

MANCHESTER PACKET

Newsletter from the Manchester Branch



Boathorse Bilbo Baggins

No 21

November 2008

Inland Waterways Association – Manchester Branch Committee

President:	Bill Bleasdale	
Vice Presidents:	Jim Ramsbottom, Ben Williams	
Chairman, Navigation & Technical, Exhibition, Planning	Steve Connolly 27 Hooten Lane Leigh WN7 3BY	T: 01924 679310 M: 07710 554602 E: steconno@btinternet.com
Vice Chairman:	Vacant	
Acting Secretary:	John Palmer 53 Southwood Road Great Moor Stockport SK2 7DJ	
Treasurer:	Barry McGuinness 4 Pole Lane Halesworth M35 9PB	T: 0161 4817237 M: E: bmcguinness@gmail.com
Editor:	Ian Price 16 Wyedale Close Buxton SK17 9RF	T: 01298 78141 M: 07971444258 E: ian.price-buxton@talk21.com
Membership:	Keith Fowler 171 Queens Road Cheadle Hulme Cheshire SK8 5HX	T: 0161 485 2813 E: kepf@btinternet.com
Canal Society & Cruising Club Liaison:	John Palmer 53 Southwood Road Great Moor Stockport SK2 7DJ	
Programme Coordinator:	Sue Day 12 Oakwood View Lower Beestow, Mossley Ashton-under-Lyme OL5 9QL	T: 01457 834863 E: sueday_horse@yahoo.com
Sales:	Andrew Perry c/o The Boatyard, Worsley Dry Dock, Worsley, Manchester M28 2WN	T: 0161 793 6767 E: perry@redburn34.fsnet.co.uk
Planning (joint): Conservation: Publicity:	All Vacant	

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Editorial Comments

By Ian Price

My intention was to produce this issue in June but family illness kept me away from home for most of the summer (or what passes for summer these days). I thank David Eatock & Steve Saxon for their contributions and patience in waiting to see them in print. Steve's has been split into two so look forward to more in the next issue of '*The Packet*' and/or buy his book from the Branch. You will see that the summer was a busy one for local events: Standedge Tunnel & Portland Basin both supported by the Branch.

We have not used envelopes to save on costs. If you have comments on this or any other matter please e-mail me.

Apology – Steve Connolly

Ian left this issue with me for printing and distribution in September but I was unable to arrange this. On his return we decided to issue it unaltered and to follow it with an update in January. I am sorry for the delay which illustrates the need for more volunteers to join the committee and share the work.

Disclaimer

The views expressed by our contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the IWA. They are, however, published as being of interest to our membership.

From the Region Chairman - Gillian Smith

In early June I was invited to an open meeting with Robin Evans and Simon Salem from British Waterways, along with other waterways users here in the North West. The session was open and frank from all parties and I thought I would share with you some of the details from the question and answer session. As an introduction Robin Evans explained that British Waterways do not have enough money to undertake all the work that they would wish (there is an approximate £20million/annum shortfall). As a result choices have to be made and maximum income has to be generated whenever possible.

Q. When will BW do something about upgrading remainder waterways?

A. They have been working on changing the status of the Kennett and Avon from remainder to cruising classification but that work is currently on hold. It is BW's aspiration to reclassify many remainder waterways but this will take time, as the plan is to try and pass one large piece of legislation through Parliament. As regards the Liverpool Link Robin was unsure as to what status would be given to this new stretch of waterways.

Q. Anglers have problems fishing in their agreed lengths due to weed and anti social behaviour. What can be done?

A. There is insufficient money and therefore choices have to be made and the money has to be put where there will be the most impact. BW's main focus at the moment is illegally moored boats – boats that are moored in areas where they shouldn't and for too long and boats with expired licences. In 2008 already BW have dealt with 40/50 more illegally moored boats than they did in total in 2007. BW admitted that they need to react more to the ears and eyes that are out there on the system and recapture trust from the users who become disenchanted when they don't see anything happening.

Q. Why does it take 5/6 weeks to renew licences?

A. Problems did occur during March and April this year when the process moved to Leeds. This has been acknowledged and the situation addressed; actions have been put into place to rectify the situation. Robin acknowledged that BW doesn't do enough things well and feedback is required from users – it helps them manage the organisation and users should never hesitate to offer feedback.

