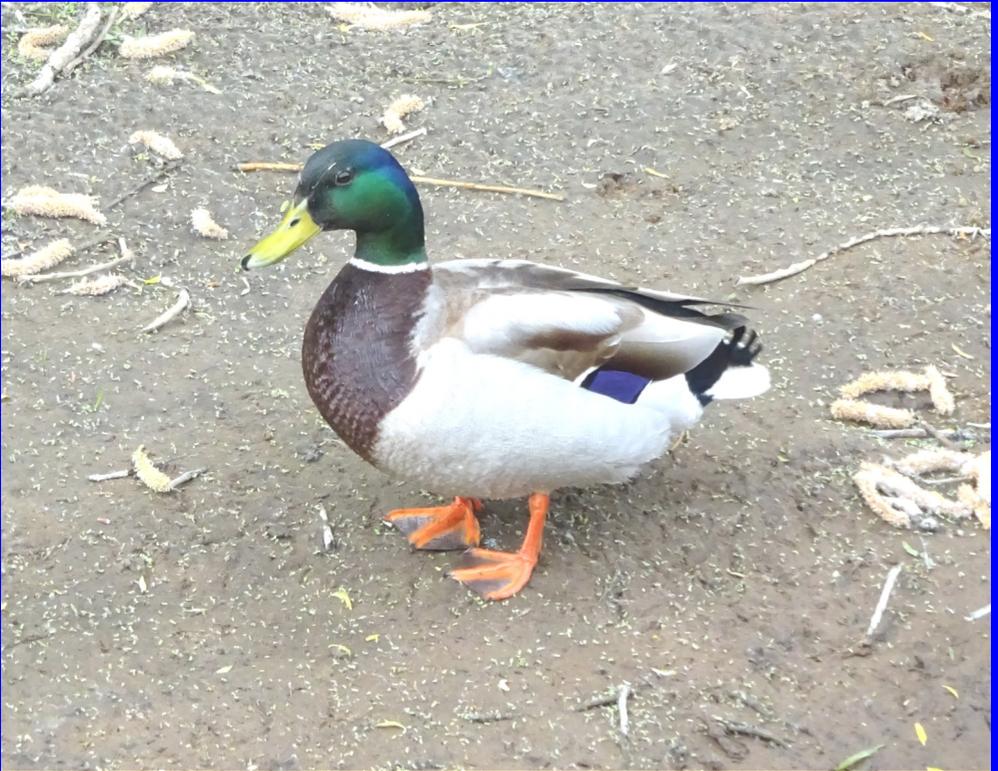


Sankey Canal Restoration Society

CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 9 Number 6
Summer 2020



Looking for a mate...

A Mallard drake in breeding plumage pictured beside the section of the Sankey the below the New Double Locks which has been dredged

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

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Founded 1985



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(Councillors from the three Local Authorities which own most of the Canal's line):

Keith Morley (Halton) Steve Parish (Warrington)

Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

The Inland Waterways Association:

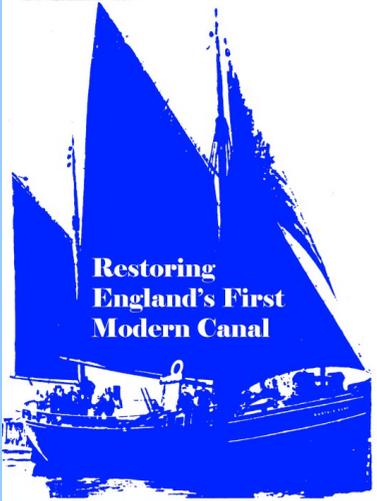
Colin Greenall (Chester & Merseyside Branch)

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 9 NUMBER 6: Summer 2020

Editor and Production: David Long
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The Chairman's Report—from Colin Greenall

Welcome to this issue of Canal Cutting, it seems very strange at this time of year to be shut up indoors, not being able to get out to be beside the canal, but we must be patient and wait for the all-clear.

The Coronavirus pandemic has affected us all in so many different ways, and to all our members I must say, stay safe and keep well, and we will get through this period of uncertainty and then, when things return to something like normal, we can get on with our lives.

