

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 8 Number 5
Winter 2015/ 2016



The Old Double Locks in Full Spate

The Sankey fulfilling its role as part of the drainage system for the Sankey Valley during this winter's heavy rains.

Also in view at the head of the lock is the new footbridge

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Founded 1985

Registered Charity Number 702571
2 Scarisbrick Road, Rainford,
St. Helens WA11 8JL Tel: 01744 884000

Emails:

(1) flatboat@aol.com

(2) peterkeen21@aol.com

Website: <http://www.scars.org.uk/>



The Inland
Waterways
Association

The SCARS Executive Committee for 2015 – 2016

Chairman: David Smallshaw

22 Harlech Road, Blundellsands, Liverpool L23 6XA
Tel: 0151 924 2036 (H), 07941 461509 (M) Email: flatboat@aol.com

Secretary: Peter Keen

2 Scarisbrick Road, Rainford, St. Helens WA11 8JL
Tel: 01744 884000 Email: peterkeen21@aol.com

Also holds responsibilities for archiving and historical matters

Treasurer: Mike Harrison

4, Darvel Avenue, Garswood, Ashton in Makerfield, WN4 0UA
Telephone 01942 723944 email mike@darvel4.demon.co.uk
Also holds responsibility for general finance

Restoration & Events: Colin Greenall

16 Bleak Hill Road, Eccleston, St. Helens WA10 4RW
Tel: 01744 732031 (Daytime) or 01744 731746 (Evenings)
Email: colin.greenall@btinternet.com

Work Party Organiser: John Hughes

Tel: 01744 600656 Email: johnhughes11@virginmedia.com

Communications: David Smallshaw

Other Members of the Executive:

Peter Brannan, Dave Callan, Neil Forshaw, John Hughes,
Bob Meadows, Mary Presland, Andy Screen

Observers from Partner Organisations:

(Councillors from the three Local Authorities which own most of the Canal's line):
Keith Morley (Halton)
Linda Dirir and Steve Parish (Warrington)
Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

The Inland Waterways Association:

David Smallshaw and Colin Greenall (Chester & District Branch)
David Jarvis (IWA NW Restoration Committee)

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 5: Winter 2015/ 2016

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



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Chairman's Report: From Dave Smallshaw

Firstly apologies are in order for the delay in compiling this edition which should have reached you by the festive season. The reason for the delay is easily explained by repeating the last few lines of my last report to you:

“For months, maybe years we have been asking members to take a more active line even giving a little time to help out. All we ask is “What do you want to do and how much do want to do?” - alas with little or no response”.

2015 was an extremely busy year for the active few who maintain the Society and a lot of time and effort has been taken up by attending and setting up talks with various bodies, all aimed at increasing the development prospects on or around the canal as well as raising the profile of the waterway and society in the current climate. I am afraid that time has to be apportioned to priorities and, bearing in mind that many of us have other work or volunteering commitments outside the Society, some jobs have to wait...and I am afraid production of this Canal Cuttings was one of the projects to suffer!

There are certainly a lot of things to report on and there are various articles in here which, I hope, will stimulate interest but a more detailed report will be issued at our Annual General Meeting which is scheduled for March 31st but more of that at another time.

One of the major problems we have with getting our message out is the general lack of knowledge of modern communications among us. Although we continue to try to master this it all takes time and what is, to many, a simple and speedy operation, appears to us as a major issue and there certainly is a need to psyche oneself up before sitting at a keyboard! I have

been busy lately attending in-depth media courses so maybe before long, given a little spare time, I'll have a go at social media again.....unless anyone out there can lend a few hours now and then.

On the waterway front things have been moving apace. Some excellent work done by John Hughes and the volunteer work parties who have made New Double Locks a much more welcoming spot to visit. We have held constructive talks with Canal and River Trust, who own Carr Mill waters and some of the canal in St Helens, with a view to forming a local volunteer group at Blackbrook, so watch for more developments here in the spring months. We are also continuing to work with Riverside College at Widnes who regularly come down to Spike Island to help out.

We are developing our ongoing partnership with the local authorities and other interested parties (I don't like the word stakeholders!) to look in more detail at the whole Sankey Valley and its immediate environment. This is in line with our long cherished aspiration of the formation of a formal body to manage the waterway and we feel there may be some progress in this way forward.

Significant events recently have been the refurbishment of the Spike Island Locks, the commencement of the installation of the new moveable bridge at Fidler's Ferry and the continuation of the work on improving the towpath in St Helens Borough with work starting on the length from Engine Lock to Old Double locks.

In all of these developments SCARS has been heavily involved and consulted, other projects continue to be assessed, information obtained and opinions formed and these will hopefully bear fruit in future times.

All we can do at the moment is continue to maintain our presence at the heart of any negotiations concerning the Sankey, and ensure that the best interests of our Society's aspirations are met if at all possible. I know this is getting a pain but any help, however little, would be a tremendous boost in taking our project forward. Drop me a line for a chat – no commitment.....if you are bored and want something to do!!

Spring is around the corner so get those walking boots on and take a look at the splendid new towpath on offer in the Sankey Valley—the picture below shows work in progress.

Dave Smallshaw



Canal & River Trust Visits to the Sankey



Our Chairman, left, with Chantelle Seaborn, CRT Manager, North-West, Steve Bergquist of CRT, Ian Hornby from Scars, and Alice Kay, CRT's Volunteer Co-ordinator visit Earlestown in October 2015

In his opening article our Chairman has mentioned meetings which have been held over the past year with officials from the Canal and River Trust (CRT). There has been a series of these, beginning with a simple fact-finding visit to establish which sections of the Sankey Canal are in their ownership, and to learn about any issues involving them. The three sections of the canal in their ownership are: a 700 metre length from the head of navigation at Blackbrook to a point 180 metres south of Blackbrook Road Bridge; a 730 metre length from the top of Old Double locks to a point just beyond where Blackbrook enters the canal channel prior to joining Sankey Brook near Broad Oak Basin; and the third section is 900 metres long and includes Sankey Brook from Newton Common Lock to Bradley Lock.

All three sections have been leased to St.Helens MBC on a 99 year lease.

Further meetings were held to address specific issues. Our first concern was the all-too-frequent flooding problem in the Blackbrook area. CRT have said that £20,000 has been set aside for reed clearance on the Blackbrook Branch to alleviate this.

We are also in the process of setting up a volunteer working relationship with the CRT, using some of their Task Force Volunteers working in conjunction with our own group of volunteers in the Blackbrook area.

SCARS are also in the process of considering a CRT Adoption Agreement which will allow us to work on the CRT-owned sections of the canal.

Further talks are taking place with a view to forming a partnership between the three Local Authorities, CRT, SCARS, and other interested bodies to take the possibility of restoring parts of the canal forward, and with a general aim of making the Sankey Valley a better place to visit.

News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

by Colin Greenall

Restoration continues to progress on the Sankey Canal

A lot has happen since my last report with some projects ending, and new initiatives beginning to take shape. Our own volunteers have been busy too mainly on tidying up the New Double Locks in St.Helens and our sales and exhibition marquee has been out and about at various events around the area.

Halton & Warrington

Linking the Locks: WREN Funding for Spike Island Lock:

work has now been completed on the £70,000 repairs to the lock gates and the cill, along with refurbishment of all the paddle gear and the desilting of the lock chamber, including the paddle culverts and the lock entrance from the river. The work was done under contract by Unicorn Ltd of Ellesmere Port and paid for by funding from WREN Environmental and Halton Borough Council.



