

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

# CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 8 Number 9  
Spring 2018



What the Sankey Canal might have looked like today if it hadn't been filled in beneath the Earlestown Viaduct... or you could be more positive and say that this is its future, once the new Sankey Canal Partnership has done its work.

*The image has been created by David Hopley (Website: [drawswithlight.co.uk](http://drawswithlight.co.uk))*

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Founded 1985

**Registered Charity Number 702571**

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Steve Parish (Warrington)

Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

**The Inland Waterways Association:**

Colin Greenall (Chester & District Branch)

David Jarvis (IWA NW Restoration Committee)

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

## **CANAL CUTTINGS**

### **VOLUME 8 NUMBER 9: Spring 2018**

**Editor and Production: David Long**  
(david@scars.org.uk)



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### **Dave Smallshaw** **(1946-2017)**

It is with great sadness that we have to report the sudden death of our Chair, Dave Smallshaw, at the age of 71. Dave had been our Chair for the past six years, during which time the Society has made great progress in its bid to bring together the three boroughs and CRT to work towards restoration of the Sankey Canal and to regenerate the whole of the Sankey Valley Corridor. Last September the formation of the Sankey Canal Partnership was finally announced and Dave was eagerly looking forward to moving the project forward. Sadly for him this was not to be, but the fight will go on.

At 12.00 noon on Wednesday 3rd December over two hundred family and friends packed into Thornton Crematorium to bid farewell to Dave, with many more standing out in the cold wind and rain listening to the eulogy of his life and times which was relayed via speakers situated in the entrance.

Dave was an avid sportsman, playing rugby union for Waterloo in his younger days, and was also a cricket fan, being a member of Northern Cricket Club. He was also a great fan of his home town rugby league team Wigan RLFC and a keen Everton FC supporter. Along with these activities he liked walking and belonged to many rambling groups. Gardening was another of his passions, spending many hour pottering around his garden

*The Acting Chair, Colin Greenall, writes:* I first met Dave in 1995 at the IWA National Waterway Festival in Chester where he was helping on the Towpath Action Group Stand. He joined SCARS in 1999 and from then on became a regular member of our monthly work parties and also on our sales and exhibition stand at IWA National Festivals and local shows we attended throughout the years from then on. During that time he attended SCARS’

Committee meetings as an observer for the IWA Merseyside and North West Branch. In 2005 he was elected to SCARS Executive Committee in his own right, and became Communications Officer in 2008. In 2011 he took on the task of Chair, a role in which he soon showed great leadership skills.

As a keen member of IWA he served on the committee of the Merseyside and North West Branch which later became IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch and was also a member of IWA North West Region Branch Committee.

In 2016 he accepted a position on the CRT North West Partnership committee, a role to which he was well suited with his wonderful knowledge of things that were happening in the North West area.

A great enthusiast for all things to do with waterways, railways and industrial heritage, he belonged to many such associations, groups and societies.

Dave leaves behind a loving wife, three daughters and grand children.

He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

***Colin Greenall***

### ***Acting Chair’s Report from Colin Greenall***

First of all may I wish each and every one of you a happy and prosperous New Year.

As the above piece relates, the Society ended the year mourning the loss of our Chair, Dave Smallshaw. However, Dave would not want us to be sitting around grieving for too long and I’m sure he will be keeping an eye on us from afar, making sure we continue the good work he had inspired in us all. The Executive have entrusted me with acting as Chair until the forthcoming Annual Meeting so that the work can continue as uninterrupted as possible.

You may have noticed that the last issue of “Canal Cuttings” contained more colour than usual—one of Dave’s last actions was to commit to improving this magazine, and to getting back to producing four editions a year, as was once the norm. We are continuing with this ambition—and you will have noticed that this issue has been printed on better quality paper. We also hope to improve the content with more archive photographs with detailed captions where possible. We are also aiming to produce other publications as well.

As I write these notes in the middle of February, having just experienced the first Work party of the year in arctic conditions at Winwick Dry Dock, I content myself with the knowledge that it can only get better from now on as we approach Spring and the lighter nights, so do think about getting out and enjoying some fresh air down by the Sankey Canal. Looking forward to seeing more of more of you in 2018.

***Colin***



# Bank Movement Causes Towpath Closure

## Mystery Subsidence at Fiddlers Ferry Marina



In early January subsidence was found to have effected a length of the towpath wall at Fiddlers Ferry Marina near the bridge which gives access to the Ferry Tavern pub. Immediate action was taken by Warrington Council and the towpath was closed to walkers and cyclists whilst the cause of the slip is investigated. Builders' bags full of rubble (*above*) have been place in the canal to prevent any further movement of the wall. Notices on the barriers (*below*) state that the area could be closed for the next six months while repairs are carried out.