Our activities prior to the pandemic lockdown are featured in our usual News from the Boroughs section and Work Party reports on the following pages.

The Annual General Meeting had to be postponed, but hopefully this will take place soon. In the meantime, the present members of the Committee will continue in office. By now you should have received a copy of the Annual Report for 2019 and I hope you find it interesting to read about the past twelve months of the society. If anyone is interested in joining the committee or to help with the running of the Society in anyway please get in touch via the any of the committee members listed in this issue.

Meanwhile, like other organisations, we have used Zoom, the Online Video Conferencing System, to hold an electronic Committee Meeting. This worked well, and has proved to be a way forward for keeping the Society's work going and we are hoping to use this again in the future.

Unfortunately this summer's Events have been hit hard by the lockdown and social distancing measures, meaning that almost all of the events that our sales and promotions stand would have attended have been cancelled. This will mean a loss of revenue to the Society—plus not being able to get out there and talk to the many interesting people we meet up with on these occasions.

Some positive news is that Canal & Rivers Trust have started work at Carr Mill Dam on a project that will last from May to December.

In the meantime let's focus on the future and hope that once things get back to some kind of normality we will be able to continue in our efforts to get the Sankey Canal Restored to full navigational standard.

In the meantime Stay Well and Stay Safe.

*Best wishes,
Colin Greenall*

“Announcement”

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic all Social Meetings organised by IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch and St.Helens Historical Society are cancelled until further notice.

However The Inland Waterways Association will be organising a series of online presentations for members to login into. Also IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch will be launching a series of presentations later in the year.

Follow SCARS on any of the social media platforms and keep up-to-date on our activities and news. Find us on:



Facebook Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Twitter: Sankey Canal @scars567



Instagram: Sankey Canal Restoration: sankeycanal1757

Report From Our Work Parties

By Colin Greenall

Before the Coronavirus lockdown was imposed, our work parties had been continuing their Winter programme of work on the line of the Canal.

Sunday 19th February: Bewsey Lock Overflow: Work continued at the site, with three volunteers turning out to pull the stumps of the trees cut down at the last work party there in January.



Sunday 23rd february: Huge Community Litter-Pick—Blackbrook to Callens Farm: In mid February SCARS were informed of a large build up of rubbish at the top of the Old Double Locks. This had been highlighted on social media with a photograph of two swans swimming amongst it, and this in turn led to the local press getting involved saying it was alarming that this build-up of rubbish was allowed to happen— and who was going to remove it.



The Canal & Rivers Trust and the St.Helens Ranger Service were informed and duly came and managed to clear some of the rubbish which had accumulated behind the swan boom at the top of the locks.

On the following Sunday SCARS led a grand community litter pick around the area of the canal from Blackbrook Road Bridge to the top of Old Double Locks and beyond to the Broad Oak Basin.

Around 35 volunteers turned out and filled about 60 bags with various items of litter i.e. plastic bottles, aluminium cans, glass bottles, plastic bags etc.etc. These were all gathered together and deposited in the compound at the Sankey Valley Heritage Visitor Centre to be collected by St.Helens Council on the Monday morning as arranged.

Our volunteers managed to clear more of the rubbish from the swan boom, but were hampered by the high water level and fast flow over the weir after heavy overnight rain-fall from completely clearing it away.



The bags of litter in the Visitor Centre compound awaiting collection by the Council.



Sunday 1st March: Hulme Lock clear-up: Eight volunteers turned out on a rather chilly morning and set to work on clearing the site of Hulme Lock, the by-wash channel and its cottage foundation. Over the couple of years since our last visit, brambles and nettles have taken over the site. They did not present any great problem to our team and, after a couple of hour's exertion the site became recognisable again—see the Before and After overleaf:

WANTED—Volunteers

Our Work Party is champing at the bit to get back to work after the lockdown. If you're also wanting to tone up your muscles, why not join them? The work you put in depends on you and what you feel capable of.

