

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 8 Number 6
Summer 2016



Fiddlers Ferry Power Station Closure Postponed

Some of the 195m litres of water pumped daily from the Mersey to the loss-making coal-fired power station is diverted after use into the Sankey—some ensures levels are maintained in the Marina at Fiddlers Ferry, and some does the same for the Spike Island reaches. Its planned closure—three of its four turbines were to stop this year—could affect that supply, but a last-minute reprieve in March means at least two turbines will remain in use for a further year. SCARS is keeping an eye on developments—the eventual closure should bring restoration opportunities as the site is reclaimed for future, different uses.

Photograph taken from the middle of the River Mersey during the SCARS visit to the Mersey Gateway site—report inside.

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Founded 1985

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 6: Summer 2016

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Chairman's Report: From Dave Smallshaw

The seasonal lull in restoration projects about this time comes from our planned restricted activity designed to protect and conserve the natural history of the canal corridor. This, however, gives us a chance to direct, in the main, most of our resources to run open days, festivals and rallies and to supplement our revenue reserves to help ensure the restoration process can continue at other times of the year. We have already been out and about with highly successful presences at Willow Park, in Newton, and at the Inland Waterway's Association Campaign Rally at Liverpool. More of these later.

We also ran an open day at Blackbrook and were pleasantly surprised to receive a visit from long standing SCARS member, Harry Arnold MBE and his wife Beryl, fresh from his fact finding mission on the Liverpool waterfront and Warrington waterways. Harry, who contributes to many waterways publications, possesses a wealth of photographs of the canal world in general but, having grown up in the area, actually had the foresight to seize the opportunity to log the Sankey in the years following its closure in 1963. He has readily made his photographs available to us, and has kindly allowed us to use these priceless shots in our various talks and publications over the years. As a very small token of our appreciation of all his support, past and present, to the Society we were able to present them both with something to remind them of us when enjoying 'a cup that cheers' (*Photo on next page*). It was lovely to see them both again and we look forward to Harry's continued support in the future.

In the last month or two we have certainly been busy with our aim of complementing the work of our own work parties with other volunteering sources and you will read in here about

one of the new action days we had recently at Sankey Bridges. We are also looking to tie up with another group of local volunteers at Spike Island by organising a monthly mid-week work party there to cover the Widnes and west Warrington part of the canal. In addition to this we have had further talks with the Canal & River Trust over setting up a local volunteer unit at Blackbrook in the early autumn. We have also recently met up with representatives of a new group of activists in the Newton area who, while primarily interested in wildlife, would also be happy to work alongside us in various projects around the Newton area, the first possibly being the tidying up of the area and the painting of Bradley Bridge. Further talks have also been held in the same area with Newton Anglers and other interested parties on possible future collaboration with restoration projects and social media cooperation as we have recently reactivated our Face book account where we will publish future activities—so keep an eye out on there too for the latest news.

Quite naturally new groups are keen to get moving quickly but thirty years experience has taught SCARS that permissions, regulations and occasionally contrasting priorities can all combine to create frustration and lead to a dwindling of interest and support. SCARS will certainly seek to support these independent groups and offer guidance and help whenever possible. Restoration of any canal is a long and painstaking business and despite all the past frustrations and disappointments the Society continues to adhere to our founding members' aims....to restore the canal to navigation.

It may often be a long and winding route we may have to take to ensure that the canal projects fit into current political and social trends, but you can be certain that we haven't lost sight of our founders' ultimate goal.

Kind Regards

Dave Smallshaw



Harry & Beryl Arnold with their souvenir SCARS mugs

News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

by Colin Greenall

Restoration continues to progress on the Sankey Canal

Work continues on improvements to the canal environment with progress on the bridge at Fiddlers Ferry and the completion of the footpath improvement in the Blackbrook area.

Halton

There are still problems with water supplies at Spike Island and the recent announcement that Fiddlers Ferry Power Station will be closing means that the supply of water to the southern part of the canal will become a matter of concern in the near future. There are also problems with the recently restored locks at Spike Island.

Warrington

Marsh House Lift Bridge

Progress is being made, and at present the completion date is given as early June. On my latest visit to the site the abutments on the north bank were ready, and shuttering is in place on the south bank (*below—the temporary bridge is behind*). The bridge itself is being prefabricated off-site and will be brought in and lowered into position.



St Helens

Footpath improvements:

Work on the footpaths in Sankey Valley Park in the Blackbrook and Haydock area are now complete and much appreciated by both walkers and cyclists. The work along the valley has also brought about the re-emergence of Engine Lock (*Below*), which has for a number of years lain hidden under water after mining subsidence lowered its level from the time the photograph on



the right was taken in the 1960s. This has proved to be a popular taking point with visitors to the area. Many thanks to St Helens Council for the excellent work that is going on to improve the visitor experience for anyone who takes a walk down the valley.



Visit to the Mayor's Parlour:

Earlier this year ten members of SCARS enjoyed the hospitality of the Mayor and Mayoress of St Helens, Councillors Steve & Lynn Glover, on a visit to the Mayor's Parlour and Council Chambers.



The Mayor and Mayoress made us welcome with tea and biscuits, and gave us a talk about the role of the mayor and in the history behind some of the objects in the parlour. To end our visit he took us on a guided tour of the chambers and explained the working of the Cabinet.

EVENTS PROGRAMME 2016

By the time you are reading this we will have begun our season of events which we attend with the SCARS stall and exhibition by visiting the Willow Park Rural Craft Display at Newton-le-Willows, and the IWA Eldonian Village Campaign Festival in Liverpool.

Forthcoming events are listed below. If you're attending any of these, please come and say hello. A reminder, too, of our need for books and bric-a-brac for our stall.

Lymm transport Rally— Sunday 26th June

Scarisbrick Marina Open Day & Boat Rally— Saturday 9th & Sunday 10th July

Newton Town Show— Saturday 6th August

Victoria Park Vintage Rally, Widnes— Friday 23rd—Sunday 25th August

CUSTOM-MADE FOR THE JOB

The ‘Linking the Locks ‘ project supported by SCARS, working with both the Halton and Warrington Councils, has been very successful, and has led to an increase of interest in the Sankey’s lower reaches and on the canal’s restoration prospects. It has also provided job opportunities for many young people.

Part of the funding from the Coastal Communities Fund was allocated to developing more volunteering opportunities in the area, and we have reported before on the tremendous work done by the Prince’s Trust and the Duke of Edinburgh’s teams earlier this year.