The work on the lock and a blockage in the pipes in the embankment of the New Mersey Gateway Bridge led to the water level in the canal falling considerably (*left*). Water is at present being pumped over the embankment in an effort to restore the level.

The red apparatus on the left is 'Trinity' - building the new Mersey crossing (see pages 13-14 for further information).



Coastal Communities Fund: Marsh House Bridge

On Monday 18th January 2016 contractors AMCO Engineering, working in partnership with Warrington Borough Council, began work on the site of the former swing bridge at Marsh House crossing. Over the next five months a new bascule bridge will be constructed to replace the present temporary structure. This will involve the closure of the road to the Riverside Trading Estate with access being made via the railway crossing by the Ferry Tavern. A temporary footbridge (*below*) has been installed alongside the construction site thus keeping the crossing point open for walkers and cyclists. Although originally planned as an electrically-operated lift bridge, due to budget restraints it will now be built as a static bridge which will be future-proofed for the installation of the mechanism to make into a lift bridge. The railway level crossing that adjoins the bridge has recently been upgraded by Network Rail giving better and safer access to the bridge



Catalyst Museum HLF Bid: Thanks to the hard work of the bid steering group team the submission for funding was successful and a grant in the region of £50,000 is now available for the refurbishment of the top floor observatory and the installation of new IT equipment. Visitors will enjoy learning about the landmarks which can be seen from the new 360-degree viewing area. The project is now in the planning stage, and it is hoped will be up and running by this coming summer.

Improvements to foot-paths /cycleway: At the centre of the Warrington section of the canal, work began in January on upgrading the foot-path/cycleway from Old Alder Lane to Cromwell Avenue with the clearance of trees at Old Alder Lane (*right*).



St.Helens

Footpath/Cycleway Upgrades: Work has commenced on the upgrading another section of footpath from Waggon Lane, Haydock to the Ship Inn, Blackbrook. Once again Kings Construction have been employed to make improvements to the badly neglected footpaths in this area with St.Helens Council doing a fine job of cutting back the overgrown vegetation that was threatening to obliterate the pathway.



Hotties Bridges gets a new coat of paint:- During the summer the footbridge in the centre of St.Helens received a new coat of black & white paint, thanks to St.Helens Council.

Report From Our Work Party

By John Hughes

The last four work parties have all been located at the new double lock site in an area of St Helens known as Merton Bank. The site is also the location of the “Burgy Banks” which are a legacy of the town’s glass industry. The ‘banks’ are in fact two large slag heaps on the site of the former Rushy Park colliery and were created by the dumping of toxic slag produced by Pilkingtons in their glass production cycle. It is thought that the name came from a brown ooze from the slag heaps shortly after the waste had been dumped there that resembled Burgoo a kind of porridge eaten by sailors in the late 17th century. The red mud present on top of the Burgies is also occasionally referred to as Burgoo, due to its slimy appearance.

The New Double Locks featured as the first restoration project undertaken by the newly formed Society in the late 1980s when the locks were fully restored from their derelict state with the help of St Helens Council and the Waterway Recovery Group. Time, however, has caught up with the site and the Society have for many years campaigned to get the site cleared of vegetation and the lower exit from the locks and the adjoining Gerard’s Bridge branch dredged to allow free flow of water from the area.



Towards the end of last year, concerned about the overall encroachment of vegetation (*left*) and the frequent flooding of the area, the Society considered it time to do some work itself towards rectifying the site’s condition. Unable to tackle the flooding problem alone we decided to look at tidying up the upper basin and the lock surrounds in an effort both to make it more pleasing

visually to the many walkers who pass here daily, and to enable them to see the role our canal played in the industrial expansion of the whole area from St Helens to Widnes. Our work party Sundays in October and November were both lovely days, warm and sunny and we concentrated on the top pound which only has a small amount of water running down a central channel. This had allowed saplings and some bigger trees to prosper in the canal bed, but it also made it reasonably accessible for our volunteers. Armed with ladders, bow saws and loppers, over the two visits we cleared all the timber and we were also able to clear the top side edges of the stone pound of vegetation to give an immediately visible improvement to the lock approach.

Swings and roundabouts ? – you knew it wouldn't last! The weather in both December and January first rained and then the new year ushered in snow and bitter cold and only the die-hards and those not faint of heart stuck to the task! The job now was to cut back all the over hanging branches to give a clear sight line on the left hand side down from the top pound and expose this side of the lock as being more accessible. I am delighted to say that this was completed along the clearing of the tarmac path on the same side. This historic site is now clear and tidy and certainly worth a visit and we hope that it will be appreciated by all the users of the paths here...when the weather improves and they venture out again! The picture *below* shows the site after our work—one of the Burgies can be seen in the distance beyond the lock. The two on the right show, top, before, and, bottom, after views of the offside of the lock chamber.

Many thanks again to my fellow workers,

John Hughes

PS:

We could always do with more help on our work parties. The work you put in depends on you and what you feel capable of. There are also non-work party opportunities now available in research and helping out on our sales and events days.

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

You can be assured of a warm welcome!





Events—by Colin Greenall

This year our Sales and Exhibition Marque was out and about at various events in the area starting in with the **Lymm Transport Rally** on the 26th June. This was the second year of this festival of transport, with events going on in different parts of the village, i.e. boats on the canal, model railway in the church hall, plus traction engine and vintage vehicles taking part in a transport cavalcade around the village. A great day out for all the family. The downside was that we were so busy working on the stall that we didn't see any of it.

On the 11th and 12 July our stall (*below*) was at the **Scarisbrick Marina Boat Rally and Open Day**, now in its third year. As in previous years, the weather was good and people



came out to look at the boats and to be entertained by the brass band, folk singers, Morris Dancers etc, as well as to look and see if they can pick up any useful items from the various the stalls that were there.

On the first Saturday in August we were at the **Newton Town Show** in Meanes Park, Newton-le-Willows. This event too is in its third year, but so far the weather has never been very kind. At this event we always seem to

get very wet and this year it really did rain with heavy showers on and off all day. However, this did not prevent the locals from coming out to have a look at what was on offer - and there was plenty to see from fair rides to charity stalls, Morris Dancers and Haydock Male Voice Choir, plus lots more.

Finally it was the **Widnes Vintage Vehicle & Fairground Organ Rally** at Victoria Park on 26th & 27th September. This year's event proved to be one of the best.

With a record attendance in the region of 70,000 and glorious sunshine on both days, people turned out to enjoy the classic cars, motor bikes, traction engines, fairground organs and much, much more.

The SCARS exhibition marquee (*right, with sales team*) was there to promote the "Interlocks Project" and to raise funds for its work towards restoring this historic waterway.

Many people, young and old, visited our stand and made purchases from our wide range of bric-a-brac and second-hand books.



New Mersey Gateway Bridge



As we move into 2016, construction of our new bridge and road network is now in full flow. The giant bridge building machine 'Trinity' has started work on the north approach viaduct, and the special machines that will build the main bridge deck are beginning to be assembled. The machine, named Trinity, is a Movable Scaffolding System (MSS), specially designed and built to construct the curved viaducts leading to the Mersey Gateway Bridge, the centerpiece



of the Mersey Gateway Project. Trinity began work in Widnes with a concrete pour for the first deck section of the northern approach viaduct, which will lead to the new bridge. Around 160 truck-loads of concrete are being poured into the 1,170 cubic metre mould over a period of around 24 hours.

