

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

# CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 8 Number 7  
Winter 2016/ 2017



Pic: Ian Hornby

## Revelation at Newton Common Lock

Work has begun on renewing the footpath between Newton Common Lock and Havanna Flashes—carrying on from the work done last year to the south, under the Sankey Viaduct. Earlier work by SCARS, the Waterway Recovery Group, and St Helens Council exposed the site of the lower lock gates, and now the remains of the upper gates are in view (just sticking up from the walls in the centre, above). The chamber was originally crossed by a swing bridge allowing access to the farm and land to the right. When the lock was filled in and covered over that access was maintained by a track on the same line, which has been left—the drop each side being protected by the red safety barriers in view here.

Wharf Road, going towards Earlestown, lies beyond

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Founded 1985

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The Inland  
**Waterways**  
Association

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Keith Morley (Halton)

Linda Dirir and Steve Parish (Warrington)

Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

**The Inland Waterways Association:**

David Smallshaw and Colin Greenall (Chester & District Branch)

David Jarvis (IWA NW Restoration Committee)

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 7: Winter 2016—2017

Editor and Production: David Long  
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### **Chairman's Report: From Dave Smallshaw**

Firstly, I must apologise for the late printing of this edition. We had most of it ready to go before Christmas, with our editor David Long hectoring us all for copy, but after a meeting of the Executive Council we decided to delay publication until we could provide further details to all our members of the changes we propose to make to our constitution, and the proposed conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

This revised edition will therefore have arrived along with: 1. A copy of the new proposed constitution; 2. A brief explanatory letter on the change, and, 3. The relevant papers for our Annual Meeting in March.

You may recall that we received agreement in principal from the members at last year's Annual Meeting for the conversion to a CIO. In drawing up the enclosed Draft Constitution we have followed the guidelines of the Charity Commission, and we hope that this year's Annual Meeting will pass a resolution adopting the new Constitution and our new status as a CIO. The Executive believe that the Society will then be able to move forward, better able to cope with the more complex legal and structural requirements of the modern day.

Although our printed publications have been sparse recently, I am pleased to report that we have now a Facebook page up and running. This will give you up-to-date information about the Society's activities—and followers of this form of modern media will already have discovered that there has certainly been a lot of activity on the waterway recently.

The summer season of sales and marketing activity gave way in October to more practical work on the canal itself. Last year we welcomed a group of tax officers to work on the canal at Sankey Bridges, and this year we have had another successful corporate volunteering day involving the international financial consultants RSM and their team of North Western partners who shifted a tremendous lot of earth and paved the way for a completely new look at



Bradleigh bridge and lock (*Above—and read more in our Work Part Repts*). Our own small team of volunteers also helped students from Riverside College Widnes to clean up Spike island and make the areas around the sea lock and the Old Wet Dock neat and tidy again.

The other significant developments along the canal length have been: the reopening of the lifting bridge at Fidler's Ferry; the development of the canal footpath in Warrington up to the borough boundary just short of Hey Lock; and the latest work on restoring the path from Newton Common Lock to Havannah in St Helens. We were pleased to be consulted by council officers on this last project and contributed certain suggestions about exposing and highlighting the canal in their work. The initial results of this work is hot off the press and will, no doubt, feature on our cover page of this edition. A full report will follow when the work is completed but things look highly promising!

So, sorry again for the lateness of this copy to you. You now have much to read and think about, and I sincerely hope that you will be able to support the Executive's resolution on the new set-up at the AGM. There has been a lot of work put into this and, as always, it has been handled by the few.

May I wish all members and friends of the Society a Happy New Year as we look forward to more progress in 2017 along the Sankey Canal.

*Dave Smallshaw*

# News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

by Colin Greenall

## *Restoration continues to progress on the Sankey Canal*

*The summer months have passed and work along the canal continues to take place, here is a brief selection of what has gone on.*

### **Halton**

The most notable thing in Halton is the speed at which the Mersey Gateway Bridge is growing now that they have two MSS (Multiple Scaffold System) machines working—one from each side of the River Mersey. The first of the three pylons from which the stay cables will support the bridge deck has now reached its full height, and the first of 146 cables will be installed from the south pylon this month (November). As the form traveller machines cast the deck segments outwards from each pylon, the cables will be connected one by one along the 1,000 metres of the bridge's length.



On Spike Island the lock gates continue to be a cause of concern along with the water level problem. The community cafe which was operating in the former Rangers' Cabin beside the canal has closed in its turn, and the building is now being used by the West bank Boat Club.

SCARS now has monthly work parties there working from our Volunteer Hub Container, we are also assisted by students from Riverside College who are working towards their Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award.

## Warrington

### Marsh House Lift Bridge



The Construction of Marsh House Bridge at Fiddlers Ferry is now complete, giving access once more to the Riverside Business Park.

Contact has been made with Pennine Trail volunteer Mike Stilgoe who looks after the section of towpath/cycleway from Sankey Bridges to Carter House Bridge. He now keeps us informed of any problems arising on this section of canal.

As reported last time we have had a corporate volunteer work party of around 30 employees of HM's Revenue and Customs, who cleared the area around the relief swing bridge next to Liverpool Road at Sankey Bridges.



Eleven members and friends of SCARS Committee enjoyed a very interesting visit to meet the Mayor of Warrington, Cllr Faisal Rashid, in his Parlour in Warrington Town Hall.

After introductions and a welcoming drink we were taken on a tour of the council chambers, and were given a very

interesting account by Cllr Steve Parish as to what goes on in the various rooms, along with some of the history attached to the many beautiful paintings etc..

## St.Helens:

Work on the footpath/cycleway from Waggon Lane to Blackbrook Road is now complete and plans are being made for the next phase of pathway/cycleway to be to start early next year this will be the section from Newton common Lock to Havanah Flash.

