What have dragons to do with canals?
see inside

No 27        April 2010

{Dragon from Google Images}
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EDITORIAL

As I am sure you are all aware the IWA is campaigning nationally to try to persuade government to reduce the cuts in BW’s funding: the Save Our System campaign. Locally the Branch takes on issues closer to home. Amongst the most significant recent issues was the fencing off of the Rochdale canal along Canal Street in Manchester for which we can claim a partial success. However we did persuade BW to install pontoons at the relevant locks which will make boating easier and safer. Currently we are lobbying on two fronts: BW’s plans to develop Marple Wharf (at the junction of the Upper Peak Forest and Macclesfield Canals) and the planned hard surfacing of the Rochdale Canal over its beautiful summit section. Details of our comments on these proposals are in this issue and I would welcome your views.

At last Spring seems to have arrived and we will soon be into the Festival Season. There is a list of those in our area in this issue. We hope that you will be able to find time to come along to any that take your fancy. Also look out for the walks and tours which organised by the Branch over the next few months.

Also in this issue are some of the canal societies in the area but others are missing; is yours? If so send me details.

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.

Branch Chairman’s Column

Steve Connolly

Whilst I have every confidence in the improved status of Manchester Branch I must admit to pinching myself now and then to make sure our good fortune is not just a dream. May I welcome three new members to the Branch committee, not just members but folk who are willing to give a few hours to furthering our aspirations. First of the three is Steve Broadhead who has offered to organise a summer of walks and tours, hence we have the new committee post of “Walks and Tours” [took some thinking about to come up with that title!] Not content with his first offer, Steve has managed to organise a free room at Manchester Town Hall for our monthly committee meetings, which having been
tried out on the 15th of March proved to be an excellent venue, although the
on street parking needs to be approached with caution. Second of our new
helpers is Diana Price, and if the name rings a bell its because Diana is the
wife of our Editor Ian. Diana has offered to take on the role of Treasurer as
Barry is finding things difficult due to family pressures. Our third newcomer is
Jean McKay who has volunteered to run the Membership Office, Jean kindly
replied to my request in the last Packet, thus proving that somebody actually
reads our publication. On that subject, following a request from Ian Price, we
have decided to reduce the number of Packets per year to three, January,
April and September. This reduction was requested due to the lack of summer
copy and the problems in producing a magazine during the boating season.
We feel that this number of editions will cover members requirements while, if
necessary, leave the opportunity of printing a Chairman's Newsletter if further
copy becomes available. We hope that these changes will be approved by the
membership and if not, please let us know. Suggestions on a ten pound note,
addressed to Ian please.

On the subject of Ian there must be something in the air in Buxton as following
a comment from the chairman regarding his health and senility, Sue suggested
we best have a Vice Chairman, proposed Ian and he accepted, poor fool!! Jok-
ing aside I am very glad we now have a further firm hand on the tiller and I
wish Ian every success in his new post. I shall now pinch myself again and
then find a dark room to have a lie down in as the pace is too much.
REGIONAL CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

Alan Platt

There has been considerable activity on the political front over the last few months. British Waterways has progressed its ideas for its future by commissioning a consultant’s report, which some may consider to be the sort of luxury they should try to do without. This develops the idea of their transferring to the ‘Third Sector’ and they appear to have listened to suggestions from their stakeholders, including the IWA. There still remain a number of areas where there are serious problems, principle of which is funding. There is growing concern that, having had their guns spiked on their plans to appropriate BW’s property portfolio, the Treasury may be very unwilling to enter into a long term funding agreement with a third sector new body. There is also a feeling that BW seem to be improving their attitude to volunteers but that in certain instances this will require a major change of attitude on the ground. Their new plans place great emphasis on engaging with a growing army of volunteers working with the new body, which begs the question as to how they recruit people that the IWA and Canal Societies have not already recruited.

