

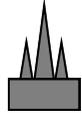
Lichfield Lines



A novel use for a narrowboat (see report Page 12)

The newsletter of IWA Lichfield Branch

The IWA may not agree with opinions expressed in this magazine but encourages publication as a matter of interest. Nothing printed may be construed as policy, or as an official pronouncement, unless specifically identified as such.



Branch Chairman's Report

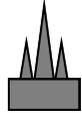
As you will see from the article on page 9 the battle to save the Trent & Mersey canal at Wood End from the worst effects of the HS2 seems to have been won. I should like to thank all those people within the hierarchy of IWA, CRT, the House of Commons Select Committee and eventually HS2 Ltd who listened to the arguments first put forward in 2011 by Phil Sharpe (on behalf of the branch committee) of the importance of saving this section of the waterway from destruction. At times it seemed that we were fighting a losing battle. The result proves that it is worth campaigning for what one believes in even if the odds are stacked against a successful outcome. As a child I was taught "If you never try, you don't know whether you might have succeeded". This has once again been shown to be correct. IWA will continue to work both locally and nationally to ensure that HS2 make proper provision for the restoration of the Lichfield canal at Cappers Lane. We will also be pressing for proper design and noise mitigation measures to be put in place where necessary. Rest assured, we will not be resting on our laurels.

I should like to congratulate Phil on being awarded a Richard Bird medal at the IWA's national AGM in September. In my opinion, this honour is long overdue. The medal is awarded for "members of the Association whose efforts and support are considered to have brought significant benefit to the Association over a sustained period". Phil's sustained period has lasted over 40 years! (see page 5). We now have five committee members and several other branch members with this award. Is this a record I wonder?

The season of CRT User Group Forums/Meetings has started. Whilst CRT is becoming a different animal to BVV, we still have to be alert to their announcements and respond where necessary. Complacency and ignorance (by us) of their activities and thinking can lead to well-meaning mistakes being made by CRT. Fortunately there is a new culture of listening to us. Have you heard the one about the canoe, the tunnel and the narrow-boat? No?

Neither had I until I went to a CRT meeting recently and discovered that there has been a change in policy over the last few years and unpowered craft are now entitled to navigate several quite long tunnels. I have no wish to prevent other waterway users from enjoying their hobby but I do have serious concerns that this is an accident waiting to happen. Most of us who drive a narrow boat or a cruiser are unaware of this change in policy, and because of this, we would not expect to encounter a canoe or dinghy on a longish tunnel. The thought that (before I was aware) I could have inadvertently mown down and killed a canoeist in a tunnel sends shivers down my spine. CRT are now aware of our concerns and are poised to reconsider their policy. I have been invited to write an article for the late October issue of CRT's Boaters' Update. The article is reproduced in full on page 4. Snarestone and Curdworth are the only tunnels in our branch area through which unpowered craft are allowed to travel but I urge you to look at the complete list on the CRT website before venturing into any tunnels in future. Be aware that not





all tunnel notices are up-to-date and so they may not include a warning to look out for unpowered craft even if they are allowed through it. We will continue to monitor this topic.

Health & Safety affects us in all walks of life and so it should. However, full and proper consideration must be given to the consequences before making changes to the norm. Risks need to be balanced against each other. As a result of the accident on a swing-bridge on the Ashton canal resulting in a girl having to have her legs amputated, all swing-bridges are to be locked so that they cannot be operated by unauthorised people. This fate may befall the tiny swing-bridge at Fradley Junction. I shall request CRT balances the risk of a single-handed boater slipping whilst getting on and off his or her boat (at a difficult, busy and windy junction) to operate the bridge against the very occasional stray child injuring themselves doing something they shouldn't have been doing in the first place. Maybe we should suggest that CRT/IWA have a Health & Safety conference and invites Health & Safety professionals who are experienced boaters to come together and thrash out some of these perceived problems to come up with practical solutions to these issues. That would be an inspired use of volunteers!

