option for the boat that would allow people to come back and visit several times over the summer.'

'One of the lovely things about our short stretch of canal is that the things to see change over the course of the season. From the frogs and tadpoles in the spring through to beautiful dragonflies and damselflies in the summer plus the beautiful local swans and their cygnets any time between May and July – there's always something different to see by the canal.'

'We wanted to give people the opportunity to come back several times without breaking the bank so our new season ticket is ideal for families and friends.'

As well as the season ticket, the group offers single boat trips at £5 per adult and £2.50 per child.

Said Graham: 'We welcome hundreds of people to our visitor centre each year and combined with a visit to Llanymynech Heritage Area, and our exhibition in the old stable block, we offer an inexpensive afternoon out for local people and holidaymakers'.

Limited parking is available at the wharf and in the village of Llanymynech.

Find out more about the wharf at [themontgomerycanal.org.uk/llanymynech-canal-wharf](http://themontgomerycanal.org.uk/llanymynech-canal-wharf) (including a location map). The season ticket can be purchased online at [themontgomerycanal.org.uk/product/llanymynech-canal-wharf-season-ticket-2025](http://themontgomerycanal.org.uk/product/llanymynech-canal-wharf-season-ticket-2025).

Sean Bish



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## First Recorded Canal Holiday?

Was this the First Holiday taken on the Canals to be Recorded?

In 1891, a book appeared on the market entitled 'Two Girls on a Barge'. It tells the story of two young students, Edna and Girton, who decide to take a holiday away from their studies on a 'barge' (as they insist on calling it). Written by Violet Cecil Cotes (1868-1915) with line drawings by Frederick Henry Townsend, the book was liberally illustrated along with stories of the girls' adventures as they travel along the canals.

Together with Cadet, the brother of one of the girls, a steerer, his wife, son and 'the artist' who joins them last minute, they set off in the boat which they name 'Industrious' to find adventure the girls beginning a journal recording their experiences. Their account highlights their need for freedom and female independence, something lacking in life generally at that time.

What was happening in 1891? Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes appeared for the first time in the Strand Magazine, the first telephone link was opened between London and Paris, and Queen Victoria was ruling over her kingdom. The thought of two girls, along with a boatman's family plus two young men all living together on a canal boat would have been considered truly shocking!

This didn't deter them however and chapter one begins with the girls' determination to take a holiday on a canal in a boat they 'could furnish their own way'. The search begins and they write to Messrs Corbett of London Salt Works knowing their boats regularly travelled between London and Birmingham.

To their delight, they are offered a boat together with boatman and family for as long as they choose. The girls had intended to operate the boat themselves (it would be interesting if they had!) but being offered someone to steer and undertake the hard work, they decide to take up the offer deciding that after all, 'a man is a sort of necessity...'

Arriving at Paddington they find the boat waiting alongside the canal wharf together with a carpenter who had been detailed to provide cabins wherever the young ladies thought they were needed. One essential they had already decided they couldn't do without were 'fairy lanterns and a Japanese umbrella to make the barge look picturesque'.

Soon, the boat's hold is being filled with what the girls consider essential: Liberty curtains in different shades, steamer chairs, table lamps, mattresses, groceries, a tea set, matches, chair backs, soap, a seemingly endless list.

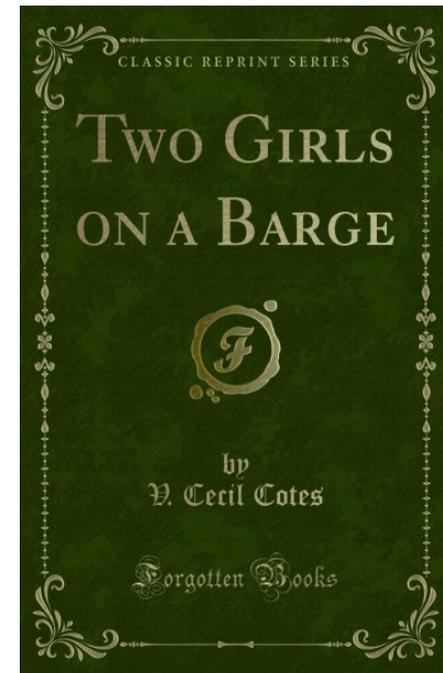
Two cabins are quickly constructed and from their cabin at the rear, the boatman makes himself known along with his wife and son Albert. Arriving next is Edna's uncle, a general who as well as bringing more goodies

introduces a friend, a painter, who then goes on to accompany the girls on their trip.