Contact me on: 01744 600656

Or email me at : johnhughes11@virginmedia.com

John Hughes

#524064

Before and After views of the remains of Hulme Lock Cottage



Before and After views of the by-wash at Hulme Lock



News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

by Colin Greenall

WARRINGTON

Government confirms Western Link Road Cash

Approval has been granted for the £142.5m funding deal for the Western Link, connecting the A56 at Chester Road, Higher Walton with the A57 at Sankey Way—though construction is not expected to start until 2021.

The road will create a new crossing point over the Mersey, cutting congestion and opening up land for development for up to 24,000 new homes and “substantial employment opportunities”, potentially including Peel’s Port Warrington.

Roads minister Jesse Norman said: “Investment in roads cuts travel time, increases productivity and helps create new job opportunities.

“The new Western Link Road will significantly benefit both road users and residents in Warrington, and is the latest instalment of the government’s record £13bn investment in transport across the North of England.”

The road will provide another link between the north and south of Warrington, taking some traffic away from the town centre. It is also intended to ease congestion close to Warrington Bank Quay station, while an additional bridge will be built over the Manchester Ship Canal.

HALTON

Spike Island Swing Bridge: The latest news we have about the swing bridge is that it will be of an all-steel construction and not, as previously reported, of carbon-reinforced plastic. The reason for this is the unknown stress level of carbon-reinforced plastic and its durability over a long period of time. There is also a cost implication in that steel will be the cheaper option. Work on constructing the bridge is likely to be held up by the present Covid Pandemic, so we will have to be patient.

Water Supply: Fiddlers Ferry Power station has now closed, but we have had word from Halton Council that the water supply will continue whilst the decommissioning of the power station site is in progress.

ST HELENS

De-silting of the Rainford Brook: Work on dredging Rainford Brook between College Street and Park Road appears to have finished, and it is hoped that this will go some way to alleviating the flooding that as persisted over the last few years in area. However, I recently took a walk along the footpath between College Street and Park Road and found that certain sections have not been dredged— i.e. the section between the Millennium Green Footbridge and Park Road, and the section from New Double Locks back towards College Street. The section between New Double Locks to the Millennium Green footbridge has been carried out to an excellent standard, with the silt being landscaped and now grassing over nicely. I enquired about the situation at the Council, and was told that the dredging was stopped by the Covid-19 lockdown, but will resume in the Autumn.

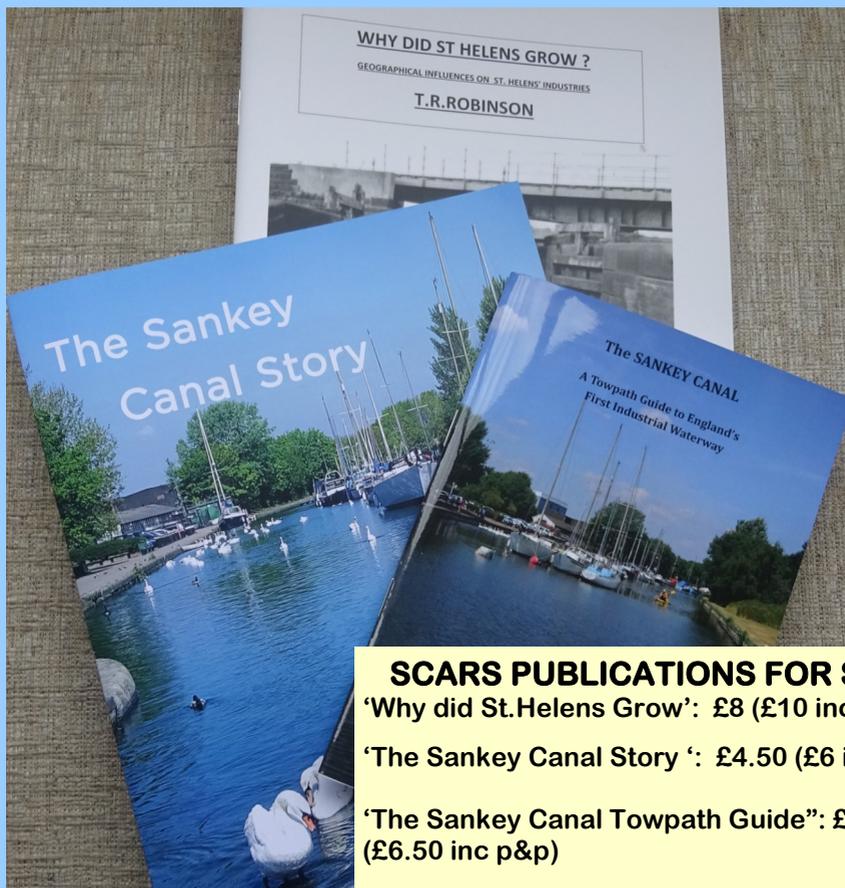
(Pictures opposite)