One of the contacts we made during this project was with Cheshire Connect, a registered charity which connects businesses with the community. Through them that we were introduced to personnel from HM Revenue & Customs who expressed a keenness to help us in a suitable project on the Sankey Canal.

Although it is now a long time since I started my working life as a uniformed Customs Officer at Liverpool Docks, my interest was naturally aroused when I discovered that the team were actually involved in enforcement and were therefore very keen to play a low key role at all times...no names please!

There have been a lot of changes in the various departments since my day, and this continues to happen as technology and working methods merge, and often force reorganisation and relocation. In this case the section had gone through the mill and were now seeking to use a day away from the desk to meet and get to know new colleagues in a non-office situation, with the emphasis on the littlest possible ‘shop talk’ possible.

It was decided that Sankey Bridges would provide a conveniently central worksite, so the task was arranged for there. The work was to clear and tidy the canal wall area by the car park there, and an assault was planned at the access to the old relief bridge and the wharf wall nearby. The area last received the loving attention of SCARS around fifteen years ago, so the work ahead was daunting. However, about 20 volunteers had expressed a willingness to get stuck in, and the date was fixed.

I was ably assisted by Ian Hornby on the day. He went over to Spike Island to fetch tools from our container there, while I brought tools from our Blackbrook container. We were blessed with cool but dry weather, as twenty suitably-clad souls listened to a brief talk on the canal - followed by a full health and safety briefing. Then they began work on the car park, where their work soon made a visible difference (*right*).





After the car park, some of the team branched off to start to clear the undergrowth on the offside and by lunchtime we were well into clearing a path through to the old bridge (left). It was good, then, to see the old Customs' spirit lives on down the years, when a goodly number of the crew decamped to the Sloop Inn for respite. The pub doesn't do food but kindly let them bring in their lunches whilst they got stuck into a well

earned drink...so thanks to the Sloop for being such good hosts to our volunteers – I'll be in myself sometime soon as I learned the beer was pretty good in there!

Work continued after lunch, until ominous clouds brought an end to a full day's fruitful work, and the volunteers started heading off home to their differing areas. The work put in was tremendous and has made a significant contribution to our aim to bring this section of the waterway back to life and act as a gateway to the 'Linking the Locks' project.



The area into which the bridge is swung when opened was cleared of rank vegetation

Our grateful thanks go to the volunteers for their efforts. At a post project briefing when I presented certificates of appreciation to the team, I was told that the day had been a great success, and that some expressed an interest in doing more towards enhancing this site at some future date. Aching limbs did not prevent a good time being had by all! We certainly hope to be able to work with the Department again...and this time we'll have more wheelbarrows.... but, as before, no advance publicity!

I Walk the Line

By Dave Smallshaw

There has been so much development along the Sankey in the last couple of years that I thought our members might appreciate seeing the current state of the canal's towpath and its surrounding areas. Although we don't have a navigable waterway, we are exceedingly fortunate in having the benefit of an uninterrupted walk along the entire length of the canal to enjoy.

Our local authorities have seen central funding diminish in recent years, but every so often schemes as the Local Sustainable Transport Fund arrives on the scene and the opportunity to renew pathways has arisen. Basically the fund provides for new initiatives across the country that will tackle traffic congestion while making it easier, safer, and cheaper for people to cycle, walk or take the bus to work or play in a more pleasant, healthy way. It is intended to link communities together and encourage use of these green highways as a conduit for more exercise and, consequently, a healthier travel experience. Our three local councils have taken full advantage of this funding—and the Sankey's line through the Sankey Valley has provided an excellent basis to implement such a policy. It must, however, be pointed out that this largesse from central government funds is supplemented to a great extent by the local council funding – credit where credit's due! The following notes record progress so far.

If we start from the Spike Island end nothing has been done on the towpath in Halton for some time. This is mainly because the construction of the Mersey Gateway bridge has entailed closure of the towpath from Carter House with the resultant non-usage in the fenced off area and has also disrupted any notion of pathway improvements. However, a lot of detail in the future plans of the area aims restore the site fully and we are promised not only a new moveable bridge here, but a fully reinstated path capable of handling the traffic of the trans-Pennine cycleway as well as the walker's needs.

Good work was certainly done within the borough when Carter House Bridge was rebuilt and access to the Widnes Wharf area and the wildlife viewpoint by the future flower some years back.

Crossing the borough boundary at the culvert by Johnson's Lane a new wide pathway has been constructed in the last year or so which opens out a stretch of canal from here to Sankey Bridges— where the Sustrans trail leaves the canal towpath and heads along the Mersey. Improvement of the particular length by the power station is particularly welcome as the high reeded section of the waterway made the path seem rather remote and thus a little menacing to some walkers. As the towpath heads eastwards and northwards we unfortunately still have to look at the ugly steel railings put up some years ago to deter sitting on a perceived unsafe bank. This continues to give a poor impression to travellers especially being on a national cycle route, but it also effectively shuts the waterway off from everyone, hindering maintenance, recreation and possibly saving lives should a young intrepid trespassing sailor get into difficulties.

The path northwards from Sankey Bridges forms part of the Sankey Valley Park with the towpath temporarily closed (for many years now!) just north of Sankey Way and access to which is by a high pedestrian overpass which poses the question whether it would have been as cheap to ensure adequate height for canal and towpath when the road was first constructed!

The pathways are adequately surfaced throughout the parkland area until the Bewsey lock area where the surface dwindles to a track as we approach Hulme lock. The path, which can be muddy after heavy rain, continues in this form past the dry dock, boat house and canal offices at Winwick, and under the M62, where it meets the bridle-way passing Winwick lock on its way to Alder Lane. Plans are afoot by Warrington Council to upgrade this section soon so hopefully we will be able to update this article shortly as tree clearance has already started on this stretch, as reported in the last issue of Cuttings.



The next section of revitalised towpath starts here and a fine and wide metalled pathway leads all the way to the local authority boundary at Newton Brook culvert.

(Above—the view north from Alder Lane bridge)

The good work continues into St Helens land as a recent scheme to deal with both canal bank erosion and path upgrade has proved a highly successful project. Here the path switches from tarmac back to compacted grit surface but this highly effective surface leads the traveller under the famous railway viaduct to its current end at Newton Common Lock site where the area has been landscaped. I should have said ‘will’ lead the traveller as the path is still blocked for safety reasons here because of the encroachment of illegal fly tipping. This hopefully temporary obstruction does not take away the superb work done here by the council in exposing not only the grade 1 listed structure of the viaduct but it also shows up the long vanished outline of the canal in the rainwater settling pools and is a credit to planners and workers alike.