At last, the steerer poles off from the wharf and the boat is on its way out of London, a horse their means of propulsion who plods along with Albert astride its back. Before long, they reach the mooring point for the night at Willesden where stabling is available for the horse and, once stationary, the girls set forth with a will to decorate what will be their home, the boat's interior soon festooned with Liberty prints, lanterns and other fripperies blocking out the canvas sheets above.

From then on, the girls have many adventures exploring the Grand Union Canal and its towns and villages. Passing through Blisworth Tunnel was cause for great excitement and the group enjoy meeting a variety of people working on the waterways.

Eventually, holiday over, the boat is denuded of all its finery, draped curtains, furniture, teapots, crockery and cutlery and all appear on a sales poster displaying the words 'Sale of the Effects of the Barge – "Industrious"'. The girls add to the poster the words 'Owners have to catch a Train' and the sale is over in double-quick time.



A book which could be compared to Jerome K Jerome's 'Three Men in a Boat' but this time, on the canals. If you would like to read it, you can find it on Amazon. At time of writing, several versions are available. The following link will take you one of them: [amzn.eu/d/eifEBwH](https://amzn.eu/d/eifEBwH). Click on "See all formats and editions" to see others.

Please let us know if you're aware of any earlier canal holidays.

Jan Johnstone

## Hire Boats – How it all began

It was in the 1930s that two of the earliest canal boat hire companies on the waterways were established on the Shropshire Union Canal running through Christleton, Cheshire. They advertised nationally to encourage the public to try a new method of taking a holiday.

The first company to take a risk was run by Geoffrey Wain, Sidney Hathaway and L Gilmore, it opened in 1935. Named the 'Inland Cruising Association', their premises were in Skips Lane alongside Geoff's house. By 1939, the venture had proved a success with a fleet of thirteen boats made by Taylors of Chester available for hire.

During WW2, trade ceased, quite understandably with fuel rationed, but with peace declared, the business began again in 1946. By then, the fleet had been reduced to four, craft having been used as houseboats during the conflict. To get started again, four wartime ex-landing craft were converted into cruisers suitable for the canal and added to the fleet.



The sign in the middle of the picture reads  
'Inland Hire Cruisers Ltd, Christleton'  
(photo: D Wain)

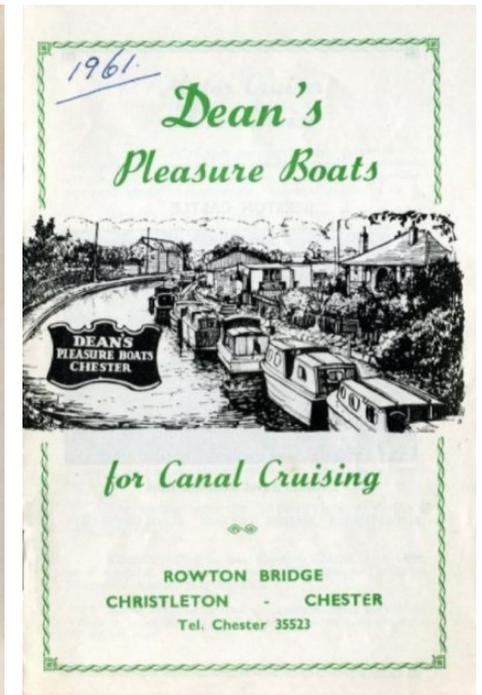
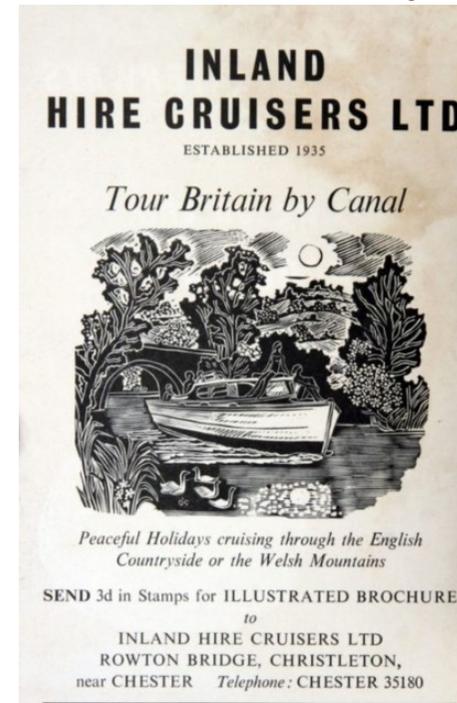
When Geoff Wain died in 1956, his son David Wain stepped into the breach changing the name of the company to 'Inland Hire Cruisers Limited'. He went on to expand the business and, using traditional boating skills, added nineteen new boats to the fleet. The business was finally sold on in October 1973.

