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TEN GOOD REASONS TO BE AN IWA MEMBER

Your support is vital in helping IWA to:

1. Campaign for properly funded waterways
2. Provide a voice for you
3. Help improve your local waterways
4. Defend the waterways from unwelcome development
5. Give practical financial and political support for waterways restoration
6. Provide expert advice for waterway managers and restoration groups
7. Organise restoration holidays for young people
8. Provide over 5,000 days of volunteer labour each year
9. Arrange affordable insurance for waterway organisations
10. Enable greater appreciation of the waterways through education and experience
AGENDA

The Column of the National Chairman

By the time you read this column, we should be about to discover the make-up of the country’s next government. Let us hope that it recognises the value of our canals and rivers at least as much as previous governments, and has the will to continue with the changes that are necessary to protect our inland waterways, which of course remains one of the main objectives of your Association.

For our part, we too have been busy campaigning in the run-up to the General Election, with candidates from all parties in our sights and the protection of the waterways firmly on our agenda. At the beginning of the campaign we launched our 2015 Waterways Manifesto. I am grateful to the branches and individual members that have worked so hard to engage with local candidates across the country and urge them to support our Five Point Partnership.

We will follow up this initiative in July, with a reception for our elected MPs at which we will stress the importance of our inland waterways and the benefits they bring to the nation. We hope MPs will sign up to the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways and join our campaign to ensure that the waterways are properly funded.

IWA has a long track record of pioneering efforts to revitalise our waterways. This continues today at branch, region and national level with activities and projects targeted to achieve even more. Some of these have quite high prominence but often, as an organisation, we have not been particularly effective at letting people know about all the good things we do. Our continued success depends on gaining more support from all people who enjoy the waterways, so a third objective is to better publicise what we do and why we do it.

Our new Marketing Committee takes the lead on this and I hope you will notice IWA’s heightened profile as we seek to improve the way we promote the Association.

Finally, I’d like to remind everyone that all IWA’s work is aimed at keeping our waterways alive. Thank you for your support in achieving this – everything our members do, however small, is important. Please continue the good work and encourage others to join the leading waterways membership charity. The more members we have, the more we can achieve!

Les Etheridge
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  - Maximum 7 callouts.
  - Member = Registered user and vessel.
  - INCLUDES REPLACEMENT PARTS COVER (RPC).

**ABOUT YOUR VESSEL.**

Name of Craft: .................................................................
Reg. No. of Craft: ...........................................................
Type of Craft: Cruiser, Narrow Boat, etc. ............................
Length: ...........................................................................
Hull: Wood □ Fiberglass □ Steel □
Engine: ...........................................................................
Electrical System: 12 Volt □ 24 Volt □
Fuel: Petrol □ Diesel □ Two stroke □
Other: ..........................................................................
Registered Moorings: (if any) ..............................................

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Expiry Date: ................................................................
Issue No: ...................................................................

I understand that this application form is subject to terms and conditions and that my membership will become active once I have received a copy of these in my membership booklet.

Signature: ................................................................. Date: .................................................................

I do not wish my details to be passed to selected contacts/companies. □

Please return form and cheque (if applicable) in an envelope addressed to: River Canal Rescue, Freepost NAT 11249, Stafford, Staffordshire ST17 0BR.
IWA Annual General Meeting

In accordance with Article 71 of IWA’s Articles of Association, notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on Saturday 26th September 2015 at 11.30 am. The venue for the meeting will be Salwarpe Village Hall, Salwarpe, Droitwich (Worcestershire), WR9 OAH (www.salwarpevillagehall.co.uk). Full details of the meeting will be provided in the next edition of Waterways.

In accordance with Article 43, nominations to stand as a nationally elected trustee (three places available) are sought. Nominations are also sought for the posts of region chairman for each of North West Region, South West Region and West Midlands Region (each to serve until the 2018 AGM) and Eastern Region (each to serve until the 2017 AGM).

Any member can submit a nomination for a nationally elected trustee, which should be accompanied by confirmation from the nominee that they are willing to be elected as a trustee of the Association. Nominations for region chairmen should be made by a member of the relevant region; the nominee should also be a member of that region. All nominations should be accompanied by a brief biography or statement not exceeding 400 words, with a portrait style photo, for publication as part of any ballot paper with the notice convening the AGM to be issued in the next (August) edition of Waterways. All nominations should be received at Head Office (for attention the Company Secretary or Chief Executive) by no later than 2pm on Friday 3rd July (i.e. 85 days before the AGM).

Elvington Lock Campaign

IWA is campaigning to save a section of the waterways system from becoming unnavigable.

Elvington Lock (also known as Sutton Lock) on the River Derwent in Yorkshire is currently closed to navigation, following a temporary closure notice issued by the Environment Agency back in February 2014. This has cut off part of the system from the national network and stranded a number of boats upstream. IWA is very concerned about the closure of this lock and wishes to see navigation up to Stamford Bridge re-instated urgently.

IWA had been concerned at the delay by EA in completing a structural assessment of the top guillotine gate in the initially promised timescale. The Association met EA in October 2014 to put forward its aspirations to see the lock brought back into use at the earliest possible opportunity. EA shared the early findings of the structural survey, and IWA awaits a copy of the report as soon as it is available.

The situation at Elvington Lock is unusual, with no one authority being responsible for the whole structure. Whilst EA own the top guillotine gate, the bottom mitre gates are in different ownership. These wooden gates are becoming life-expired and require replacement soon. IWA wishes to see the lower lock gates at this lock replaced and is working with other supportive bodies to provide both practical help and funding to replace these gates.

Meanwhile, IWA has made it clear that it has no wish to re-open previous legal arguments about rights of navigation on the River Derwent.

IWA Waterways Manifesto

IWA’s Waterway Manifesto campaign has gone extremely well, with many members and branch committees having contacted parliamentary candidates ahead of the General Election in May. Candidates have been asked to pledge their support for the five points outlined in the manifesto: Protect our Heritage; Build a Local Relationship with Constituency Waterways Groups; Work with IWA in Parliament – Join the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways; Support the Transfer of Navigations Currently Managed by Environment Agency to Canal & River Trust; Support Affordable New Off Line Moorings.

IWA would like to thank all those members who have already supported the campaign by writing to candidates where they live, and would encourage more members to do the same. Every pledge counts. The list of candidates who have so far signed up their support can be found on the manifesto pages of the website.

If you would like to get involved, even at this very late stage, information, including a link to a website that gives names and email addresses for candidates where you live, a map showing constituency areas, and a template for letters and emails, can be found at the manifesto pages of the website.

Additionally, there is now a downloadable PDF of a smaller manifesto leaflet, with space for candidates to pledge their support, which you can download and print at home. The smaller size of this leaflet makes it more practical to print and keep to hand when out and about, in case you come across a candidate, or at home, should any candidates be canvassing in your area. The new leaflet can be downloaded from the manifesto pages of the website.
In February the Canal & River Trust announced its plans to provide greater clarity to those boaters who have stated that they will ‘continuously cruise’, but then do not move their boat far enough or often enough to meet the Trust’s published Guidance for Boaters without a Home Mooring.

CRT plans to monitor how far boats with Continuous Cruising licences move over the course of their licence to see if they satisfy the requirements for continuous cruising. On the expiry of their licence, those that have consistently failed to move in accordance with CRT’s guidance will be refused a new licence unless they take a home mooring.

This new policy was scheduled to come into force on 1st May. Ahead of the introduction of the new policy, CRT planned to write to anyone with a boat registered as not having a home mooring to advise them of the process.

In addition CRT has said regular reminders will be sent to all boaters whose limited movement is a cause of concern. For the first few months while boaters are becoming familiar with this policy, CRT has proposed to issue short duration licences to give those boaters concerned a further opportunity to establish an acceptable range of movement.

IWA has consistently supported the concept of genuine continuous cruisers, but has equally recognised the problems caused by those with a Continuous Cruising licence who do not follow the appropriate navigation guidelines, and has pressed for a resolution to this for a number of years. A lack of consistent enforcement of continuous cruising within the guidelines in the past has caused a number of issues that now need to be addressed. In light of this, the Association welcomes CRT’s announcement of a new policy to clarify the guidelines for continuous cruisers and to enforce them.

IWA will watch closely to see how this new policy and its enforcement progresses, keen that all action taken is consistent and fair. The Association is pleased that positive action to tackle the problem has been agreed, but recognises it will take time for the solution to be achieved, as this is a complicated matter that is not solely a CRT issue. IWA now looks forward to the restoration, over time, of fair mooring conditions for all boaters.

IWA Photo Competition

Congratulations go to the overall winner of IWA’s photography competition, Arthur Procter, for his wonderful autumn photograph of the Peak Forest Canal at Marple.

IWA’s next photography competition is now open to entries. This year we are offering a complete set of OS Nicholsons Guides to the Waterways, worth over £130, for the overall winner.

Images will be shortlisted to feature a range of seasons, craft and activities from all over the UK waterway network, to feature in IWA’s 2017 calendar or feature as an IWA Christmas card. Shortlisted entries will each receive three calendars. Members will then be invited to vote for their favourite, and the overall winner will receive a set of Nicholson Guides.

For more information and to enter, please visit the photography competition pages on the IWA website.
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GOBA Supports Transfer of Great Ouse to CRT

The Great Ouse Boating Association has been in existence for over 50 years, looking after the interests of boaters using the River Great Ouse and its tributaries. The Association not only provides and maintains an increasing number of 48-hour moorings along the river but also produces a prize winning magazine three times a year.

The navigation authority for the Great Ouse and its tributaries is the Anglian Region of the Environment Agency who many years ago took over from the National Rivers Authority. Along with other stakeholders, GOBA has regular meetings with the EA from director level to a monthly meeting with EA river inspectors.

Prior to the Canal & River Trust coming into existence, along with other stakeholders, GOBA was heavily involved in early discussions with Defra as to the new organisation’s format. It was therefore very disappointing when it was announced that the navigation arm of the EA would not be included into CRT within the timescale as originally planned.

On a positive note, since the EA took over from the National Rivers Authority, they have made many improvements particularly to the condition of the assets, i.e. locks and staging. However, as a Government department, they are currently subject to shrinking budgets, particularly Grant in Aid which is allocated by Defra. The current lack of funds limit the EA in carrying out their responsibilities to a satisfactory level.

For example, enforcement of boat registration, although improved over the last few years is still not where it should be.

There is almost no enforcement of the 48-hour mooring rule at EA moorings. Overhanging trees are only dealt with when navigation is severely restricted. Locks on the Great Ouse are used to aid flood control during times of severe weather. Over a winter period this can result in the formation of sandbanks, which severely impede navigation for many vessels. The EA has great difficulty in getting the necessary funding for dredging these sandbanks. Even though the Great Ouse is subject to an increasing number of visiting boats every year, there has been no investment in new facilities for boaters for the last few years. Moorings, pump-outs and water points are all in short supply.