Q. How can we develop the role of volunteers?

A. There are several new initiatives in place and it is acknowledged that the volunteers are frustrated – so are BW. There is a wealth of goodwill available which they are not harnessing. Health and safety is an issue and we have to work within the rules and this applies to everyone (staff, volunteers and contractors). There is a need to make the process easier. Vince Moran has been targeted with the task of doubling the amount of volunteering that is taking place on the waterways and Ed Moss is the newly appointed volunteer coordinator. The aim is to concentrate on canal societies and bodies becoming trained and certified – they can then work without supervision.

Q. There is a perception that BW appear to be focussing on core business matters and withdrawing from partnership work.

A. BW are disappointed that this is the perception. The volunteer sector changed the face of waterways in Parliament and this has been vital in affecting future grant aid. BW want volunteer support – it adds to their resource capacity. For example, here in the northwest the Huddersfield Canal Society are now oiling all lock gear for BW.

Q. BW has vast tracts of unused waterside land – why don't they develop it?

A. BW's property portfolio is worth some £600 million. 20% is currently being developed. In Gloucester, for example, 60 acres are being developed. At Aldcliffe Road in Lancaster they are working with the Local Authority and H2O to develop the site for residential planning. Investment and development at the site at Finsley Gate in Burnley is currently not feasible. There are long term plans to create a pub and restaurant in partnership with Scottish and Newcastle and this would provide a long term income source for the canal.

Q. Concern was expressed regarding the management of trans Pennine canals and the splitting of management responsibilities.

A. Waterways can be managed as per the water source eg. The entire Leeds and Liverpool Canal or managed in a political sense (eg. in terms of Local Authority or regional government). BW policy is to manage along political boundaries and this will not change as working alongside regional development agencies offers great opportunities. However, there is an acknowledgement that links and better communication between business units and user groups could be further developed. BW staff have to find a way to overcome the problems.

Q. What are the issues arising from the moorings consultation which is currently underway?

A. The moorings tender trial caused a lot of debate. The intention was not to raise more money. BW were required to charge market prices for moorings. Recently charges have been based on comparison with adjacent private sector moorings. In the trial people were asked to tender what they felt the mooring was worth (a suggested guide price was available). In the trial, out of 168 moorings, 17% went at the guide price, 54% went for above the guide price and 30% went for below the guide price. There are currently waiting lists for moorings but BW believe that these can offer false hope.

Q. The website and use of the internet is a cause of concern for many users, especially the elderly and those who are away boating for long periods.

A. A recent BW survey indicated that 80% of respondents have good and regular access to the web. National trends also indicate that "silver surfers" are plentiful. As an organisation they have to consider how far down the web route to go, how access will change in the future and the changing face of future customers.

Q. Where would BW like us to campaign?

A. Currently we seem to be talking the waterways down. If we continue to say that the waterways are under funded, in poor condition and not nice then we paint a negative

image and good will evaporates. Therefore we have to talk the waterways up and work on Local Authorities and highlight to them the benefits of the waterways. We need to convince them that is in their interest to invest in their canal for the benefit of their communities and therefore greater funding is required.

This certainly gives us all food for thought. We need to continue to lobby our local MPs and Local Authority officers. We need to continue to raise the profile of the waterways and we need to make sure that we continue to get out there and enjoy using all of the waterways – remainder, cruise way and those under restoration. Debbie Lumb, our local BW manager, has been asked to come to one of our Autumn Region meetings. If you have any specific questions or queries which you would like raising please contact either myself or any of the branch chairmen.

Charitable Towpath Walking (Part 1) – Steve Saxon

There can be few things as relaxing and refreshing as walking beside water; and the English canal network provides a walker's paradise that can take you all the way from Leeds to London, or Bradford to Bristol, without needing to cross any roads. As part of my personal project to walk to the four extreme points of England (N, S, E & W), the towpaths promised to link up long-distance footpaths and give opportunities to observe wildlife, industrial archaeology, or local history. Hopefully there would be interesting material to write about, for the plan was to write books about the walk, books that could be sold for charity.