(Incidentally, as supporters of the Shropshire Union Canal Society may be aware, amongst the many things David did for the waterways involved a chance meeting with a journalist on a train. David had been reading about the Montgomery Waterway and the journalist, party to the Prince of Wales Committee who were at that time looking for a project to improve the environment and provide facilities for children, went on to pass details of the Monty and the ambitions for its future to the appropriate contacts within the Committee. The rest is history.)

David Wain was eventually awarded an OBE for services to the waterways, an accolade well deserved.

Also taking a chance with boat hiring in those early days were Jack and Sid Dean, local builders literally next door to 'Inland Cruising' who developed their marina 'Dean's Pleasure Boats' in 1947. They too converted ex-army pontoons, turning them into cruisers later going on to produce marine ply boats to expand their fleet.

Both the companies produced brochures to encourage the public to try a new method of holidaying on what until recently had been considered by many as a good place to dump rubbish. 'Hire Cruisers Limited' (established 1935) brochure encouraging 'Tour Britain by Canal – Peaceful Holidays cruising through the English Countryside or the Welsh Mountains' whilst 'Dean's Pleasure Boats for Canal Cruising' echoed the sentiment.



As we know, boat hiring has come a long way since those early days but its thanks to those two companies 'taking a chance' that we have such a choice today.

Jan Johnstone

## The Art of Roses and Castles

All canal enthusiasts will, of course, know about the tradition from days gone by of decorating narrowboats with roses, castles and other artwork and a lot has been written about the origins of this colourful craft although no firm conclusion has been reached as to when it was originally introduced to Britain's canals.

The first mention of life on the canals under the heading of 'On the Canal' was in an article in 'Household Words', a weekly magazine founded by Charles Dickens. The item was published 167 years ago on 11th September 1858 and was written by a journalist, John Hollingshead. An abbreviated extract concerning his comments on boat decoration follows: 'The Stourport (a flyboat) is rather faded in its decorations and is not a gay specimen of the fly-barge in all its glory of cabin paint and varnish but still enough remains... the boatman lavishes all his taste upon the external and internal ornaments... his chosen colours red, yellow and blue... the two sides of the cabin present a lake, a castle, a sailing boat and a range of mountains...'



*Stern doors of a narrowboat decorated with castles and a Buckby Can (on the roof) decorated with roses*

(photo: L White, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), [Link](#))

The most popular theory is that the decoration emanated from gypsy origins, an idea backed by many including LTC Rolt in his book 'Narrowboat'. The other supposition is that the style could have come from fairgrounds or circuses. However, both these ideas have now largely been discounted. Tony Lewery, in his book 'Narrowboat Painting', put forward the idea that the roses and castles could owe their origins to the cheap commercial art developed in the early 19th century citing papier mâché japanned trays and cheap tin goods.

Most probably as families took to canal life and left dry land for plain painted boats, they remembered the styles of what they had left behind and used it to brighten up their surroundings.

In due course, many boatyard painters came to be recognised for their distinctive styles of narrowboat painting these illustrated not only on the exterior of the boat but also used in the living quarters on cupboards and shelves and portable equipment such as the water cans, stored on the narrowboat roof, jugs, buckets, hand bowls and dippers, lamps, barrels and much, much more.

Stylised roses were perhaps the most popular of subjects, fringed with green leaves and daisies, whilst more elaborate were the landscapes featuring castles, rivers, mountains and swans frequently painted on cabin doors. Also perfected was the curved shaded lettering signwriters used on the boat cabin exterior, one popular style of the time being sans serif block alphabet.

Surrounding the lettering were painted scrolls and flourishes with shading along one edge, the whole displaying the boat owner's name, the name of the boat and its number, the gauging number, registered number and place of registration.

