

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

# CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 8 Number 8  
Winter 2017/ 2018



## Drone's Eye View of the Sankey

Our thanks to Aircam Services of St Helens ([www.aircamservices.co.uk](http://www.aircamservices.co.uk)) for providing us with this month's cover picture of the Earlestown Viaduct—probably the most iconic structure along the Sankey's length... though it would have been even more noteworthy if England's First Modern Canal still flowed beneath England's First Passenger Railway.... The alterations made to the Grade 1 Listed structure to take the pylons for the newly-electrified Liverpool-Manchester line are clearly visible. Note, too, the site of the Earlestown Wagon Works on the right. Where once 4000 wagons a year were built, and another 13000 repaired, a new housing estate is being developed.

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Founded 1985

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

Keith Morley (Halton)

Steve Parish (Warrington)

Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

**The Inland Waterways Association:**

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

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 7: Winter 2016—2017

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### **Chairman's Report: From Dave Smallshaw**

Well we have finally got to print again after what has been a tremendously busy period of activity on canal matters. Our usual apologies for the delay – the same old excuses apply, too much to do, too little time to do it, in the main – but we do need to try harder to get our issues on schedule and we will take steps to get our act together for the next time.

However, for those who avail themselves of newer communications, our members and friends are kept pretty up to date on Facebook and Twitter by our dedicated communications crew and in particular to Diane and Richard, who regularly bombard cyberspace with news of our work parties and other developments on local and national waterway related subjects. If you are not yet into using these extremely handy methods of communications then get your younger relatives to set you up or even drop us a line if you need any help in getting started.

Throughout the summer meetings have continued and our commitment to the Coastal Community Team project 'Linking the Locks' and the creation of a formal Sankey grouping culminated in a highly successful launch of the new Partnership at the World of Glass, St Helens in September, details of which are elsewhere in this issue.

We have also continued our close connections with the Canal and River Trust and I am pleased to have been invited to join their North West Partnership. We are now back on the Trust's national map and we have recently also been recognised by the Trust in granting adoption of their part of the canal infrastructure which enables us to work with them on future projects and consult with them on possible work.

The formation of a Sankey Canal Partnership has been a long term goal for the Society practically since its birth and to get the three main owners, the Borough Councils, together with the Canal and River Trust and ourselves now talking on strategic steps for the waterway and the Sankey Valley in general must be a positive step in working in harmony to a common purpose. Members may rest assured that the Society will be at the forefront in driving a positive agenda for this body.

Our work parties continue on Sundays and Wednesdays and we hope that, with the increased attention the Canal now receives, we may be able to harness local community volunteers to, in turn, adopt some particular stretch of the waterway. With our limited resources we can only give attention to certain parts of the total length at a time, and, I am afraid, Mother Nature reclaims things for herself faster than we can! The usual plea for new volunteers to help out applies.....please form an orderly queue.

Finally, the dark nights are again with us and it seems like no time at all since I last faced the onslaught of another festive season! So, humbug apart, can I wish all a happy time over the festive period and we look forward to an exciting year for the Sankey Canal ahead of us in 2018.

Kind Regards

*Dave Smallshaw*

An unusual view of our Work Party at work in the by-wash at Hulme Lock, taken by a drone, and shot by Aircam Services of St Helens: [www.aircamservices.co.uk](http://www.aircamservices.co.uk)





# Sankey Canal Partnership Conference

## The World of Glass, Wednesday 27th September

Approximately 80 delegates attended this event, bringing together our three local authorities, Halton, St.Helens and Warrington, along with the Canal and River Trust and SCARS to witness the formal signing of an agreement to work together to improve the environment of the Sankey Canal corridor and to work towards the long term restoration of the Sankey Canal.

The meeting was chaired by Lady Kirsty Pilkington and the welcome was given by Richard Parry, Chief Executive of CRT. This was followed by CRT presenting SCARS with an Adoption Certificate, allowing us to work on their behalf on the sections of the Sankey Canal which they still own.

Presentations were then made by Dave Smallshaw (Chairman of SCARS) on the history of the canal; Audrey Smith OBE, who gave a talk about the restoration of the upper reaches of the Lancaster Canal; Chantelle Seabourn, CRT Waterways Manager NW Region, talking about the role of CRT and its aims to work with restoration schemes in the north west; Mike Palin, Chief Executive of St.Helens MBC, with his vision for the new town centre development, which will focus on the canal as the centre of activity; his colleague Mark Davies, who spoke of the health and well being benefits a restored canal could bring to St.Helens; David Parr, Chief Executive of Halton BC, reporting on the work his Council has carried out to improve the canal environment in their area— such as Carter House Bridge, and the new swing bridge that will shortly be installed at Spike Island; finally David Bowyer, head of Transport Infrastructure for Warrington BC, told us about the improvements that had taken place along the canal since the Coastal Communities grant had provided funding for the new lift bridge at Fiddlers Ferry, and how it had provided an opportunity for local businesses to take on new apprentices, over 50 at the last count.

A very positive meeting which also provided an opportunity to meet up with old friends and like-minded people.

*Colin Greenall*



At the Conference:  
Standing:  
Lynn Pegler (Press Officer, CRT), David Parr (Halton BC), David Bowyer (Warrington BC), Mike Palin (St.Helens MBC). Sitting:  
David Smallshaw (SCARS), and Richard Parry (CRT)

# News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

by Colin Greenall

## Halton

The most newsworthy event in Halton is the opening of the Mersey Gateway Bridge, which is covered in a later feature.

### **Weed clearance at Spike Island**

During August a big clean-up operation took place on the Sankey Canal in Widnes after more than 50 dead or dying fish had been reported by local anglers

A thick layer of green Canadian pondweed and duckweed had caused low oxygen levels in the water thus causing the fish to die or become distressed. Several tons of weed were removed from the canal between Carter House Bridge and Johnson's Lane by specialist Contractors—*seen below, picture from the Runcorn & Widnes World.*



A council spokesman said: "The contractor is going to return in October to do further weed removal and some cutting back of other aquatic vegetation.

In a separate operation, environmental officers from Halton Council and a fisheries officers from the Environmental Agency removed more than 50 dead fish.

*(Right—picture from the Liverpool Echo*



## Warrington

### Western Link—”Red Route” chosen

Following a four-week consultation in July, the council's Transport for Warrington team has recommended that the 'red' route is the best option to tackle the town's congestion nightmare.