Enough of serious matters. Let's have some fun! I hope to see plenty of people at our fund-raising fashion show on November 12th at Byrkley Park, our Christmas lunch on Sunday, 14th December and the New Year Walk on January 1st. Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
Helen Whitehouse 14/10/14

Forthcoming Events

All Lichfield Branch meetings are held at Martin Heath Hall, Christchurch Lane, (off Walsall Road), Lichfield WS13 8AY 7:15 for 7:30pm

Monday 10th to Friday 14th November 2014—Work Party

Come along and help at our next Work Party. We will be continuing the work on the path between the “Bloody Steps” and the Bypass bridge in Rugeley. CRT are providing the equipment to enable us to complete the work started last year. Come along every day, one day or a few hours. All equipment and lunch provided but wear very old clothes and boots and a smile. Many thanks to Peter Chandler for the donation of a mower and strimmer for the work parties. Having our own equipment rather than relying on CRT will be a great benefit.

Wednesday 12th November 2014—Fashion Show

Fashion show at Byrkley Park Garden Centre, Rangemore, Burton upon Trent, Staffs DE13 9RN. This will be held along with the Edinburgh Woollen Mill within the Garden Centre. Tickets will be £3.00 with 20% off on the day and a free cup of tea. Ticket holders will receive a £5 voucher to be spent at a later date. Start time will be 2pm with various people “volunteering” to be models on the day (including me—editor).

Come along and get your Christmas shopping sorted out at one go. It promises to be a fun afternoon.

Wednesday 19th November 2014—Branch Meeting

“Cruising on the Canal du Midi” an illustrated talk on this famous French canal by Gillian & Peter Bolt.

Tuesday 25th November 2014—CRT Open Afternoon

Canal & River Trust open afternoon at Hartshill Maintenance Yard, Atherstone Road, Hartshill



nr Nuneaton, CV10 0SU from 13:00 to 16:00.

Sunday 14th December 2014—Christmas Dinner

Branch Christmas Lunch. 12.30 for 1.00 pm at The Riverside Hotel, Riverside Drive, Branston, Burton-on-Trent, DE14 3EP. Directions: from A38 take the Burton South junction A5121 then Branston exit at first roundabout, cross the railway and turn right into Warren Lane then Riverside Drive. £19 per person with a choice of 4 starters, 5 main courses and 4 desserts - see website for menu www.waterways.org.uk/lichfield. Tickets available at Branch meetings or from Christine Watkins, email christine.watkins@waterways.org.uk or mobile 07523 112683. Please book and pay before 28th November.

Thursday 1st January 2015—Walk

New Years Day Walk: "Progress towards Measham". Join us for this New Year's Day walk along the recently restored navigable section of the Ashby Canal towards Bridge 62 and beyond to the site of the proposed Gilwiskaw aqueduct, before returning on public footpaths and minor roads to the Globe Inn for refreshment and an optional lunch. This will be a 4 mile walk on easy terrain and will take approximately 2 hours. There are no stiles. Meet 10:15 for a 10:30 am start in the car park of the Globe Inn, Main Road, Snarestone DE12 7DB. Contact Clive Walker on 01827 282298 or clive.walker@waterways.org.uk

Wednesday 21st January 2015—Branch Meeting

"Curious Cuts", an illustrated talk by Phillip Clayton on some of the odder aspects of canals, both in the UK and abroad..

Wednesday, 18th February 2015—Branch Meeting

"The History and Restoration of the Droitwich Canals", an illustrated talk by the Trust Deputy Chairman, Margaret Rowley.

Tuesday 3rd March 2015—Walk

A Waterway Walk: "Alrewas Hayes, Orgreave Hall and the Trent and Mersey Canal". An easy 5.7 mile walk that passes in front of two exclusive country houses (and a view of a third) along level farm tracks, green lanes and quiet country roads, before rejoining the towpath at Alrewas to return to the start. There is one stile, but no climbs. The walk will take approximately 2.5 hours. Meet 10:00 for a 10:15 start in the car park of The Swan Inn, Fradley Junction DE13 7DN. Contact Clive Walker on 01827 282298 or clive.walker@waterways.org.uk

Wednesday, 18th March 2015—Branch Meeting

Lichfield Branch AGM plus the West Midlands Region AGM followed by a social evening.