*See following page for archive photographs taken when the marina was created in the 1980s.*



# Constructing Fiddlers Ferry Marina in the 1980s



*Above:* The pile of soil on the left, and the trench cut into the bank on the right show where the survey to determine the state of the existing walls was carried out before work commenced .

*Below:* The stone wall on the southern bank, which is where subsidence has just appeared (see page 5) appears to have been rebuilt, and capped with concrete, while the northern wall has been replaced with reinforced concrete, presumably to ensure the stability of the adjacent railway track, which carried heavy coal trains to the power station.





# Replacement of Bradley Lock Milestone

*By Colin Greenall*



On Tuesday 13th February Peter Keen and I met up with Dr. Barrie Pennington from the Milestone Society. Last year Barrie approached us with the offer of replacing the Bradley Lock milestone with a replica of the old, damaged stone which now resides in the garden of Sankey Valley Heritage Centre at Blackbrook, St.Helens. (Left)

The reason for our meeting was to decide upon the exact location for the positioning of the stone, which will be made from white sandstone by a local stone mason and engraved like the original with “7 miles to Ferry Lock”. The wording indicates that the stone dates from between 1762, when the canal was extended to Fiddlers Ferry from its original terminus with the Mersey at Sankey Bridges, and 1833, when the extension to Widnes was opened. St.Helens MBC have agreed to the siting of the stone and will provide the materials and labour to install it using quick set cement which goes hard in 15 minutes.

Barrie enlightened us as to why the original stone has what appears to be a bolt in the centre near the top. This, he said, would have been where a metal plate with the number of miles would have been. It would appear that the plate eventually disappeared, and a stonemason was called in to chisel in the number 7, slightly off centre.

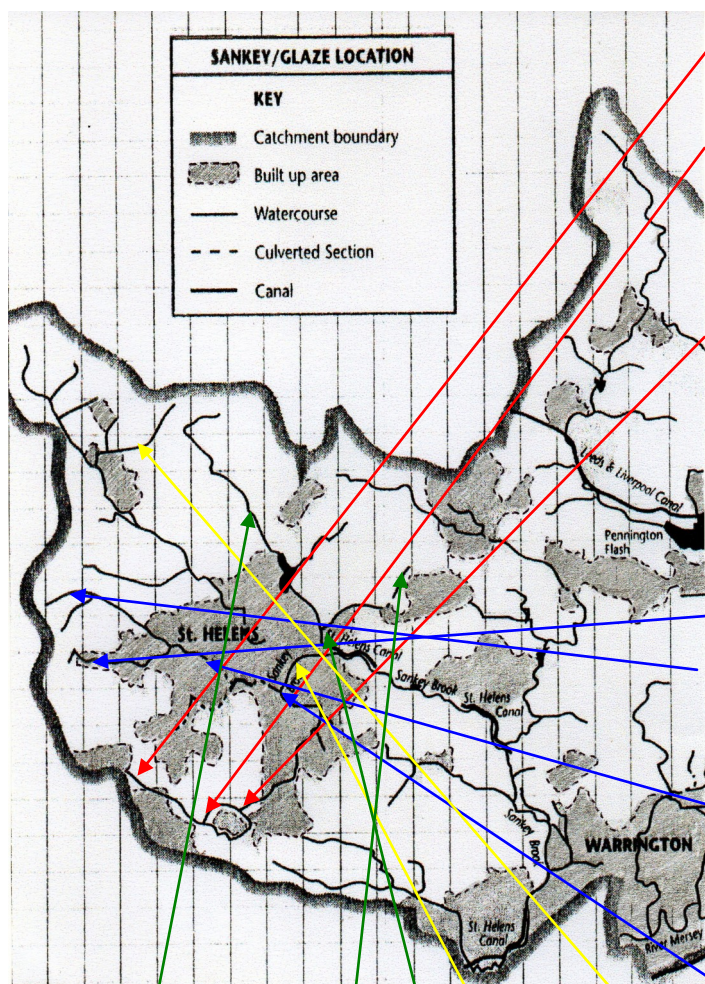
Barrie’s Society has since offered to locate two more milestone on the Sankey Canal—one in Halton, and the other in Warrington. We are presently looking for suitable locations and permission from the councils.

