

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 9 Number 10
Spring 2021



IWA Helps Complete the Sankey Milestone Project

Chester and Merseyside IWA Branch Chairman Jim Forkin (*left*) presents SCARS' Chairman Colin Greenall and Treasurer Mike Harrison with a cheque paying for the four milestones the Branch has funded. SCARS Work Party Organiser Ian Hornby on the right.

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

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Founded 1985



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Steve Parish (Warrington)

Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

Kevan Wainwright (Halton)

The Inland Waterways Association:

Colin Greenall (Chester & Merseyside Branch)

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

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

At last things are slowly returning to normal, although we still need to be vigilant and observe the rules and restrictions.

First of all, apologies for the late arrival of "Canal Cuttings" through your letter box, this is mainly due to the production team being off boating, and all the interesting things that seem to happen just when you are ready to go to press.

My wife and I have recently spent two weeks cruising the canals around the Midlands and what a pleasure it was to be out in the fresh air and viewing the wonderful English countryside from a narrow boat. CRT are working hard to keep everything moving, even so there are problems in certain areas especially in the north west. *(I can testify to that—having supported the restoration of the Rochdale Canal, I braved it for my first real cruise since returning my boat—courtesy of Brexit—from France to the UK in 2018. The experience on the Lancashire side was horrendous—CRT need to have a serious look at their care for boaters using this section. –Ed.)*

Our Committee meetings continue on a regular monthly basis via ZOOM and are proving to be useful in keeping the Society moving. Let's hope soon we will be able to meet face to face and then get our Work Parties and Events team moving again.

In this issue we continue the articles on the Waterways of Warrington and Mike Harrison's excellent review of the sugar refining process, plus a longer than usual version of our regular feature 'Around the Boroughs'.

The local elections have been and gone, resulting sadly in one of our Warrington representatives, Cllr Linda Dirra, losing her seat. This means we will soon be getting a new Council observer for Penketh. Also, in the last issue of "Canal Cuttings" I reported that the new representative from Halton Council would be Cllr Bill Woolfall. This unfortunately was not to be the case, due to the election of a new council leader and the selection of members to outside bodies. Our new Halton BC representative will be Cllr Kevan Wainwright, whom we welcome wholeheartedly.

Work on demolishing the Chalon Way Multi Storey Car Park is complete, and the area is now being cleared of tons of rubble. The next phase is to produce a plan for its "future in the mean time use" which is intended to be an area for events and leisure activities.

The water supply for the southern end of the canal is still causing concern,. The bid by Warrington Council for funding from the Environment Agency's Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme failed ,which means that other options will now be looked at.

On Page 15 you will find an advertisement for our new full colour Sankey Canal Calendar for 2022. Members will have received a copy of the calendar F.O.C. with this magazine, but we hope you will want to purchase further copies for family and friends. I'm sure you will agree that David Long, our Magazine Editor, has done an excellent job in producing this classic calendar for 2022.

The events season will soon be with us—although these are still uncertain at the moment. Our first outing should be at Lymm Transport Rally on Sunday 27th June. If it goes ahead I hope to meet some of you there. Unfortunately the Halton Vintage Rally is definitely cancelled.

Other news is that SCARS is now officially an Affiliated Partner to the Canal & River Trust. Whilst we hope this will bring benefits to our restoration hopes, the affiliation will also help the CRT in their bid to secure more funding from central Government, which in turn will mean long term security for all of our wonderful waterways.

And finally a plea for contributions to make Canal Cuttings even better - remember this is *your* magazine, so please keep the articles coming. I'm sure there are plenty of members with tales to tell of their adventures by the Sankey Canal and other local waterways.

Best wishes,
Colin Greenall

News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

by Colin Greenall

ST.HELENS

Chalon Way Car Park Demolition: Work on demolishing the multi storey car park in the centre of St.Helens is now complete. The next stage will be to decide how this large open space is to be used in the future. SCARS are being consulted by the council for our ideas for



the future of the canal waterfront and the surrounding area. Our first suggestion would be the removal of the iron railings, trees and bushes along the canal towpath to open up the view of the canal, and to provide benches, tables and catering facilities for people to get down and enjoy the waterside ambience.

Heritage Trail: St.Helens Rotary are at present working on a scheme to provide a Heritage Trail between the town centre and St.Helens RFC ground by Tesco's supermarket in time for the Rugby League World Cup in October. The route will be partly along the towpath of the Sankey Canal. SCARS members have been working with Rotary members to produce information which will be used on QR plaques (*left*) which will be located along the route. Over time this Heritage Trail will be extended to cover place of interest throughout the borough of St.Helens.

Below, left, is a copy of the signage, with its QR code, and on the right is an explanation of the symbolism behind the three-cogs logo.



16 Teeth – One per Ward



QR Code to give the visitor a brief history of the site and direct the visitor to the relevant Heritage Society web site.

Ex Terra Lucem



Black - Coal
Out of the Earth
Look Back - History of the site



Yellow - Daylight - Industry due to coal
Came light
Look Around - History surrounding the site



Blue - Sky
The Future
Look Forward - Future plans for the site and surrounding area

Note the number of teeth on the cogs represent the number of Wards in the Borough



State of the Old Double Lock:

Damage illustrated by these two images are giving increasing cause for concern. Over the past few years, high volumes of water coming over the weir at the top of the lock have been overflowing the centre cascade, washing away the back fill at the sides, and creating a void under the paving sets. These sets have now collapsed leaving a gaping hole behind the wall.

The Canal and River Trust who own this section of canal know about the problem and have been to fence off the area and assess the situation. They state that repairs will be carried out in 2023. However, the problem has been brought to their attention again in recent weeks and promises have been made to carry out the repairs when their resources are available.

Covid Anniversary Cherry Trees: St Helens Council planted 18 cherry trees around the Borough to mark the first anniversary of the first Covid-19 lockdown (23 March 2020). A tree has been planted in the Borough's two Cemeteries, and a tree has been planted in each of the 16 Wards of the Borough. Two of them have been located beside the Sankey—one at the entrance to the Blackbrook Basin site *below*), and the other beside Newton Common Lock. The plaque placed by each tree is also illustrated.



WARRINGTON

Western Link Road Scheme: SCARS were consulted by the Western Link Planning team for our thoughts about the new Bridge which will cross over the canal to the North of Sankey Bridges.

We put to them the following question and below are the replies we received.

(1) The stated 2.4 metres headroom is fine, more would be even better.

