

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

# CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 10 Number 5  
Spring 2023



## **Landmark Fiddlers Ferry Power Station starts to disappear**

Preparatory work is now in progress for the demolition of the four cooling towers on the right later this year. Plant and equipment which can be re-used has already been sold off by auction, and more will follow. Local charities are also receiving donations of furnishings and equipment.

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

**Registered Charity Number 702571**

**Founded 1985**

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Cllr. Richard McCauley, Mary Presland, Neil Viggers

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

Steve Parish and Janet Henshaw (Warrington)

Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

Kevan Wainwright (Halton)

**Spike Island & Canal Restoration Group:**

Lyndsey Byrne

**The Inland Waterways Association:**

Colin Greenall (Chester & Merseyside Branch)

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

## **CANAL CUTTINGS**

### **VOLUME 10 NUMBER 5: Spring 2023**

**Editor and Production: David Long and Jamie Highton**



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### ***The Chairman's Report—from Colin Greenall***

Welcome to the Spring issue of Canal Cuttings. I hope that you are all well and looking forward to another year of beautiful weather to get out there and enjoy our canals and countryside.

At the end of last year, the committee decided to bring the Annual General Meeting forward to January due to some members making the decision to retire due to health issues. The AGM took place at the hospitality suite at Halton Stadium and an enjoyable evening was had by all, especially as it resulted in five new appointments to the committee.

After the formal business of the AGM, we were given an update on the canal by Paul Wright from Halton Council. He addressed the issue of the lack of water at Spike Island and the condition of the line of the canal up to the boundary with Warrington. Paul explained the situation with the water supply and what Halton Council will be doing over the next twelve months. This created a lot of debate among the attendees with contribution from councillors from both St. Helens and Warrington adding to the debate. Following on from this Paul moved on to his favourite subject, railways, and proceeded to give us an excellent presentation about the St. Helens Canal & Railway Company.

I would now like to say a big thank you to the retiring members of the committee. All have given sterling service to the society for many years and have stated that they wish to stay involved with the activities of the group, so we have not seen the last of them! To Peter Keen, Neil Forshaw, John Hughes, Dave Callan and Andrew Screen - many thanks for your tremendous services to the society over many years. I know that none of us are getting any younger.

I also have to report that David Long has also decided to stand down from his position as editor of Canal Cuttings. David was the initial originator of our quarterly newsletter and has done a tremendous job taking it from humble beginnings in 1987 (one A3 folded sheet with no pictures) to its present full colour format. I would personally like to thank David for all his efforts and service to the society and wish him well for the future.

It is now time to move on and it is hoped that the new members of the committee will continue to make the society more proactive and generate interest in our quest for restoration of the Sankey Canal.

Work parties are back up and running and I know that Ian Hornby, our work party organiser, is keen to attract new volunteers, so if any of you fancy a few hours out in the fresh air give Ian a call and he'll let you know when the next event is.

Our website is undergoing an upgrade and should be out there soon. The new site will give members and visitors to the site a better overview of the society and make it easier for people wishing to join via an online process. We also intend to update the Constitution and publish it on the website.

This year we will be attending a number of events with our Sale and Exhibition Stand starting off with St. Helens Heritage Festival on Saturday May 27<sup>th</sup> at St. Helens Town Hall, followed by Lymm Transport Rally at the end of June, then at various events during the summer, so do come along and say hello.

There are some exciting developments anticipated to happen along the canal this year with the demolition of the cooling towers at Fiddlers Ferry and work on the Widnes section of the canal, plus St. Helens will be celebrating its term as the Borough of Culture for the Liverpool City Region.

I hope that you all received your copy of our calendar for 2023 and enjoy the excellent photographs submitted by members.

We will be bringing out four issues of "Canal Cuttings" each year so please remember this is your magazine and we welcome items for publication. These can either be complete articles, letters, old photographs, questions about the canal, stories relating to the canal or surrounding area or indeed anything you think might be of interest to our readers.

Once again, we will be producing a calendar, so please send in your colour digital photographs of anything relating to the canal.

I'll sign off now and leave you to enjoy the items in this issue of "Cuttings" and I look forward to meeting up with some of you at the events we will be attending.

*Best Wishes, Colin Greenall*



# **An appreciation of Former Committee Members**

by Colin Greenall

## **Peter Keen**

Peter has been a member of the society since day one and a continual committee member from the beginning; first as restoration officer, dealing with work parties and other related matters such as planning and negotiating with the local councils on anything to do with the canal. At SCARS Annual General Meeting on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1998, he became the society Secretary, a post he held until December 2022 when he decided to relinquish the post due to a combination of health and family commitments.

Twenty four years is a long time in any position of trust, but Peter was always there to offer sound advice and encouragement to anyone. Thank you, Sir. It has been a pleasure to work with you over the past thirty-eight years as a committee member and friend, may it continue for a long time yet.

## **Neil Forshaw**

Neil was first elected to the committee in the nineties and was a great ambassador for the society, always willing to help out at the various events and work parties. Neil had a way of getting people to buy things at shows that no one else could match, a natural salesman. Always friendly and great company, Neil's knowledge of the local history of the Newton-le-Willows area was second to none and his calendars of the area are still a talking point with many people. Many thanks Neil for your years of dedicated service and I hope you can still continue with the distribution of our annual calendar to local outlets around Newton.