There is concern once again about the state of some sections of canal wall near the Hey Lock and also about the disappearance of the slabs of York stone from the towpath edge.

Corporate volunteers from accountancy firm RSM (UK) have been at work around Bradley Swing Bridge and Bradley Lock, clearing vegetation from the bridge recess and the off side of the lock (*below*) and commencing the painting of the bridge which it is hoped will be completed shortly by SCARS volunteers.



## 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.

# Events—by Colin Greenall

## Rural Craft Display at Willow Park in Newton-Le-Willows: 30th May

This summer Our Sales and Exhibition Marquee has attended numerous rallies and festivals around the north west. Our first outing was to the Willow Park event on the Spring Bank Holiday Monday, organised by St.Helens Ranger Service. The good weather helped to bring out the locals who enjoyed the usual variety of craftsmen and women demonstrating their skills ranging from rope making to wood carving by chainsaw, with birds of prey, ferret racing and a selection of stalls to keep everyone entertained.



## Eldonian Village Waterway Festival: 11th & 12th June

We went to Liverpool for the Chester & Merseyside Branch of the IWA's Festival. The weather, a mixture of sunshine and showers, could have been better, but this did not stop people coming out to admire the boats and visit the stalls and other entertainments. We did a roaring trade, selling our usual selection of bric-a-brac and second-hand books. In between helping out on the stall, our Chairman, Dave Smallshaw, wearing his IWA hat, led a guided walk to the Pier Head each day.

*Above:* Some of the steady flow of visitors to our stall and exhibition at Willow Park.

*Right:* At the Eldonian—some of the stalwarts from the team which turns out to sell the canal—and your bric-a-brac—to the public.





### **Lymm Transport Rally: 25th June**

At the end of June we ventured out to Cheshire for this one-day event.

Again, the weather was unsettled, giving us a few heavy showers and making the site rather muddy. However, this did not stop the marvelous display and parade of classic vehicles around the streets of Lymm which had been organised, involving traction engines, buses, lorries, cars, and motor bikes—as well as a sail-past of historic boats on the nearby Bridgewater Canal.



### **Scarisbrick Marina Open Weekend & Boat Show: 8th—10th July:**

Again the weather was not kind, but luckily the organisers had provided a large marquee for all the traders and craft displays so that everybody could stay dry and the punters could browse round the stalls and enjoy some of the indoor activities, such as the Morris Dancing, while it was raining outside.



Pic: <http://nbgecko.blogspot.co.uk/2016>



Pic: <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/news/2016/>

### **Newton**

#### **Town Show: 6th August**

For once the weather was lovely, warm and sunny and the crowds came out to enjoy themselves. Lots of people in Newton have memories of the canal in its working days and they were keen to tell their stories of seeing the boats unloading at Sankey Sugar Works etc.

### **Victoria Park Rural Craft Display, St.Helens: 22nd August**

Another show organised by St.Helens Ranger Service. This time it was the wind that was more of a problem than the light rain that persisted during the morning. Even so, with better weather in the afternoon, it turned out to be a good event with people showing plenty of interest in our project.



Pic: <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/environmental-services/>



**Vintage Vehicle Rally in Victoria Park, Widnes: 24th-25th September**

Our final outing of the year was a wonderful event which has something for everyone— from fairground rides to classic cars, motorbikes, fairground organs... with lots of other interesting things to look at, including all the charity stall doing their bit to promote their aims.



I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the sales team who have worked wonders to get the show on the road this summer, Many thanks.

# Reports From Our Work Parties

*By Dave Smallshaw*

Things have been reasonably busy through the autumn months and after we had packed up our marketing equipment and gazebos until warmer times.

## **Big Day at Bradley—Sunday, October 16th**

Lady Pilkington, who chairs the newly established Sankey Canal Partnership, and whom we have also recently welcomed as one of our newest members, was in conversation at a business meeting in Liverpool, and learned from the Company's regional managing partner that they were interested in getting engaged in a local environmental project. Realising that this could be a golden opportunity for the Society's work on the Sankey, she telephoned me early the next morning to ask if we were interested. The response, of course, was Yes! Yes! Further correspondence then led to myself going into the city centre offices of corporate financial consultants RSM to sell the notion of a project combining canal restoration and improvement in community facilities which would meet the criteria of the project they wanted to engage the partners of the company with.

The area around Bradley swing bridge seemed ideal. The repainting of the bridge, one of the last structures on the canal surviving from its working days would put a fitting touch to the towpath improvements already undertaken by St Helens, and, by painting it in the generally accepted 'waterways' colours of black and white, would serve as a statement of active restoration taking place on the canal.

We had also registered that considerable social media activity in the area concerned itself with the problems of wildlife survival and the lack of any haven for swans and the like without disturbance and danger from towpath users. It occurred to us that clearing the swing bridge recess would serve the purpose admirably—although no one seemed to know what lay beneath some fifty years of soil and flora! Then, if we had any time or bods left over, we may also attack the vegetation threatening to swallow up the Bradley lock site too! Sunday, October 16th was the day set and preparations were made to cater for up to 30 volunteers from the company together with a small group of SCARS restoration crew to help and advise on the day. Tools had to be gathered from both our hubs and provision made for hi- viz jackets, mobile toilets, protection equipment and the like, risk assessments were done, and liaison with Newton Anglers and the Ranger Service undertaken. Rob and Dot from RSM organized the catering and transport logistics so well that everybody found the site which was a feat in itself!



The day dawned (typically!) very wet and overcast and, bar a couple of cry offs from personnel travelling quite a distance, the full complement arrived to be greeted by Dot's Café, a fully-rigged work site canteen (*left*) housed under one of our gazebos, providing hot drinks and sausage butties... and

this is before they started! The rain was intense, so the decision was made to split the team into two sections, with one group mainly on clearing the swing bridge recess, whilst the others bounded off in the wet to Bradley lock armed with bow saws, spades, rakes and other implements of torture.

