

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 8 Number 2
Summer 2014



New Interpretation Boards at Spike Island

Thanks to a grant from Ineos Chlor, new, high quality interpretation boards have been erected around the Spike Island site.

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Founded 1985

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Linda Dirir and Steve Parish (Warrington)

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 2: Summer 2014

**Editor and Production: David Long
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CUTS TO "CUTTINGS" ?

This is the last issue of CUTTINGS to contain Peter Keen's excellent summaries of SCARS' Talks Programme. His meticulous note-taking has provided us with a record of the Talks themselves, and an opportunity for those unable to attend the Talks to enjoy the wide range of topics covered at second-hand. The Society would like to thank Peter on your behalf for the years he has carried out this task, and for the enjoyment and education which we have received through his painstaking work.

However, as the CONTENTS page above once again shows, Peter's Reports have provided a major part of our newsletter's material—around 25%, issue after issue. His contributions are also one of the reasons our magazine is well received by our own members, and by the wider readership it enjoys. We print 400 copies, of which the majority go to non-Members—local Councillors, other waterways organisations and those picked up by the public from our Stall.

If we are to continue to produce CUTTINGS to the high standard we have set ourselves, we will need contributions from elsewhere to fill its pages. We would like to ask all our readers, members and non-members, to see if they can assist us in this by helping to contribute to some articles for the future issues.

Write an article if you can, or at least suggest a topic. You can contact myself (email above), or the Chair or Secretary (emails and addresses opposite) with your suggestions.

David Long, Editor

Chairman's Report: From Dave Smallshaw

Welcome again to another issue of Canal Cuttings which comes out just as the English summer weather seems to have finally reverted to form after some months of very pleasant sunshine. I hope that the weather has been kind to your plans and that we haven't finished our allocation of sun just yet.

Another busy spell for the sales team has seen us at the IWA Chester Campaign Festival, Scarisbrick Marina, two Newton shows and we also intend to be at Widnes for the final weekend of September, when the well supported fairground organ show comes to town. So, if you haven't been along to see us - and possibly buy some of our wares - then you still have a chance, but I am sure Colin will expand on these events elsewhere in this issue. After the financial disaster of its National Festival at Watford in 2013 the IWA suspended the Festivals, and decided in the future to attend a selection of regional venues instead. It is a shame, as it was the one event in which we could take our name and restoration plans to a national stage. But, as it happened, the first really important event after that decision was



close by at Chester (*above: our banner flies high over our canalside stall*)—so we naturally looked to support this in strength, but we also took the decision not to attend any other national festivals this year.

However, I saw that the IWA was to have a strong presence at the Stratford-on-Avon River Festival, so I decided to combine business with pleasure by taking in some Shakespearean culture and representing the Society on this occasion. It was a thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining event and pulled in huge crowds for the two days of festivities. Proudly wearing my SCARS shirt I made contact with a lot of the crowd you normally see at national festivals and had time to chat to IWA national officials and also WRG North West and the Wilts and Berks Canal Society who, along with other local waterway groups, had decided to send sales teams there. Both were reasonably happy with the attention they were receiving so it may be an event which we may need to look at for the future. It was certainly a good weekend and I would commend it to anyone planning for next summer.

The summer has been anything but quiet locally, and we continue to work closely with the Interlocks Project team and Halton Borough officers to formulate further grant applications to bolster our cherished aim of bringing the southern part of the canal back to navigation. Believe me this is now no pipe dream but has a definite prospect of being achievable in the not too distant future!

We are cautiously confident of success in our joint application for funding for the repair of the river locks at Spike Island. The project aims to restore the outer lock gates to full working order so that boats will more readily be able to gain access to the lower reaches of the canal. Difficulties encountered currently by those operating the gates puts potential users off and limits the potential uses that are possible, and this prevents new opportunities for water-based attractions and activities that would attract new audiences to the Spike Island Park. More use of this important recreation facility will further be highlighted in the production of a new leaflet which is due out shortly, sponsored by Ineos Chlor, promoting the history of the island through new signage and the way marking of a heritage trail. Nearby, we have been monitoring the effects the new gateway crossing construction might bring. We were alerted by SCARS Member Nick Coleman of problems where the canal and towpath had been crossed by the access road for construction purposes. The towpath, a public right of way, is now closed for a period of at least eight months, but the barriers across the route were inadequately signed as to the precise route of the diversion (a responsibility of the contractors). Luckily, through our excellent contacts with Halton and Nick's direct contact, the contractors were appraised of the problem and the route is now clearly indicated. Needless to say we will keep an eagle eye on matters which affect the waterway, and it's good to see that our members are also up the task of both alerting us and taking appropriate individual action. Incidentally I recommend that you cast an eye over Nick's contribution on the waterway history on the local website <http://ourlocalvoice.co.uk/>.

In May we were delighted to be able to release our new DVD on the Interlocks Project area and very pleased to have worked with the staff and pupils of Penketh High School. We were encouraged to see the leader of Halton Council, Cllr. Rob Polhill, at the launch event and to hear his views and support for the project. The short film has been well received; a tribute to the professionalism of the staff at Red Rose Media, the school's media team. We continue to work with them to complete our new website and other social media links and we hope to have exciting developments here to report on shortly too.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the Canal, we have made a start with a new initiative. In our last issue I requested your feedback on the future of our social evenings. The result was nearly unanimous – nothing! Save the views of a lady member from the St Helens area we got no feedback. Use it or lose it – and with a heavy heart we have therefore suspended the meetings while we take a look at how we can interact with our membership in the future. With this in mind, we decided to combine our work party event with an open day at the visitor centre in Blackbrook. We intend that this will, in future, be a hub for various activities including talks, walks and restoration projects ...or even just the excuse for a chat and a cuppa on a Sunday. We hope to get our various archive collections down there and invite member and non member alike to drop in and join us. So please see what you can do to at least support this event once in a while – if numbers justify it then we will revert to a more formal talks programme again in the future.

I look forward to seeing you all at Blackbrook in the coming month of Sundays!

Kind Regards

Dave Smallshaw

Warrior of the Waterways

July this year saw some of the hottest days of the year, and it also saw the arrival of a most remarkable visitor to the Sankey Canal.

Doug Hamilton Cox, a fit and wiry gregarious grandfather, not content with having completed a John o'Groats to Lands End walk of over a 1000 miles, is now on a mission to walk the whole of the national canal system in aid of the 'Help the Heroes' charity and in particular for the armed forces rehabilitation centre in Birmingham.

With his service background, Doug took a keen interest in the repatriation of our fallen servicemen and women to RAF Lyneham, via the nearby town of Wootton Bassett, and onwards to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford. With his wife and family, he started to attend the ceremonies and pay tribute to the men and women who had fallen. "When the hearses passed through Wootton Bassett, the church bell tolled and crowds stood silent, the families dignified in their grief" says Doug "I was particularly moved and wondered what I could do to help the wounded".