The towpath from Newton Common Lock northwards is obscured as it bends through woodland until resuming its normal course at Penkford Bridge. The path is pretty boggy here in poor weather and the whole area around the bridge needs bringing back to life again. In years past this was a favourite work party location for our restoration crew but vandalism and pressures on time elsewhere have left the area back in the clutches of

Mother Nature. Perhaps revitalisation of this little stretch may stimulate a new look at recreating a pleasant leisure spot here again. The trackway north of here faithfully follows, for the most part, the line of the original tow-path along the valley towards St Helens centre. The wildlife havens created by the Havannah Colliery pit lodge herald the start of the next stretch of improvement where a wide pathway constructed in late spring last year (*right*) was supplemented by banking protection to the old lodge walls giving the area a very attractive air.



A short distance ahead brings us to

Waggon Lane which, as its name suggests, brought coal down from Haydock mines on a tramway to the canal just south of the now almost vanished Engine Lock. Work on this stretch of the jig saw has just commenced and despite appalling weather the necessary widening and surface treatment are now in place for the next stage. Here the pathway has had to leave the towpath as it is too narrow to accommodate safe cycling (*below*).



The new line takes the higher route past a pinch point at the Callans Bridge site to arrive at the head of the Old Double Locks on the Blackbrook or offside of the canal.

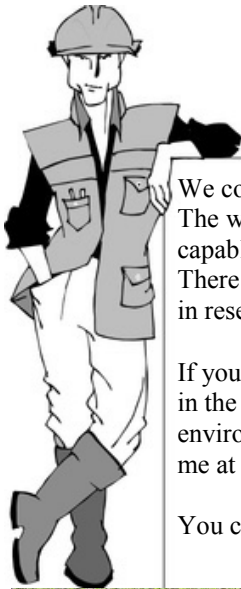
Further work is apparently planned to link the short stretch here with the good routes existing in the Stanley Bank area.

The other branch veers off to the left over the newly installed footbridge over the head of the lock and via a series of paths and pavements through to the Parr Hall area. A major problem exists at the foot of the New

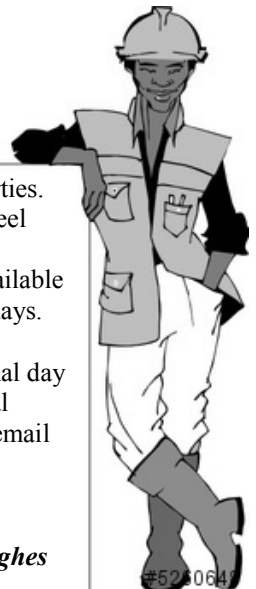
12 Double Locks, particularly in heavy weather, as the silting up of the canal and the Rainford

Brook ensure the waters combine to submerge the footpaths here. SCARS work parties have recently cleared up the area around the lock but some serious work needs to be done at the foot of the lock and in the brook to overcome this. There is no point looking to renew footpaths if they are subject to frequent inundation, so corrective methods need to be taken here before the towpath walk can be recommended into the town centre.

All in all it's a pretty happy situation we find ourselves in as regards to the state of the towpath. Some people are always quick to voice the idea that upgrades are an 'open sesame' for irresponsible motor bilkers, potential Bradley Wiggins racers, or that improved access encourages vandals and miscreants to create havoc in our country areas. Increased access also means increased usage and the very fact that more people are attracted to the waterside walk is included in our aims to heighten the canal's profile locally and nationally and we must warmly applaud our local authorities for the initiatives they have undertaken in improving these amenities for all.



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

You can be assured of a warm welcome!

John Hughes



Ian Hornby getting down to some serious scrub-clearance work at Sankey Bridges— with, of course, the best equipment SCARS can buy.

Sign up as a volunteer and you, too, could soon be wielding these classic waterway restoration tools.

Report From Our Work Party

By John Hughes

On a lovely, sunny day in **March** we returned to the **New Double Locks** to continue the work begun there during our Winter programme. This time we concentrated on the bottom lock chamber. This had become badly affected by the encroachment of side vegetation that had taken hold on the two inner ledges, and the job was really time consuming due to the narrow ledges and the safety aspect. Rope harnesses were used on this occasion for the task, the ropes being threaded around fixed points, in this case, some handy, stout trees, and controlled by two banksmen. It took some time, but with care and a good deal of effort the area was finally cleared. The rest of the workers, saved from dangling off the end of ropes, concentrated on clearing the sediment brought on by the winter floods which badly affected the stretch of the towpath at the bend by the foot of the locks. We were very grateful to the management of a neighbouring warehouse, who kindly allowed us very convenient parking access on their premises. This not only helped us transport our tools nearer to the work site, but also enabled us to get some dinner without wasting too much time in walking back to our cars which would normally be some distance away.

In **April** we were once again fortunate with the weather as we worked a bit downstream, on the site of the towpath beyond Redgate Bridge on Park Road, St Helens. Just to the north of where the sluice empties the waters of the canal into the Sankey Brook, the canal veered sharply to the East. The channel is now infilled, but some of the canal wall is visible by the car washing plant beside the road. Just before the bend and the sluice, the odd topside coping stone has occasionally been spotted among the undergrowth so the job was to try to clear the top and side of the waterway bank to see if there is a continuous length of copings. The result was a great success with a mix of sandstone original and concrete refurbishment work uncovered.

The attendant footpath was also cleared out, and its line reinstated to create a really good image and show that the canal was still alive under the undergrowth. The full length was paced out at and amounted to six cricket wicket lengths and three paces. If you are unsure what this amounts to then we might well run a competition in the next issue, the prize – a bit of rope dangling! All in all this days work proved very worthwhile and was a very good job of uncovering these features which keep the canal and SCARS well in the public eye.

The **May** work party date was run in conjunction with an open day heritage display at the Blackbrook Visitor Centre. Accordingly, we chose a nearby site to work on—the **Old Double Lock**. This area had recently been improved by substantial clearance work being undertaken by the contractors engaged in the construction of the new footbridge over the lock, and improving the canal corridor cycle/pathway. Their work just needed finishing off a bit—so our small team cut back and cleared more vegetation above the top chamber of the lock (*top right*). We then turned our attention on the locks themselves where we cleared the cascaded chambers of various bits of greenery, and rubbish that had been washed down in the winter's flood waters or thrown in by unconcerned visitors (*bottom right*). Once again the weather smiled on our endeavours and with yet more sun on our backs it was thanks again to my colleagues on the work parties for all their efforts.