Trinity is 157m long, 22m wide and weighs 1,700 tones, and will be on site for the next 14 months. She will act as a giant concrete mould, known as 'formwork', for the central deck of



the north and south elevated approach viaducts, which will be constructed in sections or ‘spans’ approximately 70m in length. It will take a few weeks to build each of the 19 spans, with this element of work due for completion in March 2017. The process involves locking Trinity onto the bridge piers and then pouring concrete into the mould to create a deck span. Once the first span is complete, the equipment will then move along via hydraulic jacks to create the next deck span, and the process begins again.

Hugh O’Connor, General Manager for Merseylink, said: “This is a hugely exciting time for our construction teams. An enormous amount of effort has gone into preparing and testing Trinity ahead of today’s concrete pour. We are delighted to achieve this important milestone and get this next phase of the project underway.”

Cllr Rob Polhill, Leader of Halton Borough Council and Chair of the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board, said: “This is a significant step in the project, as the MSS has generated extensive

interest both locally and globally. People will be able to see Trinity in action online via the webcam (merseygateway.co.uk/live-view/), and by keeping a close eye on the Mersey Gateway social media channels.” Trinity is unique to the Mersey Gateway Project and is being operated by MSS specialists ConstruGomes, working alongside Merseylink engineers.

Trinity has now finished constructing the first of 11 central deck spans (*left*).

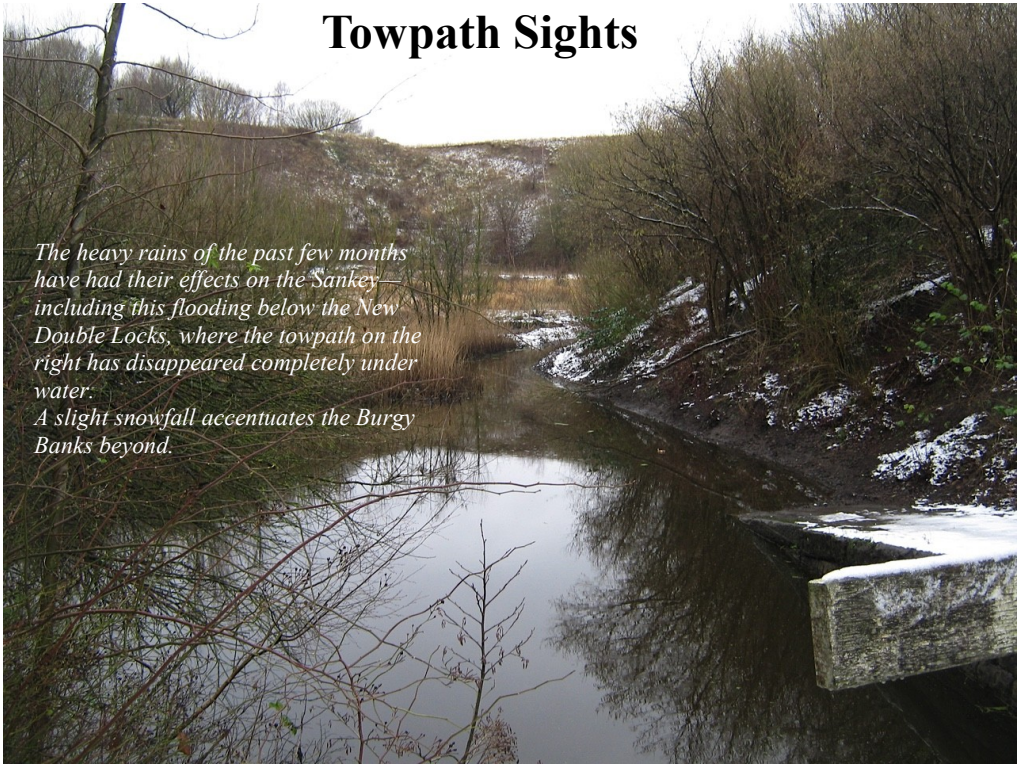
A deck slab will now be built on top, and then a machine called a wing traveller will be used to build the outer part of the viaduct, to its full vehicle-carrying width. The wing traveller is currently being assembled on site, whilst Trinity is moved to begin forming the next span in March. (These notes and images are taken from the Mersey Gateway Newsletter: merseygateway.co.uk)



Towpath Sights

The heavy rains of the past few months have had their effects on the Sankey—including this flooding below the New Double Locks, where the towpath on the right has disappeared completely under water.

A slight snowfall accentuates the Burgy Banks beyond.



The work to renew the footpath through the Earles-town section of the canal has revealed a section of the wharf which served the Sankey Sugar Works. Brian Bennett's 1979 picture on our back page shows this was left visible after the canal itself was filled in a few years earlier. Careless and illegal tipping down the embankment from the sugar works site hid the stones until now.



The Blackbrook Branch and its Waggonways

By Dave Smallshaw

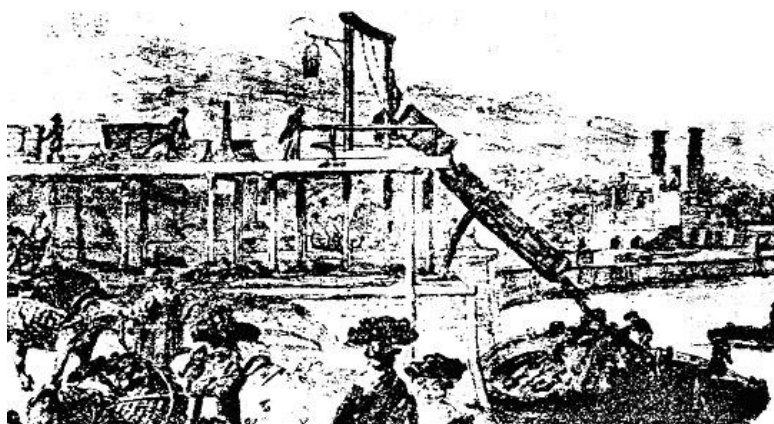
During the short days of the turn of the year and especially during the current spell of bad weather the prospects of getting out underfoot diminish with each wave of torrential rain and the half gloom of an overcast day hardly encouraging anyone to venture far from the warmth of their own house.

Confined then to armchair wandering, I happened on a set of the 1849 six inch ordnance maps, the first serious attempt to map the land in detail and an issue which never fails to provide stimulus to one's curiosity about days past. The particular ones around the Blackbrook branch area certainly provide plenty of questions for the student of industrial history and the canal, being the centrepiece, features strongly in most of these.

The pioneering Sankey Navigation reached Parr in 1757 and it only took two more years before the section from Parr to the southern basin of the Blackbrook branch and also Gerard's Bridge was also available for cargo, the extra bit north of the basin was developed over the few years with the local system then complete by about 1769. Transhipment facilities were immediately made available at convenient points on the canal and certainly at its northern basins and by the Stanley basin an iron works, linked to a forge existed, with, until about 1800, slitting facilities. There was also a copper works in the area, now thought to have been located on the high ground to the east of the basin, but this appeared defunct less than twenty years after the demise of the iron industry. However, both before and after the other industries came and went coal was the prime canal cargo, and certainly took a major role later in the development of revenue for the canal.