From its inception, GOBA has followed with interest the growth of CRT. Their ability to generate funding from different areas has allowed them to formulate long term plans. Along with an increasing level of volunteer effort, this has enabled CRT to use their funds all the more effectively.

CRT have also shown that they are willing to tackle those more difficult issues such as enforcement of boat registration, mooring regulations and more recently guidelines for continuous cruisers.

In summary, within the navigation arm of the EA, the Anglia Region is the poor relation in terms of facilities when compared particularly to the Thames Region, with no prospect of any investment in the current financial climate.

It is these funding issues, and their effects, which make the transfer of the Anglia Region of the EA navigation to CRT so attractive to the Great Ouse Boating Association.

Ian Cox,
Chairman, Great Ouse Boating Association
* See also Inbox – page 43.

Lichfield & Hatherton Grant

Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust’s project to restore the disused Lichfield Canal has received a grant of £336,000 from the Social Investment Business towards work on the Heritage Towpath Trail.

The Trust plans to use the funds to open the section of the Trail from the Boat Inn on Walsall Road to Barracks Lane near Brownhills for the first time since the canal was abandoned in the 1950s. The funds will enable the Trust to purchase two areas of land, construct a new culvert over Crane Brook to replace the one demolished during motorway construction in 2001-3, remove 60 years of natural growth and lay down a public footpath that will connect across the aqueduct.

When the work to restore the Trail is completed it is hoped that the Summerhill section of the canal will be in water within a relatively short time.

IWA Restoration Committee Vacancies

IWA’s Restoration Committee is seeking enthusiastic advocates of waterway restoration to join, or provide support for, the Association’s Restoration Committee with its work in promoting and developing waterways restoration and new waterways in England and Wales.

Current vacancies are: Committee Members; Honorary Architectural Heritage and/or Historic Environment Management (Cultural Resource Management) Advisor; Honorary Land Agent.

Whether you are currently active members of IWA at branch, region or national level, or an armchair member who thinks: “I really should be doing something more” we would like to hear from you. For more information about each role, including how to apply, visit the www.waterways.org.uk/committeeroles or contact the chairman of IWA Restoration Committee, Vaughan Welch, at vaughan.welch@waterways.org.uk or on 0121 477 9782.
Pick up your paddles, pump up your bicycle tyres and dust off your running shoes for IWA’s first Waterways Triathlon in Essex. The event will take place on Sunday 20th September 2015 at Hoe Mill Lock near Maldon, on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation. You can choose between a 50km or 30km course that will have you canoing, cycling and running to the finish line through one of the most beautiful parts of Essex.

The triathlon is supporting two deserving local causes and you get to decide who you want to support. All sponsorship you raise will go towards either Essex Waterways Ltd, who help to maintain and improve the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation, or The Susan Trust, which is carrying out a historic Chelmer lighter boat restoration project.

There are only a limited number of spaces available so book early. Places cost £35 per person but we’re offering an early bird price of £25 if you book before 31st May.

Complete the challenge within eight hours as an individual or as part of a team of two or four. Alternatively, compete in a team of three as a relay, with each person completing one stage of the route. Please bring your own canoe/kayak if possible.

For more information about the Waterways Triathlon, the route, ways to raise sponsorship, the rules, and to book your place please visit www.waterways.org.uk/triathlon or call 01494 783453 ext 611.

Sonia Rolt Memorial Service

Sonia Rolt’s family has issued an invitation to all of Sonia’s canal friends to attend her forthcoming memorial service. The service will be held in the crypt of St Paul’s Cathedral in the City of London on 14th May, starting at 2.30pm. It will be followed by refreshments afterwards at a venue to be announced nearer the time.

Railings on Marple Aqueduct

IWA has responded to Canal & River Trust’s Manchester & Pennine Waterway’s consultation on a proposal to install railings along the offside parapet of Marple Aqueduct as part of the Heritage Lottery funded Revealing Oldknow’s Legacy project. IWA is opposed to the installation of railings on the offside of Marple Aqueduct for the following reasons:

- Railings may encourage trespass into an area that would otherwise be considered out of bounds; the aqueduct is a Grade 1 Listed structure and Scheduled Ancient Monument and there is no historic evidence that it ever had railings;
- The national implications of these proposals, in particular the precedent this would set for other similar aqueducts on the canal network.

IWA’s response also raised a number of points relating to the new safety hazard that would be created by installation of railings, and whether safety concerns could be better dealt with by improved signage such as that in use at Chirk Aqueduct.

You can download and read IWA’s full response on the Association’s website.
IWA West Country Branch Launches Tidal Barrier Campaign

IWA West Country Branch has launched a campaign to make the best use of the proposed tidal surge barrier which is expected to be built on the River Parrett at Bridgwater in Somerset.

Following the severe flooding that occurred last winter on the Somerset Levels and Moors, proposals have now been made to accelerate the construction of a tidal defence barrier on the River Parrett. An earlier report, completed in 2009, envisaged that a barrier would need to be built at some point between 2030 and 2050 in order to protect Bridgwater and its environs from rising sea levels. The updated report, issued by Sedgemoor District Council and the Environment Agency in late 2014, suggests that the barrier could now be built within the next 10 years.

IWA West Country Branch fully supports the construction of a barrier and the accelerated timeframe. However, the proposals currently envisage that the barrier will only be brought into use when it is necessary to prevent a spring or high tide from surging upstream on the river. The Branch believes that the proposed barrier could be used to greater effect and benefit to the community if it is operated differently to also incorporate a lock.

The Branch has suggested that construction of the barrier should be used to:

- facilitate sea-going craft travelling through to Bridgwater and further inland;
- impound some water on the River Parrett during the boating season, thus enabling boating to take place in a relatively safe environment for approximately 20 miles upstream of the barrier, including to Langport and Muchelney;
- contribute to the restoration of parts of the currently un-navigable sections of the River Parrett, River Tone, Sowey River and Westport Canal;
- facilitate the reopening of the link from the River Parrett to the historic Bridgwater Docks and hence to the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal.

The effect of this would be:

- to make Bridgwater and its waterways a destination of choice for sea-going craft;
- enhance the use of the existing waterway corridors for leisure and sporting activities;
- enhance the tourist potential of Bridgwater and the Somerset Levels;
- open up the market for short boating holidays, including the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal which runs for some 15 miles through the countryside to Taunton, the county town of Somerset.

The improved River Parrett would bring greater community involvement and benefits, including increased leisure and sporting use of the waterway (running, walking, cycling, fishing, bird watching, canoeing and kayaking).

Lottery funds for Daniel Adamson...

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded £3.8 million to restore and open to the public the historic North West vessel the Daniel Adamson, the last-surviving steam tug-tender in the UK. The vessel was taken out of service over 30 years ago and was almost scrapped in 2004 before local campaigners stepped in and saved it.

The grant from HLF will now help to restore the Daniel Adamson to full working order, which will start with it being towed from Liverpool’s Albert Docks to dry docks where work can begin. It is hoped the restoration will be completed in 2015 and that the boat will be in service by spring 2016.

Once in service, the public will have a chance to ride on the historic steam ship as part of a programme of cruises on the Mersey, Weaver and Manchester Ship Canal. When not in use, the Daniel Adamson will be moored outside some of the area’s waterside museums as part of a joint education programme.

...and Gloucester Museum

Meanwhile a grant of £790,300 from the Heritage Lottery Fund has been awarded to Gloucester Waterways Museum. The Canal & River Trust plans for the HLF grant to fund three key initiatives that are a part of the museum’s ‘Window on the World’ project. The first strand will see new exhibitions and interactive displays created.

CRT has planned for the £1.5 million revitalisation of the museum to begin this year. It is expected that the Museum will be closed to the public from autumn 2015 until spring 2016. During this time staff will open pop-up museums around Gloucester.

The museum has also received a grant of £100,000 from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Wolfson Foundation, which will be used by CRT to fund the ‘From Birmingham to the Sea’ exhibition and to finance a full refit of two boats in the museum’s collection – Mossdale and George.
Pocklington Canal

Bicentenary Appeal...

Pocklington Canal Amenity Society has launched an appeal fund to raise £250,000 to restore a two-mile section of the Pocklington Canal. The launch marks the bicentenary of the passing of the Act of Parliament enabling the building of the Pocklington Canal, and it is hoped that restoration works will be completed by 2018, in time to mark the bicentenary of the opening of the canal.

The funds are needed to install new wooden lock gates for Thornton and Walton Locks, to ensure an adequate depth of water in the length, to bring the locks up to modern safety standards, and to build lock landings for boaters entering the locks. The Society already has £80,000 in accumulated funds, which leaves £170,000 to be raised.

More information about the appeal and how to get involved is available at the Society’s website – www.pocklingtoncanalsociety.org.

...and Boat Rally

Also to commemorate the bicentenary, a boat rally is to be held on the canal at Melbourne over the weekend of 25th-26th July.

A range of small events will be put on by the Society for boaters joining the rally, although the main attraction will be the pleasure of visiting a very quiet and rural canal at the extremity of the English canal system.

Boaters interested in joining the rally can download an application form from the PCAS website, where further information about the event is also available.

Freight News

Alan Brown

The IW Freight Group is greatly saddened by the death of Alan Brown. Alan’s lifelong interest in waterways and craft, and also railways, undoubtedly derived from his early days in Berkhamsted. He was a member of IWA’s Inland Shipping Group from its early days and we were to benefit hugely from his encyclopaedic knowledge of waterways transport and the craft employed – information which he was always so ready to share with others.

His knowledge was based on the meticulous recording of information about every craft that he saw and the many on which he went aboard to inspect in detail with a particular interest in their engines. It was not unknown for him to disappear on group visits as he made off on individual tours of inspection. Alan was a character in the very best sense of that term, was highly respected by all who knew him and will be greatly missed. It is to be hoped that a suitable home can be found for the invaluable information that he collected over the years and which has always been appreciated as a research base.

Making use of water freight

IWA’s Freight Group has always argued the case for the maximum possible use of waterborne freight wherever the conditions make it feasible and viable. For long the IWFG seemed a lone voice but in the last few years we have ceased to be alone.

Just over a year ago the Freight by Water Group of the Freight Transport Association launched Making Use of Water Freight: a Guide for Shippers – a document that describes how the water transport industry works, the reasons for and benefits of adopting water freight, the options available and case studies to illustrate the argument. The guide points to the great variety of goods that are in fact moved by water – aggregates, fuels, building demolition and construction materials, indivisible heavy loads (machinery, equipment), domestic and industrial waste, mineral and vegetable oils, grains and containers.