Adjacent Branches Calendar

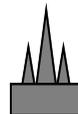
The **Birmingham, Black Country and Worcestershire Branch** hold their meetings at Coombeswood Canal Trust, Hawne Basin, Herewood Rise, Halesowen B62 8AW 7:15 for 7:30pm

Monday 17th November 2014

Leominster Canal—Mike Woodgate & Martin Hudson

Monday 15th December 2014

Christmas Supper & Slides



Monday 19th January 2015

Stratford Canal 50th Anniversary of Restoration—Clive Henderson

Monday 16th February 2015

Derby & Sandiacre Canal Restoration—Chris Madge, Chairman, Derby & Sandiacre Canal Society

The **Warwickshire Branch** hold their meetings at the Sports Connexion Leisure Club, Leamington Road, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Coventry, CV8 3FL. 7:30pm

Wednesday 12th November 2014 Wilts & Berks Canal—the most ambitious restoration ever? - Chris Coyle, Company Secretary, Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal Trust

Wednesday 10th December 2014 Quiz and Social Evening

Wednesday 11th February 2015 The Rhodes Thomas Collection—Ian Fletcher

The **North Staffs and South Cheshire Branch** hold their meetings at Stoke on Trent Boat Club, Endon Wharf, Post Lane, Endon, Stoke on Trent ST9 9DT. 7:45 for 8pm

Friday 14th November 2014 Living Afloat—50years of the Residential Boat Owners Association—Ivor Caplan

Friday 12th December 2014 Patrick and Angela Marks - Boating the Rhone, Burgundy.

Friday 13th February 2015 Branch AGM

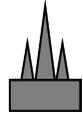
Full Article About Unpowered Craft in Tunnels by Helen Whitehouse
First Published in The CRT Boaters Update October 2014

I have been asked to write this article from a boaters' perspective. My aim: to prevent a serious accident occurring.

I have been canal-boating for nearly 40 years. Each year, I pass through several tunnels. On my first encounter, I have read the BW/CRT advisory notice outside the tunnel portal, but on subsequent passages I don't. In this respect, I suspect that I am not alone. We know all about keeping within the profile of the boat, using the tunnel light and not travelling too closely behind the boat in front. Experience and other boaters have taught us that:

- It is a tunnel lamp not a head-lamp. Training it onto the roof of the tunnel slightly to the right prevents dazzling approaching boats and makes it easier to steer through the tunnel by concentrating on the position of the light on the tunnel roof.
- Using navigation lights makes it much easier for approaching boats to judge the distance between you.
- A red light or reflective tape at the stern indicates one's position to a following boat preventing it coming too close.
- If one cannot hear the throb of another engine, then the light one sees ahead is probably the other end of the tunnel not an approaching boat.

I was not aware that there might be unpowered craft in tunnels over 50 yards long until I attended a recent CRT meeting where I learned that "paddlers" are now permitted to navigate 31 canal tunnels, some up to 525 metres long. These include Barnton and Saltersford (T & M), Chirk tunnel (Llangollen), Coseley (BCN), Brandwood (Northern Stratford), Gannow (L&L), Snarestone (Ashby), Shrewley (Grand Union) and Gosty Hill (Dudley No2). For the full list see: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/library/1424.pdf> .



I am very concerned about the potential for an accident to occur. My advice is: always read the (hopefully up-to-date) tunnel advisory notice and be extra vigilant to avoid meeting a canoe or dinghy in one of these tunnels. He/she may or may not be wearing a head-lamp or carrying a torch. If you have one, ask another crew member to keep a watch at the front of your boat. Might I suggest that anyone who has concerns about safety/visibility issues in any of the tunnels on the list invites the local CRT manager to experience steering your boat through it?



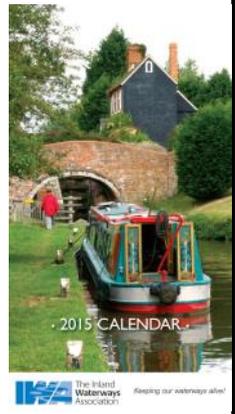
Presentation of Richard Bird Medal to Phil Sharpe by Les Etheridge

Richard Bird Medal

Phil Sharpe joined IWA in 1967 and has at various times been Branch Chairman, Region Secretary, Region Chairman and a Trustee. He has been the Planning Officer for Lichfield Branch since 1993 and their Website Editor from 2010. In a long and active involvement with waterways restoration and planning, Phil played a leading role in the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust's campaign for navigable crossings of the BNRR (now M6Toll). More recently, he has been instrumental in IWA's campaign to alter the route of HS2 to protect the Trent & Mersey Canal at Wood End, the success of which was announced just 4 days after the medal presentation.