Using the latest water level data, the headroom achieved under the bridge is approximately 3 metres.

(2) Lighting beneath the bridge;- will the available towpath standard lamp posts not cast shadows underneath this very wide bridge if the bridge is not higher than the minimum 2.4 metres above towpath level. Can lighting be provided under the bridge on both sides?

We are not proposing to provide lighting under the canal bridge, but we are proposing four lighting columns on the four corners of the bridge, which will illuminate the towpath.

(3) Will there be a pedestrian footpath on each side of the roadway?

We can confirm we are proposing a pedestrian footpath on each side of the roadway in this location within the current iteration of the design.

(4) Would it be possible to provide access to the canal towpath from the new bridge via a staircase or ramp on either side of the bridge to opposite sides of the canal?

Unfortunately, we will not be able to provide access to the canal towpath from the new bridge. We need to construct safety barriers leading up to the bridge on all four corners which prevents the inclusion of a stepped access. On the south side of the St Helens Canal we are proposing a route down into Sankey Valley Park on the west side of the WWLR. On the north side of the canal we are proposing an access from the WWLR into Sankey Valley



The site of the new bridge, North of Liverpool Road, Sankey Bridges. The Sloop Hotel, presently closed, will be demolished to make way for the new road and bridge.

Removal of Sankey Bridges Swing Bridge: Situated between Liverpool Road Bridge and the Widnes to Warrington Railway Bridge, it was originally used as a relief bridge for when the former Bascule on Liverpool Road was closed for repair or maintenance.

In March Warrington Council's Principal Bridge Engineer contacted SCARS to say that the old swing bridge was in such a dangerous state that it needed to be removed as it is beyond economic repair. Over the years SCARS Work Parties have worked on the bridge (*next page, top*) to try and keep on top of the gradual deterioration of the structure but now we have to admit that to spend money on a bridge which now serves no purpose would be a waste of public resources.



The main beams of the bridge which hold the decking are now wafer thin or rotted through completely. (Left)
The bridge is scheduled to be removed sometime in July

Riverside Estate Development, Fiddlers Ferry: SCARS responded to an invitation to comment on the proposed development between the canal and the Mersey:

What do you think about the provision of new, high-quality homes at this riverside location?

Great Idea

Do you support the removal of the existing industrial buildings on site?

Yes, long overdue

What kind of housing do you think is most suitable for the site?

High Quality Detached Residential Properties

Should the site accommodate affordable homes in the form of 'shared ownership' homes?

No

What do you think about the proposal to include a community 'riverside park' that is open to the public?

This is something that the area as needed for a long time with provision for families to enjoy a day out;- Childrens Play Area Cafe, Toilets, Paddling Pool

Is the proposed provision of on-site artists workshops and other commercial uses a good idea?

A good idea as long as it is not in the same area as the housing

Do you support the provision of an on-site community cafe, and / or improving access to water-sports activities?

Yes, a community cafe to be located near to the park.

With regards to the water sports activities, may I suggest that you leave this to the Fiddlers Ferry Sailing Club

What do you think about the proposed improvements to the quality and condition of the Sankey Canal as part of any development?

The Sankey Canal should be the focal point of the whole scheme, not the river.

The whole of the canal frontage of the new estate should be upgraded and the section beyond the lift bridge dredged and refurbished to allow for more boat moorings and the future restoration of the canal to Widnes

Would you like to see the scheme include anything else? For example children's play facilities, more or less car parking, etc.

With regards to Car Parking, this should be sited away from the new development on the opposite side of the railway so that only residents and business owners need to cross the level crossing

The full length of the access road needs to be widened to permit a two way traffic flow and a footpath provide on both sides with street lighting,

Station Road itself needs upgrading i.e. resurfacing, footpath both sides and street lighting, better Car Parking facilities for the Ferry Tavern, Provision of a Bus Stop and turn round area

Water Supply: Fiddlers Ferry Power Station stopped pumping water into the canal at the end of March, but has continued to supply water from the settling lagoons. However this will only last for a short period, and an alternative will be urgently needed to prevent the canal from drying up. A recent bid by Warrington Council to the Environment Agency's Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Scheme failed. Some of this funding was for works to restore the connection to Sankey Brook at Dallam.

HALTON

Spike Island—Water supply: Statement from Halton Council regarding the water supply:

Although the pumping that has been going on since 1983 will cease (I believe at the end of this week) some pumping direct from the lagoons will continue until at least June 2021. This has been arranged by Warrington and is supported by HBC. We don't know what the result of this pumping might be in terms of water levels but it will mean that water is entering the canal for a little longer. In partnership with Warrington we continue to work towards a more permanent solution. However I would stress that our position remains unchanged, in that we can no longer guarantee the water level in the canal.

Spike Island Swing Bridge: Progress on the reinstating the bridge across the canal at Spike Island appears to have been casualty of the Coronavirus Pandemic With Halton council's resources stretched, the project seems to have been put on hold for the time being.

Thanks to departing Council Leader: Cllr Rob Polhill is standing down after many years as Leader of Hsalton Council. SCARS would like to thank Rob for his support over the years and wish him well in the future.

Cllr Rob Polhill



Regenerating a Town Centre

St Helens Borough announces its £1million Sankey Canal Scheme—by Les Green

Town councils right across the nation are realising the value of clean waterways to economic regeneration and citizen well being and none more so than St Helens Borough Council in Merseyside. A £1million government backed scheme has been agreed by the borough's cabinet to demolish an unsightly and ageing car park on Chalon Way in the town centre thereby opening an area adjacent to the Sankey Canal for economic waterfront development.

The area already has the potential of good footfall being close to the popular attraction “World of Glass” which celebrates the international fame of the borough's glass industry. Currently the canal is hidden from public view and not fully appreciated by the community but the council believe that the opening of the area will lay the foundation for more investment and economic development in the future.

The borough was required by the government to complete the project by the end of the financial year in March 2021—which would then open the possibility of bidding for a



further £25million out of the government's £3.6 billion cities fund to boost economic growth. In sharp contrast to attitudes displayed by “officialdom” only a few decades ago when organisations only wanted to abandon and fill in waterways, St Helens Councillor for

Regeneration and Planning Richard McCauley told local press “The demolition will bring an important waterfront site into the town centre, creating a catalyst for commercial, leisure or housing development and is consistent with our heritage strategy and ambitions for the canal.”