Also used, particularly on the bows, were geometric patterns whilst the rope locker was usually painted white with a scalloped design around the edge and an ace, heart, anchor or stylised flower motif – all considered good luck – painted on the top. On motorised boats, what was known as the pigeon box located over the engine room for ventilation also came in for elaborate decoration. Other sections highly decorated include the cratch which supported and shaped the canvas sheeting over the hold and the running-block and uprights.

The wooden ellum or rudder at the stern of the horse-drawn boat saw its main post patterned with abstract designs as well as a horse's tail. The curved wooden tiller, which could be taken off and reversed when the boat was stationary, painted in white, black, red, yellow or blue. As more boats converted to motor propulsion, the tiller became much simpler, either painted in horizontal stripes or left as bare metal.

Inside the boat, decoration wasn't forgotten with scumble, a paint effect to imitate woodgrain, used to cover the walls of the cabin. Equipment such as stools, the coal box and the board used as a seat were decorated as were the interiors of the two doors leading onto the stern. When these were opened, they displayed the painter's skills to the outside world.

There has been for some time now a steady demand for boat decoration and owners can purchase transfers. Far more desirable however is to employ one of the many talented painters who are today continuing to carry out the craft and at the same time maintaining the traditions of the past and passing on their expertise to ensure their painting skills don't die out.

Jan Johnstone

## Legends of the Waterways

### Sister Mary Ward, BEM

Mary Amos was born to parents Thomas, a rope and twine manufacturer, and Sarah Ellen Amos on 4th April 1885 at Stoke Bruerne, Northamptonshire, the village where she spent her childhood situated not far from the Grand Union canal, a major commercial waterway linking London and the Midlands.

Although she never professionally qualified as a nurse, she had tried to train in London but was refused due to a foot deformity, she never gave up her dream and travelled to Belgium where she was taught the rudiments of nursing by Edith Cavell who was later shot by the Germans for helping British soldiers escape during WW1.

Mary served as a nurse behind the lines in WW1 afterwards travelling widely filling the role of nursing sister in Europe and America for ten years before coming home to nurse her sick father. It was then she got to know the boating families that regularly travelled along the Grand Union Canal.

Mary went on to marry Charlie Ward who had taken on her father's business as a rope and twine manufacturer, the business was located alongside lock 15. It was from here that she ran her surgery caring for the boating families carrying commercial goods on the Grand Union.

Open all hours of the day and night, she attended between three to four hundred cases a month ranging from broken limbs to double pneumonia. At the same time, she provided a free dispensary as well as administering medicine, visiting the sick and even on occasions performing tasks that normally only doctors carried out.

The cost of the materials she used, disinfectant, bandages, drugs, all came from her own pocket up until the end of the 1930s when her hard work was finally recognised by the Grand Union Canal Company. Realising the good work she was doing in keeping their boatmen healthy and thus working, they appointed her as Consultant Sister to Long Distance Boatmen and Families, British Canals paying her an honorarium of £2 per week. Other companies whose boating families she helped, however, did not recognise her hard work.

Mary continued to administer health care for boatmen and their families as well as acting as midwife when required for many years. As most boat people were illiterate, she would write and read letters on their behalf and help with christenings and funerals. Her work was not restricted to the canal, she also helped out the local community serving as nurse and medical advisor for the local school.

It was in 1951 that Mary was finally recognised for her services to the boating

community and awarded the British Empire Medal in the New Year Honours list. A few years later, she appeared on the TV programme 'This is Your Life' with some of her boating friends in the audience. 'You can't take me away from boat people,' Mary said. 'There isn't one of them wouldn't die for me, or one I wouldn't die for.' Her feelings were reciprocated, the boat people loved her.

Mary finally retired in 1962 at the age of seventy-seven, British Waterways Board paying her a small pension. By then, canal carrying had decreased massively and unwilling to watch it go into a steady decline, she moved to live with her daughter in London.

On 22nd March 1972, Mary passed away at the age of eighty-seven. Brought back to the village of Roade, Northamptonshire she was laid to rest in the Baptist churchyard just a short distance from Stoke Bruerne and some four miles from the Grand Union Canal where, throughout her lifetime, she had helped so many of her beloved boat families.