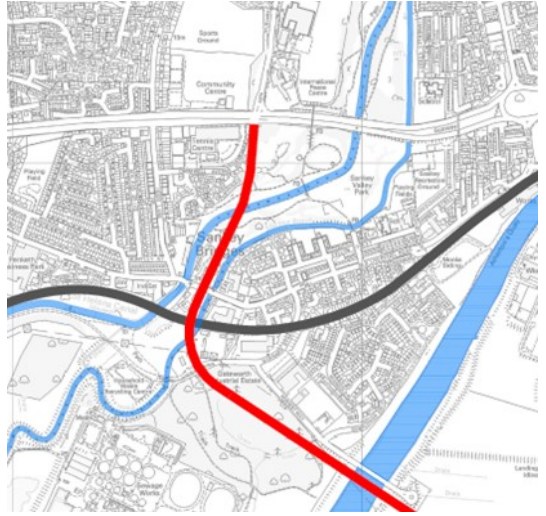
The scheme, which is planned to cost around £195 million, will link the A56 Chester Road with the A57 Sankey Way in Great Sankey.

It was initially priced at £145 million. However, in response to the feedback, there has been a redesign of the bypass, which will now impact on fewer properties than initially expected.

The scheme will now go before the Executive Board and if passed will be present to the Department of Transport in December.

A decision would be expected in the spring as to whether the scheme gets the go ahead , if it does work would start in 2020

*The section of the map reproduced from the Council's website shows that the proposed route, after leaving the A56 and crossing Ship Canal, will cross the Mersey, and cross the Sankey Brook near where the Warrington-Widnes railway crosses over it, and then cross the Sankey Canal before meeting the A57 Sankey Way at its present junction with Cromwell Avenue.*



## St.Helens

### **“The Sankey Canal Story “ Exhibition at the World of Glass**

On Saturday 9th September “The Sankey Canal Story” exhibition opened at the World of Glass in St.Helens.

The ten panels set out the history of England's first modern canal from its inception until its closure and then what happened later—the development into the Sankey Valley Linear Park, and the formation of SCARS.





## Completion of the Footpath/Cycleway upgrade

Work on the towpath/cycleway upgrade is now complete. After months of hard work the work which has been taking place between Havanah Flash and Penkford Bridge is now complete. The reason for the slow progress has been the need to improve drainage in the area caused by the large amount of runoff water from the nearby fields .

During the work the remains of Engine Lock were uncovered. The upper picture, from the St Helens Reporter, shows John Sheward (left), head of asset management at St Helens MBC, and Cllr. Seve Gomez-Aspron, Cabinet Member for a green and sustainable borough on the site of the lock. The other view, from the opposite direction is from SCARS' Facebook pages.





## SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT 2017

It is just over 4 months since the new Media Team took over running the SCARS social media accounts. In that time, we have used the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms to significantly increase awareness of both the Sankey Canal and of SCARS and its activities. Our Facebook following has increased by over 30% to nearly 450 'Likers' and the previously unused Twitter account has rapidly grown to just under 400 Followers. We are also newly on Instagram, where we already have 113 Followers and have just made our 100th Post! (Instagram is an image-based platform ideal for showcasing pictures of the canal and our work on it).

This means that people are choosing to receive news of SCARS and the Sankey Canal - and the more people that opt in, and who 'engage' with us by Sharing and Commenting, the more our news and work is also shown to others who may then choose to follow us.

These platforms are excellent for 'getting the word out' e.g. just short of 200,000 people have been exposed to over 700 SCARS' messages re Work Parties, Show attendances, Archive images, etc. on Twitter alone in the last 4 months.

Notable amongst our followers are important funding and heritage bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic England, as well as others including the local Councils, the Canal & River Trust, Linking the Locks, University Archaeology Departments and local Press and media - where exposure has translated into getting us some Press coverage in the Warrington area, the focus of recent Work Parties.

*Follow SCARS on any of the social media platforms  
and keep up-to-date on our activities and news*

*Find us on:*



Find us on  
**Facebook**

Sankey Canal Restoration Society



Twitter: Sankey Canal @scars567



Instagram: Sankey Canal Restoration: sankeycanal1757

# Reports From Our Work Parties

*By Colin Greenall*



This summer's work parties have seen SCARS Volunteers at Spike Island on our regular monthly Wednesday outings clearing vegetation from the towpath and wet dock



The team also went out to work on the section of the canal near Sankey Way in Warrington, clearing vegetation from around the foot bridge.



Our Sunday group has been busy at Sankey Bridges, and the locks at Bradley, Hulme and Bewsey

In **March** work began at Bradley Lock to clear away some of the larger trees at the top of the lock and to open up the site to allow it to be seen more clearly. A return visit in **April** finished off this work.



In **May, June and July** we were at work down at Sankey Bridges.

Again we cleared vegetation from the surrounds of the old relief swing bridge, and we gave it a fresh coat of paint.

The good weather brought out some new volunteers and a lot of interest from people passing by.







In **August** and **September** we were at Hulme Lock to clear away the vegetation from both the lock area itself, and from the foundations of its adjacent lock cottage—a task to which we returned in **November** .



In **October** we had a visit from the Waterways Recovery Group North-West who came along to help us clear trees and vegetation from around Bewsey Lock



**Many thanks** to all our volunteers for giving up their time to help our Work Parties make the Sankey Canal look 12wanted and cared for.



# Membership Subscription



Charity No: 702571

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

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

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

**The Sankey Canal Restoration Society**  
Registered Charity 702571

## Gift Aid Declaration

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

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

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

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

Please forward to:

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

# In Memoriam

## Bob Meadows



This year has seen the sad loss of Bob, who died after a valiant battle with cancer. For many years a stalwart of Waterways Recovery Group North West he attended many of their work parties, wherever there was demand, and played an active part in the regular ‘paper chase’. During this monthly event, waste paper was collected from a wide area, to be weighed in for funding towards WRG vehicles and tools. Books were another string to Bob’s bow and he assisted in their collection and sales to further swell the WRG coffers.