Whilst sections of the canal, claimed to be the first canal of the Industrial Revolution when opened in 1757, have been filled in and bridges lowered much of the line remains in water there are still hopes that full restoration can take place.

“Lucky to have a canal” – Council Leader

Supporting the scheme, David Baines, Council Leader, said “We are lucky in St Helens to have a canal, we are one of the few towns around that have got a canal in the heart of the town centre.

“We’ve got the fantastic World of Glass, we’ve got the fantastic canal-side café, and that’s the closest you can get to it really in a nice environment.

“We want to change that, so doing this will open up that whole area and kick-start the regeneration of that part of St Helens town centre.”

Jim Forkin, Chairman Inland Waterways Association (IWA -Chester and Merseyside) said “This is great news for the borough and I hope they can follow the example of towns like Stroud on the Cotswold Canal where cooperation between the various organisations involved with their waterway is bringing great benefits to the town.”

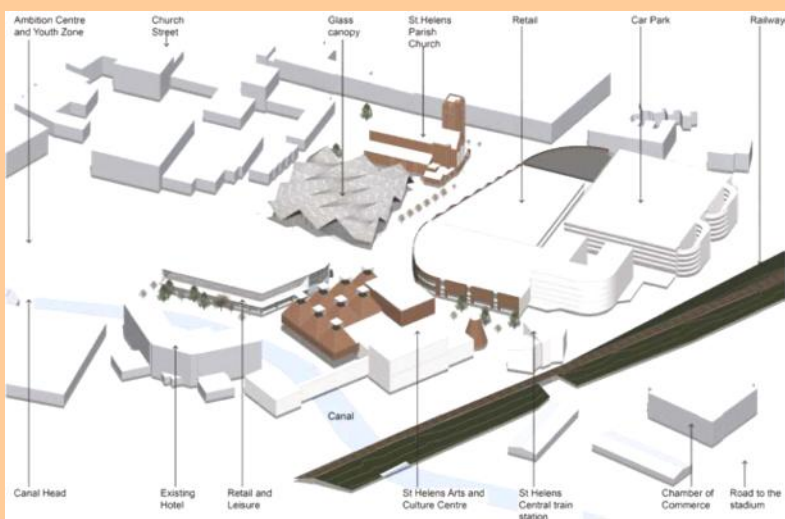
Sankey valley has, over the past few decades, been transformed with many walking and cycling routes plus some preservation work on the remaining structures, evolving into a linear open green space running from St Helens, through Warrington and ending in Widnes. It is hoped that by the demolition of this car park that many more citizens from the St Helens area will walk the canal banks.

Colin Greenall ,Chairman, Sankey Canal Restoration Society , said “ The opening up of urban waterways and their green corridors for walking and cycling right into a town centre as St Helens are doing is one way of helping society cope with the well being of populations. There are currently two pressing problems made worse by the covid pandemic, that of growing levels of diabetes and inactive children especially in socio - economic deprived areas, and canals like the Sankey passing close to inner city areas provide a cost effective means of families taking exercise and improving health”

Town centres of the future

For the past two decades the demise of the “high street” has been a subject on our television screens; the stories of the dying town centres in the wake of internet shopping and pictures of boarded up shop fronts have been all too frequent. Covid, click and collect and home deliveries have made the problem far worse and the once dominant chains such as BHS and Debenhams are now disappearing with society now struggling to see what the future hold for the traditional town centre. St Helens is now looking at one possible solution to this problem with its waterfront.

Jim Forkin (IWA) said “To attract footfall to traditional town centres they will have to adopt different roles with radical new ideas centres for entertainment, education and leisure and those towns with a waterway at their centre need to maximise the good fortune the canal builders gifted to them. In developing that appeal to the public. St Helens are definitely on the right course but any future development must in the context of their wa-



terway and industrial heritage. In the future a connection to the main waterway links and some visiting narrow boats or Leeds and Liverpool canal barges would be a real bonus “

Stakeholders are invited to comment on this concept drawing of the town centre on the Council's website

Was the Sankey Brook moved to make way for the Canal?

We have received an interesting email and image from Gary Eaton, a SCARS Member from Warrington:

Dear Colin,

Thought you might be interested to see the enclosed photo, taken by myself in glorious HD using my new DJI drone.

I was flying above the Mucky Mountains in Earlestown, looking south when I snapped this. The brook and the canal are near parallel for this stretch, and the swing bridge is visible too. It might be a trick of the light, but do you think that the brook's channel was more to the right of its present day course?

The section of the brook in the centre of the photo looks straighter than nature would have made it to my eye! I wonder if at some time past, the brook was channelized?

Be interested to get members' views.

Many thanks, Gary Eaton



The depression in the field to the right of the Brook may have been its original course, but that puts it further away from the canal—so why move it? Unless it had a further meander to the left, where the Bradley Swing Bridge sits. (Ed.)

Hi Gary

Many thanks for the interesting photograph. It would appear that the Brook has been straightened out and that, as you say, there appears to be a change in the colour of the land to the right of the straightened channel.

Various sections of Sankey Brook have been straightened out; - near to Havanah Flashes, Parr Stocks Road, and the course of the Brook under Sankey Viaduct was moved from the arch next to the canal to its present position many years ago (no idea when).

Thank you for giving SCARS permission to use this photograph, it will feature in the next issue of Canal Cuttings. Let's see if anyone can come up with a date when these changes to the Brook's course took place.

Regards, Colin

RED WHEEL PLAQUES

Earlestown Viaduct and the Sankey Canal are to be awarded Red Wheel Plaques

On Wednesday 2nd June 202, Dr Barrie Pennington invited SCARS members and several St.Helens Councillors to the Nine Arches Viaduct to decide on the location of the National Transport Trust's Red Wheel plaques which will be placed on the historic structure.