IWA Calendar

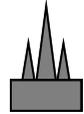
The 2015 IWA Calendar has now been released and has been selling well at some of the recent shows. These will be on sale at our Branch meetings but if more than one or two are needed please let Helen Whitehouse know so that they will be available. To get your Christmas Card shopping in early a good variety of these will also be available at meetings and again if any large quantities are required please let Helen know.



Recent Activities

Chesterfield Canal Boat Trip—Saturday 9th August 2014

Our boat trip on the Chesterfield Canal was blessed with a perfect Summer's day as we cruised along the restored but disconnected 5 miles and 5 locks of the canal at the Chesterfield end. This full day round trip on the Chesterfield Canal Trust's trip boat 'John Varley' started from the Tapton Lock visitor centre where we were introduced to the crew who would operate the boat, work the locks and point out features of interest on the journey.



From Tapton Lock we initially went south to Tapton Mill floodgate where the canal joins the River Rother and will before long continue into Chesterfield where a new terminal basin has been built. For now the boat turns round in the river, which is just wide enough above the weir, and returns to descend Tapton Lock. There is a slipway here and some canoeists were enjoying the canal as we headed north to

Wheeldon Mill Lock at Brimington. The towpath here and throughout was wide and well surfaced and being enjoyed by large numbers of walkers, families and cyclists whilst the many small wooden fishing platforms provided a safe refuge for the anglers and their gear.

The canal continues through pleasant countryside with locks about 3/4 mile apart which was just nice for a short stroll along the towpath before getting back on board for a drink and a natter. At Bluebank Lock the top gate is due for renewal and looking a bit dodgy so we were all asked to get off whilst the boat was roped through for safety reasons. Unfortunately for the photographers it didn't collapse that day !



John Varley at Hollingwood Hub

At Bilby Lane there is an attractive new bridge in traditional style and Dixon's Lock is notable for being a replacement built by the Trust after the original was lost to opencast mining. Below Dixon's Lock we passed another trip boat, the Madeline, which has recently started operating public trips so great is the demand to experience the canal. At Hollingwood Lock the old lock-keepers cottage has been restored and extended to create Hollingwood Hub with offices and meeting rooms for the Trust and Nona's, a very popular cafe where we had our lunch stop.

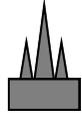


Staveley Town lock construction

After lunch we continued along a very pleasant section of canal to Staveley, where it was hard to believe there had been a massive ironworks before reclamation. Several old and new bridges, including a footbridge only just completed by the volunteers, heralded our arrival at Staveley Basin, the current terminus of the canal. Although empty now it comes to life annually at a canal festival and there are great plans for its further development.

Time did not permit a stop as we turned round in the vast basin but we all returned by road after the end of our

return trip to have a good look at the impressive work being carried out by the Trust and WRG. The new Staveley Town Lock is half built and excavators were hard at work digging out the channel beyond where wash walls are being built and two new road bridges await the



extension of the canal back towards an eventual reunion with the main navigable section, another 8 miles away.

As we retraced our route back to Tapton Lock we twice more encountered the Madeline, making the canal seem very busy even though there are only currently the two boats on the canal. We were impressed again by the way it is so well used both by the local people and visitors and the excellent work done by the Canal Trust and Derbyshire Council over many years in restoring and maintaining this delightful waterway.

(Report and photos by Phil Sharpe)

Alvecote Pools Walk - Tuesday 2nd September 2014

Warm September sunshine greeted the eight of us who met in the car park of The Pretty Pigs pub on the Shuttington Road. The 4.2 mile circular route took in Alvecote Pools Nature Reserve and a chance to discover the "lost" Amington Basin on the Coventry Canal.