From about midday the weather improved somewhat and, whilst still overcast, further rain wasn't forecast so it was decided to paint as much of the underside of the of the bridge as possible, as this may dry slowly but would not affect the movement of pedestrians over this popular walkway.... The upper parts of the structure would have to wait until another day. The amount of heavy work done by the teams was amazing and it really shows what can be achieved when you have a large body of people working together. As tons of accumulated earth and weed were removed from the bridge recess flagged stones and some early ramps were revealed, and it was possible to see how the bridge swung. It looked as if it would make an ideal haven for the ducks and swans.

The head of Bradley Lock was cleared of debris, and access to the cottage site achieved by the removal of huge amounts of invasive weed. This will enable future examination of the area possible again in the future. Also, a small amount of undergrowth was removed to open the view of the nine arches from the lock—a vista not seen for many years.

Light started to fade and limbs were getting tired, and by 3.30 people were ready to finish. These volunteers had not only given up their precious spare time but many had travelled considerable distances to get to and from the site, so they had given a full day to the Sankey. After the tools were cleaned and stacked, the gazebos taken down and the toilet emptied, we had a short time to express our thanks and present each member of the team with a certificate of our appreciation of the tremendous work they had put in on the day.

When you consider that many the partners present work at a desk by day the physical effort was s immense and we were all impressed by the amount achieved in the day

So, our thanks, again go to the partners of RSM for their time and input and we sincerely hope that we will have the chance to work again with them in the future.

We very much hope that the work done on this day will spur other, local, interested parties to form a small maintenance task force to ensure that the work done isn't just left to return to its previous state of neglect.

### **The Blackbrook Team take over—December**

Bad weather had forestalled earlier attempts to get more paint on the bridge, but John's team of happy wanderers eventually returned to the site in December. A window of



opportunity appeared at the last minute, and a hurriedly-arranged work party saw four escapees from Christmas shopping arrive on Sunday morning. The bridge horizontal side rails were given a coat of white gloss, which took the team nicely to feeding time. After brew and butties, not quite in the style of the previous occasion, it was decided to do some digging out (*left*) on the swing bridge docking area, which is the short swing arc

opposite the recess for the bridge structure itself. The reasons for this switch in tactics was twofold: the weather was punishingly cold so we needed to warm up, and the cold was also affecting the paint drying time.



As during the work in October, a layer of flags started to be revealed, but they were of a modern type, possibly laid when this area was landscaped in the 1970s. After a good two hours quite a decent section having been excavated and it was time to wrap up for the day. All the tools were cleaned and packed away, the site tidied and extra

‘wet paint’ signs positioned. The team were very pleased to meet lots of passers by who stopped and admired the new paint job (*Above*) and seemed genuinely interested in the activity around the canal which bodes well for our future support in the area. Roll on January and, hopefully a completion of the job!

### **The Spike Island Team—October to January**

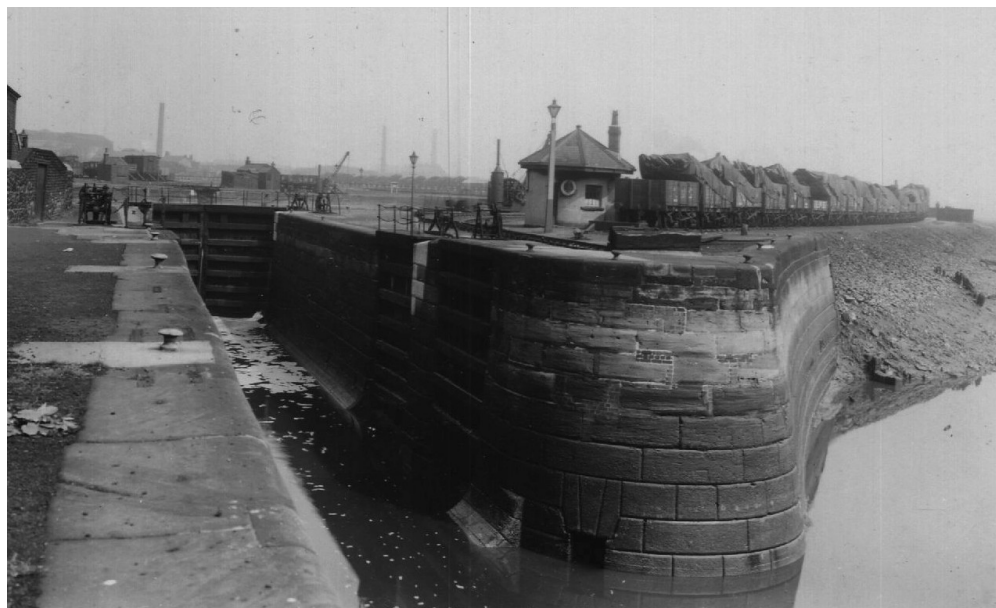
Working with the Duke of Edinburgh’s award students and staff from Riverside College, Widnes, SCARS volunteers are helping to maintain and improve public amenities on the Island as we are unable to progress further up the canal until the completion of the Mersey Gateway bridge project.



The work party dates vary from month to month but details are posted on our website and on our Facebook page should you wish to attend.

In October SCARS held a short work party to survey for possible projects for the coming winter and to look at formulating a plan of action for our work on the island. A small team then worked on one of the quadrants of the sea lock, clearing it of weeds (*left*) and exposing the decorative brickwork around the inner sea lock gates.