One will be for the Liverpool and Manchester Railway Viaduct which is the first railway viaduct on the first Inter-City route and the other will be for the Sankey Canal which is the first industrial canal in England

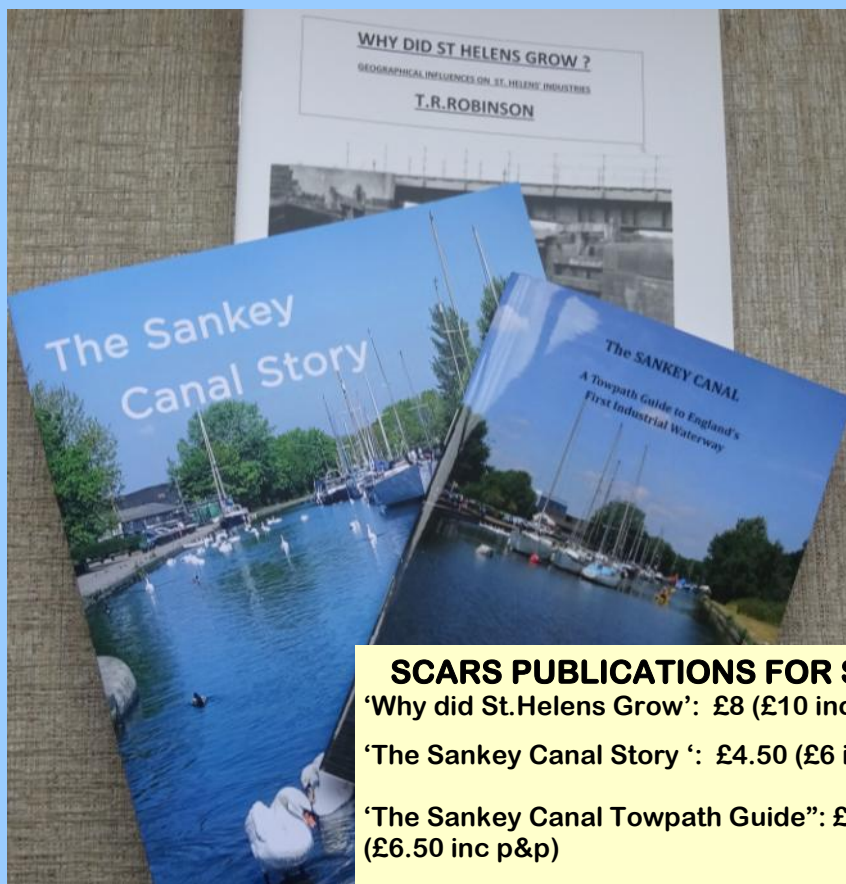
The intention is to attain World Heritage Site Status for the location of the first passenger railway crossing the first canal of the industrial age by 2029— which will be the 200th anniversary of the Rainhill Trials at which Stephenson's "Rocket" was the winner.



Left to right;- Pete Morris (Greenspace Inspector, St.Helens MBC), Peter Keen and Neil Forshaw (SCARS) , Cllrs. David & Jeanette Banks (Earlestown), Richard Corner and Ian Hornby (SCARS), Cllr. Terry McGuire (Earlestown), and Cllr. David Smith (Newton). The photograph was taken by Dr. Barrie Pennington



The Red Wheel Plaque, of which over 100 have been installed at Heritage Transport Sites around the country, are assigned to important and unusual sites of transport heritage. The aim is to draw the attention of the public to sites which may have been undervalued or ignored.



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)**

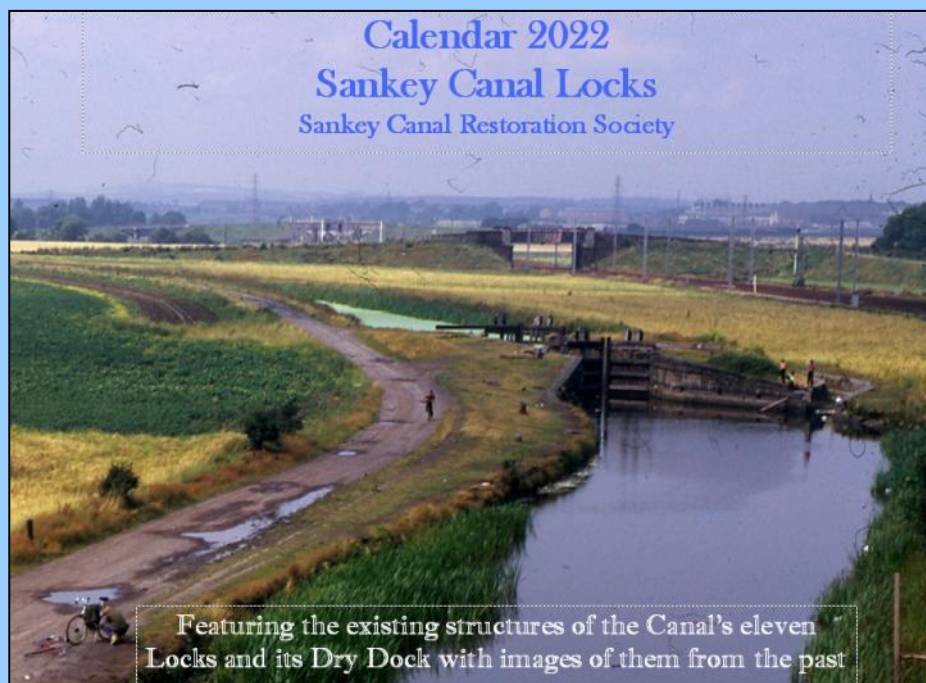
**Order from Colin Greenall:
16 Bleak Hill Road, Ecclestone, St.Helens,
WA10 4RW**

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.

Our Calendar for 2022—Free to our Members



Additional copies £5 + £1 postage

Produced just in time for the hoped-for sales opportunities at any Events we're able to attend under the present Covid-19 restrictions, the Calendar features recently taken images of the Sankey's 11 Locks, plus the Winwick Dry Dock, as its main illustrations. These are supplemented by historic photographs of the same locks, most of which feature the canal cottages which once stood beside each lock.

The cover, above, is the dramatic image taken by Waterways World Editor Hugh Potter of the lock at Winwick, with the London-Glasgow railway running alongside, taken from the embankment of the M62 shortly before the canal was infilled in the mid-1970s.

Members are receiving a complimentary copy, but further copies may be purchased by contacting Colin Greenall, 16 Bleak Hill Road, Eccleston, St Helens WA10 4RW.