The first section of the walk (reported in *Ramble Through West Yorkshire*, available from the Rochdale Canal Society) used the towpaths of the Leeds & Liverpool and Rochdale canals, linked by the Worth Way and the Pennine Way. A couple of short extracts from the book are given below:

Pink and green on the Leeds & Liverpool



The walk began on a gentle slope, as the canal, shaded by graceful ash trees, descended through Eshton Road Lock. Before long, two narrowboats were on their way westwards, both dark green and bearing the traditional bold capital lettering, with serifs and shading; the first boat was *Canny*, owned by Les and Joyce, from Burton-in-Kendal (on the Lancaster Canal, not far from Gargrave as the crow flies, but quite a few canal miles away); the second was *Colpitts, No 238*, from Longport Wharf (in the Potteries, on the Trent & Mersey Canal). Together with

other boats seen later, this was evidence enough that the Leeds & Liverpool was not isolated, but very much part of a national cruising network.

A largish clump of wildflowers by the towpath caught the eye: small pink flowers, a profusion of dark green leaves with odd creamy centres. I decided to make the most of the flower book I'd brought along, and slipped off the rucksack. Ten minutes later I was still crouching next to those distinctive flowers, hoping that they were either Corn Mint or Black Horehound, but knowing in my heart that they were neither; and they weren't Woundwort either, because there was some of that nearby, which was different. It took a phone call to

Dad in the evening, and three of his books, to finally identify Spotted Dead Nettle, *lamium maculatum*.

Meanwhile it was time to move on; the broad towpath surrounds were green and lush, fringed by hawthorn laden with haws, and dotted with flowers here and there. Even where there were no flowers, the variety of leaf forms was marvellous in itself. Generally, however, the thick green sward was decorated regularly with the pink of red clover and woundwort, and the soft royal blue of Meadow Cranesbill - the buds of future flowers showing by their sharp outline why Cranesbill is so called.

The weather was cool, with a fresh breeze; we had been promised sunshine, but the sun still hadn't fully burnt through the morning mist, which made better walking weather. The outlines of the nearby hills were delicately softened, giving a watercolour effect: 'green, gentle, low', wrote Peel of the Airedale hills, and that was just how they looked now, with trees and hedges in shadowy outline.

Energy and ornithology on the Rochdale



The canal, meanwhile, curved left under a steep wooded slope covered in dripping moss, limp fern-fronds, bright green liverwort, and brown leaves. A mature jogger strode energetically by: black woolly hat, thick grey moustache, plum-coloured retriever trotting alongside. We wondered whether it was good for dogs to run continuously, then saw that the jogger had stopped some way ahead – was he giving the dog a breather? He didn't look as if he needed one himself. As we caught up, he pointed across the canal and told us where a kingfisher was perched. So good was the camouflage that we couldn't quite be certain which was the kingfisher and which were the odd dead leaves still clinging to the bare branches – until it moved and flashed the familiar but always startling iridescent blue on its way to the next perch. From there we saw it dip twice in the canal and out again; but couldn't be sure if it actually caught anything. Probably not, since Bewick says that the Kingfisher beats the little fish to death before swallowing it. He also gives a minute description of the colouring of *Alcedo ispida*:

A broad stripe passes from the bill over the eye to the hinder part of the neck, of a bright orange, but margined on the side of the mouth, and crossed below the eye, by a narrow black stroke, and terminated behind the auriculars with a slanting wedge-shaped white spot. The throat is white; the head, and the wing coverts are a deep shining green, spotted with bright light blue: the scapulars and exterior webs of the quills are of the same colour, but without spots. The middle of the back, the rump, and coverts of the tail are of a most resplendent azure: the tail, which consists of twelve short feathers, is deep rich blue, and the whole under part of the body, bright orange...

The jogger set off again, and was soon lost to view. We continued walking, with the canal and the steep Horsehold Wood on our left, and the swift River Calder below us on our right. Beyond another moored narrowboat, *Edale*, was a curious terrace of houses whose front doors opened right over the river. A stout stone shelf ran the length of the terrace, providing a path past all the front doors. Below the shelf, the walls of the terrace dropped sheer a dozen feet or more to the river; from our viewpoint it looked very precarious, but perhaps when you're standing on it the path feels solidier than a mere shelf.