Commendably, the Canal & River Trust has adopted a positive approach to freight, set up a Freight Advisory Group and a Freight Steering Group. A selective rather than blanket approach has been adopted and a sub-group established to make a case for Leeds as an inland port where the city planners support the creation of a terminal at Stourton. Lessons learned from this exercise could be applied on other waterways. Very closely involved in all this is the Commercial Boat Operators Association (CBOA) which is an articulate promotion body.

Father Thames Recovering

In March the Port of London Authority reported that 2014 was the fourth successive year of traffic increase on the Thames. Traffic between wharves within Greater London amounted to 3,786,380 tonnes, up 5.7% on 2013 and trade within the Port of London area, which extends beyond the GL area, amounted to 5,502,715 tonnes, up 3.8%.

However, Crossrail’s main tunnelling activity is now complete and spoil removal is much reduced. The Northfleet-Wallasea Island shuttle by coasters has now ceased and from a peak of five or six operating there is now only one – that from Barking to Wallasea. There is an increasing number of waterside redevelopment sites such as Battersea Power Station and Nine Elms and these are already creating demand for removal of demolition material and the import of aggregates and other construction materials. There are many other developments in the pipeline which could also create waterborne freight.

It will be interesting to see if 2015 becomes the fifth year in Father Thames recovery and much may depend on the start of work on Thames Water’s Tideway Tunnel for sewage and flood water disposal, the transport strategy for which puts considerable emphasis on the use of river transport.

Dismantled coal cranes being removed from Battersea Power Station.

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RALLY ROUND UP

As the days lengthen and become warmer, the season of rallies and festivals is well and truly upon us. In our last issue we published a comprehensive round up of the year’s major events, so here we focus on some of the most important rallies and gatherings taking place over the next few months.

2nd-4th May
IWA Canalway Cavalcade
Canalway Cavalcade is a distinctive waterways boaters’ gathering that has been taking place at Little Venice since 1983. Organised by IWA volunteers, there will be an array of boats, trade show stalls and boaters gathering at the festival this May bank holiday weekend. As well as boating activities, look out for Morris dancing, a tasty selection of food stalls, a real-ale bar, little shops selling the weird and the wonderful and most of all a lovely picturesque view of the many beautiful narrowboats that come and join us for this special weekend. So enjoy the fun, it is totally free of charge.

23rd-25th May
Crick Boat Show
IWA will have a major presence at this event – the foremost trade show of the year. The Association’s campaigning activities will be showcased on the IWA stand and new members will be sought. Meanwhile, all existing members will have free access to the Waterways World VIP Lounge.

30th May-1st June
IWA Trailboat Festival
IWA’s National Trailboat Festival will take place at the Westmorland Show Ground, Crooklands, Cumbria, on the northern reaches of the Lancaster Canal. The festival, which is to be hosted and organised by Lancaster Canal Trust, will be part of the ‘Country Fest’ show (visit www.thecountryfest.com), an annual canalside event.

3rd-5th July
IWA Ware Boat Festival
This lively event on the River Lee in Ware is a weekend of fun and frolicks on, in, and around the river and the town. There will be the usual mix of attractions – Friday barbecue, boat parade, boat handling, quiz evening and Sunday open-air service. And don’t forget that the Saturday will be Ware Carnival and Town Fair day, so there’s no chance of being bored over the weekend. Full details on the IWA website.

4th-5th July
Welsh Waterways Festival
IWA’s Shrewsbury District & North Wales Branch is actively involved in the organisation of this event, along with the Montgomery Restoration Trust and the Friends of the Montgomery Canal. Events will be centred on Welshpool but there will various activities along the entire length of the canal. Full details on www.makingwaves2015.co.uk.

Monday with a visit to the Hincaster Tunnel, and hopefully an opening of the restored stretch. Further details on IWA’s website.

27th-28th June
Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally
See page 33.
Warwickshire Branch Opposes Footbridge Demolition

IWA Warwickshire Branch was among many organisations and local residents opposing plans to demolish a footbridge which gives access to and from Coventry Basin. Removal of the footbridge and the replacement of it with a pedestrian crossing were part of plans to redesign Junction 1 of the Coventry ring road that would have seen some of the ring road traffic re-routed past canal basin businesses to create a slip-road.

The plans were largely objected to because of safety concerns associated with pedestrians having to use a crossing rather than the footbridge. Residents of flats near the proposed development were also concerned their properties could end up on an island surrounded by traffic.

However, the latest developments have seen proposed plans halted, as the local council focuses on other projects it expects to get European funding for. Nevertheless, the Council has said it will return to the proposals in the future and that they remain in its long term plan. It also stated that it is aware of the concern the proposals have caused and can use this time to reconsider the details of the plans in light of comments made. IWA Warwickshire Branch continues to monitor the situation.

New Bridge at Mapledurham

The Environment Agency has awarded ECS Engineering Services a project to design, build and install a new bridge to replace the current structure at Mapledurham Weir on the River Thames near Reading. The proposed design from ECS will use proprietary technology to construct a strong, lightweight and durable structure using fibre reinforced polymer (FRP).

When completed, the new bridge should improve the capacity of the local access routes to the Mapledurham Weir and lock complex, as the current structure has insufficient capacity for modern vehicles. Other benefits of the use of FRP in the bridge design include a reduction in build and installation times, a significant reduction in the need for maintenance over the lifetime of the bridge, which is expected to be in excess of 100 years, a 50-year limited warranty on construction and 10-year limited warranty on surface wear.

Webcams on the River Ouse in York

IWA North Riding Branch is keen to promote a useful service available to boaters and the general public that could help when planning journeys to York on the River Ouse. There are two webcams installed along the River Ouse: one at King’s Staith, courtesy of the Lowther Public House, and the other by York City Rowing Club overlooking Museum Gardens towpath, courtesy of the rowing club.

Both can be accessed online and could potentially help in planning a boat journey to York, where it is difficult to moor when the river is in flood. With the ability to easily look at the current situation, boaters could aim for an alternative destination at short notice should river levels suddenly change.

View the York City Rowing Club webcam by visiting www.ycrc.co.uk; for the King’s Staith version go to www.larsondigitalwatercoms.com/locations/york.

River Avon Dredged in Bath

The River Avon in Bath has been dredged for the first time in 20 years to help reduce the flood risk to 238 properties in the city centre. The Environment Agency focused the dredging on the stretch between Windsor and Victoria bridges, after the Agency carried out a survey of flood defences. Large objects abandoned in the river were a hazard to navigation and increased flood risk by disrupting water flow; this project has removed in excess of 120 trollies, cars and mopeds.

Work began in mid April and was completed by the end of the month.
WRG’s John Hawkins is a Hero of the Waterways

In March CRT awarded WRG volunteer, John Hawkins, its Heroes of the Waterways Award. This new award aims to celebrate and recognise the long service of volunteers who have worked to support the canals and rivers.

Over the past 35 years John has been a dedicated waterways volunteer at both a local and national level. Last year alone he spent over 360 hours of his time volunteering with WRG on canal restoration projects across England – from helping restore Black Jacks Bridge on the Grand Union Canal to bricklaying at Meretown Lock on the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals. John is also a regular volunteer with the Rickmansworth Waterways Trust and is part of the ‘Learning at the Lock’ team, which encourages local primary school children to respect and value their waterways, as well as teaching them how to operate locks and about the history of the canals.

New Excavator for WRG

At the end of March WRG’s new 2.7 tonne Volvo excavator arrived. This follows a successful appeal in 2014 that raised nearly £20,000 to fund the purchase. WRG has also bought a new trailer so that the excavator can be easily transported around the country to where it is needed most. This will enable other waterway societies to also make use of the excavator, and save on the costs involved in commercial plant hire... it has already been put to work on the Wilts & Berks Canal.

The new excavator has a busy summer planned – it will be used to train volunteers at WRG’s Training Weekend on the Chesterfield Canal (13th-14th June) along with potential outings with WRG’s ‘Drive a Digger’ publicity stand at the Lancaster Trailboat Festival (30th-31st May) and IWA’s Northampton Festival of Water (29th-31st August).
Volunteers support Grantham Canal’s HLF project

In December the Grantham Canal Society and Canal & River Trust were awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund Grant to restore Locks 14 and 15. WRG is actively supporting this project – through canal camps, weekend digs and provision of plant training. From 27th February to 1st March, 17 volunteers from WRG Forestry spent three days felling large trees and clearing vegetation around Lock 15 to enable restoration work to start. Then over the weekend of 21st-22nd March WRG’s Regional Group ‘Bit in the Middle’ ran a plant training weekend for Grantham Canal Society volunteers on small excavators and dumpers.

WRG will be back again in the summer running three week-long Canal Camps from the 22nd August-12th September. It is hoped these camps will be involved in starting restoration work on the nearside chamber wall of Lock 15 as well as putting in clay dams and water control measures so other work can start.

Big Push at Bowbridge Lock

The restoration of Bowbridge Lock is one of Cotswold Canals Trust’s main priorities for 2015. Completion of this lock, and other structures, on the Phase 1A of the Cotswolds Canals restoration project is a critical precursor for the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for money to pay for the Phase 1B. WRG’s main focus on the Cotswolds this year is Bowbridge Lock. Regional groups have already run several weekend digs at Bowbridge Lock and over the Easter holidays 50 volunteers spent two weeks working on the lock restoration. This summer WRG will be running six week-long Canal Camps to help ensure the lock is returned back to a fully functioning lock by the end of 2015.

Weekend Digs: 18th-19th April – WRG BITM, 16th-17th May – London WRG, 12th-13th September – London WRG.

Lights, Camera, Action

WRG has been busy working in partnership with the Canal & River Trust to produce a 3-4 minute video encouraging safe working on canal restoration sites. It is hoped that the video will be available online by the end of April.

SUMMER CANAL CAMPS

WRG Canal Camps cost just £56 and are open to anyone aged over 18. This year we have 27 Canal Camps planned on 12 different canal restoration projects.

Brickies Wanted for Ashby Canal Camps

Rebuilt your garden wall and fancy taking on the challenge of a bridge – then WRG needs your help. Instead of tackling just one bridge this summer, WRG are taking on the challenge of restoring two bridges on the Ashby Canal. Bridge 62 is just north of Snarestone and once contractors have put in the foundations, WRG volunteers will be helping rebuild the rest of the bridge. Bridge 41 (Jackson’s Bridge) is on the navigable length on the canal and volunteers will be involved in repointing, repairing and replacing damaged brickwork on the historic brick arch bridge.