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

Sadly, we have still been unable to re-start our Work Parties as hoped, but are looking to do so as early as possible after lockdown ends—look out for an announcement on our social media platforms



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

#5240647

A Town Rediscovered Its Waterways

Praise for Warrington`s Historic Waterfront Rejuvenation

*Warrington, positioned in the mid-Mersey Valley, has a unique place in waterway history and the town is showing a real appreciation of these great assets. The population are now enjoying the immense open spaces this legacy of the industrial revolution has left behind and the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) Chester and Merseyside Branch are seeking to sing its praises. **Les Green**, the Branch's Publicity Officer, tells us more. (Continued from last issue)*

New uses for disused waterways

Rather than those waterways with no further commercial value being sold off, foresight in the town's authorities saw them retained and developed, and now they are valued public "green" spaces. Warrington Borough Council has a free cycling map, now on its 7th edition, (Right) which has every route clearly mapped. Longest is along the Sankey Canal, with nine miles of tarmac path funded by derelict land grants, a part of which is the Trans-Pennine Trail. The Runcorn and Latchford Canal of which the Black Bear Canal is a part, has some four miles as it passes out on the south side of the river by Moore Nature Reserves.

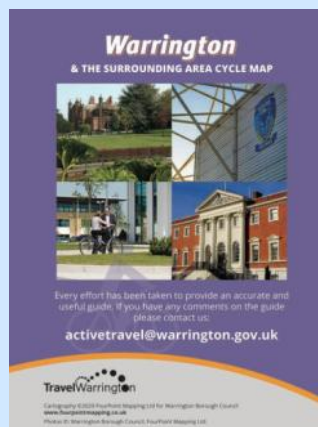
The Mersey and Irwell Navigation, an early navigation based on the River Mersey, has footpaths and cycleways amounting to about 7 miles following the river and the New Cut Canal - plus the old un-surfaced towpath around Paddington Meadow. The borough officials to their credit have improved the New Cut by progressively finding grants and monies when budgets were tight.

The Environment Agency, when building the town's flood defences, consulted widely and incorporated towpaths into the flood defences, and then added a public viewing platform overlooking the river near to Woolston Weir.

Boating and restoration

The Bridgewater Canal, fully navigable, follows its contoured and winding course to the south of the river on the edge of the Cheshire plain, offering boaters and walkers around 15 miles of stunning countryside with great views. Sadly on the Sankey Canal, although many stretches are in water, lowered bridges and infilled sections restrict boats to the moorings at Fidlers Ferry and Spike Island in Widnes. All, however, is not lost, as the local authorities in Halton, Warrington and St Helens along with C&RT are now working in partnership with the Sankey Canal Restoration Society to further protect the remaining works and return the canal to navigation. A water supply issue on the closure of Fiddlers Ferry power station is an issue in the short term but engineers are working on a solution. The prospect of a proposed new 4 mile extension to link in with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal would offer boaters exciting new cruising options.

Jim Forkin, Inland Waterways Association (Chester and Merseyside), said "Warrington in the Industrial Revolution and the resultant transport evolution was ideally located to play an important role. For centuries it was the highest navigable point, it played a critical role in the development of river navigation and maritime industries and it is a credit to the town that despite the public indifference of the past so much survives for next generations to enjoy"



Waterside Living

The waterways in Warrington do not offer the same live-aboard opportunities that many other canal towns do, but that has not stopped the developers following the national trends by building as much new property waterside as they can. The latest development, a 100 plus apartment complex, is situated close to Latchford Locks, on the site of Naylor's, timber importers, a former major Ship Canal customer.

Wildlife Corridor and £650,000 wetlands scheme

The east–west waterway corridor through the town of almost 10 miles, from the Thelwall Viaduct to Cuerdley, and their adjoining green spaces are now proving to be a haven for wildlife. As an example, a monthly bird count conducted by ecologists from the New Cut Trail Heritage and Ecology Group regularly records over 30 species of birds feeding on Paddington Meadows. Surrounded by the Mersey and the abandoned New Cut canal, this area annually attracts as many as 18 rare or “red listed” species such as Red Wings and Song Thrush whilst a family of otters often delight the ecologists.

The enormous river meanders of Thelwall and Woolston Eyes, (*Below*) clearly visible off the

famous viaduct, are truncated by the Ship Canal and are possibly the most productive wildlife areas in the entire valley. These areas of complete wilderness have been used for over a century by the ship canal as settling grounds for the dredgings out of the canal and are off limits except to permit holders. Nature in this area has the land all to its self and now, working in partnership Peel Ports who own the



land and the Carbon Landscape organisation supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund have a £650,000 scheme in the no 4 bed to develop extensive new wetland areas.

To the east of the town, on low lying flood plains, woodland and nature reserves created out of former aggregate quarry workings around Moore are much in evidence.

Jim Forkin Chairman IWA Chester and Merseyside said “Looking west from the top of the Thelwall Viaduct the waterways of Warrington and in particular the Manchester Ship Canal and the Mersey are an incredible green corridor stretching some five miles and in places over a mile wide. These enormous unspoilt places with their variety of habitats and the care taken in managing them, allows wildlife to thrive”

Clean renewable energy

The lock gates on Latchford Locks and Woolston Weir hold back an enormous volume of water which is accumulated from the Mersey's catchment area from high in the Pennines to parts of South Lancashire and Cheshire This very slow- moving body of water which, with river meanders, is possibly 7 miles long, falls some 16 ft at the locks and weir thus giving it

good potential to provide cheap renewable energy to the nation. Peel Energy is harvesting this resource, giving the town's waterways a further sustainable use. Work is underway at Woolston Weir to install three Archimedes screw turbines which from mid-2021 will generate sufficient electricity for 380 homes. The turbines are described as "fish friendly", but a much



improved fish ladder will be created making the journey upstream for salmon, eels and coarse fish far easier. Peel has planning permission for two other hydro schemes upstream which will create some 3.3 megawatt, sufficient for 2,000 homes. *Left, work in progress at Woolstone Weir, November 2020. Warrington Worldwide website*

Right, David Long's shot from his own boat of the IWA's 1994 Ship Canal Centenary Cruise fleet of narrow boats encountering a ship in the narrow approach to the Latchford Locks



“Wellness” and the effect of lockdowns

The effect of the corona virus lockdowns and resulting travelling restrictions has seen an enormous increase in the numbers of townspeople using the waterway towpaths and cycle ways for exercise. With traffic-free routes, so easily accessed within the urban areas, the town has been fortunate to have fresh clean air combined with easy walking and cycling, available on the doorstep without the need of a car.

Jim Forkin IWA Chairman (Chester and Merseyside) said “IWA members who live in the town have noticed an enormous increase of usage of the routes especially by families and mountain biking groups whilst disabled access is excellent for many of the paths.

Warrington's policy to save and maximise the use of the transport hubs of the past has proven a great benefit to the town, and with the progressive policies and attitudes displayed towards the Sankey Canal, who knows what else can be achieved in the future.”