On one particular occasion, a fellow bystander remarked that Doug's journey from Devon must have taken some time and showed real commitment. "But I only drove here" says Doug - "real commitment would have been to walk here."

And so began Doug's quest to raise money to help returning troops and their families. His first walk, as suggested to that bystander, was from his home in Devon to Wootton Bassett. Since then he has followed that up with a walk from Devon to Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham, now part of the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Selly Oak contains the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, which cares for injured servicemen and women from conflict zones. Then came the bigger challenges....

Doug has now covered about half of his waterway list, and he contacted me early in the year to get an idea of what he needed to do in the north west on his planned visit this summer.

So it was on a particularly hot spell in July that I first met up with Doug at Aintree as he completed his Leeds and Liverpool Canal itinerary, and we walked at a brisk pace down to the terminus at Liverpool. I was very thankful that he was then away on the Bridgewater for the next couple of days before we met up again at the central car park in St Helens at 10.00 on the Sunday for his whirlwind expedition on England's oldest canal. My job was to act as back up with the car, transporting water, food and generally acting as guide by meeting up with him at pre-arranged spots down the line.

Armed with our towpath guide Doug set off at a blistering pace in what turned out to be one of the hottest days of the summer and, barring a brief stop for lunch at Winwick dry dock, finally wearily tramped in at the locks at Spike Island at 4.00 on a scorching afternoon. I was in the car and was too hot—so how Doug managed it I don't know: What a performance!

I was out with Doug again the next day as we walked the long disused Runcorn and Latchford Canal and we finally parted company at Woolston Lock after three days of strenuous activity.

It was interesting to chat with Doug over the walk and he had lots to say about the various canal restoration schemes on the canals he had visited. He was certainly impressed with what we have done, and are trying to do on the Sankey and some helpful suggestions have gone into the book.

The only problem he reported in navigating the Sankey was the lack of effective waymarking in the St Helens area and around Dallam, where things tend to get a bit confusing due to the many paths that are provided there. These are certainly on our radar and, as we are planning a reissue of our towpath guide in the near future, we will certainly take up Doug's view and look at things from a walker's perspective.

Doug has now got his feet up for a summer's rest before his next expedition. His grandson estimated that he had just about walked the equivalent from here to New York (17,000 miles) so it was fitting that the one photo I managed to take of him was peering out over the Mersey at Spike Island looking for the new world. (Left)



Doug's exploits can be viewed on his website, as are details how you can contribute, on: <http://www.dougwalking.co.uk/>

He certainly values any contribution, great or small, and is to be commended for his enthusiasm and dedication to raising funds for such a deserving cause.

Dave Smallshaw

SCARS' NEXT "OPEN DAY"

is on

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14TH

from 10 AM— 4 PM

at the

SANKEY VALLEY HERITAGE VISITOR CENTRE

(To the rear of the Ship Inn, Blackbrook)

**Walks, Talks, Slideshows, Archives, Tea, Coffee & Chat—
plus the Society's Books & Bric-a-Brac Stall**

News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

by Colin Greenall

Halton

“GOOD NEWS”:

Success 1 —Sankey Canal “Interlocks Project” - Wren Bid Successful

Halton BC, with assistance from SCARS, has been successful in their bid for funding from WREN Environmental. A grant of £32,350 is now in place for the refurbishment of Spike Island lock gates, cill and ground paddles, plus the removal of silt from the lock chamber and the area around the lock entrance



Success 2— Ineos Chlor fund new interpretation boards at Spike Island.

The funding from Ineos Chlor has been used for the installation of four interpretation panels at various locations around Spike Island. They are of the highest quality and provide visitors with information about the history and industry of the area. There will also be an information leaflet to assist visitors

to the area giving them more details of what to see around Spike Island. Another bid is now being put together for benches and paving to complement the areas around the panels.

(Ineos Chlor own the former ICI works at Runcorn—ICI was the successor company to the chemical firms which occupied much of the area around the Sankey at Widnes.)

Success 3—Merseylink fund new swing bridge

Merseylink, the company responsible for building the New Mersey Gateway Bridge, have said they will build a new swing bridge for Spike Island in place of the present fixed bridge which is on the site of the railway swing bridge. This will be undertaken by their apprentices as a training exercise and will be built to the same specification as the new Carterhouse Bridge. These bridges are vital to the Interlocks Project for which funding is being sought (see below).

HLF BID

A new bid is to be submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of the canal between Fiddlers Ferry and Spike Island. The bid has been revised on advice from HLF and will be for a much smaller amount than the previous one. This takes into account the need to compromise on various elements of the last bid such as disposal of contaminated dredging etc. Halton BC and Warrington BC have also committed funding to the project if the bid is successful. The submission is scheduled for the end of August.

New Mersey Gateway Bridge: Progress report

Work is now in full swing on the construction of the new bridge over the River Mersey with access roads across the marshes almost complete on both



sides of the river. Two large cranes are in place (*Above*) to build the trestles for the construction of the coffer dams which are needed where the bridge piers are to be built. Further pictures and information on the new bridge are on the following pages.

Warrington

Coastal Communities Fund Design work for the new, electrically-operated lift bridge at Fiddlers Ferry is complete and work on installation is due to start in October.



Alder Lane footpath improved:

As part of the Sustainable Transport Route between Warrington and St Helens the narrow, muddy section of former towpath between Watery and Alder Lanes (by the Fiddle i' th' Bag) has been upgraded (*Left*).

St.Helens

Newton canal walls repair St.Helens MBC has committed funds towards the repair of the canal walls between Bradley Lock and Newton Brook. The council commission AECOM Water to carry out a survey of the section to assess the condition of the walls, and to recommend options for the repair and cost to implement such repairs. Of the eight options the council has chosen the mid-cost option of stone-filled gabions placed in front of the existing walls. These will have pre-planted geotextile on the top to aid the growth of vegetation along the canal bank. Once this work is completed the towpath can then be resurfaced to form part of the Sustainable Transport Route between St.Helens and Warrington.

New Mersey Gateway Bridge - update:

Work on the preparatory stages of the construction of the new bridge across the Mersey continues apace. The Sankey has been temporarily infilled to allow an access track to be built across the marsh to the river, where a temporary trestle bridge is being constructed to facilitate the construction of coffer dams midstream for the foundations of the bridge's piers. More about the bridge: <http://www.merseygateway.co.uk/> - from where further detailed information and photographs have been taken.

Below: Colin Greenall's pic of the infilled canal with, inset, Nick Coleman's pic of the tow-path barrier, with its map of the lengthy diversionary route.



Right: Aquatic survey specialist APEM, moving 680 carp, perch, roach, mullet and eels from one section of the Sankey to another. Victoria Pollard, Environmental Manager at Merseylink said, "This enabled two clay dams to be installed in the canal to provide a dry area which could be filled with engineered stone to continue construction of the haul road across the canal," "The fish rescue involved using a specially designed tool that



generates a mild current, to lure fish towards the nets. The fish were captured and transferred into a bucket of canal water on the dinghy before being rehomed back in another section of the canal. The water in the 60-metre stretch was pumped back into the canal, using a specially-designed filter system to ensure fish were not sucked into the pump."