Above: The section of the Rainford Brook in the foreground has been dredged—but the section from just before the footbridge awaits the return of the contractors in the Autumn.

Below: The dredged silt was piled up beside the Brook, and was subsequently spread out and seeded with grass.





SCARS PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE

‘Why did St.Helens Grow’: £8 (£10 inc p&p)

‘The Sankey Canal Story ‘: £4.50 (£6 inc p&p)

‘The Sankey Canal Towpath Guide”: £ 4.80
(£6.50 inc p&p)

Order from Colin Greenall:
16 Bleak Hill Road, Eccleston, St.Helens,
WA10 4RW

WANTED—More 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, 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.

Historic Discovery at Stanley Basin

Clearance of a big tree by St Helens Council Ground Maintenance Team reveals ancient boundary stone

At the request of SCARS, a St.Helens ground maintenance team were sent to the entrance to Stanley Bank Basin to cut down a large tree which had died, with some of its branches hanging over the water, causing debris to accumulate and become unsightly. The problems the tree was causing were identified when SCARS volunteers were working clearing the banks of the canal of unwanted vegetation.



Once the Council team had cut down the tree and removed the branches off site, our own volunteers began to clear more of the brambles from around the area, and in the process uncovered a large block of sandstone. This was later identified by Dr. Barrie Pennington of the Milestone Society as a boundary marker, marking the boundary between Blackbrook and Haydock. Dr Pennington commented that “Parishes have a long history of fierce independence with loyalty to either a local lord of

the manor or church. Some boundary stones had parish crests or emblems at the centre made from cast iron. This new discovery appears to have a hole at the centre for such a crest which has rusted away.”



WORK STARTS ON £1 MILLION REPAIR PROJECT TO UPGRADE CARR MILL RESERVOIR, ST HELENS

This is from a Press Release from the Canal and River Trust about the work being carried out at Carr Mill Dam

The Canal & River Trust has started a major repair project to upgrade Carr Mill Reservoir on the outskirts of St Helens, Merseyside.

Costing just over £1 million, the work will be delivered in two phases and is due to be completed by the end of 2020. Thanks to the innovative use of an underwater remotely operated vehicle, water levels will only need to be slightly lowered not the reservoir completely drained.

The first phase at the dam wall by the railway viaduct, between May and August, involves the removal of an asbestos concrete pipe and installation of a new gauging weir, security grill, safety railings, ladders, steps and joint sealant, plus other safety and access enhancements.

In phase two, which is due to be completed in December, the project will move to the embankment next to the A571 Carr Mill Road. Two existing underwater valves will be replaced with four new ones, complete with supporting mechanisms. Work will also include a range of improvements and repairs to increase the resilience of the crest road embankment and repairs to the valve hut building.

Originally a mill pond powering Carr's Corn Mill, the lake was hugely expanded in the 1750s to provide water for the Sankey Canal about a mile away. This is no longer navigable but the reservoir has now become a popular venue for angling and water sports, as well as a great habitat for wildlife.

The Canal & River Trust has liaised closely with Lancashire Power Boat Club, St Helens Angling Society, Network Rail and local residents, land owners and restaurants in order to try and minimise the impact of the vital repairs.

Richard Spencer, project team leader with the Trust, said: "We are delighted we have been able to keep the reservoir in water this summer for the many people who use it. The robotic remotely operated vehicle is able to carry out a range of tasks underwater and will allow us to complete much of the work by the crest road without the need for a full draw down of the water.