Sankey Canal & Sugar Refining - Part Two

By Mike Harrison

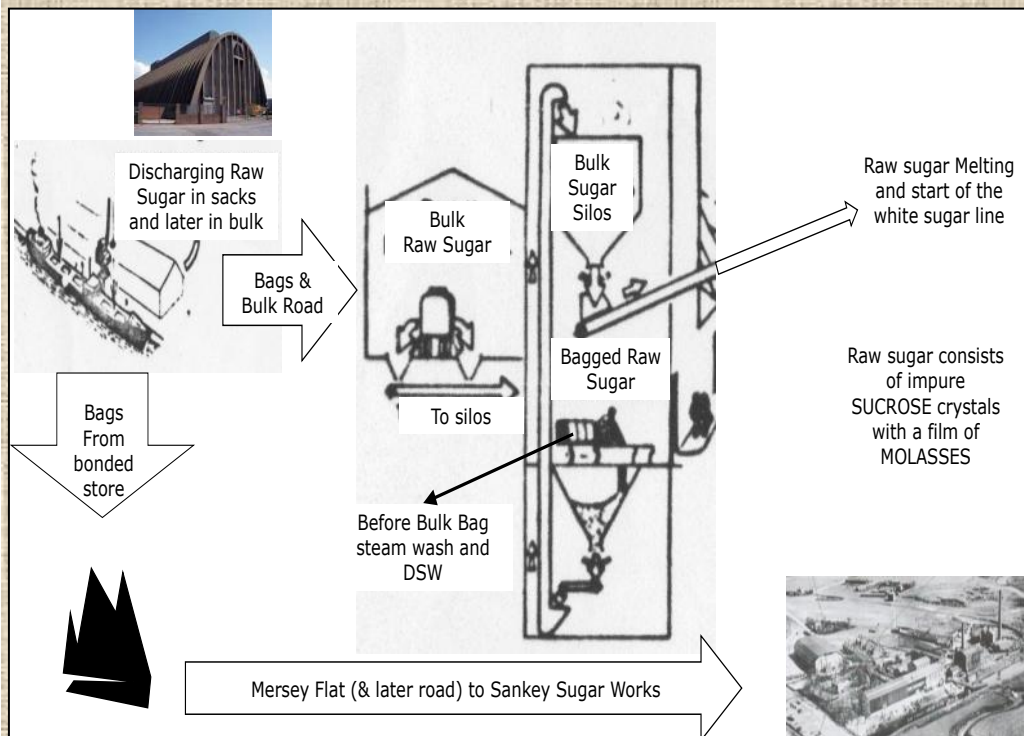
Refinery ancillary operations – a comparison between Sankey Sugar and Tate & Lyle's Love Lane refinery.

I assume that these operations were similar in both refineries. They probably differed in complexity and the size of the plant items. Within 8 years of opening the Love Lane refinery was producing 1000 tons white sugar per week, in the early 70s it was producing 90 tons per week. A figure comparable with the physical size of Sankey sugar's works.

Extensive measures were incorporated into the refinery to reduce steam consumption and to avoid wasting sugar (remember duty has been paid).

To keep down the refining costs, Oliver Lyle used the refinery for the full-size practical experiments described in his book "The Efficient Use of Steam" and contains many features covering this vital topic. There was a lot of additional "kit" in the refinery, so I doubt if Sankey Sugar used steam so efficiently.

Sugar loss was minimised by numerous "Dirty Sweet Water" recirculation streams. Every surface drain both outside and inside the plant fed the DSW tank in the basement. All floors in the refinery building had "tray" type floors with a "step-up" provision and drainage to contain locally any spillage, e.g., centrifuge gate failing to close flooding sugar / syrup all over the floor. A choice of DSW (initially) and then steam cleaning returns the floors to service.



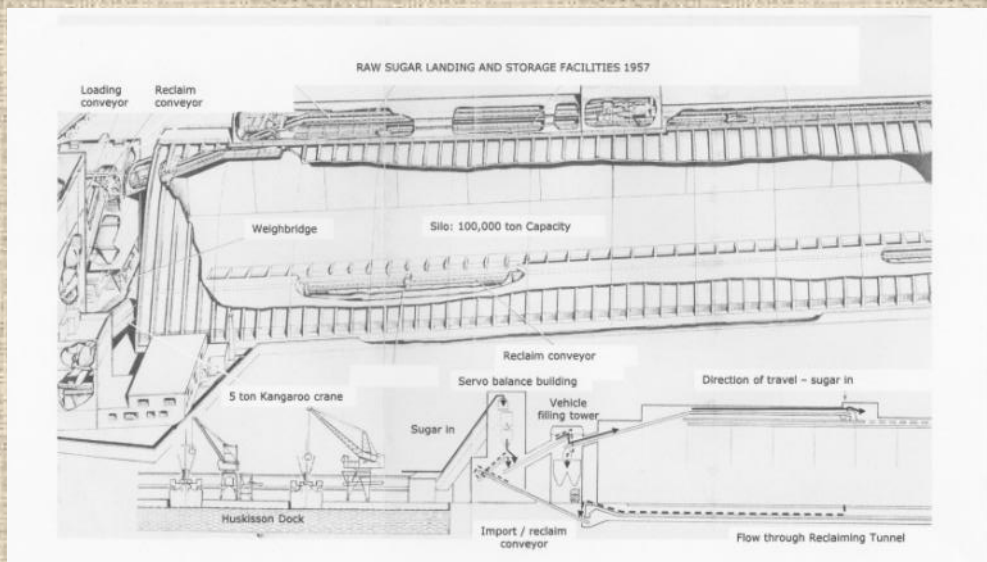


In earlier times when the bag wash facility was used, residue sugar was steam cleaned from the bags and passed to DSW. Steam was also used to rinse residing sugar from the filter press cloths or simply washing down plant. Through years of use, even water from the two wells was contaminated with sugar and after use, ended up as DSW.

All DSW was eventually returned the highest point in the refinery and joined the entry point for the sugar path. All processes relied upon gravity and where necessary product streams were pumped or carried to an appropriate high point for further processing.

The white sugar path is complex with many off-shoot streams to lesser products, from the top product down from sugar crystals and granulated sugar to brown sugar and molasses. The next instalment describes the main features of the white sugar path.

Whilst most of the bagged sugar for Sankey Sugar came by the canal, this image shows some came by road as well.