***For further information about “The Milestone Society” check out their website on [www.MilestoneSociety.co.uk](http://www.MilestoneSociety.co.uk)***



# The Sources of the Sankey Brook in St. Helens

*By John Hughes*



Pendlebury Brook flows eastwards from the Eccleston Farm area. The brook then splits near St. Ann's Well at Rainhill. One branch flows northwards then turns eastwards whilst the other flows south eastwards then eastwards before they both join together to feed Sutton Mill Dam. Leaving the dam the brook becomes known as Sutton Brook, flowing northwards towards the Parr Stocks area of St Helens.

From the west flow two brooks, Mill Brook from Gillars Green, and Windle Brook. They join at Ruskin Drive in Denton's Green and flow eastwards towards the town centre. At Dilloway Street the brook enters a covered culvert all the way to Peasley Cross. There, back in daylight, the flow is eastwards where it joins Sutton Brook.

This is the start of Sankey Brook. After half a mile the Rainford Brook feeds into it, from a north westerly direction, at Boardman's Lane, Blackbrook. When the canal was extended from the old Double Locks to Gerard's Bridge the brook was diverted into the canal and still follows this line. At Redgate outflow Rainford Brook re-joins its original course, passing below Park Road to join Sankey Brook.

The Black Brook and Clipsley Brooks converge near the Ship Inn and flow southwards to also feed the Sankey downstream of the Old Double Locks.

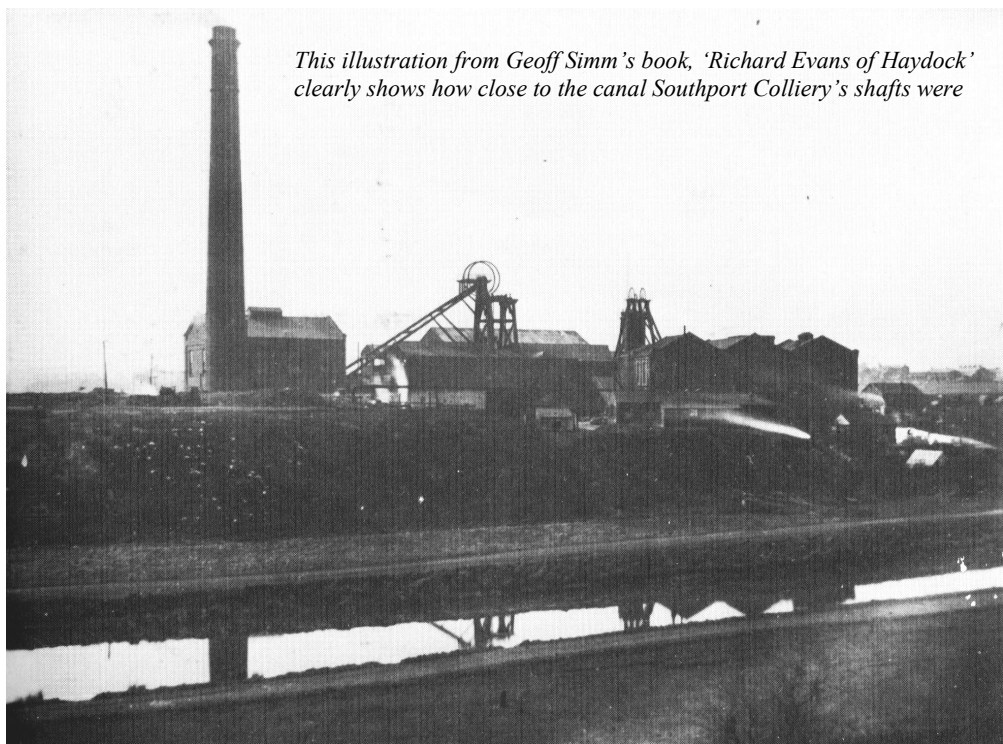
There are other watercourses that are now hidden in culverts, but are still running, feeding into the Ravenhead Branch. Lugsmore Lane Dam and Carriage Drive Dam are feeders for the downstream brooks.

## Archive Reports:1: Another Catastrophe at St Helens

*Archivist Judith Hogg has been delving through the records, and has a story which demonstrates the dangers of sinking mine shafts too close to active watercourses. It also illustrates that flooding due to heavy rain is not a new phenomenon and our engineers seem not to have learned lessons over the intervening time.*

### Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News : May 27th 1899

On Thursday a disaster occurred at the Southport pit of the Parr Colliery, belonging to Messrs Richard Evens and Co. The St Helens and Sankey Canal passes close to this pit on its way to Earlestown and Warrington and during the night the canal burst its banks at a point close to the pit shaft and poured its water down the shaft into the pit. The brook which runs from St Helens has also been involved and poured its contents, full of chemical drains, down the shaft.