"Our top priority is to keep local residents and businesses safe so from time to time we need to upgrade equipment, and repair and replace the infrastructure. We know people feel healthier and happier when they are by water, so preserving Merseyside's largest inland lake for people to enjoy is very important."

For more information about the CRT, check out their website:
www.canalrivertrust.org.uk



Plant using the freshly made-up access road from the East Lancashire Road parked beneath the St Helens to Wigan railway line



Contractors on the scaffolding erected along the dam wall beside the spillway

Happy Carr Mill Dam Memories

During the 1950's the area at Carr Mill Dan known as Happy Valley was very popular in the summer months with family groups congregating on the grassland around the run off channel from the Dam.

Children would enjoy a paddle on the slippery steps in the ice cold waters that led down into Blackbrook which was the feeder for the Sankey Canal.

Parents would bring a picnic and sit on the grass enjoy the sunshine mum with her cup of tea and dad with his bottle of beer and the kids with a bottle of pop, sandwiches (usually jam butties) and cakes.

This picture below of the crowds picnicking alongside the spillway between the dam and the Wigan-St Helens railway line, taken by Mr Edwin O'Connell around 1950, will bring back memories for many St.Helens folk that would have gone there to enjoy a few hours away from their place of work.

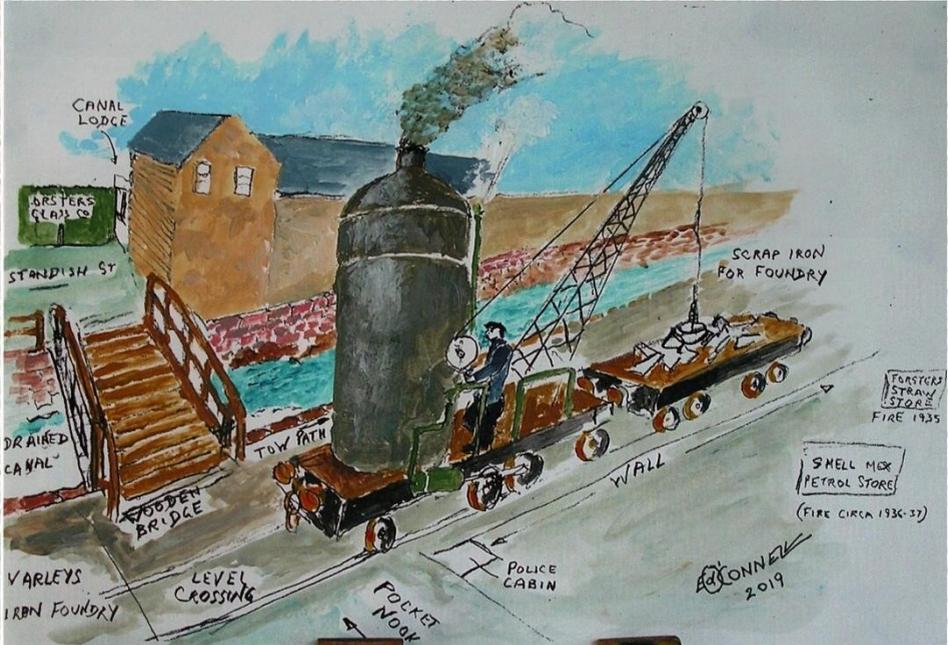
If you have any tales or pictures of trips to Happy Valley, the Funfair or the miniature railway at Carr Mill and would like to share them with others please get in touch, so we can share them with others.



Local History Corner

1. More on Pocket Nook Reminiscences

Following on from Edwin's article in the last issue of Canal Cuttings we show his painting of the scene at the crossing of the canal at Standish Street. The view is from the site of Varley's Foundry with the wooden bridge over the canal leading to Standish Street. Forster's glass bottle works occupies the far bank, whilst the drained canal to the left leads to the town centre and to the right to the New Double Locks.



The locomotive transporting scrap iron around the site, with its vertical boiler, may be a version of the 1930s Grafton self-propelled steam crane pictured, (left) at the Blist's Hill Victorian Town, Telford. (Pic. by Chris Allen, *Geograph website*)

It is also similar in basic design to the self-propelled steam dredger WIDNES used on the Sankey, which was pictured (right) by Peter Norton below Bewsey Lock in the 1950s.