The extracts above are taken from the towpath-walking sections of the books, but there are also hillwalking and visits to stately homes and museums, and sidetracks into genealogy, literature and music as well as wildlife and local history. Most relevant to IWA Manchester and the Rochdale Canal Society is that if you buy Book 2 from the former, or Book 1 from the latter, the full £7.99 purchase price goes to that charity. So even if you don't read this kind of book yourself, start thinking who you might soon need to get a birthday present for!

The books are not available in ordinary bookshops, but are also sold through certain other charities: more details on www.fourpointsramble.org.uk

Standedge Tunnel Event – Sue Day



There were many people involved in running the Standedge Canal Tunnel Festival both before and during the event. I send thanks on behalf of the Horse Boating Society for the help of all those involved, and congratulate all the cheerful faces despite the pouring rain from midday!

I have received many compliments about the event. People feel it was a good event for its first year and the turnout was good, considering the weather and short time for publicity. There was very good newspaper coverage by the *Oldham Chronicle* and *Huddersfield Examiner*. I did not attempt to contact other papers for 2008.



The two MPs David Heyes and Phil Woolas seemed to genuinely enjoy themselves and have praised the event publicly. David requested that he could leg in the tunnel so he

did his stint, then I ensured he was photographed legging as horseboat Maria came out at Marsden.

Ronnie Barnes, age 89, steered Maria up the Marsden flight on our return journey from Huddersfield. He was thrilled to be behind the tiller again.

Fantastic weather for all of our journey, except on the event day of May 4th! Bilbo Baggins, my boathorse in training, did extremely well.

We got home late on May 16. Since then I've attended by car with Toy Bonny at Rickmansworth Waterways Festival, The National Trailboat Festival in Devon, and Crick Boat Show. So I'm buzzing with ideas for our own event in 2009 etc!

In praise of BW

I dare say it was just a routine task for British Waterways staff, but my friend and I wish to commend the efforts of all those concerned in tackling a problem that occurred on the Trent & Mersey Canal on the 16th /17th of March 2008. We had moored just below Rumps Lock on the evening of the 16th with the intention of getting an early start on our trip around a section of the Cheshire Ring that would take us to Hardings Wood on Monday evening, Bollington on Tuesday, Portland Basin on Wednesday, and Castlefield on Thursday. However, as we prepared to set off at 6.30am on Monday morning we discovered that a craft that had come through the lock in the darkness on Sunday evening hadn't closed the paddles properly and during the night the stretch of canal from Rumps Lock to Booth Lane Locks was drained! I don't know how often this sort of thing occurs, but I wish I'd had a camera to record the potential consequences of not properly closing lock paddles. The picture could be displayed on every BW notice board in the vicinity of a lock. It was quite a shock to see the result, and left us with a serious dilemma as to whether we would be able to continue with our plan. I phoned the BW emergency number and the response was excellent. By 7am BW staff were on site to assess the situation and it wasn't long after that they began to trickle water into this stretch of the canal from every conceivable source. Our special thanks go to Alan who was not only going up and down the system releasing water and providing notices to boaters appraising them of the problem but also found time to frequently return to us to keep us informed and to advise us when it was safe to proceed. By the time we were eventually able to proceed at 10.30am there were two other boats waiting with us. Progress was slow as we stayed in the centre of the canal and tried to avoid any possibility of getting stuck, and it was incredible to see how this problem had impacted on the waterway for the next several miles – boats 'hanging' from their moorings, waterline levels well below normal. What a sharp contrast this was to the final stretch of our trip, from Portland Basin into Castlefield, where the problem of too much water in the system meant that the water level above the lock was higher than the lock itself on several occasions making lock opening quite a challenge. This was on the Thursday when the weather was by far the most difficult on the trip, heavy showers and very strong winds.