Accompanied at first by the busy West Coast Main Line, the group diverted briefly onto the towpath between bridges 64 and 65, before heading northwards from Amington to cross the river Anker on a footbridge, where we paused for a group photo. The route then carried on across flat farmland eastwards to Alvecote Pools Nature Reserve. These pools were created by mining subsidence and permanent 'lakes' were formed by floodwater from the Anker. The track north of the lakes is popular with fishermen, and the cries of wildlife help to drown out the noise of the neighbouring railway.



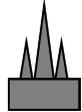
Alvecote Pools walkers at River Anker Footbridge

The group then followed a tarmac path that marks the boundary between Warwickshire and Staffordshire, and which had once led to Laundry Cottages, long since demolished. Recrossing the river Anker at Shuttington Bridge after a mile we reached the village of Alvecote and its distinct row of miners' cottages. We then picked up the towpath at bridge 59, continuing westwards along the Coventry Canal, passing Alvecote Marina and stopping briefly to review NB Dane under restoration by the Narrowboat Heritage Foundation.



Abandoned canal basin near Amington

The "lost" Amington Basin can be found in the undergrowth adjacent to the towpath near the pipe that crosses the canal by the buttresses of the demolished bridge 62. This colliery basin is "lost" in the sense that it is not visible from



the canal and there is no sign of its former entrance on the towpath. Its brickwork, however, is in remarkably sound condition, and it was not filled in when it fell into disuse. The basin is at a 45 degree angle to the cut, and explains why there is a winding hole opposite. An archive photograph shows a horse crossing the basin entrance and towing a coal boat through the (demolished) bridge 62, and the group was able to verify that the photograph had been taken from the winding hole embankment.

We left the Coventry canal at bridge 63, pausing briefly to admire the East German Border Post (!) in a garden opposite, and walked back to our starting point via Hodge Lane and the Shuttington Road.

(Report by Clive Walker, photos by Phil Sharpe)

Planning Matters

Phil Sharpe, Planning Officer

This report covers the period from late June to mid October during which I have dealt with about 70 planning applications, local plan consultations and other planning matters. As usual these are all summarised in the monthly notes on the Planning page of our website but if anybody wants further information do please contact me.

On the **Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal** at Coven Heath an application to provide facilities for boaters including farm produce, fuels, chandlery, pump-out and servicing at an existing offside mooring site was supported.

An unusual application at Penkrudge was for retrospective approval of a tree house already built alongside the canal, but fairly well concealed within a large weeping willow tree.

On the **Trent & Mersey Canal** the proposed marina near Shirleywich has been refused due to possible impacts on the groundwater source for Pasturefields Salt Marsh SAC.

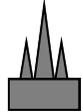
At Fradley Junction we have expressed concerns over many years about the effect of incremental expansion of the Kingfisher Holiday Park caravan site on traffic along the towpath which has severe congestion and safety issues. Our suggested solution of providing a rear access to the site has at last been taken up and we were pleased to support this application.

Along the **Coventry Canal** at Atherstone we had objected to an employment site in fields on both sides of the canal between the A5 and Holly Lane proposed in the North Warwickshire Site Allocations Plan. This has now been modified to a long term option for high quality, small scale uses reflecting the character, setting and heritage assets along the canal. Also in Atherstone the design of a small terrace of houses replacing a factory on the offside south of the top lock was acceptable.

In Nuneaton a proposed 3 storey apartment block at Triton Road will now be set back a further 2 metres from the towpath behind a publicly accessible open area as we requested.

On the **Ashby Canal** a proposed farm building near Higham on the Hill was reduced in size and set well back from the canal following our objections.

The recent extension of the restored section of the canal beyond Snarestone is already attracting recreational interest with an application for 6 wooden holiday lodges in an adjacent field.



Along the **Wyrley & Essington Canal** at Goscote detailed plans for redevelopment of the demolished and derelict housing area at the once notorious Shakespeare Crescent have now been made. However, these included a drainage ditch or 'swale' along the canal frontage linked to a larger infiltration basin on The Lea. Following our objections that the swale would limit access to the canalside and could compromise its stability it has now been removed, but concerns remain that the drainage of flood waters underneath the canal embankment in this former mining area could destabilise and breach the canal.