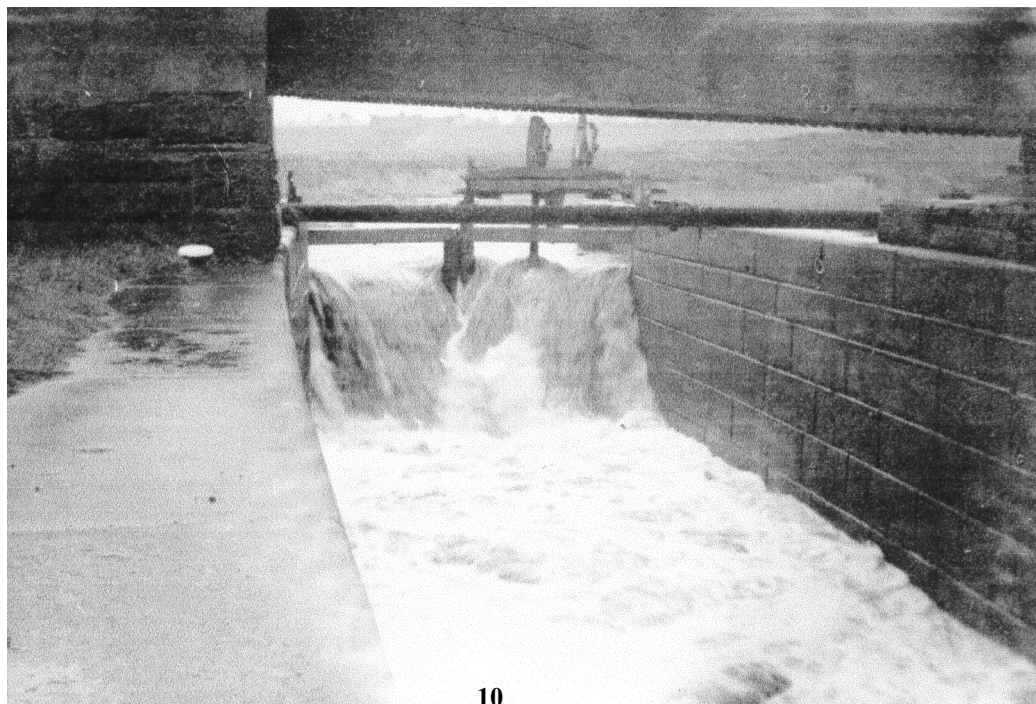
*This illustration from Geoff Simm's book, 'Richard Evans of Haydock' clearly shows how close to the canal Southport Colliery's shafts were*

It appears that the water from the brook, which were both very full in consequence of the heavy rain had forced a passage through to a disused shaft and flooded some old colliery workings which lie on the St. Helens side of the Southport Pit. The alarm was raised about eight o'clock on Wednesday night by the men working in the Southport Pit who were met by a great inrush of water. Mr. Stephenson, the Manager, and the officials in charge

were informed as quickly as possible. On inspecting the sides of the brook and canal it was found that the water in both was very much disturbed, and at one place, about 400 yards from the main shaft, the water was pouring down an old shaft with great force. Branches of trees and bales of straw were thrown into this opening and the men set to work at once to try to fill up the old shaft. Five or more old pit shafts lie close by the brook and canal, and from the height the water had risen in these it was evident that the workings were pretty nearly full. The water in the canal at this point was run off so as to ease the pressure, and the pumps at the two collieries were set going. All the men at the collieries were withdrawn from the workings , and over 200 men will be out of work for some time.

*Southport Colliery comprised of Parr No.4 and Parr No.5 pits. They were sunk in 1894—and abandoned in 1936... after flooding. Although there were indications of shafts on the slope of the valley up to about ten years ago, there is little sign of Southport Pit today. The canal tow path passes along the east bank of the canal within a few metres of its site but scrub and undergrowth mask the whole site.*

*As the illustration below, of flood waters pouring over the top gates of the Old Double Locks, show there has been a long history of flooding at Blackbrook and many efforts have been made to alleviate the problems, with varied success. With increasing rainfall due to global warming the problem is more likely to get worse than better. All the more reason to reinstate the canal as a conduit for excess water in the upper Sankey Valley.*