In November, the College team revisited the old railway bridge site to clear up new weeds and tidy up the area generally as this is one of the main public vantage points to see the new bridge works. SCARS volunteers then set to work to clear the second inner quadrant of the sea lock and examine further the base of a steam crane used in loading and unloading at the wet dock. This area was also the subject of discussion with the College staff and it was



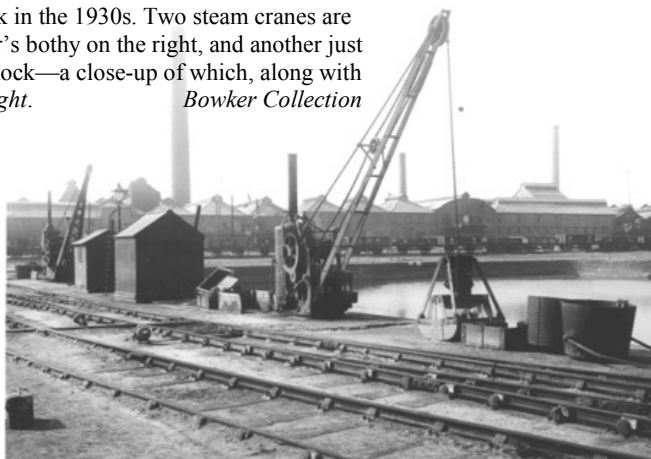
*Above:* The entrance to the wet dock in the 1930s. Two steam cranes are visible—one behind the lock keeper's bothy on the right, and another just left of centre on the far side of the dock—a close-up of which, along with another, extreme left, is pictured, *right*.

*Bowker Collection*

agreed that the team would now concentrate on clearance and enhancement of the edges of the dock during the winter month with the possibilities of painting the bollards in early spring and thus revitalising the dock's appearance

In December, some fourteen bodies from the College turned up and, in the company of Ian Hornby, they set to work on the wet dock sides, clearing away grass and weeds to expose the lovely sandstone quay walls of the nationally important industrial gem. This project continues and in early January another crew of ten extended the renovation of the dock.

All credit to the young students and their staff from the College for turning out in all weathers and really putting in some extremely valuable work in keeping the island's heritage features alive.



# The Mersey Gateway Bridge

Work on the new bridge across the Mersey continues apace with the three central pylons almost complete and the approach roadway from the north and south banks of the river moving slowly out to meet them. The giant MSS machines working from both side are now getting closer—with the north bank machine now up to the water's edge (*below*).



The Mersey Gateway's south bridge pylon is now complete, (*left*) marking the project's highest point in the River Mersey estuary. The south pylon stands at an impressive 125 metres high, while the north pylon measures 110 metres. The smaller central pylon, due to be finished in November, will be 80m. high.

Having the two outer pylons taller than the central pylon will give Halton's new bridge a unique look amongst other major bridges in the UK.

A specialist automatic climbing system is constructing the bridge pylons. This equipment builds one vertical five-metre

section at a time then repeatedly 'climbs' upwards to create the next section until the structure is complete.

Construction teams built 30 sections for the south pylon and 27 for the north pylon. Twenty-one sections will be built for the central pylon.

A total of 2,230m<sup>3</sup> of concrete was poured for the south pylon – almost enough to fill an Olympic sized swimming pool – and 1,890m<sup>3</sup> for the north pylon.

Gareth Stuart, Project Director at Merseylink, said: "Hitting the highest point on the project is a significant milestone and it's a testament to the tenacity and expertise of our construction crews who have worked extremely hard, often in challenging conditions, to get the job done." (*Written up for the December deadline of CUTTINGS—so now out-of-date...*)

# Transport on the Sankey : 1816

Over the years the Society has received donations of pictures, maps and documents of various types which relate to the Sankey Canal and its operations. One such document takes the form of a letter from a Thomas Clapham to the proprietors of two collieries which used the canal to transport its output. It would seem to be an exercise in espionage since Thomas is at pains to conceal his identity. It is here presented as transcribed from the original document, complete with Mr. Clapham's spelling which would have been quite normal for a time when there was no such thing as Standard English. Punctuation and capital letters are also rather hit and miss - so the reader should make use of their imagination. Allowance should also be made for the errors which have inevitably crept in during the transcription process from the original document. Unfortunately we have no record of when and how the document came to us, and would be grateful for further information if any of our readers recognise it. A few key words have been 'translated' into modern English—otherwise, read phonetically!

**Wigan Sept 14th 1816**

**Statement of the Toney (tonnage) watter (water) and other necessary things on the Sankey Canall Clarkes Colliery and rodes (roads) Mr Blundell and Mr Hustlers Collieries in Winstanly Orell and setrey (et cetera).**

Mr Woods account he has 3 sloops on the Sankey trades with Nant Wich at and near Sant Ellen is put on board at 8<sup>7</sup>/<sub>4</sub> per Tun 24 Hundred to the tun Cannall Do put on bord 12s per tun of 24 Hundred Canall Dues 1s per tun of 24 Hundred Frite 3s per tun to Liverpool and some 3s 4d by some vesels the state of the watter by the Lockentre (*lock-keeper*) and Carpenter Repairing a Brige near the nue dubell (*double*) rise or Ingan (*Engine*) Lock They informed me they are never short of watter onley in verely dry Seasons but has not had much trade as formerly owin to the salt works not doin much at Nant Wich they had passed throu the ferry Lock from 30 or 50 Bots in one day formerley but Could not do more then they do now but the Coale trade is verely slack at present hadack (*Haydock*) Lock pear (*pier*) head Coals Curnall Lees Capten informed me Cols 8s 4d per tun 24 hundred at Stock and Eckles Colliery 8s 4d at the Union Coliery 8s 4d Cannel 12s all 24 hundred to the tun The Ingan lifts the water into Sant Ellen Lock out of Lower pound in to the hier pound Clark Coles ar put on board at Black Brook the man informed me that thay sould to the Contrey at 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> per hundred but did not know what thay was to the Cannall