We also expressed concern at plans to test the strength of the railway aqueduct at Harden by drilling holes in the cast iron baseplate !

The **Lichfield Canal** restoration will be affected by the 3 major housing developments now proposed south of Lichfield in the Local Plan. In preparation for a resumption of the Examination hearings, the Council's response to our representations on their Main Modifications has conceded that as well as "integration of the route for a restored Lichfield Canal into an open space and green infrastructure network" these sites should provide "all necessary new bridges and associated canal channel infrastructure". IWA and Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust are very pleased that this important principle has now been established, although further detailed discussions will be needed with the developers to define the engineering works required.

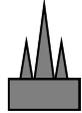
The **HS2** High Speed Rail Bill is now being considered by a House of Commons Select Committee and on their site visits in September they saw the Lichfield Canal at Cappers Lane, the Coventry Canal at Streethay and the Trent & Mersey at Wood End, Fradley. At Wood End Lock the MPs could appreciate the devastating impact the route would have on this attractive and historic location. This was undoubtedly influential in convincing them of the merits of the IWA/CRT alternative alignment and just 2 weeks later the Government announced it had accepted our case (see report on HS2 Route Changed below).



Select Committee at Woodend Lock (Harry Arnold/
Waterways Images)

HS2 Route Changed to Avoid Canal Crossings at Woodend

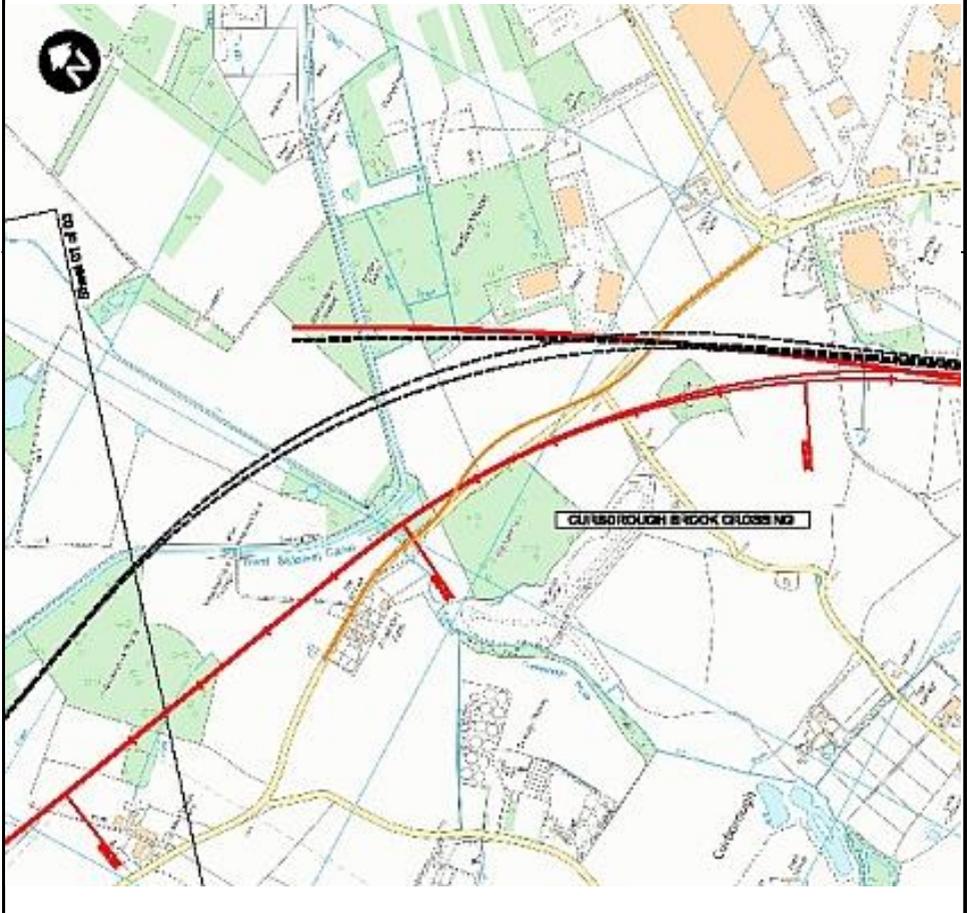
Lichfield Branch has achieved a major victory in its campaign to protect the local canals from the worst effects of the High Speed Rail project, HS2.