SCARS is grateful for Mr. Connell's contribution to our newsletter and the time and effort which he has clearly put into his material.

Across the canal can be seen Parr Hall Farm on the site of the historic Parr Hall, all of which are now sadly gone without trace.

Rainford Brook (*ringed in green*) is still running on the surface apart from one small culverted section near the Ordnance Survey mark 1001 14.145 and another near 1003 1.769. A little further still the brook is again culverted below the railway embankment, emerging again near the label “sluice” (*ringed in red*), passing below Park Road before flowing into Sankey Brook. Its surface course indicates that the Mill was probably demolished quite a long time ago and there is no further need for Parr Mill Dam.



*Two images from the St Helens' Archives:
Left: The bridge (ringed purple) being dismantled, with one side member lying across the canal.
Below: The next bridge, the 'Cephus Bridge', with the advertisement covered over—perhaps just prior to its demolition.*

At the label “sluice” excess water from the canal flowed into the brook. Today the canal’s whole flow continues to cascade down a series of concrete steps (*see rear cover*) into the Sankey Brook, but the canal itself, beyond the bend, has been filled in. Stones from its side wall are still visible beside the footpath. A little further along the canal turned right alongside Boardmans Lane whilst Park Road crossed it at the turn via a swing bridge. This is the location of the present traffic lights which govern the junction of these two roads, close to the Lidl Supermarket.

The canal follows the northern edge of Boardmans Lane through what are now the grounds of the Secondary School before continuing off the map across the area now occupied by rugby pitches and club rooms. The north to south railway line, alongside the Lane, is the Blackbrook Branch whilst the curve in the lower right hand corner crossed over the top chamber of the Old Double Locks via a swing bridge. Yet another swing bridge is shown, labelled Redgate Swing bridge. It should be remembered that the mainly colliery traffic in those days was comparatively light, as was the demand from the flats using the Gerard’s Bridge and Ravenhead Branches, so these railway bridges would not have been swung too often.

Once again we find that throughout the years there has been tremendous change in the area, and that this is a continuing process, without end. All except, of course, the Sankey Canal, which survives across just over half of the map, whilst its infilled line has been protected by St. Helens MBC, preventing any development along it. It lies ready, awaiting excavation and restoration.



What's in a name?

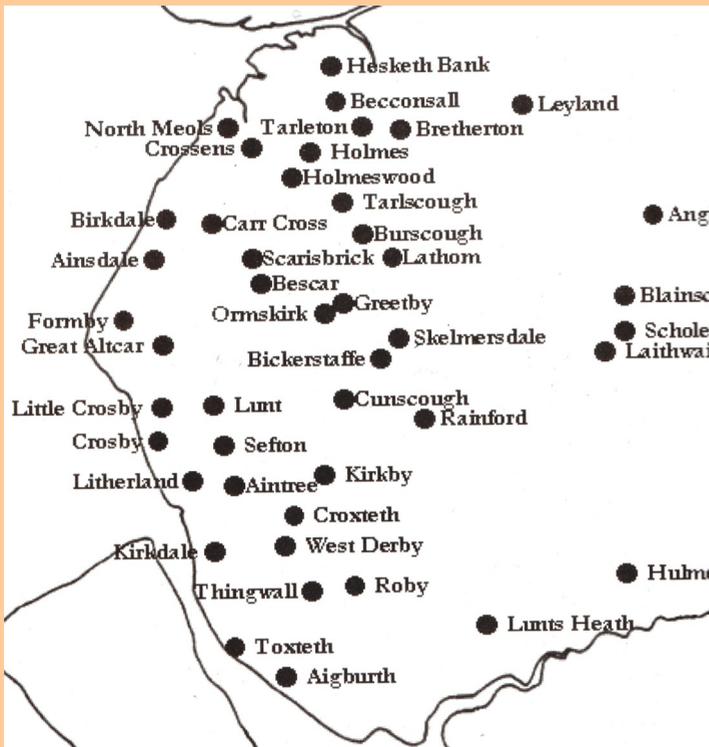
1. When the Vikings Invaded the Sankey Valley

Peter Keen writes: Scientific research has utilised DNA to investigate the origins of a wide section of the community, both locally and nationally. The Viking strand has been located in many areas including extensive traces on the Wirral. If one adds the preponderance of Viking names for the settlements on the Wirral and West Lancashire, one cannot but accept the lasting presence of these Scandinavian invaders.