Mr Clark Coals Costs Cartin 3s per tun of 20 hundred to the tun Mr Daglas makes the Carters have carts to hould 2 tun with in the sides thay bring 2 ton at once and goes twis Some days and once others but will not goo above once in winter severall of the Carters tould me it was a verely bad job thay have the Bars Cleared besides th 3s but som of the Carters says thay had as good play as Cart Coals at that price the Distans from the first pit from the Wharf at Black Brook it will be I think 6 miles some say 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> miles and some say 6 and some more thay go 3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> miles in narrow Lanes Not good rod mow thay obliged to have 3 horse from the pit at top of the hill and the rode fals for above a mile befor we com near whear thay are sinkin for Mr Blundell the nearest of Blundels pits to the Sankey is 7 or 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> miles and 2 miles all up the hill to the top of winstanley thos cols would Cost 6s per tun Cartin to Sankey Cannall if not more And thay have a good iron raleway down to the Leeds and Liverpool Cannall not above 2 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> miles and som of the pits Not above 1 mile or a mile and a half Mr Clarks whear thay are Cartin to Sankey is not 3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> miles to the Liverpool Canall down a good raleway the raleway Lade in the Rode Side fro 5 or 6 pits a regerall (*regular*) desent down tuards the Crook.



Mr Hustlers is still forder of (*further from*) the Sankey Mr Clarks Cannot Cart to Sankey onely 2 or 3 pits and that will be found a verey great Exspence The Woman at turnpike Gate sade 2 or 3 or 4 Carts per day Somtims 10 thear was 7 on Friday over. The Woman at the Bare (*turnpike barrier*) says the Carters do not think of doin much after the water is on the Wigen Canall The Sankey Cannall is soplide (*supplied*) part of th Brock and part by reservoies the peopell in the Cuntry thinks Daglas verey folosh to cart coles 3 or 4 Mile funder then he neds down a bad rode and has A good rale way to take then down but he has Informed maney peopell that I talked with that the Coles will Cost 2s per tun Les by the Sankey then by thay will by the Leeds and Liverpool Canall but you will know about that youer self this I hope will be what you wanted and give Sattis faction I did not se one person that knowed me all the day nor aksed my name but one

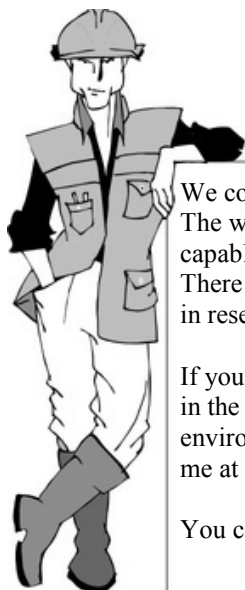
Dear Sir I remain your Friend Sinsearley

**Thomas Clapham**

Clearly the coal proprietors were operating on narrow profit margins, and it was in their interests to know what their competitors were charging for coal and what was the most economical route for their coal to reach the market. The pits Clapham was reporting for were on the South-Western side of the Wigan coalfield—most within easier reach of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal than the Sankey, but both requiring the coal to be transported by wagon to convenient wharfs on the canals. The question was—did the lower rates on the Sankey make it more cost effective to cart the coal the extra distance? Industrial espionage is not a new phenomenon.

The date of the letter is interesting—just over a month before the Leeds and Liverpool Canal was finally opened over its full length on October 22nd, 1816.

## WANTED—Volunteers

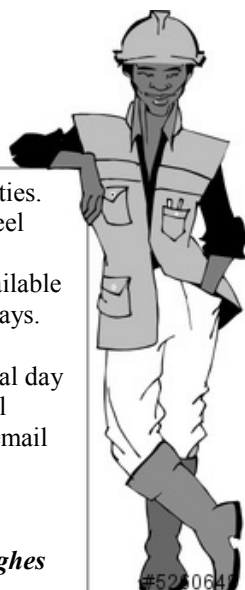


We could always do with more help on our work parties. The work you put in depends on you and what you feel capable of. There are also non-work party opportunities now available in research and helping out on our sales and events days.

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*



#526064

## Kilroy was 'ere—a record in stone

At a recent work party at Bradley Lock and Bradley swing bridge, SCARS members were assisted by members of RSM UK Accountancy as described elsewhere in this issue.

The group working on the lock side cut back dense growths of Himalayan Balsam which had almost obliterated the eastern sides of the lock chamber where the lock cottage was once located. A two metre wide stretch of lock side was revealed, including the copings alongside the lock. Some of the stones bore some interesting graffiti in the shape of initials and dates, carved deeply into the sandstone, varying in age. Clearly some people had had a great deal of spare time on their hands since the graffiti was deeply cut and could not have been achieved in a few minutes.

The carvings are illustrated below. Despite the early dates it is possible that the carvers are still around and would like to claim their 15 minutes of fame. Were they canal employees, workers at the Sankey Sugar Works, courting couples, or merely passers-by? It would be unlikely that the artists are members of SCARS but Canal Cuttings is widely circulated, so perhaps a memory will be stirred. If this is the case, Canal Cuttings would be happy to publish their stories.



## Raft Accident at St Helens

*Continuing Scars Member Judith Hogg's delving into the archives at Warrington Library we read about a tragedy at the St Helens end of the Sankey Canal. Details were published in the Liverpool Mercury of Monday, 8th August 1892, issue 13913*

The men concerned were employed as labourers by Messrs Pilling and Co, the contractors for the new Liverpool, St Helens and South Lancashire Railway and the incident took place in the district known as the Double Lock (*this would be the Old Double Lock*), where a bridge was being built across the Sankey Canal.

The men used a raft made of planks and measuring some eight or nine feet in length and about five feet wide for crossing the canal and taking over their working materials.

About noon on Saturday the Cashier for the Contractor, Mr William Jones, visited St Helens to pay the labourers and other employees. Commencing at the St Helens end of the new railway works, he paid the men as he walked along the line. He was accompanied by the time-keeper, Mr R.W. Friar, and Constable Rothery, the supernumerary for the works, based at Haydock. They carried with them a well-filled cash box and bag.