## Archive Reports:2:

### John Smith—Sankey Steam Boat Pioneer

*The next item was first published in the Liverpool Chronicle, and then republished in the Liverpool Mercury on 20 July 1932.*

#### The First Steam Boat

'TO THE EDITOR. SIR,- Seeing in your paper of the 30th ult. an inquiry relative to the first inventor of steam-boats; also some inquiries relative to one constructed at St Helen's, by a John Smith, and having seen no answer, I willingly give such information as I am in possession of, and shall have pleasure if it leads to any thing like a remuneration to the family, some of whom are still living in St Helen's, and are only in very moderate circumstances. The engine in the boat alluded to, and which is generally supposed to the first invented, was constructed for propelling boats by steam, as before stated, by Smith, at St Helen's, in the year 1793, and the first excursion was down the Sankey Canal, to Newton Races, in June of the same year, laden with passengers. On the Saturday following, she sailed to Runcorn, from thence down the Duke of Bridgewater's Canal to Manchester. On her arrival there, such was the astonishment and curiosity at this wonderful (and, as some would have it) this mad idea, that thousands of the people came from all directions to see what their eyes could not believe, nor their senses understand; and, indeed, from such were the numbers, and such the curiosity this vessel excited, that Smith was obliged (for the safety of his property) to give notice that no one would be allowed to come on board her, excepting those who paid a certain sum. This exasperated the populace to such an extent, that a party of mechanics immediately got possession of, and almost destroyed her. Amongst the visitors was Mr Sherratt, of the firm of Bateman & Sherratt, of Manchester; also several other respectable engineers of the same place, for whom it is unnecessary to name.

'So far as memory serves me, (after a lapse of 39 years,) the following is a description of this wonderful discovery ; but having made no memorandums of the circumstance at the time, and I may say, being then young, and to a certain extent, like the rest of my friends, incredulous. I never anticipated what is almost to every one in the present day so common. The vessel had on her an engine on the old atmospheric principle, was worked with a beam, connecting-rod, double crank, in an horizontal line, and with seven paddles on each side, which propelled her at the rate of about two miles an hour. John Smith was a rude, uncultivated, and self-taught mechanic, and was supported with money by a Mr Baldwin, at that time of St Helen's; and was the first aeronaut who ever ascended in a balloon, either in this or the adjoining counties. Perhaps I may observe that the vessel or boat was purchased at Liverpool, and on Smith's informing the parties from whom he bought it what his intentions were, he was treated as some insane person; he was laughed at by one, insulted by others, and pitied generally; but having money with him, he was allowed to purchase her. So strong were the convictions of this self-taught mechanic as to the general utility of steam and the ultimate success of steam-boats, that on being questioned and laughed at by a merchant at the time the purchase was made, he replied, "Those may laugh who will, but my opinion is, before twenty years are over, you will see this, river, (Mersey) covered with SMOKE."

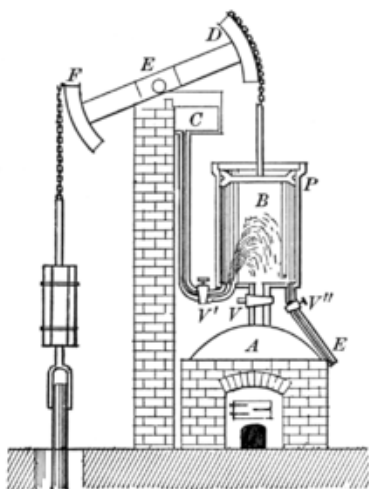
'I feel Pleasure in giving your correspondent these particulars, and the substance of the remarks I can vouch for as being correct, having been an eye-witness to most of them, and one of the party who took this first excursion.

Yours, &c. WM. BROMILOW, Merton Bank-, near St. Helen's.'



*On 5th November 1794 a meeting of the Mersey and Irwell Navigation Company's Board minuted, " A person in Liverpool , having produced to the Committee a model of a boat navigated by machinery ....Mr Wright was directed to pay him five guineas". It is assumed that the recipient of this sum was John Smith.*