Stephen Harding has compiled an excellent book, “Viking Merseyside”, which tells of the first incursion of the Scandinavian Groups. He shows how, over time, they abandoned their fierce war-like ways and took up farming, settling in usually poorer quality land, working their way up to the better, more fertile soils.

The map below shows some of the local place names with Viking elements include Aigburth, Toxteth, Kirkby, Ormskirk, Lunts Heath—and Hulme (*bottom right corner*), which lies on the Sankey Brook.

The Vikings were great sailors, crossing the North Sea, and the North Atlantic, exploring any new region they found via its rivers. Their boats were of timber, well built, shallow draft vessels well suited to landing on beaches and river banks. It is accepted that the Vikings reached as far inland as Manchester along the Mersey and Irwell, settling in the region and naming the various settlements.



The new invaders/settlers would not have missed exploring any tributaries of the rivers they travelled up so there is every chance that they penetrated into the Warrington hinterland via the Sankey Brook. As has been shown during recent years, there can be plenty of water in the brook following wet weather and their boats would have been more than capable of navigating the waterway. SCARS work parties have spent a great deal of time working on the lock and lock keeper's house at Hulme alongside the crossing of the canal and the brook. The need for a lock at the spot ties in neatly with the Viking word 'holm', meaning 'eminence amidst low-lying land'.

2. When the Celts Named the Rivers

An extract adapted by David Long from an article by Andrew Breeze on 'The Celtic Names of Dinckley and Sankey in Lancashire', published in Volume 150 (2000) of Transactions, the Journal of the Lancashire and Cheshire Historical Society. Andrew Breeze FRHistS FSA, has been the professor de filologia of the University of Navarre, Pamplona since 1987.

The name of the river is attested as *Sanki* in 1202, *Sonky* in 1228; the villages of Great and Little Sankey as *Sonchi* in about 1180, *Sanki* in 1212, *Sonky* in 1242.

Different linguistic experts have given different interpretations: most that it was a British river-name, origin obscure, whilst some said it meant 'sacred, holy'. This sees the word as being derived from the Latin *sanctus*. This produced the British word *sachti*. However, the use of the *ch* in this word was lost from the language before the English occupied Lancashire in the middle of the seventh century.

A clue to the name is provided by the many Welsh hydronyms ending in *i*, such as Brefi, Cothi, Dyfi, Rhymni, Teifi, and Tywi. The first part of the word describes an attribute typical of the river's nature—the 'roarer', 'the scourer', 'the black one', 'the borer', etc.. These hydronyms provide models for *Sankey*. They suggest only one likely explanation: in the verb *sangi*, *sengi* 'to trample, stamp down, press, or put in'. Development of the word over the years produced words which meant 'conqueror', 'trampler'.

This offers two possibilities for Sankey Brook: 'trampler' or 'pusher, presser'. The Sankey runs through a low-lying area. If it tended to flood, the Britons might well have called it 'trampler', because it left its bed and overwhelmed fields nearby, perhaps destroying crops. On the other hand, if its valley was choked with natural vegetation through which it forced itself, 'pusher, presser' might suit better. A Welsh version of the Gospels makes the point. In the story of Thomas' incredulity, a sixteenth-century translation of John XX.27 has *Sang yma dy vrys* (where the Authorised version has 'Reach hither they finger), the Welsh translator regarding Thomas as pressing or pushing his finger into Christ's wounds. Sankey Brook might similarly have been thought of as a river that pressed articles down or pushed along its course. Palaeobotanists, who could inform on the early history of the Sankey Valley (and whether it was used for agriculture or was left wild), might resolve this point.