Activity on the Mersey Gateway Project ramped up in mid-July with the arrival of two large cranes to Wigg Island in Runcorn. The crane components (*Right*) were transported up the Manchester Ship Canal from Liverpool Docks.

The cranes, which measure 47 metres high and weigh 137 tonnes when fully assembled. They will be used to build a temporary trestle bridge across the river, which will provide construction workers access to the estuary so they can start work on building the new bridge.



Below: Halton Borough Council Leader, Cllr Rob Polhill, joined the Merseylink Consortium team at Wigg Island to see the trestle bridge being built.

Once built, the trestle structure will stretch across the River Mersey, providing construction teams access to the estuary so that they can start work on building the new £600m bridge.

The temporary trestle bridge will be some 1,000 metres long and 9 metres wide.

Approximately 140 steel piles will be driven around 16 metres into the ground to support the temporary bridge. Each pile measures 20 metres long and weighs 3 tons. The initial part of the work involved foundation pile testing to ensure that the structure can be safely supported.

Work is also underway in nearby Northwich, where hundreds of concrete slabs are being produced for the bridge roadway, and in Warrington, where the trestle frame is being made. Similar construction activity to build the trestle bridge at Spike Island on the northern side of the river will begin later this month. The two structures will meet in the middle of the river in early 2015.



Events—by Colin Greenall

Willow Park Rural Craft Display, Monday 26th May

This event, organised by the St.Helens Ranger Service, always proves to be very popular both with the local residents and visitors from further afield. So much so that, this year, when the weather was less than kind leading up to the event, making ground conditions a bit soggy, the crowds still came out to enjoy the day. Various craft displays such as bee keeping, walking stick making, bodging and many more held their interest, while in the arena there were also entertaining displays of dog handling and birds of prey.



Interest in our stand (*Above*) was as usual considerable, with locals giving up their knowledge of the area around the canal and, of course, tales of the sugar works. Sales were very good and thanks must go to the team for the help in setting up and taking down of the stand.

IWA Waterways Festival, Chester, Friday 6th to Sunday 8th June

This, the biggest waterway event in our area this year was organized at Tower Wharf by the Chester & Merseyside Branch of the IWA, and it certainly live up to expectations. With over a hundred gaily decorated boats on view (*See pic opposite*), lots of stalls for the hundreds of visitors to look at, and plenty to occupy the youngsters, this was a festival that the organisers can be proud of. We arrived on site on Friday afternoon and set up the stand, and even at this early stage the showground was alive with people. On the Saturday the weather did its best to dampen the spirits with a torrential downpour, but this soon passed over and the crowds came out to welcome the dignitaries as they sailed in to Tower Wharf for the opening ceremony. On Sunday the weather was good and all through the weekend our team of volunteers was busy talking to people about the Sankey Canal Project - and sales were good.



Scarisbrick Marina Festival, Saturday 12th and Sunday 13th July

The weather was again kind to us giving us a hot and sunny day for the start of the Open Weekend at Scarisbrick Marina. There was plenty for visitors to see and do ,with many charity and local interest groups attending and a brass band and music of all kind to enjoy, plus the Morris dancers and vintage vehicles. Interest in our Stall (*Below*) and the work of the Society was good and bric-a-brac and book sales were on a par with last year's. On the Sunday the weather turned, with rain in the morning and with a steady breeze, and people didn't turn out the same, but in spite of it, the afternoon proved to be busier than expected.



Newton Town Show, Saturday 2nd August

The second year of the Newton Show was nearly ruined by the weather. With heavy downpours of rain and a blustery breeze to contend with, it was no surprise that people might be reluctant to come out, but the ones who did, made the most of it and enjoyed a tremendous array of charity stales and events that where taking place around the show ground , there was an added attraction of the Vulcan built saddle tank “VULCAN” making a guest appearance in its home town after being restored to working order. Altogether this was an excellent show and praise must be given to the hard work the show committee had put in.

SCARS Open Day at Blackbrook, Sunday 10th August



August saw the start of a new initiative from the committee, holding drop-in “Open Days” at the Sankey Valley Heritage Centre, Blackbrook, St. Helens, with the possibility of using other venues in the future. These events will take the form of walks, talks, slide shows, work parties

with books and bric-a-brac on sale, and a chance to look at some of the Society’s archive material. In this way we hope to interact more with members and keep them up to date with what is happening along the canal.

August 10th proved to be a real test for the idea, with heavy rain all day, so that the morning’s events—the walk and work party - had to be cancelled. In the afternoon, with a slight improvement in the weather, around twelve people arrived to enjoy the slide shows and talks.

We now have one more show left on our calendar and that is the **Vintage Vehicle and Fair-ground Organ Rally at Victoria Park, Widnes, on the weekend of 27th/ 28th September.** We are in need of more bric-a-brac to sell on the stall, if anyone has anything to offer, please contact me on 01744 731746, or email: colin.greenall@btinternet.com

Reports From Our Work Party—By *John Hughes*

In April it was a return to last year's September site, **the overflow at Newton Brook** for our morning effort and our meeting point this fine sunny morning was the "Fiddle i'th' Bag" pub car park.

From here we made our way to Hall Lane livery stables where Jed, the owner, had allowed us to park up, so a walk of forty yards over his paddock took us to the overflow. This saved us a trudge of half a mile with all the tools, so our thanks again to Jed for his help. A five minute job turned into a two hour job but the results were really worthwhile. All the remaining overhanging tree branches and shrubbery were cut back and the overflow floor cleared out of all accumulated soil, plant growth and rubbish. The photograph below shows the work done, but a visit is certainly recommended for a real appreciation of the craftsmanship, and size of the stone blocks with which the structure was constructed.



From there we moved over to **Winwick Quay** for our afternoon's work—but first a brew and butty break. Two more hours were spent at Hulme Lock Cottage and bye-wash. Brambles have been taking over the site so it was hack and slash time and then some strimming work and a general loom over the site in preparation for May's next outing. All in all a very enjoyable day – the weather does help, but will our luck with Mother Nature last?

In May we were to be found again at **Hulme Lock Cottage** where more remedial work was necessary—clearing the remaining brambles which were still covering the west gable end of the cottage. This task took us to dinner time which was enjoyed in ever improving weather, it now being sunny and warm after a dull damp start to the day. The afternoon shift was spent clearing the floors of the various rooms as these were covered with weeds and moss. Once again a very satisfying day's work and my thanks to all who attended.



Above: The Newton Brook overflow—the cascade down from the canal into the brook. The scale of the construction would seem to indicate the need for substantial volumes of flood water to be contended with which would otherwise have overflowed the canal banks and flooded the fields alongside.

Below: The bye-wash at Hulme Lock is one of a number of sites along the Sankey where our Work Parties have to return at regular intervals to cut back encroaching vegetation so that visitors can see the remains of the canal as fully as possible.