The land to the east of the Blackbrook branch lies in Haydock which contained the estate and lands of the Gerard family of Garswood Hall. The family took every advantage of the wealth of coal beneath their lands and mined extensively in the area and as early as 1765 Sir Thomas Gerard had started to move coal along the canal. Looking again at the maps of the area there are numerous black dots and mentions of pits or collieries around the banks

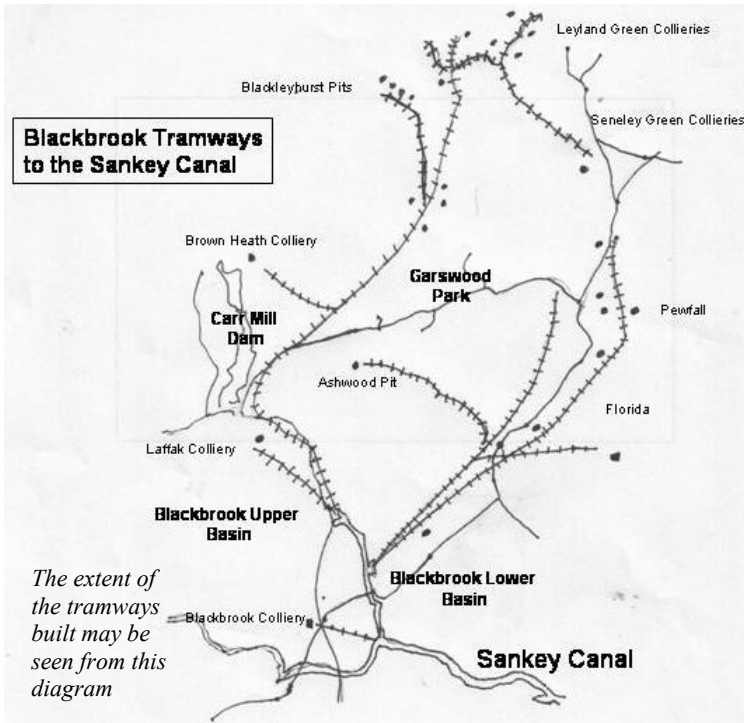
of the waterway and we can deduce from this that many small narrow gauge tramways linked these workings with the transhipment wharves in the area.



Left: A typical coal staithe of the 18th century, loading coal by chute from wagons into barges below

In 1771 there is a record of the Gerard estate agreeing to the construction of a 'planked and railed way' from the copper works to the canal, the line of which may have been overlaid in later years by narrow gauge rail and even later standard railway lines.

In 1802 Sir William Gerard ceased directly managing the mineral interests of the estate and leased them to Thomas and John Stock. Conditional in the lease, which was for 99 years, was the onus to maintain the system of the waggonways established and in the next thirty years these had been extended by two miles to cover new workings sunk. A map of 1833 shows the line starting at the Stanley basin and reaching pits just south of Garswood at Tithe Barn Hillock and also with a spur serving workings at North Florida and in the Pewfall region.



At the upper basin, the canal's most northerly point, more transshipment facilities existed. This was also the site of a two mile long tram road which originally linked the Billingehurst colliery at Blackleyhurst to the canal. Later links took in the Leylands Green and Seneley Green mines—a result of new leases obtained in 1835 by the Stock Brothers from the Gerard family.

A close look at the current Explorer maps of the area will reveal tell-tale signs of the tramways in the long straight roads and pathways of the area, as seen (right) in this photograph of the track of the tramway from Blackleyhurst Colliery to Blackbrook Basin. Some earthworks are also still evident to the trained eye, but it is hard to visualise such industrial activity in today's semi rural landscape.



Mining in the area increased dramatically in the mid nineteenth century with a record of the late 1840's showing that Stocks coal workings produced 70,000 tonnes of coal for the tramways and thus for the canal itself to convey.

The tram roads here were originally all narrow gauge and the course of the lines included rope worked gradients with a stationary engine house at the summit. A condition of the lease stipulated that the lines would be segregated by hawthorn hedges and gated whenever roads were traversed.

The arrival of the St Helens Railway in 1850 dramatically changed the landscape of the area. The canal and railway companies had now merged and the introduction of standard gauge brought increased capacity to the transfer of coal and better links to the market, and both canal and rail continued to handle large amounts of coal.

The lines to the Blackleyhurst area serviced a total of 23 shafts sunk by 1870 and the trade was really booming, but by 1880 it was all over, and the plant and machinery was sold off in October of that year; the auction list including two locomotives and 26 various pumping and donkey engines. The pits were never reopened on a large scale and the railway links to the basin were subsequently dismantled.

The tramways to Garswood and Pewfall were converted to standard gauge in about 1850 and aligned to link into the Blackbrook branch of the St Helens Railway which involved the construction of a line along the east side of the canal branch to the upper basin.

Stock retired in 1852 and the business carried on with activity mainly concentrated at the Pewfall and Ashton (Garswood Park) Collieries. The latter was auctioned off as a going concern in 1859, with the list of lots including a new locomotive and rolling stock, and eleven flats of between 70 and 84 tons, along with a private railway to the canal.

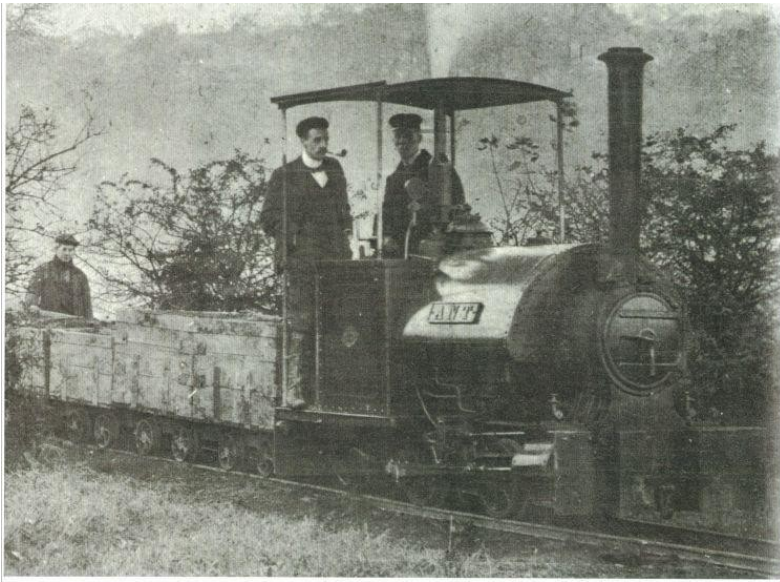
The mining rights were taken over by Richard Evans and Sons and the workings subsequently reopened, continuing to return good profits well into the twentieth century. The line to the canal at the lower basin was still in use, but probably modified and incorporated into new alignments by 1870.

As well as the longer waggonways there existed a couple of local mines which fed coal to the Sankey. Stanley colliery, situated just by the lower basin, was probably linked in some way to the tramway from Garswood Park, both collieries eventually owned by the same company, Bromilows. The local narrow gauge tram lines extending from the canal to the two Bromilow collieries were eventually incorporated in the realignment of tracks to the St Helens Railway and subsequently the LNWR.

Laffak Colliery provided coal to the upper basin from as early as 1769, the owner of which, Mr Legh of Lymm, asking for the canal to be extended to serve his mining interests in the area, and the pit looks like it was served by a very early short tramroad. Links to the colliery were converted to standard gauge in 1850, as with other lines in the area, and the basin was still in use in 1877 for canal traffic. However, by 1879 both Laffak and the surrounding collieries were worked out and the businesses were put up for sale in 1884, and by 1891 there was no trace of the workings.