The state-of-the-art parabolic sugar silo on Liverpool's dock road—Regent Road. It is a Grade II Listed building—an example of the Brutalist Architecture of the time, but still an imposing and attractive building—said to be one of the '1001 Buildings you must see before you die.' (Mark Irving)

Part Three

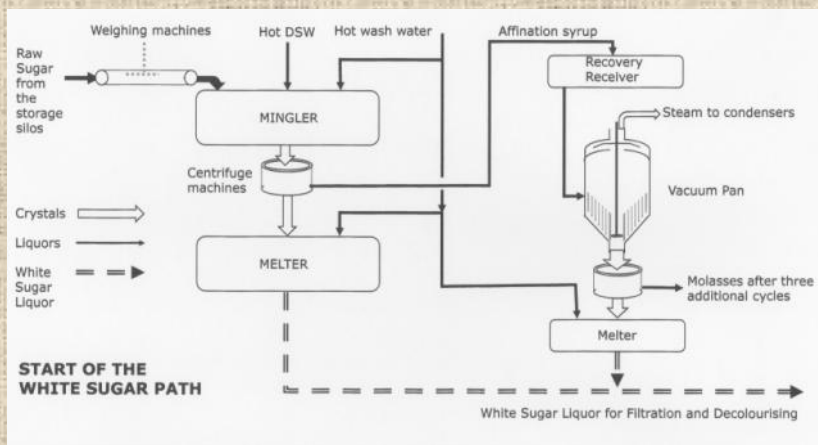
The Start of the White Sugar Path.

The white sugar path is complex with many off-shoot streams to lesser yields. The quality products listed from the top down are sugar coffee crystals and granulated sugar, to brown sugar and molasses.

This part continues from the previous one, which covers the receipt of the raw sugar into Liverpool and its subsequent handling at the two refineries. Further parts will carry us sequentially through the initial stages in the refinery's role of ridding the raw sugar crystals of the 5% impurities they originally contained, and on to the production of 99.9% pure white sugar. I propose to add a later section that covers exclusively the activities of the "Pan Man" as he boils the sugar magma under vacuum to produce the uniform sized sugar crystals, the foundation of refinery's final product.

The passage of sugar through the refinery relies upon gravity and where necessary product streams were pumped or carried to an appropriate high point for onward processing. All stages are self-contained and work independently from one another. To allow uninterrupted production, they all include intermediate storage tanks/vessels. The duplication of pumps, bands (belt conveyors), etc., are not shown in the following diagrams.

The start of the refining process is shown in the diagram below. Bands take the incoming sugar from the RAW SUGAR receipt silos to the MELT HOUSE. Each band is fitted with an integrating weighing machine that totals the mass of sugar entering the refinery. The raw sugar is first deposited into the MINGLER, where it is mixed with Dirty Sweet Water and mingling syrup, this process washes off the molasses coating on the crystals. Dirt, some insoluble waxes, together with miscellaneous trash (Baulks of wood and rats, etc.) are removed on a belt filter, which is cleaned by an external scraper.



The crystal magma (massecuite) then passes to a bank of centrifuge machines where the crystals and the syrup are separated. The raw sugar crystals pass to a Melter where they are dissolved in hot water ready for transfer to the filtration and decolourising processes.

The resultant Affination Syrup spin-off is treated in the RECOVERY HOUSE where it is boiled in a vacuum pan and more sugar is separated out, melted, and passed to the white sugar stream. Three similar Recovery House cycles are repeated to produce 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, crop sugars (each producing progressively darker sugars), for use in food manufacture. The final pan's syrup is exported as Molasses.

Runcorn Locks Restoration—by *Peter Keen*

SCARS members have followed with interest the progress made over the years by the Runcorn Locks Restoration Society. In its early days the Society faced the obstacle formed by the major road taking multi-lanes of traffic across the Waterloo Bridge from the Jubilee Bridge southwards to Chester and North Wales. To the west of this road lay the sites of two lock flights leading down the hill to link up with the Manchester Ship Canal whilst to the east lay the Runcorn Arm of the Bridgewater Canal, linking to the National network at Preston Brook. The road blocked off the canal from the locks, forming a formidable barrier which for years was considered to be an immovable obstruction.

With time, however, circumstances have altered. Congestion on the Jubilee Bridge and approach roads, and the ever increasing traffic flow meant that a solution needed to be found. The answer came in the form of the Mersey Gateway Bridge, a structure which has been mentioned a number of times in previous issues of Canal Cuttings. Its construction has allowed a rethink of the canal blockage.

It has been proposed that the major road be reduced into a local thoroughfare and the bridge be restored over the canal. This would permit access to the sites of the lock flights. One of these, the most southerly, has been completely destroyed and built on, but the other, to the north has merely been filled in to form a linear park with a public footpath leading down to the still existing bottom lock chamber.

The Society then faced the problem of how to reconnect the Bridgewater with the Ship Canal. Long discussions took place and many experts were consulted in order to draw up a suitable plan to achieve this.

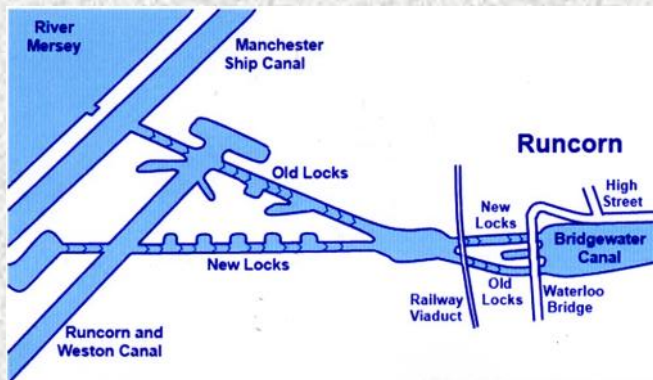
Boat movements through the locks would lead to substantial water loss to the canal, so a method had to be found to avoid this. A proposed solution was to restore parts of the canal channel simply by removing the infill, but to break the water link by installing a boat lift. This would allow vessel to navigate their way up and down hill without any water loss. This is the plan which is being put into effect, along with the creation of a turning basin, a visitor/ management centre, access and parking. The Society is to be congratulated on its progress.

The diagrams and photographs illustrate some of these events, beginning with the plan of the system as it was when in use.

(1) The position of Waterloo Bridge at the right of the plan shows the problem. Both lock flights were cut off from the canal, but only the 'Old' locks have survived.