No work party was arranged for June as the day coincided with the IWA Campaign Festival at Chester (*above*) and some of the restoration team were active on our sales stand there.

July found our planned Work Party clashing once again with the Society's attendance at a waterway festival, but we decided to go ahead on this occasion. We once again took our attention to the **Blackbrook** area and the Ranger Station there. The task for the day was mainly a litter pick on two lengths of the canal. As many of our usual Work Party members were attending the Scarisbrick Marina festival event which ran over the weekend, we had only four members on this work party.

The first length covered Blackbrook Road to the old double lock top pound, The second section from the double locks to the Wagon Lane link. Ian and Ste cleared the north bank, 'Big Colin' and myself the south bank. Eight bags of rubbish were filled from the section length of approximately a mile and half, and the rubbish had to be carried back to the ranger base where a brew and butties became very welcome for the weary workers.

The afternoon went along the same lines as in the morning but we worked on a length from Carr Mill Dam back to the base taking in the slitting mill and Stanley basin sites. A total of sixteen bin bags filled showed the effectiveness of the litter pick - so thanks again to my fellow bag fillers. My thanks goes also to the ranger service for loan of equipment and their hospitality. It was very noticeable from our pickings that plastic bottles and various forms of plastic wrapping formed the bulk of the rubbish – this time there were very few carrier bags. I wonder if those lobbying for a plastic bag tax might want to look at taxing wrapping or plastic bottles as well!!

We could always do with more help on our work parties. The work you put in depends on you, and what you feel capable of. There are also non-work opportunities now available on the newly-established Society open days which will usually run alongside our work parties.

If you would like to get a little involved in an informal day in the fresh air and do something to clear up the environment around our canal, then contact me on: 01744 600656 or email me at : johnhughes11@virginmedia.com

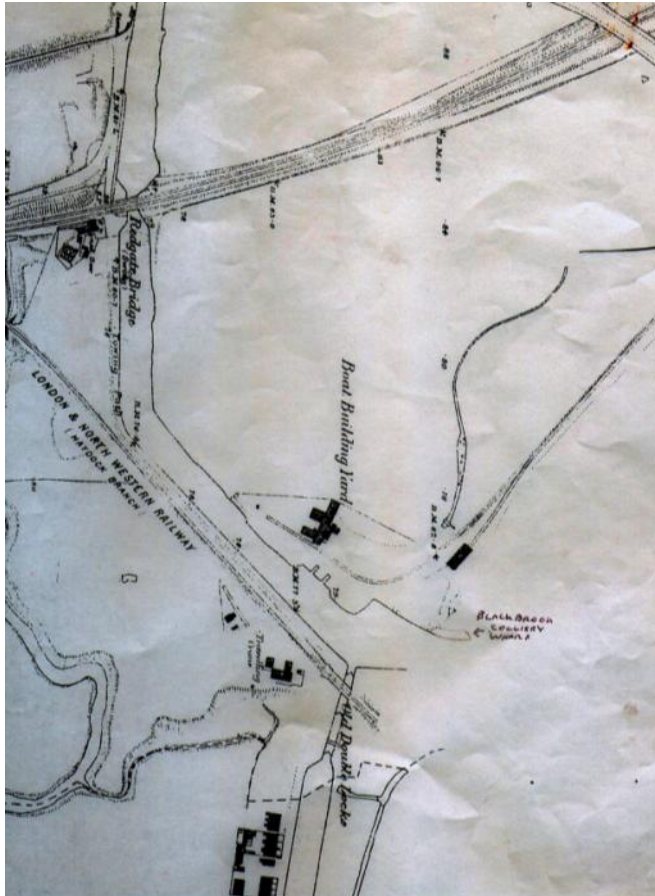
You can be assured of a warm welcome!

The Coal Wharf at Blackbrook

In our last issue we reported the discovery of the remains of a coal wharf beside the canal at Blackbrook (*Right*). Colin Greenall has found the following information from Part 2 of “The Industrial Railways of St.Helens, Widnes and Warrington, by C.H.A. Townley and J.A. Peden:



“Blackbrook Colliery was situated alongside the turnpike road from St.Helens to Haydock, midway between Blackbrook Bridge and Redgate Bridge and some distance from the canal. The Colliery was sunk in the early 1840s on land owned by Charles Orrell and shown in the occupation of Bromilow Brothers & Sothern in the Mines Lists from 1853 to 1863.



The first edition of the 6 inch OS map, surveyed in 1845 has a tram road from the colliery crossing the main road on the level and leading to a wharf at the junction of the Gerard's Bridge and Blackbrook Branches of the Sankey Canal, where coal was loaded into waiting Mersey Flats. Some years later (1850) when the St.Helens Railway open its line to Blackbrook Upper Basin the colliery became connected to the main railway system and the tram road may have been converted to standard gauge.

Although Blackbrook colliery does not appear in Mines Lists after 1863 it does not appear to have closed. Repair facilities for the firm's fleet of flats were set up at the terminus of the railway, “near the former coal wharf?” The first edition of the 25 inch OS map, surveyed in 1881 (*Left*) shows three slipways and a building that may have been a locomotive shed.”

Reports from our Talks Programme *From Peter Keen*

The Shropshire Union Canal, by Mr Graham Dodd

The second talk of 2014 was given on February 27th, by Mr Graham Dodd, who took us through the complicated history of the Shropshire Union Canal, the result of many disputes and amalgamations over the years.

He began with a reference to the Bradford Canal (1868/1874) which represented all canals in the minds of many people. At the turn of the century when in full commercial use, it was so badly polluted that methane gas would be generated on the canal bed and bubble up to the surface. At a time when smoking was widespread a discarded lighted match was all it took to set the whole surface of the canal fleetingly alight.

On a more positive note Graham explained the origins of the Shropshire system. In the late 1700s the demand for coal was increasing, calling for a cheap and efficient method of transport. Thomas Telford, the great canal engineer, envisaged the linking of the Rivers Mersey, Severn, Thames and Trent via a set of canals in the shape of a St Andrew's cross. This "Grand Cross" would connect the coalfields, raw materials and markets which would benefit shareholders and public alike.

The Shropshire coalfield was served by a small network of canals, known collectively as the Shropshire Canal, leading down to the Severn at Coalbrookdale. The river lay 207 feet below the level of the canals and, rather than build locks, an inclined plane was constructed. Loaded tub boats would be manoeuvred onto a cradle which ran on rails down the incline to the river at Coalport for transhipment, the whole process taking minutes rather than the hours it would have taken to negotiate a long flight of locks.



The Shrewsbury Canal was built specifically to deliver coal to that town from the western end of the Shropshire Canal system. It had its own notable item of engineering in the form of the Longdon-on-Tern Aqueduct (*Left*).