Jan Johnstone



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## Musings on Bridges Names

Have you ever wondered, when cruising along the Shroppie or the Llangollen and passing under its numerous bridges, about the origins of the names the bridges hold?

Some are obviously named for their physical appearance: 31 Cowley Double Road Bridge near Gnosall Heath which carries a farm track and a public right of way; 20 Dirty Lane Bridge near Wheaton Aston; or 39 High Bridge north of Norbury Junction. These last two describe the condition of the road/bridges in question when built – the former hopefully now much improved; the latter, of course, exactly the same.

Roving or skew bridges whose arches are set obliquely on the abutments instead of at right angles to them were naturally named for what they looked like while 26 Turnover Bridge, north of High Onn Wharf, 3 Turnover Bridge near Pendeford Park, Wolverhampton and 126 Iron Roving Bridge at Tower Wharf, Chester were built to allow a horse towing a boat to easily cross over when the towpath changes sides.

Others describe what is or was near them such as 55 Little Mill, 63 Clay Pit, 1 Paddock Bridge (now referred to as No 8W) and 2 Paddock Bridge – all on the Llangollen Branch – while others are named after the nearest village, town or street. An example is 41 Grub Street Bridge (also known as Lamberts Bridge) and originally named for Grub Street in nearby High Offley.

Others are more obscure such as 21 Shushions Bridge, Church Eaton. Look into the reasons and you will discover it's named for an ancient manor in the area described in the Domesday Book as containing "...half a hide, arable land three carucates (120 acres) value 4 shillings". Shushions Manor still lies to the south-west.

Another interesting name is 36 Plardiwick Bridge near Gnosall. Again named for a manor first recorded in October 1199, the land had a mixed history throughout the centuries and, when Telford's Birmingham and Liverpool Junction canal (now the Shroppie) had to be re-directed across the old estate, the forthcoming bridge took on the old manor's name. Plardiwick Manor and hamlet still lie to the south-east, accessed by a footpath from the bridge.

Bridges were also named after canal side pubs, such as 34 Boat Inn Bridge, Gnosall. While rural inn 'The Anchor', built in 1830 to serve the Shroppie and accessible from 42 Old Lea Bridge (now named Anchor Bridge in Nicholson's), is another example.

Bridges – including canal lift bridges – also carried the names of landowners or nearby farms through whose land the canals were cut – a memorial if you like to long-gone men and women who must have watched as navvies dug the

course of the canal through their fields, relieved they'd agreed that a bridge would be built to enable ease of travelling and movement of stock

Calling on my much more knowledgeable friend and SUCS secretary Sue Ball who, to quote her words, "has taught geography since Adam was a lad" and who incidentally is well worth consulting on any map issues encountered, she commented as follows.

"The Shroppie Bridges are numbered 1 (Atherley Junction) to 97 (Hurleston Junction), then on from 98 to 147 at Ellesmere Port – thus, the Shroppie Main Line. The Llangollen bridges start numbering from 1 at Hurleston to 69 Peter's Bridge, immediately east of Frankton Junction. Bridge 70 is Rowson's Bridge immediately west of Frankton Junction. Thus, Frankton Junction has Bridge 69 one side of it and Bridge 70 on the other side. Also intriguing is that Bridge 70 was once numbered Bridge 1.

Thereafter the bridges start numbering again – although there is no Bridge 1. And they all have a W after them! Thus, it's Bridge 2W Rowson's Bridge, Bridge 3W Nicholas Bridge etc, etc – all the way to Bridge 45W, Llangollen. I do not know if technically Bridge 1W and Bridge 70 (what does the W stand for West or Wales?) are the same structure, the only logical answer is that they are.

[Note on suffix W: see Peter Brown's article in [Winter 2022 Cuttings](#), page 28 where he comments "re W on the bridges: they were installed in 2007/8 by C&RT as part of a National Minimum Safety Standards project whereby bridge plaques were required to be added to both sides of all bridges."]

Meantime, Bridge 71 is Lockgate Bridge, the first bridge on the Monty below Frankton Locks, and then they number through to Bridge 153 Freestone Lock, Newtown, Powys."

Sue continues, "Why does the numbering go down the Monty instead of following through to Llangollen? Given that the Llangollen is navigable and the Monty is not? I haven't the foggiest idea but such it is... Anyone out there know the answer?"