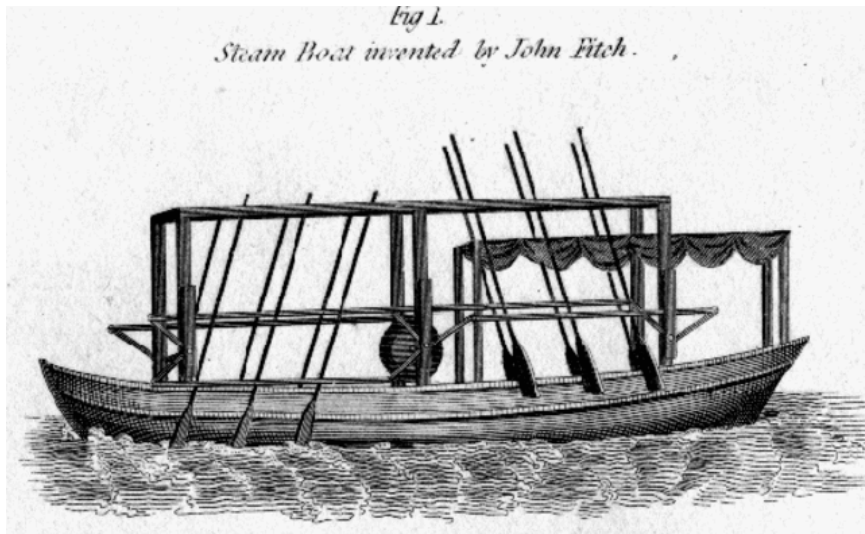
*Whilst that Navigation Board failed to capitalise on steam power, the Duke of Bridgewater was quick to take up the baton, commissioning a boat to operate on his own canal. His boat was larger, designed to haul a string of loaded barges, and was powered by two Newcomen cylinders, an overhead rocking shaft, piston rods and gear wheels. This was successful, but by 1799 had been abandoned, relegated to work at one of the Duke's collieries. Regardless of the result of the Duke's later endeavours, once again, the Sankey had notched up another 'first', showing the way ahead.*



*Bromilow's description of Smith's boat and its operating mechanism states that its steam engine was 'on the old atmospheric principle'. This would have been a Newcomen-style engine, rather than the later Watt engine, the use of which was restricted by his patents. The diagram, left, shows such an engine in use for pumping water out of a mine, but they would eventually be used to drive a steam locomotive.*

*Many others were experimenting with steam boat propulsion at the same time as Smith. In the 1780s John Fitch produced the craft below in America—the paddle arrangement fits Bromilow's description for Smith's craft.*

*Fig 1.  
Steam Boat invented by John Fitch.*



# Reports From Our Work Parties

*By Colin Greenall*

**Wednesday 29th November 2017: Sankey Valley Park : SCARS' Wednesday group** was at work on the canal near the footbridge above Sankey Way, clearing trees and unwanted vegetation from the canal bank and around the footbridge.





## **Sunday February 11th 2018: Winwick Dry Dock : Six hardy members of SCARS'**

Sunday group of volunteers were out braving arctic conditions of hail, sleet, wind and rain. Our day actually commenced at Hulme Lock where some work was needed to complete the vegetation clearance started in December. Once this was done we moved on to the dry dock. We started by clearing the top of the walls around the dock, before clearing the growth of brambles and other weeds on the dock walls themselves (*below*). As the floor of the dock was under a few inches of water, that was left to be tackled another time. In spite of the weather a good time was had by all— even the people passing by who stopped to chat and ask questions about the work of the society etc.



## **WANTED—Volunteers**

Our Work Parties are perhaps our most visible volunteering opportunity—but there are other roles we need volunteers for. Maybe you could help out on our exhibition and sales stand when we attend events around the area from late Spring to early Autumn; or perhaps you have a personal skill, for instance in communications or the media, which you could put to use to help promote the Sankey and our Society—even if it's simply visiting the canal every now and again, taking photographs, and putting them up on our social media sites (see page 18); or carrying out research into aspects of the canal's history, or of its associated communities or industries.

But don't let yourself be limited by my imagination....

To offer your services, choose a contact from page 2 of this magazine.



*Above: The results of our labours so far—why not volunteer to help finish the job?*



## **WANTED—Volunteers**

*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. If you would like to get a little involved in an informal day in the fresh air and do something to clear up our local environment then contact me on: 01744 600656 or email me at : [johnhughes11@virginmedia.com](mailto:johnhughes11@virginmedia.com)*

*You can be assured of a warm welcome!*

*John Hughes*







## Thomas Glover (1852-1913)

### MP for St Helens 1906-10

*St Helens owes its existence to coal and the Sankey Canal. Many of those involved in those early enterprises have faded into obscurity. However, one man who has a recognized place in history is Tom Glover, a miner who devoted his early life to the welfare of his fellow miners, and was elected as the town's first Labour MP in 1906. One of his children has passed his father's recollections to us:*

I was born in Prescott on March 25th 1852. My father was an under-looker in a coal mine belonging at that time to Daniel Bromilow and in 1854 my father was taken from Prescott Colliery to Blackbrook Colliery which belonged to the same

owner, there being a fire in the mine by which two men lost their lives and one of the poor fellows was never found. I went to a Church School for four years then to a National School until I was nine years of age. I then went to work down the Blackbrook Colliery.