Not content with his WRG involvement, in recent years Bob also found time to join the SCARS Committee, regularly attending meetings, and giving of his wide experience when we were discussing potential projects. He had so often ‘done it before’, and knew the pitfalls. He also played an important part in the supply line for SCARS’ Canal Cuttings, collecting them from the printers and delivering them to Society members and around the three local authority areas, covering many miles in the process. His incisive wit was ever just below the surface, ready to be produced at the appropriate moment, usually dead pan

so that one wasn’t quite sure if a joke was intended or a serious point was being made.

In the April-May issue of the Navvies Magazine, The Waterways Recovery Group’s own regular publication, an ‘Appreciation’ described the contributions he had made, especially to the Van Appeal, helping to raise sufficient money to renew the WRG fleet of vans, so essential to the work carried out all over the country.

On departing from the chapel after Bob’s funeral, those present were played out with ‘Ernie, The Fastest Milkman in the West’. Typical Bob humour. He will be greatly missed by all.

## WANTED



We are always in need of 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.

## In Memoriam

### Len Saunders



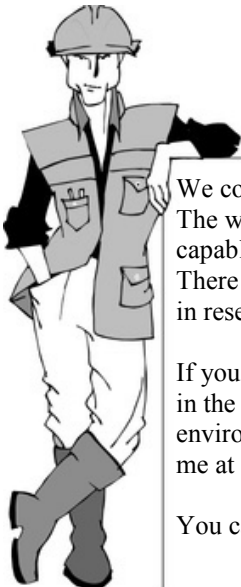
SCARS' sales stall has visited many venues over the years, and whenever there was a craft theme, there would be Len, demonstrating the art of charcoal burning. Always ready for a chat he would hold court amongst the trees in Newton or Rainford, answering questions and asking his own in return.

Although not a Society member, our meetings at events encouraged him to turn up to SCARS activities, especially work parties. Since many of these involved the judicial clearance of scrub and vegetation from canal features and tow paths, Len was in his element working with nature rather than against it.

Len was a quiet, modest man with a wide range of talents which he willingly utilised with various sections of the community.

Writer, actor, poet, craft worker, historian and musician, his aim was always to entertain and help, especially those less fortunate than himself, devoting much time to charitable causes. He even drove relief supplies across Europe during the troubles in Bosnia.

Len died on October 29th, eight days after an unprovoked attack on the street. The huge outpouring of grief from the community displayed the affection in which he was held. Just to drive this point home his local church was packed at his funeral. Local newspapers reported his case and generously printed numerous readers' comments. Clearly his loss will have an impact on his family and many sections of the community. SCARS will remember him with gratitude for the time he devoted to its activities.



## WANTED—Volunteers

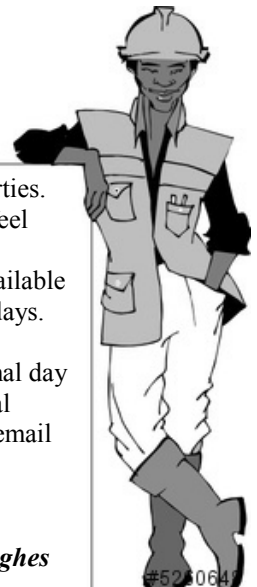
We could always do with more help on our work parties. The work you put in depends on you and what you feel capable of.

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](mailto:johnhughes11@virginmedia.com)

You can be assured of a warm welcome!

*John Hughes*



# The Mersey Gateway Bridge: Now Open



Halton's iconic new crossing of the River Mersey is now opened to the public. Following a spectacular fireworks display, the bridge opened at 00:01 hours on the morning of Saturday, 14th October 2017

The opening of the 1,000m-long bridge is the result of more than three-and-a-half years of construction work across Halton, with the bridge acting as the centre-piece for this huge road project.

The project opened on time and under budget after Halton Borough Council and the contractors, Merseylink, worked together to save around £250million on its costs.

Rob Polhill, Leader of Halton Borough Council and Chair of the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board, said: "After three-and-a-half years of hard work I am proud to announce the Mersey Gateway Bridge is open. It's been a busy project which has reshaped our borough, and led to a huge amount of work across it.

"I'd like to thank everyone who has had to navigate through roadwork's and traffic lights as our hard-working team built the new bridge and its associated roads.

"Now the project has been completed on time and under budget, it stands as an iconic, landmark structure that will help to put Halton on the map, while eliminating congestion across the borough.

"It will help make Halton a destination where businesses want to invest and families want to live. I would like to give a big thank you to everyone involved in turning our dreams into reality.

"Remember, registering for merseyflow tolls is the only way to get discounted travel across the new bridge, find out more at [www.merseyflow.co.uk](http://www.merseyflow.co.uk)."

*(Taken from Mersey Gateway Website)*

FOOTNOTE :- More than two million journeys have been made across the new Mersey Gateway Bridge in its first month of operation.

35,000 fine notices were issued in the first four weeks of the bridge's operation.



## SCARS to Benefit From the Bridge Project

Because the line of the bridge crossed the Sankey Canal SCARS has been involved from the beginning of the project, being consulted over our concerns that the work should not in any way interfere with the integrity of the canal. Approach roads on the southern bank had to allow sufficient headroom for vessels using the Manchester Ship Canal but on the north bank there is not the need for so much elevation. Nevertheless SCARS negotiated with the project team to obtain height for the restored canal.



As can be seen above, one of the support pillars for the approach road lies partly within the canal bed but engineers have not only left enough vertical clearance, but also ample room for navigation along the canal, at the same time they have excavated and removed many tons of toxic materials which had accumulated on the canal bed from Widnes industries. The re-watered canal now passes below the elevated road with plenty of room.

Thanks to the efforts of Cllr Keith Morley (Halton) SCARS members have been fortunate to be granted permission on a number of occasions to visit the construction site. Bridge staff could not have been more pleasant and helpful, answering any questions put to them.

To enable the bridge to be built a temporary trestle bridge was constructed across the river, to carry the materials needed to build the coffer dams inside which the three pylons would be constructed, and later to build the road surfaces outwards from the base of each pylon. The project team has been very concerned about recycling and it was agreed early on that some of the salvaged materials used on the trestle would be re-used to build a new bridge onto Spike Island. The present bridge is not strong enough when access for heavy vehicles is required for events on the Island—and it is fixed, preventing through traffic on the Sankey. This task was originally to be carried out by apprentice engineers on the project, but the actual engineers have now agreed to take it on. The result will be a swing bridge which will allow access on the canal and onto Spike Island. The dismantling of the trestle bridge will be part of the final landscaping being carried out to finish off the project. SCARS is privileged to have played a small part in the planning and execution of the bridge and is grateful to those who made this possible, giving the Society increased credibility in the local and regional areas.