If anyone does have stories about the numerous bridges on the Shroppie and Llangollen and would be willing to share how they got their diverse names, don't keep it to yourself. Do get it touch and let Cuttings record your stories for posterity.

Jan Johnstone and Sue Ball

## Canal & River Trust News

### C&RT Increase in Boat Licence Fees

C&RT have announced an increase in boat licence fees of 4% from 1st April 2025 for both private boat owners and boating businesses. In addition, surcharges will apply for boats without a home mooring and wide beam boats.

For more details, see [tinyurl.com/5n7p6ja9](https://tinyurl.com/5n7p6ja9) (C&RT).

### Historic Montgomery Canal Aqueduct Undergoes Essential Repairs

C&RT have completed extensive masonry repairs to the 200-year-old, Grade-II Listed Aberbechan Aqueduct. The aqueduct carries the Montgomery Canal over Bechan Brook, a tributary of the River Severn. It's located about three miles north-east of Newtown on a stretch of the canal that is currently unnavigable but allows water to be supplied to the rest of the canal.

For more details, see [tinyurl.com/5su7fy7s](https://tinyurl.com/5su7fy7s) (C&RT).

### Climate Adaptation Report

C&RT has submitted its first Climate Adaptation Report to the UK government. It provides evidence as to how climate change affects the canal network and shares the top 12 risks. However, it also says that the network can play a role in mitigating climate change.

For more details, see [tinyurl.com/bdf7judd](https://tinyurl.com/bdf7judd) (C&RT).

### Richard Parry to stand down as Chief Executive

Richard will be standing down in summer 2025 after 12 years in the post. Recruitment for his successor will get underway shortly.

For more details, see [tinyurl.com/yp3me39w](https://tinyurl.com/yp3me39w) (C&RT).

### Improving wildlife-rich hedgerow along the Montgomery Canal

Work on the above on the Montgomery Canal between Newtown and Welshpool at Brithdir and Belan is underway. Volunteers working alongside a contractor are undertaking hedgelaying and where there are gaps in the hedgerow, new sections of hedge have been planted. The work is part of the 'Putting Down Roots' project with funding from the Local Places for Nature Fund.

For more details, see [tinyurl.com/yyc4fdd](https://tinyurl.com/yyc4fdd) (C&RT).

Jan Johnstone

## Follow and Contact C&RT

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## Dates for Your Diary

Date	What	Where	Notes
Apr 18–21, 10am–4pm	Easter Historic Boat Gathering	National Waterways Museum, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 4FW	See <a href="https://tinyurl.com/2pjfcchr">tinyurl.com/2pjfcchr</a> (C&RT)
May 3, 10am – May 5, 5pm	Norbury Canal Festival	Norbury Wharf, Norbury Junction. Staffordshire. ST20 0PN	See <a href="https://tinyurl.com/42t444u3">tinyurl.com/42t444u3</a> (Facebook). SUCS hopes to have a stall (TBC)
May 25–26	Stafford Riverway Link Open Weekend	Baswich site, Baswich Lane, Stafford ST18 0YJ	See <a href="https://tinyurl.com/4bkxyfsc">tinyurl.com/4bkxyfsc</a> (SRL). SUCS plans to have a stall
Jun 7–8	Market Harborough Waterways Festival	Foxton Locks (not Market Harborough!), Leicestershire	See <a href="http://iwaharborough75.org/about">iwaharborough75.org/about</a> . SUCS hopes to have a stall (TBC)
Jul 18–21	Gnosall Canal Festival (C'Fest)	Gnosshall, Staffordshire	See <a href="http://gnosallcanalfestival.co.uk">gnosallcanalfestival.co.uk</a> . SUCS plans to have a stall
Jul 26&27	HNBC Audlem Gathering of Historic Boats	Audlem, Cheshire	Please see page <a href="#">17</a> for more details
Aug 30–31	Whitchurch Canal Festival	Whitchurch Arm off Llangollen Canal	See <a href="http://whitchurchwaterway.uk">whitchurchwaterway.uk</a> . SUCS plans to have a stall

**Before travelling, you are advised to check with the event organisers that there has been no change.**




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To book a talk at your venue, please contact [sheila.leonard@danieladamson.co.uk](mailto:sheila.leonard@danieladamson.co.uk).