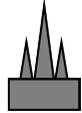


Woodend

The threat to the environment, tranquillity and heritage of the Trent & Mersey Canal around Woodend Lock above Fradley Junction has been lifted by the Government accepting the alternative alignment proposed jointly by IWA and CRT. The route for the Handsacre Link will not now cross the canal in two places with 3 bridges and massive embankments but will just miss the canal at the bend below Woodend Lock, with the line at or near ground level, greatly reducing the visual and noise impacts. The plan extract shows the previous route in black and the revised alignment in red .

IWA Lichfield Branch first proposed this solution nearly four years ago and has been campaigning for it ever since by responding to consultations, meeting HS2 engineers, and working with other canal groups and local councils. Key decisions by IWA's trustees were the appointment of a group to collate the national campaign and communications around it, and





agreeing to commission an engineering feasibility study for the 'alternative route' avoiding the canal. This became the IWA/ CRT Joint Report from Hyder Consultancy (UK) Ltd which proved its feasibility and led to us working closely with CRT in what has proved to be an unbeatable partnership over many aspects of the impact of HS2 on inland waterways.

There will still be one rail bridge over the canal about 350 metres up from Shade House Lock for the Manchester Line spur and IWA will continue to press for appropriate design and full noise mitigation measures here. As the detailed plans for the new route have not yet been released it will be some time before any remaining impacts from temporary construction compounds etc. are known but IWA and CRT will continue to work together to minimise these and to avoid any significant stoppages.

Lichfield & Streethay

As well as adopting the IWA/CRT route, the announcement on 1st October accepts the case for a lower alignment for the whole route around Lichfield as proposed by Staffordshire County and Lichfield District councils. This ties in well with the lower levels at Woodend and HS2 will pass under the A38, the South Staffordshire railway and the West Coast Main Line mostly in cuttings instead of on the high embankments previously planned, reducing noise and visual intrusion. A further benefit is that the massive materials stockpile area alongside the Coventry Canal between Streethay and Huddlesford, with a temporary rail siding bridge across the canal and scheduled to be in use for up to 6 years, should not now be needed which will further reduce the impacts on the canal system.

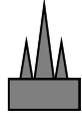
Cappers Lane

However, an adverse consequence of the lower alignment under the A38 is a new threat to the continued restoration of the Lichfield Canal at Cappers Lane. In the previous scheme HS2 passed over both the canal and the road on a high viaduct with the only concern being positioning the piers to avoid the canal and towpath. But with the lower alignment there is unlikely to be sufficient headroom at the canal crossing and Cappers Lane Bridge, only built in 2006 with a European grant to enable the canal to be restored, will certainly have to be demolished. With the skew crossing of the railway being on a rising grade, the canal will need to be diverted sideways to provide headroom and the road will also need to be diverted with a new canal bridge required. Lichfield Cruising Club were already affected with their slipway, car parking and some of their moorings needing relocating, but will now be further affected by the need for the canal and road diversions.

Although the details of this are still to be worked out, HS2 Ltd have, at the last minute, accepted the general principle that they should provide any necessary works to ensure through navigation at no extra cost to the Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust. IWA will continue working closely with the Trust, with CRT and with the Cruising Club to secure the best overall solution.

So, as one battle is won, another is engaged. But with the reputation of IWA and the whole canal movement enhanced by this success, we expect now to be listened to more seriously and hope that a solution will be agreed this time in a lot less than four years!

Phil Sharpe, Planning Officer



Library Boat Opens in Rugeley School

On Thursday 16th October, Rugeley Chancel Primary School had the Grand Opening of their new 'Library Boat'.

'Discovery Deck', as the boat has been named, was the brainchild of Sarah Mollitt, Chairwoman of the PTFA as a way to stimulate the children's interest in reading.

The boat was built by Nick Thorpe at Hixon, and is now on hard standing in the school grounds.