## Archive Reports: 1: Concrete Barge Launch

*Archivist Judith Hogg has been delving through the records, and has found three pieces of interest. This first item reports a launch celebrated in a local newspaper. Long standing members of SCARS will recall that a very early presentation to the Society was given by its first Chairman, the Reverend David Long, which referred to the Concrete Seacraft Company in some detail. His work on the subject appeared in the annual magazine of the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum in 2014 (Vol. 16—still available from the Museum). The item reproduced in full below is mentioned briefly in that work. The barge featured, the ELMARINE, still exists—it was sunk at Mostyn on the Dee in the 1980s to provide a firm resting place for the ex-Isle of Man ferry the Duke of Lancaster. As happens all too often, an enterprise which begins most promisingly doesn't always work out in the long term. Whilst over 60 concrete barges and tugs were built, the project came towards the close of the Great War, and most of the craft were launched after its end. Although they went on to give sterling service in British and foreign waters—and some still survive to this day—usually sunk, like the Fiddlers Ferry-built CRETECAMP—as part of a harbour construction! - once the war ended it became more economical to build boats in steel. Concrete barges were again resorted to in WW2, though on a smaller scale. A survivor of that era can be seen at The National Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port.*

Warrington Guardian : Saturday 11th January 1919

### **A World Record : First Launch at Fiddler's Ferry**

The launch on the Mersey at Fiddler's Ferry of the Elmarine the first concrete barge built by Concrete Seacraft Ltd. possessed much more than local interest and significance. Not only did it represent the first fruits of one of the newest and apparently promising industries in the district but it marked a definite stage in the development of concrete ship construction generally.

It is claimed that the Elmarine is, for her size, the lightest sea-going concrete craft in the world receiving Lloyd's classification. She is the first vessel constructed on what is known as the Ritchie system which is some respects is unique. There is every indication that ferro – concrete, as a ship building process is coming into its own being speedy and economical whilst producing a durable result. This is the consequence of the recognition of the need for replacement shipping, following the end of the Great War and the Admiralty has established a number of yards, including Fiddler's Ferry. It employs more than 200 hands, both men and women, with orders for 10 barges similar to the Elmarine. Other yards include Preston, Stockton on Tees, and Northfleet on Thames, all building on the Ritchie system. Although Saturday was a wintry day, the trying weather conditions in no way detracted from the enthusiasm which the launch aroused, particularly among the officials and workpeople of the company. Numerous inhabitants of the district also put in an appearance, pleased to witness the consummation of an enterprise. The preliminaries were completed amid a whirling snowstorm as last minute tasks were completed.

Happily the snowstorm ceased a short time before the high tide in the river and the launch not only passed off without a hitch but was a complete success from the spectators' point of view. One-o'clock saw the vigorous hammer strokes knocking away the wedges, a whistle sounded and the vessel was released, and just as she began to slide down the slipway she was christened by Mrs Harry Ritchie, wife of

A smart little tug took the Elmarine in tow and after she had cruised around mid-stream for a short space she was brought to the bank. It was a great day for all associated with the shipyard and a proud and memorable day for Mr Ritchie. As the company dispersed a burst of sunshine gave the happiest of finishing touches to a striking event.

A further four 1000ton vessels are under construction, being already fairly advanced with the prospect of launches in the near future. It is suggested that it would be quite practicable to build a vessel of this type in two months.



*Above:* The ELMARINE on the slipway, being prepared for her launch

*Below:* Two of the four 1000ton barges laid down at Fiddlers Ferry were eventually launched—the CRETECAMP in January 1920, and the CRETECOVE in December 1920. Here the CRETECAMP is launched, again with great ceremony, as hopes were still high that concrete ships still had a future. The CRETECAMP still exists—it was towed to an island off Norway by the Germans in WW2, and scuttled to form a wharf in its harbour.



## **Archive Reports: 2: England's Oldest Canal**

*The next item was found much further afield—in a Leeds newspaper. The area referred to is below Bewsey Lock, and stretched down to the Mersey below Sankey Bridges—where the Liverpool-Warrington road crosses the canal. The railway is the Liverpool-Manchester line, which is carried over the canal on an arched bridge and would have been safe from any flood damage. Higher up the Sankey Valley, immediately below Hulme Lock, the Sankey Brook flowed into the canal and immediately out again on the eastern bank to continue its journey southwards to the Mersey. There must have been very heavy rain father upstream if the combined channels of the canal and brook were unable to contain the amount of water involved. The flooding did occur in February, one of the wetter months of the year, so the problem is understandable. So also is the unemployment. Canal boat skippers were only paid on completion of their voyages. They may well have lost income due to freezing weather over the winter months and now found themselves once again unable to earn a living.*

Leeds Mercury: Friday 11th February 1881

### **Bursting of Sankey Canal**

The Warrington Guardian states that the floods have caused the bursting of the Sankey Canal embankment for several yards, just below the point where the canal is crossed by the Cheshire Lines Railway. The surrounding land and the high road to Warrington have been inundated, and traffic on the canal is quite at a standstill, and a large number of men are thrown out of employment

## **Archive Reports: 3: England's Newest Canal**

*This third report concerns votes in Runcorn and St. Helens over the passage of the Bill to authorize the construction of the Ship Canal. Many vested interests opposed the Bill, some for good practical reasons - to avoid a marked impact upon sections of the community and others for more selfish reasons such as the maintaining of profits. Despite the objections the Bill became an Act later the same year, the complete canal being opened by Queen Victoria in 1894. The Ship Canal, safely enclosed in its retaining walls along the south bank of the River Mersey, caused no problems to either Widnes Docks or the Sankey Canal, although it terminated the ship building and fishing industries of Runcorn, cutting off the shoreline from the open river. Ship Canal tolls would have made their continuing businesses impossible.*

Manchester Times: March 7th 1885

### **The Ship Canal**

On Thursday Lord Redesdale appointed a Select Committee of the House of Lords to meet and consider this bill ( the proposed construction of the Manchester Ship Canal). The poll upon the Question whether the Runcorn Board of Improvement Commissioners should oppose the Manchester Ship Canal bill in Parliament was concluded when the votes were counted. The Commissioners were empowered to oppose by 1,415 votes to 381, but there were 637 blank papers, and a further 600 ratepayers failed to return their papers.