P.S. These three sites are now connected by the upgraded tow path and are well worth a stroll on a nice day...so enjoy.

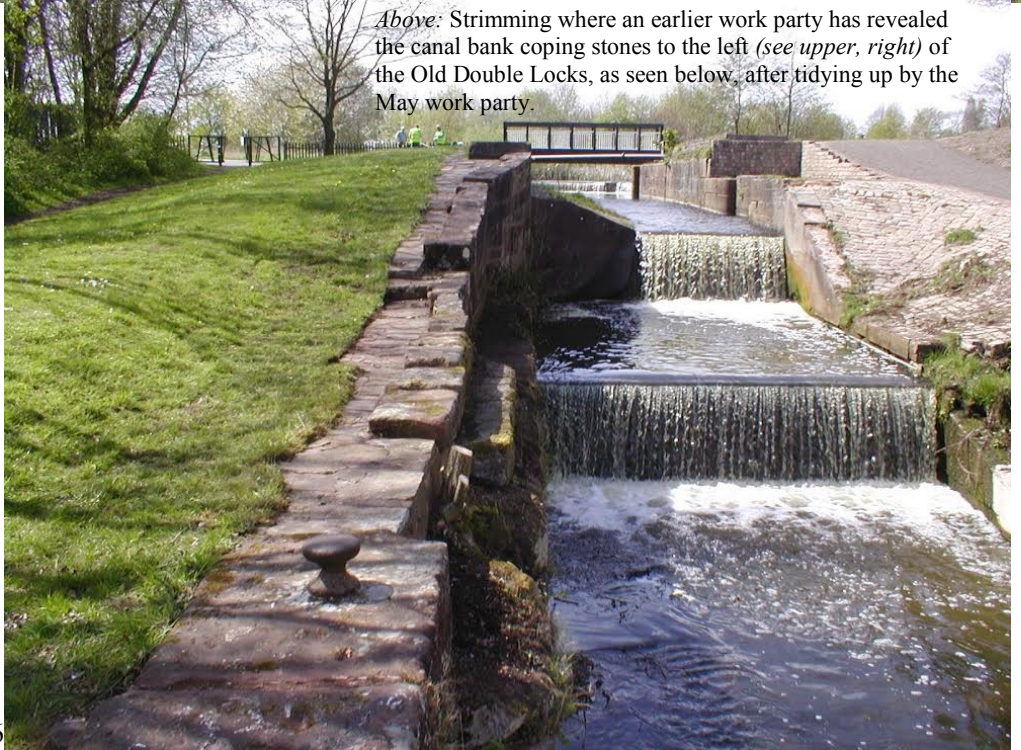


Before and After views taken from different directions, of the very visible results of the work party's efforts above Regate Bridge, off Park Lane in April.





Above: Strimming where an earlier work party has revealed the canal bank coping stones to the left (*see upper, right*) of the Old Double Locks, as seen below, after tidying up by the May work party.





A bedraggled, weary—but happy crew at the end of their stint at the New Double Locks





SCARS Visits the Mersey Gateway Bridge

Twelve members of SCARS recently enjoyed a visit to the site of the new crossing. The group assembled at Forward Point, the headquarters of the bridge contractor Merseylink, where we were kitted out in Personal Protection Equipment and then given an introduction to the project by Jim Cross one of the technical team. We then boarded a minibus and were taken to the site, stopping off at various points to have some of the ingenious equipment explained to us and then being taken out across the river on the trestle bridge (*right*) to get a close up view of the central pylons and to be told of all the techniques involved in the construction of this magnificent piece of civil engineering.



We were informed that the work on the crossing is progressing well, as the MSS (Moveable Scaffold System) moves slowly across the marshes toward the river from the north (*seen here when crossing the Sankey*) towards the North pylon. To speed the project along, a second MSS is on order from China, and will shortly arrive to be assembled

on the Runcorn side to build out toward the river (South pylon). From these two pylons and the central pylon, construction will then move out in either direction to bridge the gap.

Left: The MSS (*above and right*) has built the centre section of roadway—this self-supporting gantry will now travel along it, the outer sections will be built from it as it goes.



Frozen!

No, not the children's stories but the Sankey Canal. The major threats to canal transport were lack of water in drought conditions and freezing temperatures in winter. We continue our series of articles gleaned from archive newspapers by long-standing Society member Judith Hogg with an item on the latter.

On January 31st 1879 the **London Morning Post** published an article concerning a tragic accident on the Sankey which is reported below verbatim.

On Wednesday a fatal accident occurred on the canal near Sankey. Four young men had skated on the canal from Earlestown to Warrington, and were about to return when the ice gave way, three of them being precipitated into the water. One of the three, Henry Pilling, succeeded in getting out of the water but the other two, Thomas Levers, aged 20, and Jake Pilling, aged 19, were drowned.

It seems that the weather at the time was very severe as the article goes on to describe two other ice collapses further north— one gentleman from Birkenhead went through the ice whilst skating near Arnside, whilst two other men from Bowness were similarly drowned when the ice broke beneath their skates on Lake Windermere.

On 1st February 1879 **The North Wales Chronical** recorded the same event: **TWO LIVES LOST AT WARRINGTON.** On Wednesday afternoon a fatal ice accident occurred on the canal near Sankey. Four young men had skated on the canal from Earlestown to Warrington and were about to return, when, within a short distance of Sankey Bridge, the ice gave way: three of them being precipitated in the water, the fourth being some distance away at the time. One of the three, named Henry Pilling, succeeded in getting out of the water but the other two named Thomas Levers, aged twenty, and John Pilling, aged nineteen were drowned. Both resided in Lawrence Street, Earlestown. The bodies got under the ice and were not recovered for an hour after the accident occurred. From the similarities in the phraseology both articles seem to have been written by the same journalist who may have worked for a newspaper syndicate or sent of his work to a variety of newspapers in the hope that some of them might wish to publish. Was such an accident a rarity since it was felt to be newsworthy? If the freezing conditions affected Lancashire and the Lake District probably the whole of the North of England was suffering similar weather, causing many accidents on the ice. It is hoped that the majority of these would have been less severe and not resulted in fatalities.

A past event it may be, but such may well happen again unless people learn from the mistakes of others. Although much of the Sankey is de-watered, there are sufficient lengths which remain in water and so are potential hazards for the unwary. We should be on our guard.