The photograph (2) shows sheltered mooring for some cruisers whilst beyond the bridge the canal is walled off by the major road

The next photograph (3) is of the 'new' lock flight. The massive sandstone blocks of the canal wall are still present whilst the channel has been filled in to form a foot path. The building at the top left corner is Bridgewater House, built as a base when the canal and locks were under construction.





Bridgewater House is shown again in this photograph (4) of the lower basin along with a lock keepers shelter. The next picture (5) is of the lower pound, immediately above the lock giving access to the Ship Canal. The Runcorn and Weston Canal feeds

into the basin from the bottom left hand corner. Note that most of the vessels in the photograph are wide boats, similar to the Barmere. All the water areas shown have now gone except for the Manchester Ship Canal which occupies the top right hand corner. The last picture (6) is a view of the lock chamber which gave access to the ship



Canal. Its stonework is intact and restoration would be straightforward. Again Bridge-water House is featured. The Runcorn Locks Restoration Society has an excellent plan and the support of the local authority. It re-mains to be seen if Peel Hold-ings, owners of both the Bridgewater and the Ship Canal, is as supportive.

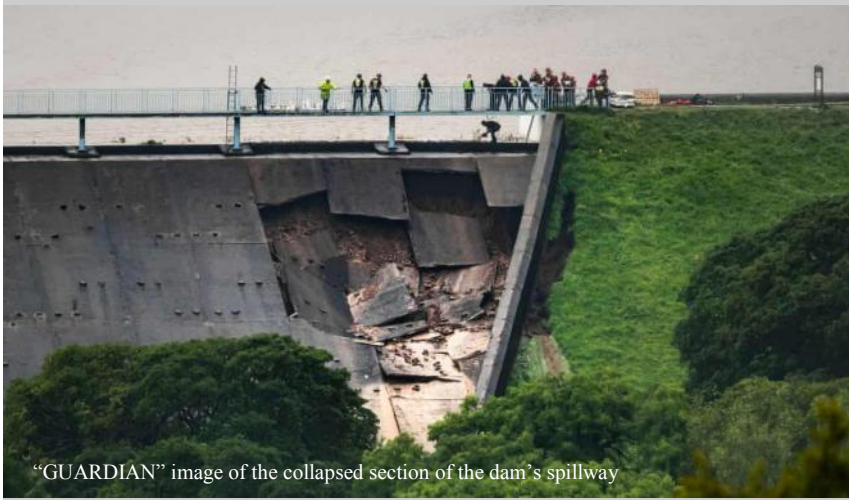
SCARS sends the RLRS its best wishes towards the achievement of its goals.



The Toddbrook Reservoir Near-Disaster—by *Peter Keen*

The heavy rainfall which caused such damage to the spillway of Toddbrook Reservoir in August 1919 became a fairly regular feature of our news programmes as a result of Global Warming giving rise to flooding problems around the country.

When the spillway at Toddbrook gave way emergency services were on soon on site, their first priorities being the evacuation of local people and the reduction in the water level in the dam.



“GUARDIAN” image of the collapsed section of the dam’s spillway

People were given accommodation locally where possible, away from the threatened area, and pumps were brought in from a wide area to try to lower the water level. Nightly, TV viewers were regaled with pictures of emergency workers toiling to

stabilise the dam, usually in heavy rain, whilst the military assisted by depositing infill into the damaged areas by helicopter.

After a great deal of effort the water level in the dam was reduced to a “safe” level and workers could concentrate on rebuilding the top section of the dam to allow communication across the valley.

Before the great waterworks projects came about reservoirs of a smaller size were built to act as water sources for canals. These can still be seen dotted around the landscape, still doing their jobs. When the major towns commenced their huge building programmes, many a valley was dammed to form a reservoir whilst pipelines were installed, some covering many miles, bringing water from the wetter areas to where it was needed.

Although the water authorities were usually assiduous in their regular inspections of their assets the canal reservoirs were sometimes a little neglected until something went wrong. In this instance it was the water company which was faced with a massive task which had to be solved as quickly as possible. When the age of the dam was considered it became apparent that many dams had been built around the same time and their construction methods were pretty similar. This concerned many people, both individuals and Local Authorities. In St Helens people looked at the dam holding back many millions of gallons of water at Carr Mill and sought reassurance. The photograph shows the Toddbrook dam with an overflow channel very similar to the scene at Carr Mill. Could ‘our’ dam collapse? Could the Blackbrook Valley be inundated if such an event took place?

In the event the dam at Carr Mill was due an overhaul by United Utilities. The results of their work produced a confident statement that the dam was safe and a plan for the development of the area was under discussion by the local authority.

Whaley Bridge Warehouse—by *Peter Keen*

Those of us fortunate enough to travel to far flung canals may have visited Whaley Bridge (just North of the Toddbrook Reservoir featured in the previous article) and may have noticed a rather unique structure located close to the public car park. This building has three gable ends, the outer two having doors of sufficient size to accommodate railway wagons whilst the centre one contains the most westerly terminus of the Peak Forest Canal, previously used to house a narrow boat to allow the transhipment of materials under cover.



Built in 1801 and extended in 1832 the warehouse would have been a hive of activity, moving predominantly limestone, raw materials and manufactured goods, from rail to boat and vice versa.

The warehouse, owned by the Canal and River Trust, has been disused for many years but has recently obtained £100,000 funding which will allow a new lease of life, to include repairs to the roof, the dredging of the central water channel to admit boats and the transformation of the building into a new High Peak Heritage Craft Centre.

Much work has been done by the Whaley Bridge Canal Group, from painting the interior to installing work benches and creating new outdoor picnic benches. Volunteers have obtained a second hand kiln which will be a great asset to the intended pottery courses.

It should be appreciated that all this work was carried out in the face of covid restrictions which makes progress achieved all the more impressive

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The Sankey Canal in 1963

Thanks to Ellen Busby for her photographs from her 1963 dissertation on The Growth of St Helens



This issue's two images depict two more views of the Ravenhead Branch of the Sankey:

Above: The lock cottage for the New Double Locks to the left of clearance of the area where Heatons Transport became located. The 'Burgie Banks' (residue of sand and rouge used for polishing glass in local glassworks) are seen behind.

Below: The 'Burgie Banks' are to the right of the Gerards Bridge Branch, with St Mark's North Road church spire and the bridge for the line to Wigan visible at the centre.