The St. Helens Corporation, by 15 votes to 5 decided to oppose the bill, the reason assigned for such a course being that the interests of St. Helens are identical with those of Widnes in keeping a deep channel to Liverpool and the entrance to the mouths of Widnes Docks and Sankey Canal clear.



## Lidl's New Store on Park Road

Those traveling along Park Road and Blackbrook Road of recent months will have noticed some marked changes. Opposite the Secondary School at the traffic lights there were two business premises, a printing company and a car wash. These have now been demolished, to be replaced by a new Lidl Supermarket. Much work has been done in site, and the project is on time

What SCARS' members were concerned about was the possibility of the site encroaching onto the course of the canal. The canal forms the western boundary of the site and originally curved alongside Park Road then turned across the main road and ran alongside Boardmans Lane through what is now the school's premises. The canal was crossed via a swing bridge, more than adequate for the traffic of the period. From there its course lay across the present rugby field to the head of the Old Double Locks.

Although the canal has long been filled in between Park Road and the Old Double Locks, SCARS had campaigned for the protection of the line of the canal, seeking assurances that no development would be permitted which would prevent future restoration. This promise had been given by all the three local authorities through whose districts the canal passes.

At the planning office the proposals were examined by a SCARS representative who was able to see that the supermarket building and its car park would be a comfortable distance from the course of the canal.



*Left*— alongside the pavement where the bus stop is located for buses in the Haydock direction, is this low wall of stonework, curving across the grass from the section of canal still in water. These stones are what remain of the canal bank. The canal would have run where the grass now grows. This area is to be sympathetically landscaped so as not to interfere with whatever remains of the canal's structures below ground level and to offer the possibility of modification if required at some future time.

It may not be possible to restore the canal to its original line in this area because of a number of factors, the most significant being getting the canal below Blackbrook Road. Clearly a swing bridge would be out of the question owing to increased traffic volumes. The road level and the water level are very close so either the road would have to be raised to give navigable headroom or the canal lowered. Raising the whole road junction sufficiently to allow navigable space would be a complicated and expensive project. Tunneling underneath Park Road would be difficult since a large main sewer runs below ground, parallel with the road, on its way to the sewage treatment works. These problems are however for the future, at present SCARS must be content that the Lidl project does not create any obstacles which may hinder restoration.

## **Atlas Street: Proposed development of a canal-side site.**

Application has been made for planning permission to build on land occupying the south-west corner of the Standish Street and Atlas Street junction. It was previously occupied by Varley's Foundry but has been derelict for many years, badly overgrown, and in need of some attention.

The proposed development would consist of a five story block built alongside the Sankey Canal, giving access to Atlas Street. It would provide 130 high quality extra-care apartments with one or two bedrooms and central communal facilities. There would be a large entrance hall with lifts and stairs to the upper floors, whilst parking space would be provided at the front of the building.

The canal runs along the rear of the site on its western side, offering its occupants a pleasant open landscaped area for relaxation. The well-used tow path is on the far bank of the canal with no connection to this space. There is a margin of open land alongside the canal to the south whilst to the north the site boundary skirts the site of the railway swing bridge which was made into a feature during the restoration of this section of the canal by St Helens MBC.

SCARS does not have any major objections to the proposals other than a preference for the minimum of tree planting alongside the canal. From long experience, Society members who attend work parties are all too familiar with the ways in which tree roots can, over time, wreak havoc with stone and brickwork.



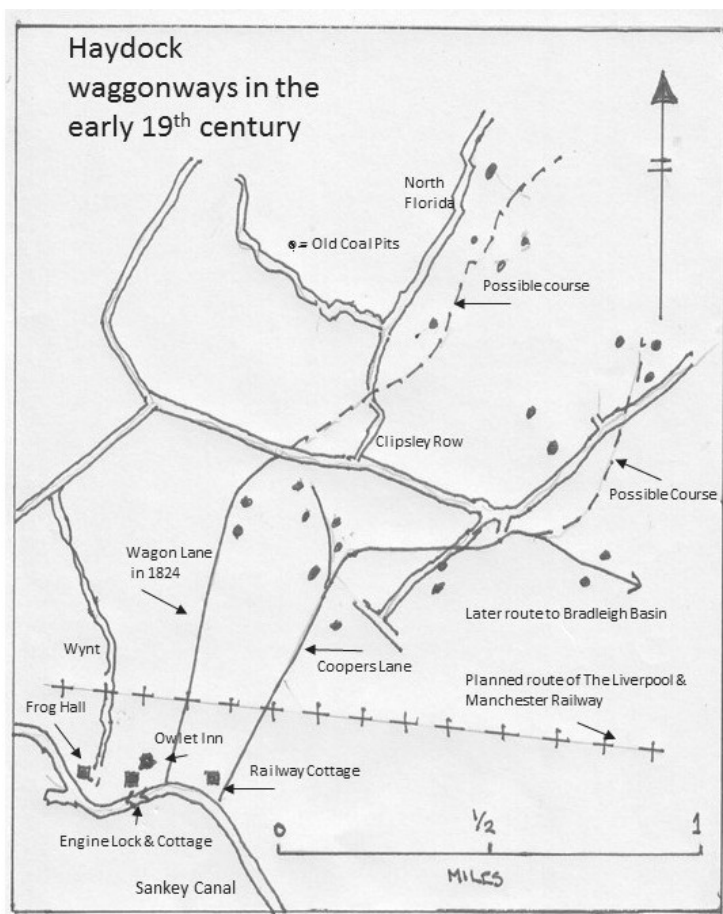
The Sankey adjacent to the proposed development on the site of Varley's Foundry. This was the location of a swing bridge across the canal which carried a railway line. During their renovation of this section of canal St Helens MBC marked the position of the turntable with the brick circle shown. Corporation Street bridge lies in the

## Canal Tramways in Haydock—by Dave Smallshaw

Following on from our earlier look (Vol. 8.5) at the various tramways which brought coal to the canal in Blackbrook and Broad Oak we now turn our attention a little further south to another prominent mining site in the Haydock area.

North of the canal a great deal of the land was owned by the Legh family. Peter Legh had been involved in the mining of coal for some time and there is hard evidence of him been one of the early users of the canal when his mining steward reported back to him in 1755 that he proposed to survey "towards the bottom of Haydock if the navigation goes on. I suppose you will be looking for coles that way".