Originally a masonry structure, this was severely damaged in a flood and was replaced by an iron trough. A pioneering structure, it suffered from being a tight fit, preventing boats from swimming smoothly through the water. It was however a useful trial run for the famous later and much larger

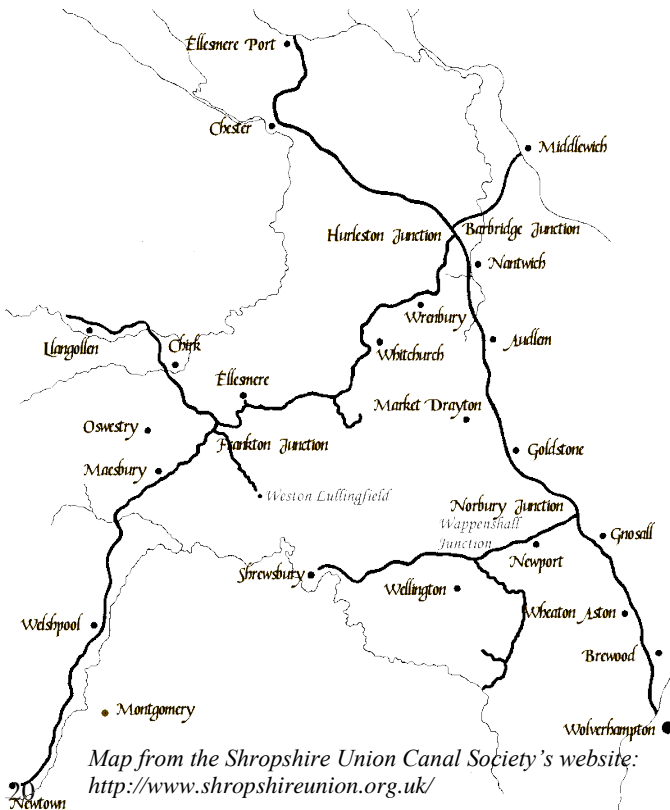
Pontcysyllte Aqueduct on the Llangollen Canal.

The Chester Canal (1779) was intended to be joined to the Trent and Mersey Canal at Middlewich but the proprietors of the latter refused to allow this. Instead a link to Nantwich was created which was used for the next 54 years until the Middlewich connection was finally allowed. This was a broad canal and would have taken vessels such as the Mossdale. Again coal was a vital cargo but other minerals and agricultural produce was also carried. In 1846 competition appeared in the shape of the Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company. This was then leased to the London and North Western Railway Company which

was delighted to allow the canal to continue in use since this took traffic from the GWR in Wales and the Border region. The canal was apparently a favourite route for poachers who would access the Beeston and Peckforton estates during the night and return to Chester by canal boat the next morning bearing their ill-gotten gains. A lengthsman's hut on this canal has recently been restored by a local society.

Telford had a great deal of trouble with the construction of Beeston Lock since the site consisted of running sand and was consequently unstable. To combat this the whole lock was built with cast iron plates enabling the structure to be adjusted in the event of subsidence. The route from Chester to Ellesmere Port was popular with passengers who used the express packet boats.

Telford was an advisor to William Jessop in the construction of the Llangollen Canal (1790s) which tapped into coal and slate deposits in the western Welsh valleys which of course meant that there were considerable engineering difficulties requiring tunnels, embankments and aqueducts. Whilst Brindley had advocated heavy brick and stone aqueducts, Telford preferred the combination of masonry piers and iron troughs. The piers were hollow rather than solid, to reduce weight whilst the iron trough forming the channel was much lighter than a masonry one lined with puddled clay. Following the success of the low level pioneer at Longdon-on-Tern, the Pontcysyllte consisted of 19 arched spans of width 53 feet carrying the aqueduct 126 feet above the River Dee below. Not far away the similar Chirk Aqueduct followed the same pattern. It had been intended that the canal should be extended to Chester but this did not materialise. Tramways were used to close any gap and the waterway was retained as a feeder to Hurlstone Reservoir at Nantwich.



The Llangollen Canal was extended to the southwest to join the Montgomery Canal (1797) which accessed Newtown on the upper Severn. This tapped into cargoes such as limestone, lead, slate, timber and agricultural produce, and also provided a fast passenger service via packet boat. At Rednall passengers could transfer to the railway to reach Liverpool or Shrewsbury. The canal timetable made it clear that journey times could not be guaranteed because of the unreliability of the railway. In the late 1800s growing populations lead to the increase in the demand for food which in turn called for more arable land to be brought under cultivation. The need for lime to fertilise marginal land called for both limestone and coal to use in the lime kilns. Sadly in

Map from the Shropshire Union Canal Society's website:
<http://www.shropshireunion.org.uk/>

1936 there was a breach in the canal at Welsh Frankton as a result of neglect by the LMS and the activities of water voles. This severed the canal, isolating one carrier on the wrong side of the breach, who lost his business as a result.

A narrow canal with deep locks, the Montgomery is currently under restoration, combining a navigable water channel with extensive provision for wildlife in purpose built reed beds and wetlands. A unique feature of this canal is the lock paddle gear. Horizontal paddles are used, controlled by mechanism unlike that on any other canal in Britain.

The Chester and Ellesmere areas needed access to the south, to the Midlands and London and this was provided in 1835 with the opening of the Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal which joined Nantwich to Autherly on the Stafford and Worcester Canal. To guard against unauthorised water flow from the new canal to the existing one a stop-lock was installed at the junction with a fall of just 6 inches. In an attempt to take the most direct line, the B.L.J. was carried along sometimes in deep cuttings and others on massive embankments. Rather than spread the locks out along the canal they were grouped in pairs or flights of five. During construction there were problems with landowners who objected to their game being disturbed, with slippage of embankments causing additional expenditure and with unstable ground through which tunnels were being constructed. The Cowley Cutting for example was originally intended to be a 700 yard tunnel but is now a long cutting with only a short run of true tunnelling. At Turley cutting, just before the summit level the lock gates, if left open, are mysteriously closed during the night by an unknown force.

In common with most British canals, those forming the Shropshire Union were amalgamated with the railways, and there followed a period when both transport methods worked in tandem with varying degrees of success. With the coming of WW1 the canals were needed again, earning a short reprieve, but thereafter traffic declined to such an extent that the S U C & Ry Co withdrew its fleet of boats and relied upon other carriers. There were further problems in 1963 when the harsh winter brought the canals to a standstill, sending its customers onto alternative transport, the most flexible of which was via road. With the thaw, customers stayed away, so there was no further commercial carrying from that year.