The IWA at the same time as it evaluates BW’s proposals has its own ideas for a Waterways Conservancy as first proposed by one of our founders, Robert Aikman. This obviously needs updating and developing in the light of the greatly changed modern situation and this is in process. A key and radical feature which is already emerging is for a new overall navigation authority to operate the navigable waterways currently managed by BW, the EA, Broads Authority etc, eliminating all the currently inconsistent licensing and management features of these bodies. It strikes me that one benefit of this could be that economies of scale in the central operations may well go some way towards relieving the current funding shortfalls all these bodies are currently experiencing.

At the same time DEFRA has just released the first draft of ‘Waterways for Everyone’ and has held a number of consultative workshops, one of which I attended in Cardiff. This contains much that is worthy and very little of substance. Positive sentiments that no one will argue with are much in evidence but very little in the line of hard proposals. The document traces how over the years the various navigation authorities have evolved without seeming to question whether this irrationally evolved structure should be improved. When
we broke up into our discussion groups in Cardiff we were asked to come up with suggestions, but not to mention funding. Needless to say all suggestions basically involved funding as that lies at the core of any current discussion on our waterways. The progress of this project may also be delayed by the impending election.

Which leads us of course to the impending election and the IWA 2010 campaign. Hopefully all branches will be developing their plans for this and if nowhere else, it will be discussed at the Regional AGM on March 6th. We do need individual members to participate in this campaign and to question all candidates on the subject of present and future funding for the waterways. We know there are priorities with Health, Education etc but there must be space and funds for the waterways. In this, as in all areas, all the work cannot solely be left to a small and overworked number of committee members. We need our armchair members to get involved.

All of which is very heavy stuff; on a happier front, hopefully the weather will improve and the waterways will be a more tempting place for us to enjoy than of late. Have a good summer.

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ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON AT STANDEDGE
&
THE HORSEBOATING SOCIETY LEGGING EVENT

SUNDAY APRIL 25 - 2010

10.30am Horseboat at Brownhill Countryside Centre, Dobcross
See the horse-drawn boat work up through the Diggle flight of locks

1pm A guided walk: start at the Diggle portal of Standedge Tunnel
Follow the boathorse along Boat Lane, over Standedge, to Tunnel End
while the boat is legged through Standedge Tunnel below you, 4 miles.
Or
1pm A storytelling walk: start opposite the Railway pub in Marsden,
and join the walk to the Standedge Visitor Centre at Tunnel End,
hearing tales as you go about the tunnel and dragons and others……..

2pm Maypole dancing & Morris dancing by Thieving Magpies
Family activities with a St.George and the Dragon theme

3pm Display of firespinning and firebreathing

3.30pm Arrival of Dragon Boat (with 2 barrels of beer!)
Cheer on St.George. Boo the bad, bad dragon.
St.George will slay the dragon to rescue all the villagers

www.standedge.co.uk  www.horseboating.org.uk
www.cuckoofestival.co.uk
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So just what was actually happening at Standedge in 1810, two hundred years ago? Boats had no tunnel yet to use, so their cargoes were unloaded, and packhorses and wagon horses took the loads overland, right over the top of Standedge, over the Pennine ridge. Below these horses at work, the tunnel was still being dug out, being worked from several shafts simultaneously. In Dec 1810, the first boat went through.

What’s happening in 2010? The Horseboating Society is making its annual return journey on the Huddersfield Narrow, legging Standedge Tunnel. This is Britain’s longest canal tunnel at 3¼ miles long. So that is exciting enough, but now take note.

The boat will be legged through the tunnel on April 25 then it will return on May 3 from Tunnel End to Diggle on Bank Holiday Monday. On that day, the tradition of parading a working horse on the May Holiday will be followed. After a long Pennine winter, a horse will nearly be in its sleek summer coat. At Tunnel End, visitors will be able to see how a horse was worked as a packhorse, wagggon horse, or boat horse before the tunnel opened for use in 1811. A 4 mile guided walk will follow the boathorse over Standedge, to Diggle, then the boat will be horsedrawn to Uppermill.