Nearby Glover's Ashwood Pit, which was a drift mine, was equipped with a narrow gauge railway which transported coal to the screen facility at Garswood Park. Instead of the continuous rope haulage system used on the other lines, the company acquired a small colliery engine, Ant, (*Pictured over*) to traverse the 1ft 6in single line tramway, which was still featured on maps in 1906.

Blackbrook Colliery, later Chain Pit, was also owned by Bromilows and was situated west of Blackbrook canal bridge, and is possibly indicated on the first six inch Ordnance Survey



The 18" gauge ANT used between Ashwood drift mine and the Blackbrook Basin. The wheels on the wooden wagons it is hauling look very similar to the pair found near the basin (below), which are on display in the Blackbrook Visitor Centre

edition of as being opposite the lower basin but was improved by a further shaft sunk south of Haydock Road in 1840 which was linked to the canal by a straight tramway.

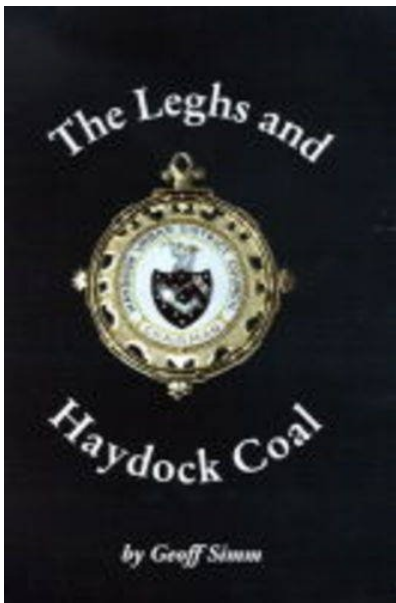
This tramway was later incorporated into the local railway system but its original loading facility at the head of the old double lock basin was then used as a central workshop site for the partner pits and also a maintenance facility for the company's fleet of canal flats.

The 1881 25inch to the mile OS map of the area apparently shows three slipways here. Our restoration team partially uncovered this site last year, and the area seems to deserve further exploration as and when time and resource permits. The site appears to have been sold off with the Laffak and Garswood sites in 1891.

A final link with the mining industry at Blackbrook may be found in the display case at the Blackbrook Visitor and Heritage Centre. A pair of wagon wheels were unearthed in the area and presented to the centre. They probably come from one of the tubs hauled by ANT, but nothing is certain in exploring these old mining lands, and I am pretty sure there are countless other relics of the old industry buried in the area.



What we are left with today is a string of pleasant pathways reaching down from the Billinge and Garswood areas which can be enjoyed by all and, to an aware eye and with a bit of imagination, the walker may be transported into a forgotten industrial hive of activity with all roads leading to the Sankey Canal.



Dave Smallshaw writes: A recent excellent talk by Geoff Simm to the Merseyside Industrial Heritage Society highlighted his recent book on George McCorquodale - Master Printer. (Published by Geoff in 2014. ISBN 0952478749, 9780952478744, paperback. 84 pps), and brought to mind his past in involvement with the Society .

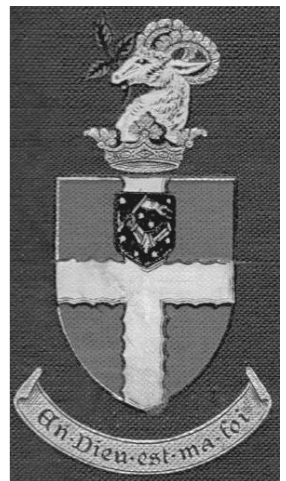
Geoff has written and co-written many fine books on the heritage of mining in the area and, researching our old journals, I found that, in March 1993, Geoff, author of Richard Evans of Haydock, founder of one of the principal coal companies in the Sankey Valley, gave a talk us on one of the area's coal-owning families, the Leghs of Lyme. Committee member of the time, David Knowles, took copious notes during the talk and a resume of the talk follows. Geoff's full study of the subject was published as a book (left) in 2001 (ISBN 9780952478737)

Geoff began by outlining the family's genealogy, whereby they became the Lords of the Manor of Haydock and Newton, and owners of Lyme Hall, Cheshire.

The House of Lyme originated from Piers, or Peter, Legh, later Sir Piers Legh. He was the eldest son of Robert Legh of Adlington, a descendant of the Leghs of Booths. Piers was the first of a long succession of men by that name. It was his son of the same name who began the family's Lancashire connection.

Piers was married in about 1404, whilst still a child, to Joan, daughter and heiress of Sir Gilbert de Haydock. It was through this marriage that the Legh family came into possession of a number of very large estates in Lancashire and Cheshire. After the consummation of their marriage, the young couple took up residence at Bradley House, the ancient seat of the Haydock family. The Legh family remained here for many generations, adding to their estates by marriages with successive heiresses, which resulted in a great portion of Lancashire and Cheshire being owned by the family.

Here Geoff informed us of the much-disputed tradition surrounding the origins of the Legh family crest, 'The Ram's Head and Hand and Banner'. The story went that Piers Legh rescued the Standard of the Black Prince during the Battle of Crecy in 1346. The Standard having fallen to the enemy in the fighting, Piers Legh gave chase, felled the opposing knight, and seized the banner. Even in death, however, the knight's grasp could not be broken, so Piers severed the man's arm at the shoulder. The Standard was reputedly returned to England with the arm still attached! Geoff informed us that the story must be false - at the time of Crecy, Piers had yet to be born. In fact, it was a Cheshire Knight, Sir Thomas Danyers who rescued the Standard.



The crest came into the Legh family after Piers Legh married Danyer's heiress, Margaret, who also brought with her the Legh Hanley estates, which were granted to Sir Thomas for services rendered. The origin of the Ram's Head on the crest is uncertain.

From the early fifteenth century, Geoff now moved on two centuries to the end of the seventeenth. It was under Peter Legh the Elder, Lord of the Manor, that limited coal extraction began at Haydock.

Peter Legh the Elder (1669 - 1743/4)

Peter Legh had many qualities, He was endowed with good judgement and much shrewd common sense, and had a high sense of his duties and responsibilities. He and his wife, Frances, undertook the care and charge of all his younger brothers and sisters, who were to make Lyme Hall their home. However, they were to be greatly saddened by their own inability to produce a son and heir to the Legh estates.

Having given up all hopes of a son being born to them Peter and Frances made a formal settlement of the estates upon the four sons of his brother Thomas, who in the event of Peter's death were to take the estates in tail male.

In 1723 the eldest nephew, Fleetwood, aged 22, married Meriel, heiress of Sir Francis Leycester of Tablet'. On January 21st 1726, however, the happiness was shattered by Fleetwood's death of pleurisy. The news of the death was received with the greatest sorrow and consternation at Lyme Hall. Peter was devastated at his nephew's death. He was, however, to be even more saddened by the death of his dear wife, Frances. As a distraction from his grief, Peter endeavoured to absorb himself more and more in building schemes. He was also very interested and involved in the education and development of another nephew, Peter, who became his heir following Fleetwood's death.

Peter Legh the Younger (1707/8 - 1792)

Geoff spoke at some length about this particular Peter Legh, for this was the Peter (the eleventh) who was to open up the Haydock coalfield. Young Peter made himself useful to his Uncle in many ways, and they seem to have got on very well together. Uncle Peter showed sympathy, consideration, and understanding to his young namesake, entering into many of his nephew's pursuits, so that their life together was happy and harmonious. The young man was educated at Westminster and Cambridge.