Today of course the situation is different, the canals are widely used for leisure purposes, facilities are provided at major junctions and termini and new marinas are under construction. Structures such as the aqueducts, boatyards and canal-side inns are now tourist attractions in

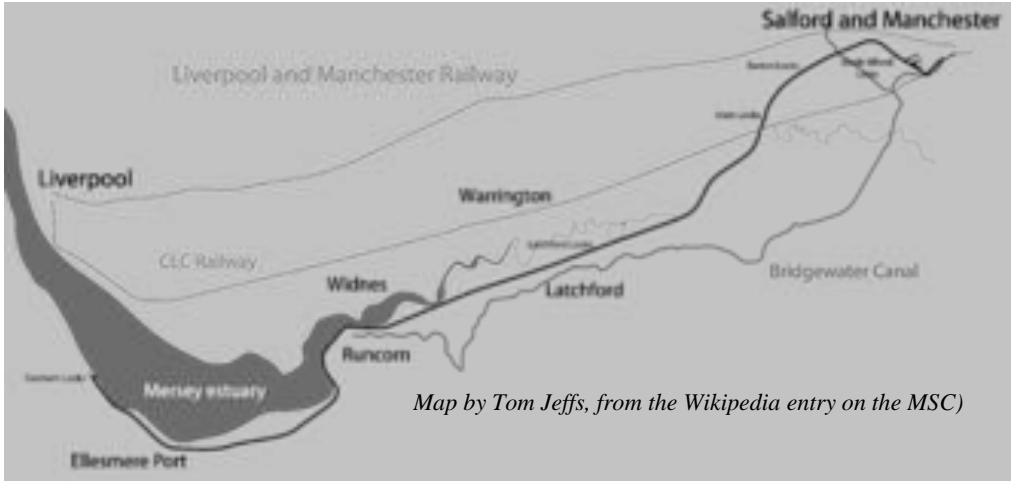
their own rights, bringing increasing numbers of visitors back to the waterways. Graham covered a great deal of ground in his talk and SCARS is most appreciative of the time and effort which must have been involved in its preparation.



Left: Pleasure boats above Audlem Locks. Pic by Roger Kidd, from the Geograph Website.

Building the Big Ditch; The Manchester Ship Canal, by Mr Glen Atkinson

The Society's meeting of 24th April was fortunate to be addressed by Glen Atkinson who had compiled a presentation based upon photographs from the Frank Mullineux collection. This was, however, a collection with a difference, being created contemporaneously with the construction of the canal, on glass plates, the forerunners of paper photographs and coloured slides, and shown to us on appropriate equipment.



The cotton industry of Manchester had long suffered from the excessive port dues payable on both imports and exports via the Port of Liverpool. Links between the two cities already existed by the mid 1800s (See map, above) via the Mersey and Irwell Navigation, the Bridgewater Canal and the Liverpool Manchester Railway, incurring understandable and acceptable transport costs. The addition of the port dues sent prices soaring and the Mancunians looked for a cheaper alternative. Goods could be transported from the east coast via the Leeds and Liverpool canal or trans-Pennine railways, but unit loads were small compared with the capacity of a sailing vessel.

In 1822 a ship canal had been proposed to by pass Liverpool but the project was never realised. Royal assent was eventually given to a new project in 1885. The canal was to be 36 miles long, beginning in Manchester, where there was limited accommodation for coastal sailing vessels, into Salford, then via Barton and Warrington to reach the tidal Mersey to the west of Runcorn at Eastham. With a bottom width of 120 feet and a draught of between 28 and 30 feet, the canal ascended into Manchester via five pairs of locks, one to accommodate the larger cargo vessel and a smaller one for tugs and small craft. Fifteen new crossings had to be provided, nine of which were swing bridges, of which seven carried roads whilst the remainder carried a railway and a canal respectively. The latter was of course the well known Barton Swing bridge, a wonder of the waterways in its own right. There were also four fixed high level rail bridges and two high level road bridges. All these features were pointed out on a map. Work commenced in 1877 and the Ship Canal was open for business in 1894.

Mr Atkinson showed some preliminary slides of scenes which covered the pre ship-canal era and features which were to disappear during the construction of the canal, then moved on to the construction methods involved.

The lock gates required covered accommodation during construction and this was illustrated as a large framework which was presumably roofed over when work commenced.



Dock walls and locks required substantial foundations which were dug by the navvies with the aid of steam cranes. (Left) Once the cement footings were ready timber shuttering was installed, the brick facing wall constructed and cement poured behind, until the required height was reached.

In parts, the course of the canal lay through rock. Where this was suitable for use in building elsewhere on the canal it would be excavated by hand using wedges and sledge hammers (Below), but if it was of poor quality explosives would be used to blast it free after which it could be used as infill as required. Much lifting and carrying was

needed and steam cranes were to be found all over the site, either static for large tasks or mobile along the railway system installed for the project. The rails were not a permanent feature but were installed wherever needed, be this along the bed of the half-dug canal or along the bank from where excavators could access the spoil. Where the ground was suitable, three steam navvies were used, built by Lubecker of Germany. These were mounted on rails along the bank of the canal and carried dredging equipment. A moving belt carried large buckets down into the ground then carried the excavated material up onto the bank where it was automatically deposited in railway wagons.



The Barton swing aqueduct was a pioneer structure which, with its approach embankments called for great engineering skill from both designers and installers. The high level steel tow-



path across the bridge (*Left*) was approached via ramps which horses could negotiate, but they would have blinkers fitted in case they were unhappy with the height.

Mr Atkinson pointed out that one of the arches of Brindley's original brick arch aqueduct was saved and reinstalled alongside

the nearby main road, a very early example of the preservation of a heritage feature.

Other techniques were illustrated such as the end tipping wagon, used to build embankments, the sometimes precarious 'Lancashire System' of bricklaying which was carried out from the inside of the feature, be this a dock wall or a factory chimney. No scaffolding was used and work was carried on at considerable heights with seemingly little in the way of safety measures. A bridge was illustrated complete with its wing walls which demonstrated how the walls were gradually reduced in width as they gained in height since there would be less pressure from the back filling behind them.

Despite the use of steam, there remained much hard physical work to be done. Many barrow runs were installed to assist in the removal of spoil. A timber ramp would be built, with a pulley wheel at the top. The barrow-load of spoil would be attached to a rope passing over the pulley, then a horse or steam engine would draw the loaded barrow up the incline, guided by the navy. The return journey would see the navy running down the planking for the next load, despite the slippery nature of the planks and his boots.

The engineer in charge, Edward Leader Williams, provided medical facilities for his workers and accommodation at places such as Acton Grange. Prefabricated buildings were erected along a street for the more skilled and senior workers. Casual workers would more likely be accommodated in converted Mersey Flats, some of which were also used as floating chapels. Mr Atkinson wound up with some views of the western end of the canal where it ran parallel with the Mersey for some distance before entering the river at Eastham Locks. This required extensive use of piles to keep the canal and river apart. Hundreds of piles were driven into the river bed in pairs and the space between filled with clay puddle and rubble. Construction had to be phased according to the tides, some of which destroyed sections of the embankment, necessitating its rebuilding.

It says much for the builders of the canal that it still functions as it did, despite the passage of time and the attention of Hitler's Luftwaffe. Having gone through a period of stagnation the canal is now being brought back to life with increasing numbers of vessels negotiating its course and plans for the redevelopment of its banks. Our thanks to Mr Atkinson for an excellent view of the construction methods used and a unique method of depicting it.