11am-1pm MEET A PACK HORSE, WAGGON HORSE, AND BOAT HORSE
1pm BOAT LEGGED THROUGH TUNNEL. GUIDED WALK WITH HORSE.

Crew and leggers are always needed and welcomed by the Horseboating Society. Enquiries: Sue Day, sueday_horse@yahoo.co.uk, 01457-834863, 07711-121-056
Website for horseboating journey details and itinerary: www.horseboating.org.uk
EVENTS IN IWA MANCHESTER AREA

April 25, Sunday - Huddersfield Narrow Canal
- from Wool Road, Dobcross to Tunnel End, Marsden. Horseboating Society journey up Diggle Locks, legging Standedge Tunnel, guided walk over Boat Lane, St. George and the Dragon theme.
See poster for timetable. See www.standedge.co.uk, www.horseboating.org.uk

May 3, Bank Holiday Monday - Huddersfield Narrow Canal
- from Tunnel End, Marsden to Wool Road, Dobcross. Horseboating Society legging Standedge Tunnel, guided walk over Boat Lane, journey down Diggle Locks, Horses at Work at Standedge theme.
See poster for timetable. See www.standedge.co.uk, www.horseboating.org.uk

June 2, Wednesday - Ashton Canal
- 7pm Guided walk on Ashton Canal with Steven Broadhead, IWA
See www.waterways.org.uk (Manchester Branch page)

July 24-August 1st - nine day Rochdale Canal Festival
-- July 24, Saturday - Opening Day at Failsworth Basin
- August 1, Sunday – Closing Day at the Summit pound, above Littleborough
A programme of activities, theme of “Have a Go” on the water. Boat trips.
Visiting boats welcomed throughout the festival. Take part in the canal relay.
See www.thewaterwaystrust.org.uk/projects/rochdale

September 11-25, Lower and Upper Peak Forest Canals, Macclesfield Canal
15 day Marple Festival with a boat gathering, promoting Marple as a canal destination
Boat Gathering, Top Lock, Marple. Visiting boats welcomed to all of the festival.
- Sept 10-12 National Heritage Open Days. Horseboat Maria, built Marple 1854.
- 11/12 Start of Gathering of Boats at Top Lock, to attend the festival - BW/IWA
- 17/18 Beer Festival and Live music, at Marple CC
- 18 Last night of the Proms, at Methodist Hall
- 18-25 Painting exhibition by local artists, in Library
- 19 Special Proms Service, at Methodist Hall and 19 Painting classes, in the Park
- 20 Halle concert
- 21/22/23 Cookery demo nights, at MCC (2nights)
- 24 Comedy Night, at MCC
- 25 Food and Drink Festival with Jazz & Brass Bands
Other ideas being considered include:
National Heritage weekend activities, Guided Walks, Local History Talks, Fashion Show Week, Well Dressing opp All Saints Church, Flower Festival, Writing groups, guest authors, illustrators, also with children, Poetry competition, Film shows: Marple College Cinema, Regent Cinema, Organ recitals, Steel Band/West Indian Evening, Brass Quintet /Band Competition, Stockport Symphony Orchestra, Stockport Youth Orchestra, Scratch Choirs, Dance, Irish Dance, Drama at Carver Theatre, Literary Talks, Craft displays. More ideas welcome.
See www.waterways.org.uk (Manchester page)

**September 19 or 26, Sunday** Rochdale Canal Society Annual Summit Rally
Rochdale Canal, Summit Pound above Littleborough plus grass site
Boat trips, stalls, brass band, refreshments etc.
See www.waterways.org.uk (Manchester Branch page)