## **John Hughes**

John had two spells on the committee from the late nineties during which time he was a volunteer at both work parties and events, becoming a regular member of our sales team, before taking over from me as work party organiser. In this role his enthusiasm for physical work shone through. Many thanks for those hours of dedicated service to the society, and don't forget you're always welcome on any future work parties.

### **David Callan**

With two spells on the committee, David was always there to make positive comments about anything to do with restoration of the Sankey Canal. David's greatest contribution to the society was at a meeting when he met George Greener, who at that time was Chairman of British Waterways, and David casually asked him if he would pay a visit to the Sankey Canal to which George immediately agreed. This resulted in a high-profile visit which attracted a lot of media attention. David was always outspoken in his view on all things to do with local government, having been a councillor for a number of years prior to joining us. Many thanks David, I hope you will still make your presence felt on anything to do with the canal and the society.

### **Andrew Screen**

After being an observer for the IWA Restoration committee for many years, Andy eventually became a full committee member in the early part of the new millennium and this led on to him becoming chairman in 2008. Andy was a great speaker and public activist, having set up the Towpath Action Group to campaign for access to canals and rivers all over the country. Andrew eventually took a step back from the waterway scene due to pressure of work, resulting in him giving up the chairmanship of the society. However, he has remained on the committee giving advice on any legal matters that have arisen over the years. Although living a fair distance away from the canal he is still a regular member of our work party team. Many thanks Andrew

### **David Long**

David was a founder member of the Sankey Canal Restoration Society and from the beginning, until 2008, was the chairman and leading light of the group in its formative years. He worked tirelessly to promote our aims and objectives. David also initiated our Website, SCARS being the first waterway group to take to the worldwide web. In 1987 he brought out the first issue of "Canal Cutting" which has proved to be very popular with members, produced four times a year for thirty six years. This equals to one hundred and forty four issues plus an annual report for every year, so as you can see a tremendous effort by any standards. Many thanks David.

# An introduction to the new members of the committee

**Steve Davies**



Hi, my name is Steven (Steve) Davies and I've recently been elected as Secretary of SCARS .

I'm St. Helens born and bred, having been born in Sutton and lived in Parr, Sutton Leach and Earlestown.

My working experience started off with Greenall's brewery. I then moved to the Sutton Rolling Mill and then into retail management.

I am retired now, which allows me to focus on my charity work, as I'm also a Trustee of the Community bookshop in Bridge St. St.Helens and the Community Centre on Chain Lane, Laffak .

I currently live in the Laffak area with my wife, Carole. I also have a daughter who lives in Adelaide Australia with her husband and two children. I have a passion for all things heritage and so have joined the Society keen to restore our local canal - the first industrial canal in Britain.

I hope to expand both the membership and the number of volunteers we have in the Society, which will enable us to finally start to restore back into water as much of the canal as possible. Our local industry has long since gone but we should be proud of our industrial heritage and work to preserve it for future generations.

Please join us.

**Paul Romanko**



Hello everyone, I'm pleased to have joined the Committee. I'm a Senior Project Engineering Manager for United Utilities in the team that manages complex asset diversion and protection works for external Clients, for example local authorities, National Highways, Network Rail, and the Environment Agency. I'm currently UU's project manager for HS2.

I live in Newton-le-Willows with my wife and children, and we all enjoy using the Sankey Valley Trail.

I'm keen for SCARS to modernise and to present a professional image. We need to work to a plan with other stakeholders, widen our membership base and improve our commercial performance so that we can play a leading role in the canal's restoration. I look forward to working with you and, like all Committee Members, I welcome your ideas and actions to help the Society to achieve its objectives.

***Paul has taken on the role of Planning officer and will also serve on the Restoration Sub Committee, plus giving us valuable advice on the governance of the society.***

**Dr. David Harrison**



Dr David Harrison gained his BA (Hons) in Welsh history and archaeology from the University of Wales, Bangor in 1997. He went on to work as an archaeologist and then as a history teacher. After successfully defending his PhD on the history and development of English Freemasonry in 2008, he became a history lecturer, working at the University of Liverpool, University of Hope, Liverpool,

and the University of Manchester. Harrison has written 14 books on various historical themes and is looking forward to lending his skills to the society.

***David will look after the archives and lead on heritage matters.***

**Neil Viggers**



Firstly, I would like to say thank you for electing me as a SCARS committee member and I aim to serve you well and with a passion. I have come to SCARS via being a member of the Save Our Spike Island group and due to my interest in the Widnes stretch of the Sankey Canal.

I was born in Widnes in 1975 and have lived here all my life. I have spent so much of my life along the canal and enjoy walking, cycling, and fishing, which my dad taught me how to do when I was young. I attended all 3 Fairfield schools as I grew up and left with good GCSE Grades. I then obtained a mechanical apprenticeship with ICI and attended West Cheshire College for 2 years and Halton College for 2 years. During this time I obtained an ONC and HNC in

Plant and Process Mechanical Maintenance. I then worked as a Mechanical Fitter and Process Operator at ICI for 12 years. After that I went working in the North Sea on an oil rig as a Process Operator for a further 12 years. I am now retired from that but have never been busier with my many hobbies. They include all types of fishing, cycling, and restoring vintage cycles, motorbikes and vintage furniture. I can also be found pottering in my garden when I get some time off.

### **Jamie Highton**



From a childhood in Haydock, I first became involved in the waterways scene in the late 80s, with regular trips along the Trent and Mersey aboard my family's Nauticus 27 cabin cruiser. We used to moor on the off-side opposite the Broken Cross pub at Northwich.