The subsequent pit sunk near to the navigation, Engine Pit, was plagued with flooding and thus had a short life and meanwhile efforts were turned to finding a better, more suitable site with good supplies of coal to the north of Haydock. Mining returned to the sites adjacent to the canal in the Victorian era when methods to deal with the inherent problems there were solved by more up to date technology.



A glance at the first editions of the Ordnance Survey six inch maps of the area give evidence of the two major waggonways that brought the coal from upper Haydock to the canal. One of the lines terminated just below Engine (or Haydock) lock and the other led to a small basin about 100 yards further south. The former, the site of which is now appropriately called Wag(g)on Lane was still operational in 1824 when plans were laid for the projected Liverpool to Manchester Railway which was originally planned to cross around here, while the

latter line now known as Coopers Lane, was disused. The two waggonway routes are still

much used today now, forming attractive sunken pathways from Haydock to the Sankey Valley Park.

As mentioned above the pits that were situated around the actual village of Haydock arrived at a later period with those clustered just south of the main road of the area probably sprung up in the early 1800s with workshops and rail sidings developing there. The projected course of the first intercity railway fired the Legh family to embrace more modern means of transportation and the waggonways were converted into standard gauge lines which were intended to link in with the premier line when constructed. The line eventually passed further to the south of Haydock and this diversion meant that a whole network of rails evolved in the area with the lines in the centre of the village then being extended by another two miles eastward to Newton-Le-Willows and a link up with the mainline on the level.

These sites also seemed to have been linked to the canal waggonways which once extended as far north as the Florida pit sites, the supply of some of the best and most expensive coal of the St Helens Coalfields.

The development of this network made the wharves at Engine Lock redundant but the canal company had not given up the trade to rail and constructed a new wharf at Bradleigh to provide new coal handling facilities, the rails ending up at the canalside by a rope worked incline. The site of the basin was alongside Muspratt's Alkali premises of 1831 according to early maps of the area.

Now let's look at the development around the area where the two waggonways met the Sankey. This area is south of what was once Haydock Wood and, although quiet and peaceful now, was once a hive of activity in the early 19th century. Just above Haydock (Engine) Lock where two important buildings. The most northerly was Frog Hall on Old Weint Road, which was most likely a small farmhouse and where in latter years traces of garden flowers could be discovered by a hedge on the site of its garden. There doesn't appear to be any pictures of the building but research has found the Winstanly family were there in the 1851 census and at some time it was a pig and poultry smallholding run by the Swift family. A short distance south and behind it lay another small farmstead reached up a short track. This also doubled as a beer house for the workers and went under an early name as the Owlet's Nest inn. Once again there is a distinct lack of information on the building so one must presume that, with the tailing off in the canal coal trade and the increased use of rail transport in this area the house lost its licence in the mid-19th century and the licence subsequently reused when the new Owls Nest pub was built in west End Road. The Taylor family are mentioned as residents on the 1851 census but at what location the pub was then is open to further research.

Engine Lock had its own lock house which in the 1851 census was operated by a William Rowlinson who hailed from Warburton, Cheshire and was at one time occupied by a Mrs Roberts who must have helped the family income by selling cigarettes to the local colliers and canal flatmen and toffees to the children as this lock was once a busy crossing linking Haydock with the Broad Oak area. The cottage was located on the towpath side of the lock but no trace of it can be seen now. This census also mentioned residents at three dwellings called Engine Row in the area and two other under Weint Cottages. Between the two waggonways lay a small settlement delightfully called The Hungry Mountain where in 1851 the large Winstanly family resided. A small building termed Railway Cottage was also situated at the foot of Glovers Lane line but as no record of it appears in



the census we should presume for the present that this was some sort of toll office or counting house. By 1947 all buildings had disappeared save Frog Hall which was still standing according to the 1951 Ordnance Map

In addition to all this towpath activity, directly opposite the Wagon Lane line was another tramway of a later date which discharged coal into the canal just south of the lock and which was the original loading point for the Aston's Green and broad Oak group of pits. I am sure that there is wealth of local history on this small area waiting to be recorded and I am sure the old Owlet Inn and the Lock house have some interesting tales to tell.



Now we have nature retaking the area again as the lines, pits and cottages are all gone. A pleasant stroll of about 2 miles can be enjoyed by parking your car at or alighting your bus at Wagon Lane (*left*) and then walking down it to where the track begins to the canal, diverting to look at Engine lock which has newly been exposed. Try

to locate Old Weint Lane and the site of Frog Hall then retrace your steps south along the canal to the site of the coal wharves and sidings. The railway cottage would be on your left as you enter the sunken trackway of Glovers Lane and look on the left for the remaining stones protecting the wagonway cutting (below). At the pinch gate, just before the houses you can turn left and follow the route of the old railway line to Bradleigh Wharf, which will bring you back to your starting place.



If walking isn't your choice, then here's a good topic to base a research project on!



# Events—by *Colin Greenall*

## **May: Rural Craft Display at Willow Park in Newton-Le-Willows**

Throughout the summer months our sales and display marquee has once again been seen around the north west at various events.

We began at the end of May in Newton-le-Willows (*right*) with the Rural Craft Display organised by the St.Helens Ranger Service. This is always a good event and one which we look forward to. As the first show of the year, it helps us to get back into the swing of getting the sales stand up and running after the winter break. The show this year proved to be as popular as ever, with the public coming along to look at the various crafts that were on display and to enjoy a good day out.



## **June: 1: The Westbrook Big Party at Gulliver’s World, Warrington**

This was an evening event, and an interesting venue with lots of family groups enjoying the attractions of the site, but for us slightly disappointing, mainly due I think to our location.

**June: 2 & 3:** We were out on Saturday 24th June it was the **Armed Forces Day** at Willow Park, followed by **Lymm Transport Rally** the day after. As always this event attracts big crowds and this year in spite of the persistent rain was no exception.

**July: Penketh Carnival** - lovely sunshine and lots of people at this family event showing lots of interest in the canal and what we had on offer in the way of Bric-brac and books.



From the left: Helpers Diane, Richard, Ian and Peter at Penketh Carnival



**August: Newton Town Show** (*right*) a community event with something for everyone, plus Silcocks Fair and lovely sunshine. Again lots of interest in what we are trying to achieve.