As the years progressed, the choice of a suitable wife was now the chief concern of Uncle Peter, and for some years he searched in vain for a lady answering in all respects what was demanded of a mistress of Lyme. Several suggested brides were rejected for one reason or another, one being considered too fat to serve the purpose, with others failing to pass muster in some respect or other. The choice finally fell upon Martha, only daughter, and heiress, of Thomas Bennet of Salthrop, Wiltshire.

Peter and Martha were married in December 1737. Four years later, in October 1741, his Uncle had the joy and satisfaction of seeing their first child, his great nephew, born. He was however, spared the grief of his death, as he died himself in January 1744, and was buried at Winwick, before this occurred.

Martha and Peter, however, had two sons and three daughters in all, with the second son, Bennet, being born in 1748. The joy of having an heir again was to be short-lived, as Bennet died at the age of eight, in 1756, and the shock of this was to scar their lives. From being a happily-married couple, they became estranged, even though they lived still under the same roof They fought like cat and dog, living at opposite ends of the Hall. Martha became warped by their loss, and soured by excessive grief, caused the wreck of both their lives.

Peter, who looked back on the years of Bennet's short life as their happiest, referring to their son as 'The Little Gentleman', had been elected Member for Newton Borough in the year of his birth. After 1756 he spent more and more time in London, attending each of the Parliaments called in the next 25 years, and also became more involved in the business of mining coal on his Haydock Estate.

HAYDOCK COAL & THE SANKEY CANAL

After giving an account of the contemporary methods of getting coal, Geoff turned his attention to the coming of the Sankey Canal. His research threw up Peter Legh's initial irritation with the planned Canal, because it was to pass through his valuable agricultural lands at Burtonwood, Newton, and Haydock. However, he soon realised that it was to be a blessing in disguise, as he would now have the means of transporting coals to his Liverpool and Cheshire markets, right by his pit-heads.

At the beginning of 1756, Ralph Leigh of Lowton was appointed as Steward to manage the Legh Estates at Haydock and Newton. Leigh was an upright and religious man, with a strict sense of duty, and well thought of in his district; members of the Legh family were to refer to him as 'Honest Ralph'. Under Leigh's direction the Haydock coalfield expanded dramatically, whilst there was a simultaneous growth in the rivalry and the competition between the various coalmasters of the district.

The opening of the Sankey Brook Navigation in 1757 was the signal for intense competition to hit the coalfields it would serve. Peter Legh's pits were growing continually, and his coal-owning interests became wider. The forward planning he had done was paying dividends and, with so many of his pits being located on the canalside, his coal was the first to be transported on the Mersey sailing flats which came up the Navigation on its opening.

As the coal trade expanded, and pits were opened at the top of Haydock, away from the Canal, Peter Legh had a new roadway constructed from them to the waterway. The roadway was for his own, private use, and only his coals could be carried upon it.

The main competitors in the coalfield struggle were the 'Big Four' - Peter Legh, Sarah Clayton, Sir Thomas Gerard, and the Case family off Prescot and Whiston. Although, in the spirit of enterprise of the day, minor coalmasters came along to challenge them, none of them lasted very long. There was no love lost between the various rivals - Peter Legh even forced the colliery of his kinsman, Legh Masters, to close by forbidding him a wayleave.

By the early 1760's, however, a more serious rival was becoming established in the area. John Mackey of Belfield, Cheshire, set up to exploit the coalfield within Parr township. An ally and associate of Peter Legh originally, Mackey's activities led to a 'battle royal' developing between the coalmasters, as one after another they attempted to corner the market by undercutting their rivals' prices. The effect of this was the closure of those pits which were higher up the Sankey Valley, and thus further from the markets, than those of the main players.

Legh, Clayton Gerard, and Mackey succeeded in driving off the competition to such an extent that only the largest collieries, and those nearest the Canal, were to survive the first five or six years after the Sankey was opened. Of these, the majority, were held by Legh and Mackey. In 1762, six collieries were working on the Sankey - five owned by Legh (Haydock Wood Pit, Haydock Stocks Pit, Engine Pit, Laffock Pit, and Florida Pit, being the most important of all), and one, St Helens Colliery, was owned by Mackey. The Legh family's mining interests were the basis of their wealth.

Before concluding his account of the Legh family's coal business, which came to an end in 1833 with the sale by Thomas and William Legh of their interests to Richard Evans and William Turner, Geoff gave some details of the family's domestic life.



A most colourful account was given of the life of Peter Legh's nephew and heir, Thomas Peter Legh. An army officer, with very little interest in mining affairs, being pre-occupied with affairs of another nature, Thomas Peter was the father of six children, but was unmarried. The reason for this bachelor, but not celibate, state, was that all six children were by different women, mostly servants. He well earned Geoff's nickname for him - 'The Ram'. A slide, taken of a portrait of Thomas at Lyme Hall, showed a handsome man, wearing a white wig, and the full dress uniform of an officer in a mounted regiment. To ribald laughter, Geoff pointed out the strange look Thomas' horse seemed to be giving his master in the portrait. The laughter was renewed when it was revealed that Thomas had died young, in 1847, 'more than likely from over indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh'.

In the 20+ years since Geoff gave this Talk the Internet has come into its own—and so it only took a moment to find the image mentioned above on the BBC's 'Your Paintings' website. It is now housed at the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry Museum in Stanley Street, Preston.

Geoff Simm was warmly thanked at the time for giving this talk, and thanks went too to David Knowles for his record of a most enjoyable evening.

SCARS' Former Chairman takes up his pen again

The Revd. David Long, SCARS' first Chairman, now living in retirement in Standish, spends some of his time researching canal and local history topics. Readers may recall the publication of an article of his in the WATERWAYS JOURNAL, published by the Boat Museum Society at Ellesmere Port in 2014, about the WW1 concrete barges, some of which were built beside the Sankey at Penketh. The next issue of the same Journal, to be published at Easter, will carry another WW1-related article from him—about the Hospital Barges used by the army in France for the evacuation of seriously injured casualties on the Somme and elsewhere. Obtainable from the Museum.

Serendipity in Lancaster by Peter Keen

During a visit last summer to Lancaster Museum to research the history of the Kings Own Royal Lancaster Regiment, I was unable to make any progress since the man with the necessary knowledge was away on a fact finding expedition in Picardy.

It seemed a shame to return home having achieved nothing so I made my way to the River Lune to make a first visit to the massive aqueduct carrying the Lancaster Canal across the river. From a purpose-built car park off the A683 from Junction 34 on the M6, the path lead alongside the canal embankment, through a small area of land devoted to wildflowers with the occasional pond for aquatic wildlife and some sculptures discretely positioned here and there.

At the end of the embankment the massive stone work came into view, striding across the river which at that time was fairly docile, there having been no heavy rain during the preceding weeks.

After photographing the structure from the river bank (*right*) I made my way up the conveniently located staircase to view the canal and aqueduct. On reaching to path level I was surprised to find that the canal had been drained, as I afterwards learned, to allow the sealing of a number of leakages in the embankment. The sealing bunds lay some distance to the south of the river and a short distance north of the end of the aqueduct. This meant of course that the whole length of the



The dished stone lining of the aqueduct is revealed by the draining of the water. The pipe carries the water flow from the north past the stoppage.

aqueduct had been de-watered, revealing the fine stone-lined structure of the channel. During the stoppage, which was nearing its end, the engineers had also replaced a number of coping stones, and some parts of the balustrade had also been renewed, bringing the structure into a condition that should last for some years. The engineers had been able to drive small dumpers and excavators along the canal bed without causing any damage to the puddle. The draining showed that the stone-lined aqueduct was not puddled (in an attempt to save weight) and a seal was visible across the canal where they met.