I joined SCARS aged 14 and have great memories of volunteering at work parties during my teenage years. Most notable occasions were grappling for submerged junk near the hotties, clearing out the dry dock

at Winwick, and battling the reeds beneath Penkford Bridge. A few photos of me as a lanky youth can still be seen on the information boards at SCARS events.

After attending Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, I moved to London to study chemistry at the Imperial College, and it was during this time I volunteered at the London Canal Museum, helping to run their merchandise sales. With their historic Bantam tug No. 4, I represented the museum at several IWA events including the famous Canal Cavalcade.

After a spell at Cambridge undertaking a degree in education, I moved up to Yorkshire and to a career in teaching. My active involvement in the waterways then became quiet, apart from annual boating holidays from the Midlands and South Wales to the Scottish canals.

I have regularly followed the highlights and successes of SCARS over the years and now find myself in a position to take a more active role in the society. As I now live at a distance in York, and thus more clerical tasks are better suited to me, I have volunteered to take on the editorship of Canal Cuttings. Thus, I appeal to all members to pass on any news, articles, or interesting anecdotes for publication.

***Jamie has taken on the role of editor of Canal Cuttings***

## Cllr. Richard McCauley



Born & bred in St.Helens, where I have lived all my life, I have been a lifelong fan of Saints and all things St.Helens, including her proud industrial heritage. All my adult life I've been involved in the local community. I am a School Governor at Nutgrove Primary and on the committee of Thatto Heath Crusaders ARLFC.

I was elected on to St.Helens Council in 2002 representing the Queens Park Ward, then following a boundary review in 2004 was elected in Thatto Heath which I still represent.

I have had various positions on the council since first elected including 8 years as chair of the Labour group, chair of planning committee, chair of audit scrutiny committee, portfolio holder of environmental services, safer communities, transformation & change and I am currently portfolio holder of regeneration & planning.

As a time-served pipefitter/fabricator, I spent 25 years in the engineering and construction industry working on petrochemical plants up and down the country. I was also heavily involved in the AEEU / Unite union, serving as a shop steward and site convenor during this time. I am currently branch president of Unite St.Helens Central Branch.

I now work full time as an EHS Advisor for an industrial spray nozzle manufacturer on Widnes Waterfront where I also have responsibilities over maintenance and the facility.



sankeycanal1757



Sankey Canal  
Restoration Society



@scars567



# Our Work Parties

Our Work Parties are now back on the job. Reports of their recent activities will be found within these pages. You can see how even a handful of willing volunteers can quickly transform a location on the canal. Why not join them?

Work Parties are organised at the weekends—and mid-week if volunteers request it. All tools are provided (but you can bring your own if you wish).

Dates and venues may be found on our social media platforms. How to volunteer:



**WANTED—Volunteers**

*Make a difference to the Sankey Canal and join one of our regular work parties.*

*The work you put in depends on you and what you feel capable of.*

*Contact: [colin.greenall@btinternet.com](mailto:colin.greenall@btinternet.com)*

*Colin Greenall*  
*SCARS Volunteer Coordinator & Chairman*

#525064



**St.Helens Heritage Festival 27<sup>th</sup> May,  
at St. Helens Town Hall 10.00am till 4.00pm**

**Lymm Transport Rally 25<sup>th</sup> June  
at the May Queen Fields, Lymm, Warrington 11.00am till 5.00pm**

**IWA Restoration Showcase 29<sup>th</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> July  
On the steam tug “Daniel Adamson” at Acton Bridge on the River Weaver**

**Newton Town Show 5<sup>th</sup> August  
At Menes Park, Newton - le- willows, 10.00am till 5.00pm**

Come and meet SCARS in our Sales and Exhibition Gazebo at these events this summer. If you would like to volunteer on our stall please get in touch via [colin.greenall@btinternet.com](mailto:colin.greenall@btinternet.com)

# Work Party Reports

News of volunteer activity on the Sankey Canal

## **Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December** — Scrap-pull and litter pick at Spike Island

Five volunteers spent about 1 ½ hours litter picking in very inclement weather (snow on the ground), collecting 8 bags of litter. The mayor and mayoress of Widnes arrived as planned, no one advising them not to come, and spent a pleasant ¼ of an hour chatting to everyone about what was going on. Eventually the group decided to call it a day, mainly due to freezing conditions under foot. It was also agreed to cancel the work party at Bradley Lock the next day, Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December for the same reasons.

## **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February** — Bradley Lock

Five volunteers got to work on the surrounding area of Bradley Lock clearing away unwanted vegetation from the coping stones and thinning out the trees that are now beginning to cover the lower end of the site



Encroaching vegetation being cleared from the lock side coping stones, before (left) and after (right)



Off side of the lock receives the same treatment



Stone work at the top entrance to the lock gets some attention with the clearance of vegetation making a significant difference.



At the lower end of the lock, tree growth is removed from the lock stone work.

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> February** — Newton Common Lock & Penkford Bridge  
Nine volunteers set about making a difference to the appearance of Newton Common Lock, first off was the repair to the fence which surrounds the lock.



**Before**



**After**





Work then turned to clearing the stonework of the lock chamber; volunteers made light work of clearing the unwanted vegetation from the coping stones. On the other side of the track which crosses over the lock (this used to be a swing bridge when the canal was navigable) the same treatment was given with amazing results.