Dates: 8th-15th August, 15th-22nd August.

A week on the Stover Canal

These camps will give you a chance to get involved right at the start of the restoration of the first of the canal’s five locks. Volunteers will be working at Graving Dock Lock, a Grade 2 listed historic granite built structure, taking down the damaged stonework and beginning the rebuilding process. We’ll also be carrying out some towpath repairs nearby.

Dates: 22nd-29th August, 29th August -5th September.

Blocks and a lock on the Chesterfield Canal

Work at Staveley Town Lock on the Chesterfield Canal is fast paced and ever changing due to the intensive efforts on the Chesterfield Canal Trust volunteers. The aim for WRG volunteers this summer is to give the project an extra boost over the summer – assisting in the construction of the lock as well as helping build 35 metres of new block lined canal wall.

Dates: 25th July-1st August, 1st-8th August.

Nature trail on the Driffield Navigation

Volunteers will be returning in 2015 to help complete a new nature trail, started by WRG in 2014, that will enable walkers to explore the navigation safely, creating an amenity for the local community to enjoy. Work will include clearing vegetation, removing stumps and installing bat and bird boxes. Volunteers will also carry out some minor repairs to locks along the navigation.

Dates: 4th-11th July.

A full list of Canal Camp Dates for 2015 can be found on the WRG website or to request the 2015 Canal Camps Brochure please email enquiries@wrg.org.uk. To book on a Canal Camp visit the WRG website www.wrg.org.uk or call the WRG Head Office Team on 01494 783 453 ext 604.
February on the Chelmer & Blackwater

Waterway Recovery Group kicked off the year with its February Canal Camp on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation. Over the week 14 volunteers, ranging from DoE Gold Award students to WRG regulars, carried out towpath work around the Sandford Lock area, clearing scrub and vegetation. This has enabled Essex County Council to carry out major improvement works, vastly improving the condition of the towpath.

WRG VAN APPEAL

An IWA-led appeal has been launched to help IWA’s Waterway Recovery Group raise £120,000 and it needs your support. The appeal will raise money for four new vans which are essential in the running of canal camps and the work of WRG’s regional groups.

For many years the vans have been supporting waterways restoration by transporting volunteers and equipment to and from restoration sites across the country. Each year WRG attends restoration sites from the Driffield Navigation in Yorkshire to the Stover Canal in Devon, illustrating the sheer mileage the vans must travel to ensure WRG runs effectively. The current vans have been in action for around eight years and it is time to find vans for the next generation of WRG volunteers.

WRG chairman Mike Palmer said: “WRG vans have been a vital part of our operations since the very beginning. Without them we wouldn’t be able to get the right materials and the right people to where they are needed most all across the country. We need your support to help us continue to restore our waterways so that they can be appreciated for generations”.

Take a look at the appeal leaflet inside this issue of Waterways for more information about WRG and the appeal.

Fundraising Activities

VANilla Fudge at Cavalcade (2nd-4th May). If you didn’t already have a reason to come to Can Actors Cavalcade this year, WRG will be manning a stall selling delicious fudge.

Droitwich Walk (Saturday 19th September). Following the success of the sponsored walk earlier this year we are now planning a 22-mile walk around the Droitwich Ring in September.

Grand Union Challenge (27th-28th June). Take on the Grand Union Challenge and walk or run 25km, 50km or 100km on a historic and scenic route alongside the UK’s longest canal. Places cost £29, £39 or £49 depending on the distance with free snacks, drinks and hot food included. Students and over 65s receive a 50% discount on the registration fee. To register or for full details visit www.grandunionchallenge.com or contact Toby Gomm at toby.gomm@waterways.org.uk or on 01494 783453 ext. 611.

Sponsored Walk

Meanwhile, despite heavy rain, over 35 people took part in IWA’s eight-mile sponsored walk around Lapworth in Warwickshire on Sunday 22nd February, to raise funds for the purchase of the new vans. The walkers included IWA’s National Chairman Les Etheridge and his wife Anne, as well as a contingent from WRG who completed the route four times in fancy dress.

Despite muddy conditions along the Grand Union Canal and Stratford upon Avon Canal towpaths and the paths through surrounding countryside, the walkers managed to raise over £2,000 towards WRG’s appeal target of £100,000.

WRG’s Chairman Mike Palmer said: “I was impressed by the generosity and the dedication of the walkers and volunteers. We are grateful for all the money raised.”

IWA would like to thank everyone who participated, volunteered and gave sponsorship to help make the event a success. We would also like to thank Joker’s Masquerade for their generous donation of red morph costumes worn by WRG members who completed four laps of the route.

Ways to Donate

Online: Visit www.wrg.org.uk/wrgvanappeal to donate via the Virgin Money Giving appeal page.

Cheque: Make cheques payable to The Inland Waterways Association and send them to WRG Van Appeal, Island House, Moor Road, Chesham, HP5 1WA.

Debit/Credit Card or Direct Debit: See the appeal leaflet inside this issue of Waterways that explains how to pay by credit/debit card or set up a direct debit. If you would like any further information on the appeal visit www.wrg.org.uk/wrgvanappeal or contact Toby Gomm at Head Office.
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www.newandusedboat.co.uk
In our last issue we focussed on Birmingham’s city centre canals, as well as the BCN Main Lines, New and Old. Here we get well and truly off the beaten track, journeying to the furthest outposts of the unique BCN system...

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Wyrley & Essington Canal
The Wyrley & Essington is the epitome of a contour canal, richly deserving its popular nickname the ‘Curly Wyrley’. It opened in 1797 and originally ran for some 24 miles from Horseley Fields Junction on the BCN Main Line to Huddersford Junction on the Coventry Canal. It was built primarily to carry coal from pits in the Cannock area, and once its trade declined it fell into a state of disrepair.

Even in today’s enlightened ‘leisure age’ it receives comparatively few boating visitors, even though both IWA’s Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch and the BCN Society are both active in promoting its use. 

Arcing around the northern fringes of the Black Country, the W&E links with the Walsall Branch Canal at Birchills Junction and the Cannock Extension at Pelsall Junction, the latter being a most attractive location and the site of a number of well attended boat rallies in recent years. At Catshill Junction, the Daw End Branch of the W&E heads south to join the Rushall Canal, whilst the Anglesey Branch runs north for a couple of miles before terminating in the pleasant setting of Anglesey Basin beside Chasewater Reservoir with its prolific wildlife and good walking opportunities.

Wednesbury Old Canal
Leaving the BCN New Main Line at the evocatively named Pudding Green Junction (which conjures up an entirely false image of an idyllic rural setting complete with village green and thatched pub!), the Wednesbury Old Canal provides a link with the Walsall Branch Canal at Ryders Green Junction and the Cannock Extension at Pelsall Junction, the latter being a most attractive location and the site of a number of well attended boat rallies in recent years. At Catshill Junction, the Daw End Branch of the W&E heads south to join the Rushall Canal, whilst the Anglesey Branch runs north for a couple of miles before terminating in the pleasant setting of Anglesey Basin beside Chasewater Reservoir with its prolific wildlife and good walking opportunities.

Wednesbury Oak Loop
The Wednesbury Oak Loop is navigable for just over a mile from Deepfields Junction to Bradley, the site of the British Waterways/Canal & River Trust lockgate manufacturing workshops. Reed-fringed and exuding a melancholy air, this diversion from the BCN Main Line is perhaps the perfect example of what seasoned travellers find irresistible about the BCN system.

Rushall Canal
Perhaps lacking the winding, ‘mysterious’ character of much of the BCN, the Rushall Canal runs for just under three miles from Longwood Junction – where it joins the Daw End Branch of the Wyrley & Essington Canal – to Rushall Junction with the Tame Valley Canal. Nevertheless, there are nine locks to keep the boater busy and a series of embankments and cuttings adds further interest. In the pound between Locks 6 and 7 once stood Bell Wharf, most unusual in being one of the very few largely agricultural basins to be found on the BCN network.

Walsall Canal
Running from Ryders Green Junction to Walsall, the Walsall Canal has undergone major cosmetic improvements in recent years and has consequently become a much valued local amenity today, popular with anglers, dog walkers and runners.

Nevertheless, engulfed in new housing developments, bordered by motorways and lacking much of its former industrial character, it is rarely cruised for its own sake, except by the most diehard BCN enthusiasts.

But Town Wharf, local point of much dynamic regeneration, is a particularly worthwhile destination at the end of the Town Arm. It is overlooked by a thriving retail park and lies close to many of Walsall’s premier attractions, including a couple of museums and a splendid art gallery. Secure moorings are provided for visiting boats.
The Walsall Canal has undergone major cosmetic improvements in recent years and has consequently become a much valued local amenity today, popular with anglers, dog walkers and runners.
Opened in 1844, a full 72 years after the Birmingham Canal, the Tame Valley Canal is best thought of as the M6 Toll of its day.

Like the new motorway, it was a northern bypass of a notorious congestion blackspot – in this case, the Farmer’s Bridge flight of the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal. Arguably, the Tame Valley is the greater achievement; where the motorway follows the lie of the land, the canal blasts a straight line through the scenery in cuttings and embankments. There is nothing quite like it on the BCN, and its exploration makes a fascinating cruise or walk.

Leaving the Walsall Canal at Tame Valley Junction, the Tame Valley Canal resolutely points a straight course to its first destination of Rushall Junction. Like the New Main Line, the Tame Valley nominally has a towpath on each side, though in some parts the grassy path barely merits the name. No matter – it all adds to the almost rural air of the canal, and the ever-present herons don’t seem to mind. Just south after Hateley Heath Aqueduct is another surprise; a 13th century timber-framed manor house, now a pub.

Rushall Junction itself is almost picture-postcard perfect, an effect only spoilt when you look at a map to find the M6 and M5 are barely 200 yards away. (At one point, you even cross the M5 on an aqueduct.) The map would also imply that the next two miles to the Perry Barr flight are deeply urban. But from the canal, you see only a deep, wooded cutting with bridge arches high above, followed by a tall embankment offering good views over the valley.

The Perry Bar Locks themselves lie adjacent to Perry Park with its impressive athletics stadium, home to international events such as Grand Prix meetings and Olympic trials. Bookended by numbered BCN cottages, the flight (seven, then four, then two) starts off defiantly rural, then becomes more urban as it descends to Salford Junction, from where the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal and the Saltley Cut offer alternative (and very different) routes into central Birmingham.
Dudley No 1 Canal

The Dudley Canals were amalgamated with the BCN back in 1846, but they nevertheless retain an entirely different character from their northern cousins on the other side of the Rowley Hills.