Right: The earliest photograph we have of Sankey Bridges was taken by local watercolour artist Oswald Garside, in about 1890—so the canal would have looked very like this at the time of this tragedy. We are looking towards Earlestown, from the bridge itself. The hapless skaters may have made their turn for home by barges moored like this—and the ice may have been unstable around their hulls as they were shifted by the wind, or by loading or unloading of their cargoes.



Another Waterway Revival in Warrington

By Dave Smallshaw

In November local residents formed a new organisation with the aim of conserving and enhancing a section of the old Mersey and Irwell Navigation in Warrington. Woolston New Cut was one of the oldest parts of the old navigation to survive the building of the Manchester Ship Canal, and remained navigable until the last river craft left its locks in the 1950s. The group intend to oversee the area of the old canalised short cut across a large bend in the Mersey which contains inland lakes, water meadows and an important nature conservancy site.

I was delighted to accept an invitation from them on behalf of SCARS to give a talk on our activities and whilst doing so, passed on a few tips from our own experiences, on how they might approach their aims of caring for this small but important piece in the jigsaw of waterways in this area.

I was very impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment not only in conserving the existing natural beauty of the area but also in their determination in looking at ways to bring the history of the waterway and its users more to the forefront and to unearth and display whatever artefacts remain of the cut. Various work parties have been undertaken already, photographic and painting competitions planned and a new pamphlet has been drawn up with the help of Warrington Borough Council to highlight the Ecological trail which can now be downloaded from the web through the link below.

It all began in the latter years of the 17th century when Warrington traders attempted to clear up stretches of the River Mersey in an attempt to gain more access to the estuarial waters and their export destination at Liverpool quays. Traders also later looked eastwards to the booming engineering centre at Manchester. The issue was taken a step further when the celebrated Liverpool Dock Engineer Thomas Steers was commissioned to make a survey of the creation of a navigation along the upper Mersey waters. Nothing really became of the initiative until 1721 when Parliament granted the necessary powers and building commenced in 1724. from Warrington to Salford.

Progress was slow, as the winding river moved slowly and the constantly moving banks of river silt caused many problems — still an issue for navigation today. The remedial works soaked up a great deal of money, but the navigation was up and running to a fashion by about 1736

In the opposite direction, improving access to the Mersey estuary was still a slow process, but over the years other schemes sped up the movement of traffic. In 1803 the Runcorn and Latchford Canal was opened, built to avoid the navigational hazards of the river by creating a controlled link between Warrington and Runcorn Gap. Other improvements in the original navigation included the creation of a lock and weir at Howley in Warrington and the construction of firstly, Woolston Old Cut in 1755, and a further improvement in 1821 which replaced the old Woolston cut and provided a navigation to remove two more loops in the river with a lock at the Paddington end and to raise the waterway by nearly four feet to a further lock upstream at Woolston with the new cut of about 3 kilometres in length.

After the close of the navigation in the 1950s the waterway still provided water by a wooden aqueduct to the Black Bear Canal which took navigation to below the Howley Weir and into the Ship Canal until disuse in the 1960s and subsequent infilling in the 1980s to create a linear park.. The land, which was owned and used for silt deposition by

the Ship Canal Company, was allowed to largely fall into dereliction, and was eventually gifted to Warrington Borough Council in the 1990s on condition it was managed as a nature reserve.

The Council has certainly worked well towards this aim and Woolton Eyes and the accompanying canal can certainly today provide the visitor with a wealth of opportunities for viewing local wildlife through a series of interconnecting pathways of which the New Cut is an integral part.

In 2002 a long clear up project started with a three year survey on the contamination issues remaining after long periods of industrialization. The recommendations revealed that the land could be effectively conserved for recreational purposes and wildlife propagation. Funding obtained on the back of this research has enabled further steps in enhancing the area, establishment of new reed beds, revealing part of the waterway imprint and creation of new walkways. The accompanying photographs show the results of this work. Funding packages are limited these days but the timely intervention of this new New Cut Group will greatly assist in the small but essential working parties that regularly litter-pick, tidy the pathways, lop down overhanging branches and retrieve forgotten remnants of a navigable waterway from the clutches of Mother Nature. We wish them well in their venture and SCARS will support them as best we can in establishing themselves as an important contributor to the health and well being of our proud heritage of waterways in the North West.

So it's well worth a visit.....Oh, and while you are there, ask the locals about the faithful navigation company servant, "Old Billy"

Learn more at: https://www.warrington.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/8007/new_cut_heritage_and_ecology_trail.pdf