**Before**



**After**

After a break for dinner the group moved to Penkford Bridge and proceeded to improve the appearance of the area.



Young saplings are removed, and litter cleared to improve an area which was beginning to look untidy.

# News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

## WARRINGTON

In January, representatives of SCARS and Groundwork met with Keiron Tame and Dan Hollington from PEEL Natural Resources and Energy. PEEL NRE are the new owners of the Fiddlers Ferry Power Station site, which they are at present clearing and preparing to demolish the cooling towers. During a walk along the canal, adjacent to the power station site, it was suggested to them that a restored canal would be of great benefit to the residents of their new housing proposal. The case was made that by providing a place for recreation, new residents would have that feeling of wellbeing which comes from being near water.



**From left to right: Colin Greenall (SCARS), Andrew Darron (Groundwork CEO), Keiron Tame and Dan Hollington (PEEL NRE)**

## Excess water at Fiddlers Ferry

Discussion continues to take place about the amount of water being lost over Fiddlers Ferry Lock gates, which could instead be feeding into the Halton section of the canal. There are still fish stocks in the upper section of the canal in Halton and thus this excess water could be vital to their survival.

## **HALTON**

Halton Council has informed us that they will spend this year working on the canal by removing all the trees and unwanted vegetation from the canal wall. Once the stonework is exposed they plan to repoint, repair or rebuild as necessary. It is hoped that some of this work could be carried out by volunteers, but contractors may need to be hired for removing some of the bigger trees and for accessing the off-side bank. Halton Council commissioned the report on the repairs required to the canal and we are grateful to Paul Wright for sharing it with us.



**The dried-up canal underneath the Mersey Gateway Bridge looking towards Fiddlers Ferry.  
Trees and unwanted vegetation are growing from the canal wall.**

## **St. HELENS**

This year St. Helens Borough Council is celebrating their term as the Borough of Culture for the Liverpool City Region and will be holding a number of heritage-related events throughout the year. SCARS are investigating if we can make a grant application for a suitable cultural project.

At Newton Common Lock the present wooden barrier that surrounds the east end of the lock chamber is to be replaced with metal fencing, whilst further north, St.Helens Council have announced plans to replace the footbridge over Rainford Brook (formerly the course of the Canal) leading to Markfield Crescent with a new structure. SCARS liaised with the Planning and Highways Infrastructure teams. We have been assured that the new abutments will be capable of supporting the raising of the bridge deck when this section of canal is restored in the future.



**The present footbridge over Rainford Brook**

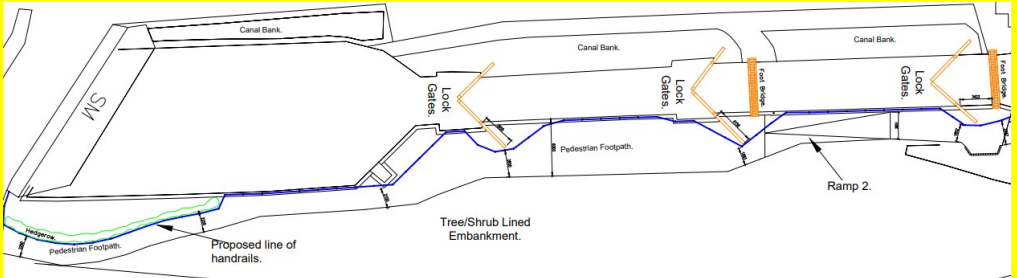


During January and February St. Helens Council made a significant difference to the appearance of Bradley Car Park alongside of the canal in Earlestown, cutting out unwanted tree growth and clearing away other unwanted vegetation.



**Tree clearance at Bradley car park**

Planning permission has been granted to erect architectural fencing along the tow-path beside the New Double Locks at Pocket Nook. The fencing will prevent access to the lock side due to the health and safety concern relating to the proximity to deep water.



**Plan of the proposed work to install new fencing beside the New Double Locks**



**The design of the lock side fence to be installed**

At the site of the disused Penkford School (relocated to Red Bank N Le W) , St Helens BC is considering the demolition of the school buildings and providing improved car parking and playing fields. SCARS has submitted an out-line proposal to provide a fitting 'gateway' to the Sankey Valley Trail and to improve the Penkford Bridge to Newton Common Lock section. More details to come!

# St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway – 190 Years

Reprinted here by kind permission of Paul Wright and the 8D Association



The St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway (SH&RGR) opened between St Helens and Runcorn Gap (Widnes) on 21 February 1833 which is 190 years ago this year. Whilst a much-loved line by members of the 8D Association this early railway has almost vanished from sight and also from history.

Far less famous than its slightly earlier counterpart, to which it was connected as early as 1832, the Liverpool & Manchester Railway, the SH&RGR was nevertheless a pioneer of the railway revolution, and it transformed the local area, being instrumental in the creation of the town of Widnes and the establishment of the Chemical Industry there.

Over the years the history of the line has been well covered in the pages of this Journal and in talks and guided walks over the years but an anniversary as significant as 190 years cannot go unmarked and so I have included in this article some key dates concerning the period 1829 up until the LNWR took over in 1864. Along with this are some photos for members to enjoy.



**Left:** In 1948 a Ditton Junction to St Helens passenger service is seen at Appleton station. Appleton was one of the stations that opened in 1852 after the line had been doubled and the inclined planes had been eased. The passenger service was very sparse at this time having been reduced at the start of World War II.