**December 10-12, Friday, Saturday** Sunday Huddersfield Narrow Canal, Standedge
**Standedge Tunnel bi-centenary** starts on Friday Dec 10 because the first boat went through as a trial on Dec 10, 1810.
Draft ideas: Summit walk, meal at Tunnel End pub, craft fair, Santa boat trips.
See www.standedge.co.uk and www.waterways.org.uk (Manchester Branch page)

**December 21, Tuesday** Rochdale Canal Annual Summit Walk
2 miles max and lunch at The Summit pub
To celebrate the opening of the canal on Dec 21, 1804
11am Meet by the lock-keepers cottage for the walk. Mincepies and mulled wine.
Organised by the Rochdale Canal Society. All welcome.
See www.waterways.org.uk (Manchester Branch page)

**Manchester Branch area Canals**

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
Branch Campaigns

Ian Price

Currently the Branch has been actively commenting and lobbying on three significant development proposals on canals in our area: the re-development of Marple Wharf; hard surfacing the towpath over the summit of the Rochdale Canal; and future use of the Whaley Bridge Transhipment Shed.

Over the last several years we have lobbied hard for a canal friendly solution to the problems associated with the bars along Canal Street in Manchester (Rochdale Canal). Unfortunately we achieved only partial success in that the fencing installed does not detract too much from the original stone walling and BW have installed pontoons on the locks making boating very much easier and safer. However the combination of the fencing and trees planted some time ago all but prevents horse boating through this section despite Canal Street being a designated towpath. Early and better consultation and more thought from those responsible for the street and canal could have produced, in our eyes, a much better solution.

Proposed Development of Marple Wharf

For those not familiar with the location, the wharf lies between two roving bridges at the end of the Macclesfield Canal, the second of which leads directly to the Junction of the Peak Forest Canal with the top lock of the Marple Flight immediately adjacent. A former BW warehouse is listed, as are the bridges, and the whole area is designated as a conservation area. It is a key location on the Cheshire Ring and a significant canal location of historic and visual significance.

The proposed development is between the warehouse and the first bridge opposite the existing visitor moorings. The site is currently a vacant and rather scruffy site which houses a mooring and parking for a charity trip boat and a BW amenity block (water, toilet and effluent disposal). Opposite to the site there are currently visitor moorings for three average narrowboats, one of which will be designated a water point under the proposals.

The plans are not finalised and planning permission has not been applied for yet.
In brief, the NW Regional Chairman has written to BW with the following comments:

“- The general design of a row of two storey houses adjacent to the canal is too crowded and intrusive. Any such development must be sympathetic to the listed built heritage in the area and the canal environment.

- The location of the 7 properties immediately adjacent to the canal with no allowance for boats is unrealistic. There is congestion here in the summer and the idea that boats will wait for the locks on the western side of the bridge ignores the reality in that boats will not be aware of congestion until they have come through the bridge, when they will not reverse back. The visitor moorings opposite the houses will be reduced by the proposed water point and congestion is inevitable. The development shows a lamentable lack of appreciation of the requirements and needs of boaters.

- The location of the new service block to the rear of the warehouse is totally unacceptable. Assuming the boater is moored adjacent to the water point you are proposing that people should carry rubbish bags and full elsan containers a least 140 metres up a steep ramp over a cobbled roving bridge and past houses. The use of trolleys, common among boaters to carry elsan containers will be impossible. This will not enhance the heritage and visual aspect of the area and may well constitute a Health and Safety hazard, as well as being completely impractical and ignoring the legal obligation of BW to allow access to facilities to disabled boaters.

- The existing facility is not satisfactory but does allow for self pump out and has facilities immediately adjacent to the canal. This stretch of canal is ill served for facilities, especially given its popularity and the idea that boaters can use commercial boatyard facilities abrogates BW’s duty in this regard. “

BW have come back with a suggestion for a meeting so watch this space.