In briefly summarising the rest of the trip we greatly enjoyed our first experience of the 'Cheshire Ring'. J.M. Pearson and Son's 'Canal Companion' for this route was a great help, packed with fascinating information and wonderfully written. Unfortunately our timescale didn't allow us to include the Peak Forest stretch to Whaley Bridge or the

Huddersfield Canal from Portland Basin to Stalybridge, but as we shared a bottle of wine at the 'Dukes '92' late on Thursday afternoon we could reflect on a very enjoyable and rewarding experience. The Trent and Mersey to Red Bull was undoubtedly a challenge, incorporating as it does the infamous 'Heartbreak Hill' – 26 locks in a seven mile stretch, but the fabulous surroundings more than compensate for the effort involved. The Macclesfield Canal must be one of the most exhilarating stretches of water in the whole network. Our thanks and compliments to the Macclesfield Canal Society for their work in helping to restore and promote the Canal and its many beautiful features. Marple Locks, though stiff to operate, are set in wonderful surroundings and the journey through Romiley and Hyde and eventually to Ashton provide interesting and contrasting images as the canal weaves through urban and rural settings. The 'handcuffed' locks from Portland Basin through to Castlefield were easier to operate than had been expected and any thoughts of interference from 'troublemakers' were pushed out of our minds as we battled against the elements. Once again we had assistance from a BW employee who was checking the locks and clearing debris ahead of a BW boat coming up from Ancoats. It was perhaps fitting that the only bad weather on the trip came during our descent into the 'bowels' of the City of Manchester. It was quite a surreal experience to be seemingly floating through the cellars of Manchester's finest 'high rise'. All in all a great experience and one we would happily commend to other boaters.

Dave Eatock & Alan Storton Craft: Dubsy II BW index no. 503173

Boaters have a Field Day ***Sue Day***

On Sunday July 6, anybody visiting Portland Basin, Ashton-u-Lyne would have seen a very busy scene amongst the many canal societies which operate locally. It was a chance to see "Life on the Cut".

Early on, the Wooden Canal Boat Society set out with their boats *Forget-me-Knot* and *Lilith* on their monthly recycling trip. The boats are taken along the Ashton Canal to the Fairfield Junction which is at the top of the Ashton flight of locks. The crew collects materials from local houses to then bring back by boat to Ashton where the goods are sold in their charity shop to raise money for the restoration and operation of their boats. *Hazel* will be the next boat to be restored, to give holidays to those suffering from depression.

Boat-trips were available on the boat *Still Waters* owned by the Tameside Canal Boat Trust, operated by volunteers from the Huddersfield Canal Society. These went from the Portland Basin Museum along the Ashton Canal to the start of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal.

Meanwhile, members of the Tudor Cruising Club, which is made up of local boat owners and assistant crew, were helping the Horse Boating Society set up a small event on the field over the aqueduct. A modern pleasure boat was taken along the Peak Forest Canal to the Plantation Farm lift bridge to collect all the gear from the horsebox needed to run the day's activities. Then this boat was moored with horse boat *Maria* at the field to show the contrast between them. *Maria* is an historic wooden narrow boat built to be pulled by horse for work carrying cargo, whereas the modern steel boat is engine-powered and was built for pleasure to be used for outings and holidays.

The Horse Boating Society “had a field day” by drawing in the public to meet Bilbo Baggins, the canal boat horse who has been trained this season on the Ashton Canal to pull historic horseboat *Maria*. Demonstrations of harnessing him up were held to explain what he needed to wear and how it worked so that he could pull a horseboat. The educational and heritage work of the society was discussed. The society can move a boat horse to anywhere in Britain in a horsebox to join another boat, but *Maria* is the flagship of the society. She is owned and was restored by the Ashton Packet Boat Co. Many people will remember having rides in her when she was operated as a passenger boat from 1978-1999. She was returned to her cargo carrying status in 2004, to celebrate her 150th anniversary. She is Britain’s oldest surviving wooden narrow boat, built in 1854 at Marple. She has been using the same waters through Ashton for 154 years. Ashton MP, David Heyes, has steered her on the Ashton Canal, and even legged her through a tunnel this year.

The Inland Waterways Association was well represented by the Manchester Branch bringing its stall and the National Chairman attending with his fiancée. The stall had much information about local canals with free leaflets and maps available, waterway books for sale, and an activity for children to colour in scenes of the waterways from boats to ducks.

Souvenirs were available for sale on another stall. Of particular interest is the DVD “Life on the Cut”, about the history and heritage of the canals. This was filmed in the autumn of 2007 by Mikron Theatre Company with the Horse Boating Society, Wooden Canal Boat Society, and the Tudor Cruising Club, all taking place on the Peak Forest and Ashton Canals.