**1829** – A survey is carried out for a line between St Helens and the River Mersey at Runcorn Gap (later to become Widnes). The survey was carried out by Charles Blackner Vignoles who had previously undertaken work on the Liverpool & Manchester Railway.

**1830** – In January 1830 a prospectus was issued and a subscription list for 1,200 shares at £100 was opened at the Fleece Inn in St Helens. Peter Greenall of a large local brewing company was elected Chairman of a Board of ten directors. The shares sold rapidly and, while all of this had been going on authorisation for the line was being sought. A Bill for its construction was posted on 16 February 1830 and Royal Assent was granted on 29 May 1830; a connection to the L&M at Sutton was also authorised.



**1832** – Work is much advanced. In September, a horse drawn passenger service is introduced between St Helens and St Helens Junction. On 28 November a train carrying coal was able to pass along the entire length of the line from St Helens to Runcorn Gap.

**Left:** Looking south from Widnes Dock Junction in 1960.

A mixed goods train is seen coming off the Marsh Sidings at Widnes Dock. **Photograph by Eddie Bellas**



**Left:** A down direction (southbound) mixed goods train is seen passing through the site of Peasley Cross station in 1965. **Photograph by Bevan Price.**

**1833** - Final works are completed and the line is officially opened on 21 February 1833. The dock at Runcorn Gap, named Widnes Dock, was not completed in time for the opening and handled its first revenue-earning traffic in August 1833. In September the company SH&RGR hired two coaches from the LMR at £1 per coach per week and began a passenger service between St Helens and Runcorn Gap.

**1845** – On 21 July the SH&RGR company merged with the Sankey Canal Company as the St Helens Canal & Railway Company (SHC&RC).

**1849** – On 19 December St Helens is provided with a new station located closer to the town centre on the south side of Church Street.

**1850** – The railway is made into a double track line and inclined planes at Widnes and Sutton are eased which allows locomotive working throughout.

**1852** – On 1 July an extension of the railway opens from Runcorn Gap to Garston. A new station opens at Runcorn Gap. Stations also open on the original line at Appleton, Farnworth & Bold, Sutton Oak and Peasley Cross.

**1853** – On 1 February a new line is opened between Runcorn Gap and Warrington White cross (extended in 1854 to Warrington Arpley).

**1856** – In November stations opened at Bold and at Clock Face. Bold station only lasts until February 1858.

**1858** – On 1 February 1858, the company opens a line between St Helens and Rainford Junction and a new (3<sup>rd</sup>) station is provided at St Helens.

**1860** – On 1 September, the LNWR take out a lease on the line between Garston and Warrington.



**Above:** One of the original features of the line, and one that still stands today, is the five arches bridge which carried the Warrington and Prescott turnpike road across the line. It is seen in the background in this view that was taken at 19:57 on Tuesday 14 May 1974. Heading south is 4M37 the 15.48 Wrenthope (Wakefield) to Halewood Cartic empties train headed by class 40 locomotive 40 186. This was a typical working for the line in that era. Although the line had been doubled in 1850 it reverted to single track at this location from 14 December 1969.

**Photograph by Brian Roberts**

**1864** – On 31 July 1864 the SHC&RC lines are taken over by the LNWR bringing an end to the independent company. They rename Runcorn Gap station as Widnes.

The LNWR had to satisfy Parliament that there would be improvements and benefits for the travelling public and for the businesses that relied upon the network. To that end the LNWR had committed to spend £100,000 to improve the railways at Widnes where a flat crossing junction, Widnes Dock Junction, had become the location of much congestion. The solution was to build the Widnes Deviation Line, which carried the Garston and Warrington route over the original St Helens line. The new line opened on 1 November 1869, and it included a spur that linked to the St Helens line. The spur allowed for a new station to be provided located on the Deviation line. Called Widnes, it opened on 1 March 1870. A locomotive shed was also provided; a shed that went on to be given, under BR, the code 8D.

Improvements were also made in St Helens, most significantly through the creation of an avoid-ing line, the Blackbrook branch. The line opened on 23 February 1880, and it passed to the east of St Helens from Sutton Oak Junction to Carr Mill Junction.



**Left:** *Looking south from Appleton station on 14 May 1974. Two class 08 locomotives, 08 918 and 08 887, are seen at the head of a Hutchinson Street Yard to Farnworth & Bold trip working for the Turners Asbestos Company Everite works.*  
**Photograph by Brian Roberts**

In the following years, the original SH&RGR line served its owners well. The LNWR added two halts in 1911 at Ann Street (Widnes) and at Union Bank Farm (near Bold). The line passed to the LMS in 1923 and to BR LMR in 1948.

It was during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the decline set in. Passenger services between Ditton Junction and St Helens Shaw Street were withdrawn on 1 June 1951. On 6 June 1964, the Blackbrook branch closed. From 14 June 1965 the passenger service between St Helens Shaw Street and St Helens Junction ceased to run.

The line between Widnes Number 7 Signal Box and St Helens Shaw Street was reduced to Goods status from December 1967. On 4 November 1968 the original southern end of the line (from Widnes Dock to Ann Street) was taken out of use. On 14 December 1969 the line between Farnworth & Bold and Sutton Oak reverted to being a single track railway. The section of line between Widnes Number 1 Signal Box and Farnworth & Bold reverted to being a single track from 4 November 1973.