The Roger Lorenz Trust

The life of a long time friend of the Sankey Canal, and indeed of all our waterways, was commemorated recently at the Stratford Boat Festival with the launch of a new Trust, which will offer young adults between the ages of 18-30 the opportunity to learn traditional boating skills.

The Roger Lorenz Trust has been set up in memory of Roger who lived in Worsley and was a boat enthusiast for over 40 years. His wife, Stef, is passionate about keeping her late husband's love of canals and boating alive. I was lucky to have the chance to have a brief chat with Stef at the festival and was also pleased to pick up one of Rogers's fine selection of waterway books which she was selling to help launch the Trust.

It's a project that is probably one he himself would have liked to set up. Very few youngsters are able, mainly through cost, to work on traditional craft, and the subsequent skills in maintenance and navigation would be lost to a generation unless steps are taken to redress the problem.

His own broad hulled vessel, Neptune, (*Right*) built in 1963, is the centre for the activities, which are based at Evesham.

The Trust aims to run weekend courses to pass on the skills of yesteryear, with theoretical and practical sections to the course.

Students will live on the boat

and get the expertise of experienced boat users to enhance their skills which, it is hoped, will lead to an NVQ qualification in future. The total weekend cost is subsidized, at just £50, which includes all meals and accommodation...sounds a bargain!

The Trust is currently looking for support for its work and to enable it to become a charity. To find out more or how you can help or maybe send a contribution then please contact Stef on 07825 447 029



Dave Smallshaw

LEARN TO HANDLE A TRADITIONAL BARGE

WEEKEND COURSES OFFERED
TO YOUNG PEOPLE FROM 18-30,
ABOARD 'NEPTUNE'
AN EX-BWB WORKBOAT.

Interested?

Contact the Roger Lorenz Trust
steflorenz@btinternet.com
07825447029 or 0161 7070588

*Perhaps you know a
youngster who would gain
from taking part in this
new enterprise?*

In Memoriam: Tony Harrison

SCARS is saddened to report the death, on 31st July, of Tony Harrison, former Inland Waterways Association consultant engineer and trustee.

Tony had been an IWA member for over fifty years. In the 1950s, when based in Birmingham, he canoed on the then about to be abandoned Southern Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. He gained a postgraduate Diploma in Hydraulics at the Delft University and moved to work at the Wallingford Hydraulics Research Station.. Later he continued to live in Goring when commuting to Watford where he developed best practice for civil and building contract administration at the Building Research Establishment.

Tony became Honorary Consultant Engineer for the association in 1989 when he was appointed jointly with Roy Sutton, and was simultaneously co-opted to IWA's then fledgling Restoration Committee. His contract administration experience was especially valuable at that time as a large number of waterway bodies, including IWA, were commissioning consultancy contracts with rather loose terms of reference that allowed firms producing poor work to still be paid. Tony served on IWA's Restoration Committee for twenty years and chaired it for five years. His period at the helm coincided with a flurry of millennium and post millennium major projects and was very busy. Tony's expertise in hydraulics and hydrology benefited numerous restoration projects and navigable waterways alike.

Tony promoted and managed the production of the entire IWA Technical Restoration Handbook, over a period of two years, with twenty papers (some by several authors) going through an exhaustive revision and peer-review process overseen by Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions.

He visited the Sankey with IWA Rescom on a number of occasions during his term of office, both for formal meetings and simply to come up to see a particular problem at first hand before offering advice. We also usually met up with him at the annual IWA National Waterways Festival. He was always interested to hear about our latest project and understood our problems at not being able to make progress with the local authorities, but always had a reassuring word that things would progress if we stuck at it. His knowledge of restoration projects around the country was endless, and his authority on the subject of waterway management unchallenged. If a Society had a particular problem, he knew of another Society that had a similar problem, and he would know how they were coping with that same issue.

We at the Sankey are grateful for his help in the past and his important contributions to our efforts towards the restoration of the waterway will not be forgotten.

War & the Sankey

The two articles following feature the effects of the two World Wars on the canal system—one referring to boatmen called up in WW1, and one detailing the role of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in our area as part of the nation's anti-invasion defences in WW2.

The Sankey was there during both wars, and played its part in transporting goods, coal in particular, useful to the war efforts. We want to research its war-time role, and would be grateful if our readers could help.

We know about the pillbox (*Right*) on the abutment of the railway bridge above the New Double Locks, but does anyone know of any other surviving relics of war defences left on the Sankey Canal and its immediate environs, or of any records of wartime activity associated with the canal?



WW2 and Our Local Waterways—by Dave Smallshaw

Member John Holt wrote to us recently after having seen an article covered in the BBC Countryfile magazine concerning World War 2 defences on our local waterways.

The article covers a walk along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, from Heaton's Bridge (*Right*) to the Douglas Valley, looking at pill boxes and other defensive structures of the time. What particularly amused John was a reference in the article to British soldiers or the Home Guard watching for German U-Boats using the canal as part of an invasion, especially at the sight of their naval ratings wielding windlasses as they attempted the infamous swing bridges on this part of the canal!



This prompted me to look up an earlier article that, as editor of the IWA journal Mersey Flat back in 2007, I had featured on the subject.

I was then in contact with Les Baxter, a member of the Ramblers' Association, who besides having a deep love of the countryside, (he was a volunteer warden at the Formby nature



reserve) also extensively walked the waterways and footpaths locally. He also introduced me to his son, Derek, who had compiled a fascinating study of pill boxes on the subject. (*Left: Derek's pic of the inside of a pillbox*) The article proved quite interesting at the time, and I reproduce it here in the hope that it may bring back many recollections to our own followers. The study of wartime defence architecture is quite well covered now on the internet

and there are a couple of good local websites, one of which I know Derek contributed to in the early days, and we have supplied links at the end of the article.

Les wrote as follows:

The Leeds & Liverpool Canal World War II Defence Line

By May 1940, Poland, Denmark and Norway had fallen under the might of the German military machine and the British Expeditionary force was in retreat at Dunkirk.

Britain started to prepare for invasion; the strategy was defence in depth and came in three phases. A first line of defence or coastal crust was created, typically scaffold and barbed wire entanglements placed at low tide, behind which mined beaches, concrete anti-tank cubes and fortified Coastal gun batteries awaited.

The next line of defence was aimed at holding up the enemy advance and denying access to major arterial routes. Thousands of miles of anti tank ditches were dug, bridges were mined and pre-existing barriers such as canals, rivers, and railway embankments were fortified.

Finally defensive anti tank islands grew up around key towns and defended villages.

The canal system from Rufford to Maghull formed part of an extensive network of anti invasion defences that stretched from the Midlands, west through Wales and north as far as Carlisle. Under the jurisdiction of Western Command, its purpose was to hinder the progress of an invasion from the West, should Ireland come under occupation, thus protecting England's industrial heartlands.