We are sympathetic to BW’s financial constraints and the IWA is campaigning vigorously for improvements in government funding for the Waterways. However our primary concern is, and must be, for the quality and condition of the waterway environment and this is especially so in such a key location at Marple Junction.
Rochdale Summit Towpath

Sustrans, under the Connect2 scheme have been hard surfacing the Rochdale Canal towpath up to Littleborough. Their objective is to improve the towpath surfacing to encourage greater use by the wider community. They aim to provide a surface which is good for cyclists, push chairs and wheel chairs and enables walkers to use the towpath in normal footwear (i.e. no muddy puddles). Some additional funding has become available which would enable them to continue over the summit of the canal. It is this which the Branch is most concerned about as it would alter the character of this very attractive remote rural stretch of canal.

Below is the letter written on behalf of the Branch stating our objections to the hard surfacing of the towpath over the summit.

**ROCHDALE CANAL TOW PATH RESURFACING**

*I have been asked to write on behalf of the Manchester Branch of the IWA to express our concerns over proposals to surface the Rochdale canal towpath from Littleborough to Warland, including the summit section, with a tar based material. The Branch represents 788 local members from the IWA national membership of some 17,000. We support fully improvements to the canal infrastructure which ease use and access by all. However we note that the proposals do not follow the IWA Towing Path Policy, and we have the following concerns based on the real experience of our members over many years:*

- *We are surprised and disappointed at the lack of early and proper consultation with users so that decisions on surfacing could be made appropriate to all users in advance of applications for funding;*

- *Smooth surfaced tow paths encourage and result in cyclists traveling at speed causing problems for other users; there have been a great many conflicts and some accidents and there is a real risk of serious injury; aggregate surfacing usually results in helping reduce such high speeds; it appears that the desires of cyclists are to take priority over others and the general amenity value of the canal*
- In rural areas tar based surfaces are out of character; it is the unspoilt rural nature of the higher reaches of the Rochdale canal which is one of its attractions to users whether long distance walkers or families out for a stroll in the countryside (many consider it to be the most attractive stretch of canal in the UK); towpath surfacing should reflect its surroundings. Little attempt seems to have been made to blend the resurfacing of the towpath with its surroundings when other bodies laying paths in rural areas do so (e.g. National Parks, National Trust).

- Has thought been given to the maintenance and repair of the new surfacing? Aggregate surfacing would appear to be amenable to volunteer repairs, consistent with BW’s plans to use volunteer groups to assist in the maintenance of the canal system

The IWA asks for its objection to the resurfacing scheme to be respected.

Ian Price

In addition to writing the Branch Chairman and myself attended a meeting in Littleborough to raise our concerns and to look at the proposed materials where already laid. Whilst the spray tar & stone chipping surface was not as visually obtrusive as we first thought it was still very artificial and out of character to a rural setting, particularly in the high Pennine location. It was clear from the debate that Sustrans had given no thought to the need of boaters (e.g. placement of mooring pins) or the problems that high speed cycling causes other towpath users such as fishermen, walkers and families with young children.

Whaley Bridge Transhipment Shed

In a previous issue we described a consultation taking place on potential future uses for the historic Transhipment Shed at Whaley Bridge. As yet we have not heard of any further proposals or movement in progressing this.

We may find out more from the BW’s Heritage Advisers when they come to our April Open Meeting.

We would like you views on these and any other matter affecting our canals.
Canal and Navigation Societies in the North West.

**Shropshire Union Canal Society**

The Society was formed in 1968 to promote interest in the past, present and future of 158 miles of canal. This embraces the Main Line of the Shropshire Union Canal, from Ellesmere Port to Atherley Junction, the Llangollen Canal, the Middlewich Arm, the Montgomery Canal and the line and remnants of the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal. These canals are an essential part of our waterways system and the society believes that they have a tremendous social and commercial value to the community.

The Society’s main concern is to reopen the Montgomery Canal which was abandoned by Act of Parliament in 1944, but which remained in British Waterways ownership. In 1987 a further act was passed to enable the full restoration to be undertaken.