The line closed as a through route on 1 November 1981 when the section of line between Widnes Number 1 Signal Box and Sutton Manor was taken out of use. The short section between Widnes Number 1 and Widnes Number 7 went on 18 April 1982.

The last train between Sutton Manor and Sutton Oak Junction ran on 15 August 1987 and that section of the line was taken out of use on 10 October 1987. On 27 May 1989 the line between St Helens Junction and the Hayes Chemical Works was taken out of use. Services between St Helens (now renamed Central) and Hayes ran until 2002. Track is still in situ on this last section of the line.





**Left:** On 12 June 1974 a train of empty mineral wagons passes the southern junction of the Sutton Manor Colliery branch heading north. The branch also had a north facing junction which created a triangle on the west side of the SH&RGR line. In earlier years there had been an eastern triangle serving Clock face Colliery. At the head of the train is Sulzer locomotive number 25 283.

**Photograph by Brian Roberts**

## **Brief History of the Bradley Locks Canal Route**

**Reprinted here by kind permission of the Bradley Canal Restoration Society**

The Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN) as they are today started with the authorisation and construction of the Birmingham Canal Main Line, completed in 1772, between Birmingham and the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal at Wolverhampton. The original Main Line from Birmingham was added to by the construction of the Wyrley and Essington Canal in 1797, from Wolverhampton to the collieries on Cannock Chase via Walsall, and the Walsall Canal from the Birmingham Canal at Ryders Green (near West Bromwich) to Walsall which was completed in 1800.

The Birmingham Canal Main Line was heavily modified in the 1830s, resulting in two parallel lines for around 6 miles around Oldbury and Tipton, and a large loop being cut off that became known as the Wednesbury Oak Loop. Today this loop survives in part from the main line at Deepfields Junction to Bradley Lane.

When the BCN Company and the Wyrley and Essington Company merged in the 1830s a number of connections between them were made, most notably the flight of locks at Walsall connecting two canals that were less than a mile apart but separated vertically by a rise of 64 feet.

The Walsall Canal and the Birmingham Main Line were already linked not only at Ryders Green, where the two met, but via the Tipton Green and Toll End Communication canal. Further links between the Wolverhampton Level and the Walsall Canal were built at Rushall and Bentley.

The Bradley Locks route was thus one of six directly linking the two levels in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of these, only Ryders Green, Walsall Locks and Rushall Locks survive. The Toll Green route and the Bentley route now lie under modern developments at least in part and are probably beyond recovery as navigations.

Starting from Bradley Lane, the Bradley Canal is initially a continuation of the Wednesbury Oak Loop of the Birmingham Canal. This stretch was opened in 1770 as part of the Main Line, and was bypassed by the building of the new route through Coseley Tunnel in the 1830s. The Loop itself was shortened sometime prior to 1849 with a straight cut across the valley sometimes known as the Rotton Brunt Line. It was from this line that the flight of locks known as Bradley Locks descended.

At the other end, the Walsall Canal had been completed as far as Moxley in the 1790s, and in 1796 a branch was built to Bradley Hall colliery. This created a situation whereby the Bradley Hall branch terminated less than a mile from the then main line of the BCN, but the two were not connected.

In 1849 a flight of six locks was built to connect the two, completing the route. Thus, the route referred to as the Bradley Locks canal was built in four separate stages in 1770, 1796, and the 1840s.

The whole of the Birmingham Canal Navigations has a place in national, if not international, canal history as surely the densest network of industrial canals anywhere. They are also significant for being so high above sea level; the entire system is over 400 feet above sea level. The reason for such early development of the Birmingham Main Line was that Birmingham and the Black Country were not well located for navigable rivers.

The Locks themselves represent a particular stage in the technological development of English Canals in general and The Birmingham Canal Navigations in particular. Both the Rotton Brunt Line and the new locks at Bradley were built on dead straight alignments, ignoring any minor changes in the contour, and taking the most time-efficient route. The locks were amongst the last on the BCN to have a single gate at top and bottom; the original Birmingham Canal Locks had double bottom gates as did the last the BCN Company built at Rushall and Perry Barr. The lagoons alongside each lock were a device to maximise water capacity in the short intervening pounds, and finally, the locks themselves are all at one side of the canal, not located midstream as earlier locks were. It is thought that this feature, which is shared by the locks at Oldbury and Perry Barr, was to make subsequent duplication straightforward. Thus, restoring the locks allows access to an understanding of a particular phase of canal development.

## **Northern Canal Association meeting Hosted by the Bradley Canal Restoration Society**

By Colin Greenall

Jamie Highton and I attended this event held at the Wilkinson Primary School, Walter Road, Bradley, Bilston in the heart of the Black Country. The school is actually built on the site of the John Wilkinson Iron Works.

I arrived from St.Helens at around 9.30am having left home at 8.00am. Jamie wisely came down from York the day before and booked into a nearby hostel. After our customary tea, coffee and biscuits the morning started with an introduction by Ivan Cane, chairman of NCA, who went through the events of the day, telling us what we would be doing and in which order things would proceed. Along with our welcome pack, which gave us details of the day, was a colour coded name badge; either blue or pink. Jamie was in the blue group and I was in the pink, so we didn't see much of each other during the event. Dave Pearson, chairman of the Bradley Canal Project, then gave us a brief history of the work of the society and their hopes and aspirations for the future restoration of the Bradley Canal and its nine locks. After this the groups split and my group began session 1.