Although there is no major water source north of the Lune, there is still a flow of water along the canal, and the engineers installed a by-pass pipe-line along the tow path to carry the flow. My visit was very timely—a few days later the water was re-admitted to the canal, once again hiding away the inner structure of the aqueduct, until the next time maintenance is required.

The 600 feet aqueduct has five 70 feet semi-circular arches and is 60 feet high. John Rennie, the Designer/ Engineer had wished to build in brick but the canal committee preferred stone, which was much more expensive and took up nearly a third of the total cost

of constructing the canal. Pile driving for the aqueducts' piers commenced in 1794 and were completed in 1795, despite bad weather, flooding of the coffer dams, drunken engine tenders and recalcitrant workmen. A silver cup was presented in appreciation of the speed of their construction, but this went to William Cartwright the Assistant Engineer rather than to Rennie who was no doubt busy on one of his many other projects.

The contract for building the structure went to Alexander Stevens & Son of Edinburgh who, with the committee's support, omitted Rennie's suggestions for strengthening the structure. Alexander died during the work and his son completed the project. The opening ceremony took the form of a cavalcade of boats which passed over the aqueduct on November 1797.



The seal where the puddle canal to the right meets the stonework of the aqueduct. The planks protect the seal from the machines which ran along the bed of the canal to carry out the maintenance and repair works



Left: The aqueduct at canal level.

Above: A repaired section of balustrade, while, in the foreground, a coping stone has been replaced with a freshly-carved one.

'Waterways Walks'

This Spring a number of guided walks are taking place in Halton, to enable people to discover more about the heritage of their area.

They will be led by SCARS supporter, David Bissenden, and will be just under 2 hours in length and involve walking a heritage trail of 1 to 2 miles length. The walks are free of charge, though booking is required to ensure that an appropriate number of people attend.

Please e-mail David on bissenden146@btinternet.com indicating which walks you wish to go on and your contact details.

Walk 1: Friday 26th Feb 2016: Old Runcorn 11.00 a.m.

Walk 2: Monday 28th March (Easter Monday): Old Runcorn 11.00 a.m.

The Old Runcorn Walks will be concentrating on the impact of the canals, railway and bridges during the industrial revolution.

Walk 3: Tuesday 26th April: Hale village 11.00 a.m.

The Hale Walk will look at the townscape of the village, centred on 'The Childe of Hale' area.

Walk 4: Monday 30th May (Spring Bank Holiday): Halton Village 11.00 a.m.

Halton village walk will focus on the Conservation Area and Halton Castle.

The guided walks are supported by 'UnLtd'/ Wellbeing Enterprises CTC, as part of their 'social entrepreneur' programme.

WANTED



Spring cleaning time is fast approaching and we are always on the search for quality goods and books which we can sell at the various events we visit each year. So please get in touch if you're having a clear-out

Our sales stall is a real help in keeping our restoration projects going.

Contact Colin Greenall on 01744 731746 (evening) if you can help.

IWA Restoration Reports

The following items are taken from the IWA head office bulletins of the last few months. The Association's monthly Bulletin, produced by IWA Head Office, contains all the latest news on issues affecting the waterways, both nationally and locally, plus a summary of current consultations etc. The bulletins form a veritable mine of information for all enthusiasts, and members can get current and back issues by accessing the IWA website.

Liverpool event is IWA National Campaign Festival 2016

IWA has designated the Eldonian Village Canal Festival in Liverpool, on 11-12 June, as its 2016 National Campaign Festival. The Festival organisers aim to increase leisure activities on a relatively underused part of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal as well as promote the event in celebration of the bi-centenary of the canal. Organised by IWA Chester and Merseyside Branch in partnership with the Liverpool Culture Company, the Eldonian Housing Trust and Canal & River Trust, the plans for the weekend look exciting.

Centred on the canal around the Eldonian community centre and including the section down the locks to Stanley Dock, the Campaign Festival's primary aim is to encourage more boats to visit this section of the canal and continue to the Albert Dock complex. The massive destruction by bombing during the Second World War due to the area's proximity to the docks, the closure of the Tate & Lyle sugar refinery and the British American Tobacco plant had a huge impact which could have meant the residents being scattered to different parts of Merseyside but there was a determination to keep this community together. Planned regeneration and the provision of affordable housing has achieved this for Eldonian.

The local IWA branch aims to improve this part of the canal for visitors by providing new mooring and service facilities at Eldonian for boaters visiting the 'Liverpool Link'. In addition, it is seen as a great opportunity to increase local community volunteering with vegetation clearance, painting and rubbish removal, and work with local schools leading up to the Festival to gain active participation in the event, as well as increased knowledge of and respect for the local canal.

IWA National Chairman Les Etheridge commented:

Liverpool, with its rich canal heritage, is a worthy standard-bearer for IWA's National Campaign Festival in this bicentennial year. Great progress has been made in recent years to open up the delights of the city to canal traffic again with the inauguration of the Liverpool Link. Our Campaign Festival aims to build on that and leave a positive legacy for the residents of Eldonian Village and all the other canalside and waterfront communities and attractions".

IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch Donate £500 for 'Pride of Sefton' Community Boat

IWA's Chester & Merseyside Branch recently presented £500 to the 'Pride of Sefton' Community Boat, as a donation towards their yearly maintenance costs.

The boat is operated on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal as a community and education facility but many people will also have seen her when she travelled to Burnley in 2012 and carried HM The Queen and Princes Philip and Charles on a canal cruise. She also featured in the recent John Sergeant programme, "Barging round Britain" when he travelled down into Liverpool docks on her.

With many boaters already booked in to attend the Eldonian Village Canal Festival during the weekend of 11 & 12 June 2016, which is being organized by IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch, in conjunction with Liverpool Culture Company and the Eldonian Village group, the 'Pride of Sefton' will undoubtedly be playing a key role during the Festival.

Jim Brett, Chair of the Pride of Sefton group, said, “*We are extremely grateful for this donation towards our maintenance costs as it is vital to keep our boats in good condition. We are also looking forward to 2016 and playing our part in the festival as we feel it will be a great showcase for the canal.*”

IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch Chairman, Peter Bolt, also commented, “*We are delighted to present this donation to the ‘Pride of Sefton’ so that we can help her to continue providing a great facility for local people to get out on the waterways and learn about the history and natural environment on the Leeds & Liverpool.*”



The ‘Pride of Sefton’ in Liverpool’s Albert Docks in August 2013. Pic from Flickr, by Alan Dow

Harry Arnold, MBE Receives Outstanding Achievement Award

The Living Waterways Awards 2015, run by Canal & River Trust, have honoured SCARS member, Harry Arnold, MBE, with an Outstanding Achievement Award.