Arriving at the lock, Mr Jones and Mr Friar and the constable got on the raft along with a labouring navy named George Jones and George Shepherd, another navy. A stout rope was attached to each end of the raft and the ropes were fastened to stakes driven into the embankment of the canal in order that the raft may be dragged from either side as desired. As they were being drawn across from the St Helens to the Haydock side the deplorable accident occurred. Just as the raft left the side two other labourers, George Micklewright and another navy, ran to the bank and jumped on to the raft. This caused the raft to tilt to one side and someone shouted "get to the other end". Nearly all the men immediately moved to the opposite side and the result was that the end of the raft quickly sank and the seven men were thrown into the middle of the canal which is eight or nine feet deep.

The scene which followed was very exciting. The men struggled to save themselves. One or two grasped the rope, and others managed to reach the sides, where they were dragged out, thoroughly exhausted, by fellow workmen. Most of the men wore heavy boots and clothing, which rendered their position extremely precarious, and in the course of a few minutes two had lost their lives. Micklewright's body was dragged to the side 15 minutes after the unfortunate "spill" but life was then extinct. Five minutes later Shepherd's body was recovered. In the meantime many willing helpers attended to those who had suffered by the immersion in the notoriously dirty and unwholesome liquid and as speedily as possible they proceeded to their homes. Shepherd's body was removed to the Princess Royal Hotel on Park Road whilst that of Micklewright was conveyed to his home in Merton Bank Road.

It is interesting to note that the cash box and bag, both of which contained large sums of money were recovered. Mr. Friar, the timekeeper, held the bag and maintained his hold upon it when thrown into the water. The cash box held by Constable Rothery was thrown from his grasp as the raft upset, but luckily being of a patent, airtight construction, it just floated on the surface and was easily saved. Both these officials later commented on their ordeal, Mr Jones describing being rescued just as he was becoming unconscious, dragged down by his boots and Ulster (coat), whilst the Constable remarked that he had never before been as near death as he had been that afternoon.

*Apart from the obvious lack of modern Health and Safety requirements, it is clear that the waters of the canal in 1892 were of very poor quality. In fact, about forty years previously much of the stonework of locks and tow paths had been rebuilt because of the mortar being attacked by the water, so grossly polluted by the industries in St Helen, further upstream.*

# Milestones and Mysteries—by *Dave Smallshaw*

A while ago I started to wonder what had happened to the last surviving milestone of the Sankey Canal which I had last seen years earlier in store in a container belonging to the St Helens Ranger Service. The thought plagued me for months, and then, not long ago, I found it, safe and sound, planted in the grounds of the Sankey Visitor Centre at Blackbrook for all to see. I then started to wonder where it had been sited originally.

As may be seen in this photograph of the stone, taken by Hugh Potter in August 1972, the inscription simply states “7 miles to Ferry Lock” which would indicate two things: Firstly,

that it was erected before the extension to the canal to Spike island in 1833, but after the earlier extension to Fidler’s Ferry in 1762 and, secondly, that its location should be, as stated— seven miles from the said lock, which would place it just a little south of Bradleigh Swing Bridge.

It looks as if the stone was moved to a place of safety during the extensive land management works involved in creating the Sankey Valley Park in the later 1970s. Now all we have to do is find the rest of them!

According to popular tradition, the Sankey’s original milestones all disappeared long ago, mostly after abandonment and through decay, but certainly by World war 2 when the authorities removed all directional signs in the nation in case they would give help to the enemy if an invasion took place.

There are no early maps of the canal of the period when

the 1762 stones were probably sited, so we have to use the tried and tested ‘OS map and a piece of twine’ method to roughly gauge where these were:

Milestone: Position:

- 1 West of the Whittle Brook culvert.
- 2 By the site of the old boatyard north of Sankey Bridges
- 3 By the Warrington to Liverpool railway (Cheshire Lines) viaduct
- 4 Bewsey Lock area
- 5 Winwick Quay, by the old Ship Inn
- 6 Opposite Winwick Railway Junction just north of Alder Lane Bridge
- 7 South of Bradleigh Bridge
- 8 South of Penkford Bridge, by outflow
- 9 Quay area by foot of Wagon Lane, Haydock

There may have also been one just by Blackbrook Road bridge.

Fortunately, we have the Ordnance Survey Map series of 1892 to help us with the positioning of markers following the 1830 extension to Widnes. The extension to Spike island has long been established and the ownership is now in the hands of the London and North Western Railway Company. This edition clearly denotes ‘Mile Posts’ on the canal route, and gives the distance to Widnes beside each marker. For some reason the last Mile Post is below the Old Double Locks, and no information is given for either the original Blackbrook and Gerard Bridge termini, or for the section towards St Helens town centre above the New Double Locks.

The OS map records Mile Posts at:

Mile Post:	Position:
1	West of Carterhouse Bridge, Widnes
2	East of Johnson's Lane Culvert
3	East of Marsh Lane Bridge site,
4	East of Penketh Hall bridge
5	East of overflow at Sankey Bridges
6	North of Buttermilk Bridge site (Sankey Way)
7	By Dallam Sluice site
8	North of Winwick Quay boathouse
9	North of Alder Lane Bridge
10	South of Bradleigh Bridge
11	North of Newton Common Lock
12	West of Engine Lock (by Fishery)
13	East of Callan's Bridge

The above data means that a total of 22, or maybe 23, milestones and mile posts were erected. From the extant 7-mile stone, we know the design and materials used to complete the 1762 set but there doesn't appear in any records or photos that I've seen at least, anything to give us any idea of the shape and size of the railway era ones. The cast-iron boundary posts across the canal from the Blackbrook Visitor Centre, and the fact that the OS map marks 'Mile Posts', rather than 'Mile Stones', may indicate that they were made of iron rather than stone. The survival of the 7-mile stone might indicate that the old set were simply forgotten about once the new ones were sited, which may mean that they may be still lying around, buried near to their original positions and thus have eluded the zealous war-time purge of locality information. It may be well worth a look, especially where the canal infrastructure has not been too 'remodelled' in the creation of the Sankey Valley Park.