In this first session we were entertained by Phil Clayton, author of various books about the Birmingham Canal Navigation (BCN). Phil gave us a really detailed history of the Bradley Canal and its nine locks, which played a very important role in the process of moving goods to and from the various location around the BCN. This was until a new improved route became available, reducing the mileage between Wolverhampton and Birmingham resulting in the Bradley route becoming less used which eventually lead to its demise.

The next part of the itinerary was a walk along the now filled-in section of the Bradley Canal and its nine locks. This was led by Dave Pearson, chairman of the Bradley Canal Restoration Project. Having first walked from the school we then entered open land with Dave explaining how the restored canal would need to pass through the car parking area of the industrial units that are now located on the line of the original canal. Once on the open parkland, the line of the canal was less clear on the ground until we reached the housing estate where a clear path led down the site of the nine locks.





**Left: The route of Bradley Canal is on the line of the footpath.**

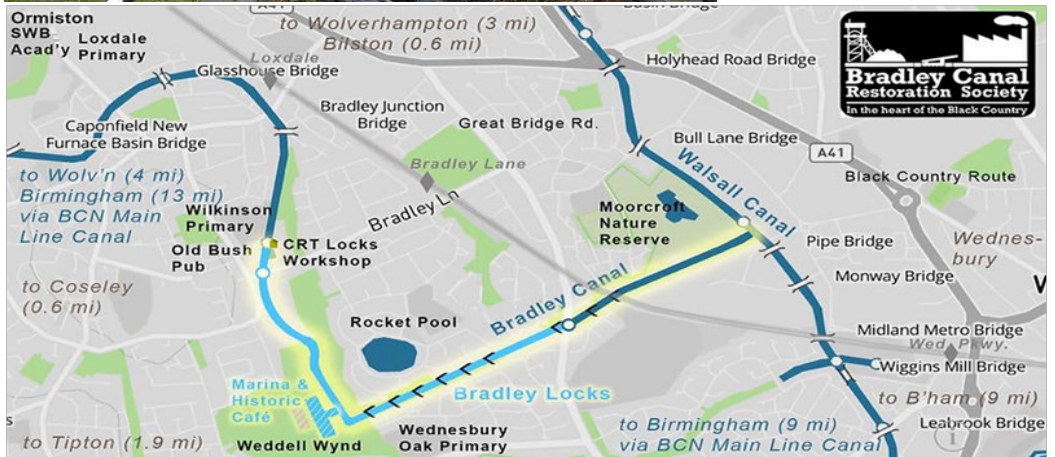
As we walked down the path towards the main road, areas of brickwork along the side of the path were pointed out. When we crossed the main road the line of the canal proper appeared. Dave told us that CRT had recently dredged the channel at their request and that regular work parties were now taking place to clear the unwanted trees and vegetation all the way to Moorcroft Junction with the Walsall Canal. The last two locks are visible although filled-in, with water being

piped through them. The structure of the canal is now visible and being cleared all the way to the junction; it has a good towpath and is well used by walkers and cyclists.

Our party now returned to the Old Bush pub for lunch and a chance to catch up with the other group. Lunch was a delicious curry and chips with other side salads and naan bread.



**Left: The site of the work done by the society volunteers leading down through the bottom two locks heading for Moorcroft Junction with the Walsall Canal. The bridge is now used by the Wolverhampton Tramway system. It was formerly part of the Great Western Railway's London (Paddington) to Birkenhead route.**



**Map of the restoration project is shown in light blue**

After lunch the second part of our itinerary was a visit to the nearby CRT Bradley Workshops, which are located behind the pub. This is the place where most of the lock gates for the midland canal system are made. Our guide around the site was Simon Turner, CRT's National Workshop Manager. Simon first explained how wood was supplied from Scotland (Scottish Oak) and then

went on to explain the process of producing the leaves (lock gates) from plans through to the finished product. He explained how some of the machines that are in use are now over fifty years old and how, along with more modern equipment, the gates are formed and fixed together with the metal fitting needed ready for the installation of the gate to the lock structure.

After Simon had finished his detailed explanation of the making of the gate he was bombarded with questions from an enthusiastic audience, which he fielded with equal enthusiasm of a man immersed in his job. He then took us outside to show us around the yard to view gates that are waiting to be delivered to various locations around the canal system.

**Below:: Simon Turner explains the finer points of building lock gates. This almost complete gate is for the Grand Union Canal showing the detail of its metal fastenings**



**Left: A general view of the workshops at CRT Bradley**



**Right: A pair of gates (leaves) for one of the many BCN Locks**

We all thanked Simon and returned to the school to complete the day's proceedings with reports from some of the restoration groups present. The next meeting will be hosted by the Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal Society in October

# News from the Committee

## Governance Policies

We are in the process of creating a suite of SCARS policies. Thanks to our friends at the Chesterfield Canal Trust we will soon have the policies in place to demonstrate to our stakeholders that we are a professional organisation able to develop and deliver a canal restoration plan.

## Canal Restoration Consultant

SCARS has contacted Patrick Moss of Moss, Naylor, Young Consultants. Patrick worked on the 1996 Atkins report (see SCARS website). We are scoping our restoration requirements and priorities, for MNY to provide us with prices for their services.