My first job was to tent the door for the ponies which took the empty tubs into the working place of the coal getters and brought full tubs back. I sat and opened the doors commencing to work at 6am and working until 5pm and 6pm, never seeing daylight in the winter, only on Sundays. My next job was to drive the ponies, after which I became a waggoner, then drawer, then at the age of 18 years I was a coal getter.

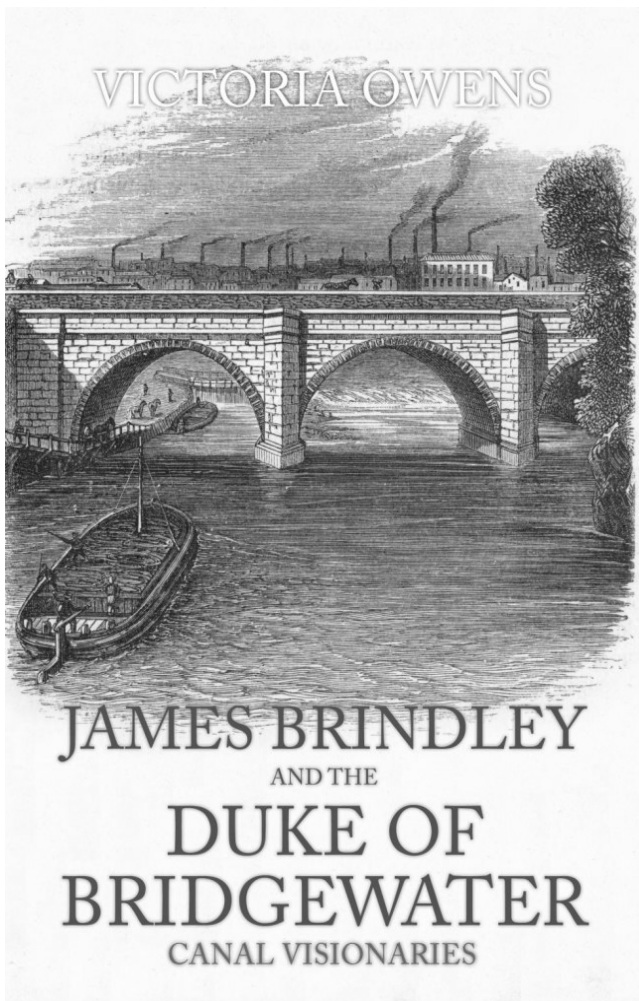
I commenced to take an interest in Trade Unions when I was only 16 years of age and was made secretary of the colliery branch where I worked. In 1868 we had a great strike in Lancashire. At that time we were connected with what was known as the National Unions and the members expected to receive strike pay, which they did, for one week only. Then we were told there was no more money and after 10 weeks stoppage the men were beaten and went back to work as we came out, I myself going back to the coal face.

Later I was appointed check-way man on behalf of the Garswood Colliery. I acted in that capacity until the colliery finished 8 years. Later, I then commenced to work at the coal face as a coal getter again at the Burns Colliery Company, Peasley Cross until I was appointed miners' agent. I had also carried on the duties of secretary at the St. Helens and District Miners' Union from 1880-1889. In 1882 or 1883 The St. Helens and District Miners Union was affiliated to the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Union but kept our funds distinct and had our own agents. I was elected Miners' Agent of the St Helens district in 1864, and carried on as secretary, along with the agency until 1889. In 1889 I finished working down the mine.

In 1892 I was appointed JP for St Helens. In 1897 our Union became amalgamated into the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation. My salary as agent was £150 a year. In 1893 we came out on strike against a reduction of 25%. After a 16 week strike and having lost the whole of our funds in strike pay we went back to work as we came out.

In 1904 I was appointed Treasurer of the Miners' Federation after the death of the late Robert Isherwood, and at the annual conference I was elected to the post (*and every year until my father's death he was elected by the delegates with opposition*). The office was unpaid. In 1895 I was elected to the Prescott Union Board of Guardians and remained a member for 6 years, when I retired as I found I could not devote the time.