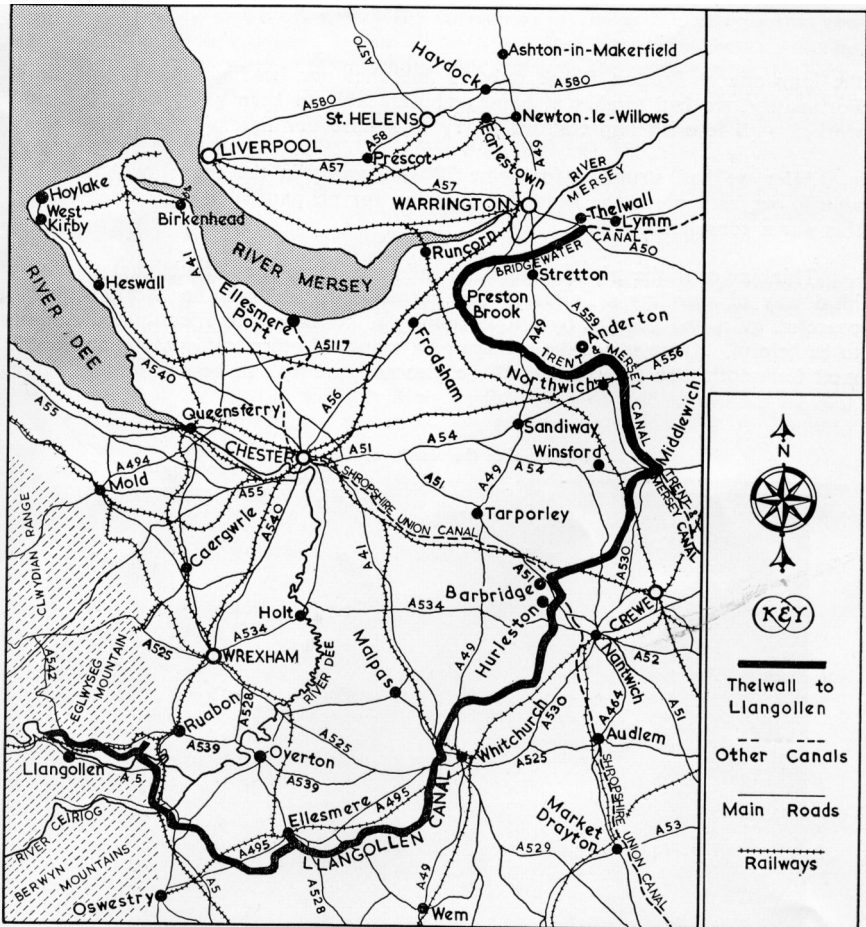


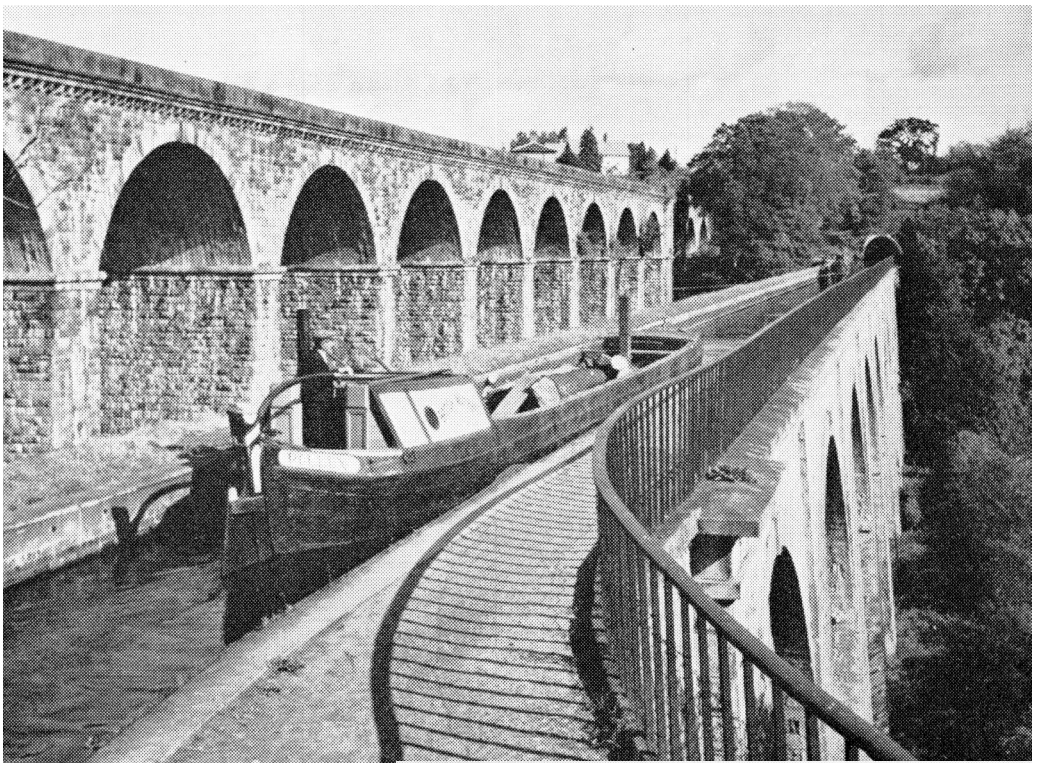
A trip on the Water

The days of the paternalistic company offering life-long employment are long gone, but many St Helenians will recall examples such as Pilkington's and The Vulcan works at Earlestown. The latter produced its own in-house magazine, appropriately named the Vulcan. Volume 4 number 6 was the Summer edition of 1958 - price 3d—or was it free to employees?

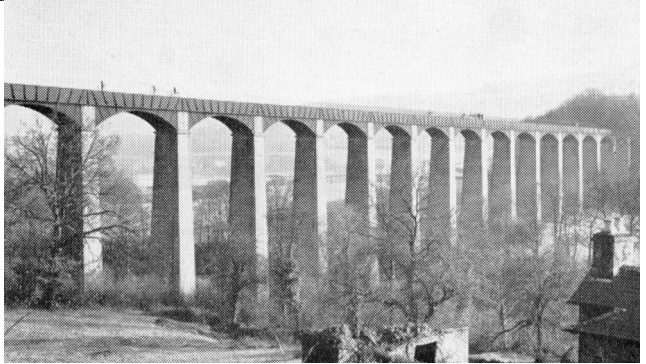
This issue contained nearly 30 items, accompanied by monochrome photographs, addressing subjects ranging from the Annual Staff Dinner and the Horticultural Society to the Theatre Group, Links with the past and Nature Corner, not forgetting the Engineering Society and proud reports on the development of the Deltic diesel engine.

One article was by a certain VS Mullen, which was a follow-up to one published in the previous, Spring issue. It described a boat trip taken by a group of company employees on a vessel named 'Gleam' from Thelwall to Llangollen (*Map, below*). The first part of the voyage having been previously described, this instalment commenced on the Tuesday with an 11-mile trip via two locks to reach the Chirk Aqueduct (*right*), a Thomas Telford construction. A short stretch through the Chirk Tunnel (459 yards) was followed by a mile or so to the shorter tunnel at Whitehouses (191 yards)





Shortly afterwards came that marvel of the waterways, the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct (*right*), one of Telford's crowning achievements. Crossing this canal in the sky affords fascinating views of the Dee Valley, but whilst the tow path walker is secure behind the protective railings there is nothing between the boater and the valley floor, 121 feet below.



Instead of turning left to Llangollen, only four miles distant, the Gleam forged ahead along the disused Ruabon branch only to be halted by the stern rope fouling the propeller and, soon after, by a succession of shallows and weed blankets which slowed progress considerably. Moorings were reached in Llangollen late on, having had to resort to using the vessel's headlamp in the gathering dusk. Here the party retired to its hotel for the night, a pre-arranged contrast to its usual night time set-up. The choice of hotels proved to be unfortunate in that it was considered more appropriate for it to have displayed a sign "Visitors not welcome", despite the recommendations of a certain motor-ing organisation.