The Dudley No 1 Canal leaves the Old Main Line at Tipton Junction. Close by is the superb Black Country Living Museum (see right) where excellent moorings are available for visiting craft. Beyond is the northern portal of Dudley Tunnel, first constructed in 1775 to provide access to sizeable limestone deposits. Ten years later it was extended to link up with the Dudley Canal at Park Head. For many years electric trip boats offered the only means of entering the tunnel, but in 1992 it reopened to general traffic, first by way of shafting through and more latterly via a tug service. Strict gauge limitations have to be adhered to however – for details contact the Dudley Canal Trust (0121 557 6263, www.dudleycanaltrust.org.uk).

At the southern end of the 3,172yd tunnel, the three Park Head locks take you to Park Head Junction with the Dudley No 2 Canal. It is a delightful location, with its much photographed pumphouse.

The Waterfront is, in many ways, the latter day cause celebre of the No 1 Canal. A multi-million pound development, it occupies the site of the former Round Oak steelworks and features pubs, restaurants and a varied mix of commercial enterprises. Good moorings are available, as they are at the nearby Merry Hill Shopping Centre.

Black Country Living Museum

The story of the Black Country is distinctive because of the scale, drama, intensity and varied nature of the industrial might that was unleashed. It first emerged in the 1830s, creating the first industrial landscape anywhere in the world. It is this that the Black Country Living Museum depicts so evocatively.

The museum is now one of the finest and largest open-air museums in the UK. From comparatively humble beginnings, some 26 acres of varied exhibits and historic scenes have been authentically created. What exists now is a ‘place’ – with a village and charismatic residents to chat with; trams to ride; games to play; things being made; stories to hear. It is both nostalgia and entertainment rolled into one, and worthy of a day out, whether you come by boat or land-based transport.

For further information, including opening times and admission prices, telephone 0121 557 9643 or visit www.bclm.co.uk.
Leaving behind these intrusively 21st century surroundings, the canal descends the eight locks of the Delph flight to Black Delph Junction and an end-on meeting with the Stourbridge Canal. From here the BCN is left behind and boaters can proceed to Stourton Junction and the more rural waters of the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal.

Netherton Tunnel Branch
Leaving the New Main Line at Dudley Port Junction, the Netherton Branch heads straight as an arrow to its iconic tunnel. Opened in 1858, it was the last canal to be built in Britain. At 3,027 yards, it is today the fourth longest navigable bore in the country, exceeded only by Standedge (Huddersfield Narrow), Dudley and Blisworth (Grand Union).

Dudley No 2 Canal
The Dudley No 2 Canal once ran for 11 miles, linking with the Worcester & Birmingham Canal at Selly Oak. Today its length is restricted to just over five lockless miles as it arcs around Netherton to Windmill End Junction (with the Netherton Tunnel Branch), another well known BCN location that has frequently hosted boat rallies.

Lapal Tunnel’s closure in 1917 may have closed the through route to the Worcester & Birmingham Canal, but commercial traffic continued to Coombeswood until 1969. And, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the Coombeswood Canal Trust, leisure boating keeps the canal very much alive through to its present day terminus at Hawne Basin on the outskirts of Halesowen.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the Dudley No 2 Canal’s route is the object of an ambitious restoration project led by the Lapal Canal Trust (see right).
Lapal Canal Restoration

What is sometimes referred to as the Lapal Canal is in fact the easternmost section of the Dudley No 2 Canal between Coombeswood Basin at Halesowen and the Worcester & Birmingham Canal at Selly Oak. Following the collapse of the 3,795yd Lapal Tunnel in 1917, the link between the two canals was severed, although this section was not officially abandoned until the 1950s.

The Lapal Canal Trust is engaged upon an ambitious project to restore the link, the long term plan being to bypass the two-mile tunnel via two flights of ten locks each. The Trust’s optimism is certainly not misplaced, not least because most of the route is in local authority ownership, and some progress has already been made, particularly at the eastern end.

For the last two years, the Trust has been engaged in discussions over plans to develop the Battery Park site in Selly Oak which would include part of the Dudley No 2 Canal. These plans have attempted to meet the needs of several key stakeholders including Sainsbury’s and a medical sciences development park and have now received planning consent. Negotiations are continuing with the company (the Harvest Partnership) that is charged with developing the whole site. This would require the repositioning of the junction of the Lapal Canal with the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. The Battery Park site requires extensive land remediation which is now underway. Further required preparatory work has already begun in the adjoining section which would take the restored Lapal Canal into the attractive confines of Selly Oak Park.

For further details of the project visit www.lapal.org.
Little more than a mile long, the Titford is one of the shorter BCN navigations to merit the name ‘Canal’.

But its six locks, climbing to the highest point on the BCN, are perhaps the best way for the curious first-timer to get a taste for venturing off the beaten track. Completely unsanitised, it is immediately attractive in parts, beguilingly interesting in others, and boasts more than its fair share of industrial heritage on the banks.

The Titford leaves the Old Main Line under the M5 motorway, so visitors will have had to climb the three Smethwick Locks first. Pause a minute before starting the ascent, for Oldbury Junction is significant in itself. It was the base of famous carriers Thomas Clayton (Oldbury), 1889-1966, whose tanker narrowboats carried tar from gasworks to the Springfield tar distillery opposite. The distillery and boatyard are no longer traceable, but there’s one piece of heritage you will notice as you enter Oldbury Bottom Lock: the right-hand lock sides are flush with the line of the towpath, rather than curving in at each chamber.

After three locks, look for the footbridge indicating the old arm to James Crow’s chemical works: the arm was called the Jim Crow Branch, and from this comes the flight’s nickname, “the Crow”. Three more locks and you reach the top, with the pump-house restored as a meeting place for the BCN Society, and moorings established on the short Tat Bank Branch. This is actually a feeder channel from Rotton Park Reservoir.

A long out-of-use, overgrown freight railway – another common BCN sight – crosses just in front of the Langley Maltings. This was a working brewery from 1870 to 2006.

The terminus is at hand – and this was the location for two very successful IWA National Festivals in 1978 and 1982. The canal splits into two truncated branches, the Causeway Green on your left, the Portway straight on; between them are Titford Pools, the reservoir that hosted the Nationals; and roaring overhead is the M5 again.

Further Information

Pause a minute before starting the ascent, for Oldbury Junction is significant in itself. It was the base of famous carriers Thomas Clayton (Oldbury)
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Design

Narrowboats were designed specifically to be used on the narrow canal system that was started around 1770. The canals were built by a number of private companies and, in the very early days, each had its own standard dimensions for locks, bridges and other structures.

As it became apparent that a national network was being created, the various companies realised that they would have to agree a common gauge so that boats could travel from one end of the system to the other without having to tranship their goods. It was agreed that the boats would be approximately 70ft long and 7ft wide and the locks would be just a few inches bigger in both directions to accommodate them.

It is sometimes suggested that the reason canal locks were so much smaller than river locks was to reduce the amount of water that was used every time a boat passed through them. While it is true that using as little water as possible was a major consideration on the early canals, this is probably not the real reason. A 14ft wide lock would use twice as much water as one that was 7ft wide but a 14ft wide boat would carry twice the amount of cargo so the amount of water used per ton of cargo is about the same for both locks.

For a more likely reason, we must look at the engineering problems faced by the early canal engineers. One of these, James Brindley, followed the contours of the land as closely as he could to minimise the amount of soil that had to be moved. This strategy served him well until he came to a hill. If it was relatively small, he could go round it, or a cutting might be possible. For a larger hill, like the one at Harecastle near Stoke-on-Trent, the only viable solution was to build a tunnel.

Tunnelling was a difficult and dangerous job in the late eighteenth century. Everything had to be done by hand in almost total darkness and in ground that was often unpredictable and treacherous. Keeping the dimensions to the absolute minimum was the only way to build a tunnel that would not collapse and could be completed in a reasonable time.

Opting for long, narrow boats brought with it several other advantages. The canals required a strip of land to be acquired for the channel and the towpath. Narrower boats could operate in a narrower channel so less land was needed. The many thousands of bridges over the new canals could also be smaller and therefore less expensive. Finally, long, slender boats ‘swim’ better so they are easier to handle than shorter, fatter ones.

The amount of cargo that could be transported by a narrowboat was around 30 tons. This was less than the maximum that a horse was capable of pulling but it was still many times greater than the amount that could be carried by the only alternative at the time – a horse and cart.
Evolution
The first narrowboats were simple, flat-bottomed hulls that came to a graceful point at either end. In some cases, the rudder could be fitted to either end to avoid the need to turn the boat round. As boats began to be used for longer trips, a small cabin was built at the back so that the crew could take shelter from the weather, eat a meal and possibly spend the night.

The canals enjoyed a period of great prosperity until the railways became established in the 1840s. A train could carry even more goods than a narrowboat and it could do it much more quickly. Canal companies soon realised that they would have to reduce their rates in order to compete and this meant cutting the boatmen’s wages.

During the boom years, boatmen could afford to have a cottage ‘on the bank’ and employ one or two crew members. With their income reduced, there was no alternative but to leave their homes and move their families onto the boats. As well as saving on rent, the boatmen did not need a paid crew as their wives and children took on their duties.

The rear cabin became the home for two adults and any number of children. It was enlarged slightly to allow for this but only to about nine feet long as any more would have reduced the amount of goods that could be carried. If the family was particularly large, a small cabin might be added at the front of the boat to provide extra sleeping accommodation.

What it lacked in size, the rear cabin made up for by ingenious planning. Every piece of furniture had at least two uses – the cupboard doors hinged downwards to become a table top or part of a bed, and the coal box by the rear doors doubled as a step. Once the design had been perfected, it was so successful that it was still being used well into the twentieth century.

Propulsion
The earliest means of propulsion was horsepower in its most literal sense. Depending on the waterway and the distances travelled, horses, mules or donkeys were used to pull the boats from the towpath.

Once the boat was moving, a horse could pull a laden narrowboat without too much difficulty; the hardest part was getting it going from rest. Horses would learn to push hard into the padded collar until the boat started moving, after which they could resume their normal pace.

Another problem arose when the boat needed to go through a tunnel. Unless the tunnel had a towpath – and not many of the early ones did – the horse had to be uncoupled and taken over the top of the hill. The boat was then ‘legged’ through the tunnel by two crew members lying on planks projecting from the front of the boat and pushing with their feet against the tunnel walls on either side.
The Steam Age
The nineteenth century saw a great increase in the use of steam power so it was inevitable that it would be applied to narrowboats sooner or later. The two main stumbling blocks were that the early steam engines were too large to fit into the narrow hull, and the main form of propulsion – the paddle wheel – was impractical in locks. Both of these were overcome by the 1850s with the introduction of smaller, more efficient engines and screw propellers. The boiler, engine and fuel were located in front of the boatman’s living quarters in an extended cabin.