The Society has done a considerable amount of work and reopened Carregoha locks in 1986 followed by Burgedin Locks in 1998. The opening of Burgedin Locks extended the navigable stretch of the canal by 11 miles near Welshpool. The Society subsequently turned its attention to the Newton end of the canal and Brynderwen Lock was officially opened in June 2002 after restoration work by the society, which started in 1998. Work now continues at Newhouse Lock.

To promote the restoration of the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal a new organisation was formed in the autumn of 2000, the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust, which has resulted in the restoration being upgraded to a rating of National Significance. This was because the Society felt unable to support two canal restorations projects at the same time. It has strong links with the new Trust which has a representative on our Council.

Contact: Linda Andrews, Secretary. Telephone 07867790195.

Email nbjosephinecollier@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.shropshireunion.org.uk/

**Wooden Canal Boat Society**

The wooden Canal Boat Society, founded in 1996, is a charity dedicated to saving, restoring and using on community projects some of the real old wooden working boats of Britain's canal network and are based at Knowl Street in Stalybridge, on the Ashton canal in Greater Manchester. These craft are a vital but hitherto largely neglected part of the canal heritage. Less than 200 wooden working boats now survive on over 2000 miles of inland waterways.
The W.C.B.S. is saving as many as it can, when restored they function not as dead museum pieces but as living working boats serving today’s community.

As well as creating a fully functional heritage boatyard the Society is now involved in a range of activities aimed at preserving and using wooden narrow boats.

The Wooden Canal Boat Society, 33 Beauchamp Street, Ashton Under Lyne, OL6 8LF

Contact: Chris Leah, Telephone 0161 330 8422 or Mobile 07931 952037

Email: wcbs@beeb.net     Website: www.wcbs.org.uk/

The Horse Boating Society

The Horse Boating Society was formed in 2001 at the Boat Museum, Ellesmere Port. The primary aim of the Society is to preserve and promote horseboating and has about 100 members and with other organisations also affiliated, the Society represents over 1000 in total.

The objectives of the Society are to promote the communication and cooperation between persons and organisations with an interest in horseboating. It also strives to maintain responsible operation of horsedrawn craft on the inland waterways and the training of crew and horses to a standard suitable for use by boathorses and horsedrawn craft and the preservation, restoration and maintenance of the various types of horsedrawn craft. The Society promotes the education of public about the history and present use of horsedrawn craft and the research into the skills, people, horses, boats, structures and equipment involved in horseboating and archiving and retention of relative literature and documentation. Many of the horsedrawn journeys undertaken so far have depended on Sue Day, the chairperson, providing the horse, harness and horsebox.     Email: enquiries@horseboating.org.uk

Website: http://www.mossley.freeuk.com/horseboating/about.htm

Is your society here? If not let me have details and I will include them Ed.
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IWA Manchester Branch Winter Talks Programme

October 2009 - April 2010

The meetings are held on the 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

12th October 2009  Tom Barkley - New Zealand in Brief
Its lakes, gorges, geysers and rivers including a boat trip through the Milford Sound

9th November 2009 Colin Edmondson - Not so Solid Ground
A trip from the salt works to Anderton looking at the old salt works, breaches, and subsidence (including some of the worst incidences in the UK)

14th December 2009 Christmas Social - speaker Alan Platt NW Regional Chairman

Note change of venue: Ukrainian Club, 215 Stockport Rd, Guide Bridge, Ashton-u-Lyne OL7 0NP

11th January 2010  Glen Atkinson - The Underground Canals of Worsley
52 miles of ingenuity and achievement. A mysterious underworld revealed and explained.

8th February 2010  Leslie Brown - Former diver on the Manchester Ship Canal

8th March 2010  AGM followed by Ray Butler - Canal Heritage Afloat - An Introduction to Working Boats

12th April 2010  Judy Jones & Andrew Tegg - BW Heritage Advisors talk about their work