**September: Rural Craft Display in Victoria Park, St.Helens**, organised by the St.Helens Ranger Service, with plenty to see - from stone masons, walking-stick makers etc., to birds of prey and ferret racing.

At the end of the month we should have been seen us at the **Vintage Vehicle Rally at Victoria Park ,Widnes**, but, unfortunately, heavy rain rendered the ground waterlogged and the event had to be cancelled, a big disappointment



This year we attended two indoor events, the first being **Halton Heritage Event at the Masonic Hall in Widnes** (*left*) in September. We put on a display of photographs, gave out leaflets and chatted to people about the canal, what it meant to them, and drew out their memories of it in their younger days.

In **October** we were invited to take part in a community day at **Penketh Library**. Amongst the shelves of

books, along with other groups and societies, we put on a display of old pictures and brought out some of our archive material for people to look at.

I'd now like to thank all the people who took time out to help with manning the stall and a special thank you to the ones who helped set up and take down our displays—

**“Thank You”**

## 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.*

### **Paul Mills**

We were saddened to report the death, on 6th September, of Paul Mills, who was, for 20 years, fundraising and project officer for the Shropshire Union Canal Society and five years ago formed the Small Task Team Volunteers working on the Shropshire Union Canal and adjacent waterways.

- SCARS would also like to add their sadness at this news. Paul was a well known and respected champion of canals in the North West and will be hard to replace. Our condolences go to his family and friends.

### **Cheshire Students Join SUMBA**

Joinery students from Reaseheath College have used their building skills to refurbish a small former clay pit office on the banks of the Shropshire Union Canal Middlewich Branch, near Church Minshull in mid Cheshire. In a project organised by Canal & River Trust (CRT) and volunteers from SUMBA (Shropshire Union Middlewich Branch Adopters), the third year students have rescued the dilapidated building by installing a new door, window, roof timbers, tiles and guttering.

SUMBA has obtained a community grant from Cheshire East Council for the building materials, which were transported to site, along with the eight students, in true canal style by the Trust's 72 feet historic workboat 'Malvern'.

The brick hut used to be a manager's office for the Cholmondeston clay pit which was operational from the late 1960s until 2002, providing clay for re-lining the canal. The building forms the focal point of a waterside clearing which has now been turned into an attractive picnic area, thanks to SUMBA's enthusiastic volunteers. Over the coming months they will be working hard to install a new picnic bench, interpretation panels and boat access to the site. The table will be made by 'Men in Sheds' from Crewe, using wood recycled by SUMBA volunteers when they repaired the nearby Brickyard Bridge.

### **WRG Can Move Mountains - Well, Railway Embankments Anyway!**

Volunteers from WRG NW returned to tackle the railway embankment which was blocking the Montgomery Canal at Pant, near Llanymynech, Shropshire. The week-long work party in July has removed an amazing 1114.5 tonnes of material so towpath visitors will no longer have to use the steps to get over it. The embankment was created on the Oswestry-Welshpool line when an old bridge was removed after the canal was closed. The railway itself was closed in 1965 and the bank was left, obstructing the derelict canal.

On previous visits, volunteers cleared trees and other growth in preparation for removing the embankment. This latest achievement now clears the canal between the two abutments of the old railway bridge. It is hoped that the abutments are in good condition and can remain in place. The spoil was removed from the bottom of Rhiew Revel Lane, Pant by lorry to Wood Lane, Ellesmere, so there were an unusually large number of lorry journeys on the minor roads during the week of the work camp - that must have confused the local residents!

Local volunteers from the Welshpool-based Thursday Restoration And Maintenance Project Supporters, known as TRAMPS, have cleared the vegetation which has grown since WRG was on site in February. The Montgomery Canal always attracts interest from across the country and WRG members came from Lancashire, Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Crewe, Wrexham, Milton Keynes and Watford. They were joined by volunteers from the Shropshire Union Canal Society whose regular work site is at Morton where they are working on the lottery-supported restoration to Crickheath.

The next stage of restoration will involve shaping and waterproofing the channel as part of the project to extend the canal from Crickheath to Llanymynech. Reopening the canal to Llanymynech is part of the wider plan to restore the connection to the national waterway network, so that boats from across the country can bring the canal in Llanymynech and Welshpool back to life.

- It would seem the Sankey isn't the only waterway affected by weed.....

### **Pea Soup on the Lancaster Canal**

The summer weeks of sunshine had an interesting side effect on the Lancaster Canal which is being invaded by a green carpet of weed. CRT has begun the task of removing millions of pieces of floating duck weed from the water, which multiplies rapidly in the heat.

While an individual piece of duck weed is no bigger than a ladybird, congregated together they can resemble a thick carpet across the canal. This accumulates litter, which can be problematic for the hundreds of boats and leisure craft on the water. Over 70 tonnes of duck weed per week has been collected by the Trust's teams across the waterways.

The Trust is asking people to get in touch via their website or social media channels with sightings of duck weed. Diane Rollin, ecologist for CRT says: "Duck weed is really noticeable across our canals at the moment. It's been flourishing in the warmer weather and sunshine. The weed is not harmful to people, but dogs and other animals have been known to mistake it for grass and ended up in the water. Significantly, if left to thrive, it can cause problems for other aquatic wildlife by starving it of oxygen and sunlight, so please get in touch if you spot areas along your local river or canal that looks particularly bad."

### **Restoration of Stainton Aqueduct Moves a Step Closer**

CRT has secured initial funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop plans to restore and reopen the Grade II listed Stainton Aqueduct on the Lancaster Canal near Sedgewick, in Cumbria. HLF's initial development funding award of £41,000 will enable the Trust to work alongside the Lancaster Canal Regeneration Partnership on a second stage application to be submitted later this year. If successful, the bid will unlock £1.5m from Heritage Lottery Fund towards a total project value of £2.2m.

The project will fund repairs to the Aqueduct, which was badly damaged during storms Desmond and Eva in December 2015. It will also help to develop other key sites along the Lancaster Canal, such as Hincaster Tunnel and Sedgewick Aqueduct, and promote new educational and volunteering opportunities along the waterway as part of the Partnership's Lancaster Canal Towpath Trail project.