Steam powered boats did away with the need for horses and the expense of feeding and stabling them. They also had enough spare power to tow un-powered boats making even more horses redundant.

As with so many advances in technology, there were also a few drawbacks. First, although the boiler, engine and the coal or coke used to fuel them could now be fitted into the confines of a narrowboat, they took up as much space as 10 tons of cargo. Second, an additional crew member was required to stoke the boiler and manage the engine. Third, steam boats could pass through tunnels with less effort but, if the boiler was coal-fired, it produced a great deal of smoke and there are accounts of fatalities due to asphyxiation. Lastly, the propeller created more wash and this had the effect of eroding the banks of the canal.

Diesel Power
Some companies like Fellows, Morton and Clayton persevered with steam but even their enthusiasm started to wane when the first internal combustion engines appeared on the scene in the early part of the twentieth century. The Swedish company, Bolinder, produced a two-stroke, semi-diesel engine that was started by heating a metal bulb projecting from the cylinder head with a blowlamp for about ten minutes. The engine was then turned by kicking a spring-loaded stud on the heavy flywheel. If this was not timed just right, the flywheel could bounce back and throw the hapless boatman through the side doors and into the canal, possibly breaking his leg in the process. Reversing the engine also required some skill. There was no gear box so the engine had to be stopped momentarily and made to turn in the opposite direction.

In spite of these little eccentricities, the Bolinder was popular with boatmen as it took up far less room than a steam engine and, once started, it would run all day with relatively little attention. Bolinders have an easily recognisable sound because the speed of the engine is varied by making the fuel injector miss the occasional stroke. This produces an irregular rhythm that has been likened to a rumba.

Bolinders were eventually replaced in the 1930s by more conventional two cylinder diesel engines like the Russell Newbery, National and Lister, many of which are still going strong.

Tugs
On canals that have long lock-free stretches like the Birmingham Canal Navigation, small tugs with large engines were used to pull trains of up to five laden boats and even more empty ones. The tugs were either purpose-built or shortened working boats.
Horse Boats And Motor Boats

Horse boats have a pointed stern with a large rudder or ‘ellum’ hung on the stern post. The blade of the rudder has to be large because the speed of the water passing over it is determined by the speed of the boat and that is fairly slow. The curved part of the ellum that the boatman uses to steer the boat can be removed and reversed so that it points upwards to make it easier to get in and out of the cabin.

The cabin is quite low because, when travelling unladen, the whole boat rides high in the water. If the cabin was any taller, it could be damaged going through low bridges.

When engines were first installed in horse boats, the propeller drew air bubbles down through the water which reduced its efficiency. A new design was developed that had a rounded stern above the waterline, projecting over the propeller. This part is known as the counter. Underneath the counter, the sides of the hull meet at an acute angle at the stern and this part is known as the swim.

The rudder passes through the counter, immediately behind the propeller. It is much smaller than on a horse boat because the fast flow of water from the propeller makes the rudder more effective.

Since the engine room was forward of the boatman’s cabin, the propeller shaft had to pass through the cabin under a raised floor to reach the stern. If the cabin height had been the same as in the horse boat, the headroom would have been very restricted. Fortunately, the weight of the engine and fuel tank ensured that the stern of the boat was always fairly low in the water so the cabin could be increased in height without the risk of damage at bridges.

It became standard practice for motor boats to tow an un-powered boat to double the load being moved. Old horse boats were used and were renamed ‘butties’ meaning ‘mates’ of the motor boats. As well as being able to transport a larger cargo, operating a pair of boats was an advantage to boatmen with large families as they had two cabins for sleeping.
Construction
Early narrowboats were made of a combination of oak and elm. Oak was used for the sides as this timber could withstand the inevitable bumps and scrapes picked up while going through the locks. The bottom was made from 3-inch thick elm which is very durable provided it is kept constantly wet.

The side planks were butted together rather than lapped, and the gaps caulked with oakum and tar. This type of construction made it easier to replace a plank if it became rotten or damaged.

During the nineteenth century, wood was steadily replaced by riveted iron as the preferred material for boatbuilding, and narrowboats were no exception. Iron was thinner, stronger and, provided it was well maintained, more durable than timber. Aiming to have the best of both worlds, many boats were built with iron sides and elm bottoms and these were known as composites.

Brightly Painted Boats
Two of the most eye-catching features of working narrowboats are the bold lettering and geometric designs on the outsides, and the familiar roses and castles decoration inside the cabin and on the boatman’s possessions.

Before the railway era, narrowboats were probably fairly plain with only the company name and boat name on the side. Some of the early companies also had geometric designs like large diamonds on their boats. This may have been a trade mark or an easy way of identifying them to the boatmen.

When the boatmen moved their families on board, their wives wanted to make the boat as homely as possible. The cabins were so small that free-standing ornaments were not practical so they resorted to colourful painting to brighten them up.

In the mid nineteenth century, there was a fashion for paintings depicting romantic landscapes with castles and lakes, and for tea trays with swags of roses and other flowers. It is possible that boating families would have seen these and used them as inspiration for their decoration.

What may have started as a crib gradually evolved into a stylised interpretation that has a life and spontaneity all of its own. Garlands of roses were painted on door panels and drawer fronts while castle scenes occupied larger panels and were occasionally seen on the outsides of the boats. Water cans, handbowls and dippers were also given the Roses and Castles treatment.

As the number of carrying companies increased, they wanted to give their boats a distinct identity so as to differentiate them from their competitors. The name of the company, and often where it was based, appeared on the cabin side in bigger and more flamboyant lettering in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
Another tradition, which may have developed from the diamonds seen on the early boats is the use of geometric designs and playing card suit symbols. Diamonds were painted in a band down the centre of the cabin roof and on the top plank around the bow where they were joined by suns and moons. Hearts, clubs, spades and circles adorned the hatch lids and slides. The range of colours was limited to red, blue, yellow and white with great care being taken to put light colours against dark for maximum effect.

When the canals were nationalised in 1948, the boats were given a uniform livery of blue and yellow. To add insult to injury, the roses and castles were applied as transfers rather than being individually painted. Sixty years on, these boats are now looked upon in a more kindly light, although many have since been returned to their original splendour.

**Cargoes**

At the start of the canal era, it would be easier to say what types of cargo were not carried. Narrowboats were particularly suited to transporting pottery and porcelain as it was less likely to be broken than on a horse-drawn cart driven along a rutted road. Josiah Wedgwood was quick to recognise this and actively encouraged the building of the canals through the Potteries.

Perishable goods were transported by fly-boats which had a crew of four and ran day and night, changing horses as they went. They travelled at over twice the speed of other canal boats and took precedence over them at locks.

In later years, the canals lost much of their traffic to the railways and then to road transport. Nevertheless, they were still used for bulk cargoes that were needed on a daily basis but where the time taken from source to destination was not critical. A good example of this was coal supplied to power stations.

Some specially built boats were used as tankers for carrying liquids like tar, creosote and ammonia solution from gas works to tar distillers. In this case, the hull was decked over at gunwale level and there were hatches for loading and unloading the liquids.

Canal carrying stopped almost entirely after the hard winter of 1963, although there are still a few small companies supplying coal and diesel fuel in the time-honoured way.

**Owning A Working Boat**

Original working narrowboats can still be bought from private owners and specialist brokers. Depending on the condition, they are sometimes offered at what appear to be quite reasonable prices. However, you should not underestimate the amount of maintenance that these boats need. Unless you have lots of spare time, some engineering skills and very deep pockets, they are best left to those who have.
Where To See Working Boats

It is estimated that there are about 900 historic working boats on the canal system and many of them are maintained in original working condition. They are mainly privately owned and the Canal & River Trust has a small fleet operated by volunteers. The best way to see the largest number in the shortest time is to visit one of the many working boat rallies held throughout the year.

IWA CANAL CAVALCADE
2nd-4th May 2015
W2 6NG*
Held at Little Venice in London. This attracts boats of all types including working boats. www.waterways.org.uk/events_festivals/canalway_cavalcade_2015. See also page 12.

RICKMANSWORTH CANAL FESTIVAL
16th-17th May
WD3 1NY*
Held on the Grand Union Canal between Batchworth and Stockers locks, this event features a boat tug-of-war. www.rwt.org.uk.

MIDDLEWICH FOLK & BOAT FESTIVAL
19th-21st June
CW10 9BQ*
As the name implies, this Festival offers a heady mix of working boats and folk music with free admission to all the gigs. www.midfest.org.uk/

BRAUNSTON HISTORIC NARROWBOAT RALLY
27th-28th June
NN11 7JH*
Held over the last weekend in June each year. Around 80 boats can be seen moored and taking part in the daily parade along the canal. As well as the boats, there are plenty of canal related activities and, of course, a beer tent. (see opposite). www.braunstonmarina.co.uk/events/historicboattrally.aspx.

AUDLEM FESTIVAL OF TRANSPORT
25th-26th July
CW3 0DX*
This festival not only attracts working boats in the pound by Audlem Mill but also has vintage cars, vans, trucks and buses. Audlem is on the Shropshire Union Canal in Cheshire. www.audlem-aset.org/events/transport-festival.html.

SHACKERSTONE FAMILY FESTIVAL
5th-6th September
CV13 6NP*
This festival celebrates all forms of vintage transport as well as having a fairground. Shackerstone is in Leicestershire by the side of the Ashby Canal. www.shackerstonefestival.co.uk/event.htm.

OPEN WEEKEND AT THE STOURBRIDGE BONDED WAREHOUSE
17th-18th October
DY8 4LU*
This event has working boats, steam traction engines, street organs and vintage cars together with a craft and collectors fair. The Bonded Warehouse is just north of the Stourbridge ring road. www.thebondedwarehousestourbridge.co.uk/open_weekend.html.

The Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally attracts around 80 boats.
Preparations are well under way for the 13th Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally & Canal Festival – co-sponsored by Braunston Marina and Towpath Talk. From its small beginnings in 2003, the event has become the premier such rally and festival on the English canals. Its formula is now much copied, with similar events springing up all over the canal network. This is good for the canals – but the Braunston Rally remains unique, with by far and away the most historic narrowboats.

The rally’s location is at the heart of the canal network, in the beautiful setting of Braunston Marina, close by the picturesque village of Braunston. But most importantly for boaters and visitors, the site enables boats to parade in a sort of figure of eight. The twice-daily parades of 80 or more of these ancient canal leviathans is a challenge for the steerers, and thus a spectacular sight for visitors and photographers alike, with so many vantage points along the canal and within the marina, including the famous waterside beer tent – the ‘Wet Dock’.