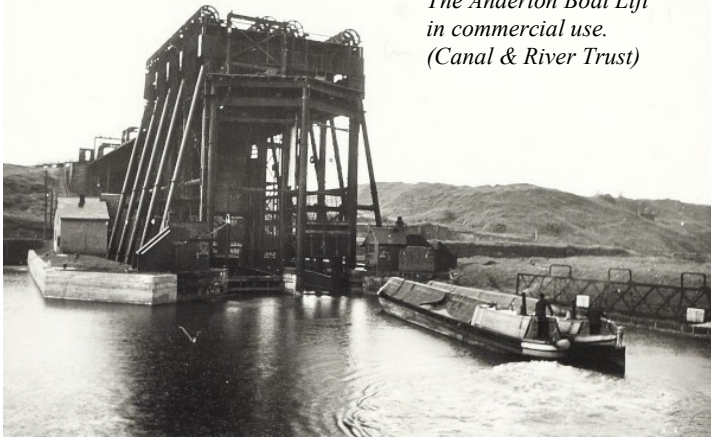
Harry, an author, historian, journalist and photographer, has been a stalwart supporter of the inland waterways for more than half a century, recording the changing places, craft and people of the waterways since the late 1950’s. Harry was also central to setting up the Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port, now the National Waterways Museum, and has supported many other waterway projects and campaigns.

Inspiring and assisting many individuals on their own conservation and restoration projects, including his daughter Julie, who volunteers with IWA North Staffs & South Cheshire branch, Harry’s Outstanding Achievement award recognises the enormous contribution he has made to helping make the waterways what they are today. We at SCARS are grateful for Harry’s support for the Society over the years, and are delighted to join the IWA in being able to congratulate Harry on this accolade.

Historic Anderton Boat Lift is Inspected for its ‘MOT’

Abseilers have carried out an aerial inspection of the ‘Cathedral of the Canals’ – the Anderton Boat Lift, a scheduled ancient monument near Northwich. The inspection is part of the structure’s ‘MOT’ to ensure that it is kept in good working order. The specialist team

*The Anderton Boat Lift
in commercial use.
(Canal & River Trust)*



was brought in as the most efficient way to check for corrosion or any other defects. The work is being carried out by Canal & River Trust.

The 80 foot tall structure dates from 1875 and lifts canal boats 50 feet between the River Weaver and the Trent & Mersey Canal. It was fully restored to working order in 2002 in a £7 million project, to which IWA made a significant contribution.

Anglers Rejuvenate Canal

Members of a new angling club, Little Britain Anglers, have been getting their hands dirty to improve the water quality and fishing stocks in the Manchester, Bolton & Bury Canal near Radcliffe.

Little Britain Angling Club was set up specifically to take on the task of re-introducing angling on the canal while working with other groups to improve the waterway for everyone to enjoy. Although only formed this summer, the enthusiastic group has just celebrated its tenth work party weekend, clearing away weeds and improving the water flow from the canal's feeder reservoir at Elton. Up to a dozen members have been joining each session to remove weeds, reeds and silt, working with the Canal & River Trust.

Opened in 1796, the canal is 15 miles long and was used mainly for shipping coal but, as the mines reached the end of their working lives, sections of the canal fell into disuse and disrepair. In 1987 the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society was formed and has been working tirelessly with the Canal & River Trust and other volunteer groups to restore the canal.

Wappenshall Funding Appeal Extended

In early 2014 the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust launched an appeal to find the match funding of £500,000 needed to restore the warehouses and basin at Wappenshall Wharf. The total projected project cost is £1.5 million and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant will contribute £1 million towards this as long as the balance is raised from other sources.

The final date to raise the money and submit the Round 2 application to the HLF was December last but the HLF has now extended that deadline and the final submission date for the Round 2 application is now December 2016. This is partly in recognition of the quality of the project and partly because the HLF has deemed progress towards match funding to be satisfactory under the present difficult financial circumstances

So far £140,000 has been raised so the outstanding amount that is still needed is £360,000.

Trust members and the boating community have pledged or donated nearly £45,000, and successful applications to charitable bodies have reached almost £95,000.

It is hoped that Telford and Wrekin Council, who own Wappenshall and have leased it to the Trust, will be able to find some funds to help but, like all local authorities, their budget is limited. There are plans to make a direct appeal to local people and an application for £100,000 of European funding with the support of Telford and Wrekin Council and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

Members may well be interested in this interesting event hosted by the St Helens Historical Society which has been keen to investigate and preserve the town's historical heritage since 1959. Demand for places could be substantial so an early booking is advised.

AT HOME AT 'THE WORLD OF GLASS'

Saturday 21st May 2016

"A Merseyside town in the Industrial Revolution"

PROGRAMME

9.30 - 9.55 Registration. Tea and coffee available

10.00 - 10.10 Introduction and welcome to The World of Glass

10.10 - 10.35 Unique archive film of John Harris and Theo Barker discussing the background to their 1950's landmark book on the history of their home town

10.35 - 11.25 'Ex Terra Lucem' - Coal and St Helens - Geoff Simm

11.25 - 11.45 Tea/coffee break

11.45 - 12.35 The Rise, Fall and Rise of the Sankey Canal - Peter Keen

12.35 - 1.45 Lunch and Lancashire Local History Federation AGM

1.45 Explore 'The World of Glass' or...., at 2.00: Follow the Canal Towpath for half a mile and visit the Friends Meeting House, St Helens' oldest building

3.45—4.15 Tea and coffee available

The World of Glass will be open for members to visit until 5.00. While there you can: watch glassblowers; visit the 1887 Cone Building, the world's first continuous glass making furnace; explore the underground tunnels beneath; watch a film on the history of glassmaking; visit the ground floor gallery revealing life in Victorian St Helens and the dazzling display of glassmakers' ingenuity from the ancient Egyptians onwards; and then look at the contemporary art exhibitions and drop in on the Artisan Gift Shop

The cost for this day is **£18.00** which includes a buffet lunch and free admission to all aspects of The World of Glass.

There is free parking at The World of Glass. Alternative parking is available at Chalon Way multi storey car park which is just beyond The World of Glass and is currently free on Saturdays. Both St Helens Central Station and the bus station are approximately 300m from The World of Glass (10 mins on foot)

Reservation Form: (PLEASE PRINT IN CAPITALS)

To reserve your place(s) please return this form by Thursday 21st April to Mrs Norma Cresswell, 53 Newlands Road, Haresfinch, St Helens WA11 9AX (01744 754962) enclosing a cheque made payable to: St Helens Historical Society

Please reserve..... place(s) at £18.00 per person

Name(s)

Address:.....

Email Address:

Confirmation and further details will be sent by email wherever possible, otherwise a SAE would be appreciated

Underline the afternoon activity you prefer: The World of Glass / Canal Walk & Friends Meeting House

Do you have Special dietary requirements? (please indicate).....

Would you like directions to The World of Glass? (Chalon Way East, St Helens, WA10 1BX)

"STEP ABOARD THE DANNY" FOLK AND SLANTY CONCERT

The FLORRIE

Saturday 7.45pm

5th March 2016

Florence Institute
377 Mill Street,
Liverpool L8 4RF

HUGHIE JONES

Yesterday's Men

Gerry Ffrench

Bernie Davis

The Jesse James

Danny's Crew



TICKETS:

£8 on the night.

£6 direct from Danny members

£7.52 at www.eventbrite.co.uk

Brian Bennett's Album: Part 10

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



The very different fates of the Sankey North (*above*) and South (*below*), of Bradley Lock, pictured in 1979, have always been a puzzle. Why was the section with the most historical value and interest (the first modern English canal crossed by the first inter-city railway in the world) extinguished so totally (though note that the walls of the Sankey Sugar Works wharf are still visible from the centre to the right, above), whilst the rather everyday sections below the lock were kept, their banks stabilised, and the area landscaped?