Thursday morning dawned bright and sunny for the return trip of 79 miles to commence with a fairly straight forward run to Ellesmere where an overnight stay at the Black Lion was a major

improvement to their previous experience. Again shallow and weeds were encountered but easily dealt with. An early start in Friday allowed progress to Markby via Grindley Brook Locks. Negotiating this staircase was as difficult as it had been on the outward trip since “when each chamber was emptied there was insufficient water to allow the boat to pass over the lock cill into the next chamber so more water had to be re-admitted, slowing down the journey considerably.”

Onward to Marbury, a small village of black and white buildings, a church, an inn and a telephone box, to which an electricity supply had only recently been connected and whose local bus service was timetabled as so many per week rather than per day.

An early start on the Saturday morning meant that the Gleam had cleared Hurlstone Locks by mid afternoon, after further groundings in shallows necessitated a crew member descending into the canal to give extra impetus to the hauliers on the bank.

Stores were replenished at Barbridge after which rapid progress was made to a point outside Middlewich and on the following morning, Sunday, passage was made through Middlewich Locks which had been left full and were therefore much more straight forward to operate. At Preston Brook tunnel the Gleam’s headlight failed so company members gathered at the prow with their torches until the vessel’s light mysteriously came on again, just before the tunnel exit. The target for the day was Thelwall which they reached in the late afternoon.

VS Mullen then reflected upon the ‘other world’, peaceful and traffic-free lifestyle on the waterways despite the mishaps experienced. He finished with the hope that “there will no longer be heard cries to abandon the canals and that British Waterways will develop these lovely assets by providing a drop more water, less weed and a little more grease on the lock gears”.

As we now know, the Llangollen Canal has been fully restored to create one of the country’s foremost waterways whilst BW has gone, replaced by the Canal and River Trust. The latter seems to be much more receptive to VS Mullen’s aspirations and it is hoped that other waterways will be similarly restored. The question lingers as to why the group went so far afield when they had a navigable canal on their doorstep. Admittedly it was not as picturesque and the journey would have been shorter. In addition neither traditional narrow boats or wide boats had entered the Sankey until over 60 years later so perhaps the logistics of obtaining a suitable vessel would have been difficult. This was however an interesting glimpse into the past showing how, despite the passage of the years, some things never change.

.....

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.
-

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.

Campaign Launched to Replace Historic Mileposts - Leeds & Liverpool Canal Bicentenary (1816-2016)

The Leeds & Liverpool Canal Bicentenary this year is being marked by the Canal & River Trust with a major fundraising appeal to restore or replace missing mileposts along the waterway's 127 mile route. The charity hopes the 'Every Mile Counts' appeal will encourage dozens of local groups and individuals to adopt their local stretch of canal and its mile marker. The Trust is looking for sponsors to donate up to £200 to restore each milepost and volunteer work parties to help restore damaged or corroded mile posts. The project is backed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, whose grant of £36,600 has supported the appointment of a new project officer, the fabrication of 40 new mile posts and a programme of activities, heritage events and art workshops for local residents.

A recent survey of the trans-Pennine canal has revealed that about a third of the original 127 mile posts are missing or severely damaged, 89 need re-painting and around 75 need new number plates fixing to them. This includes eight missing posts on the Yorkshire side of the canal, a 35-mile stretch between Gargrave and Leeds. Although the canal is 200 years old, the original cast iron mile markers date back to the 1890s. They were installed in response to legislation introduced to regulate canal freight tolls - the Railway and Canal Rates, Tolls and Charges Order of 1893. This prompted the whole of the canal to be re-surveyed and new mileposts, along with half and quarter mileposts, installed along the towpaths.

.....and on the Sankey we've only got one left!

Waterway Recovery Group clears the way for Grantham Canal Restoration

Over 15 volunteers from WRG's Forestry team, several trained in use of chainsaws, helped Grantham Canal Society clear large trees from around Lock 14 in February last. This work will allow other volunteers to set up and establish the site compound, ready for restoration work to start once Lock 15 has been rebuilt.

This work is part of the larger Grantham Canal Heritage Initiative funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. WRG is also running 4 week-long canal camps this summer helping restore Lock 15.

The Grantham Canal is 33 miles long with 18 locks and over 60 bridges. Building started in 1793 and took four years to complete. The canal not only contributed to the prosperity of the area by encouraging trade but also brought a considerable amount of skill to the area. Once the canal was completed the builders either settled nearby or moved to the next project.

Numerous hours of work have already been spent on restoring one of Jessop's locks back to



L&L Canal Society Chair Mike Clarke (left) has published a revised edition of his History of the Canal to coincide with the bicentenary

its former glory. The lock concerned is Woolsthorpe Middle Lock, so named as it's the middle lock in the Woolsthorpe Flight of seven. This will be the sixth lock to be restored on the canal and is being funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, CRT and the Grantham Canal Society. Apart from missing both the top and bottom gates the lock walls were leaning inward and it was obvious that a significant amount of restoration work was necessary. Since July 2015, when the compound was erected and site hut installed, a team of volunteers has been on site 5 days a week under the supervision of a qualified CRT site engineer. The compound area, including a small copse of trees, had previously been cleared and prepared by a team of WRG personnel, plus a large group of Grantham Canal Society volunteers.

Canal & River Trust moves its North West office in Wigan

The Canal & River Trust has relocated its North West office to Trencherfield Mill. The canal-side former cotton spinning mill, dates back to 1907 and is Grade II listed. More recently it has been converted to a mix of office space and homes.

The new address is: Trencherfield Mill, Heritage Way, Wigan, WN3 4BN. Other contact details remain the same:

Telephone: 0303 040 4040, email: enquiries.northwest@canalrivertrust.org.uk,

Update on Stainton Aqueduct

Work has begun to stabilise Stainton Aqueduct on the "Northern Reaches" of the Lancaster Canal in Cumbria, after flooding over the Christmas period left the structure close to collapse. Contractors working with CRT will begin to secure the aqueduct's damaged wall that has caused its arch to crack. A more permanent dam to protect the canal pound will also be installed. Costing over £250,000 the works are part of a multi-million programme of emergency works needed as a result of the flooding.

Vale Royal Swing Bridge Removed for Major Makeover

A 150-year-old swing foot bridge over Vale Royal Locks on the River Weaver in Cheshire is to get a new lease of life – thanks to a major renovation project. CRT has removed the bridge and transported it on a low loader to Yorkshire for major repair and restoration works. In place of the Grade 2- listed, metal swing bridge will be a temporary footbridge, allowing walkers to continue to cross the locks as part of a popular river walk, just south of the landmark A556 Blue Bridge, near Northwich.

The project has been funded jointly by CRT and the National Lottery's Heritage Lottery Fund through The Saltscape Landscape Partnership.