The event also inspires the restoration and ongoing maintenance of the surviving fleet of historic narrowboats, 150 of which have already attended various rallies over the years, with some not seen before already booked in for this year. Three of the regular attendees are having makeovers this winter, with Raymond and Sculptor both having the work done in our large dry dock at Braunston Dock. Both these craft are sponsored by Braunston Marina.

Another historic narrowboat that has received a major makeover this winter is the Fellows, Morton & Clayton butty Kildare, which is paired with President – the last surviving steam working narrowboat. The pair will be the star of the rally which will have the theme of the surviving Fellows, Morton & Clayton fleet, several of which predate WWI, including President and Kildare.

Following the death of Sonia Rolt on 22nd October 2014 – a WWII canal veteran and wife of the canal author Tom Rolt – a special gathering will be held of the four surviving narrowboats on which she worked on the canals from 1943 to 1951. A plaque will be unveiled at 10am on the Saturday morning of the rally to record Sonia’s Braunston years from 1946 to 1951, when she was married to her boatman husband George Smith. They were then working for coal contractors Samuel Barlows. The plaque will be jointly unveiled by representatives of Sonia and George Smith’s families.

We are pleased to announce that Richard Parry, chef executive of the Canal & River Trust, has accepted our invitation to open the rally. He has agreed to don working boatmen’s clothes to perform the traditional opening by steering President, with Kildare in tow, into the marina from the Grand Union Canal and declaring the rally open – to the fine sounds of church bells of Braunston and the Daventry brassband. Kildare will be steered by CRT Chairman Tony Hales, who is a regular attendee at the Braunston rallies, and has already opened the rally in 2011. He too will be wearing working boatmen’s clothes. The traditional spectacular opening should make for a splendid start to what promises to be one of the foremost canal rallies of the year. Everyone is welcome!
We publish on these pages a round up of just some of the recent activities carried out by IWA branches around the country. If your event isn’t included here, do let the Branch Campaign Team at Head Office know, ideally in advance so that they can assist with publicity and planning where that would be helpful. Alison Smedley (alison.smedley@waterways.org.uk) covers branches in the four regions in the north of the country, and Stefanie Preston (stefanie.preston@waterways.org.uk) is the contact for branches in the south.

CHELMSFORD BRANCH

Essex Waterways Ltd hosted a Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) Canal Camp in February as well as several weekend work parties, with Essex WRG and Chelmsford Branch, at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015. The volunteers carried out vegetation management work on the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation during the winter period to help maintain the navigation. The towpaths along the navigation are becoming busier each year and clearance work is much appreciated by the many users. The work has also enabled Essex County Council to carry out informal surfacing between Barnes Lock and Sandford and will assist with future access for Essex Waterways Ltd’s Avant cutter.

Work in the Elms Farm Heybridge area was also completed on 7th-8th March when Essex WRG was joined by Chelmsford Branch and the Sandford Boating Club, with 26 volunteers on site on the Saturday and Sunday.

WEST COUNTRY BRANCH

West Country Branch volunteers have spent time training with CRT recently. Volunteers have covered everything from the safe use of power tools to hedge laying taster sessions and hope to move on to boat handling. The Branch’s skill base is steadily growing, helping it to undertake a wider range of tasks along the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal.

In addition to training, volunteers have been busy cutting back a large amount of vegetation to improve towpath access and maintain a healthy hedge. The vegetation cuttings have then been used to create a dead hedge, which will act as a safe haven for local wildlife. The branch has also litter picked several areas along the Canal.

The branch’s success continues to draw in new volunteers, keen to join the community project, and the group even got a visit from the Mayor of Taunton Deane, David Durdan, a supporter of the branch and all its work.

Volunteers build a dead hedge from cleared vegetation during a West Country Branch work party.
NORTHAMPTON BRANCH

Northampton Branch held four work parties in February, two of which focused on reinstating one of the historic mile markers on the Northampton Arm of the Grand Union Canal. The marker, which had become buried over the years, needed digging out and re-setting. After the first day, the volunteers reached the 12in diameter plate concreted in with broken bricks and it became clear a second day’s work would be needed as well as a jackhammer. With the right tools for the job on the second day, the post came out and was reinstated at a proper height, before being given a good lick of paint.

The group also had two litter picks during the month that collected a huge amount of rubbish. Volunteers at the first litter pick filled around 50 bags, and around 40 were filled at the second.

BIRMINGHAM, BLACK COUNTRY & WORCESTERSHIRE BRANCH

Birmingham, Black Country & Worcestershire Branch has been busy litter picking the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal. The Branch began at Lime Kiln Bridge in January and went as far as Caldwell Lock, collecting about eight bags of rubbish. In February, the volunteers covered around three miles of the canal towpath between Falling Sands and Stourport. This time the team collected over twelve bags of rubbish all destined for the nearby council refuse depot. Volunteers were keen to get involved and came from as far afield as Malvern and Quinton.

CHESTER & MERSEYSIDE BRANCH

In January and February, Chester & Merseyside Branch volunteers completed the clearance of overhanging vegetation along a stretch of the Shropshire Union Canal that they had begun in Chester in December 2014. The clearance led to the rediscovery of the lost offside bank coping stones at Union Terrace (Chester Cow Lane Bridge). Throughout the project, the volunteers were especially careful to leave a selection of suitable areas for wildlife habitat.

Having successfully finished the vegetation clearance project, the group was able to move on to the next task at Chester Dee Lock. The branch has arranged for the installation of a tidal gauge at the lock and the work party team has begun work to clear the area in preparation.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE & DERBYSHIRE BRANCH

On Friday 27th and Saturday 28th March, volunteers gathered for the annual Erewash Canal clean up. Both days, the first led by Erewash Canal Preservation & Development Association and the second by Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Branch, were once again a great success. Despite spells of wet weather, the volunteers covered the distance from the Gallows Inn public house to Trent Lock over the two days, a distance of about eight miles, grappling rubbish from the canal bed and litter picking as they went.

On Friday, about 20 volunteers between Gallows Inn and Sandiacre Lock filled half the pan supplied by Canal & River Trust with bicycles, chairs, tyres and other debris. The opportunity was also taken to clear offside overhanging vegetation in key spots, which has had a significant effect on opening out the restricted channel. On the Saturday, about 20 volunteers were also joined by a section of the 1st Sawley Scouts and their leaders as part of work towards their community badge. Saturday’s efforts saw a similar haul of rubbish and debris, which filled the remainder of the pan, although comments were made on how the amount of rubbish had reduced compared to previous years – a welcome result of the group’s hard work. The canal is now looking ready for spring and will hopefully be enjoyed more and more as the weather improves.

WARWICKSHIRE BRANCH

Warwickshire Branch held its latest spring canal clean up of the Grand Union Canal and the adjoining towpath between Tachbrook Road and St Mary’s road in Leamington at the beginning of March.

A group of 60 volunteers used grappling hooks to haul a variety of items from the canal bed. These included the usual selection of shopping trolleys and bicycles, plus two van doors and axles, a wheelie bin, a water butt, three motorcycles, lots of pipe and a mixture of metal and plastic. In addition, a litter pick produced over 30 black sacks of rubbish.

The volunteers were made up of IWA members, Warwick University students, St Mary’s Road residents, Love Leamington members and local residents; all were supported by Canal & River Trust staff and a CRT work boat.

As well as filling the CRT boat with rubbish, two large trailer loads of metal were carted away to be recycled. Local MP Chris White made a visit and was very impressed by the volume and variety of the collection.

It is planned to continue the clean up of the canal and newly laid towpath in Leamington in the autumn with a further event concentrating on the section from St Mary’s Road towards Radford Semele. If you would like to help or would like details of other, similar events please email info.warwickshire@waterways.org.uk.
North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch

North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch has certainly had a busy start to 2015. Its monthly work parties on the Cheshire Locks have a new leader, Andy Hellyar Brook, who has jumped straight into work. The group began by finishing work at Lock 61 at Malkins Bank in January, ready to move onto the Red Bull flight in February. The branch’s aim is to have the whole Cheshire Locks flight up to a high standard within the next three years.

The first work party on the Red Bull flight attracted two new volunteers, despite poor weather, and the group made a good start clearing vegetation around Lock 44. Come March’s work party, the weather was much improved and the team spent the day at Locks 44 and 45 cutting back overgrown vegetation, cleaning setts and copings and preparing for painting. Additionally, the volunteers carried out another litter pick.

The branch held its annual Stoke-on-Trent canal clean up on the Trent & Mersey Canal on 8th February. Volunteers were met with thick fog and an iced-over canal at Middleport, where this year’s event was focused, but this did not deter the group, who used the first few throws of the grappling hook to break through the ice.

Finally, North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch have started another monthly work party at Burslem Port. To date, this has been very successful. The first work party was attended by four volunteers, later joined by volunteers they had met during the Stoke-on-Trent canal clean up. A passing group of young people on a community payback scheme also participated, together with their supervisor.

In March, the group finished vegetation clearance around the junction area and started to work along the line of the canal. The volunteers cut more than they could burn in the day, showing just how productive they had been. The view from the towpath of the Trent & Mersey Canal to the centre of Burslem has now been revealed and it is possible to start to get a sense of the junction as a destination.

Overall, the branch has had a very busy start to 2015, and it promises to stay that way as the year goes on.

Root Out Himalayan Balsam This Summer!

IWA’s annual summer Himalayan Balsam Campaign begins with an Awareness Week from 16th-24th May, ahead of its main growing season, when the public will be asked for help to root out the invasive plant.

During Himalayan Balsam Awareness Week, IWA will spread the message about the damage this deceptively pretty but destructive plant can cause to river and canal banks, biodiversity and waterway habitats. Through social media and the Association’s website, IWA will share identification tips, interesting facts and information on how people can help by joining a Himalayan Balsam pull on their local waterway.

Education plays a key role in reducing the prevalence of Himalayan Balsam and IWA’s resources, which will be publicised throughout the week, are an interesting and helpful way for the public to learn more about the plant, how to report a sighting and how to get involved with removing it. IWA volunteers gave over 900 hours to the campaign last year and freed over ten miles of waterway from the plant. IWA branches are already busy planning pulls so keep an eye on IWA’s website for more information about these events that will run mainly between late May and the end of July.

To learn more about the invasive plant make sure you follow IWA on Facebook (facebook.com/inlandwaterwaysassociation) and Twitter (@IWA_UK) and keep an eye out for the #rootout2015 hashtag during Himalayan Balsam Awareness Week.