The school was awarded a £10K Lottery Grant, and after a lot of extra fundraising, plus donations from local businesses and the council, enough money was raised to pay for the boat to be built and fitted out.

Following the boat's commissioning, IWA Lichfield has had two guided walks with the children to encourage and educate them about the waterways. The first walk was with the little ones, which was a 'canal creatures' treasure hunt. The second walk was with the older children, and told them about the history of the Trent and Mersey Canal, especially as it relates to Rugeley.



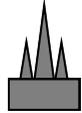
These walks are part of an ongoing relationship with the school, and we will be doing more activities with them in the coming months. If anyone would like to be involved, please contact Margaret Beardsmore on 07581 794111 or margaret.beardsmore@waterways.org.uk

Report and pictures Margaret Beardsmore

CRT Central Shires Local Waterway Forum 16/10/2014

For many years a User Group Meeting, last year called a User Group Forum, and now a Local Waterway Forum, these meetings are held by Canal & River Trust twice a year to inform and consult representatives of interested organisations, and are now also publicly advertised. Four members of Lichfield Branch committee attended the Central Shires LWF at Rugeley on 16th October.

High on our agenda was to find out more about the widely reported but little understood changes to the internal management structure, so we know who does what when issues arise. We were given a national Operations and Asset Management Overview chart and a local Waterway Structure chart for this latest reorganisation which takes effect on 1st November. As reported, it is now very 'customer' and volunteer focussed at Waterway level with all the engineering and maintenance responsibilities being moved to national control, with Central Shires staff being halved from about 70 to 35 by internal transfers. When the Waterway units



were set up they had control of most engineering work except for very major projects, were then reduced to minor works and now have lost even those to contractors under national control. From the lack of any detailed explanation of how this will all work or any enthusiastic advocacy of the change, one suspects it is not entirely welcome. Whether this will be an improvement or not in the longer term remains to be seen.

An immediate consequence of this was that the Business Update given by CRT Waterway Manager Darren Green was largely the national picture with only limited information about local works. Amongst those affecting the Lichfield Branch area are; planned vegetation control on the Coventry Canal, dredging on the Ashby Canal from Bridge 5 to 6 including moorings and a winding hole, costing about £200,000, and dredging after Xmas on the Trent & Mersey Canal from Great Haywood to Colwich, again at about £200k.

Tom Freeland, Volunteer Development Co-ordinator gave an update on the growth in volunteer activity, with 182 volunteers and 21 partnership groups contributing 16,400 hours of work in Central Shires. There are Adoption schemes and Towpath Taskforce groups at Burton, Fradley, North Warwickshire, Tamworth and Rugeley in our area, and volunteer lock keepers at Fradley and Atherstone.

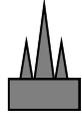
We then had a seminar on SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) prompted by the recent controversy over Natural England's last minute interference in the management of moorings for the Shackerstone Festival on the Ashby Canal. Whilst interesting, this did not address the issues of concern; why CRT are allowing NE to dictate how they manage the canal, why they imposed mooring restrictions for 6 miles all the way to Snarestone rather than just around the event site, and how much the 'temporary' bank protection cost. A 'lively' debate ensued and I suspect we have not heard the last of this matter.

Over the break there was an opportunity to talk informally to staff in more detail about this and other current issues before an open Question & Answer session. Discussions included the new Towpath Code and the continuing problems of speeding cyclists, and proposals to fit a CRT key operated lock to the swing footbridge at Fradley Junction. This was said to be necessary for 'health & safety' reasons, although it has not been a problem for 244 years. Mooring bollards will be provided either side, although concerns were expressed about the inconvenience and additional congestion this would cause unless it is normally locked open for boats. Consultation was promised but the mechanism has apparently already been fitted.

At this stage it became apparent that, once again, a question we had pre-submitted as requested was not going to be answered. This concerns the revelation at the recent Central Shires Partnership meeting that canoes are now permitted to use 31 tunnels around the system, some over 500 metres long, although most boaters are unaware of this and signage at tunnel entrances often fails to warn them. We were promised a written response, although we have been similarly promised responses and consultations on other issues but are still waiting.

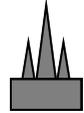
In summary, the meeting was useful, but could do better !

Phil Sharpe



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