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## Letters

I'm writing to comment on the 'Ponty Aqueduct – Who Did What?' article in the [Winter 2024](#) issue of Cuttings (page 34) and provide some additional information.

Telford was General Agent of the Ellesmere Canal Company. In modern terminology that would be Chief Executive or General Manager — an employee of the Company. The article states: 'Learning of his work as an architect, engineer and stonemason, The Company's committee was impressed by his qualifications and decided to appoint him.' In fact, several senior members of the committee knew him well as they were Shropshire magistrates who then in effect comprised the County Council. For the previous six years, Telford had been County Surveyor, responsible for County bridges and buildings. The canal company also appointed a Resident Engineer (initially John Duncombe) who was responsible to the General Agent though it is obvious that Telford was much more actively involved in engineering matters than was usual for a General Agent.

Jessop was consulting engineer, paid according to the time he spent on the project. Indeed, he was regarded as the country's leading canal engineer; during the years of the Canal Mania (1792–4) he was consulting engineer for almost a third of the applications to Parliament. Whilst it is true that he felt that the range of duties of the General Agent was too wide for one person, it cannot be right that he had hoped to be appointed — the reduction in his influence, prestige and earnings would have been far too great.

As approved by Parliament in April 1793, the plans were vague about how the Dee was to be crossed. The general line of the canal had been recommended by Jessop but he was not happy with aspects and thought it would be best to get approval for the scheme in the 1793 session and submit a bill for variation later.

After much prevarication, in early 1795 it was decided to recommend a high-level crossing of the Dee. The principal reason was water supply which at that time was planned to come from a reservoir in the hills north-west of Wrexham feeding into the planned summit level of the canal. A branch to Llangollen does not seem to have been a factor as the branch was not proposed until the previously planned summit level was abandoned in 1797.

So who suggested building the aqueduct with stone piers and an iron trough? In the absence of any evidence, my opinion is that it was a joint decision, emerging from discussions between Telford and Jessop. At that time, Telford had just been appointed consulting engineer of the Shrewsbury Canal (his first canal consultancy) and had recommended the iron aqueduct at Longdon-on-Tern which was probably designed by William Reynolds. Jessop owned a

quarter share in the Butterley Ironworks and his partner Benjamin Outram was proposing an iron aqueduct for the Derby Canal. Thus, both the principals had an appreciation of iron as a building material.

Who designed the aqueduct? Here we do have some evidence. A letter from Jessop to Telford dated 26 July 1795 has survived. In it, he says: 'I would have the piers 7 feet wide at the top instead of 6 feet, and make them about 2 feet more in the other dimensions.' A fortnight later, Jessop made his recommendations to the canal committee which resolved that 'the General Surveyor and Agent to this Company is hereby directed to proceed in the said works conformably thereto'. In my opinion, Telford made the initial designs for the aqueduct and Jessop then altered some of the key dimensions. What is indisputable was that Jessop bore the ultimate responsibility.

The above is discussed in chapter five of my book 'The Shropshire Union Canal: from the Mersey to the Midlands and Mid-Wales', published by the Railway & Canal Historical Society.

Peter Brown

*An article 'Legends of the Waterways (Charlie Atkins)' article appeared in the [Winter 2024](#) issue of Cuttings (page 40)...*

On Saturday, 31st May 1975, members of the Wirral Railway Circle (WRC), who organised canal tours over lesser-used canal sections, travelled from Runcorn Waterloo Bridge to Winsford on board Peter Froud's narrowboat 'Lapwing'. Peter was from Inland Waterways Holiday Cruises. The boat captain was Charlie Atkins. Such was the interest in the cruise that forty-seven people attended, some of whom travelled from Surrey and Grantham. Apparently, Charlie worked for Peter and his organisation.

On Saturday, 21st June 1975, the members of the WRC organised a cruise from Chester to Ellesmere Port on narrowboat 'Betelgeuse'. Horse 'Zippy' hauled the WRC party over the River Dee Branch Canal.

Chris Magner

*We asked if readers identify the location of the photo of 'Mendip' that appeared within the article...*

This picture was taken at Norbury Wharf and appears in the book *Narrow Boats at Work* by Michael E Ware, credited to Hugh McKnight.

Judy Clegg

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## Disclaimer

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## Editorial Team

Sue Ball, David Carter, Steve Clews, Richard Feeney, Jan Johnstone.



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