40 Years of the National Waterways Museum

2016 marks the 40th anniversary of the opening of the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port in 1976 (*right*), and to commemorate this important milestone for the UK's inland waterways, the museum is hosting a weekend of celebratory activities on 2nd to 3rd July.

The anniversary weekend will be full of things to see and do, including the opening of its new 'Window on the World' experience, performances from the Museum's artist in residence and the one-off chance to venture into the canal lock at the museum which will be specially drained for the replacement of two hand crafted oak lock gates.

Window on the World has been made possible thanks to generous grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Wolfson Foundation



and AIM Biffa. It will showcase why Ellesmere Port was a 'window on the world' with the opening of the Port's historic slipway, which was used for boat building and restoration between the 1840s and the 1920s. The Leeds and Liverpool short boat George is being rebuilt, and a grant of over £50,000 from the Wolfson Foundation has funded the preservation of the Mersey flat Mossdale.

Returning for the anniversary weekend will be Francesca Millican-Slater with her sell out performance of 'Walking the Shroppie', devised during Francesca's ten month period as Leverhulme Artist in Residence at the National Waterways Museum. There will also be the opportunity to take a look into the work CRT does to keep the canals and rivers open as work is carried out to replace the locks gates on the Shropshire Union Canal within the grounds of the museum.

For more details on the weekend, opening times and prices please visit the CRT National Waterways Museum website, from which our picture was taken..

IWA grant boosts work on Shrewsbury & Newport Canal

Restoration of the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals has been given a boost by a grant of £3000 from The Inland Waterways Association to Norbury to Newport Canal Restoration Community Interest Company (NTNCR), to facilitate the work being carried out on the Newport Branch of the canal. The grant money has been allocated to materials and equipment used by volunteers at the canal camps run by IWA's Waterway Recovery Group, at Forton, between Norbury and Newport in Shropshire.

Speaking at the annual Norbury Canal Festival, held at the junction where the Newport Branch joined what is now the Shropshire Union Main Line, Bernie Jones from the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust, which works very closely with NTNCR said: "We are very grateful for the continued support of IWA. Without this vital assistance it would be very difficult for us to fund the two WRG camps we have planned this year. The money will largely be used for plant hire and to cover material costs to enable us to re-water the section of our canal at Forton."

And finally.....not everyone wants canal restoration.....

Opposition to Canal in Daventry

Protesters marched through Daventry town centre on Saturday 16th April to voice their opposition to plans to build a canal arm into the town. Organised by members of the local Labour Party, the protest met in Bowen Square before heading down Sheaf Street and Brook Street to end by the Eastern Way playing field. The leader of the Labour opposition group on Daventry District Council addressed the march in Bowen Square. She said: "They talk about a new development in town, but we want the town to be revitalised. Little shops are talking to me – they say they're at risk of going bust, that footfall in the town is falling. They fear spending money on this new 'centre' on Eastern Way will mean fewer people coming to the High Street and Sheaf Street. You should be expecting your councillors to be standing up on the district council. They should be standing up and voting against the canal because that is what their electorate want. But does that happen? No."

The group of around 120 people headed off chanting 'Say no to the canal – it's a waste of money'. Opponents of the canal proposals say that the district council has spent too much so far on the plans, and will spend even more in future, and that money could be better spent on rejuvenating the existing town centre.

.....Normally we only report on the issues affecting northerly waterways but we have to spare a thought for our restoration colleagues further south sometimes!

Locomotive Building in Birkenhead?

Railway buffs are familiar with the main centres of locomotive building around the UK: Crewe, Doncaster, Swindon and Derby, but how many know that there was once a thriving, major locomotive builder in Birkenhead?

A recent article in the Heritage Railway Magazine described the finding of a British-built locomotive in Romania in the state's Railway Museum. The writer, a long-standing supporter of steam preservation, was even more delighted to discover that the engine had been built a short distance from his place of birth and close to his present home in Birkenhead.

The engine (*right*) is Number 43 'Calugareni', a 2-4-0 built by

Brassey & Co. of Canada Works, Birkenhead in 1869 (*right, sketch of its Works plate*) for service on the newly opened Bucharest-Giurgiu line, built by John Trevor Barclay. The 40 mile line used carriages supplied by Ashbury Railway Carriages & Iron Company of Manchester. No.43 apparently worked until 1919

when it was relegated to shunting duties, and was withdrawn in 1923. It became an exhibit in the railway Museum in 1939, but was restored to working order in 1944, following an air raid. It is the country's oldest steam locomotive to survive, and is now under government state protection. It has even appeared on postage stamps. The writer of the article believes that it is the only surviving Brassey loco in the world and was even more astonished to find it in working order. You can see and hear (and almost smell) it on Youtube at: <https://youtu.be/NrVFE6YOSQ0>

Thomas Brassey was a very successful railway entrepreneur, one of the richest men in Victorian England. By 1847 he had built one third of Britain's railways and by the time of his death in 1870 had constructed 1 in every 20 miles of the world's railways, in almost every continent. His company also produced associated structures such as bridges, viaducts, stations and tunnels.

His largest contract was the 539 mile Quebec-Montreal-Toronto Railway in Canada which included locomotives, rolling stock, and all materials required for building the 5'6" gauge line. One major feature was the Stephenson-designed tubular bridge across the St Lawrence River at Montreal, over two miles long and still in use today.

To cope with such a massive contract, Brassey built a new factory in Birkenhead, with quay-side access, fittingly naming it Canada Works. The factory contained a machine shop of 900 feet in length with blacksmith's shops, furnaces and steam hammers. More than 50 locomotives, known as 'Birkenheads', were supplied to the Canadian line between 1854 and 1857. 260 locomotives were produced up to 1875 for other companies such as the South Eastern, the Scottish North Eastern and the Eastern Counties railways.

Thomas Brassey died in 1870 at the age of 65, leaving a fortune of more than £5M at a time when the average yearly wage for a common labourer was £10-00.



CANADA	WORKS
Nº233	1869
BIRKENHEAD	

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Please forward to:

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

Brian Bennett's Album: Part 11

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.



Woodend Locks at Spike Island, Widnes in 1975. At that time the bridge seen above the houses was simply known as the Runcorn-Widnes Bridge. After widening between 1975-77, it was renamed the 'Jubilee Bridge' to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977.

Bewsey lock from the north in 1980—threes have grown, but this scene has changed little otherwise over the intervening years