The Canal formed part of a 'natural' barrier, from the salt marshes at Hesketh Bank in the north to Bootle Docks in the south, and in 1940 the Directorate of Fortifications and Works (FW3) started building pillboxes and other hardened field defences along its length, at major bridges and other strategic crossing places.

There were six basic designs of Pillbox for rifle and light machine gun, however, many adaptations were made to the standard plan to suit local conditions and materials. Close to Maghull station we have a rare two level non-standard brick built pillbox at grid reference

GR SD 3825 0129. Then continuing north along the canal for about one kilometre a second pillbox (*Left*) can be seen, once again of a local design at GR 370 0158. A little ingenuity is on display further along the canal at GR 3740 0225 with a loopholed garden wall; the holes have been filled in but are still visible.



Continuing on into Lydiat and, almost opposite the narrow stone bridge at GR 3700 0470, look across the field to see a type 24 pillbox (the most common of all surviving designs).



At Downholland, opposite the old Scarisbrick Arms pub, GR 367 068, you will see a fortified barn with loopholes added along the eaves to guard the bridge. (*Above*)

Near Haskavne, at GR 3825 0129, there is a fortified house, the small windows in the upper storey betray the position of what were once loopholes.

Further along the canal stands a type 22 pillbox (the second most common design still in existence). This is difficult to see in summer as it is partially concealed by trees. On now to Heaton's bridge at GR 404 118 where there is an unusual two level pillbox. (*Pic: Pg. 27*)

Travelling further on to Gregson's Bridge GR 4145 1235, we see another fortified barn and if you continue on along the road past the barn for about 300metres you will see a 'bus stop'



type pillbox in a field on the left. This is a lightly built square concrete structure (*Left*) affording good 360 degree visibility at the expense of protection. (*Ed: We think we can just make out a similar structure on old photos of the railway swing bridge at Sankey Bridges*)

Moving on now we come to the Farmers Arms pub near to Burscough at GR4289 1256, a pillbox similar to that at Heaton's bridge, has been cleverly camouflaged to look like part of the pub. About 400 metres further along the canal at GR 4321 1236, stands the Slipway Inn complete with loopholes which are clearly visible. (*Below, left*)



Finally two more type 24 pillboxes, one near Lathom and the other near Parbold sewage works can be seen at GR 4625 1088 and GR 4746 1105 respectively.

Because of the linear nature of the canal most of the walks to see the defences have been out and back along the same route, however, you may be

able to work out circular walks. Many of the defences are near to bridges crossing the canal and they are placed on the eastern bank of the canal to defend against an invasion coming west from the coast.

Where the canal turns to the east the defences continue on the same side and effectively surround Burscough airfield.



The article certainly stirred up some interest at the time, and various additions were suggested and taken on board. Mention was also made of various remnants of 'dragon's teeth' or anti-tank concrete blocks visible in the undergrowth. We generally have all taken these fortifications a little bit for granted, and to assume they were there just to guard the canal, and it comes as a bit of a surprise to learn that they formed part of such an cohesive and extensive network. At the time there was a rush to get defences erected and records, therefore, may have been a bit haphazard, the reason why some still turn up. More examples are often uncovered in the most unlikely spots as developments occur and reveal secrets in the undergrowth. And time also takes its toll as many crumble away.

More local information can be gleaned by a visit to any of the websites below. Our thanks to the owner of the first site, Peter Robinson, for permission to use pics from it.

http://www.towpathtreks.co.uk/lc/canal_war.html

http://s134542708.websitehome.co.uk/pillboxes/html/north_west.html

http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue//adsdata/arch-455-/dissemination/pdf/Text_Reports/DA42_TEXT_-_LEEDS_and_LIVERPOOL_CANAL_BURSCOUGH.pdf

http://lbmhs.co.uk/homeguard_history

Boatmen of the Great War

During World War One the combatants made use of the long-established battle technique of tunnelling. In Medieval times tunnels were dug beneath castle walls and fires set so as to cause the walls to collapse. WW1 tunnels were dug beneath enemy lines, then packed with explosives which were detonated to destroy and demoralise opponents. The construction of the latter tunnels called for specialists in the form of experienced miners, drawn from the ranks or recruited from the workforces of Britain's coalfields. Less well known is the contribution by men from the nation's canal network whose expertise made them invaluable in the transport of soldiers and war materials along continental waterways. One of the reasons for this is that the boatmen and their families were an isolated and illiterate group who left few written records, accounts, letters or diaries but whose navigation and handling skills were to contribute so much to the war effort.

Recent work by Tim Coghlan and his colleagues has been researching the topic, seeking to promote greater acknowledgement of the boatmen's contribution. At the outbreak of war volunteers were called for and it was not until 1916 that military conscription was introduced. In the meantime, those in 'reserved' occupations such as farmers, miners and boatmen continued their essential work. To combat the widespread stigma attached to able-bodied men who were not in uniform, a war service badge was issued to those exempted from military service. Many boatmen did volunteer in the early years and many of them are recorded on the memorials of the canal settlements up and down the country.

By 1916 all boatmen under the age of 25 became eligible for call-up. It had been realised that successful campaigns depended upon efficient communications, so an experienced railway goods manager, Eric Geddes, was given charge of the British section of the front. He identified two major rivers which accessed the front line. These were taken over, administered and manned by British boatmen. The work force came from existing regiments or from the major carriers on the canal network at home, whose employees were familiar with steam powered vessels.

Following a short training period on wide beamed boats the boaters were transferred to the continent where they began work on the large barges, ferrying food, ammunition, clothing and the huge number of other items needed to keep an army functioning in the field. Tonnage handled increased from 200,000 in 1915 to 2,800,000 by 1918. Other tasks undertaken included pumping, filtering, salvage work and eventually a programme of bridge and waterway maintenance.

The return journey would bring the wounded back to base hospitals for treatment before being returned to their regiments or shipped back across the channel to 'Blighty'. A boat trip would be infinitely preferable to the jolting and impacts of a slow journey along the devastated roads linking the front to rear areas. It should be remembered that, far from being a safe occupation, the boatmen were often within range of artillery fire and were always vulnerable to attack from aircraft. Stories have survived of near misses in which a few minutes or a short distance made the difference between life and death. In this year of commemoration of the beginning of the first World War the efforts of the boaters should be remembered along with the many who contributed in so many ways to the final victory in 1918. Anyone who has any boating information or stories of WW1 is asked to contact Tim on 01788891373 or via tim@braunstonmarina.co.uk.

Brian Bennett's Album: Part 7

Long-time SCARS Member Brian Bennett has kindly donated his Album of photographs from the mid- and late 1970s.



Brian's archive spans the period when official vandalism filled much of the Sankey with rubbish. Both of these photographs are dated 1975—in between Brian's visits the Winwick Repair Works' building has been whitewashed. The shack built into the fence may have been for the bridge-keeper. Earlier photographs show the windows without the sheeting. Presumably the sheeting only partially covers the windows so that the keeper would still be able to look out for approaching barges on the canal for which he would have to swing the bridges each side of the Works.