## Easter Eggs Donation

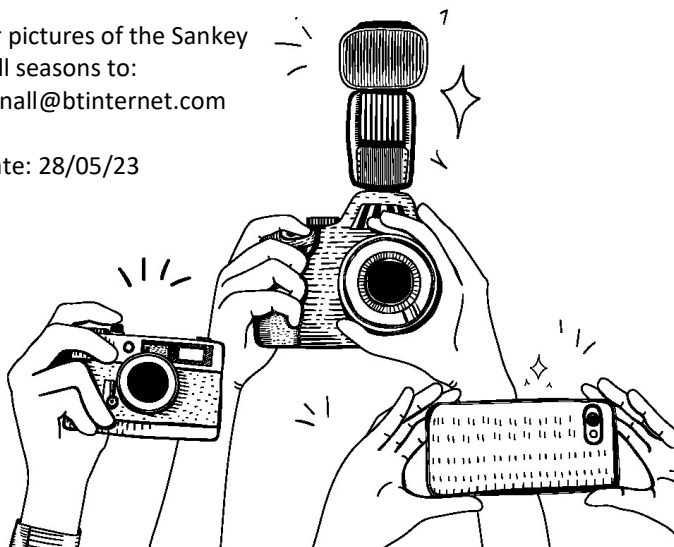
SCARS donated almost two dozen Easter Eggs to Earlestown's Business For Youth Trust. BYT provided eggs to all 2500 school children in Earlestown & N-le-W. We've also had the opportunity to update Ward Councillors Terry Maguire and Karl Collier on our activities and we appreciate their support for our endeavours.

### *SCARS Calendar Competition*

Entries are now open for this year's Calendar Competition.

Send your pictures of the Sankey Canal in all seasons to:  
[colin.greenall@btinternet.com](mailto:colin.greenall@btinternet.com)

Closing date: 28/05/23



# Membership Subscription



Charity No: 702571

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

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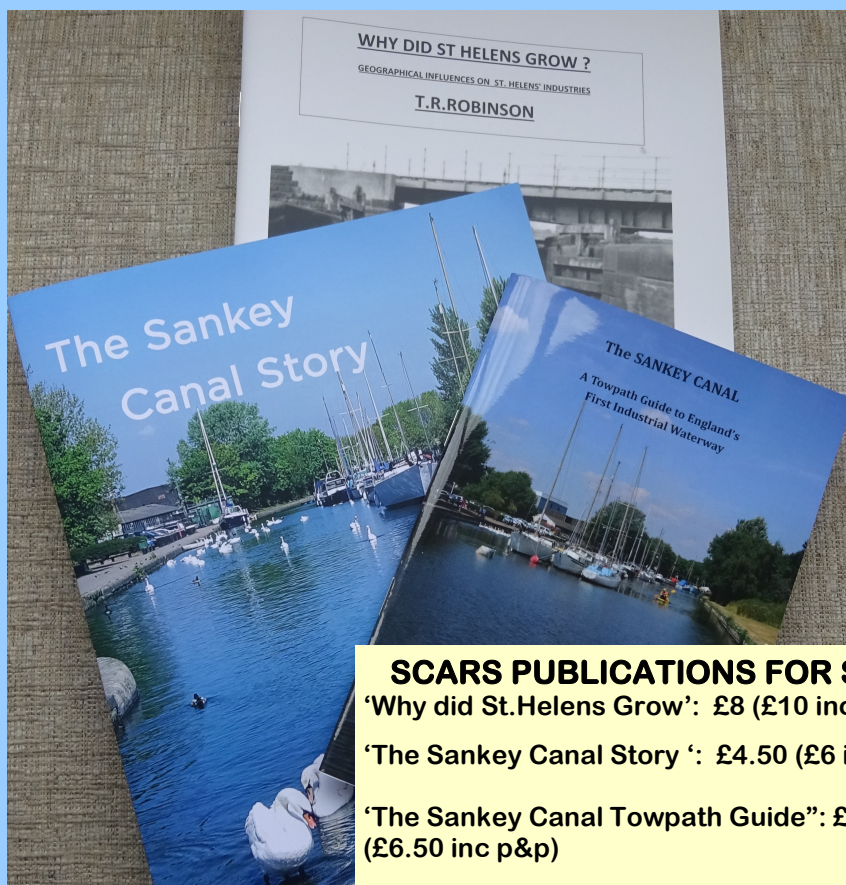
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Please notify SCARS: if you want to change this declaration;  
change name or home address; no longer pay sufficient tax

Please forward to:

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





### **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.

## The Sankey Canal in 1972

*We continue displaying the collection of archive photographs, taken by Wilf Britch in 1972. Our thanks to him for sending these interesting images of a bygone time along the Sankey within the St Helens area*



Two views of the bridge at Corporation Street (formerly Sharpe Street), from the West.  
*Above:* Over the fence on the left is the goods yard of St Helens (Central) Station. Just visible through the bridge is the railway swing bridge at Pocket Nook. The buildings to the right belong to Lennons Supermarkets Ltd, who brought the first supermarket to St Helens.

*Below:* This closer view reveals a canal rarity—the towpath does not lie next to the water under the bridge—it goes through a separate arch to the left. On the right-hand pillar may be seen a wooden roller, to take the friction of the tow-ropes of the barges. Once the horse had pulled the barge into the bridge-hole, the rope would be disconnected, hauled aboard, and then cast out to be reconnected when the bows were through the bridge. The curve of the canal wall may indicate that a swing bridge was here before the bridge was built to clear the railway alongside.