Wild over Waterways activities (WoW) were set up for families. They were able to have a go at labelling the boat harness on Toy Bonny, the model boat horse. There were questions to answer about *Maria*, a jigsaw of a mare and foal, and a game of quoits to resemble the boatman’s skills needed to throw a line over a mooring bollard when a boat is tied up.

The Horse Boating Society which organised the event on the field was very pleased with how the day went. The field is ideal for a small event such as this, drawing people’s attention to local waterway society activities. It is hoped to repeat the event again. Thanks go to British Waterways North-West and the Tameside Countryside Service as both organisations were very supportive of the event. See the website for further info at www.horseboating.org.uk

All these waterway societies welcome new members. It is an opportunity to become involved in boating without the need to own your own boat. See websites for further info or visit the Portland Basin Museum.

Boathorse News (May 2008)

Sue Day, Chairperson of The Horseboating Society

*Big news. Bonny The Boathorse has given birth to a delightful little filly on May 24. As far as I know the last foal born to a boathorse was about 12 years ago at the Foxton Horseboat Company. Bonny and baby are doing very well, so far. They are delighting the many passers by who stroll the canal towpath in Uppermill on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. The foal is already accustomed to the sounds of the lock paddles at two nearby locks. So her boathorse training has already begun! The foal is called *Mayfair Lady* (like *My Fair Lady*). *May* - because she was born in the month of May, and when the *May Blossom* was at its very best. *Fair* - because she*



was born over the May Bank Holiday, a time for feasts and fairs. In fact, I was away when the foal was born, at the National Trail Boat Festival on the Grand Western Canal, supporting the Tiverton Canal Co horsedrawn barge at that event. The foal was born earlier than expected, dismature, not premature apparently. Bonny was in safe hands while I was away, but it was a great surprise to learn Bonny had foaled early. This is her first foal and she is immensely happy and proud. Our relationship is one of great trust and she has allowed me full access to her foal, which is a great privilege. As a result of Bonny's confidence, the foal is unusually friendly.

The foal is the great grand-daughter of my first working horse Blossom and keeps my line going.

Feel welcome to visit them if you are in the area. For some time they'll be between lock 22W-23W on the Hudd. Narrow, seen from the towing path in Uppermill.

Sue Day, Chairperson of The Horseboating Society

Canal Societies in the Branch Area

Shropshire Union Canal Society

Contact: Linda Andrews, Secretary 07867790195

Wooden Canal Boat Society

e-mail: njosephinecollier@yahoo.co.uk

website: www.shropshireunion.org.uk

The Horse Boating Society

e-mail: enquiries@horseboating.org.uk



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IWA Manchester Branch Winter Talks Programme October 2008 - April 2009

2nd Monday in the month commencing 8pm prompt
In the Brindley Room, At Dukes 92, Castle Street, Castlefield, Manchester

Meetings are open to members and non-members All Welcome

October 13th	Steve Rigby Diving to the Titanic, a personal view from an award winning author
November 10th	Peter Scott <i>On his namesake 'Peter Scott' and boat 'Beatrice May'</i>
December 8th NOTE VENUE CHANGE	Mike Clarke & Christmas Social <i>The Leeds and Liverpool Canal, its' history and an update on the Liverpool Link</i> Ukrainian Club, 215 Stockport Road Guide Bridge, Ashton-u-Lyne OL7 0NP {email Steve for directions if needed}
January 12th	David Brown BWB <i>Reservoir feeds to canals, especially in our region</i>
February 9th	Colin Edmanson <i>An introduction to the history of the River Weaver and its' links with the salt industry, liberally illustrated with old and new photographs, maps and diagrams.</i>
March 9th	Glen Atkinson <i>What the Papers Said – Victorian Newspapers: a light hearted look at the incredible antics reported in Victorian newspapers</i> Followed by AGM
April 14th	TBA

Manchester Branch area Canals

The Bridgewater Canal, The Rochdale Canal, The Ashton Canal, The Huddersfield Narrow Canal, The Lower Peak Forest Canal, The Macclesfield Canal, The Manchester Ship Canal.

In addition there are four restorations in progress within the Manchester Branch:

Hollinswood Canal; The Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal; The Stockport Branch Canal; Bugsworth Basin

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