Canal milestones are a specialist subject, with the many canal companies adopting different shapes and styles for their separate systems. The Macclesfield Canal, a

latecomer to the canal age, used stone (right) like the Sankey. Cast iron was widely used, with the elaborate examples of the Trent and Mersey (left) and the utilitarian triangular ones of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company.

As reported in our digest of the IWA's News below, part of last year's celebrations commemorating the latter's 200th



anniversary was a campaign to restore all the mile markers on the 127-mile length of the waterway, and other canal societies have also pursued this aim – so what about the Sankey? (*Right—a restored mile post on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Crooke, on the edge of Wigan. The plate with the distance to Leeds had disappeared—a new one has been fitted as part of the restoration project.*)



If we can't find the original posts or stones, then can we create new ones

and, if so what design should we consider? We know what the older version looked like, but they were only installed along the 1762 line of the canal. Thus, for complete coverage of the length from Widnes to St Helens, we need to have some idea of what their replacements were like.

I checked out the website of the Milestone Society ([www.milestonesociety.co.uk](http://www.milestonesociety.co.uk)) which proved a very interesting read and gives some very sound advice on how to go about the restoration and renovation of the markers. It appears that costings for creating new markers are not too astronomical, unless an intricate design is required, and we are only looking at between 9 and 13 markers at the most.

Given that the Sankey's 200 and 250th anniversaries have been and gone, we certainly can't wait until 2057 for a campaign to replace them, so we may have to look at other schemes to achieve this. However, firstly, we will need to establish a credible design for a mile marker with due regard to authenticity, maintenance and vandal-proofing. We need then to gain the agreement of our landowning partners and agree on full costings for a safe and durable siting. Then it's down to money.

Well, there is always corporate sponsorship in return for a suitably discrete plate or carving on the stone. The other alternative is to enable the stones to be dedicated to friends and supporters of the canal, just as many benches and picnic tables are dedicated in parks and in the countryside today.

So, when you are contemplating making your will then spare a thought for your lasting memorial and leave a bequest.....well – only a suggestion!

Seriously, we would welcome any information anyone may have about these forgotten relics of our waterway's past.

*Right: My picture of the last known surviving Sankey milestone, taken last May. The years between then and when Hugh Potter took his photograph of it in 1972 have not treated it kindly, with evident damage to its crown, obliterating the '7' which is just visible in Hugh's shot.*



## 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.*

### **Every Mile Counts on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal**

Thirty new heritage mileposts have been re-cast in iron to mark the Leeds & Liverpool Canal Bicentenary - part of Canal & River Trust's (CRT) 'Every Mile Counts' project. The Trust, which cares for the canal, is marking the 200th anniversary with a major fundraising appeal to restore or replace missing mileposts along the waterway's 127 mile route.

After a comprehensive survey of the entire length, it was identified that 30 posts needed replacing with brand new posts. Merseyside Castings in Knowsley, Liverpool, has been awarded the contract to create the new mileposts and also 109 missing individual mileage plates. The family firm, run by George Harris and his two sons Paul and David, is the only foundry in Merseyside still producing cast iron products. They have made new moulds for the mileposts and mileage plates using original Leeds & Liverpool Canal patterns.

The project is backed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, whose grant of £36,600 has supported the appointment of a project officer, the fabrication of new mileposts and a programme of activities, heritage events and art workshops for local residents.

Although the canal is 200 years old, the original cast iron mile markers date back to the 1890s. They were installed as a 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.

### **Trouble at Todmorden**

Engineers from CRT completed investigations to assess the stability of a landslip that had been blocking part of the Rochdale Canal at Todmorden.

Following heavy rainfall over the Christmas period the landslip caused the surface of a slope above a section of the Canal to slide down on and into part of the channel. The slip blocked the way with earth, trees and debris, damaging the canal. Other sections were temporarily closed due to scoured towpaths, damaged locks and a failed section of canal bank.

The Trust liaised with the owners of the slope, with a view to reopening the canal as quickly as possible. With one of the owners' insurers disputing the extent of their cover, the land-owner had, in the meantime, helpfully agreed to grant the Trust permission to access the slope, enabling engineers to help with the important job of assessing whether the damage caused has resulted in any further movement of the land.

These essential ground investigation works initially focussed around one property's driveway, and the slope leading to the canal. Engineers dug a bore hole to assess the extent of the stability/instability of the slope above the canal, which also extends on to neighbouring land. Once ascertained then remedial work and clean-up plans was put into action so that the canal can be reopened as quickly and safely as possible.

In October the IWA reported that the Rochdale Canal had reopened after many months of hard work by volunteers, CRT staff and contractors who finished off some really complex repairs.

### **Manchester's Lost Waterway**

The Manchester and Salford Junction Canal opened at the end of the canal era in 1839. It gave a direct route from the Rochdale Canal to the River Irwell, linking to the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal, avoiding transshipment and the cartage of goods across Manchester. However, the hoped-for through trade never lived up to expectations and the waterway was quickly sold to the Mersey and Irwell Navigation Company. The entire waterway was formally abandoned under a Manchester Ship Canal Act of 1936. During the Second World War, the canal was drained and the canal tunnels converted to air raid shelters. In the late 1950's the land was used for the development of Granada Studios. As the studios have now relocated to Media City in Salford there are proposals to redevelop the site within the strategic regeneration plan for Manchester City Centre.