*To be continued*



**Book Review:**  
**James Brindley**  
**and the Duke of**  
**Bridgewater:**  
**Canal Visionaries**  
*Victoria Owens*  
(Amberley  
Publications, 2015)

Early canal histories often cited the Bridgewater Canal as the first canal in England. We in the Sankey Canal Restoration Society know better, and have been working for years to raise awareness of this inaccuracy and have been rewarded by more recent waterway publications giving the Sankey its rightful place as the pioneer waterway in England.

This does not in any way detract from the efforts of the Bridgewater Canal, its promoter, engineer, and agent, the Duke of Bridgewater, Brindley and John Gilbert. At their time in

history they were heading into unknown territory, especially with the aqueduct carrying the canal over the river Irwell in Manchester and for this they deserve much credit. The book tells the tale of Brindley, his association with the Duke, the construction of the Bridgewater Canal and many of the other projects with which Brindley was involved during his lifetime.

James Brindley was born in 1716 and spent most of his adult life in Cheshire, Derbyshire Staffordshire as a self employed millwright. He designed and built mills for fulling, corn grinding and flint grinding, machinery, water wheels and pumps. He was well regarded by his customers and given the name of 'schemer', not in any critical way but as an acknowledgement of his facility to identify difficulties and find a way out of them. He branched out into steam engines, boiler making and drainage pumps for mines, and was involved in a survey for the construction of a waterway between Stoke and the navigable River Trent, but this came to nothing or the history of canals in England would have been a little different. He had however been very successful at controlling water

with his work at Wet Earth Colliery at Clifton, just outside Manchester. Its owner, John Heathcote, was having flooding problems with his pit and heard in casual conversation of this Staffordshire Millwright who liked a challenge, so enlisted Brindley's help.

At Clifton he built a weir across the River Irwell, constructed a leat which flowed along on the surface on the east bank then passed below the river via a syphon to emerge on the west bank where it was led through a water wheel to operate the pump which drained water from the colliery. Here was a man who could make water flow uphill.

In 1760 the Duke's enthusiasm for a canal to link his mines to Salford was increasing, and this provided an opportunity which completely changed Brindley's life. Having successfully obtained his Act the Duke appointed Brindley as his engineer, to work with Gilbert, not only to construct the canal but, as his plans developed, to build an aqueduct to carry the canal across the River Irwell and so into Manchester where the demand for Worsley coal was ever increasing.

The completion of the canal made Brindley's reputation, so that from then on he was in great demand for many canal and river navigation projects up and down the country. He was involved in the Trent and Mersey Canal, the Staffordshire and Worcester Canal, the Droitwich Canal, the Birmingham Canal, the Chester Canal and the Chesterfield Canal. Whilst giving his attention to these projects he found time to offer advice on the River Weaver, the River Thames and even the Runcorn Lock Flight.

The book is full of information yet easy to read and would be an excellent addition to the bookshelf of any waterway enthusiast.

*Follow SCARS on any of the social media platforms  
and keep up-to-date on our activities and news  
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Instagram: Sankey Canal Restoration: sankeycanal1757



# Membership Subscription



Charity No: 702571

I wish to join SCARS - my subscription is as detailed below.

Individual (at one address)*		Donation**	TOTAL	Gift Aid**
General	Unwaged			YES / NO
£15.00	£10.00			
* Please indicate as appropriate		** Please indicate your wishes		

Name:	Address:	Post code:
Telephone:	Email address:	

**The Sankey Canal Restoration Society**  
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☐

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I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Please notify SCARS: if you want to change this declaration, change name or home address; no longer pay sufficient tax

Please forward to:

Mike Harrison - the Treasurer / Membership Secretary  
4 Darvel Avenue, Garswood, Ashton-in-Makerfield, WN4 0UA

## Brian Bennett's Album: Part 14

The late Brian Bennett was a long-time Member of SCARS Member. He took a series of photographs of the Sankey from the mid- to late-1970s. He kindly donated his Album to the Society some years ago, and they have often be used by those of our Members who give Talks on the canal to other organisations.



Alder Lane Bridge over the Sankey—in water in 1975, *above*, and infilled with rubbish in 1979, *below*. The bridge, between Burtonwood and Winwick, was built around the time of the last barges to the Sankey Sugar Works in 1959. A few months later, and it might never have been built, and there would have been another significant barrier to the full restoration of the Canal. The new bridge allowed heavy goods vehicles too large for the swing bridge at Watery Lane to the south to reach Warrington from St Helens. At the time, the direct route through Burtonwood village to Gt Sankey had been closed off where it crossed the runways of the then operational USAF Burtonwood.