Manchester Branch

Manchester Branch volunteers arrived on the Lower Peak Forest Canal for the branch’s monthly work party in February. Typically, for this time of year the weather was cold and wet, but this did not deter the group who quickly got ready to start work at Bridge 1. The aim was to get to the junction with the Ashton Canal by luncheon, having litter picked the route along the way. Working hard, the volunteers had filled 12 litter bags by the time they reached the picnic area opposite the museum and filled a further ten at this spot before heading home for the day.

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CRICK BOAT SHOW & WATERWAYS FESTIVAL AT CRICK MARINA
IWA member Janet Swabey looks back to 1955 to recall a memorable holiday on the Shropshire Union Canal...

The 'barge' in question was a narrowboat, MV Bridget of Gloucester, owned by Charles Ballinger. She usually carried milk crumb from one of several milk factories in the Midlands to the wharf at Bournville, on the Worcester & Birmingham Canal. However, MV Bridget was not travelling her usual canal – nor with her usual cargo. The cover seen in the photograph was constructed in the Bournville workshops especially for the three weeks when the 'Barge Camp School' operated.

In August 1955 I was one of a total of 72 fortunate young Cadbury employees selected to spend a week on the Shropshire Union Canal, travelling between Market Drayton and Christleton, on the outskirts of Chester. We were a girls' group of 24 preceded by a boys' week and followed by another group of boys.

By day we travelled on the boat, but sometimes when Mr Ballinger (as we were instructed to call him) said that it was suitable we chose to walk on the towpath. Each evening we put up tents in a canalside field and Harry, another Cadbury employee and an ex-army cook, set up his field kitchen. Trestle tables and benches were put up and we enjoyed good meals.

The other staff were Elizabeth Burlingham who ran the Bournville girls' athletic club, Gladys who usually supervised at Cadbury's girls' swimming bath and a lady who was from the women's employment office. Mrs Ballinger came too because she enjoyed Camp School, though normally when her husband was working, she stayed at home.

On our voyage Mr Ballinger sometimes allowed staff to steer – not too successfully because the boat once grounded near the bank. He became agitated and told us to paddle to the bank. He stood on the cabin roof, put the pole into the middle of the canal and vaulted to the other bank. There was a gasp all round and someone said, "Did you see that? He's like a monkey and he's 70." Eventually we did float off.

Mr Ballinger exchanged friendly waves with passing working boatmen and when he allowed a working boat to pass he said with reverence, "Pleasure boats give way to working boats."

Each day we stopped to make an industrial visit. We went to Cadbury's Knighton milk factory on the canal side five miles beyond Norbury Junction. The friendly workers proudly showed us the large shiny vats where the fresh milk was condensed and had cocoa added before being dried into a coarse crumb ready for transport. We then understood the 'milk' of milk chocolate.

We visited a Courtauld factory where rayon was manufactured from wood in a smelly chemical process which mystified most of us. We also went to the Stork margarine factory at Bromborough where the manufacturing process and the style of the buildings were similar to Bournville, but on a smaller scale. We were also taken on a tour of Chester.

The most interesting visit was to the salt mine at Winsford, Cheshire where we went down into an exceptionally high cavern with walls and roof of glistening clay-stained rock salt. The air was clean with a constant temperature of 60 degrees so a healthy place to work. The salt was crushed and used on the roads.

On the last full day as we voyaged in rural Cheshire we were greeted by a journalist and a photographer who were relieved to discover us, having spent a long hot day on the towpath wondering if they ever would. They were taken aboard and at Christleton we enjoyed posing at our various camping activities. The only photograph not posed was the one seen here when we greeted them from the boat. The News Chronicle was then a national newspaper and it carried a story with photographs, saying: "as an attractive bunch of matelots as you will ever see...".

Certainly it was a happy and memorable week.

In 1955 Cadbury Bros Ltd was still a private company with Lawrence Cadbury as the chairman and most of the directors were family members. Cadbury’s became part of US company Kraft Foods in 2010 after a bitterly contested takeover.
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The Sonia Rolt Story

What a fulsome and well researched obituary of Sonia Rolt was produced by Tim Coghlan (Spring issue), of which he can be justly proud.

I was pleased to note his record of my involvement, which led to making her a Vice-President. It was, at that time, my concern that Council, and thus the Association, had come to think of Robert Ackman as the principal, even the unique, founder of IWA and had forgotten the major part played by Tom Rolt, not least the writing of Narrow Boat, which had so sparked Robert’s interest.

I was determined that the Rolt name should be re-established within IWA. So how better than by honouring Sonia with a Vice-Presidency, especially bearing in mind her strong involvement in the Association’s formative days.

As Tim rightly comments, Sonia returned to the canals with undiminished enthusiasm and there began a very close friendship between Sonia and me, which lasted until the end; indeed I had arranged to visit her on the day after she died. IWA has indeed been fortunate to have had the benefit of Sonia’s involvement at both ends of her life.

One final comment. I have been very impressed with Tim’s knowledge and research skills – he certainly drew more information out of Sonia than I seem to have done! – over a long period.

A lot has been written about Sonia Rolt in recent months, not all of it very inspiring but I must say that I really enjoyed the article in Waterways. It was one of the best I have read. What a good storyteller Tim Coghlan is! He sounds very knowledgeable about the lives of the ‘Idle Women’. I wonder if he has any more tales to tell?

Marion Panzetta, Via email

I was interested to read the article about Sonia Rolt in the Spring 2015 number. In it the author states that IWA was founded by Robert Ackman and Tom Rolt, whom I knew quite well. It is not generally known that there was a third founder, the late Charles Hadfield, the well-known waterways historian. Like Tom later, he disagreed with some of Ackman’s policies, and because he felt that there was a potential conflict with his job as a senior civil servant he soon resigned. Charles and I were among the eight founder members of the Railway & Canal Historical Society in 1954, and at the first committee meeting, when I was appointed Hon Secretary, I well remember him passing me a note that said if I received a membership application from someone called Ackman, I should refer it to the committee before acceptance. In the event we didn’t receive one.

Gordon Biddle, Levens, Kendal

These are just some of the many letters we have received congratulating Tim Coghlan on his article. Thanks to him and to everyone who took the trouble to write to us in appreciation of his efforts. Ed.

Canals of Birmingham

I have to say how much I enjoyed your feature on Birmingham’s canals in the Spring issue of Waterways. Whatever your views on regeneration and redevelopment, it has to be said that Brindleyplace, with its restaurants, pubs and other attractions, does a great job in showcasing the inland waterways to the wider public. And some of those first time visitors to the canals may well go on to become enthusiasts – and even IWA members – in the future.

Roy Lewis, Via email

David Stevenson, Via email

A lot has been written about Sonia Rolt in recent months, not all of it very inspiring but I must say that I really enjoyed the article in Waterways. It was one of the best I have read. What a good storyteller Tim Coghlan is! He sounds very knowledgeable about the lives of the ‘Idle Women’. I wonder if he has any more tales to tell?

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Eastern Region Issues

You published a letter from John Revell and response from Les Etheridge, National Chairman, in the last edition of Waterways. What seems to be lacking at the moment is any sense of urgency regarding the importance of sorting this out.

We have been into Horseways Lock which the Middle Level Commissioners restored and keep in working order. We have applied to the Environment Agency many times for permission to navigate Horseways Channel and Welches Dam Lock and onto the Old Bedford River but each time our trip was cancelled by the Environment Agency often at very short notice for varying reasons. Navigation through Welches Dam Lock is no longer possible since EA piled the exit from the lock in 2006.

We have entered the Old Bedford River from the other direction via the tidal sluice at Salters Lode four times. In May 2009 we cruised with no problem the entire length of the Old Bedford from Salters Lode to Mepal Bridge (about 15 miles). We passed the stanked off Welches Dam lock and being unable to use it returned the same way. Since 2009 the condition of the Old Bedford has deteriorated significantly. No dredging has been done to our knowledge and the weed is encroaching fast, as anyone who visits the Old Bedford sluice at Salters Lode will have seen. Many of the restored sections we have cruised are less than 3 miles. Here we have 15+ miles of rural waterway. We must save it.

There can’t be many locks anywhere on the system where a navigation authority has deliberately piled the entrance to a lock and kept it closed and still unnavigable for nine years.

We must not sit back and let this happen. Thankfully Robert Aickman and other early IWA members did not accept defeat which is why we have our existing waterways network.

Lois & Roy Parker, Coventry

John Revell’s letter highlighted the eastern region’s paucity when it comes to the restoration of waterway routes, as compared to the impressive list of the mainly British Waterways/Canal & River Trust restored waterways. The difference lies in the attitudes of the navigation authorities involved.

In the east, most waterways are navigations based on river courses. The two major rivers are the Great Ouse and Nene systems – all is not well on these. For example, Ian Cox, Chair of Great Ouse Boat Association, referring to the debilitating problem of weed on the Old West River stated (in GOBA News, Winter 2014 edition): “Again, the Environment Agency appear very limited in their ability to manage or resolve the issue.”

As well as ongoing issues with those EA waters that are navigable, a greater problem has been the gradual erosion of navigable miles in the east. At the recent EA Denver Sluice consultation on the proposed revamping of the area as a tourist complex – the Old Bedford was not even considered for the consultation as the EA had stated that it was not a navigable waterways network.

Meanwhile, Swaffham Bulbeck Lode, once an off river mooring, has evolved into a drainage channel – with the lock gates finally being removed by the EA in 2013.

Elsewhere, a few years ago one could navigate the River Stour from Brantham Barrage to Stratford St Mary. Both Dedham and Flatford locks, listed EA assets, were navigable. In 2014, both locks were out of use. Although Flatford has just been reopened, funding came from the River Stour Trust. Similarly, the siting below Taylor’s Lock on the Seaford Navigation prevented boats passing through the lock until comparatively recently, when it was cleared, not by the EA, but thanks to funding from the Seaford Navigation Trust and an anonymous benefactor.

On the positive side, the EA built a link lock, in 2001, at Denver, connecting the Ely Ouse with the Relief Channel, opening up 6.5 miles of waterway. This was the first stage of the Nar-Ouse link, to form a non-tidal link from King’s Lynn to the Ely Ouse, utilising the former Nar navigation. Unfortunately, the final link was dropped due to environmental factors and headroom issues.

The 50-mile Fens Waterways Link is the EA’s flagship project, utilising a previous EA’s scheme to join the Witham to the Nene. Launched around 2001, the scheme has so far reconstructed the entrance lock (closed in 1967) of the Black Sluice Drain (mainly led by funding raised by the Lincolnshire Waterways Partnership). In theory this opens up 19 miles to small craft, or 12.5 miles to Donington High Bridge, but reliable sources give Swineshead Bridge as the limit at 7 miles.

The EA record on restoration is such that we in the east see ourselves as the poor relatives of those on the CRT network!

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