An objection to this has been raised—that the Middle Welsh *Sangi* would lead us to expect a river-name *Sangey*, not the *Sankey* we have. Yet the point seems answered by Jackson's account of *-nc-* in Welsh (*Language and History*, pp. 498-507). His work leads to the conclusion that there is no reason to think that the Sankey does not derive from Brittonic *Sanci* 'trampler; pusher, presser', a form borrowed by English in the early seventh century.

So it seems we can provide a derivation for *Sankey* which makes both linguistic and hydrological sense. We need not think that the Britons regarded Sankey Brook (until recently flowing by areas of industrial pollution) as a sacred or holy river. But they may have considered it either as a river tending to flood or perhaps as one pressing obstacles down or pushing its way through them. If so, the etymology helps historians. It removes Sankey Brook's claims to divinity, and provides evidence for the landscape of Celtic Lancashire.

Waterway Volunteer Organisations Must Think Carefully Before Considering a Return to Work



**INLAND
WATERWAYS**
ASSOCIATION

In common with most voluntary organizations not involved directly with assisting in the current Covid-19 crisis, SCARS has suspended all meetings and activities. This included our Work Parties, whom you can see on previous pages had been enjoying a very active start to the 2020 works programme. The IWA has released the statement below to Canal Societies to help them think about how they might restart such work parties in the future, when the Government guidance indicates it is appropriate to do so.

We have chosen to cancel, postpone and alter the delivery of IWA events and activities and the WRG team has cancelled or postponed events on an eight week rolling basis to be reviewed. Canal & River Trust has cancelled events and volunteer work parties for the foreseeable future.

Our volunteers and those of many waterway organisations across the country are eager to get back to championing, maintaining and restoring Britain's waterways. However, we believe there are long-term strategic and reputational risks for organisations to think about, as well as significant health risks for volunteers, in the face of COVID-19.

We have identified just a few of those risks here, and we expect them to remain in play for many months and perhaps even years:

- Waterway organisations may face reputation loss and community backlash or reduction in support if volunteers are observed undertaking non-essential work in non-safe circumstances.
- PPE provisions will be prioritised for key workers with the potential for significant delay in receiving the correct PPE for construction, waterside, and volunteer work.
- Additional hand washing facilities or the provision of hand sanitizers, and more vigilant cleaning regimes, will be needed.
- Construction materials and access to plant and equipment may be restricted, with priority given to housing developments and larger infrastructure projects.
- Working on or near towpaths, with passing members of the public, increases the risk of workers becoming infected as it could make it difficult to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

However important we believe waterway restoration to be, such volunteer work is not likely to be classified as 'essential work'.

Neil Edwards, IWA Chief Executive, says: "While it is fantastic to see so many volunteers raring to get back to business as usual, we implore all groups to step back and properly assess the risks, so as to avoid the potential for short and long-term damage of prematurely restarting operations. Our guidance will outline the risks and issues that must be considered when beginning to think about a phased approach to working safely in the coming months."

IWA will continue to work with all waterway organisations, and to offer advice and support that reflects government requirements during the present situation.

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
Registered Charity 702571

Gift Aid Declaration

Please help us to reclaim a further 25% by ticking the box below

I want to Gift Aid my subscription and/or donation of £_____ and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to the Sankey Canal Restoration Society

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

The Sankey Canal and the Rainford Brook Part Company



The Sankey Canal at times takes on the form of a canalised river—with the waters of the Sankey Brook and its tributaries spilling in and out of its course as it heads towards the Mersey. One place where the natural waterway and the man-made one parted company was at Redgate, Parr. *See the item inside on the map of this area (pages 18-19).*

The image *above* shows the Rainford Brook's flow being returned to its natural course—taking it under Park Road to join up with the Sankey Brook behind the terrace and the Redgate Hotel *above*—rejoining the line of the Canal *below* the Old Double Locks.

The image *below* shows where the line of the Canal went off left alongside Park Road to pass under Redgate swing bridge, to meet the waters flowing down from Stanley Basin *above* the Old Double Locks. A minor sluice sent excess water from the canal into the brook when the canal was operating. The photograph appears to show a weir had been constructed across the canal, sending the bulk over the sluices, leaving only a small amount of water to continue to flow left along the bed of the canal itself.

Thanks to Ellen Busby for her photographs from 1963