The Grade II listed Aqueduct was built in 1819 and carries the Lancaster Canal over Stainton Beck. Prior to the damage caused during extreme rainfall in the December 2015 storms, the aqueduct was in good condition. Emergency stabilisation works costing £250,000 were completed on-site by CRT in early 2016. However, these were not sufficient to open up the public right of way through the aqueduct tunnel or to enable navigation over the aqueduct.

## **Team Work on the Lancaster Canal**

The Owd Lanky Boaters and CRT have formed a partnership to work on a community conservation restoration project on the Tewifield Locks, near Carnforth, Lancashire. Led by Colin Oden of Owd Lanky Boaters, with support from CRT, talks and planning have been under way for some time to decide the best way to repair and bring back to life the Northern Reaches lock system.

Work got underway in early August with clearing out Lock 8 by-wash in preparation to emptying the lock and pointing and repairing the stonework, before further work can be attempted. Many local firms have pledged their support and all health and safety issues and risk assessments have been overseen by Canal and River Trust (CRT), along with their help supplying tools, safety equipment and life jackets. Around 14 volunteers, split into groups, managed to clear the by-wash, before moving on to further tasks.

Colin said. "I cannot stress too much how helpful CRT staff have been in this unique event. Local landowners have given permission for access where needed, and firms loaning scaffolding and the like don't need asking. It has been touching, and quite emotional, at the response and friendliness"

- Now good news from our local branch of the Inland Waterway' Association (IWA) of which we are a corporate member and keen supporter.....

## **Campaign Festival Wins Living Waterways Award**

Congratulations to our IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch, who won the Living Waterways award for Community and Volunteering at a ceremony held in Birmingham on 27th September. The accolade was awarded for the Branch's organisation of Eldonian Village Canal Festival (IWA's 2016 Campaign Festival) in June 2016. The event celebrated the bi-centenary of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal and aimed to increase the number of boats and encourage investment in this stretch of the Liverpool Link whilst bringing local people to the canal.

Over 80 boats moored along the canal during the Festival weekend, local politicians were taken on a cruise to see the positive impact that improving the canal environment could have for their community, and over 20,000 people attended the festival. Children were able to get afloat on the free canoes provided by CRT whilst families queued to have a ride down the moorings on the free trip boat, funded by the Branch.

Local people got involved, helping with Canal Cleanups to improve the area before the event, pupils from local schools learned about the history of canals and youngsters took part in angling taster sessions with the local angling club.

The Living Waterways Awards are managed by CRT to celebrate the achievements of those who are working together to unlock the benefits of canals and rivers.

Organised by the IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch, the festival was supported by the Eldonian Housing Association, Liverpool Culture and Canal & River Trust.

## **IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch**

Recently, a team of four working on the Cheshire Ring Mooring Ring Project installed a total of 36 mooring rings in one day. 11 rings were added along the Trent & Mersey Canal between Preston Brook Tunnel entrance and the stop lock to assist boaters waiting for the tunnel & operating the lock, and 25 rings were installed north of Ollershaw Lane bridge at Marston. These will benefit boaters visiting Lion Salt Works or stopping at the Salt Barge. As if the workers had not done a hard enough day's work already, grass was also trimmed back where it was growing across the coping stones.



- St Helens North MP, Conor McGinn, joins an important Parliamentary group.....

**New Chairman for All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways**

The All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways has elected John Grogan MP as its new chairman, at its inaugural meeting held following the start of the new Parliament.

Mr Grogan, whose Yorkshire constituency of Keighley has the Leeds & Liverpool Canal running through it, is an experienced chair of All Party Parliamentary groups, and pledged his support for IWA’s Waterway Manifesto during the run up to the general election.

Key issues facing the Group over the coming months include waterway funding, provision of affordable moorings and waterway restoration.

John Grogan MP said “The United Kingdom boasts over 6500 miles of inland waterways. They are important for tourism, the transport of goods and also as a home for many people. I hope to be a vigorous voice in championing the cause.”

Among the Vice Chairman and Officers of the group remains previous Chairman and former Waterway Minister, Richard Benyon MP, along with Lord German, John Cryer MP, Wendy Morton MP, Michael Fabricant MP, Jonathan Lord MP, Conor McGinn MP and Ranil Jayawardena MP.

MPs are aware of the importance their constituents attach to the inland waterways as places to unwind and enjoy recreational activities like boating, angling and other healthy exercising as well as the interest in the historic environment often found there. The APPGW is well placed to ensure interest in these resources is reflected in the attention they get, and that they are not overlooked.

- .....and finally – We even get a mention!

**One step closer to the restoration of the Sankey Canal**

The Sankey Canal, Britain's first industrial canal, has received a major boost with a new partnership being announced between The Sankey Canal Restoration Society, the Canal & River Trust, and St Helens, Warrington and Halton borough councils. The newly-launched Sankey Canal Partnership has pledged its support for the regeneration of the 14 mile Sankey Canal corridor. The man-made waterway was opened in 1757, pre-dating the Bridgewater Canal by four years. It begins in St Helens and runs through Newton-le-Willows, Winwick, Warrington, Great Sankey, (1757 terminus)) and Penketh (1762 terminus) and ends at Spike Island in Widnes (1832 terminus), where it connects into the River Mersey.

The Partnership aims to carry out surveys and consultations in preparation for funding bids which would enable the canal’s restoration to be delivered in phases.



The observant will have noticed that the logo representing our partnership with the IWA on our inside front page has changed. The Association has rebranded itself—the new logo being better suited to the digital age.

Its elements are: The propeller represents the core of the IWA—its Members and Volunteers, driving everything.

The leaf (green): the green corridor waterways provide, supporting wildlife and enhancing our well-being.

The bricks (red): the industrial heritage of the waterways, and the practical effort IWA puts into its structures.

The ripples (blue): the many water-based activities which take place on our waterways.

## Brian Bennett's Album: Part 13

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.



Hulme Lock and cottage, 1979. The story is that the last tenant of the cottage fell ill and had to go into hospital. While there, his home was so badly vandalized because of its remote position, that he could not go back to it. As Brian's pictures show, it hardly needed demolishing at the end.

The view above shows the ruins from across the canal, below the lock, whilst that below shows it from the north. The West Coast Main Line runs beneath the footbridge on the left, with Dorman-Long's steel warehouse in the distance. On the right may be see the platform over the top of the bywash channel, which is mentioned within in the report of SCARS Work Parties on this site.