The Friends of Manchester's Underground Canal aims to preserve this canal and restore it to navigation and have commissioned study to explore the feasibility of, and options for, its future development. For further details of this initiative go to IWA Manchester Branch's web page where there is a link to this scoping study.

### **Towpath Access Consultation on the Lancaster Canal**

The Lancaster Canal Regeneration Partnership is currently gathering the opinions of many canal communities, businesses, charities and individuals to contribute to the development of a strategy for a Towpath Trail between Kendal and Lancaster. There is to be wide consultation on the draft strategy with a view to stakeholders and other interested parties having an opportunity to comment on it and influence the final version.

### **Waterways Triathlon has a 2nd successful year**

The Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation in Essex hosted IWA's second waterways triathlon in September when 40 participants canoed (or paddle boarded), cycled and ran their choice of a 30km or 50km route.

All funds raised supported towpath repairs and build along the navigation and will benefit walkers, cyclists and runners.

### **Looking for the Last Cuckoo on the Chesterfield**

The Chesterfield Canal Trust has heard that it is a finalist in the bid for a grant from the Aviva Community Fund for an archaeological dig in Staveley next summer. The results will be announced in January 2017.

The Last Cuckoo Project is a community history and archaeological project with a focus on the Chesterfield Canal at Bellhouse Lane, Staveley. The canal basin, now a small, insignificant patch of overgrown wasteland was once a thriving industrial complex with wharves, tramways, gas works and a lost, unique Chesterfield Canal narrowboat (cuckoo). The map record and tales of a buried cuckoo mark Bellhouse Lane basin as an important and interesting place worthy of archaeological investigation in order to document, record and understand fully the function of this once thriving industrial complex.

In spring 2017 the canal trust proposes to undertake a detailed analytical study of the history of the area, with the intention of involving the whole community by collating maps, Chesterfield Canal Company data, historic photographs and collecting and compiling oral histories.

### **McDonald's Clean-Up on the Chesterfield Canal**

A group of over 30 employees from three local McDonald's stores did a massive clean-up on the Chesterfield Canal in June as part of the company's 'Love Where You Live' initiative.



The branches which took part were the Chesterfield town centre McDonald's, the Drive Thru McDonald's on Derby Road and Markham Vale McDonald's.

One group did a litter pick in areas near the canal. A second group pulled up lots of Himalayan Balsam. This is a pernicious weed, imported by the Victorians, that spreads really fast unless kept in check. The third group painted an iron footbridge that crosses the River Rother. This bridge had been in a pretty poor state but by the time the volunteers had finished their painting, the bridge was totally transformed, looking really smart.

Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Rangers played their part by cutting back some undergrowth and removing the dozens of bags of litter and Himalayan Balsam that had been collected.

At the end, the Mayor and Mayoress of Chesterfield joined the Leader of Chesterfield Borough Council at Tapton Lock Visitor Centre to thank the volunteers for their hard work. Afterwards a spokesman for McDonald's said "This has been a really worthwhile event. McDonald's is committed to LWYL – Love Where You Live – and we hope to repeat the exercise next year."

### **Scouts Join Forces with Lichfield & Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust**

A local Scout Group has been having a bash at creating wildlife habitats along Lichfield Canal. The Foresters Scout Group, based in Yoxall, have been frequent visitors to the Canal's Darnford Park, Darnford Moors and Summerhill sections during the summer, controlling bracken through the traditional method of bashing it with sticks, building bug hotels and habitat piles, digging bee scrapes, planting trees and constructing and installing bird and bat boxes. The Foresters' Beavers, Cubs and Scouts have also enthusiastically litter-picked and sorted hundreds of engineering bricks for use in future construction work.

Christine Howles, Communications Director for Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust, said: "In May, June and July we were excited to start this relationship with the Scout Group. Their work is vital to our environmental objectives and we hope that these young people will have learnt more about wildlife and will have enjoyed putting The Scout Association's relevant objectives into practice."

Angela Burns, Foresters Scout Group leader, said: "We picked a general theme of 'Water' last year for our Scout Group to be involved in and embarked on how water impacts on life. We wanted to get practically involved and chose the Lichfield & Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust. The project is huge and we want to be involved with this in the long term."

***Inspired by the above two stories?*** This year SCARS itself has organised two similar, highly successful corporate days of volunteering on the Sankey. However, unlike the two examples above, neither organization involved was from our local area - but perhaps you may know of similar groups of people nearer home who would fancy a bash on the Sankey? Drop us a line if you think there may be opportunities we can capitalise on.....

And now for the more energetic! Perhaps we could take this a stage further—by organizing an annual Clean-up/ Restoration event on the Sankey. We have all the ingredients needed – stretches of water, stretches of no water and a good towpath throughout! Does anyone fancy organising this?— perhaps we could team up with a local charity to our mutual benefit....form an orderly queue please!

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Further Details and Bookings: Tel: 01744 677486 [www.culturalhubs.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.culturalhubs.eventbrite.co.uk)

Something's afoot at Pearling Manor and it isn't just the walkers. The beautiful hostel, rich in YHA history, is lovely but falling apart. External forces are out to grab and turn it into a golf club. Cue Connie, first ever warden, with a heart as big as her rucksack. She takes us on a journey through the YHA's past in the hope of securing its future. Through thickets and thin we've managed to keep Our promise of somewhere cheap to sleep If that's threatened we must defend it Looking to the past in order to transcend it

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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 12

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.



Bradley Swing Bridge—where staff from accountancy firm RSM have been clearing the undergrowth which has flourished since these pictures were taken in 1975 (*above*) and 1979 (*below*). In the years between the two shots the Job Creation Programme project to create the basis for the Sankey Valley linear park had been carrying out its work—stabilising the towpath and carrying out extensive planting along the line of the canal. The inset photograph below, left, shows the growth by 2015— a very different, post-industrial scene from that of the b&w view from the early 1920s, of laden sugar boats approaching Sankey Sugar Works.

